

Venture Literary/Arts Magazine

Volume 2019 *Venture Literary/Arts Magazine*,
2019

Article 1

2019

Venture Literary/Arts Magazine, 2019

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Available at: <https://dc.suffolk.edu/venture/vol2019/iss1/1>

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The background is a dark, textured composition. It features a series of concentric, wavy lines that create a sense of depth and movement. Overlaid on these are patterns of intersecting lines, some of which form a grid-like structure. The overall effect is a complex, organic, and somewhat futuristic aesthetic.

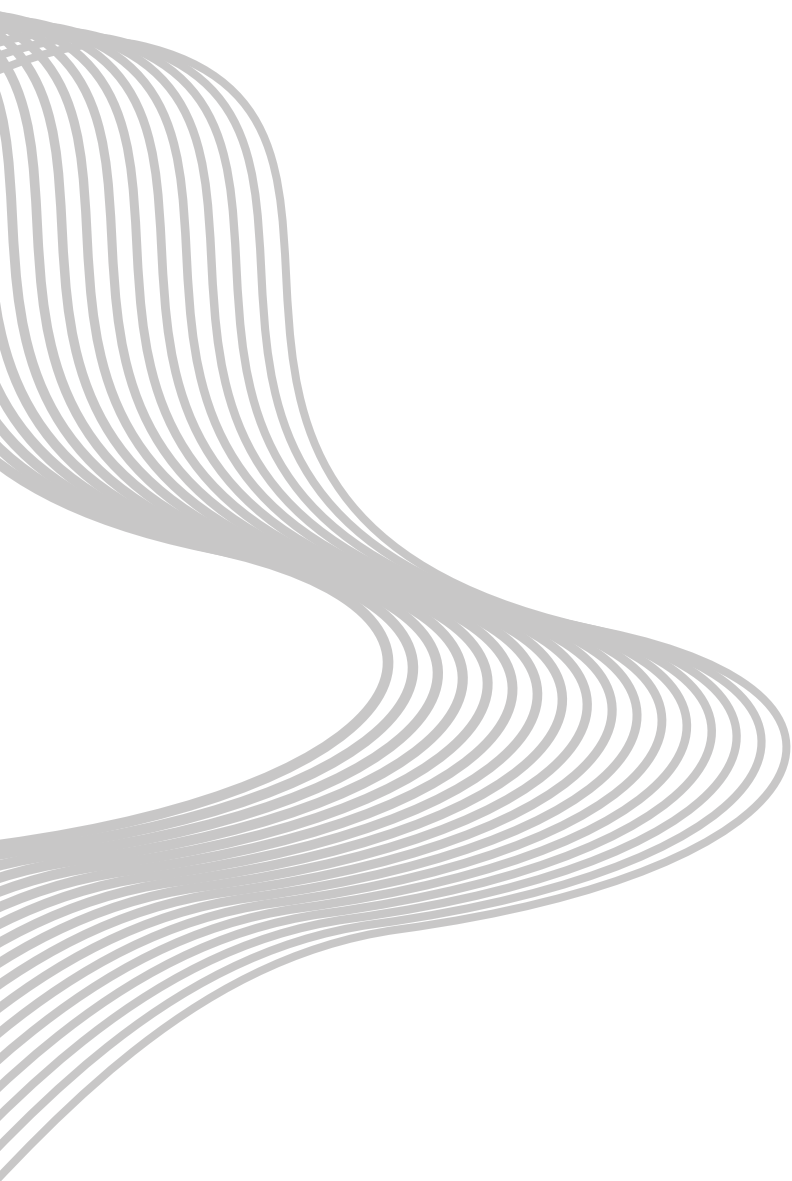
WINTER

2019

The background of the cover features a large, abstract graphic composed of numerous thin, parallel, wavy lines. These lines are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized, three-dimensional wave or a series of overlapping loops. The lines are a light gray color, contrasting with the white background.

VENTURE

Literary Arts Magazine
2019



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Thank you to...

All of my editors and readers for Venture!

I would not have been able to do all of this work without you, and you were always there to give me a laugh when needed.

The advisor of Venture, Professor Quentin Miller

Thanks for your continuous support and letting me take charge of the club, even if I didn't know the exact direction to take each time.

The English department

Thank you for helping promote my events, a specific shout out to Lauren Burch for always sending out the information I would send her in promotion of these events.

All of my professors, especially Professor Kalogeris, Professor Monticello, and Professor Bonikowski

All of you were so helpful in one way or another, whether it was promoting events to your classes or being there to just talk about the magazine.

Everyone at Student Leadership and Involvement

A big shout out to Casey Mulcare for getting it done so Venture could have venues to have these events at!

My graphic designers, Grace and Teresa!

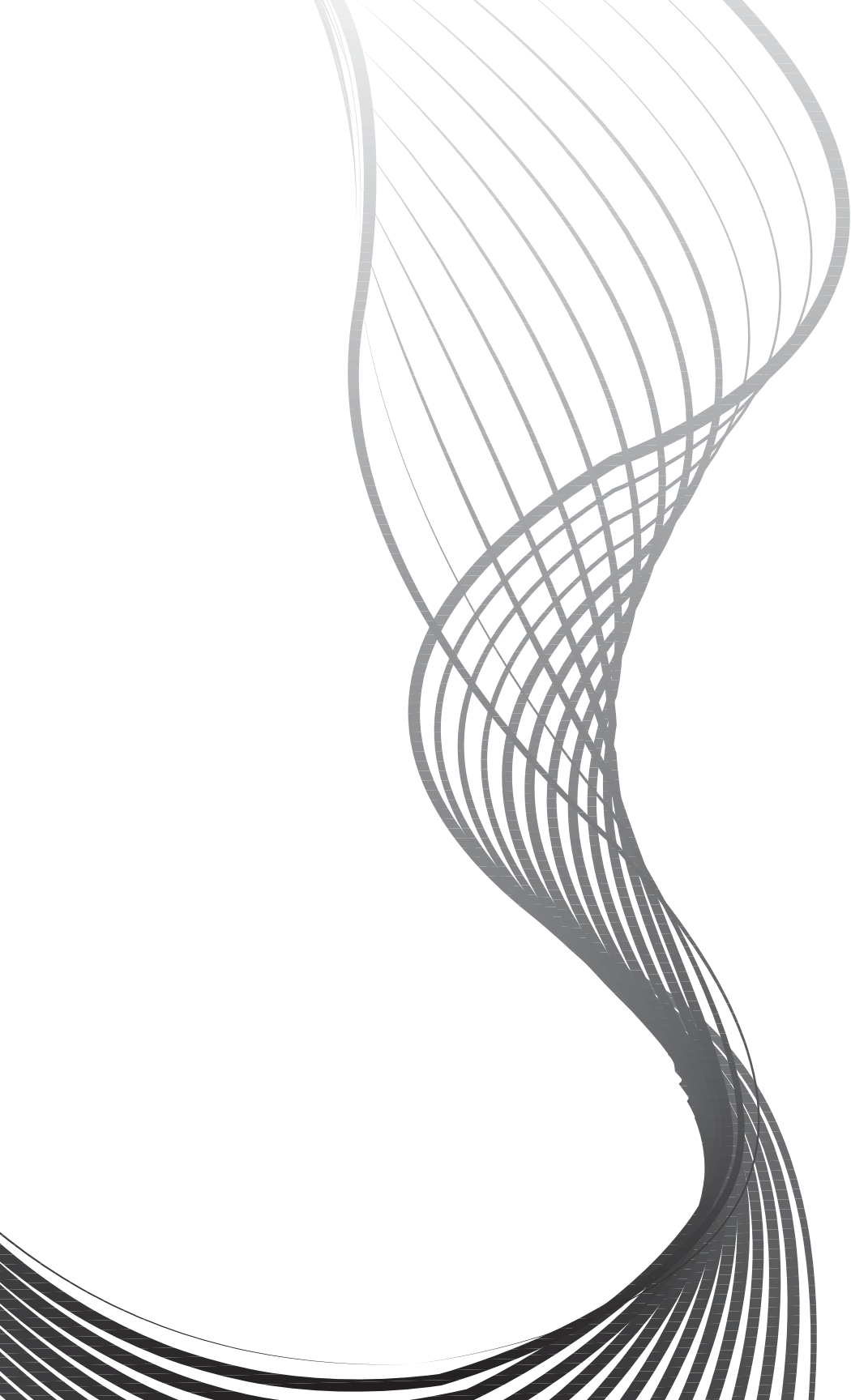
You guys are truly awesome and rock at what you do; thanks for committing to this job and giving it your all.

John Winter & The Ink Spot

The Ink Spot is responsible for publishing this magazine so I can't thank them enough, and for being so nice to Venture!

My family and friends

I want to give a huge thanks to my parents, Kathy and Chuck, for believing in me every step of the way even when I didn't have much faith in myself. Your support has gotten me to this very spot, thank you isn't enough but I hope it's a start. Also, to all of my close friends who kept me laughing even when the work was piling up; I appreciate every laugh.



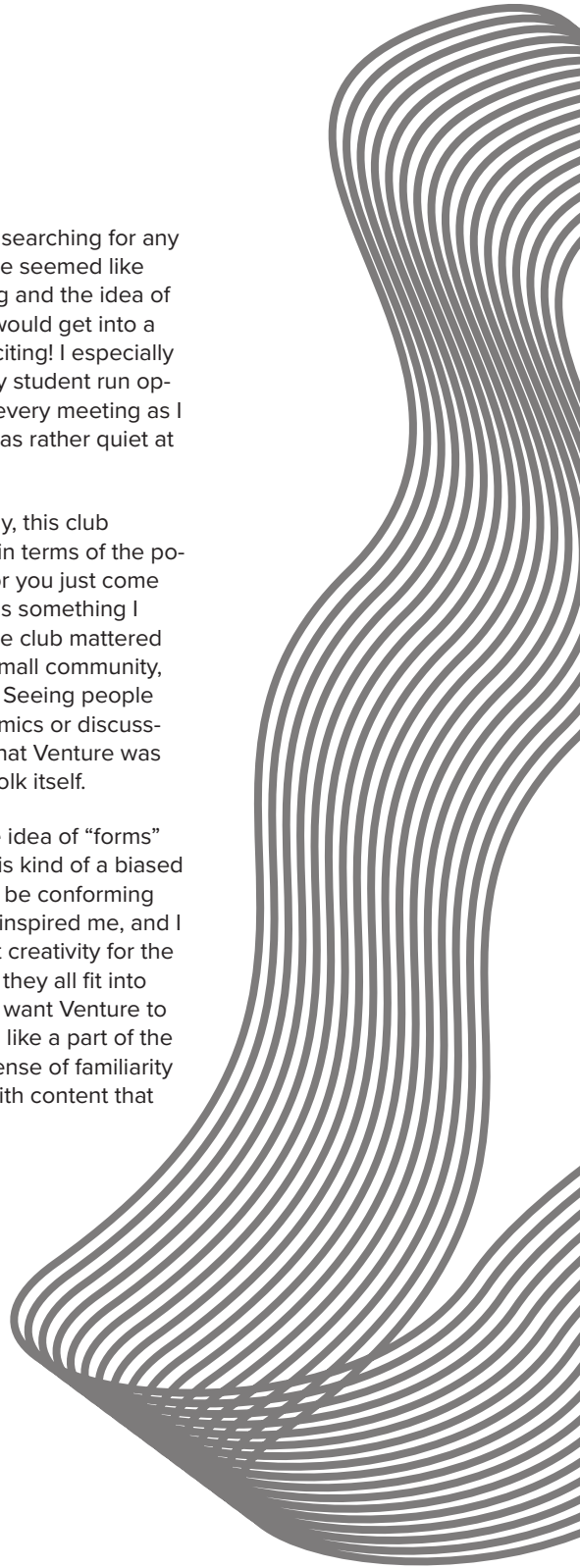
Editor's Note

When I came to Suffolk as a freshman, I was searching for any semblance of community I could find. Venture seemed like the perfect spot for me. I love creative writing and the idea of being able to determine whether someone would get into a magazine based on my decisions was so exciting! I especially found myself drawn to the fact it was a totally student run operation. So, I became a reader and came to every meeting as I wanted to express my dedication, even if I was rather quiet at that time.

This dedication led me to where I stand today, this club showed me that no matter where you stand in terms of the positional layout of Venture, if you are editing or you just come to listen at open mics, you mattered. This was something I wanted to instill this year, that everyone in the club mattered a great deal to me. I wanted it to feel like a small community, whether you held an editor's position or not. Seeing people come together over their own work at open mics or discussing work in editing sessions reminded me what Venture was all about—harboring a community within Suffolk itself.

Considering this issue itself, I came upon the idea of “forms” for the magazine rather quickly. I suppose it is kind of a biased decision, I am a poet myself and find form to be conforming but liberating at the same time. This tension inspired me, and I found that this theme would inspire the most creativity for the magazine. The submissions were so diverse they all fit into this category. This made me very happy, as I want Venture to be a place where anyone can come and feel like a part of the family. I hope this issue of Venture holds a sense of familiarity for the reader, but also inspires the reader with content that they hadn't experienced before.

