
The
Ephemera Prize
2026
Mississippi University for Women

The Ephemera Prize 2026

The W
Mississippi University for Women
Founded 1884 Coeducational since 1982

The Ephemera Prize is awarded annually in conjunction with the Eudora Welty Writers' Symposium at Mississippi University for Women. The W is extremely grateful to the Robert M. Hearin Foundation for the support they have provided for the prize and the symposium over many years.

In 2026 the contest received 46 entries from three schools in Mississippi. The winners were each awarded a $200 prize and invited to read their winning submissions before the symposium audience. Five honorable mentions were recognized, and the prize-winners read their entries, following readings by the two judges on October 23.

High school or home school students in grades 10-12 in Mississippi and nearby states were invited to write poems, stories, or essays on the Symposium and Ephemera Prize theme "'Like a Visitor from Nowhere': Encounters in the Uncanny South" or Eudora Welty's story "Moon Lake" which inspired the theme. Students from other states may participate if an alumna or alumnus of The W sponsors them by writing a letter.

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2026 Judges

Whitney Rio-Ross, author of *thunder makes us*
Justin Wymer, author of *Let the Forest Go*

The current Ephemera Prize theme and contest rules can be found on our website:

www.muw.edu/welty/ephemeraprize

Cover: Whispy Clouds

The Ephemera Prize 2026

"Like a Visitor from Nowhere" Encounters with the Uncanny South

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James Cancellare

Throwaway South

They haunt the small-town roads,
yellow and black like wasps
or police warning tape.
The bags float
like modern tumbleweeds.
Unnatural hue of plastic
drifting on a breeze that fails
to cut through the drowning air.
Always half stocked
and understaffed.
Why keep up with demand
if there's nowhere else to go?

"Black and yellow
kill a fellow."
Or at least that's how the saying goes.
Of course, they used to worry more
about the snakes.
They haven't met them,
the people who can't,
who couldn't possibly,
escape the grasp
of the black and yellow monster.
They work.
They shop.
They live.
Under its watch.
What choice do they have?
Nothing else exists here—
they're too poor
for anything else
to survive.

It traps them young,
teens searching for help
find their way through the sliding doors
to the job that they must have
but doesn't give them enough to live

unless they feed the beast.
Even then,
who knows how long
until it takes them too?
If they're lucky,
they can live long enough
to become an adult
throwing beer cans out the window
cause they didn't drown out the sadness
of driving America's favorite truck
through the dusty, dirt roads
of its dying underbelly.

Those who can flee,
who can afford to enter
for simple recreation,
often laugh
at the shoddily built,
short term life
that those who can't
have to buy.
They half-listen to the stories
of the souls
who must work to live
and live to work
to feed their captor
while simultaneously texting mom.

The nation calls it falling behind,
while themselves feeding
that great monster
who has trapped
the throwaway south.

Ananya Mantri

What Whispered in the Kudzu

I don't remember picking the honeysuckle,
only that we did: third grade, October,
little legs turned loose
onto the strip of grass behind the school
where the playground gave up and the trees began.

We pulled the blossoms one by one,
pinched the green ends, drew out
that single bead of sweetness
like we were thieves of something
the forest hadn't offered us,
already forgetting we were trespassing
on something older than the playground fence.

There lay the vines and the fence
with its chain-link gone soft with rust, half-swallowed
by kudzu so you couldn't tell
where the fence ended and the woods began, or
whether it was still keeping anything out, or
just holding the green in a little longer
before giving in completely.

Whatever it was, it had stopped being a boundary
and started being a mechanism of its own,
green and breathing, thick enough
to swallow a barn whole, a car, a house,
anything that stood still long enough.

Something moved in there.
Not wind.
Wind doesn't pause to listen to itself.
Something with weight, something patient,
cracking one branch at careful intervals
like it was pacing us, like it knew
exactly how far our seesaw kingdom reached.
We named it a hundred different things
that October: bear, monster,
the ghost of a man who used to farm that land
before we ever had a school to stand on.

