

2017

The Laureate, 16th Edition (2017)

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THE LAUREATE

16TH EDITION



The Laureate

16th Edition



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Acknowledgments and Mission Statement

Acknowledgments and Mission Statements

The editors wish to thank Western Michigan University's Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College.

The mission of the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College is to provide an exceptional undergraduate experience for high achieving students, to inspire in our graduates a thirst for the lifelong pursuit of creative inquiry and discovery, to provide our students with the skill and passion to address critical challenges, and to foster personal responsibility informed by a global perspective.

The Laureate's mission is to provide undergraduate students at Western Michigan University a place in which to publish their works of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and other creative works. The Laureate strives to be a professional and engaging journal that appeals to all.

Letter from the Editor

Working on the publication of the 16th edition of *The Laureate* has been a notable highlight of my undergraduate studies. I owe a tremendous thank you to the contributors of this manuscript, both for their efforts on creating a body of work worthy of pride and for inviting us all to experience them as singular pieces and a cohesive entity.

The included poems, stories, and photographs create a fervent, united body connected inextricably by each piece's demand for expression and the urge to be heard. Bound within these pages is a transformative expedition where the reader will encounter genesis and decay, romantic tenderness and confrontations with existential crises, togetherness and solitude. There is anger, meditation, and exaltation. There is darkness and there is light, and in the ambivalent equilibrium between the bountiful polarities, the works on an individual level—and as a whole—ask the question, “Does art, love, and the desire to celebrate or express the human condition satiate the emptiness within us?” Consistently throughout this work, the answer to that question is a resounding, implacable yes.

As much as I'd like to take all the credit for this project for myself, that would be a massive exaggeration which no person should ever believe. This experience has given me a hint about the complicated and demanding publishing process, which requires dogged determination, concentration, and communication. Luckily for me, the assistant editors (and my wonderful friends) Mary Maroste, Maura Sands, and Kaylie Hanson were there to supply these necessities. This experience would not have been half as enjoyable, let alone possible, without their eager contributions.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Design Center for their collaborative efforts and experience. The Lee Honors College's very own Jane Baas was a consistent pillar of support. Furthermore, I'll rejoice in sharing my mountainous appreciation for Becky Cooper, who was not only there for every aspect of this collection's well being, but also my own. Thank you, Becky. I couldn't be more pleased with this collection. As an experience, I've learned as a writer and an editor, and my passion for the creative arts has flourished. I'm greatly indebted to everyone who has been a part of this process. I continue to enjoy this collection, and I hope you find the same satisfaction.

Nick Alt
Editor in Chief

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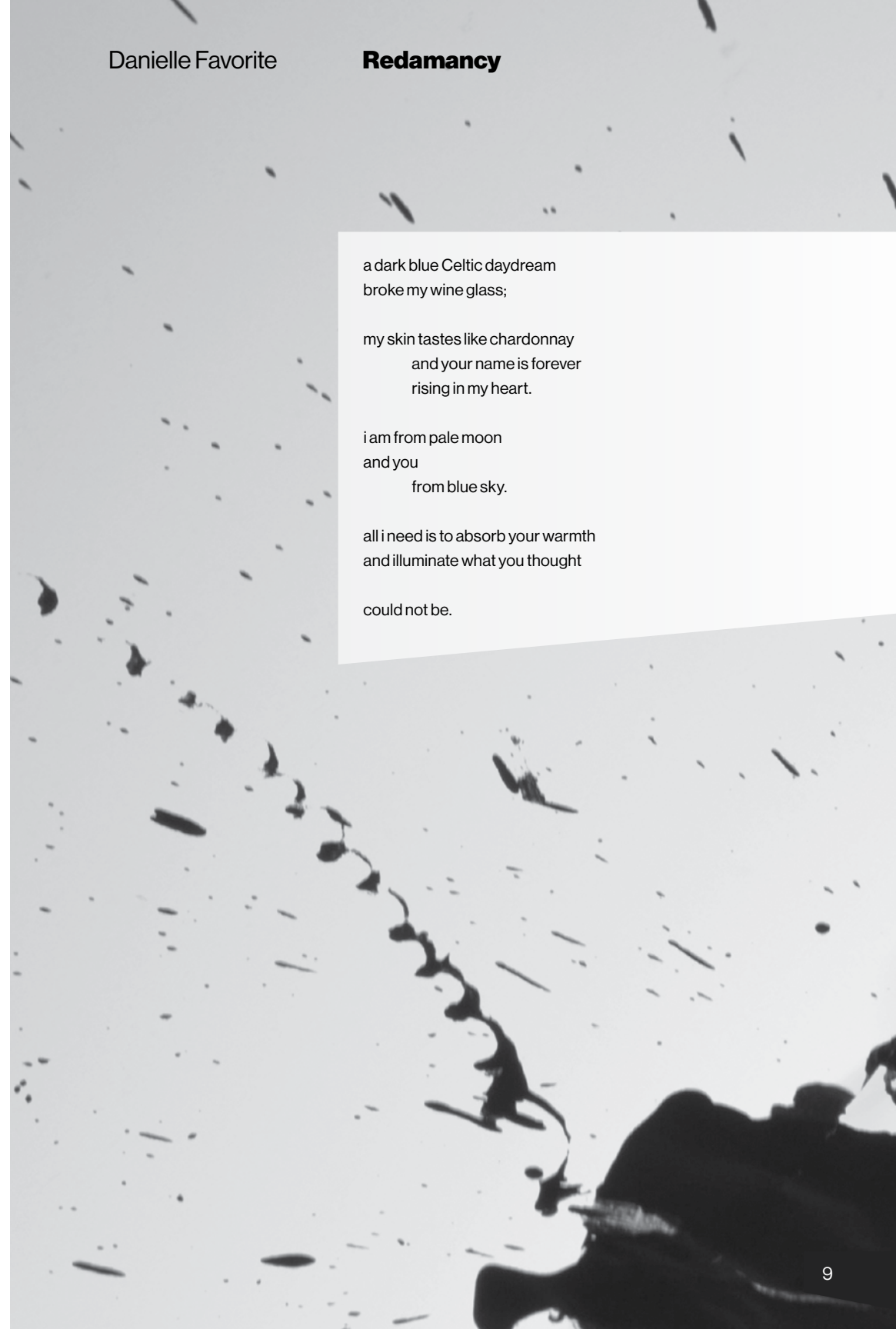
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a dark blue Celtic daydream
broke my wine glass;

my skin tastes like chardonnay
and your name is forever
rising in my heart.

i am from pale moon
and you
from blue sky.

all i need is to absorb your warmth
and illuminate what you thought

could not be.

