



Cardinal Sins

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Produced by the students and staff of Saginaw Valley State University and published on campus by the Graphics Center, *Cardinal Sins* features art, photography, poetry, and prose by members of the SVSU community, including alumni and faculty, and other featured writers and artists from across the world. All submissions are considered for publication. Selection is made by blind voting from the committee staff. Staff members are excluded from receiving a monetary award in any category.

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Editors' Note

This is our sophomore semester working as an editing team, and we are thankful for the lessons this publication has helped us learn about time management, professionalism, and teamwork.

We're so proud of how this publication has grown over the past two semesters. We have welcomed alumni and new students alike to our selection and editing teams and have enjoyed building up this staff. We hope to see *Cardinal Sins* grow even stronger.

Though we came into this issue with more experience than the previous one, we still had a lot of learning and hard work to do. We never want this publication to stagnate; we're constantly challenging ourselves to better this publication for our staff, contributors, and readers.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Cardinal Sins*.

Thank you for reading,

Megan Draper, Editor-in-Chief
Gabby Bourgeois, Digital Editor



Poetry

First Place Winner

spending sixty
by: Laurdina Lind

Honorable Mention

he was a mess
by: Tohm Bakelas

spending sixty

Laurinda Lind

sixty bucks will fetch you b-ball
sneakers at foot locker
or leather pantalones online if
you learn to say it in spanish.
in nineteen thirteen it was what
you would pay for a mile-long ditch
dug by hand though if you tried
the new tractors, only six. it's
what kept a cow for a year
when frank lloyd wright

was born in wisconsin. today
it pays for two weeks of pot if
that's the way you get yourself
through. i made sixty in a day
explaining commas to kids,
but if i binged seven days on
b-12 or ran away upriver like
the salmon that it costs you sixty
to catch in upsalquitch, it could
all be gone by sunday.

he was a mess

Tohm Bakelas

for everette maddox

the last sunday in august
held no poetry reading,
apparently oak street
had forgotten all
about them

i stopped in anyway,
making my presence known,
feeling around the countertop
you passed out on so often

i figured being a loud yankee
all the way from new jersey
might conjure something up,
but no one seemed to care

i wandered to the back patio,
searching the black night
for your gravestone

could you hear me out there,
reciting your poems amongst
the dying summer leaves?

they say you were a mess—
i believe it, man, i am too

after the maple leaf closed,
i sat on the bench outside
beneath glowing neon,
watching streetlights
grow darker

Actaeon

Holly Day

Beware of casual glances towards open
bodies of water, bubbling springs
any place a vengeful goddess might be bathing
naked under the moon, a trap
for even the slightly curious. These women,
feigning modesty and bruised dignity, are known to turn men
into stags, mice, and other vulnerable creatures
doomed to be destroyed by hounds and angry housewives.

However, if you plan these encounters as an escape
from drudgery, your fate as a field mouse can be spent
curled beneath the knotted roots of a tree, worry-free
or as a crow, or a sparrow, wings out, high above
the bill collectors at your door
the children who never shut up
the angry men and women in your life.
Eventually, there will be nothing left of you
but the pull of migration
calling you from one shore to the next.

Jars to Fill

Taylor Hart

A loving husband spends the evening pulling down a single jar,
Its contents sweet and soothing,
To enjoy amidst the cold winter evening.
His wife's kitchen is filled with mason jars,
Canned veggies and jellies lining the shelves,
With homemade labels peeling at the corners,
And a stain on the floor where the last jar shattered.

But these lowly walls of jars,
Hold far more than treats,
And reflect the story of her life,
Filled with too many flavors to count.
Some spicy, others too sweet,
But some preferred over the rest.
She has spent her entire life worried if they'd be enough.

Tender as a loving home, but fragile like cracking glass,
Her life has been a delicate creation she was scared to shatter.
She was certainly cautious,
Always carrying her heart with both hands, covered with oven mitts.
One wrong move or slip of the tongue,
At least from certain individuals,
Could end in her cleaning up a million jagged pieces.

From the moment she saw her parents' marriage end,
To the day her grandson died.
She could feel her insides spoiling,
Knowing she couldn't uncap the contents without it all flooding out.
She wished her heart would've worked harder,
That she could've shut out all the elements
And ceased cleaning the broken fragments.

She started to question why the oldest of items
Collected dust the fastest,
Left to be forgotten as time continued.
The ones we handle with the most care

May leave us in the blink of an eye
After they're pushed to the depths of our memory,
Out of reach, to the farthest corners of the kitchen.

Staring at a reflection she doesn't recognize,
She realizes there will always be something missing,
An ingredient never written into her recipe for life.
She still worries in her old age if people will
Remember her for the time and love put into every jar.
That somehow, after all these years,
She's been doing it wrong her whole life.
Maybe this world had provided too many jars to fill,
And not enough time to enjoy the contents herself
With the people that love her the most.

Unslamming the Door

Chris Innes



As I climbed into the front seat of the tour group's van,
she was pulling herself up into the back seat behind me.
My mother's right hand was on the doorframe
as I reached to close the car door.
I didn't see the fingers wrapped around the doorframe
just behind me.
That hand, carrying premonitions
knitting, sewing, gardening.
These could have been the fingers of a stranger,
but they were not.

I am too often in a hurry,
a salve for apprehension,
the way anxiety pulls a sweater over its head,
mussed hair a momentary imitation of decisiveness,
rushing not out of necessity but to be emphatic.

In the instant before,
a time shadow murmured in my ear,
a faint breeze hinting at fracturing realities.
I could hear its rushed dialogue with my willfulness,
"First, let's check."
"No, I am not responsible for others."
(2: Revisional orbits of memories spin around me,
it is everyday, everyday)

As I pulled my door and it started to swing shut,
I turned and saw the hand
grasping the doorframe behind me.
In that second, paths splintered and diverged
with the future detonating through my perception,
entering my eyes and accelerating through my torso,
an inhalation like the reversal of a fireball's vacuum,
leaving an empty cistern bruised from the scorch,
a residue of ash left there to spike the water.
I saw the explosion of the slender bones,
the severing of those parts of that contingent life.

(3: Later, waiting to cross the street, I suddenly felt sick from the fragments)

This aftermath waits for me,
with its uncongealed substance,
returning during in-between moments,
seeking opportunity in weakness.

(5: Awake in the middle of the night, when logic is elusive)

It is like a spider web that I find
stretched between us. In the webbing, not a spider but a moth,
still faintly alive.

Walking through the mesh, I can feel the filaments
whisper across my cheek
and transmit the electrochemical impulses
of the moth from within its satin wrapping,
instinctively replaying alternate flight patterns
that ramble on about redemption.

(7: Beside her in a car, watching her hands on the wheel)

In the van occupied by the others,
the door did not slam shut.
But my version carries on,
dodging across my sightlines.

(11: Re-caulked, still seeping)

I wonder if confessing this to my mother
would quiet my deviant script.

(13: Composing a request to petition my case,
feebly wrestling the broken grammar)

Or would my disclosure coagulate it
into some version of a reality for her,
transforming it into a phantom pain
stalking the fingers of her right hand?
Moment by moment, this is deferred,
not casting another fishhook to imbed in the flesh,
intermittently tugging on the skin
to raise a miniature epidermal tent,
with its latent infection pregnant with taunts.

Here division would be multiplication in the end.

So, it remains only my hands that wave away the webs,
rummaging between three dimensions and four.

(1: But am I really innocent, here with a mouth full of silk?)

Forget Me, Forget Me Not

Georgie Roache

Forget me not
For I love you and I want you to stay
In my life
In my memory
Your breath flowers

Forget me
As the wallpaper yellows and peels
Reveals
Our initials on rotted wood

Forget me not
When you hear morning thunder
Low and purple
That crumples like thinly sheeted paper
A shattering of the atmosphere
Broken to see your face

Forget me
When you wash your skin
Of drawings that trace your vein
Maintain that flower growing up your wrist
Small and blue
Forget me not

Flowers Unfasten the Cold

Mary Sesso

I remember my husband, how he loved
his Queen Elizabeth roses.
One November, two blooms hung on
even though winter was bragging
how dark it was. I touched the petals.
It was as if I were standing on the rim
of that darkness and their softness
kept me from falling in.

By March I will remember why
the darkness will step back:
because spring steps forward and the sun
spreads its light, flowers unfasten
the cold and the color green sounds
like a calliope. Because I know
kissing fire may kill me with smoke,
but especially because love
is for keeps, even when memory
forgets how to lean on itself.
If love and sadness were flowers,
they'd be in the same bouquet.



