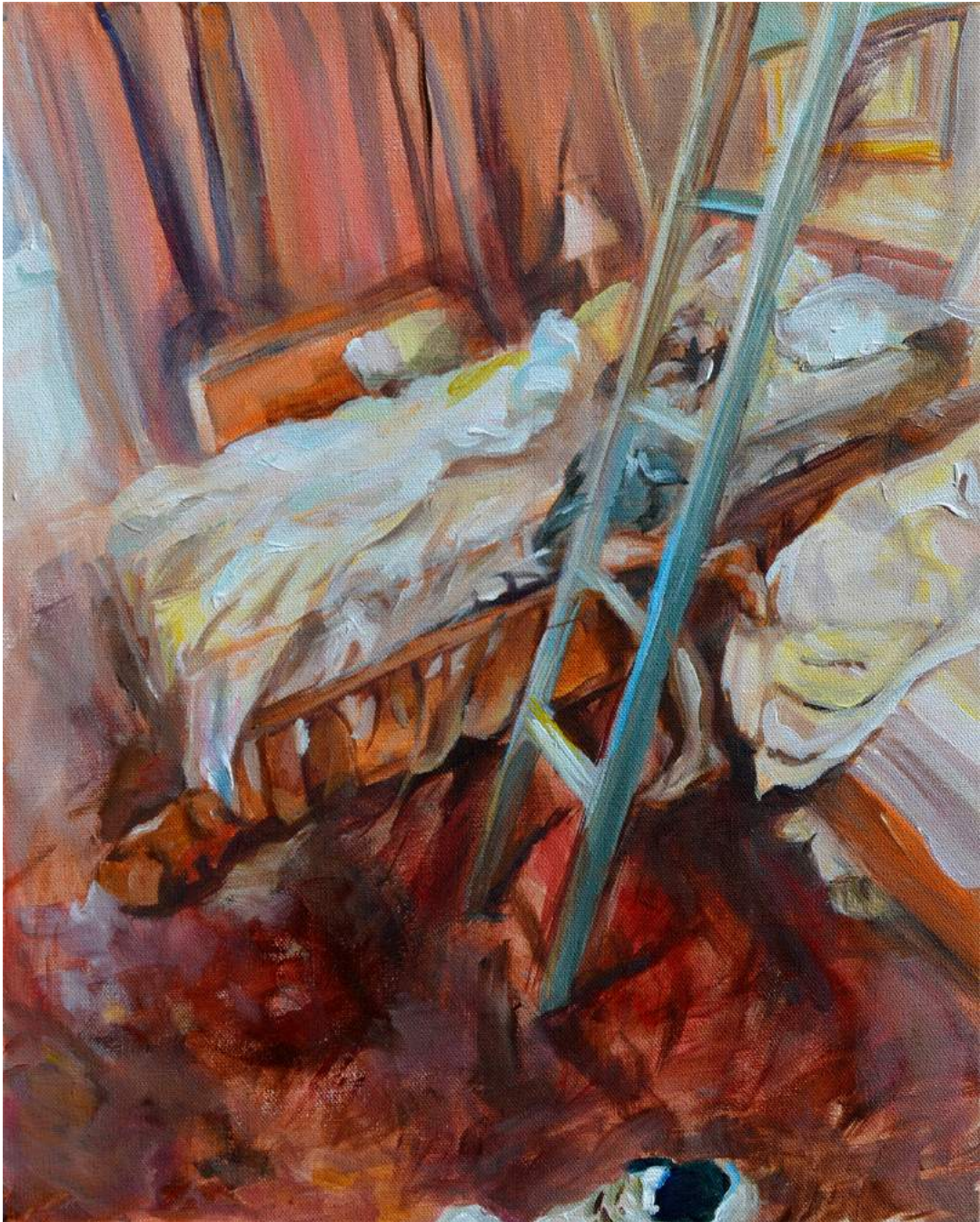


S P I R E S

AUTUMN 2016



S P I R E S

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Sully Bacerdo
Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Front Inside: "Lazy Daze"
Acrylic
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Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Back Cover: "Fracture"
India Ink on Paper
Amy Chen
Washington University in St. Louis, '19

Back Inside: "A Vigilante Ripped My Sports Coat"
Photograph
Natalie Martinez and Manuela Araque
Washington University in St. Louis, '17 and '18

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Somewhere in Arkansas

The First Letter was drafted and went something like this:
DAUGHTER DEAD SEND FLOWERS STOP.

the writer, shy of forty two,
took that daughter to a convenient store
bathroom, married her, took her out west,
showed her the leaves, took her
from her mother - a bipolar womb -
from her father - an unpresent -
from her brother - caught in the window -
and unlaced her in the fold of red clay

suppurating in the weed beds.
Maybe he killed her too, when
he set her up in that tiny house
with the pale blue wallpaper, bright
pink Formica counters, sticky
with the jam from the fingers
of the children that lived there before,
their heights etched in shaky
penmanship on the doorway.

She died on a Tuesday from boredom, in
a chair he'd made her, and she was missing
a mother she knew could never peel apples.
She was sitting at the window plotting her escape.

When he found her, he wrote to her mother,
because it's what you do with such matters.
She had sent her photographs every Sunday of
all her future husbands. She replied she was taking
the train - the scenic route - would bring lilies.
he decided to sell the house,
he made a sign, fastened it to a corrugated metal
rod and stabbed it in the yard.

Astronauts, it read, do not survive here.

*A.D. Lauren
Emory University, '17*

Oklahoma Hills

For E. W. Robinson

“‘The man with the cane – he and his family eat here for free.’ That’s what the manager said, bless his heart. And moving that senile old tree down the block? Such a kindness, I never knew.” My grandmother shook her head. “Mm-hmm.”

I sat in my late great-grandpa’s living-room, on the couch beside a pillow with the words “Get ‘er done” embroidered on it. My grandmother sat across from me, by the door, in one of the rocking chairs, and one of my older cousins sat in the armchair in the corner. No one sat in great-grandpa’s old chair. As usual, my dad resisted sitting down, and wandered around the room, fiddling with a nicotine-gum wrapper and examining the photographs on the walls.

This house wasn’t really his, but my great-grandpa had made it his own in the last six months of his life. His house, his real home, was down the street, but it had been stripped of its tiles and shingles, and sat ready for demolition. KFC had bought up the entire block, and forced him to move out, a ninety-year-old WWII veteran with cancer who had lived in that same house for sixty years. At least they transplanted his tree.

“It’d be nap-time right about now,” my cousin said. “He’d be sitting over there in his chair, watching TV, and he’d drift off.”

“Ah, but he’d just be resting his eyes.”

“Right,” my cousin half-laughed. “Right.”

“Should we sort through that box of photos?” My dad asked, coming over and settling himself cross-legged on the carpet.

“Sure, hon.” My grandmother said, and fanned herself with one hand. “You know,” she addressed me, “You’re the oldest child of the oldest child of the oldest child?”

I tried to smile, but it came out as a weird sort of grimace. “Yeah.”

