



2023 Onion River Review

Celebrating 50 Years

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river run by

Rosemary Marr

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Editors' Note

In 1906, two years after the founding of the College, the Saint Edmund's literary club met bi-weekly to share personal writing or to read. During these years, the club would produce a kind of hardbound literary review, with handwritten content, and pen and ink sketches by the authors.

In 1936, a publication titled *The Lance* appeared around campus including poetry, stories, essays, movie reviews, and more. This publication was a small quarterly put together by Saint Michael's students. Fast forward to the 1960s, when a review titled *The Quest* emerged on campus. This review would include essays, reviews, poems, and stories. The final issue in the College archives dates to 1970.

After a few years of literary silence on campus, the *Onion River Review* was born in 1973, including sixteen pages in total and a psychedelic drawing on the cover.

This is now the 50th year anniversary of the *Onion River Review*. We thank all past editors, advisors, and contributors, especially those who could not be here to see the cultivation of the many layers that make up the *Onion River Review*.

Yours in Eternal Onion-hood,
From the Desk of the 2023 ORR Staff

“You think your pain
and your heartbreak are
unprecedented in the history of
the world, but then you read. It
was books that taught me that the
things that tormented me most
were the very things that
connected me with all the people
who were alive, who had ever
been alive.”

~ James Baldwin

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A Basket Full of Dinosaurs

Natasha Williams

When our daughter Cora was a toddler, she used to stop dead out, of an abundance of caution, at the seam between the light and dark floor tiles in the supermarket. When she was eight, we took a family trip to the Grand Canyon and she wouldn't get closer than fifty feet from the edge and she didn't want us to either. "Mama don't do it," she pleaded with me. She ground her feet and put her arms out to try and block my path to the layered bands of rock undergirding millions of years of life on earth. No amount of rationalizing would get her closer to the edge. She intuitively imagined the dangers at the borders and openings of our world. But for all her fears she was the first to call out a need for courageous advocacy when friends or groups needed to do better.

In her teens I told her she was one of the more courageous people I knew. "I'm afraid of so many things," she scoffed at me.

"That's what makes you brave; you do things despite, even because, you're frightened." It brings to mind a book I once found that highlighted examples of famously successful people and how they were afraid of the things they eventually excelled at. Bolero hid behind his mother's skirt before becoming a renowned bullfighter. Einstein failed in school before realizing his theory of relativity. The book makes an argument that fear can fuel exceptional responses. In my mind it's the internal understanding of what *could be* that makes *what* is not enough to the budding genius. I've been looking for the book for years and can't find it, which makes me wonder if I made it up?

As Cora grew older, I watched as her heightened perception of the dangers around us propelled her activism. Now in college she's at the center of a movement that successfully got Middlebury College to plan to divest from fossil fuel investments. She is tirelessly an advocate for individual rights when institutions fall short. The difficulty for me is that her critique of our societies ills challenges the ideas, establishments and

even the very language we've relied on to understand each other

"They're bringing Charles Murray back to campus. I can't f'ing believe it!" She called—up in arms over the conservative author being invited back to campus.

"Maybe just ignore him?"

"That really isn't helpful," she said.

"I'm sorry it's not what you want to hear, but he got so much more attention because of the protests." I answered; struggling with how polarized our conversations felt. When Charles Murray, author of the *Bell Curve* and more recently *Coming Apart: The State of White America*, was invited to her college campus last year, my daughter was one of many peers, professors, and alumna who objected to his ideas being legitimized by an academic platform. A letter signed by more than 450 alumnae declared, "This is not an issue of freedom of speech...why has such a person been granted a platform at Middlebury?"

Though I supported my daughter's activism, I was sympathetic to the argument for free speech; the John Stuart Mills quote cited in the coverage of the student protests resonated with me: "Truth will lose something by their silence even if their views go against the entire world and the entire world is right."

"I think Mills is horseshit and quoting him reifies the exact thing the protest was critiquing, the infallibility of the white canon," Cora responded, when she read this. "The Bell Curve was used in the early nineties as evidence that Black people are intellectually and genetically inferior to White people, and Charles Murray is frequently invoked in white supremacist circles as theoretical proof of the racial superiority of whites."

"Wouldn't challenging his ideas be more effective than trying to shut him down? Why not let him speak and expose his ideas as fraudulent?"

“What if a creationist speaker were invited to talk about evolution? Would that be academically sanctioned? How is having social and class theory encoded with racism allowed in an institution where professors have to prove their worth through peer-reviewed publications? Go listen to him on the Internet, Mom!”

I went online and found his lecture on *Coming Apart: The State of White America* at the Manhattan Institute—a self-described free market conservative think tank. I wasn’t initially offended by the exclusivity of White America as the focus of his book, in part because I was interested in understanding why the white working poor seem to be voting against their own interests, but that quickly changed. “Why White America?” he asked in his introduction. “So people will understand I’m talking about a ‘General Problem.’” Was he saying that *issues of interest* were those pertaining *only* to White America? Even the premise of his argument was insidious. Murray went on to argue that working-class and poor whites have taken on many of the sociological characteristics of the Black family, including low rates of marriage, high rates of unwed motherhood, and a declining work ethic. Instead of statistics on the effects of globalization and poverty on the working class, he was ostensibly arguing that what’s wrong with White America is the encroaching failed moral fabric of minorities.

The next time Cora called, I told her I had listened to his talk. “I was really offended by his encoded racism.”

“Why do you call it *encoded*? It’s violent speech. It’s racist and classist, Mom. He uses the argument of genetic inferiority instead of looking at materialism and social inequity!”

“So why not make that argument at his talk? Shutting down ideas you don’t agree with doesn’t read well in the press,”

“I don’t care what the press says. They are only presenting one side of the argument. He was invited to speak by this conservative

student organization. They are bringing a white supremacist into a diverse community. We requested a panel of presenters to balance his views, and we were denied.” Privately I wondered if they have a conservative counter point when a progressive speaker comes to campus? “The night before his talk we had a massive disagreement about whether or not to let him speak,” Cora clarified. “Several students read his entire book in the week leading up to the protest. We compiled fact sheets and put up posters, but there wasn’t a consensus among protestors. We weren’t just critiquing his work; *we were taking a stand against how his work is used to bolster the white nationalist movement in the U.S.* I have to go,” she abruptly signaled as if my opinion wasn’t of interest to her either.

Generally public opinion was not on the side of the protestors. Even our bank manager shook his head critically as I made my deposits. “Isn’t your daughter at Middlebury? Those kids are treading on dangerous territory—trying to shut down free speech.”

“Well, they did ask for a panel of presenters to be fair. But I also worry about free speech,” I said leaning into my generation’s shared understandings. It just so happens that I sat in on a class a Middlebury during family week that fall which contrasted free speech laws in Europe and the US. Many European countries have codified hate speech legislation to curb the incitement of racial violence. In France, laws make it possible to prosecute individuals who reference terrorist groups in a positive manner. But if we limit hate speech what else will the government be allowed to censor? Hungary recently used the threat of terrorism to propose a law that imposes a tax on organizations and media outlets that portray *immigration* in a positive light—clearly a slippery slope. However in the private sector both America and Europe can limit speech through rules of conduct. Middlebury sided with the conservative club that invited him *and* denied the request to have counter points by having a panel of speakers.

“You talk about the slippery slope, which is fair,” Cora responded, “but isn’t there also a slippery slope of what we sanctify as theory, are willing to allow into halls of learning? We never said he couldn’t speak or

have his beliefs. We just said we were unwilling to listen at school' I was beginning to see they were challenging the idea that white nationalism has academic validity but I still wasn't convinced they were right to demand censor.

In the end, they refused to let him speak. "We all stood in the auditorium with our back to him," she said painting the scene for me. "He went up to speak and at the same time, in dead silence, we stood and turned our backs to him. In unison, we read a speech about the eugenics movement in Vermont, which Middlebury helped fund. We read and chanted for 45 minutes. "What is the enemy? White supremacy! Racist sexist anti-gay, Middlebury says no way." I had demonstrated against governmental policies in the streets as a youth—My daughter was raised by an activist—I marched for family planning rights and against wars but our demonstrations called for change from within while Cora and her generation were calling for a dismantling of the racist capitalist system that Murray and his ideas undergirded. Is that what's necessary? Is there nothing to salvage? I admire the vision but don't know how to join the movement.

The students were vilified in the press, accused of being snowflakes, intolerant of other points of view and incapable of hearing another side.

"I don't care what they think of us," she told me. "*We were arguing for consideration of what is to be gained—or more saliently lost—by bringing him there. No one is actually talking about political correctness. In real life we are talking about power and injustice. There's a need to talk about what this means for our education, that our academies consider bigoted speech as beneficial to our development as academics and human beings.*" She didn't care what they thought, and on some level she didn't care what I thought.

"Mom, many of the protestors were people of color, or poor, or queer, people under attack. This is where they live; students who actually didn't go home this year because they weren't sure if they'd be allowed

back in the country. And it was students of color who were unfairly targeted for disciplinary action, whose financial aid was at stake. I may get suspended. I just want you to know.” She said, sounding tired of defending their position. I knew since we paid full tuition, they had no leverage on that front. I was confident she wouldn’t get more than a warning but I had a guilty awareness that this privilege was part of the very inequality she was fighting.

Students at Berkeley and Boston University were similarly protesting right-wing pundits scheduled to speak at their colleges. Over a thousand students marched at Berkley over Ben Shapiro’s’ visit to their campus, a talk that was recorded online. “Thank you all for coming... I want to tell you this: I will not be stopped by the jackboots and Birkenstocks of a bunch of anarchist communist pieces of shit,” Shapiro spewed. A few audience members cheered, but even his sympathizers seemed taken aback. It didn’t stop the speaker from continuing his name-calling tirade against the political correctness of the liberal politic. ... “It’s horrifying, and you can all go to hell you pathetic, lying stupid jackasses.” This was worthy of an academic platform? To what end was this speaker invited to the campus? I started to understand what these students were fighting against.

Berkeley formed of a panel on free speech to look into the matter of right-wing pundits in academic institutions. They found a coordinated campaign of highly publicized events, sponsored by a small group of students working with outside organizations, aimed at making colleges appear intolerant of conservative views. “Although these speakers have a right to speak, it’s not clear that bigoted speech needs to be invited onto college campuses,” they concluded.

