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Dear Readers,

Working on this spring issue has been an exceptional experience for several reasons. As an editor, I have never been more confident in the quality of material and caliber of staff. This semester features undergraduate work from all over the country, showcasing a variety of structures and voices offered by young writers today. We have received hundreds of quality pieces and the selection process has been outstandingly difficult. I have the utmost respect for the deliberate and delicate nature of the writing showcased in this spring 2009 issue. Lastly, after three years, two serving as senior editor, I am leaving Collision, and I could not have asked for a more rewarding last semester, nor could I be leaving the journal in more capable hands.

I want to personally thank the gifted writers who submitted works this semester, and applaud those published in the issue. Special thanks to Collision’s staff for their devotion and gusto, as well as our editors for providing endless humor and backing. Finally, I’d like to thank our readers, I hope this issue absorbs and entertains you. Thanks for your support; I’ve had a really nice time.

Graciously,

Lizzie Harris
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Navigator Printing, for their consistency, superiority and unbelievable investment in the quality of this publication.
First Place

Ism

Katelyn Litterer
University of Pittsburgh
Are you ready to shepherd the rain again? It is time. It is dark. Not to bed, not to bed—it’s too soon: you are the thunder and I am the lightning. We ache. We work, I spark, and you battle: I open trees, you threaten the grass; I destroy shingles, you comb the roof; you strip the shock for every metal, we guide the rain. I show, you sound; the rain beats itself upon objects: to its frequent loves: hello, petal, I died for you, hello, cemetery soil, this was for you. You find rocks where they should not be and place them like stalks in our bed. You grow stalks. I know you do this for me while I’m frightening the sky, you reward me: I can not exist without your rocks in my bed. You mourn for the living things, you ache, I shatter, the rain goes without answers. To bed, to bed with you. I am hiding from death, you are the siren, you are the diversion, you wait and then rip your seams, you cry out to me to stitch them and instead I establish the sky for you. While I hide, I gather stalks in our bed. I terrorize, you awaken the birds in their eggs.
Second Place

After Hours
--after Terrance Hayes
--after Lorca

Joel W. Coggins
University of Pittsburgh
I want to fall asleep by you, you tired old maid. I want you to put on the mask of feathers. I want to breathe out the end of this twilight period.

I want to jump the shark & the shark’s old friend, the fossil. I want an earful of apologies & diamond chain.

If these words and grit teeth can get to sleep tonight, I want to cover three city blocks like a shadow.

I want to take you; I want to stop the world to catch your breath. I want to cast away those troubles — clouds of your conscience. I want to crash into these dark thoughts of evening. I want to destroy the shadow. I want to be the shadow & I want to destroy it, with its tired eye for indifference, its locked door, its unfolding sheets & down-turned frames in witness. I want to break down the worn-out black shadows of headboards & ashtrays, your silhouette, your anger, frustrations, your daily works.

If all of this is true, I want to be burnt by your cigarette’s glow. I want the pup’s coddling
& the dog’s bite. I want the spirit of the fight, but not its bloodied nose. I want the carpet’s comfort, but not its placement (beneath you). I want nothing of Earth.

I want to feel each breath in your body & just wait there.

I want to be your skin; I will never touch you. I do not want to be your bedclothes. I do not want to be the waking silence, or question in the night. When I learn our meaning, Sleepless, I will kill the light.

I will be the shadow.
Plate Licking

Jessica T. McNally
University of Pittsburgh
Unborn

Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack
All Dressed in Black Black Black
With Silver Buttons Buttons Buttons
All Down her Back Back Back Back

The handles shift in your sweaty palms. The jump rope wrapped around both hands digs deep into sunburned flesh. Wince, flinch, clench your teeth, but don’t cry. Feel the eyes of your gum chewing, nose-picking audience follow each turn of the rope. They cross their fingers, hoping you won’t make the hundred jumps you promised them. They clutch tight to their nickels, to their cardboard Pogs. Praying they won’t have to give them up.

Their faces start to fade, though, as you keep jumping. Their voices fade too. And it’s just you and the rope, clicking against the hot deck.

18.
19.
20.

