Fiction
Trisha Bartle
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Poetry
Steven Abell
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Non-Fiction
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Savannah Stewart
The Oval is a literary magazine published annually by the Associated Students of the University of Montana (ASUM), the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, and the Creative Writing Program of the University of Montana English department. Each volume is printed with vegetable ink on recycled paper by University of Montana Printing & Graphics.

The title font for this volume is set in Mrs. Eaves, and the body font in Adobe Garamond Pro.

The University of Montana Bookstore, Fact & Fiction, Shakespeare & Co., and The Book Exchange in Missoula, Montana, sell copies of The Oval. The standard price for each issue is $8.00. Griz Card holders can buy the magazine for $5.00.

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The Oval accepts electronic submissions of fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, and visual art in the month of February. Only previously-unpublished work by currently-enrolled University of Montana undergraduates will be considered. Submissions must be in DOC, DOCX, JPEG, or PDF formats. The genre must be defined in the submission. Submission guidelines will be listed on the Submittable portal.

For more information, details about Oval-sponsored events, workshops, readings, and the Honorable Mentions awarded for Volume X, please visit our blog at www.umoval.wordpress.com.
A Note from the Editors

Within the pages of The Oval you will find works of prose, poetry, and visual art straight from the minds of some of the most talented undergraduate students at the University of Montana. We are thrilled to present The Oval, Volume X—a benchmark achievement in a decade-long effort by undergraduate student writers, artists, and editors. It is both an honor and a privilege to present this tenth volume. We couldn’t have gone this far without the help of so many tireless individuals.

The Oval thrives thanks to the support of people and programs passionate about art and the written word. We would like to thank and recognize Becca Carson and the Aerie program for their continued dedication to the literary arts and their ability to produce invaluable staff members for The Oval year after year. In the tenth year of publication for The Oval we wish to honor the memory of Lorilee Evans-Lynn who was an irreplaceable force of good for so many generations of young writers.

Thanks go out to Sue Samson and the Mansfield Library, the generous ASUM senators and executives, Maria Mangold, Karin Schalm, the Creative Writing Program, and the English Department, Kevin Head and the annual Writers’ Fall Opus, Ken Price and the staff at UM Printing & Graphics.

Special thanks also to Shannon Janssen, without whom so much of this would not have been possible, and Sarah Aronson, for your humor, quick wit, encouragement, and dedication to poetry. Another thanks to our faculty advisor Robert Stubblefield for putting up with us and The Oval for ten whole years. Your patience and support are boundless and we could not have asked for a mentor who is better suited to the task.

We would also like to thank our contributors and all the undergraduate writers and artists that have made The Oval possible for the last ten years. Thank you for sharing your creativity, and thank you, dear reader, for joining us in the experience.

Hanna Ziegler and Stacia Hill
Editors-In-Chief
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“Aquarium,” by Lindsay Laird: photograph, digital art. This piece was chosen as the cover art.

“Baths,” by Dylan McCarthy: photograph, digital art. This photograph was taken during travels in Southeast Asia.

“Exhale,” by Andrea Morawic: pen and ink on paper.


“Glimpse,” by Hannah Fay: photograph, digital art.


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“Roxy,” by Lucy Torgrimson: white and black charcoal pencil on paper.

“Silence,” by Kelaiah Horat: charcoal on watercolor paper.

“The Great Attractor,” by Juliette Viera: collage diptych. The full title reads, “The Great Attractor in reference to a gravitation anomaly.” Created in a therapeutic exercise that holds inlaid personal symbolism of a young woman in a state of mediation or waiting while the young man/lover is off in the distance pulling on her to bring her to his realm. Earthly and cosmic, light and dark, male and female, action and inaction.
“Gimme that bicep, sugar.”
Gordy wrestled with his sleeve. Even though he was sequestered to his own canvas cubicle, he could tell the glares from the line snaking through the gymnasium/cafeteria would eventually cause the cheap fibers to ignite and expose him to the mob waiting outside. Soft yelps chorused from his neighbors’ cubbies.
The nurse cleared her throat and clicked her nails together: acrylic castanets. “Look, kid, the line ain’t getting any smaller while you shoot the breeze with me. Now let me see those muscles of yours, unless you’d prefer a prick on the fanny.”
God, didn’t the hospital have a nurse under fifty who hadn’t just come off a smoking break? This model could use some new upholstery. Gordy groaned and held a limp arm to the woman. The nurse squished it around and settled on a particularly fleshy part. She balanced an alcohol swab between her pincers and swiped a quadrant. She then stuck him without a one-two-three or a how-do-you-do. He gasped, but couldn’t pull away from the nurse’s grip. She’d had years of experience with jumpy little boys.
“Good job, tootsie pop, you were a very brave little fella.” She peeled a sticker from the roll next to the bouquet of needles and slapped it on his shirt. My Little Pony proclaimed him to be a “Super Sweet Patient.”
“Have a nice day at school. Learn something.” She smiled.
He almost told her that there was lipstick on her teeth, but then again, she’d spent a little too much time manhandling his non-muscle for his liking. He’d let her figure it out herself.
Gordy half-smiled back and stuck the sticker to the canvas
panel as he ripped it aside.

There they were. Every kid he’d gone to school with since kindergarten, branching into lines and all staring. He gauged each face for even a twitch of sympathy. Dallas. Justin. Harry. Rachel. Jennifer B. Jennifer H. Jennifer M. Morgan. Nothing. But really, they were preoccupied picturing how big the needle must be for their peers to be yelping like that.

He bypassed the hostile troops marching two by two into the booths and trundled to the playground.

It looked more like a prison exercise yard from some movie. There were two sets of monkey bars, sure, and a propped circle with chained handles hanging off. Gordy supposed the fun came from dangling from the handles, but said appeal went unrealized among the seventh graders. Every day, he half expected to see a burly man bench-pressing out there, so that the “Mom” heart tattoo on his pec bulged. The real fun of the recess pit was the rocks. Pebbles of every shape, size, and type carpeted the plot. Squatting kids dotted the gray, pounding rocks against bigger rocks.

Some boy was trying to crush a deep brown rock like an idiot. Now, the pros knew the trick was to pick the extra sparkly rocks; they crumbled the best. And the pale ones, Gordy discovered, marked up the walls of the building most vividly. He hid his best rocks under a patch of weeds that interlocked the chain-link fence. Some fifth-grade girls were harvesting the weeds, weaving them into nests to put their rocks in, but they had yet to stumble upon Gordy’s treasure trove. Rubbing his arm, he selected the best medium from the horde and stared at his blank canvas, the west side of the maintenance shed.

He couldn’t decide what to draw, so he made a circle, a typically safe start. Then, a triangle. Another circle. He stood back and... Jesus H. Christ, he knew this would happen. After last week’s events, nothing else occupied his conscious or subconscious. Gordyn couldn’t stop thinking about Gladys.

…”

“Gordy, look what Cat Damon brought in the house.”
Lorie Gilkins called from the hall.

Gordy rounded the corner and almost stepped on a bloated, black lump caked in dirt. “There’s a bat on our floor, Mom.”

“Correct.”

The assassin was nowhere to be found, but Cat Damon was always bringing dead crap into the house. At least he’d only dragged it to the foyer. Gordy still didn’t like to make eye contact with the stain in the carpet upstairs. He’d plodded to the bathroom in the middle of the night and only noticed the frog underfoot when its guts squirted like a New Year’s confetti popper.

Maybe the cat hadn’t dragged it in. Maybe it had visited of its own accord. It could’ve easily walked — wait, do bats walk? No, Gordy thought, pretty sure they pitter pattered up trees and whatnot. It could’ve easily climbed through the cat door and pattered along the floral hall runner by itself, desperate to spend its final moments amongst Walmart posters of the Eiffel Tower and Mom’s teddy bear collection.

It could happen.

Gordy’s mom nudged it with her clog. “Yep. That’s a doornail if I ever saw one.”

“What were you gonna do if it started flapping around?” he asked.

“Step on it with the other foot.”

“Fair enough.”

She perched over it, cocking her head. It did nothing exciting. “What should we do with the poor beastie?”

“Dunno, Mom. Bury it?”

“You could hide it in your father’s car the next weekend he’s got you. Or,” she slid to the kitchen in her fuzzy socks and came back with a plastic barrel of Utz pretzels. “You could take it to school in this, you know, for biology.”

“But there are still pretzels in there. I don’t think we need to pack him a snack.”

She rolled her eyes, unscrewed the lid, and munched. When the bat continued to do absolutely nothing, she flipped through a stray paperback on the counter and kept eating. They migrated all over the house, the paperbacks, on top of the cabinets, in the
freezer, under sheets.

There was still a good quarter of the pretzel container left, but Lorie had never met a pretzel she didn’t like. She and her mom would sit at the kitchen table and eat them by the crate, dragging them across a stick of butter.

In about an hour, the deed was done and they’d managed to squeeze the bat into the jar, a bizarre ship in a bottle.

She held up their work with gusto so the fluorescent lights cast ripples on the floor. “There, maybe you’ll get some extra credit or whatever.” Enthralled, she squashed her nose up to the plastic. “She looks like a Gladys to me. Isn’t that the face of a Gladys?”

“What if it’s just really good at playing dead, Mom?” Gordy asked warily. “What if Gladys just starts flopping around in there?”

She puckered, then gave the whole apparatus a terrific shake, like she was coating a chicken breast with breadcrumbs. When she relented, Gladys had not reanimated. She peered through the warped plastic at Gordy, a fine blanket of pretzel silt and salt dusting her fur and open eyes.

Gordy took it and started upstairs.

“Wait,” Lorie called, “Don’t you think we should say a few words?”

“Mom. It’s a dead bat. We’re not having a service for a dead bat.”

She wrapped herself around the bannister, pouting up at him. “Why not? We had a funeral for your goldfish that only lived for a week. Besides, we’ve named it, I’m attached.”

Gordy sighed and placed the Utz barrel on the hardwood between them, clasping his hands.

“Dearly beloved. We are here not only to mourn the death, but also to celebrate the life of Gladys, a wonderful, kind, champion of a bat if ever one breathed. I assume.” Lorie nodded solemnly. “And now, we shall hear a hymn to help us through this hard time.”

“What?” Lorie whispered.

“The only funeral I’ve ever seen was Grandpa’s and the ones on TV,” he hissed back. “I don’t know many variations.”

Lorie looked at Gladys. Then, she sang the only hymn she knows to this day:
“When I die and they lay me to rest,
gonna go to the place that’s the best,
when I lay me down to die,
goin’ up to the spirit in the sky…”
“Spirit in the sky,” Gordy echoed.

The sun rose, and Gordy dashed about his room, readying for the day. He stuffed his backpack with all the notebooks, rulers, protractors, and sour gummy worms he’d need for his Wednesday classes. The brand-new pack of Bic pens didn’t fit, after everything was aboard, which was a pity because he had English with Alexis today, and he wanted her to admire his penmanship. Gordy settled on putting them in the barrel with Gladys. She wouldn’t mind. Thus armed, he headed out the door.

In the warmer months, everyone’s plot of land on Heritage Street was clipped and groomed, the backyard growths peeking up over the picket fences to snoop into the neighboring yards. October through December was seizure inducing. Heritage alone must buy out the holiday section of Kmart in order to properly bedeck their lawns. All of Gordy and Lorie’s neighbors were retirees and teachers, and no one can slather synthetic cobwebs on a bush like an elementary teacher.

His mom’s garden was always Gordy’s favorite, though, the only one that felt like it had any heartbeat at all. Lorie was somewhat of plant enthusiast. His dad had hated it, and would always mutter that he wished she had a black thumb, but Lorie had ignored him. She’d come home after her shift at the North Valley Public Library with the back of the truck bursting with foliage. It looked like an Almond Joy commercial.

The copy-and-paste houses of Heritage Street ebbed into the bustling metropolis of Stevensville. Gordy passed the old-fashioned soda fountain, waved to the same table of old men that spend every morning there, and crossed the street. He shuffled past the laundromat, a fabric store, six churches, and finally arrived at school.
He shoved his backpack into his locker upside down and went straight to Mr. Kuchel’s room. Gordy spent most mornings and afternoons in there, the smell of formaldehyde soothed him. If anyone would truly appreciate Gladys, it was Kuchel.

“You, huh.” Kuchel didn’t bother spinning around in his chair, fixated on the National Weather Service’s website. Overcast, 43 degrees, 65 % humidity.

“Morning, Kuchel, can I keep something in here until class?”

Grumble.

“Thank you.”

Gordy tucked Gladys in an open space of a bookshelf otherwise brimming with National Geographics. He didn’t want anyone to see his bat until class, the satisfaction was in the reveal.

