“The dream reveals the reality, which conception lags behind. That is the horror of life - the terror of art.” - Franz Kafka
There's a moment in John Cheever's story "The Swimmer" where Neddy, the protagonist, is poised at the edge of a highway waiting to cross and continue his quest to swim across the city.

"Had you gone for a Sunday afternoon ride that day you might have seen him, close to naked, standing on the shoulders of Route 424, waiting for a chance to cross. You might have wondered if he was the victim of foul play, had his car broken down, or was he merely a fool. Standing barefoot in the deposits of the highway - beer cans, rags, and blowout patches - exposed to all kinds of ridicule, he seemed pitiful... Why, believing as he did, that all human obduracy was susceptible to common sense, was he unable to turn back?"

Kafka has an answer, if you take Neddy as a writer. In front and behind him there's a great peril which must be navigated in a state of total vulnerability, of near nakedness. A feverish dream which can, at the outset, seem futile, purposeless, absurd. We find Neddy near the end of that dream, surrounded by detritus and dust, conscious of the enormity of his task, of its many and nuanced difficulties. Nevertheless, despite the susceptibility of obduracy to common sense, Neddy moves forward, driven by an inexplicable desire to finish what he began. He writes, and through that act, comes closer to the "horror of life" that awaits him at his journey's end. His is the same spirit of the young writers who give this journal both its heart and its strength.

Now, more than ever, the act of reading and creating literature performs an essential, exploratory and cathartic function in human life. We at Sink Hollow are privileged indeed to have the opportunity to participate in and expand that process. Thank you for reading, we hope you stay a while.

Ethan Trunnell
Editor
## Poetry

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Design, Layout, and Typesetting by Ethan Trunnell
Everyone Else is Out Having Fun

Jennie Frost

And I’m at home wishing I was someone who liked tea. If there was bread in my oven, it would be store-bought and buttered. There’s a smell in my apartment that borders on dead mouse and spoiled Ramen noodles. I heard a girl complain about company licking her salt lamp, so I bought three. There was a time in my prepubescence when I imagined myself at my current age as a tall, blonde cheerleader. Sometimes I only shower once a week. Some of my relationships seem like looking through Saran wrap at lamplight. I once dressed a dead squirrel in pink cloth and took its body home in a Styrofoam cooler. There is a bar somewhere in some town with lines of women and men just waiting to dance. And I’m at home making lists, pouring garlic salt over microwaved green beans, drinking pink-flavored vodka in cranberry juice cocktail. My partner moved to another country and found himself. Every time I drink tea I wish it was coffee. My brother came to terms with his masculinity. I’d never heard anyone cry harder. I dated someone so I could feel anything but drunk. I have a pile of books that I keep on my desk that I’ll never read, but I hope someone else does because I read the preface, and they could use the insight. There is a line of bright-faced kids lined up for the bus, thumbs in pockets, conscious as rising dough, the sun behind them, flush with a mother’s pride.
Cycle
Megan Olsen

Her entrance feels more like an exit. Tubes shuck her nose of debris. Tiny fingers curl. Akathisia forces trembling withdrawals from her mother’s medication. At home, she cries. The witching hour filled with screams. Gasping and gulping, pink skin opening and closing. They try sugar water. They try hairdryers. They try washing machines. Finally, she falls asleep on the master bed. Daddy hovers over her, watching her sleep. He places both hands on each side of her small body, and with force, pushes down on the mattress. “If she is going to wake me up in the night, I’m going to show her how it feels,” he says. She hides behind her mother at parties, afraid to talk to the other kids. She wakes up and there is pee between her legs. She sits on the toilet for hours. She’s not allowed off until she has done her business properly. Her stomach cramps. Her bottom has a “U” shaped bruise. She pushes. Nothing. It’s spring and there’s a brand-new pink bike with tassels for her birthday. New plastic shoes, slick on March’s wet grass. Her heel slips from the pedal and she falls, ruins her dress, her white tights stained with blood. Her father takes her shoes away. Wet feet. Wet knees. Wet cheeks.

Her entrance feels more like an exit. In her lunchbox is a note that says, “Have a great first day at school, baby! I love you.” She only eats her chocolate pudding. She tries to imagine her mother’s face, but then the bell rings. Daddy tells her to start sucking her stomach in. She tries to do a handstand on the grass. Some of her friends take dance and have skinny legs and new clothes and minivans. The clouds look like they are sucking swinging children into the air. She falls on her head. Her parents teach her a new word: Divorce. Things start to double. Two rooms. Two winter jackets. Two birthdays. She is afraid to ride her bike. The word “goodbye” becomes usual. In the bathtub she feels between her legs. She pushes. Her muscles are strong and soft. Her blood becomes translucent in water. On her birthday, her mother takes her to buy a bra, but none of them fit. She buys one anyway so she can hide her swollen nipples.
Her entrance feels more like an exit. There are missing pills under Wednesday and Friday, but Thursday remains closed. She moves in with him and they eat pudding and potato chips for dinner. A rubber band loops through the hole and around the button of her pants. She isn’t used to the size of her breasts. A picture of a fuzzy fetus hangs on the fridge. He buys her a ring so the nurses won’t whisper. Her pelvis is strong. She pushes. Pushes for two hours. The baby bones her head into the world. Her eyes are black. She feels her stomach collapse. She comes home and eats nothing but strawberries and drinks nothing but milk. Every morning, he brings her a cup of coffee and puts in on her nightstand. While bathing, she holds a mirror between her legs. The black stitches look like spider legs. She is afraid to go to the bathroom. She goes to bed alone, listening to the sound of his fingers typing. His laptop has a password she cannot guess. The baby sleeps in between them at night. Her left breast hangs out of her shirt. She wakes in the night and sees her husband’s penis in the glare of the computer screen. In front of the full-length mirror, she tries to suck in her stomach. The skin hangs like loose ground beef.