Mom’s on the corded phone in the kitchen. Leaning back on her wicker chair, the one with a hole in the seat. Her hand is over her mouth.
She closes her eyes. Listening. Trying not to
gasp, trying not to breathe too loudly.

Are you going to be alright? I'll watch the
house, look after the dog…

A silent moment on the other end. A long,
deep sigh.

No. It’s fine, I’m fine.
58.
59.
60.

Don’t slow down. Stare at the honeysuckle
bush in the back yard, don’t look away. Ignore
your loosening shoelaces, the stream of sweat
tickling your nose. Just listen to the clicks,
to your sneakers thumping against the deck’s
splintered wood. Almost there, almost.

She hangs up the phone. She loops the cord
around her shaky arm. She stops.

It was too late. The umbilical cord had
twisted. Around her tiny neck.
Like the tentacle of an octopus. Like the cord
on the phone. Like the rope in your hand.
93.
94.

Your shoelace unties completely, comes
 undone. The rhythm of your jumps slows as your left sneaker gets looser and looser. You nearly trip. But, you save yourself.

Mom hugs her knees to her chest. She thinks about her kids, her own babies. Wonders what her life would be like without messy rooms, without mud stained shorts. Without the steady tempo of jump ropes.

99.
100.

Collapse onto the deck. Even though it scorches your bare arms, your bare legs. Stare at the sky above you with its clouds shaped like ships and animals. Smile as coins and Pogs and trinkets fall down on you like rain. You can’t wait to tell Mom.

**Door Knob**

The kitchen looks like a place that I’ve never been before. Even though everything is the same, the same as last night.

A few of Mom’s blue dishes rest in the sink, sticky with dried soapsuds that were never rinsed off.
There are four bowls on the table. Empty, except for bits of missed sugar and oats from her homemade peach cobbler.

*Everything is the same except for the door.*

The door that leads to the back deck where Dad goes to smoke. The door is different. It’s missing a knob because he forgot to close it just the right way. Because he slammed it instead of twisting the knob gently, instead of jiggling it three times so it wouldn’t fall off.

*Everything is the same except for the doorknob lying on the floor.*

*Everything is the same except for the streak of dried mud left from Dad’s boots.*

The boots he forgot to take off before coming back from his smoke. The boots he usually takes off real slow, real careful before sneaking back into the kitchen.

Except for the streak of dried mud and the knob on the floor, the kitchen looks exactly the same. But I’ve never been here before. Mom’s not cleaning dishes, Dad’s not cooking Sunday brunch. The walls are quiet, the air is thick.

And there’s a small hole in the door that I can see through to the deck.
Where mom leans against the railing. Smoking one of Dad’s cigarettes.

Forks and Spoons

She pulls the silverware basket from the dishwasher. She separates forks from spoons. Forks and spoons, spoons and forks. They haunt her. At home, at the diner. In her dreams at night. She can’t escape the menacing glint of metallic kitchen utensils.

She pauses. Picks at a grain of rice on a spoon handle with her fingernail. Silverware was once as precious to her as the diamond on her finger. Back when she would help her mother shine forks and spoons before a Thanksgiving meal. These forks and spoons were treasures, and they were gold, not silver. And pulled from the mahogany box in the basement but a few times a year: for holidays, for birthdays, for unexpected funeral luncheons.

She always handled each piece delicately, as if setting the table for a royal feast. At the head would be the king, beside him his queen. She always gave them the shiniest utensils.
The best water glasses. Ones that weren’t streaked with detergent residue or chipped from drunken toasts. She picked the cloth napkins that had the smallest gravy stains, chose the butter plates with identical designs.

Now she stands in her own kitchen. Laying out dinnerware for her husband and kids.

She stands above the small wooden table, hands on hips. Surveying the spread of jelly jar glasses and mismatched plates. Fingering a spoon handle.

Wishing her mother were here with her mahogany box.

*It looks beautiful*, she would say, untying the strings of her bird-patterned apron.

*Fit for a King and Queen.*

**Slivers**

Sit on the counter, next to the coffee maker. Naked feet swinging back and forth. Dirt caked under unpainted toenails.

She drenches a cotton ball in peroxide. Wipes the sewing needle one, two, three times. Blows on it, lightly. Like you blow on your
Spaghetti O’s if they’re too hot.

