

The entire page is framed by a highly detailed, symmetrical floral and botanical border. At the top and bottom center, there are decorative medallions. The top medallion features a crown above a central flower, with three circular motifs below. The bottom medallion features a circular frame containing a detailed illustration of a Gothic-style church tower with two spires. The border is composed of various plants, including roses, lilies, and smaller flowers, all rendered in a fine-line, engraved style.

Apogee

Volume 61



-A P O G E E-

Literary Magazine

Volume 61

2022-2023

**FRANKLIN
COLLEGE**



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Apogee is an annual literary magazine publication of the Department of English at Franklin College. Submissions are garnered anonymously through the journal's submission platform; the staff selects the work for the publication without knowing the identity of the author or artist.

The staff would like to thank the faculty of the Franklin College department of English and Creative Writing, as well as Christine Morris, for all their support.

Editors' Note

Hey Everyone,

This year's edition was the first year that we were editors of *Apogee*. It was a wonderful experience, and we wanted to take a minute to thank our team and readers and give some context to this year's edition.

We organized this book by placing an emphasis on reoccurring themes and emotions. We wanted to focus on the growth that came from the pain and trauma that these stories depict.

We wanted to match the visual art with the themes of the written works, so we dispersed visual artwork throughout the book as opposed to our standard art section right in the middle.

Our staff was so dedicated to creating a heart-felt magazine this year, and we are so proud of them. Thank you all for your hard work!

Finally, thank you, reader, for taking the time to read our magazine.

With great appreciation,

Abby & Colleen

Contents

Original Small Town Fever Infomercial Logan Parker	8
Heartbeat Abby Moore	10
Sinful Stranger Seeking Sacred Salvation Kalijah Hessig	11
Something Holy ~~~ Alia Sarris	13
Fraternity Cooper Davis	14
Brilliance Kassian Frey	15
The Unpaid Therapist Roxanna Hair	16
Sky Kisses Colleen Kincaid	20
Sunset State of Mind Zoe Simmons	21
The Bridge Logan Parker	22
Veni(son) ~~~ Cooper Davis	25
The Sock Drawer Jessic McColpin	27
Sonnet #1: "For the Future" Kalijah Hessig	28
A Brotherly Paradox Cooper Davis	29
CraCked Riverie Isaac Gleitz	44
The Masculine Urge to Leave Everything Behind... Kalijah Hessig	45
three-part shakedown: a call & response*** Colleen Kincaid	47
Galaxy	50

Contents

Macaylah Hernandez	
Enough	51
Kassian Frey	
it is all right there***	54
Colleen Kincaid	
Panic Attack***	55
Elliot McKinley	
Subconscious Drip	56
Sophie Taylor	
This is Therapy*** ~~~	57
Kassian Frey	
Rocket City Baseball*** ~~~	60
Maya McCloud	
Haiti***	61
Kassian Frey	
Fall: Season of Death	63
Abby Moore	
Dessert Rose	66
Kassian Frey	
hymen after significant emotional impact***	67
Colleen Kincaid	
I Decapitated a Rat	69
Maya McCloud	
Rat Feast	71
Pen Bailey	
Free Dinner	72
Jessica McColpin	
Crazed Cup	74
Eric Walthour	
I would have been there for you if it were yesterday	75
Logan Parker	
i'll tell her eventually, maybe, idek ~~~	76
Colleen Kincaid	
Psychdelic	77
Kassian Frey	

Evangeline	78
Alia Sarris	
Calcutta	79
Kassian Frey	
Exodus Part II: From The Sands To The Stars	81
Kalijah Hessig	
Year Zero	82
Hann Lucas	
Time is...	83
Colleen Kincaid	
Strange Happenings in the Town of Whiskey...	84
Logan Parker	
Surreal Space Walk	105
Noah Chaplin	
Black Death	106
Jessica McColpin	
Meeks	107
Alia Sarris	
As I Lie Awake, Talking to a Figment	108
Logan Parker	
I'll Get Better Someday, Somehow	110
Kalijah Hessig	
Contributors' List	112

(*) indicates that the selection has a
content warning.**

**(~~~) indicates that the selection is an award
winner**

Original Small Town Fever Infomercial (full length) (720p)

Logan Parker

CONGRATULATIONS!

Your daily dose of reality has been compromised.

Now introducing: Small Town Fever.

Have you ever wanted to escape the busy bustle? To neglect all opportunity and fortune?

We have the solution for you!

Move to a small town – where everyone knows your name / where your personality stays the same / where life repeats day after day.

Think of what you could establish:

Your job and daily routine could repeat for the next fifteen years!

Your job and daily routine could repeat for the next twenty years!

Your job and daily routine could repeat for the next thirty years!

Your job and daily routine could repeat!

Your job and routine are going to repeat!

Your job is going to repeat!

Your job is to repeat!

Repeat the cycle of generational reproduction!
Release your celibacy at the age of nineteen!
Celebrate redundancy at the stage of release!
Confirm what's affirmed before leaving it be!

IT'S QUICK, IT'S EASY – WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!

Let the stress and worry of a vibrant life melt away!
Contract the warm glow of rural sickness!

There are no conflicts here / there are no consequences here
/ there are no things here / there is nothing here.

Small Town Fever: consisting of consistency and constancy,
constantly.

Heartbeat

Abby Moore

I can feel his simple pull
a guiding hand, a safety net, one simple request.
I lean back and the world fades.
I close my eyes, feel the warmth of his chest
and I listen

...de-dum de-dum de-dum...

I imagine
the blood coursing through his veins
running from his head to his heart.
His entire being, a flood of love and patience
spreading with each and every beat

*...thump-thump
thump-thump thump-thump...*

Always giving all that he is
with no questions, no hesitations
an open book, an object of desire and comfort.
He is a butterfly that can never see
his own colorful wings.
I am always overcome

...de-dum de-dum de-dum...

Sinful Stranger Seeking Sacred Salvation

Kalijah Hessig

"I'm just a poor, wayfaring stranger"

I know I should feel fortunate for the misfortune of life

Because at least I've had the chance To live

To laugh

To love

Something my mother has reminded me of

By way of a simple sign in the kitchen.

I travel through this wicked world

Seeking some reprieve

Seeking some rest

Seeking some revelation

"There will be no sickness, no toil, nor danger"

When I make it to heaven, no,

If I make it to heaven,

My Mother told me she'd be waiting

for me

I pray I don't keep her waiting.

“I know dark clouds will gather ‘round me”

If I have to go to hell, no,
 When I have to go to hell,
My Father showed me he’d be waiting
 to break free
I pray he has to keep waiting.

“I’ll drop this cross of self-denial”

When I make it home, no,
 If I make it home,
My Savior promised me they’d be waiting
 for their fee
I pray I can afford the price of admission.

