The PEEL is a student run literary arts magazine, which aims to provide Appalachian State University with a creative venue for student expression. Submissions are reviewed anonymously by the respective committees—art, graphic design, prose and poetry—each of which plays an integral role in the magazine’s production. Each piece published herein reflects the views of its author or artist only. Funding for The PEEL is provided by Student Development, Academic Affairs and the Student Activity Fee.

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TOMATO
sarah wall

In the crackle of my mother’s garden
I stumble and black earth, like hail,
spits on the decayed claws of zucchini leaves.
Far ahead of us, in the distance shivering with heat
the riverbed stretches,
lazing in the sun, hoarding water.

My shoulder bag is empty. Its mouth opens wide
and it becomes begging dog, starving papoose.
Behind me, Mother frowns at the bristles of turnip greens
where rabbits have outwitted her netted walls.
The sweat glistens, her glasses slide down her Irish nose.

Cicadas scream in a return volley
to our Volkswagen behemoth
that had roared its way up the dirt road.
Now it is still in the heat; a chipped-paint wildebeest
with nowhere to graze but the snapping pampas grass.

Like firemen
Mother and I scour the rubble, listening for a cry.
“We’ll take what we can,” she says,
and sets to finding spinach survivors.
I turn to the tomato patch,
where vine fingers weave absentmindedly through chicken wire.

Three small globes hide in the leaves,
taught and green with youth,
yellow with nausea after the massacre of woodland teeth,
al turned nervously to their garden queen.
Like the sun, the tomato had grown as it sank; grown
too heavy for the weak wrist of the vine,
and snapped.

A bruise of green blooms on her cheekbone,
mottled under a black dusting of earth.
I put the hot fruit to my lips.
The cool, tangy scent is hidden beneath taught skin—
trapped in the watery flesh, pregnant with yellow seeds
I remember the back-porch, tree-shade, midsummer smell.
The tomato is perfect in my hand.

Teeth, vampiric, snap through the membrane and
into the shuddering creature. The juice bruises my chin red.

CRUCIFIXION IN A PIZZA SHOP
(OR: I SAW JESUS IN A PIZZA PIE)
michael candelario

We have ‘em set in rows of cups
like open sores
on white cuttingboard skin,
the marinara dripping from the spoon
like a bloodletting.

The girl over near the oven waits
with what are almost forceps
to snatch the collective carcass
of 1,000 yeast cells, dead and risen like Jesus,
and serve it up to the circling buzzards.
FOR SINGER, WHO THINKS THEY DON’T FEEL

j.d. dove

Happily cracked by otter stones, proudly pried from the creekbank,
Appalachian Pearlymussel feels all right when smashed and chewed, acid-soaked in stomachs and released as waste to drift freely the freshwater, keeping its place in the circle of things.

The bivalve filters, obligingly, organic waste until dams shore up rivers, sludge gums the sieving ovals.

Fighting to strain industrial soup the mussels choke, pass mute traits to progeny doomed by intrusive carp.

Genes of the genus vanish and then there is pain in kingdom animalia.

DEATH COMBS THE FIELD AT BENTONVILLE

j.d. dove

When the volleys commenced at dawn, as tents emptied and breakfast fires burned from coal to ash, I tore, bullet-speed through the sparse pine savannah, plucking up souls by their ankles, sending them on to confederacy union in one.

But that late in the war, by the final miles of Sherman’s trail, I knew my dark task would not cease with the sun’s retreat behind the Carolina longleafs. I knew that at night I could swoop slowly through the bodies piled, collecting individually the signatures of the dying.

A boy, chest flowering open, moaning mama, then a man, fast to the surgeon’s saw, clasping a ring.

A brother bleeding out, singing hymns to Jesus, his friend beside him scribbling forever yours I took him like I took them all in the wake of Sherman, raking the leaves of the southern fall.
LOVE POEM

kristianna bartow

She wakes up in the morning
when the sky rips open, seven o’clock,
and the sun burns through the seams of ragged clouds.
His arm hangs tight across the curve of her hip, and her head
is a roar of things: quick-sparking lights
and the scent of stale vodka resting heavy in the back of her throat.
She aches.

