

Brainchild

...msen and gold, car...
... dead leaves, and riding like...
... Now came the sound of hoofs, the...
... the hat of old romance was still there...
... the crackle of old romance was still...
... the first Charles had rested on...
... the crackle of old romance was still...
... the first Charles had rested on...
... the crackle of old romance was still...
... the first Charles had rested on...

Here we stand in pure form, struggling all the same, desiring all the same, fighting all the same. Perhaps for different causes, perhaps for things that cannot be agreed upon, but with the same driving forces to keep going.



KENT STATE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE
2021

VOLUME VIII

Brainchild

A LITERARY AND ARTS MAGAZINE

Brainchild features the work of undergraduate honors students in the Mid-East region and is published by the Kent State University Honors College.

Colophon

Body text is set in Lapture 8/12 and printed on 80# Cougar Opaque White Smooth Text.

Special Thanks

Alison J. Smith

Dean, Kent State University Honors College

To our advisors and mentors for their design and editorial advising.

Connect

330.672.2312

editor@brainchildmagazine.org

brainchildmagazine.org



[@brainchild_magazine](https://www.instagram.com/brainchild_magazine)



[@ksu_brainchild](https://twitter.com/ksu_brainchild)



[@ksubrainchild](https://www.facebook.com/ksubrainchild)

© 2021 Kent State University Honors College.

Brainchild

A LITERARY AND ARTS MAGAZINE

Contents

Staff 6

8 Foreword

All This Yellow Light 11

OLIVIA MARTIN

For a Trans Body 14

BOYCE BIVENS

Pretty Bird 16

HAILEY SCHLEGEL

Black History 19

MARCUS BAILEY

Sweet Like Honey 21

CAROLINE BARTOSZEK

Ornithomancy in Ohio 23

OLIVIA WACHTEL

Fully Flowered 25

AJDIN KULIĆ

12 Rick & Mandy

EVA MONHAUT

15 2017

MEGAN GOTTSACKER

18 Fragility

ABBEY JESSUP

20 what my grandmother became

MEGAN GOTTSACKER

22 White Flag

ABBEY JESSUP

24 The Elephant in the Garden

REBECCA GOETZ

The Hymn of 26
Teenage Bastard Jesus

BRIAN VOGT

Rhinestone Handcuffs 35

J KLIKA

Lost Reflection 37

MYRA KIVETT

Trilobites 40

SADIE SCHLEGEL

I Watched the Parakeets 51

HAILEY SCHLEGEL

Thinking About 52

The Gold Rush

CAROLINE BARTOSZEK

Selene 55

ABBEY JESSUP

34 It's Better to Feel Pain Than Nothing at All

NORA GAST

36 Meandering Buffalo Mind

TYLYN K. JOHNSON

38 Dreams

AVA CARR

49 the apartment complex bees dance around an empty bag of southwest airlines pretzels

MP ARMSTRONG

53 The Canaan Motel

OLIVIA WACHTEL

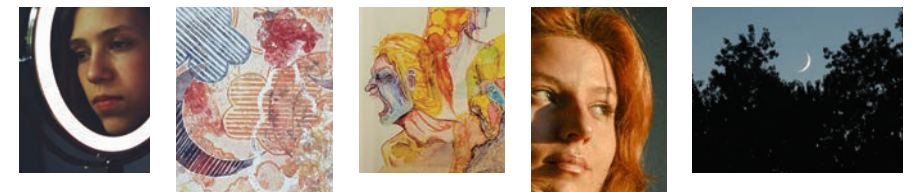
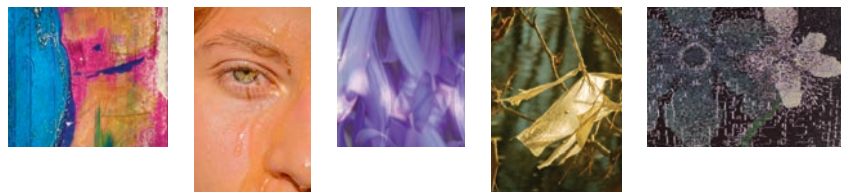
54 Fervent

SAFIA AHMED

56 Contributors

5

6



Staff



Megan Hamilton
EDITOR IN CHIEF



Chloe Holm
SENIOR EDITOR



Abigail Archer
CREATIVE DIRECTOR



Brennan Baumgartner
ART EDITOR



Anna Fox
MARKETING COORDINATOR



Clara Britton
EDITOR



Mackenzie Freese
EDITOR



Isabella Kaufman
EDITOR



Stephanie Gunawan
DESIGNER



Katie Herring
DESIGNER



Brynn McKenney
EDITOR



Charles Malone
FACULTY ADVISOR



Brittany Miller
DESIGNER



Jessica Miller
DESIGNER

Foreword

Art and culture move in one continuous circle—culture creates art, art creates culture. They ebb and flow, compete and clash, mix and mingle. Great artistic movements do not form on their own; they form within broader social contexts, within something much larger than its creators. Some will look back in wonder about what it was like to be there in the middle of the action; some will be able to give an answer.

We will give an answer.

Even more so, we will tell a story. We will tell different stories. We will illustrate the strength in numbers, the power of the people as they take to the street in support of one common cause. We will articulate what it is like to be louder than the most suffocating silence. We will describe the feeling of being alone, of living in fear, of thinking that nothing will change, that nothing can change. We will narrate beautiful stories, tragic stories, stories of loss and gain, stories of being human.

To describe something as human has become a bit of a cliché, something used when there are no other words of better fit. It is almost like we try so hard to ignore this basic fact of existence, this thing that we all share. To be human is too general, too elementary. We don't want to be connected; we want to be different. All of these constant contradictions exist to build fences between us and our neighbors, to somehow help us cope with the fact that despite our best efforts it all starts and ends the same.

Through these tumultuous times filled with social movements, political agendas, the intricacies of new disease and navigation of the rules of a worldwide pandemic, the paint we slathered on ourselves to prove our uniqueness fell in heavy droplets into the ground. Here we stand in pure form, struggling all the same, desiring all the same, fighting all the same. Perhaps for different causes,

perhaps for things that cannot be agreed upon, but with the same driving forces to keep going.

The written and visual works found within the pages of this edition of Brainchild encapsulate a multitude of human conditions, stripping existence down to its most basic and challenging shapes. To attempt to describe the emotion derived from each piece would again require replacing the word human, separating the art from each other when they are all connected by the same thread.

Thus, instead of describing them, this will serve as a place to highlight how they unite, how they fit together in one overwhelming collection of raw truth. Each poem, each piece of prose, each piece of visual art contains themes of existentialism, honesty, beginnings and ends of relationships, of life. They write in the rough edges of stream of consciousness, they write in experimental form with fresh language, they establish a voice, they talk of harsh realities, they call for action, they challenge established notions and invite new interpretations.

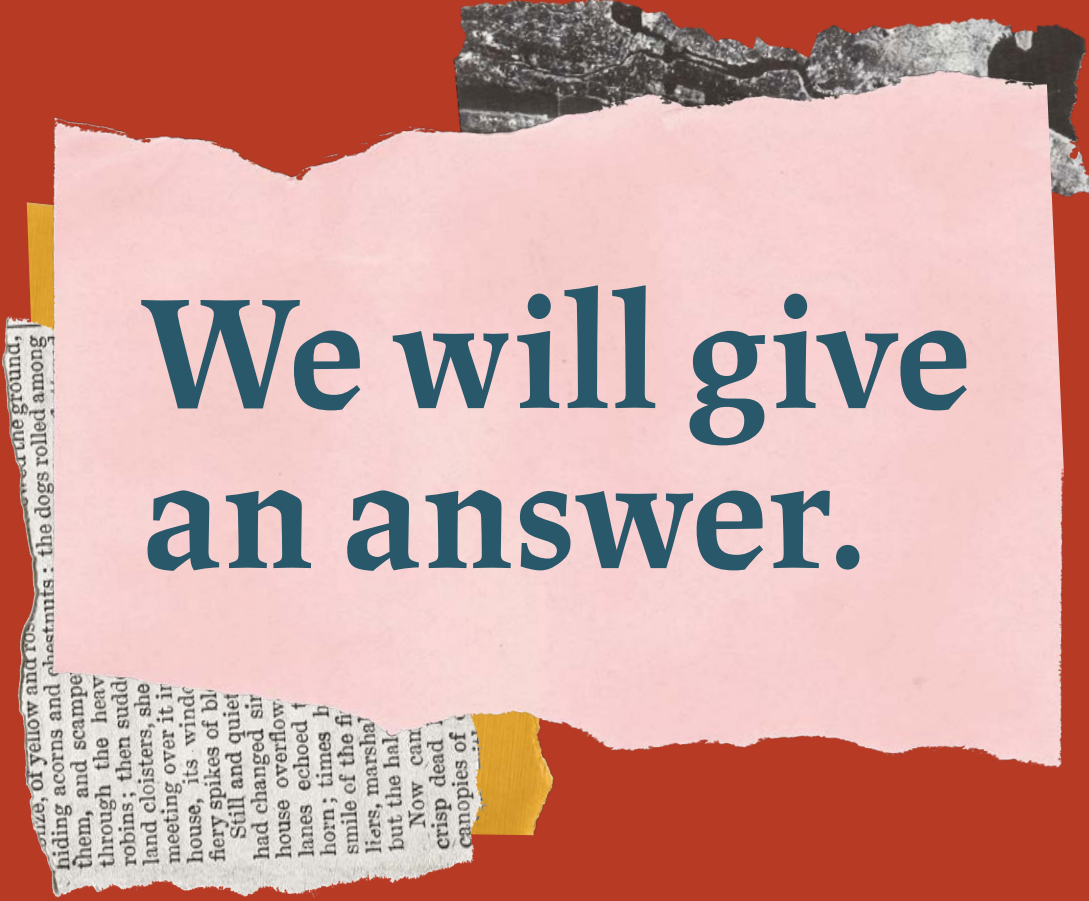
They are some of the important players in this ever evolving artistic movement, this crucial cultural moment.

