

The Castle

Fall 2021



Chief Editor: Carina Collet
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Amy Nolan

Wartburg College's
Literary Magazine

Below Average Jokes

By Addy Carlson

What do you call octopus twins?

Itenticle

Why can't dogs operate MRI machines?

I don't know, but catscan.

What generation is Forrest Gump from?

Gen A

What's the world's sleepest paper?

A napkin

How does the moon trim his hair?

Eclipse it

What do you call a blind dinosaur?

A Doyouthinkhesawus!

What kind of musical instrument do you find in the bathroom?

A tuba toothpaste

Why do ducks have feathers?

to cover their buttquacks

What do you call James Bond taking a bath?

bubble 07

Why did the cow cross the road?

To get to the udder side

Why couldn't the pig exercise?

He pulled a hamstring!

Why didn't the roofer have a wife?

He was a shingle man.

Dear No One: excerpts from a novel

By Hanna Wolke

May 27th

Dear No one,

I don't know why I'm even writing this. I know no one is going to read it. Hell, right now it's probably sitting at the bottom of a trash can buried under a bunch of old Chinese food containers. But there are some things you just can't hold in. You know, like on a long road trip, when you stop at a gas station and get the biggest soda they sell. And before you've even gone 30 miles it's gone and suddenly you regret all your life choices as you pray for the nearest rest stop to come because you think you might explode. Okay, that was a gross metaphor but just bear with me here I'm doing my best. I've never written a letter to anyone before. Let alone a letter to no one.

But it's like that, one of those things that just has to come out.

I don't think I'll tell you who I am. On the off chance someone is actually reading this. I'm trying to convince myself that someone is actually reading this, so I don't give up and go back to walking around waiting to explode. So, you know, if you are reading this, just like send out some vibes so I know. Like if there is a God maybe they'll let me know. Holy shit, let's not get into any of that "if there is a God" talk right off the bat. Let's wait 'til at least volume three for that kind of stuff.

Okay, a point, I had a point. Oh right. Okay.

Do you remember when you were a kid, how easy it was to make friends. Like, you could just walk up to some random kid and say "Hey I like your shoes. Let's be best friends!" and suddenly you were inseparable. I wish it was always that easy. Now, it's so much more than just shoes. Now it's all about what you look like, how big your house is, how fast you can shotgun a beer, whether you're funny or just a complete asshole. And so many other things that it makes your head spin. I miss the days when it was just about how cool your light up sneakers were.

Okay, I promise this isn't just going to be me crying about how I don't have any friends. Because I do, have friends. Or sort of. I always have people to eat lunch with, and I go to parties; I have people I call when I need to rant about a teacher from hell or annoying siblings. But none of them are really there for the deep stuff.

It's like, you know that feeling when you're walking with two other friends on a sidewalk and it's only wide enough for two people, so you end up walking behind them. That's pretty much how it feels all the time. Like, they're always there and I'm grateful for them, but I'll always be one step behind, trying desperately to keep up.

So, I think that's why I'm writing this. Because I need someone to tell the deep stuff to. And you, whoever you are, are the perfect person to tell it to.

I can tell you everything because you have no idea who I am. And trust me, blissful ignorance will be so much better than the painful truth.

Sincerely,

No one

June 13th

Dear No one,

I don't like to drive anymore. I used to love driving. When I first got my license, it felt like the only freedom I had. I would take off for hours and not come back until it was so dark, I couldn't see my feet on the ground beneath me. But I always got distracted, driving way out in the country where no one else was around. The only sounds around were the crunch of the gravel under the tires and the melody of whatever song was playing on the radio. I would stare up at the sky, lost in the stars, mesmerized because you can't see stars in the city. Eventually snapping back to attention by the sound of a car horn, I'd swerve back into my lane to avoid slamming headfirst into the car coming at me.

I used to love driving.

I stopped driving when the car horn brought me back to attention, but I waited just a little too long to swerve back into my lane. I never actually hit the other car, just waited until we were terrifyingly close, imagining how fast I'd have to be going to make it a tragic accident rather than just a stupid kid not paying attention. I stopped driving after that. After I would feel my foot pushing harder on the gas pedal, going faster and faster as I got closer to the bend in the road. I stopped after that. I never cared what would happen to me; I didn't want to hurt anyone else.