In photographs, my dad is never looking straight at the camera. If I’m in the photo too, he’s always looking at me. I had never noticed this before. See, my dad’s not one for expressing his affections — not because he’s cold, just because he’s quiet. He doesn’t talk to anyone, barely talks to me. But suddenly, I was glad to be his only kid. In those photos, I can tell: I am his everything.

I walked my grandmother down to the local park, holding her hand. I’m a bit taller than she is, and we walked very slowly. We didn’t speak much, but she asked me some questions about the funeral.

“You’ve never been to an open-casket ceremony, have you hon?”

I shook my head. “I’ll be fine.”

“And at the cemetery, he’ll get the military salute, with the gunfire and the bugler.” She sighed. “Mostly I’m concerned for Jerry.”

Jerry is my autistic cousin, a year younger than me. He was named after my grandfather, my grandma’s husband. He died before I was born, while my dad was still in college.

“Let’s sit down for a minute.”

The sky was overcast, a gray Missouri October day. We sat down on a bench and watched the wind in the grass. My grandmother squeezed my hand, and we didn't speak until we decided to get up and move on.

We took a few steps, before my grandmother paused to adjust her scarf. I glanced around. Where we had been sitting on the bench, there now sat a single red rose.

I had never seen my dad in a suit before, I swear to god. He was a pallbearer, and he was wearing one of great-grandpa's old suits. The shirt was too small, and the pants were too large, but he looked more formal than I had ever seen him.

The cemetery was very beautiful, hilly and full of trees, and it featured a pen of peacocks (I'm not kidding). The veteran reading great-grandpa's eulogy stuttered a lot, but the other veterans stood very still in their salute, and the bugle-player sounded dignified. Before he died, great-grandpa had played the bugle at veterans' funerals. Later, my grandma laughed, and told me that he couldn't play the bugle at all; he hid a boombox behind a gravestone.

During the salute, I lingered with my younger cousins and kept a hand on my grandmother's shoulder. Before they lowered the casket, she reached out and placed the red rose gently on top.

The drive back home took about six hours, just me and my dad. He wanted to take backroads, rather than the interstate, because passing semis gives him anxiety (it's not like I could blame him). He listened to documentaries about Elizabethan England. I stared out of the window and read stories from a book by Jhumpa Lahiri.

"Jerry did alright," I said.

"Yeah, he did."

Neither of us are talkers.

In the backseat, a large potted plant swayed back and forth, back and forth. It had been sent to the funeral home as a condolence from a relative I had never met. My dad wanted to give it a home. He's like that.

I never knew my great-grandpa much. Once, I visited him when I was very small. He was waiting for me on the front porch, behind his rose-bushes. He handed me one of the buds, with his gruff, kind smile, and led me inside. I sat on the carpet while he sat in his chair and watched TV, and I fondled the rose until petals began falling off.

When he fell asleep, I stood up on the end of the couch and leaned over his chair, trying to balance the rose atop his head. It stayed there until his own snoring jolted him awake, and the rose fell to his lap.

Elissa Mullins

Washington University in St. Louis, '20

The Painter

I will grow a beard
and become a painter
of landmarks landscapes and lighthouses
and when I've found myself
drawn and cornered
I will burn my canvas
down to pigment

and I will be a fireman
in a small town with
barely any fires
so I will go around
extinguishing the fire between
widowed women's legs
and one will say

you simply must meet my daughter

and I will be a father
of only one son
and I will toss him
into the sky
and before he falls into my
weak boned arms
I will run until my lungs tell me
no more

and I will be an old lone man
the hair on my face
gray and coarse and long

and as my son
reaches the ground
I will be lowered into it

perhaps he
will be a painter

Michael McGillicuddy
Emerson College, '17



Half a Person

Sully Bacerdo

Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Photograph



Suburbia

Anna Zhou

Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Mixed Media Sculpture (Wood, Mirrors, Paper, Mylar, Netting, Sumi Ink, Acrylic Inks, Pins)

Ghost Story

It was a drizzly evening, that May in 1996. Lucy was walking home from work, and the plinking sound of raindrops on her big black umbrella brought the taste of cherry Pop Rocks to her tongue. The rain was dodging her umbrella and misting her navy Manford's Market uniform into a deep black. She felt cold tendrils of water seeping through her backpack, and figured her homework was probably ruined. She looked down at the ground where the grass beside the road was completely submerged, churning up a muddy brown. She walked on the road to keep the mud off of her new boots. The water streaming down the black pavement in torrents made it look like a little creek, reflecting up stars and lonely streetlights.

The old woman was extremely intoxicated. After seeing the attention everyone was paying to Diane Pulaski's new fur coat, she'd been absolutely furious. After she'd downed far too many Carnaby Gimlets, her husband decided it was time to leave.

The old man was 75 years old, and he was well used to his wife's antics. He was also an extremely careful driver. He drove so carefully that his old green Buick LeSabre lacked even the slightest scratch. As his wife snored in the passenger seat, he flipped on Elvis radio and sang along to the songs under his breath.

The old man was driving at 68 miles per hour down Ellison Road when he failed to notice Lucy sheltering beneath her black umbrella. He was driving at 68 miles per hour when his old green Buick LeSabre tugged Lucy right up out of her new boots and killed her instantly. Very much unlike his wife, there wasn't a drop of alcohol in his body or an ill intention in his mind. He slammed on his brakes and stared, shocked, through his blood-soaked windshield, as the unearthly sounds of "Hound Dog" bleared tiredly through his shoddy speakers. The old man ignored the pain in his knees and ran as fast as he could to the nearest farmhouse to ring the police. His wife remained sound asleep throughout the entire endeavor.

Lucy was relatively comfortable in her plot at Mellworth County Cemetery. Her tombstone was polished white granite, under a pretty old oak tree, and she thought it looked very nice at midday when the sun glanced through the branches and left the smooth stone pockmarked with shadow. She felt that her old shoes were a little too tight; her new boots had been completely ruined in the mud, never mind the crash. Otherwise, she was relatively content. They'd done her hair up real nice and dressed her in her picture day outfit, even though it was a closed-casket affair. She couldn't complain. She felt a little bad for that old man, though. She supposed it'd been her own fault, walking down the dark street in her dark Manford's Market uniform. Thankfully, her family hadn't pressed charges. That would've made her feel positively terrible.

Her family came to visit her sometimes. Her mother would cry and pray, and her father wouldn't really do anything. It was nice to feel missed. Sometimes her sister would come too, and whisper to Lucy what she'd missed on The X-Files. Lucy stopped caring around season five, and her sister stopped coming around season seven. Lucy realized she must have gone to college. She was a little sad that she'd never go to college, but she'd never been that good of a student anyway. She'd tried and tried, but all the numbers and letters just gave her too much trouble.

On her birthdays, her parents would bring her lilies. They were very pretty, but she'd never been a big fan of lilies. The smell reminded her of funerals.

