

# Vantage Point

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Vantage Point

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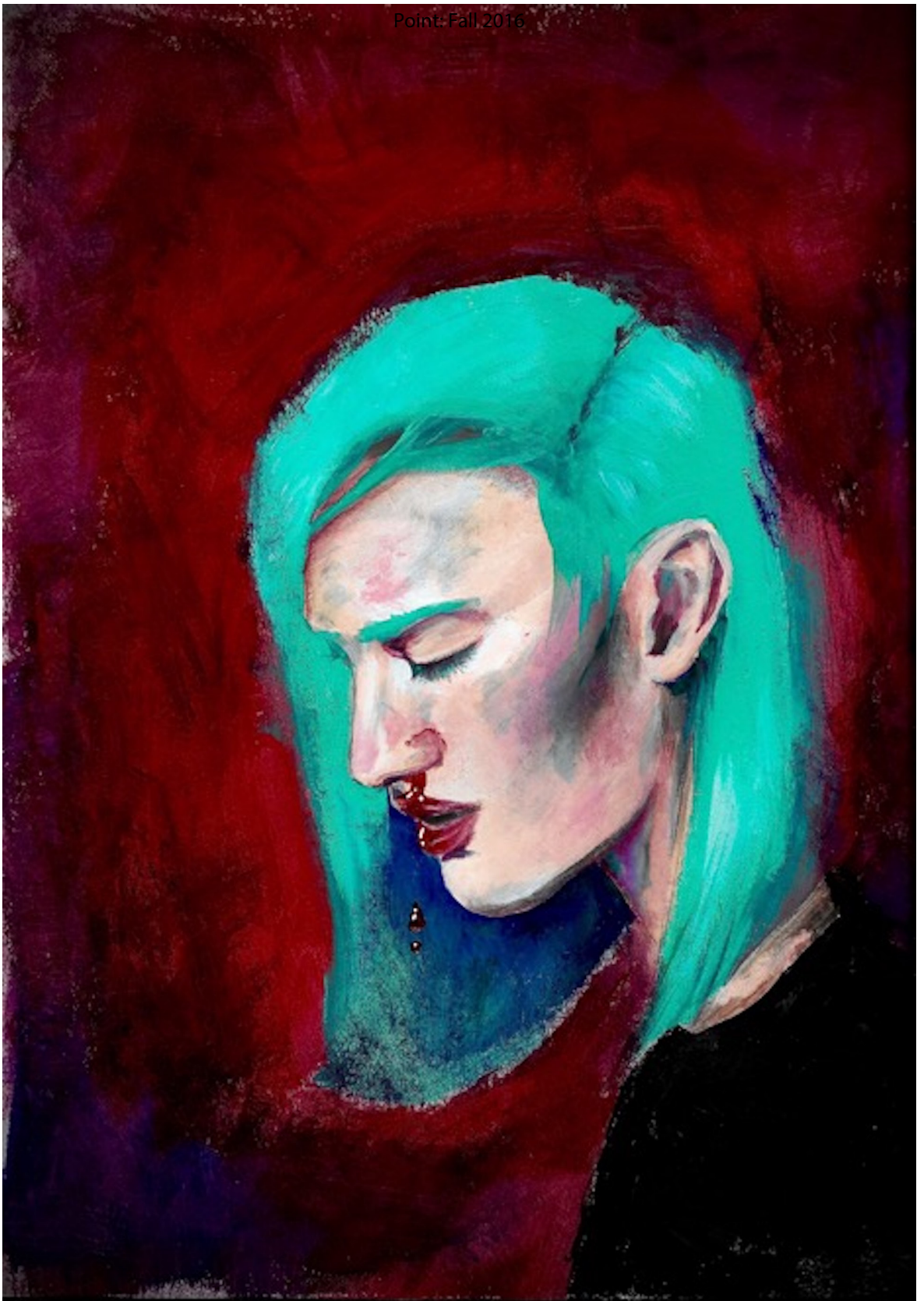
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## Letter From the Editors

Like the first light of spring, Vantage Point is a place to melt into, to absorb between harsh climates. From front to back, encounter the defiant, the vulnerable, the experimental, the soft hands of healing, the hard, and the precise capture of small beauties. Let it open you.

-The Editors

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## Tetons

*Eli Karren*

The Tetons taste tart this time of season,  
as a hummingbird sheds its coat of colors  
and chooses to be pencil lines, a silhouette undefined,

a conglomeration of charcoal and moonlight  
pooling at the edge of a bed, where the sheets  
have slipped off ever so slightly, but not like ski slopes;

more like ghosts aching to leave their skeletons.  
I dream that somewhere in the Ozarks, those colors  
are reappearing, as hikers happen across Technicolor

foliage, a river the color of blackberry blood, and set up camp  
in a valley of glow sticks. Under Adirondack shadows,  
I am still ripping carpet up and finding peacock feathers

like unused movie tickets and loose change. I will write poems  
along them and send them back to you when I know what they mean,  
astrologically centered and oblivious to the heightened postal rates.