We hope that reading this journal reminds each reader of their own individual humanity and the importance of their voice in an otherwise loudly confusing time period. This is a celebration as much as it is a journal, a reminder that to be human is not to be less than as much as it is a literary magazine.

Thank you to every contributor and reader for participating in something bigger than ourselves.

Megan Hamilton

MEGAN HAMILTON, EDITOR IN CHIEF



We will give
an answer.



All This Yellow Light

OLIVIA MARTIN

Think happy. Think happy like soft happy, the color yellow happy, yellow like eggs in the pan, eggs snapping, scrambling, happy like your mother's laugh, the too loud one, the laugh that is your laugh, all of her gestures are your gestures, too. This happy, the one that tastes like butterscotch melting over your tongue, is preferable to the days of too much happy, because too much happy means eyes like burnt out light bulbs and a voice that doesn't sound like yours, too much happy reminds you of when your father would toss you in the air and you would feel like you were flying, to put it simply, too much happy is learning of flight without being able to distinguish between the rise and the fall. Too much happy feels like the moment when you see a penny glinting heads up on sunlit cement, like a week of good luck, or a year, which is to say that too much happy makes you invincible, meaning you are a lightning strike, or more accurately, you are a roller coaster paused at the moment right before gravity takes over, which is all a complicated way to say that too much happy is akin to losing control of your own body, that too much happy leaves you raw, raw and aching and open and without a hold on the emergency brake.

"All This Yellow Light" is highlighted as the winner of the 2020 Wick Honors Poetry Scholarship.

Rick & Mandy

EVA MONHAUT

Rick was into anal
sex and poetry about cats sun-
bathing in May. He was very
lonely after his wife died,
spent his days drinking
hard cider from a hand-carved
gourd, painting intricate watercolor
portraits of her long, tangled, soot
hair, and cachinnating into the wee
hours of the night while watching
strung-out pyromaniacs on his primitive
television burn the world.

One day, Rick met a part-time
contortionist named Mandy.
She was into oral
sex and 6,000-page French novels about
the Reign of Terror. She spent her days knitting
obese afghans out of corn husks,
ice skating on frozen lemonade
lakes, and dancing half-nude in
her 10-acre sunflower field, her
bendy body flapping like a ragged
mast in the Midwestern wind.

Rick and Mandy got hitched in a
barnyard chapel at dusk, little paper-mache
lanterns illuminating the rotted fence
posts. They invited only their closest friends:
two one-eyed cats, the local brine
master sweating out pickle
juice, and her aging father, his
weathered farm hands interwoven in
joy as they chanted their vows in
iambic pentameter.

After the ceremony, they lived for
years in a dugout root cellar
somewhere east of Bristol, Indiana
until Rick found a slab of
cancer in his head;

Mandy watched him die

and when she was sure he was not coming back,
she wept
her way through the vast and endless years
until she, too, died and was buried
next to Rick on a steep hill
where the moon-eyed teenagers would go
to drink and smoke pot; the boys' eager hands
warming the girls' gooseflesh
underneath that dark, dark darkening.



For A Trans Body

BOYCE BIVENS: SCREENPRINT MONOTYPE

2017

MEGAN GOTTSACKER

Those conversations
were always like clockwork:
we opened bottles of non-alcoholic wine
and told stories of hopeful seventeen-year-old idiots,
while some of us pretended to relate to late nights and birth control.
Soon, we dove into arguing in agreement about injustice
and about mothers who won't send you to therapy,
or haven't noticed you stopped eating,
or died before you ever asked
what love is.

Pretty Bird

HAILEY SCHLEGEL

In loving memory of my grandma, Karen Sue Lilley. Thank you for the laughs and the stories you shared.

My mother always scoffed at the cars who refused to stop for the funeral processions.

“More disrespectful everyday,” she’d say as she worked on her crochet, rocking back and forth on our weathered porch swing.

Often, I’d be lying in the grass, watching the cars crawl by. I saw beauty in the hearse, its sleek black shine leading the pack of vehicles towards the rows of identical headstones across the street. Multiple passed a day, leading with grace and integrity through the stone archway of the National Cemetery, the American flag overhead.

Many times, I’d see my neighbor, an old man with bleach white hair, hobble across the street and closely follow that day’s procession. I’d watch him from my spot in the grass or from my bedroom window, curious as he walked along the headstones in his dark blue dress uniform, wrinkled and creased.

When I’d ask about him, my mom’s voice would hush, “He likes paying respects, no need to bother him, Sophie.”

My childhood was spent watching hearses and an old man.

As a long-legged pre-teen with dark hair in my face, sweating in a hoodie on a summer day, I approached the old man. He was standing near the archway I’d seen the hearses drive through.

“I’m Sophie.” I held out my sweaty palm.

“Gene.” The skin on his hands folded like tissue paper, dark spots decorating them with age. He shook my hand, offered a smile, and resumed his march towards the heart of the cemetery.

I walked alongside him, slowing my wide stride to keep up with his delicate pace. The white headstones became disorientating, their equidistant spacing playing tricks on the eyes. The straight lines of the rows changed with perspective.

“I’ve never been here.”

He looked away from the stopped funeral procession up ahead, his blue eyes meeting mine.

“That’s okay sweetie, I can show you around.”

“I’m not bothering you, am I?” I remembered my mother, who was currently running errands around town.

“No, it’ll be nice to have the company.”

Gene saw the beauty in a funeral.

On weekends, no matter the weather, I’d put on my nice black dress and find Gene in his uniform talking to my mother on the front porch. He would mutter a soft hello and we’d walk to the cemetery.

In the spring and summer, I’d pick one of my mom’s roses from the flowerbed and let Gene choose a lucky grave to be adorned with the red flower. He’d smile as I tucked the thorned plant beside the engraved dates and pat me on the back as we continued down the gravel path.

He never picked the same grave.

Sometimes we’d watch the grieving families say goodbye as “Taps” played. Gene would stand at attention, his uniform loose around his perfect posture, as I looked on with tears in my eyes.

He’d wipe my tears away as the families departed and whisper, “It’s beautiful to have loved someone this much.”

We’d walk among the symmetrical rows, Gene straightening any wayward American flags and flower wreaths. In the summer, our footsteps would trod the lush green grass between the stones and in the winter the snow gave away our path. We walked through rows of names and dates that became familiar with the time spent at the cemetery.

“Cardinals are loved ones visiting.” Gene once said, nodding towards the bright red bird perched on the curved top of a headstone. He mimicked its call softly, “Pretty bird, pretty bird. I always think that’s what it sounds like he’s singing.”

I watched the bird’s red chest pulse with its call. *Pretty bird, pretty bird.*

I laughed, “You’re right. He’s a very self-absorbed bird, calling himself pretty all the time.”

Gene chuckled.

“But I don’t know who he would be. I don’t have any loved ones who have died,” I said quietly.

“Of course you do, sweetie. This entire cemetery is full of people who you’ve shown love to, even if you didn’t know them in life. This little guy decided to say thanks.”

The hearse is beautiful against the sparkling, fresh blanket of snow. I can’t watch the funeral procession this time because I’m in it. The snow gives away my path as I get out of my car. My mother squeezes my shoulder tight as we watch the casket, draped in red, white, and blue, descend out of the hearse. I hold the soft petals of a rose I pulled from a bouquet at the funeral against my cheek. My mother doesn’t wipe my tears away, nor does she assure me that they’re beautiful signs that I loved someone.

“Taps” is played and young soldiers in neatly pressed blue uniforms offer salutes.

The bright red feathers of a cardinal contrasts the winter sky as he darts from one headstone to another, singing *pretty bird, pretty bird.*



Fragility

ABBEY JESSUP: PHOTOGRAPHY

Black History

MARCUS BAILEY

Each one grew bountiful, and then to dozens,
inside streamlined offshore whales, swallowed
whole across the tepid waters to lands encrusted
in foreign sand.

