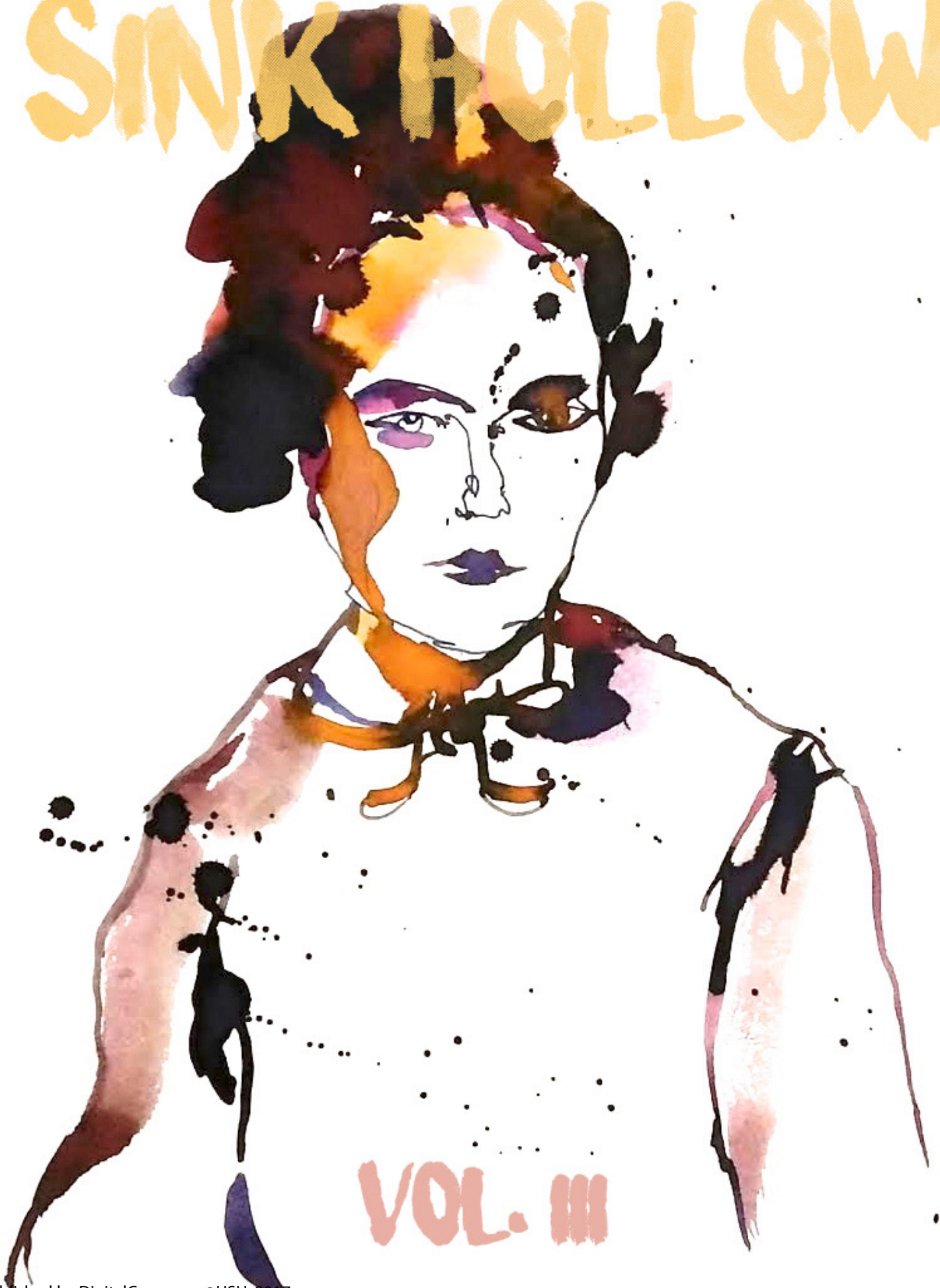


SINK HOLLOW



VOL. III

Editor's Note

It's difficult to believe that my time with this journal has come to a close. It has been one of the greatest experiences of my undergraduate career to be an integral part of its publication.

At the time of this writing, our previous issues have been read over 5,500 times, with this volume set to increase that number substantially. We have worked with undergraduates across the United States and from many other countries as well. A great thanks goes out to all our submitters. Without you there is no journal.

Though I'm moving on to other things, I trust the upcoming staff to continue in the excellent literary and aesthetic tradition which so many talented individuals have brought to life over the last two years.

I have long believed, and continue to believe, in the essential function of art and literature to a healthy democracy and a healthy civilization. I am proud to have participated, in my small way, in that tradition.

Ethan Trunnell, Undergraduate Editor

**“What a long way it is from one life to another, yet why write if not for that distance?”
- Yiyun Li**

Acknowledgments

Our submitters, from the first to the third volume. I mentioned it earlier, but without you there is no journal.

The entire Sink Hollow Staff, who worked dilligently to read through our many submissions. A special thanks goes to Abi Newhouse (Fiction), Shaun Anderson (Nonfiction), Parker Schofield (Poetry), and Millie Tullis (Poetry) who were our genre editors.

Fiction readers included:

Justin Smith, Andrew Simpson, Challis Hackley, Danielle Green, Abby Stewart, Jaesea Gatherum, and Tyler Hurst.

Nonfiction Readers included:

Madison Asbill, Braden Steel, Kaylee Dudley, Marie Skinner, Marissa Neeley.

Poetry Readers included:

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Our faculty advisors, Robb Kunz, Shanan Ballam, Russ Beck, and Charles Waugh whose support and professionalism are invaluable resources in the ongoing publication of our journal.

Thanks goes also to the previous undergraduate editor Shay Larsen, without whom the journal would not exist.

Finally, a great thanks goes to Batbilek Sunjidmaa, who lost his own life but showed me how to find the beauty in my own.

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Rabbit Art taken from “Aquatint,” by James Hadley

Syndicate

Katherine Michalik

Let me visit your dreams with glass
eyes and a doll smile. Stiff,

red, pressed and puckered; ready. Your blue
reflection in one, cracked down the center. The other

half closed. Let me touch my plastic
to your skin. Crave my fingers on your tongue,

swallow them. Taste my pink painted tips as I take
from the inside to the outside.



Bailee Jones

Breathe

Birth Control

Sean Swogger

I scream at Christ:
my voice travels up, up, up
and bounces off His front door.
What an asshole.

Deceitful Daisy,
pathetic,
even as you rule skin kingdoms.
Runaway saint who sold me up, up, up
the river 'til delta landfall as she smothers
my accusations with her body.

“Fuck off,” she said, putting my
withered chassis in neutral,
lurching-forward and leaning-back,
yelping that we aren't going up, up, up
in flames as we choke back tears,
“Blame the smoke, not the spark,”
she lies between moans.
Water balloons won't put you out,
honey. You're a fucking wildfire.

I let you slam my door last night
so the bottle wouldn't shatter on your back.
I didn't mean to get your hopes up, up, up
so far as to think I might chase.
I won't enable another fit of madness.

I made my stand that night—
you made your own and climbed
from the hood of your Elantra and
up, up, up to the ledge
of Parking Deck North.

Just as my temples touched the pillow,
your lips caressed the concrete.
I prayed you wouldn't get pregnant.
You leapt up, up, up to God's front door
and knocked.



Ian Cooper

Mother

We are Owed 108,000 Orgasms

Mayra Alejandra Cano

One for each day
Of each year
Of the conquest

Because we are hijos de la chingada
A people born of rape
Because they slaughtered the men,
And stole our pleasure.

I'm still looking for it

Because I'm not allowed
to have men in my room
They used to hide us from men
They still hide us from men

Porque en la noche adentro de la tina
My sister-in-law slaps my niece's
hand away for scratching an itch
on her vulva and says
No te tocas ahí,
no seas cochina

Porque I am not religious but I still feel the
weight of
la Virgen de Guadalupe

Between gasps of laughter
I chismear to my friends
I am a hoe
of color

Because you make me feel like Coatlicue
like her, you and I
make the
gods moon and stars

I love the sound of us
how your laughter turns into moans,
the movements of your mouth
the feeling of your tongue.

Because sex is also a form of resistance

So you and I
Let
us
resistir



Joshua Tarplin

Still Life

Fool-Lexicon

Theodore Lehre

sing//an aching neck, voice lifted to the redwood ceiling
beams, gasping an arpeggio

breath//open-mouthing open-writing, of lungs too tight
to overcome

kiss//pressed lips pressed to the inseam of a pair of
jeans, mouth the way to divinity in cracking voices, in
the dusk's afterlight

speak//begging in iambic mouthfuls and knees and
knuckles kissed to bruising, full of chest of warning beats

fall//stumbled stubbled thighs, battleworn toes and cal-
loused fingers catching pavement, grating their palm-
read skin, crisscrossed mouth-words in startled tilt

swear//Abraham's hand in Isaac's up the hill, do not kill,
honor thy father and mother and the ocean, embellished
puddles under sacrificial eyelids

touch//the diplomatic immunity of open-kissing
shoulders along thin laminated hallways, scales
balancing approach and withdraw in measures
of eye contact and bled-dry pens

warm//where but you, who but you, the bodied
body fire, both in hand and breath and a fistful
of smiles that color the world

you//you.

The Covert Manipulator and the Altruistic Victim

Emily Townsend

Heartworm

n. a friendship that you can't get out of your head, which you thought had faded long ago but is still somehow alive and unfinished, like an abandoned campsite whose smoldering embers still have the power to start a forest fire. --John Koenig, Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows

Timeline

2006: In fourth grade, Emily and Mikayla meet in a small group at Walnut Ridge's youth service.

2007: They hang out during recess in fifth grade with mutual friends. Both acquire a cell phone and each other's numbers.

2008: They are declared best friends in sixth grade and it's Emily's first real friendship. She clings to Mikayla.

2009: Emily lands in mental trouble and scares the hell out of Mikayla.

2009: Mikayla is determined to help Emily with her depression by hanging out more often, exchanging emails, walking around the neighborhood after school.

2010: A girl comes in and steals Mikayla from Emily. Emily is not happy and goes back to dark thoughts.

2011: The friendship ends.

2012: Emily and Mikayla try to patch things up post-breakup, but it doesn't work out.

2013: Both think they're over it, the hateful air posts on social media. They glance at each other quickly in hallways, but never hold eye con-

tact.

2014: Upon graduating high school, they break their seventh grade promise of getting a picture together outside the auditorium.

2014: Closure letters alleviate burdens for a short while, then the misery crashes back.

2015: “No news is good news” is bullshit.

2016: Mikayla moves on. Emily is done.

I’m a manipulator. Let’s just get that out of the way. This shy, unassuming girl is a master at tricking others to do things she wants them to do. What I have not mastered is manipulating myself to move on. And I hate myself for staying stuck on your name, your name, your name that has unearthed from my mind every morning since the day we stopped talking. The image of you burrows itself cozy in my arachnoid membrane, your spidery legs tickling my memory to wake me up, to dredge forward a thought I hadn’t remembered in years. Please leave me alone.

Closure isn’t always the end of a relationship. It opens up a relationship outside of the relationship—a lonely, icy, drowning body with a hand in the air, waving for help.

Dysthymia (dis-THY-mee-ə, from Ancient Greek δυσθυμία, “bad state of mind”), is a mood disorder consisting of the same cognitive and physical problems as in depression, with less severe but longer-lasting symptoms. It is a serious state of chronic depression, which persists for at least two years [It has been going on since I was seven, so now fourteen years. I’m a bad seed].

As dysthymia is a chronic disorder, sufferers may experience symptoms for many years before it is diagnosed, if diagnosis occurs at all. As a result, they may believe that depression is a part of their character [A psychologist officially diagnosed me in 2014].

Cause: Texas—the stupid hot weather, my parents’ remarriages to emotionally scarring people, the kids who said, “Oh, you’re in this class?” after I sat next to them for six fucking weeks, the inability to make new friends because my hearing impairment embarrassed me every time I had to ask to repeat the question or I replied with the wrong answer, evoking strange stares like I was stupid.

Effect: Dysthymia has semi-permanently shaped my views on friendships, expectations, and my constant need for validation that I am not a waste of space.

