
Pen and Ink
art & literary magazine
2023

Sponsors

HOLTER MUSEUM of ART

montana book co.

HELENA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Reach Higher Montana

CHRISTENSEN & PREZEAU PLLP

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

ALLEGRA

MARKETING • PRINT • MAIL

MARKETING · PRINT · MAIL · DESIGN · WEB · SIGNS · PROMO · APPAREL

Individual Donors:
Ron and Connie Bergum
Donna Davis
Dale Tig Vernon

Lead Editiors

Keiran Boyle
Miranda Sheafor

Selection Committees

Writing:
Katherine Armstrong
Hailey Cox
Rachel Drake
Erika Foot
Delany Lynch
Ellie Mercer
Brailey Sublette

Art:
Hailey Cox
James Moore
Alyona Zimmerman

Cover Art

Mia Brinton

Additional Thanks

Teacher Advisors:
Kevin Ward
Roger Scruggs
Laurie Sechrist
Becca Leaphart and HEF staff

Harrison Writing Award Winners

"People Watching" Page 14 — By Allison Christensen, HHS
"Engine and Annie" Page 20 — By Fox Kolar, HHS
"Love in a Live Oak" Page 40 — By Robert Stimpson, HHS
"Dancing in the Moonlight" Page 52 — By Wyatt Gant, HHS

Poster Art
By Jayden Dupler



The Issue With Counting Crows

By Lynsey Read

It's entirely nonsense
The discography of such a rock band
Inspires a strictly banal sense
Popularity and lack of ingenuity doomed to go hand in hand?

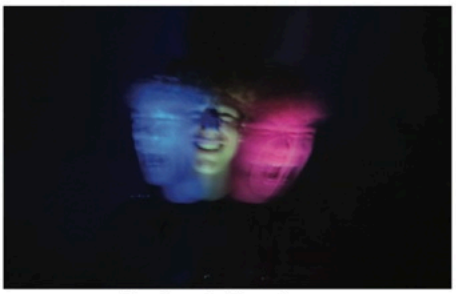
Band name from a nursery rhyme
Gives the impression of a contemplative bunch
To "Big Yellow Taxi", they should have paid the same time
Meaning squashed under a modern heel with a crunch

An environmental anthem, that ballad once was
A beautiful, thoughtful assertion
Doomed now to be remembered only as people losing loves
A complete bastardization, this Crow's version

True meaning, we've allowed ourselves to forget
I'm so sorry Joni Mitchell, really
I only hope that no more covers this cover will beget
And that we'll sing along to your song rather than to a song sang silly



By Shelley Olsen



By Izaak Ramirez

Life In Motion

By Teddy Harman

She told me after the divorce that she would be healthier and would take care of herself. I never thought this would mean taking her life. As I walked in through the paint-cracked door, a red-crimson color that we painted the day we moved in, a wave of nostalgia rushed past me. I suddenly remembered our wedding day and the life that we spent together. I could remember her bright smiling face and how she opened the curtains every morning to get the right amount of vitamin D.

Now as I look around at the dreary room, gloom draped over like a blanket suffocating the happiness like a vacuum. I see empty dog bowls still there, a coat of dust laying thick from months of no use. I sometimes regret taking the dogs in the divorce, but I know now that it was the right thing. I turn to see the empty entertainment center lay on its side, the victim of a nasty fight. I remember that fight, it was when we finalized the decision to end our "eternal vows" as she would've said. She threw the papers that I handed her, tears streaming as she destroyed the room along with our marriage. It seems so lonely without the quiet humming of the television.

But I guess everything was lonely here. I look over to the table, dripping wine bottles lay unattended, glazed with the stickiness of leftover merlot. I sit down on the crumb-ridden sofa beaten and torn, a wedding gift from over ten years ago. It was a bright cheery yellow when we got it. Now it is a dreary muddy brown riddled with stains and lies. I stare at the apartment that was once a source of joy and light and think, "What happened?" I get up and head to the bedroom mind spinning with memories, I pick out her favorite dress, one that she always wore and set it aside. I sat on the bed one last time and I cried. I cried for what seems ages because now she's gone, with a part of my soul gone with her.

Silence and Resilience

By Lillian Ware

For once, I cried and if you told me I would a few years ago, I wouldn't have believed you. Crying isn't something I've done for a long time since I finally gave up on life. Yet here I am crying because no one understands nor do they listen.

You could say I'm lost, but truly I went missing years ago. Just not physically, mentally and emotionally missing. A missing that's worse than physically because at that point you've finally lost that piece of you that makes you a person. It's the piece that gives you your flaws and your personality, but you truly don't know that it's missing until you stop showing how you feel and you suppress it. That's when you know you aren't okay, but you keep acting like you are because maybe no one will notice. Sadly enough, they will eventually notice that a piece of you is missing.

Sometimes I wish I was normal or okay, but I guess I never will be and I have to be okay with that. If I ever find that piece it'll be when I'm gone and not on this earth. When I say the most dangerous person is someone who can tell that something in them is missing, they truly are because no one really notices it until someone points it out, but if they notice it without help you should be afraid. They've probably seen a thing or two or they've been through this before and are losing pieces left and right. That's how it is, but we still keep on pushing through.

