

An abstract painting with a textured, layered appearance. The background is a mix of earthy tones like brown, olive green, and ochre, with vertical streaks of blue and red. In the lower right, a dark, sketchy figure of a person stands, holding a tall, thin, light-colored object above their head. The overall style is expressive and gestural.

BADJAN  
BENJUNAS  
BOTTI  
CALLAHAN  
CECUNJANIN  
CHAMBERLAIN  
CHANG  
DYMOND  
FLORES  
GONZALEZ  
GRANT  
HONORE  
HUCKEL  
NORMAN  
REED  
RICHARDS  
RITCHIE  
ROSENTHAL  
RUDZIS  
SOARES  
STOWELL  
SUCHECKI  
YOUNG

Folio Art and Literary Magazine 2015

FOLIO  
2015

# Folio

The Undergraduate Art and Literary Magazine  
of Southern Connecticut State University

2015

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Dedicated to Jared Coffin,  
a talented poet and 2011-2012 Folio Editor.

## 2014-2015 Featured Readers and Artists:

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Yazmin Gonzalez, Nicole Burwell, Ashley Young,  
Courtney Luciana, Ryan Meyer, Jillian Botti, Renata Wilcox,  
Taylor Richards, Zanny Stowell, Chris Soares, and Paul Benjunas.

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# Poetry

“Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.”

-Robert Frost



# When I Put On My Glasses

Everything becomes clear and focused  
and instantly I'm distracted by the definition  
of each bare branch winding into the sky and  
how the windows on a bleak building  
actually have a sparkle in their panes  
and even though I need my glasses to drive,  
I can't keep my eyes on the road.

# Hip and Heart (remembering grammar lessons)

It's a sticky summer and I do laundry every other night-  
I can't keep clean.

Wednesday morning, early August, while leaning (not cleaning)  
across the gritty counter where I earn a paycheck, I  
feel the last deep pull of my lungs before they surrender to rust.  
A calm vision catches in the coursing current of my blood  
and floats, untethered, through virgin channels of vein.  
In the way some women sense pregnancy before their body gives  
them any clues, I know I am in decay.

It's been so easy to confuse the materialization  
of hips; stretching and grazing after a long hibernation,  
with the steel-toe heaviness of my heart.

Both have me tripping over myself,  
shivering and admiring the hem of my skirt  
as it dances in time with the circles  
I keep turning in; giggling alone  
and taking stuttering steps down the cereal aisle  
for the third time this week.

Hip and heart are equally quick to bruise  
and when a laugh too high, too loud,  
too insincere rattles my lips;  
a staggered, cold gale stings  
both my gnarled pelvis  
and the grimy bit of light  
that sits behind my sternum.

Every piece of me blushes and  
pinky promises its neighbor it  
will do better. Will be quieter. Will keep

to a light simmer and not erupt boiling and steamy.

The bones cross their heart and hope to die.  
The tendons nod with big eyes and try not to blink  
as the message travels through my anatomy like a panicky  
game of telephone. The head bone's connected to  
the back bone, (we've got this) the back bone's connected to  
the hip bone (we just need to focus) the hip bone's  
connected to the thigh bone (we're done speaking today).  
Dem bones, dem bones gonna rise again.

It's a sticky summer and studying my hands  
has become a national past-time. No matter how much  
sweat has pooled in the dip of my clavicles or dampened  
the swatch of hair below my ponytail, my palms keep  
cold. Fingers shake consistently. Rings fit well, then pinch  
too tight then slide off too loose in the lifetime of one afternoon.  
I'm wasting a lot of time willing myself to stabilize.

It's a sticky summer and the hip and heart within me-  
the ones I never asked to be responsible for-  
are expanding to fill the dunes of ice I hid under all winter,  
which have begun to melt. My brain pulses loud and hot,  
untamed by my skull and I have to sit down for a minute.

Following the quick, thin stream of my thawing winter with tired eyes  
I realize how clean it is. Clear but comfortingly foggy like sea glass. Like the  
warming dashboard of a below zero drive through the night.  
It's decay but it's also ripening.

If leaves didn't crumple and fall to the ground  
how would we know when to put our sweaters on?  
Eventually the stream will dry up and become something of  
an entirely different definition. And so will I.

Valerie Suhecki

# Tick Tock

My hands remind me of those of a clock.  
They point where they should,  
not where they want.

# Plastic Bangles

Sister, you wear those plastic bangles,  
The only decoration among your  
Worn cloths, the bareness of your feet,  
Your black messy hair,  
And the purple under your eyes.

Their value to you as much as cattle,  
Their richness like white milk.  
Though they don't glimmer quite as bright,  
They feed your happiness,  
As any other Brahman calf would.

Before the blistering sun  
Intrudes onto your neighbors,  
Within this Kathmandu Slum.  
You wake among dawn,  
And greet them carefully one by one.

They kiss your fingertips gently,  
Like no dream lover would.  
They slip off your pastry light skin,  
As you continue to stack more upon thin  
Wrists, I can hear them as they ring and cling.  
Their greens, reds, and yellow hues  
Resemble soda bottles, broken glass,  
Saris hanging damply on wires.  
Hung by women who have given up  
Their plastic bangles long ago.

They restore your faith, self-discipline,  
To your spiritless routines.  
The caring for your crops, cattle, children,  
And husband.  
The only thing that forgives you for  
Forgetting to water your own seeds.

# Tired Mothers Always Rise

Nature tends to copy herself, recycling  
masterpieces to save precious energies.  
When the gaps in clouds resemble  
ripples on ocean waves, you'll know:  
nature had to take a sick day.

She doesn't like to abandon her canvas  
if it can be helped – no, she's an artist,  
true to form and ready to pour herself  
into the work like that water she eases  
from top to bottom, and back up again.

Double-time is visibly apparent, especially  
when the sky and earth collide in colors,  
her palette marrying bright hues, a merge  
to create sunsets of molten capacities:  
apologies for her earlier neglect.

# The Walk

I walked a drenched dog  
on a pouring morning  
two days ago, when it was colder.  
Mud puddles sucked  
at the bottoms of my boots  
as we cut across the block.  
I stopped then and saw  
rain collect and rise  
up from the sewer grate, grey  
as the sky it had fallen from.  
The rectangular teeth of the opening  
hissed and sputtered, spitting up  
a bubbling broth of sullied stew.  
From underneath came the wreckage,  
the losses and litter of passerby  
on days finer. Hunks of  
plastic and paper pulverized,  
flowed free at last.  
Everything became clear  
in that instant, the filth  
of the people  
of the earth  
is never gone but hidden;  
so I hid the umbrella under a car,  
hid one boot in a tree, and  
stuffed the other in some sap's mailbox.  
I felt just like everybody else,  
absolutely human  
and utterly drenched  
and completely filthy.

# Memories of Steam in a Laundromat

I smell the steam from the rice cooker  
As I iron a sharp crease in this customer's shirt  
I flip it over and fold down the collar  
I tuck each shoulder around each curved end  
Of the paper covered hanger  
I cannot stand the smell that the metal hook  
Leaves on my hands  
And worse, the pieces of hair that are just too short  
And cling to the sweat at the nape of my neck

I can hear the fan shake against the counter  
Blades turning at full speed, but the air  
Feels like someone's moist breath on my flush cheeks  
I am lucky though  
I can hear the sound of my mother chopping  
Through chicken bones  
She crouches above her large wooden chopping board  
Her hands covered in chicken's slippery, sticky juices

Each blow she makes with her cleaver  
Is a moment closer to dinner  
She grabs all the pieces  
And lets the pieces slowly fall into the pot  
The tops of her fingers break  
The surface of the simmering water  
I can smell the chicken cooking  
The air blows over my shoulders  
It feels degrees cooler than moments ago

My father walks into our Laundromat  
He outstretches one arm and wraps it around me  
His fleshy lips press against the back of my head  
The white bag in his other hand

Is barely able to hold the cobs of sweet corn  
With each step, one of the cobs is making an escape  
As it burrows a hole through the bottom

Now it is in my mother's hands  
There will be no great escape today  
As she pulls the stubborn green leaves  
To expose the buttery yellow niblets  
The silk barely removed  
She slams her cleaver down  
And the corn joins the cooking chicken

I turn facing the buffeting fan in the doorway  
Arms outstretched  
The sweat drying as I rub my shoulder  
Across my cheek  
Blowing the hair away from my face

Time to press another shirt  
The only steam that I smell now  
Is rising from the iron stinging my eyes  
Pressing down to make another crease  
I feel my muscles relax  
Not out of comfort  
Out of the back and forth  
The pressing  
The hanging  
The folding  
My shoulders fall

I hear the lid of the rice steamer open  
The hot, sticky steam  
Arises from the white, metal pot  
That is the sound of juicy hands  
Fleshy kisses  
Hair blowing, not sticking  
The air doesn't feel like warm, moist breath  
The air is filled with ancestors,  
Meaningful work and pride

# Family Portrait

When my mother tore the top right corner of this photo,  
Ripping off my older sister's head in the process,  
She had just been told that she was going to be a grandmother

When her daughter was still 17. She clutched the golden  
Cross on her necklace as if the metal had scorched  
The thin skin at the base of her throat and began  
The process of removing all evidence of Tammy  
From our home. The image of our bodies  
Has become wrinkled in the mess of my mother's underwear  
Drawer. I touch the photo gently, worried that it might disintegrate

Under any real pressure. In it, Dad slings his arm around  
Mom's waist. His jovial grin reflects the sun like the waves  
Of Floods Pond that we paddled through and reeled  
Round whitefish from the day Aunt Kim focused  
Her Kodak on us. She caught my mother's once-common  
Smile. It's directed at a now headless Tammy,  
Who displays her orange-bellied Blueback  
Trout (all 18 inches and 2.3 pounds of it).

My feet are just barely visible beyond the edge  
Of the picnic table by the lake. The table keeps  
My head propped up as I wait for my family  
To come together for lunch.

I place the damaged memory in my wallet and return  
To boxing up my mother's clothing.

# Of the Giving Void

This bee here in my ankle bone takes  
nectar from my marrow. It does not  
settle. To be here with this bee will make  
want of decay come quicker than its  
wings do flutter, quicker than the switch  
of an ankle fresh stung. Hear this bee  
nowhere but in the hum of parched bone  
echoed in my lungs, here in the undone  
tongue of sharpened shadows woken.  
Don't, doer bee; don't walk me. Bore into  
my walls and make me.

# Lineage

No one will ever know how those crooked trees  
hold so tightly to the sides of great mountains.  
Roadside highways showcase this unsung bravery,  
drivers passing softly beneath nature's acrobats.

Your daughter wonders aloud about their tricks  
as your rusted Bronco saunters past the amazing act  
that these hills put on. Her small voice echoes  
through the emptied canals of your thoughts  
while you're taken away to your childhood –  
a grinning boy in a backseat, asking Dad the same thing.

The trees, vigilant in their grasp, bend down further  
like warped gods, ready to judge your answer now.  
Her ears prick up at the response, a muddled smile:  
"Roots, honey. They have strong roots."

# Gypsy, Seventeen, Deeply Unhappy

It was the summer my  
feet tanned like a gladiator,  
my coliseum was more a  
city piled on dirt, dust, trash  
and under that: sand. It was  
a desert summer though pollution  
and global warming stole the  
'dry heat' notion, burned it  
up between layers of humidity and  
buried it under the city-  
down to sand that touched jewels  
and biblical lust.

sometimes I ate pigeons and  
sometimes I ate McDonald's.  
sometimes I was in love and  
sometimes I cried myself to sleep.

My eyes were brown, my skin was dark  
and my accent was convincing.

I could have been anybody  
tiptoeing between past-dead  
hatchbacks and stray cats-  
any lonely girl with sleep in her eyes  
and fogged up sunglasses,  
so why did I stay me?

# The Man in the Sea

He loved and jumped with the buoyancy of dancing waves; an offshore swell,  
floating on my breath, swimming currents raw and bloody through my  
veins.

I watched from the shore dissipating into the beach, bounded by a skeletal chain  
wrapped in meat,

as I fell in a love deeper than a trenches mystery, with the man in the sea who  
constantly washed upon me.

He kissed and gripped with the urgency of a coming storm, an impending  
drowning to begin,

crashing and conquering he stole the sandy remnants of my stone heart shores  
as I eroded.

I became addicted to the cold consuming cycles, cyclically craving the submer-  
sion of his tides.

The water tumbled me over; until he became a part of my skin, and I fell fully  
into the depths of him.

## 6:39 am

The crisp air  
of 6:39 am  
decides to blow my  
dress up while I'm standing  
half asleep in my  
driveway and  
I envision yr  
hands crawling up my thighs  
to lift it instead  
and now the world  
doesn't feel so foreign  
so as I hold my dress down  
I hear yr laugh and  
secretly wish the wind  
to blow once more

# Suffocating in the Deep South

March 1962 - Birmingham, Alabama

When the rising moon reached its peak,  
the men in white masks and cloaks  
gusted past our project housing  
burning away any trust and peace that existed  
with the flick of a Zippo,  
igniting gasoline soaked rags,

stuffed in clear glass bottles. Glass shards and flames  
engulfed my living room and kitchen.  
The wooden rocking chair my grandpa built  
engraved with "Jackson" where his head rested,  
blazed like a camp fire and showered embers,  
eroding the green tweed fabric

knitted to the sofa. My mother  
burst through my bedroom door  
and lifted me out of the cotton sheets  
before my room surrendered

to the heavy fumes. My head rattled  
between her blue, silky nightgown  
and tight leather jacket  
as she hurdled over  
and ducked under fire,

scrambling to get outside. I expired long,  
deep breaths, sitting in the grass wondering  
why did this happen?  
I looked up and watched the American flag  
struggling and drowning  
in a sea of white smoke.