It’s difficult to admit that I struggle with dysthymia. Sadness traps my lungs within seconds of a bad thought. I don’t have days where I’m chained to my bed and stare at my Urban Outfitters forest tapestry; rather, I take to my Twitter account and tweet agonizing lines about how miserable I am and hope my fifty-four personal/impersonal followers notice. Thirty-eight percent of the tweets are about you, either being angry about how we ended, or missing you endlessly. You only read the angry ones, like of course you disappointed me again, what else can I expect, before I switched to private.

When we were friends, I casted you as my therapist. I dumped all my emotions on you, and only you (1). Through emails in seventh and eighth grade, we had a system of sending “highlights and lowlights” of our days. I had more bad things to say than good things. Back when I actually went to church (2), you were too sick to attend a youth service and I got so mad at you that I wrote an email in all caps how embarrassed I was to sit alone among kids we knew. I hated the isolation between myself and everyone, and the realization stabbed me with every pair of eyes glancing my way, empty chairs on both sides.

I despise being alone in public because it gives the false image that I don’t have friends. But maybe no one wants to be friends with me because I’m stubborn and selfish, so it’s really my fault.

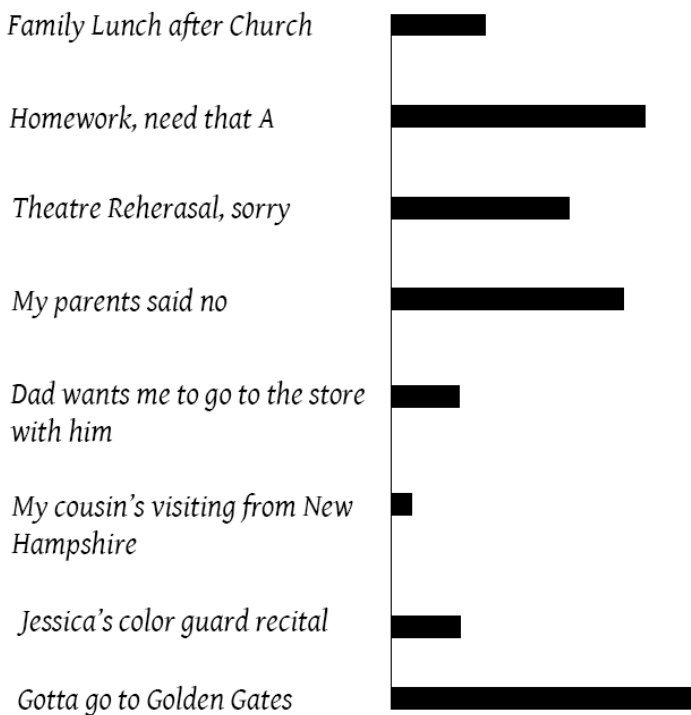
1: It’s not like I had other people to talk to.

2: I only went to church because my dad made me go to youth service, and you were the only good part of my Sundays. I’m an atheist, much to your dismay. Sorry. But not sorry.

When I felt you forgot me, like that instance at church, or if there was a large gap of no conversations, I played with death threats. I'd alarm you that I was having a bad night, drop bombs of committing suicide, and didn't answer your frantic texts until I was "normal" again. Instead of eating lunch in the cafeteria, I'd stay in my science classroom and imagined you going berserk, asking our friends if they had seen me at all that day. I wouldn't talk to you until that evening (I'm okay now, sorry to startle you), undermining your hysterical reaction as overwhelmingly unnecessary. At thirteen I knew what buttons to press to make you stay on my channel.

*stay alive,
I'll pay more attention to you,
please,
I'll never forgive myself for not helping you through this.*

Your Alibi Doesn't Fool Me



"I don't deserve your friendship."

It became a standard response after a fight from miscommunication: in emails where you pleaded for my forgiveness, you wrote that you felt inadequate to my pile of unrealistic expectations. To keep you around, I discounted my feelings and lied that you were enough, I'm sorry for supposing you could ignore your Saturday hobby of horse riding to be with me. But I was tired of hearing you say no. All I wanted

was to talk to you. I would drop everything, cancel plans, just to hear your voice.

Because of you, I built a permanent wall between myself and potential friendships, a constant reminder that I can't hold them to my impractical prospects. But I was a firm believer in that the massive effort I put into the friendship, I should receive it as well (3). And I never got that from you or anyone ever. The wall, once glass that fractured when someone new came into my life, transformed to stone when I realized that no one will ever match my loyalty. I let you go so many times but you kept coming back at my desperate request, a heroic savior rescuing me from drowning while you were also losing oxygen, my hands around your neck to keep myself afloat.

Clarification: I will break the second someone is interested in me, reveal too much information, and then when they walk away, I am nothing but the sharp edges spilled on the ground. So I built up a mountain and refuse to let anyone stroll over the peaks, forbidding them from settling into my cave only for hibernation. If they need a place to stay, sorry. They can find another mountain to conquer.

We had our rounds of stereotypical (4) friendship moments that are seen in movies and magazine articles. Talked on the phone past bedtime, hushed. Arrived together at birthday parties. We paired together for lunch, walked around the neighborhood to discuss boys and friends and teachers. On Friday nights we sat on my driveway with Neapolitan (5) ice cream and talked about the future, the roar of the football game down the road faint in the background. That stupid Blackout (6) game in 2011 was the reason we ended.

3: "Sometimes we expect more from others because we would be willing to do that much for them" -Anonymous

4: Isn't it normal when one friend is suicidal and the other devotes a lot of their time to help the bad friend feel better? Isn't it normal to experience withdrawal when the good friend needs a break from the negativity, and get mad at them for having their own life to deal with? Isn't it normal to give the silent treatment when the good friend has

disappointed the bad friend again, so they know that they did something wrong? Isn't it normal to stay up past three a.m. on a school night crying into the phone, please don't leave me?

5: You wanted cookies n' cream, I wanted cotton candy. We compromised for a boring flavor, not satisfying either of us.

6: An annual football game between Mansfield and Summit High School, the two biggest rivals in the district.

My mom didn't allow me to drive anyone shortly after getting my license. I begged her to let me take you, since I didn't want to show up at the game by myself. She said no.

I went to the game void of a passenger, and, already anxious from walking into the stadium alone, searched for our friends in the student section. Once there, I texted you where we were, and you replied you were on your way with Mary. I bristled at her name.

I decided that I didn't want to hang out with you if she was going to be around. So you and Mary sat a few rows below our friends, occasionally glancing behind. I refused to look at you until you set your sights back on the game.

Something about Mary: Seemingly a secondary character in sixth grade, until in eighth grade she cast herself as the antagonist when she decided that I was "stealing you from her" and actually manipulated you to break from me.

"I'm so done," I muttered to Miranda, my then best friend. I recycled through the girls in our social circle to that title. You knew she was your replacement, and you didn't try harder to fix that. It was effortless to make ersatz friendships to get your attention. They never lasted as long as you did, but you knew my game. You never told the others my rules, how to win, or even how to lose. There was no winning ever—no one came close to you, I wouldn't allow it. You were the comparison that made everyone else feel bad.

Miranda knew the story but didn't press on. She was still learning how I dealt with my quiet sadness. No one has ever figured it out the way you did.



Funny that no one knows how to treat a depressed person. They don't walk on eggshells. They don't slice their heels on glass. Their feet doesn't hurt at all. Stop assuming that. It's not a physical thing that hurts them.

It's the nightmares that jolt them awake, greeting the dark canvas of four a.m. It's the existential crisis as they stare at the blank wall that only resembles a pitch black grave. The observation of students mingling in the cafeteria as they sit alone. The septillionth pause in between songs. The second they start counting sheep as they force themselves back to sleep. They scream in their head stop stop stop stop

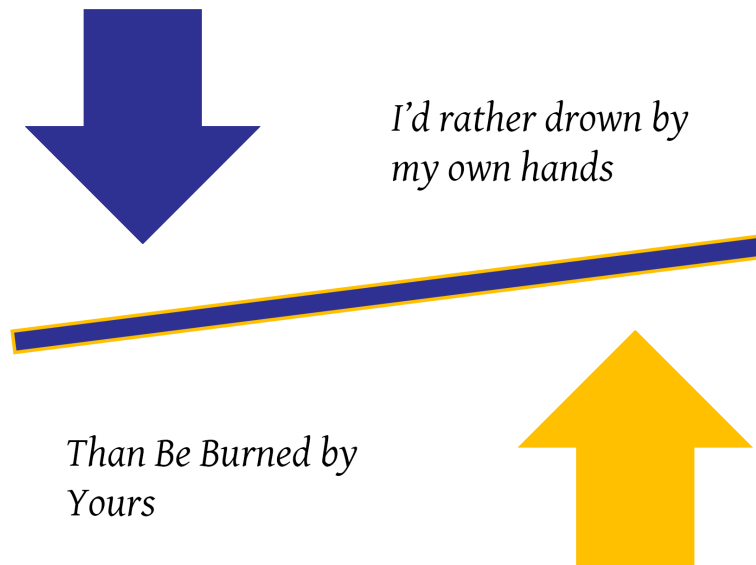
STOP until the hum of the air fades out.

Don't tell them you're sorry. They don't want your pity. Don't tell them things will get better, that you'll try to fix things. Don't tell them to lighten up, other people have it worse (7). Don't tell them positive shit. Just accept that they're hurting, hold them, acknowledge their pain. That's all they want.

They're only trying to feel human, not bursting electrons who want to explode for the sake of diminishing the pain.

7: I know children starve in Africa! I know the city of Flint doesn't have water! That's not my problem!(7A)

7A My problem is that it seems like no one pays attention to me or this chaos inside my swollen thalamus even though I don't particularly show I am bad again I want someone to ask me "are you okay?" and when I say "I'm fine" they will really ask, "are you okay?" and my problem would feel alleviated just for a moment, because finally someone cares, someone sees through my false appearance, they are not trying to fix me, they are recognizing that I am alive.



On Facebook, a scrapbook of conversations I never wanted to have had with you, we had a drawn out exchange of repeated “well, what do you want from me?” and “idk.” I wanted a friend who preferred to be with me over everyone else.

I didn’t want Mary to be your second choice. I didn’t want you to have any second choice—either me or no one at all.

September 17, 2011

[5:37pm] Mikayla Pearce

But just because we aren't best friends doesnt mean we cant be friends. That's how i see it. unless you think we can't and in that case, just say the word and we'll both move on..

[5:39pm] Emily Townsend

i guess the only reason why im still here is because i want to prove everyone wrong, that we can be friends, and because i never wanted to be that person who lost her best friend in high school

[5:43pm] Mikayla Pearce

well im obviously not your best friend anymore. and thats okay. you've found someone who i agree is better. Miranda is a better person than me. and if youre just staying with me because you wanna prove everybody wrong, i think we both know thats not fair to either of us.

[5:45pm] Mikayla Pearce

I'm not saying i dont wanna be friends with you at all. I'll be sad if we stop talking completely, too. but i think you should examine your reasons for us being friends before you make a decision.

[7:47pm] Mikayla Pearce

alright. well... where do we stand now?

[7:48pm] Emily Townsend

i dont know

[7:50pm] Mikayla Pearce

i think you do, you just dont wanna say it as much as i dont wanna hear it.

[7:52pm] Mikayla Pearce

or maybe im wrong and you really dont know. but i know that if we keep on like this, the answer neither of us truly want to hear will become inevitable and we will just stop caring.

[7:53pm] Emily Townsend

i kinda did stop caring

[7:54pm] Mikayla Pearce

to be honest, so did i. but if we keep on like this, then the result wont even have to be said. itll just happen. if it hasnt already.

[8:02pm] Mikayla Pearce

alright well i have to go. if you ever figure out where this leaves us, text me, ok?

It was the absolute truth: we were done. In the entire five years of friendship, this was the culminating moment, the denouement of my role as puppeteer, and your character of being controlled by my hands. The curtains drew before we bowed for the applause of our show.

