

**the
fall
line
2020**



**piedmont
virginia
community
college**

THE FALL LINE
2020

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ABOUT
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LOVE

Carly Haling

Mother making her famous chicken soup
again. Walking into the kitchen, earthy smells
waft. Potatoes and carrots. Bone broth steams from steel
pots. The savory elixir flowing into my raw throat.

A blenheim
Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
laying his head by the door
to welcome you home.

A cashmere sweater,
its crimson hem coming undone
from constant wear.

A sister
sharing her blanket,
and embracing you in a hug.

Love
is shown in many ways.

It can even be...

Stevie Nicks' voice
under the crescent moon.
The haunting sound of a Rumours
album on a vintage record player.



VIRGINIA JOHNSON, ILLUSTRATOR HOUSE PROJECT, DIGITAL

FRIVOLOUS THINGS

Bret Vollmer

Staying in bed past the alarm. Chasing fleeting sleep; squeezing eyes tight to trap scraps of dreams. Ignoring the shriek or buzz or hum or preprogrammed drone demanding today!

Pawing at the phone. Gazing at its glassy face and infinite pagination. Avoiding eye-contact by rubbing the electric rectangle.

Driving downhill with the windows open. Coasting down empty slopes on a bike. Stretching out one or both hands to catch the wind as it slides past the metal carapace of the car.

Whistling, humming, absent-minded beatboxing. Doodling in the margins; embroidering pages with graphite. Watching the AC's sweat bead into rivulets that waterfall to the ground. Allowing the sound of water to bend and shape your daydreams like a blacksmith at an anvil.

Imagining what it feels like to skydive while sitting still. Wondering what it's like to drown in oil as you fall asleep.

Dropping coins into fountains, wells or into the yawning, funnel-shaped vortex at the mall. Watching your penny, nickel or dime as it drifts to a bed of shimmering tile. Listening to the reverberation of black plastic as your coin is swallowed by the injection-molded whirlpool.

Explaining the rules of Monopoly to a child. Teaching a friend how to enjoy being alone. Plumbing songs on the radio for flashes of insight. Watching popular movies with the sound off.

Scrolling through Netflix, creating a list of titles you'll never touch. Watching and rewatching the same source of comfort instead. Subjecting your time and mind to the mercy of Big Tech algorithms. Creating a playlist containing every song that appears when you search the name of a hometown you've never visited. Googling satellite photos of every street you've ever lived on or everywhere you hope to go.

Clapping at the theater when the movie ends; heaping applause onto the deaf speakers of the Dolby digital surround. Clapping when the plane lands: exalting in the statistically given safety of day-to-day air travel.

Inventing new lyrics to songs that are already written. Inventing new lyrics specifically about the dog and singing them to her with self-satisfied vibrato.

Singing those same songs while gently bunching the folds of her dog face in both your hands and, with precious coos, enthusiastically affirming to her the utter perfection of her pretty image and generous existence. Letting the dog outside on frosty autumn nights just to let her back in again. Feeling the cool velvet of her floppy ears warm between your fingers.

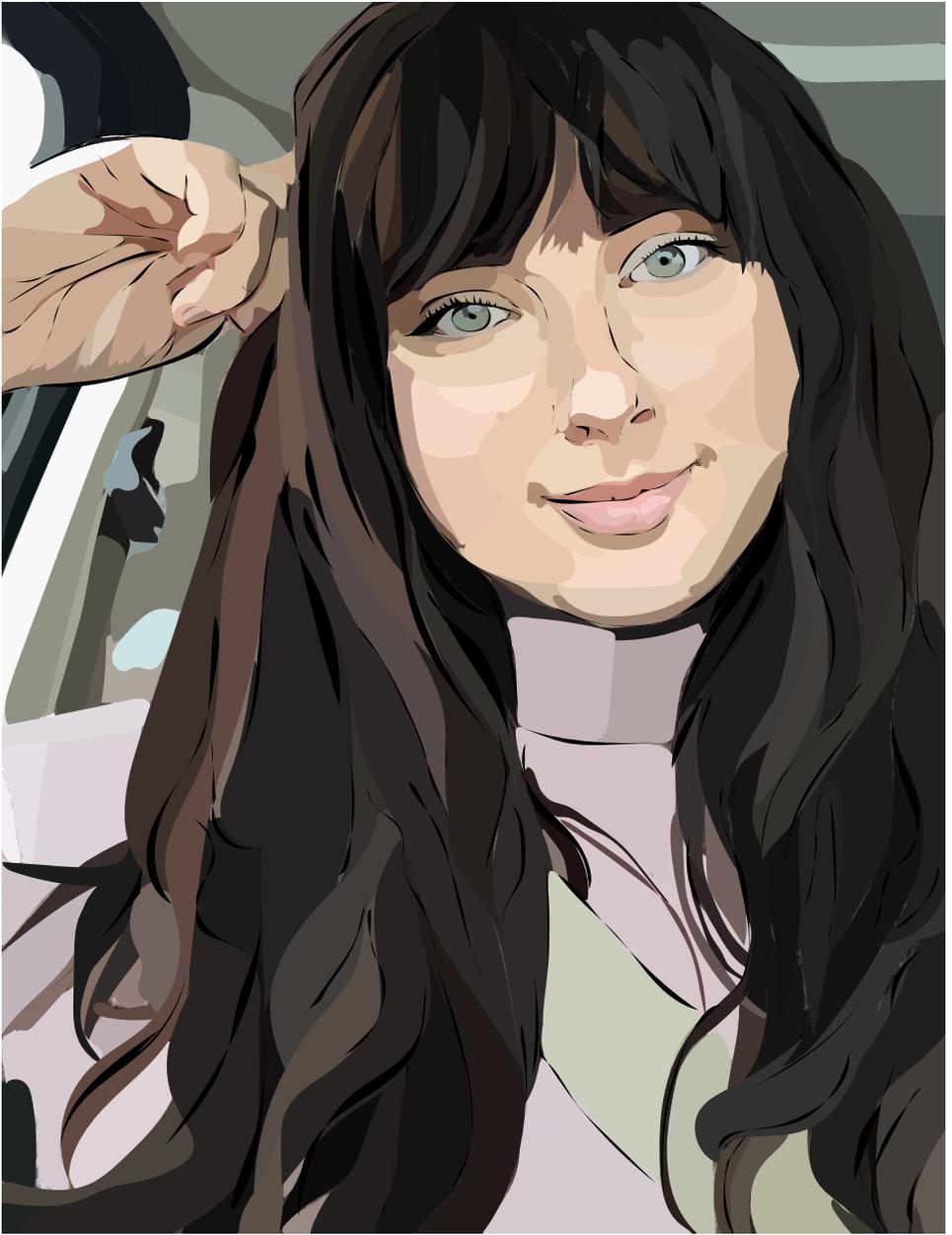
Trick-or-treating. Caroling. Congratulating and celebrating. Decorating the house for a single day of the season. Making wishes on your birthday; channeling unspoken desire into layers of cake and flaming frosting. Wondering later, alone, whether you're a broken vessel.

