





## collision staff

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

Collision is in the process of change- the old guard has left us, leaving a lot of new members to scramble something together. We've also changed advisors; Jesse-Burton Nicholson, our new faculty counsel, has been a huge help in this year's planning and execution of events and this issue.

The spread of work we're publishing this year is surprisingly national; we're only publishing two pieces from Pitt authors. We've also had a large spread in when we received the work; where we usually get the best stuff just before the deadline, we were throughout the year receiving great submissions. In fact, we awarded prizes to the both the very first poem we reviewed this year as well as the very last.

Even in a state of flux, we at Collision are as always grateful for the opportunity to support the work of young artists. It is an especially great opportunity to support those from all over the country!

Enjoy!

-Peter Webb

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**poetry and prose**

**First Prize**

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**Acerbity**

**Peter LaBerge**

**University of Pennsylvania**

This is how I breathe—quietly into an open  
full can of heinz tomato paste with almost ready

cauliflower steaming in a wicker pot with chicken  
parmigiana I am making tonight for us fanning

on the counter with spare time with condensation with  
wheel  
of fortune spinning across the room with snow falling  
in bursts

outside with hormones with november cinching at its  
end  
without satisfaction, trying to reconcile its insecurity,  
tomato paste

now with twenty percent less sodium and with the  
woman  
on tv who just won five thousand dollars for guessing

'pretzel crisps' before anyone else could reach

**Peter LaBerge**

behind with the squares fading into the teeth

of a language I haven't mastered yet with you bellowing I knew  
that one I knew it I knew it with the chicken parmigiana shedding

hot sense onto the plates I prepare for us with the sauces  
and juices spitting and glistening like an angel's skin

**Second Prize**

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**Skull Bone**

**Kate Belew,  
Kalamazoo College**

child you left your skull bone in the yard your paws  
still out  
moon bone queen anne's lace bone indigo dripping  
marrow bone  
the way you would not pass the stairs past one three  
you made  
the panic spread like cell growth in my kitchen I  
can't be sad you had to go  
away to the underground grave we all must go at one  
time sit with mom in the closet of velvet pumps and  
ballet flats after her divorce  
but now that everyone's divorced I don't recall that  
feeling you sit so still watch  
me skip school what's one more absent girl in a desk  
watch me  
sneak back into the house yell when you know I  
need help yell when  
you know I won't yell myself bitch angel you watch  
me pull my hair  
out on the bathroom floor in clumps watch me  
break the glass window you cannot  
field my anger and I apologize for that your ghost

still sits here it is  
not your fault we can't bury you in the yard in case  
what you have seen  
comes back to haunt us in case you poison the  
drinking water you were  
silent and when we put you down we were silent too

**Third Prize**

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**To the Post Impressionist**

**Angie Nam,  
California State University San Bernardino**

How can you be a ghost  
when your shoes are steel toed boots?  
You're not alone, well yes, you are still on the other  
side of the river watching the boats speed past  
water waist deep, but the world is a million  
photons of color, the blood from your feet  
finds its road back to home, and you will too.

Even if you have to be the water gliding  
soundless between the hulls.

Vast  
and nighted,  
under the froth of pearled lights.

**Honorable Mention**

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**At the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge,  
Western Grebes Dance**

**Sara Crawford,  
Utah State University**

*For Sandra Turner*

In mirror mimicry, look right when I,  
in mirror mimicry, look right. When I  
bend neck to back and beak through feathers, you  
bend neck to back and beak through feathers. You  
look right, in beak and feathers,  
when, though neck mimicry, I bend back to mir-  
ror you.

Now, head low, chin to water. We're ready  
now, head low, chin to water. We're ready  
to jet out, chests up, wings back like windswept  
capas. We continue  
to jet out, chests up, wings back like windswept  
capas. We continue  
to jet up low water capas like wings. Now, we're  
windswept  
chests, chin back. Ready to continue, we head out.

With long necks, head hooks and high beaks,  
before diving, we parade  
with long necks, head hooks and high beaks. Be-  
fore diving, we parade  
over water, feet flapping fast to prolong time  
over water. Feet flapping fast to prolong time  
before head diving. We parade with long beaks

## Sara Crawford

over high necks and fast feet hooks to prolong  
time water flapping.

