



VIOLET MARGIN

A Literary Journal

VIOLET MARGIN

Introduction

Violet Margin (formerly Alchemist Review) is published annually by the English Department at the University of Illinois Springfield. It publishes creative writing including but not limited to fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction, art, and photography by new and experienced writers. Violet Margin is committed to providing an inclusive, safe and diverse space for undergraduate students across the US, as well as students and alumni of the University of Illinois at Springfield, to test their voices. VioletMargin is committed to publishing diverse voices and aims to focus on those that have, throughout history, been marginalized and excluded from the literary canon. We especially encourage submissions from women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ writers, writers with disabilities, and writers of intersectional identities. Violet Margin reserves the right to remove work that is offensive or work that promotes harmful prejudices and stereotypes.



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Copies of You

Jason McCormick

Thin branches flutter at the ends of jostled limbs
Where a golden robin dances. She is
Wondrous enough to fill the small spaces that need filling
The rest is tundra and mud; is brown, smells earthy.

I see
Copies of you everywhere
In tree limbs, in windows, in advertisements, inside.
They're trying to be you

But they'll never sing the blue notes like you do
After a warm summer rain.
You're only blonde on the marquee
Only crimson on your lips

The stain of joylessness is so close to your eyes.
But
I will tell them
You are innocent of all that other nonsense.

Like the breeze that stirs us into sand and sea,
And the light winnowing lonesomeness
That makes love fly in short stints, you are
Never to be duplicated.

Counting Cracks

Dylan Jahn

Trapped in bed, I count cracks,
hide from the ticking clock,
beg to know, if I'm right

to be alone, to bolt the door,
to cut the line,
connecting you to I.

I remember your shadows,
skulking up my back,
to cinch onto my bare ears.

To feed me a fantasy,
of how great we'd be,
only to bite down on your lying lips.

Alone in bed--together. It was late.
I offered a guest bed, but
you said mine was great.

Entranced by your cinnamon
kisses that left morning dew
on the nip of my nape.

By the scent of burned incense--
lavender, water lilies--
enveloped between my sheets.

I asked you, calmly, would
you be with me.
"Sorry, I'm not gay."

Now, I lay in bed, alone,
with the cracks,
and the delusion of us.

How I Clung to my Yesterdays

Jason McCormick

I clung to my Yesterdays
Like a boxcar left to wallow in a wheatfield —
Naked as the day, and
Flipped over on my fragile side.

From one wind-worn stalk of wheat
There came a flowing fluid field of bronze.
The barren buried tracks —
Muffled like the call of Yesterday's yeoman.

In the old days, we wrote our love letters
Sitting in the dark by candlelight.
The warm faded photographs
Of those Yesterdays will never leave me.

The boxcar, however
— Burned in sun, its wheels up-turned —
Like a elephant's skeleton, has been
Shattered by your bright Modernity.



L'appel Du Vide

Erynne Turner

I stand on a precipice
infinite
 darkness
 pooling below
 icy wind
flirts with loose strands of hair
 dragged to a jagged edge
 by my own introspection
ribcage rattling with staccatoed breath
 I peer into the depths
 and let liberation
 embrace me

The Diamond

Jason McCormick

I appreciated everything, way back then:
The dirty knees of my white polyester pants
The white chalk lines aglow in perfect symmetry on the green grass
The lights—like stars flipped upside-down—illuminating the whole team.
Outside the diamond,
The unlit world was dark & ignorant of our heroics;
On the field we basked in dreams that drove us deeper into sleep.

Beneath the lights, our shadows were the ushers of our many selves.
Old leather mitts, moldy from winters past, clung to our fingers;
The warm smell of ketchup and mustard
On a 10¢ hot dog, and the crackle of applause
Sunk into the gravel underfoot,
And curved through the diamonds of the chain-linked fence.
We laughed and cried at our joy and our loss.

People say that kids never appreciate anything—
but I appreciated everything, way back then.

The rest of my memories—rolling around in my head like so many infield
ground balls—are more like anamnesis. They went careering underneath
my glove and way out into right field. They kept going.

I started to lose them—I surrendered to my faults and, eventually, I just
forgot how good the lights felt—I forgot the way our shadows languished
on the turf.

The Tri-Tone House

Jason McCormick

An image of the tri-tone house seems to accompany every memory I have of my father, as if the two are inexorably linked in the sequence of my memory chain. The house itself stood at the end of the street I grew up on. I remember walking past it in the dark on my way to school in the morning, when its colors all looked gray and matte and homogeneous. My father tried to portray that same consistency; and I suppose one reason we never got along was because of my need to see all the colors — the red brick walls, the dark wood-stained addition, and the pale blue aluminum siding — as they were in the light of day. I've always felt that the house altered in ways that mirrored my life and the lives of my paternal forebears, and I remember feeling like each subsequent tone marked a mysterious boundary in time that acted as both a beginning and an ending.

