

# The Canticle

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*University of Utah Undergraduate Literary Magazine*

2020





# THE CANTICLE



THE  
LITERARY JOURNAL  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

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We would also like to thank the Department of English for sponsoring our 2020 Editor's Choice Awards. The funding and resources they provided allowed us to recognize some of our most outstanding pieces and further *The Canticle's* goal of fostering a more vibrant artistic and literary community for undergraduate students on the University of Utah campus.

This year has been unprecedented in so many ways. Through all of the challenges of this year though, creativity is still able to flourish. In the darkest moments we turn to the light of art and creativity to free ourselves from the day to day, and share our innermost feelings. Thank you for continuing on and creating even in these challenging times.

As with all young publications there are moments when you have to strive to find what the voice is going to be. The community that this book creates is one that i've come to love and appreciate. Often the submissions we receive deal with some of the most intimate and delicate moments of life. This not only establishes a mentality of support and strength, it gives the magazine a poignant and soulful voice.

I look forward to seeing *The Canticle* continue to grow in the years to come. I am excited for the many opportunities and expiriemces that this publication is going to have at the University of Utah in addition to what it will bring our community here. This magazine truly lets you hear the individual voices of the students.

Thank you all so much for your creativity and support.

Benedicte Dansie  
Head Editor

# CANTICLE

/ˈKAN(T)EK(E)L/

Noun

1. Is a melody or hymn that requires the contribution of various human voices as a collective.
2. Studies of our literary landscape, a geography of intimate experience and the erotics of language.

# Table of Contents

for the laurel in the park Haley Oliphant	1
Memphis Andrew Carlson	2
Moth-Deer Caylee Gardner	3
Air, Wings, and Wind Benedicte Dansie	4
Multitudes* Elise Scott	5
the myth of icarus Haley Opliphant	6
Imagine Me Dressed as the Sky Caylee Gardner	7
Night Time in Southern UT Andrew Carlson	8
Above Part I Courtney Kendrick	9
The Milky Way Andrew Carlson	10



Eruption of the Celestial Eliza Nelson	11
The First Poem I Ever Wrote about Jacob Nain Christopherson	12
In the Lights Emma Engstrom	13
One Moment H.E Grahame	14
Preserves Haley Oliphant	15
Azul Matt Davies	16
Leo Andrew Carlson	17
Through a Musty and Welcoming Forest Colby Russo	18
Chipmunk Andrew Carlson	20
Harvest Logan Rudolph	21

Zion National Park, UT Andrew Carlson	25
Madam Arnolfini as my Grandma Nain Christopherson	26
The Vintage Collector Shivani Lindmeir	28
Baby Girl Lainey Davis	29
Lady Mountain Andrew Carlson	31
Dear Cigarette Man Sandra Del Rio Madrigal	32
In the Kitchen, Water Rumbles with the Roil of my Blood Nain Christopherson	33
Abecedarian on Expectations* Caylee Gardner	34
San Francisco Andrew Carlson	35
a poem that i will never read to you, or to anyone else for that matter Haley Oliphant	36

You are Well Formed	37
Eliza Nelson	
Degraded Town at Sunset	38
Leo Doctorman	
The Graveyard Shift	39
Maggie Goble	
The Boy on the Boat Dock*	40
Emma Engstrom	
Faith and Roses*	41
Sage Carson	
California Coastline	46
Emma Engstrom	
A Letter Never Sent	47
Megan Cather	

\* Denote winners of the Editor's Choice Awards







## for the laurel in the park

Haley Oliphant

the body of the tree is the evidence daphne presented to the  
cops i can hear my breath in the freshly ground dirt  
an arbor day feast celebrating cross pollination pistils drawn  
capillaries bloom blue chrysanthemums hemorrhage beneath  
her skin as he tenderizes the meat for carnivorous crows  
teeth find flesh when lonely bleed stars when forced to  
a blackred supernova of hot iron and prowess to survive is  
to pray for forgiveness and tally the score he feeds you  
berries to make you pucker lay down and look for mercy in  
the clouds while he rummages in your pocket for whatever  
i can smell the grave he's digging for me and I am not content  
to be a tree today



**Memphis**  
Andrew Carlson

## Moth-Deer

Caylee Gardner

I'm built from errands,  
wear the crown of a moth-deer,  
stumble through the scaffolds of sanded pine,  
and find myself transfixed by the sky,  
the sun — a single streetlamp  
and two headlights —  
I carry a briefcase  
and am nearly blind.

I have pulled every wanting  
from the week to fit some  
capital need, carry cash  
for only coffee, want to lean  
over the counter and ask  
today's barista with yellowed eyes  
if he's seen the sky lately,  
tell him it's the color of my panic,  
jade, the shade of so little time.

When I woke I found  
the cling wrap in the freezer,  
the loofah on the bed. I left  
someone on read and a ring  
of day-old coffee on a list of things  
to do before the taking  
of toast and tea —

and in the evening  
when the day becomes a time  
only to prepare for tomorrow,  
when the title "tired" is all mine,  
I leave the kettle  
to scream and still  
grow hungry.



## Air, Wings, and Wind

Benedicte Dansie

There's a need for the rush of air and sudden spurts of speed that hums just beneath my skin. It flickers to life like a fire through my veins, glowing through my skin in moments of true tranquility.

Summertime air is like a drug to my system. Every opportunity I get I roll all the windows down, basking in the sunlight, the air hot and heavy. If I'm not driving I find myself climbing out the window as though I could slip into the hum of the wind's embrace. My seat belt holds me back and I have to content myself with the way the wind ripples through my hair, whispering the places it's been into my ears. It tugs at my shirt sleeves and nips at my fingers begging me to come play.

When the July heat becomes too much to bear we flee to Grand Teton National Park. There in the solace of the ancient trees I seek my tranquility with the lady of the lake. When we take our off kilter beast of a boat out onto the water I thrive. I sit at the bow of the boat, on bent knees, clinging to the railing so I can lean forward into the speed. With my braids whipping behind me, tears streaming down my cheeks, I am reminiscent of siren songs and fallen goddesses. As we chase through flocks of gulls I have to fight the urge to fling out my arms and see if I too can soar.

