The Laureate

19th EDITION
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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 medium through 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.
I couldn’t be more pleased to present the 19th edition of The Laureate to you all. To see Western’s most creative and visionary students take a leap of faith and submit their works has filled me with a great sense of pride and responsibility. The talent in this edition is undeniable, and the ability to overcome any fear and submit their work stands as a testament to the courage of these gifted writers and visionary artists.

I would like to thank Becky Cooper for her support and wisdom; her love for The Laureate and all that it stands for is endlessly inspiring. Without Becky, I would not be the same person as I am today. Thank you to my assistant editor extraordinaire, Zoe Lewis, and Jennifer Townsend for their help and support. Thank you to the design team as well; this book wouldn’t be the same without your expertise. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Lee Honors College, who continues to see the importance of this publication and the importance of maintaining a space for Western’s creatives to publish and share their works.

I dedicate the nineteenth edition of The Laureate to the voices on campus both heard and unheard, to the creatives and artists who work so hard each day to practice their craft, and to those who support and mentor students both in and out of class.

With gratitude,

Megan E. Bossio
Editor-in-Chief
Table of Contents

Stone Path
Look Up!
Life
Cows in Fog
Diffracted
Agriculture
Et in Arcadia Ego
Suns of Time
Rising Sun
Artist Statement
How to Hate the Color Blue
Untitled
Late Eighties
The Boy in the the Bar of Soap
Tranquility
The Third Life
Sidewalk Chalk
Away
To Be Brown
About Ben
Me and Other Types of
Bomb Shelters
Untitled
Death of a Crane
Cover Up
Nonbinary
Untitled
Untitled
Dog Days
Desert Flowers
Justified
Stone Path
SHEALYN LACH
Life.

DESIRÉE GARCÍA

a breath, maybe two. opening your eyes to find unexplored territory; faintly familiar in the sense that you've been here once before. déjà vu? there's a sort of swelling but you press forward and explore. immediately the greenery catches your eye and surprise washes over your being. tall plants, their leaves rippling with each gust of wind and your mouth dries in anticipation. you expected to have to search hard for a form of life. this wasn't the case. mildew gathered in groups and there was no choice but to wade through it, the vegetation only crowding you in further and further until you were tempted to touch. unlike being on mars, the red clay was damp underneath your pressed fingertips and it became clear that there was no possible way you were alone. you could hear faint humming but the location was hard to pinpoint, especially in this state of mind. where to go from here? entering a plethora of trees, the first form of life seemed to randomly appear. or perhaps it had been waiting for this proximity, for your touch. a hand seemed to reach out and your fingers intertwined, only for a moment. and then there were more hands and they felt, grasping arms, legs, shoulders. under pressure, you looked up at the sky and felt weightless all at once. it was vast and bright yellow, mimicking the sun but surely couldn't have been. a flame of light. the hands were gone but the touch remained everywhere except your temple. you blinked slowly and waded forward. mildew had been replaced with a dark liquid and fear began to bubble over. you took a step back and listened for a sound, a signal. but it was your breath and you laughed. laughing seemed so trivial in a place like this. almost instantaneously you crouched down to the ground and cupped your hands into the pond. except they remained and you didn't seem to mind. you planted yourself firmly on the greenery, stretching comfortably. and then you leaned forward to look at your trapped hands. it was a mirrored reflection but your face didn't appear. not that you paid much attention as you relaxed your weight, laying gently on your back. your legs absorbed into the ground and you fell. how could you not? you were so exhausted, how long have you been here? time passed, and you slept. and you slept some more, when you woke up you remained only slightly disoriented this time around and you wondered how much time was left. you could pick yourself up now, and explore once again. so you did. you untangled your toes and legs from the roots you seemed to
have made and you massaged your stiff hands.
the rest of the forest like environment seemed
to stretch, green on green, and you realized how
hungry you were. it was a predictable frenzy
and it made sense to indulge. red, orange,
purple fruit filled your hands yet your mouth was
numb and at the moment it had been enough. the
rinds and remains fell into the ground to bud
flowers and trees. you held these flowers with
your eyes. nothing more could be done because
the feeling in your feet came back and you woke
up. another breath. you blinked to find yourself
on your bed. a breeze from the window amplified
with your fan created a steady pulse on your
skin. smoke waded throughout the room, following
a bitter smell you had already grown
accustomed to. a lighter was tucked in your palm
and every which way you turned you met the
gaze of this roomful of people. you were offered
something new and took another deep breath.
the seeds
she leaves them all over our apartment.
packets choke every spare drawer, and
sometimes i find them in my socks,
sprouting up out of the drain in the
bathroom sink, piled in the corners of the
cupboard like mice-stolen grain.