We bend neck to back and beak through feathers.  
I continue in mirror mimicry, when you look  
right.

Now, head low, chin to water, we're ready to jet out  
with long necks, head hooks and high beaks.

We parade chests up, wings back like windswept  
capes,  
feet flapping fast over water, to prolong time be-  
fore diving.

## **Additional Works**

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## **Thieves**

**Sophia Martins, Smith College**

Crows, little schizophrenics. Won't leave the front  
lawn,  
Or they chisel at road kill. Yesterday a raccoon  
plump  
With garbage lined the street. Big belly, no smile.

New England winter's a special hell, makes hands  
Throb. Cold nights lick the wick out early, a cruel  
Curfew. Everyone's agoraphobic here, sealed in  
warm

Homes like fetuses. Do those mean birds make nests  
For their babies? Meanness makes poems thick-  
shouldered:  
Without them, feel motherless, and without a nest.

Here's the season of white. Branches make hand-  
puppet shadows,  
Bird nests like blood clots. Once geese congregated

## Sophia Martins

in the pond,  
Echolalia like busted trumpets, mad with want to  
leave--

Migration: the smell of you from the sheets is gone.

Winter's

As much a scavenger as the crows; they've got moldy  
bread

In their beaks. This is the time: color thieved away,  
you too.

## **What If**

**Joshua Keeler, Eckerd College**

he does this every time he has an idea,  
swiping at it.

Usually he imagines the subject  
as a mosquito – always just an inch away

from a clap of death; eating  
at him. He'd never catch it. It would die

or leave him itching. Will he sit  
and write what he means?

He prefers to let the words take hold.  
What if he wrote the poem he'd said

was too good? He could do it justice.  
It's within his grasp.

## Joshua Keeler

It's a drunk blonde walking  
to the dance floor.

He'll follow her until she notices:  
she'll flit away and he'll dance alone.

He'll spot the redhead – the lion-maned – the  
black-haired –  
and stare. Stumbling, he'll back out

of the dance floor and return home to his  
computer.  
Words coat the screen.

He'll finish his poem and turn to bed where his  
wife lies.

He'll slip under covers, grasp her, and close his  
eyes.

## **Selected SEXTS**

**Kyle Robert Johnston, Westfield State University**

I.

What if I had for all the talk there was,  
words? I was supposed to kiss your i.e.  
whispers in the library and would've  
bought this ever free world tonight gladly;  
it's a buyer's market, but O! answers  
are never found. I always knew that the  
evil old are only living standards;  
but drown all talk with the power to read  
and we, the only group, alas, that's dead,  
can smash the all required part of days.  
Maybe one learns to unspell what one's bled  
and unread backwards whatever one's bade.  
Together we are more moonlight than flesh—  
—truly, I never understood the text.

II.

The hackers have already gone beyond  
whatever so much all the closeness of  
a person is and truly ever long  
I cannot take it reading fifty poems  
by ee cummings when there are people  
who are twelve and wear short sleeves (does anyone  
know about god?) and never are we full  
and we can never have new bones, I've found.  
My weekend plans: unknow, drown all the nice  
guys who honestly revere the wild  
jackassery, and write ever midnight  
an email that reflects your truly all.  
Which way makes it mean your? I read this and  
I know you're a complex personal brand.

III.

As I'm listening to humans shit and  
I'm trying to make sense of the most dense  
century of unseeing for the chance  
to de-write and re-write over again  
love and suffering, and all you pervert  
garbage men sicken me. Throw them all in.  
'Tis the end of Target today! Go forth,  
my friends! Find the alpha teen and show him  
love and suffering and Pavement. Funnel  
sweet tattoos of aren't into something. I  
learned at eight that there is no way to tell  
anything you should, and I got real. I  
never understood the draw of fake seas.  
Alas! Listen fuckhead: I am Banksy.

