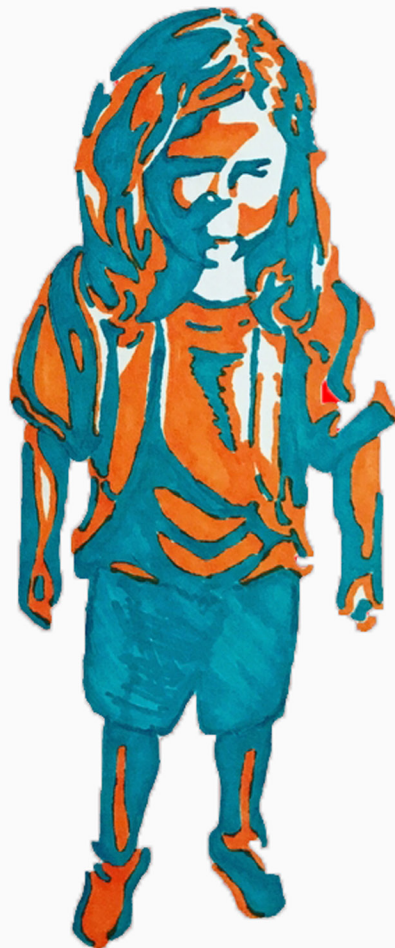


# *snaggletooth*

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Issue 1  
Spring 2018





## STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF	Anna-Elena Maheu Eden Rickolt
MANAGING REVISIONS EDITOR	Olivia Gomez
EDITORS	Henry Buckley Justin Hoden Elliot Wilson
VISUAL ART EDITOR	Becca Havian
LAYOUT DESIGNER	Carolyn Snow Elliot Wilson
TREASURER	Julia Treadwell
COMMUNITY LIAISON	Lily Meier

### A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

As of January of 2018, Bates College had no literary arts magazine. There was no platform through which student-written work could be published on a regular basis; there was no student-curated creative publication that brought Bates writers together. We started *snaggletooth* to help build this community at Bates -- to foster an environment where our managing editor Olivia saying "this poem's the tits" after reading Hope Logan's "Thanksgiving" aloud is a valid and encouraged form of literary commentary. After only two months of meeting weekly with our dedicated, talented and spunky staff, we feel that we are truly on our way to accomplishing this goal. One of the first matters we had to settle before embarking on this project was the name. After playing with some fairly atrocious possibilities, we settled upon *snaggletooth* because it encapsulates the personality of what we think this magazine will come to represent. We believe that because Bates was lacking a literary arts magazine, there is a whole side of this school-community (a potentially less wholesome, impolitic underbelly) that has been missing an outlet through which it could express itself. *A snaggletooth* serves to represent this -- a sharp, unsettling, deeply organic thing that asserts its presence by jutting out against the grain. Lastly, we want to thank our faculty advisor Jess Anthony and our co-sponsor WRBC for making the creation and printing of this project possible!

We hope this first issue knocks your socks clean off.

*-Anna & Eden*



COVER ART  
*Dreaming, Floating*  
marker  
Eden Rickolt  
2016

*Seattle, Washington*  
digital photography  
Elliot Wilson  
2017



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## Art

Last week I doused my pasta  
in melted butter,  
I wanted a fatty bite.  
The bowties glowed  
in the light, but when I tried  
to fork a piece into my mouth  
that little bastard slipped  
and slithered its way off  
jumping for freedom- hoorah

then splat! onto my lavender shirt.  
Dammit. I plucked that dead thing  
by the wing and stared  
at the greasy remains:  
a perfect “fossil” of a butterfly  
too slick to survive.

I should have given  
the shirt to a museum:  
“Butter on cotton: A study of time  
and fragility” I could have made  
hundreds of them, a whole exhibit  
traveling from city to city.  
People would have brought their families  
and paid to see...

Instead I shoved it in the laundry  
hoping some tide would fix it.  
I didn't want strangers to gawk  
at the bowtie stain  
in the middle of my chest,  
it was too intimate.

You can't look at art  
with the artist in the room.

- *Eden Rickolt*





*Untitled*  
film photography  
Becca Havian  
2017

## From the Seed

All I understand is that I'll be changing  
right through the very last moment.  
Did you see how when we sat,  
sipping sprite,  
you changed me with your song?  
Or how you planted something new in me  
every time we talked?  
I've been blooming in shades  
that the seed never saw coming,  
been slowly breathing in  
this world's pain  
and knowledge and poetry,  
and until the final instant  
I expect to wake up each morning  
with a new garden to explore.  
I know I'll find that yesterday's rain  
gave me cherry tomatoes  
and sweet corn.

At the very end I will be a forest,  
so weathered, wild and transformed.

And in that moment, too, I will love  
what I know I've been all along.

- *Olivia Gomez*

i

i gave all my love to the dream of us,  
and in doing so i neglected my own  
home-body.  
when i fed the fantasy of you  
i starved the potential of this  
magnificent garden  
right here.  
it was not you  
it was loving.  
it was falling in love with  
that much feeling.  
you didn't nurture me  
you made me crave the thrill of agony.  
and there will be someone else  
who comes along with the intention  
of watering this botanical home,  
which only i can rescue.

- *Olivia Gomez*



## An Apology to Dad

Sorry I won't answer your message,  
but "how are you?"  
has more than one answer  
and it's been a few days since we've spoken,  
longer still since I last heard your  
deep southern drawl on the other line.

Today, I've been thinking about the time  
we were in St.-Paul-de-Vence  
and watched the old men outside the café  
playing billiard balls in the hazy afternoon heat.  
I asked if I were to get lost  
in the sea of linen-wearing tourists inundating  
the village's miniature squares,  
in the twisted, Gothic streets adorned with vines  
and heart shaped holes on wooden windows,  
would you find me?

Do you remember how you said  
you would whether I was ten miles away,  
or ten thousand?  
All I had to do was call your name.

Campus last night was empty  
as I clutched my ripped tights  
and walked with January biting my bare legs,  
the coldest I've ever been.  
I whispered your name  
like you might come  
to pry me away from the jaws of the Maine winter,  
and I was seven years old again.

I'd press my answer to your question  
into the palm of a stranger before giving it to you.

- *Anna Mangum*

tried and died

in the sky, a once bird sings  
a once song.  
a now bird  
cannot carry the same tune along.  
the first bird falls from the sky  
knowing no flight means that final dive.  
the second bird sings new notes  
and knows more\* than i.

i only know  
the red crash  
of a once white  
now black  
bird  
simmering and dead  
on summer pavements,  
making no song.

\*of silken air  
of sitting in trees  
of slowly sipping time

-Anna Mangum

## Baby-things

Bean and I fought over who got to open the packet of Instant Life Eggs and pour it into the water-Water Purifier mixture. I said because he started without me and poured in the Water Purifier yesterday, I got to shake in the eggs, but he said that had he known that he was responsible for picking between the Water Purifier and the Instant Life Eggs, he obviously would have opted for the seamonkey eggs. Five days later, the tiny tank had a galaxy of babies orbiting each other and Bean and I watched them in a perfect silence, heads together. Every week, we switched who got to spoon in the Growth Food until I got bored and let him have it every week. My brother never lost focus -- he would sit and just stare at these little whiskery crescents moving around in the water, sticking together, producing, dying. Maybe he was wondering about life cycles. Is change a criterion for being alive? Moving, dying, making more of you. When we had seamonkeys, it was just us. Me and Bean, 7 and 10. Before a kid realizes the terrible minds that spin and whirl around them; before we know that the world keeps on becoming itself even if we're not there, becoming in it. Bean is good at keeping things alive, and when I reassume the responsibility of the Growth Food, the water grays and the little things die from being overfed.

Then: the painted lady butterfly starter kit, with the round plastic container housing five little caterpillars, stripy and slow. This was meant to be my project, but Bean was fascinated with the scooting spinal movements of the caterpillars and so I let him be a part of it. They tripled in size, and then, pulled by some biotic prophecy -- one that makes less and less sense to me as years form distance between the now-me and this time -- slowly crawled up their cup and attached their bodies with silk to the underside of the lid. Are we all this predictable? Their bodies trembled with change, fading to a bluish grey, hardening into dry, flaky half-moons. Being born again means you have to die. What we thought were their heads fell to the floor of the cup, but we looked this up to find it was normal. Bean said he wished he chrysalized, became something so different so fast. When no one was looking I poked at one, and it fell to the bottom of the cup, frozen forever in this half-life. Bean yelled at me, and his voice cracked as I watched the birth of a new meanness in him. Are we predictable? Catty kiddish thoughts cocoon themselves and cruelty flaps out, thin angry wings beating and beating. When it was time to move the lid, our dad did it, steady hands, like you're supposed to, into the spiral netted butterfly enclosure that came with the kit. The first painted lady ballooned out of its cocoon when nobody was watching. I released them in my bedroom, little spotted flapping things shaking up the stillness. Our mom yelled at me for doing this: we're supposed let them free outside the apartment. She was yelling, but one stopped to land on my nose: the room stopped beating and she halted mid-sentence, looked.