I never wanted to hurt anyone else. It was an accident.

I walk everywhere now. For hours I take off, just like I used to in my car, and I just walk, never with a destination. Only far enough to see the stars; sometimes I keep going, getting lost under the stars, feeling like I could walk to the end of the earth.

When I was little, before we came to the city, I used to make up stories about the stars. I'd give them names and lives as complex as my own. I'd tell stories of the stars falling in love and running away, dying and being born. The sky was always different when I looked up. Every night, there were new stars to give a life to.

I miss the stars.

I miss living under the stars. I know they're still there, but the lights are always too bright, the world around me a little too distracting, I don't get to see the stars unless I look for them. I hate having to look for things. I'm afraid one day I'll look, and they'll be gone. Like all the stars will just fall out of the sky and shatter into a million pieces around my feet.

I miss the stars.

I wish the stars had the power to heal us. If you stand under them long enough all the hurt and pain will just go away. The stars can do a lot, they built me a new world when I was a kid. I wish they could fix what I did to it. I never wanted to hurt anyone.

I hope you never find me. Never find out who I am. For now, I'll talk to the stars.

I miss the stars.

Sincerely,

No one

July 4th

Dear No one,

Do you ever think about fireworks? They're extremely dangerous explosives that we set off into the sky that could kill you if you get too close. But if you stand far enough away from them, they're beautiful. I think fireworks are a metaphor for my life. The further I step back from it, everything seems okay, beautiful even. But as soon as I get close enough, I see how dangerous beauty can be.

If you stand far enough away from anything, it can seem beautiful.

I've always been mesmerized by fireworks. The bright colors and intricate patterns and the deafening sounds that follow distract from everything unfolding around me.

All the chaos and tragedy.

The fireworks always created a barrier around me and fought off reality trying to pull me back in. The red and blue flashing lights that got closer and closer melted into the palate of color that painted the sky. The sirens played in harmony with the sounds the fireworks echoed into the air and the music they danced in rhythm to. I focused harder and harder on the fireworks so the voices and noise around me would fade into the background.

All I could see were the fireworks.

All I ever wanted to see were the fireworks

The horrors of reality always won the battle with the fireworks. I was always pulled in from under the painted sky of the fireworks, back to the reality I wanted to escape. When the voices eventually broke through the barrier the fireworks created, I felt the floor sway under my feet and unfamiliar arms kept me from crashing to the ground.

I wanted to become the fireworks.

When I was little, whenever someone would ask what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would always tell them I wanted to be a firework. Fireworks never had to be stopped from crashing to the ground. They light the sky with beauty then fall safely back down.

That's what I wanted.

I wanted everyone to be able to see past the destruction I could cause and instead see the beauty I did bring.

I never imagined the world, my world, would come crashing down around me under the light of fireworks.

I dread the fireworks now.

A lot of things are different for me now.

I'm walking behind everyone on the sidewalk, I miss the stars, and I dread the fireworks.

I really hope you never find out who I am.

Enjoy the beauty of the fireworks for me. Please.

Sincerely,

No one

Fluffy One

By Lindsey Jacobs

I don't remember how old I was when my dad brought them home. Or rather, I was too young to remember exactly. Two field mice, just big enough to fit in the palm of my pudgy toddler hand. With heavy boots and steps, Dad lumbered inside the house, letting the screen door swing shut behind him. Head to toe in dusty camouflage gear. A cardboard box under his arm and his weathered eyes crinkling with glee under the bill of his hat.

He planted the box on the kitchen tile and waved my sister and me over. He had a secret. Something special to show us. We clumsily bounded over to him and got on our knees, shoulders and limbs and cheeks pressed together to peer inside the box in tandem.

They were both minuscule, pure white with trembling silver whiskers. Shrieking and giggling, we watched them scurry around the bottom of their pen. They clawed up the side, reaching desperately, scrambling body over body until they lost their balance and crashed back to square one.

