



**Hooper**  
First Place—Painting  
**Ella Lauderdale**  
Watercolor, ink

## I Call That Beautiful

**“It is not blasphemy / to see God in the skyline.”**

**Abby Strain**

—Essay Competition

I can’t help but see poetry in everything.

When it is three twenty-four a.m. and my best friend calls to tell me that he is sitting in a motel room, alone, reading my favorite book for the fourth time, I call that Loneliness. I would kiss his forehead if he was next to me. Tell him, “you are the starry-night” and wipe the tears off of his cheeks. But instead I say, “191 days.” And he replies with, “658 miles.” And the call ends.

When I sleep in my sister’s bed, she wakes me up with a video, a voice I now only hear in my dreams. “Abby, I love you.” and my voice responds, “I love you

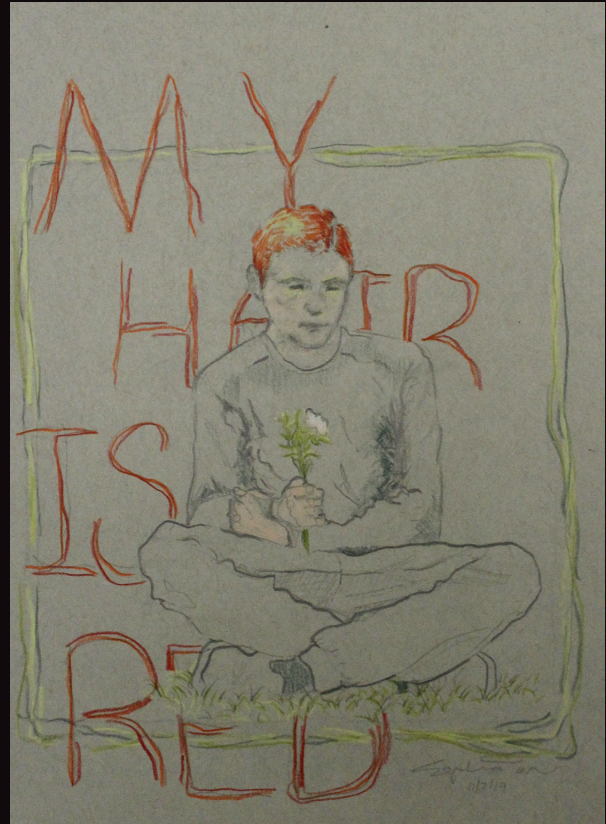
too,” thick with laughter. I call that Long Dead. My tears scream for exodus and I tell them they have only been in Egypt for eight months. They have 499 years and four months left before Moses comes.

When it is four thirty-two a.m., and my head swims with things I shouldn’t have been drinking, I tell a boy that he is beautiful. By the way his heart beats in response, I don’t think anyone has told him he is the ocean before—beautiful, beautiful, beautiful—and I call that Injustice. I hear myself tell him that I am not a foundation. That he cannot build something here. But when he kisses my forehead and tells me “you are the

starry-night,” I don’t think he remembers the traffic signals. Red and yellow and green. Synchronized flashing. Beautiful. Harmony.

When my mother tells me she bought a wedding dress, we are riding on the bypass. She does not mention that there are no plans for a wedding; she does not take her eyes off the road. I call that Discretion. She plants daisies in her chicken coop and cries over missed grad school assignments. She is the night sky. I love her enough to water the daisies.

When the car is going seven miles per hour, I slip out of the door anyways. Feet bouncing off asphalt trampoline. Legs swinging over the side of my friend’s boyfriend’s convertible. I’m chasing the wind in my hair, and I call that Freedom. We look up at the starry night and someone tells me they love how quickly Columbus, Mississippi, fades to the middle of nowhere. And I tell them that I’ve been raised to fade to nothing, just like my town. In this moment, everything is forever—and I count the seconds and the stars until it’s all nothing again. △



**Rosie Lowe**

**Sophia Toner**

Drawing—colored pencil



**Bridge to  
Canada**

**Hua Chen**

Photography