It wouldn't leave no matter how hard I tried to leave it all behind. No one knows the pain one goes through when they watch loved ones die in front of them or when they become the black sheep. Silence over takes your body as you wait for someone to understand and know how you feel. It isn't how you want it to go when no one listens nor shows their appreciation towards you as you try your best. Pain doesn't choose between sinners or saints, between the poor or the rich. Pain just takes and takes until you finally breakdown. You lose your senses, your instincts stop existing, and you feel like you're dying when others believe you are living.

The more resilient the person is the larger the pain they've felt. Strength can be measured in many ways, and pain can be one of the reasons along with reilience. The stronger the person the more pain they've felt. People don't seem to realize that pain adds up just like weight does and it can become unbearable. You don't see how it effects others because people only focus on the verbal explanation. Physical explanations, such as body language, can help someone read the room and figure out what to say and what not to say. We stay silent, until we are given a reason to shout at the top of our lungs that we are not okay. Then we are shoved back into silence that caused us to breakdown and shut down at the same time.

When I allowed those tears to fall no one saw me as the real me or the me that used to be there. Truly I wasn't the old me and that's fine. Instead I was depiction of what I saw myself as, the true me not the me you see when I smile, but the real me that I never really show to anyone. The pain you feel and the way you address it can add to everything, especially to how you perceive others and yourself. The more time you spend on overthinking and getting into your head is when you know you have gone too far.

Sometimes all you need to do is take a deep breathe and keep going until the end of the line right? Not really. What you honestly need to do-I'm not trying to saying this in a rude way and if I am let me know but-you need to take a moment to step out of whatever you are doing and internalize what you are trying to accomplish or what is happen in the moment. You can find a solution to the problem and you can figure out what you're going to say, but first try to internalize it. Don't suppress it because that won't help, but try to internalize it as someone internalize the truth in little time.

You can't see my scars, but you can see my wisdom. You can't see my pain, but you can see my smile. You can't see my fears, but you can see my strengths. You can't see the words I say to myself about myself, but you can see the words I write of courage and care to others. I gave many talents, but if you look through it you'll see that I write from experience and I write what I needed to hear so that others can hear it instead. Pain is a funny little thing, but I is also deadly. You can help others simply by existing and if you do it correctly you can save them.

I am not as I seem to be, you don't know who I truly am until you have seen the world from my mind.

Pride Doesn't Last

By Brailey Sublette

A crack.
A puncture, break, or slice.
Everybody has one.
Some have multiple.
Some have so many, they struggle to remain in one piece,

Yet somehow they do.
They go about their lives, wounds hidden,
Hopelessly taped or glued shut,
Because the only thing worse than the wounds
Is letting them bleed on others.

You walk to lunch with your friend and she asks, "How was philosophy today?"
You manage to scarf out my regular reply.
"Normal" "Fine" "Okay", occasionally mixing in a "Good".
She has become skeptical because it used to be your favorite class,
But you insist, because blood is better on you than on her.

You walk into math late, and the teacher greets, "Come on in!"
"Hi," you squeak, attempting to hide your anxiety as they all watch.
You pull out your notebook, and a kid in the second row blurts out,
Asking "when will we use this in real life?" but he is ignored, just like you.
Though if people ignore you, they won't have to deal with your blood.

Later, your gym teacher tells a story.
Everyone sits on the floor, some continuing their conversations.
He doesn't blow his whistle or yell though, he just begins talking about an old student.
Not a valedictorian or sports star, but instead someone who always seemed average.
He describes them as prideful in theirself but unknown by others.

Someone a few people to your right asks, "Why do I care about this kid?"
"I'm getting there, just listen." He replies calmly, with a certain look on his face.
This moment is when I realize why he is telling the story.
The reason he hadn't yelled or blown a whistle today.
To not make anyone's blood pump quicker.

I drift off, noticing similarities between us.
This was someone who thought about poetry and ancient gods too much.
Someone who took pride in their self but was unsure about other's pride in them.
Someone who was not "known" for anything in high school.
Someone who believed that their wounds were best hidden, blood kept far from others.

Someone who kept the blood hidden for so long, they eventually lost it all at once.
Someone who knew that they should've asked for something to stop the blood, but didn't
want to be an inconvenience.
Someone who fought so hard to keep the pieces together.
Someone who couldn't keep reattaching pieces by their self and also contain the blood.
"Pay attention," you think to yourself, even though you know this story.

By now, the conversations had gone and rapidly faded into something more somber.
You know how the story ends without listening, because it sounds the same as your own.
The stories of Greek gods and goddesses, daydreaming in math class, and scribbling song
lyrics on my hand.
It was all too familiar and I knew every aspect of it.
As he finished, I considered that maybe this wasn't the way it had to end for me.

Instead, I could show my wounds and allow others to help.
Some could glue pieces together like a puzzle,
Others holding in the blood or donating some of their own to help you recover.
Because while your blood may seem bad on others,
It's worse when you aren't there with it.



Warmingover

By Serif Michel



By Jayden Dupler



By Romeo Malone

Stop

By Zander Taylor

Stop asking that same question
How are you today?
I answer
I answer with the same response
I'm doing well, and you?

