

RAINY DAY



Hello *Rainy Day* reader,

Welcome! We're so glad you've come to us for your literary fix. Inside, you will find poems and stories submitted from undergraduates across the country. At *Rainy Day*, we take pride in blending together perspectives and personalities from all over, pulling from a wide range of creative, as well as geographical backgrounds.

Our editorial staff has worked hard to put these submissions together. Tuesday-in, Tuesday-out, they've been poring over submissions, giving their time, thoughtful analysis, and creativity to the long process of producing this issue. Our editors in particular have been deeply involved in bringing the works of these authors from a Google doc in our inbox to the finished, beautiful, bound thing you are now holding.

I'd also especially like to thank Mark Kasvin, our previous Editor-in-Chief, for helping me navigate the murky waters of Ed-in-Chiefdom for the first time. From a wee-freshman, I have been training for this job: honing my deep reading voice and straining at symbolic reaches, refining the close-read-squint. I can only hope I do my predecessors proud.

We hope you'll find this issue contains a vibrant cross-section of styles and voices, each contributing something new to the issue and connecting in a new way with the reader. To our authors: thank you for sharing your stories with us. It's our privilege to be able to showcase your work.

And to our dear readers, thank you for choosing us as your source for stories and poetry. We're so glad you are here to enjoy all of these pieces we've grown to love so much!

Best wishes, and happy reading,

Ally Findley

RAINY DAY

an independent student publication

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THIRST

Hannah Llorin

Like a man-made wave
I am broken by the same rocks
in the same way each time,
with such predictable fury.

Thus, I desired your eyes,
though not for their color, rather
I desired that they should be
the shoreline of my unbecoming.

I was liquid; I wished to trace
the archways of your being
and curve my tidal self
around the contours of your mind.

Your absence was a rain
that scarred my skin in silver
marks in which my secrets
were written and read.

So when I surfaced, I gasped
for air but not oxygen;
I needed only to breathe
in your exhalations.

OF AIRPLANES AND LESSER THINGS

Hannah Llorin

There is a moment in which one entrusts her existence
to the dreams of metal and mathematics and the current disposition of gravity.
That moment arrives into the world
like a newborn, crying out.

As a child I would leap off furniture in pursuance
of the half-second when I was both unattached
to the earth and aware of this fact.
I was a dreamer, which is to say
that I was the petulant daughter of both
entitlement and the sun shining
through a window that does not belong.

But now, I look with eyes that refuse
to acknowledge the scale of altitudes
and stratospheres. So that the landscape itself—
the snow, the roads, and the naked oaks
—seems to shrink and recede like a falling tide
as I and my mind sit pressurized, oxygenated,
encapsulated at the height of 6.6 miles.

I have never been in the ocean far enough
from shore that land hides under the horizon.
But I imagine it must be something
like passing above cirrostratus islands.

And I have never been a God
but I imagine it must be something
like watching a planet revolve and evolve
and to finally know the shape of mountains
which are unlike pyramids, or triangles
but more like the creased skin of pinched cheeks
or the ridges of disheveled linen sheets.

CREATION

Hannah Llorin

ex nihilo

She is a spark orbiting
the absence of Her thoughts;
Her dreams are asymmetrical
and tied in Euclidean knots.

Her eyelids are heavy with the dust
of atoms powdered and crushed
under the weight of an inverted sun
whose white heat makes Her flush.

She can speak in colors,
and taste the flavors of quarks;
Her names are entropy and chance
and She wrestles with the dark.

Her metallic screams birth stars
and supernovas, condensed
into echoes that have nothing
to reflect themselves against.

She, who is the firstborn
child of chaos and of light,
walks barefoot and naked
through the origami night.

Her hands trace curvatures,
weave time, and carve out space
for souls and integers to form
from the ripples in her wake.

She: mother of all things,
daughter of fire and black,
a chelonian beast alone in the sea
with a city bound to its back.

The Worms

Spencer Slovic

Worms are harmless. I don't get why people are so disgusted by them. They don't have eyes, like fish, or claws or jaws. They're just one long digestive tract. Worms are simple, as an individual organism, but as a group, that's when they get complex. Multiple worms—preferably thousands—now that's warmth.

Most people are afraid of the warmth. Most people are afraid of the worms.

I envy them, sometimes.

I'm no worm. I'm an average person, or at least as close as you can get. I live a normal life, have a normal job, normal friendships, normal routines and a normal appearance. I'm so normal you can call me Norm.

Norm just likes to play with worms. That's all. He's harmless, really, just like the worms, just like the warmth. He won't make you watch; he's learned to keep his worms hidden. Buried, if you will, beneath the soil. Worms and soil are inseparable. The only good worm is a worm underground, hidden, concealed in the silky warmth. They like it there. Norm likes it there.

But I am not a worm. I cannot live like a worm, in the warmth of the womb for my entire life. That's no life for a human. From time to time I must emerge, to poke my head above ground in the rain and observe the city not with my eyes, no, but with my mind. With my own personal ball of worms, if you will.

I'm an ordinary guy. I swear. I just keep some things under the dirt, if you will. Like my own personal ball of worms.

* * *

My boss always combs his hair neatly to the side, swooped across his forehead, tucked behind his ears, but he can't comb away its grease. It doesn't look slimy, only smooth, like if I tried to touch it my hand would just slide right off and I'd never feel a thing. If he's going to keep his hair gross, he should at least give it texture. Uncontrollable slime like that needs some texture.

The office is empty when I get to work. I slide from cubicle to cubicle, and still, no one. As I'm about to sit down at my own desk, my boss calls me into his office. He's the only living soul here—something big must be up.

"You're probably wondering where everyone else is," he says, offering me some water. I decline. I had a cup of coffee this morning and the water would just dilute the caffeine.

"I woke everyone else up early this morning and sent them to a sushi place downtown," he continues, rubbing his hand over his head. Does he feel anything?

“Sushi?”

“It burned down earlier today. Probably arson.”

“Is Denby already on the police angle?”

“Yeah, and Cruise is collecting eyewitness accounts. Not that there are many.”

At this point I’m hopeful. Since his promotion four weeks ago, I’ve been relegated to daytime robberies and clearance sales, nothing like the investigative work I usually do. Maybe he’s actually figured out how to use me in a, well, *useful* way for this paper.

