



PULSE MAGAZINE



Marietta College

PULSE LITERARY MAGAZINE

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Marietta College

THE BLESSINGS BOYS: NOT YOUR SIMPLE CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Walking in her neighborhood, described on Google as “leafy” and “residential,” and historically where Ohio State University professors had “summer homes,” she nears the alley that separates the Episcopal church and the Catholic church. This is not an ordinary dark and dreary alleyway, but instead it becomes a grand and welcome thinking-tunnel as the woman thoughtfully walks along.

On this day her concentration is interrupted by three boys, three boys alternating between riding and carrying their skateboards. She greets them warmly, the only way her gentle personality knows to interact with others. The young boys respond to her warmth, appreciating that this woman of age deigns to say hello to three boys not yet on the cusp of manhood who have interrupted her solo walk and her solitary thoughts.

The interest she shows in the boys’ lives delights them. Her queries are varied: How old are you? Where do you go to school? What subjects do you like to study? Do you skateboard here often? What will you do this summer? The boys are talkative, as they know instinctively that this woman is a safe adult, means them

no harm, cares deeply for them even though they were strangers just moments ago. Her career as a caring educator shines through in these moments with this trio of twelve-year-olds, just as her grandmotherly persona is a beacon of light to children of any age. The boys’ spirits are lifted by this caring exchange, and the burdens on this woman’s heart are lightened too.

The exchange continues with light-hearted banter, laughter, and conversation until their time together draws to a close, all parties feeling better for this unexpected encounter. The woman issues the invitation to these three boys who have gifted her with the blessings of their presence, their joy, and their life-loving enthusiasm as only exuberant twelve-year-olds on the freeing wheels of skateboards can manage. And if this were the only encounter, the appellation of “Blessing Boys” that the woman bestows upon the trio would be enough. But the woman and her Blessing Boys do not part ways on this day never to meet again.

Indeed, she tells them where she lives, that her house can be identified by the castle-like entrance (fit for the lovely regal lady she is, although of course she does not tell them this about herself), and that if they would like to stop by sometime

Cynthia Klingemier

when they are in the neighborhood, she would most likely have cookies to share with them. And who can turn down a delicious cookie invitation? She thinks that will be the end of it. Three ‘tween boys out and about on their skateboards meet a woman out and about with her heavier-than-usual thoughts. However, next time she is in the grocery store, she buys cookies just in case, and places

them in her freezer, mindful of the hope she harbors that the Blessing Boys will not forget her. And those boys do not forget. They arrive on her doorstep not just once, but several times in the ensuing months. Even now they continue that practice every so often. The woman always has cookies; the boys sometimes bring friends. Her compassion is evident; the boys’ delight obvious. Her extravagant care gifts the Blessing Boys and their friends in ways that cannot be measured. Undoubtedly, her interest in their lives adds character to the teens and men they will become. She calls them her Blessing Boys. She tells me that they met by chance. But did they? Long after she tells me this story I continue to believe that this alleyway meeting was anything but chance. And I wonder- Have the Blessing Boys christened this woman their Blessing Lady? Yes, it must be so! May there be many more visits to come! And may all the visits include cookies, of course!



Kyleigh Kozel

Apocalypse

Sam Holthaus

I look upon the darkened strip
Of ice like twisted fable,
And to my eyes the figures rise
To sit around my table.

I glance beyond their toothy grins
To hear the panicked shouts.
A chill that numbs from head to toe,
The end I have no doubt.

Cloaked are four blurred horsemen.
Like withered spirits walking,
Of white and red and black and pale
Heralds have come a'knocking.

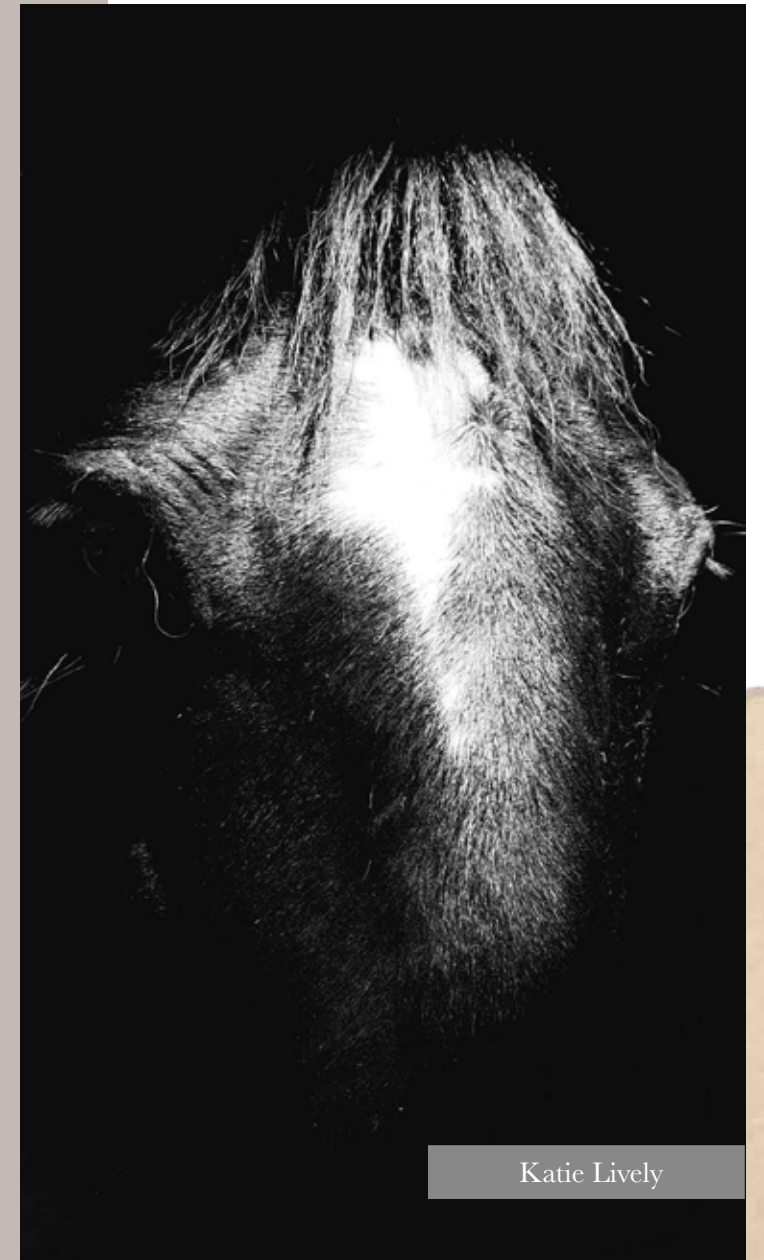
The first of four, the white rider
Harks, "Come," with hand on bow.
"I seek the treasures of this land,
And the riches you shall bestow."

The second rides a fiery steed
With sword and quaking breath.
"Peace will cease from this Earth,
All men shall meet their death."

The third upon a horse of black
Holds balanced scale in hand.
"A quart of wheat and three of barley,
Let hunger fill the land."

The fourth comes riding slowly
Pale green with scythe of steel.
He states, "I'll take the life from Earth."
And parts with Hades at the heel.

Now I sit here all alone
In a world so torn and flawed,
And watch those figures ride away
To enact the words of God.



Katie Lively

Hyacinth and Sal

David Fruner



Television



Rules



Because I Said So



Left Blank

BLUE SMOKE

(West Virginia and Fall)

Beside the mountain roads, the men
Heap and burn the leaves again.
While mountain dusks grow brief and cold,
Children scuffle through fallen gold,
Knowing that soon, some early dawn,
The hills will be white
And the leaves will be gone.