The minutes slugged by. Social Studies. Reading. Art. P.E. Recess. English (Alexis did comment on his writing, but it was just to say that he misspelled “restaurant”; what a bust). And, finally, Science. His peers shuffled in and took their seats around the lab desks, expertly positioning their backpacks so Kuchel couldn’t see them texting for fifty minutes solid. Gordy plopped his backpack at the very front seat in the room, close enough to count the stripes on Kuchel’s socks through the straps of the Chacos.

Everyone was afraid of Mr. Kuchel, though Gordy never could figure out why. Sure, he was a grouch, but Gordy always figured himself a bit of a curmudgeon as well, so it never bothered him. To the right of the whiteboard was a crack fracturing the wall at a slant, all the way to the foam ceiling tiles. Rumor had it that some freshman made a smart-aleck remark to Kuchel in the eighties, and Kuchel established scholarly dominance by pushing the kid up against the wall so hard that the wall cracked and his head caved in like a cantaloupe. Kuchel never denied the story.

Gordy sat right next to the crack. The way he figured, even if Kuchel was in a concussing humor, he’d want to mark up some new territory. It would be a waste to overlap.

“Pipe down, urchins. Today we’re dissecting worms.”

Simultaneously, every girl made a face and every boy exchanged bets on how many they could swallow before Kuchel
noticed. Gordy’s hand popped into the air.

Kuchel sighed. “What.”

“I’ve got something pretty cool that we could dissect, too, maybe, I think it would be pretty fascinating.”

The teacher eyed Gordy’s backpack. From under a stack of magazines emerged Gladys in all her glory. Gordy carried her to the front of the room like the Olympic torch, gesturing grandly to the black wad.

“Gordy.”

“Yes, sir?”

“Is that a bat in a jar?”

“Yes, sir.”

Kuchel gingerly took it and rolled it around. Gladys flopped with each rotation. “Silver haired.” He sniffed. “Lasionycteris noctivagans. Pretty common, but I guess we can take a look at it.” Unscrewing the jar, he tilted it onto the table. Gladys double tucked with a perfect dismount onto Sierra’s notebook. She squealed. Kuchel scooched her off with a pen.

The class gathered around the bat, oohing and aahing.

“Look at that thing, it’s so rad.”

“Hey, he’s kind of cute, look at the little squishy nose.”

“It kind of looks like a black puppy if you close one eye and really squint the other one.”

Gordy beamed. Gladys was a hit. Guys he’d never talked to before told him how cool they thought his bat was. One even chased his girlfriend around with Gladys, holding her by each veiny wing and telling the girl that the sun was setting and she would change back into a vampire soon. Kuchel went back to the National Weather Service. Biology was happening and thus his work was done.

For the rest of the day, kids brought their friends in to see the scary bat, touch the cute bat, make the bat riverdance.

When Principle Backus caught wind of a bat in her school, not her school, she charged into Kuchel’s room with a baggy and gloves. Rolling Gladys into yet another plastic sarcophagus, she gestured to Kuchel with the bat swinging from her fist. “What do you think you’re doing? Don’t you know a safety violation
when you see one? Never in all my years have I witnessed such unprofessionalism, no not on my life.”

Kuchel grunted. She slammed the door behind her, and Kuchel swiveled back around. He was older than dirt, what could she do, make him retire? Perfect, bring it on.

Gordy heard about Gladys’ abduction the following morning, and rushed to Kuchel’s room. Kuchel rooted through a cluttered back counter.

“Morning, Mr. Kuchel, what happened to Gladys?”

“Who in the hell is Gladys?”

“My bat, sir.”

“Oh. Bat’s gone.” He pulled a Yoplait Light from the rat nest and popped the lid. “You got a spoon?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Pity.” Kuchel rifled once more and unearthed a disposable pipette. He shrugged, suctioned a glob of strawberry yogurt into the tube, and went back to his desk. Kuchel always felt a little bad for Gordy, who spent every lunch jabbering in his classroom. And now they took the kid’s bat. As Gordy left, Kuchel mused that he didn’t seem to be mourning the loss too badly yet. Maybe Gordy’s stages of grief were askew. He always thought the kid’s wires might be a little loose. His mom was an odd bird when he taught her, it could be genetic.

Gordy’s bat popularity blew over, but days after he still got nods from some jocks, smirks from a pretty girl or two. Things were rosy, just peachy keen.

An envelope from the Montana Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory arrived on Principle Backus’s desk Tuesday morning.

... 

The morning announcements garbled at 8:23 the following day. Chairs screeched as everyone slumped down after the Pledge of Allegiance, the speaker barely audible above the din.

“Lunch will be corn dogs with tater-tot smileys, peaches, and graham crackers. The Winter Dance committee is meeting in Mrs. Stock’s room at 12:30. Don’t forget it’s Earth Day. All
those who came in contact with a dead bat in Mr. Kuchel’s class Wednesday of last week are to report to the weight room directly after school. Go fighting Yellow Jackets!” Click.

Huh, thought Gordy, maybe they want to suggest some kind of science club to look at other animals just like Gladys.

Not so.

The entire seventh grade draped themselves across various machines of the weight room. Gordy was surprised to see his mother slumped across a leg press. She perked up when he crossed the room.

“Gordy, I got a call. What’s going on, did you win some kind of award? Are these all your friends? Are they here to see you get it? Is it a medal?”

“I haven’t got a clue, Mom.”

Backus sliced through the teenagers and towered over her. “Lorie.”

“Aubrey,” Propped at a 90-degree angle on the floor, Lorie could only meet the gaze of Backus’s knees, but did so warmly. She compressed her legs to her chest and pushed out again, testing the weight. Unsatisfied, she added 20 pounds and tried again.

“Did you know about the animal your son brought into his science class last Wednesday?”

“Sure, Gladys. Did the kids like her?” She bobbed up and down on the splitting vinyl, revealing the yellow foam underbelly. Backus’s lips curled. She was always the one who had to deal with Lorie Gilkins, the one to whom she had to make up an excuse as to why they never needed her for bake sales or fundraisers or the PTA. And yet she had snuck back into Backus’s school to cause trouble, like always.

Audrey remembered when they both graduated from that very high school. Her whole family had come to visit. She had gotten her hair done at the salon, she was taking pictures with her friends, when Lorie Gilkins ran down the center aisle, spraying everyone in sight with silly string. After she sprayed Audrey, her coiffure was less hair than it was green aerosol goop. Lorie never took anything seriously, never, and, what luck, she had stayed in their hometown to reproduce.
“They did enjoy the bat, so much so that now they each need five shots of the Rabies vaccine out of the school’s pocket.”

Lorie stopped bobbing. “I don’t understand, Gladys wasn’t foaming or anything, I thought we were helping the school. You know, you might not’ve been able to afford a nice bat like that, what with budget cuts.”

She fooled people with her big baby deer eyes, but not Aubrey. “What kind of a parent are you?”

Backus turned on her heel and addressed the room. Something about forms, insurance, needles. Gordy gave his mom’s shoulder a squeeze and sidled in front of her so that the whole seventh grade didn’t see. Lorie’s mom had always said her face looked odd, puffy; those slender cheekbones weren’t structured for swelling.

The two drove home in silence. Gordy turned on the radio, but she didn’t even sing along to “American Pie,” so he shut it off again.

“I got a text from Dad today,” Gordy said as they pulled into the driveway, clipping the trashcan.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. Next weekend he’s taking me to a movie, and then he said he’d let me drive the BMW.” He bounced in his seat.

“That’ll be fun, huh?” She cracked a half-smile and poked his side. “Why don’t you go on in and start your homework so you’re not up until the witching hour again. You’ll turn nocturnal if you’re not careful.”

The front door closed. Lorie cried against the steering wheel until she had a red stripe across her forehead.

…

“Welcome back.”

Dammit, why hadn’t he gone in the other line? The same leathery woman prepped a needle. Her nails were a pastel lilac this time, a nice spring color. How festive. She gestured for Gordy to put an appendage within her grasp.

“Only three more rounds of shots to go after this, doll face,
so we won’t have to Old Yeller ya.”

Epilogue

Cat Damon was quarantined and observed in his home for 45 days, thereafter receiving a clean bill of health.
Roxy
Lucy Torgrimson
We walked until
we heard`````````````````
the railroad kept on. Her
house croaked & burped
as it swallowed us
in a hungry stupor. I flirted
with the spice rack
& stained my lips
with her wine.

We flash transparent
for kicks. I lie in bed
& the light is on. She
can see my puzzling nakedness
& the door—it isn’t
open, it isn’t closed.

I am false & thin.
Please laugh when I
acknowledge it.

Ever scare yourself
on purpose?
Only in romance, baby.

Only out swimming
in the bay, so far out
the shore plays
a thin static on the water
& the trees
are not individual.

The waves begin to mosh
& the fish
they call my name.
Darling, don’t go home.
In winter the skin on my hands will crack and bleed
tearing at the corners of my thumbnails
when I climb wash sleep pray
and I will remember your
sandpaper hands on
my rose-cheeks
as you tied
my hood
strings
tight
you
took
a blue
mug of
hot wheat
cereal milk sugar
with spoon from counter
and pressed it in my mittens
leave the mug at the bus stop you’d
say and we’d rub noses and I’d know you
loved me even though you seemed angry all the time
There’s something to be said for the memoir written by someone who hasn’t lived through what most would consider a serious trauma or something “normal people” don’t go through. Someone who hasn’t lived through a “larger-than-life” experience. Average people, with average lives, writing an anything-but-average full length memoir. Bloggers become novelists, spewing forth a narrative that everyone has lived, everyone has experienced, and everyone can relate to. I guess that’s the whole point. When Jenny Lawson published her first book, *Let’s Pretend This Never Happened*, she became an overnight success. Everyone felt connected to each other and to her—the writer! “This voice behind these words, she knows me! We’re the same person, connected in our minds and experience!” *(I am he / As you are he / As you are me / And we are all together.)*

It’s something about being relatable, that no matter how mundane your life may seem (and honestly probably is), no matter how exceptionally unexceptional you are, you are still human. You are somehow still special and worthy of attention. You are still relevant. Therein lies the message of the “average memoir:” You, all of you, are remarkable. *(There are 7 billion 46 million people on the planet and most of us have the audacity to think we matter. I know it’s a lie but I prefer it to the alternative.)*

Your life isn’t inherently interesting. What enthralls and

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invigorates you can be the most banal of shit to everyone else. Frankly, *(fuck me gently with a chainsaw, do I look like Mother Teresa?)*\(^3\) no one cares. The *New York Times* Bestseller List isn’t full of boring shit. Many people don’t want to read about the daily events of someone’s life for 300 pages without something outside of the norm happening. Say something. Do something. That’s what we live for. *(Come on, it’ll be very.)*\(^2\) We devour fast-paced, overly-dramatic fiction as if our lives depend on it. Yet somehow, against all odds and assumptions, we find entertainment in the reality of others. We find solace in David Sedaris explaining the process of quitting smoking, comfort in Jenny Lawson describing a below-federal-poverty-level childhood in some unheard of town in Texas and we found a whole damn *culture* in *Eat, Pray, Love*.

At their core, none of these stories are as fascinating as they seem. Quitting smoking is not breaking news. Everyone’s done that shit or some version of it at least. I quit smoking a month ago; no one cares and *The New Yorker* definitely won’t be publishing a 3,000-word article detailing my personal smoking history.

The difference between the harrowing tale of David Sedaris telling his vice to fuck off and me, whining like a baby about how damn hard quitting feels, is that he tells the story in such a way that you become entirely empathetic to his plight. Furthermore, he’s telling you secrets and you feel like his confidante. He trusts you, he’s speaking with you as if you are his best friend, and damn, do you feel special to be the one listening. The faceless creator behind these words is somehow brought down to your level or you up to theirs. You feel connected, not because of the story itself or the content of it, but because of how the story is *told*. You become the storyteller, as in fiction you become the protagonist. You, the reader! That’s you standing in the medical examiner’s office of death, holding a deceased stranger’s lung! You, chain-smoking in an airport bar, promising with each light that, damn it, this one is your last.

These writers, these everyday people with their extraordinarily ordinary lives have a talent. They put forth an

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emotion that invades the reader’s own psyche, forcing them to feel as the writer or protagonist does. It’s a talent usually lauded in film directors and novelists but applies here in the personal essay.

I’m not sure if one can accurately judge their own “talent.” I think it’s ultimately up to someone else to decide. I’m sure Sedaris is only aware of his talent because his New Yorker bio reads “David Sedaris contributes frequently to The New Yorker,” and I assume such a highbrow publication doesn’t let you contribute frequently unless they like you. How arrogant then is it to confess that I, as with virtually everyone else on the planet, am convinced that I have so many stories I could tell you?

