

# **Central Review**

## **Volume 21**

Cover Art: “Woman on a Bicycle” Michael Ritchings  
Cover Design: Liv O’Toole

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*Central Review* thrives thanks to the generosity of our supporters. We are especially grateful to Sandra Seaton, whose contribution to this issue reminds us that creative work matters—and deserves champions.

Want to become a part of our story? Reach out about donating or supporting our next issue.

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## Letters From the Editors

Dear Readers,

This fall, *Central Review*'s members have put together what is perhaps our best magazine yet. Within its pages rest your hopes, fears, dreams, and losses. It is a capsule, an artifact, a tangible stoppage in space and time that we can return to whenever. How lucky.

How lucky I am to be able to work alongside Brenna to cobble together something to put in the hands of the people who are inspired by what we do. How lucky we both were, because this year, we received more submissions than ever before.

To our contributors, thank you, infinitely, thank you, for trusting us with your work and for allowing *Central Review* to be a home for it. Thank you to our staff, who treat every piece they consider with the utmost care and respect for what it is: a fractal of someone's soul. Thank you to Professors Bean and Roberson for continually wading with us through the murky waters of printing.

Thank you, perhaps most of all, to everyone who submitted, regardless of whether we were able to feature your work in *Volume 21*. It is no small thing to send your work anywhere, invite other eyes upon it. We see that trust. That vulnerability. That bravery. So, thank you.

And to our readers, without whom our tree falling in the forest would have no sound. Thanks to you, it roars.

Please enjoy *Central Review: Volume 21*. It belongs to you now.

Yours,  
Liv O'Toole

Dear Reader,

With the end of the fall semester comes a new volume of *Central Review*. I cannot express the joy this volume brings me. This semester, *Central Review* saw a growth in our staff, the number of submissions, and the variety of genres we received. The result is a mere sample of the abundantly creative work being crafted by CMU's student body.

To each creative who submitted their work, thank you for doing us the kindness of getting to experience it. Not being able to publish every submission we receive is the hardest part of this process.

To our staff, thank you for navigating an ever-growing magazine with ever-growing ambitions. Every aspect of this endeavor shines because of your effort and enthusiasm.

To Professor Bean, thank you for your unending light and guidance, which inspires us volume after volume. To Professor Roberson, thank you for teaching us about publishing and making our dream of physically printing the magazine come true.

To my partner in this, Liv, I feel so lucky to share this experience with you. You have taught me so much in these three volumes we have made together, and though it is bittersweet, I can't wait to see what our final volume together will look like this spring.

Finally, to the reader. What you currently hold in your hands or view on a screen is special. It is playful and heartfelt and may induce tears and laughter. Thank you for reading it. Thank you for allowing this magazine to move you.

May *Central Review: Volume 21* resonate with you.

All my love,  
Brenna Dean

## The Staff

*Immense gratitude is owed to every person who works tirelessly to pull *Central Review* from the marble. Especially our staff for the Fall 2025 edition:*

Ashley Ford

Isabel Bronka

Luciana Alvarado Reid

Mia Bommarito

Josie Izydorek

Sophia Stevens

Sarah Kusky

Samantha Dave

Corey Hogue

Cailey Calhoun

Bri Edgar

Eden Phillips

Autumn Malinowski

Beth Holloway

Hope Hoffman

## **Depths of a River**

**by Robert Thompson**

On the surface, I run smooth and clean.  
A perfect mirror, showing you all you want to see  
Plants can take to me, those whose roots run deep  
Fish are strong enough to defy the current just below.  
To most they say how calm I must be, judged by reflection  
But wade in, and you'll feel me completely.

The mirror that I am is false, my skin is thin.  
My current cuts unseen the silt and sand without heed,  
Carrying the banks away, carving new scars.  
The truth lies in the water that runs deeper still.  
At the surface, I run smooth and clean,  
But I will only show you what you want to see.

## mayflies

by Samantha Dave

what he kissed in me was no meteor or shining pardon  
but a thousand mayflies rising from the lake  
of my body, the valley between my shoulder blades  
there's something delicate about the way they flutter  
their wings like the vibrating strings in a symphony  
what I once found appalling until you  
reached in and brought them out of me  
years of bruised knuckles washed  
in the shadow of the swarm, laughing  
at the way I called them fishflies  
when you grabbed one off the lamppost  
you let them land on your palm  
saying you feel honored they chose you  
knowing that they won't make it to tomorrow

## 5:59 a.m.

by Mak Brouhard

I keep forgetting what I'm doing in the middle of doing it. Keep walking into a room only to go in circles confused. Boxes are half-packed. An old sweater is evidence in a case I can't close. Smells like spring sweat and laundry detergent and nights I didn't cry. Smells like someone else's life. I fold it, I unfold it. Sit on the floor and let the carpet burn into my skin until I remember who I am, what I am doing. I made a home here. Multiplying myself by one; I'm the exact same number but a process has occurred.

Moving in for the summer. To the house with the hole in the door and the woman with the tongue of a snake. The walls listen. Time has passed and new people love me.

I want to be a lighthouse. A warning and a welcome. I know existence is temporary. That yours is temporary. I miss you.

I quit smoking two weeks ago. But the craving still curls in my throat like something half-alive. My lungs taste like promises I don't want to make, I can't keep. A ritual, in lullaby. Warning signs I keep ignoring. A ghosted friend, it's waiting for you to come back home. Maybe healing isn't healing, maybe you just learn to carry your rot more quietly. You are not who you were last November. You're safe; it's only change.

You walk through the world reading patterns like omens. Separate harm from hurt, sickness from survival. Studying monsters or trying to understand your parents. I'm both the predator and the prey, I'll catch myself then

eat myself whole.

I'm nineteen. Which means I know everything and nothing at the same time; an apology, an excuse. The universe is an ongoing explosion. That's where you live. In an explosion. We absolutely don't know what living is. Sometimes atoms just get very haunted. That's us. We're dust that woke up and started thinking about itself. And writes about it too, apparently.

Sometimes I lie to my therapist because I don't want her to think it's getting bad again. Sometimes I cry while doing the dishes because the clinks means someone is throwing them. My ribs are setting wrong in my body. How did that sweet little girl turn into this horrid creature? Everything is better when it's private.

In the middle of becoming. I keep dreaming about the idea of home. Blankets and fairy lights and Spotify rain playlists and the soft. There's something soft in me that refuses to die. It is almost time that I change shape again. It's out of my control.

I don't mind the walk.

It's summer and I'm getting better. Hopefully. Hopefully. Hopefully.

Dandelions are starting to swell at my feet, seas going over hills. I've missed the yellow. The wishes of childhood. Where had it been all this time?

## pale beauty

by Cailey Calhoun

i adopted slugs when i was young,  
making pets of storm runoff.  
i trotted into the backyard  
with gerber jars in hand,  
homes meant for fireflies  
now filled with sticky creatures,  
trinkets of mush and slime  
fed them moss and dirt,  
caring for my khaki companions.

my mother bought me a butterfly kit  
the summer after that  
to raise more delicate delights.  
but the impeccably patterned monarchs  
bored me  
they were too predictable,  
spinning bright green cocoons,  
traveling so many miles just to die.

long after my monarchs took flight,  
wings shriveled and faded,  
i'm still drawn to pale types of beauty  
slugs over lightning bugs.  
moths more than butterflies.  
stark white against the house lights  
and my watercolor solitude.

## night hunt

by Madilyn Sun

she comes in the night        my pearl  
ghost        little more than a whisper  
of leftover moonlight        she dances  
on a nearby roof        slivers of silver  
echoes trail my silken girl

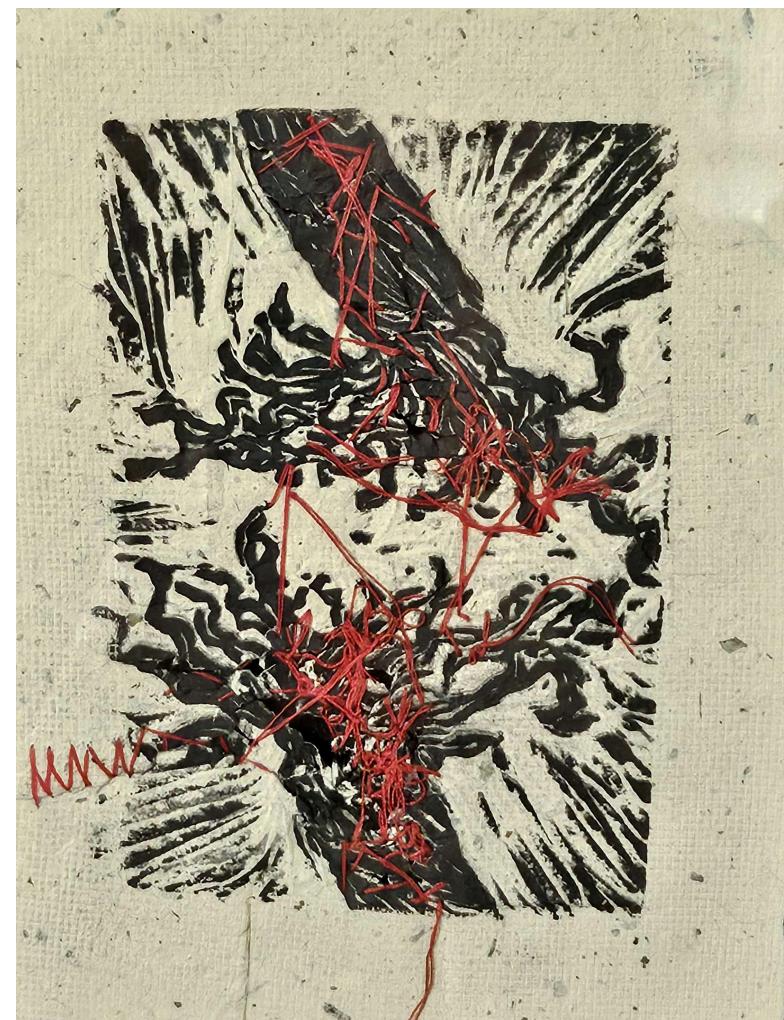
my face pressed against night's shaded glass  
i cannot help but think her  
a witch        i grow more sure with every twirl  
of her dress winding me tighter and tighter  
even as i fight the urge        i must end this impasse

i leave my post with a hunger to burn  
through her white dress        and leave sun blisters  
on her soles        i dream of the day she collapses  
when i rise to meet her her face flickers  
grey behind gliding inked curls

and loses its sheen        i block her path  
itching with the desire to still her  
no longer        will i suffer the ruinous thirst  
of watching her feet        in thin little slippers  
i will end this hunt free from my trance

## No, It's Okay, I Can Fix This, Please

by Mia Petoskey



# I'm Sorry to Leave So Suddenly

by Azel Wingard

I can't help but write back  
like loose leaf letters,  
so I apologize  
that months could go by  
before we truly speak again—  
those shared words  
with no digital feedback.

