



# LAMP

*Literary Magazine*

2023

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## The Sun Remembered

My father hung string lights in the holly bushes,

At the pit of darkness,  
Which the saltless water crusts like muscle.

We did not want to hold back the night with our hands.

In appalling bedclothes of white ash,  
The rooftops and the world  
Bow.

A white ceramic contains  
The fragile green of summer.  
About the leaves clasp crystals,  
The sun a shower of sparks.  
The gutters sob, slowly,  
Gracefully, glittering.  
The iced eaves mourn,

And the scarlet shines on their teeth.

In the holly hedge  
Hangs a litany of lights.

## Bipolar Chrysalis

styrofoam scraping styrofoam scraping spoons, nothing sharp  
( white tiles scuffed with my feet .

the faded slate of my uncolored pages  
) stained glass crayons shedding .

ice cream, cloud-like; cold licked tin foil  
( my tongue, tear-salted, questioning .

ivory keys hard-pressed under me  
) hymns scrawled on a spine disembodied .

corn and green beans mixed and swimming  
( desperation, Gideon Bible; thin bed sheets .

my, *i like it here* ,  
) and my, *i shouldn't be here* ?

SARAH  
LECIK  
6

## Sidewalk Art

*Kaley Hutter*

It gapes open, the rusted trunk of his 2004 Toyota, open like a cold-sored maw that sucks in the tired August heat. Card-board boxes with faded Great Value logos and other brands my mother never ordered from all stacked inside it like unchewed morsels. The whole animal leers at me from the driveway, and I perch on the sidewalk in my new dress, chalk waving in my fist like a baton, looking and not looking.

Above, the sun drips through the clouds and makes shining strings down the length of the sky, like some angel is unweaving each puff. White sails, Alice would call them. The sun splotches over the car's paint job, washing the old maroon with a shiny nosebleed red. I imagine what 2004 looked like, or what 2004 looked like with a new Toyota in it, its loopy t winking like a hooped baby angel. I start drawing cars. Colorful ones with four doors and four-person families, closed trunks and no moving boxes.

The screen door lashes the air, and it is him. It is him because he did not close it carefully behind like Alice and Mother always do, carefully pressing the door back into the wood frame until it is smooth under your thumb. The door squeals out and then swings back to slam on its frame, and boot-ed footsteps bustle down the porch steps. I do not look back, cannot look up from my fleet of chalk vehicles.

He strides to the car, and it's an old Kitch-enaid box in his arms. I draw a mixer in blue chalk, but it looks like an upside-down umbrella. I draw cookies and cake. My sidewalk is bursting with cars and desserts and smiling stick figures. I claim the next panel of cement.

I wait for the heat of his gaze on me as he stuffs the box into the jaws of the old trunk. I wait and I draw and I think once I feel it, but it is only the sun, come to glaze the world over again like plastic, and suddenly the maroon paint is glowing red again.

The screen door squeaks open, then quietly eases back into the frame with a soft click. Alice's footsteps are lighter than his, and when she says we're going to see a movie, there is a strange quiver in her voice.

I carefully arrange my chinks in their little bucket. We tread down the sidewalk, and suddenly the bare panels go by fast, fast, fast, and Alice wants to hold my hand, and although I am a little big, I let her because of the round drop of water on her chin and the ruler-straightness of her back. I feel heat on my neck, but I do not look back, do not look

back, do not look back. A world behind us, the great maw snaps shut with a clunk of finality, and in its silent echo, I hop over cracks on the neighbors' sidewalk.

We turn the corner to the rumble of ignition, the sound rising up into the air, into our erect backs—through them even—and I grip my sister's hand like a walking stick and feel her heart beating through the pads of her fingers, and as the grizzled old car drives away, I know the closed trunk still leers and the red paint still shines, and somewhere between us and the car, my sidewalk art glows under the unwoven sky, its visions of cars and families and futures all laid out like an offering of atonement.

**I wait for the  
heat of his gaze  
on me as he  
stuffs the box  
into the jaws of  
the old truck.**

# How to Make Leche Flan

Ashley Owens

**S**tep 1: *With your hands, separate the yolk from the whites of 8 eggs and add them to a bowl.*

I asked Nanay for her recipe this morning. I never called my mom “Nanay” as a kid. It’s Tagalog, a language I don’t know. A language Nanay regrets not teaching me when I was still young. But at least she showed me how to cook. When Nanay did it countless times in the past, the yolks and whites were ashamed of ever being attached to each other. They slid effortlessly from her hands, which were laced with dark cooking scars and stained with the Philippine sun. My hands, a pale-brown mix between hers and my dad’s fair ones, are going numb from the chilled jelly of the eggs, which refuse to cooperate. I can’t separate the yolks and whites.

*Step 2: Beat the yolks. Mix in 1 can (14 oz) condensed milk and 1 can (12 oz) evaporated milk.*

Nanay’s arm was a machine built over her mom’s blazing stove; stirring sinigang, cooking afritada, stir-frying monggo beans while a fan purred nearby. I switch my fork from my right hand to my left, my arms already drained. Eggs and milk splatter over the side of the bowl, onto the counter, and onto the cold fake wood floor of an air-conditioned kitchen. There are 8,633 miles between her childhood kitchen and mine.

*Step 3: Strain the mixture in a cheesecloth or sieve.*

When she let her mixture flow through the translucent cloth, smooth liquid filled the bowl, free of impurities. I don’t have a cheesecloth. I try scooping out the streaks of egg floating at the top of my concoction with a spoon, but it will never be pure. I can’t separate all the white parts on the surface that Nanay doesn’t have.

*Step 4: Place 3 tbs sugar in each llanera. Melt sugar on the stove over low heat.*

Every true Filipina mom has llaneras - the small, aluminum, oval molds always used for leche flan. With tongs, she held the llaneras over the orange flame of the stove until the sugar caramelized into a golden liquid—a rich color like her skin. I don’t have llaneras, so I put my sugar in a pan. It crystallizes into pale clumps. I scrape it out and try again with fresh sugar, but it never darkens.