I could tell you how my childhood was shitty. I know, a shitty childhood, how completely unique. I sometimes wish someone would write a memoir about their white, middle class upbringing. That would be weird to me. You mean families eat dinner together? Regularly? And 12-year-old daughters aren’t forced into situations where they have to protect their mothers, even if that protection means risking their own physical wellbeing? Even if it means wearing long-sleeve shirts until the bruises fade?

I could tell you how I quit smoking, or I could tell you the truth.

I didn’t, really. I made it about a week without smoking at all (Nikki, baby, I love you, but now I gotta go.) After that, I just quit smoking a pack a day: I quit buying my own cigarettes until the day last week when I finally went and bought my own again. I pretended I was proud and deleted that “Quit Smoking Now!” app on my phone, even though it reinforced my lie, telling me I had survived 30 days without a cigarette. If you don’t tell those you’re afraid to disappoint that you’ve failed them, have you really disappointed anyone but yourself? And with such low expectations, can you disappoint yourself?

But you’ve heard all of this before. Hundreds of memoirs and essays detailing childhood trauma and rape have been published throughout the years. People dedicate entire blogs to recanting their personal struggle with addiction. Everyone has had bad shit,

hard shit, unmentionable shit occur in their lives. My story doesn’t make me special or different, so why would I bother telling you?

My point here is not that trauma has become the new normal or that I can’t tell you my stories because they’ve “already been told.” It’s that the trauma discourse has come to the surface, has seeped into the mainstream culture. Trauma has been recognized as common, almost unavoidable. It’s no longer “shell-shock” or being “weak,” it’s PTSD. The stigma of trauma has faded and yet I am still so scared to tell you anything. Fearing some unforeseen repercussions, if I told you a story, if I wrote down a concise history of my childhood abuse or the rape that took my virginity, I would leave out the names and it wouldn’t be to protect the predators.

Reading a memoir is an exercise in self-awareness where you start to feel okay because someone else is talking about this. Who am I then to rely on others to tell me their story, to help me get over mine? Who am I to not tell my story because I’m scared of what you’ll think of me? Or how you’ll look at me? (How am I to forgive myself for doing nothing in the mouth of trauma? Is silence not an act of violence, too?) I’m so afraid of seeming weak that I refuse to even admit that I once was. I refuse to admit that it was—is—okay to be scared and fragile. I can’t admit that sometimes, staggering through the day in a daze of flashbacks and triggers is normal.

But one thing I can admit to is that I am unhealthily self-absorbed. At least once a day, I make a joke about how I’m a narcissist. I tell friends who compliment me that they’re only feeding my ego and someday, when I’m rich and famous and everyone respects me, I’ll never think of them. I’m only kidding when I say that, it’s subconscious way of saying, “Don’t count on me, and I won’t count on you.”

I respect them, the writers of personal narratives. I respect Jenny Lawson for talking about her miscarriage and how it changed her; I respect Blythe Baird for using spoken word poetry as a conduit through which she can tell the story of her assaults; I respect David Sedaris for a) quitting smoking because that shit is hard, and b) for talking so candidly about being ostracized by his

father for being gay (My dad left ‘cause he didn’t want a girl) and every other private thing he tells anyone who picks up one of his books. It takes courage to write about one’s personal life, to disregard judgment and be brutally honest about their shortcomings and failures. We see ourselves within them, just like we’re meant to see ourselves in the hero/heroin within fictional pieces. As long as we’re capable of empathy (lookin’ at you, Patrick Bateman), we have the ability to mirror emotions of those we have come to care for. Film directors do it with photography and camera movements, writers do it with words and structure. The story isn’t as important so much as the emotion it garners.

So, really, just be honest. Be open and enthralling and helpful. If you can’t fix the problems of your readers, gently guide them toward the path of okay-ness by telling them your story. Be funny and witty and successful.

Or write about how you’re a sensitive little bitch who pretends to be aloof and struggles with intimacy and honesty. I, of course, don’t care.
The medications the doctors give Anna, I also swallow.
I snore in a room down the hall—counting cloud and bird.
I keep asking the docs to wire my jaw shut; they laugh
and they tell me if I keep it up they just might.

I fall in and out of character, studying scars, topography
of a farm-accident story. Ponder the role of the gullet
in talk therapy. My incisions heal; bulge under stitches.

I explain to the head shrink how I rehearse with Anna,
at suppertime, an avante garde play I’ve agreed to never write
when we finally leave the tall pines of St. Eusebius.

The quack asks me if I’m angry I’m in the hospital. I know
next to nothing about the surgeries that connect Anna to me:
titanium; burr holes so our brains could breathe and atrophy.

The soul-pincher tests me by asking me what makes me happy.
I say loud traffic and cigarettes. Larkin. Golf on television.
She asks whether the slow pace of the game soothes me.

Pushed to the cafeteria, for dinner, I’m sick
of being bent like wire, into strange shapes,
by strangers, and I’m in no mood for theatre.

I twist a fork into oily noodles. Pick at grilled cheese.
Sip cold milk. Ignore the metallic iceberg. I see a young man
(paralyzed from the waist down for a bike trick)
squeeze mustard onto a hot dog.
A man falls down a flight of stairs to husky cheers. A nearby jazz club borrows a neighboring building’s naked bricks to project a silent movie. I don’t have a sober second to myself, here, and even if I weren’t consigned
to never draw and quarter these vertiginous days into a script, I could never find competent actors willing to perform on a stage built to hardly hold their weight. I sulk and watch my play: trauma and his bald mother crowd the dark windows; thunder rises from beneath our slippers. I operate two conceptual spots, fill days with darkness, a light blue director, writer, understudy, cinematographer, solipsist sans assistant:
I would not make love this hard without any help: Anna is parked against a wall and sucks her roast beef dinner through a straw.
Exhale
Andrea Morawic
We never saw the sky fall
Megan Jessop

We started in constellations.
It rained so thick that night,
we could hardly see the stars.
We felt them instead.
Falling on clay skin leaving traces
of cold puddling at our feet.
Captivating my own quiet since.

You never were beautiful.
I fell in love with every imperfection.
I wasn’t blind. Rather too aware.
Everything anyone could not see.
You kept them hidden
well. I loved you for all things,
in spite of too.

There is a box I carried with me,
containing songs, photographs
and conversations.
I placed it for a time upon
my blazon sleeve, before dropping it
knowingly, into embers.
All burned finally,
ashes—a sacred form
of letting go.
The crowd was electric. Despite the small venue, each row of seats was packed with people waiting to see what might happen. They turned to each other. They whispered their theories on how it was done.

“For my next trick, I need a volunteer from the audience.”

She raised her hand timidly, thin fingers playing in the air as a spotlight grazed the sea of people. The theater grew louder. She wasn’t the only one vying for the magician’s attention. A burly man who’d sat next to her the entire night and who smelled like oregano and too much garlic, stood and leaned forward. His meaty arm passed the heads in the rows ahead of him.

“You there, come on stage,” the magician said, his voice overtaking the zealous crowd through the oversized speakers that framed the stage. He had one arm extended, pointing into the first few rows. Though there was no wind in the small theater, his jet-black hair was ruffled.

“Me?” she asked, glancing around her. The crowd was silent, with all eyes on her. The bright light nearly blinded her and the man to her right grunted a mixture of disappointment and derision.

“Yes, you, in the stunning blue dress. Please join me on stage.” He swirled his arms in a great arc, miming her intended path from audience to the spot by his side. The spectators stayed captivated by his every movement.

She gingerly made her way along the base of the stage. A pimply-faced attendant held her hand as she climbed the steps. As she found her place next to the magician, she could feel envy
radiating off the audience like wavy heat lines over a barbecue grill.

The magician produced a long, thin microphone as if from nowhere and held it toward her. He smelled a lot better than the man in the crowd, like sandalwood and the first ten minutes of fresh rain. “Tell me, do you believe in magic?”

“Well…sure,” she said into the proffered microphone. She tried to focus, to be in the present. Instead, her mind wandered to what she had hidden in the waistband of her dress. Her attention was split between what was happening on stage and when she might get the chance to use it.

A smile spread across the magician’s face, his straight white teeth gleaming in the intense light pouring onto the stage. For a moment, he held her gaze, and she briefly felt like they were the only ones in the room. Indeed, she was the only one who could see the gold flecks in his green eyes. As quickly as it started though, the spell was broken. “Glad to hear it! Then you’re in for a treat, Miss…?”

“Elizabeth,” she answered. A few hoots came from the crowd. Her gaze flitted to the hundreds of pairs of eyes staring at her, and she nervously smoothed out her dress. Her fingers played across the blue lace that marked her waist.

“Then, Miss Elizabeth, I need you to come with me.” He held out his hand and she slipped her own into his grasp. His hand was warm and solid. Self-assured.

He led her to a tall box that had taken residence on stage for the entire show, but hadn’t yet been used. She had heard the people in the rows around her wondering about the shiny black panels for the last hour. Finally, their curiosity would be sated.

The magician led her to the box and opened the door. Inside was all black, so dark that the spotlight framing him couldn’t even reach inside.

“Please, step inside my chamber. I promise you won’t be harmed…at least not fatally.” The crowd guffawed at his joke as he flashed her another disarming smile. It didn’t soothe her nerves. Did he know? Could he tell she was hiding something?

She stuck one foot inside the cabinet, and then the other. The floor felt solid beneath her. Her heels slid across the shiny
surface, made from the same black acrylic that lined the walls and door.

“See you soon, I hope,” he said, before slamming the door with a flourish.

There were no cracks of light streaming in behind the door. She held her hand in front of her face and struggled to see an outline, but found none. Still, she could hear the commotion going on around her.

The music began. Dramatic beats filled with drums and violins, music that often became the soundtrack of her dreams. But before she could start to enjoy it, she heard a familiar clicking.

It was soft at first, almost drowned out by the crowd. Then the clicking intensified, filling the cabinet. Her legs began to vibrate, first at her toes and then slowly up her calves. The chime of the music and swell of the crowd diminished with every click of her descent beneath the stage.

Within seconds the scene changed. She was still standing on the platform, but now she was surrounded by dusty machinery, naked, armless mannequins, and set pieces from a forgotten Old West scene.

A rough hand grabbed her arm and pulled her off the platform. “Quick. We need to send this back up.”

As soon as she was free, standing amidst a pile of mannequin torsos, the man rushed to a wall panel. His tall form hunkered down to accommodate the low, bare ceiling as he pressed a big green button. The clicking resumed and the shiny black platform rose into the ceiling, pulled by four thick metal chains.

“The man expects me to be in two places at once,” he muttered. “I swear if it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t deal with his shit anymore.” Before she could respond, the man, clad in acid-washed jeans and a ratty flannel, rushed out of the room.

Elizabeth waited amidst the whorls of dust and the heavy musty scent that reminded her of consignment shops. She was barely able to hear the music above her. She was missing everything. She could only picture the final act of the night. He’d wave his arms to the beat of the music, opening the door to find nothing there. There would be more, but she wouldn’t get to see it. She never got
to see it, but she knew every move by heart.

Suddenly, the noise from the audience swelled. It held its crescendo for what felt like minutes. As the cheers died down, the ceiling vibrated with heavy thuds slowly moving from the theater to the lobby of the aging venue.

She didn’t have to wait long. Perched atop a rickety chest labeled “HATS” she heard heavy footsteps approaching, scraping against the smooth concrete of the dusty basement floor.

“You did great!” the magician said as he emerged from the dark recesses that surrounded her.

“Thanks.” Her heartbeat quickened. Not enough to create a flush in her face. She’d gotten good at hiding the flush, of keeping herself calm when she was anticipating trouble. She had already made up her mind. This would finally be over.

“I think for Cleveland you should say that you don’t believe in magic. Then it would be like I’m proving something—that when you’ve disappeared and I’ve eventually taken your place the crowd will be even more impressed.” He moved forward and placed a slim hand on her bare shoulder. “I could even have you reappear with tears streaming down your face, like how people act when they see Jesus’s face in their toast or something.”

“Cleveland?” She fought to keep her face even.

“Yes, that’s the next stop on the tour after all. Unless you think two days is too soon for a change-up like this? Faking crying could be tough for you, hon.”

“You said this would be the last time.”

A wave of pity spread across his face so quickly she almost hadn’t seen it. If it weren’t for the fact that she’d been with him for almost five years, she might not have noticed. When she first caught his street magic act as she came out of a Starbucks one crisp autumn day five years prior, that bright smile took her in. She was snared by it. In the beginning, she took everything he said as gospel. She believed every word. To her, he was magic. Unfortunately, it took her years to realize it was all a lie.