Her daughter’s footprints lead from her car to her father’s house. Her cold nose runs as she drives away. Goodbyes become typical. She waxes the wood floors over the weekend. There are two cardboard boxes that have “Old Clothes” written on the side. An empty condom wrapper sits on her nightstand; she throws it away and checks her messages. One bowl and one spoon is set out for dinner. Milk curdles under heat. Brown bubbles pop in the pot. She loses her appetite. The cat is sleeping on her heated blanket. She rolls it up and rests it on her tender abdomen. Black blood clots drip into the toilet. Her daughter comes home to find her folded in half. The hospital smells like new plastic and rotting skin. There’s a black bruise along her vein. She pushes the tube. Her pee collects in a bag hanging from the bed. She is afraid to reach down and touch herself. She asks the doctor if he will put it in a jar for her, and the doctor laughs. Her daughter reads a magazine she isn’t interested in. Instruments are lined up neatly in a row. She thinks she can taste chocolate in the air. She thinks about dark, curly hair. They place a plastic mask over her nose. Her exit feels more like an entrance.
Bailee Jones  The World I See
Breathing, blacked
under useless canvas
constellationed ceiling, muse
cloaked truth, slicked sheen sight in wett-ed
eyes showing way-it-is— see-through speech
— “life is empty am free,” seeing-through
me;
this blood libertied
by this try; star
dusted chilling yes-
terdays larged dust brushed, merged
all along lilting loned, n’er
requited immensity, there
to stare— wonder when we want to talk
to God here; lull of misting
trees, green, teemed
live ly, sunstruck porch, resonant
glean
in the evening spring, lifting, heaved
all to angelic ease, almost
-alright, water to me,
dead bugs drift along glossed surface
stream
baked forsaked warmed gleamed, denied
demise, and with that smite to remind
us cut-deep idled things, of our
fiery

destinies

and clouds

sift along like godly sen tries,

you ebb soft in neared div-

ine scene, smiling serened

"...think it might rain." careless, smoke one

and swifts skim along showing off

twisting in eights and shapes

blissed in- different, ab scented

like shined weaving palms in wind

lovelied skip wondrous spirit ed

free and stupid
Freedom, Wisconsin
Alaina Pepin

Last month, Sarah cut her ex-boyfriend’s lip with a Walmart diamond on her clenched fist. She caught him at the Comfort Suites with Kelly. I guess he got tired of the midnight shifts, of sleeping in cold sheets.

Sarah stretches her bare feet on my porch. I heard she’s got a new man now and he’s all car grease and meth. As my cup of tea clinks my teeth, I wonder why she’s wearing a sweater in June. I don’t ask because it’s rude.

Anyhow, church was buzzing this morning. Sarah’s a celebrity, not the first, not the last. Her apple pie won at the county fair, she quit her job, and her teeth are whiter than the altar boys’ robes.
When You’re Colorblind
Andrew Fletcher

Cleaning bloodstains out of the carpet is difficult when you are red-green colorblind. You can’t really see the spots mixed with the gray-black speckled shag carpet. I mean the big spot is clear. It’s much darker. Almost red. But the droplets that get scattered around it are really hard to see. She says it isn’t a big deal if there are a few splotches. She just doesn’t want it to stain permanently. Doesn’t want it to stain permanently. You clean her first, those stains are easy to see. Just a small cut on the scalp, you smile at her, no big deal. She apologizes for her face as you lift her back into bed. You put your hand on her too-soft, too-warm arm. Thin bones under thin skin. Give it a pat. Maybe two. And you don’t know whether you should stay and cheer her up, crack a joke, or leave and maintain her dignity. You leave the room. But she calls you back. Shouldn’t let the carpet stain. You say maybe you should move the dresser away from beside the bed.
No other place to put it. No room.
She apologizes again for her face, for her eyes.
She has been vomiting again. Her skin bruises so easily.
Little blotches bloom all over her arms,
you know they’re probably purple or dark red,
but they’re just black to you. Her eyes and her arms.
You scrub again at the floor.
You can’t tell if you get it all, but the paper towels
are stained pink and blotchy. Probably pink.
When you’re done you carry them behind your back
to the trash,
and ask your brother to check the floor
for spots.
James Taylor  Angels of a Different Kind
San Bernabe
Brian Czyzyk

We are yellowed splints
of pine warped by constant sun.
Your tongue tastes of ash,
and my hair comes loose in your palms.

Before the drought, we were
flank steaks and troughs
of gravy. We were belly

buttons dripping over waistbands.
We shined each other
with greased palms, with olive
oil, with spit. Now, we are

scabbed elbows and lanugo
hair. We are copper teeth
and sandy mouths. If only

we had measured every grain
punched into dough.
If only we had collected
the sweat from our sheets
and drenched the vineyard with it.

Now, I press my palm to yours,
my forehead to yours. I mutter
a prayer—not for rain—
but that I am enough blood
to slake your thirst, enough meat
to help you beat away the buzzards.

I pray that my grit will enter you,
and you’ll trudge somewhere
where shadows will canopy you,
where you can get sticky
juicing grapes, where you can
wet your lips on fat
slices of honeycrisp.
Last Prayer of a Westboro Contradiction

Patrick Ramsay

Father,
the sign reads God hates fags
and they taught me how to hold it
before they taught me how to spell
my middle name. J-o-s-e-p-h, Joseph.
My biblical namesake, he was different too.

Given a coat of many colors, his brothers
loathed him for it. As a teenager,
my wrists were red with irony
from the technicolor transgressions I wore underneath
my white dress shirt and black tie at Sunday services. You cannot fast your way out
of this one, believe me, I have tried
surviving on sacrament bread alone.
Dear Father, the edges of your signs are sharp.
We are your children who did not choose
our parents and cannot help our penchants.

We are Josephs punished for colors,
Jonathans punished for pleasures,
Davids punished for coveting Jonathans.
As a young man,

I grew tired of praying to a god
that taught my neighbors how to hate me lovingly — eternally. Downward gazing Christ paintings guilting me for jerking off on a Sunday. Worshipping myself

and men made in God’s image. Finally gorging myself on something more substantial than the body of thy son. Dear Father, the edges of your signs are sharp and it is time for me to heal my holy wounds without you. Amen.
Tuesday Morning
Patrick Ramsay

My lips are tired athletes, and I’m proud of that. He’s still in bed after I’ve rinsed him off my body, stretching and shifting and tempting into morning under the skin-stippling draught of an open window. I need underwear. Top left drawer, he rasps. It’s laundry day, but take what you can find. The landscape of his waking body is a protest to my self-promise of a productive Tuesday. But I’m going to be late, so I settle for a passing slap on the ass as I head out of the bedroom. Almost like we’re on the same team. Almost like we’re playing the same sport. I wonder what it would be called as I drive slow down South Temple contemplating the novelty of a borrowed jockstrap.
James Taylor  Dreams and Disasters
Envisioning You, Johnny, instead Dying in a Car Wreck

Bruce Hakes Jr.

There you laid knotted round a stop sign
in a coffin made of minced glass auto-debris blood oil
on an Easter evening your parents were sure
you all had enough fish bread water—atonement—
for a year and thought after church festivities
a steak dinner was essential to fatten up
your ascetically fleshy skinny spirit enclosures,
to stretch your achingly staunched stomachs.

Neither they nor He could prophesize a blown redlight;
a recently divorced father of two drunk driving
to the poetry of the silence of a radio turned off,
the ruff language of a bagged bottle between his knees.

What did you think before your kidlike face pierced
first through the windshield, when you were spiraling
between your Adam and Eve, to meet the serpent
on the sideoftheroad, to bite the unforgiving concrete.

Did God save you the troubles of knowing?
Hope you were laughing at one of your dad’s odd jokes, your mom’s jauntily awkward laughter as he swerved at 60 to avoid ruining another family’s Eden like he did his only to thwart yours east of the garden.

