collision literary magazine
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Dear readers,

Watching my second year as editor in chief come to a close, I look back with fondness at the progress Collision has made. After replanting the seed of experimental art projects last year, we decided to nourish it, working with Zev Woskoff to decorate two newsstands and place them around campus for the magazine release. We also created an April Fool’s Day zine that celebrates what has become a vital piece of Collision’s history and mythos: the mango. It amazes me to see what our passion and ambition have produced, and I want to thank every staff member, new and old, for what they’ve given to the magazine. I know there is much more ahead that I can’t yet fathom, and I can’t wait for it to come to fruition.

Special thanks go to our graduating seniors, Brian Murray and Mairin Plant, both of whom will be dearly missed. I would also like to thank Geeta Kothari and the students of her Online and Literary Publishing class for their help reading and consulting for the magazine. Time and experience have given me a better understanding of how to steer this publication, but Geeta and her class have offered a frame of reference when looking back and when thinking about the future.

Finally, I would like to give my warmest thanks to the artists and writers who contributed to this magazine, as well as our readers. Your interest and support in our publication make producing this magazine possible, and I hope you enjoy this collection of pieces that have surprised, intrigued, and challenged us. The challenges were the most difficult, especially as the #MeToo movement surged into the public sphere last year. We chose to note the story we
published that contains scenes of sexual assault with a warning at the top of the page, and we hope that anyone who has gone through or is going through harassment or assault has access to the resources they need.

Thank you again for your continued support. I hope you enjoy!

Yours,
Kim Rooney

Many resources for addressing harassment, abuse, and assault are available online, and the CDC offers a list of organizations that serve people who need help. Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (800-656-HOPE) also offers a call-routing system to direct people to crisis centers near them.
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Cover Art

The Fly That Loved Me

Sa-Rai Robinette
Marshall University
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I was born with a head full of hair and round ballooning puffs for cheeks. They turned red in too-cold winters and too-hot summers, and even in the in-betweens when my eczema flared and dotted my elbows, thighs, and cheeks. Oma was the third person to see my wrinkled red face after I was born, the third to squeeze my cheeks.

“What will she call you?” Dad asked her.

“Oma,” she told him. She wasn’t German, but my uncle’s children were so she was Oma for them and Oma for me. She’d left Calcutta over a decade ago to live with my uncle in Germany, and now flew back and forth, six months in Munich, six months in Bloomington with me.

Oma squeezed my cheeks when she laid me across her sari-covered lap, squeezed them not hard like those strangers who often tried to hold me, who brought their faces too close with bulging eyes and toothy smiles. No, her wrinkled fingers were slow and soft, smiles with all eyes. And she called me Gooloo, Roundy in Bengali. Gooloo for my thick wrists and pudgy fingers, my puffy cheeks, Gooloo for my peas for toes.
My mother could never put me to sleep. I was a restless teething baby for whom pacifiers never seemed to work. So it was Oma who slung me over her shoulder against a blanket and walked across the field in front of our house, my head enveloped in a knitted cap. She couldn’t sing in key though she knew all the words to her favorite Bengali songs. We used to sit on the stairs where the sun left streaks on the wood and she fed me Cheerios smothered in yogurt, telling stories. It was from Oma that I learned to speak Bengali through my childhood; from Oma that I learned to read the twisting curves of Bengali vowels and consonants.

When I was four we met her in the airport after six months. It was her last time of traveling back and forth, last time flying across the Atlantic Ocean: Germany, America, Germany, America. This time she’d come to stay with us for good. She had a doll for me that day—pink and soft, wearing a onesie with a long flappy pointed cap, and I ran around and around her, too shy to take the doll, but wanting to. When Mom and Dad went out shopping, we’d spent the day playing board games—flipping old wooden cards, rolling dice for Ludo. I taught her all the rules but she never let me win. There was a book she used to read to me before bed when our backs pressed to the wall in her room in our tiny apartment. It was a book about an old woman who hid inside of a watermelon and rolled home safely to avoid being eaten by a wolf.

Hands cupped to her chest in prayer in the evenings, Oma was a Hindu but in her shrine she kept a painting of Jesus beside her statue of Ganesh, beneath the many hands of Durga, and among old letters and holy books. For Lokkhi Puja, she dipped her fingers in powdered rice paste, painting the goddess Lokkhi’s feet in every doorway, curly chalky whites with toes like the dashes...
dividing traffic in the streets. Her shrine would be embellished with apples, bananas, grape bunches, incense lit, floating smoke around metallic statues of Ganesh, Hanuman, and Lokkhi—necklaces wrapped around their photo frames, coins lined at their waists.

The first time she fell down I was in elementary school and it was from the wind, so strong under our apartment building that knocked her to the ground. After that she started walking with a cane, afraid of slipping on her own feet, afraid of falling. I was seven years old when her sister died and she stood at the phone in her nightdress and cried. She was the last one left behind, the last one in her family still alive.

In my teens when my body grew in width before height, and Mom started buying me oversized jeans and sweaters, I still remained Gooloo, Roundy. Oma never learned how to use a computer or cellphone, chose newspapers, pen and paper, over TV shows, but she had more friends than me, spent three hours each day talking on the landline phone with her friends in India, her son in Germany, her daughter in Chicago. She never touched our cats, afraid of their fur, but she called their names from her stairlift, drifting down the stairs. She called me from the bathroom at the top of the stairs in our house. Hands leaning against the walker and the edge of the sink as she washed her four dentures or brushed her teeth. She’d ride down the stairlift in our house, then clank her metal walker’s legs across the tiles on the floor. Sometimes she called from the midst of sleep, Gooloo mixed with moans and undistinguishable garbles, Gooloo mixed with pains in her legs.