Cardinal Sins

Artwork

First Place Winner

Moss of Green
by: Alyssa Proctor

Cover Art

Sunset Beyond the Garden
by: Alyssa Proctor

Moss of Green

Alyssa Proctor



Digital Photo

Sunset Beyond the Garden

Alyssa Proctor



Digital Photo

Chicago 006

PM Flynn



Digital Photo

Arteries of Life

Caroline Helmstadt



Digital Photo

Lonely Chairs

Alyssa Proctor



Digital Photo



Cardinal Sins

Fiction

First Place Winner

Unwinding
by Gabby Bourgeois

Unwinding

Gabby Bourgeois

Cameron thought it might have been a skin tag. He first noticed it after he stepped off the scale and jotted down his morning weight in the notebook on the shelf above his toilet. He plucked his FitBit from its resting spot behind the faucet on the bathroom vanity and tightened the strap: a small strip of flesh jutting out from his inner wrist like the pull tab on a soda can. He brought it close to his face and squinted before realizing that his glasses sat on the bathroom counter. He snatched them up and pushed them onto his face. The tab was flat like a dime and roughly the size of his thumbprint.

Cameron gave the strip of flesh an experimental tug. The skin around it stretched like latex. He released it, and the skin snapped back into place. He shivered, then he stared into the bathroom mirror—at his pimply forehead, his knotted brown mullet, his dark eyes and darker under-eyes, his too-big bust—and sighed. He had work in an hour. He didn't have time to fixate on this. What was one more unsightly detail, one more unwanted growth?

Cameron shuffled out of the bathroom.

Cameron shuffled back into the bathroom. He stood in front of the mirror. The pimples. He had almost forgotten to wash his face again. Cameron covered his mouth with the back of his hand, yawned, and grimaced. He had forgotten to brush his teeth, too. He turned on the faucet.

Cameron sat hunched in a squeaky wooden chair in a near-empty room as he rapidly scrolled through his phone for anything that could keep him occupied for more than a couple of seconds. He bounced his leg and bit at his thumbnail. He remembered the strange flap of skin that existed only a few inches from his thumbnail, just under the band of his smartwatch. He took his hand away from his mouth and scrolled with two thumbs.

Waiting made him nervous. Doctors made him nervous. Waiting for doctors made Cameron very nervous. It had been about a week since he

had found the flat strip of skin. *No big deal* was Cameron's first thought. *I have a checkup in a bit. Maybe they can freeze it off or something. Like a wart.* Then he started losing weight, and he suspected that he had bigger problems than warts.

Cameron had weighed himself every morning and every evening since sophomore year of high school. The numbers informed his self-esteem, although he never examined why, much less if he should try loosening the grip they had on him. Regardless, he was often too preoccupied with other anxieties to alter his lifestyle, so the numbers rarely changed. The result was that Cameron had spent every day of his adult life tormenting himself over minor weight fluctuations.

Each day since the tab had appeared, Cameron had lost between 10 and 20 pounds overnight. On the first day, he assumed that his scale had broken. He ran out and bought a new one. The new scale's number had only been different by about half a pound. He bought another scale. He contemplated his weight journal, then dug under his bed for the box that contained his older ones. He had not been this light since he started college.

According to all three scales, Cameron didn't even weigh 100 pounds before he left the house that morning for the hospital. He couldn't feel a difference. If anybody saw a difference, they hadn't said anything. It was as if someone were pouring out his contents every night, bit by bit, like a man who helped himself to the decanter of scotch in his liquor cabinet after dinner. He tugged at the compression top underneath his button-down shirt. *85 pounds and I still need a binder. What horseshit.*

A nurse in periwinkle scrubs entered the waiting room and called out a name that was not "Cameron."

Cameron sighed, then stood.

The nurse made eye contact as he walked towards her. She took him in, and her welcoming smile faltered for a second. "Hi there, uh... just follow me right down this hallway..." As quickly as she came to fetch Cameron, she left him in the dust.

Cameron maintained a much slower pace, but all too quickly the strangers were sat at two chairs in a tiny room housing a computer monitor on a

swivel, a small sink, an examination table covered by a long sheet of crepe paper, and dozens of posters featuring pastel cross-sections of the human body.

The nurse typed away at the computer before Cameron had even fully sat down. “So-”

“My name is Cameron.”

The nurse’s typing stuttered. “Cameron?”

“You can call me Cam, too. You know, if it’s easier to remember.” The concession tasted bitter in his mouth. Friends called him Cam. He did not truly want this woman to call him Cam.

“But your records have you listed as-”

“I know what my records say, but I go by Cam now.” Cameron pressed his lips together and bounced his leg.

The nurse pressed her own lips together and nodded. “Cam... you know, my sister just had a baby named Cameron.”

Cameron’s leg stopped. “Yeah?”

“Yes! A lovely name for a lovely little girl!” The nurse continued typing. “It suits you.”

Cameron felt the venom in that “you.” Message received. He slumped in his chair.

The preliminary questions passed by in a blur. Cameron’s answers were clipped, and he kept his eyes fixed on a dusty red diagram of a colon. By the time the nurse left, his guts were all twisted up. No matter how hard he tried, he could never get people to see him for who he was. This appointment was supposed to change that. This was supposed to be the day he worked up the courage to ask about testosterone, anxiety medications, therapy referrals, everything that was supposed to make him better. Instead, he had to ask about weight and skin and maintaining a body he could never get comfortable in.

Cameron rubbed at his face. It was warm. Very warm. His eyes misted.

Motherfucker.

Cameron did not want to cry over a disappointing doctor’s visit. He certainly did not want to cry over a fucking skin tag. He shouldn’t have put so much pressure on this appointment to be perfect. He was blowing everything out of proportion. He was being stupid.

His vision blurred. The heat behind his eyes built.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Cameron hunched over and pressed his palms to his forehead. He hated how sensitive he was. He hated how easily he cried. Other people could control themselves. He wished so badly to be like other people.

Cameron’s tears caught on the rims of his glasses before making dark splotches on his pant legs. He wiped at his face furiously. The heat from the friction felt unbearable. He wouldn’t get anything he wanted out of this appointment. He shouldn’t have come. He wanted to be done with this place.

Cameron’s wrist began to itch. He dug his finger under the band of his FitBit and scratched until his wrist was a bright angry red. He hardly felt a thing.

He stopped scratching. He unfastened his watch and closely observed his wrist. He traced where the itchiness began and ended. It wasn’t his wrist that was itchy. It was the flap of skin. Cameron carefully pressed the flap to his wrist and scratched at it with a single fingernail. This, finally, relieved some of the discomfort. He flipped the flap and scratched its other side.

Cameron sighed. He couldn’t get hormones, and he couldn’t get therapy, but he could scratch this itch. He had met one need. Cameron eyed the flap. It looked a bit like a zipper pull.

Cameron grabbed the flap with two fingers and slowly pulled.

And pulled.

And pulled.

His skin came up with the flap like a strip of tape. Cameron's eyes widened.

He stopped pulling. The strip hung taught in his hand. He peered into the two-inch-long hole in his arm and found nothing. No meat, no vein, no bone. He was empty. Devoid of substance. How was a doctor supposed to help with this? How could anyone help with this?

Cameron could feel a headache coming on. He released the string, pushed his glasses up his face, and pressed a palm into his eye. His skin was cool to the touch. He lifted his head and looked down just in time to see the freshly peeled strip of skin recede into his arm and cover the hole he had made.

Cameron pressed two fingers into his wrist. Somehow, he still had a pulse. Somehow, he wasn't freaking the fuck out about this. He wasn't freaking the fuck out about anything at all. For the first time in a long time, he felt something akin to peace: total numbness.

Something clicked into place for Cameron. It was as if peeling his skin back gave all of those feelings, all of that heat, an outlet. If making a hole in his arm could get rid of his feelings, he didn't have to be so upset all the time. He never had to be upset about anything again. Cameron stood, turned, and left the cramped examination room. He didn't need some doctor's help. His problems were solved.

Cameron felt empowered. He could stop a crying attack in its tracks with nothing but a small, discrete tug. Hard day at work – no problem. Dysphoria – gone. Anxiety spiral – like it never even happened. There was no problem too big or too small that couldn't be alleviated with a swift peel of the flesh. Cameron had taken to wearing his FitBit on his other wrist so he could better access his magical little pull tab.

There was no trauma to work out in therapy, no chemical imbalance to address with drugs, no distress to communicate to loved ones. Nothing could touch Cameron. Except Olivia.

A couple of days after Cameron's trip to the doctor, a friend from work decided to try hooking up the only two trans people he knew. They should have been annoyed, but Cameron and Olivia took a liking to each other. They had a coffee date, then a lunch date, then a dinner date in the span of a week. They took trips out of town to museums, bookstores, and bizarre gift shops. Each had a drawer of clothes and an extra toothbrush stashed in the others' apartment. Cameron had laughed more with Olivia in the few months they had known each other than he could remember doing in the past couple of years. The intimacy they shared was fun, and tender, and beautiful, until it wasn't.

Cameron stood shirtless with his arms crossed over his chest and breathed heavily.

Olivia stared at his back. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ruin the mood. I didn't mean to upset you." Her voice was low, gentle, like she was trying hard not to spook a wild animal. "But... if even mentioning your body can set you off like that... don't you think that's a sign that you need help?"