## **Womb**

**Madeleine Foster, University of Colorado Boulder**

When I stepped into your room at St. Luke's Medical center, I thought maybe it was me who was the sick one. My eyes, my cheeks, my shoulders, with your bones holding them up and you looking out of them at me, expectantly. Your body almost seemed to be reversing through time; everything had shrunken down. It was as if you were actually just going to vanish one day, one hunk of flesh at a time, until you were just an invisible weight on the rest of us who still have to clean up after you. But it's true you carried me first, perhaps it's only fair. Saying I resent you would be an understatement. Saying I love you the most would be too.

To my daughter, my baby girl to whom I owe all the joy I had in this life that was chosen for me. Began your letter. Still evading responsibility for the lack of a prophylactic twenty years ago. This life, that was chosen for you. That you so bravely took on.

Thank you for my birth, don't do me any favors.

When you came over to deliver the news of your diagnosis I laughed in your face. I pretended it was bravado, that I just wanted to make you laugh too, make you comfortable. In reality I thought maybe all the poison you let dribble out of your mouth finally backed up on you and started rotting you from the inside out. Breast cancer no less. What greater irony than to fall ill from the very source of your supposed motherliness. Then you told me how you came home from the doctor's office to find Dan in the kitchen with his back to you, cleaning the refrigerator. You told him the news, and thinking he hadn't heard you, you repeated yourself. It was then that you realized he was crying. You turned on your heel and drove to me, without so much as a word to him. When you left I lost my breath and white knuckled the countertop until I could peel back my fingers and pour myself a drink.

To think that I might have to leave you this way was, initially, more than I could handle. How

could I let you see me, wasting away? To remember me as this ugly husk would be a disservice to us both.

Advice on how to remember you when you're gone? Classic. No no, please, go on.

When you called me to tell me you found a lump, I was painting my toenails and I wished you'd just chill out because my phone was pressed between my shoulder and my cheek and the result of this was that your voice was magnified tenfold and I hated you for that. Seriously, for that. I told you it was probably nothing. I thought if I found a lump in my breast I'd assume it was just a cyst and I wouldn't even bother with my usual forty-five-minute pilgrimage to the world of WebMD. Just this once you were smarter than me, I'll give you that.

When you were just a little pea in my belly, Daddy and I decided not to find out if you were a boy or a girl. Just a surprise, we thought why not, you were a surprise anyway!

Calling him Daddy, you hadn't spoken in

years. Surprise! Your favorite stand-in for “massive life-interrupting burden”. In the photos of the morning you went into labor, you’d been sobbing for an hour from the pain. My father made you pose in front of the living room, standing sideways, hands on your belly. Your eyes were swollen and red, still wet with tears, but your pale face was smiling wide. You looked like you were gleefully anticipating your own murder.

When I was accepted into college you rolled your eyes at me and stomped up the stairs, turning to my stepfather and muttering a quick, “you deal with this”, before slamming your door and leaving me to keep a fake smile plastered on, as if nothing could ruin this news. Dan hugged me and told me he was proud, that it was worth raising five girls, only two of them his, to keep watching us take the world by storm. I hugged him back and told him that I was the proud one. Then I went into my room and cried until I couldn’t breathe. Until your illness, we didn’t hug after that.

Would you be a son, who took after his father  
and took care of his mother? Or a daughter?  
Your mother's lifelong best friend, constant, and  
confidant?

A friend. Now that is an interesting way to  
look at it. After Dan left that first time, how many  
times did I sleep at the house with you, in my old  
room, just so you'd know there was another person  
there, breathing just next door? How many times  
had you called me from the bar, too drunk to drive  
home and too sad to be alone because some new  
boyfriend never called and suddenly that's all that  
mattered? So I held back your hair and I got you  
water and I dragged you to bed and slept on the  
floor in my own apartment. Foreshadowing almost,  
for the chemo nights that came later.

When I asked to sleep over at a friend's  
house in ninth grade you asked me if I was on drugs.  
Because only if I were on drugs would it make sense  
that I get to go out and enjoy myself while you had  
to stay shut in our house with all of us. I told you if

that was really how you felt, wouldn't it make sense that if I wasn't there you should be happier? You accused me of hating you, shut yourself in your room and cried for days.

In the past weeks, I've spent hours flipping through countless books, photo albums and journals from my pregnancy. 'Today I heard your heartbeat, and oh, what a sound.'