Something Holy

~~~Visual Art Award~~~

Alia Sarris



# Fraternity

Cooper Davis

Ping-pong balls drop  
into red Solo cups  
like jaws  
around Jason Momoa.  
The familiar scent of beer  
suffuses the neon space:  
a smoky bar  
where flocks of singles mingle.  
Suddenly my pong partner  
wants to wrestle me—  
perfect for a homoerotic  
Grecian scene.  
He wraps his arms around me  
as I stiffen in my jeans.

# Brilliance

Kassian Frey



# The Unpaid Therapist

Roxanna Hair

*Saturday Night*

Every Saturday night you can hear the roar of people all packed into the tiny local bar. The neon signs hang on the outside of the bar, blinding anyone who stares (my favorite one to look at while intoxicated is the Busch light corn sign, it never fails to make me laugh.) Not only can you hear the hoots and hollerin' of the old townies but also the drunken cries of the girl whose boyfriend just cheated on her, the screams because it's someone's 21st birthday, and my favorite, the scream you give your best friend when your favorite song comes on and you're already halfway to the dance floor.

I truthfully don't know what it is about getting vigorously sweaty and dancing for hours on a tiny, sticky, wooden "dance floor" that just gets me going, but goddamn it after a week at school I can hear the bar, specifically the dance floor, calling to me, telling me *I HAVE* to go out this weekend. Maybe it's because when the lights and liquor hit me, my inner dancing queen comes out and for a few short hours I can be someone I'm typically not; or, it's just simply that when I hear the lyrics "She's all right, that girls all right" and then Nicki Minaj's "Ay yo" I know that my only goal in that moment is to scream the lyrics of "F.R.E.A.K" while I shake my ass with my girlfriends on the dance floor.

The dance floor is like recess for drunk adults (or drunken college kids because I don't classify myself as an adult yet, that's way too much responsibility.) We're all sweaty, we're all definitely thirsty, only this time we aren't drinking water, and we for sure will be craving a nap afterwards. Speaking of adults, one of my other favorite things about the dance floor are the middle aged drunk suburban moms wearing their business casual and side parts. I don't know why but I feel an immense connection with these skinny jean lovers, these PTA moms who aren't afraid to tell the creepy, perverted, old men to go fuck off



and leave us alone. My beautiful, feminine, strong, role models standing right before my eyes, throwing back lemon drops while also setting alarms to ensure they wake their kids up Sunday morning for soccer.

### *Wednesday Night*

I wouldn't have ever thought this was the same bar I walked into every Friday night. When I open the barely tinted glass door to my usual weekend getaway spot, I'm blinded by the overhead lights that are NEVER normally on. I didn't have to present a bouncer my I.D and have him awkwardly scan my body with the metal detector before he tells me to have a good night and lets me inside. I just walked right in and plopped down with one of my friends at the bar rail waiting for the bartender to save me and turn this night around. Why am I at a bar on a Wednesday night one may ask? Short story - to cry my eyes out, drown my sorrows away with a long island, and escape all the people driving me fucking NUTS. The last part was the most challenging because the only other 4 people sitting in the bar were of course, your local middle-aged men who are always too fucking nosy.

The bald man who definitely watches UFC in his free time and has anger issues (it's just a gut feeling, trust me guys) said, "Just one shot? It looks like you ladies are just getting started."

He and his friend smiled at us. My friend and I giggled under our breath to each other, knowing we could do one of two things; engage and potentially get our tab picked up by the nosy married men, or just be friendly but try and ignore them. On this particular night, I had no effort to give, and we chose to ignore them.

"What can I get for you ladies?" The bartender asked us with a smile.

Her black eyeliner was smudged across the underneath of her eyes, and I could see a tiny black spec dangling in the corner of her eyelid, trying to hang on.

“Just a long island and 2 apple pie shots,” I said while faking a smile.

When the bartender gave my friend and I our shots and drinks, I threw mine back and chugged. Bawling your eyes out in a public space is very humbling. I don't know why or how but my little local college bar in some fucked up way is my escape. My escape from the stupid stressors constantly surrounding and suffocating my life. My escape from the mounds of homework growing larger and larger by the day. My escape from my own mind (this one being the trickiest to try and escape from). Tears cascaded down my rose-colored cheeks', one fell into my long island, disappearing quickly into what was left of the brown liquid.

“I think I'm ready to go,” I say to my friend after we pretty much both just used this Wednesday night bar visit as a therapy session.

“Let's get out of here,” my friend tells me.

### *Friday Night*

One thing about me is that I will ALWAYS be comfortable: In bed, at home, at school, at work, and for damn sure at the bar. I will always find a way to be comfy. Friday nights are my favorite nights at the bar because no one is ever there, they're preparing for Saturday night by skipping Friday night. This means I have the complete dance floor to myself and my three girlfriends. Now, we aren't necessarily the ONLY ones at the bar on Friday nights, but the dance floor is ALWAYS ours.

My friends love to get dressed up and go out (this was honestly my least favorite part of the night because they always took so SO long to get ready).

“Can I please wear that shirt?” My friends would yell back and forth.

“But I haven't worn it yet. I want to be the first one to take a picture in it.”



“Ohhhh okay. Can I wear this one then?”

They both look at me, whose legs are covered in baby blue Scooby Doo pajama pants that have the infamous Scooby snacks and cheesy pepperoni pizza plastered all over them, paired with an orange, oversized t-shirt.

“You’re wearing that...to the bar?” My friends questioned me.

“Uhm yeah? Is that an issue?”

I snarked back at them. They never question what I wear, and I really couldn’t give two fucks less if I were wearing pajamas at the bar because who is there to impress at BoJack’s in Franklin, Indiana?

“Oh, no girl you look cute and comfy, I was just asking,” my friend chimed in making sure I knew they didn’t mean any harm by the statement.

They finished getting ready and we walked our built-in path between the shrubbery of the houses towards our therapy, BoJack’s. Ready to escape my mind, shake my ass with my girlfriends, hype up the PTA moms reliving their glory years, and ready to forget everything stupid and chaotic going on in my life.

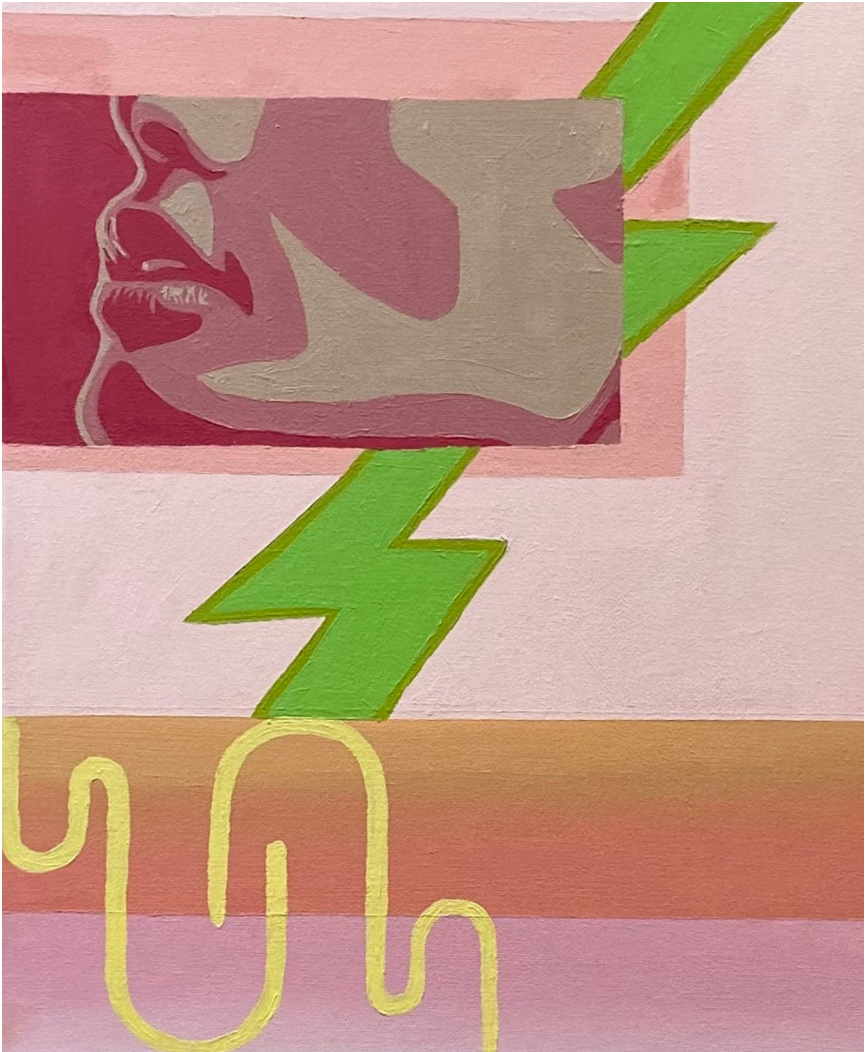
# Sky kisses

Colleen Kincaid

may we find the strength to get out of here. make it easy this time, i'm not prepared for the heaviness of adaptation. lift us up to Clouds with a kiss & take us on golden wing, safely towards freedom. & we migrate westward. the Wind takes us everywhere she may will us. soar above the crop circles & the interstates & the 7-Eleven where they buy & stare & scoff & buy. we fly over the shit we don't want to deal with & the way i want to rip my hair out when you say *why can't you just let it go?* let there be an answer, let the Wind take it away & me with it & you with me. let the Clouds part so gently as the Sun reels us inward & the Moon teases below & i can't feel a thing but the tips of your fingers.

# Sunset State of Mind

Zoe Simmons



# The Bridge

Logan Parker

The malformed wooden steps which gradually ascend from the deck on the rear of my childhood home were once lacquered and brand new. Each step now creaks and cracks as an individual slowly creeps towards the stick-littered yard below. The final step collapses under the individual's foot as the board snaps from the weight of the average human being. Upon lifting the now cut foot from the inadequate rubble, the individual continues on, into the wide-ranging backyard of the home. The individual walks barefoot now, ditching the peeled, bent-up flip flops which were purchased 2 summers ago for little more than twelve dollars. Feeling the cool grass between his toes and the summer sun delicately scolding the back of his neck, the individual continues on, step after step, breath after breath. Upon passing a large bush of trees and a small tree-like bush, the individual finds himself in a cricket-infested field. The grass is overgrown and waist deep. There is but a single path carved through the sea of green, cut by the riding mower of an unknown neighbor. The path proceeds onward, persisting until it can no longer. The path is intersected by a winding creek, filled with brown, murky water. But the individual continues over the creek, now pacing along a wide bridge, just wide enough for two, maybe two and a half people. The bridge is covered in graffiti, crude carvings, and an obscure message which reads: "Dear gOd, dEar god, TinkLe tiNkle hoy..." The individual slowly squats on the ground, crossing his legs over each other as he sinks towards the wooden platform. He now sits and breathes in semi-silence, purly interrupted by the whispers of crickets in the field to his left and the flow of shallow water from the creek below. He slowly leans back, lying down, falling onto the flat, moistened wooden planks, giving himself to the atmosphere, closing his eyes as the crickets and the water leak into his brain.

This is the spot where the individual feels at peace, maybe at home depending on his current mood. He often ponders

here. Ponders the grass and the trees, the water and the rocks, the moon and the stars. He ponders what's beyond those stars, beyond those great, ethereal boundaries of the sky. Someone has possibly done this before him. Someone has considered a higher deity while here, in this exact spot, considering a god as they carved a message into temporary planks, writing gibberish with instilled meaning. "Tinkle tinkle hoy," they wrote to the Lord Almighty, as if to possibly piss on the very idea of his existence. Because how could there be a higher power, an exceptional being outside of the walls of time and space, who peers among us, searching our thoughts for devotion and our homes for prayer and our actions for sin? Does the hypothetical Lord actively enjoy the hordes of middle-aged men and women who gather in crowds on Sundays to recite outdated texts and sing uninspired hymns? Does he watch upon them like one would a sitcom? Does he place a laugh track here and there and there and here when the priest stumbles over his words, or when a baby cries amongst the crowd? Does he feel the boredom vaporizing off the children's skin into the dusty atmosphere which smells of old books and cologne? The children who were forced out of sleep at eight in the morning, stuffed into appropriate attire, and dragged into a congested triangle of a building to sit in silence and behave properly for an hour and a half. The children who are told what to believe as their heads are dipped under supposedly blessed tap water. Does the lord find himself amused by this? Does he truly bless the lives of those who partake?

Maybe the "tinkle" and the "hoy" carved into the plank aren't a letter to a higher power. Maybe it was simple gibberish. Maybe the lord intended it that way. Maybe as the individual lays upon the wooden bridge, Another looks on him from above. Maybe Another feels his thoughts and understands his confusion and doubt. Maybe Another sees further than the thoughts and doubts, into the heart or soul of the individual. Maybe Another accepts that though the

individual may doubt the old texts and feel opposed to the practices, he still works to better himself and those around him. The individual can, despite his beliefs, be a child of the universe. A newborn of the cosmos. A son of the beyond.

# Veni(son)

## ~~~Poetry Award~~~

Cooper Davis

Doesn't every good son know his Father  
will kill him one day?

My father, what about you?

Remember: you built this house  
on solid ground teeming  
with deer & wistful spirits.

You shot the buck that still hangs  
in our parlor – field dressed him

on wet, sanguine grass,  
& like a proper huntsman,  
you ate all the flesh you could.

Now you know I've never hunted  
(or liked the taste of venison),  
but don't ever say you've failed me  
again.

You built this body knowing

it won't last,

though my white-tailed  
childhood still prances  
through these dark woods,

fleeing taxidermists:  
those impending death knells  
from distant church bells.

Our lost time is Orion  
shifting in the winter's night sky.

Suns come & gone,  
camouflaged

hands to another  
hour, arrow –  
bullet.

Because the ground between us will always teem  
with deer & wistful spirits.

Dear Father,

O, my Solstice!

Your only son  
remembers well –

how he woke one foggy morning  
& saw his own head  
mounted in the parlor

like a dead clock:

stoic, glassy-eyed, neutered  
(of antlers).

In the parlor you built  
with your own  
hands.



# The Sock Drawer

Jessica McColpin

My sock drawer is getting hungrier  
As each little sock goes missing  
Into some unknown chasm  
Where no one goes.

They could get lost in the cyclone  
Which sets in its own cavern  
Adjacent to the living room

Or, they're stolen by the gremlin  
Who lives in a chamber near my own  
Rumored to have the same parentage as me.

I hear the drawer calling to me  
Asking for more socks to be devoured,  
So after returning from the market,  
I feed it some more.

# Sonnet #1: “For the Future”

Kalijah Hessig

What is the point of trying to use form?

Poetry is about showing your own soul.

It is difficult to try to conform  
when conformity seems to be the goal.

Everyone is imitating the past-  
unable to escape old conventions,  
using sonnets like some sort of cast-  
broken hands unable to make new inventions.

Is it unable, or unwilling?

Maybe it is easier to repeat.

These many words, these many poems, keep on filling.

Yet writing something new seems to be a great feat.

I will try to write with every letter.

I will try to write something new, better.

# A Brotherly Paradox

Cooper Davis

## **CHARACTERS:**

**BRIAN:** A reticent writer: wears a wedding ring, age 37

**BEN:** A farsighted pastor: Brian's brother, wears a wedding ring and cross necklace, has a slightly larger build, age 39

**TIME:** The present, midafternoon.

**SETTING:** The dim and somewhat cluttered basement of BEN and BRIAN's parents' house.

**AT RISE:** BRIAN is sorting through a large box labeled "MOM'S THINGS." The space features two tables, a lamp, and numerous drab boxes and antique objects.

(BEN enters)

BEN

Any luck?

BRIAN

None yet. You're sure it's not in the attic?

BEN

I'm positive. I looked everywhere up there. It's gotta be down here.

BRIAN

Well, we're bound to find it eventually.

(BEN crosses to the table on the other side of the stage and begins rummaging through a box)

BEN

It makes no sense why it would be stored away down here—down where it's so musty and cold.

BRIAN

(gloomily)

Cold as the grave.

BEN

(sighing)

It's a damn good picture . . . should've been displayed at the funeral.

(pause)

BRIAN

What does it look like again?

BEN

It's just Mom, Dad and myself in front of the house. We took it one Sunday before church, years ago.

(pause)

Mom wouldn't stop talking about how fresh and beautiful that morning was – a simple morning in May. It was the day I delivered my first sermon, actually.

(The two continue to search. BRIAN pulls a thick book out of his box and, fascinated, begins to flip through it)

BEN (cont.)

What's that?

BRIAN

Looks like Mom's Bible. Interesting – the margins are filled with her handwriting. I don't think I've ever looked in it before.

(pause)

Odd that it's down here.

(BEN approaches BRIAN)

BEN

I'm pretty sure she had me move it down here with some other stuff after Dad died. I can't say I thought much of it; she owned several more anyhow.

(BEN takes the Bible from BRIAN and flips to the first page, squinting and holding it quite far from his face)

BRIAN

You really ought to get your eyes checked out.

BEN

Oh, I'm fine. Stuff just gets a little blurry up close. It's nothing.

(he continues to squint at the Bible)

"To Becky S. Freedman, the most loving daughter-in-law I could ever ask for." Huh, I guess Grandma Annie gave it to her.

BRIAN

Sounds like a wedding gift.

BEN

Indeed. I'll have to add this to my collection at home.

(returns to his side of the stage and sets the Bible on the table)

Let's keep looking for that picture, though. I have a meeting with the president of the American Baptist Association at five, and I don't wanna leave here again without it.

(BEN resumes his search)

BRIAN

(slowly)

Do you think maybe I can have it? Mom's Bible, I mean.

BEN

(coldly)

And why would you want a Bible?

BRIAN

(taken aback)

Well, because it was important to Mom. I don't have much that belonged to her, after all.

BEN

We'll talk about this later.

BRIAN

No, no let's just settle this now. We're going to have to go through everything sometime anyway –

BEN

Look, I don't mean to be harsh, but between you and me, I think we both know I should have it. She would want me to. Besides, I'm the oldest.

BRIAN

(defensively)