Cameron whipped around to face her. His eyes were wild. His arms still covered his chest as if he were wounded. "I don't need help. I told you that already. Why don't you believe me when I tell you things?"

"I don't believe you about this one thing because I have eyes. I can see that you aren't doing well." Olivia stood, naked and defiant.

Cameron couldn't meet her eyes. He bit his lip. "I just wanted to have a nice night with you."

"I wanted that too. I still want that." Olivia stepped forward and cradled her lover's face in her hands. "But babe, I don't know how many nice nights we can have if you keep bottling everything up."

Cameron stepped out of her gentle grasp. "I'm not bottling everything up anymore, I swear. I'm letting it out. I know how to manage this stuff now."

"Well then why did this happen? Why can't we talk about how you're feeling without you shutting me out?" Olivia ran her fingers through her hair and sighed loudly. "How do you think that makes me feel, knowing that my boyfriend doesn't want to talk through any of his problems with me?"

That hurts me, Cam. Have you thought at all about how your actions might be hurting the people around you?”

“That’s all I ever think about!” Cameron’s ragged breathing was the only sound in the room. His wrist ached.

“Liv, it hurts. I am so, so scared that I’m going to fuck everything up all the time, but-but now I don’t have to feel like that ever again. I’ve found something that works for me, and-and instead of being happy for me, you just want me to cut it out and feel horrible all over again.”

“That’s not-”

“Why do you want me to hurt, Liv?”

“Cam!” Olivia closed her eyes and backed up to the windowsill by the bed. She took one deep breath, then another, then another. She began to cross her arms over her own chest, then let them hang at her side. She looked at Cameron with glossy eyes. “Please come here.” Her voice was hoarse like she had choked on something.

Cameron shuffled to the edge of the bed, got on his knees, and rested his warm upper body on the cool top sheet.

Olivia closed the rest of the distance. She knelt beside him and traced cool, smooth circles into his back. “Cam,” she sighed. “I don’t know how much more of this I can take.”

Cameron burrowed his face into the bed. A heat began to form behind his eyes.

“I don’t know what you’re doing, or why you won’t tell me what you’re doing, but it isn’t working. It just isn’t.”

Cam remained silent.

Olivia continued her tracing. “I know what it’s like. I know that you don’t like yourself. I know that you’re scared and anxious about the future, and passing, and us. I know that you feel... stuck. And powerless. I see it. I’ve felt it. But I got better. I want to see you get better, and I want to help you

get better. But... you don’t seem to want that.”

Cameron sat up and leaned on his forearms.

“Please look at me, Cam.”

Cameron’s head remained stationary.

Olivia let out a trembling sigh. “...Is this how it’s going to be? Me always begging you to sort out your shit, and you burying your head in the sand? That’s... that’s not a relationship, Cameron. That’s not a relationship I want to be in.”

Cameron shook. His head hung low, gaze fixed firmly to the square of comforter right in front of him.

“You need to decide what’s more important to you: shoving away all of your pain, or being with me. Because, because I love you, and I can’t keep watching you hurt like this.” Olivia’s voice cracked.

Something in Cameron cracked too. He made a grab for his shirt, just out of view. One, two, three swipes until he snapped it up in a violent red whirlwind of cloth; he was the matador and the bull.

Before Olivia could finish blinking the tears out of her eyes, Cameron was already pulling his pants on. She didn’t try to reason with him as he fastened his belt, or grabbed his keys, or pulled his shoes on, or slammed the door. She glanced at the binder he had left on her nightstand. Maybe Cameron would come back for it. Olivia did know how to feel about Cameron coming back for anything.

Cameron stomped down the road in his too-big work boots. It was too hot for boots. The heat from his feet seemed to creep to the very top of his head. He slotted his fingers into his too-long hair and shook his hands frantically, desperate to whip some cold air onto his burning scalp and face. The heat was dizzying, maddening, suffocating. Cameron crouched down to the pavement in his too-hot boots and gripped his too-hot head as he shed too-hot tears. His throat constricted. He could not scream. He

could not relieve the rolling boil consuming his entire body. He could have melted into the pavement. He wanted to.

“Is this how it’s going to be?”

The words echoed in his head, over and over. The air felt so heavy.

“Is this how it’s going to be?”

Cameron couldn’t stand the thought of losing Olivia.

“Is this how it’s going to be?”

Cameron couldn’t stand the thought of giving up the one thing that had made him feel like a functioning human being in years.

“Is this how it’s going to be?”

These competing necessities, for comfort and control, threatened to tear him in two.

Something snapped like an elastic band.

Cameron hadn’t even realized he was pulling at the flap on his arm until he looked down at the limp ribbon of skin clutched in his white-knuckled fist. He followed the string’s path to the ground and gingerly picked up the other end of it. He placed its ends side-by-side. A neat rectangle. A raw edge. He looked at the red underside of his arm through the hole in his forearm.

Cameron was cold. The heat trapped in his body had escaped all at once through the newly minted slit like an air vent. He was so cold. He stood up from his defensive crouch and pinched each end of the string that was a part of his body only moments ago before releasing it completely. He did not see it flutter through the air, did not see it catch on a stray breeze, did not see it blow into a nearby gutter. He felt its absence, though: a deep chill that had replaced a sweltering heat. He walked home in the dark, a little bit cooler and a little bit lighter.

Finally

J. Paul Ross

Even if she’d known a pair of mournful brown eyes had watched her pull into the driveway, it wouldn’t have changed anything. If she’d known that a jaw had clenched at the engine’s final, gasping knell, it wouldn’t have prevented her from exiting the car and walking into the morning sun. If she’d known a set of knees had weakened when she began to climb the front steps, it wouldn’t have kept her from ringing the bell. And even if she’d known an unopened half-pint of vodka had been taken from the cupboard at the sound of its chime, she still would’ve attempted to smile when the door opened.

“I tried calling,” she said, gliding into the house, “but there was no answer.”

“Do you want some coffee?”

“No. I won’t be staying. But I’m glad you’re home. I was afraid you’d be going to work early . . .” Glancing at the full mug and the half-empty bottle on the table, she frowned. “Or are you not going in *again*?”

Hearing a flat, empty sigh, she took a deep breath and resumed her forced smile.

“I’m sorry. What I meant was—”

“How’s your dad doing?”

She shook her head and stood there while the creak of a body dropping exhaustedly into a chair passed — a quick respite for the knot in her stomach to tighten, a brief pause where she yearned for a sign without really expecting one. This wasn’t how she’d imagined it going and, noticing the trembling hands slowly reach around the coffee cup as if to keep the fingers warm, she peered at her reflection in the window and tried to find a beginning.

She’d spent the entire night going over what to say. She’d paced and repeated it, sharpened it and softened it until she finally had to write it down. It was to be her first step before moving on and, at four pages, it’d

been filled with countless appeals and rationales. At ten, it was choked with adamant decisions and resigned inevitabilities, and for hours, she'd been caught between rising pitches of anger, collapsing exclamations of grief and threads of heavy tears. There was draft after draft with her cringing at thoughts of ugly shouts and bitter insults, version after version of trying to find an ending where there could be smiles of absolution, well wishes and a gentle, concluding farewell.

It grew and shrank until she finally realized her words wouldn't make a difference and the entire speech would've been nothing more than yet another one-sided conversation, another waste of time and emotion. At three a.m., she decided to put it off, by five, she'd given up and by six, she just wanted it to be done with. She wanted to get to a place where it didn't hurt, a place where she could gather up the fragments but, standing there, she had trouble remembering even the first sentence. Things were hazy and jumbled, and with no starting point, all she could think of was the ending she had no idea how to get to.

"Dad's kind of the reason I'm here," she finally stated. "I wanted to . . ."

She thought she saw the long fingers that once had caressed her skin tighten their grip on the cup, but she wasn't sure. The seconds passed, one becoming two, then three, then four. They dribbled and wandered. They pooled and seeped and, feeling them twist in her stomach, she made a halfhearted attempt to recall the good times: the laughter amid candle flickers, the sweat-filled evenings and the mornings of dreamy exhaustion. She tried to picture the hikes with their voices echoing against the mountains, the summer walks holding hands and the winter embraces beneath heavy quilts.

She was almost positive there'd been jokes and conversations, trips to nowhere and painful moments apart but those memories were hard to find because they'd been devoured by the ones from the last six months. The ones of the drained expression in her father's hospital room when the doctor was describing procedures, and the tensing body in her arms after they'd left and the weeping began. There was the hurtful vacancy of a hundred unanswered ringtones, the wordless meals in restaurants, the cold drives home, and remembering the nights spent crying next to a motionless form, she found herself glaring at the lowered head in front of her.

"I can't do this anymore," she proclaimed. "I've been talking for weeks, trying to tell you something's wrong but you haven't wanted to listen. It's like you've either been avoiding me or you just don't give a shit — I don't know.

