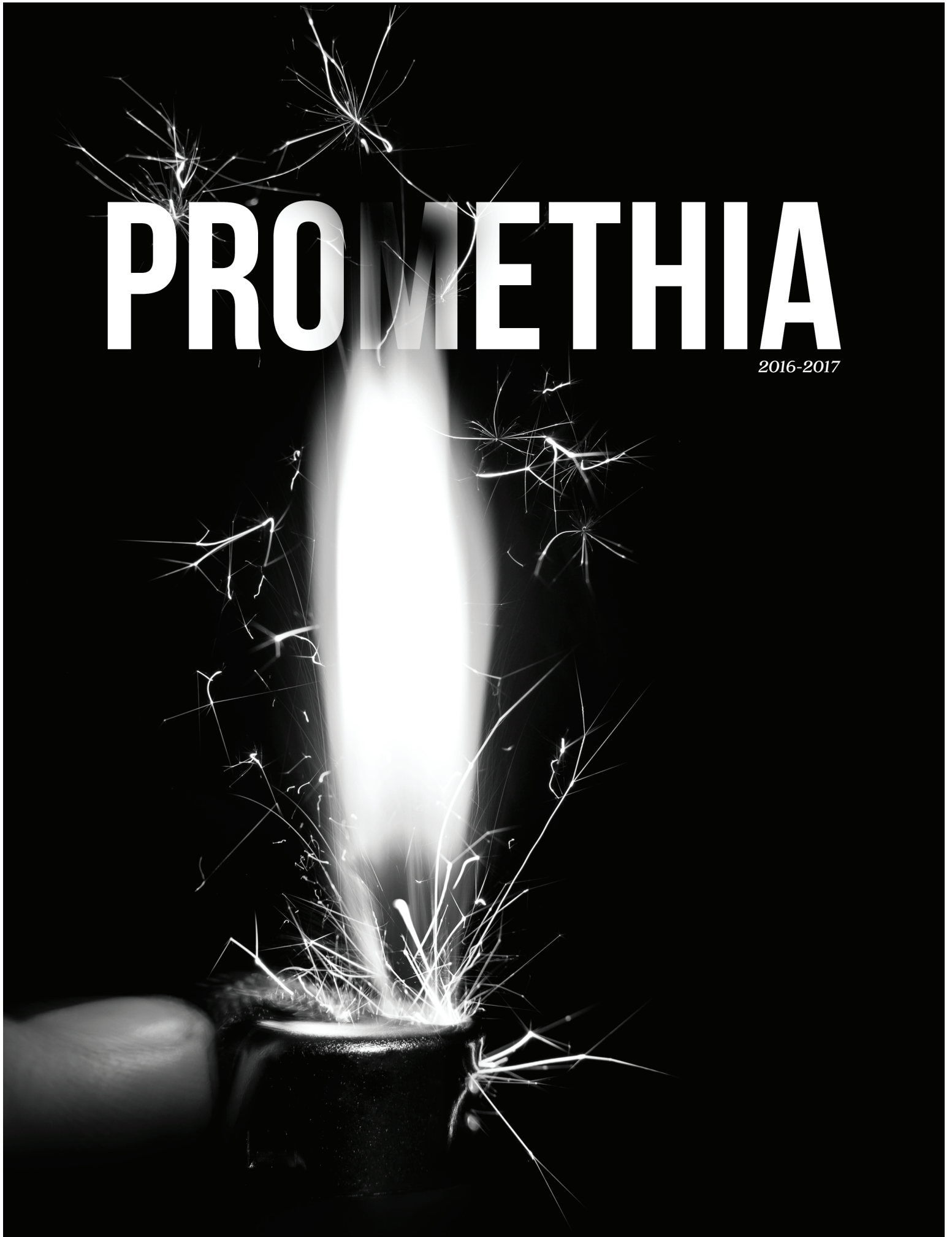


PROMETHIA

2016-2017





CREDITS

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

To write and to create art is to be observant—to be aware of the state of the world around us as well as the state of one's own soul. Words become bridges mending brokenness as art becomes a lens to see beauty in pain and creativity in the mundane. This is what *Promethia* does...it allows space for the words and the art of broken yet mending souls to come to an understanding that this world we live in is a captivating beauty.

As editors, we have seen a sample of creativity from ORU students that has testified to the variety, sensitivity, and perception of the contributing writers. We have seen personal experience turned into story, keen observation of life and society, and ordinary life details transformed into profound symbols through this year's *Promethia*.

In Dead Poets Society, Mr. Keating points out that "we read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion." We extend a special thanks to Professor Keith Gogan, who, much like Robin Williams' character, sparks a flame for poetry in his students. His own light and passion for poetry has been a beacon for this magazine and our own lives when it comes to practicing the art of observance, and for that we are grateful.

A special thank you to Lexi Sugiyama for her hard work and talent for graphic design, as well as Ginnie Miller and Octavia Mason, whose passion for literature has fueled the manifestation of this edition of *Promethia*.

It has been with great joy and excitement that we served along with you all as co-editors. You all are beautiful, creative souls.

Antavia Mason and Elise Seldenrust
 Co-Editors

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TO HER I WISH

by Jessica Collier

You and I meet as equals on this field of battle, for once,
Even though I can't believe it — for in all other aspects
You are far superior to me. I cannot rest at night
For what I see: delusions that you'd wish to war
With me. But my soul knows better.

Love does not come free. Trust me, I have paid —
With every mental war game I have played
With myself, thinking it was you. Of course
I would sacrifice to be free! Long have I yearned
To love another, but this tactic doesn't work, you see.


Break this uneasy truce! Release me from my need
To hallucinate. This painful strategic opiate that burns
Me on the inside will soon prove to freeze me whole.

But this is not about me, it is about you. You are the one
Who woke me up, but I fell asleep instead, sinking into
Violent dreams of peace. Dear, my affections for you
Will never cease. But they will not be about you. They will be about me.

And so I must surrender: not to you,
My heart's true enemy, but to that voice inside
That says, "It cannot be."