**Your Editor-in-Chief,
Jacqueline**





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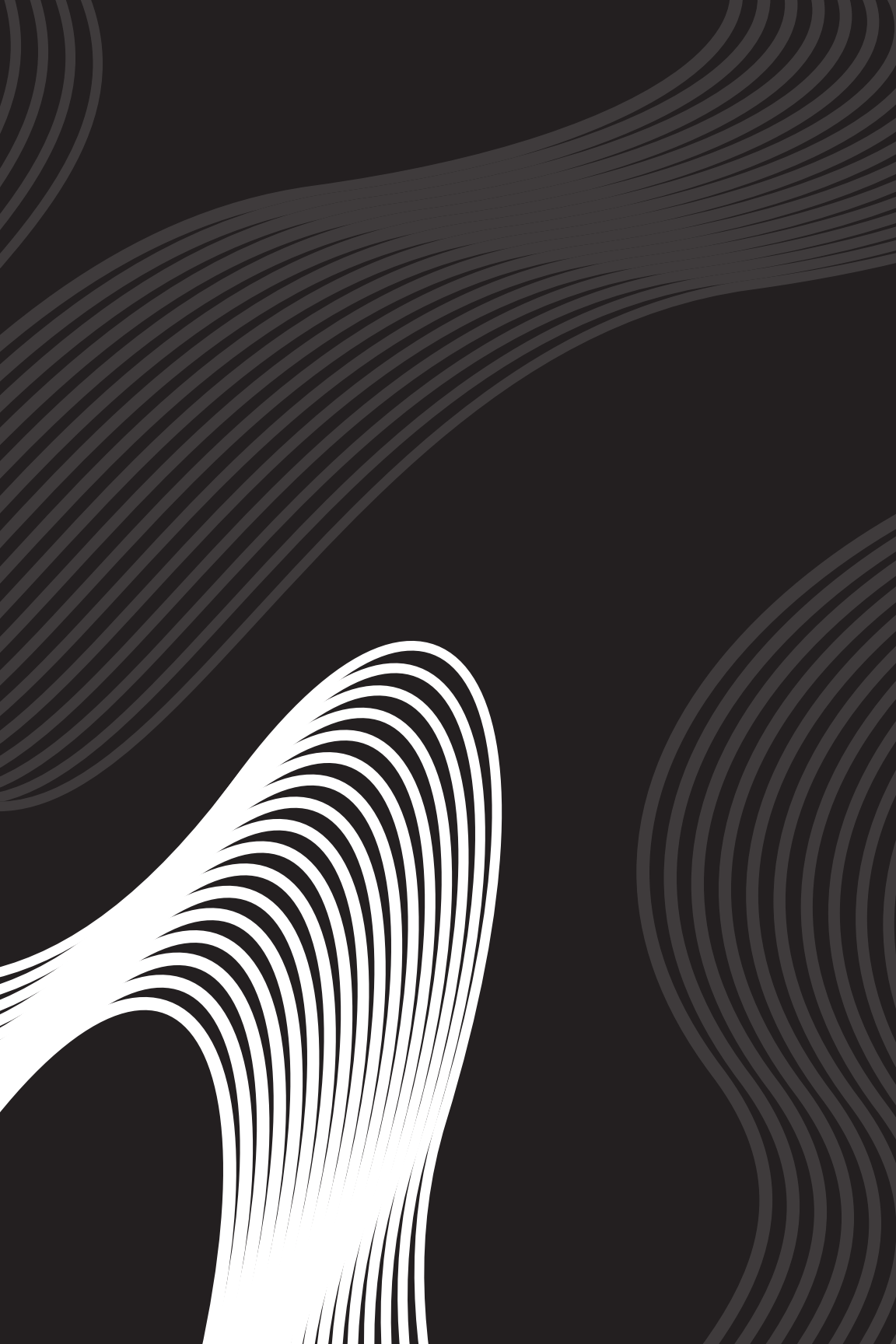
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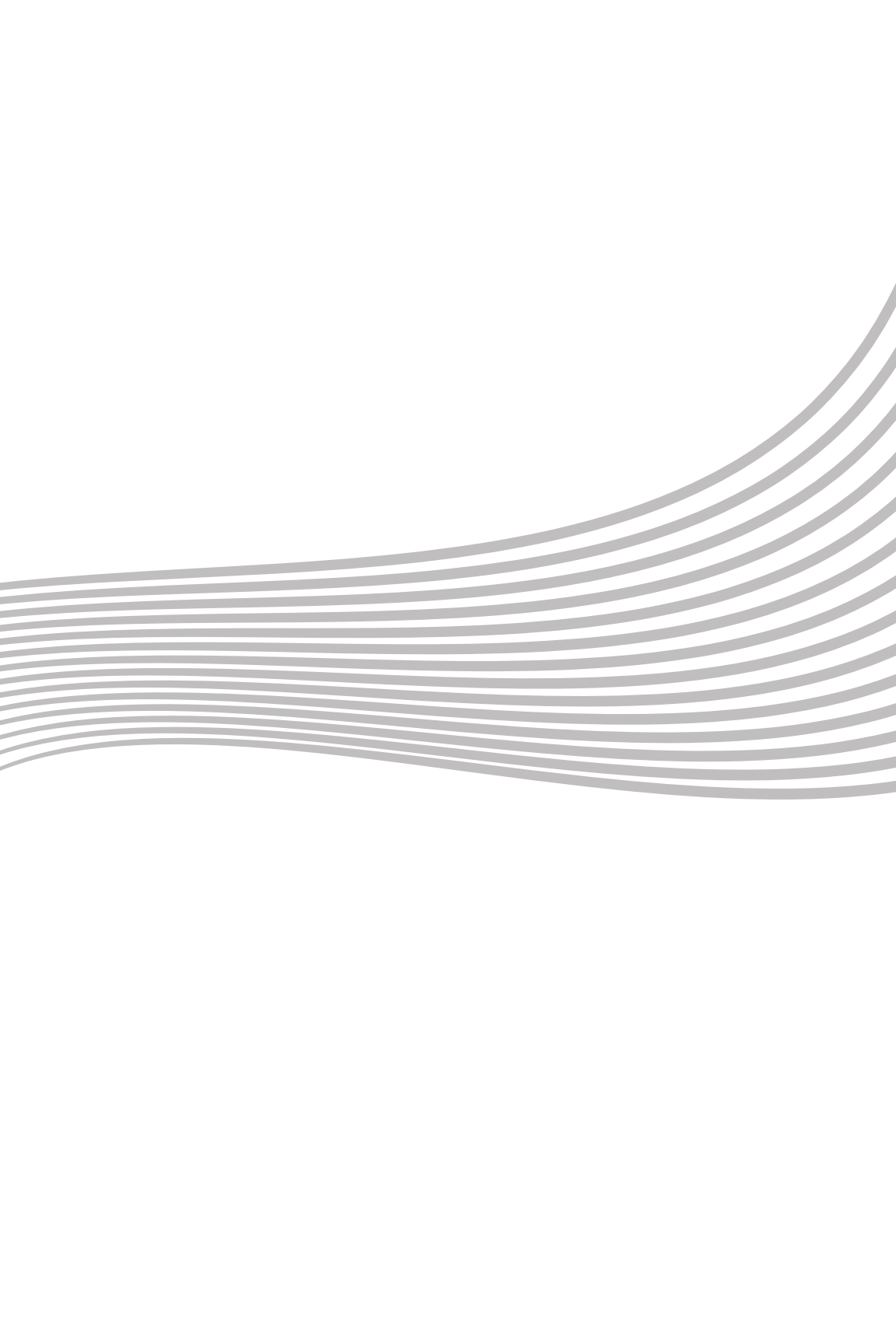
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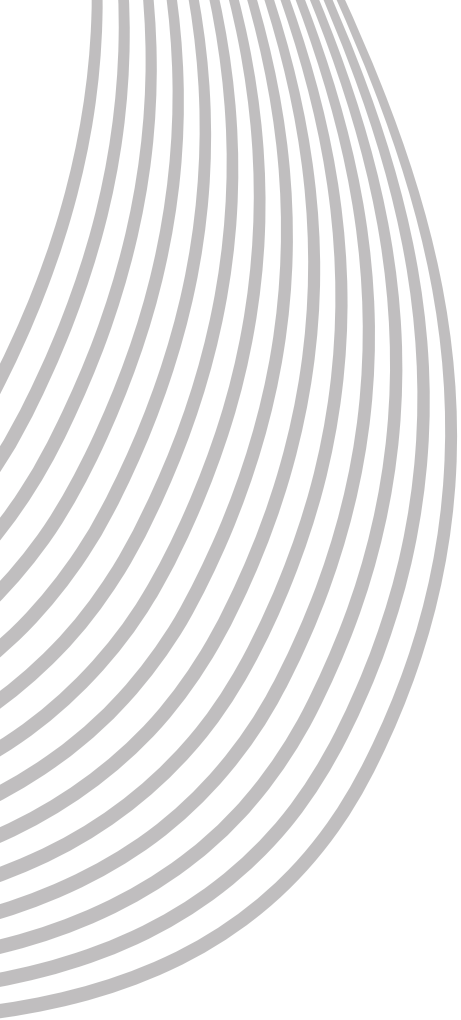
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The background is a dark charcoal gray. It features several large, flowing, wavy shapes in a lighter gray tone. One large shape dominates the lower half, curving from the left towards the right. Another smaller, similar shape is in the upper left. In the upper right, there are several concentric, wavy white lines. A subtle grid of small squares is visible in the center, partially obscured by the wavy shapes and the text.

POETRY





Lush adj.

Kate Miano

1. Having or characterized by luxuriant vegetation: a lush valley./ 2. A sound like a lullaby/ Saxophone at the jazz lounge/ harmony and brass, notes upon one another/ Toes where ocean grazes against sand so/ the rocks refine into sugar/ Under a cloud-textured blanket while/ the nights chill/ Your eyes, in my gaze/ like looking in a fondue/ dark chocolate with sea-salt caramel/ Your thick hair/ my fingers running through it/ Skin so soft satin slides over/ hold on/

Hummingbird

Molly Powers

Hello my little hummingbird
I knew I would see you again.
Coasting on flitting wings that have blurred
And carried you home once again.

Although I have missed you,
And although I've been sad,
Your final wishes have been accrued
To what you have always had planned.

So my dear old friend that perched on my hand,
Your legs have become wings
So beautiful and grand.
With a small beak that sings
Of the wondrous life that you had.

Fly away now to the home on the marsh.

To where you once lived;
In the house with green shutters.

Where you took your last breath;
In the house with green shutters.

Tucked In

Rosalie Pothier

Dark gray shadows descend to the floor
Leaving trails of nothingness.
To sleep now would be a bore
When the world is full of loveliness.

The smell of rain flows through my room,
Lulls me into rest
A candle flickers, alight, abloom
This moment none may wrest.

A well-loved book lies by my side,
The binding cracked with age.
The steady rain, with much to guide
Tells me “turn the page.”

Drive

Sharyn Gladstone

Again, I drive down that street
past worn down tenements,
overdue sentiments,
and you, beside me in the passenger seat.

I learned, as you learned, to comply with defeat.
Dragging yourself through the day,
losing it, kicking composure away,
as you waited for a turn in the passenger seat.

I drive a few more feet
in the waning afternoon,
passed where you were marooned,
somewhere, away from the passenger seat.

You said you felt offbeat.
Bristles of your ambition,
guided to perdition.
A thought, as I grasp the edge of the passenger seat.

How hollow a notion to be discreet
and cower from what cannot be achieved.
I'll wash the stains from your sleeves
if it leads you back to my passenger seat.

Love Actually

Kate Miano

The afternoon I told my mother
Of the abrupt ending
To my father's Thanksgiving dinner
I slept on her couch
While she smoothed my hair
And returned from the store
With expensive champagne-which she was sure to inform me of.
She didn't go to the planned movie
So we could drink the bottle
And eat chocolate
And watch a happy film about families
With hearts as bloodied as ours
Still beating.

Gone

Sydni Masiello

There is a distinct smell that permeates the rooms of a house during the Christmas season.
It is almost as if the walls soak up the scents like a sponge,
Encapsulating the holiday aroma in an attempt to sheathe its inhabitants in a comfy and familiar cocoon,
Or wrapped tightly, as if the house itself were a Christmas present.
It is usually the smell of a freshly cut tree, which creates this heavenly fragrance.
Along with this, the manufactured odor of nature, solidified in a jar and set on fire.
However, these smells are gone now.
We are left with the scent of decay,
Like a festering sickness you can't seem to get out of your system.
We attempt to scrub off the residue of our lingering sadness and anger towards the way the world works,
But it is unsuccessful.
He is still gone.
Therefore the house does not run properly anymore,
Like a living, breathing body,
Emitting those fragrances of a Christmas we once held dear.

The Weekly Carouse

Bryan Lopez

Oh, a wonderful joy!
Happiness deployed!
The check did arrive in the mail!
Time to call all my friends and then
Off to buy the Holy Grail.

They have arrived!
Like grooms and brides,
They've dressed so elegantly!
I serve them cups of Jay Stein's wine
On a night of revelry.

The party is wild!
Desires are trialed!
Attires are being shed!
One after another, they lunged at each other
And made their way to the bed!

They looked at me
With eyes of glee
And beckoned me to the spree.
Suffice to say, my ray had raised
And I joined the heavenly craze!

After motion explosions,
Exuberant commotion
Had all been brought to a drowse.
The joy that was reaped, while shielded by sheaths,
Is something that should certainly repeat,
Which shall be called the Weekly Carouse!

Bitch on a Leash

Christina Payne

The minute my paws hit the cement they come.

They reach out to pet, and coo, “Come here Baby, I got a treat for ya.”

They want me to heel, like a good bitch.

A good beaten bitch,

Meek and domesticated.

A bitch who knows when to stay and when to come.

They think if the muzzle is tight enough we’ll forget how to howl.

Forget how to bury our claws in their backs and our teeth in their hides.

But I was built to maul and eviscerate,

And there isn’t enough vindication in the world to satiate my bloodlust.

A true bitch can slaughter a pig in seconds.

Careful now *Baby*, you might lose a finger.

My Sweet, Sweet Angel

Emily Nayer

Warmth.

Dimples.

Embracement.

Undeniably nonexistent in this life I lead.

A life of ink, keyboards with smudged fingerprints, and filthy shoe soles.

Sleepless nights where the crackles of branches and the ruffling of plastic bags become deafening.

Clouded I have become by my own addiction.

And yet,

A delicate soul falls ever so gently, landing right next to me like the seed of a dandelion.

One touch and...

The lightbulbs have stopped flickering.

The violins no longer squeal.

The shivering has ceased.

How unbearable solitude has become.

This infatuation developing into a distinct passion

Has made the sky no longer a place for scavenger hunts but a revelation of my existence.

With every itch,

An unorthodox ardor comes creeping under my skin.

And I become helpless.

Yet relishing the feeling like the swish of aged Château Margaux in one's mouth.

We Drip in Honey

Julia Ann Wood

A loss of words is hardly any way to describe it.
When people ask about our love
I find it difficult to explain.
How do I say
That I would cross a busy street
Full of traffic just to reach him,
To comfort myself in his arms?
How would I tell them
That dancing with him in the kitchen
Is better than any school dance?
Would they think I was crazy if I said,
For him I'd drop everything,
Lose it all if it meant keeping him?
I don't think others could ever comprehend
How immersed I am in him
And that's okay.
Because while they are fine with staying dry
We kiss in the rain.
And while they prefer not to get sticky,
Baby, we drip in honey.

I Have Heard the Upstairs Woman Speak

Bryan Lopez

I have heard the Upstairs Woman speak,
"I felt a funeral, in my Brain"¹,
Whose solemn - solemn - voice bled
Through the ceiling it had slain -

And when it came to me,
With its air of despair -
Kept blowing - blowing - until I saw
The black entrance to its lair -

And then the portal opened
And all noise gone mute
But that same somber sound, ever closer,
Guided me then - to its root,

As its soft slither brought me hither,
And it, Being of tone,
And I, and nature, eccentric world,
Here, lost, obscure zone -

Where voice reigns the space, indefinite,
Where I fall up and down, up, down -
Where I hit a ceiling, at every flight,
Where the end never knows - when -

¹From Emily Dickinson's Poem #340

[Late Afternoon]

Jacqueline Janusis

The thunderstorm came about half past five
Everyone was telling me to stay inside but
I had the greatest inclination to run outside
And I did, through the downpour that soaked my skin
It was just me and the Earth and it beat me once again
But for once in my life I did not consider the thought of loss
Just the thought of running hard until my breathing is labored
And I am gasping for breath and it does not bother me for once
As I start to grasp what you meant about feeling alive.

The thunderstorm came to a close, with a few shudders
There I am standing in the street feeling the aftershocks
And you aren't here but I can imagine what you would say
It would be something witty that I can't manage myself
The storm was over but I felt even more electrified
The world became even more alive after that
Everything reemerges into the light and becomes fresh
The before is no longer tangible-

A series of approximately 15 thin, light gray wavy lines that originate from the left edge of the page and curve upwards and to the right, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Sundowning

K.P. Hubbard

Autumn broke again and we

Untangled from each other. I

Barely know your face, I lost my glasses, I can't see.

And still you sit here, no, you lie,

Drowning in your own subconscious next to me.

Evenings break the dawn in half (I only love you at night).

The first assignment Professor Elif Armbruster (English) gives her students in her “Studies in Literature” course, entitled “Writing the American West” (ENG 161), is a prompt to write by hand about their own inner frontiers. Phrased differently, Armbruster urges her students to describe or expose their own “inner wilderness” or “wild side”--themes that she and her students go on to explore in the course. To create the following “Cento”--defined as “a literary work made up of quotations from other works,” derived from the Latin word meaning “patchwork”--Armbruster chose one or two lines from each student’s response to the prompt in order to create a cohesive poetic whole. She used the exercise both to reveal the students’ creativity and originality to themselves and also to illustrate that though we may look different from each other on the outside, we all share feelings beneath the surface.

Fragments of Our Wild Lives

[WE]

Witness the unique world we live in
We are light and love and we are who we are
We were all born to be free

Everyone has an inner wilderness
So maybe chaos isn’t such a bad thing after all

Get done what needs to get done – and –
The wild becomes a place of comfort

[YOU]

You have the whole world in front of you
You just have to jump
You feel the intense rush of air flowing against your body –
Your breath is sucked right out of your lungs –
Your face is frozen still, and your mind is racing –

[I]

I am very grateful for the struggle
I do not always have to fit in
I find my wild freedom in knowledge, in justice, in karaoke nights with myself
I find the wilderness turn into my sanctuary when –
I decide to swallow my fear and turn it into my fire
I am not willing to compromise
I am overcome with uncertainty
I relish each and every day
I miss the easy days of my childhood

I miss those who have left us
I don't feel pressured to be just like anyone else
I am attempting to disassociate wealth from happiness!
I am a socialist and a feminist!
I am more willing to take risks in order to live the best version of my life
I never stop thinking
I want to break my shell
I am pushing myself to be my own type of bold
I work by choice while others work for need
I enjoy being a busy bee
I am living life and at the top of my domain
I need to do something bold in my life so I could feel alive
I honestly feel like some kind of millennial pioneer
I really yearn to be uncomfortable
I want to be alone, lost, broke, and uncomfortable
I often stand up for everyone with a strong voice
I am content with my life and the way it is

[MY]

My journey to a regained self-confidence is just beginning
My type of wilderness is the eternal search for independence
My decision to embrace the untamable ebb and flow of life is –
My decision to embrace the wild
This is my wilderness: the dark forest of the mind where I find myself easily lost.

Bugs in the Basement

Isabel Abdallah

Hard in the middle like

a vertebrae,

walking wondrously

back to the basement

and in time to meet

metamorphosis.

each leg prickling

the carpet threads.

The paper yellowed

slowly on a bookshelf,

above the roach corpse

and a shrill creak was

released as an old man

leaned on the banister

which echoed as a rapid scattering

at the bottom of the stairs.

Dear Mom:

Ally Peters

You don't know what to say to your baby girl as she's crying in the passenger seat.

She's going through something she can't explain in proper words.

It's simply hurting.

You want to take her pain away,

but there's not much you can do.

You've been on your own since you were eighteen.

Learning how to cry without a mother to listen.

Forever Lost to Me

Jon-Luc Jarboe

Melancholic madness
overrides my vocal chords.
Off, off, off! And
now it's vanished without a trace.

Oh curses, I shout
vengefully into the air.
Every core part of my soul
reaching out in agony.

The shot was so perfect
history could have been made
except it wasn't
and it's gone.

Crying at the shot that was never had.

Looking out over a city
open to the night's delight, but my
cries barely make a sound. It
kills me
to

only have had this one chance.

When will you return, my moon?

Ever since your departure
I stare, reaching out
for your hand and picture once again.

Four Beats on a Crowded Sidewalk

Sharyn Gladstone

I stop to tie my withered shoe
in the middle of a crowded sidewalk.
There's a tack in the sole. It's overbearing.

I yearn for the filthy stoop where I used
to kill moments. Now someone's on the corner
where I would stop to check the time.

I'm going to be late, I'll miss the train.
When I get there, what will I say?
I'm unable to ease into something new.

I tried contrasting; they threw it back.
Now I push ahead through the crowd of dreamers.
What would happen if they let me through?