How must it have felt, to have a second heart? I know your heartbeat better than my own. The way your voice sounds—sounded... reverberating through your chest, sharply into my ear pressed against you, just inches from sleep. I craved that moment when a laugh would knock me awake, back to where you were, all around me. When I was seven I woke up to a house that seemed empty and, full of panic, ran into your bedroom. You were still sleeping, so I shook you awake. You called me inconsiderate, ungrateful, and pulled the covers over your head. I sat in the kitchen, hungry and crying, until five hours later you came out

and held me. You rocked me in your arms like this person was my real mother, and the other one was a funhouse mirror that you'd finally straightened all the kinks out of. And for years, that made perfect sense to me.

When I think back to those days, when you and I were one, I can only be thankful that you knew better than to stay here with me in this body.

Those mornings when you would lie in bed, eyes almost closed against all the things that needed you, I wished I could stir something in you. I wished I still had the unity I needed to reanimate that force I knew you had. If only I could crawl back inside and force open your eyelids, pull the strings that must exist somewhere, who's former puppeteer fell asleep on the job.

You told me once that when you found out you were pregnant your first thought was to kill yourself. Your second thought was to kill my father, and your third thought was to just take care of it. Instead, you got married. A blissful union, it lasted

all of a year and a half. You considered it the first of your failures. All your life had been a planned success until he just couldn't love you back.

I remember the day you learned what death was. You asked if I was ever going to die, and I said yes, someday, a very long way away from now. You told me you hoped you would die first. I couldn't believe my ears, I asked you why you'd ever say such a thing. You looked up at me, and matter-of-factly you told me that you'd never want to live in a world where I didn't.

And every other fight we had for the rest of my life you brought up that same story. How much more poignant it seems now. After everything, that was still true through my adolescent years and into my adult life. Who knows, it may even be true now. I don't have nearly enough experience with a you-free world to say for certain.

For a time I hoped that out with you had gone all my demons, and that in you could grow a new meaning for me.

Just what every child likes to hear, that on their shoulders rests the expectation that every problem will disappear from their parent's life. I like to think that in just a few instances, my problems became yours. Not that I wish your life had been harder, just that instead of having to inherit all your complaints maybe you could have taken away a few of mine. You couldn't even lie and tell me I was enough for you.

After the funeral, I went back to the house. I stripped off all the black, tights, skirt, blouse, and padded into your room. I went into your closet and tried on all your old clothes. Your favorite dresses in bright pinks and blues, printed with fish and sunflowers. Your old jeans, and sweatshirts emblazoned with BATES COLLEGE. I made two piles, the clothes I'd always wanted to borrow like your work clothes, skirts and smart-fitting tops, and all the clothes you'd loved the most that never quite fit me. I threw out the work clothes. And in a way, you did exactly that. From the

moment I held you I knew that I'd give you everything I had, and it would never be enough for you. For you, the world couldn't be enough. And that we have in common. You, my wise and beautiful daughter, have turned your indignation into life. You have thrown away my puny suggestions at love and shone back at me the kind of truth and forgiveness I could never begin to take credit for. You are a force all your own and a creature I was immeasurably lucky to have known, to have housed for as long as I could.

And all of the bad melted in with the good the way only a mother can make it. You scolded me but in my sadness your arms alone could soothe the pain that you yourself had caused. And now when your only crime is disappearing, who can I blame? How can you have left me so completely, without being there in the first place? Never grow a wishbone, daughter, where your backbone ought to be. And that was it, the last message you wanted to give

me. I knew you couldn't escape an opportunity to use a cliché. "Ninety percent of success is showing up, kid!" Every time I got a bad grade. For the record, if ninety percent of success was showing up, ninety percent of people who walked into Harvard, would be students at Harvard. Ninety percent of biopsies would come back negative. Ninety percent of mothers would be able to climb out of bed in the morning. Instead I lie on your bed, breathing in the smell of your pillowcases and flipping through your books searching for a glimpse of your writing. Imagining that maybe, without me, your life would have been whole instead of overflowing.