# **I Leave the Door Unlocked**

*Ali Wood*

The first time a boy saw me naked:  
during a game of truth or dare when I lifted my shirt,  
not yet old enough to wear a bra.  
I watched his face intently, blood in my ears like a swollen conch,  
but his eyes would not meet mine  
or my chest.  
They stared into the corner  
where I kept my plastic horses.  
I could hear something else in his laughter  
at the same time he pulled down his pants,  
something like slicing open a chrysalis with a swiss army knife  
and prying out the shriveled stillborn,  
how unbearable it is to wait.

Ten years later,  
wearing a mini skirt and over-the-knee socks  
as we cross the parking lot,  
I played the confident woman:  
the kind that is skin-tight and leaves first.  
Un-showered, I scrubbed my skin with pomegranate lotion,  
afraid he would smell it on me – the desperation of unlocked doors.  
Every moment stretched wide into the shadow of a human body  
crouched over and hovering,  
his mouth a whalebone arc carving into me  
like a starved hunter.  
The silent obituary of a dying girl  
pretending she liked it.  
Back in my own bed, I nurse the welts with a stick of vaseline  
where I peel his fingers off, one by one, like fat leeches.

The first time I thought of hurting someone:  
as a kid my mom cooked pancakes in the shape of my favorite animals.



Wolves, grizzlies, owls,  
always predators.  
My brother swallowed them whole,  
but I tore off the arms and legs, making each miserable creature last.

I am trying to tell you something. I think  
I have always been this way.

## how to be internal

*anonymous*

sometimes i have to  
force the blood from my veins,  
and filter the words that  
my fingers scratch  
into the dirt beneath the lonely branches  
of the didactic trees,  
and sometimes i have to  
push the pin into my temple,  
to slowly leak the thoughts into  
a pillow, drained into a vile,  
just in case I lose my mind  
(though perhaps in my paranoia,  
it was stolen)

sometimes i have to wring the words  
from my lips  
(and leave them so sere I can't speak for  
months)  
and drag the body of my word-wrought  
martyr through the street,  
just so the world could see  
that I'm enervated, and not have to say a word.

**u.**

*Alexander Ellis*

There is nothing sadder  
than I love you  
becoming

I loved you.

## Cover Cropping

*Addy Campbell*

On my desk there is a jar of soil  
watching me with a million dead eyes.  
Two times now I have driven to Winooski

to have lunch with two different men,  
one of whom did not exist.  
Yesterday it was Sunday

so I got drunk and remembered my tongue  
pressing and swirling upon hot skin.  
Nine a.m. is not too early to give yourself

like a favor that is also for you;  
sometimes a boy will hold the door  
even though I am still seconds away.

Most people are uncomfortable with eye contact,  
though the construction workers, perched snugly  
in their trucks, draw conclusions about me

and I like it. Sometimes I wonder  
about wet surrender, what  
would happen if the Colorado let loose.

## moonrise

*Eli Karren*

When summer has finished it's splintering, the kingdoms  
we once called home will disintegrate like wasps nests  
and leave only a collection of bats wings and cat paws

scattered in it's wake. Macabre potpourri littering meadows  
overgrown with red ferns and wilting lilies where I first  
tasted death; my hands cupped around a sparrow as it vacillated

between phases of a moon that hung limp and bloody like an orange,  
begging to be cut into gibbouses and crescents. By first snowfall,  
I will have watched you leave on a raft of birch bark and pine needles,

never turning back, as you bound for a flowerless city  
of telephone pole people. I hope that someday, when  
the silicon contacts fall from your eyes, you can still see

the silver maple leaves glowing in the moonlight  
and find yourself remembering how we unfolded the frayed flaps  
of summer's fortune teller and greeted autumn's origami oracle.

## **The Things I Have Learned on Monday, or what I Know about Being a Woman**

*Addy Campbell*

Not every two wombs are the same.  
Take, for example, my cousin's, and mine.  
Inside her watery darkness,  
inside a merciful sack of fluid,  
there is another heart beating.  
Inside mine, there's the feeling of balloons  
that have been looked at but never  
inflated - limp and lucky and breathless.  
It's eighteen years in the making,  
her uterus, now a host of something  
still small enough not to be called  
someone. Guarded by a plastic t, mine  
is waiting to undo me, too.

## Alive

*Christian Collen*

You loved it when he hit you. You loved it even more when you got to hit back. Jarring in your skull, juddering in your forearm, you didn't care. It all felt good. It all felt alive.

Even when you were gassed out, lungs filled with the bite of a low tide, slipping on the sand, that's what you told yourself. Arms up, breath ragged, the taste of tooth and blood in your mouth. Alive.

