



Black Rock & Sage

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Idaho State University

Black Rock & Sage is a journal of creative works published annually through the Department of English and Philosophy at Idaho State University with assistance from the Art, Music, Theater, and Dance departments. All artistic contributions, from design to literature to music, have been produced by graduate and undergraduate students in departments from across the university. Submissions are received from September through February 14. For more information about the journal, see our website at blackrockandsage.org.

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Cover: "Same Dreams" by Milo Bossler

Black Rock & Sage

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Kristen Wheaton

Editor's Note

Last year, I was introduced to *Black Rock & Sage* and its enthusiastic community. As an assistant editor, I was granted a seat at the table of something great, and I quickly decided that I did not want to leave. After speaking with our previous editor-in-chief, the amazing Anelise Farris, about the role, I jumped at the opportunity to step in. So, here I am writing a note to a beautiful constellation of incredible student works. Though all of the voices are distinct and the pieces unique, they have coalesced, bound in the object you are now holding.

We take Breck Dalley's "Extragalactic Astrophysics" and its appeals to the materiality of particles and dynamics of being as our starting point, and her work weaves alongside the other voices. Though the poetry is diverse in form and content, collectively it reveals a deeply rich concern with sensation and experience. As I read these pieces, I feel as though I am traveling through distinct yet interconnected vignettes. Along the way, Braeden Udy discovers remnants of vestigial hips in the bones of whales; Cheyana Leatham captures a speaker as they are "trying to evacuate / glass from my eyes"; and Kathryn Wilson reveals the "intimate parts" to show how easily they are exposed, shattered. This year's Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize Winner – Reigh Downs's "You Are On the Fastest Route" – also guides us through visceral experience as they work through the fuel for which we constantly search. Our judge, published poet and educator Laura Stott, found their sestina to be a "deft use of craft." The High School Creative Writing Contest Winning Piece "Paper Dolls" by Petra Lynn Johnson plays with sensory driven language as well, breathing life into paper "noctambulists."

This year's prose also contributes to the preoccupation with experience. Kathryn Wilson's story "Circle of Life" evokes a whimsical sense of magic as we follow the young boy named Tim. Wilson invites us to watch an absurdity begin to sprout and become real at the hands of a child who simply believes. Our final piece, the Prose Prize Winner "A Tree Falls in a Forest" by Kortnie Pimentel, is profoundly concerned with the validity of individual experience and presents a complex, timely narrative that feels *real*. And it is this sense of realness that binds these works together.

I never thought that I would be writing this editor's note in these circumstance – we are alone yet all together (for the moment) in the wake of COVID. Working on this issue while in isolation has been eye opening, and I am grateful beyond words for the hard work and solidarity shown in the *Black Rock & Sage* community. This would have been an impossible task if not for the efforts of our genre editors, Tori Shelton and Sammy Stenzel, and our amazing faculty supervisor, Dr. Susan Goslee. I am also impressed with the professionalism and commitment of our assistant editors. Additionally, I am deeply grateful for the continued collaboration we enjoy with other partners in this venture in the Music, Art, and English Departments as well as the sustained support of local businesses. Finally, I am humbled and honored by our contributors: their work, the best student work that I could have hoped for, makes all of this possible. I have cherished every moment of being part of *Black Rock & Sage* – thank you, everyone, for making this experience so impossibly incredible.

Warmly,
Kristen

BR&S Musical Performances

1. "Myrtlewood and Sea Glass" by KayLynn Hammond (1980)

ISU Big Band under the direction of Jon Armstrong

Edited and mixed by Ryan Tomlinson and KayLynn

Hammond

2. "Liederkreis Op.39 5. Mondnacht" by Robert Schumann
(1810 - 1856)

Nicholas Cravens, voice

Gabriel Lowman, piano

Recorded by Bradley Irvine

3. "Saor (Free)" by Orla O'Connor (1998)

Orla O'Connor, vocals, piano, and pennywhistle

Recorded by Dera Offokaja

4. "Japan in the Spring" by Kadee Jo Callister (1998)

Kadee Jo Callister, vocals and all instruments

5. "Last Minute" by Dallas Jay McCrea (1995)

Dallas Jay McCrea, electric bass

Gabriel Lowman, electric keyboard

Joseph Emmanuel, drum set

Recorded by Joseph Emmanuel

6. “why is everything on the floor?” by Jye David Gardner (1997)

Jye David Gardner, electric guitar and percussion

Recorded by Jon Armstrong, Mason Wittman, and Joseph Emmanuel

7. “Introduction and Tarentelle” by Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908)

Bohan Hou, violin

Natalia Lauk, piano

Recorded by Brett Friedman

8. “Despite my Pride” by Dimitri Nelson (2001) and Jazz-Lynn Grant (2001)

Jazz-Lynn Grant, vocals and ukulele

Dimitri Nelson, vocals

Joseph Emmanuel, drums

Recorded by Jon Armstrong

9. “Rikai” by Adam Cuthbért (1988)

Shawn McLain, trumpet

Recorded by Mason Wittman and Eddie Ludema

10. “You seem different” by Gabriel Lowman

Gabriel Lowman, piano

Recorded by Sawyer Disselkoen

Breck Dalley

Extragalactic Astrophysics

Take a galactic second and be born
become a body, grow into a child
go barefoot and make mud cakes in your

yard, the place between your mother's
watchful eye and the spot behind the purple
lilac bushes where one day, you will

sit in the dark smoking a cigarette with your
best friend, stolen from her dad's pack of Camels,
reading Ginsberg by flashlight and swearing that

you were born too late. You too want to howl
but instead you stutter, stumble over the guilt
grown and real and hungry – hideous

but loyal, and insignificant – it will take
too long, there is only the time within seconds
to grow up, you already are, you were before

you arrived – you mass of floating particles
moving always towards the spontaneous consumption
of carbon based proteins pushing against light.

Kadee Jo Callister

you're stronger than you think

i repeat that to myself often, sometimes several times a day
today i had three cups of coffee one was so sugary you couldn't
taste the coffee one tasted exactly like a cloud, and I
mean *exactly* one was black; a soft black that was
served at a prayer vigil for my coworker Sandra's stepson
who passed i never met him he
looked like he was nice though like Sandra, roll the r,
teased me in broken English, sweet woman, brought me back
a keychain from Las Vegas, sin city, where humankind was
born it was all in Spanish and i didn't understand
it at all besides that they said *Santamaria* a lot they sang a lot
the room was overflowing with beauty with music with sadness
with yearning with faith and everyone knew all the
songs but me i hummed along anyway eager to be a
part of something i couldn't be my eyelids were heavy
but my leg kept bouncing bouncing bouncing and
afterward they served tamales and soft black coffee
i drank it while it was still very hot, *muy caliente*, i
did not slow down i did not stop my tongue burned to ash i
did not mind

Juli Kidd

Get a Dog

Today, I went to the store for no real reason.
I saw a dog and I had to buy him. His name is Max.
He's the best company I've had in ages. Even better,
Max doesn't stray. Did I mention he's a loyal one too?

I got a dog; I had to have him. His name is Max.
He's a good boy; he's better than all the
real ones. Better yet, he doesn't stray. He's a loyal one
too. Max is definitely not like my ex named Ned.

Ned's a bad boy; just like all those other
"real" ones. He's the unwanted hand goes south type.
Ned's definitely not like my dog named Max.
Ned's the type of guy you learn to hate—

on repeat. He's the unwanted hand goes south type
with every intention of screwing you over.
Ned's the type of guy you still loathe.
—Like the laundry; the one, never done, repeat kind.

With every intention of screwing you over,
Neds hang you up to dry; lost or maybe forgotten.
—Like the laundry; the one, never done, repeat kind.
If you knew better, you'd keep your things separate

or else. You'll be hung up to dry; lost and forgotten.
It's better to not repeat your past mistakes.
If you knew better, you'd keep your things separate.
Next time, do yourself a favor and *get a dog*.

Braeden Udy

Heart Mountain Ghazal

Things I will do when I finally am loose from camp:
Build a house with no fence, eat rice and sugar until my belly
hurts, not say the word camp.

Picture day, mother lays out pressed trousers, stockings,
a floral swing dress, and a mustard bow.
When the magazine people come, they will not see prisoners
toiling but a free birds camp.

White eyes smudged as glue, chocolate drop centers
Dust and dirt burrow in my eyelids like weeds, our windstorm
blurred camp.

Independence Day, I want to crawl the cliffs of Heart
Mountain, the tombstone
That stands above our shoulders, watch fireworks break on top
of Cody, glance over the unheard camp.

When war ends, will it linger on our tongues, champagne
buzzed, aftertaste,
Or will we be freed, back to the solitary evacuated home,
the strawberry rows, releasing the interred camp?

Braeden visits the dirt and brush that held all these voices,
tied them all, kept from the world—
The ambitions, the songs, the lands, the promises; the no
more dreams deferred camp.

Breck Dalley

Now Go

Rambling. The ground is crystal fine granules of ash and soot. Through the windowless window a man with one blind and one missing eye peers out with 20/20 vision down on the street.

The window contracts. Pulls back, pretends not to see the workers dance a sullen dance kicking up ash. Powdered feet pushing into back against. Back against. Pushing into.