Stretching, joints cracking, she weaves her way
out of the vice-grip, the thick-veined muscles of his arm,
and walks towards the dresser. The mirror glints
against the wall and her face swims dark across the surface.
Leaning forward, metal knobs digging into
the pale skin of her knees, splintered wood scraping her thighs,
she takes in the loose-strung shapes that build her face
with eyes wide like pale china bowls, full of fast-wilting stars.

She lifts one finger,
coral-tipped, chipped at the edges,
and touches it to the hollow of her neck
where a brown-red bruise spreads across her skin.
One day old, still throbbing fresh.
Her breath catches tight-packed in her throat
while nerves jump sharp, quick beneath the pressure.

The man rolls over and the box springs groan,
a sound that burrows beneath her skin
through layers of bone and rushing blood
until it settles heavy in her muscles, in the tissue
pulled taut with the sudden movement of her head.
A twist of the neck, wheat-gold hair falling across her face,
and she spits a thin strand from her mouth, brushes it
away from her eyes with shaking hands.
She reaches for the bottle of foundation, near empty,
but there is enough left to spread thick
across the throbbing place below her eyebrow
and the skin scratched raw along her collarbone. She unscrews the cap
and draws the tip of her tongue across her lips, winter-cracked,
the sharp taste of iron where the flesh peels away.

He kissed her last night and his hands
dug into the soft parts of her shoulders, his nails
cutting lines of half-moons across the thin skin and
frail blades. He kissed her and his breath, heat and mint,
whispered “you know I love you,” murmured apologies,
and she kissed back.

She spreads the make-up over her blackened skin,
blends the snaking red of broken vessels
to a dull blush of pink across her cheeks.
Around her, his words still weave like trails of smoke,
fading soft until there is nothing left but ash-scent
clinging to the pale blue curtains.

UNCIA UNCIA, IN CAPTIVITY

michael ryan

I live in dreams
Patrolling Pamir
Karakorum crags
Himalayan moraines
Haunts of ancestors
icy vaulted chisels
Sculptors of our race
Masterful yet fleeting
Whispers in wailing
Whiteout wind
Scenting sheep
Beguiling goats
I die on waking
Choking humid air
Ear rending racket
Panting pacing
Packs of people
Eyes prying
Provoking protected
I sense fear
Smell the salt
Of their sweat
Taste the iron
In their blood
The light burns dust-yellow through the stitched alpaca awning of each market booth. It spots your skin, illuminates the spoons and bracelets gold and blue. Millions of white insects circle lazily around my hair, dark and burning in the afternoon.

The market is a swarm, a hive. It sways me side-to-side in flamenco, a sweating undulation of noise. Your sandals are still damp from the rocks you scaled over the waterfall. Your tall, thin frame had clambered easily while I rooted into the dust across the stream, my nervous, embarrassed fingers in a flurry of photography for my family who have never crossed the sea.

Now, at a fruit stand, your fingers travel thoughtfully over each sleeping nectarine, awakening their taut and rosy skin. From my left index finger dangles a plastic bag weighted by one orange, unceremoniously plucked and paid for several booths ago. A flower of sweat has bloomed on my cornflower dress.

My shoulder-bag pinioned beneath my arm in a tourist’s paranoia, I mirror one of the hanging birds, plucked and bound with red string that oscillate indifferently

from the booth beside us. The man whittling in the shade sees my wary vegetarian’s eye and knows me, turista americana, all too well. My face flushes like the nectarine that you have at last lifted. You toss and catch it, offer the seventeen cents. I feel your hand on my sunburned shoulder.

You have been around the world, visited twenty-six countries (“they were really just small islands,” you said), and absorb the new air with ease. My first Spanish orange is leathery and dry. I puncture the skin like drying plaster, and your teeth sink easily into the nectarine.

Those nights the Irish rocked the sun awake, Casualties lay strewn across the floor.
Items now ever lost beside glass landmines:
Bottles emptied of consumed liquids adored.
Our venom of choice, adrenaline laced,
Mustered nerve to brush hands with death’s fingers.
Protected in a coat of each other’s arms,
Secreting havens as not to be hindered.
These were dawns that required breaking,
So we wrestled the sun and knotted its rays.
The strokes on the fiddle pulsed life in us
As color of passion raced through Celtic veins.
WALK
elliott chalmers
ETCHING