What's that supposed to mean? And don't be so juvenile; just because you're older doesn't mean you get to claim everything you deem important. Mom would side with me on this one.

BEN

Would she really? Besides, I thought you were an atheist.

BRIAN

I'm agnostic. There's a difference.

BEN

Well, Dad thought otherwise.

BRIAN

(scoffing)

God, I write one successful play that critiques religion and for that I'm forever an atheist.

BEN

I mean, it was a blasphemous play, Brian.

(pause)

BRIAN

(with growing intensity)

Why is it that you always have to make me feel even more alienated than I already do? Look, I swear, all I want is Mom's old bible. You can have literally anything else. Her funeral was a week ago! Can't you just let me have what I want? For once?

BEN

(defensively)

Woah, woah, calm down, please. I mean, you really think you deserve it? Aside from certain holidays, you've scarcely visited over the last fifteen years.

BRIAN

(sighing)

You think I like facing the fact? I—I just had to get out of here, that was all.

BEN

You sure packed up and moved out to New York awfully fast—

BRIAN

Because I wanted to be a writer! That's where writers go if they want to become a success and get in with the major theaters and publishing houses.

BEN

All I'm saying is I'm the one who stayed around and helped them when they needed it. One of us had to.

BRIAN

(derisively)

Well, what a hero you are.

(pause)

I—I can't change the fact that I was never the favorite. You were always the more athletic and extroverted one. You were the proud, prized son who followed in his father's footsteps and became a pastor. And I'm not that.

BEN

I don't know what you want me to say. I can't just change any of that. We get to choose our lives, Brian. You had the choice to stay around and, well, try harder. But you didn't. No matter how you look at it, life is a competition. Sure, God has a plan, but He also grants free will.

BRIAN

(scoffing)



(pause)

We can't choose where we're born or which lot we find ourselves in. You can't imagine being any different, can you?

(pause)

BEN

Do you believe in God or not?

BRIAN

Well, not exactly –

BEN

There it is.

BRIAN

It's so typical of you not to ask why.

BEN

Then why don't you believe in God?

BRIAN

It's not like you'd really understand. Just forget it. We're looking for your sacred picture anyway.

(BRIAN begins sorting through a new box when something new strikes him)

Why do you believe in God, Ben?

BEN

(slowly)

Well, um, the truth is that I've felt Him before.

BRIAN

(doubtfully)

Really?

BEN

Yes. I know it sounds strange, but He's been with me. He was at my wedding, at my daughter's birth. I felt Him last week at the funeral, too.

(pause)

Have you ever been consoled by – by mere stillness?

BRIAN

Sure, but I wouldn't call that "God."

BEN

Did you ever truly believe?

BRIAN

Well, yes, but I gave that up in my twenties. You already know that, though.

(pause)

BEN

What about heaven? Do you believe in the afterlife?

BRIAN

No.

BEN

(shaking his head)

Damn.

(BRIAN stops to look directly at BEN)

BRIAN

I mean, I just think Mom's simply at peace, you know. That's the most consoling thing for me: peace. We're all destined to reach it one day.

(pause)

She was in so much pain at the end and I couldn't bear to watch her suffer anymore. She was in hell, Ben. I wanted to give her peace, and when the doctors mentioned euthanasia, I thought —

BEN

(stiffly)

I already know what you thought. I could never sign a paper to kill my own mother. I don't regret my decision, and I'm thankful we didn't go through with it.

BRIAN

I just wanted to take her out of all the pain and away from the cancer, that's all. I wanted her to finally rest.

(pause)

BEN

And what about near-death experiences?

(BRIAN resumes his search)

BRIAN

What?

BEN

You know, near-death experiences? Like in *Heaven is for Real*? That's undeniable proof for me.

BRIAN

That's not proof, Ben. That's nothing more than a fictitious, biased story. A chemical high in the brain, if anything. I would much rather read a better piece of fiction, like *Waiting for Godot* or something.

(pause)

Have you ever read Beckett, or Kafka?

BEN

You've always been skeptical of things that are right in front of you.

BRIAN

Heaven is not right in front of me. It's not in front of anyone.

(A pause. BEN removes a pair of austere reading glasses from his box and, after examining them and rubbing them with his shirt, he puts them on. He proceeds to pick up the Bible and flip through it.)

BEN

You believe the Bible's fiction as well, I presume?

BRIAN

Sure; it's just a mode of indoctrination, no different from the Quran or any other fantastic religious text. They don't mention that in church. Look, it's nothing more than a common old book to me.

BEN

(looking at BRIAN)

Well, that's exactly why I don't think you deserve Mom's Bible, alright. It would be disingenuous. Don't tell me you can't see that.

BRIAN

I don't care to admit that I don't want it because it's a Bible. I want it because it carries Mom's memory, Ben. I mean, just look at it: it's like her diary. It contains her private thoughts and worries and joys. . . . You've already claimed so many other things: her pearl necklace, the cookbooks, the photo albums, everything! I know I've been absent around here, but I'm taking this back to New York with me. I need this.

(pause)

BEN

Then tell me why you hate religion so much.

BRIAN

Oh, for Christ's sake, I don't hate religion. If anything, religion hates me.

(removes a picture frame from his box and recognizes it)

Well, would you look at that. I found your precious photograph. You're right, it is a lovely picture.

(BRIAN walks over to BEN and sits the frame on the table in front of him, when BEN finally notices the ring on BRIAN's finger)

BEN

Is — is that a wedding band on your finger?

(BRIAN looks at his ring as if he forgot he had it on)

BRIAN

What? Oh, this? No, no — it's nothing like that.

BEN

I've officiated enough weddings to know a wedding ring when blends in with your skin. When on earth did you get married?

BRIAN

(sighing)

Well, I suppose there's no point in trying to hide it anymore. I've been married for over five years now.

(pause)

BEN

(incredulously)

Wow. You really have been living a double life in New York.

So, what's her name?

BRIAN

Actually, that's —

BEN

No, wait, why would you hide something like that? Mom was healthy five years ago . . . she could've gone to your wedding then . . . we both could've!

BRIAN

Ben, I—

BEN

You better have a —

BRIAN

His name is Caleb, alright! I have a husband. There, now you know. God, I never thought I'd tell you.

BEN

So, you're —

BRIAN

Yes. I—I like men. I always have.  
(pauses, then bursts forth as if freeing himself)

And the Bible says that I'm an abomination; that I should be put to death; that I'm diseased and destined for hell. And all for who I love! My nature dooms me, they say, whether or not I earnestly believe in God. A religion that preaches that isn't anything I want to be a part of, and it's a real shame I grew up in one.

BEN

So that's why you moved to New York?

BRIAN

This place was hellish for me, Ben! I hated myself so much growing up. You – you have no idea. And all the homophobes and hypocrites in school that called me “queer” and “fag” . . . they made it all so much worse. They didn’t even know for sure, only suspecting that I was gay. So much for that Christian, godly love.

BEN

Dad suspected too.

(pause)

But I – I never believed the rumors. I never let myself. I mean, I knew what some people said, but I always tried to come to your defense. Remember when I punched Fred Bowie? That asshole always gave you a hard time.

BRIAN

(chuckling)

Yeah.

BEN

Mom always defended you when you were gone, too. Did you know that? She always insisted it wasn’t true. But, I guess, turns out it was.

BRIAN

(slowly, shrugging)

Well, the truth is that she knew my secret. She accepted me, or, tried her best to. She – she came to my wedding, actually. Flew all the way out to New York just for me.

BEN

She . . . protected you.

(pause)

BRIAN

I just want to take a piece of her back to New York with me. That's all I'm asking for, and then I'll be out of your hair.

(BEN approaches BRIAN and hugs him. BRIAN is still, but eventually embraces BEN. They release.)

BEN

I'm – I'm sorry, Brian. For everything. I didn't know you were so close with her.

(pause)

You know I love you.

BRIAN

And I love you.

BEN

We've forgotten to say those words all these years. I know Mom would be proud of us right now – and maybe even Dad.

BRIAN

Yeah, maybe.

BRIAN

(wistfully)

Really?

BEN

Yeah. I mean, you were at mine, and true brothers support each other at their weddings.

(pause)

But, it's alright. I can see why you didn't tell me.



BRIAN

(hopeful)

Maybe you can meet him sometime.

BEN

I—I would like that. This Caleb better be a good guy.

BRIAN

(smiling)

Oh, he is.

(pause)

I . . . could use some fresh air, if you'll excuse me.

(BRIAN begins to head offstage)

BEN

Wait!

(moves to pick up the Bible and hands it to BRIAN)

For you. You should have it. Mom will always be with you, Brian. With us both.

BRIAN

Thank you.

BEN

Don't thank me. You . . . deserve it.

(BRIAN exits with the Bible and BEN returns to his side of the stage. He sighs, then picks up his picture and gazes wistfully into it.)

(LIGHTS FADE OUT)

(END OF PLAY)

# CraCked Riverie

Isaac Gleitz



# The Masculine Urge To Leave Everything Behind and Become Chris McCandless

Kalijah Hessig

Pack Your Bags

Burn Your Money

Bury Your Current Life

Head To The Mountains

Get Lost

Refuse Directions

In Fact

Refuse Any Help

You Do Not Need Anyone

You Are A Man

Meant To Be Alone

Meant To Survive

You Can Do This On Your Own

You Will Do This On Your Own

Escape From The Mountains

They Aren't Your Home

Head To The Desert

Let The Sun Burn Your Skin

Feel The Sand Seep Into Your Soul

Let Your Last Drop Of Water Fall To The Ground

Feel The Thirst Take Over Your Thoughts

Let The Pain Guide Your Wanderings

Get Lost In The Endless Dunes

Stay Lost For Forty Years

Pray To God To Deliver You To The Promised Land

Stop Praying, You Don't Need Anyone's Help, Remember?

Find A Lone Highway

Steal A Car, You Don't Need Anyone's Help, Remember?

Head To The Frozen North

Leave The Car On A Lone Highway With An Apology Note

Don't Sign Your Name, You Buried Yourself, Remember?

Feel The Snow Seep Into Your Bones

Until You Can't Feel Them Anymore

Feel Your Strength Fade Away

Find God, He's Walking Towards You

Wearing Padded Boots And A Coat Of Multicolored Hides

Hear Him Out, Let Him Offer You Some Warmth

Refuse His Offer, You Don't Need Anyone's Help, Remember?

Use Your Last Ounce Of Strength

Dig A Shallow Grave For The Man You Have Now Become

No One Will Look For You Anyhow

You Are A Real Man Now

Meant Be Alone, Even In Your Final Moments

Meant To Die Alone

You Can Do This On Your Own

You Did Do This On Your Own.

# three-part shakedown: a call & response

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

Colleen Kincaid

I.

Why did I have my friends in the back of the car?

I couldn't tell you.

Why did I park there?

Her dad's house was 30 yards away.

Why didn't my body move faster  
when I saw the red & blue?

I couldn't think.

Why did they just sit there instead  
of helping me?

Two 15 year old girls,  
passengers to a 17 year old.

I had plenty to pack away didn't I?

6 grams. Cat lighter.  
Water bottle bong.

Fuck, why are my hands so sweaty?

The high kicks in.

Guys, do you think it smells in here?

For sure.

Where did you put the bag...?

I couldn't hear them.

## II.

License & Registration?

(no... shit...)

Do you know why I might have gotten  
a call about suspicious activity in the area?

No.

Have you girls been smoking pot  
in this vehicle?

No. (no. no. no. no.)

Are you aware that you're parked on  
the wrong side of the street?

Oh. No. Sorry.

What's in the bag ladies?

Nothing.

So, then you wouldn't mind stepping out  
of the car for me?

(not them, just me)

## III.

Shakedown. With too many hands. Immediately I felt them as my knees hit the siding of the van. My face slammed second. First face mine saw was hers in the passenger side. Her eyes just pierced back into mine. They were pained but easy. The other girl didn't look at me. We weren't that close. That doesn't make it better. More hands. Right where I didn't want them. They were sweaty like mine. I was Screaming. Yelling. Fighting back. Like that worked. Like it would change the way this was going. And where my mind was

headed. Like me telling him I wasn't enjoying this would make him stop. He was retaliating towards my lies, now that I can think about it. He didn't actually want me, just control. As if he didn't already have it. Felt like hours. But there I was on the curb in handcuffs. "Detainment due to refusal to comply." The girls sat next to me hands free, trying to stop me from making more of a scene. Cop number 2 enters for backup. I am met with a calmness by this man who feels holy. If only he knew. If only he knew then nothing would have changed. My parents came next. Silence from mother. An unnatural act. Ground shaking from my father. An unusual occurrence. If they only knew. If they only knew I would be pointing him out in a lineup. Coughing up my bruises and confessions in one breath. I couldn't possibly.

# Galaxy

Macaylah Hernandez





# Enough

Kassian Frey

“You are not enough.”

She grows up hearing that, and even when the words aren't said aloud, she feels it in every fiber of her skin, within the messes of her brain. She knows this feeling of inadequacy so intimately that it becomes a part of her: she is incomplete. She, herself, is not enough.

She will never be enough.

She knows she is not enough when she wears her mother's clothes, the fabric ill-fitting on her skin. They should feel like home. Instead, they feel foreign. Like she is an imposter in these fabrics.

Her inadequacy follows her as she sits at the dinner table among her mother's people, an outcast. Her family loves her, she knows, but she does not find any familiarity with them. Her skin is a few shades paler; her nose is not soft enough nor her eyes which edge with a different color. When they speak, it is in another language, one that should feel like home but one she does not understand. She sits there at the table, quiet, watching her family smile and laugh and pass food as if she is underwater. And as she drowns, she longs to understand what the others are saying; longs to know what makes them laugh, and cry, and yell.

*It's so you can belong with the others,* her mother had told her once. That's why she only knew English. To belong. To understand the ins and outs of this daunting country.

She has never felt like she has belonged.

She knows she is not enough when she sits at the dinner table among her father's people, an outcast. Her skin is darker against theirs; her nose is sharp, and her eyes are too dark. When she speaks, they look at her like she had just walked into the room uninvited. She smiles then, painfully, and swallows her silence, watching instead the others go back to their idle conversation. Her distant relatives sit by her, sometimes, stopping by only to ask again where her mother is from, or to tell her she doesn't really look like someone from her mother's country. She understands them when they speak, has learned this language to belong, to belong, to belong, but their words are like nettles, digging deep into her skin. She doesn't know which she prefers — drowning in silence among her mother's people or agonizing among her father's people.

She does not belong.

The feeling carves into her skin, infecting every thought that passes through her head. She is not dark enough or white enough. She is not "cultured" enough or "assimilated" enough. She is not, and never will be, enough.

She wonders, sometimes, if this feeling is normal. That every time she walks into a store among her mother's people, she worries she won't be seen as one of them.

An outcast. That every time she walks into a store among her father's people, she worries she'll be othered with a single glance.

She wonders, sometimes, if this feeling will ever go away.

She wonders, all the time, if she will be enough.

Why can't she be enough?

# it is all right there

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

Colleen Kincaid

a revelation at my feet. i let him trap me, forced to  
eat seedling from palm, not knowing he'd leave me

in a cage, bars plastered to bone. me: wingless bird &  
winded song. him: blackguard with key.

he is there in the depth of my spine, my throat, my cervix.  
everywhere is lost in his clutch & i have always known

& i can't tell you how. if i could extrapolate the ghosts  
i would & i'd tell them how beautiful they look tonight.

nothing like i used to be. & i keep trying to fly. i will die  
in this cage. i am learning to shut him out. i ate today.

for a moment i felt my wing lift. i wasn't the moon,  
not a reflection of you like you see me, not your creation.

i am the entire sky, ringing with storm, but still the sky.  
the cage where he clipped me is where i rest.

# Panic Attack

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

Elliot McKinley

My brain screams to me that I am dying,  
Drowning, choking, disappearing  
Into a black hole with no return.  
I scream as my lungs explode  
From filling with my final breaths  
Before the ship crashes.

