



CELLAR DOOR  
SPRING 2020

# AWARDS

## ART

FIRST PLACE	ominous whispers ANISSA KAUR DEOL
SECOND PLACE	nights in copenhagen SARAH JANE CLOUSER
THIRD PLACE	the heavy balloon MIRANDA TEIXEIRA

## FICTION

FIRST PLACE	deer in the woods LUCY MCCLELLAN
SECOND PLACE	turning GISELLE PAGUNURAN
THIRD PLACE	whispering my body electric WILL LOWDER

## POETRY

FIRST PLACE	prayer for the man who assaulted me, and later asked, "how many times do I have to apologize for that?" KATE ARDEN
SECOND PLACE	the electorate JACOB YANKEY
THIRD PLACE	dollhouse cockroach RACHEL SLOVER

# JUDGES

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## POETRY

**Matthew Wimberley** grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. He is the author of two collections of poetry, *All the Great Territories* (SIU, 2020), winner of the 2018 Crab Orchard Poetry Series First Book award, and *Daniel Boone's Window* (LSU, 2020) selected by Dave Smith for the Southern Messenger Poetry series. Winner of the 2015 William Matthews Prize from the *Asheville Poetry Review*, his work was selected by Mary Szybist for the 2016 *Best New Poets* anthology and his writing has appeared most recently in the Poem-a-Day series from the Academy of American Poets. Wimberley received his MFA from NYU, where he worked with children at St. Mary's Hospital as a Starworks Fellow. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, NC.

## FICTION

**Adam O'Fallon Price** is the author of two novels, *THE GRAND TOUR* (Doubleday 2016) and *THE HOTEL NEVERSINK* (Tin House 2019). His short fiction has appeared in *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, *VICE*, and elsewhere. His criticism and essays regularly appear in *Electric Literature*, *The Paris Review Daily*, and *The Millions*, where he is a staff writer.

## ART

**Ben Alper** is an artist who has been working in photography for over 15 years. He divide his time between running a digital printing business, teaching, generating his own art and working on collaborative publishing projects with Sleeper, an imprint that utilizes photography, design, and text to realize artists' ideas in printed form.

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# A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This edition of *Cellar Door* was created at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, before students and staff evacuated campus, and released while all of us were home in quarantine. We are at the beginning of an uncertain time in America, and certainly for UNC. Though we glimpse, in the overpopulated hospitals of Milan, the shuttered walkways of Shanghai, that which may come to pass, it is impossible to know just how deeply we'll feel the effects of COVID-19 in the years to come.

What we can only do now is what we know best: the importance of art, compassion, and community, which we must cultivate with great care, in ourselves and in those close to us. Things feel confusing and nebulous, and it's essential in times like these to remember that the arts are a critical function— it's how we bear witness to life, even in times of strife. Even as “We tell stories in order to live” becomes shopworn, it still rings true, especially now. We'll keep telling these stories, of memory and justice and uncertainty and hope. (Or maybe you prefer Atwood to Didion: “A word after a word after a word is power.”)

So we press on. I owe a debt of gratitude for the support of our tireless staff members, readers, and our student advisor, Professor Michael McFee, who have all come together to help guide us through these uncharted times. The work in this edition is reflexive and bright, flashingly brilliant, and reminds us that we're alive, human, and together— if not in body, at least in spirit. From Will Lowder's “Whispering My Body Electric,” page 3: “I will build. There will be a you and fireworks will explode and we will both look up. I will comfort those who are scared because I know what that is like.” We'll build, and we'll look up, and we'll comfort one another, too.

Best,  
Savannah Bradley

# THANK YOU

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To Michael McFee for his decades of dedication to *Cellar Door*, including distribution of copies to the campus racks, and storage of boxes in his office.

To the artists and writers who create every day, for letting us share their work with the rest of campus, and beyond.

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WILL LOWDER

## WHISPERING MY BODY ELECTRIC

I want to tell you about the universe. My knowledge extends not to the outer reaches of the unknown, but I know what I'm hungry for, what I'm scared of, what I think about when I wake up, fall asleep, and what makes me laugh and cry and horny. This universe is my body and what makes it move. Enough for me, and in no way enough for you. But in my spiritual journey fueled by nihilism I now understand some bright almost celestial flash of happiness that sparked from not giving a fuck about what people want from me. Unless, that is, you're someone on my mind, in my bed, or being treated badly by someone positioned, in some probably horrible way, above you. Then I care. I guess you'll just have to trust me.

Paragraphs are tools, like what? A hammer? Yes, sure. I can tell you that paragraphs are sequential or something. I can almost believe paragraphs, when utilized correctly, will argue one point that contributes to the debate of a whole charade. But I have no confidence in that idea (sorry, Dr. Hammer (my first-year writing professor)). I write paragraphs that seem like they should be there, and it works. Sometimes it doesn't. Some contractor comes in and sees all the dents of missed hammer strikes and says, What an aggressive, unskilled craftsman you are. But at that point I'm looking for the next surface to beat the shit out of. I will find something that needs fastening or nailing-in or murdering. I am needed somewhere, and I will go mad trying to find it. My hammer, my hand.

I used to camouflage sexual imagery in every piece of my art. I'm lost in a magnolia flower now. It looks like an asshole. Did I intend when I set out to paint this flower to have the petals come together at the center and fold into each other like they do? No. But does it look like an asshole? Yes, I wouldn't lie. What does that mean, you ask me. I have no idea. Some of you will swear it's because I'm gay and others will erase this paragraph from your brains and whoever is left will say, I guess Magnolia flower insides do kind of look like assholes.

I'm hammering here. Is anything hitting? I guess it doesn't matter. Maybe it does. Is creating and expressing the same thing? Can you have one without the other? Do we create for ourselves or others?

## WILL LOWDER

I have a feeling whoever finds this will not care and that soothes me. I don't know anything except my body electric.

Fireworks in North Carolina. Everything is always quiet, and night is always black, and heads are always hanging low. That is, until someone shoots off a spark into the sky. I don't know if fireworks are illegal because they're dangerous or because they're loud and pretty but, tell me, what's the difference? When the first blast goes off, everyone lifts their heads. People stop moving and talking and thinking, and I think that's why I like them so much. Some do get scared. And that's OK. You can't tell someone they shouldn't be something they can't help but be.

I painted the magnolia asshole flower on break from my first-year in college. At home, I was into girls and painting flowers just to show them that I could. At school, I was talking — you know, as people do — to a boy, man, guy who looked in my eyes when I spoke. My first homosexual love interest, but that only matters because I want you to know that I was scared. Scared then so proud of myself for overcoming that fear that I refused to admit something wasn't clicking between the two of us. We'd been on a couple dates, gotten a strange kind of close. I understood his family dynamic, I saw how his insecurities drove him, I could tell when he wanted to stop going on dates without him having to tell me. As I painted the flowers I thought about how I should've done things differently. As I went on other dates with other men and did things differently, I became furious with myself because it's so easy to show attraction, act on impulses, draw people in. I'm still embarrassed, as you can tell. But I now understand I wasn't born magnetic, and I work around it. I subconsciously painted assholes until I stuck myself inside of one.

