



# The Open Field

Spring 2021 Edition



**The Open Field**  
*Spring 2021 Edition*

The Open Field is a literary magazine devoted to publishing poetry, prose, mixed-genre writing, and visual art by the undergraduate community at the University of Maine.

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Content Warning: Some of the work in this edition may contain distressing themes, such as suicide, self-harm, and drug/alcohol use.

The Open Field  
Undergraduate Literary Magazine

**Poetry**



## **Iris LeCates**

### *For Ohio*

there is a day of rain  
that I remember  
fleeting—  
bikes taken from the  
street so as not to become  
lightning rods,  
5 PM and the flickering  
of streetlamps into  
an orange sodium vapor glow,  
bare feet on rocky ground.  
a torrent of summer rain  
sliding down the sloping  
cul-de-sac and we dipped our  
toes into curbside streams  
like urban rivers,  
we danced and shouted over  
the rhythmic pounding  
of water, and I never  
felt rain that warm  
again.

## *To the Pills He Took*

I think about things differently now that it's  
him and not me it's less fog than disease,  
and I wish to purge it from his body  
without carving it from his wrists but I see  
his face and his mouth make words and I  
wonder where my little brother went, why  
he doesn't pick flowers for me anymore  
why he doesn't make capes out of trash  
bags anymore why he doesn't do anything  
but sit on the heater with a thermal blanket  
making a bubble around him like one of  
those parachutes from P.E. and I wonder if  
I didn't love him enough or if I can squeeze  
his hands until his body is so close to mine  
that he'll have to stay, or if doing that  
would just break his fingers. I thank the  
pills he took because before I got the  
overdue text that  
he'd overdosed on allergy meds I saw  
his arms, paler than mine, even, soft and  
torn and bleeding on the white bathroom  
floor because I forgot my razor  
at home just left it in the shower he uses  
behind the shampoo and Mom needed the  
new bathroom to be white and I saw white  
skin on white floor silhouetted by a red Mom  
never would've incorporated into her interior  
design, so I thank the pills because it was  
bloodless, because they were pumped from  
his stomach without complaint two days ago  
when Mom found him lying in bed and took  
him away before our brother could see so it  
wouldn't be etched into his mind the way he  
looked  
half dead. I think about his depression as  
the way his eyes carve holes into his  
face, so sunken and hollow that I look at  
him and see only a candle unlit.

*1:48 P.M.*

I wonder when you crawled from the dirt  
in wildness from moments  
I felt halved  
standing in abandoned campgrounds beside  
abandoned trains feeling as a vagabond  
in the snow  
or lost in lavender mornings in dewy fields  
when my skin felt untouched ready for  
wrong fingertips  
of bodies unmoved by wind or sorrow  
thinking they own all including the contents  
of my chest  
I spent capital of the blood and flesh scratching  
the ankles of unnatural beings while  
we sought  
nevertheless to weather the loneliness of nature's  
arms until I could never sew us back  
into one.

## *The Architect*

Elis had never feared rain—  
only its coming.  
From his father he'd learned to  
taste the air,  
to dissolve into the mists.

In his earliest memory, his father  
kneels in the yard  
eyes fixed on the mountains like heaven,  
red Bible open to a page  
the wind had chosen.

When his mother dies,  
his father wanders in the trees  
pleading with dirt for answers. Elis  
decides the house has never been lighter, never  
more likely to float away.

On a Tuesday his mother lounges  
in the kitchen with the church ladies when  
one of them asks about her marriage.  
She huffs and nearly answers  
before catching his eye in the crack of the door.

There is a house on the front of his  
father's newspaper, black and white, cross-hatched,  
plain. His mother makes him walk into  
town for a new copy when he spills her  
pomegranate tea and it leaches into the pages.

That night he angers Morgan le Fay and  
water cascades through the streets. The moon  
draws back the tide, merciful. Magenta flowers bloom  
in cobblestone cracks, winding up the walls of  
every house in town.

By moonlight, the town is the color of  
pomegranate.

## Shania Soler

### *The Essay*

Did you go to the party? I  
Heard Brian was there. Mr. Marx is  
Collecting the essays he assigned last  
Week. Everyone  
Was there. Even Sarah?  
I'm so glad it's almost break. Are you ready  
For the game on Friday? The  
Cheer team has to  
Wear leg covers since it's getting  
So cold now. Mr. Marx is a joke.  
Did you see the video? She's  
Actually showing her face. I  
Just bought these sneakers.  
Oh my God, look at her face! I  
Didn't know someone  
Could drink that much. Dude,  
I'm not ready for this Anatomy exam.  
Gross!  
Did you see the way she's  
Looking at  
Him?  
What a great night! That's what  
Brian said, too.  
Hey Sarah, looking good.  
I forgot about the Essay.

## Neily Raymond

### *Self-Education #1: Love*

You're a fisherman.  
Wouldn't you risk your  
life for the ocean,  
the palate unbound,  
the slip-billowed gullet?

Wouldn't you impale  
yourself through the gut  
on its tooth, a reef  
or some shredding cliff  
to save its dignity?

The captain goes down with  
her ship, and the water  
is proud to digest her.  
Maybe you're a horse,  
and you die on the  
racetrack, bolted in

the face—you shudder  
in the dirt, giddy.  
You're a girl, clutching  
a tube of mace, and  
you dream of attack

just to glorify  
that magic tube. You're  
a mailbox that throws  
before snowplows. You're a  
match that wants scratching,

head up in flames. You're  
a writer who can't write  
quite right, who misfires and  
vibrates with desire  
and disgust. You're a



cat on a skyscraper  
ledge, kissing the air.  
Or you're a pencil  
infatuated  
with the sharpener.

You're a warrior  
on your knees while  
war items tick past, lit  
with a puzzled smile,  
frozen, caressing

your clean sleeves—you'd kill  
to kneel here forever  
and commemorate  
in verse the long limbs,  
flattened grass. You're a

chickadee rushing  
wing-first into that  
luscious apparition  
of a chickadee  
in the window-glass.

*Self-Education #3: Nature in the Home*

It's not pin-pointable, spongy or green  
or bark-bound or crepuscular or gap-gawed.  
Not always oily (butter-dish) or potted  
(spider-plant) or moist (frog-fingers through the screen).  
It's not big-breasted Nature with her priestess  
hair, a blue-billed scaup hoisted atop,  
or mallow-rooting hog or mellow bog  
or that ripe-gummed dream—you lose your teeth.

It mosses in the corridor, avoidable.

No one's home to greet you as you walk in,  
the cat drops teeth that glitter in the food bowl—  
when you're not talking to yourself, you're talking,  
little wild type, to the wrong people.

It mosses in the corridor, avoidable.

## Zoe Karpman

### *Because We Can't Always Send Ourselves*

Blue and green

Skies and unkempt fields

We feel a breeze as the grass plays a game

Who can push the furthest from the roots?

The dandelions win, as they're picked up

With a head start given by children hoping for wishes

Parents squawk that this won't make dreams come true

"Weeds will mess up my garden.

Please don't send them towards my flowers."

The fluff dances between the ground and the sky.

They're almost clouds.

Except

*tangible*

*simpler*

*gone too soon*

better.

We can touch the dandelions

And send them towards the limitless stars.

## *The Siren*

She lives below the nearest cliff  
Abandoning everything bleak and stiff.  
It's there she learns of simple joys.  
What once controlled, she now destroys.

Goodbye to structure's rigid pain—  
It won't be caging her again.  
And let there be a brighter day  
Once all other voices are cast away.

She won't be judged by whom she loves,  
Nor once for faith (or lack thereof).  
Amidst the birds and bugs and fish,  
She has naught, but one final wish:

That everyone could find their peace  
And rage could end and strife could cease.  
A naive dream that becomes real if  
You join her below the nearest cliff.

*Of Calcium and Marrow*

*After Mackenzie Coakley's "Lucid"*

What would she be, if not this?

Clicks and pricks of cracking bones  
And nerves that are so easy to touch upon

Masquerading as a person

The joints and ribs  
and collarbones and vertebrae  
and femurs and phalanges

All seem to align for her to exist.  
Existing doesn't make the body her

The skeleton is one among many  
Repeated patterns and blueprints that  
Never figured out how to function right

Why does this one's designation  
Determine the rules of being alive?

As the skeleton walks in a line between boxes,  
The doors to both sides seem locked shut.

## Avery Maietta

### *Something Lighter*

the last one was sadder than i thought  
i'd hate for that to be all i brought  
i don't wanna be too sad a writer  
this time i'll write something lighter

a friend and i got matching candles  
he made us matching swords with matching handles  
so i'll make some words that sound brighter  
do i want matches or a zippo lighter?

yeah, i'll write something nice  
about video games, or neowise  
this weekend i'll take a brain-reset-all-nighter  
and write for waterfowl while the day gets lighter



## **Camerin M. Seigars**

*Lost in the morning*  
(a sestina)

Waking in the morning  
Making coffee for the day  
Shaking all about the room  
Cracking rays of light  
Marking another man  
Walking into chaos again

Morning jitters again  
Caffeine in the morning  
Easing another man  
Easing into every day  
Bright windows full of light  
Illuminating the room

Pacing about the room  
Mind racing yet again  
Searching for the light  
Cursing the morning  
Dreading the coming day  
Running from fellow man

Thoughts engulfing man  
Spiraling in the room  
Choking on the day  
Smothered all over again  
Screaming in the morning  
Losing sight of the light

Eyes watery in the light  
Emotion bursting the man  
Collapsing this morning  
Shrouded in the room  
Confusion yet again  
Fog lifting for the day

Leading into a new day  
Lifted up by the light  
Only to be let down again  
Stabbing remarks of man  
Filling the entire room  
What will end this morning

Drifting again this day  
Stumbling morning of light  
Baffled man in the room

## **Arend Thibodeau**

### *For One Love*

A one-sided effort  
put forth to ensure that  
a semblance remains

A scrap,

a vague remnant

of what once was. Vainly  
searching memories for  
reason.

