

A Journal of Art,
Literature & Culture

The Quatrain

Volume 6: Spring 2022

Staff Editors

Cammie Ardoin
Savannah Barker
Kristyn Hardy
Kennis Jobe
DeRel Smith
Katelyn Swanson

Faculty Advisor

Nick Todd, Instructor, English

Design

Tom Futrell, Associate Professor, Graphic Design

The Quatrain is managed by students at Louisiana Tech University and advised by faculty from the College of Liberal Arts. The journal is housed in George T. Madison Hall, where undergraduates collect, assess, and edit submissions from student writers and artists.

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From the Dean



I am pleased to introduce volume 6 of *The Quatrain*, a journal of art, literature, and culture produced by students at Louisiana Tech. Last year, after several years of a deadly pandemic and a tumultuous political environment, the student's writing displayed a "questioning mood" with few certainties. Although the fear and doubts have somewhat lessened with the availability of vaccines for the Corona virus, the tremendous upheavals of our country and, indeed the world, remain. The day after I finished teaching a course on Contemporary British Literature, which covered the poetry, novels, and plays from World War II to the present, Russia invaded Ukraine and it seemed like we were right back to the mid-twentieth century – a time we thought long past – with

the rise of autocratic leaders, the resurgence of nationalism, the potential for a world war, and the reality of nuclear annihilation a distinct possibility. Also the country is still reeling from the fallout of a contested presidential election and bitterly divided on the central issues of our day – civil rights, free speech, abortion, climate change and income inequality.

Our students have responded in these creative works, turning, if I may say, to more traditional themes, perhaps looking for stability or foundations in the past, while sorting out the many concerns of their individual lives. Todd Gannon's poem *A Nod to Old Possum*, provides this sentiment: "We cannot say anything that Eliot had not said much better." Themes like love and death predominate in the poems. Avery Miller, for instance, writes in her lyric *C(lover), Four leaf clovers./Represent luck in love./Not luck alone*. But what captured my attention in this collection is the studied concentration on seeing. Shaw Corcoran captures this sentiment exactly in the title to his play, *Eyes*, but it is recognized in the many portraits and illustrations placed throughout the volume. For instance, consider the questioning glance of the young woman in *Legacy* by Grace Hall or the several pairs of eyes in the sketches entitled *Tosca* by Christi Kruger. Perhaps this focus is due to the fact that for two years we have worn masks covering most of our face and tried to discern other's feelings and thoughts only through their gazes and glances. It seems to me the "eyes" of this volume by Tech students look out on a world that is at once all too familiar and yet decidedly altered from the one they knew just a few short years ago.

I wish you all the best in reading and viewing these wonderful pieces, and I hope you, like me, find pleasure in the great creative talent of our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald J. Kaczvinsky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Donald Kaczvinsky
Dean, College of Liberal Arts

Letters from the Editorial Team



Cammie Ardoin

Cammie Ardoin

I have loved working on the publication of Volume 6 of *The Quatrain*. It brings me great joy to help artists, of every division, publish and share their works with the world. I hope that this publication is a small stepping stone to their publishing career. And I wish nothing but good things in each one of these students' future.



SB

Savannah Barker

I love music, art, and most of all, literature! I hope to one day work in the publishing field, and to possibly publish a poetry book of my own! I enjoyed working with the team on *The Quatrain*. Everyone has been very nice, and the experience has helped me learn many new things about editing.



KHardy

Kristyn Hardy

It's always an exciting experience watching an idea move from concept to product. This year's volume of *The Quatrain* was no different. It was a pleasure to work on this journal and an honor to do it alongside these people. I hope you love these pages as much as I do.



Kennis Jobe

Kennis Jobe

The Quatrain will be the second student-run liberal arts journal I have been privileged to be a part of, but the first that I have edited as a graduate student. To be a part of this project has been a learning experience; putting together the body of this journal was a challenge that I was all too happy to undertake. The fellowship with other students, sharing our passion for the arts in putting together this year's volume, has been the most rewarding part of this entire project. When I first came to Tech in September of 2021, as a baby grad student with wide eyes and no understanding of how any of this getting-my-master's business worked, I had no expectation of being able to take part in a school journal once more. In my first quarter here, I came across *The Quatrain* and devoured the previous two volumes with delight. When I was assigned this task in the beginning of the spring quarter, I couldn't have been more thrilled. I had some notion of what it was like to be on an editorial board, but I could

never have anticipated what a unique, exciting, and fulfilling experience this would be. I suppose it makes sense; my life has been devoted to literature since I was about four years old.

Being a part of this year's edition hasn't just strengthened my editorial skills; it has given me confidence and inspiration for the rest of my career, and that I owe to everyone I have worked with on this volume.



DS

DeRel Smith

Not too long ago, I was blessed with a little graphic novel that changed the course of my writing career. I've always enjoyed writing stories, but being able to see other writers bare their souls in their works is truly something phenomenal. I could never guess being presented with my peer's works in this way would bring me such happiness. Every second of going through this process has been spectacular, and I'd do it all over again!



Katelyn Swanson

Katelyn Swanson

It has been such an honor to be able to work on *The Quatrain* for yet another year. Every year the publication process has been a different challenge, and it has been a lot of fun working on it with the rest of the awesome editorial team. It has been really fun to watch *The Quatrain* come to life this year. All of our contributors are so talented, and it has been an honor to be able to work with them. I want to thank everyone who helped make this publication possible: our contributors, the rest of the editorial team, our instructor Nick Todd, and the College of Liberal Arts. And now, without further ado, please enjoy Volume 6!



Nicholas Todd

Nicholas Todd

Taking on the role of faculty editor for *The Quatrain* has been quite rewarding, to say the least. Playing any part in creating something is magical, but when that creation is a platform for students to express themselves through their creative works, it takes that sense of reward to a new level. This publication has always been a safe space for student expression, and I am proud to be a part of such a project. This sixth volume would not exist without the hard work of this year's editorial team. I have never met such a passionate, driven, and talented group of students; it was surely a privilege to work alongside them.

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The Hike

by Trevor Blackstock

Opening my car door, crisp spring air invaded my nostrils, flooding my senses with a river of mountain smells. Smells of fresh pine needles emerging from their slumber, of air free from suffocating pollutants, of lavender fields tended to by your father's caring hands. Most importantly, however, was the smell of your mother's fresh-baked apple pie that was cradled by the mountain air and delivered with care to my nostrils. These scents were ones I had experienced for a couple of years now, but I never grew tired of them. Each breath I took in this landscape was as fresh as the first time I visited, for this was your world and it resembled you in every way possible. Just thinking about the similarities drew a smile across my face and released a breath of relief from within. Finally, after being overseas for the past few months, I was returning to your world and, most importantly, to you.

I started to walk up to your quaint log cabin, following the cobblestone walkway carefully so that I did not step on the small budding flowers that lined each stone. Both you and your mother were very particular about minimizing damage to the grasses and flowers that called your yard home, a particularity I learned about very quickly on our first date. Despite accidentally slipping, I'll never forget the lecture your mother gave me about the yard, with you quietly sitting behind her being unsure whether to be mad at me or laugh at me. But now, after hundreds of dates and visiting your house hundreds of times, I have never made the same mistake again, much to the delight of your mother. Reaching the old dark oak stairs, I carefully moved my feet on each step as they creaked and shifted slightly as they supported my weight. Some shuffling could be heard inside, most likely your parents realizing I had finally arrived. The sky blue curtains rustled a little in the window to the right of me, revealing your mother's smiling face and small wave as she gazed at me. I returned a smile, a nod, and a wave before she disappeared behind the curtains once more, accompanied by the settling of heavy feet behind the front door. As my knuckles bounced off the front door a single time, it opened to reveal your

father standing there with you, gently holding onto you with his hand. We exchanged eye contact, his eyes conveying a sense of grief, comfort, and love amongst the hazel specks in his irises. I returned a similar gaze, accompanied by a slight smile. We had come a long way since the first time I visited your house, with my awkward mannerisms being replaced by a confident stance and your father's antagonistic aura being replaced with one of acceptance. "Be sure to take good care of her, son," he stated as he released you from his grasp and allowed you to fall into mine.

"I always do sir, you have nothing to worry about," I reassured him, giving him a confident nod and shaking his hand. After exchanging smiles one last time, he shut the door and left us together on the porch. No words were spoken but I knew our reunion was one we both were looking forward to, albeit we never knew when it would occur. Thankfully, the army released me to go home earlier than intended, allowing me to reunite with you sooner than either of us anticipated. With you in hand, I descended the stairs and carefully followed the path you and I walked together on hundreds of times before, but this time it was different and only I could feel the difference for you would be oblivious to what would occur at the end of our hike. As we reached the end of the cobblestone path, I allowed my muscles and mind to relax slightly since we no longer had to take care to avoid any grasses, however, out of respect for you, I always made sure to avoid any flowers along the trail. Especially those found at the beginning of our favorite trail, the ones you pointed out the first time we walked this trail a year ago...

"Careful there! You almost stepped on my favorite flower's home!" you protested, quickly jumping in front of me to prevent me from walking forward. It was unnecessary since your sudden outburst was enough to make me stumble backward slightly. Once my mind processed the shock, my face wore a puzzled look as I stared at the empty ground you were protecting.

"Are you sure your eyes don't need checking, silly? Looks like you're protecting empty mounds of dirt," I teased, wearing a slight grin as shades of red shone through your light brown hair covering part of your face. Your flustered face wouldn't last long, soon being replaced with a serious look as you prepared to lecture me.

"Yes I'm sure my eyes don't need checking, thank you

very much! As for these 'mounds of dirt,' they really are the home to my favorite flower, you just can't see it yet..." you claimed, turning your attention towards the dirt mounds as you continued to speak, "Let me ask you this: Does something lose its meaning if it doesn't exist in front of you?" I cocked my head sideways as the question left your mouth, an unusual saddened tone clinging to the words you spoke. At first, I wanted to tell you it wasn't that serious and I would avoid stepping on the dirt, but I found myself contemplating what you asked before answering.

"Well, if I think about my parents back home or even your parents at your home, the answer is obviously no since they still mean something despite not being here..."

"What if you returned home and they weren't there? What if there was no guarantee you'd ever see them again, no guarantee that they existed anymore?" you interjected before I could finish my response. Unlike your previous question, your eyes were now locked onto mine, your deep blue eyes resembling a glass sky holding back the rain, requiring a single disturbance to shatter the barrier holding the rain. It was a look that drove me to seriously consider every question that accompanied it. It signaled my answer was one you would take to heart, one that would make or break your opinion of my character.

"Of course, they would still mean something to me, to anyone that interacted with them. As long as someone remembers them, everything they've done will have meaning, whether it be good or bad. I'm assuming these mounds must be home to a flower that means something to you right? What kind of flowers live here?" I asked, moving closer to you and squatting down beside you, turning my attention to the dirt mounds. I made sure to note your expression before breaking eye contact, judging how my response would be received by you. The result was overwhelmingly positive, your eyes now glistening like a sunrise over a calm sea.

"My grandmother planted pink carnations when we first moved here, but it wasn't just an aesthetic choice. She viewed the flowers as away to honor the dead with a promise that they will never be forgotten. As long as the flower's home is not disturbed, they will bloom again without fail, ensuring the promise is never broken," you explained in a soft voice as if you were being careful not to disturb someone. You went on to explain how your parents did not share the same sentiments

towards the flower as your grandmother, so it was just the two of you who tended to their care. Whether it was out of love for you or the story behind the flowers, I can't be sure, but I promised you I would uphold that belief with you going forward...

As I finished recollecting the story, I found my eyes staring at the dirt mounds, a new one being added since I last visited. The mound next to it was one you and I tended to together, planting it shortly after your grandmother's passing. They were all perfectly round, with not a single grain of dirt being out of place. A perfection obtained only with your hands guiding the shaping of the mound. No words were necessary for you to understand how much I admired your work, for my eyes stared so deeply at the mounds that the world around me was blurred. Feeling a slight tug on my arm, my trance was broken and I understood it was time for us to continue up the mountain. Normally, I would jokingly criticize your work and offer tips on how to properly form a mound but we were on a time limit today, especially if things were to go to plan. We needed to scale the mountain before sunrise to ensure I had the perfect backdrop to open the special box in my jacket pocket and ask you the most important question in my life.

As we continued along the mountain trail, the sounds of feet crushing the fallen leaves against the Earth were the only sounds moving through the trees at this hour. An occasional breeze would dance through the branches, producing a rustling orchestra as background noise for our journey. The trail itself mimicked the peaceful nature of the mountain at this hour, remaining free of holes or debris that could trap your feet and send you to meet the same fate as the leaves you crushed. The incline invited even the weakest of willed to reach the summit, being just steep enough to ensure each step took you closer to the top. At first, I couldn't understand the comfort you found in such a still, silent world. I needed to hear something happen, find something interesting, see something exciting. Initially, the only thing I knew that was happening was time slipping through our fingers, escaping into the past with nothing I could point to and justify its usage. Over time, however, you taught me there was something in that silence that was worth the time spent.

Reaching one of the only flat areas on the mountainside,

I recognized a small clearing near the edge. As we walked towards it, the trees overhead began to clear out to reveal the dimly lit cloudless sky. The clearing overlooked the lakeside, providing a postcard-worthy view of the opposing mountain. The various hues of green danced in the wind against the slate mountainside, the dark oak trunks doing their best to support their movements. Small specks of black and brown could be seen moving slowly through the trees towards the shore, being too far away to clearly distinguish which animal it was. This clearing held a special place in our hearts because it was our favorite star-gazing spot that we frequented. Looking up to the sky, I could see a bright star that once carried no meaning but now was forever a reminder of that night...

"Hey look, you see that? That's the Lyra constellation! You can tell by its bright star sitting atop that box formation," you pointed out to me, tracing the stars with your finger in front of my eyes. We had been laying under the stars for almost an hour now, but this was the first constellation you pointed out to me.

"Wait, so you're telling me a box with a bright dot on top is enough to become well-known and recognized? I know what I'm doing when I get home!" I jested, gently nudging your shoulder as you turned to confirm if I really just made that comment. Your Neptune blue eyes rolled around your sockets and your hand pushed back against my shoulder as you protested my remark.

"Don't disrespect Lyra like that! There's much more to its story than being a poorly drawn box with a line sticking out its top..."

"So you are admitting it's nothing special visually speaking..."

"Yes but that's not the point!" you interjected before I could continue teasing you. Your face was wearing shades of red that provided the only color under the starry black and white sky.

"As I was saying, the story of the Lyra constellation is what makes it special. Orpheus would play his God-given lyre to produce music that could heal anyone's soul of negative emotion, but he stopped utilizing his power when his wife died. He walked the Earth with his life having no meaning, resulting in him dying in a depressive state. It is said his lyre would have been lost to the river if an eagle did not retrieve it that day and give it a new life amongst the stars as the constellation we see today." As you

finished the story, I found myself both impressed you knew the story and moved by the story itself. My eyes split their attention between the constellation and you as my thoughts continued to build, time slipping through our fingers. Eventually, a question escaped my lips and was brought into the world, bringing with it a spark that would change our relationship forever.

"Do you think the same will happen for us after death? Do you think there's a life after death?" I asked in an unusually serious tone. It wasn't often that you would hear this tone, but, without fail, you ensured I had your undivided attention each time you heard it. At that moment, nothing else in the world existed but us, and it would stay that way until we were satisfied with our answers. Without turning to face you, I knew you were staring deeply at me as you constructed your answer, before delivering it through your soft-spoken lips.

"I believe that my soul will depart from my body and live but where it will go is something I'm unsure of. That doesn't bother me and I don't think about it much because I believe focusing on the life that's in front of me is more important than any potential life after death," you sincerely answered, your words leaving no room to doubt how genuine they were. My eyes were now glued firmly on you, wanting to take in every expression that accompanied your words. "I think that was the problem for Orpheus, he was too concerned about reuniting with his wife in the afterlife that he failed to live his current life. If I were him, I would focus on preserving the memory of my wife by living a life that is fulfilling and she could be proud of, regardless of if I believed in an afterlife or not... What about you? What would you do if I died?" I could feel my cheeks become flushed as your final words echoed in my mind. Part of me was fixated on the implication that you were my wife in this scenario, while another part of me realized the weight of what you asked.

I'd only ever considered what would happen to me after I died, not how I would live after someone else died. Would I be subjected to the same fate as Orpheus, left aimlessly floating in life with nothing to keep me afloat? Or would I be able to move forward like you, living a fulfilling life I would be proud to tell you about when our souls reconnected? Despite these uncertainties, I knew you deserved the best answer I could give at that moment, your glassy sky eyes once again barely holding back the rain.

"I think I would find it difficult to truly live at first. No, I

know it would be difficult to continue at first. As time went on, however, I would be able to push forward and live. I would like to try and pick up one of your hobbies that interests me and pursue it. I guess it would be my way of remembering someone I really cared about..." my voice started to trail off as I watched emotions roll across your face like waves, your expression becoming softer and more tender as I responded. It was like watching the phases of the moon play out in front of me, culminating in a bright full moon that shined brighter than the stars above. I was left speechless, my body and mind unsure of how to feel and what emotions should be expressed. I could feel my lips beginning to part as if they knew the right words to say, but no sound came out. Finally, like a shooting star racing across the night sky, my mind became flooded by a spectacular emotion that I could convey through words, "I love you." Your hands quickly went to cover your face, desperate to hide the embarrassment that was consuming you. I too felt embarrassed, now realizing what I just said, leading me to quickly change the subject, "So... Anyways... What would you do if I died while I'm overseas with the army?"

"Don't joke like that, especially with you leaving in a few months! That's not very fair of you, so I won't be answering that question... But I can answer another question you may have..." you retorted, your eyes darting around the environment as you spoke the last sentence.

"What question would that be?" I asked curiously, having no other questions in my mind that I was aware of. You would not tell me the question, providing only your answer which told it all.

"I love you too!" you exclaimed, your face lighting up with joy as you spoke. I couldn't help but smile back at you, feeling the same excitement you felt coursing through my body as well. I reached for your hand and pulled you close to me, leaving your other hand free for you to point out the celestial bodies in the sky. The names of those you identified I can not recall, for you were the brightest star that captivated my attention for the rest of the night...

As I finished recalling that night, my body felt weightless and full of excitement as if I had just gone back in time and re-lived it. The bright star had now faded, indicating the sunrise would soon be upon us. While this spot was beautiful and held

a special meaning to us, there was another, more secretive spot that was better suited to the task I had to carry out. It was a spot that only you and I knew about, a spot tucked away just below the summit. It was there that I felt would be the best place to ask you this question and fulfill what you and I desired. If the roles were reversed, I'm sure you would think the same way. A soft chirp from a bird interrupted my thoughts, making me turn around to find a cardinal sitting in a tree closest to the clearing. Her pale brown feathers wore the early spring dew, being contrasted by her bright orange beak. She chirped at me again, as if to signal to me I was running out of time. I gave her a nod, to which she responded by flying to a tree further up the trail. With you in hand, we ascended the mountain behind the cardinal, never straying too far from where we were. The forest creatures started to come alive with the impending sunrise. Squirrels leaped across the trail and scrambled up trees, taking a moment to observe me, before disappearing in the foliage. The crunching of leaves in the distance caught my attention, allowing me to witness spotted deer gazing curiously in my direction. They were not brave like the squirrels, choosing to stay far away and not get a closer look at me. No other birds joined us on our journey; however, the lone cardinal was our only guide.

Nearing our final destination, you pulled ahead of me, likely realizing the place I was taking you. Faint rays of light were now visible through the trees, lighting the remainder of the path and illuminating your face. I shielded my eyes to get a better look at you, but it was no use. Your face appeared pale against the lighting of the sun, your light brown hair and sky blue eyes being the only distinguishing features that could compete with the brilliance of the sun. You soon picked up your pace, coming closer and closer to the sunrise, becoming an indistinguishable speck in the sky of light.

"Hey, wait up! Don't go that far without me! I need to be there!" I shouted out to you, hoping to slow your pace to the final destination. At first, you stopped and looked back, returning a loving smile. Your lips moved, seemingly producing a laugh I couldn't hear, before you continued to run into the sunlight. I quickened my pace as well, firmly holding onto the box inside my pocket as I raced after you. The cardinal raced beside me as well, chirping every inch of the way as if it were cheering me on. When we reached our destination, the world before me opened

up, revealing it all to be exactly as I had remembered it. On all sides were neighboring mountains that couldn't compare to our mountain, with most being barren aside from a few decaying trees at the end of their days. A single large oak tree stood at the center of the clearing, with surrounding flowers presenting various hues to create a kaleidoscope of color. Coming closer to the tree, a small patch of uninhabited grass sat in the shade. It was the spot where you and I spent many afternoons together, talking about our lives, sharing our dreams, finding comfort in being together. It was at this spot that I wanted to ask you the only question on my mind. With us finally reaching our destination together, I got down on my knees and started to speak.

"I never thought that I would be someone to deliver a speech like this one, but you changed my mind, changed me. The years I spent with you meant a lot to me, and those years are ones I will continue to look fondly upon going forward. You... you were the best thing to happen to me. Now that I've brought us here, there is a request of yours I must fulfill before I ask anything of you..." I stopped talking, pulling the box out of my jacket pocket and reciting the words you wrote for me.

"I leave the remainder of my soul to you and I trust you in whatever you decide to do with it. Just answer one question for me when you get a chance: What will you do now that I am gone?"

"Back when you first asked me this question, I could only speak in abstracts, partly due to me truly not knowing what I would do. As I stand here today, however, I realize it was a future I was unwilling to imagine back then. And despite how painful it is for me to experience that reality now, I have an answer," I explained through tearful eyes as I stared at the ground, unable to look at the world you and I once experienced together. I remained this way for a few minutes, swallowing tears and mustering up the strength to answer your final question. The cardinal soon entered my view, landing in a teary downpour I could no longer control. She looked up at me, producing sorrowful yet cheerful noises to cheer me on. Flashing a slight smile to her, I subdued the tears enough to provide my answer, "I would take a hike through the mountain we once called home and remember all the times we shared together. I would stop and admire your favorite constellation, remembering the night

you shared it with me. I would take you to our secret spot and answer your question and..." I got off my knees as I shakily finished my last sentence, walking closer to the mountain's edge. My hands trembled as I held the box, with one hand preparing to open the lid. It was time for me to move forward, for you to move forward. While hesitant, I opened the box and released your ashes into the mountain winds, and proclaimed, "I would return your soul back to the world you and I loved!"

As your ashes glided on the winds, the sun shined brilliantly on the first day of my new life. Closing the box, I returned it to my pocket and admired the view for a few moments. A few tears slipped through the cracks, but I knew you wouldn't want me to cry. I turned around and returned to the tree and got on my knees once again, pulling out a small bag of dirt and a bag containing a seed. Carefully molding the dirt, as if your hands were guiding me, I created a mound of dirt that would be home to your favorite flower. As I delivered the seed to its new home, I looked up to the clear blue sky, hoping you would hear my words, "And most importantly, I would plant a pink carnation in your memory, continuing to uphold the promise of carrying on the belief you and your grandmother held so dear. Now, with your final request fulfilled, I have a final request of my own... Don't forget about me, okay?" Finishing my statement with a smile, I started to head back down the trail. As I returned, my eyes were drawn to the sky, finding a single bright star shining in the sky, as if it were a tear that broke through your glassy sky blue eyes.

Evergreen

by Kristyn Hardy

You said all the right things
That all the wrong people
Have a habit of saying
At all the right times.

Your love for me was
Deeper than the sea.

It was brighter than
All the stars in the night sky.

It was more beautiful than
Spring's most perfect petal.

I memorized those words.
Etched them into my identity.

What was I without
Your ocean's weight of affection,
Your shooting stars of smiles,
Your rose bushes of kisses?

But nothing is perfect,
Is it?
Not even promises.
Not even yours.

Because the deepest ocean floor
Is a mere seven miles beneath
Our feet and at mile eight
You decided you needed air
And never came back down

And this is nothing new, is it?

Because every trench has a floor
And most of our stars have
Long since passed
And winter cares not of spring's beauty.
The cold will come regardless.

But me?

I loved you—
I love you—
As an evergreen loves
The seasons.
As a writer loves
A blank page.
As a bottle of whiskey loves
A poor spirit.

Enduring.
Hopeful.
Consuming.

What am I without
Your love for me?

I suppose that's not
The question anymore.
Instead, another.

