
Pen & Ink

PEN AND INK 2020

HARRISON WRITING AWARD WINNERS:

MOLLY BRANDT "NO ONE BUT YOU" AND "AN ODE TO THE EYES THAT SEE ALL AND SAY NOTHING"

HANNAH MUSZKIEWICZ "13 THINGS TO SEE IN A CHICKADEE"

REBECCA SMILLIE "YELLOW CANARIES"

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INSTANT COFFEE, INSTANT REGRET

by Grace Taylor



SATIRE ESSAY

by Aleigha Rosencrans-Drynan

In the words of Marie Jenney Howe, "Please do not think of me as old fashioned." However, I stick with the boomers and not the zoomers on this "hot topic." To believe in foolish, phony ideas such as global warming is idiotic and plain distrubing.

The thought of our beloved world being swallowed up in raging hot fire is terrifying, but the good news is, it won't. The world is fine and global warming is not real. It was made up to scare older generations into submitting to the under-loved, low self-esteemed kids who need desperate approval.

If it were real, wouldn't the government attempt to solve it? Wouldn't people like Greta Thunderbolt come up with real ideas to stop this instead of screaming "How dare you" and insulting our country's finest leaders? I have not seen any of this happen, so therefore it is not a problem that we need to worry ourselves sick over.

Not only has it not been properly addressed but there are many, many other reasons why our Earth is not going to boil into a pot of melted land. In case one reason is too real for you I have provided multiple others to show you how fake global warming is.

Reason one is plain and simple: snow. Living in a place like Montana just shows how cold it is. I mean, in December 2019, in the middle of this long debate about a fake concept, Montana had several snow storms. Even Canada had a cold winter. If it was really so hot and our Earth was boiling could mother nature really produce a cold white powder that causes people to shiver and chatter our teeth? No, the weather outside is not at all frightful as the world is doing its normal cycle of spring, summer, fall, and winter.

Reason two is for the people of science: basic water displacement. One of the main proofs of global warming is rising sea levels. They say it's due to melting ice caps and the expansion of seawater water when it's warm. But the real reason is due simply to the rising population of people in this world. As the number of people are born the more people are in the ocean wanting to enjoy the water and swim with the dolphins. As more and more people are in the water the more the water will rise due to water displacement. It is standard science knowledge, it is normal and happens all the time. This leads me to believe that global warming is not something of importance.

NIGHTMARES

by James Gonzales

I close my eyes and try to drift to sleep
Thinking o'my lov'r, wake up to her I might
But t'night the sandman wants to see me weep
He wants to see me scream and give a fright

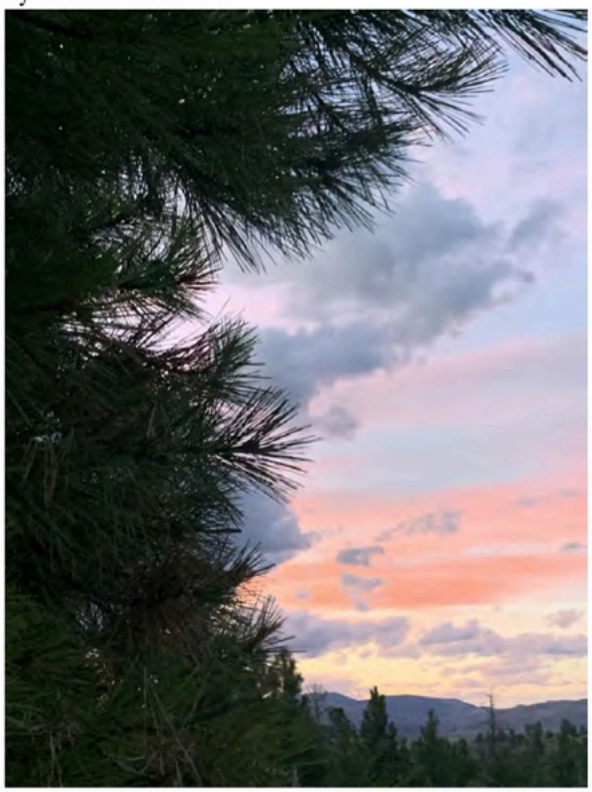
I see it all, the pain, torture, blood and dread
I jolt up, and I look around the room
Get out of bed, and to the kitch'n I tread
I try to breathe, but the fear still does loom

I pour a glass of water and drink up
Trying not to think of what just happened
I think to myself as I look at the cup
Perhaps the next night, a good dream he'll lend

Did it mean something, I may never know
But s'long my lov'r is safe, onward I'll go

SUNSET

by Brendon Brewer



THE SCREAM AND KOKO THE CLOWN

by Bree Bement



AN ODE TO THE EYES THAT SEE ALL AND SAY NOTHING

by Molly R. Brandt

To the eyes that see all and say nothing
Appraising each of your counterparts
Cerulean like a bright flowing spring
What a simple glance can do to a heart!

Limitless like the stars you wish to fly
Skin kissed by Apollo's fair blessing
Soaring and reeling through the endless sky
Seen through those eyes that do no confessing.

Soft smile wakes the weary observer
Calloused hands worried from each other's touch
Writing notes and thoughts with brilliant fervor
Such quiet words can only say so much.

Are my musings with you all for nought,
In your lovely eyes a cold afterthought?

CASSIE

by Rylee Reynolds

The smell of freshly dug dirt and rain hung heavily in the air. The sound of people crying was deafening to me. Everything was somber; the air, the weather, and the people all draped in black. It was so sudden, my father's death. He was perfectly healthy and happy. He was always there, always present. Then he wasn't. He was gone, dead.

I loved my dad; we were incredibly close. We always had been. Sure, he was a little crazy and had unorthodox thoughts about "the monsters" that he swore left and right were real, but he was kind and caring. He loved everyone very much. He did have his weird habits. But didn't everyone? Every night, without fail, my dad would close and lock every window and door in our house, and he would always triple check them. We couldn't even have a dog door for our dog. I remember the first and only time I asked him about his weird habit.

He grabbed me by the shoulders and said: "Cassie, listen to me. I know I seem crazy but never, and I mean never, open a window or door at night. They'll get in if you do. If that happens, you'll wish yourself dead. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Once he was sure I understood the gravity of the situation, he acted like it had never happened. I never asked him about it again.

It was hard, going home to an empty house. I no longer had someone to yell "I'm home" to, no one to talk to after a long day. I needed something to do, something to combat this overwhelming silence. I opened my book that I had been reading, *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness.

I hadn't been reading long when I heard it the first time. "Cassie." It was just a fleeting sound, one my ears barely detected. I brushed it off as my brain playing tricks on me. "Cassie." This time it was louder, and I immediately recognized the voice.

"Dad?" I don't know why I said it aloud, I realized how ridiculous that was the second I said it. I knew my dad was dead, I was the one who found him.

"Cassie!" this time it was sudden, urgent even. "Cassie, Cassie, Cassie." The harder I listened to the voice the more…off it was. I couldn't explain it if I wanted to. The voice sounded like my dad without a doubt; but something inside me, maybe an old survival instinct, told me that it wasn't.

"Cas," this time it sounded like my mom. I knew she was very much alive; I saw her this morning at the funeral. I rushed to go open the door, but something stopped me. *"Cassie listen to me. I know I seem crazy but never, and I mean never, open a window or door at night."*

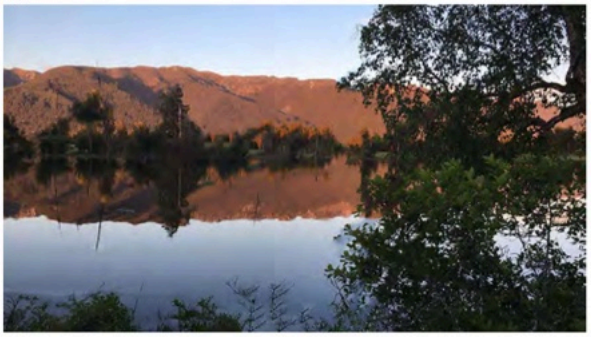
My dad's warning from all those years ago stopped me. Are these the monsters that he had been going on about for years? No! That's crazy—monsters aren't real and I'm not a child. "Cassie, open the door my love," my mom's sweet voice came again from the other side of the door. Despite my attempt of rationalization, I backed away from the door. As I did pounding began from the other side, "Open this door right now Cassie! I told you to open the door!" "Cassie." "Cassie." "Cassie."

Tears were streaming down my face as my name was screamed over and over again; now a chorus of my family's voices. None of them sounded human, all warmth gone, blurring into a cacophonous sound.

"Go away!" I screamed at whatever was outside my house. Unexpectedly, it worked. All at once it stopped and the silence unfolded once again. I was trying to process what just happened. Was I crazy? Had I imagined it? These thoughts and more swam through my brain, the silence just making it worse. But a small sound rang through the air, shattering it. I watched in horror as the doorknob ever so slowly turned. Then a terrifying realization hit me. One that made my blood go cold. I hadn't locked my door. I jumped up to lock it, but I was too late. Frozen in fear, I watched as the door swung open.

LAKEVIEW

by Daniel Ivers



STARRY NIGHT

by Nate Schellhardt



KNOWING THIS IS YOUR TIME

by Raegann Ballard

Sun setting on the mountain tops, inviting you in.
Warmly smiling at you with open arms. As the colors dripped from the clouds.
You walk outside smelling the sweet, spring air.
Climbing up a latter to the top of the worn, blue house's roof.
On the very edge, you stood for a second. In awe of the beautiful scenery,
that your small hometown could be a loving place.
That soon you might leave here, to continue your long life.
Remembering all the times you thought you weren't going to get out of here,
to make a future for yourself.
Remembering when you thought you wouldn't make it another day, week, month.
But you fought in this cold world, worked hard for what you wanted.
Now look at you thriving. Learning to love yourself, to be truly happy.
The world has surely sweetened around you.
Telling you that you came so far, you should be proud.
At that moment, you are completely still and at peace.
Knowing that this is your time.

MISTY MEMORIES

by Ethan G. Truslow

That I can do, smiles the woman.
And like smiles upon smiles
The thought of freedom once again
Came to me.
And as I sat here talking
With lost friends
Living life once again
I reminisced
And family filtered into my view
Lost loved ones I saw once again
Ghostly whispers wafted down
I was young again
And happy, it was not to last
Like the oldest trees, I kept aging
Yet I was never cut down
And I kept growing
Though I lost my view
Thoughts of the past
Sacred and holy
Twisted in my mind
And I nodded, the lady smiled once again
And she showed me my family

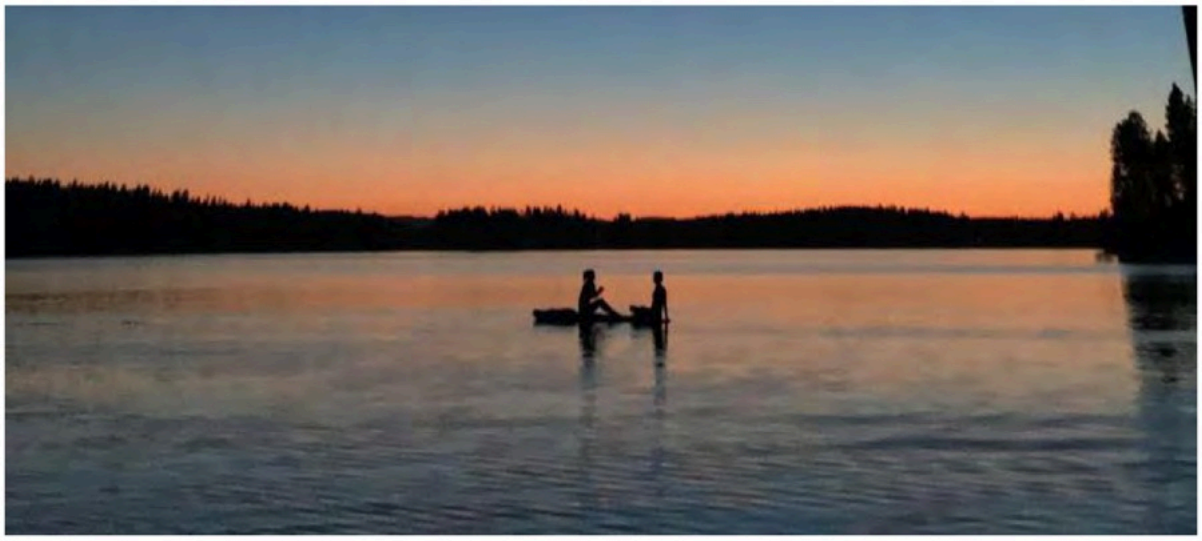
PARTS OF A PINECONE

by Ella Shropshire

We will climb the trees and pick pinecones like apples
rip back the woody scales
to eat the nuts inside
Polar opposites,
June, July and August
We will have a little cabin
And all be merry there
We will make soup out of the green things
We find in the wood
And fill a big black tub with water and mix them all around
Like the nights many dreams
We will fill jars with dirt and trinkets
And little tales of heroes and maidens who sometimes are the same thing
We will carve wooden swords on midsummer
And embroider great tapestries in the fall
Stitches rude and rough as our hands can manage
We will laugh and eat fine cakes with strawberries and whipped cream
When we cry, we will bake heartache into bread and scones
And eat them with wine 'round a big table
Safe, and happy at last.
Morning in its reedy glory
I press the first flowers and send them to you
Sunlight from the broken window
In a wee locket over my heart sits
This dream that can never be
I lace my shoes and walk to the mailbox.

SUNSET

by Trevor Swanson



JETTY SURE DOES

by Sarah Ferguson

Silhouettes of autumn crept from shadows, lingering for a moment, then smothering summer's breath. Tendrils of raw fog rose up from the ground, painting a ghostly image within the brisk morning sunbeams. Furious voices shattered the silent air. The carriage left town, as two men left behind their dignity, their violence disturbing the peaceful lullaby of the carriage's rhythm. The lullaby ended, and in its place lay regret. One of the men also lay, sprawled across the road, blood seeping from his head. The result of the fight had a greater effect than intended, one robbed of his life, the other cursed with unbearable regret.

It was 1913 when she was born and she grew, her curious mind paving a path in front of her all the while. Her radiance, however, was not enough to blind herself from her ghosts. Her mother had been slaughtered during the Osage Reign of Terror. And inside of herself, a terror had risen, the emptiness spreading until she felt hollow. Despite her tragic past, she was brilliant in mind and spirit, outstanding in her studies at school. It was during her high school years when she met him.

He was in love. He felt as if his heart was a leather book of love poems, rotting away in a glass cabinet, its pages yellowing and cover fraying. She took the book from him and gently blew the dust off its cover. Together, they had traced over the fading words, fresh ink staining the pages once again. On one knee, he offered his love to her. She wore the scars of her past, and now she wore his ring, the finest thing he could present to her aside from his love. The ring encased a small diamond with a hole in it, its emptiness degrading its worth. But she took the ring regardless and accepted his love.

"My father will not allow this marriage," she told him, and although her tears did not come, her eyes reflected the sorrow they both felt.

"You can't marry that boy; his father murdered a man," her father told her. She learned the story of her lover's past. His father he had never known had committed a crime that cast a shadow upon his own future. The tragic accident years ago created a barrier between two lovers.

She was to marry another man, a man her father had chosen for her. And as she spoke her vows, her broken diamond hug around her neck, harmonizing with the song of sorrow in her heart. Her father forbade her to keep the ring, but she held it close to her. But as time passed, she grew fonder of her new husband. She was a nurturing mother to her two sons, and her heart began to mend. But just as quickly as it mended, it began to break again.

He was a musician, and a fine one at that. He often left home, waving goodbye to his wife and two sons, so he could share his music with the world. It was during these times when he began to long for another. A woman he met kept his heart in a captivating trance, and they loved each other behind his wife's back. His admiration for his wife began to fade, like sunshine on a painting.

She was aware of her husband's affair. But society restrained her from ending her marriage, so she chose to wait until her husband passed, for then she would be free. It was not long before she wore black. Her emotions were mingling with her past, those years ago when she proceeded in white on her wedding day.

The word of her husband's death grew wings and flew. It landed on a friend's shoulder, beckoning her to spread the news. This friend informed a man of these unfortunate happenings. This man claimed to know the widow and inquired after her well-being. When he was told of her husband's death, he didn't bother to pack a suitcase. He simply drove mile after mile, 40 years of waiting, fighting, and healing whisked away by tattered highway.

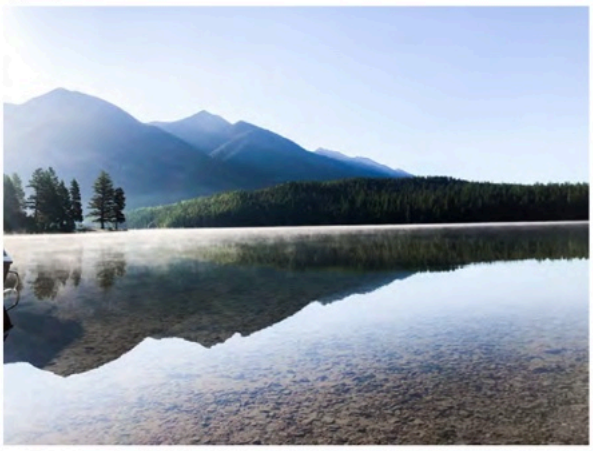
The knock on the door was brisk and cheerful, like new shoes on cobblestone paths. She opened the door.

He knelt on a knee once more, the strength of their love almost knocking him over, unbalancing the still frozen air. He presented her a new diamond ring, with a sapphire in the center.

This one was not broken, and her heart mended as she promised her love to him.