When I asked my father if he would let me play the guitar, it was the last sentence of one argument and first sentence of another. We had been fighting off-and-on for a couple of years by that point—about everything. He wasn't going to be happy unless I went to New Haven to study law; first in my class, of course, like Grampa. I wasn't going to be happy unless I didn't. But that's not what we argued about. We argued about the necessity of wearing collared shirts, the proper time for breakfast "in this house," and so many other things I've forgotten, until finally we even argued about the guitar—in a sort of passive-aggressive way. It was almost like the very idea of asking him was so offensive, so disappointing, that he made the decision right then and there that I was a lost cause. Perhaps that was the exact moment he gave up on me, but the downward spiral started a few years before that.

"Oh, what's the use in my trying!? You don't give a damn about your own life!" he yelled as he slammed my bedroom door shut, almost in tears at the grief to which I had been the proximate cause. I remember that particular argument had been about the book report I was writing on Johnny Rotten's autobiography for my 5th grade music class. That was back when my father still harboured ideas of my being a success. He never said the word, "Success," but I knew what his expectations were when he launched into one of those long-winded lectures after supper; I always knew "Success" was the inferential topic; and I was firmly resolved to prevent myself from becoming one.

He was absolutely incensed by the fact that I had picked that book, of all the books in the world. It was all about the punk rock band The Sex Pistols and their rock 'n' roll lifestyle in London. I was obsessed

with that band. I felt as if it was my destiny to go there — to slur into one of the same slimy metal microphones, to sneer at the audience under the same dingy spotlights. Of course I had other less conspicuous reasons for picking that book: I knew he would hate it, and more than anything else, I knew he would never get it—and that's what made the idea more appealing than ever. I wanted to make sure the pages of his book went backwards, so to speak.

It was during that same winter that my father started reading his big red book on ancient Sparta. To be sure, that's when the real problems between us began; around the same time that Grampa passed away. I remember my father used to make a lot of menacing facial expressions, sitting alone in his wingback chair underneath the crimson lamp and reading with his back turned to the family. That book must have been over 1500 pages long, and each evening he hoisted it up on his lap like it was a sick puppy. He must have thought it was the Bible, the way he poured over every word. His eyes danced across the page, marveling at the ancient Spartan civilization—their ingenuity, their technological prowess, and above all, their discipline. I remember he would eventually get up out of his chair and pace the room, saying, "See, they knew how to get things done over there. They knew how to Focus."

Even if my father did understand me, he made sure I never knew it. I mean, hell, even after Gramps died he didn't budge an inch. All that time, I supposed he was posturing for his old man, sort of like I did for him.

So when I approached him after two years of bickering and asked if it would be okay for me to get a job at the hardware store down the street, I was surprised when he just stared directly into my face for what seemed like a full sixty seconds. Finally he spoke:

"What might you possibly need a job like that for?"

"I wanna buy something."

"You want to buy a distraction from your studies, and I won't allow it."

"I wanna have my own money."

"Your own money? You're twelve years old."

"Ryan and John have jobs. They're the same age as me."

"Summer jobs — I offered you the same one and you refused it."

"... of painting the garage..."

"Yes — and you refused."

"PLEASE DAD!"

"What is it that you want to buy, son?"

"I want a guitar."

I'll never forget the look on his face. It began as pure disappointment, mixed with a tinge of disdain, until it became a gradual grudging acceptance of his own failure as a parent—maybe even as a human being. The emotions washed across his forehead like a glob of yellow

semi-gloss paint. About all he could manage was a brisk shake of the head, sort of like the time when he bit into a mealy apple and spit the contents out of the corner of his mouth—and all over the windshield of his Buick in the driveway. The black seeds were left to hang on to the plexiglass, while half-chewed pieces of fruit and juice slid all the way down to the black wiper blades. The *disjecta membra* of that apple stayed on the windshield for more than a week.

But he must have changed his mind, after having slept on the idea, because the next day at supper — without my alluding to the topic in any way — he said that it was okay. What was okay? Everything, he said. Again, I inferred: the hardware store job, the guitar purchase, the time when I lost the game for the team on the last pitch, even the future law school failure. It was all okay with him, after all. That really pissed me off, the way he just dropped it into the conversation—like I didn't even matter to him anymore. That was the same supper when he, for the first time ever, gave the "Focus" speech to my little brother, who was just turning ten, instead of to me. My brother looked at me accusingly, as if to say, "What have you done to cause this?"