# The Fall of Icarus

The delicate lines of his corpse white  
Legs halt on the choppy moss colored waves he's crashing  
Into. Brueghel's fisherman cannot be bothered with noticing  
Your son's body plunging headfirst into the unforgiving surf.

The sun melts the strong wax you so lovingly  
Used to craft the wings that couldn't carry the weight  
Of your son's hubris. Daedalus, it was your bitter kindness  
That led to this, your teachings

That made him crave the sun and meet the sea.  
Minerva's brown winged partridge, the nephew you cast  
From the Acropolis, rejoices in the sorrow  
Of your loss. Yet the farmer continues

Plowing his soil and the ship puts  
To sea in the face of this misery.  
All head away from his final descent, ignorant  
Of your impending torment from a beloved son departed.

Imagine the softening wax spreading over his skin  
And each feather sliding from its delicate  
Position, drifting away on an impartial breeze  
Towards the silky waves below.

The spring sun succumbs to the horizon, signaling  
To the workers and marking the cessation of an unnoticed child.

# “Entre les trous de la memoire”

-After the painting by Dominique Appia

Sun hangs low in western sky  
Ever moving, navigating, shining  
Here, yet not here  
Vanished into my own dreams  
A place which belongs only to me

Grounded in reality, feet on hard wood  
I let myself drift like leaves headed downstream  
Forgotten burdens, for an isolated moment  
Visions filled with hope and desire

Faint lines blur and disintegrate  
No black, no white, only greys  
Blending realities and soft borders  
If I leave for too long, will I ever make it back?

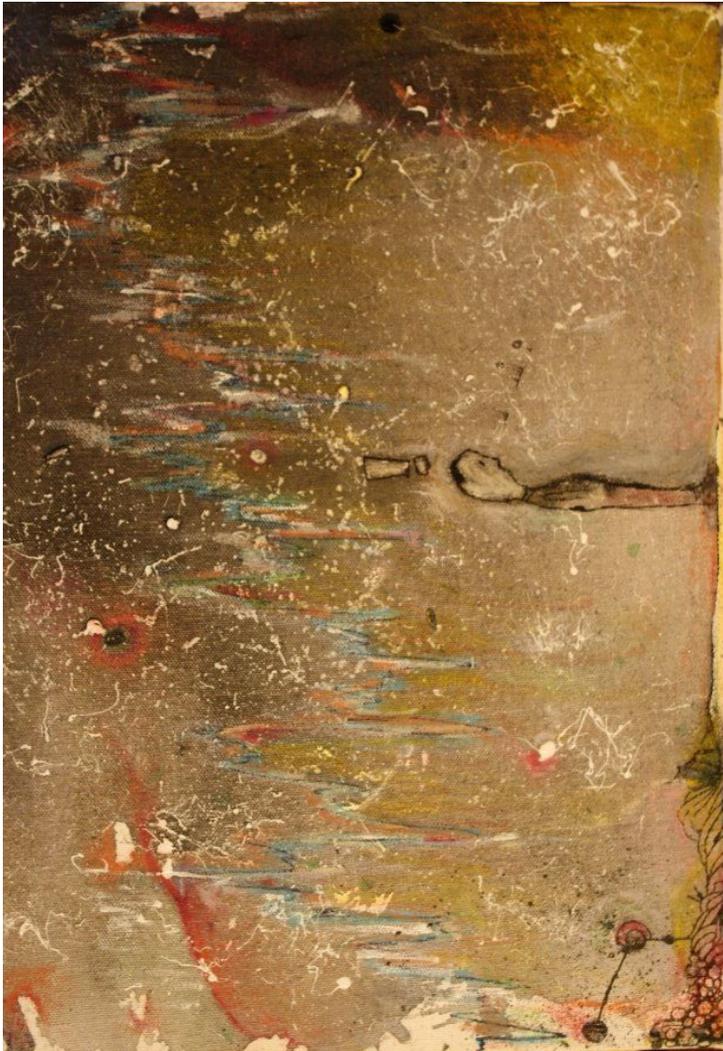
I hang from the bright orb  
Suspended above what is “real”  
Soaring above the elements  
Above fire and ice  
Above water and earth  
Surrounded by flowers, welcoming spring  
Headed westward away from all that haunts me

# Art

“The purpose of art is washing the  
dust of daily life off our souls.”