With each golden eye a golden lie
standing firmly on their sunlit skin;
whiteness falls from
the once yellow sky like petals in April spring.

Soon, soon the turmoil neglected,
rallied on streets bothered with married frustration
that once caged their unheard laments
around dusty feet unparalleled to the clear air.

They rebelled and reveled in polished greens
of neatly swept and angry floors—one
tired from the labor before submits to unkind
whispers and waits patiently at angel's door.

Dying, dying to sleep in beds from which they grew.
But here their calls succumb to scorn
and refusals fly like spirits
dancing from Calvary's clay.

By dawn the freedom runs amass
with clutches still clinging to freedom's breath.
And soon their homes are torched in frantic glees
and painful laurels sweeten their heads

as they watch a bredren swing cold and dead.

what my grandmother became

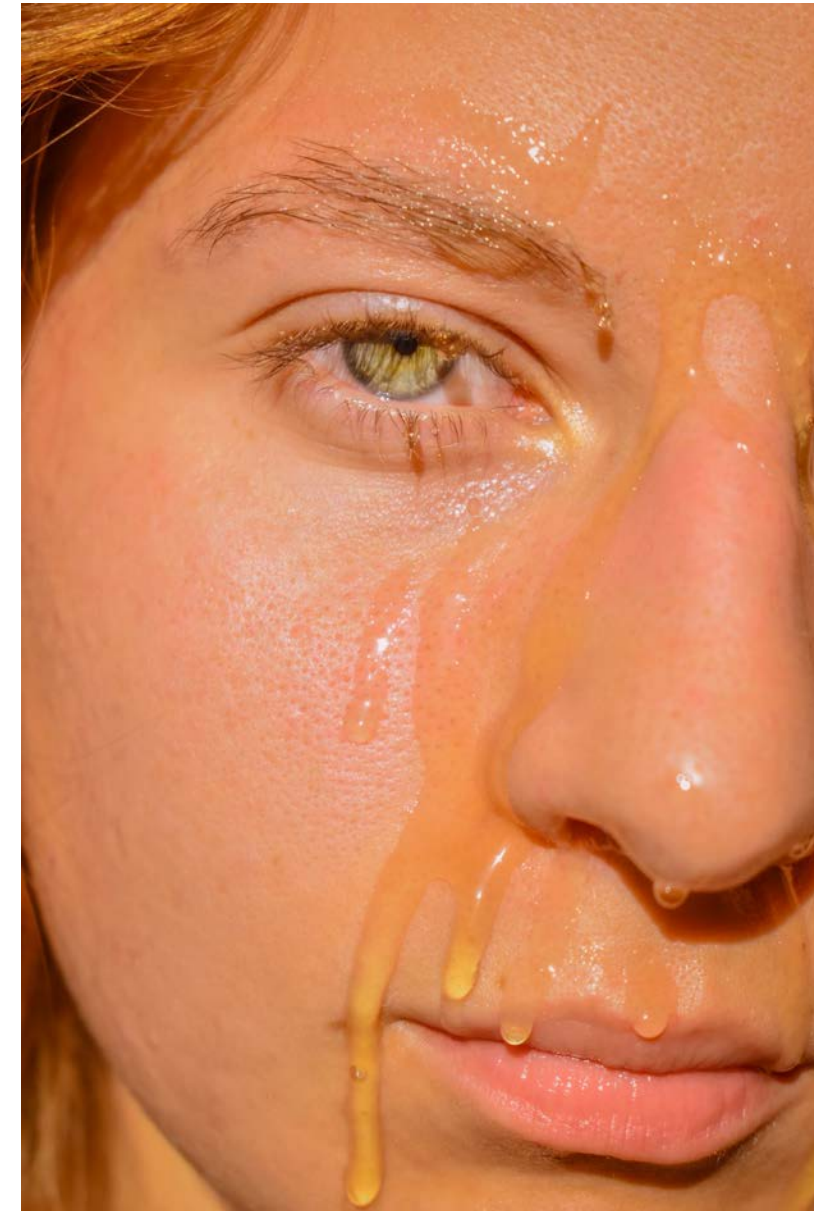
MEGAN GOTTSACKER

the body learns only
in pleasure and pain

and oh, is there great pleasure
in exploding release

so perhaps there is wisdom
in wildfire
for the sweet escape of energy

but wisdom is not kindness,
and though it may be wise
to face mortality burning and screaming,
those close enough to listen are turned to ash



Sweet Like Honey

CAROLINE BARTOSZEK: PHOTOGRAPHY



White Flag

ABBEY JESSUP: PHOTOGRAPHY

Ornithomancy in Ohio

OLIVIA WACHTEL

On the floor of the shower, the kneecaps fit perfectly into the eye sockets, squeezing back the eyeballs like icing bags until the lids dance with neon salamanders and buttercream floaters.

On the floor of the shower, the limbs dislocate and compact into a tidy bundle of tent poles, plastered with vinyl skin and mineral water.

On the floor of the shower, wet strands of bird feathers reach from the skull to the shoulders, their flight revealing something unintelligible between the spots in the vision and the bones shoved into a drawstring bag.

The Elephant in the Garden

REBECCA GOETZ

The statue in the garden
Won't give Daddy a pardon
Six feet down
With a Spade
Buried and Paid
There's an elephant in the garden.

Mommy's in the garden
Where did Mommy go?
Six feet down
With a Spade
Buried and Paid
There's an elephant in the garden.

And the widower's wife is dead
And Queen Medea's lost her head
Buried and Paid
With a Spade
There's an elephant in the garden.

Strands of pearls
Strands of sin
Hanging round her neck
Is it a pendant?
Or a noose?

There's an elephant in the garden.



Fully-flowered

AJDIN KULIĆ: DIGITAL JACQUARD WEAVING

The Hymn of Teenage Bastard Jesus

BRIAN VOGT

I roam the streets at night, alone in a city full of lonely souls. The world races past me as I speed onto the highway that leads nowhere. Every station on the radio is static.

Slick walks by with a gun tucked in his waistband. Two cars try to find a connection in a disconnected world, virtuosos playing instruments in a symphony of sparks and crushed dreams. A stripper with red claws flicks her smoldering cigarette to the ground; it ignites the gasoline on the road and flames lick the sky.

The angels spit down on us from heaven, their saliva sizzling on the blacktop. From the cracks in the concrete rise the gnarled hands of demons, grabbing at the feet of faceless drifters. The apartment buildings watch over us with a thousand blank eyes and the air smells like burnt leather.

I am God's bastard son. He came down from heaven in a golden chariot and paid five dollars to get his rocks off under a trinity of glowing neon X's. My mother was a struggling actress who lived her life like it was just another bad script. Her movie ended abruptly when a gang member, targeting a rival, threw a Molotov cocktail into the whorehouse and sped off under the starless sky. All that was left of her was a smoldering pile of glitter that scattered in the breeze.

I was adopted by a woman named Mary. She was a social worker who wanted to make the world a better place. Every day there was a new case, and it was like running across hot coals: she had to keep moving as fast as she could or she'd get burned.

After years of believing things would get better, Mary realized they were only getting worse, so

she tried to get out. But no one born in this city of ruins ever stands a chance. Those who try to leave get sucked into the inky darkness that envelopes the town, dissolving into the night. I watched Mary disappear before my eyes. No one's seen her since.

I was spinning around the roulette wheel when I got the call from Satan.

The gum on the sidewalk sticks to my boots as I walk down the alley. Among the broken beer bottles and hypodermics is a bonfire fueled by American flags.

Satan stands in front of me, his leathery wings spread. He wears a tailored Italian suit. He smiles at me and hands me a business card. A burlap bag of dirty money sits at his hooved feet, blood seeping through the fabric onto the pavement. He talks like a used-car salesman: quick and sketchy.

"What do you want from me?"

He's silent for a moment.

"You're a straight shooter. I like that."

He chuckles as his lazy attempt to butter me up falls to the ground and rolls lifelessly down the street. He sees that I am unimpressed.

"Fine. I'll be straight with you. I don't want something. I want to give you something."

"What?"

"Immortality."

I look into his abysmal eyes, confused.

"I want you to stay alive forever."

"I know what immortality means."

"I've seen your dreams, Jesus. You're scared you're going to bleed out on a highway median or disappear like your precious Mother Mary. But you can live forever without that fear if you just shake my hand."

"What's the catch?"

"Why's there always gotta be a catch?"

"Because you're the devil. You never give anyone anything without expecting something in return."

"I'll be honest with you, there is a catch. But it's no big deal—"

"Just cut to the chase already."

"I'm the CEO of evil. This city is one of many across the world that I operate. Call them franchises if you will. I can't manage all my franchises on my own because I'm a busy man. I need someone to help me run this city into the ground. I'm offering you the job."