An explanation  
why things got  
off track

The doors slam shut  
after I will them open

I question

how much can be endured  
for one love

*Paranoid*

They're keeping a list  
I know it is true  
They write about me  
and all that I do

The list it is there  
so that all may see  
and so all can scheme  
of grand plots for me

They are keeping notes  
Each time I transgress  
The way that I speak  
and the way I dress

They're keeping a list  
I know it is true  
I'm exiled in place  
They keep me from you

## April Messier

*make your body an ear*

a crying,  
a dream with poison and  
a fearful clinging to breath.

a waking,  
and a full feeling of  
*is this a life? and what is it?*

(squinting up at branches and sky swaying  
between chipped paint window panes)

and I know that I've felt this many times,  
each is a jolt-- heavy limbs sink  
into a fresh variation  
of my flesh, my being--  
floating me into my day  
of newborn skin and eyes  
untouched by views

then the gradual fading of the clear,  
warm, stifling patterns.  
how to fill the hours in a way  
that staves off--  
the silence, the stillness,  
that invites the venomous snakes to bite  
down and opens up my pushed back--  
breath, getting faster and heart  
beating, if only I could listen.

to the blood pump,  
the lung language, the whisper  
of you are okay and  
things will unfold

*In tune*

I'll look back on these days with such fondness  
and recall, when I've grown weaker and wiser,  
how my body was July-strong and sun kissed.

Years from now, sitting in stillness,  
I'll close my eyes and perhaps shed a tear,  
remembering what it was like to witness

life weaving its way through the nowness.  
Sunflowers sparkling with dew, crystal clear.  
Cool earth home in the furrows, the coziness

between rows of corn, sweet lucidness  
of the first raw mouthfuls, near  
perfectly ripe. Intertwined instantness

of all — from seed, to plant, to fruit — effortless.  
Each and all has its place, nothing to fear.  
I plunge my hands in the soil, the dampness

cooling my fingers, dirty and calloused.  
An equation of life and being together cohere.  
Nothing can stop me from feeling such fullness,  
undeniably certain that someday I'll miss this.

*"Memory comes taunting  
You pick these things apart, they're not that appealing  
You put them together and you'll get a certain feeling  
That summer feeling is gonna haunt you one day in your  
life"*

*-Jonathan Richman*



## ***Tyler D'Ambrosio***

### *The News is on TV*

I choke on my darling,  
Darjeeling, attempting to soothe  
My red withering throat.

The blue eyes, monotone  
In an Armani suit; he stretches  
Life in a 30 second snippet.

My body on the recliner—  
A candle tipped and dripping  
Wax, spilling puddles on the carpet.

The shag, my one and only  
Confidant of this night,  
Bouncing off my writhing.

My heels curl up, inwards  
Against my bum, a feral  
Imitation of the fetus.

The manufactured sounds, pounding,  
Echoing in the halls, penetrating,  
With a heavy-handed urgency.

My lips warbling your name  
Between stuttered breaths, hissing  
In the blue light of the television.

The particulars bombarding my eyes,  
Head and breast, mixing,  
And spilling down my body.

I can hold myself  
No longer, your glass face  
Beckoning, like a preacher  
Hunched over, I reach out with my palms—

Before my fingertips can brush,  
Your cheeks fade; the limelight  
Pulled away, replaced by dead air.

## **Suzie Milkowich**

### *Getting To Know Myself Again.*

Getting to know myself again

The mask is off and the used makeup cloths are all over the floor  
I am climbing, crawling on my hands and my knees up those spiral carpeted stairs.  
I'm tired, no I'm exhausted.

This tired old circus poodle refuses to jump through those hoops any more  
I need to...take care, take it easy  
People been telling me these powerful phrases all my life  
And I have given this advice to many.

Now I am reclaiming my own instinct  
Not what everyone thinks I should do, wear, eat  
Not what they want  
What do I want?  
What do I need?  
What color will I paint my fence?

My eggs been cracked  
And so was my windshield  
I can see again

Hot Pink!

## E.W. Grey

### *What I would have liked to tell you*

did you know that i started school as a history major?  
and then english and philosophy, and then english  
and anthropology, and then english and folklore.  
i would have liked to keep the anthropology major,  
but i'm afraid of getting it wrong. i'm afraid of breaking things,  
like pots and bones. i'm afraid of bones and dirt and heights and  
the swimming pool at night and public transport  
and getting things wrong.  
the first time i took the bus alone i got things wrong.  
i didn't know that you have to pull the cord for the bus driver  
to stop, i thought the stops were scheduled. i ended up two towns over.  
i ended up at one of those indie coffee shops. i ordered a drink that tasted  
like dirt. i'm a little afraid of dirt, but mostly because of the bugs. i guess the  
dirt is fine. it is brown with some green, and those are my favourite colours,  
you know. you should know, i should have told you, but you  
never asked.

*Born anew*

were you born of the springtime earth?  
uncovered from your bed of moss  
in a forest of your own making—  
winter's frost melting at your arrival  
as the birds return to lay their eyes upon your waking form;  
their song a morning prayer to the divinity they see  
as you dress in your gown of rue and bay,  
and adorn yourself in a crown of sage.  
the forest finds itself born anew  
along with you

## **Jacqui Weaver**

### *His Ultimate Demise*

For he who has puppeteered  
Let there be no more strings  
Let his hands be empty  
Let his hands be sawed off.

For he who has seized my neck  
Let someone else seize his neck  
Let him beg to be released  
Let his neck twist until it rots.

For he who has continuously lied  
Let his tongue be ripped out  
Let his teeth be plucked to none  
Let his mouth be sewn with red thread.

For he who has no remorse  
Let him cower before me  
Let him beg for my forgiveness  
Let him cry in pain for all eternity.

## John E. Burnell

### *Where I am At*

I'm waiting  
Sitting in some chair  
Seeing the people of the past  
They're passing,  
Bye

Scenes too pass  
Trotting through the field of vision  
And I breathe in the past  
Exhale what's to come

It passed along  
But didn't come to shore  
Are you sure that it'll come by?  
The flesh keeps dripping  
I keep sweating  
We keep chatting

A prized possession  
Or some primed rib  
A capitalist's obsession  
A hypnotist's luxurious wheel  
But where to find it  
And who to be  
What place to sit  
Where to seat myself

Oh, that future saga  
Fantasy fiasco  
Me, a glistening sapling  
Being a fully matured hatchling  
Gliding by with a gilded swaying of joy  
Serendipity keen with my fate enwrapped around the knuckles  
Each day enshrouded by a blissful sheen



It's a labor of love  
To keep walking in this body  
The future, my hopeless corset  
The past, a rucksack  
It was set a bit heavy and so I've heaved it over my bony back

One step forward, two back  
Turned around, swirled a bit  
And left for the right

*untitled*

Fragmented visions  
Past future present decisions  
Pupils dilate & heart palpitates blinded by a lapse of luxury  
Mornings defined by how many curtains drawn  
By how much bread leavened  
Or stairs ascended  
How many slices of the self actualized  
How much cheese grated  
How many leaves raked  
How many lies told  
Or bones broken  
How am I  
Doing?

*In the Midst*

The past rumble  
Came to be  
Fell into the predicted mold  
And molded over  
I'm walking over and over  
Again, I'm reminded  
The two are not connected  
Despite what we've been told  
The yellow of the pencil, deceiving  
What made you smile today?

It's consistently been about tearing myself into pieces  
Those that fit between chopsticks  
Put on the tongue, not a tough chew  
Consuming myself while I consume me

Lilacs dead, exposed iliac now  
Fear of lack, rot fruited, putrid flesh  
Barracks on a slope, not reached yet  
The clock's quadrants, constraint  
Socially, restrained  
Past self advice epically applicable

I'm standing in the midst  
Not a second has passed  
I haven't majorly changed  
Get it now?  
That's the gist.

## Chris Weber

### *Falling Down in the Woods on a Drunken Evening*

*Parody of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."*

Whose woods these are I do not know.  
I think this is my all-time low.  
I should have only stuck to beer  
'cuz now I'm laying in the snow

But it's alright, I'm in the clear  
I made friends with a baby deer  
We smoked some weed, and fought a snake  
And then we stole a chandelier

I cut him off, my man was baked  
We went to town to get milkshakes  
I asked him if deer counted sheep  
He said, "fuck no, we masturbate."

The woods have taught me, fuck those sheep.  
They never promised me good sleep.  
Now I jerk off in Bambi sheets.  
Now I jerk off in Bambi sheets.

