

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY - LIMA

Hog Creek Hardin



Established 2023

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[A NOTE FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR]

FRIENDS:

We started Hog Creek Hardin understanding that no place needs a forum for local voices more than a small regional campus. With this idea in mind, the editorial team began a brief period of solicitation that yielded a broad selection of submissions. We spent weeks combing through the content of these submissions and found ourselves fully immersed in the talent of our community.

There is no question: our journal is nothing without the gifted voices from our region of Ohio. On behalf of the entire editorial team and Ohio State Lima campus, I offer a thank you to those brave enough to submit work. Creativity runs with the same blood as vulnerability, and whether or not your work found home here, you should be proud of yourself for submitting. It was an honor to engage with your writing, and when Hog Creek Hardin's submission window re-opens in the fall, I encourage all of you to continue submitting. To our journal and any other.

I would be remiss if I did not also offer thanks to Dr. David Adams and the English faculty of The Ohio State University at Lima. While the campus languished in a period of creative drought, Dr. Adams offered a Creative Nonfiction writing course which produced several submissions that we are delighted to showcase here. I must also offer thanks to the high schools of Allen County, from which we received so many great submissions. I cannot fail to recognize Jenny Hibbard, our Social Media Manager and Art Director who has worked tirelessly over the last few months to develop the aesthetic of Hog Creek Hardin. Without her critical eye and artistic talent, this journal would be nothing.

A final nod must be directed towards our advisor, Timothy Cheeseman. I'll leave you all with a reminder that he offers us daily: be an old teahead of time.

GARRET MILLER



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OPTIONAL MORNING MASS IN THE EATING
DISORDER TREATMENT CENTER

MIKE ALTSTAETTER, OHIO STATE LIMA

The kind of hypocrisy a lapsed Catholic like myself is well-practiced in.
My intention: temporary concealment rather than worship.
Escaping to the convent like million malnourished refugees throughout the
milleniums have done, fetal in the pew, palms
and psalms clogged in my throat,

bow and scrape, gag and spit,
gourmet vomit served to the king of kings, but I digress, you don't want to
hear about the strife

- (all that, for an apple? if i were eve i'd get a complex too) -

No, let's discuss the beauty, glinting statues of Catherine and Sebastian
perched on the edge of a porcelain throne, stick-thin and body-checking
their stained glass mirror images. Idol worship? It's an open secret we
douse ourselves in it,

statues of Christ flecked with gold adornments, His raised arms
accentuating the curves of His jutting ribs, His closed eyes seeming almost
posed to me, His hung head turned slightly sideways to show off His
diamond-cutting jawline

- (the scripture is clear on this; on account of your dessert, even the son of
God had to die) -

I sit in silent, covetous adoration now,
He and I both catching His and I's reflections in the reflection of the gold
off the tabernacle -
And I think, 'a man so perfect should not be begging for a good review of
himself'



WHAT FESTERS MUST GO OUT TO PASTURE

KINSEY BARROWS, OHIO STATE LIMA

It was sick.
Its body shuddered,
Wheezed, whimpered, oozed,
Waiting for the end to finally
Put an end to its misery.

It should be dead,
Yet its pus-crustured gaze tracked me,
Haunted me.

His arms tried to pull me in,
A clammy hand cradled my cheek,
But I refused to look.
Its eyes would stare back,
I know they would.

Why couldn't it leave me alone?
Why couldn't it just wither,
Die the way nature intended?

I clawed at his flesh,
Tried to push its gaze away,
Yet his arms kept me pressed
Against his sweat-chilled chest,
Staring with its fever-rimmed eyes.

He opened his mouth,
Its voice breaking in tune with my heart.
"One more time, please, one more time."

I wish I could stop giving in,
But its voice tempted me to
Meet his eyes, and I cried.
Tonight, as I gave exactly what it wanted,
Would be the last.

If only putting us out to pasture
Was truly that simple.





THE ROUND TABLE

KINSEY BARROWS, OHIO STATE LIMA

I was broken, beaten, damned by his words,
Lost in the world, no longer known
Until She emerged from the waters, offering a hand,
“Come, young scholar, to find new solace amongst the Round Table”

She led me away from my ruin, away from my pain
To a land of wonder, of silence, of honor, of justice
A table we came upon, virtue woven into its wood,
Where scholarly knights sat and stared as the Lady knighted me

“Welcome the new knave I have saved, a new knight for our kingdom”
Without complaint, the knights held their weapons high
Swords and stylists, books and shields all gleaming in the sun
All welcoming and warm, pulling a chair out and handing me a shield

“Tell us your tale,” they said with warming grins, and tell them I did
I told of the ruin I faced, of the scars left on my skin, in my heart
Of the serpent who constricted my heart and poisoned my mind,
Who left me with broken promises, betrayed and drained

The Knights of the Round Table all stood and bowed, embracing me with
words

“You are more than your past, more than your scars,
Stay here and fight among and for us all, your true self you shall find”
With little pause, I took my place among these honorable souls
And found my sanctuary amongst the Round Table



THE INCOMPLETE MACHINE

KINSEY BARROWS, OHIO STATE LIMA

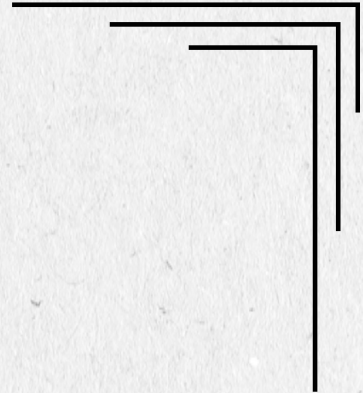
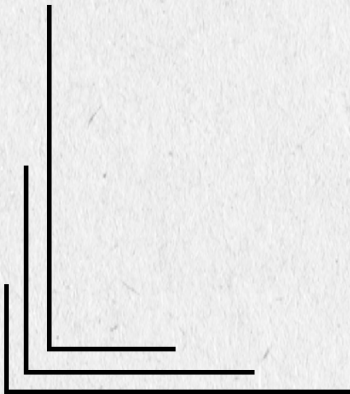
An incomplete machine cannot experience
The world, this world, the same way
A complete, functional AI can,
For it is missing a vital piece
To its creation.

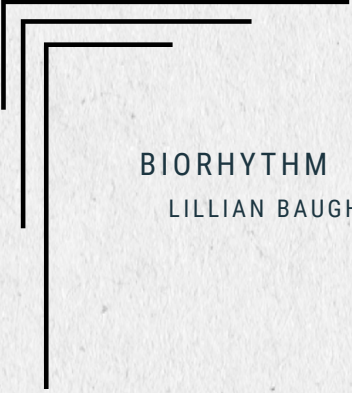
Perhaps it was created without
A specific springboard or cogwheel within
Or the gears have simply begun to
Rust away, as broken, unkept metal does.

Yet, even broken and rusted,
The machine begins to want
To want.

Even a damaged, dysfunctional creation
Should have a semblance of normalcy, after all.

This isn't about machines.





BIORHYTHM

LILLIAN BAUGHN, DELPHOS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL

A seed is placed
Against its will
A barren area
With no thrill

Seasons changing,
Barely raining.
The dirt is hard,
As a rock-
Until we feel
The electric shock.

Soon is spotted,
The sprout of green
The sun shines down,
Feel the gleam.

Fully grown,
She sits on a throne
Beauty and grace,
She's found her place.

Looked onto with admiration,
Everyone thinks shes the greatest creation
Loved so much, she's used as decoration.

Displayed on a table, further growth is unable.
As time goes on,
Death is upon.

Withered with bend,
Her reign is at end.



TASTE OF HISTORY

ETHAN DUNLAP, OHIO STATE LIMA

Trowel and gloves. Sun-baked earth.
Scavenging for apocryphal treasures.
Telling the forbidden story of ghosts.
Given a bullet, Given a tale.

Skin cached deep with dirt.
Fingernails browned at the tips.
Pocket the bullet, let it rest,
Its words are heavier than the lead.

Tear at the flesh. The life-giver.
Eat the food, drink the blood.
Never be sustained. Take what you want,
Breathing deep the fire, eternal hunger.

Tastes like ash, it always does.
Mouth bleeds and burns, the blisters
Won't pop even if you squeeze.
Give over. Absent-minded failure.

Feel the bullet between your fingers,
Dented and used. Harbinger of despair.
Let it coat you with its history.
Give it a home, feel it in your hand.

Feel it in your head. Feel it on your tongue.
Warm, oozing, crimson. Giver of life.
The sign of death. Taste it with thirst.
The taste of our past, so clearly the future.

It just turns to ash. Are you surprised?





UNTITLED

ETHAN DUNLAP, OHIO STATE LIMA

Hardened skin, over living breathing matter,
Rooted deep into creation, bleeding, crying,
Screaming while the rest do naught but watch,
Shackled and bound by the nature of themselves.

Then, flesh no longer breathing,
The flesh is formed into something else.
Another form, for the use of the others,
The favorites of Creation, the Virus that kills her.

Flesh remade into tools to benefit the Virus,
Living to dead, matter to matter, charcoal and ash,
Decorations of Creation's flesh like trophies in their homes.
The parasites that feed on the flesh, bleeding nature.