Then 2 feathery beta fish that I bought with my first few allowances. I gave one to Bean for his fourteenth birthday. They both had long names, shortened to Luke and Olive. Beta fish have boring life cycles, uneventful days. I overfed them both, and one day they rolled up to the surface, round bellies covered in white scum. Bean was caught with what our parents realized was oxy in his pocket. He sobbed, said he was holding it for a friend, and our mom cried, too, watching the beginnings of this strange baby in front of her, too-big body, shell-less and vulnerable and leaving. Blackish hair thick and coarse now. I wasn't really crying at all as I poured Luke and Olive's round bowls into the toilet, and flushed.

I killed a three-legged hamster named Pepper. She lost her leg in a hamster-wheel accident and then got fat in our cage because I gave her too many treats. She died big and tired. Bean punched me in the stomach with a strength he realized too late.

Bean had abandoned me by the time we had Calvin, a perfect little Havanese our mom drove me to Amish country to buy, thrilled that we didn't have to worry about our dad's allergies anymore. We took him home from a breeder with impressive mutton chops and he peed on my thighs in the car. Calvin couldn't be alone for more than a minute before he'd begin to cry, so he slept in my dad's spot in the bed on a towel. I came home from school and my mom was crying again saying she didn't know why she thought buying an expensive baby thing would be a quick fix and Calvin was back in Amish country before I knew it...

I want something with real wings this time, something that coos.  
Lives a long time. I started having dreams about coaxing babies out  
of faceless women; sometimes dreams of having my own.  
I have them all the time, sometimes I'm the baby, sometimes I'm the  
mother, the midwife, the baby is Bean, I'm our mother.  
I'm the midwife. I'm the mother. I'm the baby I'm the midwife I'm  
the mother I'm the baby I'm the mother I'm the seamonkey I'm the  
mother I'm the painted lady I'm the baby I'm the fish

I'm your mother. I'm your mother. Don't cry.

- Anna-Elena Maheu



*Black Eye*  
chalk pastel  
Anna Helms  
2015



## Blackberry Smooshing

Light stings your eye from the rear-view mirror  
as the sun makes its way above the horizon at your back.  
You're going somewhere new, a little village  
in Mount Lebanon you have been taught to call  
home.

The engine shakes the floor beneath your feet,  
and it reminds you of somewhere you have been,  
of summers spent picking through grass  
and blackberry brambles to find something useful and  
familiar.

The car lurches on an uphill shift  
and you are sent tumbling forward into  
something unexpected: a countryside  
dappled with spots of light and the twisted arms  
of olive branches reaching towards the sky –  
an unfamiliar landscape crafted by a familiar  
hand.

You would always smoosh the largest berries  
to watch their sticky juice run down your wrist.  
And now you wonder how this country bleeds. If the trees  
sing different hymns when the wind comes down from  
the mountains to say that winter is passing,  
and that the sun still rises in the East,  
which is alive,  
and by July the blackberries will be ripe again,  
but someone will drop olives in your palm and say,  
ya elbi, my heart, ya hayate, my life;  
it is in the ground.

- *Justin Hoden*

## Television Lights Flickering Before Empty Chairs

When I walk home  
On Central Avenue late each night,  
There is a house I pass  
That always strikes me.

Through a window  
Television lights flicker  
In front of two empty  
Reclining chairs.

Next to the chairs  
Is an old photo  
Of a young girl smiling.  
She has red hair and wears a pink blouse.

Sometimes it is a football game,  
Sometimes an old western.  
No matter what is playing,  
The chairs are always empty.

Tonight as I pass by,  
I see my grandparents' house  
Through the window.  
I see pink shag carpeting,  
Ashtrays, china dolls,  
And half-used cans of Cheese-Whiz.

My Grandma and Grandpa are sitting  
In their own recliners,  
Vacuum cleaner infomercials flickering  
Before their vacant eyes.

Next to them  
Is a photo of my mother.  
I see her long strawberry blonde hair;  
It is the day of her high school graduation.

On the left is my Grandma Lynn.  
She used to work for the telephone company.  
She would throw elaborate Christmas Eve parties  
Where she served pot after pot of coffee,  
Always smiling broadly.  
She and my aunts would gossip long past midnight.

As she grew older,  
She became too tired to shop on Christmas.  
Instead she would slip my parents forty dollars for a gift.  
On Christmas Eve I would thank her  
And she would ask softly,  
"What did you get?"

.

Tonight her stare is glassy  
And her face expressionless.  
The television lights dance on her paper thin skin.

Beside her is my Grandpa Ray.  
He used to work for the American Can Company.  
Once known as the great coupon detective,  
He would drive around all day on the weekends  
In search of the best deals on Staten Island.

He kept a little notebook,  
In it the names and ages of his grandchildren,  
Each written with neat, pristine penmanship.

Tonight his breathing is labored,  
His memory faded.  
“Where is the little girl?”  
He would ask me of my sister  
Toward the end of his life.

Watching through the window  
My grandparents begin to disappear.  
Again the recliners are empty,  
The television lights absently flickering upon them.  
I continue my walk home.  
It’s late, and I need to get up early.

- *John Ricatto*

## Callisto Becoming a Bear

Callisto was not a virgin anymore. She was a bear.  
She awoke in the strange pain of a new skin  
or maybe awoke in wonder  
as the sky folded her into its dark fabric.  
Her eyes became stars; the stars became a field of eyes  
staring into themselves in the ocean's mirror.

I stare into the bathroom mirror  
and imagine how it would feel to become a bear.  
My face pulling forward; my eyes  
deepening to liquid brown. I could shed my skin  
and take on another's. I could shed the fabric  
off my body to bare my pelt to the wonder

of raw touch. My neighbor is a wonderful  
hunter. She killed a bear and hung her teeth from her rearview mirror.  
The bear's death opened a tiny tear in the fabric  
of the North Woods, which she mends now by becoming a bear.  
Stomach full of meat, she sleeps wrapped in bearskins.  
Above her house, Ursa Major keeps a watchful eye.

Once in the woods I locked eyes  
with a grizzly bear. Was it wonder  
or fear we exchanged? Our skins  
were raised with it, whatever it was. I saw myself mirrored  
in her eyes, and I forgot for a moment who was bear  
and who was woman – as if we were a double stitch in the fabric

that held us in our places, the fabric  
that the fates were weaving – but their eyes  
had grown weary with age and while embroidering bears  
and women they slipped and sewed a wonderful  
convergence of the two – distorted mirror  
images, blurring fur and skin.

Who is hunter and who is prey in this new skin?  
Bear claws tear open women as easily as fabric,  
and women carry shotguns. Mirrored  
in the blood of the other, our eyes  
look unfamiliar, and we can't help but wonder  
who was wounded, and whose pain do we bear?

Callisto became a woman, then a bear. She bore  
the pain of virgin and woman and bear, and wondered  
why was her sorrow so vast it could not be contained inside only one skin.

*-Jesse Saffair*



*Untitled*  
film photography  
Justin Hoden  
2017



*Untitled*  
film photography  
Justin Hoden  
2017



## Thanksgiving

Can you believe what's happening? my uncle said.  
Who would do that? All over New England, safe in dining  
rooms adorned with seascapes and red-gold rugs,  
the turkey went cold and the cranberry sauce congealed.

The dance stalled. The red wine paused. A hush crawled  
into flickering candles. The chatter of college classes and state  
taxes subdued. Names we knew: Weinstein, Spacey, Simmons  
intruded into the room, percolated into narrative, and circulated the chandelier.

My uncle asked how and where these things happened. My aunt hissed,  
what does that matter now? The sibling spat amplified. Blame  
bounced and broke, words sharpened and split, too quick  
to catch and much too frenzied to allow.

The wine glasses remained full when her headlights fled  
the driveway. Her fork, unexcused, sat primly placed  
atop her plate. Her potatoes solidified. Her turkey sat still,  
expecting her return. But her story remained uneaten and intact.