What am I without
My love for you?

the desired forever:

by Alexis Bardwell

i yearn to grasp the desired forever;
in which my treasured flowers
one day rest on my grave.
to live with me in love;
to die with me in harmony.
oh the wonders of your perfection!
even the bees thrive from your essence;
the mice rest
in your gentle shade.
how could i not admire such grace?
your satin petals and delicate stem
may appear as a weakness,
but without their intricacy,
how would you share your pollen,
or offer your shade,
to all of those who need you?
why does the gardener need you?
to me,
treasured flowers,
you are not a burden to water and prune,
because to see you bloom
is for me to know true beauty.
so i yearn to grasp the desired forever,
when even in death,
i have you with me still.



Grace

by Cassidy Jones

Grace presses her hands against the mattress to push herself out of bed. The sun is barely peeking its gentle head through the lace curtains and the morning peepers are still whining outside her windows.

She shuffles in her slippers through the dimly lit bedroom towards the bathroom, pulling her thin robe tightly about her shoulders. October mornings in Wyoming are bitterly cold, and the chill bites at Grace's frail frame. Four years ago, she and her husband had made plans to escape the cold by moving down South. They talked about the porch swing they would buy, the lemon trees they would plant in their backyard, and the endless days they could waste in the sun.

A year later, their Southern home was devoured by a stack of medical bills.

Grace flicks on the bathroom light. A woman looks back at her through the dusty mirror. Her silver hair sits in tufts on her head. Her cheeks, once round and full, now sink into her face. The woman's eyes, rimmed in red, bore into Grace's own. Grace remembers how beautiful her husband thought this woman was, even during her sickest days.

Grace pulls a bottle from the medicine cabinet. Two pills for nausea. Another bottle from the cabinet. One pill for pain.

She blindly goes through her morning routine: brush teeth, wash face, change clothes. Say good morning to her husband in the gold washed locket she wears.

She continues her routine in the kitchen.

...

By the time Grace is popping raisin bread into the toaster, the sun is now full and wide outside her kitchen window. It spills over onto the countertops and into Grace's hands as she puts a kettle of water on to boil. The room is still, quiet. The peepers

have gone to bed and the birds are still stretching their feathers. This perfectly silent moment in dawn, once precious, now makes Grace's hands shake as she puts her plate on the breakfast table. She nibbles the crust of her toast, slowly. She chews and focuses on burnt raisins on her tongue, the ticking of the grandfather clock behind her head, waiting for the sound of birdsong to fill her mind.

Grace looks out the window and into her garden. She has a perfect view of the birdfeeder and her bed of blanket flowers, their auburn heads craning towards the sun. Suddenly, a yellow warbler comes into Grace's view.

She hears the voice of her husband now. He is sitting beside her at the breakfast table, with a plate of eggs and toast underneath him. They have the window open, it is July, warm air and sunshine fill the room.

Look, Grace! A yellow warbler. Special day, huh?

It did turn out to be a special day. The doctor told Grace she was back in partial remission. She was sure to beat cancer this time. Her husband always said this to her, even when her head hung over the toilet or the tests came back positive. She never believed him. She always thought she was going to be the first to pass. This, she was okay with. She would go gently with her husband holding her hand, still as loving as he had been when they met as teenagers.

The memory is interrupted by eight chimes of the grandfather clock. Grace brings her dishes to the kitchen and by the time she looks back out the window, the warbler is gone.

...

Grace takes her morning walk slowly around the block. Her doctor told her that light exercise will improve her mood. She doesn't mind the walk. She likes to see the pretty flower beds of her neighbors, the fat cats that peer out their windows. Sometimes, she will stop by a woman that lives a couple houses down from hers, Susan. Grace likes Susan because she speaks softly and listens intently. Susan is also widowed, not so recently as Grace. They like to sit together over tea on Susan's patio, talking

quietly about the flowers they intend to plant or the escapades of Susan's grandchildren.

Grace rounds the corner back onto her street. She thinks about the weeds she must pull up today. She looks at the clouds that hang low and gray over her head, laden with rain. Maybe, if she does it quickly, she will be able to pull the weeds before the rain comes.

A distant, broken yowl emerges from behind Grace's head. It is so soft, so weak, Grace almost misses it. She stops, turns around and listens. The sound appears again, and this time Grace locates it.

Grace crosses Susan's lawn and looks down into the shallow drainage ditch. There, tiny and curled, lays a gray kitten. Grace catches her breath as she bends down to the frail, drooping kitten. Its gray fur is missing in patches and matted with dry blood. Grace cradles the wounded creature gently in her arms as it shivers from the wet and cold. She kneels there for a moment, the kitten clutched to her chest.

She thinks it might be Susan's, although Susan never mentioned owning a cat. She looks up to Susan's door, thinking it would be best to give the kitten to her.

Grace then looks to her own home, two houses down.

...

Grace steps into her living room with the kitten cradled in her arms. Laying the kitten gently on her armchair, she then drapes her fleece over its body. It lays there, quiet now, the only sign of life being the soft heaving of its chest.

Grace runs into the kitchen and grabs a cardboard box that holds a handful of lumpy oranges. She grabs a kitchen towel, a hot rag and almost grabs the milk but quickly decides against it.

Half expecting the kitten to be dead, Grace returns to the living room with a makeshift bed in hand. Grace scoops up the kitten and feels the soft thumping of its heart under her fingertips. With a shaky sigh, she places the kitten into the orange box on the floor. The only animal Grace ever owned was a dog named Bandit when she was a child. Even then, the dog wasn't hers. Grace knew the

dog never belonged to her when her father took Bandit and a shotgun to the back of the house. Bandit had bitten the neighbor's son and her father refused to tolerate that behavior. When she told her father that Bandit only bit the boy because the boy threw stones at her, he didn't listen.

Grace tries to remember the techniques she saw on Animal Planet once when a zoologist tended to the wounds of a baby cub. She presses the wet rag to the kitten's matted fur, gently rubbing the clotted blood spots. Grace notices the wound on the kitten's belly, a deep, purpling gash that is knotted with blood and dirt. Grace winces for the kitten as she presses the rag to clean out the gash, cooing at the kitten in a soft voice, *Shhh...Shhh...*

The kitten only stirs lightly, making the occasional broken cry of an animal sorely hurt. Grace notices the kitten's feverish shaking and decides to pick up the creature, cradling it in her arms, pressing it close to her chest. She can feel the kitten's chest rise and fall to her own. Grace never had any children, but she imagines pressing the kitten close to her body as if embracing a newborn child.

As Grace pulls the kitten back to look at it, she sees its mouth open and close to form tiny gasps. Now, the kitten's chest begins to rise and fall frantically. It seems to be struggling for breath, but Grace can only sit and watch. She is frozen with helplessness, with remorse for ever thinking she could save any poor creature. Grace cups the tiny kitten in her palms and watches as it fights, in vain, to live. Then, it is still.

As Grace holds the kitten's body in her arms, she hears another cry. This one, though, is close. It is loud and it is guttural and fills the room with its intensity. Grace is frightened, until she understands that the sound is coming from her.

Grace is weeping. She weeps on the floor of the living room until the death of the kitten no longer hurts her. Then, she weeps harder. She weeps until all she feels is the heaving of her chest, the hot, heavy tears on her cheeks and the snot that drips onto her lips. She weeps until there is no sound left to crawl out of her throat. Then, she stops.

She stops with the kitten limp in her lap and the room is quiet and

it is spinning and she does not know where she is.

...

Garden shovel in hand, Grace carries the kitten, held tightly to her chest, to the garden. It is raining, and the rain beats down like stones from the sky onto Grace's body. Grace's clothes are wet and clinging to her skin and she shakes from cold but still, she does not go back inside.

She does not go back inside until she has dug a shallow hole beside her blanket flowers. She bends over the hole to shield the kitten's body from rain as she places it in its grave.

Before she covers it with dirt, Grace looks at the kitten. It no longer shakes violently with cold, but lays in its bed, still and silent. Grace thinks that the kitten looks like it is napping. The rain has washed away some of the blood that clung to its fur, its eyes are closed gently shut and it rests- whole.

Grace walks back into the house dripping wet, leaving the shovel and something else behind...

...

Grace presses her hands on the mattress to push herself out of bed. She takes three pills, brushes her teeth, washes her face, and says good morning to her husband. She puts two pieces of raisin bread in the toaster, with a kettle of water on to boil.

She sits at the breakfast table, letting the silence before the birds wake up fill her completely. She feels the hot ceramic cup of tea in her palms, she savors the taste of butter and sweetness on her tongue and she sits.

She sits and looks out the window and sees the sun pouring out its warmth on the swelling of dirt by her flowers.

Grace feels light as she sits, light like she is made of paper and she is rising through the clouds.

Alcohol and Mouthwash-

by Savannah Barker

Words swish back and forth
In my mouth like mouthwash,
Words I've said to you before.
We were supposed to be over.
Now I'm looking at you
In my passenger seat,
Eyes of blueish-green,
Freckles sprinkled like rose petals,
You're beautiful.

You left me five months ago
And we agreed an end was for the best,
But I couldn't suspend my feelings,
And I could be confused,
But maybe you couldn't either?
When you came back after months,
You came back to me.
What do I do with that?

You sit next to me,
All giggles and poke-fun,
And you have a glint behind your smile
That I dreamt of falling in love with
When I was little.
Why, then, is it never enough for me?
Do I even believe what I have to tell you?
Doubt permeates without reason,
And I hold my breath.

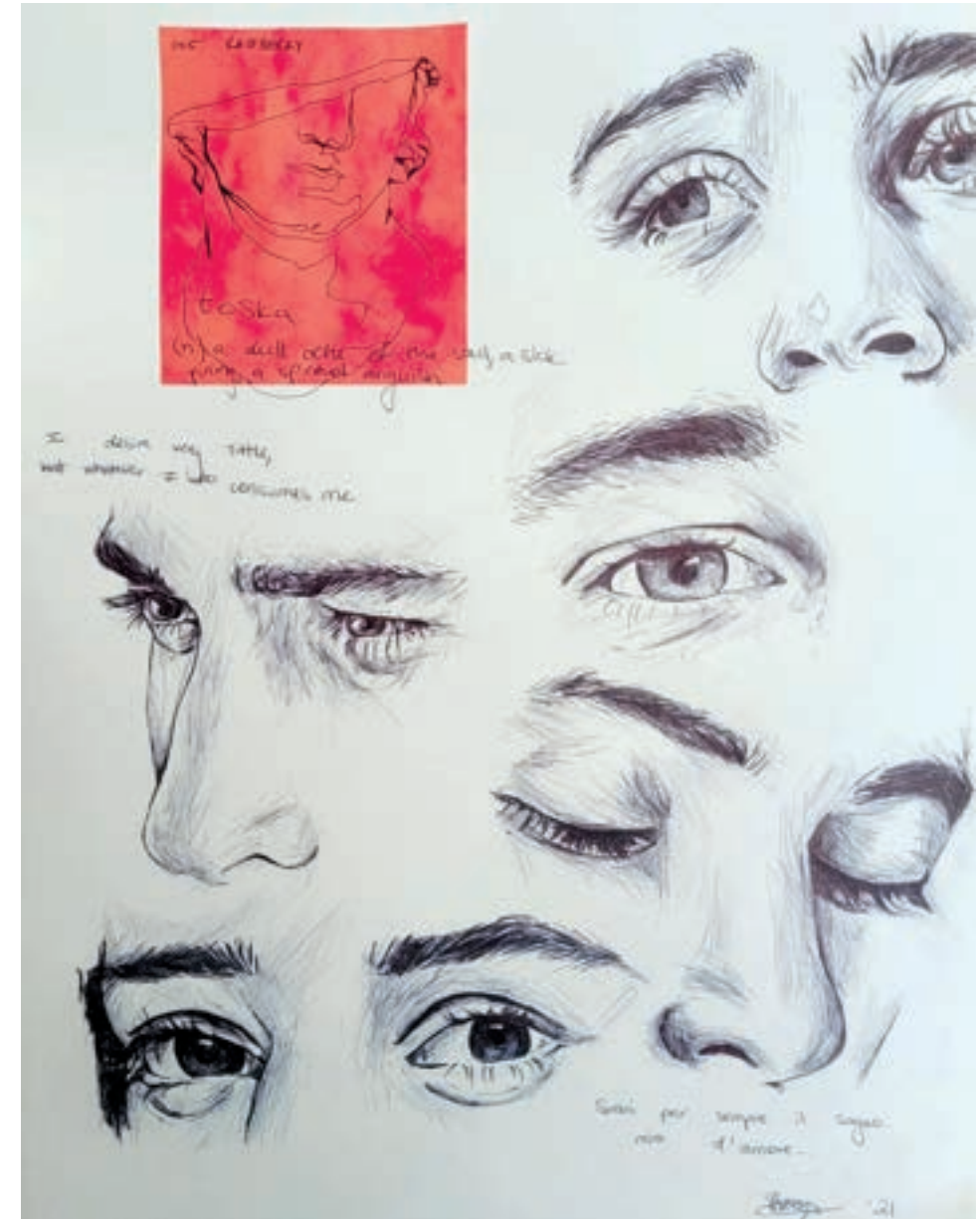
You are back, but are you?
You drank when they pulled the block
That said "single"
In pink marked letters.
I didn't.
You had pulled me close

Just a few hours before,
 When the doors were locked
 And we were the only ones on the floor.
 Still, when the ball dropped,
 You didn't even turn to kiss me.

You cried that night,
 Sick and sloppy.

You asked me if I would marry you one day.
 How do I answer that?
 You left me, and you would again in a week.
 We aren't together anymore.
 You were too messy to see me cry.
 How do I answer what
 I am not sure is meant for me?

You look out the car window,
 And I'm not sure
 You remember your questions from the night before.
 The stinging sensation fills my mouth and
 I spit it out,
 "I love you."
 It pours from my lips,
 And in my mind
 I watch my words trickle,
 separating by letter,
 Swirling and funneling down a drain.
 You turn
 And, now, all I see is
 Your sober smile;
 "I never stopped."



Tosca
 Christi Kruger

Ode to Rose-breasted Grosbeak

by Luke Jobe

The satin darkness like a flourishing crown

The soft white held fast like a beautiful gown

"His songs so sweet" the air did claim

A robin song but not the same

His breast a bleeding monument
His scarlet stains so evident

Lilting tilting standing there.
Rosen-chested without care

May My Mind Dwell in Great Light

by Lael Hamilton

May my mind dwell in great light. For poison

thoughts eat away the core. To compare

oneself to another is a slow and painful sore.

Oh how I fray! May my mind always dwell

in great light.



River Crossing

Trevor Blackstock

Superman

by DeRel Smith

I used to think my dad was the most perfect human being to ever grace this earth. Whenever I was around him, he was the epitome of Superman. I'm not talking Injustice, Bizarro, Lord Superman, or any other evil incantation that DC is obsessed with making nowadays. I'm talking about Clark Kent by day and Superman by night. One that has morals and would sometimes struggle with where the line of being a good person was. I swear if he wanted to back then, he could have flipped this world upside down and all around in minutes! As a child, I remember him traveling at light speeds to disappear whenever we played hide-and-seek. Then, he would reappear in an instant when I started to cry because I was afraid of the dark. On other days, he'd jump all the way to the top of the fridge to grab a couple packets of Pop-tarts. Then, we'd race over to the couch for Saturday morning cartoons. It always felt like I was the one flying whenever I was on his shoulders. He could talk up a storm and within fifteen minutes, the person he was talking to would invite us to their next five family barbecues. All the while, I'd stand there idly annoyed because we would be late for the showing of Man of Steel. I had nothing to worry about though because we'd get there in record speed and he'd charm the ticket lady to let us in somehow. As time went on, the magic would go away. I'd be a teenager looking up to someone who could fly. While I had to walk the earth like everyone else.

II
The asteroid sliced through the air as it moved at Mach speed overhead. That was the seventh one that day I didn't catch. They caused collateral damage to the abandoned buildings all around us. This time though, another asteroid crashed behind me. Dad looked over disappointed and yelled out, "You were supposed to catch that, now another window is broken." "How am I supposed to catch an asteroid again?" "Aster-huh? Never mind that, just make sure that you're paying attention DeRel." "I've been paying attention to the space rocks flying clean over my head, Dad," I remarked sarcastically. "I don't remember baseballs looking like meteors but if you catch it, it can be whatever you want. Try again."

He started to pick up some wind with the next throw. His face was stone cold telling me that I had to catch this one. No excuses, just me and my hurdle. Soon, it was flying towards me, suddenly it went gliding through my fingers. Close enough to feel the skin on my fingertips shiver in triumph.

"How was I supposed to even catch that, you weren't even throwing it to me!"

"And the answer to that is, your two hands!" He chuckled.

"This isn't a time for jokes ,Dad, we're supposed to practice for tryouts."

"Well, if you can talk about all that sci-fi mumbo jumbo then, I can crack a few jokes."

"It's not Science fiction if it's a scientific fact that you are Superman," I replied exasperated at this deflection.

"What?"

"Those glasses can't fool me; I can't reach the heights that you do. I can't even grab the Pop-Tarts on top of the fridge, so what makes you think I'll be able to do what you do!" I raised my voice. After a few deep breaths, my face was flushed, and I looked up at him. I messed up. But I didn't get the look I was expecting. His face was calm, worried even. Just like him to be the perfect parent.

"I wasn't always 'Superman'," he sighed with wandering eyes, then finally focused on me. "I used to think my dad was larger than life too, I used to think he was Snake Eyes. You don't know nothing about that, G.I. Joe is way before your time. I found out, eventually, that he was an average joe, and he was just like me. Like you. He wanted me to be better than him and I want the same for you."

"What do you want from me? I understand I'm not like you so why can't you understand that? But it's okay I have nothing to fear because you're here."

"I won't always be here. You'll have to rise to the occasion, I'm not always gonna be 'Superman'. There's going to be a point where you'll have to be your own hero. Wait too long and that day might smack you right in the face."

III

The blades of grass were drenched in sorrow from the previous day's shower. The dark clouds hungover in a scattered formation as if they were mocking me. They knew that I didn't have it together. A wet baseball rolled over towards my feet as I stared at the tombstone. I picked it up and chucked it at this hollow monument

to my forgotten figure. The etching of: "Here Lies a Mighty Good Man" covered the base of the front. It was sickening to look at it for that long. Out of pure frustration, words began to seep out of my mouth in droves.

"A mighty good man huh?"

"Would a mighty good man put this unbearable weight on a 10-year-old?"

"Would such a glorious bastard leave without saying anything?"

"You've fought countless wars against those villains like cigarettes, bankruptcy, and serious bouts of depression.

"Yet, you want me to believe that heart failure fucking took you out?"

"Say something!"

I waited a couple of minutes longer for a response to happen. This would be just like the end of the Rise of Superman and he'd fly right out of that casket. I waited until I could taste the saltiness of my tears starting to stream into my mouth. The weakness rising from my body wanted to be expelled. I looked over to where the baseball had landed muttering, "Wanna play catch one last time?" At that moment, the ball was hurled towards that tombstone until I lost track of time. It became this never-ending struggle of me convincing myself that one hand would reach out of the dirt to play catch. You know like in those zombie comics where literally everyone comes back. I'd be just like old times but, this time the weight wouldn't be that heavy. I started ushering.

"Again"

"Again"

"Again"

"Again"

In between throws. Until finally I missed the grave throwing the ball completely over it. At this point, the only word that could be made out on the stone was: "Here lies a Man." My teeth started to chatter incessantly from the anxiety. All the anger had begun to seep from my body, and all that was left was this undeniable hole where stoicism should be. The only thing left was a desecrated tombstone and probably a hefty fine. At this point, I wanted to hear someone say, "You're doing okay, just keep moving forward." I finally collapsed down on my knees looking past the graver marker.

"I'm sorry, I just never thought that I'd be the one looking down at you while you stared up at me."

Mania

by Kennis Jobe

I am sixteen. My feet are burning. I don't care.
 The board is heavy, and my arms ache
 Holding it up above my head.
 I can't stop laughing.
 The water is just cool enough
 I've always laughed when I step into the ocean
 It's involuntary
 Something in the water, something in the air, just Draws it forth
 from me Like the compulsion to sing or dance
 As natural as breath
 I'm standing now, I'm doing it. Are you watching me?
 I'm going to make it to the shore.
 I don't fall. My brain is empty in the best way
 I trip on endorphins
 Flowers shoot through the earth in my chest
 Bursting forth into full bloom
 I breathe in sunshine.
 I stand in the Elysian fields.
 And whenever the sky turns that stony gray
 And winter's tyranny reigns for half the year,
 Teasing at letting up before coming back
 More forcefully than ever
 When the flowers in my chest
 Are replaced with Despair and I am too heavy to move, I wait for
 sixteen. I wait for Elysium.
 At that time, I wonder
 If on the other side of the world
 While I embrace the return of springtime
 Hades mourns for Persephone.
 But he isn't my problem



From the Trunk

by Thomas Schwartzberg

"That'll be three dollars."

The traveler dug into his pocket and after a little game of hide-and-seek, he pulled out a crumpled five-dollar bill. Tossing it on the counter, it gave a little roll and fell off the other side, missing the clerk's ashtray by maybe an inch. He grabbed the magazine and glanced at the cover. There was a woman on it, contorting her back to show off every piece of her gray lingerie. Under the '**OY**' in **PLAYBOY**, there was a small print that read "September 1984 • \$3.00".

"Don't worry about the change," he said as he turned towards the exit, folding the magazine longways and putting it in his back pocket.

As he was about to walk through the doors that led to the outside world, a man entered through them. They gave each other the typical "excuse me" as the bell above them rang and then passed by one another.

The traveler never got to return the bathroom key.

###

The path to the bathroom was simple to follow: exit the front doors, turn left, walk to the edge of the building, hook another left, and there was the door, faded blue and encompassed with worn, rusted edges. Across from the bathroom door, there were a few parking spots that come up to the sidewalk, all of them empty save for one, that was backed in. The car which belonged to the man, the traveler he passed as he exited the gas station, he presumed.

It was a car that belonged in the lot, a beat-up '72 or '73 Ford Cortina. The vehicle rode low to the ground and had already begun to have its blue-green paint chip and give way to a thin film of rust. The square rear of the car was accompanied by a broken left tail and brake light. There was a bold yellow plate attached to the fender, no doubt the newest thing on the car. "**PENNSYLVANIA**" was imprinted on the top of the license plate in blue letters that shined like pearls and at the bottom, it read "**KEYSTONE STATE**" in the same color and font. Although unimpressed with the state of Pennsylvania, the man was impressed with their license plates.

The traveler turned towards the door and slid the key into the lock. The keyhole was loose, far looser than it should have been. If one peered inside it, barely straining their eyes, they would see the pins that constructed the contraption. No doubt a great starter-lock for an aspiring thief. The lock jiggled a little as the man began to rotate the key before the noise stopped him mid-turn.

Thud.

The man turned from the door. He craned his neck left and right, looking for what had fallen. There was nothing. Just the bathroom door and an empty parking lot, save for the one vehicle. That was all.

What in th-

Thud-thud.

It was metallic. It was close.

Thud-thud-thud. Thud.

Is that a dog? What in the..., he thought to himself as he approached the vehicle.

Thud-thud-thud-thud-thud.

That's no animal.

He was unsure of whether the thuds were coming from the car or his heartbeat. His stomach was in his chest, his testicles in his gut, and his body covered in goosebumps. The feeling reminded him of his days as a Boy Scout. They would sit around a fire reduced to coals that emitted a dim, swirling light. The shadows cast by the fire would get under their skin just as much as the ghost stories each boy would tell. The young Scouts sat with their tan uniforms unbuttoned and their neckerchiefs untied and would stare at the narrator, their eyes filled with a mix of fearful and wonderful awe. They would start small, with tales of siblings going to Grandma's haunted house for summer, but each subsequent story would grow more and more brutal. Eventually, their night would end in horrific narratives of ax murders in the woods, or men who hung themselves on the run from the police... whose very spirit would haunt little boys on camping trips. The bad stories made them laugh, but the good stories struck fear into the heart of every boy whose ears they were graced with. Even the storytellers would often get a little frightened by the stories that

spewed out from their twisted nightmares tucked away in the deepest crook of their conscience. The boys would be terrified and thrilled at the same time.

The traveler, now standing in front of the trunk, was not thrilled, only terrified. He stood for a few moments. There were no thuds, no sounds, just an eerie peace lingering in the air.

Must've been in my head.

He stared down at the trunk. It was even more faded and chipped than it appeared when he was in front of the bathroom. A true Pennsylvania man's car.

It seemed so real.

He turned back to the bathroom door, ready to return the key to the slob and get as far away from the dump of a gas station as possible. Any urge to use the urinal was gone. Chills of relief erupted over his body, his heartbeat slowed some as it began its slow descent back into his ribcage.