“So what do you want me to do?”

“I was going to send you down there with Cruise, but Cruise told me to leave you free to do your own thing today.” He gives me a hint of a smile, like we’re in on the same secret. I’m not sure if we are.

“Okay. Thank you, sir.” I struggle to maintain my expressionless face in the midst of this rediscovered freedom as I stand to leave.

“One more minute, Norm,” he says, holding up a spindly finger. “I have no pretensions as to knowing what you do on these midnight investigations of yours, but I would like to offer some advice, if I may, to remind you of what this paper is looking for.”

I struggle to contain my grimace as I sit back down. He’s about to start on another one of his “lessons”. His hand gesticulations grow larger and grander as he prattles on, drawing attention away from his nervous eyes and wavering tone of voice.

“We’re a small paper,” he begins, eyes shifting skittishly already, “but from time to time, if we get something really special, some aspect or detail of a story that no one else could find, we can sell the story to a larger paper.”

Right. Like we’ve been doing for years. He acts like he came up with it.

“Like the Little Italy protests. What other paper figured out they were a front for the mafia? We sold that story straight to the *Times*.” He shoots his hand up like a rocket. He must have practiced that one. “Or the mackerel smuggling ring?”

These examples sound suspiciously similar to those used by Mr. Lawrence, our old boss, in his “motivating” speeches each morning. Maybe all newspaper bosses just inherently like to listen to themselves speak.

“Like, holy mackerel, am I right?” He forcibly laughs at his own joke, expecting me to join in.

Instead, he loses my attention. I’d rather watch an airplane float placidly over his left shoulder than listen to his drivel any longer. This one’s a Delta, flying low over the New York City skyline towards JFK.

The first time I flew on an airplane, the stewardess spilled hot coffee on me and I flipped. I literally flipped the tray table, spilling the compartmentalized airplane meal onto the floor. I had scars from the burns for a few years, one big

splotch and then long lines from where the coffee dripped its way across my thighs. Now I prefer to go by train, keeping myself as close to the ground as possible.

A bird flies past the window in the opposite direction of the plane. They look about the same size from here, like two great rivals, machine and animal, about to collide in a battle for the ages above the concrete jungle.

In my line of work they like to say the early bird catches the worm. I don't use that phrase myself, but I tend to work so late that the day starts itself over again and I end up being the earliest reporter out there anyways. It sounds like tonight will be one of those nights.

My boss has moved on to the inspirational part of his "lesson", indicated by his rising, grandiose tone of voice, and his looking off into the distance like he really isn't talking to anybody—which he isn't. He looks like he needs some coffee. Maybe it would clear his mind, or at least get it working quickly enough to come up with some real thoughts rather than regurgitating a conglomerate of clichés he's heard over the past few days.

"—Thunder tonight?"

"What?" Maybe I should have paid attention to that last part.

"Rolling Thunder. The sushi place downtown."

"Oh. Yeah. I know what to do."

"Great." He gives me a goofy thumbs-up. "I always know I can count on you, Norm."

As I leave the office, I look back to see him twiddling his thumbs and looking about the room. He looks lonely in there. Maybe he should just ignore my absence and keep talking.

If the fire was this morning, I figure the police will have the scene all wrapped up by nightfall. After I leave the *Herald*, I can spend a few hours at home before heading downtown for some seafood.

* * *

I get home around four and start brewing more coffee. It'll be a late night. I feed the extra coffee grounds to my worms.

My apartment is in the basement of a six-story building, relatively short for the upper West side, and my bathtub is full of worms. About a thousand earthworms from all parts of the city are joined together in this tub, along with my vegetable-based—and therefore less smelly—compost. I mix the coffee grounds into the soil, letting my hand linger perhaps an instant too long in the worms' tickling grasps.

Someone knocks quietly on the door. As I go to open it, they knock again, louder, as if they thought maybe I didn't hear the first one.

"Hi Norm," my neighbor Janice says as I open the door. Janice lives three floors above me and works from home as an online translator. She's one of the few people in this building who actually visits. The day I moved in she came to welcome

me, and I guess we've been friends ever since.

"Hi, Janice. What's up?"

"Can I borrow an egg?"

Is that all? "Sure. You're out?"

"Yeah. I'm making a cake for my friend Lola's birthday and the recipe called for four eggs, but I only had three left." She has one hand up on my doorframe but can't hold my gaze and keeps looking down and away.

"Okay. Let me get you one." As I start walking back towards the refrigerator, I realize I still have dirt on my hand and wipe it on my jeans. "Come in. I'm brewing coffee. Do you want any?"

"Um, yeah, that sounds good, thanks," she says, making her way inside and sitting at my wooden kitchen table. I can't help but notice the way she wraps her feet around the table leg.

I only have two eggs left; I give one to Janice.

"Thanks," she says. "I could have gone to the store, but thought it was easier to check down here first."

"Any time." I pause for a second. "How are you?"

"All right."

There's more to it than just "all right". Her niece, Alice, went missing a month ago, and, thinking I was a detective, she contacted me first. I'm not that kind of investigator, but I made sure there was a story on it in the next morning's *Herald*. Maybe she wants me to look more into the case.

Then again, she might just want some company.

"Cream or sugar?" I ask as I pour her a cup of coffee.

"Black."

We both take our coffee black. I sit down across from her, and gazing over her shoulder, I immediately realize I've left the bathroom door wide open.

I don't know what the apartment's housing code says about worms, but I'm pretty sure there is a rule against pets. As long as they don't interfere with anyone else or make a mess or ruin the apartment... can't a man keep his hobbies to himself? Not that I fear Janice would rat me out—that's not the reason I don't want her to see the worms. I'm deep in my thirties and shouldn't be so concerned with what other people think of me, but for some odd reason I feel the nagging need to keep Janice's view of me pristine. By the city's current social norms, that means a view that's worm-free.

Would I give up the worms for Janice? Maybe, I think, sipping coffee and waiting for her to say something. It's not that I *like* Janice, per se. She's a good neighbor and a good person, and I've dated a few people here and there since moving to the city, but I don't feel a pressing urge to couple up and settle down any time soon.

