

The background of the cover is a photograph of a brick building, the Springer Opera House, under a bright blue sky with white clouds. The building has a sign that reads 'Springer OPERA HOUSE'. The title 'THE Fall Line REVIEW' is centered in a serif font, with a vertical line separating 'THE' and 'Fall Line'.

# THE Fall Line REVIEW

2019  
VOLUME XXII

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VOLUME XXII

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The fall line is a twenty-mile wide geographical boundary that runs across Georgia from Columbus to Augusta separating the Piedmont Region from the Coastal Plain, and was the prehistoric Atlantic Ocean's shoreline. Macon, like many cities in the eastern United States, was developed because trading ships are unable to travel further inland than the fall line.

Communities join together and diversity thrives along the fall line, which provides us the perfect name for our literary arts magazine.

*The Fall Line Review* is a compilation of the creative conscience of Middle Georgia State University.

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**Special Thanks to Graphic Resource!**

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*The Fall Line Review* is a literary journal featuring the creative and collective consciousness of Middle Georgia State University's students. Submissions are accepted, reviewed, and selected using the Blind Selection Policy and Reviewer Rating System.

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# A Letter From the Editor

Readers,

*The Fall Line Review* has been around in Macon, Georgia for 49 years. Prior to 1998, the magazine went by the name *Timepiece* founded in 1971 at Macon Junior College, and ran through 1997 when the school was officially renamed Macon State College. The decision was made to change the name of the magazine with the 1998 issue, and a note was added in the back of the issue, stating:

We know, of course, that, stretching from Augusta to Macon to Columbus, the fall line marks the edge of the prehistoric sea that came up to what we call the Piedmont Plateau. Not as stately as *The Hudson Review*, nor so strange sounding as *The Black Warrior Review*, yet *The Fall Line Review*, years from now, will have its own line of writers who will trace their early accomplishments to this watershed.

Fast forward to today. The school has been renamed, once again, to Middle Georgia State University, and continues to see growth and success, just as *The Fall Line Review* continues on the legacy set forth nearly half a century ago. This magazine is the voice of the creative souls who have come through this college. Writers, poets, artists, and photographers have all used this magazine to express themselves, their cultures, their tribulations, and joys. This year is no exception.

I am honored to be selected as this year's Editor-in-Chief. This magazine has meant a lot to me throughout my time here. It has afforded me the opportunity to express myself and develop a passion for the fine arts that I hadn't known existed within me. I must give a special thanks to Dr. Kelly Whiddon, for supporting *The Fall Line Review*. Middle Georgia State University is not a Fine

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Arts school yet the Fine Arts have thrived and continue to grow each year, thanks to the support of faculty members such as her and many others who continue to encourage artistic expression. It is my hope that this magazine will continue to be an expression of the community here at MGA for another 50 years.

While most issues of *The Fall Line Review* are without a theme, this year, I wanted to highlight one piece of work that I felt best represented the collective consciousness of the student body. That work is, "The Dream Still Lives" by Jelani Perkins. It is featured as the first poem of this collection and its final lines have been inscribed on the rear cover. It is my hope that you will find inspiration in the words and remember that dreams only die when you stop fighting to make them a reality.

Thank you to everyone who submitted to this year's issue. As a member of the magazine's review board for the past two years, I can say, this was one of the toughest selection years yet. There are so many amazing works that didn't make it in this year and I wish we could have made the book twice the size it is. I'd also like to thank the review board for taking time out of their personal schedules to review each submission and provide insights. Without your help, the magazine would never have made it to print!

Congratulations, once again, to everyone who made it in this edition. I hope you continue to create and inspire others to do the same.

Sincerely,

Jason Cormier  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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## The Dream Still Lives

I had a dream.

Recently these words have resonated within my thoughts  
as often as the day I spoke them nearly 5 years ago.

Progress has been obtained,  
many agendas have been changed,  
Yet there is still so much more to be done.

I had a dream.

Just as I had been standing on that balcony  
4 stories up overlooking the park bordered mildly by trees with an  
ensemble

Of children, parents, grandparents, wildlife and pets mingling  
about the open center field.

Without a care in mind, as my cares seem to become trivial.

All was peaceful before the extreme heat and pressure caressed  
my cheek.

The taste of hot metal and blood was all I remember before my  
senses ceased to work.

I had a dream.

I believe my future is certain,  
though there is no telling what fortune awaits my people-  
What am I saying?

Our people, all people.

This journey takes its toll on the spirit.

Being saved by God and the ones I love,  
keeping face and keeping faith, I am thankful.



I had a dream.

There are moments where even I doubted the path I paved.

Malcom I could have become

without this dream and those to help me fulfill it.

A dream I can no longer fulfill,

a dream I can no longer march towards.

Now that the remaining pain takes its leave,

carrying the warmth of my suffering body with it,

I am at His doorstep.

The people have a dream.

Intuition tells me I no longer have a face to keep.

I know the people will keep it for me.

The people have become the dream.

My spirit will live with them as I join

my God Almighty within His gates of eternal life.

Though I depart I will always live

because, within the people, the dream still lives.

## A Plea for Self-Love

Please whisper these words and tell me you love me.  
Oh so gently now,  
I'm dying, I'm dying. Can you see?

These words you whisper, they cannot be.  
As much as you tell me, I will not believe.  
Please whisper these words and tell me you love me.

Those three little words, those wonderful three;  
My mind injects me with the negative poison.  
I'm dying, I'm dying. Can you see?

I say I hate everything about myself and you say the contrary  
You say I'm smart and beautiful and funny.  
Please whisper these words and tell me you love me.

You say honesty and integrity are the key,  
To happiness and joy but,  
I'm dying, I'm dying. Can you see?

I stand in this battle with my mind and plea,  
They say love yourself first before others, so  
Please whisper these words and tell me you love me  
I'm dying, I'm dying. Can you see?

## Burial

What would happen if I plunged myself into the soil?  
If I dug so deep I grew roots?  
I wonder,  
If I gave myself to the Earth, would it be a death or a rebirth?

## Footsteps

2:00 am  
eyes heavy  
*sleep, just go to sleep*  
only time will allow me to shut down  
my only safe place  
a stiff, old, faded red couch

*Stomp, Stomp, Stomp,*  
ceiling caving in, frustration sets in  
I hold on to patience  
a prayer for silence

3:00 am  
God has listened  
eyes still heavy, head pounding  
I need this  
a black curtain falls over my eyes  
and thoughts fly  
everything is at ease

*Stomp, Stomp, Stomp*  
“Why? What is wrong with the world?”  
just as everything was at peace, it is broken  
God, I thought you would help me  
reckless, selfish, noisy demons  
silence is always broken here  
and soon, my sanity will follow

## *Recollection of the Past* - Leonid Afremov

Colors run into each other on canvas.  
My world almost jumps into theirs as I stare at the frame.  
Rainy reflections show two walking,  
though the oil paint displays a lonely umbrella.  
She walks, reminded by the shadow  
of how gone he really is.  
Light revealing empty street,  
the single thing holding up the fragile figure  
who has seen this path many times.  
Couples sharing milkshakes,  
smiles originating solely from deep affection,  
dogs dragging tired owners, children, parents  
together.  
Each radiant leaf compliments another,  
while the umbrella blocks the thin shadow from praise,  
encouragement coming only from the grounds support  
with puddles portraying what cannot be spoken.  
Words only said by the doctor last June,  
*Heart failure*, burns a red reminder in the dusk.  
Rain water only dried with time,  
though the crying replenishes it.  
Light posts, each a beacon of despair,  
a reminder of that night.  
Gleaming headlights on a mad race to the ER,  
past the lonely road on which she now walks for a cure unfound,  
only to leave with a single umbrella  
to head back to the park where they shared so many days.  
It is on that same forgotten street where she walks through night  
into her sleep.  
Then, as a leaf from the branch dismantles,  
the shadow leaves alone  
only to return to the same season, same road once again.

## Rats in the Tea Room

When Corinne was getting ready for her coffee date one blustery October afternoon, she hardly expected she would end the day in the ICU.

It was the first time she had ever been to this coffee shop, and that made her anxiety triple. She was always too busy to check it out. She'd heard good things, of course, but still.

She was always the first one to arrive. It made her feel better to scope out the place and plan exit strategies. If she started panicking and the date kept getting worse and worse from there, she could pretend to need to leave because a friend needed her. She could always pretend she didn't feel well. If worse came to worst, she could just excuse herself and leave.

"What's the worst thing that could happen?" she always asked herself. Each time, she decided it would have to be getting stabbed by some serial killer in disguise.

She walked through the door, gave her order to the old woman behind the counter, and then looked around the coffee shop. She had expected a smaller room but realized the coffee shop itself was probably bigger than her entire apartment. The walls were covered in what looked like old newspaper. Not like a wallpaper kind of look, but actual newspapers. Corinne stepped closer. The nearest section was from *The Boston Globe* and proclaimed the end of World War II.