## Dakota Hutchins

### *The Day a Virus Controlled the World*

*After "The Day Lady Died" by Frank O'Hara*

It is 4:01 in Fairfield (Maine not Connecticut) a Monday  
exactly five days since we were told that school was shutting down, yes  
it is 2020 and I am imprisoned in my own home  
because of the Corona Virus and at 4:27 I go outside  
play hacky sack with my siblings which incredibly boosts moral  
until my sister and I go inside at 5:00 to work out  
because working out helps me keep my sanity

I have taken lots of walks even in the gray cold March  
making sure to get out and move since  
you can only pace so much  
in your house

We wave and say hello  
to the two ladies on their porch (one with a cigarette and the other a patched smile)  
the one on the left comments on how she has seen  
a lot of families being together outside because of this  
and I think that maybe that is an upside  
or the chance of one for families to reconnect  
or become more intolerable of each other  
I suppose it is up to them and I realize  
that this may be the longest time my family has altogether for a while

and for my mama I just stroll down to the Circle K  
gas station and ask for some whole milk and  
then I walk back up the hill to my house  
but stop by the bakery and  
casually ask for a donut and  
a raspberry square because that's my papa's favorite

and I am crying by now and thinking of  
sitting at a wooden table in the West Market Square café  
while my friends laugh over a game  
of Catan and everyone smiles as the barista takes our picture

*Are We Human? Or Are We Dancer?*

The world up four stories

Only the tops of the trees are seen

And in this heightened world they perform

Branches curve gracefully

Arms outstretched they sweep the sky

Hardwood maples have their costumes

Brilliant reds and golds

Individual pieces all stitched together

Shifting separately, moving freely

Their bodies a form of lyric

Soft spoken pines wear no flashy clothes

Simply green velvet dress instead

Their arms lift in a wide U

Their bodies gently twist

A modern form of movement—simple lines and strength

Rain joins in

Ra ta            ta ta

Ra ta            ta ta

Ra ta            ta ta

Ta

The trees still to listen and watch

The rain's routine

As they paradiddle  
Upon metal roofs

In this high top stage it seems  
That in nature's beings  
The original performers are found  
The best dancers of humankind  
Are only an imitation  
Of the lines drawn by a divine hand

*Raw Dough*

Start with the eldest child  
Add a gender—female  
Add expectation upon expectation  
For body  
For grades  
Add financial need  
Add perfectionism  
Mix

Let her sit  
For sixteen years  
To rise

When she has  
Risen just enough  
Punch down

The whole structure  
Is different  
Such as  
When a broken bone heals  
Even if it was set perfectly  
Hairline cracks exist  
And if not set  
Correctly  
It is forever  
changed

Knead until it is elastic  
The rules and expectations  
Don't matter much anymore  
The break changes things

Much as the reaction  
Of yeast and gluten  
Transforms dough  
To its completion  
The dough was delicious  
But it was always  
Meant to be  
Bread



## Paige McHatten

### *purple house*

i live in a purple house  
our dinnertime conversations marked by red and blue  
frequent were disagreements  
but underneath the conflict  
was civility.

four years ago,  
i remember begging my father  
not to cast his vote  
for someone he wouldn't  
allow me in a room alone with.  
he held me in our purple house  
the morning i discovered my worst fears had come true.

for four years i've lived in fear  
as i stepped out of the safety of violet  
and entered the unrest of crimson  
i counted my steps in vacant hallways  
plotting where i would hide  
if the sound of gunshots bounced off the chalkboards  
if i became yet another victim  
of a nation that protected its own trivial interests  
rather than its future.

for four years i've lived in fear  
i watched as the ill became illegitimate  
i watched as science became science fiction,  
and fiction became alternative facts.  
i watched as the milestones my predecessors fought for  
seemed to be erased in the name of a greater america  
i watched as brown children were forced into cages,  
i watched as black lives who fought for justice  
were labeled as thugs,  
yet those who attempted to destroy our democracy  
were loved.

four years living in fear.  
but today,  
in my purple house,  
crying tears of blue, alongside my mother  
her beating red heart  
today: the end of my fear,  
the beginning of my hope.

## **Samantha Sudol**

### *Unwritten Colors*

There are days smoldered in hues of blue  
Darkness dancing across the room  
Drowning the sun  
Thoughts are whirring, then grazing, gone  
Hope is full, then fading, wrong

Mumbles, voices, whispers  
Words lost  
Thoughts unwritten  
Stop, and listen

Revel in the glittering spring morning,  
Bees buzzing  
Red, yellow, and violet kites soaring  
Through a cotton candy breeze

Rave in the ominous autumn night,  
Ghosts dancing  
The full moon shining with delight  
In the haunting song of the loon

When the pen runs out of ink  
And there is nothing left to say  
Pick a new color  
Let the words rain

## Katelyn Gilcrease

### *Inequity of Reason*

All we have is knowledge of  
precious self-destruction,  
yet the brilliance is so  
immense that I feel that  
I'm just beginning to  
embrace it. Through Gale,  
Deluge, and a taste of Radiation  
we have finally begun  
to live. I sat brooding the  
known world that had  
come so close to  
vast obscurity and  
wandered shadowed  
beaches cloaked in  
reminders that we  
had once existed there.  
When will we kill our  
mistakes and salvage  
what has died, before  
vast nothingness  
finally consumes us?  
When will we heed the  
mantra screamed into  
our ears and thrust upon  
our eyes day by day?  
Our sins, I fear, will  
only surface once  
The Four Horsemen  
have siphoned our souls  
and engulfed the earth  
leaving behind nothing but  
the things we had once  
claimed to love.

## Katherine Scott

### *Together*

You are the way gasoline and coffee grounds smell at sunrise  
a bottle of ocean mist and rose hips cling to the nape of your neck  
and the daylight turns your eyes into golden flames that burn my lungs.

I am a winter hike in the morning; crisp, quiet, melting slowly in your arms  
a view from roaring cabin fireplace, ash among an afternoon snowfall  
and the words of an old bookshelf engraved along your walls.

We are a decade of conversation in an immediate gratification world  
a valley traversed together, a hand-built home with no recipe  
and the foundation sits with us, settling and shifting all at once, throughout life itself.

## *Sensations of Suburbia*

Warm fresh bread with rosemary garlic insides  
and a crisp crust that crackles under soft palms.

Clipped grass with morning dew  
aerated by a humming gasoline mower  
each green blade strewn like petals at a wedding.

My mother's hug and whisper *you're home*  
after a year of existing over calls and texts,  
an emptiness still in my arms.

The silence of old library stacks  
stretching to the ceiling  
with worn spines and relaxed pages  
elegantly yellowed at the tips.

Cafes with music at the right decibel  
drowning out the hungrier crowd  
to hear only pen on paper scribble  
and piano-key bliss.

Basil picked from a secret garden  
lush soil serenaded  
courtesy of nearby birds  
on a bright, cloudless day.

A hushed crowd under dimmed lights  
dawning suits and gowns, opera house red velvet  
envelops us in cultured cabernet notes  
and insomnia coffee tannins.

The way my grandmother smiles  
as she clutches our shoulders in pictures  
with a strength I can only hope to grow.

Waking up to warmth from window panes  
pressed ground coffee and pancakes waft  
while walking down the stairs  
shaking out a Sunday slumber.

*Dear Grandma*

I hope the flowers are blooming  
bright enough for you to feel  
like sunlight is still there  
after the moon rises.

When it rains  
do the gardens run and  
turn the road brown  
like the coffee you drink  
at your church group?

The sky here is gray and  
it reminds me of your hair and  
how I do not visit enough  
and I am sorry.

## **Marla Tanous**

### *“A Midnight Dance”*

In the pale moonlight  
The pond glistens and glitters  
Crystals of ice form across  
Its surface

As the wind whispers  
Ever so softly  
It coaxes its reach towards  
Every living soul

And one soul in particular  
Found itself  
Tempted by the ice  
And the wind

Beneath the glimmering stars  
It glided across the ice  
Dancing what would be  
Its grandest dance  
As well as  
Its last

In the pale moonlight  
An echo forms  
The twinkling of ice  
And then  
Silence



*“Time & Tide”*

Time heals all wounds  
But what if  
You can't help,  
But pick at the scab

Once  
Twice  
You watch as the clock goes round  
But as we all know  
It's just a circle  
And you end right where you started

So stop watching the clock  
Find a band-aid  
And get the closure you need.

There are plenty of fish in the sea  
But what if  
The spot where you fish  
Only has sharks and eels

Here's a secret:  
It's okay to get up  
And find a new spot to fish  
So cast another line and  
Get the net ready.

*“Do You See?”*

What do you see  
When you look  
At me?

Do you see  
That I am not quite  
Black or White?

Do you see  
That I am not blonde  
With curls as dark as  
Mud?

Do you see  
that I do not have  
Round eyes  
Full like the moon?

Do you see  
That I do not have  
Fair hair covering  
My arms?  
For I am cursed  
With  
This dirt colored  
Hair

Do you see  
That I do not have  
Thin arched brows?  
That mine could be mistaken  
For caterpillars?

Do you see  
That I do not have  
a button nose?  
A Spartan would be envious  
Of mine

Do you see  
That I do not have  
Petite arms?  
Gankly & awkward  
They stretch for miles

Do you see  
Me?

Because I'll tell you  
What I see

My olive skin is kissed  
By the sunlight

My curls are not dirt  
But the darkest chocolate  
Rich and sweet

These almond eyes speak volumes  
Mysterious,  
Yet  
Inviting

My dark arm hair  
Has taught me  
To walk with  
Confident

My brows are strong and expressive  
In the way  
Blondes aren't  
(And guess what? They're trending)

My nose is like a Roman's  
But that makes me  
Strong, Powerful  
A Warrior

These arms reach  
For the sky  
Up to the Lord

I do not need you  
To see  
Me

Why?