Imagining elaborate and fantastic backstories for the cat; vividly rendering in giddy words his Dickensian life before adoption. Watching him sleep and foolishly wondering if in his dreams he remembers his names from his preceding lives or if he can gaze across the chasm of consciousness to see the details of those remaining. Letting his gentle purrs pin you to the couch.

Learning a language because you like the shape of its letters. Never being entirely sure how to spell your own middle name. Listing names of imaginary bands, babies or pets. Writing lists of frivolous things.

Getting drunk. Getting high. Praying. Meditating. Reading or writing illegible poetry in the silver and obscure light of a disinterested moon. Doing any of these things but just for the sheer fun of it. Letting your hands caress the contours of another person's back.

Feeling homesick for somewhere that isn't your home. Feeling nostalgic for a misremembered past. Peeling away the metaphors that exist beneath religion. Imagining the shape of the human soul. Hoping that it has a shape; fearing that it's a vacuum or an injection-molded whirlpool in which we drop the currency of our time to watch it spiral away. Choosing to picture it as a fountain; continuing to make wishes.



MIKAYLA THOMPSON, ORGANIC VECTOR SELFIE, DIGITAL

FIRMAMENT

Corina Parks

The snow fell in large clumps
(weightless, like a feather),
towards the ground where they lay,
hair spread in white heather.
Teeth displayed, lips apart,
joy inside their youthful hearts.
Mirrored firmament in their eyes:
silver skies, hands entwined –
a memory between sisters,
inscribed for all of time.

WE ARE FRIENDS.

WE ARE FAMILY.

Jiwoo Kim

“What is wrong with Japan?” I asked, my mother upset, “Mom, nothing gets me angrier than Shinzo Abe spitting those words from his mouth. In the face of all these facts, he is still denying the Japanese government’s explicit involvement in coercing countless Korean women into sexual slavery during World War II.”

I continued to lash out, not even breathing once, as Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, tried to justify the immoral acts that were perpetrated upon Koreans during Japan’s colonization of Korea. He went as far as to claim that the government’s actions were meant to positively influence Korea as a whole.

My mom hesitated with a bitter smile on her face, “Well, I actually feel sorry for them.”

I was a little surprised and curious about what she meant and started barking right away. “For what? For having such a dumb prime minister? I bet they are all the same people who don’t even give a damn about any of these issues.”

The next day, my parents suggested that I go to Japan for a year as an exchange student. At that moment, I thought they were crazy; and of course, my immediate answer was

“never.” However, after a week of consideration, I was on my flight to a so-close-but-yet-so-far country: Japan.

Having lived in Japan for about a year when I was thirteen years old, I came to believe in the power of sincerity. The power that can unite people who seemed to be “enemies” for life. Thanks to them, I believe that I can be friends with anyone in any country if they are sincerely caring for each other and loving our differences.

Before leaving my house, my parents waved at me and said, “We hope you have a great time there!”

I responded, “Guys, just pray that your daughter doesn’t get into a fight.”

When I arrived at Hiroshima Airport, Haruki Yori, the professor who suggested this program to my parents, was waiting for me. I went to the right side of his car and waited for him to unlock the car door, having forgotten that in Japan, cars have the driver’s seat on their right side.

“So I guess you wanna drive? Gotta hold tight,” he joked as he pretended to toss the key to me. For a second, I could see my father from his grin. His jokes helped to ease the anxiety I was feeling from the stress of airport security checks in an unfamiliar country.

When we got to school, my host parents, Maki and Akio, were waiting for me; they greeted me as if I was their long-lost daughter. Then principal Hitoshi took me to the auditorium where all the students, who I remember as angels, had gathered to welcome me. Even though my house was only five minutes away from school on foot, my friends Hayate, Miho, and Yuya came to my house every morning to walk to school with me.

