Pen & Ink

ART AND LITERARY MAGAZINE



2022

Pen & Ink

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Harrison Writing Award Winners

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Harrison Award Winner

Aino Beside the Boulder (Finnish Kalevala, runo 4-5)

By Ella Shropshire

Aino sitting on the boulder at sea, seven skirts drowned
Golden rings and copper belts lost to the waters,
The waves rising for the only one, the promised bride

Dive down, at last,
And be not a hen, sitting docile on a knee,
be more than open hands and heart,
Wash away the guilt of refusing it.
Let no hands, their lifetime spent longing, take up my own,
Not those of a man or woman or in-between or outside,
Let me be a gull and ride alone and free on the wind,
Let me be a sprite in the sea,
A sister to the whitefish, a brother to the fishes.
I will be no hen, I will not sit forever a lifelong mate on your knee,
I will not kindle your light, bake your honey bread
And lay out your bed
None shall do this for me, a watery maid to the water-wife,
Whom you knew no way to keep,
No storms, or calling songs, or perfumed winds can bring me back to shore,
For it is my nature
To swim in the tides, a salmon in the sea,
A water-maid below deep billows, a sister to the whitefish,
Dancing upon the black mud.
No hen on the knee, no fish to be caught, no salmon to be cut for you.
I am Aino on upon the sea-soaked rock, glittering in the sun
"And the ache would no more ache,"
and I, a bird would be free of reaching hands,
I, a watery maid, loveless and free.



Anio Beside the Boulder By Ella Shropshire

Aino beside the boulder, swimming,
A sister to the whitefish, a brother to the fishes,
Her wedding clothes, a golden cross, drowned all,
The waves carry her, the only one, Atho's peerless child.

Harrison Writing Award Winner

The Iron Giant

By Rebecca Smillie

The iron giant came to a shrieking halt in front of the tweed jacket standing two feet away from a would-be accident on the tracks. Douglas was going to meet a young Miss Dorothy May Ascott. He was destined not to be late. Every moment he wasted at the train station was a moment he could have spent with Miss Dorothy May. Slightly irked by the time it took for the doors to open, Douglas elbowed his way into a cabin with two young girls sitting inside unattended. Rather than question the absence of a guardian, Douglas stuck his nose out the window, trying to forget anyone else was in the cabin with him.

The two girls were dressed in blue and yellow baby pastels. One was wearing a gaudy, yellow hat adorned with feathers. Douglas wondered why anyone would put a child in a hat that nobody under the age of fifty would wear. The other girl was wearing a similar coat, but in blue, and in place of the yellow hat was wearing a large piece of costume jewelry, a fake pearl necklace. "Excuse me, sir, that's quite a nice briefcase you've got there," said the girl in blue.

"Ah yes, it is, thank you," Douglas replied, his eyes not straying from their resting place beyond the glass.

"I reckon you're a lawyer or som' with a fancy case like that," said the girl in yellow.

"Exactly right." The young girls' eyes met momentarily before diverging like two billiard balls broken by the cue.

Douglas sat, examined his wrist watch, and restlessly wondered why the train wasn't moving yet. He left the cabin and confronted the conductor.

"It is 6:15 p.m. Fifteen minutes after this train was supposed to depart."

"I'm sorry for the delay, sir."

"I will not tolerate this. I expected better service from a railway like this." His eyes looked like they were about to bulge out of his head.

"I'm sorry, sir, we are doing the best we can. Please return to your cabin and we will depart as soon as possible." With pursed lips Douglas retreated to his cabin to find the door locked. Perplexed, he tried the knob again then began banging on the door.

"Hello. Hellooooooo? Excuse me!" Douglas rested his ear to the door to listen. When it finally opened. He fell into the cabin ear first. His head landed on the windowsill then onto the floor as the young girls watched wide-eyed. Without a word, he shot up, dusted himself off, sat down, and began looking out the window again.

"We're terribly sorry, Sir."

"And you should be-" this time Douglas actually looked at the young girls as he was speaking, "-a gentleman deserves not to be locked out of his own cabin. Why did you need to lock it in the first place?"

"Why, I don't even know how it got locked. Do you?" The girl in blue looked toward the girl in yellow.

"No, I certainly didn't do it on purpose. I must have slipped as I went to close the door after you left, sir."
The train stayed stationary for at least ten more minutes and Douglas stayed restless.
"This is a waste of my time," Douglas muttered to himself.
"Do you have somewhere to be, sir?" the girl in the blue hat asked innocently.
"Why yes, I am going to meet someone."
"Who might this someone be?"
"A friend of mine...Miss Dorothy May is her name"
"Why, that's a mighty nice name," said the girl in yellow.
"Is she pretty?" said the girl in blue
Douglas nodded proudly.
"May we see a picture, Sir?"
"Yes, we would love to see a picture."
Half reluctant, but half glad that they asked, Douglas opened his briefcase to look for his wallet. He loved telling people about his Dorothy May and he loved debuting her picture. A good wallet portrait is worth the hundreds of oohs and ahhs of admiration. Douglas reached into his briefcase and rifled around, before realizing his wallet was not in his briefcase. He stood up, looked in his seat and under his chair, but it was not in the cabin.
"What's wrong mister?" The words of the little girl in blue were barely audible to Douglas as he racked his mind for where the wallet could be. When was the last time he used it? It must have been inside the train station.
"I've left my wallet inside the train station," Douglas said, mostly to himself.
"Oh no. The train hasn't moved for this long, I'm sure you have time to run in," the girl in yellow said, but Douglas was already off of the train, leaving his briefcase, and all his belongings, behind. He asked the man who sold him his ticket if he had seen his wallet. He hadn't. He looked in the place he had waited for the train. It wasn't there. Finally, he went back inside the train station, to check the ticketing counter one last time when he overheard a lady beside him.
"Are you sure I didn't leave a hat here? I didn't set it down when I purchased my tickets? It was yellow with all sorts of feathers..."
"I'm sorry Miss. I haven't seen it."
The lady left the counter and the ticketing agent remarked to another ticketing agent, "What's with all these careless people losing things today? First that lady lost her pearl necklace, and now this."
Douglas stood there in the train station, surrounded by bustling crowds of people weaving around him like the intricate pattern of a handmade blanket, when he had a moment of realization. He ran outside just in time to see the train start barreling down the tracks. He ran alongside the train, trying desperately to stop it, waving his arms like a madman in hopes of getting someone's attention. He called after the train again and again. He caught up with it just enough to see the girls in yellow and blue poke their heads out the window a few cars ahead of him. They giggled and dropped a piece of paper out the window. Douglas stopped, breathless, as the iron giant left him standing alone. The piece of paper floated towards him. As it caught

the wind it seemed to fly, fluttering its wings on the blast of the train like a butterfly. Douglas caught it. It was a wallet-sized portrait of Dorothy Mae, the same one that was given to him as a gift not long ago, and on the back was written, "You were right, she is quite beautiful."



By Kenzie Thennis

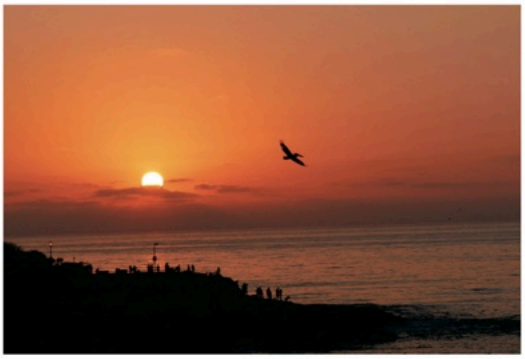
Harrison Writing Award Winner

The Chrysalis - Rebecca Smillie

I passed a regal guest one day,
That caught my eye with its display.
Enrobed in finery of kings,
It circled me with gilded wings,
Inspired me to golden thought,
Of who I am and what I ought.

A chrysalis is plenty more,
Than a wooly bear's demanding chore,
The digging of one's own demise,
For there a caterpillar dies,
But born with things they'd never seen,
A pair of wings to fit a queen,
An artist's palette is their boast,
So different from their wormy ghost.

And so it is this insect's quest,
To crawl inside their self made nest.
So like a phoenix from the flames,
They rise again with graceful names,
To fit the wings that glide and soar,
To be a monarch, evermore.



By Sarah Münker

Harrison Writing Award Winner

The Lovers' Cinquain-
By Elinor Goehring

My lips stood chapped from bitter cold
Until my handsome love did scold
them through his kiss—
an endless bliss—
My lips ran smooth by his lips' hold



By Aidia Lehman

By Faith Johnson





By Summer Hansen

Sudden Realizations 3:30 am
By Nico Newman

It happens so suddenly that it's hard to process. All at once (in reality it had been a long time coming, things had deteriorated under the watchful gaze of forced ignorance) you don't recognize your own hands again, or the peculiar way that your nose slopes, or even the permanent high arch in one eyebrow from years of uneven plucking. Time has been flying, hasn't it, work and school and sleep cycle and repeat until every day is a blur nearly inseparable from the last, and you have grown comfortable.

When realization strikes, it isn't kind; uncomfortable and jarring to the point of craving vices you've denied yourself for so long (Is that what the realization is about? The horrifying reality that you'll spend the rest of your life desperately clinging to the razor edge of sobriety, begging not to bleed whilst simultaneously wishing to scar...) and so deeply sickening that you have to try and shake it off with a walk to the bathroom because that's the only place you can go this late at night. Re-acknowledging (Because let's be brutally honest with ourselves here, it's never gone away, and really, will it? Don't be stupid) the infuriatingly intangible parts of yourself that never seem to die, no matter how deeply you bury them, no matter for how long you hold them under the water to drown; it hits harder than you wished that car hit you when you were 12 and desperately clinging to the notion that death might be peaceful.

Really how are you supposed to cope? Pray? Beg an equally intangible higher power for freedom from your own unearned misery? (Or was it earned? Did you earn this? Did you deserve this?) How do you deal with this on your own, truly, because you are on your own with this; does it help to cry?

So you sit. You sit and you want for a life you will never achieve, so completely out of reach it may as well be an explanation for why you feel this way (you will never get an explanation for why he did that, for why she left, for why you weren't ever enough). You're growing used to sitting though, aren't you? Wasting away but only internally, trying to wash away the rot in the steady stream of time (you can't cut the rot away, it didn't work, did it? But does rot wash off?)

As the numbness sinks in, maybe try to cry this time. Tears might change the way the feelings settle around your ears and up to your chin; tears might wash away the thick mud of hurt that clings to the way you talk to your Mom even though you know she never meant to make you feel so undeserving of praise.

It happens so suddenly that it's hard to process, but stays so long it may as well never be leaving.

Material Gowrl lol
By Nico Newman





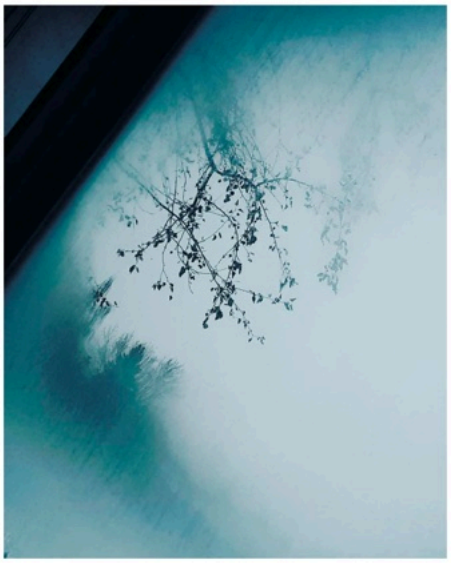
By Caidince Murray



Pastel Dove By Katy Eans

Pulling the Weight
By Karis Malkin





By Milo Bradford

Forbidden Warmth
By Pin Valley

I'm so tired,
The stench of death surrounds us
Beautiful and angelic,
But slowly deteriorating.
Rather than fade,
the darkness stays
While losing my brain,
Thoughts stray from the page.
An unknown warmth consumes me,
Comfortable but confused
The sun may be forgotten,
But still peels the ice off bones.
It won't be here tomorrow,
So you won't have to hide for long
This feeling is everlasting,
I'm shaking although warm.