When I was thirteen and she eighty-five, she published a memoir in Bengali, stories from her childhood. She wrote of the family cook, a generous drunk with a big heart; the earthquake
she’d survived; the time she stood in the same room as Gandhi. They were stories I’d heard time after time. She cried when she read me one story, when flipping through the pages of Bengali text. Burun, she told me had been his name. The sags under her eyes were wet under glasses. I wasn’t used to adults crying. That day she told me how he’d died; her third child, after my aunt, before my mother. Burun with a cracked heart, Burun who disappeared at two years old, but she never forgot his name or the shape of his face.

She fell down again my sophomore year of high school, one week after I’d been locked out of the house and she’d forgotten how to unlock the front doors. She fell in front of her desk, slipped from her walker, alone at home. She was never left alone at home after that. Caregivers started coming a few hours every day, we stopped leaving the house together as a family; there were no more family gatherings, no more staying out late. She forgot what time it was, the date of my birthday, and the color of trees in autumn. She would sit by the window, ask for the blinds to be pulled up all the way so the sun would flood in. She stopped going outside. It was too cold, too hot, too much needing to use the restroom.

The first time I went to India, I was almost eighteen, fair-skinned like my father, long hair like my mother. Aparna Mashi was Oma’s childhood best friend, same age, and same gray hair. We visited her house in Delhi, the same house that my mom had visited as a child. She didn’t like sweets the way Oma loved baked goods, chocolates, and vanilla ice cream. She represented an older version of Oma, completely mobile and clear in the head, no dementia. Aparna Mashi spent her days reading books, socializing with guests and occasionally watching Bengali TV. She ridiculed us for using hand sanitizer and fearing germs, told us how she and Oma were
inseparable in their youth, signing a book to give to Oma. One month after we returned home, Aparna Mashi died, one month after Oma became convinced that her best friend had died but we’d kept it a secret from her. And then when it came true, she became the last of her friends to survive.

She kept her dentures in a bowl in our bathroom beside her toothbrush, where they floated in a blue liquid at night. They were only partial dentures with four teeth for the few missing on the top. She drank Gatorade and salted drinks to keep her sodium not too low, not too high: just right because low sodium meant slurred speech, confusion, incontinence. We learned to navigate the insides of hospitals once, twice, three times a year. We learned how to call 911 and wait for the ambulance to come with its strong men and folding beds. Once when returning from the hospital her hair became a tangled twist of gray knots. Almost ninety years old and she still had dark gray streaks through the hair that extended to her middle back. No wrinkles on her cheeks, just creases under her eyes when she smiled. It took three hours to untie the knots, and snip away a few that had spread into a matted mass of strands. She was afraid of short hair because losing hair meant being old.

She cried when I left for college, even though college was just a fifteen-minute car ride away. College meant I wouldn’t come home and see her every day, wouldn’t sit next to her at the dining table, couldn’t move the cat who loved to slump in front of her feet, couldn’t hear her calling Gooloo in her sleep. Hands too shaky to write, she started drawing, shading inside the lines of adult coloring books. She gave one to me, a drawing of a bird with outspread wings and I hung it above the bed in my dorm room. But then after a few months she forgot to draw, fell asleep in her chair, stopped reading.
When she coughed, the phlegm gurgled up her throat and she spread her lips and hacked, straining to spit it out. Then she puffed her cheeks and released, spilling green ooze into a tissue—folded three times. The process repeated, filling the empty tissue box beside her bed with crumpled snot rags. And then finally she’d roll, pushing blankets wrapped around her sides off the bed and onto the un-vacuumed floor covered in fallen cloves she chewed because she believed they’d suppress the coughing. She kept tissues under her pillow, tissues stored in the space between her and the band of her plastic underwear. The walker clanked as she reached for it, scraping its gray metal legs against the wooden floor, a sound that meant morning, that meant this is what it feels like to be old.

Her desk was lined with an assortment of orange capsules, pills to be collected from each bottle and put into her wrinkled hands with water. Once she’d finished moaning and slid into an upright position, swollen legs and toes flat on the ground, the medicine was greeted with a grimace, sounds of disgust. I dropped the pills into her palm and she slurped water between belches. Dad removed the bedside commode from her room, freshly filled from last night. And then she’d slide on her socks, nightdress sagging to one side, covering one shoulder while exposing the other. Once seated in the wheelchair she called, cracking voice, over and over our names until we rushed to her room to unlock her wheelchair and push her into the restroom.

My mother said she died years ago, left behind a ghost who shared the same face. My father hated being at home, her loss of hearing making communication a daily struggle. Home was where she spent three hours in the bathroom, two hours to eat her breakfast only to fall asleep at the dining table. Then in December she stopped walking, ended up in the hospital, flailing in bed. Influenza,
they said. She won’t be able to walk again, they said. She was scared of the rehabilitation center where they wanted to send her to get better, to learn to walk again.

It was like a death but not. More like a disappearance, the way people slip away and home melts into something else. It happened while I was pouring the water the day before New Year’s Eve, setting the table for five because my uncle was visiting, so that meant +1, but I forgot about the -1. When I reached her placemat, I remembered she wasn’t there. There was no chair by her seat at the table, just the orange plastic placemat unlike the rest of ours, which were straw and circular, stain-free. Hers alone, next to the box of tissues, the empty water glass. I remembered she wasn’t here to eat the catfish food Mom had just fried. Instead she was in an institution eating Western foods she wasn’t used to.

This year I cut my hair into layered locks, shorter than it had ever been, only up to my shoulders and she asked from the nursing home bed: “Why did you do it? Why did you cut away your beautiful hair? Why did you change?” She wanted to know if it had snowed that day, if the pine trees outside her bedroom window at home were tinted in white dust.