Jeff Vawter

Olivia Martin



ROSES

Ashley Lewis

For Sylvia Plath

Tell me you beautiful thing:

How does the darkest flower

Shine amongst a field?

Perhaps it's the way you

camouflage yourself

Making you all the better the find

Red petals like red hair, eating men

like air

Catching the eye, drawing them in

Then the prick of thorns digging

into the flesh of those

Who dare try to pick you

But in trying to hide

You stood out flaws and all

They left you in a bell jar,

Your petals withering in the heat of

July, Leaving you nothing

More than a stamin to be studied,

catalogued They put you under the

microscope, and Tried to shock life

back into you Forgetting they had long

since killed you

They uprooted you,

Plucked your petals,

Reduced you to nothing.

Painting you out to be

The darkest of roses

when you started life

As the brightest tulip.

I have nothing to say,

I am speechless.

There are no words

worthy enough,

true enough.

I stand motionless,

in a trance.

I can not move my lips

or my mouth or my eyes.

It is meaningless,

all of it.

The comments,

the talk, the looks.

I may never utter a word again.

I may never listen

again.

I may never cry

or laugh

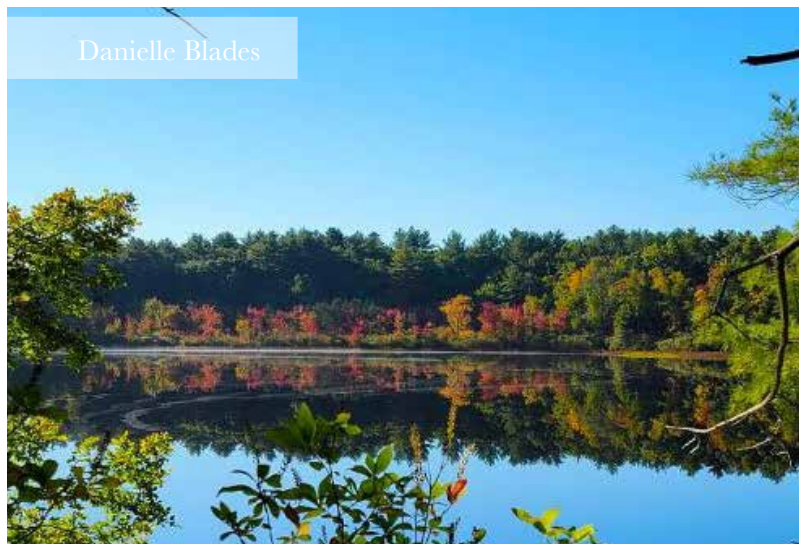
again.

NOTHING TO SAY

Robert Ford

Grant Gallery

Danielle Blades



Sawyer Moncrieff

THE EUROPEAN DREAM

If I were older, I'd probably be more accustomed to rely on legal addiction and lung cancer. Oh, sorry, I meant coffee and cigarettes. For the longest time, this lifestyle was my dream, the brown-filmed tinge of a café with an ashtray and a teacup full of hot, fresh coffee by my side. However, these temporary comforts have led to a permanent discomfort. Dying early and increasing

my heart rate to become more anxious than I already am don't seem like a healthy reliance. But the romanticism and commonality of these addictions lay an example for today's youth, as if that doesn't make me sound older than I am already. For once, I just want to twirl a lit cigarette between my index and middle fingers, tainted not by the pollution burning

in my lungs or influenced by the concern of nicotine. It's always been associated with appearing powerful or relaxed in the face of company, hardly ever seen for the cancer that lays upon the lips of the user. The sensation of relaxation is more what I desire than the disgusting release of smoke. As for coffee, it fills a numb void in my heart where my soul should be. On a more serious note, it warms my lungs to be more active, more aware of my surroundings to the point that I become far too aware of the past, present, and future. Its temporary benefits hardly outnumber the stress and suffering it enacts on the user, sprawling into a state of dizziness and false giddiness that corrupts the mind into a state of ignorant, paralyzed bliss. The

stomach tightens, the throat tightens, the chest tightens, and sweat drips from the body. As old as I am, my eyes draped with bags underneath,

“This lifestyle was my dream”

my nails grown to exaggerated proportions, my hair ripping out from my attempts to stylize its short length, and my blood pressure lowered and calmed from

prescriptions, I find my age beyond my years on Earth. My head aches and weighs heavily on my shoulders, swimming and flooded with water as if the storm in my brain froze the surface of the current. But underneath, the current still churned in waves, racing to the rhythm of my swift thoughts, hurrying like rapids to catch up to the main waterway. My brain convinces me of nausea, of wanting to release everything inside my stomach to the cold, unforgiving ground. My coherence is mumbled and incongruent, my ears fill with an elevated air despite the lack of change in altitude. But, at least I'm living up to the

expectations and experiences of various European, American, Latin American, African, and Asian authors by drowning my sorrows with imaginary cigars and the burnt tastes of black coffee, right?



THE BRILLIANCE OF *Peter Frantz* BROKENNESS

gorged
by a buffet of gossip treating me to malady

and another piece falls off...

it was just yesterday when shallow wounds awoke
and broke deeper inside to find what i've always tried to hide

warped hinges of
a rusting faith

gutted in shame with the knowledge that there is

no one else to blame

until

He

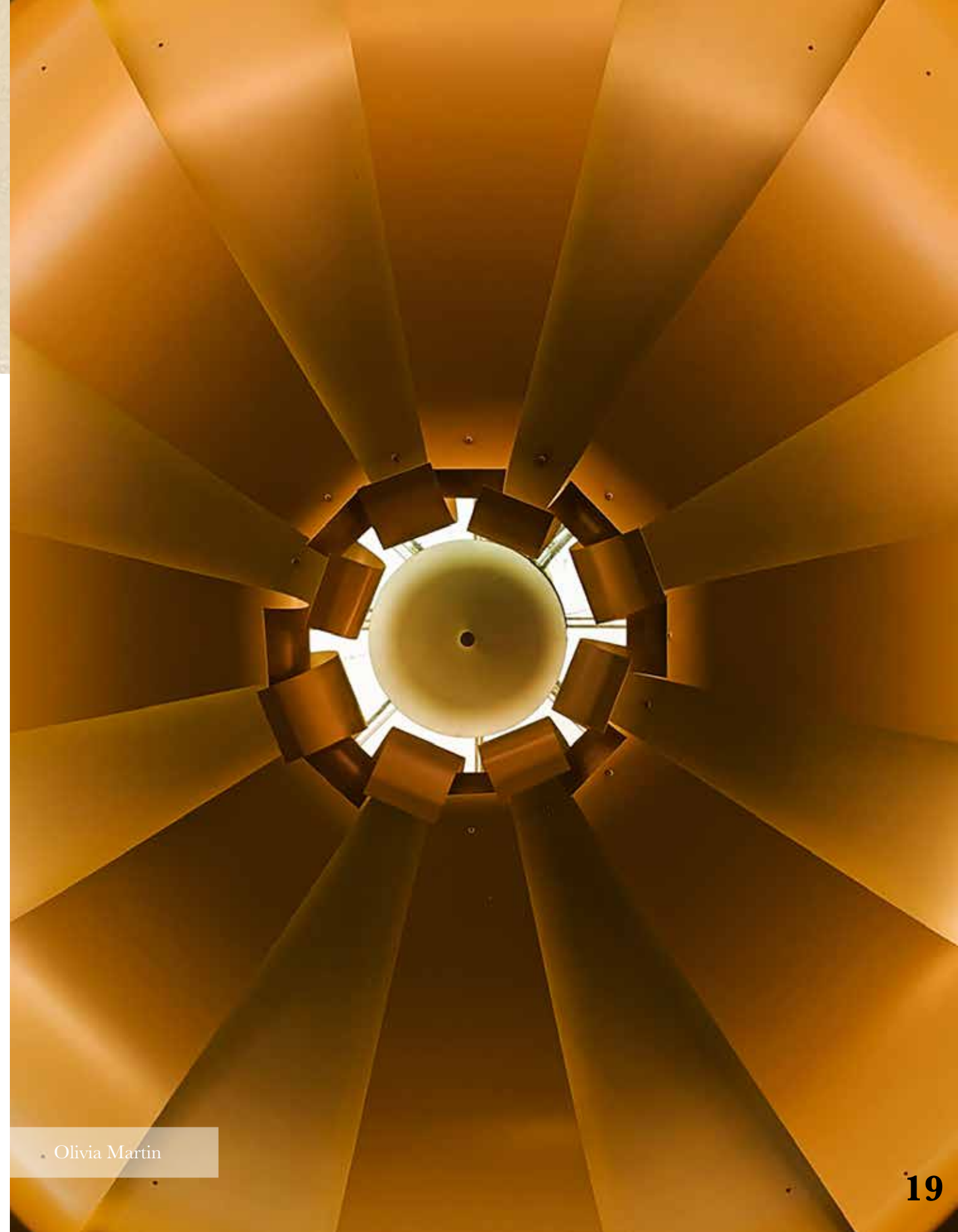
came
and separated me from my own discontinuity