My calendars  
act as ignored alarms:  
every passing day,  
passing clock,  
asking for five more minutes,  
five more days,  
with my soon to end  
peace of mind.  
What solace is there  
in unwanted solitude—  
separation  
from the soft lights  
that eased my sleep  
through many seasons?

Michigan's April showers  
are never ending,  
but only through flooding puddles,  
just as hesitant

to leave familiar ground  
as I.

My mind reflects back at me  
as cupped hands create  
slits to see watery surfaces.  
Shimmering like precious stones  
are images of  
your cradled bodies  
in my arms—  
a cherished memory  
as you become  
blankets cuddled tight  
in uneasy new environments.

The onslaught of May  
raised risks  
I'm still not ready to take  
without the right people  
by my side.  
A type of silence accented by you—  
to find comfort without  
a voice to speak with.  
Lackluster friendships will  
always be absent of  
your warmth—how  
acclimated I had become.  
Jade drinks  
and jaded comments  
never disrupted difficult words  
as they fell on open ears—  
you aid more than memory shows.  
A presence to walk with:  
darkening days diluted with  
every step away from  
lingering grief—

life within laces  
always running into our future.

Time moves against every notion:  
accordingly, I'll pack my bags as I  
lay my head to rest  
in order to prevent  
years of instability  
and separation from reality—  
hurtful it is to leave you behind.

I'm sorry to leave so suddenly,  
but the next step  
asks me to admire from afar,  
watch your media full of success,  
and wait patiently  
for random calls and texts  
when I feel far too separated  
to make contact on my own.  
Overzealous am I  
to hear how grateful  
you are with your new  
findings and friendships,  
new passions and lovers,  
paths you'll learn to walk  
without me.

I'm sorry to leave so suddenly  
even though my long reach  
cannot fully grasp  
the idea of  
space without you yet—  
I don't think I will  
until my bags are unpacked,  
and clothes

I thought you'd steal  
are placed in new drawers.  
The distance between  
will feel like  
time zones apart,  
but I know time will also heal  
as lunch hours align  
for short phone calls  
I'll take from  
new coffee shops  
to show off new drinks.

I'm sorry to leave you so suddenly.  
Just know  
you'll never be apart  
from the bond we created.  
Whether you find me or not,  
I'll be there  
for every moment I can  
and every moment you ask of me.  
I love you.

# Golf with God

by Helen VanSumeren

My uncle died today. I knew it was coming; everyone did. He'd been on hospice for just over a week before he was gone. But even then, he wasn't really *there* in that last week. The people who visited him all told me it was time. That he was suffering.

In my family, there's this belief that our loved ones are all together, playing golf with God. Like He's an old friend, and they're still enjoying hot summer days and cheap beer. When my mom used to talk about it when I was younger, it made perfect sense. Those moments were my grandpa's favorites, so why wouldn't that be what his death was like? A happy moment that stretches on. An ending, but never really *over*.

When my mom was telling me about it over the phone today, though, it sounded strange. A story she was trying to convince herself of as much as she was trying to convince me. My mother is rarely sad. She hates it. She'd rather be angry than sad, because at least with anger, you can direct it, place it somewhere. But her sadness? She never really learned how to deal with it. It debilitates her, scares her.

When I heard her voice break on the phone, I heard her twelve-year-old self for a moment all torn and small. So scared, confused, and hurt. It's a reminder that she's her own creature, someone just as painfully human and scared as the rest of us.

I'm not good at being angry. My rage doesn't boil; it

simmers and spills out through my eyes. I wouldn't choose to cry, if I could; I'd rather be angry. I don't know how to be angry, though. All I know is how to find my own hurt and sit with it. The last three years have held more hurt than I've been able to carry, and it's not over yet.

I know that one day, sooner than I'd like to imagine, I'll continue to lose more and more. My grandparents are in their 80s, my parents in their 50s. My cousin is getting married and joining a new family.

One day, it'll be my parents who are gone. Their photos will be in the obituary, posted on my cousin's Facebook. I'll be the one on the phone, voice cracking, trying to convince someone on the other end that they're just waiting for us—that they're still drinking cheap beer and playing golf with God.

When I think about it too long or too much, a silent prayer begins to form in my mind. I pray that I go first. That I won't be the one left behind, trying to make up stories, comfort others while carrying the weight of my own loss.

# Two Women Waltzing

by Jessica Reinhart

(Based on ‘At The Moulin Rouge: Two Women Waltzing’ by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec)

I.

One two three, one two three,  
one two three, one two three,  
Softly the music plays,  
gently those women sway.  
Hands on their shoulders, they  
dance arm in arm, one says,  
“Stay with me, please.” “Always.”

II.

One two three, one two three, one  
two three, one two three, one  
dame behind them peaks, asks,  
“Johnny dear, which one leads?”  
The man shakes his head, “Don’t  
ask, it’s shameful to speak  
of degenerates, wife.”  
So she closes her mouth,  
understanding no one.

III.

Two three, one two three, one two  
three, one two three, one two  
more women around them

are waltzing alone. They  
are dressed in their reds and  
their whites. Feet apart, their  
eyes meet, and they blush but  
don’t touch, though they wish to.

IV.

Three, one two three, one two three,  
One two three, one two three  
pairs on the dance floor were  
waltzing, yet only one  
stayed that way. Fearless, they  
closed their eyes, petticoats  
brushing, and when the night  
ends, they’ll keep beat with their  
pride in their love’s steady:  
one two three, one two three,  
one two three, one

## What I Saw at the Beach

by Dominic Tatrai

There was this turtle, see, or it may have been a tortoise, or it may have been a green bucket lodged in the sand, or it may have been a sandcastle covered in seaweed, or it may have been a buried head with emerald hair, or it may have been the missing link with a running nose, or it may have been an anthropomorphic nose crying over lost love, or it may have been the shadow of my ex-wife crying acid tears, or it may have been my childhood dreams choking on a Christmas wreath, or it may have been my far-off hometown drowning in spring's mean green, or it may have been a close-up of my own envious eyes, or it may have been a turtle. Whatever it was, I ate it.

## Neon Island

by Afthab Nihar

“Oh, like the cosmos?” I asked, as I read “Cozmo” on her name tag.

“Yep,” came a response from the other end of space.

It was cold, and my fingers were getting chilly. The smoke from her vape lingered between us and mediated our conversation. A lonely gas station in the middle of nothing. A neon island in a black ocean. A blue nebula that sold Cheetos for a dollar less than Walmart. You could get cheap drinks and bad coffee here. And Cozmo beside me was the only keeper of this paradise. Which of course meant she had to take multiple trips to throw the trash away—armored in neon yellow jackets—and re-arrange the items in the aisles that careless customers discarded when they changed their mind about them. She also had to clean the store and restock the inventory before 6 a.m.

I don’t know why I decided to take a long walk at 3 in the morning. I set forth on my journey with Google Maps in my hand; I would be lost otherwise. It’s funny that no matter how perfectly you try to navigate your life, you will still stumble upon people and things you never thought you would.

She had blue-streaked hair and yellow-stained teeth. A smile that moved to one end of her face before she answered a question, as if her entire being was contemplating the answer. She approached every question like that, and the whole of creation lingered for an answer.

“My hair has been every color there is,” she said when I said I liked the streaks.

It was a humble attempt at a compliment. Like a shooting star admiring a planet it came across.

“So, you don’t smoke cigarettes?” I asked.

“Nah, just vapes and energy drinks, that’s me.”

“I see.”

“What’s your name?” She obliged.

“Afthab. It means rising sun, or something like that.”

“Uh-huh,” she validated.

She was nothing and something at once, like her name itself. Nothing to take too seriously, but of definite significance. Nothing you could fully grasp if you tried, but understood if you would let go. An essence that was hard to put into words. Easy to know but hard to comprehend. She herself looked like she had drifted away in space. We stared into nothingness and watched people fill gas and drive away like celestial bodies passing by.

“Are you Bi? Because most of my Bi friends keep changing the color of their hair.”

“I fuck everything,” she smirked.

“Oh... okay, okay,” I tried to act cool.

“Yeah, there are so many kinds these days, I honestly get confused. I don’t quite know what I am.”

“That’s alright. You’ll get there,” I breathed under the wisps of steam from my coffee.

