



2017

## Toes and Paint

Nick Alti

Western Michigan University, [nicholas.a.alti@wmich.edu](mailto:nicholas.a.alti@wmich.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate>

 Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Alti, Nick (2017) "Toes and Paint," *The Laureate*: Vol. 16 , Article 17.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol16/iss1/17>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Laureate by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).



1.

Here's winter; you can't dance in the park. At dawn you swayed beneath a willow tree before I knew the way your fingers felt on my temple. I passed you, toward the woods, the only time I've ever seen you dance. I still can't appreciate the technicality of your art but in that universal moment when you moved like curiosity and rain I carried that with me through the labyrinth of maples and I don't think it'll ever leave me. My head doesn't ache, but thrashes, perhaps imploding always.

I'd curl up in the dark and hurt. You'd use peppermint oil to calm me, then smile and go practice in the living room. I never saw you, I couldn't leave the bed, but I heard your movement. Thinking of you in motion distracted me. I'm still grateful for that.

2.

I'm picking the nails off my toes in the room where you started using acrylic. You shared your paintings with me, and they were good. Their ghosts flicker on my ceiling at night. I'm gluing my torn off toenails on a blank canvas you left in the closet. I arrange them in a pyramid. My toes dangle over the canvas and fill the pyramid with blood drops. I continue this routine until I stop bleeding. There's nowhere near enough blood, far too much negative space. I squeeze my feet with my hands, force more. You'd love the texture, how some of the beads coagulate, create a pool. Others roam away in their own rivulets, as if free. You always admired texture, always touched mess just to feel it; fingers stained watercolor.

3.

If I do this every night, I'll never dance for anyone. This is my alleviation from fractured nerves. It empties me to imagine you dancing for anyone else, letting them see what I never could. I know you'll want to give your dancing. I'll swallow all of these paintings, show them to no one if you promise you will dance only for shadows of silhouettes.