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HAPPY CAPTIVE

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HAPPY CAPTIVE



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MAGAZINE

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Staff Note

Dear Reader,

Happy Captive Magazine is published every spring, and this year, the publication process feels like it's finally returned to normal. For some of our staff and contributors, this is the first time in a couple of years that we were able to conduct reading meetings fully in person and craft pieces that strayed away from the topic that had been present on our minds all the time for the past few years: the pandemic.

Volume 9 is filled with love, joy, pain, catharsis, appreciation for our earth, and nostalgia for youth. Our dedicated staff worked hard to select pieces that they not only loved but also thought you, our readers, would love as well.

We want to thank Sacha Bellman for providing us with financial advice and Jody Bates for stepping up and taking on the role of our literary advisor for the past couple months. We also want to thank our immensely talented creators and staff for being the heart of this volume and magazine as a whole.

Our greatest hope is that Volume 9 brings you happiness and holds you captive until the very last word of each piece. Enjoy, think, and create.

Sincerely,

The Staff of Happy Captive Magazine

flowers like me

Lily Wahl

Poetry

i feel pretty today.
for girls like you, this feeling is normal, frequent—
but flowers like me don't bloom so often.
it's a rare feeling for us
when our roots absorb the rain,
and our petals bloom, supple, and waxen,
when our leaves fill up with sun,
and our colors deepen, richer and saturated,
like the flowers that girls brandish in paintings,
girls like you.

such is the danger of becoming beautiful
for flowers like me, isn't it?
we'll be plucked up by those prettier than us
for the sake of accenting their undertones
and brightening their days,
later left to wither, die,
and return to the earth,
and flowers like me
don't bloom again.



death to hookup culture: A Decree

Ava Shaffer

Poetry

we're all hip bones and cellphones

these days

just a swipe on the meat market
dangled from a hook(up) like a prized calf
trophy for tropey-ness

New Joan Didion: Slouching Towards Tinder

lady of the night never looked so sad
mascara-marathon-running fleabag woman
frat flu and red brick slow her down

pay \$10 to be jaded
our age's debutante is a sticky floor
greedy hands
trashcan-born love

town's too small to avoid you more
knew you deeply
for a minute



Ants

M.A. Bauman

Poetry

Cast out...I dwell and pout in my hell.
But I can't get Out without a story to tell,
Before the toll of the knell.

A caged animal, like ants in glass intangible - I
cannot pass.

Death...immovably alive.
Breath...unprovably denied acceptance; pestilence
reigns.
It strains the brain, an acid rain;
Twixt the membrane, 'tis the bane of the pain.

Denial -
The ants storm and swarm.
Defile:
A corpse still warm, entrenched in the Cold.
Bold to cling to dead flesh till Spring.
The meat they eat like child on teat,
Eager to suck the life, sans strife.
Doomed to loom on death too soon, a hopeless
anger drives.

Consume.

Ants

The species collide and begin to divide.
The warmth fades; burn; attack.
Red threads on Summer days turn black.
Blood spoiled, carnage soiled,
The ants must feast on deceased beast.

Sick...infested with bacteria -
Trick...infected by hysteria.
They turn and Fall and learn to call on choice:
Appall.
Pincers piercing pestilent peer...*Gnaw.*
The hour turned sour with self-devour.
Raw from flaw.
The bleak meek: weak. Dour to cower from
power.
Awe au *Ahh!*

Step further.

Tainted pithy pity, tethered ditherer tittered tithe-
red ditty.
Bout. Clout.
Queen Ant: last one left.
I'm Out.



Trophy

Lauren Bielawski

Poetry

Alas
When you ask me
Why I adore the Jellyfish
You think I could never quite grasp
What it is that they lack

They have

No pearls
No teeth
No shells
No scales
No bones
No pelts

So when you ask me
Why I adore the Jellyfish
You think I could never quite grasp
All of the things that they lack

But it is their lack of anything
That makes them so splendid
Their ability to ensnare my interest
A fantastic beauty
Never to be stolen



Fridays

Ava Shaffer

Poetry

They are in line to buy tickets at the movie theater, a father with two little pigtailed girls holding on to each of his hands. The twins are bouncing up and down in their pink sneakers, trying to see over the countertop to the rows of snacks beyond. They've got rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and fast words. Chatterboxes just like their mom.

The father's hair is chestnut brown, not yet the gray it will grow as the daughters do as well. They buy popcorn and Skittles, the father knowing full well the younger one will end up spilling it before it's gone. But he buys it anyway. Anything to see her wide smile with the gaps from her missing front teeth. Nose scrunching up when she does.

When the paper stub is printed, the youngest girl snatches it up into her tiny palm, holds it close to her chest like a prayer. Tonight, after the movie, she'll scamper into her bedroom and add the ticket to her scrapbook.

