Editor’s Note

Perhaps it’s a cliché to begin by saying this school year flew by as quickly as a forgotten deadline, but it’s genuinely the most honest sentiment I can offer regarding my first year at this university. (Was I not just touring the campus last week?) How time flies, slipping away one class, one book, one conversation at a time.

As with any great literature, our hope is that the selections for this year’s *Scarab* expand your mind, shift your viewpoint, or otherwise change your perception of something you’ve been so sure of before. Let them take you on a stroll through a mysterious wood, battle a severe case of insomnia, be a fly on the wall on a first date, and plumb the depths of Hell alongside an angel.

I’d like to take this chance to thank a fellow editor, junior English major, Patience Williams, for her assistance and valued opinion as we waded through this year’s submissions, as well as Dr. Terry Phelps for getting and keeping the proverbial ball rolling.

In the wise words of Albus Dumbledore: “Words, in my humble opinion, are the most inexhaustible source of magic we have.” On this point I can’t contest. So sit back, put your feet up, and let these words work their magic.

Happy reading,

Brandie McAllister

Editor-in-Chief
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“Phosphorescence. Now there's a word to lift your hat to... to find that phosphorescence, that light within, that's the genius behind poetry.”

— Emily Dickinson
THE BRIM AT BAY

Patience Williams

dignified ego,
you assume sophistication, a right to your poise and violet sorrows:
your frail backdrop cupped with frail hands refuse defense you drip with blood through my veins a guide to soul, you sat and murmured beneath daydream

I called the red-eyed morning with the breath of yesterday drifting in my lungs, faint and low it did not answer; its transcendence spilled like an answer with its bright light it caught in my throat and [I] refused to rise
MASQUERADE

Jessica Goetzinger

I walk my days with avoidance,
Burning through the light of the forbidden third cup of coffee,
Holding myself back with excuses of maintaining quasi-sanity.
Some call it survival.
I call it saving face.

Preservation of a mask so often dawned it feels natural, carnal,
Laughter paper-machéd over the dregs.
Life is a stage, and I am its player,
Academy Award Winning Best Actress,
And the Oscar goes to…

Cowardice is the crutch I hide in the bread box.
Bravery, like all things, is a carefully constructed and well-worn t-shirt,
Put on day to day for the sole purpose of covering our nakedness.
Hiding our most intimate personalities,
And securing for ourselves the image we want to be perceived—
The deception we hope to make truth with time and use.
Saving face.
It always comes back to what we cannot—
Or better yet, what we will not—
Take into our being,
The cliché skeletons in our proverbial closets.
That which doesn’t kill you is shoved behind shoe boxes and baby clothes.

Life is a paradox in which nothing fades,
Yet nothing ever really lingers.
The faces I wash off before collapsing into bed
Are different from the ones I sketched on the same morning,
And the mirror I wake up to
Is different from the one that shrugged goodnight.

I have lost myself in what I ought to be,
And am too afraid of what I am to go searching for it.
Let the stars think I am strong:
Maybe someday I’ll believe it.
Let the sky envy my warmth;
Maybe someday I’ll feel it.
THE PARENTS OF HATRED

Sandra Coursey

‘Complicated’ is a funny word
That tells our feelings whole.
She confesses that our lines are blurred,
And that confusion takes its toll.

Yet, more absurd a word is ‘doubt,’
Who plays both friend and foe.
He puts us in a mental drought,
And perpetuates our woes.

Yes, unbearable as separate words,
But worse when wed together.
Their love is strong and undeterred,
Despite our mental weather.

How odd it is that all things love,
And secretly love these terms.
They breed rancor that we’re careless of,
And our folly each confirms.
INTRODUCTION

Matt Randall

You’ve been published
in this journal
and that one.
We hear your credentials,
those letters that follow
your name.
Do those degrees
whisper to you
in the night?
Do they slip into
your dreams and
outline your poems
for you

These pieces of paper
make all the difference,
make your words official,
genuine, an authority
on life, love, death, dogs,
whatever subject
you ramble on about.
We hear about your
presentations,
get a head count.
Each conference
and festival another victory
in the battle of prestige.
But all these credits, 
the paragraphs of achievements 
don’t do much 
if I find your images 
too vague and your 
rhyme scheme 
pedantic.

Perhaps another publication 
or festival 
will perk those letters up 
and inspire them to 
whisper new poems 
in your ear?
INTENTIONAL OR NOT

Madelyn Parker

If it had been three boys
three boys without breasts
without crevices between their legs
it would have been without incident
it would have been silent and still in their minds
no panic
no one on the verge of crying.

Maybe they wouldn’t have been going
to the same place, anyway,
if it had been three boys.
But I know
they wouldn’t have been followed.

and maybe I’m presuming things.
Maybe bad people do bad things to everyone.
But
I just feel like I’m right when I say
that most of the time
girls

are the ones told to protect ourselves.
our breasts,
those sacred crevices between our legs
that seem to be the subject of so much trouble.

forgive me if I feel a little vindicated in saying
if we hadn’t been three girls
they wouldn’t have followed.
they wouldn’t have waited in the parking lot
they wouldn’t have responded to us
pulling into the police station that way:
their car speeding away.

I can’t stop believing that if I’d been a boy
I wouldn’t have been so
frightened,
repeating “Oh my God” to a valid deity.
arms shaking when not rigid on the wheel
unable to process what’s real for some time.

And I’m sure not all of that is true.
that’s just the nature of what mean people do.

