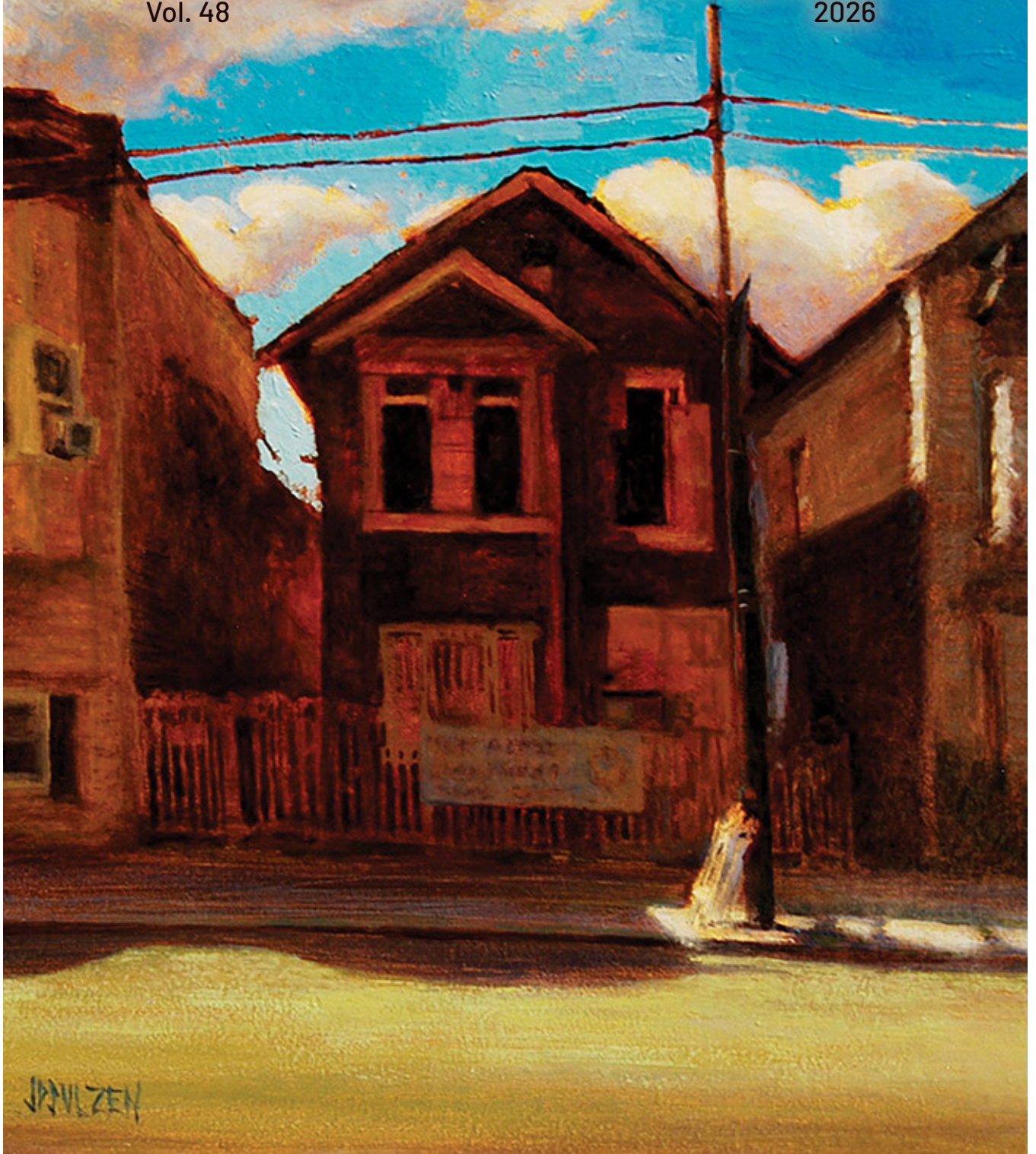


# MOTIF

The Creative Arts Journal of Concordia University Chicago  
Vol. 48 2026



JANUZEN

# MOTIF

The Creative Arts Journal of Concordia University Chicago  
Vol. 48 2026

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## A Valediction

David Rogner

I saw my first copy of *Motif* when I was eleven years old. My brother Paul brought it home from college to show the family that *Motif* had published a song he had written. I was duly impressed. I already had a vague idea that I would attend Concordia when I grew up. Not in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would spend 40 years teaching English at Concordia—and editing *Motif* for over 25 of them.

As I prepare my last edition and reflect on my time at Concordia, I find that producing *Motif* has been one of the most rewarding parts of my ministry. This is not because the journal has world-class content or brilliant editorial leadership. It is because the journal encourages Concordia students to be artists—to *make* something, to use their imaginations. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet whose work has occupied much of my scholarly attention, famously defined that imagination as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” Our artistic creations, in other words, are echoes of God’s eternal and ongoing imaginative act. We are made to be makers. I have derived great satisfaction from encouraging students to do just that.

*Motif* began in 1960, under the leadership of Dr. F. Samuel Janzow and Dr. Henry R. Lettermann. For the 1963 issue, Janzow wrote a brief piece entitled “*Raison d’Etre*,” in which he defended the journal, arguing that it “helps bring us closer to the goals set before us as a college.” What this *apologia* makes clear—as he connects the journal to Concordia’s objectives—is that not everyone was convinced. An arts journal may be of questionable value—at best, a low priority.

By the time I arrived as a student at Concordia in 1978, the journal had disappeared, a victim largely of budget cuts. After I returned to the faculty in 1986, the English department started a long, slow process of resurrecting it. I credit my late friend and colleague Dr. Lila Kurth with finding ways to make it happen. First, she entrusted me with the editorial task. Then she tackled the funding issue, first by getting help from “student activity” fees, later by convincing administrators to put funds into the departmental budget. In recent years, we have been blessed by help from the university advancement office and from individual donors who believe in the arts. This has allowed us to expand from a black-and-white to a full-color publication.

When I began editing *Motif*, I looked at what my predecessors had done, hoping to carry on their legacy. Drs. Janzow and Lettermann, both writers of hymn texts, often included new hymns in *Motif*. As an aspiring hymn writer, I wanted to do the same. They often included an especially artful homily preached in chapel during the year; I have often done the same. But they also recognized that good and Godly art does not consist solely of works that explicitly proclaim the Christian message. I have likewise striven to publish a variety of works that reflect the beauty of creation and the wondrous complexity of our human condition.

I am grateful to God, to my students, and to all the people at Concordia who have supported me in this work. As I say farewell, I pass the work on to my colleagues, confident that they will not only respect the tradition but also find new ways to honor the work of student artists.

## Table of Contents

<b>Award Winner: Providence</b> , Lily Seifferlein.....	1
<b>Award Winner: Anthem and Blues: Pity and Music in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen</b> and Langston Hughes, Elijah Kohlmeier.....	2
Life on Broadway, Velda Ndang.....	6
<b>Laissez-faire</b> , Katelyn Whitlock.....	7
Dying Knight, William Foellmer.....	8
Made for More, Elijah Kohlmeier.....	9
I Fall Asleep in Jesus Wounds, J.R. Freiberg.....	10
Help from the Sanctuary, Rev. Dr. Patrick James Bayens.....	11
The Rising Sun, Larissa Hanson.....	12
<b>Russian Sage</b> , Marlena Tomasicyk.....	13
The Breath of the Bloom, Katerina Trankina.....	13
Antigravity, Samantha Hadler.....	14
A Becoming in Recollection, Isabelle Campos.....	15
<b>Midnight Snow</b> , Taro Peterson.....	19
A Time to Reap, a Time to Sow, a Time for Rain, a Time for Snow, Nathaniel Clayton.....	20
Spanish Cafe, Kierra Mohalley.....	21
Siesta at the Spanish Café, Lily Seifferlein.....	22
<b>Califa’s Daughter</b> , Jonathan Ruhlig.....	23
Baptisia, Sarah Redhage.....	24
On the Night He Was Betrayed, David Rogner and Jonathan Stahlke.....	25
With His Wounds We Are Healed, Nathaniel Clayton.....	26
High Law, Noah Martin.....	26
Today, Isabelle Campos.....	27
Let the Land Rest, Elijah Kohlmeier.....	28
Scorched Earth, Samantha Hadler.....	28
<b>Easy</b> , Anton Jones.....	29
Tiny Titans, Melanie Goman.....	31
Nathan Goman, Paper Penguins.....	32
Nathan Goman, The Art of War.....	32
Susanna Cecilia Smith, Elijah Kohlmeier.....	33
Quiet, Kierra Mohalley.....	36
I See the Stars . . . Thy Power Throughout the Universe Displayed, Kristina Kaufman.....	37
Typewriter, Isabelle Campos.....	38
Fish, Rachel Rettberg.....	38
<b>My Love is Conditional</b> , Evalynn Berg.....	39
Illinois’ Hidden Gem, Maciej Bednarz.....	40
Pájaro volando, Paula Martinez.....	41
The Amber Gaze, Katerina Trankina.....	42
Mason Street, Katelyn Whitlock.....	43
Corner of Sunset and Crosswalk, Julie Sulzen.....	44
Finding Karl’s Book, David Rogner.....	45

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### Song of All Songs Celebration

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*Motif* includes several poems in this issue, titles bolded above, that arose from a call for new love poems, contributions to the June 2026 “Song of All Songs” event at Concordia-Chicago.

The centerpiece of this event is the world premiere of Dr. Jonathan Stahlke’s *Song of All Songs*, a musical setting of the Song of Solomon for choir and orchestra.

## Radke/Sorenson Prizes for Writing 2026

The English Department and the editors of *Motif* are proud to include in the 2026 issue the winners of the fifteenth annual Radke/Sorenson Prizes for Writing. These \$250 prizes, endowed by an anonymous donor, recognize an outstanding poem and essay written by a junior or senior English major. The winner of the 2026 poetry prize is Lily Seifferlein for her sonnet “Providence.” Lily, from Landisville, PA, is graduating this spring with a double major in English and Strategic Communication. The 2026 essay prize is awarded to Elijah Kohlmeier for his essay “Anthem and Blues: Pity and Music in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Langston Hughes.” Elijah, from Wauwatosha, WI, graduates this spring with an English major in the pre-seminary program.

