

The Lion's Eye



VOLUME 54: SPRING 2024



SPROUT

emma tomczynski

The Lion's Eye

Spring 2024

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“THIS IS THE ONLY REAL CONCERN OF THE
ARTIST, TO RECREATE OUT OF THE DISORDER
OF LIFE THAT ORDER WHICH IS ART.”

- JAMES BALDWIN

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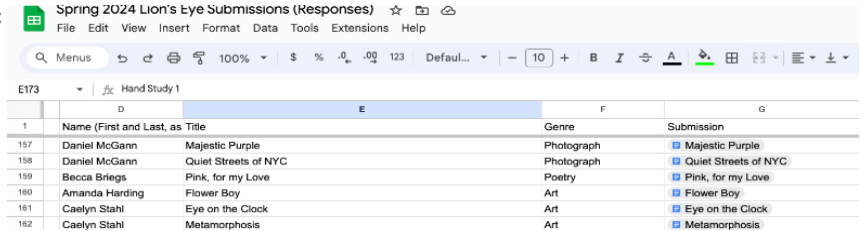
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THE FIRST LOOK

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Lion's Eye went through a modernization process this semester. Prior to this semester, students submitted to our magazine via email (tcnjlionseye@gmail.com or lionseye@tcnj.edu). Then, the executive board would add information to a Google Spreadsheet *manually*. This semester, we sent out a Google Form. Submitters might not know this, but it linked up to a Google Spreadsheet, which means that all the information was uploaded *automatically*, along with a link to the submission. This is what it looks like now:



	D	E	F	G
1	Name (First and Last, as Title)		Genre	Submission
157	Daniel McGann	Majestic Purple	Photograph	Majestic Purple
158	Daniel McGann	Quiet Streets of NYC	Photograph	Quiet Streets of NYC
159	Becca Briegs	Pink, for my Love	Poetry	Pink, for my Love
160	Amanda Harding	Flower Boy	Art	Flower Boy
161	Caelyn Stahl	Eye on the Clock	Art	Eye on the Clock
162	Caelyn Stahl	Metamorphosis	Art	Metamorphosis

Technology is amazing!

The last time we went through such a monumental change was in 2010, when we moved from paper submissions to digital submissions. In 2011, we won an award for “Greening Organization Operations” for this shift.

It seems that our submitters enjoyed the simplicity of the Google Form and the QR codes put up around campus by me and our amazing publicist Erin. This semester, we had almost 200 submissions, which is the most, by far, I’ve ever seen during my three years on the executive board and four years part of this organization. Usually, we have about 110 submissions.

I wanted to use my first and only “First Look” to contextualize this issue because I am a firm believer that these issues are history. Still, I cannot sign off until I have thanked the board members who made this issue so amazing. Thank you to Maddie, who took time out of her study abroad in England to help create this magazine. To Elizabeth, who took on the role of secretary with such creativity. To Catherine and Lauren, who I have attended meetings with since freshman fall on Zoom. They *are* Lion's Eye for me <3

And to Erin, who took on my beloved role of publicist, for which I was for two out of three of my years on the executive board. It was painful to leave because I loved that job to no end, but I cannot imagine anyone doing a better job at it. I also need to thank Erin for stepping up as co-Issue Editor to make this magazine with only a few days notice. Read her Last Look for more context on how that happened.

To quote Erin, “we’ll make a damn amazing magazine through hell or high water lol”

And finally, thank you to all our readers, submitters, and staff. We would be nowhere without you :)

Love always,



Megan Finan
Executive Editor



POUNCING RED FOX
justin mcdonald

GOD'S FAVORITE POISON

Can I keep the skin you shed?

Why?

Because it reminds me of a dandelion.

A dandelion?

It's my favorite flower.

Why is it your favorite?

Because it grows without permission.

Don't other flowers grow like that? Doesn't a honeysuckle grow on the side of our house?

Yes, but it's not my favorite. I like the way a dandelion resembles a star.

A star?

Something far away. Out of reach. I like that when the wind picks up in the summer, a dandelion falls apart and flies away and spreads itself out so thin it must grow again. I like looking at it from a distance.

Why can't you look at it up close? Surely you want to lie in a field of dandelions rather than look at one?

Well that's no fun. And besides, anyone could lie in a field of dandelions. I want the dandelions to come to me. To dance along the wind, in all their pieces and parts, until at last they find themselves in the palm of my hand. Willingly. I won't have any doubts or coincidences bring them to me.

And when they're in your hand? What will you do then?

I will put them back together again, every little seed, and plant them in my hands. I will watch the seeds grow from my flesh, sprouting from my every blood vessel, until it looks like a star ready to ride the summer wind. My star.

And then you'll let it go?

Of course not!

Then what will happen to it? What will you do with it once it has grown past what your body can handle?

I will eat it.

Why?

Because it is my favorite and it is mine and there are a million other dandelions waiting to be consumed. Why stop at just one?

You are awfully quiet.

I just remembered . . . a dandelion isn't a flower.

No . . . it isn't.

What's your favorite flower?

So, can I keep your skin?



BEAUTY IN DANGER
hannah lee



PARADISE ISLAND, BALI
ayesha susan sultana

I DIRECT A MOVIE

(summer in indiana, 1993. the last summer we have. the final scene on black water, slipped in its moonlit dress—our legs tangled in your dad’s stolen canoe. for the moment, everything his is ours. you have his boat. i have you.)

YOU: we should float here forever.

(you like to speak your dreams upward, sending them spiraling towards any merciful star. my pulse jumps, flashes. thrashing like striped bass. you offer your cigarette, my hand shakes.)

ME: it’s a lake—we’d end up back on shore.

(the haze throws the night off its hinges. smoke swarmed around our heads, blurred by sighs. you, freckled, tear streaks in two shining lines. me, taking a last drag, swallowing the smoke, silence, the scent of the sugar maples.)

(the audience doesn’t see our kiss. they get glimpses, reflected in the lake’s dappled mirror. this is how love lives in small towns: through a warped lens. the truth never fits into frame.)

(cut to black—no epilogue, no after-credits. in a way, time is suspended. there is nothing after this. the rest of our lives we float, we kiss, we cry.

we pray for open ocean.)

Your life is sweet, I'm smart and scarred.
You chirp your pretty tune, while my life is hard.

You're of the foam, I'm of the blood.
You fight with words, I kill in mud.
You reek of cinnamon, I smell like wrath.
You do your chores, I do the math.

You're made up of sugar, I'm rage of the fairer sex.
You're here to make and sing, I handle all the wrecks.

But I'm wrong.
So wrong.
I'm the wrongest I can be.

Your lack of wounds does not make you weaker than me.

I attack out of envy, and try to act dark.
Still always bite, but forgot how to bark.

I'm not better than you, or those who spread cheer.
I'm sorry love, I have been blinded by fear.

sarah knapik

JUNIPER BEAST

DRAKE AND HEN
kira rubiano



allison silver

WOMANHOOD AND BEING BURIED BEFORE WE ARE BORN

sun beats down hot on a stone.
she raises her head, smiles beneath the dirt.
worms slither from her eyes back home.
she is a mother both by choice and not.
no breeze shakes any leaves because
there are no trees left. rather, there
never were trees to begin with. (or
perhaps those with the chance
forgot to nourish them enough.)

the gentle steps of boots above quake
the roof of her modest, well-kept home,
shaking desert dust to a small storm.

with long, sharpened nails, dirt beneath them,
she claws upward, digging herself to the surface.
she licks her lips, tastes the earth upon them,
and stretches her weary, strong arms skyward.

the stone lifts with her head, atop her shiny hair.
the footsteps cease. their land-dweller pauses,
puzzled, glancing down upon the foreign sight.
(he had forgotten the Below existed.)

her eyes flutter gently closed under the sun's
embrace, delicate lashes tickling flushed cheeks.
a smile still stretched across her skin, she then looks
up and grants him a playful wave and a simple

“Hello!”

he blinks. (had they always been able to speak?)
her features, soft and hardened, invite a
strange, unfamiliar sensation into his chest.
her eyes could have been gemstones, her hair
a great beast's mane, her smile the bloom
of flowers with bright petals and lost names.
all of her makes him wish to grovel or hurl.
he does neither and instead replies

“Hello.”

“It's a lovely day,” she remarks.

he clears his throat and turns his eyes away,
toward the barren, rust-colored landscape.

she sighs and he shudders at the gentleness
of the sound. closing her eyes once more,
she rests her chin against the heat-scorched land,
one ear tilted to the earth below as she
listens to the waking of her sisters.

“Are you...thirsty?” asks the land-dweller.

she shakes her head, almost laughs at his
hesitancy, and to him asks

“Are you?”

perhaps if he had not seen her,
a brilliant lie would have come with ease.
perhaps if he had not already acknowledged
the existence of beautiful things
and realized they had been relegated Below.

“A little. Yes.”

A CIRCLE OF TIME ACCORDING TO LAISSEZ-FAIRE

It's Sunday morning–
a spring day–
and I'm outside,
chasing a ball.
It is a beautiful ball
and it is all I want.
Someday,
I will catch it.

It's Sunday morning–
sunny, without a cloud in the sky–
and I'm outside,
reaching for a ball.
It is a white marble–streaked with gold–ball
and it is all I want to have.
Someday,
I will catch it.

It's Sunday morning–
a hot day, so hot I'm sweating–
and I'm outside, panting,
running after a ball.
It is a beautiful, evasive ball
and it is all I want, despite the effort.
Someday,
I will catch it.