Honey without Honey

Cecil Craig

sweet sunlight drips in through the drain that is my blinds
obscuring my sight with the heat of an energy an eternity away
awed by the shadows that stretch forth like fingers reaching away from uncertainty
a stripped setting unfurls in my room as I lie in awe of dancing shadows
set to the tune of time they warp through my window as time does to space
specific locations are unimportant in the ceremony of this performance
the warmth, wonder, and waves crash at once on the shores of my mind
reversed and inverted in the cones of my eyes
spiralng down into its peaceful embrace
all the beauty, ceremony, and dancing
dull the simplistic beauty that dawns with
warmth

Couches and TV

Cecil Craig

I feel like I'm sinking

Into TV Static

A life so erratic

Panic

Addict to intensity

I can't float

Density

I'm tense

See

I'm blind to what lays ahead

I go against the current

As I am current

I forget the future

I lose the past

As the static fills my ears

Fears

Memories and

Dreams collide

As the walls around my mind close

I can't help but change the channel

Midnight Orange

Bryan Lopez

I walked a great distance just to see you
For I want to amend that lost hour.
I braved the cold, the bold, yet it was true;
“Expect some drizzle or a light shower.”

My body shivered for I left my coat
At home. Too stubborn to care for my health.
I waited outside. I thought your lawn wrote,
“What did you expect from the Commonwealth?”

Then my eyes shifted from dead grass to sky
And, oh my... it is a midnight orange.
I see it, that pierced gloom with lustrous dye.
A marvelous night; It breaks the bore hinge.

This is it, the lost time. Please, come outside
And look up there, where moments would abide.

Stir the Pot

Christina Payne

"Let's stir the pot."

What if I chopped up my toes,
Blended my bones,
And stewed my ears for protein?

A half cup of nose,
One scoop of elbows,
And fingertips honeyed with spleen.

- Don't forget to bread the tongue,
And braise both my lungs,
And sauté my skin till it's sweet.

Roll eyeballs in brine,
Grate teeth on the side,
And mince my words to meat.

Foretasting something-
Our soup is bubbling,
The flame is blue and hot.

Craving to gnaw-
On anything raw,
Yeah, let's stir the pot.

The Poet

Sydni Masiello

I told him I was a poet
How words dripped like honey from my lips
How I left pieces of me on every sheet of paper
How I could give him my words
But he could not appreciate the words I gave him
He made me swallow them
Never having them reach the page

Mixed

Jacqueline Janusis

Hold that close to your chest
Do not let it get away
Once you lose it, it can't come back
That originality is still inside your soul
One can see it, so very clear
Their eyes are closed
But yours are wide open.

*It's right there, don't you see?
If only you could read your own eyes
Just one time to see.*

There is a crack of light under the door
Right there, you see?
It never dims, not once
It stays with me at night
For I could never bear the dark
Or perhaps I can but not tonight

You can't catch me
I am a swirl
Blending with people and places
Who am I?
Soon I forget if I am you or you are me
But I never consider it too long
Always standing too long in the rain
That is when I get to see raw emotion
As it spills out for humanity to see
The world can't help it
Neither can I.

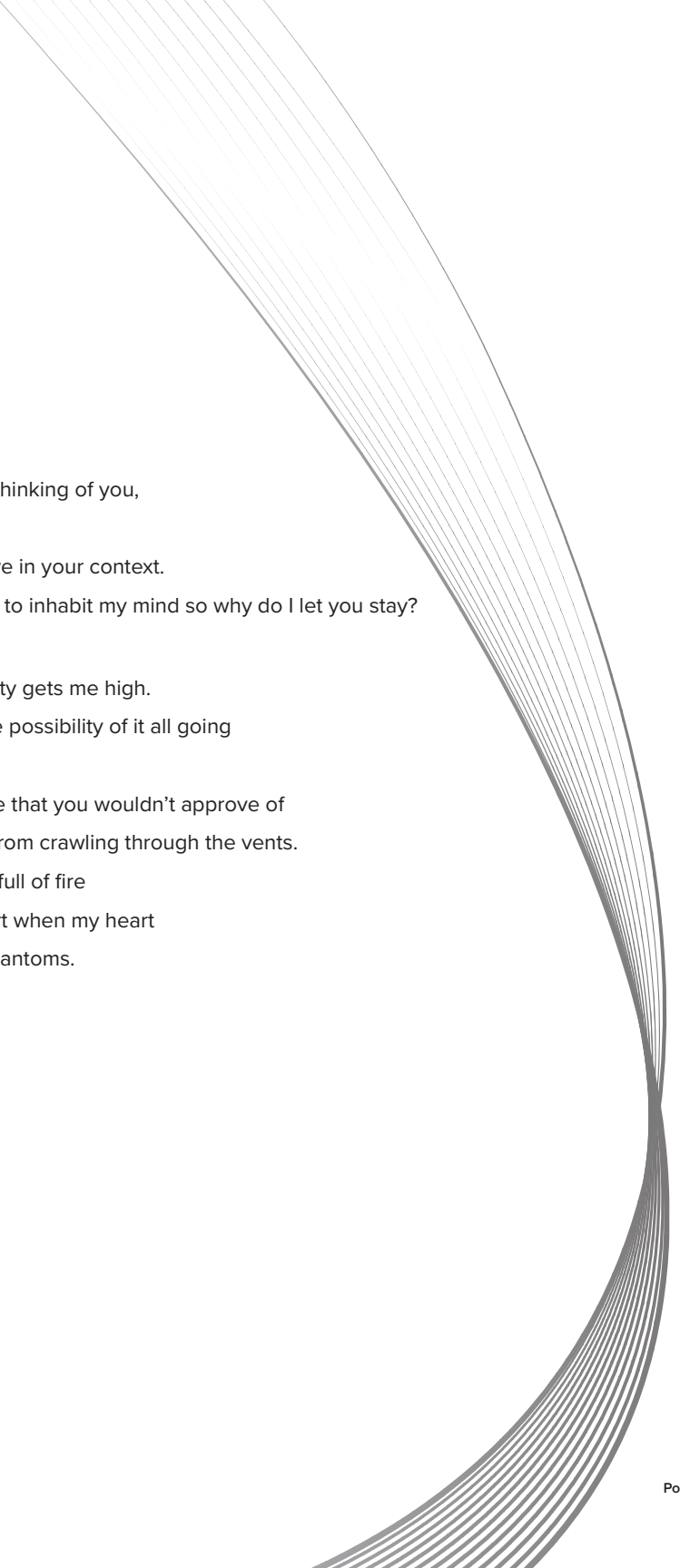
Ashen Phantoms

Kate Eaton

You keep coming back to me.
You keep coming back as cigarette smoke
that lingers in the living room
at 2am
when I'm staring at the ceiling
asking the ashen phantoms,
"How did we get here?"

My cup of tea has gotten cold
and has steeped for too long.
I ignored it in favor of my hyperactive thoughts.
Your smile curls into a beautiful "what if,"
your eyes scream out "see what happens,"
your silhouette is no longer what it should be,
now a temptation.
A sin.

I have many pleasures, some of which are guilty.
But when it comes to you, I might as well be
damned to hell.
The phantoms' smile twists into a wicked "why even try,"
they whisper, "*Why love poems? You hate love.*"
I also hate cigarettes and lack of control.
How did we get here?



I curse myself for thinking of you,
writing this to you,
using the word love in your context.
You don't pay rent to inhabit my mind so why do I let you stay?

Because the activity gets me high.
I'm addicted to the possibility of it all going
horribly wrong.
Inhaling the smoke that you wouldn't approve of
keeps the hopes from crawling through the vents.
It keeps my lungs full of fire
so that it won't hurt when my heart
joins the ashen phantoms.



Liquid

Sarah Warrener

Big dark eyes poured
Honeysuckle into my soul
And between our bodies, a soft magnetic pull,
I'd never liked brown eyes before.

My heart produced a subtle hum,
Kept beating, beating,
Till I thought,
My mind was going numb.

Always simple and such fast friends,
But when our hands touched,
Ash fell between them.

Happy to Me

Isabel Abdallah

Watch the car driving down the road,
A man on the train screams at it,
Laughing hysterically,
Claims the gas pump is still hanging out.

The ride sends bumps and vibrations
That dissolve into my skin,
Cold air,
And then it is hot.

My head rests on a shoulder,
And my hair falls over my face,
My arms fold and my neck cranes,
Fatigue ripples my eyelids.

A body without sleep,
Flowing through a day of running.
The train announces the stop,
And I adjust my body.

I remain drifting,
The moping world swirls around me,
Not infiltrating,
My deliriously tumultuous space.

Summer Feels Free

Kate Miano

Patient risks

Like signing our names on concurrent dotted lines

letting the months play out on hardwood floors

Fashioned into bookshelves and bedframes.

Where furniture taken off the street

Fits into crevices, making a home.

We don't want to clean the traps so

We befriend the mice

I'm in the mood to clean a house that doesn't belong to me, yet

And to share a bottle of wine with you

economizing-drinking at home, who could resist

with that porch and the sunset on us?

Without a fan, our skin glistens in the morning

And we bike to places with air conditioning.

In the evenings, sharing a punchline at a crowded cookout

Feels exciting again.

Scars Like

K.P. Hubbard

Scars like fault lines adorning your chest
Any second and the plates might shake us out
My lips like mud trying to seal them back together

Scars like valleys, stomach of mountains, from infancy when you were split open and sewed
back up
Scars that have stretched to the size you were when they were made

Scars like messages in bottles I'd break open with my teeth
Scars suffocated by my mouth, or your t-shirt

Scars like signatures, a breach of a border
The whole world ringing vermillion

Scars like broken promises
I could never heal you

Scars like unspoken words and undressed skin in the back seats of cars
Scars like standing 5 feet away from each other in a bar
Scars like contorted state lines, a half-empty bed
Scars like someone else's sweat
Scars like the spent contents of my purse strewn across the floor
Scars like, "are you home yet?"
Scars like scratches on our door
Scars like being gutted, just to turn to dust

Scars like
Scars like
Scars like pentimento

You painted over us

Pollination

Yasmine Tebib

harvest my love,
cultivate it,
flower by flower,
gently but surely,

undress my soul,
nibble me,
'til you can't taste a thing,
but honey,

chests pressed,
we are one

Washed Out

Julia Ann Wood

I live in a city that has painted me grey,
I love in a town where there is no color,
I am tirelessly searching for a hue
In what feels like an achromatic world.

Blank stares, and
Blankets of thick fog rolling in,
Casting a deep and
Dark silhouette.

Lighthouses that shine,
Trying to pierce through
The dark and dreary air we breathe,
Boats cruising
Slowly making their way
Through the worn cut bridge.

I ache to see beautiful things
Vibrant neons,
Delicate pastels.

But I am given,
Vacant shadows, and
Dusty leftovers
Of what was once a
Very colorful world.

My feet can only take me so far
And yet I find myself wandering,
Inquiring about something
That others only whisper about
Behind closed doors.

SPIRAL

Halaina LeBlanc

I'm crying

Does he love me?

I'm screaming

Why didn't he smile?

I'm foolish

He hates me.

I know:

Try to play it cool

Try to play it cool

I promise I don't mean it

This is my best,

as best I can

My heart is full of you

So full-

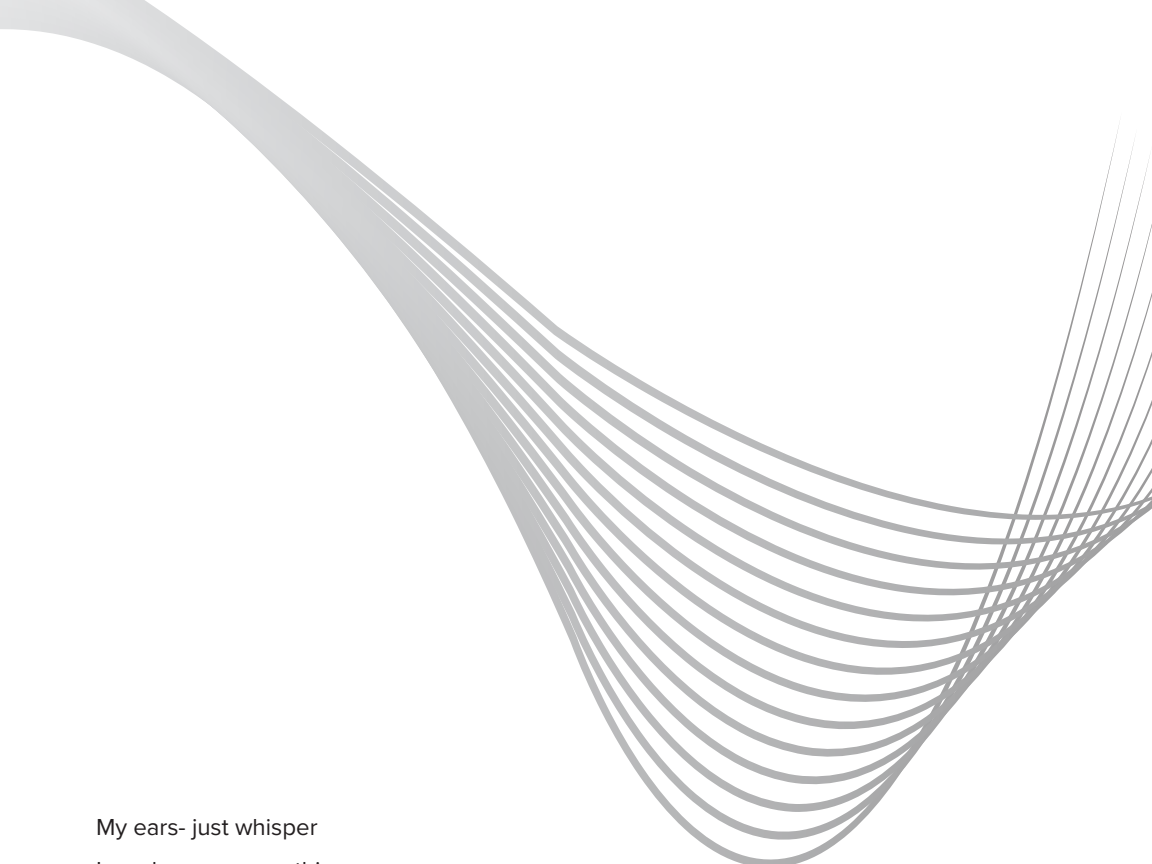
Too full-

Everybody quiet

Everybody QUIET

I can do this-

Can't I do this?



My ears- just whisper
I can hear e v e r y thing
Can't breathe again tighterplease

Hold me closer — LET GO—

Closerplease-it helps-

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME

I promise I'll do better

Shhhh

I'll try harder

Shhhh

I'm nothing spe-Shhhh

Okay

I'm trying to understand

I'm trying to believe

Everything becomes so HUGE so fast

I know you're right

Everything is fine-

Everything is fine-

These Places

Jacqueline Janusis

You're okay

Please stay, just for a day

I have litanies of work dedicated

To you

But you can't read them

So I hope the memories don't fade

I tell myself not to forget

How can I forget?

I hear you in my mind

But I avoid all those places

Which represent you and I

I can't go back

These places pull me apart

How can I go in?

To a place that is no longer

Mine

It was more yours to begin with

Socialize with people who knew your name

They don't even remember my face

Sometimes I take into consideration

The thought of stepping inside

But tears cascade down my face

And I just can't, anyways

I have tried once

It was awkward and wrong

And those people, they smiled

But it didn't reach their eyes

Not like you

I laughed, but it felt like I was choking

Remind me how to do this

How do I go back to these places

Which are more you than I.

An abstract graphic consisting of a series of curved, concentric lines that sweep from the top left towards the bottom right, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are light gray and vary in thickness, with the thickest line at the top left and thinner lines following its curve.

Remembrances

Sarah Warrener

I remember the breeze cutting through dense July air,
That air pregnant with potential,
And dampness on my back from freshly washed hair,
Enjoying this, knowing the downpour would be torrential.

I remember smokey lungs and big round eyes,
Humidity heavy with mosquitoes and flies.
I remember for the first time, being happy to be home,
The youngest I'd been since I was ten,
Left a pile of ash, came back and everything's chrome.

Cut to the Next Scene

Emily Nayyer

How does one explain the unspeakable that resists no temptation of brooding?
Continuously we run from our own hairs being ripped from our tormented scalps
Pleading to never become the cracked branch that once had been a cutting board.

Alas, it takes only a splintering cough
For a sigh to escape the caverns of comprehension.
Inwarded knees become directionless
And pallid skins redden without seeing the sun.

Clenching one's teeth to fight off the urge to blink
In order to whisper that
"Everything's going to be alright."

Because no more will the ties flutter in the gentle breeze
As the steam from stained ceramic cups dances along.
No more will children's laughter echo through carpeted corridors
Passing the muffled shouts of absurdities.
No more will windows remain fogged
Relaying messages of admiration and folly.

It will be a knock on a door for some.
A smash to the head for others.
A wave of relief and regret for more.

But what it will never be is a clenched bar of soap in an infant's hand.

An abstract graphic consisting of numerous thin, curved, parallel lines that sweep across the top half of the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are light gray and fade out towards the right.

What's Wrong, America?

Rosalie Pothier

All is not well in the world today
Not the way we thought it was.
Not the way I was told to believe it was
From my mother and father and priests and politicians.

People are dying on the streets,
Children are lonely in masses,
Families are broken,
And people are Angry.

People are so Angry.

We are Angry at those who do not believe
In the same things we believe.
Because what we believe,
Is all there is to believe.

And how dare you not believe what we believe?



Here and There

Bryan Lopez

When forests are as gloomy as you remember them,
Would you follow me to my garden of sanctuary?
Where you wouldn't worry about tripping over a stem
Or show concern about the brash coldness of February.
Take my hand. Walk from where you stand, my friend.

