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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Well, it's been a fantastic year, hasn't it? It's been some good times, Readers. I know we're a little slimmer this semester (thanks for noticing!) but as they say, it's not quantity, it's quality.

So: many thanks to all the writers who submitted their quality work this semester, and more thanks to the editorial staff, who gave up their Tuesday (and sometimes Wednesday) nights to discuss all the submissions--you guys are the best. Seriously.

Finally, thank you, Readers, for making all the work worth the while. Have a great summer, and remember to look us up when you get back!

XOXO
Nicola Pioppi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to...

The University Honors College community, for many kindnesses, a meeting space, and a means of production.

Dr. Alec Stewart, for his enthusiastic support and encouragement of the undergraduate literary community.

Karen Billingsley, for her constant availability and aid.

Chris Chirdon, for his insistence that there is no need to bribe him for his irreplaceable assistance in technical matters.

Jennifer Lee, for sticking by us semester after semester.

Commercial Printing Co. and Chris Park, for their continued excellence in printing.
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*La Jolla Memorial Hospital, Mental Ward 1994*

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Gravitational Collapse
Precision Thread
Cake
This is What I’ll Remember
Things I did see today

STAFF SUBMISSIONS

Jenn Dean
Jenna Gwyn
Lizzie Harris

shorts on congruence
thimble
strangers
PHOTOGRAPHY
Charity Sperringer
Last night I dreamt that you were peeling a pear, slowly, the green ribbon of skin unwinding and twirling in the air like a small ballerina. You smiled, lips wide, fingers splayed out to offer me a slice. I reached for it, but could not meet your hands.

I have been traveling the globe, collecting shot glasses and books of poetry from each new place, sitting in windowsills each night with a dictionary that never gives me the answers.

Tonight I am in a village where there is rarely a need to change the light bulbs. Summers here tend to neglect the lamps; the coarse curtains drawn back daily, like a thick waterfall of hair, parted, to expose the naked sun that seems reluctant to sleep at night. And here I am, my only companion a handful of dead matches and cigarette butts, all mixed and ashy in a bowl of old pennies that are useless here.
Christina Boyes
Two nights ago, I heard music from an upstairs room. I climbed the uneven steps, jagged as a pirate’s teeth, and there I found a piano. There was no one playing it. The music had stopped when I reached the top step.

I tried to lift the lid. I wanted to caress the keys, to leave prints of myself behind in this village that would never know my name. You are that old piano. The prints I left of myself on your skin have since disappeared. I did not know I could be washed away so easily.

Two weeks ago, I visited my mother. Her eyes have grown grey with sorrow. She says that without my father, she cannot remember which side of the bed she sleeps on.

She gave me gardenias to plant. She says I need to live with something alive. I asked her Wasn’t I alive enough? and she only kissed my forehead.

The paint in my apartment is peeling off the walls, falling into my shoes like grains of rice. There is still potting soil on the throw rug; I spilt it planting my mother’s gardenias. Your paintbrushes

FIRSTPLACE
are mixed in with my dishes, my earrings lost in the bed sheets,
the tea kettle silently eyes the coffeemaker, a pile of papers on which I write my dreams
grows wet and brown from the rain coming in through the open window.
SONS

Linger on the family plot:
there will be room for me
between the granite
and the skyward-reaching angel
with her kissing lips, between
fresh sod and forget-me-
nots, thin vinyl filled
with rainwater and grass
clippings. From behind the headstone
witness:

SECOND PLACE
old man bent over
marble stone set flat
in the hill, his cigarette
a brief cenotaph
glued to the blisters
of his lips. He sweeps the ashes
from the incised words
and more fall to stone. “Sons
of bitches” he whispers
smoke and years, wipes away
more ashes. “Sons of bitches.”
JEFF CALHOUN

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Jeff is an upperclassman at the University of Dayton. After graduating, he plans to pursue a graduate degree in cellular biology. His writing credits include 2River, Lily, Loch Raven Review, Poems Niedergasse, SOFTBLOW, Poetry Midwest, and Triplo-pia.

LA JOLLA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, MENTAL WARD, 1994

These are cold summers in warm rooms. The AC unit broke down, but no one really noticed, what with all the static running between our neurons.