"Ever since they told us about dad, I've needed you to be there but instead, you've disappeared — worse actually, you've fallen apart. I mean, I understand the diagnosis has brought up some bad memories for you, but *this* isn't working. You're drinking way too much. You're forgetting anniversaries and birthdays, appointments . . . dates. You won't return my calls and even when we're together, you're not really there.

"Obviously, you're going through something but so am I. *You've* had four years to deal with what happened to your mom. *I've* barely had—" She squared her shoulders and inhaled. "I mean, if we'd been dating then, *I* would've been there for you. I would've supported you for the entire thing: the specialists, the treatments, the weeks in the ICU, the hospice . . . the funeral. And I'm sorry you had to deal with it alone, but you'd think with everything you went through, you'd be more supportive. I mean, of all the people in my life, you're the only one who could possibly understand what . . ."

She fought the sob prying, crawling its way up her throat.

"I feel like you're forcing me to make a choice," she said. "I feel like it's either you or him but he's my father and you're . . . what? Tell me, please. What are you? Because we're not a couple — not anymore. If we were, you would've at least . . . God, I had to sit in the doctor's office by myself yesterday while he went on and on about what my dad . . ."

The sob finally made its way past her lips but its breathless murmur was lost, consumed by the trickle of water from the faucet and the clunk of the refrigerator's icemaker. It struggled to curl its way into the air, to rise and spread, to be noticed, acknowledged. Yet the kitchen remained haunted by the vacuum of lingering silence. Heavy and claustrophobic, it oozed and thickened, its bloated weight groveled in despondent parcels. Gazing out from behind a wash of tears, she had to force herself to whisper.

"Would you please say something?"

A thumb drifted across the side of the mug, light and slow, almost in the

same way it had when it brushed the curled strands of her hair in quiet moments. Otherwise, there was no movement, no response.

“Are you even listening to me?”

Nothing.

“Really? You’re just going to sit there?”

Still, nothing and she fumed at the coils of messy, auburn hair and the slumped, deflated shoulders before her. She scowled at the interlaced fingers, and she suddenly remembered her foolish hopes of leaving with a few mournful tears and reminiscences of softer times. She told herself she should’ve known better and instead of a sense of relief, she only felt tired now. Too drained to smash the cup into a million tiny shards, she looked at the door.

“God, I can’t believe I rehearsed this,” she said, removing the house key from her pocket. “What a waste. Two years and you’re just going to . . .” She sighed. “Well, at least you’re making this easy and I guess I should thank you, huh? Because if I’ve already wasted two years trying to save this, I’m not going to waste another minute ending it.”

She dropped the key onto the table and let the slam of the door be her farewell. Its echo rang over the front steps and the driveway, and she never knew that mournful eyes watched her stumble into the car. She never knew they’d stared at her while the engine groaned and sputtered, never knew they followed her into traffic. And once her taillights had vanished, she never knew the bottle and the untouched coffee were emptied into the sink or that as she dried her tears, the kitchen was filled with a heavy exhalation and its vacant silence was ended by a single, hollow word.

Memento Mori

Kyla Wheatley

Seth could never explain it, but he feels more comfortable at night. When the night is steady and silent, and the sky is aglow with stars. It brings him a sense of peace that not many things can.

He sits on his patio, rocking gently in the wicker chair gifted to him by his mother. It used to belong to his grandfather.

“You need furniture,” she had told him during her first visit.

He bit back a sardonic reply at that. There was a bed for him to sleep in, a table for him to eat at, and a couch for him to lounge across while he read or watched television. Seth knew what she really meant: make the place your own. The most he accomplished since then was the dozens of finger paintings from his niece that decorated nearly every wall in his condo.

Seth closes his eyes and tries one more time. If the third time was the charm, he has no idea what the thirty-second time will result in, and, yes, he’s been counting. He conjures an image of Roger in his mind. Shaggy brown hair, a chipped tooth, dust of freckles across his cheek, and eyes filled with glee. Alive. Maybe if he tries hard enough, he can bring his best friend back. He can do what he was unable to do two decades ago.

He opens his eyes and . . . nothing. There’s no one there. Just the silent night and sky full of stars. He’s not sure why even bothers anymore. His abilities were a mystery to him.

Sensing movement, Seth turns to his left to see a white cottontail rabbit staring at him intently. It’s not unusual to see animals roaming about. California is full of wandering creatures. He is just glad that it’s a small bunny and not a fox or one of his neighbor’s ostriches running loose.

He debates whether to go inside and grab something for the thing to eat, but he might return to see that it’s no longer there. So, he decides to stay put and wait for the hare’s next move.

The rabbit’s nose twitches, his beady eyes staring directly at him. Then he

moves. Runs right over Seth's feet and disappears around the corner. A breeze chases after the furry animal, setting a chill in his bone.

Seth decides to call it a night and return to his bed. He does have a long day ahead of him after all. He pushes himself off the chair and reaches for the handle of the sliding door. He pulls it open and steps into his house. Unable to stop himself from searching for the rabbit as if it could have magically reappeared during the five seconds his back was turned, he pauses as he starts to shut the door and lock it and looks over his shoulder. It hadn't.

Seth leans against the frame of the double doors, listening to the anguished singing of the woman standing behind the pew. He usually doesn't come to these things—the funerals.

This time isn't the first they've held a ceremony while he was working. Usually, he can just focus on his work and block out what was happening upstairs. Something prompted him to join.

The left side of the room is full of what he can only assume are family members. The chairs on the right side of the room are completely empty. It's the smallest number of people he's ever seen at a funeral.

Seth crosses his arm as he tries to recall the name of the person laying in the casket. It should be easy for him to remember. He's the one who worked to make them look less...dead.

A man appears beside the woman at the pew suddenly and it comes back to him.

Gregory McCoy. Age 53. The official cause of death was a heart attack. Scorpions were well adjusted to the dry and arid climate of the city he resides in. It wouldn't be unusual to find one in your kitchen at night.

There have been many times when he's gotten dressed for work and found an arachnid hiding in his shoes. It's not a large cause for concern as most stings aren't fatal.

A combination of the poison and pre-existing conditions proved extremely fatal, as shown by the specter on the other side of the room. There are much more painful ways to die. Seth knows from experience.

He watches as the man tries to touch the shoulder of the grieving woman only for his hand to go straight through her. Sympathy fills Seth as confusion takes over the man's features.

The woman walks away from the pew, stopping briefly by the casket for another glance. Gregory follows her eyes, shoulders slumping as he stares at his resting face.

It always leaves him with a bittersweet feeling. The moment a person realizes that they've met their end.

Seth quietly retreats to the basement to finish the latest body they've been delivered. He checks the tag on her toe.

Jane Doe. Age 21-23. Unintentional drowning.

The doors open automatically, and he steps inside, glancing upward as Smash Mouth's "All-Star" blares through the speakers. Seth pauses at the entrance of the pet store, observing the many people walking about. Though he's been seeing spirits for years, discerning the living from the dead still takes time.

When he was thirteen, his best friend spent two weeks in his bedroom. He never asked why, guessing that he had gotten into an argument with his parents. They always talked about running away together, fantasizing about living a life free from their parents' restrictions. When Roger first went missing, Seth assumed his friend decided to leave without him.

He was in the middle of a quiz when he was called to the principal's office, where he received the news of his best friend's fate. Roger's body was found at the abandoned farmhouse, buried in an unmarked grave. They never found the person responsible. Seth's mother moved them to a different neighborhood shortly after, fearing that something terrible would happen to him or his sister next.

The only definite tell he has is tangibility. If the person can be touched or can touch something, they're alive. It's not always helpful. It's downright annoying in a lot of situations. It's just all he has to go on.

"Is there anything I can help you with, sir?"

The woman, clad in a blue polo with an embroidered PetSmart's logo and khakis, smiles warmly at him, her red lips stretched into a thin line. He searches for a name tag before replying, the piece of identification covered partially by a gold chain link necklace with a heart pendant.

"Yes, there is, Pam. I'm in the midst of adopting a rabbit and I want some things to make him feel at home."

"I have just the thing for you. Follow me."

Seth obliges, silently trailing behind her as she leads him to the sixth aisle. He studies her as she talks about the many items that they have in stock. The blue polish on her nails is smudged, probably done in a rush.

There's a dent on her finger where a ring should be. Is she just not wearing it to work, or is she no longer wearing a ring at all? Divorced? Separated? Widow?

He catches himself before he bumps into her and tries his best to appear as if he's been listening. She gestures to the different cages on the shelf, each of varying sizes.

"Toys are at the front and treats are at the other end of the aisle."

"Thank you. I think I can handle it from here."

"Okay. Just come and tap me on the shoulder if you need more assistance."

"Will do."

Seth's attention is drawn to the two-tiered gray cage on the top shelf. Hm. He thinks his little friend from last night will enjoy this. His sister always accuses him of not having any friends.