UNTITLED

by Lydia Fife



YELLOW CANARIES FOR SALE

by Rebecca Smillie

Mr. Arthur Paxton was a simple man with a strict routine. Every morning he woke up at 6:05 sharp, made a cup of black coffee, and then settled into the chair that sat at the head of his kitchen table with the newspaper of the day. Arthur had a method of reading his newspaper. He started with the last page because he believed the best stories were nuzzled in-between the headlines and the advertisements. Brightly displayed at the top of the page was the headline, "Local School Receives Large Donation." "Boring," Arthur muttered to himself as he moved on. He scanned past the political section, the unusually large missing persons report, and came upon an advertisement that caught his eye. It read, "Yellow Canaries for Sale. Vibrant colors, excellent singers." Arthur stared at it for a moment, trying to remember if he'd ever seen it before. But he had never seen this advertisement, which was uncommon. Most of them were old and tired, like the blurb for the Glamorous Ladies Hair Salon that Arthur had seen every day. "Let your hair be your first priority," it had said for as long as Arthur could remember.

The yellow canary advertisement was fascinating to Arthur. Arthur read the fine print underneath, "Come visit Mrs. Aves at 21 North Beakfield." Arthur realized that 21 North Beakfield was only a block away from his work. He decided to swing by there on his walk home. By now the time was drawing close to 7:10, and he would need to leave for work soon. Arthur clipped the advertisement out of the newspaper, tucked it into his pocket, and then set out for work.

Every day, Arthur walked to work. He wore a tweed jacket, a white dress shirt, and a black tie. The tie was a gift from Arthur's mother. She said it complimented his hair, and she was right. Arthur wasn't a man with distinctive features, but he had shiny, crow black curls, which framed his face well.

Just as Arthur had planned, on his way back from work that day, he retrieved the advertisement from the pocket of his corduroy slacks and followed the address to a quiet side street perpendicular to the road of his employment. It was cobblestone and it was obviously not well-traveled.

There it was: 21 North Beakfield, a small building sandwiched between two, tall, empty, dilapidated buildings. If you weren't looking for it you would have never noticed this establishment with no windows and a narrow walkway, sprinkled with the occasional feather. Arthur walked up to the door and knocked. After waiting for a couple of minutes with no answer, he decided to check the address again to make sure he was in the right place, but before he could, the door creaked open to reveal a short, portly woman.

The women had a multicolored bandana covering ash blonde hair. Her eyes were small and each pupil almost filled the entire eye. Her nose was also small and very high on her face, and her thin lips, that had almost no pigment to them, were stretched into an uncomfortable smile.

"Please," she chirped, "Come in." Arthur stepped through the threshold, ducking in order not to hit his head. The first room was small, and every wall was covered with layered textiles and patterned curtains. The room was bathed in yellow light, having quite a few lamps for such a small room. It was tropically humid.

"So you must be Mrs. Aves, the bird doctor, right?"

"Yes, I do love my birds. Now please, sit down." Mrs. Aves gestured to a small brown couch. "Let me get you a drink." She glided over to a large bar cart crowded with multiple kinds of glassware, all filled with brightly colored fluids. Arthur watched her carefully as she slowly prepared his drink. She mixed a blue substance from a martini glass, a purple fluid from a large decanter and so on for quite some time. When she was finally done, she quickly stirred the beverage with a small spoon, and picked it up, revealing that the drink was bright yellow.

Confused, Arthur took the drink, scrutinized it, and wished he had watched the color of the drink more closely while she was mixing it.

"How...h-how did you get such a vibrant yellow, I mean...I saw what you mixed in there and—"

"Just try it," Mrs. Aves squawked as she watched Arthur eagerly.

Arthur was not accustomed to drinking strange liquids that strange ladies gave to him, especially if they were as intriguing a color as this one was, but Mrs. Aves had invited him into her shop, and it seemed as though she didn't get visitors often. He cautiously sipped the amber cocktail. The drink was unlike anything he had ever tasted before. It was twangy with fruity notes and a spicy aftertaste. The flavors confused Arthur, but they didn't disgust him.

"What's in this?" he asked.

"Secret recipe," Mrs. Aves replied smugly as she swooped back to her rocking chair. The two sat there for some time in silence, which was only interrupted by the creaking of Mrs. Aves' rocking chair.

"So what brings you to my shop?" Mrs. Aves asked.

"I was hoping to see your yellow canaries,"

Arthur said.

"Okay then," Mrs. Aves crowed as she abruptly hopped up to her feet. "Follow me."

She led Arthur through a long hallway to a large yellow door, took a keyring out of her pocket, and began to unlock the four different locks on the door.

"Why do you have so many locks?" Arthur asked. Mrs. Aves stopped and stared directly into Arthur's eyes.

"To keep them from escaping," she replied, completely deadpan.

Finally, the door was unlocked. As soon as it opened, Arthur was hit with the sound of hundreds, maybe even thousands of birds chirping. Behind the yellow door was a small room, filled with yellow canaries packed like sardines, all screeching at the top of their lungs. The canaries had small eyes bulging out of their heads and were an ungodly hue of yellow. They were restless, flying back and forth and bumping into one another.

Arthur couldn't shake the weird feeling he got from this room, but something seemed to keep him from leaving. The longer he stayed, the more dizzy he began to feel. Soon the room was spinning, and the birds were in a panicked state, like this was something they had seen before, but something they couldn't stop.

Arthur fell to his knees and began coughing uncontrollably. Meanwhile, Mrs. Aves stood calmly next to him. The coughing became more and more violent until Arthur was coughing up blood.

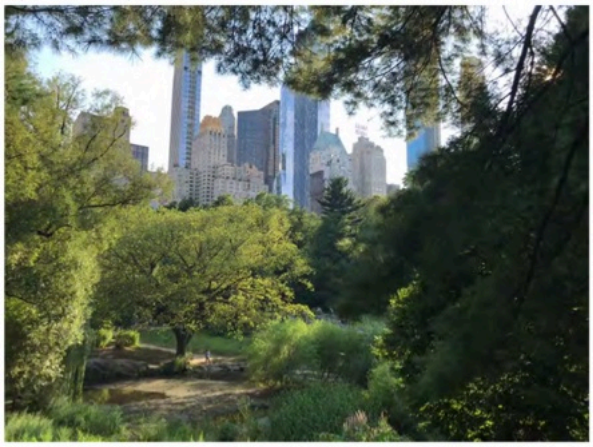
In his last moments of consciousness, he looked down to see a pool of blood. With his last hack, he coughed up a single yellow feather, which slowly floated through the air before resting atop the red puddle.

The next day another young man came to Mrs. Aves' shop. Mrs. Aves invited him in and gave him a similar drink to the one she had given Arthur. She then led him to the canary room, per the young man's request. There was one canary, in particular, that stood out to the young man since it was screeching more vigorously than all of the others. The man looked down to examine the bird and noticed it had a single black hair on its otherwise yellow head.

"How unusual," he said. As he stared at the bird, it slowly became more and more blurry, he fell to the ground, and the last words he heard from Mrs. Aves were, "Yes, quite unusual."

WINDOW TO ANOTHER WORLD

by Mara Flynn



WATERCOLOR

by Hannah Simonson



CAUSEWAY TREES

by Ashley Boyd



A FROSTED HOPE

by Kaelyn Tappe

The call went straight to voicemail. She hung up and tried again. Nothing. She left a message and tried calling her other brother. Reah hadn't seen her brothers since her parent's funeral. Will, the oldest at twenty-two, moved out after the fateful flood destroyed the bridge and their parents, unable to bear the house's reminder of their parents' memory. Tyler, twenty-one, had taken an engineering job across the state. At nineteen, Reah stayed on the farm. She meant to keep in better touch with her brothers, but working two jobs to keep the farm kept her busy. Her heart pounded as she waited for someone to pick up. Tomorrow would be Thanksgiving. She wanted her brothers to come. "I hope they can make it," Reah prayed sorrowfully, her voice sounding little in the empty house. "It's kind of late notice." The sound of the answering machine broke her thoughts. She left a message and hung up.

Reah put on her coat, hat, and mittens, and went out to check on her horse Faith before she left for youth group. As a present for her birthday last January, Reah's parents let her breed Faith to the stud of her choice. Reah stroked Faith's now round belly while the pretty appaloosa mare ate her oats. Faith's coat was blue speckled with white flecks. It reminded Reah of a starry night sky. She hoped the foal would be a roan like its mother.

One more month and the foal will be here, Reah thought excitedly. After patting Faith one more time, Reah left the barn and trotted through the snow towards her car. She had no idea if her brothers would make it for Thanksgiving, but at least tonight she

wouldn't have to be alone.

She stepped into the cold night air after saying her goodbyes. The wind had a nip unusually frigid for the season. Reah hurried to her car and started it. The thermometer read two degrees. Reah drove home carefully on the slick roads, planning all the food she would prepare for her brothers and herself tomorrow, should they come. She had already set out the turkey on the counter to finish thawing. Turning off the highway onto the dirt road that led to her driveway, Reah began fantasizing about the colors Faith's foal might be. Would it be a filly or colt? What would she name it and how would she begin its training?

Suddenly, something jumped out in front of her. Reah slammed on the brakes. Her tires caught nothing but ice, and she slid off the road into a tree. The doe bounded into the night, unharmed.

Before it died, the car's thermometer read thirteen below outside. Reah had seen no other vehicles on the road her entire way home. No one would come looking for her. The only advantage staying in the car had was that it was safe from the wind, but the temperature would soon plummet. Reah knew that if she stayed, she could freeze to death by morning. It was only a mile and a half to her house, albeit uphill, but maybe she could make it. It was her only hope.

Before opening the door and stepping out into the snow, she made sure her facemask was secure and shoved her phone into her pocket. There would be no cell reception until she reached her living room.

Reah stepped into the cold night air, shouldering herself into the wind and towards home.

"I should stay on the road. It's longer, but people can find me," she thought to herself.

Snow swirled around her, scooting along the ground. Despite the wind, the sky was clear, and the rising quarter moon gave Reah just enough light to see by.

"Thank you, Jesus. In any other situation, I would say it is a beautiful night."

After walking fifteen minutes, Reah finally reached her driveway. Turning onto it, the wind was to her back, giving her face brief relief.

"One mile to go. Man, it's cold!"

She trudged up the hill, stumbling more and more as she went. Her toes were numb. She couldn't do anything about it. Reah had pulled her hands into her coat to keep them warm, but the hill required her to pull them out again to help keep her balance. Rounding a corner, she reached the top and stumbled on. Reah's phone beeped at her, warning her its battery was low. She didn't notice. She was cold and numb. The wind, now hitting her from the side, stung her exposed skin, and her mind was growing increasingly sluggish. The sparkling snow looked soft and beckoned her.

"I'm so sleepy."

You have to keep moving.

"Just a moment's rest."

Don't stop.

"I'm so tired."

I know. Just keep moving.

It became a singsong chant in her mind; her legs plodded on in rhythm, wanting to collapse but never quite giving out. Her steps had grown slower since starting out. Reah couldn't feel her legs or her face and her arms had grown numb inside her coat.

"Look at the pretty stars…" Reah said out loud, tilting her head up to see the billions of lights twinkling in the sky. The movement almost made her tip over sideways. Somehow Reah staggered on, only a quarter mile left to go.

God, I'm so cold! she cried out internally. A warmth swept over her, just enough to comfort her and strengthen her resolve to keep going.

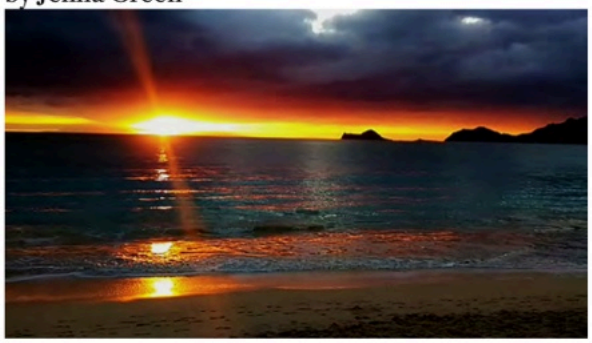
DURGA

by Leigha Carter



LIFE'S A BEACH

by Jenna Green



Time stretched long. The mere minutes of walking felt like hours in the cold night. Reah couldn't remember anymore why she was walking.

"Where am I?" she mumbled incoherently. Her face was numb. Then she saw the porch light gleaming through the darkness. She stumbled toward its warm glow, though not really knowing why. She just knew she had to get to it.

A groaning noise coming from the barn rang through the silence, breaking Reah's fixation on the light. Somewhere, hidden in the fog of her mind, the noise rang a bell. The memory squirmed its way through the mist until it rang clearly: Faith was in labor. With great effort she peeled herself off her quest for the light and stumbled up to the barn. With numb hands Reah fumbled with the door knob until finally it opened. Faith was on her side in the stall, her sides heaving. Reah slumped against the stall, unable to do anything but watch. Soon a wet, black foal slipped into the straw, and Faith stood up and started to lick it clean. The barn offered no respite from the cold, only some protection from the wind.

The foal will freeze to death without a blanket. The words echoed startlingly clear in Reah's dazed mind. "Blanket… banket…" Reah's mind fumbled with the words until she spotted the large horse blanket and liner sitting on the feed bin. She forced herself over to it, but her fingers wouldn't close around them. Reah flung her numb arms around them and used their weight to drag the blankets along. Fumbling with the latch, Reah's numb fingers finally got the stall door open, and she dragged the blankets inside. Falling to her knees on the dirt floor, Reah did her best to cover the damp foal with the horse blanket and liner. She didn't have enough strength to get back up.

"I'm so sleepy… Jus' a lil' nap…"

She felt like she was floating. The night sky sparkled in front of her. The stars swirled and drew closer. She gave in to the blackness, and the night sky consumed her.

Reah felt warm. She opened her eyes to a bright light. As her eyes adjusted and came into focus, she saw that she was in a clean, white room. It looked vaguely familiar, but her mind was still foggy and her whereabouts evaded her. Suddenly, Reah noticed two familiar faces sitting facing her across the room.

"Hey, Tyler! She's waking up!" Will exclaimed, nudging Tyler. They came and stood by her bed, and Reah recognized her brothers staring down at her.

"Where am I? What are you doing here?" she managed weakly.

"We found you in the barn lying next to Faith under a horse blanket. You have extreme hypothermia and have been unconscious for at least five and a half hours," Tyler said solemnly, as he fought back his tears and concern.

"We thought you were dead," Will said quietly; tears rolled slowly down his cheeks, "The doctors said it's a miracle you're still alive."

"We found the foal under the blankets too." Tyler added, "She made it through the night."

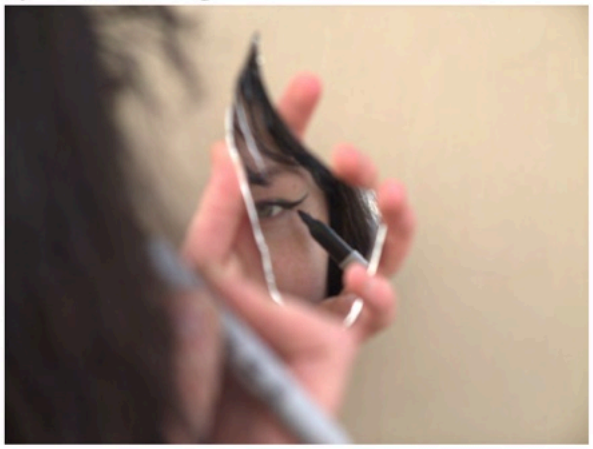
LOOK WHAT I FOUND

by Garrett Glazier



REFLECTION

by Chase Tielking



UNTITLED

by Jasper Cook



I ASKED GOD TO KILL MY PONY

by Melody Perry

It started in my second year,
I told myself I wouldn't shed a tear.
Something inside was wrong, all she wanted to do was breathe.
I had to stay by her side, I could never leave.
Though her skin grew sallow,
She made no friends of sorrow.
She whinnied for her breakfast; she dumped her water bucket.
If you asked her for a favor, she'd have no opinion of it.
But in the end, her sickness became fatal.
She hung her head when you said her name, she became reclused in her stable.
It was the move that did her in, the trailer rattled plenty.
When we found her on her side, I had tears for twenty.
She wouldn't stand, wouldn't blink, she barely made a sound.
They tried everything they could, until I was the only one around.
I told her to be brave, to stand on solid ground,
But she looked at me and said, from this there's no rebound.
I prayed for her to stand, I prayed for her to breathe,
I prayed for her to find some strength, if only just for me.
I prayed for God to take her, so I wouldn't have to see.
We set a date, I brushed her early, so I could say goodbye.
When they arrived, I mumbled, I have something in my eye.
They took her by the woodshed, she was brave, I think, surely.
And they did what they had to do, because God wouldn't kill my pony.

HYPOCRITE

by Madi Davis



POLICE SALTINES ARE RACIST

by Caitlin Matthews

All that was going through Tamir Rice's head was how to beat his imaginary demons with his plastic weapon when the resonating sound of a gun and the pain that followed brought him to the ground (Lester). Boys like Tamir shouldn't have to worry about being killed simply due to their skin color. Although the majority of law enforcement officers are not racist, American policing has unfair prejudice that has been historically and statistically proven.

It's undeniable that the majority of law enforcement officers are not racist. You cannot generalize the whole population of police due to a small percentage with prejudice. They fight daily for the good of the community and are risking their own lives. In 2018, 106 officers died in the line of duty (FBI). These law enforcement officers only wanted the best for the country and cannot be grouped with the unfortunate killings of African Americans by police. Therefore, the police system has positive enforcers that support and protect our country.

Despite a preponderance of police officers not being racially biased, the law enforcement system has historically been proven to have prejudice towards African Americans. For hundreds of years, African Americans were enslaved in order for the upper white class to show superiority (History). The hierarchy of power has remained prominent since the 1600's. Although the lines are now blurred and undeniable racism is harder to encounter, the underlying structure still remains. In the past, slaves worked tirelessly for hours in order to please their masters and in the process build America like it is today."The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history. They were people turned to fuel for the American machine" (Coates 70). The slaves increased the economy, boosted agricultural technology, and affected America for years afterwards (History). The case is the same today. The policing system uses African Americans to increased cash flow in private prisons and enhance industrial advancements while in the prison system. The systemology that is unknowingly embedded in our brain continues to affect the American law enforcement today, creating a bigoted system.