"What if I refuse?"

"You can't. I own this city. That means I own everyone in it. Including you."

"What if I tell my dad?"

"Trust me. His plans for this city are far worse than mine."

Suddenly, the dark clouds rip open and warrior

angels float down to the ground carrying shivs and semi-automatic weapons. God towers over the trash, his authoritative eyes staring through me.

"Son! Join me and together we'll lay waste to this city of sinners."

"You can't have him," Satan says. "He's mine."

Blue and red lights fill the night as police cruisers surround us. Demons in uniform throw open car doors and point their guns at the heavenly army. Bullets whizz through the air as the warriors of good and evil fight for my soul.

I duck around the corner and run for what seems like an eternity, finally stopping in front of the burned-out husk of a drug store. I watch as an old woman slowly dies on the pavement in front of the busted glass door. She was beaten by the police. Blood drips from the corner of her mouth.

The night before, she tried to skin herself to get rid of the curse she was born with. Her son, Charles, was shot a year ago for walking to school in the freezing rain with his hood up. His blood ran red down the nearest drainage ditch, mixing with the sludge and snow. What's black and white and red all over? A divided world turned deadly.

A little girl with eyes that have seen more violence than most adults stands over the dying woman. With her last breath, the old woman reaches into her pocket, pulls out a crisp bill, and pushes it into the little girl's hand. It's enough for the little girl to buy a five-dollar meal to feed her family at the McDonald's drive thru. The twin frowns of the golden arches hover above the little girl as she devours deep fried pink paste.

I walk past them and keep walking until there's no street left. I'm surrounded by clouds.

God sits in a brown armchair, his belly hanging out of his cloak. A beer can rests on his rolls of fat.

"Sit down," he commands.

I sit uncomfortably on a cloud. We stare at each other in awkward silence.

"So," he says finally, "How are you?"

"Like you care," I snap back.

"Of course I care. You're my son."

29 "You've never been there for me."

"I'm here now."

"I'm sorry, I misspoke. I should have said you're only there for me when you want something."

His face twists darkly for a split second before he regains his mask of benign omnipotence.

"I'm a busy man," he says.

I look at him in disgust. I could see that even he knew it was a lame excuse.

"What the hell do you want from me?" I ask.

"I want you to come home. You belong here."

"I belong where I was born."

"No, you don't. Satan owns that city."

"That city is my home."

"That city needs to burn to the ground. All the souls in it are beyond saving."

"That's not true. There are good people who live there. You didn't burn Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the righteous, so why is this city any different?"

"Don't talk to me about Sodom and Gomorrah. That was a different time, and I was a different deity."

"Why does the city have to burn?"

"Because—"

"Tell me the fucking truth for once!"

"Fine! You want the truth? I'll tell you the truth. The more control Satan has over the world, the less control I have. The only reason I haven't burned it sooner is because you live there."

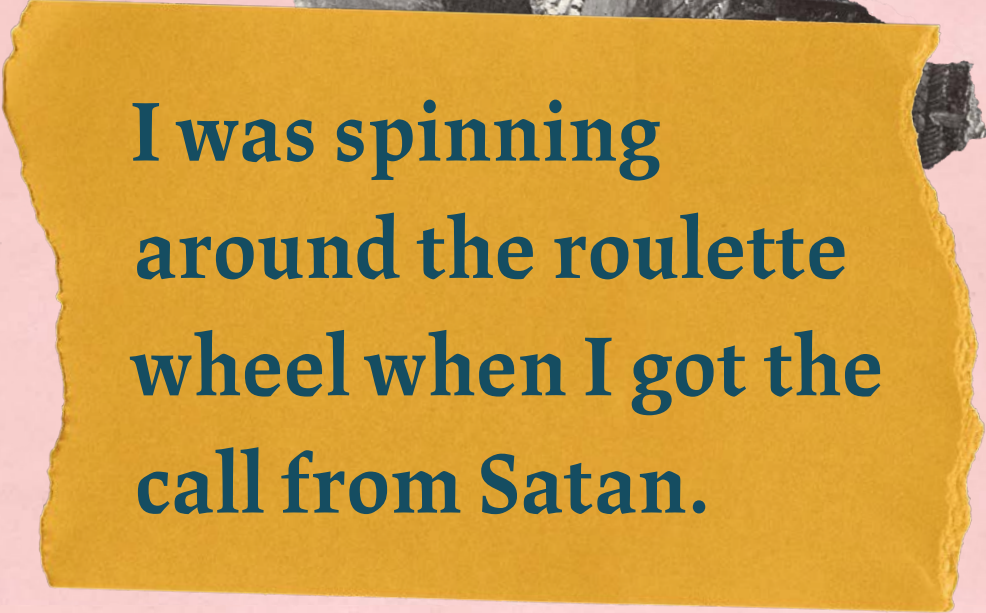
"You disgust me. You would sacrifice innocent lives to play King of the Hill with Satan?"

"Don't pretend you know what it's like to be God!"

"I don't pretend to know anything, unlike you."

God's beer can flies through the air, narrowly missing my head. I fall through the clouds in a tornado of brimstone and fire and hit the ground on a fork in the road next to a busted streetlight. The faces plastered on a billboard watch over me as my curses join countless unheard prayers and desperate cries for help.

I hear the sirens before I see the flashing lights. I run between the looming buildings, splashing through puddles of sewage. A lone violin plays in



**I was spinning
around the roulette
wheel when I got the
call from Satan.**

the distance, drowned out by gun fire. I race past shadowy bystanders transfixed by two dancers performing a tango on Baltic Avenue. The glint of a switchblade disappears into flesh; the clowns laugh in the corner.

Money spills from the ripped pocket of a mugged businessman lying dead in a dumpster. Everyone tramples over the homeless orphans reaching for the bills, only to come up empty handed.

I pass two young lovers shooting dice in a dark corner. They become three and deal with the consequences alone, while a model swallows a diet pill and smiles contentedly.

31 I see an engagement ring abandoned in the sewer, tears streaming down the slits of the sewer grate.

I watch someone dump a trash bag filled with a body into a polluted, foul smelling river, as Native American spirits wander Central Park.

I watch a house divided against itself implode, the walls caving in and suffocating the unfortunate residents.

But I'm not running anymore; I'm just watching the news. I'm sitting on a stained sofa next to a balding priest. He runs his hands through the scraggly tufts of hair clinging to the top of his head.

The broadcast switches over to a politician catastrophizing an issue on the ballot. Spittle flies from his lips as he speaks in tongues to the tune of trolls under bridges furiously pounding on their keyboards.

I can't stand watching any more news, so instead I decide to take in my surroundings: the dim glow of the TV illuminates the priest's small apartment, casting it in an unnatural, eerie light. A crucifix hangs on the wall and a Bible on the table serves as a coaster for the priest's whiskey glass.

Beneath my feet, I can feel the apartment complex swaying in the wind. The whirring of generators and air conditioning units below sound like an aging smoker trying to catch his ragged breath.

The priest drinks the last of the whiskey and slams the glass down. He purses his lips, trying to form words for tomorrow's sermon. He's drawing a blank.

He walks over to the only window in his apartment and looks out over the alleyway, where Eleanor Rigby is lounging on a throne of trash. He goes to the kitchen and pours himself a cup of coffee, hoping it will make him feel something. It flows down his throat slowly and sticks to the walls of his esophagus like tar.

Magazines pushed through the mail slot fall gracelessly to the floor. The priest lifts the magazine on top and flips through it. Sex and drugs are on sale: a one-night stand is only \$4.99 while the first hit of any drug is free, no strings attached.

Suddenly, a loud bang echoes through the apartment. The priest scrambles for the baseball bat he keeps by the couch, its broken neck mummified in a wad of duct tape.

He stands with the bat raised, shifting nervously back and forth, waiting for the intruder. The door's wide open, but we are alone in the apartment. The only thing missing is the crucifix, its faded outline lingering on the wallpaper like a ghost.

The apartment fades and I'm sitting in a well-kept office on the top floor of a skyscraper. I watch the clouds and smog float far below me through the window. I look up and stare into the sun. Purple spots float in my vision.

A man sits behind a polished oak desk, his hands folded assertively in front of him.

"Hello," he says, "My name's Thomas Huld, but you can call me Tom. I'm an attorney at law representing Mr. Satan. Please, have a seat."

I look around but quickly see that Mr. Huld is sitting in the only chair in the office.

"There's no—"

"I don't care. Let's cut to the chase, Mr. Christ."

Mr. Huld then utters a string of gibberish sprinkled with random terms from the glossary of a law textbook. Every so often, his thin, forked tongue flicks out of his mouth and licks his top lip.

I squint my eyes at him until he realizes I don't understand what he's saying.

"Bottom line is, if you don't agree to my client's terms, he will make your life a living Hell. He knows a lot of powerful people and they owe him favors. You may find Mr. Satan's proposition to be distasteful, but try to think of it as a necessary evil. You may argue about the quality of life in our little town, but Satan's policies are at least keeping people alive. If your father has his way, everyone dies. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must go destroy some evidence and put an innocent man in jail."