I call Nanay. She doesn’t offer much help.

“Just find a recipe for caramel online. I don’t know,” she laughs in her sing-song voice.

It’s something she can’t teach me. She says the same thing about the nuances of Taga-

log. It’s like asking a fish how it extracts oxygen with its gills. It doesn’t know—it just does. I will never be a fish. I hang up. I follow the recipe online that says to bring water and sugar to a boil, and it finally melts. Nanay never used water, though, just pure sugar.

*Step 5: Swirl the llanera to spread the caramel. Remove from heat and allow to cool and harden.*

With her tongs, she would tip the llaneras back and forth until the entire bottom was covered. Once she set them on the counter, they turned into panes of cracked, amber glass. Instead of llaneras, I have a 9-inch glass pie plate similar to my grandma’s, the one on my dad’s side. She uses hers for pumpkin and cherry pies. When I empty my pan of sugar into the dish, the color is weak compared to Nanay’s caramel, like how the brown of my hair looks dim against her intense black locks.

*Step 6: Pour egg/milk mixture into llaneras and cover with foil. Place in steamer for 45 minutes.*

Nanay flooded her llaneras with her mixture like monsoon rains. Her steamer cooked the custard slow and even. I don’t have a steamer. The internet says to put my dish into a cake pan of water in the oven instead. When I move my contraption to the oven rack, water spills, bubbling and hissing on the scorching metal. It’s a crime Nanay’s steady hand wouldn’t have committed.

*Step 7: Once done, place in refrigerator to chill. To serve, turn the flan upside down.*

Nanay left her llaneras in the fridge overnight, all but one. After two hours, she chose one exceptional llanera of flan to flip onto a small plate for me to test. I would eat it slowly at the breakfast nook table. Sometimes, she would be on the phone with people far away, and I listened to her animated voice submerge the kitchen with sounds of her homeland. But cooking is a language understood without words. Now, I’m amazed by how my leche flan looks. The once hardened sugar is infused with the top of the smooth custard, and its thin syrup rolls down its sides. My flan is not the same as hers. The first bite sings notes of vanilla, silky cream, and the two worlds I inherited.

*Step 8: Enjoy*

## How to Save a Cat (and Yourself)

First, unearth a hidden lair, somewhere  
Black as thunder, secluded.  
Traverse beneath a groaning house—  
There, the desperate scratching of claws  
Draws you like a soldier to a dying man.  
In the chaotic darkness, switch on  
A headlamp—illuminate  
The greyblackwhite void,  
Which morphs into a furry feline  
Begging for release.

Second, rescue. Plunge up through  
Musky insulation raising scratchy welts on reaching arms,  
Fiberglass particles clogging tickled nostrils, and  
Capte the mewling kitty.  
Clutch the kitten like a Gospel miracle,  
Bring it with holy anticipation  
Inside to a temple of restoration.

Last, watch the kitten revive,  
Clasp the grey fluff,  
A tangle of scrawny legs and fervent eyes,  
And coax it to a wellspring of life.  
Discover how to save a cat  
And find you saved yourself, too.

## Where's the Sign-in Sheet?

*T. L. Guillot*

You ask, you ask  
You tell, you tell  
You tell these questions rather well

I adore the way you score my scars  
And trade my voice for candy bars  
You scratch my name just until  
You realize who I am and what I love still

I am a churchless graveyard  
With well washed, mossy stones  
“Oh my! Your marble is so white!”  
“Thanks! I only died last night!”

I am the receipt that you give to people  
When you don't want to buy their clothes  
“Sir, you need a mask to come in here”  
“But do I also need a nose?”

I am a widow's wedding dress  
Hanging with highly elevated style  
“Dresses can't kill people, right chief?”  
“No, but they'll let you bleed for a while”

I am the final question on a test  
You killed the rest, but what of me?  
“Oh, who cares, I'll just pick C”  
“Johnny, are you wearing a wedding dress?”

I am the poet who has been hired

To fix F. Scott Fitzgerald's tires  
“Sir, is the green light fire?”  
But he doesn't answer and instead retires

“Number 273!  
It's time for you to sign in.  
Write your name, weight, and everything  
you've ever known.”

I groan and I shout  
But write it all anyways  
Knowing no other way out



## kindred

*Ellie Talalight*

the spiderweb is in the corner  
but the spider is dead  
the words to shape a memory  
are hidden  
encased in the  
spiky green shell  
of an early chestnut  
which sits on my table  
next to my phone & laptop

## Down from Horeb

*Perry O'Connor*

I saw from the airplane and understood:  
Rank on rank, the legions of the glacial clouds,  
The freezing lips of threshed water,  
All rising like angels,  
Like salmon leaping  
And breaking the sun on their backs,  
The plains heaped like thrown snow,  
And out the left window,  
Miles out,  
The broad muscle cramping into gold.

As we descended, I saw the sunbeams fall,  
**And the train of their robes filled the lower heavens.**

I was reminded of how as a child  
I understood beauty as a kind of hunger.

From below, I looked to the clouds  
Torn like bread.

JACLYN HAAGEN

## Ice

I am drowning in glass shards that twinkle in my periphery. The air is cold—  
my body, still. There is no pain, no feeling. I am frozen, motionless. The  
recycled air flowing through my lungs is my body's only movement. My eyes  
do not blink. Cannot blink. They are dry, without tears. Gravel surrounds me,  
sprinkled with sharp glass. The ground appears like a large lake reflecting the  
clear night sky above. My vision blurs. I'm covered in what look like shards of  
ice. The freckled sky grows hazy. Brightness blinds me.

Hurried voices fall upon me from above. Unintelligible sounds. I cannot  
speak.

*Forgot to tell Dad about the seatbelt.*

Everything hurts.

*Please, don't let anyone be hurt.*

Nothing hurts.

*Couldn't take my eyes off the rearview.*

My shuddered breath escapes into the cold.

*Can't feel.*

The breath fades before me.

*Please.*

*Couldn't.*

*Help.*

More voices. Boots crunching against the snow. My eyelids are heavy. It  
hurts to see.