I Miss You Like The Moon Misses The Sun
By Ariana Mays

The moon gets to kiss the sun once every 100 years

She waits and waits to feel the warmth again

Oh, how lonely I think she must be.

The sun waits for her too

Her golden soul yearns to see the moon once again

She burns brighter in prescience as the days grow closer to the time when they meet

The moon dreams of her sun

And the stars?

They dream of the sea

Her deep blue eyes constantly searching for them

She creates waves that the others below have named "Tsunamis"

They have come to the conclusion that she only makes them for destruction

But she does not wish to bring harm

She breathes only for the hope of one more glimpse at her stars

And me?

What do I dream of?

I dream of you

I dream of your eyes

A blue-green mix like grandidierite

Your smile

Always warm

Always welcoming

It will always be my favorite

Your laugh

Like coffee on a cold winter day

Your voice

Like listening to my favorite song on repeat until I get tired of it

But I will never get tired of the songs that you sing

Your soul

So kind

So much more than what everyone else thinks

So much more than the walls you have surrounded yourself with

And I miss you

Your eyes

Your smile

Your laugh

Your voice

Your soul

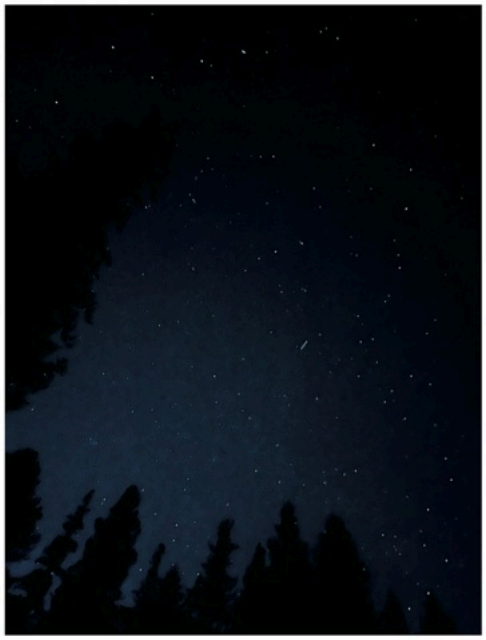
Oh, how I miss you like the moon misses the sun.

Hypervelocity Stars
By Marley Claeys

A chance meeting-
Nothing more,
But more importantly-
Nothing less

400 billion stars in our galaxy,
And I could see each of them as I looked in your eyes
I saw shooting stars collapsing into my atmosphere
And plunging into my unresistant heart

I think when our galaxies collided, you rearranged my sky
Because now that I've met you, the stars don't look the same
And I wonder if I will ever stop shaking stardust from my hair
Or if the glow of you will always remain



By Summer Hansen



By Joelle Tooke



The Three Accomplices
By Ella Shropshire



By Emma Wilson



By Elsie Ambrose

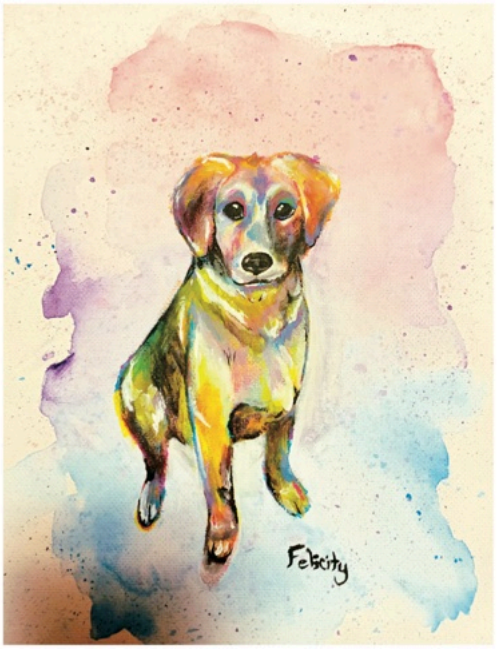
Autumn Glow By Mia Brinton



By Jacob Lagunas



By Felicity Heinzle



By Dylan Crane



By Amanda Nettleton



By Quill Keller



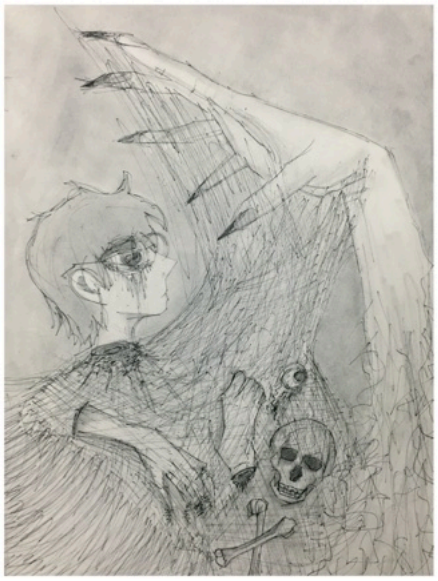
Lighthouse By Jordan Hewitt



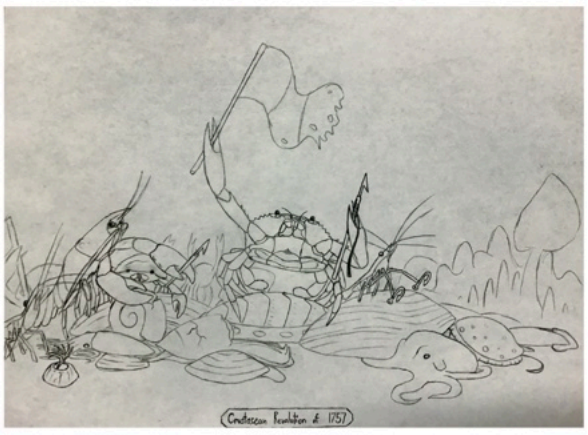
Time

By Angel Simkins

Beauty always seems to be
more eye gorging when in its finality
Piercing our heart
Regretting to only now
Be taking in its divinity
Tick Tock Tick Tock
Losing familiarity as we all grow up
Remembering memories of who we used to be
Observing our dead identities
Tick Tock Tick Tock
5 to 6 then 7 now 8
We eventually find our mortal bodies
knowing time to meet our fate
Same mind but a wrinkled face
Tick Tock Tick Tock
Where we are forced to lie
With emotion we refused to look eye to eye
Tick Tock Tick Tock
Using our last breaths to exhale regret
leaving words that were left unsaid
Tick Tock
Wondering what could have been
Tick Tock
If we knew our time limit, would we act differently?
Would we take more time to admire what cannot be recreated?
Tick Tock
Would we put up with the life we live
If we knew that in the end
Tick Tock
We would only feel regret?
Tick Tock
Too caught up in our head
Tick Tock
And only so much time
Tick Tock
Until it all
Tick Tick
stops.



Manipulated
By Milo Bradford



By Dean Randash

By Cody Renney

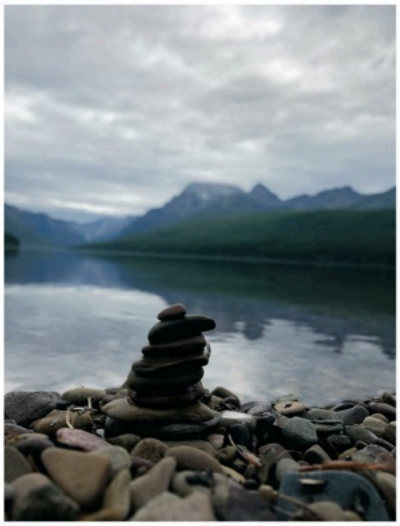


By Emma Allred

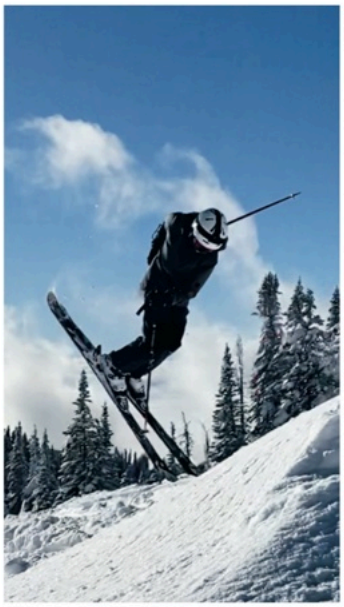


By Ayden Smelko





By Matthias Tucker



By Tizer Lindgren



By Hunter Bratcher



Independence Day
By Ryleigh Bushnell

By Conner Devine



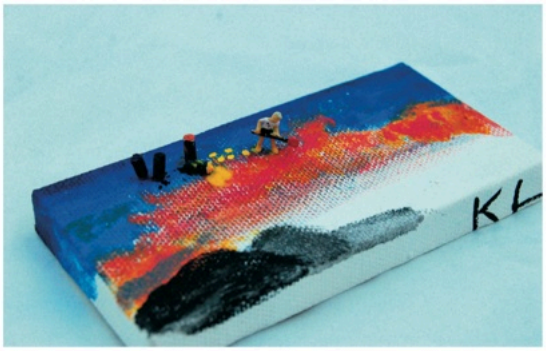
By Cole Wines



By Savannah Comstock



Unfinished By Katie Loomer



By Alyona Zimmerman





By Kory Mix

Autocorrect
By Marley Claeys

My phone no longer tries to correct your name.
It has learned each letter,
Just as I learned each curve of your frame,
And accepts it as a word.
But while the screen now embraces you,
I cannot accept you.
The space where your name used to fit in my mouth,
Just between my teeth and my tongue,
Is filled with your lies
And broken promises,
Sharp like shattered glass.
The fractals carve into my anguished tongue.
I will slice it again a thousand times,
Saying your name like a prayer.

Jasper
By Giulia Rosina





By Aidia Lehman

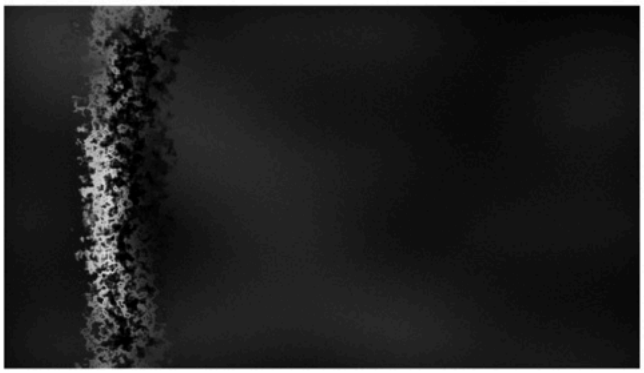
By Isabel Sutherland





Paris to Vegas
By Ryleigh Bushnell

Tree Painting
By Hailey Cox



Childhood
By Kayla Almquist

Childhood is taking my first steps.
Trying and failing until I can walk.

Childhood is running from boys with cooties at recess.
Giggling and acting like they're a slimy worm.

Childhood is running through the sprinklers in summer.
Getting our clothes soaked and hiding it from mom.

Childhood is dancing with the game Just Dance.
Me and my siblings sweating because we tried so hard.

Childhood is playing YMCA basketball.
Wearing colorful wristbands to know who I'm guarding.

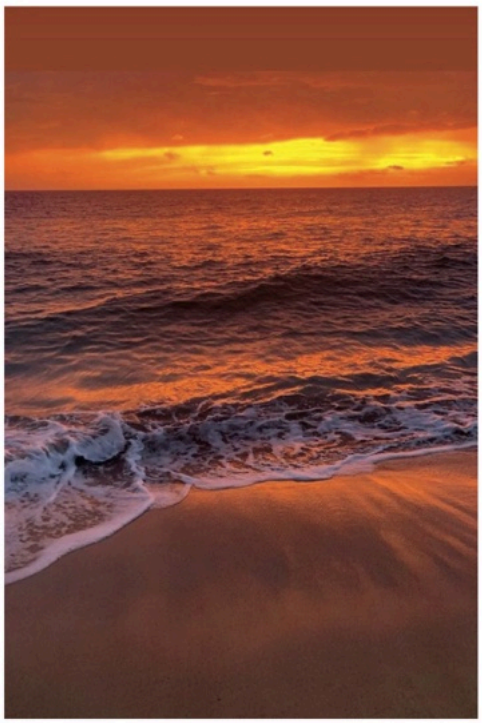
Childhood is getting to have nap time at school.
Being rewarded with candy if we're quiet.