The only person who came to visit her consistently was the old man. Every Friday, he'd bring her a sprig of lilac. Once lilacs were out of season, he'd bring her a pretty leaf or a ripe strawberry, or sometimes even some Pop Rocks. Cherry. She wondered how he knew.

He was very old, she could tell, with a big nose and even bigger ears. His hair was white and curly, like an old Roman bust, but with a big bald spot smack-dab in the middle. His skin was dark and tan, and his eyes were a very watery blue. He had nice eyes; she imagined she'd like him if they ever met.

Every time he came to visit, he told her stories. Usually they were about his family, but sometimes (very rarely) they were about himself. He would apologize a lot, but that was to be expected. He never told her his name, but Lucy figured that was just an oversight. He seemed very old. He told her about when he worked at a steel mill, about his crazy daughters. He told her about his favorite grandson, Vinny, and made her promise never to tell anyone that he had a favorite. She knew he wouldn't hear her, but she swore she never would.

Sometimes he would cry, especially when he talked about his wife, but other times he would hum songs for Lucy. He told her he loved Elvis, though not nearly as much as his sister did. She had Elvis posters up on every wall. He also told her that he could never listen to "Hound Dog" ever again. He never really told her why, so she'd amuse herself sometimes by trying to guess. It was easily her favorite Elvis song.

One day he told her that his wife had died, and that she'd be joining Lucy in a plot a few rows down. He didn't cry when he told her that, but she wished that she could cry for him. He looked so sad. She got to watch the burial from afar, and picked out little Vinny from the crowd. He looked like a younger version of the old man, but his ears were smaller.

On the last Friday that the old man came to visit, he told her a story about when he was little. She heard about his family's tiny apartment in the city on the corner of Chester and Olive, about being part of the city patrol in the fifth grade, about making sure that all the younger kids crossed the streets safely. Once he'd saved a little boy from getting hit by a car, and the city had given him a medal. He showed it to her, and told her that the paper had an article about it calling him a hero. He said he'd bring it next time, and then apologized some more.

After that, he stopped coming. A few Fridays later, she saw little Vinny walking with the groundskeeper to where the old man's wife was buried, pulling a red wagon with a busted wheel. The shriek of the wheel was deafening in the still silence of the graveyard, and inside the wagon, a shiny black headstone cast up the glare from the midday sun every time the decaying wheels hit a bump.

Little Vinny wasn't very little anymore; the groundskeeper called him Vince. Lucy had forgotten that people could grow up.

About a month after the old man stopped visiting, Lucy stopped too.

Holly Baldacci
Washington University in St. Louis, '18

Pobrecito

I gave Mamí the scars:
the tally marks I used

to count my days
before I left the womb.

I was always the kind of boy who cried of
frustration when he did not get what he desired:

I demanded to be dead,
so I clung onto my own umbilical cord

begging the doctor not to slit it
as one would a defenseless dog.

In a backwards world
the dog would be our god,

& I would be fetching Jesús
to stick around for

a little longer.
My sins can sit still.

My death cannot.

Emir Brown
Emory University, '19

Red Perching Bird

The sky wears deep bands
of day and night, so it is all
a bit sad and basically
blue.

He sinks into
the pillowed deck chair.

We have wandered here
across a vast summer day,
and I point, name, the
bird.

He says the Audubon
book inside, grab that.

Watch the world spin, breathe
boardwalked air, jelly doughnuts
and crumcakes can be love.
Bite.

He flips some pages,
shushes me, listens to its noise.

When shadow monsters came
to snatch us at night, and our
family was much larger,

there were no birds at the beach.
But here rested

A red crossbill!

He exclaims, and he is drunk,
and so am I, which perhaps is strange

and perhaps a reason to sing.
We nightly dance with phantoms

by the sea, which he argues we
come from, so we are drawn back,

while I – he stares with disbelief
as I breathe through two-decades-old lungs –

am more nostalgic, waltz with the spirits
of his parents, make clear that a red

perching bird is a very poor stand-in
for a father.

Nicholas Politan
Washington University in St. Louis, '17

Cutting Apples: 117 Stitches

He lifts a knife,
the blade heavy like an
Eleusinian coin in the lamplight.
They aren't children today –
their swollen bellies
ripe with her inability to
get out of bed. Her
mother never loved her, she Says
and so children become the same
force of pain that made them
not children anymore. He tests
the knife like he tests his theory
that they only exist to comfort her.
They do poor work – they are children
after all. He moves to the carpet,
sets the china saucer on the
ground because it's all that is clean.
I'm your brother, I'll take care of you
he had said, rummaging the empty
fridge for the apple bag. They're
somewhere between eight and forty
when he tests the weight of Eve's undoing,
pushes the knife in its suppurating flesh.
It's half rotten, mud brown, so it's
probably why the knife goes too far,
brings a crimson ribbon and a fingertip
off his small hand. Later his uncle will
yell through the thick hospital window
at the man who makes them wait, asks him
to rate his pain on a scale of one to
forty five and how did this happen son?
But for now, he does not cry. Men of ten and three
quarters don't cry. They say bad words for the first
time ever, not because it hurts, which it does,
but because the hunger has to live
a little longer.

*A.D. Lauren
Emory University, '17*

Other Flightless Birds

My Uncle Sal used to say things like: “A spiritual trial on the mountain is self-evidently requisite for young folks.”

A few summers ago I went over to his place to watch the Yankees. In addition to his obsessive stat-keeping, he watched baseball with a religious devotion. He had wire-rimmed glasses that made his eyes look huge.

Sal said baseball was only ever an argument. A team, in its own way, was arguing for something. He said each game was a very dense 9-inning chapter. A season constituted a treatise. He constantly used the word “exordium.” It was June, around noon – the interleague game against the Diamondbacks started at one – when, walking up to his low-rise ranch in Caldwell, I saw him.

At first, I thought perhaps it was a big bird – a turkey or a peacock. The county’s zoo was three blocks from his place, so peacocks were always in trees, on houses, anywhere up high and helplessly stranded. I never understood how they got up there, if they couldn’t fly, had no way of getting down.

Sal had always been concerned about them. Some nights he couldn’t sleep. He’d drive over to my Dad’s place and Sal would be going on and on, rubbing the back of his neck till it was tomato red, “Tom, Tom, it can’t fucking fly! What am I supposed to do? I’m just a citizen. I deal in civil matters. I found God, but His well’s run 100 percent dry in the way of peacockish concerns.”

That June morning when I saw him, I assumed he was fiddling with the roof shingling. But when I looked closely and saw he was sitting in a ball, arms wrapped around knees, I darted inside to get up there.

His place was dim at midday because of his blackout shades and smelly because he liked to let cheese age out in the open. Camembert melted on a cutting board. I pulled down the attic stairs, found a miniature door and vaulted myself onto the roof.

“Sal,” I said, out of breath “what’s going on?”

So, he told me.