the flowers
she has never been able to keep them
alive. they shrivel in the drought, and at
night, as she breathes in the darkness
beside me, i wonder if someday, six feet
below the tender earth, they might finally
take root between her lungs.

the rain
i find her standing out on the balcony
that faces the river, head tilted back to
the clouds, arms spread wide, soaked
through, a creature of the earth and the
cracked open sky, and i realize in one
sudden flood that i cannot keep her.

the fire
there is a fire in the apartment just a
few days after she moves out and just a
few days before i do. they haven’t rented
it out since, as if the stains were too
ugly, as if they could never get rid of
the smell, as if nothing would ever grow
there again.
Suns of Time

ZACHARIAH WILLIAMS

Blossomed in my quarantine
Amongst a field of knowledge
Allowed to be, during this season
Repressed

Sun, feed me
For I am of you
With multi-approaches in sculpture, painting, installation, video, and performance, my art practice emphasizes the connection and intricate relationship between interior architecture—the living space where feelings are transferred—and the human body—the vessel, home of the self. I want my creative process and artworks to reflect a deeper understanding of one’s self through narrative and storytelling. They are visual metaphors of emotions and the unconsciousness, expressions of connection, love, desire, and trauma.

Both literal and metaphorical, the intention of my artworks is to open and invite viewers into my personal consciousness through fragments of lived experiences and narratives—a space embodied by memories of love, loss, and belongings. I believe it is essential to embrace the fragile balance between devastation and happiness, which borders the extremes of human sensibilities.
How to Hate the Color Blue

MELANIE LEARY

You write your bad memories in blue ink. Everything that reminds you of that night is scrawled in a neatly lined notebook. Since high school you only use cheap blue pens whose caps you lose or chew through in a week. A sort of neurotic habit that your therapist assures you is perfectly normal after what you’ve been through. Your classmates back then noticed the haphazard way you began to dress, but only a few knew what had really happened.

At work, you can’t tear your eyes away from the blue ceiling fan, whirring into a corona of vivid color. It reminds you of the ocean and humid days at the beach just minutes away from home. You haven’t been back since you left five years ago. The crystalline blue of the midday sky is another thing that you’ve come to hate. You feel a swelling nausea at the back of your throat on sunny days when the piercing, pure blue overhead seems to glow behind your eyelids when you blink. It’s jarring, and it brings you back to what happened five years ago at the edge of the woods just outside the church where you were baptized.

His eyes flashed blue in the setting sun as he stood over your shivering, immobile body, shadow looming over your face. He pressed you into the cold grass, his force blurring the distant line of trees against a blue-black sky—the first few evening stars spinning across your vision. You cried and fought, but he was a lot stronger than you. His blue eyes glared down at you, the last light of day a mocking halo around his head. Down the road from your new house, there is a billboard that has a painting of Jesus on it. In a delicate font beneath him it reads, He is our savior. The omniscience of his blue eyes unsettles you every time you drive past. In the summer, the fields beyond the billboard stretch long with rows of blueberries that give Jesus a rippling cloak of brambles speckled with blue diamonds. You turn your head away from his false salvation.

Untitled

ZACHARIAH WILLIAMS

I want a hard cider
Please I promise that I won’t
Cry like the last
Time
The Boy in the Bar of Soap

DELANEY NOVAK

When I was six years old, I had a recurring nightmare about a boy trapped in a bar of soap. The dream took place on a gray day atop gray bleachers. It would start with me, alone on the cold bleachers, next to a bar of soap. I'd look down at the translucent bar—the color of a cadaver's yellow-tinged flesh—and squint my eyes just enough to see a boy trapped inside. He was disgustingly fat; his pale, white skin matched the color of a dead fish floating belly-up on the shore of a dirty lake. I'd watch his jiggly, bloated arms banging furiously against the inside of the soap bar. His cheeks were a pinkish-red—they had those gross, tiny bumps on them: the kind that look like the skin of a recently-plucked chicken.