I mention him, a different him, every time I start seeing someone else. He comes up because my trust issues come up. Every time his name leaves my mouth I remember the picture of someone else's dick he opened in front of me. I remember getting mad and I remember him messaging the guy back and I remember him telling me that he can't help what other people send him. I remember some variation of some event of some relation to that one. I remember him, and wonder which one of you fucked him while I was too. I mention him every time I start seeing someone else, and I, every time, feel like I've told them that there is a reason they should cheat on me. They just haven't found it yet.

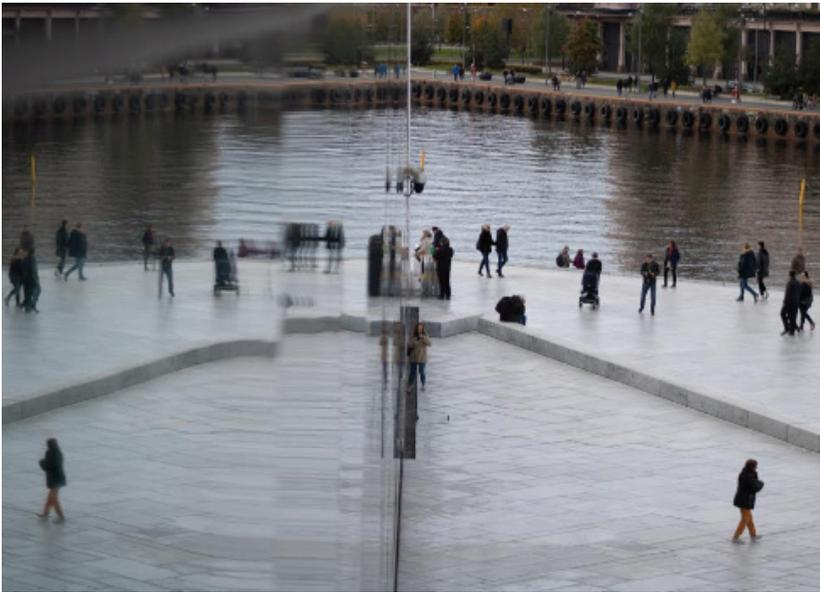
## WILL LOWDER

Keep looking, I want to say. I'm sure you'll find something.

I've always had a rather large forehead. No one would've known this in middle school — the scariest years of human existence — because my bangs came straight down to my eyebrows like a curtain covering a movie screen. But now that my hairline is threatening to recede, I'm running out of ways to hide one of my most prominent insecurities. I lie in bed, you're here too and you like to run your fingers through my hair, but every time you do I feel more and more sure that I don't deserve to be here with you. That there's a guy out there that doesn't wear his fleeting youth on his fucking face. I push my head into your chest. I get up to drink a glass of water. I wonder if you'd look away from me if I set off a firework in my room. If you found someone just like me, unaffected by some genetic deforestation, would you kiss them like you kiss me? Would you, for a second, think about running your fingers through their hair? You might end up reading this. Don't give me an answer if you do.

I will build. There will be a you and fireworks will explode and we will both look up. I will comfort those who are scared because I know what that is like. My body will pulse with an undulated happiness. Maybe I'll have a career too and some source of joy that isn't dependent on another human being, but where is the romance in that? I wouldn't lie. This is the end. Everything ends in truth. My everything, anyways.

SARAH JANE CLOUSER



*scenes from oslo*

## THE ELECTORATE

It is November, here. Towards  
the back of my aunt's property,

the pond isn't yet solid; but  
to be certain the only fish still

awake are the ones that eat  
grease bubbles and water beetle

larvae. Held, now, in my gloved hand  
is a white, sick-looking catfish.

It looks like a bleached carrot. It  
isn't sick, it's albino – but it looks sick.

My uncle knows him, says he was the  
president of the pond (showing me the

pockmarks from prior catches). Today  
he is not a lucky president. Slicing

into the fillet meat, the fish starts  
gaping and ungaping his jaw,

gasping for air. Never mind the fact  
that fish don't have lungs

or the fact that the left half of  
his body is now on ice near the porch.

JACOB YANKEY

The fish gasps for air in the same way  
a drowning child does. He is both a fish

and not a fish. He is both a human  
and not a human. He is trying to trick me,

to make me think he is my brother – hoping  
I'll throw him back into the water and let

him slowly wander back to his bottom  
feeding grounds (the same grounds

doing the same things he has always  
done - *eating the poor* - as if it wasn't

already too late). We stare into each  
other's eyes and I do not believe

he is innocent. It is November and  
today he is not a lucky president.

## ROSEMARY, THAT'S FOR REMEMBRANCE

We spent some hours in the back garden,  
in the drained tone of dusk. Everything blue  
and smelling callow, leisured trails between  
wayward fronds. Toe-ing the cross-hatched dirt,

you & I leaned in close for a whiff, halting  
for flowers with puckered edges,  
enormous poppies or violet-clusters.  
When conversation tapered out, we forked

and drifted. I wavered by the vacant hen-house,  
while you stood entranced by some  
moth's intricate politics. So we walked our  
silent figure-eights, one single cloud

going orange over the furthest roof,  
Then: a gift. Finger of rosemary  
in your palm. Bristled fragrance,  
pale braid turning between thumbs.

Pocketed, and carried home, it dried a dark  
umber, not unlike a burnt match coveting  
its odor. Slight, curious creature of  
my nightstand's drawer: a mnemonic.



*quiet sydney*

## TURNING

Danny was twelve when it happened. She noticed when she pulled her skinny jeans down her skinny legs in a graffitied stall of her school bathroom. There was little surprise. She knew it would be coming soon, as it had for her mother when she was her age. She took out the small pink bag her mom had given her for just in case, opened up a pad, and took care of business. A minor inconvenience. Before leaving the bathroom, she checked herself in the mirror. She fluffed up her hair, tucked a strand of it behind her ear, and smiled at her reflection.

Danny got home before her mom that day. She always did on Thursdays, when her mom took the late shift and got stuck in rush hour traffic. It had been a year since her sister had left for college. That meant Danny had the house to herself. In her extra hour home alone, she ate Oreos on the couch and streamed John Hughes movies on her phone. If her mom saw her watching *Sixteen Candles*, she'd never hear the end of it. A lecture on the harmful stereotypes of gender or race or something. By the time her mom got home, Danny was at the kitchen table, filling out a worksheet with Chinese adjectives.