When I came home from work three months later with a black Bullet Stratocaster electric guitar, the old man didn't even look at it. No matter how loud I played, he never once told me to turn it down. My father really had given up on me.

*

During the same year the tri-tone house down the street was abandoned. It had gone through a couple of different owners in the preceding years, which produced something of a mini-scandal in the neighborhood at the time. I remember when the Maddens moved out of the original brick structure. It was full of magic; a square, compact little ranch-style home with a sky blue porch swing and a garden around back. They sold to a yuppie couple, who added a wooden wing along the north-facing side, and replaced the white-and-pink-striped awnings with dark gray shutters. Everyone in the neighborhood stood by and watched while the yuppie wife pried the porch swing down off its hooks and put up a statue of David in the corner, where the newspapers that I tossed up onto the porch, water-logged and rotting, stacked up every winter thereafter. *They added a little something to the house, but they took something away from it too.*

The yuppies sold the renovated home to an eccentric inventor named Milton. Mr. Milton tore off the entire back wall and added a two-story addition which stretched almost all the way back to the garage. Wrapped cheaply in blue aluminum siding, Milton's addition wasso enormous that the original brick home began to look like nothing more than a glorified foyer, and the yuppie's wooden wing was made to

mimic a medieval Gothic tool shed. To make matters worse, he threw a gigantic solar panel up on the roof, facing the street, so that walking down the cross-street adjacent to the house at the wrong time of day might cause permanent retina damage. He even dug holes into Mrs. Madden's old garden plot for the foundation for his new patio deck. *Each succeeding addition added something of value, but destroyed something worth remembering at the same time.*

I remember the time I sat down on the freshly-furnished wooden deck, its broad benches still drenched in sawdust, and listened to one of Milton's lectures on electricity. He bravely asserted that the energy of the sun would someday provide a veritable boon of economic opportunity — if only we were willing to accept that some things might have to change. At the time, though, I thought I could hear the roots from Mrs. Madden's vegetable garden growling beneath me. They sounded like the voice of my grandfather, really — truly!

Then suddenly the tri-tone house was empty. Milton couldn't make the mortgage, and after an esteemed member of the city council deemed it to be "as unappealing to the eye as it is to our other sensibilities," somebody sent over a city crew to board up the windows.

*

My thoughts of Grandpa shuffle through the dimly-lit corridors of my memory like mummified monsters. I always think of him, friendly as he was, with a sort of detached and dormant fear. I say dormant because the fear never left me, even after he had waved his goodbyes, walked out the front door, and strolled gently down the pebbled driveway towards his Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme for the last time. I think I wanted to love him, but he always seemed more like a monument than a man.

Walking into his office the day after he died was like walking through a Presidential library. The pictures of him posing with foreign dignitaries against the backdrop of the Capitol were spotless and dustless as they hung on the wood-panelled walls. His encyclopedias were neatly arranged on oaken shelves, and the perfume of ancient books and fresh cigars brought back the image of the man. It was as if he stood before me in a staggered dream — half-man, half smoke — leaning against the doorway of his office antechamber.

The whispers of that day are never far away, lurking beneath my subconscious in the din of peripheral racket that forever unsettles me. In thoughts of anger, I loathe the idea of what he represents; my failure to be anything like him. But at the same time, in thoughts of peace, I mourn his memory and the echo of his solid shadow crossing over thebar into that other sea; the one to which we all belong eventually.

"I want a guitar."

That was the last sentence of one loud argument and the first sentence of a long, silent, dull emotional brawl between two men who should've known better.

I never touched that guitar again, to be honest, once I realized it didn't upset my father. But I never forgave him for his reaction — the look of disdain on his face that perfectly encapsulated our relationship; the texture of a mealy apple. The last couple years I spent under his roof were the worst. Like a walking, talking cliché, I did all the things rebellious young men usually do. I didn't do them very well, either.

I spent years in the pursuit of something outside myself, waging war with my bare fists against the cinder block walls that I used to shield myself from the world. First, there was the incident at college when I was kicked out of the dormitory for tagging the hallway. I got caught on purpose, too; I thought it would make me a legend. Then, I hatched up a scheme to open a nightclub with my friend Scotty. It was successful, until we messed up the payroll and found ourselves faced with tax fraud charges, which resulted in the entire business eventually going under. I had once scorned my father's offer of help with the paperwork and he never missed an opportunity to remind me of that. Then of course, there was my first wife Mary. She was the only thing that I ever did right. She left me, too — eventually. Really, I left myself, sitting on the curb outside the pub, licking my wounds while the sun came up. I blamed my father for that one too, of course.