Across the hall, a girl sits stark-naked
reading Sylvia Plath out-loud. You know it's bad when you start lip-synching a poem about two lovers and a beachcomber by the sea. One day I tried to clothe her, but she sealed herself like a hermit crab, her only extension two fingers wrapped around my wrist and severing my blood flow and her connection to any sort of world. When my residency was scheduled to end, she sensed the urgency in my voice. I couldn't tell which part of her spoke, but I knew my escape from that place was real, that I left one invented reality for another. The teddy bear she gave me on my first day still sits across from me, arms folded, reminding me of a summer where hell wasn't human, just a few cells misfiring like a cheap set of fireworks that scorches your hand and leaves the skin numb.
MARIN COGAN

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Marin Cogan's first name means "little devil" and last name means "priest."

It's true and completely irrelevant.

THE TORNADO OF 85

It was late May, 1985, when the tornado touched down and tore Albion from its roots like a child tearing up fistfuls of grass from a summer lawn. Eight miles away, my mother leaned over the dining room table and looked up through our bay windows with heavy-lidded chocolate eyes at the maple leaves that seemed to rush about, shuddering with concern in the strong wind. The air that day was hot, unstable, as if the earth itself was at any moment on the verge of implosion.
After a moment’s contemplation she walked to the foyer, slid on her sandals and flung the white metal screen door open, leaving it to slam behind her as she rushed across the driveway.

The wind threw her hair from her face instantly, but the speed with which it unhinged her jaw was much slower. Floating at an impossible height were roof shingles, aluminum lawn furniture, paper debris – a naturally constructed mobile of Americana with no visible strings. She shouted to my seven-year-old brother and his playmates, loud enough to be heard over the wind that flapped the loose bottom of her maternity shirt, otherwise stretched taut over her five-month-pregnant belly. I rested inside her, snuggled and dormant for the time. As the children marched past her single file on the way to the basement, she guided them with gentle hands on their backs, looking down at them over a beautiful long nose, one considerably more Roman than the one growing inside her. Above them, the sky was a sickly tinge of green.

My father passed her as she walked through the door, making a hasty exit into the storm. “Where are you going!?“ she screamed, bewildered by his nonchalance. “I’m going to get Chinese food!” he shouted, spitting a little and forcing the words over his lower teeth as if completely unaware of the sirens, the breaking branches,
the civilization being toppled one town over. She knew that there was no convincing him, the eccentric young philosophy professor with a mass of wavy black hair. She rolled her eyes, called him crazy, and shuffled down the basement steps to watch the boys roll plastic trucks over the mustard and brick colored plaid carpet her husband had insisted on buying.

In town, my father, wearing the same blue nylon jacket he’d be wearing for the next 20 years, cursed to himself, his hair blown in a million directions, hugging the bag of food to his chest to keep the Styrofoam container from coming unhinged and leaking grease and soy sauce everywhere.

- 

It was an intensely hot day in July, 1988, when my father demanded we take a family trip to Albion to see a rodeo. The temperatures pushed the upper 90’s, and the dust kicked up by the horses and cows seemed to stick to the heat waves of the mid-afternoon. On the way home, my parents stopped the car on the side of the road and walked to a wide, clear path that snaked through the woods, cut only by the highway we traversed. My father knelt by my side and explained to me that this was the place the tornado had passed through. I stretched my thin arms as hard as I could,
struggling and grimacing, trying to get a physical understanding of how wide the tornado must have been. The ligaments in my shoulder stretched until they were about to snap but it was no use – the space between my fingertips and the forest’s edge seemed to go on for miles. I collapsed, exhausted.

Seventeen years later I tore through Albion in my parents car, my own black hair flying like streamers in the pressing wind. The night was verging on summer dusk, but it was still clear enough to see the town as I blazed past on the country roads that bisected it. There is one traffic light in the town - it is forever flashing amber and red, a tireless distress signal as they wait for the millions of dollars in aid President Reagan had promised them.