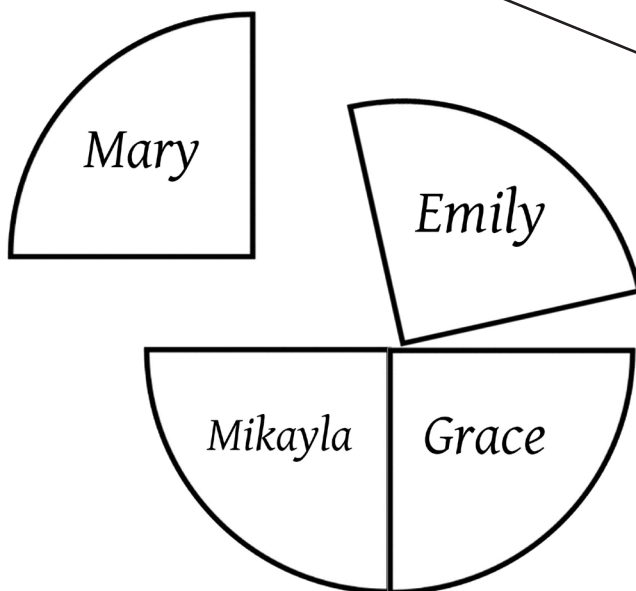
My handwriting shook as I yanked the pen across paper in my sophomore English journal, trying to be apologetic and forgiving. But I couldn't. I wanted it to be your fault that we were done. You didn't make enough time for me. You had your own life away from the strings strapped on my fingers, your shoulders aching from me pulling you back. We agreed it would be my choice to end us, and I decided it was time to fade

"We promised we would be there in the future together. We have to get through the present separate."

Junior year, my 1998 Grand Am Pontiac stayed in an auto shop for two weeks from a minor car accident. Various friends took turns picking me up for school, but I wanted to see if a certain someone would be willing to get me one day. I kept missing you even when I didn't want to.

I lied that my then best friend, Erin, couldn't get me. With a shaky finger I sent the text to the number I've longed to message every night. "This is a long shot, and I wouldn't ask, but Erin can't take me to school Thursday morning. Could you? I'll give you gas money."

Twelve minutes passed until my phone lit. My eyes teared up at your name. "Yeah! Don't worry about the money. You're only down the street. I just have to get Grace on the way."



We were the original group: me, you, and Grace were friends in fifth grade, then Mary came along and shoved Grace out in seventh. You befriended Grace again after our mess. Mary stopped talking to you shortly after we ended.

Scenarios

They pop up at the first glance of something that reminds me of you. In those unintentional dreams everything is absolutely normal. In real life, like at the mall that one time, or when you walked into our senior English class and sat a desk away, it was this silenced distance that electrified us. I couldn't even look at you. You were a stranger I shouldn't have been staring at.

1: I am at Starbucks, editing photographs on my slow Lenovo, and it is winter. You walk in, see me, and consider sitting with me. I've never gotten to the conversation in my head.

2: I am walking my dog, Jenny, in our neighborhood, and you are driving back to your house from Golden Gaits, still wearing your riding boots. You pull over somewhere and we sit on the curb, and I absentmindedly let Jenny pee wherever she wants. No conversation.

3: At our graduation you find me in the throng of black caps and gowns. After we snap a picture, you say, "I am so proud of you. You got out alive."

Numbness sunk into my thighs. You said yes. I would hear your voice after the silence of one year and two months. I replied back with a "thank you!" and smiled. It was a weird twist of exhilaration and dread to anticipate seeing you again.

Thursday morning arrived with fog clinging to your car's windows. I walked down the steps from my house slowly, figuring out how I would approach you. Would I make eye contact? Would I tell a joke? Would the last year be erased and we could pick up where we left off?

I climbed in and darted a glimpse above the steering wheel. You had a smile on your face, your glasses were still the same frames. This could be normal. We could be friends again. We could try.

We talked about our dual-credit history class, the test we had in there

a few hours later. I told you I'd text what questions I could remember. You said I didn't need to do that, you "actually studied" as opposed to my quick glance of materials right before the exam. Though that was a playful jab at remembering my (lack of) study habits, it was too polite, too poised. Trying too hard to make a conversation last, trying to slip back in our standard way of talking, but it felt like taping a shard to the wrong broken vase. "Perfect" by P!nk played on the radio and you hummed along, ostensibly eager to fill the awkward silence.

When Grace got in the car, the air crunched tighter. We all knew each other, but we just knew I shouldn't have been in there. I'm sure she was burning to ask you if we were trying to be friends again. No, it wouldn't happen. Maybe another time.

We were past repairs, and I yearned to have my car back.

I wrote about you a lot in high school and posted them on my Facebook using fake names. In the beginning, they were mean daggers, a short piece about how I took down all our pictures and stuffed them in my closet. In the middle, I claimed our entire friendship was a waste of time. In the end, I wanted you back. You were never a waste of time. The replacements didn't know how I wrestled with my disappointments like you did. They never had a chance long enough to learn the unplanned schedule of my depression.

I knew you would read them. I wanted you to feel my pain, the shadow of my misery over losing you, without directly telling you. I wanted you to notice me, my silent screams for help. In the hallway we made eye contact and slipped away to the lockers, lost in the sea of people we've known since elementary school, your clan of theatre friends and the empty space drifting alongside me. You knew I was bad again, but didn't want to start up anything that led to the same failures.

Out of respect, I attended the wake of a former softball teammate senior year. It was awkward and uncomfortable—I kept visualizing myself in the casket, as I had done for so many years prior, and through my ghostly self I'd picture you standing there, exactly how I'd want you to be—bawling, questioning yourself, hating yourself for not sticking around when you said you would. You made your promise of never leaving me if I promised to never kill myself. You broke that promise while I kept mine.

A nightmare of you in the coffin instead of the girl shattered me. I never thought of losing you in that way since I had only imagined you losing me in that way. As I noticed how many people were crying, I regretted putting that much pressure on you. Not that my death would have affected many people, but it would have hurt you beyond saving, and I hated hurting you for the attention no one else gave me.

I forgot your address, so I drove by the entrance of the cul-de-sac on St. Maria Drive and squinted to see your house number. I didn't have the courage to stick it in your mailbox without a stamp.

This condensed five-paged letter was my way of closure, sent days before I moved to college. I compiled from four other letters written throughout high school, one asking if you missed me; wondering why you didn't fight to stay; saying that I regretted our friendship; saying that I needed you so bad because I wanted to die(8) and you knew how to help me. Comfort did not root from the words you used to say—it was

On January 2, 2010, I wrote to you on Facebook that I was scared I wouldn't wake up the next morning. I knew my escape: overdose on whatever pills I could find in my dad's cabinet. You convinced me to put away the pills and swore that as long as I didn't kill myself, you would stay by my side even if we stopped being friends (it was going to happen, we just knew it). You hated yourself that you broke that promise. And I always knew, that while I kept my promises, you would violate yours. Your track record is hard evidence.

the fact that you chose to stick with me through the nefarious phases of dysthymia. And when I lost you, I had no one standing next to me as I lost myself.

August 19, 2014

This is the last time I will ever expect anything from you. I just need to say these things so I know that you know how I feel. You don't need to respond. Don't think this letter is supposed to mess with you. Just read this and we can go on ignoring each other and forget everything that happened between us. I miss you. I really do. I'm sorry for asking way too much of you all these years. I've just now realized how hard and difficult it would be to handle a depressed friend. It was a lot to deal with, and I'm sorry.

The word's goodbye but I can't say it. I can't ever say goodbye to you, you know that. I can't say goodbye to the fact that you saved me. That you understood me, the fragility of my heart, and the broken glass of my thoughts. I still care about you very much. I will always be here. But this letter is saying that I will stop contacting you, because I truly believe you don't want anything to do with me anymore.

Please do not feel guilty for my actions, and yours. Time and life happened. We were just meant for those five years, no more and no less. Again, there is absolutely no pressure on you to reply. I hope your life is much happier than mine.

Emily

Three weeks later you anonymously mailed a letter to my mom's house, who sent it to my dorm, and she tacked a sticky note with a single question mark. I knew it was your handwriting. I knew I would finally have answers to our silence. I clung to the envelope, unsure if I wanted to open it, but also not expecting anything for once.

8:Work and softball was just hell. I hated every shift and practice and felt like everyone thought I was useless. Messing up simple things, like miscommunication between coworkers and dropping a catch, triggered breakdowns.

Victim: Emily's High Expectations

Suspect: Disappointment

I honestly had no idea how you would respond to my letter. Were you going to be kind? Blame me for all the problems? Say you were glad we stopped being friends? Hope I could move on from this chaotic hurricane of a mess?

The letter started off with the lyrics from Taylor Swift's "I Almost Do" and then an apology for not asking what's wrong when you found out I was bad again through a mutual friend. The distress you went through after your sixteenth birthday without me ripped into my skin—you spent the night in your closet reading my old letters, wondering where did you go wrong. You missed the stupid jokes I made during our walks and the way my right eye crinkles when I laugh really hard. You wished you had me around during the rest of high school, thanked me for going to your plays and highlighting you in the yearbook's theatre article. You had a withdrawal of my poison every time you saw me in the hallways.

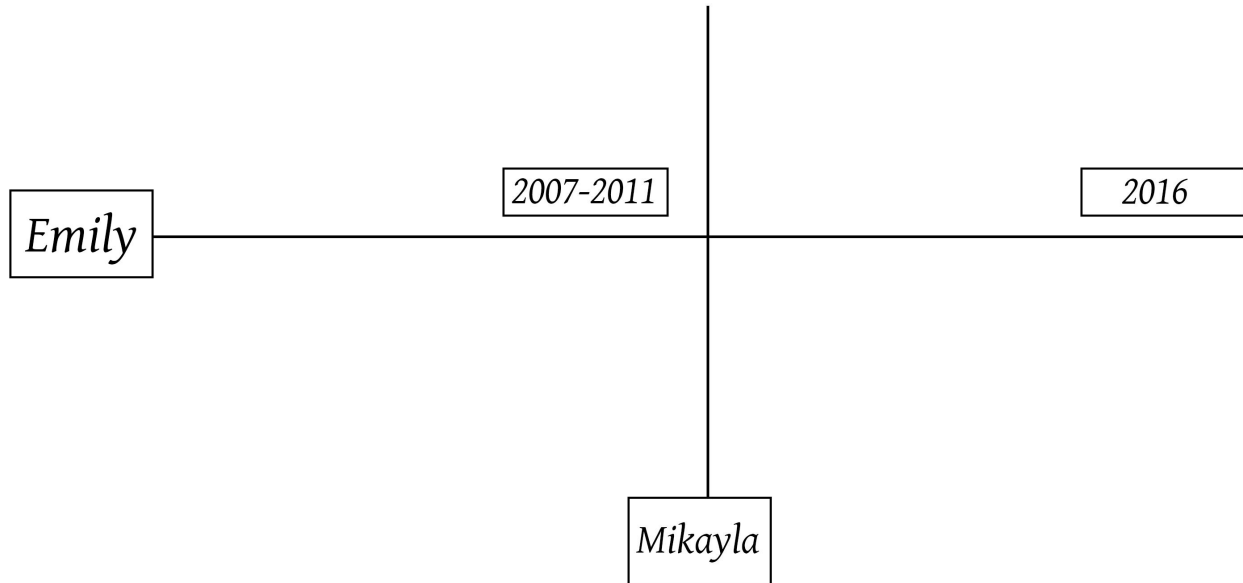
You thought that someday I'll be happy again, as if you knew my ending before I did.

On the last page you wrote that you were declared a psychology major at Dallas Baptist University, determined to become a counselor for young adults with mental illnesses, because of me. You regretted breaking your promise, you never found anyone else as loyal as I was. You still missed me.

But you weren't broken. You knew how to move on. You cut the strings from my palm.

You said your dream office would have a picture of me on your desk, a reminder of your first failure. A month later on Instagram I saw my initials Sharpied on your wrist for World Mental Health Day.

Perpendicular lines become parallel at some point, though they are always connected. We only intersected for five years. We must go on our own lines away from each other, and I'm ready to forget your name. You were my first choice, but now you are a choice I can't choose, and I accept that.



I'm tired of writing about you. You were every sappy short story in high school; you were every poem in my intermediate poetry class; you were every sadistic and distraught tweet at two a.m. I want a new subject. This is our sixth year apart, and you've obviously moved on

The only time we communicated was during our birthdays. It was an unspoken reminder that hey, I still care about you even though it's hella awkward to say hello or look at you. But then you stopped after I turned nineteen. I stopped when you turned nineteen four months later, only because I knew you were completely done with me. We were, at last, finished.

We were only meant for those five years. I'm extinguishing the fire. The smoke keeps choking my lungs. I'm walking out of the forest with papery skin, flaking off memories of us. You were an echo that faded out.