The bus empties. Has emptied bodies onto the platform. Lined them up delicately. Whispered something in each ear. Hand on the back, "*Now go.*"

Arriving. Enter doorway, push out frame and nails let swallow bolts and locks. This woman is hungry for roots and seeds. Have you seen any lately? Shrapnel burrows deep into skin, it's difficult to excavate without prying open the whole system.

Reigh Downs

Flower from Mount Vesuvius

You beat a rhythm out of painstaking breaths while you wait for him
to chop the carrots. It's midnight and the stew has been sizzling
on the stove since sunset. He used to help you when he got home
from work. You're looking at the clock and thinking: I'm sure he's just
busy—

I'm sure he's just busy—he forgot the time. Twenty-six. Twenty-seven
Cigarette.

You sit out on the concrete step of your complex, where you think
the name Crestwood Apartments is too fancy. Flecks of lead paint from 1935
are still stuck in the pores of the concrete, primordial as lava rock.

You watch a neighbor lady unhang laundry in the twilight and imagine her
frozen

in Pompeii ash. Ash. You tap the ash off your cancer stick
faster than the second hand. You're still waiting for him to pull the weeds
but you think that dandelions aren't as bad as people say they are.

There are plenty of dandelions. Some people want more exotic things.

Planting

new flowers won't replace the weeds. Pulling the weeds won't make new
flowers. You spend the next day scrubbing black off the bottom of the stew
pot

and remember he'd been checking out the orchids in the garden center
last week. You'd been in the pharmacy picking up your Aprepitant and
you walked through the sliding glass door to the garden center, and
you'd thought about how the dead fluorescents of the supercenter had given

way

to daylight like a switch had flipped in your brain. Daylight. Sunlight.
You're waiting for him to install those special lamps so you can wake up
easier, but you think maybe he's too busy looking at those orchids.

Braeden Udy

Hip Bones

I spend all day on the river and I am dreaming of whales.
Do you remember when that giant lake covered the Great Basin
and creatures with barbed teeth and seashells and whales lived here?
Of course I don't either, but maybe that's why I think of them now,
their spirits are still in this place,
in these waters.
And the surface of this water is oily, stretched, smooth as
whale skin. That's them, winking at us from beyond.

It is late Summer. September, the month of my favorite weather.
We drive off the rushing freeway and wind through kelly green fields
and trees that look as if they want us to pull over and hug their trunks.
Stay for a while. Shaded from Apollo's rays.
But we are pulled to the river
that cuts across six states, that crosses the skeleton of that disappeared lake,
that licks lava rocks tumbled on her shores.
Lava rocks as blue as the steel feathers of the blue heron
that watches us as we disembark,
thrusting the plastic hull of our raft into the viridian surge of aqua pura.

We get caught in eddies, and find white rushing waters that thrill us
electric. Long arms of spicy smelling sage dip into the mineral water,
tea bags seeping flavor in the eddies and waves.
Gilted grasses wobble on the hills, but wobble cooperatively
as if their blades have muscle memory of the muscular lake currents
that lulled them to sleep
back when creatures with barbed teeth and seashells and whales

were their chums and playmates. Now these grasses play with the wind
though something about their slowly sad swaying shows me they miss
Water.

Do you know that homo sapiens are seventy-two percent water? That
we were once
fish? That we once swam with whales? Did you know that whales have
hip bones?
That whales once walked like we once swam?

Hogan Schaak

Jonah Joins the Electric Prunes

and so I run to the west, to the ocean black blue, to the manifest baptismal
now I live on bridges and pickled garlic, I'm turning blue, and burn with you
drowning in blend and then in brew, I'm turning blue, now I do an overnight drunk
from The Hub to Double Dragon to Horse Brass, wake up naked under the underpass
I'm turning blue, speaking in forked tongues, blend and brew, blood babbling along
I'm turning blue, in the shade of a crossbeam, blend and brew, smelling like fish guts
I'm turning blue, smelling like fish guts, blend and brew, smelling like fish guts
I'm turning blue, never having to shower, I'm *turning* blue, it rains and rains
blend and brew, and I can't dry off, I'm *burning* blue, and I can't forget
blend and brew, that I'm a muddy hot sapphire and nothing. blue
hopes light shore, always baptized always turning, and I
love it with a hellish passion, deathless
breathless burning.
couldn't
you
?

Braeden Udy

What Then Remained

I alone, like Job, escaped
the creature and conditions
created to destroy me.
Splintered leg and slivered hull
sunk down deep to their purple tomb.
Power of man pale in the shadows of those below –
big as mountains, faster than hurricanes,
ghastly and bleached.
Through black sea under grey cloud,
through the realms of Rongomai,
met our end at the strike of white hot lightning.
We followed the phantoms,
those repositories of oil and light, keepers of lamps
Adam's ale ejecting through the hole on the head,
their spermaceti we leak over our shipmates hands,
tender, slippery, kindness' milk.
No women aboard save the portrait of Jesus
His hair curled like snakes, skin fair like brides.
And aboard my bride, my Q—
my pagan, my keeper of heads,
here and now submerged as cargo and timbers.
His George Washington forehead
now a monument cast in rot and bone
for only wraiths of the Neptunal deep to see.
O to be back with my bosom friend,
tattooed legs over mine
those ligaments of love that we hid

except in our marriage bed
as he devoured my Christian lungs.
The quilt in the rented room
knitting our skin,
told our story.
The maddening omens threaded in the patchwork,
this is our inheritance:
that all things must die and ruin,
some by flame, some by dust, some by enmity,
some by subtle sea.
O the story our quilt would now tell,
the sun rays and sea days never again
no longer with Q—
Oceanus, who brought him to me, now takes him away.

Kathryn Wilson

Circle of Life

What was supposed to be a lovely holiday had not, in fact, been lovely at all. It had rained at the Grand Canyon, encouraging a mud slide that carried away their tent. The Statue of Liberty was covered by fog dense enough to walk on, and Mount Rushmore was closed for reconstruction. The only thing that had been enjoyable about their holiday was the three hours that it didn't snow while in Idaho. That was when Tim found it.

Tim, a rather dim-witted child of six, very much enjoyed eating grapes, and only went to the potty in the toilet when it was the least convenient time to do so. He was, after all, trying to live his best life, and six has rather murky prospects in that respect.

Tim didn't care about being on holiday. Wherever he went, people pinched cheeks, patted bottoms, and asked how old he was. Tim hadn't cared about the fog-covered Statue of Liberty; he had liked the *cronuts*. He also hadn't cared about the rain that seemed determined to fill in the large crevasse that was supposed to be so grand, he would happily have slept through it, but his mother poked him incessantly and said, "Darling, you mustn't sleep through our lovely holiday." Tim had tried to all the same.

Tim only really liked two things that had happened while on holiday. He liked the IHOP, with its hot chocolate in mugs so large it could have fit all his Lego men. And one other thing.

Tim and his mother had been placed atop a grey mare

named Bambie and set on a narrow trail on a guided tour through the mountains. It had begun as a beautiful morning, birds happily twittering in branches too high to see, but just as they were cresting the hill, intoxicated by the pungent scent of wet sagebrush, it began to snow. Heavy wet flakes clumped in globules to Tim's hat and soaked through his mother's jacket within minutes. They turned back to the ranch but were still dripping by the time they reached a fire and could change clothes. Tim escaped unscathed, but his parents were in bed for three days.

That was when it found Tim.

All the kids staying at the ranch went on daily nature walks with Claudine. She was tall, with worn black boots and hair that shot out from under her hat like it had been surprised once and never recovered. All twelve kids had been partnered up and walked in pairs as they followed her along a new trail through sagebrush and over a brook. Tim's partner was named Caterpillar.

"My name isn't really Caterpillar," she explained as they walked. "But," she said, pointing to the unfortunate growth above her eyes, "my eyebrows are monstrous, might as well embrace it." She held Tim's left hand carefully as they walked behind the others. That is when Tim spotted it, among the dirt and tumbled down trees, the most perfect of little brown eggs. It rested prettily atop a mound of far inferior brown spheres along their path. Tim knew that it belonged to him; it seemed to sit up straighter once his eyes rested upon it. Without breaking free of Caterpillar's dry grasp, he bent as the troupe passed the mound and gingerly picked up his perfect egg. No one had seen a thing.

It fit so exquisitely in his hand that he smiled to himself as he held it there the rest of the walk.

"I don't think you should keep that," Caterpillar mumbled as they walked on.

"What?" Tim asked innocently.

"It's deer scat."

"Oh," he said and looked carefully at the little brown sphere.

"It belongs on the ground and then it will be taken into the ground and new deer will grow and do it again. Haven't you seen the Lion King?"

Tim shook his head and rolled the little brown deer scat between his fingers. 'This,' he thought, 'is supposed to go in the ground, and then new deer will grow. This is a deer scat. Scat means seed.'

• • •

Since they returned to England three days ago, the deer seed had lived on the windowsill. Tim talked to it every day. He read it his favorite stories and wondered when it would become a deer. It wasn't until his mother walked into the yard with a rake and watering hose that he saw his mistake.