With mounting separatism, talk of registries and anti-immigrant sentiment, I too am afraid for our democracy. This is how it starts, with closed borders, detention centers, and calls for nationalism. They were not alone in their alarm at the rising fascism in our country. The way slogans like, “America First” and fear mongering about border safety sounded eerily like pre-war Germany. And these ideas were being given a lot of free

airtime in the press. *Why were we criticizing the students right to protest this kind of speech? Why weren't the rest of us standing up to the dangers of increasing white nationalism and hate speech?* Is this how Hitler gained power? Stripping groups of their civil liberties in the name of protectionism and racial intolerance, while those of us not affected go on about our business. Were the protestors fragile or courageous as hell in their demands?

Most social movements of our time employed incivility and challenged the status quo. The Civil War, Civil Rights, and Suffrage movements were not courteous or civil uprisings. I was and am an activist. I march in demonstrations and write letters to my representatives. As a young person and as a parent I have seen the necessity of social dissent in the face of challenges to woman's reproductive rights, the Vietnam and Iraq wars and Black Lives Matter. I was one of a generation of parents who thought we could protect our children from all the mistakes our parents made. Parenting was something we took classes in so we wouldn't fail. But in buttressing their world and trying to provide the very best for them, we have clearly fallen short in the civic work of human rights and environmental justice. The argument for civility and free speech could be a thinly veiled attempt to hold onto the very power that's being challenged. My daughter's calling me out is an act of courage and love and separation.

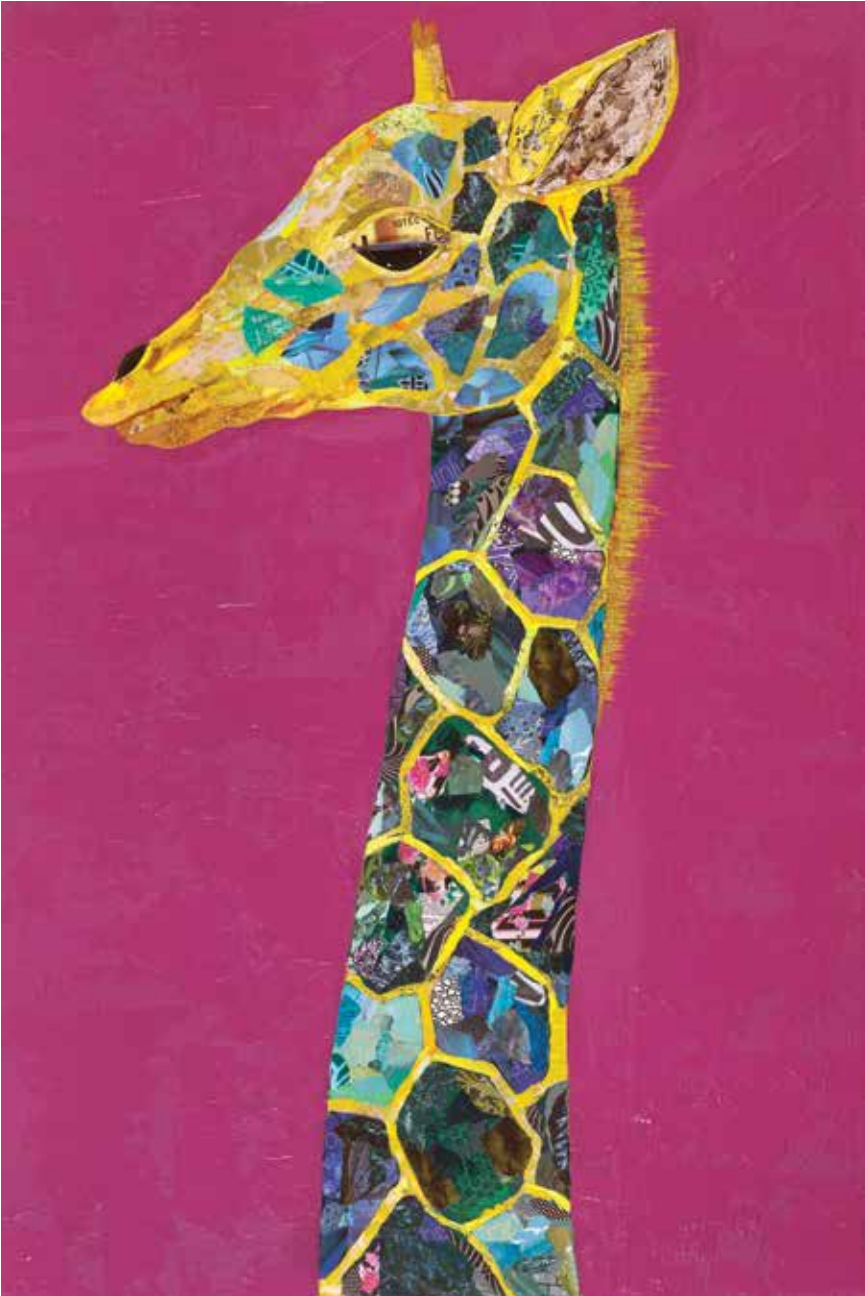
When Cora was two years old, she fell in love with a miniature Apatosaurus dinosaur figure she named Little Foot. While her little sister toddled naked through the living room taking her first steps Cora sat for hours with a basket full of dinosaurs creating a pretend world on our living room floor imagining a world where magnificent, dangerous creatures roamed the earth and she could control their destiny. This is the same daughter who is fighting what some call a sixth extinction. Not child's play but a young woman's call for justice. She wasn't asking for permission but she was asking me, asking us to join their fight for social and environmental justice.

Lower Than Dirt

Slee Fowler



Giraffe
Meg Krohn



Rough notes for a poem

Buff Lindau

I used to try to fall asleep planning
what projects the next day would succeed
in showcasing the college I worked for?
Where could I land a catchy news story?
Which reporter could I email or phone with a pitch?
Or I might ponder what to make for dinner,
but mostly, I'd dwell on the big question of
what to wear the next day—something decorous, professional, jazzy . . .
Now I wear the same thing every day—
retired after forty years in the workplace,
numbed by staying home week after week through covid—
excellent outfits no longer needed
even my mentoring at Edmunds Elementary is on hold.
Now I go to sleep—or try to go to sleep
wondering what can make a poem,
what thought or focus, true to me,
would yield a nugget to build on the next morning?
Is searching a topic a topic itself
or just a path to insomnia—
which proves it's not that rich a lode of inspiration
though it does take on a path, a well-worn path,
to what's up with my sons,
always the centerpiece, together or solo,
now with wives who assuage my worries
comfort me with their presence
each one thousands of miles away.
They bring love, smarts, care for the two
for the flagship boys, and the one grandson.
Now I'm happily asleep, in theory,
or am I nudging two pushy cats out of the way
without waking them, just befriending them?
Still awake, but exhausted by circular thinking
avoiding worries of health,

unpoetic specifics, of which there are many, and diverse.
Now fixing on the tiresome, inevitable, anti-sleep topic—aging.
Who will be alone first, him or me?

The Jumper

Robert Glover

Pine Mountain
Iron Mountain, Michigan.
1957

Temp is near zero and it has breezed-up,
but it's not a patch to a Mainer who's properly rigged.
Clambering up the scaffold, slung skis whacking my back all the way,
is a chore that certainly helps with the chill.
This is higher than the towers of St. Peter and St. Paul
near the Androscoggin.

The hewn-log hut perched atop this erector-set
might just fit my Chevrolet -
filled now with a raucous, foot-stomping squad
that doesn't seem to mind the un-subtle sway or
the creaks and the cracks.
A bottle is handed around as we men wait.

I whip out my pen-knife and scribe initials into
the rough sap-stained wall as quickly as I can,
joining a fraternity of similar carvings.
Grains of sawdust whip away when
the blanket over the door is pulled back.

Cigarettes are tossed into the small potbellied stove.
Smoke curdles inside the bright poles glancing down
from holes punched into the roof.
Rudy Maki, leaning into the corner next to the heat,
jerks his chin, prompting me to move forward.

My predecessor clumps forward to the open front,
arms out for balance, his form bisected in sudden sunlight
as he emerges. Motes of dust surround him like angels.

An old army sergeant, scarf tucked into his jacket, brusquely calls my name.
I unlimber my slats to the floor, and seat my boots firmly.
When I look up, the jumper ahead of me is gone from the gate.

I'm motioned forward by a man wearing olympic rings on his jacket.
There is frost on his beard, his breath smells of whiskey. "You want out, kid?"
"Voyons?" my upbringing slips out. "Hell, no!"
"Go get 'em, then." He slaps my shoulder and turns away.
My mind outpaces my awkward shuffle-steps, until
I'm out of the dark and my white future curves out before me, gleaming.

I jerk my wool cap tight, lower my aviator goggles, adjust my sweater,
waggle into the ice-ruts and form my bowed stance...
ritual complete and then the moment of equipoise.
One push- a forward lean- and gravity will grab on
in a one-man drag race, as with so many jumps before.
It's good the other guy didn't auger-in, I hear no sirens.

The sky is a boundless curve of baby blue, the sun over my shoulder,
my shadow pools across the waxed tips of my hickory planks.
The flags lining the ramp snap, sharp as gunshots.
They must be announcing me a quarter-mile below,
the susurrus of the cheering crowd is just audible above the wind noise.
"Whenever you're ready, jumper!" comes the call from the dark hall
behind me.

The fastest route back to my girl is right down this hill,
So I swallow, rise up, and heave.

