her soft hands
grazing strings
splinters on a bow
of the wooden child

white fingers precisely
carest the bough
her shoulders sway
in harmonic air

rhythmic latitude
intoned epithet
stilted hair entwined
in a blonde swoon

discoursing lights
breaths from the stage
pale tuned wounds
love is wooden
August, you begin with a gravelly roar in my ear drums,  
accompanied by the feeling of grey dust on a little girl's fingertips.  
She is set high on a creaking stool next to a blustering windmill of thought.  
The labyrinth of the crossword lattice encompasses her swiveling fans.  
She slices through the entrapment and warning echoes through her ears;  
"Don't rock in the chair."  
The three of us tumbled from the same page of the calendar.  
Brazil's bad luck is our summer's finale.  
our family's genesis.  
August, when I dug through you  
A hemisphere caked with the sun burnt clay of tragedy  
They mop their brows in fear of you, "month of destruction,"  
The woman whose life began at the hands of the man  
where she wept on exhibition.  

Your 31 days brought her to a new prison.  
among an Australian crowd,  
Exposing her tears in the clammy dark was not her wish.  
Your eighteenth day returned her to the public, frigid, icicle frame  
I desire your discomfort, your energy, and your closed quarters.
sleepwalker.

knitted hats in every color pulled over sunset red-head, keeping him heavy.

choosing clothes blindly from the black closet.

night shift. high beams.

lemon meringue snacks at three a.m. heavy lids. light head. day light. punch out.

bright light filtering through sheets tacked over windows, keeping life out, dreams in.
Some nights,
I cocoon myself in blankets and pillows,
so that the bed doesn't seem so empty.

I dreamed
you walked naked across the Alaskan tundra.
There was little snow, the sun wasn't setting,
you didn't see the northern lights.

Once,
I dreamed all my teeth fell out.
molars first. I woke up with blood
in my mouth.

I drowned,
last Tuesday, in a lake of lager and floating sushi; the stench was awful.
The chopsticks wouldn't float.

Never dream
when drunk, so I downed Russian water for a solid week after he gutted me:
cold sweat night terror.

I fell
off the edge of that cliff, for years and years;
never landed. Had I not waken in time,
would it have been real?: dead to the world?

Lemmings
ate my innards when I fell on the coffin crags, broke my leg—curse the inuit!
In the morning, I wake: put on new clothes.
A toffee colored briefcase
Belonging to my Grandfather.
Torn, its leather falls apart.
Like his soul
After witnessing combat in World War II.

Baseball cards
An extensive collection.
Second and third basemen stare at me.
What I once dreamt of becoming.

The Beatles album
All in white.
Where I can experience my true self.
A celebration of life
And the impact of drugs.

My father’s chain
Carries a small medallion.
Hand-made by a man in Italy.
At night it stands guard
Putting truth to the words,
Protect Me.
I never knew he was capable of such a thing. There I was sitting on the concrete steps, green paint slowing chipping off, on a hot summer day. I could see the haze from the heat. It was a row home in not the most flattering part of the city. The other children on the block were playing in the water from the fire hydrant; they splash, laugh and run. The ice cream man, leaning out of the window in an old-fashioned white uniform, served his loyal customers.

I was talking to Jason's mother. Jason was the young boy down the street. he would often roam around the neighborhood alone. The heat was too much for me and I went inside to cool off. Inside the house there was a sea of green carpet. Plastic covering the white furniture; she inherited the house from her grandmother. Tall lamps with crystals hanging from the shades, the prisms reflected on the wall.
While I was upstairs, heard him and another boy come in. I peaked down the stairs to see which friend it was. It was Jeff, another lonely boy, they had become friends. I went back into his mother's room. As I gazed out the window draped with crimson curtains, I heard the ruckus. It was a sound similar to a stampeding herd. I rushed downstairs and the police were there. They questioned me rigorously. I told them I was upstairs the entire time. This was unbelievable, they thought I was guilty. All the while he said nothing.

Finally, I convinced them of my innocence. The police let me go. They told me to take my belongings. They never looked or thought of him. Perhaps his face was too innocent. I grabbed my bag; when I reached in to grab my keys, there was a roll of money in it. Jeffery was dead. Jason stared, still saying nothing.