No grades. No nagging. No numbers on an ATM. Not "real" life. Real life. Just you and him.

You and him beneath cloud-choked stars, two figures on a beach as featureless and vast as the sky above, bordered by scalpel-edged cliffs, hemmed in more by the inebriated throng.

You'd like to think it looks like something out of a movie, but it doesn't. The blows are sloppy, the footwork drunken, there is no choreography here, yet it still feels like ballet. It started with an argument, a sucker punch, and already you know fatigue will end it faster than any fist.

It never seemed like it would be so tiring. Even knowing the basics, keeping your chin tucked, breathing constant, it still feels like sprinting the 400m. You wonder if they feel the same way; you've got the fitness advantage, they've got meth.

When the two of you break—even just for a moment—you scan the crowd. Your friends watch on, their gaze filtered by the dim glow of firelight and cellphone screens. Will they remember this? Perhaps for a week or so at most, but you know you will. There will be videos, a nostalgic laugh at lunch here and there, above all there will be your memories, that eternal coupling of adrenaline and novelty.

It reminds you of losing your virginity, as trite as the metaphor is. Awkward, clumsy, but not quite like anything you've felt before. Good and bad give way to unique, to the high of a new experience, and even beyond that there's something else. Something primal. Flesh on flesh, body on body, it's pure struggle, free of everything beyond the now.

It's a comforting thought after catching one in the ribs. Almost as comforting as giving one right back. If they'd just left when you asked this wouldn't have been happening, but for better or worse they didn't. For better or worse, you ended up hit the moment you turned around. Not the best way to end up sprawled out on a beach, and you're not going to let it happen again, at least not without taking them down with you.

You see an opportunity to turn things in your favor. You take it. A quick dip, a drive of the hips, and you bring things to the ground. The crowd cries out. Do they think it's unsporting, too brutal? They aren't the ones playing bouncer right now. You're turning the strikes into grappling, sparing yourself from split knuckles and battered ribs.

Maybe the sex metaphor is a little more appropriate now: the only thing more fumbling than an amateur fistfight is an amateur wrestling match. But here at least you've got the edge—there's a reason why weightclasses exist. The pin feels easy, the choke even easier.

And in an instant it's over, hands neither of you have known descending, wrenching, refereeing long after they should have. Is that it? You wonder, your endocrine system still on full blast, every muscle filled with purpose, primed to be a warhead. You hear taunts and howls as his friends drag him away; they are sounds, nothing more. In the aftermath of battle the mind retreats, a mirror to the body charging only moments before.

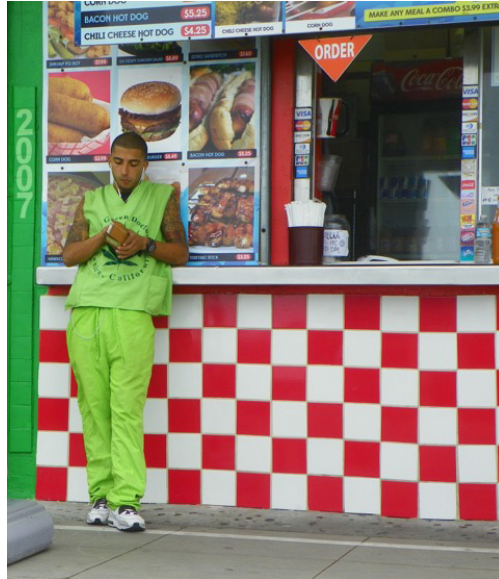
Punch drunk, you walk to your own circle. They cheer the way only high schoolers know how. They hand you a drink. It tastes like blood and bubbles. You run your tongue over your teeth, over the incisor just now made jagged. There are fragments of bone in your mouth, mixing with the bloody beer like sand and sea froth.

You don't remember quite what happens next. Revelry has a way of doing that. Feeling, however is more resilient, and that feeling is vigor. It's victory and loss and excitement and pain and satisfaction all at once. It's fighting not for the people around you, for the celebration afterwards, for the stories to tell, but for you. For putting yourself on the line like you never have before, for forgetting about school and work and taxes and every artificial thing crammed down your throat. In the fight, it's just you and him. No rules, no games, no worries. Just survival. Just risk. Just being alive.