Childhood is wanting to grow up and rule the world.
That way we could have dessert for breakfast.



By Gabriel Sova

By Sylvia Schell



By Ev Coble



By Zach Wakeland



Magic Among the Flowers
By Quin Vulk



All That Matters
By Ella Shropshire

I stare into the snow
New and twirling at a streetlight corner, its glow vestigial to all but foot traffic
With each cold drop on my tongue, the fog in the valley is clearing
The snow disappears around a bend, the mountainside blocking it,
Reappears on the street, falling light and beautiful.
What a fool I was to think it ever fell for me
It will melt by tomorrow, but for once I'll learn to survive, not suffer,
For it does not melt for me, either.
It will snow again, in a day, a month, I don't know, I don't care
For it is snowing now under the lonely streetlight
And that is all that matters

The stars are death-fetches of stars long past, giant ghosts shining above us
Memento Mori
The stars are dead, shimmering phantoms in the sky
Why should I ponder their mortality? The stars are not mine.
Tonight, they are bright, alive to us as they ever seemed from where we stand,
Looking as they have always been
Now they are alive
Dancing in the sky just as they had before I came, just as they will after I have gone
But in this moment, they flicker and shine, and I am blessedly alive to see them,
And that is all that matters

Each step I take I cannot take again, my histories writ in stone,
Recorded somewhere in minds separate from mine.
The end of summer is not mine to mourn, the rise of winter not mine to revel in,
The snow does not exist to pull me out of my own mind, the stars do not exist for me to admire
Time marches on forever and once I have wilted and gone
The stars will still shine,
The snow will still fall,
Summer will always end,
But so shall winter
And summer shall come again
Time will march on, and none of it was for my sake, it was not mine
And nothing ever will be, save maybe words put on paper, thousands of poems and songs and stories,
Which bubbled up from under my own skin, flowed to my fingertips
and painted themselves on the page
Those are mine, if the snow and the stars, the winter and the summer cannot be
I will own nothing but my words, long as I live
And that is enough.
That is all that matters

We Begin With a Sense of the End

By McCoy Vranka

A baby is crying. In the next room people are dying.
The blankets are stiff and thin. I lie
Beside your skin, soft and warm
And faintly wet. The room is sterile, white, alight.
My tears are wet and salty on my tongue. I'm not tired,
But the light goes out, so I sleep.

It evades you until I do, sleep.
Lighting the horizon, daylight is dying
In shortening patches on the floor. You are tired
Of markers and crayons that lie
Underfoot and color the walls. A light
Always on in the dark to keep fears cold and dreams warm.

Nothing but the word is warm
As it rests upon my tongue. The dog whines in its sleep
On the rug in front of the fire that's alight
Against the creeping frost, yet dying
In the heavy, early dark. You lie
On the couch, always awake but always tired.

Spoken to ward off worried hands, "I'm just tired",
But it's hardly a whisper, and your forehead is too warm.
As the early sun rises, the grass will wet our feet with dew, so I lie,
When I meet your eyes. I talk of tomorrow and hold your hand so you can sleep.
Your eyes never close though the morning still dawns. I didn't know about dying,
But I saw the room lose a light.

My nerves are alight
With the spark in her eyes, never tired.
Don't leave, she says, with the whisper of the rustling leaves, already dying,
And the sharpness of the west wind that rattles the windows, stealing the warm
Words from my lips and giving them to her hands and her skin. Sleep
Never takes me, though she falls fast into dreaming. Dust makes the body a lie.

The soul still awake, like I. Grief whines but sounds lie.
Call them but windchimes, clink-clinging through the dark, alight
By the brush of the wind on a windless night.
The air that grows tired
Of filling my lungs, that holds the dull, ringing rhythm of my heart. Sleep
and come see me in my dreams, under a sky the shade of dying.

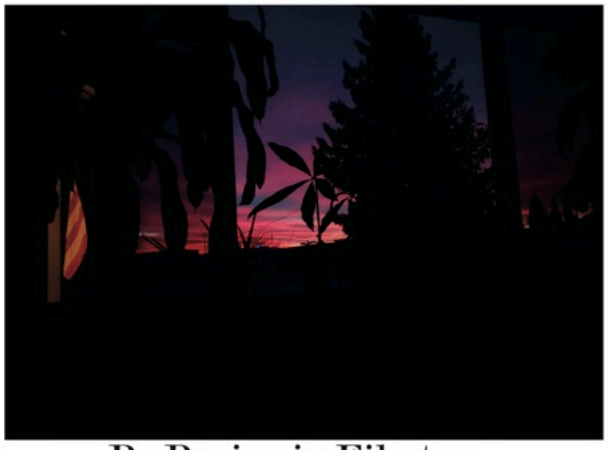
My tired eyes ache to close under cold, rough blankets. Next to you again I lie.
Salty tears warm a drying path to my parted lips.
A baby cries. A light
Goes out. The dying day recedes below the horizon. So I sleep.



By Lars Schei



By Ayden Smelko



By Benjamin Eilertsen



By Rae Hamlin

Twinkie
By Emmi Highness

At 15 months old, I was adopted. Ever since, I have been raised in Helena, Montana. It's no secret that Montana is, comparatively, not a very diverse state. I often joke that I can count all the Asians in the town on one hand. I regularly get mistaken for another Chinese girl in town who is the same age as me and adopted from the same region. This has led us to be constantly compared to each other, even though we look nothing alike.

When I was in 3rd grade I became obsessed with the book Year of the Dog by Grace Lin. I have re-read this book at least 20 times by now. But, there is one chapter in that book that I could not re-read. It was the chapter titled "Twinkie."

At age 10, I learned that twinkie was a derogatory term towards Asian Americans. "Yellow on the outside and white on the inside." I didn't realize why I didn't like this chapter so much until many years later.

When I was in 7th grade, I experienced my first blatant racist comment. I was walking my friend's dog, and a woman yelled at me "What are you going to do, eat it?" In 7th grade I battled a lot of internalized racism. My friends were young and stupid and would make rice picking jokes or eating dog jokes and I took on the motto "If you can't beat them, join them." I understood later that I didn't have to put myself down to fit in, but that is an incredibly hard concept to understand at 13.

At age 15, I experienced a classmate being racist towards me. Still to this day I do not know the name of this classmate and I can hardly remember his face, but I will never forget his actions. It was during the dreaded dance unit in gym class, we rotated dance partners and as I approached this boy he turned around, and pulled at his eyes making his eyes into slits, into "Chinese eyes."

I have constantly battled with the fact that I will never know enough about Chinese culture to be "true Chinese" and I will never have the skin tone to match my American culture. Living in Montana, I look like an anomaly. I'm stuck in limbo, I'm a gray area, I'm a twinkie.

I didn't like the chapter titled "Twinkie" because it gave me second hand embarrassment for one, but it also became a new fear of mine. I did not want to be a "twinkie" because I did not want to be bullied.

I'm paranoid. I worry that people don't like me just because of the color of my skin and not my personality. I worry that I won't be given a fair chance because of this judgment. I worry that I'll never find full acceptance with myself.

But I also use my ethnicity as a scapegoat for my anxieties. Oh, he doesn't like me? Well, it couldn't be my personality, it's probably just because he's racist. Oh, she's avoiding me? It must be because she hates Asian people, not because of my own actions towards her.

It becomes a victim complex, even as much as I try not to. "Every problem my friends have, mine are harder because they'll never know what it's like to have problems and be Chinese." That's not a valid or fair argument, but I say it to myself anyways.

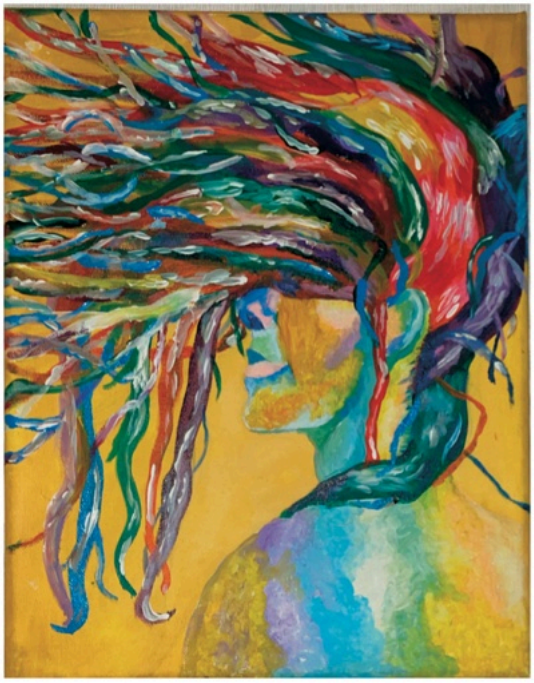
So what is a challenge, a hurdle I've had to overcome? Like many, I overcome my challenge daily; because every day I have to actively remind myself that I am not a victim, that I am not my ethnicity, that real friends and partners will look past whatever is skin deep. I have to remind myself that I do not need to find myself by the end of high school, that I am not just an anomaly in Helena, Montana. That I am not a twinkie.



By Astri Hahn



Joy in a Glass of Tea
By Vesperia Bacon



Unbinding By Logan Colberg



Sunlit Trees by Mia Brinton

The Little Trout
By Elinor Goehring

Lost between familiar rocks
Knowing what must be done
But not so willing to do it

The trout
White with some scales red
Swimming in clear water

He is so elegant in his solitude
So solitary even in companionship

Every brush of a fin against the water thrilling
Every sound of the world whispered
Secrets from looking upon the little trout

Heavy is the water upon me
For I am not this little white trout
For I am not pure
For I have known humankind

Does he see me through those gaping eyes?
Am I a disruption to his morning
Just as he is a distraction from mine?

Distraction
This fish is focused
I am focused on him
If I am focused on him, am I truly distracted?

The water cold
A creek quiet as a pond
I'll never get there
Never reach it—as the little trout has

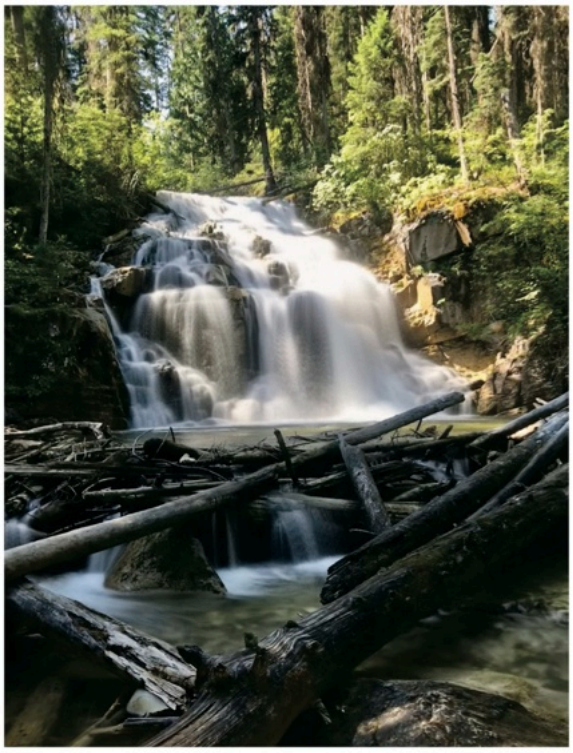
Cold and quiet
I could not
I could never

Angular are his swimming patterns
I see a bridge
And under it
I see him

A bridge far away
Yet he swims in my mind
Underneath the bridge

Time to say goodbye
Time to face the other trout
The ones on two feet

Can I see through his fins?
Just for a day?
Can I only for a moment—
Know what the little trout knows?

