



# QUIZ & QUILL



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**WISTERIA**

Mikayla Burr

# QUIZ&QUILL

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**LETTER**

from the

**EDITOR**



# DEAR READERS,

After four years of dedication to *Quiz & Quill*, with my latter two years as Managing Editor, I have watched dynamics shift among members of a group—one that continues to maintain the mark *Quiz & Quill* leaves over time. Despite change, staff has represented the heart that a publication requires.

*Quiz & Quill* is a persisting creative niche at Otterbein. It will grow with the presence of authors, artists, poets, critical and imaginative thinkers, majors outside of the English Department, but most importantly, people who care. If I have learned anything from the numerous students I have watched sift through this magazine's tasks, that is it. Upon welcoming many new faces this year to staff, this magazine was blessed by the hard work of caring humans with fresh passion, commitment, and curiosity.

Thank you, Staff, for your utmost energy and conscious decision to return week after week. Thank you, Editorial Board, for your preparation, holistic teambuilding, and contributions as Genre Editors and Copy Editors. Thank you, Secretary Abby Studebaker, for your attentive weekly minutes and detailed descriptions—I am not convinced any of us would have quite survived without your memes and jokes. Thank you, Page Designer Lydia Crannell, for your partnership, guidance, and beautiful and innovative designs. And of course, thank you, Shannon Lakanen, our Faculty Advisor, for helping this year be one of the most successful and well-organized in my time at Otterbein. There was absolutely no way for us to have done it without you.

In working with such dedicated humans throughout our last year, it has been Lydia's and my driving goal to curate a home that feels personally grown by the touch from anyone on this staff. And now, we give you a tangible publication of embodied emotion, identity, grief, admiration, perspective, and serious reflections to ponder.

WITH DEEPEST GRATITUDE,



SARAH CARNES

# SANDY RICKETTS

## ///IF FOUND PLEASE CALL///

Adriann Ricketts

Half of my heart sits in a small brown box  
on the mantle of my mother's fireplace,  
one of the main reasons she purchased  
this particular house but it goes unused,  
its entrance covered by the loveseat  
my love would try to force herself upon,  
until I shushed her gently and said,  
"No, baby. You have old bones.  
Just take it easy."

She never did believe,  
and I wish she was here to keep trying.

# TUFTED TITMOUSE

Rachel Bell

is something like an angry dream;  
she descends from her level flutter  
a flurry of feathers heather-gray,  
scatters the avian hoard, and picks  
the perfect seed.

It's a nice change of pace from  
caterpillar, I figure, as she launches  
her round body towards the flat  
forest fence, path never undulating  
until she reaches a woodpecker's work,  
a stolen home for her stolen meal.

Perhaps she is also an oldest child—  
perhaps she is also still living

with her family, pining for pine trees,  
for power over ellipses  
I want to give her a strand of  
copper hair to wrap around  
the lilac-flecked eggs, blessing  
the loners inside; they could be  
my undreamed dreams, if only  
they weren't so aggressive.

I didn't know it, but at 13 years  
and 4 days I had outlived them all;  
I have only hung upside down from  
a tree once though, and I thought  
I was going to die.

I didn't think that something so  
beautiful could be a bug-eater—perhaps  
I am stronger than I think; perhaps  
within the peach on her chest and  
the peach in my skin, there is  
a hardened center.

# MARY 1607

Lydia Crannell

Winter worn fingers

*know*

Mama and Papa are dead  
and the ground beneath dirty heels  
still sings with the Atlantic,  
baptized in sea foam

“No tears”

the birds cuckoo  
draped in dreamy cloaks  
the dead cannot taste  
salt mines or hard rock  
against the shore

Her dress of white poppies  
had never seen a  
Native burial mound  
bleached skulls forming castles  
the Others would  
not let her mourn

Once in an old English home  
she would sway to sleep  
in grandmama’s arms  
until their throats would open  
like the new lands  
calling her  
home

# WE BE WANTIN'

Claudia Owusu

after Zora Howard

*sunday night on a walmart run squeezed into the bent back of the multicultural section pressin' through hair dye & the storm of coils i more often than not don't know what to do with & sister girlfriend of my heart Ama blows my phone up sayin' she want meshikou word she can't even pronounce she talkin' japanese noodles & jalapenos black pepper chicken salt licked until it's lodged deep into the under nail & i say, "leave me alone, Ama" & she persists ten texts a minute & i ease up, remembering that this is a version of light like: tearing into the highway escape passenger seat riding laughin' over boys & side nigga privileges we be so enveloped in darkness like the children we are still born of dark things & made of matter even darker than our life's worth could measure we emerge into her smile like moonshine & summer days like when we was sittin' wide eyed in manhattan, new york car horns a holy symphony the road a raging death storm we runnin' & runnin' & runnin' into things we can't fight & oh friend of life friend of high school days clinging to hook of my arm nail marking the soft of my flesh after my brother was run over by death oh friend of grapes with plain pringles & hot ramen eaten preferably outside in the bite of winter oh friend of Korean dramas in the middle of the mall fighting each other to bits with our mouths oh friend oh friend everything we do takes us up into the sky & fades we were never meant to be here anyways not this long & not this craving for the past*

*a black woman walks behind me in walmart says, "excuse me" we 4 people now these other women & me shoved real close & tucked in the section of natural hair products my phone still buzzing like "i want meshikou. I want meshikou. I want meshikou." & i still say "stop, Ama" & i'm smiling now never mind that my phone is freezing, flashing like a maniac, never mind that the Black women & me both searching for things we can't find cause deep down i'm wanting meshikou too. cause deep down, Ama saying she broke as hell, & i'm broke as hell too. two broke folk thinkin' over things we ain't got the money for & Ama say, "Can you believe you're the only friend whose number I have memorized?" say she don't even have her man's number memorized like mine. & I smile, & we text about the food we could eat like waakye something we know to be native, not the ones that we make native & can't afford, & she tell me have a good week. & I wish her all the blessings. & i don't buy hair dye but i spend \$30 on conditioner & oil & i'm even broker than i came & now wanting meshikou. fuck kind of shit is that?*

# LIFE-GIVER

Sarah Carnes

I want to say I love you more than once in a day and I knew this the moment we stood in front of the Earthly woman dressed in Indigo, a sculpture that had me transfixed. Her belly was full in a way I've never felt; even when my belly is full it is empty. Her body was so long that I envisioned it reaching the sky and the moment she would permeate a cloud with a single finger rain would shower only us as her gift. I broke my gaze to turn my face towards yours. *Will you love me long enough?*

# AFTER THIS GOODBYE

Elise Woods

*Inspired by Sarah Manguso's Guardians*

As I approach my junior year of college, my San Antonio home of ten years seems further and further lost, otherworldly—a dream I remember in the morning but no one else knows. There are few Ohioans who understand fiesta celebrations or my love for breakfast tacos, a steady part of my diet throughout high school. San Antonio was my playground, my stage, my classroom. With time, my nostalgia for chalupas and sweet tea has hardened; my college bubble rarely penetrated by communication with old friends or former teachers—the world in which I used to belong. But two months ago, my sister called me in shock. Our high school English teacher had died. San Antonio, high school, my teenage years—the grief of my losses reinstated itself. But it was different this time.

The fatal car accident happened at two o'clock in the morning on Nagogdoches Road. I only know this because I googled Mr. Dehart's obituary. The street name is familiar; I drove down that road several times, but I cannot quite remember what it looks like or where it goes. I think I am glad I don't. I probably texted while driving down that road, a bad habit I developed at seventeen and broke at nineteen. Other than the occasional swerve and fright, I never faced a much deserved punishment for my poor decisions. No tickets, no accidents. I wonder if Dehart was texting. I don't think so.

Someone made a joke about Mr. Bean last week—that silly cartoon—and it made my stomach hurt. My mind flashed back to a strange day during my junior year. Mr. Dehart seemed bored with class, paused the current lesson, and instructed us to ask him anything we wanted to know. I was a little nervous; where would this conversation, led by a room of seventeen-year-olds, go? Someone asked if he had a tattoo and he laughed. He did. Of course he did. Mr. Dehart would do anything once. He had a small, inky Mr. Bean on his arm. I think he said he got it because he was trying to impress a girl. I can't quite remember, but I remember laughing. We were always laughing in Mr. Dehart's room.

By October of my senior year, I decided to apply for Early Decision to a college in New York City. After summers of ACT prep and college searches, I believed I had it all figured out. Everything felt final, and I needed it to be perfect. It was one of those fun Fridays, a celebration of another week completed, when I raced to Dehart's room as the bell rang. The air was warm and the campus was the kind of calm that only graces a deserted high school

campus. I decided today was the day to submit my first college application. And God, I was anxious.

I knew Dehart would be his in room, and I knew he'd help me. In an era of planning and pre-planning, Google Calendars, and overflowing agendas, Dehart was one of the few people without strict, or even pre-determined availability. Any student, any age, was welcome in his room. He was always there. Smiling. Calling, "What's up E-W?" as I awkwardly shuffled by, smiling and giggling to myself. And I think that's all he wanted. Just a smile.