As she looked around, she began her usual game of figuring out what she'd do if there were a knife attack. She would, of course, hurl herself at the attacker. Her purse would be her shield and her hot tea would be her best line of defense. After she scalded the man with her tea, she'd break the mug over his head and he'd drop to the floor like a box of books. Then she'd turn to her date, who would be too surprised and frightened to do anything, brush a lock of hair that had come loose from her bun, and ask him if he was okay. He would be impressed that she could take care of herself (of

course she could, she was a feminist, after all) and they would have to schedule another date because she would be too busy giving interviews to the police and the newspapers when they heard about the ruckus, social anxiety be damned.

It wasn't like she wanted that, but it was certainly more entertaining to think about than worry how she'd find some topic of conversation for the next hour. The true difficulty would look easy by comparison and that always made her feel a little better.

She found a seat and had received her tea when a guy walked in. Corinne recognized him from the picture her friend showed before she had given him her phone number. He had blonde hair that stuck up like a cluster of cattail stalks, all feathery and soft. She was thankful he didn't see her first. It gave her more time to prepare herself.

He did see her, though. He waved a little and walked over. "Corinne?"

"That's me. You're David?"

"Yeah," he smiled. "It's nice to meet you."

"Same to you." She kicked herself. At least the first few sentences weren't stupid, she thought.

"What did you get?" He asked, noticing the mug on the table.

"Just a chai tea. It's my favorite, so..." she trailed off as he turned around to look at the boards behind the counters with different pictures of the drinks.

"I've never tried it, but I drink more coffee than water." He chuckled a little. "I'll go ahead and order, if you don't mind."

Corinne realized she probably should have waited until he arrived before she got anything, at least so that she didn't have to wait on him. Not that she minded. It just felt like one of those shiftier social rules she picked up in some back alley behind an old church or in a school as a child. No one else would have cared, but she did.

She couldn't quite decide whether to wait with him at the counter and keep talking or sit down again and wait for him to come back. She still couldn't figure out what to do even after innumerable dates. Corinne knew she was bad at small talk, so she figured she was bored because she couldn't carry on a conversation well.

Corinne just wanted to be loved. That was all. She wanted someone to go home to, someone who would want to see her, someone who would help and understand her. She wanted all of that. She knew she wouldn't get it. She just couldn't talk. She wanted to, of course. She wanted to have a real conversation about things that mattered. But the second she saw whatever guy she liked at the moment, she'd disappear into herself and hide deep. She knew it didn't help her. She knew she was keeping herself from a relationship. But she couldn't stop. She couldn't stop her mind. She couldn't stop stuttering and bumbling over words that were much too simple for what she wanted to say.

She was almost resigned to the fact that she'd never change. It didn't matter how much she wanted to change or how many things she tried, she just would never change. It would always be a struggle. So that's why, when she walked into the coffee shop on this chilly October day, she was prepared to fail. Somehow, some way, she'd find a way to get nervous and shut down. It always happened.

She pulled out her phone and expected some check-in text from her friend who was setting her up, but there was nothing.

David sat down across from her at the table. "I'm trying your suggestion; I've had enough coffee today."

Corinne watched him for a moment, trying to gather the strength to begin some kind of conversation, but he beat her to the conversation first.

"So, what do you do for a living?"



"I'm a high school English teacher," she replied and silently congratulated herself on not ruining one simple sentence.

He chuckled. "Yikes. That sounds terrible."

Corinne bristled. "Excuse me?"

He looked up at her quickly, then said, "Oh, no I'm not trying to offend you, I just always hated English as a kid. You must deal with a lot of students like that."

It still felt like an insult, but she pushed the feeling away and trudged forward. "Most of my students don't really care about English, but it's my job to teach them how to write papers and do research. You know, skills they'll actually need in the future."

"Do you enjoy it?"

"I suppose." She took a sip of tea. "What about you?"

"Mechanical engineer. Math and science was always my best subjects."

Were. Math and science were my best subjects, she thought as she cringed. David didn't seem to notice.

"Yeah, I never knew what I wanted to do when I was a kid," he said, settling back into his seat as though he were preparing for a fireside chat. "I wanted to be a police officer because my favorite uncle was a police officer. But then he got stabbed one day by some crazy jackass and then never was the same again. PTSD and all that. So, I decided I should do something else. I don't remember how, but somehow being an engineer got stuck in my mind."

She nodded politely and glanced over his shoulder, watching the people pass by on the street.

"Oh, now I remember! I was watching a TV show when I was, like, twelve years old, about this building in New York City that was built on one center pipe. The entire skyscraper, I think it was the Citigroup Center, was built on a pipe a fraction of the original size of the building. I'm not sure what it was that fascinated me so much about it, maybe it was the fact that the building was built

wrong. The wind could literally blow it over some day and there was nothing nobody could do about it!"

Corinne cringed again. There was nothing anyone could do, she thought to herself, glancing back outside. She realized she had seen the same woman in the black sweater pass the shop twice before, each time with a different large bag. She looked back at David, hoping he hadn't noticed she wasn't quite paying attention. He didn't.

"So," he continued, "people had to go in and reinforce the steel beams with stronger, lighter weight steel so the building wouldn't fall down and crush everyone. I think I got my idea there that if I were in charge of building a building, I'd never let something like that happen. No, sir, nothing like that would ever happen on my watch."

The woman finally walked through the door of the coffee shop, still holding onto her bag. Corinne realized the woman was much younger than she had seemed when she was outside the restaurant, maybe 17 or 18 years old. She had a wide, bright smile, sickly circles under her eyes, and waxy skin. Her pink hair was clearly a wig, and an ugly one at that. The wig reflected back the lights in the way only cheap, plastic can. Corinne felt like she recognized her from somewhere, which made her anxiety drop a little.

She's just a kid, she thought to herself.

A man followed the young girl into the coffee shop. He was definitely older, with black hair that was receding slightly at the hairline and some wrinkles around his mouth. He was wearing a black sweater and black pants and white tennis shoes, which seemed strange to Corinne.

She glanced back at David again, who was strangely quiet. He was finishing a sip of his drink before setting it down again and beginning another train of thought. "So when I graduated from high school, I got a scholarship to Georgia Southern and..."

She tuned out David in order to hear the conversation going on between the girl and the woman behind the counter.

"I'm sorry, miss, but we don't have that kind of cookie today. It's not Christmastime right now."

The young girl shook her head, "Are you sure there aren't any cookies in the back you could bring out?"

"No, all we have is right here."

What kind of idiot asks for Christmas cookies in October? Corinne thought to herself.

The young woman turned around to look at the man. "What do you think of that, Joe. She doesn't have any Christmas cookies."

Joe grunted.

The young woman turned around. "I think you're right. The old broad just isn't willing to try." She reached into her bag and pulled out a gun.

Corinne could feel her stomach drop. She kicked David under the table.

He winced. "What the he---"

He was interrupted by two shots. They both turned to see the older woman stagger and fall against the wall behind the counter.

"Well, isn't that unfortunate." The young woman said. "I guess I'll have to go behind the counter and check for myself." She scurried around the counter and tripped through the door.

Corinne felt someone grab her arm and drag her down. David had apparently realized the danger of the situation and had decided he'd do something. They crawled on all fours until they were both hidden behind a huge chair in the back corner of the room. Corinne found she was curled up next to David and was very, very uncomfortable. She could feel her back begin to ache.

"Do you have your phone?" David whispered.

Corinne nodded, feeling the piece of plastic in her jeans pocket.

"Good. I'll try to make a diversion and you can sneak away and call 911."

They sat there for nearly a minute, curled up together, as the pain in Corinne's back increased. She tried to fidget a little to get comfortable, but she managed to kick off one of her ballet flats. It skittered across the floor, leaping and twirling as though it were living up to its dream of being a prima ballerina. She watched Joe's bulky shadow glide closer to the chair. As he approached, she could feel herself slipping away, sliding off into the ether she found so comfortable when she was panicking. She didn't have to see him to know he had the gun pointed right at the chair.

"Hey, Molly!" he called. "What do you want to do about the rats in the tea room?"

"The what?"

He grabbed the chair and threw it across the room, revealing both Corinne and David. I suppose this is how a beetle would feel if it knew it was about to be stepped on, she thought to herself.

"The rats in the tea room," he yelled, pulling David up by his arm. Joe loomed over him and glowered. "What do you think you're doing in here?"

"We were on a date," he said, rubbing his arm and scowling.

"How was it going?" Joe asked with a sardonic smile, as though this were his usual topic of conversation for a burglary.

David, interpreting the sarcasm as some kind of extended hand of friendship, snorted and replied, "Not well, thanks. I was in the middle of giving my credentials, but I think I bored her to death."

Joe eyed David before slowly replying, "It really is like that sometimes."

"Isn't it, though? Dating is so difficult." David shook his head. There was a long pause that apparently inspired David to storm ahead in his quest for friendship. "So... what brings you here today?"

"Burglary..." Joe began, as though he wanted to say more but was thinking better of it. Finally, he sighed and rubbed his eyes with his free hand. "Molly has cancer," he said flatly. "Make-A-Wish didn't want to sponsor her, so I figured I'd take it upon myself to do something about it." He spun the gun around on his finger. "When she found out, she wanted to join in the fun."