The fat boy in the bar of soap terrified me. For one, he was fat, and I couldn't see how a boy so large could fit into a soap bar so small. Most of all, he terrified me because I could see his flabby, fish-belly arms flailing inside the soap bar and I could see his panicked, wild animal eyes, but all I could do was sit there and gawk in horror. I remember watching his mouth move up and down as he screamed for help, but I could never hear any sound. As a six-year-old, the silence scared me; I couldn't understand how that boy managed to go completely unheard—stuck and suffocating—without anyone to help him.

Then, the worst part of the dream would come. As I'd sit frozen on those gray bleachers, watching the soundless boy in the bar of soap, it would start to rain. The rain would come slowly at first—each drop a shock to my hot, panicked skin—and then quickly turn into a downpour. As it'd continue to rain, the soap bar would begin to melt. I'd sit there, stupid and frozen, watching the fat boy silently crying for help. He'd never stop banging those white, bloated-fish-belly arms against the soap bar. By the time I would work up enough courage to reach out my tiny, shaking hand, the soap bar would be a sticky puddle. The fat boy would dissolve along with it, leaving nothing but the impression of his two pinkish-red, skinned-chicken cheeks in my mind. The circles of red would float there, suspended in nothingness like the smile of the Cheshire Cat.

I'd wake up drenched in sweat, buried beneath my new butterfly comforter. Each night I would scream for my mom and she'd come running into my bedroom, telling me the boy wasn't real; there was never a time she couldn't hear my cries.

This morning I woke up before my usual time of 4:11 am. I'd been lying in bed, staring at the world of marbled patterns beneath my closed eyelids, trying to decide whether I was really seeing those slowly swirling shapes or if it was just because I was hungry. Sometimes I thought the shapes looked like stars floating in my own personal galaxy, but today I was sure they were jellyfish undulating in the peaceful nothingness of a black ocean.

When my alarm finally went off at 4:11 am, I yanked back the layers of blankets: my faux-fur throw; my white comforter; my old, butterfly comforter; my fleece, zebra-striped blanket; and my yellow, cotton sheets. I pulled a thick, wool sweater over my pajamas, then dropped to the floor and did eleven pushups.

After I finished, I ran across my room to the dresser that housed my alarm clock, turned its siren-like buzzer off and checked the time: 4:14 am. I'd gotten even slower.

Reaching for my phone, I started the two-hour-and-eleven-minute timer, beginning my
four-step march. Each day after turning off my alarm, I'd assume the power-walking position of an old man trying to pretend he could make it across the street in a timely fashion. I'd take four steps to reach the edge of my bed, pivot, take four more steps to reach the far corner of my room, and repeat the process until the chiming bells on my phone told me it'd been two hours and eleven minutes.

I started doing this morning walk a couple months ago in July, when Michigan had become too hot to step a foot outside of any air-conditioned environment. At that time, I wasn't constantly cold, so I was forced to figure out a way to do my two-hour-eleven-minute walk inside: after two days of the four-step march, it had become as routine to me as brushing my Teeth.

After finishing my walk, I massaged my sore feet before getting dressed for the second week of my senior year of high school. I went to open my closet door, pausing to look at that rubbed-off pink name tag I'd made and proudly taped up on the first day of kindergarten. Only three letters remained: “Sam,” it read. I smiled, scoffing at the remnants: of course the last-standing letters spelled the nickname I despised most.

Throughout my life, a few people had called me “Sammy” and some just called me “Samantha,” not giving me a nickname at all. However, most people—like my friends and family—had always called me “Sam.” My nickname never used to bother me, but then in first grade a short boy with glasses that were always covered with greasy fingerprints, told me I had a boy's name. “Sam is a boy's name,” he'd laughed. “Sam is a big boy! Sam is a big boy!” I'd always been taller than all the boys in my school, but I'd never been called a boy before. I'd also never been called big; I remember hating how the greasy-glasses boy had drawn out the vowel: “Biiiiiiig.”

I put on my favorite white turtleneck and dark blue skinny jeans, glancing at myself in the mirror. My hair looked like the lifeless, dried chili peppers my mom kept on our kitchen table. I analyzed the fit of my clothes: the sweater seemed to be lying looser on my body and my size-zero jeans were only held up by the safety pin I'd fastened to the back. I stood there twirling my dried-chili-pepper hair before beginning the pat down.