I never knew he was capable of such a thing.
headache and a distinct lack of protein return me to a back to school state of mind.

already procrastinating a first day's homework because due dates are two weeks from today.

and already i miss your smile.
Waiting for her next performance.
As Mother disappears into the clouds above,
As the animals crawl, worm, back to bed.
Shoulder changes to butter,
The sky turns white.
Luminous in the morning
Softレビュー on rooftops and on boards.
As the final drops of rain snap
Animals scatter their applause
Phuminute to earth with a final crash.
Tickling the water of night.
Luminous poles downward.
Lost in Mother's twilight.
Trees begin to sway in wild circles.
Wind howling is apparel.
Thunder crashes in the sky.
Intransigence and persistence.
Secrecy real becoming more.
Slowly the backdrops always to our wonder.

Whispers of Mother Nature.
And shade their shadows to the
Nocturnal audience bob their heads
And distance.
The wind bends to howl softly in the
Steady seacoast breeze.
Rain takes its cue and laps out a
Drowning them in birch,
While keys of the picket fences,
And little sol chards up and down the
She takes the stage an orange.

To branches and rocks to watch Mother strew her stuff.
Creases of the night hold and scrutiny
And the sky holds a measure here as the
The clouds
Are high, the lights are low.
I. There are five white mushrooms on a cutting board
   Stained with strawberries.
   Beheaded,
   Their blank faces roll silently into the knife drawer.

II. There are four blank faces
    Vibrating softly
    In the reflection of dingy bus windows,
    Ripe white balloons
    Pushing past a line of spinning trees.
III. I am peeling the skins off three dry trees,
Fashioning them into something slender and pale
And bare.
I fling the bark into the sun —
And it is erased.

IV. I am pressing two white beads
Into her pale arm.
They swim past her elbow
To the tips of two fingers,
Ice-tipped branches
Drawing circles on my neck.

V. A sautéed mushroom as large as a stove
Slides into a bathroom
Leaking brown onto the waxed, tile floor.
Its reflection, a hovering, gruesome shadow
In an ovate mirror,
Lingered and gray.
Watches itself regretfully retreat
Mopping the tiles white again.
Sandy blue-black sky, waves danced in a full moon, 
the edge of the Earth just off the shore.

The tools: plastic shovels and buckets 
to scoop up space dust, 
laser cannon Super-Soakers to ward off creatures, 
dollar store tomahawks to swing at the stars.

My sand dragon, Max, 
mighty wings outstretched, ready to catch me 
in case the ocean pulled me under. 
Wait here, I said, 
Watch the horizon for sea monsters 
and never, ever fall asleep.

Lucky seashells tucked in my swimsuit pockets, 
I raced barefoot to meet the midnight waves.

The edge, beautiful and quiet, 
planets circling below me, 
ocean water forming thousands of fingers, 
a net to catch me as I played in space, 
laughing, scooping up galaxies in my bucket.
THE WAR THAT GEORGE BUILT

This is the war that George built
These are the weapons of mass destruction
That were the reason for starting the war
That George built

Never mind – they didn’t exist
These are the soldiers
With sand-scraped eyes and weary bones
Who are fighting the war
That George built

This is the bomb
Mortar, shrapnel and full of hatred
Made by the insurgents
Who have vowed to murder the soldiers
Who are fighting the war
That George built

This is the sergeant, young and proud
Killed by the bomb
Made by the insurgents
Who have vowed to murder the soldiers
Who are fighting the war
That George built

This is the box
Hastily made with fresh splinters
That contains the sergeant
Who was killed by the bomb
Made by the insurgents
Who have vowed to murder the soldiers
Who are fighting the war
That George built
This is the wife, now the widow
Receiving the box
That contains the sergeant
Who was killed by the bomb
Made by the insurgents
Who vowed to murder the soldiers
Who are fighting the war
That George built

These are the tears
Cried by the widow
That stain the American flag draped over the casket
Containing her husband
Who was killed by the bomb
Built by the insurgents
Who vowed to murder the soldiers
Who are fighting the war
That George built

These are the friends, the family, the strangers
Who shed tears for the soldiers
In a war that is over
But still being fought by a nation
That was tricked by the lies
Of the war that George built
Last summer, I stood center stage,
recited well-rehearsed lines and executed false monologues with perfect ease.
You wanted the clandestine parts,
so I cut off my limbs, bled the Truth,
but it was not enough.
Or perhaps it was too much.