Photography by
Kalian deBruyn



*“Love does not come free
Trust me, I have paid”*

A black and white photograph of a city street at night. The image is heavily blurred, showing out-of-focus lights from buildings and street lamps, creating a bokeh effect. The lights are bright and circular, contrasting sharply with the dark background. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

*“... God is not too far from this place
of cobblestoned beauty in the midst of chaos.”*

*Photography by
Lisa Kleefeld*

COBBLESTONED BEAUTY

by Antavia Mason

The smell of scented spices and the sound of cavalier laughter fill the air as my feet meet the cobblestoned pathway. Fluorescent lights beam to life as the sun sets behind signs of shopping stores and busied restaurants packed from end to end, feeding hungry tourists and ravenous men whose desires long to be met by more than smoked lamb on baked pita bread.

Hamburg is alive. A pulse beating to a drum running on hidden lamps behind dirtied curtains. Buildings reach up into the sky, straining to make contact with a climax that never quite gets high enough. People lurk and cut eyes at the women lining the sidewalk in everyday clothes, with little to no makeup to hide the tired lines that crease their weary, worn faces. To my right, a group of women huddle together, their eyes darting in wild circles as they land on the one man whose tender smile offers coffee and water with no demand for a piece of their humanity. Some women smile back; others decline with sharp nods and averted stares. With coffee in one hand, some boldly tell their life story on how a crowded sidewalk down the street from a flower shop has become a workplace, with her body as the only resource for survival.

Each woman's face belies happiness. Their eyes are silver screens replaying that, so far, they have not received their fairy-tale ending. Nights here are shrouded in empty smiles, roaming eyes, and bodies too intoxicated to realize the chaos around them is only a slight indication of the turmoil that resides inside the waiting women on the sidewalk.

People hoard around a monument that lies in the center of it all. Its stone steps are bedraggled and worn, stripped of beauty and eroded from fumbling hands that have forsaken its loveliness for amateur seduction. Strangers gaze through the stone sculpture and see only what can be gained from it without causing change to their own souls. The steps of stone become trash bins draped with the ends of cigarette butts and wilted strips of paper as stragglers stop by once in a while to look with glazed – over eyes not seeing the importance of the statue in front of them.

As I sit on the stonework, I am met with the foreign eyes of strange men and the curious eyes of younger ones. Music rises slightly above the raucous laughter. A crowd forms as people begin to meander toward the center of chaos and listen to a group of twenty-somethings play songs about a God who doesn't seem too far from this place. Eager stares fill my vision, and heads bob and sway to the sound of fine-tuned guitars and the patter of one solitary drum. Next to me sits a man whose face is as rough as weathered terrain. He nods approvingly to the music and tells me a story of a band he once saw on a video. As he speaks, his tongue wrestles against a Russian accent moving to convey in English so that I may understand him. A woman with kind eyes sits diagonally to the man on the steps behind me. Her smile is as bright as the moon, and her eyes fill with wonder when we play a song she recognizes. She tells me that she loves God, and I believe her. When one song ends, she is quick to ask if another will be played. I assure her each time with a nod and a smile.

Over the heads of the hovering crowd, the streets are still brimming with countless frames. Women still stand on corners, and men walk up to them, propositions resting strongly on their wayward shoulders. Neon lights flash in red and white, blinking away as hotel rooms no longer remain vacant. With each glint of the neon lights, souls wither, and dreams become whispers long forgotten. As the music fades and the guitars stop strumming, the crowd disperses. The man who sat beside me shakes my hand and stands to leave, his plastic chair in tow. The woman behind me stands; her eyes, no longer filled with wonder, are now drenched in sadness. She offers me a weak smile in thanks for the music. She tells me how much she enjoyed it and how she wishes we could play longer. With the music stifled and the crowd gone, we gather our instruments. As we leave behind broken women, empty men, and the incessant flashing of lights, I remind myself that God is not too far from this place of cobblestoned beauty in the midst of chaos.

*“I am from
roofline snow...”*



*“Brown and beautiful
strong and woman”*



*Photography by
Wyatt Bullard*

I AM FROM

by Keith Gogan

I am from
44 degrees north latitude
1,200 feet altitude
Montreal in time for lunch

I am from
infant baptism
childhood catechism
adolescent confirmation and
wine with the wafer

I am from
gray sky
muscled mountain
birch, beech, pine, fir, spruce, moose, deer, bear, trout, grouse

I am from
roofline snow
sliding skis
white thermometers
rosy frozen noses

I am from
woodstove heat
maple syrup from a tree
wild blueberries for free

I am from
canoe paddle wrist
shotgun shoulder
fly rod finger

I am from
white Christmas
white Thanksgiving
white Easter and
some July days too cool
for swimming

I am from
the other
New York

BROWN BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

by Antavia Mason

Brown and beautiful, strong and woman
Eyes blaze like fire setting alight all that lies in front
Nose as wide as the Mississippi river and hips as round
As grandma's pots on Thanksgiving day
Hair as potent as a bouquet of flowers
In the hands of a sure-footed bride
Sets the frame of smiles few and far inbetween
Brown and beautiful, lovely and woman
Words like honey and salve, yet sharp as swords
On the days sentences become battle gear
Lips the color of brown sugar and legs the height of the sky
You stand tall beneath the weight of the world

PAPER CASTLES

by Antavia Mason

we built our house out of papier mache walls
we placed our love on the legs of wavering wood and
decided life would hold itself together
our bed became a cloudless sky of promised rain
that never came, our pillows empty cushions filled with vacant dreams
we built our house on make believe notions
on the sacred whisperings long forsaken of purity
drenched in the frivolity of two people who have no
grasp of a love that waters wilted flowers back to life