I knew I was bad with bad news. It was cruel they’d used the word “baseball” to size the tumor. His Mom was old-old. The air smelled like hot dogs and smoke. It tasted like little league and lawn chairs. I wanted to tell Sal I loved him. I listened to the drone of slow-moving traffic on the parkway, to the scattered noises of the zoo; I kept listening to hear myself say it. The roof was littered with peacock shit. I put my arm around his shoulder and he sorta twitched and I felt vindicated, felt that he understood. “Gio,” he’d said, “this is only the exordium, that’s what I told her.”

We burned easily and the summer sun at noon would have melted us both had it not been for the oak tree adjacent the house, the one with the gnarled roots.

*Nicholas Politan
Washington University in St. Louis, ‘17*

White Guy in a Chinese Grocery Store

Wrinkly, with his belly sticking out
pregnant with spaghetti meatballs and rejections,
friendly started the conversation with “nihao” and gazed
into my boob crack for an answer. Held up
a jar of miso and asked for my professional Chinese advice
on this Japanese seasoning.

Because pretty girls have torn his ego
apart, eaten it up. I, not as good-looking
or as blonde as they are, which makes me perfectly
kind. Also,
doable.

I stared back, walked past him without a word, I bet
he didn't expect someone like me to be cold-blooded.
I would have made things up, really if he was handsome
enough.
But he was not.
Guess he will have to live a life without the taste of
good miso.

Naomi Huan
University of California, Irvine, '18

Gut Checks and Synchronicities

My roommate and I tell this story at parties.
It regards the saxophone solo played every Thursday
midnight, lasting as long as it lasts. We can't tell if
the music comes from up above or down below.
Perhaps it's an overactive siren or distressed series
of alley cats. Morning jogs with necks craned upward,
we've searched for sheet music or an open leather case.

The third Thursday after we moved—the third
unwelcome serenade—we vowed to never sleep
with the windows open. But tonight
the blue ribbons lie still, pressed against
the latticework front of a dirty white box mounted
in a window. With the sliding pane comes the tinny
moan of a saxophone played on a Thursday night.

My roommate insists it's a man, a failed jazz musician
who can only make love to his girlfriend if he fingers
the mother-of-pearl keys first. Perhaps a lonely
heart, his breath pushing through the curved brass
departs as a swan song, the last remnant
of people gone by.

If he would listen, my roommate would know.
I have hung out naked, pendulous, listening
to every bar. If he would listen, he'd hear the thrumming
sadness taut in every breath. Such sadness can only
be breathed through fuller lips. She'll straddle the pane,
dressed in white or red, one leg hanging out to lie
still against the brick. She plays for herself.

Katarina Merlini
University of Michigan, '17

By Heart, By the Wine

What, are you just going to
eat out the rest of your life? mother says.
Are you going to hire a cook?
If only you could make that much money.
As a writer.

Stepfather can cook, but is too much of
“a cook.” Everything too rich, too
complicated.
Sometimes life is already too tart
for dark chocolate and raspberries.

Father cooks, but doesn't
even keep butter and salt around.
No milk, either.
You ask for a carton, and
a box of cereal, but
by the time you return to his house
the cereal is stale and the milk
is sour.

Our food says so much
about whether or not we're okay.
The spongy, off-brand mac & cheese
crammed into your elementary-
school thermos, the jelly on your
peanut-butter-&-jelly turning
the wheat-not-white bread to mush.
That alone
could make you cry.

Leftovers three days in a row,
lost all moisture, lost all motivation,
and you take the car keys,
slip out quietly.
The grimy diner down the street
gives you eggs, bacon, hash-browns, all
smothered in gravy, in relief.

When you return home, the house is hushed.
In the dark, you thumb through
the shelf of recipe-books
beneath the wine rack
and next to the napkins.

Elissa Mullins
Washington University in St. Louis, '20



Gameboard

Ruoyi Gan

Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Graphite

Shoe Shopping

Dipping her fork into a pot of spaghetti bubbling on the stove, Olivia watched a small train of steam rise into the air as she blew on a noodle and took a bite. She grimaced. It was way too soft. But it was almost 7:00 and it was either this or a can of Campbell's chicken soup, so Olivia delved into the pantry, emerged with a bottle of Barilla sauce, and popped the lid open. Dumping her noodles into a strainer, she filled up a bowl of white carbs for herself and for Robert and then spooned some of the sauce on top. Detecting the garage door rattling, she pushed a laptop, baby bibs, and pacifiers to one end of the table while scooting Mr. Snuffles out from under the chair.

"Hi, honey."

Olivia's heart zinged. Maybe it was just the fact that she was about to have a conversation with a real adult. After a day of teaching her son about what sounds frogs and cows make, that was a definite possibility. But when Robert came up behind her and massaged the base of her skull before kissing her on the cheek, she remembered that it was more than that. Gosh, she wished she had taken the time to shower this morning. But Henry had been a handful today, always fussing, fussing, fussing, and she hadn't known what to do with him. It had been all she could do to change out of her pajamas by 5:00, let alone shower and put her makeup on.

At least she had rinsed off her face. There was that.

"How are you?" he asked, kicking off his shoes in the middle of the floor, and suddenly Olivia felt like crying. Couldn't he tell that the house was already a mess? Didn't he see the dishes in the sink and the laundry on the floor and the crumbs on the counter? At the very least, he could put his shoes where they belong, he—

Henry was crying, his little baby voice crackling over the monitor. In desperation, Olivia had put him down for a nap even though it was close to bed time and she knew she'd regret it later. Olivia popped up and tried to ignore the pulsing in her abdomen, still not fully recovered from her C section.

"I'll get him," Robert began, but she shook her head.

"It's fine. I'll get him. Go ahead and start," she said without looking at him, wishing she could bolt up the flight of stairs, but right now, even walking up them was hard. Breathing deeply on the top step, Olivia remembered the crazy endorphins she used to get from running, how she used to go for miles and never get tired.

What had happened to her?

"Love you, my nina." Camila kissed her toddler on the cheek while a soccer ball soared over her head. "Hey! How many times do I have to tell you?" she said to the two dark heads whizzing past her. "Not in the house! You hear me?" The boys dribbled past her. She slapped her hand on the table, the sound snapping against the walls. "Not. In. The. House."

“Awwww, Mama!”

“No. You look after Sofia, okay? I’ve got to go to work.”

The boys looked at each other.

“Give me the ball.”

They shook their heads.

“Diez. Nueve. Ocho—”

Mateo, wearing a green jersey, spoke up. “We were just trying to—”

“Siete. Seis. Cinco.”

Mateo nodded to his brother, but Nicolas hesitated.

Camila slapped her hand on the table again. “You think I have time for this?

You think you have time for this? Every second that you make me wait is another second that you could have more food on the table. Who puts food on the table for you, huh?

You think your papa does that for you?”

“Take it,” Nicolas said. “I don’t want it anyway.” He kicked her the ball and sat down at the kitchen table, arms folded.

She had hurt him again. Camila dropped the soccer ball and leaned across the table. “Honey, I’m sorry,” she said. “Look at me? Please?”