On the weekends, my host parents took me to places where I could learn and experience Japanese culture. Everyone did their best to gift me wonderful memories while I was staying in Japan. Even though I could not speak Japanese at first, all the neighbors and friends in school used body language, English, and translation apps to communicate with me. They expressed their love towards South Korea and told me that the majority of the Japanese disagree with their government on the contentiousness between Japan and Korea including the issue of “Comfort Women.” As opposed to what I thought, they insisted that their country is responsible for the victims who are alive. I could not believe that I was in the country I hated just a few days ago.

Despite the fact that we do not share a language, culture, environment, and the fact that our countries were often called enemies, I could feel the sincerity in Japanese people. I could not find any selfishness, ignorance, obstinacy, or inhumanity in them. I realized that I should not judge people according to my perception of their leader.

As I boarded my flight back to Korea, Japan was not a so-close-yet-so-far-away-country anymore. Instead, it was my other home where my friends and family, who had gifted me with this valuable lesson, live.

THE BOOKSTORE CAFÉ

Kiran Lakshman

In December
I took my mother
to the bookstore
where she bought calendars
for everyone, but
she died in February.
Did anyone want
to rip out January
and make it last
forever?

We had bookstore café mochas
together for the first time,
shell-shocked but dipping
our biscotti. She asked
what would become of me
if she were gone. "Sometimes
special people just get lost
in this world."

Someone's book
hit his table
as he turned
to stare. I didn't
answer. My mother's
brown eyes under
her red chenille cap.
The filo dough's
whipped fillings
inside the pastry case.



PATTY SWYGERT, BISON STUDIES, INK ON GLASSINE

DAUGHTER

Mary Clyde Bissett

Am I my father's daughter?
The one who shares my blood.
He wrote the game, said money is a good thing.
With this, we will all be happy

But I'm not happy.
Here I stand, pushing twenty-one.
Lack of change in my pockets.
One-hundred-pound weight on my chest.

Am I my mother's daughter?
The one who raised me.
Held my hand, fought my monsters alongside me.
Cleared paths for my destruction, giver of strength

Though I'm not strong.
Unhinged, shut down without notice.
I am without love.
Rusted pennies in a well, thoughtless diagnoses.

One truth finds peace,
I am no one's daughter.

POEMS

Danielle Campbell

Salt.

Your love forces me into spaces.
The tiniest spaces.
Spaces where my wounds fill with salt.

Stone.

The words you say
They stick to me
They turn part of me to stone

Mother.

I always think of you.
In the stars, in the plants.
Mother.
You are my mother.
My air is because of you.
I breathe.
Lavender.

“HUSH MA PUCE”

Julianna Skuba

Before that singular moment, that ripened moment, Camille had been standing down a thin alley off of Rue de Lorne, leaning against the sandstone wall of the Martineau building. She had been watching the ethereal dance of smoke released from her parted lips, wasting the last moments of her break when Pol's text came in, his words autocorrected to nonsense again. She smiled. I think I need to learn this new language, she thought. Camille always seemed to receive a message from Pol around this time each day, and rarely could she make out what he was trying to say; she always assumed it was nice and thoughtful although his words were perpetually turned inside out. Camille thought his accent much too thick for the phone to understand, and he muttered, too, but this text was different. This message marked the end of what Camille would later refer to as the time of angels. The era of sweetness and roses, albeit brief, when supper was well-considered, and the windows didn't rattle with the cold of ghosts knocking, when she and Pol would talk about a future that was innocent and shapeless, a time when Jonathan skipped to school humming a triumphant tune.

Camille tried to piece together Pol's message, but all she could gather was something about calling him. It seemed very much unlike him. She was obliged to get back to her desk and attend to the ceaseless waves of incoming calls that she would answer to the best of her ability. This was her second day on the job, customer service, and Camille felt she needed this opportunity. She threw away her entire break smoking when she had already told everyone she had quit, and she knew her new employer, M. Ronhuer, would not look kindly upon her calling Pol right then. She had a feeling the office had hired her because of the desperation in her eyes and the high probability she would not leave her position for quite some time. Even though her desperation was no longer all that urgent, Pol was there to catch her if she were to slip, the years of not knowing how she was going to manage her basic life and tend to Johnathan's, an alley cat life, had rewired her. Her responses were reiterations of this history, which even Pol's stability could not erase. Camille had put up a single photo: Johnathan as a small boy smiling with utter delight-holding a duckling so tenderly in his little hands. The complete abandonment to joy on his face gave her hope. That was why she had taped it above her computer screen, where her eyes could casually gaze upon his happiness. It was the reminder she still needed when the sky was the color of ink and foreboding, a Johnathan who could find light under the darkest rock. Camille quickly texted Pol back, "I'll call when I'm out. "

"Allo?" she said. Camille had just closed up the office, and she could hear him on the other side of the phone. "Allo? Pol?" Camille could hear him breathing and weeping, barely, but Pol would not speak a word. He couldn't bring himself to tell her what had happened, that he was suffering a maelstrom of devastation. The helplessness he felt shook him so that he couldn't even find himself. He was cast out to sea and

wasn't ready to have her see him like this, to have her try to assuage his confusion and regret. He needed to wrestle with it for a time, but he also knew he couldn't say this to her. He knew Camille would insist on being a part of his sorrow and that she would take offense from being excluded. Up to this singular moment, this ripe moment, Pol had been accustomed to feeling pain alone. He had conducted his life in such a way that not only had he nobody he could say such things to, but in a pivotal moment such as this, a time when all things ceased to be the same forever more, he couldn't even manage small inconsequential utterances. It was different now, though. He had to remind himself of this, that he was sharing a life, his unexceptional life. Perhaps, he could soften to her? "Please, be home soon," Pol managed to say and hung up.