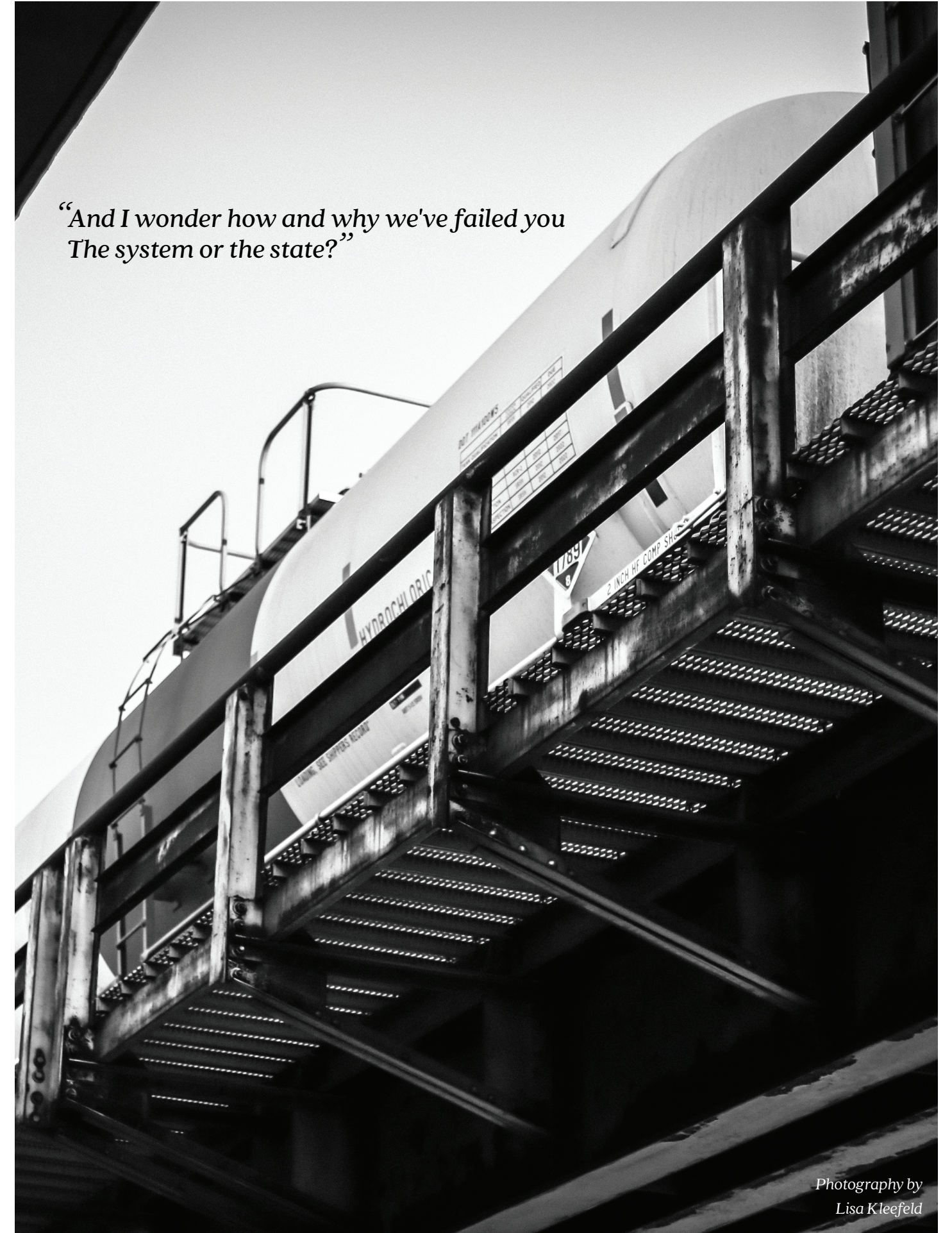
VOICEMAIL

by Octavia Mason

Let me set in stone the pattern of your raspy voice.
A lilt generated from years of inhaling the bitterness of a hard life endured.
A lilt I was drawn back to after once not in want of its rhythm.
Today, it is here no more
And my heart struggles with convincing my ears to listen to an orchestra lacking its conductor.
So for now, let me set in the stone of memory the voice of a mother no longer here.
Because all I can handle is the running of my fingers along the grooves of your voice.



Photography by
Stephanie Thomas



*“And I wonder how and why we've failed you
The system or the state?”*

*Photography by
Lisa Kleefeld*

THE A TRAIN

by Shaynee Sherwood

Huddled on the sticky floor
At Penn Station
Rocking back and forth

Pink and purple sneakers
Reveal
That if the shoe fits
You'll wear it
Even if you have a beard

This man
In our way
What is the deal
People's glances convey

But how can I help you
Other people think
As you rock back and forth
Like a grown child in pain

Face on the floor
Hands clasped
Arms reaching out
Like a sinner begging for forgiveness
Before a fried chicken meal and grace

And I wonder
How and why we've failed you
The system or the state?
As a non-descript man with a walkie talkie
Reports the disturbance you create

And I wonder if you're ill
Or coming off a high
And how many years have you been
Out here
Out here barely getting by

And one day
I hope
To see
Myself and
Society
With our
Faces on the floor
Hands clasped
Arms reaching out
Repenting
For the time
We walked
Around the man

The man near the A train exit
Who was quietly begging
Begging
To be saved



*“Shine —
and off it goes...”*

Photography by
Mark Moore

SHINE

by Jonathan Roesler

Shine — and off it goes;
For eons and eons it flows.
Past dust and cloud
And black and shroud,
Into the times unknown.

Pierce — and jabbing, dive
Through systems that strive,
And glow, and burn,
And wheeling churn,
All for life to grow.

Twinkle — and meets an eye,
So far, and yet so nigh!
For his heart to miss
And what, for this —The
Window of his soul.



Art by
Camille Suter

WARM AUTUMNS

by Gregory Brown

Wind-whipped waves of Indian
grass grasp at a pale stretch of
sky, as sedans like locusts
bounce from shop to shop, turning
black the air in their eating.

Short-sleeved teens with their bowed
heads and crystal screens stamp their
feet into rows of cement,
while eggshell leaves crack, crumble,
and spill across the walkway.