Just as quickly as it came, the pity was replaced with the plastic smile he used while on stage. “It was really more of an idea than a promise. After all, you want me to succeed, right? You want
me to become the next great American magician. That’s what you said the first night we were together. Remember? There was wine. And you were wearing that lacy bra and panty set…”

She shrank away just as his hand was about to caress her bare collarbone. “Yes, I wanted you to succeed, but I want to succeed too. I’ll never become a magician if I’m always your plant. Stuck in the audience and then stuck in the basement. This isn’t the life I’d hoped for.”

He scoffed. The mask was fading away. “You’re still on about that? I hate to break it to you, but the only thing you’re good for is wearing a pretty dress and stepping into a magic box. Oh, and a few other things, but those aren’t suited for the stage.”

“How dare you!” Elizabeth shot up from her spot on the “HATS” box, the old wood scraping up against the raw concrete of the theater’s basement floor. The heat she tried to carefully to conceal began to creep up her chest, coloring her neck crimson. Again, her hand shot to her waistband.

He grabbed hold of her then, pinning her arms in an embrace. At first, she struggled then she began to melt. This was his signature move. “I’m sorry babe, I didn’t mean that. You know I didn’t. I just get really passionate after a show.” He rested his chin on top of her head, rustling her black curls.

“You promised…” she whispered. Her resolve began to crumble.

“I know I did. But I tried a different plant before. That girl couldn’t act to save her life. I saw the contempt on the audience’s face. They weren’t fooled. She had nothing on you.”

He pulled her away just enough to gaze a moment into her eyes. That gaze still captivated her after so many years. The shiver of desire never truly went away. He pressed his soft lips against hers and, for a moment, the dusty mannequins and tired set pieces fell away.

She had warned herself before the show had even started that he’d do this. She still held hope, though. Maybe she wouldn’t have to use it after all. She pulled away from his double-edged kiss and put her head on his shoulder.

“Try something different then. Or maybe don’t use a plant
at all,” she said, her voice lightly muffled by the suit fabric covering his solid, ropy shoulder. Comfort. “I could be your assistant at least, up there with you. It would be almost like a dance. Then we could live our love openly. It could even make the act better. I could help you.”

He jerked away, pushing her back. Her knees buckled as her calves banged against the “HATS” box. She sat down atop its aged wood with a thud.

“Help me? Help me? I don’t need anyone’s help, let alone from someone with no skills.” He clenched his jaw so hard she could see the muscles working and moving under the sharp cheekbones she used to love so much.

She stood again, intent now more than ever to finally stand her ground. “I designed half of your tricks and the other half you stole from other magicians.”

“Bullshit. And even if it wasn’t bullshit, and I’m not saying it isn’t, it takes real showmanship to do what I do—to captivate the audience. Something you and those hacks don’t have. When I found you, you were still working at your uncle’s disgusting taxidermy shop. It’s time you thanked me. When we get to Cleveland, you’ll be in the audience where you belong.”

“No.”

“Are you sure you want to say that? I’ll tell you again. You’ll be in the audience where you belong. And if you think you can get by without me, think again.” He paused, stretching his usually delicate hand into a practiced fist. “I don’t know what’s more laughable - the thought of making our relationship public or the thought of you trying to be a real magician. If you try to leave me, I’ll destroy you. I did it to the last girl and I’ll do it to you. You always wondered what happened to Leanne, my first and last magician’s assistant. I don’t think you want to find out.”

Her heart thumped inside her chest. She finally had a glimpse of the man she always expected hid beneath that handsome, charismatic exterior. Her fingers went to her waistband, where she felt the familiar outline of a small vial. It was so slight it would go undetected unless you knew it was there. But she was good at concealment, something she had to coach him on from the
beginning and that he never truly mastered.

“You’re right, honey. I’m sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking.” The crimson color drained from her neck as she again buried her fire deep within.

“Right. That’s right honey.” He put his arm around her shoulders. “Now, let’s celebrate another successful show with a glass of champagne.

Two Years Later

Dizzy. The crowd made her feel dizzy. She’d only been at it for two years now, yet the hum of the crowd still pumped her up. When she was alone on stage hearing their awed gasps, she knew that this time it was for her. It made her veins feel like they were filled with electrified crystal.

Her show was different. All of the showmanship that made her ex’s act seem so stodgy and out-of-touch was absent from her 90-minute thrill ride. “Thrill ride.” That’s what one impressed critic wrote on his magic fan blog.

Now she was on the stage in Cleveland. The biggest venue in town, not counting sports arenas. Even though he’d toured through Cleveland a dozen times, he was always at the smaller theaters, the ones that usually filled the audience for off-off-off Broadway plays performed by local youths. And she was there too, back then. In the crowd where she “belonged.”

Just like last year, her first year as a headlining magician, she planned something special for the Cleveland show. She didn’t call anyone up from the audience. Most people were skeptical of that. She had her own volunteer of sorts, though.

But first there was the buildup. Although she’d shared some ideas with the magician, she saved her best material for her own act. She glided across the stage, performing one trick after another like a dance. Each one was so meticulously timed that the applause rarely had a chance to die down. With each successful sleight of hand and grand reveal, her heart raced. She kept calm, though. She didn’t want her giddy excitement to show.
She used the whole auditorium, not just the stage. She used the walls and the ceiling, the aisles and the seats. The audience felt like they were a part of the act. And when it came time for her final trick, she used her most important prop just for Cleveland.

The ushers and ticket-takers weren’t able to sneak into the show like they normally did, but that didn’t keep them from gushing to Elizabeth once the night was done. It had been a packed house. All they could do was wait in the lobby for the show to end. While they stood, holding their brooms and dustpans, they listened to the swell of the crowd.

First, there was laughter, then gasps. Finally, the applause was so loud behind those closed theater doors that one timid usher had to cover his ears. The applause held for seconds that grew into minutes. As it quieted down, the theater doors opened and guests began streaming into the lobby.

“I have no idea how she did it,” one man exclaimed. He rested a palm on one cheek, unable to keep his mouth from falling open slightly.

“Damien would love this. We’re bringing him next year,” said another patron to the woman he’d hooked his arm around.

“It looked so real,” a teenage girl said. She gazed at the program she held in her hands. It was wrinkled from the firm grasp she’d had on it throughout the show. She would squeeze and pull at it at every big reveal.

Her date looked just as amazed. “Of course it wasn’t, though. That’s about the only part of the trick I could explain. Not how she got that mannequin to fly though, or how he appeared behind us in a matter of seconds. It was amazing.”

“And a handsome mannequin, too. He had a practically disarming smile. You should take some lessons from that thing.”

“Gross, Joann.” The couple weaved into the thickest part of the crowd now leaving the theater and entering the cool autumn air. Their comments became buried in a crowd of murmured astonishment and exclamations of joy.

While the ushers were finally able to start sweeping up the auditorium, Elizabeth was in the little basement below the stage. Although she had a loyal crew of five to help her transport most of
her things to and from the trailer they hauled behind her tour bus, there was one prop she dealt with all by herself.

She learned a lot when she was working for her uncle, before she’d ever met the magician. In his shop, she learned about skinning and tanning. About stuffing the cavity with wool and wire. About using glass eyes to make faces look lifelike.

Now, years after leaving his shop, she still remembered how to do it. Preparing, stuffing and mounting. She pushed her finale prop into a large box. Back-first, she pushed and folded its limbs. She took a moment to caress its hair, now bleached blond rather than the jet-black that diehard magic fans might recognize.

Surprisingly its skin was smooth to the touch, almost like soft, cream-colored leather. One last look and she was ready to pack it away again, hidden in a safe place in her home until her next special show in Cleveland. There it waited while she toured the country, living her dream.

“This is all you’re good for,” she whispered before replacing the lid on the box. As it settled into place, the smell of sandalwood and fresh rain mixed with chemicals only a taxidermy enthusiast would recognize wafted out from the mass inside. Across the old, warped wood was spray-painted one word: “HATS.”
Poem At Twenty-One
Elizabeth Mays

i want to
learn how to be
a person
who moves around
a crowded room
with ease.
i breathe in the shower
only i wonder
about blue lines
under my eyes.
i discover that
a level photo
frame does not
satisfy.
i wish you could
see me when
i have a thought
all to myself.
do i still want
to be just
like everyone?
last year, i wanted
to be everyone.
i want you to
know that i
wasn’t always
so harsh.

should i shape things
in a way
so they don’t
make me cry?
i wonder how slow
cracks sneak in like that.
i lean against
the dresser and look
at cracks in the ceiling.
i usually should
still be worried.
sometimes my heels
split open and i can’t
run but i didn’t run
anyways and it
is early.
Thanksgiving Day, 2016

here are the railroad tracks, cross them,
and there is the Yellowstone County line.

although the sign reads NO TRESPASSING,
the barbed wire beckons with fingers curled.

waiting for trains to pass,
to paw at the West,
feet treading on sandstone,
printing animal tracks
into untouched snow,
en route to the Shed.

O’ what a haven I know.

but if this is the meadow,
where is the grass?
here is the sandstone
tufted with sage.
burnt sage.
where is the fire?
who burnt the sage, the sage?
who burnt the grass, blasted the stone?
what of the Shed?
where is my lean-to?
charred wood,  
a mockery gleaming in the sun,  
rusted nails and combusted sandstone.

the washboard basin is no longer empty,  
the basin now filled with the soot of the roof  
stands alone in the shimmering black,  
the greatest of places, forsaken  
lean-to, is burnt to the ground.

O’ what a haven I knew.

from my points of low being  
from the valley it drew me  
past the railway tracks,  
across summertime meadows,  
past sunbathing rattlesnake packs.

from the valley it called me,  
from my manic heart’s heaving  
to the blizzardous humming  
of wind whistling through walls,  
snowfall drumming  
on the corrugated rooftop.

O’ here stood a haven I knew.

here was the shack room door  
scratched with the words  
THE GRATEFUL SHED.

here was the open front,  
the range’s mouth  
where I’d stare into the valley  
with the envious eyes of rivers  
long since dried, of sandstone  
long since eroded.
here was the place
    abuzz with stone hornets,
    hundreds of whispered ideas.

here was the prairie
    where I shall first pray, then breathe.
    where I shall first write, then breathe.

here is the shack, ungraciously fallen,
    where I buried my head so gratefully,
    dug for all that I never deserved,
    all that I never received.

    O’ here lies a haven I knew.

sage:          that’s for remembrance.
sandstone:     that’s erosion, not forgetfulness.
shed:          that’s where the true cowboys go to sleep, write,
    where their ghosts drink whiskey
    with me and myself, alone at night.
    where we perfect the art of self-talking,
    consider synonyms for never-letting-go
    where gritback Montanan shepherds go to rest
    with myself on the basin, drinking from dust.
Love of Beauty: For Jiějie
Lucy Torgrimson
Her body is a smeared street lamp
Golden in the right light
And a texture too high to really feel
With the whole of your palm
Her body dances in the shine of parking lot ice
Comfort in the dark
Where alley cats watch with star-blank
Eyes. Her voice is in D minor
Keyed with two hundred chords
You’ll catch your death
In her weather.
DEPTH AND PERCEPTION
Kelaiah Horat
She brews her own
because she likes to see
sepia seeping up.
She cannot sleep so she
needs coffee to keep her eyes –
brown ringed around soft green
– awake.

At night I am the coffee bean
ground up, pressed through a film of paper,
cleaner and clearer when I speak.
Not so gritty, because
it might give her heartburn
if I had no filter.

Instead my lips hide behind tense,
monitored silence.
Words swell and slip from my eyes,
eyes she does not see
because it molds her like clay,
folds her into a ball,
turns her away from me.
So I go home
where her ears cannot see me,
and her eyes cannot hear me,
no one can hear me
and my hands, my eyes, my lips
all speak at once.

Hot drops squeeze from my eyes,
drowning irises blue
(concentrated at the curved edges
and dripping in toward the black hole).
I didn’t ask for them to come
but I don’t fight—

the loops and spikes I penned to the page, dissolving
blue separating into motionless ripples of color,
tinged dark at the ragged edges and bleeding
through the bleached and pounded tree pulp.
Paper, fragile skin, bruised but not yet
broken – I can save it if I’m careful.
Do not touch the salt-watercolor.
Words could snag and form tears.