It's Sunday morning–
dark clouds rolling in, looming without an ounce of rain–
and I'm outside, shivering as I glance up ever so often,
chasing a ball.
It is a white ball, pretty ball
and it is all I want but I'm afraid of the storm ahead.
Someday,
I will catch it.

It's Sunday morning–
it's raining, pouring, and cold, icy–
and I'm outside, shivering, freezing,
scraping my knees, reaching for a ball.
It is an evasive ball, slippery and fast,
and it is all I want, despite how far away it
is.
Someday,
I will catch it.

It's Sunday morning–
snowing despite the growing warmth of
the season–
and I'm outside, lying in the snow so cold I
can't feel my fingers,
watching a ball grow farther and farther
away from me.
It is a white ball, perhaps with some gold,
and it is blending into the snow
and it is all I want as my tears freeze
against my cheeks.
Someday,
I will catch it.

It's Sunday morning–
no longer cold, no longer freezing, and I'm
floating I'm so warm–
and I'm outside, happy, though I don't
recognize where I am anymore,
flying after a ball.
It is a beautiful ball, so pretty I could cry,
and I'm finally so close I can taste it.
Today,
I think I might catch it.

It's Sunday morning.

MELTING AWAY
amanda harding





A PLACE TO REST
caelyn stahl

Sometimes my dreams rot
In the white corridors between apartments
Where you put a needle in your arm
And sung me to sleep with a storm of grief
I want to be closer to you
Than the circle of fury on your tongue
And the little white lines on your skin
But everyday, I pray you'll stay
And pretend that you love me

Sometimes my dreams rot
In places we used to walk
Around rivers and streams,
Black metal beams,
And words we used to talk

Sometimes my dreams rot
In your grimace at my pain
I give you a hug
You say "I'm a drug
But the cure would drive you insane"

Sometimes my dreams rot
In the ground where you buried your anger
In the walls you laced with fentanyl
In the faces of all my relatives
In the trees where you used to swing
In the cuts I saw on your arms
In the hatred I felt everyday that I woke up
And there was the chance my eyes would meet yours
And you would scowl back in my direction

gabriela thomas

SINCE THE FIFTH GRADE

Sometimes my dreams rot
As I ponder my ancestors past
They look down with fear
As Hell's down here
They're praying I am the last

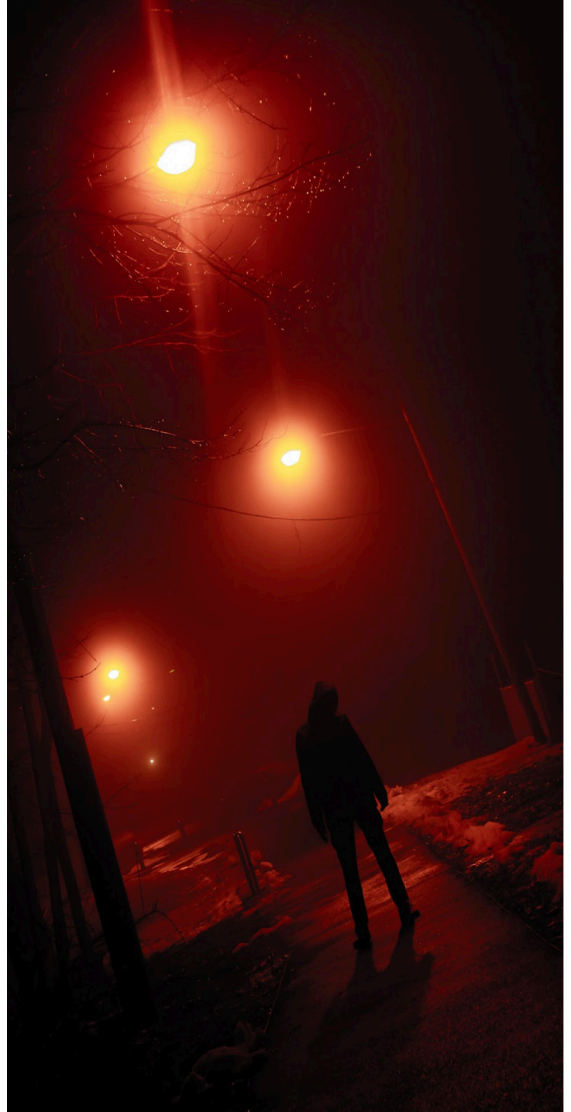
My dreams are rotting
The only comfort I find is a blade
I am all that you hate
Despair is my fate
I've been dying since fifth grade

erin parker

SHE RAN

Expanding upon lines from Emily Carroll's Through the Woods

*She ran,
Though nothing chased her but his screams,
Which howled at her heels all the way down the
Low, lonely road.
The road seemed never-ending,
As did his wretched screams.
She ran all night,
Passing trees with branches that
Danced like he did at parties,
Hearing wind whistle like
He did whenever the room went quiet,
Seeing only darkness ahead just
As he did before the blood dripped down his throat,
Like sap from the tree she last passed.
Eventually the sun came up,
But she couldn't stop
And she never will, as long as
She could still hear his screams.
The wails that she felt across every inch of her skin,
That made her throat ache as if she were the one crying,
That she tried to tune out,
But never could.
Because his life haunted him,
And though he loved her,
It would forever haunt her too.*



THE ENTITY
daniel mcgann



END OF THE DARK ROAD
daniel mcgann

I act like a predator,
But when I get nervous, it's how prey does.

I'm the rat that tears through it's chained leg,
I'm the broken teeth you clench so you don't swallow them.
I'm slitted eyes, glazed with gorgeous panic.
When things are good I stalk and preen, when they're bad I curl up to die.

I've got real nice canines, but they're covered in my own meat more than anyone else's.
Because I gave the abyss my gaze,
And it took everything else.
I just came to stare,
I didn't mean to bring something back with me.
A beast bigger than me, a true predator, deadly in all of the ways I am not.

I just want to keep on breathing,
And if it wants me dead,
It'll have to do the job itself.

I just want to bathe in plasma and marrow,
And if it has to be mine,
So be it.

sarah knapik

HUNT ME

We stir ourselves among villains,
pull ourselves flushed
against the great emptiness of the universe
in our quest to be both holy and sated
amongst our pagan ancestors.

You see,
we have failed many times
and returned.
Hungrier,
crueler,
more desperate to outstretch our hands until
our fingers cut themselves against
the glass of fortune.

We surge against the notion
that perhaps such pain
shall bring relief—
the sacrifice needed
in order to kiss the gates of Paradise.
But we have forgotten that blood often runs
tainted into the cups of gods,
consumed and forgotten,
the outline of our sins
a mere bitter aftertaste.

Witness us!
The path we think we carve,
all those strings named Destiny and Fate
leading us to the cliff from where we'll leap
blind
with our friends,
hand in hand,
as we tempt tragedy
to caress our bloody palms
with love.
The heavens do not fall silent
as the weight of tragedy befalls us mortals.

kaitlyn britton

TO PLAY THE LOTTERY

They watch us,
laughing,
as Memory records our pride
and mistakes it for arrogance.

But we shall know.
We shall know that,
if only for a moment,
we were gods,
drunk on our own blood and greed,
anxious to prove ourselves wretched
in such temptation.

Ah,
such is Chance,
such is Luck,
such is the deal made
and struck
at the expense of all that made us beautiful
in the garden we have forgotten.

We have forgotten!
We have been forgotten!
And Memory shall remember only
the gamble and the taste of metal,
faded on her tongue.



EL MATADOR
elena ladrón posadas

kevin hoppe

BUT WHATEVER HAPPENS, YOU CAN'T FALL IN LOVE WITH ME

You tried to warn me, but it was too late

An angel took you away
The blade he plunged through your heart pierced mine
So my heart will always be with you
But my soul is left wandering alone

The fire you sparked to warm me
Now burns me up inside
Until nothing remains but ashes
That drift away like petals in the wind

Do you remember the first time we met?
You reached out to me with a flower floating on your fingertips
And said "Lovers used to gift these to each other"
As you pinned the flower upon my shirt

This moment lost to time blossoms in my breast
Only to be plucked away by reality
Your hand will never reach out to me again
And I will never be able to reach back

MAGNOLIA
anirudh koneru



sarah knapik

AN APOLOGY TO SNAKES

They say you were the first horrible thing to happen to humanity.

Harsh.

The precursor to the first evil deed, the temptation that got us kicked from paradise.
You symbolize betrayal and evil in all our stories, your name is synonymous with backstabber.