I follow him to the door and walk through it into a room with walls that pulsate to the beat of a mass-produced, synthesized pop song blaring from unseen speakers. I stand over a different version of myself lying on top of a messy bed. This the other me wears a red pencil skirt, a black low-cut blouse, a Marilyn Monroe wig, red lipstick, and mascara. A beauty mark is penciled in on the other me's cheek. Red heels lie where they were kicked off.

Next to the other me lies a thin boy with a red mullet wearing a baby blue suit jacket and matching pants. Underneath the jacket he wears a blue and white striped collared shirt and a geometric patterned tie. His blue eyeshadow is a shade darker than his suit. The boy's eyes are closed; he is fast asleep.

I watch as this the other me looks up at the ceiling with their hand resting behind their head. Tears hang at the other me's eyelids, waiting for the right moment to release and plunge to their violent death. The other me swipes at the tears, but they keep reappearing at the corners of their eyes.

A humming noise breaks my concentration and rattles around my skull. A dull pain emanates from my neck and my vision starts to blur. My eyes refocus and I find myself lying in a familiar race car bed on a hot summer night. Mother Mary stands above me, smiling.

"Sweet dreams my love," she says, turning away from me.

"Wait," I say. "Will you tell me another bedtime story?"

She turns and looks at me. I can see that she is trying to think of a story.

Like all good storytellers, she draws on her own experiences, and her thoughts land on a particularly belligerent drug dealer she encountered earlier that day. He had parasitically crawled into her subconscious and refused to leave.

“This is a real story. I saw a cowboy today.”

“How do you know he was a cowboy?”

“Because he was wearing a cowboy hat.”

“That doesn’t make him a cowboy.”

33 “But he also had a gun holster like you see cowboys wear in the movies.”

“Well, was he riding a horse?”

“No. He was driving a red Mustang.”

“But what was he doing in the city? Don’t cowboys live in the Wild West and herd cattle?”

“That’s not their main job.”

“Then is it to steal things?”

“No. That’s an outlaw’s job.”

“Then what do cowboys do?”

“They help people who no one else will help.”

“Does that make you a cowboy, Mom?”

“No, but I work closely with cowboys. There aren’t many left in this city.”

“Why not?”

“They’ve been killed by all the outlaws.”

“Well, when I grow up, I want to be a cowboy.”

She smiles and nods her head the way parents do when their kid says they want to live in a house made of candy when they grow up. She pulls the covers up to my chin and I slowly feel myself float away into a dream.

I wake up inside a red Mustang. The last living cowboy is sitting behind the wheel, weaving between cars on the highway.

“What are you doing?” I yell over the sound of the wind blowing past us.

“We don’t have time to talk!” He yells back.

“We’re late!”

The cowboy starts cackling as he accelerates over 200 mph. The skyline blurs until the buildings merge into a large black mass streaking past us. As the cowboy eases off the gas, a McDonald’s emerges from the mass. The cowboy gestures at the little girl sitting under the golden arches, and she hops into the backseat without saying a word.

I turn to look at her. It’s the same girl I saw outside the drug store.

When I turn back around, we’re parked in the middle of the priest’s apartment. The priest waves at me and slips in next to the girl, carrying his Bible coaster under his arm. I see that a ring stain from the whiskey glass was imprinted on the cover of the Bible.

Our next stop is a building shaped like a cartoon heart with a small round door at the bottom.

The cowboy goes inside and after a few minutes emerges with the the other me, who sits behind me absentmindedly examining their cuticles.

Our final stop is the old church on the corner of Hope and Main. The church had seen better days: graffiti clings to the stone walls like ivy and a rusty padlock hangs from the doors.

The cowboy pulls his pistol from its holster and shoots the lock. A cloud of dust erupts into the air as the the other me pushes the doors open.

Inside, the church is shrouded in darkness, the only light coming from the dim multicolored rays that filter through the wooden boards over the stained-glass windows.

The floorboards creak as I tentatively step into the darkness. The cowboy turns on a flashlight revealing rows of dusty pews. Behind a pair of pulpits stand God and Satan, preaching to the empty seats.

They both stop talking when they see us walking down the aisle.

“Son,” God says. “Are you ready to make the right decision?”

“The ‘right’ decision?” Satan says mockingly. “Self-righteous, much?”

“Shut up!” I yell. Both of them fall silent. “I’m tired of you two bickering like children.”

“We’ll stop bickering when you make a decision,” Satan says.

“No, you won’t, because when this is over you’ll find something else to fight about.”

“Well, when Satan does something wrong, it’s my job to hold him accountable,” God says.

“What about when you do something wrong?” Satan asks.

“I never do anything wrong.”

“Bullshit!” Satan exclaims. “You screw up all the time; you’re just too narcissistic to admit it.”

“Both of you are narcissists,” I say. “It’s a miracle that humanity has survived this long with you two idiots in charge. I can’t support either of you in good conscience.”

“But you have to pick one of us.”

“No, I don’t.”

“This is your last chance to make the right choice,” God bellows, summoning his angels.

“Yes, it’s your last chance to choose me,” Satan says, calling through a walkie talkie for all units to converge on the church.

“No.”

The word slips out of my mouth like wind rustling through a grove of willow trees. Everything is silent. Everyone is gone. The world around me is grey. A small window pokes through the grey mist. I walk over to it and tentatively look down. I see my body lying in the center of the city.

A woman staring at her cell phone steps over me on her way to work.



It's Better to Feel Pain than Nothing at All

NORA GAST

Rhinestone Handcuffs

J KLIKA

There is a woman living in my bed.
don't make a sound, it's okay;
she can carry me gently out of my head.
when she throws me off cliffs, it's okay;
she reminds me not to drown.

she follows me to town
where the traffic lights attack, but
she reminds me to hold back;
she shuts my mouth when it goes slack.
she likes to rest her fingers

right upon my eyes,
closing me off, taking me away
to drunken dreams where memory lies.
she is hiding in my shower,
she is slouching in my chair,
she tells me it's okay if I don't
pick those clothes up over there.

she gently pats my skin,
she calls me to lie down,
she flitters and flicks when I begin to dance around.

But that scares her, she complains,
so I lie here all the same,
sleeping in my lady's chains.

Meandering Buffalo Mind

TYLYN K. JOHNSON

a perennial perineum that lasts millenia like the flower in the dome of the cranium becomes quite
tainted under the taunts of thousands of theists.

We should take a moment to breathe in,
and to exhale,

the beauty of that meaningless sentence that plays with words in the way we do
with fish trapped in clear bowls they can't see
the sides of except for the water falling up, but they cannot see
because fish see water like we see air, invisible and always there,
until suddenly it isn't and we're screaming for it to come back
but our screams jump to another dimension where the scream is given air
and particles to bounce off of that are so scientifically small, we couldn't reach them
with our microscopes or stethoscopes
and that's honestly magnificent and terrifying like you would not believe
and I feel all of the worlds,

I mean words,

no,

worlds,
slipping from my mind without punctuation and I kinda like how this sounds
because it isn't like "a perennial perineum that lasts millenia like the flower in the dome of the
cranium becomes tainted under the taunts of thousands of theists"

which I won't put a period to
because that'd kill the vibe of this beast I've created that hopefully ruined a moment
but made you laugh, and I wonder how a god-fearing people could destroy
the delicate flowers growing from their bodies with such mean words
when those flowers have grown on them since time immemorial

and it is a shame

because there comes a pleasure and pain
when it can reign over this lush land so.



Lost Reflection

MYRA KIVETT: PHOTOGRAPHY



Dreams

AVA CARR: MONOPRINT SERIES



Trilobites

SADIE SCHLEGEL

The sun was barely starting to set on the white suburban home with faded yellow shutters, but the dim lights from inside still showcased the family to the outside world. Each lit window was a square Polaroid, a snapshot of the people that lived there.

The kitchen, seen through the window at the front of the house, had a low hanging light above a small wooden table decorated in handmade doilies. The wife still had an apron on and was setting the table for her husband. He was too busy taking off a khaki jacket and kicking off thick work boots to even acknowledge her. He made a beeline for the fridge, took out a slender brown bottle, and plopped into a chair. The wife turned back to the sink, a narrow frown on her face, and continued washing dinner plates.

Through the window on the far right, two young girls could be seen huddled against their bedroom door, ears pressed hard against the painted wood.

Debbie, the eldest, clutched her sister's hand and turned the cold metal doorknob as slowly as she could. Tiptoeing softly down the carpeted hallway floor, she led her sister to the backyard.

"Where are we going?" Donna whispered too loudly.

"Anywhere."

"Anywhere?"

Nodding her head stiffly, Debbie whispered back, "Anywhere but here. Anywhere that doesn't smell like pickles."

