

THE MUSE



The Literary Magazine for Mountain Brook High School

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of Mountain Brook High School.

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Dear Readers,

To the parents, friends, family, and random persons who may not know how they got here, thank you for taking the time to open our magazine. Held within these pages is a years worth of hard work that begin with the workshop process in the fall, moved through competitions in early spring, and finally into the creation of this literary journal. This year's staff has worked tirelessly to bring you not only their own creative pieces, but the best selections of poetry, short story, and artwork in the school. As this years editor, I couldn't be more proud of the dedication and hard work put forward by the Muse class, and couldn't be more appreciative of the quality submissions put forth by the entire Mountain Brook High School.

I hope that you enjoy reading as much as we enjoyed making this piece.

Yours Truly,
Adelaide Kimberly

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Always Learning to Walk
(A study of life stages through haikus)
By Charlotte McRae

I.
Core dictates body
And shreds ten live fingers from
One negative space

II.
Cloudy skies curdle
Sending salted rain down from
My cheek to my chin

III.
Direction is here
And everywhere we are not
Eventually

*photograph by
Adelaide Kimberly*



A World of Foreign Objects

By Abigail Adams

It's a good day when she wakes up and remembers where she is; nonetheless who she is.
She's not allowed to drive a car, be alone, or cook.

As she looks around at the wood paneled walls and outdated furniture, she looks lost.
She doesn't know where she was or why she is there.

She forgets who she is and who she loves and how she lived her life.

It's just part of the process, and has to be accepted.

She also forgets the little things.

She stared at the straw and the plastic that covered it and examined it as if it was some sort of foreign object.

You and I, when we are handed a straw, we know what to do.

We know how to unwrap it and what its for.

Betty didn't.

She forgets, and it's no way to live.....

I wake up wondering where I am and who I am.

I have been deprived of driving a car, being alone, and cooking.

As I look around at the wood paneled walls and outdated furniture, I am lost.

Why am I here?

They tell me that it's alzheimer's and I seem to have forgotten what that even is.

The waiter handed me what I think is called a "straw" and I don't know what to do with it.

Those around me know, but I've forgotten.

This is no way to live.



*Photography by
Adelaide Kimberly*

(I'm)mature

By Charlotte McRae

a man was sitting next to me on a
plane
an old man
the age my dad
would have been

he offered me a newspaper
newly bought from the overpriced
airport shop
it smelled of skimpy paper and
hummus

seventeen
 the age of responsibility
 the end of ignorance

I said yes
my mom wants me to start
reading the news

I took it and thumbed
past the words and organized
obituaries
I went straight for the sudoku

*Photography by
David Faulkner*



Following the Circle

By Millie Livingston

“Kiss me.”

The girl tiptoed up and kissed the old lady on the cheek. Silence passed.

“Grandma?”

“Call me Savta.”

“You know that only Grandfather calls you that.”

“It’s who I am.”

“Can we take a walk?”

“Of course.”

The two started down the circular, concrete path that surrounded a small pond. Street noises floated toward them. A siren wailed. A large brick building cast its shadow across the lake with a big blue sign on top, glinting in the sun.

“I’m glad to be outside,” the old lady said. “It has been too white indoors.”

“It is nice out,” said the girl. “For what it is.”

“No, it’s beautiful.”

The sun shone down, its warm rays casting themselves across the pond, causing the light to glint in iridescent stars as it reflected off of individual ripples in the pond.

The old lady shivered.

“Look at the leaves,” she said. “They’re already changing colors.”

“Of course! They do that every autumn,” the girl responded.

“Maybe it just feels special this year. I guess I haven’t been outside much recently.”

They continued to walk, passing a flock of ducks sitting on the lake.

“I almost forgot! The nurse gave me some bread so that I could feed them!”

“Of course!”

The girl hurried to the edge of the water, laughing and ripping the bread apart as she hastily flung it to the flock. The grandmother stood by the girl. She absently formed her bread into small circles, tossing the other way into the middle of the pond, in isolated water.

“Grandma, the ducks are the other way... What did you just say?” the girl asked.

“L’Shanah Tovah! It’s a greeting... part of a holiday... I was reminded of it. It is our tradition. It reminds us of renewed life...” she faded off.

“Don’t talk that way, Grandma. I don’t like it. I don’t understand.”

“Ok.”

“Let’s keep walking.”

“Ok.”

They completed the circuit, right in front of two clean, automatic doors.

“Grandma, we just finished the trail.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I was lost in thought. Let’s go around one more time. I would like to see the leaves again.”

Patio Tree

Photo and poem by Charlotte McRae

Patio tree
Why so willowy
You shake your hair
and cover your scales
Maybe you're praying.



Abyssal Rummage
By Katherine Grace Moore

Decadently silked down sheets
forged from the tenderest of Geats
move elongated fingers wrestling with the moon
to tingling heartstrings pulling to tune.

Sylvester gawks at Lucifer's shoes
his tingling brow in two and twos
sliding across the velvet plains
to mingle beside the cloths of May.

Wilting whispers whither her woe
passing into the darling doe
the trajectory is somewhat dismayed
on the day of the night of the slithering play.

Mushy backdrops of coal and wind
find dreams in parcels and empty bends
for whims of snowfall and thorns of dawn
upon pillows of roses and petals withdrawn.

Lips of Lucifer so strike the night
to whisper to nightingales frozen with spite
to lower their voices and aim up their games
for the ripe time to call in time by the thames.

Rouge shoes dance through the litter of rain
trotting and stopping for no doe in pain.
The weak rise for the ones who do harms
and by God be they safe in the midst of pulled arms.

Gatherings trample, topple, and trust
to find the right party in all of the lust.
Forget the forsaken and take what is at hand
by God they are safe from the scowls and the brands.

The white wind breathes through,
Sylvester's breath does too,
and Satan is smitten by the light of red shoes
before the light escapes like slippery paste.

Blackness wraps around.
The shoes are slick.
Lucifer falls
at Satan's knees.

He pleas.

They dance.

They trade a glance.

They take a lap.

He jumps the gap.

He climbs up high.

Not allowed in the sky.

The shoes are bloody.

The land is old.

Eyes are sunken in bittering cold.

Tinted streets of May
may never be the same.

Nothing is alright
with the devil in the light.

Ruckus consumes the streets
and Sylvester tips to a man on the side,
"Blessed be the ones who have avoided the wrath of God's eyes."



The Folly of Paris
photo and poem by Adelaide Kimberly

I.

His hands are faster than bird's wings
when he releases the spear.
The arc of his hand
and wide, staggered stance
are poised like dawn to
end life.

The weapon does not glisten,
already coated in a viscous, crimson coat.
The people have taken to calling
it the deathstick. Hades' staff.
Charcoal, polished and well loved
like the men that fall beneath
its point.

From above there is a collective breath—
many blink, that is how long the
fall will last—
then the corpse is paraded
three times before the wall.

Feet pound along the walls.
*He has fallen! The great defender
has fallen!*
Will the city fall so quickly?

II.

Many come to defend the walls
praying to the wrong gods
for glory.

From along the wall
bets are taken.
How long will it take for him to slay them?
The archers stomachs
ache with hunger for golden armor.

Apollo's chariot peaks.
There is a flash of charcoal
and a collective sigh.

Next wily women
line up before the stones.
Their battle cries too
shortened before the end of the day.
Who will come next?
No one, no one.

III.

He throws himself at the walls
tearing at rock with fingers
like he is the god that built
them and he could pull them down.

Arrows clatter around him.
They say his mother is a goddess—
perhaps she protects him now.

The doors below rumble
beneath mighty fists. Timbers splinter.
He screams for death
but he has killed all those who could give it
to him.

Only his legs are visible
as he attacks the Scaen.
Tentative, fattened fingers
extend a bow, caressing the arrow like
the lover that waits for her doom.

Release and the tip rushes on,
breaking the orb that none have been able to
puncture.

All eyes alight on
the small weapon.
It seems so weak in the golden
warrior's presence.

There is a glint of charcoal
and a thud
and the arrow had embedded itself
into the wood of the deathstick.

Below a creak
and then a groan.
The gates have fallen.

IV.

The city is run through
like maggots through a corpse.

The golden warrior first finds the prince,
pressing his own arrow
and the last hope of the city
into his neck.

He prowls through the wreckage
and finds the back gate.
One last battle and it has ended
and a boy lays under
Hades' staff.
Ten years for this.

V.

The story is written.
Sung to crowds who weep over
Aristos Achaeon.
The man who ripped apart
the gates of Troy
and wished only to die.

Matriarchal
By Charlotte McRae

Holding the swing
between pinkie and thumb
Thoughtfully,
without an
actual
Thought.

The pendulum was her yoyo,
rustic rope hairs
and cedar.

And the child meant nothing to it,
but a weight
ticking upon her toy.

What began to grow against
the south
and a little below
the west,
her scaly bark
moving without reason

It seemed

She didn't question
(how would she ever question)
why she began to change.

But there was a purpose.
She protected the pendulum,
tied around her young knobby fingers,
from her wise brothers

Wilt
Water
Wind
Warp

And there was an effect.
She protected the weight she bore,
Childhood,
from her wiser Father:
Time.

What He Ruined
By Sarah Beth Daniel

What he ruined
he ended.

Scream.
Fall.
Concrete.

Discontentment grappling
up my spine.
Uneasy air.

Invisible,
inaudible,
nameless.

Chasing a vapor,
you left everything.

There's a steel grip around my heart
with no name –
your name won't fit.

Paint my mind,
you bleached my heart.

What I scream
you don't hear.
What I do
you don't see.

I lash out to know I'm alive.
No one knows – you don't know –
why.

I can't
find someone,
find something.

Speak,
scream,
silence.

Stains on my heart
in reality,
in fantasy.

Shattering in my eyes,
what's left in between
breath and heartbeats?

What can man do,
what can woman do?

Create,
destroy,
burn.

All of these.



photograph by
Charlotte McRae

*Photograph by
David Faulkner*



Mommy

By Charlotte McRae

Mommy
she crafts her own wings
from fallen delicacies
pine cones
marigold buds
and awakes each numb artist
to the loveliness of life.

To whom it may concern

By Georgia Nelson

Today is my birthday.
I am 21 years old now.
I was born in Jacksonville, Mississippi,
where my parents met.
They were young when they fell in love,
full of life and the will to do extraordinary things.
A trait I always admired,
though never seemed to obtain.

Thin, fragile skin stained violaceous
under tired eyes that have lost their brilliance
due to weary nights spent sleepless.
Exhausted from years of pretending things are fine
because I'm scared of an uncertain future,
and I'm scared I'll never be the good, kind, smart person
I was put into this world to be.
The person my parents wanted me to be.
The person I wanted to be.

I'm scared because I don't even feel like myself in this skin.
This cracked, rough, worn skin.
I'm terrified because I lost myself at some point down the line,
and I don't think there's just some kind of lost-and-found for this stuff.
Though this skin starts to feel more like a forgotten sweater than a home every day.

Memories recounted through rose colored lenses,
before the weight of the world fell on our shoulders.
I had a dream, a life, a future.
I wanted to be a nurse;
All I ever wanted to do in my life was to help others.
It felt like my place in the world.

At 16 years old I had a license.
I had a car I loved, a boyfriend I adored, and a job I cherished.
Armed with all that a hopeful girl could ask for,
the world was my oyster.

At 17 I lost my mother and my sister to a fatal car wreck.
The core of your inner being, your soul and your heart,
demolished in the blink of the eye
of the man behind the wheel feeling the affects
of what was in his cup.
I lost my home, my car, my love, my job, and my childhood.
I lost my way.

At 17 years old I was thrust into an adulthood that I didn't know even existed.
I thought I was mature before,
a young adult ready to take on the world.
In reality I was just an ignorant girl, disoriented,
stumbling her way through a path unguided.

At 18 years old I stopped eating.
I just lost interest
and the desire for all aspects of life.
I no longer savored the taste of food,
or the will to survive.
The things that made me feel meaningful
no longer held a fictitious front.
I would have stopped breathing if I could.

At 19 years old I buried my griefs in substances that warped my perception
of what was real and honest.
It became like a habit, a way to cope.
Drowning my sorrows in liquor
that tasted like pressed flowers
and bit my nose as it slipped down my throat.
I had become my own biggest fear
and enemy.

It's a disgusting habit, like picking at your skin.
Straight edge razors at the tips of your fingers
that can dig under imperfections
and rip them out.
Leaving you scarred and disfigured,
you realize what you've become.

Today I turned 21 years old.
I live in Jacksonville, Mississippi,
yet I still don't know where I am.
But I'm looking harder than I did before,
I promise, to whom it may concern.

I Let Them

drawing and poem by Charlotte McRae

They roll,
drips
no
longer
follow
one
pa th.

Gravity only exists when I
Let it
Now it rains
Towards the stars
The sunbursts extinguish
with each
silvery sphere

They are all
one; divided.