We kept our hands to ourselves until our dad reached inside and patted them with thick, chapped fingers, caked in dirt and oil stains, showing us that it was alright to touch them. We poked and prodded and chased them from one corner to the other, barely dexterous enough to scoop them up, let alone to keep them from surging out of our grasp and back into the box. Our laughter rang like bells. We named them, taking extreme care and employing all of our originality.

"Fluffy," I christened the first mouse.

"Fluffy Two!" my twin declared for the second.

Fluffy One and Fluffy Two. There was no visible way to distinguish one from the other, but after so many minutes of knowing them, I liked to think that we could tell them apart by their personalities. One was partial to running clockwise, and the other counterclockwise, but only sometimes.

Our dad asked, "What do you say? Should we introduce Muffin?"

Said cat eavesdropped from afar, hunched above our heads from the dining room chair, chartreuse eyes alight and fixated on the box. Every attempt she had made to encroach had been foiled by our barrier.

I don't recall if I knew better or not. But I do remember grinning and nodding eagerly. Wholeheartedly. And I remember that Dad scooped Muffin out of the chair—hissing and squirming, as she rarely allowed him to get near her—and lowered her into the box, barely retracting in time to save his exposed hands from a stray swipe. I watched with a wide grin.

Like a switch, Muffin changed. Awful, awful screeches came from the box. My grin melted. Muffin pounced, and at the moment, I didn't like her anymore. A curdling scream—a death rattle. I clapped my hands over my ears

"No, no!" my sister and I pleaded. "Stop her!"

Dad chuckled.

Fluffy Two hung limply from Muffin's maw. My twin reeled at the sight, screaming like she had been struck. Inside the box, the cat dropped the mouse at her feet and crouched again. Fat tears plopped down my reddened cheeks.

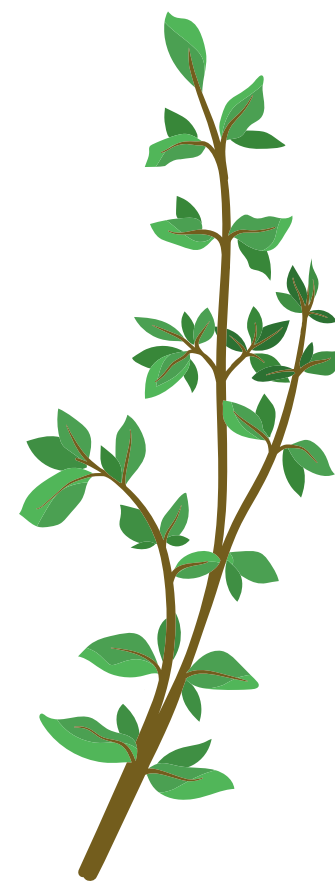
The box tipped to the side. A flash of white followed by a flash of black as Fluffy One streaked across the kitchen floor, through the living room, and down the hall, and Muffin gave chase. My sister and I followed right behind her, wailing.

Fluffy One shot into the last room at the end of the hall, our shared bedroom. I burst through the door just in time to see Muffin’s tail slither underneath the bed—my bed. I dove forward and threaded my arm into the pigeonhole between the wall and the wooden bedframe, petrified squeaks ringing in my ears.

My grubby fingers closed around a silky tail, and I squeezed and pulled. And pulled and pulled. Muffin hissed but was confined by the narrow cubby, so I was safe from retaliation, but her claws ripped at the carpet. After I extracted her from the pigeonhole, she scrambled off and disappeared before I could blink, likely to lick her wounds. I didn’t care. I didn’t forgive her for a long while. I squished my face against the carpet and peered under my bed. My heart pounded in my ribcage. I saw a silhouette. Small. Still.

My sister sniffled. “Poor Fluffy One.”

Behind me, I heard Dad’s uproarious laughter.