Darkness.

*Better.*

*Calmer.*

Light. Red light. A sea of red.

Darkness again.

*Can't feel.*

*I'm frozen. Stuck.*

*Help.*

—

I jolt awake with a sharp inhale at the sound of knocking at my door. I am  
pulled from a hazy dream that has already escaped my memory. Exhaustion



weighs heavily upon my eyes.

“Sorry to wake you.”

It’s Bridget. I like Bridget. She works the night shift and keeps me company after my company leaves. She braids my hair, paints my nails. I look down at my nails. They are a beautiful coral color, thanks to her.

“Morning meds.” She shrugs. “Sorry.”

A twinge of guilt flashes across her face, but I know she’s not really sorry. Her grin is soft, calm, reassuring. “Rough night?” she asks.

Most nights are, I want to say. But I don’t.

She meanders over to my bedside, paper cup in hand. “Big day,” she says, her eyes aglow, looking expectantly into mine.

I nod, extending my arm toward her.

She takes my hand in hers, wraps my lifeless fingers around the paper cup. I’ve lost track of what’s inside. Mom knows.

I lift my arm to my mouth, let the various capsules tumble onto my tongue.

Bridget lifts my bedside tumbler to my lips. I latch onto the straw. The water is lukewarm, the ice completely melted from the night before.

“Thank you,” I say.

Bridget unplugs my phone from its usual place upon the windowsill and hands it to me, opening the fingers of my left hand to slide them through the loop attached to the back. There are two messages: one from Carol, one from Mom.

*TODAY’S THE DAY!!! love you bunches. see you soon.*

*Thought of you all last night sweetheart. Can’t wait to have you home. I love you.*

“OT’s at ten today. Then,” Bridget says with a smile, “you’re home free.”

“Home free,” I say, more to myself than to her. I look down at the cream blanket hiding my legs, straighten the creases with the side of my free hand.

Bridget heads toward the exit, then turns toward me at the door with her hand on the frame. Her eyes meet mine. “It’s going to be a good day, Evie.”

—

It’s the morning after that fateful night. The details are the first thing on my mind as I come to. The fierce rays of a rising sun warm my face. Brightness, then pain. It’s too bright. I close my eyes. I see the person colliding with my windshield just before it all went dark. I panic.

It was just a deer, they say. No one was hurt, they say.

But I am hurt. And now voiceless, too, with that horrific image on playback in my mind.

It is just a trick of the mind. Still, I’m haunted.

Why couldn’t I keep my eyes off the rearview long enough to spot the deer and avoid the ice?

I couldn’t tell them that I was sorry.

—

It is a good day, all things considered. I am met with balloons and banners. I paint with Lindsey and Michelle. They bring cupcakes, which I eat with a fork. Something we practiced together.

I pass Alex in the hallway on my way to OT. “They don’t usually make such a big fuss about other people’s last days,” he says to me. “You must be special or something.”

I roll my eyes and shake my head. I hate that he’s right.

“Congrats,” he says with a smile. “Really.”

“Thanks,” I say.

The three celebratory balloons tied to the back of my chair catch my eye. I imagine untying them and watching them float up to the ceiling. I hear the piercing sound of their pop after they have succumbed to the heat of an overhead light.

There is a note from Alex on my bed when I return.

*Congratulations on your formal exit. Best of luck in the Olympics.*

*P.S. Sorry it’s not gold.*

Next to the sticky note sits an old Yoplait silver lid tied to a red ribbon. I smile.

*Thanks, Alex.*

When Bridget returns, I have her place it around my neck.

—

I am three days out of the ICU. It is just me and Carol. Our local church is treating Mom and Dad to a nice dinner at a fancy steakhouse. Carol makes the hour-long trek to the hospital by herself.

“You say the word, and I won’t go.”

“Are you crazy? You have to go. You all have to go.”

“I just really can’t imagine competing right now. Not with you here. Not with everything that’s going on.”

“Hey, look at me. I’m fine. Everything’s fine. I’m stable now.”

Her blue eyes hold mine. They are glossy and red.

“You’ll regret it for the rest of your life if you don’t.”

“I’ll be thinking about you every second.” She grabs my hand in hers, holds it tight.

“I know,” I say.

—

Mom, Dad, and Carol arrive later, all wearing their matching peach and teal t-shirts that display my name in big, bold letters. I select a black Nike crewneck and white athletic shorts when Bridget asks me to pick out my outfit for the day.

Carol braids my hair while Mom packs my things. Dad and Bridget chat about the Blues and their disappointing season.

The rehabilitation team—doctors, nurses, therapists—all line the entryway, including Sheryl, the secretary, and several of the other patients on the ward. They clap, cheer, hoot, and holler as Carol rolls me out. I don’t need to see her to know she’s smiling wide. Bridget walks beside me.

—

It’s January 24th, the first night of the U.S. Figure Skating Championships. The date is marked on my calendar with big, bold letters. Bridget’s handwriting. She says it’s a big deal.

It is a big deal.

All of us gather around the television in the common area. Alex, the new guy, rolls in next to me. He’s twenty-three. Was engaged to his high school sweetheart. Jumped off a cliff with some college friends in Hawaii, landed on the water wrong, and that was it.

They show a close-up of Carol. She’s next on the ice. Her dress is a coral pink color. It complements our blue eyes well.

“She does look just like you.”

“So I’m told.”

“She’s pretty serious about this, I take it?”

“She has her eyes on 2026. They say she might actually do it.”

“Wow. What a story that would be.”

My parents always joked that we were both born with ice in our veins. Dad played college hockey, and Mom curled in high school (a broken ankle cut her figure skating career short), so they put us both in figure skating lessons at four. Carol excelled. I walked off the ice with bumps and bruises and never looked back.

“It’s funny,” Alex says. “You could tell strangers you broke your neck training for the Olympics, and they’d believe you.”

“It’s a cooler story than a car accident.”

We watch the rest in silence.