THE VEILED DIVINE
miranda coe
PHOTOGRAPHY
UNIQUE
kaitlin beavers
PHOTOGRAPHY

MOON MAN
matthew alexander
DRAWING
Kitty Dance
lauren jordan
mixed media

The Wright Poster
gabe sena
digital work

Please Please Baby Please
elliot chalmers
etching
UNTITLED
CARTER HARRIS
DRAWING

CELLS AND THEIR CILIA
LAURA TAYLOR
MIXED MEDIA
BREAKFAST
kristianna bartow

It is five o’clock in the morning when she wakes up. The mattress beside her is empty now so she stretches her arms out, thin and pale in the dark room, and she swallows thickly. There is a layer of film coating the inside of her mouth, a bitter morning-taste around the edges of her tongue. She sits up and tucks the comforter beneath her chin.

The comforter is the same pale blue as the bedroom walls, the same pale blue she and her husband saw in Home Depot and held up against five other similar shades. He asked, “Are those actually any different?” and she said, “I have no idea,” so they decided on the one with the nicest name. Number 602, Bluebell. “Like the flowers in the backyard,” he had said with a smile. Like the ice cream, she had thought. He was lactose intolerant and only ate soy ice cream. His favorite flavor was vanilla. He didn’t like waffle cones.

She tries to smile at the thought, but the shape feels wrong against her lips. They are dry and cracked in the morning air, so she stops smiling and her tongue darts across them. She can taste blood where the skin has split. Throwing her legs over the edge of the bed, she runs a hand through her hair, fingers snagging on tangled ends, and stands up.

GLORY
jonathan dantzler

Glory is in the night.

Glory is in the roaring outside my windows, driving back from your house at four in the morning, where the clunk of the shifter and chirping of the tires are the only music that plays. It hangs in the edges of the silhouetted mountains, indistinguishable but unique, that lay somewhere off in the darkness. It’s the red glow of the tachometer, contained by the cheap plastic cowl on my dashboard, with needles that bounce wildly as I carve into the corners.

Glory was in your smell. You laughed about how you hadn’t showered in a day or two, and I laughed about how I couldn’t tell. Your hair was a little greasy, sure, but you tied it back and it didn’t matter very much. You were still flowers and softness and warmth, the feeling of sleeping in the backseat of a car as a child while your parents drive you home on some long highway.

Glory was in your dress. Perhaps it had been shorter than you intended, and when you leaned over to kiss me, it might have gotten a bit shorter. I didn’t mind, and neither did you. You almost buried my head in the couch cushion, and I thought we were sure to suffocate together in the friction and the sweat. My jaw ached and your lips were a little chapped, but I didn’t mind, and neither did you.

Glory was in how you could talk about him between kisses. So freely, so openly, like he was dead, and you were remembering. There had been so much trouble and despair, and for you, floating through life was harder than walking. I didn’t mind listening. I loved it, even if it meant that maybe I was a memorial for something lost, rather than a monument to something new. But not all requiems are sad, and I’d rather be a song than a paragraph in the newspaper that no one ever read.

Glory was in the way I felt. I was swept up, exhausted and weary-eyed but begging for more hours in the night, for the next day to never come, for sleep to be an option rather than the outcome.

Glory was in being a little upset, yeah. Glory was in hating that we had to collide at this moment rather than another moment. Glory was in knowing that I couldn’t really have you, that you still belonged to him. Glory was in missing you a little more than I wanted to when
She walks to the kitchen and opens the refrigerator. It’s nearly empty now; she hasn’t been to the store in almost a month. The women from church sent her home with all the leftovers from the funeral. The kitchen was full of homemade pies and vegetable trays and soggy casseroles. She picked at it for weeks, but now everything has started to go stale and moldy, so she grabs a carton of eggs and pushes the door closed with her hip.

She sets the carton down and opens the cabinet above her head, reaching up for a bowl. The bowls are on the top shelf and she has to brace herself against the countertop to reach them, stretching her muscles until they are tight and quivering. Her fingers graze the side of the heavy glass mixing bowl and she eases it towards her, towards the edge of the shelf.

It was nearly a month ago now, late in the afternoon, when her husband threw himself off the edge of the fourteen-story financial building downtown. The officer knocked on the front door later that evening and nervously toyed with the ends of his mustache while he spoke to her, while she struggled to hold herself upright and her nails scraped against the wood of the doorframe. A week later, she found the note stuffed in the pocket of her favorite jacket.