Even more significantly, statistics have shown that the police are racist. In terms of using violence and searching vehicles, the percentiles for African Americans are staggeringly higher. During the 2012 FBI supplementary homicide report, it was found that 39 percent of all police killings, while the suspect was not attacking, were African American (Vox). That is significantly higher than the percent of the population that is African American: 13 (Vox).This shows the racial imbalance in our country. Ideally the percentiles would match those of the population; however, since our law enforcement system is racist, they are not. Furthermore, the racism is not only apparent in lethal shooting, it also arises in daily traffic stops. A report from retired federal and state agents found that 42 percent of unwarranted searches were of African American vehicles in San Francisco (VanityFair). Considering African American traffic stops accounted for less than 15 percent, the large disparity further proves the racism in the United States by law enforcement officers (VanityFair). The system will take necessary steps in order to "protect" the country from African Americans that have been proven not dangerous. Therefore, the American policing system is racist.

Tamir Rice and hundreds of other African Americans have been brutally murdered by law enforcement officers in the United States of America. Their lives were ended with one too many bullets, punches, tasers, or acts of violence. They are not here

today to graduate high school, get a job, or even get married; however they will always be remembered. This bigoted police system is taking away African American's opportunity for greatness because they are continually racist.

STAG BEETLE

by Michaela Allen



FAME IS HOPELESS

by Danielle Prouty



HOODIE

by Ella Rowland



THE EDMUND FITZGERALD

by Ella Shropshire

They christened a graveyard at the bottom of the lake
Nothing but sand
And shipwrecks for miles
Empty
They say bodies sink down there
Trapped in their old ships
People don't take the dead from the waters icy clutches
The wolves at Isle Royale gorge themselves on the crew of the Kamloops
The lake feasts on their ship
Her fingers sticky with blood
That is the way of the lake
Lonely in the blue
Miles from anything but sand and sturgeon
In the depths, they are dancing
In an underwater hall
Look—here lies the SS Evanston
She sank long ago, her hull cracked nearly in two
They have only now found the wreck
They say you can hear children playing down there
They say there is a cat ghost
Who didn't wear his life jacket
A few miles ahead
Lies the Lady Hubert
A sailboat
Young and shining
She went down after a long battle
Weather did her in
Her crews scattered to the winds
The mast cracked
Her sail torn and drifting
Her waters haunted by the
Whispers of tearful smiling goodbyes
The freighter St. Helena
Runs a long lonely course
And November's witch has come knocking
The crew of the 'Fitz
Lie in the sand by their ship
The wreck is christened a graveyard
An old man floats through the Kamloops
Like the young stewards last words in a bottle
I am the last one left alive
They christened a graveyard at the bottom of the lake
But death owns all her cold waters
We are holding our own

UNTITLED

by Lydia Fife



LOST WORDS

by Nate Schellhardt



WHITE LILIES FLOAT ON THE WATER

by Andrea Stalnaker

White lilies float on the water.
They float on glaze water,
Moving with a slow grace.
White lilies float for the women in their Sunday dresses.
For the men in their copper button coats.
For children in church white best.

White lillies lay on deathbeds.
They call upon death in its waking hour.
It floats on black caskets against its heavenly colored petals.
Death knows theses flowers,
They're elegant mask hides the decaying face.
The rotting flesh of ones once loved are closed shut in a finely decorative box,
Locked in place and lowered into the ground,
Then covered with earth with death's bouquet on top.

White lilies are hung in a vase.
Parlor rooms have painted glass bottles on the walls and ceilings.
Over a marble mantle are Easter lilies for holy decor.
Father smokes out of his wooden pipe
While mother sews a pattern on her layered quilt.
And their child plays on the floor with his metal train set.
White lilies stay still in the frame.

White lilies float in the waters of the mind.
The dreams, thoughts and imagination of mankind.
White lilies come when birth, life and death follow.

HIDDEN GEM

by Grace Burton

At the shelter, I did spy
A tiny kitten with a glint in her eye.
A panda coat, a stare intense
But with a name that made no sense.
"Cloudy." No, she was too bright.
Like the sun, but with whiskers white.
Then she trumpeted, "MEOW!"
And the other cats seemed to bow.
It was a command, meant for me,
To give her a proper name. A royal decree.
And if her name fit in this poem,
She would allow me to take her home.
So I thought for a while
And my heart began to smile.
"Diamond," I announced, and I swear she nodded
And off to her new home she trotted.

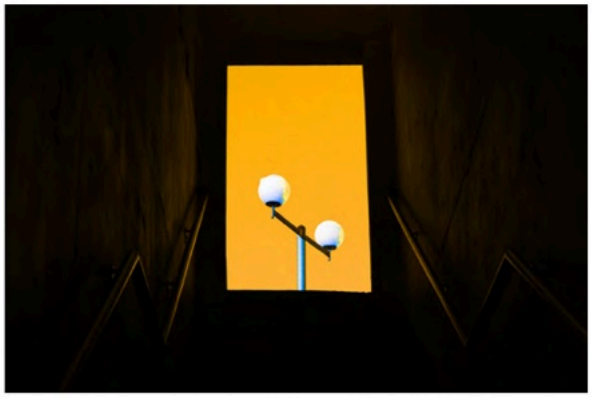
BROOKLYN BRIDGE

by Mara Flynn



STREETLAMP

by Shiloh Corcoran



ICE

by Braelyn Germaine

From the mountains
a river shall run
And down to the sea
make its way.
It carries a sparkle of
sun,
A piece of white bone to
the spray
It glimmers like frost in
the morning,
The water this crystal
becomes.
Too flippant it heeds not
the warning;
To the heat in the south
it succumbs.

SHADOWY HOLLOWS

by Brandon McDuffie



A POEM FOR A KITTEN

by Ashlin Slanger

Oh, restless child,
just you wait.
For all you know is winter's mild
standing steady state

You spend your days sleepy,
dreaming of a field to play.
The house offers no space, and bleakly
you run its halls of disarray.

But child you know not of what comes
if you shall stay a little longer.
For with spring and her drums
beating, you may go outside and wander

Outside is foreign to you, child,
born in winter's cold embrace.
With spring, you see, comes sun: unexiled.
Let her warmth caress your face.

BRAINS

by Abi Shirley



BELLOSA LAKE

Chloe Verhine

The breeze settled swiftly across the top of the tall golden grass near Bellosa Lake. The sun shined, content with the clear blue sky that confined it. I found myself peering at a rather sizable dragonfly buzzing above the fresh waters. In the midst of my staring, I observed Willie crouching in the tall grass. Willie was my younger brother. Many folks at school call him "slow" on account of Willie's developmental disorder, or whatever Mom told me to call it.

"Willie, how about we head down to Bellosa?" I asked, knowing he would say yes.

"Okay Ed, but can you teach me how to swim today?" said Willie, knowing I would say no.

"Now Willie I have tried my best but you just ain't seem to pick it up!"

"I promise this time, Ed. Please?"

"Just c'mon," I said, guiding Willie to the lake with a vague gesture.

We trudged along until we reached the clear waters, which seemed to reflect the whole sky. We both jumped in the shallow part of the water.

"Now try and swim to the deep part," I commanded.

"I don't know, Ed…" Willie said hesitantly. "I'm a bit scared."

"Every time I try to teach you, you just quit! I'm going home!"

I angrily exited the water.

"No wait! Ed, I'm sorry."

"I have better things to do anyway"

I continued walking, water dripping from my clothes. Willie continued calling me with a certain desperation in his voice.

"Please wait up," Willie made his final plea. But I didn't look back.

Willie never came home that night. It was already 10:00 and I worried for him being by himself. I left the house to go check on him.

"Willie! Willie please come home! I'll teach you to swim I promise!" I called out.

No reply.

"Willie!" I called out a final time before nearing the lake.

The lake's surface mirrored the moon and star's luminosity. Just next to the moon's reflection on the lake was Willie's lifeless, floating body.

GUITAR MAN

by Melody Perry



SURF

by Chris Eodice



NO ONE BUT YOU

by Molly Brandt

The diner was quiet. Juliet swept the dilapidated tile floor, mind numbed by the repetition of dull colors. Red, white, red, white. Again and again, sweep by sweep. She hummed quietly to herself, a song that someone had played on the jukebox that afternoon. It was a bouncy, soulful tune and Juliet found herself swaying and smiling as it played through her head. Sweep, sway, smile. "One Less Angel" she remembered it was called. As she swept around the bright chrome base of the jukebox, she paused and leaned the broom against its side. Taking in the bubbly, fluorescent neon along the sides, Juliet ran her spindly fingers over the song selection, searching for the tune that was so desperately stuck in her head.

When her eyes found the song, Juliet eagerly punched in "19" and watched the records spin until the single was in place. A click later, Shy Baldwin's voice drifted across the diner, over the counter and back into the kitchen, where one line cook remained, preparing vegetables for the inevitable Friday rush that would take place the following day.

The stars shine, your eyes catch mine.

His head perked up upon hearing the upbeat be-bop tune, and turned out to catch Juliet's gaze, who had her trademark grin, mischievous and expectant. He shook his head and chuckled, a knowing, sweet sound. Setting down the head of lettuce in his dark hand, he wiped his palms on a tattered dish rag.

"Juliet," he started, moving around the wall into the dining room, its chairs and tables against the far wall, rag in his hand.

"Peter," she said, mocking his tone into the top of the broomstick, miming along to the words into the makeshift microphone.

Could there be one less angel in heaven?

Both abandoning their respective cleaning tools on the tall counter, the music moved into the second verse. Juliet held out her pale hand and Peter took it, dark skin juxtaposed like a dark glove against a bright snowbank.

Juliet's pale rose lips formed a genuine smile as the two began a jazz box step, their faded oxfords shuffling over the tiles. A hand jive followed, each clapping and moving at their own accord; the moves coalesced together and set up the two for the jitterbug.

Must be one less angel in heaven, 'cause look who's dancing with me.

Grabbing Juliet's hand, Peter swung her under his arm and out, arms extended. Juliet laughed as the music shifted into the bridge, the two coming back together for the bus-stop step. Heels clicking, the two moved into a sugar push, deep amber eyes locked on emerald.

My heart stops, the music drops, the world falls away suddenly.

"Texas Tommy?" Peter asked over the music; Juliet nodded and shuffled a quick triple step that clicked merrily on the linoleum along with the music.

The partners giggled as Juliet tripped over her own feet, Peter's hand catching hers to steady his clumsy counterpart. With his hand in hers, Peter pulled Juliet into a wrap move and back out in a flourishing twirl.

My angel loves me, she said she loves me, oh that's heaven to me!

The music stopped with Baldwin's voice ending in his masterful belting tone and the diner fell into silence once more, save for the two dancer's panting.

"Can you imagine if we showed up at Ruthie's Dancehall and put on a show like that? We'd take first prize, guaranteed," Juliet spoke after catching her breath, fixing the pink skirt and starch white apron of her uniform.

Peter shook his head, gaze falling to the floor, smile dropping onto the worn tile. Juliet realized her mistake quickly enough and caught her breath. The air seemed to hang in suspension as Juliet quickly filled to the brim with guilt.

"Jules, they don't let people like me through the door, much less let us win any prizes," Peter spoke solemnly. His strong form slumped against the counter, and his slender hands reached up to untie his apron, dirty from days of use. He played with the frayed strings, the air thick with sorrow.

The sight broke Juliet's heart.

The notion of segregation made her so enraged that she wanted to break the rack of coffee cups, right then and there. She wanted to show up to city hall and give the malevolent Fat Cats a piece of her mind; she wanted to march in the streets and picket the state capital, she wanted to stride right up to Mr. President and make him change his corrupt laws and apologize to each and every individual who had been disenfranchised by racism.

But most of all she wanted Peter to feel safe, comfortable, and confident in his own beautiful skin. They hadn't known each other long. It had been a bit over a year since Juliet had shown up at the diner looking for work. The owner, a man from the Bronx who had moved south for the weather, was eager for a new waitress. His daughter had left a few months after he had opened the restaurant, running off with a

young boy who had flown in the war. When she left, he was down a waitress, and gave Juliet the uniform the second she asked if they were hiring. His name was Chuck, and he made it his personal mission to make the greatest diner faire east of the Mississippi. After experiencing the atrocities in Europe during the war, he was hyperfixated on the harmless things he could do in life, determined to make peace and great burgers all at once.

Peter had been an employee for a few years then. Though he had started off as a dishwasher when he was fourteen, he had worked his way up and was now Chuck's right-hand man in the kitchen, all at the young age of nineteen. Chuck had seen Peter playing kick the can across the street when he was first moving into the diner, its chrome siding glimmering in the high afternoon sun. He had asked if the kid wanted a job, and Peter happily obliged, eager for money to buy nice things for his family and to save up for an automobile.

He'd always liked the look of a Chevy.

He was working the day that Juliet came in for the first time. She caught his eye from over the counter as she came through the door, cherry red lips smiling as she neared the counter. He thought she looked like a honey-blonde teenaged Wonder Woman. She thought he resembled a pilot or a great Broadway star, a real all-American boy.

When she had left after being told to come back the following day for training, Chuck made his way back into the kitchen to continue making his secret sauce recipe. Upon picking up a large wooden spoon and stirring the large gumbo pot on the stove, he turned to Peter with a wide grin.

"Well kid," he breathed, testing the sauce on a petite spoon and nodding in satisfaction, "looks like we're finally gonna have a fresh face around."

Peter smiled and continued cooking on the grill, curious what her name was, what she liked, and if she'd be any good at being a server.

And what she would think of him.

Busy days and long nights had made Juliet and Peter friends and the two best employees Chuck had ever had. They attended high schools on the opposite ends of town, and never saw each other outside of work, but somehow became the closest friend either had.

Juliet thought back to when Peter was late for the first and only time ever.

He was on the evening shift and the staff on that night wondered what could have possibly made Punctual Peter late. Chuck flipped burgers anxiously, watching the back door with expectancy when Peter had walked in.

His head was down, and he clutched his ribs with his right hand. Juliet had shot a look over the counter upon hearing the creak of the hinges and stopped mid-order when she saw him quietly enter, apologizing to the customers she was waiting on.

Wasting no time, Chuck and Juliet had patched up a silent Peter in the small office. They knew what had happened; the south was never safe for young black boys. Chuck called the police immediately, but was told there was nothing that would be done.

And that was that: no justice for the innocent.

Juliet vowed to give Peter a ride to and from work in her old Ford pickup from that day on.

She kept her promise.

Swept back to the present, Juliet crossed in front of Peter to the jukebox, once more searching for a Shy Baldwin song. She punched in the selection "20" and waited for the soft, lonely tune to float over the restaurant.

No one has to know I think you're wonderful, no one has to know you're my dream come true.

Peter's figure remained defeated against the counter and Juliet felt her heart tug against her chest in sorrow and another painful, consuming emotion.

Let the world go spinning in space, we'll find a place for two. So no one has to know I want you, no one but you.

Hesitantly, Juliet reached for Peter's hands, soft and careful. His fingers shied away in protest at first, then softened into Juliet's touch. She took the apron from his hands and set it down on the counter, and gently pulled him forward so the two stood close amidst the yearning melody of the song.

No one else can tell I think you're beautiful; no one else can tell you're my favorite view.

Juliet carefully laced her arms around Peter's neck and began to slowly waltz to the song. He smelled like peppermint and honey and his forget-me-not blue dress shirt was ironed with care. Juliet knew his mother pressed it every other day before he left for his shift; he had told Juliet about her when they had stopped for sodas after work one late night.

Let the world all think what they will, I'll wait until they're through. 'Cause no one has to know I need you. No one but you.

That same night Juliet had parked outside his small home, the lights glowing behind soft yellow curtains. He had looked at the house then back to her as she gave him an easy smile.

It was hard for her not to tell him how much she loved him right then and there. The strange feeling had alluded her for months, each stolen glance and charming grin only multiplying the butterflies she felt in her stomach, her mind wandering as she

worked or read or drove, to him and his stupidly perfect amber eyes and how they crinkled at the corners when he smiled.

But he had climbed out of the truck like he always did and leaned back through the open window, chin resting on his arms on the steel frame. After a drawn-out gaze and a soft "goodnight," he would wander up the dirt path to his front door, wave one last time, and shut the door behind him.

Now, with him melting into her touch as they waltzed, Juliet wondered how she could possibly tell Peter everything.

Tonight I'm gonna tell you that I'm hoping, praying that darling, you feel the same.

Instead, she uttered a soft apology.

"I'm sorry, Peter. I regretted it as soon as I said it."

It had always been a sore spot that the two weren't able to go dancing together. It was a shared passion, and they both wanted the other as a partner. Peter had known that it was risky using the diner as their own personal dance hall, but as soon as he had pitched the idea to Juliet, there was no going back. She had latched onto the idea and not let go, and Peter was happy to go along. The two had spent most every closing shift together they had alone dancing. Something so simple held all the answers for Peter's anxieties about the world around him and Juliet couldn't think of a time she was happier than when she was dancing with him. From Lindy Hop to the Charleston—which the two still loved despite its waning popularity—they danced their sorrows away. Peter had thought himself some sort of Cinderella—whenever he was dancing with Juliet, all seemed magical and right in the world. But the clock always had to strike midnight, no matter how much he fought it.

But here and now, the slow piano and Shy's sultry voice lulled Peter's aching heart as he swayed with Juliet in his arms. She seemed so close, yet so far. He cursed the world for keeping things on the outside the way they were. He hated Jim Crow more than anything in the world, and hated it even more because it kept him on the other side of a sprawling divide from who he loved.

