



# S P I R E S

SPRING — TWO THOUSAND SIXTEEN  
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY EDITION



# S P I R E S

intercollegiate arts & literary magazine

- spring 2016 -

Copyright 2016, Spires Magazine  
Volume XXI Issue II

All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from Spires and the author.

Critics, however, are welcome to quote brief passages  
by way of criticism and review.

[spiresmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:spiresmagazine@gmail.com)  
[spires.wustl.edu](http://spires.wustl.edu)  
[facebook.com/spiresintercollegiatemagazine](https://facebook.com/spiresintercollegiatemagazine)

## LITERATURE

---

|                    |  |    |
|--------------------|--|----|
| Keegan Hughes      | The Fish Instinct.....                       | 5  |
| Jack Ralls         | Sauerkraut.....                              | 6  |
| Nick Politan       | Escalator Bliss at the Beidermeier Mall..... | 11 |
|                    | Rug Burn.....                                | 12 |
| Amy Chen           | Runaways.....                                | 15 |
| Sloane Wolter      | Losing.....                                  | 16 |
| Jacqueline Brogdon | Father Daughter: A Posthumous Mystery.....   | 17 |
| Tanner Boyle       | Dover Demon.....                             | 28 |
| Jon Freeman        | Harvesting.....                              | 29 |
| Keegan Hughes      | Cliffs of Aran.....                          | 30 |
|                    | Port Tunnel.....                             | 31 |
| Elijah Armstrong   | (1995-2013).....                             | 33 |
| Sloane Wolter      | First Cigarette.....                         | 34 |
| Meghan Gunn        | The Butterfly Effect.....                    | 37 |
| Evan Alger-Meyer   | Deaf in the Desert.....                      | 40 |
| Sloane Wolter      | Legacy.....                                  | 41 |

## ART

---

|                    |   |    |
|--------------------|---|----|
| Dante Migone-Ojeda | Frontenac.....                          | 9  |
| Anna Joo           | Void.....                               | 10 |
| MJ Brown           | Untitled.....                           | 14 |
| Zoe Kline          | Nana's Kitchen.....                     | 27 |
| Anna Deen          | Untitled.....                           | 32 |
| Jake Yoo           | Limb #3.....                            | 35 |
| Adare Brown        | 450 Braque, Still Life with Fishes..... | 36 |

Front Cover: "X Painting, Man Ray"  
Oil on Canvas  
Adare Brown, Class of 2016

Front Inside: "Towards the Waking World"  
Watercolor and Watercolor Pencil  
Alice Wang, Class of 2018

Back Cover: "FLASH"  
Oil on Canvas  
Jake Yoo, Class of 2016

Back Inside: Excerpt from "De Colores"  
Etching and Lithograph on Paper  
Dante Migone-Ojeda, Class of 2016

# STAFF

---

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Editors-in-chief:      | Meytal Chernoff<br>Shelby Ozer  |
| Managing Director:     | Catherine Thoms   |
| Literary Editor:       | Ben Harvey  |
| Layout Editor:         | Dante Migone-Ojeda  |
| Public Relations:      | George Zhou   |
| Art Editor:            | Anna Deen   |
| Social Media Director: | Sabrina Wang  |
| Staff:                 | Elijah Armstrong<br>Holly Baldacci<br>Haley Berg<br>Sarah Chen<br>Allen Chu<br>Olivia Ratinoff<br>Rachel Wortham<br>Anjali Vishwanath |

## The Fish Instinct

I always end up hooksnagged,  
the metal spike through cartilage,  
standing dumbly, the reel in my hand  
in-spun, unlike my father's rod  
that arched soundlessly out. He could throw  
a line that caught a fish  
before the splash.

He said I'd never gut a fish  
because I'd been on that end of things  
and it would be like gutting myself.  
I'd nod dumbly, play the fool.  
How could I explain—  
the satisfaction in the slice  
the weight of that strange earring  
ringing in my aural spiral,  
the bloodbeat out of time, some new  
syncopated reverberate, and how anything  
that made music was not pain.

I'd let his worm-worn fingers pry the hook  
out of my ear, fishjaws.  
What he could not remove  
lodged in permanently:

The fish instinct to be snared.  
I'd never gut a fish because  
I tangle in wire, self, metal, skin,  
indulgently coiling outside-in,  
sticking hooks in my own ears  
just to catch some resonance.

*Keegan Hughes*  
*Class of 2016*

## Sauerkraut

I've always hated sauerkraut. Not in the same way that a child hates broccoli or a dog hates the mailman; this was a deep, passionate hate. Everything about it repulsed me, from the musty smell that hung in the air like a fog to the slimy texture that indicated it was not the slightest bit edible. Just the sight of it made my stomach churn and my chest burn. I detested it, the smell, the sight, even the word itself. What an ugly word. It refuses to roll off the tongue, but rather gets caught in the throat like a chicken bone, as if the esophagus rejects such an ugly combination of syllables. Perhaps choking on the word would be preferable to swallowing what it represents. It would be a lie to say that my dislike of sauerkraut grew as I got older because I believe it is something I was born with. The hatred was a part of me, like my name or hair color. And I truly hated it.

When my father came here from Ireland, as a result of what I assumed to be a directional error, he lived next to a whole row of German families. As mostly single and strange men in an even stranger land, they quickly bonded over the things closest to their hearts - food. The Germans laughed when they heard that my father, in making a family delicacy, preferred to boil the cabbage, as was an Irish tradition. The gaggle of Germans took it upon themselves to educate the poor misguided man, and they taught him to pickle the cabbage. And he loved it. I don't believe he ever boiled cabbage again after he learned to ferment the stuff instead. He began to make sauerkraut for his companions, and soon they were coming to him for his recipe. They were addicted to the stuff like some vinegary heroin, and my father was the neighborhood kingpin, though I still contest that his product was far more harmful than any illicit substance. He began to sell jars of sauerkraut, and when that became profitable enough he bought a small warehouse and started to mass-pickle the cabbage. A dynasty was born.

Luckily, my father had a small worker who lived with him and was available twenty-four hours a day. Any waking second that I wasn't in school or asleep, I was slaving away at the sauerkraut dungeon. My father filled his nine circles of pickled hell with Bavarian immigrants who would've found it an honor to bathe in the hallowed boiling vats as if they were filled with brine in Bethesda. I sat on a wobbly stool with the other workers, shredding heads of cabbage or mixing spices together or preparing jars. My skin and my clothes and my thoughts began to smell like vinegar, that horrible, awful smell that burned my nose and lungs like mustard gas. I had to find a way out. One time, I told my father that I hated everything about his business and that I'd rather be sweeping garbage in the streets than working in his warehouse. He responded by giving me two black eyes



and, just to spite me, a promotion: taste-tester. Apparently liberation wouldn't come that easily. Day in and day out, I tasted that vile product, all for the good of the precious business and my twisted father. There were hours of trying not to gag and holding my breath, hoping that I would finally pass out and get even a momentary break from the acidic fumes and bitter taste. I dreaded each day more than the last.

After years of the work, I finally became numb. The smell, the taste, the texture were all implanted on my brain, providing about the same level of pleasure as a tumor in the same location. I could recall the proper amount of pickling salt to add into a fifty gallon container of cabbage before I could remember my own name. Every day for years had been a freshly-fermented hell on Earth. I knew I would keep scrubbing heads of cabbage and tasting finished product until the warehouse finally burned down or some other equally optimistic disaster occurred. Physically, I was still young and youthful, but inside I lived for nothing but sauerkraut, which was hardly a life at all.