—

Mom and Dad wait at the van, just beyond the automatic sliding glass door. Mom’s iPhone camera is front and center, capturing the moment. Her eyes are fixed on the frame. I can tell there are tears in them. I blush, embarrassed and unsure of how to handle all the attention. I try to avert my eyes from the camera knowing full well this footage will end up on the Facebook page later. I deflect everyone’s excitement around me. I try to look excited and hope my eyes don’t give myself away.

Before I get to the van, Bridget stops. “Hey,” she says. “I’m proud of you.”

She bends down and wraps her arms around me. I wrap my arms around her. “Thank you,” I say. Eyes closed. Nose scrunched. Tears rising.

“I’ll see you at the lake.”

—

It’s Valentine’s Day. My room is covered in greeting cards, heart-shaped balloons, and flowers in vases. Most of them are from Mom or Carol. A few from relatives. One from a friend. Dad brings me a box of heart-shaped chocolates and a bouquet of roses. Annual tradition for each of his two #1 girls.

My family has left for the night. A light February snow falls just outside my window. I extend my hand, pretend to catch the flakes in a palm that is hidden behind curled fingers. The corridor lights are dimmed for the evening.

Bridget bursts through the door at eight with all her usual energy and optimism, just in time for the night shift.

“What movie will it be tonight?” she asks. “I will not accept any answer other than a rom-com.”

I choose *You’ve Got Mail*. Bridget stays for the first ten minutes, then goes to complete her usual rounds. She returns about halfway through, just after NY152 has stood up Shopgirl at Cafe Lalo.

“How easy it must be to fall in love through a computer,” she remarks.

She stands at her cart with her eyes transfixed on the screen. Her hair is pristinely curled and pulled back into a low ponytail. My dirty braids feel like a rat’s nest pancaked against my pillow.

“He just stood her up. They’re not in love yet,” I say.

“Yeah,” she says, “but they will be.”

“Meg Ryan doesn’t know that yet.”

—

One week out. I awake to Bridget’s knock at the door. Two lines swirl around in circles in my mind. I ask for paper and pen to write them down before I lose them to the dissipating fog.

She pulls a notepad and pen from the nightstand at my bedside. “Do you need me to write something down for you?”

“That’s okay. I got it.”

“Okay.” Bridget sets the notepad down on the overbed table, pulls it in close, and raises the back of my bed. She opens my hand and helps me secure the pen in place. It falls from my grasp a few times, but we eventually secure it.

I write large and slowly. The script resembles that of a child learning to write for the very first time. Bridget tends to miscellaneous tasks around the room while I write. She tries to be discreet, but I can tell she’s straining to read what has been written on the page. The words flow from my drowsy mind and emerge in the clear on the paper.

*The only thing that remains strong  
is the ice I find myself running on.*

“It’s ironic,” I say. It’s awful poetry. That’s why I like it.

“It’s sad,” Bridget says, rehangng a shirt that has fallen from its hanger in the armoire.

“I’ve been thinking,” I say. “I know what I want to do next week.”

“What’s that?”

“I want to go to the water. Lake Superior. That one beach up north my parents used to always take us to when we were kids.”

“I think that sounds lovely. But isn’t it still a bit cold for that?”

I shrug, brush off the question. “Have you ever been?”

“No. I grew up in St. Louis, far from the water.”

Bridget takes the lined paper from the overbed table, hangs it up on the pinboard across from my desk like a mother proudly hanging up her child’s mediocre artwork. It is a welcome change next to the countless other “Get Well Soon,” “Feel Better,” “I’m Thinking of You” greeting cards.

“You know, it’s not always a bad thing to be running on ice. Not if you’re wearing skates.”

I roll my eyes, shake my head. “Very funny.”

Bridget pushes her computer cart toward the door and flashes a knowing smile. “I’ll be back in ten after your breakfast has arrived.”

—  
One sleep left. Dad has snuck away from work for the afternoon without telling Mom.

“Just needed to see you,” he says.

We sit in silence for a while. I’m in and out of sleep. It’s quiet aside from the occasional snuffle or two.

“I just want you to know,” he says, when he happens to catch me awake, “that all of this... it’s not your fault. None of it.”

His eyes are focused on the door. His hands are clasped in his lap.

“I know that, Dad.”

He fiddles with the ring on his left hand, looks down.

“No,” he says. “You don’t.”

He’s right. I don’t. Not really. Not yet.

“It was one in a million, Evelyn. A drop in the ocean.”

He looks up at me. Tears well up in his eyes. He pulls his chair in closer, takes my hand in his. Pats it twice. Like the breakthrough of a ship on choppy waters, a singular droplet cascades down his cheek.

“One in a million.”

—  
It is a nearly four-hour drive to Lake Superior. Small talk fills the first hour. Silence, the second. Carol’s AUX, the third and fourth.

Ten minutes out, and the first sight of the water brings back memories of picnics in the sand with Mom and splashing in the water with Dad. It has been ten whole years. Carol and I were seven when we visited the shoreline last. Dad picked up coaching, Carol’s practice schedule became more grueling, and Mom took on a full-time job. Schedules grew busy.

Bridget’s gray sedan pulls into the parking spot next to us.

Dad lifts me from the Mom emerges from the sunglasses. She pulls the own from the vehicle’s buried in the back of closet back home.

We file onto a wooden to the beach. The sand Dad’s shoes. The area aside from one elderly retriever down the way. flock to Minnesota Even if it is an unusually “The water will be cold,” still sure about this?”

“I’ll only put my legs in

Dad pipes up. “We drove four hours. She’d better be sure.”

“I’m worried about your body temperature.”

“I’m sure,” I say. “I can’t exactly feel temperature, anyway.”

Dad chuckles. Mom throws me a look that says, *Not funny.*

Dad’s step is uneasy beneath me as he ventures out onto the uneven sand. Mom and Carol walk ahead of us. Bridget distances herself, walking to the right.