Camille and Pol had met completely by happenstance, on a day that was golden and wasteful, glorious and so god-awful that they would both laugh a little at the absurdity of it all when, later, someone would just so happen to ask. Camille had been walking down Rue Saint Paul, her skirt and hair whipping about her. Her shoulders were tightly held as she clutched the collar of her jacket up around her pale, graceful neck. She was walking briskly, but blinded by the angled beams of the sun. She had no need to see each step, really, she knew the street well--where the stones jutted up in the sidewalk, extruded by too many unbearable winters, when to cross to avoid the clochard asking her to spare some change, which she felt she could not possibly spare, the wafting of respectable perfume from the woman with the tidy hair who always seemed to be a few paces ahead each afternoon. Camille had known this street before most of the shops and cafes had civilized the neighborhood near to where her father had worked and to where she had walked every day after school to meet him. Her weathered father had worked in machine shops most of his life. This shop, the shop on Rue Monseigneur Gauvreau, made valves: stopcock valves, spherical valves for holding tanks and cisterns, leaf valves, marine this and that. Camille was never all too interested. Sometimes she would have to wait for her father, James. She would stand out of the way, by the industrial tilt windows peering through to the bustling street below, dreaming of opportunities outside of her life. The smell of shaped steel, sweat, men, cigarettes, and the incessant din of heavy machinery is what she remembered most about her father's work. James would gather his belongings measuredly: lunch box, woolen cap and his coat. He would clock out and imperceptibly nod to the floor manager, perhaps to a co-worker or two and leave as if he hadn't worked there for years on end. Camille and her father would cross the street and stand at the bus stop, no matter the weather, usually silently and wait for the metrobus to take them to their semblance of a home on the outskirts of the city.

On the day that Camille and Pol met, she was older, no longer a schoolgirl, no longer meeting her father after work. Those days were gone, as was her father. James had passed ten years earlier on a bright afternoon. Back then, Sundays were not a day of rest. She did all the chores while her father watched trout fishing on the tv. On that bright Sunday, cupped within his worn lounge chair, his legs stiffened; he wet his pants; he gasped all while sitting before his television and quietly passed to

the monotone ramblings of his favorite show. Camille thought his heart had finally broken all the way.

The day she and Pol met, walking down Rue Saint Paul, a few paces behind the respectable perfumed lady with the tidy hair, Camille witnessed a young boy walk out into the rushing street. The beautiful young boy with angelic curls stepped out into the Rue Saint Paul, disoriented at first, as if he didn't understand the consequences of his actions. He then saw Camille distraught and moving towards him; he stared at her, a bambi, not able to move. His blue eyes caught her off guard. A workman, driving his van with a ladder strapped to its side, was talking on his phone, perhaps to a future client or arguing with his wife, and was distracted and didn't notice the beautiful young boy with angelic curls and blue eyes. Camille ran to the boy, now limp and horrifically bloodied, and she held him. The traffic was now still, and the crowd that had gathered, whispered, looked on as if Camille was the boy's negligent mother. She indeed felt negligent. Camille had seen the young beautiful boy step out into the street; she had seen the van with its preoccupied driver rolling hopelessly towards him. She had locked eyes with the boy, as if he had known her and held infinitesimal trust in her; she had seen the impact and the boy's body jettison into the air only to land lifeless on the cobblestone street. No other mother came to the boy, no relative nor guardian; no one except a tall, beige man. The man took off his warmed coat and covered the boy who lay in Camille's arms. When the ambulance arrived, he gently encouraged her to give the boy over to them, to let them care for his small lost life. He then drove her home and wrote on a scrap of paper his name and number, just in case she needed to talk. This was how Camille and Pol first met. In retrospect, it all seemed to have unfolded as if it had been skillfully choreographed, but at the time, it was serendipitous, sweet love found in a hapless tragedy.

Billowing clouds of exhaust from the traffic made its way to Camille's lungs. She felt she couldn't breathe and dug around in her cavernous bag to find her inhaler. The time was 5:14, and the sun and its warmth had already dropped behind the Michaud Building. Camille stood at the bus stop alone, the cold of October finding her vulnerabilities. She lit her last cigarette. She coughed; it burned, while a single street light turned on, flickered until finally it shone with a steady light. The bus was running late, and Camille was not dressed sensibly. The wind ran up her skirt like an aggressive lover. It found her weakest link, her pale, graceful neck, and she could not hide from its bite. Camille, standing at the bus stop, shivering, felt hollowed, emptied and utterly alone. She could see she was surrounded by hundreds, filling their cars with private thoughts. In that moment though, her past trumped the present; she was invisible to the world. Her cigarette was her last match, she imagined, *La petite marchande d'allumettes*. Somehow and predictably so, the dark and the cold and the great expanse of anonymity would always bring this on, bring her to this vacant abandoned place. And then the bus would arrive. As soon as she was seated, the hissing of the hydraulic brakes released, the familiar used smell of others, and the profound sense of protection she found riding public transportation, Camille came back to the comfort of her life, to her dear Johnathan and to Pol.