Furiously, I worked downwards from my cheeks, to my neck, my collar bones, my sternum, my rib cage, my stomach, my hip bones, my butt, my thighs. After reaching my ankles, I worked my way back up. I felt like an over-zealous TSA agent, certain there was some change—some threat—I'd missed the day before. I exhaled: all my bones were still there.

Inhaling, I held my breath as I made it to my arms.

I squeezed them like one would anxiously squish a flour-filled balloon. My sleeves hung away from my arms, but as I squeezed, I was certain they'd grown another layer of fat. It seemed that each day my clothes fit looser and looser, my flabby arms felt fatter and fatter.

“You'll have to eat only half the apple today,” I muttered as I made my way to the kitchen.

Rounding the hallway, I saw my mom standing at the counter, clad in a silky gray pantsuit; red hair wrapped tightly in the ballet bun she wore for work. She was humming to herself as she putzed around the kitchen making a peanut butter and jelly for my lunch. I grabbed an apple from the mint green fruit bowl on the kitchen table and rinsed it under
the faucet.

My mom flashed me a smile, but splotchy, red patches beneath her eyes shattered the facade: I knew she'd been crying.

“Another bad morning?” I asked, glancing at the seedy, strawberry jam-covered knife in my mom's hand.

“Oh,” she sighed, allowing the corners of her mouth to drop, “I just had another dream about your father.”

“The same one?” My eyes followed her hand as she dipped a spoon into the Jif peanut butter jar.

She nodded.

Ever since May, when my dad had a heart attack in bed, my mom had been dreaming about the moment he died. I asked her about it a couple months ago, after I'd moved my morning walk to my bedroom and could hear her muffled sobs through the far wall of my room each time I passed.

I nodded in understanding, like an alcoholic might bob his head while listening to the all-too-familiar story of a fellow addict.

My mom stared at me, waiting for a reply.

I just stood there gently moving my head up and down like a recently-flicked bobblehead. There was nothing else I could say: I missed my dad too, but that wouldn't help bring him back.

As my mom globbed a thick layer of peanut butter on a slice of spongy, white bread, I noticed the apple still in my hand; nonchalantly, I slid it behind my back.

“Well, I have to go get ready,” I said, taking a step away.

My mom nodded, smooshing the gooey slices of bread together.

I replied with a few quick, final nods—for good measure—and made my way back to my room to put on foundation.

I hated wearing foundation because it felt like I was smearing a thick layer of mud on my face, but I had to wear it: the scars on my cheeks were too obvious without it and I didn't like people asking why my face was so red.

Sitting at my vanity, I set the apple down, poured a glob of the cool, tan foundation on a sponge and began to pat it into my skin. As I patted—squinting my eyes just enough to make out my reflection—I thought of the spongy bread of my peanut butter and jelly. I didn't understand how my mom could care enough to pack me a lunch, but not enough to see that I'd still had an apple for breakfast the past fourteen days. As I stood there, rhythmically patting, I thought back to our argument two weeks ago.

“Sam, shall it be the usual for your last first day of school?” my mom said, pretending to wipe away a tear.

I was sitting at the kitchen table, cutting an apple into dice-sized pieces and plucking them off the knife with my lips. My skin felt hot as I remembered I'd have to bring lunch now that school was starting.

“Actually mom,” I said, “I was thinking about getting hot lunch this year.”

“What? You hate hot lunch!” Her left, overly-plucked
eyebrow arched into an upside-down V.

I looked at her as I slowly chewed an apple piece. I didn't know what to say; I did hate hot lunch and my mom knew it. Ever since I'd tried it on the first day of sixth grade and called her crying from the principal's office because I missed my peanut butter and jelly, it had become a running joke between the two of us: never send Samantha to school without her PB and J.

“Well,” I started, “I thought I’d try something new—”

“Samantha,” my mom cut me off, “is there something you’re not telling me?” She glanced at my breakfast of apple.

“What?” I tried to sound confused, like I couldn’t possibly understand how an idea as absurd as that could pop into her head.

“You know, you look a little thin to me,” she trailed off, “I know I haven’t paid much attention recently, but I sure hope you’ve been having more than apples for breakfast.” She motioned to the half-carved apple on my plate.