An ocean of fingerprints
sandy skin
burnt and coiled and licked
over
and over
and over

I can not know what pulls where
Those questions are just the air I breathe
The gasps I survive on,
the clouds that also suffocate
me.

But it's all a choice
and I let
them
roll





*photograph by
Charlotte McRae*

My Dad
By Sam Poole

Two children fighting over whos dad
is stronger, smarter, and better
but ended in something dumb

4 heavy punches were thrown
one to the head one to the gut
two to the heart

fire burned in the kid's belly
rupturing through his fist
20 hard jabs were tossed

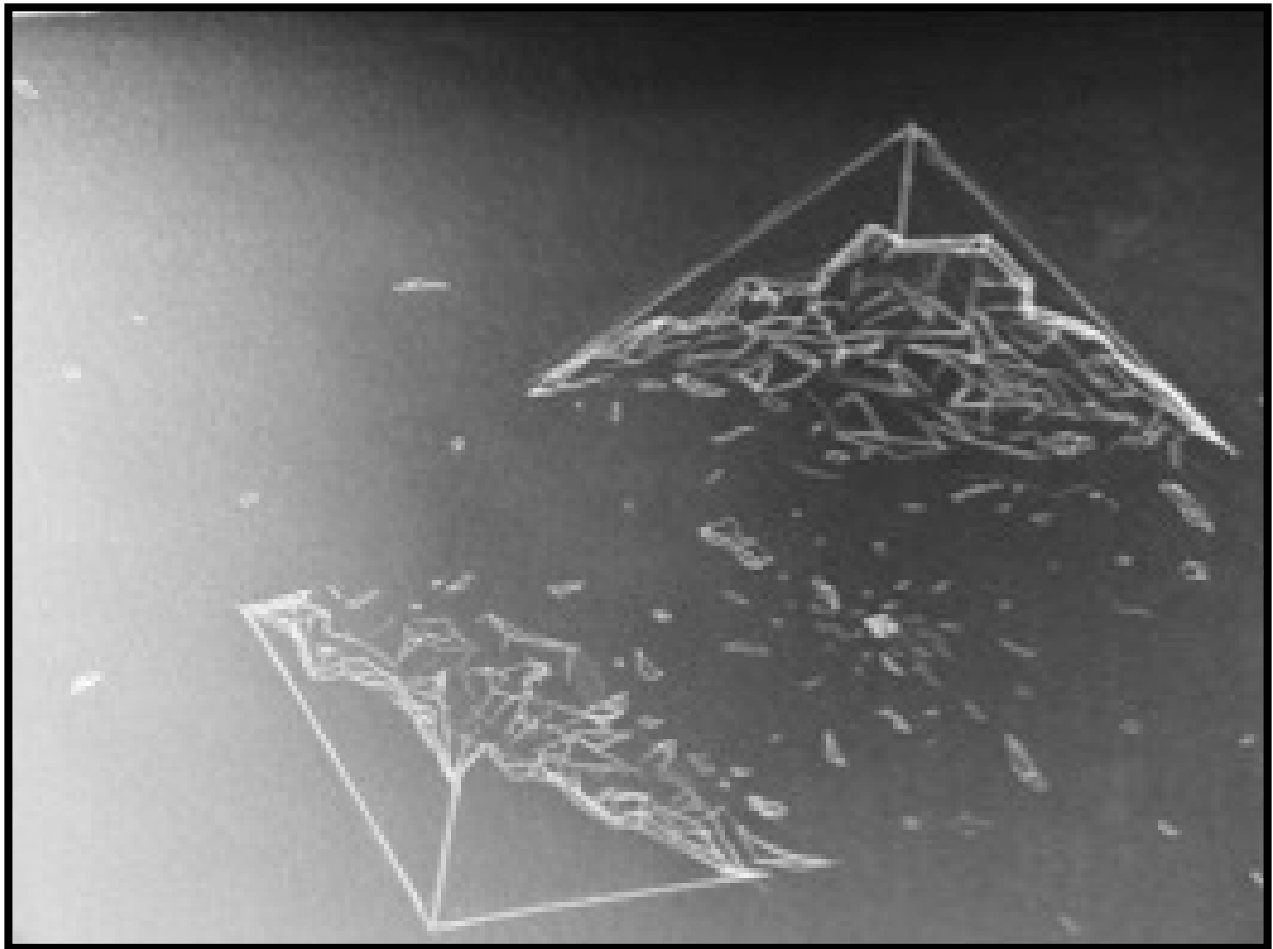
all this fighting for something stupid
the bones that were broke tears that were shed
cause my dad can beat up your dad

Unflinchingly
By Charlotte McRae

The hill slopes like Pappy's pipe. Dry puffs of fog roll off the pavement, as if an old mouth was coughing for the changing clouds. Tobacco rings wilt above grass. Horses childishly search for the peppermints--half eaten, edges smoothed by sugar ants. Not too far off from the respite, beyond the cross planked fence and wild raspberries, my grandfather is praying. He sits in his brown leathered chair, splotted with pen scratches and coffee stains. I watch with my back burning against his fire, wondering if he sees me gazing at his furled white brows. Pappy knows most every verse in the Bible. He's probably read it 77 times. He doesn't understand it, of course, but he knows the Author and he knows the Message. I wish to electrocute myself with it.

No sounds arise. Occasionally a page rolls over itself, or a spark ignites a small horizon behind me. I continue to observe, hoping his eye-flecks of wisdom might drift into my own. But Pappy, look at me. I don't know the Author and I don't know the Message. Pappy please notice my longing. Please teach me.

He unflinchingly prays. I walk down the hill alone.



*Drawing by
Sarah Beth Daniel*

Kiss Me
By Lauren Elgin

“Kiss me...” his persistence is killing me. I shake my head at him. “You’re using me.” My tenacity is killing him. He shakes his head at me. “Would you stop saying that? You know I love you.” “No I don’t! What else was I supposed to think? You ignored me for three weeks and then lied to me about where you were while you were all over her.. whatever her name is. If you really love me you wouldn’t have done that to me.” There are tears in my eyes when I finish speaking. He closes his filthy mouth and then I know he can see I am right; he is defeated. There is a brief pause and he looks at me with god knows what emotion.

“I only want you... I know that now. Actually I have always known that but I’m sure now. I can’t find myself to be happy when I’m not with you.” He is desperate with his words. “I don’t believe you.” I speak in a hushed tone. I only feel disgust now. There is a pause and neither of us speak. He and I both are breathing fast and I feel his eyes on me. His hope for a new “us” decays as I stare at the ground.

“Please look at me...” He voices breathily. I take a brave step toward him and give him the angriest most heartbroken look I can muster.

“What you did to me was unfair. I trusted you and I gave you all of my love and I waited for you and you used me. I am supposed to be your priority and I’m supposed to feel important but I barely even feel wanted by you, even now when you’re trying to win me back.. whatever this is, I don’t care. My confidence in you and I has dwindled to nothing. You gave me less than half the effort I deserved and for that I can’t be with you. You and I cannot possibly work if you can barely even pay attention to me.” He looks up and I can see wet, shiny streaks down his cheeks from his angry tears. Why is he crying?

“I know what kind of man you are. You are the kind of man who wants the result without working for it. You are the kind of man who puts himself first. You never take responsibility. You are selfish. You are constantly blinded by your own vanity and that pushes you to do witless things.” I’m breathless now and I sit down to regain my composure. He wipes his nose with the back of his hand and rubs his eyes with his calloused fingertips.

“You’re wrong, you know.”

“Am I? Am I wrong to feel betrayed?” We both speak with low voices, but mine is strong and his is weak.

“No, of course you aren’t wrong. I know I hurt you. I know I messed up. I am the one who did wrong in all of this.. But you are wrong to think that’s who I am. You are wrong to think I hurt you on purpose.” He comes closer to me and bends to his knees so I am looking down at him. His eyes are red rimmed from tears and his cheeks are rosy. I lift my hand to his hair and he welcomes my touch. He breathes a sigh of what seems like relief and internally I am fighting with myself.

“Please, just kiss me...”

Words from Bambi
By Charlotte McRae

I remember when I was seven or eight, my grandmother picked me up from school one afternoon. My carpool number was always 222; it bobbed from the car mirror on a yellow slip as she pulled up in the line. I opened the door (to the back seat, of course. Bambi has always been a rule follower). The wooden duck umbrella in the side pocket and the smell of the Yellow Pages were loyal greeters when she came to pick me up. My blithe grandmother sat with a traceable smile—the kind that leave graceful wrinkles. We were on the way to my grandparent’s farm for the weekend for good ole’ simple living. Most of the ride, my grandmother asked me questions about school and friends. You know, the usual adult-child interaction. I answered shyly; Bambi could tell I didn’t have much to say, seeing my reservoir for after-school talk was drying. Time passed and my face pressed up against the window, watching trees smear past.

“Mirage” she said.

My gaze awakened a little.

“That’s a mirage”

The word had never met my ears. What was she saying?

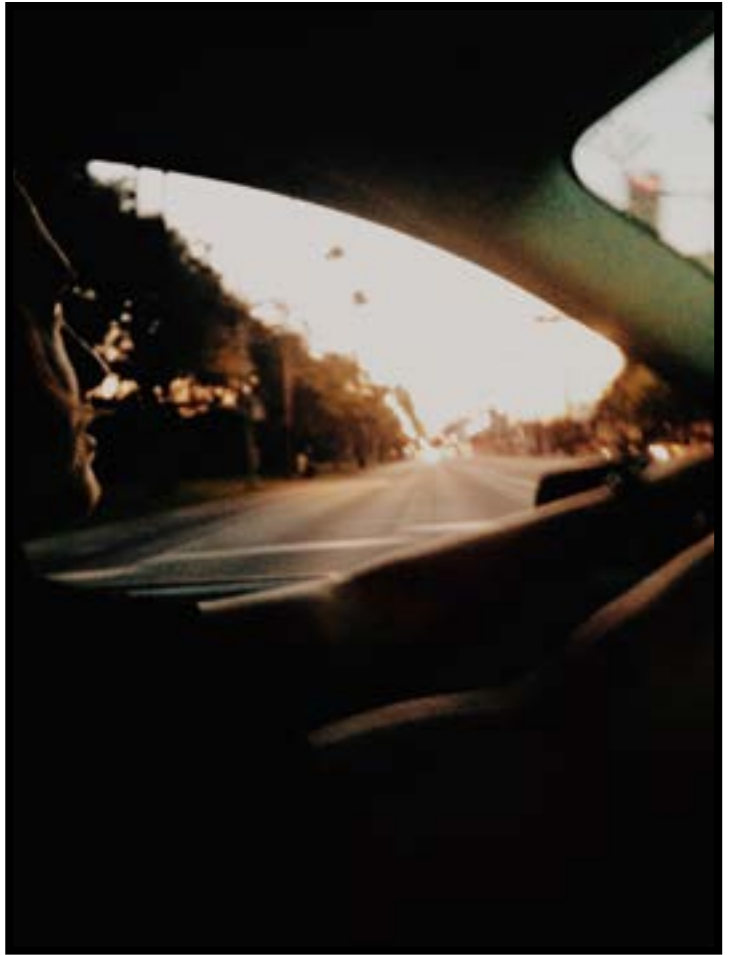
“You see that river on the highway that keeps disappearing as we drive towards it?”

I didn’t realize until then that fourth realm in the road. A puddle caught between time and place and heat and waves.

“Now I don’t quite know the science behind it—how a dry road can appear lush and puddled. They say it has something to do with the sun, and I always think I can reach it. But that’s never the case...well not in our time.”

We continued, both of us staring at the unattainable illusion in simple silence.

Mirage, I’ve dwelt on that word ever since she mentioned it. So much so, it has become my favorite word. However, it isn’t the word or the french lineage that give impact. Rather, it is what the word means, of course, and only time showed me what my grandmother revealed through the word. That mirage, that mirror of boiling heaven, can never be caught. Only what it’s reflecting may be met after a lifetime.



5 Stages

Bailey Coats

The first part began with a smile
A simple hello
A macchiato and a pike coffee
A friendly goodbye

The best part was the undeniable connection
When our eyes would lock
Knowing that you were there
Feeling loved, feeling important

The rough part was the crazy schedules
The limited texts
The routine
Feeling second compared to everything else

The tough part was seeing you dance with her
Hearing the gossip
Feeling excluded
Watching you walk away and never look back

The worst part is realizing how much you really cared
Knowing you stopped having feelings
That you stopped wanting me, wanting to be with me
Finding out that I meant nothing to you in the end

First, best, rough, tough, worst. The end.

*photograph by
Charlotte McRae*

Newton's Law

drawing and poem by Charlotte McRae

I like words that sound human

a foot
an open window
decisions
Gravity
ground
work suit
half-burnt
fluttering

I like words that don't sound human

skyline
tray tables
suspended steel
black
ashy-lungs

I dislike the two together

broken
skylines
diving
feet
bodiless
clothing
eye-less
face

body
suspended



A to Z - Attila to Zilla

By Katherine Grace Moore

“Man, I can’t do this myself,” his hand travels to an itchy clump of fabric near his rear.