I peeked into his classroom and politely asked if he would edit my application essays with me. We worked on three short ones, cleaning, revising, and polishing. I submitted my first application right then. Dehart and I were not particularly close, but I trusted him. His ease calmed my nerves, grounded my overwhelming world of homework, college auditions, ACT scores, and applications. My favorite part of his classroom was a poster in the corner of a clipart man, his hands in the air, and a large circle around him and a thick line running through the center of it. The caption read, "NO FREAKING OUT!" It was funny because it was true. We were all freaking out. Dehart grounded us. Especially when we were hurting.

My junior year, I had fallen hard for a guy. He was a jerk—unkind and selfish—and some part of me knew this but denied it. I am surprised we lasted as long as we did, and looking back, I wish we hadn't. I remember our goodbye during the lunch period. I handed him back a plastic bag full of his stuff, little things of his I had borrowed throughout the past months. He was barely sad, merely resigned from the mess of our relationship. He was not my first love, but he was my first heartbreak. Teary-eyed for months afterward, I realize today that this was my first battle with depression. Little did I know.

After this goodbye, I stumbled my way down the hallway, unsure of where to go or what to do with my myself and my first heartbreak. I found Justin, my best friend, in Dehart's room. I think it was Dehart's room; I can't quite remember. I do remember sitting with Justin and crying. And I felt free. Free of judgement or questions. I could just sit and cry, and that was okay. I think that's why I feel like I was in Dehart's room.

Justin and I stopped talking about a month before Dehart's passing. I miss him sometimes. I asked him to stop texting me when he is drunk, and I haven't heard from him since. It is strange the way people move on. And it is strange we never talked about it—Dehart's death. We didn't recall the long hours with Dehart during our class trip to Alabama junior year, or how much we enjoyed listening to the scrappy faculty band play at fundraisers, Dehart always the lead vocalist. A few months ago, Dehart randomly commented on an embarrassingly ancient Facebook photo of me and Justin surrounded by



friends at a football game our freshman year. I don't remember much about that game or that day, but I laughed at our shockingly young, chubby selves. I never thought Justin and I would stop talking. And I never thought Dehart would be so suddenly unavailable, gone.

By April of my senior year, I was accepted to Barnard College in New York City, my top choice school—the one Dehart helped me get into. I never told him. I had changed my mind long before the admission decisions were released, but I am not sure I thanked him beyond that one afternoon we spent together writing. I wish I had. It is strange to think about how much has changed since those exciting October days two years ago.

For those first few weeks after his passing, I felt like I was not allowed to miss him. Mr. Dehart was not my favorite teacher. I complained about him often, too worried about my AP score and “college readiness.” But guilt is my means of coping with the world around me. I feel wrong a lot of the time, guilty about words I have said or didn't say. I ache for Dehart's wife and three young, blonde boys. My sister once told me that Dehart let his sons pick out his outfits each day. I laughed, struck by a moment of clarity, a single realization that suddenly explained his mismatching shirts and ties. I smile at this small but all-telling commitment, his promise to his boys.

Guilt and grief coil in my stomach when I think of Dehart now, as I try to make sense of a senseless accident on Nacogdoches Road so many miles away from me. No one in Ohio knows of this shocking loss, and I miss San Antonio. I miss Dehart. My sister and I wondered about the accident over and over. Was he speeding? Was it suicide? I found out a few days later that he survived the initial impact, passing about forty-five minutes after reaching the hospital. This seems unfair, as if he could have been saved. As if he was just so close to living. Why didn't he? Why couldn't he?

Although I didn't love Dehart the way other kids adored him, I liked him. He was kind, a beaming source of light and humor. A week after his passing, I searched the library for Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. This was one of the only books I actually read junior year for Dehart's class, and it has stuck with me ever since. The familiarity of the first few pages eased my nostalgia, and for a few minutes, my grief. Despite the confusion of this sudden tragedy, I found steadiness in the permanent printed words, unchanged from when I read them so many years ago.

Beyond the ache of grief, I am thankful for Dehart—his calmness amidst the chaos and confusion of high school, his endless jokes, and ready-for-anything attitude. He reminded me *life will go on*, and I guess somehow it will now, too. The San Antonio I knew and loved no longer exists, changed by time and loss. But I still crave breakfast tacos, and I think of Justin from time to

time. I live with the memories of what—and who—used to be.

Thank you, Mr. Dehart.

Rest in peace.

And no—no freaking out.

# NY, NY, NY

Jacob Strous



# GONNA HAVE A GOOD TIME (ALL NIGHT LONG)

Gyasi Hall

It was almost certainly a moment he would have told his therapist about, had he been the kind of person who went to therapy.

The Giant Eagle's Fluorescent lights making everything shadowless and chewy.

All the boxes of cereal he had knocked off the shelf trying to keep from falling over.

The way he seemed less to cry than to collapse.

His song getting pumped from the store's speakers.

Michael Steiner, AKA Mike Steiner, AKA Mikey Boy, AKA Mike Stoner, AKA Mikey Marijuana, AKA The Suburb's own Jay-Z.

The song had been number one on the Billboard Top 100 for so many weeks in a row people stopped checking.

The song was called "Gonna Have A Good Time (All Night Long)" and it was about college parties and girls and smoking weed and having a good time, presumably throughout the whole night.

No one bothered to help him up off the grocery store's blinding tile floor, although they certainly did stare.

The only thing he really remembers about the song is a part in the second verse where he rhymed "Freshman" with "Keg stand."

He had been on XXL Magazine's Annual Hip Hop Freshman Class cover back when the song first dropped.

He was the only white person on the cover.

His first album was called *Baker's Dozen*, one of the jokes being that the album had thirteen songs on it.

The floor wasn't actually tile, but linoleum made shiny and flat to look like tile.

One time he smoked so much before one of his concerts he only got through one song before he started throwing up and throwing up and they had to stop the concert early.

The only thing he really remembers about the song is one of his ad libs during the outro where he asks no one in particular if he could just stay in college for the rest of his life.

Some video game company struck a deal with his label and gave him a shit ton of money to feature the song in one of those dancing games, so kids in suburbs all across the country could strap oddly shaped controllers to their wrists and dance along to the song about college parties and girls and smoking weed and having a good time to see who could get the highest score.

Critics hated the album, but everyone loved the college song.

His father didn't like his rapping, but his mother supported him.

Psychological Trigger, his therapist would have told him.

His song getting pumped from the store's speakers.

The way he seemed less to cry than to collapse.

The Suburb's own Jay-Z thing wasn't his idea; some hype man at one of his concerts once called him that, and he tried to tell him to cut it out, 'cause he had too much respect for Jay to compare what he did to what he did, but his producers liked it.

The other joke of course being that the term "baked" can be applied to various pastries and/or someone who is high.

The video game company was so dependent on his song to push their otherwise mediocre game that they advertised the fact that the song was in the game not only on both the front and back of the box, but on the game disc itself. Plus it was the first song on the track list by default, despite the fact that everything else was in alphabetical order.

Of the ten people on that year's XXL cover, 4 of them quit making music altogether, 3 of them are dead, one is facing jail time for sexual

misconduct with a minor, one believes the earth is flat, and one is crying on the floor of his local Giant Eagle.

The one guy who did finally help him up and try to calm him down confessed to having lost his virginity to a girl named Amanda Kent back in college at a party while this very song played, and he had always sort of wanted to thank him in a weird way, 'cause even though him and Amanda Kent never made it as a couple, she was still probably the hottest girl he had ever known, and so thank you, and can I get your autograph, etc., etc.

His second album was self-titled. Critics loved it, but nobody bought it, due in part to that fact that there were zero songs on it about college parties and so his label dropped him.

The messed up part was that he still had to check out after everyone had seen him crying, and he was buying too much stuff to use the self-check-out.

He had been so anxious about what people would say about him throwing up and having to cancel one of his first concerts that he locked himself in the tour bus bathroom to wait out the panic, but it turned out to be fine, since everyone on the internet was saying that it made the concert wild and crazy and just like a college party.

Michael Steiner wondered exactly what kind of parties these people had been to.

His mom actually had the song as her ringtone for the longest time, which sounded exponentially awkward coming from the phone of a middle aged nurse, but he always suspected she had it just so she could have an organic way to brag to all her friends about how well her son was doing.

Psychological Trigger, his therapist would have told him. Memory as a sort of flood. A lot of stuff coming at you at once. Synapses. Fight or flight. All that brain chemistry shit.

He had been given a copy of the game when it was released, even though he didn't have the console to play it.

The messed up part was that he did give the guy an autograph.

It didn't make any sense to him, since a truly analogous party would be one where the host got sick all over the carpet like 10 minutes in and kicked

everybody out to go lay down, which sounded like an extremely shitty party, no matter how great those ten minutes were.