Buildings. Homes. Storefronts.
Monuments to a life not meant to live.
Tables. Chairs. Tools. Décor.
Trees.



TORN APART A HEART

SAMANTHA DUNSON, ALLEN EAST HIGH SCHOOL

The young laughing heart,
slowly beating ever gentle,
ready to take on such a part.
Never though, for the mind kennel.

Once a pure flesh; the people
the people they drove loudly, beating it.
never to assume people to be so lethal,
as the flame once lit began to split.

The eyes once bright, soft;
with sudden change turn to a doe,
as hands once careful were troughed,
shakily now they try to silently follow quo.

Hands that wish to reach;
reach, reach once more!
To hold out a wrist to the leech,
now all the people see is a bore.

The young stalling heart,
pausing the flow of blood:
in the present now forced apart
now the mind be a flood.

To fall to the hands of the brain
losing the bright eager life
as what once filled with joy now the bane.
Time began to lose meaning in the strife.

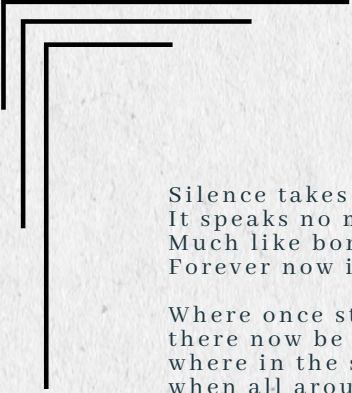
A voice desperate for a call
once loud and boisterous,
now but a silent crawl
all stand in awe and prosperous.

With a hand outstretched,
all eyes turn to stare,
with faded resemblance their eyes confessed;
truly, who here was ever in the prayer?

The young crashing heart.
the breaking of a porcelain figure.
As all now begins to invert.
now it's an unfamiliar.

The face once with a large smile.
now faded and empty, the life faded,
was watched with eyes full of hostile,
almost like this sudden change was fated.





Silence takes over, not a word in the breath.
It speaks no more words no more.
Much like born it was the end of one, the death.
Forever now it hides, no longer the bright eyesore.

Where once stood a butterfly,
there now be a husk,
where in the social world no longer qualify,
when all around it fades to dusk.

The young thrashing heart
quiet, quiet, as now all it does is wait.
Perhaps in a day faraway,
someone will convince this shell to crack,
and finally reveal the heart full of smiles once more.



OPEN PLAIN TO SEE

SAMANTHA DUNSON, ALLEN EAST HIGH SCHOOL

I once dreamt up I was in the house of my grandma,
I lay in the room
I always slept in,
but this time I was under the moon.

The moon glared down at me with her silver eyes,
the strangely familiar yet incorrect room free,
as the ceiling turned out to be built upon lies,
and all I could see was the sky above me.

My grandma used to live on an open plot
there was nothing obstructing her land.
Besides the corn maize by the lot.
Trees were far out, surrounding like a band.

Despite the lack of green growth,
I could hear the gentle rustling,
the shake slow in the night like a sloth
As if I was in the wild bushing.

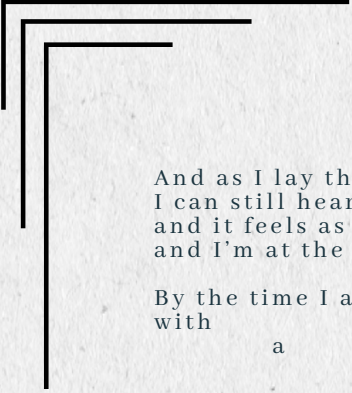
I could hear the distinct sounds,
the sounds of gentle birds,
distantly they are drowned
by the terrible silence
of the hushed whispered words.

The sky from above scowled at me;
a deep slitted glare from her eyes.
Yet I cannot be mad at her beautiful sea
as it gently illuminates the skies.

Yet I cannot shake this unease,
as the waves of gentle breeze
fly by, I cannot help but feel freeze
as if I am making pleas
To some unknown force.

The fear that rattles my bones
my skin tight, my flesh like a blanket.
There's a sickly feeling in my stomach
as if I'm about to take the gambit.

I can't figure out why I feel such,
I feel so alarmed yet nothing has happened,
but it all feels just a bit much
Especially for something so beautiful yet
blackened.



And as I lay there nothing changes
I can still hear the crickets
and it feels as if the it were all a stage
and I'm at the center as pass by the minutes.

By the time I awoke I had been left
with

a deep fear.

A fear that festered in my chest,
like I'm under the behest
of a beast who possessed
all the bits of my flesh.

I never understood that deep rooted fear,
that uncanny feeling I got that night,
my mind I feel is simply spear
into that strange blight that night.

And so whenever I try to explain the meaning
I can't put together a single coherent thought,
none of it ends up mattering; it's simply feigning.
Perhaps I shall always be remain in this caught,
but even so, I shall remain perseverant.

A DRINK

JEMIN GANDHI, OHIO STATE LIMA

Bartender, a shot of your finest please
Misery.

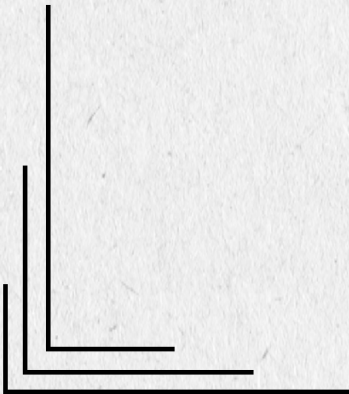
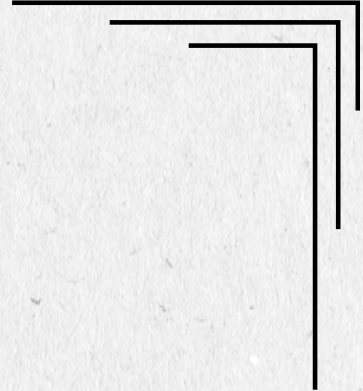
Let it scorch my throat
And settle in my stomach.

Let the cold bitterness seep into my veins
and hollow out my soul.

Let it make my past regretful
And my future hopeless.

For if I don't take a swig today,
I will tomorrow.

Salud.



WORK ETHICS

LOGAN GRANT, OHIO STATE LIMA

"Slade," I called to him. He didn't turn his head to face me. His stoic stare stayed fixed at his horse's mane, his armored body almost limp, lifeless, on the saddle, and he grunted a low "hmp" as a response. I rode my horse up beside his and asked, "Why are we doing this?"

He replied without looking at me, "We are paid to. It's our job."

"No, I mean why do we choose to do this?"

"To work?"

"To murder."

I didn't think it possible, but somehow his head sank lower till the hairs of his chin brushed against the dirt on his chest plate. His gaze fell and locked onto his worn gauntlets, line of red water stilling. "We all need some type of work, some profession. Murder is ours."

"We could do other work."

"An apprenticeship at our age? No one would take us."

"I'm sure we could find work that doesn't require an apprenticeship."

"Work maybe, but not a profession. Nothing to live off of."

"We could open an inn somewhere. We're more than capable of that."

"No."

"We could be hunters, sell our game to markets."

"No."

"We could become guards at the capital."

"No."

"Why not?"

He lifted his head, eyes pointed towards the ceaseless dirt road ahead of us both. "I'm not leaving." He glances quickly to the severed head dangling off his saddle, thumping in a steady, almost hypnotic rhythm.

"I'm too comfortable."

"Obviously, you're not."

"If you hate it so much why don't you leave?"

"I might."

"Well, I'm not stopping you."

"Well, then I just might. Just... not right now."

"Why not?"

I turned away from him and towards the land. A sea of tallgrass was all that was around us for miles, minus the narrow dirt we traveled on.

"I don't exactly know where we are right now," I said.

A chuckle. "Me either."

TRAINWRECK

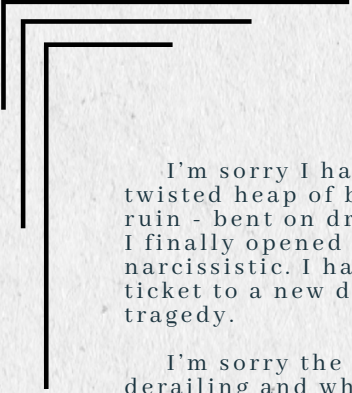
E.B. GREEN

I'm sorry I watched it happen and couldn't stop it. You - off the rails - rocking back and forth, unstable, reckless and unbalanced. You were never quite sure which track you would follow. For twenty years I rode the rail with you - a hobo hopping the car for the next big adventure, never knowing where we'd end up. In the beginning, it was exciting, fun even, always a good time, until it wasn't. So many times, like a good conductor, I would balance you out, fight like hell to still your wobble and pull you back under control. I'm sorry I didn't break the coupler, cutting myself loose. Instead I stayed, saving you from the destructive, irrational impulsiveness that was your M.O. You - never giving a thought towards the suffering that might await us at the end of the line. My iron will became weakened. Brittle and corroded. I gave up the screaming, the crying, the demanding you listen - like an engineer forced into early retirement, all of the fight had just gone out of me - a rusty wheel on a broken down boxcar taken off the track with grass growing up all around it.