Untitled
Celia Durgin

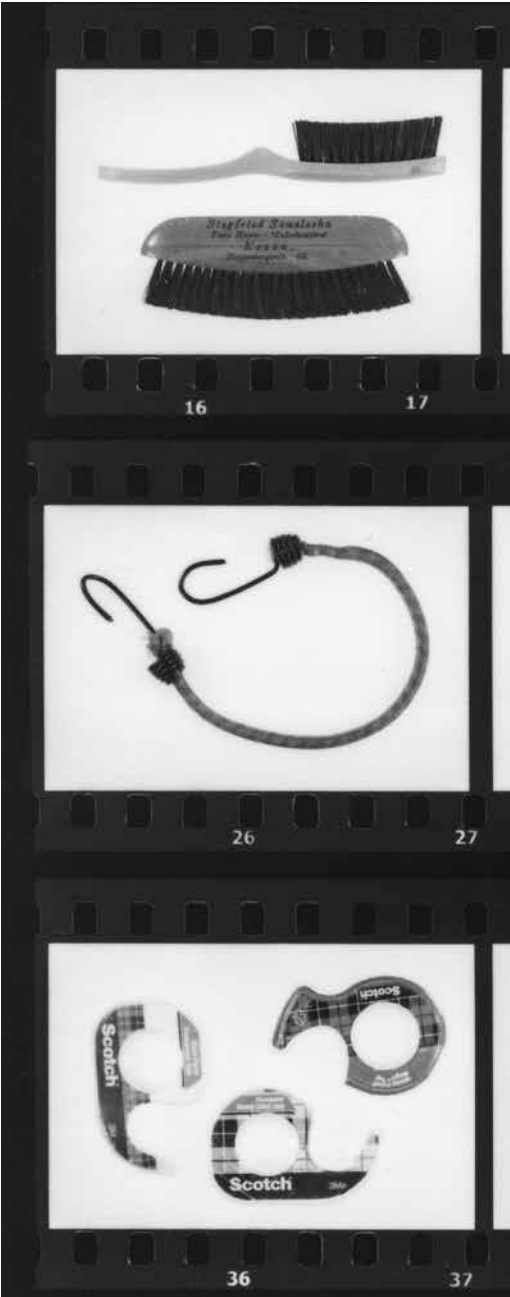


Cole
Izzy Kolb



Things of My Mother, Triptych #2

Jordan Douglas



A Road Lit Green

Lauren DeCristofaro

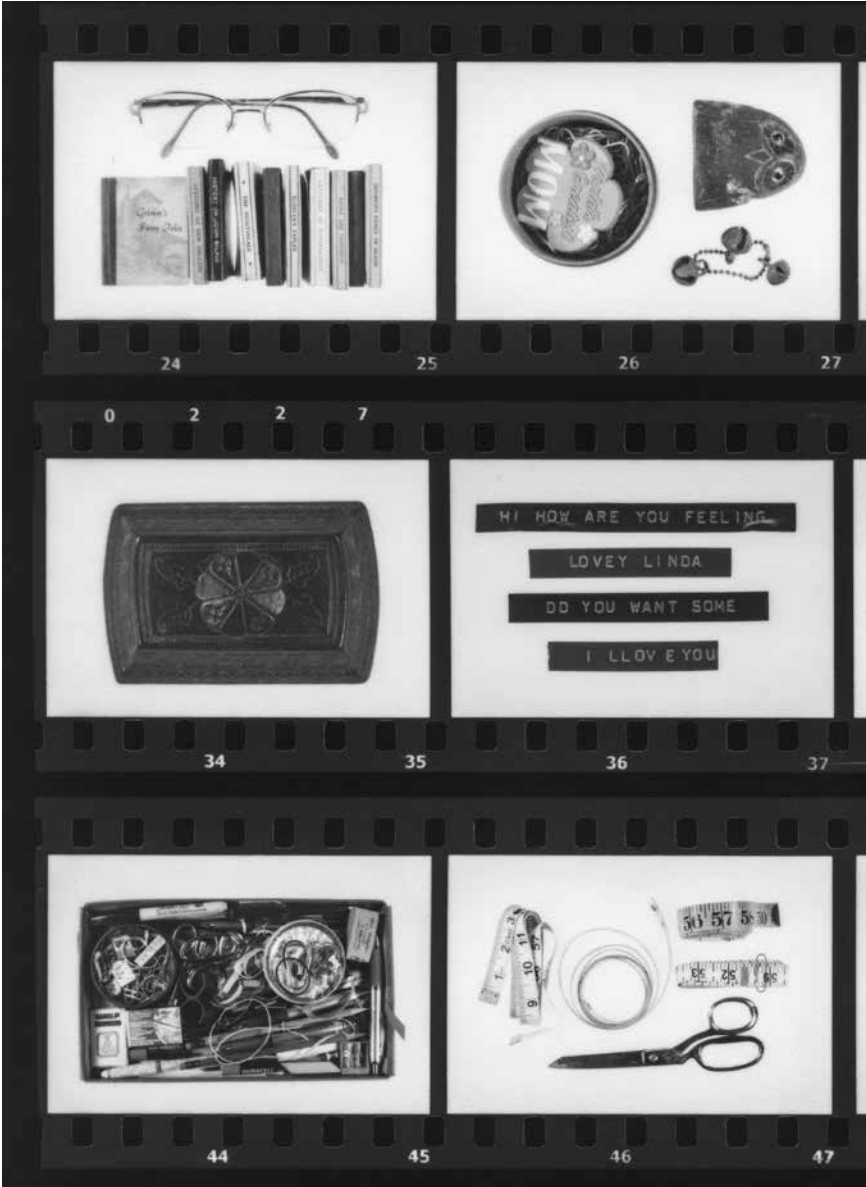
As I approach the stop light, I feel my pulse increase. *Please stay green.* It turns red. *No.* As my breath becomes audible, I contemplate the distance I have before I come to a complete stop. Approximately thirty feet, give or take twenty feet. I never excelled in math and now I'm contemplating what feels like level four calculus. All of this, in hopes of keeping my six-month-old daughter peacefully asleep. My car creeps up behind the mid-sized sedan stopped in front of me, quickly burning through my hastily projected distance. The driver must think I'm incredibly impatient or trying to entice them into a game of road rage chicken. A game no one should play with a sleep deprived mother as their opponent.

Now, at a complete stop, I hear rustling from the backseat. Only a few seconds until the rustle morphs into a full-bodied cry, triggering responses both physical (*make more food*) and mental (*will this ever end?*). I glance out the window, a green awning shading people leisurely sipping coffee. From the road, their features are indistinguishable—a mirage of what my life used to resemble—back when I wasn't driving like a lunatic, chasing twenty minutes of quiet. I wonder if they notice me. If the deep dark crevices under my eyelids are stark enough that even the streaky glass of my window can't obscure them. As they sip their lattes and speak about celebrity gossip and if Sherman Williams Agreeable Grey is grey enough for their newly painted living room, can the coffee drinkers' sense how I have never loved so deeply or felt so lost? Can they feel the quiet desperation rolling off my body, my heartbeat a steady *when? when? when will this get easier?* Nobody tells you this part, I think.

The light finally switches, the mid-sized sedan increasing in speed, and my eyes dart back to the road. As my car approaches 20 mph, I sense the rustling quiet, the screams dulling until only a soft whimper remains. I take a breath, allowing the momentary peace to wash over me, uttering a prayer for a road lit green.

Things of My Mother, Contact Grid #1

Jordan Douglas



A Guest Lecture

Hallie Benton

Behind the lectern the retired Professor stood,
his mind lost in thought,
as he presented to his audience a photo
from the very first day he taught.
In the photo the Professor was smiling,
the lines on his face then few,
while beside him stood his friend and colleague
with whom to the school they both were new.
The Professor recalled memories,
of the life they lived back then—
discussions together over tea—
things which would never come again.
In his lecture the Professor spoke,
on philosophy and truth,
while behind him the photo remained
a stark reminder of his days of youth.
When the Professor made his last remarks,
and the lecture came to a close,
he asked if there were any final questions,
when a student raised their hand and rose.
The student asked the Professor if he was happy,
and he smiled beneath his hat,
“I did what I wanted to do,” he said.
“How wonderful is that?”

Picking

Sarah Poutree

Blueberry fields will always
smell
like the ocean muck
that seeps into the soil
and fertilizes the earth.
Bad knees and achy backs
will not stop her from picking
sweet round globes.
The only sound in the field
will be the berries hitting the
bottom of her bucket
which is never full enough.
Her small child sneaks
bites
Sometimes handfuls
of the delightfully juicy fruit.

Self Portrait of my Desk

Nate Hoadley



Untitled

Emma Salvatore



At last, a Paeon to Her

Buff Lindau

Once a cooking trap—now a refuge.
In retirement I'm ever more in the kitchen
with bags of CSA veggies to corral
and three meals a day—for him and me.
I'm embracing the mysteries
of squashes in surprising shapes,
leafy greens—i.e. chard, kale, pac choi (!)
cilantro, arugula and more—
yams, rutabagas, celeriac, shitakes . . .

It slipped up on me.
Her legacy embraced all that, plus croissant
puff pastry, multi-layered buttery doughs—
Can you believe?
And every other kind of baked good.
(She made almond-filled croissant for my professor's birthday—
along with a spray of her grandiflora roses—really!)
Back then. Till now. I thought only of asserting
a feminist stand, and avoiding the stay-at-home,
home-maker world. I did marching, anti-war sign-waving,
speechifying for civil rights and women's rights
through the sixties and seventies.

Now, under her surprising influence,
number one son made perfect pie crust and pies
for our Thanksgiving feast at his house
preceded by a spatchcocked turkey, and amazing stuffing
flavored with his own stock, slow cooked for hours
not to forget the brussels, the mashes, the greens and more!
And then those pies! His grandma, who adored him
(though she was gone when he was only six)
would have been so proud

of his flakey browned-crust ed apple pie and pumpkin pie
which delighted his own nine-year old Max
whose brief grump vanished into the joy of pies.

And what a gathering by son number two, former pro chef—
who roasted an impossibly huge turkey for fifteen guests
in the snowy woods of northern Washington state.
Word has it, it reigned supreme along with all the fixin’s
though fast-coming snow required a quick exit the next day
to avoid Twisp’s mountain-road twisting into impassability.

She would have smiled deep to see these two make Thanksgivings.
She would have been so thankful—as am I.

And what if she knew I was contemplating
her Eastern European cabbage and noodles for dinner
a homespun dish outdone by my other indulgences these days
exotic mushroom pasta, roasted vegetables, seared scallops
and other innovations which have intruded on my
former professional working woman’s agenda.

It’s full-time kitchen lore these at-home days
after a forty-year career, insisting on, striving for, authority
in my marketing, PR, teaching world
where feminism held sway, I said.
And so it does—again—in the kitchen,
where those oft lamented, once-shunned “home arts!”
have me in a grip,
aspiring to high talents inspired by my mom!

!