But he wouldn’t. He wouldn’t, and Camila was late, so she grabbed her keys, slammed the door, and unlocked the door to her 1986 Toyota Camry, adjusting the duct tape on the rearview mirror so it wouldn’t fall off again when she was driving. She shouldn’t have done it, she told herself. The boys still remembered him. They still remembered the good things about him like the horchata he made in the summer and the ball he played with them on Saturday afternoons. They never waited up for him to come home at two in the morning, wondering why his clothes were rumpled while trying to be convinced that it was just because he had to work late at the office. She had believed him willingly, too. That is, she had believed him until one night he came home and wouldn’t look at her as he packed his clothes.

Camila wasn’t good at this type of thing. She didn’t know how to be both a mom and a dad. She looked out the window and noticed that the moon was up already. It was a half moon, his favorite, and suddenly it was hard to see. She hit her brakes when a pedestrian came out of nowhere and ran across the crosswalk. When she pulled into the parking lot, she turned off the car and rested her head against the steering wheel, her chest shaking as she breathed. “You can do this, C,” she said. “Pull yourself together.”

Wiping the eyeliner from underneath her eyes, she smoothed her hair and walked across the parking lot and pulled open the door at Dillard’s.

Still, there was nothing like that baby smell, that smell of warm milk and baby oil and freshly laundered clothes. It used to bother Olivia when she was younger. The oldest of five kids, she had never been able to escape that scent because she was always tending, so at thirteen she had become so desperate that she invested in body spray to get rid of the aroma in the house.

Now, though. Now, she didn't mind smelling like Henry simply because he was hers. There was something about it that she couldn't quite describe, that peace that she found from holding his tiny body against her chest when he had once been growing inside of her. True, his drool was soaking her t-shirt, but after five weeks, she had gotten used to that and at least he was quiet.

Olivia looked around the room. It wasn't nearly as quaint as she had imagined it would be. She and Robert hadn't had time to paint the walls the mint green they had picked out from Home Depot and none of the furniture matched, but still, there was something beautiful about it.

She heard footsteps and closed her eyes.

"Honey? You okay?"

Robert poked his head around the door frame like a nervous little boy. She smiled. "Yeah. I'm okay."

"Let me take him so you can finish dinner."

More like start dinner, Olivia thought. But then she remembered the spaghetti on the table and felt sick. "You know, I think I'd rather go on a walk," she told him. Now that she thought about it, she hadn't even been outside today. "You'll be okay with him?"

Robert lifted his eyebrows and kissed Olivia on the nose. "Course I will. He's my kid too, remember?"

Yes, but that didn't mean he knew how to change Henry's diaper or generally keep him alive. Still, Olivia couldn't resist, so she changed into her sweat pants and grabbed a water bottle and went on a walk.

It felt good. It felt oh, so good. Olivia had forgotten what it was like to have her back in a completely straight position, without a baby on her hip that popped her spine out of whack. She tried a light jog. Man, how was it possible to have all this extra fat on her after just nine months? Her love handles weren't cute anymore. They were squishy and big. Alive, even. She should have worked out when she was pregnant. She swallowed more water, pressing the cool plastic bottle to her face. She stopped. Even her face felt wrong. Jiggly. She smiled just to remind herself that she could see her cheeks while smiling and groaned.

Her baby was crying. She didn't know how she knew, but she did. Besides, her Fitbit told her that it was 8:00. She should go change Henry, give him a bath, sing him to sleep. She should clean up the toys on the floor, help Robert with the dishes, eat her own meal, for heaven's sake. "Just sixty more seconds," she said, staring up at the sky. The moon was already visible even though it wasn't even close to being dark. Her stomach growled. Her sixty seconds were well past.

But it wasn't fair. It wasn't fair that Robert went to work all day and had intelligent conversations with real adults while she worked from home. It wasn't fair that she never had time to clean, so the house was always a mess, and when she finally did have time to clean, all she wanted to do was sleep. Olivia rubbed her eyes. What was the matter with her today?

Breathing harder, Olivia shook her head and bounced up on her toes. Her calf muscles felt tight. Poised. Her jaw clenched. She wanted to go somewhere, do something. So she ran.

She didn't get far, just to the Dillard's down the street, but hey. It was civilization and Olivia needed to sit down, so she pulled open the door and wiped the sweat off her forehead with the back of her hand.

It was so clean and shiny in here. Olivia had forgotten what clean and shiny looked like. And the smell! It was a heavenly combination of flowery perfume and metal hangers and expensive leather. She stood still, gazed up at the fluorescent lights, and listened to the brushing sound of the escalator steps that rose up to the ceiling.

Passing by the makeup counters, Olivia sprayed on some perfume from one of the testers as she made her way to the shoe department. She smelled her wrist as she looked around. Of course, there were the typical glass tables displaying pumps, boots, running shoes, and sandals. But there were also shoes hanging from the ceiling on ribbons and a flat screen on the wall showing off models that Olivia knew were photoshopped, but that still didn't exactly boost her self-esteem.

The chairs! They were the kind that swiveled when you sat in them. Olivia collapsed in one and smiled.

"Can I help you?" a woman asked. She was maybe 5'3" with short black hair pulled back into a ponytail and she was curvy. Very curvy. But in the case of this woman, Camila, the nametag said, it was in all the right places. Not like Olivia's lumpy torso.

"No, I'm just looking, thanks." The response was automatic. She didn't have her credit card, anyway. Come to think about it, she didn't even have her phone. I should probably call him, she thought. But who said she needed someone to know where she was every minute of the day? She was an adult, wasn't she? She could handle herself.

The woman was still standing there and offering Olivia a grim smile. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm good. Thanks, though." Olivia got up and meandered over to the flats. Oh, how she needed some new flats, something easy, something practical. It was all about being practical these days. She was a mom, right? A red pair of shoes caught her eyes. Gosh, they were so shiny she could see her forehead in them.

Or maybe it was just that her forehead was shiny. Either way, she loved how the toe came to a point, and how the interior was gold, and how it smelled like it was made of good quality materials. Steve Madden. Yikes. Sixty-eight dollars. That was two big boxes of diapers from Costco.

Still. There was nothing wrong with trying them on. Wiggling her foot out of her shoe and peeling off her ankle sock, Olivia cringed. Boy, her feet were sticky. Not the ideal circumstance for trying on shoes, but she dried off her toes on some gray stained carpet and slipped them on.

Perfect. They simply molded to her feet—as well as flats could do such a thing, anyway. Olivia shuffled over to a long mirror, avoiding eye contact with herself

and cringing inwardly when she still saw how much she bulged over her sweatpants. Determined, she looked at the shoes. They were beautiful shoes. That was the good thing about feet, she decided. Although they might have grown a little while she was pregnant, they still never got fat.

“They look great on you,” someone said. Olivia jumped. It was that worker again. “Everything in the store is twenty percent off,” she softly. Olivia stood on her left foot and took off the right shoe.

“Thanks,” she said, voice squeaky. “But I’m just looking.”

The woman nodded and walked away.