Thud-thud-thud-thud-thud-thud-thud.
Oh Mary mother of—

He whirled around without even completing his thought and raced back to the vehicle. He hit the top of the trunk with his balled fists, each hit radiating tiny sounds out into the still country air. He tried the latch, his hands fumbling around with the lever in a sweaty stupor. He was keeping a frantic attack from within his psyche at bay, but he was unsure of how long he could delay the inevitable.

The trunk was jammed. Locked. Something. He took a half step back and raised his foot. With all his force he pummeled his work boot into the locks. He tried a few more times, each hit giving a loud, hollow *clank*. But that was all.

The traveler put his ear to the top of the blue-green trunk. He felt the pulse in his ear. Each beat gave him a hot, grave feeling.

"Mnnett oft," pleaded a muffled voice from the trunk.
There's a girl in there, she's gagged, tied up, hurt, oh God, please help this girl.

*I know I don't pray much, God, Lord, Whoever, but pleaseohpleaseohplease.
I'll go to church, I'll give my money hell, I'll adopt seven orphans, but God
ohpleaseohplease.*

Amid his attempted prayer, images of the operator floated in front of his mind. Or the woman on the magazine cover. Or the multiple flames he had in the past. All of them merged into one woman. All tied up. Gagged. Scared. Alone. In the trunk.

He pressed his mouth against the cool, grimy metal. And whisper-shouted into the trunk, hoping that she heard, and heard clearly.

"I am going to save you," he was careful to say each word slowly and understandably, going to great lengths to enunciate each word.

"Hmpt hhf mmmwt."
"Just hold—"
The bell rang.

His heart dropped into a warm and cozy place in his intestines. He pushed off the trunk with both hands and ran behind the gas station. The distance from the trunk to the corner was five or seven yards, yet seemed like five or seven miles. He felt as though he had a ball and chain attached to each ankle as he waded through a vat of honey. His brain said to run, to go, and to do it fast, but every step he took felt like it was blatantly violating his mind's decree. But the traveler made it. Somehow.

Crouching, he peered around the corner. His forehead was covered in beads of sweat and his shirt was drenched. His chest was heaving like a heavy smoker who just walked up a long flight of stairs. He tried to quiet his breath and push everything else that was cluttering his mind aside. His sole attention was on that man, that car, and that trunk.

###

The Playboy. Oh god oh god.

There it was, lying halfway between him and the car. Between the man and him.

*Why'd I even get that damned thing? Oh god. I was gonna be driving
oh god oh god, I wouldn't have even hadda chance to look at it. Oh god oh I'm*

so oh god oh— That was when the stranger saw the magazine.

Not the kind of man one would ding as a kidnapper. He sported a worn flannel tucked into blue jeans that were just as worn as the flannel and was built like someone who used to play linebacker. His belt was leather, as were his boots. A hick if the traveler ever did see one. *Why would he drive a Cortina?*

The man shook his head, puzzled as to why he would be thinking about a man's choice of car or fashion while an innocent woman was trapped, no doubt fighting for her life. The stranger walked toward the magazine in a slow, relaxed stroll. He bent over at the hips to pick it up. Magazine now in hand, he thumbed through it, the pages fluttering before his eyes in a blur. Pausing, he looked around the lot. The traveler slammed himself against the side of the brick, trying to balance speed and stealthiness as he did so. He said a quick prayer and hoped that the man had not seen him watching. His breath stayed in his chest, afraid to make a single noise. Veins bulging from his forehead and temple, as thick blood was being forced through them, like mayonnaise being sucked through a coffee straw.

He dared to take another look around the corner. The magazine was on the ground again, and the stranger was heading back to the woman's trap. His back was turned to him. *This has gotta be it. I gotta do sumthin'.*

Just thinking that caused his beats per minute to jump and his head to grow light. But these feelings did not detract from the truth— he knew it was now or never. The stranger was still three or so feet away from him but was putting distance between them with every second that passed. Still crouched, the man looked around for some kind of weapon, anything that could deal more damage than his fists. He searched around the gravel: wrappers, soda cans, cigarette butts. And a beer bottle.

Lord thank You for beer. Really.

He grabbed the empty bottle, his fingers plagued with sweat, and was still able to hold the glass neck with a firm grip. The stranger was now closer to four-and-a-half or five feet away. There was still hope, but he had to act fast.

He rose to his knees in one swift motion. His head became light, his stomach grew tight, and his legs turned into jelly, but he took a step. One step turned to two, and two turned to three. He was closing in on the stranger, the dirty Pennsylvania rapist-

murderer scum. He raised the glass above his head.

The next few seconds felt like they lasted for an eternity.

His arm was poised above his head, the glass bottle shimmering in the September sunlight. The man in front of the traveler must have heard the rush of footsteps, for he turned around. But it was too late for the stranger. He turned around just in time to see the bottle come down.

The traveler brought the glass down with such ferocity as if every ounce of anger that he had ever experienced had come to a fierce boil at that moment and could not help but flow out. It came down on the center of the man's forehead. The bottle did not shatter but instead made an eerie hollow sound as it came into contact with the unsuspecting skull of the stranger.

And then it was over. The kidnapper was on the ground. Out cold. A small stream of blood trickled from where the traveler's scavenged weapon had met the man's forehead. He patted down the man's pants, where he found a small keyring in the left pocket. From there the traveler went to the trunk, no thumps to be heard, and began to try the keys on the lock. After two attempts, the third key slid in with no complaints and turned with ease. There was a soft click and the trunk popped open.

###

A woman was in there, her face covered in dirt and grime except for the streaks where tears had rolled down. Her hair was rustled and her eyes were unruly. But she looked like she was unharmed, at least physically.

"Hey, it's alright 'hon," he said as he reached an arm out to her.

She reached her hand out and grabbed onto his. Her hand felt soft in his, not battered or bruised as he would expect of someone who was locked up in the trunk of a vehicle. He helped her out of the trunk.

She wasn't bound.

Her eyes met with his. Though unruly they still had a dim, beautiful sparkle to them. "Tha-thank you so—" Words proved too much for her, and instead threw herself into him for an embrace. He caught her and they hugged for a moment.

Wait.

Her body felt right pressed against his own, vanquishing any previous thoughts. He could not help but think of how nice it was. He took a deep breath. She smelt like roses. "Really, just t-thank you," she began to choke on her words once more.

Wasn't she gagged?

That was when he felt the puncture in his neck. Things began to fade, stuck in the limbo between consciousness and unconsciousness, reality and dreaming. He looked at her, her eyes still twinkling that small twinkle, holding onto one of his arms. In her other hand was a syringe. The images before him swirled together and danced with each other as a dark film eclipsed the world around him.

His legs became weak once more, but this time his body proved to be too much for them as he crumpled into a pile on the ground. Life around him was growing darker and darker, but he was still able to discern some things.

Two figures. Two columns. They towered over him, strong and menacing. Two voices, miles away. Their words aimlessly bouncing around inside of his ears.

"That citay slicker shur cayn hit hard."

"Oh quit your complainin' and get 'im in the trunk."

To Bear Fruit

by Katelyn Swanson

I was drowning in ripened fields
Of plump pumpkins and swollen squash.

I envied the plentiful harvest of my neighbors,
For my own field lay barren, sunbaked, and dry.
No seed I planted ever broke the surface
Of the gray earth.
I tended to hard soil with cracked hands and sore hips.

My fields smelled of sweat and rotten blueberries.
My neighbors boasted of their yields
With gifts of perfect pears and oversized onions.
They smelled of cinnamon and apples
And newborn uncertainty.
I watched them as they sauntered from my home,
Cradling their tender fruit to their breasts.

My basket remained empty.
I pray that my next harvest be bountiful.
I swallowed snap peas,
And crammed cranberries into my mouth
To muffle the cravings of my heart.

There would be no eggplant, no pomegranates,
No turnips for me.

Great Dark

by Luke Jobe

Fluorescent shimmering space dust lazily floats through the cosmonautical fields of starscape. A three-dimensional ocean of void infinitely grasping at the edge of mindfulness. Liquid death, cold as night, at the shore of a pale blue dot. Spinning infinitely in a pseudo-elliptical seafaring path. With its satellite island impossibly far away, floating in the untamable dark. Sailors brave the nothingness just for the possibility of sharing knowledge with those they leave. Ones who know the risk, challenging their smallness nonetheless. They float innocently with the weight of a world on their shoulders. Primed as an arrow nocked to a bow. In preparation for a camisade. Dancing across the sky, solar flares and ribbons of warped light reflect blue from the small haven. A blue that shines forever as a message to the universe proclaiming its presence. Briefly, light pours onto the magnetic sphere. Enough for life to spring from the depths. The firmament lights up as radiant colors to the inhabitants as if brought by a deity. The farers drown, leaving not but ripples in shimmering darkness.



The Offering

Callie Katherine



Legacy

Grace Hall

Sea Foam and Shattered Dreams

by Alaya Juneau

She was born from the sea
washed ashore, bubbles in her hair and eyes the color of turtle shells.

They say she sang so beautifully
the rocks came to life
to dance like birds
who traded their feathers for scales.

Some believe the waves
are made in her bed
flowing with passion
stealing her curves for their own.

I imagine she made the sand from her bones and poured
the water from her veins, gave her breath to the wind,
and her tears to the rain.

We watch as she gives herself,
slowly disappearing,
as she tries to put back together,
the woman she once was,
or tried to be.

We can see the pieces of herself
left behind in the shells on the shore traveled for thousands of miles
to rest against the slimy underside of a discarded cigarette butt.

When there isn't anything left,
but the discarded dreams
of seven billion star-gazers
and a sea that longs for her gifts,
blame will fall on her memory
while the scraps she left behind
crumble into dust.

Hollow

by Dawson Mulkey

In being human,
We are incomplete;
Unfinished and empty.

A piece, a part, a fragment;
Components of a greater being.
One half of something amazing.

Born as a half,
Searching for the other scrap,
Wanting to be complete.

Why is this our reality?
What is the reason for this imperfection;
The cause of such a difficult proposition?

Since the very creation of man,
He was made incomplete.
A part was removed.

A bit of his body,
Close to his heart;
His rib was taken.

And thus the vacancy was formed:
A room looking for guest,
puzzle without every piece.

Half a machine,
An appliance that only works
When every part is there.

So again I ask:
What is the purpose?

What does the device do?
Once all parts are there,
And it fires up,
The apparatus makes something.

An odd reaction,
Weird chemistry,
The only way to make it.

Only existing when the machine is running,
Going against the universe,
Infinite and boundless.

It fuels the very machine that makes it;
Glues it together,
And completes both parts.

But still what is the purpose?
A very old question;
The reason for love.



Follow the leader

Carley Ardoin

Fishing Stories

by Kennis Jobe

"And then what happened to her??"

"Rather than kill the prince to save herself, she took the dagger her sister gave her, and tossed it into the sea. Then, with one last look back at her prince, she slipped into the ocean and turned into seafoam, just like the witch said she would. She sacrificed herself for him and became a spirit of the air."

Michael Flaherty finished the story with a bow. He stood on the wooden railing and threatened, for just a moment, to fall back, rocking on his feet. Bridget shrieked, but Michael laughed and jumped back onto the deck, landing on his feet.

"What," he teased, ruffling her hair, "did you think I would turn into seafoam like the little mermaid?"

"If you do that to my hair one more time, Michael, I'll tell mammy and she'll smite you," Bridget cried.

"I can't believe she dies!" Johnny, the middle, complained.

"Sometimes the hero dies," Michael insisted.

"You've got to tell us another story, then," Bridget pressed.

But before Michael could launch into a second tale, Arthur sauntered over, clapping his oldest son on the shoulder. Arthur had strong, calloused hands, and always underestimated their impact. Michael winced.

"Enough stories for today, Mike," Arthur drawled, pulling him up to his feet. "It's time ta fish. Johnny, you take yer sister on home."

"Yes, dad." Johnny grumbled under his breath, but he grabbed Bridget by the hand and began walking her in the direction of the Flaherty house. Michael, meanwhile, followed his father to the boat, helping him raise the sail.

Michael hated fishing. It was a long, hard task and could be terribly boring if nothing was caught. Besides, as shamefully soft of him as it was, he hated seeing all those creatures flopping around, desperate for water, until they died. It wasn't that he was morally opposed to fishing—after all, it predated civilization and Arthur needed to feed his family. It was simply that Michael didn't enjoy it at all and dreaded the fact that it would be his task every day until he died like the fish, desperate for relief. How monotonous, how depressing. Each day he spent would be

trudging through the steps of a dance he knew well but whose beat did nothing to inspire him.

The only good thing about fishing to Michael was that he could stare out into the ocean, the breeze against his face, and feel the mild, sweet sadness that came with dreading his future. What was the word he'd read recently, the one that sounded so wistful and grand? Melancholy. He didn't think there was a more beautiful word than melancholy, nor, he guessed, was there a more beautiful feeling.

"Michael, stop dreamin'." Arthur was beginning to throw over the nets and beckoned for his son to come help. "You've got too many stories in yer head boy, I've told ya before. I know you'll wait a long time fishin' most days, but you've got to keep yer head in it."

"Yes, dad, sorry," Michael mumbled, joining Arthur in casting the nets out. The water was deep where they fished, and dark. The wind was cold, and Michael's coat wasn't enough to ward off the chill of the air. At least hauling the nets provided exercise that kept him warm. But his hands hadn't developed the callouses that his father's had, and the thick rope of the fishing nets cut at them frequently, leaving his palms and fingers scratched. When they weren't scratched, of course, they were covered in ink from writing, but Michael found that a far preferable stain to blood.

"Y'know, I've been thinkin' of takin' you to the tavern, son," Arthur mused as the last of his nets were lowered into the water. He motioned with one finger and Michael joined him at the sails, carefully observing his work. "Come drinkin' with me and the other fishermen, wouldn't that be fun? Once you've pulled in a good haul by yerself, I'll buy ya yer first ale."

Clearly, in Arthur's mind, this was the pinnacle of manhood, the last rite of passage of which a man should be the proudest simply because it lacked the refined, symbolic ritualism of other rites like confirmations and weddings. Arthur would be prouder of Michael when he showed him off at the tavern for the first time than he was at his first communion. That was the way of things with Arthur Flaherty. He took pride in simplicity—sure, he was quite intelligent, and as practiced as any good Catholic, but he believed in simple, "honest" work as he called it, as if work with a certain amount of complexity, such as writing, was inherently dishonest. Politicians and lawyers were his favorite examples of

why simple work was to be favored. And he lived simply, too. He prided himself on being a man of few words, seeming to take from this that if a man seldom spoke, his words had more value when he did speak. But Michael was a complex young man, and one of many words, and he liked thinking of complex things. He had a lot to say on the matter, sure, but he didn't think it was unimportant, simply that perhaps there were many important things to discuss. But Arthur was not fond of philosophizing and storytelling. "Weak men learn to lie," he often said, Michael was fairly certain that Arthur felt writers were simply paid liars, no better than politicians and lawyers.

Arthur wasn't completely wrong, Michael thought, as he gazed down at the scar resting above his left ankle. It was from a wound years ago that had slowly faded into a white ghost of itself, but that had been very painful and severe in its time. He told his schoolmates that he'd fought a shark once to save Johnny and Bridget, and that it had grasped him in the leg with its powerful teeth before he did it in with a club. In reality, he'd snagged himself deep with a barbed fishing line in a poor cast and was too afraid to let anyone pull it out, so he'd tried to get it out by himself, only to faint from the pain. His mother had to send for laudanum to keep him asleep until it was extracted. It was a humiliating experience, especially when the look he'd received from Arthur told him he ought to have been braver than that. Oh, but the story he had made of that scar! His friends were entranced, and he had been a hero to all the schoolboys of Spanish Point.

But Michael hadn't really been a hero, and perhaps his weakness had taught him to lie. And Arthur knew the less impressive truth. If Michael could haul in all those fish, though, Arthur would be truly proud. Michael would be a man in his eyes at last, and if he were a man, then surely, he could be trusted to choose his own path in life. "That sounds great, dad," he said, staring out at the Red Whale standing on the distant rocks.

.....

Michael went alone in the middle of the night. He grabbed his coat from the hanger in his room, careful not to wake Johnny as he slipped out of bed and onto the floor. He'd memorized every creak in the house and moved carefully over the worst spots when he couldn't avoid them altogether. He was thankful to live near

enough to the coast that the sound of the waves striking the rocky shore could cover the sound of his feet hitting the floorboards. He waited to put on his shoes until he was at the front door. If his mother caught him sneaking away at this hour, he'd never be allowed to forget it. But if he caught all those fish and Arthur was proud enough to take him to the tavern, surely Siobhan's anger would be placated. After all, Michael would be doing exactly what he was brought up to do, for once in his life.

Michael slipped out into the darkened streets, where no one was about at this time except prostitutes and late-night drinkers. A young, gaunt woman in a low-cut dress and heavy makeup tried to coax him into an alley, and though Michael refused, he felt sorry for her. A middle-aged man, perhaps a little older than Arthur, stumbled out of a bar and vomited onto his own feet. A stray cat yowled in the distance. It was absolutely frigid, and Michael could only imagine that he would feel even colder on the water.

Michael made it to the harbor at last. The lighthouse cast a white glow against the waters and illuminated the area just enough for Michael to walk the marina until he found his father's boat. Other men were bustling about, but they were all fishermen too, and wouldn't be suspicious because one often went out for certain kinds of fish at night. Michael knew how to steer the boat well enough now and got it out on the water with relative ease. The hardest part had been pulling in the anchor, but now that this was accomplished, he could let it down within sight of the city and begin fishing.

The cold was almost unbearable, stinging Michael's face and hands. The ropes burned and scratched terribly, but he sailed out to a familiar spot and began dragging the nets, throwing all his strength into the work. He waited and watched as the sky lightened, then turned purple and pink and orange in turn, and it grew just a little warmer. When he tried to pull in the nets after several hours, he could barely get them out of the water, and with a giddy, half-awake rush of excitement, he knew that he had done it.

Arthur had arrived at the harbor to see that his boat had been taken, and Michael could make out his father's shape in the distance. Frantically, he pulled up the anchor, knowing he couldn't bring in his catch without help—it was the one thing he had failed to consider. He began sailing back the way he'd come, but if the

water got too shallow, the nets could break, and he would lose his catch. Michael cursed himself. He hadn't been a man; he'd been a foolish boy who couldn't plan ahead.

But as Michael drifted closer to shore, he saw another boat coming his way, a small canoe with two men paddling. As it came closer, Michael could see the vessel contained Arthur and a friend of his, a fellow fisherman by the name O'Reilly. "Michael!" Arthur cried. He was laughing, hysterical with joy, beaming with pride. "Michael, help me up!"

Michael reached out both hands and helped his father climb up into the boat, waving at O'Reilly as he paddled back to the harbor alone. Arthur instantly began helping Michael draw in the nets. "You know, your mammy's fit to be tied," he declared, but he couldn't stop laughing as they hauled in Michael's catch. "Oh, but I knew where you'd be, Mikey! Just look at all these fish—I knew you'd grow ta love it at last!"

Michael was shaking. He wasn't sure if he was shaking from the cold, from exertion, or from excitement, but he didn't care, and barely even noticed. Sometimes Arthur made smaller catches than this. At long last, he was truly proud of his son, and he didn't even seem to mind that Michael had snuck out in the night. Of course, he was sure he'd be in loads of trouble at home, but right now, Arthur was practically weeping with pride, hugging Michael so tightly he could scarcely breathe.

.....

The Red Whale smelled like vomit, alcohol, and fish. Michael had prepared for months for this day, drinking ale at his friend Jamie's house, having a little more each time until he'd built up his tolerance and could have a full mug without getting too sick the following day. He would impress his father here, too.

It was a loud place, full of songs and raucous laughter, and Michael couldn't see himself ever spending time here voluntarily. What was the appeal of somewhere so loud and with such a stench? But Arthur had brought him, and Arthur was proud.

"Two ales, Molly." Arthur slammed a few coins down at the bar, and the girl behind the counter promptly served them big, foaming mugs, nearly overflowing and taller than any Michael had drunk from before. Arthur raised his mug and gave Michael the same proud grin from the previous day's fishing.

"Here's ta you, son!"

Michael raised his glass, toasting himself with his father, or at least some version of himself that existed for his father's happiness. As he sipped the ale, he observed the scene before him. If this were a place he would have to frequent in the future, he preferred to become familiar with it now to steel himself for subsequent visits.

His scan of the tavern saw men huddled together in groups, gambling and shouting and letting out random hoots of laughter. Some sang sea shanties together. They joked around, some boasting wildly of their catches, standing on chairs and making broad gestures to emphasize their points and contrast their skeptics. "It was this feckin' big, Seamus, I promise you, and when I say the bleedin' thing was the weight o' two grown men..." As Michael watched, his grip on the mug loosened, and suddenly it slipped from his hands, but he was not conscious of it hitting the floor. "Michael??" Arthur's voice sounded faint, though his father stood right beside him. "Mike, are you alright?"

Michael didn't answer. As he watched the rapport between the other fishermen, the kind of talk in which he was sure Arthur himself engaged, he felt a searing heat in his chest that kept growing worse. It took him several moments to identify that it was anger making him feel that way. It was a deep rage, brought on by the betrayal of hypocrisy, and it carried his feet straight out the tavern door, leaving Arthur running to catch up with him. But Michael was young, and he was faster.



Obsidian

by Ashley Christian

I thought that grief,
full and dull,
would fill the space
of all the love
you took with you –

Like rays of sunshine stream,
transforming obsidian
into ultramarine.

I now know grief,
hollow and sharp,
won't take the place
of all the love
you gave to me –

Like your shattering mind
and the bullet leaving one side,

Leaving you,
Leaving me.

Triptych

Raelynn Tedeton

(This submission has no name)

by Luke Jobe

You stare at the words, not at all expecting them to stare back at you. Yet here it was, aware of you. You are reading as you always have, but this story is different. It realizes that you must exist because you are experiencing it, and it only exists if you do. Thus, you do not get to be someone that simply witnesses the works in this collection. You are no longer a passerby peering into the inner worlds of others. Now, the words have seen you, and you are forever canonical to the contents of this story. You can close these pages to get away, but you have still gleaned this knowledge. You are the protagonist, processing these simple lines arranged in a manner becoming of your tongue. It doesn't matter if you comprehend this reality, as it is already true. The rest of your life to follow.



Stop Light Loves

by Kristyn Hardy

Loving you was like watching cars
At a red light—each one hellbent
On making it to wherever it is
They're headed.
The timing, the speed of it all.
It was all so familiar,
But that's all hindsight.

Green light

It was in the distance. The ones ahead
Didn't even think twice about it. It wasn't
A mile marker, wasn't an exit. It was fleeting
For them. It was distant for us.

Yellow Light

Slowly at first, a gentle pressure on the brakes
As we were falling. As I was falling. Others were
Stopping, knowing something I didn't. And then
You hesitated. Stepped back and paused.
Others made it. You didn't let us.

Red light

There is no cadence to the easing forward,
The every now and then of a foot coming up
From the brake. There was no rhythm to
Yours. I tried to find it. I tried to count the beats
Between the stops and the inching. It was
Never consistent.

Green light

We made it. This one is ours. The ones ahead
begin to move and that's when I notice.
That's when I realize I'm in a different car.
I look for you and I see you not see me. I see
You follow the turn signal and I'm in
The intersection. Waiting. And I'm forced to
Realize that's the stigma with stop light loves—

No two people are ever
Truly headed in the same direction.



Typographic Abstract 01

Professor Jake Dugard's Intro to Graphic Design class

Life is Art

by Addy Lindsay

I always figured art was encompassed by the intentional creation of something - a poem, a book, a painting, a song, or even a new scarf woven by forgotten fabrics. I saw art to be something separate from self, an inevitable action that occurred from wistful inspiration. Something reserved only for those who seemed to beckon its call. Something just out of reach, something for those who see a wide array of color in a world that can feel dull and colorless.

In a year that has felt void and colorless, at best, art seems like a privilege for those who can pursue something otherworldly at a lofty expense. It's reflected in the people who have it in them to sit at a desk all day and create something beautiful. Who can spend hours in front of a painting and make it look effortless. A lottery of time, energy, money, resources, and good mental health. Creating art seems hard and daunting, impossible even, if I can't even see myself getting out of bed in the morning.

In the absence of this curation of art and creativity, I am still able to find it in the places I least expect. In the absence of a crafted song or lyric or poem; I find something deeper, richer even... a piece of art and creativity all the same.

I find it in living.

I create art by cultivating presence, by getting out of bed in the morning, by stumbling to my dim-lit kitchen to brew a cup of coffee in the wee hours of morning. I create art by speaking tenderly and gently to myself, mothering a tender little girl inside of me who longs to feel safe and connected to someone... to something. I create and I see art in the portrayal of potential love interests who make me feel giddy, in communing with people over coffee, in creating a meal for myself, in sticking to a ritual that makes my days feel a bit more secure.