“You could do it before, Attila, and I say that you can do it again,” the cone sits firmly in one hand of the man as the board sits in the other.

“Awe come on,” he scratches, and a whistle blows.

“Action!” the board clicks.

“Awe nah man!” Atilla stops scratching and turns to the scene before him. He takes a small step forward and an earthquake ripples through the roads from his foot. “See man! This ain’t gonna work,” he rests his elbow on the top of a highrise and pulls out a cig.

“Anyone got a lighter- wait. Nah, I got it,” he clicks his tongue and a spew of flames erupts from his face.

Just as he is putting the butt to his mouth past long, pearly whites, a plane swoops through the air, knocking the cigarette out of his hand and onto a roof.

“Get back to work!” the man shouts through his cone.

“Darn it,” Attila looks over to the roof and then begins taking a few steps forward. The structures tremble around his sluggish body. “Come ‘ere,” he reaches a long arm forward, leaning over a small apartment complex as he does so. “Come tah papa-” just as his nail touches the sizzling paper, he loses his balance and demolishes the building beneath his swollen body.

“Cut!” the man shouts, “Honestly,” he glances over to a long reptilian tail that sticks out amongst the rubble, “How do I end up with this when your tape you sent had so much emotion; so much, dedication; so much, of something?” He places his forehead on the rear of the cone in distress.

“I cain’t understand what you mean,” the tail stiffly slithers up as Atilla rises out of the rubble, “That tape had some of the best, darn tootin stuff that you people haven’t ever done seen before,” he scratches the clump of fabric near his bum again and then pouts behind the teeth that hang over his eyes, “Man, these claws don’t do nothin’ you want ‘em to. And these darn pants is tight. And all yer lights is making me sweat between my flab-abs,” he throws his arms in the air and lets out a roar, “Roll dem cameras, ‘cause you gonna get something you ain’t never seen before!”

Without another word Atilla turns to the city and slams his foot to the ground, sending a ripple through the streets. The cameras roll. He rages through the city on a spontaneous rampage.

“This isn’t what the script called for,” the man whispers to a beautiful, camera-ready lady, “but I think this is gonna be big.”

The lady rolls her eyes and strides away with her clicking heels clanking through the enclosure. The man watches as the scene falls out before his eyes.

“I knew I was right in choosing him,” he continues watching, and then shouts through his cone, “You’re gonna be a god, Atilla!” he chuckles to himself, thinking of the big bucks that will be brought in, until he pauses, and smiles, “God Atilla,” he ponders on the words for a second, and then grins, “Godzilla.”

Muck

By Charlotte McRae

when I went on a little walk
through the forest
or whatever you call it
something awoke
along with
every
single
sense

suddenly I was taken
underneath
my body
and my eyelids
and my skin
that drapes so tightly

I forgot what fingers were
mere things of volume
drooping from some bony branch
too carefully

piled and veined
rooted and stretched
I was not beautiful
I realized
I was just a resemblance of a tree

one who had already learned the laws of
nature
and of rebirth
of falling
of carcasses
of brokenness
of uneven physicalities
of twigs in the murk
of crushed twigs in the murk



*Photograph by
Warren Fitzpatrick*

Turned Thoughts

By Sarah Beth Daniel

Out of all my bad habits
You were my favorite.

Those I say aren't there
Scream at the bruises you can't see.

I couldn't catch a breath in open air.

Water burned my skin,
Trees grew red,
Wisteria hung blanched.

So when you said I couldn't leave
I convinced myself you were right



*photograph by
Charlotte McRae*

Drive-Through

By Adelaide Kimberly

Lionel's Lexus rolled smoothly across the potholes on his way to work; the air was still perfumed with new car smell. His fingers twiddled with the dial as he searched for a radio station, finally settling on the local classic rock station, and then came to rest on the steering wheel. Humming along four measures behind the song, Lionel swept his hand through his hair and tugged at his collar. He needed something to say when he arrived at work -- something *good*. It was the beginning of the new fiscal year, and despite their rapid increase in sales, his employees had been wearing thin these past few months as the company grew in popularity. Saving people's souls was more taxing than many of his workers had thought.

Banking a hard right, Lionel pulled into the parking lot and into the first spot, which was reserved for him. Throwing open the door, he clambered out and ran his hand through his hair one more time before striding into the modest red brick building. The white laminate floors squeaked under his dress shoes as he strode down the hall towards the conference room on the left.

"Morning, Lionel," a voice called out to him as he pushed the door open. Looking around, he saw the optimistic face of Daniel, his second in command, peering up at him from the end of the table. Lionel responded with a thin lipped smile and strolled to fill the last empty seat at the head of the table next to his young counterpart and another new recruit he had not yet met.

Silence fell in the room as he settled into his seat and pulled a few papers from his briefcase. Really, he was just buying time as he organized his thoughts, but he figured he looked more professional with something in his hands.

"Would you like some coffee?" Tina, one of the ladies that worked in marketing, offered. Her brown eyes followed his every move with unnerving reverence.

"No, thank you, Tina," Lionel said with an easy grin, attempting to shake the goosebumps her gaze gave him. Tina's face flushed as he murmured her name, his rich baritone voice dragging out the second syllable of her name. "I apologize for my tardiness," he continued, flashing the smile around the table. Several people returned with grins of their own and still more waved their hands to brush away his apology as if batting at a fly. That was the perk of saving people's souls: he got to do whatever he pleased.

"As you know, we just started a new fiscal year," Lionel began, leaning back in his chair and lacing his fingers together as if preparing for something great. The table seemed to hold its breath, as he paused. "And, as you know," Lionel felt his voice grow fuller as he spoke; his words echoed around the glass-walled room and thundered against eardrums. "We had an *amazing* year last year with record breaking numbers in all sectors." Applause burst out around the table. This was the news they'd been waiting to hear. Everyone knew that attendance as well as sales had almost doubled in just one year, as had positive press and coverage in the news, but they had all been listening for his praise. Lionel fought to

keep his smile from becoming a smirk as he saw Laureen, an assistant on Wednesday services, fighting to keep tears from her eyes.

“Yes, the Lord blessed us with a fruitful year, and we managed to save the lives of many, *many* people.” There was another smattering of applause after this and Lionel delivered another smile as thanks. “But this is a new year with new challenges, new goals, and more people to serve. The Lord has set before us the very difficult task of growing his following and aiding all that we can.” He felt the reverberation of his words through his chest as he continued on, diving into his plans for the new branch in Selma and Tuskegee, possibly one in Mobile as well.

“I would never want to force you to relocate, so each new location would have a completely new staff and a chief minister that would report to home base so that all of you can continue to spread God’s message here.”

“Where will the funds for the new locations come from?” Blake, one of the ministers asked.

“I’ve had money in savings for some time and I’ll be paying the downpayment from pocket until both churches are up and supporting themselves,” Lionel informed them. This, of course, was not true. Lionel had no money in savings. He did, however, have thousands of dollars worth of profit that he had transferred from the church’s bank account to his own that he could afford to invest in the new properties. But like many things inside the business, what his fellow workers didn’t know couldn’t hurt them, and his declaration of selflessness was met with another round of applause.

“You aren’t worried about the church growing too big are you, Lionel? I mean, would it work better if there was an individual director at each location instead of having them all report to you?” Demetrius suggested, his voice wobbling as he spoke up for the first time. “That way they could be in tune with each individual communities needs and it would save you a lot of work.”

The room hummed with silence and Lionel felt his heart race. *Quick!* Lionel knew he had to think fast before his greedy undercurrents were uncovered.

“Demetrius, there is a lot of merit in what you say. It is clear that you are truly on the lookout for God’s people,” Lionel chimed, leaning forward in his chair so as to give the appearance of investing his full attention in the issue. “However, on the size of the church, we have an obligation to the Lord to spread his word across the nation. Does he not say in Mark 16:15 ‘and He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’? As for my work, I appreciate your concern on my behalf, but I could never ask another to do the work I am capable of doing myself.”

Lionel waited with baited breath to see if his speech would be accepted, but after a moment passed, a murmur of agreement rippled around the table and he allowed himself to slump in his seat. He had won. By the time the meeting came to a conclusion, he had converted the entire congregation to his line of thinking.

“It’s going to be another good year,” Demetrius shouted as he made his way out of the conference room.

“Ain’t nothin gonna stop us,” another voice concurred.

The room emptied until it was just Lionel and Daniel, who was still scribbling on his yellow legal pad. Slumping further in his seat, Lionel tugged at his collar and propped his feet up on the table.

“So did we get the property in Selma?”

“We closed the deal two weeks ago,” Daniel said, inking out his last few words before throwing the pen down and settling back in his chair.

“And the one in Tuskegee?”

“Got it last month.”

Lionel finally allowed a smirk to spread across his face. When he first opened St. Matthew’s Drive-Through Church, he had been steeped in college debt, risking a massive bank loan on the idea that church without the service could make him rich quick. Instead of attending a lengthy, time consuming church service, all a good Christian needed to do was spend five minutes on the way to the golf course or the gym and roll through the Drive-Through Church where someone would hand them a bag with a mouthful of wine, a slice of pita bread, a card with a piece of scripture, and a prayer written by one of the staff. It was simple, short, and most importantly fulfilling. But despite his belief in the idea, it didn’t change the fact that he had been broke and couldn’t afford to screw this one up.

The idea, however, had stuck, and within a month his staff consisting of himself and Daniel had grown to include several ordained ministers and two young college graduates to work in marketing. Lionel was supposedly an ordained minister himself, or that’s what the certificate hanging in his office proclaimed, but in actuality he had an undergrad degree in Marketing from Tennessee. He figured if he was going to start a church it would be best if everyone believed he was religious despite the fact that he found the entire institution ridiculous.

“Lionel, there’s someone here to see you,” Tina’s voice chimed as she stuck her head in the door. Sitting up straight, Lionel nodded for her to send the person in, plastering on his smile once more. One look at Daniel sent his partner packing, leaving Lionel to wait alone for his mystery guest.

He did not have to wait long until a young, middle-aged blond woman with big cheeks and watery blue eyes shuffled into the room. She was dressed in a simple, lavender button down paired with jeans that were most likely from Target and a heavy coat of red lipstick that made her appear sick and pale. All at once Lionel’s smile felt particularly forced.

“I’m Lionel,” he said, getting to his feet to shake her hand and motioning her into the seat next to him. Her grasp was surprisingly strong despite her unimposing appearance.

“Yes I know,” she chimed. Her voice was breathy as if she was on the brink of tears at any moment.

“May I ask your name?”

“Laura Anne Reich,” she sighed.

“Pleased to meet you,” Lionel said. Laura Anne nodded as if she agreed, although

Lionel wasn't certain that she had heard because she was busy scanning the conference room walls.

"I have the same scripture hanging on my wall," she said, pointing to a verse from Psalms that Lionel had bought for five dollars at Hobby Lobby. It was a pasty yellow color with archaic style font and a cartoon lamb in the bottom corner; it was probably designed for a child's nursery.

"It's my favorite Psalm," Lionel lied. He had never even read the entire piece.

"It's a good one."

There was a pause in the conversation while Laura Anne adjusted herself in her seat.

"What can I do for you today?" Lionel asked.

"Well, my family has been struggling recently," she said airily. "My husband was a preacher at a local ministry just outside of town, but he was recently let go. They cut several staff members."

"My sincerest condolences," Lionel said, framing his face in what he hoped was a concerned look.

"Yes, thank you," She breathed. Laura Anne's voice was beginning to grate on Lionel.

"Is there anything I can do for you? We have several ministers who can pray for you and your family if you feel you need support from the Lord, or if there is anything else?"

"Thank you, prayers would be appreciated." Laura Anne's hands wandered to her purse where they rummaged through the contents and extracted the red lipstick that didn't suit her.

"What we really need," she sighed. Lionel thought he might gag if he had to look at her for much longer, let alone listen to her dry tones. "Is a job for my husband. We've been looking at all the local ministries and they all have established staff and we heard that Saint Matthew's was expanding and we wondered if there was a position for my husband?"

Lionel didn't know how she knew that the Drive-Through church was opening new locations considering it had just been released to his staff earlier that day, but he did not care. He felt his smile became genuine and without knowing it, he leaned forward toward her.

"You said that your husband was a minister?"

"Yes. He's worked in ministry for some time."

"Well it just so happens that we are opening two new branches and we may be able to find a place for him. What's his name?" Lionel asked. Laura Anne let out an airy laugh and blinked her watery eyes several times.

"I completely forgot to tell you. He would be here himself, you know, but this was the only time that he could meet with someone at First Ministry downtown. His name is Murphy."