Replacing the shoes on the counter, Olivia sat back down in a chair and swiveled around and around, her reflection whizzing past her in mirrors on columns and in mirrors on the floor. Resting her head on her knees, she closed her eyes and breathed through her nose and told herself that she would not cry.

Camila kept her eye on the clock. She had been stocking shoes for the past hour, shelving boots that had been put in the wrong sections in the back, sticking sale stickers onto the soles of stiletto heels that no one in their right mind would ever wear. “Mujeres Americanas tontas,” she grumbled. It was five minutes to nine. She stood behind the cash register, having just rung up a girl for a blue pair of shoes that probably cost as much as Camila’s first car. Now, there was just that one woman left—the one in the chair. Camila had watched the woman spinning. The woman’s head had been on her knees like she was going to throw up, and Camila kept watching as the spinning got slower and slower until the woman just stopped. Now, the woman’s head was on the back of her chair and she was curled up in a ball, blonde ponytail dangling over her seat. A little boy walking by had reached out to grab it, but was stopped just in time by his mother.

There were no more customers, and it was almost closing time. Camila crossed the space between the register and the chair, tapping the girl’s knee. “Look, ma’am, I’ve got to go home,” she said. But the woman didn’t move. “Ma’am,” she said again.

The woman stirred. She was just a kid, late twenties, early thirties at the latest. “What time is it?” she asked, standing and then sitting again, holding her forehead.

“Nine o’clock.” Camila took a step back. “The store is closing, ma’am.” She watched as the woman stood up and headed towards the red shoe, looking around for something.

“Right. Sorry,” she said, hobbling and searching the ground for her sock and shoe. “Where is it?” she muttered, rubbing the jacket marks on her face. Camila tapped her on the shoulder, holding up the shoe. “I brought it over to your chair when you fell asleep.”

The woman nodded, wobbling as she pulled her sock back on before she stuffed her foot in her shoe. “Thanks,” she said. “Thanks. Have a good night.” Without a word, the woman turned and left.

“Mujeres americanas tontas,” Camila muttered. “Mujeres americanas tontas.”

Ever since she was little, Olivia had been good at directions. When she was eight, her dad had let her go to the grocery store by herself to buy ice cream because she knew their neighborhood better than he did. And when she was sixteen, she had driven from her home in Iowa to Chicago just by looking at a map to visit her sister for a weekend. Robert joked that it was her sixth sense. To this day, she didn't even use the GPS on her smart phone, and she never needed Siri for anything.

But somehow, she had no idea where she was, except that she was on Elm Street. Wherever that was. She turned left, but that led her to a dead end. Jogging back down the street, she turned left again, but Maple Drive looked no more familiar than Elm had. “This is what you get for jogging in a new city where you never even see the streets because you never go outside anymore,” she said. “Just walk to the next light and you can figure this out.”

Her sock was all scrunched up in the toe of her shoe. Everything had been sort of a blur when she left the store, and she hadn't taken the time to put it on very well. Plus, it was getting cold. Was it just her, or did spring come later in Colorado than in Iowa? She walked a block and paused on the corner, standing below a lamppost and breathing heavily.

There was no stoplight.

Olivia wrapped her arms around her sides, clenching her ribs. Her legs felt unsteady. How long had she been walking? Her abdomen was throbbing and she was afraid she might faint. Her doctor was going to kill her at her appointment next week for exercising so much before her six weeks were up. Sitting down on the curb, Olivia bounced her feet. “Do not panic,” she said.

But she didn't know this place and she didn't know what she was doing here. She wanted open space. She wanted to drive through cornfields with her windows rolled down while she listened to the Beatles and sang until her throat hurt. She wanted to talk to her dad. She wanted to cry. But she couldn't cry. She was an adult and she was a mom and good moms weren't supposed to cry, were they?

“Why?” she whispered. It felt like a shout, but less satisfying. “Why?” she said again, and her hands pressed into the sidewalk, gravel sticking into her skin, but she didn't care. She was shaking, she knew. It was the same shaking she had done when her mom died and she'd gotten a phone call to come down to the principal's office while she drank a glass of water as the principal told her that her dad was going to come see her, and she just knew. She knew that something was wrong, but she didn't know what, just that Mom had been drinking a lot these days, and that Dad wouldn't tell her why her mom kept on screaming in the middle of the night and why she was always crying, crying, crying so much that her eyes were always red in the morning when Olivia went to school.

“You okay, ma'am?” Olivia's head jerked up at the sound. A car was stopped at

the crosswalk. “Honey, you need a ride home?”

Olivia squinted and recognized what she thought was the voice of the worker at Dillard’s. “I don’t know where I am,” she finally admitted.

The woman—Carmen, was it?—smiled. “Do you know where you live?”

“Washington Boulevard.”

“Washington Boulevard,” the woman said, nodding. “I can take you there. Get in.”

“But—“

“Get in.”

Olivia stood up, and the woman leaned over her seat to open the car door. A song from the Spanish radio station danced in her ears. “Thank you,” she said. “What are you listening to?”

“Never mind what I’m listening to. You want to talk about it?”

“Talk about what?”

“Talk about why you are so sad.”

Olivia shrugged. “I’m not sad.”

“Baby, I’ve got three children and I’m a woman, so I know sad when I see it. You want to get home? You tell me why you are sad. And put on your seatbelt. These airbags are not so good.”

“I’m really okay,” Olivia whispered. She kept her eye on the moon outside her window. “Can we turn on the heater?”

The woman smiled. “It’s broken,” she said. “Come on. What’s your name?”

“Olivia.”

“Olivia, I’m Camila,” she said, tapping her nametag with her fingernail.

Olivia folded her arms. “Hi.”

“Hi. So, what are you doing out here, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“What am I doing out here?”

“Are you a parrot, honey?”

Well. “No—“

“Then answer the question. And don’t tell me nothing.”

Olivia rested her head against the head rest. “Okay.”

Camila rolled her eyes. “Okay, let’s start small. Why did you go to Dillard’s tonight?”

“I just wanted to look at the shoes.”

“You just wanted to look at the shoes.”

“Yes.”

“By yourself?”

“Yes.”

Camila scowled. “Fine. So you wanted to look at the shoes while you’re sweating and tired because that’s when most women go shoe shopping.”

Olivia shrugged again. “Well, I’m new to the area. Plus, what are you doing

here? Didn't you get off work awhile ago?"

"I needed groceries."

"There's a grocery store nearby?"

"It's the Mexican market. Okay, Olivia. You run to Dillard's and when you leave, you get lost because you're new here. Good. Now, why are you so sad?"

Olivia rolled her eyes. "I'm not sad!"

"Well, you're certainly not happy, are you?"

Her hands fell to her lap. "I just wanted a break, is all."

"A break from what?"

"From my baby." Her voice fell to a whisper. "And my husband."

Camila nodded. "Ah. So, that's it. How old is your baby?"

"Five weeks."

Camila nodded again. "And your husband?"

"He's gone a lot. Which is fine, but I miss him. I want him to be home, you know? And then when he comes home I'm such a monster half the time because I just don't know how to do it."

"You don't know how to do what?"