A Lesson

I encounter my difficulties,
like long-lived friends.

Across the breadth of a dozen states—
I hope you wait for me.

And then what more?

I am not the man,
putting color to the leaves.

And you are lovely, corazón,
but this is my history.

Sink in the Morning

"That's where your brother takes his baths,"
My mother says to me.
Her breath on the top of my head is gooey
And smells like chamomile.

She is holding me up by my armpits,
Over the counter of our kitchen
And above the metal sink
Which, in its magic, is shining.

All of its scratches form arches in the light.
All of these arches were moving out

Away from me—
Like the ripples move in my brother's water
Away from him.

"You used to take baths here too"
She says to me.

Can I still fit my whole body inside the sink?
She sets me down next to it
With my feet at the bottom.

She watches me as a farmer would a prized pumpkin or squash,
I feel old for the first time.
The soap and bubbles rise in between my toes.

Lie

and say
you see that glass
overflowing
because technically
air occupies it too.

Say you love eating
out with friends,
say you'd love to go
out this weekend.

Say you don't torture
yourself with grades and
other people's opinions because
charismatics don't
& the catch-22 here is that
if you care about what you want
you don't get it
because happiness
breeds like mold in a jar.
You have to give it the best

environment to thrive,
which is to say
every place outside
your comfort zone
and lean back and smile.



Suffragette Colors

Yellows twinkle
in the lamplight

and fall into glistening
puddles, reflecting

the harmonious reds
as they spread their wings

and blossom into aromatic
oranges, opulent purples

and somber blues—but of all
the colors only one guides

me as the clickity-clack
of my heels tap against

the chestnut stones, and
it's that bountiful turquoise

that washes over me, and dances
with the creamy whites creating

a smokey haze that protects
me from the night—it's been

a long one for sure, the muddy
memory stains my cardigan

and not even the colors
can wash it away; the dream

I'm living is not
the dream that I want,

it's been inflicted upon me
like the Black Death

of the patriarchy
concocting pus-filled buboes

on my throat and genitals
that chain me to the stove

From the painting "Dream On"
by Leonid Afremov

as my head throbs black and blue—
action is circular, certainly,

good deeds spring
from good deeds, but as is always

the case, the wicked
are just as likely to cloak

the world in their preconceived
shadows—but at least

now I'm alone in the acrylic
moonlight as the cloud

of colors are whisked together
like egg whites on a Sunday

morning—the sinister, jaded
green ideals that hover

over me are deflected mostly
by my umbrella, and the rays

of majestic turquoise
christen me

the master of the road,
the commander of the colors,

and the enemy
of the dark

The Big Community

The director handed the brand-new script to the talented actor and told him to memorize it for the following day's rehearsal. "To memorize an entire protagonist's dialogue in an evening! That's an awful lot to ask of your lead," said the actor. "Don't worry about it," replied the director. "Even though you're the lead, something tells me that you'll have no trouble memorizing your lines by tomorrow. Now get to it!"

The actor sat on his bed in his cluttered studio apartment. He was facing the floor-to-ceiling mirror that stood perpendicular to the bed. The actor looked at the cover of the script. It read, "*The Big Community*." He flipped to the first page and read the introductory synopsis. The play was about an android that was created with no outstanding physical features or unique behavioral protocols. It was programmed to mimic what it perceived as positive behavioral and emotional characteristics exhibited by the people it met. It was additionally programmed to tell itself what it perceived itself to be upon the conclusion of whatever interviews it conducted, so as to achieve the end goal of telling itself, "I am a human with a soul and I am good" and thus returning to the lab from whence it came.

The first person the android encountered was a successful looking businesswoman on her way to work. The actor recited his lines: "Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is."

The actor cleared his throat and repeated the lines until he captured the perfect tone of someone confused, curious, and without a human soul.

"Please stop. I need to learn." The actor pictured in his mind's eye the woman hurrying away, feigning a desperate need to be somewhere else.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

The next person it met was a fruit vendor peddling his produce in the streets of the Chinatown in whatever city the play took place. "Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is." The actor felt he was getting better at reciting that line, which did reinforce his confidence in that aspect of his role, but he also wondered when the character would grow enough to warrant some change. "Please stop. I need to learn." The actor imagined the vendor yelling Chinese expletives at the android and brandishing a cleaver in its direction as he backed into the doorway of his shop.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"No wonder the director thought I'd get my lines down so quick," thought the actor. "It's just the same thing repeated in different scenarios. The character doesn't even grow enough to change the dialogue at all."

After its visit in Chinatown, the android found itself in a local science fiction convention known as RobotiCon. Upon its arrival it was immediately greeted with a frenzy of arms asking for autographs and the flashing lights of phone cameras. "We love your kind!" yelled the android's fans. "We love you!"

"Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is."

"Nailed it," thought the actor.

The fans ignored the android's words, however, and continued to take pictures of themselves with it, posting the photos online so their friends could see that they were *actually touching a real* android. The actor practiced squinting his eyebrows in the mirror, trying to capture the perfect aesthetic of someone so deluged in fans (something the actor thought he should have no issue conjuring).

"Please stop. I need to learn." A touch of frustration entered the actor's voice, but he then stopped and considered such a change. The android had not seen any frustration, so it would not know how to exhibit it. But surely that must itself be frustrating, right? The actor repeated the line with the same inquisitive but otherwise apathetic tone with which he delivered the line previously and found that to be the perfect method of approach for the scene, despite whatever real frustration lingered in his heart for his character. The actor looked back to the script and saw that the fans were relentless and, defeated, the android fought its way through the crowd to leave.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

The script was thinning with not many more pages left to rehearse. "Easy," thought the actor. "Just one more scene."

The android found itself in an alley behind a large and important theatre. Despite the ritzy façade of the building, the back was as repugnant and malodorous as the alley behind any of the other buildings in the city. It was in this alley that the android found an actor leaning against a dumpster and smoking a cigarette. He was using the neck of his white t-shirt to wipe bronzer off of his cheeks when he spotted

the android and his face lit up. The actor in the alley yelled out to the android and ran over to it. He explained to the android that he was trying to perfect a robotic role for a play he is in and he wondered if he could just spend a few moments with the robot to study it.

"Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is."

The actor in the alley was delighted for such a response and let out a small cheer. Then he cleared his throat, regained his composure, assumed an emotionless, stony face, and repeated what the android said back at it.

"Hello. Would you please answer some questions?"

"Please stop. I need to learn."