When you are lost in the Mojave, with no end in sight,
Just the ruins of Ozymandias in the blend
Of arid red, would you follow the mirage made by light?
To enter the space between here and there? The Nowhere?
Let me pull you in. Keep your mind off things

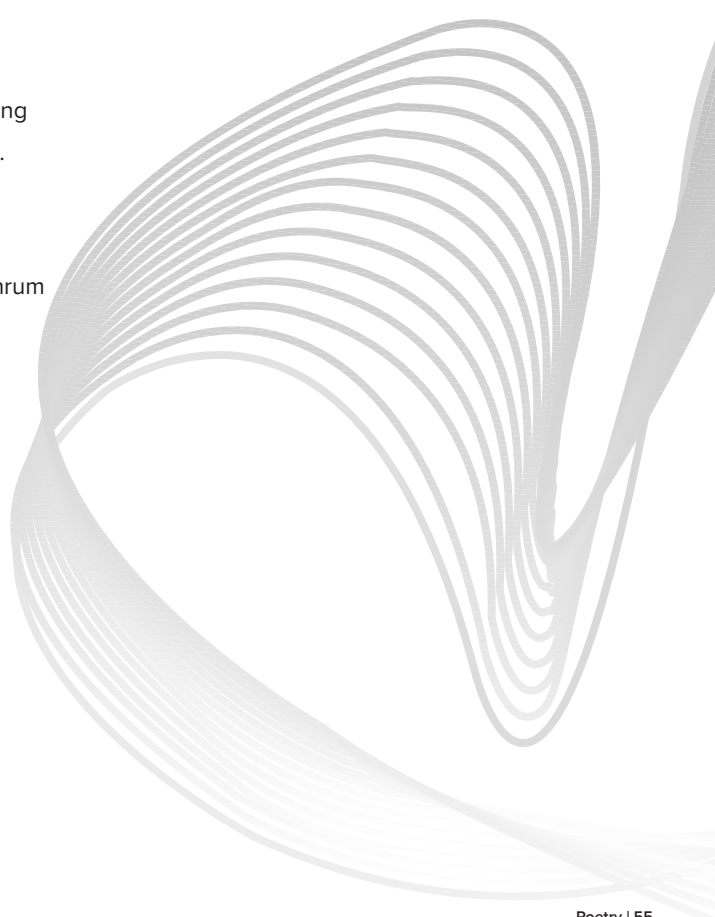
And just feel! Gravity be damned! Weightlessness, my Lair.
Float around! To think, back there, you were pulled by strings.
Stretch and let those bones crack. It welcomes with applause.
When it's time for rest, best to spread out like a starfish,
Shutter those eyes and wish for life to slow to a pause.

A Lullaby

Christina Payne

A voice like a house
No, like a home.
If I could douse
Myself in your words alone,
I'd drip sweet saccharine honey.
With sighs of velvet wrapping,
Around and around, like a funny
Coat that extends unseen, trapping
Me in your deep and dulcet hum.

I live in a murmurous haze,
Bound to your warmth and the thrum
Of your chuckling rays.
Out of your breath plumes
A fiery bird syruped in
Smothered laughs, it blooms
A mumble-clad watchman.
And when I'm not strong
When I'm lost and alone.
You whisper your song,
You bring me home.



How Can I Fall Asleep When You Might Call?

K.P. Hubbard

I am a midnight snack

I am footsteps on the hardwood

I am the click of a door

Running water

I am the light in the window

You are outside

No, you are not outside

You are the outside

Locked by glass and metal

Pushing against my frame

Big

Empty

Will you knock?

No

You can't knock

You're not the outside

You're a can of junk food

A hollow laugh in a full bed

A blank slate of memories

Burgeoning

Not empty

The carved out tree an owl calls home

It isn't empty

It's new again

It doesn't miss its guts



February

Isabel Abdallah

The dead pigeon rests next to
cigarette butts and ashes and
spit and waste.

There is a grey haze, not like
fog

it stings and stabs

leaves behind corpses; exposed
with gristle and gore showing.

Soon there will be things stripped
down until they sit naked

below the flaming trees,

a world of ash which

crumbles into hell,

no life remains except

the writhing and tormented

rats and birds.

The sky churns, rumbles,

and stiffness.

Spring is on its way



On This Trip

Kevin Dix

South Main Street wasn't a fancy place to grow up.

It's modest white house with their ghosts of the past,
Stand sentinel along the channel of my childhood memories.

On this trip, for the first time in many years, I soaked those memories and
ghosts in instead of letting them chase me away.

There is no longer the dread of saying goodbye to
aging loved ones as they live now only in my heart.

And on this trip home my heart has been full.

[The Ocean's Troubles]

Jacqueline Janusis

At night you see the trouble crawl out
Through the long grass stumbles the kids
That search for a surge of euphoria
Which cannot be obtained at home, the sea
It calls to them like myself but I do not ask the ocean
For something it cannot deliver, asking for more
It always leads to trouble.

But the boys run to the sea, not bothering to change
From their clothes to a bathing suit, because tonight is quick
It is quick and thoughtless and they just want to scream

The delight is palpable and I stare
Because I am struck by this joy that I have seem to have lost-
Lost since I was in high school where
Being careful was thrown aside
To truly electrify one's being

Can I get it back, is that too much to ask?
The boys howl as the Atlantic envelops them.

On the Similarities Between a Pomegranate and a Heart

Kate Miano

How this muscle bleeds and bends
As you start on the exoskeleton
Hungry fingers tearing it all away

Go grand, then get particular
Capturing the whole first
To then pick it all apart
Which sometimes stains your fingernails
With many flavors of states and stories

One hundred rubies
The lips kiss, then swallow
One hundred rubies hide
Inside this heart, this pomegranate
Millennia old still sowing seeds
After bleeding out.



Untitled

Sarah Warrener

When the light leaves my eyes
And there's nothing left to fight,
You'll drown me in deep pink skies
And clip my wings so very tight,
So that you're sure I'll never find
a world where soft lilac light
Can sing sweet honey in my mind.

So I'll flee in the dead of night
To keep you from being In My Life.
Free from your malevolent bite,
I'll flourish into furious flight,
Leaving you alone out of spite.



Clash

Bryan Lopez

Without a care,
The Mound stood there,
The wind all fair.
Bring up a chair,
Sit down and stare.

Dare, if I lie?
If time goes by,
Should I let die?
Take a breath. Sigh,
Watery Eye.

Don't cry, not yet.
The waves' in debt.
They'll come, they'll fret.
Problems, forget,
If only you let.

All That I Am

Julia Ann Wood

Sometimes I feel shallow like an insufficient tide pool

But I know that I am not.

I am made of star mass and band-aids

and wide green eyes and dirt from the garden and apple juice boxes and
scrapes and bruises and stubbed toes

and sandy hair

and words written and chapped lips

and unfinished stories.

I am all that I've experienced, all that I've endured

I am so much more than what you see today.

I am so much more than what I see today.

Put a Human in the Animal World

Isabel Abdallah

Beating it, kicking it,
So that it knows to come back when
I call,
Each leather fingertip and
The earth beside the
unloved bone marrow left for the hunter.

He knows what to eat,
To save the fatty parts for energy,
He is a true hunter,
A deluge of knowledge seeps into
The woods, and tramples the carcasses
Being preserved by the frost.

He ignores the abundance,
Continues to forage,
Animal forever.

Coincidental

Kate Miano

One time it happened- I remember watching you
Separated by the rush hour commuters
Your yellow scarf brightening the exhausted compartment
First, I had to wait for bodies to disperse
To make you notice me, so we could smile
From that, the grey day no longer felt it

As we walked together to your home.
Recently, we had plans for dinner
Hurrying from the station, I noticed
You yards ahead, headphones in
With a phone call you stopped and turned
And with that, we walked to our house.

Made me remember the first of anything
Opposite groups of friends encouraged us
One more house stop, and we converged
Without an agenda, but to sit and drink.
From choosing that piano bench, look where we are
Sharing clothes and smoke
Beds and coincidences.

Back To This Place

Jacqueline Janusis

I have not been back in months
My mind has absently driven there
Because that is always what I did
But then I remember you are no longer there
And my car reverses back down the street

I want to go back

But you don't live there anymore
Some new man lives there and he lives
In a space that I used to occupy
I want to tell him that this condo is mine
But it isn't, it is his
How can that be?

The place is so alive and loud
I turn my car stereo down low
Inside someone hollers over the television
I look from the yard that I used to stand in
Now I am a trespasser in what used to be my home
How can that be?

The Spins

Christina Payne

Tired of being comfortably numb.

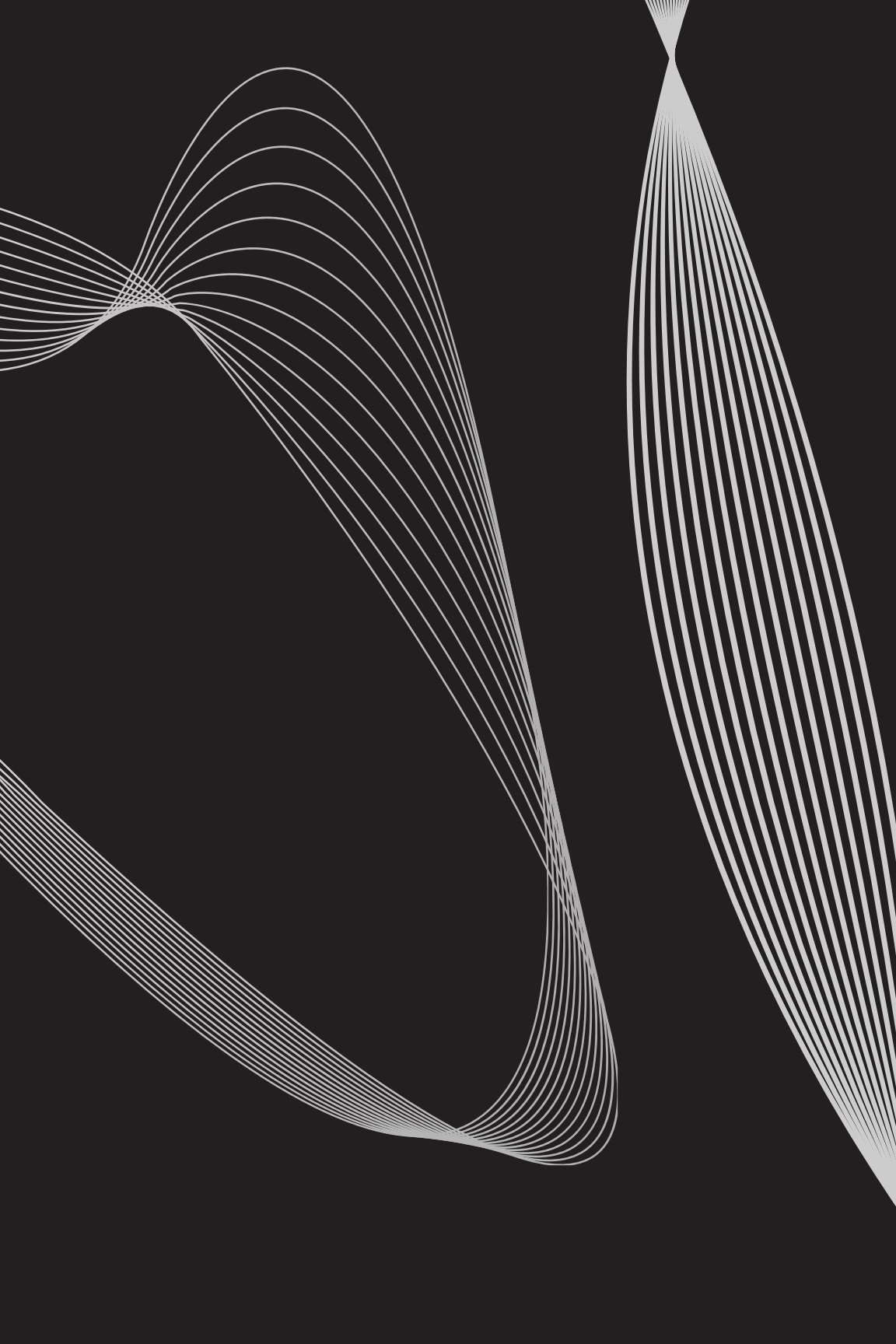
Your breath in my ear a swirl of colors
Blended into the curve of your lips
And beamed out in every grin.

Candy sweet words,
Melting through my skin-
To the rhythm of a song
I don't think you knew you were singing.

Letting your laugh fill me like helium
Until we were floating
-Suspended-
Inside a lyric
You wrote with your smile.

And all the while,
The beat trembled in the air.
The colors flickering-

Until the record stopped.



The background features a dark gray field with several elegant, flowing white lines. These lines originate from the top and bottom edges, curving and looping around the central text. The lines are composed of many thin, parallel strokes that create a sense of motion and depth, resembling smoke or liquid in motion.