Molly popped her head out of the doorway. "Joe. Are you talking to the hostages again?"

Joe looked down. "No, I'm not," he replied, holding up his handgun to David's chest. "I'm intimidating them."

"You didn't need the gun to scare us," David said quickly. "We were scared of your legs."

Joe looked confused. "My... legs?"

"Yeah, man!" he began, as though this were the conversation he was waiting all day to have. "When I was playing football, the coach always told us our power was in our legs. A guy could really hurt someone if he just relied on his legs. You just have to..." David prattled on, explaining the mechanics of how powerful legs can be.

Joe looked at Corinne with a look of almost compassion. He raised both eyebrows and rolled his eyes, which Corinne figured was some kind of solidarity. She could only sit and nod, hoping somehow, they wouldn't get shot.

"Don't act like you're going to attack me with your legs," Joe finally interrupted. "I'll shoot you first."

There was a crash in the back room of the coffee shop and Corinne could hear the stream of expletives flowing from the door.

"You good in there?" Joe called.

Molly reappeared behind the bar, but this time leaning heavily over it. "Jostein, I think I overdid it," she said, her pink wig askew on her head. Her pale face was completely white and she was trembling.

"Alright, let's roll." Joe cocked the gun and pulled the trigger, shooting Corinne once and David twice. Then he lowered the gun, walked over to Molly, and picked her and the bag up in his arms.

Corinne had read about being stabbed, so she was prepared for that. However, she was not prepared for the searing, seething pain that erupted in her leg. She pulled her phone out of her blue jean pocket, making an effort not to look over at David's bloody body and trying to stand, but the pain only multiplied. Then she slid back towards the ether, watching the scene as though it were a video she was trying to examine.

He carried the girl and the bag to the door but paused before he left. Joe looked back at Corinne and David. He had the same expression on his face that Corinne had seen one time when a student had been accused of cheating. The student was clearly guilty, but there was no real proof that pointed to him above any other student. Corinne had been surprised to see the student wasn't smug about getting away with cheating. He had almost been sorry. Almost. There was still a flicker of quiet pride behind his eyes and it shone out to Corinne. That same light was shining out of Jostein's eyes that chilly afternoon. She watched and shuddered as the door closed behind the two burglars.

Even as she dialed 911, she could feel herself slipping further away. "Hello 911, what's your emergency?"

"We've been shot. We're at 451 Northern Border Street. Please send someone, quickly."

"How many are wounded?"

"Two— no, three. Three people shot."

Corinne could see the blood oozing from her leg, feeding a bitter, scarlet lake. She could feel her ears go fuzzy and her vision grow slowly grey. She didn't remember much else, though she knew she had been picked up and had ridden at some high speed to some hospital.

When she woke up, she saw she was in a hospital room with an IV plugged into her arm. She tried to get out of bed to go ask for help, but her leg wouldn't move. Looking down, Corinne realized it probably was broken. It was wrapped in such a way that it made her think of a cotton swab with an iron rod instead of a plastic one. Corinne could feel her heart revving up as she remembered both David and the old woman had been shot. As she reached for the call button, she heard a cheery voice float past the door.

"Excuse me!" she yelled, hoping someone would hear.

A nurse rushed in. "Is everything okay, Miss. Lemore?" she asked as she began to check the monitor beside her bed.

"The two people I came in with... the man and the old woman, are they okay?"

"David and Lois? Yes, they're fine." She replied. "Both lost a lot of blood, but they'll recover soon enough."

Corinne sighed and was silent until the nurse left, then she tried to get comfortable in a bed that was not her own. She turned and looked out the window. The sun was setting out over the nearby lake, spilling splashes of golden paint on the cerulean water. She could hear birds chirping over the sound of the machines in her hospital room and even saw one fly away into a nearby pine tree. She looked at her leg, then back at the lake. Corinne watched wave after wave of water caress the edge of the shore as though they were old lovers, gentle and kind. She smiled and fell back asleep.

## The Lament of Nicholas Chopper III

Oh, woe is me!  
I'm stuck, stuck as a stump!  
Though, I'd rather not think of stumps;  
my oil can right there,  
taunting me from its wooden throne,  
its condescending court of oaks standing like towers surrounding  
us both.  
I almost curse, but my lips are rusted shut;  
oh, how I wish I could curse this metal body of mine,  
the elements eroding away at its once lustrous form!  
Oh well, I've never been a fan of curses anyways  
ever since my axe was so hexed  
as to chop-chop-chop away at my person,  
forcing me to replace bit by bit with nut and bolt,  
until I was left a husk: a Tin Man!  
Though, all of Oz calls me the Tin Woodsman;  
after all, I am practically a work of art, standing here  
like a still-life, still alive.  
I suppose I am proud of my fanciful sway,  
all I can manage with the bit of oil left in me:  
a clumsy, regal dance, but with no one to share it!  
Ah, Nimmie Amee, my darling; if I could only see her again!  
However, I shall not return, not without a heart to love her with,  
for I am a lover before a ruler.  
Without a heart, though, I wonder if I can still call myself that,  
for what's a monarch without one?  
Why, to the Winkies, I would be a Tin Tyrant!  
A nice moniker, if I do say so myself, but one without honor!  
I even ponder if I still have a brain, conjuring such ideas,  
but then figure I must if I'm brainstorming like this so often.  
Ah, storms, caught out in the rain!  
This is no place for an emperor, albeit a humble one!



## Favor in Disaster

Charcoal masses hovering, interrupting the sun's cobalt backdrop. The sky's mischievous tears plotted against her, aiming their fall onto her silken tendrils. Her heavy garments swollen from the blameless rampage.

Yet, the sun focused its bright lemon hues on her; fluorescent primrose seeped through the cracks of her cultured smile. Her arms, outstretched brown silk limbs, filled the air's bosom.

The playful rain tickling its vice, instinctively melting innocence onto her skin, massaging natural life into her silken tendrils. Rust colored locks began to spring with supernatural precision in each coil, blooming from her scalp and trickling down to the perforated dips in her body; the wind, dancing in their majesty, blessing every swivel and curve.

Her heavy garments, dark and swollen from the blameless rampage, bloomed around her thin frame, blossoming somber denim into profound indigo;

Sharing wisdom with the prudent flora curdled beneath her, she knew,

God's favor was among her.

## Allen Ginsberg

America how you shed your scaly skin so  
defiantly and threw my neon kind aside.

*It is love, America.*

It was your intolerance  
driven from cavernous shallow hate  
that held away our wedding bands.

Show me, America, show me,  
Where the truth lies,  
the truth that me and my neon kind  
will burn in hell.

Lie down, America, Lie down,  
for your jubilant juvenile  
strolls over the world  
must have made you tired and irritable.  
We've given you life and joy, life and joy,  
don't you take your anger out on us.

Oh but god, America, god  
told you to cast your children  
from the table in a laughing fit,  
to get your homophobic fix.

Your children America, your children.  
Your Marijuana cigarette rolling royal high hipsters.  
Your rug laying loose drunk dopamine druggies.  
Your hidden high-rise faggot saintly sex fiends,  
your electric neglected neon kind.

As the heat was pulled from your first summer,  
and you rolled into the fall of your empire,  
you quickly realized giving each of your children care was all too  
queer.

## Home

The air is cold; warmer than the outside, but still, it is cold.  
This place smells of stale paint and sheetrock.  
Light colored pine is at my feet and barren white walls surround me.

No decorations are present, not even leftover nails in the walls.  
This place hasn't had a human dweller in years, just the hairy brown spiders in the corners.  
The only noise to be heard is blood moving past my eardrums. It is quiet.  
This place is empty and alone.

If I close my eyes hard enough, I see a different picture.  
I see my wife, dancing to a record, playing to my right. Her golden hair dances along with her.  
I feel the warmth of the fireplace to my left, as the bright orange glow lights up the room.  
I smell the salmon baking in the oven and taste the sweet white wine running down my throat.  
I open my eyes and the visions somehow remain. I see my future.  
I see light grey walls with colorful abstract tapestries hanging on them.  
I see bookshelves, barely holding all of the books, which display the colors of the rainbow.  
I see my blond headed children, barely able to walk, teasing our dog and grabbing her tail.  
I see the most expensive thing I've ever purchased, but I see a place to grow.

I see my home.

## Muted Screams

*silent...*

*quaking...*

*shivering...*

Whispers to her in the dark...

**Why do you wish to stay**

*calm...*

*cold...*

*empty...*

**You have nothing left**

*alone...*

*distant...*

*abandoned...*

Threats emanate destruction...

**Why do you fight, just give in**

Shadow hands reach up for her  
whispering... **It will be alright**

Calm at first but now violent...

**Take the pill, just give in to us**

Fighting at first, but now...

*broken...*

*slow...*

*sinking...*

*tired...*

She slips into silence...

*numb...*

*peace...*

(...)

## Andromeda

You can leave now, Perseus.  
You want to save me —  
but I don't care.  
I'm fine here, standing chained to  
these slick rocks.  
I see the beast,  
wrapped in sea salt mist and  
thrashing through churning waters.  
Each fang glistens,  
sharp enough to splinter  
rocks and chains and bones  
and me.  
Death will be quick —  
I won't feel it.  
Don't save me,  
please.  
I don't want to go home  
to the monsters  
who defaced my smile.