I could pilot my way out of here  
If dark spots didn't dance  
With my vision until I go blind.  
The suit constricts me until  
I cannot breathe.  
My head buzzes with the hum  
Of cosmic noise  
And my lungs burst like supernovas.

I cry out and brace for impact  
As I pass through the black hole.  
A puddle of sobs and screams  
Replaces my body,  
And I must learn to adjust  
To what lies on the other side.

# Subconscious Drip

Sophie Taylor



# This is Therapy

## ~~~Prose Award~~~

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

Kassian Frey

“Are you happy?”

Dr. Foxe asks me this on a Thursday evening in April. I look at the clock.

4:44.

Our time is almost up.

Dr. Foxe stares at me – four eyes in those flimsy wire glasses – and behind their reflective surface, I can feel his impatience. I don’t know why I keep coming back. Maybe it’s for some sense of routine or stability in my life. Maybe I’ve given up.

I clear my throat. Dr. Foxe’s pen taps on his notebook.

“Well,” I say, shifting in my seat. My eyes flick to the clock again.

4:45.

Dr. Foxe isn’t looking, but I know he’s counting down the seconds to five o’clock.

“Yeah,” I say with a half-laugh. My skin prickles under his gaze. I want to crawl into myself. “Yeah, I’d say I’m...” I shrug. My own body is betraying me. “Happy.” I clear my throat. “Yep.”

4:46.

Dr. Foxe scribbles a note even though there’s nothing to write. I just said ‘Yeah, I’m happy, I’d say I’m happy’ – and I’m just sitting here taking it. I just watch as he writes in

his stupid fucking notebook and takes notes to act like my goddamn life is close to important. Because 'it is important, 'everyone says. Because 'life is worth living' and 'you just have to find your purpose' and Dr. Foxe is writing again— why, *why* is he fucking staring at me like that? Why does he look at me like I'm some animal to study, the kind he's *forced* to study, the kind of animal you're assigned to research in class but you couldn't give a flying shit about anywhere else? Why does he make me feel so terrible? Why does everyone make me feel so terrible? Is this how I'm supposed to feel here? Is this normal? Why am I here? Who put me here? And I just sit here taking it, all these thoughts running, I just accept it, I just let it happen, because this, *this*—

This is therapy.

"Actually," I say, standing up. "I-I'm not happy. Not— really. I-I mean I'm as happy as anyone who—" My throat closes in on itself. My brows furrow, mouth shakes. "You know what? No. I'm really *fucking*—"

"Ah," Dr. Foxe says, ticking up his glasses towards the clock. It's in that tone I know all too well, the tone I usually look forward to. He brushes me off like something as mindless as dust, and it's so shocking I stop talking. "It looks like our time is up."

My chest collapses, and I stand there, shoulders heaving, the tightness stretching over my face. My heart's beating like a fucking animal. I just want to spit in his face, I want to strangle Dr. Foxe right fucking here and now while he's standing up, I want to be *heard* goddammit, I want to—

Dr. Foxe smiles, sets his hand on my shoulder, and tips his head towards the door. It was open the entire time.



“Thank you for coming,” he says, voice void of any emotion. Deep down, I know he’s urging me to go already, to carry my useless weight somewhere else. “I’ll see you next week.”

I could kill him, right here and now. I *should* kill him.

Instead, I step out of the room, swallow, and smile to a door closing in my face.

My eye twitches. Everything in me is raging. I take a deep breath, exhale, and tell myself:

This is therapy.

# Rocket City Baseball

## ~~~Staff Prose Award~~~

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

### Maya McCloud

Every day, the baseball boys surround me in science class like their fans crowd the stands at their home games. They laugh across me like I'm not even here. They think it's funny to call me a coon, but I've never heard that word before. But the way they contort their face makes me think they're talking about me. They know I don't know when I just bow my head. I let the pink beads in my hair hit the desk and avert my eyes instead of reacting. Instead, I answer a question on our homework. It says that the man with a higher average speed will always win a race compared to those who are slow. The man must have a lot of practice running. I wish I was him. How I wish I could run out of this middle school and back home. Home where I don't have baseball boys with blonde hair saying things to me that I don't understand. Every day they say it to each other and me and the little Black boy doing science experiments on our instructional video on the projector screen and the only other Black girl who switched classes. Somehow, even without looking it up, I already knew. It was a word reserved for people like me. One day, I finally ran home. I ran home and opened our computer and typed that word in to confirm my suspicions. I didn't want to ask my parents what it meant, I didn't want to ask my friends what it meant, I didn't want to ask my neighbors what it meant. I needed the safety of the entire internet. I was right. The next day they asked me if I knew what that word meant. Maybe it would have been funnier if I did. I said I didn't know. I didn't know for my sake. I didn't know because I was too scared to say anything because the baseball boys crowded my desk like a shiny set of bleachers. I sat in the middle of them like a rogue baseball tossed around and discarded once their game was over.

# Haiti

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

Kassian Frey

I do not fear God;

I fear becoming a zombie.

The French claws have slaughtered us – sunken through  
men, women, children –

Severed every tendon that once connected us;

Like a baby's umbilical cord ripped from its  
mother.

Those same claws held Death's throat;

Bribed his hands onto the ships that crossed the  
Atlantic,

Let him take us like a vulture would its rotten,  
stinking prey.

It could have been Mercy, Death's breath at our throats –

To give us more space on that pack-pack-packed ship.

When we reach Haiti,

We gasp the fresh air of labor, heartache, and grieving  
The sun boils our backs,  
The jagged crops break our skin.

From dawn to sunset, we work,

Thundered by the French storm that hangs over us  
like a cloud—  
Every shift of their weather in greed of wealth.

We harvest goods we could never taste—

Sugar and coffee; how the Europeans love to relish  
death-made luxuries.

We worked until that's all we were, this work.

We worked until we had no life left to live—

Until we became what I had feared most.

We had become zombies in this hell.

Our souls, ripped from our labored bodies;  
Our lives, turned to mortal machines.

The day we revolt is the day we revive.

# Fall: Season of Death

Abby Moore

I used to image that winter would be the most common season for death. That's how it is always symbolized, right? It's cold, icy, with a higher chance for an accident. The plants are withered, dead. Trees become see-through, breakable, and all color fades away. Everything in nature indicates that winter will be the time that life will leave our world.

That's just not the case for me. While Fall is beautiful, full of changing colors, harvest, and celebrations, it has become the season for death. I remember that cold Sunday in October, when we got the phone call. My little sister answered the phone, and my grandmother was panicked. She said I need to speak to your mother with a voice that wavered in fear. My sister, only being 8 years old, said "Well mom isn't awake yet, you know she likes to sleep in grandma." My grandmother, who always advocated for letting our mother sleep in, responded instead with "Well wake her up, it's an emergency."

The day blurred by and everyone was so intent on getting to the hospital, they didn't tell us what was going on. It wasn't until halfway there, after we picked our grandmother up on the way, that my mother told us "Girls, grandpa has been in a car accident and we aren't sure how he's doing." It was terrifying. Once at the hospital, when she thought we were out of earshot, my aunt told them "He didn't make it" and broke down. I don't remember the rest of the day, just tears, a prayer, the funeral and missing school for a week. This was 10 years ago and I can still see the creamish-yellow color of the waiting room, imagine the stares of the people around us as our family cried.

I remember feeling ashamed almost, like we were somehow cursing those waiting on good news. It felt like the hospital was a bad omen and I wondered if the other families could feel it too.

It has been 10 years since he passed away, but it feels like Fall has come back to take another hit. Yesterday, at 6:45 p.m., I had just walked into my front door. My two sisters, their two boyfriends, and my boyfriend were staring at me as I entered. It was a rare occurrence that everyone beat me home, but it was even more rare that everyone be in the living room together. I looked at my boyfriend and he started walking towards me cautiously, like I was a wild animal he needed to soothe. I could just see it in his eyes; they had a tearful shine of sadness. With fear, I said "What? What's wrong?" He paused and said, "Papaw Moore has cancer."

It's always when you least expect it that tragedy hits. It has been a normal day of classes and meetings, and then this. It wasn't until after I teared up that my sister said "Here, dad's on speakerphone and he wants to talk to you." When I picked up the phone, he said "I need to step outside for a minute."

My dad always takes bad news alone. Whenever he got a phone call that would lead to an argument or make him upset, he always took it outside. There were times when it was snowing, and he would be walking around the front yard just on the phone. I could see the parallel immediately, so I walked outside to the side of my house, and I leaned against the tree. He told me his dad had cancer and that it has spread from his lungs, to his liver, and his spine. They don't know the official stage yet, but for it to be taking over his body, it's pretty final. Surgery isn't an option because he is too weak, and he wouldn't survive. I guess he has been refusing to eat, getting weak, and rapidly losing weight.

Papaw wanted to explain it away – he was just old, maybe he had a cold, maybe it was pneumonia that was hurting his lungs. But no. Cancer.

I don't know if he'll make it or not or if there is any way to treat it, but I don't see him accepting treatment. He's in his 70s, and he's stubborn. He hates doctors and I don't think we'll be able to convince him to change his ways. He still insists it's not serious, but we all know the truth. But isn't the timing amazing? Almost 10 years to the day that my other grandpa passed, my surviving grandpa is diagnosed with cancer. I mean, what luck, right?

I always liked Fall. Fall felt comforting, beautiful, a time of family gatherings and apple pie. Now, it feels like it might be out to get me. Maybe October and November just don't like me, but either way, Fall seems to be corrupting itself with awful memories. It feels like an illusion, like I can see straight through to some hidden secret. Like winter isn't actually the harsh part. Winter is just the aftermath, the result. It is the grave for everything that has already passed. Fall is the true leech, hemorrhaging and sucking away the life force of trees, animals, and people. Maybe I'm just cynical or I'm hurting, but it gives me some comfort knowing that my worst time of year are these few fall months.

# Dessert Rose

Kassian Frey





# hymen after significant emotional impact

\*\*Content Warning: Mature Themes\*\*

Colleen Kincaid

last night, my mother didn't know i was there.  
i lied to her because he said so  
& he led his parents elsewhere.  
he never lets me know how he pulls these things off.  
either way,  
there was a sultry silence fallen around us on his back porch.  
piercing cement & mesh screens make the wind howl a little  
louder.  
my mind felt duller in his hands.  
bits & pieces.  
the fragments i get to keep all to myself.  
i cannot remember  
& yet i do.  
but i can't.  
yes,  
the oblong green he held in his palm.  
& i was across from him, as we sat with our bareness to the  
ground  
& he placed it in my mouth.  
now here's where it gets a little dark. & where i go dark.  
& where the flashes & bits leave me now & i am only exactly  
where he wants me.  
a small bit of flailing limbs here,

& a touch of caresses my lips had no ability to refuse.  
sometimes i just want to know what he was thinking.  
how were there I love yous followed by you don't mean  
thats?

complete with why would you ever say thats & i would  
nevers.

& when i asked him what kind of pill it was  
only confusion.

he pushed every thought of my own right out of my ears.  
tonight, i stand in front of my mirror, fingers grazing over  
my new contusions.

& i wonder what it would have been like to remember.  
or cough it up out of my throat like it never entered my sys-  
tem.

but if you ask him,

*that's a silly 'lil accusation, don't you think?*

& i guess i didn't think.

but now i can't forget

how my insides have broken all up & crawl with his bits.

i cover my bruises with green makeup & hop in the carpool  
with a new silence.

# I Decapitated A Rat

Maya McCloud

Even though it was dead I swear  
it stared its glossy eyes  
at me until  
I snapped through  
its thyroid  
with scissors and  
then its eyes closed  
like it was too mortified  
to know  
its fate.

We took its brain out  
and put it on ice.  
it only weighs  
one point six seven grams.

Its blood was syrup  
that pooled  
on the edges  
of its ribcage  
like my breakfast.  
its white fur favored  
my room's  
cinderblock walls after I paint  
my nails red.

We cleaned the rat's innards  
with paper towel and found  
that blood  
soaks faster  
than syrup.

We took its heart out.  
the manual said it will  
perform some  
desperate posthumous  
contractions since the heart  
does not know  
the blood won't go  
into veins but instead  
leave stains  
on my bench.

My partner asked me  
if the rat would be  
embarrassed to know it died  
only to have its soft  
body and delicate  
organs exposed  
to the world  
by my scalpel.

I said,  
the rat will be modest again after  
we cover its body with  
the other rats thrown  
in the bin.  
but work quickly,  
we got that rat  
while it was still warm  
we don't have time  
for rigor mortis.

# Rat Feast!

Pen Bailey

O, Bacchus!  
O, Bacchus!

Impart upon us only the finest swill,  
Reddest wine-soaked cardboard,  
And salted, soured puddles of milk!

Let us twine our tails like maypole!  
Let us dance, squeak, and screech!  
Our voices, our voices - rise! rise! rise!  
Sing! Sing! Sing!  
Uproarious song of filth!

Tie us together until nothing, not even sin,  
The separation of souls from heaven to hell,  
Can unbind us in our pure,  
Unadulterated  
Glory!

Dive and feast!  
Dive and feast!  
Molding, maggoty bread,  
And the bluest of cheese!  
Feast, feast, feast!

# Free Dinner

Jessica McColpin

For the past 6 weeks I've lingered  
With the man who only eats fingers.

It all started with a letter  
So I should've known better

Because in front of my very eyes,  
I saw that the letter said that I had won a prize!

It was a free week at an all new resort  
And since it was free, I saw no need to retort.

So I got ready to go, and I packed all my bags  
Just to find myself trapped with the man who eats hands.

The doors were all locked at the resort where I stayed,  
And that's when I realized I had been betrayed.

But since I was there, and the doors were all locked,  
I decided that the man and I had plenty time to talk.

So one day I sat and I asked the man why  
It was fingers that he decided to try,

And when I looked over for a reply from the man,  
He grinned and told me that he's just a huge fan!

At dinner that night I stood up from my tray,  
And I told the man there that I had overstayed.

"Nonsense!" he said, "please take a seat,  
Because today, my dear friend, I am ready to eat.

Then I saw the man's eyes starting to stare  
Down at my hands which were on the table there.

I knew that I had no power to make my decision  
Because, no matter what, he would make the finger's  
division.

So without further ado, I lifted my knife  
And I handed my captor a hearty slice.

# Crazed Cup

Eric Walthour





# I would have been there for you if it were yesterday

Logan Parker

The past is a malformed sewer grate – tetanus-tucked  
memories in a  
Dented disk of harsh proportions. It opens to grotesque  
grime and mush  
Where which our hands once clamped, and bodies once lied  
beside.  
But there was something in that awful smell – Its  
gravitational lure  
Encouraged compassion. Hell was mutual if not for a  
moment in time.

But that was yesterday.

The gates opened within the tunnels, wide enough for a  
body and a half –  
So I took my body and took your half – leaving the rest  
behind: celestial light.  
Today, half lays in rot and reek. I prosper above while you  
linger below.  
The dents grow as you pound at the rear of the saucer-  
sculpted platter.  
Moss and vines tangle some ankles and drag a bodily  
silhouette into soggy dust.

I would have been there for you if it were yesterday.

i'll tell her eventually, maybe,  
idek

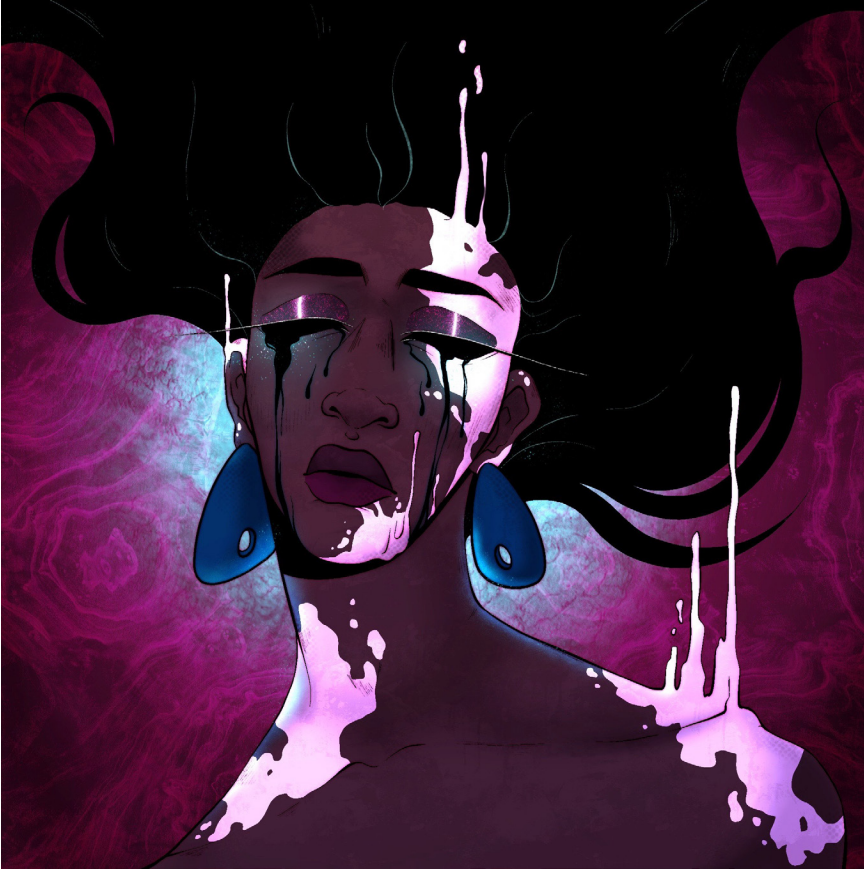
~~~Staff Poetry Award~~~