"I'm home," her mom said, singing out the last syllable. She set her bags by the door, a briefcase and free tote from Planned Parenthood. "Daniela, how are you, my baby?" She cupped her face with her hands and planted a kiss on her forehead. "How was school? Is that Chinese? Oh, mi bebé, so smart."

"School was good," Danny said.

"Put your things away, Daniela. I'll make dinner. I'll call you when it's ready."

Even before she heard her name called, the aroma of bay leaves and tomatoes simmering in chicken stock was already permeating Danny's bedroom. Steam rose from the plates of arroz con gandules on the table. Her mother was in her house clothes now: faded pink pajama pants and a purple shirt with THE FUTURE IS FEMALE printed across the chest. Her curly black hair was tied up in a plump bun. They took their places on opposite sides of the small square dining room table.

“Do anything fun today?”

“Not really,” said Danny. “Maya asked if I could sleep over next week. Can I?”

“Probably, but let me check if I can drive you first. How is Maya, anyways? You see her at school?”

“I sit next to her in fourth period.” Danny scooped some chicken into her mouth. “We’re doing the personal health section of gym class.”

“Personal health?” She set down her glass of water and made a thoughtful face. “Oh, sex ed! When your sister was in that class, they made all the girls put a condom on a banana.” She chuckled as she cut a piece of chicken off the bone. “You know what, did they do that thing with the gum, too?”

“Actually, we—”

“Your sister told me they gave her a stick of gum, made her chew it up and spit it out, and then – Dios mío – they told all those girls that if they went and had sex, they would be just like that chewing gum. And of course, no one will want to marry a chewed-up piece of gum, right? Es ridículo, no? Basically telling those girls they’re garbage.” Danny’s mother was shaking her head and cutting her chicken with a little more gusto now.

A lone strand of curly hair had escaped from the bun on her head. Whenever Danny imagined her mother in her youth, she’d see her doing something like marching or chanting or burning bras. But most of all, she’d see the dark coils of her mother’s mane blowing wild in the wind. Like every part of her was determined to defy gravity. Danny wondered why she didn’t inherit it, that righteous spite. Why she didn’t see anything worth the effort of changing.

“When is Andrea coming home?” Danny asked. It was time to change the subject. She already knew her sister would be coming home tomorrow – she’d been counting down the days. Andrea had told her she visited home way more than her other college friends did. Danny still didn’t think it was enough.

“She’ll be here when you get back from school tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Danny said. She took another bite of her dinner. A few moments of silence, then she spoke again. “Can we go to the store later tonight? Before Andrea gets here? I have my period, and I think we’re almost out of pads.” Her mother let out a small gasp.

“You got your period?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Danny replied. Her mother’s silverware clinked to the table as she got up and held Danny’s face.

“My baby’s growing up!” she said. She hugged her, nuzzling her chin on the top of Danny’s head. “My little baby Daniela. You’re finally a woman!” She held her by the shoulders and admired her newly christened warrior. “Oh mija, you’re so beautiful. You’ll do so much, I know it.”

Danny squirmed out of her mother’s embrace, then retreated to her room. *You’re finally a woman!* What was that supposed to mean? Had something really changed?

*You’ll do so much, I know it.* Danny would show her. She would do nothing but stay the same. She went through her nightly routine of showering, brushing her teeth, and picking her clothes out for the next day. Nothing had to change. Danny was still Danny, and she liked her that way.

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They watched a movie in fourth period. A low-budget animation about their changing bodies. During a scene with two cartoon ovaries arguing over whose turn it was to release the egg, Danny got up to go to the bathroom. Before rising from her desk, she remembered to grab the pink pouch in her backpack.

When she returned to her seat, Maya leaned over and whispered. “What’s that?” she asked, gesturing towards the pouch in Danny’s jacket pocket. When Maya spoke, Danny could see the colored bands in her braces, alternating pink and green.

“Pads and stuff,” Danny said. Her gaze was already back at the TV at the front of the classroom, but she could see Maya exploding quietly in her peripheral.

“You got your period?” Maya asked in a loud whisper. “You’re like, the first in our grade! You’re a straight up woman now. Are you totally PMS-ing? Do you have like, cramps and stuff?” Danny shrugged her shoulders, focused on the now dancing uterus on the screen.

“Not really,” she said. “I’m fine.” Maya shot a quick glance at Ms. Williams at the front of the classroom. Danny shifted her eyes over, too. Ms. Williams was sitting behind her desk, which was cluttered with a mess of various school supplies. She looked heavy in her chair as her eyes were fluttering closed. Danny heard Maya speak again.

“Did your boobs come in yet?”

Danny whipped her head around. Maya was leaning towards her, buzzing in her chair. Like a fly over rotten fruit.

“What? No!” Danny said. Maya frowned at Danny’s chest, then slouched towards the TV screen. Danny pulled the sides of her jacket closer around her body and sat deeper in her chair. She could hear the flickering of the projector on the ceiling above her.

She felt hot all of a sudden. With her leg bouncing under her desk, Danny looked around. Each one of her classmates was either falling asleep or already snoring. She stood up slowly and headed towards the door. Before leaving the room, she passed by the teacher’s desk. The drone of the movie had lulled Ms. Williams into a deep and peaceful slumber. Danny lifted a roll of duct tape from the mass of clutter on the desk and stuffed it into her pocket.

With the duct tape buried in her jacket pocket, she hurried to the bathroom again, faster this time. She sped to the farthest stall and slid the lock closed. She tried to forget what Maya had whispered in the dim light of the classroom. Danny would not change. Why did she have to? There was nothing wrong with her.

She took out the tape, removed her jacket, and lifted her shirt up

around her neck. She stuck the end of the roll on her flat chest. Then around and around, until the top half of her torso was fully encapsulated. When her lungs felt sufficiently tight, she brought the rest of it to her teeth and tore it off. Before leaving the bathroom, she checked herself in the mirror. The dull gray of the tape was invisible behind her floral-patterned shirt. She thought of Maya again. How she was practically foaming at the mouth, raving about the blood that made her a woman. Danny looked satisfied at her chest in the mirror. It was so tight, she thought maybe it could keep it all in.

At first, the tape tugged at her skin, but she noticed it less as the day went on. Riding on the school bus at the end of the day, she almost forgot about it completely, except it scratched her once under the armpit. Once she was dropped off at the bus stop, the gray cylinder wrapped around her felt like a part of her body. Strolling in the strange stillness of suburbia, all Danny thought about now was getting to see her sister at home.

When she opened the front door of her house, her sister jumped out from behind it, arms outstretched and hoping for a squeal.

“Andrea!” Her sister’s arms wrapped around her and shook her side to side. She felt her plastic chest rub against Andrea’s body. Danny waited for a reaction from her sister, but she didn’t seem to notice.