"Mum, what do seeds need?" he had asked at breakfast.

"Well, it depends a bit on the type of seed, but they all need water, and dirt and sunshine."

He nodded along staring at his empty plate and hoping he wasn't too late.

"May I have a pot and dirt?"

"Karen, where's Tim?" Tim's grandmother asked as she walked into the back garden. "I've brought him a present."

She carefully hefted the box from one hip to the other.

"*We* went on holiday and you got *him* a present?" Tim's mother laughed as she moved about the yard, pulling up the offending weeds and occasional flowers that got in her way.

"He asked me for a pot of dirt this morning. I think he wants to play at gardening." She smiled at her mother, then saw the beheaded peony in her hand. "Bugger," she mumbled.

"Him too, huh?" smiled his grandmother as she walked back into the house calling for Tim.

Tim's door was slightly ajar when she found him kneeling before the terra cotta pot.

"You're going to be so happy to have dirt and water. I'm sorry that you've been thirsty so many days, I didn't know," he said, picking up the deer seed.

"Tim!" His grandmother burst in, dropping the present. "What is that in your hand?"

"It's a deer seed. Caterpillar told me so."

Tim's grandmother looked from the boy to the pot and back again. "Is it?" she asked kneeling beside him.

"Yes, I got it on holiday. Caterpillar said that it's called scat and that it belongs in the ground and then the Lion King makes more deer." He poked a careful hole in the mound of dirt and placed the seed inside. "Do you think it will take long?" he asked, gazing into his grandmother's face.

"Well..." she paused, "it is an American deer seed and it may take longer because of the time difference."

He nodded. "Yes, difference of time."

• • •

"He planted a bit of poo, Karen," Tim's grandmother whispered to her daughter as they sipped tea in the garden.

“What? How’d he get poo?” Tim’s mother asked, pouring another cup.

“Do be quieter, Karen. He really thinks it’s a seed.” The two women leaned in closer, tea cups in hand. “He said that a caterpillar gave it to him. And that the king of the lions will make it a deer.”

“He has quite the imagination. But where’d he get it?”

“He said on holiday. It looked like deer droppings.” Tim’s grandmother leaned away from her daughter to see if anyone was listening. “What are we going to do? He’s so certain it will become a deer.”

“We’ll have to tell him, Mum. He’s too old to think that deer come from seeds. His father would never stand for it.” She leaned back in her own seat and ate a sandwich. “We’ll just have to tell him.” She put down her sandwich and walked into the house.

Tim’s grandmother waited. She heard Karen walk up the stairs and open and close Tim’s bedroom door. She waited. She heard the door open and the stair announce Karen’s return.

“Tim’s father will just have to tell him.”

• • •

“It’s sprouting!” Tim came yelling down the stairs the next morning.

“Sprouting, dear,” his mother said without looking up from her sewing.

“No deer yet, but it’s sprouting!” Tim shoved the plant in his mother’s face showering the flannel quilt with dirt and vermiculite.

"Ah. Tim, be careful." She brushed the blanket clean.

"Sprouting," he grinned, returning the pot more carefully beneath her nose for examination.

The terra cotta pot boasted a brown and white sprout. His mother was speechless. She touched it gently.

"It's like down," she said to her mother a moment later on the phone. "This is impossible."

"Oh Karen, don't be silly. There was probably something lodged onto it and that's what growing. Or a seed that wasn't properly digested by the deer is sprouting."

"But Mum, it's brown and white. What plant is brown and white?" Karen asked, twisting the cord around her hand as she watched Tim talk to his plant in the window.

"Well, I'm not a horticulturist; I haven't any idea. But I can tell you that deer don't come from plants, even ones from Idaho."

• • •

They stared at the plant. Tim's mother, father, and grandmother bent closely around the terra cotta pot as it sat on Tim's windowsill, its leaves turned up toward the sun. It was now six inches tall. The furry leaves had turned tawny and had a white underbelly, and were beginning to show white speckles. At the tip of the plant was a small leathery, black bud.

"This is impossible," Tim's father said. They all nodded.

"Do you really think it's going to grow a deer?" Tim's grandmother asked. No one moved, they only stared at the plant.

"All of this is insane," Tim's mother said. They all nodded.

“How long does it take to grow a deer?” Tim’s father asked. They shrugged.

“What do you feed a deer?” Tim’s grandmother asked. They shrugged.

“203 days,” Tim said from behind them. All three jumped and turned toward the door. Tim stood smiling holding open a library book about deer. “Should be soon.” Tim grandly laid the book across the bed. “At first,” he said, starting the book from the beginning, “they need milk.” Tim’s grandmother sat on the floor. “But,” Tim went on, turning the page, “the book says goat is okay, when there’s no mom.” Tim’s mother sat on the floor. “Then they’ll eat grasses and nuts.” He pointed to the pictures and graphics on the page as his father sat on the floor. “If it’s a mule deer,” he turned the page, “then it should be tomorrow.” There was a long pause, no one moved.

“I better get some goat’s milk and a bottle,” Tim’s mother said.

“I’ll get blankets and a box for it to sleep in,” his father said, as they both left the room.

• • •

Tim’s father took the next day off work and Tim stayed home from school. All four of them moved the pot into the living room and waited. Overnight the bulb had tripled in size and was supported by a tower of pillows. A hot pad, warm goat’s milk, and blankets had been waiting all day. They took shifts watching over the plant. Nothing had happened.

The hours dragged on.

Tim hadn’t moved on the sofa. His eyes focused on the black bud.

"We'll be right back, alright sweetie?"

He nodded.

"This is insane, we're all insane. That," Tim's father pointed toward the living room, "is just a bizarre Idahoan flower, not a deer plant. We've done a terrible thing getting sucked into this," he whispered as he paced the kitchen.

"He'll be devastated," his mother whispered. And looked out the door to see Tim, talking to the flower, touching it softly.

"Maybe we should get him a pet?" his grandmother asked. She riffled through the cupboards and pulled down the scotch. Offering it to the room. They all nodded and took a swill.

"Let's tell him," his mother said.

"I'll tell him," his father said, taking another swill and squaring his shoulders.

"Something's happening!" Tim yelled from the living room.

They all scrambled out of the kitchen and gathered breathlessly around the table. The leaves of the bud were shifting, nudging their way open from the inside. Tim reached over to pull them apart but his mother stopped him,

"They need to open it themselves, dear. It's good for them." She smiled. He clasped his hands together and waited.

Slowly, the leaves began to open. Furry outer leaves peeled away as endless ruffles and swirls of pale pink and fuchsia petals. As the petals opened a sweet scent burst into the room, filling it with distant smell of rain and flowers. They waited, glanced from one expectant face to another; then all at once, they leaned in to take a closer look.

"How can there be nothing here?" Tim's father asked,

moving his fingers carefully through the petals.

“There’s nothing there,” Tim’s mother muttered from the sofa. She stared at the plant and her husband’s back as he began to riffle through the petals more aggressively. But nothing was there.

“Maybe the king doesn’t come to England,” Tim suggested from his elbow.

“Maybe not,” his father smiled. His hands lowered to find his son’s shoulder. They moved to the sofa and sat together. Tim’s mother’s head dropped to her husband’s shoulder and Tim stared at the plant.

“Maybe,” his grandmother said, “maybe.” She walked to the pot and putting her fingers in the dirt.

“What are you doing, Mum?” Tim’s mother asked, rising and moving beside her mother.

“I just wondered...” and her hands stopped and she broke into a laugh. She grasped the flower by its stem and gently lifted it up from the terra cotta pot, “if deer might grow from the roots.” She showed the pot to her daughter who took it and laughed. Tim and his father stood and ran to the table.

There in the bottom of the pot, curled onto itself, was a miniature deer.

Milo Bossler

Same Dreams



Rachelle Cooper

Network 1



Oil and pencil on masonite, 4'x4'