Wait—
give her time, and do not leave her.
She knows you are there
though she does not see. On the worst days,
I have seen her – she spits.
But tomorrow she will smile,
and her eyes will thank me for the note I left
on her desk saying “I love you.”
Though we will speak not a word of it.
flourish, wilt, seasonal rouge.
leaves bake themselves into the mud,
potters raking clumps of clay
into kilns at dawn.
fingertips, open palms,
bare feet blindly paw at pedals
by dim and wintry light,
by center-justification,
by the plight of precious petals—
Solaris! redden the dew! thaw the mud!
for who else will ask the poppies
if all is fair in blood, blue?
in war, red?
Glimpse

Hannah Fay
FRAGILITY, NO. 4
KELAIAH HORAT
The mountain base cradles two houses, conjoined like fated twins. A hallway with two doors on either end separated them—pathways of veins where blood runs through, leading straight to the heart. At age four, we moved into this new home with new faces, as my cousins whom I had not yet met came for a visit—strangers settling in to barren living rooms. There have been muted voices since.

Aunt Charlene and Grandma’s voices in the hallways, the voices of Daddy and Grandad in the next room, every voice was echoed by the sound of mother’s knife, chopping carrots on countertops. The voices projecting muffled words, saying things like, “perhaps we will leave a place for a new mother,” or, “someday your sister will share her husband.” The words paint an abstract still, a portrait of betrayal, moving us to jealousy, moving us to embrace this bitterness.

We were made to blend into the background as the setting of this story, each touch of artistry attempting to soften how our mothers have been oppressed. We were raised in hushed whispers, whispers that taught us the ways in which our souls would seek salvation; three levels of hell we eternally belonged to—hell in its present form. We are never free.

Our women and children are personal forms of bloodletting. We’ve created a poultice for hiding their scars we’ve created while being scarred ourselves. There are rivers of offenses beginning from beyond my father’s father’s father. We hold within us a lust that makes us gods. We have cleansed ourselves, for our sins, with histories of a romanticized martyrdom. When did it become murder of the innocent when all this time it was war?
Perception of the Troubled
Maree Herron

I find him in the darkness where I stuffed him long ago;
My eyes blink cold with weariness, the source of which I know
Can only mean he wakes again from depths of sorcery
Which fills my ears and binds my tongue with bitter vertigo.

I thought the ties that bound us snipped would free me from his grasp,
But strings of Fate are only cut by death’s impending rasp.
He holds me like a lover scorned and rocks me to and fro—
Then beats me with the doors unlocked; I dare not speak or gasp.

Through death through life his eminence will haunt me o’er the years;
For bound to me he lives, but stripped apart he disappears.
That box of cruel Pandora bids my hand upon the clasp,
And brings about the specter once again into my fears.

Two entities!—They cry;—a friend and foe, a murderer!
You live as one but he upon yourself didst not incur!
Such piteous lies do ever shout that I could spurn the tears
That from him scream in agony upon my face demure.

A heart, a lung, the two doth churn my dark unwilling blood:
Such necessary organs would if taken bring a flood,
His tendrils reach into them; their distinctness now doth blur—
Until our lives are terminal, a Flower killed in bud.

I do not ask for sympathy nor charity nor rue.
I only want for understanding of this thing—taboo;
For ’till the sky doth brighten, clouds across it; dark; will scud—
And bring about continuance where tampered minds adieu.
THE GREAT ATTRACTION
Juliette Viera
AFTER THE STORM

MEGAN JESSOP
The shadows grew long and the potential buyers short. The cabin was put on the market weeks ago, and over those two weeks people had come to check the place out. No offers had been given. Mrs. Brown sat in a chipped white deck chair, and looked out at Georgetown Lake. Dinnertime left it empty and calm, save for the smart fish that hadn’t been caught by retired old men in rickety metal boats fishing from dawn until dinner.

She took a bite from one of the cookies she’d made for prospective clients. They’d grown hard in the summer sun, but nevertheless had sugary appeal.

Mrs. Brown looked at her watch. It was six twenty on Friday. She wished she had a place to go after this. She was going to drive back to Butte and repeat the same things she did week after week. Each week, she hoped her friends would call her out for a couple of beers, or her husband would sweep her off her feet and take her on an impromptu vacation. Every week, neither happened. She’d go home, hear her husband complain about working overtime and see pictures of her friends living their own lives on Facebook.

This week was different. Her whole week had practically been spent at Georgetown, sitting on the deck, baking cookies that hardened in the sun, and finding new and interesting ways to catch the attention of couples and families that took tours of the cabin. She’d grown quite fond of the tiny place, as she’d searched for an owner for it, and in return, it gave her shade beneath the roof’s overhanging.

People didn’t want the place because it was old. The mass of wood was built in the twenties, and according to the information
she’d gotten in order to sell, had been given additions and been remodeled over the years. In the walls were old electric heaters with knobs to select the desired warmth. The water had to be turned on underneath the cabin, where any normal sized adult could break their backs due to it being a tiny crawlspace that smelled of mildew and moist. The cabin was a cream color, but the paint endlessly chipped and peeled away showing traces of many layers of colors. Written dates in the cement of the boat garage indicated traces of past owners.

The place was lived in and worn, but Mrs. Brown figured it would sell because it was waterfront property and had two acres. It’d been years and years since the beetles attacked the trees and now the property was properly shaded.

Mrs. Brown heard the purring of a car slowly descending down the pine-needled, dirt driveway. She flattened the skirt of her dress and stood up, a forced red smile etching its way across her face. She cleared her throat and ran her tongue across her teeth for any signs of stray cookie.

The owner of the green Subaru Outback slid out and stretched. She was an older woman, perhaps in her seventies. She had white hair and wrinkles all over her tanned and freckled face. She wore a crew-neck sweatshirt displaying “Jingle Bell Run,” from the 1990s. The woman grinned from ear to ear as she stared at the lake, wrinkles crinkling at the edge of her eyes.

Mrs. Brown didn’t know whether to speak up or not. The woman appeared almost reminiscent as she stared at the blue water lapping against the rocks. Her eyes were on the water, but also on so much more. She seemed somewhere distant in her thoughts. The woman finally turned on her heel and politely nodded at Mrs. Brown.

“Hello, ma’am!” Mrs. Brown said, ready to repeat the mantra she’d been saying all week to people she’d never see again. “Are you here to take a look at the cabin?”

The woman ran her sharp blue eyes over the cream-colored structure. Her lip quirked up at the side, but the semi-smile did not give off the same meaningful feeling it had when the woman had devoted her attention to the lake. If Mrs. Brown wasn’t mistaken,
the smile almost felt sad.

The woman shook her head. “No,” she said, her voice croaking with age. “I think not. Much has changed, much has changed.”

Mrs. Brown furrowed her brows and pursed her lips at the woman. If she didn’t want to look at the cabin, then her job was done. She wasn’t going to press an old woman into buying it either. She’d die soon and Mrs. Brown would be back again, struggling to find a buyer of the old structure once more.

Mrs. Brown took her seat again, frowning, as the old woman grinned at the flat rocks used as makeshift stairs which then led to the real wooden stairs.

“Surprised these old things are still here,” the woman muttered. She walked up the rocks and then took the wooden stairs one by one, slowly, like the breeze that blew through her white curls.

Mrs. Brown stood up to help the woman onto the deck. The old lady had obviously seen this place before, but Mrs. Brown wasn’t interested in its past. She only needed someone to buy it to create a future.

The old woman took her arm and reached the top. She thanked Mrs. Brown and then shuffled over to the front of the deck which looked out onto the unkempt lawn, and the navy and purple waters. The water erupted with many rings of waves as fish jumped out to catch pesky gnats for dinner.

“Much has changed,” the woman muttered again and Mrs. Brown sighed, chewing on her cheek as she stared at the back of the woman. “But much is still beautiful.”

The old woman nestled her body against a beam of wood and turned her head to the left, staring at fishermen in the distance. Bonfires were coming to life across the way and clacking loons echoed across the lake.

Mrs. Brown checked her watch. Six forty. Twenty minutes to go. She wasn’t necessarily ecstatic to leave. Her destination was her own house- a place that hadn’t felt like home for a while.

“That smell is nostalgic,” the woman said, cutting up the silence of nature. “I remember it well. Pines, dead fish, and the
smell of gasoline on wood. Oh, it’s been years.”

Mrs. Brown wanted to roll her eyes at this woman, but for some reason she couldn’t. The woman wasn’t doing anything wrong, and Mrs. Brown had twenty minutes until she was done. She supposed she could afford to sit down and talk to this woman who obviously wanted to be heard.

She snatched a cookie and walked up to the woman, leaning her hip into the beam next to her. The woman turned her head and stared at Mrs. Brown, her blue eyes warm and full of experience.

“Was this your cabin?” Mrs. Brown finally asked.

The old woman smiled, tight lipped, and the crinkles in her eyes became more prominent.

“No, no, definitely not mine,” she replied, looking up at the pink sky. “It was my father’s cabin. He bought it with mother in the fifties. Us seven kids grew up in it, and after we became adults, our children were raised in it. It’s seen many little hands.”

She chuckled as she watched a hawk land on one of the scraggly tree branches. “I remember every single detail about this place before dad sold it. I know all the changes it went through, the ins and outs. I have memories so vivid that even age won’t stop them from resurfacing.”

The old woman’s gaze met Mrs. Brown’s. She ran a chubby finger against the soft wood and looked back at the little cabin.

“I won’t bore you with my stories, though. I came here to say goodbye for the last time.”

Mrs. Brown didn’t respond. The woman seemed too young to be put into a home, and she didn’t want to know the alternative for a woman her age.

“You won’t bore me, ma’am. I suppose if I’m selling this place, I should know a little bit about it,” Mrs. Brown replied. “However, I’m going to need another cookie. Would you like one?”

The old woman smiled and nodded.

Mrs. Brown snatched the plate off the table and brought it over to the beam, balancing it in between them. The woman took a bite of the cookie and squeaked in pleasure.

“These are quite good. I’ve somehow managed to burn all the batches I’ve made recently. I forget I put them in!” She chuckled
and pointed out at the fishermen, who had just caught a fish.
   “They’ll eat well tonight,” she said.

Mrs. Brown nodded.
   “Where was I? I guess nowhere. Lost in my thoughts, as usual,” the old woman said. “I guess I could tell you a bit about the specifics of the cabin, but, to be honest, those are not what make the place.”

Mrs. Brown watched the woman, who was observing the fishermen. The hawk that had left its perch in search of prey.

“The cabin began with whoever had built it in the early 1900’s. When my father bought it, he painted it this ugly, yet memorable, mint green color. Slowly, my parents had more and more children, and by the late sixties, nine of us ran around this place. My brothers and sisters have left their marks all over. That outhouse—goodness gracious I can’t believe it’s still there—has mine and my two younger siblings’ signatures with dates from the seventies on it. And, I don’t know if they’re still up there, but the attic has some of my brother Dan’s stickers on it.”

Mrs. Brown grinned. A couple who had been viewing the cabin the other day had asked why there were stickers on the slab of wood in the attic and, she was sure, had said no to purchasing it because of the stickers.

“When I look out at the bunk house, I can still smell the musky scent of the moth-eaten blankets and the flowers painted around the walls. My sister first told me about her love for John Travolta in there. My daughters hated sleeping in the bunk house because thousands of gnats joined us, but their cousins would join them in there to play house and practice plays. The good thing was that it was right next to the charcoal burner, which never went a night unused and gave off a smell that clung to your clothes for days. Meat was a necessity up here, and I’m pretty sure my fingers are chubby because of all the salt dad used on them.”

The old woman turned so that her hunched back was leaning against the beam. She took another cookie and picked it apart, pieces falling onto the ground.

“Those are for the ants,” she said, shoving a piece into her mouth. “I always thought that if you were going to immerse
yourself with the nature up here, you should appreciate all that it brings. I can’t tell you how many spiders became my roommates. Colleen would kill them, but until then, they were left alone.”

She smiled and pointed to the left where a hot tub sat unused and half of the porch remained unfinished.

“See that window right there?”

Mrs. Brown nodded.

“There are three bedrooms back there. The one in the very back doesn’t have a door. My daughters loved that room. It had one of those heaters that makes the room warm in two minutes. They loved that thing. After going tubing, or jumping in the lake before dinner, they’d run for the heater. I much preferred air-drying on this porch after going skiing. Believe it or not, but I used to ski, easy.”

Mrs. Brown chuckled and the old woman placed her warm hand on hers.

“When I was about your age, my daughters and I would come up here all the time.

I married late, so all of my brothers and sisters were married, and many of them had kids. Those floorboards have seen so many dirty little feet. We were lucky the place got to see generations of kids. But we considered this place home. You never felt unwelcome here. It was a congregation where my family members, cousins, aunts, and uncles could come and be reunited. The heart of this place was dad though. He always seemed to be here. He ran the place. He was respected, and that’s how this place was treated.