She'd be proud of him for getting a pet.

"You haven't been over in weeks. Madison misses you."

Seth walks through the apparition on his way to the fridge, switching his phone to his other hand before opening the door. His sister's attempt at manipulating him with her daughter is transparent.

"I miss her too, Terry. I've been busy with work."

"You can't spend all your time at the funeral home. You need to be around people."

"They are people," he snaps without meaning to. They've had this conversation many times. More frequently than before since Terry started dating a therapist.

He takes out the box of leftover pizza he bought two days ago and places it on the counter. He could just reheat the remaining slices for dinner. Tomorrow, he'll go grocery shopping and try to fill his fridge with more than takeout food.

"You know what I meant, Seth. Living people. I mean, when was the last time you did something that didn't involve your job?"

"I got a rabbit."

He glances at his latest companion as he shuts the microwave door shut. "*Liar*," she mouths with an indignant expression, causing his lips to form a half smile. This isn't the first time someone has followed him home from work. It's usually those who've died recently. He's not sure why, but it probably has something to do with them seeking some source of life. Or perhaps there's an invisible neon sign above his head: "Patron Saint for the Recently Deceased."

"I'm just worried about you. Mom is too. We don't want you to be lonely."

Bored? Perhaps. Stagnant? Well, he wouldn't say it about himself, but he's sure others have. Lonely is the one thing he's never been.

“I’ll try to make it to dinner next Sunday. How is that?”

“That’s perfect!”

Seth is grateful for the microwave’s repeated beeping. He now has an excuse to end this conversation.

“I have to go.”

“Wait!” There’s a long bout of silence after his sister’s outburst. She’s probably chewing on her nails, a nervous habit that they share.

“Terry?”

“I got a call from an investigator. He’s been looking into Roger’s case, and he wants to talk. Has he reached out to you?”

Seth was approached by Detective Dannon while he was at work a week and a half ago. He didn’t like to be interrupted and was rather short during their brief introduction. He was ashamed to say he thought the older man’s efforts were futile. He told the police everything there was to tell when they first interviewed him.

“I have to go.”

“Seth, come on.”

“I promise that I’ll call more.” Seth hangs up and sets the phone face down on the counter. Moments like this make him wonder if his sister would be more understanding if she could see what he saw.

He glances at Jane Doe again, who’s now moved towards the window, watching the sunset. On the other hand, he’s glad she doesn’t have to.

Seth ventures outside at night to sit in his chair like he usually does. The Jane Doe stands beside it, staring off in the distance. He wonders how long she’ll stay. Spirits tend to move on after their funeral. Although, most bodies that come through the door are brought by family.

No one has come to claim the young woman yet and she’s scheduled to be cremated tomorrow.

He sprinkles some of the food on the ground for the rabbit, then moves to stand beside the rocking chair.

“My name is Heather,” the girl speaks. Her voice is hoarse and scratchy, which is normal if you’ve drowned.

During one of their family outings, he snuck away from the group and dunked into the deep end of the pool. He had been about seven years old and eager to show his mother that he could float without her help. It’s a bit of a blur what happened next. He just remembers sinking further and further from his body. There was no bright light. His entire life didn’t flash before his eyes. He just existed at that moment, watching himself as waves splashed around his unconscious body.

“It’s nice to meet you, Heather.”

They spend the rest of the hour in silence. The rabbit never reappears, and sleep is starting to demand his leave. He adds more food to the pile just in case the rabbit comes while he’s inside.

When he checks the next morning, the pile of food is gone, and Heather is nowhere to be found.

Pamela Robinson. Age 43. Blood loss.

Home invasion turned fatal, according to the news reporter. He’s been watching the news closely for updates. She was delivered with a slashed throat and a large dent in the back of her head. The police were still looking for the burglar. The band-aid covering his palm begins to itch, and he resists the urge to scratch it.

Her funeral starts in ten minutes, and he could hear the footsteps of people arriving above him. His boss stands next to him, staring intensely at the woman.

Randall rarely ever comes down here, choosing instead to deal with the hundreds of families who come through here. He's not sure why this time is so different.

"You did good. You can barely tell she..."

"I was just doing my job," Seth responds stiffly. "Did you know her?"

Randall nods, eyes glazed over with unshed tears. "We went to high school together," he explains. "She was a nice woman. Didn't bother anyone. I'm going to—"

Randall doesn't finish, too choked up on tears. Seth doesn't watch him go; his attention remains on the woman in front of him. She looks much different out of her work clothes. The ring that was missing from her finger is there now, to be buried with her.

He reaches into his pocket for the necklace he took. A sticky note falls out of his pocket, and he looks down at it. Seth frowns as he recognizes the number as the one that the detective left for him. Seth might give him a call later.

The fluorescent lights reflect off the small heart. Seth slips the jewelry into the pocket of the jacket to her matching blouse and skirt.

"You should have something to take with you, so you won't get lost."



Color Artwork

First Place Winner

Blood Branches
by Lucas Luna

Blood Branches

Lucas Luna



11"x13", Acrylic paint and Posca markers on black and white canvases nailed together

Who Am I?

Trent Caulkins



Collage medium using printed photos, ink, and acrylic paint

Ignorant Oblivion

Nicole Szymanski



Acrylic on canvas



Cardinal Sins

Flash Fiction

First Place Winner

After the Apocalypse, Day 59
by Kelly Talbot

After the Apocalypse, Day 59

Kelly Talbot



Janice pulled the small equipment truck next to the curb at Riverside Park. She walked around to the back, raised the door, pulled the ramp down, and grabbed the two-wheeler. She loaded some amps and rolled them out to the amphitheater. She made trip after trip, bringing speakers, cords, effects pedals, the sound board, the mic stands, microphones, and everything else.

As she worked, from time to time she took a drink from her big thermos. It actually had whiskey and coke in it, but she figured nobody'd notice. And if anyone complained, she didn't give a damn. Nobody had ever appreciated what she did anyway. They always looked at her like she was incidental, like she didn't count. It never occurred to them that what she did was both an art and a science.

Once she had the gear set up, she did some sound checks. She moved the locations and angles of the speakers. She adjusted the microphones and the guitar amps. She swapped out some cords. She rewired the sound boards. Finally, everything was just right.

Satisfied, Janice left the amphitheater. Because the equipment truck was going to need to stay here until after the concert, Janice had arranged to have her VW Beetle in the lot. She climbed into her little car and drove home.

It had been hot work, and she was sweaty. She took a long, hot shower. When she got out of the shower, she touched up the polish on her fingers and toes. She did her eyelashes and her lips. Then she put on her favorite pair of bell bottoms and donned her leather vest. No bra, no shirt. Just the vest. Then she put her wide-brimmed burgundy fedora. She appraised herself in her floor-to-ceiling mirror.

"You look hot," she said to herself.

She grabbed her guitar case, headed outside to her cherry-red Corvette, and sped through the streets to Riverside Park. She pulled around back to the VIP lot.

She strode out onto the stage with her Fender Stratocaster. She looked out across the empty seats of the amphitheater.

She leaned toward the microphone and shouted, "Welcome, everyone! I'm Martina. Now, who's ready to rock?"

Martina raised her guitar pick high above her head and brought it down across her strings, sending hardcore thunder roaring across the amphitheater and beyond.

And she rocked.

A Night at the Amphitheater

Aaliyah Burgess

A note from the editors: This story contains brief references to suicidal ideation. Please read with care. Help is available. Please dial 988 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

It was quiet here. The dignified oak could almost be heard creaking as the sky cried. I sat on the moss-patched stone seats of a long-forgotten amphitheater with soaking clothes and mud-caked sneakers. This old forest claimed all the lost, abandoned, and neglected. Maybe that's why it felt like home to me.

In the soft sound of tears hitting the canopy, I heard a question. *If you were to disappear, who would care? Like sweet nothings, the wind whispered in my ear, would anyone even notice your absence?* The amphitheater's silent, cracked concrete made me ask, *If I hung myself by my shoelaces on the sturdy limbs of an oak, how long would it be before I am found? Or would my noose snap and Mother Earth swallow me whole before anyone noticed?* Tears dripped from my curled dead ends. I'm not sure if they're mine or hers.

My head perked up in a fleeting moment of panic as a dead bush nearby shook its wet branches. It could be a bear, they're common around here. I didn't move because I didn't care. Let it maul me, tear me to shreds, eat me. At least then my life would serve a purpose. In the moon's pale glow, I watched its brown branches steadily shake until the pointed ears and small round body of a rabbit burst into view.

Unaware of my presence, or unbothered by it, she moved to the brick center of the theater to nibble on the clover peeking through the cracks. For a few long moments, I watched her as a child would their crush across a crowded dance floor. Eagerly awaiting their affirming eyes, but such hopes were always ill-founded. A glance is just a glance. Then her beady black eyes met mine. Slowly my chest rose and fell as I froze to not scare her away. I knew eventually she would leave as everyone does, but not yet.