“Yeah, my boyfriend is the most feminine-looking guy ever. He’s got long hair too.”

“Cool,” I tried to paint a mental image of the guy.

“What’s the craziest thing you’ve ever done?” I asked, putting my fingers in my pockets as the Michigan wind blew on us cruelly.

“Me and my friends stole 35 dollars’ worth of pumpkins in a day.”

“Seriously? You could have told me any story in the

world, and you chose to go with pumpkins? No one even likes pumpkins. Did they even notice it was gone?”

She chuckled. Eyes closed.

“Okay, this one time I went missing from home for a whole week, stayed with a friend until my parents reported it to the authorities and found me. Was grounded for an entire year.”

“Why, though?”

“I had a... funny childhood,” Cozmo’s eyes winced. “But it happens, some people don’t have good childhoods, and it’s fine,” she retaliated.

“Yeah. Sorry about that, though.”

“It’s alright. How do you like this country so far?”

“I like it. You can be anything you want, and nobody gives a shit.”

“NOBODY gives a shit,” she echoed.

“Yeah... I gotta go now, this was fun. I probably won’t see you again,” I laughed.

“Yeah. It was great meeting you.” We shook our hands and parted.

A fleeting conversation, somewhere in time and space.

# The Final Meeting

by Sophie Pettinger

*Based on the painting “Hellelil and Hildebrand, the Meeting on the Turret Stairs” by Frederic William*

Wait for me, I beg of you, please wait for me.  
Please, please, please,  
my voice a hoarse whisper as I grasp the cool, silver  
metal that separates his flesh from mine.  
Our tears are as silent as the stars,  
and sting as if they are made of fire.

It is forbidden, they tell us, for us to be one,  
for us to love, for us to even be seen in this damp, desolate staircase.  
We embrace, holding on to this solemn moment of time,  
begging for it to cease.  
Crying out to the stone walls to seal us off  
from the world, as I whisper  
stay here forever with me.

I can see the sadness in his eyes,  
that creeping feeling killing the light that once lived there.  
Silently telling me that our time is up,  
as he places one final kiss on my trembling hand.  
Telling me for the final time, that he loves me,  
And always will, as he quietly leaves me.

My salty tears fill my mouth,

drowning me in my grief, silently sobbing as the  
clank of his armor becomes softer. This was just a  
fairy tale, a fantasy.  
A secret that will forever stay within  
the damp smell of the stairs,  
as I am to be married tomorrow.

## **fact about the ranger**

**by June Maslowski**



the ranger slings his peppery musket over his shoulder, drags the crooked leg of a giant beast behind him. his hound snorts, says something like you've really done it this time. the ranger always hates how his hound hounds him, but he knows how to follow, how to sniff and lick his face just the right amount, so he keeps him by his side. his hound, though disputed by the church, is a good hound. somewhere just outside the forest, a mourning dove crashes into the gleaming cathedral windows, falls to the ground, dead. the priest sees this as an augury. he starts building a vineyard. miles away, surrounded by leaf litter married with the dirt, the ranger thinks of his wife and how he doesn't have one, how one doesn't have him. all he has is his musket, his hound, the beast's leg, his legs.

## **Dichotomy of a Creative 4**

**by Jo Kenoshmeg**

## Dandelions

by Katherine Foote

Little yellow flowers  
Poking through the grass  
Inevitably mowed down  
When the grass gets too tall  
But we don't have to worry about that  
Right now  
The yellow will shrivel  
Return to the bud only to bloom  
Again this time white  
And the fuzzy seeds  
Will drift away on the wind  
To find somewhere else  
To start over again.

## Muggy August Nights

by Rowan Schachermeyer

You dream of the days where I bite and nip at exposed skin,  
flushing your cheeks and nose  
and sending plumes of breath from parted lips,  
where a simple brush of my cold fingers  
sends goosebumps up your spine.

Now, though,  
I slink hot and humid in your window,  
laying beside you,  
wrapping around you  
as you writhe, trying in vain  
to escape my hot breath  
down your neck.

You lay there,  
every inch bared to me,  
blankets kicked to the floor  
and sweat slipping down your nape  
as you beg for reprieve,  
for me to disappear until the sun  
finally settles,  
when my hot, harsh hands become gentle,  
wicking sweat from your brow,  
no longer that too-warm bedmate  
but that soothing lover.

# I Could See Myself Clearly

by Maxwell Maksymowski

Bobbie can't remember how he ended up here.

In a general sense, of course, he knows that he and his half-sister Faith worked incredibly hard to repair their once fractured relationship. It wasn't perfect, because life isn't that simple, but they had most of their puzzle complete. It was usually fine, but once in a while he'd step onto a piece that was missing, and plunge into the cold dark unknown of Faith hating him again. But these days, those missing pieces were few and far between.

In a less metaphoric sense, he doesn't remember how he ended up sitting on the floor of Faith's bedroom while she paces back and forth, ranting like her life depends on it.

It's not that Bobbie is uninterested in what Faith is saying, it's just that he knows exactly how this rant ends, and he's had the same bit of advice saved up for four years. He stands up and starts wandering around the room, careful to stay out of Faith's war path. He is also subtly moving to the far end of the room, so if something does go flying, he'll have more time to react. The odds of having something thrown at him at any given time are low, but never zero.

It just so happens that also at this end of the room is Faith's closet. The door is open, and on the inside is a full length mirror. Bobbie smiles and his reflection smiles back. That's always a good thing.

He's not sure what comes over him, but really, if Faith didn't want him snooping around, she would've yelled at him already, so she's basically telling him it's okay. He

peeks around, and there's all of the usual things that are in closets. Clothes, bedding, and the like.

Near the front are the clothes that Bobbie recognizes. The shirts, pants, dresses, skirts that Faith wears frequently. Nothing incriminating. No skeletons just yet.

The rhythmic walking ceases behind him, and he turns around to see Faith stopped in the middle of the room with her hands on her hips.

"...and I just don't know what to do." she finishes.

Bobbie opens his mouth, his glaringly obvious solution on the tip of his tongue.

"And another thing!" Faith un-finishes, and Bobbie closes his mouth again. His professional opinion can wait until she's ready. In the meantime...

Near the back of the closet are a bunch of clothes that Bobbie doesn't remember Faith ever wearing. One of them catches his eye. It's a dark green skirt that has a floral pattern decorating the ends. He pulls it out and faces the mirror once more. Bobbie holds the skirt up to his waist.

And... huh.

It looks nice. It looks right. The green works well with his eyes. The length is strange, and it reaches his ankles. He's never seen Faith wear something so modest. It's not her style at all. His style, however...

Faith appears in the mirror behind him, fingers digging into her own waist. "...well?"

Bobbie turns around, skirt still in hand. This is the moment he's been waiting for. He pauses, waiting for the metaphorical dust to settle from Faith's pacing before saying, "Dump him."

"Ha! As if it were that easy."

"Sometimes things are 'that easy,'" Bobbie shrugs.

"Says the queen of overcomplicating things."

Bobbie rolls his eyes because she's sort of right. He is the one who clawed at their shared mother after learning

of her betrayal five or so years ago. But he's not the one dating a man just because she feels like she should, so who's the real loser? He moves to hang the skirt back up when Faith says, "Go try it on."

Bobbie freezes, "what?"

"You know where the bathroom is," Faith says, gesturing towards the door.

He narrows his eyes, staring at Faith's face. It is, as usual, void of any sort of emotion or sign that she's being sarcastic or in any way not dead serious. You'd think that after everything they'd been through Bobbie would be able to read something from her face. You'd be wrong.

The metal part of the hanger digs into Bobbie's palm. He doesn't want to get this wrong. He doesn't want to take a plunge off of the puzzle.

Faith sighs, like Bobbie is the one being unreasonable, "My grandmother would wear that skirt. I'm not going to. Go try it on."

She ushers Bobbie out of her room before he can argue. Not that he would've argued, but he would've liked the chance to.

The bathroom light is dim, and the bulb flickers when he flips the switch. Bobbie carefully does not look at himself in the mirror as he changes into the skirt. The fabric is soft against his legs and there's a lot of airflow that he's not used to.

Bobbie typically wears the most durable clothes he can find. Patched jeans, ripped jackets, old band t-shirts that have been through war, exactly what you would expect a teenaged drummer to wear. The skirt, however, is delicate. Fragile.

The mirror over the sink is too high up to see the skirt at all. The only full length mirror is the one in Faith's closet. Bobbie anxiously rests his hands on his hips, debating if he really cares enough to walk back to Faith's room in a

skirt, just to see what he looks like.

It's not that he's scared of Faith. Because he's not. He's actually incredibly brave, thank you very much. It's just that he's never quite gotten over that time Faith held his head in a toilet bowl and he was so sure he was going to drown. He had choked down toilet water in his mouth and his nose. It encroached into his throat and his lungs. He was certain he was going to die. He didn't, of course; Faith wouldn't outright kill him, but that sort of uncertainty doesn't go away.

So what if he's a little scared?

He opens the bathroom door and begins the treacherous journey back. Bobbie steps into the doorway, and sees Faith with her hands on her hips, staring at a small pile of skirts she's made on her bed. Her eyes immediately flick down to his newly acquired accoutrement.

Bobbie very confidently moves past her and to the mirror.

He's not cliche enough to say that it's life-changing. Because it's not. It's a piece of clothing, one that is owned by his incredibly hateful, incredibly complicated half-sister. But Bobbie would be lying if he said it doesn't make him happy.