I know how to ignore your name. But I hope my name screams in your head every time you study a list of mental illnesses, every time you drive by my house on St. Matthew Drive to Golden Gates, every time you say no to someone when they try to make plans with you. I hope you remember all of your mistakes that made me unhappy. I hope you know better now. What a fine friend you were. (9)



9: Certainly you remember the guilt, the anger I instilled in our friendship, our stupid, wonderful friendship. I'm thankful for my life, but you carved a scar while trying to save me. You've ruined all future devotions to people, because I have to keep them at a distance to not get scorched again. Thanks a fucking lot. I will never feel happy in a new attachment because I have to keep my expectations wrangled in a cage, snarling to get out. Godamnnit. All I did during our broken time was hate you, miss you, forget about you, remember everything about you. I terminated the effort I gave you to whoever needed me as their friend. Gotta go below and within instead of above and beyond, all that clichéd shit. Reduce my feelings to be unselfish. Can't be a manipulator anymore.

James Hadley



Aquatint

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

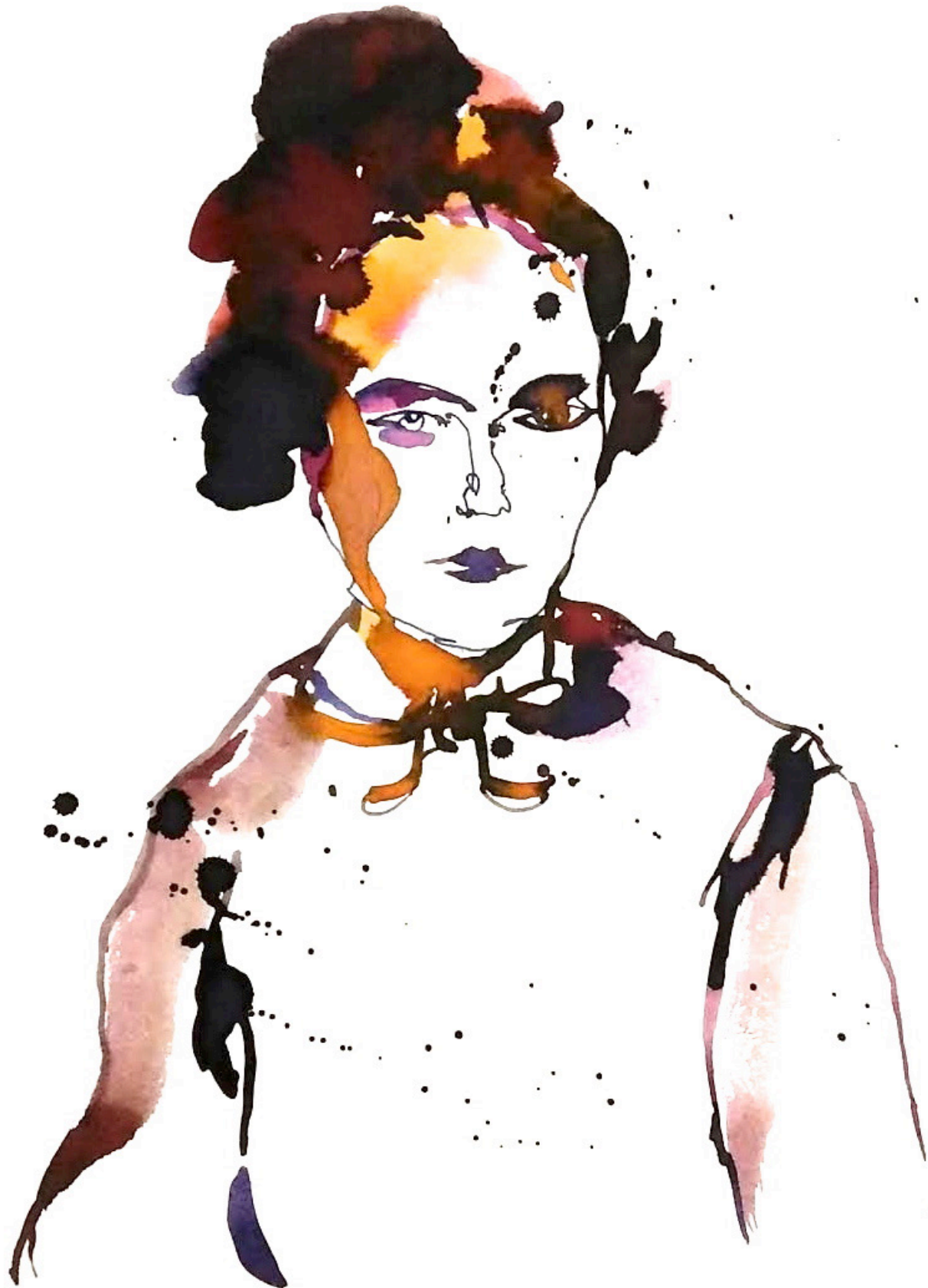
Grace Ji Yan Tsang

Grace Ji Yan Tsang is an undergraduate student at New York University majoring in Communicative Sciences and Disorders and minoring in English. She loves painting, reading, singing and watching otter videos over tea.



Tea You Later

Published by DigitalCommons@USU, 2017





Viola

Published by DigitalCommons@USU, 2017



Secret Creatures of the Trees



Feeling Treeish



Starry Night in Evora

Hanging Temple

Alex Bullock

The first time Sheridan sees Xuankong Si, really sees it, it appears slowly out of the mist just after sunrise. A temple clings to the wall of a cliff. It seems like it stays there only by willpower, that at any second it could give up and crumble. Dr. Shae wanted to get a time lapse shot for the documentary. They awoke at precisely four AM to make the twelve-minute drive in Mrs. Xu's bus from The Henjili Hotel in Hunyuan to the temple. Sheridan sat with the film crew silent, some drifting back to sleep, some squinting through windows into darkness. It took them hours to set up multiple shots. Dr. Shae was sure each one would be the quintessential angle.

Sheridan just waits. He is interning with the documentary crew, but he has no knowledge of the winking, whirring equipment. He studies architecture at Syracuse University in New York. He knows about wood, stone, and metal.

The morning begins to speak. Birds whistle. Bugs hum. The people who work below the temple open shop. The buildings themselves seem to wake up with the morning sun. The colors seem brighter, closer.

The temple itself curls into the cliff wall and refuses to step into the light. It was placed so precisely, that even in the sunniest hours of the year it only gets four hours of direct sun. The temple seems like a living fossil. It is 1500 years old. Sheridan is twenty-four.

Dr. Shae comes to stand beside Sheridan. He wants to know

what shots Sheridan thinks will be best. Sheridan looks up at Dr. Shae's tall frame bending like a hook. The man is so tall it seems he could reach up and touch the bottom of the temple, hundreds of yards above them. The last stars dissolve into the sky when they turn to go.

The crew will film for just under a month. It is early May, just before the monsoon season. Sheridan spends most of his days roaming beneath the temple in drizzles. The locals tell the crew this is a record year for precipitation. Sheridan can't speak Mandarin, and even those who do on the crew struggle. The locals speak Jin, a dialect of Mandarin. Whenever anyone speaks to him, he pretends he is a monk who has taken a vow of silence and just smiles and nods. The rest of the crew stays in Hunyuan whenever they can't film. Sheridan shares a hotel room with two men named Mike. One smokes too many cigarettes and shouts at waiters. The other takes pictures of dead birds and talks about entropy whenever the temple is brought up. Dr. Shae is always busy; but when he sees Sheridan he smiles and asks a million questions. Did Sheridan like the humidity that morning below the temple? Did he see the elderly woman crying at the temple yesterday? Did he notice that in the silence of the temple it feels like you're underwater?

It has been a week when Sheridan and one of the Mikes spend a rainy day below the temple. They climb up to the temple and Sheridan's breathing gets harder. The rain turns to waves as he bends in the air. Mike grabs Sheridan's arm to keep him from losing his balance on the temple stair.

"Hey man, what the hell?" Mike seems to shout from far away, "Are you okay?"

Sheridan shakes his head and takes some deep breaths before telling Mike it's just a head rush. Mike tells him to be more careful, and not to be the asshole who falls from Xuankong Si. Sheridan doesn't tell Mike he has idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. Sheridan doesn't tell anyone he has idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. It is a flaw in his engineering, and one that no doctor can pinpoint. He has always been ambiguously sick.

He has always been told to stay below certain altitudes and not to fly. Someday, it will kill him.

Sheridan goes back to the temple later that night, alone. Mrs. Xu lets him use the bus when it is late. He has gotten clearance from a small lady who works at the admissions office to go whenever. He makes sure to climb the path slowly. He explores the temple carefully, like unfolding a secret.

By the end of the second week Sheridan has seen all of the forty rooms, and each of the seventy-eight statues. XuanKong Si is the only temple with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism all represented. Sheridan read somewhere the temple acted as a way station centuries ago. People of all faiths would come to pray. In the precariously balanced temple, all visitors found peace. Sheridan likes to spend mornings alone in the temple before it opened, before filming. It seems so clear why the monks wanted to be so high. The need for this silence. Legend says that you can't even hear a dog bark from below when you are in the temple. The height makes Sheridan's breath quicken and vision melt. The air seems quicker up here, this close to the stars.

When the crew films, and when the temple is open, the spell is broken. The temple comes to life, flecked with tourists. Sheridan picks out Swedish, Lithuanian, Arabic, Portuguese. The film crew's machines record everything. Someone is always filming Dr. Shae when he is at the temple. He is always talking about the temple, repeating the same lines, hoping for a better shot. He talks with the tourists. They smile and wave to their families. Dr. Shae keeps asking Sheridan to be in the film. Sheridan can't find enough excuses.

There are so many screens at the temple. They throw unnatural fluorescent beams at the ancient wood. Sheridan is sure that flash photography shouldn't be allowed, but he hasn't noticed much done to stop it. Mrs. Xu tells him that it is shame and it is a heavy burden knowing what your people have done to the ancient relics. She just shakes her head when Sheridan asks her more.

One of the Mikes keeps asking him if he's okay. Maybe they both do, Sheridan can't tell anymore. By the third week Dr. Shae asks if Sheridan is okay.

"When we're up on the temple you seem distant. You look pale." Dr. Shae passes Sheridan a beer at the hotel. Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis affects the lungs. It is really a name for a motley assortment of conditions, the doctors just can never seem to figure out what precisely is wrong with Sheridan. There is mucus in his lungs, it makes it hard to breathe. Sheridan is lucky, his condition has been late in its onset and slow in its progress. Two friends he made at the children's hospital years ago with the same condition died before they were twenty-two. Another keeps breathing tubes on twenty-four hours a day.

You understand why I couldn't tell you before we left, Sheridan tells Dr. Shae, who runs a long finger on the lip of his beer bottle. Like a hook dancing on the mouth of a fish. Dr. Shae asks Sheridan if he needs to leave for home. Sheridan won't. He can last the week.

The crew starts to act differently around him. They walk more slowly up and around the temple. Their hands hover around his elbows. His dizziness gets worse.

The statues in the temple were made by putting cloth similar to the paper mache Sheridan made in grade school over clay. After the cloth set, the clay was broken and taken out. Then the statues were painted gold. Sheridan felt like those statues, so light inside, but he still couldn't seem to get enough air.

The fourth week in China, Sheridan can't hold in his resentment for the project. It seems wrong to him that the privacy of the temple should be exposed to the world. Every tourist's picture, every second of film, they are a pervasion of the temple's purpose. Sheridan stands by the temple walls and listens to Dr. Shae.

"The temple is one of the very first examples we have of over-engineering. When some of the oak beams anchored into the cliff face

needed to be replaced, there was concern for the structural integrity. However, it seems that the supposed mastermind behind the temple, Liao Ran, thought about replacing the beams ahead of time,” Dr. Shae has filmed this line seventeen times. Over-engineering is everywhere. Sheridan’s head gets hot as he stifles a coughing fit. One of the Mikes watches him like he might turn into a bird and fly off the cliff face.

It is becoming harder for Sheridan to slip away from the Mikes. After his conversation with Dr. Shae, they seem always to be around. They are too nice. People always become too nice when they worry. No one will say anything mean to people like Sheridan on the off chance that’s the last thing said to them at all. More time is spent in Hunyuan. Hunyuan isn’t said to be a city but it has twice the population of Syracuse. The film crew spends time in bars and at parties. They have had enough of the temple. Dr. Shae and Sheridan are the only true lovers of structure, and architecture. Sheridan is alone.