ART





Kate Eaton Well to the Heavens



Jena Corea Shipwreck



Casey Grosjean Untitled 4



Casey Grosjean Untitled 3



Ana Pita Reflection

Grace Potter Arizona Highway





Ally Peters Untitled 7

Christian Bostrup Christmas in Madrid

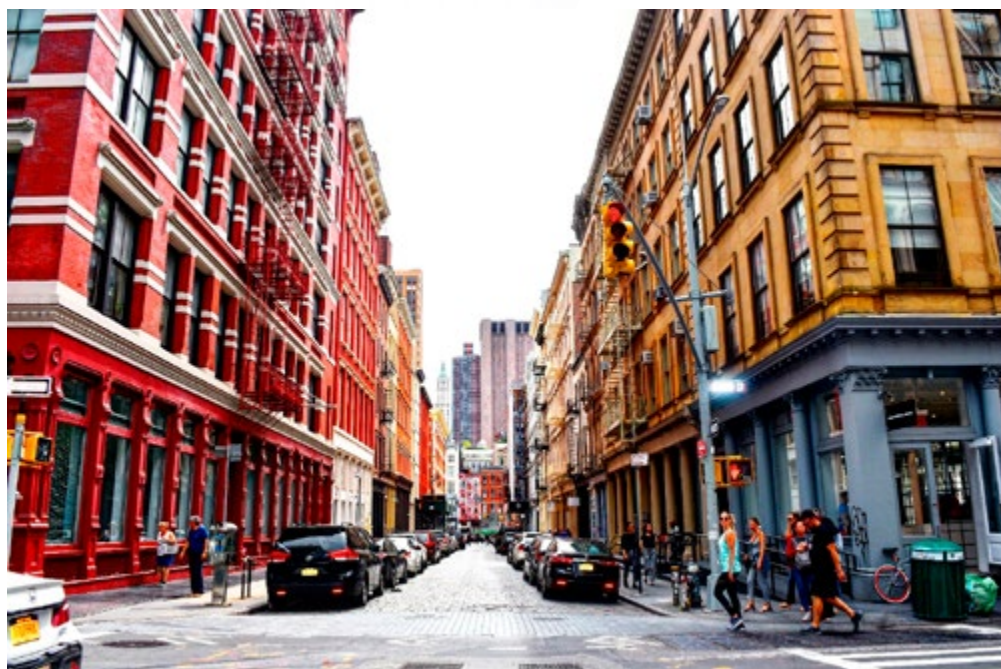




Jena Corea Castle on the Hill



Casey Grosjean Untitled 7



Dhwani Chheda Untitled 4



Matthew MacDonald Untitled 8





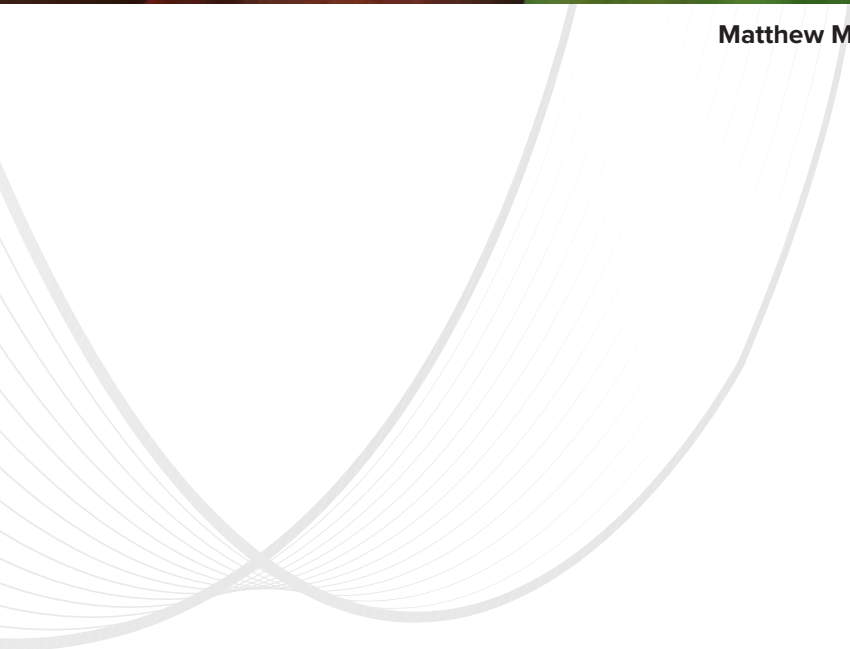
Kate Eaton Above and Below Deck



Kevin Dix South Main Street



Matthew MacDonald Untitled 6





Teresa Willand Bear

DIZZY

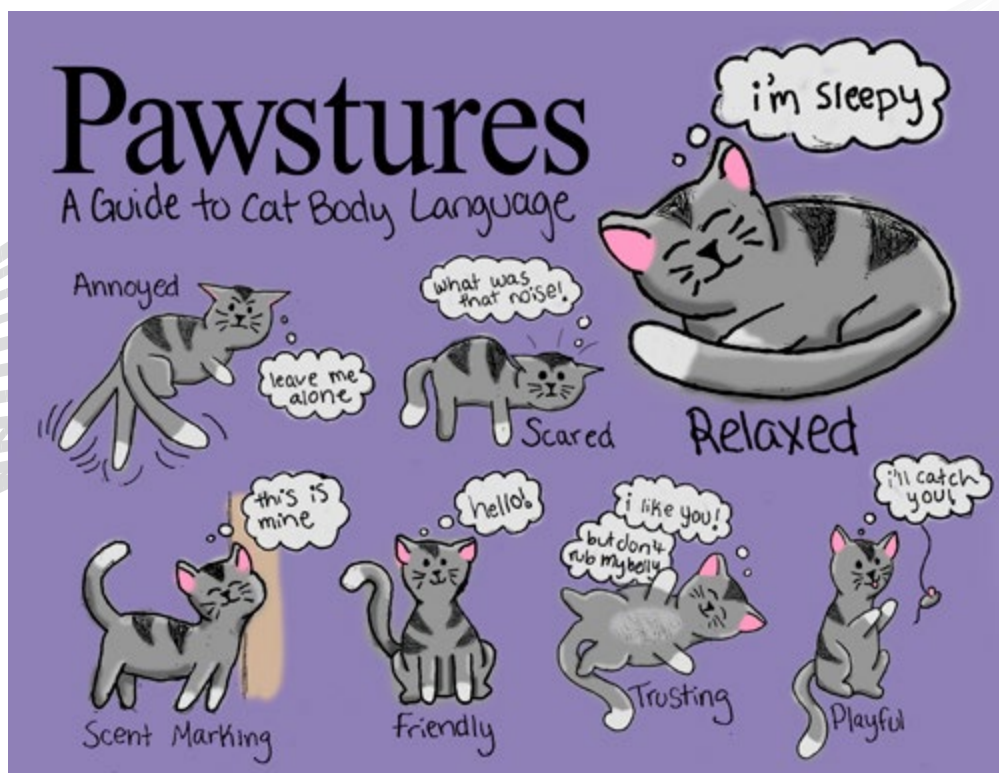
Charlotte Armstrong Dizzy



Ana Pita Live, Love, Laugh



Isabel Abdallah Untitled 10





Jon-Luc Jarboe Twilight Clocktower



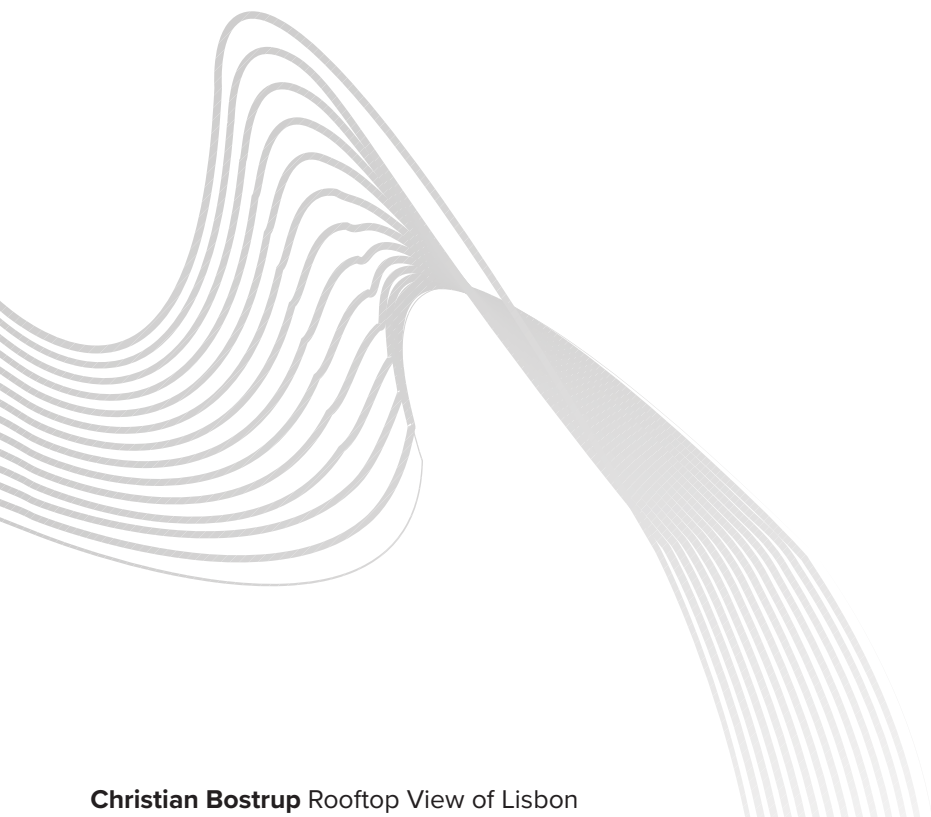
Ana Pita Paint 1

Ana Pita Paint 2





Kate Eaton Lucky Secrets



Christian Bostrup Rooftop View of Lisbon





Matthew MacDonald Untitled 1

Kate Eaton Vulture's Glare



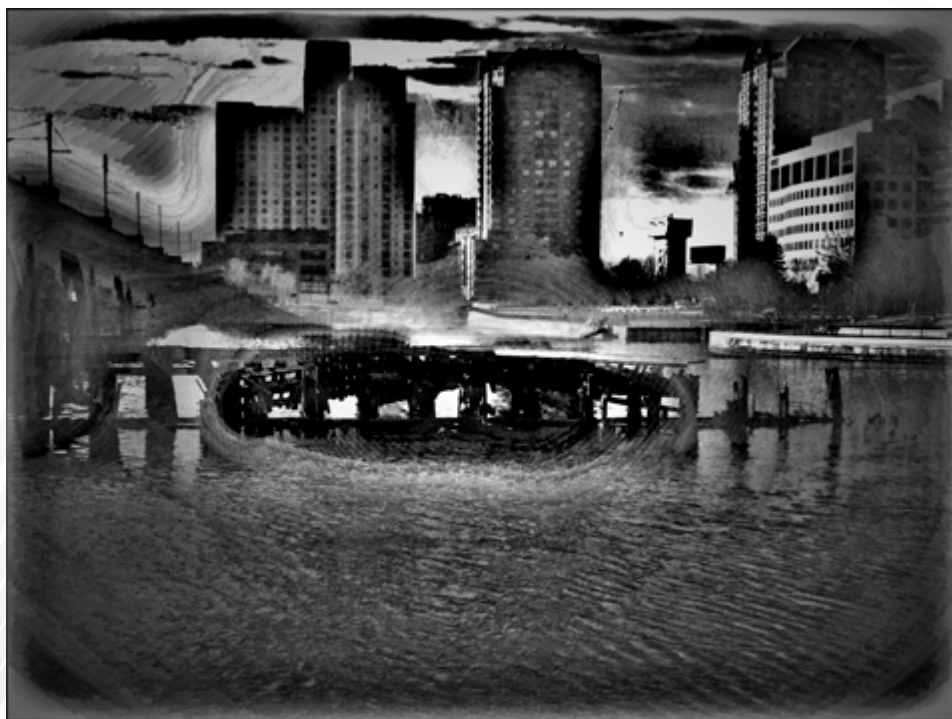


Ally Peters Untitled 3



Jena Corea Dreaming in Rome





Jon-Luc Jarboe Recollection of a Burned Photo

Dhwani Chheda Untitled 3





Ally Peters Untitled 1



Jena Corea MEOW



Jon-Luc Jarboe Lapis River



different color

same heart.

Grace Potter Heart Color



Charlotte Armstrong Crab Mandala

Elisabeth Goemaere Cowboy Boot





Dhwani Chheda Boston 2

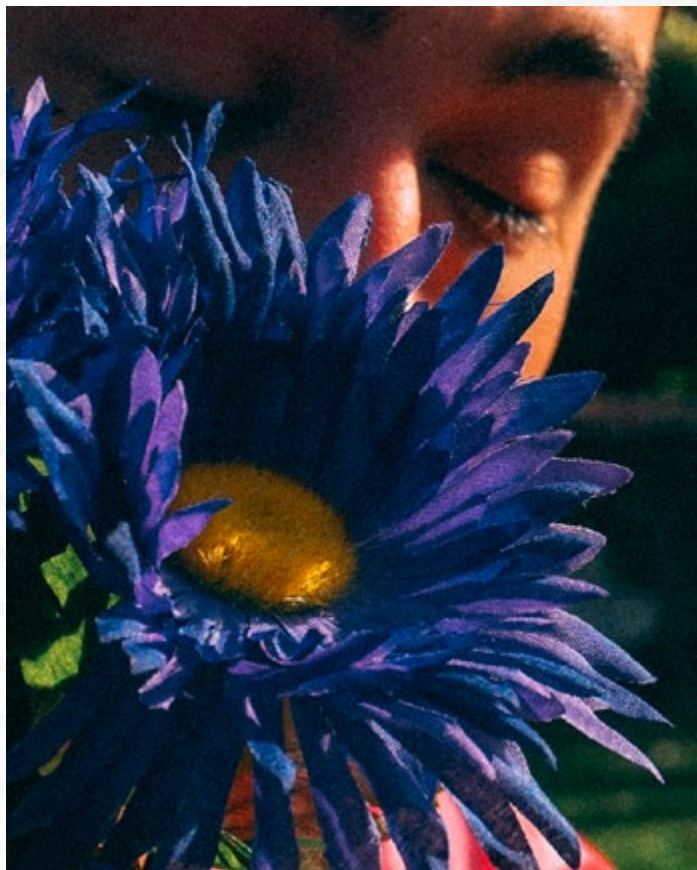
Ally Peters Untitled 2





Isabel Abdallah Untitled 1

Matthew MacDonald Untitled 5





Jena Corea Coastal Daydreams



Christian Bostrup The Streets of Salamanca



Jon-Luc Jarboe Fey Forest



Ally Peters Untitled 6



Isabel Abdallah Untitled 3



Kate Eaton Staring is Roo-de

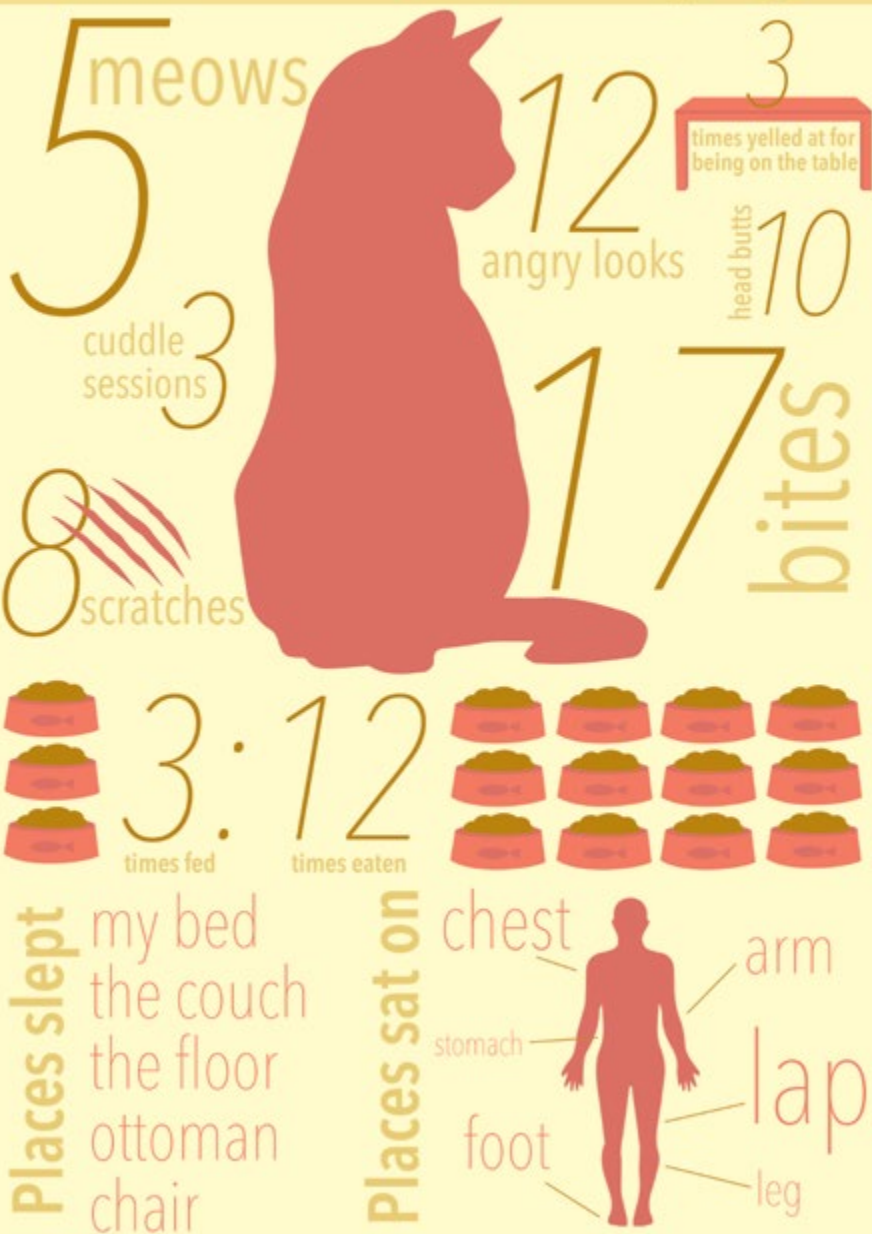


Christian Bostrup Toledo

Ana Pita Pink Sunset



72 hours with Popeye



Grace Potter Infographic



Christian Bostrup Sundown at Dehesa da la Villa Park



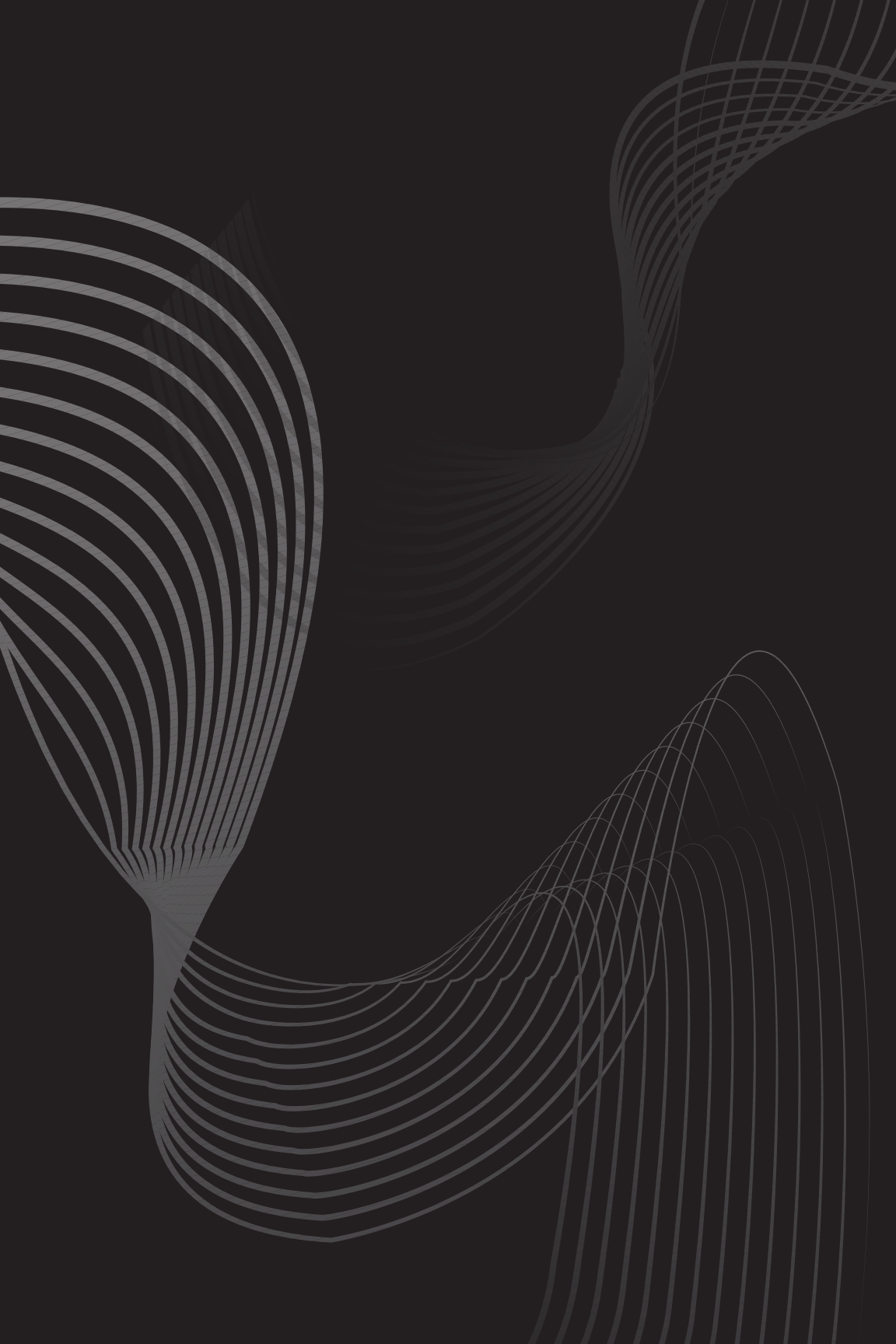
Jena Coreia England's Take on Trump



Dhwani Chheda Boston 3

Casey Grosjean Untitled 11





The background features a series of white, wavy, concentric lines that create a sense of movement and depth. These lines are arranged in a way that they appear to flow from the top left towards the bottom right, with some lines curving back towards the top right. The overall effect is a dynamic, organic pattern that frames the central text.