Bobbie shifts his hips slightly and watches as the fabric cascades from the movement. He grabs the side of the skirt and swooshes it. There's a giddy, bubbly feeling building in his chest, and he wants to laugh.

But he doesn't, because that would be showing vulnerability and he's not going to let Faith tear into his very fragile insides. He wants to be sure of how he looks. He wants to wear more skirts. He wants to keep wearing this skirt.

And above all, he wants his older sister to like him. But she's as unreadable as ever as she hovers behind him in the mirror.

He hates that everything is easy for her. Then he

hates himself for thinking that because he knows that's not true. And then he hates their mother, and then society, just because.

Bobbie's been staring at himself blankly for too long, he realizes. Faith gestures for him to speak, and something clicks in his mind, four years too late.

She's waiting for his reaction to respond. And since Bobbie's not reacting she's not reacting and it's a feedback loop of professional neutrality. It's going to go round and round until the world ends or one of them passes out, whichever happens first. Probably the world ending.

The realization then comes with two options:

Option one is to play it safe. To shrug it off and say that it's whatever. He'll change back out of the skirt and put it back in the dark recesses of Faith's closet to never see the light of day again. No one's toes get stepped on, and no one's heart gets stomped on.

Option two is to be honest. To say that it looks great and he likes it and please Faith don't be an asshole about it. But that has the horrifying possibility of Faith laughing at him. She could tear down any sort of joy the fashion statement has inspired and spit on it and Bobbie wouldn't do anything about it because he's a man wearing a skirt and the little voice at the back of his mind is reminding him that skirts are for girls. But they've gotten better. They're friends. The risk is small.

And Bobbie's never been one to play it safe.

He swishes the skirt one more time for good measure and allows the smile that he's been suppressing to take over. "I like it."

Faith nods sagely, still no emotion on her face. She moves from standing by Bobbie to her bed, where the stack of other clothing items lay. "Good. You can have these, too."

"Well- uh- what do you think?" Bobbie sputters.

Faith gives him a once over. She thinks for a moment.

Then another moment. "It's not the worst thing I've seen you wear," she admits. "But you look happy."

And maybe that's something. Maybe that's all that matters. Maybe that's another missing puzzle piece snapping into place.

# tailspin

## By Gwendolyn Kilpatrick

george tells me i'm not in a tailspin  
 that it happens to girls my age  
 with our intense mascara and smudged personalities  
 he wraps two skinny limbs around me  
 trying, i'm sure, to enlarge them  
 and pretends to care about my head  
 while i pretend to believe what he says

i have not been out partying enough  
 to be honest with you  
 twice a week is over one hundred times a year  
 minus christmas, birthdays, sick days  
 and those days when your friend gets so drunk off shit vodka he pukes  
 the lame girls stay inside for the night  
 so i go out

in the purple haze of the club  
 i can yell *this song is so fucking shit*  
 so my friend can yell back *yeah, but it's a vibe*  
 and then i don't have to think about assignments or responsibilities  
 or the fact that, at the end of the day, i am wholly unloveable  
 because everyone is loveable at night  
 even the ugly girls can get kissed  
 even the ones like me

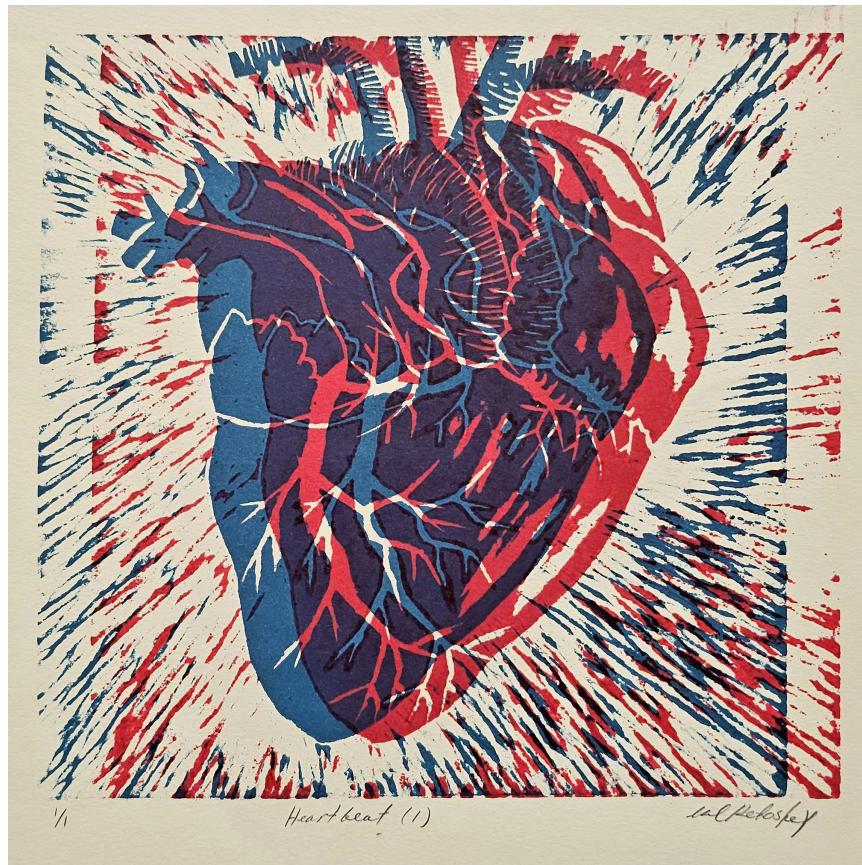
george doesn't like it when i go out  
 so i try to watch his features when i tell him

as they deflate like a balloon  
 and i imagine his eyes and skin in a puddle on the floor  
 and laugh

what could he know  
 about femininity? desire? ego?  
 or the fact that maybe i am tailspinning  
 hurtling towards the cold, heavy earth  
 where men are encased in the soil  
 and girls my age sink further in  
 throats coated with dirt

## Heartbeat

by Mia Petoskey



## You were taught to forgive with a knife—

by Eden Phillips

to press the blade to the hollow of your throat and *carve*. Carve until you find it, the resentment. It will smell like tobacco and feel like going to bed hungry. Place it on the finest dish you own and serve it with gaudy silver cutlery. Your blood will spill from their lips on to their bellies—bulging with the richness of your anger. Watch them gorge themselves on it, on you. If you run out of anger, feed them your will, your spirit, the meaty part of your thighs, and your delicate eyes. They are scavengers, picking your body clean, and you are a generous host.

*Forgive your abusers.*

*Forgive your oppressors.*

*Forgive the nameless monsters  
that ate away at your girlhood and youth.*

*Forgive them by gutting yourself.*

*Let them become satiated; become empty.*

## becoming a tar pit

by Louis Keebler

the past thickens as it spirals  
around itself in your memory,  
encasing enemies and lovers  
in oozing, black tar

one day to fossilize,  
only their impression  
on you.

everyone you once knew  
and will know will become  
a mess of black and amber  
intertwined with one another,

intertwined with you.  
this museum of figures  
becomes you,  
at least  
a part of you.

## Confessions of a Twenty-One Year Old Teenager

by Marissa Cipriani

*With lines borrowed from "I am a Cento" by Beth Holloway*

I am a good person but also sort of terrible. &  
sometimes I love everyone & sometimes I love no one. &  
both versions are true at the very same time like quantum  
physics or like how light is both particles & waves depending on  
who's paying attention. My therapist says I have abandonment  
issues but what she means is I abandoned myself first so  
now I'm just finishing what I started. I don't know how I  
stay awake for so long. Brew another pot of coffee while the  
laundry sits wet in the machine, growing mildew. Somewhere  
inside the anatomy of my wanting, a wire. A terrible hunger  
that eats & eats & eats & never gets full.

My therapist says I think too much about death,  
but I think that she just doesn't think about it enough. It's  
a philosophical thing, I know, but real grief is too heavy to  
carry. Yet, we learn to carry it anyway. The moths keep flying  
toward the porch light like they're in love with their own  
destruction & I get it, I really do. I've been doing the same  
thing with avoiding texting people back since I was thirteen.

I like the tender parts of life the best. The vulnerable  
underbelly of all things, the place where my armor doesn't  
fully meet. It's metaphysical when my friends paint their  
nails blood red but cry at commercials & love what can leave  
the quickest—a person or a feeling, a moment or a memory,  
the way autumn smells right before it dies into winter.

The universe does not revolve around my grief even  
though some mornings it feels like it absolutely should. As  
if my pain is significant enough to shift orbits, to redirect

traffic, to make the news at eleven. We are small & slowly getting smaller. We are trying to be gods in these bodies that betray us, that age & ache & forget why we walked into certain rooms.

I am a made-up version of myself & also the real version & who knows, maybe both are true in a non-linear condition of becoming. Someone called me intense once like it was an insult, but they were right. I feel everything at level twelve, at frequencies that would make a dog howl. I will not apologize for the amplitude of my existence even when it's inconvenient, even when it makes people uncomfortable at dinner parties.

There's a butterfly sanctuary in my chest where I keep all the beautiful things that died—pressed flowers from my grandpa's funeral, the last text messages I deleted, the way her voice sounded when she said my name like it truly meant something to her. Selfish, I wish I could preserve them forever, keep them secured in glass, stop entropy from doing what entropy does best. But we don't get to keep anything. Nothing belongs to us. That's the devastating point.

I read somewhere online that grief is just love with nowhere to go & I've been walking around with all this love like contraband. The dishes pile up in the sink. The sun keeps rising as if it doesn't know someone important died. The world keeps turning & I keep turning with it. Although, I never agreed to this—survival—to this mandatory participation in my own continuation.