Dad’s walk is slower now, more careful. He takes up the rear of the procession. His right arm lies beneath my back, his left arm under my knees. My legs dangle in the crisp air. I almost see them kick frantically before me as I anxiously await the gentle toss toward the sky. But before I capture the hazy image in full, the memory of my youthful giggle fades into the present quietude of crashing waves and squawking gulls. Today, the sky is a beautiful bright blue color, marbled with the kind of cotton-candy clouds that make it look like you could dance across the sky.

**A small wave rolls  
in and  
immediately  
covers my feet.  
My toes sink into  
the sand.**

chair into his arms.  
car in her sunhat and  
sole beach chair we  
trunk, likely found  
an old, dusty storage

overpass that leads  
crunches beneath  
is mostly deserted  
man walking his golden  
People don’t usually  
beaches in late April.  
warm spring day.

Mom says. “Are you

for a second,” I say.



I rest my head on his shoulder and close my eyes. I am seven again, being carried to the car in his arms after a long day under the sun. My cheeks are rosy, and the sand has nestled in between my toes. It follows me home.

Ahead, Mom sets up the chair in the dense sand that has been darkened by the waves. The wind gives Carol some difficulty in laying the picnic blanket behind the chair, where the sand is still dry.

“Way to go, Carol!” Dad laughs at her tussle with the blanket.

“I’d like to see you give it a try!” Carol takes off her sneakers to hold the blanket in place.

With Mom’s assistance, Dad sets me down into the low chair. A small wave rolls in and immediately covers my feet. My toes sink into the sand. Mom yelps, denouncing the frigid temperature with a shrill shriek, and scurries off to the dry sand behind me.

“Comfortable?” Dad asks.

“I’m fine.”

Carol straightens my legs.

Bridget wanders over, looks out across the horizon. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Sure is,” Mom says.

All five of us stare out into the infinite horizon. If it wasn’t for the shallow wave patterns, you might actually trick yourself into believing you’re standing on the edge of an ocean. A vast yet unimposing horizon. An image without end.

“Glad to see we’re finally out of the thick of winter,” Dad says.

Another wave rolls in. I close my eyes. Breathe in.

“The snow hasn’t hardly been melted two weeks!” Mom says.

Breathe out. The wave rolls back. Carol braves the cold, sits down at my side. Shivers as the water submerges her legs.

“I don’t know, Dad,” Carol says. “The water’s still got quite the chill to it.”

The water recedes. Carol rests her head on my shoulder. The crinkled Yoplait lid reflects a ray of sunlight, catching my eye.

Bridget walks her bare feet into the water, exclaims how cold it is and hops around like a broken wind-up toy, desperately trying to keep both feet above the water. I laugh, thankful she has chosen to come. A more forceful wave rolls in.

Mom asks if I’m too cold yet. She gets a towel ready, fully prepared to dry me off and escort me to the warm car when I’m ready. I say not yet. I wait a moment longer. Another wave rushes in.

Mom walks behind me. She wraps her arms around me. Says I feel cold. I tell her I feel fine. Dad walks down the beach, stares off into the distance. His footsteps leave a firm impression upon the sand that the rolling waves fail to fully wash away. Carol writes our names on the ground with a washed-up stick. Us against the world, she always used to say. Bridget is a few strides away, chatting with the man and his dog.

The water recedes one final time.

“Okay,” I say.

## Sonnet —

When I behold my lover’s cerise smile,  
The oceans raging seem like whitened noise  
And painted roses lose their fragrant wiles,  
And gravity recenters on his voice—

You’ve heard this sonnet. The world is sopping wet and pregnant with such sonnets, as prudent women giggle fierce and top the glories of their head with lacy bonnets—  
Yes, you’ve heard this sonnet, but have you heard

the poet children of the prudent world,  
promiscuous with language, in pursuit,  
of grasping-sucking-coloring-tearing furred  
a noun and verb which none can deem astute?

That sound is of treefall in the woods

(hurling two married squirrels out of bed just as they were faking romance arguing over who would get nuts and their tails have hardly touched but hanging on the wall the first cracked shell they shared a branch they can’t forget yet they hardly know they’re just two animals making life every time they bury

what they love, as any animal would).



# SELENE

The moon is neither friend  
Nor mother,

But a swollen white animal  
Against whose blazing form  
Formalities of struggle and of love  
Find rock, foaming  
With silence and distance.

Nothing in these lower wastes  
Sins in a way she can forgive.

Armless Madonna,  
Crueler than marble,  
Hide once again the arrogant animal  
In the merciful robes of the dark.

*Perry O'Connor*

## Darkness in the Streets

*Kayla Werner*

Darkness gripped the city's edges, yet thousands of lights illuminated the sidewalk, casting flickering reflections on the murky waters of Elliot Bay. Tired from the long day and unaccustomed to such late hours, I stumbled off Goodtime II, a harbor cruise boat. Many of the other high-school athletes around me rushed onto the pier, shouting jubilantly into the darkness, invigorated by nightfall and the hours spent dancing and eating ice cream. It was the last night of the Tenth Annual Brooks PR Invitational. Brooks had flown the top high school runners in the country here to Seattle, Washington to compete on the track. Staring into the barrage of twinkling lights over the black bay, I breathed in the night's cold air. What a beautiful city.

A beautiful city of industry and innovation, Seattle was the birthplace of companies such as Starbucks, Microsoft, and Amazon. But it was not always so. Overlooking this same bay, ninety years ago, stood America's longest-standing "shantytown" of The Great Depression. Over a thousand men who had lost their jobs banded together in an empty shipyard facing the sea. Using spare lumber and scrap metal, they carved out a home for themselves. They called it Hooverville.

A few short days ago, I had dodged through people and luggage in the crowded Seattle airport until I found the Brooks representatives waiting to pick me up. Eight other athletes stood in a half circle, chatting like old friends. Too timid to join the conversation, I sat quietly, fumbling with my box of catered Panera as I listened to the light banter.

"I hope they don't give us bags again this year," one girl said. "I have sooo many bags from races."

Another butted in, "You know you can sell your bags on eBay. I got two hundred dollars for my last one." I could imagine an eager young athlete ordering the backpack, happiness lighting their eyes as they ripped the packing tape off the cardboard box. It was worth every cent. After all, sports were everything.

representatives rushed us into a room where they outfitted us completely in Brooks gear. After we had tried on pants, shirts, jackets, and shoes, they gave us the keys to our hotel rooms.