"Please stop. I need to learn." The actor sitting on his bed and staring at himself in the mirror chuckled at how funny it was that the actor literally had to learn from the robot, and so his words held more meaning than he thought.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine." There were notes written by this line. *Both in unison. With fear.*

"What?" thought the actor. "Where was fear playing a role in this play?" The page ended after the note with the word *End*. "That's it? That's the whole thing?" He assumed the message of the play would be covered by the director during tomorrow's rehearsal, so he tried to pry no deeper and instead turned to the mirror to practice the final line. "I hope that whoever's playing the actor in this thing can get the unison well enough," thought the actor.

He stared at his reflection and twisted his face until it was the perfect face of the android. With his visage properly established, he repeated the lines, each time with a slightly more pronounced tremor in his voice than the previous until he matched what he assumed was the playwright's vision of fear.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

End

o small thing
which we have rescued from life:
round belly still
and jarred like preserve.

(God damn the day I was born.
—Job)



**The Diary of a Young Girl
and Jeff Mangum**

My love—she has a rash on her cheek.
When I come close to her it cups
The edge of her lips
And back towards her nape
All sweating and heavy.

She knows her flesh is blushing,
Drying then opening again,
And when she speaks I hear the layered skin of her
Face separate from her skull
Like clay pulled
From a smooth slab of stone.

It twitches
Like her hands twitch—he has not
Eaten.
To be beautiful
I sing
And trembling with life.

I would wipe it from her face
Leave her clean like white roses after rain,
Take her filth and rot and toil
From her
With my sleeve—
Keep them.

She would wince,
Her bare toes would scrape
Backward across the gravel, and the rocks would
Turn and scatter in time with the dripping of her dress
Then she would find me.

And I'm in Athens, Georgia writing
While a singing saw remembers frantically
That it is alive.
And 53 years ago my love was dying.
With just her sister at her side
We sing together

Something about your skin will be so smooth I will mistake it for glass
 When you went upstairs I forgot where the icebox was and spent fifteen minutes holding
 the stem of an empty glass
 waiting for it to be full
 I saw you in the reflection, isolating an emotion
 Building a home around it
 Giving it a proper resting place,
 pillow under neck over bed between sheets
 You ask me, how about you let go?
 To set the glass down or wait
 I twist my fingertips around the ridge and imagine all the people I could have been
 I tilt my head and suck down what doesn't exist
 I could see us both through the empty glass,
 Transfixed on what was outside of it
 We prescribed meaning to the absence of space
 My hand grasping so loose it could have fallen
 "We're never really touching anything"
 I mumbled I should pack up my things,
 My sweaty palm fogging the glass
 Maybe we should sightsee states over
 Maybe we should grow fins and explore the ocean
 Maybe we should tattoo our bodies with topographic maps
 Maybe we should
 The glass still empty and I froze
 The mid-air head rush of watching something hit the floor
 My mind broke into numerous pieces and I went for the shards
 You said let's call it a night
 while I swallowed my tongue so many times it became an extension of my pride

**An Open Letter to the
Father Who Was There**

Did I ever tell you what
 happened to all those
 words that I needed you
 to say in defense of
 me? I swallowed them to
 fuel angst rained on memories
 like confetti at a parade
 but they calcified, became
 the weight in my chest, heavier
 each time she burned me down
 and you stayed silent. We have both
 gone to bed with her poison wrapped
 around our necks.

I learned quiet much
 faster from your apparent
 apathy than from her
 pinching the soft skin
 under my doll-like arms
 until my body watered with
 whispers of, "I'll give you something
 to cry about" through teeth pressed
 together to flatten my emotions
 until she could crush them in
 her hands.

Don't explain to me
 about dosages and chemical
 imbalances because I know what hatred
 looks like in blue eyes just like you do.
 If you'd ever paid attention you'd
 know what betrayal looks like in
 hazel. You have always been my
 teacher by opposition, giving
 me a voice that can separate
 her atoms by never even trying
 to use yours. We have both been
 colored by her. Nothing rips
 apart a child's cheek like a diamond
 ring applied with force but words
 are what put me in therapy.

But we don't talk about
 the reasons because what

exactly can we say? That the reasons behind my mental history are the reasons behind your complacency? I survived her. I haven't quite finished surviving you. No one can smooth out the bruises and explain away the tears like you. You'd think I'd get at least the art of lying from her but while you covered up her indiscretions I was covering up blood and wishing the words rattling around my brain were true: "You are not my daughter!"

She can serve herself the idea that I am not her fault but the concept will never taste right and you know just as surely as you'd like to believe that my accomplishments are yours, baggage is the only thing you've ever given me. So don't ask me to forgive you for the weight, you might know well the sound of anger bouncing off your walls but you'll never know the sound of redemption.

Austin Wines

Genesis and Chance

I.

Sometimes I am more deer than person:

I walk through the woods, I see movement in camouflage,

I freeze,

they laugh,

I stare,

my red heart bursts, you *could be shot*

My heart bursts again

I'm bleeding, I burst, I run away.

Don't come back.

Does anybody care what I look like in a field? Does a person in a black cloak ruin a landscape?

The throbbing space between the stars, a bruise.

A cold lake in November,

black coffee,

black squirrels,

my eyes.

In the right light

anyone can look like a darkness.

II.

I sit on the edge of a collapsing concrete foundation staring at the lake,
a stubborn slab: all angles, all unforgiving.

The lake laps at it,

don't touch me.

The foundation slips forward,

the lake whispers what it knows,

The foundation sinks lower,

the foundation kisses the lake and knows it is wrong,

and the lake swallows it.

The foundation loves on the lake's terms

very slowly, and then forever.

III.

Two snowy-eyed deer collide in a field,

their hearts burst.

Two jittering specks blown across

a sunlit cloud of goldenrod,

the first neon subtleties of fireflies.

Two hundred flickers of the moon

and a speckled child is born,

weak legged and drowsy;

it shivers in its mother's slime.

This is the coincidence of consciousness,
The man running toward me is fate.
 The fawn drinks the wet air for the first time.
 A mother feels what she knows
 bleed into the dirt.

We were almost in love.

IV.
Sometimes I need my knowing to condense on my body and harden,
crust on my skin like dirt,
crust on my skin like something to scrub
roll down my body in heavy drops,
swirl to the drain
it bubbles, it's mud, it clogs.

[illegible]

Is anything ever, until we find something new?
A person's body slides out,
wads of yellow paper, moss, spools of unfinished sentences
unraveling to the ground.
He clips the thread.
He keeps pulling.