Rowan Metivier



A Message From Your Unclothed Daughter

Sarah Poutree

the washing machine is not working.

my shirts go in white

and leave yellow, misshapen,

smelling of mold.

my jeans come out as a different size;

stains from the previous night still

darken the denim.

now the washing machine is not draining

my jaundiced shirts and my dirty jeans

marinating in a mixture of Tide

and the stains from last night.

the washing machine never worked.

Signs of the Times

Ro Marr



Dialysis Trials - 1981

Robert Glover

I did not salute you.

I was girls and baseball and Star Wars
tracing "AC/DC" on brown-bag book covers
a lip-gnawing priority over lectures.

You faced shade from the start.

Draped in hospital smell like a sour shirt
painfully hasty in your jaundiced actions
as if each movement raced some expiration
— limbs losing recall of their native arcs.

I try to haunt the hunched egoist teen:
discern the scholar, not the shell
staggering awkward to the green slate
to scribe flats and sharps in brisk sloppy marks
scraping dust white on the cleff-snake staff.

Eyes knob-lost behind swollen hills of cheeks,
each smile had to lumber fleshily into place
and Still you labored

desperate for the flighty rows to focus
on your Truth— music meant everything.

You huffed your muse across lined vinyl
and prayed for our transfiguration
through flat scratched 1960s fidelity.

I had not a whisper of empathy while
bruised stick arms caressed the air
from the ill-fitting corduroy confines
of your gray suit-jacket,
coaxing notes to migrate
steep, steep upstream
from your wounded flesh to our dull heads.

I marvel at the courage
of your dialysis trials.

I sing you now,
decades tardy
and Teacher,

I praise your grace.

Untitled
Gabby Doe



Original Typeface

Christianna Bostley

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M N O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z ! ! ? ?
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A WIZARD'S JOB
IS TO VEX
CHUMPS QUICKLY
IN FOG.

What's Out There?

Mary Kohn



Garden Encounters with Clippers, Digger and Gloves

Buff Lindau

Seductive, intoxicating, entertaining, even virtuous—
gardening has it all—and all outside of time and obligation.
Our small gardens front and back and behind the lilacs call me out.

The primo glory today—a profusion of volunteer peonies,
pinks and whites, in lilting elegance, each one a lovely solo,
traipsing up the hill interspersed with bushy echinacea,
budding now, coming soon into glorious pink with rusty orange centers.
All the peonies have bloomed into a grove, a virtual grove dotting the
hillside with robust greenery and exquisite blossoms.

Using son Ben's gift of a super hand digger that cuts through underground
webs, I weed with gusto, removing fast-spreading lilies of the valley,
bachelor's buttons, clover, grass, and stuff that enshrouds the favorites.

The garden lure is strong. Its mojo and reputation virtuous
removing obligation to do other tasks—laundry shopping dinner—
when there is a patch showing new blooms, calling, calling me.
Now. Full summer. Such a delight to gaze on, weed, give space to chosen
plants.

Astilbe is back with its red spikes, drawing hummingbirds (sometimes).
“A still bee is better than a dead bee,” son Dave loved to say, back in the
day. And phlox is pushing forth, promising masses of bold color to come.

Annuals bloom with fervor for their one chance to shine:
snapdragons, lisianthus, zinnias, nasturtiums—
the very names a poem—volunteer arugula, dill, mint.

I welcomed the spring showing of trillium
and a quick patch of exotic blood root.
Both protected. Both exquisite.
Coming back and back again for thirty years now.

And two bushy, bold rose bushes, returned to full flower—
one of delicate pinks, the other overflowing in bold reds.
And transplants took hold, where a broken bench once stood,
magnificent ligularia, bushy hosta, and the excellent fluffy plant with
white spikes—

The great escape. Every gardener knows it.
The garden is full of worthy explanations for
why you're day-dreaming in the garden.
That's where I meet my mother—weeding.
She shook the earth off each weed,
conserving the dark rich soil she'd had trucked in to cover the South
Carolina red clay.

She nourished an amazing garden: azaleas, camellias, a fig tree,
huge magnolias, roses beyond compare, lovely anemones
(Tomatoes too—who can not do tomatoes—for a few home-grown?)

My sons also show up in the garden.
Botanist Ben gave me the amazing digger and
hearty, no-joke clippers for pruning intruders.
Dave the reporter gave me good-fitting garden gloves.
Essentials—digger, clippers, gloves—always with me in the garden
though the sons, gardeners themselves, are thousands of miles away.

To garden for the joy of it, to encounter those others
in one densely planted flower patch or another—

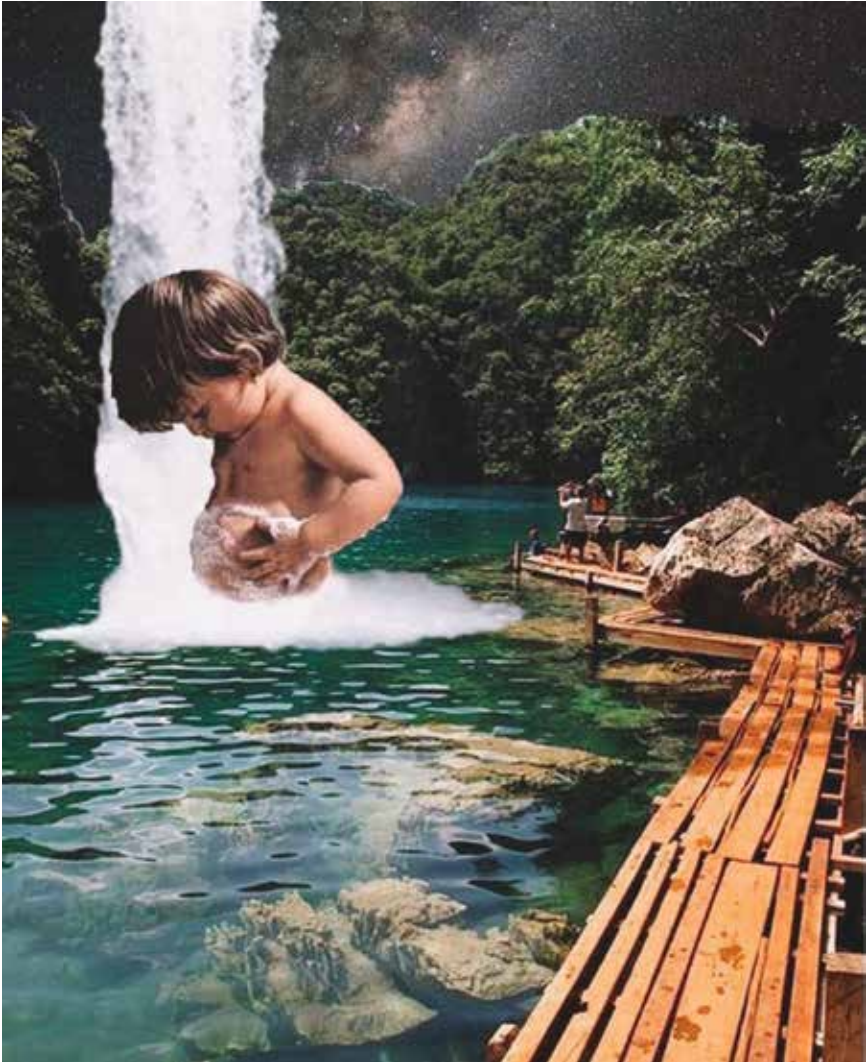
all praise the great good fortune of having a garden—in Vermont.

Closing Time

Katie Escobedo



Baby Flic
Rowan Metivier



Below my Feet and Above my Eyes

Nick Albino

Sooner or later I always end up walking, whether it be a waking walk or one in which I'm sleepwalking, I never know until I'm there. I was sleepwalking that morning. Stepping first from pavement to grass, then back to pavement, then to grass again. I passed dogs and passed people walking them. Squirrels played in the trees, burying their treasures in hopes of remembrance further down the line. Birds and assorted rustles played games above me; I looked up and found the jumps, saw the tag played between two, and kept walking towards my destination.

Grass turned to dirt turned to mud. I reached the trailhead; the air was crisp and the wind was blowing. I should tell you now, this is a story of things happening— there is no correlation, no foreshadowing, no deeper meaning; I went for a walk, and I enjoyed it until I didn't then I enjoyed it again. Putting that over there, my feet sunk into the wet mud (my shoes included). Sinking in mud is a good feeling, it proves that I was there for myself in the moment and there for myself when I walk back. I like to get to witness my paths.

I had set off from the muddied spot, eyes to the maple branches and hands in my jacket pocket. The leaves at the top, the tip top, the tip-of-the-pencil-sharpened-to-a-razors-edge top were freckling orange; my walk was off to a good start and I became happy. Not that I wasn't happy to begin with, but now, seeing fall begin in the most slight and simple way, my happiness was reaffirmed. I saw a bird above me in those moments, I'd say it was a wren but truly and honestly I would be making a guess. I watched it with my neck cranked upwards. It copied me as it made calls and chattered with its unseen family. I walked on with my head to the branches as the wildlife began to hide from me.

The bird flew away, and the squirrels and chipmunks created distance between us. After walking further there came a point where I decided to turn. The trail led forward, and the beaten down, pressed upon mud watched as I strayed from it. Taking it as a slight, the ground where

I stepped immediately was mush. I sunk, and I basically swam my boots through until I was onto more solid, crunchy ground. I try not to disturb the unwalked areas but it's impossible to step without causing a tremor for an ant, and it's impossible to miss every fell branch and stray plant which dot and linger like paint strokes on grey-brown canvas. So—I step onto as little as I can but understand that steps mean sacrifices. I find that the best parts of walking in the woods are always in the saunter, the aimless joy that I cast myself out into. Walking in the unstepped lets me reveal and see what others don't, or haven't yet, or hardly have seen. First, walking for five minutes, I saw moss. I so desperately love to see moss. It was growing and breathing on top of a stone which sat at a respectful distance from an old maple. The branches of this family of moss leapt onto and around the stone, through the floor of the forest and up against the old tree; they were united and they all treated me as though I was intruding on an intimate moment. I walked forward while looking backwards.