A man in smooth leather holds
tight onto this platinum
woman, covering up her
open belly with python
hands, and her mouth opens, the
rose beneath her celestial
nose splits wide open, she sings:
"Can you believe it's still like
eighty degrees a week before
we go home for Thanksgiving?"





CRESCENDOS OF OUR BALLADS

by Octavia Mason

My heart is yours to rest upon
A cushion never deflating from pressure
Each thump an original lullaby
Composed only for your ears
And if you are to ever wander off
The crescendos of our ballad will rise with each step you take
Until you gradually descend back into my arms

ENDURING THE FALL

by Carmen Ruiz

Wind,
passionate and pounding,
has colored my tree into a bruised maroon.

Rooted firmly,
it does not compromise,
but only bleeds through its leaves.

Stained with the pigment of endurance

Although it may appear as if she is falling apart,
she will make it through this season.

This tree will make it through the season.

*Photography by
Wyatt Bullard*



WHAT THE ENGRAVING AT THE PARK SHOULD HAVE SAID

by Hannah Borger

Rotunda of nature, dome of marbled white and blue
Students standing, stopped
Ears cocked
For tutors in the treetops

VIOLA'S SONG

by Victoria Atterberry

Today I will see her
bathe in the applause from the melodious notes of her music
without holding the pieces of her frightened heart.

Today she will stand slightly taller
and feel the vibrations of sounds only she can make.

Her chin will rest gently yet firmly over her instrument of choice
that taught her to love the soul's pure and raw emotion.

She will inhale the wood's sweet maple and
Like lilies floating softly in the water
her hand will glide across the silk string.

Her song will leave no eye dry and no heart untouched.
As a teacher I am pleased.
As a father I am proud.

THE BALLOON EFFECT

by Amber C. Earls

There are rules to letting go.
You can't just...half let go of a balloon string
Either it sails from your fingers or it sticks to the tips
There isn't an in-between
And these are the laws of gravity that I am trying to defy.
I am holding onto long talks and 8pm gawks
From outrageous things I'd say at funerals
And the challenges to my spirit that you have brought.
And the things that are pleasant.

I am one of those people who
Unfortunately
Mate for life
So, when you break down my walls
You really can't go away
But that being said
You did break down my walls
So I thank you for that
Because without that wrecking ball
I would still be bound
And they are telling me
That there will come a day when your name won't matter to me anymore
And that I will find peace in the arms of the man I will love
And possibly wonder how you are doing with your wife and your children
And even if that should be the case
I'm not there yet.
I am still letting you go.

But the more I think about it
Maybe I'm not trying to defy gravity
But maybe I am slowing the process down by letting you slide, and not slip, from my fingers

But I do want to let you go
And I want to watch you float away
Into the limitless skies of your destiny
And I want to wave goodbye until you disappear from my eye view
And when you float down to the earth again
Changed completely by the altitudes of time and space
I'd like to believe
You won't need to find my home or private beach
Because as the wind leads you back home
The memories will be enough.



*“There are rules of letting go.
You can't just...half let go of a balloon string.”*

*Photography by
Victoria Atterberry*


PIMPLE PRESS

by Ginger Gregory

Pop, press, push
pop, press, push
red button
screaming
"Don't touch!"
open the gate to
skin city where
blasphemy and
blemishes blend.

Blood red mountains
mini volcanoes with
white lava
erupting,
self-image
soon severed.

Why remain within
Skin city limits?
Kindness
Joy
Humility
Generosity—
These are suburbs where
All are welcome with
No press necessary.



*“Why remain within
Skin city limits?”*

*Photography by
Lexi Sugiyama*



*“Remember
When we played with paper dolls?”*



*Photography by
Anissa Presley*

PAPER DOLLS

by Faith Sweet

Remember

When we played with paper dolls?

Tiny pieces of paper in our palms became

Dreams that we lived in our heads, stories and songs

We loved to believe in.

But now, oh now,

The paper we played with grows plain,

Longer

Thinner.

No pretty toys, we only have time for to-do lists.

And it is this: a long line of empty boxes from our own and other people's luggage

Thrust upon us until it's far too much to carry

And we lie flat and passive under the crushing weight of these great expectations.

Some lists are short, wrong, raw, shallow—

Built on pretty nightmares in flickering lights

And the expectation of guys that shout catcalls across the parking lot as we walk by.

Others are longer, well-meaning, less likely to draw condemnation:

Long hair, cute sweaters, and Starbucks.

Love Jesus enough to be a good girl but not enough to be inconvenient.

Either way, we do our best to measure up to things presented to us.

"Stand a little higher, smile a little brighter at me, baby!"

Know when to talk, when to laugh, when to touch.

Try not to panic when we're told we're too little or just far, far too much.

Stretch, curl, pull-in and push-up

Anything to fit inside those tiny boxes in front of us.

But it's useless.

Because I'm curvy, but too curvy, but not curvy enough.

Because I'm not quite an artist or an executive or an intellectual

Or any other label because the truth is,

I am too much to be a checklist and not enough to fill up these boxes.

And the unending question is:

When did dreams, our playthings, turn around to define us?

Remember when we held our lives in our hands, not our shoulders?

Remember

When we played with paper dolls?

POISED

by Ginger Gregory

a child
standing in line
prize in pupils
chatter's change
sealed inside
mouth's pouch—
Poised.

ballerina!
she spins with
seesaw balance
tutu talented,
tight legs and
loose spirit,
plie before applause,
Poised.

an athlete,
arms aligned with
the goal,
ball before buzzer and
team behind.
Barely breathing she
Steps toward
that target,
scoreboard blind and
Spirit Poised.

surgery patient
sitting with
picture-perfect
posture,
waiting for
Dr. Dolor.
Fear knocks on
Mind's door but
Faith whispers
I Am—
Poised.

Galaxy of dreams
glistening
in his eyes,
crowd listening to
hope's sound.
Their gaze a glimpse
Into the future—
One filled with
Squared shoulders
Lifting societal lids,
Permanent lease
on possibility,
Poised for redemption.