Time

By Carina Collet

In my garden this summer, I grew time.
When I planted the seeds, they were simple round beads
Funneling through my hands, the seconds slipped by.
So I buried them in soft soil, hid them from sight.
Each morning, I looked lovingly at my plot
While the sun slipped above the horizon and into the sky.
I was eager to see the delicate shoots break out
and burst from the ground
I hardly dared leave it
Time was so sneaky
It seemed to double in size overnight.
Once my time was established
I had to fend off the rabbits
That hopped in to nibble the leaves

When my recipe called for fresh time
I was loathe to mutilate it
But I clipped off a sprig
And I did it again
And again
And again
And again

For years my time seemed infinite
I could clip it
Forget it
With my neighbors I would share--
I.d plenty to spare.
It slipped into the corner of my garden
As the years passed, stems started to harden.
So a cutting I made
And gave it to my daughter
I told her to plant it.
May she never take for granted
A perennial,
Time.

Maggie's Castle

By Grace Becker

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are constant
Innocent curls of sunshine, falling
From the gentle halo of your unknowing head
Hurry now, Maggie, your mother is calling
Hurry back from the castle, it's time for bed

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are curious
Oceans and currents of air waves, wafting
Comes the cinnamon scent of a pie-tin day
A break from their piercing, their action, distracting
From the noise of screeching, of Dragons to slay

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are cautious
Tiptoeing steps across mountains, caving
Walls of fool's gold, of hope growing dim
A fork in the line, the tightrope waving
Hold on now, dear Maggie, the future is grim

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are crooked
Curses you heave at church bells, tolling
The worst of them kept for yourself in a jar
Cynical eyes see storm clouds, rolling
Thunderous words from your lioness heart

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are crumbling
Wreckless leaps across chasms, flying
A teetering stomp, one foot off the edge,
But Maggie, we heard you call out from the lying
A whisper, a "Help me," and with it a pledge

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are crying
You've captured your crumbling, crooked mistakes
You know the way they turn you from grace
You know you haven't always faced
The world in such a way
You crave to be cautious, curiosity fading
Anything more than the mess you're creating
Anything else, because tensions are breaking,
Watching Dragons head home for the day

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your castle you are cleaning
You stretch with your brush and your ladder, peeling
The paint off the walls for a coat brighter still
Legs crossed on the floor with your glue sticks, healing
The cracks in the steps to the home that you've built

Little Maggie, little Maggie
In your Kingdom you are ruler
Your hands are folded, your eyes are smiling
You get to decide on who your parents raised
You get to be cautious, curious, crying
You get to move forward, your people will praise
Oh look at the sunlight, your castle is shining
Look out on your Kingdom, there are Dragons to slay

This Is About One Very Specific Run in 2017 And Also Every Time I've Ever Gone Running

By Caroline C.

My feet strike the pavement.

I am going to run until I forget my problems, I tell myself.

The misty rain settles on my skin

And reminds me that I am part of reality

Tethered to it by the keys thudding against my chest

By the streetlight that reflects off of the rain soaked sidewalk.

I am running to remind myself that there is a reason I am here.

That I still have things to do and things I want to do.

I am self-medicating, running until the world around me feels like the place I live again.

A cadence, I think. Slow and heavy, but I feel so light.

It's like magic, flying over obstacles

The rough pavement puddles that are invisible

The blindness after every car that drives by.

Running at night is probably dangerous

So I've been told.

But night is a time for discovery.

You can forget that the rest of the world can see you

You are as incorporeal as the darkness

And your problems cannot find you anymore

When you are in the dark running from them.



The Bong

By Greyson Kincaid

I remember sitting on the grimy concrete floor of the garage. Ahead, illuminated by the orange glow of the naked lightbulbs, my father wrestled with a packing box. He stabbed it, and with this newfound handhold, ripped it asunder, causing the innards to spill out. With the dull smack of rubber, the Bong plopped onto the cement. I had never seen anything like it.

The Bong started its life quite innocently. Its main purpose was to transform its user into some form of kangaroo. Two blue planets, smashed together, orbited by a ring of orange plastic. Put the feet on the plastic, gripping the top ball, and bounce on the lower ball. I had never seen conjoined balls before. Unfortunately, I lacked the coordination to bounce, and my brothers also failed to tame the Bong. The tectonic plates on the balls shifted, the orange ring spun in violent orbit, and the rider soon found himself kissing pavement. With our dream of being kangaroo-men extinguished, we found a new purpose for it.