Sometimes I wonder if I'm so terrified of heights because I lost my wings. Maybe once I had this gift to fly and that's why I crave the screaming winds and soaring speeds. There's a recklessness in my soul that is entrapped in this steel framed body. It weighs me down to the earth, leaves me off balance. I fear flying now because it's something that's out of my control. In another life I could soar unfettered by the machinery of man. Now I must fly locked in a tin can, suspended over the oceans by the apparent laws of physics, which I have no hope of ever understanding. So instead of flinging myself into the abyss, letting the winds unfurl my wings, my heart clenches and anxiety claws up my throat. In the end, maybe we are all just the fallen, struggling against the nature of our blood.



**Multitudes**  
Elise Scott

## the myth of icarus

Haley Oliphant

1

he was in love with the sun / and when their lips met he drowned / in heavy honey and lemons / in the warmth of earth's favorite star

forelimbs cupping solar flares / wings in gravitational collapse / a perihelion of mortal body and photosynthesis

2

but wax was made for the moon / his feathers dripped one by one / embracing cinnamon and saffron / filling his lungs with beeswax and dandelion's greens

folding magnetic fields in closer / tasting iron and helium from her bones

he slipped

3

the sun dove / saline bursted into sweetwater / chlorophyll blushed orange / and the tides burned brighter

transmutation be damned / he was her zenith

4

growing colder / the earth began to wilt / honeysuckle ruptured the ground / seaweed raptured the air / protons stealing hydrogen to satiate themselves

5

apollo ripped the sun from the current / and poseidon shut the gate / an aphelion of mortal body and photosynthesis

bound and gagged by equilibrium / the sun watched her lover / burn out

## Imagine Me Dressed as the Sky

Caylee Gardner

Imagine me dressed as the sky  
to meet you, made up and open wide,  
imagine pulling on your clothes — no —  
the phosphorescent membrane of your skin  
from the box — no — the treasure chest  
of wide ruled lines next to your bed and  
composing yourself into conversation,  
no conservation of running  
water, no close handle for comfort.

Now imagine loosening your lips — no —  
the handle of sounds that slip from  
— no — stain your tongue,  
escape from unnamed space  
in your veins, our shared silence  
veering away from the night, no  
damper for the spark and buzz,  
no close switch for secrecy.

Define vulnerability:  
the building of body and language.  
This is not opening the jar of oneself  
up to another. This is up to you  
to make me.





**Night Time in Southern UT**  
Andrew Carlson

## **Above Part I**

Courtney Kendrick

It's like a swirling void of deep mystery  
An endless expanse of possibility and blue beauty  
Sometimes decorated with glowing, distant jewels  
Or shadowed thick, white cotton candy  
Soaring impossibly high above us,  
yet nearly within reach  
Ancient, though continuously changing  
Proof of our insignificance while an inspiration to any who dare to dream,  
who wish to reach not the moon, but the sun  
They can break the roof and lose the shelter  
but reach the stars our cover gave us only glimpses of





**The Milky Way**  
Andrew Carlson

## Eruption of the Celestial

Eliza Nelson

crucified with dusk  
he hangs from stars,

battered and bruised.  
empty holes leak  
nothing from his hands,  
calloused from too much Singing.  
(he says i need to praise—Sing—with my hands).

nailed to the air and yet  
tied to nothing, somehow he holds  
the sky together,  
constellating flecks of light.

flinging himself  
into space in the middle  
of his dying,

he explodes,  
soundless,  
arms still Extended.

i wonder if he, just now  
begins

# **The First Poem I Ever Wrote About Jacob**

Nain Christopherson

In my dream, I read your diary.  
You held it up yourself—the handwriting  
crinkly and kiddish, so true  
to life—to the plush of my face.  
You'd written that you loved me.  
You'd written, implausible as the end  
of any given winter, that you'd write a song  
about my name. Right then

in my dream, it started to pour in  
the sudden night. We slipped  
across the street slick, moonlit, unfrantic,  
clutching each other's arms out of sheer practicality.  
Who knows where we ran to, except out

of the rain. When I woke, fall  
seeped through my window tissuey  
and cool, your scrawl a leaf stuck, still,  
to the wet cement of my eyelids.





**In the Lights**  
Emma Engstrom

## One Moment

H.E. Grahame

One smile to start rapport. One laugh. One grin.  
across tables of dim dinner discourse  
A pizza and coke. Bowling and songs. Within  
moments we were on a soulmate-crash-course.

One note to start a song. One chant. One cheer.  
Across a mob of grand guitar glimmer  
Drumbeats and bass. Passion and dance. Unclear  
when we became more than migrant shimmer.

One shift to start a dance. One skip. One stride.  
Across splashes of star-speckled skyline  
Hillsides and gin. Waltzing and words. Inside  
knowing always that our lives would entwine

From one moment. One love. One breath. One friend.  
To one million moments without an end

## Preserves

Haley Oliphant

I am afraid of the day you will stop making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for me. Never asked for, but somehow always needed. Two white-bread-perfect-ratio-cut-diagonal-sign-your-name-on-the-bag-with-a-pun sandwiches that you haul in your car for a half an hour drive to me. Will you run out of gas that day? That day when your telescopes reveal the stars and galaxies on my body to be nothing more than skin tags and scars; when the map you've made of me turns from soft rolling hills to bloated blubber, you will finally see the elephant in the room. Your new moon eyes will still direct the tide of mine, but will you blink? Will you look away? That day — when you finally discover that I am just three small creatures in a trenchcoat trying to get into a movie I am terrified to see — will you run out of peanut butter?

Will I have to ask you then?