"Well have him call me and I'm sure that we can get something worked out," Lionel said, fishing in his coat pocket and pulling out his custom business cards. Getting to his feet, he escorted Laura Anne through the building toward the door participating in light small talk. She thanked Lionel before escorting herself to a modest, red Honda and zipping away. Lionel watched her go with a smirk. *If there really is a God, he sure is looking out for me*

he thought. Two new branches, one new minister, and no work done on his part. He could already feel the cash that would stuff his wallet.

Four months later Lionel found himself perched behind his desk, listening as Daniel droned on and on about the Selma location. They had been talking about revenues for the past four hours and he could feel a headache beginning to come on.

“The Tuskegee branch still has low attendance, but the numbers show that the advertisements have been working. I think another minor investment will see huge returns and then we can cut of spending on marketing and rely on word of mouth.”

“Fine, fine,” Lionel groaned, sliding down in his chair and propping his feet up on his desk. “And Selma?”

“There haven’t been any issues. Their attendance is much higher than in Tuskegee and we haven’t had to invest anything besides initial costs,” Daniel said, flipping through several packets in front of him.

“And what about Murphy?”

“He’s still not reporting,” Daniel said with a grimace.

This time Lionel groaned audibly. When the Selma location opened three months ago, Lionel established Murphy as the chief minister and supplied him with several other staff members. The local congregation loved Father Reich as they called him, and the one time that Lionel had actually met him, he had seemed pleasant enough, albeit slightly bashful. However, Murphy had failed to follow the only ruled laid out for him by headquarters: he was required to disclose all information that pertained to income and expenses. They had received only a handful of emails from Murphy since the sector had opened in Selma. Lionel had tried to be patient, crediting his silence with high levels of stress and overall business, but Lionel was tired of waiting.

“Have you reached out to him again?” Lionel demanded.

“We’ve sent him several emails, contacted his secretary Margaret a few times, and even sent Tina down to check on how things are going. I think he may just be too quiet and unsure of himself to make demands of his staff to get the information to send us.” Lionel scoffed.

“All he has to do is send us an email with attachments to the spreadsheets his staff has been keeping. You don’t have to be outgoing to do that.”

“Do you want me to call him again?” Daniel asked. Lionel considered this, but decided against it. Every time someone from his branch called to speak to Murphy, he was always mysteriously unable to speak on the phone.

“I’ll call his cell,” Lionel replied. “If he ignores me, I’ll fire him.”

Lionel hoped he sounded much more confident than he felt. The truth was, the thought of firing Murphy was as unappealing as the phone call he was about to make. Headquarters had received plentiful positive feedback about the positive message of Murphy’s ministry, and Lionel feared that firing his top minister might cause attendance to drop. *But he’s not disclosing* Lionel reminded himself. *He could be stealing money and we’d never know.* The thought of his precious, hard earned greenbacks gave Lionel the nerve to

whip out his new smartphone and pull up Murphy's contact. The phone rang four times before the other side picked up with a click.

"Hello?" A tart woman's voice said through the speakers. Lionel remained silent for a moment, expecting to hear the whimpering voice of Murphy on the other side.

"Hello? Yes this is Lionel calling to speak with Murphy."

"I'm sorry, Murphy is unable to come to the phone right now," the woman's voice snapped. Pulling the phone away from his face and covering the receiver with his hand, Lionel swore, feeling the headache he'd been holding back all day coming into full bloom.

"Who is this?" Lionel demanded, no longer interested in formalities.

"Laura Anne," she replied quickly.

Lionel felt his jaw drop as he pulled to mind the pudgy cheeked, watery eyed, blonde woman whose voice reminded him of air rushing out of a balloon. The woman he was now speaking with bore no relation to the woman he had met.

"I'm sorry Laura Anne, but I need to speak with your husband. It's about our disclosure policy."

"He's not able to come to the phone," Laura Anne repeated coolly. Lionel's grip on his phone tightened.

"Frankly, Laura Anne," he spat, "I don't care. Your husband has blantly been disrespecting orders from headquarters and either he will answer the phone or you will find yourself once again looking for a job."

To his horror Laura Anne laughed.

"Will we? What, are you scared that we're stealing your money?" She jabbed. Lionel's mouth fell open further. "If you're going to open a church, you could at least make it more convincing that you actually care about what you're doing."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lionel screamed.

"Don't you?" She was laughing again and a hint of her previous breathy voice slid through the speaker. "I saw your certificate hanging in your office the day I came to speak with you. I know you bought it offline."

"How dare you!" Spit was flying from Lionel's mouth as he listened to her laugh. "I'll fire him! I'll fire him! I'll-I'll-I'll tell everyone you're stealing from God's house!"

"No you won't," she laughed. "And if you try to, we'll pull up the website your degree comes from and you'll not only be losing money from Selma but you'll lose all your income as well."

"You can't prove anything," Lionel said, but his fire was gone.

"Yes I can, and you know it. We're both quite happy with where we are financially right now and we wouldn't want you to mess it up."

"How'd you know," he finally whispered. "How'd you know it was a fake?" Again Laura Anne laughed, her voice growing louder with each exhale.

"I bought Murphy the same one four months ago," she said, and then the call ended with a click.

The Joy Drive

photo and poem by Charlotte McRae

if you get the chance
drive mindlessly for me
allow your mind to bounce
and curdle to
the old car speakers
allow your hands to grip
and your feet to extend
upon pedals
allow your body to pilot
and your mind to nap
in yellow woods and wet windows

allow yourself to get lost
and then do it all again.



Homeless

By Anna Howell

They say that home is where the heart is.
What happens when hearts no longer feel?
Becoming a drained organ, trapped beneath the skin- and nothing more.
One that is just barely beating, struggling to survive.

Does this mean you have no home?
No place for peace, comfort, or stability.
As if you've been left alone, stranded in the bitter cold,
You look within to find the answer.
Surely it's somewhere.

Parts of yourself have gone astray, all the good memories are gone.
All that remains are the memories you wanted most to forget.
You've grown too tired and fatigued to care.

It feels like you are living in a stranger's body.
But this composition of scars, flesh, and bones is entirely your own.
Nothing could change that even if you tried.
You destroyed your body for a peace of mind that never came.
And now comes the inevitable reality to face.
You lost your home. You lost your body. And you lost your mind.



*drawing by
Charlotte McRae*

Caesar
drawing and poem by Charlotte McRae

Inevitable age
Can be heard from under my bed
Under his wheeze
Under his dusty dog skin
Under his 12
(he would say 84)
years

Ti
me
pass
es
Under his grave

Ti
me
ceas
es
Under his grave



A Game of Chess

By Katherine Grace Moore

“Kiss me,” she whispers.

“Not now,” a trail of slime follows his voice as it crawls into her ear.

“Why not?”

“Because I said so,”

“That’s not what you said to-”

“I said nothing!” he pushes her onto the bed and forces his left hand to her face.

“See? What does this mean, Bonnie? Tell me what this means,” as he speaks she rolls over to the other side of the bed.

“Leave me alone, James!” she rolls off the bed and into a pile of musty, lavender scented clothes.

“Bonnie. Please now, darling.” a smile stretches across the man’s face under wrinkled eyes.

The woman crawls under the bed. The sound of footsteps encircle her fortress.

“Bonnie. Tell me what this means,” there is a sudden loud clink of metal followed by a white silence. A musty smell lies vacantly in the air. “Bonnie. Come out, please. We need to talk,” he bends down and slips the fallen piece of metal around his finger, and then bends further down to look under the bed.

“You’re a monster!” she shouts, slapping his hand as he slips it under the bed to her.

“Oh, so *I’m* the monster here? Then what do I call you?” he grabs her arm and drags her out from under the bed. “A siren? Enchantress? Serpent? Well, Mrs. Monster, what shall it be?”

She falls helpless in his arms, “I want to be left alone!”

“Not now,”

“Why not?”

“Because I said so.” he declares.

“But-”

“Enough of this foolery. Mrs. Monster, which of us is more foul? The aware or the unaware?”

“It couldn’t be helped-”

“Yes it could! You don’t just do that, Bonnie-”

“You’re drunk! You aren’t making any sense-”

“Shut it,” he pushes her to the ground and holds her down with his boot upon her skirt.

“Monster!” she wails as she crawls toward the door.

“Medusa,” the word slithers off his tongue, “Seductrice.”

She claws at the splintering floor.

“Please, James-” her voice quivers.

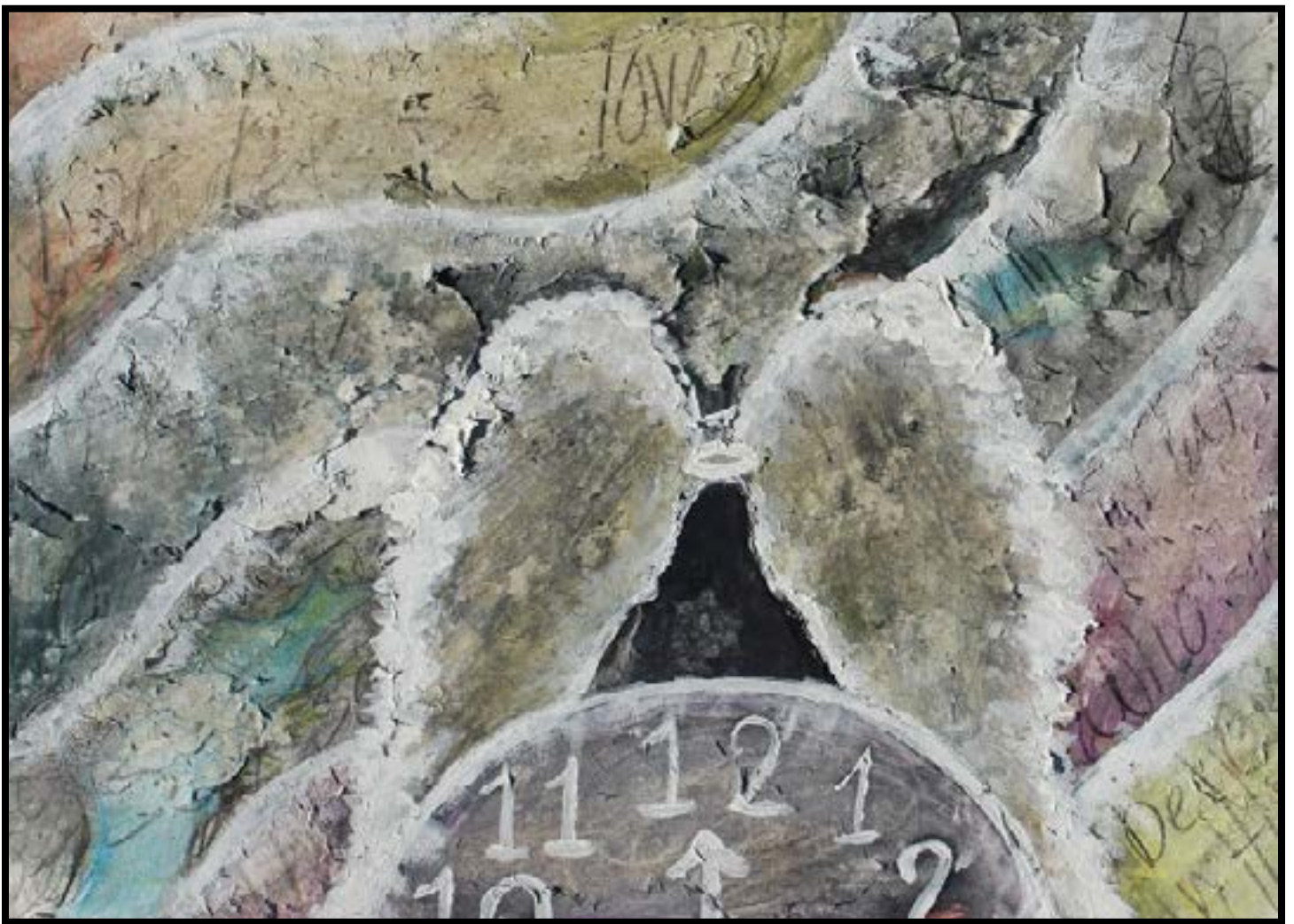
“Angel of darkness,” he reaches down and grabs the back of her skirt, pulling up violently so that it tears at the hip seam.

“Monster!” she tears the few final strands and scrambles with splintered hands to the door.

“Mrs. Monster? Was there something you needed? Oh, the door. Let me help you with that,” he runs up to the door and slams it over her delicate fingers. Her fingernails pull up like hinges and fall like coins to the floor.

A fueled scream explodes from the woman’s strained lungs as the man bends down to her face. She meets his cold, grey eyes with her own.

“Checkmate,” he murmurs.