With one last squeeze, Andrea released Danny from her arms. She raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips. “Slushies?” she asked. Danny smiled and nodded. “Leave your stuff here, D.”

She yelled towards the living room. “Me and Danny are going to Quickie’s!”

“Okay,” their mom answered. “Just don’t forget your pepper spray. And be back before dinner.”

They’d make the trip to the gas station down the road and buy 98-cent slushies every time Andrea came back from school. It became a ritual of sorts. Danny figured that as long as she was next to her sister, the long walk to Quickie’s was worth it. Andrea’s waist-long hair swished behind her with every step. She smelled like shampoo and perfume.

Since going to college, Andrea had acquired a new foreign scent. It was like spending a weekend at a friend's house, then coming back and smelling like a stranger in your own home. Danny would listen with quiet rapture as her sister told her about the boys in her hall and the professors she hated. She was plugged into gossip about what Amy drunk-texted her ex and the email Marjorie accidentally sent to her T.A. Sure, Andrea had changed, but she kept no secrets.

Danny realized her sister was a woman, too. She thought this was the best version of her sister. Danny let her thoughts wander. If Andrea had changed, then who was the person she left behind?

The sun was almost gone when the girls got there, but the lights at Quickie's were always on. Danny and Andrea made a beeline to the machine in the back and filled their cups with fluorescent red and blue liquid. They stuck a straw through the plastic lids and lined up at the register behind a woman in sweatpants and a man wearing a baseball cap. Andrea spoke first.

"So, Mom told me—"

Danny interrupted her with a long groan. "Of course she did."

"I ran into Mrs. Stevenson when I was walking earlier," Andrea said. "Apparently she knew too. Sounds like Mom even told the neighbors."

Danny threw her arms up and groaned even louder. "Are you kidding me?"

Andrea snorted. Then she began to laugh. Danny's frown curled up into a smirk.

"She was like that with me, too," Andrea said. "It's extra, pero, like... it's Mom. She cares. A lot. And you know she lives for that female shit."

"Yeah, I guess," Danny said. "It's just weird, you know? I thought she'd be cool about it." She swirled her straw in the slush, mixing the colors into a muddy purple brown. "I mean, it's not even a big deal. But she says I'm a woman now. It doesn't feel right. It's just so... grown-up."

They moved up one spot in line.

“Listen Danny,” Andrea said. “You’re a woman when you feel like it. Look at me. I’m a grown-up, right? And it’s not just because I got blood coming out of my chocha.”

Andrea paid with two crumpled-up dollar bills from her back pocket. A bell chimed behind them as they pushed open the glass doors. They hadn’t gotten ten feet from the gas station before they heard a whistle behind them.

“Nice tits!” A group of boys were standing by a gas pump next to a polished blue Jeep. It was already dark, but Danny could just make out their faces. They looked like they must have been high schoolers. Danny stood behind Andrea in the shadow cast by the streetlight and lowered her head. High schoolers and middle schoolers took the same buses home, and she didn’t want to be recognized on the ride back tomorrow.

“Let me see those hot tamales!” One of them made a V-shape with his fingers and wagged his tongue. They kept leering at Andrea, then looking around and snickering. As if to confirm with each other that they were still being funny.

“Hey!” Andrea’s voice cut through the air. She stretched her arm out and flashed her middle finger. She gathered some spit in her mouth and launched it their way. She yelled again. “Eat a dick!”

They laughed and laughed. Everything Andrea did seemed to be a joke to them. She guided Danny away from the scene with a hand on her back. Danny heard her sister mutter under her breath: “Little bitches.”

Come dinner time, it was as if the event had never even happened for Andrea. Danny couldn’t say she was surprised. Her sister was bullet-proof. But something was turning in the pit of her stomach, and she couldn’t put her finger on what it was. She tried to take a deep breath but didn’t get very far. The tape squeezed her lungs when they got too full. She poked her food with her fork. “Mom? Could you maybe stop telling people about, you know, my period? It’s kind of weird.”

“I’m sorry, did it embarrass you? It’s nothing to be ashamed of, you know sweetie? Be proud of it. You’re a woman! Maybe you’ll have to tell your friends to start calling you Daniela now, right?”

Danny gritted her teeth. She knew it would be wise to stay quiet, but she decided to speak.

“Why? What’s so good about being a woman? I don’t get anything, do I? Why should I change? Is there something wrong with me now?”

Her mother was visibly shocked at Danny’s reply, but she tried to suppress it. “No, no, no mi bebé – of course not. All I mean is women are smart. Women are strong. That’s how you are.”

Danny scoffed. “Are you serious? Andrea’s a woman, right? She didn’t do anything when those boys at Quickie’s were talking about her boobs and shit!”

“Danny, what the fuck?” Andrea said. “I did say something! You were there!”

Danny remembered how they looked at Andrea. With their ravenous eyes. “Well, they didn’t stop!”

Their mother was caught between reprimanding her daughters for their language and pressing them for more details about the gas station.

“Mija, is this true?”

“Yeah,” Andrea said. “I mean, I already yelled at them. What am I supposed to do, beat them up? Not worth it.”

“They weren’t going to hurt you?” Their mother asked.

“Of course not, they were just a bunch of kids.”

Their mother sighed and shook her head. “No, it’s okay. I understand. You did the right thing.” She turned her head towards Danny. “There’s just garbage people out there, baby. But you have to fight it, Daniela. That’s what women do.”

In her room that night, Danny did her best to continue as usual. Shower, brush teeth, pick out clothes. She hoped her routine would guide her back to how she was. Before getting into the shower, she caught her reflection in the mirror. A head and a neck atop a smooth gray rectangle. It looked just like it did in fourth period. She scratched at its edge. It barely budged.

Still bound in her silver cocoon, she stepped into the shower. She turned it on and felt the cold water turn warm. She turned the knob to the right and closed her eyes as it got hotter. Drops of water seeped into the sticky space between the tape and Danny's body, loosening its grip. Her outer layer was slowly sloughing off of her chest.

It was a heavy thing, her second skin.

Danny watched the red-tinted streams running down the shower's white floor. The scarlet water pooled and swirled before falling into the drain. She noticed her reflection in the shiny metal surface of the shower's handle. Its curves warped her image into a distorted creature with a body and a face. Danny looked into the eyes of the thing staring back at her.

And she felt her wet gray shell fall to her feet.



*the heavy balloon*

## MAN APOLOGIZES, BUT

She has learned how to wilt greens by watching  
The way sweat cooks the grass stuck to her feet;  
Wonders if that's how it would taste to singe  
Herself with an open-mouthed kiss: salty, sweet.

Discovered roasting beets as an artist  
Mesmerized by how the juice stains her hands,  
Partitions flesh to scarlet chunks of ink  
Peers the earthy peels into rugged fans.

