

Sidelines

Literary & Art Magazine

2020 Mini Edition



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Simmons University Literary & Art Magazine

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This magazine is dedicated to the
Simmons students for their perseverance,
resiliency, and strength during these
times of uncertainty.



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Sidelines

Simmons University Literary & Art Magazine

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

For the majority of us, the coronavirus pandemic has completely altered our lives. We've been displaced and forced back to homes that may not be welcoming. Our seniors, who have worked so hard, no longer get the graduation they deserve. We are worried about our vulnerable family members and if our lives will ever go back to normal. It is safe to say that everyone is suffering from the stress of the situation.

Sidelines isn't able to publish our normal magazine, but we didn't want that to stop us. The Simmons community deserves to see the amazing work that has been sent to us, and we hope that it provides some joy and inspiration to everyone. Creativity always perseveres and blooms regardless of the situation.

We will publish our full magazine in the fall. All work that has been submitted is still in consideration for the magazine. Work can still be submitted (including work by 2020 Seniors) to our email sidelines@simmons.edu.

Sincerely,

Sara Getman, *Editor in Chief*

A Boston Morning

by E. Smith Umland

A morning calls us once again
to travel the cracked bones of this

soft-sunk city, every hollow sucked
for its marrow. The sun blithely

collides with the fog of morning
breath and the heat that rises from

bodies who have just discovered
they are not dead yet. The split

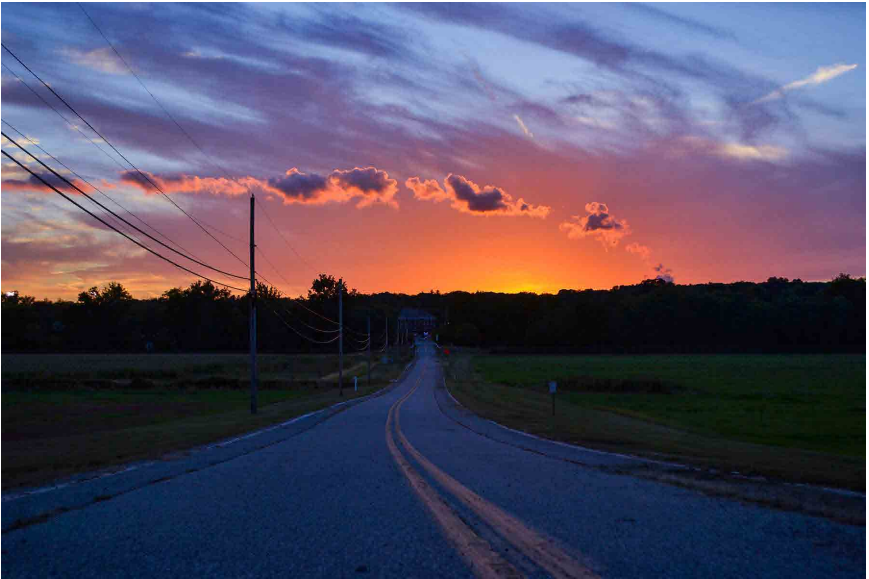
of living in a long un-bound corpse
is in every eye but no mouth. We

do not want to remind the sea
of our little home of bones that

belongs to it.

Sunrise & Sunset

by Hannah Rice



Contemplating My Death on a Saturday Morning in Late Summer

by *Lucy Lawrence*

I.

I sit on my front porch and take in the garden.
It is Eden without its serpentine judgement.
Fallen peaches and apples fertilize it, as does the excrement of worms.

Chamomile flowers doze lazily under the hot sun.
Their petals reach toward the soft pungent soil,
Like a child holding her arms out for an embrace.

The peppermint gathers thick and heavy close to the ground.
Their leaves drip a sharp oil that nauseates the senses,
And sweetens the earth.

II.

When I am summoned by that cloaked figure,
I will take time to harvest the sickly petals and leaves for tea.
I will pour out two measures into clay mugs for my caller and I.

We will drink deeply and it will warm my stomach.
My limbs will be quieted, And I will fall amongst the flowers.

I will rot with the peaches and apples.
I will rot with the worms.
I will rot with the chamomile and mint.

III.

The morning dew will accumulate between
My eyelashes, in the hairs of my eyebrows,
And between the lines on my hands.

This dew will dissolve me.
The peppermint will cover my body,
Digging its roots into my flesh, it will consume me.