You turn your head. Bite down on your cherry Popsicle, hard. Your front teeth throb from the shock of the cold ice. Open your mouth and red juice dribbles down the chin, the neck, onto the lone white pocket on your purple shirt. Wipe your chin with a palm that smells like grass. Lick the rest of the juice from your lips, savoring the sweetness, distracted from the sharp pricks in the skin of your heel.

She rinses the needle under the faucet. Sticks it back into its tomato-shaped cushion. Done?

Done.

You hop down from the counter, run towards the screen door. But she grabs your arm. A pair of sandals dangles from her hand.

Roll your eyes. She kisses your forehead, ruffles your uncombed hair.

As soon as your feet hit grass, look over your shoulder. Make sure the doorway is empty. Chuck the sandals behind the pink azalea bush and keep running.
Jelly drops

Once in a while we walk to the library. Scuffing our feet on the uneven sidewalk. Stopping to pick heads-up pennies out of cracks and shallow puddles. Sometimes we find quarters, for laundry. Mom calls them the four leaf clovers of pocket change.

The library is never quiet. Old women huddle around the checkout desk, gossiping.

Did you see her stomach? Did you see his hair?
Did you know the mayor is getting divorced?
Well of course it’s true; I heard it from his wife.

Mom nudges me along, to the Nancy Drew shelf. I gaze up at the rows of bright-colored paperbacks while Mom flips through a gardening magazine. I wonder for the first time about how many books are in the library. When I try to ask the old women, I get shooshed.

At home we stack our books on the table. Drape our coats over chairs and doorknobs.

She stares at me while I eat lunch. Tells me to enjoy being young, tells me that she’d give anything to have a face as buttery as mine again. She makes an extra PB and J on Wonder bread
for herself. I catch her slurping up a drop of grape jelly from her plate. At first she blushes, but then she laughs.

_You only live once, kiddo._
On the Train

Mary K. Carter
Appalachian State
University of Boone
ON THE TRAIN

Once on the 5:40 Amtrak from Houston to Dallas I saw an elderly couple giggling wildly across the aisle.
He twisted the tired sinews of his neck backward. She threw cautious glances over the seat.
His hands, covered hers in trembling adoration—something gold winked impishly.

Five minutes from the station he took a seat three rows ahead.

The train wailed to a halt. She caught me, her eyes glinting powder-blue, under lids delicately creped.

She rose with her weathered leather purse, grinning. He peered anxiously at her, the window, back again.
Plastic crinkled keen, she forced open my palm, a peppermint. She winked and walked briskly away.
Through the window I saw her shuffle into the open arms of a man, woman and child wearing identical beige coats. They held her like a frail gosling.

Farther down the tracks he walked alone, sluggish under some invisible weight. His hand clenching the same secret melting into the silence of my mouth.
MIA
*Hong-Thao Nguyen* • University of Pittsburgh

I took two trains and three buses to Qui Nho’n
To find you myself.
With one gray picture and my fake silk purse,
I tried to close the distance between us,
As if you would be waiting for me
Among the elephant grass.
INFOMERCIAL, AN OVERLY EXCITED ANXIOUS CAR HORN BLARING, WE ARE OFFHANDEDLY ENTRANCED
Evan Chen • University of Pittsburgh

i imagining two more, four more, sixteen more reaching for their handsets, sending signals out towards tightfisted attractive young salesmen, a hello to a hello, an addition of fees, a troubling new figure, an admission of guilt, of loneliness, an offhanded “i am lost,” the shock of spoken truths echoing across the wire, the wire tipping towards the hungry potholes beneath, two hundred and fifty six now at their handsets, it’s getting good now, the blood-luscious blonde pursing her lips open, she’s looking hungry and sixty five thousand five hundred and thirty six are hungry, she’s looking eager and four million two hundred ninety four thousand nine hundred sixty seven are eagerly touching that dial, there, a little lower on the frequency side, and we are all calling now, dialing one eight hundred slogan by brand and mouth by tooth They Are Gracing Our Receivers,
we four million two hundred ninety four thousand nine hundred sixty seven drunk hungry souls calling out in the three thirty six a.m. darkness, indian lads paid thirty cents to the dollar to suck up our emptiness seven thousand nine hundred eighty seven miles away, so far and so dear, so dear and so close, we weep in the night, we buy in the night, we are filled up in the night.
LIKE FOR THE FLOWERS