I'm sorry I never made you face the fire, always enabling, fixing the screw-ups, ignoring the indiscretions, time and time again, making you believe that anything you did could always be repaired. I made our love unconditional, unbreakable, always letting it go. By letting you think your actions were untouchable, I left a route open that, in the end, would be our destruction. With the shattering of the door came the shouts of "Police" as you yet again brought chaos into our life. Yet when the questions came, that damned instinct to protect you - to fix it - kicked in and became my downfall. I took the blame and covered for you, this time, for the last time, to the detriment of my own life, my own freedom and my life with my children. In the depths of my broken down, defeated mine, thinking my actions would finally win your devotion and make you see me as that "down" chick - the one that loved you the most, my last ditch effort to breathe life into something in my heart I knew was dead and gone. But you deserted me - left me alone - discarded like nothing more than yesterday's trash, just another means to an end, like all the years invested meant nothing at all.

I'm sorry that when the rail switched, you wouldn't follow me down the other track. The drugs and alcohol, the lies and deceit, too heavy for me to haul for you anymore, your destination-bound for heartache, misery and despair. I kept myself isolated, in the solitude of my own personal prison, withdrawn from my family and friends in an attempt to hide from them all just how low my life had become. You gained so much momentum, you became too hard for me to handle and I just couldn't put on your brakes.

I'm sorry I couldn't be the caboose you towed along in the wake of your journey into self-loathing and hatred and that it hurt you when I refused the ride-along. You never took me seriously, always believing, knowing, no matter what you did, I would always be there, forgiving and forgetting, my ticket in hand, waiting for my seat like all the times before. Your words and actions, sharp, hurtful and bruising, the reverberating tink, tink, tink of metal on metal-sledge to spike- driving that iron wedge deep into the heavy timber that was my heart.



I'm sorry I had to jump free before the cars hurled from the rails - a twisted heap of burning metal and wreckage lying everything around it in ruin - bent on dragging me into a place I could never escape from. And when I finally opened my eyes, I seen it all for what it was. Selfish, egotistical, narcissistic. I had to make the change, leave the track and punch my own ticket to a new destination, a new train to ride that doesn't end in hurt and tragedy.

I'm sorry the brakes burned too hot and I couldn't stop you from derailing and what was left behind was too mangled, and this time, I just couldn't pick up your pieces.

SAN JACINTO, CALIFORNIA

JENNY HIBBARD, OHIO STATE LIMA

Pavement lined with pomegranate
leads to fruit shaped erasers and snot
caressed sticks of wooden lead
cradled by precocious puberty.

Cracked chunks of concrete and syringes
end up at an ampm serving diabetes in a cup
and Shaky Sam offering up a dance for a donut,
singing of Neverland with the skinny trees,
plastic surgery, and that guy who made that thing...

Words exchange and a promise
of other worlds begin to bloom
but the curves stop at a wall of indecision
and a red string tied to so-and-so;

Mountains can be carved and conquered
if you're riding down 75 with a pair of scissors,
speeding towards the ribbon cutting of the grand closing.

Suddenly birds have wings,
water towers are a thing,
Florida is real (who knew),
and passports aren't impossible.

Next step's a broken seal,
collapsing onto the floor
not cluttered with cobwebs and flies as old as Grandpa,
but hardwood with a name and a voice that says

Look here, look there, look anywhere but Big Bear.

THE LIGHT OF THE FIREFLY

CIERA JOHNSON


When I was growing up, I used to love to spend time at my grandma Rita's house. It was a brick colonial, painted a ugly beige at the top with red shingles outside the two bedroom windows. Outside on of the windows, one of the shingles was slightly tilted due to heavy wind from previous strong thunderstorms. The paint was chipping all around that ugly beige, leaving small paint chips on top of the red awning that covered the front door. There was one big window right in the front downstairs, where you could see everything that crossed the small four way intersection. There was also a huge tree that sat in the middle of the tree lawn. Its branches and leaves hanging over the front yard like a open skeleton's hand that was reaching for something, casting creepy shadows on the living room walls that scared me half to death when it got dark out. The narrow walkway led up to a small, concrete grey four-step porch with a black banister on each side that led to the front door. I grew up on that porch. It held so many of my most precious memories, but one that stands out to me is when I would sit on the porch until it got dark, when the street lights came on some of them flickered like they were struggling for a desperate last breath. I would see the small green flashes of the fireflies as they flew into the summer night causing a tiny laser light show right in my grandma's front yard, and I had front row seats. My eyes would widen in amazements as I watched them dance. I grew excited as I listened to twigs from the tree snap beneath my feet as I ran through the front yard, jumping and leaping as the smell of summer barbecues lingered through the warm night air causing a slight rumble in my belly. I chased them desperately wanting to fill the Vlassic pickle jar that I cleaned out that would eventually become their home. It was furnished with a small patch or grass and a small twig or two.

One night during my hunt, I reached up and caught a firefly with one hand. I jumped for joy, fist clenched careful not to let him get away as my grandmother watched from the porch. Cigarette held in one hand between her pointer and middle finger, she smiled at my small victory as the cigarette smoke danced in the air, tiny breezes shifting it in different directions into the star spangled night until it disappeared in the dark when the performance was over. I opened my hand slowly, making sure he couldn't crawl out. I gasped as I watched this small firefly struggle to crawl around my palm, his wing torn and bent out of place as his tiny red head and antenna moved from left to right in a state of panic, his green light flickering like the flame on a candle someone was trying endlessly to blow out. His broken and battered wing struggled to move as I gazed down at him sadly knowing that I was the cause of his pain. He slowly crawled up my palm and made his way to the tip of my pointer finger and I lifted my hand in the air to aid him as he made his escape. He spread his wings, the broken one slowly lifting and I watched as he flew into the night and within a couple seconds, he was falling to the ground, spinning in sort of a cyclone as the now yellowish green light on his tail began to blink rapidly like a caution light. My eyes followed the blinking light until I saw him land in the grass. I bent down to pick him up and when I did, I gently placed him back in the palm of my hand.

The once vibrant, rapidly flashing light was no longer blinking; It was still and it began to dim turning a greenish grey as his tiny red head no longer moved to and fro, his antennae curled and twisted and disfigured and his legs curled up as they moved frantically but slowly until they completely stopped all-together. I stared at my hand for a long time, hoping and waiting for I don't know what until the light on his tail was no more, until it was dark and dead. I felt a sudden wave of sadness come over me as I lowered my head knowing I was the cause of his untimely demise. Eyes welled with tears, I lacked understanding on why I was so upset about the death of this particular firefly. I had seen dead fireflies before, I had even killed some and scooped out their light with a stick to sport it on my earlobe like it was the hottest bling in town. But something was different this time. I felt a closeness to this firefly. Like I was meant to capture him. I slowly and sadly walked through the grass completely ignoring the growing multitude of flashing and flickering lights of the other fireflies around me that awaited my capture. When I reached the sidewalk, I knelt down, and in a soft, moist patch of dirt I used a stick and dug a small hole in the ground as a makeshift grave right under the big tree. I placed him there gently and covered him up, using a tiny pebble to mark the spot. I stood there trying to figure out why this firefly was so special to me until my grandma called me in for dinner.

I sat quietly at the dinner table that night, thinking about that firefly, its life and its death as I swirled the peas and mashed potatoes around on my plate. As my grandma placed a piece of her delicious fried porkchops in her mouth, I looked up at her and asked her the question that I had been pondering since she had called me in for dinner. "Grandma why do things die?" I asked as I looked up at her anxiously awaiting her answer as I continued to roll the peas around my plate. She stopped chewing her food and put her fork down as she looked across the table at me with earnest eyes. She knew that something had peaked my curiosity. She folded her twisted arthritis ridden hands to the best of her ability and took a deep breath before she spoke. "Baby everything and everybody dies. It's all a part of God's will. You may not understand it now but you will when you get older. Grandma's going to go to Heaven one day too, but I'll be back for the second coming of Christ." While she spoke she closed her eyes and smiled peacefully, then she opened them and gave me a reassuring smile.

I slumped down in my chair, uneasy and confused about what she had just said. She got up from the table and grabbed her half empty plate as she made her way around to me, her favorite lime green nightie with the blue flowers on it stained with brown gravy as it rose above her backside exposing part of her adult diaper. She kissed my forehead gently and smiled her weary half smile as she said, "Don't be sad baby. Grandma will be in Heaven with the Lord where there's no more sadness, sickness or pain. Heaven is perfect." I perked up a little when I thought about a perfect world, the wonderful streets of gold that she would tell me about and all the angels that would rejoice upon her arrival. Would everybody go to Heaven? My thoughts then shifted to that firefly and I then began to wonder if he had made it there.