**Break**

*Dori Sharp*



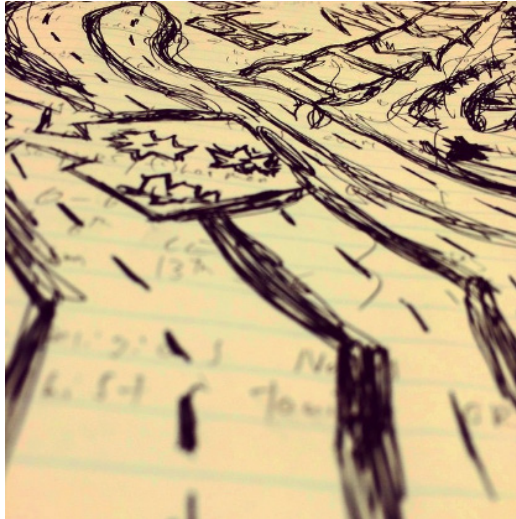
**Stroll**

*Dori Sharp*



**PE47**

*David Noyes*



**Conviction**

*David Noyes*



## When Shawn Christensen Relies on a Familiar Palette

*Addy Campbell*

*after the film "Curfew"*

If suicide was a color,  
directors would pick Flint by Benjamin Moore,  
a fresh coat in the guest room  
at 5 pm in January, peak cold.  
On the screen, even the bathwater  
looks tepid, holding its reds weakly,  
losing vitality against all the gray.

How it went:  
It was early morning in October  
when she jumped from the interior balcony  
into her open living room,  
tethered by the neck  
to the handle of her bedroom door.  
I imagine her big sister woke to its slamming  
and to all the brightness.

Christensen knows how it should be -  
appropriately shaded -  
in nineteen minutes he adds black.  
Every seat seems sticky and Onyx,  
every light bulb sterilized like a blade  
before an operation. In the tub,  
Richie is not responsible for the gravity of hygiene.

For weeks I wondered what her body looked like  
suspended like a phone between rings,  
like silence amplified, the power disconnected.  
Thank goodness for Flint, for Sophia,  
for flip books and bowling alleys.  
The water dilutes Vermillion to a washed-out  
Rose Quartz, and outside of the screen,  
I can breathe again.

Sometimes there are no nieces to roll their eyes  
and prescribe girlfriends and vitamins,  
no metallic corners or right angles -  
just loops and irrevocable knots.  
Sometimes it is sunny like Pale Straw,  
and the rumors are true,  
and she is sixteen, and was.

## Tropics

*anonymous*

and if you've ever tried  
to climb a palm tree,  
(not even a tree but a grass)  
then you know the bones  
that break  
and the nails  
and the feet  
and the gritting  
of teeth.  
under sand  
(smothering)  
under intense heat  
sweat and saltwater  
and sunscreen in pores  
and between fingers  
in mouth  
and eyes  
and ears  
and down into the lungs  
with the sand  
drown in the air made of  
heat, the ocean  
depths,  
open sea, release,  
and sink into the wet towel,  
the shady place, the place  
under the palm trees.

## **When I Have Stopped Checking for Bedbugs at Two-Star Hotels**

*Addy Campbell*

The Econo Lodge. Between these dry sheets,  
another man brushes curls from my eyes,  
which he claims are sparkling and bluish green.  
Thirty-three seems late to romanticize

like boxed wine. I've always been a cynic,  
but here is a new correspondent to  
avoid answering; don't ask what makes me tick.  
Besides, I have my father's eyes - just blue.

The truth: the drive was long, the sex decent.  
The headboard was padded with black leather,  
faux like whatever it was that he meant  
when he asked to spend the night together.

Faking affection is so damn laborious.  
Leaving, I told him, I'm an Aquarius.

## Salon d'Automne

### (Françoise Gilot Drips From Picasso's Canvas)

*Eli Karren*

I wrote a letter to a dead ballerina; begging her  
to stop Diagheliv's mad Parade before my veins  
hemorrhage in sync. How ironic, that this is how  
I disintegrate, a history covered in cataracts, which

ended the moment those flower petals became a crown  
of thorns. Now, that you chasséd from the mis en scene,  
paintbrushes pliéd above a canvas, and I stand arabesque  
to rapturous applause. My mutinous corps de ballet

set fire to the flowers weaved by your lover's fingers  
and pull apart your armchair with as great of grace  
as a girl pulling grapes from a vine. When the rain  
first came, I hid under your Japanese fan, but it would

not protect me from the shattering sky. Under amorphous  
black clouds, I bled paint and flecked gold. Atop the carpet  
where I first cried diamonds, I must now begin the danse  
macabre, the fouetté jeté across the gilded veil. Please,

sister, reverse my curses, we are one and the same. We  
both drip watercolor tears in Parisian streets. However,  
the charcoal of my outline does not smudge; I am inexplicably  
attached to his canvas; I am indelible in your ephemera.