No one has to know we could have everything.

They were young. "Age has a funny way of telling others what they think you should know and what you should feel," Juliet had written in a leather-bound journal. "Just because I am young does not mean I cannot love deeply."

She thought about what she should say to Peter now, in this tender moment. The song was ending soon, and Juliet already felt regret creeping up in her throat for not saying something sooner, for not taking this perfect chance.

"Juliet," Peter said, interrupting her lamenting. She lifted her head to meet his gaze and was once again caught in awe at the beauty of his eyes. They said so much and Juliet felt as though no one would ever be able to see her as completely as Peter seemed to be able to.

"Thank you," Peter said, his eyes scanning her pale face. Her eyebrows knit together quizzically and Peter felt his chest tighten with endearment at the expression.

"What for?" she asked. Seeing him softly smile, Juliet felt her heart lighten, though the smile could not hide the sadness behind his gaze.

"For driving me home."

"Oh."

"And Juliet," Peter breathed, heart leaping in his chest.

"Peter," she said in her lighthearted mocking tone, her downcast expression changing into that mischievous smirk he loved so much.

He stepped away now, spinning her under his arm, and pulled her close once more. The sorrow was gone and they were swept off to their own place, just for the two of them, where nothing mattered outside of the diner with the old tile, the chrome furniture, and the bright rainbow jukebox.

Let the world do what it does, you're safe with me because...

"I love you," Juliet uttered before she could think. Fear struck across her features in realization and she quickly looked up and scanned Peter's features, urgently searching for a reaction. His lips fell into an easy smile and his cheeks glowed with happiness. His eyes shone bright and Juliet knew she had said just the right thing.

"I love you too," he spoke softly and pulled her into an embrace. Swaying to the end of the song, the two were safe in each other's arms. Though they were sure such euphoria would wear off when they had to face the real world together, for now, in that moment, nothing mattered besides them, waltzing in that place for two, where there was no one else.

I love you, no one but you.

UNTITLED
by Nina Bracht-Bedell



WHY I RUN
by Ashlin Slanger

They ask me why I run.
Through desert heat or icy rain.
I say: my mind becomes undone
Free of it's perpetual, pungent pain

What is it that pushes me,
Through my body's livid languish?
Why do I endure; buzzing like a feeble bee?
Because: my thoughts all seem to vanquish.

Am I running away from you?

This I cannot say
I only know that I am running
And that you are gone away

GOUACHE AND CUT PAPER LANDSCAPE
by Allison McJannet



NAUGHTY PUP
by Sara Geesling



I BELIEVE
by Kloe Bickel

I believe that loneliness is essential
I believe that music is what drives all movement
I believe that yellow is too harsh of a color
I believe that arguments are when we shed the most skin
I believe that cottage cheese is the worst of all dairy products
I believe that suffocating is a truly beautiful way to die
I believe that the worst feeling is paranoia
I believe in a higher power
I believe that men under 30 with man buns are simply superior
I believe that handwriting is an extension of our souls
I believe that pancakes are better than waffles
I believe that the purest form of love in kissing someone's open palm
I believe in ice cream cones
I believe that my middle name dose not suit me
I believe that we are all on this planet for some sort of purpose
I believe in pink sunrises spent with pretty girls

DOUBTLESS
by Julia Young

I used to be afraid of the dark, because I thought the monsters would get me, and they did eventually. It came to me first in a nightmare, then it became not something of fear, but something of strength. It was with me, always with me, whether I was awake, dreaming, or within my own mind. It crept through my thoughts, preyed on my worst fears, and yet somehow it was familiar. It snuck up on me, but before long, it became a friend, not a foe. I became friends with the monster inside of me and it revealed my weaknesses. Though it scared me before, it couldn't hold its grip over my mind. I broke away from its grip and brought it into my submission. It would escape only to be brought back down to its knees. It was now under my control and it wouldn't rule me. Never again would I let it be powerful and controlling. It hurt me, broke me down, crushed my hopes. It would stop me from what I wanted. It trod on my aspirations and dreams. I fought it for control. That is, I used to. The monster was me. I stopped myself. I won. Doubtless.

MY FAIRYTALE
by Marley Claeys

What's the first lie you were told?
Was it that things would make sense when you're old?
Or maybe it was that Santa came once a year
For me I remember quite clear,
The words "happily ever after"
Read to my ears

I watched little girls come to sit on a throne
And I thought I'd be like them once I'd finally grown
I watched mermaids grow legs
And wood turn to man
And I thought if they could then maybe I can
I spent my whole life chasing after this dream,
Like the magic they had ran through my bloodstream

But reality hits in the darkness of night,
When my thoughts overwhelm and consume all the light
Because all of my castles crumbled into the sand
And I'm not the fairest one in the land
There was no perfect kiss that turned beast into man
I think my fairy godmother saw the shadows and ran

FLOATING

by Sarina Bogy



FOR LOVE OF A FROZEN HEART

by Carousel Sackman

I remember days like this,
And yet I don't want to think about it,
The way we used to play,
Cheeks rosy as smiles froze to our faces.

The ground is as white as it was all those years ago,
Glittering crystals reflect what little light there is,
I can't tell if the sting is from the glare or my tears,
It hurts to see children play in the cold.

How can the sky be so grey?
It was so bright when we were younger,
And now I must stop my mind from wondering,
As the crunch of snow follows my every step.

You wanted to learn how to draw,
To make things with your own hands,
So we could make something that would last,
As our friendship became something else in the cold.

I can't even stare out the window anymore,
Because I see the wind chimes we made together,
Tiny glass snowflakes twirling around small metal pillars,
Blue like ice and grey like the winter sky.

It's hard not to listen,
The clink and ring of glass on metal,
The fading scratch of your pencil,
The crinkle of frosted paper.

The warmth of your hand still rests on my shoulder,
With a smile so bright it rivaled the sun,
Your eyes were so pleading I couldn't refuse,
You wanted to teach me something for a change.

I can still hear you laughing,
Like the wind is playing with my head,
Metal and glass click together like broken ice,
Why did we go skating that day?

SHADOWS

by Ella Rowland



CEDARMOOR

by Natalia Kelly

There is a town far outside of Occoquan, Virginia that the locals will take the dirt roads to avoid. The one-lane streets that get you just far enough away from the sight of the city that people can feel comfortable driving away, even when they have to veer off the gravel to let other cars pass them. This town has a population of one-hundred-and-twenty-two. Cedarmoor.

Cedarmoor has a code of conduct for if you pass through, which most people try not to, so long as they know. Strangers driving in from out of state, or out of Occoquan, usually fail to recognize these rules. They are as follows:

When passing by the single K-12 school, do not linger near the parking lot. The staff require the space, and will phone in to have you removed.

A building painted red is a sign that they will never be open when you find it convenient. Come back on accident and try again.

The liquor store has been closed for years, and the inside is heavily vandalized. When you see the lights on and a person leaving with a brown paper bag, do not question them, and do not stare.

Always go the speeding limit. The Sheriff can catch you even if you do not think so.

There is a local pool where the swimming team goes to practice. They are always there when you are. Do not watch or follow along in their drills. Stay away from the drain and filter.

The bay is behind The Sheriff's office. There is not a lifeguard on duty, so act with caution.

The hotel is not safe for more than a one-night visit. People caught staying for more than a day have to deal with room service.

There are two cafes, the Red Bird and the Smokehouse. Never order a London fog from the Red Bird and never order espresso from either.

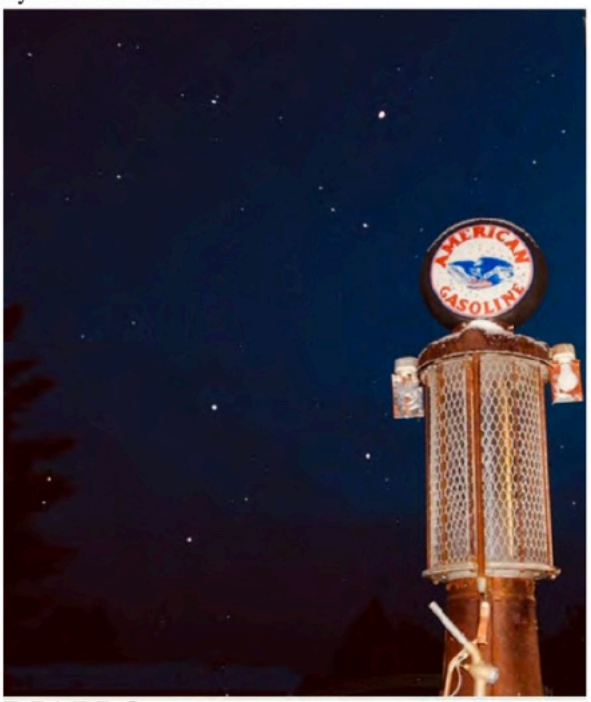
Sometimes the people are watching. They are standing at their window, or watching from a store or a restaurant. They are looking from the street corners and the red lights. They are looking at you from the

benches in the park, from the swings at playgrounds and the stools at the bar. They are watching you from store check-out lines and ordering queues. They watch you. They look how you remove your wallet from your pocket to pay for your road snacks and your bottle of water. They watch as you leave, tucking your change into your pocket. They see how you unscrew the cap of your water, give yourself rug burn on your palm from the divits in the plastic. They see how you drive slowly past the market, their eyes do not flinch when you slam on your breaks because, hey, where did that stop sign come from? It was not there when I came in! They see how you get more frantic the longer and longer this town seems to consume you. Their heads turn from the evening news, the newscasters following suit. All of them stare at you. They watch you get nervous, but they are adjacent to stone. They do not move from you. They do not get closer but they never, ever get farther. They see you run a red light, they see you curse the day, they see The Sheriff's car emerge from the corner. They knew he would come soon. The Sheriff, too, sees you. Their eyes are ice, white and unrelenting. They bore into you from every angle of every place in this small, unassuming town. They watch you struggle to find the exit. They watch as the desperation grows in you, how you ask the God of a godless town to let you exit from the nightmare that is Cedarmoor. They watch you scream into your dashboard as the night crawls towards you. They watch you put your pedal to the floorboards and as The Sheriff continues at the same pace he has for miles. You do not understand. How Cedarmoor could turn from a suburban row of townhouses and an empty, baseless lot of stores to miles and miles of the same buildings. Over, and over, and over again they watch as you pass by them again, again, again, again, and again. They do not change but you do. Cedarmoor changes you. The eyes change you, the watching changes you. They see you run out of gas, pull over on the side of the same black road you have been driving for hours. They watch you lock your doors fruitlessly in some wild attempt to stop the inevitable. They watch The Sheriff pull in behind you even after you swore to yourself he was miles and miles behind you. That does not matter to The Sheriff.

Watch who passes through Cedarmoor.

GAS PUMP

by McKenna Moore



DIABLO

Danielle Prouty



FAMILY SHORT STORY

by Lauren MacDonald

"Come on, come on! We need to hurry!" I yelled, hoisting the crate over my shoulders again. I ran down the alleyway, my feet slapping against the pavement.

We had seen a couple of coppers by the back entrance to one of the local businesses. They were a bit too close to where we had been unloading the booze to be comfortable, so as soon as we finished unloading it all, we ran off down the alleyway, just in case they saw us leave.

"I'm going, Frank!" Tommy said behind me, picking up speed and shoving Michael forward. We reached the car and Michael and Tommy got in the back, putting the booze in the hidden panels we installed for the checks the coppers did every once and awhile.

I reversed the car and took off down the street, heading to the speakeasy where we store the booze. It's not permanent, just until we can get out of Canada and back down to Plentywood. Tommy, Michael and I were three of the few bootleggers in Montana, seeing as there weren't many people living there. The only place we could get access to anything good was up in Canada, where I knew a couple guys who had some. It was a long and risky trip, but it was worth it in the end.

The trip to the speakeasy took only a few minutes. We unloaded the car at the back of the building, taking all of the booze inside.

"Frank! How's it going, pal?" William, the owner of the speakeasy, said, patting me on the back and taking a box.

"Not too bad, Will, not too bad." The boys and I followed him up into the main area, sitting down at the bar.

I'd known Will for a couple years. I met him in Wolfpoint, Montana when I first became a bootlegger. He had been one for a couple years and we did some work together before he opened up this speakeasy. Will's a really great guy and he taught me a lot of the stuff I know about bootlegging.

"What'll you guys have?" the bartender asked, leaning against the countertop. He went behind the counter and grabbed three glasses, pouring us our drinks. He set them all down and I took a sip of mine, the feeling of the alcohol going down my throat, a feeling of flames licking at it viciously. Setting the glass down, I turned to Tommy.

"Hey. We're heading back home tomorrow, all right?" He nodded, setting down his glass as well, telling Michael the same thing. We sat at the bar for a while, drinking and telling stories, laughing and having a good time.

We headed back to Plentywood the next day, bright and early in the morning. I drove, Michael in the passenger's seat, and Tommy in the back with the booze. The drive was about two hours long and we reached Plentywood soon enough. The alcohol was stored at a safehouse, which was really just Tommy's grandma's basement, seeing as it was pretty far from the center of town and there was a good distance between any other houses.

"Okay, Tommy, you log all the goods, and Michael, you come with me to go see Charlie," I said, walking back out to the car, Michael following behind me. I reversed the car, driving down the street to the closest speakeasy I knew of, The Copper Bell. My friend from high school, Charlie, owned it, and he helped the boys and I get in touch with new people or other speakeasies as customers. There have been some close calls with the coppers in the past couple months, but we'd been careful enough and I'm hoping it'll stay that way.

Pulling up at The Copper Bell, we got out of the car and headed in. We walked into Charlie's

NATURAL FLOWERS

by Ryann Thomas



office, sitting down at his desk in front of him.

"How are my boys today?" he asked, giving us both a smile and kicking his feet up on the desk. Even though he was only two or three years older than me, Charlie was like a dad to us both, helping us with the business, giving us new customers, all of that stuff. He was always such a happy guy, making the job less stressful and making sure we stayed positive and focused. I owed him a lot, too, for all the things he's done for Michael, Tommy, and I.

"We're good, Charlie. What have you got for us today?" Michael said, settling back in his chair.

"Well, I've got a couple new people lined up, as well as the regulars like Georgie and Jim. You'll be dropping off Georgie and Jim's loads at the usual spots, but for one of the new customers, you'll be meeting at the old abandoned Roberts farm out at the edge of town tomorrow. Does noon sound about good?" Charlie set down his pen and looked up at us, making sure we heard.

"Yeah, sounds alright, Charlie. Thanks for setting us up with that. We got your stuff coming in later today with Tommy." I stood up and shook his hand, Michael following after. Michael was like a little brother to me even though he was a year or two younger than me. Tommy and I always took care of him, making sure he got a good pay, didn't get into any trouble, stuff like that. He reminded me of a little puppy that way. Always following us around, young and innocent.

Life wasn't always like this, before the Prohibition. Us three weren't criminals, we'd never even been arrested or watched by the coppers. It's just what happens in times like these, trying to help other people out. Yeah, alcohol isn't a necessity, but it helps. People are going to want to have fun or want to forget something or just have a drink to finish the day with and if there's ways to get it and give it to people, I might as well try to do something.

"It was good to see you, Frank. You too Michael. Come 'round again soon, I'll get you guys some drinks on the house. Bring Tommy, too." We said our goodbyes and headed out, making our way back to the house. When we got back, Tommy was making dinner with his grandma. Another casserole, I'm guessing.

"Hey, Frankie. How'd it go?" Tommy asked, setting down a spoon and wiping his hands on his pants.

"We got some new customers. A drop off tomorrow and the regulars, too." I sat down on the couch and leaned back, finally relaxing for the first time today. Hopefully I can sleep well tonight. I haven't had a good night's sleep in... who knows how long.

Tommy finished dinner and we all ate together, talking about the business tomorrow and telling Tommy about how Charlie was since he wasn't able to see him. We all went off to bed after that. Michael and I shared a room and Tommy slept in a small room in the basement, saying it made him feel better if someone was "watching over the merchandise" or something like that.

He's always been the most serious one about this. His brother was a bootlegger at the beginning of Prohibition. Tommy told me that he got killed in a shootout with some coppers at a drop-off gone wrong, but I never really got the whole story. I do know that he does this to do it for his brother in some way, which was what fueled him day to day. I always admired his work ethic. It was a thing I couldn't hold on to, always goofing around with the guys in Canada or the people at the speakeasies. Maybe one day I'll be able to sit down and focus like he does. Hopefully.

The next morning I woke up, again without a good night's sleep. I went out into the kitchen where Tommy's grandma was making breakfast and I grabbed the morning paper. Michael came out a few minutes later and then breakfast was ready. We ate quickly, knowing we had a lot of work to do today. By the time we left the house, it was already 10:30. We had to drop by The Copper Bell and give Charlie his share of the booze, then it was time for the meet-up with the new customer.

FAWN

by Michaela Allen



Michael, Tommy and I arrived at the old Robert's farm early. It was a nice day out, partly cloudy, but warm. I was looking up at the sky and could see the sun rays poking out from behind the clouds. I was talking to Tommy about the guys we were meeting, saying how this drop-off should be pretty quick. Then I heard it. We all heard it. The bells of the coppers cars coming down the street. I couldn't comprehend what was happening at first, but then it hit me. We were going to jail. All of us. How did this happen?

The sound got closer and closer and I could hear Michael yelling at me to move or run, but I couldn't. My body froze. I knew that the coppers would arrest us; it was inevitable. I'd heard about the stories about the other bootleggers who'd gotten arrested. They never ended well. I mean, take Tommy's brother for example. I don't want that to happen to Tommy, or Michael. I don't want to die.