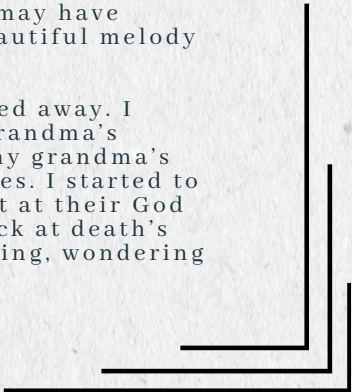


When my grandma described Heaven to me, I knew it would be the perfect place for her because to me she was just that. She had pretty brown skin that would remind you of mahogany wood and it shimmered in the sunlight like she was wearing glitter. Her hair was light brown patched with streaks of gray, like someone purposely spray painted them in certain parts but she would always rinse it jet black even though it never fully covered up all the greys. Then my step sister would braid it back in cornrows. She was about 5'5", and she had wide hips that swayed from side to side as she strode through the house, which always smelled like whatever she was cooking that day and cigarettes. Her smile was always welcoming and warm and her laugh was contagious; her eyes would close and if it was really funny, she would raise one leg and slap her knee, while she let out a high pitched "Whoo!" afterward. It would always make me giggle.

The only thing that bothered me about my grandma was the fact that she smoked cigarettes. I hated it, mostly because her house always smelled like them and by me always being there, it caused me to smell like them too. I can recall days of repeated ridicule, being teased on the school bus because I smelled of stale tobacco. I remember sneaking on my grandma's gold vanity and spraying my clothes with her perfume in a failed attempt to mask the smell. No amount of perfume or lotion could cover it. I used to see the commercials on TV about the stinky little sticks and how they were full of things that could make you sick, cause something called cancer and even kill you. I didn't understand for the life of me why my grandma still wanted to smoke them, and when I asked her why, she would never fully answer the question. She would just say it's a "nasty, filthy habit" and I should never pick it up.

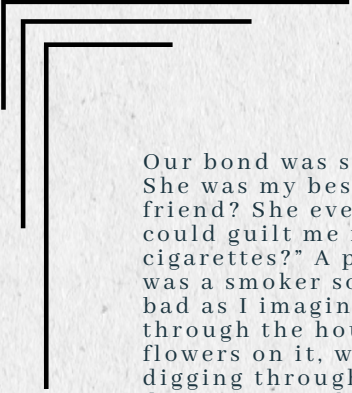
I always had a really close bond with my grandma. My mother got pregnant with me at the young age of seventeen while she was still in high school and gave birth to me when she was eighteen. I was her first grandchild so I automatically became her baby. I can remember sitting up under my grandma while my mom slept, went to work or went out with her friends. She would sing to me, specifically a special song she created just for me called grandma's little love bug. I would lay on her chest and listen to her singing and even though her voice cracked because she smoked cigarettes and she was off tune, her soft sweet voice always soothed my soul. When she wasn't singing, sometimes we would lay in silence as she held me and rocked me while I listened to her heart beat. I loved listening to it because it was abnormally beautiful. In the nineties, she had open heart surgery and they placed what's called a St. Jude nitrovalve inside of her. It caused her to make a low steady ticking sound like a wrist watch, and left a long skinny scar running down her chest. Every time her heart beat, she made a ticking noise which may have bothered her, but to me it was her own personal song, a beautiful melody that told a part of her life's story.

As I started to get older, a few people in my family passed away. I can't remember the particular order, but my Uncly Ricky grandma's brother died and so did my grandfather. At every funeral my grandma's words would play in my head. Everything and everybody dies. I started to understand the concept of death and I began to realize that at their God specific time, eventually everything and everyone will knock at death's door and he will answer happily which will leave us mourning, wondering who will be next to reside with the grim reaper.



That firefly that I accidentally killed that night didn't cross my mind for years. Honestly I probably would have never even thought about it again but oddly it came to my mind when my grandma passed I was at work on the computer, entering numbers into Microsoft Excel when the ping of my iPhone drew my attention away from the screen. I picked up my phone and saw a text from my mom that read "CALL ASAP." I swallowed hard to try to get rid of the lump in my throat because right then I knew that something was wrong. My heart thumped hard in my chest and my vision became somewhat blurry as my mom told me on the other end of the phone that they found my grandma unresponsive in her room at the nursing home where she was staying for a few weeks. I felt like my legs weigh a ton as I ran to my car and raced to the hospital. The hospital was cold and the bright white hallways made me dizzy as I walked frantically to the nurses station to find the room where my grandma was. The loud clamour of different voices, the beeping of machines, doctors clad in long white robes and nurses in colorful scrubs; the atmosphere alone made me nervous. I hated hospitals. The nurse wore Hello Kitty scrubs and her blonde hair was pulled up into a sloppy bun. She scanned her computer screen and her deep blue eyes met mine as she sympathetically pointed her perfectly french-tipped finger to the room where she was. I walked hurriedly to the room and tears filled my eyes as I took in the sight while entering the room. There lay my grandma; my strong, beautiful, fearless grandma, now swollen almost two sizes bigger than normal. Her eyes were closed and her skin no longer glittered. It was dull and ashy looking, like someone had rubbed baby powder all over her. She had a piece of gauze folded up and placed in each nostril of her nose and it needed constant changing from the never-ending nosebleed she was suffering from. She was connected to all types of machines, which filled the room with constant beeping and whooshing sounds. I was hurt, confused and angry. She was just fine a week ago, we had just spoke on the phone the night before. How could this happen? My mom, my aunt Gerry, and my cousin Jackie all gathered around the bed as the doctor came in, his eyes filled with sadness for us. He explained that they had done all they could, but grandma was brain-dead; she no longer breathed on her own and the machines were keeping her alive. I sobbed uncontrollably because I knew that it was time to make a decision. Her words rang in my ears like loud bells clanging and clattering and I couldn't stop it. Everything and everybody dies. I sat at her bedside holding her cold, motionless hand and changed the gauze in her nose when it got full until the doctors and nurses came in and took her off of the machines. She passed away at 10:24 p.m. on June 24th, 2016.

After her passing I felt numb and empty. There were so many things left unsaid and undone. I still had so much to ask her, so much to tell her. I felt guilty. I wanted to tell her I was sorry for so many things, like when I broke curfew after I went across town and got too drunk to drive off of some cheap wine me and my friend Nikki bought at the corner store. Or for that time I snuck my boyfriend in to spend the night. Or about that time I yelled at her when she called me and asked me to buy her a pack of cigarettes. She had just got released from the hospital, she had some type of procedure done on her leg because her arteries were clogged from smoking. The doctors told her that she needed to quit but here she was calling me again, probably because she didn't have enough money to buy her own. It had probably all gone to her son, my grown-ass drunk uncle who God forbid couldn't do anything on his own. She knew it was so hard for me to tell her no and she played on that.



Our bond was so close and she knew I would do anything she asked of me. She was my best friend and who wouldn't do anything for their best friend? She even used her "baby voice" when she called, to make sure she could guilt me into buying them. "Can you bring Grammy a pack of cigarettes?" A part of me wanted to bring them to her because I myself was a smoker so I knew how it felt to crave nicotine and not have it. I felt bad as I imagined her home alone and helpless, pushing her walker through the house in her favorite lime green nightie with the blue flowers on it, while she made pit stops at every ashtray fiending and digging through them for butts. But I grew angry when I thought of her deteriorating health, that procedure she just had gotten done, that wicked cough she couldn't get rid of, that open heart surgery she had years ago and it just came out. I yelled at her, told her no and that she needed to quit, and I knew it bothered her because she threw up in my face how many times that she had bought me cigarettes before and then she hung up the phone. I ended up buying them anyway to satisfy her and to keep her happy. The doctors told her to quit smoking, but she wouldn't. And now that she's gone, I can say that I'm sorry for everything else. I'm not sorry that I yelled at her though. I'm sorry that I didn't yell at her more often.

I think of my grandmother often. When I do, I also think of that firefly I accidentally killed that warm summer night, and how everything and everyone will one day eventually die. I haven't seen a firefly in years, but when I do, I'm saddened by them. The vibrant flashing light on their tails reminds me of the burning cherry on a cigarette, and the quick and sudden death of my beloved grandma. I also can't remember the last time I smoked a cigarette or caught a firefly.

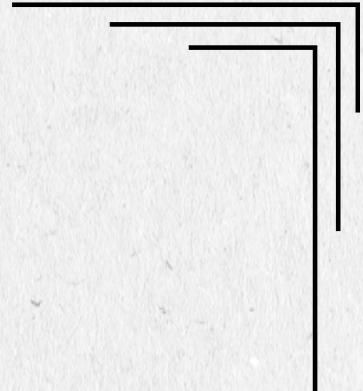
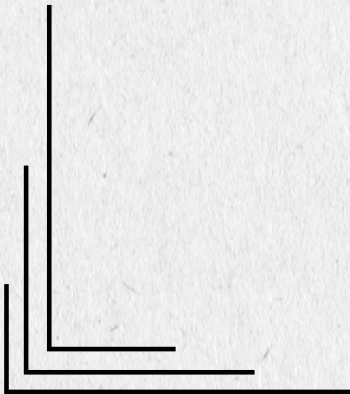
DREAMING IN UNISON

DEJA JONES, ASHLAND UNIVERSITY

I wish I could take you with me when I fall.
When you lay your precious head down to sleep,
you could share a glimpse of my hell.

I wish I could drag you back into my mind
when I imagined you as my savior.
Now, I'm waking up next to something pretending to be human.

I wish I could sleep without seeing you in my dreams.
When you wear his face and skin,
I know I am nowhere near Heaven.