In the depths of the wood, I continued. I walked and looked and stepped and stood. And to prime what was about to happen I should mention I think that we all, every species, are able to cry for help. And I think that no matter what is calling, we are able to understand it. So as I rose up the incline, creating distance from the moss before stumbling across a strange intersection of branches and trees felled and stacked. I could see from there a riverish nearby, maybe a creek, maybe a brook— and if it was a brook it was babbling. If it was a smaller river it was running, and if it was a creek then it was just there, no noise for that type of water. But I heard the small leopard frog before I saw it; my stomach recognized death before my eyes could find it. A snake was blended and camouflaged, only revealed through movement—the frog jumped. Bitten already, there was nothing else to be done besides watch as the frog struggled with the strength of dying. It jumped, and with it the snake rose and fell. I could hear the cries, and like a heartbeat, they slowed.

I stepped away, and the leaves felt like they rose with me. The world slanted slightly. I could still hear the croaks behind me, their subtle vanishing notes in the air staggering me with each moment. I walked back

towards the trail. Step over step. Sinking with each foul footing down the hill towards the creek and past the still, ill-looking pond, I crept back over the brush. I crept back onto the path.

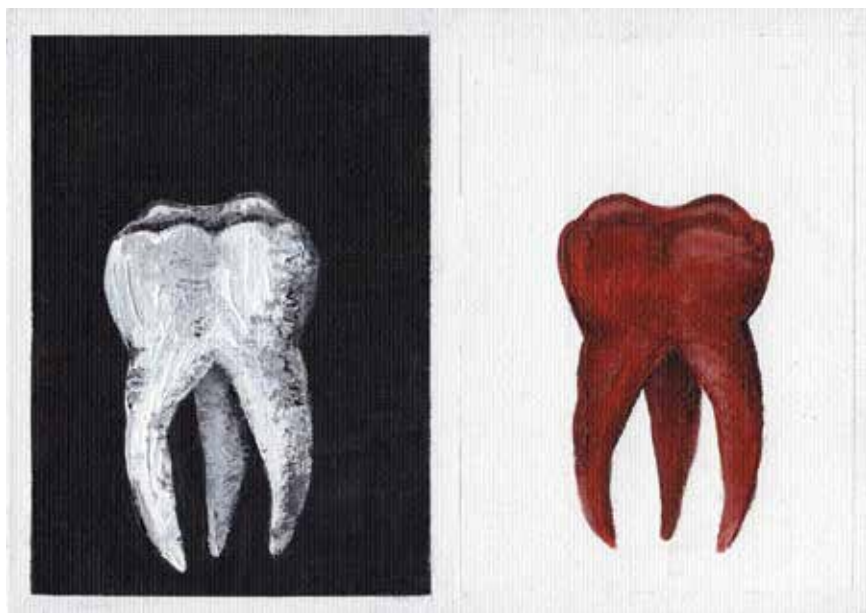
Trees danced, and the water glimmered. The refraction of light through the leaves reflected on the pond. I glanced at the side, and I turned and glanced at the other side. To my left was a vine of riverbank grapes, to my right was a mess of vegetation. I took a grape off and ate it, separated the seeds out one by one. Spit out as if to replant, but really just to be rid of them; I had another. They were bitter, those pre-wine bundles. I was early, or late, in picking and eating them, but it didn't really matter to me. I was still disoriented, my mind was still wrapped around the frog; the bitter held no success in freeing me. I walked along the trail more and more until I was reaching the part that looped.

The looping part is one I don't really care for. I'd rather the trail circle, or even square around. If it was shaped as a whole rather than right at the end then I would get to see more landscape, see more trees, and see more wildlife. At the same time, walking back lets one see a new angle of what they've already seen. In that sense, I saw new but still familiar sights. The large maples from behind, now from the front, still towered over me. Their leaves at the tip top, tippity top, tip-of-the-tongue top, were still green, with simple hints of orange and yellow. I walked under them again for a second time. I cranked my neck up again to look. My world went horizontal for a second when I didn't recognize I was falling. And suddenly I was on the ground. The world was much browner down there, flecks of old trees and remains of ferns and foliage of years ago mixed together like batter. Rising from the ground I had to shake the sprinkles of it from my pants and jacket. The multicolored, brown-green spectrum fell like fall time snow. Caught in the act, I saw my friend. He was seemingly content to pretend not to have seen my fall so I said my hellos and goodbyes, tied them together when I gave them, and kept going on my walk out the woods. Soon I reached the trailhead, and soon my shoes reached pavement again. I noticed the difference between footings immediately and regrettably. Once your feet readjust to walking

on soil and earth, going back to man made stone and placed cobbles is an injustice. But I walked home anyway, I saw more dogs and I saw more people. I saw more squirrels acting like squirrels, and then I saw my door and my friends. I came to the door then opened it; it was warm air that came at me first, then the noises, then the laughter.

Kit's Worst Fear

Emily Majewski



Ghost Prints

Cito DeNegre

Following ghost prints the forest,
the jack-knife in my hand and my brother
to my left. We follow my father
and his markings in the snow.

He calls out to us, Our Father,
we step on the pooled ice that has
frozen in a low ditch, new sands
of crystalline water droplets surrounding-

the snow is like the crust of your
eyes between the stones of the walls
that form veins tracking through New England,
unmarked memories of settlers dawning

lattices on newly ancient land, and he
calls out, like God to Abraham, and says
“you can walk on it,” and we walk. I’ve carved
a stick in autumn at some age,
the ice doesn’t crack, it holds like his hands

did when he held me up to the shower head
(“here is thy ram”) when I was young, confused
that his body was different from mine.
“Careful,” he says, the same warning he would

give years later, retrospectively, looking
at a cut from carving a spoon from a block
of beech wood. It was my first scar and I earned it,
we skid of the ice carefully, my brother and I,

I had no scars on my body then,
and now I have just this one, but one day
I will ask who will stand there ready to call out
“Careful” as I walk through these woods again.

Replica of Hans bolts replica of Daedalus et Icarus

Nate Hoadley



Home

Faith Morgan

I like to count the days I've spent in Northfield, CT for any given year and this year I've counted only fifty-six.

On the eastern side of Litchfield, CT lies the burrow of Northfield where old women rest in churches that have been converted to houses and a library that used to be a ranch-style house sits on the hill. Just a mile south from the town, Thomaston rests at the feet of Northfield and provides groceries, pharmacy medications and takeout pizza for the families that exist in the burrow it spoons.

Often, I wonder when Northfield should no longer be called my own home and when it will just be my parents' town.

At the age of seventeen, I sat in a friend's car on the pavement that stretched closer and closer to Bantam lake in Litchfield until it became swallowed whole by the water. Instead of launching a boat, we nearly launched his car into the water, parking so close that the hood was only about a foot from the lake. The headlights of the car were the only indicator of water slowly rocking in front of us. A slow mist rose above the small waves where the light extended. We sat. We talked about where life would take us in the next year and where it had taken us our whole lives.

In the rear view mirror, small headlights blinded us and became larger and larger. A golf cart gassed and broke right next to his car. In the car were two middle aged men holding beers and cackling in the seats. Silence suspended in the air, a weight on the chest, as the eyes of the men stared into the driver's side window for an eternity.

At the age of twenty-one, my boyfriend and I treaded the water of Bantam lake. My fingers, pruney and wrinkled, waved softly against the velvet thick water and it was quiet.

We had jumped off the dock, a flaily attempt at diving and I let the water wholly consume me. Then I thought of myself at seventeen, when I'd float frantically so as not to submerge my stick straight hair and meticulously coated eyelashes beneath the water. Afterward, a beach blanket stuck to my damp stomach on the sand and we just laid there looking at one another for a while, knowing then that Litchfield was the one place we could exist as a whole instead of two halves on either side of the coast.

For three years, I have spent two hundred and twenty eight days each year existing in a different burrow. Colchester spoons Burlington, VT in a similarly affectionate way that Thomaston does Northfield.

In Colchester, an old man with white hair past his shoulders (always in a ponytail) has learned my and all my friends' names while he works at the corner store next to campus. Sometimes he'll show us the new drinks in stock, excited for us to take them home and try them. Or other times, he'll give us the free posters he gets from the brands he sells for our house. I'll bet he drives past campus after his shift, listening to the rap music echoing and lightly vibrating his car, smiling with the thought of us all young and in the middle of joy. We often talk about being surrounded by college kids at his age, how it all must make him feel.

In Colchester, I spend Sundays sluggish and surviving, while outside my townhouse, morning dew settles gently on crushed cobalt blue beer cans in the grass. I watch my neighbors trudge outside, one by one, collecting each can and dropping them into a trash bag and even with all that effort to reset the yard, there still lies at least five stragglers by sunset.

By Monday, the cycle of rest, then rage, then rest, then rage is done. On Monday, I rise and go, without so much as a moment to breathe in between it all. I ask myself then, if home is not so much a building with a bedroom, or even a person, but rather the feeling that settles in my chest when I dance or when I write or when I'm so immersed I don't have the option to think.

Three years ago, Colchester spread its arms to everyone I surround myself with like a mother welcoming home a small child as it hops off the steps of the schoolbus. We often look at photos from that year, just children trying to figure out what they're supposed to do by themselves. That year, we'd spend whole nights in one another's rooms, drinking wine and telling stories and sharing music and I remember how equally familiar and unfamiliar their faces looked, all at once.

In Colchester, I have multiple things I call home and they can't shelter me from rain but they hold me; they don't have a dining table for me to eat at but they ask me if I've eaten today. In Colchester, I watch the leaves of multiple trees change around my house. By September, a few branches are an aged burgundy, while the rest are still a blinding green, but by October, there is a landscape of foliage around me that has transformed itself from what it used to be.

My Father's Mailbox

Jordan Douglas



In the Beginning

rosemary marr

In the expansion of the universe
when everything small became everything big,
it was quiet.

Everything was as it should be.
Everything was simply the way it was.

No expectations were failed,
because there were no expectations.

There was no doubt, no guilt, no other versions
where things could be more right
or more wrong.

Then dust became fish and
fish became monkeys.
Monkeys became you
then me.

So you cradled my soft head as the world became big
and loud.
You spoke my name and I remembered

everything was the way it should be, because
in the beginning, there was you.

ASC. Scorpio

Rowan Metivier



A Lucky Life

Buff Lindau

Who can believe that supermarket orchid
sent out green spikes, held steady, formed buds.
Slowly they grew, then opened, stretched fully wide.
Now it has three purple-striped unabashed lyrical blossoms
in the dead of winter, in the window where a chill intrudes
but a radiator sends heat from below—and we gaze in awe from above.