*“ballerina!
she spins with
seesaw balance
tutu talented,
tight legs and
loose spirit
plie before applause,
Poised.”*



*Photography by
Stephanie Thomas*

WAKING UP FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM

by Abby Zellmer

It was kindergarten graduation. I was lined up with a small collection of 6-year-olds on a church stage. We were looking out at the audience—mostly photo-snapping parents and relatives—showcasing our impressive accomplishments from the year in songs we shouted more than sang. Now, during a brief interlude between musical recitations, our teacher was making her way down the line of bobbing blue paper graduation caps, interviewing us (with a real live microphone!) about our interesting kindergarten selves. The questions were simple enough, starting with “What is your name?” and culminating with the soul-baring, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I looked down the line. Let’s see. She’s on number three. So far we’ve had a firefighter, wedding planner, veterinarian. She was coming to me now: “and what do you want to be when you grow up, Abby?” It was my time to shine. To express my life’s dreams and the high, aspiring goals that my kindergarten education was preparing me to attain. I took a deep breath. “A waitress,” I answered.

America: the land of opportunity. The land where a kid is regularly asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and almost over-encouraged to dream big—the bigger the better. As children, visions of changing the world by being a heroic firefighter, brilliant doctor, or award-winning novelist run rampant through our heads, creating dreams whose unreachable distance from our childhood reality somehow only makes them seem more real.

Fast-forward a few years, however, and the endless opportunities slowly become more tangible, albeit no more attainable. The fact that people do, actually, have different strengths and weaknesses and that maybe, since you don’t like math and are struggling to keep a C average in Algebra 1, you shouldn’t become an engineer, grows more and more evident. This awareness weeds out some of

the aspirations we’ve been nurturing. This is also the time when our dreams are dimmed in our desperate attempts to survive the maelstrom that is middle school and high school. Waves of hormones and a tumultuous voyage of “finding yourself” threaten to overtake us. The opinions of our peers begin to mean the world to us. The desire to fit in and be “cool” grows stronger than the desire we have to do what we love. The wild dreams we had as children are often replaced by tamer, more popular goals. However, as we move closer to graduation and the beginning of adult life, we begin to realize that there is so much more living to be done ahead of us, and our dreams start to come into focus. They may be different now, but they are there, ready to be identified, shaped, and grown.

However, the process of making post-graduation plans can either nourish or inhibit those dreams. Too much pressure to come up with a plan, to reach full potential, to do something great and worthwhile can cause someone to freeze up, their personality, gifts, and desires bound up in the sudden insecurity that they aren’t “doing their best” and are another statistic of wasted resources for the Department of Education. These pressures, meant to push someone forward, often have just the opposite effect, driving the delicate seeds of dreams down deeper into the lifeless spaces of our souls. However, when nourished with encouragement, acceptance, and good old-fashioned love, the seeds begin to show signs of life and even sprout fresh, young leaves, full of promise and vivacity.

Once we launch into life after high school, however, having reached the next step in attaining our goals, we are met with another storm—the reality of a world where money is necessary and jobs are not exactly ripe for the picking. Knowing this is what’s waiting for us on the other side

does not do much to inspire us in the midst of assignments, late-night study sessions, and tuition payments. We realize how much courage it actually takes to “follow our dreams,” as we are so often told to do. For some, like the doctors and engineers, that courage is especially tested during their schooling. Their studies are grueling, requiring perseverance, passion, and grit to carry them through. For others, like teachers and artists, their determination will be tested upon graduation and having to fend for themselves. Their classes, although they also take dedication and hard work, don’t tend to be quite as difficult, but it will take ingenuity, diligence, and heart to be successful after they graduate. During these times, it is easy to forget why we are doing what we are doing. It’s easy to forget the dream that we set out to pursue. It’s easy to fall into discouragement, into taking the easy way out. But those dreams were planted in our hearts for a reason. No, it won’t come easy, and it does take more than the oversimplified mantra “just believe,” but it will be worth it.

It’s too bad there isn’t a graduation ceremony for life. All of us in our lavish, shining graduation caps and gowns, lined up, reflecting on our lives’ failures and successes as we wait for our names to be called. We’re preparing to answer a different question this time, however. Instead of “What do you want to be when you grow up?” we are each asked, “Who are you, now that you’ve grown up?” You see, our dreams hold more than desires for success in a specific vocation. They contain a part of us, a part of who we were made to be that we have not quite grasped yet. They remind us that there is something bigger than us, and from that realization comes a beautiful, passionate life. And that is an impressive accomplishment.



*Photography by
Lisa Kleefeld*

SILENT HOUSE

by Faith Sweet

The house creaked, and the silence grew deeper.
It'd been nine years now. Nine years since we'd
moved to Minnesota, to this place, and it still
hadn't welcomed us. It let us live, it tolerated our
presence, but it wasn't our home. We'd cleared out
the burnt orange shag carpets and covered the
Hawaiian murals on the walls with our own colors,
but somewhere, deep down inside the aging stick
frame, it refused to change. Its soul was still stuck
somewhere in the seventies. It never truly had a
prime, just a lifetime lived by a quarreling couple
stuck in the northern Midwest suburbia when they
really just wanted to live on the beach in Florida.

I could have sworn the place still kept their
presence. It was never really content, always
shifting slowly during the night, putting cracks in
the drywall showed peeling strips of the old neon
paint. It sat in all its banal square-ness in a plot of
dead grass and dandelions, frowning absently at
the warm concrete of the street. It always looked
like it had some complaint to make, but was too
polite to say it and too rude to keep the sour
expression off its faded brown siding. And so
we lived alone with the house that didn't like us,
never saying anything, never complaining, just
sitting: silent.