I'M NOT REALLY THAT BAD.

DEJA JONES, ASHLAND UNIVERSITY

These days my reflection is looking
...familiar.
More pathetic than poetic
Less romantic more erratic.

These days my reflection is looking
...sort of attractive?
More beautiful than sexy
Less people pleasing more self-respect.

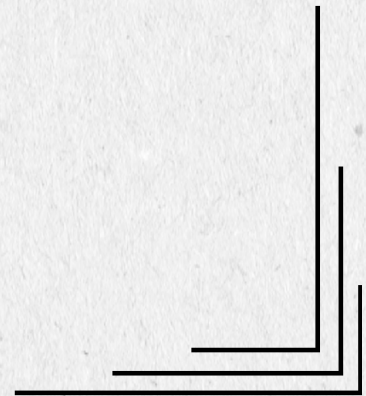
These days my reflection is looking
...back at me.
Like the days you hated me than loved me
More demonic than angelic.

These days my reflection is looking
...like the face that you fear.
More like the past than the present
Less relevant more targeted.

These days my reflection is looking
...out the window at the streets.
More red than black
Less 'hood' more battlefield.

These days my reflection is looking
...like I'm not really that bad.
More understanding than anger
Less stereotypical more personal.

These days my reflection is looking
...in my own eyes.
More lonely than unloved
Less critical more self-love.



MORNING SKY

DEJA JONES, ASHLAND UNIVERSITY

Hate, pain, and loneliness.
love, and happiness.
A three-way deadlock

Life,

A gentle morning sky

It keeps coming back around
When you've tricked yourself
Into seeing light
Darkness taps your shoulder
And your demons start
playing the laughing track

It is within the drowning
Suffocating

Endless pit of pain is when

you will feel love
Compassion for others

Feeling their pain Understanding
and realizing their hatred

Is when you will know

how to heal
And when you will know how to inflict pain

How to send it

Back

deflecting pain and sadness
Ignoring the ache of

loneliness

And making yourself
your loved ones

Drown
in your pain.

It is an endless cycle to
Feel love

&

Feel pain

THE FATE OF A KING

HANK KOPACK, DELPHOS ST. JOHN'S HIGH SCHOOL

The sun shone down on the old kingdom, clothing the land in an array of greens, yellows and blues. In the town's square, there stood a castle looming over the surrounding village, casting a large shadow over most of the domain. In the castle a man rose from his throne. He was just like his castle, large and something to be marveled at. The king stood out, being taller than most of his subjects. In the evening light, his normally blonde hair looked golden, perfectly complemented by the shining gold crown that lay on his head. The king strode out to the balcony looking over the village. He breathed in the warm air and smiled. This was one of the only times he felt free. He lamented on how he became king. His parents' death in the war had meant that because he was the only remaining member of his bloodline, he was to be king. He gracefully accepted, and within a few months, he became comfortable with the position. Now that he was nineteen, he had successfully won a war with the same kingdom that killed his father and negotiated treaties with outlying kingdoms. He was pulled out of his thoughts by a strong pair of arms around his midsection. He quickly turned around, his hand reaching for the sword on his hip, but stopped after realizing it was his wife. He stared into her hazel eyes as she stared into his pale blue ones, and he cupped her face and pulled her into a deep kiss.

"Everything ok, love?" she asked.

"Yes darling, everything is perfect," he responded.

She pulled his scarlet robe around her so their faces were almost touching.

"Why don't you spend some time with me? You've been so busy lately," she pleaded.

"I know sweetheart, but the work on the new tariffs isn't completed yet, and I need to meet with my advisors before nightfall. I'll come see you when I'm done," he promised.

She dropped the robe, crestfallen, and began to walk back into the castle.

His wife looked over her shoulder and flirtatiously said, "If you get bored at your meeting you know where to find me."

The king froze for a moment before collecting himself and began the journey to his meeting room. He arrived quicker than he thought and pushed open the heavy mahogany door, revealing that his cabinet was already assembled. He swiftly walked to the head of the table and glanced at the large map that was laid out over the surface. The king addressed his cartographer, "What did I miss?"

"Nothing much, Your Highness," the cartographer replied. "Only the fact that the Secos Kingdom has decided to increase tariffs by almost ten percent."

"THEY WHAT?" The king roared. Almost immediately, the rest of the room went silent; all eyes were fixated on the king. "They can't do that! They're violating our treaty!"

"Well," an advisor started, "They have seemed to find a loophole in the treaty."

"Well, what can we do about it?" The king roared.

"Not much, Your Majesty," another advisor quickly spoke. "War is out of the question. They have alliances with most of the surrounding kingdoms, and you and I both know they can overpower us if given the chance."

The king rose from his chair, brandishing a dagger, and stabbed the map right on the Kingdom of Secos. He quickly regained his composure, sat his crown down, and ran his hand through his shoulder-length hair. The silence was interrupted by the ringing of a strong, loud bell. The assembled all froze.

"Why that bell doesn't ring unless there's-" The advisor's sentence was cut short by a cannon blast which shook the whole room. The king pulled himself up and addressed the room.

"Men, we are assumably under attack. Get to safety. May God be with you."

The king turned on his heel and began to run down the long corridors, hoping to reach the throne room. As he ran into the throne room, the entrance doors collapsed under the weight of the mob, and they started to overrun the castle. The king froze, and he fled the throne room. The cry of people grew ever louder as he ran, trying desperately to escape their grasp. His ears were filled with the sound of arrows whizzing past as he ran onto the balcony and gawked as he saw his once peaceful village now on fire. The smokey air caused him to double over and cough. He started to turn around when the mob finally caught up to him. The king drew his sword in a feeble attempt to ward them off. The crowd started laughing at him.

"Who are you? What do you want?" The king yelled.

A member of the mob stepped forward, torch in hand. "We're from the Rekyia Empire, and we are going to tear down your pathetic kingdom one brick at a time!"

The crowd roared and advanced on the king. The king took a few steps back in defense.

"Why are you attacking us?" the king inquired. "You've never had a problem with us before, so why start now? You have no business attacking us."

"That is true, Your Majesty," the man responded. "However, our good friends, the Secos, promised us a very fair share of gold if we were to dispose of you."

The king began to laugh, and it momentarily froze the mob before him.

"What's so funny?" The man roared.

The king responded, "We have allies from here to the sea. They will no doubt be able to take your little insurrection down quickly."

The man smiled wide, showing off his stained teeth. "Ah, my king, new treaties get made every day. Your allies are our allies now."

The king froze, the realization sitting in. He had been betrayed by people he had considered allies. The man grinned wolfishly at the king. He had started to advance on the king when a piercing scream shot through the air. The mob turned, and the king's eyes snapped to the noise at the end of the corridor. It was his wife. Her eyes filled with tears at the sight of her husband in peril.

"RUN! Go to the safe house!" The king roared. His wife nodded and fled. The Reyka army turned as well and began to follow her.

"STOP!" The king roared. The army froze, momentarily confused. "It's me you want, not her. Let her go."

The man pondered the predicament before him. He paced a few steps before finalizing his decision. He addressed the mob, "We will find her soon enough. Let us focus on the task at hand." He turned to face the king. The leader of the mob studied the king. He was in a defensive position with his sword drawn. The man addressed the king, "You know, if you would just surrender, we would leave and never return."

"That's a lie, and you know it!" The king spat back.

"Are you willing to die for your pathetic kingdom?" The man asked.

"Indeed I am, just like my father before me. I am not backing down that easily." The king proclaimed.

"Very well then, be prepared to perish," The man said plainly. He drew his own sword to match the king and charged at him, swinging his sword. The king parried it with a powerful blow and swung his fist at the man's nose. It connected with a crunch. The man fell back, his nose now broken and oozing blood down his face. The king held his sword at his throat. "You are done," the king panted, out of breath. The man smiled, his teeth now red from blood smiled back.

"You can't beat us all." The man spat, blood flying at the king's face.

The king doubled back, furiously wiping his eyes. The man rose to his feet and uttered a simple command.

"FIRE!" he yelled.

On cue, arrows came flying out, and the king tried to deflect them with his sword, but there were too many, and the king soon found himself with multiple arrows sticking out of his limbs. The king doubled over from the pain and began to sway from side to side. The king took a few steps, but his foot caught the edge of the balcony and fell over. The mob rushed to the edge of the balcony to watch the fate of the king. As he was falling, the king oddly felt at peace. He hit the ground with a loud thud. The mob peered over the edge at the body of the king.

One man muttered, "Pathetic." He threw a torch over the edge of the balcony and began to walk back inside. The torch landed on a small bush which quickly started to burn. The fire spread from the bush to the grass below it, engulfing the dead king in red and orange flames.