The city slid by her, lights slowly burning, Quebec beginning to glow. Camille could not admire its beauty that night; it would have felt adulterous somehow. Something was amiss; in fact, something was quite wrong. Pol needed her, it seemed. She had thought Pol was completed. He had a friend, a hobby and job selling insurance that was marginally fulfilling. She and Johnathan were a pleasant surprise to his life that he still struggled with from time to time. Pol had been living a life alone for many years, by choice he had told her, but had never fully elaborated. To have a few mysteries between them was like unfulfilled desire. It kept the embers burning between them as the rhythm of domestic life had settled in. Pol had fast become accustomed to being a father to Johnathan, and they could hardly be separated. It was a double love affair for Pol, with different parts of his heart warming, different doors unlocking, shelves dusted off. Pol said he felt masculine. When he revealed this to Camille, she noticed, for the first time, a glint in his eyes. Perhaps the beige man was beginning to bloom.

Metrobus 60 continued along its route making its predictable stops. The flow of strangers off and on were restful for Camille, like the to and fro of waves from the sea. She could lose herself to thought, usually, but tonight was different. She remembered the evening, when they were walking through the park and the mist from the fontaine de le Foi touched her face and rested upon her eyelashes. Pol held her and said so bravely that he wanted to protect and care for her and Johnathan. Behold a gentleman who knows not what I really am nor what I've done, thought Camille. She remembered on that day, in that moment, vowing to not use him up, but to take a chance on something with Pol that could very well be love. Camille would be there for him, for Pol, until they both turned to dust.

The metrobus came to a stop. Camille braced for the cold and walked to their rowhouse, second from the corner. Pol came to the door. He had been waiting and heard Camille's footsteps as she approached. He opened the door and stood there; she could see that he had been crying. "Tell me, Pol," she whispered, "tell me," and kissed his brow and embraced him.

Pol had already given Johnathan dinner and brought out a plate for Camille. They sat in silence while she ate. Camille finally put down her fork and knife. "Pol, I cannot eat like this," she said under her breath. She didn't want to involve Johnathan in what she herself didn't understand.

"Okay," Pol whispered. "Let's go into the dark. I can speak to you in the dark. "

Pol led Camille into their bedroom, drew the blinds and turned off the lights. "Let's take off our clothes. Do you mind?" he asked. They both undressed and met underneath the blankets. Camille held Pol and ran her hands through his hair while he cried quietly. "They're both gone," he said finally. "My mother and father, both. "

No pictures of them hung on their walls, no conversations were shared over the phone, no cards sent, no wedding gifts received. "Camille, I was not a good son. I am

guilty. I should have been there more. I should have been there for them--forgiven my father along the way, somehow. Done the work." Pol's tears were rivers. Puddles began to form on the bed and then began pooling on the floor. "I'm relieved, too. I feel burdened and free. I feel untethered because I knew they were always there and now they're not. "

Camille and Pol lay there together for a long time until neither could tell who was who.

"The police said they thought it was asphyxiation. Our neighbor, Monsieur Bouchard, found them. It had been a few days since he had seen them, so he went to check in on them. They were both in their beds, " he said, "looking as if they were having nice dreams." "A gas leak couldn't be found; the police are at a loss. And who are we! Eating, fucking, laughing and carrying on with our lives for the past few days while my mother and father were forgotten, dead in their beds waiting patiently for their one and only son to remember them."

Camille whispered, "How were you to know, shhhh.....," as she held him closer.

"Maudine Anne-Marie Michaude, that is what her stone will say. She was always Maude to everyone, except me. She would have skinned me if she heard me call her Maude. She loved fixing hair, making people feel good about themselves. Arichat is small, you know, and for a time she was the only coiffeuse. What she loved most, and I know this - she needed to be a part of it all, to know everybody's business." Pol's tears were becoming words, migrating like a flock of starlings to his lips. He was being transported to a time without tribulation, telling more than memory served. Camille lay there, holding him, silently, daring not to even breathe, enjoying this time of weakness for him. Pol began to quietly sing:

Dors, dors, le petit bibi

c'est le beau p'tit bibi á maman.

Dors, dors, dors, dors, dors,

le bibi á maman,

hush, hush, Ma Puce."



REID MOULIS, VALUE STILL-LIFE, CHARCOAL ON PAPER

THE OLD GUITARIST

Gale Davis

Hunched over, barely alive.
Desolate.
Alone, except for the guitar
that rests atop his hallowed chest.
Skeleton-like fingers move
across wires as if petting air.

The old man leans toward
his instrument
rockling gently
to its rhythm—
a beat as precious
as his heart.

He is silent. No need
to speak.
A man of subtle refinement
only credits the instrument
not himself.

His pride rests in owning
one possession.



MALIKHA KHAN, COLOSSEUM, CHARCOAL

INNERSITES

Bret Vollmer

I've heard my internal workings:

 a stomach that sounds like a haunted dog.

Veins full of gunpowder and pasta water

 irrigated by empty ventricles that cage

 an imaginary city...or neighborhood?

 ...really nothing that busy--

 maybe a valley.

 Or actually,

 what's within my skin is, like,

 (and maybe you feel similarly)

 a derelict fireworks factory

on the vacant plains of grassy Oklahoma:

a vast and flammable savanna

 where the summer sun drinks every drop

 of earthy liquor from the planet's roots.

And the factory's staffed by a single sleep-deprived smoker

 who eats TV and speed to stay awake,

 and takes regular breaks

 to inhale

 and grind their eyelid against the dry horizon.