The Bong made quite an effective terror weapon. The plastic ring made a satisfying crack against ankles or shins. With proper technique, the thrower could skip it across the cement, making it viable for long range assault. Close range, its size offered protection from enemy armaments, and a well timed swing, or unexpected throw, often gave its user the upper hand. The other neighborhood kids had Airsoft guns, but I had a Bong, and they're lucky I never used it on them.

The Bong enjoyed its position as the pinnacle of playground weaponry. Its offensive and defensive capabilities were unmatched by any other in the arsenal. But after enduring several brutal campaigns, the Bong took its retirement. The orange dish had cracked. We separated it, a necessary amputation to save the life of the conjoined balls. For a while, this dismembered appendage was used as a grisly Frisbee, until it became lost in the woods, irretrievable. The balls were alone.

Though the Bong had lost much of its utility, both for jumping and warfare, its oddity demanded it be instilled with new purpose. Naturally, it was elevated from weapon to deity. We carried it reverently from the garage to its newfound home, the backyard playground, placing it on a regal bed of mulch. There, it would rule over a golden age of prosperity and creativity. Occasionally, it was thrown at a rival, but this action was one of reverence, a sacred way of remembering its past. We even wrote hymns for the Bong, original masterpieces that flowed from the very depths of our souls. Of course, these adulations were ripped right from the church hymnal, switching any mention of God for a heretical rubber substitute.

For a while, the Bong guarded the playground. It oversaw the playground's evolution from a simple store bought kit to a formidable three story fortress. It witnessed several sophisticated schemes, from attempting to convert the sandbox into a pond to trying to leap out of the swings and land in the trees. The Bong was still involved in games, still thrown, still sung to. But humans are forgetful, unfaithful creatures. Eventually, the Bong was just thrown. Just kicked. The old ways became foggy recollections, glimpses into a past too old to return to. I became too advanced for such frivolity.

We wanted to see how far we could kick it. It wasn't the Bong anymore. Just one ball that looked like two. Off it goes! It went pretty far. Should we get it? Maybe later. I'd like to think it rolled to where we lost the disk.

After we lost the ball, we lost the fort. My father thought we were too old, and he wanted to make a garden. Three stories of memories splintered in an afternoon. The patron guardian of the playground wasn't there to protect it.

Walking to the backyard, I see an outline. In it, some ideal version of myself is laughing and worshipping something-- weaving between the fort's three stories. I see only a rubber ball, but he sees the Bong.

Over 4 Years

By Moriah Morter

Stand upon an empty plane. Close to your heart is the gravel of a slow dirt road. Your journey is long, perhaps endless. Pick up your sword, and begin. Nothing; this is closest to reality - a state of being. Dirt clings to your body, wash it all away and become this - nothing. Reborn, a brand of freedom - nothing.

And so it begins - you are breathless, running, fighting. See a mirror in your mind, a version of a figment, an enchanted clone. Come to hate the original. Fall down, trip, eat your own dirt, get used to it. Grit between teeth, self-loathing.

Comfortable in your own skin? Lie in a bed of thorns, more comfortable than a bed of roses. You need to be punished.

Love. Loved. Loved. Wake up. See this version through another's eyes. Hatred dies, you take its place. Flip your paradigm.

Finding gravel is freedom, a comfort, a state of being. A rhythm to dance between star and sky, find yourself in this pattern - somewhere in between.

Happiness is a state within the self. Look, towards the horizon - a labyrinth. Quiver at the thought of beginning. Of all the monsters conquered, reborn. Visions of an army, rising up - raise a sword to strike. Plunge deep into the heart, look in their eyes and see yourself. An inexhaustible army. Throw down your sword. Pull the shadows close, into yourself. You are only human.

Free again, the joy of release. You find yourself freed of chains, missing a Master. Claim one, dress it in uniform, fall in love. Try to please it. Find that your idol is unpleasable. Crawl back to the abusive lover, for forgiveness. Find none. Instead, kiss punches, kiss fists, kiss bruises.

Realize that this is a figment of your imagination. That you have

made a Master. It is painful to wipe away the illusion. Who are you without a Master?