The most popular style of home in Albion, Pennsylvania is not ranch or colonial, it is mobile. A few worn, working class homes line the main street, adorned in peeling paint, yellow ribbons, and rotting plywood. On one side of the traffic light is a sedentary McDonald’s with florescent white lights that seem to beg for potential diners who’ll never come, no matter how late they stay open. Over its shoulder sits the Senior High that once served as a makeshift morgue for the town’s 12 fallen citizens. A lonely
tavern near the old railroad tracks reminds with a dirty, poorly lit sign that “the public is welcome.” The remainder of the town is occupied by deteriorating buildings – cinderblock skeletons where small businesses thrived before the tornado carried them off.

When I arrived at my friend’s country home that night I pulled in the driveway carefully, my tires crunching gingerly over gravel to avoid hitting one of their grey farm dogs. That night a convict had escaped from Albion’s State Correctional Institution, but that didn’t stop the boys from insisting we drink our Budweisers on the porch with the swarms of gnats. As everyone spoke calmly, I slurped my beer and squinted at the woods across the road for better focus, wondering if the criminal was hiding in there, trying to walk noiselessly on dark moss and cool earth. He had to be quiet.

When the tornado came through, it killed all of the animals in the forest. They rotted and decomposed, contaminating the town’s water supply so that it had to be shipped in for months following the storm. The forest has been quiet ever since. Maybe he was at the old railroad tracks, the ones that once employed an entire town, waiting for a getaway train that’d never come. I wondered if he could see us, a group of unsuspecting young people, exposed and
vulnerable in a swath of yellow porch light. But no one seemed concerned. It seemed everyone had a parent who was employed by the prison. And we weren’t calling attention to ourselves. Our voices sounded unnaturally quiet, as if the heavy summer air swallowed our words before they could float away and disturb the silence, attract the convict’s attention, or wake the dead.
DIANA CHEN

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Diana Chien is a freshman at Princeton University, where she is studying biology, French, and creative writing.

VASILISA

I.
In the clearing was a girl with a red cloak,
a rose in one hand,
a blade in the other.

II.
He climbed your tower last night,
dint he?
Don’t look at me like that
for I know how it is when they look at you
with their lions’ eyes opening like sunlight in flowers
and furthermore I know what it is
to trade roots for riches –

Go to your loom.

III.
The wooden woman:

The carpenter made her,
The tailor clothed her,
The student prayed her
to life.

Who should have her?
IV.
O
bring me your
signs,
sons,
swans,
sins,
for I am here
to undo knots, part thorns,
make bloodied linen white
again and
turn feathers
to flesh.

I would track you
through the red sands and the white,
on the back of a wind
or with stones
for eyes.
- Only
give me time,
and a little silence.

V.
Second Sister, upon marrying the king's baker,
realized that perhaps she had gotten the long end of the stick
this time because after all it is only so long
that you can go on supping on milk and pearls,
at least when the mouths that you have to feed
are of a certain sort, that is children's and not
a chantment's which while shapely,
maun have naught but pearls and milk, or perish sure.

VI.
Dropping
her knife in the reeds on the kitchen floor,
she stooped to retrieve the distant
glitter, remembering
a ring in a bowl of soup;
frowned, when he laughed
and moved to take it from her.

“Lamb tonight, love?”

VII.
She walked into the bedroom, and shut the door behind her.
JACQUELYN SEIGLE  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Jacquelyn Seigle is graduating someday soon with a B.A. in English writing, and a B.S. in neuroscience. She’s into giving and is pretty good at naming things. She is currently the editor in chief of Three Rivers Review.

TRANSCONTINENTAL

your hair falls like burnt kale & you sleep at an angle that scares me when I am above and you are stranded, fault-lined at a bad idea
you give bread, river, water