one shattered to bones from almighty thrones

and i'm finally now able to see
the me those pieces were
always meant to be

a work completed in

perfect
broken
unity



Olivia Martin

It's Spring

JIM SCHWARTZ

I hold the flowers of spring and the robins sing.

I yearn for a time of peace when bombs from aircraft cease.

A time when terrorists disappear and people live without fear.

A time when people are not violent and the guns of war are silent.

A time when armies destroy every tank and land mine.

That would be a time most divine.

It would be nice to see a world without militant rivalry.

A world with peace and harmony.

Take the flowers from my hands.

Let's pray for peace in all lands.



TO BE A TREE

KAY HICKS

Kyleigh Kozel

To be a tree,
Oh, God, to be a tree.

To reach, to stretch,
to touch the clouds;
to sear the sky
with fiery hue;
to be a shelter
and a home
for some warm life.

To sway and bend
and not be broken.

To breathe with every fiber;
to be ...
and that is all and that is everything.

Sometimes I envy trees.

Natural Disaster

SAWYER MONCRIEFF

Olivia Martin

As the rain thunders down,
the gray sky casts an overwhelming tiredness
over the road trip.
Clusters of trees pass by my eyes,
Vermillion, auburn, some still contain
chlorophyll, struggling against the changing conditions to maintain their summer glow.
They compete for sunlight in the clearings between the roads and the highway.
But alas, the sun has vacationed far from here. Perhaps he visits in Europe or South America,
but not in the Northern hemisphere.
As the temperatures drop,
the layers of clothing multiply,
the desire for a hot beverage grows stronger,
and the craving to sit in front of a fireplace, bundled in blankets and watching the flames
crackle, becomes unbearably tempting.
My thoughts race as fast, if not more swift, than the trees and roads passing by. Both sights
and senses are blurred, I am numbed by indifference and irrational drowsiness.
Blasted clouds which empty my feelings of pity or excitement.
If I were lucky, I would be able to see a cardinal sing sweetly to the trees for their bearings
of fruit. Or perhaps if a deer were to spare a glance at our vehicle as we drove by the forests.
Meaningless signs and numbers take seconds of time off my life.
But our crowd is waking up and animated, making pit stops at gas stations here and there.
Hours feel like they last seconds, the rain patters lightly. But the drip finally stops. The clouds
clear slightly to reveal a blue sky. And my eyes open up in delight.



RECOMPENSE FRED ELLIOT

The boy was born almost 40 months ago, his parents' first child. The glee of this new arrival was palpable, even to the woman in the waiting room. She was thrilled when she heard the news that a son had been born, happy for his parents and grandparents. Later that day, the woman would hold the newborn, her eyes sparkling, her smile memorable. After 10 minutes, she gave the boy back to his mother, stood up gingerly and shuffled out of the room, still happy but displaying some

tenseness as she walked. One could tell that something wasn't right with her. In the months that followed, the boy's first Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years were occasions the woman would be with the boy. Her reflexes declining, she "held" the boy while he was prone upon a pillow on her lap. The effervescent smile and sparkle in her eyes were ignited when the boy appeared; the tenseness would reappear when he left. Rarely did he cry or whine. He would visit the woman every few weeks and the expression on his face when he saw her indicated a budding fondness; there was no question of her love for him. The woman and the boy were on divergent paths. As the boy aged, his words became sentences and then paragraphs, while the woman's speech took the opposite course. The boy went from crawling to standing to walking, even ascending stairs. The woman relied on a stairlift

and then a wheelchair while the boy pranced around her. His joyful presence always infused the woman with energy. The woman's aide beckoned the husband; "Come, she don't look good." One glance. He knew. His now weeping heart, grieving these past few years, quickly shattered. He sat beside her, embraced the lifeless and chilling body and sighed. Alone. Empty. Distressed. Comforted only in knowing that the woman passed as she so desired, at home, peacefully. The husband slowly rose to spend moments with their son. The stoic man shed tears when hugging the son. The priest arrived shortly thereafter and the three of them said prayers over the woman, whose sheets had been made wet by the son's tears. In the days that followed, the husband attempted to mask his loneliness, his hurt, his emptiness by trying to carry on with his daily routines and tasks; his heart remained in pieces. Two weeks after the boy's third Christmas, the husband visited him. He wondered if the boy

knew of the woman's passing, or even if he could understand what that meant. Those thoughts vanished when the husband joined the boy. Over the next few hours, the innocence, the purity, the gleeful happiness of the boy was infectious. When the husband left, he was grateful to have been with the boy, to be in a space that was oblivious to death, where only love and happiness, curiosity and joy reigned. The husband's heart was mending. The periods of glumness were lessening. Four weeks to the day of the woman's passing, the boy now had a baby brother. The husband held this newborn while the boy danced around them. The husband was briefly stunned; from lifeless to new life, from emptiness to hope, from a barren wilderness to a sense of purpose. Recompense. Surrounded by the woman's everlasting love.



Kyleigh Kozel

ON DAYS OFF

John Matthews

On days off,
Take a walk through the woods.
Sense the crisp drafts of autumn,
That dismiss your breath.

Wander a path,
Shuffling leaves as you go.
With all the traditional colors,
A beam and a glow.

Hide by the oak,
Concealed to the brook.
Hear it trickle through the rocks,
The cool water, fresh and pure.

Witness the doe, fawn by her side,
Statuesque, motionless,
Once hopping nearby.
They refresh in the creek, not staying for long.

A chatter, soft yet distant,
You look up to the right.
A squirrel, bustling down through the pine,
Uncovers his winter stash of acorns and nuts.

Be cunning and sly,
For you might get lucky.
To spy a fox,
This nocturnal beggar, traversing its next meal.