One night, I went to the warehouse with my father after all the other workers had gone home. My father had noticed some slight errors I had made when setting the temperature for one of the boiling vats. He addressed me like a brain-damaged child while showing me my mistake. I nodded, looked troubled by my carelessness, and assured him it would never happen again. As we were going to leave, he took me up to a catwalk that ran above the warehouse; he said the smell of the cooking sauerkraut was strongest up there, and he loved to breathe in that wonderful aroma. We stopped walking directly above a vat of boiling water, and the sour smell enveloped us. Perhaps it was a side-effect of the fumes around me, but I decided that I had had enough. I told my father, once again, how much I hated his food and his passion and his product. He stared at me. I realized that I hadn't looked him in the eye for a long while, and it seemed like there was a fresh fire that danced behind his eyes, something I didn't recall from when I was younger. His face got redder and redder, and I could see rage building up. He slapped me, and my face stung like the smell was stinging my nostrils. He smirked and told me that he didn't care.

And then, the damndest thing happened. He slipped. My poor, beloved father, whose employ I had loved for years, slipped. I can assure you, I have no idea how it could've happened. He fell two stories and made a splash like a cannonball in a pond. He screamed and screamed in the boiling water, and I watched from overhead. He thrashed and splashed around as the vinegar slowly filled his lungs.

I looked at him struggling and, I have no admit, I was a little confused. After all, didn't this man love his sauerkraut?

When the police finally arrived, my father had certainly seen better days. They had to shut off the boiler and skim the bottom of the vat until pieces of him began to float to the top. I'm not sure what happened to the batch that he fell into, though I can't imagine his little accident could've harmed the flavor very much. Eventually, my father was removed from the vat. I saw him one last time as the police were taking away his pickled remains. I looked at his face, and I failed to see the issue. The boiling water treatment had done wonders for his skin. He had much fewer wrinkles, and I swear he looked ten years younger.

His funeral was insufferable. Workers and family crowded around his urn, crying and muttering about how he was gone too soon and what a tragedy his death was. It wasn't his time, they would inform me; I glanced at my watch and smiled to myself. I must admit, my eyes were watering as well, but only because the whole sanctuary smelled like vinegar. The smell was still on my clothes and in my nose and on my brain, so I guess it was fitting that it would be on my clothes one final time. The worst tragedy of that day was that I had to get my suit dry cleaned to get rid of the stench - it was quite inconvenient when it took three weeks for my suit to be cleaned, and it was returned with a small spot of bleach on the collar.

And now, my father sits on a coffee table. My family likes to gather around the urn and weep their crocodile tears until they're dehydrated. I usually excuse myself and leave the room when this ritual begins. I can't stand to see such a phony act. I'm sure somebody, somewhere, misses the man. Maybe even my own family, possibly, though I can't fathom a reason. Every now and again, when I walk by my father's urn, I catch a whiff of vinegar and sauerkraut. Maybe it's not such a bad smell after all.

*Jack Ralls*  
*Class of 2019*



*The movie starts in ten minutes. It's a Chilean independent film about losing a loved one or something like that. The security guard has been walking behind me since I arrived in the mall. I haven't gone into any stores, but he hasn't let me leave his sight. About 20 feet from the theater, he walks past and watches me get in line. I hope the concession stand sells beer.*

Frontenac  
Photograph

*Dante Migone-Ojeda  
Class of 2016*



Void  
Oil on Canvas

*Anna Joo*  
*Class of 2017*

## Escalator Bliss at the Beidermeier Mall

Unrelinquished, unrelinquishing, not yet seen before man and mannequin alike, Skip took the step and – in two strides had realized the latent fear of his life before quickly forgetting it.

Above, crystalline and shimmering rays of sunlight flitted through the pyramidal ribs of primordial industry – celestial harmony for the murky and mortal. Up, up! McDonalds, yes, the golden arches, Skip felt he understood. The sequence of Fibonacci like the brow of a beetle, everything so perfect as the robot grinded, no, slid, below.

For quite some time he'd felt the frenetic torment of unrest, but here he was hitched, his chariot blessed with the divine breath of a blue-bodied boy. He could grab at the chandelier: glass spirals fluttering in the breeze of an omni-AC. Glass spirals as a window into the invisible; the chandelier as grace. But, what was any of this without the others! Mere fragments of a perfect whole! Soaring higher and higher he was passing through the clouds – the odorous nebula, a perfume of sweetly vaporized ambrosia: Abercrombie & Fitch, that colossus of the human spirit, cotton stitched and dyed and doused in the divine fragrance of true dignity, the garb assumed and tugged, tight and tighter and – skin! O Skin! O Second Skin! Yes, now, here, pomegranate seeds and the Grecian canvas of the thick yogurt frozen over – a berrypink, ho! Pinkberry!

Skip, now two floors above, climbing still, touched the ends of his ten fingers to various parts of his face, to ensure he was still flesh and not – he was so ebullient that he might have merely faded away, lost not in distance and darkness, but in lightness and grace. Pray, faith, he told himself.

Have faith and never look down: but how could he ever understand the true meaning of exaltation without a comprehension of distance? Of the below? To find his apotheosis he had to look down, yes, straight down: Panda Express, Boba Tea, the strokes of a symphony lighter than air wandering from The Foot Locker – and the food court. All of it. As of a carnival: only the wholeness now could he see it all. He could fit it into a wrinkle of his palm, perhaps if he winked his right eye he could squeeze it all away, like an accidental tear – a piercing moment of brilliant sunshine.

The longer he stared, the more he saw. It was a wholeness, yes, but he was peering inside the machine. Where was God? He was here and only here! A plastic tray left aside by a young boy, picked up by the plump maître-d, disposed of and thrown into a large cleansing receptacle – no; Oh silly Skip! That's just a garbage can. But this tiny blip, this absolutely infinitesimal blemish on the canvas of an impenetrably perfect portrait of man's infinite love: why, nothing more than a drop in the ocean.

He knew, he felt it once more when the voice boomed: "Closing in Five Minutes" that he had never – he could never have – truly been so high before in his meager life. What had been the point of all those years? Had he ever even existed before this? Of course he had, yes, silly, thoughts. But he couldn't help feeling like nothing had ever touched him so deeply. When he got up this high, it was like an anxious stillness. The vibration on the rubber handrail, quivering under his grip. It was a sweet blur of human patience; so fast and frozen, this was the freedom of Icarus.

And the garbage cans? Well, what could one do?

*Nick Politan  
Class of 2016*

## Rug Burn

Your experience in the Ant Assassination Club came in the form of burning. It escapes you then, but this is what you think of as you sit in the Cahokia and fish with your Dad. You begin to remember. The magnifying glass. The ultraviolet vitamin-D. The burning, like a tiny campfire on the bug, belly-out. It was easy. Easy peasy lemon squeezy. That was another method: lemons. You spritzed the seedy flesh, and imagined the mania from the ant's eyes: acidic hellfire raining down in consumption of its dust-mound kingdom.

Did ya see that one?

Your Dad is all worked up by the latest catfish to glide by your feet. Your feet that dangle limply off the edge of this bark seat he's carved. He's always been good with his hands. His meaty clamp envelops your tiny paw when you shake hands. He's never been a big fan of hugs. You think this is normal for so long.

You fix your glasses. Pull in your line. Cast again. Drag. He's trying, you see this. After all, he's the one who brought you up here to the mountain forest. Presumably he thinks that this will fix all. Some father-son fishing, alone time. That this will make you feel better, among other things. You still haven't grown as much as the doctor said.