Craves the way leeks must be cleft apart;  
Removing the grit like a mother cat,  
The fur and fleas catch in her lungs and heart  
Swallowed through her fingertips, burnt and flat—

She has learned to love her separate sphere,  
How rosemary burns, the scent of it here.

## TEMPLE

*“David Best’s ‘Temple’ transforms the Renwick Gallery’s Bettie Rubenstein Grand Salon into a glowing sanctuary, offering visitors a quiet place to reflect and pay tribute to lost loved ones. Wooden placards are provided for visitors to write a personal message and leave within the installation.”*

Build it. Hoist up the curling walls,  
the cascading carved chandelier. For a bit  
it is cloistered from the noise.

A couple of years later, take it apart—  
the room cauterized, it was only briefly there,  
maybe rebuild it out in the desert,  
burn it back out of being—

and being here, it’s breathing in  
a shared air. I walk to the altar, climb the steps and  
for a moment, the room is just the hollow knock  
of my boots up the wood. I peer over the edge—

piles of thin wooden slabs poured over,  
I think of wishing wells. They are too far down  
for me to read their overlapping asks.

RACHEL SLOVER

A tiny sign tells us not to write on the walls, though  
there is no one who wants to enforce it. People have written  
across everything, they brought their own pens, deeper ink.

*Bob, you would have loved this*

*Ian it's spring and we miss you – Mom*

I trace the room behind the few others who are here,  
we are circling something together. Beside the altar,  
the corner is wide enough for me to slide back  
into the carving, and I'm back here alone  
for a while to feel the walls  
hold me at either side.

*To my boy self,  
I miss you buddy*

And the eyes drawn on the walls, everyone lost  
for something is drawing eyes  
looking up.

*I'm doing my best to let you go*

Gasping out from the city center and here  
in Washington they crouch behind their walls,  
keep making their numbed decisions.

Outside the city is beginning its slow burn.  
They are taking the temple down.  
It was always meant to be temporary—  
a bath of amber light, a break.  
I don't know who I came for.

*It's bad baby  
come back*

We are losing sanctuaries,  
they don't wonder how to build more



*the balloon follows me*

## DEER IN THE WOODS

It was strikingly dark out, but the July heat served a sense of comfort to the night air. Cicadas chirped, wide awake in the thick silhouette of the foliage, and the sky above was sugar-coated in stars, maybe more than Evie had ever seen. Summer nights had a certain liveliness to them that she forgot about through every other season. It separated them from the still, prototypical nighttime..

Of course, part of the energy came from Tom. He walked slightly ahead of her, thermal and solid, her hand tucked in his. He was guiding her, Evie supposed. He was a leader. Not in an aggressive, demonstrative way, but more in that he knew what was best, and would always show it to her if she asked him to. They'd started their relationship that way. She'd come into The Silver Spork Diner as a confused and nervous bus-girl, and he, who had bussed tables for a year before he became a waiter, had shown her the tricks of the trade.

"Fill the water glasses when they're about two-thirds empty," he'd told her. "If you do it before then, you're a nuisance. If you do it any later, the customers will notice they're low."

Evie had taken his advice, and not long after, a four-top of chortling old men had complimented her on her astute water-pouring service. When she'd told Tom, he'd scoffed.

"They're flirting with you," he said. If you weren't a pretty girl, they wouldn't say shit about your 'astute service'. Believe me, I never got any compliments like that."

"You think I'm pretty?" She'd asked.

"Objectively speaking."

But she'd never been called pretty much before, just "cute", and the compliment exhilarated her. She didn't care that he was a little older, and different than her, although she'd blushed when relaying her crush to her mother, who she knew remembered Tom as a rebellious kid who had graduated a while back. But she was 18 now, an adult. 18 and 21 felt a lot closer than 14 and 17 had. They were matured now,

especially Tom. He was quieter and more controlled than she remembered him being. He asked her out for the first time in person, to dinner, and paid. And he'd walked her to her door afterward and kissed her lightly, saying "Let's take things slow." She didn't necessarily actually want to take things slow, but she appreciated the sentiment. She'd never had a boyfriend before. It didn't matter; he didn't need to know that. She was going to college at the end of the summer, but so what? Over a month buffered them from that goodbye, and if they lasted as long then they would figure it out when the time came.

This was their third date. Tom had told her that he wanted something unique this time. When yesterday she'd mentioned staying up late to read *The Haunting of Hill House*, he turned to her suddenly.

"You like ghost stories?"

"Yeah," she'd shrugged, caught off guard.

"I know what we're doing for our third date."

Tonight, he'd picked her up from home in his dingy blue car with nothing but a canvas backpack in the backseat. They'd driven to the woods near his house and trekked off the path, aimlessly into the trees. Evie wasn't stupid: she knew all of the reasons not to go wandering off into nowhere with a man she'd known two months. But she felt safe with Tom: dry-humored, thoughtful Tom. Initially, the novelty of a late-night walk in the woods with a man to protect her had been pleasing. Now, though, Evie was growing bored of walking.

"What are we looking for?" she asked finally, swatting a mosquito from her leg. The air was starting to stick to her skin.

Tom squeezed her hand. "Just a clearing to lie down in. There, how's that?"

The patch of grass and pine needles looked comfortable. Evie nodded. "Looks nice."

She watched as Tom slid his backpack off of his rounded shoulders. She could just make out his features in the moonlight. He pulled a

picnic blanket out of the backpack and rolled it over the grass, kneeling down to smooth out the edges. He patted the ground beside him, and Evie plopped herself down eagerly.

“So, ghost stories,” Tom prompted. Evie nodded.

“Yeah. Hey, do you have any snacks in there?” She asked, poking the pack with her toe.

Tom laughed, reaching into the bag and handing her a bag of popcorn. “Of course. And,” he asked, “Do you smoke?”

“Tobacco or weed?”

He pulled a small Ziploc bag of a fibrous substance out of the front pocket. “Weed.”

“Yeah, sure.” Evie spoke casually, even though she’d only smoked twice before, once with her best friend, just to know what it felt like, and the second time taking one hit from a dying joint at a party. Tom pulled bowl from his pocket and went about filling it. As she squinted to watch him, her body a little tenser than before, Evie heard a soft rustling in the leaves.

“Did you hear that?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s deer. They get really close when I come out here sometimes; it’s awesome.”

“Oh, nice,” Evie said.

“Why don’t you tell the first story while I pack this?”

Her mind was blank, or she supposed just occupied with panic at the prospect of smoking the bowl without Tom realizing what a novice she was. Or perhaps panic at trying to seduce him without seeming inexperienced, or make him love her without realizing how boring she was. But she agreed, wracking her mind for something, anything to fill the next minute. Then, looking at the sharpness of the stars, and thinking of lying under similar ones at girl scout camp ten years ago,

it came to her.