But feeling powerless because you’re a girl
is not something the world should tell you,
intentional or not.
rotting in time – sleepless!
anxious in waking, sleepless-

year-long of worry,
inner-voice restless, sleepless…

time warped, forever present,
amnesia-imprisoned-poppy-field sleepless

Dawn-spilling-in, CAT
alarm-clock, can’t sleep-in-sleepless,

Mother says, “Don’t destroy your-”
I respond “Huh?” - sleepless.
THE GATES OF HAVEN

Brandie McAllister

The gates of Haven Lot
Alive with light and darkness naught

Ope for those of ethereal measure
Seeking hoards of entreasured pleasure

Without key and without lock
Without want and without mock

Seraphim feathers glow white and true
Nowhere can be found a somber hue

Faces blaze with light from the sun
Shining on and on since the words It is done

Flutes and horns and harps they hear
And raise their voices in holy cheer
By the gates that gleam like a pearly tear
But it is not the only gate that’s near
Down the path, and none too far  
Lay wilted roots and wasted mar

An awful sight, a dreadful scene  
Of unfriendly fiends and monsters mean

Who guard the gates of Haven Not  
Bolted by goads of iron wrought

Enclosed by moats of torrid black  
Employed by trolls on bended back

Imps and beasts of wicked gentry  
Jest and boast and plead for plenty

If let inside, they would usurp the fort  
Corrupt the crown and spoil the court

They write in red on the walls of the alley  
Keeping count of the wicked, tally by tally

They give their souls to death to keep  
Forever trapped in dungeons deep

They wail and moan and gnash their teeth  
Men gone mad with crushing grief

They pick and scratch at flesh charred black  
And never do find the narrow road back

Their cries rise in tuneless song  
As verse by verse, they hum along  
To a chant of regret and things done wrong  
Of an eternity they hope won’t last too long
They’re dead now
I’ve got their lips and I’ve got their dream,
Their oppression flowing in my bloodstream
Nothing separates us besides for time,
but I sleep next to the girl with battered back
and bruised hips, the girl whose feet are shackled in chains
I cuddle next to the young men whose bodies roamed
soullessly through the bottoms of bloody rich seas
25% European, he said to me
the average African American has 25% European blood
so much rape
You died and in exchange
I live for you.
I don’t mind the ghosts
come experience life with me,
because although it might be hard sometimes
I get to live
THE BAD POEM

Matt Randall

It slunk around the corner,
head down.
It was a bad poem.
It had piddled on the floor again,
leaving a trail of adjectives
and a few drops of
extra commas.

Head down,
it tried to slip past.
It was a bad poem,
and it knew it.
It wouldn’t get a treat
or even a public reading.
It was going in the drawer again.

It tried to slip past,
but it didn’t get far.
Stanzas dropping, lines downcast,
it was a bad poem,
and it was going to get its punishment.
No amount of pleading images
or cooing metaphors would help it.

It was a bad poem
on its way to be put down.
Black and white,
The keys open doors
To another dimension.
Like a music box,
It fills the room with the
Sound of hammered strings,
Twirling in the empty air
Like a ballerina,
Never telling the same
Story twice.
What a strange mystery it is,
To connect with it so deeply,
Yet to never completely understand.
It makes me feel secure,
But also inferior.
My life is told within these keys,
As an internal diary,
Playing out loud.
But it’s okay-
My secrets are written in an
Unsolvable language,
Learned by many,
But understood by none.

MY DIARY

Sandra Coursey
UNTITLED—JULY 10TH

Jessica Goetzinger

Once you asked for a stupid long phase
I guess “stupid long” is a relative term
To you, it meant a week

Or, maybe I’m just not a stimulating
As you thought I’d be
I couldn’t live up to my own photograph
The one you carried in your brain
Hidden behind credit cards and old ticket stubs
Beside the under-used condoms

Whatever it is, whatever it was
I know you’ve lost your interest

I read the horoscopes in your sandwich-crust conversations
Thin, insubstantial, like dust upon the shelves
The love I could have felt for you
Dissipates with each silent nod to the obvious
You’ve lost your interest

And, so you fade into the others
Each one no more than what he was
An easy distraction
An evening breeze to pass the time

With Fleetwood as the soundtrack
I file you away to the back of the closet
Because, despite your silence
I can hear what you’re not saying

Whatever it is, whatever it was
You’ve lost your interest
Many might say they’re a leaf on the wind, 
pushed around by highly ignorable sin.

Believing in suspension by a powerful might, 
loss of will and choices a terminal fright.

And that’s accepted and coddled and fed handsomely, 
why save up for penitence with the sin is free?

It’s the Good Housekeeping subscription mom forgot she paid 
but we’ve got Jesus, there’s no need to be afraid

Of our gluttony consuming the foresight of, 
all the starving and crying, and lack of love.

We’re just tugged by providence, we like to claim. 
We do right by a patriarchy, we pray in God’s name.

We’re elite and chosen, and we ride on our sin. 
like a helpless leaf that’s caught on the wind.

Help the sinners, help the wayward, they’re lost in a crowd 
Fear the atheist, fear the Gentile, not the man who’s proud

of the blissful lack of observance he practices here. 
It’s God’s holy Christians that the world should fear.
GARNISHES

Patience Williams

They put garnishes
in my mouth and
in between my legs.

*Keep these parts*
*beautiful and closed,*
they said to me one night—
and then
morning woke the sky up gently
she widened her eyes and
drew a blanket of dust closer to her earth’s chest—
she hushed a prayer to the ground.
I disturbed it with my footsteps and my intention
when I lost the disturbance of last night in my
countenance, in my admiration for life—
I was going to be honest, even if the garnishes multiplied and my soul grew warmer everything I felt, I was to be honest everything I saw, I was to be honest everyone I met, I was to figure out their honesty I was to sacrifice myself in the name of everything I wanted to become

*how untrue how untrue how untrue*

dthis mantra followed me in my journey and I’ve got confessions now that have their own voices I’m both the good and the bad the people I meet are my influences I discover many things through them I’ve got a neutral temperament: melancholy I’ve got a calm spirit and a longing gaze here they are; here’s everything

I write to justify
I write to forgive
I write to love
I write to live.
I wonder
Which world is actually
The reflection of the other.
But it doesn’t matter
I guess.
The mirror is so sure
Of its perception
And I am so sure
Of my reflection.
What if
I am the glass
That doesn’t lie
(But does)
And the glass is me
Who sees itself so clearly
(blindly)?
I am the world
Behind the glass.
A reflection of
My past.
The mirror is me.
Trapped.
Reminding me who
I am.
Now.
The uncensored truth
Staring back at me.
Flaws
Are all I see.
The glass doesn’t lie
(but it does)
Not just a mirror
But a magnifying glass
Of shattered pieces.
7 years bad luck for a
Broken mirror.
But glass isn’t the only thing
Here
That is broken.
BA D FRENCH A ND FICUS TREES

Matt Randall

Disturbed by the dying air conditioning, the dusty fake tree beats a torn branch against the dirty window. I look at it and wonder why it hasn’t been replaced—or dusted.