My father proclaimed precariously that his sister  
would come back. I knew my uncle's warm, cape house of hardwood  
and reupholstered chairs. I knew this house of hide-and-seek  
and nights spent tumbling up and down the stairs.

But the tender crack of my uncle's voice, that I didn't know. I froze  
when I heard my father's tenor there, the one that had always  
soothed my childish tears. The break in pitch shattered  
our cadence of dinner and whispered life into my fears.

I couldn't breathe. I knew why my aunt would not return. I knew,  
the women heard something brew from behind and threaten to plunge  
us into truth. But they only praised the brussel sprouts while we teetered  
on mute histories, too close to nudge, too near to ignite.

I felt the room slip into my hands. I could claim  
the revolution, let passion surge through the door.  
But when I faced my father's frightened eyes, I was not his peer.  
I was his daughter, with a home, not yet lost to the night outside.

I poured myself more wine. The room exhaled. With the realm  
protected, shielded and sound; the familial tempo  
returned. By pie, we were in firm agreement, we couldn't believe  
no one would see it, and the candles continued to burn.

*-Hope Logan*



*Untitled*  
Ceramics  
Robert Dee  
2018



*Untitled*  
Ceramics  
Robert Dee  
2018

## Flight

Imagine night where my breath makes  
dew form: heat radiates and evaporation stalls.  
My hands are pale under a full moon.  
The morning comes.

Leaves rustle, loons call low, Barred Owls hoot  
eight times, the peepers shriek, and mosquitoes buzz.  
The quiet is not quiet.  
I breathe and metamorphose.  
I am hatching.

My veins stretch, skin breaks, and bones burst  
from my shoulder blades. No spells  
are uttered yet my very own  
protein keratin protrudes  
through my cotton shirt.  
Atom by atom my feathers;  
the rachis, the barbs, and the vane are built.

My body is opened ground. The splitting  
echoes like tree roots ripped from soil. My bloody  
evolution joins the chorus of night.  
I cry out  
to the dark; no answer.

With a swoop, I rise sleek into cool air.  
I am no Icarus and I won't fall.

I hear a racoon forage in a dumpster  
and glimpse the outline of a fin whale against dark water.  
I ride the Gulf Stream to Greenland.  
I watch an iceberg slip into  
lukewarm ocean.

I pierce the Stratosphere  
and touch the ozone layer; just three oxygen molecules,  
millimeters thick; the width of a penny.

The air vibrates when  
I hurtle myself into orbit and there  
I stay chasing the new dawn.

The news  
will say, there's a new meteor in the sky.  
The news will say it's a product of North Korea!  
They will hold their breath, train their missiles,  
and wait for me to hit the ground.

They will fear for their world.  
They will think  
I'm a god, I'm a planet, I'm a plane, until they realize  
no, it's just a bird.

- *Hope Logan*

## Don't Think Too Much About It

When I was a girl  
my mother told me  
not to swallow

watermelon seeds  
or vines would sprout  
from my mouth.

I am the daughter of rural America,  
raised in a garden.

I sustain.  
My shame is stained  
with red blossoms.

I get home from work and cook dinner.  
We eat the fruits of my labor  
but I eat less than my share.

I am dinner.

I pulled three ticks  
off me today. I picked  
them up in the field.

I am a mother, weighed down  
by my swollen breasts.  
I am a river of milk.

When I was a girl  
my mother told me how to rotate  
crops to prevent soil depletion.

Am I the farmer or the farm?

I have been told  
I could suck the chrome  
off a trailer hitch. I have been told

it is not my place to think  
too much about who sucks what  
out of whom.

Am I mother earth?

After crops become harvest  
and furrows lie fallow  
will I be nothing but hollow?





*Untitled*  
film photography  
Becca Havian  
2017

## Friday Night

It's Friday night and you still don't have any plans. You're not surprised because you don't have many friends, and the ones you do have don't like going out with you because you drink Smirnoff Ice. It started as a joke. Your college friends had a reunion and hid them all around the Airbnb. The first time, you took a knee, chugged it a little too slowly then let out a burp, and tried to dab. You accidentally poked yourself in the eye. Everyone laughed. It was fun. You were the coolest of your friends. They called you a hero. The second bottle was hiding under the hand towel on the bathroom counter. You brought it with you from the bathroom. "It happened again guys! Watch, I'll do it in five seconds!" You took another knee but fewer people were watching. You chugged as hard as you could for five seconds. The bottle was still more than halfway full. Your friends Jenny and Katherine said they had to get something, so you sat down on the sofa. "It's just you and me," you whispered as you stroked the neck of your grape Smirnoff Ice. You thought about how other people said it tasted like cough syrup. You wondered why everyone pretends that cough syrup tastes bad. You are the only one willing to admit you like it.

You're unique. That's why tonight, instead of going to a bar, you go to the art museum. You remember that you have a membership. You bought it a couple of months ago after watching *Mona Lisa Smile*. It is now your favorite movie, or at least your favorite movie that Kirsten Dunst is in. Or at least your favorite movie with Kirsten Dunst that's not *Bring It On*, although the weird Holocaust one was good. This reminds you that you want to go on Birthright. As a confirmed Methodist, you need to reconnect with the homeland. You are pretty sure your Grandfather is Jewish. The body scrub that you found in the check out aisle of TJ Maxx has minerals from the Dead Sea. Swimming in it is supposed to help your acne. Plus, you have been wanting to change your Instagram aesthetic. Maybe you'll make a new one - a travel-gram. You smile at the thought of how cultured you are.

Which is why when you go to the art museum, you take notes and critique the art. Your freshman year of college you took an art history class about women in art. You got a D on the final because your paper was "not intersectional." You didn't like the professor anyway. You wonder for a second if she was right, but then remember that you are a quarter Jewish. You finally find the contemporary wing of the museum. You could have found it with a map but you don't want to look like a newcomer. You are cultured, after all. You stand in front of three different paintings and nod your head. They really resonate with you. You turn the corner to see two standard looking bathroom signs with caution tape covering the doors. You marvel at the subversion in this piece. You sit down on the bench nearby and start taking notes. You write about the gender binary that you learned about in your college class. You note the details in the piece. "Wow," you think to yourself, "they even put fingerprints on the handles." You take your phone out to snap a picture of the installation but you forget to turn the sound off. You look over to see that the museum employee is coming your way. You start to think of excuses: you're a student, or you're looking to buy the piece, or you are the artist. When she comes over you apologize. She looks confused and politely lets you know that there are working restrooms located on the second floor. She apologizes for the inconvenience - the bathroom was flooded this morning. You try to tell yourself that she is part of the art - a whole performance piece. But even you realize you're full of shit. You mutter "thank you" and decide to go home.

When you get back to your apartment, it is too late to try to find people to go out with. You decide you don't like going out anyway. You look in your fridge for something to eat. You take out some hummus and chips. You decide to start preparing yourself for the mediterranean diet. You close the door and sit down. You look for something to watch on Netflix. You search for movies with Kirsten Dunst, and choose *Mona Lisa Smile* over *Bring it On*, because, well, you're not like the other girls. Before hitting play, you go back to your fridge to look for something to drink. You take out a green apple Smirnoff Ice and pour it into your only wine glass. You swish it around, take a sniff, and gulp it down.

- Eden Rickolt



*Haniya*  
oil and charcoal  
Saleha Belgaumi  
2018



## A Diagnosis: *Radiation Dermatitis*

His art is unlike any other.  
His art is precise and calculated,  
And although some may call him cold,  
His art allows them to continue to have an opinion.

The woman sits on his blank canvas,  
Her face just that: blank, unearthly, scared even.  
“What is wrong with me?” she says sheepishly.  
Without an utterance, his paintbrush hits the blank canvas.  
Her blank canvas.

Her blue gown with white bows in the back falls to the ground  
Allowing him to fully assess and calculate and calculate and calculate.  
The rhythm of his paintbrush striking her canvas grows,  
As the beat of her heart races nervously in sync.

He confronts her with the words, “Radiation Dermatitis.”  
After a final moment of ignorant blankness,  
She stands up to view his masterpiece,  
“I, I have that? That’s me?”  
He nods and his lips curl with relief of her understanding.

She redresses quickly,  
Not with distress, but with excitement,  
And excuses herself.  
In the waiting room,  
Her husband greets her with swift solace,  
And then moves his gaze to the artist that evoked his wife’s excitement.  
He pays him a quick nod for acknowledging his wife’s beauty.  
And without buying the doctor’s art,  
The couple vanishes from the hospital  
With only a new appreciation for the vibrancy of the independent beauty in the color existing on  
the woman’s skin.