Megan Murphy

The Morning Pachamama was Born

As my mother gives
Birth, solar flares
Crack the sky.
Dirt rises to her ankles.
Each callus
Flavors the earth. She is a
Goddess!
Her womb is what
Incan's call *la cantuta*.
Jade spills into fuchsia. She
Keeps the land bountiful by spinning
Lamellas of orchids, until
Magic sprouts from every seed.
Nestled against
Ombé tissue, I know it is time to let her
Placenta go. She wraps me into a
Quilt made of yellow
Rose petals,
Sage, honey, and
Turmeric. Sweet herbs will heal her
Uterus. My mother's
Voice stirs my heart. She
Whispers our names.
Xiomara declares
Yesterday's pain over and offers
Zumo de pomelo from her breast.

No one will remember me, she thought.

She hangs upside down,
rain water collects in her open mouth,
behind her teeth.

She researches family members who exhibited sociopathic tendencies.
Lights a lantern outside
the bedroom door
at night
to be certain no spirit steals
her intentions,
written on moleskins,
under a pillow.

Dad kissed her on the head and asked "Why does your upper lip always itch?"
Still asks herself this question, there are a million answers.

He said it's because she couldn't keep quiet, always opened doors with stolen keys.
Theft is a common theme in her life,
whether it be a pair of gold hoop earrings, heavy,
lion-head shaped clasps,
or any man with a dagger hanging
between his legs.

She wrote a novel every time he breathed onto her neck in the nighttime.

She knew
because of the stories Dad told her, before
he crushed sage and fern together with his hands—that
this man controlled her with his silence, devoured her with his rage, and
would kill her
with his body someday.

She should've stayed invisible to men, but broke that magic long ago—
It wells up in the belly, radiates warmth through the heart and brain, you see it in her face.

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 danc-
ing 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.

Rest

I have never seen
 a Mourning Dove,
smooth grey feathers,
 soft coos in soft light.
I was born grounded,
 deep rooted teeth.
There's too much soil in my toes,
 Grass root in my head,
mud pouring out of my eyes.
I take so much comfort
 in darkness.

**Money is a Crime, Rape
is a Personal Experience**

My friend Denise said
she takes up too much
of my time.
She just moved
into a peeling pink house
on the East Side—
two bedrooms
for seven hundred flat—
a little too close

to where my ex and I
wanted to live,
where the doors locked
in the morning
when he woke up,
and key holes
were a low voice
spoken through the
deepest black mustache.
I light a candle whenever
he's mentioned,
plant a tree every year
in the woods where
I burned his name
and threw it
on the wind.

I smoked a bowl
and across the room
in the mirror,
saw Denise and I—
like water when
the ground is too cold,
and the air is too hot.

We both slid our armor off
like wrapping paper
and let a man
close in on us
like a claw.

**First Drawing Done
After Open Heart Surgery**



A New York Poem

I.

Not that I ever remember
what I wore,
but this was a special occasion

in an airport,
where people drag their be-
longings through checkpoints,
as a matter of national security.

*(not that I could
protect you.)*

II.

Harsh light hung along strips
over white rooms.
The belts were unmoving.

We would stand in light forever
for luggage.

Waiting forever for others
also, someone resembling a lover?

*(“everything’s from New York, baby—
even grief.”)*

III.

A small dog, an old Polish couple,
me with my backpack and suitcase

then pull it all back, further out
to the city in the plane ride over

*(where somewhere you were,
where are you now?)*

no great matter,
with me, forever,

on this scuffed floor—

almost sure.

Joshua: A Short Lament

I.

When I was born my brother held me, and then he grew older, and grew a goatee, and shaved it off, and grew a new one, and I grew a moustache (but it never grew thicker than a shade of dark green) and still he held me. He held me with one hand when he had to smoke a cigarette, and in another when he tied his tourniquets and filled up his syringes. He held me and I grew. I grew to weigh 200 lbs and then 4 tons and then 4 million massive bulbous tons, straining every muscle in his workaday body. Still he carried me, carried me to work at all those restaurants, all those family gatherings (where my weight somehow grew even more), all those nights out with friends that our mother warned him about, dark rooms, strange cities, dim lights, and he had to explain that that ginormous ball of fat in his arms was his younger brother, but eventually he stopped explaining and all these shadowed friends pretended not to see me and they slapped pills in his hands and he swallowed them with tap water. Until one blue day at the end of April I grew to such a mountainous size that my brother could no longer hold on and he dropped me and it shook the very foundations of the earth and all my family toppled over and died for a little while and then got up and realized that it was not us who had died but it was my brother...—lying on a bed in Detroit (maybe needle in arm, maybe a pain pill dissolving in his stomach, I never found out) surrounded by strangers, eyes rolling away, spirit smearing into someone's dirtied sheets, voices ghosting around him, swimming in and out of his ears, and I lay there, taking up all the space in the room, stealing all of his oxygen, thieving all of his thoughts. Then his dear friends, those faithful companions called EMTs to the scene and the EMTs cut a hole in his throat to try and help him breathe, but they did not realize he was a Sisyphus relieved.

II.

And you. You who made me a promise, whom I made promise me. You liar. Now you now see, heaven or hell, your eyes are open and you now see. Your mother gurgles and weeps and spits into your bed and inhales your blankets, and your stepfather tries to hold her, tries to hold all of us. Your older sister is torn apart by the Furies, limb from limb, biting her skin and her heart, her poor abscessed heart, because she looked back, she dared to look back, she dared to call your phone, your damn phone you sold for 30 dollars in the twilight hours. And neither of them can see any of us for the shade of you that hangs in

their eyes. Your younger sister wears your New Era cap and gives everyone tissues because she hates the sight of snot. Your younger half-brothers play in the front yard, but the older one, his eyes are red. Your father, your father who believed more than all of us, your father questions God, and he questions your vision you explained to him in church this past Sunday (where you were high), and said that you spoke to God Himself. Your stepmother tries to stay busy. Your grandmothers show us baby pictures of you and your grandfathers are at a loss for words. Your niece doesn't even know yet. And me? Oh I. Well you know, don't you? Doing what you taught me, trying to hold things together, trying to hold them together but in the end it doesn't work, because they think too much like human beings, they don't see the immense power of love, they fail to comprehend the infinite God that binds us all together into one fabric, and so they think in differences and philosophies and old bitter hates and old sins and holiness and unholiness (thinking you were never prone to), and they create chasms, each from each. So I delete your number from my phone. So I take your oldnew Bible (name embossed in gold on the front) that you never opened. So I type out some stupid words because it feels better than talking. A word is a dead thing, like a body that they say you are (but you're not are you?), a body that used to carry a spirit of meaning that is long gone now. But look at me: your younger brother now must make a life out of dead things.