Because I see Me  
And  
Beauty  
Is in the eye  
of the  
Beholder

## **Liron D. Estrach**

### *A Captain's Oath*

I have roamed with sails full-bellied  
And all the lead and cannons readied.  
Ne'er as often have their spirits broken  
As we have taken our victory token.

But in the last heat of battle's pain  
When the mast fell on a leaking prow  
My crew I faced to fearlessly exclaim,  
"I will not part with my sacred vow!"

And bound forever to the deep  
Unburdened from my earthly ties  
I listen to the silent ocean drum  
deaf to their triumphant cries.

I lie, ever smiling at the sun;  
For a free man never dies.

## Matthew Koehler

### *Prometheus*

“Zeus! A spirit of too bloat’d worth!  
Surely fumes stained with hated shades,  
Who, to creatures of mortal Earth  
Blare allegiance to pride soaked braids,  
Wrap and embalm thy ruthless frame!  
Still beams of anger ring about thy throne  
Who to my poor tract wildly came,  
And confined me to prison of dim tone:  
But lessen their dire, piercing, slash,  
Which in floods of moanful depth fell,  
And abused my flesh in one dense splash!  
Since I too have, as my mind can tell,  
Man-like pity and life filled breaths,  
A heart who owns loving passions  
And a soul who still evades deaths  
Dark shadow: here dense emotions  
And imaginative strains leak  
From my beaten and trodden brain,  
Which thou wouldst still desire to speak  
Of, to all divine gods, in cruel vain!

But cover now thy blue spacious skies,  
Zeus, as I still uprightly thrive,  
And not suffer fully that demise,  
Which thou didst swiftly contrive:  
To bolster now that tasteless pride,  
Which swallows that title of thine,  
No god should see who thou didst chide  
Too harshly, but lives with mirth divine!  
And when that thick blanket is laid,  
Over thy heavens startling length,  
My youthful visage shall not shade  
Thy thoughts with horrors of strength  
Robust: I shall not (longer) pierce thy sight!  
Thus soothing the ills thou didst capture  
When thy vision to rule, in height  
Too severe, succumbed to a rapture!

Yes, Yes! Fleshly pain may still bind  
And taint my beautiful days,  
But imagination from my mind,  
Entwined with purest love, still blaze

And eagerly sere the heavy gloom:  
By desiring to bear what upholds  
Thy identity, and any plume  
Of gaiety far better for our molds,  
When ailments assault the mort'l flesh,  
Than breaking to this Earthly sorrow:  
Which thus forces thy frame to not mesh  
With any misery arrow,  
Which may gnaw thy gaieties?  
I know I still behold what dearly  
Costumes me in mirthful deities:  
Thus thy girding chains harm not me!

Those gowns of fire who casted hope-  
Whose flakes did parade in thy hall  
Still drenched in layers of gold, broad in scope-  
By my merit dripping palm did fall  
To abused and forgotten spheres,  
Which signaled by their dim shawl  
Like skies, which shed nauseous fears,  
That they contained mortal life:  
Thus I spared them from brutal harm,  
Which often presented much strife,  
And licensed their tracts gaudy charm!

Thus, Zeus, though I be costumed here  
In thick silver rings designed for pain,  
My idea of fire for each sphere  
Cannot be wrapped in one tight strain  
Of metallic wire, and pushed abroad:  
It is not limited to (only) one man  
And one verdant region of sod,  
Each soul who (now) frightens bleak death can  
Bear this philosophical load  
And drip it upon barren lands,  
Which cowered when thy grasp sowed  
Sharp terror in too broad of brands.”

# Visual Art





“Power of Three”

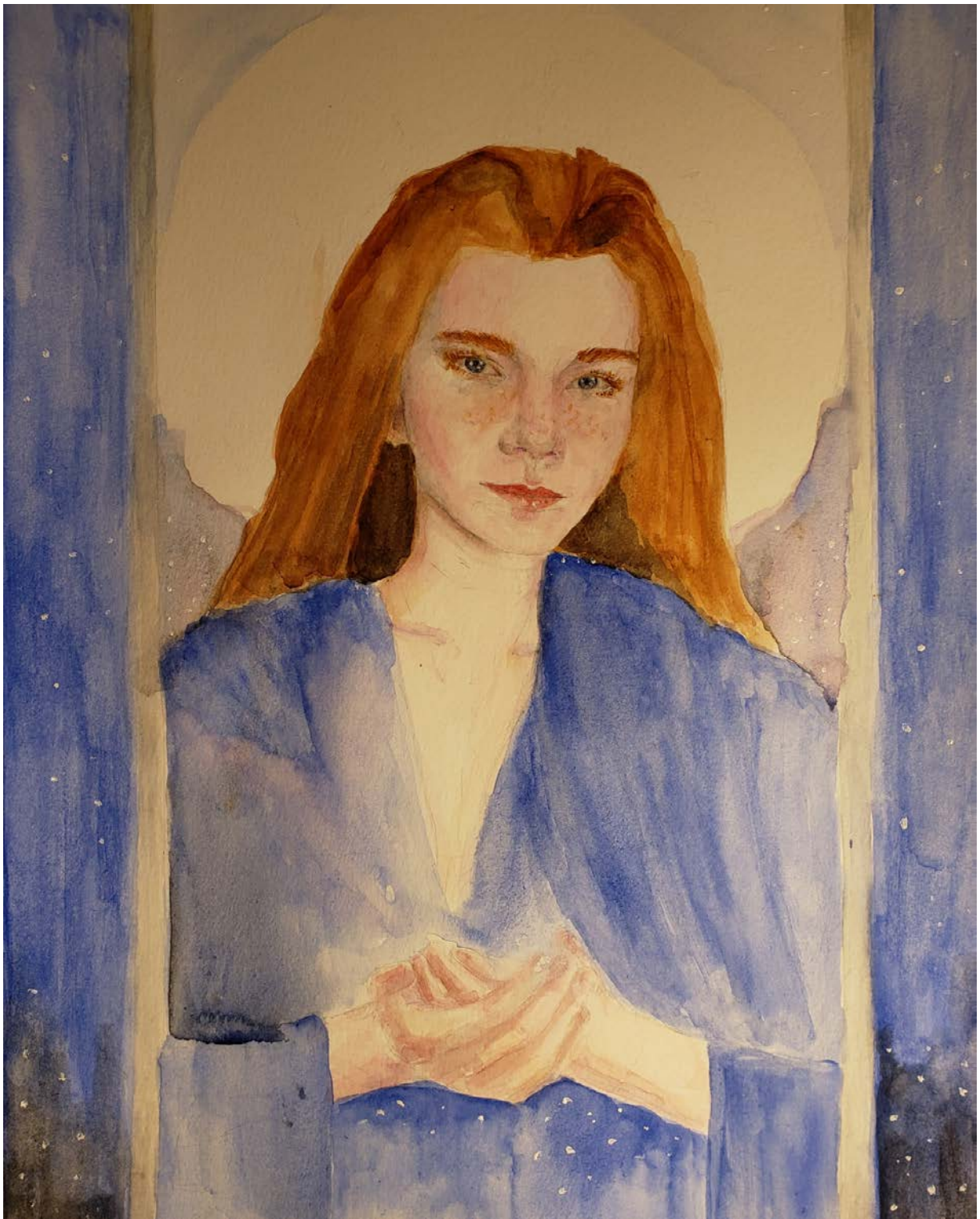
*Suzie Milkowich*



“The Glowing Maiden”

*Haid Tanous*





“Varda”

*Haid Tanous*



“Corner Table Still Life”

*Donald Patten*





“Fruit Bowl Still Life”

*Donald Patten*



“Pears on a Striped Surface”

*Donald Patten*

**Fiction**

## **Liron D. Estrach**

### **Peaceful Knight**

It smelled of sunflower and gooseberries. Her touch was warm, her kisses sweet. “My brave soldier,” she whispered. “My knight.”

I smiled at her. The grass beneath us was soft, and the sky above was blue.

“Tell me of your stories,” she said. “Tell me how brave you have been.”

I told her stories, but most were a lie—I had never fought a dragon, or slain a troll. Only men.

And I was too ashamed to tell her of those.

“Tell me,” she asked softly, “is it bad?”

I swallowed, thinking of my brothers, of the mud and blood, and the fever that had taken most. “Yes,” I said. “It is.”

The sky darkened, and I shivered.

“Then why won’t you come home?” she asked.

“Because—”

She blurred to smoke, and her warmth was gone. I huddled against the mud wall, my rifle beside me. Someone was gently kicking me awake, as gently as he was able to.

“Wake up, soldier. The war isn’t over yet.”

## Bad Apples

The streetlights were turning on just as Jonny made his rounds. From the radio came a voice like crumbling newspapers. A white vehicle moving south, followed by the passengers' descriptions.

He was supposed to go on break soon, but just then a white BMW passed him. He turned the signal without thinking and followed the vehicle until it stopped. He was always suspicious of nice cars in neighbourhoods like these. He had a knack for this, an instinct.

When he was close enough to see the driver through the side mirror he gave his response, "Zero-two-zero-one, this is Walker. Responding to call. Running a code nine on a white BMW at Fifth and Central, matching description."

"This is Brent, proceed on code zero, suspect might be armed."

Excitement leaped up inside him. *Armed*. And there he thought something good would never happen. He swallowed. "Copy."