Prose



vell•i•chor

Kate Eaton

vell•i•chor \v=\ n. 1. The feeling of peace that flows over the soul when entering an old bookstore: as in the smell of yellowed paper that floods the pathways in the brain, creating the euphoria of vellichor. 2. The ability to time travel through worn leather covers and water-damaged paper: A combination of nostalgic wonder and new experiences / This comfort only comes from a cup of soup on a cold day or waking up next to someone you love / An understanding that everything is fleeting / This world, this book, this lover, will all fade away / Hope that the old bookstore from my hometown will never close / The need to run away / The need to feel trapped in time, like the ink within these pages / Where the light shines behind my eyes as I come home with today's finds / Where you laugh at me for finding the thickest books possible / And I hope, the whole time / pretending / that you feel the vellichor too.

Open Letters to the Little Things

Kate Eaton

Dear Rollie Pollies,

You were such an important part of my childhood. I loved watching you all run around and wondered at your ability to curl yourselves up into balls for defense. I do not know your scientific name and I never will. I hope you don't mind. I also appreciate your tolerance of me constantly picking you up and keeping you on the front porch. I can only now understand how frustrating it must have been to spend so much of your life trying to do one thing and get to one place, only for something bigger and incomprehensible to come along and put you somewhere you never expected to be.

And for that, I am sorry.

Dear Stray Dog Hair,

Even though it's been over a year since my dog passed away, I appreciate you holding onto my laundry so that I may hold onto all my memories of your source. I don't know how you still manage to find me, but it always makes me smile. It reminds me that someone is looking out for me and that the very fibers of our being are connected. I will see him again one day. Perhaps it will be a surprise, as it always is when I am states away, and a thin, squiggly white hair appears on one of my sweaters. I don't know how you got onto my Ireland clothes, mostly because I'm not sure how I could've gotten any farther from home, but it made packing more bearable.

I hope some of my hair is lingering in his fur somewhere.

Dear Medication,

Small but mighty, you are. I'd like to think I am too. But I guess I wasn't until you came around. I'm still not entirely sure about our whole chicken-and-egg situation. Was I stronger before I needed you or am I stronger because I'm not afraid to need you? I'm not sure, but regardless, I'm glad you're here. Thank you for allowing me to enjoy my friends and reading and video games and the insignificant things like living. Thank you for putting up with me saying "I need to take my drugs!" every time my alarm goes off. Clearly no one except me thinks it's funny. But hey, at least we have each other, right?

Although, sometimes I wonder how long you'll be around.

Dear Size Ten Font,

I can't actually use you when submitting typed assignments, which sucks because I like ignoring page limits and writing for however long I want. So, size twelve it must be. Sorry. Trust me, I find you much more appealing. You're compact. You fit more of yourself into a small space, but you don't demand all the attention. If you were a person in the front row of a concert, you'd be the one that wouldn't sing too loud just in case other people are filming or in case the artist might actually hear you. You'd keep your phone down, listening, enjoying, being in the moment. You'd relish in the beauty of letting someone else take up space with their art.

But when the mic gets put in front of your mouth, you belt it for all those behind you.

Dear Claddagh Ring,

There you were, sitting in one of the most touristy places in Dublin, with your Connemara stone heart and silver hands and matching crown, the band braided together. As soon as I saw you, I knew you were the one. I fished out my credit card, tried not to think about how much you cost, and immediately put you on my right ring finger. When I first put you on, you were cold, but your heart faced inward, indicating that I was taken. We both knew that wasn't exactly true, but I appreciate you indulging me. Surprisingly, when I finally turned that heart outward and accepted that I didn't need the stone heart you had first represented, you became warmer.

You taught me that no matter which way you faced, my heart was mine.

Dear SD Card,

Holding my memories for years is tiring, isn't it? If only I could take out and delete things from an SD card in my brain. Just be glad that you only hold images. You don't have to hold conversations, emotions, television shows that remind you of people that have hurt you, songs that remind you of the people you've hurt. You don't have to hold the ugly things. You get to focus on the light, see things from a different angle. You help me save the good moments so that I can hang them around my room with fairy lights. You remind me of the beauty of this world and the places I've been. You don't just show me pictures, you show me hidden adventures, successes, celebrations, peaceful days.

You show me everything I forget.

Dear Hair Band,


So, you've finally snapped huh? We both saw this coming. I just thought I was going to go first. After all these years of turmoil and being stretched too thin, you were the first to go. I'm sure it was tiring, trying to keep everything together. Granted, my hair isn't that thick, but you had to deal with all the dirt and oils and whatever shampoo and conditioner didn't rinse out. Plus, you sat on my wrist all the time, so you had to deal with the skin cells and the cold water of the bathroom sink and different types of soap that could not have been good for your fabric. I probably should've been gentler with you.

The only difference is that you can be replaced.

Dear Pocket-Sized Kleenex Packs,

Want to know how many times you've saved my life? I don't. I'm scared to find out the number. Between runny noses and running from my problems, I always feel prepared when you're in my pocket. I say I'm the Mom Friend, but it's really you that does all the work. You're a napkin, you're a tissue, you're a shoulder to cry on, you're a physical and emotional clean-up crew, you're entertainment because for some reason, my mom can never figure out how to open you and it always makes me laugh. Having a little stack of support in my pocket feels so much better with you?

And I'm sorry for all the mascara.



Dear Pack of Cigarettes,

Do I want frostbite consuming the tips of my fingers while you set fire to my lungs? No. But do I want to smoke cigarettes? Sometimes. Do I want to listen to Mom and Dad yell at me about how bad smoking is while letting you yellow my already dirty nails? No. But I do think I'd like the feeling of seeing something bad exit my lungs. I'd like to breathe in and watch all the carbon dioxide and rat poison and tobacco and disgusting stuff leave my body. Maybe if I could see the monster leaving my mouth, all my negative thoughts would leave too. Think about it, the feeling of holding something in my hands and exhaling all the toxins.

Maybe I can also draw out the smoke from my mind.

Dear Mason Jars,

Yet another item that is as versatile as I wish I could be. You've been a Mother's Day gift, a Father's Day gift, a Christmas gift, a bank, a drinking glass, a fairy light, a display for my Kirby figurines, and a container for my grandmother's homemade jam. How is it that something made of glass can change and shift into what it's needed to be? I suppose I should understand since I've been doing the same thing for years. We're transparent, and fragile, waiting for the moment when we are dropped and shattered. Maybe someone will try to put you back together with super glue.

As for me, I'll try not to fall.

Dear Noise-Cancelling Headphones,

What a blessing you are. Finally, something to block out the rest of the world and consume me with lyrics. I'm falling asleep on a smooth leather pillow that speaks to me in rhymes and melodies that drift into the next dream, the next day, the next emotion, the next song that speaks to me. The soft whispers of a punk song or the screams of a ballad carry me along my commute. I pretend that I'm not walking to the beat, but I think everyone knows. You and I, we share secrets. I tell you how I feel, and you know just what I want, searching my Spotify playlists for something to relate to. You tell me what I need to hear, and I admire that.

It makes our sweet nothings even sweeter.

Dear Explorer's Guild,

Still waiting on volume two! I know it's not your fault. It takes a long time to write a book, especially one that is a whole volume and is partially illustrated. I'm just being impatient because you were my favorite world to get lost in. In fact, I've wandered through your 784 pages twice. You took a history that was bleak and destructive and turned it into something beautiful and creative and explorative. I became attached to your characters and was biting at the bit to find out how everything would wrap up. I had that satisfaction, the second time taking place after just a week, but here I am, waiting for you to invite me in again.

I crave your escape.

Dear Journal,

It's strange to be writing to you and not within you. You're probably the most dangerous thing I've ever owned. You hold my experiences, opinions, confrontations, emotions, memories, highs, and lows. The secrets you hold would make even the strongest of us quake and fall. Everyone I have ever loved would feel a shiver run down their spine if they could read even an inkling of how I felt about them. Everyone who had ever hurt me would finally understand how much I've held back and how quiet I have been. Everyone who I've been friends with would be terrified by how much I know and could reveal about them.

I would finally be a force to be reckoned with.

Dear Ex,

Too much graphite has been wasted on you. I refuse to waste ink on you now.

Dear First Love,

There were so many warnings about how it could all go wrong but I ignored them. Eventually I got you to ignore them too. It was fun, what we had. It was fun, but you were right; it was destined to crash and burn. For one, you live 3000 miles away and it's not a guarantee that I'll ever see you again. I will come back to Ireland, but I want you to know that I'm not coming back to you as the naïve girl you knew. I fell in love with you. I didn't mean to. But it happened. But the thing about love is that it's a lot harder to fall in love than out of it. I came back to my life and found that I could be happy in myself, just like I had been before.

Thank you, but goodbye.

Dear Love,

You dangerous, fickle thing. News flash – you're not funny. You think you're so mysterious, making me fall for people who are unavailable. I have some choice words for you, Love! You and all your minions: Infatuation, Crushes, Lust. All of you are just like demons, running around in the shadows, evading the final call. Well I've figured you out. You, Love, are nothing to fear. You, Love, are nothing to cower away from. No, you're a monster that is to be defeated. People believe that the world's problems can be solved through you, Love, but they're wrong. Oh, how wrong they are.

Only when we see the demons hiding in the shadows does true Compassion appear.

Dear Poetry,

Even though we've had a rocky relationship, I appreciate your ability to allow me to express myself in the best way I know how. You allow me to truly be myself and share bits of myself that are hard to push into the light. Your metaphors and analogies break down the skeletons in my closet and allow me to work through things, bone by bone. You have taught me to love myself. You have taught me how to appreciate the stories and struggles of others. It's crazy that just twenty-six letters and a few characters allow me to truly live how I'm meant to.

You mean everything to me.

Dear Life,

Small but mighty, I am. You have tried to knock me down several times. Unfortunately for you, I like to see the look on your face when I get back up. I've got to hand it to you, you've done a good job testing me throughout the years. However, you've neglected the fact that you gave me a support system and the privilege to go seek professional help and take tiny little pills that kick my serotonin into working again. The joke is on you, Life. If your goal was to keep me down and destroy me, then keep on trying. I will keep brushing myself off and getting back up. I will keep reflecting on the little joys.

Because it's the little things that make the biggest impact.

Not With You

Rosalie Pothier

"Do you want to go to the movies?"

"No."

"Do you want to watch TV?"

"No."

"Do you want to take a walk?"

"No."

Amanda took a deep breath. She studied Oliver who was a few feet behind her the Arizona sun reflected off his pale skin. He was going to burn if he sat on the bench any longer.

"Do you want to do anything?" she asked.

Oliver didn't look up from his phone as he continued playing some stupid game. The muscles in Amanda's arms tensed as she uncrossed them.

"Not really."

Not with you wasn't said but was implied. Amanda knew it was. She picked at the hem of her frayed jean shorts. She'd been dating Oliver for two years. They fought a lot, but she didn't think anything was wrong.

He hadn't touched her in a while – at least over a month. And not just sexually, he hadn't touched her at all. Oliver always used to be absent minded touching her, grazing her hip, stroking her arm, leaning against her, but now he kept his distance. Amanda felt the distance like it was a boulder between them. She hadn't told Oliver she was pregnant, and now she was afraid he wouldn't care.

She didn't know what she'd done wrong. Maybe she didn't do anything wrong. Maybe

it was just Oliver being Oliver. He'd never given her as much attention as she gave him. Still, she couldn't shake the feeling that she'd ruined everything somehow. Maybe he knew about the baby. Maybe he didn't want it.

"My parents won't be in town this weekend," Amanda said. She'd have to tell him.

Oliver hummed. She didn't think he was listening. He was still looking down at his phone. Amanda moved closer, invading his personal space by resting her thigh against his knee. It'd been over two months since she missed her period. She wouldn't be able to hide the pregnancy for much longer.

"Do you want to stay over?"

Oliver waited a second before replying, eyes glued to his phone, "I'm really busy this weekend."

"Oh. Okay."

"Sorry, Mandy."

Amanda sat down on the bench, her hand held protectively over her small belly, and knew, deep down, that *everything* was over.

Tiny Blue Jeans

Sydni Ann Masiello

They were miniature—almost the size of my forearm, give or take a few inches. So small that I could only picture a doll being able to fit in them, so much so that I picked them up, brushed off the copious amount of soil clinging to them, and fit the fabric neatly into my back pocket. I had planned on washing them when I got back to my apartment, maybe making a whole project out of them by adding rhinestones and glitter to give them a bit of character. Then, I would gift the pair of jeans to my niece, Cadence, who would use them to accessorize her favorite American Girl Doll. Cadence was as close to being my daughter as she could be without me having to carry her in my stomach for nine months.

2012 was a rough year for everyone in my family. It had been a warm evening in June when my brother had gone to work at the family convenience store. It didn't bring in much money, but he and his wife were struggling—especially when they received the news that they were expecting a baby.

“Money is money,” my brother would say. With the thought of being able to provide for their new baby, working late nights never bothered him. The night of the murder, my sister-in-law went into labor. We didn't tell her about the robbery at the convenience store or that her husband had been fatally shot. We decided it'd be best to wait until the baby had been born.

I guess everyone grieves in their own way. My mom moved closer to the rest of our family here in Boston, my sister-in-law began abusing drugs, and I started taking care of my niece when her mother was so out of her mind, she forgot her daughter existed.

Soon, it was getting to be around that time of year again. I knew it because my mom had called me asking if I wanted to grab a coffee with her. She never drinks coffee. She's always been a health nut and consumes strictly water and kale smoothies, unless it's around the time when my brother died.

“I couldn't sleep well last night,” my mom said.

I watched her take a sip of her coffee. “It's probably because of all this caffeine.”

“You know how bad my dreams get around this time of year. It's hard for me.”

“It’s hard for me too,” I said while wrapping my hands around a cup of coffee, bringing it to my lips and taking a sip. “What the fuck?” I said, the cup landing on the table with a thud.

“What’s wrong?” My mom asked, grabbing a few napkins to clean up the spill. My face contorted in disgust. “It tastes like dirt.”

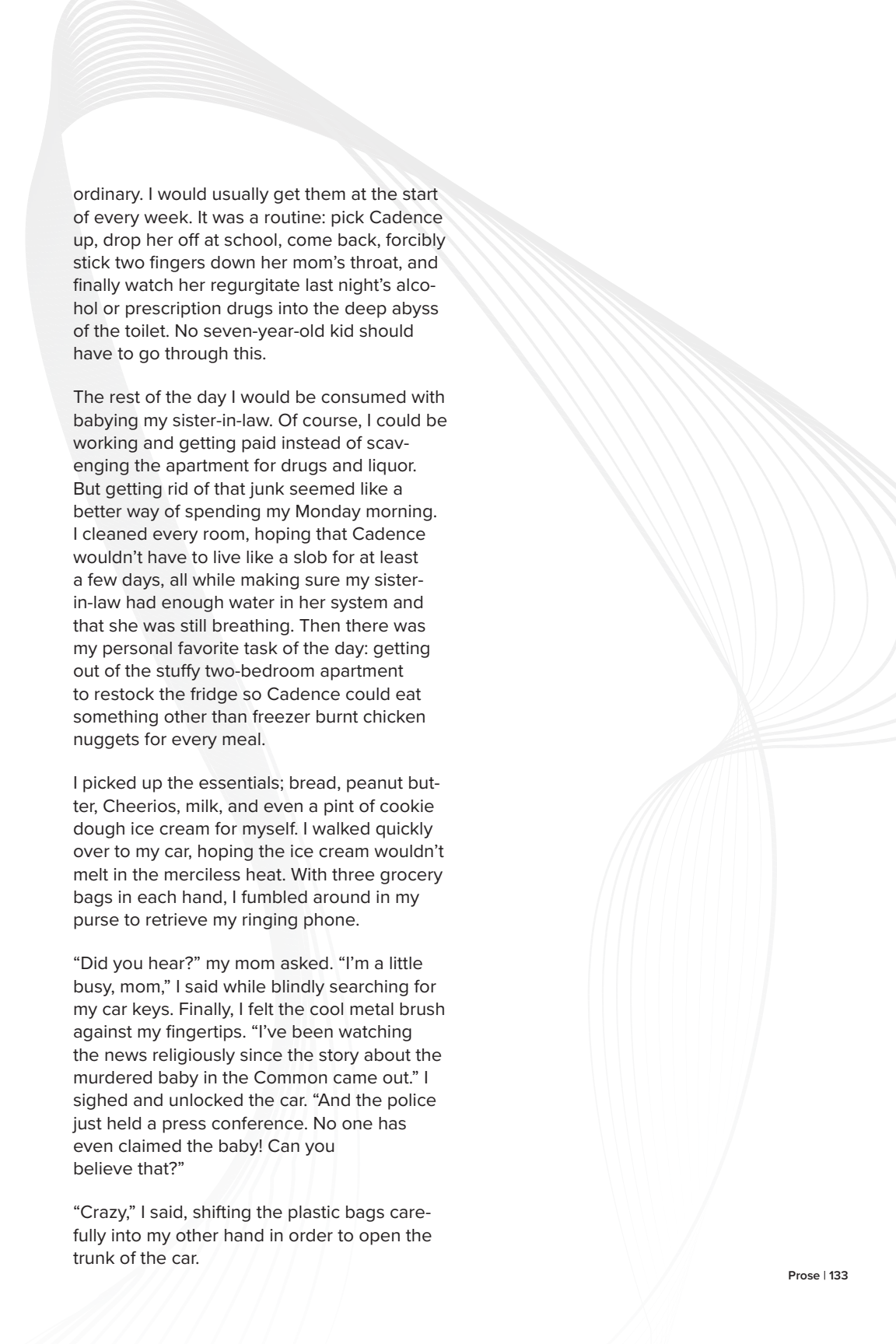
She glanced at me and then at the sad cup of barely-touched coffee, picking it up to taste it for herself. “Honey, it tastes fine.”