The awards are named for two distinguished former members of the English Department, Dr. Merle Radke and Prof. Karl Sorenson. Dr. Radke taught English at Concordia from 1957 to 1987, in addition to editing the journal *Lutheran Education* for many years. He passed away in 2017 at the age of 95. Prof. Karl Sorenson, who served Concordia from 1965 to 1999, taught courses in British literature and drama, as well as directing and acting in many plays, both at Concordia and in area community theaters. Prof. Sorenson passed away in 2004.

We also gratefully acknowledge the Dr. Merle and Ruth Radke Endowment Fund, which helps to fund the annual publication of *Motif*. The endowment was established in 2017 to honor Dr. Radke’s service to the English Department at Concordia.

### Providence

Lily Seifferlein

Some day I’ll see you at the grocery store,  
 your face lit up by harsh fluorescent light,  
 and mine, I think, will soften at the sight—  
 a quiet gladness asking nothing more.  
 Yet then, of course, we both will turn away,  
 to glance at lists with *cereal* and *tea*,  
 each tending to the day’s sweet litany,  
 mere happenstance our paths crossed here today.  
 O string of fate, I thought it once meant more,  
 when my hand would have been the one to pen  
 the list you hold, my mouth the one you kissed.  
 Though what we were still lingers from before,  
 we meet the life we feared we’d miss, and when  
 we meet it, see God’s hand in what we missed.



## Anthem and Blues: Pity and Music in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Langston Hughes

Elijah Kohlmeier



From both a historical and literary standpoint, Wilfred Owen and Langston Hughes seem a rather unusual comparison. Owen writes largely concerning his experiences on a European battlefield in the first World War, whereas Hughes voices the plight of impoverished Black Americans in the 20th century. In addition, their styles are completely different. Owen composes metrical poetry in classic forms, utilizing the sonnet and structured rhyme as well as maintaining precise line length throughout his poems. Hughes, meanwhile, mixes the contemporary sounds of jazz, blues, and be-bop into a new sort of poetry. Where he does use rhyme, it is seldom regular, and his line length is wildly varied. Owen uses a varied vocabulary, while Hughes uses the simple everyday speech of his community. The comparison of the two seems, at first glance, a juxtaposition. Upon closer inspection, however, it seems the two have more in common than one might think. For one thing, both poets are more than willing to reveal the hard truths of their cultural situations. Owen does not shy away from telling the gory details of the battlefield to his readers, speaking of machine guns and gas in terms as gruesome as they were when he saw them firsthand. Hughes, for his part, describes the depressing and brutal situations African Americans of his time faced throughout the country.

The brutal honesty in their poetry, for both Hughes and Owen, wasn’t written merely for self-expression nor to be torn apart in an English classroom, but rather to bring about compassion for two suffering groups of people. Owen might as well say as much in the “Preface” which he had planned for his poems, claiming his subject was not “heroes” but rather “the pity of War” (928). In this way, Owen changes how these soldiers are seen, not as noble but as pitiable, and this ought to thus change readers’ views on the war. Thus, Owen presents the horrors of war in his poetry, using sound devices to gain even more compassion toward an end of the war. Hughes similarly seeks compassion on the “low-down folks,” as he calls them in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” that they might find acceptance for how they are, rather than by seeking to be “white,” which some see as “unconsciously a symbol of all the virtues” (964–5). Thus, Hughes must show the lives of such folk honestly, even in their saddest forms, or else they will never gain true acceptance. He uses jazz forms because “jazz is their child” (965), and to gain true compassion for these low-down folk, he must write like such folk sing. Therefore, Owen and Hughes, while on the surface being incredibly different from one another, are on a deeper level united in their common cause, to find pity and compassion for their peoples through their honesty, and they share a common strategy—the sounds and music of poetry—to accomplish this.

This is most clearly the case in Owen’s most famous poem, “Anthem for Doomed Youth.” The poem is written in sonnet form, fourteen lines of rhymed iambic pentameter. As Edmund Blunden writes in *War Poets: 1914–1918*, Owen was able to “concentrate meaning and metaphor within that enduring form,” even if that meaning was found in death and pain (38). However, this choice of form itself may have much to do with Owen’s purpose of evoking pity. The sonnet is often associated with romantic love; having rather the death scene of a platoon of soldiers overlaid with such a form offers a jarring reading to anyone familiar with sonnets.

Anthem and Blues: Pity and Music in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Langston Hughes, Continued.

However, far more than merely subverting a classic form, Owen goes out of his way to make each word of this poem intensely musical. The opening octave of “Anthem for Doomed Youth” strips away the false music often associated with death, replacing it with the true sounds of soldiers’ passing away. In the first line, Owen inquires after the “passing-bells for these who die as cattle,” saying that they are missing, replaced instead by “the monstrous anger of the guns” (2). Likewise, Owen says that, for these deceased, there is no “voice of mourning save the choirs,” which are themselves “wailing shells” and “bugles calling” (6–8) rather than human voices. In *English Poetry of the First World War*, John Johnston comments that here “auditory images are paired with opposed images that evoke contrary impressions of anger, haste, impersonality” (177), as opposed to the personal mourning of a proper funeral. In this way, the music which Owen mentions—bells and choirs—are replaced by artillery fire and sounds of war. This then pulls the reader into the scene of the poem through the sounds he describes.

Owen goes so far as to accomplish this with the sounds of the words themselves. The guns are not merely mentioned but rather are illustrated with the consonance of the phrase, “the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle / Can patter” (3–4). This moment of intense cacophony sounds like precisely what it describes. The machine guns are made palpable when Owen “plays with alliteration finely,” as Blunden puts it (38). In fact, by using this cacophony, Owen undoubtedly portrays some of the horrors of war as well to the reader, thereby hoping to inspire compassion in his audience in an effort to end the war.

And indeed, garnering compassion for these dying soldiers is Owen’s ultimate goal in this poem. Owen, through his musical words, paints a picture of a poor funeral held for all of these young men. There is hardly any mourning for these dying soldiers. Rather than candles for a funeral vigil, there are only the eyes that “Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes,” and in place of a white cloth for their caskets are girls whose “pallor” when they hear of their lover’s death “shall be their pall.” This then culminates with the “slow dusk” equating to the “drawing down of blinds” (11–14) in mourning. Owen laments the fact that all these young men die without funeral rites, and the alliteration he uses here make this lament beautifully tragic. In this way, by not offering them funeral rites, Owen forces the reader to recognize how the soldiers’ lives are carelessly thrown away for no purpose.

And it is this meaningless death which draws out the compassion of readers. Owen makes it clear that they are dying for no apparent reason, calling the soldiers on the front lines “these who die as cattle” (1). They die, Owen argues, for no reason—in a war the purpose of which is barely remembered. This is exemplary of what John Lehmann would call Owen’s attempt “to make the public ask itself what end the unceasing casualties—on both sides—were serving” (55). The purpose of “Anthem for Doomed Youth” is clearly to stir compassion by highlighting the meaninglessness of the soldiers’ deaths. Owen’s aim is that such compassion might bring an end to the war. However, he is not willing to sacrifice the beauty of poetry for this purpose. Rather, by subverting a well-known form and using musical devices, Owen makes the beauty of the poetry contribute to the pity of the situation.

Langston Hughes does something surprisingly similar in his poem “The Weary Blues,” advocating for the plight of African Americans by presenting an altogether bleak scene. However, “The Weary Blues,” much like “Anthem for Doomed Youth,” still maintains the beauty of poetry, albeit in a distinctly new way. This poem is one example of Hughes imitat-

ing blues music in his form and meter. As Donald B. Gibson points out, “Much of his poetry . . . was written to be read aloud” (54), and this is perhaps the foremost example. From the first line onward, Hughes speaks of music, writing about a Black man “Droning a drowsy syncopated tune, / Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon” (1–2). It is impossible to read this poem quickly and truly appreciate it. Everything from the sound of the words to the relaxed meter calls on the reader to slow down and truly appreciate, indeed, even experience the music of the poetry.

As far as the practical ways Hughes accomplishes this effect, one of the most palpable techniques is Hughes’ intentionality for what sounds are stressed. The brighter, higher pitched “i” and “e” vowels find themselves consistently unstressed, while low, slow “o” and “u” vowels are given greater weight in the irregular meter. This forces the reader to have to slow down significantly while reading this poem, which emulates exactly the kind of music Hughes portrays. Similarly, the “l” sounds in phrases like “pale dull pallor of an old gas light” (5) press on the readers’ brakes a little more, forcing them to move through the slow music of the poem. Making the reader slow down allows them to hear the sad plight of the Black man singing his song.

The use of repetition throughout this poem adds to the feeling of blues music, as this style often involves such repetitions. Thus, Hughes repeats that the man “did a lazy sway” (6–7) before moving on to speak of the Weary Blues. In the same way, the Black man playing the blues repeats “I got the Weary Blues / And I can’t be satisfied” (25–28) before ending, “I ain’t happy no mo’ / And I wish that I had died” (29–30). In addition to this, the repeated interjection of “O Blues” (11; 16) adds another layer of blues musicality to this poem. Not only does the repetition add to the blues effect, but it also heightens the compassion of the reader by stressing the dissatisfaction of the blues singer. In addition, by using their form of music and showing the beauty of it in his poetry, Hughes makes readers of any race appreciate the music of the Black communities and thus inspire compassion for their suffering.

This compassion is drawn out even more with Hughes’ mentions of death throughout the poem. The first instance comes in the song the Black man sings, with its tragic ending of “I wish that I had died” (30). Having this blues singer say such a sad thing in so musical a way stirs the compassion of the reader of this poem. Hughes then completes the poem with a return to this death, saying that “He slept like a rock or a man that’s dead” (35). This creates the greatest sense of compassion for the Negro blues singer. After all, the man who had wished to be dead slept as though he was truly dead. However, the man seems dehumanized in this final line, for he sleeps not like a baby or any other sort of person, but rather like an inanimate rock. By so dehumanizing him, Hughes makes the reader see how truly awful his figurative death is, for it seems nobody cares for the singer. Thus, in a sense, he got his wish, but Hughes forces the reader to remember what a sad wish it is. In this way, Hughes stirs compassion for the tragic plight of this singer, all the while maintaining the beauty of the poem through the blues style.