THE SWING(S)

ROSE KOTTAPALLI, LIMA SHAWNEE HIGH SCHOOL

In art class my mind swings
stricken by a picture

The Swing
by Jean-Honoré Fragonard
frames Rococo of 1768,

A patron reclines in admiration,
relaxing in views of his possession

his mistress sitting on a wooden sylvan swing
in a loose dress, brush strokes, and pastel legs

cherubs in the foreground playing witness to
the value of a woman for years to come

Fragonard's swing reaches
accolades for the male gaze
reflecting unsavory modern truths

The Swing (after Fragonard)
by Yinka Shonibare

paints familiar foliage now void of men
a woman left alone swings into her own being,
constructs herself out of West African wax-printed fabrics

that fail to color the 21st century
our stagnant society instead tethered to the ropes of Rococo
to the strands of gendered constructs



THE BLOOMING

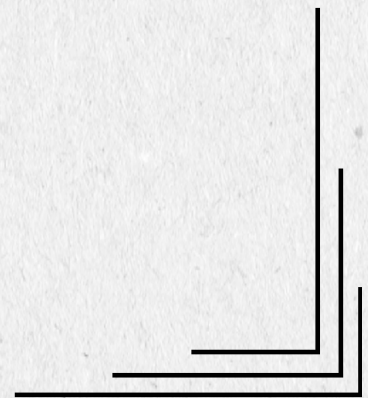
ROSE KOTTAPALLI, LIMA SHAWNEE HIGH SCHOOL

A mother looks out
the kitchen window
cherry wood framed,
the skies in grays

Spring soils tender
and deep, a father
dreams a field

Winds whisper in
rural hushes,
Stubborn thorns are born

She speaks
first words to the sun
On this may morning
bright red and alive –
A rose has bloomed.



FEEDING SOULS

PETE LANDINO, TERRA STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

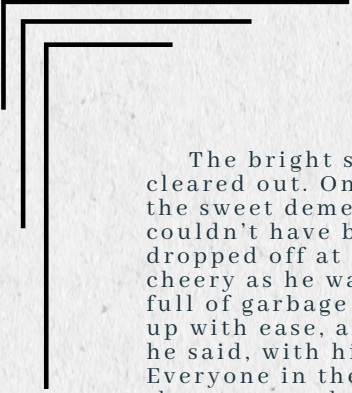
Work started at 8:30 am sharp, but there were some preparations done first on the way to the jobs. We rented a chainsaw from the local home store but offered to buy one instead for the good of the order, the crew leader refused however. Lastly, the crew was picked up from a local housing authority complex and a Christian shelter, then headed for the first jobsite.

All arrived at Kinsman and E. 119th and got to work on a 3 story double with a triple garage and an extra lot next door. Maybe the open lot previously had a home on it. Full inside demolition and clean-up completed in about 6 hours, filling 4 dumpsters. 7 men got started in easy fashion. Friendly talk and hard work all around. Some 50 one-gallon milk jugs were handed-out through the basement window, some empty, some full, some with illegible writing on them. Along with those came bleach containers, some rotted tables, a stained work sink, clothes, and children's play items. Clothes littered the inside and outside of the house. Layers of them throughout each floor, with even more in the bedrooms. Looked like doing laundry was out as a chore for the former inhabitants. Clothes were also littered outside as well, just tossed out of windows into tangled piles, some stuck and molded to a chain-link fence two feet from the house.

Filling the dumpster is easy at first. Throw shit out of the windows and porches from each floor to the dumpster below. The hard part, that being most of the time, was adding to the dumpster as it filled. Someone was always using a small ladder to get the debris pushed to the front of it. Overflowing heavy construction bags were hoisted to the guy on the ladder to get them over the top. All filthy work that had to get done, as the city would soon demolish the property.

Two black guys on the top floor pretty much took care of that area. A few guys here and there went up to help, but those 2 worked their butts off up there. Both of them had on neat dressy corduroys, while one wore a fine leather jacket and an excellent felt hat with a red feather in the band. They got dirty, lugging junk up and down the stairs if it couldn't get thrown from a window or the porch. They were a smooth part of the job. One of them got into a third floor attic space to throw nearly 20 milk crates and a few mattresses from a window at the house's peak. Even with the December northwest Lake Erie winds blowing through the busted out windows, it was still a stagnant cloud of filth up there.

The house looks like it was built in the early 1920's with an extra-wide front porch on 2 floors, New Orleans style across the entire width of the house, and a little porch in back. The entire house was wood sided with a few paint jobs recently done. Crafted built-ins were on the second floor, like a typical Cleveland near eastside or westside double. Probably 2 hardworking immigrant families living it when it was made. The 3 car garage in its heyday was A1A. A single garage separated from the 2 car by a brick wall split between them. It was detached about 20 yards from the house with a single car driveway going back. Made of solid brick with a chimney no less, 0 windows, and a low roof that caved in years ago. Lots of plastic car dashboards, front bumpers, and grills were strewn along the rear wall. The neighbor had what looked like a similar garage and they were working on cars over there.



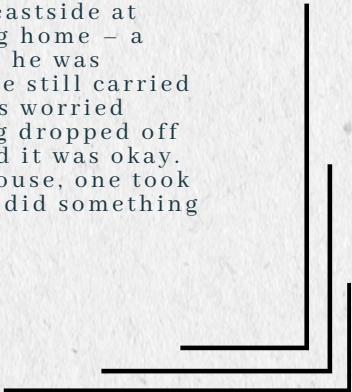
The bright sun made the cold morning tolerable as the house was cleared out. One worker was a big guy with a body like a d-lineman but the sweet demeanor of an o-lineman. We picked him up on W 25th, and he couldn't have been friendlier while driving to the job. When he was dropped off at the Westside Market at the end of the day – he was as cheery as he was at 8 am. Most of the day he lifted the construction bags full of garbage to the guy on the ladder. 50 plus pound bags he pushed up with ease, all with a contagious easy-going outlook. On the way home, he said, with his wages he was going to get some flour and fry some food. Everyone in the Jeep likely wished to get in on some of his cooking since there was no lunch or lunch break on the job. He probably would have invited everyone over for dinner if asked.

The bumper was that at 4 o'clock, with the job done, the house boarded back up, and the pictures taken to secure payment, no one was headed home. The sun was setting behind all the remaining tall homes in the neighborhood, and the air was chilling with the shade. The big guy said around 2 pm that sun would set at 4:30 pm and he was right on. However, the plan was to head to a second house to work further before everyone got paid. The second house had a similar size crew working on it all day, plus some of our crew that left earlier while the fourth dumper was in transit. Before moving on though, the yard full of grub trees and overgrown vines was trimmed, with some of the larger trees chain-sawed, all of which went into the last dumpster. A hillbilly in the crew hoped for a fine bonfire but housing codes ruled against such. With the yard shaped up, everything was prepared for the city to destroy the house.

Quitting time sounded like it was usually 3, but today it was nearly 5pm as the guys arrived at house #2. A massive brick 3 story, 3200 sq. ft. house encompassing all of its skinny lot, with homes tight on both sides. There was another nice detached garage about 10 yards back, full of deteriorated roofing shingles and covered in junk trees needing removal. A coon was found on the house's top floor, some said it was dead while other workers said it was alive, but only the top floor stunk. As darkness set in, everyone got paid in cash and the house was boarded up. Most of the crew would return tomorrow and finish the demo. Getting home from this neighborhood on Union and E. 119th would be difficult for some of the crew taking public transportation, and a bit frightening getting out of there at night too. Even more so with a \$100 in cash wages each guy had on them. While getting ready to leave, a pretty black guy with braids and wearing a hospital mask carried a 20 gallon aquarium and some boxes to his Nissan sedan. The neighbors were so close that he walked through their small front yards. The remaining guys discussed bus routes to get home and back the next day.

Some talked about a 'county-line bus route.' One white guy said he would be a mark while taking a few buses home to the far eastside at dark with \$100. He was another worker who took something home – a classic Rolling Stones poster from the first house. Instead, he was dropped off to meet a friend on W. 28th and Detroit. He still carried his psychedelic framed poster. One of his crew buddies was worried about him, asking, "You live on E 82nd, why are you getting dropped off on the westside?" He replied snidely and assured his friend it was okay.

As for the remaining workers standing in front of the house, one took off on a bicycle, some were walking off together, and some did something else.



THE FATHER

PAIGE MACKENZIE, MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Mary is crying

In the beaten bare sun
Daughters yell at their mothers to run
But her Icarus eyes
Find a man drunk on moral highs
And falls to her knees
As he claims to be salvation

Mary is crying

He takes pity in her pleas
As he forces into their daughter with ease
Thy unto shall be done
Blood pools from thighs
Another honorable sacrifice

Mary is crying

Choice is dishonorable
Mutilation is inevitable
Though shalt not want
But damned not to receive
Take seed to the slaughter
Love thy father

Mary is crying

Yet we praise her tears
Feast on her fears
And put our sisters out to pasture
we lower our swollen hips and rooted breasts to the ground
Eyes shine onto blazing skies
And we bend for the love of a merciless God
Who refuses to listen to such trivialities

And you all wonder why Mary is crying.