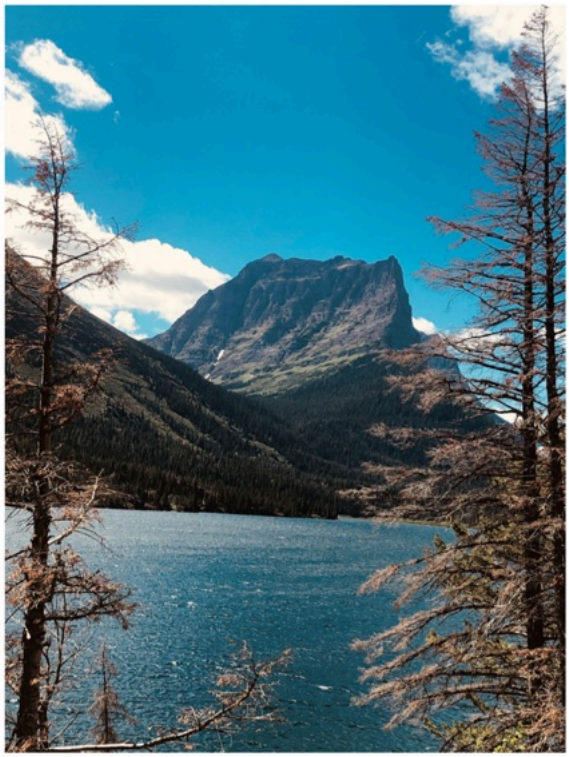


By Dylan Crane

By Connor Devine



By Matthias Tucker





By Quill Keller



By Kinden Wareham

From These Cathedral Spires
By Keiran Boyle

Relentless scoffs.
Stained glass windows, reconstructed from
Shining, but shattered souls.

"Can I pray for you?" No, thank you.
Please, no.
"You have sinned," they exhale,
But what is their sin?
Old men; no eye contact.
Old women; pitiful smiles,
Tears hanging on by only a prayer of hope.
Hope for what? Surely not hope for me.

Father preaches his hope, he preaches his love.
"The mass has ended. Go, in peace."
But do they go in peace?
Do they leave with prophetic love?
No. They live with pathetic hate.

Dissonant fear echoes,
Like the eight mourning bells, reverberating.
The words, ringing through my being,
"You're going to hell," but did I ever leave?

This church is no promised land.
This building provides no sanctuary.
These pews offer no humility, no hope, no home.
Scripture tells me I am a disgrace, but I wonder
Why shouldn't Pride sing from these cathedral spires?



Melting Candles by Hailey Cox



By James Stafford



By Morgane Fourré

Raspberry Trail
By Marie Romano

It walked along a Raspberry Trail
The ground was laced with red
Crimson spilled on the snow in dots
Leading behind a pine tree
Becoming a Raspberry Trail

Hiding behind a snow covered tree
It looked for victims for its game
And its eyes landed on a little girl
Playing in the snow
Just near the Raspberry Trail

The echo of laughter filled its head
The joy the little girl had
Was something it could never bare
So the creature snatched her away like a crow with its prey
Pulling her on the Raspberry Trail

Soon the sun will set
Leaving the trail behind
'Her parents will look for her' the creature thought
So it dragged her body away
And created another Raspberry Trail



By Isabel Sutherland

The Final Adoration
By Piper Claeys

My eyes melted into my skull as I tried to make a pattern out of the lace draping hanging over my bed. I couldn't tell its true colors in the night when the colors of dusk are burned into my corneas. I tried to read, a truly foolish attempt when all I can read is love. I gulped down the delicious water on my bedside table, pitiful. I even tried to meditate. Anything to push the thoughts away from the forefront of my mind. For at this point in the night, I was begging for sleep. Praying to whatever god could take this drug from my mind. I shut my eyes and my body sank a little deeper into hell. The open window allowed a cool breeze into my stuffy chambers, and it rang again. A laugh. Sweet and staccato. Unafraid of joy. And I am so envious. Breath hit my lungs as I gulped in the sweet sound.

It began a few days earlier. Sitting in sunbathed monotony and listening to the infuriating click of silver on porcelain. My love hungrier than I. I was mindlessly poking my dinner, my mind blank and somehow spiteful. One simple glance from my mother told me the meat on my fork was meant for my mouth. I brought the heavy silver fork to my lips, a laugh echoed in my ears. Startled, I pulled the tool from my teeth and my eyebrows knit together.

"Mother, who else is in the manor tonight?" I ask, quirking a brow at her.

She looked at me just as confused. "It's only us, Phy. The staff left for their own meal and your father doesn't return until the 7th."
"Oh." I sighed, turning back to the meal.
From there, the laugh came sporadically, like a fae in the Horana Mountains. Illusive but stunning and oh so enthralling. But like a fae hunter, I was addicted. I craved the sound. Like opium dropped in my ear. I wanted to hear her joy. I wanted to taste it. She was my Narcome.

So, when it came again as I looked up into the lace, I was ready. I closed my eyes and let my mind collapse. Until the last thought in my brain was the sound. Constricted in the center, muffled from the force. Sinking into my subconscious, I chased the voice. Deep into the files of my mind. The laugh came again, sharply to the right. I dove for it, but as I went, it started to get darker and darker. My mind began to cool, I'm close.

Suddenly, a great light blinded me, and the laugh filled my mind, across all hemispheres. Nirvana kissed my eyes. I had found my love, auburn hair and eyes like sand. Skin as dark as olive and her body like a tree. I saw her in the pasture near the water, half a day's journey east. She would be there.

I shot out of bed and grabbed a thick petticoat to slip on under my sleep dress. Scribbling a note of where I was going and why. I darted through the dark corridors and galloped down the stairs. My shoes clacked loudly as I ran through the ballroom. Making a final pass into the servant's hallway, I reemerged in the stables. As quickly as I could, I threw my saddle over my horse's back and mounted him.

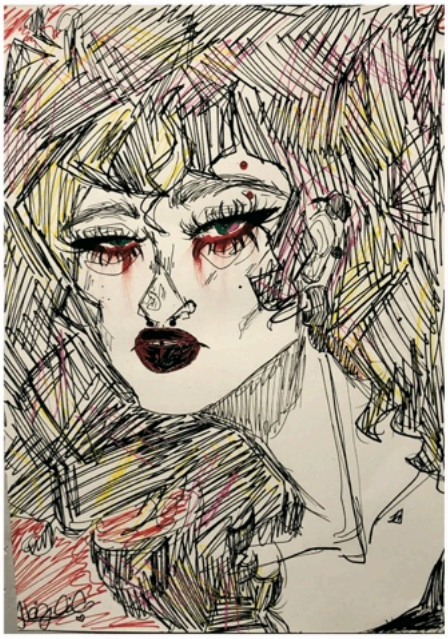
I pressed my foot to his side, and he began a gallop. I gripped the stabilizing rope and with the steady single beat of his hooves we catapulted into the night. The wind whipped my face as the beast charged forward, settling in for the next few hours.

The sun graced the sky as we followed the river over the pass, we knew we were close. The horse sailed onward preparing to stop. When we hit the ground where I knew her to be, I slid off his side and turned, looking for her. I frantically spun in circles, dragging my eyes across the landscape, searching.

When my eyes fell on hers, I felt it. My heart crashed against my chest, thunderous and determined. The Wind Ribbons of gold formed around us, starting to braid themselves together. One end looped around my middle and the other around hers. It was over, she was here.

It felt like we had been uprooted from the earth and transcended to the heavens when our bodies met. It did not matter if there was fire raging against our ankles or if the sea had swallowed us down. What mattered was that her arms had met mine and my Invincible Love had been found. All I could feel at that moment was pure exuberance in the fact that her existence was true.

When the time came that I was able to remove my cheek from the crease between her neck and collarbone, my mind was obliterated by the bewitching grace of her face. My visions were pure, but far from the true awe her face dawned. My breath filled my chest as I took in her excellence, and I thanked the god I had prayed to for bringing me my Belle.



By Abigail Baker



By Olivia Dewey

The Place that Calls Me
By Miranda Sheafor

The drive from Montana to Utah is not a short one. A quick search will tell you it's about 12 hours, not counting any breaks in driving, and it's a journey that twists through a relatively barren landscape. The occasional flecks of wildlife and the flashes of small towns that all look the same from afar make for a fairly monotonous backdrop. But Capitol Reef is unmistakable. The vibrant reds and oranges that ombre over twisting mountains and stretching plateaus are distinct even in the fleeting glimpses caught through the window of a speeding car. But more astounding than anything to me was the emptiness. So few people, no matter where you looked. Fruita is a shock of lush green amongst it all, like a strange oasis in an even stranger desert. Apricots were in season in the orchard at the time, and they coated the trees in droplets of golden orange. I climbed a waiting ladder, gathering a bowlful of the soft fruits. Each bite was full of a gentle sweetness that kept me coming back for more. I reveled in the idea of returning the morning of our last day, but the trees had lost their shining jewels seemingly overnight. More people must have come after us, trickling away the fruits until all that remained were the unripe and discarded, left in the grass for deer to graze on.

Then there was the stargazing. I remember wanting to go out to the stretches of flat rock to watch the sunset after hiking for the entire day. Out there, the sky in its entirety surrounds each person and swallows them whole in a vastness that makes all the ground just underfoot feel miniscule in comparison. The sunset crests the infinite horizon, filling the canvas of sky with any color it pleases. I knew I had to come back to see the stars.

The rock is cold and jabs into your back as if it knows exactly how to irritate you. But the air holds a stern and thoughtful silence and
the sky itself is a blanket of darkness so deep it's colored, dotted in so many stars it's as if the universe is looking down on you in her entirety. Everything blurred away and it was just the two of us, staring back at each other.

But Cohab will always be my favorite. The steps leading up to the canyon entrance are a sheer set of switchbacks ingrained in the cliff. They were exhausting the first time we scaled them, but the second time the challenge was thrilling. I hit every turn with a purpose and pushed past every step in a blur. The view from the top is like a bridge between two worlds. Facing one way, the park is visible for miles. Russet cliffs claw out and recede back in endless waves. The other way you see the canyon. The walls within are an ever changing and winding corridor. One moment, they hold shades of pale tan pocketed with small holes. The next they are a perfectly smooth surface coated in stripes of every warm hue from carmine to copper. Wildlife bursts from every crevasse and stretches out from any patch of ground it is afforded. The winding trail is composed of a cool dust that is as soft as silk and whose color shifts



A Cherished Place By Ella Rowland

with the walls above. Every ledge and bend, every nook and steppingstone, the endless expanse of Cohab beckoned me on. This place was a mystery waiting to be solved. An adventure waiting to be explored. And it was as if it waited just for me.

Capitol Reef will always hold a special place in my heart for a myriad of reasons, but the part that really grasped me was the emptiness of it all. The park was often empty in the way that it remained unmarred by humanity. But more than that it was empty in a way that seemed to call out to me alone. It wasn't just a place that touched on every comfort and sparked every curiosity. It was an expanse that I could explore for me, and for no one else. The adventure was mine. That's what beckoned me onward then and what tugs at the edges of my mind and the strings of my heart even now.

MR. LINDEN'S LIBRARY
By Gage Bradshaw

Books. Books are rather important throughout the lifetime of man. Unfortunately, it's a dying hobby to read or write and we do it for work and rarely for fun, at least in the case of my generation. But not me. Reading is my life force, it's the best and safest vice you can live in. When things get hard, project, deny, pretend. You can bury yourself in stories and get a temporary break from your problems and focus on some fictional world problems. Sure, you can't pay your rent, but Mary Beth's best friend just got killed by an alien dragon from the depths of Florida. Now your problem isn't relevant. Anyway, I spent a lot of time at the corner bookstore. (It used to be a vet, but they found out the owners were taking the dead animals and putting it in the next-door sandwich shop's freezer.) It's an especially small bookstore. Only a few bookcases and it has a very antique look. I like books, but the store is cramped and has an extremely thin and ugly pale green carpet across the floor. However, it's the only bookstore in town. As I said, it's a dying passion. I have bought or read nearly every single book in the store. I lost an arm due to a mail truck accident, so my disability check takes care of my bills, therefore I have a lot of downtime for reading. In fact, Mr. Linden began giving me the first pick when he got shipments into the store!

"Have anything new for me?" I asked as I walked through the door.

"No, sorry, nothing. Maybe read a book online, or order one." He suggested lazily. He knows my deep hatred for online shopping, I mean he knows the government is stealing his information yet encourages me to do it anyway. Hardly a revolutionary. But he's old, no doubt he cares about such things now he won't have to deal with them. I'll be nice about it.

"Literally die in fire," I suggested calmly.

Just then there was a faint sound of a bell.