“Did you ever hear the one about the yellow ribbon?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“It’s a southern legend, I think. Some people tell it as a black ribbon, but I like yellow.”

“You intrigue me. Let’s hear it.”

“Well,” Evie cleared her throat. How did it start? “Well, there was a boy and a girl, right?”

“Of course.”

“Their names were Sam and Sally. And they had been friends all of their lives, but as long as Sam had known her, Sally had worn this big yellow ribbon around her neck, and never once taken it off. And she would never tell him why. He was curious, but he liked her so much that he let it slide. Eventually he asked her out, and they started dating, and still she evaded his questions. And she never took it off. Not for sleeping, or sex, (she was careful to keep her voice even here) or anything. When he asked, she would just promise to tell him the story another time. And poor Sam was so head-over-heels that eventually he stopped questioning it.

So they kept dating, and got married, and the ribbon stayed, and eventually Sam just stopped asking altogether. They had happy kids and lucrative careers, and he tried to tell himself that the ribbon was insignificant compared to all of that goodness. But he always wondered. So finally, one day, on their fiftieth anniversary, he was lying in bed next to Sally while she slept, just staring at that ribbon on her wrinkly neck. And finally, his years of self-control ran out, and he pulled the end of the ribbon, just untied it in one swift motion. And uh- and her head fell off.”

The story, which had kept Evie up at night for weeks as a child, felt anti-climactic. Still hunched over the bowl, Tom cocked his head.

“Did she scream?”

“I don’t know,” Evie said, “Maybe.”

She could see him turning to look at her through the dark.

“Okay,” he said, “Good one. I’d never heard that before.” His voice was warm and soft, but she could feel the patronizing tone, and felt hopelessly childish.

“Well, what have you got?” she asked, sounding more defensive than she’d intended.

Before answering her, he held the bowl to his lips and inhaled. When he lit it, the embers illuminated his face slightly, enough to see his closed eyelashes. He breathed out, a cloud of stinking smoke that drifted lazily away from them in the summer breeze.

“Have you ever heard about the Soulsuckers?” he asked, passing her the weed.

“I don’t think so,” she said. She handled the bowl clumsily. She tried to hold it in the exact position that he had, fumbling with the lighter and sucking in too urgently. She clamped a cough in her throat as she exhaled, making her eyes sting. She thrust the bowl back into Tom’s fingers.

“Oh,” Tom said, “I’ve got to tell you about the Soulsuckers.” He took another hit, and again, the trees rustled.

“The deer,” Tom said, passing her the bowl. “Maybe if we speak softly they’ll come close enough to see them.”

Evie could feel the smoke settling on her brain. “Okay. Tell me about the Soulsuckers,” she said.

“Here, take this. Okay, so, once upon a time- Don’t laugh! That’s a perfectly valid way to start a story!” Tom said. “Once upon a time, the Eastern forest was inhabited by colonies of these beautiful, reclusive creatures. Imagine silky, tailless monkeys, with glittering eyes and long

nails. They lived in dens deep in the woods, and kept amongst themselves. They were intelligent, but modest. They lived comfortably, but they preferred not to expand their small communities, finding moderation sensible. And they were careful to avoid notice by humans, whom they observed from afar, taking notes and making judgements. They saw discrimination, war, and selfishness, all from a safe distance. They were in agreement that interaction with mankind would bring nothing but trouble, and were content to avoid us. Unfortunately, though, over time, staying under wraps became difficult. Human society was pushing its way into the woods, to tear things down and build them back up again to their own whims. It became clear that if the creatures had to either relocate, or be discovered.

He paused dramatically to take an inhale of smoke and release it.

“After much discussion, the creatures eventually concluded that although humans were messy, they held potential. Humans expressed love and kindness, creativity and humor. The rational creatures were fascinated by these emotions. They saw a potential goodness there. They did not want to spend the rest of their existence evading humankind as it expanded, and they came to the decision to reveal themselves to the humans and to attempt a co-existence.”

Tom’s face was unnervingly ambiguous in the dark, so Evie closed her eyes, feeling the earth beneath her back, and listening to the leaves whisper gossippingly between Tom’s words. Her head felt foggy enough to evaporate. She was beginning to wonder if she had ever actually been high before now. She took another hit.

“As you can imagine,” Tom was continuing, “the discovery of these creatures was huge for humanity. The creatures had community, language, even science. The two groups agreed to participate in an exchange of thought. The creatures showed the humans their own villages, built underground. They tried to teach them how to move almost invisibly, the way that they did. They shared the simple but effective tools that they relied on. But ever-practical, the creatures kept their most valuable skill a secret. In exchange, they accepted human gifts of clothes and jewelry from the humans, mostly out of politeness.

Quietly, the dynamic soured. Neither side saw any use for the others’

offerings, and for the humans, this was a cause for anger. ‘One would expect,’ they muttered amongst themselves, ‘for creatures as strange as these to have something of value to offer us. But no, the best things about them are their eyes and fur.’

“Oh no,” Evie said, barely registering her own voice. Her palms were clammy, and she realized that she was on edge. Tom seemed not to hear. The deer moved in the bushes, but he was too focused to notice.

“And, naturally, as soon as the humans came to this realization, the eyes and fur were what they had to have. They invited the creatures to feast, but when they arrived, the humans skinned them and gouged their crystalline eyes out, leaving nothing but claw, muscle and bone. Afterward, they wiped out the entire community, bashing in their dens and burying their bodies, so that all that remained to remember the creatures by was their fur and eyes, which soon were broken down into clothes and jewelry.

But what the humans did not know was that the creatures did not cycle through life and death as all other animals on Earth do, but lived on endlessly, eternal spectators. What they did not know was that they had sparked a new sensation in the hearts of the creatures: the thirst for revenge.”

“Cheesy,” Evie said, even though she could feel her hairs standing on end. She was too high, but she took another inhale anyway, watching the smoke smudge the night.

“Maybe,” Tom said, “But it’s true. They had planted a seed of deep resentment in the creatures, who before had seen life all but objectively. So, the creatures laid low, and let themselves be buried one by one in shallow graves. And then, one by one, they clawed their way out and reconvened, this time deeper in the woods, to plan. They were nothing but muscle and bone, but they had one asset that the humans had neglected to harvest. Their long, thin, claws. In truth, their claws were the largest reason that they had managed to thrive for so long. Because they were not really true claws so much as needles, designed to extract the desirable from whatever they inject and repurpose it for themselves. In the past, they had mainly used their claws to absorb energy, but they could also harness more intangible forces: love, wisdom, courage.

And this way, the creatures always had a surplus of resources and knowledge.