Later that night, I turned on the news and was greeted by a ridiculous headline, I think it read “The Insect Apocalypse.” It was quite disrespectful in my opinion—to the body.

I could hear the helicopters outside. Usually the sounds of the city could be drowned out by some music, but not this. Not the incessant whirl of dozens of helicopter blades. Not the wail of police sirens or the barks of the cadaver dogs. Not the beat of the heart in my chest or the ringing in my ears consisting of the six-month-old baby’s wails I was imagining. How could no one hear it? How could no one notice until the bugs started to swarm around the fresh dirt in the humid air? That was until the corpse was dug up. He was found by a runner, just like myself a few days ago when I had discovered the jeans. Apparently the insects were attacking some sort of material protruding from the sea of mud. It was a clipping of blue fabric with tiny yellow ducks, the only piece of cloth swaddling the body.

Within the next few days, an investigation ensued. The baby boy had been strangled and buried in the Boston Commons. Then a shirt was found in the muddy shallows of the pond. It had red and blue stripes and looked like it could fit a doll.

I got the call in the morning: “Mommy’s asleep again and I can’t wake her up,” Cadence said, her voice cracking like static through the phone. These types of calls weren’t out of the



ordinary. I would usually get them at the start of every week. It was a routine: pick Cadence up, drop her off at school, come back, forcibly stick two fingers down her mom's throat, and finally watch her regurgitate last night's alcohol or prescription drugs into the deep abyss of the toilet. No seven-year-old kid should have to go through this.

The rest of the day I would be consumed with babying my sister-in-law. Of course, I could be working and getting paid instead of scavenging the apartment for drugs and liquor. But getting rid of that junk seemed like a better way of spending my Monday morning. I cleaned every room, hoping that Cadence wouldn't have to live like a slob for at least a few days, all while making sure my sister-in-law had enough water in her system and that she was still breathing. Then there was my personal favorite task of the day: getting out of the stuffy two-bedroom apartment to restock the fridge so Cadence could eat something other than freezer burnt chicken nuggets for every meal.

I picked up the essentials; bread, peanut butter, Cheerios, milk, and even a pint of cookie dough ice cream for myself. I walked quickly over to my car, hoping the ice cream wouldn't melt in the merciless heat. With three grocery bags in each hand, I fumbled around in my purse to retrieve my ringing phone.

"Did you hear?" my mom asked. "I'm a little busy, mom," I said while blindly searching for my car keys. Finally, I felt the cool metal brush against my fingertips. "I've been watching the news religiously since the story about the murdered baby in the Common came out." I sighed and unlocked the car. "And the police just held a press conference. No one has even claimed the baby! Can you believe that?"

"Crazy," I said, shifting the plastic bags carefully into my other hand in order to open the trunk of the car.

“What kind of bullshit is this! A six-month-old baby is found strangled to death in a park and no one even knows whose it is. And the only evidence that they have to go on is that scrap of duck printed blanket!” I winced as her loud yells pierced my eardrum and my phone fell to the paved ground of the parking lot. “God damnit,” I mumbled, placing the grocery bags in the trunk, I bent down to recover my slightly cracked phone. I could still hear her frantic, upset voice streaming out.

As I reached for the phone, the tips of my fingers turned cold and my whole-body seized up. In the blackened screen of the phone was a set of young blue eyes staring back at me. I bent down lower, looking more closely I could clearly make out the figure of a baby carriage with the head of a baby boy peering sneakily from inside. Unsettled, I grabbed the phone and turned around and was greeted with nothing more than a few empty shopping carts.

“Honey, are you there?” my mom’s voice boomed from the speaker. I put the phone to my ear, still desperately searching for the set of blue eyes and the bald head of that baby. “I have to call you back,” I said, not waiting for a response. I did a few laps around my car, searched the vast expanse of the parking lot and even underneath my car for something, anything having a connection to a baby. But there was no carriage, and no baby to be seen. Not even the faintest cry or giggle of a baby could be heard.

After dropping off the groceries and checking in on my sleeping sister-in-law, I gathered some pajamas and clothes for Cadence and drove back home to relax before having to pick her up from school. I didn’t want her sleeping in that environment tonight, and, I was hurting too and in need of something to keep my mind from wandering. That pint of cookie dough ice cream would have to do for now. Two hours and with more than a half of the tub of ice cream gone, it was time to pick up Cadence.

I went to her elementary school early so I could get a parking spot up front. I wanted her to know that I cared. If no one else did, I adored her. It was so hot in the car that I was genuinely upset with myself for not bringing the rest of the ice cream with me. With all the windows sealed shut and the AC blasting as much cool air as it could, I sat fiddling with my phone, waiting for the kids to file out of the school’s doors. My phone vibrated with a text from my mom: *They’re holding a vigil for the baby downtown tomorrow if you want to go with me and Mrs. Lucca.* I didn’t quite understand why my mom was so invested

in the murder case. Maybe it's because she went through the heartache herself. To me, the death of the baby was unfortunate, but not something to worry about so I responded with a no, using the excuse that I was busy. We both knew I wasn't.

Then the growing buzz of a fly snapped me out of my thoughts. I turned around to scour the backseat for the pesky insect but had no luck. Turning back around, my eyes landed on the beady red eyes of what looked to be a blow fly positioned directly in front of me on my steering wheel. I squinted, wanting the fly to know how much I despised it. It seemed to stare back at me, fearless. I even thought I caught him wink as if to say, "Go ahead, try me." And I would.

I reached for the glove compartment and grabbed the car's bulky manual, perfect for times like these. The manual landed on the rim of the steering wheel with a thud. The buzzing stopped. Satisfied, I removed the pointless book from where I had thrown it and went to examine the remnants of my victim. As soon as I flipped it over, the faintest sound of buzzing rang in my left ear. Slowly, I turned to meet the gaze of the same penetrating red eyes. Suddenly, the buzzing grew louder. The sound was now coming from my right. Wait, no...from behind. Or maybe above? I squeezed my eyes shut trying to get the incessant buzzing noise out of my ears. I reached for the car manual again, the palm of my hand coming in contact with several odd feeling objects: hundreds of buzzing blow flies. My hand began to shake violently, the rumbling buzz of the flies progressively getting louder as they popped like popcorn on a stovetop. I retracted my hand quickly, jumping out of my car seat and onto the sidewalk filling up with little second graders with their rolling backpacks and mothers and fathers with their little children propped up on their shoulders. I stumbled forward, the buzzing still fogging up my mind. I felt a pair of hands on my legs and I looked down to

see Cadence had found me. She opened her mouth, but the only noise being emitted was a steady buzz and the flapping of tiny wings.

“What?” I asked in a haze. Suddenly the noise ceased altogether. “Auntie, am I staying over your house tonight?” “Yes,” I said while peering into the windows of my car in search of the tiny nuisances, “Yes you are.”

They were all gone.

I took Cadence home right away. The weird events of the day left me exhausted and questioning my own sanity. I didn’t want to involve her further in something on top of her mom’s substance abuse problem. That night, Cadence asked if she could sleep with me. I remember always being scared sleeping away from home as a kid, so of course I said yes. I saw it as soon as she shuffled into the room wearing her unicorn pajamas, the ones I had gifted her for Christmas last year. The Doll’s eyes seemed to follow me, mocking me. It sat, propped up in Cadence’s arms wearing the pair of jeans I had found and given to Cadence. I gave it the same stare I had given the fly only a few hours before.

“Are you okay, Auntie?” Cadence asked, looking at me puzzled. “Yeah, sweetie,” I replied, my eyes never leaving the seemingly endless stitches of those tiny blue jeans. I fell asleep dreaming of denim.

I woke up in a panic, feeling a pair of eyes on me. My eyes scanned the room, the clock read 4 A.M., Cadence was sleeping peacefully, and the goddamn doll was sitting on the windowsill. In my sleep induced haze, I got up out of bed and headed for the doll. The sequins and glitter I had glued to the denim seemed to shine brighter in the moonlight that peaked in through the curtains. I was drawn to it. I needed to get rid of it. I hated it. I hated those jeans and I hated that damn doll. The next thing I knew, I was hovering over the doll, my teeth clenched and the faint

taste of blood in my mouth. I looked down to see my grip on the doll's plastic neck.

"Auntie?" Cadence said from the other side of the room. "What are you doing with my doll?"

I blinked a few times, now aware of what I was doing. I dropped the doll, it landed on the hardwood floor with a bang.

"Nothing, sweetie. I was just making sure she was comfortable against the windowsill," I lied, my body visibly shaking.

I rushed to the closet, rummaging through the dirty clothes on the floor and then the clothes in the back. I couldn't stop my hands from shaking and I didn't know why. I grasped a soft blanket in my hand and brought it to Cadence who was now sitting up in bed.

"Here," I said, laying the baby blue blanket over her. The yellow ducks patterned on the cloth were illuminated in the glow of the moonlight, along with the fraying ends of the fabric from when the blanket was whole. "Go back to sleep."

Glow

Kate Eaton

The house was aflame bathing the lighter and lawn in an orange glow. The blackened structure slowly crumbled, sending spots of light spiraling into the air before disappearing into the night. As ashes fell in return. The crackling of the blaze was broken by the blaring of sirens. Red and blue flashing lights fought against the fiery haze. Someone in a police uniform put on a latex glove and picked up a lighter. It felt warm, but he couldn't tell if it was because of the flames, or because an arsonist had dropped it not too long ago.

It had been a birthday gift; her name engraved on the side of it, silver digging into more silver. She flicked the flint wheel and the light reflected in her eyes. She sighed and put the zip-po lighter back into her bag. It sat there, bouncing among the makeup, pens, cigarettes, and tree-killing receipts from CVS. She had wondered if one day the receipts would catch on fire and set her bag aflame. She decided to cross that bridge when she got there.

She yawned as she got on the train and threw her backpack onto the seat next to her, causing the small piece of metal to fall out. It slid across the floor, stopping against the foot of a man with dark rings around his eyes and a phone full of angry text messages. He glanced away from his phone and saw the lighter. He took a quick look around as he picked it up, and slid it into his pocket. The man ran his thumb over the engraving as he watched a girl with short blonde hair and a handmade bag walk off the train.

When his stop was announced, he got off the train and left the station. He knew exactly where he was going. He remembered every turn, every tree, every house. He pulled the lighter out of his pocket, examined it, and lit a cigarette with it. He was here. He knocked on the door.

A silhouette of a woman appeared in the glow of the doorway. "What are you doing here?" she asked.

"I wanted to apologize...I wanted to talk." The man pulled a gold locket out of his pocket, causing the lighter to fall out, bouncing down the stairs.

The woman sighed. "Fine." She let him in.

The lighter sat on the sidewalk as people passed it by, the air growing colder by the minute as night came. Finally, a teenage girl with bright red converse grabbed it. She looked at the name on the side. Taking out a pocket knife she crossed out the name, placed her own instead. She then continued down the street meeting up with one of her friends. She tossed him the lighter. He dropped it.

"Careful, dickwad. That shit's probably expensive." The girl scolded.

"So? You carved into it instead of selling it." Her friend argued.

"Why would I sell it when there's an abandoned house that could use some warming up?"

The boy smiled and they walked together until coming upon a run-down house. One of the windows was boarded up, but the boy had a feeling someone lived there. The bushes in front looked too nice for this place to have been abandoned. He asked if she was sure no one lived here. She told him to shut it.

She ran her finger over the scratches in the silver, lit a flame and lit an exposed area of the house. It started small but grew quickly. She cackled before tossing the lighter over her shoulder onto the grass. The two watched as the place turned black becoming engulfed in flames.

"Sick." The girl said, admiring her own work.

One of the boards covering the front window came loose. It tumbled into the bushes as a voice came from the house. The faces of a small girl and a cat could be seen trying to escape, but the gap was too small.

"Help!" the little girl screamed.

The teenage boy was stunned and ran to find some way in, finding a door he reached out and turned the door knob burning his hand in the process. He ran in to get the little girl and her cat outside. He asked if she was okay, and she nodded, although coughing. "Let's get you someplace safe." Suddenly, they could hear sirens.

As he looked back at the lawn the only thing he could see was the glint of orange light coming off a small piece of metal.

Mourning Sun

Jon-Luc Jarboe

Slowly, a young man crawled across the cold stone floor using his right arm, his left trying to cover his neck as vermillion blood oozed out. He pushed himself forward until finding a space underneath a collapsed stone archway. He checked his left hand and cursed under his breath at the amount of blood. Pulling a dagger from his pocket, he tore off a piece of his black overcoat fashioning a makeshift bandage around his neck. Finished, he began to go through his pockets: a medium-sized bottle bearing the cross, a small bag (containing salt, herbs, and garlic), a booklet, an ink vial, a quill; he continued to tear into his pockets until finally coming upon his gun. A flintlock, not powerful enough to kill the creatures he hunted. *But if things went from bad to worse, he thought, it would finish me.* Taking the booklet and writing materials, he began to write.

“My name is Samuel Goodsprings. My family is to the southwest of this castle in the small village of Normenville. They live next to Silver’s Cathedral where I work. I am the priest who...” He stopped for a moment to listen to the silence hanging in the castle’s halls. His hands quivered as he held his breath. *Nothing should rise again, he thought, but that doesn’t mean I’m not afraid one of them is still around.* He waited, only hearing a gust of wind blow against the castle walls. He breathed out and continued to write.

“...who guided people from the twisted words of the Devil. The Beast of the Black Forest who had caught the faithful in his web denying them peace in this world and the next. I hope that by finding my last testament, I will be able to tell my flock and those who had passed that the deed is done. The undead have been put to rest and the ones who drank the blood of the innocent, who ate the flesh of newborns, and kept their own

bodies fruitful while their souls rotted; they have been staked and slain. But I fear it may be too late for me.” He felt around the edge of the bandage, it was wet with blood. “For I have been bitten by one of the vampires that lurked here. Hopefully, I’ve already put an end to my own life before I too prey upon my flock. Should I instead become one of them, I shall recount my own experience, so another can put me to rest.” He put the booklet down, took the bottle with a cross on it, and poured in the contents from the bag, screwing the cap on he mixed the contents producing a dun colored water. He took a sip. *Sweet, very sweet, that’s a good sign,* he thought as he began to write again.

“This all began a month ago with that young child Isabella. Her family had been growing ill soon after her passing, their pale bodies shivered regardless of the cloth they wore or the fire they lay by. In between their bouts of narcolepsy, they claimed to have seen her walking along the roads in a tattered white nightgown and covered in dirt. Her face curled into a gnarled grin like a jackal as she danced in the moonlight. I dismissed this initially, I am a man of G-d, but I am also a rational man and simply could not picture it. For I had seen her grave and the dirt was untouched. Had I been more cautious, I would have brought a shovel and dug up the casket. Her family kept telling me she flew into their dreams and sucked at their veins. Again, I ignored them and for that I am dearly sorry. They perished shortly after I left that last time.” He took another sip. *Still sweet.*

“No reports of the family returning from their graves occurred, but the same shadowy figure of Isabella continued to haunt the town. I decided the only solution would be to find the culprit, so one night with some of the townsmen I watched the streets for the

creature. The red sun dipped below the horizon as we drank and talked. Very little happened, but then in our lanterns glow, a pale beauty strolled into view. Her cheeks were flushed red and her hair, long and raven black. We all stared as she twirled and danced to some silent melody. The others stared at her for her naked flesh, I stared because of her eyes. They were yellowed like a wolf's. They appeared starved waiting for the next person to drain. I rushed at her and pulled her to the ground, the rest of the group removed from their trance helped in seizing her."

"She screamed in wild tongues as we brought her into the church. I continually asked her: who she was? Why was she roaming the streets barely clothed? Where did she live? All I received were animalistic growls and half-words that frustrated me. I was on the edge of beating her, but I remained calm. I stepped out for some cool air. And it was in that moment, the Lord gave me a simple idea to confirm what she was. From my belt I grabbed my dagger and seized her hands, I slashed my blade swiftly across each palm. They were bloodless. As though I had cut not into human flesh, but unbaked clay. They quickly fused together and left no scar. This woman was undead."

"We all knew what must be done. Four of us held her down while I took a decorative metal spike from the walls and a judicial hammer on my podium. I'm a rational man, but my father taught me every old myth that roamed these lands. Of the creatures that haunted the night, cursing those with a sickness that would make them stalk their friends and family. I placed the spike above her chest and hammered it in. Her screams ceased, but it was not over, any man could pull the spike out and she would be revived. And so, with my dagger and a woodcutting axe, I chopped off her head and burned it in a fire outside. Her soul was now free."