The last night in China, the Mikes both drink too much and Sheridan convinces Mrs. Xu to let him use the bus one last time. She has been a ghost the whole trip. She is always nearby but the crew was more interested in Hunyuan’s small night life scene than talking to Mrs. Xu. Sheridan waves at Mrs. Xu in the rearview mirror as he drives to the temple ground. She looks like a child standing outside the hotel. She has a child herself, a young girl, who she hasn’t been seen since the crew arrived. Why didn’t he take the time to learn more about the guide?

The drive seems faster than usual, but Sheridan thinks it might be him who can’t keep up. It’s an hour before midnight when Sheridan gets to the temple grounds. He walks around below the temple for a while. The reservoir is still. The shops are silent. The temple is solemn. The night vibrates around Sheridan’s head. The air is lighter than it should be. The glow from Hunyuan leaks into the place. How would it have looked fifteen hundred years ago? Sheridan asks the night. How many stars could you see?

It may be minutes or hours that pass before Sheridan turns to

climb to the temple. It may as well be an eternities. The silence is so present that each step Sheridan takes sounds like a drum beat, an avalanche. The mountains around are as silent as Gods. Sheridan visits each room, tries to memorize each statue. He can't remember which one goes with which religious tradition anymore. They all jumble together. He thinks he can pick out a Laozi, but it might be Confucius.

The hours jumble together too. Sheridan climbs up and down stairs, trying to understand as much as he can. He makes himself look down, he makes himself think about the worst that could happen. There has to be something he is missing. The beginnings of dawn soon show. A birdsong, the sky turns to a deep ocean blue. Sheridan nearly runs between rooms, he is running out of time.

His head swells, and he feels the pressure in his chest build. He looks out at the mountain across the valley. It is the twin of this one. Why was this mountain the one chosen to be crowned with the temple? Why wasn't the other one made equal? Sheridan's breath sounds like gunshots. The mountain across the valley swims in the ocean that is the sky. It is an iceberg. Everything seems upside-down and inside-out. Sheridan is gasping, but he wants the silence to be unbroken. He climbs to the highest corner of the temple. He feels like his head is falling into the sky, his body a tether. The world is so far away, he can see so far. The mountains blur. The world is becoming a smudge of color. Sheridan thinks of the Ten Thousand Things of Taoism. A number that represents the amount too big to comprehend. All of it. The birds singing here have lived by this temple for generations, their ancestors might have seen it built. How many of the people in Hunyuan have descended from the temple's builders? The lines of history weave in Sheridan's mind. The places like this all over the world that Sheridan studies overlay his mind. Cappadocia, Turkey. Where rocks like mushrooms became houses. The Roussanou Monastery in Greece. A place built on the pillars of the earth. Here. All of it so perfectly engineered. The structures will fall too; the world spins in front of Sheridan. He thinks of all the years al-

ready past.

A sound. Two blonde women are smiling as they take a photograph. The first visitors to the temple. They journeyed here looking for something just like those travelers years ago. Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism. The creators of this place meant it to be a refuge for everyone. Places aren't owned. Sheridan hears the footsteps of everyone who has walked these temple walls. Blood pounds in his ears. A rattling gasp forces itself out of his airway. Sheridan looks for something in the distance to focus on, something to steady his vision. He sees the last stars in the morning light, slowly getting fainter as the edges of his vision fade.





Karu Shao

The Paradise



Karu Shao

Edo Period Women Portraits

Death Before Friday Prayer

Sebaah Hamad On the way to Al-Aqsa as we pass through narrow rows of solid concrete, one by one, my front pressing against a stranger's back, I cannot stop scrunching my nose, trying to rid the canals from a sting, a pain I cannot place, when behind my ear my sister-in-law's lips whisper: Gas. Bomb. For an instant I wonder, how did she know so quickly?

My sister-in-law knows how particles swept up by wind, slithered up a man's nose as he journeyed to pray. how their split tongues savored each venomous bite.

how his nose scrambled up and down trying to expel poison— how his chest ached for breath

and how

each breath brought more venom

until the sun climbed above his face and death smirked near his swollen feet.

Syed Hassan



Apocalypse Redux

The Remnants of a Building in Ramallah

Sebaah Hamad

Outside of Bank al-Arabi,
the bank my uncles had
refused to invest in,
I waited.

The sun dripped heat onto the pavement and
sweetened the fruits.

A man convinced a woman clutching a bag of cu-
cumbers to buy another kilo.
His were better.

I wanted to dance.

To toss off my shoes and dance barefoot among
the garden of vendors.

“A kilo of cherries! of figs! 20 shekels! fresh out-of-
the-oven!”

Their words shaded grape leaves between wrin-
kled hands.

I wanted to sing to the tune of a Saturday after-
noon,

to smile in the face of the sun and know
that the people connect my bones to the land—
a ligament of loss.

I twirled the corner

and jolted to a stop:

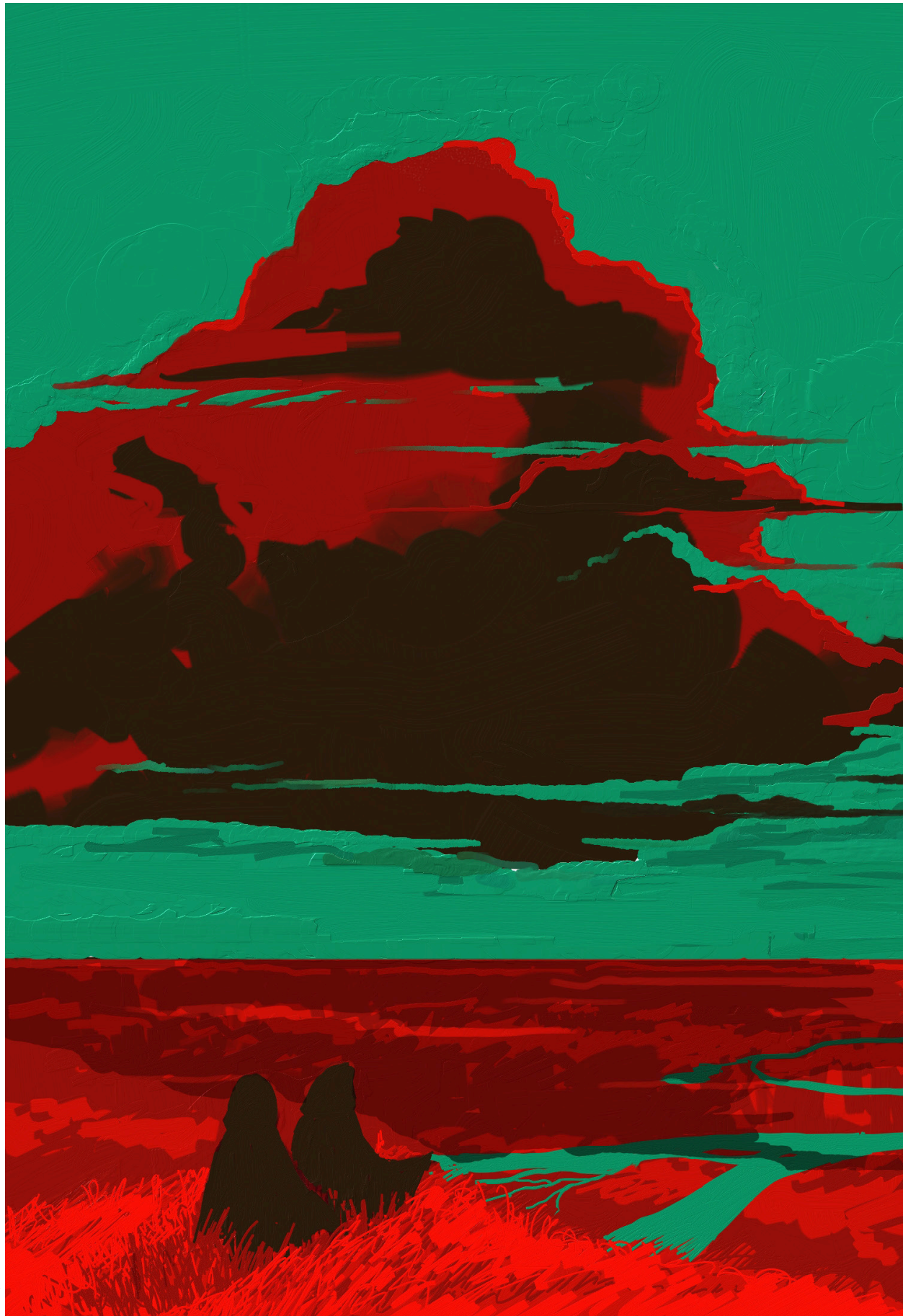
a gap where a building should be
and a man,

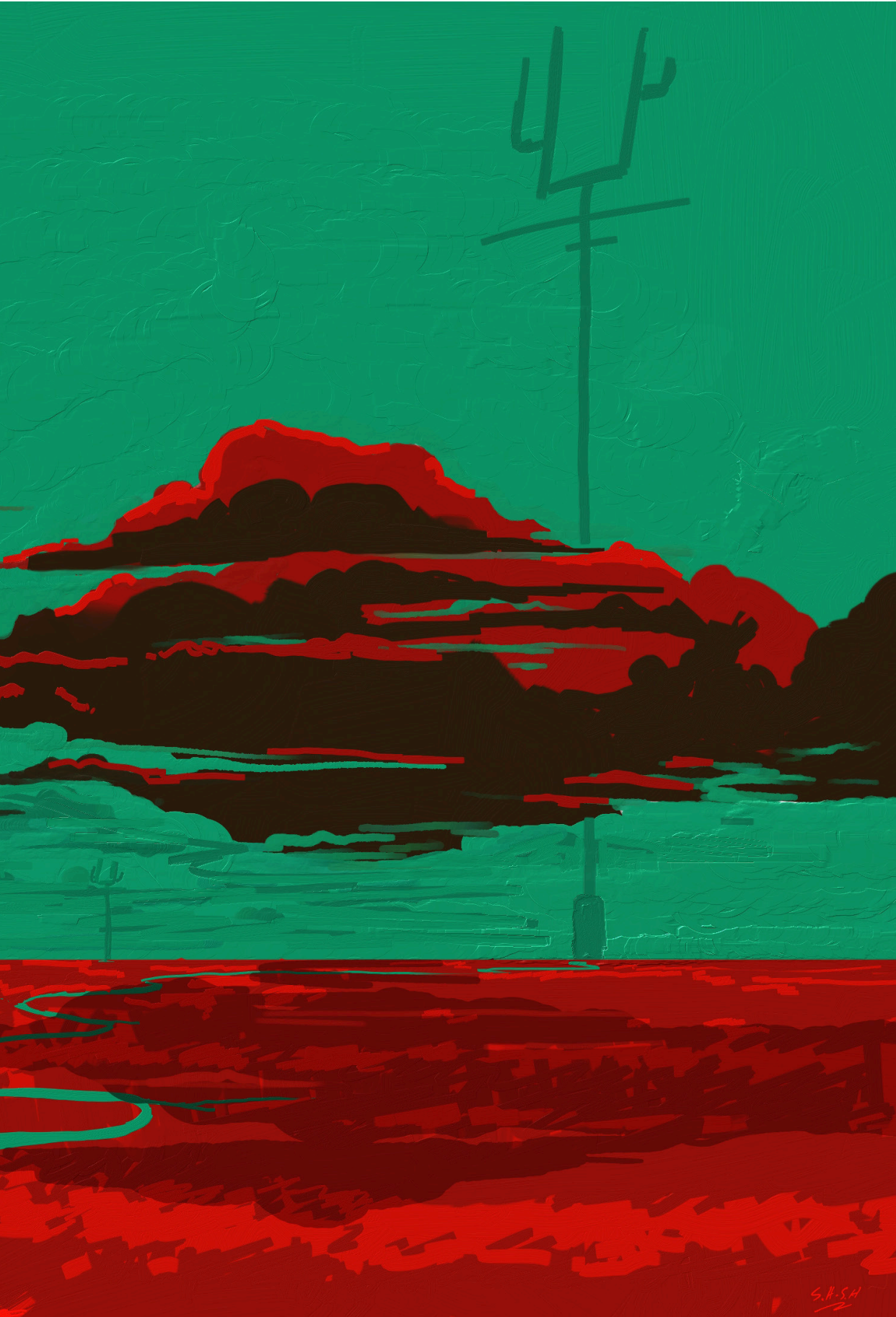
sitting with crossed legs, atop
a shattered stack of bricks

selling fruit covered with
the dust of cement

and the bitter memory
of what had been.