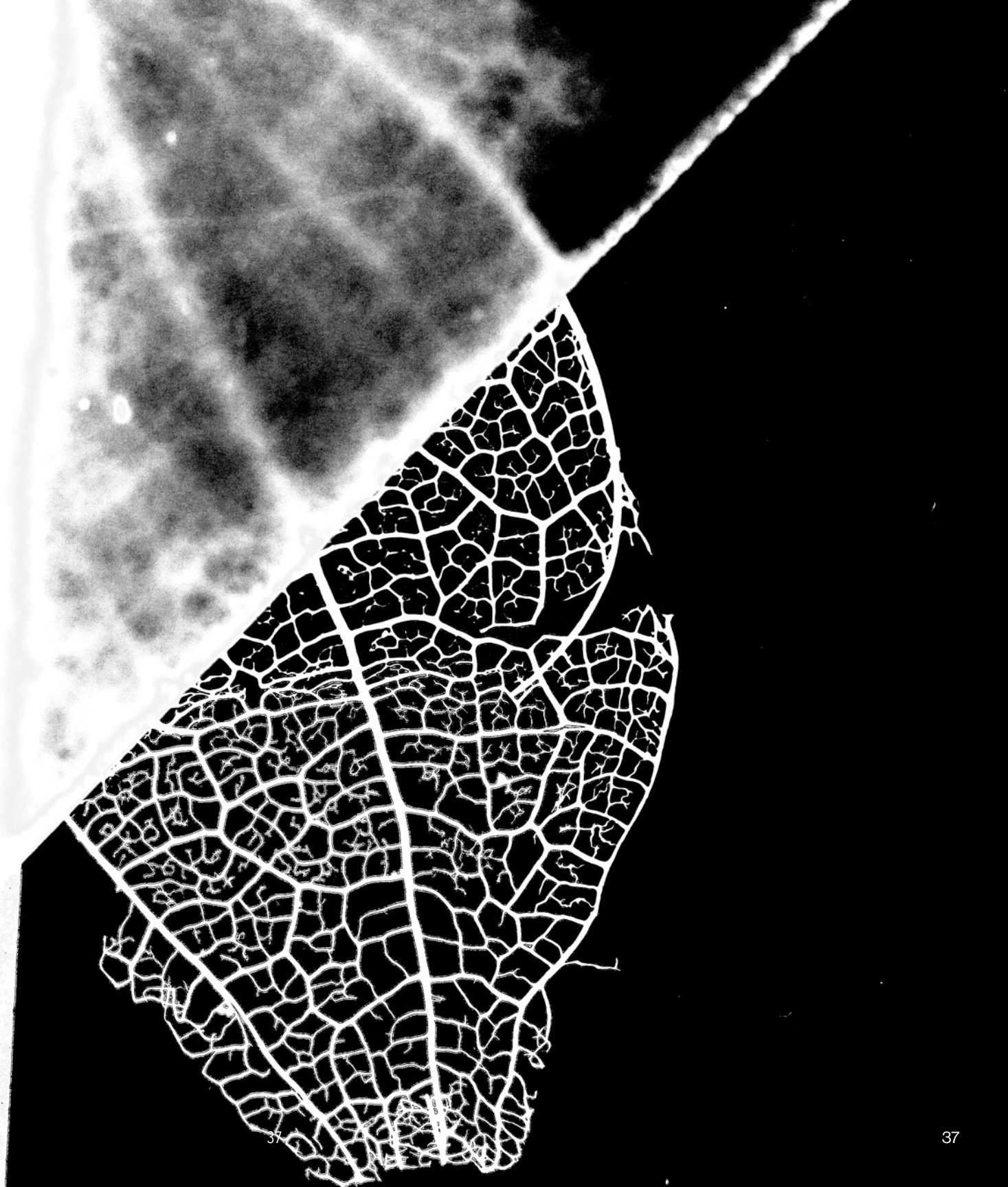
III.

Who are You that shaped him in the womb? Who are You that birthed his first cell, that drew this sperm to that egg? Who are You that wrote his first breath? Who are You that wove together that first eyelash? Who are You that knew each hair upon his head? Who are You that crafted that little toe? Who are You that touched his fingers with Your own infiniteness? Who are You that taught his eyes to see, his bones to hold, his chubby feet to walk? Who are You that inlayed a tongue for him to speak Your praises? Arms to be uplifted? Tear ducts to weep? A heart to pound? A mind to never comprehend Your fullness? Who are You and What are You? Are You What they say You are? Who are You that crafted his soul from starlight and holyspit-swirled mud? Who are You and where are You, that laid down the foundations of the earth? That rent darkness from light and raised up those trees and all the living things? Where are You that sprung up man from the dirt and breathed life into him? Where are You that decided that that breath should one day end? Where are You that carved the Law into stone and Grace into Your Son's flesh, that bathed the world in a flood, that split the Red Sea? Where are you O Mighty One? Where are You

that stopped the Earth from spinning for Joshua, but was powerless to stop him as he lay in that bed and lost himself to unholy dreams and visions, never to awake? Where are You, Whom was powerless against his will? And where are You that said "I shall never leave you nor forsake you?" Where did his spirit go, where has it roamed? Did You watch it go or did he come home? Oh Father whose eyes never rest, where is my brother? Where did he go?

IV.

I love you, Joshua. Wherever you are, I know at least that you can hear me. I love you. Only God, and maybe you now, can fully comprehend how much I love you. I loved to make you laugh, I loved to drive in the car with you, I loved your pragmatism, I loved your servant's heart, I loved the way you joked with Milena and made her feel invited, I loved the way that you loved our darling niece, I loved watching TV shows with you, I loved hearing your voice on the phone, I loved sitting beside you in church, I loved how we were the two sanest people in our family because we weren't afraid to laugh at our foolishness. I loved you even when you were high, and you got paranoid and your words had a bite to them, I loved you even when you promised me, you *promised* me, not a few days before you died, that you weren't getting into this stuff again, I loved you then, Josh, I loved you when you couldn't speak coherently, I loved you when you couldn't walk up the stairs straight, I loved you when you lied to me again and again and again, I loved you when you tried to get up off the couch and you fell right on your face and slept that way, and I covered you in a blanket, and I should have covered you in a thousand blankets and captured you there on the floor so you couldn't move, and you would sober up, and we would play video games together again. But these college fiction classes teach you not to be cloying or maudlin, so I'll stop trying to bury you in words.



Father

Lift off the lift chair
and shoot brown woodchucks
off the deck past my bedtime
and let me watch. Bruised boy blue,
wipe your black eyes, chase
your whiskey with swallows of lake water,
from Goguac
and dye your beard black.