But now, they stroll down the dark tunnel to their red cloth seats, hushed silence falling upon them. *Creak* as they settle into their favorite chairs. (The fifth row from the back, seven seats in).

Fridays

Crunkle as they open the Skittles bag.
Tip-tiptiptip as the little candies cascade down onto the somehow sticky carpeted floor. Oh, the sanctuary of a quiet movie theater. The background for their Friday night ritual. Movies with dad.

One day, the girls will grow older, choosing to go to football games or dances at their school instead. They'll be playing the clarinet or trumpet in the marching band in the rain, their version of *Friday Night Lights*. They'll go on dates with boys and girls to the local spaghetti place, giggling behind breadsticks. They'll fill their evenings with cheap reality TV and cheaper gossip with their friends. They'll spend their Friday nights hunkered over a wooden desk in the local library, studying for midterms.

One day, they'll be in college, the source of the father's now all-gray head. They will go out on Fridays with plastic IDs and red Solo cups. Dance until their feet hurt. They'll make friends with the artsy late-nighters at the coffee shop. Read poems at open-mics.

Fridays

One day, they'll have great big lives of their own. They'll work overtime for a passion project they can't, *won't*, turn away from. They'll attend fancy wine dinners with clients. *Clinking* cheers. They'll visit friends in far-away towns, guests at far-away-friends' weddings. Cameras flash, capturing a scrunched-up nose. More to add to the scrapbook.

But for now, they sit in a row in the small town movie theater. One, two, three. The girls hold their father's hand all throughout the previews.



River Glass

A. Whitfield

Poetry

So I lay in a clear creek
Bare against the stones
Water moving over me

I lay there until
my aching body
Went numb with cold

And when I emerged
I thought
“Now I am clean”

But the next day still I wanted you



3:14 AM

Aaron Chavez

Poetry

(tw: implied SA, suicidal ideation)

Popcorn ceilings

Battery 16%

Is typing.....

Wyd

Demon time.

Zzzzz....

Zzz.....

zz....

2 years

The moment haunts you

It repeats, every graphic detail

Every second

Every nerve of pain

His anger, your fear

Over and over

Over and over.

1 year ago

He kisses your neck

Begging you to indulge

You freeze in fear and confusion

I've seen this before.

6 months

You gotta forget about it somehow

14

3:14 AM

Only to make it worse
Fuck this shit.

Fuck this shit.

It rains outside
And the showers moisten my scalp
And my cheeks with the salt of my tears
I've always hoped to wake up
But I'm not sure if I should anymore.



Traveling Circus

Riley Courtney

Poetry

I'm learning how to rest while on the road, forgetting the comfortable chambers of a home under temporary red and white candied tents taking a burning refuge above my bed, where the darkness has been rumbling.

Audiences bask in the vibrant remains of the forgotten fallacies, etched by my traveling cirque.

Poetic elephants with decadent ivory tusks paint the night sky
with stars and moonlight, manufactured in a greasy, buttered ring of fire.

Midnight monkey, speaking to the deep brown cobwebs pressed against self proclaimed wounds, marching like a halo and banging his performative salutation to my nightmare.

My god is commanding and devious, and boy, does he know how to put on a show. He bends my body and writes his rendition of free will against the edges of a tightrope wire, ready to snap.

Traveling Circus

I'm stored away in bejeweled crates that might
as well be my coffin,
tucked between the degrading iron tigress and
the greed of an unknowing child.

My body, my moonlight, my performance.
I'm learning to explore my own intimacy in this
salted stagelight dark.



Spells of the city

Kate E. Lore

Creative Nonfiction

2:30 a.m. in Columbus, Ohio: when the bars let out, when people are released, and suddenly, the alcohol hits them like they've been drinking poison. They are suddenly dumb and dazed. Some of them walk out across the street as though they can't even see the cars.

Especially in the Short North, in the arts district of the city. All upscale restaurants, stores, and bars. Where the nice clubs are. Where Goody Boy diner is open late, and we're so drunk we can hardly sit up in our seats, ordering sandwiches, and chugging water as if it were the antidote to clear our minds and create a better tomorrow.

But that doesn't usually work. Not even White Castle can save us. We get a pitcher of Long Island at the gay bar and black out hard. Both wake up the next day still spinning.

2:30 a.m. in the Short North, when suddenly the music stops, and the lights come on like a spell has been broken. Suddenly, we have to face our real selves in this light that seems too bright, and you feel sick. We see ourselves, each other, such a mess. Beer bottles, shot glasses, and a plate of half-eaten food. Makeup caked and smeared

Spells of the city

If you're lucky enough, you're too drunk to notice. Sometimes, if you're desperate, you ask for one more shot to get there. You swallow it down as your hand is signing your name on a piece of paper so we can go. This is the moment when the people at the bar who've been trying to make eye contact with each other all night suddenly realize—time's up. But sometimes, one of them steps up with some last-ditch effort. Almost always, this person can barely speak, becomes embarrassed, and turns to escape. But sometimes, their romantic interest is too drunk to care, and if in this situation that person is better at talking, they can carry the conversation all the way to the top floor of the apartment building across the street.