No
No that's not true
Rip my heart out and look
Look at the wounds that I've stitched closed so poorly
Poor me

No.
Feel my burning lungs
Burnt. Caracoled and black from
all the times I inhaled the fire
Hot and everlasting
The fire that I can't put out
I won't.
I won't put it out or complain

No
No, I won't
Because complaining is weak
Weak and childish
I am not childish
I have grown up to be mature
Mature for my age
My grade
My siblings
My family.
I've grown to be strong
No crying
I have nothing to cry about
Crying is useless
I am not useless
I'm just ungrateful
Because I cry
I sob
Scream, even

No
Shut up
Zip it
You're supposed to be mature



You're not weak
You're doing well, right?
Shut up and take it
Take everything and zip your disgusting lips
Lips you chew on and scab
Chapped and dirty
Dirty of other people's lips
Dirty
You're so dirty
14
You're 14
Don't ask me my body count
How many people I've kissed
It's embarrassing
Humiliating
You're a disgusting human
A toy, really
Gross
You're a gross kid.
Just like they all told you
Don't
Don't ask me that question
Are you okay?

No
Shut up
Shut up, I ask silently
But I smile
I nod my head because
I'm fine, thank you
I'm fine
Ignoring everything that makes me want to scream at you
Scream and speak and cry

No! Sit down with me and talk to me! I have no real purpose right now. I'm without a crowd. A clique. Friends. Friends?

No. I just. I hurt! I am in pain.
Don't break character
No
So, I wave at you
I wave goodbye and carry on with my thoughts
And the cycle continues
The cycle that wont
Stop

Art By Hannah Rosine



By Lynae Leeper

I'd Do Anthing

By Aiden Weber

I picked it up to have a better look and immediately froze with fear. This was the murder weapon we were looking for. When they said my brother was their prime suspect, I never believed them. He was always so quiet, always the first one to help mom when she was doing the dishes, and always the perfect sibling. He was the kindest person I've ever known. He'd always spend time with me, even when he was busy. Always taking me to the park, to get ice cream, or to just drive around town. But he always told me the same thing every time we'd spend time together. I'd do anything to protect my little sister.

As I stood there in his room, I felt like I was on the set of a movie. His bed was perfectly made, tight blue sheets flat against the mattress. There was not a single crease in the fabric. His band posters were displayed in black frames around his wall, perfectly aligned. His floor was clean, and the carpet was vacuumed. His books were organized by color in the bookcases, dusted, and cleaned as if it was a brand-new bookcase and not one he bought for $15 off Facebook Marketplace. The room looked nothing like the room of a murderer. His closet had his shirts neatly hung up and his shoes were organized. And yet, a bloody hunting knife was sitting in my hand, and it came from a shoe box at the bottom of his closet.

I didn't mean to knock the box on the floor. I was just here to grab a photo album from the top shelf of his closet. An album that contained all the pictures my mom wanted to use for a display at his graduation. My brother was graduating high school as a valedictorian and was going to medical school. He was going to be a doctor. He spent years learning about the human body. Every vein and artery's location was seared in his brain.

My ex-boyfriend's body was found a week ago, but the blood on the knife looked dried and it had to have been there for over a month. Just when he went missing.

"I'm going out," my brother said. A month ago, when he left to go on a jog.

The worst thing is that I don't feel anything.

I'm not saying my boyfriend didn't deserve it. But standing in my perfect brother's room, holding a murder weapon, I don't feel particularly inclined to hand the knife over to the police.

Standing here I remember all the times I was told to stay quiet. All the time I was told that my ex's behavior was normal for a boy his age. That boys will be boys. That it meant he liked me, that I should be flattered. That bruises from abuse were nothing to worry about.

I was always told that I could go to my parents when I needed something, but when I did, I was told that I was a liar and that it didn't happen. That I lead him on, that I probably asked for it. That he probably got tired of me holding out on him.

My brother believed me though.

I put the knife back in the box and back on the shelf where it fell, my brother's words ringing in my head.

I'd do anything to protect my little sister.



By Bridger Sullivan

School

By Lanay Morris

You walk and drag
Whilst you talk and nag
Waiting for the clock to tick
As you listen to the pens click

You sit in your seat that squeaks like the mouse in the wall
Every day you walk up the stairs and try not to fall
You're reminded its lunch as you hear the 4 th bell
You walk past the cafeteria and sniff the air the smell
Cracking open a book you don't want to read
Listening to the loud room but silence is what you need