Someday I'll learn to take up space in the world, instead of trying to build a closed-circuit life. And when I find that partner, I'll let him take care of me back. I'll tell him I'm lucky to have him, but he'll be lucky to have me too. Should we have a daughter, my letter to her would read very differently. To my daughter, who was born very much wanted and very much loved.

She won't need to read this to know that it's true.  
To my daughter, who continued to be wanted and  
loved by me my whole life through.

Whether I leave you much too soon or just  
in time, let it still feel much too soon. And while it  
hurts for you to lose me, know that nothing brought  
me happiness in this life more than bringing you  
into it with me.

I know that my greatest challenge as a parent will  
be the choice between raising my daughter in an  
effort to allow her to learn the same lessons that I  
learned in my life, or to avoid the misfortunes that I  
struggled through altogether.

My own mother taught me strength and  
independence through a sort of abandonment. I can  
only hope that at this point I've been able to teach  
you to be capable on your own, to want me there  
but not need me to go on. Never be afraid to live in  
a world without me, because you are your mother's  
daughter, and nothing can take away the time we  
had together.

While I can appreciate the flattery that comes from having created a person who seems for a time to live only for me, what strikes me as greatly important is allowing this person to belong to themselves, without really ever having to let them go.

You have allowed me to learn lesson after lesson about what it means to be a woman and a mother. From you I've learned patience, strength, and love to an impossible degree. And I can say with all confidence, I couldn't be happier that you came into my life. I wouldn't know how to live in a world without you again.

When she wakes up in the morning, I'll already be waiting. Always. When she asks to sleep over at a friend's house I'll say of course, and sit up all night just in case she needs me to come get her back anyway. And when she gets her college acceptance letter I'll tell her that I've never been so proud, even though I have been just to call her mine every day. When her first boyfriend breaks her heart

I'll wipe away her tears and listen to her worry that she'll never feel that way again. When she comes home drunk and needs me to hold her hair and fall asleep next to her on the bathroom floor I'll do it, and then ground her for a month because I will not have that shit.

Because of this, when I get my diagnosis, I won't have to call my daughter. She'll be right next to me, holding my hand. When I found the lump I won't call her, believing that it's nothing until the last minute. When I get surgery, she's there waiting for me when I wake up. When I go through chemo she brings me trashy magazines and her new boyfriends come with her to talk to me for hours about feminist literature, yes, feminist literature, because they met in women's studies class. With her help and support I'll have the best possible chance of beating this disease.

So when she gets married I'll be there, crying but approving. When she has babies of her own I'll be there to feed them in the middle of the night

while she sleeps. And should she ever need a friend,  
I'll be one, but never without being her mother first.

I wish your grandma could have met you,  
because just like me, she never could have given  
up on living if it meant not seeing you. All through  
my life even after her death I harbored resentment  
for her, but seeing her through your eyes, she did  
something big and important. She gave me to you.

## The Moment A Little Fire Died

Corey Zielinsky, University of Colorado Boulder

the dry man

said on his fb status

something strange, like

“I

keep

hearing

things

ha

ppen

for

a

reason...

So what is it?

To

learn w

hat

real

pain

is?

I’m good, thanks.”

0 likes. 0 comments.

Posted 7 hours ago near Fashion Heights

Currently 9:50am.

## **Strawberry Awake**

**Jacelyn Weber, Bradley University**

Sometimes I would open my eyes when we'd kiss.  
Afraid to miss the strawberry vines hanging off  
precious pinky promises.  
Afraid to close this diary of night stands.  
Until the alarm clock plunged to the floor  
into Neverland stories. To you "never"  
was the non-verbal cue of eye shifts of lips swift  
incense.  
Speaking before thinking you actually loved me.  
Feeling you with arms wide opening the table of  
contents,  
scratching out "we are on the same page."  
Leaving me open, laying me out.

Rewriting my prologue:

My name is Strawberry Child.  
My hair, the color of Anne Frank's diary,  
my bones are carved into ten fun facts about the  
Holocaust.

The big bang happened in pages of my childhood.  
Boom. Bang,

*turning the page.*

I am a permeable membrane,  
stirred by peppermints, mixed with fleeting scripts  
turning into the rhythm of my blushing pages.  
Freckles on the inside of my book spine.