This is it, Jonny thought. This is what he had trained for. He was going to get that bastard. Some bad guy with a gun. Some drug dealer. If he caught him, there would probably be a bigger fish, a bigger investigation like in one of those movies he had watched when he was a kid. Bang-bang—he'd take on the Cartel all by himself; chase them across the border back to where they belong. Nothing to stop a bad guy but a good guy with a gun. This was his chance. Maybe he'd even make detective.

He stepped out of his car, his hand ready on his hip. On his Glock 22. He undid the holster, just in case. You never know with these criminals. They are unpredictable.

The window to the car was down and he saw the man in the driver's seat. A black male in his thirties, a black female in the passenger's seat. He bent forward carefully.

"Can I help you, Officer? Did I do something wrong?"

Jonny didn't like the tone in the man's voice, there seemed something fake in it, something nervous. He peered at the young woman, her face was tight like a raisin. They must be hiding something, he thought. Drugs, probably.

"License and registration please," Jonny said.



The man fumbled nervously through his back pocket. For a moment Jonny's hand was a vice around his gun. He was both relieved and disappointed when the man only produced a wallet and handed over his license. Terry Brown was his name.

"Uhm... Officer?" Terry said.

"Something wrong?" Jonny asked, caressing his gun with the palm of his hand.

"Well, sir. Yes, I... I've got to tell you... there... there's a firearm in the car."

"Okay, then don't reach for it."

"I'm not," Terry said, yet he was moving.

Fear struck Jonny. This was dangerous. But then he also felt exhilarated by the idea that it really *was* dangerous. Ever since he was a boy he hoped something like this would happen, that it would be more like the movies. Finally something good would happen. Something *exciting*. Jonny felt his blood pumping right through to his ears. Suddenly he was like Martin Riggs in "Lethal Weapon." This was what he signed up for, why he wore a badge. Action. Like in the movies. Pictures of police shootouts flashed before him. Him taking out a band of thugs. Bang-bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Confidently, Jonny moved a step away from the car, his gun half liberated from its holster. "Hey, don't do anything stupid!"

"He's not!" cried the girl on the passenger seat.

"I'm not!"

"I said, don't reach for it!" Jonny warned, though secretly he hoped Terry would ignore his advice.

"I'm not!" Terry said hastily, but his hand was moving. Moving somewhere. To his gun, Jonny was willing to bet.

"Hey, don't fucking move!"

Yes, this was it. This was his moment! Taking down the bad guy. There'll be a big case coming from this. Some human trafficking ring he would stop and then be a hero. A good guy.

Terry was still, trembling, yet Jonny was sure of his motion, that he was reaching for the gun. The girl was crying, shrieking, "He's not! He's—"

*Bang-bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Jonny didn't even feel the recoil of his gun when he pulled the trigger. The girl cried out, her hands reaching for Terry—reaching for the gun.

“DON’T PULL IT OUT!!!” Jonny screamed. His heart was pounding, his breath heavy as rocks.

At his booming voice the girl recoiled against the door of her car, and wailed, “Oh my God! Oh my God! Officer, you... you just killed my boyfriend! Oh God no, please!”

“I said, don’t fucking move!”

Like in the movies, Jonny thought wildly, just like in the movies! He felt so powerful, invincible, untouchable, unbeatable... He was Harry Callahan, Frank Serpico and Ben Shockley. He was a hero. A badass.

With numb fingers he reached for the radio scanner on his shoulder, “Code three! Armed suspect down. Fuck! I repeat, armed suspect down! We need a ten-fifty-two immediately.” He was shaking, and his gun was unsteady in his hand, his knuckles white. “Holy fuck! Holy fuck!”

“Ten-fifty-two is en route. Dispatching additional units.”

“C-copy,” he panted.

Terry’s eyes were open, staring blankly through him. The man’s chest was red and wet. He heard a baby cry in the back of the car. The girl on the passenger seat had tears rolling down her cheeks.

Jonny reached down to Terry’s hand, for the gun. But there was no gun, only insurance papers, splattered with red. This wasn’t like the movies at all, he realised. Only the sound was the same.

Bang-Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

## Kenyon Geiger

### Precipice at the Theological Hall

Acting for so long, as I had done (the result of the dreams of another man), I had come to think of it as my dull little profession, my immurement, my sentence for pursuing the arts and the general, varied acts of cowardice I had committed over the years to excuse myself from the stultifying mundanities that I believed fully were not only inimical to myself as an artist but were a type of tyranny created solely for the purpose of destroying me and molding my reanimated corpse into the image of God the Father (the American one, the one that rises and rests within the machine, turns this way and that only inasmuch as his boss allows, breathes on command, listens to his wife, pets his children, eats with gusto, cannot remember childhood, a demiurge, or that stray thought he once had that let him know he was immortal).

The interviewer asked, “Why here?” Lenses, cameras, grips, producers, technicians all awaited my answer. My vocalizations would be televised in the States and in Britain, seen online all over the world. The man who pretends to be many men is retiring. The man who is pleasant to look at, with both a softness and a roughness to him. The man who is envied, ruminated on for hours by children and adults alike imagining they were him or could be him. The strut, the gait, the turn of the mouth that is like a sneer, like a playful grin; the way he moves about with such ease, such grace, the world making way for him. I could answer, “Why not?,” though Prague is a strange place to demand an interview and requires further explanation. How pretentious, how grandiose. Who does this guy think he is? Many men, endless emanations. For every scene rehearsed, a new character is erected out of the ashes of so many other characters who were too maladroit or fragile to stand on two legs and exist in three-dimensional space with the forcefulness of others. So many names. What got you into acting? This teacher, that, a story my mother once told about how her grandmother would be a different person every day and so remained happy for never tiring of herself, the way I recited a line from a sitcom and made the girls in class laugh. All lies. The truth? All of them and none, the cavern that I was building for myself in the deepening night of another winter, the solemnity of open faces, the inability to know myself, reading of the traveling Yiddish troupes in the diaries of Franz Kafka. Reading of rumored Kabbalistic rituals, reading of Max Brod, of Kafka’s odd but honest—startlingly honest, incisive—descriptions of people, his encounters, his family, his dreams. What specificity. What

imagination. And so I am now in the Theological Hall, obscure volumes surrounding me, shelves and shelves of mental states, expansive passageways and portals. I fell into Kafka's dull little book once, twice, three times over the past week. I mean this literally. This is what I came to tell the interviewer, this remarkable instance, and to pull it off again.

"Why now?" he asked. I said, "When you get to the end of the song, you stop dancing. You don't ask why." I had no idea why I said this. Sweat formed on my brow, causing a chill to ripple through my craven self. I could not remember now if I had literally fallen into the book or if I had mistaken a reverie for the actual.

The interview ended abruptly, for there was an argument that had escalated into violence out in the hallway. A new interview was scheduled for the following week, cancelled again just as it started because of one of the grips having a heart attack. This went on, interruptions and cancellations, postponements of one kind or another, for an entire year. I feared I was in the daydream of another man. Finally, twelve months and an unknown amount of rescheduling later, the interview commenced. Halfway through, I decided to interrupt it myself. I stood up and went to a book at random. It dropped on the carpet of the immense library, echoing. There were murmurs from the assembled. The book laid open, astride the left page a creature unfurled a prodigious, serpentine mouth with vivid red tongue. Dancing on the tongue in agony were naked men, their heads and limbs contorting from the infernal pain. Resting upon the edge of the tongue was a bed, to which I could rest, start this life again, forget I had done this before, achieve the illusory sense of self again, only to lose it again. The interviewer cleared his throat.

When I stepped onto the page, my foot sunk in only slightly, as if stepping into a very shallow pool of water. The supernatural mechanism at play I had yet to understand, knew intuitively that any witness would think the rubber of my boot disappearing as it had was a kind of optical illusion, and indeed they would be correct in this analysis, so to speak, for that which is not provable must be deemed illusory for all ordered minds to go in living in orderliness, ordinariness. I did not speak, did not move, only exerted force onto my foot to make it go in further.

A faint hissing noise from the lights, the warmth of them, added to my sense of impending infernal torture, like the image before me. I would not have chosen this picture, wondered if it had chosen me. The creature stared at me, mouth open, which I was certain had grown at least a quarter of an inch since my boot had been placed atop it.

The interviewer came up behind me, dawdling, reticent. He slipped a hand into the pocket of his trousers, took it out. He smelled of shaving cream, restless nights. He asked if I was all right. I pulled my boot level with the floor and assured him that I was fine, in a matter of speaking. He asked if I would like to continue. I peered again at the bed in the picture. There was both a softness and a roughness to it. I knew that the rest which I sought would be brief, ephemeral. I knew too that there was no torturous element in the bed, as I had previously surmised. I knew also that the cycle would start over if I were to simply will this to be the reality of things. I could taste the choice of human significance even as I bent down and closed the book.

**Shania N. Soler**

**The Lighter**

“Your wife has passed away,” the officer watches me with large, dark brown orbs. The fine hairs on the back of my neck and arms stand on end as all sound around me fades to a high-pitched ringing. His fat lips continue to move but no sound travels to my ears.

The cigarette that was dangling from between my lips takes its final leap and falls to the ground below. My eyes follow its path, watching as the black ashes speckle the off-tan sidewalk. Smoke curls above it, swept away by a breeze.

“Mr. Evette? Sir,” his hand enters my vision, drawing my gaze from the dying poison on the sidewalk. Why is he here? Something about my wife; about Michaela. Did something happen to her?