You watch your grade drop

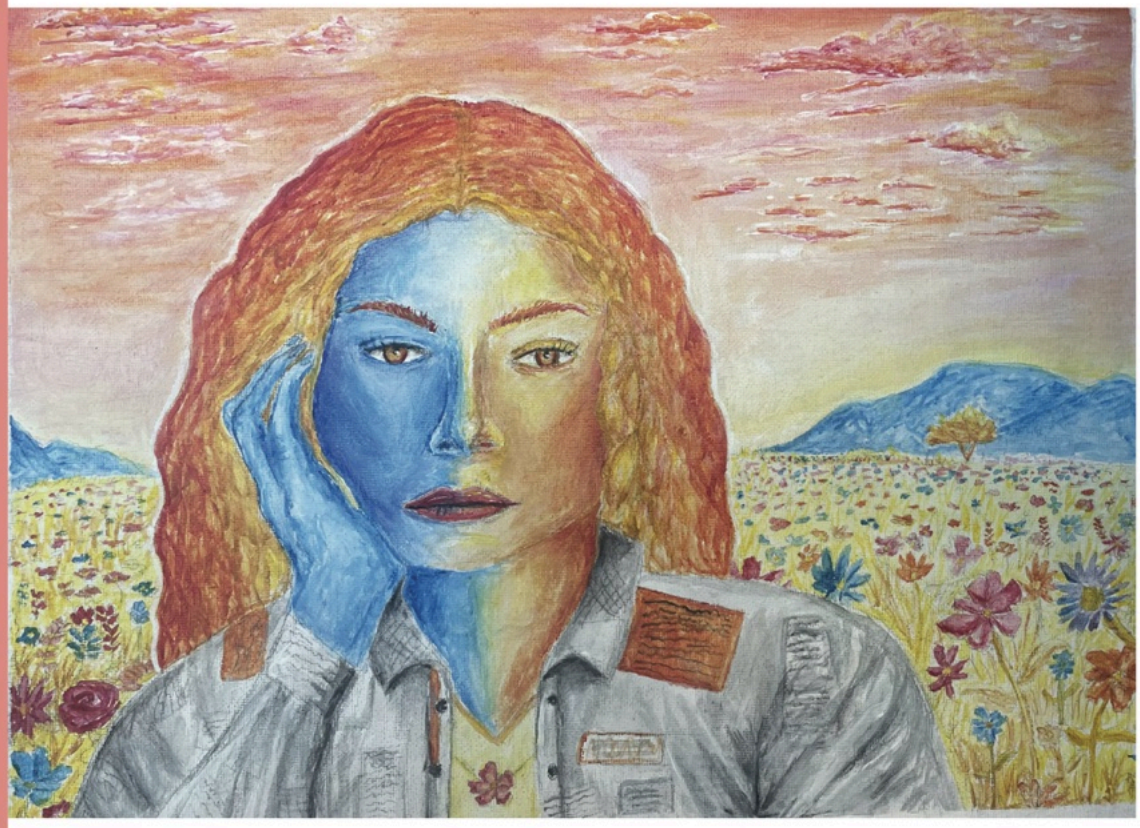
Just like your motivation to do work eventually will stop

The last bell of the day rings
And you are finally relieved to leave

By Liv Perry



By Sara Jeanne Dorrington





By
Felicity Heinzie

Knowing is Pain, Knowing is Beauty

By Meika Arensmeyer

She had fallen for a lie; knowledge is not always beautiful. Knowledge is powerful. So powerful, in fact, that it tears people apart and drags them down without warning when they least expect it. And then, they come back again and again because their naivety tells them so. They say ignorance is bliss.

A small note: It is not.

Have you ever seen it when someone learns about a secret and they let it rip them to shreds? She had, and she never wanted to be caught like that, deranged and out of her mind like someone who had lost their world and the color had drained from their insides. She knew if she learned as much as she could about anything, she might be able to save herself just a little bit from the heartbreak that bluntly drops in when someone finds out something they didn't know before. So, she learned.
Really, her life was the color of grass. So lively and luscious as it was young and then it grew before becoming dark, but not hesitating to come back when it was sprinkled with the right kind of love. Though I suppose that all lives are like that, aren't they? The first time her strands lost their color of contentment for a time was the dreadful premier of the second educational system in her life. Second of many more that would follow and tear a piece away from her each time.

A background of the girl: She had skittishly and fearfully made her way through the first half of kindergarten, each day being filled with terror that quietly dissipated as time walked along, holding her hand and yanking her through when she refused to keep running. She was then relocated; the family had moved yet again. Thus began kindergarten experience #2.

There were many tear-filled days in those next five months of school. She wondered how something so beneficial could be so cruel and haunting? Though she later realized it wasn't the learning that hurt her. Of course it wasn't. She knew she'd never let the things she didn't know before hurt her later. It was the people. Every step she took dragged their cold, harsh gazes along her spine, quickly fleeting when she turned to glance back. Paranoia would be her close friend, every little thing the people around her said that she couldn't hear. "They must be saying mean things about me."

Another reason she learned like she did: To prove others (Insert: herself) wrong.

She knew it was hard to make friends and she never understood how people could do it so easily. Did they not have to think about every little thing before they said it and still let the wrong thing slip? "No," she thought, "That's impossible" because otherwise she could have done it just as easily as they did. She never knew what to say to people and couldn't get the words out so she already knew they would never respect her for the way she talked to people or the sense of humor she didn't really have. That left only one option. To be smart. At least, that's how she saw it at the time. She hoped that if she could be a source of knowledge for others, maybe they'd respect her then. Naturally, it didn't matter; she eventually would gain the knowledge that the things she does don't have to be for the people around her who didn't really care anyway.
She would not remember what it felt like to learn for the first time. No one would. The very first thing people ever learn is how to breathe, how to do these things that are considered so mundane and instinctual that no one ever thinks about them. She would remember how it felt when she was praised for learning, however. I presume that must have been where it all started.

A definition: praise – express warm approval or admiration of.

Warmth is often synonymous with comfort, which should explain why humans feed off it so much. It is quite pathetic to see if I am being honest. They want the secret to happiness and cannot realize that it is right in front of them and are only making their own lives more difficult. Yet they never stop searching for it. Now that is what I do admire about them. The thirst they harbor for even just a miniscule amount of information is meritorious at the very least. Learning for her seemed like the only thing worth living for. Sure, she had her family and loved them along with the sense of comfort they provided, but all she wanted to do was learn. In her mind, nothing was even comparable to learning, it was the stuffed animal she never held onto in the night. There was always more to learn. In a sick way, she loved it when her brain felt like it might make her fall over because she knew it had been weighted with knowledge.
In all the years of her life so far, she would never "give

up" on learning something at school. You could say she was determined but really, she was just stubborn. Too stubborn to let herself be limited by some little bit of knowledge that she didn't have yet. Too stubborn to not constantly push herself and challenge what she thought she couldn't learn. And in the end, that is what truly kept her wanting to learn more. Ignorance is not bliss. Knowing is. Sure, it hurts sometimes, but the beauty it creates is far superior and she knew that for a fact.