I will become the soil that the chamomile flowers reach for.
The apple and peach tree roots will wrap themselves around my bones,
Anchoring themselves until death fells them too.

Fruit

by Kaylin Wu



Waking Up First

by Lucy Lawrence

Sunlight creeps softly through the slats in your blinds,
and tiptoes across your floor,
trying not to wake you up.

Your eyes stay closed
despite the gentle flickering of Sunlight
between your eyelashes.

I watch for a minute more from the warmth and
comfort of bed, as Sunlight flirts with your floorboards,
and dances around your dream catcher.

Tentatively, I stretch my toe out,
dipping it into the soft pool of Sunlight
who has leaked onto the floor from the window.

The rest of my body follows
and I slip into that little pool,
from one warmth to another.

Awakening

by Hannah Rice



Look Who's Talking

by Catherine Bernard

The room was small and cluttered, closer to an office than a classroom because there wasn't any extra space for the bad readers group--not that we were actually called that, though it was true. If I had bothered to lift my head, I would have seen the numerous motivational posters Ms. Patty loved. The largest one hung behind my head and preached the power of yet. "I can't do this...YET," it said in bold, rainbow type. I didn't have to turn to know what it looked like; I had been looking at it for a year.

"It's all right, Brandon, just try again," Ms. Patty said. I glanced up from where I was quietly digging my nails into the soft edge of the table to look at the boy sitting across from me. Brandon was the worst reader I'd ever met. We were in the same grade, both ten years old, and stuck together in class all day. He couldn't sound out the simplest words. He never understood the stories and couldn't answer any of the questions at the end. If Ms. Patty corrected his pronunciation, he forgot about it by the next time he saw the same word. I lowered my eyes to the table, counting the tiny slashes I'd been leaving in the wood for the last half hour as Brandon stumbled over the word cat again. The other three students at the table were fidgeting, pulling at clothes and biting at nails, waiting for their turn to read. My backpack was leaning against my plastic chair. If I unzipped the front pocket, I would be able to see my dad's copy of *The Shining* that I had grabbed from the bookshelf yesterday. My fingers twitched in my lap.

"Catherine?" I looked up at Ms. Patty, her squinty eyes looking slightly bigger behind her thick glasses. "You need to pay attention or you won't know the story," she sighed. I didn't tell her that I finished the story while everyone else was reading the first page. Brandon snickered as I straightened my back, my cheeks flushed with blood. I glared from under my bangs for a moment before focusing on the page I had to read, taking a deep breath as quietly as possible. My tongue already felt heavy where it sat in my mouth. But Ms. Patty never let me skip my page or write my answers to the discussion questions, so I opened my mouth to read aloud.

I was younger and shorter when I started speech lessons. In fact, I was

still short enough to hide under my mom's chair in the waiting room when my name was called. By the third appointment, I silently watched Mom's sandals scuff against the tile floor next to the therapist's brown loafers, never taking my back off the wall to peek past the chair above me. "Kitty, you need to come out now, honey," Mom said gently. The hem of her beige pants dropped into view as she bent her knees low enough to see my dirty, pink sneakers, dulled by the shadow of my hiding place. "You don't even have to talk if you don't want to, but you should still—"

"Get out from there, Catherine—your mother has things she needs to do while we're together," the therapist said evenly. I wanted to tell her that Mom would stay in the waiting room the entire appointment, knitting while waiting for me, but I pressed my lips together; when I talked in front of her, she started correcting and teaching. There was a moment of silence before Mom's knees settled on the floor and an open hand reached toward me.

"If you don't come out, you won't go to dance class this week," she said, sighing quietly. I pouted at her thin hand. Slowly, I unfurled my legs and crawled back into the artificial light of the waiting room, looking down sadly at the dust sticking to my skirt and leggings before halfheartedly brushing it away with a hand. Mom smiled as she wiped the rest of the dirt away and sat down again. I didn't look away as I walked with the therapist into her office, keeping my eyes on the red and beige against the white walls until a door separated us.