At the table behind me, a blonde studies French, loudly spitting conjugated verbs all over her cold mochaccino and half-eaten scone. Her accent is horrible, but no one says anything.

She doesn’t bother me that much, though I toy with the idea of saying tu es une vache violet just to see if she understands. But that would break my silence, acknowledgement my lack of concentration.

Looking back to my own table, I stare at the book open in front of me. But the stark black and white words, bones of ancient Egypt, do not interest me.

I look up again, bad French soundtrack still playing, and watch the dusty ficus leaves sway.
Isn’t it just a piece of shit
that some people die and won’t be missed?
Their whole life building up to this.
Maybe practicing tolerance isn’t worth some risks.

Knowing nobody liked his wit.
Pretending we cared when he had a fit.

That’s it.

Avoiding your demons doesn’t fix
what taints the flavor of your spit
to a metallic, sour kind of hit,
like the blood from split lips.

And no, I never got a damn kick
out of listening to rambling when I’d rather slip
out of the uncomfortable chair
where I always end up sitting,
getting less and less interested spinning
around like we don’t feed right into it.
What we do, what we say to fake it a bit,
When we realize we haven’t been feeling,

Yes I’m reeling.
Overcompensation is peeling.

I would definitely hate missing class for this.
Before it happens,
will we pretend like it’s all okay?
and put together a summer bouquet?
Asking everyone about how their lives are going
when one’s about to end over there
and I feel like a monster because
I really don’t care.

I’ve got homework to do.
Is that rude
prioritizing myself
over the wheezing man in the next room?

Isn’t death supposed to mean something?

You bullshit your friends:
“It’s the right moment for him
to go up into the sky.”
And they think you might cry.
The truth is, my cheeks are dry
And they’re more distressed than I.

Who ISN’T more distressed than me?
It’s a little bitter realizing too late
you can’t spill your monstrosity
to everyone you know.
You have to put on a show.
Pretending you struggle with emotions
that don’t exist.

I’m fine
I promise it’s true.
And I have things to do.
Penciling in a funeral
like it’s a dentist appointment.
A WOman IN LOVE

Patience Williams

A caress in her voice,
her tongue spoke softly and
the words drifted out of her mouth
like thin, plush rose petals
love held her gaze and she wondered
what she would sound like,
look like, be like when the matrimony
of moment and infatuation passed through
her like honeymoon, but refrained from
imagining it too much, for when she did
is when it began to leave her—her fear of
it was the only thing that made it so.
she only knew the certainty of things
once they’d left her
so she sat and she wondered and she loved—
FICTION

“Fiction reveals truth that reality obscures.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson
THE THINGS I REMEMBER

Ashton Arnoldy

Part 0

The front door blows open, my Nana runs to it, peers out and sees a monster down the road. It comes closer and closer - she tries to shut the door, but can’t. About that time a board flies by and she thinks “well, that’s not normal.” Nana remembers her mother telling everyone to get in the bathroom, pleading “God, save my children!”

In the center of the rubble is less than half of the bathtub–the knobbed end. Somehow it still shines and stands out sharply in the sunlight. Plumbing veins are strewn all over the square foundation–the cement hugs a heap of mystery debris. Taking note of all the wreckage beyond its embrace, the clinging is sad, forlorn. This picture is the emblem for a family legend.

In the background you can see the clothesline my Nana and her mother were tending to when the hail came. She says the hail looked weird, as if it had been cut - flat on one side and rounded on the other. She says they turned from the clear skies in the North to see a shadow swelling in the South. If you look at the picture you can see clothes still hanging on the slanting line.
Look back even further and you will see the woods my Nana woke up in, covered in mud and blood, screaming for her mother. She says she hovered above those trees, looking down at herself and the men who scooped her up – there is wonder in her voice as she tells me that she didn’t remember this until recently. She tells me that before this day, she’d never heard of a tornado.
Their house sat on a hill facing East. In this picture Nana’s parents, the Simpsons, stand behind the house, facing West. In black and white, their smiles are relaxed. A bundle of tall weeds rises up against the white paint of the house behind them. Nana laughs and says, “I don’t remember them ever watering grass and mowing and things like we do today.” Nana tells me that somewhere behind the camera is a cage, the home of two little squirrels she bottle-fed. “They were real tame and I could let them out and they’d run around in the yard and come right back to the cage!”

They lived on Silk-Stocking Street, home to all the higher-ups of the Pure Oil Camp. “My dad had climbed his way up from being just a roust-about and working on wells to becoming assistant superintendent - and he had a company car,” explains Nana. The houses along Silk-Stocking enjoyed a fresh coat of paint every year or so – as the crisp whiteness of the photograph attests. Small luxuries of Silk-Stocking Street were short-lived for the Simpsons though.

Off in the distance, in the right corner, you can see the neighbor’s house – twinned in design. Nana tells me that a girl she was friends with lived there. In the weeks leading up to the tornado of 57’, she and her friend were learning how to cook. “We’d take turns fixing a meal for her parents and then we’d come to my house and fix a meal for my parents, it was kinda neat.”

“Mother kept house well,” Nana tells me. Her name was Norene. In the picture, she’s smiling with her hands tucked snugly into the pockets of her long, dark button-up-dress. There’s a sureness about her sturdy form that any child might find security in. Nana tells me that her mother loved to fish and right away I envision her with her
with her own reel cast into the clay-colored water of the Ouachita River, summer-sun-setting. Two of her friends invited her to go fishing the day of the tornado, an invitation she declined because, as Nana explains, she had a bad feeling about the weather.

After the tornado, it became Nana’s job to make dinner. Speaking of the “coincidental” culinary lessons leading up to the storm, Nana says “there was a reason that I had to learn how to do that, because otherwise we would’ve been up the creek without a paddle!”