In comparing “The Weary Blues” with “Anthem for Doomed Youth,” then, an interesting pattern emerges. In very different ways, both poets nevertheless make music a central part of their poems. Owen replaces funeral music with the sound of war artillery and subverts the normal expectations from a sonnet. Hughes finds a way to emulate the very blues style about which he is writing. Both, however, connect their forms of music to

Anthem and Blues: Pity and Music in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen and Langston Hughes, Continued.

seemingly meaningless deaths. For Owen, nobody cares enough to cease the fighting or even to bury their dead, despite the fact that the original purpose of the war had been forgotten. Rather, the dying soldiers are simply cattle dying for no reason. For Hughes, nobody cares enough for the Black singer to seek his well-being; he compares his figurative death to an inanimate rock. Indeed, it appears these meaningless deaths are meant to evoke the pity and compassion of their readers—and to seek social reform through this compassion. For Owen, this means a ceasefire, while for Hughes it requires an end to the injustices which his people face. Both believe that poetry which seeks social justice does not need to be “social justice poetry,” so to speak. A poem can be beautiful while still seeking to change the world—and can even use that beauty to do so.

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## Life on Broadway

Velda Ndang, Ink and Watercolor



## Laissez-faire

*Katelyn Whitlock*

I am confounded by your  
overabundance of care as we  
stand there, sliding,  
sparkling in parking lot. I am  
shivering and shaking in my sleeveless dress, making  
a mess of my white shoes in the slush.  
You steady me on ice-slick cement,  
settling into shirtsleeves,  
holding out your jacket for me to take, and I  
make you put it back on because really, I'm fine, and

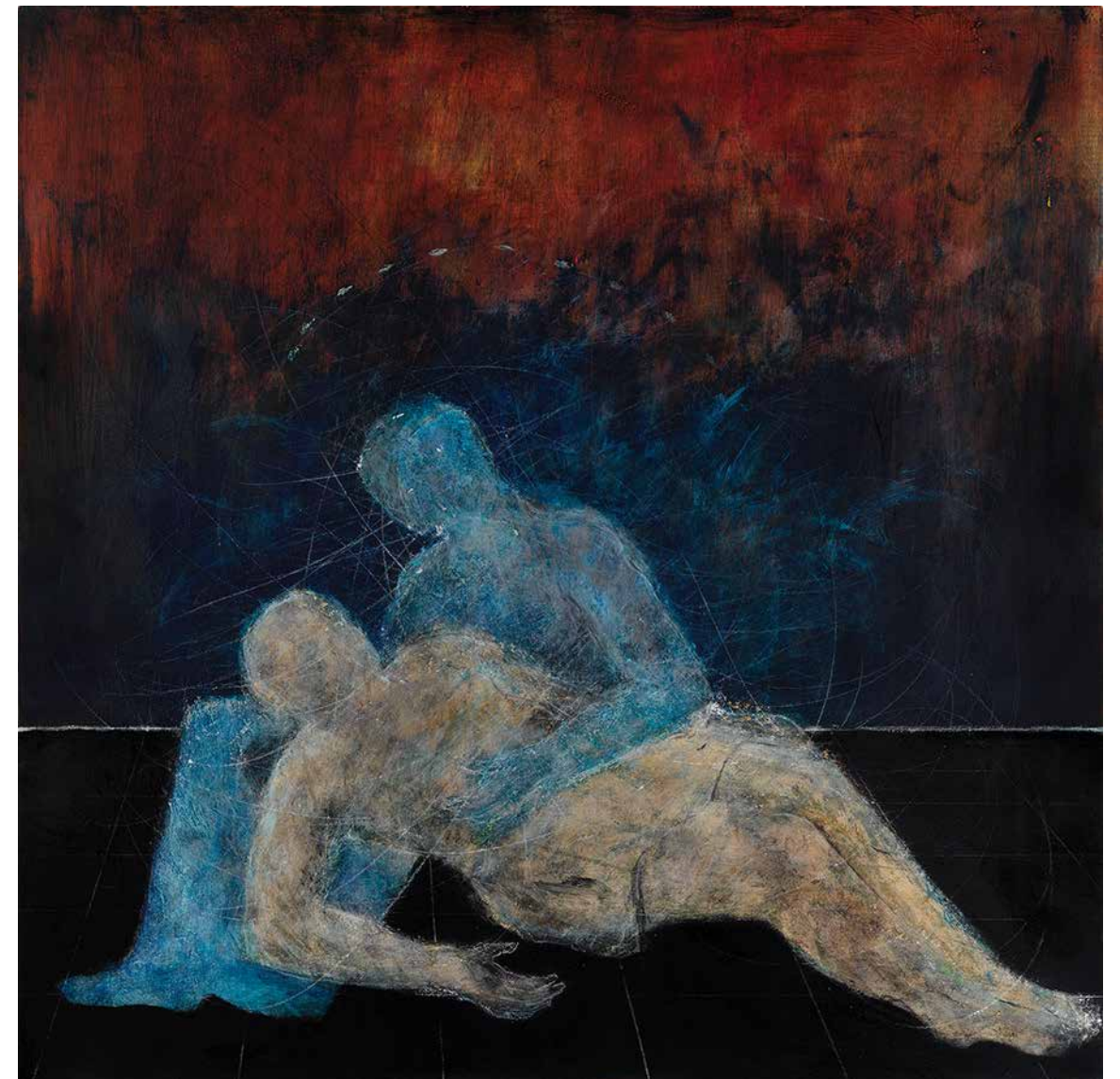
maybe I don't want to glitter-bomb your suit coat,  
cover it in microscopic debris that is a  
constant reminder of me, clingy and conceited,  
or withhold from you the warmth you so  
unsparingly offer, for I  
hate to be the cause of your shaking; I am  
content in my trepidation, humiliation at the  
involuntary tremble of teeth.  
I shut my mouth and stare out at starless sky,  
resigned to rise above weakness.

I seek this self-destructive independent ideation,  
conflation of chivalry with a  
profanation of my pride. You  
purse your lips, consider my shaking shoulders  
as I realize my fault, my fatal flaw:  
I want what I cannot take.  
Make this happen,  
will it into being.  
Looking your way, finding you lovely,  
subliminal messaging suggesting you  
offer me suit coat like men are supposed to and yet  
I simply cannot set my pride aside.  
Sarcasm and snide remarks conceal my  
numbskull neuroticism.  
I want to take a boulder, tie it to my  
violent self-reliance, let it sink,  
no longer overthink.  
But it's all been said and done, certainly  
must've scared you away, fickle as men are but you

slink suit coat over my shoulders,  
give me a smile as I stand  
there, stupefied at your persistence. You  
know I know not what to say  
as I shrug shawl off shoulders, satin  
frozen stiff. The white  
billows out into winter wind,  
my stubbornness, my sin  
confused, charmed by your care,  
resigned to be more laissez-faire.

## Dying Knight

*William Foellmer, Mixed Media*



**Made for More**

Elijah Kohlmeier

“You were made for more,” they say—  
truer than I think they meant.

I was even there that day.

“Sculpted from the potter’s clay,  
now you’re full of cracks and dents.  
You were made for more,” they say.

I, however, know the way  
you were made is why you’re sent.  
I was even there that day.

“Guilty! You have fallen prey  
to the twisted tree-Serpent.  
You were made for more,” they say.

But the price you had to pay,  
someone else gave every cent.  
I was even there that day.

“Brokenhearted, here you pray  
after everywhere you went?  
You were made for more,” they say.

But I take your heart of gray  
stone and give a soft one, then  
“You’re remade for more,” I say.  
I am even here this day.

**I Fall Asleep in Jesus’ Wounds**

*For Deaconess Frances Szeto:  
God’s richest blessings on your ministry at Concordia Chicago. Is. 40:11*

1 I fall a - sleep in Je - sus' wounds, There par-don for my sins a - bounds.  
2 In peace and joy I now de - part; God's child I am with all my heart.

Yea, Je - sus' blood and right - eous - ness My jew - els are, my glo - rious dress.  
I thank thee, Death, thou lead - est me To that true life where I would be

In these be - fore my God I'll stand When I shall reach the heav'n - ly land.  
So cleansed by Christ, I fear not death. Lord Je - sus, strength - en Thou my faith.

Text: Paul Eber, 1511-69; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-78, alt.  
Tune: J. R. Freiberg, b. 2002

SZETO  
88 88 88

Text: Public Domain  
Music: ©2025 J. R. Freiberg. Used by permission.

## Help from the Sanctuary

The Rev. Dr. Patrick James Bayens

The Presentation of Our Lord

February 2, 2026

In the holy name of Jesus. Amen.

“We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. For one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” Well-known words, from a well-worn psalm. Surely Simeon knew it—by heart. Blessed Anna as well. Maybe you’ve found it too, and made it your own. Try it on. You are here, in the Lord’s courts, after all. Where it’s better to be a doorkeeper than dwell in the tents of wickedness. So it fits. But in about ten minutes or so you will leave. And go on and do whatever it is that you must do. Anna and Simeon, however, did not. They kept hanging around. In hope, one might say. Or would “anxiety” be a better word? It’s been forty days since Christmas. Seemed like forty years for the seer, who had heard in the Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. A wilderness of waiting, though it be in the courts of the Lord’s house, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Every night, he went home, knowing—that today had not been the day.

Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

I prayed that prayer as a child every night; for years. Simeon, though, was not thinking about dying when he went to bed every night. For he was looking for the consolation of Israel. Tomorrow morning matters. As it always does in all the psalms. For God still has unfinished business to attend. Neither Simeon nor very elderly Anna prayed, “O God, just let me die and go be with the angels.” Theirs was a restless spirit. But they were in the right place to hear the Spirit speak. And see the Christ. “The Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple,” they knew; “He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” You’re in the right place too. Even if you soon shall leave. They knew their prayers mattered. Do you? They do if God still has unfinished business. With your wayward son whom you lovingly brought to the font. With your confused sister, who made her first communion, but has been hard to get out of bed of late. With your wayward and confused country. Unfinished business, too, with you, who have put your prayers on hold, and have let hope slip away. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.” If you let him. If you will hold God accountable—to his own word. Such is the stuff of faith, of prayer. And showing up here. Anna was in the temple interceding for those who didn’t show up, as well as for those who, like her, were seeking redemption. Seek and ye shall find. And she wouldn’t leave; and Simeon woke up anxious every morning and came on back. To pray, “Lord, let it be today”; or “Thy kingdom, come!”