Olivia hesitated. "I don't know how to be a mom."

"You're not the only one, honey."

"What do you mean?"

Camila exhaled. "Never mind what I mean. Have you talked to him?"

Olivia exhaled. "No. I don't want him to think I can't do it. He works so hard every day, so I should be able to do this."

"Honey, you need to talk to him. Your husband might work hard, but what you do is harder. Talk to him. Most husbands are good to talk to."

Olivia nodded. "I should have called him."

Camila's eyes widened. "You mean he doesn't know where you are?"

"Well, no."

"Honey, don't you ever do that again. Always let your husband know where you are, you hear me? Always. No matter what your spouse does or doesn't do, they deserve that." Her voice started to shake, and Olivia looked at her.

"Okay," she finally said.

Camila pulled up to the house and put her car in park. "Come back to Dillard's someday, okay? I'll put that pair of shoes on hold for you."

Camila waited as Olivia tried the door. It was locked, so Olivia knocked. Goodness, it was a miracle that woman was still alive. Didn't she ever bring anything she needed with her? A man came to the door. He had brown hair and his collared shirt was untucked and his cell phone was up to his ear, which he dropped when he saw Olivia.

He pulled her close to his chest, held her against his collarbone, and wouldn't let go.

Camila sat there for a minute and watched them, rolling down her window by hand. She tried to hear what they were saying to each other, not even caring that her gas level was going down. She remembered what it felt like, that feeling of safety, that feeling of being home with somebody and knowing that there was one place in the world where you belonged and everything was good and right and whole.

And all of a sudden her hands started to shake, so she rocked her body back and forth, trying to remember how to breathe and attempting to stop the tears from coming as she rested her head against the steering wheel, crying until her throat went dry.

But she knew that nobody was going to save her, and she knew she had kids she needed to put to bed, and groceries she needed to put away, and mail deliveries she needed to make in the morning. So, she put her car in drive and turned up the music and flicked on her blinker and headed back home.

Danielle Christensen
Brigham Young University, '16

Badlands

Four million faces bubble out
of cooled magma drip castles.
Bighorn sheep feet gracefully
navigate unbeatable slopes,
gradations of impossible pinks.
And the yellows—the color
of suburban curtains, peak
through mounted strata.
It's easier to wrap my head
around this erosion when
I picture the erratic pattern of
rain down my drivers-side window.

Similar streams shine amidst
the sprawling lawn out my window,
glinting in sync with my wheels.
Even the handicap parking sign
seems to take on a bizarre
rainbow glance in this light.
Imagine managing a homestead
on these Martian plains, mauled
by these mountains and their
malevolent furrowed brow.
Tourist plaques call this
prairie an “ocean of grass.” I disagree.

This boardwalk below my feet,
sure, almost a crow's nest,
but in its calm clearing,
I feel instead a miniature movie-set
forest. Breeze ruffles grass
like leaves, giving off
sandpaper scratching, but
the sound didn't scale down.
Crickets, frogs, birds boom,
their clicks and calls conglomerate,
conduct themselves to my ear.

It can be hard to distinguish
a jolt of joy from chill of cold
but they're one and the same
on these windy promenades
overlooking panoramic plains.
Punctuated by muddy creeks,
unbottled liquid gold spilled
on the lab bench bad lands,
left to smolder, mold.
It bears brunt of lightning
storms dormant volcanoes
and ever-threatening eyes.

Ben Zeno
Washington University in St. Louis, '17

Early

I watched my mother
Fill a water glass
At our kitchen sink
Just after dinner.
She got stuck there
For a while
Too tired to do more than
Just stare out the window.
The water filled the cup,
Spilled over her fingers
And she didn't notice
For a few minutes.
At 35 at 5:30,
It was still early,
But I don't think
She thought so.

*Kennedy O'Dell
Princeton University, '18*



These Things Take Time

Sully Bacerdo

Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Photograph



Airhead

Ruoyi Gan

Washington University in St. Louis, '20

Graphite

moon phases

We're moon phases

I say, watching you drink sweet cherry wine.
I thought comparing us to the celestial would make a fracture
feel temporary. But we are an asteroid about to collide
into this diner of crimson-colored booths,
waning gibbous moons, faux-leather.

You argue: we are cobalt galaxies, a pearl milky way,
the big dipper's light on Alaskan snowbanks,
two people with three years of drinking cheap wine.

No, I reply, a supernova; the remnants of a tall bottle.

*Becca McGilloyay
Emerson College, '16*

Chinese

It was a hungry afternoon, I lay in bed.
The room melted me into a pool of gastric juices.
Daddy yelled something in Chinese,
but I was too hungry to care.

Crunchy leaves were waiting for rain to turn them into soggy cereal,
And my neighbor walked his dog—the filthy animal, mashing
the grass and its dignity, without hesitation.
I had had breakfast, lunch and many snacks.

Also had bitten every nail from fingers and toes,
they were crying blood, like cheated housewives.
I would be going back to school
where students who have real names like John, Christian,

Amanda or Jack would ask if I ate dog meat for breakfast.
Sometimes they would laugh at my words; they would laugh
so very hard, shed a few tears, and put their hands around
their pretty furry ears with small golden hair,

Shorry, I not understand what you tawking about.
They were young ears burned the color of creamy custard,
Sweet delicate and eggy, like peonies
blooming on an early spring day. Suddenly dad came back.

He wore an over-sized jacket drenched in kungpao sauce.
He was panting, and wiped the sweat off with his sleeve.
His cheeks were the color of blood oranges. He grinned at me:
“Say hello to your friends,”

and poured his bag of human ears onto the table, like withering petals
they were—dying at the very end of fall.

Naomi Huan
University of California, Irvine, '18

The Waiting Room

He had never been to a prison. He had never seen a prisoner. His only knowledge of prison came from movies and television and he knew that these visual depictions were formulated for dramatic or darkly comedic effect and were, in reality, wildly inaccurate. He had no real reason to assume that prison would be a dank, dark, dirty place, but he had nevertheless felt completely deceived when his GPS led him down the county highway to this long red brick building. If not for the guards stationed at the gate and the barbed wire coiled around the chain link fence blocking off the small recreation areas on either side of the building, he might have thought it was an elementary school or an apartment complex. He parked in the back corner of the parking lot and waited for visiting hours to begin, disoriented by the realization that the local thieves, pedophiles and murderers lived just a few miles away from his comfortable home. He would have preferred that the prison be just as he had imagined it – a long drive down an unmarked road, miles and miles away from the nearest un-incarcerated civilian, deep in a wooded area that experienced at least fifty inches of heavy rainfall per year. The prison itself would be a ten-story concrete block with tiny windows and bulky iron bars over a single door. In his imagination, there would be no reason to visit this prison. There would be no reason to visit any prison. His watch beeped on the hour and he took a deep breath. He got out of his car and walked across the parking lot and into the prison.