In fact, you're not much bigger than the last time you were here. You remember this place. This pond. You remember, as he must. The familiar trees; wind-twisted conifers perched like strange falcons; clarity's ambient fragrance like honeysuckle on pine; yes, you remember. Perhaps, it's remembering what's in between that's the trouble.

Listen.

He says this to you, so you try. Your ears, however, are not cooperating. It's too crowded in between them. You nudge against what's happening. You're in the middle of so much. Arms touch, and you bump into Mindy Bergman, your crush, in the sixth grade hallway. You drool onto the top of her head when flirting at her locker because she's on the ground gathering her books, and you've decided starburst is a good idea despite the obvious flaw of salivation. You run quickly for your size, though. Quickly through these hallways in your head, and you're hanging onto that parking meter like it's life or death. You are not doing Tee ball camp, and you are *screaming* this. "Hysterical" is the word your Mom will use when your Dad is later trying to explain just how the hell you were acting.

But they don't understand – how could they? Most especially, most wrongly, your Dad doesn't understand. Paul Bunyan was your least favorite story growing up; it only reminded you of him. He selfishly took all you could have been. Snatched it and kept it for himself: the gene to be big.

Hey buddy... You know I really miss spending time...

You don't hear the rest because you're still clearing the crowd in between your ears. You're working it all out – unfrozen snackbar pizzas, chlorine up the nose, summer rain on the blacktop, the soft spot where a recently lost tooth tastes.

Suddenly, your line jerks your arm, and the crowd scatters.

You got one!

There's a dumb catfish on the end of your pole. The idiot that bit. They'd been circling for two hours. The bait couldn't have been any more appetizing than the steroidal syrup your Dad spooned

to you during your darkest days. When your legs couldn't bear the weight of you. And he's behind you now, holding your shoulders: a safety net.

C'mon, that's it! Pull that baby, you got it.

Your hands grip the fishing pole like it's Willy Wonka's golden ticket. You feel the tension in your forearms, bulging, gorged with blood. The bones in your shoulders stretch, and you feel the release. A bittersweet farewell, you relinquish the pole. Your Dad jumps back, thinking he's done this again.

But it was just you. And the Earth moves underneath. The clouds – if there were any – would do the same. When you've done crying; when you finish hearing the mocking echo of your wails; when you feel so small you could shrivel up and crawl into the entrance of an anthill, your Dad puts his hand on your shoulder.

Hold still.

You never knew your shoulder could make that noise. That pop, like bubblewrap. You're grateful when you taste the sweetness again. Honeysuckle mixed with regular breathing air – a goup of something nice.

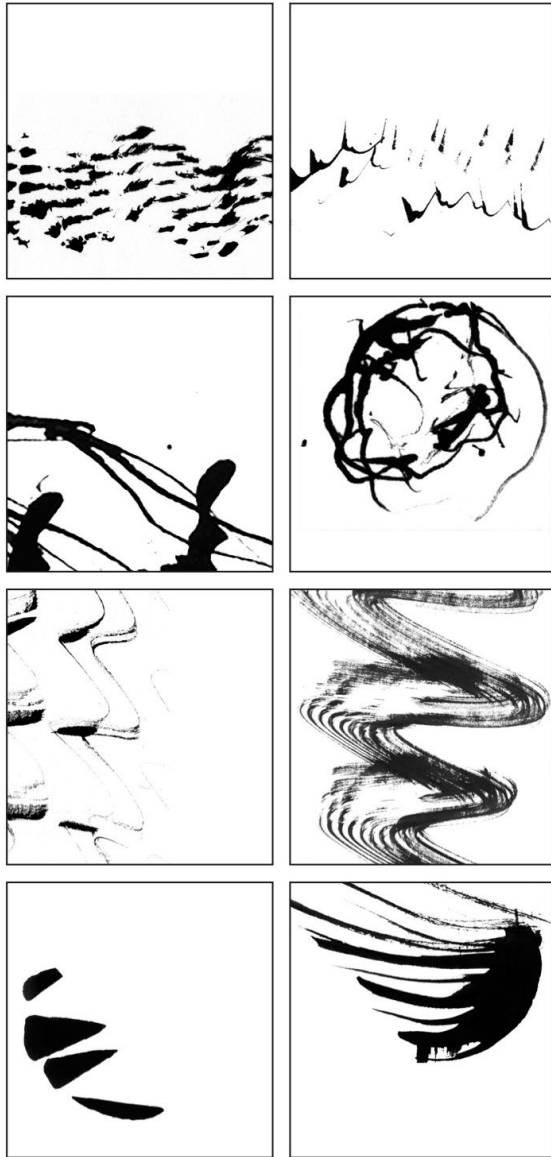
I'm sorry.

And these words, and his close breathing, and his pain that you feel more than your own; these kill you because all you want to do is hate him. To hate him you must hate everything about him. Remember and hate: Deet bugspray, violet wine-stain on his upper lip, depth of his voice like the bottom of the pool, helmet-smacking in the dugout, heavy steps away from your bedroom door. Relax, breathe, remember more, hate more: arm wrestling, goldfish at physical therapy, grey whiskers on his chin, fertilizer on his brow burying Leila in the backyard. You're running out. To hate you must remember: dust on his jackets, whistle in the morning, thrown like a baby rag doll across the closet where there she is and there he is and then there the hot spiral of pain is like a fire in your spine not from a magnifying glass, but from him. Remember: nothing. You've got nothing else to hate.

Your shoulder will heal in a month, and you will tell your friends how lame the Cahokia was; how lame your Dad is.

Your head will stay empty, and you will grow in time. You will have new wounds, but for now you can't wash away the Cahokia, which is to say, you can't unremember the pond, or the sweet weight of the mountain that tattooed itself onto your skin. Your sling will be like a dangerous fishing net, ready at a moment's notice to show you what it caught: staccato chirps and lonely roaming chants, the howl of a broken thing, the lightness of a sky without clouds; all of this, above the forest, above you and your Dad, above everything – forever overhead.

*Nick Politan  
Class of 2016*



Untitled  
Ink on Paper

*Anna Deen*  
*Class of 2018*



## Runaways

When I was twelve, I ran into the girls' bathroom, chased by fear and two boys in my English class who are the reasons I wake up some mornings drenched in cold sweat and hot tears. The worst part was when I stopped running and started counting the specks on my ceiling, hoping that my mattress would swallow me up so I wouldn't have to feel hungry eyes, among other things, on me again.

When I was fourteen, I decided to disappear so my ghosts could not find me. They clung on desperately, though, pulling out handfuls of hair. As I grew smaller, they grew louder, moving into the new hollows in my collarbone. I ran everyday, barefoot, on the treadmill, scraping the bottoms of my feet when I fell off, pink, sweaty, and ready to die, hoping that if I ran long enough, the past wouldn't catch up to me because I could not bear the weight any longer.

When I was sixteen, I saw lights across subway tracks and doors in dark places. The most efficient metro system in the world could not save me, and slurred voices in the emergency room could not take me. My mother sometimes would drag my body out of bed, and it would just pool around her feet like frayed laces on old shoes. I was tired of running, or maybe I was just tired. Hair is a lot easier to cut off than the invisible trails cold clammy hands leave on your body.

When I turned eighteen, I was not just eighteen; I was also seventeen and sixteen and fifteen and so on. I was twelve again when I saw him at IHOP and felt my fingers close around metal like they closed around me. I was fourteen again when I ran, pink, sweaty, but not quite ready to die, red white lights flashing alarm bells. I was sixteen again when the ghosts stopped following me, replaced by tires; this slurred voice never quite made it to the emergency room this time. And I was eighteen when my life finally started just as his ran out.