SOMEWHERE

by Virginia Miller

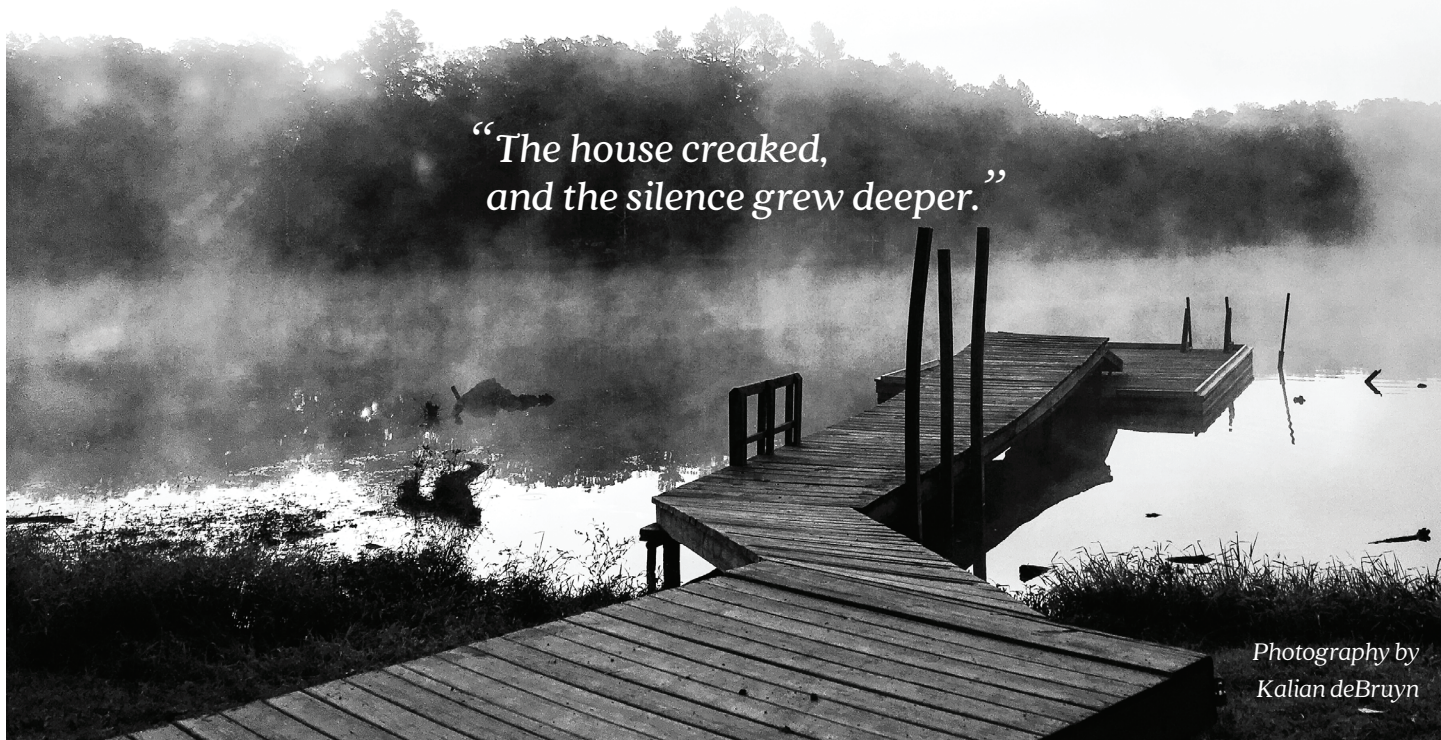
Sitting in a crowded shop
Not quite sure what it sells
Breathing in the sights and smells
Wondering about the desires
Of strangers scurrying somewhere to wander
So strong that it is called lust

But where is somewhere
If when is so evidently now, right this very minute
Or as soon as the ticket is booked
The seat claimed on a flying machine
That no one ever thought would
Get off the ground

Where is somewhere
If who is them, every last one
All in a hurry to get away
From where they are
To where they will next be
From which they will depart to point C
Hoping to see the point
Of all the rush and hustle

Where is somewhere
If how is whichever way is quickest
Or whichever way is cheapest
Or simplest, or easiest, or
Has the most leg room
To stretch out kinks in backs
From being contorted to cast glances over shoulders
To keep an eye out for whatever is always just behind

Where is somewhere
If why is an elephant
In this room
And every room that they enter
And so immediately wish to leave
The topic they wish to talk about less than
Anything else
Lusting after where to run from why