Syed Hassan





<http://www.llakendalellamafarms.org>

Shari Christopherson

Date Posted: 12 JULY

Welcome to the Llakendale Llama Farm. Here we have developed the perfect method for raising llamas--solitude. Studies have shown that they are natural herd animals, but they said that about humans as well, so here each llama is placed in a zone by itself. They are given plenty of space to run, and ample amounts of food and water. The only time that llamas are permitted to interact with each other is to mate. That is all they really need anyway—it is a safer method of living.

When female llamas give birth to their young, commonly known as crias, other female llamas would normally surround them, but there is no reason for that here. They give birth alone, or with one of our specialists. This prevents embarrassment for the female llama and protects their young from other females that may be jealous.

We also keep the male llamas separate which is added security for them. They do not fight for ranking in the herd, because they are completely isolated from those who would challenge each other. All males get to keep their testicles this way. There is no need for another llama to fight for his right to mate by biting off another male's reproductive organ, because they all get equal time with the females. Doesn't that sound a lot more pleasant, men?

Our llamas have unique characteristics. As you observe each llama from our watchtowers, you will notice some calculating the perimeter by walking the fence lines. Bet you didn't know llamas could do geometry! We also have some singers on the grounds!

You can often here a harmony of humming. Even though the living quarters are spaced apart, the llamas can hear each other. Separation is the key to creativity!

We look forward to your visit where you can witness the beauty of llamas in isolation. This unique, one-of-a-kind, experience will leave you wanting more!

Want to live a day in the life of one of our llamas? With our deluxe package, you can stay in one of our hotel rooms where you will have an abundance of room, food and drinks. And, of course, just like the llamas' living, the room is made just for one! Now isn't that a peaceful thought? You may never want to leave!

CLICK HERE for pricing and availability.

Date Posted: 25 AUGUST

Llakendale Llama Farms has been temporarily closed due to unforeseen required repairs on fences. We underestimated how strong our llamas become given these ideal living situations.

Link: <http://newsroom/kwz/llamasmissing/runaways/7865>

Last Posted: 10 OCTOBER

Llakendale Llama Farms will be having a grand re-opening in two weeks! You may have visited a ghost town in the Wild West before, but have you ever been to a llama ghost town? See what life used to be like for llamas in isolation! Discount tickets available now! *CLICK HERE* for more details.



Tess Cramer



Mom Gives Birth to Julie



Tess Cramer



Sara and Julie Blow Out the Birthday Candles





Tess Cramer

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/sinkhollow/vol3/iss1/1>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26077/T24b-f68b>

Sara First Day of School



Julie First Day of School

The Quiet Breaking Us Down

Morgan Sanford

Dear Bruce,

I'm writing you tonight because the feelings will be cold tomorrow. You said that, and I like it. I like to think of writing you like that.

I like to think of you there on the far end of my letter, you reading what I'm writing. You, eyes deep, face pensive, forehead creased. You open the envelope, you pull out the page, and you read it. I wrote back as soon as I could, Bruce. I hope I haven't kept you waiting.

And then you bend over my thoughts like I bend over the paper, and you try to decipher my mess. The slant starts straight, twists tight until it breaks. I try to write the way I'm supposed to, Bruce, but sometimes I feel too much to do it right. I see your scribbles in my mind, you writing back, your words, the way they're flowing from your pen.

There's something about those words like embers burning on the floor. Something about that picture in my head the heat that makes me wonder what it means. Same reason why I write to you right now because I know that when this song stops pulsing in my ear my heart will stop pounding and my fingers will stop flying and the ink will smear and I won't be able to finish my thought. Like all those times I leave a paragraph for later and come back can't remember what it was I tried to say. I have to get

this out before the friction fades. You press my messy words into your chest.

I trust you Bruce, feel safe the way you always seem to hear the only friend I write to anymore. I trust the way I hear you too so grateful I can talk to when we write it's like we're meeting in the middle. Something in the way I dump myself all over desperate heat melts frozen lick the envelope I close it stamp it mail it hope you'll open read same frantic pace I wrote that fast and flying. So the feeling won't get lost. So the feeling won't get lost the words too deep to write them. So somehow you can read this like I wrote two days ago my fingers racing words flying ink spilling hand smearing because I just want you to feel it and you can't, Bruce. My words you can't because they take too long to write.

I know this letter will be cold the day you read it, page cool, ink dry and envelope still sealed. Nothing left of flames that singed my hand their blaze across the paper, white hot paper burning ashes falling breathing losing until I tuck the embers in the envelope and seal it shut it mail it.

You read them and the wind blows words away.

Dear Bruce,

Tell me about Clara.

You write about her a lot, how you don't want her to write. How she writes and signs her letters "love"—that irks you, but I'd like to ask you why. Would you rather not be responsible for someone else's love? Would you rather not bow under its weight? I've never been brave enough to ask someone to stop loving me like that I'm glad I'd never have to ask something like that of you. You understand me in a way that's deeper than all that. We write like friends less cluttered than all that.

But Clara wrote you every week or maybe every day and she called you names when you broke her heart and told her not to wait. When you told her not to write you anymore. Told her she was nice enough but even so she wasn't quite enough for you. I mean, I don't know if that's exactly how you phrased it, but I think that's what you said: that she lacked the depth to make long days feel shorter. I wonder how she felt reading that letter in her parlor back in Minot. I wonder if she cried Bruce when you told her you were through. I wonder if her heart broke wasted months of writing to a soldier seas away. I feel for you, Bruce, but I also feel for her. I wonder if she cried or just got mad. I'll admit that I've done both. I know how broken angry feels.

Maybe Clara raged while she sobbed and wrote you letters, one after another sent them off before she even stopped to think. I hold myself against that waterfall of words Bruce every time I fall apart, my body blocking sounds that I'll regret. But sometimes fine things break when someone says you're not enough. Sometimes you start to believe it. I know that, Bruce—

I know because like Clara I have, too.

I wonder how it hurt the news she married Collins. For you how did it feel to read those words? You called your love a sinking boat, a wreck that all the letters in the world just couldn't save, but you wrote your sister angry when you heard. I think you felt betrayed. Because something had died that you knew, or at least that's what you said.

Still, there's some small comfort breaking hearts. There's safety knowing, at least for a while, that they're still in love with you. They wake up every morning to check the mail and hope you've found the time to write. It's sick, that aching, longing place. I've been there, the breaker, and I have been the broken.

I broke his heart three times; he cried and broke mine twice.

Twelve months off and on he knew me deeper than anybody, could read my face like letters. Almost like you do, Bruce. Except you read my words like letters, and him, he read my face... I loved him more than words could ever say. I fell for him the same way you for Clara ended us like life did both of you. I only check my mail for you now Bruce you'd never hurt me quite like that I think that's why I feel safe spilling all myself to you.

He and I we saw each other on the bus, 43 days after the break. Twelve months of reading my face he said he couldn't take it anymore. I've never lived through hell like that before. And then that day he told me, "She and I in June we're getting married. Things are going really well. I thought you'd want you'd like to know." And I smiled my smile was breaking because love means wanting what's best, but he and I lived through so much then something died that we knew.

I know you didn't want her, but I hope for your sake and for mine that it hurt when you lost her. I hope so because I've been that girl a thousand

times, Return to Sender stamped across my letters and a “please don’t say ‘I love you’ anymore” bleeding ink my heart I know just how she feels. I hope you ached for her because I know she cried for you.

His words have mostly cooled, but they still hurt sometimes.

Your words had long since cooled, but words still hurt sometimes.

Dear Bruce,

I'm going to write what I feel how I feel it, not the way I'd say it. You know as well as I do that words just aren't enough.

You know that lost feeling you said you get on trains? That lost feeling, you said. On trains. That their whistle makes the world's most melancholy sound.

I get that lost feeling too sometimes, deep in the pit of my stomach like a chasm that's too big to fit. But it doesn't come to me on trains. It never comes to me on trains. It always comes in the moments when everything in me stretches and spins inside out, ready to wrap another body in a cocoon, wrap it squeeze it tight into my insides pull the cord, pull the hood the string the outsides tight. When everything turns out to pull a body in but then there's nothing

there.

I get that feeling a thousand times bigger than myself, splitting seams and spewing out a million directions, foaming, flying, bubbling right over the edges of a Coca Cola glass, me infinite and tiny all at once. Something big and broken beautiful and perfect scarred and scratched a thousand times. My insides feel raw in moments like that, too much redness and sadness and wetness to feel good or safe or whole. Turn down the exposure or the picture won't turn out. Turn down all the feelings or the writing won't turn out. I feel lost when I am broken, when the high of the waves and the music fades away and leaves me gasping. Grasping. All the moments when I claw to the exit claw at the nothing for something substantial to cling to. Falling through sky towards a ground that will break me, insides hanging out, my heart in my hand, willow branches tangled through my hair. Falling, gliding, spinning, splashing, smashing to the pavement. I watch myself from above,

the trajectory of body tumbling down toward the blackness, and I hold out my hands to keep myself from jumping. Back down off the high dive, I say. Go back down now.

Back down off the stairs.

Too much body. Too much blood.

Too much fissure, schism, void.

Too much space between I don't know how to cross it.

The way I hold my soul out, beating, pulsing—jagged, ragged edges—but then simply purely

me.

That's the only way I know to cross the void.

I hold it out to the boy standing high up on that high dive, toes curled tight over the edge, swim trunks blue like the ocean and the sky wrapped into fabric eyes and swirled around like water. He bought them new for this trip and I am waiting hushed at home while he stands breathless, frozen, cold. The way I hold it out say, here, please take this but don't break it.

And he jumps.

And he falls.

I'm falling too, of course, wind whipping past that pulsing ball of flesh, stinging my insides, singeing my outsides, inside out and tumbling through the air. And something in me wants to bubble like a parachute, blow out to fill the sky and slow the fall, slow the breaking, ten feet from the surface, five feet from the surface, three feet from the surface,

break the surface

SMACK

My emptiness is shattered,

smashed like glass across the floor.

Like the plate that I dropped on the floor.

Here are all the jagged pieces, I say

I say I told you I'm not perfect

He clambers out from the pool, towel blue trunks hair streaming falling
waving shining sparkling splashing

perfect.

Here are all my pieces.

And that is when I get the lost feeling, Bruce.

That feeling, like a trainwreck, like a lump in my throat I need water but
mostly it's smashed down into my stomach. In the pit of my stomach. In
the bottom of my stomach. All the way down in my stomach. When he
holds out his hands and he shakes his head no he says no.

That is when I come up for air, but I can't.

You said on trains. On trains you get that lost feeling.

This is when I get that lost feeling too.

Dear Bruce,

I think I have something to tell you. I think I have something to say.

When I close my eyes, all I see is that moment on the couch, me curled into a ball, him touching my leg. I thought it meant something, that touch, the way he stayed till 12:30 three nights in a row and we talked and we laughed and he told me I was good. He said I was so good. And he looked at me like he meant it, like he wanted to know those purer parts of me, but mostly his hand on my leg it was clamping my leg and that told me. That he came because he wanted to. That he'd stay because he wanted to. We met in class then seven days they made one week like that, him calling me at night, him telling me the truth. I thought something was changing, that somehow all the broken things were fixed. I'd prayed so hard for someone to laugh to cry with me like that, you know; you said you want those same things too. Someone who listens and still cares enough to stay.

Him stretching laughing smiling spinning lit up his whole face, washing dishes bubbling brimming full of joy for life. Me dancing laughing—"dork," he said—I stepped into the risk of something new. I tumbled into arms he held outstretched and let my fear slip down like walls. They crashed and falling shattered to the floor. I burst the way he beamed he saw me Bruce he looked he saw me Bruce I thought that meant we found something I thought that meant we found it. Me broken and him pocketing my pieces. I laughed into his eyes I smiled I thought connection.

Then I stirred the brownie batter with the bright magenta spoon and he wrapped his arms around my waist he buried his face in my hair and I froze. I froze up cold because touches like that, they mean something. He held and I pulled and he ripped me in half Bruce he scared me but I let him do it anyway. Why on earth would someone tall dark hand-

some bend down to wrap his arms around my waist, bones protruding out beneath the skin, ribs and hips stabbing through all the parts of me that feel like they're wasting away. I think I tried to starve myself so I wouldn't feel it happening inside. I felt tiny there, the chasm of his arms, full and empty in all the ways I'd always wanted. Tiny safe but also he could crush me if he wanted to. So I handed him my heart I sent him songs that made me cry, and he kept coming over late at night because he wanted to. Because he wanted to. Because I wanted him to want to.