“Mom, I’m fine,” I said. “I’m just having some stomach issues these days. Anyways, you should be glad I’m eating an apple—it’s saving you a doctor’s bill!” I tried making a joke to lighten the mood.

“Hm.” Her green eyes narrowed, searching mine. I stared back at her, first widening my eyes, then crossing them and puffing out my cheeks.

She laughed. “Okay, but you’d tell me if there was something wrong, right?”

“Right,” I said.

“Well, I’m still making your lunch—” she paused, “—and I’m packing an extra peanut butter and jelly.

“Sounds good.”

My mom made my lunch and kissed me before I went out the door to get my bike. “Are you sure you don’t want to just drive your car?” my mom asked.

“Yeah,” I said, pulling a jean jacket over my sweater, “I feel like a kid again when I ride my bike. Plus, it’s only a mile—and I’m helping stop pollution or whatever.”

“My little environmentalist,” she smirked, patting my head as I stepped into the garage. Once I heard the door lock, I paused until I was certain she was out of earshot. Quickly, I took off my backpack and pulled out my lunchbox.

“Bear,” I whispered to our old yellow lab who lived outdoors because my mom was allergic to anything with fur. “Bear, here’s a little treat.” I tossed him the two peanut butter and jellies. As I left the driveway on my yellow bike, I heard his tongue smacking furiously against his muzzle.

“At least someone’s enjoying their breakfast,” I thought.

As I finished gunking up my skin with sticky foundation, I opened the left vanity drawer to dig out my hidden knife. I leaned back, cut the apple in half and quickly ate the smaller side. Tossing the other half into the trash, I headed back to the kitchen to grab the peanut butter and jelly that’d soon be inside Bear’s stomach.

“Have a great day at school, honey,” my mom said—appearing more animated—as I reached for my lunchbox.

“Yeah, okay,” I replied, giving her a kiss.
I went outside, waited for my mom to lock the door and gave Bear his breakfast. "I think you're about seventy percent peanut butter now, Bear," I said before riding away to school.

After classes were over, I put on my helmet and rode my yellow bicycle the one mile home, soaking in the midday sun rays like a patch of Russian sage. The late-summer breeze whipped against my face as I forced my muscle-less legs to move faster and faster. Repeating the same mantra over and over in my head—a continuous loop like the spinning wheels of my bike—I fell into a trance-like state: "Faster, Samantha, faster; faster, Samantha, faster; faster, Samantha, faster."

Every day I competed in this one-person race. I was constantly urging myself to ride faster each day, to pack an extra book in my backpack if I failed to keep up the day before—or to add another even when I didn't. Today I brought my AP Biology book for the extra challenge of carrying its 331 pages. We were learning about homeostasis in animals; I thought it was fascinating that an animal's body temperature will decrease, or its movements will become slower, when it needs to conserve energy.

I liked learning about animals in general. I was always watching those nature documentaries that show the same thing over and over again, only in different parts of the planet and with different species: animals searching for food and trying to mate before dying. The one thing I could never understand about these documentaries was why everyone always seemed to be concerned for the lone, emaciated polar bear or lion cub. No one's ever concerned for the big, fat animals.

David Attenborough might narrate a shot of a lumbering polar bear with thick, white fur and say something like, "Here we have a healthy, thriving male." How can he know an animal is thriving just by looking at it? The fat bears struggle too.

For them, each day is still an unknown—a question of if they'll survive until nightfall. Yet, the skinny animals are what people care about. The bones poking through matted fur and the zombie-like movements are voiceless animals' sign language: so long as people can see them, their silent cries for help are never unheard.

As I continued pedaling, numbing out the tightness in my chest and the burning of my legs, I began to feel dizzy and light: leaning backwards, my eyelids slowly closed. "BEEEEEP," the sound of car horn awoke me from my semi-conscious state. I swerved the handles of my bike just in time to get out of the gray van's path; my front wheel hit the curb, catapulting me on top of someone's dead, orangish-brown grass.

With my backpack pinning me to the ground—trapped like a turtle flipped over by a sadistic six-year-old boy—I was flooded with the memory of a September day in fourth grade.

"Sam!" my mom called, "Remember not to take off your helmet, young lady! And be back before the streetlights come on!"

"I won't, Momma—and I will!" I yelled back, hopping onto my hot pink bike. My parents had finally given me permission to ride around the neighborhood alone and I relished that newfound freedom. I hummed as I glided leisurely across the familiar, smooth streets, lost in a world of childhood imagination.