 Watch with us--

 together we'll stamp red cigarette butts into tender earth

 and shiver, because it's night now,

 as the sparks take flight like vicious pixies.



ALYSSA MARCKESANO, SUCCULENT, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

THE GIANT SUGAR MAPLE TREE

Dana Cherry

Growing up in the country, summers were spent alternating between my grandparent's homes while my mom and dad worked. While my memories are full of wonderful times spent at both homes, there is something special about the days spent at my granddaddy and nannie's home.

A tree. A giant and beautiful tree. It was over one hundred and fifty years old if the stories my granddaddy told me were true.

He told stories better than anybody I've ever known. Filled with colorful details and sure to make us all laugh, his stories almost always added a new detail with each time. This particular tree was supposedly planted by my granddaddy's mother when she was eagerly anticipating the return of her husband from serving in the war. The sugar maple tree was planted right by the driveway; it was out close enough to the road so that he'd notice it when he got home. The symbolism of a fresh start. This little tree had quite a lot to live up to. Boy, did it ever do that and surpass all expectations as well.

Some of my earliest memories are of my older cousins and I playing under the shade of this massive leafy green tree. We collected the helicopter seeds from beneath the tree and tossed their fragile bodies in the air and watched them flutter down, swaying back and forth, before coming to rest softly back on the ground. Sometimes we had a contest to see which helicopter seedling could stay in the air the longest. We cheered on those little floating seeds as if they were aware that they were competing and that our cheers would influence how long they could stay airborne.

We hung a giant rope on one of the lower hanging branches and used this rope swing to fly back and forth without a care in the world. We looped a foot through the bottom of the rope where it had been neatly tied. My cousins pushed each other as high as they could before running under them to avoid being hit by the swinging person that was hanging on for dear life. We laughed deep belly laughs as we watched each other try to navigate. Careful not to hit the giant trunk of the massive tree.

Back when I was growing up, kids didn't hang out in the house with adults. We were told to go out to play and we would be called to come inside when it was time. In the heat of the summer, the temperatures would easily be in the 90's. No worries for us though. Because under that tree was guaranteed to be at least a 15 degree

drop in the heat just from the shade provided.

On days when my granddaddy had run out to the grocery store, we would have the added treat of popsicles, the kind with two popsicle sticks that you could break in half if you were particularly careful. I always wanted the cherry popsicle, and I was the youngest grandchild on this side of the family. If you follow where I am going here, you'll guess that I always got that cherry popsicle even if one of the other cousins asked for it. Sometimes I would try to split my popsicle and share, but it rarely worked out the way it should, and often there was a piece of my juicy red popsicle hitting the ground under our tree.

I had a specific favorite part of the old maple tree. I don't know if it was because of its age, or its size, but the tree had the most massive above ground roots all around its trunk. Some of the roots formed into perfect little "bowls", and when there was a mud puddle to be found, or a bird bath to snag a little cup of water. You could be sure that the best mud pies ever made could be found right there under those branches. I could sit there patting out my pies to different sizes and shapes for hours. I would present them to my older cousins or my older sister. They were never too impressed. My nannie and granddaddy both appreciated a good mud pie when they were given one though, and I can still feel my cheeks burning from smiling so big after one of them complimented me on this being the best mud pie they had ever seen. Every single time.

And then, I grew up.

My grandfather passed away. I got married and had five children of my own. One constant through all of that was the big old sugar maple still standing proudly, announcing itself silently to all that passed by on their travels. People were able to find my grandma's house just by being told to keep an eye out for the beautiful tree in front of the old farm house in the curve. My children fell in love with the very tree that I had loved so much as a little girl. Each time we'd go for a visit, I swear my heart did its own little happy song watching my kids run in circles around the trunk of the tree. They'd pick up the little seedlings but didn't have nearly as much fun watching them float as I had at their age. They never understood the art of a good mud pie.

Twelve years ago this May, my dad called to tell me that my nannie wasn't doing well at all. I went to see her, spent time by her side, and told her I loved her. She wanted to be home. The place she had spent almost all her life and did not want to go to a hospital. She'd dealt with heart issues and knew there was nothing more doctors could do for her. I stepped off the front porch and went and sat under my tree. I cried. I felt a strange comfort sitting under the tree, and somehow felt everything would be okay. After all, my nannie herself said it was her time to go. She passed shortly after.