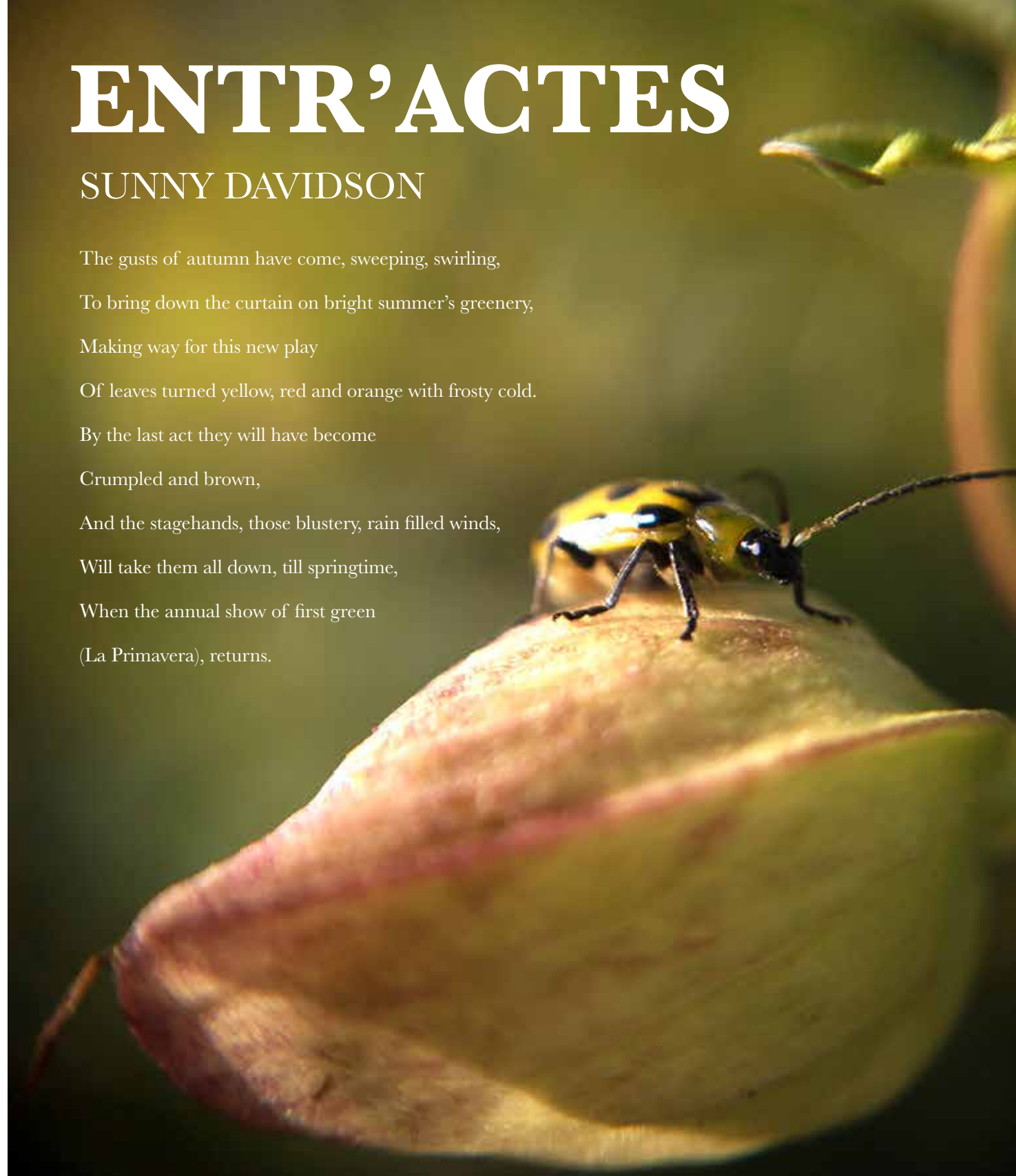
Anticipate the adventure,
Perhaps not far away.
On days off,
Take a walk through the woods.

ENTR'ACTES

SUNNY DAVIDSON

The gusts of autumn have come, sweeping, swirling,
To bring down the curtain on bright summer's greenery,
Making way for this new play
Of leaves turned yellow, red and orange with frosty cold.
By the last act they will have become
Crumpled and brown,
And the stagehands, those blustery, rain filled winds,
Will take them all down, till springtime,
When the annual show of first green
(La Primavera), returns.

Olivia Martin



I wonder, as I lie on the pre-storm park pavement in pain,
if she knows that her laugh sounds like rain.
Not a physical hurt, but the ache of unrequited love
that comes from walking down the road of friendship I cannot get rid of.

I wonder, as the clouds form in foreplay,
if her eyes will overcast in that same gray
when I tell her truth and risk losing my best friend.
Should I love her secretly and take what I can get?

I wonder, as the sun seeks to set apart the clouds,
if her lips would feel like soft morning dew.
Or would they linger on mine like frost on glass
while I hope time grows as slowly as grass.

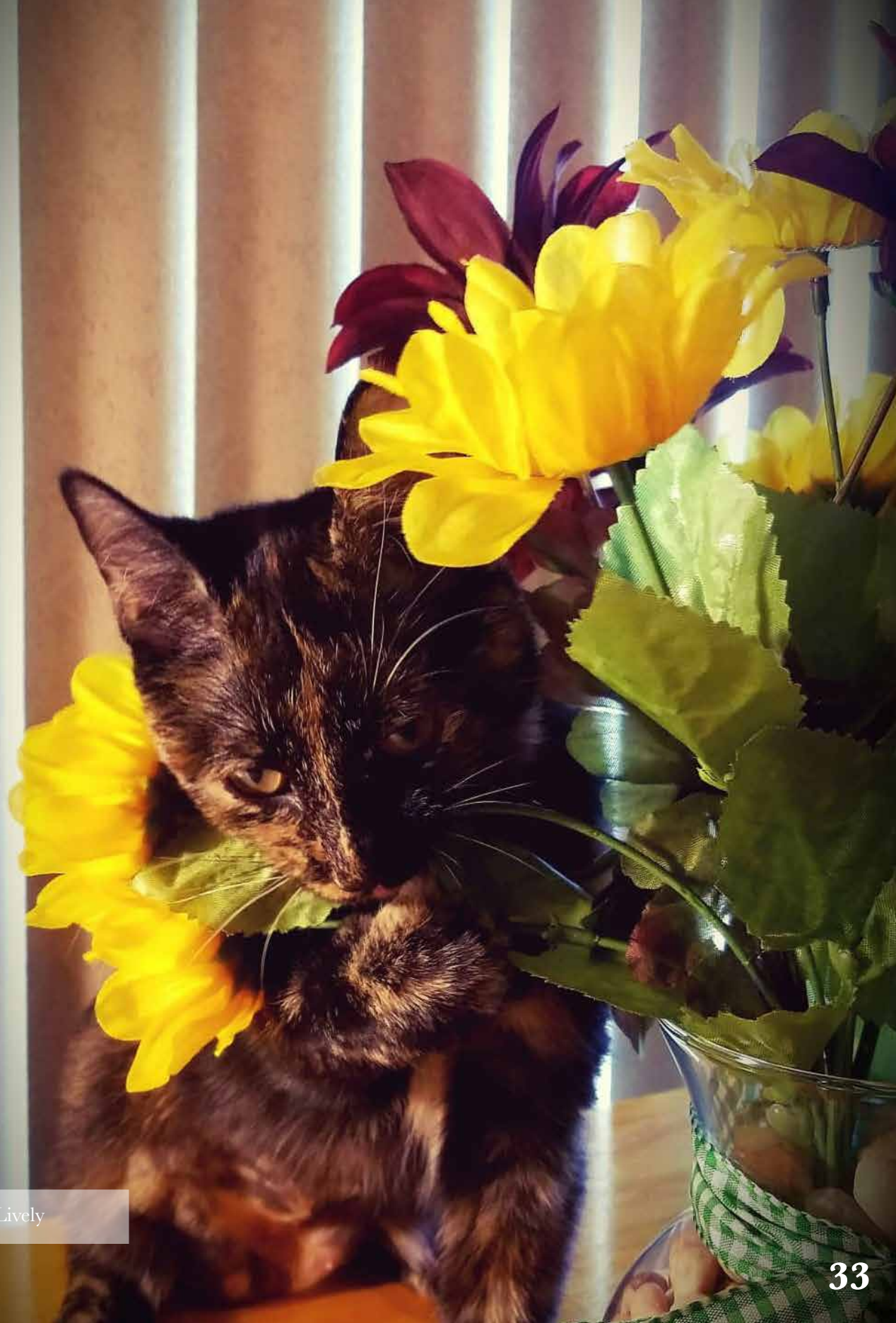
I wonder, as the puddles practically pool around me,
if the answer will finally set me free
or will it end without the prize,
making me disappear into a world of dead grass and black skies.