## Chiaroscuro

*Margaret May*

I flicker and shift in shadows  
of contrast like a Caravaggio canvas,  
and I bicker with simplistic questioning and complex reasoning  
amongst entrenched thoughts that stifle  
down expectations, and suppressed indignations rise  
like pressure on a diver, descending into sinking and inking waters  
constricting breadth and forced to decompress  
at 130 feet below in the lucidity of neon black light  
refracting in a silhouette of static confusion like a spotlight  
doomed static on its waving target;  
I was told, "These are the best years,"

so either I'm naïve or deceived by the beasts that battle in their masquerades  
of challenge and lost desire and lost interest and lost maps  
of marvel that reflect the fractured focus and refract  
the internal wavering that asks  
right time, right home, right lover, right dinner  
choice of oysters over potatoes;

so either I'm naïve or incapable of counting consistent comforts and passing pleasures,  
but how can this be when those algorithms and fractions and PEMDAS once told me  
the order of operating was always fixed  
towards a solution by means of strides and strokes, not backwards  
in un-crumpled scrapped papers  
of suppressed sentiments pigmented with sketches,  
but erased by mental strangulation;

so either it's naivety or inexperience that quells The Girl with the Pearl Earring's loss  
as her pearl drowns back down to the ocean floor,  
decompressing back to sand as she swims down deep  
like a pearl hunter ravaging the seabed in the dimness  
amongst misleading flickers of opal white shimmers  
before the shallow water blackout hits,  
and there's no oxygen in the reserve  
for intuition to breath.



## Waiting Game

*Annie Hayes*

The receptionist hands me the plastic clipboard  
With a plastic smile etched upon her red mouth.  
Just fill this form out, hon. Someone will be out to  
See you soon.

I stare at the long list of questions,  
Cold and accusing. They ask me  
What I have done wrong to end up here.  
The air around me drips with disinfectant  
And sick, sweetly caressing my nostrils as  
I deny again and again to the endless list.

A blue-swathed figure appears every few moments to call  
Everyone's name but my own.  
My pulse throbs in the hollow of my collarbone  
As I unclench my sweaty fists once more and  
Write down my medications and date of birth.

I think about the last person who occupied my place in this chair,  
And wonder if they were aware of the noose in their chest,  
Or noticed how no one dares look at one another.

## Illness

*Seth Wade*

I'm told my blood betrays me. My brothers and sisters believe this, and I'm told to agree.

I always heard its whispers within my veins – most clearly in moments of intimacy. My fight for sleep often failed, their incessant muttering driving me mad. According to my memory, I never understood them. According to my brothers and sisters, they never understood the blood-babbles either.

Perhaps if I had forced clarity ... if I had taken a knife and frayed my flesh, if I splattered my blood across the ground, would I hear clearly? Would the whispers turn to yelps, as I smeared them around, and would they have explained a path of escape? Alas, hindsight is a foolish wish. And as my siblings tell me, all of us afflicted face a reckoning – not as a goal, but as a fact. I am told my blood betrayed me long before the whispers, and I was slated to encounter what they call the il.

---

I met it on a cold September night. It was windy, with gusts forcing the crooked trees to spew their dying leaves, the day's rain clumping them on the ground. I was walking home from my work shift, still making my way through the empty parking lot. Nearby the dark and unruly woods, its many light posts were comforting, and so I zigzagged my way through.

I was half-way through the lot, my mind somewhere else, when I heard my blood whisper.

I stopped. It was odd for my veins to moan then – they liked bothering me on purposefully inopportune times. I recall having a flash of thankfulness that they were active then as opposed to later. I heard the whispers grow harsh, unfamiliar, and strange. They sounded alien, and I realized louder moans elsewhere masked them.

I scanned the lot, until at the far end, at the edge by the woods, I could see a light post flicker wildly. And then, I saw it.

A large, pulsating, ungodly mass flopped onto the cement, with a wet shimmer and knotted boundaries. Its form of movement seemed a blur, as if the thing itself seemed to disagree with the reality it was present in.

My veins became quiet, as did the far off whispers, and for a moment all I could hear was

my own short breath.

But the thing moved. It seemed to set itself upright, and though it lacked any understandable features, an opening formed, which I inferred to be the mouth. It grew, and seemed to face me.

It bellowed a deep, otherworldly roar. Deafening, it sounded like a train or a vacuum, as if an exhale was amplified beyond possibility. I flinched and covered my ears in vain. I wanted to run ... or at least I knew I needed to, but I was too dazed to react. I could only witness.

The lights kept flashing violently. I never saw it move ... but I could tell it was getting closer, as it crept in the brief seconds of darkness that the erratic lights provided.

The woofing roar from its gape, the dizzying, flashing lights about the repulsive mass – I couldn't process it fast enough. I unconsciously took a step back.

Suddenly, all of the lights went out, and the noise stopped. The abrupt absence of the eerie sight and overwhelming sound made me gasp, as if I had been holding my breath for far too long.

There was a moment of nothing, but I began smelling it. It was unmistakable – that infamous stench of flesh gone to waste. I knew it was near.

Just as I began to move, all of the lights returned, and all at once my senses were singed.

The bellow came back, so loud that it physically pressed upon me. The smell became so overbearing it seemed to sting all the way to my lungs. Most present was the sudden image of the rotten, putrid thing in front of me: a dark throbbing blob, appearing to be of mangled human organs, mashed and churning together into an unrecognizable form. Its gape protruded outward, almost teasing me.