to a false village,
transcontinental

There is a line
between a village
and a dry well, your
foot and anything.
I am canopied
into a disconnect –
your huts
my huts
cannot challenge war
they both tend the same
fire
Sometimes I feel that anxiety is passed down – that the beads of sweat multiplying like cells on my mother’s forehead as she heaves and salivates in motion will someday be my own. Panting, dripping, pulsating movements transferred through her mitochondrial DNA into my bloodstream, a new condition sprung from our contemporary society restrained by countless shopping lists and portable calendars – constant motion; our lives like automatic treadmills. Every afternoon my mother marches in place. She stomps with her tightly laced-up Nike’s on the mahogany hardwood floors of our tiny, cramped living room, on
the brink of explosion. She claps her hands together, mimicking the motions of Leslie, the semi-famous aerobics' instructor of *Walk Away the Pounds*: a four video set comprised of fifteen, thirty, forty-five, and sixty minute workout sessions for your convenience. You don’t have to own an enormous house enhanced with a Bowflex and Nordic Tracks to get a first-rate home workout; all you need is a television, VCR, and a two by two foot square of space to tone your body like bikini supermodels with names like Ms. Lulu and Rihanna.”

It happened this past August, three days before my intended departure to my first year of college. I had felt during those summer months a climbing fear of relocating five hours away from the home I’d grown up in, a sort of empty void stemming and swelling, lurking in the corridors of my chest, encompassing my entire body as if – when my exodus actually took place – swallowing me whole and leaving in my space a blank landscape, an invisible, unknown self. I imagined myself lost in transition, a temporary equilibrium state with no cord to latch onto, no constancy except for my own tangible body.

I think it’s hard to anticipate change when it’s so grand because you can contemplate it all you want, twist scenarios
around in your brain until they split, become the author of your own future and, essentially, play God. But having never physically experienced a movement of this sort, there’s no ground to walk on; your settings all contain clouded borders and collapsed octagonal lines with vanishing points so far into the distance that they could very well go on forever. It’s like in anxiety dreams when you try so hard to run from something or someone, but you’re caught in slow motion, a lost sense of time.

That humidifying and saturated August morning I arose to a quickening pounding, a rapid pattern of thumping seeming to radiate inside of me. I sat up thinking it was my heart, my eyes nearly blinded from the light of the sun shining through the tiny crevice between my window shade and frame. Clutching my chest in horror, I let out a relieving gasp and released the strain of my shoulders. The pulsation had echoed from the militaristic trekking of my mother’s swollen feet in front of the static downstairs. Up. Down. Up. Down. I swiveled my head away from the sun’s glare and sat up, but something still felt off. I still sensed the swift repeating of rhythmic contractions from the previous false alarm, an unnecessary extra espresso-shot in my morning cup of coffee for my pattering, anxious heart. I threw my legs off the side of
the bed and with intention of scrambling downstairs with a surly comment to my dad in mind about my mother’s prime choice of exercise scheduling, and like usual flexed my sluggish thighs while pushing off with my hips muscles and quadriceps in order to stand.

It had taken about twenty minutes to convince my parents that I wasn’t exaggerating. “Mom!” I had shouted, having intended to do so in a different manner downstairs. “Dad! Come quick! I...I can’t stand up.”

I had been known to flower my circumstances in the past, amplifying bits of information in order to get what I wanted or help prove my points: “A natural actress,” my Dad always said. “Maybe one day she’ll use it to her advantage and become a lawyer.” One time I secretly squirted ketchup all over my arm after my little brother had punched it out of frustration, and pretending that it was blood, scared him into believing that his teeny-tiny kindergarten blitz had produced such a result. It made him feel sorry, all right, but for all the wrong reasons.

“You have what is called Guillain Barré Syndrome,” the neurologist began to explain to me in the emergency room a couple of hours later. “You are not going home tonight.”
I remember shifting in my seat, unable to physically express my full level of distress. My entire middle region ached from the mandatory (although inconclusive) lumbar puncture like a massive abdominal strain, an effect of what felt like an increasing mass plotting the collapse of my insides. The MD had told me to assume a fetal position. "Decrease the joint angle in your neck. Full flexion is necessary," she had said. "Now raise your knees all the way to your chest, dear. Don't worry, you'll hardly feel a thing."