The chair in the therapist's office was smaller, but my sneakers barely touched the ground as I sat down next to her desk. Her own chair was large and black, and the wheels let her roll closer to me as she started talking. "How old are you, Catherine?" My eyebrows lowered, almost completely hidden by my messy hair. I lifted a hand above the desk where she could see and signed seven; I didn't care if she couldn't understand sign language because she should already know the answer. She smiled tightly, wrinkles spreading across her face, making it look stretched out like the skin didn't fit right. She twirled the ends of her brown hair, taking a second to pull out papers from a drawer. "Do you talk at home? with your family?" A pause. I nodded. "Don't you want to talk to other people, too?" she said as she leaned in, resting her hand on my shoulder lightly. Another pause. I shrugged, both as an answer and to move her hand. She laughed as she settled

back into her chair, shaking her head slightly and picking up her papers. "When you start going to real school, you'll need to talk. Maybe it will be easier if we start practicing now instead of then," she said, softening her voice to something kind. But I didn't want to practice. None of my sisters had to practice, not even the baby. They could just talk. I clenched my small fists and shrugged. "Besides," she said in a stage whisper, "I feel like you're going to be a very fast learner; the stubborn kids always are. But first, we have to start." A pause. I nodded, smiling just a little.

Maybe I would have been in kindergarten if I hadn't been home-schooled. Mom still tried to take me and my siblings to nearby playgrounds when other kids were out of school; she was afraid we wouldn't learn how to socialize if we only talked to each other. There weren't any children to talk to that day, so I circled the neon, plastic playplace, waiting for my turn on the swing. Mom couldn't push me and Evie at the same time. We both wanted to go too high. I focused on kicking mulch into different patterns as I walked, dragging my velcro sneakers through the dirt underneath. The only slides were made of metal that had grown hot in the direct sunlight and the monkey bars were too high to be fun for a slight six-year-old, which meant I had to wait for Evie to get off the swing set. As I turned for my next lap through the wood chips, I saw two new kids jumping up to grab the monkey bars. A new mom sat on a bench nearby. I looked down at my buried feet before aggressively shaking away the mulch, running back to the main playground, kicking up a cloud of dust and wood chips as I went. The taller-than-me boy dropped down from the bars to stand next to the shorter-than-me girl when I reached them.

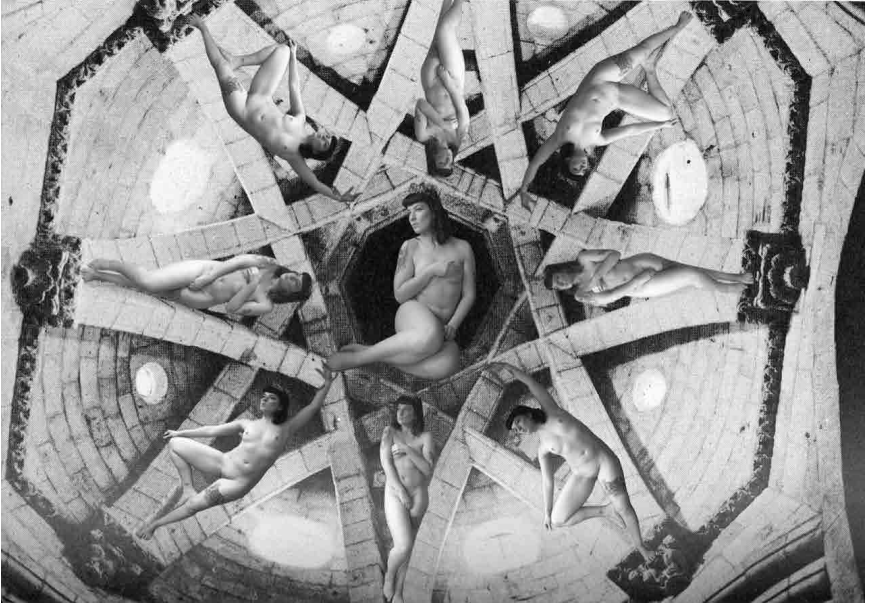
"Do you want to play with me?" I asked, out of breath from my run.

"What language are you speaking?" the boy asked, head tilting to the side. The girl laughed nervously and grabbed her brother and ran away before I could respond. I stood in the dirt as they left to play on the slides. All at once my muscles, rigid from the sudden cold, were shaking; I could see the vague shape of Evie and Mom in front of me, warping and tilting the longer I stared. My bright pink sneakers walked toward the swings.

"Kitty? Are you ok?" Mom said, breaking me out of my daze with a solid hand on my shoulder. I shook my head *no*.