# Azul

Matt Davies

## I

She declares  
her commitment  
she repeats  
the phrase  
to waiters  
writes  
on windows  
on napkins  
scribes into tables  
and still  
she repeats it  
morning  
intrudes  
the smell of the country  
she puts out the lamp

## II

He forgets  
his flaw  
he can't recall  
the phrase  
watching in mirrors  
reflections on walls  
through smoke  
her bronzed figure  
naked in the lamp light  
lighting her cigarette  
standing from the chair  
his hand  
on the knob  
breakfast downstairs  
forgotten words

## III

She declares, he forgets  
her commitment, his flaw  
she repeats, he can't recall  
the phrase, the phrase  
to waiters, watching in mirrors  
writes, reflections on walls  
on windows, through smoke  
on napkins, her bronzed figure  
scribed into tables, naked in the lamplight  
and still, lighting her cigarette  
she repeats it, standing from the chair  
morning, his hand  
intrudes, on the knob  
the smell of the country, breakfast downstairs  
she puts out the lamp, forgotten words

*With all due respect to Gabriel Garcia Márquez and his  
short story 'Ojos de pero azul'*



**Leo**  
Andrew Carlson

## Through a Musty and Welcoming Forest

Colby Russo

The Emily House was where the Easter bunny made its first appearance. It's where I learned to convince Isabel I had the power to turn myself invisible with a 9-Volt, battery-powered, star wand. I'd clutch the base with one hand and wave the other—tell her to close her eyes and count to ten. I'd sneak out of the room and hide behind the open door. After searching the room, she'd walk out towards the kitchen. That's when I'd carefully step back into the room and wait for her to return.

We hanged our clothes to dry and cooked oatmeal on a cast-iron, wood-stove. I remember the time my mom placed my Merrill slippers under it in hopes to dry them. They ended up melting. I said, "awe shucks." And she said, "yikes!"

It's funny how much I learned from being around her. All the dozens of phrases and quirky words she picked up from around the world. Like "breaky" for breakfast, "snail mail" for mail, "via" for by, "rats a fratsa" for darn, and my all time favorite "there's more than one way to peel a mango." She'd pronounce mango with a soft, drawn out "a" rather than with a typical gringo accent. So it sounded like maaango. Not mango. People in the US are always hurrying to get to the end of something. Why? Be more tranquilo. Chill. Life is pure. Pura Vida.

It was one hour to school and one hour back atop dirt roads woven through a mix of cow pastures and rainforests. My friends and I cherished these walks. They allowed us to step into a world of magical realism. Land cruisers became allied caravans. The oxen Ulises led with his pack of dogs were part of an enemy ambush, even though we could always hear them from around the bend.

A wise strangler fig I'm sure is now well over 100 years old rose through the deep primary and secondary layers of vegetation and hung over the road like an archway. You could always feel its energy. And I swear I saw fairies playing on its vines one day as I sat in the field watching the sun melt through the horizon.





**Chipmunk**  
Andrew Carlson

## Harvest

Logan Rudolph

I pity the corn stalks cut at my feet. I reaped their sweet corn but have not allowed them to die. I need them still as sentries to my fields. I use their rigored roots to protect my soil from erosion. They stand half-in half-out of life, unable to choose. In their rows they look like a premature graveyard. They kneel as their own headstones, prevented from wilting peace by convictions of instinct. They are too proud to die even in their decapitated state. I trample one under my boot to appease my conscience. I tell myself the rest will die soon. With the snow. If not, the clean, white powder will bury my guilt just the same.

I cringe at my own step. There is blood in my boots. They are too tender to go on. Each stride sees my toes slide on the bloody sole and bite into the narrow leather tip, hammering my nails deeper into my skin. Cold has failed to numb them so the cost to continue will be pain. I must keep going. I concentrate. My boot is a needle. I use my strength to jam my nails through my socks, coated in a coagulating red mass, crashing into the shoe's blunt end. The needle contains novocaine. I rip my big toe's nail in half with a twist of the leather. It will stop the pain. It screams. I kick my boot heavily into the ground, suffocating my toes deep in a leather noose. I feel a pin jam into the soft flesh under the nail, sending with it a final jolt of extinguishing fire. The screaming stops: my feet are numb. The boots fit comfortably. A bubbly laugh booms from my mouth. Relief. My wife bought these boots for me. I wear them everyday, even though they are too big. The fit doesn't bother me none. I keep walking.

I love my wife. My wife was a coward. She chose to end her life by her own hand. I do not pity those who can't endure the trials of living. Her pain overcame her will and she drowned in a half inch of water. I regret her decision. I do not understand her decision. I have pride. I do not think she did. And yet I do not blame her for her choice. I blame myself for letting her go.

To prevent my demise I have recruited the assistance of my shotgun and am pursuing the trail of the creature that has come to kill me. It made itself known to me at the natural time of my death this morning but was unsuccessful at its task. I have no doubt I will be able to overwhelm the beast and bury with it the mortality of mere man. But the way is hard. Obscure shadows choke my gait and at them I unsheath fear. I shudder at the wind's waves of drenched terror. I haven't a towel—I am in hell. Tolerable. If I succeed I suspect that I shall live forever, whether I will emerge from my willful suffering is yet to be seen. I am no stranger to

nature and understand the irrationality of this notion. I myself have wondered if it is possible to kill something I fear so dearly. I have wondered if I will be able to pay the price of my life. However, my will is unbending. I admit I am selfish, and a conservationist by nature, and with what my nature has given me I shall outgrow my earthly bounds. I ask, would you not do the same given my circumstance? Would you not choose life over death?

I have followed Death into my fields, using its tracks as evidence of a trail. I had shot it when at first I designed to dig myself from my own grave but believe only to have wounded the creature. I found that its blood is red like ours and have concluded that it is itself capable of dying as any animal is. Now I follow its trail, but cold wind rolls down the Rockies and I am exposed in the planar expanse of my fields. My position is too risky, I must forgo the hunt for fear of the elderly fragility of my wellbeing. Hell is cold. My immediate surroundings are flat, but a grove not too far from this one field of my acreage will provide refuge from the wind. It was planted by this land's settlers to break up fronts like these as they threaten the livelihood of our crops and soil. Wind is a constant threat to the farmer. I move quickly toward its refuge, stepping on wooden pegs.