We learn to read between the lines, to translate silence into every language except honesty, to make meaning from the absence of meaning. & maybe that's all we're doing here—all of us—just trying to read each other in the dark, squinting at subtext, guessing intent. Hoping we got the message right before the sender vanishes.

Don't look back, my therapist tells me, but I'm composed entirely of rear-view mirrors & what ifs & the

specific way the light looked on a Thursday afternoon six years ago. Memory is a museum & I'm both the curator & the only visitor, wandering halls full of artifacts that hold minimal meaning to anyone else.

We are the gods of our own undoing. I'm not ready for any of this—not the grief, not the growth, not the inevitable calcification of hope. Maybe I am not yet tired enough of wanting, of reaching, of believing that this time will be different even though every time is exactly the same with different lighting.

Dust unto dust. Ashes to ashes. All these pretty ways of saying you're going to die & everyone you love is going to die. & one day someone will have to go through your things & decide what to keep & what to donate. & none of it will matter because you'll be wherever the dead go & your stuff will just be stuff. Inanimate, meaningless, without the context of your hands grasping it.

I am tired of being profound. I am tired of alchemizing my pain, like if I can just make it beautiful enough it won't hurt. But it always does. That's the trick they don't tell you—you can get all dressed up & go about your day, but underneath it's still grief. Still just the raw sound of missing someone who isn't coming back.

Somewhere inside the delicate center of my chest, a string. If you pull it, I unravel. If you pull it, I come undone. If you pull it, everything I've ever held together falls apart & I become what I've always been underneath this performance. Just a girl who doesn't know how to live a calm, moderate life.

But here I am. Still here. Still drinking coffee at midnight. Still writing love letters to ghosts. Still believing that words can save me when they haven't before. Still hoping that if I can just get the language right, if I can arrange the syntax perfectly, something will shift. Something will heal. Something will finally make sense in this world that has never once made sense to me.

# The Common Room

by Lu Marulanda

A spider ivy unfurls over the edge of its misshapen pot. Yellow lights embalm the air like midnight mist. Pots, mugs, and three bottles of Lawry's seasoned salt sit on smoky-maple colored wooden stands. Above a twenty-four-inch Toshiba television, a charcoal ranchero prances around Toyota lowriders and Fleischmann's duck gin—printed on khaki coated paper. A twill futon rests along the cream wall beside a glass-topped coffee table. Beige, oak coasters are placed neatly upon the glass's Clorox-wiped surface. Over the futon's backrest, a tiger-patterned blanket sleeps. Coarse, taupe, chevron rugs cover the vinyl composite tile. Creme brulee and salted caramel—grounds recently roasted in the single-serve Keurig coffee maker—waft through the room. A leftover aroma of Ghiradelli chocolate sauce, vanilla syrup, and Shadow *Pour Homme* perfume circles the air. Twin pothos plants, Betsy and Bonnie, jump out of their greening jar on the stone sill. Sun that rims the swollen, silver-skinned clouds reaches the

tippy-tops of desk drawers. Rain pelts the window pane, dotting the green-banana ash tree with waving branches. Leftover droplets from the dim-lit sky field through the insect screen. Teeny driblets squeeze themselves out of the cheap fiberglass, plinking in open space.

## At the Gates

by Madilyn Sun

*After Arthur Chapman's "At the Outposts"*

Friends with the lonely faces,  
What are your plans today?  
Friends of the bunched-up spaces,  
What hope has come your way?

What voice calls from the backyard  
Behind the fenced wall?  
What force keeps you barred  
And brings your fun to stall?

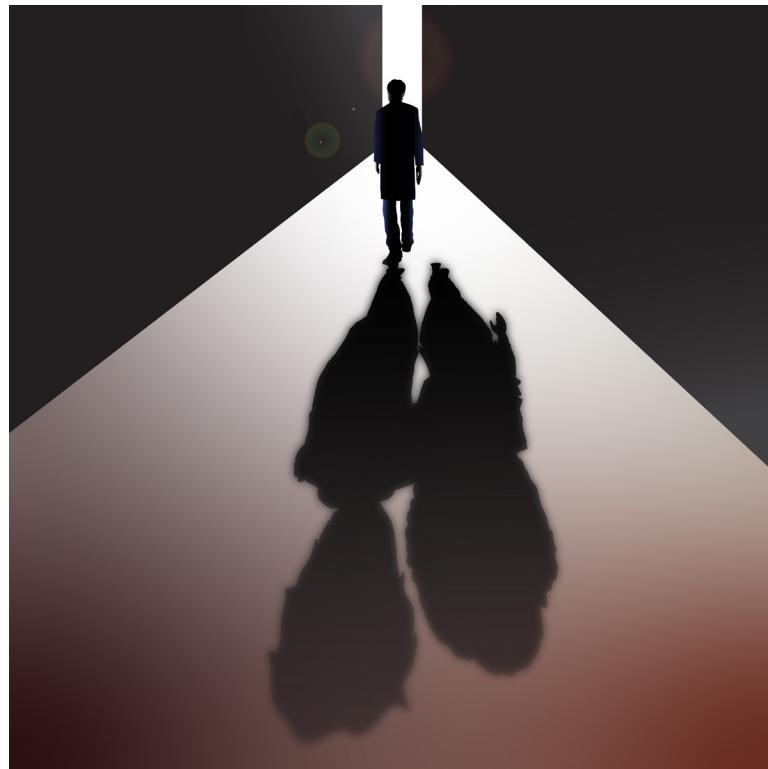
What pitiful faces are dreaming,  
What bodies have lost their motion?  
What, then, leaves your face beaming  
Except a gate left open?

Friends with the laughing faces,  
What are your plans today?  
Friends with the scrunched-up gazes,  
What light graces your play?

## John Doe

by Louis Keebler

what does it mean a doe keeps staring at you as you're walking to your apartment from your college's ceramics/sculpture studio when it's eleven at night...is she warning you of something / or is she scared of you (her dark eyes reflecting moonlight and cold air when you're just feet away) and what you could do to her...what does it mean when not fifteen minutes later you see a stranger (a pheasant) dead yards in front of you—why do you feel the urge to archive his stilled body in a picture (his head is cocked toward the north, his feathers unruffled), that urge fights with the one (that loses, which says) to move this bundle of iridescence and dark spots off the concrete into the trees and grass which he probably came from to become carrion...but instead he has to rot on the curb they fixed this summer / but someone will probably call the city, and an underpaid worker will scrape his body off the concrete, toss him into a black plastic bag, and put him somewhere you won't see; because we don't want to know where they throw the trash.



## **By Your Side: A Gentle Reminder You're Never Alone**

**by Almir Martin**

## **The Side Contour of Miss Adore Noir**

**by Beth Holloway**

*Based on an image in issue 15 of the magazine "Adore Noir"*

A ghastly pale shade of skin, quite pronounced atop a matte black back drop. Each eyelash an inky grey arrow pulled tight by thin bow brows. Charcoal clouds, like factory smoke,

smudged into an eye shape. And the nose of a Woman. If given color, an image of creamy slug red lips would emerge, and underneath? My grainy would-be-pink tongue

wets the filter of this cigarette. Not to be lit, oh no no. The boys in film class find it daring and edgy, sexy, they say. Give us heroin chic. Give us destruction.

Indifferent. Bored. Detached. Give us Kate Moss at lunchtime. Camera light flashes hot white, like milk over my skin. Their sticky lust, heart shaped gummies

stuck between their teeth. And they want to put them in my teeth. They want to break down the door and bury their hands in the steamy cherry pie. Lick their fingers.

But their fingers stick to shutter-release and I bathe in black and white as they capture the side contour of Miss Adore Noir.

# Corner Speaks to Corner

by Alyssa Moore

My love, my diagonal, planar love.  
 They may hide you with posters, detest  
 your cream walls of  
 brick and mortar. They call you a prison but  
 you are my foundation.  
 You are a mirror image of  
 myself, we are bland and boring together.  
 We may only touch by intersection  
 just once, but when we are dilapidated  
 and they bring their machines to break and crumble,  
 our dust will meld, our rubble will mingle, and our bricks  
 will marry.

May no column block my view,  
 nor the rafters hang too low.

May the cobwebs  
 in the deepest parts of your corner be cleaned  
 by the softest of dusters.

You are more than aesthetics,  
 you are more than structurally sound.

You are so right, my love.

How dare they think you obtuse,  
 the ground has not yet shifted  
 enough to leave you so vulnerable. Nevermind the crack  
 deep within the concrete of the floor.

But, if we were to never meet  
 if your walls fall north  
 and my walls fall south,

as I collapse I will imagine the dirt beneath me  
 is you,  
 that the cloud of dust in the air is you.  
 I will take a deep breath, your dust  
 seeping into my cracks. Making me whole once more.  
 May I imagine your touch until my rubble  
 is turned to new walls and reused to make the grandest of buildings  
 or returned to the earth forever,  
 resting at the idea of you.

# Maternal

by Ella Hunnewell

I.

In the familiar arms of my mom  
I became a little girl again.

Grandma was in the hospital,  
fourth time this year and it was only May.

Mom got a flight the day after she got the call.  
She was hundreds of miles away when her dad died,

I don't think she wants to make the same mistake twice.  
She has to be there no matter the outcome.

I don't want to picture her fear for her mom  
but I do anyway—the curse of curiosity.

Her mom was one of the last ties to her childhood.  
Whose hug will make her feel like a girl again?

II.

July brings heat and hospice into Grandma's home.  
Mom flies to her mom's bedside,

two days later the impending text from my aunt still surprises me.  
The movie theater credits are an ironic background.