Call the camper a cocksucker when the tires are flat
and the mosquitos kiss with the singe
and the stars on their side.
Man of army men and summer browned skin,
don't shoot your father when he hits your mother
hang him
with your belt when you leave it
looped around your waist.

Unbraid your veins from IVs
and dig from the dusty flesh
your fossilized spine. Carve
an oar from the bone
and paddle backwards. Teach me how
to shoot machines in the woods,
not animals, dryers that died full
of clothes still damp inside them,
warm refrigerators and
immovable lawn mowers. But Dad,
I can't shoot my own dog.
Hug my mother when you make her cry
Store the wedding china
together "handle with care."
Broken down bodies creak as they
crystallize. Native chief,
where are your feathers?
Lies.
Paint the house of colors tan,
Tuck your tie-dyed
behind the tree line and tell me
where you think you came from.

Don't trust
The electric respiration
whispering women lullabying you alive.
Unplug yourself from the wall
and whither your way home

Danielle Favorite

Metamorphosis

i run to where the moon
kisses the end of the world
because I'm sick of blanks,
just as Plath was.

empty hands reach for empty skies

and my lips shed poetry.

ghost becomes her
the blackbirds cry to each other
as they watch shadows lead me
to where daylight darkens

and i wet my pale lips,
ready to transform.

**Mercado nro 1 de
Surquillo**

Tia Diana fills her bag with strawberries,
mangos, *lúcuma*, and a pineapple.
Fuchsia cracks. I want her
to lick the pink off her teeth.
Tarantulas hide in between bananas;
occasionally, falling into baskets of
purple corn, limes, and carrots.
She haggles over bruised potatoes.

Around the corner,
lomo saltado on a street cart.
Sirloin and onion sweep
through the market, spicy.
We walk to the butcher's
to buy beef heart.

Chickens hang by their feet,
plucked and ready to be boiled.
The fattest roosters
have been sliced open,
but their stomachs, livers,
and intestines remain intact.
A severed pig's head side-eyes
customers as the butcher weighs
our meat.

She gives me slab
of pomegranate muscle to hold.
It sinks into my palms
like a cold ball of clay.
In crinkled paper,
blood organs soak.
Tonight, her dogs will fight
over the last piece of cartilage.

Under the blue sky, a brown-eyed girl
begs strangers for *soles*.
She is barefoot, and I wonder
if the hot pavement hurts
her feet. There is nothing
I can give her,
because this heart does not belong
to me.

Girl, Age 6

The terrain of brains topography to a map.
Broken oceans slip away leaving a tide pool oasis,
the microscopic life, dances and sways
in the seawater, plays salty children.
Silverfish slip through fingers
but details get lost, in synapses that are stunted.
The neurons breaking but the sea-urchin still swims.
Tiny feet splashing in the puddle,
Rain on my mermaid face. Once,
I squished my toes in the mud
in the sunken part of my driveway
that built up a sea when it stormed
and I squirmed in my swimsuit
patterned with metallic fishes, but
the month, the goose-bumps, the giggles I couldn't swallow,
all crawl back into their rocky crevices.
The tree in my backyard started as a sprout
fed from the concrete reservoir.
It sprang up from the solid center and stretched towards heavy clouds,
fell down into the earth with roots searching for pockets of laughter
until leaves could not find the oxygen,
and branches became brittle with forgetfulness
and the core was soft like old apples
pulling fistfuls of rotten wood from my heart.



**Im anune Hayasten e
(My Name is Armenia)**

The forgotten, unheard of, deaths
of over a million, saw deportation,
devastation,
death marches of civilians.

Butcher battalions liquidate—
Christianity strong enough to equate
to a threat bigger than actuality.

Children drop one by one,
rays of sun deliver deathblows.
How far can someone go when
stripped naked, on display?

Bodies laid out in rows of hate
all dripped, in a fluid state
they scream and

blood lakes cover ground.
Numb to sound,
pounding hearts fall.

Classified a Genocide.
Clarified by the Crucified.

[Enter me]

feel the heat,
feel the sorrow of my people.

Burn

Alone, darkness pulses, silence whispers
"you still haven't finished your thought."

I know,
I know.

If truth be told, silence lies.
Loneliness is written on my blank paper.

I know
I know.

But what company does loneliness keep
other than the stain of tears and blood?

I know.
I know.

Silence whispers once more, taking my
thoughts in its breath, only to join the darkness.

I know.
I know.

Light fills the dark (they aren't on speaking terms)
and I say into silence,
when the time comes, I will set myself afire, for
the world must burn, and I am the only world I know.

I know that
I don't know.

Barefoot Behind a Jail

I'm behind the county jail filled
With big knuckled workers I went to high school with
And there's Benny all smiles and "fuck dude" and
Fingers through his hair
And he's running at my pickup
Giving me that look like I can save him.

So I'll tell him next time he sits
On a gray tufted carpet in Eaton County—
While the watch dogs howl at strangers and
The only light is from a yellow lava lamp
That's too fat to roll itself over—
That he shouldn't take what they hand him anymore.

And then he's all "they got divorced" and then *no shit*
And "I'm homeless, help me."
Until he brings himself too close.

And his lip will curl up just past the piss
Yellow chip at the base of his canine
And he'll hold it there like it's their fault
That they couldn't love each other forever.

When he hugs me I'll feel how weak
He has become. And when I get
Home later my lover will tell me that she never wants
To lose me and I'll say she never will and I'll hear

My parents share the same words 20 years ago
In their new house, over a fresh
Puddle spreading darkly
Through the carpet and through some shitty
Pencil drawings of the garbage man that weren't done yet.

Back in my room my dad will ask me if I love her
More than he loved my mom
And I'll leave him before he gets all "I was so hopeless"
"The things I've done Drew"
"I'm still alive, see? See?"

I'll go next door to Evan's room and tell him that
I'm scared. I'll lay down
On that stupid futon mattress that smells all
Gamey and I will hang my head off onto some loose fabric.

Stare at the ceiling, at how clean it is up there.
And he'll tell me for the first time that he needs to be out west.
He'll get up and look at me from the door like he can still change the world
By running barefoot down East Kathleen while Dad drives after him.
I'll spend my money on road signs so that he'll have to think of me still.