By Shelley Olson



By Kylee Hamper

People Watching

A Short Story Inspired by the Conan Gray Song
By Alli Christensen

The little coffee shop on the corner of campus. That was where Laura'd be sitting. Every morning. 7:15 AM. Without fail. The same table, too. A high two-person in the corner, where she could see everyone inside, procuring their complex coffee orders, cramming an essay, or casually conversing with their loved ones. And outside, on the street, walking by in groups or alone, hurried or relaxed, talking or listening to music. She'd order a classic vanilla latte, and sometimes she'd be reading or writing something on her computer. Mostly though, she'd be people watching. Laura noticed things. And she always had. It was just the way her brain worked.

On her first day at the university she walked from her dorm to get a calm-the-first-day jitters latte, and Laura noticed a couple sitting at a counter facing the window. They were talking and laughing and Laura could tell that they were really, truly, in love. And they were. The next time Laura went to get coffee, the couple was there again. They were there the next time too. And the time after that. Laura loved seeing their smiles every morning. The hopeless-romantic in her couldn't help but peek out whenever they laughed at each other's jokes. They made her believe in love, more than movies or books or songs that she loved ever had. Laura had never really been in love, not seriously. She had loved people, sure. But nothing like what this couple, Blake and Cassie were their names, had.



This particular morning, a frost had taken most of what was left of the flame-colored leaves and everyone that entered the coffee shop was flushed red from the chill. Laura's table was near enough to Blake and Cassie's that she could catch snatches of their conversations or gleam more information about their relationship. They were playfully bickering about some assignment, in some high level philosophy class, Laura didn't know for sure. Laura didn't really get philosophy all together, it wasn't her thing. It was theirs though, they even met in a metaphysical philosophy class. Metaphysical. Philosophy. Laura could not comprehend why anyone in their right mind would take that class, but if it gave her a relationship like that...well.

"No no no, Blake, there's nooooo way that's right," Cassie giggled, reaching over his arm and erasing something he had written.

"Hey!" Blake exclaimed, "I worked hard on that answer." He gave her a look of mock indignation and shock.

"No you didn't!" she laughed, her shoulders shaking, "And that's why it's wrong."

"Well...I was...quite distracted last night, I suppose," he said.

"Blake!" she exclaimed, but her smile never wavered.

"Whaaaat? I just meant we were talking a lot, that's all."

From her table, Laura smiled to herself. They really amused each other, Blake and Cassie. Laura wouldn't have found the conversation particularly entertaining if she had been involved in it, but sitting where she was, seeing how much they did truly enjoy it, it was much more so. Laura thought back to another conversation she had witnessed a couple weeks prior. That morning it had been much warmer, almost everyone ordered iced drinks.

Blake had been teasing Cassie about something she did last Thanksgiving:

"Okay no, there's no way that happened! There's just no way! Blake, I could not have said that to your mom! I would remember if I had. That's so embarrassing, oh my god," Cassie said to him, the disbelief was evident on her face but she was laughing too.

"No no it's true!" Blake replied, positively hysterical with laughter, "I swear to god you told her the sweet potato casserole was 'disastrous' instead of 'delicious!' You were that nervous."

"Blake I did not! How do I not remember this? Oh my god!" Cassie was dying then too. Laura could see her eyes glisten with the start of happy tears.

Laura didn't think that conversation had been excessively funny either, but listening to Blake's boisterous, booming laugh and Cassie's genuine, albeit much quieter, giggle that shook her whole body, made her want to join them. Laura didn't think any relationship of hers would look very much like Blake and Cassie's, but the same love and emotion would be there and that would be the part that mattered.

Laura watched Cassie and Blake for a little longer while she finished her latte. Then she got up, pulled on her coat, pushed in her chair, and walked out the door into the chilly morning.

"So what did the famous Blake and Cassie do that's got you swooning this morning?" asked Claire, Laura's best friend, when she came into their freshman seminar with a lost-in-thought expression on her face.

"Oh nothing special really," she replied, shrugging. It was a lie. Laura thought everything they did was special, even the little things. She lived vicariously through them after all.

"Oh come on, I know you better than that," Claire chided, "There's at least something you want to tell me."

"Why am I like this Claire?" Laura asked suddenly, throwing her arms up in the air.

"Like what?"

"Why do I go to that coffee shop every day and sit there and watch them? And why am I so happy for them but at the same time think it's so unbelievably unfair that they get to be so happy and I'm... well just...people watching?" Laura slumped in her chair looking dejected.

"Do you want the honest answer? Or the pandering answer?"

Laura sat up a bit and looked at Claire directly. "Honest."

"I think you're scared. You don't let people into your life, and when you do, you don't let them get close before you push them away. Even me! I have to force anything real out of you sometimes."

Laura was silent for a very long time after that. She knew it was true, but it still hurt to hear. She did cut people out of her life, very flippantly, in fact, like the tags on her clothes that itched her exactly one time. It wasn't that she wanted to do that, she just really was scared. And that's why she was all alone. Not that she stopped hoping.