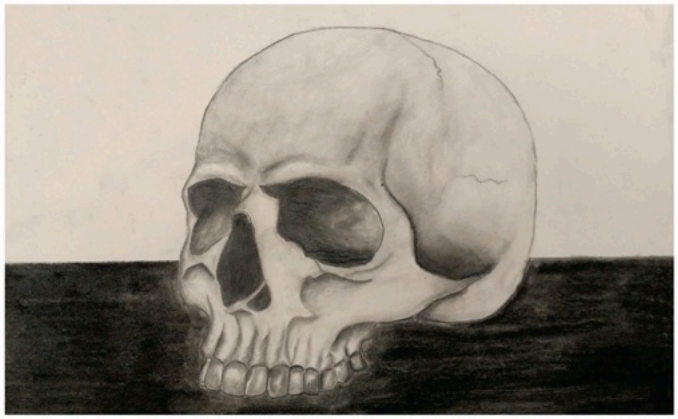
Someone other than me just entered the store. They were wearing a dark hoodie and looking at the ground, as if shy or hiding. They walked up to the counter and without eye contact asked,

"Do y'all buy books?" His voice was shaky, and he seemed nervous, likely an introvert and doesn't get out much, social anxiety is no joke.

"No." Mr. Linden said, "unfortunately not, but there is a thrift store just two blocks from here." Then the man began to walk away, but I stopped him.

"I like to read and have government money to burn so whatcha got?" He looked at me and for the first time made eye contact, he was pale, and his eyes were sunken like he hadn't slept in days or even weeks. His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked terminally sick. "Take it, for free, just take it. I don't want it anymore." He said then at once ran out the door. Must have been a junkie, the guy was clearly high. I looked at Mr. Linden and told him to have a nice day then before leaving the store I urgently wanted to see what I would be reading. I opened the book and there was a leaf on the page. I blew it off and began to read the first few lines as I got into my car. It was amazing writing, and I was put into a trance. I couldn't seem to find an author, but it did seem rather old. I don't feel like I've been sitting very long, I only thought I just sat down but it must have been hours, because it was dark outside and bordering 9 O'clock. Confused, I brushed it off and went back to the store to tell Mr. Linden about this book. It's only been an hour past close and he sleeps there most nights.

The door said "CLOSED" on it, but it was unlocked so I let myself in. It was dark inside. I called out for Mr. Linden a few times with no response. I guess it's time to play and find the light switch. I blindly followed the wall and all of a sudden I fell flat on my face. Ow. A few steps forward I found it and turned around to see what I tripped on. It was... a vine? Like the ones at pumpkin patches in October. That is, well, odd to say the least. I decided to follow it. It slithered across the whole shop and up behind the counter. That's when I saw him. Mr. Linden, on the ground, with a bloody vine protruding from his chest. What. The. Hell.
I let out a loud shriek in fear and reached for my phone to call 911. When I begin to dial the numbers, a vine whips it out of my hand, sending it shattered to the ground. In a flash of panic, I turn and sprint to the door, but it's locked. I pound and I scream but no one can hear me. No one is coming. It's then that I feel a tight grip around my ankle that pulls me to the ground. I let out one more cry only for it to be silenced by a thorny stem stretching into the bottom of my neck. And as I fall to the ground choking on my blood from the deep cuts it has made in my throat I make eye contact with the sunken eyed man from before.
"Sorry" he says apologetically, "but it has to feed."



By Katelyn Gonzalez



By Kylee Hamper

Life Through My Eyes
By Mia Brinton

Sudden rushes of emotion
And sporadic deep thoughts
Finding calm in commotion
And untangling earbud knots

Smelling flowers when in sight
And painting indigo mountains
Feeling peace in the night
And tossing pennies in fountains

Seeking poetry in the moon
And brewing chamomile tea
Humming the same tune
And remembering the sea

Reading stories in the clouds
And dreaming of France
Excitement in big crowds
And wanting to dance

Look through these glasses
My life looks like this
Little moments as it passes
Overall, it is bliss.



By Sara Dorrington



Silly Bird By Vesperia Bacon



By Sapphire Ferguson-Jetty



Lovely Feeling By Cassandra Hawks

The Field of Sunflowers and Strawberries
By Icelynn Frandsen

Inside me is
Sunlight and clear skies with
Wild sunflowers gleaming below them,
And an old yellow rusted Chevy parked alongside its dirt road.

Vast bright green pastures shining as the day comes to its end,
And a bright dark orange covering the sky, to accompany
The majestic essence of golden hour.

An open field with a light breeze,
And the sound of a beautiful strong violin,
As its player sits in a patch of sunflowers gleaming in their field.

A golden retriever running happily in the field he shares with the sunflowers, for he loves the sweet sounds of strings.
A patch of lucious sweet strawberries as they sit, watch, and wait to be discovered.

Inside me is a girl who burns with such a passionate flame for what she loves, though she is still sweet and bright like the field of sunflowers and strawberries.
Inside me is hope, love, light, passion, the sweet taste of strawberries, and a chorus of the many musics of the world.

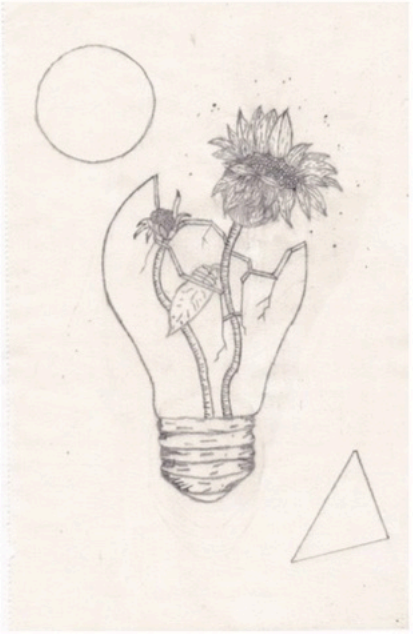


Airport Ambiance By Ella Rowland

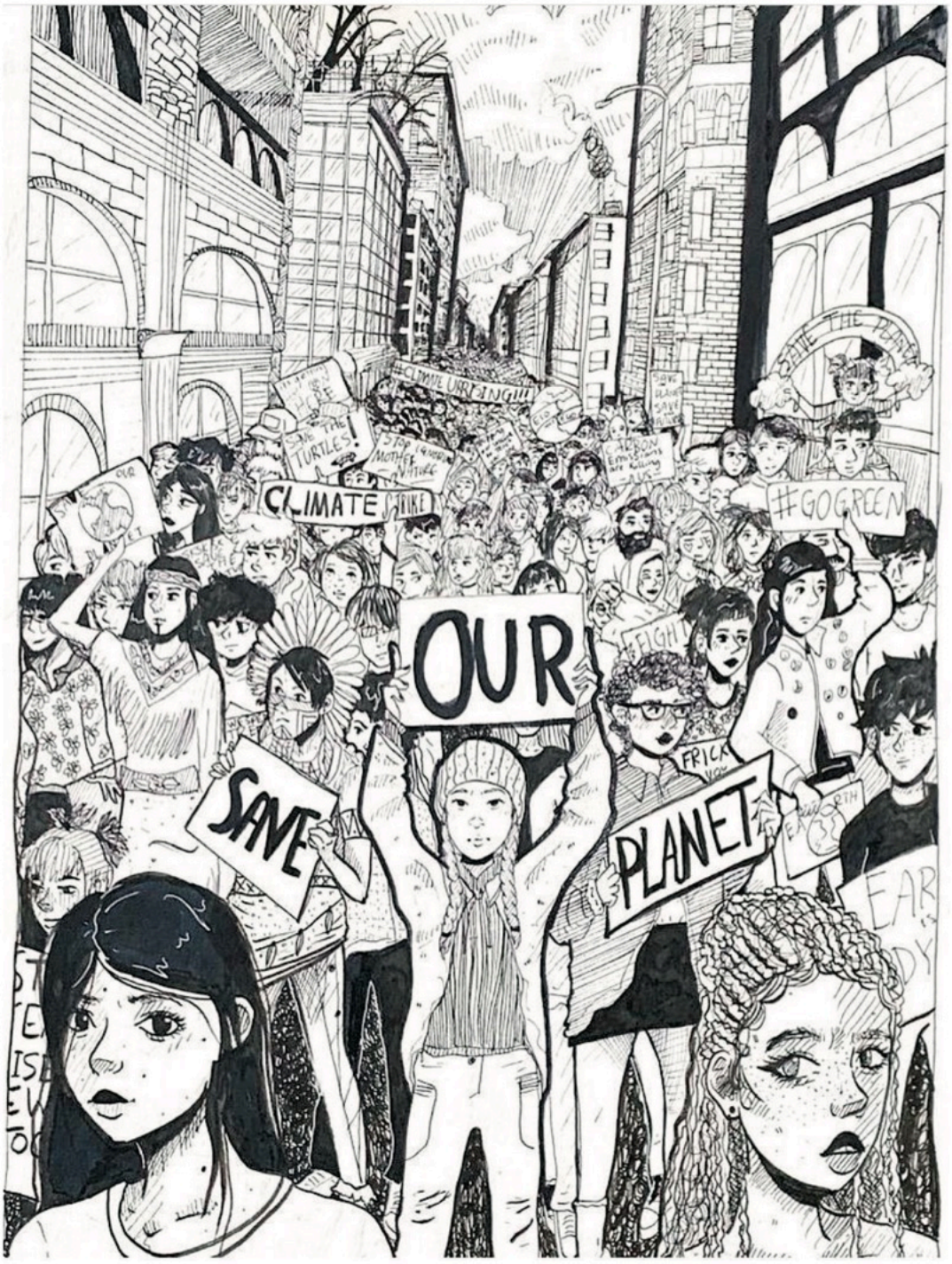
To Be.
By Haley Ingraham

To Be a writer is to pick apart every
Fiber of our being
And to revel in our misery.
To Be a writer is to be so wholly
Uninspired and inspired,
Worshiping and cursing it all as if it is holy.
To Be a writer is to cause
Eternal unrest,
Every word a silent plea for what was.
To Be a writer is to be strong,
Overcoming oneself
Despite the fear of doing it all wrong.

To Be a Writer.



Bulb By Icelynn Frandsen



Climate Crisis By Karis Malkin

Keats in my Sister's Room
By Anna Ries-Roncalli

Of the seventeen-some-odd winters of my life, that one was the most beautiful and the one that returns to me most often, because it was then that I first fell in love. I was thirteen and had just discovered the usefulness of my sister's empty bedroom. Sitting across the hall from mine, my sister's departure years before had left it in perpetual darkness, the door blocking the outside world, preserving the lingering strands of her presence and awaiting her return. I would pass by the doorway over a hundred times every day and each time I would pause to look at it, at the peeling white paint, at the dust slowly gathering in the curves of the door, at the wooden carvings shaped like two enormous eyes staring back into mine.

One day, my mother asked me to retrieve a book from the depths of my sister's room and so I stood outside the door, bracing my shoulders before turning the cool metal knob and stepping inside. I was immediately struck by the size of the room; it was much smaller than I remembered, the bed I used to sneak into on nights when I couldn't sleep was almost miniscule, lying compressed between the desk and the bookshelf. Quickly, I entered, retrieved the book I had been looking for, and left the room, feeling somewhat giddy from finally crossing the threshold and the realization that the empty room was no longer as daunting as it once had been.



After that quickly began a ritual of sorts. Whenever I got bored, or whenever I felt the impulse, I would poke my head from my room into the hallway and peer around me to see if anyone was watching. Upon confirming I was alone, I would quickly creep into my sister's room, barely letting my feet touch the floor until I was closed in, locking myself away from the outside world, escaping the mundane ordinary tasks of my life and allowing myself to explore the hidden treasures found so easily in her room.

While I diverted myself by inspecting different parts of her room, I would always return to the one I considered the most important--her bookshelf. My whole life I had felt so starved for words that I searched for them everywhere, devouring every letter I possibly could, and her bookshelf was no different; its vast size enchanted me and I would sit in front of it, scanning every book title, moving across the shelf one by one and examining each spine, determining if it was a worthwhile or interesting read, until one day I found a book different from the rest. One day I found a book of poetry.