-Pablo Picasso





# Foggy Orange Abyss

Fatima Cecunjanin

*Cover Art*



Steve  
Ashley Young



# Laying Skeleton

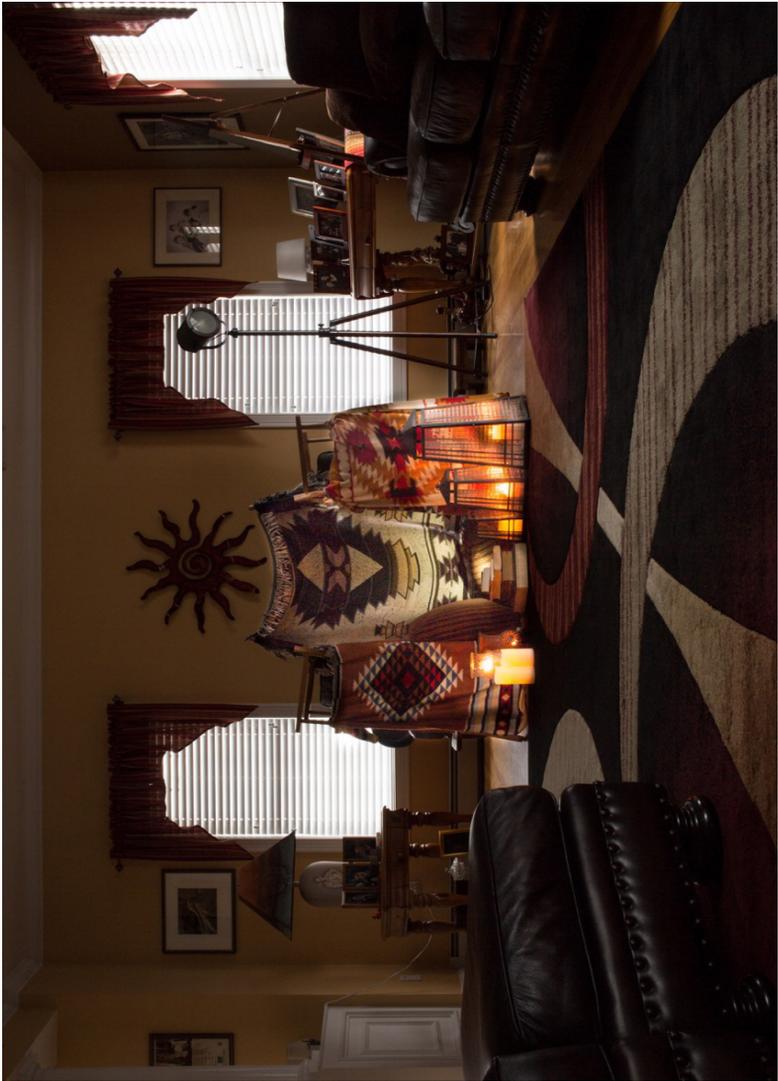
Destiny Flores

*Second Place*

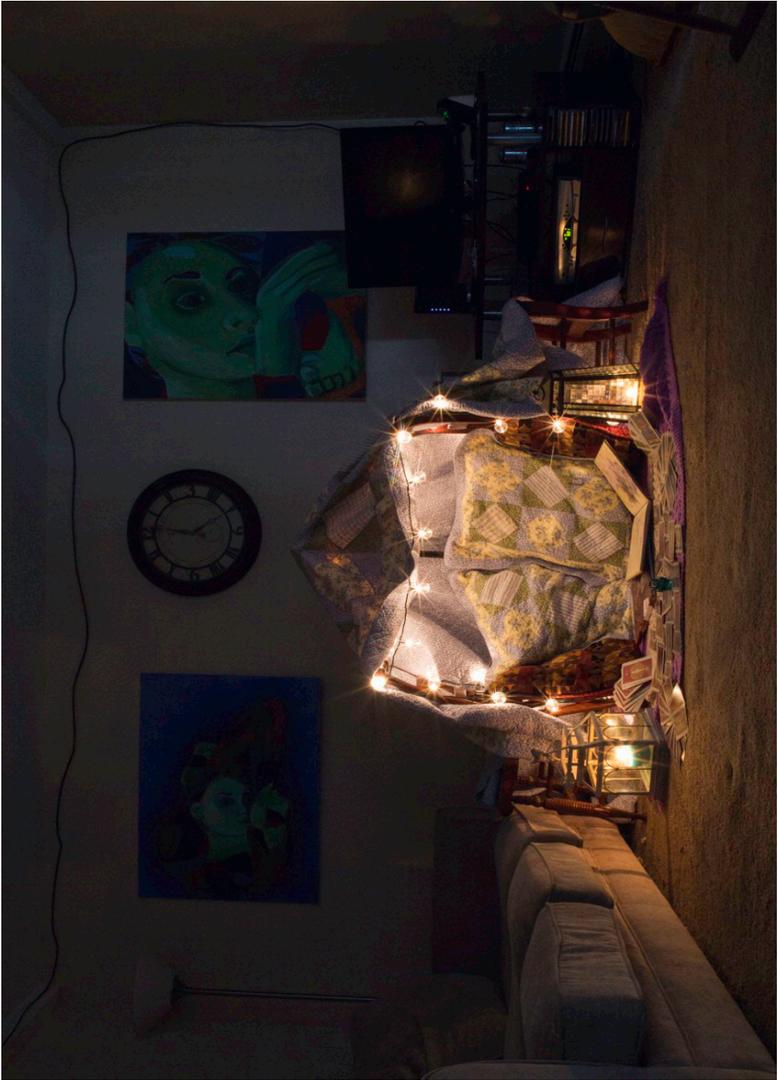


# Classical Study

Kirsten Reed



Vickie  
Ashley Young



Ashley

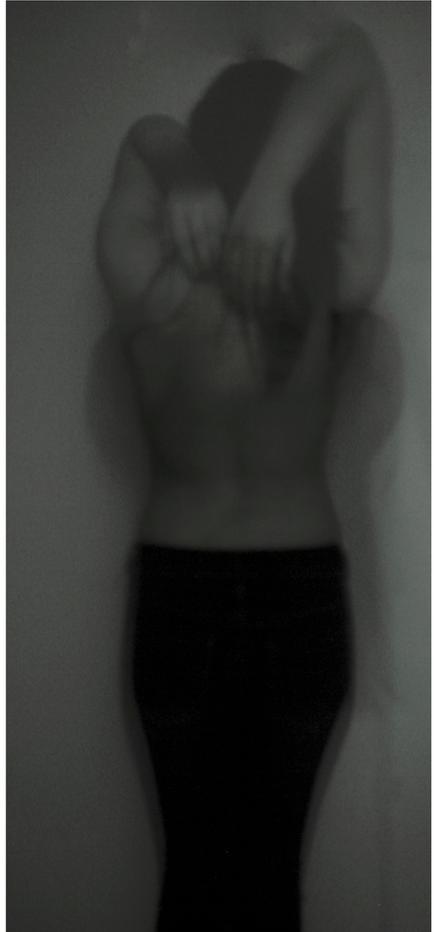
Ashley Young

*Honorable Mention*



# Reflected

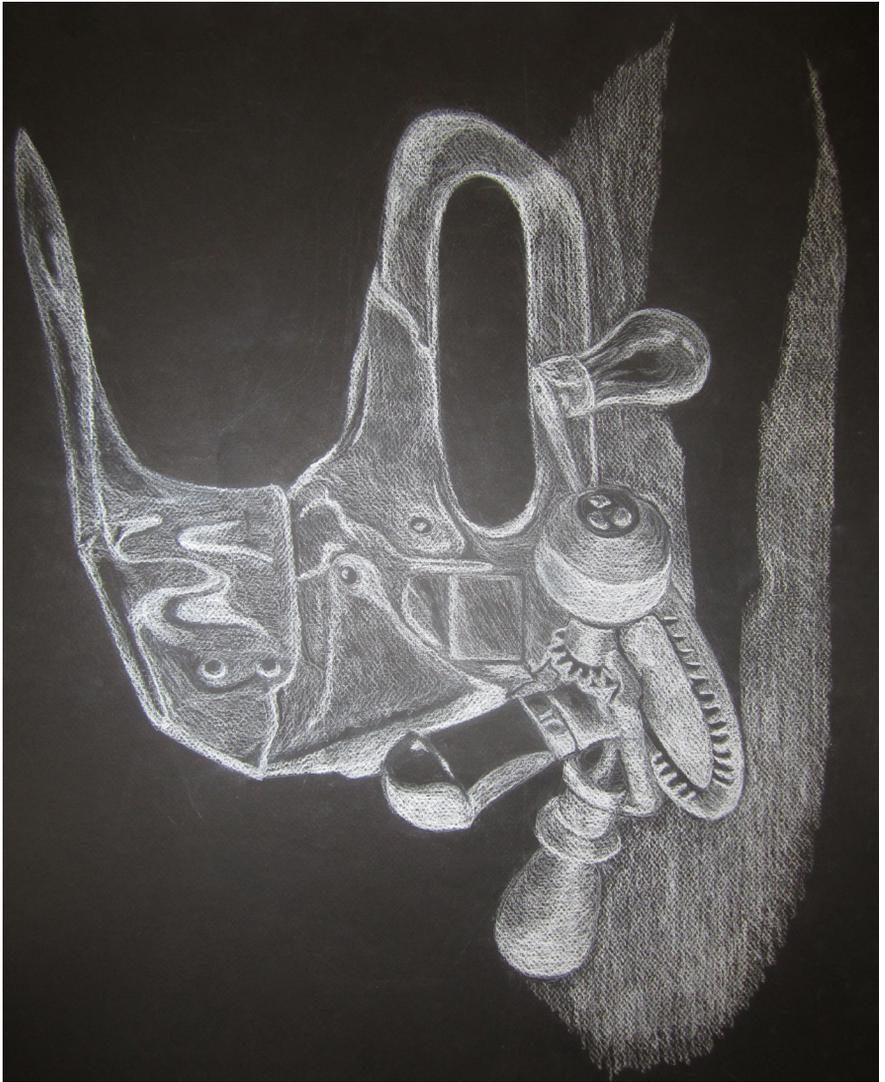
Paul Benjunas



# duality

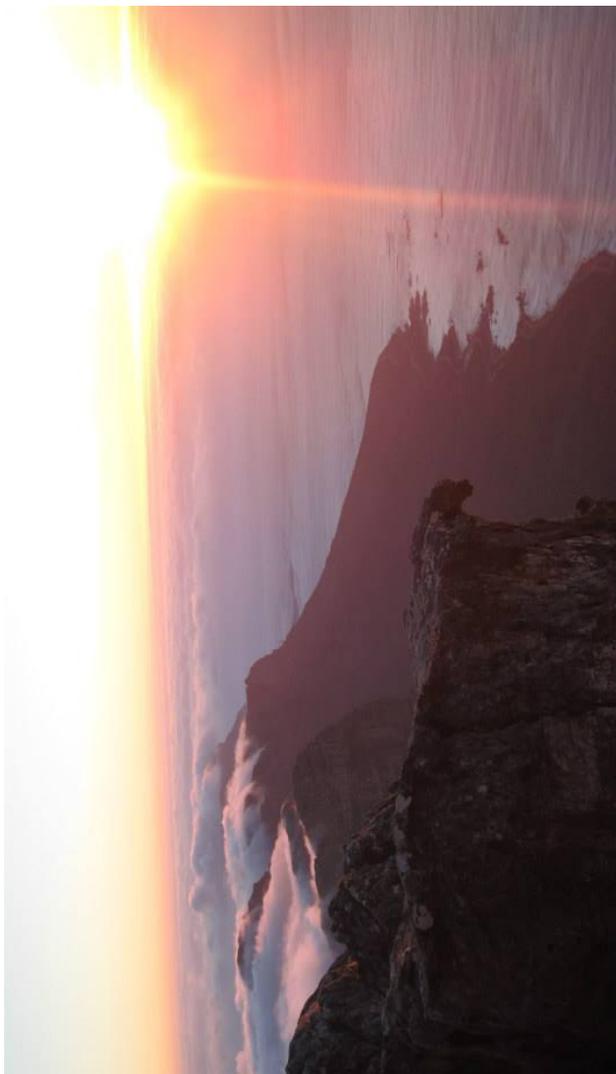
Mary Rudzis

*First Place*



# Hand Tools

Kirsten Reed



# South Africa

Michelle Ritchie



**Gulp**  
Paul Benjunas



# Don't Drop Me

Taylor Richards

# Fiction

“It is no wonder that truth is stranger than  
fiction. Fiction has to make sense.”

-Mark Twain



# My Friends

In middle school while Mr. Martin teaches algebra, we don't listen. Instead my friends and I talk about their older boyfriends. They love them, they say. Maria who has straight hair, long and shiny as a black horse's beautiful tail, says when she turns fifteen, she will leave far, far away with him to the highest mountain in the world where the moon and stars shine very strong, so strong it will hurt their eyes a little bit.

"Your mom will get mad," I tell her.

"My mom did it too. Why wouldn't I?" she replies while writing his name with a red pen inside a bad-shaped heart on her notebook.

"Okay," I say, trying to pay attention to Mr. Martin, but he is talking too fast and crooked numbers are everywhere on the chalkboard.

My friend Lulu, tall with wide, wide hips as a woman, said she will leave even sooner before her parents notice that inside her belly a baby named Cruz grows.

"Why you named him Cruz?" I ask.

"It's a tradition, all the men in our family's second name is Cruz, but it will be my son's first name because it will make him stronger," she says smiling.

"Ohhh," I say

Lulu will go to Mexico to a new house, one that her boyfriend built with money from here. She is happy because she will be with her boyfriend who already promised she doesn't have to work. She will not have to cook nor take care of her seven brothers who all sleep crowded in one room.

I don't have a boyfriend yet, but Maria tells me her boyfriend's brother likes me. He says I'm beautiful and he wants to comb my curly long hair in his room. He will come today after school to take me home, so my friends help me get ready.

"Take out your socks!!" Maria says when we go into the girl's bathroom.

"Take out your socks!!" Lulu yells.

"What?" I ask

"Take out your socks, he is coming!" Maria demands.

I take them out. Stinky. One pink, another blue. Maria crumples each one into a ball and puts them inside my bra. Then, she smears some of her pink lipstick on my lips, puts some shiny eye shadow on my eyelids, and says I'm lucky because my eyelashes don't need to be curled.

"You are ready!" Maria exclaims loudly.

"You are perfect" Lulu says

When I look at the mirror, I don't recognize myself, I feel different.

Pretty like a model.

When I get into his car, he doesn't bring me home like he said he was. He brings me into the woods where the leaves fall from the trees when the wind blows, where some birds hide behind branches and others into their nests, and where squirrels run, run like getting away from us. After a long walk I stop to rest my back on a tree trunk, and right then, his thick hands grab my body tight, and his raspy fat lips touch mine. I close mine hard wishing there was crazy glue on them, and when he finally stops, I move away from him.

"Take me home?" I ask

"Yes, beautiful."

I like when he calls me beautiful.

The next day, all my friends want to know about the kiss, and I want to tell them that no birds sang while we were kissing, that no colorful butterflies appeared inside my belly like it happened to them, and that, in fact, the sunrays disappeared for a couple minutes, but I instead say, "I found the love of my life."

"Thanks to us," Lulu replies

"We should skip today to go to their house, they live alone. Do you want to or not?" Maria asks.

"Okay," I say only because I don't want to stop being friends with them, only because I want to belong, only because I want to have something to talk about during lunchtime.

"We will skip Mr. Martin's hard class. I will be waiting on the front main door, please run."

"Yes," I respond, but something inside me hurts, a pain squeezing my stomach.

When it's time to skip class I cry aloud inside the bathroom because I'm a bad friend, because I don't want to go. I cry without stopping wishing someone could hear me to tell them what's wrong. I don't want him to comb my hair like my mom does every night after she gets out of work. I don't want anyone to take her place. I want to answer Mr. Martin's difficult math questions. I want to know the answers, the answers my friends don't know.

# Up the Wolves

My road doesn't have street lights on it, so you can see all the stars in the woods perfectly if there aren't many clouds. My best friend Rosie could name all the constellations, and I never got tired of watching her point each one out to me. She knew all the myths behind them. The way her eyes lit up when she looked at the night sky, my god, I could have sworn there was a whole other galaxy beneath her skin. "You know that one," she said to me, and I ripped my gaze from her face and brought it to the sky. Yes, in the north part of the sky there were these three small stars, ones that wouldn't stick out if you didn't know the story. My mom used to tell me the legend of the two brothers that ran from their mother and she was forever looking out at them running away. It was an old Algonquian tale that, for the most part, died down with the rest of our people.

"I wish I was as smart as you," I said, nudging the toe of my sneaker around in the dirt.

"Don't be stupid," Rosie replied, smiling at me. "You're just smart in different ways than me." I smiled back and the way her curly blonde hair framed her face reminded me of a lion.

"Hey, Nara, are you back here?" Johnny yelled as he crashed through the bushes. I stood up and brushed the dirt off my butt and greeted him with a hug. He smelled like alcohol and butterflies fluttered in my stomach because I knew what would come later. I'd given my virginity to him three months ago and since, these weekend parties became a ritual of him stumbling into my bedroom and unbuttoning my pants before I had time to convince myself that I wanted to fuck him.

"Phil's gonna light off those fireworks he found earlier if you guys wanna watch," he said, and even in the dark I could tell his face was red. He was good at hiding his drunkness; he didn't slur words and only got angry sometimes. "Yeah, we'll meet you there," I said, turning away from him. He grunted in acknowledgement, grabbed my wrist and pulled me into a slobbery kiss.

"Do you really like him?" Rosie asked me in a small voice after he'd left. I shrugged.

"I guess. I don't know. He's really nice most of the time," I said, shoving my hands in the pocket of my hoodie.

"Does he even call you his girlfriend?" she asked me, her voice becoming more serious. I shook my head.

“No, because that’s not what we are. We just...” I trailed off. We just have sex after school and he shares his alcohol and cigarettes with me.

“You deserve better,” she said, and the words hit me like a wave. I never thought of mine and Johnny’s relationship like that; I was half using him for cigs and beer but I was half happy for those small, intimate moments we had. And I guess, in a way, a small part was letting him use me.

“He really likes me, though,” I said to her, not making eye contact. She shook her head.

“I’m just saying, Nara, you deserve someone who isn’t ashamed of you. He sure acts like he’s ashamed to be fucking a senior in high school, but not enough to stop doing it.” I could hear the anger in her voice, and I couldn’t help but feel like I was disappointing her. A pop went off in the distance and I jumped. They’d started the show without us.

“Do you wanna go watch?” I asked, pointing in the direction of the noise with my thumb. She just kept looking at me.

“Are you mad at me?” I asked her feebly. She shook her head and walked closer to me.

“Nara, of course I’m not mad at you. I’m frustrated because Johnny is a shit show. He graduated like four years ago and still does the same shit. You’ve been through so much and deserve someone who realizes how strong you are.” Rosie had been there for me through everything; my mom leaving, my father’s downward spiral into alcoholism. She never told me trying drugs or drinking were bad things, she would just follow me along to these parties in the woods and make sure I was okay. “Never feel bad for the ways you tried to kill your sadness,” she’d said. I’ll never tell her, but that night after she left I cried alone in my room, coming down from a high she’d sat with me through. Suddenly I didn’t want Johnny to come back with me tonight. I didn’t want to feel his hands fumble with the button of my jeans despite me asking him to wait, something I’d convinced myself I thought was cute despite, deep down, feeling afraid more than anything. I heard another pop a short ways off, but this time I didn’t jump.

“I want to go home,” I said to Rosie.

“Alright, I’ll drive you,” she replied, turning towards the bushes. I followed her quietly, and we walked past the group of the others without speaking. I stole a glance at Johnny as we passed, and his eyes were glazed over staring at the bonfire. He didn’t notice my absence until hours later, when I got a text asking where I was.

As Rosie and I walked through the woods back to the parking lot in silence, I couldn’t help but think about my mom. She’d always told me how lucky I was that I didn’t grow up on the reservation like her, but there were times,

especially in her absence, that I wanted it more than anything. I was the only Native kid at school, unless you counted the white kids that said they were “part Cherokee” or whatever. Everyone always asked me if I was Mexican because of my light skin, and I guess because I never wore my hair in braids because I cut it short my sophomore year. A lot of my teachers called me Indian despite me telling them not to. “If anyone ever calls you Indian, punch them in their fucking face,” mom had always said. I found myself missing her often after she’d left my father, despite all the hurt I still felt. I think the divorce was best for her, and I guess I always knew that she was mainly with my dad because she needed an excuse to get off the reservation. Still though, her new boyfriend is an asshole, and she never calls me anymore. I wonder what she’d say about Johnny.

I was happy to see Rosie’s Honda Civic in the small parking lot, and when I opened the door the familiar smell of stale weed hit me in the face and I couldn’t help but smile. Rosie was great to smoke with.

“I’m glad you’re leaving without him,” Rosie said as she started the car.

“Yeah,” I replied, “me too.” She plugged her phone into the aux cable and I closed my eyes as I let the familiar sound of Rosie’s Kid Cudi Pandora station fill the car. I thought about asking her to sleep over, but for once I wanted to fall asleep alone.

“Hey, Rose,” I said, looking over at her. In the corner of my eye I couldn’t help but notice her amethyst crystal swinging back and forth gently from her rearview mirror.

“Yeah?” she replied, keeping her eyes on the road.