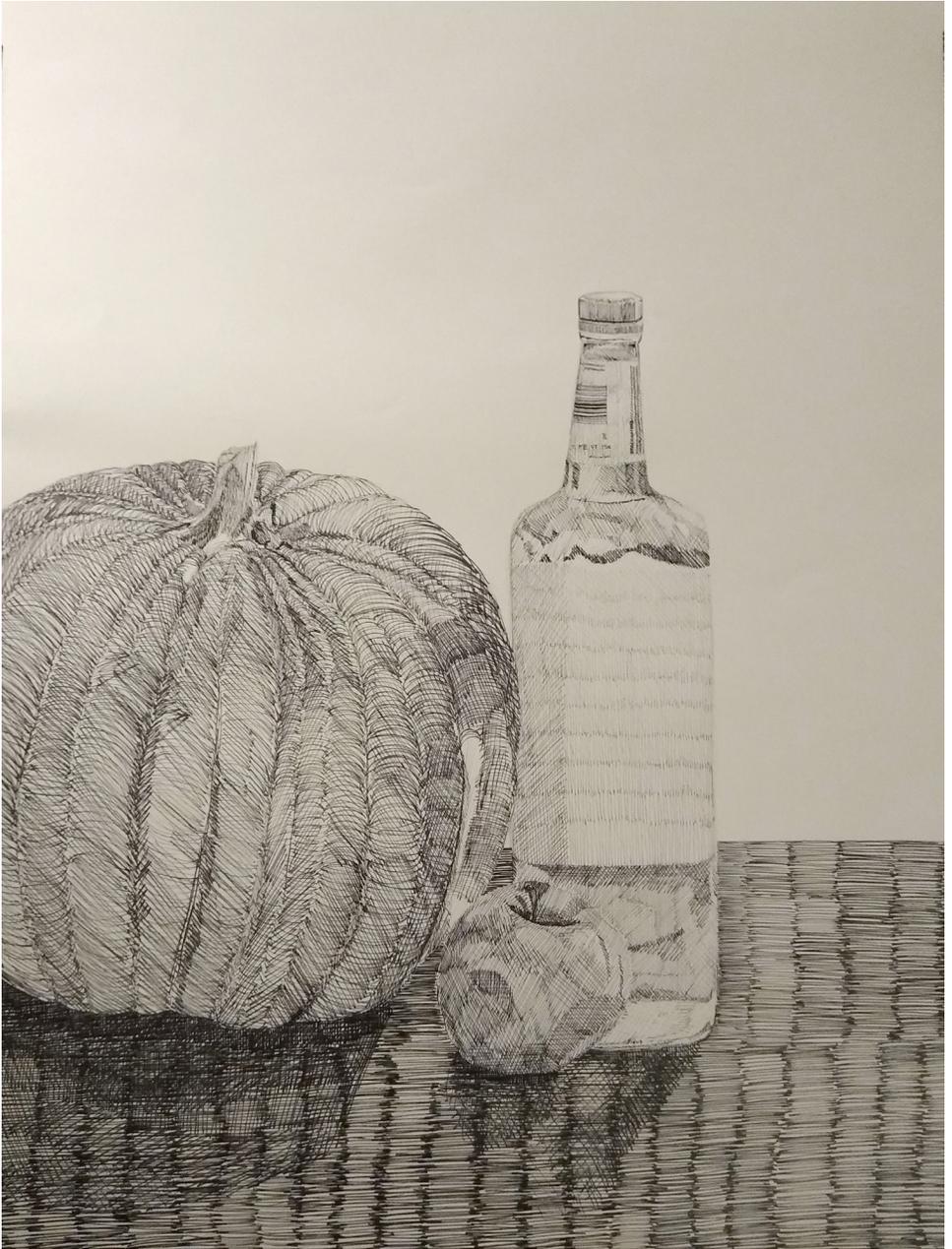
A couple months later, my dad called me again. This time it wasn't someone that wasn't doing well. My beloved tree, my shady solace, my playmate, had been struck

by lightning during a storm the night before. The lightning caused significant damage to the trunk of the tree, causing it to become unstable. Because of its size there was concern that if left alone. This tree was a symbol of my childhood that may fall onto the house. The only thing older than that tree around there was the house. It had to be protected. The tree had to be taken down before it could fall and destroy the family home. My dad knew how much that tree meant to me. He said he could wait a couple of weeks so I could come by and get some pictures of it. How could this be happening? How could it have happened? My nannie had just passed away. That tree was my safe place and I couldn't lose it. I understood logically why the tree had to be taken down. I couldn't wrap my mind around it emotionally, though. Where would I ever find that same peacefulness if my tree and its leafy shelter were gone? I went by and took pictures. I took them from every side. I tried to get close ups of the most sacred parts, my dear mud pie roots. I cried.

The day came and the tree was taken down. Piece by piece. My dad chose to have the company leave the stump around 4 foot high. My sister and I went by and planted beautiful perennials in the base of the trunk. We lovingly added soil with extra nutrients. Our tree would still have life in it one way or the other! Our little flowery stump is a loving tribute not only to that special tree but to both of my grandparents as well.

When I was finally able to look at the pictures I had taken that day before the tree came down, I was surprised. I was disappointed and sad. The pictures didn't capture how special that tree was. They didn't tell a story the way I had hoped they would. They didn't convey the importance of every branch, every helicopter seedling, the rope swing, or the rooted caverns. None of it. Somehow though, I still felt such love, adoration, and fondness to this tree.

That's the moment that it hit me. My memories of that tree, of my granddaddy and his never-ending stories, of my nannie, they are all alive every day in my heart. And they are as clear and as special as they were when the tree was standing. My grandparents still feel alive. I understand how lucky I am to have those memories, and now peace is within me.



TAYLOR BROWN, CROSS HATCHING STILL-LIFE, INK ON PAPER

ENTITLEMENT

Mary Clyde Bissett

Congratulations,
You've won this round.
My back still aches, your blood-stained knife remains
In hand, I tell myself you know not what you do.
You don't mean to diminish my pride.
Consciously steal my light so you can take center stage.
Hold my hand to hold me back.

I build you up; I built your castle.
Tirelessly laid brick by brick.
Now you sit in your tower with watchful eye.
My presence locked away.
Thrown with the key, never to be seen again.

Congratulations, I've lost
The game. My frail body gave out, tired
Of holding you too high. Unscathed
And victorious, you needed my pride more than me.
Slyly replaced my light with a broken bulb.
A relentless pat on the back for scarring mine.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Gale Davis

My classroom was located on the first floor, precariously abutting the nun's lounge. It is, has been, and probably will be the type of place where one needn't linger. A sense of boundary permeates the space. There is little need for signage atop the door to indicate Private--everyone knows. Even new students get first hand info on where not to go. Being naïve is not acceptable.