*With much sadness I am sorry to tell you  
that Ann passed tonight at 10:30pm.*

*It seemed like she was waiting for her granddaughter  
to arrive before she was ready.*

*She had a wonderful long life  
and she will be missed.*

A moment of silence covers me. One second she's a comfort,  
a hug, a Friday phone call, the next she's memory.

III.

I start to see my grandma in my mother's hands  
and face. In the way she tilts her head

and the way she grasps for the right words. The fear  
deepens with every twitch of the clock,

with every *I love you*, with every missed phone call:  
the echo of inevitability.

When will my mother die?  
How old will I be?

I won't be ready.

# Craving

by Aphelion Bates

I long to be loved, leaning in  
to anyone who opens their arms  
or pauses by my side for a moment

too long. I wake up holding myself  
every morning, cradling my cheek  
in the palm of my hand like I am holding up

the entire world, and tracing too gentle hearts  
on my side where I wish you'd put your hands.  
Dig your fingers in instead,

break my ribs like a promise,  
pull aside bone and let your mouth  
melt my organs like butter on your tongue.

I always seem to do this, equating violence  
with love, offering these extremes  
to disguise that I'm struggling to stay

balanced on a bell curve, sliding back  
into depravity to avoid becoming another  
of your boring boyfriends. So I'll offer up my stomach

and say its yours to savage, even if I'm hoping  
you'll come in close to hold me. It's easier  
to show devotion that way, to offer blood

at the altar I've created in my head.  
It's easier to be Cain in his garden, to find  
a sacrifice of blood when vegetables

won't suffice. It's easier to offer everything  
at once than to try and fall into a routine  
I've never been able to keep.

Go ahead, refuse to etch your name  
into my bones—that's easy to stomach  
when you've always been too good

for my kind of violence. But please,  
don't stop your hand from holding mine.  
I know love is supposed to be

a daily thing so don't leave me yet, one  
of these days I'll remember to say good night  
before you're already asleep in bed.

# Soaring

by Ella Hunnewell

When you close your eyes,  
the world spins  
and your brain heats up.  
Warm sparks travel  
down your twitching legs  
and grab at your feet  
with static claws.  
Your feet tingle  
until they  
disappear.  
You  
have  
no feet  
for only an instant,  
then they phase back into place  
hovering and touching the top of your crocs.  
Your feet are heavy.  
Your feet are floating.

The conversations from five minutes ago  
are making sense now.  
People disappear  
then reappear  
then you remember them leaving and the time  
in between the past and now.  
Your tongue is Velcro,  
weighted with lavender beads,

and the rest of your mouth is felt.  
Tongue writhing in confusion  
against walls trying to stop the movement.  
People's voices hover above  
and you are left to sort out whose voice is whose  
then untangle the different words  
and watch the letters slip back into their throats—  
swallowed with their heavy, Velcro tongues.  
You're tripping balls while watching  
*The Addams Family* (1991).

Your roommate's dog glides past  
through thick air—  
water in flight—  
a fish against your calf.  
You realize you're eating cookies.  
They are thick but never seem to choke you.  
Your vision lags  
and the past must be recaptured for the present  
which happened five minutes ago.  
Your spine flows back and forth—  
kelp—  
a snake's skeleton undulating in oil.

Your eyes are crying sunburns,  
Glow radiating down  
To hover on smiling cheeks.

You keep thinking the dog is a fish.

Your limbs keep disappearing.

Static legs invisible,  
Tardis-like visions  
flashing in and out of existence

until, twitching back into the universe,  
your foot connects to the tendons  
to the nerves in your ankle  
and you slowly walk,  
one foot in front of the other,  
to get more cookies.



## **Castle in the Sky**

**by Mia Petoskey**

# Evolving

by Cailey Calhoun

weeding in the thick air  
in the heavy sun  
in my bleached jean shorts  
from freshman year

with my hair knotted up  
and my target sunglasses  
slipping down my nose

the crabgrass is a bitch  
and so are the dandelions  
with their hangnail-like  
roots that threaten  
to take the whole  
garden bed with them

and there are these other  
finger-like weeds with stems  
that spread to nearly two feet  
they jump at any touch  
like they're scared  
and they throw their seeds  
up and all over  
so goddamn smart they are  
knowing when to get out  
where to go

the leaves I tear are  
more clever than my hands  
it's like they can smell  
the fertile dirt from feet away

as I dust off my arms  
which have started to burn  
under angry afternoon sun  
I imagine after I stuff  
the stems in the trash bag  
and throw them onto the curb  
the petals rising out  
pulling aside one fate to find  
root in another

## music in books

by Maggie McGrath

these stories are *harmonies* in my brain  
interweaving together, deeply ingrained

the sound of each page turning  
and a cozy candle burning  
causes me to keep returning  
to bask in the comforting refrain

pages flutter like griffin wings  
or the *pizzicato* of violin strings  
the story inside loudly sings  
begging to be unrestrained

these stories are *ballads* in my brain  
interweaving together, deeply ingrained

raindrop sounds found in anxious tapping  
of fingertips on soft, paperback wrapping  
as the storyline becomes nerve-wracking  
moving fast as *presto*, wild and insane

the love interests banter  
while their horses race at a canter  
and no questions are left unanswered  
as their arguing resembles a passionate *pavane*

these stories are *overtures* in my brain  
interweaving together, deeply ingrained

dragons thunder freely overhead  
their shiny scaly wings widely spread  
a gentle *cadenza* amongst the bloodshed  
that against all odds is always sustained

as the book comes to an epic conclusion  
the magic and intrigue fill me with delusion  
that I could live in this world of illusion  
and escape this dull world full of disdain

these stories are *oratorios* in my brain  
interweaving together, deeply ingrained

# Aunt Bon's Book of Words and Phrases

by Megan Miller

## *Bitches and Birds*

An utterance of the author aimed at gathering dozens of scantily clad women and ravens on a classic stick-shift slot machine merits to gain a hefty thousand-dollar payday.

## *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph*

According to the author, *Jesus* is only uttered in situations akin to stubbing your toe. Add *Mary* and *Joseph* in situations akin to dropping a bowling ball on both your feet.

## *Who's Buying the Beverages*

The author requires a diet Pepsi. Buy one. Now.

## *We Come from Circus People*

An explanation the author gave all 6 cousins for their size 11 feet only clown shoes would fit, and skewed molars, impacted canines, twisted bicuspids that would make a carnie blush.

## *And We're Off*

For your vehicular departures. Usually signals an adventure, like going to see *Mary Poppins* on stage, or navigating two hours to the nearest Kohl's, Bath & Body Works, or Cracker Barrel because the author has coupons.

## *Shit the Bed Louie*

Only the author knows who Louie is and why he is always shitting the bed.

## *A Ball of Wax*

A substitution for *good*. Instead of *Good Day* it's *Isn't this day a ball of wax*. Instead of *Good Job* it's *Aren't you just a ball of wax*. *These ribs are a ball of wax. What a ball of wax that dog is*.

## *Scoff*

The author finds you unamusing according to the following recipes:

A dash of scoff with a sampling nail tapping: bothered. A cup of scoff with a pinch of eye roll: irked. A platter of scoff with a side of tossed head lathered in nose turned: utterly peeved.

## *Jiminy Crickets*

The author is applying to be your conscience at this time because why are you giving yourself carpet burn sliding down the basement stairs.

## *Too Many Cooks in this Kitchen*

Specifically, the author wants you to leave before your fingers end up in the mashed potatoes. Or the author noticed you chopped up six bananas instead of five. Or the author is telepathically signaling you to start working on cooking the mostaccioli. Hurry up.

## *You Don't Know Shit from Shinola*

You are currently correcting the author. This was a mistake. If the author said the grass is orange and pickles pair well with peanut butter, then it is absolutely true.

*We are Ladies*

When traveling out in public with the author, do not act like a trash panda by ripping out the manicured bows in your hair or scooping up rocks and shoveling them into your purse. Bear in mind that the author carries a wooden spoon with your ass's name on it in their purse exactly for this occasion.

*Get that Damn Hair Out of Your Face*

The author is annoyed at seeing your eyes through an opaque wall of hair. Either start wearing a headband so they can scorn you with their honey eyes directly, or take some scissors and start chopping at that mop.

*Hold Down the Fort*

The author is retiring their purple spectacles of wisdom, which means you have come of the age for scoffing, drinking diet Pepsi, carrying wooden spoons, and telling the world *they don't know shit from Shinola.*

**Basket of Eggs**

**by Isaac Koens**

When *you* decide to put all of your eggs in one basket, sometimes an egg that *you* place at the top rolls down to the bottom, and then when *you* decide to take that one out the viscous yellow drips between your fingers like a busted septic tank on a hot mid-July. It'll ruin *your* weaved wicker basket that *you* bought for only two dollars at the Salvation Army.

*I* don't have that problem.  
*I* knew there were 318 jelly beans in the jar at the county fair.

*I* have twelve Uno Skip cards stacked in my deck.

*I* have backup plans to make new friends just in case the old ones decide they "don't like me" anymore.

As observant as *I* am, *I* stacked all my eggs as meticulously as the mesoamericans stacked their pyramids, and now that *I've* collected all the eggs in *my* beautiful handcrafted basket, (unlike the two-dollar wicker one *you* bought at the Salvation Army) the chickens are finally starting to catch on.

And who knows.  
Maybe *I* want them to.

## Dichotomy of a Creative 5

by Jo Kenoshmeg



## Body Dysmorphia

by Carter Moleski

I am the cracked and splintered city of Atlantis  
crumbling to dust at the bottom of the ocean,  
mermaids scream as they are slaughtered  
by the greek marble walls,  
like snowflakes dissolving into a child's red mittens.