Then he packed his bags, his new blue swimsuit, and he told me he liked Vegas.

He never said another word.

Bruce, when you stand pensive there on the ship deck with tears in your eyes, I know what you are saying. When you cry out into the void for someone to hear you, letters to girls who just don't understand you, I think perhaps I do. I think I cry there too. I think I stay up late at night with you.

Silence eats me up inside, but not because it is.

What kills me is the void where bodies stood ready to catch me, press my words into their chests and keep them safe.

Silence isn't empty on its own.

Only when those bodies turn their backs against the sound.

I stayed up reading poems 4 am he stayed up writing sent them said he couldn't sleep because he's thinking. Said you're the only one I show these to. I saw his fear and so I offered up myself, said please, just let me hear you please because

I need to be heard, too.

I'm falling apart I said I'll break my silence, too.

How does it feel, Bruce, staring out across the ocean, pen pressing paper into words that no one knows? Staring out over the sea and writing war to worlds who've never felt the blast of guns? All the times you threw bodies overboard you heard the splash and then you fell asleep on watch. I wonder if language ever feels like it's lacking, like it's not enough and never will be, pushing back against the page like I pushed back against the sculpted arms pulled tight around my waist. In that moment of transcendence, aching beauty ripping burning perfect sweet. I felt that way right then, me pressed up wrapped against the counter. Like brimming thoughts too big to fill their space as words. Is that the way you feel when music makes you want to cry? I know you dream about the person who will hear you Bruce because I dream that same dream, too.

I hate the way I stiffened at his touch, stiffened like my words, skin pulled taut because I was afraid. Afraid to let him hurt himself hurt me or maybe even both. I hate that fear; I never knew that it would be my last.

Afraid to taste the words I'd sob after he left.

And maybe that's the risk we take hurling words into the ocean. They splash and skip and bob and sink, and then what are we left with. An empty void and words we never said. And you with your pen and me with my bright magenta spoon, brownie batter smeared like blood across my cheek. And you stand there staring and I stand here staring and we stare and we stare at each other because silence is the only way to speak. The only way to speak, on paper and in life Bruce do you understand the things I'm trying to say. I need you to hear me

no one listens anymore I move toward you can't abandon me like he did Bruce connection nothing more than thoughtless twisted fabricated touch. I move to touch his hand we meet connect until he pulls away we're ashes floating up like smoke from burning words.

I forgot a touch is not a promise. The circuit breaks when he stands up to walk away.

I told him to his back Bruce said I missed the way we were.

Dear Bruce,

And then I never said another word.

Jonathan Gilmore



Face 2 Face

Dear Bruce,

You said you felt smug and mannish standing there in the depot, the quiet breaking you down. The quiet breaking down. The quiet breaks us down.

Like two people in a room who can't look at each other their faces say too much. I walk in strong and sure, but then I see the way he sees me looks away and all my words break down.

He looks away I really wish you would answer my letters.

All those nights you say you just can't sleep for thinking.

The witching hour when wisdom teeth pulse throbbing more than scars. Open dreams raw flesh dark ravaged deep the blackness. I lay there open eyes that night it hurt too much to sleep. Knowing if I reached to grab my phone, I'd have no one to call.

The silence breaks me down.

When you wake from dreams still happy then you lay there blink because you can't stop all the truth from rushing back.

The silence broke me down.

I checked my phone too many times.

I checked the mail too many times.

When Grandpa pulled that box down off his shelf, Bruce, he said his brother was his hero. He never knew him Bruce because he left when he was five, but the way his parents smiled and cried about him...

I turned the bathroom light on stood there staring, starving at the way I couldn't eat.

The naked silence no one heard but me

The way you wrote nine months of letters straight into a shoebox.

It's been seventy years, Bruce, and no one reads your letters. No one reads you anymore. No one even hears you anymore.

Your mother with a telegram hand shaking sobbing pressed against the table. Your father wrapped his breaking heart around her.

When Grandpa pulled that box down off the shelf, he said he stood and watched her cry. Five years old my grandpa stood he stared she cried.

He cried the day he told me, too, then handed me a letter.

Dear Bruce, that day he handed me your words.

I stood there staring drowning t-shirt swollen eyes the mirror

Bruce, he handed me your letter

And I touched you through the glass. I mean the page. I mean the yellow paper that almost fell to pieces in my hand, the gentle curve of cursive, the gentle slope of words, the blots and stains and ink. I imagine you writing, brow furrowed, lips pursed, bent over a clean white sheet of paper.

Your absence tainted every word with grief. It's been seventy years, and the pages aren't white anymore. I hold them but your writing's hard to read. I furrow my brow and purse my lips and bend over, straining to

make sense of jumbled letters set in lines. I glance at the transcription, the translation, how Grandpa understood you better than I can. But even then I feel the ache, Bruce. I ache the words they break inside because you sent your last and never knew it would be Bruce. I keep on reaching out I'm reaching but you never write me back.

I read your every letter, Bruce, I read your every word
I touch you through the paper but I cannot make you speak.

You and your dream on the train, and me staring back from the glass.
Cold, skinny fingers touch the mirror

memorizing my face I swear I see you.
I need I have to see you.

Standing there in the bathroom, harsh yellow lights like your letters, I finger every curve. The bags and dark eyes and the skin. Clavicle sticking out beneath skin. The too rosy cheeks, and the skin. The bones and the blood and the skin.

The day he pulled your box down from the shelf, I stared up at your picture. My great uncle Bruce on the wall. Dark suit, white smile, and the skin. You young and handsome Bruce before the bullet broke you. The black and the white and the skin. You look like my cousin, I think, and my brother has your eyes. No wonder the letters from Clara. So handsome, we said. He's handsome, they said. We need you, he said. I miss you, she said.

Hello, Bruce

I said.

You in your frame Bruce and me in the mirror, I strain to see your

face in me. I tell myself a touch is not connection Bruce this circuit
can't complete just you but me I'm stubborn reaching out to touch you
through the glass.

I reach out to touch you through glass, Bruce

and I realize I'm touching myself.

1945 March 1

Mr and Mrs Athol Barrett Blake
745 South 6 East Slake

The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you of the death of your son Ensign Bruce Druwood Blake USNR as a result of gunshot wound on 23 February 1945 while in the service of his country. ... Burial at sea or in locality of death highly probable. When further details are received they will be forwarded to you promptly. The Navy Department extends to you its sincerest sympathy in your great loss.

Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, Chief of Naval Personnel 

James Hadley



Rubicon



Syed Hassan

Tether



the fates could not have weaved a stronger thread

Sarah Gill

when my neighbor's husband died
she started stitching a quilt
out of his old patterned shirts
and ripped denim jeans
and if you asked me
id say it was an ugly old
quilt that smelled of cigars
and pickled beets because
that was what he liked to
eat on sunday after church
with saltines and a glass
of milk from the cows in
the pasture a mile away
from their little house
and the quilt was never
warm or soft or beautiful
but to my next-door neighbor
it was the whole world

Bailee Jones



Farmington Bay

For a Body Not Yet Gone

Cassie Garison

The room is skeletal: butterflies
are crucified to a corkboard above a bed,
little more. You slide the pins loose,

place their frail torsos into a mortar
on the floor, crush the pigment
from their wings. Colors erupt

in paroxysm— blend and wilt
like bone through tears in flesh. I,
meanwhile, prod the room with my mind:

nerves spill from my chest— stain
the floorboards crimson— skin split,
sternum to groin, flesh yearning for pins.

You and I, we live as anachronisms:
two wooden-eyed alchemists

leaving flowers at each others' graves
in between days, trading ribs

every time we intersect.