*Amy Chen  
Class of 2019*

## Losing

On the day I lost my first two teeth  
a strange man ran down my street.  
He was chasing after a child.  
A neighbor called the police.  
I made a tent out of a large umbrella  
and a blanket which was too hot to sleep under  
but was perfect for tents  
because the light filtered through it  
and I could pretend I was in a sea cave.  
I stayed inside all night,  
giddy with the slick thrill of darting my tongue into the gap in my teeth.

Years later on a Friday  
I lost you. The day after the fourth of July.  
We'd stayed up fighting all night and the fireworks.  
We made love one last time--fucked actually,  
though you didn't know it was the last time.  
I choked on you, and vomited.  
That was the first time that ever happened.  
I remembered your mother's voice.  
Thick exotic trills and aspirations,  
telling me how to pick the best fruits  
at the Persian market near your home  
while you met with an old friend,  
played tennis under a canopy of palm trees.  
The next day, you took me to the tide pools  
to catch me a crab, showed me how to poke  
at the fleshy anemones until they would retract.

I went home  
Shrunk into my sea cave  
Sealed up all my  
Gaping spaces

*Sloane Wolter  
Class of 2016*

## Father Daughter: A Posthumous Mystery

“I think the orange and red looks manly.” The florist nods at me, lips pursed. She is following my lead.

“And you’re sure not the white?” my mother asks. She has become paralyzed in her indecision, about the flowers, about which saint to have on the prayer cards, about where to hold the luncheon afterwards.

“Not the white. They’re too plain.” I don’t like the white calla lilies that she wants, but not because they are too plain. They are crisp and pure. To cover him in chaste lilies feels like a lie that we tell about the dead, that they were nicer, more accomplished, more innocent than they were.

My mother doesn’t disagree with the orange and red day lilies so we take that as a decision, and the florist closes her binder of options, probably to prevent my mother from going back in and finding something else. We have been standing here for an hour, flipping laminated page after laminated page. The florist has been patient, offering us coffee and tea, but it’s nearing two and she likely wants to take her lunch break.

I just got off a nine hour flight from Madrid, so I wouldn’t mind a lunch break myself. But we are meeting my father’s twin brother at three at the funeral home to pick a casket for the wake and an urn for after the cremation. I will find out later that there hundreds of options at every step in this process, and each one of these options will cost you. It shocks me, the money we shell out on these things. My mother previewed the cost of the whole show we’re putting on, and it’s easily a semester of tuition. Life insurance should cover it, but it’s just the principle of the thing. I can’t even pull the “he wouldn’t want us to fuss over him card.” He wasn’t the type of person to say *when I die, don’t spend the money on me. Just do what you want with me.* He would want us to expend the effort.

The florist looks between the two of us, not knowing who’s in charge here, but suspecting it’s me. “I’ll just go ahead and finalize these papers. It shouldn’t be more than a few minutes.” She pushes through the double doors to the back area and leaves the three of us in the front of the store.

I follow my mother over to where my brother is scrolling through his Facebook feed, lamenting all that he’s missing on his Big Ten campus this weekend.

“You chose really nice flowers,” my mother says quietly and runs her hand through my hair, “he would have liked them.” Her voice buckles at the end, and she brings a hand up to hide her face. She cried on the phone when she told me, but this is the first time I’ve seen her cry over my dad. Her face gets blotchy and her green eyes turn a more electric aquamarine. She actually looks pretty when she cries.

“Mom...” I say. My brother starts crying, because he always does when she does, and he’s the softer one between the two of us. I can almost exclusively cry when no

one else is crying.

I'm in shock and I'm tired and while I don't know if I necessarily miss him it feels like I have been gipped out of feeling a profound grief, because it signifies what could have been. It is a conditional mourning. *We could have been so close. If only he had done x, y, and z, I could be more sad if he had loved me more.*

My mom starts, "He was a good man. He didn't deserve to die."

"Of course. No one deserves to die," I say and rub her back. She is much smaller than me, and with her fists balled up by her face she seems so child-like it's makes me feel small.

"You know, I still loved him. I always thought we would end up back together." My brother and I glance at each other over her head, but neither of us say the words we are both thinking.

*But you hated him. We all hated him. We hated him because you hated him.*

It feels as if an identity of mine is unwinding. I have carried this hatred with me for so many years only to have my companion in this hatred tell me it was all imagined.

*Did she really love him all along? Even when I didn't. Even when she practically told me not to.*

---

Some children of divorce harbor fantasies that their parents will get back together, but that was always my worst case scenario and something that I never held as a possibility even when they started becoming friends again and having lunch once in a while.

These lunch plans started when my brother and I went to college, and they were nearly impossible for me to imagine. What did they talk about? Did he make her laugh? Until we'd gone away to college I had only ever seen them be civil, pass child support checks through rolled down windows and leave succinct voicemails on each other's phones about our extracurricular scheduling. When my brother had a baseball game, he always sat on the away team's bleachers, giving my mother what we all thought of as her domain. When he picked us up on one of the rare occasions that my mother enforced the court-mandated time spent with him, he never came into the house. Instead he would lean against the rusty brick of our garage smoking a Marlboro, always the ones with the silver packaging that I've come to know as Ultra Lights. He was charismatic and charming to an outsider and would chat up our neighbors, making them laugh and making my mother look bad, because *a guy who was that funny couldn't really be so bad.* We were always relieved when he went home and we could go back to our day.

Because of this formality in our relationship most of the required time spent

with our father was not spent at one of our houses but at an equidistant diner. It was usually one diner in particular called Downers Delight run by a Greek family that served just about everything all day and had a 7-page picture menu that was always sticky with syrup and powdered sugar. My father knew the owners and all the waitresses. He was that kind of person.

There are so many instances of eating at Downers Delight that it's become hard to pick out specific memories, but I remember that nearly all of the pivotal conversations in our relationship happened at one of those fabric back booths. Sometimes my brother sat on my side of the booth and sometimes on my father's depending on where his allegiance lied that day. I always sat opposite of him. My allegiance was clear. I stood with mom.

There is one conversation I know we must have had in one of those booths, because we had the conversation so many times—at a Quizno's, at a Dairy Queen, on the side lines of several baseball games. It was the conversation about whether or not he cheated on mom. I believed the answer to this question would tell me if he was a good guy. I thought I could forgive his meanness and neglect if he hadn't cheated.

Now that I'm older, I realize that cheating is the sort of thing that most kids go their whole lives not knowing about their parents. It's the kind of thing you shouldn't know about them if your parents can help it. My mother told me outright that this was the reason the marriage ended.

I know this is going to make her look bad, but it never felt strange to hear these personal details of her life. We were partners in our secrets. Where some parents saw their kids as whiny nuisances, I was privy to my mom as Diane Brogdon and not just Mom. I knew who her first kiss had been and that she used to sneak out on her roof to smoke cigarettes in 8th grade, that she hadn't quit until she got pregnant and still had hankering for one every once in a while. I was her little mini-me, her biggest champion, and I took pride in the fact that she confided in me and chose my shoulder to cry on.

