

**2017 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention: Alex Maynard**

Sex Carnival

Catering had returned
the candy apples to storage, the hosts had packed
tables and games away. One floor up
a charity ball ends. Its attendants wander
the hall, high heels on the tiling
like knives against a cutting board. They pop the balloons
promptly, orange and red latex lying flaccid
at our feet and under the hosts' sneakers
as they try to ferret away
the leftover food, passing off what doesn't fit on the cart
to the remaining guests. Meaning us.
We make our own contributions
clearing the cart of popcorn, two hands at a time.

Landscape with Washerwomen: Oil on Canvas:
Alessandro Magnasco: Circa 1710-1720

A dull blue void beckons over
serrated mountain peaks. Supersaturated
air crystallizes into cloud
cover at the snow-sloped horn's sharp thrust
into the sky. As its spreading sight wafts
through the leaves, the preemptive smell
of damp dirt and plants makes
the trees shiver.
The women shiver.
Garments are pulled
from a blackened pond burdened
by the distant storm.
Women stack their washboards
in no particular hurry. A girl at the opposite end
of the water still scrubs.
As the others rest, their palms
imprints in the pond,
her ripples nibble their hands, make webs
of water between their fingers—
as though they were to be reborn
as ducks to live on this pond,
the river Jordan flowing
down the mountain
across the deep
green plains
to meet them.

Becoming Freshmen

I

He failed his midterm that morning,
insisted he drink his wine
with his dorm room open.
Just to piss off
the RA

II

Someone is asleep
on a couch in the lounge.
I don't know who they are.
The janitor walks in—that narrows it,
it's not the janitor.

III

When we find Isaiah, he's a squat, strawberry
ice-cream cone
melting into a chair,
his computer the cherry on top. We drag him
out of the lounge, but he collapses
in exhaustion
at the base of the steps,
sleeps until dinner.

IV

It's a foggy night, we're hiking
through the wood to the lake.
Somewhere farther in
a voice calls, Hello, who's there?
We locate the source with our noses, the smell
of weed a brighter beacon
than our flashlights.

V

Isaiah's eyes went vacant at the dinner table.
I stopped eating to explain.

“He's 21, he's allowed to if the door's closed.”

“So if you're underage,
you're supposed to drink with the door open?”

“If you're underage,
you're not supposed to drink at all.”

Isaiah slumps over
his barbeque chicken meatloaf
and lets out a soft moan.