## The Penitent

Forgive me Father  
for I have sinned  
it has been seven days  
since my last confession  
and seven days before that  
and seven days before that  
I am a good wife, Father  
I never orgasm  
while my husband has me  
in the missionary position

I kiss my children  
and their father  
when he leaves for work  
and they leave for school  
(the ones who are old enough)  
and I rock this baby on my hip  
stare out the window  
and dream of killing them all in their sleep

Forgive me Father  
for I have sinned  
I hate my nosey neighbor  
and I am dying to fuck  
anyone who will  
touch me in places  
that aren't motherly

I have thrown this child out the window  
smashed her head into the pavement  
in my mind  
while she nursed at my breast  
my milk  
the richest thing she'll know  
in her life  
and it's not her fault  
and not mine  
maybe my father's  
or her father's father's

Forgive me Father  
I just don't have a prayer  
anymore  
for these tired stories  
the perpetual penances  
the kneeling  
and begging  
for worthiness  
sitting face to face with you  
our worlds split by this decorative wooden slat  
me telling you my awful secrets  
you pretending not to be aroused  
at my heaving breasts and my confessions of  
masturbation

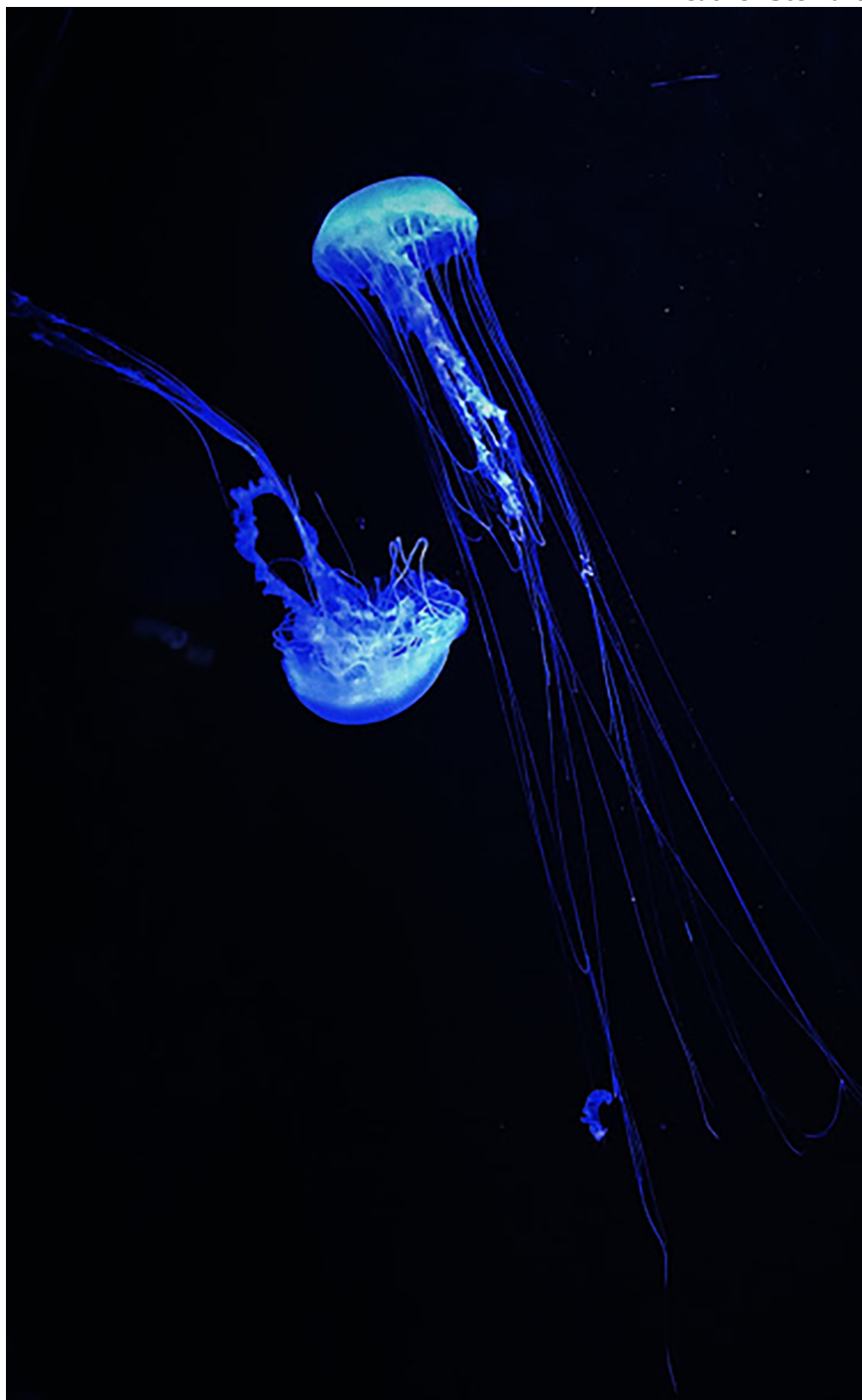
Forgive me Father  
forgive my wretched family  
but at least we try, Father  
we show up every blessed Sunday  
with our faces scrubbed  
and our rags of clothes  
and my children make the most noise  
running through the pews  
scattering the prayer missals, screaming  
and laughing in the faces of the saints and  
the Virgin Mary  
but they're the most dedicated  
little priests and nuns in training

I hope they learn to orgasm.

























## Dandelion Kisses and Asphalt Dreams

I sent you dandelion kisses, breath cascading, swallowed by the air; I hope you get them.

Watching the magenta sky transform to sour peach flames, as the sun reached down to kiss the cobalt sea, I wonder if you can see it to.

You are the queen of the skies, whether cerulean or cobalt or gray, in my mind. Your life is a divine playdate, I know it. Every now and then, the clouds show me your face, plump, just as I remember.

But, I still have asphalt dreams of your temporal presence, like your tiny fingers, oblong and kissed by God, enveloping mine, assured brown eyes staring back at mine, despairing.

Those images are speckled dust in a black room, floating into the abyss of hopefulness and faith in God's message.

## Side Peace

I would risk it all for you because you are a priority  
I would risk it all for you because I absolutely need you in my life  
to survive and I need you after a long and horrible day  
I need you  
I'm willing to drop all of those people I call my friends just to have  
you  
Better yet, I'll even drop my boyfriend of two years that's been  
stressing me out for you  
Can't you see?  
It's because of them we can't be together  
Because I'm so stupid and too clueless too realize what's in front of  
me. I've been neglecting you and for that I am sorry  
But even more sorry for not choosing you over them  
And not realizing that I am a gem  
And that I deserve everything but them  
For you, I'll cut off the ones that take advantage and take me for  
granted  
Because all I want is you and whatever I want better believe I'm  
going to have it  
I deserve you after everything that I've been through  
To get to you, I'll do whatever it takes  
I'll become so unapologetic I won't even consider it a mistake  
Leaving it all behind without a care in the world gets me so  
aroused  
And I can't wait for us to begin our new life together  
I'm going forward with this and not looking back because I yearn  
for you  
Without you, I am insane  
Without you, I am in pain  
You make me feel so good that all I want to do is call out your  
name

Peace.

Peace.

Peace.

So good to have peace.

Without you, there was stress and strain

As I did so much for people who wouldn't do the same

Peace.

You're all I need

So, no more sneaking around

No more denying the fact that we're perfect for each other

Let's be together

No more being my side peace

## Acidity

His silhouette stood as no contrast to the murky gray horizon as he sat at the edge of the pier; he's there every Sunday, after all. If it's for me, he never admits it. Stepping forwards, the old planks of the dock creaking beneath my feet, I went to take my place beside him and sat. "Anything bite yet?"

The old man is beside me, holding a fishing pole, the line drawn down to dangle in the murky silver waters below. Reaching behind him, a rubber-gloved hand fumbles about in his cooler for something I already know is there: a frozen fish, which he then tossed down into the onyx abyss. "They will." He responded in a faint wheeze: an old man's voice for an old man.

"And why's that?" I'd never asked before because I had never cared. Now, about to be thrown out onto the street, I had started to take notice of everything beyond the door's threshold. Even so, my thumbs fiddled with one another impatiently, hands clasped in front of me in a cold, jittery sweat. I try to focus on something else, lowering my gaze to my stained yellow Converse. I could see the man wore his usual darkened, muddied rubber boots, along with his Sunday's best: a pair of fishing overalls with a checkerboard flannel button-up beneath it. I had to focus on something. This was taking too long.

"'cause that's what bait is for, boy. Now hush up; you're scaring 'er away." I was already tired of his shit; my name is Lucas, not "boy". But he had something I needed, so I did: I hushed up and thought to myself. I wondered where the mud on his boots had come from; it rained so often here that the sky was a permanent shade of binding gray, a looming haze of pollution and heavy clouds. However, it hadn't yet rained today, so I figured that, after looking to his truck, he must have come from out of town to fish at this dock. The crimson paint might as well have been brown with how dirtied it was with dust and mud, but it kept moving—every Sunday it came around, at least. Because that's when he fished, and that's when we made our deal.