One time he stumbled on a fan made porn compilation video that was at least partly set to his song, so that all the thrusts and moans and various other sexual gesticulations were on beat and it scared the hell out of him and killed whatever mood he had built up inside himself.

The girl that rang him up made a big deal about not making a big deal about not looking at him and pretending not to recognize him and completely ignoring the fact that he was still breathing through his mouth and his eyes were bloodshot and he was fighting back more tears and that no he was totally just another regular customer who was buying a somewhat questionable amount of Lucky Charms; she was college aged.

He never actually finished college.

He wrote the song 'cause he wanted to have fun, and the most fun he ever had during both of the years he spent pursuing a degree in Business involved college parties and girls and smoking weed and having a good time.

How art imitates life.

Or vice versa.

He looked almost photoshopped on the cover.

He couldn't remember how he stumbled onto the video.

The only thing he really remembers about the song is the bit in the beginning of the music video where it shows him waking up on a couch in a trashed frat house with a DVD that had LAST NITE! written on it in Sharpie, and that in the video he puts the DVD in the player under the TV and that's what transitions us to the party, and thus to the song.

He was actually on his way out of the Giant Eagle, but had decided to head back for an extra box of Lucky Charms.

They made him go to radio stations with pre-written freestyles.

In an interview about his then-upcoming second album, he told the interviewer that the first album was about getting high for reasons having to do with sociability, whereas this new album was about getting high for reasons

having to do with loneliness.

*Baker's Dozen* actually had two singles, the second one being a song called "Tasty," which was about college parties and girls and smoking weed and having a good time but was noticeably slower and thus harder to dance to and so nobody cared about it.

Of course, the version of the song in the game was the censored version made for the radio, so during the chorus, since they couldn't mention anything about drugs, "need" rhymes with silence.

That year's XXL Freshman class is considered to be the best in the entire history of the magazine.

It doesn't make any sense; even if they filmed the whole party, who the hell has the time or the sobriety to burn the entire thing onto a DVD, and label it, and stick it in his hand before he wakes up?

The only thing he really remembers about the song is being at a music festival to promote the second album and this drunk lady screaming, "Play the college song, play the college song, play the college song," until everyone had joined in and their collective demand was louder than his mic.

Psychological Trigger, his therapist would have told him.

His song getting pumped through the store's speakers.

The way he seemed less to cry than to collapse.

The interviewer just blinked.



# TRIP.

J.R. Gill

I remember me and Grandpa watching Fred Bear traverse the continents using his handy name brand bow and arrow to down a polar bear, an elephant.

I asked Grandpa if he had ever been on a hunting trip and he mentioned Michigan, his friends, all dead now, the cold and campfire, the golden pheasant I have hanging above my bed.

My uncle John died when he was seventeen.  
Had he not, I'm not sure I would've been born.

Maybe if he were eighteen,  
his car would've broken down and Mom would miss her date with Dad where he finally said I love you.

Maybe he's twenty now, got drunk at a party and spent the night in jail.  
My mom picked him up the next morning. Grandpa slapped the shit out of him when he got home.

My mother was twenty-six  
when I was born.

My mother was twenty-one  
when Uncle John died.

I fell asleep before I saw the tiger hunt,  
the one I wanted to see the most.

I dreamt of Uncle John sitting high in a tree, bow in hand.  
I talk to him at night when I'm the only one that can see him.

I later awoke and  
asked Grandpa why things had to die.

# COUNTING

Sarah Carnes

IV.

I stayed for a while longer to take a picture of the view through my windshield one afternoon when the clouds were grey enough to celebrate melancholy. One and a half trees and two soft water droplets magnifying the branches; I titled the image so that the observer could participate—

*Look closer and more curious*

it's the way I try to look at you so I can understand why grief is different for you.

III.

I get lost in keeping up. It's as though I am floating outside of my shape, reaching. The minutes are in front of me and I want to hold them. One time I received an applause for merely arriving, and it is often that I arrive and think

*at least I showed up or*

*I'm here and that counts.*

II.

You're quiet when letting others see you. I tell you about the dream I had while you were sleeping next to me in my bed—

*you finally told me what you wanted, and you wanted me to stay.*

I gave it some thought and decided that everyone is leaving; ghosts are only here because they exist until their dissolution—

they must drift in some larger cause before fleeting.

You speak up that you do want me to stay. In saying this to me after I've already told you about my dream, you're worried it has lost its value.

"You still said it" *and that counts.*

I.

The parallels are running closer and closer together,

and I think I trust our fears enough to ask

if what we're both afraid of is having to say *I was late, and I was sorry?*

# CRAZY DUST

Alex Futo

When Tatum bought the old, purple vase with more chips in it than glaze for a dollar off her neighbor—it was an act of charity, she later told her father—she didn't expect to find ashes in it. Cocaine, maybe, but not actual human remains. If she squinted her eyes, she swore she saw bits of a white resin tooth filling, much like what she got as a child for her first cavity, mixed in with all the dust. Dust, she thought. Human dust. She bought a vase housing human dust from Crazy Cameron down the street.

Everyone called him Crazy Cameron because he couldn't say no to any crazy request when he was high off his rocker. Actually, he didn't really need someone to prompt him to act out of his mind. He once tried to climb her father's house at 3 a.m. in the dead of winter, naked, eyes red like a demon, and lost his grip on the gutter. He ended up landing on a thorn bush. His screams of "Oh shit!" amused her because he deserved it, didn't he? What did he expect to happen? When she watched her father, seasoned in patience and compassion, help Crazy Cameron out of the bush with a blanket in hand and offer to call an ambulance, she marveled at how his red eyes flickered away into the night.

Crazy Cameron was twenty-five and living off an unexplained inheritance; it was the only reason he could afford her father's neighborhood as a Wal-Mart cashier. Why he still had the job while he sat on millions, she had no idea. Maybe lowlife street cred came with being a drug addict; if you were going to be an addict you had to fall in line with their drug creed and commit to the stereotype. Hypothetical, she thought, but still plausible. Though his inheritance was the true mystery. It was unexplained simply because he was never in the right mind to give a straight answer. Catch him on Monday and he'd tell you he'd found gold between a dead woman's toes in a morgue. Catch him on Friday and he'd say he mastered the art of making good money filling out online surveys.

Tatum was thirty-one and unemployed, living off her not-for-profit father like a leech. There was no inheritance, not a penny to her name after the divorce over a year ago. Her ex-husband made sure to suck her dry after her grand disappointment, and she let him. She remembered the look on her attorney's face when she voluntarily offered her entire 50/50 share to him. She gave him everything, and he gave her nothing in return, not even a "have a nice life" after their five years together. Only, it was she who gave him the worst possible nothing. She figured she owed him for her emptiness.

Regardless, as she stared down at the contents of the vase, her stomach undisturbed and fingers itching more chips into the glaze, she wondered if this was the source of Crazy Cameron's inheritance. *Was this who had to die to make a guy like you rich?* she thought.

"Tate?" her father called, lightly tapping on her door. He wouldn't dare walk into her room without a proper invitation. Far too polite, too trusting for her taste. Some friends from high school told her he was more mothering than father-like, whatever that meant. She never had a mother figure, her mom upped and left the hospital hours after Tatum was born (against medical advice, too, her father had told her). Why couldn't her father play both parts? Granted, he'd been too soft with her. Even now, as she spent more time in bed than doing anything else, he wouldn't say anything. She wanted him to kick her out, tell her to get her life together, but he wouldn't. He wouldn't dare.

"Yes? You can come in."

He opened the door a crack and set a plate of food on her desk, next to the others that were still mostly full. He glanced at the plates, as he always did, but didn't say anything other than, "Dinner's ready. Homemade veggie lasagna with extra cheese, your favorite."

"Thank you."

Then he nodded and shut the door. Too polite, too trusting. Maybe she ought to climb the gutter buck naked and fall onto their thorn bush to switch things up a bit. Crazy Cameron sure had a far more interesting life than she. She looked back down at the vase and frowned.

Was this all she amounted to this past year? This stale routine, this mother hen of a father, this vase, this life? Was this really all she deserved? This year had done nothing but whittle away her dignity into nothingness. Perpetually empty and without purpose—make that her tramp stamp to bring all the boys to the yard and have none of them stay. Nobody ever stuck around for an empty bottle.

Tatum messed up the moment her mind started wandering out of bounds. She accidentally thought back too far, a year and a half too far, and dug her nails into the chips in the vase.

She could see the nurse, a plump woman, staring at a dark screen, squinting her eyes to find something that should've been there, that *was* there. Her then-husband, Jack, was there too, holding her hand. His smile looked fabricated. She used to call him out on his "fake" smiles to prove he was

trying to hide something. Only she didn't need Jack's fake smile then; he wasn't allowed to tease her when their lives were on the line.