She caught me off guard. She took a hop forward. Then another. And another. Stopping at the steep bottom step. With eyes reflecting the curiosity

that had killed many cats, she stared. Cautiously, I showed my wet empty palms. I had nothing to give. No food. No water. Just myself, and I was never enough for anyone. Still, she advanced. Still, she stared. Until she was an arm's length away.

Her brown coat, though damp, reminded me of chocolate chip cookies; sweet and warm and bursting with joy. In remembrance of such untainted golden memories, a fervorous tremor rode through my bones. I knew touching her cookie coat wouldn't make me feel any different, but I outstretched my fingers in the hope or desperation that it might.

She bit me and left.

I instinctively recoiled, a thumping heartbeat in my ears made the world around me go silent as I watched her dart into the darkness. The bite made my finger throb in time with the rhythm in my chest which began to decrescendo. The sharp October breeze blew through my rain-drenched clothes. A shiver made me rise as I watched the rose-red water hit the moss-covered stone. The blood-formed branches in the water and goosebumps began decorating my damp skin.

I smiled and left the amphitheater.

Secrecy

Clive Aaron Gill



Charles agreed that he and his wife, Patricia, were ready to try for a baby. To their surprise and joy, she fell pregnant within a month.

Patricia quit her job as a registered nurse. She maintained a doctor-recommended diet for eight months and resisted cravings for junk food. She ate a spring mix salad with small pieces of chicken, walnuts and chia seeds, as well as low-fat yogurt. Her previous diet of ice cream and doughnuts would not do for a future Sullivan child.

On a summer morning, as a brisk breeze rocked pine tree branches in their large backyard, Patricia's craving for a McDonald's Vanilla Shake, and Bacon, Egg and Cheese McGriddles stood between her and the future Princeton PhD child of Charles' dreams.

While Charles was at his office at the architectural firm, she drove to McDonald's. She pulled open the front glass door and was greeted by the mouthwatering, pungent smells of burgers, fries and hash browns.

The secrecy excited her.

A Day in History

Cassie Lehman



They met accidentally. She was walking with her nose in a book, he was in a heated argument on the phone. Neither could tell you who was really to blame. All they know is that the encounter ended in a broken phone, a torn book cover, and a date for that Friday. *reliqua historia est.*



Black & White Artwork

First Place Winner

Rumination
by Shannon Glaser

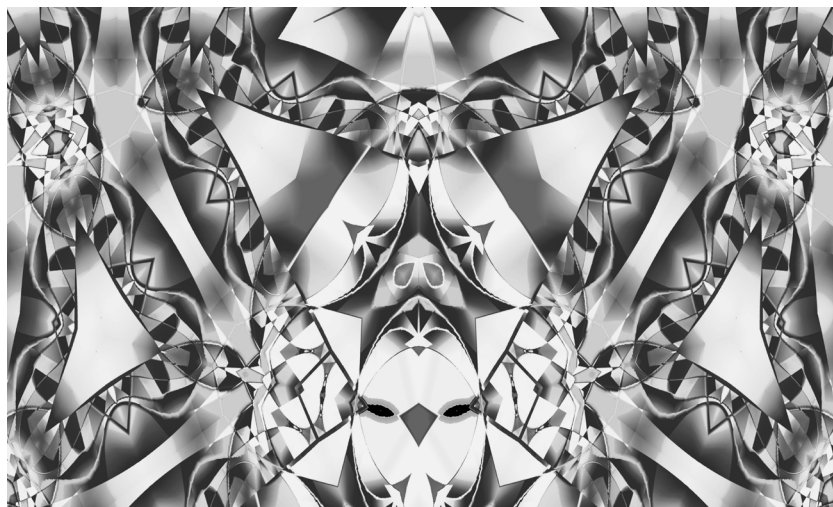
Rumination
Shannon Glaser



Charcoal on paper

Pyramid Scheme 2a

Edward Michael Supranowicz



Digital Painting



Cardinal Sins

Creative Nonfiction

Esther

Gabby Bourgeois

A note from the editors: This story contains graphic depictions of family trauma, family death, and feces. Please read with care.

August 20th, 2019

“Esther Gudrun (Donajkowski) of Alpena died unexpectedly, on August 18, at the age of 101. Esther would fondly reminisce of her early years raised on the family farm in Bolton, along with her six siblings and parents, Peter and Rose (Zaborny) Donajkowski. It was here she first found her love of gardening, hard work, and sharp wit.

“Esther would proudly recount her many years of work which began when she was only 14 years old, for a mere 50 cents a week. She also used her sewing talents to earn a leadership position at the garment factory and was the first woman to work at the Alpena Elk’s Lodge. Before marrying the love of her life, Donald Gudrun, in 1948, Esther had many adventures including winning a trip to the 1939 New York World’s Fair.

“Her family will forever be grateful for the lessons she taught us in perseverance and keeping humor in every moment. We will need this now more than ever as we try to find our way in a world we’ve never known without her.

“Esther is survived by her daughter and caregiver, Emma Rose Fletcher, and son Richard Gudrun; her grandchildren Donald, Barbara, Michael (Korrin) Fletcher, Arthur, David Gudrun; great-grandchildren Gabby, Jordan Bourgeois, and Eli Fletcher; brother Lewis (Lola) Donajkowski. She was preceded in death by her husband, her grandson Travis, great-grandson Nathan; siblings John Donajkowski, Vern Girard, Fran Mainville, Lottie Bolenz, and Gladys LaMarre. A private interment will be held at Holy Cross Cemetery on Friday with cremation arrangements handled by Bannan Funeral Home.”

Mom presses a damp wad of tissues to her eyes after she finishes reading out the obituary. Grandma clears her throat and nods, her glassy eyes fixed on a particular swirl in the wood grain of our kitchen table. I blow my nose into my own tissue. My nostrils are rubbed raw. The three genera-

tions that have come after my great grandmother sit around my laptop in silence. Nobody turns to look at the empty green recliner in the darkened living room.

My eyes drift to the clock in the corner of my screen. After 10:00. We had been writing this for almost 40 minutes. It had felt much longer than that.

“What does everybody think? Does it look good?” My voice is thick with mucus. I cough and take a sip of water.

Mom nods. “I think it’s good.”

“It’s perfect.” Grandma’s voice breaks. She removes her glasses, sets them on the table, and presses her palms to her eyes.

A fresh wave of sadness washes over me at the sight of her grief. “So, I can send it off to the paper?”

A unanimous “yes.”

I nod. I send off the obituary, the picture we picked out (her 90-something birthday. She’s holding a gift bag to her chest, giddy and beaming like a little kid, and her sweatshirt is so pink that it makes her face and hair look blue), and a few strings of words that do not adequately sum up our predicament.

As soon as I shut my laptop, we disperse to our own corners of the house. That screen had irradiated us; we could not face each other without the risk of recontamination.

July 11th, 2019

Grandma noticed the smell first. It didn’t hit me until a few seconds before the shouting.

“Mom! Why didn’t you say you had to go?” Grandma’s voice bounces off the walls.

My pulse quickens. Grandma Gudrun had been losing her hearing for as long as I could remember, but our constant shouting was something I had never gotten used to.

“I didn’t have to go.”

“Well, you must’ve, ‘cause you certainly went!”

I make my way into the living room just in time to see Great Grandma, perched in her green La-Z-Boy like a queen on her throne, casually shoo her daughter away, her hand adorned with broken nails she had refused to clip for months. My brother zooms past me to occupy the space I left in Grandma’s room. I don’t blame him.

“I jus’, I jus’ didn’t feel like gettin’ up. Saved ya a trip.”

I believe her. She couldn’t hold herself up anymore, and even with help from a walker she had owned longer than I had been alive, her balance was only getting worse. She needed two people to not only lift her and carry her to the bathroom, but to fight against her urges to lean backwards while walking forward and fling herself to the ground while everyone fought to prop her up.

“I’m gonna fall, I’m, gonna fall!”

Every day she tries her hardest to make that happen.

“You didn’t feel like getting up, but sitting in your own shit? That sounded like fun to you?”

Great Grandma barely lifts her hand for her next dismissive wave. “No.”

“Well, that’s what you’ve been doing for God knows how long!” Grandma looks around the living room before sighing deeply. She turns to face the big picture window next to Great Grandma’s chair. She loved to loudly inform us whenever the mailman stopped, or when the garbage men came through, or if a semi passed our house. Sometimes we joked that Grandma Gudrun was a better dog than our beloved mutt, Max.

Cars come to a stop on our busy little road, one after another, like ants who have lost the scent of their trail. The light at the intersection must have turned red. A blue truck towing a white fishing boat stays framed in our large window.

I once saw a picture of my great grandfather in his sailor uniform: blue suit, white cap, whiter teeth. A handsome young man with his whole life ahead of him walked past two women on a bridge one day.