I had never read poetry before. Yet,

Power of Books By Katya Shkurigin

I saw my hand--somehow separate from my body--stretching out before me as I reached for the shabby, black cover and then read the first poem: 'When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be' by John Keats. As I let his prose wash over me, my thoughts went quiet and I felt a calmness settle deep in my soul. I read the poem over and over, until its stanzas were imprinted into my memory, returning to her room each day for weeks to obsess over every line. It became my constant companion throughout those bleak winter months, quickly worn out from my loving caresses on the thin pages, falling apart by the seams as I turned the pages again, and again, and again. Looking back, I never would have known that a fourteen line poem would alter my heart so much. Yet that was all it took for me to fall irrevocably in love with poetry, with its flowing rhythms and beautiful imagery, with its words that never failed to reach that part of my chest that was so very hidden and so very empty. In the solitude of my heart, poetry brought solace. My older siblings were grown and gone and I was alone; I knew that nothing would ever be quite the same again and felt my life--along with my childhood--quickly slipping through my fingers. But then, suddenly, there was someone who understood. There was someone who felt what I felt, someone who described it so perfectly, someone whose heart ached like mine. There was hope.



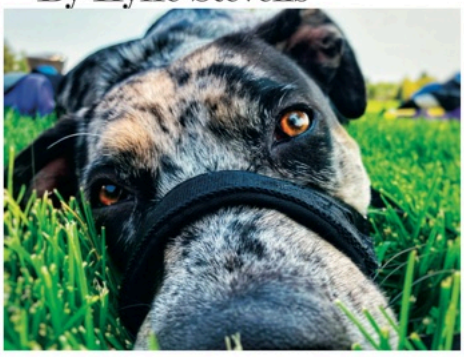
Iridescent By Katya Shkurigin



Something in the Grass
By Kylie Stevens



Moth into the Flame
By Quin Vulk



By Kylee Hamper



By Emma Randash



By Harrison Lashway

Clouds (How I wish the world would be)
By Drew Gustovich

Once upon a time, there was a choice that had to be made. Saving ourselves or saving the natural environment and its benefits, who for all this time has kept us alive. We chose both, instead....

Reflecting off silver
Stung her eyes
While a bright but navy sunrise stood over top the sky
A silver locket, silver chain, with a slight rise
Gripped onto the back of her head's hair
Once it could no longer cling; a deep fall, eventually reaching ground...
Not the ground from your toes to your scalp
Rather a ground miles below your feet
It left a vague echo, mourning a final goodbye...
"Goodbye." She whispered back, lending a final glance.

The below.
A place people like me cannot go,
Rather admire from above
In the below...
Neon sun rays shine through the leaves of fruit trees; condensed, like rain during nights of thunder
Everything advancing civilization and tech takes place in the sky, above the clouds

Ground gifted us resources; wrapped with bows, allowing for life....
It's only fair to not mistreat something who has done nothing but supply
So, we live in the sky
Levitating
Higher than birds; higher than kites
We've heard rumors about ground where its own people allowed theirs to ignite,
Up in flames of orange light
But here, a taxi stays in flight to avoid the place people like me cannot go,
Rather admire from above...

We watch sharks with teeth whiter than the snow, covering sections of the below
We watch fungi with powers to heal, grow throughout the sweaty jungles
We watch the ocean dance in synchronicity
Yes, parts of ground come here, above the clouds
Only, we take no more than needed
And do not venture to the below in crowds
No suffering lives here
There is not a reason for deception, leaders, marketing, currency, or power here...
Here, we share
Here, we are family
Here, we create
Here, we build
There is a lot of room in the sky to watch nature's colors, dance with resources
It is beautiful, above the clouds; even when the rain cries below our feet
It is peaceful, above the clouds
I first arrived here, a small child, with nowhere to live, I was viewed as another mind, more ideas, and memories.
I was seen as a living being. Not a number, not a burden
Now I live in a large hollowed out tree.
Beautiful paintings, my favorite Netflix show, and a canopy bed strung with vine curtains; await inside, chattering together while I'm not around
A smell of fresh pine always fills the air, steaming off my naturally scented pine floor
The tree has life, I have shelter. Win, win
Things are comprisable here
Why destroy a life to build a shelter when one can have both?
Why replace nature with civilization when one can have both?
That is why we live above the clouds
A compromise we have composed

By Lyli Ernst



Overcast By Nate Fang





Reflecting By Nate Fang



By Kjehl Campbell

Atoms Never Touch
By Victoria Seamons

Atoms never touch I was told when I was small
So you've never touched a door, a table, or a wall.

You've never touched a pencil, a book or a chair
You've never touched your face, your feet or your hair.

And as I grow older, it makes me sad to reflect
Because try as they might, atoms will never connect.

A higher power, fate, destiny, a god watching close,
No matter the effort, it will always be almost.

A similar story, the tale of you and me
Gives a similar message: we were not meant to be.

When I first met you, I fell deep in love
I knew you were the one. That, I was certain of.

I wanted you with me, always, forever
Through thick and thin, and stormy weather.

I'd see you everywhere, in the sky so clear
I'd see you in the stars, in the sunrise, in the mirror
You would invade my thoughts, and at night in my dreams
You lived in my mind. I fell for your schemes.

But throughout the years, I've learned and I've grown
And try as we might, we're better off alone.

But if I'm being honest, you'll never really leave
Because the mark that you left may burn and may bleed

But the impact you made on my fragile soul
Will always be with me because love takes its toll.

And I'll see you in the mirror, in the sky and the stars.
I'll hear you in the ocean waves and in the song we call ours.

I'll miss your arms around me, when I needed to be filled
I'll feel your warmth, your beating heart, lingering still

And to me, that's the saddest part
That I can see you, I can hear you, I can feel you in my heart.

But when I want to be with you, I'm asking for too much
Because we were never meant to be as atoms never touch.

Burning The House Down

By Wyatt Gant

It was 11:30 PM. A sleek black car pulled alongside the curb and parked in front of a rundown apartment building. The interior of the car was pitch black, betraying none of its contents save for the miniscule orange glow of a cigarette from the driver's seat. The flicker of the cigarette occasionally illuminated the grizzled chin of the car's driver. The orange glow of the cigarette slowly washed down over the driver's body, revealing a clean business suit that his employer had requested he wear, as the driver lowered the cigarette and exhaled a puff of smoke. The driver rolled the window down, dropping the cigarette out of the car and onto the asphalt. He exhaled, feeling a calm wash over him. Before he left his house, he had taken a shot of heroin, as was customary for him before jobs like this. The drug's slow, drowsy calm kept him steady as he mentally ran through the plan his employer had given him.

Just another anonymous voice on the phone, demanding a little bit of unfortunate property damage. Usually, I'd ignore it, but this particular anonymous voice happened to be very rich. Said rich voice just requested that a rundown eyesore of an apartment building would mysteriously catch fire tonight. The building's fire alarms would fail to go off, the building would burn to the ground. A few people would undoubtedly get hurt, but a little bit of money would shut them up. I'll get paid and my employer will get to build a brand new source of income on top of the building's ashes.

Vic ran through his mental checklist, carefully accounting for everything he had on him.

Matches, pants pocket, left side. Cigarette, pants pocket, right side. Lighter, chest pocket of his coat. Floorplan of the apartment building, pants pocket, right side.

He wasn't frightened or nervous. Fear wasn't even a possibility, due more to the heroin than any amount of confidence. He popped open the car door, feeling the cool nighttime breeze waft over him. He wasn't concerned or even slightly scared. He was Vic Madsen, and he had a job to do.

Vic climbed out of his car, grinding his foot down on the remains of his cigarette. He walked around to the trunk of the car before popping it open. As Vic pulled the trunk open, the hinges produced an unpleasant shriek, making Vic wince.

Must remember to oil that. Not terribly professional– the rich voice on the phone wouldn't be pleased if it had heard that.
He retrieved a red canister of gasoline. He slammed the trunk shut before beginning to cross the street, moving towards the apartment building while the gas can sloshed at his side. He walked quickly, hoping to outrun the notice of any prying eyes in the surrounding houses. Once he finished crossing the street, Vic walked around the front of the building, searching for an open window. After a couple seconds of searching, he found it. Moving closer, Vic lifted the canister of gasoline above his head before pushing it through the window and into the apartment.

As Vic began to clamber his way through the window, he locked eyes with one of the building's security cameras. Knowing that his employer had promised that all of the building's cameras would be mysteriously deactivated for the night, Vic gave the camera a winning smile before pulling himself up and through the window. Suddenly, he felt a stabbing pain in his arm. Stifling his reaction, Vic tumbled through the window into the apartment, producing a little too much noise for his liking.

Content that no one heard his less-than-graceful entry, Vic climbed to his feet and dusted off his pants. He quickly yanked his sleeve back, dismayed to feel the wet fabric.

Art By Karmen Knight

Feeling around on his arm, Vic discovered a sizable cut stitching diagonally across his lower arm. Wincing against the pain, Vic looked back towards the windowsill. A long rusty nail stuck out of the chipped wood. Covering the laceration with his hand, Vic decided that it would be better to finish the job before treating it. Any blood that he left behind wouldn't be very useful as evidence after the building had been burnt to the ground. He squinted against the dark before mentally chiding himself for not bringing a flashlight. All of his preparation and he forgot to bring a flashlight.



Retrieving the canister of gasoline, Vic began to inspect the apartment. He slowly and carefully crept across the creaking boards as he searched for the kitchen. After a few agonizing minutes of quietly stumbling through the dark and dusty apartment, Vic came upon a small dingy room covered in peeling, flowery wallpaper. Cardboard boxes filled with newspapers and dry cloth sheets, undoubtedly placed there by the ever-helpful voice on the phone, sat draped across the peeling vinyl counters and archaic stove. Could this be any easier?

Quietly chuckling to himself, Vic opened the canister of gas before beginning to generously drizzle it across the entire room. The flood of dark fluid washed over the newspaper, the ancient floorboards, and the dry scraps of cloth. When the gasoline had sufficiently coated the contents of the kitchen, Vic stepped back for a moment. He carefully thought over the plan, ensuring that every task his employer had detailed had been completed. Once he had once again completed his mental checklist, Vic reached into his pocket to retrieve his box of matches. He popped the box open and carefully retrieved a single match. He brought the scarlet tip of the match up against the lid of the box and struck it, lighting the match and washing the room in a fragile orange glow. Vic took a deep breath before raising the match above the gasoline-stained piles of cloth and paper, already imagining the rest of his night once this job was complete. Just as he was about to let the match go, a flicker of movement caught his eye. Vic jumped in surprise, quickly twisting towards the movement while trying to use the impotent light of the match to probe into the darkness. That's when he saw something.

The Something's posture resembled a sort of hunched monkey. Its skin was the color of red meat and had the unsettling texture of striated muscle. Thin veins criss-crossed its body. Sheaths of a bone-like shell covered parts of its arms and a line of vertebrae-like plates ran down its back. Its head was a blank, apathetic mask of bone, coldly regarding Vic with eyes that didn't exist. Fleshy tendrils emerging from a slit on its face constantly twitched as though tasting the air. It couldn't have been more than 3 feet tall, but it exuded an aura that made Vic break out in a cold sweat. It was perched on the floor a few feet away from Vic. It regarded him coldly, the twitching of its mouth-tendrils the only movement in the room for a moment.

Merely regarding the Something made Vic start to feel nauseous. Colors began to swim in front of his eyes and the room seemed to lean heavily to one side. Vic stumbled, beginning to

feel sick. He was torn between looking away from the Something in an attempt to preserve his sanity and keeping his eyes fixed on it to prevent it from moving while it was unobserved. Every single alarm bell in his brain was going off. He could feel the Something on the table emotionlessly regarding him.

Can't think, can't stand, going to fall, don't fall.

Vic stumbled again, leaning heavily to his right before he hit the ground hard, dropping the match onto the floor. The fragile radius of orange light went out, plunging both Vic and the Something into darkness.

Vic's fingers scratched madly at the box of matches, unwilling to let the Something move about unobserved. Vic's breathing began to grow ragged as he desperately yanked out another match and shakily lit it. The Something had remained where it was. Vic's vision began to twist, the edges blurring like a kaleidoscope as he observed the Something again.