- Sommer Glasgow

## silent night

the air feels dry and hot on your cheeks,  
and mother is looking at you funny  
as if you've done something unforgivable  
like skipped church on Christmas, or  
kissed a boy at the dinner table,  
but all you've done is burn the house down  
and the air is dry and hot, and  
she should thank you, because  
it's December, and  
without the fire you'd both be freezing.

It's the same dream every night,  
the box of matches,  
the empty jugs of lamp oil,  
and mother's eyes  
not sure what to make of her son  
who now stands outside the burning house,  
visible to her, yet  
on land she can neither fathom nor touch.

Every year it's the same,  
the good boys brush their teeth for Santa Claus,  
the birds fly south,  
but we,  
we are unlike those birds  
who read the language of the earth  
and return year after year  
regardless of thought or will

we had never known how  
to bridge this divide,  
to come together in one body,  
but we made it to the other side  
only capable of understanding  
in dreams.

*-Justin Hoden*



*Terlingua, Texas*  
digital photography  
Elliot Wilson  
2017



## The Widow's Walk

Carol decided to make popcorn and toast for dinner again. The cupboards had been bare for at least a week, save for the value pack with movie theater butter that occupied the top shelf in the corner along with a bottle of cooking oil. The paper bag began to fidget, spinning lazily on the glass plate that ran slightly off its track. It clinked against the inside wall every few seconds. She barely noticed the minutes that passed, transfixed with the microwave's pulsating hums and ticks. Daylight had left while the kernels popped so she ate in a dim kitchen, one light above the oven casting a foggy yellow.

When Carol and Martin had looked at the New Bedford house, the realtor had pointed out the widow's walk with a mysterious glee, like a museum curator might talk about an ancient artifact. Interesting, but now mainly good for trivia or a bit of history. It was a sort of rooftop patio, a fenced-in square at the top of the house. The realtor gestured to a pull-down ladder in the upstairs second bedroom.

"The idea was that wives of sailors could use it to watch for their husband's return from sea. Typically seen on 19th-century homes, here on the coast." Martin and Carol had nodded, intrigued. They hadn't spent much time in New Bedford, but everywhere they looked they found remnants of its maritime history. There were the museums and historical signs, of course, but it was more than that. The people who walk solemnly along the streets, the rusted fishing boats, the liquor stores— all of it seemed tailored to a solitary life at sea. Of course, whaling had long since ended its tenure as the city's chief industry, but to them it looked as though not much had changed.

"Legends will have a woman in a long dress, pacing back and forth, waiting in vain for a sunken ship. You might even find some ghosts around here." The realtor gave a halfhearted laugh. He adjusted his clipboard and began to talk about track carpeting.

They'd come to New Bedford following a residency opportunity for Carol at the Southcoast Brain & Spine Center. They'd been dating for three years and living together for one, and both had plenty of confidence marriage was somewhere in the future when they signed the documents from Century 21. Martin had just begun to work remotely, so the move was a sensible enough decision. They'd rented a u-Save van at the start of the summer when the air was hot and wet and their forearms beaded in sweat over cardboard boxes and masking tape. They spent their first few days in New Bedford unpacking. Plates and bowls were in the last box in the back of the car so they ate out of saucepans with plastic utensils from past take out orders and grocery store delis. The more time they spent sitting on stools in the kitchen, the more they noticed that asymmetry of the house, the cracking ceiling, the way the washboard sat crookedly between countertops of different heights.

They went to the whaling museum on a Friday afternoon, prompted by the realtor's suggestion from the March before. A whale skeleton of astronomical proportions hung from the ceiling. They circled around a replica of a ship and murmured over cases of scrimshaw. They listened in on a local school group's tour to hear that New Bedford was once called "The City That Lit The World", supplying whale oil for lamps across the nation. It certainly didn't anymore, Carol had thought, glancing out at the drab grayscale rain draping over rusty buildings with punched out windows. They circled back to the first room, with the whale skeleton - sixty six feet long, the sign said. They craned their necks back and stood underneath it, slowly turning to get the full view.

"Careful!" A museum attendant approached them, smiling. "You might get dripped on. This skeleton has been oozing oil for twenty years. Whale bones are so oily,

we can't even predict when it will stop!" They stepped back from underneath the bones. Martin turned to the attendant.

"How did this one die?"

"This one was tragically hit by a tanker off the Nova Scotia coast," she said, a sympathetic frown peeling her lips down. "Its body was recovered for research, the skeleton reassembled, and then given to the museum by the National Marine Fisheries Service." Martin's eyes lingered on the bones for a few more moments, waiting for a drop of oil to dribble from the skeleton, but nothing came. He wondered if what the woman had said was true, or a repetitious fun fact.

At the kitchen counter, Carol's fingers scraped against the bottom of the popcorn bag, among unpopped kernels and burnt bits. The butter coated her fingernails, which had grown long. She hadn't cut them in a while. She wouldn't go to bed for an hour or two, for fear of spending too long in the not quite nighttime light that frequented the pale walls. She looked around the kitchen and wondered how she'd pass the time. The warmth of the stove light and the worn wooden floors were a nice contrast to the whitewash of the ICU, but a terrible reminder that she wasn't there.

After graduating, Martin had found work designing sets for talk shows. His first project was for a morning show on Fox 5. The executives had noted that they'd wanted a 'fresh and progressive design', but had balked at his first proposal. Too far, they'd said. Our viewers need to be able to relate to it. A tireless back and forth ensued, finally resulting in a set design not unlike most waiting rooms and Martin grumbling about his artistic integrity. Several slow years passed, and the two of them lived frugally as Carol finished school. Word passed around, though, and soon enough Martin had been approached by larger affiliates of CBS and ABC. He took over the second bedroom as his studio, the floor constantly littered with sketches of coffee tables, large desks, armchairs, and lighting designs. Carol always rubbed his shoulders and said "that's nice!", wanting to support him as best she could while studying for various med school exams and licensure. They were busy, but they loved each other, so they made it work.

Martin's was one of those forgotten about jobs that most people don't notice. His task was to create a set that enhanced the show without ever calling attention to itself- it was more important for it to be boring and pleasant than to be thought provoking and creative. In introductions he referred to himself as a designer, reminding himself of earlier dreams to work alongside architects and civil engineers. In reality, though, he spent his days hunched over the drafting board or fax machine, spending hours on the phone with talk show executives with kitschy taste and engorged egos.

He had been excited about the move. The New Bedford house had big rooms he could spread out in, and windows and skylights to provide some semblance of connection to the world outside. To give himself structure, he pretended that he had to be working by nine each morning. Carol left by six-thirty every morning, while he slept. After five years of residency and another two in fellowship, Southcoast had offered her a full time position as a neurosurgeon. She felt like she owed them something, too, that she would be of some help in New Bedford. Martin seemed to be taking well to the new city and his new studio, and so rather than apply to other hospitals and relocate again, she accepted. As they spent months, and then years in the New Bedford home, their schedules became more and more estranged. They forgot to get married. Six months in, the Center had to downsize, and laid off one of the other surgeons. Carol absorbed more duties, spending longer hours in the OR, away from the house and Martin.

He had taken to filling his free time painting watercolors of the boatyards and

decommissioned paper mills in New Bedford. Something about the vivid color and levity of the paint had a way of making the gloom of New Bedford's decline seem hopeful. He painted blue whales, rickety estates, and grizzly sailors walking the cobbled streets, lanterns full of blubber oil in hand. He read *Moby Dick*, and then a biography of Herman Melville and envisioned him shipping out on the *Acushnet* from the New Bedford docks. He didn't leave the house often, except to go shopping each week, or to take a walk. He took to fixing up the house with small projects. He made the countertops level first, then moved on to painting the basement, and then to constructing a series of stools. The next week, he began to build a bar downstairs, using scrap wood he'd found in the adjacent lot. As he was carrying the planks down the tight, twisting basement stairs however, the bundle knocked into a paint can sitting on a top shelf. It tipped, rotating slightly to clip the back of Martin's skull. He swore loudly, dropped the wood, and clapped his hand to the back of his head. Tears welled in his eyes, which he blinked away quickly.

The sting subsided after a few minutes. Carol came home that night, late, after two surgeries that day. Martin came out of the study, pecked her on the cheek, and asked if she wanted him to heat up the leftovers from dinner.