Nana was 14 when the tornado came. Of the time before the storm, Nana says, “I had the happiest childhood and it was like-” she pauses, her eyes sparkling of another place, another time, “…like my childhood was over. It makes you stop and think, ya know, that there is not a forever here, on Earth anyway…”

with love,
ashton arnoldy
The man was brought to the psychiatric office by the advice of his priest. He himself had no particular inclination for a therapeutic approach, but, as the priest could give only repeated shrugs and ineffectual excuses on the church’s behalf, he went there nonetheless. It was not by any means that the man disliked the prospect of health or sought to remain in some self-fulfilling prophecy of his plight—he simply doubted that psychiatry could offer him anything of help. To him, everything was, at this point, subject to doubt.

The voice of the therapist ran, flitting in and out of sonic folds, of competing interests, of differing frequencies of sound like an adjusting radio, of a seesawing gray-scale that constantly shifted black to white and white to black as it pounded upon his eardrums, making her voice indiscernible from that which surrounded it, all the while he would remain silent, gripping and polishing the bulky cross pendant at his chest. This pattern continued for two sessions before at last she asked him:

— Why do you do that?
M: Hm?
— Your necklace. Why do you touch it so constantly?
M: My priest gave it to me.
— Do you like it?

The man was silent for a time.
M: …I’ve worn it since I was five. It’s a comfort to me…
— Why’s that?
M: It makes me feel like…I’m okay.
— Is that why you stroke it?
M: Yes. When I feel like there’s something wrong…I just touch it, and it makes me feel better.
— Do you feel like there’s something wrong now?

As the man had expected, little to no progress was made during the session. And as he made his pilgrimage back to his darkened, one-bedroom apartment, he felt that the night would be particularly sleepless.

As the cab pulled onto his street, the man exited prematurely and began his walk down the desolate sidewalk, past orange streetlights and dark, abandoned first-floor shops. Halfway through his journey, he turned rightward into a twenty-four-hour supermarket, small and dim under pale fluorescent lights. The store was empty save for him, a disgruntled-looking clerk, and a man in a large leather overcoat. Without tarrying any longer than was necessary, the man entered the aisles to execute his quick shopping list.

With a jug of sugar-free grape juice under his arm, he turned into the bread aisle and searched for his usual selection of the lowest fat and the lowest artificiality. Just as he found it, though, the man, without precedent, stopped his hand mid-reach and turned slowly to peer down the aisle. The man in the overcoat, utilizing his distinguishing garment as a sort of shield, appeared to be plucking several small bags of chips from the shelf, looking covertly over each shoulder as he did so. In making such small glances, he instantly caught the man’s somewhat spellbound stare, looking at the coated man not as a judge does a criminal or a saint does a sinner, but as one man does another in the midst of an oncoming hurricane. The coated man looked back with annoyance.

— Hey. Back off, will ya?
The man continued to stare, though he was no longer looking directly at the man in the coat. His aim was more so behind him, at the space just against his back, fixated and transfixed upon nothing.

Likely tired of the interaction, the coated man scoffed and turned away, making his way down the aisle. But the man continued to gaze, unable to remove his eyes from the figure they perused. He began to step towards the departing figure, but ceased his step immediately, instead resolving to drop his grape juice on the bread shelf and abruptly leave the aisle. As though he could not bear to stand in the store any longer, the man sped past the other aisles, past a heated altercation between the coated man and the clerk, and left the supermarket.

He stolidly resumed his march down the street. After progressing three or four more blocks, the man came across two women, both in tight, meager shorts and adorned in fur all over. Lipstick painted their faces with an obsessive amount of color, and their curled hair was done up in ridiculous abundance.

— Hey, you, looking for a good time?

The man made his pace more brisk, propelling himself quicker along the street.

— Ah, c’mon, just thirty or forty for a good throw. Sixty for the night, though, darlin’.

He kept his pace, almost past them, until, looking up from the sidewalk he had so obsessively perused, he breathlessly shouted and started backwards.

— Ah yeah? Them prices catch your interest?
— He seems like he’s down for it, I think.
The man didn’t reply, able only to gape and shudder at the air beside the girls, apparently at nothing.

— Well, hun, don’t make a fuss about it, there ain’t nothing to stress about.
— We know you want to stay a while.
— Yeah, what’s the matter, tough guy?

The man began to convulse, his shoulders bouncing up and down as though controlled by marionette strings. Breath rapidly folding in his lips as wind wrinkles a sail, he raised one shaking hand to point at the nefarious space at which he marveled. The girls followed his gaze.

— …what is it?
— Who cares what he’s about, he seems like he needs to relax.
— Yeah, I think so too.

One of the two, an unnatural blonde, approached him with slow and methodical demureness.

— How’s this?

She swung her hand forward, landing upon his crotch and putting light pressure upon it with experienced fingers.

— We know you like that.

The man shot backwards, shrieking violently as he shoved the woman away from him.

— What’s the matter with this guy?
— Get lost! Wasting our time like this.
The man could not escape, though, wrestling fervently with the air as though a great beast had just set its sight on him, wrapping its arms about his body as he struggled for escape.

— What’re you doing? Get out of here!
— You’ll never get far enough.
— This ----weed making a god---- scene.

Just as the girls rose to approach him, the man gave his arms one final fling and sprinted away from them as they called obscenities after his fleeing form, sprinting speedily as though the devil were on his tale.

One week later, the man returned to the psychiatric office, having arranged for a weekly appointment every Saturday afternoon. The therapist continued her naïve attempt to relate with the man, but he knew that she could never bridge such an impassable chasm as that which separated him from her. It was the same chasm that the man’s priest had been unable to even see across, let alone join the man in his private territory.

— So…what is it that you feel is wrong right now?

The man was stubborn in his taciturnity.

— You’re stroking your cross necklace again. You have been this whole session. Clearly you feel like something isn’t right at this current moment.

The man avoided her gaze, staring downward like a scolded child. However, he appeared less like a child who has been reprimanded and resents the hand that has exacted his punishment; rather, he more so resembled a child who is fully aware of his guilt, and who casts his face away to prevent the world from perceiving it. This face was soon raised though, slowly as if caught by the fishing hook of a suddenly insistent urge.
M: Is there something bad here?

The therapist recoiled slightly. A few ineffectual comments passed about what “bad” was supposed to mean, questions as to what the man meant by “here,” one or two accusations as to whether or not the man deserved to even be seeking help – but the man’s ear was attuned somewhere else, caught by something faraway.