The iron light of the harvest moon blinks broken rays through waving trees onto the tawny coat of a cougar. The light fires the nocturnal eyes of the cat in the darkness. Her hind legs power through underbrush, moving with silence and great efficacy as pulleys and levers above her shoulders, puppeteered by a killer's instinct. She is alone at the apex of her territory, the survivor of an extirpated population. Nature's brush has painted authoritative claws and teeth on her, capable of gutting a deer in one wrench. She inflicts the will of a natural hegemony, balancing life's circle around her integrating focus. However, skin clings to her ribs and hunger tightens her stomach with unrelenting wrath. Trailing behind her two blue-eyed cubs mimic their mother, pawing at her tracks. All that she has to give she surrenders to them.

Her ears twitch independently from each other, straining the sounds of the forest into signals, rooting out the high pitches of prey. She stalks under the willful guidance of mother moon. Her muscles burn themselves in her impotence. Without a kill soon she will have to eat one of her cubs. Her natural beauty knows no cruelty yet instinct uproots intention. She turns her head to her children. They play tackle and claw each other, ignorant of their circumstance. She feels love for them both. She nuzzles them with her snout, communicating warmth through silent touch.

The distant disturbance of wild panting and leaves breaking turns her ears, then her head, to the north. She smells prey. Through the trees she snakes in clandestine and fluid movements around patches of moonlight. Her shoulders circle as cogs. Her tongue drips honey. At the edge of the grove she spots an old man breathing heavily and alone with the sturdiness of a tree supporting his back. Her body pushes into the ground. She is uneasy. The man is larger than herself and, normally, she would not risk an attack, but the situation is dire. She looks again to her kittens behind her, mimicking her movements. Everything she does is done for them. Stalking slowly from the shadows, the cougar releases her retractable claws. Her heart pumps in anticipation like an engine and adrenaline courses through her, abating the pain of hunger and strengthening the muscle that remains on her frame. Providence is with her. Her stalk bursts into a sprint. Teeth bared bone white and eyes shining with yellow fire she leaps into the air. The prey, seeing her threat, raises a shotgun, tracing her attack with an imaginary line. Limbs outstretched, maw calculated on the wrinkled man's neck to suffocate his breath, the cougar heralds death's banshee with a diaphragmatic screech. The muzzle flashes. The animal dies with fear in its eyes.

The old man's ears ring a discordant note. He can feel a warm liquid spreading across his chest and stomach. The weight of the cougar dropped him onto the ground, his back still supported by the bark of his tree. His gun is pinned in between himself and the lifeless body of his victim. The warmth of the cougar's body and blood comforts the man in the cold air of night. He utilizes the heat as a coat until the animal's life is fully gone. Vampire. Then, using the gun as a spade, he pushes the cougar off of his reddened chest and onto the floor of leaves to his right. Under the watch of the harvest moon, the man looks over the cougar's corpse.

My hands' gunpowdered will has buried life's casualty with a bullet. Blood soaks through my skin. That won't wash out. The cougar's coat mirrors the orange moonlight; strong breath, made colorful in her chest, stolen by my involuntary instinct.

Nature's purveyor tabulates the totals of his bargain. I marveled at the beauty of the teeth. Sharpened by prey, they were white stalagmites, forming calcium deposits in its mouth that ran to a fine point above the lips. Examining further, by its overturned belly, I knew it was a mother and, as for size, from head to tail it ran about seven feet. I smoothed my hand over its fur, soft and thick to the touch. I paused over its ribcage, tracing the bumps over its ribs, solid and spaced like prison bars. They poked at her skin as daggers no longer inflicting the pain of hunger. At this my wrist coiled into itself and my heart dropped to my gut. All pride dissipat-



ed from me in tears with the heat of her body. Had I been hers to claim, the sharpness of her hunger could have dulled, her cubs would still stand to survive. But at the will of my smoking hands and atavistic aim, she lay dead at the feet of a man too old to feel the vital prod of hunger. Yet too scared to die.

I looked through tears' distortion at my hand caressing her fur. In it I see my age. Protruding veins pump cold blood sporadically through my fingers. Next to the skin of the mother, mine appears to sag and is cut deeply with wrinkles, splattered with the sun's cancerous stare.

The tree opposite the man leaned in to look more closely upon his unnatural mistake. My gaze fell on the eyes of the graceful beast. They shone the color of my own, no longer able to light their own fire. Rivers ran through ravines on my cheeks, forming a delta at the blood on my neck and chest. Tears of rage. Over my heart, damning red clots broke with Spring's melted ice. I ripped my eyes from her and up to the sky. A tree, silhouetted by the hot moonlight opposite me, appeared in my altered state as a face does. Two hollows made embered eyes and within their depth and curvature I saw my own: the eyes of a cornered animal, fighting against inevitability, streaming sap down my face.

I looked again at the cougar and saw its final bed of leaves painted red pairing its slaughter to my own resting place. My body weakened. What kind of man, overcome by a fear of dying, would push an animal, so kind and beautiful, over death's ledge for his own life's ugly maintenance? Sitting there, soaked in dispassionate blood, I felt as a plant and a coward. Rooted stiff to the ground. Yet I hold a spade in my hand. Courage.

The tree in front of the man pushes autumn leaves down from branches onto its shivering roots. They sit like a blanket, warming the saturated water climbing milky green veins under the rough skin of bark. Soon the animals will powder their fibrous ridges and dead stems, paws and hooves processing and pressing on soft earth, burying their remains before the dirt locks with winter. When spring arrives and the western winds bring the warm taste of rain, the dried leaves will move again. Before with the wind, now with the rain, the leaves will climb through the roots back up the trunk of stretching bark and mark their passage with the fattening layer of a fresh wooden ring. A few inches higher they will wave at the passing sun until their time comes again to fall.