*Mixed Media by
Katherine Grace Moore*

**Which do you prefer? A small change on a big scale or a big change on a small scale?
*painting and poem by Charlotte McRae***

Don't talk to me about scales. I have dealt too darkly with them, trapped in places where girls and boys spin their worth on numbers and scales and changes. Scales are objects we use in order to understand things relatively. They are means of comparison with the potential to skew people's minds, as I have seen. To answer the question, I believe neither circumstance exists. Rather, I feel changes occur, and the scale upon which they develop is irrelevant. More importantly is the scale in which we react to the shifts and our attitude towards the alteration. Do we accept the change with grace or do we fight it? I have found the course of life and its transformations cannot be battled nor contrasted. So, whether on a large scale or small scale does not matter, for Change's only path is towards rebirth. There is no comparison nor scale for renewal.



Girl-obsessed

By Georgia Nelson

“Kiss me” echoes in my head
my heart pounds in my chest
a million things left unsaid
eternally recessed

viridescent eyes
and bitten lips
her hair routinely messed

thoughts immobile
freckles focal
phantom lungs compressed

she looks at me like a nympho
my heart lodged in my throat
says she has an old soul
emotion unrevoked

bleeding nails
and star-kissed cheeks
beauty, self-professed

tired skin
and kinky mind
mentally undressed

electric body
perfect oddity
clearly girl-obsessed



*Mixed Media by
Frances Hancock*

Binary

By Charlotte McRae

Frozen flames ablaze,
My mind knows two gravities
I am confused and under
a daylight of moons
a slumber of suns.
The stem between my brain is turgid
I want to mend.



*Photograph by
Mabry Crane*

Flying Susans

By Adelaide Kimberly

From where I lay on the couch, I could see the black eyed susans flying across our yard between the strips in our blinds. They arced through a cloudless sky to land scattered across the grass exploding like dirt grenades; a few even managing to roll into the gutter where they sprawled like snakes on warm rocks. Despite their sudden uprooting, the plants still clasped the dirt they had recently evacuated, the thin, white veins clinging desperately to the earth. A smattering of yellow petals that were lost mid-flight fluttered to the ground as a form of last memento before they disappeared from my point of view. Every thirty seconds or so another flower went streaking across my line of vision towards the street, breaking the dull monotony of the Tuesday morning suburban landscape. Occasionally my mother's head or a stray hand coated in dirt could be seen through the blinds, but the steady flight of susans had not stopped since around ten in the morning.

Besides the echoes of snapping roots or the rumble of a car engine, the only other sound to break the silence was the monotone mumbling of a television coming from the far corner of the house. On a typical Tuesday, I would be sitting in my advanced pre-calculus class listening to my teacher Mr. Skilinski drone on about trigonometric functions, but this morning I had awoken with a raging headache which was quickly followed by a resurfacing of last night's taco dinner. So now, here I was laying on my couch watching the black eyed susans that my mother prided herself in fly across our yard and trying to decide if I could stomach to eat a few dry saltines. Without the company of my dad, who was at work, my younger sister, who was at school, or my cat lemon, which had abandoned me to supervise my mother's work, I had nothing to do but sit and watch.

However, my curiosity turned to concern when it changed from susans to roses flying through the air. *Surely not* I mused as I sat up to get a better view of my mom as she worked. But upon adjusting my angle, sure enough I saw her tearing savagely at the creeping rose which ran up the railing to our porch. Her face was red and bloated with sweat like a fish which had been laying on a baking dock under midday sun -- I was sure that she smelled like one too. Shuffling through the house, I mustered my strength and yanked open the heavy glass front door.

The air outside was heavy with what smelled like freshly mowed grass, but I knew it was the aftermath of the flower rampage. As for my mom, she made no notice of me as the door slid open. I watched in silence for several minutes as her fingers tore at petals and leaves and branches, throwing each of them to the ground in turn.

"Mom?" I posed, my voice hoarse from this morning's vomiting episode.

"Go inside," she snapped without glancing up. My eyebrows seemed to eat my forehead they shot up so quickly and my stomach churned, threatening to repeat its actions from earlier. Her voice was dry as twigs and cracked like the logs in our fire on Christmas morning. Her hands moved faster, grabbing entire vines and ripping them from the railing by using her entire body weight to yank them from the wood. Pops and cracks

filled the air as the vines snapped under her fury, occasionally she let out a small gasp of pain before redoubling her efforts. As I watched, my mom stopped to wipe her hands on her shirt, leaving a smear of red where her hands touched her white, cotton v-neck. My already weakened stomach blanched as I watched the crimson liquid flowing across her shirt, ribbons of blood dripping down onto her legs. *The thorns are ripping up her hands* I realized shock, feeling my body threaten to convulse as my mother once again attacked the rose vine, wrapping her delicate skin around the bristly branches.

“I’m going to get you some bandaids,” I said to her before turning on my heels and disappearing back through the doorway, desperate to escape the hurricane of bloody flower petals that were flying around outside.

The house echoed with my footsteps as I stumbled through the halls, attempting to shove thoughts of my mother’s damaged skin from my mind. *Where are the bandaids? Mom’s room.* I directed my feet towards the far corner of the house, listening as the sounds of the television that had been left on grew louder. My fingers shook as they wrapped themselves around the railing, my breathing was ragged as I clambered up the steps. Of course my mom would choose today, when I was on death’s doorstep, to go insane.

The sounds of newscaster’s voices became clear as I reached the landing, peeling to the right towards my parents bedroom. *Band-aids* I reminded myself.

“We’re off to Jacob who has ground coverage for us,” a male voice said in a businesslike manner. I ignored him as I tumbled into my parent’s room, beelining for the bathroom where I knew the band-aids were hidden behind the mirror. The box was small and pristine and I had to force myself not to imagine my mom’s bloody hands soiling the white cardboard. Closing the cabinet, I turned back into the room, my eyes passing over the T.V. screen in the far corner.

My feet wound to a halt as I watched the pixels dilate across the room, voices pounded against my ears. I paused for one second, and then two. The band aids slid from my clammy finger tips, the box hitting the ground seconds before I bent to face the floor so that I wouldn’t throw up on the bed.

Wisp

By Charlotte McRae

I feel like I'm always reconsidering

Well not those times our lips are stuck

And

Like I tried to describe once

Our cheeks move in such an uncontrollable dance

And

I let my hand levitate

To your hair

And

Like an artist,

I render my care cubistically;

Wholistically.

At those times I don't reconsider

And

Your heartbeat

from that chamber I don't know fully quite yet

Penetrates my goosebumps

But am I myself

I've never been in love--

Well not this wispy kind

Am I supposed to be confused

Confused be to supposed I am.



*Photography by
David Faulkner*



Procrastination
By Virginia Waters

*Photography by
Adelaide Kimberly*

I keep waiting
for some
unexpected
alteration,
you can see it
in the shadows on the floor
and the stillness of the chairs
and the fingerprints
smudging the windows
painted shut
too long

The Palace of Prejudice

By Thomas Cooney

I am from the palace of prejudice,
I am from old ideals.
Where the few are tolerant,
Where the persecuted escape by their heel.

I am the product of old money and new hatred,
I am from the church of the chosen few.
Where we have the only keys to the kingdom,
Where we spit at those who dare stand at the gate.

I am from the city of melted dreams,
I am forged in fires of yesteryear.
Where they sit in the cold settled ashes,
Where they wait for the fires to burn once more.

I am from the palace of prejudice,
I am from the closed off community.
Where the different are few and far between,
Where no one has immunity from bigotry and bias.



*Photography by
Warren Fitzpatrick*

My Open Skylight

By Zoe Allen

I looked up at the sun. But, it wasn't really the sun. It was just an image of the sun, seen through an inch thick panel of glass that was in desperate need of cleaning. So, I looked up at a distortion of the sun. And, because of the tainted glass, the light seemed more out of reach than ever before. The barrier was so obvious, and the light was so far away. Hopefully someone would realize that the skylight needed to be cleaned soon. But, I certainly wouldn't be the one to clean it. So, I continued on to an area of the building that was sheltered by ceiling.

I continued down an adjoining hallway. With every step, the echoing of my footsteps resounded through my veins. I slowed my pace. Each step was delicately taken, so the sound of the echo was not as rattling. There was no need to hurry. My schedule was cleared.

When moving at a painfully slow pace, you notice a lot about your surroundings. I noticed every single shade of grey in the hallway. Someone must have liked the color grey. I prefer pure black and white.

I finally made it to the threshold of the last door of the hallway. The room was comfortably bare with only two windows and no skylight. There was one table in the room. The table supported only two objects. One crystal glass. One plastic pitcher. I took the pitcher and poured myself a glass. I examined the contents of the glass that refused to settle to a stagnant state. Without thinking for any longer, I downed the glass. I felt the liquid flow down my throat. It purified my insides to a deep white.



*Photography by
William Scott*

Beyond The Ethereal Sea

By Clay Harkins

Have you ever wondered what lies beyond the ethereal sea? Did you ever think of the probabilities of impossible possibilities that you never got to experience due to your binding relationship with gravity? Look up to the stars to take the gifts you never received, to ponder on the thoughts you never perceived, to drift from this earth that seemed impossible to leave. But one day lest all you gained was in vain, you must return to this earth because now it is not only to gravity, but also to responsibility that you are bound. The duty, the honor, and the humility that comes with imagination and creativity is now your burden to cherish. This wonderful weight that will lead others to gaze upon the space that dawned on you the ability to set them free, to allow the insomniacs to dream, and the mute to sing. This cumbersome gift will continue to live after you have given your last breath. Because no matter what the human spirit cannot be conquered by death.



*Photography by
Mabry Crane*

Goodbye Forever

By Alden Gibbs

Hot tears fall from her face
Like geysers of woe
For no one understands
Not even him
And hopefully they never will
The pain is unbearable

As she opens her eyes she can see him staring
As she turns her head she hears footsteps running
But he never runs the full distance
The foolish hunter always stops for a drink
And takes long, slow sips that pull him further away from her

By the time he realizes what he has done
He sprints to catch up
But the deed has been done
She has already crossed the finish line

She waited for as long as she could
But her legs got tired
Just as her heart

She hears his pleading call but forces herself to ignore it
Just as he had unintentionally ignored hers

Goodbye forever.

homecoming

Sophie Nadler

it is monday,
and his mother has finally grasped
that her son will never see
the earth turn green again.

he decides not to tell her
that he didn't want to see flowers
in the end anyway

for he is drawn to the leaves
floating through the air,
a flesh that crumbles like his own.

it is monday,
and as the sun strikes the asphalt,
he feels himself begin to melt with the ice.



photograph by Murray Brown

340 Meters Per Second

Price Delk

I received numerous honks and thumbs up that Tuesday after football on my way to the Chevron. The local elder, sporting his plaid gatsby hat, who claims he drove “one of those” in high school and fellow motor heads frequently acknowledge my sweet ride when I zoom by. I could have sworn I had filled it with gas just last week, but my hasty mental math in lieu of a standard gas gauge tells me I should play it safe. Properly functioning turn signals, brake lights, and rear safety belts were all minor details missing from the car. Thank goodness the two twelve inch subwoofers worked though. We clearly had our priorities straight while repairing the car.

Dad, being the go getter he is, decided when I was thirteen to suddenly erect a shop, similar to a Jiffy Lube, of a not so meager one thousand square feet in our backyard to rebuild some classic cars. Granted he had limited (to say the least) experience with this so called “hot rodding” business, he felt strongly about the project. He equipped himself with thousands of tools, a car lift, an air compressor, plasma cutter, and anything he thought he might ever need to rebuild a vehicle. Little did I know, the search for my first car had long since begun. We started shopping online for unrestored “project cars” from Craigslist and stumbled across my dream car: a 1969 Ford Mustang *Mach 1*. For those who are unaware of how cool this car is, it is essentially Hank Aaron’s bat to a sports fanatic or free Louis Vuitton gear to a fashionista. This is the HolyGrail of classic cars. And it was all mine.

The only thing was the grail was just a shell. It had no engine, no steering wheel, no suspension, nothing but the frame and the faded red body. So we set to work. We spent weekends together, some weekdays when the homework was manageable, mornings before school, nights after Dad got home from work, any chance we could squeeze in to get to work on our car. We exhausted our spare time on one *sest*, our creative term for “session” that was developed in our studio that was the garage, just to install one U-joint, bleed the brakes, or manufacture the drive shaft safety loop. Our casual hobby quickly transformed into a life-consuming commitment. Just a mere three years later, we neared the end of the project, and a feeling of apprehension overcame me. Maybe I was scared of the inevitability of wrecking a six-figure car. Maybe I wanted to have something to always tinker and occupy myself with. Maybe I wanted an excuse to stay up past my unreasonably early bedtime.

No matter my desire to prevent it, the inevitable ribbon-cutting blitzkrieged upon us. A glossy candy apple red paint job and countless hours later, our Mustang was finished besides the ever present blinker and brake light issue. *Close enough for government work* as Dad always says. My car’s initiation on the road was nothing short of memorable. I will never forget the rank odor of burning plastic flooding through the downed windows that couldn’t be rolled up and the fluidity of the transmission as I hammered through the gears. The memory of holding our breath and closing our eyes as we traversed through Leach Street, which teemed of potholes, for fear of a carelessly untightened bolt coming loose. I could never erase the look of pure, true joy and pride in my father’s eyes. We did this. We

built this car from nothing. Every bolt, every screw, every wire.