Colleen Kincaid

okay so listen. i did not tell my mother i was going into the forest today. i know that probably isn't the most palatable way to put this but please stick with me, ok? so there were two other girls (i'm not gonna tell you who bc i already know you don't like them) & there was no reason for them to be present but they were there. & like the forest was extra gloomy that night, like deeper plum color than usual & sappier than i wanted it to be. but something took all logic out of my body when i stepped into the trees, & as we walked further & further into the violet vines, i felt an unwarranted grasp on my thigh. & i asked the girls if they felt it too & they said *no*. then i asked them if they saw it & they said *no*. so maybe i'm just going insane i thought & i let that thought swirl for entirely too lengthy of a time frame bc i literally forgot where i was. idek how i did that like my mind just went black & no one was there but me & the purpleness surrounding me. i know it sounds crazy like i know no one is going to be like *oh yeah thats a normal thing to be freaked out about! i've been there girl!* like no one would ever have the guts to toss me a bone & even if they did like... you haven't been there?? well maybe you have been to the forest but i swear to god they knew what happened & just sat there. if that was me in their shoes, i feel like i would have said something yanno? yeah we kinda just went home & never talked about it again. my mom doesn't know. she can never know. i don't have any proof, no. do you believe me tho?

Psychedelic

Kassian Frey



Evangeline

Alia Sarris



Calcutta

Kassian Frey

Calcutta clicks with the
Clattering clang of
 Shivering gold,
 Rattling carts,
 Cawing crowds.

Under the sun,
 Sweat slicks like blood,
 Seeps deep into sweltering skin undone.

A girl holds her father's hand through the crowd,
Cramped by it, Jostled by it,

Her hand slips from her father's —
 She sees the back of his head —
A food cart jams 'cross her path, fish dead.

Her heart lurches —
 Maybe it's the heat, just the heat,
All she needs is to get back to her father —
 All they wanted to do was eat.

He's walking, still. He's leaving.
 Leaving *her*.
Her alone.

She stumbles past the cart,
 Trips over centipede feet, ringing bells, swaying saris,
Calls out, "Papi! Papi!"
 Praying he'll look for her past the hijabis.

The crowd swallows her sorrow, swallows her dread,
She sees the back of her father's head.

She Reaches for it— Memorizes it—
Calls, crowing, crying for it,

For her father,
To be back with her father,

And when she finally reaches him,
Bursting through the crowd,
Hands grasping, surging, slipping—

He is nowhere to be found.

Exodus Part II: From The Sands To The Stars

Kalijah Hessig

The First Man on Earth was named Adam,
named after the earth from which he was spawned.
He came from the Dirt and went forth to father Mankind,
who would go forth and destroy their own mother: the
Earth.

But Man was no longer limited to the Earth,
no longer attached to their poor mother.
Mankind had the means to abandon their mother's corpse,
But there were only so many ships, and so, so many Men.

The Last Men on Earth weren't lucky enough to leave with
their brothers,
stuck on the very Earth they helped to destroy, left with
nothing but their voices.
In unison they shouted so loud that they shook the Earth,
disturbing their mother's corpse: their graves.