Michigan, 10,025 km that way

And before he does leave I'll bike home and lay
Down on that saggy part of my
Living room floor

So that I might fall through it
Like the ice over Holland's pond
And that I might find our shorts and underwear down there before surfacing
And grab them from the muck and the clay
So that I can give them to my kids one day and say "Look!
We ran home through the snow, all the way, naked and cackling
As our penises shriveled and our butt cheeks got red
And your grandparents were just lying there
Laughing, they could barely breathe"

Kaylie Hanson

Rainy Weather Friend

When Marianne was first invited over, she'd wanted to come. She'd been meaning to stop by and visit, just like the old days. Except in the old days Felix didn't have tumors growing inside his body like grapes in a vineyard. He was skinny, pale, bald, with chapped lips and sunken eyes—but he'd smiled when she showed up at his bedroom door and waved her in, almost cheering. "Annie! I missed ya," he said. "How've you been? How was Seattle?"

"Rainy."

Felix asked how her family was, what she's been doing with herself. He talked about how much he'd love to make a snowman that winter or maybe even dare to dream he'd be well enough to go skiing. He was feeling better, he'd said. Nobody visited him after the first two years. After maybe an hour, an hour twenty, when Marianne was dangerously close to yawning, Felix gestured to his bookshelf, "Do you wanna watch a movie, Annie?"

"It's getting late, Felix. I should probably let Brutus out of his kennel."

"But I have X-Men. You love X-Men."

"I really have to go, Felix." Marianne frowned, reaching forward to squeeze her friend's bony, cold hand.

"Okay," he muttered, disappointment dripping from his voice.

"But come and hang with me more often. Please?"

"Promise," she said, exhausted. "I'll visit all the time."

Three weeks passed without seeing Felix, by fault of the whirlwind that was Marianne's day-to-day life, and when she got the phone call at four in the morning, Marianne realized, with all the grace of an anvil crashing down on her skull, she wouldn't.

**Small Boat in
Ludington, MI**



Garden Bones

Spring morning, my Rottweiler
hobbles across dew tipped grass,
hip dysplasia rattling his bones.
He stumbles, struggles to squat
near the moist corpse of a newborn bunny
he killed yesterday.
In the subterranean acres of my mind
reserved for suicidal ruminations
& admiration for animated pornography
I'm overwhelmed with envy of his organic hedonism.

My spring evening, I scour an abandoned basement
lit by one dangling light bulb,
steal rat carcasses from spider webs
glimmering in the sporadic lighting so much
like twinkling stars in lost nebulas.
I boil their meat
with stolen spices
from grandmother's warm kitchen.
Watching snuff films in black&white
I eat cold soup out of garage sale vases
which once held anniversary roses.



We Wade Through Junipers

Shannon weeps as the sun falls in the Mojave Desert. Beauty is the golden light that reflects off the hearth of her iris. Our tears melt like embers. Three crows undress a carcass. She sings "Tiny Dancer." We ascend the iron mountain and scream over beds of sage! Visions of my father: mint aftershave, olive threads from a sweater worn on cold days. Cold coffin, wildflowers on mahogany. Each memory pulls on my heart's hangnail. Shannon and I stand under the freckled moon— shining girls. Lyrics make the rattlesnakes hiss beneath the brush. My whispers quiver like the silver strings of Orpheus's harp. Eurydice spills a vial of Jupiter. Gold flakes that once swirled around my father's pupil trickle out of the sky, and I watch him drip down the surface of every blue cactus. He bit into thousands of Fuji apples, and when he laughed, pieces of fruit fell from his mouth.

Moles

When you walk to the bathroom you will look into the eyes of someone who has felt pain.

Through the green parks,
 alone in the creaking woods, down rows
 of velvet pews, stadium bleachers, the peopled counter of a café, uptown, sitting
 quietly on the last bus,
 someone who knows:
 the likelihood of blood,
 the taste of carpet burns,
 someone entering who shouldn't, the "what if?"
 the bad man in a disguise, the bad man who drives too slow down the street,
 the wolf in the nightgown,
 the bad man pretending to be just a wolf in a nightgown.

Just like the stories,
 just like they said he would, the pencil sketch on the news,
 a snapped twig beyond the tree line, the person you've never seen before, the
 person you know, he takes something from you,
 before you could comprehend
 that you have something to give.
 This is a hole. I say it like it happens smoothly.

Can things like love and poetry fill anything up?

Drip, drip, collect, it's fuller now—
 the echo, deeper now.
 It's dripping:

it fills up, it pours over.

Can it?

You thrust cupped hands under leaking pipes,
 it's you vs. the soil, you vs. the sun, you vs. the well.

Can you drink a well dry? *Ask yourself.*

A waterless well is just a pit. A cavity for rot and sediment,
 a hole in the ground, rusty metal pumps,
 thirst,
 the nightmares you wake up from and don't remember, the nightmares you wake up from
 and do, fear collects with sweat on your lips, trembling memory:
 a place where water used to be, something someone used to need,
 a lung you stand on until it won't breathe again,
 collapses silently,
 where dogs get trapped,
 and boys fall

where their bodies, forgotten

their souls echo on limestone

their teeth break on rocks and coins

eating the wishes thrown down by drunks, children, yearning throats of the downtrodden,
 we reach with cupped hands, wish for more than water.

Are you at the bottom of a hole?

Well you put yourself there.

Rock by rock the night is built,
walls surrender to a hole of dove-gray sky,
a sky that has too much to listen for to hear you.

What can we do with a hole like that?

Fill it in?

Bury myself in bed for three lightless days,
bury my feet in dirt to imitate permanence,
sink every pen in a swamp, the
unsure earth swallows them from my memory,
bury my fingernails relentlessly
inside of you,
to find water, bones or hide?

Breath inside a casket, black water at the bottom of a well,
smoke held in your chest
until there's nothing left to expel.

Uncle Bob & Wooden Duck

Riding the ripples of Torch Lake it's too hot to eat

[I punch my temple until it

swells to the size of a turnip]

his eyes shot the color of elevator metal

4 hours later the middle line

on my left palm splits in half,

there was a story about a head of lettuce

[I couldn't remember]

holes corroded through his sourdough sternum.

Half sleeping, the white in my tapestry

melts into my glass of wine,

he shed his old skin hoping to last the winter

[I was afraid to be lonely].

Honey boiled in the beehives of my shins,

small lizards balanced on my raised purple skin,

I painted my nails the scent of a night

covered in spray paint.