“I’m sorry,” it said in quickly scrawled cursive, slanted letters with narrow hoops. “I love you.”

The note is in the drawer of her nightstand. She has read it forty-seven times.

She cracks an egg on the edge of the bowl and the shell splinters, runny yolk spilling down the side of the glass and pooling on the grouted countertop. She has never been much of a chef. Her mother tried to teach her to cook when she was younger, but she didn’t have the patience for it. She turns the burner on high and dumps the eggs into a skillet.

He was the one who did most of the cooking, but she always made breakfast. “You’re doing it wrong,” he would say each morning, shaking his head while she scraped filmy bits of yolk from the bottom of the pan and scooped burnt eggs onto a plate. He would laugh, a low wheezing sound, and she hopes she can hear it now if she strains hard enough. But the only sound in the kitchen is the oil sizzling in the pan, eggs bubbling and popping against the heat. The dull hum of the oven fan. Pipes clanking in the walls.

She turns away from the stove and looks towards the top of the refrigerator, where they keep the breadbasket. Where she keeps the breadbasket, she corrects herself, the words stinging more than she thought they would. It’s empty. Everything in the kitchen is empty. She needs to eat breakfast and get dressed and go to the store, pick out an outfit and put some makeup on and try to look like a real person again. Some foundation, at least, because the skin beneath her eyes is dark and sagging. She doesn’t like the way people look at it. They look at it and they know something is wrong with her, that something is burrowing into the deepest, softest corners of her mind, keeping her awake in the dark.

Every night, she lies very still beneath the covers, palms slick with a coat of sweat while breaths catch quick and sharp in her chest. Every night she rolls over and reaches out towards the left side of the bed. The side nearest the window. The side with the pillow that smells like fallen pine needles. Every night, the tips of her fingers graze across empty sheets.

The eggs are pale yellow and rubbery now, so she cuts off the heat and turns to grab a plate, still in the sink where she left it after dinner last night. She turns the water on and lets it run over the surface of the dish, rinsing away leftover crumbs. The liquid soap that sits beside the faucet is empty, so she tells herself to add it to the grocery list. Dish soap. Orange-scented. This bottle was lemon, with a basket of bright yellow fruit printed on the front label. He always picked out the dish soap. She told him it smelled like furniture polish, but he said it was cheerful and reminded him of his mother’s kitchen, so they always used lemon-scented soap. And now the bottle is empty, plastic bent in the middle from squeezing out the last few drops.

Later, she will put the bottle in the drawer with the note.

She removes the skillet from the heat and dumps the eggs onto the plate. They are burnt on the bottom, a light shade of brown. The kitchen table is covered under a pile of sympathy cards, funeral paperwork and fresh copies of death certificates. She pushes them aside, settling into a chair.

She lifts her fork to her lips and takes a bite. The eggs are bad. The eggs are always bad. He said it’s because she never whisks them enough. She never leaves the heat low enough. She never gives anything enough time to finish, always pushing too far and too fast so it never turns out right. She swallows thickly. It’s not a good breakfast, burnt eggs without salt or pepper, without a cup of coffee or a person sitting across from her with his elbows on the table, fork hovering in the air before him mid-bite while he scans the job ads in the morning paper.
The therapist told him that he might want to consider medication, but he said no. He was worried about the money. About health insurance and psychiatrist fees and medication prices. So he said no, and a few months later she was walking away from the freshly dug grave, heels slipping on the dewy grass as she made her way back towards the church.

She tried to swallow again, but her throat feels full of sticky syrup and her mouth has gone dry. She puts the fork down and pushes away from the table, chair scraping against the ceramic tiles. Ceramic tiles he tried to finish himself two years ago, but he counted wrong and they never lined up against the far wall correctly. She always joked about it, saying a person with a degree in philosophy should never try to do anything practical around the house. But she loves the kitchen and she loves the tiles and, if she could, she would put them in her drawer. She would put the whole house in there. The yard and the trees and the scraggly weeds growing up through the cracks in the sidewalk.

She leans over the kitchen table, hair falling into her face and brushing against the plate of eggs before her. She twists her wedding ring around her finger, feeling the metal tug against her skin. The diamond is dull and cloudy in the low lights of the kitchen.