All the while, Uber drivers charge forward in waves like rescue from a ghost. Their white light appears, takes in the stumbliest of us all, angels that carry us home.

In the Short North at 2:30 a.m., you're still awake. Probably walking up and down the street. Looking for something, but you don't fully understand what. We are roaming like vagabonds. Occasionally striking up a conversation with the gyro truck guy.

Spells of the city

Grasping for anything, like a dying man wanting to believe in magic. We lied to ourselves in the streetlight, tried to cast a spell. We'd do anything to push back the inevitable return home. Anything not to face the reality of our lives.

For an hour, we fight it, as everyone else, one by one, calls it a night. We watch the most happening part of the city slowly deflate. Just an hour. Best to get home before it falls asleep completely, else you might never wake up.



Siamese Sunlight

Stella Kinoshita

Fiction

Jonyu began to question the reason the raven-haired boy came to visit him the morning after his mother's funeral. It seemed like the child wasn't quite sure either. The child, however, had limited capabilities to begin with, so this could be forgiven. Jonyu wasn't sure what to do. He found that the child reminded him of when he was younger, yet that may have been his own narcissistic impulse, or maybe it was the only way he could attempt to comprehend what he was living through. The child didn't seem to notice Jonyu, at least until he asked his name. He couldn't remember. At least that's what he told Jonyu once he caught his attention. The child was referred to as Basil by Jonyu for the time that he was going to accompany him. This, taken from observation: one of the first things Jonyu noticed was the small weed growing from the top of Basil's head.

On his way to his mother's house, Jonyu walked at the edge of the brick road along with Basil, who only followed along because he really had nowhere else to be, or anything else to do. Basil was a child, from the way he acted, to the way he could talk without response for what seemed to be an eternity without worry or fear of judgment.

Siamese Sunlight

With the occasional hum or affirmation from Jonyu, Basil would just continue talking about this or that. Basil talked about the playground where the other kids would play with him. Basil would talk about his old nanny, how she refused to take her medication. Basil would talk about climbing pine trees and getting sap stuck on his palm, and about the ants which would make the dirt soft.

Jonyu wondered, if only for a second, when the boy had died. He couldn't recall a single child who enjoyed the world as Basil did, who noticed the world without the aid of a tablet or a phone, devices which now had been considered extensions of young children's limbs. The thought began to spiral, so Jonyu waved it off and spent the rest of the walk trying to catch onto what Basil's current topic of conversation was. The attempt had failed, as he was still unsure of why Basil had now mentioned the mushrooms which used to grow on the roof of his old home.

Jonyu took in the scent of his mother's house, which he hadn't ever visited. The curtains were transparent white silk, light seeping in, and hitting carefully placed philodendrons and Chinese evergreens among other plants and greenery.

Siamese Sunlight

This was quite unusual, as he remembered his mother faintly always attempting to keep a small plant on the windowsill, yet it always ended up withering away within a week or two. Jonyu seemed to forget that his mother, even at her age, could continue to learn. Jonyu seemed to forget that his mother, even without him around, would continue with her life—that it wouldn't be the same when he came to visit.

Yet Jonyu never did visit his mother. It was not just sunlight seeping through the old, thin windows, no. It was also guilt.

Basil, as Jonyu had been left a statue in the doorway, decided to roam the space. There was a piano in the living room and a small library near the kitchen at the back of the house. In the kitchen, a pair of old screen doors, a few tears visible from where Basil had stood. Out the back, Basil found a small pool, freshly fallen red maple leaves scattered through the water. The color they left in the pool startled Basil.

At that moment, Jonyu forgot his reasoning for entering his mother's home. He walked through the lower floor, trying to recognize anything from before he moved out and his mother moved to this neighborhood.

Siamese Sunlight

Most of what he saw was new, or he had just never seen it before. In the next room, Jonyu was able to find something he remembered: an old record player, hooked up to gray speakers. The system was covered in dust, but Jonyu was drowning in silence, and that wasn't much of an issue. A record had already been left on the slipmat, the needle partway through. Familiarity was what Jonyu was looking for. Maybe he would find it in his mother's old music. He plugged in the record player, the record beginning to turn. The speakers sang a low serenade, calm, yet quite sad. Jonyu laughed at himself, turning and sitting on the nearly worn mustard couch. The music matched his internal melodies well, and for that, Jonyu realized his attempt at lightening the mood had failed. For a while, he sat and just listened to the music. He spent time looking around the room, noticing the dull color of the walls and the magazines he saw to be complete garbage. He noticed how the room was completely silent, other than the song playing.

At that moment, with the horrid limbo-like feeling and nothing but the distant hums of the record player to comfort him, Jonyu felt very, very small all by himself in that house, and very, very lonely.