Suddenly, a hand emerged. The fingers were limp and plump, with bruises along its yellow arm. The revolting appendage came toward me.

I stood in fear, rejecting the reality of it all. Was this the il? In panic, I recalled the lore of my blood. Its fingers pressed my face, jamming their way into my mouth. I tried to scream, but only choked. I knew I was facing the il. Oddly enough, I believe it was my realization which caused me to lose consciousness.

I was told that my co-workers found me drenched in sweat, with dried blood pasting my face. I don't recall much about waking up. I know it was the ambulance they called that stirred me. I do remember being loaded into the stretcher. I knew people were talking to me, but their voices sounded like whispers. Instinctively, I stared off to the end of the lot,

where the woods met, where the thing emerged. That once flickering light post was off, providing a small patch of darkness. At the time, I feared the distorted voices were coming from that spot, as if the il was watching ... amused.

---

And so, I survived the il – a gift not often granted. My brothers and sisters congratulate me for overcoming my blood's betrayal, I no longer hear my bloody whispers, and my veins are quiet and empty.

And perhaps the horror of it all has twisted my morality, but I feel guilty. A part of me thinks my afflicted kin and I ignored the harm to relieve the pain. I think I soothed myself in fretting of the noise; it was easier to fuss over the sound of the whispers than the words they spoke. Could it be those whispers were warnings – advice even – and not a building spell?

I don't know, but my il is not a folly of my blood. No sentiments from fellow invalids will make me accept my now muted veins. I suppose it's taboo and immoral to side with my

## Moon Goddess

*Emily Johnston*



## Wolf

*Emily Johnston*



**Pearl**

*Dori Sharp*



**Casual**

*Dori Sharp*



## Thought Textures

*Emily Johnston*



## Making Shepherd's Pie

*Jean MacBride*

The sun was dripping down the horizon like dirty dish soap. To a passerby it looked wilted, to a watcher it looked wise.

I was helping my friend make shepherd's pie. I was chopping the beef and she was peeling the potatoes. She skinned them with an otherworldly delicacy, or a motherly respect. You see, it is hard to know what my friend is thinking sometimes, especially when she is tired like she is now.

"I think you have it!" I called to her, she nodded and released her work. After putting it into a snug bowl, she moved on to her next charge. When she finished I chopped her potatoes into smaller pieces while she husked the corn.

Finally, we concluded with our preparations, and I slid the ingredients into the oven. I sat with my friend, as she watched the oven vigilantly, and asked her how she enjoyed the farmers market today.

"It was fun. Lots of people."

"Yeah the magician was funny wasn't he?"

"He called on me and said he was going to make me disappear."

"He did too! How did he do it?"

"He hid me under the table, he told me not to come out so I didn't."

"But you did come out."

"Yeah and then he yelled at me remember? He told me to stay hidden."

"He didn't yell at you..."

"He told me to hide though. He wasn't very nice."

"It was just a trick."

"Yes it is always a trick. They make you disappear, they take your voice because you are different and can't fight back..."

"I think you need a pill; would you like me to get it?"

Now my friend is catatonic, her fingers spasm on the keyboard where she is typing and her eyes stay glued to the floor. She no longer gazes and shakes but remains motionless. I go to the medicine cabinet and bring her a pill. She swallows it shakily and gazes out at the slimy sunset. We are silent like this for ten minutes.

Finally, I get the shepherd's pie. She eats it with all the grace her disability will allow. I eat with busy indifference.



## **Aubade**

*Jack Wheaton*

November open window,  
but warmth in flannel sheets.

Minute hand, fall back  
as it pleases you, for

morning always tastes  
better in the afternoon.

Your body embers  
nuzzled in my ash-bed

of a chest – each breath  
ignites us.

Drinking up our oxygen,  
we swelter like a sun

outraged with this room,  
lit by these two stars alone.

We blaze until all gravity spins  
clocks faces right again,

into night again –  
until we're cooling

in the late night breeze  
only waiting to reignite

against the chilled embraces  
of the morning.

## **A Posthumous Note**

*David Noyes*

It is I who the waving palms recognize as coal burns, initiating fractures of steel bonded overnight. Whistles of departure hide the moans of empty stomachs and broken farewells. It is I who wishes an end to this war and quiet refuge from the bloodied carnage. The train, along with its cargo, has long since been out of sight. It is I who stands alone, inhaling a conscious breath. A visible exhale in the northern cold. It is I whose salted eyes and humbled bones sleep restlessly; tortured by who I once was.

I am the unsettled hope rattling in your weeping eyes.

## **The Valedictorian's Younger Sister Makes Lists of Things She Is Good At**

*Addy Campbell*

My binders are always organized.  
I can French braid my own hair  
and fishtail, and regular braid.  
In the top drawer, my underwear is layered  
like smooth stones in a cairn  
and there is a row of juice bottles  
in the windowsill.