One of those women, Great Grandma, nearly thirty, took one look at him – his blue suit, his white cap, his whiter teeth – turned to her friend, and said, “That’s the man I’m gonna marry.”

And she did. She always got what she wanted.

Grandma closes the curtain. The picture disappears. “Now we’ve gotta clean you up so you don’t track shit through the house.”

I shuffle forward, anticipating her request.

Grandma turns and looks at me as if I had appeared out of thin air before returning to her deeply settled frown. “Gabby, help me lift her.”

I nod and step to the left side of the green chair as Grandma steps to the right. She doesn’t look at us. I’m not sure if she’s embarrassed, or if she just can’t handle being wrong. We both bend forward and loop an arm under one of Grandma Gudrun’s armpits.

Before I can prepare to push off the chair with my right arm, Grandma says, “Okay, this might be a little tricky. We’re both gonna have to lift her with one arm and pull her pants off with the other.”

A pit forms in my stomach.

“Are you ready?” Grandma’s voice is gruff. She looks at me, already red, already angry.

I don’t think I’ll be strong enough.

“Yup. Ready when you are.”

I don’t have a choice.

I stand with my feet spread wide and my legs bent to increase my stability and decrease the work my shoulders and back will have to do in lifting. I

grab at Great Grandma's pant leg. She swats at me, and I narrowly avoid contact with the yellowed nails. I refuse to dwell on what could have made their undersides so dark.

"Mom, we're picking you up for a second! I need you to lift with your legs."

"Whassat?"

"Your legs! Lift with your legs!"

She's so loud, and I'm so close. Her voice reverberates in my chest, and I want to cover my ears. I look down into Great Grandma's nest of white hair. She used to wash it in the kitchen sink and curl it with rollers. They always came out so shapely, nothing like mine. The top of her head would look sculpted from marble. Then, somewhere along the way, she couldn't do that by herself anymore and Grandma took over. Some time after that, Grandma had bigger messes to worry about. Now, her beautiful curls have unfurled, and she's fighting to drag the rest of herself back to the ground as we pull her up.

Grandma curses as her mom starts screaming, but soon enough her trip in the air is over and her sweatpants are pooled around her ankles. She falls back to Earth.

Something in my back twitches. She's the smallest she's ever been, yet she still finds ways to make herself too heavy to bear. She's dead weight. Maybe that's all she's ever been. Something in my stomach twitches. My face is red with exertion and shame.

"Oh my God, you're filthy!"

I'm pulled back into the moment, and the smell gags me. I look down at Grandma Gudrun's pants, at the disposable mattress pad covering her chair, at her inner thighs. All brown.

I take a couple of steps back and try not to breathe through my nose. This was the worst it had been in a while. We had been taking her illness in stride. Some things, like messes, were getting easier to manage. Others, like tempers, were only getting harder.

"Mom, how long have you been sitting in this?"

Great Grandma shrugs, feigning nonchalance.

"Goddamn it." Grandma moves away from her mother. Her back is to her. She's quiet now as her eyes start to mist and her fists clench at her sides. "Goddamn it."

I shuffle towards her again, then look back at the mess behind us. "Grandma, should I call Mom? I'll bet she can leave work early to help, she's done it before."

"No. No, no, no." She waves the thought away like a pesky fly. "I can't do this to her." Her voice breaks.

I almost cry.

Grandma looks over her shoulder at her mother. "Put the chair up."

As she crosses from the living room into the kitchen, I return to the mess and bend down to pull the lever on the side of the green recliner.

As the bottom of the chair becomes parallel with the seat, Grandma Gudrun yelps like she's been thrown 50 feet in the air.

I step back and rub my temples. I don't know why I'm not more used to this.

After a few minutes of the faucet in the kitchen running, Grandma comes back with a bucket of water in each hand and a washcloth on her shoulder.

Great Grandma flinches back. "I'll be fine like this."

For a moment, I think that grandma is going to snatch the hand waving her away out of the air. Instead, she sets the buckets of water down near the chair and gets to work cleaning the mess.

Great Grandma cries out as the damp cloth touches areas of her body that she hasn't properly cleaned herself in a very long time.

I want to leave. I want to shut my eyes and cover my ears to all of this. But something compels me to stay and bear witness to the wisps of Grandma's grey hair coming out of her ponytail, and the liver spots on Great Grandma's legs, and the bright beams of sunlight bouncing off passing cars and filtering into the room through our thin beige curtains.

"My back hurts," Great Grandma grumbles.

Grandma drops the washcloth into one of the buckets. "So does mine! I hurt it helping you 30 years ago!" She flings droplets of water everywhere as she waves her hands around her head. "Now you're hurting all of us, over and over again, and you don't care!"

Her words shake the walls, but I can't bring myself to cover my ears.

"I do care!" Great Grandma's voice is strained and brittle. She hasn't been drinking her water like she's supposed to.

"If you cared, you'd help us help you! But you don't! You sit in shit, and you don't eat, and you don't tell anybody what's wrong! You don't care about getting better—"

"I care too!" Great Grandma tries to sit up in her chair, tries to look imposing. She can't. "I care a lot, an' I can feel! I can feel everything you're doing to me."

Grandma's arms drop to her sides.

I think back to the stories Grandma would share about her dad. About his kindness, his patience, his dedication to his wife and children. About how he loved traveling in the navy and how he wanted to show them all the world, to give them all the world.

About his cancer. About how his only wish at the end was to die in the house he built for his family. About how his daughter was only a teenager when he broke a dish and threw up all over the kitchen, and his wife sent him away to stay in the hospital full-time. About how he never saw the inside of this house again.

About how he never got what he wanted.

I lean against the wall. I get the picture.

"You can feel." Grandma bows her head. "Sometimes I wonder."

It's summer, it's the middle of the day, I'm in my monkey-print pajama pants. I should feel content, I should feel excited to finish my last year of community college, I should feel safe. I haven't felt anything of the sort since Grandma Gudrun stopped eating, stopped carrying herself, started wasting away.

Grandma picks up her washcloth. Her hands shake as she tries not to tear her mother's crepe paper skin. She lets out one choked sob, then another.

November 25th, 2021

I look down at my monkey-print pajama pants, then at our living room. The space by the picture window is occupied by a bookshelf containing more knickknacks than books. We moved Great Grandma's recliner to the middle of the room, closer to the television and the entertainment center, and threw a blanket over its back. Much nicer than a mattress pad. It's a lot cozier this way. We don't think about what's missing as much as we did when that big old chair still sat empty by that big old window.

Grandma is in that chair now. I turn to her, and to Mom sitting a couple of feet away in another recliner. "I just realized I haven't thought about Grandma Gudrun in a while," I say.

Mom turns her head to me but keeps her eyes fixed at some point above me, like she's trying to look into the past. "Huh. Yeah, I've been so busy with work, I haven't really either."

Grandma puts down her Switch and looks near me with a similar faraway look. "You know, now that you mention it, I haven't either. Guess I've just been so tied up with cooking and errands and my little games lately that I haven't found the time." She returns to her Switch and her village full of cute animals that demand very little of her. "We'll have to visit her grave when the weather gets nicer."

I nod my head and bite my bottom lip. I almost don't want to ask the question on the tip of my tongue. "Do you... miss her?"

Mom and Grandma look at each other, then at me.

A unanimous “no.”

My shoulders relax a bit. “Me either.”

Acknowledgments



There are so many amazing people who put work into this journal behind the scenes. This page is only a small representation of our gratitude for their time, support, and skills.

Thank you to J.J. Boehm and the PJPC team; Taylor Hart for designing a fantastic logo; everyone at the Graphics Center for faithfully printing our journal; SVSU’s English and Arts department and the RPW department for encouraging students to join our team and submit; and all of the SVSU students who have shown interest in our publication over the past few years.

Thank you to Dr. Kim Lacey, our faculty advisor who is constantly fighting for us, answering our questions, and encouraging the growth of *Cardinal Sins*. We so appreciate your continued dedication to this publication and to the students involved.

Thank you to all of our talented contributors. We are so pleased to feature you in this issue. We hope you’re as proud of this journal as we are.

Thank you to our staff, both new and old, for killing it this semester. We appreciate your hard work and passion for the arts. Seriously, we would have been floundering without you.

To everyone we forgot to mention, thank you.

Lastly, thank you for reading the Winter 2023 issue of *Cardinal Sins*. We hope you enjoy.

All the best,

Megan Draper, Editor-in-Chief

Gabby Bourgeois, Digital Editor

Biographies



Winners

Gabby Bourgeois is a writing tutor and senior at SVSU studying Creative Writing and Professional & Technical Writing. Their work has been published in the 2020-21 edition of *Writing@SVSU* and the January 2023 edition of the University of Utah's *Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Issues and Media*, and they will appear in the upcoming 2022-2023 issue of *Writing@SVSU*.

Shannon Glaser is a third-year graphic design major that prefers to make fine art over graphic designs. She aspires to someday design packaging that will end up on a shelf in the Target beauty section.