You see, the gist of the matter is control. We are unanimous in the opinion that losing control even for a brief span of time, might lead to some type of rebellion on our part. So, in the interest of civil rest even during break period, the nuns never leave the premises. Mind you, they would not have to go far. Their convent is next door. Just a few steps and they could be free of us as well. I would call that a win/win! It might do some of them a world of good to let go--let their hair down.

It is probably very difficult for the young novice sisters to stay so vigilant. Perhaps they are tempted to toss their veil over a chair or let out one walloping non-sisterly belch. My goodness, can you just hear that one in the confessional! How many Hail Marys does it take to erase being normal?

No, they insist on hunkering down in full penguin garb within earshot of us feral girls. No need to give mischief a season! Ever ready—ever steady is their mantra. Besides, it is difficult to maintain the Silence Code when out of range. Every student is keenly aware that the nun's revere silence. To hold one's tongue is akin to winning an Olympic medal. It does not come easy. Years of practice, discipline, and self-denial are involved. Yes, silence is golden! And we are taught from day one not to settle for anything less than gold. That is why we work so hard for those shiny stars on our papers. We are driven to the highest standard.

Of course, sometimes we do forget that our mouths were made to stay shut (except when eating or answering a question). That is why all the walls are lined with gentle reminders to think, think, think. No need to speak. Walking does not require talking. Silence is a virtue; whereas, talking is a weakness of the flesh.

One fateful day, I remember coming out of my class next to the nun's lounge. It was already five minutes into break time. The nuns were closeted behind the dark oak doors. It took a few extra minutes to collect my stuff before heading out. I raced down the hallway. As I was buzzing along, one of my laces unraveled. I tripped. Books tumbled out of my grip like a rockslide onto the slick tiled floor. Papers neatly stuffed in my folder leaped in a wild flurry. A paper trail dotted the floor. Some-

where, in the deepest crevice of my wicked Catholic heart, an unmentionable word escaped. "Damn!" I yelled.

Before I could slap my hand over my mouth, that word flew like a torpedo searching its target. I froze. My feet would not move. It was as if someone poured mushy cement into my immaculately clean black and white oxfords. If death has a face, it would have looked like me that day. I am doomed! I know that heathen word echoed through the walls. I began to imagine every foreseeable consequence. Of course, confession was paramount. I would have to go to the church office immediately. Confession had to be arranged right away. My soul was in mortal danger, should I die before admitting my behavior. Following this, the priest or Mother Superior would telephone my parents for an urgent conference in keeping with their responsibility for raising a respectable Catholic girl. My parents would thus be grilled on how they spoke, what TV was permissible, etc. Of course, I would be sent home with extra homework such as a one hundred word essay dealing with controlling the tongue.

The cherry on the cake would be public disgrace. That would be something like forfeiting free time during breaks and lunch to mop the floors or some other noticeable penance to dissuade others from hanging around me or worst yet, having a dirty vocabulary. It wouldn't be pretty, for sure. Dirty words require sanitizing. There's nothing like scrubbing the floor on one's knees to gain wisdom.

I waited. I prayed silently. I bargained with God for a reprieve.

Then, in almost a whisper I heard the most beautiful sound. Behind closed doors, those sisters were in unison offering up prayers for my forgiveness and well being. With tears in my eyes, I heard their soft petitions to God for mercy as, "She knows not what she is doing. Amen."



KAREN SIEGRIST, RECLINING NUDE, INK ON PAPER

CATALYST

Christopher Cutshaw

It sharpens the mind
and rouses the spirit.
The woodcutter's blood,
a daydreamer's grievance.
The milk of a cow,
a sweet plant's confections.
Pairs well with the brew,
that promises heaven.

SPREADING MY WINGS

Alicia Williams-Prince

I am beautifully made by the universe.
Living my wildest dream.
Now unconfined, becoming a butterfly.

I am the stillness before dawn.
Glowing brighter than the sun.
Now unconfined, gently fluttering by.

I am reclaiming my purpose.
Fearlessly finding my calm.
Now unconfined, seeking my happiness.

I am spreading my wings of glory.
Preparing to take flight.
Now unconfined, fluttering high in the sky.



TAYLOR BROWN, PARTNER PORTRAIT, INK ON PAPER

SOMETIMES, FOR FUN

Bret Vollmer

I skip to the end of a poem and then decide whether to read it.
You can do that here -- not that you need my permission --
but I typically miss the music and the image,
metaphored here as buckets of broken
beads and bells and shells thrown
down a sandy staircase, scrubbed clean
by antiseptic sunshine dripping from the horn
of a magic goat, one that doesn't scream
like WiFi but sings like vinyl,
greasy syllables to ignite
pianos and burn paper-dry
bad vibes in an origami skull.
And as we approach this middle's end,
Amalthea (the goat) begins
to strut along a snare drum stretched
across a sullen sea to chew
on aluminum and croon echoes into
a jungle sinkhole half-filled with holy rainwater.

And whether you think that glass is half empty or half
full, understand you are the vessel.

Fall Line:

a narrow zone that marks the geological boundary where different elevation regions (such as coastal and piedmont) meet, and is distinguished by the occurrence of falls and rapids where rivers and streams cross it.