Sometimes I add too much salt to the rice  
or use lemon extract instead  
of vanilla in the Christmas cookies.  
I drop the word dubious  
in casual conversation  
like a rock in the lake,  
always the ripples.

Liam K. has a crush on me.  
Though my mother doesn't say it,  
she likes my friends better than my sister's;  
they are in fifth grade and don't say thank you.  
I think I deserve some acknowledgement  
for wrapping wire around pebbles like an artist.  
I will never smoke a cigarette.

## Crystalline

*Eli Karren*

& all that I desire is to write letters on my skin, to receive  
postcards littered with your medical graffiti. They talk

of poetry, & snuggle up against half developed polaroid's  
that twist like mobiles upon my ceiling. Here, under

this celestial regatta, I map out one final constellation of lies,  
before the truth fully blots out the stars. It's true; I do

not fear the astrology of stillness, & I subscribe  
religiously to the cosmic connection at which our brain's

move with dial up speed, synapsing slower the further  
we are apart. I only fear crystallizing in this chrysalis,

to never leave the suburban caves where our stained glass  
eyes no longer glimmer. I feel your gentle tremors; your spine

twisting out of focus like a kaleidoscope. We are not precious  
metals, nor were we mined deep in the mantle, but somehow

we tessellate with our eyes closed, refract light during  
the witching hour, & make each other's luster brilliant.

## **Nude in the Morning Sunlight**

*Michael Green*

Fingers intertwined, arms stretched high and far  
lungs full of first waking breath, breasts high and small (pale pink offsetting white)  
her core held in midair – a soft, arcing bridge above the bed  
light, falling in lazily through the window and  
sinking,  
sinking,  
into skin drawn taught over rounded ribs

[exhale]

Toes spread, feet planted as supports  
legs extended and together, twin ivory towers angled like Pisa  
thighs culminating at the small, downwards sloping “V” of the pelvis  
then, North, above the blonde grassland of miniscule hairs, past the circular reminder of  
human beginnings, into the shallow valley above the heart  
ending at shoulders pressed back into the pillows as opposite supports

[inhale]

Ripples of brown spilling omnidirectional, strands contrasted with sheets  
eyes opening; circle of black encircled by clear-seas blue set on cloud  
in profile: petite nose and the curve of lips colored like sun-faded roses starting to part,  
the small of her back descending as softly as a tongue of flame fades  
and, catstretch complete,

Good morning.

## Weezer on a Train

*Jake Mooney*

The subway is filled to bursting with people. They fill every seat and nearly every square inch of the standing room, all clutching the hand rails and little handles hanging from the ceiling. The cacophony of small talk and phone calls is drowned out by the Weezer song buzzing melodically from my headphones. This overpopulation, combined with the ninety-five degree weather, succeeds in turning the rail car into an oven. I stand there baking in the heat, smothered in the scent of sweat pouring off of those round me, knowing that after walking a couple miles already today, I am contributing my fair share. My bags pull down on my left shoulder, causing an increasing strain that I dully focus on as a distraction from the heat.

I look around and see the other occupants fanning themselves with newspapers, wiping their foreheads with tattooed arms, exchanging pleasant small talk with those packed in next to them... just being people. There are people sitting in front of me, none looking at one another and all trying to look very serious and professional. In their reflections on the window behind them, however, I can see the screens of their phones as they check their emails and play Pokémon Go. I smile internally, knowing that I would be doing the same things if my hands weren't occupied.

I watch my reflection flicker in and out of existence as we fly past the regularly spaced columns of the changing station, giving me the odd impression that I am being approached by myself. It gradually begins to solidify as we enter the darkness of the tunnels, flickering faster and faster until it stares at me statically.

It mirrors my stance, one arm extended above it and one holding the strap of the bag around its shoulder, staring directly at me. I notice only then that I am mouthing along the words to "Thank God for Girls" and that my fingers are tapping along to the sum beat of the song; my pointer finger covers the overlapping snare and cymbal parts while my middle keeps a steady bass pattern. It's one of those little things that I've done for so long that I don't even notice it anymore and I suddenly feel slightly foolish and imagine that I can feel people staring at me judgmentally. I don't stop though, because I know that if I do, then I'll just start tapping my foot, or bouncing my leg, and those would draw more attention from my imaginary critics.

I sway back and forth as the car takes turns, accelerates, and slows entering each station. My right arm holds on to a bar above my heading and I feel like a fish on a hook, flopping around in a useless attempt at escape. As the floor leans and turns beneath my feet, I

am oddly reminded of snowboarding, and I feel a memory of cold winds and frigid snow on my skin as surely as I feel the person that keeps bumping into my side. I follow that train of thought happily and reminisce silently on my favorite runs and wipeouts of the last season, letting them supplant my current surroundings.