Strategies take hold; ice cubes for watering once a week.
Patience, observation, and this excellent reward—blooms!! and more to come
while winter prevails—different forecasts by the week.
Threat of the worst—ice—always lurking, but none so far . . .
grippers on shoes, salt on the front walk, a cane for walking with some
confidence.

We keep on keeping on, thriving on CSA variety veggies
a challenge, but ok, healthy.
We're bravely staring age in the face: both facing four score,
not three score and ten, actual four score.

Far from our stellar sons, we're stalwart,
chatting with them, planning visits (which covid halted),
chatting some more, ignoring all our health quirks
that these days come and stay, don't vanish if ignored like once.
They're here to stay—that knee pain, hip pain, shoulder pain,
just hoping it's far from the vital parts.

And so, us two, the cats, the orchids, carry on
embracing our lucky life.

What Could Have Been

Anna McNulty



My Father's Kitchen Window

Jordan Douglas



Tire Swing

Tien Young

It remains there in the backyard, tied and hanging from that old tree.
The rubber is peeling and sticky, the rope is worn and frayed,
but it still swings and sways in the wind and storm.
How long has it been there? You don't remember - he built it for you
when you were just a child.
You haven't used it in years, so a family of rats have moved in,
and yet, the memories of swinging with him remain,
even after he got that call,
left you and your mom in '55 and never
came home.

The Barn

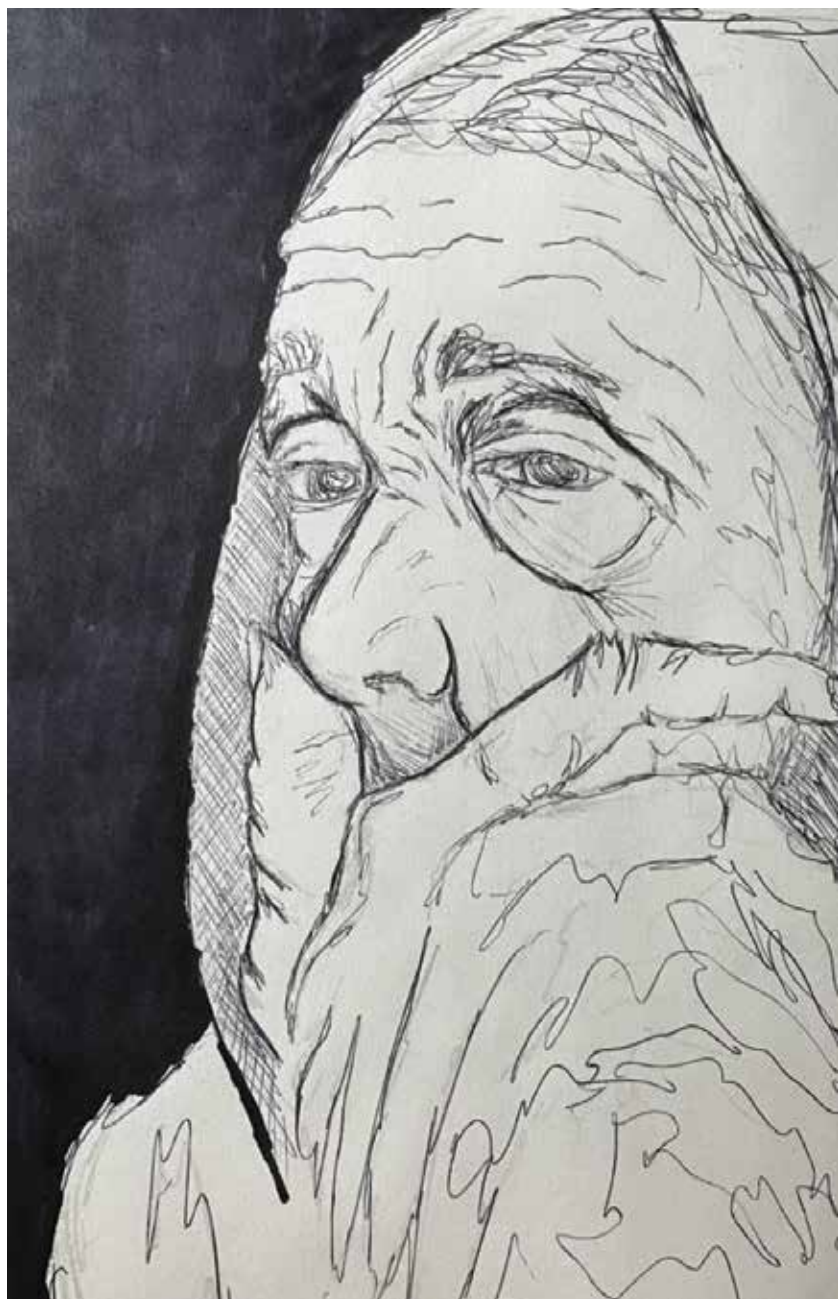
Izzy Kolb



Untitled
Gabby Doe



Old Age
Anna McNulty



Door Poem

Anonymous

And here at the crossroads of present and future,
A granddaughter photographs her grandmother in front of this door—
She stands behind her cell phone as her grandmother squints into the sun;
Granddaughter's shadow peeking out at the corner of the frame.

Back in 1954,
Her grandmother squinted into the sun in this same spot,
Only this first time around,
She was called granddaughter.
Pig-tailed and tiny,
In front of the same door
At her own grandmother's house after her first day of kindergarten.
The shadow of the photographer and Kodak Brownie at the corner of the
frame.

Here in front of this blue door,
On this ancient concrete path,
In front of the old farmhouse with slanting floors and too-low ceilings,
The sound of holiday traffic in the distance,
The sun shining brilliantly on the thin crust of snow,

Here at this crossroads
time is blurred
As granddaughter turns into grandmother
where first grandmother photographed;
now granddaughter photographs.

And so the circle of life continues,
Granddaughter becomes grandmother,
New roles, same door;
Photographed and squinting and smiling and loved.

Two Halves Make a Whole

Anna McNulty



The Neighborhood Cat Event

Buff Lindau

Up a tree,
that cat jolted the neighborhood,
triggered collaboration.
The drama of it, the urgency, the excitement,
five or six neighbors jumped to the rescue.
But we didn't know how, had no plan.
The glorious beast, way up, stuck,
moved gingerly out along the branch
then turned around, branch shaking.
He knew he couldn't back his way down.
Never had done. He'd clambered way up, fast.
Too far. Too fast.
We knew he was too high up to reach
and might go higher.
But he stopped. Recognized he was in trouble,
bared his fangs when we called and offered food.
Too high to rescue. We stared. We wondered.
Would we need a fire truck?
Stymied. We neighbors stood, ambled around,
called, "Come on, come on, kitty."

Then the cat's owner arrived home—
we hadn't seen her for weeks.
We reconnoitered,
said a dog, owned by the boyfriend visiting
his girl about to leave home for college, was the culprit.
Boyfriend's dog leapt from the parked car.
Chased the cat. Caused it all. So fast.
The colorful cat, brown and gold and black,
up so high before stopping to check.
Up and up. Then stuck. Minutes and minutes passed.
He took delicate careful steps in each direction
maneuvering along the shaky slim branch

back and forth, never downward. Then still.
Its owner hauled a ladder from her garage.
Astonishing the strength she had to carry it—
a serious heavy four-part retractable ladder.
Then she climbed, fast, all the way up, beyond the handholds,
feet on last rung, one hand reaching for cat, one hand on tree trunk.
Four neighbors held each leg of the mighty ladder,
supporting the mighty neighbor,
all of it situated by the tree on a slanted lawn,
a garden rock under one ladder leg stabilizing the tilt.
Up went the fearless owner,
calling, climbing, not stopping
offering cat food and cat bed
(my cats stared wide-eyed from the window).
“Joe, Joe, come on, Joe,” she shouted, pleaded, called.
Joe would not come.
(Who knew his name was Joe? It’s a good name.)
Freaked, Joe showed top and bottom fang-like teeth.

Tearing down the ladder, the owner ran into her house,
got a vented, soft-sided cat carrier.
Back up she went to the top step.
Holding on with one arm, she reached for Joe with the other.
Somehow she got Joe to get in the carrier.
How did that work? Why did that work?
Must have been the carrier smell. And the owner, of course.
She bravely held the tree branch and the cat carrier, on the top rung,
balancing the heavy weight of robust Joe—
a Maine Coon Cat of superior good looks.
Down from the high-up ladder, rung by rung
holding, balancing, moving.
Then off she went into her house
with Joe in the comforting cat carrier.
We put the ladder in her garage
put the food and cat bed and rock away.

Had the neighborhood silently linked up
with the one neighbor whose politics we avoid?
The danger, the shared excitement, the rescue
may have changed something on our short street
in this masked-up, fear-spreading, polarized, pandemic era,
swamped by an uncanny Vermont heat wave.

August 2021

Simple Poem

Dan Johnson

I know the lake by our house.
It moves from itself, ripples center to edge
from displacement, maybe a body from the dive tower,
or a bass hunting a fly. It sends itself outbound.

So too I go from my center to my edge,
from things I know, you and you and you and
you, to the fringes. I reach and follow. I ride the ripple
somewhere there to somewhere here. Yourself; myself.

My mother sees me with a pen,
an open notebook. She asks, *What are you
working on?* Says, *I bet you're writing about us.*

Untitled
Gabby Doe



Herniated Disk

Nate Hoadley



A Series of Sentences From my Bed

Nick Albino

My dreams take me to places I wish I was never aware of.

I'm haunted by the memories of what could have been.

I woke up to red-seeped blinds, cracks of light like scales, illuminating my grey two blanketed bed; my arm still hurts—the only thing appealing about getting up is the bathroom.

I wish every night for that street-lamp bulb to burn out, for it to not be replaced.

For a moment of stasis in failure.

The days must be so vivid to those who sleep at night.

Already I feel as though I've done enough, as if I've got no more to give.

But the sunrise will be beautiful this morning, I'm sure.

Every sunrise is beautiful.

And I stare until I am numb.

I couldn't give it justice to speak it; I can't say what should be & I can't write with a lead-weighted heart.

And now, at this point, so trapped in myself— nothing could change me.

Ah, where do I go when I daydream?

It feels as though I'm grasping, desperately reaching with my whole body at sand grains burning my skin, each grain a memory.