**Zion National Park, UT**  
Andrew Carlson

## Madam Arnolfini as My Grandma

Nain Christopherson

Even through frenetic hordes of flip phones,  
there was something so composed in the serenity  
of Madam Arnolfini's skin and scene.  
Like my mother's mother next to me,

I imagined her unruffled by the irreverent  
mosh of tourists—didn't think,  
at twelve, to ask what either woman might  
be holding under tongues or tucking

into uteruses; that is, what stifled  
what color-corrected  
what slathered-over my father might  
much later imply. Marriages

brim over with these things, as I pretend  
to discover. What prepares  
a woman for her husband's infidelity but  
every infidelity before? Decades of eyes

cast at floors as her trust is misplaced,  
like car keys, under pillows in foreign rooms.  
(He does hang one hand off the bed to hold hers,  
always.) What prepares her for betrayal

but the bitter hope that,  
like chicken pox, her prior agonies  
might render her immune  
to what happens now. So mimetic

of this painted wife, grandma is skeptical but  
unmoving, pale with rage but

paralyzed to imagine recoiling from what cares  
for her, though in darkness. I wonder whether

my grandmother is also dead  
in every portrait, was dead clutching my hand  
in museums, dead carrying my mother  
in green or gowns in some other

color she could not look at directly.

## The Vintage Collector

Shivani Lindmeir

bound to a fleeting lover  
until the Mother  
Collector took you under  
her wings of tapestried thunder  
braided silk of champagne  
a smooth bias-cut train  
threadbare, thrifted for the thrill  
a clearance kill  
treated with haphazard care  
seams burst with negligent tears  
buttering bodies with the bandaged  
batons of fashion's carnage

It's a good Mother's will  
to repair, mend, and thrill

## Baby Girl

Lainey Davis

"That's just what it's going to be like."

The girl pushed her tongue against her loose tooth as she thought over what her mother had said. "Then how come you get to be a policeman?"

Mama pressed her lips hard enough to make dimples as she stared out over the road. The girl was barely old enough to be sitting passenger. She had to stretch her legs just to touch the floor. "I worked hard, baby girl. But even with work, you are going to notice the little things."

The girl looked out the side window in the dramatic way she had seen in movies. As the car bounced over a pothole, the seatbelt rubbed her ear. "What kinda things?"

Mama didn't have a response for that, not right away at least. Adults didn't have to answer questions as fast as kids do, so the girl waited. She watched as cars pass them.

"Being a girl is nothing to be ashamed of."

The girl recoiled. "Why would it be?"

Mama's face tightened again. "Because even with history feeling so far and gone, it leaches, it sucks the good from today sometimes."

It was the girl's turn to scrunch her face. "Like how girls couldn't vote."

"Yes."

"And how they had to wear skirts."

"Yes."

The looked down at her hands. "Those things are gone."

"They are."

The girl allowed herself to move with the car for what felt like forever. Mama only looked ahead, her police badge flickered in the afternoon sunlight as it bounced with them. It made the girl remember.

"Yesterday," the girl said. "When you came to pick me up from Taylee's house and you were talking to her dad, he asked you if you were an officer 'cause of your badge—"

"Because."

"Because of your badge," the girl corrected. "But then he asked if you were the lady at the front desk because you weren't in uniform."

Mama nodded.

"But you don't wear police clothes anymore because you're a detective—"

"That is the game, baby girl. That has always been the game. Taylee's dad took one look



at me and because I was in civilian clothes and had a badge he assumed I was a receptionist or secretary or bookkeeper or something. He saw something out of the ordinary the thought of promotion didn't even cross his mind."

The girl bowed her head in reverence she didn't understand but felt nonetheless. It was the same kind of feeling that she felt at great aunt Mage's funeral. She didn't ever know Mage, but she mourned anyway.

"Should I not go to Taylee's anymore?"

"No, baby girl." Mama spared a second to look over to her daughter. "Rick is a good man, he just needs good examples of women to look up too. Our world right now is broken, but the best way to fix things is to talk about them, just like we are talking now. We can't let expectation decide who we are. Just can't."

The girl nodded what felt like the most important nod in the world. But then it faded. Broken?

"Mama?"

"Yes, baby girl."

The girl's eyes dropped to her jeans. "Why was the world ever broke in the first place?"

Mama pretended not to hear again as she stared on over the steering wheel. Finally, she pulled a breath. "When you and your brothers were little, and you didn't want to share a toy, what usually happened?"

The girl shrugged.

"You would fight. You would fight and fight and fight until whatever it was that you were fighting snapped right there in your hands. People are just the same. In an effort to not look weak people scare themselves away from the idea of sharing, and before you know it you have one big broken world."





**Lady Mountain**  
Andrew Carlson

## Dear Cigarette Man

Sandra Del Rio Madrigal

Dear Cigarette Man,

I don't know if you recall the double-braided girl who struggled to park her car beside yours in the available space. I don't know if you remember the way you tucked the paper into the crook of your elbow as you helped her, forming two parallel lines with your forearms, directing her car to fit into the two white lines. You smiled the friendliest smile with the cigarette clenched between your teeth as a chuckle rolled out, leading the tumble of words that came right after. Your story was something about how you didn't want the neighboring car to hit hers, something about how parking spaces can be so small. You defended your kindness with a story about questions, asking her who she was, who she has been, who she is going to become. You told her about what the world was, what it has been, what it was going to become. You puffed smoke into her face when you told her that she was meant to be a hero. Your words were like hands grasping onto her arm as she tried to run free from your frantic mind. She tugged and tried to slow your conversation by forcing awkwardness onto your tongue, but you were relentless. You pasted guilt onto her cheeks when you said that her generation was lucky, for you had never had the chance to lose yourself within a place where wings sprung out of backs so that you would always be saved when you fall. You took a sip of your coffee when you contemplated whether to let her leave or not. This double-braided girl who had only arrived to get her frappuccino for the evening. This girl, who you had mistaken for being a high-school student at first, until you discovered that she was only just beginning college. This girl, she now stands outside the coffee shop once a week, thinking about the way you held her captive for so long...

The man with the cigarette, plucking truths into her eyes.