"Laura," Claire nudged her gently, "Don't be mad at me, I was just trying to be helpful. You know that, right?"

"Suuuuuure you were," Laura teased, "You saw an opportunity to make fun of poor lonely Laura and you didn't hesitate."

"Hey you asked for it," Claire laughed, putting her hands up in mock surrender.

7:15 AM the following morning found Laura running through a soft flurry of snow to get to the coffee shop. She was late. Laura was never late. What if someone stole her table? Or what if she missed Blake and Cassie? That was why she was always there by 7:15. The snow had thrown her off so much she was going to be a full ten minutes late. When Laura got to the coffee shop, she threw the door open and looked frantically around for Blake and Cassie and they were there at their table, almost as if they hadn't moved from the morning before. But sitting at her table was a guy Laura had never seen before. He had dark, kind of unruly hair, glasses and was wearing a cream colored turtleneck under a black pea coat. He was beautiful. There was just no other word for it: he was just beautiful. Laura let go of the door in surprise. It slammed shut and everyone, including pea coat guy, looked up at her. Laura wanted to disappear. This much attention was so mortifying to her, she almost turned around and backed out of the shop altogether. She didn't though. She got her latte as usual and started walking toward her table out of habit. About halfway there she remembered it was occupied and stopped abruptly. She stood there for a solid ten seconds before starting to turn around, planning to find a new table and that's when he spoke to her.

"Can I help you with something?" he asked, not looking up from his computer where he was busy typing.

"No...it's just I usually sit there and I was walking this way out of habit and I...sorry. I didn't mean to bother you."

He looked up at her then, after blinking several times, he gave her a small smile. "You didn't. You can sit, if you'd like." He gestured to the chair opposite him.

Laura thought for a moment about what Claire had said. She wasn't going to be scared today. "All right."

After they finished their drinks, he walked her to freshman seminar. Laura couldn't stop smiling and looking at the snow. The gosh darn snow that had made her late this morning. It was still falling, in big, fluffy flakes. Laura thought she was in a snow globe, it was that beautiful. It was sort of like her in a way, the snow. Free falling in such a peaceful, carefree way. Without caution, almost. She realized she hadn't looked at Blake and Cassie once that morning.

Art By Autumn Richeson



A New Woman

By Caitlyn King

Women these days, imagine them back then, like way, way back then.
I'm powerful, poised, patient, perfect, philanthropic, and picturesque.
Just don't imagine me in a flowing set of robes in deep colors with a gold crown on top. I'm just not that full of myself to look like your average imagined Greek goddess type women. I may end up telling you who I am, suffice it to say I am a powerful daughter yet another powerful man. Although I sound incredibly fun to talk about you weren't here to learn about me, you're here to learn about a woman forced to be thrust into greatness. It all started in a parasite, infecting rats, and then a man widowing a woman.

Etienne du Castel was a kind nobleman and a kind husband to Christine de Pizan. The plague doesn't care about kindness, money, and anything this man could offer it just takes what it wants.
She explored the astrology tower, searching for her fathers daily wisdom in lessons. She snuck around the corner her parents were arguing.
"Christine shan't learn the ways of men. She must learn to be a good little Christine lady." That was the tone of her mothers shrew voice.
Before she came rushing through her father spoke, "She should learn of the world."
"She needs to make good meals and keep her future husband content; he will provide her a living."
Her father was but a whisper. Christine de Pizan felt a bag was pulled over her head suffocating her thoughts.
****HERE IS A SMALL FACT****
Not a whole lot of father's care about their daughter's education
Only a few rich and powerful men were able to support their daughters
Those women were the few who grew up with the luxury of knowledge

Christine de Pizan would have been one of those girls, but her mother decided she didn't need knowledge to be a well-mannered housewife. So, as she conformed to society, she was forced to pick up small tidbits of knowledge from her father as he worked. Then the sky rained death, that day was eerie and black, and death walked the French streets. He's a pretty calm man, just lonely. Never did he notice me. I was a common whisper in history. I helped make sure a few survived their so-called end of world. The black death was mighty tis a shame that everyone thought it was poor death's fault, he was just mopping up the human mess.
Christine de Pizan's story simply was someone who influenced monarchs that women's struggles should be heard and felt. She expressed how she felt fate had gifted her,
"Alone am I, to feed myself with weeping
Alone am I, suffering or at rest
Alone am I, and this pleases me the best" (Willard, 54).
She took all she was given as a gift and not as punishment from God that she had lost her husband and father those who truly influenced her. If only more women of the renaissance were given the gift of these words. Christine de Pizan is a woman who started as curious and ended spreading that curiosity and inspiring others to be the same.

Art By Kylee Hamper

Achlys

By Aliester E. Salome

Noun: The mist or fog one sees before death, Proper noun: Achlys An ancient Greek goddess of death-mist, misery and sadness

Jagged lines running towards each end of the paper; hash-marks on clothing and skin.

It had been too long, the need to feel the same euphoria was enough to fuel me into the early hours of the morning. Eyes looking into eyes; teeth smiling at teeth. A hand that feels everything touching one that will never feel.

Fiction and life; words and thoughts; meanings and differences. A heart that has never felt and a chest left torn open and bare to the wind.

Months of waiting, is it pleasure or validation? Can it be classified as a sin to be so focused on one sheet of paper?

Is it wrong to pour one's heart out to a false being? Can fiction feel and know when the artist cannot convey their own feelings and knowledge?