His Morton-salt-skin dissolved into the bathtub,

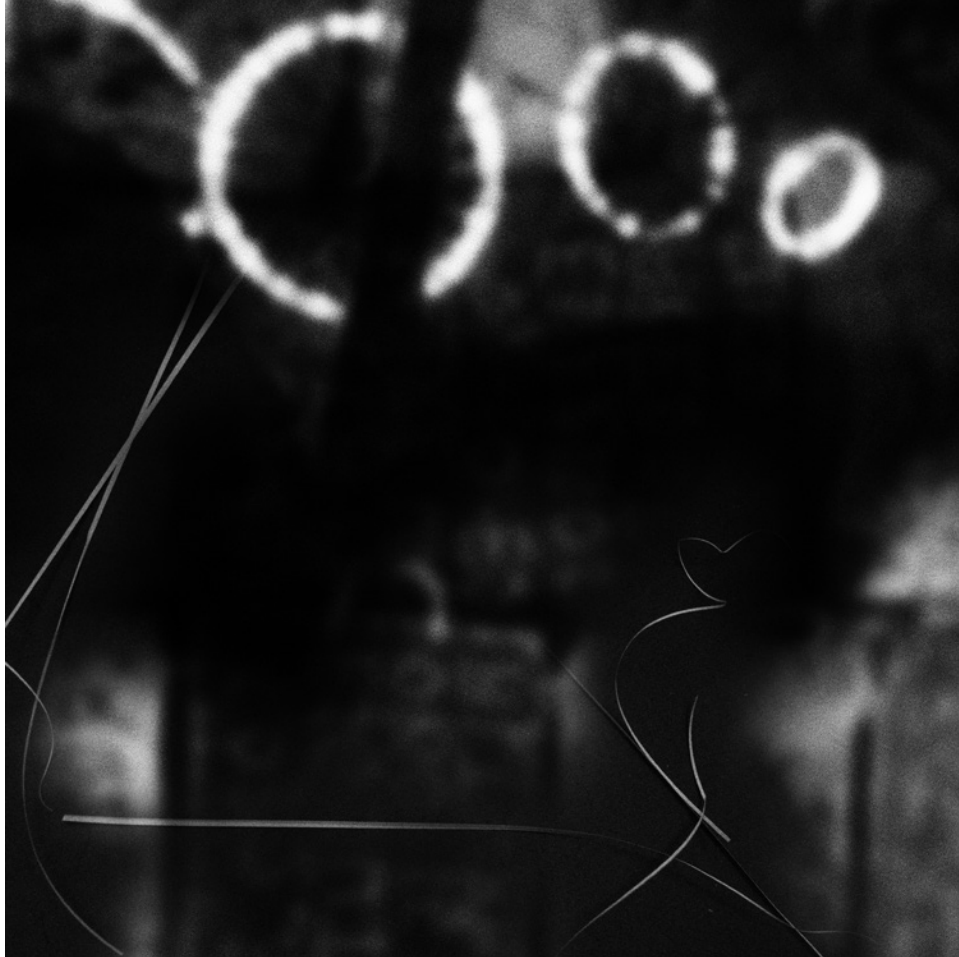
All the tapes unraveled, I spit out my old teeth.

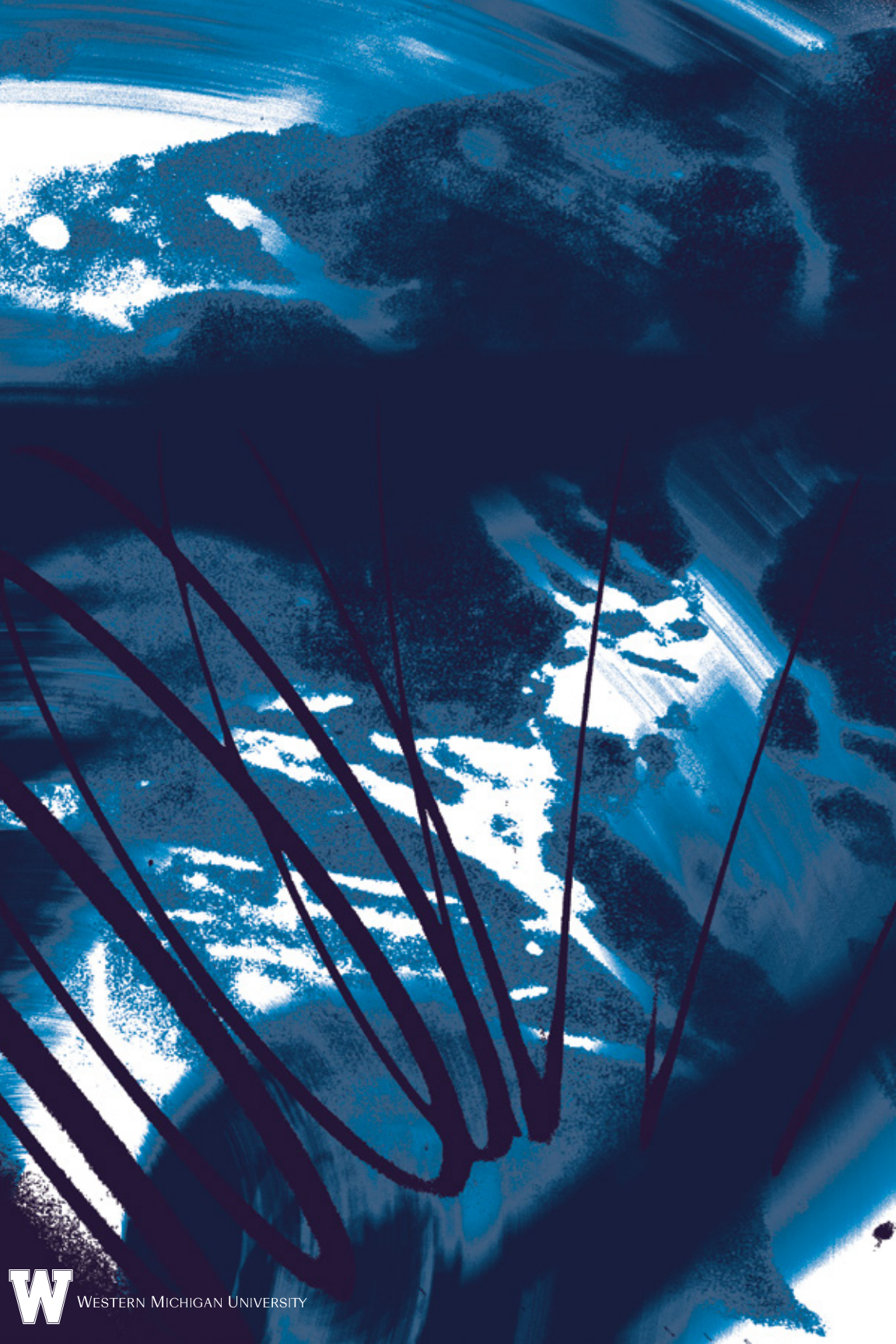
He carved three ducks

out of the only maple tree I ever loved,

three months before he burned the earth

with skid marks he fell asleep painting.





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