My mother revealed to me later that that's what the doctors had told her before her natural childbirth with me and that they lie in order to bring your apprehension level down. Five years later and in full dilation at the hospital, she screamed bloody murder for an epidural injection before the doctors even had time to ask. According to my dad, she apparently wasn't permitted to hold my brother until three hours after the delivery due to her uncontrolled stool release in her hospital bed four-times-and-counting during only the first fifteen minutes of her post-birth experience, as well as inability to tell the doctors, when asked, what year it was. (I wouldn't be surprised if she retained a previous agreement with the epidural administer to pump the catheter with an extra boost of anesthesia that day).
“Now what happens with Guillain Barré,” the neurologist explained, “is that the paralysis begins in your peripheral regions – i.e. your hands and feet – and quickly moves its way to the center.” She placed her hands over her chest as she said this.

The team of residents accompanying the doctor surrounded my bed in a near-claustrophobic semicircle, confining me within an inescapable region of radiated energy under the florescent, ultraviolet lights. Their clipboards rattled as the doctor spoke.

“Now nobody knows why certain people develop GBS. All we know is that it’s usually triggered by an acute infectious process – meaning any regular virus could have incongruously reacted with your body and produced this rare, autoimmune polyradiculoneuropathy.”

My body felt, then, as if it were descending, an inward collapsing of matter with no gravity to break my fall. The neurologists’ hands scattered back and forth and I dazedly watched in a trance of shock as her arms entwined as if a part of an impressionistic image.

Panic in slow motion.

My mother stayed beside me for seven days straight as they kept me constantly awake by checking every thirty minutes for vital
signs and pumping me with violent doses of immunoglobulin to halt the spreading GBS, sodium chloride to hydrate my body, and oxycodone to calm the resulting twenty-four hour migraines and extreme nerve pain. Up. Down. Up. Down. My heart rate monitor beeped on the off-beats of her jarring breaths. Every five minutes the vigilant nurses’ pattering footsteps could be heard from down the hall as the machines did not read my naturally shallow breathing patterns as a plausible sign of life. The beeps continuously sped up with velocity and sound, increasing my heart rate just by the fear that they produced in me.

My pediatrician had always found it difficult locating my pulse.

I constantly dreamed awake that my body repeatedly exploded in reverse, that the GBS entered the tips of my fingers and toes, and through my veins consuming my only means of escape; it progressed inwards like a rapid channel, attacking my heart from the inside. I am stationary. I am static.

Implosion.

My mother and I lay sideways with her head at my feet. I remember one moment slipping into a semi-unconscious state and feeling her foot in my mouth. Glancing down, I saw that my foot,
too, sat clamped between her teeth as she bit down with enormous force. We both couldn’t feel a thing.

I visualized during the Nerve Conduction Velocity part of a mandatory (though also inconclusive) Electromyography test the static of the TV shocking my mother as it sucked her in towards the screen.

I even mused a hologram of a bright, cloudless day – the day of my leaving – where I pranced like a fawn through our front lawn to the open car door, disappearing into a suction of blackness with blurred edges. Stellar evolution.

“Now Rachel,” the mandatory hospital psychologist began to speak, “my job is to check on in-patients who have suffered through extensive trauma to see if they are mentally secure and able to deal with the extreme transversal of their lives.” She tapped her pen up and down on her notepad as she continued: “I want to start by asking you about your previous feelings towards leaving for college in general, and then move towards the idea of your beginning at least a semester late.”

At this point, a week and a half after the five-day intravenous immunoglobulin that succeeding in halting the GBS at my thighs and forearms and immediately (and very surprisingly) reversing
my paralysis into a backwards regaining – along with intensive daily physical therapy, of course – of strength, I sat in my new bed-on-wheels in the Rehabilitation Center floor of the hospital. My calves vibrated along with the humming compression boots that massaged my legs in order to keep blood clots from forming.

“Well,” I replied, “although I craved a... I guess an evolution, or detachment, from being under complete control and order of my parents, I honestly believe that I can now admit a sort of dread – a, a panic at the idea of walking into an unknown territory on my own.” I paused to shift my body – somewhat awkwardly – more towards her direction. “And I guess, I guess my body just decided that it wasn’t ready either. I mean, fuck – excuse me – but God damn, can you even believe what you’re hearing? Do you even hear what I’m saying? It’s like my body decided to completely go against my mind and physically, I mean actually prevent me from leaving – I mean, talk about Descartes’ dualism theory – and you know, I’m actually really glad that I’m starting late because, because I think that I’ll actually be ready now, you know?