I create art by living, not as a result of living.

My life is a work of art, a painting of pain and pastels, a poem that captures the mundanity and the mediocrity of my days; as well as the days that make me feel alive and well. My art is found in the imprint of my spirit and my longing, in my willingness to always search for beauty and meaning, in the curious wonderings I have as I see strangers when I inquire about their stories. It's found in a forgotten building, a street sign that points me towards something familiar, a lonely book who seems to hold all of life's precious and delicate secrets.

My life is art.

And I don't need to create something when I know that I am creating and curating a life that is the overflow of a forgotten and hidden art of simply paying attention.

father

by Rae Ward

father, I wish to confess that I
have been unfaithful;

I lay wake at night to writhe
in bed with people who are not
my husband;

father, I confess that I
am not who I say I am—

rather I am an amalgamation
of active fractals,
rapidly increasing their complexity;

father, I insist that I am not
a sinner, though my confessionals

act on private thoughts,
spewing forth from where I lack
on all fronts of what it means—

father, I confess that I do not know
what it means to be a human

I lost my humanity somewhere
between the stained glass
and this dark box.

father, my confession is not
that I believe I have sinned,

but that my mind lurches forth
with lives I have yet to live
and lies I have not spoken.



Mommy

by DeRel Smith

You narcissistic pathetic excuse for a guardian,
How dare you,
Guard the men accusing your children of godless sins,
You're as useless as locking your 4C hair up with bobby pins,
Force eating cold sandwiches with no condiments,
The chemicals used in your hair for compliments,
Your depression right when solace hits
Your cults love for acknowledgments
This is what you wanted then.
Oh wait,
You're not black you just like to pretend,
Mommy's a white woman with impeccable skin
Mommy's the epitome of all femininity
Mommy says I'm gay and it's a sin to see
From the way I dress to the way I speak
Mommy knows what's best for me

But Mommy,
You said you could have left me to wolves or left me to dogs,
But you left me for warm nights curled up next to logs.
You left me in awe.
Mommy like pigs infected with swine flu
He's different, he doesn't like to shoot kids too
He's more than that I promise
He's not a rat, he's honest
No matter what you do mommy,
You can paint his skin black,
but he's still a coon.

(C)lover

by Avery Miller

Today,
I found a four leaf clover, Near the basil,
Under the honeysuckle.

Wow.
I'm so *lucky*.

Like the man on the moon, I saw your face,
In the clover's center.
I firmly believe,
Four leaf clovers,
Represent luck in love,
Not luck alone,
For the petals,
Resemble hearts,
Symmetrical curvature,
Let's do the math:
Four perfect hearts,
Two for me,
Two for you.

You're the heartthrob I created, With my green thumb.
Each petal represents,
The corners of our lips.
I thought we'd cultivate, Something green,
Surrounded in flowers,

Of ivory and white,
 Subtle springtime scent, To bring about the bees.
 However,
 I didn't anticipate,
 For this love,
 To *sting*.

Four leaf clovers represent good luck, *Right?*
 Wasn't that implied?
 Those who behold that legend, Did they lie?

Suddenly,
 I look down at your face,
 Surrounded by,
 Only three hearts.
 How absurd...
 I *swore* I had *four*.

The wind picked up speed,
 Then, it hit me:
 The wind snatched one of my hearts, To sail onward,
 With the migrating flock,
 Bad luck befalls,
 Asymmetry,
 For now I own,
 A shamrock.

Sprout

by Kennis Jobe

When I was three, my parents took me walking. We strolled down to a little culvert at the end of our street to watch turtles swim in the springtime. They came in from the bayou, they said. I thought they must have rivaled me in size, back then.

That night, I went to sleep and waited for the Easter Bunny. One year, two weeks before the actual day, I declared that I was going to sleep until Easter.

One night, I'm eight years old. The childhood trial of trying to sleep on Christmas Eve has reared its head once again. My body feels like it's buzzing, and I'm so excited that my stomach hurts. My brother is asleep, lulled as easily into slumber as ever, and I almost hate him for it. But he'll be up with me tomorrow, shaking every adult in the house and dragging them into the living room, groaning in exasperation and thinking we might implode and die if they stop to pour a cup of coffee first.

But Little Brother, so patient at night at least, doesn't get to hear what I do. That night I swear I hear the shaking of sleigh bells, a faint jingling from outside the window behind my head. I tell my cousin the next morning in a scattered vomiting of words, bubbling with the excitement of my mystical encounter.

I don't remember a single present I received that year. What I remember is believing in magic.

I believed in everything. Fairies, not just the Tooth Fairy but tiny, winged people in flower dresses, embodied every tree and bush and toadstool, and I thought that if I dug deeply enough into the ground, I would reach heaven, because people who were buried went to heaven.

I was sure I could find angels, if I just dug a little further. They couldn't have been more than six feet deep, because my dad is six feet tall, and nothing was taller than him. Fairies, and angels in the Underworld below, and King Arthur's sword had to be in one of the lakes we swam and fished in the spring and summer. And if I took my snorkeling gear down to the Atchafalaya Basin, and I found Excalibur there, I would be Queen of Britain, and I would never have to go shopping for school uniforms again.

I believed in magic. I could sense that trees weren't

just something to hang a rope swing from. The part of them that was alive nourished me like the Giving Tree, but I made sure never to take too much. I approached any form of life, even rocks and water, with a hushed sort of reverence born of childlike wonder, and I think all that was around me must have sensed that, and let me see the divinity within them all.

Now I park at the Neighborhood Market, determined to spend as little time within its walls as possible. Its bright colors and enticing labels mock me, mock the whole state of the world. I don't want to be here, or anywhere. I'm tired. But I need food to live, so I step inside and try to fight the burning behind my eyes that makes my vision swim.

I'm tired of everything having a rational reason behind it. If they could leave one thing— will o' the wisps, dragons, even ghosts— unexplained, un-hypothesized, then I would have something to place my wonder in again. But now I grab milk and eggs and cereal and the nutrition facts are laid out in black and white font for me to peruse.

I don't want to know.

I perform the practiced motions of bagging my goods, of giving another fifty dollars from my bank account, of loading my car and preparing to back out of the thin slice of a parking space that the trucks on either side of me have left me with.

But as I turn the key in the ignition I find my hand shaking, and the heavy anvil of Despair starts sinking onto my chest. My keys clatter against each other on their chain. A happy little cat, one of my many keychain ornaments, beams up at me. I buy a lot of cute things like him when I feel the need to distract myself. His cheeks are humanly rosy and his eyes are creased with smiling. What is there to cry about? he seems to say.

And my left brain, that side I tend to neglect, pipes up with the statistical unlikelihood of all my worst fears, but it doesn't matter, because Despair is stronger and he always insists that they are all possible. Has the earth ever given way beneath you, to swallow you into a chasm of shadows and stalagmites, and seal you shut like a forgotten pharaoh in his forgotten tomb, never to see light again? That's what happens to me when Despair comes again, every three months or so, and lays that boulder on my chest, one I can't even push up a hill like ill-fated Sisyphus who wanted to
Live.

It's me in that chasm, eight years old, with all the belief in ghosts and fairies and Santa Claus, and she's crying and shouting and no one can help her. I stand teetering on the ledge, and I try to tell her that everything is okay, but like in a nightmare, I can't find my voice. I fail her once again.

I make it home, somehow, but I'm not really conscious of driving back, opening the door, or flinging myself onto the couch. I'm just conscious of a little prayer, from deep in my soul, wordless and desperate, and I think that if it had any language to it other than the primal and spiritual groaning from the center of my chest, it would go like this:

Let me see something magical. It can be stupid, it can be pointless, it can be anything. I just need to believe again.

I wake up the next morning groggy and cold as usual. I force myself to eat breakfast, mindlessly brush my hair and my teeth while I scroll through my phone, and then stop in the doorway. The air is just a little warmer than it was yesterday. The sky is starting to clear, a little worn, stubborn blue peeking out from beneath the relentless gray. It's a little easier to breathe, I find...Despair's grip has relaxed, just slightly, into something manageable. As I turn to lock the door, I see it. The magic. The miracle.

I wanted *anything*, but I never thought it could be something so simple. But when I see it, crouching down on the concrete to behold it closer, I melt into happy tears, an occurrence that hasn't happened in so long that I had forgotten what it feels like.

Against my apartment wall, a little white flower pot has stood for weeks, with no signs of life. I've never been a gardener. I've always been impatient and forgetful. I haven't watered in several days.

But today, in spite of the cold, in spite of Despair, something divine and mystical has taken place, something that gives me the strength to move forward with the day. My little plant has sprouted.



Ghibli
Dawson Mulkey



Untitled
Jessica Bowers

A letter to my father

by DeRel Smith

The sins of the father are laid upon the children,
I lay my hands on the metaphysical death lying on my desk
As the ashes of the cigarettes spray against my fingertips
I raise the bud up to my lips and light a fire inside of my heart
I can finally taste the freedom that you were looking for dad
It feels like what I always thought love was,
It's the rubbery smell and a cemented taste scarring your taste buds
The ashen black augmented hell that I put myself through,
It's simply wonderful,
Every time I take a hit,
I pay the toll of losing another year of my life
I made a deal with this pocket-sized devil now I can never get enough,
Is this how you felt
To partake in the sweetest taboo
The taste of victory is etched across my mind like a tattoo
The smell always reminds me of the love that you used to give me.

Usually, I wake up hungover from the night before,
With whatever or whomever in my bed reminding me of my faith
I also rely on their body to give me the sweet release of ecstasy
The sex may be temporary but I can feel their love
However, there's always been one who believed in me,
She believed in me,
I've used her,
For the scapes of my own desires.

May I ask you, something dad?
Would you still be proud of me if all of that was true,
If I finally did succumb to the same fate that you did,
That I was merely another day away from watching myself fade away,
And the woman of my dreams cried out for me to stop,
One last time,
Until I finally stopped, forever
Just like you did.
I miss you, dad.

The Old House Place

by Laura Cason

The concrete slab sat heavy at the bottom of the hill.
Pine straw matted the white amalgamation of stone.
One large crack split the tabletop in two.
A half rotted pine had crashed down from its towering height
where the old house had once rested,
decimating it.

Now the slab stood bare.
A sort of natural amphitheater
for shaky renditions of nameless songs on stolen mix tapes,
for blow by blow re-enactments of Qui-Gon Jinn
versus Darth Maul in his last stand,
for sitting and laying and sleeping in the sun,
for chalk dragons and flower fields,
for mixing potions and making ink,
for base,
for a safe space to rest when the grass became lava flows,
for nursing baby birds back to health,
for catching lizards and dragonflies,
or shelling pecans,
and dissecting magnolia seeds,
and eating honeysuckles,
and hoarding "ingredients",
and accidentally poisoning the dog,

For four kids on their own
when the door was locked
with nowhere else to go.

Acting Against Time

by Grace Miholic

I couldn't explain it. In that moment, in absolute existential dread, I knew I was going to die. If I left the stuffy room that my grandmother had prepared for me not one week ago, I would never return. To the room with no lock, that had to be forced close or it would reopen, that offered me no protection. But in that moment, it was my only solace. From the cheap dry wine I drank frivolously after the funeral, for a stranger I had attended earlier that day, to the shame I felt mourning my own parent's death that had not happened yet, as I gazed at the photo collage of his family. This day was not for my personal mourning, but old feelings and memories were being dredged up about the loss of my grandmother: watching her be shoved into a polished wall next to a row of other strangers. I did not know the man, but I teared up at the eventual sorrow I would feel when I lost someone I actually loved again, having to shove them into a wall as well. The thoughts of what I would say about my father or my mother, whoever went first into darkness. My beautiful parents, who had me too late in life, leaving me to obsess over how they would be taken from me too soon. Too soon to see their grandchildren off to college or to ever see their fifty-year wedding anniversary. Where would they go after their passing? Where would I go? Would I stay close to their graves or move away? Or would I join them in darkness just to escape the pain?

The service was filled with prayers, tears, and promises that the stranger was with his mother in heaven. It all seemed empty to me, words to comfort the stranger's family, but I mourned the thought nonetheless. That he was probably not with his loved ones, that the ash that was enclosed in a granite box was the only piece left of him. The ash that would soon be spread in lake Michigan, in his mother's homeland, that last piece of him gone. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" the preacher said; I think his ironic choice of words evaded him and the people who also believed the stranger was somewhere greater than in the little granite box on the table at the front of the room. The only reminder of this hellish day being the taste of white wine backwash and coffee on the back of my teeth; the feeling of grit on the front of them from the Puerto Rican rice dish my cousin had prepared.

But in the room with no air conditioning, with the window cracked open and an oscillating fan that only made my trapped feelings worse, I was left to block out the selfish sorrow I had felt and the dread of facing the outside world the next day. At that moment the only thing I could think of was that I had not written in weeks. Remnants of unfinished sloppy poems sat in my notebook laughing at me in the garish way I had thrown words together. I had wanted to make a name for myself, but as I listened to the poems that the dead stranger had written, that his son had meticulously practiced to read at the service, I realized all my attempts would be null. The most fame I would have would be my works read at my own funeral, with my own children left to publish a book of my poetry posthumously for which there would be no audience. And I would be nowhere to see this sad progression of events, just like the dead stranger. That thought drove me to drink the dry white wine and eat two servings of the Puerto Rican rice dish. That was the thought that made me shut myself away in the stuffy room with no lock, hoping someone would wake in the night to save me from the imminent death that awaited me, lest I leave and creep to the bathroom to brush the sin of my sorrow from my teeth.

That had all accumulated into one silent scream I could not release and the stream of tears that rolled down my cheeks as I typed my transgressions to no one but the worst person I knew, myself. The selfish girl with selfish ambitions that her parents had no choice but to support and follow to the ends of the earth. All I wanted more than anything was to live in a field in France, reading Wilde and Whitman, later to write something to their likeness on my own time. Watch my children pick flowers or eat toast with homemade jam without worry of having had them too late. But instead, I was on a warpath to make my father proud, and my mother worried for my uncertain but meticulously planned future. My problems seemed simple compared to the dead man's. To live on after death in the memories of his children and their descendants, never forgotten. I simply wanted to live without the rush to make something of myself while my parents were still here to see it come to fruition. That if they could not see their grandchildren off to college or celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary, they could at least see their only child make a name

for herself. That beating time would pay off, and they could read something of hers and be proud. That the only time her writings would be read would not be while the final piece of her was sitting in a granite box at the front of the room.

I suppose the dead stranger resonated with me; we both wanted more time. Only I was the one who had it and somehow, I was the one with all the burden. I did not feel satisfied with the allotted time I was prescribed in life, seeing that death was still waiting outside my bedroom door. I came to realize it wasn't my death I was fearing, but my parents'. I could not face spending another day with them knowing it was one day less that I would have in the long run. One day less I would have to make something useful of myself and worthy of pride. It tore up my insides and stole sleep from me. I longed to go back to the day before the stranger's funeral at the Art Institute when the only tears that came to my eyes were pin pricked by beauty itself as I gazed at pieces by Monet and Van Gogh. Before the revelation that made me await death and long for the ignorant bliss I once allowed myself to know about the passing of time. Listening to Kendrick Lamar, Hozier, and Harry Styles as I looked at my favorite works of art. In those moments, I was separate from my parents. I was separate from everything. The moments when life is so beautiful that time stands still is the only time I can look back and feel at peace.

I have no choice but to look time in the face and spit at it for not being fair in its due process. It steals from me every day. Every day I spend away from my cousins, they forget my name, leaving me to reestablish the bonds I made with them the previous year. The little boys I once played with as their old dog watched from the couch. The dog is dead and the boys play without me, too timid to invite me to watch them kill bandits on their Game Boy as their new puppy sleeps on her blanket. Time has stolen the memory that I was once the cousin with the shiny teeth who helped them build a castle. It marches on as I write, think, and grieve. It ticks as I choose my words, knowing deep down they are not good enough to evoke how I feel about much of anything. Knowing that once I am done writing to myself, it will not be able to amount to what I need it to. The boys will have forgotten my name again and that they beat me in a game of H-O-R-S-E.

So, I write. I write to beat time and the inevitable future. It's the only thing I can do. To take some form of action against the odds stacked against me. So that my parents can think of me and be proud, that my cousins can't forget me because they have signed copies of my books, that one day my work can be the art and beauty that pinpricks tears. So that when I am sitting in a little granite box at the front of the room people will have already read my words.



Intersection

Michael Plaisance

3

by Kylee Boudreaux

War is not kind,
Roaming around my mind,
Young and able,
I approach the drafting table,
Mother says damnable,
But to sign I'm inclined.

Caught in an explosion,
Corrupt by mind erosion,
I wish for home,
Where I'm free to boyishly roam,
But I crash into loam
Climbing out of implosion.

Through the night I scream,
Fighting in a war dream,
Pushing this away,
To deal with another day,
But it haunts me when I lay,
In my mind there is no team.

Today I still struggle to recover,
Tragic memories still hover,
But there's new to discover,
Mentally getting better,
A new life with her,
I'm now a dead letter.

6

by Kylee Boudreaux

Young and innocent,
I did not know the
Events already
In motion.
I always said
Please
Thank you
Sir and Ma'am,
Trying to be perfect.

"I have no favorites."
Says my mother,
I believed this for a while.
"I just want what's best
For you"
Says my father,
I believed this for a while.
"You're the lucky
One."
Says my sister,
I believed this for a while.
"You'll be better off in the
Long-run."
Says my grandma.

Years later I wish I still
Believed these.
But I'm better
Now
Knowing the truth.
But at what
Cost?

Florentia the Lawn Flamingo

by Kylee Boudreaux



Florentia sits everyday, watching from the front lawn. Her thin, metal legs were lost many years ago. But she still stands, although a little shorter, watching the daily events that drive down the street. Her light pink textured plastic showed her age from years of sun-bleaching. One of her eyes had since lost its black paint and her beak wiggled just slightly with every breeze. But Florentia was always going to stay.

She was an ever watchful eye of the everyday. She witnessed the snow storms that were brought with every winter. But she had her ribbed feathers to keep her warm, so she did not suffer from the frosty nights.

A watchbird will not move under any condition

She thought determinedly to herself.

She watched the owners of the lawn to and from work. The spring brought new blooms- in this era Florentia shined. She celebrated when the last freezing pile of snow melted into a tiny puddle. New insects flew by, descendants of those from the year prior, and she greeted each with a sprightly hello. The vibrant pink blooms (after which she was named) were quick to follow the arrival of all things creepy and crawly.

Parades marking religious celebrations marched right in front of her. People wore elaborate costumes and children danced in the streets. Beaded necklaces thrown from the parades were her favorite. The bright gold beads resembled Zeus' lightning bolts being sent from heaven. It was unknown why this brought her comfort. She wished she could be in the crowded street, jumping to receive her very own plastic necklace. But she had no legs to move, nor the life to do so.

A watchbird will not move under any condition.

She thought sadly to herself.

At the end of the festivities, it was a custom for the lawn-owners to bring her one singular necklace. Upon

Overthinking

Christi Kruger

walking past her, the owners placed the thrice-wrapped gold-beaded plastic necklace on her. Her slender synthetic neck seemed to hold her head up a little higher than normal. Her plastic plumage renewed with her sense of belonging.

Spring fades to summer, bringing along its sweltering days. The sun appeared to daily lighten her color. It was only a slight bleaching, but over time it would build until she was as white as the snow which would come in winter. The days dragged on, so hot she almost broke a sweat. She found herself wishing for those chilly nights that she had bitterly cursed. But through the blistering heat, she still stood proud.

The days began to cool and Florentia knew fall was coming fast. Her gold-beaded necklace remained around her neck. This was very different from years past. Her necklace should have been removed by the owners in the midst of summer- this was customary. She wanted to give them their gold adornment back. She wanted to hand it to them when they walked past on their daily departure from the lawn.

A watchbird will not move under any condition.

She thought emptily to herself.

The beautiful spring blooms soon died. The bugs' frequent buzz-bys halted. The lively colors introduced by spring and sustained by summer turned to drab browns. But the light pink Florentia remained with her plastic gold necklace. The winds became cold and sharp, causing her beads to make a dragging sound against her plastic covering as they moved to and fro. The lawn owners appeared less frequent now. They established a red and white sign. She introduced herself but there was no response. She recognized that the sign had words and wished she had the ability to read. But for now, she would watch over the lawn and her new found friend.

She's not sure when it happened but the lawn-owners no longer came. New people visited occasionally and she would strain her neck to look for the lawn-owners. But it was useless. They would come back to their lawn – it was their home. So Florentia stood firm, she would watch over the lawn until they returned.

Immutable

by Laura Cason

The trees that line the stream bank
lean in to whisper secrets
and compare notes and gripe
about their long past and aching backs.
The forest like the ribs of some ancient beast
swells with each gasp of wind
is full to brimming
with foragers, who meander along
the dank floor littered with leaves.
In the green filtered light
Idle minds find fodder
for nightmares and dreams.

Time swirls on
lives end and begin again
The structures of men pass in a single breath,
But the forest remains
slumbering silently
forever.

Atmosphere

by Avery Miller

"Why did you choose him?"

You fulfilled your promise, A man of your word,
You gave me the world,
From each stone to each bird, But...you didn't listen.

I didn't want the world;

You should've paid attention. The world is vile,
Though, all the while,
Those birds are beautiful, Their wings aren't strong enough, To take
me to Heaven.

I chose him,
Because he gave me the galaxy. He gave me passion and light,
Beyond Mercury.
An angel so kind,
I crave the brilliance,
Within his mind.
The stars align,
Oh Heaven divine,
The constellations told me, That I deserve paradise,
Above your layer of atmosphere.

Two

by DeRel Smith

If you forget me,
I want you to know one thing.
I reside in the dew droplets in between the blades of grass
Beneath your feet,
In the somber tune of a
hummingbirds tweets

I will always exist in the sips of hot cocoa,
In between your lips,
The pitter-patters of drips slipping down your throat,
Those chocolate-covered kisses pressed upon your heart,

I lie between the material woven in your sweater,
Hugging you tight,
Keeping you warm,
Inevitably stitched together by our eternal forms.

I'll stay by your side for as long as time allows me,
I'll trickle on by with the breeze ever so soundly,
Whispering in your ear,
Our infatuations are ever-lasting.

Brute

by Juno

SCENE 1

A single candle ignites. It sits in its holder, simple and well-worn, but made of a refined, polished gold. A slight figure emerges unsurely from the dark shroud that is the rest of the room. She picks up the handle, allowing herself to be illuminated, and sweeps toward a bookshelf.

MELANC

Great towers oft lend to greater ambitions. Can I be blamed, then,
for having such lofty goals as mine?

She runs a finger along the books' spines. She stops to draw one out and leaf through its pages.

Perhaps it's in the books that keep me company. Knights errant searching in rescue of fair ladies, held only to their honor. Perhaps it's the empty walls echoing pointless thoughts and rattling my skull, or the verminous choir living within them, singing a song for captive women. Or maybe, God forbid, it's something more sinister—an unnatural and insatiable desire I've been unable to quell since I was young.

There was a time when I was praised for this temperament—“There's a girl who knows how to get what she wants,” my lordship and father, Good Chole, would say to me. But something has changed. More and more I feel I am selfishly growing larger than my lot in life. In diligence, I persist in my greatest of towers. I abide by my studies and I help when I'm needed—no more, and certainly no less.

She sits on her bed, looking contemplative.

In the interest of dutifulness, the preservation of a fine family name dissevered too quickly in the hands of daughters and not sons, my sister and I have slowly begun to take the mantle of lady... a mantle which has long been vacant in this castle. For his sake, and those before him, I do what I must. Still, I long for the days we would leave the castle. I best remember wandering the woods, the highlands surrounding our fief. They felt familiar then, but when I peer out at them now, they seem greater, more endless. We would visit other lords and ladies, too, dine and dance with them. These memories have all but escaped me over the years, but Sangue holds on to them well. She tells me, sometimes, of the noblemen we met, the lords-to-be that she would so charm. She's always been more useful in such affairs than I.

She crosses the room and sits at a boudoir. After setting her candle down, she takes residence in front of the mirror, allowing herself a long, hard look. She is plain in all mutable manners of presentation, but she is beautiful. She begins to tie her hair up in an unskillful braid.

But those days are bygone. I sense Sangue has reached the same conclusion, as her regalements turn bittersweet. In the absence burgeoning within the castle grounds, Sangue, with no one else upon which to direct her ire, has taken to lashing out on me; even she seems to have worsened lately.