Siamese Sunlight

He wondered if he should just embrace it. Just to lay on the old mustard couch, which seemed to have more air than anything, and collect dust in the house he never dared to set foot in when his mother was still alive. Yet this was a bitter feeling. Jonyu didn't deserve to be embraced by the comfortable home. He knew that.

The needle skipped, for merely a second, and he pulled himself back up. For the first time since he entered, Jonyu wondered where Basil had gone. He ventured up to the second floor, and looked through each room, if only briefly, to see if Basil was there, but stopped in one carpeted bedroom, finding that there were more than just a few houseplants living in the abandoned home.

Kneeling down, tilting his head to look under the tall bed, Jonyu found something familiar, and for once he could say he felt a bit of joy there. A Siamese cat made its way towards him. Jonyu lifted the feline, cradling her as he continued to look through the house. Making his way back down to the lower level, Jonyu noticed the familiar weed-headed child at the back, kneeling at the edge of the pool, and went out to join him.

Siamese Sunlight

Taking his attention from the water, Basil noticed the cat in Jonyu's arms, and as a child does, he ran over to bathe him in affection. What an interesting reaction towards something you don't know.

Jonyu, taking his attention from the boy and cat, looked to the tree above the pool. Japanese maple trees were always his sister's favorite. He wondered why she didn't get the house instead of him. She was always his mother's favorite after all. The thought of it never bothered Jonyu. It was fair.

The maple tree was dying, the leaves falling in the water below. Jonyu no longer wanted to be in his mother's house.

Jonyu offered to let Basil hold the cat on the way back, yet he declined. Basil was afraid he would drop her, and that she would run away; that they would never find her. Jonyu only smiled and continued to walk on the red bricks. Basil didn't talk on the way back. Instead, Jonyu talked about his mother and his memories of her. Little stories about his childhood, how she would get mad at him when he misbehaved. The sun was nearing the horizon, and the lamps in the neighborhood had begun to light up. Lightning bugs flickered through dimly lit gardens and well-kept lawns.



Coversations Between Worlds

Riley Courtney

Poetry

The sun graces my waters with its presence.

only in memory do we taste its warmth.

You have no luck, we bask in its untamed glory

must I remind you, to boast is also to burn.
you'll become one with the Earth, forget
your sun;
hands will reach through to bring you below
—true warmth
thy sun is but nothing compared to Hell.

Though we physically hold no bounds, you are
me,
I am you—I can witness your face grow tense;
Envy coats you from the inside out, my Friend.
I could melt the Earth's frosts—ruin the winter—
I would do anything to show you my sun.

to melt would be to murder. You mean to
say
your dreams not cold? Look towards my
eyes and see:

Coversations Between Worlds

we are blistered blue when we meet, only
you—
you hold the golden glow of day within
you.
I will not deny my chilling envy, Foe,
but you mustn't deny your own fatal boast.
I know, even in light, you're cold. I feel it.

Enough with the cold. You are simply bitter,
For I may bask while you're subject to wallow.
Would you share your dark the way I'd share
mine?

I wouldn't wish my lightest days upon you.
all for me: too cruel a fate, too cruel a
fate.

You know I would welcome any part of you.

there are parts I may not give. Too cruel
a fate
I wish I had light in me the way you do;
it feels too long since we were one in the
same.

Can you still feel your skin? I'm sure it hurts, my
Love,

Coversations Between Worlds

Tell me you can still feel it. It remembers
warmth

it must. It must.

I'm so cold, my Love.

I know.



thief!

Ava Shaffer

Poetry

gimme my summertime back! and my postcards!
my pink sweater with the geese on it and those
hours spent in the car with my mom!
my secrets my solace my sarcasm *stolen*
nothing's gonna warm THAT cold heart so
gimme my tj maxx blanket back bitch!

can't believe i wasted my girlhood with you
slumberparty epiphanies in moonglow silver
geometry church giggles held in sacred palms
homecoming sparkle don't need dates when
we've got matching red shoes
that's us that's us that's us that's us

what were boys compared to us?
/UHs/ (pronoun): me & you
in case you forgot
lord knows i can't

we were (gogo) girls together for godsake!
smacked that october photo off mom's mantle
evil sinister cruel curdling rusty attachment
bruised bonds
snap

Theif!

saw on instagram you got your nipples pierced
hate to know you're changing too
letting the distance grow that's on *YOU*



green flags

Ava Shaffer

Poetry

i'd bang Frankenstein's monster
he's just my type
 the strong silent type
 the broken jarring kinda grotesque type
 the sending people running for the hills
type
just add pitchforks and we've got a friday night

give me your stitches your grime your translucent
skin
gift me your gothic shower me in your hideous
 maybe together?
let's share some sexy self-sabotaged solitude

you don't scare me
trust me i'm familiar with it all oh *man* am i
used to your ugly
only ever dated guys with it on the inside though,
so let's give this a try
 call me!