M: Excuse me, sorry to interrupt—You’re not interrupting.

M: But may we, um…it sounds weird, but can we walk to the lobby very shortly?

They walked down the hallway until they reached the counter window bordering the glum, nearly silent waiting room. The room was almost empty, save a few sad-looking patients and one particularly disheveled woman in the corner whose messed hair masked her face, and whose stoic disposition could not quiet the noise that drifted from her body to the man’s ears, bordering on a rabble of disagreeable rancor—

M: Do you hear it?

overpowering any speech conducted otherwise with its vicious cacophony—

— Hear what?

yet somehow consuming all other sound in the room as though it were all one communal Hell—

M: It.

until it swallowed even the man’s voice within his own head.
Of course we do.

The man hastened back to the therapist’s office without bidding her follow, wishing some form of silence might still him. Yet, before she even reentered the room, it became clear that such comfort was not possible for the man – and that madness had exclusively selected him.

M: I just don’t understand. I said a lot of Hail Marys, and a lot of Our Fathers, but nothing has changed. Father Garcia said that if I just prayed better, if I just said my prayers and had faith in God, then this would go away.
— I hear you referring to Father Garcia an awful lot.
M: …really?
— Yes. You talk more about him than you talk about your own family, which is an unusual trait in patients. Do you think, perhaps, you see Father Garcia as a kind of father in his own right, maybe?
M: I…I try to think of God as a father. Father Garcia said to. But he never said anything about this happening…

The man retired into muffled sobs again.

— Father Garcia really failed you. Didn’t he?

The man, head wearied with the magnitude of his woe, managed to nod morosely.

— Perhaps you should go and see him.

He raised his head slightly.

— I mean, you mentioned that you hadn’t gone to mass for a few months now. Perhaps if you go there, if nothing else just to see him, you’d feel better. I mean, if nothing else, it couldn’t hurt.

M: You don’t know that.
When he opened the doors, the man found himself immediately deaf. No end to the babble of voices contained within the cathedral could be seen, each crying out to each of many horrible things, of future plans of lunch, of recently fair or foul weather, of deep sufferings within blackened cages, of prayers and parables, of a woman handing the man a program—

M: Thank you…
— You’re welcome, dearest friend.

of neighborhood reconstruction, of their dearest children and what success they had out there in the world, of an oncoming storm—

— I’ve seen it on the weather channel, yes, a storm will come through tonight. Should be bad.
— Yes, yes, perhaps we deserve such a storm, indeed.
— God does engage in justified wrath upon us low and filthy sinners.
— Indeed, I have heard many things about that young man in school. A shame he is not doing so well.
— Worry not, friend, we’ve got our hands on his life, safe and secure with us.
— Oh how wonderful!
— How dreadful indeed, this weather.

of darkness imperceptible from such a place as that, of chronic and debilitating pains for which prayer was desperately needed, of all the joys and wonders of Heaven so scarcely attainable from the low, low ground on which the man stood—
— You know how it is. Sometimes we sinners can just get so deep down in our depravity, it’s nearly impossible to regain our former ground.
— Surely impossible! What silliness to believe in humanity!
— True, true, and alas, we are so very helpless to our own fleshly depravity.
— It is still your fault, however.
— The fault is purely ours.
— This world is ours.
— I believe in the blood of Jesus Christ, though. If I did not, well, I would surely die.
— Die! Die, indeed! Die!

of neighboring churches and neighboring realms, of madness and its insistent, persistent pounding upon the door of the man’s mind.

— Oh how wonderful to see you again, it’s been so long!
M: Yes…yes, certainly.
— We’ve been waiting so long for you to return.
— It is indeed wonderful, we’ve missed you so very much.
— Oh, do sit with us!
— We haven’t seen you at Mass for many months now.
M: Yes it…it has been quite a while.
— Ah, but you have always belonged here. With us.
— Forever.
— For all eternity, Amen!

The man’s hands trembled as he lowered himself onto the pew between a hairy-armed man and an immutable noise. Between these two fellow churchgoers, the man heard whispers constantly slithering into each ear.

— You know, it’s very good that you’ve come back to join us here.
— We’ve missed you so very much.
— Not to cause you any shame,

But the man would feel shame regardless.
— but we have been reaching out, trying to contact you.
— We always wanted you here, with us, to praise the Lord of this land.
— But you’re here now, and we all agree that this is a very good thing.

But the man knew that it was not. He said nothing, though, and placed one palm over his eyes, waiting for Mass to ensue, thirsting for relief, eventually hearing familiar words drone from the innumerable congregation, intermingled with the rambling of the lost.

— I confess to Almighty God
— Do you confess?
— to the saints, and to all the Saints, and to thee, brother
— Ah, to call you brother again!
— that I have sinned in thought
— What do you think of this?
— in speech
— Now, it’s not polite to speak during Mass, honey.
— in work
— That’s not what I heard, actually.
— in the purity of mind and of the body.
— We will never relent from our ordained labor!
— Therefore, I beseech you,
M: Pray for me.

The masses sat. The man withdrew again into his hands, sheltering himself through the clamorous silence until the Kyrie was to be sung. When it was, however, the man nearly buckled back into his seat from the magnitude of the music, pounding thunderously upon his ears. Every voice rose at once with no two agreeing in tone or volume, and the hymn was at once a racket, a dissonant, inharmonious dirge. The man tried again and again to raise his voice, but the unmusical music was so very autonomous
so very irremediable that it was knocked directly back down, and 
he could do nothing but retire back into his mind, shattered like 
glass from the inhumane pitches.

Now convulsing uncontrollably, the man brought his hands to-
gether and pressed them to his tear-drenched face, bowing into 
them as though in prayer. Sobbing for his traitorous mind and the 
tragedy that it bled, he felt two hands clap him on the back, rub-
binding gently as to relieve him of his burden. But the burden was his 
alone, and he was to bear it alone without prayer or grace, and one 
of the two hands knew fully well that such was the case.

It was almost relief to hear Father Garcia’s voice as it recited 
the Responsorial Psalm:

— My God, whom I praise, 
do not remain silent, 
for people who are wicked and deceitful 
have opened their mouths against me. 
M: Please… 
— They have spoken against me with lying tongues. 
With words of hatred they surround me; 
they attack me without cause. 
M: Please… 
In return for my friendship they accuse me, 
but I am a man of prayer. 
They repay me evil for good, 
and hatred for my friendship.