The nurse had excused herself suddenly and speed-walked—she wasn't just walking, why wasn't she just walking?—out into the hallway. A few agonizing minutes passed. Then the doctor walked in. She didn't think they needed the doctor to see the something that should've been there, that *was* there. Another couple minutes of him scanning the screen, each more taxing than the next. "Is something wrong?" Jack asked, squeezing her hand. Not to comfort her, more like to use her as a stress ball.

"I'm afraid—"

She stopped the flashback and sped ahead. She didn't want to relive the doctor's words ever again.

Jack had still been talking with the doctor, defeated, confused as to why Tatum could be so empty, when she stepped out into the hallway to catch her breath. Her tear ducts were dry; the needle was on E after the past hour of heartbreak. She pressed her hand against her cold, empty stomach, still sticky with leftover jelly, and wondered where she went wrong. She could never carry a baby to term; she'd always miscarry. It didn't matter if she wanted to be a mother, if Jack desperately wanted her to make him a father, because she couldn't have a baby. Where the hell did she go wrong?

"Psst, hey."

She almost forgot that Crazy Cameron had somehow weaseled his way into the worst day of her life. His 3 a.m. gutter mishap hadn't been their first encounter.

Her empty self flinched and looked inside the room across the hall. A young man stood hunched over, draped in a hospital gown, holding his IV contraption like a walking stick. He was slick with sweat and shaking like it was winter in July.

"Y-You wouldn't happen to b-be a genius at figuring out lock c-codes, would ya?"

She stared at the drawer he kept jerking at, labeled in medical jargon that essentially meant: drugs, lots and lots of drugs.

She shook her head no.

"W-Well shit, that's n-not what I wanted to hear."

She just stood there, silent and staring.

He rolled his eyes dramatically. “Cocaine, if ya g-gotta know. Doc says I gotta get c-clean, but he’s a real hardass. Some nurse must be fondling his b-balls too hard.”

She didn’t know what to say. Then he looked down at her body, his eyes trailing dangerously along her invisible curves, and she subconsciously hugged her stomach.

“Like I said, the nurse’s g-got a good grip. You shouldn’t let a hardass t-tell ya when your life’s supposed to b-be over.”

She gaped at him, at a loss for words.

“Y-You s-should really learn t-to speak up. People d-don’t listen when your t-trap’s shut.”

“I-I don’t know what to say,” she mumbled. These had been her first words since the nurse first pulled up her ultrasound.

He shrugged. “B-Better than nothing.”

Crazy Cameron had a twisted way of spitting words of wisdom when you least expected it. Despite the fact that he’d been going through withdrawal and really was in no shape to give sound advice, Tatum wished she would’ve listened to him. Maybe it would’ve spared her, those grueling months after the ultrasound, from her impending divorce. She never knew what to say or how to move on, and Jack finally got tired of doing all the talking and moved on without her. She could never make him the father he wanted to be anyway. Little did he know that she’d been tired of listening, too. She’d been tired of listening for years.

Tatum stared down into the vase. A part of her imagined the human dust in the vase being her lost child, while the other part claimed it should be empty. Another not so reasonable part of her told her that babies and tooth fillings just didn’t make sense, and she wholeheartedly agreed.

“Tate?” Another knock on the door. She flinched. It wasn’t like her father to make a follow-up visit this soon after dinner.

“Yes? Come in.”

He opened the door and held out her phone. “You left your phone in the bathroom. Looks like you have a message.”

She grabbed her phone and unlocked it. Her eyes unpacked the contact name barred across the screen—NEVER AGAIN, it read—but she opened the message anyway.

*You ever feel like coloring outside the lines? Sloppy is vogue now. You should get with it.*

She stood up suddenly, startling her father.

“Tate?” he asked.

“I’m going out,” she said, clutching the vase close to her chest.

“All right. Have fun, then.”

Her father acted awkward, but there was some relief in his voice from her jumping to action instead of staying what she called a bedridden burrito, forever lost in her blankets with her laptop, binging Netflix and Hulu. Jack used to say that these “streamers” were designed to prey on people who swore their allegiance to cable and the 8 o’clock news like them (*We won’t ever stoop so low*, he said, sipping on his tea out of a “Hello, My Name Is: Pretentious” coffee mug she’d bought him). Personally, she preferred the craze around *Stranger Things* over watching another shooting on the 8 o’clock news.

What was so wrong about avoiding the cruel things in life, anyway? Why was pain given so much attention? Why did people like to stock up on pain and make a competition out of it? Winning meant you were losing, didn’t people realize that? To her, it made sense that some people liked to be numb instead.

“I will, thank you.”

Then she walked out.



She knocked on his door. *NEVER AGAIN* echoed in her ears, but she was desperate. He answered, red hair disheveled and no shirt, as usual, and quirked a brow at her. He seemed strangely sober.

“I’m returning your vase,” she blurted. “It’s got sentimental value I didn’t pay for.”

“Oh, you mean the vase you stole the other night.” He stopped and continued when something seemed to click in his head. “So that explains the

dollar I woke up to shoved down my shorts. You left it there as payment for the vase? Really?” He looked amused. “Sounds like you had a *wild* night.”

She blushed. “Yeah, yeah, sure. But maybe you shouldn’t keep a vase on your nightstand with human remains in it. It’s impractical.”

“Human remains?”

She tipped the vase at him so he could look inside. “Yeah, see the remains? Looks kinda like dust, but it’s human dust. I literally took a *fuckin*g dead person from your home for a dollar and for that, I guess, I’m sorry. I’m sure you’ve done worse.”

She was surprised by her confidence around him, by how her vulgar thoughts could slip off the tip of her tongue so effortlessly. Her father, as patient as he was, would’ve scolded her for her poor manners. Jack would’ve given her a hard look, as if to say *what the hell, Tate?* But he didn’t swear. Good thing neither of them were here now.

“Maybe I have. But you can put stealing human remains back on your bucket list, because you’re not carrying a dead person in that vase.”

“Excuse me?”

“That would be Papi, the best damn dachshund that ever lived. I just put him down last year. So yeah, he’s the pile of ‘dust’ you’re carrying around in that vase.” Then, as if he knew she’d ask, he tacked on, “A friend of mine stole the special tin you get from the vet—y’know, the one with the paw prints—and left Papi behind on my kitchen floor. So I had to improvise. Oh, and he helps me sleep at night, I guess.”

She stood there, stunned, eyes staring down at the vase.

“B-But, I saw a tooth filling!”

“Yeah, so dogs can get cavities. Fillings are a thing for them too.”

All her fantasies and hypotheses about the vase—the human dust, mostly—took a one-way ticket to *shit, you were wrong, try again*. Dog dust, she thought. Papi dust. She had a moment in her room, alone, reminiscing with a dead dog. What a concept. So, she broke her routine and laughed. She laughed like the past year and a half didn’t happen. She laughed because Jack, her father, and her burrito-hub bedroom weren’t here. There wasn’t a routine in place to shut her down, not with Crazy Cameron around.



“Careful, think about the baby,” he teased carelessly, because she knew he knew, and she didn’t care.

“Haven’t you heard?” she said, playing his game. It was like a switch went off in her head—*no more doom and gloom 8 o’clock news talk*, she thought. “I’ve got nothing but tumbleweeds in my uterus. I’m barren. Too hostile to carry life. Now are you going to let me in or not?”

He smiled and fished a straw out of his pocket. “The usual?”

“And then some.”

Tatum pressed a kiss to the corner of his mouth, grabbed the straw, and stepped inside.

“So, Papi didn’t happen to bury a few million in the backyard instead of a bone, did he?”

He grinned. “No. But you might find a couple grand in Chobi’s litter box.”

“Great! Send her my regards when I drag my sorry ass home and regret screwing you.”

“Will do.”

Only she didn’t plan on returning home to her father anytime soon. She didn’t have any regrets, either. To her, anything was better than being treated like an empty bottle.

# ANOTHER ROSE CLICHÉ

Rachel Bell

Hello, soft and deepening twilight—  
Hello and goodbye to the space between days.  
The sun has been my second hand, skipping sixes since I was  
twenty-six and wanted every minute to be morning,  
when rubber bands clung to newspapers like long looped hands clutching  
grenades, and lipstick only came in shades rosier than real roses—  
pinks I've since tried to find.

This garden is filled with roses like my father was filled with clichés;  
he used to say that thorns protected the reddest reds  
like pain kept beauty rare and secure in its delicacy.  
And I might have understood that, but I never understood what he meant by  
“beauty”  
or what makes it better for pretty things to be delicate and the good to die  
young.  
I'm neither delicate nor dead.

Staring at your streaks of hidden violet, I thought it might make sense,  
maybe;  
a violet you create as you twist the maroons of these velvet wimples  
with shadowed veils, enough allure to grab them with bare palms,  
Blood waltzing to my elbow as dark as the teenage boy's on the freeway—  
flowing across pale and acned skin, dripping onto the steering wheel—  
... but it wasn't a dance and you can't make it beautiful with any shade of  
sunset.

“If I had a nickel,” my father would say, but I don't want more metal  
If I had a petal for every man, woman, and child who thought the twilight  
was not for them, who strayed out of stained glass where beautiful things  
belong ...