"Translate anything interesting recently?" I ask as her eyes start to dart

about the room. The pristinely organized room, I might add.

“Only a few legal documents, mostly people wanting to see what their dead old Italian relatives actually left them,” she says, laughing.

I chuckle along in sympathy, sipping my coffee. I could go shut the door, but it might draw unnecessary attention to the bathroom and its contents.

“Hey, Norm, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“What do you think happened? What do you think happened to...” Janice trails off, but we both know the word that would roll off her tongue next. *Alice*.

“I’ve told you everything I know. Everything I could find out.”

“Yeah, but what do you *think* happened?”

“Like, what do I *imagine* happened?”

“Yeah.”

“Imagination is a tricky thing. Usually false, speculative. As a journalist I don’t like to go there.”

“But as a person. I’m not writing any articles on this. No one’s listening.”

I don’t want to get her hopes up. I don’t want her imagination going wild, and with my help her speculations would only get darker. “I really don’t know.”

Janice looks at me with a tinge of disappointment. I stir my coffee. It’s almost lukewarm enough to drink.

“Can I use the bathroom?” she asks.

I can feel the blood rushing to my face. I try to think of a way to get her not to use the bathroom, but all I can think of is the fact that I need to think of a way of getting her not to use the bathroom, and I’m stuck in an endless thought loop. I don’t think I’ve breathed in a minute. My face is maroon. At least I look odd enough to capture her attention. Her eyes stay fixated on my self-suffocation, rather than looking for the restroom.

I finally catch a breath. Trying to look as natural as possible, I tell her that the toilet is clogged and that she should probably just go upstairs to her own apartment to use the bathroom.

She gives me a blank look and I can’t tell if she buys my lie or not. We go back to small talk but for the rest of her visit all I can think about is the bathtub full of worms twenty feet behind her.

After Janice leaves, I start boiling a pot of water for spaghetti on the stove. I should shower and change into darker clothes—it’s almost time for me to check out the burnt-down sushi restaurant. Any other journalist would have been watching the news all day, but I prefer to work from the hard facts alone. I’d rather draw my own conclusions than borrow those of the talking heads up at channel seven.

I can’t help but notice a draft in the room as I undress and slip into the bath. The bathroom’s usually pretty warm, and today it was warmer than usual, so I opened the window, but now it’s getting a bit too cool for comfort. I climb out and

close the window, but I've left dirty footprints on the gray tile floor. Gray is such an ugly color, I've decided, but I don't dislike it quite enough to shell out the money to replace the tiles.

Hands gripping the slightly slippery sides of the tub, I close my eyes and sink into the soil. The worms keep it loose and airy, and the perfect consistency makes it feel like a cloud. The soil is warm from all the life and movement, and its general mucosity gives it the feel of a skin cream rather than a mud bath.

After I stop moving I begin to feel them. They're hesitant at first, shrinking back from the strange new object in their home, but then they begin to slide over me, looking for any food I may have brought or the food they were eating before I came. I feel a worm slide between my left fourth and pinky toe, and I wiggle my foot a bit. It quickly moves away, but others aren't so timid.

Pretty soon I'm surrounded, swathed in a writhing swarm of sliding, stringy oligochaetes. My skin wasn't meant to have so much stimulation at once—I convulse against the bottom of the tub, several times slipping beneath the surface and forcing myself up to gasp for air.

A metallic clattering arises from the kitchen—the pot lid letting out steam. The spaghetti must be boiling on the stovetop, but I'm willing to risk mushy pasta for another couple minutes.

* * *

I pause halfway up the stairs as I emerge from the subway. All I can see are shoes, millions of small black and brown rodents scampering across the concrete, tip-tapping codes on the surface of an underworld they don't even know exists.

I'm sure you know about the subway system. Everybody does. But do you know about the abandoned subway stations? The closed-off subway tunnels? Did you know they're teeming with life, just like the depths of the ocean? Homeless people, rats, drug dealers, teenagers drawn to the quiet to record their first mixtapes. They all make their homes down there.

Rolling Thunder is surrounded by police tape, but nothing more. The fire must have been put out quickly—the one-story building still stands and looks like it just came out of the toaster, not a raging inferno. I wait next to the smashed window for a moment, pretending to check emails on my phone, until the street clears and I slip inside.

I learned earlier that day that the owners of Rolling Thunder were Dominic and Francine Palamino. No criminal records, no feuds or incidents or notoriety to speak of. Nothing that would immediately suggest arson, yet that was what the editor-in-chief told me, so I'll let that stay the default assumption. Maybe other Japanese restaurateurs had it out for them—Italians running a sushi place. Imagine that.

The restaurant was probably pretty hip, back in its day—yesterday, I guess. Like many New York restaurants it's deeper than it is wide, but they still manage to

fit in a bar and a looped conveyor belt alongside a few tables. What really strikes me as I walk inside is the tree. A small apple tree rises from the center of the conveyor belt, its blossoming flowers still intact. The faux-leather seats that line the bar have proven to be flame-resistant, but the conveyor belt's plastic segments didn't seem to do so well and are melted together in a permanent snaking pattern around the room.

A light illuminates the restaurant and I duck down, but it goes away and I realize it was just a passing car. Staying low, I make my way to the cash register, but it's already been emptied or looted, so I won't find anything there. As I move past the leather barstools, I notice they're coated in a thin layer of ash. It doesn't look like there were any customers in the restaurant when the fire started—or any people for that matter—because all the ash, on the floor, on the chairs, on the counter, seems perfectly preserved in sheets, as if the police didn't even step inside earlier today.

The rear kitchen is clean. The fire doesn't seem to have reached it. The charcoal stops at the door, and only a light dusting of ash seems to have blown in onto the white tile floor. If kitchen equipment didn't start the fire, then the only other natural cause would be an electrical flaw. I stick with my theory of arson. If it was, they didn't finish the job. With a bit of cleaning and a few fixes, the restaurant could open up for business again within a few weeks.

Before I leave I decide to check out the inside of the conveyor belt. Maybe I'll find something there that will actually make this investigation worth my time. I jump over the conveyor belt into the middle of the ring. The dirt floor crunches beneath my feet. Dirt? In a restaurant? The whole inner floor of the sushi-go-round is covered in it. Not just covered, I discover, pawing at the ground with my shoe, but actually made of dirt. The apple tree grows right out of the bare-earth floor. Must be a nightmare come health-inspection time.