I wonder, as the storm finally seethes with strikes of lightning and thunder,
if I should lie here until the water drags me under.
Living my life in Wonder, is that living at all?
Do I stand up and tell her now or wait and risk the fall?

I Wonder

Dylan Brown

Katie Lively





the walk home

MINERVA MCKAY

it goes fifth to tupper
then down the long, straight shot of sixth;
the intersection at wooster is my favorite. i stand
in the middle sometimes and see all the stars, i see
your face in the nebulosity,
your smile etched in heaven—
then comes an easy L-turn and it's a straight shot
back to my house
which, despite the clutter
feels so empty without you in it.
the walk home, though,
remains full and kind
to me, to my weathered feet
and unwashed hands, to my mariner's heart
out at sea in an unending adoration
born out of necessity for you,
battling the incomparability of it all, the
astonishment you never cease to leave behind.
when i was young,
washington was my domain
i was no cartographer, no adventurer. i was afraid to
go a block beyond even the library.

what a surprise, then
for you to waltz into my life,
to have me as a compass needle pointed to the
true north of your tender home? your
tender heart?
on the walk home, i whisper
i love you,
to the trees, the crickets
an utterance for every star,
for there are no other words
no other emotion.
my feet, they know the way—
they know every way, every nook and cranny
of this town
front street to ninth,
putnam to maple.
for you,
i learned every brick
every unpaved road, the
heart and soul of marietta
etched into my bones. for you,
id travel it all. the steps would never be enough.

Olivia Martin



KEEP TOSS

Cynthia McKenzie Hilliard

The stacks yield the usual dross: old receipts, junk mail, and cryptic handwritten notes. I sort quickly, squinting at faded ink and crossed-out lines. Keep, toss, keep, toss.

A photo caught between two empty file folders interrupts my rhythm. Mom, Dad, my sister Grace, and me. I turn it over and read my mother's firm, clear script:

July 1956. I lean back and close my eyes, trying to remember the boy I was back then. Eight years old. What had that boy dreamed about? Feared? Desired?

I feel myself slowing down as I return to the task of going through my mother's desk and filing cabinets. Shoulders sagging, I massage the back of my neck. I regret volunteering to do this, but Grace said she'd handle the closets and drawers and together we'd do the garage and basement.

A credit card receipt: \$53.82. Toss.

My fifth-grade report card. I study it, oddly pleased at my excellent marks in reading, math, and social studies. Mrs. Wolsey had written: "Carl is attentive but likes to talk." Ha. The old bat. Keep.

A Trip Tik from AAA detailing the route from Pittsburgh to San Francisco. Toss.

A folder marked Funeral. With a sense of dread, I scan the two sheets inside. Why had I not found this a week ago? Mom had listed hymns and scripture readings, suggested speakers, requested no flowers, and asked that Somewhere Over the Rainbow be sung. Damn! We had hit the mark on maybe one hymn and one reading, but Over the Rainbow had not bounced off the stained-glass windows at the First Presbyterian Church. Sorry, Mom. It was a nice funeral: well-attended, poignant, and authentic.

One flower bouquet, so we nearly got that right. Heartfelt remarks. A suitable tribute to a 93-year-old woman who had lived an upright and transparent life in a small town, known and respected by all. Keep.

Several thick files of medical reports and bills, tracing my mother's cancer journey from the first symptom to hospice. Toss.

A recipe clipped from Parade magazine for a vegetable quiche. It looks good. Keep.

A program from one of Grace's piano recitals. I peer at the selections. Grace had played The Hall of the Mountain King. I conjure up the church fellowship hall, me squirming on a folding chair while Grace lumbered through her piece. Ugh. Would she want this? Keep.

A piece of paper flutters to the floor. Scooping it up, I see it's been torn off a larger note or letter. "Have you told him?" There's no other identification. Toss. Grace appears in the office doorway. "How's it going, brother?" She's two years older, and the yin to my yang. She's cool: I'm hot. She's logical: I'm, well, emotional is not a word I like, so let's go with animated.

I look at the piles on the desk and the crammed file drawers. "Uh, I'm making progress, but losing steam." I hold up a colorful brochure. "Why, for instance, did she keep this mailer for a dog trainer?

Winston died two years ago." Winston was my mother's much-loved but badly behaved Jack Russell terrier. Toss.

Grace flops into a side chair and brushes her hair off her face. "Who knows? You'd be just as mystified if you went through my desk, and I consider myself organized. At least an 8 out of 10."

"How's the closet diving? Find any hidden treasure? Old government bonds? Gold bars? Loose diamonds?"

"Yeah, right. I did find an expensive purse I'm keeping, since I assume you don't want it. Too bad Mom and I were different sizes, but there are some scarves and earrings I like. The rest is going to the thrift store."

I pick up a passport application, half filled out. "Was Mom planning a getaway to Brazil?" Grace smiles, and together we imagine our mother jetting off to Rio.

It wouldn't have been out of character. Grace stands up. "Back into the trenches, my good man." She marches off. Toss.

A dozen solicitations from various non-profits. Toss.

Medicare, AAA, and car insurance papers go in the trash. A hand-drawn Mother's Day card catches me up short, an awkwardly lettered LOVE, CARL printed at an angle under hearts and balloons. It's at least 60 years old. I swivel the office chair and stare out the window through tears. I feel a stricture in my chest, and I tell myself to breathe. In-out. Life-death. Mother-son. Love-loss. Happy-sad. Keep-toss.

I try to remember our last conversation. I called every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday at six, and usually found my mother bubbling over with her latest project. She was taking a line dancing class. She was baking Halloween cookies for a neighbor.

She was planning a presentation at the Senior Center, dressed like a historical character. Martha Washington, maybe?

The last conversation had been somber. We both knew time was collapsing around her, and I parsed my words. What if they were my last words to her? I didn't want them to be: "Hey, Mom, don't forget to lock the back door tonight." I also didn't want to make us both weepy with a final declaration of love. I went for the middle ground - reminiscing about family vacations, former pets, and Dad, who died five years ago. Mom was my link to my early years, another traveler on my road of life, and I wanted to plumb her memories and clarify family stories.