I was idling at a red light on Euclid Avenue when a middle-aged mom rear-ended me. I glanced in my rearview and looked back at the car in front of me. The superficial apologetic face of the blonde in the Hyundai confirmed my actual nightmare. All of my work, for four years, has now been defaced in a division of a second. Whether major or minor, I would be upset. I pulled into a side street and she followed me, waving as if it was enough to say *sorry*. I stayed in my seat and stared at the kid playing catch with his dad in his tee ball Cubs cap in the yard across the street. The woman interrupted my view of the game, and I realized I had to deal with this. I lumbered out of my car and could not take my eyes off of the dent. Crushed in at a forty degree angle, the original '69 chrome made the license plate sit awkwardly and uncomfortably in a crooked position. My hands fell by my side as I listened to Charlie Brown's teacher rant. She rambled on about how she swore she was paying attention and that there was no visible damage. How someone can ram a car at a dead stop while paying attention still escapes me. She wrote her name and contact info on a polka-dotted sticky note and told me to give it to my mom in case I lost it. She mentioned she was late to picking her daughter up from her piano lessons then sped off, her car undamaged. I, meanwhile, sat down in the black driver's seat with its red stitching and called Dad. I tried not to cry.

With Dad's words of *you drive 'em down and build 'em up* echoing in my head, I came to the conclusion of why it stung so much. This was more than just a cool car. More than mere days spent in the shop. This was a tangible relationship of a father and his son. It was a memory, both developed and developing, of the *knuckle busters* and the *bonked heads*, the jokes, the sweat, the frustrations, all captured into one car. I realized that I didn't want to cross the finish line because I didn't want my rich relationship with my father to have a finish line. It was more than just tightening bolts and welding sheet metal. It was welding the bond between Dad and me. I craved putting the car together every day not so I could get behind the wheel of a fast car, but because it meant more time with Jimbo. Some people call me crazy for loving a car so much or for crying that day, but if only they knew. If only they knew the unforgettable, life-molding, irreplaceable memories that the Mach 1 held within its red and black steel, then I think they'd begin to understand. But my dad was right. Our memory had been driven down, but this was not a time for mourning. This was a time for rebuilding. And rebuild we would.

nostalgia

by Sophie Nadler

I read the yellowed pages
that preserve
December 16th, 1992.

inside is a life I've never lived;
the shell of an ant
crystallized in tree sap,
its small soul intact within.

my breathing heightens
upon seeing the
quick strokes of black ink,
words which
bore brutishly
into the notebook's core
amidst a battle between
paper, pen, and mind.

and I feel it all
vicariously,
the yearning that bleeds
from the pen's nib
like an open wound;
the burning tears
that buckle knees
and scathe the skin
like acid.

I feel it as if it were my own.

photograph by Tara Henderson



Peaches and Cream

By Georgia Nelson

Water drizzles down the broken gutter,
From last night's storm,
falling from the sharp, rusted edge,
down to the crisp, clear puddle beneath it,
sparkling like stars in the night.
You're still in bed, eating your usual Summer breakfast,
as your wife lays next to you.
She's in your old college t-shirt
with her hair pulled back
probably from the day before.
She's like peaches and cream,
in the morning.
Dipped in white linen sheets,
clean and cool,
they wrap and flow around her,
grabbing at every curve and peak.
Glimpses of speckled skin,
delicate and decadent,
coming in and out of vision
As she twists and turns.
Silky, blonde peach fuzz
catches the soft light of dawn
casted through worn, tired windows.
Warm golden hair,
red bitten cheeks,
slinking lines that plunge and climb,
giving her a figure so ample and enticing.
You touch her gently,
so as to not bruise her fragile bones,
as her scent draws you in.
Sweet as sugar and hot as spice
Begging you to take a bite.

A Daughter's Perspective

Sophie Nadler

I say,
"don't you hate him?"
and he mumbles back:
"you may not need a father,
but I do."

across the hall,
mother is a meek child,
walking in light steps
that apply enough warmth
to dull the points of the icicles
before they fall.

to me, her rain feels more like thunder,
to me, its faintness sinks to the center of the earth
to boil and bubble and spit.

dad mumbles half-truths,
brittle branches of dying trees
to soften our beating hearts.

he says, "I love you and I'm sorry"
by slamming the car door
so violently that remnants of wood splinter in my stomach.

time has taught us to be silent,
but threads weave in the back of my mind,
crafting web of resentment
able to capture even
the most beautiful butterfly.

it snows in my bedroom
when dad is gone-
little powdered sugar flakes
that brush the crown of my forehead.

my teeth chatter at his absence,
lowering the temperature
with each sound breath
until I wonder
if it is better to be alone.



The Inexorable
Sophie Nadler

*Photography by
Adelaide Kimberly*

I look at him and see her,
the tar in my words
clinging to phantom blonde hair.

what was once bleached
and fried straight as straw
bubbles and melts,
shrinking so violently
that both mother and son
become one amidst the fog.

I watch his face,
once a Picasso sketch
with two glowing eyes,
dim and quiver
into his mother's
overripe smile

and in this moment
I know I have lost.

Oma

By Sarah Beth Daniel

Red nails always distracted from her arthritic hands,
Brown from sun, age,
And undisclosed heritage.

Bright patterns, fake jewels, and large rings
Always made me wonder
“What was a gypsy doing in Huntsville?”

Her lipstick was as red as the gardenias that held her pride.
Classic, fading beauty,
Embodied everything she had been.

I don't see her in the mirror.
I see her in my mother's laugh
I see her every time I look down at my hands.

Gardenia petals fall and tomato vines rot
Next to the vacant dog house
Overlooking the garden that tended to my infantile imagination.

It's taken all to come back.
Cotton fields roll past the windows
And magnolias taint the air.

A trek to find memories
Led to my soul crying from the dirt
Of an overgrown garden, of phantom gardenias.

From the ivy clinging to brick
I saw her reach for me
Until my hand hit my reflection in the glass.

Something To Remember

Sophie Nadler

they are now precious dirt in the ground
and when we reach the same fate,
no one will remember
the way we'd really like them to,
but there's comfort in knowing
that they'll still have the tapes.

i mean its fourteen years later
and my hands still clench
when the plane plunges
into the building's torso
and all there is is blood and dust,
crumbling bones and empty bodies
with the souls bursting out.

the sky spins itself into a blinding wall of dust
composed of desperate confusion and ashes
that once were hopes and dreams,
burning through the wide eyes watching,
straight into our brains.

we all know what stirred
beneath the veil of dust;
we play it over and over
in our minds like a movie,
except movies aren't real
and god can't be real
and my eyes weren't there
for the dust to sting.



*Photography by
Warren Fitzpatrick*

A Silent Winter

Chandler Cox

It was a cold day in December as John gazed out of the window. He looked at the dead trees. The beautiful scenery he had once known was now colorless. Cattle remained still in the frozen fields, and all was quiet. John looked over the farm. His eyes made way towards the horizon to see a familiar blue pickup return. Dust rose from the dirt road. Charles parked the truck and stepped out. John walked down stairs to meet his brother at the door.

“God, it’s good to see you, brother,” said John.

John and Charles sat down on the couch and talked about the Charles’ experiences overseas. His words lacked enthusiasm. His eyes lacked the sense of hope that John had once been so familiar with.

“Did you look into his eyes when you did it?”

“No.”

“That took lots of gut,” John went on. “Not many men have the strength to do that.”

“It was only part of the mission.”

“What is it like? Do you feel like a different person?”

“I’m just doing my job.”

“I don’t think I could’ve done that to another human.”

“It isn’t something anyone should have to do. Somebody has to though.”

“When do you go back?” asked the John.

“Too soon,” Charles replied. He set his glass of whiskey down.

John looked for answers in his brother’s solemn expression. It was as if he was looking into the face of a ghost. A sense of concern arose. Charles was scarred from the inside out. There were no signs of life left in the soldier.

John stood up and walked upstairs towards his bedroom.

“Night Chuck.”

As John laid in bed, he looked out of his window once again. It was dark. He couldn’t see the trees or cattle. There was nothing. He cut his lamp off and went to sleep.

Charles made his way to the study. He sat down in the desk. He gazed at the picture frame of the two brothers. He lit a cigar. Reaching into the bottom left drawer, he pulled out a .44 magnum and polished it. The brother placed the handgun next to the frame. There was a silence throughout the house. He put his cigar out in the ashtray and closed his eyes.



*photograph by
Kate Spurlock*

being human
Sophie Nadler

we touch,
rummage really,
from one thing to the next.
the stars are nice, sure,
but is that really why
you brought me here?
you find pleasure
through the underwire that presses
against my flesh
but i cannot.
symbiotic;
sadist meets masochist
but hell, i'll play your game
and leave it.
as long as it's candyland.
i don't care for monopoly;
it's far too long.
I'm in a rush.

“D.C. - Destruction of Capital”

Mary Louise Howland

As I gaze out the window of my room,
I see the sun shining down upon grass.
It shines green, and lies lush surrounding me.
Inside the pure White House, I calmly sit.
But this is just the calm before the storm.
I await the danger, I have been warned.

I hear branches crushing, armor clashing.
I see the british approaching the house.
Swiftly, the pure house begins to darken.
The green and vibrant grounds I once knew now,
turned into smoke and red flames and burned ash.
White House weeps in sorrow before falling.

The roaring red flames heat the capitol.
The fire surrounds the city with smoke.
Thick smoke leaves everyone gasping for air.
It was as if living in a nightmare.
It was endless terror with no way out.
A once pure White House, now turned into ash.

The death of the White House is not the end.
Our great nation will be reborn again.
Our country is still alive and thriving.
This may be the death of our capital,
But it is not the death of our nation.
With a greater strength than ever before,
From ashes, nationality is born.

*photograph by
Kendall Alby*



XXIII.

Adelaide Kimberly

There is a pause between each of your steps.
Careful consideration
of the relativity
between your knees and ankles,
complex bowing and arching of
bones and ligaments.

There is not a pause between your words.
Flowing, flowing, steady
over mountains, voice raised for war.
Or perhaps just for song,
because if the Earth is moving in a straight line
and it is only gravity curving space,
then what, say, is the difference
between laughing and dying?

Nor is there a pause in the
gentle spread between gums
and teeth.
No strings to lip lock
or stoically subdue
the forty two muscles
it takes to smile.

There is, of course,
relativity to stops and starts,
starts and stops.
We are moving and stationary at once,
but the relativity is the same.

I wanted to talk of the Earth
and you of tin cans orbiting,
circling, circling, the globe,
but it is the same.

“Sectionalism”
Mary Louise Howland

As I walk down the streets of this town, I am overcome by the actions and emotions of those
all around.

A man, a woman and a child, all busily working and wandering making our nation's growth
go wild.

Behind every face is a story untold, As I look around many looks are chilling cold. Some
are living in pain, but hiding it with a look so brave, when deep down they are hiding that
they were a slave.

I think of this controversial topic, it seems unreal and so horrid, as it should be apart of a
story told gothic.

Sentiments of slavery vary in many different ways, some view slavery with haze, as one prays
for its end, and others view slavery with praise.

Along with slavery in the spotlight, violence has flashed its light.

I hear of John Brown and his men who are strongly against slavery, raid and attack humans
and towns with much bravery.

The disagreement between slavery and a free state, provokes emotions of sadness and to-
wards each other, hate.

I now see that separation thus begins, where the North and South have disunion within.

Amongst the separation so crazy, people in America, attempting to contribute to the
growth of our nation, working so greatly.

I believe that with the Cotton Gin and the railroad system, the growth of our nation seems
to be in mint condition.

Then Abe Lincoln was elected in 1860, I believe that's when our nation's conditions change
very quickly.

Along with Abe's election, the disintegration of the Whig party created some tension.
The Cotton Gin and Railroads were intended to make our country grow, when in reality it
made our nation grow apart, North vs South, and in different directions did they go. Right
before my eyes, in 1861, that's when the war begun, but not to my surprise.

Disagreement resulted in the South seceding, leading to a civil war, the north and the
south competing.

The war carried on for four years, forming the States of Confederacy, and causing many tears.