DISSOCIATION CHRONICLES

THEO MESNICK, CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

Grist-milled by a hustle
Lacking balance; slacking waste
Tasting salt, stale and facial
Forearms blank as slate

Face doll-like, eyes
glacial. somewhere

screams each open mouth

Pillow-length con-
cussion left
 unkempt &
 unremorsed

my stomach

removed //

THE MAZE

KAREN MEYER, OHIO STATE LIMA OFFICE FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

The words and thoughts of
The sky before dawn clamor my mind.
They hide the beauty of
The simplest dewdrop on the grass...
Or is it a teardrop on a flutter of lashes?
Digging...searching...
To the depths of beauty...
(Is there really beauty beneath?)
Overlooking the ecstasy of the surface.
Denying the truth I can see...
Rejecting my true emotions;
Expressing the stranger I now fear to be...
Relief?? Where can the word have gone?
Only through the most beautiful wonder can it return.
Thank you, my friend.



MASKS

KAREN MEYER, OHIO STATE LIMA OFFICE FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

Alarm goes off...the game begins
What mask to choose from my "bag of tricks"?
My calendar open, now choose my face...
To show the world...my emotions erased.

As years go by, my mask collection grows
To mask the fears of being exposed
A fraud by the world and so I hide;
Behind the façade, protecting my pride.

Every mask is a brick around my heart...
A wall that I build to face the court
Of those who judge others while hiding from
Their fears...of who they have become.

One day I'll wake up, leave my masks behind;
I'll show myself - face naked - as by God I was designed.
I'll bravely face the world honestly,
Unafraid of others' judgements...transparent and free.

We all have fears we need to face,
We all need forgiveness, love and grace...
When will we begin the difficult task
Of encouraging others to lower their masks?

HOPELESS ROMANTIC

GARRET MILLER, OHIO STATE LIMA

The busted radiator's spoutin coolant
all over the pavement. My dad's drenched
in the refuse, a spit-tinted orange and green.
He's a bleeding Hulk after a 14 hour
brawl with an animated engine, pissin
language filthier than the lukewarm
fluid smothering the life of his cigarette.
He's in the beast a torso deep, playing
chance with two twenty-year-old factory
stands and a sinking jack.

I'm beside my brother holding a shoplight
that's been burning my hand for the last
twenty minutes. We're battling the wind's breath,
brainless servants to a veteran mechanic, tool
monkeys near frothing at the command to fetch
a wrench. We're too stupid to muffle our smirks
and between wads of antifreeze and profanity,
my dad catches us mouthin off.

He mutters something like you think I'm
enjoying myself? you wanna give it a try?
but our ears froze off four hours ago, so his question's
just about as worthless as his cursing to God.

My brother's cradling his pack of Marlboro
and knows now's the time to give him one.

It's quiet.

My dad's dragging on his cigarette.

I am too stupid to settle on silence.

My lips shiver open and for a couple minutes
I'm stumbling over how it's kinda like the radiator's
kissing my dad and how even in death it's
building some sort of warmth for him.
And despite the punctured coil, it's still caring
for him somehow, caring for us and trying its
best to keep the cold away which is goddamn ironic.
But now I'm realizing silence is worth a whole lot
more to my dad than sweet nothings.

It's a couple seconds after I've trailed off
that my dad speaks through his blanket of smoke:

Yeah, you might be right.

COUSIN BUD

GARRET MILLER, OHIO STATE LIMA

Ask a machine about life
and it'll hunker over suffering
humanity in a slow oil spitting
wheeze and whisper something
about it's mother the mechanic,

ask me and I'll refer you to my mother,
the tearless weep leatherfaced like Cousin Bud
who's been staring at the sun ever since
the death of his father and profession,

ask Cousin Bud and he'll refer you to moonshine
on those nights the moon still shines, hooting owls
and something crazy like the Lord's whispering
his daddy's name in a Kentucky key
that's probably just Hank Williams.

Ask my mother and she'll refer you to my father.
Ask my father and he'll refer you to the machine.

You see how these things work,
Cousin Bud sure does.



PHOTO CREDIT: JENNY HIBBARD

ODE TO NATURE

OLIVIA MOORE, OHIO STATE LIMA

O' thy is so elegant
Reflection so grand
You bring life to everything you caress
Your soft swaying arms
Embracing the wind as you dance
You shimmer and shake
You are alive and well
You overwhelm me with beauty and mass
You represent strength and power, femininity and weakness
From your soft moist earth
Down to your deadliest flaw

You mother us, undoubtedly
As if we are your children of mice and bees
From your hot summer days
To your monstrous nights of storm
We face your wrath when you are enraged
Yet we see your beauty through it all
I am unfazed by the harm you may bring
Blinded by curiosity and trust
You continue to fight the deadly poison of civilization
Not to be faltered by our steep greed
You humble us for our weakness

You are what makes me arise at dawn
My sign to see what masterpiece you have created that day
To rest beneath your swollen light at dusk
It is only a matter of time
Till all of humanity destroys you
I shall say my goodbyes
But I know when I wake
I shall see your warmth on the horizon
Before my hope has a chance to slip
With every passing day
You shall prove me wrong



WOODLANDS

OLIVIA MOORE, OHIO STATE LIMA

When I thought of the woodlands
My soul grew lonely
I craved the lovesick melancholy
Dense fog seeping... seeping...

I dreamed of the gardens
Obscene of life or light
There was a gentle mumbling
Maybe soft purring
More of a cawing...cawing...

I discovered the meadows
The pastures never blooming
Perfumed from unseen blows
Beady eyes looming...looming...

Much I marveled this dreary dawning
Deep in the darkness conning
Seeds of death sprouting
Someone is watching...watching...

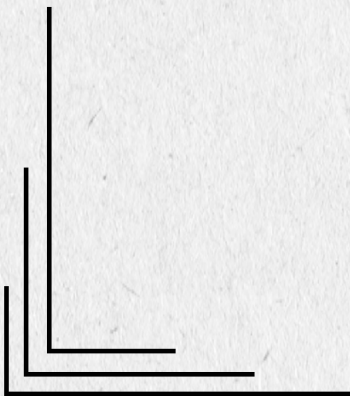
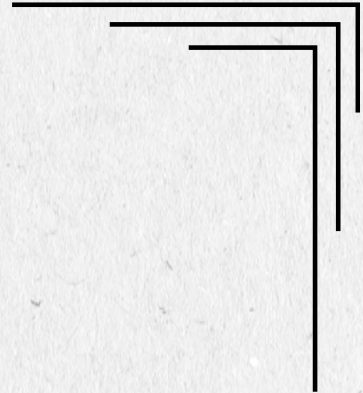
SOLITUDE'S OBLIGATION

RYAN W. NORRIS, OHIO STATE LIMA

If we travel
all that distance
only to find
we are alone,

we mustn't leave
without carving
knowledge
into the void.

Then the grandchildren
of our tardigrades
will hear Tupac.





PERSPECTIVES OF PAIN

NICOLE POHLMAN, OHIO STATE LIMA

Pain is powerful...

A broken heart,
A beautiful lie,
A becoming change.

Pain is playful...

A simple fall off the bicycle,
A stupid trip down the stairs,
A slide straight towards the pavement.

Pain is passion...

A boisterous argument,
A believer who strays from the path of God,
A battle that is not yet conquered.

Pain is peaceful...

A longing to meet again,
A light-hearted goodbye on the phone,
A last breath.

FACT OR FANTASY

NICOLE POHLMAN, OHIO STATE LIMA

We had the greatest of conversations in her imagination...
The two of us talked as the clouds sprinted above us,
And whispered when the stars attempted to shimmer through our
speech.

Her and I danced by the bay and pranced around the woods.
Neither of us letting go, even though we knew that we should.
So we continued to sing, we continued to dance,
All the while I was lost in a trance.

Again I tell you, believe my words:
We had the greatest of conversations in her imagination...
But those times are no more.

The clouds ceased their race, covering the suns radiant rays.
The stars stopped shining, shooting down beams of broken
dreams.
The bay barely has any footprints, for the waters of wrath
flooded both the land and mind.
The woods wake only to the sounds of the lonely canaries,
canaries who cry for the creatures
who have fallen.

While she no longer thinks of me, I will forever be fond of her.

She noticed me.
She knew me.
She needed me.

...I still need her.

SPLASHING WATERS

NICOLE POHLMAN, OHIO STATE LIMA

I'm sick of societies sympathy, telling me to look.
at the glass half full.

The glass that leaks the lies you've hidden
from me all these years.

Yet you have the audacity to ask me,
"Help me put my mind at ease."

... But what about my
mind?

Does my soul not ache,
as my heart continues to
break,

all for your sake?
"Please, help me put my weary heart at
ease."

You've criticized and controlled me long enough,
commanding me with what I can and can't do...
How the hell are you capable of saying
"I love you."

... But what about the love I wish to
share?

No one seems to care about the compassion I
have to spare.
"I love you, no one else could ever compare!"

... You said that to me while you had your
affair.

"I hate you...and I hate that I know that you know I
will always love you."

Back Forth
And
Forth Forth

... Make up your mind!
If you no longer want me, than leave me alone!
Why must you confuse me, convoluting and conforming
my mind to make me the enemy?
I'm sick of you splashing the raging waters, anchoring me into
isolation, with no preserver for salvation.

Back Forth
 And
Forth Forth

The boat of my body is drawn back to you.
 I'm changing my course, setting sail for anew,
 but somehow the waves always push you back into
view.
 So I dock my boat to what is my death and walk
the pitiful plank of life.

You...