Later I'd learn what kudzu does
to whatever it finds standing still:
smothers it slow, keeps its shape
in green until the shape collapses
into something the vine wears like a coat.
Somewhere under all that leaf
there might have been a foundation,
a fence line older than the fence,
a plot not mowed because no one
was paid to remember whose it was.
The South keeps things that way sometimes.
Not erased, just covered.
Still there if you dig,
which nobody where I grew up
cared enough to do.

We never found the thing that moved.
By winter the fence had disappeared for good,
just green now, a wall you couldn't lean on,
and none of us asked twice
what it was keeping furtive.

I think about it still, some nights,
that half animal, half memory,
and I understand now what we couldn't then:
some visitors don't come from anywhere.
They were already there.
We had just finally gotten quiet enough
to notice them looking back.

Tulasi Pizzolato

Blue Lips

If I so much as breathe on them
I believe they will shatter.
A bee, in its downy disguise
lands ever so tenderly;
it sees well through her closed eyes,
calculates precisely when to sting
intoxicating her subconscious, setting her afloat, setting her free.
Turn, turn the thawing terracotta
and watch it tumble onto her limbs
and out of her lips.

Lela Reed

Oh Amy

"*The grass is always greener on the other side!*"

Kelly loves to say that.

Kelly is my therapist.

I don't like Kelly.

She doesn't understand me; nobody understands me, but whenever I say that, people like to write it off as "teen angst". Teen angst my ass; I'm in pain. *Real* pain. Not that superficial shit the other girls at school like to whine about.

With them it's always about a boy, or their weight, or maybe mommy and daddy won't buy that shiny new car for graduation. I think those girls are pathetic. I don't like them. In fact, I don't like anybody, especially Kelly.

If I died and went to my own personal hell, my Satan would be Kelly. Red pointy horns would stick out of her teased blonde hair. A too-wide smile would split her hot-pink-painted lips. Her forked tongue would slip out as she hissed, "*Welcome to hell, Amy! So happy to see you made it!*" Satan Kelly's pointy tail would swing back and forth with excitement, so happy to torture me more with her aggravating voice.

"So, darling, how are we feeling today?"

Her voice is too loud, too bright, too chirpy.

"I feel fine," I tell her.

"You always say you feel fine, but your leg doesn't reflect that." Kelly smiled at me, so sweet, so patronizing. I frowned back at her, choosing to say nothing rather than the obvious "Go screw yourself." I would get in trouble if I said that, though, because where I live, disrespecting your elders is a capital offense.

The unspoken rules are: Don't disrespect your elders. Don't miss church. Don't be weird.

The South isn't the best place to live. I hate it here, just like I hate everything and everyone else. I only have two things I love; the first thing is my dog, Missy. Missy is the only living being in my life that isn't a pain in my ass. The second is Lady Jane; only Lady Jane gets me in trouble. Like a lot. I think if my dad wasn't a cop, as absent as he may be, I'd be sitting in a juvenile detention center getting honey buns in exchange for being a prison wife.

Her scent still sticks to me; I don't mind it. I love her smell. It brings me comfort, but other people wrinkle their noses and give me a judgy glare when I pass them by.

Unfortunately for me, Kelly began speaking again. "Amy, nothing is ever going to get better for you if you keep lying to me. I am trying my best to help you, but I need you to start trying to help yourself too. Now, how are we feeling today?"

"*I feel fine*" Is on the tip of my tongue; I want to insist. Instead, I tell her half the truth. "I'm angry." I am angry, but I'm also sad. Sad feels too weak, though.

"Why are you angry, Amy?"

"The girls at school pissed me off."

"Again?"

"Always."

"You really hate those girls. Why?"

"You know why."

It makes me mad to have her ask me why I hate those girls. She *knows* why. We've talked about it a million times, yet we keep circling back to this topic. They're annoying, bitchy, loud, stupid, awful, bleach-blonde, orange, cheerleading, Morgan Wallen-loving, wannabe barbies with the fakest smiles on planet earth.