“When my dad turned ninety, things changed. The inhabitants of the cabin started to dwindle. Everyone’s lives became more complicated, and their jobs became more time consuming. Children became adults with other things in mind. The last days seemed to hang in the air that final summer. Dad was aging, and only a couple of people came up. Everything was still the same in terms of home, but there was a sadness that seemed to settle throughout Salmon Lane. I remembered a lot of things that summer: my brother Tom and his jokes at the dinner table, Dad falling asleep while watching the news, kids and their cousins starting a game of Monopoly, only to leave it some hours later,
forgetting it completely.” She pointed to the cream-colored cabin.

“This cabin is filled with all of those memories. It lives within the walls and it remains within the old musk it gives off inside. I can feel the memories as whispers in the wind. The imprint my family gave off swims in the deepest part of the lake with the fish and flies in the sky with the birds. So many memories were made up here. It seems as though this cabin could never forget us.”

She sighed and shook her head, letting out a squeak to break her thoughts. “Oh, I sound like a lunatic,” she said, stuffing the last of the cookie in her mouth.

Mrs. Brown shook her head.

“You don’t sound crazy, ma’am. You’ve captivated me.” The woman patted Mrs. Brown on the shoulder and returned to her thoughts before continuing the way that old people sometimes do.

“Dan made and put up a sign in those last years we were here. It said ‘Wilde Ruhe’. It meant ‘Wild Calm’. That’s exactly what this place was. With seven kids and their own families coming and going all summer, this place was used, loud, and wild. Kids were here and there, families went their separate ways during the day—sometimes using the boat for skiing or for trips to Philipsburg to get candy from the Sweet Palace, but, at the end of the day, everyone came back together for dinner and a relaxing time around the fire. Even if kids were outside playing and adults were working on outdoor projects, like chopping up wood, or fixing the dock, we were all immersed in the calmness Georgetown had, and still has, to offer.”

The old woman sighed and watched as the ants started showing up to take her cookie crumbs.

“Wilde Ruhe,” she muttered, as if reminiscing. “Those memories. I don’t care what family takes this house and which families have lived in it. This cabin provides a home and becomes a home. It’s always a Wilde Ruhe, even if the commotions are different from our family’s.”

Mrs. Brown pointed at the structure.

“Well, the last family who was here sold this place because they were moving to the East Coast. They told me when they were leaving that they had the best years of their lives up here. I have to
believe you when you tell me that this place brings good memories to people.”

The old woman chuckled and gripped Mrs. Brown’s arm tightly.

“I could spend days telling you all my memories from when I was a young girl to a middle-aged woman up here, but the only reason this place was special was because family made it special. When family is mixed with nature, somehow that makes it even more spectacular. You wouldn’t even have to be religious to find God up here. Everything makes this place a home, from the people next door, to the simple embers that die after a fire that has heard stories from families in their own separate lives.”

Mrs. Brown nodded. The place was beautiful. She’d spent all week here with a lack of potential buyers, so she’d had time to revel in the peace and quiet of the Montana nature. She understood exactly what the old woman was saying, but she wished she could feel the sense of home that the old woman felt as she recollected her memories of this cabin. Emotions could be seen through the woman’s aged eyes, and Mrs. Brown wished she could recall a time where she could feel that sense of memory and family and home.

“How do you make a place a home? I can’t afford a place up here in Georgetown and I live in Butte, which doesn’t exactly have much nature in the suburbs.” The old woman seemed to ponder Mrs. Brown’s question for a while. She looked back up at the sky, which started to turn into a pale purple color.

“I can’t tell you, Miss,” the woman finally answered, and Mrs. Brown frowned. “Your family is different than mine and we are different ages and have different ideas of a home. We lead different lives and are mere passersby on this day. I guess, as I’m nearing my last days and keep recalling my memories, I would suggest one thing.”

Mrs. Brown looked up at the woman longingly.

“You find the people you love and you live the life you want. Find a place, no matter how little or big, where you can make memories.”

The old woman turned back to the lake and waved at the fisherman. They waved back, their tiny faces beaming smiles at
their catch.

The old woman smiled at Georgetown Lake, stained pink and purple from the sky with the loons ringing out, and small, orange fires lighting up around the bend.

“Miss, find your Wilde Ruhe.”
SILENCE
Kelaiah Horat
I was minding my own business, sitting with a mug of chamomile tea and my Chinese homework in my lap, when I noticed him noticing me. He had brown hair and glasses and was wearing a university sweatshirt and jeans. I was a college freshman at a Christian weekend retreat, and I was sure I hadn’t met him. His gaze wasn’t aggressive, or even that uncomfortable really, but I hoped he would stop gawking and come over to introduce himself. He was standing in a small group of Japanese girls. I trusted their judgement. I smiled at him to signal that I caught him looking and that it was safe to approach. He left the group of girls he was with and before I could even squeak out the first hello—

“Let me guess,” he said. “You’re Korean!”
I shook my head. “Um, Chinese.”

“Oh, thanks. My friends over there are trying to teach me how to tell the differences between Asian ethnicities. I know you don’t all look the same.”

Why is it always white boys who say rude things? I’m sorry, it’s not just the white boys. Many people are unintentionally insensitive about race, myself included. But in my experience, it’s the white boys who are the main culprits and feel entitled to ask their weird questions.

An Asian in Montana generates mystery, which I’ve never understood given the first Japanese and Chinese immigrants arrived in America in the 1800s. Asians have been here for a while now, and they’re here to stay. It’s disconcerting when university students hear my perfectly unaccented English and still ask how long I will stay in Montana. I think their ears play tricks on them. Besides, the Albertson’s grocery clerks have told me that I have great articulation.

My community in high school already knew I was adopted from China and that English was my first language. They speculated
that the most “Chinese” thing about me was my affinity for white sticky rice and my gifted ability to eat with chopsticks. Now at the bright age of 21, I am constantly reminded that I am Chinese.

I understand why people ask stereotype-based questions and I don’t always mind them. There’s a tone you can hear in people’s voice when they are genuinely curious.

“So, do you...I mean...well, what I’m trying to say, er ask...do you eat a lot of rice?” my boyfriend’s mom asked. She used the delicate approach, but she was sincere.

Sometimes the tone isn’t there, and any reply just confirms their expectations they already had about you. Old ladies in church ask my hometown friend where she is from then they ask me and they don’t believe me. They pause and wait for me to clarify. Oh, wait, you want to know where I am really from. Okay, why didn’t you say so?

I understand why people ask stereotype-based questions because I do it too. When I see someone dressed to the nines or in a costume, it makes me curious. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have given them a second look. My curiosity sometimes discriminates by race too. I get excited when I hear accented English or a foreign language. I always turn my head, smiling, trying to identify the country or region. And then I look at him or her or them and listen to a babble of words I don’t understand to see if I was right.

I’ve spent some time in China during the summers, and I get excited when I see white people or black people or basically anyone who isn’t Chinese in China. One day I was enjoying a large portion of tomato-egg rice in a crummy Chinese cafeteria when the bell above the door rang. I turned to see two white men step into the restaurant. Their bewildered stares at the menu confirmed my suspicion that they were indeed foreigners. In broken Chinese and finger pointing, they ordered their dishes and sat down.

I approached them. “Where are you guys from?” I asked.

They paused and looked at one another, before answering slowly, “A-mer-i-ca.”


I don’t know how to talk about race. I don’t like to talk about it. I was raised in white culture. I value integrity, critical thinking, and productivity. I believe in a diligent work ethic to get where you want to be in life. As a child, I used to eat Cheerios with slices of banana,
consume episodes of *Dragon Tales* every Saturday morning, and earn an allowance by picking up rocks in my parents’ backyard. I think it’s natural that I would feel pretty assimilated. I’m more than happy to acknowledge how race might affect others, but I don’t like to think about how race might affect me.

I can’t tell you that I feel like a victim of oppression and racism because I don’t feel wronged. Before more than 100,000 Japanese Americans were relocated to internment camps in 1942, Japanese women were burning letters and photographs from home, packing their kimonos, and hiding Buddhas in the attic, doing anything they could to distance themselves from their home country and prove their loyalty as immigrant Americans. But the Japanese got put away anyway. They gave up their homes, they lost their jobs, and they sent their sons off to fight the Axis powers. It’s an extreme example, but it’s what I think about when I think of Asian discrimination in America. This isn’t my experience.

I used to think Asian discrimination in the United States was a non-issue, certainly in contrast to discrimination that the African American community faces because generally speaking, Asians have been viewed as a successful minority. Most Asian immigrants in the 1800s kept their heads low and their voices quiet, choosing to assimilate to Western culture and minimize cultural differences. The Asian communities continue to do this today. “Don’t you see, Jenny? That’s part of the problem,” my friend Kim, half-Korean, told me.

Asian Americans suppress their culture and heritage, as if becoming more “white” or more western is an upgrade. Some of my Asian friends’ only learned English, their parents afraid their sons or daughters would be teased at school for an accent. Other parents did so because, when they moved to America, they decided to ascribe to the culture of their new home. In some cases, it’s the children who don’t want to learn their ancestor’s tongue because they think it sounds strange or too different. It’s a subtle discrimination, and one I don’t believe the general public tries to reinforce. Collectivism, however, is so embedded in Asian American community that it’s difficult for many traditional families to want to share their stories, much less their thoughts and opinions.

More obvious Asian discrimination is in the American media. Asian Americans receive little to no representation, and much of the
attention reinforces negative Asian stereotypes: broken English or funny accents, nerd-geniuses lacking social skills, bad driving, shy or submissive personalities, cultural nuances, or authoritarian parents. Think of Lilly in *Pitch Perfect* who maintains a nearly silent role throughout the movie until her beatboxing skill is discovered, or the classic ending scene of the Chinese waiters singing “Fa ra ra ra ra” instead of “Fa la la la la” in *A Christmas Story*. I know, I laugh too. I can only guess it’s because some of these racial profiles aren’t seen as stereotypes at all.

These examples are considered microaggressions. A psychological definition of microaggressions are everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. I think the “intentional or unintentional” clause makes microaggressions especially hard to identify. The first time my eyes were opened to microaggressions in my life was in my American Literature class. Rather, it was the first time I personally related to a microaggression. Asians call it the “Second Question.”

“Let me ask you a question,” my Vietnamese literature professor, Quan Ha, said to me. “Have you been asked, ‘Where are you from?’”

I smiled, knowingly, and nodded. He often teased our class about Asian standards: straight A’s, Asian neatness, Asian revenge. Today, however, my class was studying race theory. I wasn’t sure how he would approach the topic.

“Have you been asked twice-- a second time? What do you say?” He pressed.

I shrugged. “I know people are just curious, so I usually don’t take it personally. I guess I tell them where I was born.”

“You tell them what they want to hear,” he said, critically. He addressed my friend Chase.

“Do people ask you where you’re from? What do you say?”

“I’m from California.”

“Do they believe you?”

Chase said, “Generally, yes.”

“Why do people believe you the first time, but ask Jenny and me a second time?” No one said a word. “Me,” he continued in his
Vietnamese-accented English, “I never tell them what they want to hear. If I am asked, ‘Where are you from?’ I say ‘Missoula.’ I know what kind of answer they want, to hear that I’m from Vietnam.” He looked at me. “I refuse to answer the second question because it perpetuates the belief that Asians are foreigners in this country.”

What do I experience when people ask me the Second Question? I’m not sure yet. Is asking the Second Question rude? Or have I been trained to perceive it as rude? It’s difficult for me to discern. I do not believe American culture needs to be more censored or sensitive for the sake of politeness, however, we do need to be more aware of the heart behind those comments or questions. Are we genuinely curious, or are we seeking to confirm or reject a preconceived stereotype? What makes race-comments inappropriate or oppressive are the generalized assumptions behind them. What makes race-questions rude or offensive is not ignorance—it's when individuals expect certain responses that affirm their suspicions.

Discussing race topics will always be a challenge. I don’t think white people should feel like they must walk on eggshells around ethnic minorities. I think ethnic minorities ought to recognize when questions come from a curious heart. Some of my friends insist, “I don’t think about race when I see people, I just see everyone as the same.” The truth is, it’s more honoring when we have conversations about ethnic and cultural differences, seeking personal experience or perspectives rather than pretending to be colorblind. Many ethnic minorities don’t identify as “everyone,” and are happy to share their unique cultural and individual perspective if someone is willing to ask and to listen.

I find myself in a unique intersection of ethnic and cultural identity. I was born in China, and am ethnically Chinese, therefore I identify as Chinese. Yet, I was raised in Western culture, and I have a typical “white” American family, so I also see myself as culturally American.

Simple enough to understand, right? Plenty of people, however, have expressed an opinion of how Chinese or how American I am. When I am in China, I am not “American” enough for the Chinese nationals. I am not “Chinese” enough for my American teammates because I do not speak Chinese fluently. When I am in the United States, my Chinese friends see me as 100 percent American, but the everyday white person commonly mistakes me for a Chinese
foreign exchange student. Even when I went to a completely different country I’m told what I am. The first thing my Kenyan host told me was, “You, you are not Chinese! You are an American.” I tried to explain the difference between ethnicity and nationality. “No, if you get in trouble, the Chinese government will do nothing for you.” It’s hard to argue with that logic.