Johnny, were the firefighters, paramedics, who fathers, who soon to be daddies, gentle when they unknotted your ungodly bent bones from the slim steel pole? Were you alive then or were you already skybound?

Did God save you the troubles of pain?

The many walks after class after you left were done on worm-eaten wooden prosthetics.

The many rides alone on the yellow bus were just high doses of electroshocktherapy.

The many faces I mistook for your face were just the false masks of a Godnotthere.
Sapling
Braxton Thornley

Dance dear sapling--
the wind only breaks
what’s rigid
James Taylor

When Worlds Meet
I’m not Fire Island
Rachel Donahue

I want to drink you in
in wild gulps

kneeling in the ocean

I want to know you,
like the dips in my own collarbone

our thighs quivering like the
sea foam in the wind

I’ll drink in the ocean with a crash

and when I walk away

I’ll be left again
sucking the salt
from in between my teeth,

hoping my own wet
can quench my thirst
Blessing List
Haley Kapp

Ambassador Scholarship
Out of a thousand applicants, they chose me. And I met him. I met Tyler. Clearly God had a plan for us. Tyler said that every Sunday on our walk home from church. He didn’t know that after we started talking, I begged God “let me love him.” For months I tried for Tyler’s attention, pled that his eyes would rest on me.

He had a girlfriend when we first met. I didn’t know.

I’m athletic
All-American for high school soccer and basketball. Worked out at morning and night for subtle lines on my abdomen, telling him I had a six pack when I flexed.

I tensed them one night, right around two in the morning, when he pulled up my shirt. Straddling his hips, nervous and thrilled. Showing that I, at least, hadn’t lied. We had sex for the first time that night.

My body
34DDD and a size six waistline. “A porn star’s body” is what he called it, and I became so damn proud of that. Before him, I wanted them chopped off, wanted a more proportionate body. My mom had gotten her breasts reduced too. “They’re unattractive” she would say (did a man tell her that?), and I believed it for eighteen years. But Tyler couldn’t keep himself away from my chest: his eyes, his hands, his kisses.

Three months into our relationship, he told me about his addictions. Asked me to play a role he had seen on screen.
My hands
I had beautiful long fingers with perfect bedded nails. Gentle enough I could love how I wanted. Firm enough I could love the way he already knew how.

Tyler would crack my knuckles. I hated it, would beg him not to. But he kept doing it. Wrapped up in this fake love—scared I’d set him off and he would leave me—I never made him stop.

My parents
My parents and I always had a strong relationship. They took me on nights out those weekends I didn’t have my own date. I did what they asked of me, my whole life. Around the same time I met Tyler, my sister was diagnosed with severe OCD and anxiety disorders. Every conversation with my mom and dad became focused on her. Tyler: the escape route I pleaded for at night...

My mom called me early one morning, crying. When I asked what was wrong, she struggled taking words off her trembling tongue. “A voice-mail... from you... last night... Asking Tyler... asking him... to screw you harder.” My parents and I didn’t talk until the breakup.

My voice
We sang an entire cd full of love songs in the car. At the end of the mix, a voice came on the blown speakers. “Happy Valentine’s Day, baby,” she giggled. I already knew the voice. I turned on Tyler and said her name, asked him why on February 16th, the cd surfaced. Told him “cut the lies” when he could respond.

“I told you, my sister recorded that for her husband.” He lied anyway, and I let him.
My roommates
They said if we didn’t end up together, then love didn’t exist and everyone should just quit searching for it. They talked about us with confidence, asked me for set ups with his friends. He didn’t have any.

Later they told me about the other girl—her golden eyes, tight biceps, how her long, curled hair bounced while she slinked around the room. They told me how her dimples pressed into those cheeks, as sharp as the tears that filled my eyes. Told me what they heard he did to her.

The LDS church
He fucked me for the last time a night before first attending the Mormon temple. Running late for a family meeting, he stopped by my apartment for a quick screw. I cried the whole time, pleaded “don’t go tomorrow.” Told him how wrong he would feel there, for our immorality. “You’re right, Haley. You’re holding me back from my full potential.” I lay there, raw from friction and naked on the floor when he walked out.

Tyler left to serve the church—preaching against abuse, addiction, premarital sex... preaching repentance—a few months later.

My Bishop
I went and saw him a few days after Tyler left. I didn’t know why, I had come because it was expected of me. I just sat and stared and nodded when he asked me about my sins. I let him talk at me. He said that boys will be boys, that Tyler would find the right path. He told me “think—if Tyler and I swapped positions, if I had left with transgressions on a mission—would I feel I deserved Tyler’s forgiveness when I came home?”

This man I didn’t know shoved words through my gritted teeth, into my defrauded mouth before I could make a conclusion of my own: “Yes, you would.” But I knew now that I couldn’t let him.

Write down a blessing list, he said. “The things you know you should be thankful for.”
Bailee Jones  An Apple A Day
A Rearranging
Clay Meek Whisler

For J.

Apartment three’s a drab disaster
By decree of hardened eyes, my tonic.
Look around: The August sunlight stripping
Gray from weathering sofa seats,
Afternoon after dragging afternoon.
And the off-center Edison, alive,
Dangling over my dining table,
Like God. Ever-watching, all knowing,
Beholding me, the rover on the rocks,
And everyone wild enough to dare
Step through our door. My poor possessions,
Locked in at their angles, subject to scenes
Unsuitable for seven-year-olds,
Calamitous for twenty-one year olds.
We enacted them all the same—Blindsides,
Pesticides, and the whorish beguile.
We all still try forgetting last year.

Dangling light be damned. Call the boys!
Rip down the drapes! Toss them to the wayside
And wastebasket. Replace them with jazz,
And burlap and opened old windows!
When they arrive, we’ll stand collected
On the staircase, creating, conceiving
Every possible topography:
Of the living room, and bedroom alike,
And the scanty-stocked kitchen. We’ll flip clocks
And coffee sacks, swap herbs for swiveling
Fans, upgrade stained sheets for costly fibers.
I’ll empty my pockets for this.
Revive that white slipcover from the closet!
I’m going to re-virginize the ottoman.
Flop it all! Flop rug and votive candle.
Flop lantern and armchair and shelf of poems.

Breathe in the dust all aflutter, baby.
I’m going to tear this place apart,
Labor through daylight, through moonlight, and wound—
Mother showed me how to do it right—
And once we’ve finished, when it’s all made new
You won’t recognize you ever slept here.
untitled excerpt from “The Good House & The Bad House”

Doe Parker

my body a refrigerator
organs / jar of tomato sauce
my dad was raised where they salted the road
he could touch under the brake pedal.

i pull myself open. a ball of yarn
rolling across hardwood, eventually stalling in the dust.
all these cups of water grew into ice cubes
i bent out of plastic.

the slack of a loop of yarn
held wide as an armspan / so much valley.
succulent, a desert plant / word used like decadent.

carton of eggs, bundle of lettuce,
cut with a large knife. wrinkle of tissue
falling into wet green ribbons. hands in a bowl
tossing with oil poured from the neck
of a metal flute. the note matching the hum of light
only on when the door is open, my back against the shelves
holding the sound open all night
James Taylor
Falling Skies
To Say Goodbye to a Coffin

Kandace James

My spine shifts, desperate
to withdraw from all this husk,

longs to sway in a void
other than the body.