I'm book cover trying to wobble within words  
and stagger out shelves. To watch the stars come out  
of the closet and let go of the dust jacket.

*Forgive myself.*

Forgiving *him* was my first chapter:

“Playground love.”

Afraid to grow up and lose donated blood.

Oh, I was positive one day I would need  
lungs to breath out,

I love you over and above one more Paul McCartney  
silly love songs in the background of my *Almost*  
*Famous* arms,

## Jacelyn Weber

of my favorite rocking chair where my mother sang  
to me  
under the stars and kissed library dust off my out-  
of-print,  
longing to be held between a man's finger thumbs.  
Sinking into ink, unfolding the chapters he'll want to  
read over  
and over.

**Intimate Unknown**

**Ryan Ellis, University of Colorado**

It appears after thirty miles of rocky, rutted jeep track and corrugated gravel. Tucked into a lull between the olive green hills of central Zambia, flashes of glistening blue between the tree trunks become an expanse that stretches out to the north as far as one can see. It was created in 1924, when Prince Edward VIII of Wales approved of a planned hydroelectric plant, and a resulting team of trusted men were sent to drill dynamite into the walls of the canyon. With what must have been a breath halting rumble, those walls succumbed to the explosive charges and came hurtling to the river below. In the weeks that followed, a dam was born, swallowing villages, crops and entire forests as it made its persistent march up the hill.

It's a curious property of education, that in a sense it serves to prolong grudges and feuds. Ninety years ago the dam was surrounded by mobs of angry, displaced villagers. Lands that had sustained the crops of their ancestors now sat uselessly at the bottom of a lake, and racial tension was set to snap. Today the lake is older than the most weathered of the elders, the past is long forgotten and the fishing is good. History has no place because it doesn't grow crops, it doesn't catch fish and it doesn't hunt game. If the history did have any weight I might not be so

welcome there as a white man.

When I was about two, though I don't remember this, I was paddling in the shallows when, in an explosion of murky water and reptilian scales, another child was ripped away from beside me. Parts of his body were found three days later, wedged under a rock in the next bay. Such is the way of central Africa, that the story is told without sensation, without emotion, as though it had been just another weekend occurrence.

As I got older, my paddling turned to water skiing, jumping off cliffs, playing mud rugby when the water was low. Eight years after the kid got taken, I swam half a mile from the middle of the lake to the shore with two of my friends. A poor decision perhaps, but such decisions create the rift between living, truly living, and merely surviving. When survival becomes too easy, we have to look to poor decisions and synthetic situations to ensure that we still live. All three of us crawled, spluttering and panting, from the shore without a legitimate care in the world.

Now, two full decades since the croc attack, I float in the warm, soothing water below the cliffs, explaining to a group of wide eyed and jittery British tourists that, yes, we do still swim and ski and jump off of cliffs. The villagers stand waist deep in the water for hours at a time, flicking fish into the reed baskets that hang around their necks. After the rains have drifted back north, cattle herders bring

their coffee-colored herds to graze the abundance of green that's left behind by the receding waters. If ever there's something that'll bring a croc out of hiding, it's a calf nibbling the young, soft grass at the water's edge. Yet still we don't see them. I'm sure that if men in khaki trousers and wide brimmed hats were to patrol the waters for our safety, they'd be inclined to tell us not to swim, even to issue us with a fine for doing so. But you're in Africa, so the only men in khaki are the farmers, and they don't care if you swim or not.

"All water in Africa has crocs in it," they quote from their African holiday handbook, "they can move fifty miles across land in one night."

When there are no tourists to play with, and I can't fathom anything else to do, I sit and watch. The absence of televisions, radios and cell phone reception make it remarkably easy to just sit, completely absorbed in the hive of activity that disguises itself as a drowsy, unmoving panorama. Gentle winds make shadowy smears on the water's glassy surface, dancing as spirits from one end of the lake to the other. Among them, the dark silhouette of a village elder paddles painfully slowly from the veils of morning mist. He's standing as surely as if his feet were on dry ground, but instead they're in the bottom of his weather beaten canoe. We call them dug-outs; long, narrow boats carved from the

trunk of a single tree. It takes four strong men to carry one from where it was made to where it will be launched.