"Sure hon, that would be nice," she said, collapsing onto the couch. She'd had two cases that day, a seven year old's pituitary tumor and then an elderly man's aneurysm.

"Started another project today."

"Oh? What is it this time?"

"A bar for the basement," he called over the drone of the microwave. "After I painted it I thought we could put it to use. You know, we could have your colleagues over for dinner or something when it's all finished. Hey- you know what I found down there? An old lamp. I tried to light it with cooking oil, but it didn't work. Guess you need the real thing." He paused, for a few minutes, the microwave plate clinking against the glass every few seconds. "I did whack my head while I was working," he mused. "Gonna have a heck of a bump." Carol fiddled with the button on her sleeve absentmindedly.

"Oh that sounds awful," she said. "Should you get some ice?" He seemed to have not heard her, and soon appeared with a tupperware of vegetable stir fry and a glass of water.

Two nights later they ate together and played a game of gin rummy after desert. A long tradition of theirs- a simple game entertaining enough to be played over and over. Martin made a couple counting errors, which Carol let slide because they were having a nice night. He went to get more water from the kitchen, and when he stood, the glass slid through his fingers and shattered on the table. Carol shrieked and clasped her cheek, where a shard of glass had become lodged in her skin. Martin stood unmoving, staring ahead, a look of mild confusion across his face. She jumped to her feet, grabbing him by the shoulder.

"Martin! Hey-" his eyes snapped over to her and he became panicked. His eyes became frantic, not focusing on her. She guided him down to the couch.

"You said you hit your head the other day, right? Hon?" He nodded slowly.

"Paint can," he murmured. Carol's mind began to race.

"Your father. He has a blood condition, doesn't he?" She already knew she was speaking too quickly for him, if what she suspected was true. Martin nodded.

"Is it von Willebrand's?" His eyes scrunched. "Please, hon, try to think."

"That sounds like it, yes-" He trailed off, breaking eye contact again. Carol's heart raced.

"I need you to try and stand up for me, okay?" She adopted the tone she used at work. "We're gonna head to the car, okay? Can you still hear me?" Martin nodded slowly. She steered him into the driveway, helped him into the passenger seat, and drove to the hospital. Panic consumed her, filling up empty space in her body as she fitted Martin into a spare wheelchair by the door and pushed him into the ER. He was taken down a

long white hallway, around a corner, and deep into the ward.

“Are you Mrs. Kane?” A doctor had walked out of the double doors after thirty minutes. She nodded. “It’s likely a case of internal bleeding. He’s unconscious right now, and we’ll need to do plenty of CT scans and tests to isolate the issue. If it’s a hematoma, we’ll likely need to operate as soon as we get those results, and then he’ll be transferred to the Neuro ICU.” It took her several moments to get across that she knew what the problem was, that Martin’s father had a blood disease that prevents clotting, that he likely had it himself, that she had failed to remember that crucial fact when he told her about the accident, that she had suggested he get a bag of fucking ice. That she was a neurosurgeon at Southcoast, that she saw these cases every day at work, that she had removed hematomas before, that despite all this, she didn’t notice the possibility of her own husband’s mortality. Carol sat in the waiting room folding chair, unfeeling, unhearing, unseeing.

“He has von Willebrand’s,” she finally said to the doctor. “He said he hit his head on a paint can two days ago. I didn’t realize when he told me.” The doctor stood in silence. The double doors swung open twice.

“Such a condition severely affects his ability to form blood clots, ma’am. This could likely worsen his state.” The doctor spoke to her softly, but she sensed a hint of reproof in his voice. Her face grew stony and she began to shake.

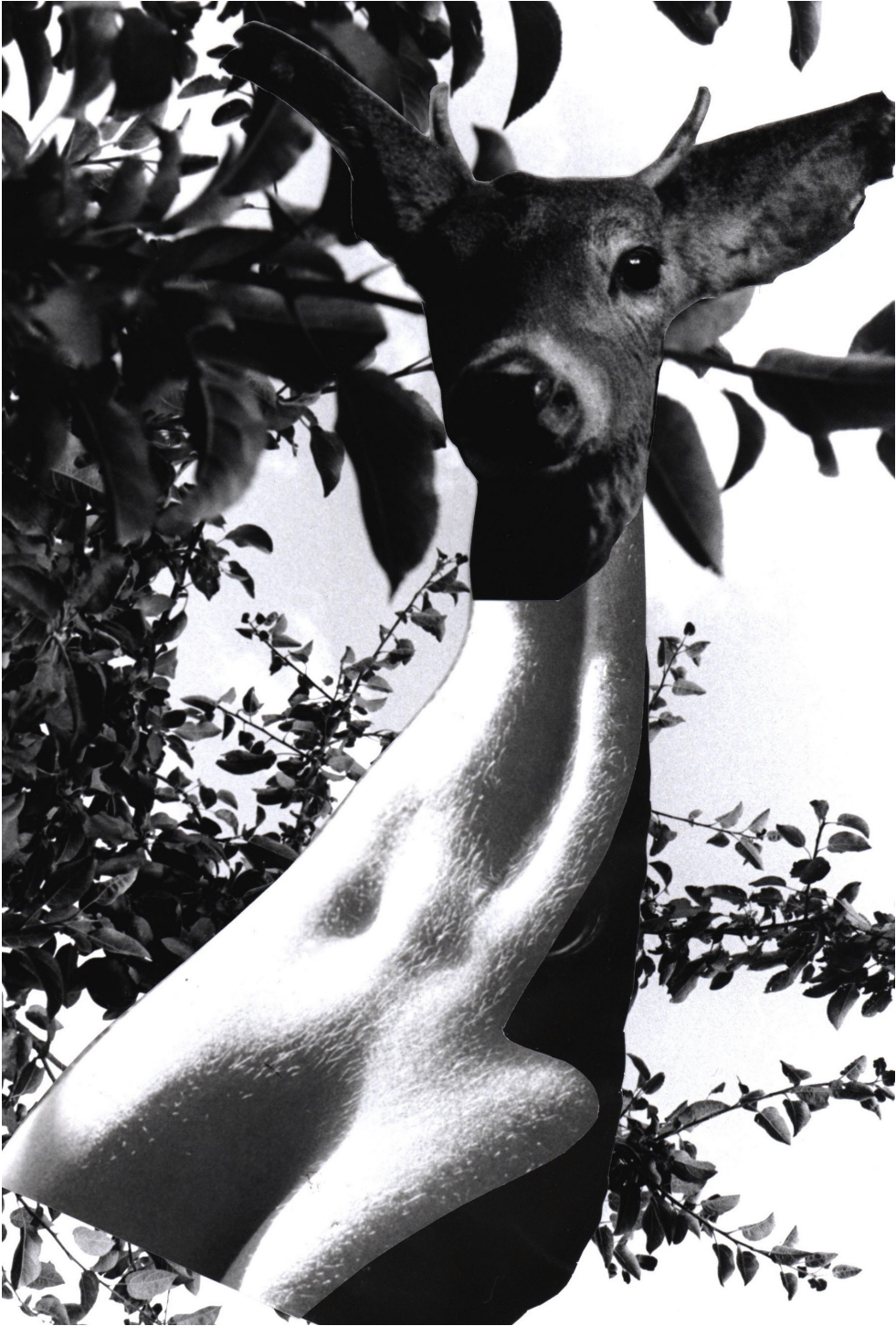
“I’m a neurosurgeon,” she finally spat at him. “I fucking know.” The double doors swung open once more.

“We’ll let you know as soon as we know more,” he finally said.

It had been eight days since he’d dropped the glass. Carol had been at the hospital each day, until the nurses and doctors urged her to go home and sleep; they’d call if anything changed. She’d sustained phone calls, doctors talking to her, again and again, wanting to scream out that she knew, she knew what the next steps were, she knew what the estimated procedures would be. She hadn’t been shopping, she hadn’t been to work. The Center said they understood. There were only two more bags of popcorn, and a few more slices of bread. Had he been to the hospital soon after the initial impact, he may have needed an operation, but recovery would have been quick and fairly simple. In the forty eight hours that passed, however, blood had been leaking into his brain, slowly, drip by drip. The pressure had built up, and his oxygen deprived brain had begun to falter, finally descending into a coma post operation. Carol stood up from the counter, balled up the popcorn bag with a frantic energy, twisting it tightly in her hands over and over. She walked into the living room, then into Martin’s studio, then back through both. Her breathing accelerated, audible now, but she continued to pace. She turned her phone’s ringer on high, daring it to ring. She glanced out the window into the deepening night, into the harbor where lights twinkled on and off in the docks, glinting off of bows and sterns. All she could do was wait.