A hotel room. It seemed a given, a requisite. Of course, we should have rooms; after all, our houses were hundreds of miles away. But all those years ago, the Hooverville men had practically nothing. The waves would lick greedily at the edges of the establishment, and the cold winds blew through the scanty shacks, but the men had nowhere else to go.

That cold night after the race, I stood on the dark pier, half-listening to the chatter around me.

“My race was hooorrible,” said one girl, “but it doesn’t matter. I already have a scholarship.”

I wouldn’t have to pay for college either. I imagined myself in university, studying in the library as beams of sunlight streamed through the large glass windows. But I also saw the track. It stood in the middle of campus, the lined lanes like a whirlpool lapping up time and energy. At night, the bright lights would illuminate red rubber, casting artificial shadows while athletes ran around, and around, and around. But that night, none of it mattered. The future seemed too dim to merit much attention.

I hugged my chest in an attempt to keep warm. When would it be over? I just wanted to crawl into a warm bed. Then again, at least I had a warm bed to look forward to. The men of Hooverville didn’t have warm beds. They would huddle beside a weak fire—a pitiful attempt to ward off the encompassing darkness. Gathered together, they spooned themselves a tasteless gruel from the bottom of soot-blackened cans.

As I walked off the pier, the smell of fried chicken permeated the air. A handful of exhausted coaches stood

where the dock met the sidewalk, passing out boxes of hot chicken strips. I wasn’t hungry, but I took a box anyway. I could give it to my parents if I didn’t eat it. It was comforting to hold the white cardboard in my hands, absorbing its faint heat. Following those in front of me, I stared vacantly at the brick sidewalk lit by the streetlamp’s artificial greenish-white glow. “Hey!” a guy shouted, and a brown hunk hurtled through the air, smacking into another athlete’s back.

“What the—” she exclaimed, whipping around. “You didn’t just chuck a piece of chicken at me?” Laughing hysterically, she reached into her box, ripped off a chicken strip, and lobbed it at the guy.

Instigated by the anonymity of night, the athletes flung the fried chicken at each other. Some targeted their friends, but others simply tossed the food into the air. As we passed by the Seattle Ferris Wheel, someone pitched the remaining contents of their box on the sidewalk in front of us. An officer standing on watch muttered, “That’s rude.” Beneath my feet, a plastic cup of ketchup was spewed on the sidewalk. I wrinkled up my face in disgust and quickened my pace. Was I wasteful like them?

But the men of Hooverville got their living collecting waste in the streets. At the crack of dawn, the men would rise with a faint hope in the new day. Using carts fashioned from repurposed tires, the men picked up paper, metal, or anything else of



value. Every scrap had a purpose. Nothing was wasted.

I opened the door to my hotel room, set my bag on the floor, and collapsed on the smooth white sheets of the bed. Reaching across the nightstand, I flipped the light switch off, and darkness enveloped the room. Tomorrow, I would go home using the airline ticket purchased by Brooks. In the fall, I would go to college with all the expenses covered by my scholarship. Never questioning the countless dollars spent on my comfort and education, I would spend hours running laps on the rubber track. I couldn't tell if it would be like the chicken—discarded on the darkened sidewalk, cold and trampled. Was I like the men of Hooverville, carefully utilizing each resource to its full potential? I couldn't tell. There wasn't enough light.

**I couldn't tell if it  
would be like the  
chicken—discarded on  
the darkened  
sidewalk, cold and  
trampled.**

## Acquainted

*Leah Besser*

*After Robert Frost*

Have I looked back to another good-bye  
And have my feet proclaimed the saddest beat?  
The rain stood still and  
Night came down and

I walked out on the street.  
I outwalked one watchman

Have I dropped an unearthly cry?  
His was far away  
Further  
The furthest call

Over houses, the height of the sky passed by  
Interrupted

When in rain and the city lane I stopped  
At an unwilling-to-explain clock  
Luminary eyes against one still sound from  
Back in time

Neither light nor night have been acquainted with the city,  
But *have* been acquainted with me.

Have I not one right or wrong say?  
I have

Author's note: This poem is a remix of Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night." Using all the original language of Frost's piece, I created an original poem that emphasized the feelings of introspection that I found to be present in Frost's piece.



## People are Not Seasons

*Olivia Matson*

I'm colder, and I sniff a lot.  
Getting a whiff, I'm stiff  
In my plans, 'till I'm not

When leaves turn, my stomach drops.  
Nature is planned, predictable, and I'm  
Flying By the Seat of My Pants

The leaves turn, but not how you turned  
On me,  
Unpredictably

My skin is clear, mind is wrecked, yet I  
Lucked out, spun out, tossed out  
All your overcast memories

I'm scaring me, sat in the damp leaves—  
But despite your destruction,  
I'm better.

## The Illusion of Closeness Making up for the Lack of It

Breath plagued  
with the scent  
of coffee.

Laughs hushed  
in the stillness  
of libraries,  
shattered unspoken rules.  
Bones digging into bones,  
... dial..... tone.....,  
flakes of  
croissant  
like falling  
snow dusting  
your shirt,  
chocolate smeared on your lips.

Prickly  
leg  
hair  
as  
needles  
of  
a cactus.

Legs too hot  
to stay close.  
But please don't go too far.

Blankets pile  
on your side.

Squinting eyes, sunny haze. Morning came.  
Warmth lost, cold usurps.

Fluorescents turn to blinding spotlights,  
my audience holds their breath.  
"Any boys in your life, honey?"  
*There are none, Mom.*  
*Maybe if knowing someone new wasn't nauseating.*  
*Maybe if there was a book to stop me from loving him.*  
*Maybe if I wasn't a window for him to look at who he really wants.*

"No."

I greet the darkness with a full embrace.  
Cold flees, warmth floods.

My detergent mocks me as it seeps through the air.  
My sweatshirt waist.  
sleeve my  
around.