As Mass drew to a close, the man immediately stood, trampling 
his way over others in his pew as if they were not even there. His 
body struggling as though burdened with a disease, the man stum-
bled his way down the aisle towards Father Garcia, who was smil-
ing wide, shaking hands, giving blessings.
His body crumbling beneath the weight, the man fell down before the Father, calling out his name. Silence may have followed this, though it would have been imperceptible to the man, and as he looked up he saw a queer and inquisitive look on his savior’s face.

— I know your face, friend, but I’m afraid that your name escapes me. What is your name?
— My name is Legion, for we are many.
Evening had fallen by the time Gabe emerged from the café. The sidewalks, smeared like watercolor canvases, bustled with people hunkered beneath the inverted black bowls of umbrellas. Turning up his collar, he dodged the puddles that reflected the light from the streetlamps above and decided to deviate from his usual path.

The cobblestoned alleyway between Bleaker and Elitch was dark except for a faint blue-green haze emanating from somewhere out of view up ahead. As raindrops turned to talons, the icy fingers of the wind lashing his cheeks, Gabe stumbled into the light. The stoop of the narrow flat reminded him of the storefront of an old bookshop, but his best guess was that it was an abandoned greenhouse. The splintered windows, though overgrown with blue moss and creeping vines, seemed to be putting off heat as he stepped past the threshold in escape of the rain, a wave of warmth washing over him.

Lifting his head, the eerie light fell on the pale planes of his face like moonlight filtered through the facets of an emerald stone.

The marbled floor, strewn with desiccated leaves and wilted petals, lustered faintly beneath a layer of crusty soil like a dusting of cocoa powder. Hanging palm fronds drooped from the domed ceiling like fireworks in mid-explosion. A heady blend of rhododendron and worn leather itched his nose and he silenced a sneeze in the elbow of his coat. Somewhere from within, the sweet frolic
of a piano played. Shaking like a dog after bath, Gabe shuffled
down the hall of varnished wood panels almost unthinkingly, the
heat drawing him deeper inside. About the time he identified the
source of the music—a vintage record player lazily churning out
a familiar sonata—he noticed a tall, tan-skinned woman inclined
against a bookcase.

Draped in a green velvet frock, the color of the gown enrobed
her like patina on copper.

Gabe froze just as her dulcet voice broke the stillness.
“You know, it’s rude to enter someone’s home without being
invited in,” she said.

Embarrassed, Gabe fumbled over his words, unconsciously re-
verting to his days as a schoolboy. “I’m… I just, I shouldn’t’ve—”

The woman hushed him with a raised hand. “It’s alright,” she
said, motioning for him to come in further. A cradle of hot air
ushered him three steps forward. “I never much cared for the rain
either.”

Unsure of whether to apologize or sprint for the door, Gabe
asked the first question that came to his mind. “If you don’t care
for the rain, why live in England?”

“It’s temporary.” The slam of a heavy book punctuated her
words. The wood of the claw footed desk the tattered volume
landed on was so rotted Gabe was surprised it didn’t crumble to
dust beneath the impact. Looking closer, he saw worms tumble
out of the empty hardware holes, landing on the cold marble and
inching away. “I made a snap decision.” Her dark eyes flashed
like green jasper. “Like you just did.”

A quote from one of his favorite John Hughes films suddenly
ran through Gabe’s mind as his wandering eyes raked over the
woman’s body from the crown of her black head to the dirt-lined
toes of her bare feet: Don’t confuse paradise for a pair of long
legs.

Gabe cleared his throat. “I’m sorry for—”

“What’s your name, love?” the woman interrupted.
“What’s your name, love?” the woman interrupted.
Gabe staggered forward, unsure, and extended his hand. “Uh, Gabe.”
Her eyes passed over his hand as if it were a rare and curious artifact she stumbled upon in an antique shop. She did not offer her own. “You have beautiful hands. Get those from your father?”
“Mum, actually,” Gabe clenched his fist and dropped it back awkwardly by his side.
The woman smirked, speaking his name slowly as if it had a peculiar flavor to it, a flavor she liked. “That short for Gabriel?”
Gabe nodded. “Like the archangel. Mum’s a Catholic. Hardcore.”
His eyes wander away from her, taken by the strange-looking flowers and herbs scattered around the place.
“I was a believer once.” The woman’s slender shoulder shrugged beneath her gown. “But that was before I became a sour old woman,” she said, seating herself in the bowled cushion of a cracked leather armchair.
“Old? Right,” Gabe snorted. “C’mon, you can’t be a day over twenty-five.”
One end of the woman’s mouth tugged up as if he had shared some private joke. “Sit,” she ordered kindly.
Gabe swept a pile of dried leaves from an empty lounger across from her and sank down into it. “So what’s yours?” he asked, drumming his (apparently beautiful) fingers on the armrests.
“What?” the woman tilted her head, a loose lock of hair falling over her shoulder.
Gabe raised his eyebrows. “Your name.”
“Oh,” the woman sighed, “of course. Ambrosia.”
Gabe nodded. “Is that a family name?”
“I’m not sure,” Ambrosia said after thinking about it for a moment. “I haven’t got one anymore.”
“You haven’t got a family? You must crave company then, especially living in a place… well, in a place so—”
“I sometimes crave conversation, yes.” The woman’s gaze dropped to the foliage Gabe had scattered to the floor, her eyes alight with something he couldn’t quite place. “But never companionship,” she added almost wistfully.

“Sounds lonely.” Gabe shifted in his seat.

“No doubt it does to someone whose emotions are so transparent,” Ambrosia smiled.

Now it was Gabe’s turn to tilt his head. “You think I’m an open book then?”


Following her line of sight, Gabe glanced behind him, but all he saw was the record spinning in the player. Turning back to face the woman, he tugged at the collar of his coat, the humidity causing a small collection of sweat to crop up on the back of his neck.

“Tell me, Gabriel. Have you heard the poetry of Sappho?”

Gabe shook his head, fidgeting with his lapels.