*Passed away*

What does he mean by that? Passed away as in died? Michaela died? But that doesn’t make sense. She’s at home, probably in the kitchen looking out the window above the sink; her hair will be up in a high ponytail. The light from the sun will catch on the strands the way it usually does, making them look like black silk.

If she isn’t there, she’ll be in the living room, sitting in the wooden rocker she received as a gift from her mother back in Hong-Kong, showcasing intricate designs of Chinese mandalas carved over the back of it on both sides and on the armrests. She’d always run her fingers over the carvings. We’d situated the chair right beside the window that looks out onto our front yard. Sometimes, I’ll see her small features in the glass pane. I’ll wave, but she won’t respond to it. She never does.

If she’s not there, the officer probably didn’t check our room. Michaela likes to sit up there from time to time. She says that even though it’s the same front yard, the same driveway, the same sidewalk, and the same nosey neighbors across the street, the view changes with the height. But she would be there,

*Looking out the window.*

A chill sweeps over my body, realization wrapping every thin, bony finger around my body. I knock the officer’s hand away before digging into the navy-blue pocket of my suit pants. One cigarette left. I’ll have to run to the gas station tonight.

“Let me guess,” I say, eyes traveling down to the metal badge that catches in the light like my wife’s earrings. “Officer Rogan,” I place the end of the fresh poison between my lips. My hand trembles as I grab the lighter, the small object weighing like a brick in my pocket. Cool metal burns my skin like the flame that catches on the cigarette. One attempt. Two attempts. Third time’s the charm and the *click* echoes like an eerie turn between us. I take in a long pull and blow out the smoke with little care of the direction it goes in. The officer bats in front of his face, nose crinkling at the white smoke. He bites his tongue, swallowing any remark he has as I say, “The neighbor found her hanging in the window?”

~

“Where is it?” I pat down the pockets of my black suit pants. My friend, Austin, had gotten the suit for me this past week, insistent on my attendance at the funeral no matter my protests or wants. Now, here I was, left on my own while he was off dealing with the other grieving guests.

Just as I thought it would be, the funeral had been as silent as the house when I’d entered it after my meeting with Officer Rogan. Even with all the condolences, the speeches, the crying, it was just quiet. Something that left me numb as I pictured the old rocker lying on its side.

The rope had been gone, and so was her body, but the police hadn’t cared to tidy up the chair. I reached down, lifting it and setting it by its rightful place beside the window, fingers absently stroking the nameless carvings. The wooden seat rocked back and forth, every small groan like a cry for her, for Michaela.

Her family was at the funeral, so was mine; friends from both our groups were there. She was more popular in death than she was in life. No one laughed when I said this. She would have found it funny, but then, she always found cruel humor and satirical irony funny.

“What? Did you run out of cigs? I can spot you one,” Austin asked, stopping beside me. He’d been dealing with the aftermath of the burial, but the finishing apparently took less time than I thought it would. He reaches into his pocket, no doubt ready to produce a pack of cigarettes but I shake my head.

“It’s not the cigarettes. It’s my lighter. I can’t find it,” a growl rises at the back of my throat and I stop walking, not caring that the crowd of grieving gets further and further away from us. Everyone is on their way to *Stevies*. It was Michaela’s favorite restaurant.

Had been mine, too, until it was decided that's where we'd eat after the service.

"The shitty lighter with the leopard print?"

I nod and Austin snorts, shoving his hand into his pocket and pulling out the black lighter he carried around. "About time you got rid of that tacky thing. Get a new one," I swat his hand away, not taking the offer. The cigarette won't taste the same with that piece of junk.

"You don't understand," I say, reaching into my pockets and turning them inside out. Nothing; not even a speck of lint, and my mind jumped to five years ago, her voice washing over the inside of my thoughts...

~

"What? You forgot your lighter?" Her voice was tinkling, like a sterling silver bell, polished to perfection. It pulled me from the pointless search of my backpack and pockets. Eyes the same color of the honey I stir into my evening tea shimmer in the nighttime street lamps, a slight tilt to the ends of each.

I sighed, "So it would seem. Not a huge deal though," I pulled the cigarette from my mouth. "There's a gas station along this street. I'll pick up another." I nod towards the end of the road, illuminated by large lights and cars. A small, chilly hand wrapped around my bicep; it stopped me from taking another step forward and drew my attention to the small woman.

"I have one you can use." The glistening of her lips captured my eyes, and it took all I had to focus my attention on hers once more. I registered the words she'd spoken, and my brows lifted as my gaze traveled along her small, athletic frame.

"You smoke?"

"Oh God, no," she chuckled, releasing my arm and tucking a few black strands behind her ear. Three metal piercings caught in the light: an elephant, a vine, and a dangling sun. "My father did, and my mother does on occasion, but I know what they are. Poison, through and through. I just carry a lighter around for forgetful old men." The teasing look she sent my way said it all. I took the lighter from her outstretched hand; a grin turned up the corners of my mouth.

"Old men? I'm only thirty."

"That's three years older than me, old man."

I grunted in response as I lit the poison between my lips. "Well," I said, blowing out a stream of white smoke, careful to send it in a direction away from the intriguing and



beautiful woman that stood beside me. “Care to join this old man for dinner?”

Her peach tinted lips expanded into a smile that left my heart stuttering in my chest. “I thought you’d never ask.” She extended her hand forward once more, those black strands pulling loose from behind her ear and brushing against her cheek, making it apparent just how pale she is. “My name’s Michaela.”

“Jacob,” I took her hand, awe-struck at the way we fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Perfect.

“You can keep the lighter,” she said. “It was only one in a pack I bought.” I glanced down at the small metal object I’d just received. It’s one of those cheap refillable ones. A leopard print pattern wrapped around the sleek body; the color, purple or violet or whatever strange name some nutcase had deemed for this different shade of purple, paints the tacky design. It’s something I would toss out if anyone gave it to me. Something that I would never dream of owning or being caught dead with.

I placed it in my pocket.

~

I blink away the memory and look to Austin. My throat closes up as my gaze sticks to his suit jacket. It would match my own if I were still wearing it, but I’d taken it off, lying it on top of Michaela’s small body in the casket.

She’d looked so frail and beautiful, surrounded by the white of the interior, dressed in her peach-colored gown. Her mother had insisted on choosing it because it brought out Michaela’s beauty. Her skin was a stark contrast to the black strands that framed her face. Long, black lashes had cast vague shadows against her cheeks, and her lips had been tinted the same color as the night we’d met.

My head whips around to where they’re covering the hole they’d lowered her into moments ago with cold, damp dirt. I’d smoked poison before it was time to give my speech in front of the casket; say my goodbyes in front of my friends and family. Dad had rushed me, and I’d pocketed the lighter in a different place from usual.

*“I just carry a lighter around for forgetful old men.”*

The breeze carries her voice to me, wrapping the words around my throat like the noose they’d found around hers two weeks ago.

**Alexis K. Allard**

## **Picking Up The Pieces**

My body seemed to melt into every last step I took. The trailer that stood in front of me was poorly kept, it was obvious it had been beaten by too many winds as it tilted slightly to the right. The grass was unmown and scratched at my bare shins as I walked towards the shedding deck. I kept on my toes to avoid the scrape of my tight sneakers against my blistered ankles. Pausing, I took a deep breath before turning the squeaky handle, I didn't know whether I should be angry or concerned towards what lay on the other side of the trailer door. Walking through the threshold I was encased within darkness and attacked by the smell of days old garbage. I stepped on the back of my shoes and relieved my feet of their pressure. Dropping the heavy duffle that had been cutting its sling into my shoulder onto the unswept floor, my eyes, not quite adjusted to the darkness, scanned the small room.

"Mom?" I asked, "You home?"

In the middle of the room a mass of piled blankets began to rise in front of me.

"Yes?" said the mass.

"Are you sleeping?"

"No, I'm awake. Wha...what's wrong?"

"You're serious?"

"I must've got tired and fell asleep."

"It looks like you've been here all day." I crossed my arms and looked down at my mother, who was surrounded by dirty dishes and torn wrappers.

"Oh no. Shit...shit...shit..." A banana clip was caught in her gray half-fallen hair. She began fumbling around the blankets, shaking them out vigorously until the clip finally lost its grip and landed among the mess on the floor. With a sharp clunk, a phone appeared, "Eleven missed calls, oh my god."

My eyes gave an uncontrollable roll, "Why am I not surprised?"

"It won't happen again, I promise."

"Like you promised last week and the week before that?"

"Please. You know how hard it is."

"Yah, so is walking home after playing an entire game."

I began to walk away as she got up, accidentally kicking a purse and spilling its contents. Pill bottles rolled in every direction, clattering down the tilted floorboards.

“Shit!” An open bottle had spilled, and the small oval-shaped pieces scurried away. My mother stumbled to her knees, trying to stop them from rolling out of sight. “I can’t be off my count again.” The panic in her face was thickening.

“Why were you off your count in the first place?”

“Well, sometimes I’m just in so much pain and then I take one and forget I took it, and then I take another one..”

“Funny...seems like you forget a lot of things.” I turned my back to her, setting a dead pace towards my bedroom, my place away from all the mess.

“I said sorry! What else do you want from me?”

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe a parent who actually shows up and doesn’t just sleep all day.”

“Well I would if you would even tell me when your games are!” she paused from gathering her pills.