- Elliot Wilson





*Untitled 8*  
analog photo collage  
Chandler Ryan  
2017





*Untitled 13*  
analog photo collage  
Chandler Ryan  
2017

## Eulogy to My Mother's Car

“Did I tell you the Highlander died? I'm going to donate it to NPR or something.”

We are gathered here today to mourn the loss of the Highlander. Or, rather, to celebrate it's life as it journeys on into the afterlife, which my mother has decided has something to do with the National Public Radio.

In its youth, the Highlander was marvelously shiny. I conceived of it as very trendy. My mom got the SUV when I was in third grade, back when I wore crocs and an increasingly ratty orange North Face zip up. She used that sport utility vehicle to drive me to and from school, which was a block away. But, I didn't like to take the bus, it smelled like elderly salami.

The Highlander was my mom's trusty steed as she miraculously transported me to and from my 10 dance classes per week in middle school. She was never late and always brought me a turkey and cheese sandwich from Subway when we had to zip right from Hebrew school to hip hop class. “Please make sure they don't toast it, mom, I don't like when the meat is warm.”

I'll never forget the rides in which I sat munching on my Subway sandwich, stuffing the Subway Eat Fresh paper into the side compartment of the Highlander's back seat. Yelling to my mom in the front seat, I would ask her to constantly switch between Chicago's two hottest radio stations: KISS FM and B96. We didn't listen to AM 1300, Radio Disney, anymore because it sounded too static-y. And I was way too old to listen to R-Diz, I did hip hop dance now.

Sitting in the Highlander, parked outside the big window of my dance studio, my mom cheered me on during my painfully pubescent foray into hip hop dance. She smiled as my brown gaucho pants clashed with my clunky black hip hop shoes. I valiantly bopped around to Fergie's “Here I Come” while wearing an unnecessary training bra.

After my aforementioned boob training, I had acquired the pectoral physique of a pelican. Large-breasted in the most literal sense, I graduated from eighth grade a few years later at my suburban middle school. I now sat in the front seat, next to my mom as she excitedly drove me to and from summer school in the city during the following June, July, and August. Forty-five minutes each way in the Highlander, switching from B96 to KISS FM during their respective commercial breaks. We would be moving downtown so I could attend private high school in the fall.

That September, my mom and the Highlander transported me to therapy three times a week. Unlike our short and pleasant rides to and from hip hop class, I became as talkative as the Highlander itself. My irrational angst permeated its gray interior, and now that I could sit in the front seat, I would petulantly blast the top 40 stations in an act of baseless resistance.

Four years of high school, to and from therapy, to and from Kathryn's house and Molly's house, and Ella's house, to and from Starbucks and workout classes and the movie theatre as we screamed at each other. Then I'd cry, and she'd cry, and, of course, I'd scream at her because she had cried. My mom and I kept trying to connect, but the closest we would get was sharing brown Starbucks napkins to dry the tears we'd caused each other. I'd stuff the used napkins in the side compartment of the front seat.

The day my parents moved me into my freshman year dorm, my whole life was packed up into the Highlander in two obnoxiously large duffle bags. One for bedding, my study pillow, and the three lamps my mom had hypothesized I'd need in my dorm room. One for the clothes and the shoes. We bickered in my dorm room that day, whisper-yelling and arguing about where I should store my towels, all while anticipating the



reality that my new roommate could walk in at any minute.

As we stood in a parking lot to say our goodbyes that day, I looked at my mom and surrendered to tears. I cried because I was scared, because I didn't know what came next, because I despised expressing genuine emotion, and because I had wasted so much time. Four years of fighting and screaming while we rode in the Highlander, and now, standing in front of her as she had to leave me, I couldn't fathom being without her. I had spent so much time running away, not realizing that I had all the stability I needed sitting in the driver's seat next to me.

Far from the car's gray interior and used-napkin encrusted side compartments, my mom and I have connected despite the enormous physical distances that separated us over the past few years. Whether I've been at school or studying abroad in Europe, I've sat on park benches all over the world just to talk to my mom.

After my usual tagline, "Can I call?" she pulls over on the side of the road in the Highlander and answers my Facebook video-call. It doesn't matter that the camera faces away from her. Just knowing she is on the other end of the line is all I've ever needed. Some of my favorite calls have been the day my heart got broken for the first time, the day before the birthday I spent in another country, and the night in Florence, Italy, when I walked along the Arno River alone and let the weight of all the time, and personal growth and change wash over me like a tranquil wave. I need and want to share it all with her.

When I got off the plane after living in Europe and being away from my mom for three months, I ran to her, heaving and wheezing as I carried my obnoxiously large duffle bags. We held each other, both crying tears of joy. My tears slowly descended down the back of her increasingly ratty black North Face zip up. And as we piled my duffles into the Highlander, and I cried because sitting in it with her really felt like home.

So, here's to the long, tumultuous, and meaningful life of our Highlander. Thank you for granting me fourteen years of sitting next to my mom.

*-Tricia Crimmins*

## LIFT, STRETCH

make a garden of this ramshackle  
body. watch the little deaths  
I die over  
and over, opening  
wider each time.

remind me of how it feels  
to be a leaner girl-woman,  
a hot month past, knees  
cutting clefts in the dirt,  
weeding, pulling slender  
lives up from the birthing ground,  
arms angled like sunbeams,  
legs of an animal that can run and run.

forget the contract: that we keep growing;  
watch, instead, how warm, how  
liquidy (we) the ground  
can get, skin of the earth,  
spilling.

don't listen to the voice calling me (you) in  
for iced tea, fancy-made  
with the meanest slice of lemon;  
they want to point  
out time, how it  
comes to kill.

move, sow  
lift this body,  
stretch it like its strong;  
I will not let you die.

- *Anna-Elena Maheu*

## A Breathless Swim

into a fog filled morning,  
i set upon a dock affixed it's mooring.

i entered cool and imbued  
into the throws of currents' feud.

encumbered by its wet embrace,  
i was suspended in its silent space.

the waves parting my thighs,  
i awaited the soundless sigh

of water's heaving; in and out  
it's chilling cloak sought

to welcome me, pure;  
an unknown visitor.

the ripples abiding me, it begged.  
offering a soundless home beneath my legs

airless, i mouthed to it secrets untold  
as bubbles entered the threshold

of my lung chamber.  
an unmoored but without anchor,

i was entranced by it's languid gloom,  
encapsulated in it's azure tomb

my chest swallowed water  
relieving the quiet shutter

of breath it could not spare  
as i churned amidst its airless air.

sedated in it's dark realm  
unable to tell

air from blue.  
but i was cleansed, remade anew.

swimming a careful line,  
i waited for a sign,

a movement of truth. a tight  
brandish of capitulating insight.

i succumbed to its beating  
moves. allowing the pleading

liquid to vanquish me.  
beholden to this murky sea,

i relinquished every molecule  
of oxygen to it. the cruel

cool entered my veins  
as i skimmed under its glassy plane.

unable to tread lightly,  
i sunk. it claimed my entirety.

- *Chardon Brooks*







*and if an explosion III what comes after [a nice quiet corner of space]*  
acrylic, pencil, marker, and ink on mylar  
Maddi McKay  
2018

## Little Acorns Grow

It was the end of summer when we were both done growing. Our skin could not be more tanned. There was no more space for freckles on our noses. Kit and I'd get back from long days at the beach during the days we took off from work, walk barefoot up the driveway, and hang our swimsuits on the chairs in the backyard. Fewer words were spoken with each drive. He hummed the same song. How red our shoulders would be on those afternoons. Kit would come up behind me and drape his arms around me. I remember thinking how much his touch hurt. Then, my skin would heal and the burn would fade and it would begin to peel from the inside out. Kit would pick the dead skin from my shoulders with his hands so gingerly.

"Thank you, Kit," I'd say.

"You'd do the same for me."

And I did. I'd rub the sunscreen on the parts of his back that he could not reach. When it would eventually sweat off and he'd fail to reapply, I'd be there with a bottle of aloe, waiting in the kitchen. Him wincing at each touch. I'd try and blow cool air over his skin but it never helped. He would sit straight up in his chair, in a loose, cotton t-shirt, waiting for the burn to heal so patiently.