“I’m really happy you’re my friend. I just hope you know how much I appreciate you always being here. I think...I think you helped me realize a lot of stuff I might not have on my own. So...thanks,” I said, and I smiled at her. For a second, her eyes met mine, but she quickly looked back at the road ahead of us.

“Of course, Nara. That’s what friends do. What kind of friend would I be if I didn’t stick by you?” I almost felt like crying as she said it, but it was a weird kind of cry. Not from happiness, but not entirely from sadness either. I had put all the weight of my sadness on her, and she’d never had anything to come to me for. Rosie grew up in an affluent, two parent household; she had blonde hair and blue eyes. There was nothing wrong with her.

Rosie and I didn’t talk much on the ride back, and I found myself wrapped up in my thoughts. I couldn’t stop thinking about how I’d first met Johnny last year at a party, how he’d sauntered over to me and we just talked the whole entire night. The fact that he was older completely enticed me back then, but now it just seemed kind of...sad.

“Let me know if you need anything, alright?” Rosie said to me as she pulled the car into my driveway. I gave her a thumbs up.

“Thanks Rose, for everything,” I said as I closed the door, and she smiled at me. I grabbed my house key out of my back pocket and sure enough, my dad was asleep, open mouthed, in his arm chair. Quietly, I stepped over his legs and turned off the TV. He’d find his way to his room eventually. Our one-story house was small, but it was all we needed. I guess it was good that we didn’t have any stairs, so my perpetually drunk father didn’t accidentally break his neck or something.

I wrinkled my nose as I walked into the kitchen, the smell of beer hitting me in the face. It was time to go to the bottle return, but apparently dad forgot. The counter was covered with a constellation of bottles, and as I opened the fridge, I was excited to see that he’d picked up some vanilla coke. He knew I loved it. I grabbed a can and went back to my room.

Immediately I set the soda on my nightstand and got to work stripping my bed. The patchwork quilt my grandma made for me, my pillowcases, my white sheets, everything. I balled it all up in my arms as best I could and threw it into the washer in the hall. I could still smell Johnny’s sweat on my sheets, and I had never wanted it gone so badly.

Back in my room, I flopped down on my bare mattress and grabbed my headphones from my nightstand. I turned up the volume on my phone as I let my favorite album wrap itself around me. After a few minutes, I noticed a text from Johnny. “U home” was all it said. I turned my phone over and closed my eyes again, breathing in the acrid smell of the bonfire that lingered on my hoodie. I cherished the way my naked mattress felt on my skin, its silky surface more inviting to me in that moment than any lover.

## Two Days 'Til Sunday

August 17th 1853

The sun's hot out today, but that don't stop Master from workin' us none. "Cotton not gon' pick itself," he always say. No breaks for water or even to wipe our brows, us slaves are no more than his property. He treat me nice sometimes, I used to think he even liked me a little bit, 'til I realized he was just usin' me for the warmth of my lady parts. He even gave me a baby a while back. I felt the life growin' inside of me. I tried to keep it secret from Master, he wouldn't take too nicely to his pure blood being mixed with the likes of mine in a life we both created. I couldn't hide it for long though, my belly got to growin' and Master started noticin'. He came out one night and instead of wakin' me up by makin' his way inside me, I was awaken by the thunder of his heel pounding on my belly, a force strong enough to erase a life that never even had the chance to live.

I grieve my baby every day and cry myself to sleep every night. The tears hide themselves during the day time cause if Miss knew the events that had taken place she'd surely have me skinned like the animal she thought I was. I always thought she had some idea about it all. I could tell by the way she look at me all side eyed and crooked. I know she don't care for me too tough. Hell I even over heard her tellin' Master to get rid of me a few times. She tell him to give me lashes and he do. Wouldn't want Miss tellin' people he a nigger lover, worse name you could be given round these parts. He give me my lashes and I take 'em, feel like God himself striking me sometimes but I take em. Ain't got no choice in the matter after all and it still don't compare to the thunder of losin' my baby.

I ain't been feeling too well lately, feel like this life or lack of truly livin' done finally made its way to my health. My body barely 22, but my spirit no less than a century old. I been sold and traded as a slave since I was only 9 and picking cotton since my fingers could reach the bush. But I'm tired, Lord knows I'm tired, and another week of lashes, crooked eyes, and Master parkin' his unfaithful snake in my garden will surely take the last bit of saneness I got left. It's Friday now and I wait patiently for God's day, the day I'll make my way to freedom.

August 18th 1853

Tomorrow makes three months since I lost my baby. Sometimes if I

listen real hard I swear I can hear my baby whisperin' to me through the wind. Today it told me it can't wait to meet me. I whisper back and tell it I'm sorry for the wait but all in good time, we shall meet again. I'm down here tryin' to make the best out of a world that keeps handin' me the worst. Miss saw me holdin' my belly and lookin' down at it while I was walkin' from the field today durin' me and my baby's conversation. I guess she put it all together cause she walked up to me, looked me square in the eye and said, "What you holdin' your belly for girl, look like you got somethin' you harborin' in there."

I look at the dirt beneath my feet prayin' God touch her, spearin' my back from the lashes she might order upon me. "No ma'am I'm just not feelin' well this evening that's all," I say trying to avoid the evil in her eyes.

"Well I hope you ain't lyin' girl, you know there ain't no place in the Kingdom of Heaven for no liars. No honey, liars burn in the pits of hell and it's my job as a patron servant of the Lord to rid the earth of lying, sinful niggers like yourself." She moved in as close as our bodies would let her without being close enough to touch, she was very careful not to brush up against the skin she thought so unclean. "Tread lightly my dear, your days are numbered on this plantation." Master watched from the porch as his wife reprimanded me. She turned to walk away and when she saw him standing there staring, she made it a point to show me and him she meant business. She turned meeting my eyes with the hatred of her own and spit in my face before angrily scurrying back to her all white three-story home. You would think a woman with so much would have more on her mind than little old me.

As I lay here writing I can't help but think about Miss's words, "Liars burn in the pits of hell," well if that's what God has in store for liars I can only imagine what he has planned for murderers of the innocent like Master. I must go now. I can hear Master coming for his nightly visit. One last night of lending my body to his adulterous lust. Tomorrow is Sunday.

August 19th 1853

I hear my baby's whispers louder than ever today, three months since I lost it. Master has me in the fields ropin' up the canes like every other Sunday. You need strong rope to hold such a tough plant, hard on the outside yet sweet as sugar on the inside. I've grown hard like this cane, the sweetness that lingered inside me is no longer there. I've come far out into the fields, far from the torment of that house, Master and Miss, just me and my scraps of paper and pen. My mama taught me how to write when I was just a young thing. She learned by peakin' in on her Master's lessons as when she would teach her daughter to read and write. Mama got pregnant by her Master too, his wife found out and ordered her to be hung immediately. Writin' always been my way of connectin'

with mama. She and my baby were all I ever had in this world. I know she takin' care of my baby for me, I know they watchin' me. I miss 'em both somethin' terrible. I'm not gon' be writin' for a while, today I run to my freedom.

I drop my notes and I run. I run from Master and Miss. I run fast as I can, but it's like runnin' from the lashes on my back, all the runnin' in the world and they still there right behind me. Then the wind blows and I hear my baby. I close my eyes and picture her runnin' right beside me. We stop by a tree and talk and laugh about finally meetin' and cry about the torturous wait. We climb the tree together, and she tells me all about mama and how she been watchin' me grow. We stop on one of the strong limbs and she hands me a necklace from Mama.

"Nana been savin' this for you," she said, "she say it'll take all your troubles away." I had never seen somethin' so beautiful, it looked like glory linked together by a chain of sorrowless days and a gem in the pendant that shined brighter than the sun ever had. I take the necklace and hold my baby's hand tight. We stand together on the limb of the tree, I take a step and finally exhale a breath I'd been holdin' for way too long. Free at last.

# Shabbat and the Finicky Fridge

I don't think there's anything worse on this goddamn planet than salmon-colored sofas. As I sit waiting at a tacky glass table in Nancy's dining room, I can't tear my eyes from the god awful pink couches in the parlor. She's my new potential landlord, and she's got a nasty reputation for being greedy, nickel-and-diming all of her tenants until they're broke. What am I getting myself into? I think, but I can't escape the bind I'm in. My roommate dumped me, and this last minute deal is all I've got. I look down at the glass tabletop and see my reflection. What a mess of cowlicks and sleeplessness.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Miss," Nancy says as she waddles back in and sits down across from me, "Shabbat is starting in just a couple hours, and I had to make a phone call."

"Oh, that's alright. I'm in no rush," I say, but I am in a rush. It's Friday afternoon, and I only have another 48 hours to move all my shit into the new house. What the hell is Shabbat? I don't have a clue. Nancy flips through a folder with her sausage-like fingers. She licks her thumb every time she flips a page, and it drives me fucking crazy. I can't stand when people do that. It makes me want to rip my eyelids off.

She produces two copies of an unsigned rental agreement from her bag, and I space out while we go over the terms. It's all the usual stuff: don't drill holes in the walls, don't flush anything weird down the can (at this, I stifle a laugh), add twenty bucks a month for the dog-- hold up. She hadn't mentioned that.

"What's this extra charge for the dog?" I ask.

"Eh, we charge \$20 per month for each pet, you know, for destruction of the premises and all that".

"I asked when we spoke on the phone earlier, and you told me there was no additional charge for the dog," I say, witnessing with frustration the rumors coming to life.

She chuckles confidently. Her lips are thin and chapped. As she laughs, they look like they're going to rip apart from stretching over her teeth. I bite my tongue.

"Yeah, alright." Nancy says in a deep, croaking voice. She clears her throat. "Let's make a compromise. You pay me ten bucks per month instead. Fair?"

I get frustrated, but I'm going to try and be wise about picking my bat-

bles. The apartment is cheap, and nice- and the landlords know it. What Nancy has failed to realize, though, is the presence of quarter-sized grease stain on the chest of her lavender-colored cardigan-- not so omniscient after all, are we?

“Sure. That’s fair.”

The front door opens, and in walks Nancy’s husband. I know he’s a rabbi from the brief small talk that had taken place during our initial walk-through of the apartment. He’s dressed the part too, in a sharp black suit and clean-shaven. His kind-looking blue eyes compliment his silver crew cut beautifully. What a farce.

“God bless,” he says as he walks toward us, passing his horrid pink couches on the way. “You’re gonna love the new place. New heat, new windows!”

Nancy chuckles and shakes her head. “No, David. That’s the other place.”

“Is that so?” he blushes with embarrassment at his error. “Ha! Well, you’ll love it anyway.” To avoid further awkward exchange, he saunters out of the room.

Nancy smiles at me with a shit eating grin before we continue down the list of terms in the lease. I half want to rip the thing up and shove it down her throat, but I need the apartment. At long last, I receive a set of keys. Nancy walks me to the front door.

“Good luck,” she says, cocky.

“Thanks.”

When we shake hands, her wrist feels like a plump, wet noodle. As I walk the half a block to my car in the freezing rain, I think about how long this year has been. I’m ready for it to be over. I had an incident with my roommate because of my “episodes” and she kicked me out. It all seems like a blur now, but she says I tried to unscrew her cat’s head off its neck, or something like that. I don’t like to think I did, but I know better. I left without giving her any shit. I wouldn’t want to live with me either.

I think the episodes started about half a decade ago, when I was 19 or 20. It’s hard to remember exactly when, because they started out small-- so miniscule, in fact, that I only notice them in retrospect. I guess my triggers were the same back then as they are now-- just a lot worse. Even then, it’s hard to pinpoint. Once it was my old next-door neighbor honking his car horn over and over. Another time it was the water cooler in the office I got fired from. The thing was broken and kept bubbling up from the bottom, and the noise drove me to the edge of something horrid. My roommate Kristen’s cat was scratching at the carpet, making the most god awful ripping sound. Even remembering it now makes me feel lightheaded. Its just noises, I think. Certain types of noises

get stuck in my head, and it feels like my brain isn't my own anymore. Then I black out and do terrible things that I can't remember. I don't know why. Neither has any psychologist I've seen so far. They just give me sedatives, as if I can predict these things happening. I can't anticipate when I will suddenly have a blacked out urge to smash a window, or toss a water cooler down a flight of stairs, or strangle a cat.

It's probably better that I'm going to be living alone now.

When I open the door and walk into the place, I'm shocked by how much more spacious it seems than the last time I was in it. The large and intimidating presence of the landlady had made the one-room apartment seem smaller. I walk the perimeter of the studio and to the bathroom doorway, admiring the personality of the old crown molding. I hate newer buildings. Everything looks like it came out of a goddamn Sears catalog. I look out the one window and survey the wooded area behind the building. I think about putting my desk below the window so I can look into the trees while I write. Pleased with the idea, I make my way to the kitchenette.

The fridge is unplugged. I reach behind it and find the cord, pulling it up to the outlet on the wall. The machine clicks and whirrs to life. It sounds a bit louder than it should, but I try not to pay it any suspicion. After all, the apartment is empty, causing even my footsteps to echo. I spend the rest of the evening moving some basic things over: a mattress, some clothes, and some books. Around midnight, finished arranging my belongings in a circle around my bare bed, I lie down and promptly fall asleep.