One year later,
the water is stagnant,
and I am floating facedown in yesterday’s demise.
Hold my lilac face,
kiss my swollen eyelids,
breathe poignant verses into my lungs.
Let me repent.
I promise, this will be my final eulogy (until tomorrow of course).

I admire those who boast of no regrets,
but my mouth will not utter such fallacy.

That said,
I regret:

last August in New York City,
LA still fresh in your mind.
The phone call that came ten minutes too late,
as I sat on a departing bus,
sipping tears from a Starbucks cup.

And after work on Friday,
I did not go to Union Square.
Instead, I overdosed on self-prescribed heartache,
washed it down with contemplation of infidelity.
I starched a neatly pressed facade until a smile became impossible.
I never did know when to stop believing
some sort of human and want that may take them somewhere
"words can drown a soul."
Kesten is right.

Still, there was hope on the street corner.
Even if we both desisted so.
You could never completely deceive me.
Wrapped up, you cannot hide the truth.
My cold cheek,
wrapped around, tied up.
Your body pressed against mine,
shuttered closed from 15 hours.
For a moment, it was enough.

My head, hurt, my heart full of theories.
— we walked into a restaurant, can a love there possible? September ninth.
beginning:
the me back.
he's still the same
your presence,
your absence.

Every figure we did not make along the way.

Julianne
Thompson
Wheeler

which would have hidden our disdain for each other?
Are we weighed on the feet of our fallen commission?
The city streets that never met the bowls of our shoes.
Champagne Dreams of a little girl in Hollywood,
Never left a mark on the path she took
Lost in the shadows of the Hollywood hills
Tell me who made you swallow all of those pills

Now she's lost in a 10 cent income track
Never forgot her life but never went back
She says "life's a blessing not only a curse"
But stay quiet my darling it can only get worse

It's the nights when she falls in the Hollywood Hills,
When she chokes on herself, when she swallows her pills,
It's in the dark when she sells herself to the West Coast,
Now she drinks to the future a champagne toast.

Ran away to the sun, from the past that she shook,
Forgot what she did, forgot how it looked,
Hiding from the life each dream led her to,
Now listen to these men, they all love you.

It's the nights when she falls in the Hollywood Hills,
When she lies to herself when she swallows their pills,
It's the dark when she finds that she fears them the most,
When she makes her annual Hollywood toast.
SUDOKU #18

9 6 2 1 5 7 4 C
3 2 A 5 L L W 9 A
S L O 1 S T 8 -- 2
9 1 5 C 4 U 2 T 3
B Y W A V E S M I
6 D 7 S 1 E 9 5 4
7 N 1 T E 8 N C E
L 4 i K E 5 A 6 1
T 5 3 V A 1 4 8 D

easy

Note: Poem arrangement by author.
I should not be eating these.
These frozen delights.
These demons from a sub zero grave.

They sit and anticipate my return.
Another chance to release their intense color
Blue, Red, Green, Orange.
Blinding me.
A mask
Covering their true identity.
Colors tell me lies.
Confuse.
Trick.
Manipulate me.

So cold.
So sweet.
So smooth.
So addicting.
So bad.
For my teenage body.

FROZEN DELIGHTS?