I felt claustrophobic. The jail cell wasn't tiny, but I felt like the walls were closing in on me. The cell reminded me of a grave; no light, no air, just you, and yourself. Even though it was Tommy, Michael and I in the cell, along with the guys who were coming to buy the booze, I still felt alone, like I'd been stranded on an island with no way to get home.

It had been a couple days since we'd been in there. The other guys had been moved to their own cell, so it was just the boys and I now. At least we had each other, like always.

"Frank Wilson, Michael Elsner, and Thomas Kinney?" An officer had come over to our cell and brought out his keys.

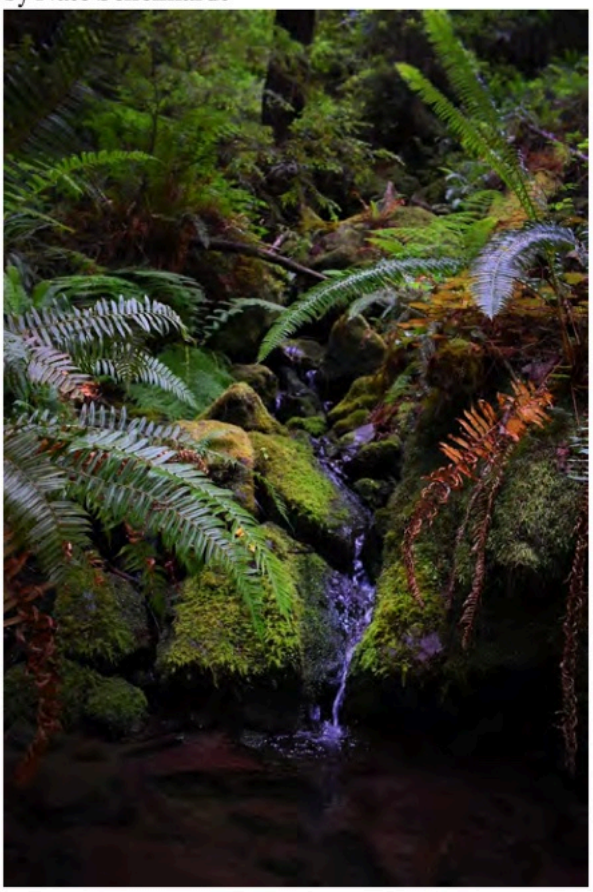
"Yeah? That's us," Tommy said, looking up from his shoes.

"You're all free to go."

We stepped outside of the station, taking in the sunlight for the first time in days. I looked up at the sky and, just like before, I could see the sun rays poking out from behind the clouds.

OVERGROWN WATERFALL

by Nate Schellhardt



THE THINGS THEY LIFTED

by Ryan Magee

They lifted the Hammer Strength steel cast dumbbells and barbells. They lifted Smith's, cables, curl bars, lead plates, and Rogue bumper plates, ropes, flyes, integrated dip parallels, stringers, and much more.

Every month the maintenance team came in, they lifted patches, rubber to melt and repair. They lifted refill jugs, each held four gallons of water. Lee Haney lifted a new chest supported row for those qualified. Ronnie Coleman lifted his tub of Optimum whey to avoid catabolic muscle loss. Dave Draper lifted his meal prep container. Some of these they mutually lifted. With a shared effort, they lifted the lateral raise circuit machine, weighing 150 pounds. All of them carried the pressure of expectation. Frequently they lifted one another's spirits. They carried the mental struggle of persistent dissatisfaction.

They carried side effects from their drug use. They lifted gym cards, shower towels, trophies, supplements, and tobacco, books on the science behind growth. They lifted their fists in disapproval. They carried the gym itself—Gold's Gym, the iron, the environment, the work required to maintain a successful atmosphere. They carried the members. They carried the integral traits of their gym, the body odor, the sweat stains, the sound of weights being lifted, the aggression, the hate, the frustration.

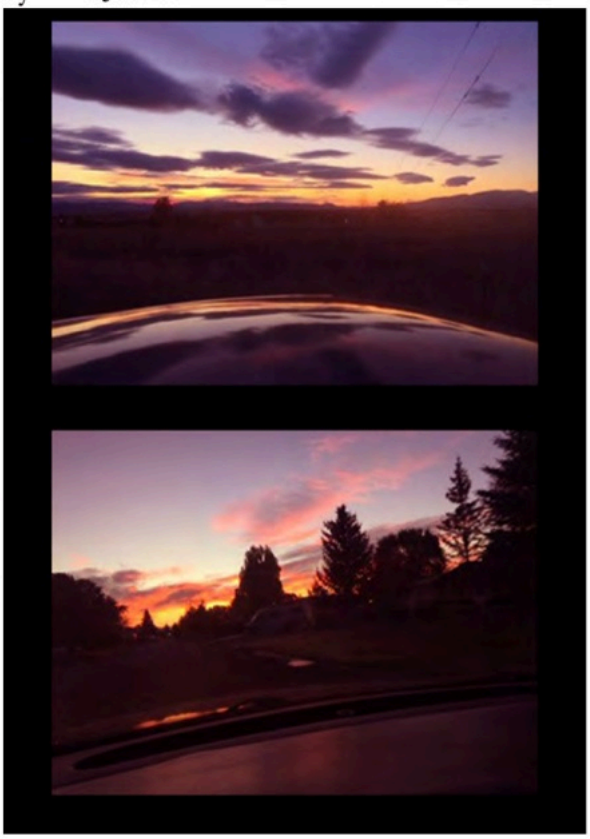
They worked like soldiers, carrying their own weight on their shoulders. By sunrise they were in the gym, at sunset they were finishing their final work of the day, but it was not to stay healthy, it was simply the immense pressure to conform to their unrealistic morals, dumbbell after dumbbell, with no immediate gratification.

Rich Piana was no exception—he took the iron to the extreme and was never satisfied. He claimed to be part of the one percent of the population with a dedication of such intensity. They lifted simply to lift. Exhausted, they forced themselves through another workout, one rep at a time, sweat pouring from every pore in their bodies, not a bad day's work. They overcame the overwhelming urge to come to completion, just one rep following the last, bearing the lactic acid buildup, forcing themselves past failure, pushing past the breaking point. The work was seemingly second nature to them, no conscious deliberation went through their minds, it was solely the vision of conquering expectation which yielded a force capable of producing unrealistic volume.

This ideology stemmed from their success. The ability to produce visible growth carried a weight in their minds. They saw no repercussions, just growth and the ability to grow.

BEAUTY

by Anna Justice



SKY

by Jayden Bloom



THE SLEEP I LOST

by Marrin Chapman

As a teenager who takes four college level classes, is involved in numerous clubs, two bible studies, Wednesday night youth group, a church leadership group, has a job, has soccer year round, and takes piano lessons, I never expected to get a lot of sleep. I expected to lose it. Going to bed at eleven p.m. is early, and getting up six hours later is restful. Sometimes, I close my eyes in the middle of a boring chemistry lecture for a second just to taste the melanin and black air. I sit in my car on the way back from practice dreaming of the sleep that awaits me after hours of studying; but, when I get home, I can't. The lamp beside my bed is lit. The speaker on my desk hums the soft sound of Coldplay. The cup on my windowsill still steeps with hot mint tea and honey. I cannot sleep.

I lose sleep over what I can control. I lose sleep and the biology homework that slipped my fatigue-fogged mind. I lose sleep and the bible I'm supposed to use at seven the next morning. I lose sleep and track of every task I take on, but the fear of a two-hour test on all 206 human bones is not what keeps my weary eyes fixed on fairy lights that keep dark walls dimly lit. I lose sleep over tomorrow. I lose sleep over the anxiety that encompasses my eyes, that makes me see through a lens of calamity and doubt. I lose sleep over every misstep: the laugh I made, the words I stuttered, the actions I made. I lose sleep when my heart falls in my chest, violently tearing my mind out of a night terror yet again. My heart beats, thrums, echoes so loudly in the concavity of my chest that all I can hear is just that. I lose sleep tossing and turning and thinking and just sitting there, still. I sit there in the deafening sound of silence trying to trick my mind into sleep, so that I wake up rested, so that I wake up okay. The sleep I lose is as numerous as the stars in the night sky, which I know because I too am awake when they are.

When my alarm rings in the morning, I cannot open my eyes because it feels as though my eyelids have been tied down with cinder blocks and the weight of my homework. My limbs ache with the fatigue that my eyes feel in the middle of a calculus lecture. The temptation to sleep is all too great, and the need is even greater. My mouth and mind move slowly to speak the words that I need to say. The senseless stutter, the miscalculated laugh, the clumsy fall, all hang over my head, reminding me of what I failed to do. I go home, repeat the same tedious cycle, and come to one conclusion: I lost sleep and my mind.

UNTITLED

by Lydia Fife



UNTITLED

by Lily Templeton

Derry could never match the leisure and tenderness of Killeagh, which was quietly settled among the soft, northern hills of Ireland. Early on, he realized that he was too heavy for the village he was born to. Sometimes, he would watch his mother breathe, watch her lungs fill with weightless air that seemed to lift her off her feet with every breath, and he would breathe with her but felt the air instead as cold lead that filled his stomach and pushed his heels deeper into the ground.

He noticed the way that everyone else was able to float seamlessly over the earth, unnoticed, while his heels dug deep grooves wherever he went. It seemed like every move he made was recorded and every impression created by his great figure was a glaring reminder of just how much space he took up.

The deep-rooted aggression he was born with snaked around his body in place of the vessels that were supposed grow there, and the whole village saw him, saw the internal fuse, and they were afraid. Other children ran from him, sometimes in making fun of but others in genuine fear. Even teachers flinched at his presence, and probably for good reason, as Derry tended to wear a sadistic smile on his face even at the most intimate moments.

However, the most peculiar thing about the boy was his eyes, which were set heavy into his face and did most of the talking for him. They were deeply unsettling in that they posed a threat to anyone caught off guard, who seemed to fall into them and

ROSE COLORED GLASSES

by Lillian Hollibaugh



never quite escape. He was the kind of child that everyone, in the darkest depths of their stomachs, hoped might fall down a well or maybe stray a little too close to the raging river on some stormy night.

Derry did his best to fit in, tried to keep his internal flame at a slow, silent burn, but he knew from the deep ache living behind his ribs that there would never be a day where the world would stop holding its breath at his arrival.

It was spring in Killeagh when the most wonderous woman he had ever seen walked in the door of his and his mother's homely shack.

She didn't knock; in fact, the door trembled in her wake, collapsing before her. Derry, mouth full of a lovely breakfast, glared with contempt at dirty black boots. And then up, his gaze travelled, until the woman caught it, merciless. They rested there, defeated, doing their best to comprehend the powerful figure before them.

She was an older woman, weathered, but wearing her years proudly on her skin, but the first thing he noticed was that her eyes did not follow the same pattern of aging. Derry realized quickly that he could drown in the color, almost yellow if you stared long enough, which he did.

He knew then that he was in love, and there would be no other like her. But before he could drop to his knees in front of her and confess his fantastic realization, his mother hunkered in and crushed the bubbling tension with her hasty benevolence.

When they finally separated, Aideen looked over to Derry, and upon seeing him for the first time, squealed a little and started toward him. His heart almost stopped right then as she grabbed both his cheeks in her perfectly textured fingers and pinched them just the right amount and he dissolved at her touch.

Apparently, Cousin Aideen had gone to the well for water one morning and had never come home. Everyone had assumed that she had fallen in. Having the 'every man for himself' mindset, the people of Killeagh turned their heads and hoped for the best, never once actually looking down the well for themselves. That was 15 years ago. In truth, Aideen had just gone out and joined the army in secret, and then moved to America once her term ended in search of the American Dream. Upon failure, she finally returned home and then sat in front of Derry

and told her stories and he watched the words dance upon her lips and then out, out across the air, to where they fell asleep snug inside his ears.

Derry, being a man of simple needs and pleasures, couldn't ever forget his love for Cousin Aideen. Even after several wives and countless children, he still longed for the untouched fantasy of her lips and those eyes.

After years of unrequited love and desire, desperation began to set in, and Derry was known for his extremes.

It started with simple bar fights, usually starring a poor man who sat in the wrong stool that night or a wandering drunk who fatefully ran into Derry's path. Soon, however, as his anger spread and his figure broadened, and he landed himself in the hole, beyond anyone's surprise, where he sat, stood, paced behind cold bars for the rest of his little, tired life. At least in prison there was no soft dirt for his heels to dig into, and he went unnoticed.

———

Some people, like Mike, just wanted to party.

When he wanted a good time, he got himself one. For all anyone knew, he could have coined the phrase "party hardy," for the way he moved was like a snake in cool blue water.

Michael. Besides his enthusiasm, he was nothing like his father, whom Mike thought to be the bane of his very existence.

Derry McMahon was a stuttering drunk who couldn't stay on his feet unless he was throwing someone off theirs. He held the place of most feared and least respected simultaneously, but he seemed to carry both with equal pride, which was even more embarrassing for Mike. When he first went to prison, it was like no one even noticed a change. It was so expected that the whole town settled into this state of foe ignorance over the loss.

Thankfully, Mike's connection to his father was faded, as he had so many other children that the existence of their relation was not often recognized. Instead, Mike was known for his rich lust for the world around him. He lived everyday like it was his last; loudly and without fear. To Mike, his fearlessness was the only convenient trait that he had gained from his father, but he squeezed everything he could out of it like a sour lemon he had convinced himself was sweeter.

Of course, the life that Mike led was tired and static. Partying could last him long enough but the in-between portions were where he would return in a drunken haze to a cold, empty house; to his frail mother curled in front of a luminescent box, her face stony and vacant as it always was; to a dusty mattress on a sad, creaky floor; to sour air swallowed up by nothing, on top of nothing.

Sometimes he would wake up choking, like he had forgotten to breathe or maybe the air had been stolen right from his lungs by that same, ugly thing that breathed down his spine as soon as he stepped in the door. Mike would rather be anywhere but there.

Sometimes, though, things would pick up again when he would meet someone who was a little more human than the rest while he was out on his extravaganzas. All these people had the same thing in common, that look of desperation that pulled him in because he knew it so well, felt it deep inside his own reaching eyes.

That night, the desperation led Mike to a man named Lucy, who talked about a lot about things he seemed not to know a thing about. His favorite part about Lucy, however, was how he called him by a nickname upon shaking his hand.

"Good to meet you, Mikey!" he spouted with utmost confidence, and the line reeled over and over in Mikey's head. He didn't talk to Lucy much for the rest of the party, but his eyes stayed glued to him still. Mike was fascinated by the way that he controlled the room with uncomfortable ease and that somehow, he and everyone else knew that Lucy was the one who rose the sun in the morning and told the flowers when to bloom.

After that night, Mike could not stay away from Lucy. Sometimes he would forget to react to his real name being called, knowing that it was so miniscule compared to the way that Lucy called him, giving every sound in his glorious title the rank of a king. People had always made Mike feel important, but Lucy made him eternal. In spending more time together, Mike realized that Lucy cared a lot about the world around him. He frequently took part in charities and rallies, and after strenuous convincing, Mike agreed to join him in one.

Once they arrived at his first rally, a local park, Mike quickly realized that he was not prepared for the next several moments of his life. An angry sea of people stood before him, faces solid and signs waving. The rally began and Mike watched helplessly as the mob slowly twisted until it became a tsunami of fury, bowling towards the helpless streets ahead. Although this was his first rally, Mike gathered that this would not be the average protest, and his guess was confirmed when he spotted the flashing lights out of the corner of his eyes. It was baffling to him how much braver people were in sight of authority when they knew of the raging army beside them.

But Mike was not a part of the tsunami; he

did not feel the same blistering rage. Even so, the air outside that cool autumn morning felt crisper than before, and a small spark lit deep in Mike's stomach. As the people thundered on, Mike's spark grew until it was a small flame, and he felt the wind pick up and it stung his eyes and fed the flame more, and more, and more. The burgeoning flame crept up into Mike's throat, flooding behind his eyes, and he began to understand that the movement of his body was no longer voluntary, that the flame was now him and whatever was left of Mike was banished to the depths of his stomach.

This foreign feeling was a fiery lust for violence and passionate obstruction that he knew so well but had never felt inside himself, and now it was all he could see. The world began to burn like paper, beginning with the edges where the sky met the mountains and it all began to close in on Mike. What he was breathing now was not autumn air, but thick smoke and it coated his lungs and his nostrils and soon all that was left to do was succumb to it. The flames roared around him and knocked him to the ground, and he felt them push into his back and wrap hot around his wrists, pulling tighter and tighter until all he felt was sweeping cold and then nothing at all.

He awoke in a cold, lonely cell with only the unforgiving smell of anguish and iron clogging his nose.

It seemed like everyone was out looking for Ruby that night, or they should have been, anyway. I never liked her much, but that didn't matter because I hated the way that the house felt a little colder with her absence. At first, I wasn't worried because she almost never comes home with whoever went out to walk her; she is usually on her own schedule and comes back when she feels like it. But it's never been this long.

I don't like the lump in my throat, not big enough to cry out but not small enough to swallow. The world feels a lot bigger now; it feels like there are so many unchecked corners. Where could she be? Dogs are already dumb, but blind dogs really get the short end of the stick.

Frantic. It's in Mom's hair that she keeps running her hands through, and there's some behind the lampshade, and I see it clinging to the ceiling.