Baroque

by Bonney Couper-Kiablick



Get Home Safe

by anna mcguinness

here is something that scares me the
arrival board at north station the letters are
yellow or if they spell out "ON TIME" they are green or
if they spell out "DELAYED" they are red
always at the bottom
with the amtrak arrivals in the middle of the word "BRUNSWICK"
(yellow) the letters R and U and N are green so you can read the word
"RUN."
twice.
like it's trying to tell you something
like it's screaming

he bruises easy. i bruise easy but he is like
fruit. i bruise if you aren't careful if you aren't careful enough with me
i always ask people to be careful (they aren't)
he just bruises and bruises and bruises

mom, can i call you on the telephone?
do you have a minute? a couple minutes, a few?
i am feeling very young. i am feeling
afraid.
mom, can i call you?
i am feeling thirteen again. i know. unlucky.
what a bad number. can i call you?
i don't even know how to make a dentist appointment.
i think i killed myself. i think i never made it past thirteen

here is something that scares me the
sound of everybody in north station getting
an amber alert. a soft rumbling
my phone says my cooperation
is appreciated. a little girl.
i wonder who was there when it happened.
i wonder if someone told her to RUN.

here is what he looks like moving away from me.
he looks like a train and the number nine and big letters spelling out

"ON TIME" he looks like a kiss that isn't long enough and a hug with a backpack on and i shouldn't still be standing here.

get home safe. but i am home. (reread that. think about your english teacher)
but we are home we were home his hand on my stomach. we text each other we say get home safe and i can feel the tug enough to make me cry in front of the pigeons and the green letters at north station they spell out "RUN"

i want to scream i want to tell him to RUN to come back to look at me again and tell me he wants me to look at me and tell me he knows i'm evil and RUN and i'm really crying in front of the pigeons

mom, can i call you?

do you have a minute?

i don't know how to do this. i can't be evil i never even made it past thirteen i don't know what a deductible is.

he wants me wants to touch me and i want it so bad.

i stood in north station and

i stared at the arrivals sign and all i could do was scream or let him leave in silence.

Reds

by Kaylin Wu



Treasures

by Evelyn Bernard

It's late November. I can tell from the air, cool and still, from the dry leaves breaking under our heavy boots, and the dark mass of bare trees staring us down from across the field. Their shadows stretch across the grass, reaching toward the steep slope to the water, disappearing at the spot where the ground falls away. Every time I look up the sky has changed colors—first blue, then hazy burnt orange, now a dusty gray that settles on our faces and seems to pull the forest closer to us.

I brought Dru here so he could run around, but right now he's not interested in running; content instead to wander along the forest's edge, eyes always on the ground, he stops only to pick up stones and acorns with his tiny fingers. These, I know, will be lined up on bookshelves and scattered across tables when we get home tonight. He calls them his treasures.

I watch him closely as he steps onto the edge of the swimming pool. One foot carefully in front of the other, eyes squinting in deep concentration, he creeps along the perimeter. He jumps in at the shallow end, his rain boots landing on the concrete with an echoing thud. It's hard to imagine people swimming here, when it was filled with water instead of dirt and dead brown leaves, before spray paint covered every surface on the inside. You could look up and be in the water and the forest and the sky all at once. Dru looks so small as he walks toward the deep end, closed in on either side by graffitied concrete. The quiet is jarring; no birds, no wind, no distant voices, just the dull echo of rubber boots on the bottom of a swimming pool.

And way across the water, growing darker each minute, are the hills striped with streets that could be mine, and the strip of car lights streaking across, and the blue-gray bridge stretching across the river. Years ago, my sisters and I used to stand here on the edge of the forest and scream, imagining our voices soaring over the water, wondering if anyone could hear us on the other side.

I didn't believe my sisters until I heard it for myself. Standing in the hallway before the entrance to their attic bedroom, my fingers fumbled against the wall, feeling for the light switch. Then

I noticed the soft breathing, slow and regular. Someone was lying asleep in the pitch darkness. I stood frozen in the doorway for a minute, holding my own breath to make sure that my mind wasn't playing tricks on me, and remembering with a sinking stomach that I had left my entire family downstairs. The sound wasn't going to stop. I turned around and walked slowly back down the hallway, refusing to run because that meant admitting that whatever I had heard was really there.

My parents never saw or heard anything, but at some point my siblings and I all did. The breathing in the attic bedroom was the most common at first. Then the dreams began. Lucy and Grace were the only ones who ever got them, but their stories were enough to keep us all awake at night. First the waves of vibrations would come over them, starting at their heads and moving down until their entire bodies had been electrified. Then the buzzing in their heads would start, growing louder and more intense as they lay paralyzed. Lucy said that she once thought that she was going to die, but her attempts to scream all stuck in her throat. She always saw a white pinprick of light above her head, as if she lay at the bottom of a well, miles under the ground. Grace was the only one who saw the shadowy figures around her bed, and she could never say if she had actually been dreaming or not. Once, they whispered to her that she would break her leg. The next day, she did.