"It's a frozen fish," I couldn't help but say. "What do you expect to catch with that?"

"If them's livin' ones down there are dumb enough to get that close to a hook, then they's dumb enough to fall for a frozen fish." His dry answer almost left me laughing. The old man couldn't have been more than sixty, with a face like an old oak: wrinkled with creases, painted with a beard of white moss. His facial hair almost reminded me of a pure cloud, rare in this city, but it more reminded me that all I could manage was some peach fuzz. His eyes were sunken with thought, as if drowning, and a deep brown; though, it was hard to tell from under the shade of his hat: a crimson cap with some obscure logo of a fish driving a truck with some words long faded away. That's what made me laugh, even if I saw it every Sunday. Because he'd never catch anything here.

I only stitched my sides when I saw him reach into his pocket; we had a deal, he and I. Recovering, I straightened, rummaging through the pockets of my torn blue jeans; there were only three things in my pocket: a pack of cigarettes, some lint, and a lighter. Oh, and a few coins. Lucky me. I withdrew the pack just as the senior brandished a translucent green bottle, white ovals jingling about inside, like clappers in a bell. It was like Christmas: we made the exchange. He shifted a cigarette past his barren lips, and I swear I could hear his jaw creak like the pier. But I didn't care; I popped open the bottle, downed a few pills, and carefully put it in my pocket.

There used to be three of us here: me, the old man, and Reggie. It was through him that I had met the elder at my side, and it was through him that I got my fix; he was our intermediary, taking my cigarettes to give them to the wheezing geezer and taking the old man's pills to give them to me. I was sure that Reggie wasn't even his real name, that he had jacked that name from an informant or drug-dealer from any movie in the eighties, but he seemed like the

type of guy to threaten me with a serrated switchblade in place of just learning how to take a joke like I could. Plus, he and I would only meet whenever he deemed worthy, as if he truly were trying to replicate the agenda of some sort of mobster despite practically being nothing but a delivery boy. The young man was short and lithe despite his age, with pale skin, wiry blond hair, and bugged blue eyes; though, despite looking as if he could collapse at any moment, I doubt he had ever done any drugs. Well, I didn't think he did any until his face showed in the obituary. Out of some cross between respect and apathy, I gleaned over whatever his true name might have been, passing right on to the cause of death: "passed away suddenly." To me, that meant suicide; to the old man, it meant it was time to meet me, face-to-face where the both of us would meet the delivery boy: at this pier. That was months ago.

"How's the 'missus'?" I asked, letting the image of that hunched, skinny boy slip from my mind to linger like my heated breath in the chilled, late autumn air.

"Don't like me smokin'." The old man responded only after I took the liberty to light the cigarette for him. It seemed like he really was trying to ignore me, instead focusing on the line, even after the frozen fish had probably already sunken to the bottom of the shallow waters. I remember when I had first met the man; he hadn't changed much since then, but then again, old dogs barely do. I never even thought much on his delusional actions; after all, with his age, senility had no doubt taken its hold on him. Not that I cared; I almost found it funny, in fact. He had never told me his name, so I would joke to myself, saying he had probably forgotten it; I never bothered asking, just as he never troubled himself learning mine. So humorless, I'd at first wondered was he a businessman, while Reggie had once wildly theorized that he was an undercover cop, but we had both been wrong. He was a butcher, so even if he was chucking frostbitten fish into the sea below, he must have

been doing something right to have still been in business in this sullen place. But that didn't matter to me, because we had done our business, like we did every Sunday morning, almost religiously. And it didn't matter now, because the following day he was found and arrested for slitting his wife's throat, gutting her like a fish, and dumping her off the side of the pier.

I licked my teeth in the bathroom mirror; they were still faintly yellow, even after I had brushed my teeth after a smoke, a pill, and some projectile vomiting. They stung, too, when I tried to sink them into a orange to freshen my breath even further. Claire knew I smoked and took "antidepressants" that weren't prescribed to me, which would explain why, when I rose my head from the sink, I could see her reflection as well: leaning against the doorway behind me, arms folded, and her expression lifeless, stuck somewhere between a scowl and a pitying smile. After all, my wife was also my therapist, even before we had gotten married, but soon she would be neither of those. "It stings because of the orange, Luke."

"What?"

"Yeah, the orange; it's a citrus fruit, and it'll sting your mouth a bit after brushing your teeth because of their acidity. Toothpaste is a base, so it's better if they don't mix." She continued on callously, as if educating a child she knew wasn't listening. I wanted her to leave the room, to leave me alone, but to stay as close as possible. I'd started taking the pills for her, after all, but still, she couldn't appreciate the effort I made to hold the marriage together, or even try herself. A heat rose in my stomach, but it only settled as a sickness that made me want to throw up again.

"Since when were you a chemist?" I tried to joke, lowering my head to the faucet to run some cool water into my mouth, as if it could flush that stinging sensation out and keep the bile rising in my throat at bay.

"Since I actually took a chemistry class. At college." She spoke matter-of-factly. I winced slightly at those two final words, as if Claire had been using my ego as a dartboard and had just gotten a bullseye. She continued to button up her blouse and straighten her slacks, turning about to leave me there, trying to wash out the bad taste in my mouth, just like she was. Lifting my head, I let the water dribble past my lips and into the sink, eyeing her back in the mirror as she straightened her chestnut bob-cut as best she could without a reflection to consult with. She had wanted a divorce; I imagine she had gotten tired of my shit, just as I had gotten tired of her pity and looking down on me. My hands felt clammy as I gripped onto the sink, catching my breath coarsely as I shifted on my feet to catch my balance. The nameless pills the nameless old man had given me... I heard on the news that the man hadn't taken them, and they used a word I didn't know: lithium. Used to cure depression, like I had, but it was bad for me. Used to cure bipolarism, like the old man had, but it wound up badly for his wife. Because she didn't like him smoking, I figured.

Just like my wife. My knuckles rasped against porcelain sink with low thuds, no doubt leaving my knuckles blue and cold, but I barely felt them. I had tried as hard as I could. The medication that she had prescribed to me just weren't strong enough; if they were, then why was she still leaving me? I had taken them for her, tried to hold as many jobs as I could for her, and, now, if the police cared enough to try to find out what happened to all the old man's pills if he hadn't been taking them, I might even go to prison for her. She helped me, she loved me, and now she's going to toss me off the side of the pier, even after I've frozen over; how she found me. I opened the mirror door, peering inside; the razor blades seemed to give off a darling sheen. After all, all I could manage was peach fuzz, so it wasn't as if I used them. I pulled one free and held it so firmly in my grasp that I was sure my palm bled. Yet I didn't care; I didn't care



for much, but I did care for her. I glared at her, stumbling against the doorframe, disoriented, but with the stainless steel drawn and brandished in blood. She was going to leave me here to sink to the floor. I called out to her, lifting the blade; I didn't even realize tears had began rolling from the edges of my eyes and cascading down my cheeks to drop to the carpeted floor like rain, but I knew what I had to do because I wouldn't catch anything. Anything but her.

## Mind Murder

Concocted in my head,  
that's how all things start.  
Revealing insecurities from underneath,  
the blanket is ripped back.  
My heart wakes up startled  
like a sleepy child,  
realizes it hurt, or is it?  
I am told I am not ok  
that I'm depressed, shaken  
but nobody is there in the morning  
when the sheets are ripped away,  
collapsing in a white parachute at my feet.  
It is my hands that expose me.  
They try to claw at my forehead,  
peel back my scalp to keep  
as their Indian trophy.  
I fight back with memories,  
though part of me wonders why,  
why I don't let them kill my mind.

## Acid Tongue

Coil your tongue  
Strike at your own words  
Constrict the rhetoric  
What's under your claws?  
The steel of the morgue  
Is cold as your blood.  
Why do you try  
To heat your insides?  
Why don't we drain you,  
And freeze the whole city?

## When They Spoke of Love

Oh, you honey-tongued prophet,  
What is this I taste in my mouth?  
I am drunk off your touch and craving heaven.  
And you, you are golden,  
Lit from behind like some holy thing.  
Are you even real?  
If I dared, would my fingers slip right through you,  
Like light, like a dream?  
When Moses came down from the mountain he spoke of you  
And of this love, this love,  
Of our never-ending love.  
And David sang of your lips,  
Full of the promise of G-d.  
How full they were, how inviting.  
I think you will be my end.  
For my heart is too full and I have always felt too much.  
And you, you make it ache  
Like some horrid thing in my chest  
Compared to your light, your light.  
Your endless light.

## Letha Ann Holmes

This morning my pillow was drenched in tears,  
I tried to piece together my miserable dream.  
Ain't got much sleep since my ole man went missin.  
I hear tell of negro men and women's bodies stiff and icy,  
hanging from the moss clad tree limbs  
that intertwine and point their wretched fingers towards nowhere.  
And brown bodies floatin down river  
like the logs at Tucker's lumber mill.  
Some of em, I'm told,  
are mutilated and scattered along the railroad tracks like confetti,  
claimed only by unmarked graves.