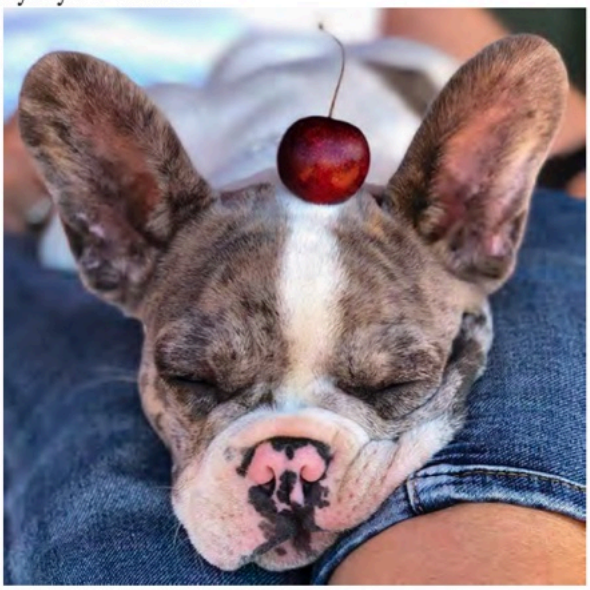
Frantic. I wish everyone would go to sleep. I want the house to be still again. Still and cold and lacking is better than frantic and lukewarm and full of skeptical faith. We will find her; I tell everyone through my mind. Or we won't.

I come home to her nestled deep into the couch, like she's afraid to let go. Mom says she was in a hole a street down. Apartments that burned down earlier this year, must've fallen in, she keeps going. *Two-and-a-half days.* Blind dog, our Ruby Rose, stuck in a cold, lonely pit for two and a half days. Fallen into imprisonment.

The air in my house is back to normal. I find myself watching her, making sure she's still here. She is. I would like to ask her what freedom feels like. I go to sleep instead.

SWEET LIKE A CHERRY

by Dylan Culwell



NORMAL MONTANA WINTER

by Jaida Green



REMEMBER THE EARTH

Carousel Sackman

It started off simple, it seemed like every other average year. Then famers started yielding less in their harvests, and forests started to dwindle. By the time we realized something was wrong it was too late. The Earth itself was dying.

Marcel Speight didn't want to be where he was, on a dying patch of land miles away from civilization. But he was a scientist and everyone was either working their brains to bits or panicking because the planet was dying beneath their feet. Marcel was just one of the unlucky sods that was commissioned to find a way to save this blasted planet. The only problem was that they could find absolutely no reason for the earth to be as sick as it was.

So, it was reasonable for Marcel to be even more cranky than usual. Coupled with the fact that he was a 34-year-old man who looked like he was in his late forties, well, he wasn't a happy camper. Marcel was a tall person, standing at about 6'4", he kept his graying auburn hair cut fairly short, and left a well-trimmed beard clinging to the perpetual scowl that stayed firmly painted on his face. Chocolate brown eyes sat heavily under bushy eyebrows, glaring at anything and everything they could see.

Maybe that was why he was sent to collect the diminishing plant samples: his colleagues wanted a reprieve from his severe face and biting tone.

Well if that's what they want, Marcel thought darkly, scowl deepening and brown eyes narrowing farther, if that was possible. He had specifically asked Tyler Rogerson, the head scientist in charge of their research facility, if he could go out a little farther than usual to look for samples. The younger man had barely bothered to restrain his relief at the idea and Marcel was rather proud of himself for keeping a mostly straight face. Afterwards, he had gathered some basic equipment and camping gear, setting off without a word to anyone else in the building.

Now he was marching through the withering plant life almost a full day's brisk walk from the research facility he'd spent the last six-and-a-half months living in and he honestly felt a little calmer for it. Marcel glanced up, checking the position of the sun. It would start getting dark soon, he noted, starting to look for a suitable place to set up camp and—

Marcel froze, eyes blown wide, and stared. In front of him, not ten feet away, was green grass. He blinked, brought his hands up and rubbed his eyes in an uncharacteristic show of disbelief. The grass was still green, vibrant, living, green grass. After staring for a good minute or two, Marcel carefully set down the pack he'd been carrying, opened it and sifted through until he pulled out a couple of objects. The first one looked like a small remote, a miniature screen was set near the end of the device, as well as a few buttons. The second appeared to be a glass jar of some sort, but the small control panel on one side said otherwise.

It took Marcel an embarrassing amount of time to pull himself together, and when he did, he set to work on the subject of his recent breakdown. The remote-like scanner was used to gather a basic reading on the grass, just to confirm what he saw and felt beneath his fingers. The container came next. Marcel carefully dug up a small section of grass, silently marveling on how the soil underneath didn't crumble like sand when he lifted the clump of sod. He carefully placed the grass in the jar, setting the controls to mimic the earth's atmosphere and keep the plant fresh until he could return to the research facility.

Now for the hard part: figuring out why this particular area was doing so well when the entire planet was dying. And because Marcel didn't current-

GLACIER THEMED WOOD-BURNED CLOCK

Allison McJannet



ly have access to stronger equipment, he would just have to wander around with his scanner and see if he could find anything worth noting. The shock of finding living plants was finally wearing off and he was reverting to the mind of a scientist once again; take good samples, do as much research as possible with the current resources, and report any findings back to the superior. Marcel took out his phone and called Tyler and waited for the younger man to pick up, not caring that the sun was setting and any reasonable person would be asleep by now.

"This had better be good," Tyler's sleepy voice grumbled through the phone, Marcel smirked for a moment, any reason to make his superior's life difficult was a good one.

"I found something that might interest you," Marcel snarks back, smug dripping from his tone like water from a leaky faucet.

"Believe it or not I managed to find some living plants." Silence, absolute dead silence on the other end of the phone. Marcel almost checks the connection when Tyler speaks again.

"You're certain it's not some sort of trick?" Ah, there was the skepticism he was expecting. Marcel snorted, not bothering to hide the annoyed contempt it contained.

"Why would I lie about something this important? I even went as far as to test it myself." Marcel paused, he could almost see the younger man on the other side of the conversation, drawing himself up to either wait out the customary rant that Marcel let lose or interrupt him and list every reason he was wrong. Marcel sighed, running a hand through untidy auburn hair.

"Tyler." He listened to the slightly confused quiet on the other end of the call. "You would have to see it for yourself, so find my location and come out here. Whether it's now or tomorrow doesn't matter, just get out here," he hesitated before adding, so softly he almost didn't hear it himself, "Please."

"All right, I'll meet you tomorrow." And with that Tyler ended the call.

Marcel didn't waste any time setting up camp after the call had ended, he needed all the rest he could get for tomorrow.

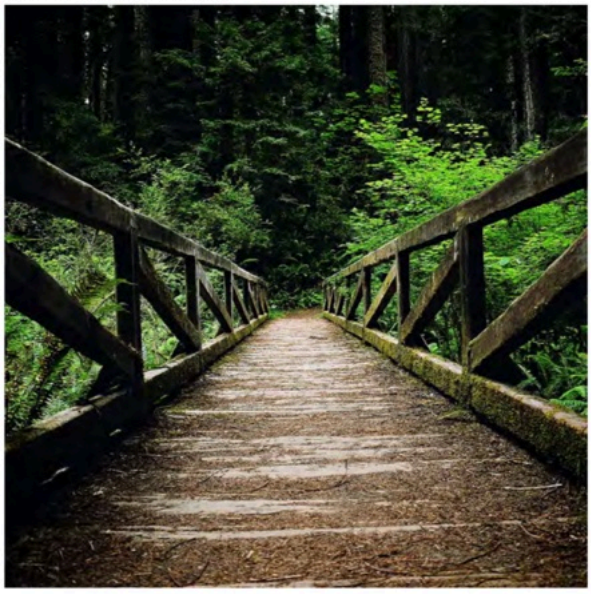
HEALTH NUT

by Danielle Prouty



HIDDEN BRIDGE

by Nate Schellhardt



LOLLI

by Zoey Wall

I once saw a picture of a lion from a book the boy read to me
After that, I liked to pretend I was one of them
I held my head up high and gazed into the distance
It was definitely what they call picturquese
The girl would laugh and call me her little lioness

I tried to be a lion when my family found out.
I could feel the cancer coming in before they knew
And right after they got the news, it got hard
They mostly liked to bury their heads into my chest and their bodies shook

But I kept my head high for them, to let them know I was still strong
After that we started going on extra walks
Exploring all the places I loved to go
Treats were plentiful and they even let me have my ball again
They took it away before because they thought it made me reckless.
But when I got sick, they just wanted to make sure I was happy
So I didn't tell them about all the balls I had hidden in the yard anyway

I got pretty lucky to grow up with my family
They lived down the road from where I was born
And they visited every weekend to see me
The kids didn't know I was theirs
They cried when their parents told them I was coming home

I hope they were happy tears or that would be awkward
They took me to see a lot of things
I tasted lakes all over the place
A few times it tricked me with salt
Everyone thought it was funny when I spit it out
On those trips I always tried to stay humble
Because people liked to ask to take my picture
A lion on a beach is too irresistible

Once I overheard the doctors talk at an appointment
They thought I had a few weeks
I was okay with that, I had the best life
But my family said I wasn't ready

There was too much to do still
They wanted me to live more, so I did
I got to backcountry ski and drive in an RV to Sedona
We explored Glacier National Park and sat on the rim of the Grand Canyon
I protected our camp from a group of pesky mountain goats
And the pictures continued when I got my very own photo shoot
(I let the girl join me for her senior pictures)

I dropped my ball in the middle of a 200m dash
And got stranded on the Missouri River
And I spent so many quiet evenings with my family
Laying in front of the fire and reading books
Well, I can't read but I liked to nap next to my kids
We learned how to live every one of those moments like it was the last
Each one was special and we treasured the time we were lucky enough to spend together

The cancer grew much slower than the doctors thought
But when I knew it was time I let my family know
And they understood
I got to stay at home and I laid in my favorite spot in front of the fire
And I wagged my tail so that they knew it was okay
When it was all over they put me on the hill above the house
So that I can always look down on my family
Because I know that there is nowhere else I'd rather be.

SUMMER

by Brett Stoos



THIRTEEN THINGS TO SEE IN A CHICKADEE

by Hanna Muszkiewicz

number one
when your dad takes you camping, he points to the chickadee
see him staying up late, stoking the fire, drinking another
whiskey and calling for the bird to come and say hello
what keeps you awake

number two
when you lie on your back in the grass of your grandparents
pasture, you hear the song of a chickadee in a nearby tree
you close your eyes and listen
what keeps you happy

number three
there is a baby book, the kind made out of board, and it names
all the birds and when you read it with your mama, your little fingers
touched the chickadee and you wouldn't let your mama turn
the page
the thing that keeps you coming back for more

number four
you sit in the garden and listen to the chickadees and wonder
why they make that sound
the thing that keeps you curious

number five
he broke your heart and all you could hear for weeks after
was the melancholy song of the chickadee
crying and calling and begging
for someone to answer
the thing that keeps you hurt

number six
he broke your heart and so you went on a drive and you pulled off
the road and lay on the hood and stared at the sky and a chickadee
flies by and lands on a nearby branch
the thing that keeps you healed

number seven
you couldn't sleep one night because the thoughts
were too loud
and so you opened the window to drown out the silence and
you heard the chickadee
the thing that keeps you listening

number eight
you are growing up, and you have forgotten what it feels like to truly be free
so you run, fast, no destination in mind, channeling the chickadee
the thing that keeps you young

number nine
you once thought that maybe this world would be better without you in it
but chickadees call for days and days
and eventually someone must come
the thing that keeps you hopeful

number ten
you were at a boys house
you were walking down the hallway and you saw a painting
little bird, black head
is that a chickadee
the thing that keeps coming back

number eleven
when the art teacher asked what you wanted to draw, you looked up at her
big child eyes
you want to draw a chickadee
the thing that keeps you creating

number twelve
the passenger seat of your mama's car
passed by something, little and dead on the side of the road
guts painting the pavement, wings broken
it was a goddam chickadee
the thing that never lasts forever

number thirteen
i hold a peanut in my palm and stand very still
the chickadee flutters onto my hand and takes the nut
resting, waiting a while before flying away
as if to say
you are not alone
i decided that that was enough
the thing that keeps you alive

LIGHT EDITS

by Kendall Schlosser



STARRY EYED

by Ella Rowland



THE STAR

by Braelyn Germaine

There once was a star in the sky
Who knew it was his time to die.
He fell with a swish
And made children wish
On that old shooting star with a sigh.

The star splashed down deep in the sea.
The fisher-boy watched it with glee.
He found an old boat
And grabbed his worn coat
And sought out the star for his plea.

He dived down as deep as he dared.
The star still flickered and flared.
Though hot to the touch
It didn't hurt much
So clutching it, love he declared.

He quickly rowed back to the one
Whose hair shone as bright as the sun.
He gave her his love
With the star from above
And promised his heart she had won.

The star she then took with delight
And loved him with all of her might.
With a glowing full heart
They swore never to part
And married the very same night.

UNTITLED

by Nina Bracht-Bedell



HE LOVED HER

by Ellie Doney

He loved her
He loved her hair
He loved her smile
He loved her nose
He loved her eyes
Her eyes deeper than the melting snow
He loved her pale skin
Her almost translucent skin
He loved her
He loved
She melted his heart
His soul and his being
He melted away
His last thought was her
She was inside
He was looking in
She was in
He was out
Forbidden love

Unlikely loving love
For she was stuck
Hanging forever
Immortally inanimate

The love of a snowman and a holiday ornament

DRUGS

by Marie Romano

Soon in this world
The pollution
Addiction
And our drug fixation
Will now expel out of the picture
Like the tar expels out of our lungs

The sticks and sticks upon tobacco
Grow like sticks on a tree
And will soon burn
For our desire
To feel higher
Like society wants us to be

Powder spills from the bag
As if snow was falling from the sky
Melting away
At the intake
As we try to get up and rake
Away at the floor to escape

And with the
Drugs upon drugs
We force into our body
They claw out to escape
And leave us damaged…
An overdose that can break you

UNTITLED

Elsa Grebenc



FLAMED BOOTS

by Brandon McMillan



THE CAPTAIN AND HIS SHIP

by Justin Hatzenbuehler

He gripped the wheel tightly. Holding on in this crashing rain was near impossible, but he had to. He was given this responsibility, and he was not going to let anyone stop him. Not even the beast tearing his ship in half. He had to move the boat into position, the rain never letting up, the waves throwing it like a child in a bath, and the beast trying to demolish what he worked for. The beast towering above the water with massive teeth and leathery skin, taller than the mast.

It felt impossible. Until hope rang through the sound of "BROADSIDES READY TO FIRE!"

All he had to do was wait for the perfect moment. That split second that decided both the boat's and everyone's fates. He waited. Rain thundering. Hearts pounding. Wind screeching. This was his time. He saw the opportunity and seized it.

He yelled at the top of his lungs, "FIRE!" The thunderous clap of the cannons going one by one until all ten were fired. Repeatedly striking the beast until it stopped attacking. The beast was destroyed, flailing and falling to the bottom of the sea to be forgotten, but remembered in the stories to be told.

They all cheered with joy and victory. The beast had been defeated. He led his crew to victory. But everything was shattered when the shower head turned off and he looked at his toy boat and dinosaur, all while the bath started to drain… but his imagination lived on forever.

UNTITLED
by Nina Bracht-Bedell



SUNLIGHT
by Maddisen Bummer

As sunshine flows through the drawn back curtains I can't help but smile.

The sun is one of the only things that has ever made me happy.

In the summer I can't help but to risk sunburning myself just so I can stay a few more hours out in the glorious summer glow as my body gets more tan and my mind gets happier.

In autumn the sun is such a rare thing that whenever I see it out, all I want to do is lay down and bathe in it, knowing that it may be weeks before I get the chance again.

Winter is the hardest time of the year. The sun comes up late and sets early, giving me no time to enjoy her beams. But when she decides to come through, the warmth I feel can't be replaced by any fireplace or heater.

Spring sun is a beautiful thing. It brings birth to flowers, trees, animals, and overall happiness. The love I feel for spring sun cannot match the love I have for any other season's sun.

I don't think that anybody could hate the sun. She warms you from the inside, melting all of the sad and broken pieces together until you're back to one whole, happy person. I hope I never take her light for granted.

CRYSTAL BALL

by Hannah George



OUR PHONES

by Fallon Turner

Why do we measure our friendships in followers and streaks
Why do we put our faith in the ones we "keep"
Why do we think it's how people make the cut
If you can tell them all your secrets
If they're trustworthy enough
And why do we say we love someone
When they only make us tick
Why do we say we care
When it's an empty promise to them
And why do we say we want to help
But when they ask we're never there
Why do we say all these lies
And think it's somehow fair
Because to me I think it hurts
To me I think it's sad
To me I think we're obsolete
And to me that makes me mad
I'm thinking we're all fake
We're superficial and into lies
We spend more time trying to be perfect
And hide what we're told to hide
And we're held against our wills
But won't say a goddamn thing
We suffer in our silences
But on social media it's a thing
We'll complain and say we hurt
We're depressed and troubled and mad
And post our feelings out
But all we do is like the picture
We never comment we keep on sliding
And that's the empty promise
We know we keep abiding
It's a double standard
To be perfect
And to post what makes you bad
But we all stay generic
And that's what makes me sad
Because despite all this difference
We really are the same
We all makes these promises
We all play these games
We all practice the plastic face we put on to look ok
But I'm really sick and tired of not seeing any change
I just want us to be real
And reliable and good inside
To not play all these games
To not push someone outside
To let someone else in
When they're all alone
To trust people instead of thinking they're out to do the worst
And to not rely on tech
To make us not feel alone
I just want a connection
One that's not with my phone

BRUNO

by Chase Graham



A GOOD DREAM

by Melody Perry

"Now, just take a deep breath and tell us what you remember."

The woman questioning me is trying to be polite. She nods her head slowly every time I talk and she's refilled my water cup twice, but I can see the tension stuck on her forehead in the way her eyes don't move when she does and the twinge in her jaw.

I hold my breath for three seconds and try to talk for the sixth time that hour. "I went to bed last night..." I pause, then what? How do I explain the photos in front of me? The mangled bodies, the bloodshot eyes, did I do that?

She notices me looking at the photos and pushes them closer to me. I catch a glimpse of something sour, making my stomach churn, and I have to look away. I place my hand over my mouth and take another breath.