Donna laughed at this, her giggle clashing against the sound of chirping crickets and distant cars.

"Shhhhh!" Debbie clamped a clammy hand over her sister's mouth. "It's not funny. I can't stand the smell of pickles!"

A loud bang! cracked against the greying sky. Shattering glass made the house groan.

The girls' heads snapped toward their house in unison, eyes wide with fear as they jumped back. Voices began growing louder, like rumbling thunder, vibrating the house's fragile frame.

"Can we go?" Donna mumbled, her fingernails digging crescent moons into the back of her sister's hand.

"Yeah." Debbie breathed and pulled her sister forward.

Debbie debated where the best place for refuge would be but figured they'd follow the road and go from there. The pavement was still warm on the soles of their bare feet, even though the summer sun was now replaced by a canvas of stars. The street lamps buzzed and flickered on; fireflies began winking amongst the grass. The windows in perfect suburban homes lit up as the girls hustled down the street.

Debbie gave each window a discerning side-eye as they passed. She was skeptical of the perfect families huddled around their pristine television sets watching the newest episode of *The Partridge Family*.

Well, maybe skepticism wasn't the right emotion. She wasn't quite sure what the emotion was, but looking through the windows of those houses made her stomach lurch. Looking down at Donna, whose pale fingers were still intertwined with hers, she

sighed. Donna's cheeks shined with silent tears in the moonlight.

"Don't worry, Donna. We'll find someplace soon."

Donna let out an audible sob and messily wiped the tears and snot off her face.

"C-can we stop? Please?" She sat cross-legged on the asphalt road in protest and began sobbing even harder. "I hate this!"

"Shhh, okay. Shhh, it's okay." Debbie panicked as she tried to quiet her trembling sister.

"What's wrong? I thought you wanted to go?"

"I-I do want to go! I hate that place! But I'm scared... and what about Mom?"

"Okay, okay..." Debbie's blonde head swiveled as she frantically searched for someplace they could go quickly. It wouldn't be long before an attentive father from one of the tidy houses noticed two strange children having tantrums in the middle of the road. "The cornfield!" Debbie pointed at the shadowy field at the end of the street.

The dark green stalks were at peak height and swayed gently in the wind, their rustling inviting them in. The waxy leaves brushed against their faces as they scampered in, feet sinking into the fertile soil. Debbie lost track of how many rows back they went. Five... six... twenty? But she couldn't see the road anymore, and that was enough. She plopped down on the dirt and brought Donna with her. Stroking her sister's long, soft hair, she whispered, "Okay, we're safe. What's wrong, Donna?"

Donna, though 10 years old, looked much smaller in the dirt underneath the shadows of the corn stalks. She rubbed her puffy eyes and spoke softly as tears continued to fall.

"Why can't he stop? Why does he hate us?"

Debbie began to cry too, but wiped away her tears with one finger and spoke with an unwavering voice. "I don't know. That's just his personality I guess."

The two sat in silence, looking at each other and the stars. Debbie's fingers began absentmindedly fidgeting, digging in the dirt as she thought about her sister's innocent question.

Why does he hate us?

"Maybe it's the pickles."

"Mmm?" Donna looked at her sister, eyes narrowed in confusion.

"The pickles. It smells horrible. Maybe working in a pickle factory all day puts him in a bad mood."

"Maybe." Donna shrugged as she picked at a hangnail.

"I mean, think about it!" Debbie's dirt-covered hands pressed further and further into the ground as her blood pressure rose. "He smells so bad when he comes back from work. His clothes are just covered in vinegar and salt and... and whatever they put in pickles."

"Cucumbers?" Donna suggested.

"I think his *skin* smells like pickles."

She wasn't quite sure what the emotion was, but looking through the windows of those houses made her stomach lurch.

Donna let a laugh escape but stifled it when Debbie shot her a look.

"I mean, think about it." Her index finger hit something hard beneath the soil. A rock? "The whole house smells like pickles because of him! Imagine how pickley the pickle factory smells! He must hate it!" She continued on and on, her voice losing its usual steadiness and her strong demeanor crumbling.

"He's just so *mean*! Every word that comes out of that rotten mouth is rude. He hates his life, and he blames us for it. He blames Mom for it! She's done nothing but love him, even when he yells at her! Did you see the bruise she had on her forehead last week? There's no way she just 'fell.' He's a disgusting human being and I wish he would just poison himself with that alcohol he wastes all his pickle money on!"

Her hands were beginning to shake, but she caressed the rock she found for comfort. She felt hot as her words began spewing out the emotions she had held back for years.

Donna let her speak. Often, Debbie was the one protecting Donna, but they had switched roles, at least for tonight. It could have been five minutes or a couple of hours, but Debbie spoke until her throat was raw. Swallowing the taste of blood, she squeezed her eyes shut and held the rock in her palm, breathing in and out slowly. After redeeming her composure, she pulled her sister into a hug and gently opened her hand to examine the rock she had found in her fit of rage.

Curious, she noticed that the rock was quite unusual: it was small and covered in symmetrical

ridges. Examining it, even in the darkness, she could make out the flat outline of an odd beetle. She had found a fossil! Intrigued, she smiled and slipped it into her pocket before releasing the tearful hug. "Come on Donna. Let's go home."

"Look, Mom! I found a fossil!" A small, blonde girl ran up behind her mother and hugged her legs tightly.

The years had worn Debbie down; grooves and creases had become permanent features on her forehead. Though some were marks of stress and worry, she also had deep laughter lines from long years of smiling. She embraced these marks, just as she was starting to embrace the gray streaks in her hair.

Debbie looked down at her Sarah, cupping her face as she tucked a long strand of blonde hair behind her daughter's ear. "You did? Let me see!"

Sarah was always digging through the dirt. Her hands were usually covered in mud as she dug along the creek in their backyard, or coated in dust from searching through the rocks in their gravel driveway. Her fingernails were always worn and caked with grime. Fossils entertained her for hours, but often the 'fossils' she found were rocks shaped like a tooth or a jagged crack in a stone.

Sarah plopped the golf ball-sized rock into her mom's hand, her toothy grin eager for appraisal. Debbie jokingly scooted her glasses up her nose and pretended to be a rock expert. "Now, let me see, what do we have here?" To her surprise, on the top corner of the rock was the cemented indent of two tiny shells. "Wow, Sarah! You did find a fossil!"

The toothy grin grew wider. "I know!"

"I used to have a pretty big collection of fossils when I was just a bit older than you. Maybe you can start your own collection!" Her head buzzed with excitement at the idea of her daughter storing various fossils in organized plastic containers and sandwich bags — a mini museum.

Sarah looked up at her mom and batted her eyelashes.

"Can I give it to Grandpa?"

Debbie sighed and felt her shoulders drop. Sarah's wide eyes looked up at her, innocently begging. Debbie tried not to roll her eyes with annoyance. She put on a fake smile instead. With a tad bit too much excitement, she exclaimed, "Sure, let's go! I bet he'll love it!"

The 30-minute drive to her mom's house felt much longer as she attempted to swallow the bitter irony. She looked at Sarah through the rearview mirror and smiled before regaining a frown. Her daughter was so happy about seeing her grandpa.

She was giving him a fossil.

The older Debbie got, the more the house began to smell like pickles. That and beer. She was convinced that the fumes mixed together created mustard gas or something toxic that would eventually suffocate her as she slept.

The yelling got worse too.

Donna would often sneak into her sister's bedroom whenever the fighting was particularly bad. She'd

shuffle under the blankets without saying a word and sob until Debbie somehow calmed her down. She'd read her Nancy Drew, or tell her to listen to the wind chimes through the open window. Anything to get her sister to stop being afraid.

She'd remove her fossil collection from under the bed and explain each one to Donna in excruciating detail.

"If you look at this one hard enough, you can see the slight outline of feathers."

"This one's covered in seashells. Here, touch it. Doesn't it feel funny?"

45

"This one has a little fish in it. See, there's his mouth."

"And these," She'd whisper as she pulled out another Rubbermaid container filled with rocks from under her bed, "are my favorites. They're called trilobites."

She'd hand her sister her favorite one and tell her all the fun facts she knew about the ancient fossils, all while remembering how she had found the precious stone in that cornfield on that terrible night. It was her first.

The yelling in the background would grow louder. Sometimes glass would shatter or there would be loud *bangs!* so she'd list off more facets to drown out the noise.

Then one day, the yelling stopped and the house no longer smelled like pickles.

Their mother never told them much about what happened, but he had been there one day and the next he was gone. He packed what he saw as valuable and left their mother with the rest.

Whenever Debbie dreamed about this day, she imagined she'd be happy. She thought that the sun would always shine, but when that day finally became a reality, she somehow felt more nervous. She had a permanent stomach ache.

She never knew why she constantly felt on edge. Perhaps it was the way her chair still wobbled when she sat at the kitchen table; he had thrown it at the wall once. Or maybe it was the crack in the bathroom mirror she saw while brushing her teeth. Or the way she could still hear her mother sobbing through the walls at night.