I am the never finished painting on  
the canvas of the bathroom mirror,  
constantly shifting, forever changing, never  
good enough for the unforgiving artist or their paintbrush.  
Every day a new face appears, a new blemish, a new perfection,  
the infinite identities blend together,  
making a pulsating whisk of discontent.

I am the first leaf to lose its color in the fall,  
the brown and rotted reality who  
lays under a bold mountain of red, orange, and yellow confidence.  
I am the only dead flower in Dione's garden,  
carnations, orchids, and daisies pay no attention  
as they stand patiently, waiting for sunrise and rain.

But tomorrow, I am new.  
I have the confidence of a king and the completeness  
of a 1000 piece puzzle, lying proudly on the kitchen table.  
I am the toe of the world's greatest ballerina,  
holding buoyancy in a raging river of obstruction.  
I am a bolt of lightning in a city of solid metal,

a game of chess, a shuffled deck of cards.  
An unpredictable, whimsical, broken  
metronome always drifting off the beat,  
playing a horribly beautiful syncopated rhythm.

## What I've Learned in Six and One-Half Semesters of College

by Jacob McLeod

1. Coffee tastes good
2. Classical conditioning elicits trained/learned responses
3. I got hooked on coffee because PSY100 was at 8am
4. Francisco Madero was president of Mexico from 1911-1913
5. Everything is political
6. If a professor isn't at least a little crazy, you're not getting your money's worth
7. The pregame is usually better than the bar
8. You can't throw snowballs in Kelly Shorts Stadium
9. My sister is cool
10. Fingernails can be chewed back uncomfortably far
11. If you go to the casino dressed like Elvis Presley from the 1973 "Aloha from Hawaii" concert, old women will scream and take pictures with you
12. Alliteration allows an author an awesome amount of artistic accentuation
13. Hold on to a girl that does the worm for you unprompted
14. Childhood pets don't stay forever
15. Neither do people
16. When EQing an instrument, cut frequencies before you boost
17. Break rules in the name of art
18. If AI ends humanity, poets will be the last to go
19. Dorm bathroom floors make great beds in a pinch
20. Due date ≠ "do date"
21. If I lived a thousand lives, they'd all be over way too fast

## Sleeping Boy

by Brittany Hanner

*“When I am broken beyond all sickness and you, may you be brushed  
by the ghost of my hands, which can live if you do.”*  
-Emma Wynn

My arm is not my own, my hand already a ghost  
as I lie here detached  
from it and the world it lives in.  
Theres a small head of hay colored hair  
restricting the life flow from elbow down.  
I dare not wake him.  
Every subtle movement turns numbness  
to static tingle, reminding me of the connection  
that keeps me alive.

## My Fiancée and I Take a Trip to Empire, MI

by June Maslowski

When I was younger, the dunes  
looked like the knees of some slumbering  
giant, just dipping their toes into the lake  
as it drifts inwards, then away.

This was when my body was skin  
and bones, when my father abused  
pills and heard voices, when he carved  
the walls with a cheap katana, held my mother  
by her throat while I watched on, crying  
oceans, begging for him to spare her.

You and I haven’t gone there together yet, and I’m sure  
when we do—perhaps as newlyweds—

we won’t climb that colossus. Instead, I think  
we will stand at the ankle, our feet

in the wet sand, my swimsuit  
never quite comfortable enough,

and you’ll say something like, “that tree  
at the top looks cool,” and it will.

## The Time Of Your Life

by Kayla Thatcher

We cannot outrun  
the grains of sand within  
the glass. We are trapped in the  
dome of crystal. We stick to the edges  
and cross our fingers, hoping that we will  
not choke just yet on the rising grit. Slowly  
gasping for air, pleading that the pain  
of fleeting time will not burn our  
skin like old summer days.  
Or mar our hands  
as we hold  
our lifeline tightly.  
Hoping that it will not injure  
our minds, weaken our bodies.  
Our bones may grow brittle, they may  
snap or crack. Our skin will sag, drooping  
as the Earth's gravity grows greedy for  
us. The chronometer is relentless and  
indestructible. So we seek escapes.  
Things to make us feel better  
about inevitability.



## Soul Trees

by Michael Ritchings

# Crooked

by Alyssa Moore

*Inspired by Terrance Hayes's "The Blue Terrance"*

I come from keyboard clacks in the dead of night,  
quiet whispers into mics after loud  
cackles of laughter, yelling at strangers,  
scolding, birthed from black sheep, dog bites cleaned  
with hose water and melatonin dreams. I come from  
imagination games, throwing rocks across driveways  
near-missing cars that don't belong to us,  
mermaids and water balloon grenades. I remember  
ice covered trampolines with cousins I had yet to  
meet at Thanksgiving dinner and Easter wrapped into one.  
Does she remember it like I do? Bright pink  
winter jackets and wolf head hats to cover frostbitten ears.  
I come from distraction, cars beaten and bruised  
from metal on concrete and guard rails, begging to  
go to the park, wood chips embedded in kneecaps from  
failed monkeybar attempts. I come from big smiles with missing  
teeth, the sound of their whistle still echoing off the old  
tin roof and shag carpet. I come from loose toys lost in  
floor vents, the feeling of rubber between your teeth,  
squeak and squelch, squeak and squelch,  
*get that out of your mouth it's bad for your stomach.*  
I come from warped teeth, years of  
fixing, pushing, pulling, expanding, rubber bands, metal,  
plastic, denied treatments, teeth filled with wisdom stopping

complete perfection. I remember the taste of iron  
on the roof of my mouth, the dull ache off my molars as they  
shifted, glaciers in the arctic, using my fingers like skateboards,  
my incisors like ramps as I ollied their edges. Maybe one  
day I will land hard enough to force them back into place.

# Amazonian Giant Centipede

by Beth Holloway

*“In the ultimate act of motherly sacrifice, some centipede moms offer themselves as the first feast for their young” - Houston Museum of Natural Science*

I.

She has  
Vamp fangs salivating with venom.

A solitary predator  
With 46 razor-edged feet,

Long enough to crawl  
Through one ear, out the next.

She preys on bats and birds,  
Slays tarantulas

Who dare approach  
Her nest of eggs.

Bows only to the kin  
She clutches and grooms.

Softens her hard exterior  
Only when they come of age.

Forcibly molting her  
Exoskeleton, digestibly.

And as her final act,  
She serves up their first meal.

II.

She has  
Work in the morning.

No breaks between sprints  
To mortgage payments and heat bills.

A grazer picking trampled  
Blades of grass from the dirt.

Lines on her belly, lines on  
Her face, melting skin.

She has trainer bras to fold,  
Ants to put on a log,

Spring breaks to scrapbook,  
And band-aids to kiss.

She has a mouth, but  
There are two more that come first

She has nothing she wouldn't give,  
Spoon feeding every penny she owns,

Spoon feeding the skin off her back.  
For them, she would.

III.

She has,  
What was it she had?

Stale, dry teeth washed  
With coffee and smoke.

Like smoke, tangible  
One second, gone the next

Pounds of debt?  
That's what inheritance is for.

She gave you life,  
Okay? Now go live it?

The fuck you expect  
Me to do for you.

She has me me me.  
Her her her.

She has a mouth  
That eats.

You want dinner?  
Go find it.



## Dichotomy of a Creative 6

by Jo Kenoshmeg

# Are you going towards

by Ella Hunnewell

or away? Are you wandering?

Is there a place in mind? A wisp of a destination?

The outline of an end goal filled in by expectations?

Inhale and exhale.

Push and pull.

Fishhook embedding around your right clavicle; barb scraping bone.

One direction. One goal.

Any movement toward a different path pulling the flesh taut,  
ruby pearls rising from the skin to adorn the metal edges.

Endless wheezing sprints away from piles of papers,  
assignments, and due dates snarling

at your ankles. The hot breath of failure whispering in your ear.

Check your shoelaces are tied, one trip up could cost months.

Gooseflesh, raised hairs,  
eyebags, missed quiz,  
weighted air, crumpled laundry,  
gasping breaths, desperate reaching,  
piled dishes, skipped meals,  
concaved couch, greasy strands,  
moribund succulents,  
winded while cemented in place—  
but it's 11:58.

Your eyes are blinded with blue light

and your cramped fingers contorting over laptop keys.

An ever-growing to-do list with doubts it will ever empty.

Are you walking toward

Or away? Pacing through the garden in the dying summer sun,  
you stumble across monarchs drinking from tiny purple chalices.

For a moment, they linger. For a moment, you breathe.

A wind you hardly notice is a squall

they must survive. A life so delicate one swat from your hand  
could lacerate chitin wings and pour pale yellow out of skeletal fractures.

Looking behind you to the squirrel gnawing on an acorn,  
to the green leaves tinged with the first hints of autumn,  
to the fountain spraying mist and prisms of light,  
walking and watching and waiting for the world to end  
and wondering where you're going.

Inhale—pull as much peace as possible from the air into tired capillaries.  
Exhale—lose steam and crumple until you're covered in monarchs.

## Meet the Contributors

*Thank you to everyone who trusted us with their work.  
Without you, there'd be no Volume 21.*

**Aphelion Bates** is a senior at Central Michigan University. Though they have nearly finished their degree with a major in Secondary Math Education and a minor in ASL, poetry has held their heart for most of their college career. They have been published in *Central Review* several times, and are forever grateful to Jeffrey Bean for pushing them to take the Creative Writing Certificate and continue pursuing poetry after finishing Intro to Creative Writing.