And then—Mary and Joseph bring in Baby Jesus. The same Jesus you are shown, and receive, here. The answer to all your prayers. And your tears. Those sighs too deep for words. Luke doesn’t say so, but yes, I see tears. A whole flood of them. Down the seer’s cheeks. But they’re tears of joy, now. All the while Anna is in absolute ecstasy. An old woman who’s seen it all, we say. Who’s not supposed to get excited at 84. She’s in ecstasy, grabbing anyone she can.

Simeon takes Mary’s son in his arms. Doesn’t everyone want to hold Baby Jesus? And says that he now can depart in peace: “your word has been fulfilled.” How much has been fulfilled for *you*? For you see, Simeon didn’t just see the Christ. But what would come of him as well: destined for the fall and rise of many; a sign opposed; thoughts laid bare—the real you, exposed. No more hiding behind your well-primped façade. A sword cutting right through blessed Mary too. She would not die until she had seen the chastisement for *our* peace fall on *Him*. A pool of blood.

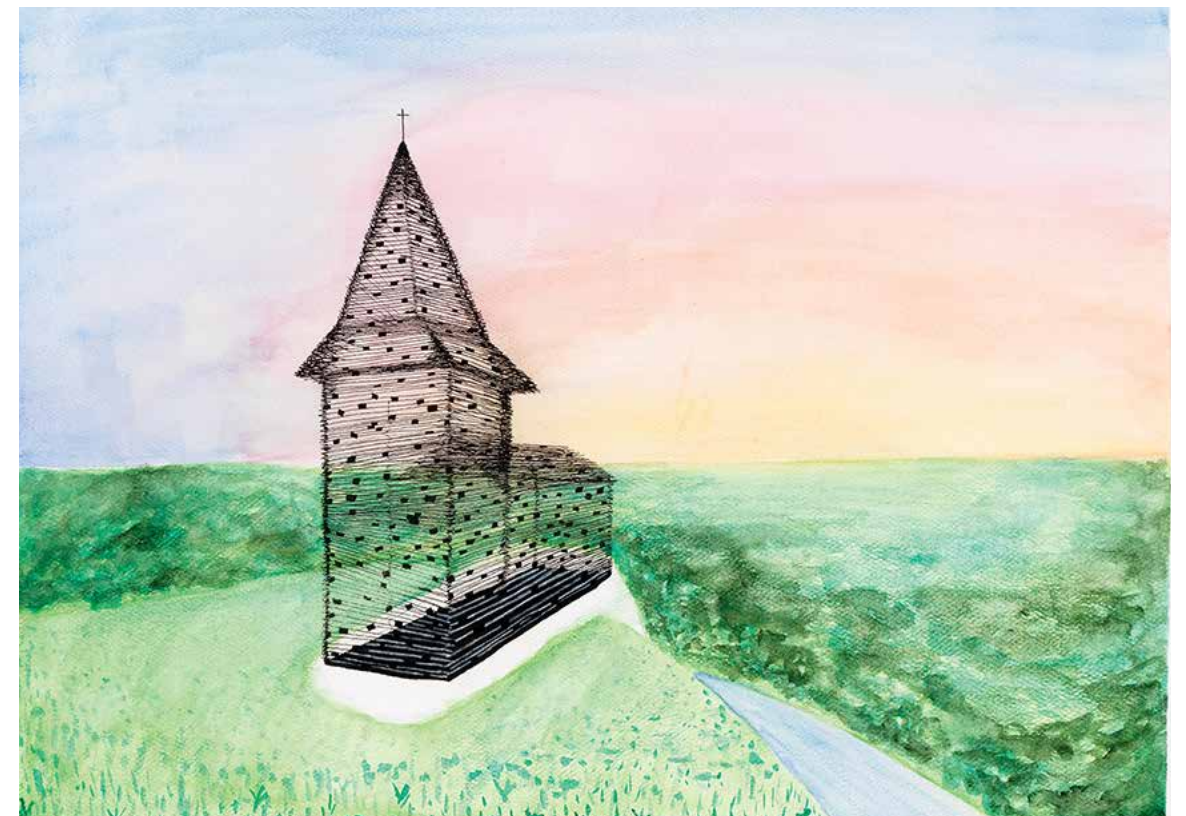
The Christmas angels promised peace. Right here on earth. But even *they* didn’t know it would come through the blood of the cross. “The peace of the Lord be with you always,” *you too* can hear. And when you do, know that it is the nail-scared, glorified Christ who is speaking to you. Your Jesus himself. No longer in Simeon’s arms, but all grown up and exalted. And speaking directly to you. The peace for which you’ve waited—or not—is here. Believe it. Receive it.

David once prayed, “May the Lord send you help from the sanctuary.” How did he know that the Lord would do it for you *today*?

In the holy name of Jesus. Amen

## The Rising Sun

Larissa Hanson, Ink and Watercolor



## Russian Sage

Marlena Tomasicyk

I watched them tear out the Russian sage,  
rake and wrestle it from the ground.  
I ripped purple fistfuls in a rush  
before they could take it all,  
cutting the palms of my hands on rough stems,  
desperate to hold onto what was fleeting.  
I stole away into the grass nearby,  
sage nestled in my lap.  
A wasp landed on my resting hand,  
attracted to the sage's lingering scent.

Soft summer flowers vanish  
like time spent holding hands.  
I gathered what I could of life's beauty,  
all of you that I couldn't have.

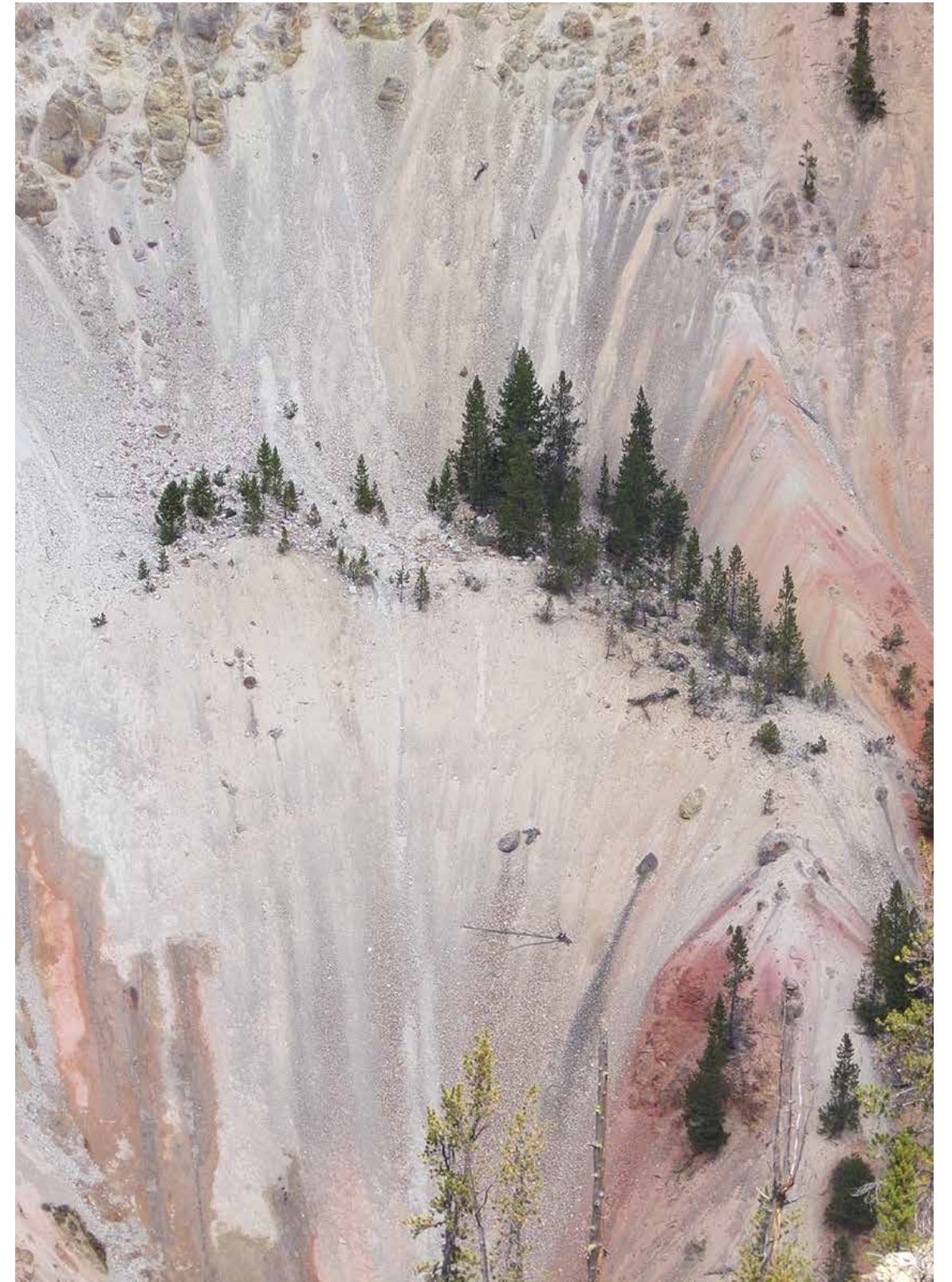
## The Breath of the Bloom

Katerina Trankina, Macro (Botanical) Photography



## Antigravity

Samantha Hadler, Photograph



## A Becoming in Recollection

Isabelle Campos

There were many children’s bedtime prayers whispered in my ear at the age of four, wrapped in the arms of my maternal grandmother and the blue, bleach-stained Hello-Kitty blanket we shared. I remember the hot pink glow of the IKEA flower lamp attached to the wall beside my bed. It was the only light cast upon us as she said a line, then waited for me to repeat it. And so began my conversations with God.