The house had fossils that she wished would just go away.

Once, when she and Donna were watching cartoons and attempting to do homework, their mother walked in and cleared her throat.

She stood in the doorway with her arm around a slender, curly-haired man with thick glasses. Debbie had never seen this man in her life, and it scared her that he was in her house.

"This is Stanley."

He chuckled, "But you can call me Stan," Silence.

Debbie could feel her brows furrow and eyes narrow.

Donna, on the other hand, was beaming. "Hi, Stan!"

"Now girls, Stan wanted to ask you a very important question." Their mother nudged him forward a little. "It's very important that you listen to him."

"Debbie, Donna..." He looked at each of them. Debbie wondered how he already knew her name.

"I love your mother very much, so much that I asked her to marry me. Now, she already said yes, but I'm wondering if I can be your new dad?"

Donna screamed a 'yes!' and immediately lunged off the tattered sofa and hugged the stranger.

Debbie said nothing. Instead, she sat still with her fists clenched. It didn't matter what she wanted: they got married and he moved in.

The curly-haired man with glasses too big for his face wasn't all bad. He loved reading *The Peanuts* comics to Donna and would watch *M.A.S.H* too loud at night. Instead of smelling like pickles, he smelled like dust from the baseball diamond, or grease from tinkering on cars. These weren't necessarily bad things, but they still irritated Debbie.

After one exhausting day of school, the sisters sat on the floor of Debbie's bedroom with textbooks and papers sprawled around them. Annoyed by a particularly hard algebra question, Debbie gave up and decided to ask her sister a question that had been itching her brain for too long. "Why do you like him so much?"

"Hmm?" Donna looked up from her book.

"Stan."

"Oh. I don't know. He makes me laugh."

At this, Debbie snorted. "But he's just so... so... annoying."

Donna frowned. "No, he's not. I mean, he's a little stingy with money—"

"Forcing us to use no more than two squares of toilet paper isn't 'stingy with money.' It's

controlling. And an invasion of our privacy." Debbie hissed through clenched teeth, almost certain that Stan was lurking somewhere, eavesdropping. She swore she could smell the baseball dust through the door.

"I mean, yeah. But everyone's got their weird thing. I mean, Dad—"

"Don't."

"What?"

It had been months since they had brought up that vile man. Debbie liked to pretend that he simply ceased to exist after walking out of their lives. Besides, his pickle smell had been replaced by dust that caused her to choke.

46

"Don't compare them."

"But he doesn't hit Mom," Donna argued, her voice growing louder and more irritable.

"He yells at us for not having perfect grades, then expects us to help him with his stupid 'home improvement projects' all day every day. He mocks me when I read for fun."

Donna still didn't look convinced, so Debbie spat out the last one, "He makes fun of you for gaining weight, yet yells at you when you don't finish your dinner."

Donna looked on the verge of tears, but didn't let her sister's comments overtake her. "He's nice enough. I know you think I'm blind or something because I'm younger than you, but he usually makes me smile. He makes Mom smile, and that's enough for me." She gathered her things and went

47

The older Debbie got,
the more the house
began to smell like
pickles. That and beer.

to leave. Before shutting the door, she glanced back at Debbie and stated matter-of-factly, "You're being too hard on him. Your expectations are too high."

Several weeks later, Stan only proved her point further. She had been in her room kneeling on the floor, looking through her ever-growing fossil collection and organizing it. They were all laid out on her bed for her to observe and clean when her door swung open without warning. It was Stan, a giant smile on his face.

He didn't even knock. Why did he think that her privacy was his to invade?

"We're going to start a project today. And I want you to help me."

She probably sighed. Maybe she rolled her eyes. But she still got up off her carpeted floor and joined him without uttering a word of defiance.

He led her into the kitchen, where a blue tarp had been laid carefully over the linoleum floor. The kitchen table had been moved out into the garage and various buckets took its place. There was plaster, paint, pieces of drywall, and obscure looking tools. He handed her a pair of rubber gloves and safety goggles. "We're going to fix these holes," he said too calmly as he pointed out all the scars in the wall.

The room started spinning around Debbie and she was hit in the face by the sudden smell of rancid pickles. The smell was seeping out of the walls, making her stomach churn and hot tears leak out. She didn't know why she said it, but she did.

"No."

Stan looked at her, eyebrows raised, and sternly asked, "What did you say, young lady?"

"No."

"What do you mean, 'no'?"

"You know what I said!" Her voice was louder than she meant. She threw the gloves and goggles onto the floor with a loud *smack!* The goggles cracked and a lens popped out, flying across the tarp.

A heavy silence weighed down the room.

Stan's face slowly became red as he struggled for words. Shaking slightly, he uttered, "D-don't tell your dad 'no.'"

That was the last straw for Debbie. The tears weren't stopping and her cheeks were glowing red. She wasn't thinking rationally, so she yelled, "You're not my father! Stop acting like it!" Then she stomped on the already broken glasses and ran to her room.

Donna had stepped into the hallway, curiosity and concern etched onto her face. Debbie ran past her, shoving her out of the way, and slammed her door.

Stan ran in after her, fuming. He pointed at the ceiling, where a lightning-shaped fracture had formed from her sheer force. She didn't know she had that much strength in her.

"What the fuck, Debbie! First the glasses, now this? Stop being a little brat! Your mother and I don't have money for this—"

"LEAVE ME ALONE!"

Silence again, and then his eyes darted to her bed, landing on the scattered fossils as if he hadn't seen them before.

"What are those, Debbie?"

She didn't answer.

"Why are you wasting your time with stupid rocks?"

He spat dust at her, "Your time should be spent doing something important! Like helping me and your mother out, or getting good grades in school! If you have time to be idling over stupid rocks, you have time to get a job and help us pay our bills. You're fifteen now, for Christ's sake! Stop acting like a fucking child!" With that, he spun and hurried out of the room.

Trying to calm down, Debbie began stuffing her fossils back into their containers.

Dust filled her nostrils and Stan returned, this time with a garbage bag. He began scooping up her rocks, and bones, and trilobites. His rough hands weren't gentle with them as he deemed them little more than trash.

He was silent, but his actions were louder than anything he could have possibly said.

"Grandpa!" Sarah exclaimed as she ran towards the old man sitting on his creaky daybed. The familiar sound of a *M.A.S.H* rerun was playing on TV Land.

Debbie stood indifferently in the doorway as her mother gave her a welcoming hug.

"Thanks for coming, sweetie," she cooed before listing off names in the local obituary that she assumed Debbie knew.

The old man pushed up his too-large glasses before embracing his granddaughter. "Hi sweetie, how are you?" He plopped her down on his skeletal knee.

"I'm good," She giggled. "I brought you a present!"

"Oh, really? Show me." His full attention was absorbed by the little girl as she held up the brown rock and gingerly placed it in his wrinkled hand.

"Wow, look at that." He held it up to his face and twirled it around. "There are seashells in it! How neat! Tell me all about it."

Sarah babbled on and on about the rock. He listened fully, even when her story became wild and imaginative. She told him tall tales: Her little mind was a wide adventure and she didn't spare a single detail about her quest to find this treasured fossil.

Debbie sighed and disappeared into the kitchen. A part of her wanted to coo over the bond her daughter shared with the old man. A larger part of Debbie felt dizzy though, so she sat down at the kitchen table. The chair swayed beneath her weight, and the dim light hung over her as she breathed in the dust.

The living room was a different scene: a Polaroid picture of a little girl and her perfect grandfather.

the apartment complex bees dance around an empty bag of southwest airlines pretzels

MP ARMSTRONG

the bees flock to the same spot along the curb every day. i don't know what draws them there, but i suspect the lingering scent of beer; don't know my neighbors but bet they've noticed, too. today, the swarm surrounds an empty bag, its inside glinting aluminum-silver in the sunlight & a rounded heart beating primary colors on its glossy sleeve. i recognize the logo since i was supposed to fly this summer on a plane from southwest airlines, make my mouth dry with chewing the bland, over-salted pretzels inside into a paste. instead, i am chewing the inside of my cheek until i taste the salty tang of blood. did you know that another word for a group of bees is "grist"? & did you know that its other definition is a verb meaning "to grind"? fitting for all of this, for the time & place that feel as though they are grinding me up & reforming me into sausage. you never want to know how your favorite things are made: me & the future & those pretzels & bees included. you never want to know all the meanings of things, either. you probably want to be just a bee, with only your body & no need for words or symbols or futures.



I Watched the Parakeets

HAILEY SCHLEGEL

I watch the parakeets
with their blue and green feathers
and the flutter of a wing,
the clawing of a bell.

I watch the parakeets
within their immaculate iron cage,
within the white noise of a hospital,
old women with walkers
and skeletal men in beds.

I watch the parakeets.
I stare straight ahead,
the commotion of feathers
as they bounce around their cage.