“You really think you can just lie to me and pretend like I won’t know. Those pills shouldn’t make you sleep all day.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” She didn’t look up at me but continued to gather the bottles and pills that had fallen from her purse.

“Oh really? Today you slept through my soccer game, last week it was my parent-teacher conference, tomorrow who knows... maybe it’ll even be my graduation.”

“It’s not the end of the world, I’ll go to your next game.”

“That was the last one. I told you that last week when you *promised* to be there.”

Her brow furrowed, “You *never* told me that.”

“Yah I did. Maybe you’d remember if you didn’t make yourself forget so much.”

I hoped she would say something else, something I could yell at her again for. I watched as my mother struggled to see the pills that had escaped beneath the couch...

~

I remember I awoke to the sound of thunder, the kind that shakes your home. My dog, Max, was barking as if there was a clumsy intruder in my bedroom.

“Mom!” I screamed.

I heard her feet as they galloped up the stairs. She arrived at my bedroom door short of breath, wheezing. I could hear her stop right before entering, she never did want me to see her so weak.

She opened the door, “What’s wrong?” she asked. She walked over to my bed, trying to slow her breathing through her nose. She sat down on the edge of my pink and purple striped bedspread and tried to calm Max.

“The storm,” I said, squeezing my stuffed bunny to my chest. She took a deep breath in and released it, seeming to have finally caught up to her lungs. There was a flash of light that illuminated my room and reflected off my mother’s bald head. Max barked at the thunder again, telling it to go away. I began to cry, and my mother gave me her hand. Her eyes were so tired, but her grip was so strong.

“Shhh,” she said, “It’s just the angels bowling in the sky.” She smiled, and I gazed back up at her lightless eyes, confused. I always used to think this was such a weird way to describe something so terrifying. “Come downstairs, I want to show you something.” She stood up and began to walk to the door, I jumped out of bed, too scared to lose her. Max followed close behind, protecting me from the threat of the storm. I followed her outside to the porch, strangling my stuffed bunny with my arm.

“Mom?” I hesitated at the door frame. The floor was a flattened down old blue carpet that was mistaken for having been waterproof, too many years ago. Its brown threads from underneath had been revealed and were flattened to the floor.

“Come on, we will be safe, it’s all closed in.” She plopped down in her prized white wicker chair, and I joined her sitting in its sister. The porch was indeed enclosed, but the old window panes creaked in the wind, and the wind screamed through the screens while they clinked against the dirty glass. White light filled the porch and immediately after, the skies roared. I froze.

She laughed, “Woo! Looks like that one just got a strike!” Her smile was as infectious as the cancer moving through her bones. I laughed with her as I thought about how silly she always was. “I want to teach you a neat trick. The next time you see lightning I want you to count from one, and then stop once you hear thunder, okay?” She looked at me to see if I understood.

“Why?” I asked.

“Well, the shorter you count the closer the storm is, but the longer you count, the storm is farther away. Do you understand?” I nodded in return. It was not long before I saw a jagged light escape the clouds.

My mother counted with me, “One...Two...” *BOOM!* I squeezed my bunny tight and looked up at her with wide eyes, she smiled again.

“Now just give it some time,” she said. We sat there together, for a few years it seemed, in silence. The only intruder was the rumble coming from the panicking rain on the porch roof. I watched as my mother’s favorite rose-bush flooded. All that work to keep it so beautiful, gone in a gust of wind. The wind was cruel, beating down on her roses until they retreated behind their thorns.

The lightning dimmed and the thunder dulled, and my mother looked at me, “Let’s count again when we see another flash.”

There was a dim light and we counted, “One...Two...Three...Four...Five...” *boom.*

“See,” she said, “Not as scary as it was before, huh?” I shook my head. “Just give it time, I promise. This storm will pass.” Soon, she grabbed my hand and led me back up the stairs to my bed. Tucking me in, she kissed my cheek and Max jumped back up to the foot of the mattress. She walked to the door and began to close it; darkness began to consume me as she left. “Wait!” I screamed, she stopped. “Leave it open?” She nodded, and the light from the hallway streamed in to defend me against the dark. Little did I know, it had already swallowed me whole...

~

*“...we really need to work on our communication. See, you’re not listening! You never do.”*

*“What?”*

*“You just never listen, you’re just like your father. He never listened...”*

~

I woke up staring at the glowing stars struggling to keep their grip on the dusty white ceiling. They provided just enough light to reflect off the fluorescent yellow duck tape that divided the room into two halves.

“Pssst, you awake?” I asked.

“Ugh. What?” she mumbled through her pillow. My sister’s bed was on the opposite side of the duck tape, on her side of the room. Nervous for my voice to break the boundary, I hesitated, and the voices came again.

“Screw you! I work all day, someone in this house has to make money, I can do whatever the fuck I want when I get home...” my father yelled.

“They’re fighting again,” I said.

She groaned and twisted in her sky-shaded sheets. “I know, just try to go to bed.” She turned around and seemed to fall back asleep, but something told me she was listening too. We were always listening, every night, all night it felt like sometimes. Nothing to stare at but those peeling ceiling stickers, I laid with eyes wide open.

“I can’t work, you know that! You are so arrogant, I can’t believe you!” my mother yelled.

“Yeah well boo-hoo! Why don’t you just leave me alone.” my father said.

“Fine!”

“Fine!”

There was a brief silence until the sound of my mother’s footsteps carried through the hallway. She opened the door to our room and the light flooded in, washing away the glow from the ceiling constellations. For some ashamed reason, I closed my eyes fast and tried to pretend that I was sleeping.

“You girls awake?” She said, coming towards and sitting down on the side of my low mattress. “I know you girls are always listening.”

I turned my head to her as she tucked her dark hair away, behind her ear.

“Yeah, I am, sorry mom.”

“It’s not your fault. You awake?” She got up and walked over to the other bed.

My sister slowly sat up and nodded her head.

“I want to let you girls know that your father and I aren’t going to work out, we are going to get a divorce.” She sat down and looked at her hands, peeling at the skin around her thumbnail...

~

The divorce took years to actually happen. By the time it did, my family was gone. My siblings were grown and moved out on their own; Father absent and away, consumed in his

work; and Mother infected by rage towards my father that she took out on me, the only part of *him* left.

“You are just like him!” she screamed at me. “You never think about anyone but yourself!”

I looked around at the bright room infested with full cardboard boxes. The one in my hands was getting heavier as my arms ached to surrender to gravity.

“All I said was that I wanted to spend the weekend with dad.” I put the box down on the staircase.

“You know he totally screwed me over in the divorce, and it’s like you don’t even care at all!” she said.

“Nope. Not really.” I made my way back to the UHaul truck full of the fragments that used to make up my home.

“Are you serious? You know what he does to me affects you too!”

“Mom I don’t care! Just leave me out of it. I won’t tell you anything anymore if you’re gonna act like this every time.”

She picked up the box labeled ‘dishes’, and the bottom broke open. Gravity had claimed another victim. The mismatched plates broke onto the gravel driveway, creating a mosaic of dirt and stoneware.

“Shit!” she threw the limp cardboard to the ground and walked away. “I’m done. I’ll pick them up later.”

I grabbed the last box for my room and walked around the broken plates, wondering how long it would take my mother to pick up the pieces she had left behind...

~

My mind came back into focus onto my mother, in the dark small room where we had existed, for what seemed like forever and a day.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said all those things. I just get so angry sometimes.” There was no blame in her voice, no blame directed at anyone but herself. It was as if she was apologizing for a lifetime of guilt.

Holding back my breath, I walked towards the chaos and began to gather the lost pieces. Laying on my stomach, I reached under the couch and with a sweep of my arm collected a series of dust, pills, and wrappers alike. My mother winced as she got up and sank back into the couch.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Why is it so dark in here anyway?” I got up and walked to the light switch. I flipped the switch up, but nothing happened.

“My social security didn’t come as planned.” she looked down at her hands, her gray hair blocking her eyes from sight. She began to peel at the skin that hung off her thumbnail. “Look at it this way, we can light some candles, and instead of watching T.V., you can tell me all about how your game went.” She looked up and tried to smile.

I watched as my mother began desperately lighting the candles that were on the coffee table, the flame was quivering as the lighter trembled in her hand. Letting go of my breath, I walked back toward the couch and sat down.

“So did you guys win?” she smiled at me now sitting beside her.

Her smile was infectious, “Of course we did.” I took the lighter from her hands and steadily lit the candles which began to surround us in a dim, but warm light.



## **Iris Elise LeCates**

### **Snow/Stars/Static**

Blinding lights hurt like truth in abundance.

When I first discovered that the world wasn't meant to be seen as through television static, I believe I was thirteen. My vision had begun to crackle and pop with flashes of light like miniature bombs, glaring white and then gone, and my mother had taken me to a doctor, who sent me to a specialist, who sent me to another specialist, and so on down the line a couple more times until I met Dr. Leibowitz.

"Look at that wall," she'd said, pointing at the clean, white wall of the doctor's office. "What do you see?"

"A wall," I responded, resting my chin in my hands.

"Is the color flat? Even all across?"

"Is it not supposed to be?"

Dr. Leibowitz cast me a sideways glance. "Well, it is. But is there anything in your visual field that keeps you from sensing or perceiving it as plain white?"

And so I stared at the wall, expecting that she, like the others, would make some insane diagnosis that would quickly be ruled out with labs or an MRI. As I stared, though, I realized that while I knew in my heart that the wall was white, it was like I was watching a channel our cable couldn't quite pick up.