"What solace is there for my babies?"  
John Henry, Jr., at seventeen, is old enough to get the cows to  
pasture  
and slop the hogs fore his trek to school.  
My jubilant baby girl, Lindy's pastime is collecting daffodils and  
dandelions,  
while singin her papa's favorite tune, "*You are My Sunshine.*"  
I won't acquaint none of em with this sorrow,  
of which my kinship is bona fide.  
My young ins won't know of my ailing heart  
as long as God's bright sun anoints me with radiant hope,  
and breathes life into my glorious dreams of our family reunion.

## The Invitation

You are cordially invited  
to never see me again.  
You are welcome  
to stay away from my family  
And it would be most appreciated  
if you ignore my wedding.  
I would be honored  
if you kept my name out of your mouth  
And it will be my pleasure  
to keep yours out of mine.  
Please RSVP  
regrets only.

## Benched

Here I sit, along with her on this warm, metal bench,  
waiting patiently for our ride to arrive.  
And it's here where we lose track of time,  
lose track of our problems,  
and lose track of our minds.  
The blazing sun bears down on us like a curse, a heavy weight on  
our shoulders,  
but she smiles, saying it feels nice  
and that makes me feel nice.  
She looks like a mirage: shimmering, dancing in the sunlight,  
a gleaming figure of which to follow, even if I can't touch her.  
And, as we sit here, I ponder what she thinks:  
she's told me what she wants to do.  
To make art, she told me, and it's what I believe.  
It's what I know--what we both know.  
It's a thought that makes the both of us happy,  
as we sit here, losing track of time,  
losing track of our problems.  
She loves art, and I love to see her happy,  
but I can't follow her anymore.  
I can't follow her down these tracks she's set for herself:  
the ones she believes have been rolled out for her like a red carpet.  
Because, she tells me she wants to be a pediatrician instead:  
to work with children.  
To see them smile, to make them feel better.  
But, most of all, because it's a steady road.  
A reliable one.  
A well-crafted track that I know she didn't choose.  
And it's not mine.  
And the mirage is left only a blotted blur now.  
So here we sit, waiting for our ride, as we lose track of time  
and I lose track of her.

## Divorce, Never! Murder, Maybe...

Oh, the Glory of Old Macon. And who would have thought such misandry in the heart of the city? It was 1947, still the days of the war generation. It had only been several years since the ending of World War II when many women had learned a bit of independence. Just as it was announced that the war had ended in 1945, a Sunday afternoon in Macon, Georgia, soldiers shot craps, drank heavily and invested their time in shenanigans at not having to go overseas and fight for Uncle Sam. But, the women of the city were just beginning to get the fortitude to stand up to those bastards. The lovely Anjette Donovan would soon become the bride of Benjamin Franklin Lyles, Jr.

He had been in the Army and certainly he was not expecting to return to Macon to find a woman of independence waiting. Perhaps the American Government never should have used "Rosie the Riveter" as propaganda for the war. Now the women knew they could be whatever they wanted. Prior to that, they had been content to drink tea, play bridge and bake tea cakes. The year was 1947, freedom, industry and female independence was the remnant of the war-torn period of "The Good War". That's a strange title for one of the bloodiest conflicts of human history. Perhaps the history of Hitler himself spoke to the new Mrs. Lyles. After all, they had both learned a strange religion consisting of the Occult and Root Doctors.

Known as the Biltmore Apartments in the 1940s and 1950s and located across the street from Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, Ben Lyles and his wife moved into the Biltmore Apartments the year of 1947, when they were married. Mr. Lyles' new wife would take up another residence and that was the one that would lead to their demise. She loved the spotlight and more so, the charm available from other men when she visited the family restaurant and chatted at the patron's tables. The family restaurant was Lyles Restaurant



on Mulberry. Her charisma, charm, and personality soon made her a favorite among many lawyers, judges and politically connected folk as she charmed her way into the hearts of all she served. And oh how she loved that restaurant. Moreover, she loved the status it brought her.

Her husband's health began to fail him in 1951 and he decided to sell the restaurant. Perhaps it was the Rheumatic fever from while he was in the war and perhaps it was too much alcohol. Anjette became infuriated, and the arguments began to spew. He became sicker and sicker and as he weakened, Anjette whispered. She was whispering to an old "Root Doctor". Root doctors were not really medical in nature, but there were those that believed that had more power than medical doctors. Gullah called Gee Chee in Macon was alive and well in Macon Georgia and Anjette had located herself a Root Doctor. Not to be named here by special request, he used to own a retail market in downtown Macon and he practiced his spells and potions in a warehouse next to the store. He used to paint rocks red and wrap them in cloth and tie them with jute string. He told his practitioners to speak to the rock every morning with things like, "I will not be jealous today" or "I am a beautiful person", things that psychologists now call positive affirmations. Little did the practitioners know that those were changes in their own mindset and not power in the rocks.

Well, the old man Anjette visited mixed up spells and potions and when Ben Lyles sold the restaurant, Anjette would have her vengeance. The older man I interviewed happened to live in Macon his entire life and was born in an area known to locals as Payne City. The Root Doctor happened to be a distant cousin of his and he learned from that distant cousin that Anjette was known to practice the Hoodoo.

Well, old Ben Lyles became sicker and sicker and despite the efforts of the medical doctors, they could never learn what was ailing him. He died in 1952, but not before blessing Anjette with two lovely daughters. Anjette and her daughters would move in with her parents, William and Jetta Donovan at 2790 Vineville Avenue in Macon and there Anjette would save every penny she earned to buy herself a restaurant. Oh, and the insurance money came in pretty handy as well. Maybe old Ben had served his purpose after all. Anjette was 5 years older than Ben and always believed herself smarter. He never should have sold that restaurant without consulting with her. She knew some of Macon's most powerful and could have gotten more money. But, if all the world is a stage, why on earth would she want to sell her little stage? For a woman who could stretch the behaviors of women in a small Southern town with flirts and short skirts, well she damn well knew better than him what was needed to keep everything going. Once again, there he went acting all independent. Her misandry grew even stronger.

Now a widow with two small children, she soon got herself a new restaurant in Macon, Georgia. She was able to pinch pennies and buy back the original restaurant for approximately \$12,000. She must have been embittered by that carousing Ben Lyles selling the restaurant to fund his gambling habits. Once again she was on the top of the world, serving, chatting and preparing meals for the finest of Macon's streets. Little did they know, she was from the true underbelly of her small town.

Shortly after re-opening the restaurant, a new man came into her life. Mr. "Buddy", Joe Neal, Gabbert was a pilot for Capitol Airways. She charmed Buddy and within months they would jet off and come back as husband and wife. It was spring of 1955. Only several months after he married Anjette, he fell deathly ill as well. Stricken with seeming grief, Anjette told friends, "I guess he will up

and die as well". She was so attentive to Buddy during his hospital stays. She would sit for long hours into the night and minister what little food and drink he could stand. Ant poison must taste pretty good. He was transferred to the Dublin Veteran's Hospital and Anjette did not leave his side. He was pronounced dead on December 2, 1955.

After Buddy died, Anjette gathered the girls and bought a house in Northwoods Subdivision. She purchased a split level home with 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms on Pinewood Drive. It wasn't long before Anjette had the town buzzing with innuendos when she started dating Buddy's boss from the airlines. She went to the Bibb County Courthouse and had her name changed back to Lyles from Gabbert. I suppose she wanted the same last name as her children. The elder Mrs. Lyles, Ben's mother was very lonely and spent most of her time at the restaurant with Anjette and her children and it wasn't long before Mrs. Julia moved in with Anjette and the girls. That mistake would cost her the very life in her body.

Anjette found enough records while moving Mrs. Julia in to know she had some money stashed away. Anjette wanted it all upon her death and tried to get the elder Mrs. Lyles to make a will. She refused and reasonably so. I guess she thought if she didn't make the will, she would be safe. After all, death and money seemed to follow the young widow.

Anjette started whispering again to the black candle and sure enough, Mrs. Lyles was soon hospitalized with the same delirious illness the others had before they died. "There must be a horrible virus in the Lyles' house" the town's people buzzed. After all, people keep getting sick there and go to the hospital to die. Now, that ant poison that Anjette carried in her handbag was necessary because you know that you can't allow ants to take over a restaurant. Whispering to a black candle and a little help from arsenic was all that it

took for those around her to become sick. Anjette did not leave her mother-in-law's side and ministered to her every need while she was in the hospital.

Surely enough, the elder Mrs. Lyles was soon interred next to her husband and Anjette had "little Ben" exhumed and re-interred next to his mother and father in Wadley, Georgia. Anjette presented a will in the probate court of Bibb County, Georgia. Oh, but remember, Mrs. Lyles would not execute a will. Mrs. Short skirts and flashy flirts was good to go again, but only for a bit.

Soon her eldest child, now nine years old, Marcia would fall ill to the same dreaded "virus". Anjette would tell those all around her that she was guessing it wouldn't be long for Marcia. An elder Macon individual that used to teach Marcia at the Tinsley School tried to encourage the little girl who was fearful while she was sick. She explained to her that worst case she would be in heaven with her daddy, Little Ben, her grandmother, and grandfather.