Some wall broke in Vic's mind as he looked upon the Something. He felt a surge of every moment of fear, pain, embarrassment and terror blaze through his mind in an instant. Vic's dad coming home drunk and angry one night, Vic showing up to school the next day with bruises on his face.

He felt a burning pain on the cut on his arm. He looked down at the wound only to see it regurgitate a thick flow of blood.

Asking Rachel out to junior prom, her laughing in his face, mocking him to her friends.

When the blood cleared, a cruel mouth was left over. Small needle-like protrusions formed teeth that resembled rusted nails and needles that were used too many times. His father shouting at him, Vic shouting back, the sharp crack and rush of pain as his father's hand impacted his cheek.

The mouth flexed a few times, opening and closing, plunging its teeth into the flesh of Vic's arm. Vic tried to scream, only to realize that he'd already been screaming. He couldn't remember when he started.

His girlfriend leaving, unwilling to even look at him as she fled. The click of the door shutting behind her.

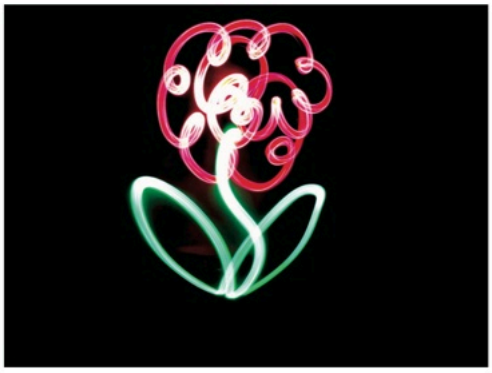
Vic felt the mouth's teeth scythe into his flesh, setting his skin on fire with pain, as the mouth began to speak.

"Hey, dude, can you keep it down? People are trying to sleep in here."

That's the last thing Vic remembered before consciousness left him.



By Paedyn Miller



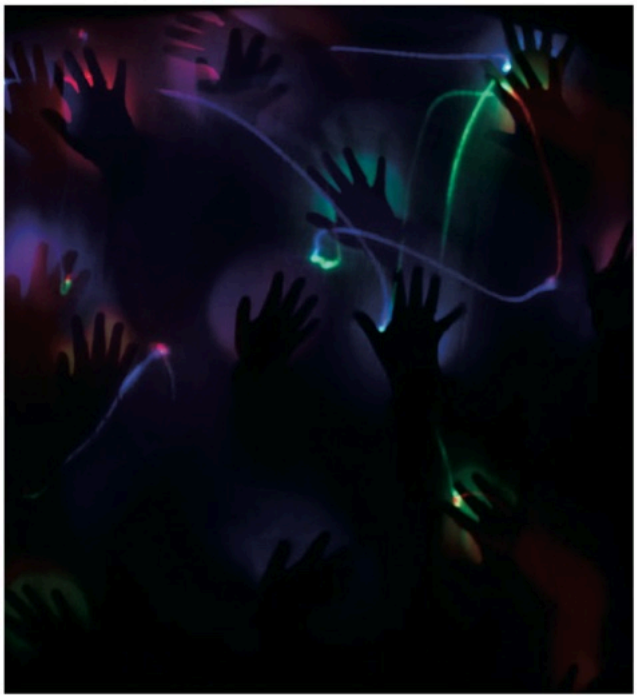
By Mikayla Hall



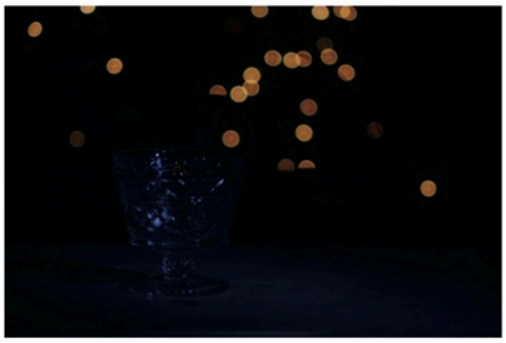
By Maci McElvain



By Myha Fayant



By Myha Fayant



By Natalie Pravecek

The Time I Held A Star
By Rebecca Smillie

Summer nights hold so much magic. The contradiction of the cold of the night with the heat of the season allows for untold wonders. One summer night, I laid on the grass surrounded by darkness...and the stars. The light of the sky was enough to light all that I needed to see. For in the dark, light becomes more visible and the distant bodies are illuminated in our globe.

A summer breeze droned in the background; the rustle of the willow branches floated softly over it, and the crickets' and creatures' nocturnal stirring in the bushes built up their individual choruses. The stars are brightest at that time of year, when the worries of the world are blinded by the light from far away. The stars that guided our ancestors. The stars generations have reached for, like an infant reaches for the mobile hanging over its crib. That oh so human longing for something greater than itself. Something more vast than any man could imagine. And yet to us every immense gaseous body is but a spot, a stain of the cosmic blanket only visible at night.



If we were not made to yearn for it, then why, from our view, are the stars so attainable? If they were only made to be admired, then why do we have an innate hunger for the wonders of the universe? And yet we reach, not having the oversight to see that what is untold is beautiful but also filled with dangers. Maybe we were only made to touch the heavens for a second and no longer.

I held a star in my hands only once. The star had fallen from the sky, the most unlucky of its brothers. I held a piece of the heavens within my hands. I felt it, and admired how it showed through my fingertips. Yet the longer I held it, the more I began to wonder if I could consume it, the entirety of it, within my hands. If I could mask it within the secrets of my flesh.

I tried to suffocate its light between my palms, becoming obsessed with every bit of light that I could hide. But I could not hide it. Streams of light escaped my grasp, it was not mine to contain. I tried again and again until finally the sun came up with the new day.

The light of the dawn shot through the night and soon the relatively dim light of my small star was gone, swallowed up by the radiance of the biggest star in our solar system. I grasped at the emptiness between my fingers. I looked around to see if it had jumped out of my hands, if it lay on the grass next to me, or in the trees behind me, but it was nowhere. Finally I looked up and I saw it, one last time, in the last moments of sunrise before it twinkled away into blue never again to return to our planet.

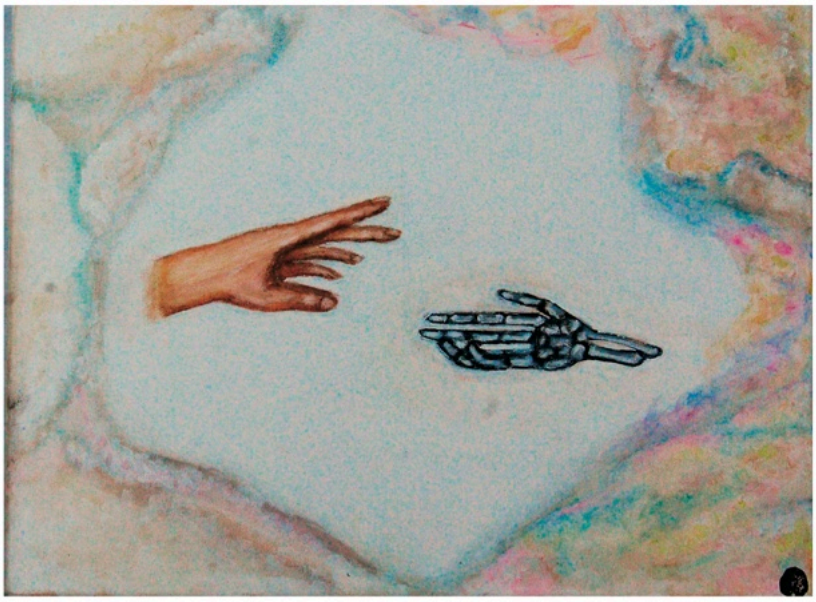
Art By Molly McGree

Dragon Mama and Her Baby
By Kaylee Stewart



By Max Padmos





By Abigail Lewis

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Cutthroat

By Elsa Grebenc

On the cold gray water
Ripples moved outward
From the surfacing head of the cutthroat

I stood ashore
Watching it feed

The trout glides slowly through the weeds
An undisturbed moment of clarity
In the still morning air

The lake without the fish
A lover without a love
Together they are one
Serene and whole

I don't pretend to know
How it came to be
Its eyes of glass
And fins of silk
But its quiet mystery
Makes me believe

Fog drifts along the water
Ghostly shapes swirling within
The trout below
Reflecting the light of the sun

O people above
Do we think we know more?
Than the creatures that came before
Than the trout that watches and waits
With a quiet wisdom
More powerful than any machine

Others find life in concrete jungles
Among the lights
And sound
But I know
True life is found deep in the woods
Deep in the water
Among the trout

And when the cutthroat disappears
Among the rocks
It marks the end

The end of the days spent in the sun
Spent on the shore
Watching them jump

I walked along the river
Right by its side
Knowing the cutthroat follows its waters

It swirls and races
Over rocks and through rapids

But I knew the trout would be safe
In a pool
Or an eddy
Peaceful as always
In ice cold waters



By Morgane Fourré

More than This
By Lauren MacDonald

She sat down in front of the mirror, just like she did every night. Her makeup came off, as did her clothes. And then the words. Some of them she could take off easily. They melted off, just like her makeup. Others took some scrubbing, but they too came off. And some didn't. Some were stuck there, virtually tattooed onto her skin, leaving a mark on her forever.

They weren't hurtful. They just made her uncomfortable. They were vile and repulsive and made her skin crawl, the words morphing into bugs that would creep across her skin. No matter how hard she tried to get them off, no matter how many times she'd scrubbed at her skin to the point of it being raw and her being so utterly fatigued that she couldn't, they wouldn't come off.



It pained her. Seeing those words every day, ugly markings on her skin that were reminders of how the world saw her. She knew she was beautiful. People had told her that her whole life. But as she got older and started dressing differently and wearing makeup, the comments got more and more lewd and uncomfortable, and it became less validating to hear it and more violating.

She was more than a pretty face. She was more than a skinny and fit body. She was more than the makeup and clothes she wore. She was not an object to be admired and commented upon. She had worth and substance and she was kind and friendly and she snorted when she laughed and cried when she saw sad movies. She liked rocky road ice cream and Oreos dipped in peanut butter. Her favorite movies were rom coms, but her favorite books were thrillers. She liked to look at the sunset from the rooftop and read books in the shade under trees. All these things and so much more made her the person she was. All the things on the inside mattered the most, but most didn't care to look at the inside. They looked at her and saw a gorgeous girl and didn't think twice about commenting on her looks. They didn't think twice about getting to know her. They didn't think. No one ever does. It's all lust at first sight and nothing else. They see her on the street and think she's sexy and gorgeous, but she's more. She's so much more.

Pretty Girl By Cassandra Hawks

Summer Rain
By Ella Shropshire

There is a house,
Mud-built walls, sturdy, with a roof of straw,
With a garden full of uprooted wildflowers
Where we all rest our heads on pillows and blankets and coats and cushions
Made into nests on the floor,
Where a stream trickles at the front step and lulls us to sleep,
It runs straight into the woods around our little hamlet, runs through fields and towns and cities
Until it feels the sea's cold saltwater embrace
The sea pays us a visit when it rains, hard in the summer, softer in fall,
All of us huddle neath the overhanging roof,
Counting down and jumping into the rain,
Dancing in the puddles and falling drops
All of us together in the first bleed of sunset,
Laughing in the kitchen, stirring, and kneading and stealing bites of dinner
Eaten in candlelight round an old table worn smooth
By our rough hands that it used to fill with splinters.
Some of us will leave,
Chasing the moon and the sun across the world,
Splitting off to the west and east, north and south,
And come back again,
Down the forest road some cold, clear dawn
With a fardel string over their backs and a face cracked wide with a smile.
Some of us will stay forever,
Planting pumpkins and carrots and sweet peas,
Carving paintings into the walls,
Tending quietly to the hearth, sitting by the fire long past midnight with ink-stained hands and fingers,
Spending day after blissful day
free and at peace in the early sun.
And so we come and go and come home again,
On and on down the long years,
And on some far-off night, we'll all be together once more,
In warm sunset candlelight
To take up each other's hands,
Knowing that despite the distance we were always holding them,
And laughing, jump into the rainstorm.