“No comas eso, pues!” Grandma’s command shook the world of her small clean kitchen. I stopped breathing. There was a cracked Oreo in my small hand from my little brother’s pack and a pink mug with shaking milk in the other.

“¿Quieres engordar? ¡Vas a engordar si sigues tragando!”

Her voice was pained. I had just condemned myself.

I dropped the Oreo on the checkered vinyl table, set the mug down and even though it spilled a little, I ran off to the living room, my nose burning and mouth folding into a frown. I heard the yell to clean my mess, but I didn’t want to go back into the kitchen. I just wanted Pa to come pick me up before she saw me cry. I whispered the only prayer I had memorized.

There were no nuns at St. Bede Catholic School, just underpaid pink-cheeked teachers who spent their money on our name tags and told us that God loved us. Every day on the intercom, before the pledge of allegiance, we would recite an Act of Contrition, asking God to forgive our little sins of hogging the crayons, leaving our beds undone, and eating too much candy. Our second-grade teacher, Mrs. Norton, would walk around and make sure we all folded our hands. “Take your hands out of your pockets” because we were learning the meaning of the word *reverence* before we understood the necessity of such a concept. We stood there like restless puppies learning to sit for the first time, the girls in navy plaid skirts and the boys in blue slacks. The way I saw it, God would first listen to those with perfectly folded hands and absolute concentration during morning prayer. So I would align my fingertips and ballet flats, holding my breath to capture a stillness, a perfect obedience I thought was possible.

I didn’t want to pray. The longest half hours of my high school freshman-year were the thirty minutes we spent as a family trying—often failing—to pray the rosary. Still, every night my dad called from the living room with his wooden beads in hand, the epoxy icon stickers peeling off of the Our Father beads. Many times I mumbled the words while continuing to do my homework. I was bothered by my parents’ insistence that this would make us a better family. I was bothered by prayers in Spanish I couldn’t pronounce. I tried to find meaning in the words, but my mouth moved with the unconscious dance, and every syllable slipped between intakes of breath, unrecognizable.

We heard the intercom say that school was on break for a long time. We scuttled out of sophomore chemistry, went home in a daze, and began our year of rest and isolation.

This was the perfect chance to change my life—myself: order the disordered, control the variables. I wanted to try on the word *health* in a way I had never before. My WhatsApp nutritionist from Mexico said I would feel so much better once I decided to finally do it. She sent me a salad Pinterest board.

My new plan was to eat a three digit number of calories a day of chicken, vegetables, and almond milk protein shakes. If I was still hungry I could make myself sugar-free jello, or a salad, or a sugar-free jello salad. My food diary became scripture. I branded the calories per portion of every major food group on my brain. My screensaver was a blurry photo of the rules. I was on the covid swim team. I did yoga on Zoom for P.E. I took self-care walks. I brushed my hair and put on sunscreen every day. I made so much jello and choked it down because I had decided to change my life.

We would “go to Mass” in the basement. As faithful laity in uncertain times, we still responded, we still sat, stood, knelt, and took spiritual communion before the bright live-stream. It was in one of these virtual masses that I tried to stand too fast. I faltered, catching myself with my knee on the sofa.

Mondays were weigh-in days, every two weeks. I kept a little journal with the precise measurements of the scale and the tape measure. It had been a few months and the work was showing. My mother was ecstatic. I had never known or accepted a look so proud from her than the day I came home from swim practice, still in my swim suit and running shorts, and she called me *flaca*.

It was a day in February when we went to Olive Garden and I realized how my short breaths were caught in my chest as I tried to enjoy a simple lunch with my family. Salad, soup, *bread* and *pasta*, numbing the numbers in my mind going off like a slot machine. I had cried over a bagel the week before and the thoughts were familiar by now. *Just because I was hungry didn’t mean I had to eat. If I skipped lunch I could have a big dinner. If I had a big dinner I would be sick; better not eat dinner. It wasn’t a problem because I was just reaching a normal weight. I didn’t deserve food anyway. I wasn’t sick enough. This is the cost of your happiness.*

The echoed litany behind pleasant conversation sang to me like a siren and followed me home. That was the first time I forced myself to vomit. I’ve blocked certain details in my mind, but I can’t forget the shame, the listening for distant footsteps, the sound of running water at the sink, the taste of mouthwash, and the tears of relief as I looked at my face, my slimy and bright pink lips in the mirror, pulsing with the beat of my heaving breaths. I smiled and felt pretty.

“I’m so proud of you.”

## A Becoming, in Recollection, Continued.

I was sitting on the couch, post purge, watching a rom-com and nursing a cup of ice water. I stared at the scar on my right middle finger knuckle, freshly pink from scratching against my teeth.

I had done it. I was where I wanted to be.

But my body rejected most meals. Pa would tell me I looked pale, yellow.

My grandma bought me hair growth vitamins because all my hair tied up at the top of my head was no bigger than an apricot. *When I was a little girl ma could braid crowns around my head.*

Now she noticed that I would go up the stairs very slowly.

Even so, I didn't know how to stop.

One day, I was running the registration for the blood drive. I saw my peers give blood and I decided to donate myself. I stood in line thinking I had no idea what my blood type was. The man who did my initial screening was nice. In rapid movements he changed gloves, cleaned my middle finger, punctured it, and inserted a small glass square with a drop into the machine.

His routine movements were halted when he read the machine. He noted the thinness of my blood and told me we needed another sample because this one was wrong. Different finger, new wipe, another puncture. He stared at me confused as he saw the new results and called another volunteer. This time a nonchalant woman in scrubs repeated the process. Third puncture, this time on my right ring finger.

"Honey, you can't donate blood. You need the blood." They stared at me, waiting for an explanation, an answer.

"Okay?"

My hemoglobin was a six, but I didn't know what that meant, so the woman just looked at me with a twinge of pity and said:

"Go home and make sure you eat some steak."

I told my Ma that night. The truth seemed to slip out, as if it was trapped, waiting for the moment to escape. I had imagined her reaction many times. Anger. Disgust. Sadness.

The only outcome I could not prepare for was the pure joy on her face as I told her my favorite pastime was puking my guts out. I was taken aback, confused, angry at her smile.

"Thank you," she said with tears in her eyes. "I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't tell what. Thank you for telling me." I was speechless as she pulled me into a hug.

In protecting myself, I never considered who I was hurting by keeping them out.

My mother was almost never a tender woman; she was my example of strength and grit, not vulnerability and intimacy. But here in this moment, I gave her the most fragile bit of my bruised heart, and when I expected her to crush it even more, she held it, me, in a way I suspected she had not let herself do since I was a little girl. I sobbed in her arms that night. For her. For myself.

In February of that year, my grandpa had been diagnosed with Covid in Mexico. My grandpa, Aquin, gentle and funny, generous and diligent, was now unconscious, on his way from Michoacan, Mexico to Laredo, Texas. Here, his son would meet him and spend the last fourteen days by his deathbed. My dad, stronger than all of us, held the phone to Aquin's respirator-covered face on a blurry face time call. Through the loud hum of the oxygen machine he would tell Aquin that we said "Lo quiero mucho, abuelito," and he would tell us that Aquin would mouth the words back in half-conscious breaths.

I was free falling though the world of grief. Screaming into wet pillows, forgetting, remembering, trying to stand, failing to stand, trying to eat, wanting to throw up. I wanted to cope the only way I could. But my Ma was waking me up with prescribed iron and vitamin D pills paired with orange juice. She would sit with me after meals, making sure I didn't disappear. She watched me cry over Cheerios and bananas (Aquin's favorite breakfast). She made me lunch for school and asked for picture proof that I ate.

I never expected her to lose her strength as well. In the familiar cushion of our living room seats, my two siblings and I sat wide-eyed as my mom and dad confessed the results of her scans after a suspicious lump formed on her right cheek.

*Ma has cancer.*

I repeated the words in my head, trying to see if such a sentence could make sense. No, it could not. It was early and treatable. It was early and treatable. I had to trust the little information they gave us. She would do some rounds of chemo, radiation, chemo. Early and treatable. She was going to be okay.

I started to pray—or yell. The two were intertwined in my tears as I looked at my First Communion crucifix and asked the God of the universe how he could dare.

It was March and my Ma laid on the couch, eyes closed, resting.

"You're going to a retreat. I signed you up already," she said.

Would it have been any other image before me and I would have revolted, argued, and defended myself tooth and nail not to attend this church thing with strangers.

But it was the way my Ma lay on the couch, fragile and exhausted from her appointments, my Ma, who still wanted to take care of me when she couldn't walk, who took the time to register me for this retreat. I don't think I could have denied her anything those days.

So, I went with an obedience I had long since retired. The day I left for the retreat was the day they shaved mom's head.

*I want to love me like you love me.*

*I want to love me like you love me.*

*Oh God, give me the grace to love me like you love me.*

## Midnight Snow

Taro Peterson

Your heeled boots click on concrete.  
 Despite your intimidating look,  
 patched up leather jacket and impractical footwear,  
 you're anything but threatening.  
 All sweet ramblings, all soft smiles.  
 You hold my hand, rubbing gently every few minutes  
 to make sure I'm still listening to you.  
 You know I like to walk, so despite the threat of blisters,  
 we stroll around the lake.  
 The lights of the city glitter around us,  
 reflecting into your iceberg eyes  
 as you peer back at me,  
 hesitating before asking,  
 "Why'd you stop?"

I can feel the soft pressure of your thumb  
 brushing against my knuckles.  
 I take in your questioning look, eyes squinted.  
 The first dusting of snow, scattering the light,  
 making you glow like an angel.  
 There's already some flakes in your wild hair,  
 points of light contrasting against your dark locks.  
 "It's snowing." My words fog between us.

That confused look shifts, a pinching between your brows.  
 "It tends to do that in winter."

The flakes start to really fall;  
 clumps of snow flutter to the ground,  
 brightness gracefully cutting through the night sky  
 like stars falling to earth.  
 It's perfect, it's picturesque,  
 It's walks around the lake,  
 It's jet black hair and soft smiles, it's  
 magic.