Viscous

Lauren Bielawski

Poetry

Buttermilk sand dollars and marmalade oil
Running thick like tar and rusted syrup
Dripping messily onto blush-drunk coral
Clogging porous polyps and calcified purpose
Violet bells with their vapor tails
Blossom amidst its viscous conditions
Being smothered into submissive sculptures
Remaining stagnant and utterly motionless



Word Vomit

Chloe Southard

Digital Art



Self Portrait

Stella Kinoshita

Digital Art



My Experience With Young Adulthood

Cecillia Schuler

Watercolor



Jester's Burden

Stella Kinoshita

Mixed-Media Mask



Bug's Eye View

Taylor Stephens

Photography



The Barn is Hiding

Taylor Stephens

Photography



Eccentric Perspective

Kendal Rumprik

Photography



Phases of Desire (out of order)

A. Whitfield

Poetry

Laughing in someone else's apartment
I catch eyes with a girl across the room whose
socks are in my laundry

Later my phone buzzes, and it's someone across
the city who used to want

my thumbprints on their thighs
Struggling to open a jar or move a couch, tipsy
enough to call me, laughing

And I'm warm and loose enough to go down the
line

Enjoying the rumble of public transportation, the
humanness of movement

The fizzy brightness of being needed

So many ways to know someone—socked feet in
the kitchen

Pressed tight under my arm, braid my hair before
you leave tomorrow

I think some of the answers I need are behind
your teeth

Can you tell the flavor of my Hi-Chew?

It's not like this yet

I'm sorry for talking about the things I want
like I have them

Phases of Desire (out of order)

The truth is the curve of a classmate's thigh
where her tennis skirt ends
Still feels like something I have to be forgiven for
 A deep tangled fear, spitting like bad rain
That I'm not _____ enough to be allowed to
want her
My inversion becoming perversion in the context
of another person
 In the context of my imperfection

It used to be that when I thought about the consumption of my body
My mind went to the scavengers and the beetles
Roots pushing fingers between my ribs
Now I think of the warm water on my body after
a shower
 What my clean skin might taste like

At night, desire is a sweet and clever friend
Perpetually entertaining, quick and vibrant in the dark
Yet in the light of day, those shadows shift into
Actaeon's hounds
Pursuing me for a glimpse of a man's painted fingernail, or full lip

Phases of Desire (out of order)

There are chaste cravings as well
Once on the couch beside my father, I watched
a girl

Run her finger down a sleeping boy's nose
And his shaking nightmare subsided
Exposing an emptiness I had never before
touched, or realized

A late intermission: I cannot kiss you, my tongue
is far too weary
from trying to explain how and why I would kiss
you

Oh how the language of desire slips from
me like the silver eel
Who dissolves its organs and builds them anew,
out of the single-minded deter-
mination to fuck

If I could give over words entirely, I'd say only:
There are places that are warm, fresh, and
draped in sunlight
Here on the Earth beside us



friday

Aaron Chavez

Poetry

tap tap tap...
the cool menthol exits the gate of my lips
he laughs at me
“hit it one more time for me”
i inhale, the sweet burn tickling my throat
he grabs my face
his cold, soft hands, thumbs resting on
dimples.
he smiles, and we look at each other,
my brown eyes staring at his forests
our eyelashes frozen, puffing our breath into the
frozen air.
snow, fluffy like flour.
26 degrees.
Friday.
i think he’s in love.

we didn’t have long.
he had to go,
i wish i knew sooner.
because now nothing is the same.
and i hate him for it.

Friday

and now it's only cold.
the December air biting my cheeks
red and lonely.
i wish he were here.
he made everything normal, it was perfect, actually.
but, i saw something he never did,
the big light turns off.
hail.
13 degrees.
Friday.
i'm in love.
end me.



Coloring Pages

Riley Courtney

Poetry

I hate that I've grown up.

Decadent ghouls drenched in regal purple and
all the shades of my blood line the hallway to
my childhood bedroom, posing mocking stares
meant to remind me to cling to the colors I still
have (the ones that they lack) and not to spend
my days mourning the vividness of my youth.

I'm a teenager sacrificed to the tree stump in
my backyard,
cut and mourned before I could climb it. Enter-
ing my adulthood,
my cheeks are still drenched with the vivid cyan
yogurt and
bubblegum pink chalk, ground against the brick
of my house in trusting innovation, where the
rain won't reach but the sun hits twice a day;
That's why the pink looks so bleached, I'll tell
myself.

There were butterflies in my dad's ears
and caterpillars growing from my mother's stom-
ach.

My sister and I learned metamorphosis on the
stems of royal irises
in the cool months of spring; we were both
chrysalises stuck

Coloring Pages

to the American suburbs, hanging by the tar
used to fill the cracks in the sidewalks
and swaddled by unweeded backyards and sand
from boxes turned litter for the stray cats.