This one for the shy one, this one for the could-have-been  
These two for that girl who sold me lemonade  
and her citrus-eyed mother  
This one for “God loves me,” this one for “God loves me not”  
These three for the steel-gray suits on the metro, absorbed in abstractions  
This one for the dead boy, red jeans, fish-eyes, phone-rings ...

God, if only the phone didn't still ring ...

... If I had a petal for every man, woman, and child who didn't understand the  
rose clichés, I'd have  
seven billion petals drying on the pavement  
and four hundred million naked sticks, thorns honed and whetted  
by the space between days.

# SILENT PIANO MAN

Kay Strobel



# COPING

Kendall Gribble

*“That girl is an island unto herself.”*

When I was fourteen years old, I moved away from my childhood home. I was taking it as well as any kid would, seeing as my parents were getting divorced and the only home I had ever known was literally falling into a sinkhole. It turned out that all of those “settling” cracks that houses sometimes get were, in harsh reality, caused by the gradual sinking of our house into a fucking crater (which apparently happens quite often in Florida, who knew?). My mom made jokes about the irony of our situation, and thinking back, it seems fitting that many tumultuous years in that house drove it into the ground. Luckily, such an unforeseen circumstance freed my mother from the weight of a drowning house, marriage, and well-being.

At the time, we were all trying to make light of a shitty situation. My mom’s usual upbeat attitude was only so infectious, and I silently struggled to come to terms with such a loss. Something about the act of being shoved into a foreign place gave me stomach aches. Sometimes, it still does. There’s a quote by Sigmund Freud that states, “You are not the master of your own house,” and in my case, I was *not* the master of myself. Everything was unknown from that point on, and in this way, I retreated into myself.

I don’t think I have ever told anyone about my last moments in my old house. I felt very alone with my melancholy, like no one would understand *why* I felt such a deep loss. My world, my sense of self, was crashing down, and I figured everyone would look at me like they always did: the baby of the family. I was tired of hearing bullshit about “coping” with divorced parents. My brother had just about written our dad off entirely at this point, and my sister had always harbored her own quiet sadness about him, so I didn’t want to say the wrong thing or burden someone with my heartache.

I can still remember the exact moment we pulled out of the driveway for the last time: sitting in the back of my brother’s ’94 Buick, surrounded by the last few boxes of kitchenware and cleaning supplies. It took me a long time before I stopped writing down our old address or phone number on forms, before I really started accepting a new place as my home. I didn’t care how many bad memories the green-roofed house carried, because I felt as if I was losing the good memories, too. *Maybe if I closed my eyes hard enough I could hear the faint bark of a dog or springs of a trampoline. Maybe if I jumped out of the car and held*

*on for dear life, nothing would have slipped away. Maybe I didn't even know what it was I was holding on to.*

This move meant my parents were finally splitting up, and I could imagine what came along with that: dividing time between both parents, deciding which holidays were spent with whom, more fighting over money, fighting just to fight. I could feel my childhood, my innocence, slipping away as the massive oak trees disappeared in the distance. This house, this street, had been the backdrop for so many of my memories, and I felt like I was leaving them behind with the dust bunnies and 10-year-old carpet stains. I still remember my last walk-through of the house, as I tried to soak in every last memory those walls held, appreciating every minute detail. No other family would create the exact same memories here that mine did. They would never understand the origins of millions of tiny scratch marks imbedded into the wood floors from family pets and sibling rivalries. They wouldn't appreciate the way the back porch can keep all your secrets after long phone calls late into the night, or how the porch is just close enough to the pool that the screen stays wet ninety percent of the time from countless pool parties and splashing matches. A new family would not appreciate the lamp at the bottom of our steep yard, how it somehow still glowed brightly enough that I could see it at the end of the cul-de-sac and know it was almost time to come home.

I slowly made my way through every room, taking in every crack, every loose tile. I tried to reimagine all of our things back in the places they belonged because without all the furniture, the oriental rugs, the portraits of Native American chiefs, they were all just rooms again. The memories remain engrained in the walls, but without all the *stuff*, it was just four walls that couldn't hold us in anymore. Some other family might see that lamp at the end of the driveway as some rusted, decrepit eyesore, not as the marker for a special house or a light during dark nights. Some new family would inevitably move into the old bedroom I shared with my mom, which might not even be a bedroom anymore, and not realize that those same walls hold in countless angry words and fights, or that the tall window on the left is where I snuck out for the first time. I am sure no one moving in wants to know that all my childhood pets are buried along the back fence, or why the metal gate on the side of the house is severely bent at the top (that first time sneaking out didn't go over so smoothly). Every square-inch is a memory, every millimeter was important to me, and I didn't want my memories being covered up and forgotten by new ones.

*"No man is an island."*

As I took my last lap around the house, I didn't want to be sad. I couldn't help my depression over the situation, but I maintained a strong

exterior despite it. I knew this was a huge chance for my mom to get out of a bad situation with my father, and I needed to think about it like she did: a new adventure. Something exciting, a new chance to make even better memories in a new house. As I made my way down the familiar hallway, I found myself frozen in the doorway to my old room. This room seemed even more foreign to me now, as I had spent the last two years living in my parents' room with my mom while my dad slept down the hall in mine. The walls that used to hang my boy band posters were bare now, and as I thought about some stranger moving in and painting over the sky blue and white walls, my stomach clenched into tight knots. My mom spent so many painstaking hours delicately laying a wallpaper border of running horses along the tops of the walls, making "clouds" with white paint on balled-up grocery bags, and soon someone was going to move in and cover up so much hard work, so many memories.

The last moments in my bedroom feel like a lifetime ago. It felt like grieving a death, and I wish I understood then that every story must end for a new one to begin. I was losing a physical space, a special comfort, but four walls don't define someone's personhood. At the same time, I didn't want anyone to forget what a home can mean to a person. I walked to the furthest corner of the room, laid down at eye-level with the floorboards, and signed my name and the date, trying to make one last mark. I knew that as soon as the next family moved in, my name would be covered with fresh paint and someone else's furniture, but I needed someone to know I was there. I wanted my little eighth grade signature to say, "Someone was here before you creating memories, someone else made this a home before you, and they matter." I hope whoever came after us would create something that's difficult to leave behind, too.

Sometimes, when I am visiting home or on my old side of town, I make a point to drive by my old house. It's only a 15-minute drive from where my mom lives now with our two dogs and cat, but it feels like another world. Every curve in the road that follows the river has remained the same, but when I finally hit the right street, it's unrecognizable. The neighbors have painted their house some terrible shade of burnt orange, it's hard to even look at. A wooden fence has replaced the broken metal one going into my old backyard, and the plants are so overgrown at the bottom of our yard that the lamp is covered in vines and weeds. I only ever drive by during the daytime, so who's to say if the lamp even shines anymore. I have no idea what covers my old walls now, and I don't think I want to know. I hope whoever lives there is making memories out of a home that gave me so many great ones, and I hope when they walk out of their front door every day, they appreciate each story that was made behind it.

# ON THE VARYING KINDS OF BLACKNESS AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FREE AND AT HOME— IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT

Claudia Owusu

in a hole in the wall African restaurant, around the relatively rough parts of Columbus, Ohio—or the “surviving enough” parts, blackness exists in all the different shades there is, with cackling laughter bouncing through the walls and back, the way it tends to when things are still, and held intact high life music sings of a love lost or a love trying to be attained, and on a Sunday noon like this, right after the weekly sermon, everyone leaves themselves loose, trying to fill their stomachs and find a good place to lay their minds to rest

we ask each other about our journeys, we thank God for the arrival, but we never ask about the water we never ask what it looks like from the sky, from the belly of the metal beast, whether it boils over like soup or like bloodlines furrows inside of itself like sand or like leaving your mother’s country behind today, the language is a porcelain plate in our mouths we crawl over it wrap our tongues around its cold neglect its desolate we grind our teeth into the halves and tell our children to find meaning

at the restaurant, i wash my hands in the bowl of water the waitress brings i rinse them over and once more for eating i stare my reflection into a full moon and i am back home on the outskirts of the school compound with a bucket full of well water and the school teachers calling my name over the sound of the school bell wishing me well telling me “take care” “let the Lord wrap you in His word” “let the wind take you to all the good places” “let the sun harden you” “let it prepare you for all the wars you will fight inside yourself”

and i’ve never seen a farewell like this except in the movies except when i brag about my home country in my American classes and i feel worlds away from everyone else in the room except when my Black playwriting professor tells me to “take it easy” every time we part —except when the only other Black student in my class says “see you around” and something inside me stings for reasons i am not yet sure of

in the winter i dream of summer and in the summer i dream of summer i dream of sweat comfortable between my napes and my hair quieted down by humidity i think of electricity i think of grass fields turned into makeshift



dance floors the voices of musicians asking to search my body in pidgin <sup>1</sup>

i see Ghana in my dreams sometimes; and it is a dark skinned guy in skinny jeans and a loose shirt with coarse budding dreadlocks, spitting some lines about name brands and getting jiggy with the nights like it birthed him

the waiter brings our food one by one and we eat from each other's plates we calm our tongues with cool air when it stings and we exhale through the glass windows, we watch the city all around and at the gas station down the street, a Black man asks me for a couple of dollars, anything...really...if you have it, to fix my broken down car my brother and i with music blaring through the speakers pass him our pockets he asks if we are Jamaican if we come from the islands his hair hanging like a willow tree over his eyes "No." we say, "are you?"