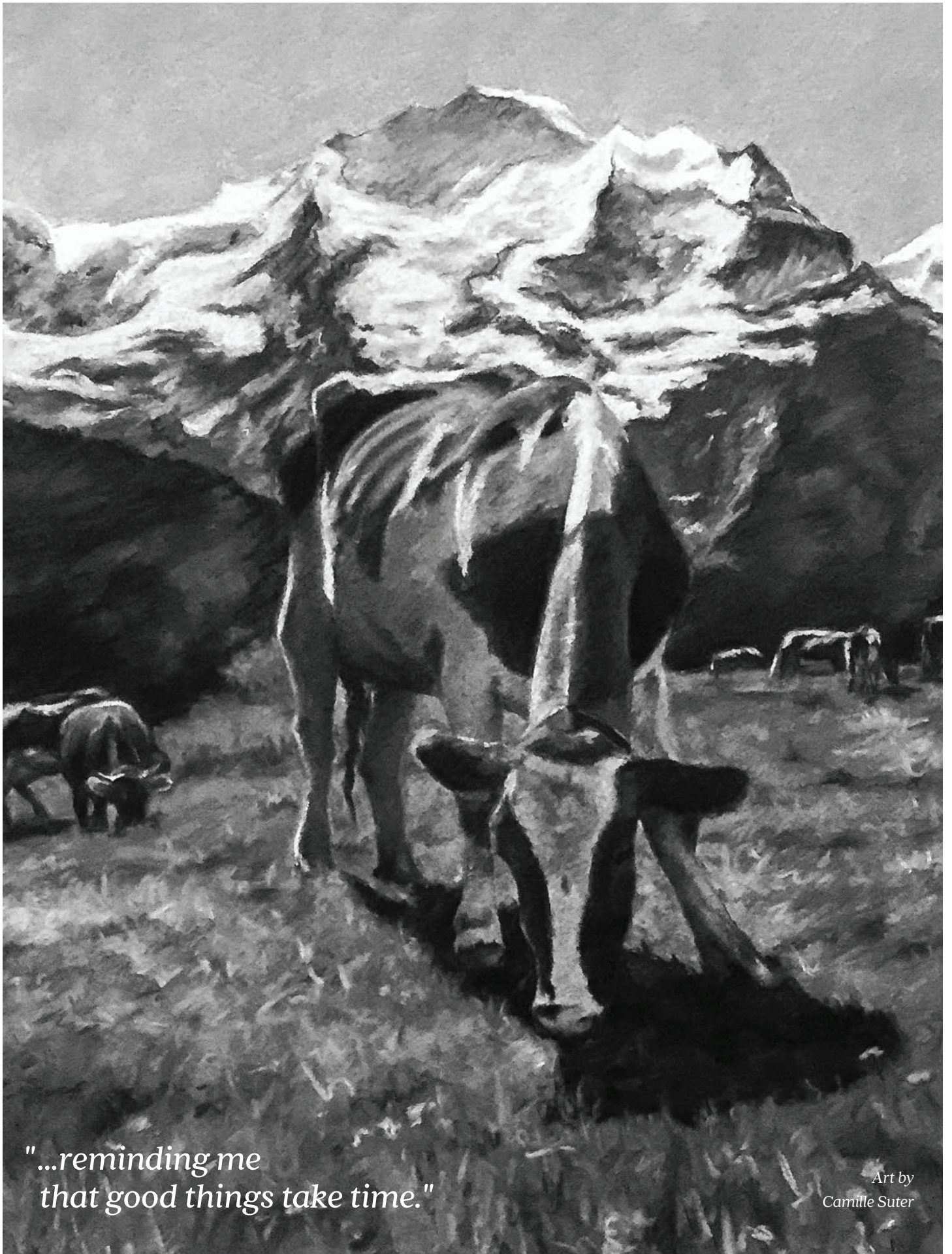
*“The house creaked,
and the silence grew deeper.”*

*Photography by
Kalian deBruyn*



*“Hoping to see the point
Of all the rush and hustle”*

*Photography by
Lexi Sugiyama*



*"...reminding me
that good things take time."*

Art by
Camille Suter

GREEN ONIONS

by Emma Giddens

They are ready to pick just before fall comes.

Something special must happen in the soil, something sacred – because every year, the green onions mature slowly and then, all at once, spring up green like tulips in March, just in time to be sliced up for stew. I'm convinced it's because they know better than anyone when the seasons are about to change

I sowed them in early summer, right after I called my 87-year-old grandma, like every year, to ask her what I should plant next in the little square plot that sits outside of my house. The raised bed, with its plastic siding in the most practical shade of brown, had produced two dozen vibrant red radishes the week before – the most striking vegetables I had ever seen – and I was ready to fill their space with something equally breathtaking.

Grandma rambled off half a dozen different varieties of produce while I fervently scribbled her suggestions on a notepad, noting the little quirks of each type. I immediately paused, though, when she cooed, “You could grow some of those green onions.”

I'd seen her plant them before – after roaming around Lowe's eyeing half-dead plants on the clearance rack, she would sweep me over to the garden section and grab a bundle of onion bulbs, laying them on top of whatever wilted plant she had decided to revive. They stayed buried in the soil of her garden for months, tugging themselves deeper and deeper into the ground to hide their expansion, while Grandma patiently looked on, biding her time until the day she chose to uproot them, uncovering her secret creations: large, creamy white onions.

Three weeks slid by, and I started to grow impatient with my little green onions. They were six inches tall and hardly the size of peas. I'd check the plot two or three times a day, hoping that in my absence, the rooty little vegetables would double in size. They didn't.

I almost pulled them up multiple times in my frustration, but every time I got close, Grandma would talk me off the ledge like an alcoholic on the verge of relapse, reminding me that good things take time.

She was right, too. As I approach the raised bed, I know that this time I won't walk away empty-handed. They're twelve inches tall now, with thick stems that shoot high into the air and billow out like palm fronds.

How did this happen? I ask myself, gathering a cluster of onions, my fingers overlapping where the prettiest shade of green meets milky white skin. I give them a soft tug, and out of the ground comes a group of pearls covered in dirt, with long hair extending from their heads.

I rub them clean, washing each head in warm water, before laying them straight across a wooden cutting board. As I slice, the pungent smell of juicy onion fills the air. I grew this, I think to myself, sliding the pieces off the board into a green Dutch oven. It's the most common miracle, and, at the same time, the most special.

CANCERED BEAUTY

by Alyssa LaCourse

My mom looked in the mirror at her naked face as I sat on the edge of the bathtub staring. I watched as she gently moisturized her face before rubbing her foundation in. I watched each stroke she made as she brushed blush onto her beautifully defined cheeks. I watched her as she coated each eyelash with mascara to make her eyes pop even more than they already did. I watched in amazement at how such a beautiful woman could become more beautiful with each step of her routine, hoping that when I grew up I could look just like her.

My mom was getting ready to meet with a surgeon to lay out a treatment plan to beat breast cancer. I sat on the edge of the bathtub watching my mom bravely get ready to face a very difficult day. At 46, my mom repeated the same routine she does daily, but this time as she got ready, she looked different. She was stroking her hair as if she was making a mental note of each fiber and how it felt. I could tell my mom was a little fearful of the day, but there was no way she was going to reveal that to me. Bible verses about strength, bravery, anxiety, and fear were laid out before her while worship music filled the air. It is hard to trust God in a situation that seems so devastating, but my mom was doing the best she could.

This was not the first time a cancer diagnosis had hit the family. Seven months before I was born, my paternal grandmother died of breast cancer. When I was 10 years old, my paternal grandfather died of lung cancer. Four years later, my maternal grandfather was diagnosed with prostate cancer but caught it early enough to beat it.