“Hmm,” the woman hummed. “An unfortunate consequence of patriarchy. Sappho was an Ancient Greek poetess, in a sense the female equivalent of Homer, only better. She invented the love song, as it were. The island she grew up on was called Lesbos, where the word lesbian originated.”

“That’s… interesting.” As Gabe nodded, he suddenly saw himself and the woman as if he were standing outside of the greenhouse, and how strange they must look.

“He is more than a hero,” the woman says, her green eyes locked on his blue eyes. Before Gabe can ask, she answers, “The start of my favorite poem by her.”

“Oh,” he cleared his throat. “I’m sure it’s wonderful.”

“It is,” she grinned. “Would you like to hear the rest of it?”

Gabe sucked in a breath, feeling faint from the heat, almost laughing out of boyish discomfort. “Be my guest.”
“He is more than a hero,” she began. “He is a god in my eyes—the man who is allowed to sit beside you—he who listens intimately to the sweet murmur of your voice, the enticing laughter that makes my own heart beat fast…” To Gabe, it was as if the distance between them were closing. “If I meet you suddenly, I can’t speak—my tongue is broken; a thin flame runs under my skin; seeing nothing, hearing only my own ears drumming, I drip with sweat…” Like the robe that cloaked her, Gabe’s gaze trailed from her shoulders to the décolletage of exposed skin between her breasts, a great fissure between two very round hills. “…trembling shakes my body and I am greener than the grass is. At such times, death isn’t far from me.”

Before Gabe could turn his mind to football or Aunt Tessy or cold showers, a fuse lit in his trousers and he became as stiff as Ambrosia’s posture.

Averting his eyes, he remained silent for fear of stammering. Steeling his gaze, Gabe forced himself to focus on her face.

The silence between them lingered for an immeasurable moment, her stare growing fiercer, until the tension became palpable. Her expression seemed to say, It appears you’re the one dripping with sweat.

“Bullocks, it’s hot in here,” Gabe blurted, a nervous chuckle bubbling out of his throat.

“Don’t be afraid, Gabe,” Ambrosia said, softly as a falling leaf.

“Why would I be afraid?” he asked.

“It’s perfectly normal to be. In fact, I’ve heard it said that the final moments before death are the most liberating.”

She’s bonkers, he thought, distracted by a tangle of parched vines spiraling up the claw foot of Ambrosia’s chair.

“I think…” Gabe swallowed hard. “I think your plants are thirsty.”

“I think you’re right,” the woman sighed. “They don’t get nourishment nearly often enough.”

A rush of cold adrenaline wracked Gabe’s body just as a thorn pricked the smooth flesh inside Ambrosia’s wrist, the crawling vine trailing from her arm like the snaking tube of an IV drip.
With the fingers of the hand that had just been pierced, she pointed to Gabe’s hands.

“You have lovely veins,” she observed, a grin twitching at the corner of her lips. “You know what they say about blood and water.”

“No. What do they say?” Gabe asked.

“Water is sweet,” Ambrosia cooed. “But blood is thicker.”

Gabe glanced back at the hallway he’d come from, his heart pumping so hard his chest hurt, incredible heat trapped inside his coat, climbing up to his neck and flushing his face. In the next second, he leapt to his feet and took a single step toward the door.

Before he could take the second, a thick rope of ivy lassoed his left ankle and swept him off his feet, his skull smacking against the marble floor with a sound like splintering glass.
THE DATE

Patience Williams

it began on a calm date—
neutral lighting, beige chairs,
a daisy floating in a square-shaped bowl.
Her eyes watched him carefully, full of
delight and her mouth rested in a half smile.
He watched her teeth as she spoke, the whiteness
peeking from between her red lips;
the focus of his eyes blurred and he could watch
her eyes and her body language without being
obvious that he wanted to know her reactions.

It begins with a couple on a calm first date in an unfamiliar setting:
a quiet scene. She talks about herself and her interests, and why she
likes them, and who she adores, and why she adores them; the ambi-
ence is not forgotten, but it contributes to their composure, and their
curiosity about each other. Each has a wide span of romanticized ideals
about the other, each one crafted to accentuate their personalities and
also exploit their true motives. The tones of their voices slip into the
ambience of the place, as if they are shy, as if they are a mixture of
exhilarated and saddened and contented to be sitting in front of the
other. The date can be described as “going well”; as “pleasant”; and
they depart after a hug and a gentle, appropriate stare into the eyes.

The next date can still be described as ‘pleasant’; their composure
slackens a bit, and they remember the cashier. Yes, there’s still that
questionably leaky pipe hanging from this table; let’s move to another
one. He talks more this time, more than her and she tries to keep up her
interest with his conversation and she hopes for him to notice and com-
ment on her quietness. Once he pauses, she immediately begins talking
with a little bit of burst at the beginning of the first word she speaks.
He watches her hands this time as they become animated, and he glances at the door once. She notices. She says what she doesn’t like, and why she doesn’t like it. This dislike has now narrowed his vision of her; it has subtracted a possibility. He remembers it, and her colored personality dims a little. She pauses to take a sip from her glass, and becomes slightly agitated by the daisy’s stillness in the water.

On the third date, she begins talking about her day before she sits down across from him. He helps her by taking her jacket and resting it on the chair beside him, glancing at his watch while he does so. He takes note that she’s four minutes late. He takes note that he’s supposed to take out the salmon fillets from the freezer. He takes note that this woman in front of him talks a mighty lot, particularly about herself. The cashier glances in their direction and he catches her eyes. He smiles at her.

The woman in front of him wraps up her conversation. She takes note that he looks much more tired (or older?) than the date before. [She takes note that he has on a wedding ring today.] She takes note that his eyes have wandered towards the door five times now. He’s bored by her, she thinks in her head, because he’s bored of himself. He has nothing to talk about.

“Did anything interesting happen to you today?”
“No, not that I can think of.”

And she concluded that he probably didn’t want anything interesting to happen to him; he wanted to be fooled. His lack of participation in the conversation dimmed her perspective of him. He no longer seemed bright, nor happy; his profile online seemed convincing, and she was certain he was ‘fun and energetic, and always excited for new things’ but perhaps at an earlier time in his life. She glanced at his face. His eyes were averted. When he lifts them, he catches her staring, and tells her, “I’m sorry.”