He was jarred by the unremarkable appearance of the waiting room in which he now sat. There were three rows of metal chairs topped with beige linen cushions; it was spacious and mostly clean. Two subpar landscape paintings hung on either side of the door and a fake houseplant sat in the corner. The white walls, the fluorescent lighting, the sticky, pungent odor of citrus-scented disinfectant reminded him of the dentist's office. He felt betrayed by the pleasant nature and friendly smile of the guard who gave him a "Visitor" badge and told him to make himself at home while he waited. This was a prison, not a Holiday Inn, and he did not care to make himself at home.

Maybe it was not the distinctive scent or the pseudo-cheerful receptionist that reminded him of the dentist's office, but rather, the unrelenting churning of his stomach. He had an intense, almost unnatural, aversion to the dentist's office. In his younger years, every time a dentist appointment rolled around, he would go to great lengths to feign illness – putting a thermometer in a pot of boiling water, clutching his stomach and writhing around on the ground in an overzealous imitation of a character on ER whose appendix burst, drawing red spots on his arms and legs with a permanent marker. This became an incredibly predictable pattern and he had never successfully fooled his mother, but he had continued these efforts with admirable resiliency, because there was nothing, truly nothing, worse than going to the dentist.

He hated the dental hygienist. Her name was Christine; she was a forty-something woman with a bleached blonde ponytail who smelled strongly of cigarettes, and felt obliged to shove her slippery, latex covered finger so far down his throat it threatened to bring up his breakfast. He loathed the sound of her nasal voice as she asked him how he liked school and

lectured him about flossing every day. He resented being rendered so thoroughly defenseless that he was forced to beg this woman for water, administered through a straw with such condescending directions as “open” and “swallow.” He resented the dentist, a decrepit old man with coke bottle glasses who aimlessly poked and prodded his tender teeth, assaulting his gums with a tiny metal dagger and acting shocked and alarmed when they bled.

And worse than sitting in the dentist’s chair was sitting in the waiting room, his palms sweating in anticipation of the blaring light and sticky vinyl chair and the fluoride rinse and the hot, stale breath of a couple of sadomasochists masquerading as licensed medical professionals. And now he was sitting in the prison waiting room, his palms sweating in anticipation of hearing the guard call his name, and seeing a man strut down the hallway in handcuffs and a jumpsuit, and the potentially frightening, potentially familiar smile of a convicted murderer masquerading as his father.

It had been six years since he had seen his father. It had been about five years since he had firmly declared to God, to his mother, and to himself that he never ever wanted to see him again. His memories of the last time he was with his father were pretty much like all his memories of his father. His father had pulled his battered black Toyota up to the sidewalk outside Truman Elementary School at about three o’ clock on a Friday afternoon. He had driven to a fast food restaurant and they had ordered the same thing – a burger without tomato – and his father had asked him how his Little League baseball team was shaping up this season. Then they went bowling and his father told him he was getting too old to use the bumpers and he bowled exactly ten gutter balls. They got back into the car as the sun was setting and his father had let him sit in the front seat and pick the radio station and turn it up far louder than his mother would ever allow. His father had driven him back to his small suburban home, given him a pat on the back, and told him to be good. His father waved at his mother from the bottom of the driveway. She smiled and waved back but did not leave the porch. He asked his mother why she didn’t love his father. She told him that love had nothing to do with it. Then his father disappeared for about a year.

His mother told him that his father lost his job and was going through a hard time. He didn’t understand why that meant his father couldn’t come to his Little League games or pick him up after school on the occasional Friday. He was angry, then he was sad, then he didn’t feel anything. He went to school and baseball practice and did his homework and hung out with his friends on the weekends and nothing really changed. Sometimes he thought about the man who used to buy him a burger once a month and wondered if he might show up to his birthday party or his baseball game or his sixth grade graduation. He never did.

It happened on a sweltering, humid, early August day. He had spent the morning splashing around in his friend Jason’s above-ground pool. They had just finished peanut butter and jelly sandwiches when his grandmother burst through the front door without knocking and told him it was time to go home. The strain in her voice silenced Jason’s mother and he didn’t beg her to let him stay just a little longer. His grandmother’s hands shook as she gripped the steering wheel and they did not speak as they made the short drive back to his house. His

mother was sitting at the kitchen table. She was wearing sunglasses. She was crying. His grandmother told him to sit down. His mother told him that his father had shot his girlfriend eight times in a Walmart parking lot. The girlfriend died. His father was convicted on first-degree murder charges. The murderer was condemned to two consecutive life sentences. The murderer went to prison. His mother cried. He cried and cried and cried.

He searched for the murderer's name on the internet. The murderer was an alcoholic. The girlfriend had changed her phone number and taken out a restraining order. The murderer had stalked the girlfriend for about a year. The girlfriend had two kids. The murderer had told his best friend he was going to kill the girlfriend because he couldn't live without her. The girlfriend's family said they hoped the murderer rotted in hell. He hoped so too.

He remembered the day one month ago, when his mother had asked him to sit at the kitchen table and begged him to go to the prison, much like she had begged him to go to the dentist. She told him the murderer may have done something unforgivable but the murderer would always be his father. She told him that love doesn't end when people do terrible things. She told him how much the murderer wanted to see him, how much the murderer missed him. He told her he didn't care what the murderer wanted. She cried. He surrendered.

He sat in the bright, chilly waiting room. The prison itself may have been surprisingly clean, but he felt dirty and sick. He didn't want to come face to face with the pair of eyes that had gleamed with pride when he hit a home run and watched a woman scream when he shot her. He had never been to prison. He had never seen a prisoner. He had never known the murderer. He was scared he might recognize him. His breathing was fast and he feigned interest in a few old magazines, paced back and forth to the bathroom, got a drink of water, and sat down again. He tapped out the piano fingerings to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" on the seat of his chair. He fumbled around with his keys. He changed seats three times. The clock ticked loudly. His legs bounced up and down. Blood rushed to and from his brain. The guard told him it would only be a few more minutes. He sat. He waited.

Grace Haselhorst
Washington University in St. Louis, '19

Here's Three Ideas, and Also a Fourth.

I.

When I was little I would read at night, and listen
to the stairs creak
and depending on the creaks I'd know
who was climbing.
Deep, groaning, deliberate creaks: Dad.
And I'd pretend to be asleep.

II.

I've found that when my name is called
In a loud room, a cafeteria,
My brain is trained to hear it better
Than just some other random word or phrase.
You don't have to listen hard to know.

III.

You know how when you get lost
at Best Buy, and mom is somewhere
looking at something and you're thinking
this is it, this is the time she forgets
she brought me here, this is the time
she goes home without me
but then you hear her clear her
throat an aisle over and it's fine?

IV.

I think that's maybe why
I want to go back to Grant Park to the Art Institute
with Martin Puryear's weirdass shapes with
you. I want you to be at the other end
of the gallery, looking at some twisted, sculpted wood.
I want to catch myself—
as I look at all the loops and doodles on the wall—
I want to realize
I'm listening for my own name through the crowded hall.
I want to realize I've memorized the way you cough.

Noah Arthur Weber
Washington University in St. Louis, '18

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