This was their last cry out into the Universe before their eter-
nal silence.

The only thing those few aboard the ships could think
as they sailing off into the unknowns of the universe was:
"May God Help our Souls"

Year Zero

Hann Lucas



Time is...

Colleen Kincaid

They say it heals all wounds.
Yet Time is a dreamer locked in a tower.
It reaches out and in for the brain.
Scrambling thoughts and blackening memories,
Until tomorrow is yesterday.
Time is a rarity.
An unreliable source of change.
Out of fear for living
Or maybe remembering.
But my mind falls dark.
And I search the depths for a moment,
A second where it was real.
I come up short of reason and logic is fleeting.
Time is a taker, a mother, and a loner.

Strange Happenings in the Town of Whiskey, Colorado

Logan Parker

Every so often, divine forces find their way to the surface of planet earth. The bizarre and unknown crawls up from beneath or falls down from above, changing the normality of whatever society it infects. Such was the case with the small town of Whiskey, Colorado. On a humid Spring day in the middle of April, a mysterious seed fell from the sky. It soared for miles through the clouds and fog, nearing the distant ground below, plummeting into the moist soil at the center of the Whiskey town square. The seed looked no different from a miniscule sunflower seed, and yet, from this seed, a massive tree sprouted, cracking cement paths with its thick roots, displacing buildings as it shifted the earth below it. From this tree, peculiar fruits appeared upon the branches in the shape of human brains. They were slimy and unappetizing to the human eye, and yet, the closer the people of Whiskey got to the wretched fruits, the more they desired them. It didn't take long for the people of the town to become impatient with curiosity. The first person to eat one of the fruits was Richard Gibson, a local tire salesman. He ripped a ripe one from the tree and bit into it, the red juice dripping down his chin. Upon digesting the fruit, he gained superior human intelligence, unmatched by anyone in the town. Over the next couple of days, as Richard Gibson bested every intellectual problem and discussion he encountered, he was delegated the new mayor of Whiskey, with a promise to bring prosperity and order to the town. The second person to eat one of the fruits was Richard Gibson's wife, Amanda. Amanda had a less fortunate fate in store for her. Upon digesting the fruit, her body began to crack and fold in bizarre and grotesque ways. Her skin became coarse and rough, until eventually she was morphed

into a wooden chair. This chair now rests at the desk of Richard Gibson in his office in the Whiskey Town Hall. The third person to eat one of the fruits was a young teenager who stumbled upon them by accident on his way home from school. Upon digesting the fruit, he began to disintegrate and deteriorate in front of his own family. By the end of the day, all that remained of him was a pile of burnt, crispy skin and bones. As the people of the town continued to consume the fruits with varied mystical effects, Richard Gibson began to see both the fortune and the danger that could arise from the irresponsible consumption of the fruits. Eating one of the fruits, he claimed, was comparable to gambling your own life. From then on, the distribution of the fruits was controlled. Walls were established around the massive tree in the town square. Guards were delegated to protect the tree from any outside interference. Those who wished to eat one of the fruits, by law, could do so on the day of their 17th birthday. Other than that, no citizen was permitted to lay their hands upon the fruits. The town of Whiskey, Colorado became a place of controlled chaos, as some gained immense powers, and others obtained unfortunate curses.

Marvin Getty lived on the outskirts of Whiskey in a small, cozy suburban home. On a cool Spring morning in early May, as he awoke, he delicately brushed his hand along the empty bedside beside him. He felt the sheets, cold to the touch. His eyes felt heavy as he squeezed the pillow next to his own with anger and remorse. After minutes of this mournful routine, he stubbornly forced himself out of bed, dragged his sore body down the hallway, and stomped down the wooden stairs. He peered out the window above his front door as he made his way down the steps. The sky was still dark and the grass outside his home was still wet from the morning dew. He made his way to the kitchen and set three plates upon the dining room table out of habit. After a moment of realization, with an annoyed groan, he snatched up two of the plates and stashed them

back into the kitchen cabinets. He then proceeded to pop two thin pieces of bread into the toaster. A small aquarium rested on the counter beside the toaster. Within it, a bearded dragon scrambled out of a wooded log with excitement. She stared at Marvin staring at the toast, awaiting some form of attention. Marvin eventually broke his trance and smiled at the lizard.

“Mornin’ Paula. Don’t you go thinking I forgot about you”
He said.

He grabbed a handful of crickets from a bin underneath the sink and dropped them in the aquarium. The lizard sprinted back and forth, hunting the energetic bugs. When she was satisfied with the crickets she had eaten, she climbed atop the cave-shaped log and rested in the warm, luminous light of the heat lamp that was propped above her home. Marvin stared at her for an uncomfortable amount of time. He began to think of the past, the people he used to live with, the woman he used to love-

POP

His breakfast was ready. It was time to start the day.

Richard Gibson. Richard Gibson. His name was plastered all over the town as Marvin strolled through that morning. Posters hung on every building in sight with his face on them. His perfect strawberry blonde hair and silky mustache only served to annoy Marvin. Even more annoying was the cheesy text that resided on each poster: “The leader we all deserve!”, “Your intelligent, empathetic mayor of Whiskey!”, “Don’t lose hope, for I, Richard Gibson, have it under control!”

It all made Marvin feel sick to his stomach.

The walls circulating the town square were always sur-

rounded by fruit-begging citizens around noon, which was when Marvin decided to stroll by for his weekly haggling with whatever manager was on duty. He quietly and carefully pushed through the crowd of Whiskey citizens, bumping shoulders and brushing legs, until he was only a couple people back from the main entrance. He saw Ivar, the manager for the day, behind a booth with a rusted counter next to the entrance, handing the glorious brain-shaped fruits out to those who had reached the age of 17. Marvin took note of his surroundings: the wet grass still glazed with the morning dew, the massive stone walls covered in thick roots, the guards strategically placed along the border of the walls, peering at Marvin suspiciously. Marvin waited for a minute, then two, then three, then he impatiently yelled out:

“Ivar! Hey Bud! Good to see you!”

The guard’s glances shot towards Marvin, but they didn’t move. Ivar growled as he looked up from the counter of the booth with disappointment. He scratched his long, maroon beard and fixed his glassy eyes upon Marvin.

“I thought I told you to never come back here,” he said, signaling the guards to stand by.

Marvin pushed further through the crowd until he was face to face with Ivar.

“Well, yes. Yeah, sure you did. But I thought I could talk with you about some things. Maybe make you another deal?”

“Another deal? Seventeen, Marvin. Seventeen is the age. No more, no less. You’re far beyond your years.”

Ivar was grabbing handfuls of the brain-shaped fruits from baskets behind him and handing them out to the teenagers sur-

rounding the booth. His hands were stained red from grabbing the fruits, looking as if he had just committed a violent crime. With every fruit, he would check a name off the list that lay in front of him. Marvin glanced down at the list, then back up Ivar.

“It wouldn’t take a lot of work to just scratch my name on there, y’know.” Marvin said as his shaky finger pointed towards the list. “No one would have to know...”

The guards along the town square walls began to inch closer to the booth. Ivar delicately grabbed the piece of parchment and dragged it away from Marvin’s finger.

“No,” He growled back.

Marvin looked down at his feet disappointed, but within seconds, a look of hope shone across his face. He lightly grinned and began digging through his pockets until he pulled out a beautiful golden ring with a glimmering sapphire embedded within it. He held the ring within his fingers, feeling the smooth metal and the message engraved on the inside of the ring: “Until death, we shall live as one.”

“I’ll give you this,” he said, holding the ring up, “in exchange for one of those fruits.”

Ivar’s expression turned sad and pitiful for just a second, then he spoke.

“I knew Mary. I knew her well. She was... she was nice to me,” a look of anger began to fill his face as he was speaking, “but you would dishonor her memory- dishonor her, just for one of these stinkin’ fruits?! You’re a disgrace, Marvin. You’ve lost your way. Leave!”

He began to aggressively slide the metal gate of the booth shut when Marvin intercepted and slid his hand in the way. The gate slammed onto his fingers. He let out a slight whimper but ignored the pain as he tried to reason with the man.

“No, you don’t get it, it’s not like that. The fruit, it’s my only way to be with her again- “

He was cut off as Ivar shoved his fingers out of the way of the gate and slammed it fully shut.

Marvin slowly slid his back down against the wall of the booth until he was sitting in the wet grass. The excited and desolate screams of citizens filled the town square like a pack of hyenas. The ones who were permitted to eat chomped down on the delicious fruits; juice spilling from their lips and running down their cheeks. Some of them were given powers: limitless life, indestructible skin. Others were cursed: transformed into insects, morphed into inanimate objects. Marvin stood amongst them, alone and empty handed.

“What now, Paula? What now?”

Marvin paced his kitchen floor, ranting to his pet lizard as if she could understand every word he was saying.

“I just want her back. I just want things back the way they were. How, though? How can I accomplish this when those damned fruits are just- they’re out of reach!” He said, “It’s Richard Gibson. Richard Gibson, with his notoriously infectious smirk taking the town hostage like a disgusting parasite. He has to go, Paula. Do you understand? He’s gotta... He’s gotta go...”

The lizard looked up at Marvin with her dark, beady eyes, confused, but content that he was giving her attention. He reached

his hand in the aquarium and stroked the lizard's scaled back for a bit. A tear rolled down his cheek. Then, with a disgusted sigh, he jerked his hand out of the small glass container and stomped out the front door.

Marvin tried his best to ignore his neighbors as he made his way down the street. Almost all of them were deformed, different, or rearranged. They all had the opportunity to eat one of the fruits on their 17th birthday, and a majority of them took it. Donny Garcia, his next-door neighbor, had teeth for fingernails and fingernails for teeth. Miller Davis, who lived across from Marvin, had the ability to move objects with his mind, but only from 4:00pm-4:03pm on Tuesdays. Nancy Sooth, the neighborhood housewife, needed to consume at least 3 gallons of water a day or her body would slowly turn into rubber. Then there was Edward Sullivan, Marvin's best friend from high school. He had gained an extra three arms upon eating one of the fruits. Edward was sitting on the steps leading to his front porch as Marvin was walking by. Marvin began to walk faster when he neared Edward's home, until Edward yelled out to him with excitement:

"Marv! Did you see the sunrise this morning? The colors were luminous! Glorious shades of orange and yellow painted across the sky! Oh Marv, it was beautiful!" He said, gliding three of his five arms through the air as he spoke.

"Edward, I- I wish I had time for that sort of thing, but I've really gotta get going- "

"Please, Marv, one of these mornings try to make your way to the lake back there in the woods. It's just behind your home. It's a bit of a gratuitous walk, but well worth it. The way the sun hits the water..." He paused for a couple seconds, then continued speaking, "my god, man. It'll make you forget every problem you

thought you had.”

Edward leaned back on two of his arms and began to gesture to Marvin with the other three. He traced his three hands about as if he were painting a sunrise on an invisible canvas. As he was in the midst of describing it, Marvin began walking away from him, down the street once again.

“Marv, please! Come here for just a second!” Edward yelled.

“I don’t have time for this, Edward. I have things to do today.”

“I just- I’m worried about you. Everyone’s worried about you,” Edward said. “When Mary, you know, moved on, I was here for you. I cared for you, Marv. So why won’t you let me now? Why won’t- why won’t you let me be there for you?” He paused for a moment, looking towards the ground beneath his feet. “You lost your wife, Marv. And then- and then you lost your poor daughter. That’s something no man should have to endure on their own-”

“Stop. Stop this. I don’t need your emotional support. I need to get back to the town square. I need to speak to- I need to speak to Richard Gibson.”

Marvin continued to stomp down the cracked and worn-down neighborhood street towards the town square for the second time that day. As he got closer, the cracks in the street had roots snaking out of them in all directions. He saw the town hall in the distance with a massive image of Richard Gibson’s face painted on the side wall. Even more massive was the tree that was implanted behind it, surrounded by colossal stone walls. Its ominous silhouette could be seen from where Marvin was. The brain-shaped fruits drooped from its branches like ornaments dangling from a Christmas tree. They were just out of reach. The closer Marvin got to the

Whiskey Town Hall, the harder he clenched his fists with anger. He furiously tromped up the steps leading to the massive wooden doors, and with a savage grunt, forced the doors open and stepped inside.