Car lights flash through the restaurant again, but this time they stay. Looking out from behind the conveyor belt, I see that a car has pulled up almost to the door of the restaurant, its headlights shining directly into the windows. One figure steps in front of the lights, then another. I can only see their shadows from my hiding spot in the booth. They step through the smashed window as I shrink back down behind the conveyor belt. In the darkness I don't think they see me.

"Let's do it fast and get outta here."

"Yeah."

"And make sure to get the kitchen this time."

"Okay."

"That's where all the good stuff is. Gotta go kaboom, man."

I think I hear a trickle of water, or some other liquid. They must be spilling gas on the floor. Footsteps make their way through the restaurant, pouring gasoline everywhere, just inches from my own head on the other side of the conveyor belt.

The footsteps fade. Silence, for a moment. Then a sound like all the world's air is being sucked into the room, or like all the room's air is racing to make

its way out.

I scramble to stand up and leave, but it's already too late. Flames surround me, covering the front entrance to the restaurant, the door to the kitchen, all the windows. I look around frantically for a way out, backing up against the apple tree.

I try to think and breathe at the same time, but I can only manage one or the other in this heat. There are knives under the counter, but knives won't help me here. The flames are getting closer. A small pink apple blossom almost hits me in the eye, instead bouncing hard off my cheek. I touch it to find it is hard: plastic, fake. The whole tree is fake, I discover, knocking on its hollow trunk. It's all made of plastic, suspended from the ceiling with wires.

I feel ashes landing on my skin. The flames are over the conveyor belt now, traveling along the ceiling. The fire isn't warm; this is hot. Warmth is comfortable. This just hurts. I do the only thing that comes to mind, or, rather, the only thing that comes to me instinctually. I dig. Down, into the ground, my hands working as fast as they can. The soil is surprisingly light and airy for being at the base of a tree, like it has a colony of worms, and my fingers dig through it with ease. In fact, the soil becomes lighter and lighter still, cooler and cooler, away from the hotter and hotter heat of the fire. Soon enough I'm on my knees, leaning into the hole I'm digging at the base of the apple tree, when suddenly the soil isn't soil at all, but cool, cool metal.

A trapdoor. I fumble for a latch, finding a ring and pulling it open. Warm air streams out of the hole, filling my lungs for a glorious second before the fire encroaches on my find. The flames lick my face as I pull myself feet-first into the hole, but my shoulder catches on the side and I find myself spinning downwards through the air.

My left elbow breaks my fall as I hit a hard floor below, but my head follows soon after, slamming into the concrete. I can't feel or move anything below my left shoulder. I writhe on the concrete, holding my head with my left hand, my other arm trailing loosely behind me. My gasps of pain echo and reverberate, and patches of the ground are wet, sticky. I think I've blacked out, but then I spot a flicker of orange through the hole in the dirt above me, far away.

A light, too bright, too close, shines in my face. I grope for it and it hovers back, light footsteps scampering away from me.

"Help!" I shout. "Help."

The light moves closer again. My head hurts.

"Don't worry," says a voice. A child's voice. "You'll be okay." A little girl.

We need to get out of here. The fire will find us. The ceiling will collapse.

"The fire..." I tell her. "It... don't..." I start, but the pain in my head is too much. The last thing I feel after the darkness is the drip, drip, drip of water from above.

* * *

Something about the worms changed after that night. I could never quite get the same feel from them again, the same sense of comfort, as day after day feelings of revulsion and regret crept in.

I'm not blaming Janice's niece for this, or her kidnappers, or even Janice herself. I think it was more of an internal, personal thing that drew me and the worms apart. Maybe they weren't what I was truly after, but an outlet, a displacement. They were just a stage in my life, I guess, and I grew out of them.

A few weeks after the fire, while I was still on paid recovery leave, I started letting the worms go. I didn't have a car or anything big enough to transport them all at once, so I would take the worms and dirt a bucket at a time out into different parts of the city, releasing them into parks, alleyways, abandoned subway stations. Soon enough they were all gone. I can take baths now, not that I want to—I shower.

But I can let people into the bathroom. Janice has started coming over more and more lately, and she can stay longer now that my toilet has officially been "fixed." I don't think she knows that I was the one who found her niece, but she might suspect something. I published the article under a pseudonym, selling it to the *Times* and not even running it in the *Herald*, so there's no reason to expect that Janice knows it was me.

After I blacked out in Rolling Thunder's hidden basement, I woke up in a hospital room. The fire trucks must have reached the scene fairly quickly again, spoiling the arson attempt for a second time. I think the arsonists got what they wanted, though. No one's entirely sure how Alice ended up in that basement, or why someone wanted the building burned down, but I have my suspicions. I think the arsonists wanted Alice to be found. I've started looking into it, but I still can't find anything.

The owners swear they didn't know about the hidden basement, saying it must have been one of the sushi chefs, but I don't quite believe them. The building still stands, again, but I think the owners are trying to sell the property now. I walked by the abandoned lot one day to see them pouring concrete into the hidden basement. "Structural stability," a construction worker told me when I asked what they were doing. I agree—an airy foundation won't support anything. Sometimes you just have to squash the soil down to build on top of it, compacting it densely, worms and all.

FOURTHS, HALVES, SONS, SUNS

Miles Ginoza

How can diaspora
mean anything to me

so entrenched
the soil now deep in my soul
crawl all over me
worms spreading American slime
over my face

personally seeking sanctum
in search of asylum
in search of love

cannot see very far past the
dirt covering my hands
it muddles my mind makes me mumble
stumble over the cracks on my
skin

hair splits on my knees
from the wet and the dry
I am aching to dig my way out
the sun very much what I yearn for
to reach towards

two in fact
one red one yellow
rising and setting
pulling me up and out
and letting me down gently
in some place called
home

THE COLORS YOU SEE WHEN YOU RUB YOUR EYES AND KEEP THEM CLOSED PHOSPHENES

Nina Crosby

Chemical dependence
in murky lake run gray
where the birds float on breath.
Dissolve, Acid Casualty, you young
devolution of fetal night-
mares in blistering, blinding white
light.
Do you care?
Clean out your gutters and
watch the water bugs scatter
from their makeshift homes
among dead leaf brain matter.
Napalm lotion rubbed onto your skin,
grating spine feels of fingertip
crying cerebral sadness.
Drink from her lake,
chemical dependence capsule break
and bitter gulp full.
God be Ye in ladled out catatonia,
sink to the bottom and live
among the pebbles.
They dance before your eyes as
blood bubbles, grayscale vision of said blurring future.
Her Jonestown cocktail too sweet,
rim run red.