I watched the parakeets
as my mom told me to do,
as she held my grandma tight
and my grandpa was the skeletal man.

I wish I hadn't watched the parakeets.
I wish I hadn't heard their squawks.
I wish I hadn't seen their beaks attempt to break the bars

—But the last breath,
the last movement of the chest—

Grandpa,
I'm sorry I watched the parakeets.



Thinking About the Gold Rush

CAROLINE BARTOSZEK: PHOTOGRAPHY

The Canaan Motel

OLIVIA WACHTEL

A cat sits on stained, matted pink carpet,
lapping stale water beneath the dusty air,
filling the corner with sounds of a decorative fountain built by a cactus tongue.

A window breathes in stratified, flaking yellow light,
illuminating the skin cells and dandruff coating the dresser,
filtering dried bilge through the aluminum shades to restrain the floor.

An orange Bible sleeps on a padded, pleather cranberry card table,
receiving a baptism of salt-and-vinegar crumbs,
redeeming the 5,000 cigarette butts and peanut shells.

Fervent

SAFIA AHMED

There was a row of strawberries stacked tall against the poplar leaves, blood-sodden estuaries forming on their spines.

If he held still, he could feel wanting well up behind his teeth like molasses. Yearning to see the sun fan its breath beyond his horizon's mountained vertebrae embedded itself between the swell of his ribcage where ambition was supposed to have appeared three years ago. People told him it was a pity. He thought it was salvation.

His mother crooned into the hardened red of her palms sometimes when she thought he wasn't awake, her eyes trembling like loose pearls. She sang like she was trying to heal something. Maybe it was for herself. Maybe it was an ode to the willows who shaded the schoolchildren from summer's scornful glare but had no one to shade them in return.

He thought people were a lot like willows that way: primitive tenderness imbued in the folds of their marrow. In how hands were built for perpetual interlacement. In how lungs were born to cradle breaths with such care it might have been a tragedy.

He waited for the strawberries to melt into seeds, vermilion-cheeked and peering over the edge of the earth, waiting for something monumental.



Selene

ABBIE JESSUP: PHOTOGRAPHY

Contributors

ALL OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE STUDENTS WHO RESIDE IN THE MID-EAST HONORS REGION. THANK YOU FOR SHAPING EDITION VIII OF BRAINCHILD MAGAZINE.

Safia Ahmed (she/her)

INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE
UNIVERSITY INDIANAPOLIS

Safia Ahmed is a first-year student and biology major at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She enjoys reading and writing in her spare time and is interested in film studies and graphic/editorial design. She hopes to continue her education in medical school and plans to pursue a career in the pediatric field.

MP Armstrong (they/them)

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

MP Armstrong is a 20-year-old disabled queer writer from Ohio, studying English and history at Kent State University. Their work appears or is forthcoming in *Perhappened*, *Prismatica Magazine*, and *Hominum Journal*, among others, and their debut chapbook, *who lives like this for such a cheap price?*, is published by Flower Press (2021). Find them online @mpawrites and at www.mpawrites.wixsite.com/website.

Marcus Bailey (he/him)

INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTH BEND

Marcus Bailey is a sophomore at Indiana University South Bend where he is a biology major under a pre-dental track. Originally from Jamaica, Marcus permanently resides in South Bend, Indiana with his mother and two siblings. Marcus is passionate about animal rights and the conservation of the planet. When he is not around his computer focusing on academics, you can find him writing poetry or attending to his garden.

Caroline Bartoszek (she/her)

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Caroline Bartoszek loves people: she learns about them with her psychology and neuroscience degrees, she draws them all the time, and she loves capturing them in photos. With humanity being as complex as it is, she finds that she never runs out of content or ideas revolving around her greatest passion. She also has a love for cooking, the outdoors, and those she surrounds herself with, who keep her grounded and bring love to her life.

Boyce Bivens (he/him)

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Boyce Bivens is a current junior at Kent State studying printmaking and photography. His work focuses on the interactions between different social structures within a queer or transgender identity.

Ava Carr (she/her)

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Ava Carr is a first year fashion design honors student at Kent State University. She loves anything creative, especially experimenting with a variety of media. She is intrigued by marker rendering and printmaking, which has inspired her to minor in textile design. She is particularly excited to seek the fusion of art and fashion in her career.

Nora Gast (she/her)

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Nora Gast and is a sophomore studio arts major at Kent state university with a concentration in glass.

Rebecca Goetz (she/her)

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Rebecca Goetz is a current sophomore at Miami University double majoring in marketing and theatre with a minor in French. She loves all things creative and quirky.

Megan Gottsacker *(she/her)*

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Megan is a BSN student at Kent State graduating in May. When she's not studying for nursing classes, her passions for art and music keep her going. Megan started writing poetry as a teenager and found that it was a great way to express the emotions that couldn't be explained otherwise. In the future, she hopes to support positive self expression for others in psychiatric nursing.

Abbey Jessup *(she/her)*

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Abbey Jessup is a junior year photography major at Ball State University. She has interests in many different genres of photography, including her recent love of abstract photography. She hopes to use her passion for animals and biology to become a conservation photographer while keeping up with fine art photography as a hobby.

Tylyn K. Johnson *(he/him)*

UNIVERSITY OF INDIANAPOLIS

Tylyn K. Johnson is a third-year honors social work student at the University of Indianapolis, with a minor in applied Spanish. A part-time writer with a love for community, Tylyn nurtures his passion for writing through the occasional spoken word. In his artistry, he focuses on building communion and empowerment with other marginalized folk. His work has appeared in Etchings literary magazine, Parody Poetry Journal, Indiana Voice Journal, and Rigorous, among other spaces. If he's not writing or dialoguing, Tylyn is learning how to better support the work happening in his community. @TyKyWrites on Instagram, Twitter, and Medium.

J Klika *(they/them)*

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

When they in fourth grade, J began writing poetry with Kent State's Wick Poetry program on field trips and in class. They loved the possibilities of imagery and wordplay, and attended the poetry camp for the next few years. This is part of the reason they chose Kent State, and it has remained the one constant in their life since then. Their work explore multiple ways to circumvent poetry's unspoken rules.

Myra Kivett *(she/her)*

INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE
UNIVERSITY INDIANAPOLIS

Myra Kivett is a 19-year-old artist and independent singer-songwriter from Indianapolis, IN. Myra currently attends Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis as a Bepko Scholar and is in the Honors College. Myra is currently pursuing a Bachelor of the Arts in Communication Studies and hopes to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. Alongside her degree, Myra is pursuing minors in theatre and music through Indiana University and is also pursuing a Certificate in Music from the Berklee College of Music. To learn more about Myra, visit her website at www.myrakivett.com.

Ajdin Kulić *(he/him)*

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Ajdin Kulić is a Bosnian-American textiles artist and poet whose work seeks to uncover and heal intergenerational trauma through metaphor.

Eva Monhaut *(she/her)*

INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTH BEND

Eva Monhaut graduated from Indiana University South Bend in December 2020 with an honors BA in English and a double minor in French and sustainability studies. Her previously published works have appeared in Brainchild Magazine (2020), Analecta (2019) (2020) and Oye Drum Magazine Volume 3 among other publications. She is a freelance writer, news reporter, and nanny currently working on plans for her tiny house. In her free time she can be found reading books, drinking coffee, and writing poetry.

Hailey Schlegel *(she/her)*

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Hailey Schlegel is a Senior English major with a creative writing minor and will be graduating from Kent State University this spring. This will be her second time being published in Brainchild, her short story "One Last Walk" appearing in the 2019 edition. Her short story "The Corn Dog Stand" was published in the 2020 publication of the campus Literary Magazine Luna Negra. You can also find some of her work in this year's publication of Luna Negra. Hailey has enjoyed being a part of Kent State's English department and the Wick Poetry community the last four years and would like to thank everyone involved for the amazing experiences and opportunities.

Sadie Schlegel *(she/her)*

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Sadie Schlegel is a senior honors student at Kent State University. She will be graduating this spring with a degree in English and a minor in creative writing. She is from Holmesville, Ohio and works as an intern at the Wick Poetry Center.

Brian Vogt *(he/him)*

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Brian Vogt is a freshman in the honors program at Miami University. His major is currently undecided. Brian wrote his first "book" in kindergarten about a detective trying to locate dinosaur bones that had been stolen from the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. This is the first time Brian's work has been published. He was the recipient of a Scholastic Silver Key for a collection of poems in 2019. Brian is currently working on a novel about high school and the inadequacy of teen mental health services.

Olivia Wachtel *(she/her)*

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Olivia is a third-year English major with minors in psychology and creative writing. She loves to read, mostly because literature helps us become more self-aware and empathetic, but sometimes because it's just fun. She owes so much gratitude to her cat (who snores entirely too loudly), her friends (who are entirely too supportive), and her coffee pot (without which she would be entirely lost).