"Remind me."

"I hate them because they're dumb. They act as if they have it so hard and say the stupidest things."

"Well, Amy, do you go home with these girls?"

"No."

As if; I think it'd rather gouge my own eyes out with a rusty spoon dipped in sewer water.

"So, you don't go home with them; how do you know they don't have it hard?"

That was probably the stupidest thing she could have said, and the most cliché too. Life isn't a Disney movie, and there is no way that all these girls go home and they have something awful going on.

At least not awful in the way I go home and have something going on.

Every time I go home, my mom is drunk, my dad is passed out, my house is a mess, my little brother and sister have made a mess and are screaming in my ear that they're hungry because they haven't had dinner.

I think the only reason Kelly defends these girls so hard is that she was one, still is really, just thirty years older and pumped with more plastic than the ocean.

"I just know Kelly." I don't even bother hiding the annoyance in my voice anymore. Let her hear it. She doesn't really care what I say or feel anyway. She's only doing this to get paid, not that she needs the money. Her husband owns damn near every store in this town. She loves it too. It makes her feel powerful.

I bet that's part of why she chose this job too. It makes her feel powerful, having all this information over people's heads. It doesn't matter that these are real people she's talking to, real people who are struggling. It's just drama to her. I'd bet my life that she goes home and tells all her patients' business to her husband, HIPAA be damned.

I hate coming here, but I don't have much of a choice. The court is pretty demanding.

"You just know…oh, Amy." Kelly pursed her ugly, hot pink colored lips at me.

I pursed mine right back at her,

"Do you want to know what I think?"

"No, not particularly." It slipped out without meaning to, but Kelly didn't scold me; instead, she rolled her eyes.

"Amy, I think you're jealous."

There was a moment of silence.

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Before I burst out into hysterical laughter.

"HA! Jealous? Of what? The bleach frying their brains? The tan hands? Hahaha! Wow…that is funny!"

I was having a real hoot; Kelly looked pissed.

"What? It's funny. Really funny actually."

"I'm serious, Amy."

"Well so am I, Kelly. I have nothing to be jealous of."

"Really?" Kelly said, disbelievingly.

"Really."

"So, you aren't jealous in the slightest bit that those girls you hate so much have friends? Actual friends that they can hang out with? That they don't have scars all over their legs and their arms? That they don't have to go to court-ordered therapy because they got caught smoking weed? That they have present parents? That they don't have to-"

My smile faded rather quickly.

"Shut up." I know I said disrespecting your elders is a capital offense, but I just couldn't help myself.

I grabbed my bag, and I left. Our session wasn't anywhere close to over, but Kelly Lewis could kiss my ass and eat my shit for all I care.

I didn't want to go home. Because at home I didn't have "present parents," as Kelly Lewis put it.

I hate her. I hate her. I hate her. I hate her.

I hate everyone. I hate everyone. I hate everyone. I hate everyone.

I hate her. I hate her. I hate her. I hate her.

I hate everyone. I hate everyone. I hate everyone. I hate everyone.

I find myself at the only safe place I know. It's deep in the woods behind the school I go to.

St. Augustine Catholic High School.

St. Augustine Catholic High School is the least holy place I know.

Deep in the woods, I have a little hideout. It's falling apart; it's been there for years. Probably built by an outcast just like me twenty-something years ago. I make my way inside and sit down. On a little wooden table sits a little wooden box. In that little wooden box is my stash.

I keep it here because ever since I got caught, my dad has been searching my room. Room searches suck. He goes through everything. He lifts my mattress, goes through my laundry, my drawers, my purse; he opens everything that zips; he checks inside my shoes; he even flips through the pages of my notebooks as though he expects something to fall out.

Until he calms down, I'll keep it here. He can't get rid of it if he doesn't know where to find it.

Hours have passed; it's dark out now. The moon is high, and so am I. I can see the moon through the cut-out wood that works as a window.

I've been thinking about the session, how I stormed out, and wondering if I should feel guilty. I decided that I shouldn't. All the awful, inappropriate things Kelly has said to me. "*Shut up*" is probably the nicest thing I could've said to her.