These moments fall around me;  
 bits of divinity float into my outstretched hand.  
 I want to hold them forever, savor every speckle of cold,  
 inspect every unique pattern and  
 commit it all to memory.

But before I can even start  
 to catalogue each crystalline structure,  
 it melts in my palm.  
 Despite my efforts, or perhaps  
 because of them,  
 the magic  
 melts.

## A Time to Reap, a Time to Sow, a Time for Rain, a Time for Snow

Nathaniel Clayton, Photograph



## Spanish Cafe

Kierra Mohalley, Photograph



## Siesta at the Spanish Café

Lily Seifferlein

In the day's heat, the bustling  
intersection of conversation and coffee  
becomes quiet. People pause to rest.  
With a contented sigh, the cafe settles as  
forks slip into their napkins and woven chairs  
tuck their feet  
beneath the table.

The cook, who made an afternoon  
espresso, leans at the counter, listening  
to a love song on the radio, turned down low.  
The smell of citrus floats along with a faint clinking  
from where the busboy washes the dishes with a  
blue rag in  
absent-minded circles.

Stillness settles on the floors,  
with a pause that lets the red and white umbrellas  
stretch lazily beneath the dappled sunlight.  
Soon, it will be busy, bright, and bursting with  
conversation. But for now, let the wind's murmur  
in the fern leaves  
have its sleepy sweetness.

## Califa's Daughter

*Jonathan Ruhlig*

Would you want to live forever  
with me?  
My love, can you imagine

taking a cool morning walk  
through the avocado groves  
before the noon heat?

We would eat fish and fried zucchini.  
Across the table, your face  
catches my eyes like the sea-waves my ears.

You could wear that dress I see  
you in: blue, likely your sister's handiwork.  
The Santa Anas never were dressed so well!

I'd wear my ragged hoodie,  
long worn out,  
as bland as the sand dunes.

In those few hours, others see another  
young couple: we're on congested sidewalks  
with dog-walkers and shirtless joggers,

cyclists and taco-sellers,  
yet I feel your serenity  
in the commotion.

While lying on the beach,  
while it's sunny with a soft breeze,  
your face would be resting

on my hairy chest,  
getting baked by the sun.  
Though others can't see your shyness,

I can see your inner peace  
better than the sailboats  
on the horizon.

To the boardwalk, we're nothing special, but  
nothing special about you, my love?  
With your soft face? Your quiet demeanor?

## Baptisia

*Sarah Redhage, Photograph*



# On the Night He Was Betrayed

MANDATUM NOVUM

10.10.10.10

David Rogner, b. 1960

Jonathan Stahlke, b. 1962

1 The Lord of Glo - ry kneels and wash - es feet  
 2 The Friend of Sin - ners prays that they be one,  
 3 The Bread of Heav - en calls them to the Feast,  
 4 The Man of Sor - rows, bathed in blood - y sweat,

To show His friends a les - son they must learn:  
 Though they will soon de - ny, be - tray, and flee:  
 His bod - y and His blood in bread and wine:  
 Im - plores the Fa - ther to be spared the cup,

In ser - vice is com - pas - sion made com - plete,  
 And yet He bids them love as He has done:  
 A taste of sin for - giv - en, joy in - creased,  
 Then does God's will, and goes to pay the debt:

And love will free - ly give what none can earn.  
 Self - giv - ing gra - cious, full, for - giv - ing, free.  
 A life as branch - es, graft - ed to the vine.  
 A life laid down, for sin - ners lift - ed up.

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# With His Wounds We Are Healed

Nathaniel Clayton, Photograph



# High Law

Noah Martin, Ink and Watercolor



**Today***Isabelle Campos*

Today in the mail,  
 Mom got a new speaker.  
 Bluetooth, waterproof,  
 it sits next to the toaster  
 and serenades us both  
 with a song of forbidden love  
 as she washes the dishes  
 and I type away from the table.  
 She feels it more than I do,  
 the waves of power that  
 crash in every chorus,  
 the opened crypt of lovers  
 past. I've never seen her  
 quite like this. Impassioned,  
 daring, reckless, waving  
 the soapy Corelle plates  
 as her off-key belts,  
 a heartbroken battle cry,  
 remind me that before  
 this woman became  
 my mother, she sang  
 this song exactly  
 as she does now.

**Let the Land Rest***Elijah Kohlmeier*

The growth didn't stay long.  
 Beautiful as it was, it was the wrong time,  
 or maybe the wrong seed, or both,  
 that made it die so soon.  
 The soul is not so beautiful empty,  
 just flat brown ground and  
 a little white snow.  
 But there's more there  
 that you can't see, or hear,  
 but feel inside.  
 Run your hands through the hurt and learn  
 the earth is tired.  
 So before you plant anymore,  
 just let the land rest.

**Scorched Earth***Samantha Hadler, Photograph*

**Easy**

Anton Jones

Confession:

before you, I wanted to fall  
 in love on an airplane,  
 that place between so much—  
 a bardo. So easy  
 to imagine the urgency  
 of life and death and why  
 love must happen  
 by the time we deplane  
 or never at all.

I would have the window seat.  
 You, the middle. And though no one  
 would claim the aisle  
 you stay where you are  
 not wanting to break the paper edict  
 planting you in 19B, so you say.

It's hard to picture your face  
 or what your voice sounds like  
 but what I do know at 30,000 frigid feet  
 is craving the warmth in your touch.

I know you are wearing a sweater,  
 make it an ugly Christmas one,  
 taking pride in how gaudy, how brazenly  
 you represent everything  
 that comes with the holidays.  
 I feel its fabric as your elbow  
 pushes away mine  
 so you can take the armrest.  
 You smile: that first little  
 invasion, breaching walls of my  
 well-maintained personal space.

I know you are wearing jeans  
 as your legs cross, one of which  
 dangles in my space, keeps touching my knee.  
 A nudge, your presence, every time  
 we hit turbulence. Though I  
 can't picture the color,

I know your hair is on my shoulder,  
 at first just a stray,  
 a strand shed and now stuck to my shirt.  
 But soon, your whole head of hair  
 leans in next to mine.  
 There's your face—  
 And that's your voice—  
 Excitedly, your whole body  
 nods in agreement, and so  
 your hair gets stuck in your mouth,  
 and what you say as  
 the nails you painted yourself reach out  
 on spectral fingers to cup my face—

Everyone has had this fantasy  
 of love when it finds you easy  
 when it pushes into your space  
 wraps you in a blanket of human touch  
 high in the air where nothing else matters.  
 But it has never been *easy*  
 and it never will be.

Confession:

I have always been  
 embarrassed  
 as a poet  
 who can't write about love  
 as *easily*  
 as I can grief.

## Tiny Titans

Melanie Goman

The tiny titans march about the halls.  
 “Miss Mel-nie, they don’t wanna play with me!”  
 Their voices bounce along the colored walls.

“So sorry James, they want to play with dolls.”  
 The endless preschool problems, Oh Em Gee,  
 The tiny titans march about the halls.

Loud laughs of friends drown out his drawn-out bawls:  
 “But that’s not fair,” he cries, “I’m only three!”  
 Their voices bounce along the colored walls.

Fists fly and soon the titans start to brawl;  
 I sigh and think: I need some more caffeine.  
 The tiny titans march about the halls.

Amidst the fighting, screaming, and the scrawls  
 I hear, “Miss Melanie I need to pee!”  
 Their voices bounce along the colored walls.

Across the room they joust, neanderthals.  
 The bell begins to ring while they run free.  
 The tiny titans march about the halls;  
 Their voices bounce along the colored walls.

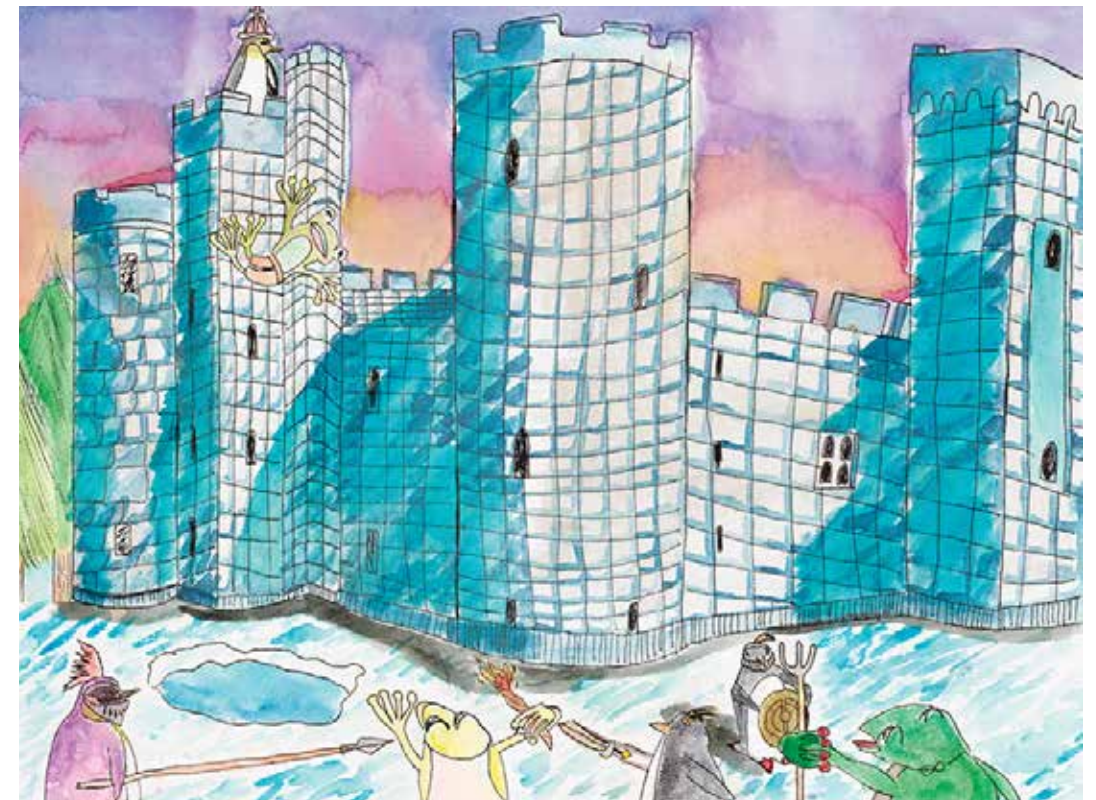
## Nathan Goman

Paper Penguins, Paper Sculpture



## Nathan Goman

The Art of War, Watercolor and Micron Pen



## Susanna Cecilia Smith

Elijah Kohlmeier

Susanna first heard Charlie speak English at the baggage claim in the Atlanta International Airport. They had been studying abroad in Spain for a semester, and they had met and fallen in love speaking Spanish. That's why Susanna had assumed that he simply spoke Spanish with an exaggerated Castilian accent. But we all know what happens when you assume.