Milo Bossler

Meta-Mortem



John Bybee

reading nude



Conte crayon on paper

Stephen Aifegha

King's Vision



Carmen Chacon

Reflection



Oil on panel

William Bybee

Seven



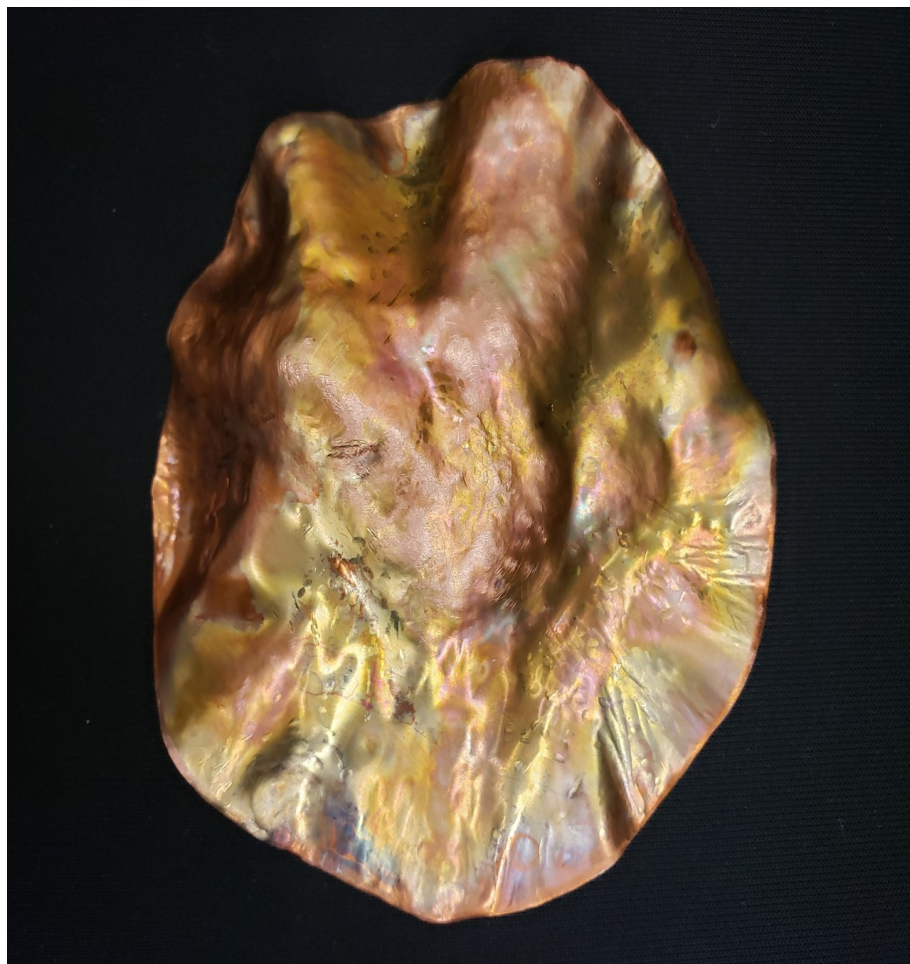
Milo Bossler

Twin Image



Heather Bjornlie

Smack



Kassidy McCurry

Markhor and the Fires



Water color paint, black India ink, and white charcoal on Yupo paper

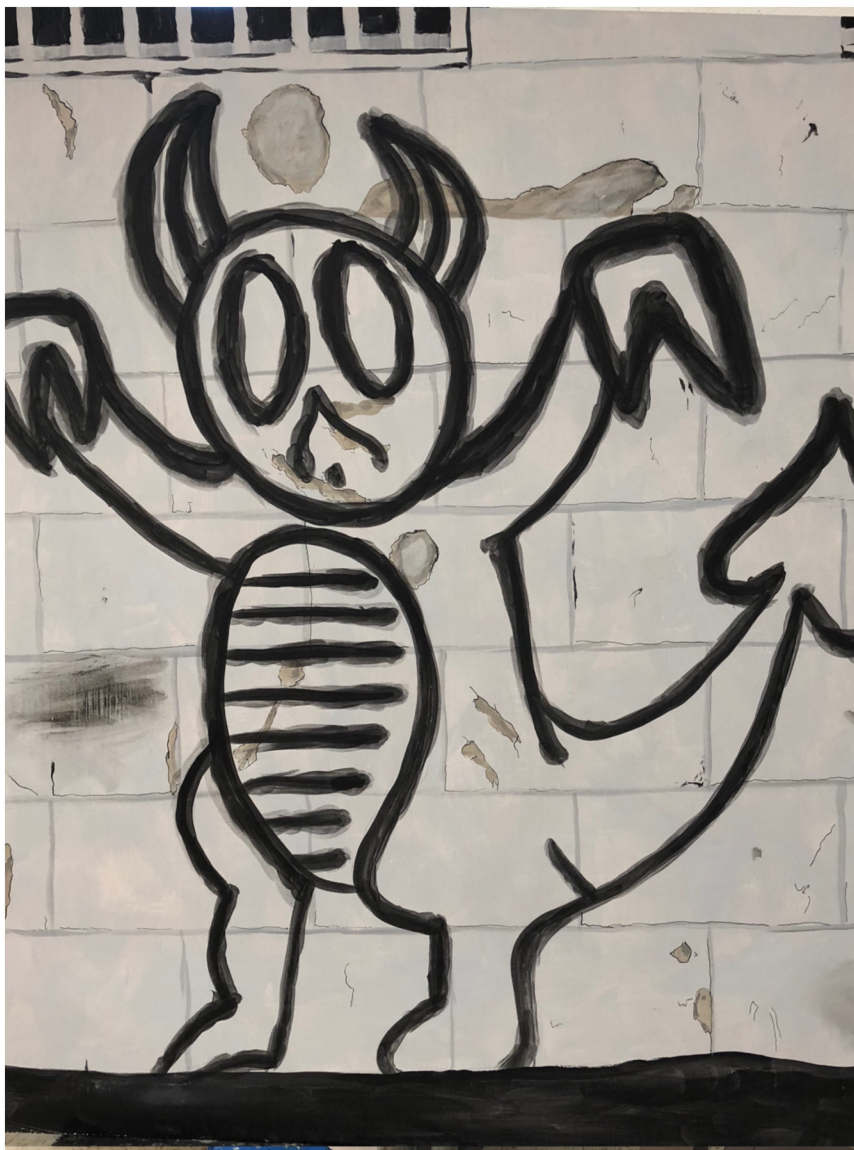
Iris Lindemood

Overlook Puddle



Bryan Anderson

Alley Demon



Acrylic on wood panel

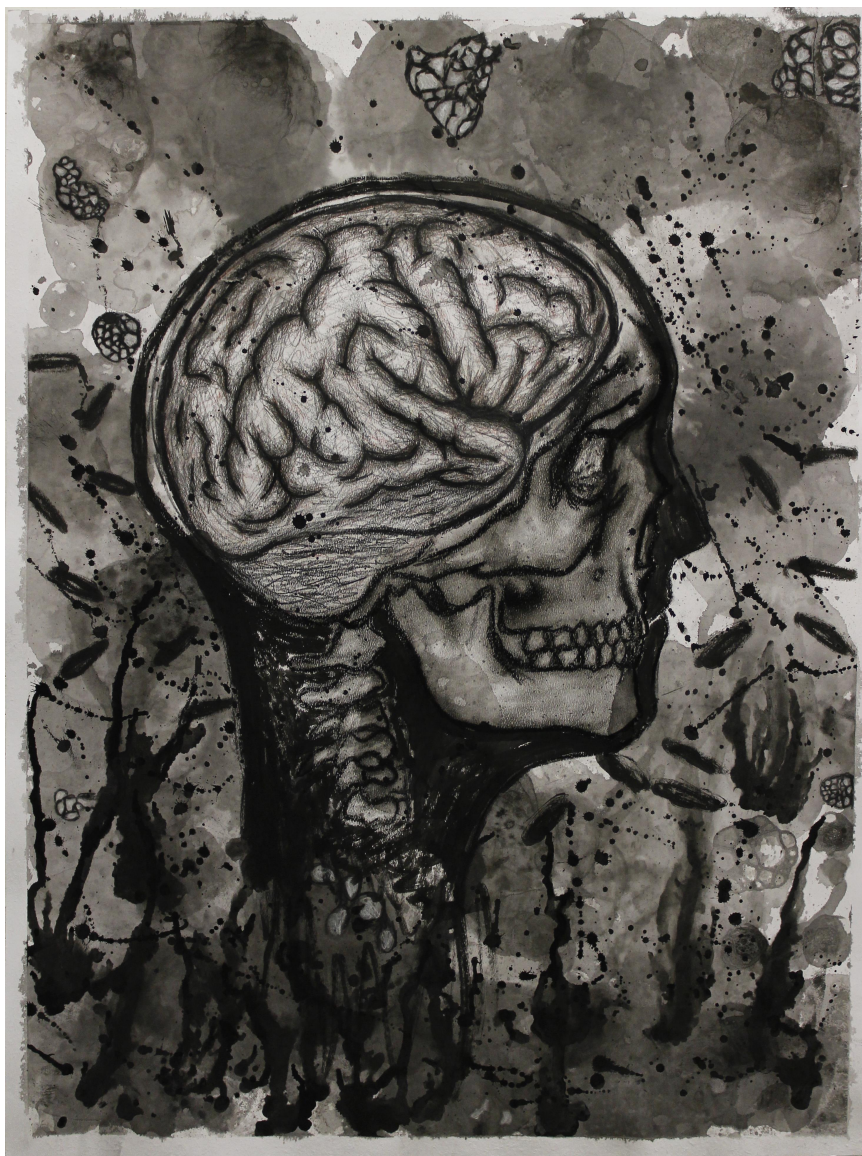
Rachelle Cooper

After Old Master



Kristi Fisk

As Mental Illness



India ink, charcoal, colored pencil

Mary Unger

Grave



Cheyana Leatham

Angler

I am holding onto blue,
and trying to evacuate
glass from my eyes.
There was this lighthouse
in Maine that Dad used to point out the rocks in the dark.
The things that fell
to bioluminescence.
Ships yes, but other things.
Seagulls.
Whales.
It became a game
of pattern recognition to me,
to wait for moonless nights
and watch for the whales sprayed on the sand.
I concluded that everything
lies in a section of probabilities.
Submersibles malfunction at a rate of 0.05%.
I take three breaths as my headlamps shatter.
And in the black of the indifferent sea,
there's the lighthouse.