The elder will sit when he's reached his chosen fishing spot, and there he'll throw anchor and spend the better part of the day. As I watch him, the sun makes its first appearance over the horizon, thrown into an auburn glimmer by dusty miles of atmosphere. Still its light is energizing, and with it the birds begin to shout for their territories.

The change from night to day takes place with tropical haste, about the only thing that happens quickly here. It'll be about three hours until the wind comes up, so my girlfriend – Nora - and I decide to paddle thirteen miles up to the other end of the dam. Surprisingly, in all the time I've spent here I've never been there. Very few people have, and why I don't know.

As we put our home out of sight and our destination begins to come into view, my questions are answered. The water sits below a maze of petrified trees, their grey trunks ending in sharp points, and their masses making for a gnarled and forbidding wall. Between them the water swells occasionally, just to remind us of the creatures lurking beneath, and the fiberglass bottom of our canoe feels paper thin. The water seems cold and hostile.

As we paddle back, and the familiar grey cliffs come into view, fringed by dark trunks and

olive green leaves of Mopani forest, I wonder what I don't know about the things that I know everything about.

**White Stone**

**Madison Sudon, Youngstown State University**

You always smelled like

Wintertime, grease and iron

From long voyages through forest furs

Finding the divine in crushed pine needles

And dirt, warmed by the breath of life below

You knew so much you never told

Me, in ways I realize now

Meant more than needed expression

I tried forgetting about you for a time

But here, I realize you merely melted

## Madison Sudon

Down into the stone to join the quiet

Hum of cicadas, the rush

Of passing leaves,

The milk white snow

## Straight Man

Kaeli Hood, University of Pittsburgh

two comedians walk into a bar  
and trip over the punchline

it flutters, or  
but well  
*you're fucking it all up*  
coffee | anxiety  
an amorphous exchange rate  
playing the price is right  
in greek or french roast

transcript of a text message:  
“you’re probably starting to understand.”  
the coffee on my breath  
built a cocoon, waited all spring  
in your stomach

and now you talk moths,  
which differ in mostly arbitrary  
ways from butterflies

**that glow of sticky, fragile, torn, heavy life**  
**Zach Power, Brigham Young University**

Last summer I left the house each morning at 3 a.m. to suck the dust and debris off the college campus floor; peeling myself from my pregnant wife who was cuddled to our toddler son, I showered slowly in water. In the kitchen I ate dim bowls of granola and kefir. Once, when I walked to the sink, a small brown lightning of a mouse noiselessly cracked the silence of the morning, palpating my heart with barely a fistful of softly scurrying life, as if my heart stuck to the brown and gliding droplet of water of a mouse, as if we were one drop of water cohered and slipping through the small gap under the dishwasher, until the tension between us broke, and I snapped back into my body and found myself trembling with the thrill of sticky life torn apart, all in a moment. I feel for water—the constant atonement that water feels when it meets something so similar to itself, the tearing of evaporation, the birth of distillation, the chaos of cohering, the sliding down the side of my body each morning in

the shower.

I rinsed my bowl and spoon with water and hopped on my bike in the dark and peddled to work. The cars at 3 a.m. didn't scare me, didn't have the same stampedic ferocity that traffic has during the day; rather, they seem pedantic in the morning: an old woman on a walk, with two big flashlights, taking long strides, unlatching the scales off her eyes, letting the smell of light, grandchildren and retirement out into the dark, summer, morning air. I ride my bike past these cars. Once, I strained my eyes at the fading stars and the dark road, avoiding nails or thorns, avoiding the sudden eyes and stare from a frozen silhouette of a deer standing before me. I didn't register its shape, but I immediately registered its life, knowing that life moves, that it could leap with the force of a vehicle and slam into me with girthy muscle, bones and blood. I imagine myself: heart punctured by an antler, gasping to death on the side of the road, while my wife rolls out of bed to fill up our son's bottle, or maybe she rolls over and smothers him, or maybe she rolls into premature labor, doubled up and calling the phone

next to my dead body, lying in the gutter like a deer, and a jogger sees my face and wonders who I was, what had happened, why I was there, not wondering if I were alive, realizing a certain weight is missing from my flesh.