"BEEEEEP," a car horn screamed at me as I rode through a stop sign, forgetting to look both ways before crossing the street. I turned my
handlebars instinctively, toppling onto the fresh, green grass of a neighbor’s yard. When I opened my eyes, the driver had already slammed on her brakes and jumped out of her red car to run towards me.

I cried and cried as that lady with black hair pulled me into her arms, telling me it wasn’t my fault and reminding me of what a smart girl I was for wearing a helmet. I buried my red, embarrassed face in her shirt—the scent of vanilla perfume silencing my sobs.

The neighbor whose yard I’d fallen into came running out of her house too. She brought a first aid kit and a Hershey’s chocolate bar—both for me. I felt like a princess getting all that attention, so I pretended to cry a little longer until the black-haired lady finally drove me home with my hot pink bike in the backseat of her red car.

As I remained sprawled on the dry grass next to my yellow bike, I longed for the days of my childhood. I missed the freedom of stepping onto a bike and knowing that I could go as slow and as long as I wanted. I missed being held when I cried and bandaged when I was hurt.

Silence surrounded me as I assessed my injuries. The mystery-homeowner’s door never opened and occasional cars rode by without stopping. Slowly, I wriggled my way off the ground, straightened out my bike and hoisted myself on top.

I sighed, tired and longing for the comfort of vanilla-scented perfume. I began pedaling: “Faster, Samantha, faster; faster, Samantha—.”

Once I made it home, I took off my helmet as carefully as I used to take the Wrenched Ankle or the Charley Horse out of the red-nosed man in the Operation game. I looked in my helmet and saw two tufts of red hair trapped inside.

Recently it seemed that everywhere I went, I left a little pile of my hair behind; I felt like a dog who couldn’t resist marking its territory. Picking up the clumps, I threw them into the afternoon breeze and watched as they floated away like the fuzzy, white puffballs of a dandelion. I didn’t know how long I’d been losing my hair, but I was at the point of resembling a boy with a botched half-mohawk more than a girl.

When I got indoors, I turned on the news to drown out the silence of my empty house. Ever since my dad died and my mom had to start working more, I’d gotten used to coming home to nothing but the soft hum of the electricity.

I walked into the bathroom and undressed, itching for the relief of an almost-too-hot shower; I could never understand how anyone thought the sandy sludge of the Jordan River was more purifying than the rhythmic pulse of steaming hot water.

I soaked underneath the showerhead’s stream until my skin turned bright red and the windows became so heavy with fog that I couldn’t see out. I wrapped a white, yellow-tinged towel under my armpits and went to the sink to slather a thick layer of lotion over my dry skin. Wiping a face-sized circle into the steam-covered mirror, I stared at the reflection of my pinkish-red cheeks. Squinting, I brought my face closer to the mirror, moving my hands to my cheeks. Running the pads of my fingers along my skin, I thought I noticed tiny bumps like those on a recently-plucked chicken.

I tried to tell myself to stop, to remind myself that nothing good ever came from picking—but that never worked. Once I felt those skinned-chicken bumps, it was as if I’d been put under a spell; I had to pick.
I dug and dug at the bumps, attempting to scratch them off or squeeze them out; it seemed that the harder I squeezed, the more I noticed something trapped inside, refusing to come out.

My skin felt hot as I ran my fingers along my face, determined to remove any last trace of a bump. I don't know how long I picked before I made eye contact with my reflection: two wild animal eyes stared back at me.

I froze and glanced at my arms, still poised and ready to attack the next bump. They looked white and fatter than ever—like the bloated belly of a dead fish.

Dropping my flabby, sun-deprived arms, I surveyed the damage to my cheeks. Both sides were oozing and inflamed; I felt sick and scared. The last time I'd picked this bad, I told everyone I'd gotten poison ivy on my face—I didn't know what my excuse would be this time.

I slumped onto the hard tiles of the bathroom floor and closed my eyes: a vision of my two red cheeks hung in the blackness.

I thought of the time thirteen years ago when I would constantly wake up terrified from a nightmare I kept having. I remembered how safe I'd felt when I would yell to my mom and she'd run into my room, laying with me until I fell back asleep.