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1 A language that has developed from a mixture of two or more languages and is used for communicating by people who do not speak each other's language (*The Cambridge Dictionary*).

# TRACK XXIII - CARDI B - BODAK YELLOW

Gyasi Hall

I mean / what exactly is a banger? / is it something you inject under the skin / or is it the skin itself? / does it demand noble sacrifice / and swollen feet / and bars and basements / and whole streets recently flooded / with hollow bodies / waiting to be taken / back to the heaven they were promised / 'cause they someone's children's children? / or is a banger a curse? / the happy hum of filled souls / rejected / and bounced back / every song a sermon / every sway and bop a baptism / or maybe / like all good and terrible things / a banger was built by hands / hands that are black / and cracked / and painting whole maps of celebration / with the flesh they have left to give / and back in '87 / Baby Suggs said / *Ain't a house in this country not filled to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief* / and I think she was talking about trap music / I think she was talking about rap music / I think she was talking about whatever sonic blessing / is really just an anthem chopped and screwed / and given to those doomed to be young / and stay that way forever / and I have lived long enough / to see a banger / as a kind of feral guide / back to something you cannot speak of / something that refuses to be made small / enough to fit between teeth / small enough to be bound / and shipped across an ocean of empathy / not now / not again / and when Cardi B steps out from the speaker / this too is a miracle / and when she says / *these be bloody shoes* / entire centuries disintegrate / and start to bleed / the blood rises up from the floor / and stains my kicks / and in this version of freedom / I am dancing / and then walking / and then wading / and then drowning / and then finally being spit back out onto the sand

# TEARS OF GLASS

Kay Strobel



# KALIM OF MANY NAMES

Abby Studebaker

Kalim shakes his wings with a huff, upsetting the fine layer of dust that has settled during his nap. He stretches them toward the sun, veins glowing through skin that goes transparent when taut, backlit by the late afternoon light bathing everything in a silky finish. The air is thick, and the dust swirls in clouds before falling again.

Kalim the Awoken rakes one taloned claw behind his ear, seeking an itch, then rises easily to his feet, extending each limb and cracking each joint in an artful display of muscle and bone settling into place. He looks around quizzically, wondering who gazes down upon him today.

Screeching cherubs flock to the enclosure's railing, leaning out so far that he watches curiously, hoping one will fall in. Once, what must have been very long ago, an older gentleman had lost his balance while grabbing for his falling hat and toppled in with a gasping noise, as if he couldn't believe it. He had hidden and quivered when Kalim the Concerned approached, sniffing in the underbrush that sporadically covered the ground, like tufts and tangles of untrimmed fur. He'd even tried to smack Kalim away with a branch when he approached, but it rattled like rain off his scales, and a tuft of flame singed the man's cheek like a warning. He got quieter after that, his prodding stick ash at his feet. They had stayed together for a while, maybe a week, in which Kalim curled around the man like a nursing dog with her pups and pulled down bits of leaves and fruit for him to eat. One day, Kalim the Mended woke up from a nap to find him gone, but every day for a year the man returned to the edge of the enclosure, looking down and muttering his thanks.

But the cherubs do not fall. Their mothers beckon them away or their own wandering eyes pull them elsewhere, to other pits and creatures and stands selling bowls of noodles. Kalim the Halfhearted paces his territory, from one steeply sloping wall to the other, a trip that takes far too little time each way. His wings stay close to his sides, far too large and delicate to risk catching on a stone or tree branch. The spikes down his spine are like thorns as he walks, catching the sun's glare.

It has been half a lifetime since he last breathed fire, truly breathed it in ways that set whole forests alight. Half a lifetime since he last saw another dragon, slinking below the ground as she fled from the pursuing crowd, wings shot full of arrow holes. They were not from here. Half a lifetime since he felt

hot puffs of air under his wings, carrying him skyward.

Kalim the Old and the Tired Before His Time wishes he knew where the others had gone. Wishes he knew how to follow. Wishes there were not a chain as thick as his leg and a thousand times as long anchoring him to the ground, tough like spider silk and granite.

Biyu the Precious is pulled along by her mother, but breaks free to stand at the edge of a high cliff, a fence as tall as herself guarding the drop. She sticks her head through the slats, peering down at the dragon below, his slinking body and scales like jasper. She had thought he'd be green. Biyu kicks a clump of dirt over the precipice, watching it fall and burst against the rocky enclosure wall, a rain of dry soil spattering the ground. The dragon turns his head to the side but stays where he is, one eye looking at her. It is orange like a cat's—orange set in red, like fire found form. His tail moves side to side, brushing the chain on the ground.

Biyu's mother has given up on controlling her daughter and stands in line at the noodle booth, a copper coin in hand. She does not see why Biyu cares so much about the Western monster. She does not see Biyu the Bold stick her hand through the fence of the dragon's enclosure and let something drop, a fluttering something that pivots and swings as it falls.

Kalim the Unmoored sees the object settle in the grass, remarkably near where the man had fallen. He sniffs first from twenty wingspans away, detecting only the faint scent of something floral and fading. He looks at the child again, small in her tunic, hands grasping at the wooden fence.

Kalim creeps to where the object fell and nuzzles for it, finally coming across it in a hidden corner, pressed against the wall. He blinks in surprise at a white flower, its large petals soft like cream against his muzzle, its stem cut cleanly. He does not know whether this is an offering or a coincidence, but the flower reminds him of a kind that used to cover the hills of his birthplace, their subtle fragrance perfuming the high mountain air for miles up. He does not think, but snatches the bloom up with his tongue, grinding the petals between his sharp teeth, and swallows.

Biyu sees the dragon's head stuck among the underbrush, searching, and she smiles, satisfied with her work. The merchant traveling through the town had given the flower to her for free two days earlier, saying it was a gift from a friend. She didn't know what he meant, but he called it a fire flower and said it would warm her home through the winter if she buried it beside the hearth. But Biyu the Quick had heard of the dragon at the zoo, the Western

monstrosity that could breathe flickers of light and warm stones to sleep on. It had flown in years ago, a whole flock by its side, but the others were gone long before she was born. Her mama said that the only good dragons were those that lived in streams.

Maybe the flower would warm his belly. Maybe he could use it to keep the enclosure comfortable as the days shorten and the chill winds creep down from the mountains. Biyu did not know, but she knew she and Mama had plenty of wood—their hearth could burn on its own.

Kalim wakes later that night, unsure how he has fallen asleep while daylight still shone. He feels fire brewing in his bones, heat fiercer than any other he has felt since he soared with dozens of others to this land, searching. With a nervous hiss, he exhales, and sets the grass alight. Flames reflect in his surprised eyes as he watches the burning shrub toast to the color of caramel and then of pitch.

Kalim the Ablaze roars at the chain that binds him, scorching it as close to the shackle as he can, not minding the smell of smoldering scales rising from his ankle.

A man watches from above, the darkness hiding him as an inferno creeps into being below. He is an older man now. He looks down eagerly, face illuminated, hat squarely on. Seeds shift in his pocket as he watches Kalim ignite.

# THERE'S A MAP IN THE BASEMENT

Lydia Crannell

missing Hawaii, torn at  
twenty-one north  
one-hundred and fifty-five west  
It has holes in the shape of a dart's mouth  
silver knife throwing plans  
when my brother said  
That's where I will go  
and I thought  
Do the people in Kabul split in two when we bullseye

There's a map in the basement  
that smells like mustard seed  
grandma's jars, daddy's boots,  
dusty fireflies past their expiration date  
and I wonder if the paper tastes like time  
can it feel itself shrinking, fading  
the skinny creases that have erased whole cities  
countries in silly colors that look even stranger now

There's a map in the basement  
with deep lines pressing into its flesh  
a heart pumping  
the blue and black veins of our Mother  
I press fingers to ink, hoping it will smudge  
leaving me with something almost permanent  
and it reminds me of  
the rivers and mountains in my grandfather's palms  
except maps don't die or sing funeral hymns or go to heaven  
they just get rewritten with new funny colors  
and more open space

# SMALL IN A BIG WORLD

Amber Hayes





# KITCHEN FLOOR, AT 6P.M.

Adriann Ricketts

All that's left of her is a small brown box, the polished wood blending beautifully with my mother's décor in the living room; her paw print, stamped onto a card with the words, "We're sorry for your loss," and a lock of her hair, pale and blonde, kept in a tiny plastic bag.