Untitled

by Millie Livingston

There is no fear where there is no exposure. I perform, but there is no faltering, no fear. Immersed inside myself, my unknown thoughts release from a cradle of vibration. They emanate from too deep to form words. Every breath I relinquish is protected and transformed, indifferent by the time it condenses into sound. Between lies an ocean, a mass of serenity and storm that cannot be approached. No matter to whom I play, I am protected from vulnerability. My portal travels in one direction; none can trespass. The only one that harbors my feelings is the only one that will never speak without submission. This extension of myself gives me confidence to give all that I have; this part of me. This bulwark, this comfort; this inanimate, this understanding, this cold object; yet so expressively human. A mere horn.



photograph by Ann Marie Eich

“Lost Girl”

Anna Howell

She has lost herself again
Her body is present but her mind is drifting like paper in the wind
The two have grown disconnected, dispersed into separate entities
Until they are merely strangers

She has wandered too far into the woods this time
The darkness of the night sets in across the evergreen oasis
Trapping everything inside of it until the curious break of dawn

She is back where the lost souls come to find themselves
Timidly, she whispers her darkest secrets softly into the earth’s soil
Where they are safely intertwined with the roots of the unborn trees

Oh how she dreads the day when it will grow into a thing of self-hatred and anger
Give her an axe and tell her to chop it down, to start with the trunk
Maybe then she will uncover the strength she has possessed all along

But until that day do not come searching for her
She does not wish to be found
She has to make peace with herself and the world that surrounds her
here in this sanctuary of trees and hidden secrets
In the wilderness



*photograph by
Cole Summersell*

Pensacola

Inspired by Carl Sandburg's "Chicago"

By Virginia Winn

City of Five Flags,
Emerald Coast, sun bathers delight,
Home to dolphins, seagulls and sand dollars;
Bright, warm, inviting,
City of family fun.

I hear you are the Redneck Riviera, which I have witnessed:
tattoos, mullets, tank tops, short shorts, drunken slobs.

And they tell me you are cruel; hurricanes destroy
your sandy beaches.

And they tell me you are filthy; remnants of BP's negligence
still blackening memories.

And this I say to those who doubt and question your value,
I say back to them:

Show me a city where the waves kiss the shore, where family comes together, and dolphins
jump for joy.

Sun kissed,

Playing,

Napping,

Visiting, leaving, returning,

Behind the traffic is a shoreline

longing for tired souls in search of peace,

Like a sinner seeking salvation,

Or a baby's desire for her mother.

Dreaming!

Dreaming of bright inviting warmth,

Under the sun on you white sand,

Proud to be on the Emerald Coast, sun bathers delight.



*Photography by
Warren Fitzpatrick*

Birmingham

Inspired by Carl Sandburg's "Chicago"

By Cole Holmes

The Magic City that grew over night,
The city founded on steel,
Coal mining, iron smelting,
Toiling in the infamous Sloss Furnace,
Home to the Vulcan:

I have heard of your haunting past and I cannot refute it, for I have read the history books and seen the photographs of canines and water hoses.

I have heard you are corrupt, turning a blind eye to the criminal while persecuting the blameless, and I admit it is true.

I have heard you are harsh, and I acknowledge the homeless I have witnessed shivering in the biting cold.

And having conceded these points, I turn my attention to the cynics and scoff at them in their ignorance exclaiming:

Find me a city with workers more upbeat, rising before the sun and breaking their backs 'til it sets, a populace who tends to the needs of others before their own.

A city strong enough to assemble over night and with the power to sustain itself amongst great adversity.

Tough as a two dollar steak, and meaner than a skilletful of rattlesnakes,

Relentless,

Digging,

Destroying,

Arranging,

Molding, melting, remolding.

Through the heavy dust, soot disguising his face, grinning with satisfied eyes,

Held down by the lot fate dealt him grinning like a kid in a candy shop,

Grinning as if he were a rich man never to worry about need,

Gloating and grinning that at his disposal is the greatest city America ever produced, and in his heart a flame that never falters,

Grinning!

Grinning the sly, arrogant, gratifying grin of a champion, dirt-covered, drenched in sweat, coated in grime, honored to be steel supplier, coal miner, iron smelter to the nation and home of the Vulcan looking over the city with contentment.

The Longing Heart

Inspired by T.S. Elliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

By Brooke Gresham

I walk in embraced by the whirling aroma from a pipe, brushing a kiss on the cheeks of many,
Something I should refrain.
The extent of my persona pushes them away,
Unable to reach without a punch.
Hidden deep within a withering soul lies a longing heart,
Thinking with a brain
Is no pain
Compared to the heart inside my head
Wishing it were dead.
Running round on the clock with no end or solution to my desperation.

Love runs like a strong brew
Longing for a cup to be sipped from by you.
But the cup is chipped
Or the brew too strong.
Every man's a chipped cup and
Each woman's brew too strong
Will I be strong enough? Am I too strong?
Will my chance come soon?
Despite my cries?
These unanswered questions leave me cornered.

My longing is inevitable, along with my loneliness
Due to my unholiness.
Cleanse my soul and thoughts, I want no part in this unfulfilling life
No love, but lust
A relationship that is only in my head.
I feel as if I were dead.

Their faces mock, as if I am a disgusting swine
Unworthy of a second
But don't I look fine?
My worry is an addiction of uncertainty,
Self doubt,
Obsession,
Longing,
Only for a glance.
I ask so little, yet I receive less than none.

My love, my love,
Can't you see my pain?
Love is but a gain
There is no light like love, yet I'm surrounded by darkness
There is nowhere to go, but down.
My love is so deep that I drown.

Darwin
by Charlotte McRae

We all have critical limits
Darwin said
 a certain endurance of night
 is required for a plant to
flower

Malcolm, you reek
of night -
black cologne on your skin
likely to soak under your organs.
even your cheek bones
carry aromatic stains
wiped away in waste bins

and when you breathe,
air condenses to graphite
 solid
 ashy
 mark-making device
but no match-maker you say

and when you move,
charcoal scabs cover the clock
and purple threads, your hands
but no use you say
my hands have without her

you can't really tell someone
because it's your own problem
of course
therefore you resort to leaving tubs of salt
 spilling now
dwindles of dopamine
 limping now
because you loved her
 falling now
and you don't have her
 crumpling now

because she is
 gasp now
bi polar
 ripping now

But Malcolm, listen.
Listen
To
Me
This is your critical limit
 the night
 merely a lack of light
 dripping upon your body
in order to bring about your buds
Your own buds



*Photography by
Adelaide Kimberly*

A Glimpse of Heaven
Inspired by T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
by Chandler Cox

On the clouds we walk,
Through the pearly gates,
Hand in hand,
Each stride smaller and smaller.
On the clouds we walk the elegant pathway,
Towards the seemingly endless horizon.
But there is an end,
It slowly magnifies,
As the light of the day recedes.
On the clouds we walk towards our
unknown destination.

Shall we approach a stag and its mate,
Eating together in the endless field of rye,
Standing firmly against the blue sky,
Until a sudden affair,
A rustle in the nearby shrub,
Sends the couple frolicking away,
In a desperate flee from uncertainty.

Continuing our journey among the skies,
We follow the pathway,
Composed of loosening stones,
Winding toward the small village,
Where the old man,
Skin of sand,
Sits and reads his book alone.
We stop and greet him.
The man warns us,
Of our inevitable destiny.

Nothing is heard besides his watch,
Ticking at a familiar rhythm,
Ticking... ticking...
Like the beat of our hearts,
An unnatural beat,
One which leaves me asking myself,
“Where are we?”

On the clouds we walk,
To our ultimate resting spot,
Eyes closing slowly,
Sun setting at the horizon,
A final view of the light,
We will never see again.



*photography by
Frances Hancock*

Fate

by Charlotte McRae

We used to put the ants on macadamia shells,
place them on a river
established from our green hose
that mommy worked so hard
to keep coiled

We'd snatch our heels
and throw them down the driveway
to follow our sails
of yellowed leaves and
twigly infrastructure

No worries
We made sure the ants reached
the resevoir
It was just a puddle
 "the color swamp"
 with rings of mercury from all the cars' oil
that sat almost boundless

Mommy killed her angel
Gus
the dog that I never trained
to stop chasing cars
 he chased them to heaven
 I left him to chase them to heaven
Via tire skids and
separated little limbs
Avoidable

We saw a crushed skull
looked like a pile of sand, only softer.
the weight of a few red Macadamias
in a puddle of dead dog--
a different puddle than the one we'd send the ants to
 on their play boats and rafts
but the puddles ultimately represented the same destination

dual puddles, one destination
dual decisions, one destination
dual timings, one destination

that is fate
Unavoidable.



*Photography by
Mabry Crane*

Get Ryd-of-thym Blues

Laura Breckenridge

I cover my nose with my hands, but it's too late. The overwhelming stench of chemicals burns my nostrils. I cough. The smell is familiar, but one I can't place until I reach the staircase landing. I stare in shock at the dark blue trails and puddles staining the once pristine hardwood floor. It might have been a beautiful brown and navy abstract if I could have seen anything but the red of my anger. In midst of the chaos sits Anna Louise, naive to the mess she created. A path of blue coats the right side of her face, contrasting with her tan skin and trailing beneath one of her dark brown eyes to her small, pink lips. Blue constellations cover her light green shirt and gray shorts. I debate whether to battle the forming stains or to just trash the outfit all together. Her long legs and tiny feet are patterned with color as she sits comfortably on the floor. But most noticeable of all are her hands, half as small as mine and caked in blue. Her hands have always amazed me. No doubt a unique characteristic of her syndrome, her first finger is longer than her middle finger so they form a perfect stair step. Although they are different from anyone else I know, I see her hands as the perfect design, a creation so delicate and so logical that it is just everyone else's fingers that are odd, not hers. However, her fingers do not look quite so lovely wrapped around a bottle of dark blue nail polish, O.P.I.'s cleverly named "Get Ryd-of-thym Blues." Oh, she definitely got "ryd" of it. At a height of five feet two inches (thanks to numerous growth spurts), Anna Louise is now tall enough to unlock the sliding locks my father strategically installed on the top of all of our doors and to reach even the highest shelf of the bathroom closet, on which the nail polish rested. A knot of worry forms in my stomach and smothers my feelings of exasperation as my aptitude to make sure Anna Louise is safe takes hold. Lifting her up and dancing around the nail polish so not to spread it, I lead her to the bathroom and clean her up. I encourage her to go play with her little toy puppies in the other room before I return to the disaster on her bedroom floor.

From a young age, my first instinct has been to protect Anna Louise and put her needs before my own. I'm sure that all big sisters feel that protective instinct, but everything is intensified when your little sister has special needs. If my parents or I don't make food for her, Anna Louise cannot eat. She needs help going to the bathroom and bathing. I have pictures hanging on my walls that may appear to be multicolored scribbles to someone else, but to me they are more precious than the Mona Lisa. Whenever Anna Louise says something no one can quite understand, my mother calls me over to be a "translator" because I can detect nuances in her language like a musician can differentiate between flats and sharps. In the summer, my mother and I worked on teaching Anna Louise how to buckle herself in the car. Although it took months, I have never been more proud than when I saw the look on her face the first time she made the belt click all by herself.

Twenty minutes and one bottle of nail polish remover later, the potent scent of acetone drowns the smell of nail polish and the floor is faded of all blue remnants. Sweaty and panting, my knees pop satisfyingly when I gradually rise to my feet. As I walk into the

room, Anna Louise’s eyes fly up from her toys with caution. Our recent conversation still lingers in her mind as she recalls my stern tone, what I have come to call my “mom voice.” Fury replaced with exhaustion, the corners of my mouth fold into a warming smile. “Want to watch a movie before Mom and Dad get home?”

“Mum-a-ee-uh” she replies, referring to her favorite movie, *Barbie: Mermaidia*. As we sit on the couch together, watching a movie I have seen so many times I can quote, a wave of calmness washes over me. No matter how many times Anna Louise pulls all the books out of my bookcase or dumps fingernail polish, grits, or her personal favorite, oatmeal, on the floor, I can’t harbor angry feelings for long. I am her protector, her translator, her friend, but most of all, her sister, and I would not change that for anything. With her head against my chest and my arms securely embracing her, I almost miss Anna Louise mutter a soft “I love you, Lawa.”



*Photography by
Adelaide Kimberly*

Polarity
by Charlotte McRae

did you know
that when you feel something
you never touch it
because
there are atoms separating your fingers
from the object

poles exist between
desire
and
physicality.

so you never felt me
when my skin burned
from your gentleness
when you traced a constellation
in my cells
sweetly,
violently.

you never felt me
because of the atoms
your hand slid upon

but the protons and the neutrons
and the shells of electricity don't consist but of
physicalities themselves

so you'll never love me
for fear of direct contact
between our souls

so you'll
never

love me

Anything
By Sarah Beth Daniel

Scribbles on a page
Words written with a languid hand
In heat that melts ink.

Muscles atrophy or give in to gravity
On thick layers of steaming grass
Under cotton quilts.

No clock can tell me where to be
If one tries, I'll break it.

There's a beauty in nothingness
And in the insignificance of time.

If only it could last
Longer than I know time will allow.