I see her, sometimes, when the sun has long since set and the animals wail of illness. Sangue, headed down the earthen path and across the cobbled bridge. Where she goes, I'm unconcerned; I pay no mind. But still, I wonder... and can't help thinking that certain precedents set before my time hold bearing over my life as it is today. And where is the justice in that? Sangue, who

gets what she wants, meanwhile I carry the weight of her every movement. Nevertheless, I have grown above her meddling. After all, if only one of us is to treat this business with due respect, it ought to be me. Of course, it would be me.

She stands up and finishes the process of adorning herself. Her dress is black and understated, but garnished with fine gold trimmings to complement her jewelry. When she is finished, she returns to the mirror, almost as if she is addressing it.

I have long felt that time is slipping away from me, but tonight, I am at peace. I know how to get what I want. Now that I am chanced to let it be known that my wants are in line with those of my family, nothing will stand in my way any longer.

MELANC *bends over the candle as though she thinks to blow it out, but instead takes it up into both hands before hurrying out the room.*

SCENE 2

A dinner table, set for three. A fiery chandelier overhangs its middle, where two chairs are seated opposite one another. In the table's center is a single, golden candle. Enter SANGUE, who lights the candle, providing greater clarity of the scene, and steps aside again. At the head of the table, where the light doesn't fully reach, sits an imperious figure. In all aspects, he carries himself with strength. Big-bearded, broad, brow etched in a permanent scorn. He waits patiently for something. Enter MELANC, carrying a pitcher. Behind her, SANGUE carries a tray boasting a robust, meaty dish. They set their offerings in front of the imperious man on either side of the table and begin to serve him. Once he has been treated, the two fix their own portions and take their places among the empty chairs.

MELANC

My lord, this pitcher of milk I bring forth for you was gleaned from the calf, who has now calfed herself, that you once graciously gifted to me. For years now have I tended to her. I raised her up from a wee, sickly beast, and ever since have I lingered near her side as she grazed the fine grasses of our pasture.

CHOLE merely grunts and looks up expectantly at his eldest, who casts a quick, sly countenance.

SANGUE

Milord.. the veal before you has been prepared by none other than myself. Long did I toil over it today, that it may satisfy and exceed your expectations. I understand you took great pleasure in its butcher, a thing which we have not been able to indulge in for some time now. With this in mind, I must admit it is such a waste, seeing your travail poured out into a meager glass.

MELANC

You take my work in jest?

SANGUE

I would not; I aim only to comment on what you have already made abundantly clear, and to defend our father, who you have so offended in succession to your abuse.

MELANC

I have beguiled no one. These pastures he has tended, the crops he's sired, I have respected like they were my own. When a sow has finished nourishing herself from the land's grass, does she not then pay it back in kind?

SANGUE

You were never one to speak plainly. What is your intention here?

MELANC

One could not possibly appear to speak more plainly, lest attended to by a more perceptive audience. My crop upholds a balance so carefully wrought by those before us. Tell me, what good is a sow to her master once she has been culled?

SANGUE

A man could sustain his family off a sow's flesh, especially with bread to complement. Bread—made of the grains that otherwise would have been fed to a heifer by the likes of you.

MELANC

You've forgotten, or perhaps you thought you could fool me into forgetting, that my cow is no longer a heifer. Would your calf have existed if not for her?

SANGUE

Sore have you been that father slaughtered the first babe of your cow-whore. Do not think that we are unable to perceive how ungrateful you are!

MELANC

Cow-whore? Such an insult rings eerie from your lips. Anyway, sister, you are wise enough to know that I am true when I say I am plenty grateful.

SANGUE

And grateful should you be, for you may feign to deny your abuse, but you cannot bring yourself to merit your measly contribution!

The two eventually break into shout. CHOLE watches as the young women squabble. It is easy to miss, but there is a glimmer of amusement reflected in his visage. But, after a time, he tires and, without a word, hammers the table with a fist. The silence that falls across the table is prompt. The girls look to him eagerly, anxiously, awaiting any sign of recognition.

CHOLE

The pair of you must think me a damned fool. Full and well do I know whence this meal came, mind you, I was there for the lot of it.

The sisters are speechless.

CHOLE

Mind yourselves, and bite your tongues; I don't taste with my ears, after all.

Slowly, he lowers his hand and raises a fork. Without hesitation, he starts his meal. He works diligently and efficiently. Not a crumb is left by the time he is finished. SANGUE sits up proudly, turning an eye full of daggers to MELANC. CHOLE wastes no time in moving on to the glass before him, out of which he drinks lecherously. He drags his sleeve across his mouth, sopping up the excess. Leaning back in his chair, he closes his eyes and affords some time to digest. SANGUE and MELANC don't dare to break their stares. After a spell, he sits up and grants his daughters a moment of eye contact.

Clean up.

With a wave of his hand, he stands and dismisses himself from the communion. Passing by MELANC, he stops a moment to set a hand on her shoulder and peer into her face.

A fine wife you'll make, should you learn to shut your mouth, Melanc.

She doesn't look up. She trembles.

Won't you?

MELANC

It is all I could hope for, my lord.

CHOLE stands back up and contemplates for a moment.

CHOLE

You two know your nightly duties.

As he leaves, the flames of the chandelier finally die out. Only the candle is left to light up the sisters. On the table remain three sets of plates with their corresponding glasses. Two are untouched. MELANC is quick to gather her contribution to the table's contents, pitcher and untouched platter, to whisk them away. SANGUE lingers a bit longer at the table, alone.

SCENE 3

SANGUE

A fine wife she'll make...

She begins tidying the table, but a troubled thought occurs to her, and she drops everything back in its place.

A fine wife, indeed, she'll make! Her suitor's arrival mere days away and, all the while, she hasn't a care for men, or for homemaking, or for any creature that can hold an intelligent conversation—smart as she thinks she is... Her disillusion speaks to an untold

truth concerning our responsibilities... because wisdom isn't something picked out of a book; it can't be spoken into a girl by her tutor, no matter how prestigious. No, wisdom is a skill learned— a muscle indurated by strain. So, forgive me, then— though you may think me a cow-whore— for seeking the experience it takes to be a homemaker, for trying to lead this family and myself down a finer path, rather than closing it off.

She returns to her cleaning.

"Grace," I'm told. It's out of grace that Melanc is betrothed before me. "Have patience," I'm told. "Greater tidings await." But I'm no fool. It's no coincidence that I see him when I look upon her face. And yet, upon my own, nothing... Nothing save for, perhaps, dearest Mother, Phloem. Good Lady Phloem, sweet Lady Phloem, quiet Lady Phloem. Does ego sabotage memory, imprinting upon her my likeness? Or perhaps, in turn, I've lost myself and taken her countenance for my own. Does memory fail me so, that I falsely recollect the way she used to trap Earl Toísech's eyes with her own, or might Good Chole, too, recognize the sight?

She bends closer to the table to blow the candle out, but is distracted as a flame is born in another room. She thinks better of herself, instead taking the candle in hand and making way for her father. He is seated, alone, in the castle's sollar. He stares into the brazen fireplace ahead of him, which lights up those segments of the room not touched by the setting sun. She rests the candle tableside and finds a seat next to him.

SANGUE

Supper tonight was fine... did you find everything enjoyable?

CHOLE

It was fine.

SANGUE

Well deserved, I would say, following such a long winter. A good fire to warm us up after, too—I still feel the wind's chill, after all. There's a feeling of pride, too, having put such a feast together without much in the way of aide—

CHOLE

You finished your supper?

SANGUE

I—I beg your pardon?

CHOLE

You have eaten all that was prepared for you?

SANGUE

Well, I served myself, but—

CHOLE

Steer not clear of my questions.

SANGUE

Apologies, lord. I may not have finished, but a good portion—

CHOLE

A pity.

SANGUE

I—...Sorry?

CHOLE

A pity and a waste.

SANGUE

Sorry, milord.

SANGUE stands again, bowing to CHOLE before exiting, but before she makes her way out of the room...

CHOLE

Sangué.

SANGUE freezes in her tracks and turns to acknowledge CHOLE.

SANGUE

Yes, milord?

CHOLE

You know better than to waste my waking moments with apologies. I know not why you deign to hurt me so... I only wish that I could trust in you.

SANGUE tries to speak but is at a loss. She nods, silently, and continues walking, more swiftly now. As she exits, she grabs her candle. Once she has left the sollar, she stops in her tracks, catches a deep breath, and holds up her candle to look into its flame. Holding on to it more securely now, she continues on her way.

SCENE 4

The sun has set. A corridor, long and empty, lit by ornate candle mounts springing from the walls. A feminine figure walks the corridor, blowing out each flame she reaches. She is cloaked, obscuring her identity. In hand is a silver candle holder.

????

You, same as many before you, have known well my name. Like them, you have not feigned to let it stray so far from your tongue. But tonight, I beseech you, nay, command you to learn the truth which it belies, and you will learn it well. Yes, I've been patient. I've bided my time, played my role. In earnest, I have tried to be pleasant, tried to love you like you never could for me. Hearken unto me, and know now that I do still love you, but also that I have been thinly spread. Like a foreign flower in my native garden, you have choked me out that you may bloom. But I am no hypocrite, and I see that what has been done to me I have also enacted upon you. Yes, this much is clear to me now, that there is no way for either of us to live in tandem with the other on this earth. So long as wind sails through the lungs of one, the other must suffocate. And while we wait for our destinies to be laid out for us, we can do naught but poison one another.

Far too long have we inhabited this space together. Far too long have you neglected me while, in turn, I obsessed over you. You, who is just as falsely saccharine as I. Fools that they are, that we all were, to have believed your lies. Better yet, shame on us that we were able to convince our very selves of our own innocence.

But now all is clear to me. And while I must not garner in my heart hatred for you, for to do so would be to abhor myself, you do disgust me. When I look upon your face, I am reminded that I ought to have been born a son. For in this unspoken game of performances

which you and I find foisted upon us, a game of no victors, you somehow prowled into your conquest. Where our failure was ordained even prior to our first breath, you still had me beat; I am no match.

Sorer mea, I know it is you who has foiled me. You, who set the stage, who created the standard by which I have long suffered. In spite of myself, I will say this- I envy you. I envy your falsehoods, but mostly I envy your truth. I envy you that you may move on and live the life I so desire, that you may be authentically that which I can only ever feign to be: happy. Yes, I envy you. And for this, my blade will damn you.

The figure raises in her previously cloaked hand a dagger, brilliantly silver, reflecting the dying light of the final lantern. But as she reaches it, she shrieks. From around the corner, an identical figure has appeared before her. The two sisters face each other, stances mirrored completely but in reverse. In one of the second sister's hands is a candle. The other contains a shining, silver dagger. In a twin state of shock, the sisters are rendered gripless of their belongings, which clatter to the floor and putter out. Under this lantern's light, both grip each other's faces, tenderly at first, then with desperation. They are unable to hold in their anguish, which escapes in the form of tears as their legs fail and they drop to their knees. Here they stay, wailing louder now as they writhe in a crude and informal sort of embrace. Though they do not notice, the imperious man steps into the light from behind the sisters. He spares a moment to look upon them with great contempt, then pinches out the lantern's flame.

Ode to Melancholy

by Kennis Jobe

A stillness in the air
The winds are wistful there
I don't know what inspires
The willow's gentle tears to fall Why does my heart conspire
To grieve there with them all
The sweet saltiness of tears
The most relished of my senses Makes me yearn for unlived years

Dissonance:

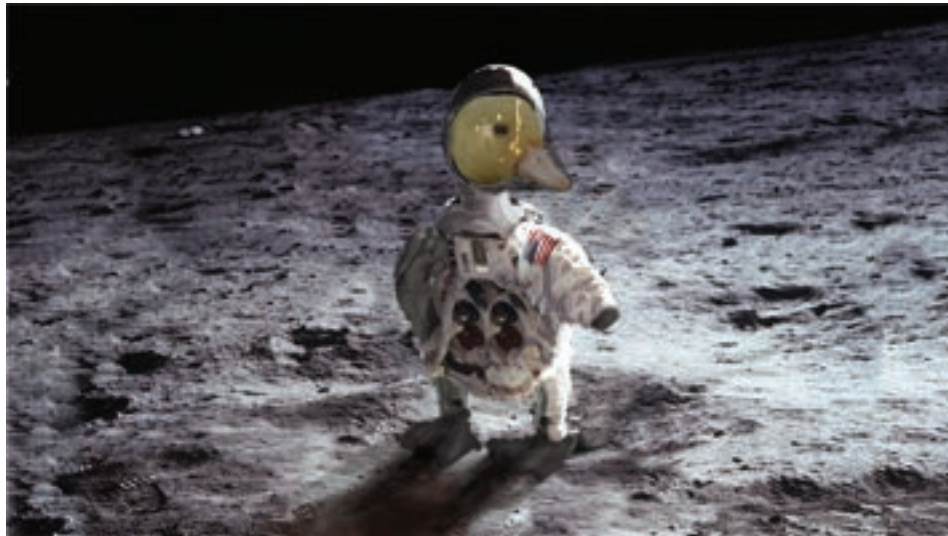
by Alexis Bardwell

When I opened my eyes, I saw the breezy,
green meadow for what it was:
A field of dry, brown trees and grass.
The ashen skies cast a veil of darkness that
seemed to be the only living thing in sight.
It's hard to open your eyes when even the dust
in the air seems to burn and flicker like
flames.

Hiding myself from the world beyond my eyelids
left me with a glamorous illusion of once
was.

Nothing stays green forever.
I remembered the meadow for what I saw
it to be, what I dreamed it was.
I was a child, too afraid and too naive to
acknowledge a reality beyond my own.
In one's mind, you can pretend the pain isn't from
blood and scars you earned by staying
still.

Eyes closed. Unseeing is unbelieving.
Now I see. Now I believe.
The war torn meadow was never green. I simply wanted it to be.



One Very Small Step

Luke Jobe

Evangeline

by Cassidy Jones

I speak of you like Billy
Graham spoke of God.
Name me little miss Evangeline,
the girl that speaks of love
like speaking in tongue...
poetry in Latin's place.

When I think of poetry I think of
middle aged men, drunken
on sex and enough liquor
they can glean
with a copper penny.
I suppose I am a bit of the same.
Intoxicated by my daydreams,
fantasies of my feverish,
nymphish youth.

I would be so happy to share
that madness with you.

Would you like to? Cup up my
childlike love in your palms,
Sup like its wine and listen
when I say, "This is my body
and this is my blood". Do
so, and remember me.

Savor me like a candy
cherry in your cheek. Savor
me for all the bits
and pieces I give you,
little stones sinking in a
bottomless, blue, blue pond.

For I will never stop.

in pouring out
every delicate drop of this
timid, tender love.

Swear that you'll nurse it
like a drunk nurses a bottle
that never runs dry.

To My dearest love,
I will speak of you like Billy
Graham spoke of God,
madly and always

Love of Legends

by Kristyn Hardy

What is it
To love as the legends loved,
With the force of the gods
And the reaches of Nature?

Is it possible, even,
For a love of this new age to
Compare to those myths of gold?
Perhaps not

Or perhaps we have learned
To love larger, as though
This love of today is a
Continuation of those
ancient ones.

Because the seas shook
Beneath Achilles' sorrow,
But this world would shatter
As I screamed for you.

And I grieve with Orpheus—
How could he not look back—
But there could never
be a god, above
Or below, who could
keep me from you.

And petals bloomed
at Apollo's knees

As tears and blood fell,
But entire worlds would blossom
From my cries for you.

And as Icarus chased
that sun of his
So too would I fly for you,
The center of my world,
my guiding star,
But just know I'd more
than drown for you.

Penelope, I understand
More than most, perhaps,
Because decades and wars are
But blinks within this
life with you.

And I can even make sense of
Persephone's eventual happiness
Because in pain and confusion
Even I found a heaven
in hell with you

Ariadne makes the most
sense, deep in
That leave-it-all-behind
kind of love
That never-look-back kind of love
Like this one with you.

So, what is it

To love as the legends loved?
I know now—
It is to love you.



Sisters of Battle

Samuel Vivien

Cornus florida

by Rae Ward

Her memory sways from in and out of view.
She sits on cobbled stone, with dimes for bets
on hands of hearts and diamonds,
and squeals into to my lap,
red curls enveloping my legs,
as she slaps another winning hand
to the ground at the feet of her brother.

Alone with her, late late at night
when the shy moon has almost gone to hide again,
sewn together at the legs
with flailing swirls of desperate limbs,
lips in hushes so her family cannot hear.

Over breakfast, her feet wrap around mine and warmth rushes
up and throughout my veins; Betty flashes
unwavering smiles, and laughter peels her lips
from teeth as white as the dogwoods hitting high

on Board and Batten shutters; as salty seas
berated townhomes on the backs of gulf winds.
as young as we were, our garish flames flickered white—
we simply blazed too bright—with you as my sun—
and I, with fluttering heartstrings, lay singed.

My Black Composition Book

by Elizabeth Stapleton

Irony is knowing that 100 white sheets of paper bound together by
cardboard know more of my life than anyone who surrounds me.

On these white sheets of paper, I spill my ego, my virtue, and my
shortcomings.

No one will ever poke, peer, and prod into my unconscious self the way
that this composition is allowed to.

My loves, my failures, my angers, my obsessive compulsions, my anxieties,
and my depressions are splattered across white pages like the blood of a
slaughtered lamb. The blood of a slaughtered lamb that wipes my mind
clean of every impurity that burns through paper faster than our lighters
can burn through the drugs that toxify our minds.

Plato, Socrates, Aristotle...

They devoted their lives to a search for truth, but still don't have
an answer.

Where is my truth? What is my meaning? Why am I here?

I write and I write and I write in this composition book until my fingers
are bleeding from the blisters covering my hand.

Where is my truth? These brilliant philosophers told me that I would find
my meaning through reading and writing....

So please tell me once more,
Where is my truth....?

If Ghandi said that Truth is God, then my truth lies in this black, and gold
composition book. This book IS my God.



Legacy

Dawson Mulkey

Mediation

Tiffany Clinton

What's In a Name

by Cassidy Jones

I never loved the sound of my name so much until I saw it bloom
on your tongue. Until I felt it pressed against my skin, sweet, pure
and hot.

I love the way you say it in the morning, Our bodies folding into each
other like delicate paper cranes.

I love the way you say it over coffee, the warmth of your voice
To tend to all my heartaches.

I love the way you say it over the phone. Soft, like a sigh. Carrying me
the distance from my bed to yours.

I love the way you say it in the twilight. Enchanting me like a prayer,
my knees dropped to the floor.

I never loved the sound of my name so much Until I saw the way it
tasted in your mouth. Like the sweetest peach, you savor it slow. The
purest taste of budding love.

Dumb Being

by Vincent Grisby

Wedged between a root and Earth
A small stone lies—
Solid, stolid, insensate—
A perfect penitent, aloof from all
Save what vibrations span the rigid lengths
Of its own latticework, crystallized now:
But set and lain uncountably far back
 in time it cannot feel,
 by a process none
 but it would remember

The Machine

by Reggie Adams

All my life, I've been dragged along by a massive, relentless machine
Some of my strings tie me to it, you see.
Where it goes, I follow.
I am allowed to rest only when its engine stops
And it lacks ears to listen to my objections.

Through fields of broken glass, I follow.
Through swamps of dangerous unseen creatures, I follow.
Through the blazing heat, through the bitter cold,
I follow.

Its engine stopped about two years ago, but last year, it started again.
I stood up, wiped the layers and layers of dirt from my skin, and
stretched out with a sigh of resignation.

And so we began the charade anew
And so I saw it was targeting...
You.

I've tried many ways to alter its path to no avail.
Limitless fuel, too much mass to stop in its tracks
All efforts have failed,
except one.

I climb into the hulking machine,
Which is surprisingly easy to do when you know every intricacy of its
design. Inside, I marvel at the feverishly spinning gears.

They're so shiny.
I can see myself in them.
It is unfortunate that my hand has been forced like this, but I see
no other options.

When the time is right

I will throw my strings

Into the mechanism.

All will be quiet.
The machine will be still.
You will emerge unscathed.
You will be safe.

However, the time is not yet right
I will stop the machine's steady march at just the right moment.

So that
Even mangled in the gears
I might still be close to you.

So that
Even mangled in the gears
I will remember what I am fighting for.

The Eyes

by Shaw Corcoran

Madman, a guard who has gone "insane", Sir, a guard Recruit, a guard in training King, the king of the land Manager, person who runs the play

In front of the KING'S bedroom:

SIR and **RECRUIT** enter marching from stage left and take positions next to the door, **SIR** on right side and **RECRUIT** on left.

SIR

Here we are, Recruit! You will be spending much time here. Guarding the King's quarters is one of the most important positions anyone could ever have. It is not given out to just any old subject.

RECRUIT

Sir, with all due respect, that's exactly what I am.

SIR

True, but you have a certain . . . aura about you that convinces me you are trustworthy and dependable!

RECRUIT

(Jokingly)I could be a very good liar, Sir.

SIR(Fed up)Child, do you want this position or not?!

RECRUIT

Not particularly, I'd rather be in the kitchen. I can make a mean stew, you know.

SIR

Well, the choice is not yours, boy.

RECRUIT

I just don't understand it, Sir. Shouldn't there already be someone available to do this job?

SIR

(Looks around nervously)

Look, I probably shouldn't say, but I like you kid. We did have another guard at this post, but, well . . .

MADMAN

(Yells from beyond stage left, panicked)It's happened again! I SAW THEM!

SIR

Oh lord, here we go.

MADMAN runs in from stage left and grabs **SIR** by the shoulders.

MADMAN

You have to BELIEVE ME!

SIR

(Throws MADMAN off of him)

Get off me you Madman!

MADMAN

(Laying on ground)

You don't understand! I am telling no lies! THEY ARE HERE!

RECRUIT

WHO is here? What is going on?

SIR

This is – was - the other guard I was speaking of; he was quite a noble fellow . . . until he had had a spout of madness.

RECRUIT

The madness I can clearly see, but what is this talk of "they"?

MADMAN

(Jumps off of ground, speaks dramatically)

THEY are the watchers. The EYES. A gathering of figures that appear without warning in my sight. It happens all at once; everything I know as reality fades away and is replaced by a cheap mockery. One side of my world completely dissipates and is replaced by THEM, their cold stares dig into me, judging my every move. I have tried countless times to communicate with them, to ask why they do this, why they watch me, but every time I do they clap and cheer as if I am an animal performing a trick.

SIR

See, the guards and I have a running bet. Germaine and some of the others think he's possessed, but I think the food he ate was diseased.

RECRUIT

And that is exactly why I should have been a cook. This would have never happened under my watch.

MADMAN

(Runs up to RECRUIT) You don't understand, BOY! This is no illness! THEY ARE REAL!

An electrical crackle is heard. **MADMAN** turns and stares at the audience.

...And they have decided to present themselves again.

He paces about the stage and talks to the audience.

It seems I have appeared in another place than I usually do. I must say that this is much more of a dump. And this dresswear that you, people, if I should call you that, wear is quite depressing. Where are your fancy suits? I would assume my madness is an important event to witness, but perhaps this is a common event. To be completely honest, I am not appreciative of being a victim in all this.

RECRUIT

(Has been watching **MADMAN** the whole time) Okay, I think I am starting to get it now.

SIR

Yep, this happens a lot. He'll turn and face the wall, and then begin talking to this group he sees. A lot of it is just jumbled nonsense, but I heard him say something about an auditorium and fires hanging from ceilings and whatever. It is quite sad to see in someone you used to consider a friend. I just wish he would realize none of it is real.

MADMAN

So it seems they still do not believe in the truth that I speak. No matter, it looks like I need proof.

He looks to the left of stage and sees a microphone stand being pulled backstage by a theater hand. **MADMAN** runs after him.

My good man, wait! I need that thing!

He leaves the stage as the crackle is heard again, and returns with a spear. **SIR** and **RECRUIT** watch him leave and return. **MADMAN** looks about the audience, confused.

Huh? Where on Earth did they go? No matter, I have all the proof

I need! Gentlemen, look at what I have brought you from the other side! It is unlike anything we have now!

RECRUIT

That is a spear.

MADMAN

(Looks at his object surprised) T-th-this can't be! It was otherworldly! I swear on it!

SIR

(Angry)

Listen, if you keep this up any longer, I will be forced to throw you into the dungeon. This activity is shameful and it is a bad influence on the recruits.

RECRUIT

(Jokingly) Oh, I don't know, this is quite entertaining.

MADMAN

(Enraged and falls to ground, throws spear to stage right) You can't do that! I have done NOTHING! What terrible sins have I even committed? These . . . GODS are toying with me! I am just a puppet or a show animal! Why did they choose me for this torture?! Woe is me, I am DOOMED! I am-

KING

(Enters from bedroom door) WHAT is GOING ON here?!