Orange Fungi By Jordan Hewitt



By Sarah Münker



By Kallie Lahti

Masked
By Lauren MacDonald

I peeled off the mask, putting it aside. I rubbed my face and closed my eyes, letting the silence consume me. The parking lot around me was empty. No cars, no people, no birds strutting around searching for bits of food left by people who were careless enough to throw it out of their cars. The few lights that were on kept flickering, darkening the space around me. Some spots were darker than others, spots where the lights had gone out completely, not getting a chance in the light again until someone came around to fix it— which is rarely, if ever.

The day had been long. Too long. Too many teachers asking about my day, too many people wanting to hang out after school, too many pointless conversations with my parents that went nowhere. I looked out across the vast space around me. Dark. Fading. Comforting. Usually this parking lot was packed, filled to the brim with cars and people. It was alive and vibrant during the daytime. But now it was deserted. It didn't have anything or anyone taking up space.

After the sun set, the parking lot would start to empty. There were stragglers who were still parked there, still busy roaming around inside the stores, taking their sweet time. Then they would leave. They would leave and there would finally be quiet and solitude. An empty parking lot at night left a weird feeling in my stomach. But the feeling was comforting, in a way. I was alone— finally alone— and I could shrink down in the seat of the car, curling in on myself, letting the wear and tear of the day flake off my body, bit by bit, until I was finally myself again. My real self.

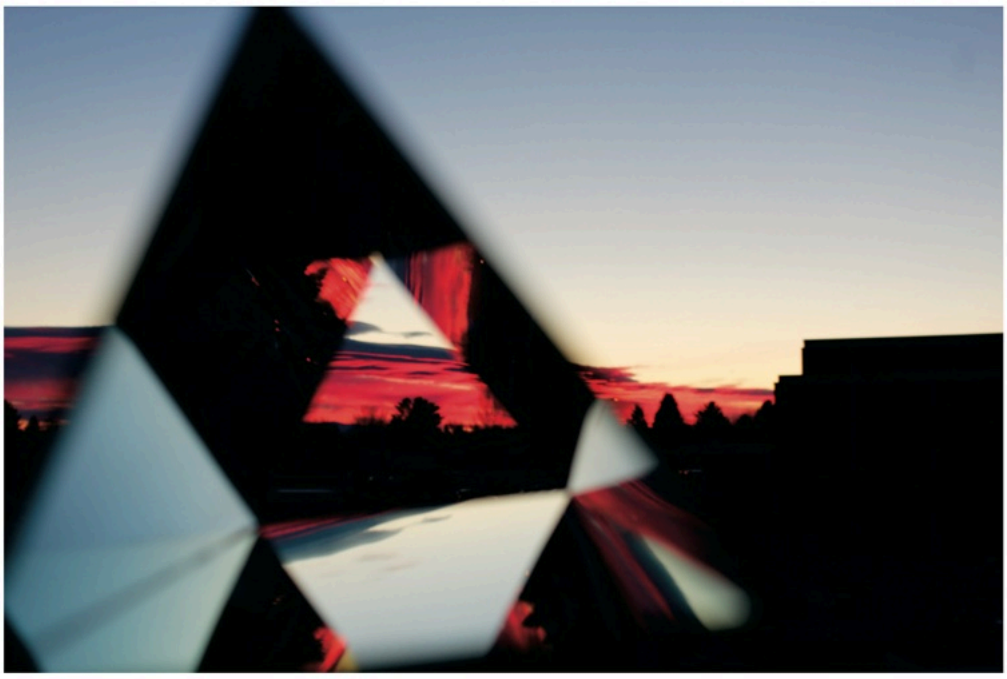
I could feel my true self coming out every once and a while. Sometimes through a laugh, sometimes through a conversation I had with someone new, sometimes through a piece of writing for one of my classes. A ray of light would shine through a miniscule crack in the mask, created by the wear and tear of all the years it's been used. There were more cracks than there used to be. It was getting old and worn out— so was I. There were times where I was tempted to throw it at a wall, watch it shatter into millions of little pieces, pieces so small that I wouldn't be able to pick them up and put them back together again. But then I thought better of it. I thought, without the mask, who would the world see? Would they see the real me or what they thought was a façade, not knowing that all this time I had been hiding, shielding myself from their watchful, malicious, spiteful eyes, fearful of what would happen if they knew who I really was.

The clock read 1:34 am. This late at night was the only time that I felt as if I could safely let out my inner self, instead of having it sit in a dark corner, collecting dust and cobwebs. It had been dusted off a few times. Cleaned up, taken out in the sun for a little while. But it was always a bit too short-lived. It always had to go back at some point, the risk of too much exposure being too great. I looked at the mask. It was heavy, stifling, uncomfortable. I hated it. I didn't want it. But for now, I needed it.



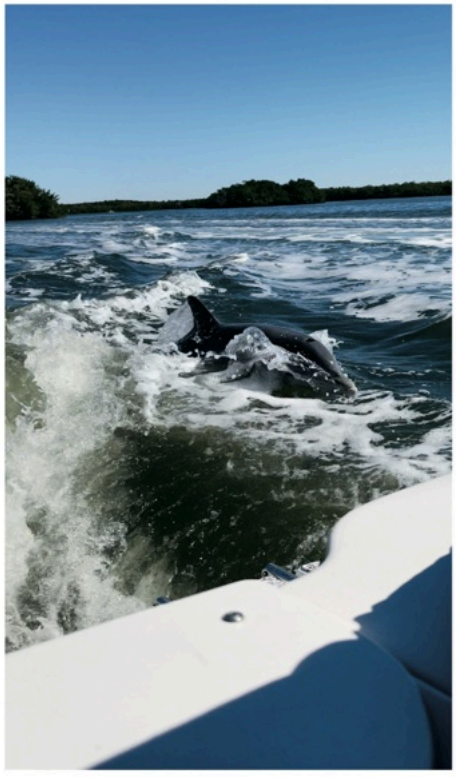
By Ashlyn LaFave

By Natalie Pravecek





By Mason Hays



By Mason Hays

Dying Stars
By Pin Valley

His hands slid across the spotless counter as he slowly walked to the light in the center of the room. With the smooth floor as cold as the thoughts crowding in his mind, frostbite gently nipped at his feet. Blood lovingly dripped from each limb, but he was persistent enough to make it. An oddly placed field of grass lay before him, a single white orchid wilting in the center. With his legs shaking as they were forced to move, the flower just seemed to distance itself. Following his presence was a darkness looming over his shoulder, whispering into each ear. Only a loud static was audible to him, the flower's music drowning in it. No one has heard an orchid sing, so his mind refused to listen. Pins and needles licked the sides of each leg, his arms not yet in their reach. A loud thud played over the static as his legs gave in beneath him. The flower stopped running and he crawled to its symphony. With his speed immediately tarnished, the darkness crept on top of him. His breathing was harsh and unsteady, who knew the lack of light would be so heavy? It taunted him, slightly in the lead. The flower's light dimmed more with each inhale he made. The grass grew under his cracked hands, each blade helping him crawl along the floor. His body threatened to fall limp, leaving him to be drained out and hollow. The pins spread to his arms, each crack and blister bleeding from his palms. Determination shrinking to exhaustion, his motivation was wearing thin. The grass shriveled under the blood spilling from his body, his only assistance running away from him. The static reached the lonesome orchid, teasingly dimming its light. With the white noise slowly disappearing, his ears screamed for his heartbeat to stop. The flower's music was gone now, leaving complete silence to add to his insanity. He turned to lie on his back, looking for dying stars. With the last light burnt out, the stars revealed themselves. His shaky breaths slowed and came to a steady stop.

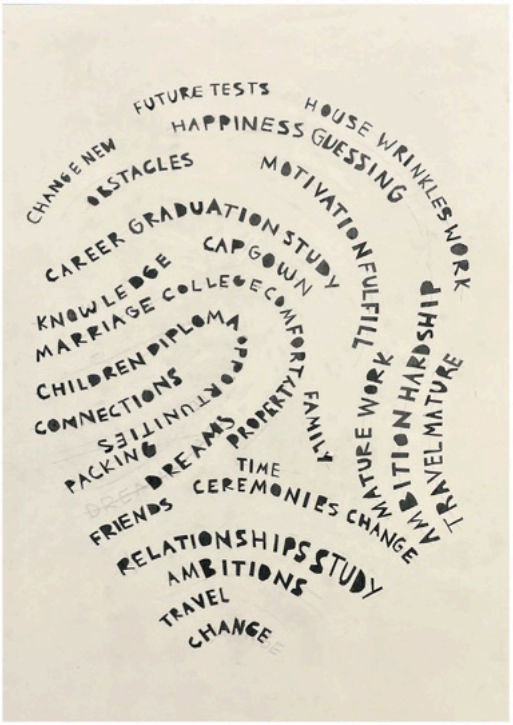
"The stars are beautiful tonight; I wish you could see them."



By Wyatt Smith

2 AM
By Ariana Mays

It's impossible to know a person
Really, truly know them
Until you have a conversation at 2 AM.
Right before you fall asleep
The most human you can be,
There's no wrong or right
Just words filling the silence.
Let me see your insecurities,
Your dreams,
Tell me things about you
That I wouldn't know.
Remind me I'm not the only person
With problems and that
No one is exempt from suffering.
I want to hear it all
Your heart and mind.
There's no better time
For a lobotomy.
No better time
To not be alone.
I'm glad we got to philosophize.
Because you don't really, truly
Know someone
Until you converse at 2 AM.
And it was a pleasure to meet
2 AM you.



Senior Year and Beyond
By Alexis Staley



Seen By Haley Ingraham

To Miss Someone
By Victoria Seamons

The child giggled
And smiled with glee.
She ran to her grandfather
And sat on his knee.

"Grandpa," she said,
"I have something to say.
I have a question to ask you."
He said, "Ask away."

"What does it mean to miss someone?"

Grandpa took a deep breath
And let out a sigh.
He gathered his thoughts
Of how he'd reply.

"Look at me, child."
He said with a smile,
"I've been through a lot.
I've been here for a while.

"I know what it means to miss someone.

"When you go on a playdate
to play with your friend,
But your mom picks you up
Because it's come to an end.

"You want to go back,
Walk back through that door.
You want to be with them
For just a little bit more.

"That's what it means to miss someone.

"And sometimes your parents,
Your mom and your dad,
Have to go somewhere else
And you want them back bad.

"You want them at home
So you can hug them so tight.
You miss their voices
When they tell you goodnight.

"That's when you know you miss someone.

"But sometimes, my child,"
He took a deep breath,
"Sometimes they're taken
By a thing we call death.

"That's when they leave
And they can never come back
They try and they try
But it's life that they lack.

"So you look for them everywhere,
In the streets, at the door,
In the lights of the city,
At the beach on the shore.

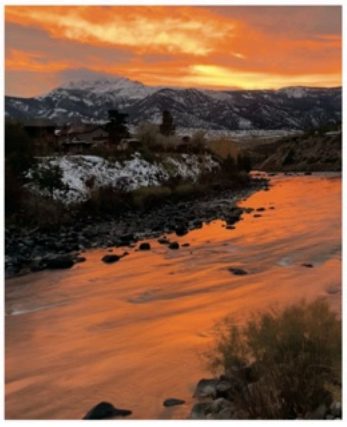
"Tiny memories of them
Will pop up in your head;
At the park, in the stars
While you're laying in bed."

"But grandpa?" she questioned,
"Could it be true?
That death that you speak of,
Did it take you too?"

He looked deep in her eyes.
"Yes," he replied.
"But if you think and remember
I'll be by your side.

"I love you my child,"
He said with a smile
And his eyes filled with tears.
"Now I must go for a while."

The child watched him
As he faded away.
"I'll never forget you.
I miss you, okay?"



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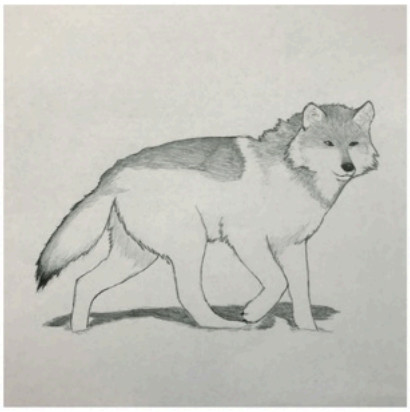
By Kylie Stevens



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