HIATUS

Talia Rodwin

October draws to a close.
 What has been accomplished
 except the alcohol on my hands?
 Leftover isopropyl
 from scrubbing,
 from converting dirt and dissatisfaction
 to a rubbed-raw shine.
 The sting –
 I wake up with it in the morning,
 go to sleep with it at night.

The bitter pungent scent that stings my nose,
 leaves me crinkled and disturbed.
 It is also a texture on my ghost tongue. It is also
 a rustling in my chest
 that I embrace – it makes me feel more alive
 than dead.
 It's the severed cord, it's saying
 I'll just watch.

When will I come full term, be born again?
 When will I know sweetness that is not nothing?
 When will I be overflowing?

ROSH HOSHANAH

Talia Rodwin

Kadosh kadosh kadosh

we raise ourselves on tiptoe
pushing ourselves into the sky like angels.

But I've kept my feet flat on this linoleum,
my head buried in a prayerbook,
written in a language I don't understand.
Heavy-tongued words, unfamiliar melodies stream around me
and my mind resides in blankness
at the sound of those ancient, plaintive recitations.

A New Year?
Or a new soundtrack to an old year.
We seek change
but our fingers scrape against flesh,
pulling away nothing but dust.
We fall perpetually short.

THE I-90

Marin Sklan

Our vanishing was noted
 only in the shadows of lightning flies
 somewhere off the interstate
 on the frayed train of Madisonville.
 Their little congery,
 dappling the air in sheets of
 phosphorescence,
 cast eyes on our trail of clothing
 errant against a landscape
 designed to toughen feet,
 in a crest of socks and straps
 already damp
 with the sweat of our bodies.

AMERICANA ON MAIN

Marin Sklan

Your town wrapped around us
in the nape of main street,
where old men came with tracting eyes
for the young women who moved
in steady, humming circles.
Mosquitos, in line with the seams of beer cans
pressed the lips of drivers
too preoccupied by short skirts
to indulge the nuisance of insects.

I walked the strip,
feet sticky from regression
that oozed out of a '57 Cadillac.

I - dampened in the roar of bar hoppers,
hushed over with humidity and proof by volume,
pulled in by the attention of a divey jukebox -
paused and listened to the music,
sweat lining the stir of beads around my neck
as I whistled Cajun air through my teeth.

CHOCTAW

Marin Sklan

Someone told me
 that this river had an appetite for leeches
 but I stripped down anyway
 to wash the sand out of my clothes
 after you grabbed me
 and we went clamoring through the silt.
 You stood on the shore
 in your wet denim
 while I held out my clothing in the current,
 hidden by the thrush of Chinese tallow
 and hissing cicadas.
 You watched in silence
 pushing your hair back by the handful
 while I
 with my back bare to you
 twisted the swamp out of my brackish ponytail.

FLOWER ON THE MOUNTAIN

Patrick Kane

my eyes on a wall
gray valleys in the gentle dawn
he's got a handsome smile
slender frame lithe fingers
whistles in the faraway night
waterfall...snow...footprints
arabesque of red and purple across the dusty floor
neon signs flickering
in the blue night I said
"Come here."
filigree of worn winds
there I sat with the smoky rose of
the sun dying in my eyes
he was wounded when his plane fell
in polluted waters sperm floating over
the rocks after dusk like teardrops stream down
trees in the garden between his
legs a rising flower soaked by
mist in the morning carnations curl like
filigrees of cypress and jade an adolescent boy astride
his horse galloped through the heat past
oak trees and old men vibrating out of focus there was
his garland...white lace...broken wings....smeared by
California fog I heard the sad music of
winter mornings by the water and the low sky
against palm trees standing over
oleander bushes dripping beads of
moisture his life lingers terminal shock in deep waters on
the back porch motioning mysteriously protean
life in the pools yellow stars throbbing
sunlight an axe hacking into the bark of
the coastline he was a flower
on the mountain the breeze is quiet.

CYCLES: THREE POEMS

Sofia Valenica

I. erosion

she palms the space she is in for living forms
of twin matter

sullyng the water with her fingers
she whispers to the Bluefin tuna on the shoals
feeds them sediment scraped from the backs of her teeth
they circle her ankles in quiet solace

Massachusetts isn't cruel to her
but she suffers a transoceanic ache
her scream juts out to the coastline—
a blue shark whips away into the crest
of something sudden and sharp

she came clad in icesheets stripped from the Atlantic
became a soul shedding seasoap

II. creation

I move my memory mouth over a
wet clay model with knees of glass
collecting wax leaves that scale from
her sheer cheek

I carry her dislocated stone organs
like jewels
in corporeal chasms lined with silk

here is organic motion—
she is formless and I am whole

III. respiration

light forged into golden lacework
curtains our soft corrosion
warms us into live metalwork

a sycamore bows shyly to us
echoing ripples into each gilded vertebrae
encouraging me
to bend to your sore chemistry
to show her
the spirited friction
of our gentle jeweled bodies
breathing in a resistance to rot

FOUNDATIONS

Sofia Valencia

I am peeling ginger and carrots over the sink
alone with my anatomical cadence
a homebody to my candor

earlier this morning
I tugged these roots from wet soil
with my cut fingers
which now sting under tepid water

a soft breath warms my ankle—
interrupts my concentration

I am patting my pup's pink belly
feeding him baguette pieces dipped in olive oil
letting him drink from my welled hands

every time my hands are emptied
I want to refill them but

I know I cannot give what I do not grow so—
here is the channel I bore
here I place my body to be filled

here I am folding into myself
pressing my mouth to taut kneeskin—
safe with my own heat

ROASTED

Julia Allen

August was only half baked
When you barbequed my ventricles
On the lawn and
Invited our neighbors to watch.