Once again, my flesh,
murky water rushing and

swallowing soil, drags
my clumsy bones back into me

and every vertebrae
scatters; leaving spaces

in my backbone, gaps
within my skin, then clasped

by churning air.
What a brilliant dream I make of it.

What a queer game
they taught me.
To take up all this melanin,
these bones,

and all these gaps;
hold them up to a void

other than my own.
Watch how they soften

in currents.
We slept hidden behind a curtain
of lodgepole pines. You wore spearmint
Chapstick on your neck and goosebumps
down your shoulders like a suit that was tailored
to make me sweat. A pink-grey sun poured
Through and across your bare shoulder blades
as if they were two peaks of an untouched
mountain range. I sat stoic in the quiet of our morning,
waiting, watching 7AM kiss your sleeping back.
Never have I been so jealous of the sun.
The shaded valley of your spine swayed
only with the permission of your breath.
Each inhale teased the space between us,
each exhale called me closer.
You woke to the black capped chickadee song
and greeted me the way you said goodnight,
with wine-soaked, wordless lips.
West
Matthew McKay

Your plastic cup full of beer
should have
a leather jacket, too.
Maybe like yours but
with bloodstains
and softer edges
one where the cow suffered
just a little more
than the
Chinese gentlemen
standing by the side
of the
fucking knot of metal
spewing out
America and
packaging her tiny fingers
up.
Slapneck, Michigan
Alaina Pepin

I was born to a line of downcast eyes and twitching hands on the last day of September. They wrapped me in wool and laid me in a wooden bucket beside the washboard and laundry soap. They scrubbed my skin until it snapped and stretched like the pink bubblegum wedged in their molars. They doused me in Colavita and dipped me in Lake Superior because the church ran out of chrism and holy water. And money. They fed me blueberries and oats mixed with milk. They tied my curls with twine. I scratched my feet on river rock and soaked my dress in sap. I grew up to be apron-clad and barefoot on the scoured pine floor. They taught me to fold my fingers in eggs and flour and to let the men break the bread first. My sister says she’s tired of being poor while I plunge my nails in the dry soil with satisfaction. I dig for cabbage, for peas, for beetles. Sometimes for reasons to leave.
Rebecca Piazza

Rabbit
The Rules of Running the Roads

Melissa Sibley

I once saw Jesus at a rest stop somewhere outside of Marion, North Carolina.

It was the tail-end of summer, 2014, after my sophomore year of college. I was headed back to school, which for me meant a six hour road trip along the backbone of my state. A long drive to make all alone, so I usually talked to myself throughout the trip, thought through possible stories I could write, the latest conversations I’d had, what I would say to my mother if she started asking me questions I wasn’t ready to answer yet.

If I was in a good mood, I imagined that God Himself tuned in to my rambling road thoughts, and I fancied my inner monologue to be something like a prayer.

I’d pulled over that day because it was a warm sunny afternoon and I wanted a moment to breathe in the warm August air that wafted in through my open windows.

The rest stop was bustling with people, young parents and children on vacation, little girls dragging stuffed animals to restrooms and old couples strolling by the fountain while a fat security guard sipped a Coke and kept a lazy watch. I sat on a stiff wooden bench for what felt like hours, watching the people walk by, lost in their own happy little lives. There was no room for anger or confusion here. My blood-red hair shone in the sun and drew attention like a child misbehaving in church.

Finally, after a quick stretch break I threw a quarter in the burbling fountain and tossed the empty container of my “Road Food”—an 8 ounce bottle of Nesquik strawberry milk. I made two wishes on my one quarter cause I figured by now that God owed me one.
A minute later, I pulled out of the long diagonal slot in my small SUV, rolled my windows back up and mentally prepared myself for another hour or so of driving. My attention was so focused on getting back on the highway that I didn’t notice the giant truck come lumbering up the wrong exit ramp until I was staring it right in the headlights. In a split second, I said a prayer for real—God get me through this—and swerved right as hard as I dared. The truck roared by on my left side and scraped the Fire Engine Red paint from my front bumper. My hands shook in the driver’s seat as I pulled my vehicle to a hurried stop. The other driver slowed his car as well, a massive green pickup truck that looked like it had aspirations of becoming a Hummer when it grew up. The blocky mirrors on the truck stuck out so far they looked like landing gear.

From what I could tell the occupants were a father and son pair, both looking frantic and gesturing wildly as they spoke to each other in the front seat.

I jumped from my car, unharmed, though somehow I felt the impact in every sinew and ligament in my left side. The giant truck shivered. Its driver’s side door flew open with a creak and a slam. The son got out but the father did not.

The driver lurched over to me while I knelt by my bumper, examining the long, violent scratches on my car. The rest stop seemed quiet now; the birds had stopped singing.

The closer he got, the more I realized that the man looked exactly like Jesus.

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My mother has a unique saying for everything, from words that make sense but leave a terrible taste in your mouth like “slickum,” in reference to condiments on a sandwich, to words that must be entirely of her own invention, like “vomick” in place of the word “vomit.” If my mother is par-
particularly angry at me, she will most likely invoke my favorite expression, “running the roads.”

She always uses this in reference to me and my tendency to drive around town “with no good reason at all.” “You’d save a lot more money if you quit running the roads at all hours of the night!” she’d scream at me on the phone while I sat in my dorm room, cowering. “Why do you do it, why are you driving so much? What’s wrong with you?”

I think what she was really asking me was what do you have to be running from all the time?

***

Earlier that summer, I told God to mind his own business when I started the disastrous period of my life that I refer to as “that time I tried to internet date.”

I felt desperate at the time, loose around the edges. It felt wrong to be banished to the depths of such an inane practice, but I saw no other choice; there were no gay-friendly areas within three or four hours of my small hometown. I could imagine what my mother might say in an alternate universe where we could talk about such things—If there’s nowhere for it to be done, then God doesn’t want you to do it.

For my whole life, God has told me what He does and doesn’t want me to do. At least, His people have told me the rules. At nineteen, it finally occurred to me that maybe it was people that had been putting words in God’s mouth, not the other way around. Maybe all those years of vacation Bible school, Sunday church lessons, Wednesday night youth groups, and Friday morning chapel services had simply made me desensitized.