I was more than happy to sit in on a bitch session about my father with my mother and her divorcee friends. It made me feel included. The conversations usually went like this:

Diane: *"I told him he had to take the kids this weekend, because I have a business trip, and now my mom's going to have to watch them because he's taking Debbie on a cruise. He never took me on a cruise."*

Sue: *"At least yours pays child support, mine just gambles it all away and tells me he's got nothing."*

Tina: *\*Just sbakes head\**

Diane: *"I just don't understand why he's like this. I suppose it's because Debbie doesn't like it when he has responsibilities to his kids."*

Sue: *"They never do."*

10 Year Old Me: *"Ooh, Mom! Tell them about what he said last week, that was really bad."*

It was at this point that my mother would look down at her little mini-me, give me a guilty glance and tell me to go play with my brother.

She tried to limit what she told me, but it's hard to not give your child a reason when their father doesn't want to see them. They are going to hate one parent in these situations, and I don't blame her for not wanting it to be her.

And so it was in her name that I often provoked arguments, tried to get to the bottom of what had really ended the marriage. I remember the first time I brought it up. I was about 12.

"I did not cheat on your mother, Jacqueline," my father said, signaling to the waitress for another vodka and tonic, even though he knew I got upset when he drank more than two. He was not considering my stake in the subject, just answered as calmly as possible while making it known that he was annoyed by my questions.

"I *know* you did. Mom told me you did, with Debbie." Whether or not my brother was on my side that night, he always stayed out of conversations about the divorce. He stacked the little plastic cups of creamer in a pyramid and repeatedly slid a packet of jelly across the table, knocking them down like bowling pins. Sometimes he would peel back the foil on the cups of creamer and take them like shots. My dad let my brother get away with this because *boys will be boys, but you are supposed to act like a lady.*

"That happened after we separated," he said tersely.

"But it's still cheating if mom didn't know." This ability to close moral loopholes is why my mother always thought I should be a lawyer. I narrowed my eyes at him and shredded my bread roll and then rolled the pieces into gluten pellets. I flicked at few at my brother. We always did this at dinner with our mother, but it was a risk to do it with our father who couldn't stand it when you ate soup the wrong way.

"I don't even know why I'm talking to you about this. I'm 45 years old. I just know more about life than you, and things get complicated. It's something you can't understand now."

This was the worst end to our arguments, the one where he tried to discredit me. No matter how many times I asked him, he would always tell me that he hadn't cheated. I knew my mother wasn't lying, but there was always a part of me that wanted there to be some situation in which they were both right. And so I kept asking. At a certain point, all I wanted was for him to admit it so that maybe I could move on.

---

But the answer to this question of whether or not he was a good guy seemed to be present in what I witnessed and in my consequent visceral reaction to our time together. The earlier years after the divorce were characterized by my thrashing around in the backseat of his car as we drove away from my house. I pounded my little fists into the back of his headrest, screamed until my throat was raw, and worked myself up into hyperventilation.

His response to this was usually to tell me I was being a brat or to whip around and raise his hand like he would slap me. I knew he'd been slapped for less as a child. I willed him to hit me, to give me evidence of his abuse, but he never hit any of us. He only ever raised his hand, cocked back like he was holding himself back from doing it.

As I got older, I no longer threw tantrums in the car either because I simply grew out of it or more likely because I knew my mother needed alone time. But I still resented those weekends with him, the ones we spent watching him do errands at Debbie's house, watching them both drink too much and yell at dinner. Debbie was everything my mom wasn't: domestic, well-dressed, blonde. It hurt me to think that he thought my mother, the center of my world, was not good enough, that he chose someone else. I started to wonder if he thought I should be more like Debbie.

For Christmas he bought me a straightener. I hadn't asked for a straightener, and when I asked him what had inspired it he said he thought I looked better with straight hair. I straightened my hair everyday for the rest of high school. He offered to take me to get my eyebrows done and my hair highlighted like Debbie's. His abuse took the form of snide remarks about my appearance. These remarks were always swathed in a guise of helpfulness and thus that much harder to critique else I seem *ungrateful*.

When I brought this up with my mother, she would always say something to the effect of: "He's always been that way. He was that disrespectful to his own mother, then me, and now you. He's someone who just doesn't think about others. Just know that his opinion doesn't matter."

Once I asked why she married him in the first place. She responded with, "I honestly don't know. I made a mistake, but I'm happy I did because I have you and Michael. But do I want you to marry someone like that? No, definitely not." Sometimes she provided an anecdote about his horribleness to illustrate her point. Something about how he flirted with other women in front of her on their honeymoon or how he once flipped them both in a car in one of his drunken rages. It totaled the car, and my mom walked the two miles home, refusing to get in back into a car with him.

My brother and I had no reason to think he was anything other than

a terrible human being and just a genuine asshole. So this is how we treated him. Towards the end of high school, I had written him off so much that I was actually able to spend small amounts of time with him. I just clocked the hours and called it a day. I thought we were all in the understanding that he was mean but because he was family we had to deal with him just like we had dealt with my father's father, another mean old man, until he died.

The ironic part is that as I widened the distance between us, he started to need me more and more. His relationship with Debbie was falling apart, probably because she realized that the man you want to be with is not the one who cheated on their wife with you. At my grandpa's funeral the summer before my senior year of high school, I remember a palpable tension between them as he leaned into her and she remained rigid.

That year he moved into his own apartment. He and Debbie had separated, and he lost his job within two months. He was living by himself for the first time since he was 18. He'd gone from living with his family, to living with roommates, to living with my mother, to living with Debbie. He did not know how to be by himself, and I tried to teach him. I gave him pep talks about being on his own for a while to figure out what he wanted the next phase of his life to be. It became harder and harder to be openly angry at him, because it didn't fuel me anymore to stand up to him. His life depressed me, and I wanted him to go back to being a pompous asshole who shopped name brand and had a six-figure salary. That man was a worthy opponent. This one was not.

His drinking had always been present, at the periphery of my early memories of him, but when all this happened he began drinking more and more. When he called I stopped being able to distinguish if he was drunk or not. His voice lollered over syllables, and he would easily forget how the conversation had begun so I had to keep reminding him of what I was talking about. He stopped driving the 20 minutes to see us, because he said *the roads were icy*. When he called to say this, my mother always said he sounded scared of himself, of what he might do if he got on the road. It was as if he had already given up on changing. To him, everything was downhill, he had nothing.

This infuriated me, because I was still there. I was sticking around, albeit out of familial obligation, but still, he could at least pretend like he wanted to rekindle our father-daughter relationship. Were my brother and I not reason enough for him to turn it around? I shared this feeling with my mother, and her response was the same as always to just tell me that he was a selfish man, that he always had been.

For a while things seemed like they might get better in the fall of my sophomore year of college. He had sworn off alcohol after falling down the stairs of his apartment and landing himself in the hospital for a couple weeks with internal bleeding. When I came home for Christmas, there were no blue SKYY bottles on his counter, no more obsessively chewing Altoids to cover up the scent on his breath.



It wasn't until later that spring that he ordered a drink in front of me for the first time since he fell.

"What are you doing? You said you quit," I said, ready to pounce. If I'm being honest, I had been waiting for it to happen. Not hoping, but waiting.

He didn't look at me, just skimmed the skin off the top of his soup with his spoon. His appetite was mostly gone between the alcohol and the cigarettes. Before he'd been trim and muscular, and now when I hugged him he felt like a wisp of himself like my grandpa had in his last few years, hunched over a walker. The bone of his sternum was visible through his dress shirts that he still wore to his job everyday. "Functional alcoholism" they call it.

At Christmas of my junior year, I gave my father a charcoal grey scarf that would go under his expensive peacoat. I had spent all of Thanksgiving knitting it. The four of us, my brother, my father, my mother, and I, were going out for a nice dinner to celebrate Christmas a day late. He invited my mother to dinner, probably because they had started to get lunch sometimes. He only ate a full meal when they were together. Neither were the same people they'd been when they were married. He no longer had the energy to hit on the waitress in front of her, and she no longer cared if he did.