He married his wife, Sherry, and began teaching middle school algebra right out of college. The eagerness they held for each other and he for a fresh career soon dissolved into boredom, evident by the extra ten pounds he quickly gained about his midsection. The kids in his classes were distracted, inattentive, and lazy. He often watched them through the glass in his door, they were engaged in conversations, feeding off of one another joyously and yet their faces fell dull when he entered. As he wrote equations on the board he could feel them longing to be elsewhere, texting, sleeping, daydreaming.

Their disinterest drove him to an all-encompassing loneliness. Sherry had begun work at an accounting firm and was rising quickly in ranks. She too had become distracted and inattentive; her once delicate and feminine frame becoming more and more hidden beneath power suits and gender-ambiguous haircuts. She looked ten years older and he unintentionally began to long for their youth, the nights spent in college on their backs bending the grass's blades as they conjured hypothetical dreams for their future. Now they rarely talked, rarely went out, and rarely expressed any sort of affection for one another. He faintly remembered the last time they made love; it had been months ago.
Their eyes pressed shut as he tried with all his might to recall the face beneath him.

She worked late hours at the firm, coming home just before bed, undressing always in the bathroom. He would listen to the creaking floorboards, the running faucet and the sound of bristles rubbing against the small and perfect teeth he rarely saw.

At a faculty meeting he was informed of an open position for a head soccer coach at the middle school so he took it. It would beat spending the evenings alone. He had played soccer in high school and then in college, though only intramural and only a few days out of the month. Nevertheless, he was excited.

When he told Sherry about his plans her response was curt.

“That’s great, hon, I’m glad you’ve found something productive to do with your time,” she said.

He didn’t understand why this statement made him so angry, but before he fell asleep he mumbled,

“You look old.”

And he wasn’t sure, but he thought he heard her crying.

The first few practices were easy. The boys were fun, lively and eager to please. He found their devotion to the sport charming and a welcomed reprieve from their attitudes toward algebra. They all laughed and joked about the girls in their classes, though innocently enough. They were still riding the initial veins of puberty and knew very little so far on the functions of their bodies. When he joined in they welcomed his seasoned perspective. He found this refreshing and envied them their naiveté. If only he too were just learning what he was capable of, what all humans are capable of once they fasten on the heavy jacket of adulthood. His indiscretion earned him their respect and ultimately their trust. They frequently commented on the developing females in their grade, discussing what they did or hoped to do in the darkened movie theaters with their girls on the weekends. The things they did, however, were very innocent. Mostly kissing followed by brief touching, the exploration of one another’s body parts. He recalled his own experimental nights throughout college, fostered by too much booze and eventually leading to a bed full of strangers. It was a different time then, he thought. And now he could merely laughed at his misery, his growing dis-attachment from his wife, and his increasing fondness towards the boys.

One evening after several weeks of practice they were packing up their things in the locker room, joking as usual. One of the boys, Geoffrey, a tall mousy kid who was typically quiet and more reserved than the others, asked him,

“Hey, Devore, why don’t you have any kids?”

The others turned to him, curious. He himself began to wonder as well. It seemed he and Sherry had discussed children at some point in their marriage yet never gotten around to giving it more thought. He made light of the matter.

“Hey,” he said, “I’m in the same boat as you guys. I’ve been married for almost ten years and still can’t figure out how to get my girl to sleep with me!”

There was a brief eruption of laughter. Geoffrey was the only one who seemed dissatisfied with the answer, but pushed no further. There was knowingness in his face. Devore thought briefly on why he hadn’t noticed it before. Geoffrey looked a great deal wiser in comparison with his teammates, who seemed often still damp from the womb.

The parents were waiting in the parking lot for their boys and as they filed out, Devore returned to his classroom to gather his materials for grading. Pushing past the door to his room, he caught his reflection in the glass. His hair was thinning but from his time spent with the boys his cheeks had gathered a new and youthful hue. Still he felt very much alone.

As he attempted to zip the stubborn front flap of his briefcase, there was a light tap on the door and Geoffrey entered. The two stood looking at one another for a moment, Geoffrey cleared his throat. Devore went back to fumbling with the zipper.

“Is everything okay?” Devore asked.

“Yeah, I just wanted to say I was sorry for asking about your kids and stuff. I didn’t mean to make you mad.”

Devore looked up from his briefcase and smiled. Partially because no one had cared whether they made him mad in a very long time, and also because Geoffrey’s haircut reminded him of Sherry’s.