A few months before my meeting with rest stop Jesus I’d finally started admitting to myself my less-than-Godly feelings for the same sex. I had been a Good Christian girl up till then, never stepped out of line or spoke out of turn. I remember being sixteen years old and describing myself as
“submissive” to my high school principal, being proud about it, like it was a good thing, because God told us to be humble and obedient, especially the girls.

***

The first Internet Girl I met in real life scared the shit out of me. Her name was Mona, and I only knew a few things about her—she had a massive pile of long dark hair that hung past her hips, multiple piercings, and a mother that didn’t care about her at all. And she was attracted to girls, like me.

I drove half an hour to a Dunkin’ Donuts in Havelock, NC, to meet her. My hands shook during the whole drive. I told my mother that I was going to hang out with one of the girls I knew from work. There was no way I could go without lying to her about it, which made my already anxious mind creep into overdrive. Multiple times I thought about turning around and going home, but I felt in my bones that doing so would only postpone this day, not eliminate it.

I met Mona for coffee. This particular Dunkin’ Donuts was situated right beside the airport, so as I parked I could hear airplanes take off and land, the sound so loud it appeared to echo off every building and car on the crappy strip mall. Mona ordered a fancy frozen latte. I got a regular black coffee. I never went to Dunkin’ Donuts; I had no idea what you were supposed to order there.

“I’m so glad you could come,” she said. Mona held her giant coffee in one hand, wearing jeans and a t-shirt, looking for all the world like she belonged there. I wore my best black lace romper, too much makeup, my hair freshly dyed and curled around my face. I was clearly overdressed.

Until that summer I had kept my hair blond, never wore makeup, and assembled outfits out of goofy mismatched sweaters and shorts over colorful tights. I always thought they went together well even though friends
and teachers liked to make jokes about them. This summer I fashioned a version of myself that looked polished but cold. I appeared put together, yes, but one tug at the right place at the right time would’ve pulled me right apart.

I said, “Me too,” to Mona, but I didn’t really mean it. I felt squirrelly, hunted, watched, like I was on some terrible reality show. Why did I come here again? Mona was very open to talking about her sexuality; she seemed relaxed about it in a way that I couldn’t imagine. She wore a rainbow button on her t-shirt; I couldn’t even say the word “lesbian” out loud without visible pain and discomfort.

For her part Mona tried to lighten the mood—she made jokes about coming out to her friends, talked about all the different girls she’d dated, and insisted that if I stuck around, I would “love the things she could do with her tongue ring.” All the while I sat silent with caged eyes, excused myself to go to the bathroom three times, and constantly surveyed the store as if my mother were going to come rampaging through the doors at any moment.

***

Gay. The idea was an abomination in my church, and a joke in my household, if it was ever mentioned at all. Some of my earliest memories of the concept of “gay” are images of my mother, cleaning the house while listening to Clay Aiken on the stereo, talking about how “what a shame” it was that he turned out to be a “queer,” how disgusting, how sad. My mother, sitting on the green couch in our living room in the near-dark, watching Ellen Degeneres dance around tables, saying “she’s a queer, you know.”

I didn’t know, had no idea what that really meant, just that gay was bad, dirty, something to keep secret.

And I did keep it secret, even from myself, until finally in college
my world expanded past my dark living room and my private Christian school and I realized the feelings I pushed down would follow me around. For more than a year, and that summer in particular, I could not reconcile the meek girl I was with the questioning, volatile, confused person who was seeping out of my skin. Nothing made me feel better. Crying only dried my eyes out, getting angry only left me with ripped sweaters I could never mend, and no matter how many times I cut and dyed and re-dyed my hair, I never left the salon with the feeling that I’d gotten what I came there for.

I did not beg God for forgiveness because I was not sure yet if this was something that I wanted to be forgiven for.

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“Are you okay?” Mona asked. “You look like you’re being stalked.”

I felt like I was being stalked. “Does it get any better?” I asked. It was so vague, but I thought she might understand what I meant.

It was quiet for a moment. For some reason there was a gaggle of people in Dunkin’ Donuts right then, about 2 o’clock on a Tuesday afternoon, and they’d all chosen this moment to hush their conversations and look to their cell phones. It was so quiet I could hear the sound of coffee and ice making its way from Mona’s cup to her mouth as she took a pull from her drink. Her piercings winked at me in the glint from the sun shining in through the window.

“I don’t know if it gets better,” she said, toying with the piercing in her eyebrow. “But it does get easier.”

I didn’t exactly feel uplifted, but I did feel a little more relaxed after that. I mentioned my overly religious mother, my workaholic tendencies, my obsession with obtaining the perfect shade of red hair. Mona seemed amused by all of it. For a little while I felt calm, in control, like maybe I could do this, this whole gay thing.
“I should probably get going,” I said, even though I had blocked out precisely six hours for this particular outing and I was only midway through hour number 2. I was ready to leave, ready to get moving again.

As I was getting up to leave it hit me once more what was at stake—what my mother would do if she had any clue what I had really been doing, the way she would call me “queer” like she had Clay Aiken and Ellen, the fights we would have, the quiet sham of a life that would be impossible for me to continue. I thought of God and wondered if He would still listen to my rambled road prayers if he knew who I really was. I sobbed. In the middle of Dunkin’ Donuts, in front of this Internet Girl I’d never met before, I sobbed and ruined all that makeup I had so painstakingly applied just hours before.

Mona was infinitely too nice about being cried on by a stranger. She patted my back and went to the bathroom to get me paper towels. I sat there mopping my eyes in Dunkin’ Donuts, wishing I’d worn considerably less eyeliner. No one was even looking at me. I wasn’t sure what strange new world I had entered, where someone like me, a girl who kept her emotions locked up tighter than the devil’s choker, could end up crying in front of a strange lesbian with mammoth hair and a tongue piercing.

Regardless, after my eyes were dry I crawled up into the lap of my car and ran the roads for another hour at least. I wasn’t ready to slow down and let my feelings catch up with me, and the road wasn’t ready to give me up just yet.

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Back at the rest stop, Jesus was getting closer.

Rest Stop Jesus had a long, scraggly beard, watery brown eyes, and he looked truly, unfathomably sad. He had some weird lined tattoo on the sides of his neck, something long and angular that reminded me of the gills on a shark. He tried to speak to me, but his words came out in a sloppy, bro-
“So sorry,” he said with his hands waving in the air. “Did not see you!”
“You were going the wrong way!” I looked at Jesus hard in the face.
“You could’ve killed someone.”

Jesus looked appropriately guilty. He reached into his pocket and pulled out something square, shiny, and teal. It took me a minute to figure out it was his wallet. He was rooting around in the different compartments when I backed up and shook my head.

“Forget about it,” I said and shooed him away.

I didn’t want money or retribution from Jesus anyway.