My sleep is cavernous and black, but something's yanking me out of it. There is a rhythm: a knocking at the door? Or perhaps a leaky faucet?

Click, click, click.

I open my eyes. It's coming from the kitchen. I step barefoot across the cold floor to investigate. The refrigerator has stopped roaring, but is making a persistent clicking noise. I don't know a damn thing about fixing a fridge. I look at the microwave clock. 3:14. I can't call the landlady. I decide to wait until morning.

There is no sleep to be had for the rest of the night. The incessant clicking coming from across the big room keeps me awake. I wrap a pillow around my head, but it does no good. The sound seems to reverberate off every corner of my skull, click, click, click, punching the backs of my eyes and piercing the deepest part of my ears. When dawn at last arrives, I am nearly delirious with maddening exhaustion.

I plod down the stairs and out to the parking lot to escape the cacophony, and am met with frigid, blustery air. Thick snow lay in heaps as far as my vision allows me to see. There must be three feet of this frozen bullshit. It's so cold

outside that I can't bear it. I can't go anywhere. I walk back into the apartment.

Click, click, click.

I pick up my phone and call the landlady. No answer. I curl up on the floor in the corner of my bedroom, as far away from the sound as I can possibly be. It makes no difference. The dog doesn't seem to be bothered by it. She snores contently on my bed, her back paws twitching intermittently, click, click, click.

I remember what Nancy had said about something called Shabbat. She had to make a phone call before it began. What did that mean? I open the internet browser on my phone and look up "Shabbat" and the results are detrimental to my morale. Click, click, click. According to Google and Jewish custom, she will not be available until sunset. Son of a bitch. Click, click, click. I'm stuck.

I decide that I don't give a goddamn if the milk goes bad. I pull the refrigerator's power plug out of the wall.

Click, click, click.

How?

The fridge ceases to run, but the clicking never falters.

The rhythm of the noise becomes the rhythm of my thoughts, and I realize that I'm losing it and I can't get it back. Click, click, click. I, can't, take, this, shit, any, more. I think about how massive the universe is. I think about the biggest star. V, Y, Canis, Majoris, click, click, click, one, thousand, times, bigger, than, the, sun, click, click, click. I think about my dad and brothers. Sons, of, bitches, click, click, click. I think about social justice. Reverse, racism, does, not, exist, you, white, imbeciles, click, click, click. I think about Amish people who are lucky they don't have refrigerators and shoe factories, which, prob'ly, smell, funny, click, click, click. I start laughing, and my heaves of hilarity fight with the rhythm of the clicking, oh hell does it ever fight, the two sounds chase each other like dogs chase grey squirrels. They roll up and down over and under one another and hiss and jab and spit. I feel the click, click, click gain some leverage and I laugh louder because I know I can't let it down or take a break even for a moment or else, but then, click, click, click, I think for two seconds about jux-ta-po-si-tion and the fucking syllables rearrange in my head and get screwed up and my laughing stops and click, click, click, the fridge wins and I raise the white flag, take it just take my whole fucking brain, and I plug the fridge back into the outlet so it gets cold so my brain won't rot. I fling my head against the top corner of the thing again and again and again until warm blood soaks the front of my shirt, take, my, brain, click, click, click, and I keep doing that for a long time and then something changes and I end up in this place that has NO fridge but refrigerators are cheaters and it's still click, click, clicking away.

# The Best Kind of Burn

Baby Boy clutched a briefcase under one arm and a shivering miniature dachshund as his hostage under the other, his eyes focused towards the blur of dark green on the other side of the lake. It wasn't his destination. It was his escape.

The way his fingers still tingled stiff and red raw under his thick gloves should have made it clear enough the ice wouldn't crack, but Baby Boy didn't make a habit of running across frozen lakes. Beneath three layers of socks, his toes tingled as well, and he briefly wondered if perhaps even the blood in his veins had congealed in the cold. The only heat across that empty stretch of pure white Minnesota void was tucked in the back of his trousers, but Baby Boy had never been able to hold a gun without feeling anything but cold. Minnesota was nothing compared to that.

Though the serrated bottoms of his boots had found a grip against the ice, the crack of a 9mm pistol some ways back pushed him into a stumble. His feet slid, nudging snow aside to reveal the glistening gray beneath. The dachshund whined with the jostle, and Baby Boy might have whined too if he could even find his voice. Struggling to push a dry gulp down his throat, he dared a glance over his shoulder.

Baby Boy had never seen a bear in the wild, but as Mama came up over the hill, he was sure that even his father—that old, sharp-eyed predator that bagged 14 point bucks like they were rabbits—would have mistaken her for a grizzly.

Standing at only 5'3", even in her Louboutins, Mama's bulk came partially from her thick otter fur coat and partially from her the venom that ran through her veins—too acidic, too simmering, too boiling for the cold to ever freeze over. Sunglasses flashing like signal mirrors, Mama kept her arm raised as she stalked towards the edge of the lake, handgun pointing to the heavens like she intended to pick off angels.

She was too far away for him to make out whatever she was yelling, but he could hear his name, and the dog's name, and "thief", and "bullshit", and "traitor", and a whole other bunch of real lousy words he'd never ever heard Mama say about him. Other people, sure. But never her Baby Boy. Then again—how many Baby Boys had come before him? How many Baby Boys had she hunted down the moment they got sick of her?

Maybe Mama was a hypocrite, to call him a thief while she waved her

pilfered gun in the air, draped in fabrics bought with money she never earned. But he hadn't questioned it, at the time. It all seemed so right. She made it feel so right. When she plucked that pistol from the hip of a man that crossed her, the precious knife she'd lodged into the back of his neck was already forgotten—but that's how it all went with Mama. There would always be something new.

"Oh, Baby Boy, it's perfect," she had cooed, stroking her thumb across the painted likeness of the Virgin Mary on the grip. Plucking her long cigarette holder from her lips, he remembered how she held it against her face and grinned at him with yellowed teeth, as if she were cradling a kitten rather than a gun. She called it La Madonna: the Blessed Mother for the Mama. It was made for her.

"Belvedere!"

The dachshund heard his name as well, and narrowed himself like a bullet. Tiny front legs paddled uselessly in the air as he tried to wriggle out of Baby Boy's arm and run towards Mama. She saw him struggling towards her and stopped, her arms outstretched dramatically, La Madonna hanging precariously from her thumb.

"Oh, darling, Belvedere! Mama's coming!"

The display of affection was short lived, and she let her arms fall to angle themselves akimbo at her sides. The bear was back. Mama was like an iron Baby Boy remembered his real mother using, all those years ago. It could warm up in an instant, smooth out all those nasty wrinkles and make everything seem okay—but when the day was done, the shirt was be right back to the mess it started with, and that old iron had gone cold the moment it was tugged out of the socket.

She'd seemed nothing short of the Blessed Mother herself, when she stepped out of that 1967 Ford Mustang Convertible in a cloud of anachronistic mystery. Her black sunhat canonized her visage like a dark halo, red lips permanently quirked like she knew a secret about you that even you didn't know. The plastic click click when she folded her sunglasses and tucked them into the collar of her blouse still felt so loud, even in memory, and her eyes bore a strange, foreign affection that he never really saw from her again.

He hovered a good foot over her, fiddling with the edge of one of the cardboard boxes lined up on the old Ping Pong table in his driveway. Her giant fur coat seemed pointlessly warm for a North Carolina spring, which probably meant she was rich, and if she was rich, maybe she'd buy some of his old junk, and if she bought enough of it, maybe he'd finally get enough money to go to college because God knows his father wouldn't shell out a penny. Maybe he would have, back when his mother was alive, maybe back when they were hap-

pier and things were okay, but not then. Then it was just a waste, because Baby Boy was dumb, dumb as they come, and he'd just flunk out anyway — really, he'd be better off just flipping burgers because then at least he wouldn't be too useless.

It all came out in one mumbled string of consciousness to her, as he tore off little pieces of cardboard from the box and flicked them on the ground. She mimicked the fidgeting, her gloved fingers toying with the dial of a broken rotary phone she had plucked from the box. He couldn't really look at her, then (something that never really changed), but he could feel that knowing smile of hers as she watched him — like he was just the brand of whiskey she'd been looking for.

"Or," she said, unceremoniously dropping the phone back into the box. "You just run a few errands for me. Easy work. I'll pay handsomely." If crocodiles could smile, they'd grin like Mama. "Handsome cash for a handsome boy."

And she still called him handsome, even after his face was all cut up with a broken beer bottle and had to grow weird sideburns to hide the scars, and even after he'd cried in the ugliest way after the first time he'd killed a man, because Jesus Christ his father always called him a pussy for not being able to shoot a goddamn deer, but there he was — a real murderer, now. And every time, Mama held him in her arms and went Shhh Shhh and told him what a good smart brave strong handsome gentle Baby Boy he was and that's all he could have ever asked for, because even when his real mother was alive he couldn't remember her saying such nice things. He lapped it up thirstily; intoxicated not by the taste, but the warmth it gave his belly.

"You goddamn hatchet-faced piece of shit! You filthy little cocksucker!" Her words were easier to make out as she got closer, but Baby Boy wished he couldn't hear. He wished he could will his locked legs to move again, but they wouldn't budge. Mama fired La Madonna into the ice a few feet away from where he stood, and the frosted floor splintered out from the hole like a spider web — not enough to completely shatter, but to surely break if someone stood on it.

"Watch it!" Baby Boy finally found his voice, and, gripping Belvedere tightly under the belly, he held the little dog out, gesturing him towards the wounded patch of ice. "I'll — I'll throw him in!"

"Bullshit!" Mama shouted back, loading another magazine into La Madonna as she tossed the empty one aside like litter. "You'd sooner kill me than you'd kill a dog." She knew she was right. But that didn't stop her from taking cautious pause, her palm pressed against the base of the gun as she watched him with pursed lips. "Put the dog down, Baby Boy."

Baby Boy gave a delirious laugh and shook his head, backing up an inch

as he shifted Belvedere in front of his chest like a small, furry shield. “So—so you can shoot me? No. Fuck no. I’m through with you, Mama. I’m through.” A dribble of snot ran down from his nose to his lip. “Done, done, done. Ain’t doin’ this shit no more. It’s one thing when it’s bad guys, Mama. I ain’t killin’ good folks for you. Nope, nope, nope. No Ma’am.”

But how good it had felt at the time—riding high like old time outlaws in their own wheeled steed; Mama’s 1967 Ford Mustang Convertible. Baby Boy would put his boots on the dashboard and suck on a Pina Colada flavored lollipop, Belvedere on his lap with his head out the window, long ears flapping in the wind. Sometimes, just for fun, Mama would take a handful of cash and toss it in the air while they drove, and Baby Boy would turn and watch all the green flutter away.

Exhaled breath curled out of Mama’s nose into the crisp air like dragon’s smoke. Baby Boy sniffed and continued shaking his head. “You’re—you’re gonna have to find yourself a new Baby Boy, ‘cause this one’s through, Mama.”

Her chin tipped skyward, Mama digested his words. They didn’t sit well in her stomach. She slipped La Madonna into the pocket of her coat and began to slowly step forward.

“I made you, Baby Boy.” When her hand slipped back out, she had her cigarette holder and a lighter. She spoke nonchalantly through clenched teeth as she lit the smoke. “I saved you from that horrible place. I gave you a purpose—”

“Shut up!” Belvedere squirmed and whined with Baby Boy’s outburst, but he didn’t dare quiet himself now. Not after how long he’d kept quiet—how he unquestioningly bludgeoned the back of strangers’ heads on her order. Children should be seen and not heard, it was true, but Baby Boy, they better not see you, neither. Frogs? Snails? Puppy Dog tails? No, the recipe for a good Baby Boy was strength, stealth, and silence. “Shut the fuck up! I’m fucking DONE!”

Mama took a drag on her cigarette and tossed her head back in a condescending laugh. “Oh? You’re done? And where are you gonna go, Baby Boy? Where you gonna go?”

Baby Boy sniffed again, swallowing nervously before holding his chin out indignantly. He jerked the arm clutching the briefcase. “College.”

“Yeah? College?” Mama continued to stalk forward, close enough for her voice to be a patronizing whisper. The click-click as she took her sunglasses off and folded them echoed over the lake. “What college, Baby Boy? What college are you gonna go to, huh? What are you gonna study?”

Baby Boy lowered his eyes, still unable to hold that narrow gaze of hers. He wanted to find that same strange affection she’d given him that spring day in North Carolina they first met, but he knew that if he looked up, all he would feel

were the eyes of a predator.

“Come back to me, Baby Boy. I take good care of you. Mama takes good care.” She slipped her sunglasses back into the pocket of her coat, the hand clutching her cigarette stretched out to beckon him into a one-armed hug. “Put down Belvedere and the money. Nice and gentle. We’ll go back to the car. Forget all about this. We’ll go to Five Guys. Get you a cheeseburger. You love Five Guys. Don’t you love Five Guys, Baby Boy?”

Baby Boy ran a tongue over his chapped bottom lip, looking down at the shuddering wiener dog in one arm, then the briefcase of money in his other. The tree line was yards away—and where would he go when he finally got there? What warm arms would be waiting to embrace him? What college would take a dumb Baby Boy with nothing but cold hard cash and a cold hard dachshund?