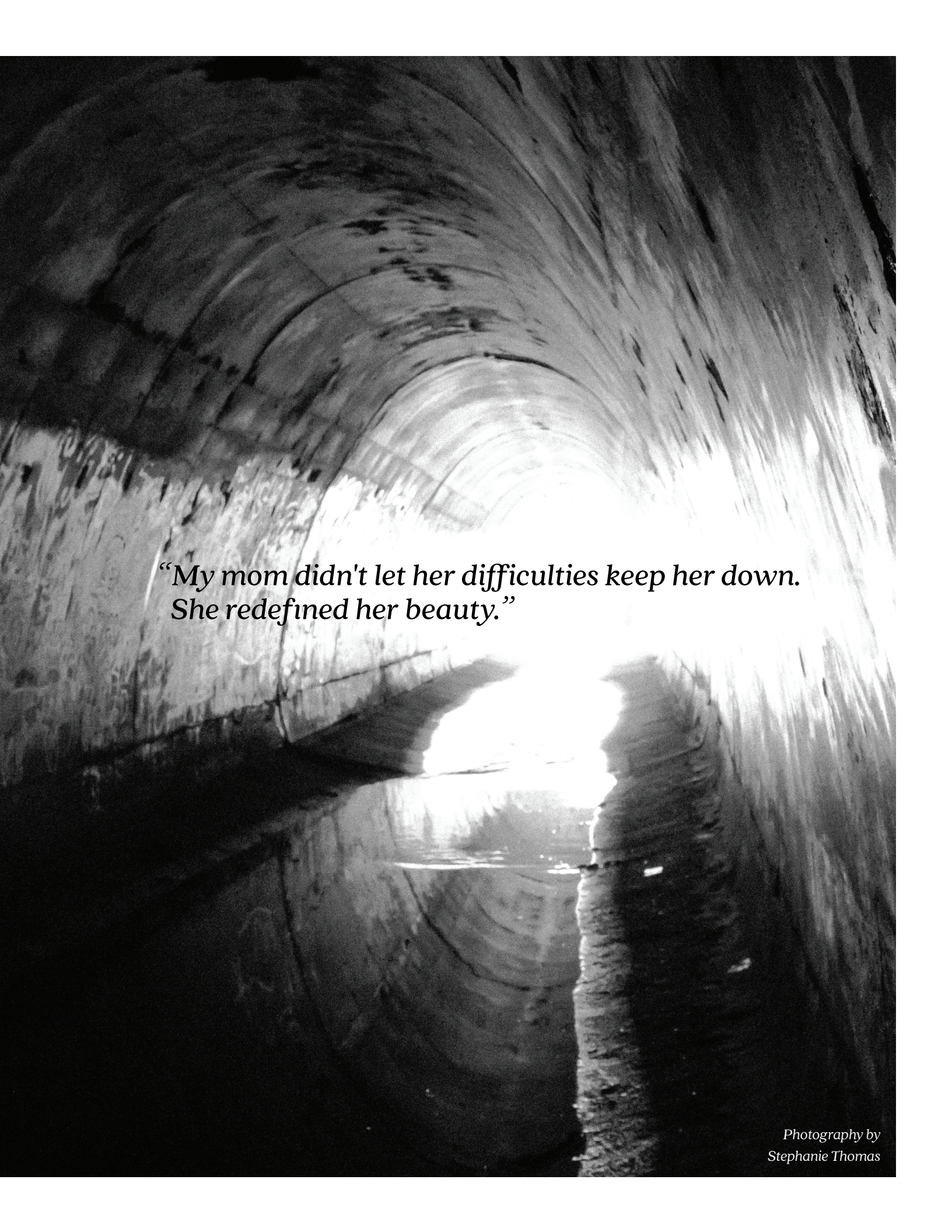
Cancer was a topic my family did not shy away from. We had seen the damage it could do, all the while witnessing the devastation it causes during the treatment. Chemotherapy changes a patient; all of a sudden, someone who was so full of energy and compassion can become lethargic and distant. Everyday tasks like going to the grocery store or making lunch become milestones rarely seen.

Every once in a while, they will have a good day and might walk to the mailbox or sit outside. I was preparing for the worst as my mom was preparing for her new life.

Months later, again I sat on the edge of the bathtub and watched my mom get ready for the day. After months of chemotherapy, weeks of radiation, and a large number of daily pills, she looked different. Patchy threads of short grayish hair replaced her shoulder-length brown hair. She had this sense of heaviness on her face not because she gained weight, but because of what she was dealing with. It's difficult finding clumps of hair on your pillow when you wake up. It's difficult having people stare at you in the grocery store. It's difficult having what the world defines as femininity stripped from you. It's difficult watching your world move on when you sit on the side helpless.

My mom didn't let her difficulties keep her down. She redefined her beauty. Her striking face structure forced people to notice her strong cheekbones. Her new haircut made people look intently into her warm brown eyes. Her beauty moved people. She was not afraid to rock her hair without a hat to cover her head because her lack of hair allowed her to be vulnerable with what she went through. She was not ashamed of herself. Yes people stared, but she was a walking testimony of what God can do. Her new beauty opened many doors and started many conversations that could not have happened if she had a full head of hair or even a wig.

My mom and I are the only girls in a house that is overrun by boys and boyish things. She has taught me how to be feminine in the midst of masculinity, strong in the midst of adversity, brave in the midst of fear, selfless in the midst of our selfish society. I may not get to sit on the edge of the bathtub and watch my mom get ready for the day every day, but I will always remember those special moments with her as I get ready for the day.

A black and white photograph of a tunnel. The tunnel's interior is composed of curved, layered rock or concrete, creating a series of concentric arches that lead the eye towards a bright, glowing light at the far end. A body of water is visible at the base of the tunnel, reflecting the light from the exit. The overall mood is one of hope and perseverance.

*“My mom didn't let her difficulties keep her down.
She redefined her beauty.”*

*Photography by
Stephanie Thomas*

words matter.

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