Each moment a wave.

I cannot think, I've thought my share already— I must sleep again.

Moon People

Rowan Metivier



Psalm of Amtrak Sundays

rosemary marr

Blessed be the fruit,
the strawberries spilled in the aisle,
sticking to white shoes,
staining her tread red.

Blessed be Your daughter
that thanks the cushioned seats
for their restrictive recline,
and snug spaces between chairs
where strangers' legs shake
in time, against the track.

Blessed be row solitude
and the Sunday Scaries,
Saturday night "sips" sworn into
soft sobriety in the morning.

Blessed be the high wires,
and the lowriders
sitting in coach,
spines slumped sideways.

Blessed be the glow from the window
that lights up just the sleeve of her sweater
and draws her eyes outward:

flora by the tracks

outward:

antique car graveyards and
rusted towns that pass by
in a yawn-and-stretch

outward:

trees down by the drying streams,
trees that become the mountains

outward:

where the sky is

blue,

blue,

blue.

The Coat

Buff Lindau

Pink with fur-trimmed hood.

A coat hung there, alone.
Hoisted on the wrought-iron fence
Surrounding the school play-ground
Of kids and swings and jungle gyms.

There it was, still, the next day
Small, limp, snow all around.

What did she do without it?
Go in after recess shivering?
What did the teacher say?

That sad coat sagging on the fence spike
With bedraggled white fur trim.
Who's looking after its girl?

Who's looking after the children?
How to keep them from abandonment
Hanging on a fence unclaimed.

Sweaty House

Izzy Kolb



Untitled
Gabby Doe



Maple Ideal

Cito DeNegre

Maple apotheosis
of rebellion in green haven-
if we are not mistaken,
no message hopeless
from that image graven
will say sweet leaves greet greenless ends;
far from heartless,
but with no whispers of gloom-
burn off, away in flash and fire,
with immortality as their last desire
(sylvan catharsis, burn bright in thy dying bloom).

Concrete Wall

Jenna Wilbur

i sense you there,
sitting around
the bend in this concrete wall.

i wish i could see you,
touch you,
feel you,
but i can't
'cause this concrete wall.

it is barren,
brutal, and
barring:
that concrete wall.

...

i'm sitting here—
on my side—
'round the bend of this concrete wall.

pondering
why
the world refuses
to resign,
and let me see you,
sitting there
on your side of the concrete wall:

in your yellowed lawn chair
with your now-white hair,
oh
you've grown so tall.

“if this was a race
you’ve won last place,”
i’d mumble as
you’d crumble, and bawl.

“i’ve missed you,” i’d say
as we’d lay
together
against the concrete wall.

Untitled

Emma Salvatore



Cherry Bikini

Faith Morgan

At seventeen, I could float through the halls of my school without wondering how much of a hill my stomach had made itself that year. At seventeen, I had a friend tell me that she felt self conscious when looking at me. Often, I wish I had felt sympathy and anger for what caused that to happen inside her but instead I just felt accomplished. It is no mistake that my legs have made themselves sturdier since then; the whole of me taking up more space in that which holds.

I am not a child anymore but I often find myself staring at photos from when I was. She still exists somewhere inside of me.

In the photo, the familiar curve on the inside of her knees is something that has never changed, something I still notice in the mirror, something that connects me to her. In her cherry bikini, her stomach is bold and without silence and I realize, then, that neither is her voice, and neither will it ever be.

How does a loud girl exist in a body that is too small to contain her, anyway?

It is no mistake, then, that the littleness which engulfed me at seventeen forced the girl into quietude. It forced her into relationships which climbed the social ladder; only yes's and no no's; a silence that never required conviction. She exists, also, still, somewhere inside of me. Sometimes I hear her calling, quietly, from a distance, and she carries all the voices of validation for her body with her, trying to convince me of something. I only now understand that to listen, to try to achieve what she has achieved, is only in hopes of satisfying that gaze.

Perhaps the hill of me now is the girl widening into the havoc that follows loudness or the truth. There is a grief that exists here. How does the girl grieve the body while also welcoming the woman? Ever since seventeen, I have only wanted to be a child again. To run down the

boardwalk of Hammonasset Beach in my cherry bikini, hair chopped into a bright blond bob, cheeks stained with the icy red of a push-up pop. Spinning, and pivoting, not for the camera but for the water, for dad, for the yellow that began to warm itself in my chest.

Ever since seventeen, I have only wanted to be a child again.
To exist in the body without even recognizing it as a body.
To just be.
Loud, big, without shame and honest.

Hollywood Small

Meg Krohn



The Sock Mystery¹

Greg Delanty

There should be an asylum for single socks,
lost, dejected, turned in on themselves.
The twin sock, soul mate, doppelganger gone AWOL,
on the lam, slipping through a time-space warp
somewhere within the module of the washing machine
or dryer rattling in the cellar's deep space. Gone
we know not where, to the afterlife of socks,
the Elysium of Argyle, the Valhalla of winter woolies;
the Shangri-la of crew, gold toe, tennis, summer wear.
Surely there's no purgatory or hell for socks,
even for absconders who walk out on partners, family,
before their soles are worn threadbare, their number up.
The odd time it happens, these socks get lonely
for the earth, and weeks, months later the prodigals
meekly reappear under a bed, cushion, wardrobe, only
to discover their partners have disappeared,
passed on, unable to make it alone. But how good
it is to see socks united once more, folded
into each other, close, touching, at one,
the deserter promising to stay put, not to take a hike,
not do a runner this time. No greater joy is known
than on these occasions. Such dancing, such cavorting,
such jubilation in the kingdom of sock.

¹ From *The Professor of Forgetting*, to be published August of 2023.

Long Night

Lily Friesan



That Town Distance (2020)

Robert Glover

His scooter runs past gravestones
bumping rough on a broken path,

town panic barring us from
other courses, making outlaw
green spaces my son prefers.

Through this marble garden we walk
familiar routes: scouts throng here
in dutiful spring, to plant flags
and tend to neglected plots.

Bare acres, now, no mourners.
The boy launches down a long slope -
hunched to balance and laughter
unfurling like a sun-lit scarf.

Our cache of joy has dwindled with
these Covid days - to bare face
to the sky and give breath to glee
unlatches my gated soul.

At the pocked resurrection arch
he calls back, beaming, heedless
of masks, weeds, blossoms or markers.
Tenuous bliss
shared in muted company.

Luna Moth

Ro Marr

By the week's end, the creature will have dried up,
hidden in the weeds where
the little fuzzy legs fell from the hickory tree.
It'll be found by a child,
kept in a shoebox, and forgotten
along with photographs whose faces, will in time, lose their names.

But this night,
it rests in the branches, waiting,
and inhaling from a mouth too small
to ingest anything
but the air around it.

The Spectator

Dan Johnson

I remember the dads who coached,
or were, in some more undefined way, involved.
These men would go red in the face, seize the grid
of their son's facemask, yank them close.
Are you fucking listening to me?

But you always stood away, often leaning solo
on the chain-link fence at DeSimone, or perched
on some distant height in the Granatell grandstand.
I never minded, could always spot you
from the field, knowing that all

I had to do was look where all the other
spectators weren't. You never said a thing
about the game, never uttered an opinion
about strategy or play, but always chuckled
about some odd moment, gave me some quiet

word of praise, patted me on my back
when my grey shirt was darkened with sweat.
I remember the day we bought you your own stick
at the Dick's in the mall. It was the only one
you've ever had, cheap. You played catch

with me even after the nylon sidewall
blew out. Us two in the backyard, or sometimes
an empty field. Always an empty field.
I'm listening, aren't I? All I have to do
to find us is look away from everyone else.

Impermanent Marks detail #1

Ian Trance



Thoughts From a Mirror

Nayeli Reeve

She only ever came to me when she was naked or crying.

When she was naked it was easier. She would take off her clothes, I would take off mine and we would stare at each other in silence. Sometimes it was staring, sometimes, it was a quick mean glance before moving on, and sometimes she would poke. She would jab a finger into my skin, poking and prodding and pulling at all of my blemishes, judging me in the silent way that she often did. My hand would move with hers as she roamed my skin, pointing out each imperfection. Trying to erase them away.

I hated it when she cried. When she cried, I cried, her emotions were my emotions. I hated it that way. I didn't want to love her so much, but I did, so when she cried it twisted something in me and I would cry with her. It hurt. I could do nothing but stand there, an arm's length away, watching the tears stream down her face, as I felt my face do the same. I would watch her face distort, mean and twisting. I would watch her as she watched me, we would cry, and even then, I could feel her judging me. I was not a pretty crier.

It hurt most when she cried while poking me. She was more judgmental then, picking at everything wrong with my skin, feeling the pain and hatred. Her touch was harsher too. I ached for her loving touch, but I knew it would never come. I would poke her back, I would pick at her skin while she picked at mine, and I would hope it felt more loving. It was hard, when being touched harshly to touch back nicely. I would try, she wouldn't care.

Sometimes she would laugh, she would take one look at me, and her face would split into a horrible mean laugh. I would laugh along, I had no choice, but I hated myself for doing it.

Sometimes, on rare, beautiful moments, she would smile when she saw me. Those moments were few and far between, but they were my favorites.

Her smile was soft, it would make every feature on her face seem more lovely. I would smile back at her, loving her smile, wishing the moment would last forever.

She never stayed for long. Often it was just a glance, a small judgmental look would cross her face, and she would move on. Sometimes she would stand there and stare, we would watch each other and whatever emotions showed on her face. She would never watch for long, a couple minutes at most, before she walked away again. Leaving me alone in the dark.

I hated when she walked away, no matter how mean she was, she was all I had. My world was blurry and black except for her. When she came to me, the light would enter my world, I would once again feel tethered to reality.

She would smile. I knew she would. No matter how many times she screamed and cried and judged, I knew she would eventually smile again. I loved that smile more than anything, it brought light to my world again. She would love my smile someday too; I knew she would. She had to.

Impermanent Marks detail #2

Ian Trance



The Cockroach, The Shoe, and You

Anna McNulty

I have come to value authenticity
in the people and things around me.
You are written all over the walls,
And you do not apologize for it.

Like the cockroach, who does not
Shy away from its simple truth
Of being a cockroach.
And does not try to hide itself,

Well, maybe from a shoe.
But you, my dear, do not.
You are you, and nothing but you
And it is brilliant.