“Home is the best place,” she told the nurses. Her lips quivered as she fought to stay awake, mind wandering, forgetting what day it was, what month, what year, what season. She fought to stay awake before drifting off to sleep. Fighting to say she didn’t want to be there, she wanted to come home and sit in her chair and watch the sun through the trees. Because home is the best place.
i can’t do this anymore—

we woke up to find it graffitied on the side of our house, and under the tag were four lilac flowers. mom tried to wash it away with the hose, but the words stuck like glue to the brick.

all of our neighbors had something to say about it; knocked on our door to tell us it was tacky, or unsymmetrical, or that they were concerned. mom got tired of the persistent commentary, so she put a comment box on the front porch and every wednesday she emptied it out with the rest of the trash

and things seemed okay.
we carried on like we normally would,
every morning i’d leave for work
and every morning she’d hand me a brown paper bag lunch

every evening i’d come home
and every evening she’d place two plates on the table, meatloaf and mashed potatoes, every evening

and every night i’d go to bed
and every night she’d stay up in the kitchen
    cleaning and
reading

and things seemed okay.

one day she came inside covered in red paint, a bucket hanging at her side, her face old and tired. i had never seen her look so tired.

when we woke up the next morning the letters were back, “I CAN’T DO THIS ANYMORE.” all caps, white paint dripping down the wall like scratches.

she felt defeated, stopped eating, bathing. every morning when i’d leave for work she was sitting at the table
small and lifeless staring right out in front of her,
past the walls
into vacuum space.

when i’d get home,
she’d be there
hands folded, eyes glazed staring, unmoved.

this went on for three weeks.

then one night, i woke up to see her through the kitchen window scratching at the wall with her bare hands—screaming at the top of her lungs. her eyes were oceans and her bones were decaying inside of her body.

all at once
she folded in on herself, delicate origami girl
shaking with the wind.
she slid down the wall, face buried in her hands.
collision spring 2018

down the street i could hear someone’s dog barking,

and mom
lit up by moon—
a fallen star with trembling hands,

dug up the four lilac flowers
    and tucked one behind her ear.
Third Prize

Panama City Beach, 2015

Alex Coffman
Georgia Gwinnett College

Cool beads of whiskey sweat
trickle down my neck
while I look out on the gulf,
wondering if the knife’s edge of the sea
is going to gut the world beyond,
and pull my past in with the tide
along with driftwood rot, and bloated
sailing men with marzipan skin.
I sink my bottle into the sand and stagger
out into that tarred Florida seawater,
listening to their wailing call –
They tell me I’m ready to join them
on that last God-damned voyage.
Honorable Mention

No Place like Home for the Holidays

Fiction
Lauren Fabrizio
University of Pittsburgh

Editorial Note: This piece contains scenes of sexual assault.

Snowflakes the size of cotton balls dropped to the earth, intermingling with the gravel of my father’s driveway. I pulled the key from its ignition and let the car fall silent and cold, the air so still I could hear each flake as it thumped against the cracked windshield. Goosebumps spread over the exposed skin of my arms. A warm yellow light backlit the tinsel-covered tree framed by the front window. It was tacky, those silver strings draped over every branch. They’d stick to the dog’s fur every year and they’d swirl in pools of his vomit for weeks after the holiday. That dog was probably dead by now, anyway; he was old even way back when, sleeping under the kitchen table every year, hoping a few smelts would end up drunkenly thrown his way.

Christmas Eves were split in half between the parents; after the divorce, Mom had dibs on six o’clock Mass while Dad kept custody of his annual shindig, smelling of cigarettes and ash. I’d never shake that particular memory. The smoke seemed to have enveloped my brain, soaking into the grey matter. Boyfriends would smell like Christmas Eve with Dad, their dry mouths tasting stale, dirty, unclean. Passersby were the same, along with minimum wage workers lighting up next to dumpsters while out on break, or raggedy home-
less men decorating street corners just off campus—others tossing their own butts into what little coffee the men held to keep warm. Smoke-stench would even marinate into the tin of dry rigatoni made by one aunt or another every year—a holiday delicacy. My mother always made me and Zany take our coats off before going inside that house; they’d be ruined by the stench.

Church, on the other hand, smelled like incense and sweet tree sap. There were green hollywreaths decked with red bows and candles sparkling intermittently throughout the congregation. Every year—every single year without fail, I swear to Christ—my mother cried to “Silent Night” while row after row of parishioners shuffled forward to receive the sacrament. Zany flipped through the crepe-thin pages of a decades-old New Testament.

“Alexander, pay attention,” my mother would scold as she pulled the book from her son’s grasp. She’d stand him up straight with a yank of the wrist, all in preparation for the Mass’ grand climax.

“Elizabeth, take your brother’s hand, please.” Christmas Eve Masses were habitually overcrowded; we would be pushed to the outskirts of the crowd—always running late—where we’d stand only centimeters apart. I could feel warmth radiating from my brother’s hand, always clammy, always damp, the way all small children seem to come glazed in sticky dew. But the air of the church was cool and still; windows on all sides, like a fishbowl, I’d watch the snow crash to the earth. I never really believed in God—whether holy or spirited or both—not even way back then. That unbelief would only grow worse and worse, sometimes festering like an old, infected wound, sometimes feeling more like a superiority complex. But, regardless, the church glowed golden on Christmas Eve. My mother was happy.
So, I grabbed my brother’s hand.

“Our Father, who art in heaven,” the congregation started off.

The last Christmas Eve spent with my father had been branded into my memory, impossible to be repressed along with other divorce tales. I was fourteen, a freshman in high school—still lanky, still getting the hang of concealer and mascara. I dressed myself for church with some combination of skirt and sweater, polished off by a pair of red high heels on loan from Mom. They made me walk like a newborn fawn through the snow, knees buckling gracefully. The air blew cold enough to pull back the freshly shaven down of my legs, replacing their smoothness with mountainous goosebumps. I spent most of Mass with my legs tightly crossed in the hopes that nobody would notice.