Lifting my head, I glanced at my phone lying on the floor.
If I go anywhere after I die
I imagine it will be a moment—
back in my fresh childhood,
on a budding summer day
when I couldn’t tell whether
it was ten or four in the afternoon,
and time stretched boundlessly—
like water on a deceitful horizon.

I’ll die and wake up
underneath purple fairy netting—
Mourning Doves at my window,
coo-00-00-00’s filling blue air
while shafts of yellow sunlight
stretch to stroke my velvet skin,
making rainbows through the glass—
colors fluttering on butterfly sheets.

Or I’ll emerge outdoors
barefoot on warm, black concrete—
breathing in the familiar cut grass,
pastel chalk in my plump, peach hand

Sidewalk Chalk

DELANEY NOVAK
while inspecting green vines
of pink and red Morning Glories,
trumpet-like blooms still open—
ot yet their closed-umbrella shape.

If I go anywhere after I die
I imagine it will be a moment—
back in my fresh childhood,
on a fleeting summer day

when I didn’t know that
gray rains would soon come,
and churn my artwork into dust—
melting the white clouds away.
to be brown

DESIREE GARCIA

i know you said you’re sorry. i know you said you
misspoke. but we misspeak all of the
time and it isn’t because we’re uneducated it
surely is because we have to be so
calculated with our thoughts. that’s all they
stay as because if my brown skin is too loud
i might lose my ride. though i misspeak so often
and yet you ask me how to say -insert
phrase in spanish here. i am not your translator,
please pull out your latest smartphone
and go on with how your car takes too long to
warm up even though there are cars
ambushing brown and black and brown and black.
except not him because he doesn’t
even look mexican right? you may say we should
live in peace but there is no peace in
the hands you lay upon us. there is no peace in
the costumes of my dead you paint
upon your already white face. i’m so tired of our
memory to be left without a trace in our
history books except the courtesy paragraph in
the margins. i should be grateful for that
much or so i’m told. but please, continue to eat
our food when your palate might feel
bland. continue to advocate for my preservation
on this land surely for the
enlightenment on social media. continue on with
your warped idea of feminism but insist
upon grooming my unkempt body hair. this is the
culture. i know you couldn’t truly
understand and it isn’t your fault but please regard
our blood and our efforts when we
‘steal your jobs’ to try and sustain. god forbid we
only sustain. i shouldn’t have to fight in
order to stay alive but i will, and i will write and
cry and write.
time doesn't slow down everyone is always talking about
the stretch and
pull of tragedy the endless fractured moments weaving
in between one
another taffy or honey or blood but she was reading a
book in the backseat
when the car rolled three times and i can tell you that
time did not slow
itself for her it did not cradle her within repeating
seconds it could not
spare her such mercy—
eight years old paintbrush clutched in pudgy fingers and
my mother sits
me down at the table teaches me how to create a color
wheel primary
secondary tertiary says these are our colors this is
how we bleed—
drive past my childhood home and wonder what they’ve
done with the
sandbox in the backyard crowded with weeds and stray
garden mulch
how they’ve redecorated the studio in the basement i
remember being
three and elbow deep in oil paint and the smell of
turpentine this isn't my
home anymore my home is populated now by different
photographs and
altogether different miracles coaxed from boxes of pasta but i can't help wondering when they painted over my mother's blue front door—

you say surviving is preservation but surviving is reconstruction it isn’t how well you weather the storm the crash the explosion it’s how fast you can remake everything it destroyed and sometimes i think we are all rebuilding the foundations of happiness in the craters around grief where there used to be houses—

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**Untitled**  
MAKAYLA LONG

Conch to my ear  
My name it screams  
Young girl what are you doing  
Go live your daydreams
Death of the Crane

MELANIE LEARY

She always began her mornings like this: sitting on the back porch with a cup of black coffee, breath steaming the air, hair a wild gray-brown cloud around her face, eyes downcast. Some days, when she didn’t have to work, she would bring a book outside with her, glossy cover hardly creased, and half-heartedly flip through its pages.

In the summer, the early-rising sun would gleam off the gold ring on her finger. On occasion, she would disappear inside before emerging in a modest black dress, hair combed and styled. Then she would leave for two hours, prayer book tucked under her arm and her late husband’s watch clutched tightly in her hand. She would always return with slightly-smeared makeup and red eyes.