The physical therapist instructed me to walk on a treadmill and peddle a stationary bike as well as participate in various other balance and muscle-building exercises each day in order to help
regain my strength. It’s funny, and actually quite poignant, that in order to become mobile again I had to perform the very opposite action that my response to – I think – inwardly triggered the GBS in the first place. Every day a constant repetition, and therefore every day a greater familiarity and order implanting itself into my mind and body, my brain inscribing a routine down with its own overly rich pigmented, crimson blood.

Change.
My family has booked the same suite in the same city on the same beach on the same days every late August ever since I can remember. “I don’t have the time or energy to plan one of those, what, one of those pricey trips to Europe all you kids seem to talk about these days,” my mom would tell my brother and I each year. “Hell, it’s not worth the stress of spending more time researching than actual doing. We work hard every day, you know, and don’t feel like having to work any more than we need to.”

After my mother finishes her workout video, she makes sure to rewind it all the way to the beginning until the reversing rollers come to a halt and the VCR clicks. She then sets it back into
its glossy case and lines it up with the other numbered-by-miles-walked versions. In the hospital I only heard her footsteps as she walked to and from my room; I looked forward to her sequence of going and leaving and coming back. It was the approach of the necessary boundary, the event horizon that I had craved from the beginning, but had never received until almost swallowed whole.

The nurse informed me upon signing the release forms to go home – exactly two and a half weeks after arrival to the hospital – never to forget to immediately mention to my future doctors the condition I had suffered through due to the only lingering, permanent result of GBS: ghost reflexes. “You know if you forget to mention it, the doctors will have a heart attack when the nerves in your knees don’t respond to their reflex tests,” she said. “They’ll think you are some, God forbid, poltergeist or something!”

I now refuse to enter a gym of any sort – reject the action, even the idea of motion with no destination. The times that I have tried to succumb to electronic exercise machines because of the cold or the rain or any lack of good running weather, my insides have become physically ill just from the sight of others in stagnate
motion: the physical quintessence of a complete and utter region of a friction-created energy field so strong that escape almost proves impossible just by the prospect of it. The routine, the vacuity, the idle black fantasy of it warps the very turnaround of my fortune – it mocks the essence behind my prolonged time at home.

I am registered to begin my first semester during the spring term of what should be my second semester of my freshman year of college. As I jog through the empty streets in alternate sequences each morning, passing duct-taped trash bags filled with acceptance letters and tuition bills and nostalgic letters home, I confidently gasp with deep breathes and close my eyes with little fear of losing balance; my anxiety exists in the little confines of sweat that bead off around the edges of my forehead and neck and the tiny creases in my palms. I am between gradient and gravity. I envelop an igniting core that burns in the center of my body – heaving: up, down, up down – as I continue to exhale and shift towards the ultimate exhaustion, the gravitational collapse of a star.
SONDRA PETRI
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

PRECISION THREAD

I am the granddaughter of a seamstress;
meaning: a childhood spent
in crisp fit pinafores, scrap
fabric, and dime-store patent leather
Mary-Janes. Look at her; look at me
-all smiles-passed down a cloth-bound
fastened down Kodak Polaroid past
(she took her time to hand script)
in a picture album. See:
This is how I stitch together memory.
I am at a loss to explain how I cannot
hem a sleeve or press a seam, yet mean-
as the precision thread steady slips
the eye-to meet line with line, to mark
up the page and then spare it down;
mind to salvage each last draft with care
and finish then with a clean cut story.
Because my grandmother is a seamstress
I am frugal with words. Raised in pleat
Press dresses, I was never moved to raise
my voice at home, in class-
other girls in blue jeans with their unstill hands
clutch with the crumbs of fresh-baked chocolate-chip cookies.
JACKIE WICE  UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

CAKE

May came early, again
this year
so mom swallowed her memory
like pills
prescribed beside the birthday cake.