My last words to her were these: "Goodnight, dear heart. You are the best Mom, even when I'm not the best son. Safe travels and sweet dreams."

I pull myself back to my task. Toss junk mail, her library card, and several old magazines. Keep her good fountain pen, her checkbook, and a rare photo of Winston at rest, snoozing in a patch of sunlight.

I find knitting instructions for a baby blanket (toss), a list of passwords (keep), and a mysterious key with no label (keep?).

A small box at the back of a bottom drawer holds one of Mom's embroidered handkerchiefs. Keep. Plus, there's another photo: this time of me in my early twenties. I look closer, puzzled. I'm leaning against a 1950 era car, smiling into the camera. I have never owned or known anyone with a car like that, but it's definitely me. The same shock of brown hair, the same nose and wide-set eyes, the same build and stance, the same goofy smile. It's me, or my doppelganger.

I turned it over. Mom had printed TOM, no date.

Tom? Tom who? Was Mom in some early stage of dementia and we hadn't realized it? Had she labeled this photo of me while some frayed portion of her brain held sway? But the writing is not new. It's old. Decades-old.

A more suspicious part of my brain stirs. The question, it suggests, is not Tom who? It's Tom, why?

I glance up, then stand and step to the wall of the office, where a family picture hangs. My family of origin: two parents, and two kids. Grace looks like Mom, and I look like . . . neither of them. I remember the scrap of paper I found earlier: "Have you told him?"

Grace sticks her head in. "Want a break? I'm going to make coffee." She retreats down the hall, calling back, "Find anything interesting?"

"No. Yes. I mean no, nothing worth mentioning." I open my wallet and slide the photo of Tom inside. Keep.

END

Thoughts on the Nature of Ethics and Morals

Jim Perry

Not so long ago and in a place not so far away, a young man aspired to become a priest in the land's established religion. He studied for a long time and learned many things. He was tested through strenuous effort and great sacrifice. One day the priests invited him to join them, and led him through the wilderness to a cave. The High Priest welcomed him and guided him to the Sanctum Sanctorum, a room with walls paved in gold and jewels shining in the flickering light of many fiery torches. In the center of the room was a block of granite on which rested a large book, bound in black leather with the words "THE ETERNAL VERITIES" stamped in gold on its cover. The High Priest led the young man to the book and opened it, and the young man saw that it was...loose-leaf.

The Back Garden of Memory

JUDITH KRUM

The rose velvet album holds sepia photographs, edges cracked,
Edwardian family stiffly posed, folds across faces,
Tea table set with tatted white linen, the best china,
Hand-painted with violets and roses,
Gilt-edges only slightly worn away.
Men wear gray suits and starched shirt collars,
Their faces frowned with work and responsibility.
Stiff women wear white blouses, dark woolen skirts,
Their lives are closed by child-rearing, laundry, and cooking.
And now, even after 100 years,
The formal family still peers from the velvet album.
No new smile lines, no delicate dimples.
Aunts and uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents,
Are doomed to live forever with folded faces.
Their stories are passed down through crusts of toast
And swirls of milky tea served in chipped china
In the back garden of memory,
Where an arbor of lilac and tall spikes of hollyhock
Frames the wrinkled family gathered around the tea table.
One aunt, Beatrice, played the piano beautifully
And had schizophrenia.

Another, Mildred, the baby of the family,
Died of pleurisy in 1910.
Uncle Harold was so thin that you could count his ribs
When he died of emphysema when he was 71.
The stories have sprinkled down
Like ashes from Uncle Harold's cigarettes,
Tales told of the sepia family in the rose-velvet album,
Stories embellished by the tatted white linen tablecloth
And the chipped china tea set.
When lilacs bloom each spring,
The heady fragrance re-awakens the sleeping family
And they try to smile through their folded faces.
The folklore of the family, the legacy of the ages,
Reduced to glimpses of bygone people and times.
Now stored in boxes in basements
Along with scratched china and embroidered linen.
Now families use paper plates
And photographs are stored in the Cloud.



Olivia Martin

Organic Legacy

Jim Carillion

Soon when I have my fatal heart attack
weeding then hauling heavy mulch to
these community garden walkways,

cremate my body and spread my
ashes mixed with more mulch as
you name that walkway for me.

It is the second-best way that
I can imagine leaving this world,
sweating buckets toiling for others.

May my ashes ease other journeys
along these garden rows, doing
some lasting good after I'm gone.

Here I will rest among these lovely flowers,
healthy vegetables for our neighbors in need,
and endless weeds still needing to be removed.



Olivia Martin

Rose Wardlow

Girls Don't Kiss Girls. Girls Bake Bread

So, we stand in the kitchen,
flour covering every surface;
kneading the dough,
getting stuck between our fingertips.

I blow flour into your face,
and it coats your hair,
like snow falling
on a crisp December morning...

Girls bake bread. Girls don't kiss girls.

You stoke the oven.

I'm frozen by your warmth,
or the opened fridge.

On the opposite end of the kitchen,
a blush burning into my cheeks,
icy hot,
as you slide the first loaf in.

Girls bake bread...

You catch me staring and I turn away,
only for you to get revenge,
and stick a powdery handprint to my chin,

that lingers for a few seconds.
And as you hold my face,
you look like dough.
Soft, warm, squishy.
Tempting me to take a bite—

Girls bake.

So, I do.



Kyleigh Kozel

YOUR BED

Payton Brinks

You stopped setting an alarm clock years ago, long before the room became your world. Memory fails as to when, but you've never truly needed those things. Without set schedules or demands, you were able to work at your own leisure. In theory of course. You don't work as much as you used to. There's no motivation to, inspiration more fickle than ever through the weight of blankets in dire need of replacement or a wash. You'd likely be more inclined to leave if you could tell what time it was. If the passage of time were not a mystery you had no motivation to solve. You have greater concerns. The glow of the morning sun nor the flash of a camera break through those darkened curtains. You prefer it that way. Without its light glow, when you decide to stir may be the middle of the day, it may be the middle of the night, but you don't tend to leave much either way, do you? No, leaving runs too many risks, risks played out for all to see on cheap paper lining the racks of supermarket checkout lanes, flashy and sensationalist and not where you want your last images to be seen. Too many have fallen to those piranha-like hordes, and you refused to be one of them. The 27-Club is not going to take you into its ranks, should you do anything to help it. And so, you stay, sheltered in these walls. But it seemed that simply lying low didn't stop those prying eyes. If anything, it fueled their obsession, wanting to catch a glimpse, a taste, a fleeting view of the artist whose life lay so tantalizingly out of reach of their fish-eye lenses. Rumor mills that chased your fading figure, eager to see more.

And the letters, of course. You didn't deserve that infatuation disguised as admiration, bordering on obscene. Almost amusing at first but more and more specific as time went on. Locations you frequented, family that you called. The box meant to intercept letters from your residence gave way to letters that flooded out the bills left unpaid. Some went further. Some got closer. Trust came in shorter and shorter supply, and though you knew on some level you needed help, who could you trust to do so? Who is free of hidden agenda or duplicity? If you had an answer to that, perhaps you would not be here. For now, you peer out and stare at the guitar in the corner, strings layered with dust and regrets. Out of tune and useless. You want to sing, like the songbird you are, yet you flinch in fear when the silence is broken. Do you fear who will hear? Of course you do, each time you reach out of the blankets, your eyes search for any sign of movement, any sign of someone other than yourself. Because you swear you've seen it. A shade, you mutter to yourself, some figure just out of the corner of your eye. Something that should not be in a place occupied only by you. A new apartment would rid you of it, you're sure. But then you'd have to leave. So you stay. And you watch the room, and we are still. All is still. And yet you search, eyes bloodshot and bleary until exhaustion or hunger overtake you, and you must succumb to one or the other. For now, you pull the blankets over you and return to safe slumber. Remembering a time before these walls became a tomb. And as I reach my hand out, you flinch away in your sleep. Equal parts aware and not. It's alright, I hold no grudges. You simply don't know, don't understand why I do this, nor who I am. But that's alright, I'm patient. I know you, after all. One day, I know you'll get out of your bed.