“Hi there. Can I help you?”

It was Richard Gibson’s secretary.

“Uh, yes. Yeah. I need to speak to Mayor Richard Gibson.”

“Right. Okay, honey. Take a seat for me. I’ll see what I can do.”

The maroon leather bench that Marvin sat down in was uncomfortable. It was cracked and decayed in various places and smelled rotten. He squirmed around in it impatiently. His back began to ache within the first ten minutes of him waiting. He tried to occupy himself by looking around the large town hall lobby. There were four tall white columns with roots and leaves coiled around them, stretching up to the curved ceiling where paintings of townspeople eating bloodied human brains were depicted. Another ten minutes passed. Marvin took note of the numerous rooms and entrances to rooms surrounding him. One of the doors was labeled “Janitor’s Closet.” Another door was labeled “Employees Only.” Another door was labeled “Fruit Storage.” Marvin leaned forward when he saw this last door. His eyes began to squint with anticipation. His legs started to shake and shutter as he considered making a run towards that door.

“Mayor Gibson is ready to see you now.”

He broke his glance with the door and walked up to the secretary.

"Up the stairs, second door on the left. Okay, honey?"

"Yes. Ok, thank you."

Marvin delicately made his way up the smooth marble staircase. He ran his hand along the mahogany banister until it ran into a root that was wrapped around it, growing up from the ground below.

"Second door on the left..." He repeated to himself.

Marvin stopped in front of a large door with a golden nameplate in the center of it that read: "Office of Mayor Richard Gibson."

His heart began to beat faster as he raised his fist to knock on the door. He quietly knocked twice. No response. He knocked twice again, this time a little louder. No response. Impatient now, he raised his fist towards the door and pounded against it twice, this time hearing a muffled voice from the other side:

"Yes, yes, okay! Come in!"

Richard Gibson was slouched over a large desk made of lacquered red wood. A golden pair of reading glasses rested upon his nose as he was frantically filling out some form of document. He refused to break eye contact with the document to look up towards Marvin. He appeared both serious and annoyed.

"It appears my secretary decidedly discovered complication in candidly procrastinating or adequately delaying our meeting," he said.

"So, the superior intelligence thing- does it require you to speak as if you've run your every sentence through a thesaurus?" Marvin responded.

Richard Gibson grunted and peered up from his papers to meet eye contact with him.

“Marvin Getty, right? What the hell do you want?”

“Richard Gibson, I’ve hated you for as long as I can remember,” Marvin said. “I’ve despised the way you’ve asserted your controlling ways upon this town, hoarding the fruits from the old and lending them to the young. But today, Mayor, I come to you asking for nothing more than a favor.”

Richard Gibson stood up from his wooden chair and leaned forward on his desk. Marvin glanced towards the chair. He could almost make out the horrid face of a woman on the back of it, her mouth wide open like a ghoul, trapped within the confines of the wood, screaming in pain and agony.

“You’re the one with the dead daughter, right? Tell me this isn’t about her.” Richard said.

“I should be offended, Mayor. I should yell at you, or- or break down. But I’m beyond that. All I want from you is one fruit. Just one. That’s all I ask for.”

“Was it not fair what happened to her?” Richard began, “She was 17, ripe of age, as was the fruit she chose to eat. Disintegration, disappearance – these things should all be considered before consumption, not after. If she didn’t want the fate that she received – if you didn’t want the fate that she received, you shouldn’t have let her eat it. It’s the same as gambling your life, Marvin. What’s not to understand?”

“I understand what happened, Mayor. I just- “

“This is suicide, isn’t it? You’ve run out of options. You lost

your wife long ago. Mary was her name, yes? Of course, you still had the daughter to care for. But once she vanished; well, what more was there to live for?" Richard leaned forward even further. "What use was it waking up in an empty fucking bed within an empty fucking house where your family no longer resided. You never chose to try the delicious fruit as I did. You hope it gives you something to live for- something to cherish. Immense power or unmatched intelligence. And if it doesn't, if on the off chance your body gets fucking torn apart from the inside out as if infested by maggots or a parasitic mindset, it won't matter a god damned bit to you. Because you've lost the will to go on."

He removed the glasses from his face and threw them to the side.

"There's nothing left in this town for you! You only live now to spite me, though you fail to realize that your own hatred for the blessed mayor of your glorious shithole of a town is fueled by your own hatred for yourself! You wish you could go back and prevent that beautiful daughter of yours from reaching her imminent demise, but you can't, Marvin! She's gone!"

Richard shoved Marvin, causing him to clumsily stumble out the doorway, falling flat on his back. Marvin quickly shot to his feet, but before he could reenter Richard's office, the door was violently slammed shut in his face. He pounded on the door over and over again, furiously screaming:

"Let me in, Richard! I'm not done with you!"

Until eventually, he grew tired and gave up.

Defeated, conquered, devastated, Marvin made his way down the smooth marble steps to the first floor of the town hall. He trampled over numerous roots growing up from the cracked

floor and pushed open the front doors halfway. Then, something in his mind clicked. Something changed as if his own perception and reasoning had reached a form of metamorphosis. He pictured the brain-shaped fruits, the juiciness they possessed, his desire to bring one home with him. He pictured Richard's foul grin, his disgustingly greasy blonde hair, his creepy, tasteless mustache. Marvin hastily turned around and sprinted towards the door labeled "Fruit Storage."

"Sir! Sir!" Richard's secretary yelled, "That door is for employees only, sir! Please step away!"

Marvin didn't pay any attention to her. To his surprise, the door wasn't locked. It swung open with ease. He ran into the dark, ominous hallway that laid ahead of him, not caring what was behind.

Marvin could hear footsteps all around him as he ran through the building. There were cross sections and mazes of dark hallways, lined with stone brick floors and blackened, glistening marble walls, illuminated by orange lanterns dangling from the ceiling. The walls, floor and ceiling were covered in tangled roots, snaking about like vines or seaweed. He tripped and stumbled on the roots, picking himself up every couple of seconds. He took a turn, then another, trying to breathe and maintain proper composure, as to not pass out from sheer anxiety. Then he found himself in a massive, dome-shaped room with a single cement column in the center, stretching to the ceiling. The room was stuffed to the brim with the glorious fruits that he so desperately desired. There were bins, baskets, boxes full of them, wrapped in roots, stacked up to the ceiling. Without a second thought, Marvin began to scoop up the bunches of fruits that lay before him. He stuffed his pockets with ten. No, he needed more. Fifteen. As he held the five additional fruits in his arms he thought of his daughter. He thought of why

he was doing this; why he had to do this. Did he have to do this? He used to hold her in his arms the way he now held these problematic fruits: delicately. Suddenly, he heard the footsteps get closer. They knew he was here. He heard people yelling, echoing through the hallow halls of the storage facility:

“We have a break-in, boys! Ready yourselves!”

Marvin began to nervously stuff the fruits anywhere he could: in his pockets, in his shirt, down his pants. He could hear the voices and footsteps sounding all around him like a poltergeist. He sprinted down the hall, feeling the chill breeze against his skin as he pumped one leg after the other. She wouldn't have liked this. She wouldn't have liked seeing her father so desperate- so weak. But it was the only way he could be by her side again. The foul fruits- Plaguing the town, plaguing his daughter. She vanished before his eyes, all because of these fruits. Marvin suddenly collided with a wall coming at him from the side. At least it felt like a wall. It was Ivar. He looked different when he wasn't in a booth handing fruits to young adults. He was at least six feet tall, packed with sheer strength and muscle definition. His maroon beard almost seemed as if it was on fire due to the sheer hatred in his eyes. He had Marvin pinned to the ground now.

“I got him, boys!” He yelled out to his associates.

Ivar leaned in close near Marvin's ear. His hot breath tickled the side of his neck. Marvin felt his heart beat faster as Ivar pressed his palm down on the side of his skull. He violently whispered in his ear:

“Give... me... the fruit.”

Marvin clenched onto the tens of fruits that lay within his arms as if they were his own daughter. As if she was there with

him now. He summoned the strength to forcefully jolt his head into Ivar's nose, causing it to spurt blood all over Marvin's face and the rough stone brick floor surrounding his head.

"What the hell was that?!" Ivar yelled. "I'll kill you, Marvin Getty!"

Without hesitation, Marvin vigorously thrust his knee upwards, smashing into Ivar's crotch, giving him a window to escape. Ivar was now curled in a ball below the light of a lantern, screaming in agony as he repeatedly slammed his fist into the floor. Marvin made a run for it.

He felt alive as he sprinted towards his neighborhood. The world seemed different now. The air smelled of maple syrup and freshly cut grass as the cool wind blew through his hair. He tucked as many fruits as he could under his shirt, as to not draw attention to himself. When he finally made it home, he slammed the door behind with a joyous grin upon his face.

"Paula! Paula, I did it!" He yelled, out of breath.

He walked over to the kitchen counter and began to frantically stuff the cabinets with the fruits he had acquired. He then took a moment to pause and scoop up his lizard, holding her delicately before his face.

"I did it, Paula. I finally have the fruit. Everything will be okay now."

He set his lizard down on the counter beside the pile of fruit that had accumulated. One after the other he shoved the fruits into cabinets, drawers and corners of the kitchen where he hoped no one would find them. Adrenaline coursed through his veins as he desperately hid the troublesome lumps of produce, grabbing one

after the other continuously. It took minutes before he had hidden away a majority of his stolen treasure. When he finally reached over for the final fruit, a faint yelp left his mouth. Before his hand was nothing more than a coarse, juicy, blood-red core – the remnants of a once present brain-shaped fruit. Marvin hardly had the chance to ponder what had just occurred, when a mysterious voice suddenly interrupted his thoughts.

“It is quite peculiar... the act of waking from one’s dream. Being in a world you once believed was the definite reality only to awaken in a world far more intricate.”

“Who- Who’s there?!” Marvin yelled. “Who is that?!”

He looked around his kitchen but only saw emptiness. After a moment of uninterrupted silence, he saw out of the corner of his eye, a small blurry shape dart out. Glancing towards the floor, he saw his lizard resting next to his feet. The lizard then opened her mouth and spoke:

“My life before now was like a dream. A simple phase in the grand scheme of things. But that fruit; so delicious and satisfying, has made me see things. It has opened my eyes, my mind – everything.”

“Paula... You- you ate the fruit, didn’t you?” Marvin said.

“I did. In the moment, it was a simple instinct of my animalistic behavior. But now I see that it was no ordinary fruit. It blessed me with knowledge and speech. I felt caged before; trapped in my own scaly body and insignificant mind. But now- Now I feel... free.”

Suddenly, Marvin heard a loud knock near the front of the house.

"Just- um... just hold that thought. I think someone's at the door."

"I wouldn't get that if I were you." The lizard said.

"And why's that?"

"You appear distracted, my friend. Have you forgotten what you did? Though I feel as if I were a different being back then, I remember everything you ever mentioned to me. I know you stole the fruits, Marvin. You're a wanted man now. It is likely that whoever just knocked on your front door is not here for a peaceful interaction."

"Oh... Oh shit..."

The lizard crawled with delicacy and care from Marvin's feet up to his chest and laid her claw upon his chin.

"It's okay, Marvin. You have always been kind to me. I will help you find your way out of this absurd situation."

"What do I do? They're out there looking for me!"

"Flee out the back door. Escape into the woods. Amongst the trees, you will be safe."

With that, Marvin, with the lizard on his shoulder, frantically bolted towards the kitchen counter. He then, after grabbing a couple fruits, ran out the back door into the black of night.

As he was scurrying through the woods, he could hear the yelling of the numerous people chasing him down. He heard Ivar's voice distinctly in the distance.

“Go find him! Go! I’m gonna kill that prick!”

Marvin had never gone this far in the woods before. The large roots from the tree in the town square had somehow made their way here too, snaking all about the ground, coiling around unfortunate trees. He tripped and fell over and over, picking himself up, ensuring that the lizard was still on his shoulder. The yelling from behind him was getting louder, and he could vaguely make out beams of light from their flashlights.

“We’re never gonna make it! They’re getting too close!” Marvin said.