Mama was Hell, but she was the only home he had.

“I—I do love Five Guys,” Baby Boy mumbled in defeat.

“See?” A crocodile grin pulled Mama’s red lips. “Doesn’t Mama know best?”

He nodded, sniffing again as he carefully lowered Belvedere and the briefcase to the ice. The dog shuddered violently, shifting on his paws as the bare pads hit the cold ground. Though he watched Mama anxiously, the dachshund made no move to run to her. Baby Boy scratched Belvedere’s ears, and then straightened up, his chest puffed out for only a moment before he fell back into a slump.

“Mama?” Baby Boy shoved his hands into his jacket pockets. “Do you think I could get... a bacon cheeseburger, this time? I know they cost extra, but—”

La Madonna lashed back out from Mama’s coat pocket in a second, like a viper in the grass. Baby Boy’s hand shot to the side of his neck, blood spurt-ing out between his fingers. His other hand stretched out to her, he hopelessly mouthed words that would never be understood by anyone but him. Whatever he intended to say was reduced to just a series of strained, wet gurgles, choked past a gaping maw with dark red pouring down his chin. He only managed a single step towards her before collapsing, blue eyes still bulged out of his skull when he finally went still.

Mama stared down at Baby Boy with the same mournfulness a drunk might have for an empty whiskey bottle. It had the best kind of burn, all the way down—but there’d been too many by this point for it to even be memorable. And there would continue to be more. There would always be more Baby Boys. The world had no shortage of desperate, malleable youth, and, yellow though they were, it hadn’t taken all her teeth to sweet talk innocents into her 1967 Ford Mustang Convertible just yet.

Belvedere stood there, tail between his legs, one paw raised and curled against his body. He stared up at Mama with that guilty look dachshunds are bred with, whining pitifully but making no move to run to her.

“Christ, Belvedere.”

Mama slipped La Madonna back into the pocket of her coat and stepped forward to collect her dog and her money, but a whispered crackle beneath her locked her knees in place.

A red spider web ensnared her. Baby Boy’s blood had run into the veins of the broken ice, circling down into the telltale bullet hole like a drain. La Madonna burned through her coat pocket, and with her pulse hammering in her head, Mama tried to slowly step back—but the stiletto of her heel caught in one of the cracks.

“No, no—Fuck, no—”

She jerked her ankle to yank it, out but the twist of the joint may as well have been the pull of a lever. The ice collapsed beneath her, and she let out a shriek, but it was quickly muffled by the freezing, stagnant water that filled her mouth as she was tugged under. Baby Boy’s corpse and the money followed, the edge of the briefcase knocking into her temple as they all tumbled in. She didn’t struggle for long.

Belvedere paced the opening, nervous eyes flickering over the bills floating over the still water like algae. He sat down and raised his nose to the sky, giving a long, mournful howl.

# My Super Duty Red Truck

I love my 2014 Ford Super Duty red truck because it takes me everywhere I need to go. I feel proud to have it because it is incredible! Not only that, but I work my ass off to pay the dealer every month. Every morning the smell of the leather seats gives me the confidence to sit on them. When I drive on I-95N to work, I know people in shitty cars talk about the wonders of my truck. In it, I listen to *corridos* that reminds me of my parents, and my twelve brothers. If only I could drive it on the dirt roads of my *rancho*, my dad would be proud of me, and people would be envious because they will never have one! Every Friday, after feeding and cleaning the shit from smelly cows and stubborn horses, I patiently clean my truck. First, I gently remove the dust and lint from the console and dashboard with a white micro-fiber towel that I slightly spray with Windex. Then, I start with the instrument panel, which I clean even slower because I am mindful to not damage any sensors or handles. When I lightly brush the knobs and buttons in the center panel, I use a small brush because the bristles get into any of the cracks and crevices that a micro-towel cannot reach, and I never forget to brush the vents. It feels good to clean something that is mine and just mine. When people look at me all dusty and sweaty from working in that stinky farm, I know they don't think this truck is mine, they think it's my boss', but no. No, this truck is fucking mine.

I have experienced these feelings before except it wasn't with a truck. She was beautifully perfect. Her skin: soft like porcelain and a hair so long that it reached her wide hips. It was so soft and warm that I used it to cover myself during the nights to not feel the cold. I stole her from her parents when she was turning fifteen, but when we were first going out, I felt proud to have her by my side, and I knew other people didn't believe she was going out with someone that didn't shower often and walked barefoot everywhere. Maybe because I didn't pay tons of money for her like I'm doing with the truck, but who knows? After we moved to the United States, shit just changed. I've treated her badly; perhaps horrible, but I'm never able to control myself. She is fragile, innocent, and still very beautiful.

Every day after work, she calls every half hour to tell me not to spend money on alcohol and tequila with my friends because we have other expenses, and we need to save for Lily, our little girl. I get mad because she doesn't understand I need to relax after being in that disgusting farm for more than twelve hours.

One night after having sex, she lay sideways on the bed. I looked directly at her face. I noticed a dark gleam on her hazel eyes and more wrinkles around them, and what use to be light skin is now full of dark patches I asked her,

“What’s wrong?”

She responded, “I’m just tired of cleaning rooms.”

I told her, “But you’ve done it for years. Don’t complain.”

“Yes, but I’m tired of doing it everyday, I’m tired of my life,” and she continued, “Maybe if I had stayed with my parents that night, my life would now be different.”

I wanted to tell her that I don’t regret anything, that I love her like the first day, but I got so mad that I grabbed her skinny naked body with my big sharp hands, and I threw her on the floor. Then I punched her until blood was dripping from her face. She was so bruised that she called out from work for a couple weeks.

Maybe, if I am gentler with her, I can rediscover how incredible she is. I should try to listen when she talks like when my truck asks for an expensive oil change; perhaps, I should be more attentive to her, like maybe after dinner I can thank her for the delicious meals she cooks every day instead of quietly walking to the living room to watch TV. Perhaps, instead of buying an air freshener for the truck I can buy her a perfume and see if her new smell gives me the confidence to hug her once in a while, or maybe, instead of never forgetting to brush the vents, I try to never forget to buy her white tulips, which are her favorite flowers.

# Silent Night

It was the night before my wedding and the house was filled with relatives and friends from all over Banjul. Women were gathered, cooking all kinds of traditional Wolof dishes. My friends and cousins sat under the mango tree in the backyard, clapping and singing, "Saitor sait." They danced to the rhythm of the drums.

I was in the bathroom with my mother, my aunty and grandmother. They had me undressed, as they poured salt in a warm bucket of water. This was a ritual that tribal Wolof women did for the bride the night before she wed. It was believed to keep all evil spirit away and prevent any tragedy from happening on the day of the wedding. I stood quietly as my grandmother poured the warm salty water all over my body. My mother wrapped the traditional white cloth around me which signified my purity. I was an untouched woman and the tribes celebrates that about a woman.

Later that night, I lay on my bed unable to sleep. The sound of the empty air filled the silence. The women had gone to bed. I got out of my bed and paced back and forth in my room. My whole body shivered but it wasn't a cold night. I hugged myself and stood at the window looking at the trees in the backyard as they moved freely at the touch of the wind. I sighed and wished I could be as free. I was marrying a man my parents chose for me. He was rich, educated, handsome and young. I didn't love him.

My mother told me that love would come eventually when I begged her to convince my father to not make me marry him.

"He is good for you Ndella," she'd said. "He will give you everything your father and I couldn't give you."

I looked her. Her eyes sparkled. She looked happy.

"Did you love Papa when you married him?" I'd asked her.

She put the bowl of rice she was preparing down and put both her hands on my cheeks. "Yes, I loved him deeply," she'd said. "There was no other man for me."

I smiled.

"He had nothing to offer me," she'd continued. "He was a tailor from the village of Basse and he had no education." She dropped her hands from my cheeks. "We struggled for years. Some days harder than others and when we had you, we weren't sure how we were going to feed you." She looked away. "Ndella, love can survive many things, but some struggles will break love apart

no matter how strong it may be.” She turned back to the rice she was preparing. “Choose security baby girl,” she’d said. “Love will come.”

Now as I stood looking out of the window, that day seemed so long ago. The house was quiet, but my mind was so loud. I grabbed the white blanket my aunt laid out for me. The blanket I was supposed to spread on my matrimonial bed the night my husband would make me a woman. I wrapped it around myself and opened the door to the backyard. I needed to think. I needed to understand the commitment I was about to make to a man I didn’t love. I sat under the mango tree and lost myself to the dead of the night. I thought about the life I was about to start with my soon-to-be husband. I thought about the dreams that may never be; I wanted to go to college. I’d always imagined I’d be a good doctor, but how could I be a doctor when I was about to be somebody’s wife? I thought about my parents and how much they’d struggled and sacrificed for me. I thought about Malik; he was the kind of man that most Wolof women prayed for, but as hard as I’d tried, I couldn’t love him. Maybe it was the way he looked at me like I was beneath him, when our parents introduced us for the first time. He seized me from head to toe while I sat quietly listening to our parent discuss our future together as if we weren’t there.

“You are absolutely beautiful,” he’d said to me later on when mama left us alone to talk. “I just need to clean you up a little,” he got up from his seat on the opposite side of room, and sat next to me. “I wasn’t sure about this arranged marriage thing, but this could work,” he said.

I looked at him.

“To be honest with you, my dad didn’t really give me a choice, it was either marry you or forget about my entire inheritance,” he said. “I don’t know what my dad owes your father, but he is pretty adamant about me marrying you,” he placed his hand over mine, “but you are beautiful, I think this could work,” he’d said.

I’d contemplated running away many times after that day, but I didn’t know where I would run to, and my fear of the unknown always stopped me.

After what seemed like an eternity, I walked back to my room. I stopped abruptly, my heart started to pound like drums. Malik stood at my door looking at me. His big beautiful brown eyes pierced through me.

“Where were you?” he said.

I wrapped the blanket a little tighter around me. “What are you doing here?” I asked.

He was not supposed to see me before the wedding. In Wolof tradition, it was bad luck for the groom to see his bride the day before the wedding.

“I didn’t see you all day, I wanted to see you.” He looked handsome. He knew he did too.

I walked slowly towards the door. "It is bad luck to see me the night before we wed."

"I don't believe in that superstitious bullshit," he said.

I walked past him and opened the door. "I need some rest for tomorrow," I said. "Goodnight Malik."

He stood in front of the door blocking my way. "I want to come in," he said.

I stepped back from him. "Malik, you cannot come in. I can't..."

He walked inside my room. "I didn't ask," he said, "I'm not asking you."

I bit my lip. He wouldn't try anything, I told myself. He was not that kind of man. His father was a diplomat; he spent most of his childhood traveling around the world. He knew better. He wouldn't hurt me. I reassured myself.

"See you tomorrow." I forced a smile.

"I want you," he said.

I balled my hands into a fist. "Malik, I may not have a choice in who I marry, but this is still my body and I choose who I give it to."

He grabbed my hand and pulled me inside the room and shut the door. "It is no longer just your body when you become my wife," he said.

"I'm not your wife yet."

He smiled. "You will be my wife tomorrow. What difference does it make?"

"No," I shook my head.

"I'm not asking," he whispered in my ear.

"You are just going to take it?" I grabbed the door knob and turned it.

He grabbed my hand and pulled me away from the door.

"There is a word for men who take what isn't willingly given to them, and there is a special place for them too, Malik." I could hear my heart pounding through my chest.

He locked the door. "It's not rape when a husband takes what is his."

"I'm not your wife yet," I repeated.

He put his arms around me and picked me up. He gently laid me down on the bed. "After tonight, you would have no choice but to be my wife because we both know that Wolof men don't marry women that have already been touched; impure women."

"Please Malik, I have already agreed to marry you. The wedding is tomorrow. I will be your wife. Please, you don't have to do this. I'm not ready."

He pulled up my dress and forced himself inside me. I closed my eyes and swallowed my cry, and after a while, he rolled off me. My eyes were still closed.

He kissed my lips. "I'm sorry Ndella, but I just couldn't take the chance

of losing you. I promise I will make it up to you.” He opened the door. “See you at the altar.”

I heard the door clicked. I opened my eyes and he was gone. I looked at the clock and it was three o'clock in the morning. I touched my face and felt the fountain of tears down my cheeks. I pulled the covers over my head and begged sleep to steal me away.

I woke up to the sound of loud voices chanting old Wollof wedding songs and the drums that guided the voices. “Saito sait. Sait bu reffet ak yeow,” they sang. A beautiful and pure bride, I repeated the words they were saying in my head. Not anymore. I didn't realize that I was crying until a loud and sharp moan escaped my lips. I covered my mouth with my hands and felt the tears on my face. The light knock on my door startled me and I jumped up.

“Ndella are you awake? I have your wedding beads for your waist. Do you want to try them on,” my Aunty Amirah said from the other side of the door.

I wiped the tears from my eyes, and got up quickly to open the door. She wore a smile on her face, but it disappeared the moment she saw mine.

“What hap...” she started to say but I grabbed her arm and pulled her in the room quickly, and shut the door behind her.

“You have to help me aunt Ami.” I didn't recognize my own voice.