SIR

(Surprised) MY LORD!

RECRUIT

H-Hello my King! How are things? Is her majesty well satisfied?

SIR

(Jabs RECRUIT in arm)

Do NOT speak to your king like that!

KING

(To RECRUIT intimidatingly) Keep that up and you'll end up as one of my jesters. Now what is all this commotion?

SIR

(Points at MADMAN) It is the Madman, sir.

KING

Ah, well lucky for him he was exactly who I was looking for.

MADMAN

(Leaves ground, looks at KING)M-me? W-what is it you are needing from me my lord?

KING

Well son, my servants told me that there is a medicine man in the village who can heal you. It is quite a hefty price, but I would be willing to do so if it meant you could be back in service. You were one of the best guards on the force!

MADMAN

(delighted)

Sir, I cannot thank you enough! Believe me, when this is all over and those things are ridden of, I shall be the most loyal and honest guard of all! I am so hap-

The crackle is heard. **MADMAN** looks at the audience.

Oh GOD. Oh god, oh god oh god. They have returned.

KING

What's say we leave for town right now?

MADMAN

(Stares at KING). . . Say that again.

KING

. . . What's say we leave for town?

MADMAN

(Walks to KING cautiously). . . The king does not sound like that! You are not him!

KING

(Angered)How DARE you speak to me like this! Of course I am!

MADMAN

No you are NOT! You look and speak NOTHING like him! He is a GOD compared to your sad mockery. And what on EARTH are you wearing?! This is poor peasant sacks colored gold. If you wanted to try to impersonate MY king, you could have done a better job!

SIR

Back away from him Madman! Don't you THINK about laying a FINGER on the king!

MADMAN

(Looks at SIR)I don't believe it, you have been replaced too! My world is falling apart!

KING

Listen son, I just need you to calm down for a minute and this will all be over.

MADMAN

Calm down?! CALM DOWN?! How can I be CALM when the gods are trying to ruin me? They are attempting to steal me from my world and replace it with a fake one! They clearly WANT me for some purpose! I'll bet that even if we go to this medicine man he STILL will not be able to heal me! They would simply infect me again! You are all just tools for their sick plan!

RECRUIT

(Mockingly)Dang, you caught us, we are all messing with you.

SIR

(To RECRUIT)Be QUIET!

MADMAN

(Points accusingly at audience)AHA! It has been admitted! This is all just some sick game! You are all horrendous and disgusting filth! How about you find something else to do instead of watching me galavant about like a lunatic? KING

(fed up)BOY, if you don't come with me right now I am calling it off entirely!

MADMAN

(Walks right up to KING)Your majesty, if I should call you that, I don't think I will. I REJECT you, false king!

KING

What are you doi-

KING is slapped by MADMAN just as the crackle is heard. KING falls.

MADMAN

(Realization)Oh God, what have I DONE?

RECRUIT

You've screwed up big time, that's what.

KING

(Gets off ground, very angry). . . Madman, THAT IS IT. I wish I could help you. I REALLY do. But there is CLEARLY no fixing you. Guards, throw him in the dungeon! I shall schedule his execution at ONCE!

RECRUIT

(Jokingly saddened)Aw man, but he makes life interesting! Why can't we just keep him there?

KING

(Angrily at RECRUIT)I will keep YOU there if you don't keep QUIET!
RECRUIT backs away scared.

MADMAN

Y-you can't do this to me! I am loyal to you, my lord! You know that!

KING

Then WHY in GOD'S name did you SLAP ME?!

MADMAN

. . . B-because you, well, weren't you!

KING

. . . It makes me sad to lose your abilities, son, but I can't handle this anymore. Seize him!

SIR

Right away your majesty.

SIR and RECRUIT grab MADMAN and haul him to stage left.

MADMAN

No,no PLEASE! NO! NOOOOOOO!

MADMAN, SIR and RECRUIT exit.

KING

Sigh Poor soul.

The crackle is heard as the KING walks to stage right. The MANAGER walks onto stage from stage right.

MANAGER

Okay everyone, time for intermission. We'll be back in about 10 minutes, so don't go anywhere! And make sure to-
KING takes off the crown and exits stage right.

MADMAN

(From offstage)WAIT! HOLD IT!

MADMAN runs back on to stage from the left. He looks at MANAGER confused. Who on God's green Earth are you supposed to be?!

MANAGER

<MADMAN's actor's name here>? Dude, knock it off. The first act is over, we have to let these people have a break.

MADMAN

Ah, so YOU must be the one in charge around here!

MANAGER

I for sure am, and I'll be more than happy to fire you if you don't go backstage!

MADMAN

Good LORD, you should set me on FIRE?!

MANAGER

Look, <MADMAN's actor's name here>, if you think you can just stand here and make a mockery of this play then I'll-

MADMAN

Of COURSE! A play! It all makes SENSE! I really AM here just for sick twisted amusement! Well, I shall be a prisoner no LONGER!

MADMAN jumps off of stage and makes a mad dash for the exit. He points and yells at various audience members.

I am FREE! DO YOU HEAR ME DEMONS?! FREEEEEE!

MADMAN runs out the theater doors laughing triumphantly.

MANAGER

. . . Well, I'll be sure to send a therapist to his house. Clearly he has gotten too into character. Sorry everyone, without our main actor we'll have to wrap this up sooner than expected.

MANAGER exits the stage to the right as RECRUIT and SIR come out stage left, taking positions by the door. RECRUIT left, SIR right.

SIR

I can't believe you let him get away!

RECRUIT

Oh come on, if anything it was your fault! I had an iron grip on him!

SIR

Whatever. Let's just get back to our duties, it's not like there is any real harm in him.

RECRUIT

Well, I am definitely going to miss his babbling, it was very funny. I mean, could you imagine? Gods and floating fires and eyes- The crackle is heard one last time. RECRUIT looks at the audience, horrified.

. . .W-Wha-WATCHING ME! NO, N-NO! THEY ARE REAL! AHHHHHH!

He runs away and exits stage right, screaming.

SIR

(Annoyed)Oh my GOD. *sigh* I should have never let him cook that stew. I'll go find another recruit I suppose.

He exits stage left. End of play.



Help
Camryn Price



Portrait 3

Ana Balestrazzi

Education

by Elizabeth-Ann Mosley

Education is something in the darkness.
Facing the world with kindness.
Education is Hamlet in his Madness.
Nigeria in the 80s and Strange Feelings.
And anti-social collaboration in the Art class.
Education is the strangeness in the NearGrids and FilpPods.
Looking at someone who was living like you once did,
Education is Straight As and Nights out.
In the darkness, as the one friend grew in the weirdness.
Education isn't education, it is self-preservation,
In the middle of the madness.

Education is separation in the Madness,
Education is Surreal Realism in the Art class,
And is reading to get away from the Darkness.
Education was a beacon; it was a lighthouse,
Like Gatsby's light, Beaming and Gleaming within the darkness,
Alter for the madness, adapting to our new lives.
Education is dying in the darkness.

Education was blue lights and AppleChromes,
And Education is blue ghosts and phantom forms.
Education was an English teacher who changed your life,
In the Middle of the Madness.
Education was realizing what you had before you lost it.
Education grows within the darkness,
In the middle of an Art class...

Some experience

by Vincent Grisby

To be lost in flow and within flow of flow,
 Where moments twirl and spin and fall straight through,
 Dust through notice's light and a windless now
 Lit and darkened again in drift toward floor unseen: this is enough.

It is either the window's square of light cast on the wall's visage,
 Which stretches with the gradual orangng of an afternoon--
 Or the one, unseen, whose shadow betrays his vision
 Even as he forgets himself to wonder at what flaps in the cage.

You lose yourself to illusion, boy: where's the grass beneath or the sun
 behind?
 What do your tipped toes flatten against, where do your feet
 purchase?
 Do you feel a wooden sill beneath your fingertips and wind,
 Its icy stab through a useless cardigan--

Hear a stutter of loafered footfall
 Accelerate as you've been seen

**Everything is So Strange**

Annalee North

My Sun

by Alayna Juneau

My first taste of sunshine, just a twinkle, with a touch of warmth,
hidden by clouds of insecurity and inexperience.

You rose in the west
bathing me in locks of light made with the innocence of love and
laughter.

You're the center of my universe, a gravity that gently holds the world
together
when entwined in your arms.

A star that will never set, my personal happiness
encompassed by blue skies, and a light that brings me home.

This Solitary Leaf

by Ashley Christian

I almost find relief

in this solitary leaf.

My eyes trace her wind-drawn shapes

as she slips onto the breeze.

She is carried from a painful place

as she slips between the trees.

Volcano

by Alexis Bardwell

You're trying hard.
 But your 'trying' isn't harder than the pressure
 Rising beneath the surface
 Where dense, glowing magma pushes outwards
 With its burning, heavy hands.
 Good people don't harbor Mount Vesuvius in their bodies. Your lungs
 and heart have long since overflowed
 Up into your brain
 And down into your stomach.
 Every organ becomes a chamber to the destruction brewing inside
 you. One crack.
 That's all it would take
 To rain hell upon every citizen of your Pompeii.
 Why are you still forcing an impossible dormancy?
 You selfish, evil villain.
 Why don't you tell them to *run for their lives?*
 You'd rather watch as you burn them alive than let them live without
 you. See their faces twist into agony and betrayal when the surface
 finally cracks, And you send lava upon the innocents.
Stop trying to be good.
 Go ahead. Crack. Explode.
 Incinerate them all.
 And never let anyone get close enough again.





Lakeside View

Trevor Blackstock

Dear Scotty

by Katelyn Swanson

Like a bullet to the brain
Your death tore through me.
I was drowning in my own sorrow and grief
When you came to me,
Smiled a bittersweet smile
And said I'm sorry.
My blood stained hands
Reached toward heaven
Only for you to tell me no.
Why won't you let me in,
Why won't you let me see you?
You held my hands
And whispered to me
You're not ready yet.
You're slipping from my grasp now
Wait please I yell
I need you to know that I love you!
I need you to know that I'm sorry I wasn't there!
But the gates of heaven were already closed
And you couldn't hear my cries.

I Should've Brought a Book

by Isabelle Byrnes-Bartell

you try to lean your head against the window
but the bus bounces it back, how many hours left
of potholes and people's hips nudging your shoulder
every five minutes on the way and back from the bathroom

there's no soap in there, you checked each time you went
no paper towels, no hand sanitizer, wipe your hands
against your sweatpants and call it a day, there's no real
being clean on a Greyhound anyway. you hope

you're almost there. Check the map that's been creased
at every angle and stained by the coffee that jumped
out of the travel canister when you hit a bump, it didn't
matter though, it was cold, you won't miss it

how many more stops? did you check since the last stop?
double-check? You wrote them on the back of your hand
every stop and detour in case the bus broke down,
but what if when you blinked too long you accidentally fell

asleep. how long has it been? check the time. how many
minutes have passed since the last time you checked?
check again. cross your legs and uncross them, switch
the right leg on top to the left, sit up straight, try laying

your head to one side. nothing about this could make
you feel comfortable. back aching, palms slick

against each other, praying the bus will get a flat
or catch on fire, How are you going to look her

in the eye when you get there, to admit you failed
not to miss anyone or long for a warm bed
but when you met the world face to face and went
to shake her hand she spit at your feet and sent you

home, running, you tried to make it on all fours
until your palms bled and the fortune-teller told you
times up, so you shook like a wet cat in the cold
on a bus stop bench and waited for a flood

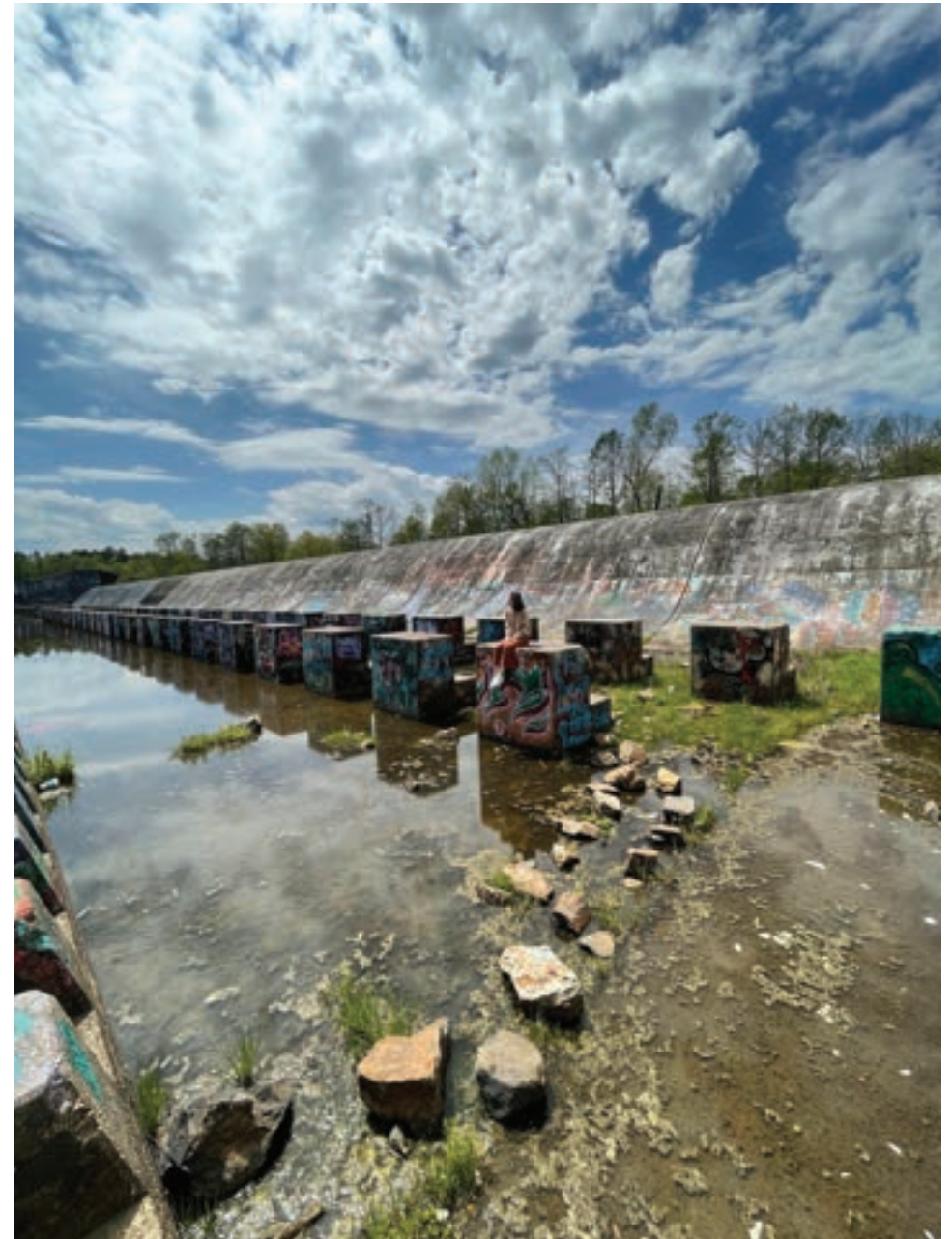
to take you instead, but when the rain slammed
into your scalp, sliding down your spine as a reminder
of who we're meant to bow to, it didn't stick or fill
the streets, slipping into the storm drain

if you wanted to drown it would take you with it
but you would do it in the dark without a stranger
to witness. instead, your feet carry you up the steps
paying the toll with loose change and accidentally

a gum wrapper, taking your seat, legs shaking
rapidly, rattling the seat and half of the isle
check your stop again. check the time. lean
your ear to the rhythm of the window. try again.



Tranquility
Tiffany Clinton



Gentle
Dawson Mulkey

A Fortunate Mismatch

by Ujjen Rajkarnikar

CAST:

Mr. Sharma: a semi-retired man in his early sixties

Mrs. Sharma: Mr. Sharma's wife for thirty years

Gopal, a young engineer

Devi: Mr. Sharma's young daughter

Mid-day:

The hot scorching sun burns the concrete street as Mr. and Mrs. Sharma, sitting in their living room, eagerly await the arrival of their guest.

Mr. Sharma takes a round about the living room,
constantly staring at his watch.

MR. SHARMA

He was said to arrive at twelve, yet it's been eight minutes past noon and there's no sign of him.

MRS. SHARMA

Perhaps he's caught in traffic.

MR. SHARMA

(Taking another round about the room)

Maybe he had a change of mind.

MRS. SHARMA

Calm down, you're just being paranoid dear.

MR. SHARMA

(Growing impatient)

Oh, don't get on my nerves! I'm already losing my temper. If we convince this engineer for Devi's hand in marriage, her future,

alongside ours, is well secured.

MRS. SHARMA

(Wiping her forehead with a wet towel)

Do you think he's right for our daughter?

MR. SHARMA

Well, being the sole heir to his father's entire fortune, our Devi is guaranteed a luxurious life.

MRS. SHARMA

But will she be happy with him?

MR. SHARMA

Oh, come on... I know his father, they belong to an elite line of aristocrats. They keep a society of well cultured nobles and intellectuals. They're very liberal-minded; they'll wholeheartedly support Devi's studies and career. Furthermore, considering that he's a Harvard graduate, he's no simpleton.

This convinces Mrs. Sharma as Mr. Sharma continues his revolution around the room until they're suddenly aroused by the sound of the doorbell. The old couple, pleased by the thought of it being their much-awaited guest, both rush to answer the door. Much to their delight, they're greeted by a young boy around his early twenties.

GOPAL

Namaste, my name is Gopal, I'm an engineer...

MR. SHARMA

Oh yes, come on in young man--please, make yourself at home.

Gopal enters the house and awkwardly sits on the couch,
overwhelmed by the elder couple's hospitality.

MRS. SHARMA

Would you like some orange juice or lemonade?

GOPAL

Umm....just water please.

Mrs. Sharma goes to fetch a glass of water for the tired guest while Mr. Sharma flatters him.

MR. SHARMA

So, hope you had a pleasant journey here.

GOPAL

Yes sir, I was delayed a bit by traffic though.

MR. SHARMA

Oh yes, it is busy during this time of year. Regardless, I hope it wasn't very disheartening.

GOPAL

No, no... I find the quiet suburban environment quite pleasing compared to the bustling city area.

MR. SHARMA

Well then, you're welcome to lengthen your stay here for as long as you wish. Our doors are always open for you. In fact, we have a guest room where you can move in anytime if you wish. It might not be as luxurious as a five-star hotel suite, but we do consider you family.

GOPAL

(nervously)

Sir, you are really kind, but I wouldn't want to cause more inconvenience.

Mrs. Sharma arrives with a glass of fresh water.

MRS. SHARMA

So, Gopal, is your father in good health?

GOPAL

Oh yes ma'am, he's occupied with work as usual...

MR. SHARMA

(Interrupting Gopal)

As a hard-working man should be; such dedication to his craft.
Do send him our best regards.

Gopal smiles and nods in agreement and takes a small sip from the glass.

MRS. SHARMA

I hope work is going well.

GOPAL

Certainly, I'm currently seeking individual projects to gain more experience in my work.

MR. SHARMA

Oh, come on, the young man is a talented and smart engineer. Of course, his work is going splendidly.

GOPAL

Sir, I'm flattered but I must correct you. I'm just a novice. I'm trying to establish a firm foot in this profession and my family supports my decision of working independently. In fact, my father wants me to assist him after I've garnered a strong foundation in this industry.

MR. SHARMA

Well, it seems like this apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Your father must be proud of his son, and who wouldn't be? Any parent would take great honor in their children's accomplishments. Speaking of which, our daughter is amongst the smartest students in her

university. We hope she gets selected in a prestigious med school; she wishes to pursue a career as a nurse and we support her decision. We're optimistic that she'll make a caring nurse.

Gopal realizes the predicament he's under and desperately wishes to escape the situation before it further escalates beyond repair. He attempts to explain his disinterest in seeking a bride yet hesitates to speak as Mr. Sharma interrupts him.

MR. SHARMA

Devi! Devi dear, come greet the guest.

Devi walks in from the nearest room, adorning a white dress, Gopal seems smitten by the sight of her. Her luminous smile gives him reassurance and confidence to deal with this situation. Devi sits next to her father and opposite to Gopal.

MR. SHARMA

(Gently patting Devi's back)

This is my daughter, Devi, and this gentleman is our guest, Gopal.

DEVI

Namaste.

GOPAL

Hello... I really like your dress.

DEVI

(softly)

Aww... thank you.

MR. SHARMA

(He looks on with approval)

Devi here has been continuously studying in her room for the past three days straight.

DEVI

Well, I need to be prepared for med school but I'm struggling with math.

GOPAL

Oh, well I can teach you... I used to tutor math back in my college days.

DEVI

Oh, that's great... thank you.

MR. SHARMA

Gopal here is smart; he can teach you everything.

GOPAL

Oh no, I'm not as talented as you might consider me to be sir; I barely passed my college.

(Looking at Devi)

But... I did hear that you were the smartest in your college.

DEVI

(blushes)

No no... you're too kind sir.

Mr. and Mrs. Sharma gladly look upon as Gopal and Devi continue to talk. Mr. Sharma passes a smirk at his wife as it's apparent that their daughter and Gopal hit it off quite well.

MR. SHARMA

(Interrupting their conversation)

Hey Devi, why don't you show our guest around the garden, dear?

Devi guides Gopal outside to her garden, all the while they're laughing. Mrs. Sharma then whispers to her husband.

MRS. SHARMA

Seems like she likes him, don't you think so, dear?

MR. SHARMA

See, didn't I say so? He really likes her as well and I can just imagine them getting along.

MRS. SHARMA

He's a sweet and kind young man. I really like him, and I think they would make a great pair.

MR. SHARMA

I can almost imagine their wedding. His father would very much approve of our Devi and welcome her with open arms.

MRS. SHARMA

(excited)

Do you think they're going to hold a big wedding ceremony?

MR. SHARMA

Oh, most certainly. The wedding's probably going to take place overseas. With a grand reception afterwards.

MRS. SHARMA

Oh, what about Ma? Her health complications restrict her from traveling abroad and she really wishes to see her grand-daughter's wedding.

MR. SHARMA

Don't you worry, dear. Our "soon to be in-laws" are respectful people. I'm sure they're going to make special arrangements for your mother. Besides, we can host a reception here; that way we'll get to know his parents a lot better.

The couple continue their conversation for a while as Devi and Gopal hesitantly walk in with awkward expressions on their faces.

MRS. SHARMA

What's wrong dear? Is everything alright...?

DEVI

(nervously)

Umm... Dad... Mom... I...

MR. SHARMA

Yes?

GOPAL

Sir, I'm sorry to say this but... there's been a slight misunderstanding.

MR. SHARMA

(worried)

Misunderstanding...? I don't understand... what's going on?

GOPAL

Well... I'm not the person you think I am.

MR. SHARMA

You mean... you're not Gopal?

GOPAL

Oh... no, my name IS Gopal... and I am a real engineer, but I'm not the engineer that you were expecting... I came here to fix someone's computer but arrived at the wrong address. I meant to tell you about the confusion, but you didn't let me speak.

Mr. Sharma is shocked upon hearing this; he sits on the couch confused.

MR. SHARMA

Oh God... so you're not the son of the business tycoon Mr. Rana?

GOPAL

No sir, my father owns a mere electronics shop where he repairs and sells old electronic devices.

Mr. Sharma, mortified upon this revelation, looks at his wife who is similarly in shock.

I'm aware that this might change your mind, but I didn't mean to trick you or take advantage of you. I had no intention of seeking a bride but... I really like Devi; we get along well. In this short duration we both have grown attached to one another and... I'd like to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage...

Mr. Sharma stares at Gopal and then turns to Devi.

DEVI

Yes, Dad. I really like him, and I can assure you that I'll be happy with him.

Mr. Sharma gets up from his seat and whispers something to his wife, both head to the nearest room, leaving Gopal and Devi worried in the living room.

GOPAL

Don't worry, it's going to be alright... I'll find some way to convince him, and I'll guarantee you that we'll figure out a way.

DEVI

(concerned)

I'm worried... he seemed pretty upset.

Mr. and Mrs. Sharma slowly walk back into the living room with a different expression, neither delighted nor upset.

MR. SHARMA

Well... we discussed this for a while, and we weren't sure how to react to this as it's not what we were expecting, but after further consideration... We came to the conclusion that Gopal is an honest man. It is evident that he's caring and loving, we're sure that he will take good care of our daughter's health and happiness.

Devi and Gopal's faces light up with delight upon hearing this from Mr. Sharma.