My parents stopped questioning whether what we experienced was real. Instead, they nodded their heads, took down the paintings whose eyes followed us at night, and covered up the tiny closet door in the attic bedroom that we swore held something evil.

No one really knows when the dreams or the sounds stopped. We certainly don't know why they did. What's important is that by the time Dru was old enough to know what was going on, whatever was tormenting us had decided to leave us alone.

Dru is the youngest, a boy preceded by five older sisters. He is more carefree, more giving, less timid than any of us ever were. We've tried to create a different world for him—one where only good magic exists. We built fairy houses, scattered pixie dust, left out notes from the fairies and the gremlins until the woods where we spent our summers became his own magic world. He is seven now, and stashes of his treasures are hidden throughout

the house—smooth stones, pieces of bark, sea shells, and clumps of moss. As long as I continue to find these treasures, miniature tokens of his belief in the fantastic and the good, I feel that he will be safe.

Before the darkness can grow any deeper, I remember the ten-minute walk back to my car.

“Hey, Dru! It’s time to go!” I call. I turn around, struck with a strange feeling that I should check whether the path back into the woods is still there.

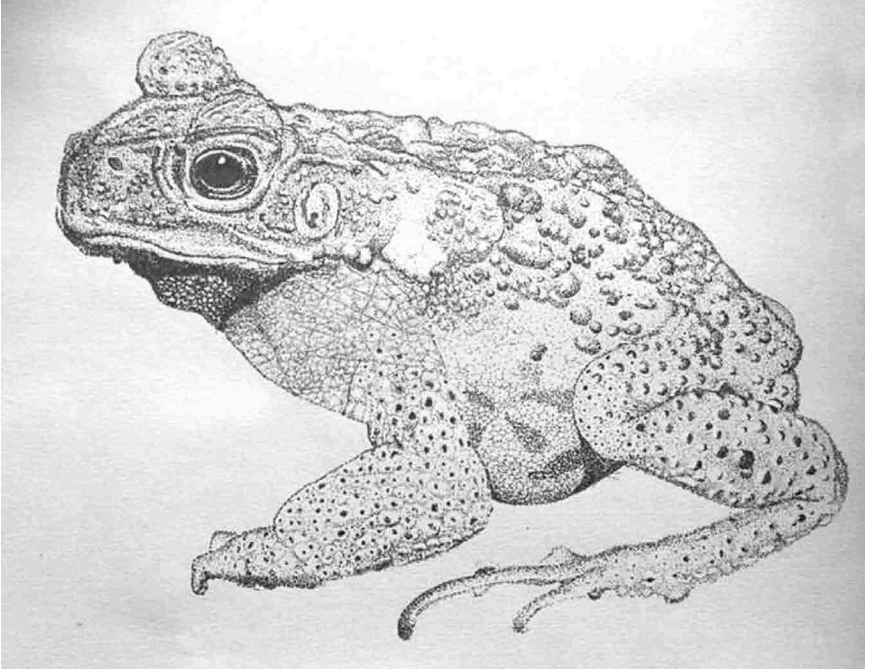
Dru shuffles through the dead leaves at the bottom of the pool, then climbs the steps to meet me where the concrete turns to cool grass. He walks beside me as we retrace our steps across the field, through the woods, past the wishing well and the empty flower beds. He tells me about the treasures he’s collected, oblivious to the silence pressing down on us from all sides and the way that the trees seem to shift as we pass by.

This way takes us past the root cellar, a concrete cave built into the side of a hill. If I had never ventured inside with my sisters, equipped with the flashlights on our phones, I would still think that it opened into an abyss—the darkness inside is so infinite. We have stood inside and turned our flashlights off to feel the black matter stretch around us in all directions, to feel the familiar sensation of being in the presence of something powerful, dark, and unknowable.

Whether we whispered, sang, or screamed, a thousand voices thundered back at us. Dru stops near the opening to the root cellar, finally looking up from the collection that he holds in his cupped hands. I watch him as he stares, unblinking, at the shadows that have begun to spill out of the opening, stretching towards us. I place one hand on his shoulder, and he turns around to follow me home.

Frog

by Sarah Defanti



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We thank the Gwen Ifill Student Driven
Media Advisory Board for their generous
support.

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