Jealous…She called me jealous! There is nothing that I hate more than when you say you hate someone, and they claim that you're just jealous!

My hatred for those girls, for everyone really, doesn't come from jealousy. It comes from them all being horrible people. I was only 10 when I learned how awful those girls, people, could be.

I was new on the playground. I was walking with my friend; her name was Emily. She hadn't been hanging out with me anymore, and I asked her why. She told me that it was because another girl didn't want her to hang out with me. So, I told a teacher.

Turns out Emily was a dirty little liar, and so when I told that teacher, she played dumb. That teacher no longer wanted me to hang out with either of them. Stupid, I know. But that's where it started.

Those girls are born bitches. I think that when they're in utero, while they're sucking all their mother's nutrients out through the umbilical cord, they also suck out their evil ways, so when they're born, they're already perfect little she-devils.

It only gets worse the older they get. When they get older, they simultaneously get meaner and stupider at the exact same time. Especially that Emily girl. Out of all of them, she's the stupidest I know. Although she and two others are pretty close runners-up.

They're such wastes of space; they all turn out the same. They peak in high school, get a boyfriend, go to college for cosmetology, or nursing, or, in Kelly's case, psychology. They join a sorority, get passed around frats like a joint or a keg stand, end up pregnant, turn into an alcoholic, and have way too many kids.

I'm not making this up! Go anywhere in the South, and you'll see! Follow the fake tans, bleached hair, Kendra Scott, and ugly, brightly colored church dresses, and that'll lead you straight into the awful world I live in.

The boys are no better; in fact, they're worse! Football, baseball, loving country hicks. They either have a buzz cut or hair cut like ice cream. Walking around in Hey Dudes, like they're the king of the world, laughing too loud about nothing, thinking they're so cool and so smart and that every girl wants them when, in reality, the ONLY girls that want them are the dumb bleach blondes, aforementioned.

They disgust me. Thinking about them makes me sick. Physically sick. In fact, I feel like I have to—

After I threw up, the high started wearing off, so I packed up and went home. I made sure to take the long way and walk extra slow. I would have spent the night in my hideout; I did that once, but the one time I did, my little siblings didn't eat.

I'm going to get in trouble when I get home, but when am I not in trouble? As long as I've lived in this awful town, all I've known is trouble. That's why I can't wait to graduate. I'm going to study abroad, block everybody; I might even block my own parents!"

Wouldn't that just be a dream?

When I make it home and unlock the door, the first thing I hear is yelling.

"Shut the hell up, Kimberly!"

"Get out of my house, Don!"

Great, mama and dad are fighting again. From the sound of mama's voice, I can tell she's drunk.

"Is that- AMY! AMY!" My dad yells.

"Yes?"

"Get your crazy ass mama out of my face-hey, where the hell have you been it's damn near 12 o'clock. You know James and Mary went to bed hungry?"

"Well, why didn't you feed-"

"Don't sass me. Hey…you been smokin' again? What did I tell you about that?"

"No, I haven't."

"I ain't stupid, Amy. I can smell it on you, and I can see it in your eyes. You ain't slick. I done busted a hundred other drug addicts just like you."

"I am not a drug addict."

"Yeah, and the Queen of England ain't dead and buried."

"Dad, please, give me a break."

"No, you give me a break. Kelly called. She said you left therapy early today. That you shouted at her. Why you always gotta be a problem, Amy? That therapy is court-ordered! In fact, you're lucky; that's all you got!"

My dad yelled at me for another hour before he let me go to my room. I passed James and Mary's door, frowning. I feel bad. I love my siblings…sometimes. Even though they feel like such a burden, I still love them. Them and their stupid names.

Mary and James.

Mary and James are twins; they didn't have a name for a week, until mama got super drunk one night and read the bible and decided on Mary and James, thinking she was picking Mary and Joseph.