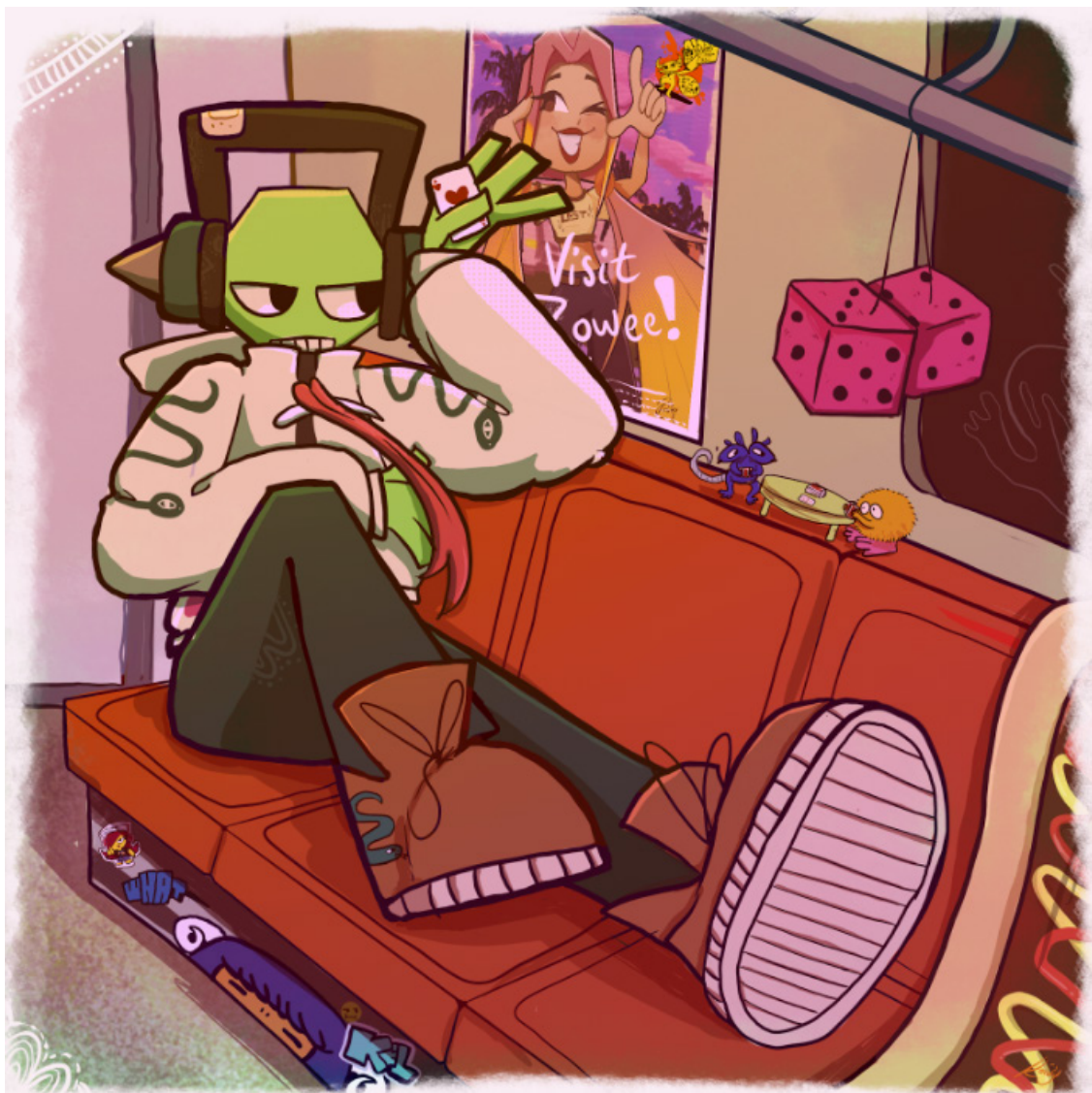
You're shot at, stepped on, gassed from your home.

You're blamed for being angry, as if our species hasn't made war into an artform.

You're blamed for being dangerous and mean
When all you've
ever
been
is
Scared.

*SCARLET KING SSSNAKE:
ENTRY 1 IN
HERPS OF FLORIDA SAGA
esteban mendez*





SSSTRIKER
ravenna gemignani

I think I've narrowed it down
to something about the
expansive, blackened sky
that ignites such a strong desire within
for cherry tobacco in my lungs.
I'm not the same as I was before.
Yet some things never change,
like the streetlights that illumine
on white houses and worn roads.
Truth is, I've never smoked.
Sometimes I yearn for what I should not have.
Sometimes I yearn for the touch of my mother
in a hug or a hand on my back,
but I've found we've wintered.
There is still that blood love between us
as I will always be her daughter,
but there are days I worry she sees an adult
where I see a child.
We once shared the same eyes,
the same splintered pine needle green,
but as I've begun to experience life on my own,
her eyes have lightened like softened seaglass
where mine now cast shadows on the skin
beneath them. It's as though I've taken the place
of the matriarchal head, the next in line to mother
someone, something, but how can I when
I don't remember what shaped me
when I was still a malleable youth?

alyssa rimathe s.

I, WOMAN

I am not ready to teach what I never learned.
Everything came easy to her, this mother of mine.
She was sweet on the vine,
is now smooth in the wine.
My mother earns beauty with age,
earning freedom from womanhood
as my time too quickly approaches.
I weigh my own femininity
over a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of white.
I buy neither and escape while I can into the night.
Is a woman a lover?
Is a woman a mother?
Is woman the fear of the fall
or the beauty that balances them all?
I wait for dawn to give me an answer and wonder
if I only started to chase the sunlight
when twilight whispered *woman*.



PERSONA
mallory mcgowan

All things die in the spring.
My mother sighed and told me to cheer up
This season marks the beginning of life
I heard the phrase twenty times in twenty years, and it never grew on me
(Hell, it still hasn't).
I fell far from the tree, so each year, I grow a garden of new beliefs.
All things die in the spring.
Rain pours from my eyes, as I cry in my bed
The fruits of my labors will atrophy and die
The darkness of winter promised a rebirth
But still, I lie underneath a crown of roses.
All things die in the spring.
I sacrificed my soul to be your Moses.
For my heavy heart is a cross to bear
I'd rather drive myself to exile than share.
So let me be your martyr.
To reconcile with my sinful condition
I will lose my lover every year
For I believe all things die in the spring.

ashton calo

ALL THINGS DIE IN THE
SPRING

becca briegs

WATERMELON

I spent many summers at an old wooden table coated with chipping green paint. Regina, they called her, the girl who carried dazzling bottles of nail polish with her, charging all the other girls a shiny quarter for a manicure. There were days I'd sit at that worn table and chip at the sun-faded paint because I'd forgotten my quarters. The other girls sneered my way and coated their nails with the bright pink polish.

One day, I decided to bring my own nail polish. I didn't charge one single shiny quarter, instead I dragged the bench into the woods and bathed my nails in my startling black paint. No one ever came over to bother me there. At the end of the summer, a flavored ice truck parked itself at the camp, charging everyone twelve quarters for a cup of flavor ice. The popular girls' quarters were all gone. My ice was watermelon flavored and left a bright pink stain across my mouth as I smiled at them.



PARADISE
mallory mcgowan

JUBILEE

Even in bed, Sadie would wear her bathing suit and pray for a jubilee. She would lie awake and listen to the waves crash ashore, letting its serene plunge soothe her longing. One night, when the moon glowed and the tide rose, hundreds of blue crabs strung the coastline. In those dark hours, people drove across town to celebrate. They built a bonfire to cook the crabs, a harvest that burned until sunrise. “So how’d they taste?” I asked. Before she could respond, Sadie looked up and closed her eyes, trying to remember anything about that midnight feast. All she could think about was the laughter that echoed throughout. A sound through sleepless nights she can still hear.



DARLING U

mallory mcgowan



DAYDREAM
mallory mcgowan

elizabeth klein

WHEN I HAVE A HOUSE

I'm painting flowers on the walls
and putting color in every room.
I'm cloaking the mirrors with silks
and washing my sheets with citrus.
I'm eating dinner on the carpets
and letting the pets on the couch.
I'm hanging pictures of my friends
and playing music in the smallest hours.
I'm winding fairy lights around the handrails
and adorning the windows with suncatchers.
I'm sunbathing in the grass
and reading amongst the trees.
I'm using teacups as water glasses
and freezing ice in the shape of stars.
I'm opening the door
and welcoming you in.

stibs

NIGHTLY HABITS

i have a bad habit.
at night,
when i can't sleep
and there's no more room for me to
think,
i drink.
i drink your words off the very page,
the rhymes tickling my throat,
the words dancing on my lips.
i have a bad habit.
when even my own mind
is too busy
for me to visit,
i resort to one thing:
i get drunk on your words.



SOULS OF THE DAMNED
hannah lee

erin parker

UNTIL I GO NUMB

It's not "one step forward and three steps back."
It's actually a continuous sprint.
I'm so afraid of falling,
But my feet are stumbling underneath me,
So fall I do.
But every time, I am pulled back up and placed upon my feet,
Forced to go again.
There is no ending ribbon in sight.
I'm on a godforsaken treadmill.
Who knew it could even go this fast?
It's one step forward and three more new aches and blisters,
But there is no emergency stop button.
So I take one more step forward and three steps I regret,
Three steps of grief,
Three steps of addiction.
It's step this, step that,
The first step is admitting you have a problem,
But my problem is that I can't stop my staggered running,
Or else I fall.
And fall I do.
But then, I'm placed back upon my feet.
Because it's not one step forward and three steps back,
It's one step forward and then another one and then another one,
And another one and another one.
Life comes at you fast
And keeps getting faster.
So chase after the carrot that they dangle in front of you.
Until the day your legs go numb.

I feel like I have to take care of everyone,
but with you, I can relax.
You can hold your own,
and I can hold my own,
and we can hold each other,
closely, hopefully,
and I am
spellbound.

megan finan

SPELLBOUND

I want to trace your smile with my fingertip,
cuddle with one hand tucked between two soft rib bones,
play The Chainsmokers just to hear you sing,
ask you to carry my laundry basket,
kiss the tip of your nose once, twice,
squeeze your hand as I drag you through the mall,
ramble about how *smartbeautifulkind* you are,
buy you lavender and roses so your dorm smells pretty,
give you the soft pieces of my heart no one else is allowed,
pretend we aren't clichés.

I want everything with you.

HAND STUDY 1
maggie machado





GRAPE FLAVORED JELLY
brooke zevon

stibs

DRUNK ON THE NIGHT

he drinks the darkness
as though the stars
are his only hopes.