While lost in my thoughts, we reach Quincy Center station and the train begins to empty like an upturned flask. The people around me push past me roughly as I try to step to the side. My phone becomes quite, as I finish *The White Album*. I step to the back of the train and fiddle with my phone until Leslie Odum Jr.'s soothing voice fills the void. The temperature drops in the train as it grows less and less crowded, and I relish in my reclaimed personal space as the train rattles back to life.

Over my headphones, I hear the conductor's gargled voice over the PA system. I can't make out half of what they say, but I've been counting down the stops, and it's time to get off. As I step out of the cooling train car into the red line station, I am struck again by the difference in temperature. I find myself smiling as I leave, almost regretting the end of my trip despite itself. I tighten the strap on my bag and adjust it more comfortably, making my way out of the station into the summer day, wondering when I'll get to take the train again.

## Eating Starlight

*Eli Karren*

We grew up with amethyst eyes and tanzanite teeth, hair  
the flavor of rhubarb and freshly stomped raspberries. Before  
our feet could melt into the pale sand, we knew the palette  
of the desert, the secret language of bolo ties and recipes

for scorpion candy. We prayed to no God, but found saviors  
in QVC hosts, the first men at the flying saucer crash, weaving  
moon rock into necklaces and tiaras. My sister believes we are  
clandestine royalty, and once wore crowns fashioned

from fallen stars, their dripping metals making us invincible.  
When we die, we give consent to let our bodies be exhumed  
and our entrails to be lain out on the spinning velvet tray  
of Home Shopping Networks. The highest bidders may claim

our emerald spines, our pearl encrusted cochlea, and blood diamond  
fingernails, but they will never steal the star garnet from our skeletons.  
It is all we have from when the world was young,  
and dinosaurs roamed our backyard in nightgowns and fleece slippers.



## **Catechism for a First Communion (With Tongue)**

*Caroline Shea*

Bind your body tight in linen, brace its excess in.  
Skin your knees a hundred times until the scabs flake  
like gold leaf. Deprive. Deprave. Paint hymns on your stomach  
with soap in the shower. Say “holy war” five times fast.  
Revel in the strictures of physicality, let hunger envelop you  
with grasping, sweaty limbs. Rock yourself against its rigid form  
until you shudder quiet, clean.

Stretch your happiness like a pelt. Pound at its skin with tattered knuckles,  
chant insanities, inanities, incant the same fears over and over  
as if this will banish them. Drum the hide until it snaps. Try to stitch it up again  
with fingertips as pricked as a diabetic’s.

Let him touch you  
until your thoughts fizzle out. Sink your teeth into distraction  
like it’s your last meal before the electric chair. Think of being buried  
alive and whether you could train yourself into stillness—  
an end finally amputated from resistance.

Scatter of soil. Suck the last drops of oxygen in like the dregs of a milkshake,  
vanilla sticky on your lips with mixed spit. Try to puzzle it all together,  
legs hooked like a blood-red Barrel of Monkeys, arms flailed in a parody  
of drowning. In the middle of a cigarette, he laughs—

“I’m going to die.” Take up running.  
Max out the speedometer on the highway out of town  
(So many sanctioned forms of self-harm). Try to be good.  
Terrify, but never in the way you meant to.

Seal the vessel of self-wreck  
with neat stitches and move forward. Bruce Willis crawling  
through Nakatomi Plaza on sore knees, feet ribbonning red like a maypole.  
Where is your model of survival that isn’t synonymous with sacrifice?

(At the end of the film, his wife re-shrouds herself  
in his last name, his wife-beatered chest bellows outwards, proud, satisfied.  
He has earned this reclamation. Men almost die to get rewarded.  
Women almost die to get diagnosed).

Necking in bed, he says “I don’t think therapy works.”  
Suck his fingers like fat off chicken bones. Let him drive you home.  
Say a prayer. Say sorry. Biblically, when women bled,  
they were quarantined. Sequestered alone to cleanse themselves,

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to contemplate if they had ever been clean. Crawl to Jerusalem on sore knees,  
wrists ribboning red like a revolution. Make the pilgrimage alone  
and wake with another body in your bed. Prostrate. Prone. Pull  
his arm around you. Stop waiting on the edge, toes curled in the sand.

Submerge.

# The Pouty Sunflower

*Emily Johnston*



# Uncommon Compassion

*Emily Johnston*



## Interlaced

*Margaret May*



## The Canvas Out There

*Margaret May*



**This publication favors no form or content above any other; it is simply a journal of art that thinks. Our success is impossible without the creative talents of our contributors who continue to reawaken the journal's spirit. Our goal is to stimulate and support an artistic community, which will unify and strengthen the university as a whole.**

*Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue.  
Vantage Point wouldn't be possible without you!*