Jules Churba-Pyzer

Hand-me-downs

When you died everyone was ripped apart at the seams.
I hadn't seen some of the family in so long they hardly recognized me.
All of us side by side at your deathbed
made me wonder about what came after:
After you were gone, what would become of all you left behind?
Transparent smiles stained with resentment haphazardly hung on the walls.
Moth-eaten ambition gathering dust in a pile
of forgotten dreams somewhere in the mudroom.
Bags of emotions long repressed stacked to the ceiling of the master bedroom.
Love ruined by sticky commitment jammed in all of the light switches.
The front door squealed as it opened.
You used to say you would oil it eventually.
I guess now it was up to me.
I began to pile things into boxes, labeling them basement or attic.
 Independence four sizes too small: basement.
 Blame four sizes too big: attic.
 Responsibilities that always pinch and rub: basement.
 Self-worth held together by safety pins: attic.
The unopened affection scattered throughout the piles of well-worn aggression
would fit best in the attic, but there was more room in the basement.
I mulled over where to put the half-chewed insults and expired
apologies from God knows how many years ago.
I decided to deal with them last.
The upstairs was blocked by containers full of petty
interactions that should no longer hold any worth.
I wanted to throw them out.
But I knew you wouldn't like that, so I put them all in the basement

and locked the door behind me.

I sat down at the kitchen table to have a glass of water.

Something was bugging me. Lots of things were bugging me.

Why didn't I leave this junk to someone else, anyone else?

I guess I don't want you to be thrown away.

I don't want you to be forgotten.

New experiences are being given to those around me,
but my hands are weighed down by these hand-me-downs;
because if I don't take them,
no one will.

Norrin Shearer

McNuggets

“It’s fucking weird that you write poems, dude;
poems are for girls,” he said to me,
ketchup from his McDougle crawling
its way down his chin.
I nearly choked on my McNuggets.
The red of the seat behind him
almost drowned him out, the intensity of the color almost blinding.
His phone buzzed, illuminating a photo
of a woman scantily clad in a bikini
bending over to pick up a volleyball
from the sand. I looked away, but
the buns of his hamburger wouldn’t
let me forget the image. \$1 Coca-Cola slurped
through my straw. I watched grease pool
on his tray, marinating his french-fries
in animal fat. He lifted the soggy, drooping
potato to his mouth, staring at me. Waiting
for a response. “Yeah. I guess so.”
I didn’t eat another bite.

Breck Dalley

Your Color is Red

It's time to go to
the dentist. You're
fucking terrified of
the dentist. You feel
exposed. Vulnerable.
It reminds you of
your annual exam. Your
feet in stirrups, naked bum
resting on thin paper
that cackles every time
you move.

There's only one way to
approach the dentist
and it requires red.
You pull on your
red shirt, your red
pants, your red socks,
your red shoes.
You even have a shiny
red vinyl jacket
just for this occasion.

Red is your
power color.

It's also the
color of the droplets
that splatter onto
the plastic bib
the dentist puts
under your chin.

Red suit on, you're
now ready
for the drill, for
your gag reflex
to take control, for
the blood. You're
ready to embrace
the gore.

You're a solid
mass of hemoglobin
revving your
dental engine
anticipating
takeoff.

Emma Lavender

Sheep Sheep

It takes an hour to hit where it's been burnt black.
The sky's dark to the West, with the bitch running South.
She's angry — huffin', puffin', and blowin'
a column that blocks the view. The smoke's risin', climbin',
painted orange-red and lookin'
ominous. Cars a mile away stop to look.
We grab packs, watching the shadow-puppet show of dancing flames.

I'm stone faced while the brick wall insists on driving.
Bumping along the line, while falling steadily, steadily behind.

Black: lava rock cliffs and my mind.

Morning peeks over the mountains, falling on tired faces.
The fire's been chugging along, we just mind our own line as it stirs —
rising higher with the dawn. She caps out another column while we stare.

Scarf down my last granola bar, think about the two missed meals.
Don't think about a Meal-Ready Eat.
Watch the air show of SEATs, LATs, and VLAT:
heavy planes in the sky, buzzing us from overhead. Swirling grit and char —
we cough up in rib-racking fits. Red-rain of retardant drops
drift, mist, and splatter...then we're painted too.

The flames get higher with the wind, threatening
to cook the first nozzle body alive. I cry just to keep my eyes wet.
We spray water and run next to the engine through the sand traps.

Shell shocked — again.
Criss-crossing old bomb ranges — again.
Breathing in sour dust — again.
I see bones.
*D'ya think the cancer'll come from this shit
or the sun? Betcha it's this.*
We all see bones.

Dig a hole into leg meat with the tip of my knife, hoping the pain will
keep my eyes open —
I still fall asleep behind the wheel.
Lucky it's just a two track; I bleed more and think of coffee.

Ignore the hunger, exhaustion, dry-eyes, and what hurts — shrug it off.
Drive, spray, go refill, spot an antler shed.

Wash. Rinse. Repeat.

We laugh at the name Sheep-Sheep Road.

Kathryn Wilson

The Starship

I

The Starship USS Enterprise is sleek and stale gray. He painted it himself he says. From the kit his dad gave him last Christmas. He knows it's dorky. It took a total of 46 hours. He gleefully takes it down to show me all the private parts. The intimate parts. The delicate parts. I smile. I nod. I laugh. I open my eyes wide. Just the right smiles at just the right parts.

II

The Starship USS Enterprise is never dusty. It floats. Tethered to the ceiling in his white room from dental floss, or maybe fishing line. It swings in a lazy figure eight as we move. I get to watch as it glides overhead. Protecting or peeping. Peeping. Back and forth it swings. Back and forth. I watch it stall as the rhythm changes. I'm always watching it. It is always watching.

III

The Starship USS Enterprise is speckled. Or maybe it's just the light. I had forgotten it was there, because it's always there. Always been there. A satellite just above us. Just far enough away to see it all. Omnipresent. Peeping. It's probably just the light. Nothing can touch the starship. I'm sure nothing can. It must be the light. Must be. I'll turn off the light.

IV

The Starship USS Enterprise is dangling by one fractured warp coil. I need to tell him. We need to let the little starship rest. Decommission it. Give it a proper and decent burial. But I can't. The only time I notice is when I'm here. With him. On my back. Watching it sing its gentle song in figure eights. But someday it will just crash. Blow up in our faces. I just can't bear to tell him.

V

The Starship USS Enterprise has fallen. When it fell, it broke. Shattered. Pieces of the lovingly crafted, imaginary ship splayed across wooden floors. It was not repairable. The aged plastic fractured into a million daggers. All spewed across the room. Like a mine field of knives. Sometimes things stay broken. We tried. But it will never fly again. But it was a hell of a flight.

Breck Dalley

Mitchell's Dress

Mitchell is getting ready to play. He's putting on his dress. The one in the trunk in grandma's attic. It lives in the eaves among glass jars of rotting canned fruit and thousands of obese dead houseflies. Yellow, pink, and orange flowers grow out of a poly/cotton blend. Bold. He likes that it's long. That the top is fitted, and the bottom flares out when he moves. He stoops low into the eaves to change. Bending grandma's attic. Bare feet make contact with splintered floor. The smell of must. Mouse shit. Flies buzz around the soft cartilage of his ear. He shudders in the heat. Shirt off. Pants off. He unzips the back of the dress. Step left. Step right. Call me Michelle.

Jules Churba-Pyzer

Skin-Walker

I've had dreams
of pulling back my skin and peering at what
lies beneath.

Once;

Fresh grass clippings.

They made my muscles itch
and left my bones stained green.

Once;

barbed wire slithered
between tendon and vein
wrapping around blood vessels
to keep warm.

If

we could unzip our flesh
slide it off our bones and hold it in our hands
folded in even sections
crumpled in a ball thrown to the side

Would we trade our skins like

lip gloss in a woman's bathroom?

Sell it for some extra cash at the pawn shop?

Donate it to the salvation army because it simply doesn't fit
anymore?

Buy the smooth unblemished skin we've always wanted at the
corner stall in the mall?

Return the wrinkled and the stretch-marked
skin for a full refund or exchange?

Once;

A dream
Forgetting about
color—
Size or height—
Unbalanced portions of fat to flesh—
where our skin was interchangeable
where our eyes weren't stained with the permanence of our
bodies
and we could finally be kind to
ourselves
and
one another.

Petra Lynn Johnson

Paper Dolls

High School Creative Writing Contest Winner

One million perfect paper dolls
Paraded down Poplar Street last night

Hand in hand, out they fanned
In the milky midnight moonlight

They had no faces just their clean-cut, pre-cut cloths
Fluttering about in the dusty light of dawn

Oh my Orphic darling dearest
I wish you could have seen

Those dainty daydreams all a-running
Those noctambulists, dandiest paper dolls

Reigh Downs

Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize Winner

This year's poetry contest judge is Laura Stott. Stott is the author of *Blue Nude Migration* (Lynx House Press, 2020) and *In the Museum of Coming and Going* (New Issues, 2014). Her poems have been published in various journals, including *The Rupture*, *Kettle Blue Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Rock and Sling*. She holds an MFA from the Inland Northwest Center for Writers at Eastern Washington University and is an Instructor of English at Weber State University. She lives with her husband and daughters in northern Utah.