Prospective Details

Faith Morgan

In the house,
I imagine a woman with too much company.
I imagine a woman who smells of vanilla.
I imagine a woman who keeps paint on her face
until her husband has fallen asleep.

In the morning,
She stacks a child like firewood in her arms
before setting him out
into the flaming orange sunrise
to catch the schoolbus.

When the house is empty,
she files callouses from her palms:
soft as her child's skin.

rat race

Kai Hines

When scientists die they come back as lab rats
And when politicians die they come back poor and drunk
And neither man less angry
And women come back as birds
And whales and bugs and things
Except for the rotten ones
Who come back as scientists

To My Mother²

(Marymount Hospice, Cork)

Greg Delanty

Tonight I keep watch over you dying,
the most peaceful night I ever knew.
I suppose it's the release of your going
drawn out over chemo months into

years. I soothe your agitated hand. You lie
under the nightlight's nimbus, reflected within
the black window—your bed and you fly
in the pane above the city's Saturday-night din.

Pure Chagall. You head into the stars,
over Summerhill, Capwell, Evergreen, the Black Ash;
hover above familiar streets and lanes, bars
folk sing in. There is no need to dash.

Your name has just been noble-called.
Sing South of the Border one last time. You
raise your voice above the Lee, the town you hauled
a lifetime of plastic bags through,

bowing into the drizzle, drudging home
along North Main Street, up Blarney Lane;
our city of hills, our Frisco, our Rome,
our Buenos Aires, our Varanasi. Rain weeps on the pane.

Your hand must be waving adios. Ma,
the night sky reflects our city below.
Now every light's a votive candle, your Fatima.
Behold the glass darkly. There you go.

² From *The Professor of Forgetting*, to be published August of 2023.

Hana's Sea

slee fowler



Belongings

Antonia Messuri

1979

You take the local to Grand Central. From Grand Central you get to Penn. From Penn to Chicago. From Chicago to Belton, Montana. Then just a short bus ride to Glacier National Park for a summer job that promises great adventure.

“It’s only 56 hours on the train,” my mother said to me encouragingly after we found out that flying there would be too expensive.

My mother had lit up with the vague idea of this possible summer job I’d listlessly mentioned on the phone less than a month before I graduated from college. I was rather understandably confused with nary a direction.

So a few weeks later, on an otherwise unidentifiable morning in May, with great purpose, my mother walked a number of yards ahead of me, lugging my duffel bag sideways against her belly as we headed down the hill to the train station.

She was moving at such a clip it was as if her life depended on it. Only it was my life she was trying to save. Oh sure, she wanted me to have this post-college adventure, she wanted me to see the wild west, and oh, those Rockies: Sure. She wanted me to be surrounded by young people my own age. Mostly though, what my mother really wanted was to save me from the life I’d cultivated the past four years while in college living eight hours north of the City. In Backwater Falls, New York, I’d fallen in love with a North Country boy along with all the backfire backwood trimmings. Only part-time immersed in my studies in English literature, I’d been full-time knee deep in tractors, pig farming, bull head feeds, and the joy of yokel locals in small time bars.

So this New York, New York, kind of Mother, who herself had originated from small-town heights, Ohio, and spent her summers in Potawatomie, wanted more for me than a life of desolation, bitter winters, and small-town regret. She wanted for me what she herself over time and with some lucky breaks had discovered: to see just how big the wide world really was. So it was time to bid adieu, arrivederci, sayonara, sawadika, and ciao for now to all the hay and hayseeds. Time to pour any leftover Genny Cream Ale down the rusty drain. Goodbye to Star and Rural Routes; ta-ta to ramshackle states of mind really that were in sad and sorry, severe and sky-high disrepair. The world was much bigger than that, brighter than that, and she was going to get me there.

Her strong arms wrapped around me as we rode the Metro South. I could feel her resolve. She would have gotten me to the mouth of that river even if she had to carry me the whole way there herself.

We pulled into Grand Central. Then we wove our way to Penn by subway.

And as we stood together in the dark on the platform beneath the station, waiting for the Amtrak, I thanked her.

“You belong to me,” she whispered in my ear, holding me close.

Then she put me on that train destined for Big Sky, shoved my bag above me, and kissed me a deeply warm and exuberant goodbye, telling me that everything would be okay.

As the train chugged down the line and out of town, I leaned my head against the dirty glass and watched my mother waving, smiling, crying.

2009

You take the highway off Route 7. From 89 you get on 91 South. From 91, you take exit 29A toward Capital Area. Merge onto Whitehead

Highway. Take a slight right onto the ramp. Look for Arch, then Main and Retreat. Look for Seymour and then just a short driveway up to Hathaway Hospital, where you'll see the signs for the IPU.

"Tell them at the front desk you're her daughter. Make sure they let you in," my sister had told me on the phone the night before.

And so I was let into the inpatient psychiatric unit and found the rec room just as the orderly was grabbing her by the back of her sweat pants, making sure she didn't tumble head first as she bent forward and nerf bowled.

"Look who's here," the affable aide shouted much too loudly under these circumstances.

The disheveled woman who was my mother turned her face toward me and flashed a cockeyed bozo smile plastered on a face that had worked hard to save face way too many years. Someone paying close attention could see the evidence of that in those eyebrows still holding the tension in the last lines of reserve. She made another nerf ball move, and the gutter ball picked up some laughter from the murmuring corners of the room.

After the game, an orderly arranged us next to each other on kitchen chairs. I put my head in her lap hoping this appeal might rekindle a connection, re-fire a synapse or two. Some kinesthetic link? Some lingering maternal desire? But no. My head lay in a stranger's lap waiting for some touch, but none came. Her hands, though, hovered a few inches above my forehead. I remained still, pressing my cheek against her thighs. I stared with my one available eye at the inside of her palms hovering over me and prayed. Why wouldn't they make a touchdown? Instead, my mother's hands stayed above me, wrapped loosely in some imaginary gauze, and blessed me with confusion.

So I wrapped my whole body around her in the dingy bed in the middle of the empty room next door, and we fell asleep together, two

strangers entwined, her shrunken head in the palm of God's hand.

And then I stood over her as she was being diapered. She gave me a faint look of shame, and I just smiled faintly back and told her that everything would be okay. The rising dust and smell of baby powder blessed us in this empty tomb, this sanctuary. A benediction.

Her cell mate took a slug at her. I shouted, "Don't you do that." The raccoon eyes staring at me told me I had come close to a sinister realm that I still pray I'll never understand. They spoke gibberish to each other as their wheelchairs crossed.

I leaned over and kissed my mother's skull, all that vast unfathomable space, whose personality had vanished, whose milk had long dried up, whose loving outstretched arms had flown the coop, now just flapped, whose eyes still danced for me only now in a disquietingly unknowing sea.

In my own sea of torment, my own alarm, something came sweeping in. However ignoble her demise, I suddenly saw that the Queen of Saints was at her side.

That's when I knew that this woman didn't belong to me anymore. Her road was paved in disappearing acts. Splotches of pavement would vanish in the night. Black holes, no sun, would rise to the surface in the morning. My mother had been taken to heaven long before she even died.

"I'm so proud of you," my mother told me throughout my life, making me shine like a bronze vase waiting for more flowers. I left her at the nurses' station and made my way down the corridor toward the exit door that would lock behind me. And in my broken vase full of grace, I turned around for one last look, and smiled and waved goodbye to her and wept.

“And I asked myself about the
present: how wide it was, how
deep it was, how much was
mine to keep.”

~ Kurt Vonnegut,
Slaughterhouse-Five

Senior Editor Biographies:

Nick Albino '23 is an Environmental Studies Major / English Minor from Woodbury Connecticut. When he isn't spending his time passing his time, he is daydreaming of new colors. Though new to the Onion River this year, he has swam before. And while some say he's bad at swimming, they'd be right. Never one to put much emphasis on his swimming capabilities, he often finds himself in bodies of water. But anyway; he is here now and had a hand in this.

Hallie Benton '24 is an English and environmental studies major. She is a cowgirl with no horse and the muse behind Jet's classic song, "Are You Gonna Be My Girl". When she isn't growing onions at the farm, she can be found eating them, editing them, and writing for them, too.

Cito DeNegre '24 is an English Major and French Minor, and still isn't sure why his last name is spelt differently across his legal documents. When not overburdened with readings for classes, he can be found trying to understand Russian and Old English grammar and climbing rocks (not at the same time, thankfully).

Jackson Greenleaf '23 is a Philosophy major with a Digital Media and Communications minor. Outside of the Onion River Review Jackson can be found listening to the same four songs on repeat for hours and weaving I Think You Should Leave quotes into casual conversation whenever necessary.

rosemary marr '23 (she/they) is an English major with minors in Creative Writing and Philosophy. She has been dubbed "RoseFairy" by artist and Onion River Review contributor, Slee Fowler. Rosemary enjoys supplying the community with fun facts that are not fun and certainly not facts. Rosemary does not enjoy verbal altercations with the trees, however they will not leaf her alone. After college, Rosemary dreams of learning to ride a bicycle, but understands not all dreams can come into fruition (luckily, onions are vegetables).

Faith Morgan '23 is a Business major with a Creative Writing and English double minor. In her free time, she has been knitting a collection of squares that will be made into a blanket sometime in the next decade. She firmly believes that the conclusion of her last Onion editing session will cause her face to look as though she has just chopped an onion.

Kaylee Sayers '23 is an English and Political Science double major with a minor in Global Studies. In her free time, she can be found crocheting stuffed elephants and reheating leftover pasta respectively. She is terrified of one day being forced to participate in a casual karaoke session.

Auxiliary Editors:

Annabelle Farrell '25 is a Political Science major with minors in Spanish, Global Health and Gender Studies.

Mary Kohn '24 a double major in Biology and Art & Design.

Sophia Meimaris is a Junior English major, with minors in Education and Gender Studies. She loves crafting and can frequently be found with her roommates in their common room.

Jenna Wilbur (she/her) is a freshman who is majoring in Environmental Studies and planning to minor in Creative Writing. Playing in the dirt, making art, and being an avid collector of various knick-knacks are some of her favorite pastimes. She intends to have domesticated a campus squirrel by the end of this year and foresees many pet cats as a part of her future endeavors.

Yours in Eternal Onionhood,
The ORR Staff 1973-2023