We said our prayers and offered each other a sign of peace. I took ten-year-old Zany’s hand and he confidently blurted, “Harold be thy name.” An old man in the pew behind us sniggered. My mother cried. I chewed my communion wafer delicately. The family choir sang “Joy to the World” and the entire congregation shuffled back to their Buicks.

“Are you excited for the party?” my mother asked Zany’s reflection in the rearview mirror.

“Santa’s going to be there!” I still can’t decide if ten is too old to believe, but, then again, I grew up much too fast.

“His name is Dana.”
My mother reached over to pinch my ruddy thigh, narrowly avoiding an off-road swerve on black ice.

“Elizabeth, please.”

“What did I do?”

I knew what I did. Dana, my father’s best friend, wore Hawaiian shirts to formal events. After a few drinks, he and my father would turn to a discussion of “that bitch ex-wife of yours” as Zany sat three feet away engineering a tower of off-brand Legos and I eavesdropped from the other room between scenes of *It’s a Wonderful Life*. At some point every year, Dana would slip away to put on a rental Santa suit, fragranced with years of use, his tummy stuffed with my grandmother’s hand-sewn pillows. The aunts would drunkenly line up to take a seat on his lap, straddle close enough to mix their cigarette breath with his whiskey. Every year someone asked if there was a present in his pocket or if, perhaps, he was just happy to see them.

“Elizabeth, come tell Santa what you want for Christmas,” my father called out. I peeked out through the kitchen that separated my room and theirs to see Zany crawling down from the man’s knee. Maybe if I stayed quiet they’d move on to a new rehash of that “cunt ex-wife” who always thought she was “so much better than this goddamn family.”

I sat in the corner of the living room; it was still wood-paneled from the seventies and too poorly-insulated for December festivities. A good place to seek solace between the branches of a sweet-scented pine and the old box television with channel-changing knobs. Jimmy Stewart was saving the family business from underneath a layer of buzzing static. I picked at a plate of cookies balanced
in my lap.

“Ho-ho-ho.” Dana slipped into the doorway without me noticing. His voice slithered through the strands of a stringy, fake beard. Taking a bite from a gingerbread man’s leg, I tried to appear transfixed by the black-and-white screen.

“Daddy’s looking for you,” Santa grumbled, taking a step forward. “Why don’t you join the party?”

“I’m watching a movie.” Dana inched closer and groped for the television’s power button.

“No, please,” I blurted. He shifted his body in my direction. He crouched to his knees, only centimeters away now, sandwiched between the chair and the tree. A few nettles dusted to the floor as their branches bent against his side. “Just let me watch.”

Santa grabbed a snowball cookie from my lap. Crumbs tumbled from his lip and into the sagging beard. Gently, he stole the platter and dropped it to the floor. I watched as he finished his treat and sucked powdered sugar from his cracked knuckles. Dana leaned closer. I pressed with all my might into the back of the chair, fearing its ancient adhesives might crack away and send me tumbling and vulnerable to the floor.

I should have yelped as I watched him raise his red hand to rest on my bulging kneecap. I should have screamed at the first touch of skin. But all I could focus on were the half-moons of dirt—maybe dried blood—caked underneath his chewed fingernails as he clawed up my thigh, underneath my skirt.
I still remember the hot flush of his breath against my panties as he asked what I wanted for Christmas.

“Hey, Dana!” My father belched from across the house. “Grab me another Bud while you’re in there.”

Santa drew back a bit. I crossed my shaking legs. I could hear his hips crack as he rose to leave. Framed by the doorway, only a step from my reprieve, he threw a glance back over his shoulder. There was a pale gleam in his eyes, a reflection of the glowing tree.

“You know, I remember the day you were born. I was there.” I nodded. A ringing-bell sounded out from the television set; Jimmy Steward stood there smiling at the crowd of joyous carolers, neighbors, and friends.

My knuckles were white as I sat gripping the steering wheel. A layer of frost obscured my view of the house. In the passenger seat sat the crumpled page ripped from the hometown chronicle, a gift from Zany I’d received in the mail just a week before: the obituary for one Dana Feuller, aged fifty-nine. It was a heart attack. He was remembered as a son, a brother, and a friend to all.

Merry Christmas, sis. Love, Alexander. He had scrawled the epitaph in permanent marker over the dead man’s newsprint portrait. The ink bled seamlessly through the paper.

Shadowed figures danced occasionally behind the silhouetted tree. Without seeing, I knew there was a tray of Italian smelts somewhere in the kitchen, probably neighboring a tin of rigatoni. It was difficult to remember the reason I had made this drive at all. The freezing stagnancy of the car made the twin, still-fresh scars along my
wrist quiver and itch. At some point in the last year, one therapist or another entreated me to attempt amends, to reach out to my father who, inevitably, would be found in newsprint soon enough as well. Tucked in my purse, which had fallen from the middle console at some point along the day’s journey, was a card of condolences. No personal message inscribed, no thoughts or prayers included, just a signature. That felt like enough.

With a deep breath, I pulled on my tattered coat—which smelled of fading fabric softener—and crept into the snow. I wedged the card into a crack of the shattered garage door window. Visible through the glass was the hanging corpse of a doe, slung by a broken ankle, ready for carving. Dried blood clung to the ragged edges of a gash on her neck. Her meat was tender and mild, but I couldn’t stomach the thought after my father finally told me, years ago, the origins of the jerky he kept in a metal tin at the top of our pantry. I remember crying to my mother about what was happening to those poor deer. My father complained that it had to happen, that it was, in fact, merciful in a way, since it was a quicker death than a car accident or starvation. He kept mounted visages and antlers in the room where he and Dana would lounge with cigars, remembering their youths together.