Open laptop
Clickety clack
Enter my password
So no one can hack

18 email notifications running one after the other
As if
It's a race to see which will be opened first
Joke's on them because the answer is none

Pinterest, Ticketmaster, Dominos
How'd they find their way there, who knows

Six windows
24 tabs each
All of a sudden
Crash

Like thunder
It's transparent
Through the windows

Your disk is almost full
Aggressively click remind me tomorrow
As if the 80 reminders on my phone aren't enough
Don't even get me started on my phone

New tab
Google drive
New doc
Crash

That's not new
The crash I mean
And yeah the routine too

avina sharma

CRASH

Just exit out the tabs
But they remind me that I'm only at the top
Of a very long list
The naughty one
Filled with missing assignments
And freshly baked cookies coated with anxiety chips

Cookies
On the computer
Tracking my every click
Watching me add even more to the list

10 new tabs just added
Finally started my essay
It's due three months ago
Crash

Computer tripped while running
All the tabs
Gone in an instant
Along with my half finished assign-

Crash
Computer slams shut
Crash
Now I don't even know what

To do

21 missing assignments

11 upcoming assignments

1

brOkEN coMpUTer

Drive it to the shop

To heal the cuts of procrastination and scars of imperfection

Head against the windshield

Glass chips

It only took a matter of seconds

A

R

S

C

H



WOOD DUCK TAKEOFF
justin mcdonald



THE ARTIST AND HER PAINTING
amanda harding

megan finan

IT'S STILL FEMINISM IF THERE'S ONE GOOD WOMAN.

Don't pit Women against each other. But what if that Woman deserves it? Then, can't we twist Her braids, pluck Her eyelashes, and crush Her skull? Paris Geller, I think, should prick the baby blue eyes of oh-so-sweet, oh-so-fake Rory Gilmore until blood wells up like tears. Caroline Forbes can bite the crisp neck of Elena Gilbert and suck Her blood like apple juice for Her crimes of sobbing selfishness. Jade West can cut through boring, conceited Tori Vega's soft belly with silver shears, and Georgia can steal Ginny's lighter and click, *click* until Ginny's ash because She's spoiled, don't you see?

Don't you see? Every Woman is replaceable, so mold yourself into the interesting one.

Don't take up too much screen time because we will get sick of you. Don't be boring because we will crucify you. Don't ever forget there's a Woman out there who can steal your skin and play your role better than you.

She is a cavity,

Birtherd from bacteria
Nurtured by negligence
Desire fueled destruction
Decay written all over her walls.

She is a cavity,

She is breaking down
Layer by layer
Once incipient
Now turned rotten
Soft outsides mistaken for weakness.

This is not spontaneous,

Nor an act of love
This is a buildup
When no one cared enough
To nurture her lesioned insides
From becoming calcified caverns
Her longing for sweetness
A dull ache
Now stings with regret.

brooke zevon

CAVITIES
(REMEMBER TO
BRUSH AND FLOSS)

She is a cavity,

You want to excavate her
Rid her presence
From your body's memory.
She vows to get better
To clean up the canals
Of her hollow heart
Fill the vacancy with substance
And seal it with a crown upon her head
A marker of beauty and perfection
On the outside.

But you wanted to excavate her
Said removal was easier
Than any remedial charity
You were worried what would happen
If she came back.

She was a cavity.

Now she is an absence.



WATCH YER MOUTH
caelyn stahl

ryan krstic

SO MUCH (FOR) STARDUST

I see myself in starlight
Against the backdrop of the moon
I dance amongst the fireflies
I hear them humming “soon”

They start to form a circle
And lift me in the air
They deposit me atop the stars
With the utmost touch of care

I walk along the Milky Way
I make a left at Ursa Mmajor
The planets and I play a game of tag
I hide within a crater

I jog along Saturn’s rings
I share a lemonade with the sun
I nap within the softest cloud
I catch a glimpse of Voyager 1

Last I grab a passing comet
For a one way ticket home
She tells me, “You’re made of stardust love,
So you’ll never be alone”

Far too soon my feet touch ground
And I look up at the sky
And though it seems so dark from here
I know it’s full of light

And as the sun starts to rise
I wave hello to my old friend

stibs

STAR STUFF

she is made of star stuff,
the lingering effect
of supernovas
colliding
and light

thrown in every direction,
the breathtaking sight
of immortal beauty,
the kind that shines
for centuries,

only to reach a destination
that doesn't worship her
as he does the blinking planets.



A GALAXY ON EARTH
kira rubiano



CORAL BEACH, BALI
ayesha susan sultana

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

I made myself tea the other day
and dunked the tea bag twice,
then reeled it back like a wriggling fishing line

because that's how you liked your tea—honey brown
and weak—and it's still my gut instinct to make tea for you.

New seasons of *Father Brown* and *Endeavor* released,
and they record on your TV.
Mom keeps the TiVo OnePass,
but we don't watch.

We would have watched with you, Grandma.
You know that, right?

The shows should have ended when you died.
It's only right.
It's only fair.

I don't know if I miss you enough,
but I know I would have shown you pictures of my England trip,
and you would have said you always wanted to go to Europe,
and my heart would have shattered,
and I would have smiled
and I would have lied: *One day, Grandma. One day you'll go.*

I have a boyfriend now,
and you would have loved him,
and you never will meet him,

and it's the *nevers* that kill me.

I don't know if I miss you enough.
I went to class the day after you died
and killed my presentation,
and sometimes I think I might be heartless for that.

When your hearing went kaput,
you said I was the only one you could still hear
because I speak so loudly.

I read a Bible excerpt at your funeral,
spoke slowly and loudly.
I tried to believe in Heaven for the day
in case it made a difference,
but I didn't cry.

I hope you heard me in Heaven, Grandma.

I held Mom's hand in the pews
and watched her cry for the first time in my life,
and I shattered like my potentially non-existent heart.

I don't know if I miss you enough,
but *enough* is an unquantifiable term.

Screw *enough*.

Mom feels like she didn't do enough for you,
and the guilt eats at her until she can't sleep,
and she told me once she thinks she got her guilt complex from you.

I tell her she did enough, I tell her she was an angel,
I tell her no one could have done more,
but she doesn't believe me,
and my heart—my very existent heart—shatters again.

Female guilt is our curse,
and I refuse to let it wreck me.

I function and I thrive and
I miss you.
All three are true.

I hope Mom heals,
and I hope you are guiltless in Heaven, Grandma,
and I hope Heaven is a seaside town in Italy,
and I hope you sunbathe on a beach towel
with a weak mug of tea, salty potato chips, and Grandpa
on the towel beside you.

sabrina ciaravino

THE TWINS

The little star twins hug each other tight
Asleep on the light blue bed of the sky
Oh how they snooze...
Cradling the world in one tiny arm and the future in another
They sync their rising and falling chests in time
Doze among the clouds
And hold each other's pinkies in promise,
They will together dream the sweetest dream

You lead me to your notebook
And I scribbled on your page
But I can't erase this feeling
This is the drafting stage.

I drew my own conclusions
Until my hand was sore
But once I saw my pencil
There's no point anymore!

You saw my broken state
I saw my life as null
You said, "you're not pointless,
you're just a little dull!"

Then, you became sketchy,
You drew the curtains down
You loved my chipped graphite
And turned around my frown!

But how is it the pad
With paper white as snow
Wishes for my pencil
To taint her paper's glow?

"You're my no.1 pencil!
And you don't need to prove,
You were sharp enough for my heart,
you made the writing move."

gabriela thomas

THE PENCIL AND THE PAD



DUCKIE BATH
olivia stark



SUNFLOWER
anirudh koneru

erin parker

5'2

She's my height, my stature.

We often stand the same:

Arms crossed or hands on hips and a slight lean on one leg.

She scowls whenever she's thinking,

Yet hides the rest of her emotions—

At least until she can't anymore.

She's always got a pen by her,

For crosswords or shopping lists,

Nothing left unwritten.

She mouses her hair and still says it's a bad hair day.

She wears jewelry on special occasions,

Except her wedding rings are worn daily

And sometimes her watch, but she mostly stopped a few years ago.

She puts on pajama pants when it gets dark,

But leaves her shirt on from the day until just before bed

And now I do the same.

She's often got a water bottle on one side and a beer on the other,

Because that's all she likes to drink,

Except for green tea on pancake night.

She's a picky eater, but hates to admit it.

She does so much for us, but won't admit that either.

She knows everyone better than they know themselves

And her hugs are the first to calm me down.

We have the same hair color and eyes,

Same opinions, same interests.

She's my height, my mom,

We often stand the same.

sarah knapik

HOW I HOPE IT IS

Death picked me up from the party in a 2007 SUV.

I ran over and hopped in the back seat after saying bye to all the girls, buckling up with a wiggle.

Death looked back at me.

"Did you have a good time?"

I beamed back.

"It was great! I had so much fun- I love them."

Death smiles a bit, and pulls away as they start to drive.

"Good, I'm glad."

I curl up in my seat, watching light posts pass as the car speeds up. I glance to Death.

"Where are we going?"

"Home, of course," they answer. "It may take a while. Nap if you want to."

The heat of the car is cozy, and I close my eyes as the lull of wheels on the road goes on.