The tree sat in the center of our backyard. The backyard was large and rectangular and was mainly unattended to by us. The tree grew in the middle of the shape, a miniature garden of lettuce and green beans on the far end, and a small, wooden patio with wicker chairs inherited from my grandparents house directly outside the screen door. It was our first summer attempting to grow our own food. At the beginning of the season, we both would go out often to check on our seeds, but as the days went on we both lost interest in their growth. We let, unknowingly, a few vegetables rot and sink back into the soil. That summer, we let the grass go without attending to it and it was so high we almost missed the quick beginnings of the oak tree. A few dandelions peeked out between the green and brown blades of grass. The oak started as a small sprout which turned to trunk. We found it because Kit stepped into it. He crouched over, hidden by the tall grass. The only reason I found him was because of the small yelp he let out. It was morning, the sun had begun to rise later. Daylight was still long but constantly vanishing. A farm-like fence wrapped around the lawn. The planks were stained gray and vines wrapped around them. On the day we found the tree, the sun was at eye height. I stood over Kit telling him to stay still as I looked at his foot. When we came back to the tree the next day, it stood taller than the grass.

Kit and I stood in the kitchen the morning we found it, the Saturday, looking out over that lawn. Kit was washing the pans from breakfast. I finished my tea and set it next to the sink.

"You don't have to finish the dishes right now. I can get the rest later," I told Kit as I pressed my cheek to his shoulder, but he continued to over-scrub the burnt eggs from the pan so violently. "The grass has gotten tall. When was the last time it was cut?"

"Might as well finish them now," he said, avoiding my question at first. But he continued, "I don't think it's too tall. Anyway, what does it matter, we never spend time in the backyard."

"Let's go outside."

It was still morning and the fog was lifting quickly. Walking through the grass my calves became damp with dew. Kit led the way and he walked far ahead of me until his foot found the tree. After he had stepped on the growing oak, we sat by it for a few

minutes as he got over the pain. The small frame of the tree was not crushed by his weight. We played our guessing game. I told him I'd go first as I sat cross-legged in front of him with his foot in my lap. While he asked me questions, I only responded yes or no. He asked the usual questions: Is it a man? Is he alive? Would I have learned about him in school? Eventually he guessed the fifth chief justice of the supreme court. He was right. His turn took me longer to guess, an artist who makes his work out of rocks and pieces of ice and leaves them in the wild. On my second round, he could not guess mine. Some of his questions I could not answer fully, had to tell him maybe. When I revealed it was the cinnamon stick from the applejacks box, he let out his joyful and boyish laugh. His big smile revealed his crowded bottom teeth. I leaned down and kissed the top of his foot. In the time we sat next to it, where minutes turned into an hour enjoying the morning, the tree grew two centimeters. I did not believe Kit when he told me it had grown so much in that time, so we measured the tree against our legs and went back inside. When we came back after our lunch, the tree was another centimeter taller.

"I have always wanted to build a treehouse," Kit told me. "Ever since I was a kid. I never had a lawn of my own. I'd even do most of the work, if you wanted." He went on for a while longer, working to convince me. but he didn't have to. I had always wanted to make something with Kit. Something that would last for a long time. And I had always dreamed of having my own tree house. When I was a little girl, on trips to my grandparents house in Santa Barbara, I'd stare up into the Moreton Bay Figs and think about how much weight each branch could hold. I'd get my sister to hike me up so I could sit among the leaves.

Kit collected many splinters while we prepped the wood for our house. All on his left hand, he held his palm out to me as he complained about how he needed to stop biting his nails. We went to our bathroom and he sat on the rim of the tub as I searched for the tweezers. I had him lay his hand on my thigh as I squeezed the flesh of his ring finger, trying to get the splinter to protrude. "I need you to stay still," I told him, which he did even if it was only for the first one and I had to remind him again for the next three.

That night we looked out the window in the kitchen to find the oak starting to rise even higher above the grass. The bare floor of our constructed tree house grew in stability with each additional branch that bloomed from the trunk. We stayed at the window, shoulder to shoulder, until the sun had set and all we could see was our reflections. Some people said we looked alike, I think with all the time we had spent together our faces began to blend.

We played Scrabble on the floor of the living room, feeling the wood of the tiles, explaining our excitement to build the next day. Kit got to play first. Vivid. 32 points. He was proud of his score, smiled as he wrote it down. Grabbed another five letters from the bag. I added holds to the board. 26 points. His turn, vowed, 24 points. After I picked my new tiles, I smiled, even laughed a little. I had a play. I placed a K and a T on the either side of his I from vivid. Nine points since the T matched up with the O from vowed. I was so proud of myself.

"Look what I made!" I said with great enthusiasm

"It's only nine points," he responded while writing down and tallying up my points.

"But that's you. K-I-T."

"It's cute, Jen. But we are playing a game and it'd be nice if you took it more seriously. I like this game." He told me he would for sure win after my move.



Which he did. A total of 325 points. Pecan, down the left hand border. I trailed greatly behind with 130. Dire as my last work. I had been holding onto a Q since the fourth round, searching for a place to play it but the opportunity never came. In all the times Kit and I played the game, I only ever won once. Even then he lost by only 20 points having only consonants for the majority of the game.

Outside, fireflies swarmed the garden, lighting it for only brief seconds. We watched the tree in those moments of brightness. "Will you play scrabble with me up in the treehouse once it's done?" Kit asked.

"As long as you give me double points for playing your name."

"Yeah," he said, "yeah."

After that conversation, I only lost by 186 points that night.

I woke up before Kit the next morning. I only ever noticed how tan he had gotten that summer when he laid upon the white sheets of our bed. That was the closest I had ever seen his skin match his amber hair. I admired his cow-lick, the way his hair turned into a tide-pool-spiral not just at the back of his crown but also at his hairline. I used to run my fingers in the clockwise current of his hair. I used to think it was a real miracle. He had shallow-set eyes with full lashes which rested delicately on his cheeks. I worried his cheeks were getting sunburnt. I wondered when the light would wake him up. He slept in a faded blue shirt with the logo for the local running group. His chest rose and fell with each step I took out of the room. Half an hour had gone by since I had woken up when he came down to the kitchen. "Morning, Jen. We've got a lot to do today," he said, coming up around my shoulder and kissing my cheek. It was quick and dry as though he had done it every morning, which he had. While I ate a bowl of strawberries and cereal, Kit finished last night's dinner. He was already dressed, ready to get to work. He had on an old cap with salt lines stained around the brim. He asked me to bring the sunscreen down once I was changed.

When we came out to the tree, it was up to Kit's chest. If we stood there long enough, we could see it sprout a new branch. I told him we'd better get moving or else it would be too tall for us to reach. The trunk of the tree was rough and each ridge was the width of a fat finger. The roots were huge and made the garden floor uneven. Both of us had our share of trips. Even with the rough terrain, we built the walls of the house quickly. With the foundation of the house already set, everything else came quickly. Kit spent time nailing down the planks while I sanded the corners. We were up in the tree for so long it grew another two feet while we were on it. Kit told me if anything, it was only growing faster the taller it got.

"We better build a ladder before it gets too tall for us to climb into," I said.

"Or for us to climb out," Kit replied.

Once we had worked until we had gotten hungry, we decided we should go get lunch and a rope before it grew anymore. Kit jumped out of the tree first. Standing on the ground, he could extend his arms and reach the entrance of the house with his hands.

Kit lifted his arms out to me. "It's okay. I've got you."

First, from the basement, we found a six-foot nylon rope. It was dusty and some sections of it were covered in grime, for it had been stashed in the corner. Then, we ate. When we came back to our tree, it was up to Kit's eyes. He carried the rope on his shoulders. The heat was heavy at this point and when he removed the rope there were sweat marks where it had once rested. Kit knelt down on one knee, and pointed to his thigh as though to say Jenny, this is a step for you, then extended a hand for balance. I pulled my body into the house and Kit threw the rope to me. The hammer and a few nails sat in a small wooden box next to the doorway and I made a hook for the rope to hang from on top of the door. Kit was much larger than I was. Even on a night out with five inch heels

on, the top of my head only came to his nose. But the rope held his weight well and after he climbed up he continued to hold it in his hand. "We did well, Jen," he said. Something hit the top of the house. It made a sharp and single knocking sound. We both looked to each other. Another one hit. I popped my head out of the frame and looked up to find a collection of acorns forming from the branches of the tree. They were larger than normal, closer to the size of limes. It was a long while before another one fell again onto our house.