I suggested to the vet that we burn her rug as well.

Sandy had bad bones, bad limbs, bad feet, slippery feet, that caused her to slide around the house like she was always wearing socks. When we moved into our new house, complete with beautiful hardwood floors, my mother grew tired of the constant falling and bought several rugs that we placed strategically throughout the house, from the front door, through the living room, around the dining table, and into the kitchen. Sandy adapted immediately, as if she knew the deed was done specifically for her, and began to follow the trail we'd laid out for her with a wagging tail.

Sometimes, she would get caught on the small spaces between her carpeted road and she would crash, and everyone would watch pitifully as she dragged herself to the nearest rug. When I happened to see it, I leapt out of my chair, wrapped my hands around her thinning waist, and helped her to her feet. She licked my hands as if telling me she didn't need the help.



I told my mom we should burn her in her rug. All of the rugs were "hers," but Sandy was a social creature, which made her reluctant confinement to the first floor of our house even more tragic. When I was taking care of the dishwasher or getting a late night snack, she would take solace in the rug beneath the sink. It was a floral pattern, part of a set my mother bought specifically for the kitchen. A mix of plant greens, sunset skies, and ocean blues; it was Sandy's go-to spot when she wanted to spend quality time with her people in the kitchen.

I told them we should burn it because if there's an afterlife for dogs or whatever, I'd like Sandy to have it so she can snooze her days away in comfort, since our resident fat cat took over her expensive orthopedic bed in the recent years.

Mom looked at me like I was crazy. I looked back with teary eyes. Sandy was laying on a slab of metal in between us, tongue lolling out of her mouth. I ran a hand through her fur. She was already starting to get cold. Sandy was always a bundle of warmth and joy and love. This felt wrong.

Mom chuckled. I wasn't joking. Said, "It's part of a set." Asked the vet to give it back to us when we came to pick up Sandy's ashes. And then we left, Sandy's dead eyes staring back at us.



She was the first death I ever witnessed.

She was fine. Just old, my mom said. We knew it was coming, but she'd just been to the doctor a week ago. Given a clean bill of health.

I confess that I absolutely, positively lost it. I was unloading the dishwasher, Sandy laying on her beloved rug, watching me with loving eyes as I put the dishes away. My boyfriend went to move my car to make room for when my mother came home from work. He came back into the house, Sandy looked back at him, and her eyes looked off.

I asked her jokingly what was up, holding a spatula in my hand. Her tail wagged upon hearing my voice, but her head began to nod up and down. She huffed a hot breath of air. Drool formed at her lips.

I dropped the spatula and slammed the dishwasher shut. I'm surprised nothing broke. I fell to the ground next to her, grabbing her head as I tried to look into her eyes, but they were going in opposite directions. Her tail kept wagging, her ears perked up as I said her name, softly at first, then louder with growing terror.

"Something's wrong with Sandy," I told my boyfriend, and then I screamed it at him, and then I screamed for him to call my mom, and then I screamed Sandy's name, again and again and again, pressing a hand into her heart like I wanted to reach inside and pump it myself to keep her alive. Her breathing quickened, her head held up only by my hand.

She's dying, oh god, she's dying, Sandy, oh god, she's dying, they said she was fine, oh god, what do I do, what do I do, Sandy.

My younger sister, an STNA at a nursing home, came downstairs, awakened by my shrieking, and in a soothing voice, she calmed me down,

explained to me what was happening, that there was nothing we could do, that she'd seen this before, that Sandy was out of it but she could still hear us, and I didn't want her last memories to be me shouting at her, so I forced myself to quiet down, and I stroked her head, and I thanked her for holding on as long as she did, for always being happy to see me when I would visit during school, for being the best friend I ever could've asked for, and I told her I loved her so much, so very much, until she was gone, and cold, and I felt her heart stop in her chest.



Now she sits on the mantle of the fireplace, resting above my head when I take a seat below her. And the rugs that made up her makeshift trail are picked up and kept in the basement, save for the ones in the kitchen.

And when I have to go in there, my eyes are inevitably drawn to the swirled plant greens, the sunset oranges, and the ocean blues that she used to cover with her beautiful blonde body, and I feel an emptiness in my rib cage, and I wish it had been burned with her. Because now, it is like I'm looking at one half of a whole.

# AGE OF FISH

Daniel Kushnir

Ancient tower tombstone  
Rising from the shore

Crag-house, whose cough fills the sky  
With a hundred million bristled spores

We found your bones  
As they were  
And how odd a grandfather you are  
To the lichens on the bark

We had many questions

Do ants remember?  
Those who pulp fat oaken roots  
Must have once built their homes  
Under shady caps

Was the sky still blue then?  
Or did those spores and  
Four hundred or more millions years  
Dye it this way

Was the earth once in love  
With the fungal trees in her hair?  
Browns and greys, and fatal white

Did they keep their vines tangled  
Stretched across or under soil  
Blind fingertips, lover's mic cables  
Always reaching out, like those in cedar boxes  
Under granite, can never do

How porous things must have been then

Severe yellow tusks  
Like redwood spears  
As prosperous as dandelions

Clipped from history  
Like ugly toenails

We were not yet born  
When they grew old and died

If the mountains shrunk  
Would we deny them too?

# THE WIND IN MY MOTHER'S SCARRED CHEST

Claudia Owusu

We were all Baby “A.” Every. Single. One of us.

At first, it began as a small joke, leaving namelessness a place in the family house. But then it kept on stretching through longer periods of time with each sibling until it just...stuck.

Between the early months when Momma’s belly swelled like a passionfruit, to when she was bursting at the seams, pee trickling in her panties with every sneeze, Momma went to God with prayers about our names. Her breath would rise heavy like the clouds in April, and her voice would thunder the same tongues grandma used to shout around the house. It was a *time*, just a mere whisper away from the months grandma kept throwing her slippers away and started walking around barefoot—way before the summer she lied down on the outdoor bench and never got back up.

Momma would always seek counsel from both the ancestors and God—chewing on names. “A” names. And so my sister Alma was born, and then Abigail, and then Amina, and then Alexandra, and then me, Agnes. I stayed Baby “A” the longest, my birth certificate the most quieted, the months that passed, the most questioned, and in June, just around when all the other babies were being dedicated at the crusader’s church, the Pastor asked about me in Momma’s arms. His eyes lay discontent at the answer Momma gave, so funny that she laughed right there, right there in front of the altar, her kind of coughing, sneezing laughter that dejected everyone in the room into a space of childlike embarrassment. It wasn’t like any of the men Momma got with had names that began with A, or even that their holy grandmammies had A names to be sentimental over. But Momma got real inside herself after Abigail’s daddy left. Real early in the morning, before the chickens had even come up with their cry to the barely visible moon, creeping off just softly enough for only the crickets to sing goodbye in his wake. Momma ain’t cry or nothing, maybe she suspected as much. With her hair locked all over her head, and her eyes the color of corn husk, she took both my sisters in her arms and took to the Accra streets to find work. Abigail, who wasn’t Abigail then, but only Baby “A,” would man the front kiosk whenever Momma had clients that she needed to take to the back. Alma would find herself in the cartons of sugar and milo that the convenient store had, and she would spend the afternoons eating herself elbow deep until her loose front teeth matched her mahogany complexion and her sugar high widened her eyes into heavy oaks.

When I came around, Momma was married to my daddy, who was a preacher. And despite people turning their noses up at Momma, being the haggard woman she was to snatch up one of the last really good missionaries, Daddy did right by her. Stood by her side long enough. Even Grandma said so. He sang her hymnals on Sunday morning, taught her to grow houseplants, took her on horse rides at the Labadi Beach when the money coming in from the church was real good, and best of all, he ain't have no problem with Momma's unnamng. Said that a woman like her only needed time, needed some thinking through in order to settle herself and be sure of what kind of spirit she was inviting into her house. God forbid she go and name one of us wrongly. And at first, I liked Baby "A." It felt like something sweet to hang onto, a trinket of Momma's love for me. But then the times got longer, harmattan came and went, Grandma broke her back in the farm, Daddy quit the church and left back to England, and my namelessness stood out like bad crop.

Staring at my reflection, moments before fetching the pail from the aged metal bucket full of bath water, I was no longer a baby, and "Ayyy" was a hollow sound I felt worlds away from, like something cheap you'd say to drive a nosy goat away, or to get a hawkker's attention in a crowded market.