Since they were in America again and about to part ways for the summer, Susanna thought this was the perfect time to say her first words to him in English.

"Charlie, I'm in love with you."

This may have been a bit premature for their relationship, but she wanted to make sure that Charlie knew how she felt before a long, separated summer.

And anyway, the problem wasn't what she had said at all.

"I'm in love with you, too," Charlie began. And then he continued, "Thuthanna."

Her eyes, which had widened with hope as he began, narrowed in uncertainty.

"You mean, 'Susanna,' right?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah," he said as he went to grab his luggage. When he came back with his suitcase in hand, he pointed to a car waiting outside, "Well, my ride." He let go of the handle and gave her a tight hug.

"Okay, goodbye" Susanna whispered. "Be safe. I'll see you at school."

"Goodbye for now," he replied. "I'll, uh, find you on camp—er, when we come back."

As Charlie began to walk away, Susanna called after him, "I miss you already!"

He turned his head and yelled "I—me too!" And he was gone.

Susanna stood at the claim, waiting for her yellow suitcase and trying to pretend she hadn't heard what she thought she had. There was no way, right? She should've noticed even in Spanish. But maybe she was just blinded by her feelings and his willingness to listen to her. Or maybe it was just him adjusting back to English after speaking Spanish so long. That's what she told herself, anyway, but she knew the truth in her heart from the moment he said her name.

Susanna Cecilia Smith was, quite unfortunately, in love with a man with a lisp.

"Maybe we should just text for the rest of the summer," Susanna said into the phone.

"Okay...why?" Charlie asked.

"Well, you're so busy with Sully's and the online classes, and everything's going to pick up for me with all the tourists on the beach," Susanna replied. "This way we can text during breaks, and we don't have to worry about finding times when we're both free."

In her defense, they *were* both busy at work, and she *would* have a lot more lives to guard as people fled the oppressive Texas heat for the coast.

It still felt a little bit like a lie, though. But if it was, it was at least an effective one.

"Yeah, that's true," Charlie agreed. "And online classes are a different kind of rough. They just drive me crazy."

"I can understand why that would be annoying."

"Right, and that's not even for my major, it's just a general. The why should I care?"

"I have to head out to meet up with Becky soon," Susanna responded. "I'm going to go get ready. I'll text you tomorrow. Love you."

"Oh, okay," he said. The sound of a kiss blown came through the phone speakers, and she smiled. "Love you, too, Thuthie."

Susanna groaned loudly after she hung up.

Charlie looked at Susanna in the passenger seat of his car. "I feel like we haven't really gone out much since then," he said. "I barely get to talk to you anymore."

"I mean, I've been busy," she responded. "And you can always come and sit with me when I'm working."

"I know, Thuthie, but there's too many people in the library that we can't really stay much without them getting upset."

She really was in love with him. They'd grown so close in Madrid, and texting over the summer had done so much for their relationship. She cared about him, even with his lisp, and he seemed to be so much more comfortable with himself knowing that. He would even play the lisp off for laughs sometimes when they hung out with her friends. Most of the time it didn't really bother her; she'd gotten more or less used to it.

But every once in a while, he would say something with a lot of S's, and the lisp would become all she could think about for a while.

They finally pulled in to the nature preserve and began their hike under the bright orange and yellow leaves, rustling like a lisp in the wind.

The couple held hands and hiked in silence for a while. Eventually, Susanna took a deep breath and opened the other can of worms the couple had been avoiding for a while: their future.

"Charlie, we need to figure out what we're going to do after graduation. We live so far away, and we only have next semester. I love you, but we need to make a plan."

"I agree," he said. "Which is kind of why I brought you here. Just hold off until we make it over that hill."

When they did make it to the top of the hill, the couple was greeted with a view of the sun slowly approaching the distant horizon, reflecting over a stream that flowed in lazy cataracts down the other side of the hill into a lake teeming with golden leaves. This astounding sight was made all the brighter by the loving gaze Susanna saw in Charlie's eyes.

"Thuthanna," he began, and she suppressed a shudder. "I have loved you ever since we met in the Madrid Airport. You made me feel welcome even in a foreign country. You made me feel home even an ocean away from my family. You made me feel loved in a way I had never known before. I have only grown to love you more over our time in Madrid and our months apart, and that time together made me know that I want to love you for the rest of my life." Charlie lowered his voice in an attempt to make the moment more intimate. "Thuthanna Thethilia Thmith, will you marry me?"

"No." Susanna stood there, stiff as a board, incredibly unsure of herself.

"Oh," Charlie said, still on one knee. "Uh, why not?"

"Because..." Susanna tried to come up with something to say that wasn't about his lisp. "It's about your lisp."

"You noticed that?"

"Yeah, it's kinda hard not to notice when you're constantly saying, 'Thuthanna.' I swear I hear 'Thuthie' come out of your lips every twenty-five seconds! I cannot stand to listen to you say 'Thuthanna Thethilia Thmith' for the rest of our lives—ugh, the rest of our lives."

"Well, you could take my last name," Charlie argued. "Theththon."

"You mean 'Sethson?' Do you not see the problem there?"

"Look, I get that it can be a little annoying, but I don't see why it has to keep us apart."

"It's not—just, no, alright? I can't be with you if you're gonna keep talking like that. We're done!"

“That’s rough, Su. So how was the car ride back after that?” Becky asked, patting Susanna’s head, which was buried into her sweatshirt.

Susanna was too busy sobbing at this point to respond, but the car ride was really awkward.

“Why does the lisp bother you so much, Su?”

“I don’t know.”

“And you’re willing to give up your entire relationship over an ‘I don’t know?’”

“Yes.”

“Oh, come on. What about that boat ride you went to in that one park in Madrid?”

“El Retiro?” Susanna asked, voice still shaky from crying. “What about it?”

“I seem to remember getting a phone call at four in the morning about ‘la mejor cita del mundo’ right after.”

“That was before I knew about the lisp.”

“So? The way you talked about him, he could not have a mouth, and I still would’ve gone out with him.”

“Maybe if he didn’t have a mouth, things would be better.”

“I mean, mouths are used for more than just talking. Like kissing in the middle of a plaza...”

“I forgot I told you about that. That was a good time.”

“Su, what if I had a lisp? Would we thtill be betht friendth?”

“Stop it. And of course we would.”

“So why not Charlie?”

“I don’t know—”

“Not good enough.”

Susanna sighed. “I guess he’s just not the perfect guy I thought he was.”

“And you have to have the perfect guy?”

“Yes.”

“Even though you aren’t perfect?”

“Yes.”

Becky flicked her ear.

“Ow!”

“Su, come back to reality for a second. You are going to lose the best guy you’ve ever met to some other girl over a little lisp!”

“What other girl would go out with him right after we broke up?”

“I would! I’d fake a lisp for the rest of my life if I have to just to be with a guy like Charlie! Now go get your man back before I go steal him from you!”

Susanna sat at the bar, looking out of the window at Charlie and his new girlfriend slow dancing to the music of the saxophonist on the side of the street. Becky looked like she was having the time of her life in his arms, and Susanna remembered how good that felt.

She still had a hard time believing Becky had actually done it, but Becky liked to say that good friends always kept their word, and Susanna had taken too long.

After a couple minutes, another guy came up to the couple outside, and after talking for a minute, they walked up the steps into the bar.

“Hey, Susanna!” Becky said like she wasn’t with Susanna’s ex. “This is the guy I was telling you about, Ryan.”

“You look lovely, Susanna,” the new guy said.

“Thanks,” Susanna said, looking past him at Charlie, whose eyes seemed very interested in everything but Susanna.

“Do you mind if I sit?”

“Go ahead.”

“We’ll leave you two alone,” said Becky.

“Thank you, Becky,” the new guy said.

“No problem.” And with that, she and Charlie were gone.

“I hear you and Becky know each other,” Susanna said.

“Yeah, we used to date in high school, but that was a long time ago.”

“Really? Why did you guys break up?”