He for one looked extremely relieved. “Thank you, thank you!” he said, and the wallet disappeared. Instead he fished out a piece of paper from his shirt pocket. It was a pamphlet: “Your Real Reward Waits in Heaven.” The image on the cover depicted a thoughtful looking blonde heterosexual couple, their faces turned up towards the sky, the background littered with grey clouds and peppered with white doves. I must have seen hundreds of flyers like this throughout my life, but this one looked especially washed out—the colors were faded, the paper felt worn, even the text looked blurry, as if it had been printed on a machine that was running out of ink.

I took the paper and for a second pretended to be grateful. I had a smile on my face and Jesus had started to walk away but I couldn’t let Him. I was so tired of pretending.

“I’m gay!” I yelled at his retreating back. “I’m gay!” Jesus looked back at me like I was crazy. For all I knew, he didn’t even know what the word meant. I said it one more time, louder, like maybe that would help him understand. “I’m gay!” Jesus leaped into his massive truck and high-tailed it out of there, taking the correct exit ramp at least. That’s it, I thought. I’m gay. Where is the reward for me?

For months I’d been wondering where Jesus went, if He was even lis-
ting to me anymore, and now I would have to figure out what to do with the possibility that Jesus was too busy traipsing around rest stops off I-40 to give a damn about me.
Tess Cramer

Self-Portrait
Ode to Ambiguity
Zoe Ramos

Whist stilled and shook, buried by moon,
I so wish I could deny what I know
with faith through line breaks—end’s left, thought opened
—and wraithed rights simply to link
corners amidst.

To deny what I know,
the edge of a question, to fall in rough trust.
Misted luster luminates solace broken
in ways more than one; escort seizes
ruptured daybreak.

The edge of the question, rough trust in fined will—
ruellia’s spell, sweet spun kinesthesia,
tastes in ways more than one; escort seizes
billowed lovely ill nectar.

Balsam’s spell is sweet weaved rapture,
stolen conscious sensing for this
seizing—sickened nectar stolen,
swooning mint breeze.

With stolen senses only for this
darkness alived only outside, skin runnels
in stinging mint breeze,
ambrosial pollen breach.
Dirt’s only alived outside, becking dread of life’s end.
Swooning winds, one by one, lose touch—
ambrosial pollen breached in sweetened, liberated organs,
limped leaves of ebon locust dropped.

Lucid eyes lose touch with heat of spaded sun.
All close, cover glowers, and imagine light.
Limped leaves of ebon locust drop
to death. Sasanquas have shared my breath.

I look for cover from glowing, gaped birth
through seed of sunlight, giving reason to be apart, denied.
Sasanquas have shared this wont.
The consequence— life of me gambols and sports.

A reason to delight in flagrant fleshes lacerating
is faith through line breaks of ends left unopened.
The consequence—life of me spurns the branch
like leaves riding wind, shaken free, embraced by moon.
Folding Origami Swans to Cure Emphysema
Mary Maroste

Coughing, you gutted your 2nd deer in the damp & dark garage
& readjusted the horse reins [tubes]
tangled around your head.
A child, I emptied my Velcro wallet
[paper, licked clean of all its sugar buttons]
hoping I could offer enough to shut off the machine
beeping every time you lost breath at night.
[Grandfather, you could have lived longer]
But you still smoked cigars as thick as
my toilet paper roll telescope
while you backpacked your rifle onto the porch
& shot shadows of birds & Play-Doh bowls
I left drying in the sun.
This was the year I filled books with lost teeth
[bubble soap, mascara, glass] & left trails of string
around pine trees on your property
[you gave more land to your sons]
& signed absinth stained Christmas cards upside down.
This was the year my grey rabbit got lost under your house
& you scratched your ex-wife’s name
onto peeling wallpaper we folded into swans.
Tess Cramer

Dad & Julie on Halloween
string around the throat of a tooth, palm to door
mom kept my baby teeth in a plastic easter egg, every sunday
i’d run my hand over my gum-line
& feel the stub of tooth under the root-scar.

we lived between hills of dead grass
& windmills, broke clumps of caked dirt
with weeds
my moms hair fishhooks. our teeth grow
with craters built into them.

we went to church every sunday
i got asked if i had a boyfriend &
maybe half the time i did. i wore pointy silver shoes
& dress pants after a war on dresses
that i took back after i started college.

this is swallowing baby teeth. when my dad would weed the front yard
i’d save all the snails onto my arms & watch them slim me into a floor plan.

i ran dads fishing pole along the ground like a metal detector
& tangled the string. when i lost my first tooth i put it back. when i ripped
up grass i tried to stand it up. swallowed, buried
our family eats apricots like a hoop eats basketballs
i’ve got a stomach full of stones. body a river.
we went to church every sunday. i ground my teeth, counted teeth,
ate communion wafers with tongue,
prayed with lips

the neighbor elizabeth’s house
was covered in ivy, as they peeled it off
the house crumbled down. she had the same birthday as me,
my birth middle name

this poem is fingering the gap in my smile
pulling boulders up from a riverbeds.
my mom keeps my baby teeth in a plastic easter egg.

how is a house even built?
  1. a hole is dug in the dirt
Notes on a childhood summer: "Because we are dying"

Zoe Ramos

“This town sucks,” mouths in from us, metabolic things at the beat of every single second’s break, hoveling in from foreign cave systems of rock tradition, there to steal a break from secondhand existing. “Life is now” adverts wisp through slicked rote lips of women with creamy, paved-in skin, perfumed loneliness; and in the heat of every second of highway’s passing, graphic foods tease inward innervation into awareness like dust in air and we “Breath in. It smells here. I hate vacations.”

Beachgoers anoint bodies, crisped with carmelized skin like candied people—good to the taste, smelling of aromatic weed against the throbbed orange sky. Everyone’s higher at the drum of every single seconds dropping. And I’ll wish I knew some itinerant who could teach me how to roll so I could choke and retreat for just one second on some of this cloudy contentedness that everyone’s so wedded to.
And things are made with mouths to fill up body cavities with smaller living things through sticky gums of innards, pale vascularity of utilitarian designing—a chemical obliterating of a single-second strike rate. Solar flecks mirage into the greens and humankind divorces them from earth, marking walls of prismaticked banquets for slave buying. The sun is the mother we steal drug money from all for just a single second of reveling in stilted grandness.