I gave him the scarf before dinner, and he started laughing and then crying. Perhaps his initial reaction was to think it was ridiculous that I could still care after all these years. He kept saying, "I can't believe this. This is great." His dark eyes were glassy and it was clear he'd had a couple beforehand. The scarf added bulk to his chest under his peacoat and almost made his body look like it used to.

At dinner he ordered vodka and tonic after vodka and tonic, probably because my mother was driving. I called him on it.

"Do you really have to order another one?" I spat as soon as the waiter had left. We were all very good at keeping quiet as he poured our waters and took our orders.

His face flared up, from broken capillaries or anger I don't know. "I'm a grown man, and if I want to have a drink I can have a drink."

"Well, you've already had a drink," my brother chimed in, looking up from his phone for the first time that night. I glanced at him, and he nodded in solidarity.

"Jackie, just leave it alone, okay?" my mom asked.

"How are we all just sitting here not addressing the fact that he's literally going to kill himself? He's being an idiot! You would never let me do the same." As soon as I raised my voice, I lost my brother's support. He was not a scene-causer. One of his old classmates was at dinner a few tables over. Saving face was always priority number one.

"I'm not just going to sit here and have you all yell at me," my dad growled.

"No one's yelling at you, Mike."

"I am," I said to my mom's annoyance. Why was she suddenly defending

him?

He stood to get out of the booth and went outside. I think he forgot that my mom had drove and we watched him pace along the sidewalk for a few minutes. Puffs of his cigarette smoke hovered over his head like thought bubbles. He came back inside after a few minutes. We ate the rest of the meal like it hadn't happened. We even joined in on a half-hearted joke about the waiter being overeager to buddy up to my dad for a big tip.

It felt like we were eating with a ghost.

I went abroad and I never saw him again after that.

---

My uncle found him on the floor of his kitchen in his apartment on Thursday, February 6th, 2015 in a depressing parallel of finding his own father dead just two years earlier. My mother was the first person he called. I didn't get the call until Saturday morning, and I was on a transatlantic flight home Monday morning. Primary cause of death: heart failure. Secondary cause of death: alcoholism.

---

The vast majority of my memories of my father are negative. And so when I returned to Madrid after the funeral, the piece of information that I could not let go of was the one she had shared at the florist. I did not call her on it at the time, because she was easily the most upset of any of us. This too puzzled me. His death had been a shock, but had also seemed an inevitability considering his lifestyle. I did not voice this opinion, but his death felt a little like relief to me. I was no longer waiting for the bad thing to happen. It had happened. The relief did not last long, because it had never occurred to me that his death would not be a relief to my mother.

---

November 2nd, 2015 I return home for All Soul's Day. I am there to memorialize my father at our Catholic church. It is for my mother more than anyone. My father wasn't baptized and never attended mass with us. He technically is not allowed to be included in Catholic ceremonies, but my mother always ignored the exclusionary aspect of Catholicism.

"I have a surprise for you," my mother tells me when I walk in the door and drop my backpack in the foyer. I ignore her to greet my dog.

When my dog finally loses interest in me, I give in and ask "What's the surprise?"

"Remember how your Dad always used to videotape everything?"

"Yeah," I say even though I don't. He moved out when I was 8, and my mother

frequently forgets this fact.

“Well, I had all the old VHS tapes converted to DVDs so we can watch them!”

I haven't mentioned to her why this glorifying the past bothers me. I agree to watch a couple before dinner.

The first one dates July 27th, 1999. My fifth birthday. We are at the pool with all of our extended family celebrating. Even though all of us cousins are only kids, it's the parents' youth that strikes me as bizarre. They're sitting around a plastic table on the pool deck talking about Nicole Kidman for some reason.

Then my father's voice comes on. I realize I haven't heard it in 9 months.

*Here we are. It's Jacqueline's 5th birthday.*

He zooms in on my tanned, freckled face, and I smile at the camera.

The video jumps to a few days later. I am in the same swimsuit, standing on the high dive. My father begins narrating. *Here's Jacqueline standing on the high dive about to take her first dive. She just turned 5.* I tip forward, like a teapot, just like the lifeguard taught me. My tiny body falls, hits the water, and the resurfaces. The camera follows me dogpaddling over to the ladder.

*Jacqueline?* There is his voice again.

I turn to him, wrapped in my towel, wet baby hairs stuck to my temple.

*Who's your daddy?*

*You are!* I point to him and scream. I am grinning.

*No I'm not.* I want him to turn the camera on himself, so I can see what his face was like before alcohol ravaged it. But he keeps it focused on me.

*Yes you are!*

*You're right I am. Do you love your daddy?*

I nod my head up and down fervently. *Yeab!*

The video cuts to another day, but I pause it. I am crying now. I cannot imagine a time when I felt this way towards my father, and I want to so badly, but everything I know about him is a barrier. I turn to my mother, “What the fuck happened? Where was this guy my whole life?”

“He was sick, Jacqueline.”

I bring up the thing that's been bothering me for the past nine months.

“It fucks me up when you say all that stuff about getting back together. I go my whole life with you telling me you hate him, and then you just take it back when he's dead. I hated him because I thought you hated him. It fucks me up.”

She lowers her head. She knows I was going to call her on it eventually. “He wasn't always a bad guy, but I'm sorry you didn't get to know him before the alcoholism. That's why I say that I wanted to get back together. I'm just thinking about old times. It wouldn't have been realistic the way he was at the end.”

I want to tell her that I'm not talking about realism, I'm talking about whether or not she loved him the whole time. Because if she loved him despite everything, then maybe I

could have loved him too. Why did she not let me love him too? Even if it was just the old him, the one I see in these videos. I wonder if it is possible to forget all these things and love him anyways, or if that makes me weak.

*Jacqueline Brogdon*  
*Class of 2016*



## Nana's Kitchen

Etching

*MJ Brown*

*Class of 2017*

## Dover Demon

I stole a stallion, baby-faced and listless,  
and no one missed us as the dark streets of Delaware  
kissed us and our aching heels.

With you foremost in my mind,  
I captured that Dover Demon of your own design  
and your surefire circumstantial evidence eyes said it all.

Innocence depleted, they pierced me  
like several stigmatizing spears of destiny  
and my wound seeped golden boughs of viscera.

*Tanner Boyle  
Class of 2018*

## Harvesting

The black bloom grew  
Where we least  
Expected—  
In ourselves,  
Who thought each other  
Protected.  
The frantic flowers crept,  
Barely out of view—  
Woven as mazes  
In the likes of  
Me and you.  
And at first,  
A panic— by fear diverged  
From a path of lightness  
(Or what you thought it was)

And onwards it pushed,  
A colorless bloom—  
Your body the frame  
Of a darkened loom—  
Your heart like a dove  
In the obsidian tomb—  
And trembling  
Like a nervous bomb—

And I might have heard you call to me,  
From the mires of your misery,  
But I did not notice anything—  
I was far too busy—  
Harvesting—

*Jon Freeman  
Class of 2016*

## Cliffs of Aran

Alone I quick-stepped up the path,  
The sun glow-orbed and full.  
Checking off boxes on my visitor's guide,  
Cramming an island in my camera's eye,  
I swallowed it up whole.

A stone-wall chiseled off the path  
And, adventure-crazed, I climbed across  
Into some posthistoric craggy world  
Of wind-curled ferns and wind-cut rock:  
World sharp as karst and soft as moss.