Lying in my bed, staring up at the ceiling, absently petting Missy's head, I think back over my day again. It was terrible, absolutely terrible. And I blame Kelly for that. If she never set me off like that, then I wouldn't have had to cool off, and I never would've gotten home late.

Rolling over, I shut my eyes tight and fall into the fantasy world I have in my head. I'm older in this world, prettier, happier; my scars are gone, and I'm living in the Netherlands. I have no contact with anyone from my past- well, currently my present-

and I have three cats and Missy.

I spend my days painting; yes, I paint. Here I'm at peace.

I don't think I've ever felt true peace; the only way I can get close to it is using my friend, Mary Jane.

Call me what you want; call me a jealous, angry, self-mutilating, drug addict. Say I'm a nobody and a disappointment. I've heard it all before. But I know who I am. I know why I am the way I am. And I know who I want to be. No, no, who I'm gonna be.

Just one more year, and then I'm free. Free from Kelly, those girls, those boys, my family.

"We're gonna get out of here," I tell Missy. She looks at me, and for a second I feel like she understands.

"Yes, we are."

Makayla Wrenn

God's Inheritance

The first time I walked through the doors of Central United Methodist Church, the Mississippi heat followed me inside. It clung to the backs of my knees and gathered beneath my Sunday collar while the sanctuary swallowed the noise of the street. The ceiling fans turned lazily above the pews, pushing around air that smelled of old wood, perfume, paper hymnals, and peppermint candy. Sunlight came through the stained-glass windows in pieces, red and blue spilling across the aisle and disappearing beneath polished shoes. My family had arrived early enough to claim several rows, which meant there was nowhere for me to sit without being within reach of somebody who could pinch me for misbehaving.

I started walking down the aisle, greeting people I knew.

There was Uncle Earl near the back, already sweating through the collar of his white shirt. He had been smoking weed for as long as I could remember, long enough that I had never known him without the faint smell of smoke following him into the room. He had his Bible open, though I had never seen him read it. That morning his fingers rested on the pages, unmoving. I wondered what he could possibly be praying for. Maybe he was asking God to make peace with himself. Maybe he was asking for another chance.

Maybe he was asking for nothing at all.

A few rows ahead sat my aunt, Tasha, her purse tucked beneath her arm and her hands folded tightly in her lap. Her son was in jail. I knew that much. I did not understand bail or court dates or how long someone could sit behind a locked door waiting for a decision made by somebody else. I only knew that every Sunday she prayed with an urgency that made the words seem heavier when they left her mouth. I watched her close her eyes and wondered whether she was asking God to bring her son home or asking God to forgive him for whatever had kept him there.

My mother was already in her seat. She had spent the morning making sure everyone was dressed, eaten, and made it to church. Now she sat quietly, her hands clasped together, her thumb moving slowly across the side of her finger. I knew later that she had been praying about the electricity bill. At the time, I only knew that adults sometimes became very quiet when money was involved. There were bills on our kitchen counter that seemed to multiply overnight, envelopes that my parents opened carefully and folded again before putting them away. The lights were always on when I needed them, so I never understood that keeping them on was something you could have to pray for.

My father sat beside her with his Bible resting against his knee. He is a first-generation American, the son of a woman who came from Kenya, and I had grown up with pieces of Kenya scattered throughout our house. It lived in stories about my grandmother's childhood, in names and phrases that sounded different from the Mississippi English around me, and in the food that appeared on our table. Ugali was

one of those foods. Warm maize flour, thick enough to tear apart with your fingers, familiar enough to make a place thousands of miles away feel close. My father's mother had carried those memories across the Atlantic, and my father had carried them into the family he built here.

Around them, the rest of the congregation carried their own private inventories of need. A woman near the front wiped her eyes with a handkerchief. A man in the corner kept his head bowed long after everyone else had lifted theirs. Someone's child slept across their mother's lap. Someone else stared at the floor as though the answer might be hidden between the floorboards.

The choir began to sing, and the entire room changed.