She smiles a sad smile. “No, it’s okay.” She continues talking, as if his eyes had reminded her of something. Maybe it was a notion to be friendlier to those who seem like they might need it.
“Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.”

— Pablo Picasso
I have always been interested in human personality, and this fascination has led to my love of portraiture and fashion. Many people think of the fashion world as a separate world, but it is really a reflection of our personae; it is an integral part of how we communicate to others about who we are. The people around us make assumptions every day, from our personalities to our social status to our intelligence, just based on the clothes we wear.

Many major fashion houses target people in their early 20s, an age when people begin to figure out who they are. I used this same age group and photographed their personal taste. I use a white background to focus on the relationship between the person and the clothing they are wearing. I want the audience to interact with this series, noticing how much they infer about each individual photographed based only on their appearance. It isn’t important what the impressions are, but being aware that they exist.
Fiction and nonfiction at once, “Areté Already” is the record and compressed expression of a rite of passage. Distilled from a narrative which focuses on a transition from self-centeredness to “reality-centeredness,” this image serves as an emblem for its larger form. Both behind the camera (as filmmaker) and in front it, the subject of the film aspired to transform through critical self-examination and the articulation of that reflection through story. Though the main character is named “Areté,” the title serves more as a calling to actualize some undetermined potential, or virtue.

Putting things into sharper focus requires “Areté” to deconstruct his character, to become conscious of a family mythos and its influence on his consequent behavior. Making his formative experience conscious allows “Areté” to detach from it, to reshape it. This self-understanding inspires an empathy with which to look upon others with compassion. The filmmaker’s creative resolve was to catalyze this shift in himself throughout the process of making the film. This brief description serves as the archetypal skeleton for the particular content of the narrative—to know the stuff of the story, the reader must watch it!
MY OTHER AND ME
Whenever I am in the middle of a project and someone asks what I am painting, I always say I don’t know. When it comes to art, I usually have a basic idea of what I want it to look like, and then I allow it to become whatever it wants. With my paintings “Tire Swing” and “Speak” I was inspired by pictures I found online. I knew exactly what I wanted, but even then, somethings wouldn’t work out, so I would change them in the middle of working. Sunsets are always extremely hard to paint, so I remember while painting “Tire Swing”, if I would accidentally add too much red somewhere or too much yellow, I would just blend it into the colors around it and keep going.

“Feather” was an idea I came up with on my own. I thought it would be really cool to add ink and paint together on the same painting. The watercolor was hard to control on the canvas, but the fun of it was letting the paint run wherever it wanted to. You can never make a mistake when it comes to art; some things are just more aesthetically pleasing than others.
SPEAK
FEATHER
Ashton Arnoldy grew up in central Arkansas. He moved to Oklahoma City in 2011 to study film with English and comparative religion as auxiliary support. Ashton is concerned with worldview and its a priori influence on behavior, relationship, and identity. Upon graduating in May of 2016, he hopes to spend his life helping humanity transition into a more participatory relationship with the cosmos.

Sandra Coursey is a sophomore piano performance major at Oklahoma City University’s Bass School of Music. She is the Vice President of Sigma Alpha Iota, and a member of Phi Eta Sigma. As well as music, she enjoys writing in her free time. Some of her poetry was also featured in the 2014-2015 issue of The Scarab.

Jessica Goetzinger is an Oklahoma-grown free spirit who was raised on healthy doses of sarcasm and Broadway musicals and enjoys witty conversions and the Beatles catalog. After graduating from Edmond North High School, she earned her B.A. for English Literature from Southwestern Oklahoma State University where she was an active member of the school’s Sigma Tau Delta chapter. She is currently finishing her second year at Oklahoma City University School of Law.

Onnika Hanson is a BFA Acting Major at OCU, class of 2019. She has drawn her entire life, but she never painted until the fall semester of her freshman year of college. She was inspired by her dad who has painted as a hobby for years, and she fell in love with it the minute she started. Onnika is excited to finally share her art with other people.
Brandie McAllister is a junior English major. She serves as treasurer for the OCU chapter of Sigma Tau Delta and is the Editor-in-Chief of this year’s Scarab. A short story of hers was published in the Spring 2015 issue of Tulsa Community College’s review journal, The Tulsa Review. She currently works at an Oklahoma City public school where she created a sixth grade newspaper.

Madelyn Parker has loved poets like Shel Silverstein since she was a child and has loved writing since she was ten years old. Her parents both have degrees in religion and have influenced her open-minded but analytical outlook on the world, thus influencing the way she writes about it.

Matt Randall is a freelance writer, editor, and social media marketer, which is a professional way of saying he writes blog posts for florists. He is an alumnus of Oklahoma City University and is also the co-founder of PegLeg Publishing, a small independent publishing company located in Oklahoma City, and co-editor of Glass-Fire Magazine. His work has been published in The Muse, The Rectangle, Gentle Strength Quarterly, and Entrances & Exits.

Carlos Sanchez is a freshman English major. He enjoys writing and reading fiction stories, especially anything fantasy. With a few short stories already compiled, he wishes to move on to larger works soon. He hopes to be able to have a book or two published in the future, but his biggest dream is to write the story behind video and tabletop games.
Chandler White (pen name C. S. W.) is a freshman English/Writing Major at OCU and plans on being a professional fiction writer. He was born and raised in Meeker, Oklahoma and attended Edmond Memorial High School. Chandler has finished one novel and a number of short stories, and he was initially inspired to write by his grandfather James Dupy, who published many poetry and short prose works over the years.

Patience Williams is a junior English major at Oklahoma City University. In the fall semester of 2015 she studied literature at Oxford University and will be studying Latin American literature in Mexico this upcoming summer. She likes people a lot and strives to be healthy, but French fries are still her favorite vegetable. When she is feeling upset, she likes to do things for other people and smiles as often as she can.

Devon Wilson is a photographer based in Oklahoma City. She is earning her Bachelor of the Arts in Photography this year from Oklahoma City University. Devon specializes in portraiture photography, working with both digital and darkroom processes. She concentrates in fashion and documentary photography. Devon also works in graphic design and video.
Sigma Tau Delta

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