"I slept soundly, woke up in the morning, normal. I went out to the kitchen and saw my roommate. She turned around and screamed, ran out. I didn't know why until I caught my reflection in the window." My voice sounds distant, like music playing in a faraway room in your house that you can't remember turning on.

She nods again. "Your friend, Lauren, correct?" She thumbs something in her file and drags her finger down the page. "She said you walked out covered in blood, with wounds on your arms and legs, and were missing a patch of hair." Her eyebrows move in a question and I raise my one uncuffed hand to my head. I gently press my fingers to my scalp and cringe at the tender spot behind my ear. They washed me, hosed me down like an animal really, after scraping my skin for samples, digging under my nails, and bagging my clothes and yet, I can still smell the sharpness that they bottled up and tried to wash away.

"The blood on your clothes is an exact match to the family we found last night, and yet you can't recall ever leaving your house. Your friend says she got in late so there's a big whole in your alibi. No one on can seem to place you between 11pm and 2am, the exact time of the murder."

I'm quiet again as tears gather in the corners of my eyes. Ever since I woke up and was shoved into a cop car, I've been standing on a cliff. A dull breeze blew past my face, blocking out the world until they said that word. Murder. I bit back a sob as my head continued aching.

"You can make this real easy on yourself, Cassandra," the woman coos. "Either you give us a confession, or we keep digging. Now wouldn't you rather take a nice nap, maybe a hot shower instead of sitting in this cold interrogation room? We have counselors, someone you can talk to. Maybe a hot meal or book? Doesn't that sound better than this?"

I shake my head as I begin to cry again. "I'm sorry, I can't. I truly don't remember anything. I went to bed, fell asleep, and—" My voice cuts off, caught in midair.

The woman sits up, her eyes sharpen. "Yes? What happened after you fell asleep?"

"I had a dream."

She frowns and sighs. "Cassandra, honey, I think we all know what happened after—"

"There was an animal." I recall, and my vision swims as the memory comes back. A stinking black hide, a too small head, something snapping. "I wasn't alone."

Her eyes flit to the side and I wonder just how many people are watching me from behind the window. She adjusts in her seat and begins jotting something down. "Carry on."

I struggle to fit the pieces together. I'm unsure which part of the dream came first. "I was outside, somewhere cold. There was snow on the ground." My hands began to shake as I glance at the photos again and realize the victims were found outside in the woods. The images show them painting the snow around them. I swallow and keep talking. "I was walking, dragging a stick behind me. I don't know where I was going. There's a sound in the woods, the animal, maybe. He growled and—"

"He?" She interrupts.

I nod. "I think so." She writes that down.

"I think I looked up because I saw something lasso the moon. A thick black rope caught in the middle and tried pulling it down to me, but it wouldn't give. The rope just kept pulling harder and harder until..."

"Until? What happened next?" she asks after I'm quiet for too long.

"It broke. Something cracked across the sky and it shattered. The pieces came falling down like meteors. They all flew in the same direction." I look to the right, remembering the light that caught my eye in the dream. "I tried to chase after them but when I reached the edge of the clearing I fell." My head jerks up and I

squint as my head pounds even harder. The woman looks at me seriously and I take a sip of water. The edge of the cup catches my parched mouth and I taste blood. I open and close my lips a few times to get rid of the taste, but it just grows.

"I was in the sky, in place of the moon. I'm looking down on the clearing. There's... something written in the snow."

She sets a pad of paper and a pen in front of me and I take it wordlessly. My hands follow a path as it writes characters I don't recognize. Long, looping letters cover every inch of the page and I tilt my head as I try to figure out what it says.

When I look up, the woman in front of me is gone. Her chair rattles slightly but the door never makes a sound. I look under the table, around the room, at the camera in the corner and find that I'm alone. The cuff on my wrist is gone so I stand, still holding the paper. My head aches even harder now and it's hard to look straight.

A thud hits the wall behind me, and I jump, turning around, knocking my chair to the ground where it's swallowed up like dust. When I turn around again, the room is darker. The table and chair are gone. The only light in the room comes from a small fluorescent bulb that hisses and crackles softly above my head. My heart pounds in my ears as I walk towards the window, the only distinguishing feature in the room. Something taps softly behind it and I hold my hand up to the glass. It burns my fingertips as soon as my skin meets it but I press my palm harder against the window. A tap knocks lower, and I drop my eyes to see the reflection of my writing. Only two words stand out starkly in black.

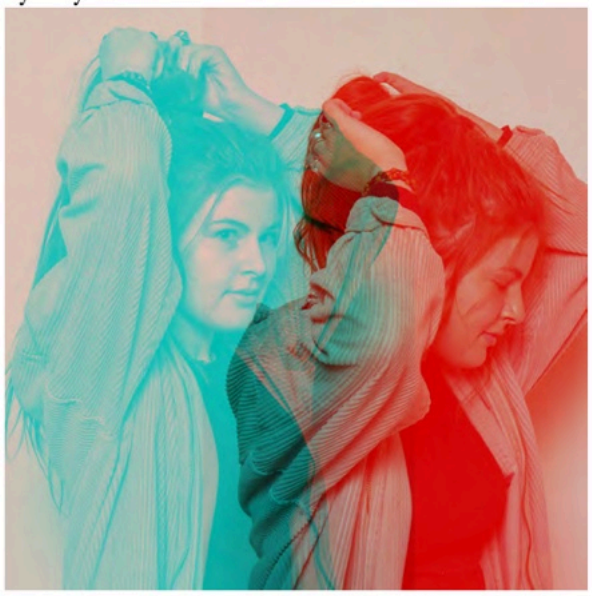
Wake Up.

Something heavy is thrown against the glass, sending a glittering web of veins racing across it. I'm thrown back and I'm falling, once again.

A voice calls me too, more whimper than word. My eyes part and I see a face below me, grimacing in pain. Her eyes are dull, and she sucks wind through cracked teeth. My hands are cold, slick with something dark. More voices call around me and I turn to find people littering the ground. Veins snake across the dirt and grow dark, the smell knots my stomach. Someone sobs off in the distance and I want to do the same. My confusion is enough for the victim below me and she wrestles something from my grip before throwing me to the side. Before I fully hit the ground, I see her raise something above me, and lunge.

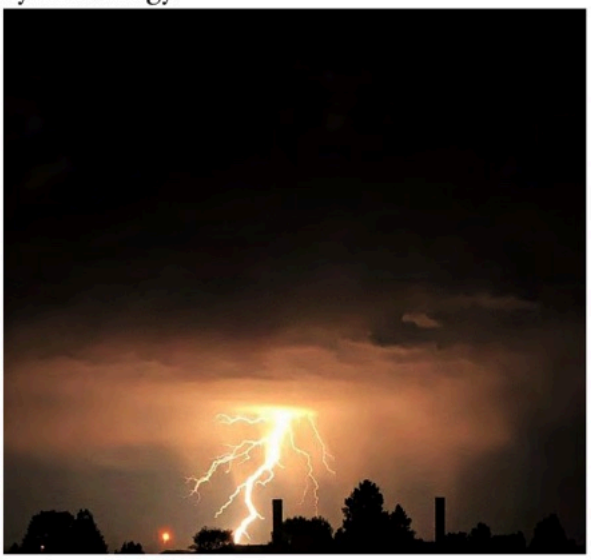
RED AND BLUE DOUBLE

by Maya Mulder



LIGHTNING

by Sarina Bogy



UNTITLED

by Elsa Grebenc



HISTORY IN THE MAKING

by Chase Tielking

After waking up from an uneasy dream, I sit up agitated and breathless while my heart is pounding. After I recollect my thoughts, I get up and get a glass of water. The water tastes transparent, almost as if it is cleansing my soul of the bad dreams. Tonight's dream was especially bad. I usually get so scared my wife Mary wakes me up because I'm shaking so much. But this time I woke up as stiff as a board. I was terrified for what I just saw. I can only imagine the loud shot then everything going pitch black. I don't want to remember this, but I also don't want to go back to bed and go through that unpleasant dream again.

I stay awake. The clock reads 4:02 A.M. on April 14th. Today all I wanted to do was stay home and try to stay calm. This shouldn't be hard, but my wife likes to go out and do things. More time passes on and I brew a pot of coffee in our kitchen. Mary wakes up from her deep slumber.

"Why hello dear, how was your beauty sleep?" I asked.

"It was magnificent. I noticed you left the bed earlier than usual," Mary replied.

"Oh, it was just another bad dream I had. I don't want to go out anywhere on this fine Saturday," I expressed back to Mary.

"Why's that?" Mary remarked.

"The nightmare I had made me debilitated, I'm all worn out," I mentioned.

"Well I hope you get some rest because we are heading to the theater tonight."

I want to fight back with my wife, but maybe going to the theater to watch a live performance will make me relaxed. Maybe going out won't be that bad, but until then I'm going to try to sleep to solve all my problems.

The clock now reads 6:37 P.M. and the show starts at 8:00. Mary and I put on our nicest attire for this evening. While I'm wearing a perfectly fitted black tuxedo, my wife is wearing a long, dark, silk

dress. We are ready to leave when I have an aching feeling in my stomach. The feeling that something bad is going to happen. I don't want to inform Mary about it since she's gotten all dolled up. We take out the automobile and start heading to the theater.

In the bathroom with emerald green walls, I look into the mirror and I see John, a young man married to Izola. I love her dearly, but she wouldn't love me for what I'm planning to do. I think what I'm planning is great, but in other individuals' minds they would think I'm a criminal.

"I'm headed out Izola, I love you," I verbalized.

"I love you too, I'll see you after the performance," Izola replied.

I'm headed to the theater all jittery. Nervousness is running through my bones, and I am hysterically pacing. My pockets are heavy with some change and a fully loaded gat. No one has noticed me yet, I am as invisible as a pristine window. I look as natural as the other individuals, blending in with all of them.

Unsure what to do, I want to go back home and see Izola one last time before I execute my delirious plan. I am crazy to think this will actually work out for me. This is a major deal, no one has even done this before; I'm the very first one! No one has even had the thought of doing this. I am mad to think that any sort of this will turn out for me.

Everything is going smoothly. Nothing bad has happened yet. All I need to do now is to perambulate up those stairs and into the booth. Once I get into there, everything will change. I will be shaking vigorously and unready for what I was going to do to him. *I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna be the first one to shoot the President.*

I start up the stairs. A fine red carpet leading all the way up to the booth. I take each step slowly and cautiously until I reach the top. I start to glide along until I see an open booth with a towering man and a dolled up woman. They both look very stunning, but I'm only after the man. I look to my hand which is going into my pocket, it reaches for the shooting iron. The pistol is heavy and is starting to shake in my hands. No one has heard me yet, at least not until the loud shot.

Everything here is dark. Nothing around me and it is completely silent. I don't know what to do here, everything just happened so quickly. I was enjoying the performance then a shot went off. The shot went off into my head. I haven't woken up since so I have been stranded here with nothing to do.

The nothingness is giving me a panic. All just pitch black until I see something coming after me. It seems to be a bright light, inviting me to go inside of it. Since there is nowhere else to go I start heading to this light. While I am moving closer to it, it just keeps on getting brighter, brighter and even brighter. Then I made it, I made it into the light. But it darkens and I start to stiffen.

Adrenaline runs through my body while I am as stiff as a board. My mind is agitated while my body is breathless. I am alarmed and it seems I am having some déjà vu, or just another bad dream on April 14th, a fine Saturday.

UNTITLED

by Leigha Carter



GRAND CANYON

by Aaron Robinson



CROOKED

by Miya Nettleton



BROTHERS IN ARMS

by Anna Ries-Roncalli

Fifteen days after our older brother, Giuseppe, died in the war, my twin, Giacomo, took his own life. He'd always been the most delicate of us and the war had hit him harder than most, but he was still happy. He still knew how to have fun. No one had expected this. No one had heard his tears in the middle of the night, the strangled cry of him choking himself with his pain. No one had heard him chanting fervently to himself every spare minute, prayers for mercy, prayers begging the Lord to save him. No one had seen that fraction of a moment where his face crumpled and his eyes cleared as he shed the mask he wore to achieve a semblance of normalcy, shed the mask to reveal his true self, a shadow of the man he once was being swallowed by the inferno inside. No one except me.

Giacomo had a habit of saving people. He saved me from countless fights when we were young and saved my life countless times on the battlefield.

"Battista," he would always say. "Nothing is too broken that it can't be fixed." I would always laugh it off, him and his crazy ideas.

"What about that mirror?" I would ask. "If I were to take that mirror and break it into a million pieces, you would be able to put it back together?" But he would always just smile at me like he knew something I didn't.

He was always doing that. Although we were the same age, Giacomo was ahead of me in practically every sense. His brain blazed hot and bright like a star you could still see from millions of miles away. Mine, on the other hand, smoldered, still burning but unable to give off heat. Our mother held big dreams for him, away from Sotto il Monte, away from us, away from everything we knew. Specifically, she dreamt of priesthood, the greatest honor that could be bestowed on any family, its shining hypocrisy glittered rather seductively with hope and the promise of salvation.

Giacomo didn't share these dreams, however, something that frustrated her to no end. He was happy at home, figuring out how to make wine the fastest or the best uses for our money. And then, of course, when we were thirteen, he met Elvira. And Mother lost all hopes of priesthood for him after that.

Before Elvira, it had been Giacomo and Battista, the two brothers who were practically joined at the hip. Before Elvira, we had been each others' protectors, each others' homes. We were the one place we both belonged.

After Elvira, it was no longer Giacomo and Battista. It was Giacomo and Elvira and then Battista after that. After Elvira, suddenly Giacomo belonged to more than one place, suddenly he belonged to Elvira too and somehow I too was locked on to this girl who had taken myself from me.

"You don't have to worry, Battista," Giacomo told me one night, after I expressed my concerns about Elvira. "You'll always be my brother, my other half." I didn't bother saying that I had heard him whispering to Elvira that she was his other half too.

Nonetheless, Elvira's presence grew on me, a small but stubborn tree that took root in our lives with the intention of staying, and by the time we were fourteen I could see why Giacomo was drawn to her. I was dragged along with them wherever they went, seeing as Mother would have nearly died of shame from the impropriety of it otherwise. The only reason both Mother and Father agreed to it at all was in the hopes that they would be seen as betrothed, since Elvira was rich and we needed the dowry for our vineyard.

When we were fifteen, Giacomo confessed to me that he wanted to marry her, that nothing else in the world made him as happy as she did.

"She burns my heart," he whispered to me one night. "It burns my heart when I think of her, but it feels right, it feels like she has burned me into actually existing. And the burning makes me feel like I'm finally real."

I didn't know what to say to that.

When we were sixteen, he proposed to her in secret, and they cherished any spare moment they had alone together, brought to them by me, a rather dull horse that never seemed to delight them as much as the package it left behind. So they met, more and more frequently for longer and longer amounts of time, completely disregarding the fact that I was always running out of excuses.

And yet, these meetings felt rushed, as though they knew their time was running out. After all, the Great War was still plowing forward, a train without brakes manned by the Grim Reaper himself, leaving behind a trail of exhaust in its wake, eating up those behind it, stopping at every station to pick up the next passengers on the journey to death. Giuseppe himself had been called aboard already, along with most of the able-bodied men of the village. Prayers were always being uttered to save those that were left behind, a rather hopeless task, for the prayers of mere men meant nothing to the whims of powerful deities.

When we were seventeen we found ourselves boarding the very train we had hoped to avoid.

Words don't exist that can describe the agony of warfare. Try as I might I can never describe it, the words always waiting on the tip of my tongue but vanishing without a trace the moment I try to speak them. They're trapped inside my mind, banging incessantly on the side of my teeth and my skull and my brain and my everywhere, like the sound of glass shattering when it hits the floor, the sound that sparks a feeling of loss as you know the mirror can never go back to what it once was, that now all you can do is clean up the leftover shards. I can never escape it; it's always there whether a dull ache or a pulsing feeling that makes me want to scream as loud and as long as I can, pushing it out until finally it leaves my body.

And so, I don't speak, I don't make a sound, I hold it in as it kindles my recklessness, my need to escape, my need to be anywhere but here, anyone but myself. I soldier on, with the hopes that one day I'll be free, that one day by some miracle of God the mirror will be put back together again.

Giacomo and I never talked about the war. Perhaps he wanted to, and sometimes I felt as though he did when he looked at me with his long eyes, staring me down as he silently screamed for help behind his mask. I always looked away. It was too hard to see the pain in his eyes. But maybe he didn't want to talk about it either, and I had just been imagining it all, hoping that I wasn't the only one who felt this lost. Yet maybe if I had turned back to him one of those nights in our bunk, maybe if I had tracked him down after dinner or before bed and taken him by the arms and shook him until he gave in and told me why, told me how he was feeling, told me anything. Maybe if I had he would still be alive. But maybe not. Maybe it wouldn't have changed a thing. Maybe Giacomo would have trudged along in the same manner until finally he gave in to the comfort of death, the comfort of nothing at all. After all, we no longer feared eternal damnation. The world we lived in was already a hell swallowing us whole with it's flames of darkness.

Giueseppe's death was the beginning of the end. We had lost our older brother, the man we looked up to. On the train ride home for the funeral, Giacomo never uttered a word. He stayed seated in the same position the whole time, his eyes tilted out the window, looking but not seeing as the world passed him by as I tried my best to console him.

After a week of not talking to me or Elvira, he finally called to me one evening.

"Battista," he said, "I need you to promise me something." His eyes were ablaze with recklessness and hunger, and for the first time in my life I was afraid of my own brother.

"Anything," I replied, although it made me somewhat uneasy and I had a feeling this promise would not be something simple but something that would make me squeamish, the feeling of having swallowed something rotten.

He turned to me. "Marry her," he said.

"What?"

"If I die. I need you to promise me that you'll marry her and look after her."