Stouped along the rocks
Of Ithaca Falls, my can soup legs
Waddle toward the water
And fill with *faux amis*.

I stagger backwards,
Containing every snowflake melted
From our winter shadowing
Studies of Newton's laws.

You photograph Nicole's corpse,
Scream your viewfinder is scratched,
The ferris wheel hisses profanities, and
Someone stole her diaphragm.

You drown our laughter in
Wax paper and the wishing wells.
A Northward wind sends you inhabiting
Our backyard reservoir.

What budget paper doesn't cover
You, the filmmaker tangled in his own
External lights and microphones?
Reward: One cubic zirconia ring.

Tonight, I pull you from Cayuga Lake.
First comes orange seaweed,
The beard I once braided while eating
Chocolate cake and crying about constellations.

Your rib cage slips out of my net
 And feeds a hungry deer.
 The mole on the left side of your neck
 Glistens like a penny in my palm.

I take it and sail away on a yacht.
 I do not need your rustic calves
 Or green pearl eyes
 To slump ashore.

SITTING SICKNESS

Julia Allen

This is the song we said we'd never play.
A stem of lilac dying from top to bottom

With the scent of remorse caked in every flower.
Daniel shakes his head against the jumping moon,

His eyes rogue agents from the stars. Alone in my
Square, the mums shiver and spit profanities against

An empty bed, a scarred desk, and lists of freckles
I want to kiss. Retrieve me from the turntable,

Smooth the dust off my callouses, and pretend
You are ready to be a spindle.

FORGETTING TO LOVE WOMEN

Cori Bratby-Rudd

Politics body rush
Knocking feeling into a structure
Into a protest, into an end zone.
Sometimes we fight for lesbians so much
We forget to love women

And so we are either sex or sexless.
Standing at the picket line
At the finish line
Brandishing medals and nudity
As opposed to a lover.

Now I have a girlfriend
Who wants a revolution so badly
We never have time to kiss.

A COUNTRY'S BONES

Cristina Herrera Mezgravis

Robert needed to get to the pharmacy. Cars braked and accelerated abruptly, steering violently to get past the other. The dashed line that divided the cratered, two-lane road was all but nonexistent. The crosswalk looked like lines of white chalk smeared by someone's foot. Robert tightened his grip on his old crutches and stepped down onto the street.

Cars braked loudly so close to him that they threatened to knock him down. He could almost imagine the sound of his skull cracking under the weight of their tires. The drivers honked at him as he kept his eyes fixed on the pharmacy. He couldn't hear their insults; his ears were still ringing when he got to the sliding glass doors.

Robert's crutches squeaked against the porcelain floor. What was unnoticeable on the dirt floor of his home, now made him cringe and look around apologetically on his way to the counter. The young pharmacist aide wore her plain green uniform. Dolores, as he read from her nametag, carried two white baskets. She placed the one full of colored boxes in front of the lady standing next to him. In front of him, she set the one with two small boxes and chewed noisily while she waited for him to say something. From looking at her face, Robert could tell this wasn't precisely what she wanted to be doing at that moment.

"350 *bolívares*," Dolores said. Robert shifted his weight, leaning on the other crutch.

"How much are they?" he asked calmly.

"350 Mr.," she said and went on chewing her gum. Robert thought for a moment.

"Which one's the calcium?" he asked.

"This one Mr., 72."

"72... and this one... *Ibone*," he said the medicine's name with care, admiring the sound that emerged from his mouth. It was a little dark blue box, the name in curved beige letters.

"278," Dolores said and sighed impatiently. Robert looked back at the box.

"Ibone. The name of my daughter," he smiled up at Dolores, feeling his cheeks grow warm. Her face remained unchanged. Robert swallowed before saying, "No, I don't have enough."

Dolores took the white basket away from under his eyes and disappeared hurriedly down the aisles of pharmaceuticals.

Robert shuffled around to walk down the aisles behind him. When passing the mirror above the eyeglasses rack, he noticed the collar of his faded red shirt

curved inward, not ironed since the day it was bought. With every step he took, his shorts menaced to slip down from his slanting hips. He thought of Ibone. Ibone would stare at Dolores until she stopped chewing her gum. She would hate the lady with the basket full of medicine boxes without even knowing her. Ibone would not bring little Evelyn with her; people would look and wonder.

Children were a gift from God, Robert was sure of that. He was moving down the baby aisle now. Round, plump, blue-eyed babies smiled at him from supplement cans and diaper bags. He knew he had to get well. Despite the hours his wife Matilde spent cleaning three-story houses, the money did not last. She would be cooking when he got home. His granddaughter, Evelyn, would be waiting for him, hoping for candy. Ibone wouldn't be home.

As he neared the end of the aisle, he saw the lady. One of the bag boys had to help her carry the heavy bags that strained her delicate, manicured hands. Robert tightened his grip on the old crutches, made his way to the door and left the pharmacy, mumbling to himself under the Venezuelan sun.

FATHER, YOUR COUNTRY IS DYING

Cristina Herrera Mezgravis

“Jesus, in you I trust,”

read the window-sized sticker on the back of a bus.

He dressed in white, hands wide open, eyes on the viewers’ eyes,
under layers of dirt, carbon monoxide and tears of rain burnt dry.

The bus turned right and stopped over the crosswalk;
white lines of chalk smeared by someone’s foot.

The riders trailed around the bus to get off the street,
from root-raised asphalt to cracked concrete.

Father, your country is dying

“These people have no salvation,” father snorted,

“I was looking at those kids the other day,
in the white shirts of their summer camp,
and thought that maybe they’d come back someday
to rebuild this country from its ashes.

Because that is what will be left...
ashes.

The animals that run this place will leave nothing more.

Pity.

Because your generation won’t get to see...
won’t get to see the change.”

“No, not if everyone’s leaving.”

“yes, that’s what I’m saying.”

*Father, your country is sinking
and you stay to see if it floats*

“Pity.”

He'd carry me against his chest held tight,
 I'd reach over, he'd spare the bite
 by watching what way their ears would face
 as I patted their noses over the wooden stall gate.

He'd smile, a full teeth smile, when calves
 licked my hands with their grey tongues,
 and I'd draw back to fill my lungs and scream,
"They scrape me, daddy, they scrape me!"