“I’m not mad, Geoff. Are your parents here yet?”

Geoffrey smiled, visibly relieved. “Actually my mom wanted me to see if you could maybe give me a ride home. She has a yoga class or something, and my dad’s out of town.”
Devore swung the briefcase to his shoulder.

“Sure, I’d be happy to.”

This was the first time he gave Geoffrey a ride home and the two sat in silence for most of the ride. Devore made small talk about school and pried Geoffrey for details about any possible relationships he might be venturing into. But by the fourth or fifth time he’d taken Geoffrey home, the two had become fast friends. Geoffrey informed Devore that his parents were in the middle of a break-up and his dad had been out of town for nearly three months. His mother was taking it badly and relying heavily on alcohol and slurried reassurances from strange men. She had become somewhat oblivious to Geoffrey’s existence and he feared that he was merely a painful reminder of the man she had once loved. Devore indulged to Geoffrey the details of his own failing marriage, his wife’s oblivion to him, and his fear that they had made a mistake in choosing one another to share their lives with.

Devore enjoyed having someone with which to ventilate his frustrations, despite the faux pas that it was his student; he felt there was a silent trust growing between them and he was taken with Geoffrey’s unusual maturity. Geoffrey was young, but he understood what it meant to be a casualty of solitude and heartache. On this the two connected eagerly, and nothing was mentioned concerning the taboo nature of their friendship.

Geoffrey then confided in him that he was too shy to talk to girls. He was afraid he wouldn’t know what to do if confronted with an opportunity to make sexual advances, and all of the other guys on the team were way more experienced than he was.

This took Devore back to his younger years. He remembered that insecurity and fear of rejection. Even now his relationship exemplified this. He hadn’t the slightest clue how to unlock the legs of his dusty wife and face her vaginal hubris. She had become a stranger.

He reassured Geoffrey that experience would come, but they were both doubtful. Geoffrey’s doubts stemmed from an inability to understand anything other than instant gratification. Devore’s because he feared from personal experience that his words were nothing more than empty promises delaying inevitable failure in relationships. Nonetheless, the two continued to encourage one another.

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A stale nausea was growing strong in Devore’s stomach. Every electric nerve ending that had been taught with excitement moments earlier now lie limp in a pool of fear and revulsion. Had Geoffrey turned him in? He could not allow himself to believe it. Up until the moment the officer read him his rights, squeezed the cuffs around his wrists and pushed his head under the frame of the car door he had never been happier with his life. He was teaching class with a new vigor. He was smiling more. His relationship with Sherry hadn’t changed but their distance had become bearable and he was grasping for new kindling to reignite some sort of fire between them if possible. He and Geoffrey were friends, good friends, and moreover they had needed one another. Surely the police would interpret any gray areas as innocence.

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Geoffrey began staying after school under the guise of needing a tutor, though he was actually quite adept in algebra. His mother, he said, was glad to be free of him. It gave her more time to crush the pills that she had begun slipping into her drinks. They talked of everything except his studies. More times than not they would pass the night janitors on their way out of the building.

One evening, the two were nearing Geoffrey’s home. They were caught up in a conversation concerning the misguided tactics used by parents to keep their kids from following in their footsteps, when they suddenly realized that they didn’t want their time together to end. Devore suggested they continue driving for a bit and Geoffrey agreed, dreading the placid face of his sleeping mother as she lie sprawled across the sofa. There was something excitable in the air between them that night and though he could not place it, Devore felt it rushing over him as he drove past Geoffrey’s home.

Their uncharted path landed them in a nearby field that served as a host to a multitude of electrical towers. Monstrous rods and appendages twisted from it and coiled into the sky. Geoffrey had known many boys his age that had attempted to climb the towers but never succeeded. He and Devore sat quietly before them, momentarily basking in their strange grace. Devore wanted to propose an idea to Geoffrey that at first had seemed absurd, but the more he considered it, the more he couldn’t let it go.
“What if you tell the guys on the team that you’re seeing a girl from one of the schools nearby.” he paused for emphasis.

“Yeah, but I’m not.”

“Well, I know that and you know that, but they don’t.” Devore could tell Geoffrey was considering the idea but was not yet connecting his dots of intention.

“I could tell them that but it wouldn’t change anything. I want to be able to talk about all the things they talk about for real. I want to know what it’s like to kiss someone without having to lie about it.”