Can paper retain memory the same way it can graphite and ink, or will it slide off the surface into an endless void. Is it the paper's fault or is it the artist's fault for tearing. But which one tears first?



By Hailey Jones

Amy

By Tom Davidson

People saw me as the perfect boy in high school. Good grades, captain of the debate team, and a full ride to any college of my choice. I worked hard to keep that image when the opposite was true. I struggled with school, had no friends, and I got diagnosed with mental illness at a young age. It sounds like the beginning of a cheesy book. However, I took all of this and poured my soul into academics. My parents were proud of me for this, and it soon became my medication. The approval and praise I received was the reason I kept going.

I took classes that pushed me. All honors and advanced classes. I pushed myself over and over to numb the pain. It worked for a little while but soon, I started becoming numb. The monotony of my everyday life had become too much. Wake up, go to school, go to work, do homework until I go to bed at midnight. I felt like I needed more stimulation or something to help me get out of the hole I was in. Then I met Amy.

Amy was a year ahead of me in school, however we were in some of the same classes. A few months into my junior year of high school there was a house party. Of course, I went to keep my image. I hated parties as they are extremely overwhelming, and I couldn't stay for long. It was loud and with lights flashing over and over, dizziness overtook me, and I decided to go into a room to get a little bit of quiet. I walked into a bedroom when I saw someone already in there.

"Oh, I'm sorry I didn't mean to disturb you," I went to walk back out of the room but paused with recognition, "Oh hey Amy."

"Don't worry, I would enjoy your company," she said with a smile.

I smiled back and sat down next to her on the bed. We sat with muffled dance music blaring in the background.

"Why are you in here? I assumed you would be out there having fun," I asked.

"Oh, I'm not really the party type. I came here with one of my friends, but she left with some guy. What about you?"

"I get overwhelmed easily. I guess I don't show it very often."

She suppressed a laugh. "Would it be bad to say I'm not surprised?"

"I suppose not," I said while laughing.
I paused and realized that I hadn't had someone I felt comfortable talking to in a long time. I really only had very surface level conversations with people and hadn't had the opportunity to really talk about myself. Amy noticed my pause and cocked her head.
"What's up?"
I looked at her and said, "Oh nothing, I was just thinking. I haven't really had someone to talk to in a while."
She seemed to stop and think. "I am actually surprised by that. I guess I always saw you as a person who was constantly surrounded by friends. I was always jealous of you. Honestly, I haven't talked to someone about this stuff for a while too. My mom left when I was a kid, and it's been just me and my dad ever since," Amy paused, "I'm sorry I didn't mean to dump that on You."
"No, no, don't apologize, I like listening to you. It's nice to know that I'm not the only one with problems," I say with a warm smile.

She smiles back and says, "So what's your damage?"
I chuckled. "Well, my parents are extremely proud of me," I look over to see her roll her eyes, "However, they don't see how much I'm struggling. I'm sick of always being the seemingly perfect person because that's not who I am. It just feels like no one sees that I'm struggling ot that deep down I hate that I have made this name for myself, and I just wish that no one had expectations of me."
"I'm so sorry," she says sadly.
"Hey, it's fine. I really think that once I graduate things will be better," I hesitate and look down at my hands. "When I was a kid, I saw my dead grandpa in the corner of my room.
My mom and dad just thought that this was a weird coping mechanism. But I actually saw him. It got worse and I started hearing things and my parents of course feared I was going insane, and I got diagnosed with schizophrenia. So, I have the privilege of being on anti-psychotic Medication."
I look up and suddenly the room disappears. I get disoriented but I remember where I am. I was hospitalized a couple months ago. I looked over to where Amy was, but she's gone. Tears sting my eyes as I look down and squeeze my eyes shut.
"Please not again."