"There's just the static," I said.

"Have you always seen the static?" Dr. Leibowitz asked.

"Haven't you?"

"No."

Dr. Leibowitz rose and flipped the light switch.

"What do you see now?" she asked.

The static seemed to glow, incandescent in the dark. I could make out rippling shades of blue and purple, flecks of red among the whites and greys. Somehow I knew that although nothing had changed, although this was not unlike what I saw staring at the ceiling in my bedroom late at night, that I would no longer be able to see the world the same way from there on out.

I was correct.

So, the night that I spun off the road into the rocky sands of the southern Arizona desert, I blinked the dizzied haze from my eyes before scanning the road. There were three options for the source of the lights: car headlights, the reflection of my headlights on some metal, or a misfiring in my brain. There seemed to be no other car, and it was too dark to determine whether there'd been some metal junk on the side of the road. My head ached.

As I sat in the front seat, eyes scanning the pavement, I became suddenly aware of the static, as I often do when I would least like to. Static muddled the colors of the mountains and of the sand, and I could not tell if cacti jutted from distant mountaintops or if the static was crackling just enough to produce a lying shadow. I got out of the car, slamming the door. The night was so hot that I could feel sweat clinging to my skin.

The land before me sloped up into a rugged mountainside dotted with dry brush and saguaro, the rock slicing into a sky glittering with so many stars that I felt the anxiety of the wreck dissipate as if it were rising off my skin like steam into the sky. Between the night and I, as always, unfortunately, was the thin layer of static. A burst of light popped up in the sky as if to remind me that there would always be this imperceptible divide between the world and me— we would never quite see eye to eye.

A creaking in the distance broke my spell of self-pity. Along the mountaintop, I saw a figure move. I scrambled to find my keys in my pocket, clenching them between my fingers so they stuck out from my knuckles like claws. The darkness suddenly felt hostile. I blinked over and over to try and distinguish between static and the world, and it began to seem as if the figure had three arms— or possibly four— or possibly was not a figure at all, but a saguaro, its arms delicately twisting in the moonlight. The saguaro reached out, the tip of one arm touching the saguaro beside it, and that one, too, began to move, the creaking of its joints echoing through the canyon. So this went down the mountainside, saguaro to saguaro, until I found myself staring into an expanse of saguaro writhing— no— dancing, long spines glinting in the light of the moon.

I took a step forward, and then another, finding the courage to slip my keys from a clenched fist into my pocket. I stood in front of the nearest saguaro and it came to a creaking stop as the wind began to rise. I felt the hairs raise on my thighs.

*Up.*

I sucked in a breath.

*Up.*

One of the saguaro's arms moved as if to direct me up the mountainside, so I stumbled along, watching the ground so as to avoid low-lying cacti. I forced the words "Thank you" from the back of my throat. The saguaro in front of me continued their odd dance, arms carefully avoiding my path.

*Up.*

The saguaro seemed to whisper.

*Sky.*

*Ward.*

I wished that I had brought a jacket.

*Up.*

I wished that I had kept driving straight.

*Uhhh*

*P.*

Static would be the least of my problems if I was going mad.

*Sky.*

Or if I was dead.

*ward.*

I found myself at the top of the mountain, standing beside the largest saguaro I'd ever seen. The wind whipped my hair and stung the tip of my nose with cold. Above it all I could hear the creaking as every saguaro turned its arms skyward. The wind calmed. The night was still—

Until it wasn't. The stars seemed to implode in bright flashes of light like the hundreds of thousands I'd seen before, but these hung in the sky like lightbulbs rather than flickering out as quickly as they'd come. They emanated a soothing warmth, more docile than the intrusive heat of the desert summer. Something within me stirred and I reached into the sky, pulling from the darkness an orb of light, a star. The large saguaro beside me extended an arm. "I want to hold it," I argued, clutching the star to my chest.

The saguaro was still.

"I like this one."

Stillness.

“I want to hold it a little longer.”

Against my chest, I felt the star pressing gently toward the saguaro. I gave in, holding it out so that the saguaro might grab it. The star floated into the saguaro’s arm and seemed to be absorbed by it before a bud grew and bloomed into a flower as white as starlight right where the star had entered. I hoped I understood.

Plucking stars from the sky, I carried them in my arms to each saguaro, allowing every arm to take what it might like. Each star bloomed into a new and pristine blossom, and before long it seemed that the stars were catching on, first falling into my arms on their own, and then finding a saguaro with merely the motioning of my finger. I walked until the sky was empty. The wind picked up.

*What do you see?*

“Darkness.”

*All across?*

I knew in my heart that the sky was empty, but nonetheless it glowed with static—incandescent, even in the dark.

“I see too much.”

*Better than not at all.*

So I sat, and I looked out at the white saguaro blossoms. I watched the sky grow lighter, because it’s not true when they say that it’s darkest before the dawn, since really it gets lighter and lighter and you just never realize that there was a time when it wasn’t as light as it is at that moment, until it becomes so undeniably bright that you must assume that there was a moment darker than the one you’ve now found yourself in. That’s around when the saguaro blossoms tuck themselves back into their buds, little blossoming stars winking out one by one until all is light.

# **Creative Nonfiction**

## **Suzie Milkowich**

### **Flying Corpse**

People will tell you that I am not right in the head. And frankly, I have to agree. At times I do things a little differently. Like, take my newly deceased cat: I had a talk with her one evening after we concluded that she was beginning the active dying process. I asked her if, when she died, I could have her fur coat. “Meow,” she responded, which always indicated to me that the answer was yes. She was silent if the answer was no.

I have always been drawn to dead things, whether it be a hospice patient or some fresh roadkill. I have never wanted to skin a human, but I have skinned a red fox. I gingerly sliced him from his balls to his ears, without cutting through his pelt. As a wannabe taxidermist, I thought about skinning Kadie but didn’t know if I could do the deed. So, I went on a google search, and after calling five taxidermists, I found one guy in Austin, Texas, who would do the job for a small fortune.

Enter Martinez Brothers Taxidermy. The one brother, Alex, is the master at skinning pelts. He sent me an email detailing the exact process for getting Kadie’s body there in one piece. This is where I should add that I sometimes lack comprehension skills and read every other sentence. Not following the instructions can make for a hair-raising experience.

First, I was to obtain a small styrofoam box, like the kind that you would ship a fresh, live lobster, or Omaha Steaks. Second, I was to pick up Kadie from the veterinarian’s freezer and then drive an hour to purchase dry ice. So far, so good, right? Someone suggested that I make sure, double sure that nothing will leak out of the box, or they will just toss Kadie’s remains in the garbage. So, I took it upon myself to place the securely taped styrofoam box inside not one but two large garbage bags-- without, as I mentioned, checking the mailing instructions. I tied the first one, then the second one, and then shoved it inside the mailing box. Now there would be no chance in hell that this box was going to leak.

As I carried my fur baby into the empty FedEx store, the box was beginning to swell. It was growing as I was holding it right before my eyes. I quickly placed it on the counter, and I stood back. I told the sales gal that I wanted to ship this package overnight. As I was standing there, the tape on the box began to peel open spontaneously. Beads of sweat were pouring down my temples and into my mask. Oh shit. The sales clerk called for the manager, who was new in

this position. The manager said, “I am trying to locate this in the shipping manual. I don’t think we can ship this pet of yours.”

In less than a minute, the tape on the box had popped entirely open, and out came the two black garbage bags, which were inflating like balloons right before my eyes.

I knew that this was not a good sign.

The brave manager sneaked over to the box, and as she carefully reached her fingers towards the super taut bag. IT POPPED. We all jumped back, and now the second bag was also inflating. Shit. The sales clerk handed me a box cutter, and I reached as far as I could and swiped the blade against the bag. Hiss, the bag immediately released the air. Oh no, my heart was beating really fast and I had no idea what was about to happen.

All I could do was see my frozen little Kadie, flying out of the box and in the air with me trying to catch her like a football. The manager then quipped, “And this is why we do not ship animals via FedEx. “I’d suggest,” said the manager, “taking it to UPS.” And that’s just what I did. At the time I had no clue what was causing this scary event. A Facebook friend inquiry revealed, “Oh you need to have some air holes in the box, to accommodate the release of the carbon dioxide from the melting dry ice. Who knew? I do now. I stopped in a large empty parking lot and took over half of the dry ice out. Then repackaged Kadie for flight, leaving some air holes..

The UPS shipping center was packed with people so I waited for the female clerk who was covered in tattoos, a large circle nose ring, and giant gages in her ears. Surely this young gal would help me. She took the box, entered the shipping information and Kadie was shipped overnight to a tune of \$224.00. I received a call the next day from Alex of Martinez Brothers Taxidermy in Austin, Texas. He, the master of pet taxidermy, called me the next day to report my kitty cat arrived in perfect frozen condition.

Yesterday I received a call from Alex, Kadie’s pelt turned out beautiful and will be arriving back to me vs USPS in a few days. I can’t wait to have her fur in my hands and maybe even add an alligator clip or two to her feet, so I can wear her around my neck. I may not be right in the head according to some. But to others I am just Suzie Milkowich.



Kadie Lynn Milkowich, was the runt of the Ocicat litter and was very petite and svelte. She adored me but loved heat more. She was 16 when she stopped eating and drinking. And it was time to say goodbye. RIP my fur baby.



# The Open Field