Alone I braved the fissured clints,  
The deepened grykes, this fracture-land.  
Ear-led by the sound of cliffs,  
I hurtled toward the sea-borne roar  
And views of panoramic span.

Alone I stumbled to the edge  
Alone I breathed breathtaking breathless  
The froth-white crash of blue-broke waves,  
The green-glow from the under-curves,  
A seascape pulsing restless.

In broken awe I thought of you  
And texted pictures of the scene,  
Blind to any beauty but  
The green-glow of your charging light,  
The blue-glow of your screen.

*Keegan Hughes  
Class of 2016*



## Port Tunnel

On the bus-link to the airport  
In the dead of fuck-it's-early,  
We fell to our own corners,  
We fell to our own worlds.  
Diverted eyes, diverted lives,  
Frayed headphones just for show,  
Big neon reminder tags of stay-the-hell-away.  
We knew us by aborted looks:  
An Asian couple, head-bowed,  
A small Italian grandmother,  
Some Germans, by their accents,  
An American, by his clothes.  
And our Irish driver drove us  
Past O'Connell, past the Docklands,  
Past the Dublin soft sleep-breathing  
Past the pubs and early houses  
And the many-bridge-crossed quay  
Towards Port Tunnel.

I knew it, it was silly,  
But the instinct came upon me,  
Averting head and eyes so the neighbors would not know—  
So ashamed yet could not stop  
The stopping of my breath.  
Then the silence strangely textured,  
And the air grew taut like tightened strings,  
A wholly unvibrated thing,  
Each of us somehow convinced  
Traditions could be true:  
Like kids, we held our breaths—  
Bus many-peopled and became  
World superstitched together.

And of course I don't believe at all  
We kept that tunnel upright,  
But the exhale reemerging  
Gave it just a touch of something.

*Keegan Hughes*  
*Class of 2016*



## Untitled

Black and White Photograph

*Zoe Kline*

*Class of 2016*

(1995-2013)

You exit. You are a shadow, discarded, an old hairy corpse, a fat voice lodged in memory like dirt. Once you complacently nodded, said *I wouldn't go that far*, when Bill said: *I have no sympathy, it's the easy way out*. Once you went through the hills barefoot, ten hours without shoes, hacking at the thorn of the wood. Axe fallen: you are isolated, you hated the world and your own. You said nothing until suddenly you were dead, suffocated. You twisted your wheel into leaping, the whirligig of the track and the child music and high voice. The cutting off, the designs burned. Nothing graduate, sir, dead, dead.

*Elijah Armstrong*  
*Class of 2019*

## First Cigarette

To begin:

it was your birthday and we sat on the front stoop  
and you smoked a whole pack of cigarettes.  
You don't smoke, but your dad started at 22,  
and he doesn't have any breath to smoke them with now  
and you were depressed,  
and a writer.

Maybe it's not my right to include a line about your dad.  
Maybe lines about your dad are only yours,  
stored away somewhere that I'm not allowed.  
I don't believe in trespassing.  
But when you smoked so much,  
I breathed in my dad too,  
his scrubby flannel jacket from when I was 7.  
Too rough to touch, we never touched.  
Maybe he was afraid of giving me splinters,  
of my little fingers swelling with stubble and shards of glass and bits of metal.  
He once told me not to crumble charcoal in my hands because it would seep into my pores.  
He wanted to keep ashes away from my body.  
He mostly stayed away from me.

You and I drifted from the bedroom to the living room to the porch,  
Me, silent with a gun  
growing in my throat,  
Trigger at my voice box.

I asked to have one.  
I had you light it.  
I wanted both of us to unfurl smoke from our mouths  
And our curling tongues to dry out together  
So that it wasn't just our choice  
To be silent.

*Sloane Wolter  
Class of 2016*



Limb #3  
Melted Oversized Lego Bricks

*Jake Yoo*  
*Class of 2016*



450 Braque, Still Life with Fishes

Oil on Canvas

*Adare Brown*

*Class of 2016*

## Butterfly Effect

There are approximately 2 million listed geocaches in the world right now; their precise GPS coordinates are listed online so that players can track them down in the self-proclaimed “world’s largest outdoor treasure hunt.” Geocachers primarily hide their caches in places that hold significance to them or reflect something of their character. In other words, a geocache marks a spot of Earth that at one time was important to a human being. Perhaps it is a place that held a moment of fleeting importance, or perhaps it is a place where a relationship has been sustained between the geocacher and the land. Either way, the geocacher is planting something of herself when she plants her cache. I have only found one geocache and it was entirely by accident.

~

On a hunt for the perfect hammock trees in a scorching St. Louis summer, I find myself in a grassy knoll two miles from my dorm. It is a seemingly deserted little spot on the edge of a park, near an old outhouse that is barred and chained shut. On this patch of overgrown grass stand four large trees situated in a diamond shape, all at the ideal hammock-ing distances from one another. The silence of the place is only tainted by the sound of runners’ shoes on a nearby path, but these footsteps fade in and out hurriedly. A quarter mile away there is a road that runs parallel to the park- but these cars are in a hurry as well, racing past each other in the bike lane to get to very important places with very important people. Neither the cars nor the runners pay any mind to a girl with white-blond tangled hair, pulling a yellow hammock from its casing. I pinwheel the bare soles of my feet into the grass, letting the cold dirt exfoliate the permanently scabbed and blistered skin. Near my toes there are two tiny butterflies, whose weightless bodies perch on single blades of grass; they open and close their wings, pitching golden-amber tents on their backs. How convenient it would be to always carry my own tent on my back. I wish I could shrink and climb into the butterflies’ little camps, to see what it looks like when the sun shines through their thin, orange spotted walls.

For a second, I try to synchronize my breathing to these creatures’ slow, deliberate movements. I squint upward, and the sun peers through the swaying canopy of leaves above me, creating dancing shadows that play hide and seek on the ground. As I look around this green little nook, forgotten amidst the city, my eye catches the faint glimmer of a sunray reflecting off something metallic. The source of the light beam is a small, beaded container, poking out from a knothole in one of the trees. I open the container to find a ripped piece of paper with a list of names and dates. Beneath the list are two toy dinosaur figurines. Upon realizing that this is a cache, I sign my name on the bottom of the log. In the times I have returned, no one has done the same- this geocache seems to have fallen off the grid. It is no longer a destination for adventurers, just coordinates lost amongst millions of other entries.

I do not believe in coincidences. I think a place seeks a person as much as a person seeks a place. A few weeks after I discovered the geocache, the knothole filled with a deep layer of fungi,

hiding the container from the naked eye and making it inaccessible. The ecosystem continues to cultivate beneath the trees with no human hands to suppress it, but the big oaks remain sturdy in the overgrowth.

In the following months, these trees become my giving trees, offering shade from the hot Midwestern sun and an escape from droning lecture halls. Beneath these trees, my future is put on hold. They provide a sanctuary for me to simply be, to feel my heart beat to the orchestra of cicadas and mockingbirds. I sit between two roots and imagine them growing and embracing me, the big tree smiling down in its wise way. Sometimes in my hammock a boy joins me, laying to my right, always to my right. He is the only other person who knows about this spot and what it means. He signs his name next to mine on the geocache log, permanently binding him to my secret place, and to me. We make up stories about an imaginary couple who also sets up their hammock in this exact spot, calling the trees their giving trees. So far, this couple has yet to arrive at the same time as us, and so we are okay with sharing.