Joe Koran
I’ve got this eerie ass feeling inside, like I’m trapped in a Poe poem. I feel like some see through freak’s pressing his steel boot deep into my chest. Inhale… exhale, “Girl you got to just relax”. I’m paranoid out my mind, what the hell is wrong with me. Hell, that’s where they’re trying to send me. They not going to possess my black ass, I don’t want to be the next Emily Rose! If you going to try and scare my ass do it gently, send me Casper. Such a friendly guy. Cute kid. I mean my life is pretty shitty, but I want to live. "luh muhmm, ha.ha. hello” My voice is getting raspy. All hell, they got me. Next thing you know I’ll be walking down steps belly to the sky, throwing up everything but my Gerber meals from my infant days, and talking like my mouth was hit with twenty shots of Novocain! I mean I thought I had everything…I’ve got the Ghost-be gone candles, the spirit detector spy kit I ordered off ebay, what else

**STRAIGHT JACKETS FOR SALE!**

Joy Pinkney

do I need? I’ve seen crossing over, and I never miss when that Sylvia Brown lady is on Montell. My mommy told me that if you watch too many scary movies you drive yourself crazy. Do I sound… who’s there — oh, it’s just the shadow of my betas swimming free. Free, not like the people in the movies. So sad. Why does someone always have to die? Oh, and don’t get me started on those zombie guys. I swear I saw one the other day, but my sister keeps trying to reassure me that it was only some homeless guy! "Yea right, that’s what they want you to think” I say to her. They’re not going to suck me in! I’ve got my holy water, my silver bullets, garlic, I’m ready. You can all believe there’s no such thing as ghost. I’m going to sit here and watch my movies I would take notes if I weren’t tied up in this thing. They never let my hands free, my mom told me this jacket was the new style, I mean it’s all white and had nice long sleeves. I wish I could take it off though, but I can never seem to get my hands free. “Can you help me out of this thing…just for a second, I’ll give you the chant that prevents you from turning into a werewolf…fine don’t help!” It’s time to take my medicine anyway! And my mom told me if I watched too many scary movies I’d end up in the Looney bin. “Ha,” is what I say to her. “I’m the most sane person alive. You’ll see, when you wake up one night and a spirit is trying to take your soul...you’ll wish you were my friend!”
In Jamaica there are immense black cliffs lining the shoreline. The rare, white beach you may serendipitously find will be littered with debris from these massive formations. Thundering waves crash against the mountains. The sound is deathly intimidating to me as our young driver Tom speeds around the dirt road along the cliff side, overtaking any Peugeot that regrettably traveled less than 40 kmph. We pull down the long stone driveway to our villa, a pure white structure set in a dense forest of banana trees and a crystalline oceanic backdrop—my home for the next two weeks. While I thankfully praised our safe arrival and quickly escaped from the dirty, white van, I heard the voice of a middle-aged woman, deep and commanding from years of practice from scolding her two teenage sons. Lucille. That was her name. She was singing what sounded like a traditional slave song—a tune I never heard back home. The soul of the island was in this woman’s bellowing vibrato and pristine white smile that glowed in great contrast to her dark skin. I
could taste the sweet aroma of fried plantains which crackled and popped on the kitchen stove as I passed by the door, heading towards the veranda overlooking the vast Caribbean Sea. It gets whiter, clearer as you approach the coast. I am the whitest as it gets as I stand above it on this dark, foreign land. I was unprepared and unsuited for this culture in which my brother and his fiancé had decided to marry. A light olive-skinned, blue-eyed 15-year-old American girl in this sea of dark skinned natives—they never failed to treat me like one of their own during my stay. And for two weeks, I ate as they did, danced as they did, and smiled like they did: pearls among onyx and with the utmost love for life, with the soul of irie; no worries.
I walked through their house
a museum of my history
I felt like I had as a child
mischiefously sneaking about
the hallway to my grandmother’s bedroom
keeping the company of candy dishes
there were bowls filled with dried roses
containing foreign sweets
never seen displayed in grocery store aisles.

Immaculate virgins, rosaries, and passions of the Christ scattered about
I tiptoed lightly, knowing their eyes were upon me.
Returning to the cold foyer
pausing to watch the girl and the peacock
so many secrets within the walls.

in the bar room I catalogued old whiskey jugs
with blessed designs on bottles of gin and brandy
next to the “NO DANCING, THANK YOU - MANAGEMENT” sign

sat a picture of the Leather Corner Post
Against the wall rested a Boombah - and I, tempted to play it.
Portraits hung on the wall of my relatives
people met, but never known.