"she would have been twenty"
mom says to the cake
and makes the words linger
on
to suggest that
time had not stopped
when i was little
because

when i was little
we would eat cake
with candles in the park
where mom would take pictures
as my sister wished
on each flame's passing life

but today
we line up with our plates
in the kitchen
where there are no candles, or cameras
to watch
and we close our eyes to pretend
that mom does not sing alone
to the cake
as if it were the birthday girl.
THIS IS WHAT I'LL REMEMBER

steel-scarred hands
soft red sweater
soaked in my mascara

stained storm
You didn't expect to hear
answers, just held

my head to your chest
wouldn't let me go
until it blew over
JASON ENDRESS
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Jason Endress is a twenty-three year old artist and student. He is the author and publisher of the soon-to-be-in-your-local-book-shoppe collection of poems, "In Early Morning Water." He is currently occupied with building a boat, because he's lost patience waiting for his ship to come in.

THINGS I DID SEE TODAY:

sunset
love wearing insecurity

nicotine stained fingers
an unmade bed

traffic lights and
crossing signals

budding leaves bold
squirrels
fat victorian robins

cracked plaster ceilings
fresh fruit
cracked sidewalks,
fresh pavement

a flat tire

morning
night
photographed friendship
and other paraphernalia.
STAFF SUBMISSIONS
JENN DEAN

shorts on congruence

(1) Samson polished his shoes with a tawdry brown at the kitchen counter and left a smear the shape of himself.

names, he said, are arbitrary

(2) tomorrow is my mother's birthday & my father asked for a new organ to play her a tune less solitary.

(3) I know now why she was afraid for me to choose a life of novellas and tiled floors.
JENNA GWYN

THIMBLE

I formed you, rawhide rolled in the palm of my hand
Pressed you flat, from a brittle goose-white board.
I soaked you in a porcelain bowl in the kitchen,
Your pasty integument, once stiff- now swollen, gelled, and grey.

I lifted you out from the sink where you soaked,
Lapping at the luxuries of rehydration,
At the illusion of rejuvenation, of youth, of life.
So pliable, I stretched your rubbery skin over mine, hide over hide.

Molded and hardened to a curled shell, cut
And cast around my finger,
I folded you, arms in prayer upon yourself,
Wrists bound together by a lock of stringy sinew,
Tied up twice and pressed to the lighter-
As the wick burnt down gooey, then hard, like glue.

Dressed in blood knot, armor welded unalterable, now you snuff
The blazing sinew into gnarled rivets. Dirt and grime smudge
At your grain as you resist against my tools. Hardened
From the outside, your tolerance yields beauty.

I quilt with you, make medicine bags, I gouge
Into you never exposing or feeling- Needle and
Flame lick and etch craters, blemishing your face
But you push on against strict metal that pierces holes
Through tanned leather; once whole, once yours.

Once white, velvety rich, you’ve become
Like a sculpture, or fibrous paper mache,
A tightly laced girdle around the arch of my thumb-
Freckled, dimpled now, like a glazed orange rind.

You’ve lost your wild smell, and
I no longer keep you in the dark of the plush
Buckskin pouch, thumping against my chest as I walk,
Mixed in with rusted jingling change-

I found you in my sewing kit
Still you don’t fit in with the spoils
Of spent thread and cracked plastic spools, or even
The gold embroidery scissors- no
You haven’t lost that luster that reeks of things homemade.

Impressing upon thread I splice into itself
You shield my sanguine fingertips from pinhead
And awl as I grow softer, vulnerable, under your
Brittle body, now thickened and bruised by flame.

I watch others, with hands more stern than mine
Smash the lock of sinew into molten blood knot-
I’ve heard how it hurts, seen the flinch, smelled
The burning flesh. It’s how you got your glossy sheen,
Your visage once porous- now calloused, now bald.
I know it can be done, by those whose skin is rough,
And thicker than my own. I could shed you,
My removable callus. Soft fingers can be hardy.

They laugh at me, say it will make me strong.
I want to prove I’m indifferent too,
But kiss their blistered fingers instead.
LIZZIE HARRIS

STRANGERS

They are barbed wire fences, that challenge coyotes, and Mountains that blind us from where we could be going.

They are insects, crawling like our mother’s skin, when our father leaves town and comes back again.
MUSIC