She writes this about the winning selection—

There were so many amazing poems to choose from, but ultimately “You Are On the Fastest Route” stood out to me the most. Here was a sestina that surprised me with subject matter and kept me guessing at every turn in each stanza. The images were stark and interesting, but there was also a deft use of craft. Writing a successful sestina is difficult, something I've always admired and never accomplished myself. A poem like this takes a lot of work!

Reigh Downs

You Are On the Fastest Route

He has to gps the nearest gas station when the lawnmower is out of fuel
And ends up lost when the screen on his phone goes black.
He's never really talked to the neighbors. Asking for directions earns him a
suspicious eye.

They point him to where the city streets connect, Departure Road,
And he thanks them as he walks past the driveway where their kids play,
The little girl is screaming as the boy snakes a hose and blasts her with
water.

We don't always pay attention to the yards in which we play
As children. We stand up and the sun spins dizzily in our eyes
And for a moment a spray of stars swarms our vision and fades to black,
Ground turning under our legs faster than we can pitch from aft to stern,
water-
Tossed boat pulled under by a wave of dark. We rise again, driven by a fuel
Of hunger that barely lets us remember our head spilling open on the road.

Rushes of color hide a world that pays for sex and hands of Black-
Jack. The peacock of nighttime lights that flash are best seen from the road
In Vegas—proud colors presenting—and the servers balancing trays don't
bring water.

He snatches glasses as they pass: a mating ritual before he continues to play.
Liquor-fueled vessels roll the die, hit or stand, aim for the bullseye,
And I think it would have been best if he'd gone to the next exit to refuel.

A wandering heart led on a digital leash, the display of midnight neon draws
his eye,

And he flees from neighbor kids like a drowning man from water.
But the colorful mating dance of casino lights won't fuel his car. It
sputters down the road.
The tires rumble for another mile or two before running out of fuel,
And the lights are streaked in neon contrast against wet puddles on black
Asphalt. The blanket of night dropped its curtain on today's play.

The self-exiled cowboy now leads the reins of the steed he rode
Across Nevada desert, cracked hooves dragging where dust-devils play.
But the horse breaks down. He takes a shot of whiskey to refuel,
And leaves his mount on the side of the interstate. Other travelers eye
Its corpse as they pass. They find him walking with only a jug of water:
Miles from his horse, his home, his childhood. The sky is almost black.

Much later they'll find where he stockpiled food and water,
And excavate the subway where he burned Pradas for fuel,
And wound the generators on carousels where neighbor kids used to play,
Alone with cold lamps, the only things between him and the black,
Barricaded behind Walmart trucks tipped over in the road.
He will be the last survivor in the hurricane's eye.

The curtains fall at the end of the play, and we never knew
We were going to see a black comedy. We laugh nervously in the car,
Water on the windshield, eyes on the road, remembering to grab fuel
before going home.

Kortnie Pimentel

A Tree Falls in a Forest

BR&S Prose Prize Winner

I'm twenty-two. Barely. I sit in my room reading tweet after tweet. Horror stories in 280 characters.

"Thank you to the women sharing their stories. Thank you for your bravery. You are not alone. #MeToo."

I add no mention of my own story and still I shake. My thumb hesitates over the retweet symbol. I close my eyes and touch down on the cracked screen of my iPhone. I don't feel brave. I feel like I want to vomit.

• • •

Babe don't worry about coming. I know it's not your scene.

I stare at the text from Jordan, fuming. I know what kind of party this is. One where my boyfriend gets drunk and fucks a girl who's not me. At least that's what my brain has on repeat. I feel crazy, so I delete the novel I have typed in my phone and type, *fine*. He doesn't respond.

My yellow VW Beetle smells like crayons. I rest my head against its worn steering wheel. I'm parked on an unfamiliar street. Is this really Mike's house? It stands tall on this hillside amidst the trees, nearly invisible with its tiled stone sides and creeping vines. I sling my purse across my body (the way I've been told makes it harder for people to mug you) and try to fix my smudged makeup in the rearview mirror. One more minute of deep breaths, and I step out of the car and into the balmy air. Besides the birds, it's quiet. Early blossoms coat the large trees that hide houses in their shadows. A door here, a window there. Yet, I feel exposed in the middle of the cul-de-sac.

When I reach the door, it opens before my knuckles make contact, and Mike stands there with a smile on his face. I realize he's been watching me from the window.

"Hey, so glad you could make it," he says. "I thought you weren't coming when I didn't hear back."

"Yeah, so did I," I deadpan.

He shrugs this off, "Well look, we're just waiting for a friend of mine and then we'll head over. Need anything to drink? Smoke?"

"I can wait. Thanks though."

I take a seat at the oversized dining table. The highbacked chairs are upholstered in some godawful floral pattern and I wonder at the appeal of something so confused. I realize I don't really know Mike at all. We have absolutely nothing in common and that becomes painfully clear when I hear his slow breathing, and the low hum of the AC. I avoid eye contact, running the edge of my fingernail along the shallow grain of the hard, wooden table, tracing the patterns that remind me of the veins beneath my skin.

Finally, there's a knock on the door and then a guy lets himself in. This must be Mike's friend. He's cute. Mike introduces us. Alex.

"Nice to meet you, Alex," I say. He has a nice smile.

Mike brushes dark hair out of his eyes, his other hand on the doorknob looking anxious to leave.

"Alright, should we head out?" he asks.

• • •

I'm sitting with Natalie, my best friend, and our families at a local brewery for my birthday. The walls are brick and

the brew kettles are housed on display behind the bar. It's very hipster, but I love it. We laugh over mediocre beers and vegetarian pizzas, talking about nothing really.

"Did you watch the last football game?"

"How's wedding planning going, Natalie?"

"How does it feel to be twenty-three?"

Natalie and I go over the game plan for the rest of the night. We roll our eyes, trying to tune out our fathers talking politics. Natalie is that best friend for me that everyone has, the one you can communicate with strictly through extreme eyebrow raising, head swivels, and eye rolls.

"Why do they have to talk about politics at dinner?"

"I don't know? Pissing contest?"

"My grandma always says no religion, politics, or phones at the table."

"That's probably because everyone shits on her religion and she doesn't understand cell phones. "

"Well at least they aren't fighting. In fact, they seem to be getting along."

"Right. Let's hope it stays that way."

• • •

The three of us pile into Mike's two-seater sports car. The seats are sleek with smooth black leather. The giant subs in the back are turning the car into an oversized vibrator; and for the next ten minutes, I am poised uncomfortably on Alex's lap. No one attempts to speak over the too loud rap music on the ten-minute drive to the house party.

The house is in the sketchy part of town. Drug users and broke college kids populate this neighborhood. The worn

wooden panels on the house are dying for a fresh coat of paint and the mesh on the screen door is punctured and torn. We walk straight through the crowded living room and out the back into the warm night air. The lawn is mostly dirt patches and long, untrimmed grass. A wooden fence cuts us off from the sagebrush on the other side. I can't help but notice how close we are to Jordan's house. I can almost smell the weed and sex from the back patio. I try not to think about Jordan. I'm here to have fun. I down the rest of the drink in my hand. Mike has bought me Redd's because I'm not old enough to appreciate beer yet. He might be right.

• • •

I take a sip of the dark stout in front of me, the 6.0 ABV giving me a good buzz. I should probably take it easy since I'm about to go pound some cheap tequila shots a little later with Natalie.

Our fathers start talking about Kavanaugh and I hold back a gag. I've heard almost nothing else on the news and I'm over it.

"All I'm saying is that she shouldn't be saying anything. Can't prove it."

"Yeah, she's trying to ruin this guy's life."

I interrupt, "Oh my god, please stop."

"Well, you don't think so?"

My jaw hangs open. This is not happening right now. I look over at my mom for some backup, but she and Natalie's mom are ordering drinks from the waiter.

"No. I don't," I finally reply.

"Look, I'm just saying this whole situation is being

handled pretty poorly all around.” Natalie gives them a scathing look.

• • •

I’m fairly drunk. I stumble down the hallway stairs through a small group of people. I don’t know anyone and haven’t bothered to ask. I pee quickly and glance at myself in the mirror, washing my hands with a dirty bar of soap. I look rough, a little frazzled. Mascara is still smudged under my eyes.

I sigh and leave the bathroom. Outside, there’s a line of girls. All three brush past me into the small bathroom continuing their conversation without pause. The basement is small, and the beer pong table takes up nearly the entire room. A bare, spotted lightbulb with a beaded chain hanging down provides the only light in the room, casting it in a piss-yellow hue. The walls are white and dingy, and I wonder how old this house is. A window with a large sill provides a view of the corrugated metal of the window well. Alex is sitting there with a beer in his hand, waiting to play, and he catches my eye and beckons me over.

• • •

I sit on Jordan’s couch, while he plays *Halo* on his Xbox. We’re drunk on wine and I want to fuck, but he seems a bit preoccupied. I just need to find a way to get his attention. I smirk as I undo my jeans and reach my hand beneath my underwear. I touch myself while I sip my wine. He glances at me.