On the day **Laurinda Lind** was born, a guy on Long Island caught a 57-pound recordbreaking tuna. On the day she submitted this poem, two earthquakes shook the Mentawai Islands. Also, five years ago, she won the Keats-Shelley Prize for adult poetry. How are these connected? They aren't.

Lucas Luna is a 19-year-old neurodiverse transgender man who found art as an outlet for his emotions and creativity. His pieces are rarely planned, and many are of his signature doodle art style, but a ghost or two can be found occasionally.

Alyssa Proctor is a Graphic Design major and Art minor student. Aside from painting or illustrating she has a passion for photography, ever since she got her first camera. Any chance she gets to catch the sunset and photograph it, she takes it because landscapes are her favorite genre!

Before the apocalypse, **Kelly Talbot** was an editor for *Wiley*, *Macmillan*, *Oxford*, *Pearson Education*, and other major publishers. His writing appeared in dozens of magazines and anthologies. He divided his time between Indianapolis, Indiana, and Timisoara, Romania.

Contributors

Tohm Bakelas is a social worker in a psychiatric hospital. He was born in New Jersey, resides there, and will die there. He is the author of 24 chapbooks and several collections of poetry. A new collection is forthcoming from Zeitgeist Press in 2023. He runs Between Shadows Press.

Aaliyah Burgess' imagination is the only part of her that has ever functioned just for fun. She's constantly finding inspiration any and everywhere. While her mind was running faster than Forrest Gump, her fingers could never keep up; playing leapfrog with short stories to poems to half-baked dialogue ideas.

Trent Caulkins was born to be weird. Starting off by drawing stick figures in the margins of his math tests while his teacher loomed behind in disapproval, he slowly improved. From anthropomorphic animals to socio-political topics to more personal art, Trent has always been wild and eccentric with his art

Holly Day's writing has recently appeared in *Analog SF*, *The Hong Kong Review*, and *Appalachian Journal*. She spends an inordinate amount of time following wild animals around her back yard, trying to get them to talk to her.

PM Flynn is a North Carolina writer and photographer. He holds a B.S. in English from East Carolina University and has been published in many fine print and online anthologies, newspapers, and literary magazines. He takes good pictures because they don't take themselves and he no longer worries about zits.

Numerous stories by **Clive Aaron Gill** have appeared in literary journals and anthologies. He tells his stories at public and private gatherings. Born in Zimbabwe, Clive has lived and worked in Southern Africa, North America and Europe. He received a degree in Economics from UCLA and lives in San Diego. More of Clive's Stories are available at amazon.com/author/cliveaarongill.

Taylor Hart is a senior within the professional and technical writing program. Upon graduating, she hopes to work for NASA and work as a science communicator. Outside of that, she's usually aggressively rage gaming and screaming at the TV.

Caroline Helmstadt has an interest in nature photography; when on the trail, she frequently looks up or down to capture some detail or perspective that caught her attention. She appreciates the patience of her partner, Julien, who waits for her to get the right shot.

Chris Innes is a writer living in Washington, D.C. and has had poetry published in a variety of literary magazines, including *The Wisconsin Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Burningwood Literary Journal*, *Prairie Winds*, *Common Ground Review*, *The Pikeville Review*, *Descant*, and *The Mankato Poetry Review*.

Cassie Lehman is an English major in the College of Education at Saginaw Valley State University. She is currently working towards her Bachelors, and plans on becoming an English teacher. She is an avid reader and baker, occasionally putting the book down to pick up a pen and write.

Georgie Roache loves oranges, especially at night.

J. Paul Ross is a Colorado native. Most days, he can be found in a dark walk-in closet, cursing his monitor for its annoying love of comma splices. This of course is insane because everyone knows that comma splices aren't caused by monitors, they're created by the PCU.
Mary Sesso

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*. Edward is also a published poet.

Nicole Szymanski is currently pursuing a BFA with a concentration in printmaking and a BA in Graphic Design at SVSU. She is interested in the combination of new techniques and processes in her art making to convey complex emotions without having to speak on their behalf.

Kyla Wheatley has always had a love for horror. An obsession with the *Goosebumps* series has warped their deranged little mind and thus Memento Mori was created. They hope you enjoy reading it as much as they enjoyed writing it.

Staff

Megan Draper is probably gushing about *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, petting a cat, or planning her next trip abroad. She's a third-year Creative Writing and Spanish double major, and the Editor-in-Chief of *Cardinal Sins*. Her work has previously been published by Owl Hollow Press and is forthcoming in *Belmont Story Review* and *300 Days of Sun*. Learn more about her writing at www.authormeganriann.com.

Gabby Bourgeois didn't feel like writing their second bio.

Kim Lacey is still wondering, like twenty years later, if she remembered to drop off the refill to table 62.

Annaleese Armstrong is a first year PTW major and a reader and editor for *Cardinal Sins*! She's also a member of the pom team and the honor program! Like an old granny, her hobbies also include reading, crocheting, and playing scrabble.

Olivia Bruzewskii is a fourth-year Communications major who runs on coffee and delusion. When not freaking out over homework assignments, she can be found reading a poorly written fantasy novel or hanging out with her sorority sisters.

[No Danielle bio](#)

Chrissy M. Hansen is a graduate of SVSU. She has a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and has published on a wide variety of issues in academia, from historical Jesus studies to Tolkien studies to Ethics. She has always loved fiction and poetry, particularly epic fantasy writing and surrealistic poetry. She plans to work as a writer and editor in the future. Outside of academia, she is an activist for LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, and is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Liliana Orozco is either petting a cute cat or customizing a cat family in her sims world. She is also a first year PTW major and this is her first year on the editorial team!

Leah Richardson is a first year PTW major, and is a reader and editor for *Cardinal Sins*. When not reading or editing for the magazine, she can be found procrastinating, jamming out to a good song, dancing for SVSU Hip Hop Crew, or reading and editing.....for fun.

Zach Vance is a Creative Writing major and Religious Studies minor who formerly wanted to go into Psychology but determined it was too much work. He is currently a senior at Saginaw Valley State University and his billionth year as a college student in general. He is a reader/editor for *Cardinal Sins*. He has two cats who he loves very much, and has never kicked a puppy, despite what Editor-in-Chief Megan Draper might say about him.

Katherine Weber is an aspiring editor who loves grammar, chocolate, and her cat Buttercup. She is in her final year at SVSU and wants to encourage everyone reading this journal to keep writing and editing and submitting!

Submission Guidelines



All general submissions must:

- be submitted through (<http://cardinalsins.submittable.com/submit>)
- include multiple submissions for a single category in one document
- not contain any contact information within the attached document

Text submissions should:

- be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, single spaced, with 1" margins
- include the title at the top of the piece
- be attached in .rtf, .docx or .doc format
- Poetry should be no longer than 70 lines
- Flash fiction should be no longer than 1,000 words
- Fiction should be no longer than 3,750 words

Artwork/Photography submissions should:

- be 300 dpi or greater
- have high contrast and sharp definition
- be attached in email in .jpeg or .png format
- be saved as their title

Note: photos that have been manipulated with a computer program should be submitted as artwork, not photography

Maximum number of entries:

- Submit up to 3 poems, 3 flash fiction pieces, 2 pieces of fiction, and 2 pieces of creative nonfiction
- Submit up to 5 artwork and photography pieces in each category
- You may submit to as many categories as you would like

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Prizes and Judging

Prizes may be awarded to SVSU students, faculty or alumni in each of the 8 categories we publish: poetry, fiction, flash fiction, creative non-fiction, black & white photography, color photography, black & white artwork, and color artwork. Outside SVSU artists and writers are free to submit and are eligible for publication; however, they will not receive monetary compensation for a general submission category prize.

Staff reserves the right not to award a winner in a particular category if no submissions are judged worthy of the award.

The SVSU-affiliated winner in each category will receive \$100 and recognition within the publication. All submissions will be entered into their respective category's contest unless otherwise requested.

Judging is done through blind voting by the editorial staff. Members of the editorial staff are permitted to submit entries for publication but cannot receive prize money for winning a category.

By submitting to *Cardinal Sins* you affirm that the work attached is solely your own. You agree to abide by *Cardinal Sins's* requirements governing submissions. If your work is accepted for publication, *Cardinal Sins* has the right to publish and distribute your work, in print, on the *Cardinal Sins* website, and, on occasion, in an audio format.

You retain all subsequent rights to your work.

Thank you for submitting to *Cardinal Sins*.

These guidelines are subject to change; please visit our Submittable page for the most current guidelines and for deadline dates.

A Note on Content & Taste

Though *Cardinal Sins* has no set theme, note we do not tend to publish works that feature explicitly sexual content, overtly triggering content used for shock value, glorified abuse, and/or similar content. Those topics may have their places, but they likely won't work for our university-funded publication. Please be conscious of this as you submit.