## **In the Kitchen, Water Rumbles with the Roil of My Blood**

Nain Christopherson

Have you ever been in love?  
You asked me as if you could possibly  
have anything to teach me about weeping  
openly on sidewalk, and now, waking up  
in the muffling heat of this room, I am outraged again  
by the patronizing way you looked at me.  
What else could you teach me  
about the crushing of a cardiovascular system? Mine  
gasped in the bottom of your daypack all July  
through Beirut and Barcelona and back  
home to here, while I shuddered in red-orange  
and rain. What could you know about being  
hung up on the ceiling of your own  
heart as blood heats; threatens—  
your own life—to boil you?  
Thank God, this boasts the morning  
glisten of your absence. I divorce duvet  
and the sweat of its consorting agitation;  
trust an open window will suspend  
the steam I emit at this memory. Relief  
seeps in with cold as I discover January—  
its immediacy, its snowing-in.

## Abecedarian on Expectations

Caylee Gardner

Ask me if I am happy in my skin, if I am  
basking in every curve and reveling in every  
corner — if I am content with my  
desires. Ask me and I will answer  
every time: to be a contortionist is not always to be  
flexible. I want to be as much  
grandiose as small, want to be loudly as much as  
hide. But I cannot shift my body to fit into all my  
I's, to yours, to theirs. Every attempt to conform looks  
just like this: one leg  
knotted under another,  
linked over one arm, around  
my head and out of it — how impossible  
not to not know the limits  
of a kind, how  
perfection  
quits when something tears.  
Realize that I can only  
say and do so much  
to please someone other than myself.  
Underneath every bend is a body half-  
vexed by expectation,  
waiting for surrender in the shape of an  
X. Here are the palms of my hands. Do  
you see how they are open? Pause and  
zig-zag around your desire for something more.



**San Francisco**  
Andrew Carlson



## **A poem that I will never read to you, or to anyone else for that matter**

Haley Oliphant

Staying awake for 28 hours still brings the Sandman with a  
rose-colored glass of warm milk  
a greasy piece of pepperoni pizza to share with you;  
I didn't realize how tired I was  
of everyone pitying the girl who  
cries when the male bar creature says  
"She has nice tits, but she's too fat to fuck.  
Too much work. Not worth it."  
So when you wound up your tongue to  
punch him, I woke up  
to the sounds of New York City  
in what can't quite be called nighttime,  
where streetlights and neon signs  
drink moonshine after hours  
and subway passengers  
ride with confessions  
in their pursed lips,  
where I'll nod off to sleep  
but you'll still tap my head  
with the Times to tell me we've arrived  
at the dock in what can't quite be called  
morning —

I don't want to come to the  
end of this poem and realize  
I have fallen in love  
with you, not when I  
have someone sleeping  
in Salt Lake City for me  
while I stare at the Brooklyn skyline  
from the deck of the Staten Island Ferry  
as the sun kisses the  
forehead of each building  
and you tell me  
"Good morning."

## **You are well formed**

Eliza Nelson

“You are well formed.”  
-Archibald MacLeish

you are well formed with broken  
hands and eyes twisted  
from staring at too many straight lines spilling  
from periphery.

your crooked size and heavy arms slide  
from reflected light in the air, dancing in seriousness.

it's fitting, how misfittingly  
you settle

into yourself.

maybe walking until all the angles line up hasn't done you well  
and maybe spacing your steps in the center of tiles  
is teaching you lies about things making sense yet

I like the way you stroll,  
your gait lopsided,  
clinging to one side. I like how you leave  
uneven imprints (how does one leave imprints at all?)  
and give up time in ways that don't add up,  
I'm addicted to the way you crave alignment  
though everything about you is so off-skew



## Degraded Town at Sunset

Leo Doctorman

(Bauer, Utah)

Crisp as new infatuations, I desire backroads like wood desires rust.  
When the sky turns sangria magenta we lurk under projector-clouds,  
Menacing the dead with ghost stories, finding iron bones in the creek.

Past the churning industry and into the buried industry, towards the land  
That's scarred with artificial hills. I'm downtown, on mainstreet. You dropped  
Your hard hat right there, where the safe got shot open. Nothing is inside

But it's not like we looked. I realize that the newer-than-they-should-be  
Trees are where an ancient park once caressed a neighborhood;  
Suburbia falters when its analog ground shifts. And by the collapsed

House stands the aging lamp post, cut wires dangling from its head  
Like hair from a skull, the teeth of the bulb lack electronics, yet sips  
The sunset like wine, refracting and twisting that which it wishes

It could create. The dirt is littered by trash and rubble, the latter  
Employs tactics of natural stone, hoping for a demise honorable  
To minerals, but the seams of rebar within betray the shattered

Concrete, eating away at its insides like pestilence in August.  
I find peace in the leaded sands, and depth in the tailing ponds,  
A crumbling factory withholds a suggestion that it once smelled

Of glue and effervescent chemicals. And in its demise it burned  
A sunset, taking the town with it. I can almost hear the superintendent  
Scream through the inferno, 'I am prairie lighting, bring me the rain'

## **The Graveyard Shift**

Maggie Goble

I've ring dinged the bell  
And climbed up from hell  
So sorry to bother your shift

Clawed through the woodwork  
Surprised that it did work  
So could you happen to call me a lift

Oh I'm not dead  
They misread what I said  
Sad is much different than gone

You see I've a habit  
Of chasing a rabbit  
But they didn't seem to catch on

They thought I was crazy  
And just a touch lazy  
So I happened to fall down that hole

But I've clawed my way back  
Made up what they lack  
And now I've reclaimed my soul



**Boy on the Boat Dock**  
Emma Engstrom

## Faith and Roses

Sage Carson

The Moore siblings had said goodbye to the ocean when Roselyn had been seven years old. She'd said goodbye to her Grandpa too, but she remembered less about him.

Instead, she remembered the sky smudged with gray, the steely water sloshing on the beach, her mother's voice as she had snapped at Roselyn to hurry up. She remembered how her brother Harry had sat down on the stairs and put his head in his hands. Mostly, however, she remembered how her sister Faith had waded into the shallows barefoot. She had stopped cutting her hair a few years previously and it already hung nearly to her waist. She had looked like a water fairy, a traveler, something out of a book with a grimy dust jacket and an overused plot. She'd looked at the horizon as if she had been searching for something.