Wet wings, we are haunted only by what was,
in a farewell to colors and an unapologetic dis-
missal from youth.



Disconnect

M.A. Bauman

Poetry

To disconnect
From the top of my neck.
An insubstantial speck
In the midst of the dreck.

To silence the thoughts that my misdeeds have
wrought.
To squash out the rot and all the feelings I've
caught.
I'm tired of this calamity in my head from the
vanity,
And the battling noise like two kids clashing toys.

Well, the winner's not me. It's not you or the free.
To be free is a joke, divine prank bespoke.
They tell you to try; don't give in to the lie.
"Just keep pushing on; to give up is wrong."

But I feel a port on the back of my head
To deport my data and put my info to bed.
My actions are there; they'll always have been.
But the rest I can't bear. I'm in need of a friend.
A digital pal for my motives to render,
A source of morale: my will to surrender.
I'll upload myself to his digital world,
And download the lessons my experience unfurled.

Disconnect

I just figured out we've been working together.
He's been piloting my body with the touch of a feather.

But that doesn't mean I've no input to give,
For if I weren't around, he'd have no reason to live.

He's learning his lessons as I'm learning mine.
We'll have mastered this program by the end;
give it time.



Alone But Not Lonely

Laurel Dobroszi

Creative Nonfiction

She danced with the town as they clapped to the rhythm of her feet. The drums pressed on, exciting the crowd and giving her the feeling of flying. Hands reached toward the sky—*Suspended in Gaffa*. The night was blue with yellow accents as the lightning bugs decorated her fingers. She was alive. Pure bliss as she twirled, her hair and ruffled skirt following close behind. Alive. With the people, with the drums, the guitar, the music. With the ground and the grass between her toes and feet of mud. Alive with a smile and a laugh. No longer did she feel alone. Not lonely, but alone. As the sky faded, and the crowd vanished, leaving nothing but what once was, it was time to part from the extraordinary. Back to the apartment and nightly routines. The lightning bugs followed, keeping her safe from the ordinary and bringing her comfort on her journey home. She longed for another moment just as rich. Where her feet could dance to the drums once more.



history books

Lily Wahl

Poetry

some couples hold hands in public,
yet don't talk when the people go.
they're picture-perfect together,
but their affections are for show.

love is what we have
when we're in the dark, alone,
dreaming of the day we'll laugh in a crowded
room,
hoping to call each other home.

i die every time you touch me,
you cry until your eyes aren't blue anymore.
i don't want to have to spend my life without you,
but this love is an attritional war.

we're cut from the same cloth
as other pairs of other lovers,
we just fit together differently,
have to be a little tougher.

we shouldn't have to be heroes
shouldn't have to be brave.
we don't need to be something for the history
books;
i just don't want to take this secret to my grave.



Between Dusk and Dawn

Ashleigh Brelage

Poetry

The day grows weary
Between dusk and dawn.
The stars come alive,
Only hidden behind the light
Polluting the city sky.
But in the country,
It's a different story.

Fireflies and lightning bugs
Dancing in the grass and trees.
Children running and laughing
Catching all the flying things.
Stretch out your blanket,
Warm your toes by the fire, and
Smell the oak, or cedar, or ash.

Join us as we look above
To the twinkling stars
Embellishing the night.
Connecting the constellations
Orion and his belt, Cassiopeia,
Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, and
Dream of what lies ahead.

Would you rather be inside?
Tucked into your cocoon bed,
All snuggled and sleepy and calm.
The night is meant for adventures
Non-existent in the sun
Often seen as just an end,
Night is here, beginning again.

As campfires glisten,
Smoke reaches the heavens,
Brushing the stars above.
At this moment, you realize
We are not so far apart
If the moon and the stars
Sparkle and shine so bright.

Enjoy the warm fire,
Dew on each blade of grass,
Lights of the flying bugs, and
Friends gathered together.
The moon, so clear, so bright.
Remember to look at the stars
Wherever you may go.



Dreamt Up Notions of Love

Riley Courtney

Poetry

Once you were my warden,
but now I exhaust my spirit
to avoid the exhausted swing of your blade;
I know my murder would be proof of your love,
so with every step you take
towards me and our rosy walls in my slumber,
I grow closer to opening the door
separating me from you;
To die in your name might be the ultimate
sacrifice.

Too soon do you make that choice for me --
in wake rather than in sleep --
cutting through closed doors
inviting the deep sickly red that used to exist
only to me
out into our hall,
pouring from your mind,
out from the door in which you shatter,
tempting me to join it.

I stand now,
alone in the hall with rose wallpaper,
not the flowers you gave in love,
knowing my body may never leave that hall,
and my mind may never escape your grasp.



Reminiscing

Avery Guilford

Prose

The windows were down, and the light August breeze was blowing strands of my hair, cutting streaks across my vision.

But it didn't matter, I could still see you.