You, living thing, bound the golded rust gates to the lavish apartment pool, nearly begging for breach—dangling locks left relaxing from dreamy watchmen with faces drooped in dirty magazines. It’s too cold to get out now. The slickness of the water clings to supple sloughs and laughs at slipping, appetent hands. And us, drowning from the depth of this trance, you ask me what I want to do next and I wonder why it is we crave so much when all we do is take from the very second we start living.
James Taylor Chronic Pain
Buddhapada
Jordan Floyd

Nostrils flair fill feel breath one two three four
lotus flower lips lotus flower body om mani padme hum exhale one
two three four nostrils flair fill feel breath one two three four
lotus flower lips lotus flower body om mani padme hum exhale one
two three four nostrils flair fill feel breath one two three four
lotus flower lips lotus flower body om mani padme hum exhale one
two three four nostrils flair fill feel breath one two three four
lotus flower lips lotus flower body erect om mani padme hum exhale one
two three four nostrils flair fill feel breath one two three four
lotus flower lips lotus flower body erect sunflower spine om mani padme hum exhale one
two three four to have you receive at this important time in your life
they say to share these blessings only with those who are close to you
and at times when it seems appropriate It is a time of decisions, a time of
growth and development of your heart, mind, and spirit, as well as your
knowledge I got my blessing when I was eighteen He wishes to remind
you, Jordan I called the man unannounced from Logan that He loves
you I felt the blessing would help He knows you I knocked on his door

They say these blessings are holy Jordan, by authority of the Holy
they say these blessings are like a compass set toward heaven somewhere
due North it is my sacred privilege to bless you and to confer upon you
they say these blessings are a promise from God, and if you keep your
end of the promise a blessing from Heavenly Father, a blessing which
He is most pleased one two three four lotus flower lips
lotus flower body erect sunflower spine om mani padme hum exhale one
two three four to have you receive at this important time in your life
they say to share these blessings only with those who are close to you
and at times when it seems appropriate It is a time of decisions, a time of
growth and development of your heart, mind, and spirit, as well as your
knowledge I got my blessing when I was eighteen He wishes to remind
you, Jordan I called the man unannounced from Logan that He loves
you I felt the blessing would help He knows you I knocked on his door
sometime in the early evening my parents came with it was customary He loves your heart I had filled my mind that Fall with the stranger and the mysterious stranger and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and your mind he put his hands on my head and I felt a small bit of oil fall through my hair and onto my scalp your spirit he hit the record button on the tape recorder he put his hands on my head your willingness to serve others he introduced me to his wife the Mormon patriarch the wife the ordained patriarch the squatty old woman in a flowing blouse the Holy patriarch put his hands on my head the mother left the room the patriarch who I’d never met before he put his hands on my head He loves you for the influence you are in your home he spoke soft above me he put his hands on my head for the example you are to your siblings my dad stood next to him my mom sat beside us on a wooden chair he put his hands on my head and He will always be there to bless you my mom cried for impermanence or decorum or spiritual comfort I think that day my dad hugged me tight after he finished speaking softly above he put his hands on my head to listen and to answer your prayers I prayed for three weeks I never missed a day I asked and asked and asked he put his hands on my head and to guide you along the path of truth three years before I found two paths and a third the middle and righteousness as well as His beloved Son, who loves you also he put his hands on my head I can feel their pressure now as I sit lotus flower hunched head in the hat transcribing three years of culmination om mani padme hum the magicians stone as it were he put his hands on my head I feel it

Holy

he put his hands on my head there’s no turning back once eyes see
the italics they say these blessings are a promise from God they say to share these blessings only with those who are close close close nose fills feels sunyata one two three four no self no self sunyata quick to exhale nothingness there’s simply no turning back now Holy there’s no turning back he put his hands on my head there’s no turning back shamatha shamatha shamatha

Nose fills feels the tide of air slow one two three four lotus flower lips can’t shake concept of soul buried deep plunge exhale one two three four nose fills feels the cusp start again again slow one two three four lotus flower lips exhale

I never wanted to write about Mormonism this isn’t about Mormonism this is about viparinama dukkhata I am to remind you also of the love of the Savior, your Savior and Redeemer even Jesus Christ I hope this offends people I hope this is my 1955 He knows your righteous desires my William Blake born to absent parents absent of mind He will always bless you and be close to you my absent minded masturbation He knows you intimately I hope this offends people I hope they shudder in their chairs and bedside tables and morning countertop breakfast soirées as you remain true and faithful to your I plan to write my story in the hollow testimony words and to those things of this blessing I plan to write the story of my He knows your strug-
gles and trials viparinama dukkhata as well as your joys as I saw it see it imagine it you have been taught by your loving parents I hope my mom reads this I hope she remembers the night she called me outside Ontario the night she left the message she cried and she threw words out disappointment and sadness and she called again and we spoke on a Sunday I suspect she went to church that day I suspect she taught a lesson about King Benjamin maybe Alma struck dumb by God I bet it made her wonder about me gave her context for the night when Om mani padme hum exhale one two three four nose fills feels no air one two three four exhale speech stammers when when I broke down outside Winnemucca 68 miles exactly I counted I needed to know could we make it to a hotel no no my lungs said no I paced in the sagebrush a Nevada state prison a mile away on the foothills paced and lost breath was mindful of breath lack thereof a Nevada state prison on the horizon battle born monastery for criminal men apostates me it seemed one two three four lotus flower boy crumpled under sage brush lotus flower lips exhale Nevada air lotus flower lungs breathed so heavy so heavy there’s still plenty to exhale one two three four nostrils fill the road quiets the monastery Nevada prison looks quiet in memory feel the air silent filling lungs one two three four we spoke on a Sunday while I sat on the bed we spoke on a Sunday only a year before I broke down on the day I crossed the Columbia River with an ounce of weed two days after
we smoked our last celebratory bowl in the garage sanctuary while it rained rained rained outside three days after four days after five days after four months after I first fucked Emily six months after I first got drunk this is not about Mormonism this is about viparinama dukkha-ta I’m writing my eulogy in the hollow words of my mother’s God she called me on a Sunday to say it felt like a death to her

shamatha shamatha shamatha

nostrils bloom catch air grasping one two three four lotus flower mind one lotus flower its earth epicenter mind exhale one two three four nostrils fill feel uniform ripples air one two three four

My viparinama dukkha-ta began when my great-grandmother died she lived on 4th West and Center Street in Logan she died in the Sunshine Terrace we held my baptism in Logan so she could watch my father grab my arm place his other arm in the air at a right angle palm flat facing the crowd a Hindu statue no fear no fear in me see me go under in my white jumpsuit see my foot break the surface of the water the first time see my foot gasp for air or hesitate because it knew something then I wouldn’t discover until my mind breached what it couldn’t at eight I was only eight see the two men I had never before met on either side of the baptismal font nod toward my dad do it again they gesture I was eight only eight and they told me I’d feel clean they told me then I was responsible for my sins for the time when I dropped the rock splat straight on my neighbor’s head and he cried and cried my mom asked why is Luke crying I responded I didn’t know for the time when I’d
learn to masturbate at scout camp it was Chad’s idea he said it felt good and he was right for the time when I sat and watched Spencer take a latex glove from his duffel bag he tore the middle finger off he gave it to Chad Chad put it on his dick and Spencer wet his mouth with his tongue I want to know what a blow job feels like Spencer said it was a mutual agreement a scout camp covenant I watched I watched they said I was made clean that day and I remember my great-grandmother smiling in her wheelchair she wore a heavy white sweater she wore pearls she always smiled until she couldn’t until she seemingly couldn’t close her mouth until my grandmother had to pour tangerine nectar into the back of her throat until she didn’t acknowledge us when we walked into her room in the Sunshine Terrace she only stared up up up at the ceiling but never at us staring down at her over the edge of her bed that day they said I was made clean that day my mom got sub sandwiches after my baptism and I was mad because I didn’t like sub sandwiches I sinned I suppose for the first time then for the last time on the Sunday it was a death to her the final hurrah that day they said I was made clean my great-grandmother died in 2004 I sang at her viewing but only to myself as I paced the room back and forth running my hand along the wall back and forth singing this land is my land this land is your land from California to the New York Island from the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters this land was made for you and me back and forth my hand running along the wall at the viewing where she stared up up up at the ceiling from her casket and the viewers stared down down down over the edge into the great big hole on the westernmost side of the Logan cemetery I sang that day too I cried when they closed the casket I cried the same tears years later on the road to Winnemucca
on my bedroom floor a death a death I saw my great-grandma dead and all too early I saw myself lose breath saw nostrils flair flow in out dead lungs the wind is the only movement and yet