Emily Visits Billy

Jim Murtha

A play in one act

CHARACTERS

BILLY (Collins) Contemporary poet in NYC who writes free verse, often humorous

EMILY (Dickinson) Nineteenth Century poet from Amherst

who wrote end rhyming, metric verse

Time: Evening, a day in 2016

Setting: Billy's NYC apartment

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Settled in his easy chair with a well-worn book in his lap, Billy turns to the back of the book and runs his index finger slowly down the page.)

BILLY

Emily, I need something uplifting, something to soothe my troubled soul.

Perhaps Hope is the thing with feathers.

Or, here's one of my favorites

I'll tell you how the sun rose.

(He closes the book and looks at the back cover.)

For someone so famous, why don't we have more paintings of you? It's always your oval face, hair severely parted in the middle, a meager lacy collar atop a black dress, a frail ribbon loosely tied around your slim neck. (He is distracted by movement off to the side. Emily appears, dressed exactly as he described her. A half-smile softens her face.)

EMILY

Hello, William, how nice to see you again. I enjoy your verse. It reminds me of my contemporaries, Ralph and Henry, though I must say, your work is often more humorous.

(Billy rises, put the book on the table, and turns, arms akimbo, to face her.)

BILLY

Emily, what a pleasant surprise. I was just —

EMILY

Yes, I know, William. You're browsing through my rhymes.

BILLY

What possessed you to come here, Emily? I'm not accustomed to seeing ghosts. EMILY

Really? What about your poem, The Revenant, about your deceased dog who reappears?

BILLY

Well, you have a point. But you're the first deceased human to visit me. Let's talk about your poetry. People don't write like you these days, all that rhyme and meter.

EMILY

No, not for some time. I don't imagine people will come back to my way soon.

BILLY

There was Edna for a while, and, of course, Robert rhymed every now and then.

EMILY

Yes, I love Edna's sonnet, Love is not all: it is not meat and drink. And how could I not adore Robert's exquisite Whose woods these are I think I know. But you, William, you baffle me at times.

BILLY

(apologetic)

People call me Billy.

EMILY

Ah, that's a little awkward for me, William. I hope you can understand. Billy sounds like a little boy or a farm animal. And you, well, you're clearly a man. But to return to my point, I was thinking how you work so hard to avoid rhyme.

BILLY

It's not that I try to avoid rhyme. Rather, it adds another restriction. Besides, I'm so accustomed to free verse now.

EMILY

And you do it so well. Yet your images could be enhanced. Listen to this, one of your poems about dogs

I can hear him out in the kitchen

His lapping the night's only music

Head lowered over the water bowl

Like an illustration in a book for boys

You could have said it more tunefully:

He laps water in the kitchen

Inventing music for my night

His head bowing toward the vessel

A boy's book picture comes to light

BILLY

(throwing up his hands)

But, I don't want my poem to be musical. They're not to be sung. I'm a lost cause, Emily.

EMILY

Here's another instance, this stanza of your lovely lament, Vade Mecum:

I want the scissors to be sharp

And the table to be perfectly level

When you cut me out of your life

And paste me in that book you always carry

BILLY

You said it's lovely. Why try to change it?

EMILY

It is lovely, but how you must have struggled to avoid the obvious variation:

I want the scissors to be sharp

And the surface without vary

When you cut me from your life

To paste me in that book you carry

BILLY

(frustrated)

I get the point, Emily, but I'm happy doing what I do.

EMILY

You seem to have a lot of fun doing it. By the by, your poem about undressing me: my, my, but that was clever. And, I must say, a bit titillating, especially that part about you riding a swan into the night. Why, you even blushed when you wrote it.

BILLY

You were here? That's what you meant when you said it was nice seeing me again?

EMILY

(embarrassed)

I feared if I told you, you'd stop composing. You were relishing the moment so. And in the last stanza you borrowed several of my lines. That pleased me so.

BILLY

I'm glad you weren't offended. Some women took offense and even wrote poems about undressing me. Generally, no matter what I write, the people love to read me. As you may know, they made me Poet Laureate.

EMILY

Oh, William, what a perfect iambic tetrameter, they made me Poet Laureate. You have the start of a poem. And what fun it will be to rhyme laureate. Dear me, I've kept you long enough. I'll be on my way now. I've enjoyed our little visit.

(Emily vanishes.)

BILLY

(Billy picks up a pencil and notepad from the table and starts scribbling, muttering to himself.)

How about excoriate, hoary bat, glory that, more he ate, story bit . . . (He puts the pencil and paper back on the table, picks up the book, and turns to a page.)

I'll tell you how the sun rose

A ribbon at a time . . .

(curtain)



Kyleigh Kozel

The Gathering Place

Katie Lively

Clouds of dust from the old gravel road, disturbed by the occasional raging vehicle, fractured the rays of sunlight that warmed my cheeks. A cool breeze gently blew my hair into my eyes, temporarily blinding me. Leaves of many

solemn colors crunched beneath my feet with every step toward the rotting wooden bridge. The water below the bridge ran with a peaceful rhythm. Songbirds echoed within the jungle of branches overlooking the bank, their music never

ending, but their bodies invisible for fear of the creatures beneath them. Frogs bathed in the cool water, joining in with nature's song from time to time. Across the stream, a squirrel posed on a rotting chunk of firewood, acorn in hand, never offering to fidget. Peace filtered through the environment, and stillness dominated the scenery.

The wood croaked as I gradually stepped across the bridge. A large stone disrupted my path, so I doubled over to grab it. Stone in hand, I extended my arm over the silver rails that provided the only sense of security on the creaky old bridge. Without conscious direction, my curled fingers released the stone. I watched it fall in slow motion, slicing through the misty air until it reached the water, where ripples disturbed the still water and the echo of a small splash silenced nature's orchestra. Life snapped into action in an instant. Dropping the acorn, the posing squirrel scurried up a tree, frogs leapt from rock to rock until finding shelter under a fallen leaf or a buried stone. The group of minnows that once littered the water darted in every direction, until I could not spot a single fish. Then, all sound

fell absent, and nature was still once again.

Leaves continued to crumble under the weight of my shoes as I continued on my path, worn by many generations of strides. The hard gravel trail once formed a driveway, but the earth consumed the old rocks. Grass now paved the path, with gravel implanted in the soft soil under the weight of passing vehicles. The large, flat stones, taken from the creek years ago, guided me to the seven faded wooden steps that lead to the porch of the old, worn down, pale blue Farm House, where generations of precious moments, and memories that live on through the thoughtful stories of their makers shower the many rooms. A memory is triggered every time I turn my head. Visions of thanksgiving meals, with twelve-foot tables covered from end to end with flour and homemade noodles laying out to dry, and young children scurrying through the kitchen to avoid being stepped on by the many preoccupied chefs flow through my mind. Images of all the busy aunts preparing extensive Christmas dinners for the forty-

some annual family guests. Escaping to the yard to celebrate the Fourth of July by holding laundry baskets above our heads and waiting for cousins to bust water balloons in them.