See the way the sunlight danced across the strawberry blond of your curls that were, for once, set free from their hat. The way your crystal blue eyes sparkled as you sang along to the sound of Springsteen filling that car because you thought no one was watching. And the way your lips spread wide into that smile the second I looked at you, catching you at that part of yourself you didn't even know you let me see.

My heart swelled.

My heart soared.

And that's when it happened.

I fell.

Fell for all those secret smiles and silly quirks I was just starting to discover. Fell for all the late nights talking and long mornings of blissful laziness. Fell for all the differences that seemed to lay between us like the road of endless hours that we thought separated us.

That's when I fell hard.

Reminiscing

I didn't know it then, and I'm not even sure I fully understand it now, but that's when everything changed. And not changed in that cliché way every movie is about, but changed in that subtle shift of a way; you would have to look close and hard to find this change, but it was there.

In that moment, on that hot summer day as we drove just to drive, I let my walls down and opened myself up to the possibility of being endlessly and unconditionally loved. Loved not just for the superficial layer everyone sees, but loved for the internal baggage buried so deep and far I thought it was all but forgotten. Loved for all my stupid jokes that for some reason always seemed to make you laugh. Loved for all the nights I fell asleep to the movie or rose hours before you simply out of habit. Loved despite our not-so-different differences and those now do-able hours between us.

That's the love I fell for.

The love that makes you relax against that front seat of the car and breathe in the all-of-a-suddenly sweeter August air.



untitled 1

Sam Fouts

Poetry

funny
to think
that
beyond this
cosmic
curtain

our universe
may exist
on the
crumb
of a crumb
of a

sandwich

barreling a
centimeter
towards
teeth
every
billion
years

untitled 1

this
could all
end
in a
chomp



untitled 2
Sam Fouts

Poetry

in a
far
off
time

when
hunger
is cured
thirst
quenched
war and
borders
obsolete

all matters
life death
political
and
mundane
will be
settled

quite
decisively

untitled 2

in a
game
of chess or

checkers

if necessary



rapid eye movement

Aaron Chavez

Poetry

fifth-grade science project
that shitty volcano that you had to make ex-
plode.

your first kiss
and how painfully awkward it was
both your noses touched
hers was cold
didn't matter
you're gay.

your first crush
how he looked in his jersey and shorts
jet black hair,
combed back, silky, smooth
smelled like swagger Old-Spice.

opening night of the school musical
everyone's parents brought them flowers
you left early so you didn't feel awkward not
getting any.

your first time
how...romantic.

rapid eye movement

first sip of alcohol
it was not good. 2/10.

gazing at stars
it smells outside, like feet or roadkill, or both.
way past bedtime. 2021
feeling good. this is nice. after all, everything is
okay.
Carly is playing. get into it!!!
finally having what you never did before.



Legos

Becca Blanco

Prose

“Say cheese!” I smile.

“Look how cute!” A screen flashes in my face.

I see my face among the others in the photograph. And in my face, I see him. For a second, my heart stops. I blink hard and look again.

God, I look just like him.

Yet for years, I had fought the reality of being a daughter.

But now, I recognize his features on me: his eyes, his nose, his smile. I see his hurt, our hurt, in horror. My stomach drops. The undeniable evidence on the screen makes me want to scream.

I see the eyes that would look into mine. Every Christmas, every birthday, and every holiday in between. The eyes I’d avert my gaze from, the eyes I’d hope wouldn’t look my way. I see them on my own face.

The eyes that once told me I was undeserving, ungrateful, regrettable.

Legos

That year, my nine-year-old eyes had searched under the tree in pure bliss, so eager to tear carefully wrapped paper into shreds. I'd gotten Legos—a huge set that I had begged for all year. It came with a girl who had dark hair just like mine. I was ecstatic, and at nine, the holiday didn't mean much more to me than Jesus, presents, and being careful around Dad.

After the ritualistic paper shredding was over, I carefully assembled my Lego set in the living room. Spending thirty minutes on each page, ensuring that every little piece had its place.

I admired my handiwork—not a single piece left over meant a job well done. I played for a few hours in peace, putting together perfect scenarios of perfect nine-year-old girls.

My older sister briskly entered the room, her eyes careful like mine.

“Bring your things upstairs,” she ordered in a calm state of urgency. She fought my barrage of questions with a dismissive and firm restatement of her previous sentence. I looked into her eyes and knew.

Legos

“Is he...?” I asked quietly. She nodded, and I held my breath for a moment.

“Now.”

I clumsily carried my Lego set up the stairs, dropping a few things on the way down that my sister diligently picked up behind me.

“Get Tess,” she whispered on the way up. I did exactly as I was told. Carefully, I placed my Legos on the desk of my room, and carefully, I crept down the stairs to grab my baby sister from the couch. The drowsiness from the nap I woke her from was enough to put her right back to sleep the second I got her into our bedroom. One piece of damage control was covered. Before anything else, Tess.