I'm not sure I ever really wanted to make amends with him. I was too full of phony conceit at that point in my life to ever admit being at fault, and in the normal course of things we probably would have drifted apart. In all likelihood, we never would have seen each other again until the day of his funeral or mine. That's the way I wanted it to be. I mean, why come groveling back to him after all those years? I didn't want to give him the satisfaction. My mother tried to broker a peace — we still talk — but I always brushed her off when it came to Dad. My Grandmother's funeral almost broke me. But even then, her death wasn't enough to make either one of us step across the no-man's land between us at the ceremony and start a simple conversation. For that was surely the place to begin — the simple.

There wasn't much point in hoping that either one of us would suddenly be the better man. After all, we can't always be the person we want to be. We can almost never be the person those who love us want us to be. Did I just say my father loved me?

Sometimes, I actually think he did. As it turned out, he's the one who made the first move, years later, by inviting me to Christmas when I was twenty-eight. I went. My folks had moved into a house out in the country club suburbs, but I went anyway. I wanted to see him ten years

older, I guess — I wanted to see him with a pudge. But we talked about the way things were at the time; we never even alluded to our calamitous past.

"Your mother wants you back," he said after dinner, sloshing around the ice cubes in his whiskey. He was always afraid to be the one who blinked first, terrified that someone might think he had lost face by being honest.

But I read through the lines, I guess. I said:

"I miss you too, Dad."

He reddened, almost smiled, and at the end of the night he shook my hand — I don't know why he did that. Nothing had really changed. I hadn't cleaned up. I hadn't apologized. I didn't have a good job or money or a decent car. I didn't in the least share his outlook on life. I never did finish college, which grieved him to no end. I had even lost Mary, whom he adored. But he shook my hand the way I always wanted him to. That was the end of that fight, I guess. But goddamn, what a waste of a decade!

Much later in life, I learned about how the argument between my father and I spanned multiple generations. My father was stuck in between himself and the arguments he had with his own father; he later told me that he felt he needed to represent Grandpa's point of view after he died; and about how he'd always noticed the way Grandpa was conciliatory with me in a way that he never was with his own son.

It must have galled him.

But in my mind, I keep going back to that tri-tone house down the street of our old neighborhood. I don't know why I always think about it. Perhaps it's because that old house was sort of like us, even after they boarded it up. It had a whole lot of history, a whole lot of layers. I heard somebody is renovating it; somebody from the old neighborhood. But I'm not sure what it will look like. Mostly likely, it will be the same as it always was; a hodge-podge of walls and of windows, passed down from one generation to the next. *Each one will add something to the last, and each one will take something away from it, too.*

THE END

To Find Sensation Again

Dylan Jahn

Alone
and isolated,

my senses,
left undone.

On my belly in
the shower: scalding.

My skin peels, sizzles, wails.
Sensation, limbering up my neck.

Fingernails splinter, digging into the grout.
Fleeting pain, nerves go numb, their faces appear.

I've become close to the tiles on the floor:

Crack, he has a family, a loving wife, a large home.
Glare, she is single and happy, focused on her career.

There when no one else will, simple tiles on the floor, relief from a world
alone. They are my friends, my family, catching me as I fall.

Illusions from my burning skin

Uninvited

Jamie Jarosz

What more can you say about the audacity of a winter?
other than that, it assumes its invitation every year
hand outstretched over the earth
the housewarming gift of the sheer and sheen of cold
an ancient recycled covering falls, is not quite silent
it quietly crackles
it inches itself over, slyly mimics rainfall, unaware it's not quite as
welcome
as the water who ushers in the foliate spring
to be fair-
it does blanket the finch's songs, the tiny sleeping buds, the slumbering old
trunks
it does lock us in, its purity encouraging reflection, a time to slow down
it always forgets its tempest storms, the memory dissolved, of its
inevitable offering
winter is a guest, who never remembers to knock
brazenly blizzards through a doorway
a chilled cloak in tow
we brace ourselves for its obliviousness
and gently shut the door behind it

Where to Next

Destiny Evans



Why I'm not an Artist

Stephanie Reynolds

Fear of failure.
A ridiculous part of the human condition.
My condition.
Pressure on paper.
Indents on my bones.
Shaky lines follow my hands.
Unfinished drawi
Unfini wo

Fear of failure.
Causing more pain in its wake
More failure wearing
the mask of success.
Ink stains and carbon hands.
Crooked noses and those evil words.
"What is it?"

AH! The bane of my life.
The love of my love.
How do I move forward when I can
Feel a part of me on paper.
Colors blend beautifully in ways words can't.
Muscles master a skill like magic.

If it were meant to be would I know?
Would I know?
Would I know?
Tell
me.

Am I meant to use paper in this way?
Is that my new dream?
Tell me now. Won't you?
You're beating in my chest.

You must know.
Use morse code
Against my veins.

These words.
These lines.

Can it not be both?



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