So, although they had never used this ability to harm, taking only what they needed to from humans and animals that crossed their path, the time had come to take full advantage of their gifts. By night, they began sneaking out of the underbrush to snatch whatever human prey came their way, sucking some of the goodness out of it, and leaving them gray. Usually, they would take the memory of the abduction as well, leaving their victims confused, to live out the rest of their lives in an angry or depressed haze without knowing why.

But occasionally, just occasionally, they would leave the memory intact. They allowed whispers to be spread that all would hear but few would truly believe. And thus, they became the Soulsuckers, dark, mysterious monsters who lurked in the woods and robbed people of the best parts of themselves. When a person started to go dark or cold, became suddenly cruel or distant, someone would mutter that the Soulsuckers were to blame. Society became a little crueler, and a little dimmer, and nearly no one knew why. Soon even the stories all but dwindled, drowned out by the other chaos in the world. But the Soulsuckers kept feasting, and still today, humanity fades and distorts because of them.”

Evie waited, listening to the forest move.

“Is that the whole story?” she asked finally, when nothing but soft slow breath had been coming from Tom for what felt like a while.

“More or less. Did you like it?”

Evie shrugged. “It was okay.” Her organs were pulsing beneath her skin, and she couldn’t bring herself to look at Tom. Instead, she stared hard into the woods, trying to put a location on the deer. She’d never been this near to one before. She thought she could see the outlines of their antlers amidst the trees. Squinting, she could make out pinpoints of light where the moon reflected off of their eyes.

“There’s a little bit more,” Tom said. “Sometimes, the Soulsuckers would take mercy on their victims. Sometimes, if a person begged, the Soulsuckers would leave a little bit of goodness in exchange for a deal: that

the victim would help them find new prey, so that they could continue to thrive within the woods.”

She could hear the deer breathing. Imagine their wet noses twitching. In a minute, she would be able to reach out and touch one.

“What are you looking at?” Tom asked quietly.

“The deer,” she said. The silhouettes were advancing. They were nearly in the clearing now. Evie wiped her palms on her shorts.

“Evie...” Tom’s voice was soft. “They’re not deer.”

It was then that they came forward. The not-deer. Walking on two, legs, not four. Their eye sockets were hollow, but a dim light still glowed from within them. They were built of raw muscle and bone. But what Evie’s eyes went to were their fingers. Their claws were unlike any she had ever seen, inches long and wire-thin. She turned to give Tom a look of betrayal.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “It was this or they took everything.”

At some point Evie awoke in the moonlit clearing. The night sky looked exactly the same as it had when she had lain down. Tom was on the blanket next to her watching the stars.

“You fell asleep,” he said mildly.

She could feel herself flush. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay. You’re not used to smoking, are you?”

“No,” she admitted. She felt so strange, emptier somehow, and cooler beneath the skin. She wondered if she’d had a bad dream.

“It’s okay,” Tom laughed. “We can turn you into a pro.”

Evie didn’t see any reason why she shouldn’t want such a thing. The hint at a future would have had her dancing inside an hour ago. Now though, she felt strangely unmoved. She realized that her desire for the

LUCY MCCLELLAN

unknown had left her. The thrill had flickered out.

She pushed her cheeks into a smile with her lips. "I'd like that," she said.

She did not want to go back home. She did not want to go anywhere. And so, she stayed, and hoped that in time, she would feel full again.

SARAH JANE CLOUSER



*nights in copenhagen*

## DOLLHOUSE COCKROACH

Haven't I been around  
and around already  
I've gotten good at feeling my  
way around in the dark but this it's something  
not quite right  
some unease settled under  
in the slick of the floors  
in the paint pricked  
from the walls in nail scrapes I am not  
used to everything  
being at my level I am not used to everything  
tricking me like this as if I am  
one of them no  
longer small as if  
it's safe  
enough to stay when I know what  
still waits some hand  
to find me tomorrow  
this belonging here  
and not really  
did you know I saw myself earlier  
blurry in a sheen of plastic  
creased across the wall  
an apparition born low to the ground  
no one around to tell me if this is real  
if the hand is raising something up  
to bring it down

PRAYER FOR THE MAN WHO  
ASSAULTED ME, AND LATER ASKED,  
“HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO  
APOLOGIZE FOR THAT?”

*after Charles Harper Webb*

May there come a day, decades from now, that you start to feel that something's off; that you start to smell traces of my perfume just when you are drifting off to sleep; that you find a hair a different color than your wife's curled delicately on your pillow. May you wake up from the deepest part of your sleep trembling because you swear you heard my voice carried in on the breeze. May you feel someone humming in the upstairs of your quaint suburban home only to find the faintest warmth from my soles left in the floorboards. May you be terrified. May you taste adrenaline every time your phone rings. May the street be filled with cars that do not look like my old car but that make the street quake like something I might drive. May you hear my laughter, the sweet kind from before, emanating from behind your TV set. May you pull out all the books on the shelves, picture books and old textbooks and airport novels, because you swear you saw between them the flash of an eye, the one you once saw huge in terror, now narrowed, cold and determined. May you have to sing to yourself always so you do not hear me waiting. May

KATE ARDEN

your wife not understand. May you overhear her on the phone to her mother, when she thinks you are asleep, wondering if it will be tomorrow or next week that you finally snap. May your children aim weary looks at you, a stranger, unkempt, wild eyed and sweating in what was once their living room. May she send them to live with her mother. May she start packing a suitcase. May you be forced to move states by the memory of me. May you be unable to eat because your stomach is always full of me. May you sleep in fits. May you hear my name in the mouths of passing strangers. May the new city reek of me. May you long to see me, finally, at last, if only so that it will all be over. May your wife call and you hear my soft chatter in the background. May your kids' new sitter have the same name as me. May you find skin under your nails though you have not touched anyone in months. May you find yourself crumbling to the ground begging on your worn knees for forgiveness. May you repent so forcefully and for so long, asking the benevolent sky to crack open and drown your undeserving lungs; asking the ground to boil and melt the body you once allowed free reign of this earth and all its bodies. May your pleas be so earnest and distracting to passersby that it gathers media attention. May I see your gaunt figure on the news and it take me awhile to recognize you because I have not thought of you in so long.

It is possible, just slightly possible, that then I will forgive you, and it is only because I remember feeling once how you feel there on your knees. My god, how I pity you. Your god, how I pity you. May you die of relief with my name on your lips, praising me as a merciful lord, one who is kind to animals.



*ominous whispers*

## DOWN SOUTH DELIVERANCE

*First Date — 1910*

My mama used ta bring ‘em in,  
run ‘em to the basement,  
real quick so Daddy Foster didn’t see.  
She’d fit ‘em snug in that ole’ chair  
with their shoulders up an’ ropes tied strict like a  
barb’ wire fence that only lets love through.

After the room was soakin’ in prayer,  
an the Holy Ghost had answered His invitation,  
she’d begin.