She opened her eyes wide and grabbed my arms tight with both arms, and motioned for me to sit on the bed. “What happened Ndella? Did you have a fight with Malik last night? I saw him leaving your room early this morning when I got up to pray,” she said.

I covered my face with my hands and took a deep breath. “Look,” I pulled the covers away from my bed to expose the blood stains on my sheet.

“You guys did it?” Aunty Amirah covered her mouth with both her hands. She moved her hands to her hips and busted into laughter. “Well, girl that is no reason for you to cry your eyes out like somebody was beating you senseless. Gosh, I thought you were going to tell me that he changed his mind about marrying you or something.” She sat down next to me on the bed. “Listen Ndella, I'm sure you two are not the only couple who ever got too eager and did it the night before the wedding. I did it with your uncle a month before we got married and I found out that I was pregnant.” She giggled. “These kinds of things happen all the time, especially with people who are in love.”

“I don't love him,” I said it louder than I intended to.

“What?” Aunt Amirah said.

“I don't love him, Aunt Ami, and we are not two eager love birds who couldn't wait for the wedding night. I didn't want to do it and I don't want to marry him.” I stood up and started pacing. “I have to get out of this. I cannot marry that man.”

Aunt Amirah was silent. I looked at her. Her mouth was wide open. "Ndella, what exactly are you saying? You think he?" she stopped, unable to say the word.

"No, I don't think aunty, I know he raped me," I placed my hand on my stomach to settle the pain I felt in my lower stomach.

"Okay, Ndella, you have to think about this. Calm down. That man loves you, anyone with eyes can see that. He is wealthy, he is educated. He is going to take care of you. He is going to take care of this entire family." She took my hand in hers. "You know how hard your parents have struggled to raise you, Ndella. This man is going to change that. Think about what you are saying before you say it again," Aunt Amirah said.

"You are asking me to marry a man who raped me?" I sat on the floor with both my arms resting on my knees and my hands on my head.

"No, I'm saying, he loves you and he will make you happy and your family secure." She sat on the floor next to me. "Come on, Ndella, you hit the jackpot. This man is going to put you in a mansion, and take you to places you can only dream of. No matter what happened last night, just remember that he loves you."

I stood up, and sat back down on the bed. I got up again and walked over to the door. "I want to tell my mom, she will tell me what to do. She won't ask me to sacrifice myself for this family's security. She loves me." I turned the lock and opened the door. My mom was at the door. She got in the room and closed the door. I threw myself into her arms.

"Mama, you have to help me please," I said sobbing.

She held me tight, stroking my back. "What happened?" she pulled away from the embrace and looked at me.

Aunt Amirah pointed towards the bed to show her the blood stains. My mother looked at me and started to smile, but I shook my head because I knew what she was thinking.

"I didn't want to. I told him no, but he did it anyway. I didn't want to, mama."

My mother pulled back like someone pushed her. She put her finger under my chin and turned my face towards her.

"Look at me," she said.

I did.

"Don't you open up that can of worms, baby girl," she said with a flat look on her face.

"Mama?" I said, unable to move. I sat on the carpeted floor and closed my eyes. Both my mother and aunt joined me on the floor. Both holding my hand. I jerked away and moved back.

“I know you don’t understand, but he is good, baby girl. I know he loves you and he will make you happy. He is helping us and we need that. If you don’t marry him, no one else will marry you. How is that better? He will make you happy,” my mother said.

“I would like to be left alone,” I whispered. I wouldn’t have had the guts to ask my mother and aunt to leave my room because respectful Wolof girls don’t ask their elders to leave their presence, but I didn’t care. They’d asked me to marry a man I didn’t love for their security. I no longer owed them anything. My mother, and my aunt got up, and left me. I laid on the floor, looking at the old cracked ceiling of my small bedroom, and cried one last time for the woman I used to be.

# Cognitive Labyrinth

Everything is going to be quite alright, so I reach for the brightest colored pencil and get going. On with my life. A bright yellow fill, a floral outline that catches nicely in the sunlight filtered through the speckled window glass. Dead bees and flies and mosquitos remain from the warm months, their skeletons enjoy the foliage. Their ghosts fly and the whisper of their buzz is in the air. On with my life, this sounds more productive than actuality. On with my solitude, no communication with my few contacts. I am erased from their memories for lack of use. But they are not even smudged from mine. Their faces and the conversations and interactions remain drawn in permanent charcoal, black and white, but Technicolor when I dream. In wide screen, I recall a fight with the girl I traveled with once. I wish this was black and white, the colors seem too real and I am transported back into that unforgiving circumstance. The shame and anguish adopt purple and blue hues and swim like dialysis through my blood networks.

But I continue without purpose and without plans. The view from my window is good. I hear more fuzz. The static drumming noise. A synthesizer after a bottle of wine, playing hooded readings of glut and prescience. I think of boredom, the etymology, and the feeling of it, and the way it is expressed. Yawn, a deep inhale and exhale. I yawn, unashamed. I open my mouth wide, bear all teeth and close my eyes, and see the spirals and stars. Yawn. This won't solve anything. Just a break from the break from work. My thoughts wander and it is hopeless to catch them as they lunge deeper into the realm of cognitive labyrinths.

Come closer. Let's run to the field out there. See the blanket of purple? It's lupine, so beautiful, but invasive. Staunching all diversity, welcoming new ecologies. I want to howl at the moon, but the pattern on the wall is transfixing. It is only possible to focus on the wall and only if it is beige. Focus on it I do, and project my reveries onto it, but when I blink they're gone.

I see myself slide through the crevices of dark buildings, navigating alleys. The rats in the basements, the dogs in the window sills, the cats on the pavement, black and swallowing all light. I follow the smell of salt and methane, towards a dirty beach with sea foam, nature's bubbly bath of slime and radioactive shell fish, the delicacy in this northeastern American city. It's cold and I step onto the sand and walk to the water line and accept that this is not my home, the land of turks and greeks, the war-torn paradise in which I was raised where

people enjoy a hot and dry C climate. Mediterranean. It is quiet and the waves sound more like a buzz, the ghosts from the bumble bee grave followed me here. For a moment I feel present. But the feeling will evaporate like it always does, and then it's back to the rat race, to the stuffy basement, yawning and eating cheese. The VHS tape will continue to rewind, but I am forward. I am ahead. I have seen this movie already and the story has already been told.



# Judges' Commentary

# Poetry Judge: Ann Hudson

Ann Hudson's book, *The Armillary Sphere*, was selected by Mary Kinzie for the Hollis Summers Prize and was published by Ohio University Press. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Cream City Review*, *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Seattle Review*, *Sow's Ear*, and elsewhere. She lives with her husband and two children in Evanston, Illinois, where she teaches at a Montessori school.

## *First Place:*

### *Memories of Steam in a Laundromat - Toni Callaban*

The sense imagery in this poem is evocative and mesmerizing. It neither glamorizes nor disparages the difficult work of laundering and ironing and cooking and being a family. It does something more demanding: it presents the difficult work for us to witness. The "meaningful work and pride" the speaker describes is a reflection on the shared efforts of making a living, but also the larger effort of supporting a family (emotionally as well as financially). How we see what we do as meaningful on a larger scale is tremendously important, and the poem looks unflinchingly at that work.

## *Second Place:*

### *Plastic Bangles - Stephanie Chang*

"Plastic Bangles" moves deftly from the visual imagery of the sister ("your / Worn cloths, the bareness of your feet, / Your black messy hair, / And the purple under your eyes") to the emotional and psychological resonance of the bangles she dons each morning. As closely as the speaker watches the sister, it is the "ring and cling" of the bracelets which pierces and gives a brightness to the "spiritless routines" the sister is burdened with. The poem addresses the sister not with pity, but with sympathy and compassion.

*Honorable Mention:*

*Gypsy, Seventeen, Deeply Unhappy - Kiernan Norman*

I find this poem haunting, and have been thinking about it for days. I love its wild, raw energy, its boldness. “I could have been anybody / tiptoeing between past-dead / hatchbacks and stray cats,” the speaker notes, suggesting simultaneously that the speaker is anonymous, silent, nearly un-noticable, and that the speaker has agency and can transform herself into someone other. She could be “any lonely girl with sleep in her eyes / and fogged up sunglasses,” and what mystifies her (and thus the reader) is why she remained her self? What is the self made of? How do we choose it? I love how the speaker demands that we confront these questions.

# Art Judge: Frank Bruckmann

Frank Bruckmann lives and paints in historic Westville Village in New Haven, CT. After graduating from art school in the states, he spent several years in Paris and Madrid copying the masters in the great museums of Europe. While abroad, he immersed himself in the local cultures by learning their languages and painting landscapes of the countryside and cityscapes. A “brief visit” to Connecticut in 1990 became a permanent relocation for Bruckmann because he discovered that there was endless painting material on CT’s shoreline. Whether setting up his easel on the beach, painting portraits, taking off to Mexico or Europe for a landscape painting trip, or composing a still life in his studio, one can see a man at work who is dedicated principally to the art of painting and living.

## *First Place:*

### *Duality - Mary Rudzisz*

The first thing that attracted me to “duality” was the ephemeral quality of the overall image. The impermanence of the situation, the softness of the figure. The relationship of the values between the darkest dark and lightest light is very well achieved, giving it an ethereal, almost ghostly quality. The correlation of the hands from one image to the other and the figure represented back to front is completely consistent with the black to white change of values. The eerie, phantom like layer over the photo gives it hazy, nebulous character which invites you into the piece, but doesn’t allow you to go too far.

## *Second Place:*

### *Laying Skeleton - Destiny Flores*

“Laying Skeleton” has a beautiful sense of structure. The artist’s use of negative space combined with an excellent rendering ability of anatomy, creates a very believable object in place. The use of values, from the dark cast shadow to the light peeking through the clavicle and the rib cage, give form and life to the drawing. Even the directions of the artist’s marks gives one an insight to the structure of the bone, suggesting a thin or thickness of mass.

*Honorable Mention:*

*Ashley - Ashley Young*

I find this image intriguing, not only for the overall design, but the interesting narrative, the relationship of lighted areas to the more obscure parts of the photo. The engaging correlation of the tent like structure to the dual portraits on the wall, to the almost dead center placement of the clock. The artist finds a very interesting use of the warmer beiges in the foreground with the cooler violets in the back which gives the piece a dramatic sense of depth.

# Fiction Judge: Lawrence Coates

Lawrence Coates is the author of three novels: *The Blossom Festival*, *The Master of Monterey*, and *The Garden of the World*. His fourth novel, *The Goodbye House*, is forthcoming in the fall of 2015. His work has been recognized with the Western States Book Award in fiction, The Nancy Dasher Award, The Barthelme Prize for Short Prose, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. He is currently a Professor of Creative Writing at Bowling Green State University.

## ***First Place:***

### ***Silent Night - Tanta Badjan***

In “Silent Night,” the author sensitively depicts a young woman in an awful dilemma. The opening situation, with Ndella facing a loveless marriage, is dire. The author then raises the stakes and shows the aftermath of Ndella being raped by her fiancé. The irony is profound. Ndella is being forced into marriage by social and cultural custom, and yet the story also demonstrates the hollowness and hypocrisy of those very institutions.

## ***Second Place:***

### ***Up the Wolves - Carlin Huckel***

In “Up the Wolves,” the author shows a young woman who is between worlds and seeking some sense of herself. Her mother divorced her father and left Nara, though Nara feels much closer to her mother than her father, and she hasn’t come to terms with being left behind. She also struggles with her ethnic heritage, since her mother was Native American, and she doesn’t quite know where she belongs. Predictably, she is easily persuaded that a man paying attention to her means something. The story shows how friendship between women can be meaningful, and the final image wonderfully captures Nara’s turning point.

*Honorable Mention:*

*My Friends - Yazmin Gonzalez*

“My Friends” shows a nice control of irony. The friends of the title are not really good friends at all to the main character. While they are encouraging her to follow the same path as themselves, she struggles with the fact that her desires are not the same as theirs. At the end of the story, she thinks she’s a bad friend herself, because she wants something different. She wants to know ‘answers,’ and while the immediate literal meaning refers to answers in Algebra, the reader understands that she’s seeking broader answers in her life.



# An Interview with Elizabeth Edelglass

# Elizabeth Edelglass

Elizabeth Edelglass' short stories have been published in *Michigan Quarterly Review* (winner of the Lawrence Foundation Prize), *Lilith* (Short Story Contest winner), *In The Grove* (William Saroyan Centennial Prize winner), *American Literary Review*, *Passages North*, *New Haven Review*, *Blue Lyra Review*, *The Ilanot Review*, and more. She has won a Connecticut Commission on the Arts fellowship, and her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and for Best New American Voices. She has stories forthcoming in *Lilith* and *jewishfiction.net*.

As a librarian, Edelglass has worked at the U.S. National Archives and recently retired after eighteen years as Director of the Jewish Community Library at the JCC of Greater New Haven. She lives in Woodbridge, where she raised her three children. Edelglass is currently at work on a collection of linked stories and two novels.

# An Interview with Elizabeth Edelglass

**Folio:** How long have you been writing and how have you grown over the years?

**Edelglass:** I've been writing all my life: teen essay contests, school newspaper, even about 100 pages of a novel tapped out on my high school typewriter, a manual typewriter that my parents somehow allowed me to buy with italic typeface—I guess even then I wanted my words to stand out from the rest. All I recall of that novel is that it began with a teenage girl getting off a bus in a strange city—long before I'd ever learned Tolstoy's quote about the only two stories of all great literature: "...a man goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town."