Voices rose into the rafters while the organ hummed beneath them. My aunt swayed slightly with her eyes closed. My mother sang softly. Uncle Earl finally closed his Bible. Somewhere near the front, a baby began crying, and an older woman laughed quietly as she bounced him against her shoulder. The ceiling fans continued their slow circles above us. Outside, cars passed along the street and Jackson continued sweating beneath the summer sun.

I started noticing the people around me differently.

I noticed who came to church in pressed clothes despite having little money. I noticed the women who arrived carrying dishes for fellowship dinners even when I knew they had stretched their own groceries to make them. I noticed the men who joked loudly about everything except the things that frightened them. I noticed people disappearing for months and returning thinner, quieter, or simply changed. I noticed relatives who spoke about mental illness in whispers, as though saying the diagnosis too loudly might make it contagious. I noticed how addiction could become a person's identity, how incarceration could swallow every other fact about someone, how poverty could make a person invisible until they needed something from you.

And above all, I kept noticing Aunt Tasha.

I watched her sit in those pews after her son's conviction by an all-white jury; her hands folded in her lap while the choir sang above her. I could not understand how an entire jury could look at her son and see a criminal while she could look at him and still see the boy she had raised. I did not understand the courtroom then. I did not understand how twelve people could sit together and decide the trajectory of another person's life. I only understood the difference between the man they had decided he was and the son my aunt still believed him to be.

I had been raised around this kind of silence. I knew that silence could mean an adult was worried about money. I knew that a person saying “I'm fine” usually meant I should not ask again. I knew which relatives needed a hug instead of a question. I knew when my mother was calculating something in her head by the way she pressed her lips together. I knew that Aunt Tasha's smile changed whenever someone mentioned the courthouse.

As I grew older, that difference became harder to ignore.

I began asking questions that were uncomfortable precisely because there were no easy answers. Why did some people receive the benefit of the doubt while others received suspicion? Why could a white person's desperation be called a mistake while

a Black person's desperation could become evidence of character? Why did mental illness become a medical condition when it happened to one person and a moral failure when it happened to another? Why did poverty become an explanation for some families but an accusation against others?

And why, if God was going to judge the Black man for the worst thing he had done, did nobody seem as interested in asking what had been done to him?

That question stayed with me.

When people spoke about Aunt Tasha's son, I pictured the boy she had raised before I pictured the man in the courtroom. When people reduced Uncle Earl to his addiction, I remembered him sitting beneath the stained glass with his Bible open. When people talked about poverty as though it were a personal defect, I remembered my mother's hands folded in prayer over an electric bill.

I had grown up too close to these things to believe that a label could tell me everything I needed to know.

My mind continues to return to that one day in church.

The sanctuary emptied slowly. Hymnals closed. Programs folded. Dresses brushed against wooden pews. Children were called by name. My family gathered itself and headed toward the doors, back into the Mississippi heat and toward the bills, court dates, kitchens, diagnoses, jobs, and ordinary problems waiting on the other side.

And somewhere between the stained glass and singing, I learned that perhaps judgment was never the inheritance I was meant to carry. Understanding was.

Honorable Mention

Maya Diaz

Beneath it All

The *swish* of the murky blue wet around me
And the brisk brush of your painted nails against mine
Brings goosebumps to my sunburnt skin
As our limbs paddle calmly in the lake behind your house

And under the lapping of the infant waves:
Silence.
But the hum of your body in the water
And the relief of your song above the surface
It's the only gospel that can find us here.

Floating under a darkened blue
The chapel pews are far away
And the preacher's law isn't below the lake
It's only us and our damnation.

We think of each other, and we think of growing up,
we think of Confession, and we think of sinking.
We think of how the horseflies aren't as invincible as they seem
And neither is the Book that defies us.

We forget the people who condemn things like us.
We forget the splinters of the pews,
where we kneel in our flowered dresses every Sunday.
We go beneath the sound and under the buzzing of the South.
We descend, for the first time, and maybe for the last.

Piper James

Just a Tree

Gnarled and twisted roots
Reach to the top.
Beneath, blanketed,
What's left of a mother's baby
Lay down the foundation.
Life sprouted from death.