    Outta breath, Uncle Trev would turn up  
    later.

    Kids left at home with Auntie Rose.

Those two knew just what to do  
in this strange delivery room,  
but helpless at a hospital.  
For Cuz’ Constance, it was as  
smooth as Gramma’s hand-kneaded butta’ rolls.

Uncle Trev told her,  
“Don’t be alarmed if I seem a little feisty, it’s  
not you I’m chattin’ with, it’s that demon.”  
Poor sucker wouldn’t stand a chance.

This is about tha time I’d close my eyes and  
wanna inch away, but I never did.  
No fear in perfect love, heard that?

SYDNEY JAMES

Mama'd look 'em in the eyes while they were  
fully human, remind 'em who they are:  
worthy, loved, cherished, God's image-bearers.

Her marred hands engulfed Constance's,  
like God's grasp of this green earth.  
Then they'd call the Devil in 'ha up:  
the Tormentor,  
the Evil One,  
the Jealous One,  
the Ancient Attack,  
Saint of the Smokestack.

Mama tol' me one time  
"Satan smells like sweaty body odor,  
masked by garlic-onion-juice  
deodorant."

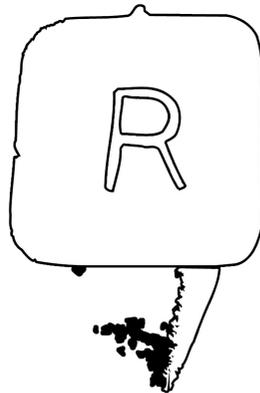
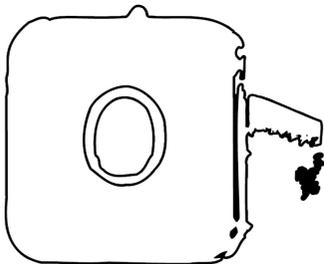
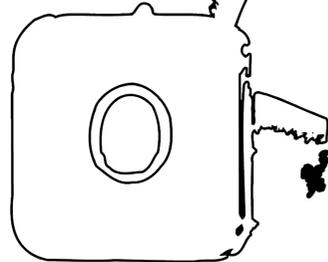
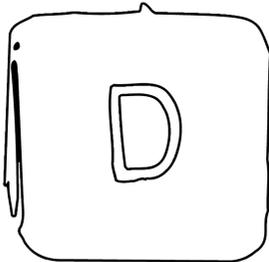
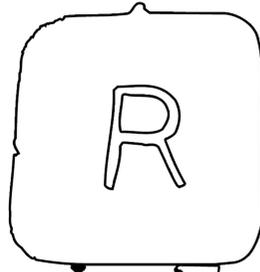
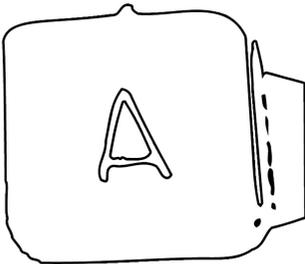
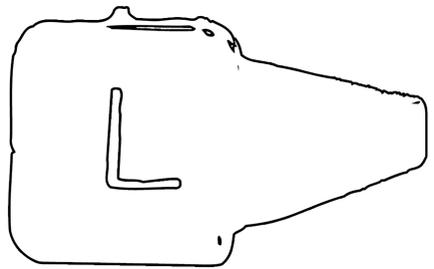
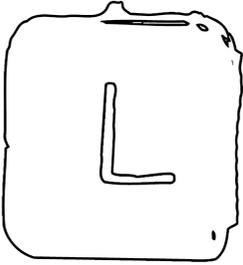
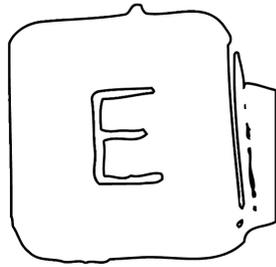
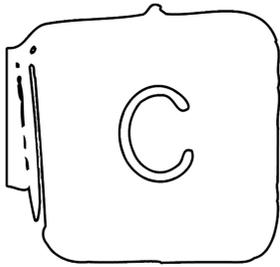
Lucifer would turn Constance's  
mossy eyes, dead black;  
blacker than that eight ball Uncle Frank  
lost his bills over on Friday nights.

He'd convince 'ha of beautiful darkness:  
but hatred's necklace strangled 'ha,  
malice's tongue suffocated 'ha,  
and envy's etch touched a vein.  
Death's pursuit was mad 'n' unrestrained.

In that low-lit room,  
windowless room,  
scream-proof room,  
I saw the Devil himself leave Constance.  
Uncle Trev told that Bein' it had to leave in the  
name of Jesus.

It did just that.

Yep.. that was Tuesday in Mama's  
house growin' up.  
How 'bout yo'self?



# CONTRIBUTORS

**Kate Arden** is junior from Fuquay-Varina studying Political Science and English.

**Sarah Jane Clouser** is a junior from Charlotte, NC studying American History. She recently studied abroad in Sweden where she was able to travel to Oslo and Copenhagen to get the pictures that are featured.

**Anissa Deol** is a sophomore originally from Pennsylvania but Raleigh has been her home for 12 years. She is majoring in Journalism with a double major in PWAD and a minor in Creative Writing. Sarcasm is her strong suit, she can dish it and take it. She is an avid lover of films and loves to read and she has been Batman's biggest fan since she was seven.

**Sydney James** is a junior from Stokesdale, NC, studying Advertising and Creative Writing. She's seen the goodness of God in the land of the living; it's her favorite thing to write about.

**Will Lowder**, a junior English major, is happy when he listens to "We Found Love" by Rihanna, when someone tells him they like his shirt, and when Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis give their heartfelt speeches at the end of *Freaky Friday*. He does not want to tell you what makes him sad.

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# INFORMATION

*Cellar Door* is the oldest undergraduate literary journal at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Published twice annually, the magazine has continually published the best poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and art of the undergraduate student body since 1973. It welcomes submissions from all currently enrolled undergraduate students at UNC. Guidelines for submission can be found online at [www.unccellardoor.org](http://www.unccellardoor.org). Please note that staff members are not permitted to submit to any section of *Cellar Door* while they work for the magazine.

All undergraduate students may apply to join the staff of *Cellar Door*. Any openings for positions on the Poetry, Fiction, or Art selection staffs will be advertised online. You may contact us via e-mail at [thecellardoor.unc@gmail.com](mailto:thecellardoor.unc@gmail.com), or DM us @unc-cellardoor on Instagram and Twitter.

## SUPPORTING CELLAR DOOR

Your gift will contribute to publicity, production, and staff development costs not covered by our regular funding. Contributors will receive copies of the magazine through the mail for at least one year.

Please make all checks payable to “Cellar Door” and be sure to include your preferred mailing address.

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