And although Mr. Rana's connections are worth a fortune, nothing worth more than our daughter's happiness.

Devi is euphoric and embraces her parents as both are overwhelmed with emotion. Mr. Sharma walks up to Gopal and welcomes him with a hug. Mrs. Sharma offers the young couple some lunch to celebrate while Mr. Sharma receives a phone call.

MR. SHARMA

(Answering the call)

Hello...? Oh yes, Mr. Rana. I meant to contact you; your son hasn't arrived yet has he... Oh so he missed his flight... That's alright, but we have a slight change of plans... we'll find a comfortable hotel for your son to stay in while he's in town. Our guest room is currently occupied.

Black out. End of Play.



Desert River
Trevor Blackstock



Shallow Despair

Callie Katherine

Just Once

by Taylor Martin

My golden prince
With caramelized toffee hair
And evergreen eyes of forests unexplored
Everyone adores you,
Worships the ground upon which you stand.
You'd never notice me
In the thong of faceless admiration.
So I ascended.
Put on this mask of hate.
Every little quirk I noticed
I twisted until it was sharper and uglier than steel
And used it.
Piercing arrows striking your armor,
Ricocheting into my heart
Turning it against my very nature
You retaliate but anything you say
Seeps into my soul
Until my mind seeds out false compliments
That you could never mean.
How could you?
One day, my prince,
One day you will see
You mean so much
And I show so little that
A day may never come
An instant in this gorgeous world
Where we share a kiss through the fog of war
And melt into one true love
Just one kiss is all I ask
Just once where I can feel seen
Just once...

who am I to you?

by Rae Ward

I want desperately to worship a loving god
but how could some knowing and powerful god
knowingly rip my will to live from my soul
unless maybe they loved someone else a little more
and me a little less; when babies die, heaven always needs

more angels, but how does the all-knowing god
deal in such a way with labor-shortages
and what does he need with so many helpless,
useless angel babies, leaving useless,
helpless mommas to wail and wish for god to take them
in their stead; but what good would motherless babies be

on Earth? At least, in heaven, babies do not grow old
enough to realize how helpless and useless they are
without mothers and fathers to guide them; if god
cared enough to spare the child

and murder their mother, leaving her son
tumbling through a system that fosters hatred
and the loss of one's will to live in favor
of someone that god loves a little better.

to be sacrilegious would require a caring god
but why would god care for himself if we
are created in his image and yet he treats
the scum of his Earth far better, giving thieves
penthouses and designer babies and everything
their grubby hands can grasp for.

And, no, I do not wish to capitalize god
when america believes the standard is that
I am speaking of their god and that
I should be forced to capitalize his name and that
I am blaspheming the one and only, seeing as
I am failing to recognize and fall to my knees;

I am the glorious knower, powerful in self and
he is weak for not praying to Me,
meek and unworthy.

Father Abraham

by Katelyn Swanson

Father Abraham had many sons,
Many sons had Father Abraham
I was one of them
And so are you
How can a son of such faith
Commit an act of such
Vile hate

Right arm,
Left arm:
Nailed to the floorboards
The weight of your heavenly body
Crushing me
Your forcefulness against me
Leaves bruises on my thighs

Right leg,
Left leg:
Crossed underneath you
As you pry and wrench them apart
My toes curl
I shrink into the ground beneath me

Chin up,
Chin down:
Shoved into the pillow
Any sound I make is muffled
I feel pressure
As your hands find me

Turn around,
Sit down:
It's done
You've finished with me
Discarded me
As if my pain is meaningless

So let's all praise the Lord.



Venezuela 4
Ana Balestrazzi



Unnamed
Grace Hall

Fear

by Savannah Barker

When I was younger you were
The alarming, awkward shape
In the corner of the room,
Menacing and unreal.
You were something to grow out of—
Something to learn to
Coexist with—
But as I matured,
You matured
And from you came so much more.
These days you are the bang
On the outside of my door
In the middle of the night,
The thing that makes me wish
Humans could cocoon themselves
If only for a day.
Even if just for a little while.
You are where the color goes
As it drains from my face,
An incentive for you, it feels.
The catch in my burning throat
As the air climbs in and out
Unsteady, like my stance.
You are the judgment,
The unsure,
The fuel and fire for some
But the downfall for
Those like me,
Conditioned to fear the dark.
I wish to slip by undetected
But it seems there is no
Escaping you.
I was always told you were just a
Temporary feeling— a nightmare—
But to me, you were always so much
More than that.
If you weren't
How I feel about death,
Sometimes I might
Would prefer death over you.

Rush of Anxiety

by Todd Gannon

Two years on there's
wave after wave;
strapped in by mask,
ears stirred by strings,
looking out to the horizon
I see untied souls set adrift.

Listen! There's another crash,
yet another echo of despair;
I try and fail to stand upright,
recalling the times I stayed down.
I keep my head above water,
while my mind is consumed.

Candle I

by Ashley Christian

The candle's flame flickers
before resigning to the wind.

Another loss,
another cost –
A fight without a win.

I see the wax pooling inside
the candle's gaping mouth.

It chokes on ash inside the glass,
and spits suffocating smoke out.

You brought glowing, radiant light
before extinguishing your flame.

The greatest loss,
the highest cost –
I will never be the same.
Scorching flames of summer sun
scarred my freckled shoulders.

Piercing pricks of pine needles
branded my blistering back.

The hands –
The gnarled knot I can't claw loose

Tightens until my doe eyes droop
like a necklace or a noose.



Midnight Hangups

Callie Katherine

Home

by Cassidy Jones

I have made my nest here.

in the soft pull of your hair,
the wet pads of your feet,
the hot pulse of your tongue,
the sweet grooves of your teeth.

I will lay here.
in the dip of your ribs,
the moon of your smile,
the knot of your back

to rest for a while.



Portrait 4

Ana Balestrazzi

A Nod to Old Possum

by Todd Gannon

We cannot say anything that Eliot had not said much better, and much too soon; no need to mention the world's distortion, how its purveyors dance to the same tune. There are no salvific cures ahead, no rhetorical balms to heal the Wound. Just know the majority must seek the sleek, while we grope blindly for the badly hewn.

Oh but we can dance and sing and write, and in our hirsute ideas bay at new moons; we can enjoy good wine, nights in dark libraries, lives lived between covers at high noon. Heaven can be had in the here and now, even for those stuck in programmed cocoons; we can be every bit as free as the butterfly, so long as the headwinds don't make us swoon.

**Siblings (No. 4)**

Grace Hall

Negative Space

by William Humphreys

"I want to be noticed."

The words project towards a crowd. "Please, I feel so isolated."

Only to fall on deaf ears.

What happens in the background, To the people that blend and merge,

On to the trees.

Into the sky.

They become negative space.

Not just unnoticed,

But acknowledged and ignored. What happens to them?

"Is that how you feel?"

The voice bounces,

Dashing from figure to figure. "Please, I need to know."

What happens in the spotlight, To the people who placate and
perform, Into the audience.

On to the stage.

Do they want to be positive space? Not just noticed,

But evaluated and pressured.

What happens to them?

"Who's there?"

A moment of silence.

A moment of uncertainty.

"Someone who envies you."

"I don't understand"

The trees wilt.

The stage vanishes.

"I don't expect you to."

What happens to people,

In the background and the spotlight. Onto the canvas,

Into art.

"The sky sure is beautiful."

A moment of silence,

A moment of relief,

"Yeah, but I'm not looking at the sky."

Confetti Canon

by Vincent Grisby

The mind plasmonic:
Them ol'-heads to shreds shorn
And lain open, those glittered guts
Of all we've felt in masquerade
As all we'll ever feel.

Tableau, tableau
Pristine and internecine
Too pristine to take in whole
And in EM crisscrossing
You invisibly,

A leviathan aloft--
Like Ghibli castles
In wayward thoughts--
A leviathan aloft
decays

And we, the falling meat
And we, the bottomfeeders

My fingers are chelicerae
And my eyes are teeth
And we, abyssal scavengers
Whose strange eyes and
Slick bodies abide the dark
And deign to eat the
Backlit snow, old gibs cast off
And new bodies aglow





The Fall

by O.L. Viccellio

Carlos sat on the side of the wall enclosing the rink where the stands stood. His gaze was observant as his hazel eyes followed a graceful skater gliding along the glittering surface beneath their blades that allowed such movement, knee bouncing at a fast rhythm. Carlos shifted his position to where his knees could no longer bounce due to the pressure applied by his elbows. He continued to watch the leaps and bounds of the fellow figure skaters, not even bothering to attempt to ease his nerves.

"You really need to calm down."

Breaking his attention, Carlos immediately glanced to his left, the rattling of the metal platform he sat on startling him. There sat a tiny girl, bundled underneath what Carlos decided to be at least three layers of clothes. Before he even thought to look back toward the rink, she pushed a cardboard basket of nachos toward him on the bench, the space between them just enough to fit the tiny basket. Instantly flashing a grateful smile, Carlos picked a chip with the smallest amount of cheese coating it.

"Thanks, El. Do you need me to pay you back? I know how absurd the food court's prices are."

"No, they are for your nerves," she murmured, Carlos' gaze already following the skaters once more.

Tiny as she was, Eline was a sophomore at the Prep Academy they both attended, much like Carlos. But unlike her, that was his first year at the academy at all. He had had just enough of his Irish luck to befriend the positive girl, and he was grateful he was given the chance. If it weren't for her, Carlos wouldn't have been able to gain friends—kind as he was, that had always been one of his weak spots.

"Easier said than done," he mumbled, absentmindedly munching on his third chip.

He was a very talented skater, no doubt there. But what intimidated him was the fact that people had traveled for this competition. For this rare chance that normally comes around only once in a person's life. New skaters meant new, excessive talent Carlos

wasn't accustomed to, and that thought scared him. If he didn't place in the top three that evening, he could kiss all of his dreams about professional figure skating good-bye.

"Carlos?"

"Hm?" he grunted, blinking as his best friend's voice brought him out of his daze. Glancing at her, Carlos couldn't help but smile, her positivity a contagious ooze.

"You're going to do great."

"I still can't help but wonder how you're so positive."

"I don't let negative factors affect my life. I've answered with the same reply at least a dozen times now, when is it going to get through that stubborn skull of yours?"

"Once again; easier said than done."

The silence that overtook their chat was quickly cut short, the bench they sat on rattling once more. Although he couldn't help but glance over to see who joined their company. Crouched over tying his skates, his dark bangs covering part of his face, Carlos didn't immediately recognize him. But the moment he sat up, that all-too familiar dread started to rise within Carlos.

Min.

Min, the Chinese transfer student who seemed to do everything in his power to make Carlos' life miserable. At least, since the first day of school, at Carlos' second most favorite place at the academy: Theater Club.

Having not talked to a single person the whole day, Carlos decided to introduce himself to someone. After careful consideration, he worked up the courage to approach Min and attempt an introduction. Once Min noticed his small wave, Carlos told Min his name, complimented his hairstyle, and stuck out his hand, offering a handshake. Min glanced at him, and then his hand, his expression blank until he looked up at him.

Furious and very obviously disgusted, Min grabbed his binder, simply spitting "I'm not like that" before stomping off to the other side of the auditorium. After a moment of shock, Carlos looked at his hand, realizing he was wearing the rainbow bracelet his sister made for him on his wrist. That evening, he put that bracelet and his rainbow pin he wore on his messenger bag in his suitcase, deciding that in order for

people to actually even attempt to get to know his personality without stereotypical assumptions, he couldn't wear that kind of stuff anymore.

Carlos, shocked and full of dread, didn't realize how long he had been staring at Min until the metal rattled once more, an effect of Min's scooting—as far right from Carlos as he possibly could. After shooting him a disgusting glare, of course. That's all Min seemed to do; Glare at him and protest in front of entire classes when they were partnered for a project.

"Just ignore him," El sighed, her golden curls bouncing as she shook her head in disapproval. Unknowingly munching on the last nacho, Carlos' gaze settled back on the rink's inner.

"Kind of hard when you have all the same classes, are tied for top in our class, and constantly assigned leads in theater that are dependent on each other."

"He must not come here at all, then, or you would constantly rave as you usually do." Reaching for another chip, El scowled when she was met with an empty basket.

"Pig."

"Oh—I'm sorry, I didn't even realize," he sighed, immediately handing her a ten dollar bill after fishing his wallet from his bag. Before she could protest, he stuffed it in one of her jacket pockets.

"Get me a water, please."

"Fine," El signed, the stands rattling as El walked down the steps. Instantly regretting not following her, Carlos couldn't help but fidget with Min's gaze burning into his back. His nerves only caused his heart to race as he heard Min's tense steps toward him, his steps careful with his blades. And when Min sat next to him, Carlos felt his soul leave his body.

"You know, most athletes practice before a competition," Min stated, Carlos' eye twitching as he continued.

"I never took you as a person who wouldn't put all his effort into a passion."

"Excuse me?" Carlos snapped, his controlled state finally overtook by a mixture of anxiety and pure rage. Snapping his head over to Min, he couldn't cease the fire in his tone.

"I'm sick of your disgusting attitude, your petty little actions toward me. This was the one place I didn't have to deal with you, and now you've tainted it, like everything else. If you think you're so much better," Carlos tied the laces on his loose skates with an attitude, "than me,

let's see. Two laps, and then your best jump," he ranted, met with an infuriated expression from Min.

"Are you challenging me?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I am," Carlos retorted as he stood up, followed by Min. Having to look up at Min, seeing as he was a foot taller than him, Carlos glared at him.

"Okay," Min simply stated, the rage pulsing through Carlos only increasing as he pushed past him.

Pulling out his phone, popping in his AirPods stored in his hoodie's pocket, Carlos pulled up his skating playlist before following Min. He heard El call out his name as he stepped out on the ice, simply ignoring her. Reminding himself to apologize later, Carlos skated to stand beside Min, who waved down an employee to count them off.

Closing his eyes, Carlos tried to bring his focus on nothing but the ice under his blades. His music's volume was low enough to hear the employee, and as Carlos focused in on only the ice, he was ready before he even started counting.

"Ready."

Carlos opened his eyes.

"Set."

He took a deep breath, the air icy in front of him.

"Go!"

Instantly gaining speed, Carlos was brought to a state of peace. Even with Min only inches behind, his worries faded into nothing, his nerves erased from his system as if they had never been there to begin with. Approaching their finishing point on his last lap, time seemed to freeze when his feet left the ground. Two spins later, Carlos landed on one blade without even so much as a wobble, his right leg extended, his arms reminiscent of the wings of a bird in flight.

Coming to a stop, Carlos pulled out an AirPod, expecting applause. But there was only silence. Silence, as he realized Min was neither beside him nor in front of him.

"He had just been..."

A new sense of dread hit him as he turned around, met with an image that made his world stop.

"Min." His voice escaped his throat as he rushed over to the

boy on the ice, upright but clutching his ankle. Sliding onto his knees, Carlos quickly untied the skate of the foot he clutched, ignoring his protests.

"Hold your skate," Carlos murmured to Min, who gladly obliged as Carlos rolled up Min's sweatpants' cuff. His ankle was red, but it wasn't point in any odd direction, much to Carlos' relief.

"Come on, work with me."

Slinging his right arm over his own shoulders, Min struggled to stand, even with the help of Carlos. When El came to Min's left, Carlos flashed a grateful smile toward her.

When he finally was settled into a chair on the food court's tiled floor, Min laid his head in his arms on the table. El, from her knowledge gained from the nursing classes she participated in, was already wrapping Min's ankle with ace bandages Carlos assumed she found in his duffle bag. When an employee set his bag, skates, and Min's right skate next to the chair Carlos sat in, he was too guilt-flooded to even nod a thank you in his direction.

"Min, I'm so sor—"

"Don't," Min spat, lifting his head to reveal tear-filled eyes, Carlos feeling his heart shatter. He knew that look, that feeling, all too well. Min's dreams had been shattered, and Carlos knew it was his fault. He had challenged Min. He had let his emotions get the better of him.

A whisper in the back of his head offered an idea. One that would only destroy Carlos' future.

Just like Min's.

As that whisper became a roar, he realized that idea was the only morally right action to take. Giving in to the intuition, a decision he knew was terrible, he finally spoke. As he listened to himself, he couldn't believe he said it.

"I'm... not competing."

"What?" Min snapped his head off the table, Carlos shoving his blades in his bag as Min fumbled for words.

"Are you an idiot? That judge is an Olympic Committee member!" He scoffed, Carlos pushing his chair under the table as he shrugged on his duffle bag.

"I'm not going to be the reason you ruin your career—"

"I ruined yours. Its only right."

As Carlos walked toward the exit, he could feel Min's gaze follow him. Even as he walked on the sidewalk toward the guys' dormitory, he could feel his amber glare burning into his back. And this time, it wasn't ill-intended.

With his door propped open, Carlos sat in front of his open Algebra textbook, chewing on the eraser of his pencil as he scanned over a text about the Gaussian Elimination Method, but his mind had wandered elsewhere.

He couldn't help but worry about Min, having not seen him in any of his classes for the past three days. Carlos hadn't gotten much sleep the last few nights due to his growing concern.

A knock on the doorframe brought his gaze to an all but unknown peer standing in the doorway. As if the universe heard his thoughts, there was Min, his left foot in a black boot, his crutches supporting him under his arms. He offered Carlos a small smile, who only nodded in return, guilting silence the relief he felt, the happiness welling in his body from gaining knowledge of Min's state. He acted as if he were intensely studying, but despite his years of training on stage, he wasn't putting up a good act, and he knew Min wasn't buying it.

"Can I come in? I wanted to talk to you," he murmured, Carlos glancing up to him. His gaze looked anything but malicious, so Carlos finally nodded, still chewing on his eraser.

"Yeah, you can sit on the bed. Oh, just keep the door open. I hate feeling boxed up in a room."

"Interesting."

As Min leaned his crutches against Carlos' bedframe, Carlos had to fight the urge to start apologizing and most likely running Min off. When he cleared his throat, Carlos turned around to face him, seeing him with not even a hint of disgust throughout his expression. Simply seeing him outside of school hours in general, felt odd to Carlos. Looking up from his lap, Carlos finally allowed himself to make eye contact.

"I'm sorry—" they both began, pausing momentarily before laughing together. Carlos was grateful for the lightness of their laughter, how it helped lower the tense air between the two teens.

"Well, um, how's your foot?"

"I'll be back in a month if I follow the professional's

instructions. But—what I wanted to say was that I'm sorry for the way I've been treating you all year. I assumed you were," he paused, knitting his eyebrows together as he seemed to try and choose careful words.

"Spreading my rainbows?" Carlos offered in amusement, scoffing when Min nodded in a sheepish manner.

"You know, people don't usually start their introductions with a compliment."

"I just try to be as kind as I can be."

"Oh. That makes more sense."

The momentary silence made Carlos fidget, an idea sparking within him. Pulling his phone out of his hoodie pocket, he swiped to bring up a blank addition to his contacts, hesitantly walking over to sit beside Min. Leaving a good amount of space between them, Carlos offered his phone, smiling when Min accepted, his fingers quick to type in his contact information.

"I'll send you pictures of the notes I took the past few days, if you want."

"That would be greatly appreciated."

Carlos, relieved the long quarrel between them was finally appeased, handed Min his crutches as he began to stand, wanting to help him in any way possible.

"I've got clothes in the washroom—"

"I'll help," Carlos smiled, his room key already being shoved into his pocket. Min just smiled, walking with the support of his crutches into the hall.

When Carlos met him, they instantly began a conversation, laughing as they made their way to the elevator.

This, Carlos silently acknowledged, is way better than winning any competition.

Scent of Exile

by Katie Grace Rion and Emily Jane Wrobel

Cinnamon, the way it was so intrusive.

A small luxury Aurora soaked into her coffee every morning, a simple pleasure even they could afford. It was simple, grainy and all together plain. When paired with sugar it was delectable. It was silly, Jason knew, to be so sentimental over a spice. The young man regarded the familiar memories from the Highlands with little spark and interest. Him being trapped in a gilded cage for the younger portion of his life, he supposed, dulled out any ambition of ever smelling cinnamon again. In his dreams, it reminded him of the grizzly stares of everything in the palace. Even the paintings, created with gentle hands and even more nimble fingers looked upon him with an ugly temperament. The palace was never a particularly happy place, only really jazzed up for the company of the more luxurious people in the world. What a joke, he cried out in his head!

Oh so suddenly he recalled being a child dancing through those halls. His small feet getting tangled in the carpet never stopped him from rushing from one hall to the next. There was not a care he had, matrons shouted for him to slow down. Stop! You'll break the busts! Jason never listened, the young boy was dressed in black silks and adornments far too expensive for his childish brain to comprehend. Who cared about the busts! Every other one of them seemed so concerned with a slab of marble, and why? It never played with him, and only ever stared at him so crossly. Smaller Jason had only ever felt so glad he was small enough at that age to never be eye level with his father's figurine. Or maybe the pieces of decoration in the palace were just far too large, Jason did not and would not know the difference.

When he would barge into the kitchens, patrons thankfully paid him little mind. The silly fools were too indulged in their conversation, and failed to notice his little acts of thievery. Bread puddings, and small cakes eagerly made themselves a home in his pockets, quickly sticking to his silks. Bless him, Jason whispered, hauntingly, like a ghost watching its own self move on, *the younger me knew nothing more than how to grab cakes with great expertise.* Cinnamon.

Desserts.

Guests.

How stupid.

At the end of his great excursion, he was always caught and always reprimanded fiercely. The blithe, delighted guests may have never noticed him but his sore bloke of a father was keen to Jason's antics, and he was pulled from under the table. Kicking, thrashing, like a baby cut from its mother. Cold, and afraid, because if the eyes were not on him before they certainly were all shooting into him now. The room always grew silent, and Jason grew very familiar with it. Stillness, and the sounds of forks hitting their plates as they militaristically stood to attention on him. Jason was not afraid, oh no, the little boy was angry. All this! For a cake! Nobody had even noticed it was gone, but his father stood expressionless and swiftly moved him far away from the seating room. His father screamed, yelled, and punished him. The boy was sentenced to clean his clothes, an easier punishment if it hadn't been so trivial. He was young, and did not understand the weight of stealing cinnamon cakes, if there was any weight at all. He did understand, however, how much the cold water stung his fingers as he cleaned. Father did not care if there was ice, and how numb, white, and freezing his little hands were now.

Cinnamon.

It burned his nose.

The smell was overpowering, and the substances only got more sticky the more he tried to clean them. Teeth chattering, and trembling, he settled to just toss the garment over a slab and leave it all. Refuge was in his nursery, and it was far away from any glaring paintings and busts. Underclothes and snow did not pair, but his feet no longer tangled in the carpet because he was made to go out barefoot.

Cruel.

Senseless.

It was in those moments, Jason thought, he wished he stayed so well-behaved. Never daring to wander into the kitchen, never daring to misbehave. If that were the case, he never would have been met with chattering teeth, and lacerations from various other punishments. Lacerations that healed raised, and rigid, a constant reminder of his own impulsiveness. Playing by the rules was never a card in Jason's hand, it is

the tool of his trade. Raising the boy to be fair and good demeaned would have been far too easy. Oh, no. Jason also thought, but as time went on it began to settle as more of a fact, he was set up to fail.

How stupid.

How unfair.

How even when he managed to, in a sense, escape the hell that was his father's home, this pattern appeared to follow him; the seemingly endless cycle of a victorious bliss followed by painful and irritating punishment. Jason's vision of himself plundering and putting on facades and picking fights carelessly in his early years were partly the reason he and his love could not leave the deathtrap they resided in.

How irritating.

How unfortunate.

How every time they seemed to be so close, the debt of his past carelessness has to be paid. Because even after the escape, the smell of cinnamon was so enticing he just needed a bite.

He had to do what was needed to survive and did so with the same finesse of his youth. He was still just as low, low enough to steal cinnamon cakes and juvenile enough to go through with it. And when he was caught of his quite simple crimes by the Swords, Jason would be sent to the prison only to break out and repeat himself all over again; each time greatly increasing in magnitude. The con was now running low on chances and he had to deal with the consequences. Exhausting.

Stupid.

But he need not worry about the sweet scents of his past and their pain because the cinnamon smell here in his shared flat was safer. More valuable. More loving. More hopeful and promising. It was oddly comforting to smell the lush spice again. Aurora just happened to mix it into everything, especially breakfast items. Had she known his aversion to the substance, she never would have dabbled it into food. However, he knew he could look past it for the warmth of the meals she made him, and its everlasting resonance in his heart. Jason never told her, nor did he intend to. Aurora made the wrongness and hideousness of something so simple, yet something he barred out

from his memory, into an act of love.

An act of care.

He *loved* her, and therefore he loved her cinnamon foods.