You are only you.

Joy. Dance to the beat of the heart, in time with a pounding of the earth, written and writing with feet, with heart, with lungs, with internal fire. Dream a dream.

Let it grow inside you, a fun and playful thing. It grows teeth, it grows hungry - you do not feed it, and so it feeds on you. Watch it eat, inside and out. Look in the mirror and see the dream. You are a zombie, between carcass and dream, through the half eaten skin is you. Is you. Take your dream and bury it. Burn it. Stomp on its ashes. Rest In Peace.

Once more, you are free.

Yet all along, your wrists are wrapped in chains. Standing high above the ground on a pedestal. Convinced that you love the view, but here you are stuck. Placed there. High up on a pedestal. Forget the opinion of your convincer.

Step down. You are only you.

Know what you love. Not glory nor pedestal, nor those who place you there, not dreams, not even the power of the sword, or even the fight. What you love, this you have learned. The shining moment where weakness is exposed and true strength revealed. Love the journey, and more than that - that rhythm that you cling to in your heart.

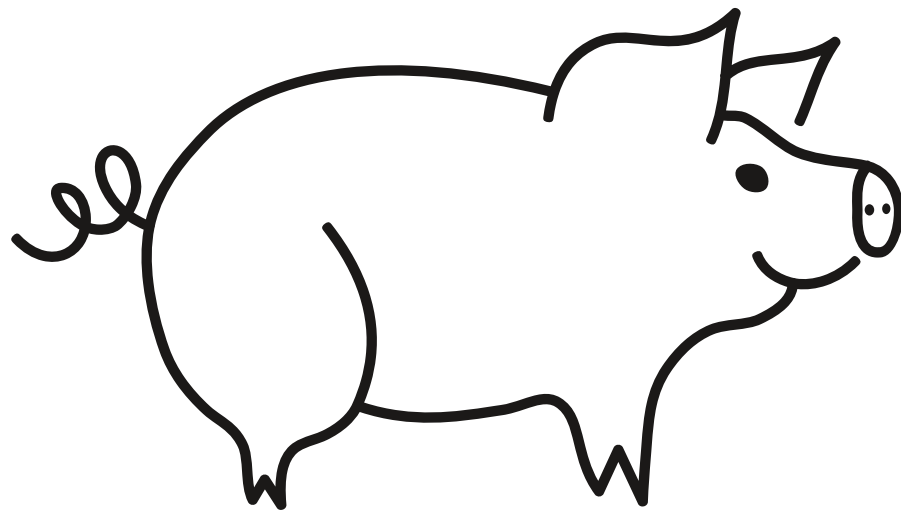
The one that is born dancing through sky, under sun, on this earth.

A center in the labyrinth. Look outward and move on. A center in a labyrinth of a million centers. Leave this one - outward and beyond. A great, exhilarating unknown. Lace up your shoes, and travel on.

Itty Bitty Piggy

By Karen Olvera-García

There is an itty-bitty piggy that sits in the back of my mind. An Oink echoes in my mind, every time I consume some bacon. The more I ingest, the oinks die down. Itty-bitty piggy squeals in joy when I reach for a carrot, serotonin sparks. Thousands of itty-bitty piggies fly in the back of my mind. Does everyone have an itty-bitty piggy that oink in a passive-aggressive way? Do they hear the squeals that appeal to the itty-bitty piggy.



Pony

By Karen Olvera-García

The pony neighs. It feels a stabbing pain in its hoofs. The pony wishes it could use a cane, silly pony. Sometimes the pony cannot sleep at night. They are in deep denial that their friends are still in the stable. Silly Pony, all your friends were turned into a tasty meal served next to some veal. It appears that the pony knows that their friends are gone, oh dear. The pony is irrational, they think this is an international crisis that all animals are being turned into boxed lunches. Sometimes the only thing to do in situations like this is to provide reassurance. Pony is aware that they cannot be hunted because they are pinker than blush and have angel hair for a main. Pony, anyone could seek the entire galaxy in your bright mane, we must protect you from the blood-curdling butchers. You are the last of your kind, Pony, stay golden, little pony.