nostrils flair om mani padme hum prayer like breaths fill one two three four eyes mandala mind mandala fingernails count exhale one two three four nostrils fill breath feel years tumbling in one two three four om mani padme hum metamorphosis the sun poking its bald head above the horizon line of my mind exhale

There’s no alternative way to say what I need to say These blessings are eternal there is no end in something with no end they are predicated upon your faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ this is not about Mormonism your obedience in keeping the commandments this is my death your willingness to serve others to give of your time and talents You will have many opportunities to reach out to those who need you It will be your opportunity to put an arm around many and to draw them close to the Savior through your love and testimony I bless you to follow His example and too look to His light throughout your life and take it along with your light into the world to share with all that you meet.

I imagine my own funeral in the way I imagine God It is my sacred privilege to seal these blessings upon you I imagine my mother breathes the crowd breathes the strangers all there too nostrils flare one two three four lotus flower minds lotus flower bouquets on top of a mandala casket interwoven with each bald-headed apostate
before after exhale one two
three four blessing you to come forth in the resurrection of the just this isn’t about Mormonism I’m writing my eulogy in the empty space left in my casket where a body should be in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.
Submitter Bios

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is a senior at Utah State University studying English and journalism. He currently lives in Salt Lake City where he writes for City Weekly Magazine.
**Jennie Frost**

is a Jewish, Appalachian poet from Maryville, TN. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Anomaly, Kudzu, Glass Mountain,* and *Political Punch,* an anthology on the politics of identity from *Sundress Publications.* She is a two-time winner of the *Curtis Owens Prize* and beginning in January, she will serve as the Writer in Residence at the Sundress Academy for the Arts.

**Bruce Hakes Jr.:**

is an undergraduate student at Jefferson Community College who likes conservation, poetry, music, silence, and the wild ways in which our dreams can move us.

**Kandace James**

is currently a student at Kennesaw State University and will be graduating in March 2018. She is a junior and is working towards a Bachelors of Arts in English, and minoring in African and African Diaspora Study. She transferred from Thomas Nelson Community College, in Virginia, with an Associates of Arts in Social Science.

**Bailee Jones**

is an undergraduate student at Utah State University pursuing a BFA in Art Education and Painting & Drawing with a minor in Art History. She loves creating art, playing piano, reading, and admiring the beauty of Cache Valley.

**Haley Kapp**

is an undergraduate student at Utah State University. She loves writing, reading, and spending time with her husband and family.
Matthew McKay

is a Northwest writer currently sleeping in Tacoma, Wa. His work deals with the neck breaking nostalgia that comes out in the small moments, and is rooted in a life spent in and around the Northwestern and Northeastern United States. He is currently working on his first full collection of poetry. He lives with his imaginary cat and some lame roommates.

Megan Olsen

is a senior at Weber State University studying English with an emphasis in creative writing. Here she served as Editor-in-Chief of the undergraduate literature journal, Metaphor. Currently, she works as a tutor at the University. Her publications include poems appearing in *The Rectangle, Sink Hollow, and Metaphor*. Megan has also presented her work at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference for the past four years. She lives with her daughter, husband, and four cats in Ogden, UT where she continues to write.

Doe Parker

is a trans poet originally from San Jose, California. They are a co-editor for Columbia Poetry Review and are majoring in poetry at Columbia College Chicago. They have been published in *Habitat Lit Magazine* and have work forthcoming in *Pine Hills Review*.

Alaina Pepin

is a poet and writer born and raised on Lake Superior’s shore in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. She is in the midst of her fourth and final year as an English secondary education major at Northern Michigan University, where she works as a Writing Center tutor. Her poetry appears in *Pif Magazine* and is forthcoming in *Beech Street Review* and *Ore Ink Review*. 
Rebecca Piazza

is undergraduate senior, double majoring in English and Art at Towson University in the Baltimore area of Maryland.

Zoe Elise Ramos

is a student of creative writing, biochemistry, psychology, and art at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. She’s been published in The Switchgrass Review and has submitted work to the Scissortail Creative Writing Festival. She is the Associate Editor of Poetry for the newly revived national journal, The Windward Review. Aside from writing, she is also a chemistry researcher and a catechism teacher.

Patrick Ramsay

is an undergraduate student at Weber State University where he serves as the Editor in Chief of Metaphor Undergraduate Literary Journal. He enjoys poetry, traveling, and tracking wildlife at Antelope Island State Park.

Melissa Sibley

is an undergraduate student at the University of North Carolina Asheville, where she spends her time reading David Sedaris and Cheryl Strayed and writing her own creative nonfiction, cradled in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. She is set to graduate this year with a BA in Literature and Creative Writing. Her favorite activity is cruising down the Blue Ridge Parkway in her furiously red Kia, windows rolled down, a full tank of gas and nowhere to be.

James Taylor

is a 21 year old student photographer from Minnesota. He is currently studying at Utah State University in the USU Photography Program. Taylor started his photographic career in digital photography manipulation at the age of 15. He is presently exploring other forms of the digital photography world and creating art within it.
Braxton Thornley

is an undergraduate student at Dixie State University who is currently studying English with an emphasis in Secondary Education. He lives with his wife among the red rocks and crashing thunderstorms of Southern Utah and enjoys watching the rain almost as much as he loves discovering slot canyons and writing poems. Braxton formerly worked as a section editor for Dixie State’s literary magazine, *The Southern Quill*, and now works as a tutor at Dixie State’s Writing Center.

Clay Meek Whisler

presently studies English and creative writing at The University of Northern Iowa. His work employs homosexual as well as regionalist themes, both inspired by his childhood home, a farm in the Iowan countryside. Clay plans to attend graduate school outside the state next fall.