The coroner became a bit suspicious now and ordered an autopsy upon the little girl's demise. ARSENIC. The verdict was in. Exhumation was ordered for all the others, Little Ben Lyles, his mother, Mrs. Julia, and also Buddy Gabbert. Low and behold, they had all been poisoned. An autopsy had been performed on Buddy when he died but, not knowing what to look for, the arsenic had been overlooked. It would take tissue samples from all the victims to confirm that indeed, they were poisoned.

Anjette was indicted for murder, but only for the little girl. Upon entering her house, they found black curtains, black candles, voodoo potions, and multiple occult artifacts. They also found a piece of paper that had multiple signatures for Julia Lyles and indeed the will Anjette had presented for probate had been forged. Most of those attorneys she had rubbed shoulders with in Macon refused to defend her because, at the end of the day, "they all believed

she was guilty as hell. Their biggest fear was that Anjette would start to name the names of all those she had bedded while at the restaurant." No evidence proved she was a little slut but tongues certainly wagged to the contrary. One of the local rag papers headlined "From Black to White, Overnight", talking about Anjette's hair color. That beautiful black hair would turn a sterling platinum.

She was tried in 1958, and it wasn't yet legal in Bibb County to speak directly to the jury on a defendant's behalf. So she wrote a statement for her attorney to read. "I have killed no one", the note read. Cumulatively, the evidence was damning. Anjette was found guilty of the little girl's death and sentenced to death. She would never die, however, by the hand of the government of Georgia. Those same judges she had cavorted with could not politically pull the trigger and they impaneled a team of doctors who would find her criminally insane. She would spend the last of her days in Central State Asylum in Milledgeville. Poor little Anjette was escorted regularly for hair and nail appointments.

Anjette died in the asylum at the age of fifty-two from what the coroner called heart failure. Many around Macon believe she got what she gave. It is still told to this day that Ant Poison caught up with Anjette as well. Many believe that she was given Arsenic in her food trays. Root doctors were of no assistance to her then. She just faded into the jaded history of Macon, Georgia.

## Broken Condition

The good times, the bad times, the struggles, the victories,

The losses, the gains, the heartache and pain, the sorrow, and days when I had thought that I didn't even want to see tomorrow, You were there.

Although I'm not worthy and although we both know I'll never be perfect, You shower me with blessings as if I really deserve it.

But, God I don't think you quite get it.

Oh, God I cuss and I fuss and I moan and I groan when things don't go my way, I sin, sometimes I lose faith, I have negative thoughts, I'm jealous, I'm selfish, I'm reckless, I complain, and sometimes I ask myself am I even sane?

It takes a God like You to love someone like me who's imperfect, flawed, and in broken condition and yet every day for twenty years I've been rewarded with the privilege of existence.

The crazy thing about it is, sometimes when I wake up in the morning with a negative attitude, I'm so focused on the negativity rather than showing gratitude and yet, you continue to bless me.

Oh man, I'm telling you it takes a God like You to love someone like me who's imperfect, flawed, and in broken condition and yet everyday for twenty years I'm still winning.

I'm still winning even when I lose because I know that miracles are something that You do.

I'm filled with so much gratitude because You love me more than I love myself, You're there for me when there's no one else, and forgiving like no other.

But, I'm humble and I won't ever take You for granted because having You in my life is such an advantage.

It takes a God like You to love someone like me who can complain, is sometimes vain, imperfect, flawed, and in broken condition and yet everyday for twenty years, I've been rewarded with the privilege of existence.

## Happiness

Happiness is easy, not hard.  
Hard is when you are unhappy.  
Happiness is easy with the one,  
Like life is with money.

Happiness comes to those in love,  
With feelings of hope and optimism.  
Happiness is vulnerability,  
Putting trust in your person.

Without hesitation, your person is there,  
In the midst of chaos and anywhere.  
Happiness is a friend and a lover,  
To take care of you and steal the cover.



## Priceless

I sit on my shelf  
among other women, longing  
to be picked.  
Hair and dresses painted on,  
perfection clings to us  
as tightly as we hold on to it.  
With price tags strung from our arms,  
arms pale, tan, pink,  
all dream of being picked,  
unbound from ropes of slavery  
to our doubts.  
My porcelain begs for attention,  
for admiration of my detailed design,  
to be cherished  
like the blooming bouquet I hold.  
I hope of one day getting new flowers  
from someone who won't leave a scratch,  
who will treat me like a delicacy,  
the glass doll that I am.  
He will leave me glistening,  
not broken like the other girl on my shelf,  
knocked away by the careless teenage boy  
who didn't appreciate the artwork,  
the time it took to make her into who she was.  
Now she lays, broken.  
I stay on my shelf, hoping to be taken  
for what I am worth.

## On Pierre Auguste Cot's "Springtime"

Swing me  
pressed into your chest  
across sunlit leaves  
out over the stream  
and back again  
your strength  
like the hardwood  
and I am  
your wildflower vine  
A breeze heavy with  
the heady musk of opened flowers  
spins into spirals  
the stretched sheer gauze  
of my spring gown  
cloaks nothing from the view  
of the deer  
hiding in the trees  
or the frogs beneath us,  
in their chorus of mating songs  
Back and forth we glide  
the lace over my breasts  
billowing open  
like the yellow buttercups  
which sway beneath our feet  
exposing tender blossoms  
two rosebuds  
pink and peach  
The stream is our melody  
a pair of painted butterflies  
dance drunk above our warm heads  
I could say, swing me

and make you think that  
maybe I am  
hard to reach  
or point to the flitting dancers  
and say they're you and me  
But what I really mean is  
touch me  
Take me into your chest  
here in this grass  
slide your fingers beneath the lace edge  
of my gown  
and discover why I've led you here

## War Town? No, Bore Town

If there's one thing I've gotten used to in my life, it's the strange look people give me when I tell them I'm from Warner Robins, Georgia. I always hope that when people ask me where I'm from, I can just tell them I'm from Georgia and leave it at that, but that would be too convenient. So then I have to also mention what city I'm from and explain that it is quite literally bum-fuck nowhere.

Warner Robins was founded in 1942, being named after General Augustine Warner Robins. It was made into a town in 1943 and into a city in 1956. The city is an expansion of Robins Air Force Base, which was built in 1942. The expansion has attracted many people over the years.

The amount of time my family has been here is baffling. My grandparents, both sides, spent their lives in this city, and my parents have as well. Obviously, I have as well at this point, and to be honest, it is something that I want to change sooner rather than later. At worst, the city can be described as "boring" and can be described as "nice" at best. That's it though, just nice. There is no real excitement to be found in this city; nothing interesting ever happens. That may be fine for some people, but not for me.

Warner Robins is about as suburban as it gets. There are no tall buildings in site, and the busiest parts of the city are nothing compared to one like Atlanta. Going down Russell Parkway, one of the busiest roads in Warner Robins, one can see how truly bland and uninteresting the city is. Gas stations and restaurants galore, but not much outside of that. But, do you want to know one of the worst parts about living in a city this small and dull? It has got way too many fucking people in it. Driving down Watson Boulevard or Russell Park between the hours of five and six pm is nothing short of an absolute nightmare. Every red light is backed up, and there is virtually no space between the cars. Need to switch lanes? Yeah, good fucking luck with that. Maybe, just maybe a kind soul will show some mercy and hit the brakes for half a second to let you through. Don't count on it though. Especially if you think someone

driving a pickup truck will cut you some slack; now THAT is a pipe dream if I've ever seen one.

I'm a fan of mild weather; I feel like most people feel the same way. If Warner Robins was a person, I can't say it would feel the same way though. Residents of the city typically need to be prepared for one of two things upon leaving their house. They should be prepared to step outside and immediately start dripping sweat, or they need to start taking measures to prevent frostbite. I'm exaggerating of course, but my point still stands. If one likes mild comfort, then Warner Robins is not the city for them. Not to mention the humidity that is best friends with the heat, making our lives even more uncomfortable somehow. Warner Robins has quite the military presence, and I don't just mean the American military. I'm talking about the army of gnats that are based here. They are a dedicated collective, not hesitating to fly into battle .002 seconds after a person leaves their house. Their determination is admirable. In all seriousness though, fuck gnats.

When looking for a word to describe in a nutshell what Warner Robins is all about, I can at least tell you what word I would definitely NOT use, and that word is "unique." The architecture of many of the buildings is generally uninteresting and basic. The public schools are a good example of this. Inside and out, they all look the same to me. Just a drab looking brick building that barely catches the eye of anyone. Even the insides of the schools look the exact same in terms of structure. There are some different colors sure, but I always felt like I was in the same building with a re-skin throughout my public school education.

I actually find it funny that parents and authority figures are surprised at all when teenagers turn to recreational drug use to have fun. Why the hell would anyone be surprised at that? What does anyone do for fun in Warner Robins, Georgia? Teenagers aren't old enough to go to bars, so that isn't an option. Rigby's Entertainment Complex is mildly amusing for a short time, but then

what? All teenagers have to do is either go out to eat over and over again or sit in their rooms and twiddle their thumbs. Of fucking course they're going to turn to recreational drugs; they've gotta find some way to kill the boredom.