Devore nodded; this was precisely what he had already considered. He continued, “Yes, but what if you could experience it? What if you could really know what it’s like to kiss someone or do anything else you wanted to do? I would be willing to show you, because we are friends and because I want you to be happy.”

This was the hot gut-punch. The air grew heavy, along with the silence that followed. Geoffrey seemed slightly disgusted at first, but his face softened.

“I think you should take me home now,” he said.

Two weeks passed, during which Geoffrey did not show up for a single tutoring session. Devore again became disgruntled with his life and felt stupid for imposing his outrageous idea on such a young boy. Without Geoffrey to talk to, he felt lost. Lost because he had taken such a risk. Lost because his only friend must’ve thought he was a creep, and perhaps he was because he found himself missing Geoffrey’s laugh, the way his hair fell in front of his eyes, and the scent that lingered in his car after he dropped him off at home. He was embarrassed that he had given Geoffrey such reason to end their friendship.

Then one evening, as the sun was just beginning to collapse from the weight of the day, Geoffrey stepped through the classroom door. Devore sat alone at his desk. The room was empty save for the ghost of a hope he no longer knew how to hold onto. Although it had only been a couple weeks, Geoffrey looked older. Taller perhaps, more confident. In his eyes Devore could make out traces of forgiveness, and perhaps even hope.

“Devore,” He said. “ I’ve been thinking about your plan. Maybe it’s a good idea.”

He wanted to melt with gratitude, to beg Geoffrey’s forgiveness for having had the idea in the first place. He wanted to say forget about it, let’s just be normal friends. But beating in his chest was a small eagerness for something more, something less lonely.

The week following their reunion, however, Devore and Geoffrey simply caught each other up on the things they had missed. Devore had little to say and didn’t want to admit that he had spent the previous weeks pining for their friendship. Geoffrey, however, had confronted his mother about the pills and insisted that she see a counselor twice a week to get her priorities and life back on track. Devore was impressed with Geoffrey’s fortitude and felt his own compassion and respect growing with every encounter. Still, he did not bring up his plan, hoping that if it were to resurface then it would do so organically. Geoffrey said he still lacked a girlfriend but was determined to ignite his own happiness. His determination stirred Devore to the point that he began to consider ways in which he could also relight the fire between Sherry and himself.

Then one night Devore and Geoffrey found themselves again beneath the towers. The air was cool and magnetic. The towers seemed to be directing their energy onto the hood of Devore’s station wagon. They talked briefly. Geoffrey responded quickly to a text message then turned to face Devore. In his eyes was the reflection of a holy moonlight that Devore took as a sign to edge forward with his initial plan. So it happened. A kiss, however slight, passed between them and Devore found himself wondering at how long it had been since he’d kissed someone. Anyone. Suddenly he felt self-conscious, afraid that he would teach Geoffrey some outdated method that would land him even further from the relationships he so desired. Geoffrey said nothing but did not object as the moon continued to shine from his eyes. The second kiss, however, was something entirely different.

Devore’s head was whirling; his guard had tumbled down. He felt his mind pass through currents of nostalgia, the electric scent of breath pressed close to his face caused him to float above the scene. He was no longer kissing Geoffrey, but everyone he had ever encountered.

He was kissing his mother as she left for work, clinging to the hem of her brown woolen skirt. He was kissing Sarah behind the yellow plastic slide of his daycare, hiding so the other boys wouldn’t see them. He was kissing Emily, his high school sweetheart before she left for college four states away and he never heard from her again. He was kissing Sherry on their wedding day, the white lace of her dress running the length of
her arms. He was kissing her again and again on their wedding night, as he finally unclasped her gown. He could taste the sweat on her neck and he kissed her as gently yet as hard as he could. He could smell her hair as he pushed it from her face.

These memories became colors, hazy at first and bouncing from the hood of the car before echoing into the darkness sprawled before them. Purple, yellow, red, pink, orange, blue, they represented everything. Everything he had ever known. Everyone. Yet, when he opened his eyes, the only remaining color was blue, and it was flashing in circles outside his window.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LOVE
amanda gilleland

He said I loved you before you grew eyelashes.
She said I loved you before you could read the word “love.”
He said I loved you before you rode your first pony.
She said I loved you before you could play baseball.
She put her hands into his pockets and placed her fingers around his fists.
He said I loved you before I.
She said I don’t have much time left for you to love me.
He said I could stop time and love you for as long as you’d like.
She said I would like that, and there they stood.