I stumbled back to the car with uneven footsteps across the slick gravel. With a turn of the ignition, the vents sent a rush of cold air. The radio found itself halfway through Elvis’ “Blue Christmas.” If I hurried, I could meet my mother on her way back from Mass.
Additional Works
Mi Amor

Kari Gillman
University of Maryland
i imagine the water is a cool drop of bullet, echoing that empty dome

Sarah Summerson
Franklin & Marshall College

when my father took us
hunting in the ordinance winding
up into the
mountain where the
headstones sank like
sand ships, two hundred years old
and the erosion left wooden
boxes creaking out the hillside like
little toes, bones older than I had ever seen I
shot a gun for the first time and
didn’t hear the sound of the
bird falling only the crack of
the rickety door of the graffiti
room, the bunker where they kept
BOMBS in the fifties, I
liked the sound of my voice shouting
back at me, like the whole world were only
rings in my pond
Reptilian Gaze

Emily Hammack
Metropolitan State University of Denver
We called him Turtle because of his shell—an oversized, moss-green Jansport backpack stuffed to the brim with a mountain of textbooks, crumpled tissues glued together by a thick layer of snot, Ziploc bags filled with crumbling peanut butter rice cakes, boxes of extra-strength allergy medication, you name it. The backpack weighed Turtle down so heavily that his gait was more resemblant of a slow, pathetic shuffle than the sort of effortless, springing steps you’d typically expect to find in kids our age. Sometimes, Kate and I would make a game out of his burden: we’d walk to homeroom thirty minutes early and linger coyly outside of the classroom, make-up compacts in hand, as we pouted roguishly into our tiny mirrors and luxuriated in applying our oh-so-shiny bubblegum pink lip gloss coat by impeccable coat. Turtle was always the first one to arrive to class in the morning, surpassing even the teacher’s near-infallible attendance record, so when he shuffled up to the classroom’s steel frame door, lugging around that disgustingly green backpack with its taut, tattered straps, a bulbous curve etched so deeply into his spine that he looked more like a boomerang than a person, we’d gingerly shift our attention away from our spotless compacts with eyes like snakes as we crept silently behind Turtle with the intent of knocking him forward in one swift motion onto the vinyl floor. Our game had three simple rules: 1. You only get one shot at knocking Turtle over, and he can’t see it coming when you take your shot. 2. No re-dos allowed. 3. Don’t get caught.
Kate came up with the ingenious idea of calling our game “topple the turtle,” and once the rest of the student body caught wind of Westlake High’s new favorite pastime, we became something of minor celebrities within our school. Nobody had yet prevailed at toppling Turtle over successfully, but within mere weeks, practically anyone and everyone was willing to try. For a few short moments preceding the start of each class period, broad-shouldered, loud-mouthed football jocks and gawky, blue-haired art nerds alike crawled out of the trenches of adolescent apathy and cliquey isolation in hopes of earning the prized title of “Westlake High School’s Reigning Champion Turtle Toppler.” To keep things fair, each eager applicant received an opportunity to topple Turtle once a week, and if they failed (they always did), they’d have to wait until the following week arrived to try again.

As the brains behind the entire operation, Kate took her status as resident creator of “topple the turtle” very seriously.

“Guess what I got yesterday!” Kate hissed, eyes gleaming with mischief as she cupped her pristinely manicured fingers along the side of her face and leaned in close to avoid being scolded for talking during our pre-calc lecture. “A prize—for the winner. Figured if I light a fire under these little bitches’ mashed potato asses and give them some extra incentive to win, maybe someone will finally step up to the plate and knock that turtle down.”

“Jeez, don’t you think that’s a little harsh? We’ve already ruined the poor guy’s life enough. Maybe it’s time we just shut this thing down.”

“Shut it down, Hannah? Please. We’re just getting started! This school is like a shithole vortex of sad, pathetic losers with no...
real sense of direction or purpose. They need people like us to show them the way. And if showing the entire student body the way has to come at the expense of one sad little turtle, one sad little turtle who’s already set himself up for a lifetime of total fucking misery anyway, then so be it. I mean, this is what we wanted, right? I’ve got more spirit in my pinky finger than this school’s got in their entire student body.”

Kate lifted an outstretched pinky finger to the air: an olive branch—fully symbolic of our unbreakable bond and lifelong friendship.

I raised my own pinky finger and interlocked it with hers. “Yeah. You’re totally right. We should finish what we started.”

Kate and I had become inseparable since the first day of kindergarten when we spotted one another on the playground during recess. We were both wearing the exact same dress: a lacy, powder-blue jumper with delicate little yellow butterflies exquisitely dotting the apron. Neither of us wanted to ruin our brand-new dresses by playing in the grass with the other kids, so we elected to sit on a nearby bench and page through a copy of a Teen Vogue magazine Kate snagged from her older sister’s room that morning instead. We couldn’t understand most of the words printed on the magazine’s pages, but Kate and I simply adored looking at the pictures: golden-legged swimsuit models with dark, lush eyelashes and incomprehensibly voluminous hair, elaborate fashion spreads with pages upon pages of dazzling, sequined miniskirts and gossamer, lavender prom dresses, and our most favorite part of all—the make-up advertisements—sensational displays of strikingly radiant women with sparkling, rainbow pigments decorating their eyelids, full lips expertly glossed with stunning shades of baby pink and fire-engine
red, and skin so smooth and flawless it almost seemed to glow off the page. We couldn’t get enough. And we didn’t. For the rest of kindergarten, and in all the school years that followed, Kate and I became as close as sisters, dedicating every waking moment to learning how to be as beautiful and elegant and strong and untouchable as those gorgeous women found deep within our magazines’ gleaming pages.