I know I am free to identify however I please, but I do feel displaced at times. Now that I’ve begun this exploration of racial identity, I’ve begun to realize it’s affecting me. I just don’t know how yet. Maybe I thought I belonged in a certain cultural identity, and now I am conscious that some members of that cultural group see me as different than “them,” or never considered me apart of “them” at all. Racial questions or racial comments make me feel othered an outsider looking at something I thought I was a part.

Do you know what that feels like? Do you know what it feels like to feel “othered”? For me, it happens when:
• When people refer to me as an “oriental girl.”
• When the boy across the aisle asks me, “Did you receive more attention in elementary school because you are Chinese?”
• When my “white” boyfriend says he knows people who have an issue with us being in a relationship.
• When the Chinese girl says, “It’s good for you to have an Asian face without the accent, you’ll get further in your career.”
• When English-learning Chinese college students I just met are disappointed to have me as their language partner.
• When the Chinese boy said, “Your skin is really dark. It’s not a good thing.”
• When the older white man spat at me; I was five years old.

Race impacts us in ways that we don’t even realize. Once you see it, you see it everywhere. This is a snapshot of a young woman who is trying to understand why race has become a more prevalent—and more sensitive—topic in her life. This is me, at age 21, realizing that I am treated differently—for better or worse—because of race. This is me sharing a piece of my reality with you and asking you to believe me.
My mittens have no clear front or back—
thumbs and other fingers, an obvious inside
and outside (interior/exterior).
But I can’t tell the right
from the left.

I thought of this on a Saturday
sitting in a carpeted seat on the bus
next to the man asleep on his thighs.
I thought how simple and pain-filled
it must be to live in the hip creases.
Such an inclination to fall forward.
The afternoon sun beat down on the gravel and Tony’s shadow wavered before him as he walked home. Tall and skinny as he was, his shadow was even thinner and stretched out, dancing before him like a skeletal puppet on strings. The driveway opened to seven acres of land where his house squatted, the white paint as bright as a bone in the sunlight. In the driveway another car was parked next to his family’s pickup truck. The big black sedan had a license plate from Texas, not too far a drive from Tony’s small hometown in New Mexico.

Tony eyed the car as he walked by. Crickets chirped in the tall grass as he stepped forward to peer through the tinted windows. A black pit bull lunged at the window, barking frantically. Tony staggered backward, his heartbeat pounding in his ears as the dog scratched at the window, foamy slobber gathering at its jowls.

The door of his house opened and a tall, thickset man with a graying black moustache and salt and pepper hair walked out onto the deck.

“Josephine startle you, boy?” asked the stranger.

“The dog?” Tony looked from the pit bull to the man and back again.

“Yeah, the dog.”

Tony shrugged in response, though his heartbeat still skittered. His father stepped out behind the man, a beer in his hand. Tony got his wiry frame from his father. Next to the man with the moustache his dad looked small and washed out.

“Tony, meet Mr. Jack Corrigan, my new business associate. Jack, my son Anthony,” his father said as he brought the can to his
“Pleased to meet you,” Corrigan said, lumbering down the steps.

Tony shook the stranger’s hand, self conscious that his own palms were slick with sweat.

A loud bang from around the side of the house followed by a string of curse words brought everyone's attention to Tony’s older brother. As skinny as Tony and his father were, Murphy was even lankier, with sharp cheekbones and eyes that sank deep into his skull. His black hair fell unevenly around his shoulder and he had full, puffy lips that smirked at Tony as he approached, swinging a hammer at his side. Tony flinched away.

“All set then?” Corrigan asked.

“You want to have a look?” Murphy said.

“Yes. You coming, Martin?” Corrigan looked back at Tony’s dad, who nodded slowly and took another long sip, his Adam’s apple bobbing under the thin skin of his throat. He trailed after Murphy and Corrigan. Tony was about to follow when he heard his mother call from the house.

“Tony—is that you?”

“Coming, Ma!” he said and shifted his backpack, squinting at the trio as they headed up to the barn.

The house was even hotter than it was outside, though several fans were set up in various corners of the rooms. They made a loud humming noise that made Tony feel like his house was an airplane getting ready to take off.

His mom was in the kitchen, her limp blonde hair tied back in a dark green scarf and thick glasses magnifying her brown eyes as she blinked at him.

“Help me with the dishes.”

“Ah, come on Ma, I just got done with school,” he protested.

“I need to talk with you about something.”

Tony sighed, taking the drying towel from her, and let his backpack slide to the ground.

“Tonight some people are coming over to the house. It has to do with your daddy’s new business partner, but I don’t want you leaving your room under any circumstances, you hear?”
Tony mumbled a yes.
“What was that?”
“Yes ma’am,” Tony said, louder.
She patted his cheek with damp hands and smiled. The action forced the hard lines around her mouth up, more of a grimace than a smile.
“You’re a good son, Tony.”
They both jumped at the sound of the screen door opening and Murphy strutted through the door, flinging himself onto the chair, which gave a dangerous creak as he balanced on two legs. Tony’s mother opened her mouth to chastise him, but when Mr. Corrigan and Tony’s dad came in she pressed her lips into a thin line and turned back to the dishes, jaw clenched.
“It all looks great, the boys will be by in a couple of hours to set up the finishing touches. Spectators arrive at eleven o’clock sharp. Place your bets and get ready because tonight, boys, there will be blood!” Mr. Corrigan clapped Murphy and Tony’s dad on the shoulder, jostling them a bit. His grin could have shamed the devil.

Mr. Corrigan left and Tony eyed his father cautiously, well aware that he was holding a new drink.
“What did he mean, there will be blood?” Tony asked.
His mom shot him a warning glance and Tony’s dad banged his hand down on a chipped desk. A pile of unopened envelopes spilled onto the ground and his dad kicked them aside, but he didn’t respond.
Murphy’s lips ticked up into a menacing smile and he opened the refrigerator with a yank that caused the cans inside to rattle. He took out his own beer, despite being only sixteen.
Murphy reminded Tony of a wasp that he once had in his room. His big brother’s energy buzzed, warning him if he got too close, it would sting. It hadn’t always been that way. When they were younger, they used to play with old horseshoes and throw them at a stick they’d put in the ground, trying to catch the shoes on the stick. Tony never threw far enough, but Murphy used to run, pick them up, and put them around the makeshift pole, pretending like he had. Then Murphy made friends with what Ma called “the
wrong people.” They stole stuff, like key chains and candy bars, but they were never caught until they broke into a jewelry store. Murphy spent a couple weeks in a juvenile detention center. Tony wasn’t exactly sure what that meant, but knew it was worse than detention in school. He also had to do community service, what Murphy called “picking up shit on the side of the road.” After that, Murphy was different. He was distant with everyone and there was a mean light in his eyes that hadn’t been there before.

Murphy purposely bumped into Tony on his way to the living room and before disaster struck, Tony picked up his backpack and went outside. He climbed up the oak tree to a thick branch that had a perfect dip in it for sitting. He hung his backpack on another branch and removed one of his textbooks. In science today they’d done an experiment with a Coca-Cola bottle and Mentos. The soda was full of carbon dioxide and the bubbles stayed suspended in liquid until they opened up the bottle. His teacher called that nucleation. Mentos contained tiny pits on the surface and they acted as nucleation sites. As they sink to the bottom, bubbles rise and a geyser of frothy soda is released. Tony opened his textbook, but instead of reading he leaned back against the tree and watched ants scurry across the textured surface.

“Hey, kid, you wanna see something cool?” Murphy asked. Tony squinted down at his brother below.
“What is it?” he asked, suspicious.
“Come on, let me show you,” Murphy said, shrugging his shoulders in the direction of the barn.

Tony hesitated but Murphy grabbed his right leg that dangled down one side of the tree and pulled him down. The bark scraped uncomfortably into his skin as he fell.

“Get off of me!” Tony wrestled free of Murphy’s grasp, feeling the sting of blood on his calf where it had been scratched by the rough wood. He picked up his textbook, the pages were crinkled and he shook off the dirt.

“Don’t be such a baby, come on.” Murphy said and pushed Tony forward.

He didn’t have his beer can anymore but his breath smelled like alcohol. The sun was low in the sky, and dust kicked up around
their ankles as they trekked uphill to the barn. It’d been empty of animals for a couple years now, but as they entered the building it still smelled like horses, the scent of molasses from the sweet feed and leather from saddles and bridles subtle in the air.

Tony saw that wooden boards had been put up around the corral and his skin prickled uncomfortably. He wondered what exactly Murphy, his father, and Mr. Corrigan were up to.

“This way,” Murphy said, striding to the back room where he opened a door and with an impatient wave called Tony over.

“Christ,” Tony breathed out softly. In the dim light he could make out five cages with dogs curled inside, panting in the heat. The smell in the room was rancid, with meat gone bad and dog crap that hadn’t been cleaned.

“How long have they been here?” Tony asked as he walked further into the room to get a closer look. A brown and white pit bull with a scarred face growled at him and he took a step back.

“Corrigan and some of his friends brought them up a week ago while you were in school. We’ve been training them.” Murphy said, going up to the cage with the pit bull and kicking it with a strange look on his face.

“Training?” Tony asked.

“Yeah, you know, like with bait animals. We got some kittens and rabbits and let them at it, stuff like that. What are you looking so squeamish about? Jesus, kid, stop being such a pussy.”

Tony opened and shut his mouth, unsure of what to say. His brother scoffed and bent down to look into one of the cages.

“Dad’s not letting me bet in this fight, but if I was I’d bet on this one,” he said.

“Fight?” Tony asked, the details beginning to click. “Dog fighting?”

“Slow aren’t you?” Murphy grinned. “I can’t believe you haven’t figured it out already.”

“Murphy! Tony!” They both jumped at the sound of their father’s voice, and Tony turned toward the door, feeling guilty. His father looked angry. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Just showing Tony the new family business,” Murphy said. “It is not our family business,” their dad said with intensity.
Murphy lifted his hands in mock innocence. “Go inside and get washed up. Your mother’s got dinner just about ready.”

Murphy made a kissing noise to the dogs and strode out. Tony followed, his shoulders tight. When he crossed the threshold his father slammed the door shut and then took him aside. “Forget what you saw in there, okay son?” “But—” Tony started. “Don’t talk back to me,” his dad said. His voice was harsh but his eyes were imploring, begging even.

The prickle on Tony’s skin since he’d entered the barn began to burrow deeper into his body, into his blood stream, making his heart beat faster. His mind raced with the reality of the situation. He felt like one of the Mentos in the Coke bottle, ready to explode. “Go on, get inside now,” his father said.

Tony swallowed and nodded, walking back to the tree to get his books. “Don’t forget to wash your hands,” his mother said when he entered the kitchen. Steam rose from the rice in the pan, but even the smell of flour from his mother’s homemade tortillas couldn’t get the memory of the sour smell of the dog cages from Tony’s mind.

They sat at the table and Tony began to eat the beans and rice heaped onto his plate. There was too much inside for him to roll the tortilla up yet. “Burritos again?” Murphy said, “I hope we can afford something different after the fights get under way.” “Murphy, I told you, we are not discussing this!” Tony’s father said.

Tony methodically brought forkfuls of beans and rice to his mouth, keeping his gaze fixed downward. “What is the big deal?” Murphy asked. “It was your idea, wasn’t it?” “Murphy,” Ma said, her voice was tight. Tony glanced up to see her clutching her fork and knife, staring at his father. “What? We are just supposed to pretend like everything is normal when it’s not?” Murphy demanded. Tony felt his mother’s gaze turn to him and Murphy’s followed. His older brother gave a
scornful snort.

“Right, let’s protect innocent little Tony. Tony who gets good grades, Tony who is this family’s last hope.” He turned his dark eyes to Tony, who was having trouble swallowing. Suddenly, he wasn’t hungry.

“Hate to break it to you, kid, but everyone’s going to tell you you’re gifted and then you’re going to get older and realize they were lying. You aren’t worth a damn.”

“That’s enough,” his father said, “go to your room, now.”

“My room?” Murphy laughed without humor. “Two more years and I’ll be out of this shit hole of a home and I’ll go farther than that.” Murphy shoved himself away from the table. The door to his bedroom slammed so hard the water in Tony’s water glass rippled. The only sound was the whirring of the fans as Tony set down his fork.

“May I be excused?” he asked.

“No,” his father said.

“Yes,” his mother said at the same time. The two of them stared at each other from across the table and Tony looked back and forth, unsure of what to do.