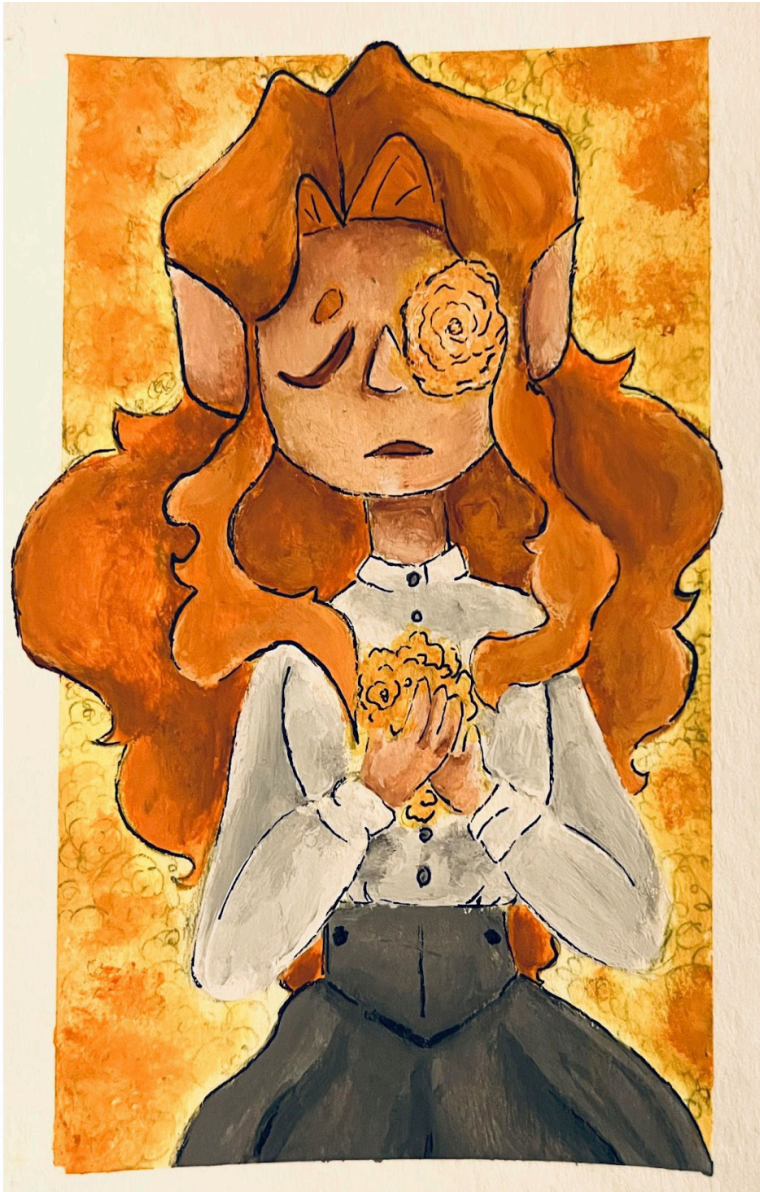
I fall asleep.

When we get there, Death gently unbuckles me and carries me home against their chest.

LONELY CELESTIAL
tyler harvey



ELEGY FOR MARIGOLDS
jess gronikowski



A DEDICATION TO THE FLUTE
emily bielski



justin diefenbach

EVIL MISS ABRAHAM

FROM TOWER OF FADI

Evil Miss Abraham

from Tower of Fadi

Justin Diefenbach
(Justin D Music)

$\text{♩} = 120$

Bass Synth. *mf*

Drumset T

Drumset B

5

Cryst. Synth. *mf*

Bass Synth.

D. Set T *mf*

D. Set B *f*

9

Cryst. Synth.

Sci-fi Synth. *mp*

Bass Synth.

D. Set T

D. Set B

Full YouTube
Video



lauren farrell

OFFERINGS

My brother, I have nothing to offer you. Nothing useful, at least.

I can offer you a story, I suppose:

The week before you were born, our family got Chinese food.

I don't remember the fortune inside my cookie,

But I remember the Learn Chinese! words, written on that slip of paper: *Little Brother*.

I was sure you were going to be a sister, but sure enough, you joined us a week later.

Ours is a relationship shaped by drawing together and then drawing Nerf guns,

Singing badly together, screaming at each other even worse,

Pillow fights gone physical, jokes gone personal,

Board games played, multicolored pieces thrown across the living room,

Running races, running after ice cream trucks, running our mouths, running to tattle,

Years that echo *He started it! She started it! Won't you two cut it out!*

Our mother's voice: *One day you'll regret how you treated your brother!*

I never realized what a constant you were in my life until I moved out,

When it dawned on me: you would never call. And sure enough.

If four-year-old me knew that the slip of paper inside said *Little Brother*,

I don't know if I would have cracked it open.

Have I ever been a good sister?

My brother, what can I offer you to make up for everything I took part in ruining?

We once had a kingdom made of our living room, our yard, the stretch of our street

That we ruled with our grandmother's knitted blankets tied around our necks

Like the capes of superheroes, like the robes of queens and kings.

Now I watch your face morph through photos posted online,

Now I learn of your life's shifting through our mother's phone calls.

My brother, what can I offer you? I wish I could offer you something from our past,
When our relationship was turbulent, but at least we had something.
If I could harness the essence of a rug burned elbow, a grass-stained knee—
If I offered you these things from our past, would you accept them?
Would you hold my hand while I got my flu shot? And rip off my bandaid, if I was too scared to?
If I offered you glowstick-coated fingertips, Play-Dohed fingernails, the way I used to,
Would you take them?

I used to have so much. I used to have a fortune cookie. I handed it to my father to read for me.
I don't remember the fortune, just the words, and the disappointment.
I wonder what my fortune said. If it prophesied more than just you. If it prophesied us.
There's something about moving away that makes big sisters care about little brothers.

I can't offer anything of use to you now. You need nothing from me. All I can offer is memory.

If I were to stretch out my hand, hold out a fortune cookie, would you take it, break it open?
Would you, even if you knew the paper inside said *Big Sister*?



kaitlyn britton

BAD DAUGHTER

She stands alone in the kitchen,
scrubbing away at the pots and pans.
And the dishes,
and the spoons,
and all the food leftover on them
and she hates the way the water feels on her skin.
“Water cleanses us,”
her mother had said while she stood there,
bleeding for the first time.
“You just need more cleansing than most.”
She used to sit for hours in the bath,
just as she now spends hours cleaning dishes.
Scrubbing and dunking and scraping and wiping
and yet they are never clean enough.
She is never clean enough.
No matter how long she sits soaking,
she will never be a son.
No matter how perfectly clean the dishes are
after hours of suds and water,
they would always be dirty.
If the plates shatter against the sink,
she does not hear it.
If she bleeds,
she does not feel it.
She is scrubbing away all the dirty skin
until the skin has been rubbed, raw and red.
If only I were born a boy.

MAJESTIC PURPLE
daniel mcgann





BAD TRIP
madison bui

REFLECTION
madison sgro



elizabeth klein

WOLFSBANE TEA

I sit down in the sunroom
You sit out on the porch
We don't talk until dinnertime
Words just whispered away

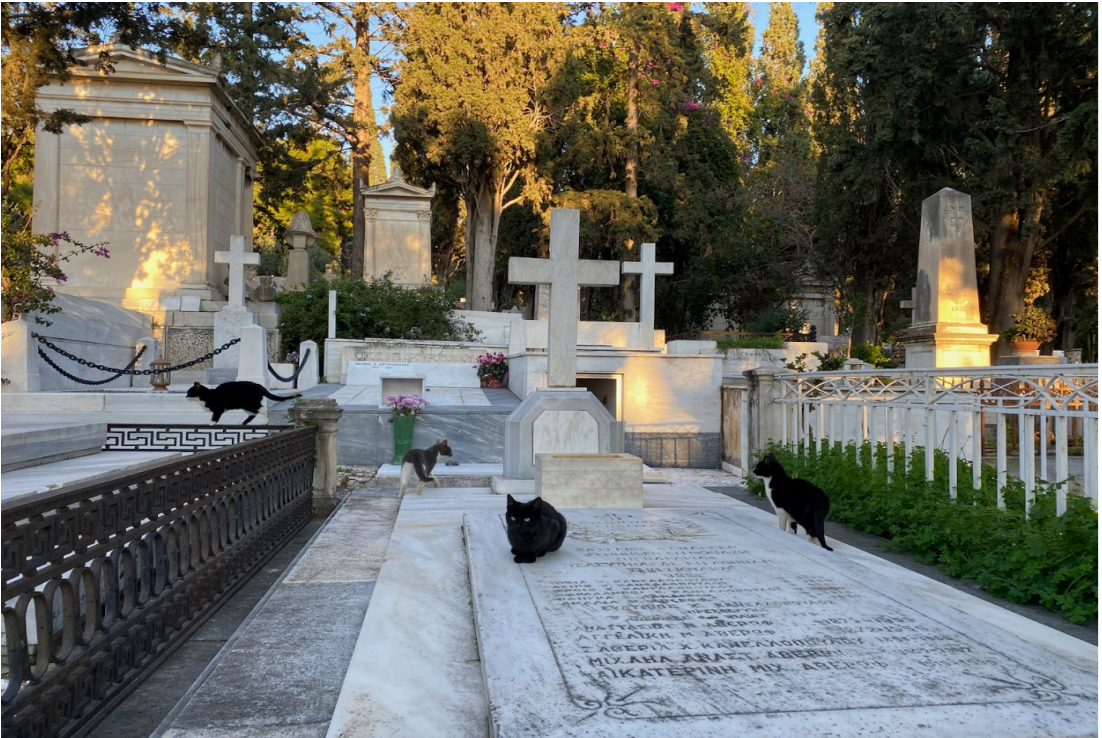
I sit down in the garden
You step on my daisies
We come in for the afternoon
I've made us some lemonade

You say lemonade's too sour for your
Taste buds and I oblige so I
Make you a cup of tea
And I watch as you drink in front of me.

ayla hussain

ILLCIT AFFAIRS

Two pairs of shoes. It's one in the morning and there are two pairs of shoes on our floor. A pair of shoes I've never seen before. Your glossy black Oxfords, so prim and proper, sit silently. Innocently. Nary a scuff or mark. God knows all hell would break loose before you let them get dirty. Before you let me touch them. Touch you. A place in hell just for me. Glossy black Oxfords. Glossy black. Glossy. Black. Glossy black heels. Glossy. Black. Heels. Heels. Heels. You said you liked my Keds, shit stained and covered in blood. 10 hours on my feet, the smell of saline IV bags and mourning families suffused into the sweat that soaks my soles. But I wonder how you could fuck her without wrinkling your powdery blue pinstriped skin. I wonder how your face could have contorted in orgasm while being so pumped up with botox. I wonder how I've seen those shoes everyday for the last ten years, but never like this. Never next to heels carelessly tossed aside, maybe thrown off in a fit of passion. Bright red soles mocking me. Heels skinny enough to stab through each of my eyeballs. Not once, but twice; a pair for the lovers.