And eventually, Kate did it. At Westlake High School, Kate was supreme queen bee: a straight-A honors student on track to become the senior class valedictorian, captain of the varsity cheer squad, and darling of the Westlake Student Council Booster club. I did it, too, but only by association. Before Kate, I was just Hannah. But as Kate’s best friend since grade school and trusted confidante, I seamlessly stepped into the role of Kate’s right-hand woman. Kate got me my spot on the cheer squad, taught me how to make my eyeliner wings so fine and sharp they could kill a man, and helped me secure my status as the second-best thing at Westlake since sliced bread. Kate was the first-best thing, obviously.

Kate had a reputation for being ruthless: cold, difficult, temperamental, and fully capable of slandering someone’s name and destroying their reputation in seconds if they got on her bad side, but she only did that because she had to if she wanted to stay on top. Or at least that’s what she told me.

“Well if you’re as confident about toppling the turtle as you say you are, why don’t you take the next shot?” Kate smirked, one eyebrow raised high.

A challenge. If I toppled Turtle, I would be my asserting my dominance at Westlake, and even more crucial than that, my loyalty
to Kate.

“I guess. What’s the prize?”

“An Olive Garden gift card. Fifty bucks. I found it in my mom’s file cabinet this morning. She has like a billion gift cards in there anyway, and she never fucking uses any of them. She won’t even notice it’s gone. And I know how much you love those endless breadsticks, right Hannah Banana?”

“Right.”

The bell rang; class was finally dismissed.

“Wicked!” Kate called out as she shoved her notebook into her tote bag and began making her way toward the exit door. “I knew you wouldn’t let me down. I’ll send a group chat out to all the little minions tonight and let them know that you’ve got dibs first thing tomorrow. Don’t pussy out on me, Hannah!”

The next morning, I drove to school thirty minutes early and met Kate at Westlake’s “Class of 2002” bench, our usual meeting spot.

“Ready to make some waves?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“That’s what I like to hear. Britney texted me a few minutes ago and said Turtle’s school bus just pulled into the lot, so we’ve gotta get a move on if we wanna catch him.”
Kate and I whipped out our compacts and lip gloss with the utmost precision as we quickly made our way to the homeroom class hallway. As we stood near the lockers and began to survey the scene, the other students of Westlake flocked nearby like a group of starving vultures, eager to see if today would be the day that the turtle finally got toppled.

Suddenly, Turtle emerged from around the corner and began sluggishly making his way down the hall.

Kate looked at me and beamed. “You’ve got this, Hannah. I know you can do it. Everyone’s counting on us. On you.”

Turtle continued to trudge down the hallway, the roar of Westlake’s typically chatty student body dissipating to a gentle murmur of breathless voices and stifled chuckles as anticipation thickened the air. At last, Turtle reached the classroom doorway. I slammed my compact shut and placed it in Kate’s outstretched palm, preparing my body to topple the turtle, and in turn, allowing myself to become Westlake’s greatest legacy. I took a deep breath and lifted my arms; usually strong, tight, and chiseled thanks to years of cheer conditioning and my status as the squad’s top spotter, but in the moment, they felt more like strands of overcooked spaghetti quivering on the stove than the weapons of destruction they were about to become. I gathered up what was left of my courage and rushed forward, raising my arms higher as Turtle made his last step toward the classroom.

Turtle turned around. An immediate hush fell over the entire hallway, some students gasping audibly at the sight. He stared straight into my widening eyes, blank-faced, then briefly turned his gaze to my still-outstretched arms. Turtle abruptly turned back-
toward the classroom, shifted all his weight onto the backs of his heels, and swiftly propelled his body backwards as he tumbled atop his backpack and came crashing onto the hallway floor, stoic and immobile once his body reached the ground.

Kate began to dart her eyes around the hallway anxiously, presumably nervous a teacher was going to notice the commotion and start handing out detention slips.

Turtle slowly picked himself up off the ground, wincing, then proceeded to dump the entire contents of his backpack onto the hallway floor. Once the backpack was empty, he zipped it up, though it was now irreparably damaged, gave it one last wistful look, and sent it soaring into a nearby trash can.

Turtle stepped toward me with an open palm. “Game over. I win.”

“You win.” I shook his hand. The warning bell rang. Startled students began to exit the hallway as they tiptoed over Turtle’s belongings and stormed the classroom door, the festivities of “topple the turtle” beginning to evaporate with the reality of another dismal school day setting in.

In homeroom that day, Kate and I didn’t discuss the turtle incident. In fact, even in the days that followed, we never discussed the incident at all. It simply became a part of our existence that we refused to acknowledge—a dark, dirty secret neither of us wished to revisit. We never went to Olive Garden either. About a month after the incident, Kate told me her mom came storming into her bedroom, demanding to know what had happened to the $50 gift card she and her husband were planning to use on their date night.
On the day following the incident, Turtle came to class with a new Jansport: a rolling backpack with sturdy, rubber wheels and a sleek, black handle that would make it virtually impossible to ever get toppled again. Just like the last, Turtle’s new backpack was dyed that very same infamous moss-green hue.
On the Run

Michael Le
York University
SOLITUDe

Michael Le
York University
Distance Between

Em Sapp
Bowling Green State University

A brick house on the corner of Berlin and Hill is not enough to say that this is home. Instead, I have to tell you about: a garden full of rose bursts and sweet pink hibiscus, a mother hunching over to pick stinky ladybugs from sunny petals. About: the creek below the cliff where a father treads gently in soft morning dew; the leaves that fall like apple confetti as he sits on his lawn chair wishing the deer to dance by. About: the basement of snow where summer siblings sit to forget the cold. When you’re lost between there and here, you tie together your favorite things, and you carry them on your aching back.
Silver

Tatum Shirley
University of Pittsburgh
Gold

Tatum Shirley
University of Pittsburgh
Not About Nature

after Slave Ship by J.M.W. Turner

Shalini Rana
Virginia Tech

Blackened miasma
    below, churning with
blood and mismatched parts

while mast and hull break
    into the hot flesh of
a yellowing dusk.