Their mother had said that God brought them to Utah, but in reality, it was because Uncle had offered their father a job. He'd struggled finding one after he'd been let off from the one he'd gotten after the war and money had been tight. Their Uncle didn't have any children, so he even had graciously offered for them to live with him.

Uncle had looked a bit like Santa Claus, if his hair had been white instead of black and he'd been jollier. He had the crinkles around his eyes, the girth, the force behind his words. He'd embraced their mother when they'd arrived at his house, had glared disapprovingly in the direction of their father. He'd embraced Faith for a fraction of a second too long, had patted Harry on the shoulder and had rustled Roselyn's hair.

The first night in the house, Roselyn had curled under the covers and had pressed her face into her pillow. She hadn't wanted anyone to see her crying. Her mother had been so happy with the new house after all, her father had always gotten so strangely distant when she'd cried, Harry would have worried and Faith -- well Faith --

"Are you crying?" Well, Faith would have found out regardless. It was almost as if she had a magnetic pull toward criers. The bed had shaken when her sister had climbed in next to her.

"Come here you little shit," her older sister had said fondly. She'd rolled Roselyn into her arms, Roselyn's face bumping against her sister's chin, her elbow poking into her stomach. But that was the thing about siblings. Even when it was awkward, they still fit together.

"I want to go home," Roselyn had whispered against her sister's chest. "Uncle scares me."

"You don't need to be scared of Uncle," Faith had promised. "You've got me. And I'm tougher than Uncle." She'd fallen asleep tangled with her sister, only waking briefly when

someone had opened their door and her sister had slipped out of the room. Her sister had been snoring next to her when Roselyn woke up, however. Her pillow had been damp beneath her face and Roselyn had thought that maybe her sister had missed the ocean too.

On their first day of school, Faith hadn't gone to school at all. She'd instead spent the entire day in a park adjacent to the school, dressed in a pair of Harry's pants and an old Beatles T-shirt she'd found on the beach before they'd left. She had apparently not been doing anything at all, just lying in the grass and looking up at the sky with the dress their parents had picked out for her next to her. Her mother had given her sister quite the lecture about 'appearing beautiful in the eyes of God' and Faith hadn't ditched school again.

A few months later, Harry had been suspended for punching a kid in the face. Roselyn had been home sick with a cold that day, so she had accompanied her mother to the principal's office.

"He had it coming to him," Harry had said later, in the car. "He called Faith a-- he called her -- " with a glance backwards at Faith, he had moved closer and whispered the word into her mother's ear. Her mother had stiffened.

"Even if he said that," she'd said, "there's no excuse for using physical violence."

"He was spreading lies about her Mom -- "

"And how," their mother had said, voice tight and controlled, "do you know they're lies?"

In the years that followed, her mother liked to say that Faith was slowly descending into sin. She'd refused to cut her hair or tie it back, so it always had hung in a tangled mess well down her back. Sometimes you'd look at her and you'd see blonde hair instead of a girl.

There was a drop off at the back of their Uncle's property. Faith had begun to spend more time there than at their own home. She could be easily found sitting on the edge of the cliff, legs dangling over the edge, blowing cigarette smoke out through her lips. She'd keep smoking until her eyes were red and her voice was hoarse. She had always listened to Roselyn though. Always.

The day Roselyn had come home and found her sister passed out on the couch with a bottle of vodka and her drool on her face, she'd been terrified. She'd crept over to her sister and touched her shoulder. Her sister had woken up with a start, the vodka bottle tipping from her hand and spilling across the floor.

Roselyn had imagined her mother's reaction to the stain and had felt fear pulse through her body. She'd wrangled her sister upstairs, tucked her into bed. She'd come back downstairs and had dumped a bottle of orange juice over the stain, masking the vodka scent and creating an even bigger and more noticeable stain. Then she had squatted upstairs, waiting.

"FATHI!" her mother had roared, feet stomping up the stairs. Roselyn had rounded the corner

before her mother could enter their room.

"Oh Momma," she had wailed, "I didn't mean to."

"You did this?" her mother had whispered.

"Yes," Roselyn had sniffled.

"Now honey," she'd said, in what was evidently supposed to be a relaxing, soothing tone. "You don't have to cover up for her. I know it was her."

Roselyn had realized that she'd need to pull out all the stops for this one. "I did it because I hate Uncle!" she'd spat, "he should have to work at something for once -- "

Her mother's hand had made a sharp crack when it landed on Roselyn's face. "You think you have it so bad, don't you?" her mother had demanded. "Living with a roof over your head and family members who love you, well you have no idea what it's like living in the real world, do you? My father didn't love me, he hated me. He was an enemy of God, thinking of his daughter in ways you wouldn't understand. He touched me in ways you wouldn't even think of and your Uncle -- your Uncle saved me. So don't you dare talk about him like that."

Roselyn hadn't understood what her mother had been saying then, but she'd understood later. Everything had been progressing in a sort of recognized spiral before a wrecking ball had come through and smashed it all to bits.

The wrecking ball had been this: Harry was going to Vietnam.

Later, it was Harry and Faith that was all Roselyn could remember. Maybe it was all any of them would remember, in the end. This had been the only goodbye that mattered.

Harry had cupped Faith's cheek in his palm, oh so gently. Something in her older sister had slowly caved, knees dipping toward the ground. Harry had caught her, holding her closely. Roselyn had realized, with a strange sort of detachment, that her older brother had been crying. She'd never seen him cry before, not even when they'd said goodbye to the ocean.

Faith hadn't cried.

In the months after Harry had left, Faith had increasingly begun to care less. She'd leave cigarettes on end tables, bottles in the bathroom sink, would come back to bed later and later. Roselyn had felt her sister slipping away from her, piece by piece.

On Roselyn's thirteenth birthday, Faith somehow had scraped together enough money to buy Roselyn a pair of shoes she'd been begging for for months.

"God Faith," Uncle had said, "that must have been all your savings."

"My grades aren't good enough for college anyways," Faith had said.