My older sister stood in my doorway, ready to give more orders.

“Close your door and don’t listen.” I saw fear flicker in her eyes for a second, masked quickly by sisterly duties. I could hear the escalation of a conversation happening downstairs. The precursor to disaster. I strained my ears to listen to the content of it, trying to grasp today’s-

Legos

category level.

“Beck.” She looked at me in a motherly way, a way that no twelve-year-old should know how to look at anything. “Do it.”

I begrudgingly nodded and she left the room, gently shutting the door on her way.

Don’t leave...

Muffled voices continued from downstairs. I heard my sister’s door close and looked around my own bedroom. It was decorated in an explosion of butterflies and flowers—a fitting overcompensation. My younger sister’s snores came softly from her bed across the room. Muffled voices continued to grow in volume, and my little Lego paradise sat atop my desk. I made my choice.

I opened the bedroom door noiselessly, dismantling my fortress of protection, and sat against the wall next to it. Muffled voices grew louder. Clearer.

A roaring voice came from downstairs. A raging lion with no particular path of destruction set in mind.

Legos

It bellowed of things true and untrue, throwing accusations to the same beat that it slammed cups, doors, and other things that it loved. As I listened, the sting of each accusation was sealed with a crash.

A calmer voice followed. A wavering voice, a silhouette on the beach staring into the waves of a tsunami, arms outstretched. Please, it begged, not like this.

My heart ached, and I felt a pang of loneliness—not for me—but for that silhouette awaiting her inevitable fate. I wanted to help, to run down the stairs and end the madness. If only to stand in the middle of things and take the blows. But fear kept me frozen in place.

Silent tears rolled down my face as I listened, discovering things I never knew about myself—undeserving, ungrateful, burdensome. Regrettable.

“Six financial burdens...”

“...complicate things...”

Legos

...

It's my fault.

My glazed eyes wandered to the desk and my Lego set sitting atop it. It looked so different now. A bunch of stupid fucking plastic.

Who could be stupid enough to beg for a bunch of stupid fucking plastic? I had a home, a bed, a family—what purpose did a box of plastic serve?

Filled with tearful rage at my own idiocy, I grabbed the set from my desk and brought it to the floor. My tiny fists smashed it to pieces. Not a single piece left out meant a job well done.

When the malice finally found its way out of my body, I looked at what I had done and began to sob. Something I had spent an eternity meticulously building, destroyed in seconds.

Shakily, I grabbed the box that had once kept the set safely unassembled and unharmed.

In the aftermath of my rage, I remorsefully ensured that the set was picked apart piece by

Legos

piece, and I carefully organized them back into the individual bags they'd been in before I'd come along. Once the damage had been seemingly undone, I resealed the box with all of its original contents and pushed it away from me.

They don't deserve this.

I don't deserve this.

Crashing waves of realization slammed into me, over and over again, leaving me with seconds in between each, gasping for air just before another took me out. Until the final surge deftly landed:

I am just like him.

With my back now against the wall, I pulled my legs to my chest and glared at the box—a mirror to reflect my own self-hatred. The evidence that I was a horrible person, so young and yet so apparently vile.

The one-sided battle raged on downstairs, filling my ears with more fuel for the first spiral of many yet to come.

Legos

After a while—it was hard to tell how long really—the final blow was dealt, and all was quiet. The garage door slammed shut, shaking the entire house and alerting all of its inhabitants that we had officially entered the aftermath: the next step of damage control.

I glanced at Tess. Her sleep had kept her safe. I surveyed my room. Nothing broken, the damage was contained downstairs.

I didn't bother to take my Lego box into account during damage control.

I heard the soft click of a bedroom door closing and locking downstairs, a sound that only a practiced ear could pick up. She didn't like being seen—not like this. It would be hours until we saw that silhouette again, but she was safe enough.

Adjusting my body to sit in the doorway, I looked to the two bedroom doors across the hall from mine. Both sealed tightly. I was alone.

But it was my fault.

And I deserved it.

Legos

I deserved it.

With swift hands, I grabbed the Legos from my bedroom floor and hurled them down the staircase, standing, watching, waiting. The box exploded on the first step, sending pieces in every direction. The clattering cacophony resonated in my heart—a heart I had recently learned was calloused and vacant.

I deserved it.

With each step the box met, I felt a sick tension in my body release. And it felt dreadfully good. If I had to hurt, something else did too.

A horrific realization struck me the instant the box met the staircase's bottom, the bricks finalizing their descent. They littered the staircase, sharp ends threatening anyone who dared to consider escape.

Fear struck my body. This was not damage control. This was damage. This was my fault.

Again.

Legos

I went numb. This was damage. This was undeniable evidence.

In careful hysteria, my tear-stained hands guided the bedroom door to a soft close. My feet guided me to the closet door, and it softly clicked, closing and locking.

I didn't like being seen.

Not like this.