GUARDS OF THE GRAVEYARD
amy reznik



SPRING
anirudh koneru

SNOWY DUDE
brooke zevon



lauren farrell

A TREE'S LAST SPRING

First week of April,
The buds on the tree embrace
The air in self-trust.

The tree is tired.
But you color, anyway,
So sure of yourselves.

A short time, blossoms;
And hopefully soon, bright fruits
To fall, spreading seeds.

You are not in doubt.
You stretch your petals outward.
You are just in wait.

What confidence! Blooms,
Displaying yearning petals
For pollination.

Flowering season:
A season of romance, all
While knowing that it

Who knows if the bee,
Or the bug, or hummingbird
Will arrive for you?

Ends.

Without them, there will
Be no fruit, no renewal.
So you become sweet.

That soon you will fall,
Beautifully, as martyrs,
As lovely corpses.

Facing extinction,
The tree sways in doubt, but you
Blossom, ever-brave.

So, at last, you blooms,
Strong and self-sacrificial,
Inspire new life.

madison flynn

VISCERAL

The one thing that writing does not do
Is give me the tangible feeling
Of putting on a pair of Doc Martens
That will inevitably give you blisters
Future scars reminding you of your power
Open wound open soul
Lacing them up like your secrets
And adorning a long skirt
That sways when you move
And pierce your ears with metal
And smear your eyes with charcoal
And stomp and strut and scream
In a crowd of thousands being jostled
By your presence among a common people
And cry and reminisce and
I FEEL EVERYTHING SO
I will take my pen and snap it in half
With the force of my being
And create and spawn and shout
Until I too bleed ink
Until words become visceral
Until words become action

WASH IT ALL AWAY
emily bielski





TRAPPED
madison sgro

lea pichardo

THE COUPLE AT THE PARK BENCH

the old couple out to enjoy
a fresh dewy morning

the day unkempt and tangible

the woman and her walker
the man in his brown cap

then:

a silk sleeve,
a soft breeze,
a light sneeze

the reveal
of badly burnt flesh and bone

waiting for the flinch
and look of disgust

i instead find myself
captivated

by the expression of an
individual overwhelmed

this man -
he does not turn away
like I thought he would

instead he stays,
sinks to his knees,
kisses the skin reverently

incandescent bliss
flitting across his features
ripping open
the seams of his being

fragmented but beautiful beyond all comprehension,

the sunrise greets them both

KIDS AGAIN
amanda harding



She just stands there,
jellyfish translucent body
glowing in the moonlight.
A wreath of white silk
Resting upon her head.

We are surrounded by dark
foliage, accompanied only by
the whistling breeze of night.
Alone together.

Aware of the weight of my own presence,
I dull the knife of my dark skin.
I stuff downy feathers in my voice and
lay it down on a mattress made of clouds:
"Can I help you?"

She takes a moment and steps in
the silence. A wisp of a smirk
dances upon her upper lip before
wishbone arms shoot out at me like a gun.

Vines chain my feet to the ground.
Branches whip at the skin on my back.
Leaves taunt my corpse in the making.
But as the air drips from my lungs,

I realize my arms are left unbound.
Telltale blue and red lights cut through
the overbearing darkness, accompanied by
the sirens that had been chasing me since birth.

ayla hussain

BETWEEN SOME VINES AND A HARD PLACE

She steps towards me, wraps
her china doll hands around mine
and makes a necklace of my knuckles.
"Kill me," her eyes taunt,
"I dare you."

For what might happen to the Black man who
holds a little white corpse?

What if?
What a question.

What if I hadn't quit my shitty job,
if I hadn't needed a few extra bucks,
if I hadn't walked into that Walmart and used that illegal credit card,
if that TV had stayed on that shelf?

I know where I'd be. I'd be sitting on my red couch, sleeping,
eating salt and vinegar kettle chips
out of the blue bowl my ex bought me
the day I found my first gray hair.

becca briegs

MOTHER

But even though I miss the couch,
even though I hate the public toilets and grimy showers,
the thing I miss the most were the chocolate-mint Girl Scout cookies.
The ones that my mother bought me
even after she had quit to her job
and would take me out to shoplift TVs.

One day my friends will stop laughing.
There will be no more game nights in my parents' basement,
No more nights turned to mornings with my roommates.

One day my childhood home will be filled with the lives of
strangers.
My family dinners will turn into a meal for one,
And the last of my dog's hair will be vacuumed up.

I will stop writing poetry,
Stop taking pictures of every pretty flower I see,
Stop painting places I've never been.

Graves that we haven't even thought of yet will be dug
And filled,
Then our grief will cease to exist.

But until then,
I'll just wait,
And smile and laugh along with my friends.

erin parker

ONE DAY



*MIL OCHOCIENTOS VEINTITRÉS
METROS SOBRE EL CIELO
elena ladrón posadas*

MY MOM IS BEAUTIFUL

I was 8 years old when I realized my mom was beautiful
and I was not.

I saw her ribs poking out of the bottom of her crop top, wrapped in the tight cloth that was her
skin.

Her long nails that dug into the surface of my arm, leaving little red marks akin to bloody
crescent moons.

Her laugh as another tall dark shadow loomed over me, uttering to her “that came out of you”.

“That creature, that abomination, that swelling ball of pus you call a child, crying, curling,
cratering in the corner of the living room

That girl, that thing, that’s your child?”

Her shiny laugh echoed throughout the house, engulfing me in a heavy blanket of fury

Her words piercing my skin as she replied, “Well, she’s her father’s daughter”

My dark eyes burned in disgust as thoughts encircled my mind about my blue eyed father

My brown matted hair, not a product of his beach blonde curls

Every section of my body began to swell and secrete sweat and blood and pus and tears

A balloon began expanding in my chest, as she snapped her face toward me and whispered
“say hi to your Uncle”

I scalped her

I gouged her eyes out

I flayed her flesh

I wore her as a gown around me, encased in the beauty that the flock of relatives near her
admired

But when I walked into the kitchen, every eye stared at a disaster

What a horrible sight

What a terrible sight

What a terrible disappointment

Something so horrendous could come out of someone so magnificent

Something so vile could come out of someone so ethereal

Something so human could come out of someone so Godly

I was 8 years old when I realized my mom was beautiful
and I was not.

lea pichardo

DEAR DIARY

sometimes
i wonder whether it's a given

the noose around my neck
the turmoil among the waves
the sickening, the nausea

the urge to vomit it all up

but then i think

i am loved

so
i climbed down from the railing
from where I was perched
on my tippy toes

to sit,
to gaze,
to wonder,
to cry

to pretend that i am full
and that my belly is not aching for more



QUIET STREETS OF NYC
daniel mcgann

Creation,
From the act of pleasure
In which we both spawn

Tenderness,
In times when the world
is too dark to see

Abundance,
Of love, kindred to wheat
Ripe for sowing

Guidance,
Though it is never enough
And often too much

Betrayal,
Through words of fire,
Hot knives cut ties

Anger,
Which flows through her blood
And now mine

Sorrow,
When I wish it was easier
To turn away from each other

Reconciliation,
Despite despair, we magnetize
Harmonizing in reluctance

Tradition,
Seen in how she bestows upon me
These gifts that have been given to her



ST. NECTAN'S GLEN
emma huegi

alexis cherby

HER GIFTS TO ME



MALLARD DUCKS IN FLIGHT
justin mcdonald

TRAM STOP
ana ladrón posadas



MANIFESTACIÓN EN SOL
elena ladrón posadas



GROCERY LIST

Can you please get me some parmesan cheese? The cheap one. In the bottle. I also need relish sauce; the one in the fridge is expired. You might as well get some French dressing and ranch too because you can never have too much of that. Same with mayo and ketchup. You can never have too much. If you're getting parmesan cheese, you might as well get pasta too. Yes, the wheat one. That's the only one I eat. And when you're in the pasta aisle, try and pick up some quinoa if that's there. And some ground chicken. And that red pasta sauce. We'll need some of that.

I think that's everything I need for now.

Everything I need to make a meal and survive in this world.

Shelter. Water. Food.

That's all I need.

Happiness is not needed. Neither is hope. Or love.

Bloody Mary; do NOT put love on that list.

Erase it! Mark it out! Tear it off! I don't need any more of that. No more broken hearts. No more anxiety about whether or not he likes me. No more playing games. My heart is officially on lockdown. The barbed wires are up. And electric. Not one measly motherfucker will wiggle their way into this battered heart of mine. No more unmet expectations. No more wishing to be understood. No more searching for the one who will care for me in the ways I cannot care for myself.

Care...

If you care, get me some cranberry juice.

If there's none, I suppose orange will do. Or even lemonade. Or just lemons. I can squeeze them myself.