COFFEE
b.a. etheridge

He said I loved you before you grew eyelashes.
She said I loved you before you could read the word “love.”
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She put her hands into his pockets and placed her fingers around his fists.
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The young man steps up to the counter to place his order. He is at a coffee shop, and it is morning—earlier than he usually likes to wake up, but he has decided that today will be different. Today will be the day he gets his head together again. Over the course of the past several weeks, he has allowed his hair to be unkempt, his face to grow scratchy, and his clothes to remain dirty. Over those several weeks, he has fallen out of favor with the girl whose affections he has been attempting to win. He has taken her out for coffee at this coffee shop two or three times—never lunch, never dinner, always coffee, because coffee has no implications behind it. You can’t disappoint someone on a coffee date.

The last two times the young man has called the girl, she has neither answered nor called back. Similar things have happened to the young man before: girls in whom he has been interested not returning his phone calls, and now, like then, he is taking it hard. See, when the young man meets someone new, he thinks of the future. He likes to construct scenarios for the two of them should they ever marry. With this most recent girl, he was a banker and she was a nurse, and they lived in California with their two daughters and a dog. With the girl before her, she was in real estate and he was a starving artist, and they were childless.
Et cetera, et cetera. Now that she is seemingly gone from his life, he knows he will never again be a banker, and though he does not want to ever be a banker, he is saddened nonetheless.

Today, though, he will get himself together. He will clean himself up and find someone new, whether it is tomorrow or next week or next month, because he never was going to be a banker and he doesn’t need her anyway. He feels a need to tell her this, so while grabbing his latte from the barista he fumbles in his pocket, fingers running over his car keys and the lighter he has for the cigarettes he started smoking three girls ago, retrieves his phone, and dials her number, but she doesn’t answer.

Before leaving the shop, he throws away his latte, only one sip from being full. He picks up a fast food breakfast he will eat for dinner, because he knows he will end up drunk again tonight.

ROUGH THE PATH

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j.d. dove

Mama woke me, pinching my ear and lifting me clear of the straw bed I shared with little brother in winter. He didn’t stir a lick and I don’t know how. Ma was wild.

She squeezed that ear and pulled my face right to hers, bloodshot eyes screaming wide open. She whispered loudly that we were going to see the devil tonight and that I was to become a right-living man.

Shaken and wordless, I did what she told me: Put on pants. Put on boots. Grab the Bible. Grab the rifle.

Out the front door, into the sharp air of the mountain night, we strode. Mama like her body was ablaze, swatting and cussing. Her nightgown flapped like a ghost flag as we crossed the big field.

She took us past the property line and over the glinting creek. We ducked into the woods where she picked ginseng. Bramble thorns caught her gown and ripped her hair.

I asked where we going, and she said, I told you. We’re going to see the devil on the other side of this mountain. Gonna show him good. Hand me that rifle.

I asked why we going now, and she said, boy, you ain’t gonna turn to no evil like your pa done. Ain’t gonna be a drop left when I’m done.

We climbed, grasping dead stumps and bunched laurel to bring us up, gasping, to the crest of the ridge. I looked out and saw the whole range glowing moon-blue.

We scurried on our hinds down the other side. Ma told me to hush up, but I hadn’t said a word. I sat still and then heard music. My body hairs electrified when I saw the devil.

He was hunched by his fire, playing dulcimer. A metallic tower boiled and smoked behind him. Demon music droned. His face was charcoaled black.

Ma said hold this Bible to your heart and stay calm. She ran towards the fire.

The devil stood and shouted her name.
She shouted pa’s and fired into his chest.
The PEEL is a creative manifestation of brilliant works made by us, ASU’s student body. This magazine is just a tiny iota of the great things we can share with each other as young intellectuals. It has been a real honor to be a part of this publication for the past three years. I’ve witnessed The PEEL become a publication of superb content and design. A publication any university would be proud of.

This is the PEEL’s fourth year of publication and I know, without any doubt in my mind, there will be many more to follow. If we continue to be a student body wanting to branch out into the world, the PEEL will continue in this direction of publishing our works and making known our creative ideals.

We are the young. We are the creative. It’s our voice, our vision!

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Please include what positions you are interested in.

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