*Father, your country is dying,
 It's no longer the one you try to piece with your memories*

And in his eyes, he's set me free
 of blatant lack of opportunity,
 of bulletproof cages and crime-filled streets,
 while he holds on to every Wednesday,
 when in golf courses, under pretexts of play,
 he feels no air trapped above his head,
 and looks over the lake, dark, polluted,
 to the mountains that remain
 the sole witnesses of those days,
 of the farm he'd been forced to sell,
 of the stories he'd have to tell,
 of nibbling noses and grey tongues,
 of the strength of his daughter's lungs,
 that now inflate with colder air
 and stories that she's meant to spare.

BLACKBERRIES

Cristina Herrera Mezgravis

“A clear conscience makes a soft pillow,”
spilled from the lips of a man that cheated.
He died, and with him, the truth,
while his words rest enthroned in my mother’s memory.

I wonder how much weight his head carried
every time he lay beside her,
the wife that now cries over his half-open casket,
stroking the glass that lays over his body:

glued lips pulled tight into a grimace,
pale hands fixed neatly over a suit,
green veins stopping short of his fingernails.

Did his lover see the prickles on the lean, bowed arms
before she drove her hand into the bramble
or did she feel them dive into her skin,
cutting through the ridges of her fingertips?

Did she feel she could burst dewed drupelets
or was it the taste of rotten blackberries
that stained her mouth
when he did not think of his children?

SURFACE TENSION

Abigail Newhouse

Underneath this pale skin
I am bone,
p i e c e s
of osseous matter
held together by ligament hope.
That cover, too, removed
to find heart pit pat,
electric brain beat,
blood gushing through veins,
a connection.

I guess what I mean to say
is we are not so different.
Same particles-pull-together.
Why do you only see my surface?
Curves and bosom bust,
orb-filled fat.

I don't know why I
have skin stretch white
on body chamber.
I don't know why
this defines, assigns me,
why appearance entitles new nurture.
Beneath I am
bone brain vein base
like you
he
 she
we,
this cover just critique.

LANDING

Adrienne Pisch

My momma always told me that we were like cats. You can drop a cat, throw a cat, do anything to that damn cat, she'd say, and it would always land on its feet.

I'll admit, I used to try it. I met him after Pa left. He was a scruffy orange tom, hair matted and tail half-gone, but he never tried to bite me. I'd drop him from shoulder height. He'd land on his feet. Then I'd pick him up again, twist him until he was upside down, and toss him off the front steps. Again, he'd land on his feet.

Momma didn't know it, but I saved my leftover fish sticks for him every Tuesday night. They were always cold, which Momma didn't seem to notice, and I always excused myself to the bathroom with jean pockets stuffed with crumbling breading and flaky mystery fish. Momma didn't seem to notice that either. She was always fixated on *Dr. Oz* or whatever other show was on the TV. The volume was always off, the closed captioning was always on, and her hand was always close to the silent phone.

I'm guessing old Tom realized I was the one leaving out food for him, because he started coming to me. When the weather was nice I chose to wander outside, playing on a rusty swing set my Pa had found on the side of the road two summers before, right before he left. I'd gotten used to being alone, but after a few hours of playing I'd see a familiar pair of yellow eyes from the side of the lawn. It was almost like Tom was checking on me.

Once he rubbed himself between my legs as the landlord's diesel grumbled up to the trailer. "Watch yourself," the man warned, "them strays have fleas, and fleas don't pay the rent." I nodded and pretended to shoo the cat away, but I ran after him as soon as the diesel was gone. I don't actually know if old Tom liked me or just put up with me, but he always came back.

In the winter it got bitter cold. Sometimes it would get so cold that the bits of skin showing through the holes in my jacket would turn purple, and teachers would give me the extra clothes they had picked up in the lost and found. Momma once beat me for that, thinking I stole them from someone's knapsack.

I had my sweaters and Tom had his fur. He must have made it through the winter in Mr. Arlington's barn, nestled in hay and feeding on rats, because I never saw him outside. Not that I blame him. Momma made me stay outside a lot, even though it was cold, because she needed her space. I think that's what Pa said to her, and she used those words like a blanket to keep him nestled against her heart.

The neighbors didn't like it when I spent all day outside. It made them nervous, like they thought I was going to throw a rock through their window. So

after a few hours in the snow, they'd come over and look at my wet mittens and ask if I wanted to go to Mass with them. I didn't really know what that was, but they promised it would be warm.

The first time Mr. Turner asked me to go to Mass with him, I asked my momma. She didn't hear me. I didn't bother to ask again. Sure enough, just like Mr. Turner promised, the inside of Mass was warm. It was warm and grand and filled with people. It was like the inside of a cat, filled to bursting with slimy kittens. The people there mewled, just like kittens do. Just like Pa used to over dinner every night, asking for good fortune. He always asked, every night, until he left. Then our house was silent.

On the way back, we'd stop at Moe's Diner and get blueberry pancakes. And after that, we'd pull into the driveway of my doublewide, and I'd venture into the emptiness. This happened every week until the snow melted, and then one evening Tom was there to greet me. His amber eyes checked for me, found me, and then pretended to be disinterested. He left before I could pet him.

Momma never did like Tom. She never saw him much either. She hit him with her old Honda right before Easter, leaving a trail of guts on the main road. The snow had melted away by then, and his body ended up a squishy, fat, muddy mess. Then a coyote got it, I think. I didn't see him again. There was just a red patch on the road, right in the center.

Over time, the mark faded to brown, then the dusty gray of old asphalt. In May they replaced the whole road, all the way down to the corner store. Momma always hated springtime because of the construction. The traffic always made her late, she said. I never knew what she could be late for, except maybe the next episode of *Dr. Oz*.

It was warm enough I didn't need my sweaters anymore, and I gave them back to my teacher. They were even holier than when I had gotten them, but she didn't seem to mind. Momma beat me again for losing them.

I ran around outside even more, roaming farther, sneaking into Mr. Arlington's barn while he was away at a cattle auction. I hadn't seen Tom since that night after Mass and pancakes, and I missed his silent presence. I missed tossing him into the air and seeing him fall on his feet. I missed his leaving, and I missed his coming back again. I knew that his tomb wasn't the blood patch skidded across the road, even though that was where he died. His tomb was this barn where he'd spent the winter, chewing on rats as I'd chewed on pancakes.