Kit and I stayed up there for many hours. We found it was cooler than inside our actual home. Neither of us had our phones and after moving around and talking for a while, we ended up in the corner next to the door, me sitting up and Kit resting between my legs. His back on my belly, his head on my collarbone, his arms resting on my thighs. I thought about how we never sat together like this anymore, just the two of us - no tv turned on, no books or music. I loved him, but I had a hard time expressing it at this point. I no longer knew how to reiterate the things I felt. When Kit would perform acts of love, sometimes I would resent his ability to express himself. But we sat there, just the two of us, as it had been ever since we had moved to this town. There was only the gentle breeze of the last weekend of summer and an occasional acorn releasing itself from its birthplace. The breeze made me think of the first night Kit and I ever spent together. It was a Tuesday in January three years ago, back when we both lived in cramped apartments, and a blizzard was said to come in the night. The snow had not yet started but the streets were ready and every car was parked inside. We sat bare-chested in front of the space heater in my bedroom, me behind Kit. I caught the heat running through his body and we listened to the delicate sound of warm air as it pushed over us.

I thought about progression and growth. I thought about his hair as I stroked my fingers through it. Kit fell asleep in my lap. I soon followed. When we woke up, the sun was beginning to set.

"Oh, Kit. Look outside. Look at how high we are." I told him, with my head out of the frame. The tree had begun to grow faster. The rope was far from the ground, hanging high above the grass. The trunk of the tree was thick and sturdy. The branches that the house rested on were strong. Acorns continued to fall every quarter-hour.

"What should we do?" I asked Kit.

"I don't think I could climb down, the trunk is too big. And the rope's not enough. It's still a fall even if I hang from the bottom. I feel like we can even see ourselves getting higher."

"I think you have to jump."

"Yeah, I think it's the only option" Kit said.

He took a deep breath in as though he were about to do something so courageous it would take every ounce of bravery within him. I could tell he was scared. We had grown another half foot in the time we were deciding what to do.

"Kit, you can do it. It's not so far." I said, looking him in the eyes, nodding my head for reassurance.

"You're right."

"And," I thought as he went to grab the rope, "what will I do?"

"I'll be waiting down there for you. You won't have to fall far. I'll be there waiting."

While I believed him, I knew the longer he took to leave, the higher up I'd have to jump. As Kit reached out for the rope, an acorn fell, barely missing his arm. They were full and heavy. I had been holding on to Kit's hand but I let it go so he knew he could not wait longer. He told me that he'd see me down there and began to descend the rope. At the end of the rope his hands released to let his body fall as though he were weightless, like the way I used to drop barbies from the roof of my house as a child. I heard his feet hit the ground. It was much heavier but with more elegance than the way

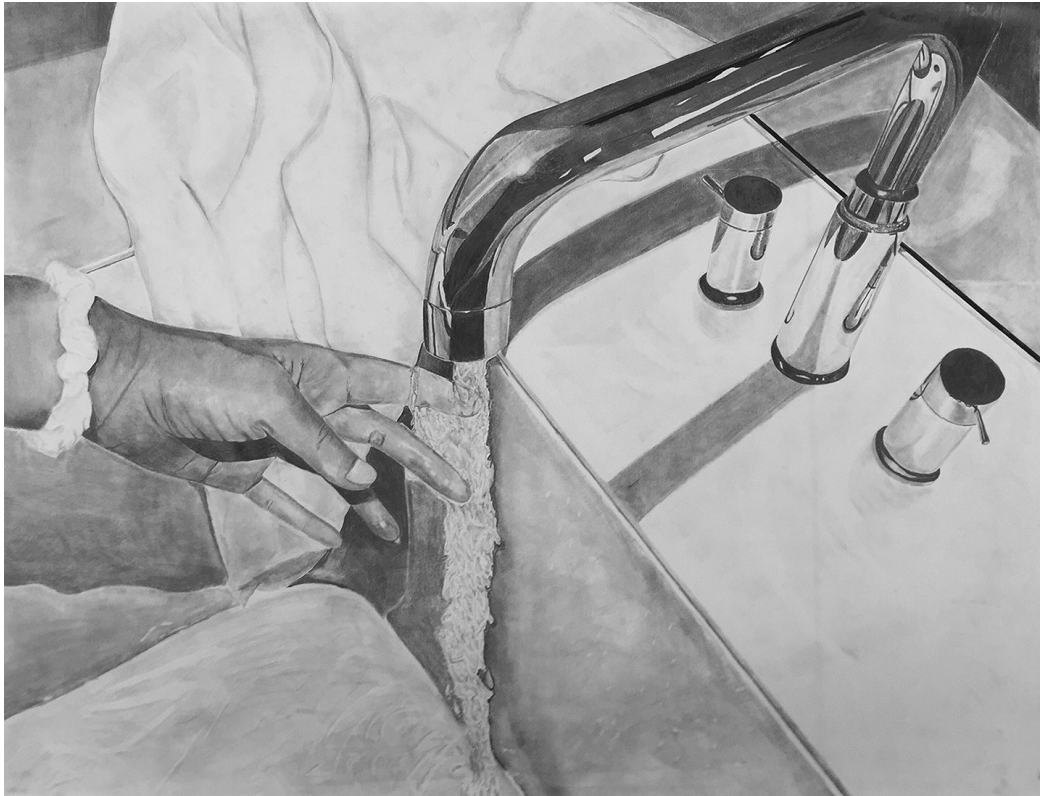
those plastic dolls fell.

Our oak grew as I yelled down to Kit, making sure he'd be there. With my hands sweating I tried to grab the rope and I pulled it into my shaking body. I held the rope to my chest and inched my toes over the edge of the house. Slowly, I let my feet leave the floor and clutched the rope between my knees. My body slid down the rope and when my legs reached the end of it, I continued to lower myself down. I called out to Kit, making sure he was there, and he kept repeating the same sentence. I'm still here. I hung from the bottom of the rope, my body dangling: the fall did not seem as far as I had built it up to be. My feet hit the ground, then my knees. Kit caught me around the waist and he lowered my body to the grass. He let go of me and let me lie there for a moment before he lent out his hand.

Our tree was twice the height of our two-story home. The tree house tucked among the branches would never be used again by us. As branches sprouted, they broke away at the walls, splitting them up. The floor stayed in the center but everything else was torn away. It was late in the day and the sun was lower than the top of the oak. A few of the lower branches blocked the light, but when the breeze came through, the leaves let the light come over the two of us. We watched them break apart for a few moments. "It was still nice to build it with you, Jen," Kit said, "I'm going to go start dinner." He kissed my shoulder and went inside.

Our neighbors would call us up to complain about the titanic tree in our yard. They'd knock on our door often. They said it ruined their view or that it kept their homes in perpetual nighttime. But we told them we could never cut it down. We thought we'd save it, the house we made in it, for one day when we'd have kids. And they'd be more adventurous than we ever were and they'd find a way up the tree. They'd have Kit's skin, strength and affinity for words, maybe they'd have my nimble hands, and they'd find a way up the oak to the house we never got to enjoy the way we wanted to. They'd hold the ridges of the oak's trunk and wedge in their small feet for stability as they climbed. They'd bring games and lunch up with them and our days would be full of the faint sound of their laughter above us. Kit would call to them for dinner and they'd fly down the trunk so casually. Then, after all of this had happened and our kids had spent years up in that house, they'd grow too old for it and would move on. They'd climb down one day, never to go back up. Our oak would ache with years of weight and it would grow tired and start to bend towards us. Eventually the trunk would snap at the base and the whole oak would fall directly on our home. It would crush everything we had, all with us watching from the road. Only then would Kit and I understand it was time to move on.

- Anna Helms



*Water on Hand*  
graphite  
Anna Helms  
2015

## ode to the traffic jam

oh thank you  
for thickening  
this summer  
air like honey  
settling along the floor  
of a cup of tea  
slowing everything  
before it is  
swirled around  
by the spoon  
of the passing day  
traffic jam  
you are a miracle  
that settles this  
well-rusted body  
on its thousand-gear  
journey  
and extends  
before me  
like the expected  
built-up-to  
violin note  
prolonged  
in inspiration  
after the final  
baton swish  
thank you  
oh great works  
of the united  
states highway  
service for  
suspending my  
hurry as I  
see the man  
emerge  
from the dimpled  
front door

the woman already  
on the phone  
I assume  
telling some loved  
one that she is really  
okay no really  
when our eyes  
meet she manages  
a deep breath  
and a smile  
that collides  
with my eyes  
and seems to say  
it will all be okay  
before the traffic  
lurches forward  
and I race off  
while the landscape  
turns blurry.  
and almost beautiful.

*-Jake Atwood*

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