“Jesus,” he breathes, throwing the controller onto the couch. He picks me up and carries me to his bedroom.

• • •

“How’s your night going?” Alex lifts the silver can to his lips. I look down at my own drink, apples decorating the label wrapped around the glass bottle. It’s almost empty.

“Fine, I guess.” I check my phone for a text. Nothing. I look around for Mike, for another bottle of Redd’s.

“Just fine?”

“Honestly, pretty upset. I can’t stop thinking about what my boyfriend is doing right now. I know he’s at this other party with a bunch of girls. Like, attractive girls. And it’s not that I don’t trust him, but I just wasn’t invited and—”

I cut myself off, realizing that I’m rambling. He probably doesn’t give a shit. A loud cheer erupts from the crowd watching the two girls who have teamed up and are destroying people in pong. They start waving their hands over the cups as the guys across from them try to line up their shot. I murmur an apology and turn to head back upstairs.

Alex grabs my arm. “Wait. You can hang out with me down here if you want.”

“Alright,” I say, and stand next to him.

• • •

“If something like that happened to you, I would know about it. Like if you came home upset or something, you know?” He’s serious. I think I can tell when he’s being serious after twenty-three years.

There’s an awkward silence.

I feel Natalie’s hand squeeze my leg under the table.

It's gonna be okay, it says.

Damnit, Dad. Everything was going fine. Now I can feel it all coming up. I feel the tears threatening to run down my face. I can't make a scene.

My mom mouths, "Are you okay?" The confusion is clear in her face, but so is the concern.

Instead of responding, I look down and shove pizza in my mouth. My mom offers to pick up me and Natalie, so we don't have to catch an Uber.

The bars close. She picks us up. She asks. I tell her.

• • •

I wiggle the cork from the mouth of the bottle, but it breaks in the middle.

"Fuck," I say. Natalie laughs at me, her empty glass waiting expectantly. I pull the top half off from the twisting metal and twist it back into the remaining portion of the cork.

Pink Moscato. Clearly, we're underage. But we're young enough that this won't give us a debilitating headache the next morning.

The rest of the cork slides out and I pour wine into both of our glasses. Natalie adjusts her slimy facemask sheet, and I try not to smile for fear of mine slipping off as well. We plop on her boyfriend's couch and turn on the Xbox to watch Netflix. Really, it's a just a pretense. We never actually watch anything.

"How are you?" she asks. "I know it was hard for you to leave Jordan."

I sigh and take a long drink from my glass. "I'm okay."

"Just okay?"

"Yeah," I say.

“Well,” she pauses to sip her wine. I’ve already downed half of mine. “For what it’s worth, I’m glad you left. He was a dirtbag.”

“Not the time, Natalie.”

“Sorry, you’re right. I just want you to know I’m here for you.”

“Yeah, I know,” I say, tossing back the rest of my wine. Natalie’s glass is barely touched. She looks like she wants to say more.

She looks at my glass and smiles awkwardly, getting up from the couch.

“I’ll grab the bottle.”

• • •

I’m still checking my phone for a text from Jordan.

Alex leads me into a bedroom where an iPhone charger is plugged into the wall by a crowded nightstand.

“Thanks, my mom would kill me if I let my phone die,” I say. I’m a bit dizzy from the Redd’s so I sit on the edge of the unmade bed.

He takes a seat next to me.

When I turn, he kisses me. For a moment I kiss back, but then I pull away.

“Come on,” he says. I giggle uncomfortably. He pushes me back onto the bed and kisses me again. I play along, but I think about Jordan. That he’s getting trashed at his own house party. That maybe he’s thinking about me. That I’m lying in the sheets of a complete stranger. That this is a bad idea.

I try to sit up, but my head spins. His weight keeps me in place.

It seems like no time at all before he drunkenly finds his way into me. My shirt is pushed up over the frill of my bra, my pants are pulled down. I wonder if the people outside know what's going on, if they think I'm a slut. The slut that fucks boys at parties. I stay silent, squeezing my eyes shut, hiding behind my eyelids. This was not how this night was supposed to go.

He buries his face in my neck, never looking at my eyes, and comes. He climbs off the bed and wipes his dick off with a stranger's towel. I stare into the darkness and think I should get up.

• • •

I look for Mike. My eyes are puffy and red.

"We have to go," I say when I find him back outside, talking to some guys around a table, as if he hadn't moved from this spot.

"What? Why?"

"Please."

"Okay, let me just go grab Alex—"

"Can't you just take me to my car?"

"Well it's late so we can all just go." I know he's trying to be nice.

I'm already at the car when they walk out. I don't look at him. I have to sit on his lap again and the Redd's churns in my stomach. The leather cool against my clammy hands. When Mike pulls the car to a stop, I jump out and vomit on a bush. Alex goes inside without a word and Mike holds my hair back.

"You can't drive home," he says.

"Well, I sure as fuck won't stay here," I snap.

• • •

I look at the pattern of my pajama pants through the bottom of my wine glass and readjust the mask on my face.

“Natalie,” I say.

“Yes?”

“I’m not sure. But I think I have to tell you something.”

The worry is clear in her face.

“You know you can tell me anything,” she says.

“Remember a few weeks ago, when I went to that party?” I ask.

“With Mike? Yeah, I remember. Did he do something to you?” She’s starting to look angry.

“No. No, he wouldn’t, but,” I pause to refill my glass, “he has this friend, Alex.”

I’m crying now. The tears feel strange running beneath the mask.

“Tell me what happened,” she says. So, I do.

Natalie reaches across the couch to take my glass of wine, setting it on the side table and pulls me into her arms. The slimy mask slips off my face, and I cry for a while. She cries too, but she’s trying to hide it.

“I am so fucking sorry,” she says.

• • •

Jordan’s house is a disaster. There are beer cans everywhere. And weirdly enough, an inflatable kiddy pool on the kitchen floor.

“Jordan,” I say.

He laughs. "What? We haven't had time to clean up yet."

Clearly. I wander into his bedroom. It's comfortable here. I'm used to the baseball posters, the clear plastic drawers next to his unmade bed that you can see the clutter in. There's a candle on the dresser, Black Cherry, that he insists on lighting when we have sex. For the romance, he says. I won't tell him about last night.

I glimpse a used condom in the trash. I don't know if it's his. I feel sick, but also strangely numb. I know I'm going to leave soon.

• • •

In the morning, when we all meet up for family breakfast, my dad can't look at me. Later he'll tell me he loves me, and I'll say I love him too. For now, I sip my coffee, relieved that my mom told him and not me. I can almost imagine the scolding he received from her. I chew on the greasy bacon, willing my hangover to go away.

I look out the window over my breakfast. Even from inside I can feel the cold grey of the November morning. Dry, crumpled leaves hang onto thin branches so precariously. I watch as a few finally give up and break off, floating to the ground below. It's probably going to start snowing soon. A fine white has already started dusting the mountain tops.

They'll start over in the spring.

Colophon

Issue 19, 2020 of *Black Rock & Sage* is set in Dutch 766 BT type at Idaho State University using Adobe InDesign. *BR&S*'s cover and footer font is Futura Medium. The journal is printed on 60 lb Cream Tradebook (436 PPI) by Bookmobile in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Contributor Bios

Stephen Aifegha is an undergraduate at Idaho State University pursuing a degree in arts and communication. However, his subject matter and narrative as a mixed media artist center on historical, social, cultural issues that concern Africa in regard to cultural syncretism, identity issues, culture clash and pride. His art is a sort of activism regarding the problem and issues faced by the continent of Africa, which draws from pre-colonial and post-colonial history in reference to the setbacks it has caused for Africa today.

Bryan Anderson was born in eastern Idaho, left for a long time, and came back to be near family. He earned a BFA from ISU and is currently working on his M. Coun. He graduated high school when some of his classmates were born, served ten years in the USAF, worked a lot of jobs, learned some life lessons, and recently figured out what to be when he grows up.

Heather Bjornlie is a multimedia artist who focuses on the traditions of metalsmithing and the liquidity of painting. Bjornlie experiments with including fibers and installation into her works as a student at Idaho State University. Bjornlie's themes explore mediums as tools rather than creating a piece based off of a medium.

Milo Bossler is an ISU student who is interested in exploring the world through art. With primary strengths in drawing, Milo likes to experiment with different approaches to art through both traditional and digital media.

John Bybee is an undergrad student at ISU who specializes in metalsmithing and fiber art but experiments in other media. His work explores themes like Sexuality, Queer Representation, and Gender Nonconformity.

Abstraction has given **William Bybee** a way to talk about subjects that matter to him, but not force his thoughts on a viewer who is not ready to receive this message. Through abstraction he explores the world of codes and the world of Queer Abstraction.

Kadee Jo Callister was born in Idaho Falls and loves creating. She is studying music and is passionate about writing songs, but loves writing in general. She also loves cuddling with her cat, Scooter, and wants to be reincarnated as a quaking aspen tree.

Carmen Chacon's choice of medium is oil on panel. She enjoys the fluidity and expressiveness of oil paint and its ability to be forgiving and unforgiving at the same time. She is concerned by man's misuse of his environment and in her work she expresses the beauty of this fragile niche.