Before Daddy left, the house had gotten so empty that it felt heavier. Momma kept receiving letters from God knows where, Daddy kept drinking, and Grandma anointed all of us more than once a day, her memory a butterfly's wing melting away between forefinger and thumb. In those days, Momma would sit at the dining table with a photo album and cry. A thunderstorm wavering in her chest and desert smoke in her mouth. Alma would return home from work and find me on the steps, creeping behind the curtains and pinch me between the shoulders. Daddy never hit Momma, not like the others. And most of all, Daddy bought Momma flowers and things around the market. Abigail said sometimes physical objects ain't good for showing love, that it don't necessarily mean a person is gon' stay, and a couple of months later, when all of Daddy's things had left the house, and all my older sisters watched, waiting for my questions, holding alms for my hurts, I kept mute. I snuck out in the night to the well on our compound and tried to find my own name. It had been almost seven years, and Baby "A," or "B," or "Bya," when you say it fast enough, was what took up space; was what kept like a stone holding down a stack of papers in the wind. It took another year or two for her to find my name, and by then I had exhausted myself with waiting—being addressed by an English last name at school, my piercing blonde ringlets standing out so strongly that not even yomo<sup>1</sup> could quiet it down. Daddy had been calling less and less until less turned into nothing, and then nothing turned to wondering if he was alive, safe, and then nothing again.

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1 black hair dye

When Momma discovered my name, she was sitting at an open fire over the crock pot, fanning away in her absent mind, a ravine in her eyes. The sun had just about put itself to rest, and my older sisters were just getting home from their apprenticeships, one after the other, carrying a half braided doll head or a web of sewing needles and thread, suckling at a thumb or dipping fingers into a cold cup of ice water. The wind whistled all on its own, in the eerie way that makes grandmas warn grandchildren about dwarfs coming in the night to take them away. As Ma's hair swept across her face, and the fire dimmed down to the lowest whisper, Ma rolled over the wooden stool she was seated on and lunged towards me, "The voices—I mean the ancestors—I can hear them again," she said. "They right here with me. They been. And I think they saying they want me to name you Agnes. It sound Israeli, don't it? Greek? I think they've forgiven me. Can't smell another man on me no more, maybe. I heard them loud and clear in the fire. And yo name gon be Agnes." My sisters stood around, each grabbing onto something for solid ground, mouths opening and closing, as I sat in the middle of the verandah, the corridor behind me a long line of things only Momma could see with her opened eyes. "Now, Mama. I know how and where it is you coming from, but ain't it a bit too late for that? The girl be ten next month. And besides, everybody around here getting used to calling her Richardson instead of Baby. It ain't always that something gotta be precisely named—" But Mama's eyes only grew in absence, flying far from the conversation, as she looked into the fire and kept whispering, "Agnes. Agnes. Agnes." And I remember going to sleep that night wondering if it was me or the fire she was calling.



# AMITY 1

Jacob Strous



# FROM *A CHILD WHO WAVED TO AIRPLANES*

Sarah Carnes

I raised my fingers  
    above me,  
    spread apart and stretched,  
  
    growing myself  
    enough  
    to touch the flying-thing with wings  
  
    longer than a robin's  
    kinder than the hawk's  
    and sharper than an eagle's

I am still small;  
    almost a dot

And it could move closer  
    but I think we have an understanding /  
    there's distance  
        and shapes  
        and talks from the sky

# SITTING AROUND WITH YOUR FRIEND WATCHING WRESTLEMANIA IS MAYBE NOT THE BEST TIME TO RELINQUISH GRIEF

Gyasi Hall

But then again / sometimes your dreams try and make you feel bad about staying behind / about debating the existence of God with someone who is all temple / so maybe we are all owned by something / maybe this is what victory looks like / when it finally reaches the horizon / and stretches its arms across years of wrongdoing / just to cup the face of a day it will never see the end of / maybe this house was under construction long before I got here / I don't even watch wrestling / but I too have seen men yelling and rioting / fighting for pride / only for one to be slain / and melt into the past tense / and for the other to walk away / nothing on his shoulders / born into a screaming crowd / because what is the screen if not a twisted mirror? / what is sweat if not the baptism itself? / what are my tears if not my cup runneth over and over and over again / enough to quench the thirst of those who can no longer drink? / blessed are the crying / blessed are the scared / blessed are the bodies ripped out of a night just like this one / tonight is the Undertaker's last match / and this is also an injustice / Jay's whole body possessed by anger / as he remembers his black boyhood / eager to see someone they called the dead man / get beaten but never die / get beaten but always get back up / get beaten but never turn into a ghost / so many ghost stories / so many fights / so many names crawling out of my phone and haunting the blocks they once owned / maybe we are all owned by something / I tell Jay wrestling's fake / and he says *yeah / you're probably right*

# A MOTHER'S MONOLOGUE

Lydia Crannell

November grays outside the window. And the tulips you slept in when you were 8 are dead. Rotted gone.

The doctors whispered come back tomorrow. Spiders on their tongues, webbing in their throat.

The priest said Holy Father please.

And you, wrapped in white. Golden lilies in your hair. Thick milky veins, like honey and toast mornings, said to stop crying Yosemite

on your 9th birthday. Grand Canyon when you were 7. Tail pipe open, smoking smoking a hole.

A hole they had to dig two days after, because we all know corpses make the flowers grow. Oh how they grow in the summer heat, waiting for the rain to taste like God,

like the time we ran through the neighbor's sprinklers, because we were ripe with the feeling of *now*.

But *now* is *gone* and *then* is the wrinkled finger painting and 5th grade diploma and four different ultrasounds I refuse to take off of the fridge, because you were almost tall enough to reach the top.

You. A beautiful oak tree splintering out of me, baptized in green.

They tell me I'm crazy when I say that I can't feel your hands anymore or your ghost kisses on my heart.

Don't do this, we sang, old Church choir robes dripping wine. They didn't understand that the cathedral was crying. Wet weeping stone.

Don't do this. Sunday confessional. Don't do this. Thorn sister. Don't do This.

Don't steal the yellow moon,  
my blue and  
pink tide.

Like ripping the pages from this bible.  
They killed His baby, too.



**AUTHORS**  
&  
**ARTISTS**

# AUTHOR & ARTIST BIOS

**Rachel Bell** is a junior Creative Writing major who loves writing all forms of fiction and poetry. Rachel has been published in literary magazines *Flip the Page* and *Quix & Quill*. She hopes to someday be the author of multiple published novels and chapbooks of poetry, if and when she stops daydreaming long enough to finish things.

**Mikayla Burr** is a twenty-one year old jack of all trades (master of none) who just wants to create and build things. Art and the humanities allow her to do that in any capacity, be that writing, drawing, painting, or carpentry.

**Sarah Carnes** is a senior at Otterbein who spent four years dedicated to her studies of psychology, creative writing, and criminology/justice studies and is now more curious than ever about her role on this planet. She lives for a sense of longing and loves space(s). Endings are memorable and she hopes you always remember where you left your beanie.

**Lydia Crannell** is a senior English Literary Studies and Music double major who finds home in a good poem, long-winded questions, and her cello. In her time at Otterbein, Lydia has focused on poetry, drama, and (her new found love) critical theory. Lydia has been a part Otterbein's Literary Magazine *Quix & Quill* for four years and is currently the Page Designer and Drama Editor. Her latest creative work can be found in Z Publishing's *Ohio's Best Emerging Poets* anthology.

**Alex Futo** is a junior Creative Writing major with minors in Literary Studies, Arts Administration, and Marketing. She has plans to work in the publishing industry and, eventually, be a published novelist.

**J.R. Gill**: Filthy heathen. Student of Jack Kerouac and Dr. Hunter S. Thompson.

**Kendall Gribble** is a senior Creative Writing student all the way from Tampa, Florida. Ironically, she hates writing about herself as much as she loves writing about herself. She loves weenie dogs, a good night's sleep and telling people to look at the moon.

**Gyasi Hall** is a junior at Otterbein University. He enjoys writing Poems, Fiction, Non-fiction, and spend most of his time in his room re-evaluating his top five albums of all time list.

Amber Hayes is a junior at Otterbein University, her passions include riding horses, photography, and music.

Daniel Kushnir enjoys long walks on beaches, food, and writing autobiographical statements in 150 words or less.

Claudia Owusu is a junior at Otterbein University studying Creative Writing. Her work has appeared online at wusgoodpoetry.com, and in the anthology of *Ohio's Best New Emerging Poets*. Her favorite book, if she had to choose, is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston; her favorite song, if she had to choose, is “Hey Baby” by Stephen Marley ft. Mos Def.

Adriann Ricketts is a senior English-Writing double major set to graduate this Spring. She strongly prefers tea over coffee and dogs over people, and hopes that ultimately, this will all be worth it

Kay Strobel constantly connects the ideas of music and writing together, through poetry, playwriting, backtracks, and how each book has its own song to be told. Kay wants to express the need for both in abstract mixed media artwork such as “Silent Piano Man.”

Jacob Strous's goal as an artist is to prompt the viewer to expand and change their understanding of the presented concepts through the process of self-analysis. Overall, his body of work is defined by a focus on visual dynamics, minimalism, shape, and abstraction.

Abby Studebaker is a junior with far too little time on her hands to write and far too much she wants to write about.

Elise Woods is a junior Theatre and Creative Writing double major. She is a fan of indie films, hot coffee, and misses her fourteen-year-old childhood pup, Winston on a daily basis.







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