LED lights  
form bodiless  
phantoms.

Feigned warmth to forget  
the cold hand of being alone.  
Fingerprints bruised my skin. Stained. Tattooed.  
Not by overwhelming touch,  
but by the lack of it.

CARALYN

HAMBY

## What Is Left to Carry

*Grace Flaig*

Adlee Meremikwu left the Ceres colony at the age of eighteen. He brought with him only a duffel bag of clothes and his father's sniper rifle slung over his shoulder.

The clothes he eventually outgrew, and his duffel caught on a shipyard fence one day and was ripped beyond repair. But the rifle never suffered any ill fate.

It used *real bullets*, which in the 26th century were impossible to find. Adlee's father had insisted that thermal rounds always left a burnt aftertaste if used while hunting, and so he had hoarded nearly every last bullet left in the galaxy. On special occasions, he would take Adlee and his sister Nehir out hunting. "The way your great, great, many great grandparents did it," he would claim in his gruff, melancholic way.

The rifle, unsurprisingly, was much harder to master than a thermal rifle. It may have been somewhat lighter than current models, but using real bullets caused an absurd amount of kickback. His father had been the only one in the family to master it. He had allowed Adlee to fire the precious bullets now and then, but Adlee never managed to land a single shot.

Hours after the colony had been raided, their crops destroyed, and his family's bodies accounted for, Adlee had searched the ruin of his home for any ammo that may have survived. The ashes, still hot, scarred his hands and melted his palms into mangled, pink slabs of flesh. Still, he did not find a single bullet. When the colony was resettled, someone else would find his father's cache. Someone with soft hands would clear the rubble of Adlee's childhood and find those hidden gems of lead. But there would be no use for them, other than to sell them to a collector or to become expensive trinkets in a cabinet drawer.

Without bullets, the rifle was a worthless antique. Without working hands, Adlee could no longer farm. So, he carried his rifle from planet to planet, boarding one migrant ship after another in search of what comes after the loss of

one's entire life. On bigger ships with more room to disappear, he would find a quiet spot and unwrap the rifle from its meager canvas cover. He would polish every groove, inspect the parts he was clueless how to fix, and for as long as he was able, sit with the memories it carried.

What a great burden they both shared. To be the ones left behind, with no purpose left to cling to.

Three days after turning twenty-one, Adlee decided to sail back to the Milky Way.

He knew little about Earth, other than that his family had originated from a country called Nigeria. He couldn't remember if his father had said whether or not the country still existed. He could simply do his own research, but Adlee decided against such a simple solution. He would arrive and see for himself whether any home of his remained in any part of the universe. If it did, then perhaps Adlee's wandering days would be over. And if not, then he had to wonder if there was any point left to wandering at all.

To save money, Adlee snuck into the cargo bay. His father's hunting trips taught him well how to melt into shadow and silence his footfalls. He slipped through the vents in the engineering bay, the rifle slung across his back, until reaching the third deck passenger hold.

The people were squashed together like cargo. He crawled out of the vent and carved himself a spot in the crowd near the vent wall. He placed his rifle in his lap and cradled it close to his chest.

The girl beside him slept like the dead; not even Adlee's shuffling out of the vent had woken her up. An hour after takeoff, she cracked open her sunken eyes and stared dully at him.

"What's that?"

Adlee clenched his jaw. He held the rifle closer to him, as if the sickly girl had the strength to rip it from his arms.

The girl watched him, waiting for a response. "Sorry, I was jus' curious. Why-"

She smacked her hand over her mouth and coughed until tremors ran through her frail body. A crimson stain was left across her palm. The girl wiped her hand on her lap. "Why come this far? Are you visiting someone?"

Again, Adlee could not bring himself to speak.

"Well, it's a long trip. Maybe you'll feel like talking to me later. I'm here 'cause-"

The girl succumbed to another fit of coughing. This one was much longer than the last.

She gasped for breath, blood dribbling down her chin. Adlee hiked his shoulders and waited for the coughing to end. But one minute later, two minutes later, her pale face turned purple. His mouth opened suddenly as he told her, "Sit up." The girl tried, but her bony hands shook beneath her own weight. Hesitantly, Adlee placed his rifle against his side and hoisted the girl up by her shoulders. She was freezing, yet Adlee felt fire beneath his scarred palms. The girl could not have been any older than Nehir had been. Nehir, who had their mother's eyes and their father's laugh and who Adlee had found first in that burning field with the insides of her head scattered across the corn.

The memory loosened his grip, but Adlee caught the girl before she could fold over onto herself again. And to his surprise, the words did come out. "I'm sorry."

The coughing finally stopped. Exhausted, the girl rolled her head to the side and blinked up at Adlee. Her eyes had fallen so far back into their hollow sockets, yet she smiled as wide as she could muster.

There was a terrifying *boom* from the engineering bay. The vent near Adlee roared to life as all the air left the room.

Adlee fell back against the vent, caught in its vacuum. The girl landed on top of him, hands clawing at her throat. Then the ship began to shake, and her tiny head went smack against the metal haul. The covering of Adlee's rifle fluttered off and disappeared. He reached out. Not for the girl, but for his rifle. He gripped the barrel just as it began to slip away. But his grip, already weak, was loosening. Tears sprang to his eyes. The fear of letting go, not suffocating, overwhelmed him. He willed his fingers to curl further than his tight skin would allow.

Then, just as suddenly as it had left, the air returned.

A chorus of gasps erupted. People laid atop one another in a pile of human debris. Arms, like branches in a storm, waved, clung, and gathered together. Hands smoothed hair, gripped shoulders, tugged at clothes. Words soothed, called out, urged a response, an explanation, to the chaos that just occurred. The room was far too small for the number of families, refugees, and vagabonds crammed inside. But it must have been the cheapest one to book passage on, given the lack of emergency systems that went off when the air went down.