The best memories were made sitting on the squeaky wooden porch swings, when family members lined the porch rails in cheap plastic furniture, and children slept in the laps of their loving parents. The distinctive sounds of stringed instruments added a liveliness to the quiet evenings. My twin cousins recruited their dancing fingers to sound harmoniously while my uncle strummed in time on his guitar. My grandpa followed suit, putting his energetic flare on the music with an old acoustic guitar. The audience let their voices fly in sweet melodies, completing the music. The sound was alive. Heart beats kept tempo with bouncing legs. The chilly nights turned magically warm when the instruments emerged and sound vibrated through my chest.

The old Farm House stands firm on its foundation, allowing its guests to continue to assemble. The dirty white shutters support

the homes of many songbirds, and the soft breeze carries the music created by the swinging windchimes to anyone willing to listen. Green moss creeps along the stone walkway, and the flowerbed exhibits a fine display of hard work and dedication. The wind whistles through the nearly leafless autumn trees. A coyote calls to his peers in the distance, as a young jackrabbit scrambles to find shelter in the forest. One last leaf floats to the earth as I turn to leave, departing temporarily, but knowing in the back of my mind that it will not be long before the family meets again at the old gathering place.





“Bird Lady of Cologne”
Jane Michael

Graces and Pain

Jim Carillon

(following quote from “Our Town” by Thornton Wilder)

“Only saints and poets see glimpses of it,”

The intense beauty and grace of ordinary life:

Your precious new infant’s first deliberate smiles.

Support of a friend when you need it most, when they see you need it before
you do.

Still after all these decades her naked silhouette rising from our bed at first light.

After a long climb, the view of a waterfall or the valley below from a rock-ledge.

Acknowledgement of a job well done, that your efforts helped another.

That amazing athletic move by another that seals the win for your team.

The vibrant fall foliage this year across these glorious hills.

The joy of tasting the last home-grown blackberry late in fall.

Seeing that old friend after her long absence.

Cresting the long hill on your bike and gliding that final stretch home.

That first taste of chocolate ice cream long after you’ve given it up.

Knowing how a revised ending might work for a poem.

Yet daily life also often brings numerous struggles and pain:

The helplessness of your role when her cancer has finally returned.

When the pain and recovery from yet another bicycle accident seem endless.

Continuing economic and social injustices you'll never see reversed in your lifetime.

Realizing your parents aren't the heroes you thought they were
and struggling to find ways to love them anyways.

The early weeks after you've transitioned your foster child into his new family.

Holding and rocking your crying sick child when there's nothing else you can do.

Having to return to that job you hate again this morning (and the next).

The vast emptiness of your bed long after your partner is gone.

Feeling (and knowing) you are inadequate at any age.

Losing your child, a dear brother, or anyone before their time.

Wondering years later about what might have been if only you had . . .

Life's graces are ever sweeter in the
face of endless struggles and pains.

May I be vigilant and grateful for
the graces that do come my way.

THE HUMAN (BURNT OUT) MEETS THE (IMMORTAL) LOBSTER

Minerva Mckay

HUMAN: Oh, geez. You are huge. Where am I?

LOBSTER: We are in the Bathypelagic Zone of the Atlantic Ocean. It is off the coast of Maine. **HUMAN:** (full of thinly-veiled confusion)Right.

LOBSTER: We are approximately 1,677 feet underwater.

HUMAN: Oh. How come I can breathe?

LOBSTER: I have blessed you with various gifts to aid in your survival. There is no oxygen, so I have given you breath. There is no light, so I have given you vision. There is no speech, so I have given you telepathy.

HUMAN: That's nice of you, I guess.

LOBSTER: I have brought you here to aid me in a task I cannot complete.

The Lobster turns slowly, showing its large back. It is in the process of molting.

LOBSTER: I have been around since the Cretaceous; I am one of the very first lobsters. I have been growing for so long. Every year, I find a human to help me shed. I am too big to do it on my own.

HUMAN: Uh... alright. I can do that.

LOBSTER: They are often far more surprised.

HUMAN: What, do you want me to fake it?

LOBSTER: (says nothing, clearly wondering if this is actually something it wants.)

HUMAN: Look, I don't really care who or what you are. You look kinda freaky and are the size of a T-Rex, but I've got classes in the morning and work in the afternoon. Can we get this over with?

LOBSTER: Fascinating.

HUMAN: For sure. Soooo fascinating. How come you have the power to get me here, anyway? **LOBSTER:** With age, I have learned many things. My mind, although old, has grown in strength imperceivable to those who have not lived as long as I. You would be surprised at the power of simple thought.

HUMAN: (snarky) Pshh. Okay. If I just think hard enough, maybe my job'll just poof out of existence. (beat, sigh) I've just got so much to do.

LOBSTER: I understand.

HUMAN: No, you don't. You're a lobster older than dirt. You don't have to pay rent or study for tests or write ten page papers. You just said it—all you do is think. You couldn't possibly understand.

LOBSTER: You and I are more alike than I thought we would be.

HUMAN: (irritated) How so?

LOBSTER: It is interesting. You are so young, and yet so tired. You are overworked to the point of extinction.

HUMAN: Tell me something I don't know.

LOBSTER: I hear little of human life. From you, it sounds arduous. I have lived many years and never seen a human so wracked by their own exhaustion. Tell me, have you ever been in love?

HUMAN: Wow, you sure are forward. Take me out to dinner first.

LOBSTER: Have you any support system to speak of?

HUMAN: Coffee is doing a pretty good job.

LOBSTER: Human, listen. End your jokes. End your snide remarks. You and I, we are the same. I have never breathed your air but I understand your struggles: you are lonely. You are alone.

The Human will not look at the Lobster, but continues shucking away its outer shell.

LOBSTER: Look at me. I am a miracle. I should have died alongside my brothers from the weathered pains of age long, long ago. You understand—it is hard, to exist. Time is against me. Against you is the world and its intricacies. Again and again, I beat time. Again and again, my skin is shed. Again and again, I am aided by travelers carrying minds vaster than my body, souls vaster than my ocean. You have a kindness vaster than my years despite your own pain. Without you, I would not survive. Look at you. You are my miracle.

The Human says nothing. The Lobster's old shell comes off. It sinks downwards, fading into the abyss below.

Image Credits

LOBSTER: I cannot do it alone. Neither can you. You understand. **HUMAN:** It's just so hard.

LOBSTER: It is. And yet, you do it.

HUMAN: What's even the point?

LOBSTER: I have been alive for so long. I have wondered this many times. Take comfort, Human, in knowing that there simply is none at all.

HUMAN: Then why do we do any of it? Why is anyone trying at all?

LOBSTER: You have fashioned a tormentful life. The world is not so dark. Some things, great and small, are worth existing for.

HUMAN: Why am I doing this to myself?

LOBSTER: Such is your nature. Fish swim; I grow; you self-destruct. But you heal, too. You are good at healing.

HUMAN: I... I don't know if I am.

LOBSTER: And yet, you will.

HUMAN: (beat) This is the weirdest dream I've ever had.

LOBSTER: I love you.

HUMAN: I think I love you, too.

The Human and the Lobster watch the empty expanse before them. The ponderous silence returns, as if it never left.

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Olivia Martin

Olivia Martin

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Grant Gallery

Jane Michael

Kyleigh Kozel



COLLOPHON

Kyleigh Kozel

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