**Mak Brouhard** is a second-year student at Central, studying Forensic Psychology. They often can be found with their cat, Lynx, in their home with a coffee and a laptop, writing whatever comes to mind. They often draw inspiration from the earth and can be seen walking around in Mother Nature a lot. This is their first time submitting to *Central Review*, but they one day wish to publish a book of their own.

**Cailey Calhoun** is a senior (much to her disbelief) here at CMU. She is finishing her degree in Secondary English Education, and she can't wait to start student teaching. She is an editor at *Central Review*, President of Sigma Tau Delta, and Secretary for Poetry Central, so it's safe to say she loves poetry. In her free time, she loves going on long walks in no particular direction and writing poems to deal with the fleetingness of time. She is so thankful to be involved with the wonderful writing community at Central.

**Marissa Cipriani** is a 3rd year Marketing and Professional Sales major who has used creative writing as an outlet for the past decade. She is currently serving on Beddow and Thorpe's Community Council E-Board as a Community Leadership Coordinator. When not spilling her guts onto paper, she enjoys the outdoors, laughing too loud, and romanticizing her own existential crisis. She is usually found in Grawn Hall, the EHS Building, or the Library writing while procrastinating. Don't be a stranger and always be you. : )

**Samantha Dave** is a senior at CMU studying English and creative writing. Along with finishing up undergrad, Samantha is in her first year as an Accelerated Master's in Creative Writing student. When she's not writing poetry, she can be found listening to music, reading a new book, or playing video games. She draws inspiration from the music she listens to, the relationships in her life, and the world around her!

**Katherine Foote** is a senior in her final semester at CMU, studying English, Psychology, and Public Law. Her curiosity-driven nature has served her well, both as a student and a writer. After completing her bachelor's, she hopes to complete her Paralegal certification in the spring, then go on to pursue a Juris Doctor.

**Brittany Hanner** is a writer residing in Mt Pleasant, Michigan. Her work has been featured in *Images Literary Magazine* and *Central Review*. She is currently in the accelerated MA program for Creative Writing while earning her bachelor's degree with a creative writing certificate.

**Ella Hunnewell** is a Psychology and English major at CMU. A variety of her poems have already appeared in the past two editions of the *Central Review*. In the future, she plans to continue on to grad school and get her PhD in Psychology while continuing to write poetry.

**Louis Keebler** is an English and Psychology student and aspiring author at Central Michigan University, currently living in Mt. Pleasant. He is working on a novel, as well as adding other works of fiction and poetry to his oeuvre. He has been published in *Central Review* previously, with his poems “deadname” in Volume 18 and “why won’t you let me die” in Volume 19. Within his two bachelor’s degrees, he is specifically focusing on mental health, LGBTQ+, and Creative Writing studies, and hopes to pursue the career of art therapist.

**Jo Kenoshmeg** is a photojournalist in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. They work for *Central Michigan Life* as Photo Editor and for Central Michigan University Communications as a Photo Intern, and have had several pieces of work published in the *CM Life* newspaper and in *Centralight*. They are currently studying photojournalism at Central Michigan University and hope to work for a newspaper after graduation.

**Gwendolyn Kilpatrick** is an electrical engineer, amateur poet, and narrative writer studying at Central Michigan University. She has gotten poetry published in the *Central Review* and the *Poetry Society of Michigan*. Her main inspirations for writing are Sylvia Plath, Sally Rooney, and Elliott Smith. In her free time, she enjoys running, reading, fashion, and music.

**Isaac Koens** is a senior at Central Michigan University, originally from Muskegon, Michigan. He is a Media Arts major, double-minoring in Multimedia Design and Creative Writing. With his poetry and fiction works, he aims to capture a uniquely lighthearted and comedic tone while offering brief glimpses into deeper psychology. Isaac has a passion for storytelling that he plans to pursue beyond graduation.

**Kayla Thatcher** is a writer from Lapeer, MI. She is a junior at CMU, majoring in Sociology and minoring in creative writing. She plans to pursue a career in forensic sciences. Some of her work can be found in previous editions of *Central Review*.

**Robert Thompson** is an independent hobby writer whose interest in foraging has led him to study environmental health and safety at CMU, and he is aiming to be the first in his family to graduate from college.

**Maxwell Maksymowski** is a Central Michigan University junior. He is studying Broadcasting and Cinematic Arts, with a minor in Technical Theatre, and a Creative Writing Certificate. He currently works at the Clarke Historical Library processing old news film. In the future, Max would like to work behind the camera on television or backstage for live theatre.

**Almir Martin** is an artist/designer from Gary, Indiana, currently studying graphic design and cultural competency in his senior year at CMU. Both art and design are equal vehicles to share snapshots of his vision of the world with the world, so that other people can see and connect with them. His journey has been one of evolution; finding his footing, losing it, and finding it again. A lot of those struggles are acknowledged and confronted in his personal works.

**Lu Marulanda** is a writer attending CMU for a major in Social and Criminal Justice. They started to write flash fiction and short stories in their sixth-grade year of school. In their eighth year of school, they transitioned to writing poetry. They spend their free time competing in spoken poetry competitions for organizations like Midland Creative 360 and Friends of Roethke Foundation. They hope to one day publish their own collection of poetry after graduating from university.

**June Maslowski**, inventor of the #junefact, is an aspiring poet from the middle of nowhere. If she were born in medieval times, she might have been an apothecary or herbalist of some kind. She cooks a mean omelette, blew her knee out clicking her heels too many times, and even secured a follow from cloud rap icon “Lil B” on Twitter. She sincerely hopes that you enjoy her work, and if you don’t, that’s probably fine too.

**Maggie McGrath** is a writer pursuing a Creative Writing Master’s degree at Central Michigan University. This would be her first publication since her middle school poetry was published in a collection of works for seventh graders. She is from Macomb, Michigan, and when she isn’t writing, she loves reading, singing, playing alto saxophone, crocheting, gaming, stargazing, and cuddling with her (evil) cat, Riley.

**Jacob McLeod** is a singer/songwriter from Big Rapids, MI, and a senior at Central Michigan University. He studies Commercial Music with minors in Songwriting, Creative Writing, and Broadcasting, and plans to pursue a career as a songwriter/producer. As a poet, his work has never been published before, but his original music has been released on all streaming platforms.

**Megan Miller** is a senior from Bad Axe, Michigan. Her work has previously appeared in the *Central Review*. She is currently majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing, History, and Public Law, as well as working towards an Accelerated Master’s degree in Creative Writing at Central Michigan University. Outside of writing, Megan enjoys crocheting, tennis, trivia, reading, spending time with her dog, and attending the theater with family and friends.

**Carter Moleski** is a junior at Central Michigan University. He is a Mathematics Education major with a minor in Creative Writing. He enjoys writing poetry in his free time, specifically about nature and music. After he finishes his bachelor’s degree, he hopes to earn his PhD in mathematics and teach at the college level.

**Alyssa Moore** is an artist and student living in Grand Blanc, Michigan. She’s currently a student at Central Michigan University, majoring in Studio Art with a certificate in Creative Writing. Her best work comes to her when she’s in the middle of something else.

**Afthab Nihar** is a graduate student at CMU. He is from India, and he has loved writing and reading from a very young age. He worked as a software engineer and is now looking to broaden his horizon with a master’s in information systems. He is a movie buff and loves to travel.

**Mia Petoskey** is a local artist living in Shepherd, Michigan, who specializes in printmaking, graphic design, and digital illustration. She is currently enrolled in the BFA program at Central Michigan University and president of the CMU Print Club. She is the graphic designer for the CMU Esports program as well as Moore Hall TV’s newest show, “Dungeons & Dormrats.” When she has spare time, she enjoys spending it crocheting or knitting while listening to horror podcasts.

**Sophie Pettinger** is a Junior at Central Michigan University studying secondary English education with a minor in creative writing. She hopes to return to teach in or near her hometown of St.Clair, Michigan, and publish a book one day.

**Eden Phillips** is a poet from Stockbridge, Michigan. He is currently studying English at Central Michigan University with minors in Creative Writing and Intergroup Relations and Justice, as well as being part of the Accelerated Master's in Creative Writing program.

**Jessica Reinhart** is a student writer from Fraser, Michigan. She is a double major in Environmental Studies and English, pursuing an Accelerated Master's in Creative Writing at CMU. Through her combination of majors, she aims to embrace the unconventional by using fiction and poetry to explore the world and what it really means to be sustainable. Three of her past works have appeared in the *Central Review*.

**Michael Ritchings** is an artist currently living in Midland, Michigan. He is a BFA Studio student, Veteran, and father of two beautiful daughters.

**Rowan Schachermeyer** is a writer from Chesterfield, Michigan. He is currently studying Creative Writing and Psychology at Central Michigan University, and hopes to pursue a Master's in Creative Writing as well.

**Madilyn Sun** is a poet living in Sterling Heights, Michigan. Two of her poems have appeared in the *Central Review*. She is a senior studying the French language and English literature at Central Michigan University, and she aspires to teach in France and continue writing poetry after graduating in the spring.

**Dominic Tatrai** is a writer living in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. His work has appeared in *Central Review* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. He is currently studying creative writing at Central Michigan University. Dominic does not eat things he finds buried at the beach. Anymore.

**Helen VanSumeren** is a writer living in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. She is currently studying psychology with a minor in leadership at Central Michigan University, but she hopes to pursue her PhD in psychology with the end goal of becoming a child psychologist.

**Azel Wingard** is a writer from Saginaw, Michigan. His writing hasn't been noticed on multiple occasions by the Scholastic Art and Writing program. He is currently pursuing Creative Writing as a minor.