I rested in the hayloft of Mr. Arlington's barn, curling into the same position I imagined Tom would take before resting for the night. In that moment, fetal, I became a cat. We shared a body, a breath, and we left our troubles behind. The hay felt prickly against my face, and I buried myself in it and went to sleep.

When I woke up and stretched my stiff limbs, the barn's brightest light shone from two amber orbs. The kitten mewled once and twisted between my legs, a

silver tiger born in the wrong place. It purred, rumbling like a diesel, so I picked it up and held it to my heart.

The sun's low angle meant that I had to hurry home or I'd trip on the stumps on my shortcut through the fields and pine trees. I tossed the kitten into the hay pile and scurried down the ladder. Even though his body was no longer curled against my heart, I could still feel the warmth there. It resonated like the choir in Mass.

I didn't have to watch where he landed to know that he'd landed on his feet.

I ran all the way home, filled with the energy of this new cat. Its heartbeat surely matched my own, and my legs felt as spring-loaded as any barn cat's legs had a right to be. Despite my pace, I barely made it home before dark. Momma was asleep by the time I got back, lights still on and the TV turned off. Everything was silent. I brushed my teeth and went to bed, hoping Momma wouldn't know how late I'd been out. The hay and dirtied clothes would get me in enough trouble.

Just as I was getting sleepy again, car tires crunched against the gravel in our driveway. The noise seemed unimaginably loud, and the yellow headlights could have been the sun. I rolled over in bed, satisfied that the mewling of Mass had worked. Our house wouldn't be silent anymore.

I didn't have to watch out the window to know that Pa had finally come home.

BEUY'S FELT SUIT

Gavin Gao

Frayed around the lapels. Hung
at the neck under the spotlight
like a martyr no longer struggling. It's heavy

as the guilt a shepherd
bears, having lost his herds. It looks
a lot like the coarse

hair that has been eating a blind
bear for as long as the poor creature remembers.
Or this brazen skin that I'll be buried

in. This suit that I was
given, even before I tumbled
from the indivisible dark, has been wearing

me for twenty years. It has dragged me
through the teeth of whirlwinds
and sent me flying across the world.

My mother sewed it
with her whalebone needle. This filthy
outfit that has carried

me this far — around every driftwood
and through
pines tinged red by a wolf

moon — I'll wrap it
tight around my flesh. I'll
wear it proudly like breath.

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Nina Soleil Crosby studies English and the History of Science and Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. With what she describes as a “lo-fi, melancholic Beat bacchanal” style of poetry and short stories, Nina engages art within a literary expulsion of life and death. Entrenched with metaphor, personal anecdotes, and raw emotion, Nina’s work often reflects ideologies surrounding religion, sexuality, and mental health.

Abi Newhouse Vaughn is an undergrad student from Utah State University. She enjoys experimenting with all forms of writing, hanging out with her cats, and watching all of Quentin Tarantino’s films. This is her first publication in a literary journal.

Miles Ginoza is a senior studying English and Comparative American Studies at Oberlin College in beautiful rural Ohio. His favorite poet is Thebe Neruda Kgositsile.

Cori Bratby-Rudd is a recent Gender Studies graduate from UCLA. Drawing primarily from her experience with lesbian moms, Cori’s writing most often strays toward subjects involving queerness. She hopes to release a chapbook soon, which will address her life in a loving rainbow family, and the various types of systematic prejudices and injustices this same family was forced to endure.

Spencer Slovic is a writer and filmmaker from Portland, Oregon, who currently studies Film Studies and Comparative Literature at Stanford University. His one-act play *The Resurrectionist* was produced at Stanford won the Young Playwrights Inc. 2014 National Contest, and he is currently at work on a full-length, *Fissure*, about the next California earthquake. He has written and directed many short films, including winners of the Fresh Film Northwest film festival and Interlochen Center for the Arts Future of Cinema Film Festival. He is currently the president of Stanford’s filmmaking club, Cardinal Studios. This is his first published short story.

Talia Rodwin, a student at Oberlin College, has previously published in The Plum Creek Review. She studies English and French academically, but in her free time she also “studies” knitting, baking, and music. She grew up in Rockville, Maryland, where she still lives with her family and her dog, Shakespeare.

Patrick J. Kane is a freshman at Cornell University and plans to major in English. He enjoys reading literature and writing about it, and when he isn’t in school, he takes pleasure in spending time with his one-year-old nephew, Owen.

Hannah Llorin is a freshman at Stanford University and is originally from Baltimore, Maryland. She plans to major in Human Biology and pursue a career in public health or intellectual property. In her spare time, Hannah enjoys backpacking and running.

Cristina Herrera Mezgravis is graduating from Stanford University with a major in English with Creative Writing Emphasis and a double minor in Translation Studies and Modern Languages. She grew up in Valencia, Venezuela. When she was four and made believe she was a dog, her grandmother assured concerned visitors that she just had a big imagination. When they asked her father how she would feed herself as a writer, he said, “Well, I tell her that if she comes up with the next Harry Potter, I’m not complaining.” Though Cristina doesn’t usually write fantasy, she couldn’t help smiling.

Adrienne Pisch is a student at Cornell University majoring in Biological Sciences with a concentration in Microbiology. She is minoring in Creative Writing and Infectious Disease Biology. She enjoys hiking, coffee, and putting off schoolwork in order to read a good book.

Gavin Gao is a senior majoring in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. He loves plum jam and clothbound poetry books. He is currently finishing up his senior creative writing thesis. Gavin hopes to continue writing after graduation and to one day travel around the African continent in an air balloon.

Julia M. Allen is an undergraduate studying Industrial and Labor Relations and will graduate in 2019. She has served on the editorial staffs of five international literary magazines, and her work has appeared in *Cadaverine Magazine*, *This Great Society*, *ditch poetry*, and more.

Sofia Valencia is a poetperson who is studying English at Reed College in Portland OR. She’s happy she hauled her heart here, she loves this rainy city, she spends her time feeling loved by poems & scooping avocados hollow with a spoon.

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