In my day, college English departments did not offer fiction-writing courses. I studied history at Tufts, where my only fiction option was a four-week experimental one-on-one workshop between myself and a biology professor. Those were the experimental '60s. No great writing ensued.

In the late '80s, when my youngest child started school, I took two semesters of graduate level fiction writing at SCSU, and I've been writing fiction ever since. Wish I could remember my professors' names, but I can tell you that one of the best things one of my Southern profs did for me was to recommend me to Alice Mattison's Anderson Street Writing Workshop. Alice, our wonderful New Haven writer, became my teacher, friend, and lifelong mentor.

An MFA program never fit into my busy life as mother, librarian, and wife, but I was happy to pursue a more eclectic, independent course of study. Over the years, I have sought out writers I wanted to learn from at workshops at Wesleyan, Taos, and Provincetown. I love learning something new from each new teacher. Recently, I've had two lucky opportunities for month-long residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, writer's heaven, where I've had concentrated time to focus on making the shift from short-story writer to novelist.

**Folio:** How do you generate story ideas?

**Edelglass:** I've written fiction based on what I call "family myth" stories I think

I remember my mother telling me about her large extended family — stories that might or might not have been true when she told them, and that I might or might not remember correctly. I've also made fiction from stories heard from friends, snippets of conversation overheard from strangers in public places, human interest stories clipped from newspapers, and stories utterly invented in my head, inspired by nothing (at least nothing conscious) other than my imagination.

On the occasions when I do write fiction generated from some kernel of truth, I rarely ask more questions from the original source. If starting from "family myth," I don't go back to my mother to confirm my memory of her story or to extract more of the "truth." Once I have an idea, I want the freedom to allow my characters to discover their own truths.

By the way, I record story ideas (and save those newspaper clippings) for future use in my writer's journal, something else I learned from one of my SCSU professors.

### **Folio: What inspires your writing?**

**Edelglass:** I began to have some success publishing my fiction when I found myself writing about Jewish characters. The Jews in my stories are rarely Orthodox or strictly religiously observant, but they think about God and worry about the rules of Jewish law, even as they break them.

As a Judaic librarian and a Jewish writer, I've done some research into what constitutes Jewish American fiction. Isaac Bashevis Singer once said, "Every writer must have an address," while Bernard Malamud has been quoted as saying, "What I write about Jews comes out stories, so I write about Jews." Not all Jewish American writers agree with this perspective. E.L. Doctorow says, "All literature is fundamentally secular and universal," and Philip Roth has repeatedly and firmly rejected the label of American Jewish writer: "I write American," he has said. While I don't dare compare myself to any of these prestigious writers, I have to say that Singer's and Malamud's truths are true for me: I have an address, and when I write about Jews, out come stories.

### **Folio: What's one of the biggest challenges you face when crafting a story?**

**Edelglass:** For me, the biggest challenge is plot, narrative arc, how to take interesting characters and/or an interesting situation and turn those ingredients into a fully formed story.

The first writers' conference I ever attended was at Wesleyan (it's local, and it's annual, and I highly recommend it to SCSU students). There, I learned

from Roxanna Robinson to write towards the end. Write the most dramatic scene you can think of, first, and then write towards that. I don't always work this way, but sometimes it helps.

At the Taos Summer Writers' Conference, I took a course with Antonya Nelson on "The Shapeliness of the Short Story." From Nelson, I learned to read with great care, both the work of others as well as my own work. On rereading a first draft, I search for patterns, repetitions, especially repeated images. Often the repetitions were not intentional in the first writing, but once I discover them, then I have my hook, my tool to "shape" the story.

**Folio:** Do you have any tricks up your sleeve on beating writer's block?

**Edelglass:** I suppose I ought to say, "Write every day. The only way to get the work done is to sit down and do it." Although of course that's true, and I do suffer from the usual writer's infirmities of distraction, angst, and procrastination, it is also true that I personally find I must have something to say, a story to tell, before I sit down to write. Sadly, this does slow the writing process, but I do spend a lot of time thinking, and then, when I'm ready, the words pour out.

Alternatively, I often find that if one project is stalled it helps to turn to another, which is why I currently have several stories percolating, while I'm also hard at work on a novel, with the first draft of another novel sitting on the back burner.

Finally, a writers' group can be helpful, especially when you're first starting out. Commitment to the group provides inherent deadlines: must have something to share next Thursday!

**Folio:** What advice do you have for young, aspiring writers?

**Edelglass:** Writer's groups are good for more than just deadlines. The feedback from others can be stimulating and sometimes magical, while you also hone your own writing skills through careful reading of others' work. Of course, listen to all advice with discriminating ears: take the advice that seems right to you, and ignore the rest. (But if the advice you ignore keeps coming back, draft after draft, meeting after meeting, from multiple members of your trusted group, then eventually you'll probably have to consider it.)

Read, write, and network. And never give up. Publishing opportunities don't fall at our feet; we have to search for them, and we have to be willing to accept a lot of rejection along the way. Call yourself a writer, believe you are a writer, and take every opportunity to meet other writers and to get your writing into the hands of readers.



# A Little Bit About Our Contributors...

**Ashley Young** is a senior at Southern majoring in Visual Fine Arts with a concentration in Photography. She has studied photography for eight years and plans on continuing her artistic journey after graduation. Ashley aims to present vivid narratives through her work, in order to show the world how she sees the world.

**Britney Grant** is a senior at Southern Connecticut State University who's majors are Collaborative: Elementary Education/ Special Education and English. Britney is a Senior Resident Advisor in Farnham Hall, as well as a member of the Urban Education Fellows Program on campus. She aspires to work with children post graduation!

**Carlin Huckel** is in her third year at Southern. In the future, she hopes to write video games. Carlin doesn't really know how to do anything besides write and read. In her free time, she gets really emotional about Breaking Bad and listens to emo music that hasn't been a big deal since 2004.

**Charlotte Chamberlain** is a junior studying English and the art of curiosity. She believes that an attuned and sensitive appreciation for the nuance of language interwoven with boundless empathy plays a key role in fostering social and cultural growth; humanity needs English majors. Outside of the classroom, Charlotte is an amateur painter with a philosophical fondness for physics and a passion for expanding her tea collection.

**Chris Soares** is a senior and not your average English major. He aspires to be a surgeon and cut deep in the flesh, as he hopes to accomplish with his writing as well. He doesn't know if his last sentence is grammatically correct, but it sounds cool.

**Dani Dymond** is midway through her junior year at SCSU after transferring from her native Southern California to a snowier kind of Southern this past fall. She is an English major whose primary hobbies include writing and reading, though she also loves ice hockey, long hikes, and shameless Netflix/ Pinterest bingeing. While she aims to author books or work in publishing after graduating, causes surrounding environmental preservation and animal rights are important issues that she hopes to work on behalf of someday. At times, such

as in "Lineage" and "Tired Mothers Always Rise," nature's roots hook themselves not only into her heart, but into her poetry, as well.

**Destiny Flores** is a sophomore and wishes she could get by with only having to take studio classes. Destiny is that one quiet person in class that will whisper things that make her surrounding classmates laugh due to her "sarcasm", yet she is being entirely serious. Destiny also has an obsession with dogs but finds it hard to receive her daily dose of dog by living on campus. The alliteration is strong with this one.

**Fatima Cecunjanin** is a senior majoring in geography. She is a full time student, part time waitress, and occasional writer/painter/traveler. Her and her dad want to take the trans Siberian railroad across Russia, one of their many far-fetched wanderlusts.

**Jill Botti** writes for the same reason that people pick pesky cobwebs from the corners of ceilings. Jill will likely never be certain of her graduation date. As wise Tom Callahan III once said, "You know, a lot of people go to college for seven years!"

**Kaitlyn Honore** is a sophomore majoring in English. She enjoys writing poetry and spends her time reading as many books as she can manage. She aspires to eventually teach and force students to appreciate literature as she does.

**Kiernan Norman**, a recently declared theatre major, works locally and regionally in theatre and film. Kiernan has been a featured poet for Coalesce Literary Magazine and The Insomniac Propagandist, along with having her work published in Germ Magazine and Wild Quarterly. She is part of the spoken word artist collective Meta4rikal Mindz based out of New York City. She is very thankful.

**Kirsten Reed** is a student, creator, and lover of art. Born and raised on the Connecticut coast, she has a passion for drawing and painting and aspirations of working professionally in these mediums. In said ambitions, she is unwaveringly supported and uplifted by her family, friends, and darling dog,

Frida.

**Mary Rudzis** is a freshman, majoring in journalism and is hoping to minor in fine art. She enjoys writing, local music, getting caught in the rain, and long walks on the beach. Often found petting an animal or eating vegan snacks. Very rare.

**Michelle Ritchie** is a senior at SCSU working toward a degree in Geography and Environmental Studies. Her chosen course of study, photography, and poetry are all inspired by the places she has traveled to. She has been all over the world, experiencing places such as Iceland and South Africa, and is in a constant state of planning her next adventure.

**Michelle Rosenthal** is a junior at SCSU. Michelle continues to work as a licensed massage therapist while pursuing a social work degree. In her free time, she likes to read, write, hike, dance, and spend time with her adorable dog.

**Paul Benjunas** is currently a biology education major and an avid wildlife photographer with a particular focus on reptiles and amphibians. One day Paul hopes to publish a book, documenting his stories and photos of his wildlife experiences.

**Stephanie Chang** is a senior at Southern Connecticut State University where she is studying to receive her Bachelors of Arts degree in English. Stephanie loves to write creatively and professionally. Her concentrations are poetry and short fiction, as well as social media blog writing. Stephanie comes from a multicultural family, which she has acknowledged has contributed to the inspiration and scenery for her work. Outside the world of writing, Stephanie loves to spend time in nature, and has a passion for hiking. She has lived in Connecticut all her life, residing in the city of West Haven, CT.

**Tanta Badjan** was born in Gambia, West Africa. She came to the United States at the age of 14. She was here for precisely three days when she started school at St. Augustine Middle School in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Tanta found it really hard to connect with her peers because not only was she new to

the American culture, she was also shy and very introverted. One afternoon, her dad drove her to the library to pick up some books to keep her entertained at home. She picked up her first novel, *Jane Eyre* by Emily Bronte, and fell madly in love with the book and reading. Reading helped her develop a vivid imagination, so she decided that she wanted to tell her own stories too. Writing helped her understand herself and this new world that she suddenly found herself in. Tanta grew to love being by herself because it allowed her to get to know herself, and the more she knew, the more she welcomed her solitude, which motivated her to read and write more often. Tanta believes that, in a way, books saved her from the emptiness she felt after being uprooted from her life in Gambia and placed into the American culture she once struggled to fit into.

**Taylor Richards** is a junior journalism major and creative writing minor. If she's not writing poems, taking photos, reading about feminism, finding inspiration, obsessing over artistic minimalism, wearing lipstick, or trying to rationally justify the irrational characteristics of her life, she's probably sleeping, eating, or doing homework. After she graduates, she hopes she can travel as much as she can.

**Toni Callahan** is a senior at SCSU, as well as a military wife, a mother of two teenagers, a dance mom, a robotics mom and cheerleading coach. Her childhood memories of watching her mother and grandparents work in their family-owned laundromat inspired her to create the poem "Memories of Steam in a Laundromat". She admits that she does not enjoy reading, but she appreciates those who can immerse themselves in a well-written world. Toni believes that there is value to reading, but the art is in the writing. She also believes we all possess values that should be shared. Sometimes they are words, sometimes talents, sometimes just a smile.

**Valerie Suchecki** is a freshman at SCSU. When she's not working towards a degree in Communications Disorders she is writing poems, playing with dogs, or rewatching episodes of *The Office*.

**Yazmin Gonzalez** is an undergraduate student at Southern. She is thankful to God and her loving family for all the support. She hopes to get an MFA in Creative Writing to continue doing what she loves. She is currently climbing a big mountain, one with rocks that sometimes hit her hard, but she

keeps climbing and climbing until she gets to the top, ready to fly.

**Zanny Stowell** is a junior English major at SCSU with hopes to one day write professionally. She is delighted to say that this is her second Folio publication, which is two more than she would have ever anticipated. She would like to thank her parents for their unwavering support in her creative interests, and congratulates all the other artists and writers featured in this year's magazine.

# Folio would like to thank...

Each student who submitted his or her work  
Our loyal open mic and workshop participants  
This year's featured readers and artists  
The Fire Place Lounge (except for the noisiness)  
Bookmarks English Club  
The English Department  
Jeff Mock  
Margot Schilpp  
Dana Sonnenschein  
Tim Parrish  
Robin Troy  
Jason Labbe  
Tom Dorr  
Frank Bruckmann  
Lawrence Coates  
Ann Hudson  
Elizabeth Edelglass  
Charlene Cammarasana  
Denise Bentley-Drobish  
Brian Carey  
Tea, Coffee, and Caffeine  
Mondo Mayo  
Gummy Bears  
Manatees  
The English language  
and Scrabble