Kayla Rich

Hearth

Published by DigitalCommons@USU, 2017

Kassi Roos



Octopus

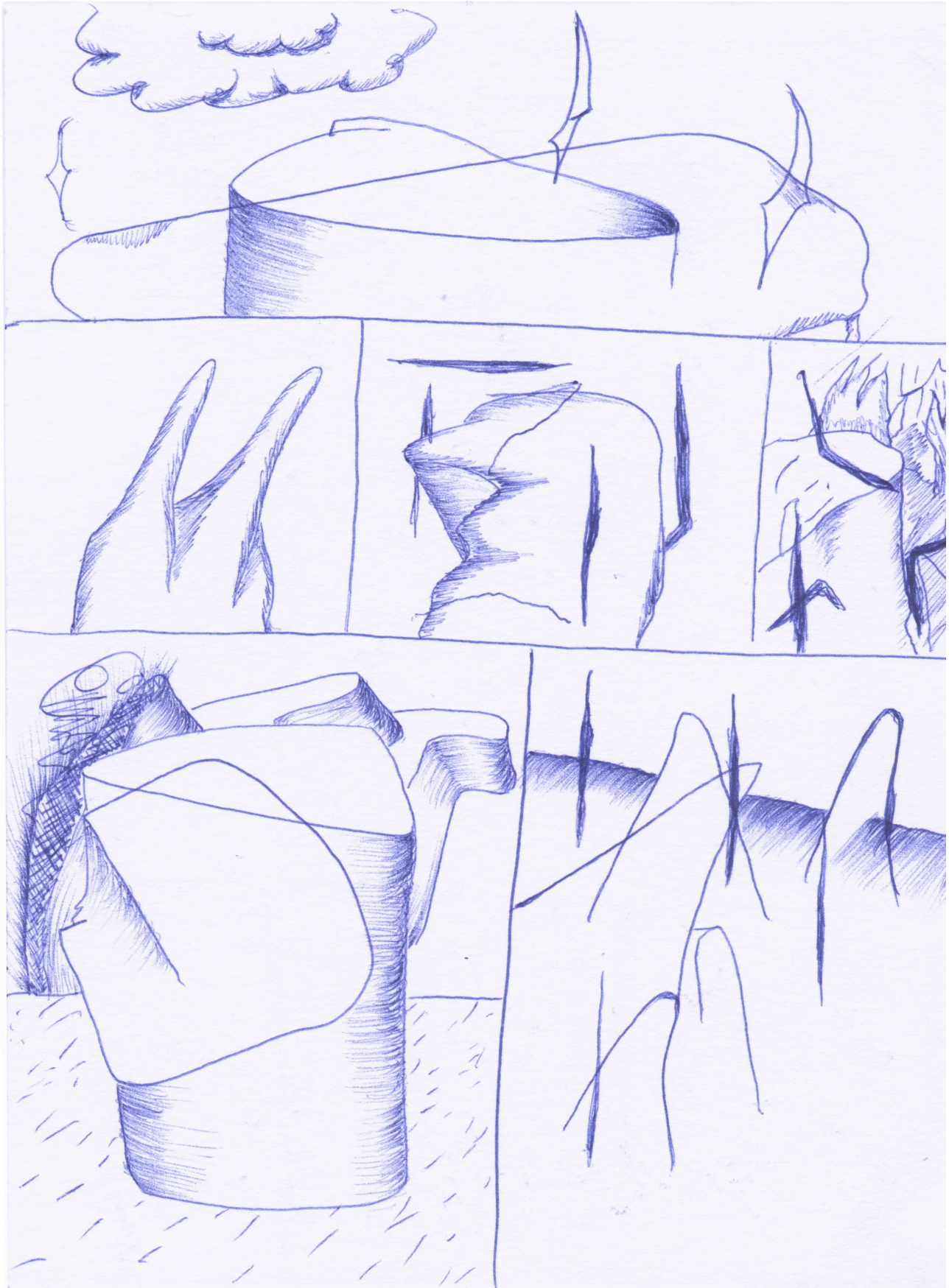


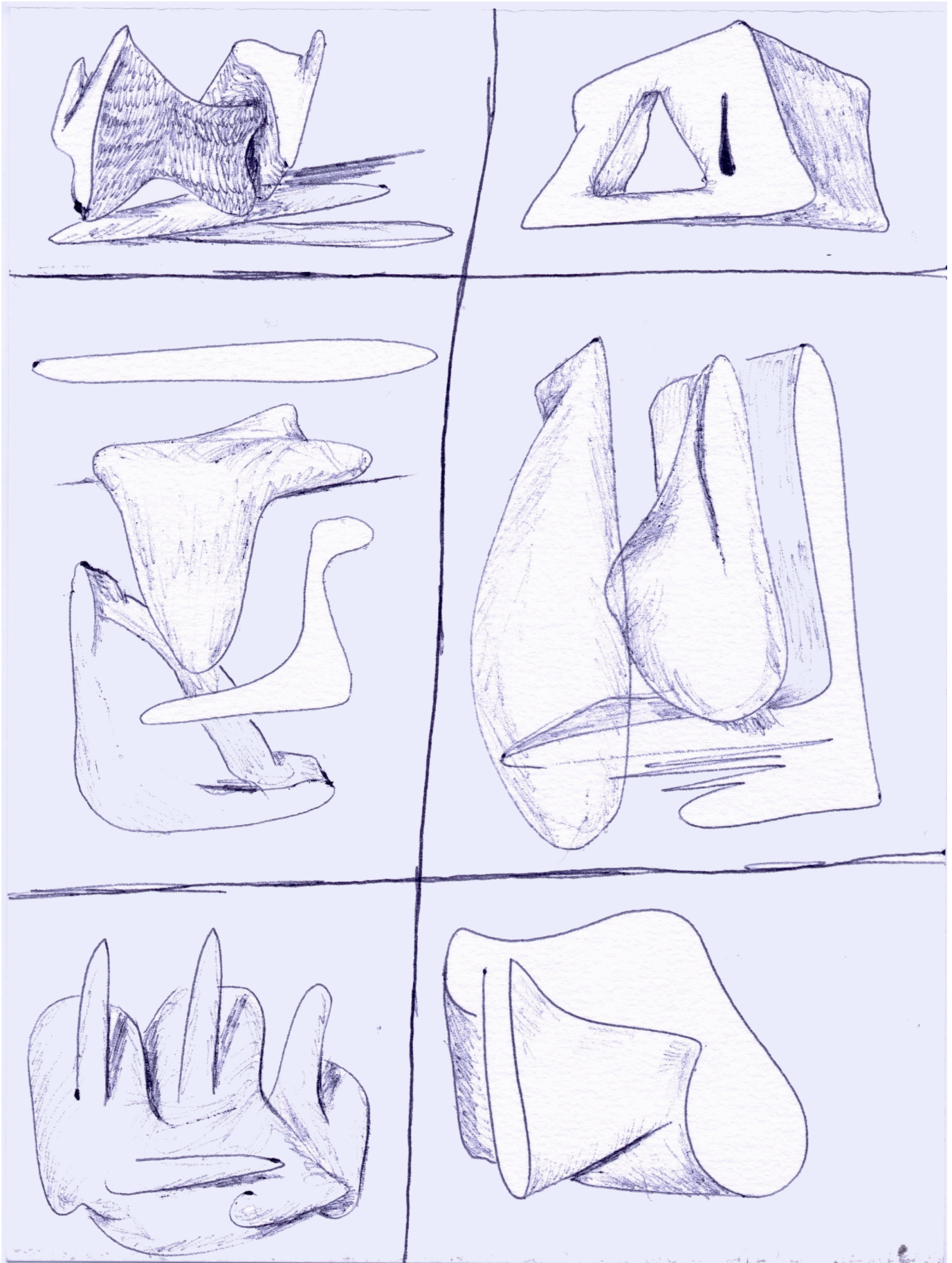
ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Andrew Gist

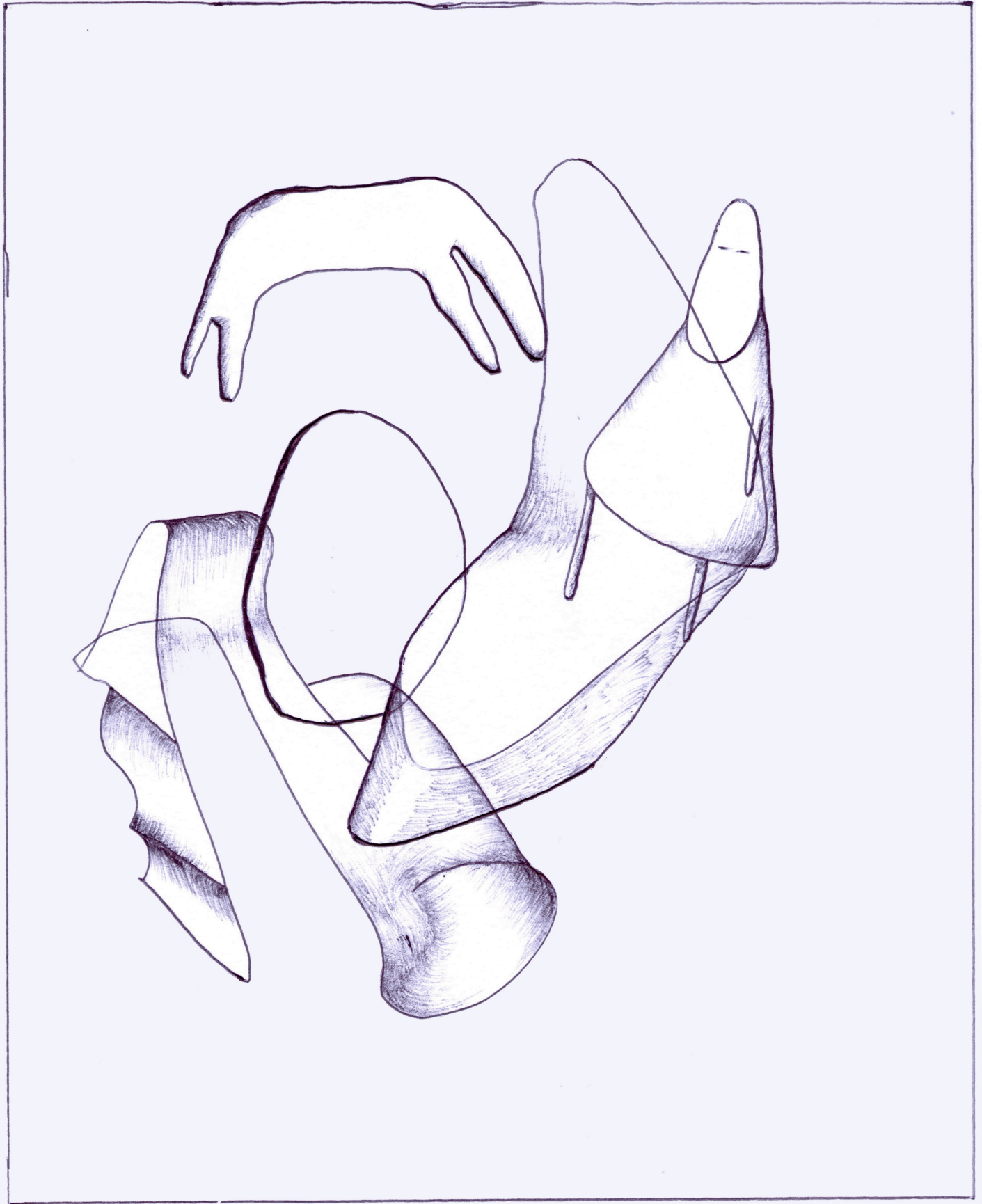
Andrew Gist is an artist and undergraduate student at Portland State University focusing on zine making, alternative comics, and illustration.. He is interested in shapes and the corners of rooms. He primarily works in ink, but at times uses acrylic paint and digital editing. The pieces included in this submission are all pen and those colored are done with digital editing.













All of Andrew's Work is Untitled

Submitter Bios

Alex Bullock is an undergraduate studying English, Philosophy, and Latin at Utah State University. Her hobbies include running, listening to classical music, arguing about The Lord of the Rings trivia, and eating instant mac and cheese while watching Chef's Table. Her two favorite words are the verb meaning "to find" in Latin, invenire, and the English word, pretentious.

Mayra Alejandra Cano is a junior majoring in English and Chicano Studies at the California State University, Fresno. In addition to her studies, she is also the Co-Editor of La Voz de Aztlan, an ethnic supplement to the Fresno State newspaper, the president of the Chicano and Latin American Studies Student Association, and the assistant director of el Ballet Folklórico de Madera.

Shari Christopherson is a senior at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. She loves crazy socks, sewing and llamas. "http://www.lakendalellamafarms.org" is her first published work.

Kaelin Ian Cooper is a student at Middle Tennessee State University, pursuing his BFA in Printmaking with a minor in painting. Inspired by Greek and Roman statues, while also influenced through science fiction, Kaelin explores sexual fluidity and his humanistic, moral makeup. side note: He loves mermaids

Tess Cramer is an undergraduate student at Utah State University. Her multimedia approach incorporates her own family photographs, a process of creating and destroying which aims to be illustrative of memory loss.

Cassie Garison is an undergraduate at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She is studying Classical Languages and English Creative Writing. She enjoys traveling, painting, and wearing casual clothing to formal events.

Sarah Gill is an undergraduate student of English and Creative Writing at Dalhousie University. She is a veteran writer of many forms but loves to paint watercolor woodland animals on the side. She adores adventuring and camping with her boyfriend Philip and her beloved four-pawed companion Wylie Coyote.

Jonathan Gilmore is an undergraduate at Portland State University. He enjoys long walks on the beach, itty bitty kitty cats, never ending popsicles, a good laugh and creating from “chaos”.

Andrew Gist is an artist and undergraduate student at Portland State University focusing on zine making, alternative comics, and illustration.. He is interested in shapes and the corners of rooms.

James Hadley is an undergrad at the University of Utah. He enjoys making art and skateboarding, and nothing else.

Sebaah Hamad is an English Literature major at Le Moyne College. Her fiction and poetry has been published in the literary journal Salamander and in 2017, she won the Newhouse Poetry Award. In the fall, she will begin a doctoral program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She lives a double life as both a New Yorker and Californian. She is a mediocre painter, tea fanatic, and fast-talker. She has yet to learn to pause.

Syed Hassan is an undergraduate student double-majoring in Art and Philosophy at University of California, Santa Cruz. His work is primarily digital, nestled between the fields of illustration and graphic design.

Bailee Jones is an artist from the proud state of Texas. She is currently an undergraduate student at Utah State University in the BFA Art Education program with a Drawing and Painting emphasis and Art History minor. She enjoys art-making, playing piano, and admiring all the beautiful snowfall in Utah—even in April.

Theodore Lehre is an undergraduate student at University of California, Berkeley. In their pursuit of a degree in English, Theodore has also developed a passion for astronomy, the Irish language, and well-made coffee.

Katherine Michalik is an undergraduate student at Salisbury University majoring in English and minoring in art. She has a passion for writing as well as for photography.

Kayla Rich is an undergraduate student at Utah State University. She loves art, reading, being in the print studio, and spending time with her family. She loves swimming and considers herself more fit to be in the water than on land.

Kassi Roos is a student currently enrolled at Brigham Young University-Idaho. She loves to work in many different mediums consisting of oil paint, watercolor, acrylic, and ink and often combine them to create a different feel to my artwork.

Morgan Sanford is a senior at Utah State University studying

English and Spanish Teaching. She is an Undergraduate Research Fellow who loves asking questions, writing music, and finding beauty in unexpected places.

Karu Shao is an contemporary artist with diverse culture background. Born in China, live in Japan, studied in Switzerland, Canada, and now being an undergraduate student at University of Miami in the USA. She love traveling, nature, culture study, and philosophy. Also, she is enthusiastic about adapting all of the new things and turn into her art pieces as showing her perspective toward the world. She does a variety element of art, not only painting, but silkscreen print, ceramics, photograph and short film.

Sean Swogger attends Kent State University as an undergraduate. He enjoys writing fiction and poetry, and hopes to pursue it beyond graduation. Meanwhile, his quests for the strangest music and the perfect IPA continue.

Joshua Tarplin is an undergraduate student at Yale University. He enjoys working with the gestures of multiple media.

Emily Townsend is a senior English major at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her poetry, nonfiction, and flash fiction has been published in HUMID 7 and 8, The Bookends Review and Junto Magazine, and other works are forthcoming in Superstition Review and Thoughtful Dog Magazine. Her nonfiction essay had been nominated to represent SFASU in the AWP Intro contest. She is currently managing editor for HUMID 9.

Grace Ji Yan Tsang is an undergraduate student at New York University majoring in Communicative Sciences and Disorders and minoring in English. She loves painting, reading, singing and watching otter videos over tea.