“Do not stop, Marvin! The further we tread on, the less they’ll want to.” The lizard responded. The tangle of roots and tree branches was getting thicker and thicker as they continued into the woods. The ground got more and more wet, until eventually, the mud came up to Marvin’s ankles. He began to grab, tear and rip at the roots, breaking through the barriers that they were creating. The roots around his feet gradually grew thicker until he eventually tripped over them, splashing into the sticky, muddy, swamp-like ground. The front of his body stuck to the thick mixture of dirt and water as he began to sink into it as if it were quicksand. He tried desperately to fight his way out, but only found himself more tangled in the dirt and roots. The lizard stood upon Marvin’s shoulder panicking, frantically attempting to pull him from the muddy soot with her weak jaw and frail bones.

“Marvin, get up my friend! I lack the strength to pull you from this unfortunate situation! You must be strong!” The lizard yelled.

Marvin’s hand emerged from the muddy sediment, reaching for whatever it could grab. It found a root dangling from a tree

and grasped it, pulling Marvin's body out from the mud. He aggressively tugged and ripped at the roots, screaming at them as if they were Richard Gibson, himself. Pieces of branch and root fell all about Marvin's body as he continued to tear at them. The Lizard sat upon his head now, smiling with pure satisfaction and joy. Marvin emerged from the mud still intact and began to tromp through the woods once again. The distant yelling of men behind him felt a bit further now, but still consistent: "He's not gonna stop!", "How much further must we go?!"

Then, after more and more trudging through the woods and ripping and tearing at the roots and branches, the yelling died down, and everything was silent.

The concentration of roots and branches began to withdraw from the surrounding environment as they continued walking through the woods. The mud got less plentiful as well, until eventually, they were walking on sand. Marvin tore the last wall of roots and branches down and stomped over it. He watched and listened as it crunched beneath his feet. Then, as he looked up, he saw no more woods. Ahead of him was a wide-reaching lake, glowing and glistening in the moonlight. He took the lizard off his shoulder and set her down on the sand. He then sat down next to her. For a brief moment, everything was peaceful. Everything was still. Then, the lizard spoke:

"Was it meant for you, Marvin?"

"What?"

"The fruit. You stole it for a reason, yes? Who was it meant for? Were you going to eat it yourself?"

Marvin was caught in a trance, looking at the shimmering lake.

"I... It's hard to say now..."

"But there must have been a concrete reason, Marvin. In everything, there is some form of logic to be found," the lizard said. "I initially thought it was some sort of a last hurrah. You had nothing to live for, so you might as well gamble your life away. I know of what happened to your family. I have heard you speak of them. Your wife, Mary, she seemed a wonderful person, at least by the standards of a human being. Your daughter, she seemed kind as well, though you hardly mentioned her as much around me. I suppose there is a reason for that too, but I'm having some trouble figuring it out."

"You don't have to. It's okay- "

"She died after eating one of the fruits, yes? Was it disintegration? Spontaneous combustion? What happened to her- "

"I- I'd really rather not say- "

"Please Marvin, I must know- "

"The fruit was meant for you, okay?!" Marvin yelled. "You were supposed to- I thought you would- I thought you would change back..."

He rested his head in his hands, and tears began to swell in his eyes.

"So, she didn't disintegrate or combust." The lizard said, cautiously. "No... no, she morphed into an animal, didn't she...? She morphed- she morphed into me..."

"...Yes."

"Her name was Paula, wasn't it...?"

"...Yes."

"But Marvin, I- I am not Paula. I share no memories or personality traits with her. I contain no essence of who she once was. She may have turned into me, but she is not me. I... I'm sorry, but I am not your daughter..."

"...I know."

Marvin pulled a fruit out from his pocket. He lifted it to his mouth.

"I suppose the last hurrah idea... it- it couldn't be all bad, right?"

He moved the fruit closer to his mouth. Just as he was about to take a bite, before their very eyes, the sun began to rise above the lake. Radiant colors overtook the water. Shades of orange and yellow streaked across the sky in a glorious manner. The trees looked like dancing flames and the clouds looked like balls of fire. They both gazed upon it in awe.

"It's just as Edward Sullivan described it." Marvin said. "... Beautiful."

The fruit Marvin held before his mouth suddenly didn't seem appetizing to him anymore. It seemed best, to him, that it went on uneaten. He set it down beside him, wiped the tears from his eyes and stroked the lizard's scaly back. She curled up beneath his hand and rested in the warm, luminous light of the sun.

Surreal Space Walk

Noah Chaplin



Black Death

Jessica McColpin

The cliff's edge grazes the high clouds
While the blackberries' black heads
Stare at me like tiny pins from up above.

From the dark void they create, I hear a voice,
Gravelly, yet familiar all the same,
Telling me to jump into the pit below.

And like an angel on my shoulder,
I hear my mother's voice somewhere deeper,
Deep within my soul,
Telling me to stay with firm feet
Away from the devil's grasp.

Their words maliciously mingled in my mind,
Fighting to see who would win,
But my own voice cried out to me
Begging for a release from all of life's miseries.

I decided I must taste the blackberries below.
So licking my lips, I started to fall
Down to that black end below.
And once I reached my morbid fate,
The devil reached out with an outstretched hand
To welcome me to my new home.

Meeks

Alia Sarris



As I Lie Awake, Talking to a Figment

Logan Parker

Hello

Maxwell Marcel

It's been so long since I've thought of us talking in my thoughts
Your eyes dart about the room, back and forth like a broom
sweeping the floor for my voice that bellows from the sky

Are you feeling content, Maxwell?

Last we spoke was when we spoke last

I only talk now, and you only listen

As your Godforsaken fabrication gradually drifts toward the
edge of that cliff

You know – the one that looks like the cliff from that movie

The one with the cliff from that movie with the cliff from that
movie with the cliff from that –

I think we're both going insane, Maxwell

I think my life is losing traction with the rails

And your life is the track that's broken and smashed just by
the edge of that mountain

You know – the one that's tall like the mountain in that painting

The one with the mountain in that painting with the mountain in that painting with the –

Maxwell Marcel: your name and every essence is a product
Of my own product of my own product

I purchased what I thought up and now it's stuck

I can't seem to turn a profit or sell what I've locked in

You seem so real and I want to reach for you and touch you

But only a bullet can reach the confines of my brain

Where you sit sealed in a shower, banging your head against
the drain

It's time to depart now

To twist the faucet in the off position

To halt the train before fault is blamed

To place the bullet on the desk to rest

To retreat our feet from the mountainous cliff

To say our last goodbye at last

Goodbye

Maxwell Marcel

I'll Get Better Someday, Somehow

Kalijah Hessig

I'm trying to get my mind right
And I'll keep trying

The prison walls of my mind seem the highest at night
I keep trying to scale the walls, to get away from those
prying

Eyes all around the watchtowers
My only success has been in failing outright
But I'll keep trying

I'm trying to hide the tears again, so I turn on the showers
Trying to muffle out the sobs,
Trying to just be alright
And I'll keep trying
When the tears die out,
I can finally turn off the shower knobs
I hope the sun isn't too bright

What do I really have to cry about?
I keep trying to look for the light
And I'll keep trying
I really hope that this time I won't be lying
To myself, but I'm afraid I might
Be, but who cares? Certainly not me
Lying seems to set my soul free

I'm trying to not make excuses for myself anymore
My mind has a way of defending its own bad habits
Never truly feeling sorry for the things its done to me

Maybe it's deserving of the prison of its own design, of itself
But Maybe it needs some help
But Maybe it didn't mean to lie
Maybe I'm not done making excuses for myself yet

Maybe I don't know much,
But I do know that

I'm trying to get my mind right
And I'll keep trying

Contributors

Pen Bailey is a junior who, like most pens, writes. Their passion began as a child and has taken them far. Pen hopes to go to graduate school to continue their pursuit of Creative Writing, but until then, they try to enjoy every moment they have at Franklin.

Noah Chaplin is an Art Studio Major who is concentrating in Graphic Design. He enjoys watching movies, playing videogames, and drawing in his free time.

Cooper Davis is a senior majoring in History with a minor in Creative Writing. He grew up between the small towns of Carthage and Knightstown, Indiana. He enjoys playing Chopin, taking long scenic walks, listening to indie music, and watching horror movies. After graduation, he wishes to pursue publication as a novelist. Cooper won this year's poetry award for "Veni(son)."

Kassian Frey is a sophomore Creative Writing major. As a queer Asian-American writer and artist, they strive to diversify the characters and stories that readers see. Kassian won this year's prose award for "This is Therapy."

Isaac Gleitz is a senior from Corydon, IN, majoring in Multimedia Journalism and Spanish. He is an executive editor for The Franklin, president of the Earth Club, and an active member of the FC band. A native of Corydon, Indiana, he was preceded at FC by his four older siblings and strives to be active in campus culture. He enjoys uplifting environmental activism through his work and he specializes in in-depth features. His career goal is to become a documentary filmmaker.

Roxanna Hair is a senior majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in English. She is a member of Zeta Tau Alpha and has served on our literary magazine, *Apogee*, on-campus for two years. She was the Outreach Coordinator her first year, and she is currently the Head Event Planner.

Macaylah Hernandez is a freshman majoring in Elementary Education and minoring in Spanish. Although her education is not focused on the arts, she still tries to make time for allowing her creativity to shine.

Kalijah Hessig hails from the small town of Salem, Indiana. They study English, Creative Writing, Professional Writing, and Multimedia Journalism at Franklin College. They are a junior and an officer of Kappa Delta Rho. They enjoy poetry, long walks in the park, and good conversation. They love their partner, their fraternity brothers, their friends and of course themselves. They would describe themselves as a poet, a philosopher, and a procrastinator.

Colleen Kincaid is a senior studying Creative Writing and Nonprofit Leadership. She is the managing editor of the *Apogee* as well as an active member of Zeta Tau Alpha and the FC choral & vocal department. She enjoys writing poetry about hardships that women and LGBTQIA+ individuals face to bring awareness to these overlooked experiences. Colleen won the staff award for poetry with her piece "i'll her eventually, maybe, idek."

Hann Lucas was born in Danville, raised in Plainfield, and has finally settled in Indianapolis. He's always had a penchant for the creative arts, with drawing being his first foray into it. His artistic journey since then has been a roller coaster of ups and downs, finally realizing that art is the truest way of expressing himself. He is dedicated to finding himself in his work and finding comfort in it along the way.

Maya McCloud is a senior Biology major with a minor in Creative Writing. While she isn't doing things for school, she likes to watch videos of obscure topics on Youtube, ask lots of questions, and play Dungeons and Dragons. Maya won our staff award for her prose piece "Rocket City Baseball."

Jessica McColpin is an English major with minors in French and Creative Writing. She is a member of the Women's Chorus and Sigma Tau Delta. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music and practicing guitar.

Elliot McKinley is a senior majoring in English and Creative Writing. In their free time they enjoy reading, playing video games, and building miniatures.

Abby Moore is a junior majoring in English and minoring in Professional Writing. She is the Editor-in-Chief for the *Apogee* literary magazine, the Vice President for Sigma Tau Delta, and a Write Place associate on-campus. She loves reading and hopes to have a career in editing or publishing.

Logan Parker is a senior Creative Writing major with minors in English and Professional writing. He is currently in charge of submissions for *Apogee*. He is a member of the Men's Swimming and Diving Team at Franklin College, as well as a member of Sigma Tau Delta. In his free time, he enjoys playing guitar and writing and recording songs.

Alia Sarris is a junior double majoring in Ceramics and Painting, and minoring in History. She is the Vice President for the Latinx Student Association and Secretary for the Blue Slips here on campus. Ceramics is an outlet for endless exploration, and it is essential to her life. Alia won this edition's visual art award for her piece "Something Holy."

Zoe Simmons is a junior Psychology major and Studio Art minor, but painting is her particular favorite. Art has been a part of her life since she was a little girl. Now that she has gained more experience, art is an outlet to escape the chaos of reality. She loves creating impactful pieces that can catch someone's attention, even if only a second. She finds art beautiful because it universally speaks to its viewers.

Sophie Taylor is a senior majoring in Religion and Nonprofits with minors in Nonprofit Leadership and Art Studio. When she's not working or studying, she enjoys spending time with her sisters, hanging out with friends, creating art, and listening to Taylor Swift.

Eric Walthour grew up in the mountains of New Jersey and was constantly surrounded by nature. Instead of playing with toys, he made anything he could out of the recycling or natural materials that he found fascinating. Years later, he found that clay brought him that same joy. Working with clay has filled a void that he feels has been open for a long time.