There was no debating this: we both knew who he meant. I didn't bother saying that he wouldn't die either, for we both knew, deep down in the depths of our souls where we never cared to wander that he would, that this would be a promise to him I had to keep, the one promise that would ever truly matter.

And now here I am, a few days later. Sobbing, lying next to his dead body, a gun in his hand and a shattered mirror nearby scattering broken pieces all about, the sun reflecting off them creating some sort of halo of light around his head. A piece of paper in his hand.

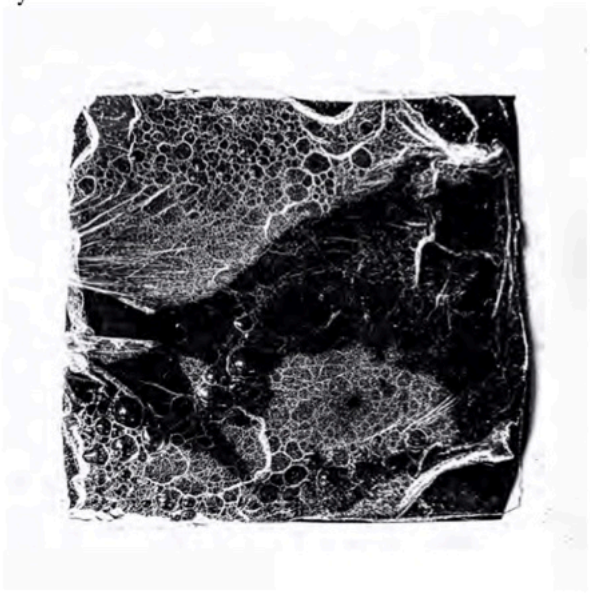
I'm sorry. It was never supposed to be this way. Let Elvira know that my love for her will always burn a flame in my heart for the rest of her life even though I'm gone. And tell Battista that he was right about the mirror.

This would break them. This would break everyone. The shame, the pain, it would all be too much. And so, I got up. I moved Giacomo's lifeless body to a chair, positioned the gun just right. It had to be believable. I turned toward the fire, it's flames licking at the air around it. I took a clumsy step towards it, then looked back at Giacomo. I moved towards the fire quicker, this time with purpose. I stood in front of the fire, staring it down as though it were Giacomo, staring it down as if to say that maybe I was wrong, maybe he had been right about the mirror after all. I take one last look at the letter before crumpling it up and dropping it in, the flames devouring it in mere seconds. I walk out of the shed and into the light, burdened by promises, burdened by death, burdened by secrets.

Nobody needs to know.

DECONSTRUCTED POLAROID

by Shiloh Corcoran



DERANGED

by Danielle Prouty



GRASS

by Sam Noble

i lie on my back in the lush green
grass and watch as the sky paints a
picture. clouds swirl, combining
and then dispersing, images here one
moment and gone the next. i see
you in the clouds, but don't take that as a
compliment. i roll over so i don't have to look
at your fluffy white face because it's
gross. i press my skin to the earth and inhale
deeply, a smell of spring filling my nostrils. you
were here last spring but now you are gone and i
don't feel bad. you deserved
everything that happened to you
because your sins were so great that
all the blood in the world couldn't cover your
sick stains. an ant crawls across my
arm and its tiny feet tickle my
skin with almost unnoticeable
grace. your touches were always
noticeable; they hurt me. you were not
gentle with my body or my
soul, and now both are eternally damaged
due to your dirty hands. you sick
bastard! i wish i could expose you to the
whole entire world but i know that if i speak
even one small word, you will
end me. you have never
cared about anyone but yourself. protect
your reputation and lie to cover your
despicable actions, but i know the
truth. the truth is that you are the worst
thing that ever happened to me, and i hope
that you suffer forever in hell. the truth is--
a raindrop splashes against my
neck. i look back to the sky and see that
gray storm clouds have replaced the
soft white ones from earlier in the
day. another drop adorns my
forehead and slowly trickles down into my
eye, where its pure blue
intertwines with the buildup of salt
beneath my eyelid. the truth is--
my clothes are soaked as the heavens
pour out their sorrows upon the bleak
landscape that has been parched since
before time began. it sobs uncontrollably
and i just want to comfort it and say that
everything will be okay but that is a
lie, everything will not be okay as long
as you still haunt my memories and come to
me at night in my dreams, as long as you

THE MEADOW

by Nico Bungi



stab my soul the same way that you once
stabbed me with the dagger beneath your
jeans, as long as i am still alive. i am
running over hills but the grass is
slippery with tears and i don't
know if they are mine or the sky's and i fall
hard. mud covers my knees and i
turn my face upward and
scream from my soul, an
explosion of pain and frustration and
anger and sorrow and lost
innocence and brokenness and i
collapse. the truth is --
the truth is that you are gone
forever and despite the way you
violated me i still miss you and i
hate to admit that i can't seem to
purge you from my heart, you are a
disease that i can't shake, a
chronic ache that will always be with
me, your own dissatisfaction with
life taken out upon my frail helpless
body, and one day maybe i will
forget you, but i doubt that day will
ever come. i realize that i am still
sitting in the mud, my jeans soaked and
brown, my face speckled with dirty
water. i stand and trudge up the
hill, concentrating to avoid slipping on the
slick grass. the torrent has slowed but the
sky still trickles tears down upon the
earth. in the wake of its sadness new growth has
begun to emerge, a
promise of better days to come.

UNTITLED

by Elsa Grebenc



A DROP OF OCEAN

by Ryann Thomas

She loved the sea
The allure of something unknown
Feeling small in its tremendous depth
Not knowing yet filled by understanding
A drop of the ocean
A drop of her life

Waves
drifting in and out
Like her thoughts and words
Reaching out to place shells
Reaching out for a hand
For something to hold
For something to be a part of
Frothy, overturning, roaring
Emotions rolling with thoughts

Seagulls
Ringing through piers
Like her laughter, like her tears
Honking, Squawking
Flocking high above the sea
Soaring through the blue sky
Almost as blue as the water
Almost as clear as her thoughts
As her dreams

The shore
Between her thoughts and her actions
Between heaven and human
Still yet breathing
Softer than the first breath of morning
Waking after a perfect sleep
Crunching beneath our feet
Beneath the pressure

Sand
Silky and delicate
Sifting through our hands
Strong and stable
Like the foundation to a skyscraper
Endless
Like needles of evergreen trees
Particles floating with the water
Meeting the comfort of the oceans touch

A lifeline
At our feet
We visit it, we relish in it
The ocean brings life and joy
The ocean
The girl
Freedom

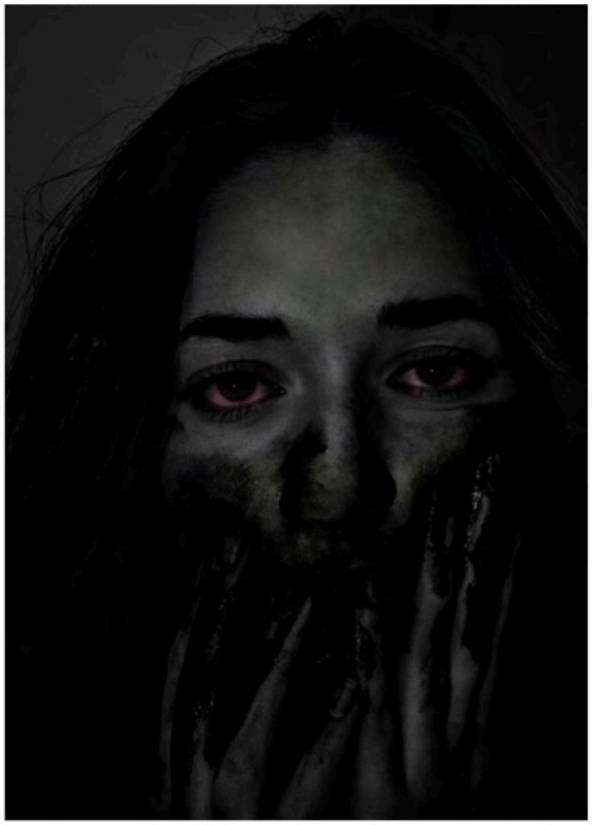
MIDNIGHT SUMMER'S DREAM

by Ashley Boyd



UNTITLED

by Maya Mulder



SUNRISE

by Gracie Standish



SECOND CHOICE

by Katie Wakeland

Lay me down gently, don't throw me away
I wanted your love, but I'll do what you say
Forget me, once you found a suitable one
That replaces me, erases me, and leaves me out of the sun

Don't worry about me, I know you never did
But sugar coat it once in a while, after all you're just a kid
Throw me away, I'll still pull myself back
You can hate me, break me, and I won't attack

I know I'm screwed up, I've heard it before
But that won't make me come back and beg you for more
I cry for your help, and you soundproof my heart
I was dead before born, I was messed up from the start

People don't care unless you're one of them
I've pried, longed to be let in
They shut the door hard and left me in the dust
To fix all my problems before entering their trust

I need someone to laugh with once in a while
But I was just a second choice, my emotions kept on file
So screw you for leaving, but I'll still beg to have you back
Second choices can only move backwards, and first turns to last

WAVES

by Quill Keller



DO YOU REMEMBER

by Dominea Uncles

Do you remember
Laying wrapped up in each other
On Kallie's couch
Your legs wrapped around mine
My foot caressing your exposed leg
One gentle hand in my hair
One tracing my lips
A loop up to my nose
Along my sculpted jawline
I stared into your endless green eyes
And saw love so raw it was dripping
You whispered I love you
And my heart locked those words away

Do you remember the way you kept me close
The stutter of your heart against my back
And the steady rise and fall of your breathing
As I fell asleep
To your sweet sighs
Feeling at peace for once
I had no idea

Do you remember
Standing in that hallway
Those same eyes pleading
You are distant
Yet standing close enough
The tension
You longing to hold me one last time
I felt it too
I felt your heart tug as you said goodbye
As you spewed your excuses
And begged me silently
Not to cry
As I stood there
A statue of regret
Because isn't this how it always ends
You hesitate
Like your going to reach for me
But your arm falls
And your wall collapses
As you turn away
And I crumble
A sobbing mess
Do you remember
When you loved me
And we were one
A beautiful mess
Put together for some reason
Do you remember
When I finally said yes to you
And you promised
That you really loved me
I'm sure you did

Now I remember
All of these things
As I'm sitting here
Replaying them
And shedding glass tears
Down my porcelain face
I remember
You said you loved me

DEEP BLUE

by Mady Schnackenberg



MOONLIT ANTLERS

by Carousel Sackman

The forest was thrumming with life; massive green-leafed trees stretched to the dark clouds above, stars lit the dark of the night like beacons. However, the frantic woman running through the undergrowth took no notice of the pure, untouched beauty around her, desperate to find a safe place in the dark, a place where she could hide her precious cargo. She ran as far as she could, the emerald grass soft beneath her feet, and though she knew few would follow her into the wilds of this particular forest, she didn't want to take any risks. So, she ran, blood and tears left behind like a twisted path of sorrow.

Her wounds were too great, her exhaustion too much for her to bear. When the woman finally stopped, curling up to the base of one of the giant trees, she passed within a few minutes, the dying prayers of a frightened mother resting on her lips. The bundle of rags she carried in her limp arms stirred slightly, before giving a soft whimper, the infant inside seeming to sense the passing of her mother, and cried for the safety and warmth of a loving parent she no longer had.

The babes' cries were not left unheard, as one of the more powerful denizens of the forest watched for a time before approaching the heartbreaking scene. The gray clouds parted for a moment, illuminating the larger-than-normal stag that was standing a small distance away from the tree. His white fur was frosted with silver, shimmering like a moonbeam-made flesh, the arcing antlers resting on the beasts' head in a magnificent display, eyes like molten gold stayed fixed on the source of the noise that had disturbed the deer's slumber.

The stag walked forward, head lowered, until it had reached the child held by the corpse. The deer sniffed the bundle, warm breath pushing some of the fabric away, revealing a tiny human girl. The baby stopped crying, eyes crinkling open to show beautiful lavender orbs.

Molten gold stared into pale lavender, two completely different creatures sharing the quiet of the night. The deer lowered his head a little farther, allowing the giggling child to lay her pudgy fingers on his velvety black muzzle. Even if this was a being that was unfamiliar to the beast, he would not simply watch something so young and full of life become a meal for the many predators that wondered this dark enchanted forest.

The magnificent deer looked up at the still glowing moon, the spines on the ends of his antlers almost touching his back. He seemed to be waiting for something, silvery fur soaking in the glow of the celestial being in the sky. For a moment all was still, nothing moved, even the babe seemed to understand this was a time that called for silence. It seemed like years before the stag moved, lowering his head to rest his muzzle on the infant's head.

The stag moved away, hot mist-like steam escaping his nostrils as he took a step back. Then something strange happened. The mist glowed in the moonlight, swirling as it made its way toward the girl, twisting around her tiny frame and lifting her out of her mother's arms. The glow of the moon was seemingly absorbed by the mist, getting brighter by the second and completely hiding the babe from view.

The glow finally died down and the infant was carefully lowered to the ground, no longer a human child, but as a fawn with silver fur darker than that of the stag's. When the young deer blinked open her lavender orbs, she was met with the molten gold of her new elder. The large stag touched his nose to the fawn's, lifting her head slightly before backing away, silently encouraging the young deer to stand. The dark silver fawn seemed confused for a moment, turning her head to observe her surroundings, ears perked, before attempting to move her spindly appendages. She succeeded in standing after a few tries, wobbling on splayed legs. The silvery stag snorted softly, carefully nudging his new ward away and deeper into the forest.

He would care for the youngling as best as he could.

SUNRISE

by Makayla Vanwinkle



MARIGOLD

by Kendall Schlosser



LOVE

by Maddisen Bummer

Love is an unbreakable bond.
Many have been able to loudly and confidently say that they feel loved, but there are still a lot who don't, and I think that those people don't understand what love can be.
Love doesn't always mean romance.
It means secret looks between sisters as they sit at the dinner table unwilling to be the first to break down and say sorry.
It's the bond a parent shares with their child during a sports game, pushing them to do better, but congratulating them regardless of how they did.
It's friends who, even when they've drifted and haven't talked in weeks, are able to pick up the conversation where it was left off.
It's the family pet who sleeps by your feet every night, waking you up at the simplest sound because all they wish to do is protect you.
Love is having someone who is unapologetically yours, who is there for you regardless of if you messed up big time, regardless of if either of you are in a bad mood, and even in the silent nights where neither of you can seem to fill the empty spaces, but basking in the comfort of each other.
I know I am loved, and I am glad to reciprocate the love to others.
You are loved, too, even if you don't believe it yet, I know that one day, you'll meet someone who makes you realize what love is.

UNTITLED

by Nina Bracht-Bendell



TREE

by Braelyn Germaine

I begin small in the dark.
In order to live, I must first break.
I wake to the sound of emeralds and jade.
Though I am more precious than these,
I always long to be more.

My fingers are bronze tears
That drop to the ground and scatter
Like small pebbles on a mountainside.
My hide is a shield, tried and true
It molds my shape.

Though I have no eyes, I have many ears
That tell of whispered secrets
Overheard in green gardens
And gabled rooftops.

This all I do in an endless cycle.
Through many storms, I remain.
I can stand the test of time
Unlike so many things, I am constant
Never changing, ever growing until—
I am gnawed from the inside.

Like doubt eats at courage
My spine will disintegrate
And become an empty home.
My life will be cut from me
Like a vine of fears stopping my breath.

Like a soldier defeated I will wilt
And become the shell of what I once was;
Home now to all manner of vile creatures
Who longed only for my end.
With a soundless crash I will fall
And become the fuel of my enemies.

So it has been
And so it will be
For none can truly stand the test of time.
The day will end, and though
I may not live to see it, I know
There will always be another sunrise.

DESERT WANDERER

by Carousel Sackman

The sea of dunes stretches out before your feet,
Skin blistering under the heat of the sun,
Look back once more and take it in,
You will be free or die trying.

Every day hurts,
Burning like desert sand,
Crimson trails after aching feet,
As cold metal bites your wrists.

The storm roars like a furious beast,
Wind pulling and pushing in every direction,
Aching feet carve a path through the stinging sand,
You can almost hear the mother's voice.

It is a lonely path to travel,
Across endless sands,
Death waits patiently,
All it takes is one wrong step.

Fall to bleeding knees,
Whispers of encouragement echo in a pounding skull,
Shackles clank in the upward struggle,
A dry smile of hopeful faith.

But for all that hope,
All the faith carried close to heart,
It is a fear of what lies behind that moves blistered feet,
And the burning crack of a whip.

Mother whispers,
Asking for a little longer,
Safety lies just a little farther,
The promise of a home.

Freedom or death indeed.

CABIN

by Isabel Lane



UNTITLED

by Jasper Cook



DEADLINE

by Wyatt Gant

I need to finish, I'm not done...
Can't slow down, can't have fun…
I'm tired, it must be midnight…
I can't stop, can't douse the light…

No, everything's not fine…
Oh no, here comes the deadline…

What am I doing, trying so hard…
My sleep schedule, I disregard…
I need my sleep, I should stop…
Compared to others, my work is slop…

Now listen as I pout and whine…
About this awful deadline…

I'm getting sleepy, it's almost due…
Speaking of coffee, I've had two…
I need to sleep, I'm slacking off…
Failing to keep my spirits aloft…

I sliding down a steep incline…
I need to beat my deadline…

Why am I trying, I need to rest…
Never have I faced a greater test…
I'm typing fast, I'm in a hurry…
My hands are flying in a flurry…

My prowess is on a steep decline…
I'm about to miss my deadline...

Any stability I may have had…
It's all gone, this is bad…
I'm actually about to pass out…
I'm having a large scale creative drought…

As I try to make a good design...
I think I missed my deadline...

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