Rebecca Landau • Virginia Tech

this morning
a stalk of flowers
saved my life

they

were not even lush
petals but dried silhouettes

white shells of what
once held life

but they were
beautiful

and delicate

and i had to stop running
to hold them

to protect them
to carry them
to keep them

and i decided

i’m going to learn to love
my own body

the way i loved
those flowers
quietly
[like listening]
attentively
[like looking]
reverently
[like praying]
Intuitively
[like knowing]
maternally
[like for the flowers]
HE SAW HER TRAPPED IN A HURRICANE
Ben DeMeter • Penn State University

And though the wind,
coyote-roar of oblivion
swung splintered timber
like railroad spikes; his heart
young, clumsy, flickering,
was still fool enough to think
that if it held his lover close,
she could be stayed.
Her rag-doll body kept warm
and breathing.
STAVE

Patrick Allen • University of Pittsburgh

This reputation precedes me,
as poet,
as sound-miner
managing sparks
of howl & echo,
dirges of burning
dirt, drum-thump
in open throat,
old beachhead hum, &
endless music of
mollusk-shells, clacking
under cracked
moon. Curvature
of moan: nervous
wrist tailors
the razored
edges of barrel,
built along the lungs.
Its leak. Its loop.

It speaks. It seeps, as
rust-ringed faucets
left to fill the sinkholes
of sound, when there
is nothing to be found
but silence among the tatters.
HIGHWAY

Marlee Gallagher • University of Pittsburgh

You were looking at my face, or between my movements, my neck. This exchange rate is horrible, she said, and if you don’t mind, drive north until you reach the river, until you reach the bridge, until it takes you to the charming place of torn windows haunted by child ghosts infected with spermicide. She was Christian, without a doubt, holding up a sign on the highway, something about birth and death in one quick motion (and wouldn’t your Buddhist mother be proud?). My only issue is on a shelf beneath the pornos; the fact that she spelled “America” wrong is detrimental to my recognition of Good Country People; listen lady, this life was not my choice. I take a short breath, I count to one because I can stand it. If
I don’t call you “lady,” then you never exist. Zachary’s advice is sound, but I can’t stop taking note of burned houses on the side of the road, or broken branches that root on my insides and become giants. Would you believe in “she was once a brush on your shoulder” and me “everything”? This emotion is a cracker I’ve steadily nibbled. Take this test, for example, all it proves is that I can’t mass produce, and, anyhow, who would want to? You see, antiquity is charming as I’m crushing crumbs under this keyboard; as I’m melting our productions on the racks of a dishwasher falls out of the wall again and again. I kick the smell of Styrofoam, I’m admirable of a cancer opening itself in my heart like a novel. And you had better be proud of the hole you put in our wall, bits of lead floated out like how I imagined this dust storm to look.
**The Walk Uphill**

*Isaac Hill* • University of Pittsburgh

hard, I'd guess. With the trees
moving, not
with the wind.
In front of behind each

blackberry branches  tassels
streak, whips
each leg
finger, not towards

34 the sky, towards your
leg. And your back
green  blue white gray
dark gray

But the sky, it must
have been hard to look
at the  and flowers
gold and red blooming into

the horizon and horizons
slivers there and
here you see that?
of behind. You step
As soft as beets in some brown dresser drawer

the rocks, humus and dead things
the sound of
being
spoken to the nettles
Sitting in a coffee shop writing to you with peppermint on the tip of my tongue, coco drips forming in the back of my throat, there’s a man I’m looking at, Julia, and he’s got muscles on the outside of his arms. The women, who look like round men, are making him lift boxes off high shelves while his pants look a little bit too high too tight too up in the wrong direction. They talk in high pitched voices and wear green aprons while the man wears red and has a beard similar to the man I’m in love with who’s currently on a North West flight to Los Angeles.