And if you happen to pass by the milk section, get me the oat one. That's not for the pasta. I'm just thinking about breakfast for tomorrow. It's gonna be cereal. Again. Speaking of tomorrow, there's no cleaning supplies. Go ahead and grab Windex for the mirrors, comet for the bathroom, and some softener for the laundry. There's so many clothes to wash.

Grab a bottle of bleach too. That's not for the clothes. It's for me to wash my mouth out. I feel sick after talking about that L word. Just go and get what's on the grocery list.

conor curtin

SATAN

I am a swamp gas which will reach the surface of my quagmire in due time. I navigate complex networks of vines and fish, my empty skin is pricked by the barbed scale of some shadow. I am only a soldier in this war. Vile filth grafts to my empty skin as I navigate bile. The birth canal widens. *My mind moves in new and interesting directions.*

“I am come from Hell.”

I breach the surface. I am birthed into the air. Its crispness burns my skin, oxygen grasps my throat like an umbilical cord or noose. I am violated for the crime of buoyancy.

“Is this my choice? No.”

I can no longer take it. My grafted insides attempt to tear outward. I must breathe, I must pop. I fear my annihilation, however the air outside stabs into my eyes and skin, and the warmth of Hell has become reduced to dying embers in my belly. I release into absence. I do not believe in God but I pray.

“My buoyancy transcends life and death. I am angelic.”

Sulfurous gas fills the area, a chemical reaction from my insides colliding with molecules of air. The gas casts apparitions in my wake, becoming wings that unfurl from my absent body. I metamorphose into myself.

My being becomes a demon-shadow, the stuff superstitions are made of. All the while, my pungent misery flows to the heavens. My anti-body moves and shifts in ways previously thought impossible. I am endlessly dividing.

“I am beautiful and one.”



EYE ON THE CLOCK
caelyn stahl

katie katella

PAPER CUT

CURIOUS RED TAILED HAWK
justin mcdonald



I glance across the way at the prince,
Gazing into his soulless eyes,
Giving him my most distressed look of sorrow.
I embody the pain and terror of death for him,
he takes it nonchalantly, flipping through white pages,
Slicing the edge of his pointer finger.
“Cut!” the sophomore director yells.
“Amazing. Truly.”
He turns to me, disgusted, suggesting I work harder
be more emotional. Make him *feel* something.
That performance isn’t going to get you a compelling
newspaper review, he argues.
And then asks my costar if he needs a bandaid,
Or some Neosporin?

The open wound on my body
laughs at him, gouged by makeup artists.
Sickly green and ruby red,
it peels off in one prosthetic tear.
I chuck it in his face, threatening to quit
Again
I mourn a time where I wasn’t so tethered to this role
To these script pages
And engulfed in hatred for my costar.
Our director just grins, shimmering through
his kelly green braces riddled with wires.
He knows I won’t leave this play. I never do.
“That was better.” He half-applauds me.
Clapping his sweaty hands around my wound,
Before handing it to a makeup-artist
Who paints it back onto my body.
He sits on his throne and demands we start from the top.
I’m stabbed with performance again.

KINGDOM OF BOGOR, INDONESIA
ayesha susan sultana



I lay our spoons beside each other on a folded napkin,
like when we cried for mother's arms in the hospital bassinet
after birth. He insists we open the Maxwell container
I bought him last Christmas. We take turns smelling
the Colombian grounds, basking in its aroma of mild,
fruity roast. Grandpa always said a whiff
brings good luck. He studies the tablespoon I mound
as demonstrated, the muscle memory lifted
in my heaping. He observes how I load the filter
with smooth, steady pours—like a grave digger
piling dirt onto a casket after service. He asks to scoop
the last serving, but we laugh when his spoonful hits
the pot's rim and sprinkles grams onto the counter.
Still, I let him do the honors of pouring the water. My finger a guide
as he pours to my nail, its tip aligned with the 6 oz. mark
faded from father's thumb. We ramble on about the varieties
of milk and sugar, our cravings stirred by the machine's
hissing and gurgling. He grabs a cup inherited
from grandma, pours to the ringed-stain
left from a sip we distracted her from. I cannot help but
cherish this moment from afar—like when I watch from the window
as he steps onto the porch and waves to our neighbor,
with the sun shining on his mug held high.

brett moran

TEACHING MY BROTHER HOW TO MAKE COFFEE



TAKE A SIP
madison sgro

Some days I bite my tongue so hard that I'm afraid it will fall off.
I question everything,
See everything,
Feel it all.

My heart palpitates
And my mind flurries,
But I'm too scared to speak.

erin parker

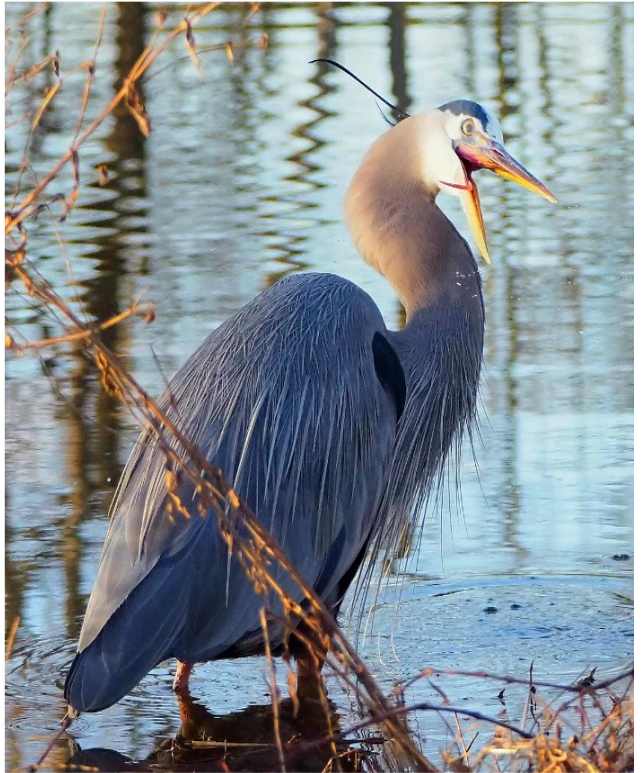
THE TASTE OF IRON

So I chew my own tongue
And swallow the blood
And grieve like "everyone else"
In silence.



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD
kira rubioano

THE GREAT BLEH HERON
justin mcdonald



gabriela thomas

MESSAGE TO MY CLONE

All this dirt under my nails
Wouldn't you like to see where I went to high school?
All this blood under my knuckles
Wouldn't you like to see where I was last night?

I have cardboard in my skin
Glue inside my veins
The leaves on the ground stick to me
As I float over sidewalks
I swallow the air
But it claws at my throat
And like a rusted faucet
Blood spurts out then
 Stops. Starting. Stopping. Stops.
Please look through my yearbook
Please look at my project
Please dissect every part of me
Cherish me and let me last forever

I feel so beaten up and bruised
You can fix me
A new me, a true me
Just screw me

Blood is trapped in my knuckles
I don't know what I wanted
I didn't think it was this

 Please live as me
 Please live for me
 Please live by me
 And stand against me
 As everything I hate
As everything I long for
I want to be cherished
I want to be devoured
 I want to be held
 I want to be killed

 All this dirt under my nails
Wouldn't you like to see where I went to high school?
 All this blood under my knuckles
 Wouldn't you like to see where I was last night?



AMSTERDAM
elena ladrón posadas



CANAL IN BLOOM
ana ladrón posadas

lea pichardo

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

across the aisle from us,
a man and a woman exchange souls
through open mouthed kisses
with tongue and saliva

she moans
and curls her fingers and toes
she gives herself over to the sensation of being consumed

it is an act of unconditional surrender
we're staring at them, quietly amused

then,
all of a sudden,
i feel you pick up my hand

gently
and
kiss my wrist

i close my eyes and decide that the line between pleasure
and pain
is a thin one

why death by kisses?

why not just tear me apart limb from limb,
cut me open with the serrated edge of a knife
or plant a bomb in my chest?