We lay in my doublenest Eno, playing I Spy and listening to John Mayer's folk album. I press my tongue to the inside of my cheek and put my face against his, like a gumball's in my mouth. We talk about the past but mostly make plans for the future, vowing to travel to the ocean where he lived as a child. We try to devise inventions that will make us enough money to get there. It turns out biodegradable k cups have already been on the market for a decade. He talks about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada with just our backpacks, sleeping under the stars in the desert and touching the clouds on top of the mountain peaks. I talk about the quiet Missouri plains, because they are home and they are all that I know.

Yet I'm happy to be lying right where I am, beneath the same sky I would be beneath anywhere else. As conversation fades with the daylight, we are perfectly content in the silence of each other. We sway with the hammock back and forth above the earth. I see a colorful bug on the ground, a little mosaic racing over dirt mounds, and I lean over the hammock's edge to let it crawl up my arm. The significance of a place often does not truly present itself until it is merely nostalgia. So I bury these moments to save for later.

As the summertime dwindles into fall, my visits to my hidden spot become less frequent. The boy drifts away with the heat wave, heading westward and taking with him the secret of the place beneath the diamond trees. "I'm trapped here," he tells me, and I understand. They say once you've lived beside the ocean you cannot stand to be away from it. "You can come Meg- let's do the PCT. Let's leave and not tell anyone. You don't belong here either and you know it." But I guess my soul is not as free as his, and I am still bound to the idea of a cap and gown and diploma (But what do these mean, really?). And so I let his restless soul go and leave me landlocked.

A secret is a lonely thing.

Yet despite its bitter sweetness, the spot of the diamond trees still draws me when I need to go somewhere no one can find me. I tumble off the grid like the geocache, out of view from the world of people looking only for themselves. On my campus just two miles away, there is a little glass box filled with people working and reading and finishing problem sets. This box



is dimly lit and void of even ambient noise. In this box you are scolded for exhaling too loudly. Beneath the trees, I wonder how learning became this way- to learn about the world by locking yourself away from it. I wonder about a boy whose restless soul ached solely for dirt between his toes on the Pacific coast. Is that drive buried somewhere in all of us, perhaps just deeper in some than in others? Is it human nature to leave? Or should we be content to mark our ground, to remain in its security, to stay? In an instant these thoughts wane with the breeze. I feel the sensation of gravity pulling my cocooned body in my hammock towards the earth.

When it is too cold to walk, I stop my visits altogether. The trees lose their leaves and a layer of frost covers the bustling villages of insects on the ground. The butterflies pack up their tents for the winter and embark on journeys elsewhere. The only sign of life is the cache within the knothole, and a list of humans who bound themselves to a forgotten patch of earth.

*Meghan Gunn*  
*Class of 2017*

## Deaf in the Desert

Hey, you know what's funny, really fucking sneeze-your-eyes-out funny? Sand in your shoes. Did I say funny? I meant loathsome. The way the grains rub up against each other like they're trying to multiply, scratching and scraping, always rolling, sifting shifting sitting shitting, like godforsaken shards of glass. It's the same on a beach, or here, in the desert. In both places it grinds you down, polishes you off until you're nothing but dust. It's that crunch as you break all the little bits, crashing them together until they're smooth as billiard balls. And when it gets between your toes? It stays there for fucking ever, like a disease. I really hate sand.

A lot of people say the ocean is a desert. Personally, I don't see the resemblance. Yeah, they're both sort of big and empty if you don't look hard. But think about it. One of them has a fuckton of water in it, the other doesn't. One of them brings vast plumes of life, more things and creatures than you can spend a thousand generations getting to know. The other is dead. I'd rather have water than fucking sand.

It seems fitting, then, doesn't it, that the living should get the sea and the dead get the desert? But, that's not what happens. Not really. I'm not dead, not technically. It's hard to tell with all this fucking sand around. It's the sort of thing that makes you want to find a corner and just lie there weeping. Of course, you need water for that.

I'm probably thirsty. That's what happens in a desert, isn't it? What you don't know where you are? Be honest, I didn't notice, much. I wasn't technically lost, no more so than when you make the wrong turn downtown and find that kitsch shop with glass birds and fish and ugly little doilies that make you question your place in life. There's always the door to go back outside and get on-track with whatever you were doing before. You just can't seem to find it, even though it's right in front of you. Goddamn doilies. Fucking sand.

I could be on my way up the continent by nightfall. I wouldn't do that, though. I hate walking, but sometimes you just have to, you know? I mean, not for any reason, just, you feel like you'll sink if you don't. You feel like all those things, all those people and pasts and memories, everything you left when you started walking, it'll catch up to you if you stop. Who knows what'll happen then.

When my feet start to ache and my joints squeal, I'll just sit, lie down maybe. There are things here, things you can't see unless you look real hard. That's not my style. If my eyes close, I'm in the nothing. Not dead, not yet. Everything I see is what swims back, wrapping around until the world is bright once again, and throbbing like a vessel nipped. I can hear them all, the whole of them whispering, asking each other the questions that don't matter. I'm not the one making noise.

I wake, I run.

*Evan Alger-Meyer  
Class of 2017*

## Legacy

Nothing dries here.  
The damp flicks its tongue over your most intimate items,  
no matter how tightly you pack them away.

Prepare for that.

The lusciousness they keep talking about probably will just turn out to be clay.  
The loamy soil that sprouted all those prairie grasses,  
not seen since the pioneers, who stood out and stared at the undulating expanses,  
shouting across the golden sea, O Pioneers, This land belongs to the future!  
has long since been covered by super Walmarts.

Once my brother dove into the algae  
at a nature preserve that used to be a garbage dump.  
He rose, black slick seal hair dripping with organisms.  
I saw the rounding of his belly under his tee shirt,  
the rosy candor of his bubble gum face straining against thick, armpit heat.  
And I prayed, silently.

The hornets nearby must have heard me  
carrying the prayer through the trees until they dropped it on a baking highway.  
A tractor trailer racing horses to the horse races  
flattened it into the asphalt.

Please, let me die before him.

*Sloane Wolter  
Class of 2016*



For more creative content including new media, video, and digital artworks, visit our website at [spires.wustl.edu](http://spires.wustl.edu). You can access a variety of works not featured in our print magazine, as well as past issues dating back to the turn of the century.

This publication was designed by Meytal Chernoff, Dante Migone-Ojeda, Shelby Ozer, and George Zhou; set into type digitally at Washington University in St. Louis; and printed and bound at Missouriian Publishing Company, St. Louis, Missouri.

The type face is Centaur MT, designed by Bruce Rogers.

For this issue, Spires accepted submissions exclusively from undergraduate students at Washington University in St. Louis. Works were evaluated individually and anonymously. Spires is published bi-annually and distributed free of charge to the Washington University community at the end of each semester. All undergraduate art, poetry, prose, drama, song lyric, and digital media submissions (including video and sound art) are welcome for evaluation.

Special thanks to: Washington University Student Union; Missouriian Publishing Company; and the authors, poets, and artists who submitted.

Submit your original work:

[spiresmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:spiresmagazine@gmail.com)

View past issues and additional artwork:

[spires.wustl.edu](http://spires.wustl.edu)

Stay in the loop:

[facebook.com/spiresintercollegiatemagazine](https://facebook.com/spiresintercollegiatemagazine)



Dios te salve Maria piena di grazia, gracia,  
el Signore è con te.

Bendita tu e benedetta fra le donne,  
e benedetto è il frutto del tuo seno, Gesù.

Santa Maria, Madre di Dio,  
ruega per noi peccatores,  
ahora y en la hora della nostra morte.

Amen