Jules Churba-Pyzer began creative writing in the eighth grade, creating truly terrible and cheesy stories that she keeps to this day as a reminder of how much she has grown in her abilities as a writer and as a storyteller. She hopes to never stop growing in her abilities and love for creative writing.

Rachelle Cooper is currently a graduate student in the Department of Art at ISU. She received her Bachelors at Central Washington University. She works in multiple

mediums from found organic materials to traditional drawing and painting. Rachelle's work is influenced by growing up around the forest and water in the Puget Sound of Washington State.

Nicholas Cravens, from Meridian, Idaho, is pursuing a Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance and loves all music.

Breck Dalley is a MA student in English and is interested in ecocriticism and twenty-first century poetry. Breck grew up in Pocatello and tries to spend as much time as possible running on the trails that surround the area with her dog Leroy. She has decided that the best things in life include poetry, mountains, and her two children (not necessarily in that order).

Reigh Downs is a full-time English Major with a focus on Creative Writing at Idaho State University. They have lived in Idaho Falls since they were six years old and are currently happily married. They have two dogs, two cats, and one eccentric roommate. Their dream is to eventually become a freelance writer and artist for roleplaying games and to create their own comic series.

Joseph Chidiebere Emmanuel is a Nigerian drummer, currently majoring in music at Idaho State University. He is also sponsored by Canopus Drums, Bosphorus Cymbals, and Salyers Percussion drumsticks.

Kristi Fisk's art is about addiction as a mental illness. She often sees that people believe addiction is a choice, but how can it be? Her painting titled "As Mental Illness" was made while she was enrolled in Abnormal Psychology, when she learned more about how Substance Use Disorder affects the brain.

Jye David Gardner is from Pocatello, Idaho and has been involved in music from a young age. After graduating high school, Jye played lead guitar in a country folk band in Jackson Hole, WY, where he decided to pursue music as a career. Jye is now a freshman in the music program at Idaho State University.

Jazz-Lynn Grant has been acting, singing, and actively creating plays at ISU.

Iris Gray (Lindemood) is a second year graduate student in the Art Department. Studying photography as an undergraduate led to her current graduate research, exploring how photography and other media can reference concepts such as absence, memory, and a sense of history.

Idaho born and raised, **KayLynn Hammond** is living out her lifelong dream of composing; playing trombone and piano; and, soon, teaching band in her home state. "Myrtle Wood and Sea Glass" holds a special place in her heart, embodying the sounds and mood of the Oregon Coast, where her entire family took their last vacation. Waves rolling in and out, the sun rising and setting, the feeling of sand under bare toes, and laughter of children running in and out of the waves are all

memories that are echoed in this work. Special thanks need to be given to the ISU Big Band for their work and time on “Myrtle Wood and Sea Glass.”

Bohan Hou is a violinist from China and now a freshman at ISU. She has been learning violin since she was five years old. She spent a lot of time in learning the violin. In fact, when she was young, she did not have any winter or summer vacations or any extracurricular activities because she spent most of her time practicing. She broke two violins while she was learning the violin—of course they were accidents. She has participated in the Wuhan Youth Palace Children Orchestra and served as concertmaster. She also participated in the Wuhan Chamber Orchestra, and now she is a member of the Idaho State Civic Symphony.

Petra Lynn Johnson is a high school student at Compass Academy in Idaho Falls. She was born with a rare physical condition called arthrogryposis. This meant an uncountable number of surgeries and even more downtime. In her down time, Petra discovered the arts, namely poetry and ink drawings. She plans on going to art school after college and hopes to take a classic ’round the country road trip at some point. She enjoys chai tea, her cat Impala, and mustard yellow.

Juli Kidd is an aspiring writer. She’s currently attending Idaho State University and will graduate in the Spring of 2020. Juli has always enjoyed reading and writing from a very young age. Her hobbies include listening to audiobooks, running, and practicing yoga. Juli’s ideal job would be to work at a book publishing house.

Natalia Lauk comes from a lineage of classical Russian pianists and piano instruction. Lauk was born and raised in Siberia, Russia, where she studied piano with her father, Dr. Evgeny Lauk. She received Master's degree *cum laude* from Krasnoyarsk State Institute of Art in 2000. In 2011 Lauk moved to Idaho and became a collaborative pianist at Idaho State University Department of Music.

During the summer, **Emma Lavender** fights wildfire. She has written creatively since high school, but never ventured into poetry until this past season. A good friend/coworker encouraged her to try writing with her on their slow days, and she was inspired. She has continued creating poetry, but her favorites are still those that are tied to her experiences in the desert.

Cheyana Leatham is a senior at Idaho State University who will never graduate because she keeps taking on more projects. Her major is English with an emphasis on creative writing, and her minor is global studies. She mainly likes to write about topics that connect people.

Gabriel Lowman is a Pocatello-born pianist and a teacher with a passion for all kinds of music.

Dallas Jay McCrea is a music education student at Idaho State University. He was born and raised in Boise, Idaho. He plays trombone and bass at ISU.

Kassidy McCurry is an art student at ISU, and she has created a series of paintings about various endangered species.

She wants to show how beautiful and powerful these animals are and to have the viewer experience their beauty from a different perspective and see them as living beings, and not just “animals.”

Shawn McLain is a senior Music Performance major at Idaho State University. His professional endeavors include performing with the ISU Faculty Brass Quintet, performing as a featured soloist with the Idaho State University Symphonic Band, and maintaining a private studio in Pocatello, Idaho. He currently resides in Pocatello, Idaho.

Dimitri Nelson has been making music in his home studio for a while now and desires a future in music production.

Orla O'Connor is an International Student hailing from Ireland in her junior year at Idaho State University. Orla grew up playing traditional Irish fiddle and began Classical voice studies in 2017 at ISU. She is a member of the concert and chamber choirs at Idaho State University and is a past member of the Idaho State Civic Symphony. Orla's main instruments are fiddle and voice but she also plays the guitar and whistle. Orla is a native Gaelic speaker and works to promote the language in Pocatello. Other than music, Orla's passions include cooking, dog petting, going for long walks at the weekend, and the odd IPA with friends.

Kortnie Pimentel is graduating this May with a degree in Creative Writing and a minor in Psychology. She has plans to one day move to the PNW and build a tiny house. She loves playing D&D with her friends and even plays on the podcast *Dungeon Stories*.

Hogan Schaak is a PhD student who tries to explore the soul through poetry and theology and expand the mind through literature and relationships. For now, the squat pen is his tool, but maybe someday his wife and he will just brew beer back in Oregon.

Norrin Shearer is a graduating senior at ISU. Originally from Meridian, Idaho, Norrin moved to Pocatello to major in Creative Writing with a minor in PR and Advertising. Norrin loves all things fantasy and is the Dungeon Master on a Dungeons and Dragons podcast called *Dungeon Stories*.

Braeden Udy always has a book with him wherever he goes and a story spinning on his phone's Google Drive. He is working on his first novel now but has been thinking about the story since high school; he thinks maybe if he can get it on paper it will get out of his head. If he could live in any time period, he'd choose Edwardian England or 1920's Los Angeles. His favorite writers include Benjamin Alire Saenz, Louise Erdrich, Herta Muller, Sarah Waters, and Cormac McCarthy. He has degrees in American Studies from Utah State University and in Public Administration from Idaho State University.

Mary Unger is an art student who transferred to ISU from the College of Southern Idaho to work towards her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Idaho State. While photography is no longer a part of the art program here, it is how she fell in love with art as a whole and why she is continuing to pursue it even after college.

Kathryn Wilson is a senior at Idaho State University, majoring in English, minoring in creative writing. This means she writes. Which really means she stares at a computer screen until fear of not being a genius is overcome by fear of a due date, and then words come out.

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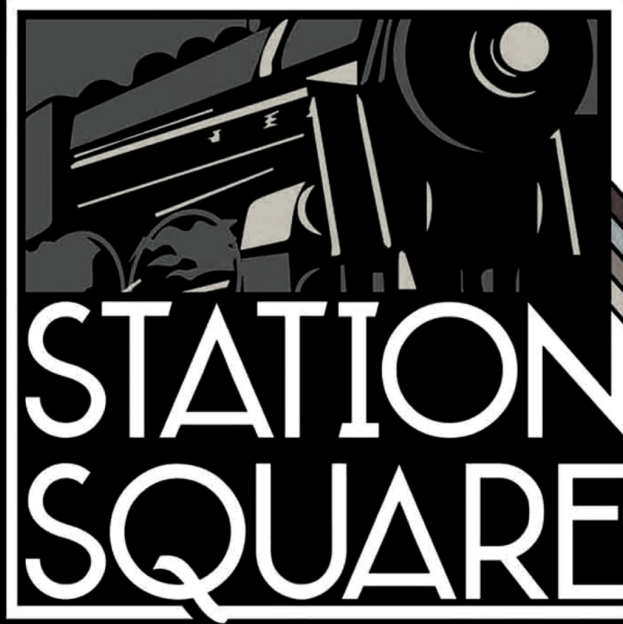


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