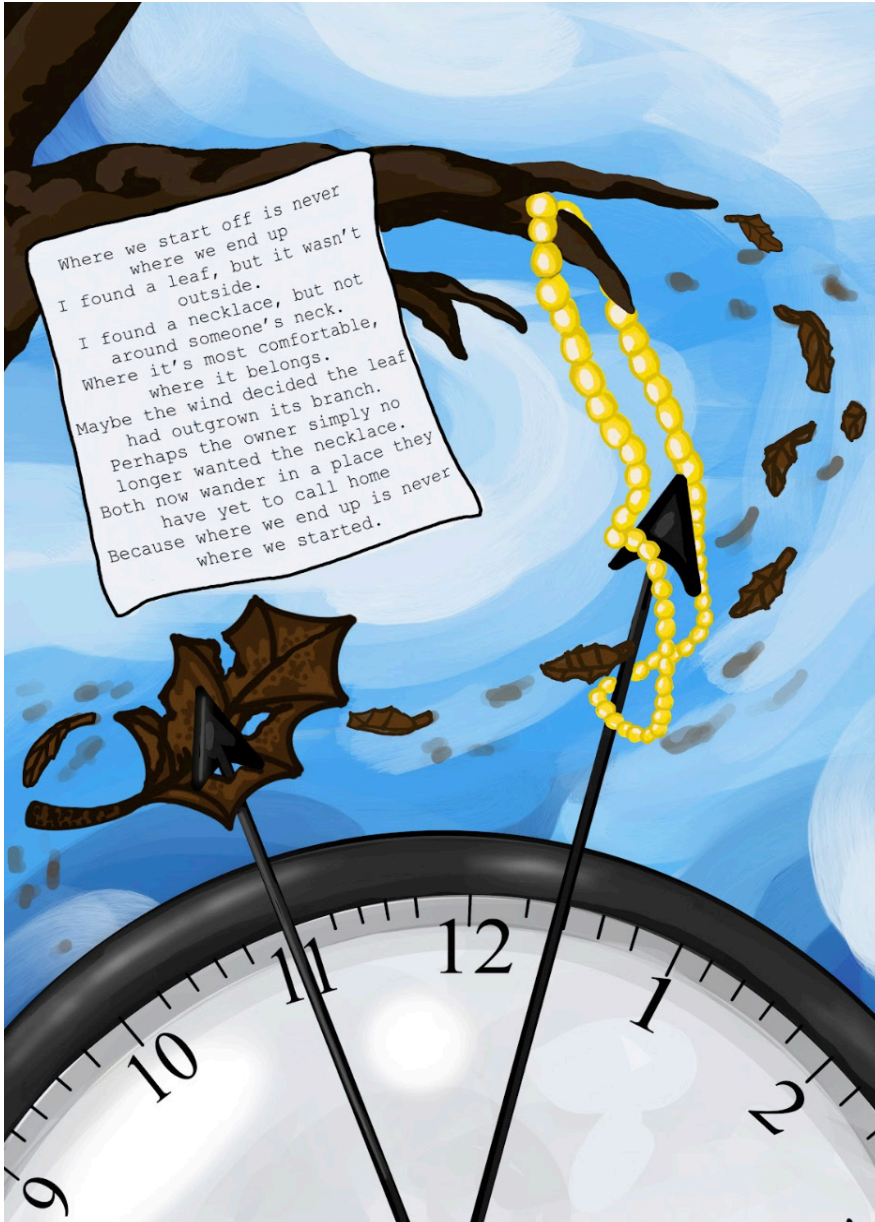
why not make something poetic out of me
and bury me in a graveyard
of estranged memories?

why would you do this?
make love to me in such a public place?

so, you could watch me break apart?

what is it that you gain from my unconditional surrender?

WANDERERS
marisa martinez



Where we start off is never
where we end up
I found a leaf, but it wasn't
outside.
I found a necklace, but not
around someone's neck.
Where it's most comfortable,
where it belongs.
Maybe the wind decided the leaf
had outgrown its branch.
Perhaps the owner simply no
longer wanted the necklace.
Both now wander in a place they
have yet to call home
Because where we end up is never
where we started.

becca briegs

PINK, FOR MY LOVE

Red, like the blood that dries up around your toes,
at the end of a long day,
like the color of the peeling leather bench where
you tie your shoes and laugh with your friends every Saturday.

Orange, like the hints of dawn,
that shine across the wooden floors,
like the peels of your favorite fruit
that you eat as a snack every afternoon at four.

Yellow, like the healing bruises
of yesterday, or the worn flavor of scrambled eggs,
like the stage tape you glance at
to guide your curved feet and your straight legs.

Green, like the salads, like the veggies
you try to eat and always waste,
like the pair of scissors you own to fix the stiffness
in your shoes until they clasp your foot without restraint.

Blue, like the eyes of the teacher that witnessed
every mistake and saw through every lie,
like the water bottle you filled with water six times a day
and always kept by your side.

Purple, like the walls of the studio you
find yourself dancing in everyday,
trapped inside of the old studio near Broadway,
learning the many colors of ballet.

SPRING GODDESS
sarah ullman





FOLLOW ME
madison sgro

ashton calo

TO: EVERYONE I EVER LOVED

Everyone I ever fell in love with was my soulmate, even for the smallest fraction of time.

If not here, we created something beautiful somewhere else in the vast universe.

In another universe, you would've taken me to your beach house. You'd have taught me to surf, and perhaps I would've learned how to navigate bodies and hearts for the first time that summer.

In another universe, We got to have our night under the stars, lips intertwining with our twilight blue lace. The girl I fell for when I nearly fell on my face during that field day when she helped get me back on my feet with a sunny smile.

In another universe, you would've taken the train from Philadelphia to spend lazy weekends with me and the autumn leaves and the morning birds. You'd chat about your latest art project while the vinyl record plays in the background.

Everyone I ever fell in love with holds a piece of my heart.

It's in the back of their minds, in the prongs of their teeth, in the palm of their hands. I don't know what they've done with it.

All I could hope is that they take good care of it as they carry on.

In the meantime, I will continue to stitch the holes in my chest.

I will hold my breath and walk to the cemetery on a cold winter's day to fill the grave you left behind in my head.

And I will wake up in this universe with my lover softly sleeping beside me in our bed.



VASE ABLOOM
IN COLORED PENCIL
lauren farrell

In whispers of night, where stars ignite,
There lies a love, a boundless flight,
A cherished flame, so pure and bright,
Yet veiled in fear, a trembling plight.

A heart aglow, entwined in grace,
Love's tender touch, a sacred embrace,
But depths so deep, a daunting space,
A fear of need, in silent chase.

A soul laid bare, in fervent plea,
Enraptured by this harmony,
Yet shadows cast, uncertainty,
Of loving vast, too desperately.

For in this depth, this sheer abyss,
Lies love's allure, an endless bliss,
But fears entwine, a fragile twist,
Of holding tight, a cherished wish.

To love so much, a daring art,
A risk, a bond, a fragile heart,
Yet love endures, a timeless chart,
Beyond repair, a work of art.

gabriela thomas

ADEDI'S HEART



BASKING IN THE SUNLIGHT
sarah ullman

It started with one glowing candle, and every year,
you gained another, until your parents got you
a carefully decorated cake too big for your eyes,
so your marvelous, massive family could each share a taste.

With every passing year, your cake became
more crowded with swirled candles and vibrant pink flowers,
until there was barely enough space
remaining for your own name.

Your gifts become fewer, turning into dollar bills and cute clothes,
and then you were graduating high school and
there weren't just 18 candles, but
an extra for good luck, for your bright future.

And then you had to move away.
And now you celebrate alone, with a single candle,

burning dim on top of a cupcake for one.

becca briegs

ONE

Boy meets girl.

Girl sees boy.

He smiles.

She bares her teeth at him in her own makeshift language
and hopes he understands.

He asks her to dance.

She tries to tell him that the melody in her hips
has been stolen from her
and she's been laughing ever since.

He stays there, hand outstretched.

There is no word for "no" in her language.

lea pichardo

BOY MEETS BEAST

kaitlyn britton

THE LAST BREATH
OF TWO PENS



PAJARITOS EN ZARAGOZA
elena ladrón posadas

born of ink and will,
raised on whims
and ill-thought designs,
we have us all been rendered
useless
with both age and time.
we were mere extensions
of the hand which fed us.
the sweat,
the tears,
the curdling
metallic taste
forever on our tongues,
was never our own.
never ours to claim.
doomed to live and be pronounced
dead
before we've had a chance
to prove our use
still flickering.
for who would cry
for the replaceable soul—
the second daughter—
already buried and forgotten
before the first line was drawn?
we have been gone
far longer than we have been,
fleeting and fleeing
the minds of both
creator and master.
even as the last of our blood
stains the paper
and the grooves of our movements,
etched deep,
prove we did,
indeed,
exist at all.

THE LAST LOOK

A NOTE FROM THE ISSUE EDITOR

I only started thinking of myself as a writer when I got to college and joined The Lion's Eye staff. In the past few years, I've been published multiple times and am now taking on my second executive board position, as a co-issue editor this semester. It's certainly been an adventure. Luckily, that is exactly how I see writing.

As we try new things and collaborate with different people, we become true writers, true artists. Our elected issue editor, Maddie, has been on adventures of her own studying in London. Our lovely executive editor, Megan, stepped in to help create this magazine and kindly asked me to help, too. I guess, in a way, we've started another adventure. Having three people format this has been fun: sending versions back and forth, and constantly discussing our creative choices.

Somehow, I've been trusted with the last look. For whatever the real reasons may be, I'm going to place part of the reasoning on my sense of adventure. I love experimenting with my writing, taking inspiration from other pieces and the world around me. I am always game to take on new roles and help in any way that I can. I've loved stepping in to work alongside Maddie and Megan in creating this beauty (I know I'm biased, but this is a beauty, right?) I've also loved spending this year working with Catherine, Lauren, Elizabeth, and our dedicated staff as we explore the creations of our adventurous community.

I'm proud to have been a part of bringing everyone's work together, creating a map within this magazine of all of our adventures. Each piece—poem, artwork, prose, photograph, story—is a landmark of where we have been and where we are all now, uniting on this campus.

So with this, I ask you to take your own little adventure—write a story, draw a picture, whatever it may be. We are all artists and creators, we are all explorers. If this magazine inspires one thing, may it be for you to explore.

Graciously,



Erin Parker
Co-Issue Editor

ABOUT US:

The Lion's Eye is published biannually by the students of The College of New Jersey with funding from the Student Finance Board. The magazine provides an outlet for creative expression, publishing student short fiction, poetry, prose, photography, illustrations, graphic art, and more. To learn more about The Lion's Eye visit our Facebook page, TCNJ Lion's Eye Literary Magazine.

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SUBMISSIONS:

Although the deadline for our next issue has not yet been decided, submissions are currently being accepted. Please send all submissions via e-mail to tcnjlionseye@gmail.com.

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DISCLAIMER:

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**“I will take my pen and snap it in half
With the force of my being
And create and spawn and shout
Until I too bleed ink
Until words become visceral
Until words become action”**

- Madison Flynn, VISCERAL (pg 64)