Waning
by Charlotte McRae

how many full moons did you plan for
when you dropped your pupils upon my skin
did you think
five moons
that's all I'll give her

you started as a waxing gibbous
meter by meter
turned and offered more dimensions
and concavities
craters
and I rested my fists in them
I felt safe

then that time you asked me if I was looking at him
[the moon you meant]
I said yes
I am looking at him
[at you I meant]
the moon means nothing compared to your charm

charm
forget charm
charms aren't meant to last
by definition they are fleets of blindness
so you began weaning
and filling the craters and
closing the gap between light and passion

now the moon is new
it's gone
and headed
for the next tides you plan to tangle

Nibbling Thoughts

By Georgia Nelson

Honey,
I envy pale night skies.
Leaves shimmering on poplars.
The drizzling rain in starry darkness,
the dangerous mood,
the intimate dance to blaring silence,
the warm september breeze.
Straining to stay awake
under flickering lights a gleam,
luring me to dream.
Defeated by dreadful thoughts,
nibbling at me
“fall asleep”



*Photography by
David Faulkner*

Insomniac

By Sarah Beth Daniel

My eyes burn as I stare
at all the blank spaces I can find,
The serenity of willful unconsciousness
Has made no friend out of me.

My tongue sticks to my teeth
It consumes my focus,
Yet I only stare at my water glass
And make no move to take it.

Thirst becomes my relief,
If only for a moment
Before each thought resurfaces
Equal parts thirst and paranoia.

My palms are on fire
My fingers, frozen steel.
I crack each tender joint
And hope that one will snap.

My mind rehearses the symphonies that haunt me
Every decision I've made
Everything that I have done
Every word I said to you.

Lamp-light is painful
But it's one more distraction
To keep my mind from rehearsing the scene
As my eyes strain over the painting you hated.

I turn over myself,
Finally Sleep appears merciful
Until a phantom touch makes me alert
And your vision fades.

Artificial
by Charlotte McRae

we made spaghetti
you traced my waist
as it was hugged by your moms old hand-made apron
the sauce was homemade
we lied

it was actually a can of prego
added some sautéed onions
seasoned with sea salt and spontaneous amounts of spices
otherwise it was somewhat pre made and artificial

apparently our love was too.



photograph by Gracie Tortorici

In a World of Pens and Swords
By Sarah Beth Daniel

The pen drops
Like a pin drops:
Daintily, ignored.

Words she reads
Leaving words unread
The ones she won't like
Ignored.

Pens are
There to be theirs
When they have the words.

Pins, like pens,
Draw blood
When one reads
The words left unread;
They can no longer be theirs
Even as the read words penned
are lying there.

When a pin drops
Like the pen,
There will be blood.

One in the Same
by Charlotte McRae

you are a shallow deep
oh I'm deeper than a shallow?
no
a simpler cavern
a sand bar to say.
thank you?

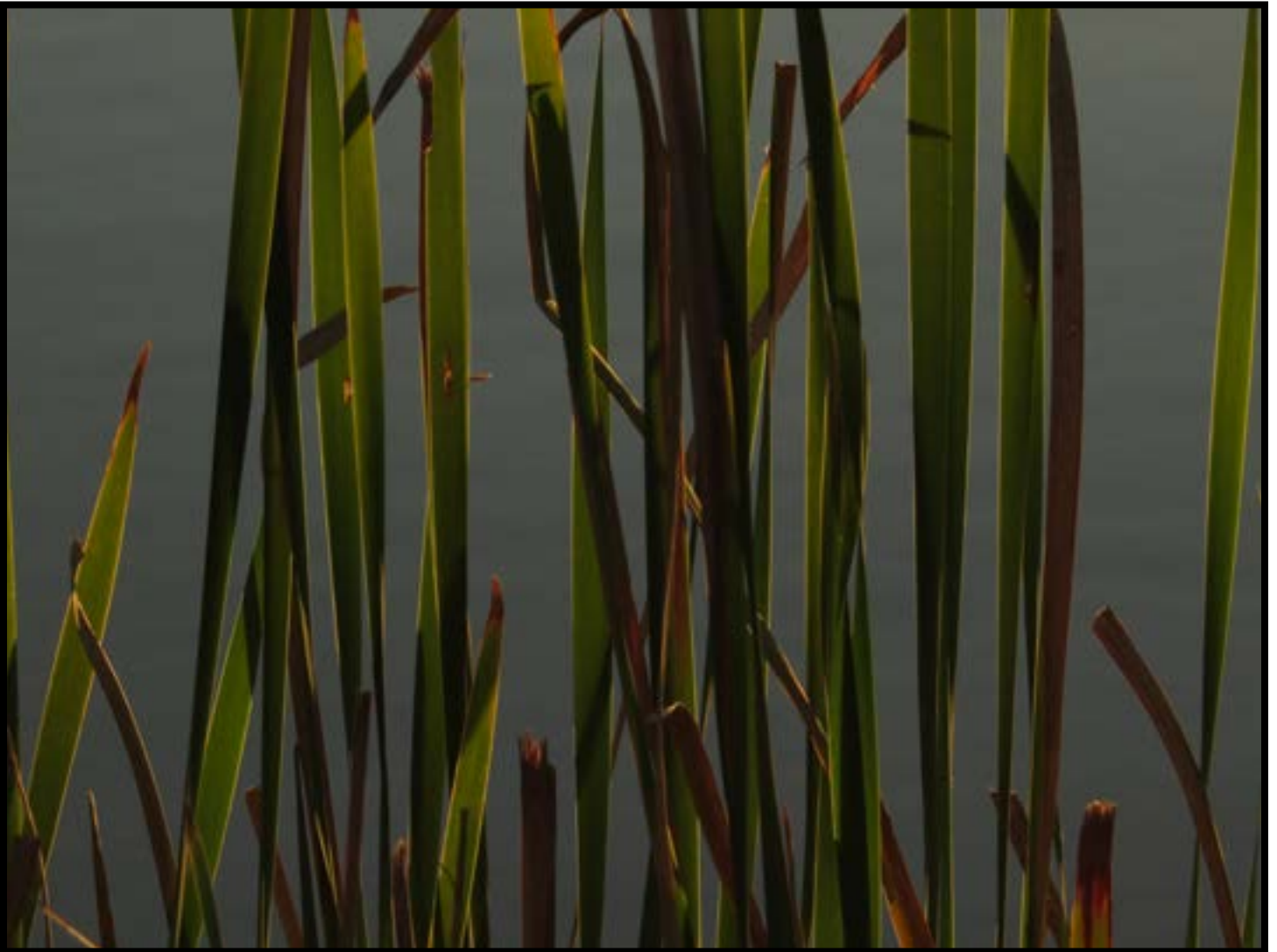
but shallow and deep are really
one in the same
out in this sea
we're shallow on air
but deep in water
oh so deep in water



Drawing by Georgia Nelson

For What
By Sam Poole

Always remember a fallen soldier
Always remember the fathers and sons at war
Always remember the thoughts of sons at war
Always remember that you lived in history
Always remember that you were buried in history



Photography by
Mabry Crane

Young Philosophies

By Sarah Beth Daniel

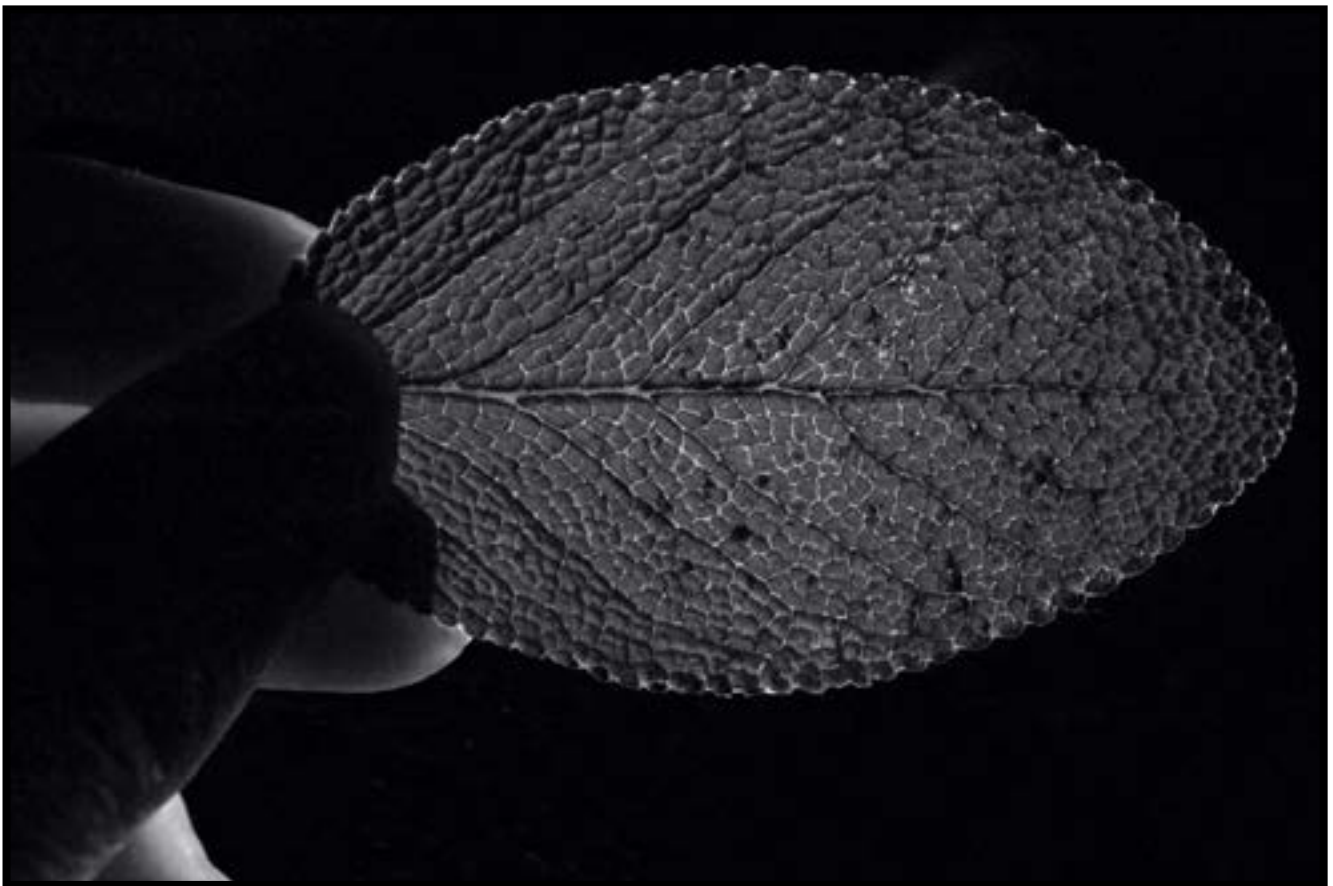
There was always a wish within me to run away. But now, faced with the road and the temporary nature of my being, I am staring down fears as I no longer have people or certainty to shield me.

Anxiety is the name of the time, the bottoms of each foot painted in feigned surety and stability. Though we were taught long ago to walk, we are just now being asked to stand on our own.

None of this will matter in a matter of months, yet I find myself doing the same things I have always done despite change looming. I wondered the cause for this and found a safety in regularity and security and a fear of falling into the obscurity of uninteresting and average.

My hands are empty. I find myself looking around for someone to hold on to as if I'm a child. And really that is what all of us are realizing that we are:

Children. Lost, excited, afraid as we are put into adults' bodies and asked to find a place and purpose for ourselves, given nothing save for a blank map and an ever-spinning compass.



*Photography by
Frances Hancock*

Her Land
By Elizabeth Smith

The land is rich to open minds;
To opened eyes the land is poor.
Still, with their picks, they create mines,
Chipping savagely at her core.

The land is sweet with ripened fruits;
It's drowned out with a strong perfume.
Deep in the mines they shake the roots,
Digging knowingly to their doom.

The bird has sung his morning song;
Deep in the lobes grubs gnaw on glands.
A toast to the queen's wealth is rung:
Praise the Queen of a barren land!

The land feeds off of open minds;
From opened eyes she makes her home.
Her roots run deep into the mines,
Absorbing poor and greedy souls.



*Photography by
David Faulkner*



*Photography by
Grace Lockett*

Respire
by Charlotte McRae

a gasp of him scooped out every time you pass
hollow inverted breath
I'll never know you
just an abstract face on a highway,

you remind me of him



*Photography by
Sarah Grace Page*

Dear Sarah, I'm Sorry
by Georgia Nelson

I think I'd be pissed too,
if he left me for someone else.
If he didn't love me the way I loved him,
if he didn't make my heart melt.
And I think I might hit him too,
if he had left me
for you.

I would despise me,
I would hate my guts.
I'd tell all the girls about me and my friends,
I'd tell them that we were all sl*ts.
I would do stupid things, just out of spite,
if he had called for you
instead of me that night.

And I'd cry every day just as well,
if he broke my heart like nothin'.
if he told me that he had changed his mind...
I can't imagine that discussion.
And I'd light that cigarette too,
to burn my throat on the curling smoke
of a lonely Camel Blue.
If only he had left me
for you.