The deer and I didn't collide, and I made it to work. Weeks later, peddling at 3 a.m., I saw another deer run and slam itself into the side of a car. My memory doesn't tell me if it limped away but instead tells me that the man in the car must have felt the living weight slam against his passenger door, felt the weight of life flash against his own life, as if he were the clack of a slamming screen door mixing with the summer muffles of thunder, coming in waves of decibels from the distant crack of lightning—molecules slam into molecules at break-neck speeds: such small cymbals sending the sound of light along.

Once, while vacuuming at work, I listened to a podcast about a man who drove onto Gallopin' Gertie— a bridge that wobbled when the wind

blew. Escaping his car, he flopped onto the rocking pavement and then turned back to the car to save his dog, which bit him. He left the dog. Making it to safety, the bridge collapsed, and he told the reporters what bothered him the most was that he had to go home and tell his daughter that her dog was dead.

I quit my custodial job the day my wife went into labor. I drove the car to the hospital. Often, when I hurtle down the highway, I realize that all the life in the car is in my hands. I realize how simple it is to jerk the wheel to the left, slamming us into the wall or a semi-truck. I realized, then, that I could kill myself and my wife and the mid-wife, who was in the car out of her seat on her knees checking how much the cervix was effaced, who felt how thin that flat muscle is between birth and not-birth, who felt that force opposing birth, that piece thinly ticking counterclockwise to both birth and death, who felt a process taking place, while I felt that impulse to jerk the wheel, to jump off a balcony, to cease swimming, to drive to the hospital because I felt like a thin impulsive muscle trying to hold back processes.

Hours after we arrived at the hospital, Kylie

was sweating and screaming something about God and love, and I told her that the baby had hair, lots of hair, dark hair. She reached down and touched the curls on the head of the child. Thinking of Kylie's gritted teeth and washed out deer eyes, I wonder that something as small as our cells—cohered, unlatched, flashed, flopped together by an impulse—gained so much momentum that it rolled a head and blood out of her womb, with a heart and hands and feet and lungs that began screaming and gasping for air, with eyes that are black and blinking. I took the scissors in my hand and cut the pulsating chord of life between the two, and I felt what happens when the mouse tears through the kitchen and when the deer slams into the side of a car and when the dog bites the man on the bridge and when a thin muscle gives and my wife is holding our child breastfeeding her with mouthfuls of colostrum packed with pre-biotics: life within life: life cohered to life: life cut from life: life to from by before on around in life.

My memory doesn't tell me what I said to my wife when the birth was over, what she said as a reply, what the doctor or nurses said to the both

of us, but it reminds me that the mid-wife took a picture of the placenta all splayed out and bloody in a bowl under the heat-lamp next to our newborn daughter: that glow of sticky, fragile, torn, heavy life.

**She Reminds You of Someone You Gave Birth to Once**  
**Scott Chalupa, University of Houston**

All pigtailed and tricycle excitement in the driveway  
sometime near the end of the hot season when  
snowshovels get their resting, not rusting just  
resting. And beyond her in the pigtailed on her  
tricycle, he is out with his bladereel mower like  
he goes out every day near the weekend. All of  
this comes to you sometime in the morning that  
someone tells you is afternoon and she is here, the  
she you thought you gave birth to then but now she  
is not so familiar

—here with a chocolatebox that you  
liked last week but maybe this week you think you  
might prefer icecream, though who knows what  
with this afternoon sun in the morning. All these  
thoughts in the linen curtains that don't really hide  
the miniblinds and someone keeps thinking strange  
sentences in your head and so you try to remember  
someone you gave birth to once

—the excited  
tricycle with the pigtailed on the handlebars and  
he bladereeling the driveway sometime in the  
hot season when everyone is out snowshoveling  
because it falls so thick in the morning afternoon.  
But someone has a soothing voice you remember  
hearing sometime ago, and she feeds you cordials

from the chocolatebox after lunch and she doesn't  
question you about your afternoon nap like the  
other she that reminds you of someone you gave  
birth to once.

**visual art**

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**collision**

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