“Fine.” His father sighed, “Just go.”

Tony looked to his mother and she nodded in affirmation, a small smile on her face.

On the way to his bedroom, Tony paused to look at a picture frame that leaned crookedly on the chipped brown shelf. The glass had long since been broken and never replaced. The picture inside was sepia and scratched, but Tony was fascinated by it all the same. It showed his parents, his mother eighteen, and his father twenty, on their wedding day. They looked happy. His mother held a bouquet of flowers, and a single one was tucked behind his father’s ear where she had put it. His mother looked out from the photograph, not smiling exactly, but her face was soft and sweet. His father was looking at his mother in a way Tony had never seen him do in real life. He set the photo down with a sigh and retreated to the safety of his room.

The rumbling of car engines woke Tony and he lay in bed listening to the sound of voices outside. His mother had told him
to stay inside, no matter what he heard. He kept picturing those dogs curled up in their cages and Corrigan’s voice echoing in his head: *there will be blood*. Once the slamming of car doors stopped and the voices faded away, he climbed out of bed, put on his tennis shoes, and removed the screen from his window. The night was warm and a slight breeze tickled his skin, not quite cold enough to raise goose bumps. Tony slid the window half closed and, after making sure the coast was clear, headed towards the barn.

Music blared inside, the walls reverberating with the beat as Tony walked around the back. He slipped through the door and climbed the rungs of the ladder, the metal cold and sharp on his hands. Up in the rafters the smell of cigarette smoke hung in the air. Tony maneuvered his way above the corral where Murphy and his dad had nailed in plywood walls to prevent escape. People surrounded the enclosure, watching a dog being dragged away, bleeding and whining, to the backroom.

A cowbell rang loudly and the sound of snarling dogs rose above the noise of drunken conversation. Tony caught sight of Murphy in the crowd, his face animated and shiny with sweat as he looked at the next pair of dogs being brought out.

The next fight started.

The two dogs were large with thick muscles. Tony recognized one as Josephine, Corrigan’s dog, and the other was the white and brown pit bull. As soon as the two were released they lunged toward each other, jaws wide, giving off deep, guttural growls. With each rip, tear, and bite of the skin the crowd raged. Outside the pit, meaty hands clapped, deep voices bellowed, shouts of anger and manic laughter. Tony expected the barn to collapse with all the energy.

The barn didn’t fall, but Josephine staggered and the brown and white pit bull didn’t hesitate to strike. Tony closed his eyes. He couldn’t see the carnage, but he heard it all: the awful yelp of pain and the jeering of the crowd. He didn’t know how long the fight lasted, but after that moment everything felt wrong. He twisted and broke strands of straw that lay in heaps beside him as the dogs fought with a vicious determination.

Finally, the cowbell rang again and the brown and white
pit bull was declared the winner. Tony opened his eyes and saw three men jump into the pit, one holding a rod and the other two carrying a muzzle. They wrestled the pit bull to the ground, forced the muzzle on, and dragged the mutt out. Josephine lay at the far end of the corral. Tony watched Corrigan walk over and stare at her for a long moment. She whined and lifted her head, but Corrigan spat on her and then reeled back and kicked her hard in the ribs. Tony winced and gripped the railing hard as Corrigan beat down on Josephine with a terrible rage, breaking his beer bottle on the corral and jamming the broken shards into her flank.

“Hey Corrigan! Don’t be a sore loser, you bastard,” a man laughed and walked over, clapping him on the shoulder.

“What a bitch,” Corrigan said, tossing the fragmented bottle down beside his broken dog. The two stumbled out of the barn.

Tony waited. He counted to one hundred and tried to slow his heartbeat, which thudded loud in his ears. When Tony was sure everyone was gone he scrambled down the ladder and rushed over to the corral. He slowly lifted the latch and went towards Josephine with soft steps. She growled low in her throat and he could see the whites of her eyes as he approached. Her skin trembled. Blood and dirt stained her matted fur. Tony crouched down beside her and reached out a hand. Her head lunged up, teeth snapping, before collapsing back down in the dirt.

Josephine’s breath came in short puffs. An ear trickled blood, some parts coagulating while the deeper wounds on her side seeped into her fur, staining it a dark and muddy red. Tony inched closer, talking in low, soothing tones until he got close enough to touch. He didn’t though, instead letting Josephine get used to his presence.

“I’m sorry this happened to you,” he told her. His throat felt tight and he cleared it. His eyes burned and hot tears ran down his cheeks. The dogs puncture wounds oozed with blood.

“Oh, Tony,” his mother said. “I told you to stay in bed.

Tony looked up to see her standing at the corral entrance in her pajamas, bathrobe hanging off her shoulders, the light reflecting off her glasses so he couldn’t see her eyes.
“Can you help her?” Tony asked. His mother bit her lip as they both looked at Josephine.

Before she could respond there was the sound of gravel crunching beneath feet and the squeak of the barn door as it was wrenched open. Tony’s mother grabbed his arm with surprising strength and dragged him out of the corral, pressing him back behind one of the thick wooden posts. Tony peeked his head around the corner and saw that the person entering the barn was his father. His mother stiffened, her grip on his arm began to cut off circulation. In the dim light his father’s figure looked distorted. He saw him remove a long, thin object from around his shoulder. It took Tony a moment to realize the object was a shotgun.

“Close your eyes, Tony,” his mother whispered.

He didn’t. He left them wide open as the shell left the barrel with a loud crack. Josephine’s head thumped heavily against the ground, instantly dead. It was over.

He watched his father’s shoulders shake with suppressed emotion and then he disappeared from sight as he crouched next to Josephine’s body. Tony’s hands were clammy with cold sweat. He felt queasy when his father reemerged, dragging Josephine’s body behind him. Several breathless moments passed and Tony squeezed his eyes shut. His throat felt dry with dust.

“Come on, Tony,” his mother said, releasing her grip. His arm tingled as blood began to return. “We got to leave before they come back.”

She didn’t have to say who “they” were, for Tony to know that she was referring to Mr. Corrigan and his friends.

The sharp scent of juniper and sagebrush assailed Tony’s nose as they stumbled back to the house, taking the long way around. The moon leered, a cruel half crescent in the dark sky. He felt shaky and unstable, his ears still ringing from the shot of the gun.

“We could’ve brought her to the vet or…or…” Tony trailed off. His mother’s glasses flashed in the moonlight as she looked back at him. She gave a heavy sigh.

“They’d take one look at that dog and want to know how she got that way and we have to keep what happened quiet,” his
mother said. She spoke evenly, but when he glanced at her he could see tears glistening behind her glasses.

“He didn’t have to kill her,” Tony said, although he wasn’t sure of anything anymore. His mother’s mouth twisted into a grim line. She stopped when they were outside the backdoor and turned to face him.

“Your daddy did the only thing he could do, you hear?”

Tony nodded, but he couldn't meet her eyes.

“Look at me,” she said.

With effort, he dragged his gaze to her face that was full of resolve.

“Sometimes, my son, the only mercy we get in this life is death.”
towel
bread
peanut butter drinking water

love of river
minnow marsh willow
striated smooth-run mud-stuck rock
and a day.

I sit in current shallows
youngest son, little one and I,

sandbar breaks the curve
big kids take turns
tube-floating island-side
dented pirate-bucket lies
in sand.

no kayaks, oars, canoes
no SUP
someday, okay but for now
our chacos tans second-hand
and the river runs our sun-loved skin the same.
& I know air is cold  
beneath the tree.

& there is a cause I don’t know.  
Won’t clap for it, never knew  
the seismic frames trembling  
under the ownerless footpath. Little breath

was little worth, pester & litany;  
index pages on branches,  
cradle of twigs, a cry—  
a face on the window w/ lips

tumbling slowly, silently  
tumbling: no longer after the same music.

I never knew my hand, its claim;  
the slip-tongue wind folding  
across my sidelong channels. My will  
was my own? It passed  
w/ the chastened alley’s trash  
& slunk heavy to its begging corner.

I brokered deals w/ canines  
sparked in streetlight glares.  
There is a tongue  
running over those teeth,  
cutting itself & spilling words; the blood  
I tracked through the living room.
Well, this newspaper chandelier burns
a pleasant black stain.

On concrete w/ the dead matchstick
I draw again in soot
my silent reflection, imposed
over lush cold dome.

& in that song came roosting
a hindered whistle, tracing
casual slopes & turns through pillars
of salt poised on my tongue.

& I know the sun leaks
untraceable rhythms.
Contributors

Steven Abell is more or less from Red Lodge, MT, and has been writing poetry for 12 years. He is currently a senior, and will be attending graduate school this coming fall at UMass Amherst.

Trisha Bartle was born and raised in the Twin Cities, but she has called Missoula her home for the last decade. She found selecting her English/creative writing degree to be an easy decision.

John Christenson is a junior studying creative writing. He spends his weekends scaring birds.

Amber Davis is a senior in the English program and has had past work published in The Oval. She writes raw and sound-rich poetry from human moments of realizations or memory.

Hannah Fay is a native Austinite who braved the snow to come study microbiology at UM.

Elizabeth Griffin is currently a senior and will be graduating this spring with a bachelor’s degree in creative writing, Spanish, and English literature. While at UM Elizabeth has been president and co-founder of the UM Circus Club where she instructs aerial silks. She plans to pursue an MFA in poetry after she graduates.

Maree Herron is an English (Linguistics) and Russian major. She grew up in Spokane, Washington. She was an avid reader at an early age and became interested in the functions of language when she was young.

Kelaiah Horat is a sophomore of music performance on the violin. When she is not trapped in a practice room, Kelaiah enjoys creating visual art, baking, skiing, hiking, and walking her cat.

Megan Jessop is a senior majoring in English and literature. She was born and raised in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley of Montana and began writing poetry as a creative outlet when she was 13 years old.

Lindsay Laird is a third year student majoring in terrestrial wildlife biology. She also has an interest in creative writing and photography, specifically wildlife photography.
Brad Lambert is a 22-year old undergraduate at UM. His work has been previously published in Volume VIII of The Oval and Volume 66 of Polaris Magazine out of Ohio Northern University. As both a gay man and small-town boy, his poetry reexamines a love of the Old West against its many tribulations.

Elizabeth Mays grew up in Helena, MT, and when she came to Missoula to attend UM in 2013, she discovered a love for language, storytelling, and writing. An English teaching and creative writing major, Elizabeth enjoys writing, mainly poetry, and has recently been entralled with Sharon Olds.

Dylan McCarthy is an amateur photographer from Helena. His photograph, “Baths,” was taken on his travels in Southeast Asia.

Kailyn Mercer is a junior studying literature and creative writing. She enjoys hiking, playing with her three dogs and lying about her hobbies to make herself seem cooler and more outdoorsy. She doesn’t currently, nor will she ever, understand the Oxford comma and considers this to be her biggest flaw.

Andrea Morawic is a third year art education major.

Emily Morrison is a sophomore studying English education and creative writing. She grew up in Florence, MT, and proudly participates in the Global Leadership Initiative and the UM Advocates on campus. Emily’s hobbies include hiking, birding, and having conversations with her golden retrievers.

Cassandra Sevigny is an economics student with a love for recognizing the world spun into small details, and a love for transcribing those details and their meaning into human language. She also enjoys swimming and experiencing nature.

Jenny-lin Smith loves literature, writing non-fiction essays, and traveling.

Savannah Stewart is an aspiring photographer and wildlife biologist from California. With the Sierra Nevadas as her backyard, she developed a passion for all things wild and beautiful. Savannah hopes
her devotion to art and science will lead to a career in which she can enjoy both.

Lucy Torgrimson is a senior majoring in English with a minor in German. She loves to draw in her spare time. Her favorite things to draw are portraits of people and animals.

Claire Venery is an undergraduate student majoring in English.

Juliette Viera is a student at the University of Montana.

Anna Weishaar was born and raised in Missoula, MT, and is a lover of writing fiction. She is a creative writing major and film minor.

**HONORABLE MENTIONS**

The Oval would like to acknowledge the winners of this year’s Honorable Mentions, whose pieces will be uploaded to the blog following the release of Volume X. Visit www.umoval.wordpress.com to read more poetry and prose and to view more visual art from University of Montana undergraduates.

- **Ballet** by Hannah Fay • Visual Art
- **Clara Venus** by Ava Johnson • Poetry
- **Foraise** by Juliette Viera • Visual Art
- **Monument** by Steven Abell • Poetry
- **Nothing Gold Can Stay** by Megan Jessop • Visual Art
- **Silent Sounds** by Samuel Forstag • Fiction
- **To the Moon and Back** by Cheyenne Goetz • Fiction
- **Wolf with Wings** by John Hooks • Fiction

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