Adlee threw his rifle back into his lap, jostling the girl. Without a sound, she slumped to the floor. A crimson stain was left on the wall form where she had been leaning. One hand still wrapped around his rifle, Adlee shook her. She rocked limply from side to side. He turned her face towards his. Surely, she could have been revived. She just barely caught her breath before it was ripped from her again, but if Adlee was quick enough, and

he covered that gash on her head, then he may have been able to—

His palms pressed down on her chest in a steady rhythm. He pumped a breath into her, only to push it out with his hands. Still, he continued until his elbows ached and her head rolled to the side. Blood oozed from her skull in a dull trickle.

Word spread fast. Space junk breached the hull, right outside engineering. The bay was sealed off as soon as the emergency protocols were activated. The crew ran back and forth between the crowd of frantic passengers. Adlee watched, still sitting next to the girl. He knew nothing of machinery or ships. All he could do to help was stay out of the way. He had taken off his cloak and laid it atop the girl's body. If the universe had decided she did not deserve her life, then at least she deserved to rest undisturbed.

The head engineer, a stout woman in oil-blotched overalls, hollered out in desperation. "We need scrap! More scrap! Watches! Jewelry! Metal! *Please!*"

Panicked, passengers pushed and shoved their way to the woman's feet. They slapped bracelets and hairpins and belt buckles into her hands. The woman chucked the baubles behind her towards her fellow engineers, who scrambled like animals to catch them.

What they needed metal for became clear when the smoke hit Adlee's nostrils. He flinched, holding his rifle close to his chest. His face buried itself in the crook of his arm. Scrap would not be enough to save them. But to die among so many strangers might have been better than to live alone any longer.

Then, Adlee lifted his head and looked at the girl.

Maybe she had been looking for someone. Someplace. Something. Just like him.

Adlee lifted his head. He gazed upon those before him, of whom he knew nothing. Though scared, they worked together to pass more scraps to the engineers. A walking cane. A pair of glasses. A frame with a picture still inside. What had they given up to get here? What were they giving up now? He held his rifle closer still. His stomach lurched. He did not understand. How could they part with such things?

The smoke dragged Adlee far back into his memories. But instead of returning to the raid, he returned to the woods with his father. His hands, a decade younger and calloused from farm work, poked at a tub filled with animal guts. His father paused his work skinning his latest kill. He batted Adlee's hand away. "Don't mess with all that. We ground up every last bit."

"But it's all waste."

"There's no such thing as waste."



His father gave a stern nod, and Adlee drew himself back to the present. With a nod of his own, he stood on trembling legs and shuffled to the front of the crowd.

The woman appeared suddenly before him. She locked onto his rifle instantly. "Sir...Oh, sir. I think... I think that may just be enough. That'll melt down perfectly. Thank you. Thank—"

She reached for the rifle. Adlee jerked away.

"Sir? *Please*, we only have a few minutes."

Adlee nodded again. The woman inched closer. Closer. He squeezed his eyes shut. She was not dressed like those who barreled through the cattle gates and blared their horns and rained thermal shots across the sky. This woman did not rip the rifle from his arms just to then shove him down and use it to crack open his skull. She simply placed her gloved hands atop his own and slowly, so slowly, peeled his fingers off the barrel and the stock.

When Adlee opened his eyes, the rifle was gone.

Hours ticked by. The engineers emerged covered in soot. The woman declared they would make it to the Milky Way. People cheered. Sobbed. Praised deities from across the cosmos. Adlee, frozen in his corner, stared down at the body of the girl.

A sweaty hand draped itself atop his forearm. Adlee looked up into the tired eyes of the woman from before. Her gloves were tucked between her bust and overalls. "I told you it would be enough. Thank you for saving our lives."

He swallowed and said nothing.

The woman finally noticed where he had laid his cloak. "Oh my..." She lifted it up just enough to confirm her suspicions, then laid it back down. "Poor thing. I-I'm so sorry for your loss."

Adlee shook his head.

“You didn’t know her?”

Again, he shook his head.

“Oh. Then I’m sorry we didn’t notice sooner. I’ll call someone to move her body. Make sure they preserve it as best they can.”

“What-” The word broke free, just barely audible. “What about after...?”

“We’ll see if we can identify her. All her info will be in the system.” Her gaze softened.

“Are you alright, sir?”

Adlee nodded, and the tears lining his eyes dripped down his cheeks. Kneeling over before, the woman eased herself down and sat properly beside him. “I’d never seen a gun like that before. There’s no shame in feeling sad about it. I know it’s hard to let go of things sometimes. Where’d you find such a weapon?”

His heart hammered at the word. “Not a weapon.”

“Oh? My bad. It looked like some kind of old rifle to me. What was it, then?”

He thought for a moment. It was a weapon. It had been a weapon. But then it wasn’t. It absorbed too many memories. It hung off his back for too many years. He thought nothing of it, other than something he had to carry. To remind himself of where he came from and what he had lost. But now —

“It’s a ship,” Adlee said.

Pride wavered in his voice. Yes, a ship. And one day the ship too would be melted down and made into something else. Streetlights. A bridge. Maybe even a school. Adlee would pass under those lights. He would cross that bridge. He would take his children’s tiny hands into his own and walk them to that school. Because he would leave this ship, help find that girl’s family, and look for Nigeria.

# DUSTIN RICHARDS

## Roll of Film

Slowly trickling

Came well-rested memories

Melting from the trees

# So, Ars Poetica (by Archibald MacLeish) and I have been talking

and walking.

We went to Walmart once;  
we both ended up in the fabric section.  
Ars would stroll the aisle back and forth with  
its hand knocking on the wrapped mounds of fabric  
and tell me about its silent color,  
where it's seen those colors.  
I would feel each one and think  
of its practical use, what  
it matches with at home; how it  
would sound under scissors and the wind.

Artistic choices, somehow,  
from the fabric aisle —  
that's where Raleigh and Spencer share fairy dust,  
where David hides from Saul.

At the checkout counter  
we all have fabric,  
for some logical or spark-of-genius reason.

There's no wrong pressing together dye and threads.

We just have the same differences,  
enjambments, and images —

Inspiration is  
one thread,  
many fibers.

SARAH  
LECIK