She never had any visitors, her only family being an elderly grandmother who lived across the state. Once in awhile she would receive a letter in the mail, her name spelled wrong and the scent of nursing home clinging to the pages.

After her husband’s death, she started working part time as a bank teller, even though she had received a degree in Writing many years ago from the prestigious private school in the city. She was an author of many books—essays, novels, short stories. But my favorite of her works was a small collection of poetry called The Death of the Crane. It was the last writing she had published before she stopped writing altogether.

I saw her slowly lose herself, voice growing ever fainter, eyes becoming dull and vacant. I thought that this had to be the biggest tragedy of the decade. From my bedroom window, I watched the gentle blue glow of the TV screen coming from her house. I glanced at the copies of her books lining my shelves, dog-eared and worn, and I felt the overwhelming need to give her peace.

Pulled by an invisible force of compulsion, I snuck into the yard and through her bedroom window to watch her sleep. She looked different there, in the sanctity of her home. The slight hint of wrinkles framing her eyes had smoothed out, and her breath came in slow, even puffs.

My pocket knife glinted through the dark, and I smiled.
Cover Up
SHEALYN LACH
you cut your hair in the bathroom sink
because Dysphoria said so,
because your mother said
“Don’t cut your hair shorter,
You’ll look like a lesbian.”
and you’ve liked girls before, but
you never really thought of yourself as
a girl who likes girls,
and what the hell is gender anyway?
it’s not pink or blue,
long hair or short hair,
makeup or no makeup.
it’s not a Cosmo quiz you fill out
“Are You a Boy or a Girl?”
because you’re not as simple as
Mostly B’s and C’s or as Boy or Girl.
you are not a girl.
you’re something else,
something different but alike.
because when people look at you
they see skirts and makeup and pink —
girl skirts and girl makeup and girl pink,
you are not a girl.
you’re kinetic energy,
the first spark to a flame
that reaches through the night
touches my tired eyes and brings me warmth.
you are not a girl. you are a star,
not a star in the night sky,
because the stars we see are dead and you are
so alive, you are waiting to be seen and felt and understood: a newborn star,
brighter and warmer than the sun.

nonbinary
CAMILLE MARSHALL

6160

The Laureate
Untitled

MAKAYLA LONG

High cliff edge
Churning waters below
Sunset crested horizon
I feel my heart grow
kaleidoscopic
adjective

sometimes my fragmentation
impedes but it can also
reveal; i see different shapes
as the colors inside me crash
and crush

chrysalis
noun

in the metamorphosis of the
seeing i, too, become some new
fragile, winged creature

evolve
verb

and i wonder how many
different versions of me
have been birthed thusly
how many kaleidoscopes
have swallowed dead
butterflies only to break them
into diamonds
Beyond breathing, three things are vital to your survival: Food, sleep, and people. Usually these statements are preceded with “choose two,” but in this case, you get none of the above. You eat cereal for breakfast and dinner — milk is protein, and cereal is made from grains which come from wheat which grows from the earth, so it’s basically a vegetable. It’ll do.

You’re still alive on a cloudless night with some friends playing god, playing Uno. You change the color to yellow and it would be nice if you could change the color of your own life. One yellow card later someone changes the color back to blue.

It’s another Wednesday afternoon and you’re thinking about dropping out of school because life is bad. You tell Siri because she is the only one you talk to about your feelings. “Hey Siri, what kind of job can I get with a high school diploma?”

I guess I’ll stay in school.”

Your mother points out over dinner that you started biting your nails again. She has to say it twice, because you weren’t listening, you were too focused on your full plate of food, playing Tetris in your head. The L block would fit rather nicely between these two pieces of asparagus and this lump of mashed potatoes.

There are no wells in the city so you make wishes out of the toilet in a rest area bathroom. The penny floats to the bottom and you wish for [ ]. The stars are dull and the neon sign outside flickers against the backdrop of still treetops — that and yourself are the only proof of time.
Dog Days

CAMILLE MARSHALL

Before seeping into melancholic reflection veiled by this year’s shadows,
breathe and remember:
Dry tongues held honey.
Minds survived sandstorms.
Pearl tears washed away dirt.
Withered arms carried still.
So whether lush oasis or barren land
kissed or pierced your feet,
drought cannot wither seed sown
in soul.
For cracked hearts vase desert flowers.