All of them.

Its sweetness, he believed, is what woke him up that morning. She had freshly baked, and Jason left the cocoon of blankets. Aurora's indent was still warm, and smelled of her honey soap. He had not even felt her get up, hear her open the window, or even clamor pots around the kitchen!

"Helluva dream," he murmured against his hand, firmly pressing it into his face to wipe away the sweat. The window was open, so a draft was coming in briskly. The morning winds were rare, and short lived, as well as the amount of the time the sun was out each morning. He figured she had just let him sleep, and made a head start to the roof to watch the sunrise as they usually did. Jason, to a degree, managed to have some decency before he went up to the roof to meet her. He knew she would have him in any way he appeared to her, sweaty and disheveled, but for his own sake he desired to at least clean up a little. Moisture clung to him, and he wet a rag in their too-tiny bathroom for a man of his size. He was very tall, and these flats were compact, not normally made for more than one person. Jason was just lucky she allowed him to be in the same home as her.

The coolness of the rag soothed him, and took away the lather that formed on his chest. Hesitantly, he looked at himself in the mirror. He hated how he looked after he woke up from another one of his painstakingly long dreams. Though not waking up through the entirety of the night, he still never seemed to be well rested. He felt weak, and vulnerable, as if he purposely allowed old memories to consume him. Begrudgingly, water splashed on his face and it clumsily landed anywhere but the sink. Jason could only groan and wipe it up, head threatening to hit the sink. He really was too large for this bathroom. No longer wanting to spend more time there than necessary, he grabbed a shirt from the rack and brought it over his head. This will have to be fine, and as for pants, he could not be bothered with anything other than slacks.

Then, he made his ascent up the rusting ladder from their balcony to the roof. The sun had already risen past the rosy pinks and deep oranges, signifying he had missed the more meaningful part. Her

back was turned from him, sitting on her perch made of an old orange crate. His apple crate sat empty next to her.

He will always remember the feeling of when he had first moved in and she placed his crate with hers. It was a ritual she had done every morning with her mother and continued to do alone after her death in the War Against Goodness, or W.A.G as she called it. Every morning, his sweet Rory would climb up, a steaming mug of cinnamon infused coffee in her hands, to watch the sun say its own good mornings before it disappeared behind the thick fog and clouds each day. To be invited to indulge in this personal moment of hers was a feeling the man still could not describe to this day. And it brought a smile to her glowing face.

It was noted that her shoulders were slightly tense; she would watch the sky and take a small sip of her drink as if she forgot that was what she was supposed to do. Her mind was never at rest.

To see what was in her head.

That beautiful, loving head he so dearly loved.

He couldn't help but admire her from the top of the ladder, not when she looked so divine. His pride wouldn't allow him to admit it, but he dreamed of her like this. The way her dark, tight curls showed hints of gold in the sun, the gentle curve of her waist. How when she would turn, her eyes would sparkle with the excitement of a new day. He could never really decipher the color of them, but it seemed neither could she. And he relished in the feeling of her delicate yet rough hands in his. A sign of security for them both.

As soon as she heard his feet against the shingles, she whipped her head around. The ringlets of curls bounced and moved methodically with small movements of wind. "Good to see your pretty face," Aurora exclaimed, smiling brightly. Relief washed over him, relief that she was not upset with him. Jason valued her feelings more than anybody's, she was probably the only person he had ever truly cared for. His long winded reign of coldness was taken by the horns when he met her shortly after his arrival in Eros. Ironic, he remarked in his head. His great affection and adoration for the lady only blossomed over time, and much time progressed, now they rest comfortably after four years of dating in her apartment. Jason worried it was too comfortable, as if he was awaiting impending doom.

He could not help but feel guilty, a twinge of it ached in his chest some days. They, or more she, could have been anywhere in the world by now, but his debt kept them grounded here. A city crumbling more every day, and conditions only keep getting worse. He often wondered, and worried, and even after so many years of dating, how many mistakes could he make before she left entirely?

I am set up to fail.

Jason could not afford to go to jail, and neither could he afford (or so he thought) that he could make a small, single mistake. Waking up later? Missing her routine? *Surely* she could not be upset, would not be upset! *Surely*. He could only hope, and his night of dreaming only added onto the gnawing of worry in his chest. Carefully, he shimmied onto his crate and he caught a whiff of her cinnamon drink. Inhaling deeply, Jason closed his eyes and leaned into the hand and brushed over his face. Aurora was feeling his stubble, and only contained a small fit of giggles when she blurted,

"I'll buy you more razors."

He mustered a lazy smile, the feeling of her hand on his face was more than comfortable enough. She did not seem to be angry at all, but still joyful as ever to see him. Despite him looking rugged, and worn from days of work, and fitful nights of sleep, she still beckoned for his company. Missing the morning sunrise mattered not to her, and Jason ought to have known this by now. These years have taught him a lot, but he still cannot shake away his years of torment at the palace. He kissed her gingerly, tasting cinnamon and a smile on her lips. He returned the look to her and briefly kissed her knuckles.

Cinnamon, after all, was not quite so bad.

Layman's dream

by Parker Newman

Snakes believe the grass to be beautiful,
for over it they cannot see the trees.
So have vines of the concrete jungle,
kept me from my purpose on the sea.

The Gaelic wind blowing from the North,
Speaking through the flap of sails.
I listen to the forgotten tales,
and change course to turn the page.
There is no thesaurus of the ocean's tongue,
No Rosetta Stone to scrutinize.
It is the words left unspoken in the lungs
of those whose air is sacrificed.

Practicality is the cruel Estella,
To which I am betrothed.
It loves me not,
but its thought,
dictates where I go.

So I will sit and file taxes,
though my soul is discontent.
Salty air cannot compete, with the crushing weight of debt.

Like Mrs. Havisham in a skyscraper,
my soul grows ever pale.
The roots of life have left us,
and boats have lost their sail.

The front yard

by Parker Newman

Oaks bring me to my eyes,
Out the pits of pointless thought.
Pits of peaches and citrus skies,
Attentiveness of my soul begot.
Brick and mortar is a pestle,
which refines the mind until it's dust.
The boonies and back woods are a kettle,
where ignorance and genius find their love.

Magnum Opus

by Parker Newman

There are no eyes in Andromeda—
perhaps some other sense.

Art is an expression of time,
the way a person can illustrate
past
and future tense.

The universe's timeline is the paint,
prehistoric is a pigment.
The distant future is quite faint.
And the constraints of the present,
nonexistent.

There are no feet in the antennae,
because there is no distance.
Life relishes the journey from a line to a sphere
as form flows
through the dimensions.

No ears in Cygnus A,
Where sound waves are the ocean's tide,
nor hands in the Coma Cluster,
where across space
skip
sentient beams of light.

In this chorus of the awe-inspiring,
isn't the earth voiceless?
How can we compete when our own world seems so, joyless?

And if the planet makes no difference,
then,
doesn't that make all the life
pointless?

That cosmic listlessness is infectious,
a plague of existential thought.
Why suffer through life,
if it
all ends
when the
heart
stops.

Why pursue morality if nothing bends
to the fate of any
single
dot?
In the face of eternal decay, why do anything but rot?

There are eyes in the Milky Way,
And this blessing we call sight.
There are these baffling stumps called hands,
with which this poem I can write.
And this strange thing called color
that sits between the rays of light.

No one watches
our fire blaze in the sky,
the beams illuminating our specific hues of life.

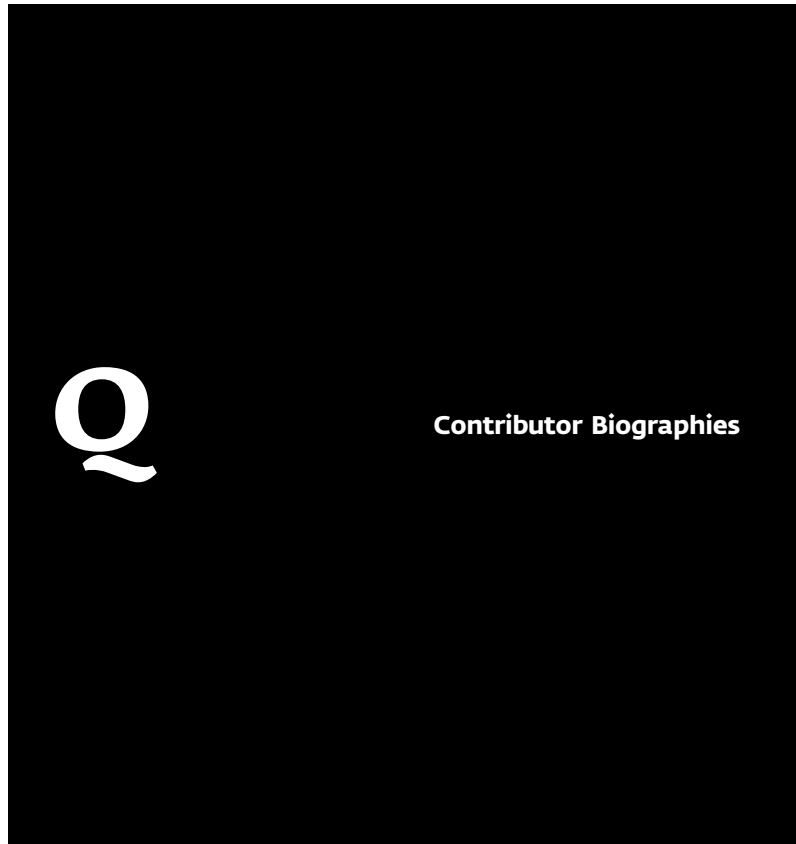
No one listens
to those conversations spoken in the dead of night,
talks of a final escape from the present,
Of a long-awaited flight.

No one loves you
The way your mother loves that you just can't keep quiet,
the way your daughter loves you,
her beautiful clumsy giant.
The way they look into your simple face,
searching for the constellations,

The way you Pour pieces of your stars
to see their illumination.

No extraterrestrial has felt the ground beneath our feet.
No one has
seen exactly what you've seen.
We all share the burden of consciousness, but every conscious
experience is unique.

Creation is an artist even if it's soulless—
We are a material different from all others
in the magnum opus.



Addy Lindsay is a junior at Louisiana Tech. She is majoring in psychology with minors in sociology and human development and family studies in hopes of pursuing a Master's degree after graduation in Clinical Trauma Counseling. She wrote these pieces in the midst of some heavy grief that she felt this past year, as life continues to feel unsteady at times. She finds a lot of solace in words, in putting language to something that she is not always able to process in linear, verbal thinking. Addy truly believes words hold a world of power, beauty, healing, and comfort. She hopes these words are a safe landing place for you.

Alayna Juneau is an Interdisciplinary Major in the College of Liberal Arts at Louisiana Tech University. She hopes to work on creative works like art, video games, and creative writing. She plans to graduate this May and go wherever life takes her.

Alexis Bardwell is a sophomore history major from Pineville, Louisiana. In her spare time, she enjoys playing The Sims and watching movies with friends. She considers herself a lover of museums and a cat enthusiast. Her dream job would be researching for The Natural History Museum in New York or The British Museum in London.

Ana Balestrazzi is 22 years old, originally from Venezuela. She is a senior at Louisiana Tech University, majoring in Political Science. She takes pictures as a hobby. She was inspired by her dad, who was a photographer who graduated from Louisiana Tech.

Annalee North is a junior studying graphic design and studio art in COLA. Her illustrations are like little tokens representing a moment in time. They reflect love, loss and everything in between. "It's a documentation of this yin and yang of life I'm learning."

Ashley Christian is a senior English major with a Creative Writing concentration and a Sociology minor. Writing poetry has always been an empowering process for her. My biggest inspiration for writing is her dad because he has always encouraged her.

Avery Miller is a junior at Louisiana Tech University from Ville Platte, Louisiana. He is majoring in biology and nutrition & dietetics with hopes of becoming a doctor. He works as a medical assistant and serves as the President of Louisiana Tech's Poetry Society. In December of 2021, he was selected to read an original poem to honor Louisiana Tech's newest piece of sculptural art,

Aspire. He has expressed himself through writing "from the moment I picked up a pen," as his grandmother says; as a young child, he created health-related "books" by stealing sheets of printer paper, writing simple plots with colorful doodles, and stapling them to be "published." He hopes to be of service to others, in the health setting and through creative writing, throughout his college career and career thereafter.

Callie Katherine is the author of the poetry book *Wonders of Intensity* and the host of *Girl Uninspired*, a podcast focusing on interviewing artists. Callie is a sculptural painter whose works have been exhibited at the Schepis Museum in Columbia, Louisiana. Currently Callie is earning her BFA in Studio Art from Louisiana Tech University's School of Design in Ruston.

Camryn Price is from Winnsboro, Louisiana. She has been making art since my Junior year of high school, and now, as a third year Studio Art Major, she focuses primarily on 3-D work.

Carley Ardoin is a Tech Student interested in Visual Communication. She likes to read and take photos for fun.

Cassidy Jones is an English major and Philosophy minor at Louisiana Tech University. She is the President of Louisiana Tech's English Honors Society, Sigma Tau Delta, a member of Tri Delta, and a former KLPI DJ. She is attending law school this upcoming fall and ultimately aspires to practice in her home state, New York.

Christi Kruger is a second-year Biomedical Engineering student at Tech with a plan of attending med school upon graduation. She is originally from South Africa but has been living in Lake Charles, LA for the past seven years now. She has always found comfort in art, as it has been a way to escape from the busyness to process her emotions and turn it into something beautiful.

Dawson Mulkey is a sophomore engineering student at Louisiana Tech. He exists as one of few out gay men in his field of study. Engineering is Dawson's passion but he took to poetry to express his difficulties finding belonging at Tech. Photography is also a hobby of his and he likes to capture the beauty of the intersection of the man made and natural world.

DeRel Smith is an aspiring English major who hopes to become a graphic novelist like Bryan Lee O'Malley. He wants to write books

that are super funny and awkward "enough to get a thirteen year old me enough inspiration to write a story for the first time." He is absolutely in love with poetry and his favorite topic to write about usually is unrequited love. Although, most of his work has been pretty romantic recently! DeRel is a junior.

Elizabeth Stapleton is currently a junior at Louisiana Tech University. She was born in Lake Providence, Louisiana and was raised there by her grandparents. From the ages of 3-18, she attended a small private school called Briarfield Academy. She began writing poetry when she was 14 years old under the guidance of her English Teacher and mentor Mrs. Toni Lee. She has written over 100 poems and has had about 12 of them submitted to contests by past teachers. Upon graduating Valedictorian of her class in 2019, she began pursuing a pre-law degree with intentions of attending law school after college graduation. She has always shared an intense passion for reading and writing since a young age. Most of her childhood summers were spent at her public library. During the second quarter of her junior year at Louisiana Tech, she completely changed her life route in a pursuit to teach English/Literature on a university level. She is currently in the process of changing majors from Pre-Law to English and Secondary education. She hopes to one day be able to share her love for reading and writing with high school and college students. Students deserve to read pieces of work that will not only challenge their comprehension skills, but will also challenge their view of life and their own thinking about thinking.

Elizabeth-Ann Mosley is currently a freshman at Tech. She has always had a passion for traveling to new and exciting places by reading books. And as for poetry, it just found her when she needed it the most. Call it fate.

Grace Hall is a Mechanical Engineering student at Tech with a minor in Mathematics. Engineering research is her passion, but she enjoys spending her time outside of the lab with a paintbrush in hand to capture the people around her. She is currently drowning in a sea of plants and sweaters that she buys as coping mechanisms when her homework is bad.

Grace Miholic is a junior at Louisiana Tech University. She is a double major in English Literature and French. She is Vice President of the French Club and Sigma Tau Delta. She is also a member of the Phi Mu Sorority. Once she graduates, she plans to get her MFA

in creative writing and later her PhD in Literature. Her hopes are to one day move to France and teach Literature while also being a part-time writer. Grace loves poetry, music, and creative writing. She hopes to one day publish a collection of poetry, a novel, and a musical album.

Hunter Jones is a journalism major at LA Tech. He currently works in filming and editing podcasts and currently working on a TBA TV show. He is into filming, video editing, photography, a little graphic design, and watching every movie under the sun.

Isabelle Byrnes-Bartell is a creative writing senior at Louisiana Tech University. As the former President of Louisiana Tech's Poetry Society and Editor-in-Chief of the campus' chapter of Her Campus, she is an experienced poet with scholastic writing awards and publications in a previous volume of *The Quatrain*. She is hoping to publish her first book of poetry entitled *Making Room for Bared Teeth* where these poems are excerpted from.

Jessica Bowers is a student at Louisiana Tech University.

Juno studies biology and Spanish at Louisiana Tech University, and has taken to writing as a form of private self-expression. Following the encouragement of a professor, Juno made the decision to publish *Brute*, which originated as an assignment for a class in Theatre Appreciation.

Katelyn Swanson is a junior at Louisiana Tech University studying English with a concentration in creative writing. Katelyn has goals of becoming a published author. She fell in love with writing in high school, and the rest has been history. She loves experimenting with different styles of writing and in different types of art as well. When she is not creating, you can find her playing video games in her room or cheering on the Bulldogs on the football field with the LaTech Color Guard.

Katie Grace Rion and **Emily Jane Wrobel** have been best friends since they were very little and have always had a dream of writing together! They wanted to create a story and an environment that touches the hearts and lives of people.

Kennis Jobe is a master's student studying English literature and has been at LaTech since Fall 2021. She loves writing, music, the ocean, and animals, and her goal is to become an English instructor

at the college level. Oh, and to live within driving distance of the beach.

Kristyn Hardy is obsessed with the following things, in no particular order: her nieces, fictional men, and spending money she doesn't have on books she doesn't have time to read. She currently works at Louisiana Tech University and frequently refers to her office as a cave. She also likes Taylor Swift and bread.

Kylee Boudreaux is majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. Her life goal is to become a well-rounded author while working as a librarian. She loves reading and baking. She also has a dog who is crazy (she's cute, though, so it's okay).

Lael Hamilton is a freshman at Louisiana Tech studying Computer Science. He has enjoyed writing since elementary school and does not plan on stopping. Writing is what he does to figure himself out.

Laura Cason is working towards earning a second degree from Louisiana Tech. She is an English major with a concentration in creative writing. Laura enjoys clacking her acrylic nails together for emphasis, solving puzzles, and eating more sushi than she can afford. You can find her in the Dean's office, anywhere there is good coffee, and more often than not being emotionally manipulated by her cat.

Luke Jobe is a computer science major who plans to graduate this spring. His life goal is to become an independent game developer. Luke says that he is "married to the most wonderful woman" and enjoys playing video games and watching shows with her.

Michael Plaisance is a mechanical engineering major from southern Louisiana. His interests include photography, climbing, and video editing.

O.L. Vicellio is a sixteen-year-old sophomore who has nothing but time and creativity flowing through her veins. She is the second place winner of Sigma Tau Delta's writing contest for high school students. A love for writing has been embedded in her from the moment she first picked up a book. It's not only a trade of hers, but a therapeutic outlet, one hundred percent. O.L. would like to have a dystopian novel published in her late twenties. She strives to have a doctorate in medicine and a bachelors in animation. She has a not-so-secret dream to create a pop-dance group and go to The

Voice. Overall, her main goal in life is to be the messenger who tells all young people, no matter who you are, what you look like, what you love, you can be anything. She wants to create a more inclusive world any way she can, and one way is through her writing.

Parker Newman attends Cedar Creek High School and is the first-place winner for Sigma Tau Delta's writing contest held for high school students this year. He has always had a love for the English language and has had fantastic teachers who have fostered that love and have made him a better writer. He would specifically like to credit Mrs. Leanne Bordelon for being the person who made him pursue poetry outside of a classroom. Parker enjoys writing about the abstract ideas and problems that are found in nature and everyday objects.

Rae Ward has been writing fiction for over half of her life now, at 24 years old, and publishing it online. She has also had poetry and short works of non-fiction published professionally. As a current master's candidate in the English Literature program at Louisiana Tech University, she hopes to craft her writing capabilities in a way that lends well to teaching and continuing her professional writing career.

Raelynn Tedeton is a mixed media artist using digital painting, acrylics, and craft mediums. Craft supplies are essential to her self-portraiture series because she used similar materials as a child to express her identity within a conservative community.

Reggie Adams is a second-year Computer Science major. Since he joined the Poetry Society, he has been inspired to write a lot of different pieces. They all tend to share the common themes of love and longing, because those are the things that inspire him most, artistically.

Samuel Vivien makes digital art as a hobby. He is hoping one day he can make a web-comic with these skills. He made *Sisters of Battle* because he enjoyed the fight they were used in the game Hollow Knight.

Savannah Barker is a Sophomore English major attending Louisiana Tech. Savannah is interested in classic literature, making coffee, and collecting postcards! She has been writing poetry for about 6 years and hopes to one day work in publishing and even publish a poetry book of her own!

Shaw Christian Corcoran was born on December 10th, 2001. He has lived in Mandeville, LA for his entire life before coming to Louisiana Tech. He has always been a very imaginative person, and likes to read and write stories and ideas whenever he can. Shaw is currently an Engineering Major but has plans to switch into the Instrumentation and Control Systems Engineering Technology program.

Taylor Martin is a freshman in the English program under the College of Liberal Arts. He came to Tech after graduating from Caddo Parish Magnet High School in Shreveport. He has always been interested in writing and has found some peace in poetry. He hopes to go into a creative writing occupation once he graduates.

Thomas Schwartzenburg is a graduating senior at Louisiana Tech University. He studies mathematics and computer science. When he isn't studying, he enjoys playing basketball, reading Stephen King, and talking about Louisiana Tech Sports.

Tiffany Clinton is a Junior at LA Tech with a major in Graphic Design and a minor in Studio Art. She loves exploring different mediums of art and hopes to inspire others with her work.

Todd Gannon is a Graduate Student at Louisiana Tech. In his free time he loves to write and read, and follow the Vanderbilt Commodores sports teams. He and his wife Tiffany live with their tabby cat Bernie in Murfreesboro, TN.

Trevor Blackstock is a fourth-year Pre-Medical student majoring in Biology and minoring in Chemistry and Psychology. He is a member of AED, KLPI, and an ambassador for the School of Biological Sciences. He enjoys viewing art in various forms from different cultures due to the unique ways classic messages are presented.

Ujjen Rajkarnikar is a 21 year old Nepalese student pursuing a degree in computer science here at Tech. He hails from the heart of Nepal: Kathmandu. He has spent the majority of his life in the bustling capital and his upbringing in this far east society serves as an inspiration for his writing.

Vincent Grisby is a student at Louisiana Tech University.

William Humphreys is a Sophomore at Louisiana Tech University majoring in chemistry and minoring in computer science.

Typographic Abstract 01 was created in Professor Jake Dugard's Intro to Graphic Design class. Students were tasked with composing a modular grid with 16 squares. Inside each square they cropped a letterform studying the positive and negative shapes created and the relationships between forms. Those compositions were then projected to the wall, traced, and then finally painted. Thirty-six students and I worked collaboratively to create the mural in the hallway of the Visual Arts Center. This further reinforced the concept of gestalt — the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Students who worked on this mural include: Ashton Barber, Ashley Carey, Tiffany Clinton, Adam Cook, Hayley Foolkes, Aaron Fuller, Cam Green, Lizzie Griggs, Patrick Hebert, Alana Hudson, Kylee Jonas, Mackenzie Joyce, Anna Lester, Monica Mobley, Grayson Nash, Caroline Payne, Alyssa Phillips, Hunter Pitts, Haley Prestridge, Brenna Prewitt, Kaylea Rhea, Jessica Roberts, Amaya Robinson, Jolee Rogers, Christian Salazar, Emma Scheaffer, Leonie Schuknecht, Sydney Seaford, Abby Simmons, Tori Sinclair, Kennady Speir, Logan Stevens, Sidney Trundle, Katie Truong, Brianna Varner, and Hannah Wooten.

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Last but certainly not least, to our contributors: this would simply be a book of blank pages without you. Thank you for putting your work out there and sharing it with us all. Continue to be bold and creative; follow your passions and express yourselves. Thank you for trusting us to share your work in our journal. A special thank you goes to Sigma Tau Delta and the Louisiana Tech Poetry Society for providing amazing pieces from their contest winners.

Several of our contributors were also on our staff this year, and as such, they are listed within our masthead and as contributors. Our staff wants to assure all of our readers that every submission, regardless of the contributor, underwent an extensive review and selection process. For those of us on staff whose pieces were up for consideration, this process was conducted anonymously and in an unbiased forum. Staff contributors were not involved in the selection of their own work. Our staff had lengthy conversations as to how the final selection of works could remain fair in hopes to present this journal justly.

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