Dead-faced fish and beaked
    maggots swarm their meal:
black bodies made faceless

by mercenary men.
    Nothing new, nothing new.
The oiled sea bellows

its agony to
    the modern viewer.
Piazza della Repubblica Carousel

after Carolyn Hembree

Emily Spakauskas
Westfield State University

O carousel of piazza repubblica o leaping horse drawn
carousel of neon orange and roped ponies galloping
galloping around the spinning corners
of piazza repubblica’s four original corners
O carousel of neon and blazing illumination
with Angelo taking the lead ahead of Fabio
and Expresso, but Bellino in last place
the Italian steeds of a carousel that turns
O dio mio of the elderly piazza repubblica still standing
of home to artists and past writers, O piazza of the past
mirrored insides O carousel of house of mirrors
taunt and beg tourists to explore and ride
never leave the spinning O the spinning
of the carousel of piazza repubblica of Florence
carriages drawn by Linguini and Cavallo, adhered
with rope to the winding and curving poles
gold like the Ponte Vecchio of failed businesses turned famous
jewelry apartments
O golden arch of forever standing of piazza repubblica
O piazza of cafés and O piazza of gray, dark stone
a rectangular square of sun shoving
O carousel begging for shade or light, O carousel of its own glow
O bellisimo my piazza that never begs for want but only needs
gentle stallions of the night,
heroes to the intoxicated mortals filled with bubbly champagne and

Spakauskas 47
wailing O piazza-
my piazza repubblica O my carousel
my my my carousel of spinning and riding
dull luster in the day to remind that Cavallo never leave you
but you will leave them
and in the darkness of the red night hue Fabio will call to you
O my bella of hidden desire and risk, O of my piazza
come along with your piazza O my O my piazza
of painted Italian scenes of flowing rivers of bridges and Michel-
angelo sunsets
painted on your favorite view of carousel of piazza repubblica
bellino racing to the finish line
O my bellino of carousel of piazza della pubblica
swirling me in the rainbow pellets of your incandescent glow.
Carnival

Adrienne Wooster
Roger Williams University
The Good Algorithm

Jamie Harper
Truman State University

procedure good.meaning (a₁,a₂,…,aₙ: alternate facts)
for Q=“how are you?”, A=“good”
    when i:=contentment to depression
begin
    i=contentment then
        x=“It’s great today”
            otherwise, “Work is fine” or “It’s okay”
    set m=i
now j:=m-1,
    such that “I’d rather not be here”
        y=“I want to be anywhere but here”
          thus “It’s better than being home”
as j→n,
    however, “Why are we alive” and “Why do we exist”
        z = “I don’t want to be alive”
end [(x,y,z): good ∈ words³]
Portrait of Grandfather and Brother

Dalya Bain
University of Maryland
Alien

Tatum Shirley
University of Pittsburgh

When I was 10 or so, my father woke me up one night at 2 AM. He led me downstairs, a heat coming off him I knew wasn’t natural, said I saw the coolest thing, you wouldn’t believe it, you’ve got to see this.

We stood in the kitchen, pitch dark. A single light shone through the window.

Aliens, he said,

Doesn’t it look like aliens

Or a UFO.

I nodded through a sleepy haze. Yeah, I guess it does.

His eyes retracted, suddenly lost to himself, a man half-lucid in blue pajamas

Pointing to a streetlight from behind glass with a daughter at his side in the middle of the night.

Well then, he said. I just wanted to show you

An alien in our own yard.

And we went back upstairs and I got into bed

And I could have been dreaming, I am always dreaming

And my father would think so because

He didn’t remember

when I told him in the morning.
Passenger

Sa-Rai Robinette
Marshall University
The Fly that Loved Me

Sa-Rai Robinette
Marshall University
Fly Noir

Sa-Rai Robinette
Marshall University
I pulled the buckle tight, until it felt
like my insides would squeeze
out of my stomach if I breathed.
My feet tried to hold me to the ground
on ballerina toes until finally, we lifted
slowly—up, up, up, gaining speed like a
car in chase; behind us,
the fear of dropping back to Earth.
Back and forth like a handsaw,
higher every time, until on one side
I could reach out and grab the clouds
like cotton, and the other side allowed the sky
to push me like a child on a swing.
The buckle was shed like a sweater
after a long day at work and the seat
eased into thin air beneath me,
and I flew freely—a fairy
with my hair snapping in the wind,
my arms out wide.
I closed my eyes,
only opening them when we stopped
up top; not because I was scared,
but because the darkness let me see
clearly and feel the motion in my bones.
Then slowly, slowly, we came back down
and the harness released me, for real this time,
the unrestricted ground feeling like prison.
Space Cat

Tiffany Kane
Marshall University
My Oma says it is sacrilege to drink wine cold

Miriam Moore-Keish
Macalester College

My Oma wears clothes that fall like fitted sheets on a laundry line and hang off her like waterfalls like her voice falls in rivers

when she says “I’m a tenor” but really she doesn’t have enough joy to beat gravity and her voice digs into earth

like my toes while I watch her rake leaves in our American home. The leaves don’t fall in Germany.

Only Omas fall. My Oma’s husband fell out of love and they fell together like origami, folded but opening like petals to see pollinated wounds and flesh inside.

She drinks gluehwein heated on the stove. I imagine it steamstains the air bloody and I imagine what would happen if Jesus could turn saltwater to wine, how it would stain the tablecloth
*collision* spring 2018

when she cries while we sing the blessing.
You & I

Kari Gillman
University of Maryland
Out of the Jungle

Jordan Larson
Iowa State University
Lonely Ocean Man

Jordan Larson
Iowa State University
The sky was clouded grayscale and the wind whipped my hair across my face.