Wanna know the peak of excitement in Warner Robins? It's high school football. Now, there's nothing wrong with high school football; it's quite the spectacle and is plenty exciting. But, when it's the peak of your city's excitement, that's telling of just how little goes on in this place. I can't speak for others, but I find it a little depressing that the best thing you can do in this city is sit on some uncomfortable, metal bleachers on a Friday evening, watching teenagers play football. I can't blame people though. This city is much too small to have any kind of professional football team, and there isn't any college football to be found here either. Georgia is very much a football state, so we have to get our fix somehow. Again, it is just depressing to me that there is nothing more exciting, in a general sense, going for this city.

The Georgia National Fair is easily the most overrated thing about Georgia. Walking in, one can see vendors after vendor with overpriced and unhealthy food to sell. Spending seven dollars on a lemonade? No fucking thanks. But people buy into it anyway. Why? Because a little novelty goes a long fucking way in this town. That's why this little, dinky fair attracts so much attention with its below average production value. If you put this fair next to a real amusement park like Disney World, then it's like Kobe Bryant playing a game of one on one with an eight-year-old with no arms. What is there to do at the fair? Here's what we've got. You can wait in line for at least thirty minutes for a ride that will last, at most, three minutes. Worth? I think not. You can fork over a metric fuck ton of cash for some greasy fair food that will ultimately leave you feeling sick and full of regret. You can spend money to play the obviously rigged fair games that you have a zero percent chance of actually winning. When I was younger and still full of naive hope,

there was one game that I played every single year. The object of the game was to throw a little yellow ring and make it land perfectly around a bottle top. Winning such a game would have won me an electric motorcycle, and boy did I want it. Did I win? No, obviously not. Good on you for wasting your money on young me, Mom and Dad.

If you're a fan of roads constantly being under construction, then I highly suggest packing your bags and moving down here to partake in the "fun" as soon as possible. Here's a fun fact about myself: I am not a fan of said construction. I'm really not sure which aspect of it I dislike more. Is it the roads constantly changing the structure and throwing me off? Or perhaps, it's how it just adds to the already annoying traffic problem this city has. At this point, I'm almost positive that Highway 96 has been under construction since dinosaurs were still roaming the planet. Maybe the roads will be finished by the year 3000? A boy can dream. Until then, I'll just think of the constant cones littering the streets as part of the "charm" Warner Robins has to offer.

Since I've spent the last three and a half pages giving this awful city the earful it deserves, I do actually have something positive to say for once, and that's that there is plenty of green in this city. In other words, nature is definitely not dead here in good old Warner Robins. There are plenty of wooded areas around to explore, and residents of the city frequently use them for hunting. Hunting was never my thing, but I did my fair share of exploring when I was just a lad. Feeling the leaves and twigs crunch beneath my feet was a nice feeling, and breathing in the fresh air was a delight. Thinking about the Spring and Summer days I spent with my brothers messing around in the woods gets the nostalgia rolling. It's not much though. If hunting isn't something that you're all that into, then I promise you that the nature will lose its charm pretty quickly.

Let's not get things twisted here; The Museum of Aviation is way past cool. It's easily one of the biggest draws of Warner Robins,

and the things it houses are nothing to sneeze at. When I was in elementary school, I went on multiple field trips to visit the museum. I was in awe of everything in it. However, this doesn't really change anything about Warner Robins as a whole. The museum is interesting to visit once or twice, but it's not something exciting that you can really do on a semi-regular basis. It is a novelty and a temporary one at that.

The environment of Warner Robins is nothing to write home about. I'm sure you've seen what an inviting, relaxing environment looks like in pictures or on television. It looks like a place where you can comfortably sit outside and get some homework done, hang out with some friends, or just chill by yourself. A good example is the outside of a nice little coffee shop, circular tables everywhere for people to sit down and relax. Warner Robins though? Environments like that aren't exactly common here. Buildings have a very simple nature about them, and not in a good way, but in a sort of bare bones kind of way. Some of them can even be described as almost "run down." Trash litters the ground, and there is no effort made to make people feel welcomed or invited. Honestly, the only places you can find inviting environments are neighborhoods such as The Vinings. Good fucking luck moving into such a neighborhood though, considering that houses going up for sale there is a rarity.

The only reason anyone would ever want to live in Warner Robins, Georgia is for love or family ties. What else would keep a person in such a place other than that? We are constantly searching for ways to kill time, and we will latch onto anything that is at least slightly interesting to try to kill the mind-numbing boredom with. Overall, Warner Robins has nothing to offer besides uncomfortable weather and an endless cycle of boredom.



## Room

We would all share diesel cigarette dreams  
with hopes that sprung from our asphalt lungs.  
We used to sit and stare at  
the lights in lines like rosy clementines  
or at hills of hilarious red poppies painted on the walls.  
It was our black blue barracks of  
reckless hot-pink napalm nights  
and depressed nitrogen mornings.  
All in this square angled Angel of a room.  
It is cut wide open with memories like ghosts  
calling through the ribby windows and half dead hanging doors.  
They bang their fists on the skinny starving floors  
and scrape their fingers on the cracked canyon boards.  
But now we're gasping for air because our days  
of screaming at the billboards of our youth have worn  
our steel vocal chords to tobacco rust.  
We've grown tired and our sighs have taken  
the place of screaming.  
Now the upholstery is sagging off the couches  
and the unhealthy heaps of cigarette buds  
have wrapped their spiraling fingers around our throats.

Lay some flowers in the middle of the room  
and burn some incense by the window.

## Downtown

I've never liked the "downtown" of anywhere, really.  
But here I am, tense,  
hands firmly gripping the wheel before me, my back pressed  
against the tanned leather seat,  
clinging to both in a cold sweat.  
Today, my father teaches me how to drive,  
how to navigate the concrete labyrinth that lies before me.  
Following the white stripes decorating the road as if they were the  
string meant to liberate me from this maze,  
a sickening chill bears on my chest, the illness meeting vertigo as I  
circumvent the block once more.  
My eyes wander, glazing over the glow of luminescent traffic  
lights in the distance,  
over the signs advocating for an array of rambunctious restaurants,  
the scent of heated meats pouring from their windows and con-  
joining to mingle in my nostrils like an odorous maelstrom.  
I don't like "downtown".  
But I'm torn from my thoughts by my father's anodyne voice,  
telling me to watch the curb as I circle around it once more;  
I almost hit it-  
I apologize, but he tells me it's fine.  
That everyone might hit the boundaries in their life, but it's alright,  
Because everyone knows the way to go in the end.  
"The way they must go," I think to myself as my eyes find focus  
on the pedestrians venturing the sidewalk  
Like mice in a maze of brick and mortar.  
Adults, all of them-whether their faces are buried in the blinding  
radiance of their devices,  
or idly chatting in a group, like a flock of cooing pigeons  
or just another nest of mice.

The gleam of the sun showers past the buildings that stand like obelisks, testimonies to a world of order, to blind us to their faces; well, me, at least-my father is focused on the road ahead, just like the rest of the nest.

Like I should be too, he tells me as I strike the curb.

I hesitate, but continue on, choking down the rising bile in my throat as if it were the antifreeze in the car's sputtering engine.

I never will like "downtown".

## Eternal Dissonance

My times been wasted, brain depleting  
My problems, can't face 'em, brain is fleeting  
My sentience is moot, brain is heating  
Everything's fucked. I'm melting.  
Now a shallow puddle, no shape or form  
Will a god suck me up to be reborn?  
Hell's fury isn't worse than a woman scorned?  
Everything's fucked. I'm melting.  
Will I slip through a fissure? Hi Satan!  
Did you melt too? No, you were beaten  
It's hot here. Bye! I'm evaporating  
Everything's fucked. I'm melting.  
This cloud's nice, is it number nine?  
The whole world underneath, the view is fine  
Soon, I will fall, just a matter of time  
Everything's fucked. I'm melting.  
Can't say sorry. Won't see you again.  
Do you like it there? Have any friends?  
I won't make it to you. My Cycle won't end.  
Everything is fucked.

## **Lingering Thoughts**

You're a hugger,  
assaulting my body with your pervasive pressing  
no regard to the awkward tension that builds  
from the uninvited infiltration of my personal space.  
Your face against my ironed shirt  
wrinkling and staining it with glitter lip balm  
that is sure to be seen reflecting off my face, body, hands  
and any other contaminated surface.  
Can't you tell from my pose that I don't want this?  
The arms draped along my sides refusing to return your embrace  
the rolled eyes and exasperated sigh.  
No, you leave without a second glance  
uncaring of my reactions to being violated.

Finally, tonight, you left without saying goodbye.  
No warmth from your touch lingering behind.  
No glitter to find on my cheek when I shave.  
No scent of your hair to trigger thoughts of you  
when I lift my shirt over my head before lying in bed.  
No reason why I'm still thinking of you at all.

**“Though I depart I will always live  
because, within the people, the dream still lives.”**