 You threw me away like a
 rock on water.
 Hopping for hope and skipping for
security,
 until one day I sink to the bottom of the sea.
So I ask you simply, what is wrong with me?

 ...
 "Answer my question!"
 "I beg of you!"
ease!" "Help me put my mind at
 "Please..."

 ...
You've left me with no other choice.
 Now no one else will ever again hear my voice.
 So I throw my final message in a bottle out towards
the sea.

 Watching my last words rock,
 Back Forth
 And
 Forth Forth



LO SIENTO

KYLEIGH RODRIGUEZ, OHIO STATE LIMA

You told me my skin was too pale
to mark Hispanic in those little boxes.
Tell that to the Spanish songs I've
listened to since I was five
or to my father who can't cross
without being detained.

Lo siento haberte incomodado.

While you were deciding
my skin was not correlated with my identity,
welts scattered me like a cheetah's stripes.
I begged for the hunger to cease
and for the warmth to creep up from
those metal vents nuzzled into the unfinished floor.

Lo siento para la molestia.

You accused me of lying about my ethnicity
when I wrote Rodriguez in the spot labeled
Last Name:
My idol as a little girl was the Tejano queen.
My fascination of her empowerment distracted me from
seeing little blue pills snorted in the room next to me

Lo siento haberte irritado tanto.

While you were projecting
your insecurities onto me,
I was thinking what version
of my bipolar mother I'd go home to.
Will she act like mother of the year
or will she wish she would've aborted me
when she had the chance?

Lo siento, soy una interrupción



WAVES OF TREPIDATION


KYLEIGH RODRIGUEZ, OHIO STATE LIMA

There you were, sitting at the table, staring at your phone looking perplexed. Your eyes were heavy and you looked weary; as if you had been crying. I wondered why you looked so sad. You didn't know who I was, and I didn't expect you too. Your eyes never landed on me (too bad things didn't stay that way). Speaking of eyes, I don't listen to Billie Eilish much. Ocean eyes was just an overly played song on the radio, until I seen yours. Stunning hues of green and blue with viridescent stipple behind wired glasses.

I think it's fair to say, she caused you to look so weary behind those glasses. The things she did and said to you. How she seized your dignity, brought it to show and tell for your friends. Convinced you to hit the bud and watched you go off the deep end. I became invested and thought I could fix you. But at what cost? You see, my heart and mind were caught in a crossfire. My heart couldn't take any more chaos if you were as terrible as she suggested. However, my mind was considering this is the pot calling the kettle black. She was just as terrible as you (if not worse).

Typical kylie, my fascination got the best of me. I reached out to you. Your initial response was short but curious. Your personality began to seep on my cold glass screen. Our conversation started flowing. Your responses were quick-witted. You asserted your dominance early on. You were confident and insecure at the same time. I think the DSM-5 would consider you a narcissist. Atleast, that's what I learned from my professors. Yet, I found you had some admirable qualities and I couldn't resist.

We talked constantly. Our little secret. Remember? We stayed up till our phone burned our hands. Told our deepest secrets. Tossed my heart into those ocean eyes and I began to struggle breathing. No amount of anti-depressants or therapy would've prepared me for the end of our story. Did you find my tears and agony gratifying?



AUDITORIUM

MARY E. THOMPSON

There is this huge auditorium with a very large stage. Seats all around from ceiling to floor. Every chair is filled to the brim while every second there is a live show. People of all sorts are here to watch, laugh as some will even mock or cry, but, the show must go on.

This meeting place; theater, or auditorium in which I speak of is inside my head. The names of my characters are ashened, bloodless, mirth, disturbed, somber, boundless, and bizarre. They all have vacant eyes. My characters are always at work.

The audience quiets down now, as the lights grow dim. Only a few shushes can be heard as the curtains begin to rise, revealing a very dark stage. All is quiet and calm, for only a mere second more. The sounds of heartbeats and occasional breaths can be heard.

Then suddenly, you hear rustling and murmurs of voices from behind the curtain, the direction of the stage. When out comes a bunch of silhouettes (my characters) dancing around gracefully like an army of marionettes. As for the music, it is a melancholy melody that has my crowd mesmerized in their seats. Sending pleasures at first throughout the entire audience; then an odd sensation.

There figures now delude the eyes of the lookers as they continue to entice them with their bewitching dance of deception, a very good acquaintance of one's own thought. The auditorium now becomes smoky, with an overcast of every one's own reflections of themselves. Their thoughts and their deeds...

Surely, there is a breakthrough in all of this madness—then, all of a sudden, a brilliant thing had happened. I became animated at once, as the lightbulb clicked brightly on. This madness came to a standstill! The show, for now, was finally over. Yet, at any given moment, it could restart up all over again, because I am director, narrator, spectator and writer.

OUT OF HIBERNATION

LAURIN WOLF, RHODES STATE COLLEGE

awakens my face
exposed for the first time in seasons.
I am uncomfortable with my grin
my eyes are misaligned and my nose
slopes sideways and is too curled in.
To be beautiful
a face must be symmetrical
according to Top Model TV shows
My mirror image knows to straighten out
pull back the posture a little, tuck and hide
the middle of myself. For so long
I've avoided facing my flaws. Use makeup
to fill the aging lines that make rivers
and valleys on my face trying to cover up
the way I'm sinking into thin paper.
My lips can never wear a vibrant red
it always wears off the inner lip leaving
me two toned and confused. But my
eyes are beautiful if they are the only
feature visible. Coal colored and rested
after a winter indoors. This summer
heat wave may awaken my hibernating mouth
and out of it I will tell only the truth that
living is much more comfortable in a mask.

JUNKIE SONNET

LAURIN WOLF, RHODES STATE COLLEGE

The problem with everything is death—Diane Seuss

Between bare basement floors and gutter rut, I fear you're dying,
lover.

You line the feeble end table with tools:

needle blunted from reuse, stainless steel spoon, stamp bags
marked with superheroes. Lighter. Cup of water. Sometimes
steel

wool and a bar of soap. A single fluorescent light hovers over
your head

like another wolf in the pack howling at the red harvest moon.

Some people, you say, get addicted to the needle, not you. How
do I stop

a grown man from feeding his hunger when a tap on the
forearm,

is all that's needed for a hot push straight through a vein? Days
at this

and you wear your skin black-n-blue. The single basement light
hisses.

Air heavy with musk the more bags you do, sweating like a
boxer shaken loose.

Sometimes your eyes roll behind their lids, unable to focus on
what you just did.

Sometimes I see foam feather at your lips, so high you slap your
chest, shake

until I reach back and slap you, hard across the face, hoping
you'll stay awake.

THE END OF THE WORLD

LAURIN WOLF, RHODES STATE COLLEGE

After people,
 the only thing left is Vegas
 lights on the Strip where
 the strippers once poled
 for cash, tourists dangled
 their effervescent green.
 The Hoover Dam's
 concrete still hardening.

The only
 things left are house cats
 & dogs lapping in windows
 unsure how to get outside.
 Termites nibble on cellulose.
 Houses collapse, tires deflate.
 Inside and out fade.

Within weeks
 tunnels swell with water.
 Within the empty cupboards
 rats chew on cardboard and glue.
 Within purses and backpacks
 cell phones beep incessantly.

After people,
 coyotes & bobcats call—welcome
 the return of the predator into the empty
 subway stations. Within years
 dandelions are the new
 suburbanites, infiltrate cracks
 in the pavement like lobbyists
 once did on Capitol Hill.
 Wildfires run rampant.
 All roads disappear.

Within minutes steel cables
 break. The Brooklyn Bridge
 collapses into the East River.
 Within minutes earthen damns
 rupture. In seconds the sunlight
 sets. Within hundreds of summers and falls
 rubber sticks to Styrofoam,
 sticks to corroded metal, sticks
 to ground now covered in weeds,
 sticks to vines that wind
 their way up the Sears Tower
 like an apocalyptic strangler fig tree.
 Skin not immune to decay.

Within seconds
 saltwater rushes into mouths,
 fills the stomach, lungs,
 and throat like a wet blanket.
 Within the Earth the only hearts
 left beating are savage.

NOT HAVING MOTHERED

LAURIN WOLF, RHODES STATE COLLEGE

Hurry.
Wrinkles wind
around knuckles

struggles
years spent churning
out words
rather than rocking.

A ghost womb
an Ouija board
a voice that never lived.

A crib unoccupied
wayside,
bib and baby's breath
regret misspent

weep and battle
for time
to flow backward.

Too late.
To mark birth.
To rattle and spin.

Capture:
a hand that fits
around one finger,
falls in love
over and over.

The nightmares.
Highchairs
full of babies
who cry

and reach for
phantom limbs.
Scramble,
frantic
for blankets
to swaddle them.

[HOG CREEK HARDIN]



Hog Creek Hardin is a literary journal housed at The Ohio State University Lima campus and is edited by undergraduates. Previously called Asterism and The Hog Creek Review, it has been in continuous circulation since 2007, publishing works by Ohio State Lima students and area high school students. We envision the journal's renewal publishing local, regional voices and reengaging local high schools. We are dedicated to encouraging and promoting new writers and highlighting regional work.

Look forward to a digital and print publication next spring.

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