The perfect weather for ripped jeans and an oversized sweatshirt with thin blue stripes, or the one that was black allover and had holes in the sleeves for my thumbs.

I was a bumblebee, moving from house to house collecting candy.

Sophia wanted to play a game so we watched daisy petals rush to the ground; he loves me, he loves me not.

We found a broken music stand on the side of the road before we watched the Cowardly Lion run around the stage.

In untied shoes, a size too big, we scraped along the sidewalk.

I laid in the dirt of her backyard
and held my breath
while they covered me in
golden leaves.

Covering ourselves in Christmas lights,
instruments in hand,
we marched onto
the field and did the Time Warp.

It was the first game of the season
and my jersey wasn’t stained yet.

Then the sky lightened a little,
the wind died down,
and I forgot.
Family of Four

Jack Suva-Urwin
University of Pittsburgh
I am the stupidest pilgrim

Lucas Grasha
University of Pittsburgh

I try to tap the iron tree
for sap. It yields not. It
is wiser than my axe—

How can I keep from losing?
This journey of borders,
duddy chimes, hymns ratty:
I irrigate my throat dry
by mountain air. My
god calls from a crag.

A soft, humble apocalypse—
dour borders and chords
tired. The tree hums.

My rest beneath:
slow, dying, waiting
for a bandit at sunset.
I shan’t. I rustle, move.
Feeling weight, my
canteen is fat again, wet.
Bird Painting

Holly Griffin
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Food log

Jordan Mondell
University of Pittsburgh

1/8/18

8:30 a.m.
Rolled oats, ½ cup, dry — 150 calories
Water, 1 cup, wet — 0 calories
Flax seed, 2 tsp, health blog recommended — 20 calories
Peanut butter, an unmeasured spoonful — 95 calories, mas o menos

Daily total: 265 of 1,400

10:41 a.m.

Avocado, ½ ripe and supple, “the good kind of fat” — 120 calories
Wheat bread, one slice, burnt in the toaster — 90 calories
Spitting out last bite into public toilet — -10 calories
Well-lit photograph of green meal, 43, 44 likes (and counting) — 0 calories

Daily total: 465 of 1,400

1:02 p.m.

Lunch break, anxiety-induced swimsuit shopping on asos.com, 15 minutes — 0 calories
Romaine lettuce, 1 cup — 5 calories
Fat-free balsamic vinaigrette dressing, 2 tbsp — 40 calories
Chicken, boneless and skinless (how I feel most days), 4 oz — 100 calories
M&Ms, 3 individual pieces, red-colored — 10 calories

Daily total: 620 of 1,400

6:08 p.m.

Chicken and white rice, microwaved in a plastic boat, cold in some spots, 1 frozen serving — 350 calories
White merlot, the cheapest the gas station had, 5 oz in a plastic wine glass — 120 calories
Another glass of merlot because we’re alone and no one can see, 5 oz — 120 calories

Daily total: 1,210 of 1,400

10:00 p.m.

One more glass of wine, 5 oz — 120 calories
Only drank half, fell asleep while sad-binging *Keeping up with the Kardashians* — -60
Sleeping pill, 1 serving — 0 calories, I would assume
Toothpaste, 1 heaping glob to make up for yesterday’s pass — 0 calories
Swallowed some on accident — 1 calorie

Daily total: 1,271 of 1,400
Burst

Bryan Pennington
Marshall University
Suspended
Bryan Pennington
Marshall University

Pennington
on peaches

Kendall Gillen
Florida State University

green vines grow on the kitchen sill
right above the sink.
when i think of my mother,
she leans, off-guard, at the window
washing a fresh peach, blushed pink,
that grew in our backyard.
she reaches for another.

delicate and fleshy
the skin soft like spring.
she holds them under the faucet
and thumbs away dirt.
she is careful with them in a way
she wasn’t with me.

my mother lays them gently
in their wooden box. they wait
to be eaten; the vines watch over them.
she leaves her place at the sink,
and i am left alone at the kitchen table.
i frown, pick up a peach,
and take a bite.
Osaka-Jo

Alissa Hashisaka
Oregon State University
Ode on a minivan

Raven Halle
Florida State University

spitting breath
warm into july

cd player scratching stevie
scratching the edge of
what is almost.

’93 sedan, hearse

of salad days:

what the body splatters
is textbook.

point to a feeling
& the carpet stains its fur

& the clutch: what feet
can grasp that shifting is static
movement is
still movement?

beer cans know the
crushing, too.
Tenacity

Courtney Bennett
Michigan State University
I remember the itch.
thought it a deer tick
the blood burster the
blisters parasite
but it was just the curve
of Estes Park’s skyline. I had
stuck the view in my socks
in March
& forgot about until
the October roll.
Then itched
like the whole blue prism
decided to drown my skin
as if I nestled that red-tailed
hawk in my breast
I forgot about
(in bright December I
couldn’t paint out)

& when I run away
give me that red rock pocked land of flesh,
that old rusted cabin I could bike to,
the ribbon of twine road unwound
along the border of Boulder;
then
maybe
in the bleached long-grass,
in the fields so gaping they swallowed me whole,
I’ll be greenering.

Kruczek
Bask

Leah Schaperow
University of Maryland
Breaking Down

Leah Schaperow
University of Maryland
Modern Monet

Leah Schaperow
University of Maryland
Founded in 2001, Collision Literary Magazine is a student-run literary magazine that features the work of undergraduate students not just from the University of Pittsburgh, but from all over the world. Our publication is made possible by the funding of the University Honors College.

We accept poetry, nonfiction, fiction, visual art and photography.