"After realizing the truth, my thoughts turned to the worst. Had she made a pact with the Devil? Had she been turned? And if she had been turned, then who and where was that beast now? The next morning, I told my followers the truth. There would be no more late-night strolls, trips to the tavern, or festivals, when the sun went down everyone went in until these beasts had been rooted out. For the next few days, I and a few men dug up the graves of our families. If they were just bones, we left them be, but any intact corpse was to receive the same treatment as that vampire. But even with our work and no one on the streets, people disappeared or grew ill and passed. I wished I had time to mourn, but if I was to stop this

menace, I couldn't afford to waste time. I studied by candle light day after day, until I finally came upon a book that spoke of an old legend." He took another sip; the taste had grown bland on his tongue.

"Several decades ago, north to our village a castle stood where a Lord and his family lived. Their lands were fruitful and their people...as happy as one could be as a serf. However, the youngest son felt that his intellect made him a worthier candidate to rule than his other older siblings. He requested various books: poetry, grimoires, anything on the subject of rituals and read them fervently until finally coming upon the knowledge he needed."

"One moonless night he invited one of his sisters up to his room under the guise of discussing a good book he had recently read. He locked the door and placed a cloth over her mouth, laced with a sleeping potion. He laid her on the bed and bashed her skull in. He drank from her blood, pledging himself to Satan saying he had taken the fiend's blood as his own. He carved up her raw flesh and swallowed it saying he took on the fiend's own flesh. He tore at her greedily and sexually abused her corpse until only a bloody cadaver remained. He cleaned himself up and dumped the body in the gardens where no one would discover her."

"He continued this horrid ritual several times over, charming his family and servants into coming upstairs where death awaited them. His powers grew and with it, he was able to convince others that some of the serfs must have caused the disappearances as an act of rebellion. He watched gleefully as their heads rolled off the executioner's axe. His face became pale and child-like, his hair and clothes so neat it seemed his feet had never touched the earth he walked on. His eyes, like that vampire I saw, were yellowed, and described as hungry for another plaything. Soon, even the lord and lady passed and only the eldest brother and youngest brother remained. On the night before the eldest was to inherit the castle, the older brother invited his sibling to his room for some wine. The two poured each other a glass and toasted to a long reign and new rule."

"A week before this, an angel had visited the eldest brother and told him what had happened and explained what he would need to end this nightmare. He would mix some wine with holy water, garlic, salt, and herbs which when drunk by the beast would cause him to become comatose. Then he would simply have to stake the creature and burn his head.

As the vampire drank his glass, he grinned at his brother and then dropped to the floor like a log." He took another sip; the drink began to numb his tongue. "But the eldest, however, could not finish his duty. The vampire had poisoned all the wine in the cellar, as a precaution and so he too fell dead beside his brother. They were found the next morning and buried underneath the castle in the family crypt. The serfs left for other lords or formed their own towns without any nobility to recognize."

"I set out to gather supplies like the eldest brother and included my own additions like a lantern, something to write on should I need a final will, and five of our strongest men. We had to end this immediately and rode out that night. Underneath the glow of the full moon, I caught sight of some old ruins. It was indeed the castle. Dark ivy grew along the columns and towers, the stones were weathered black. The stain glass windows were empty, most likely due to thieves, and the entrance sat open as if it were inviting us inside. We approached cautiously, our backs to each other and our lanterns unlit. The floor was covered in rat droppings and the pillars holding up the ceiling had cracks running along their shaft and base. The only light came from the doorway and empty windows." He scratched at the bandage and took another sip. It numbed his tongue and gums. "From beside the door, a vampiress flew out and sank her jagged claws into one of my friend's necks. Blood splashed out of the wound as he fell to the floor dead. We wasted no time in beating her with our hammers, and yet every time her limp body rose again giving us not a single chance to hold her down. I leaped onto her allowing the others to grab her limbs. Her breath stank of wet dirt and mold. I retrieved a stake and hammered it in, another took his axe and cut her head and threw it outside. We'd retrieve it for burning after the vampire lord had been destroyed."

"I stared at my now dead friend. His name was James Col, I hated having to do the same to him and leaving his head outside. But we couldn't risk him rising against us. After that encounter, it would seem the element of surprise did little against these monsters, so we turned on our lanterns and moved deeper inside. Before us was a ballroom, several carved archways had fallen alongside the pillars, luckily no beasts were waiting in the small spaces around the debris. We moved through an old door into the kitchen..." He breathed in and out trying to calm himself. "By the Lord's grace and mercy, may my soul never see what was in there again. We quickly departed into another hall and found stairs to the upper floors. As we made our way up the creaking staircase, from above another vampire flew down tackling us. Like a snake, she struck at another one of us with her pearly fangs chewing at his throat. We got up and beat her to a pulp, I staked her and chopped off her head. I checked my friend for a pulse. Nothing. He had succumbed to the wounds. He was one of my better church goers, a lumber man who always helped, may you rest in peace Thomas Grail. After removing his head, we climbed the stairs confident no surprises awaited us at the top."

"I was wrong. Very wrong, as we climbed to the top, down the long hallway was the throne room and I saw him. A snow-skinned gaunt figure in black silk robes. He may have passed as an average young man if not for the yellow eyes sunk into his skull. He leaned against the chair, as though he'd been expecting us since this whole affair began." He scratched harder at his wound and took another sip ignoring the water numbing his mouth and throat. "At his feet were two more vampiresses, their bare flesh dripping with fresh blood. He slowly waved us in, 'Well done, gents. Perhaps I can kill your thirst with a glass or two.' He said while smirking. I heard loud thumping behind me and turned to see one of my men running back down the stair-

case. Then a scream rang from downstairs, a violent scream begging for mercy from the Lord himself. William, you always were a coward, but you still didn't deserve to be sliced into cuts of meat and your blood poured into bottles for fermenting."

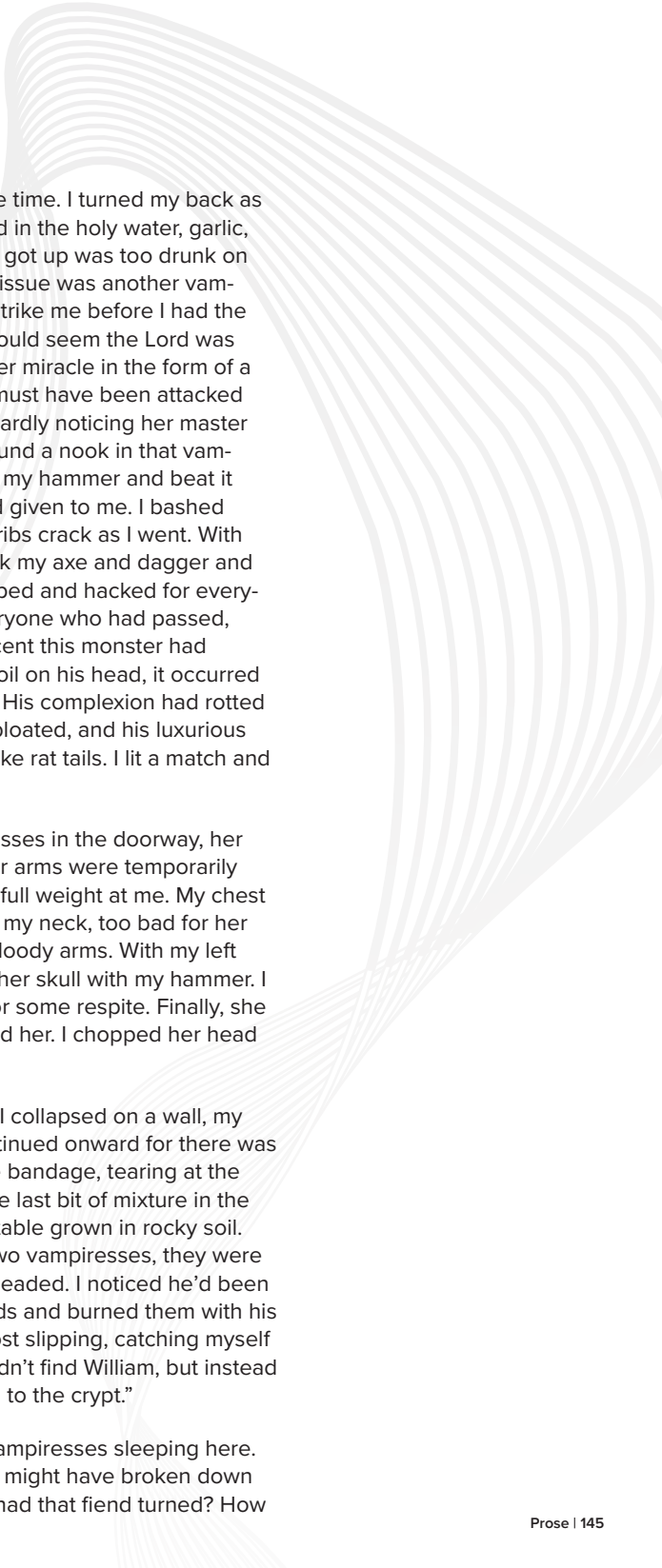
"I knew why he ran; a vampire can rise from death as many times as they please unless destroyed. A vampire has claws and fangs sharper than our steel and silver. A vampire is faster, smarter, and is an unnatural creature whose main weakness, the sun, was several hours away from rising. And yet, I placed my hands on the silver cross around my neck and said a prayer to the Almighty. 'Lord, may we have the strength to overcome this darkest hour. May you sharpen our axes and our minds into your weapons against the beast and his horde.' The remaining two repeated with me as we walked down towards the room that I thought would be our tomb."

"The vampire lord gestured to his concubines, they slipped past us and closed the grand door behind us and locked it with a wooden bar. Though we were at a disadvantage I kept my hands on my cross and weapon. The lord clapped his hands and another vampiress came from one of the side doors connecting the room, she carried a porcelain plate, on top was a violet bottle of wine and a few glasses. 'You must be quite parched gentlemen, riding from your town was a journey and a half. Then you had to fight a few of my mistresses, why if I was you and not who I am.' He paused, 'I'm fairly certain I'd be dead. But enough chatter, come, drink, be merry, I'll even let my own girls escort you to more private chambers. For tomorrow night, your town will be added to my growing kingdom.' He smiled again. As another friend of mine, Robert Goodell was escorted away to one of the side-rooms by the two vampiresses who had locked us in. 'That is unless you believe you can resist me. Because you can't, your god may be a powerful being, but he holds not a single candle to me. Not on my land, not

in my castle, and especially not in this room.' He took up three glasses, wine flowed into each of them and walked toward the two of us."

"I frantically began trying to think of some way out, something I'd missed from the legend or from this ruined castle. A weakness in his defenses, but there were none. We were outmanned and outsmarted, had I waited until dawn we may have beaten him. In defeat, I held my head low as I accepted a glass from him. I knew it was poisoned, but I didn't care, I had no choice and I would die here. 'A toast to a new age, to a new rule, and to Satan, may his glory be as bright as the night is dark...' It was then, my remaining partner in this crusade, Luke Vanegas, curled his fingers around his glass. The brave fool didn't care about the odds, and as the vampire spoke, he threw his glass into the lord's face. He wasted no time and hurled himself against the monster. His sword about to plunge into the fiend's heart, when the vampire lord laughed. He rose himself off the floor, grabbed Luke's neck and laughed as he crushed his throat in his grip."

"He held him aloft and squeezed him like a sponge, Luke's blood streamed out into the monster's mouth, once drained the lord tossed him against the wall. Luke's body crumpled to the floor, forgotten by the beast as though his life was nothing more than a snack before the feast. 'What a rude little creature, I need a new glass.' I offered him mine as an apology and he accepted, proud he had convinced a priest of G-d to ignore his dead comrade and offer him a drink. 'Well, then shall I resume the toast? To a new age, to a new dusk, my kingdom shall be eternal under the red skies of Hell.' And then he gulped the wine down. I tossed my drink to the side, grabbed my hammer, stake and dagger. He would have laughed at my attempt had he not found himself falling into a stupor and to the floor unconscious."



“Luke in his sacrifice had given me time. I turned my back as he distracted the beast and poured in the holy water, garlic, salt, and herbs. The vampire as he got up was too drunk on his own power to notice. The only issue was another vampire was in the room waiting to strike me before I had the chance to slay her master. But it would seem the Lord was fortunate, as he granted me another miracle in the form of a lady’s scream. One of her sister’s must have been attacked by Robert, she flew away quickly hardly noticing her master comatose on the floor. And so, I found a nook in that vampire’s chest for my stake. I readied my hammer and beat it inside with all the strength G-d had given to me. I bashed and pounded it inside hearing his ribs crack as I went. With that done, I had one last task, I took my axe and dagger and plunged both into his neck. I chopped and hacked for everyone who had been turned, for everyone who had passed, for all my friends, and for the innocent this monster had devoured. As I poured my lantern oil on his head, it occurred to me how much he had changed. His complexion had rotted into a ghoulish green, his cheeks bloated, and his luxurious hair had decayed into something like rat tails. I lit a match and burned his head to ash.”

“I looked up to see one of vampireesses in the doorway, her mouth was slick with blood and her arms were temporarily wounded. Enraged, she threw her full weight at me. My chest felt crushed as she tried to claw at my neck, too bad for her I had blocked them with my now bloody arms. With my left arm, I elbowed her back and beat her skull with my hammer. I bashed again and again, hoping for some respite. Finally, she revived a bit too slowly and I staked her. I chopped her head off and set it aflame.”

“My chest shocked me every time I collapsed on a wall, my arms enflamed and sore, but I continued onward for there was work to be done.” He ripped at the bandage, tearing at the bloodless wound while drinking the last bit of mixture in the bottle. It tasted as bitter as a vegetable grown in rocky soil. “I found Robert’s corpse and the two vampireesses, they were staked on the bed, but not yet beheaded. I noticed he’d been bitten as well, I chopped their heads and burned them with his lamp oil. I walked downstairs, almost slipping, catching myself on the wall in pain as I went. I couldn’t find William, but instead found a door we had missed. It led to the crypt.”

“There were several coffins with vampireesses sleeping here. If I wasn’t determined to end this, I might have broken down on the floor and cried. How many had that fiend turned? How

many had my foolish rationality killed? Too many, but at least I was here now to end this, so they'd be free. I began staking them one by one, chopping them off two by two. A total of sixteen, had they awoken I would have been finished. Two more remained, before me was a scarlet haired vampiress. Her moon-white skin entrancing me in my delirious state as I staked her. I didn't even notice as a pair of cold lips kissed my neck."

"I turned to see another raven haired vampiress, perhaps the one who had claimed William had woken up from her slumber. Some warmth glowed in my chest, before departing to my neck and out of my body altogether. Coldness claimed my fingers and hands. My legs froze as blood was drained out of them and into her mouth. On instinct, I raised my hammer and bashed it against her face as if I was crushing a mosquito. She fell and so did I as I staked her. I chopped their heads off and crawled up the stairs to the ballroom where I'm sure I will die as I fear it is too late for me."

He moved his hand to his neck, trying to find what had been making him itch, his green eyes opened wide as he searched for the holes where the vampiress had bitten him. He looked at his now shivering hands, the bottle was empty, he had drank the whole mixture. His skin was frigid even though no wind blew here in the ballroom. *I wasn't bitten, he thought, there's no mark, there's no mark. I drank the whole mixture, no undead could do that without falling into an unconscious state. No, I wasn't...* he glanced at his red stained palm. He knew the truth, as the silver cross around his neck began to burn.

He picked up his gun and placed it against his still warm, beating heart. He had loaded it with silver bullets, difficult to forge, but it would kill any weakened vampire or man turning into one. *May I join my flock in your Kingdom, my G-d,* he thought as he pulled the trigger. Down the corridor, up the stairs and in the throne room lay the lord's body. His head had been burned to ash, but his body laid only a few feet away, his left hand closed into a tight fist. Inside, the flesh had melted as several silver bullets were buried into his palm.

Dispatched From Across the Seas

Emily Nayyer

Dearest,

Unfathomable feelings of pure bliss have been streaming through my veins, circling around my hammering heart. Dare I say that the piano notes flowing out of the neighboring window are no longer irritants as they drift and swirl in sync with the swaying of the slender branches above? For the morning dew that creeps up onto the wings of the ladybugs drowsily sitting on the tips of the uncut grass has become an embrace of the day ahead rather than a protest against.

Without you, there is no stillness. The crows screech and circle around children whose hair flutters behind as they rise up and above the wood chipped ground with their miniscule feet stretched out in front. The wind ruffles the sand that sneaks between one's gritted teeth and the leaves of the willow tree have but a glimpse of what a rippleless pond is like as the breeze holds its breath. The waves rise and fall within seconds from their stilled elegance.

I wonder... are you the eyelash I wished upon by the bowed oak tree where the shadows are freckled by the gushing sun rays that push past its silhouetted branches? For that was when I knew that you are the one I leap for rather than hop. The one that makes my heart beat like a drum at the brink of a crescendo. The one that allows me to stand on the rumbling train tracks without the slightest hint of fluttering butterfly wings.

As the leaves take on the colors of the newly blossomed, I pray that the chill I feel by my side will take on a warmer touch before the unseasoned blades take on the faces of the old. I await to feel the impressions of your words that I yearn to come out of silence but for now, I relish the many letters you have sent thus far.

Forever and always,
Jane



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Isabel Abdallah

Charlotte Armstrong

Christian Bostrup

Dhwani Chheda

Jena Corea

Cecil Craig

Kevin Dix

Kate Eaton

Sharyn Gladstone

Elisabeth Goemaere

Casey Grosjean

K.P. Hubbard

Jacqueline Janusis

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Kate Miano

Emily Nayyer

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