Julia, I’m wearing your sweater again. I’m freezing, and I have nothing else covering my skin but gray boots and black tights. I’m so sick of craving sugar and dirt, paying eight ninety nine for a pack of twelve condoms, finding ways to talk in your eyes, picking out scented tubed soaps to wash my small body, figuring out where your Christmas tree will go in your house this year with your chair gone.
She
Christina Beasley • Sarah Lawrence College

She has this big city of a sweltering sadness that breathes like a radiator and gasps like hot water from the pipe. I want to tell her that she has the girl irony of two poorly balanced stilettos, that the way to break a wishbone is not by catching the whole damn chicken between your two front teeth, but the whys roar and her boughs slouch doused in chicken-scratch silences.

I want to tell her that I love her but her Picasso-toes leer at me from beneath her skirt and lord knows I’ve never forgiven inattention to detail, Lord knows most of all. I wish I could knit myself between her fingers like how a spider weaves its feast if only her lips did not purse so ineloquently, if only her knuckles would not trip atop and under themselves at the sight of my palms.

She asks me what you call that stuff that collects in the corners of your eyes upon waking, and I want to say contradictions, they are abrasive enough.

Sometimes, when I pick the lint from her sweater with the intricacy of hanging a Christmas ornament she closes her eyes
and forgets. She opens her arms wide across the doorway and owns something. It is only enough to keep me when she looks softly and asks, delicate as wet concrete, how exactly one learns to swear in another language, she means really swear, she means say words that should never be said.
ON A PLAYGROUND IN TURKEY
John Gosslee • Liberty University

Leaves fell and the children made little piles. One boy executed others with an orange pistol, but took some prisoners.

Handfuls of leaves were grenades spending golden shrapnel, children yelled from branches: bombers dispersing payloads of laughter. Small voices pleaded with us to launch them, we being carriers.

A boy heaped explosions of leaves in the air and laying down requested burial. We shoveled leaves and commenced rights, he reached out and grabbed her hand.
ANNA RASSHIVKINA
SARAH IVINS
Sarah Ivins
Staff Submissions
I hold shotguns; and buckshot, lilacs; 
and I hold gypsum, oxygen, Godel’s 
Incompleteness Theorem; golden 
geese laying golden eggs; and 
chloride; I hold guanacos, cardboard 
cutouts, and grunting pigs; the National 
Guard; I hold the near invisible lines 
on graph paper; I hold grasshoppers; 
glucose, grammar, glow worms, germs, 
gangs, fungi; I hold solitude, urine, 
Guantanamo Bay; tall grass, grasslands, 
grass-of-Parnassus, grass snakes, grass cutters, 
grass plot, grass roots movements, grasseries; 
I hold alligators, gentrification; and frogs, 
genes, dandelion seeds; I hold hoarfrost, 
geography, gimmicks, Gila 
monsters; I hold gelatine, GI 
Joes, Papa New Guinea, Gregorian 
calendars; I hold genocide, bacteria; I hold 
green house gasses, guns, finches; 
and gorges, Bhagavad-Gita, and gulags
We questioned everything. Got nowhere. 
Clouds rewound quickly 
Within an iron cage. Inexhaustible 
Pupil vacant iris. We arriving singing 
Forgot the words. So I bought a frame 
Hoping it would remember to be still.
When did the spine of this alabastrine hand endeavor to redefine itself as so pathetically delicate? These ribbon wrists were once as worn as an ape child’s, these palms and knees scraped the fuller hue of weeping fruit.

Before I exhausted that patience and primal coordination to stalk the drove of cherrywood chairs from under dining table, I knew the pride that came with gnawing on their gazellian legs.

Arms tied to my sides with the belt of my bathrobe, rose tongue flicking over baby fangs: there was power in the limbless form, in curling around my grounded prey and crushing it so closely.

And how my sisters and I wooed one another like frantic birds and cast our lightweight bodies from the sofa’s arms, confident
in cotton wings fashioned
from the pillow shams—
where did that feral elegance go
when this bipedal blueprint
remapped my anatomy, the twisted
asterisk bidding the embarrassment
of no clothes? This motion is unnatural
and clumsy; the walk of the sally crab
was less awkward. This is what I chase
beneath the pomegranate sheets:
the phantom habits of animals buried
by the steady floods of flesh,
like fossils under sand.