All these hidden treasures
and I feel as though my grandmother
would never utter a word
about these prizes hidden in her home.
thus why I search myself
out to discover history
in exchange for conversation.

MY RELATIVES: MY STRANGERS
Megan Zummer
it is easy to get lost
in the shoe department

especially when
i see you walking

in each new
pair of shoes

or each new pair
walking you

brown boots that climb up your short legs like leather skyscrapers & clap the ground loud

compounding
undone homework
broken car radio
dirty dishes
bad cups of coffee
ATM overage fees
crowded lunches
stale images
alarm clocks
commute times
trite poetry
cramps
gas prices
dropped cell phone calls
bitten fingernails

not being able to fall asleep

into
two new boots making one new person
moving on.

Note: Poem arrangement by author.
80 cents from a dollar and we’re half past spent
Many folks like to holler at our sacred repent
But I’m not too sure and I’m not half told
That when I die I hope I don’t get old

Mr Smith likes to sit in his reading chair
As his wife rubs his feet and cuts his hair
Now Mr. Smith has no daughters
Or so I’m told
But as his girls get younger
You know he just gets old

Still she never wonders where the day has gone
When their miles away from the break of dawn
Yet she asks herself what happens in the dark
But she never stops to ask the missing solar spark

No question here in need of an answer
That the love in this house is as deadly as cancer
Living 35 years with a love so cold
But when she cries, you know she feels so old

Mr. Smith likes to sleep
Mr. Smith likes to eat
As his wife slaves away
In a simmering heat
He yells to her “hurry, it must be your age!”
But he has never seen a woman
In a boiling rage

When he sleeps he snorts
Scraps his teeth on his fork
Looks at her smiles and says “what happened pork
You used to be cute and now my temper’s short.”
But as wife she ignores what she’s always been told
Because when he dies she knows he won’t be old

Mrs. Smith sits alone with her nightly guard
As her husband lays beside her in the dark
Now I’m not too sure and I’ve never been told
That when she lost her knife she lost it in his throat

Cherish you in a heavenly brew I do
Cause you never let go when they take care of you
Tell her she’s different and special it’s true!
But if you get her hot
Don’t let her boil too
I am the currency of Deutschland,
I am the closely-guarded opponent,
the mighty objective undertook.

I am the unsightly scuff,
I am that scuff’s commission,
I punctuate the question,
I reveal distance and condition.

I am the travelers’ well-known guide,
Identifying symbol known worldwide;
distinguished cowards and champions both,
of those who fight, and those who hide.

I measure time and accuracy
excellence and quality;
distinctive signature left behind,
cross of plain man and nobility.

I am the intended target
of this man, the expert shot,
perhaps a blissful victim unknowing;
a life of promise, all for naught.

I am the position sprinters and racehorses take
the corrections teachers and editors make;
the lines they cross,
the grades at stake.

Will you leave yours on this world?
Mark my words,
this will be your lasting impression.
oh beauty,
it rages in the mirror
and mocks your inability to tame it.

I admit, on days like this,
I want to grab a fistful of your raven hair
and smash your face into the mirror,
the resulting bloodied deformity
an accurate portrayal of the monster I know,
perhaps then you would rethink your self destructive ways.

Go now and sew up the imperfections,
hide truth with powder and rouge,
substitute love with stilettos and sex.
Unlike you, I cannot camouflage my pain —
invisible bruises never quite heal.

I will no longer attempt to save you.
Your reality is distorted, not by pills
but by a drug far more addicting.
He is your apothecary.

I look up at you
as you creep closer to the edge,
but my arms and legs are immobile.
I am pinned to the ground.

I would rip out my heart if that’s what it would take for you to acknowledge my pleas,
but honestly,
I don’t even think you would notice — selfishness is blind.

As children, we battled
and now we revisit the war.
I’ll make this easy — you win.
I’m not giving up on you.

I’m just giving you up.
Essence Fine Arts and Literary Magazine is a collaborative effort of Kutztown University students who share and express personal feelings, philosophies, and views through artistic media, poetry, and short stories. The Essence staff expresses appreciation to all its contributors and readers for sharing in this student publication.