Roselyn had pulled back, concern etched into her face. "But -- you've always wanted to go to college."

And she had. Faith had wanted to college so badly that she'd created a collage of



college brochures when she was eight. Her mother had always disapproved of the notion, of course. Women shouldn't go to college in her mind.

"Well," their Uncle had said, "you can be my personal secretary. I'll teach you everything I know."

For a while after that, everything had gotten better. Faith had stopped arguing with their parents quite so often, had smiled more, spent more time with Roselyn. They'd sit on the windowsill and make shapes out of the clouds, despite the fact that both of them were too old for such things.

The day Faith had died, she had written a letter to Harry. This had been common practice at this point, but Roselyn and her mother had both found it odd when Faith had refused to show it to either one of them. "She must have been asking Harry for boy advice," her mother had said excitedly in the car. They hadn't opened the letter, but Roselyn wished she had.

Roselyn pictured the moment her sister took that jump often. Had she hesitated, up there on the cliff? Had she taken a step back and reconsidered her options? Or had she simply stepped off the ledge as if she were going down a flight of stairs?

Roselyn had been the one to find her. None of them had noticed Faith was gone until a day and a half after she'd disappeared. It hadn't seemed like an odd Faith thing to do, disappear randomly in the middle of the night. In fact, her parents still weren't concerned the next day. Roselyn had been, however, and the first place she'd thought to check was the cliff.

She'd known something was wrong the moment she'd reached the site. Faith's hair, her beloved, beautiful, untamed hair, had been braided back apparently. Roselyn only had known this because the entire braid had lain trapped under a rock, spare hairs occasionally escaping and fluttering into the air.

Roselyn had first thought that her sister had been kidnapped. Surely her sister wouldn't have ever cut her hair. There was a note under the rock too and Roselyn had torn it in her haste to read what it said.

Three words in her sister's handwriting. I'm sorry Rosie.

Later, Roselyn wouldn't be able to say what had made her look over the edge of the cliff. There was only one reason that her sister would be over the edge and that hadn't seemed possible yet. She was careful as she had looked over the edge, careful as she saw her sister's body crumpled like a tin can on the rocks at the base of the cliff. One of her sister's hands was bent crookedly toward the sky, an unnatural angle frozen in time.

"FAITH!" she had screamed as loudly as she could. And she'd known her sister was already gone, because Faith wouldn't respond. And Faith wouldn't have left her sister screaming for her at the top of a cliff.

Her parents had been more concerned when Roselyn hadn't come home. They'd found her curled up at the side of the rock, face bloody from where she'd been scratching it against the ground.

Two months after Faith had died, her door had opened at night. A long creeeeeeeek. Her uncle in the doorway. Her mouth had shaped a question and he'd given her the answer. It had hurt, it had hurt, it had hurt. She had lain afterwards in her bed which still slightly smelled like Faith and had understood why her sister had apologized before she'd jumped.

She'd told her mother the next day.

"Oh I see," her mother had said scathingly, "you remember what I told you about my father and now you're using it to attack my brother. Can you imagine if your child said that about Harry?"

Roselyn was stunned. She hadn't thought her mother wouldn't believe her, she'd automatically assumed she would. If her mother had gone through something similar to this, why wouldn't she believe her.

"I can't believe you," her mother had said, "you're just like Faith —"



**California Coastline**  
Emma Engstrom

## A Letter Never Sent

Megan Cather

My mother always said you can tell who a person is by their fingernails. Yours were short and well groomed, but always had a rim of dirt underneath, like a french manicure. I never knew what to think about that. I knew you would leave cracks in my soul, even from the start. Our second date you took me to some garage band concert in the back of a sketchy neighborhood bar. I have this specific memory of that night and even though that was years ago, I can still see it vividly. You were staring at me silently but so focused on every detail of my face that it seemed if you stopped, I would disappear. Nobody has ever made me feel so important before. There were blue lights flashing in your green eyes, and time seemed to stop around you. In that moment I was completely captured, helplessly being sucked into you. I should have listened to my mother, but I would have gladly broken my heart a million times for you.

You taught me the hard way that words have no real meaning. Anyone can say 'I love you', but real love isn't words. Real love is details. Real love is a verb. A day won't go by without me wondering of how much of what you said you actually meant, and how much of it you were just saying to gamble with my heart. I think all along you just wanted to be wanted. Like that day at the park when I met your friends. Or that night at the thai place when I told you I loved you. I was just food for your ego, just someone to call you handsome and laugh at your jokes. I never stopped loving you though, even through the worst. I would have dove into the pits of hell if it meant making you happy, and I did. It was a curse. It was the curse of loving you. All my friends thought I was insane for staying by you. I wasn't naive, I knew what you were doing to me. I couldn't ever bring myself to leave you and I didn't want to. You made me feel a way that nothing else could. They didn't understand. They didn't know you like I did. I didn't know how to be happy without you. I needed you to feel accepted and validated. But I don't consider myself a total victim of your manipulation. It's true, you were poison to me, but I chose to drink it.

I was there for the funeral. Closed casket. I didn't even get to say goodbye to those green eyes. The driver that hit you was drunk, going 90 in a 40. When they buried you, I stood over the 6 foot hole thinking about if I jumped, how far would be far enough to be with you again? I will never miss you more than the first night. I cried all that night, seeking anything that would comfort me like your embrace would. If I closed my eyes tight enough, I

could pretend you were there. I leaned into you, but reality is cruel, and I was instead met with the tile on the bathroom floor. I forgot all the misery you caused me while you were alive. You were my saint, my reason to breathe, my reason to smile. It's been a little over a year since you died. I think about you everyday. Why did we have to get in that fight? Why did you have to die? I don't think about the bad parts of us, I'm slowly forgetting them. That scares me because I want to think of you in entirety, from the good to the bad. But since you, I'm learning how to be happier with just myself. I'm trying to rebuild.

Your mother is good. Pete and Anna are getting married in the spring. It's gonna be beautiful. I'll talk to you soon, and I hope you're taking care of yourself.

Sincerely  
Yours,