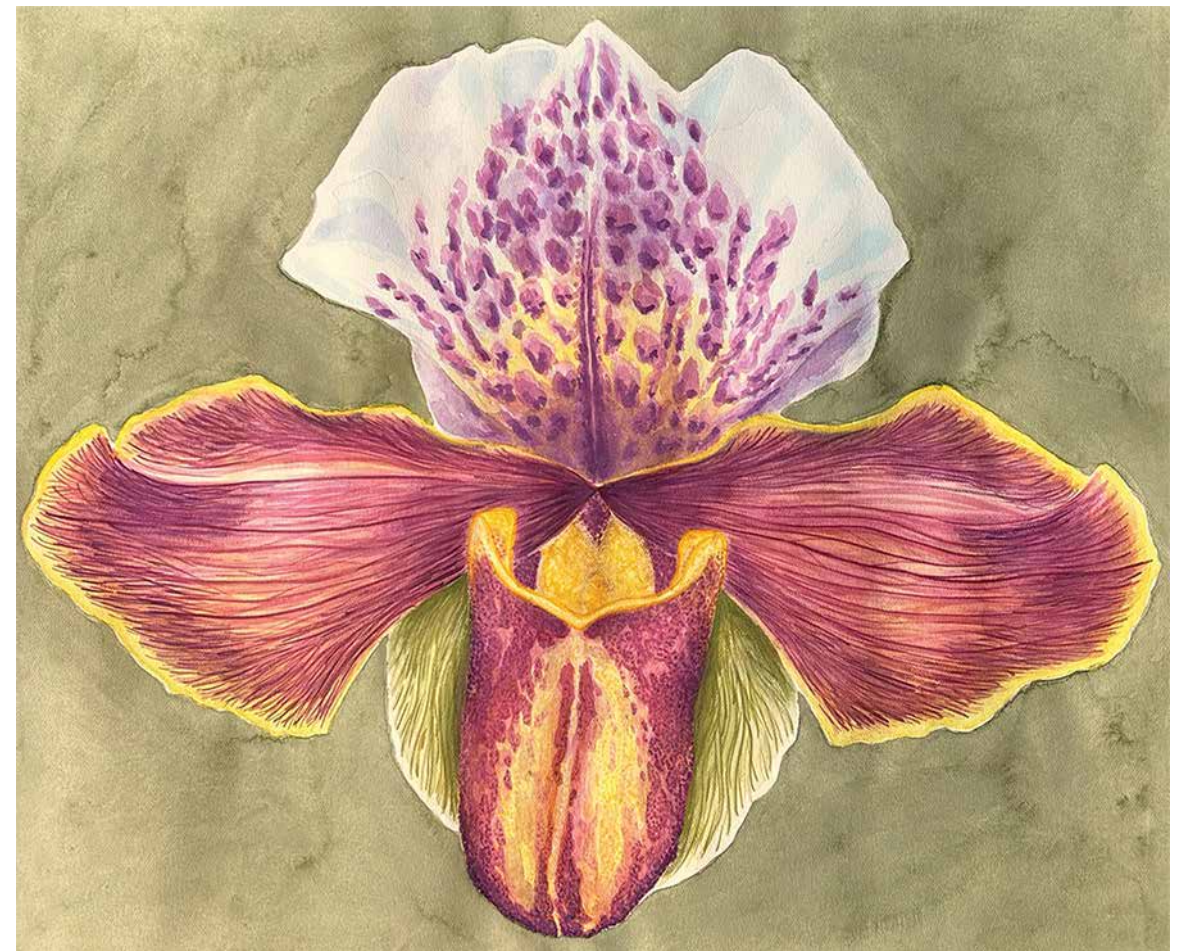
“I don’t quite know. She said it was something about my name? She wouldn’t go into much detail.”

“...and remind me of your name again.”

“Wyan Wichawdson.”

## Quiet

Kierra Mohalley, Watercolor



## I See the Stars . . . Thy Power Throughout the Universe Displayed

*Kristina Kaufman, Painting*



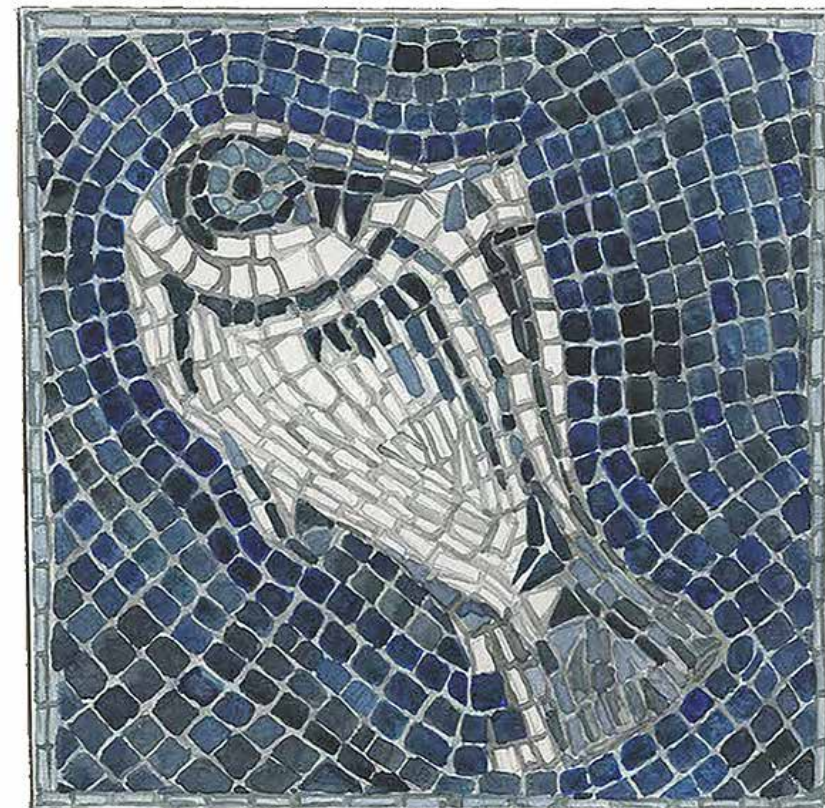
## Typewriter

*Isabelle Campos*

At the Goodwill, I found a 1952  
Alpine Blue, Smith-Corona Silent Super  
tucked between a laminator and a rice cooker.  
It stood on the shiny wire rack, patient  
and unpretentious, so I lifted the blue box  
and rested the weight of it on my hips.  
The scratchy metal underbits of the machine  
reciprocated my grasp and dug  
into the paleness of my palm.  
I looked down at the typewriter.  
It offered me an alphabetical smile  
and a silver handshake.  
It asked if I was a poet.

## Fish

*Rachel Rettberg, Mosaic*



## My Love is Conditional

*Evalynn Berg*

My love is conditional

—but please don't take that the wrong way.

I saw that look, your lips  
pursed and appalled,  
that I could take our love  
and make it seem so small. I understand  
that initial gut-wrenching reaction—  
because if love is conditional, then that means  
it's transactional,  
more like money than emotion,  
like signing a contract  
rather than devotion.  
And if those terms aren't met,  
then the whole relationship is under threat—  
I become the owner, with you as my asset.

But let's say the terms  
are a partnership—  
expectations are immediately set  
of who can do what.  
One plows the field  
while the other  
sows seeds. And since man is condemned  
to forever work and pull weeds,  
I don't know why God wouldn't give him  
someone who matches him in needs.  
To be loved unconditionally,  
I couldn't accept.  
In choosing to deny  
that unconditional sublime,  
I must approach love  
as something tangibly real, created only  
when two humble lovers strike a deal.

If my love were unconditional,  
that means you're replaceable—  
that your company is commonplace,  
that I would equally take delight  
in any other person's embrace.

So I'm sorry, dear, for keeping  
this from you for all these years—  
that I only love you for  
your beautiful mind  
and the ways in which it's inclined  
towards virtue, community, and art,

how it seeks every day  
to better understand my heart.  
Tragically, our love was corrupted  
by conditions from the start.  
For I dropped my defenses, as you did yours,  
just so we could reach each other  
at our cores—  
so, please, let me put my hands  
under yours, and ease the heavy weight  
of your soul—  
so that, together, we can shamelessly explore  
in mutual admiration  
that inner passion that, when cultivated,  
blooms into reciprocal attraction.

One day, we'll look back  
and marvel at our labor, savor the  
sweet fruit and flowers at our feet—  
this garden we've fostered, the sacrifices  
we've made—like two artisans,  
with love as our trade.

## Illinois' Hidden Gem

*Maciej Bednarz, Acrylic on Canvas*



**Pájaro volando**

*Paula Martinez, Photograph*



**The Amber Gaze**

*Katerina Trankina, Oil and Modeling Paste on Canvas*



## Mason Street

*Katelyn Whitlock*

Red-brick bungalow  
 aglow with light from the old 60's hanging lamp.  
 Wind chimes on the porch,  
 a sort of whimsy in this place  
 I associate with bandaged knees and  
 childhood dreams I

remember trick or treating  
 in frilly princess gown and,  
 candy-bound, I obnoxiously  
 knocked on white door  
 more times than I should.  
 Annoyed neighbor imbibed  
 bribed me with a dollar twenty-five,  
 incentivized insolent behavior, and now  
 my notion of vocation is  
 pestering the powerful I

remember walking dog now long dead  
 to a park where children no longer play,  
 still playground, now doubling as a shooting range.  
 And those simple summer afternoons on the porch,  
 drowsy in the din of stirring trees,  
 blurring with backfiring cars on Austin,  
 lost in powdered lemonade and sidewalk games  
 and the whir of the train,

change. The bungalow never changed  
 in those years of sleepovers and being  
 spoiled by grandparents,  
 shrinking into strawberry shortcake sleeping bag  
 at every suspicious sound in the loudest silence in the world I

remember peeling wallpaper,  
 sticky with sweat in summer heat  
 in the dormer where my mother once dwelled,  
 hands varnished with vintage glue.  
 Sifting through  
 years of rust and rot,  
 fought with furniture to break it down and  
 discard in desolate alley.

House is empty now, sold,  
 and I have grown old and jaded,  
 at desk job nine to five,  
 passion for pestering turned  
 into pursuit of paper-pushing.  
 To a simpler time I wish to retreat,  
 every time I pass by that house on Mason Street.

## Corner of Sunset and Crosswalk

*Julie Sulzen, Oil Painting*



## Finding Karl's Book

David Rogner

--in memory of Karl Sorenson

I'm wrapping it up,  
 shutting things down,  
 pulling old books from shelves—  
 when I find one culled from  
 Karl's collection, years ago, when he  
 called it a day and gave them away.  
 I had forgotten all about it.

In the margins of *Modern British Poetry*  
 I find my mentor's tidy cursive  
 annotations penned in neat diagonal rows:  
 notes on Housman's prosody,  
 Yeats's mythology, Hopkins's theology—

here a phrase of Rupert Brooke in brackets,  
 there some words of Wilfred Owen underlined,  
 arrows pointing out patterns hidden  
 in Hardy's dark lyrics or in Auden's  
 quirky cries of faith.

The notes go on in careful script  
 as if he'd opened the exam copy  
 from Harcourt in 1966 and started  
 illuminating the manuscript,  
 hand steady, cigarette and coffee  
 at the ready, working systematically  
 until he'd mastered each poem, then

coming to class to meander  
 in strangely brilliant disorder,  
 reading lines dramatically until we  
 heard—some of us—what he knew:  
 that poetry, as Auden says, *makes nothing*  
*happen, but survives . . .*  
*a way of happening, a mouth.*

These annotations come too late  
 for me to use, yet their spirit has, at times,  
 blown through me. I may take the book home  
 to learn what I might have said—  
 or leave it for someone who will say it.



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