Why does this life look so lifeless?
Its head hung down low-
To whom is it bowing?
Is it time weighing on these
Ageless things?
What has it witnessed?

A seed, dropped from high,
Grew for long.
Its once tall
Boughs saddened.
Once, they sprung
Up with joy-unawares.

It has watched
Thousands.
The copper, white, black.
All the same—
watched the sky
Rain down red.

Life ends here, flat
Stones tilted upward,
Stolen from earth,
Surrounding the
"Tree of Life"
Long forgotten.

Once, they grew too quick.
The ground littered
With something brittle—
Choking and spreading

Its way across the world.
Diseasing without care.

It saw a field only formed
A few moons ago,
Stripped by plowing
From those who needed
Too much too soon
From the ground.

How much longer
Will this sad life last?
Who will be the keeper
Of its knowledge
After it is cut down
Meaninglessly?

Will it watch the
World burn down?
Or will it be
Lost before
The inevitable
Sets fire—

Kamdyn Patrick

After Death, What?

Where you going when you die?
Is Jesus gonna hold your hand as he lets you down?
Will his love be worth his wrath?
A white sign in the dirt asks

Down the road I see another
Ziptied to a stop sign
On a backroad
The sun is falling
The horizon is orange
But covered by the trees
I can see its glow over the tops

A call to worship with three words
After death what?

The maggots will work on me
Before all the rest comes
They won't mind the things I've done
What I've said
All the sins I've committed

The eyes would be first
The softest part to work into
From there they'd travel my sinus'
Make their way to my mouth
Down my throat
Into my stomach
Work from the inside to the outside

Wiggle through my brain
Pick through my thoughts
My memories
Eat it all with no judgement

After death I want the moss to grow
Over my bones and in between my sinews
The roots of the pine to wind around my legs

I want the black birds to swoop and clean my mess
The mushrooms populating
What's left of me

Start to fertilize the soil around me
When the dandelions shed their fur
They'll land on me
Settle down for a while
Then be off

I am not hospitable like the land
But the moss doesn't mind
I'll watch the deer step over my bones
Heading towards the road my mom drives

The dogs off their owner's land
Will stay away
Can sense that uneasiness of a human body
In a place that it doesn't belong for too long

The strays won't mind
They'll lay by my ribs
Warm the dirt where I lay
After death

Kate Wu

hornets' nest: a contrapuntal

they had proliferated. large swarms, ten at a time,
crowded over their combs, patted over their pupae,
& white paper covered larvae as they huddled next to each other to stay warm.
nectar, honeybees, peaches, tree sap, chewed-up insects were
brought back as
    smooth pointed stingers batted away my hand,
    bringing tears as i ran &
cried.

question:

mom,

what is a home?
the country of my ancestors?

can you do something about this?
my hand pointed
behind the safety of a glass window

answer:

yes, of course, dear, she said.
and the next day
poison drew a misty haze
around the house

although i know that
would never work because that
place is already home to too many.
i need somewhere more me.

question:

they dropped like flies, i don't like
staying

where i am now?

because they're polluting the place

answer:

it's fine sweetie,
it'll all be cleared up soon, she said,
looking at a pamphlet.

"hornet larvae are nutritious
& a delicacy!"

i don't think so.

i'm a hundred miles away from
the two places i lived half my life in.

then the closest i can say
to having my own place is this
dim room with gray walls,
undecorated desk, chair, and nothing else
leaving me to myself & my disembodied
consciousness

so last i knew,
the larvae were cooked, sold for a
thousand to a michelin star restaurant,
and entered a rich person's lips.
they keeled over, foaming at the mouth—
dead, just like everywhere i
thought i belonged.

then maybe would it be best if i
lived the rest of my years
floating from place to place until
my body is entombed, buried.
then somewhere would be my
final resting place. seeds would
float on top, digging
their way to my steel coffin and grow
over the centuries until i'm just bones to
become a great & beckoning tree.

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