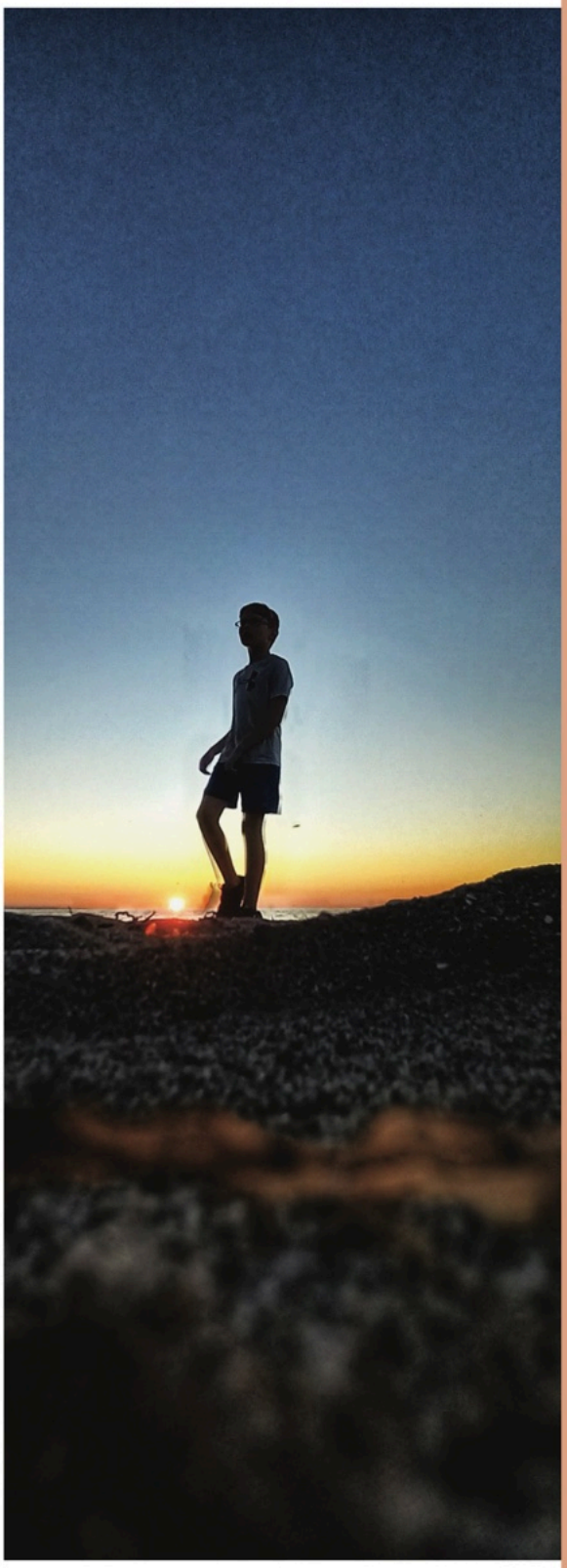


Photo By Lillian Ware

Engine and Annie

By Fox Kolar

Engine watched Annie walk up to him. The dusty old park they met at everyday complimented
her nicely. She was practically formed from shades of tan and brown and beige, only distinguished from the dry ground by the beat-up purple sneakers he'd watched her steal from Walmart 2 years ago.
"Hey, Engine. Engine, Engine, Engine. Is that your real name?" She sunk down next to him on a faded green merry-go-round.
"Dunno."
"How'd you get called Engine? Was your momma drunk when she had ya?"
"Dunno."
"Well, Engine," Annie laid down on the merry-go-round, squinting at the bright sky. The zippers on the fanny-pack around her waist made noise as she moved. "I was readin' in that one red school book today. I know it's summer but I was bored outta my head and I knew you wouldn't be out so what's the point of outside if daddy ain't screamin' his mind out and you ain't out here. In my school book there were lotta photos of Arizona. You know Arizona have a trout that ain't anywhere but there?"
"Nope. You interested in Arizona?" Engine had gotten up to follow Annie, who had jumped up spontaneously sometime between 'You know' and 'ain't anywhere'.
"They had four battles in Tucson, Engine. Four."
"Okay."
"Anyways, I was reading Arizona in my book and daddy came into the bed-room and was all swaying. He was real quiet, and I got weirded out, so I left to come find you."
"Quiet?"

There had only been three times in Annie and Engine's friendship that she had told him her father had been unusually quiet. Engine stopped walking, causing Annie to also stall. He stared at her neutral expression and how her foot lingered in the air for a moment before she set it to the ground. They were almost out of the park now, headed toward their houses.
"You good?" He asked.
Annie let out a puff of air and looked back at the roundabout.
"Yeah."
"Yeah?"
"Yes, Engine. Yes. Move your feet, asshole." Annie turned and started walking again, tugging at the hair-tie on her braid until it came loose. Stretching the hair-tie with her right thumb and left pointer finger, she shot it across the street. "We have shit to do."
"What shit?"
"We're road tripping to Arizona."
"Roadtripping."
"Yeah. We gotta pack."
"Roadtripping."
Annie picked up her pace. Engine kept up with her a few feet behind.
"Yes, Engine. Yes."
"Okay."
"Go home and pack. One bag only, we need a light load. Grab clothes, your other shoes, and get a second bag but put food in it. Only food in the second one."
"Okay."

Engine's kitchen table was flipped on its side, one of the brass legs bent inward. It had been that way for two weeks, so usually he ate in his room or went outside. Today, he hung a bag on the unbent leg and searched in the pantry for anything unopened. He brought out a wheat-thins box and two cosmic brownies. There were maybe bagels in the fridge, but fighting the rats for them didn't sound too pleasant. Engine opened his first bag, shuffling through his clothes to get to a little bag with two twenty-dollar bills and three fives. He shoved it in with the food and closed both bags, swinging one over each shoulder and pushing the screen door open. He slowly walked to Annie's house. She was sitting in her driveway when he arrived, a bag sat on each side of her and a key fob in her hand.
"Engine. Engine, Engine, Engine. Is that your real name?"
"Dunno."
"How'd you get called Engine? Was your momma drunk when she had ya?"
"Dunno."
"You got clothes?" She asked.
"Yeah."
"Shoes?"
"Yeah."
"Food?"
"Yup."
"Good. Put your stuff in the back." Annie stood up and walked to the back of her father's grey van. She unlocked the back doors and opened them for him, stuffing her bags in before stepping aside.
"I only got 55 bucks. You got cash?" He asked.

"Nope."
"Then we don't got roadtripping money."
"$55 is roadtripping money." Annie closed up the back and started walking toward the passenger door. "You can drive?"
"Yeah." Engine walked to the driver's side and didn't speak again until both of them were settled in their seats. "We're gonna need gas. And food, a place to sleep."
"We'll sleep in here," She adjusted the hem of her shirt, looking out the window. "and I can get guys to give me money if I ask pretty enough."
"Guys." He said.
"Yeah. Guys."
"You hang around any guys?"
"Other than you?" She looked at him. Her face was still.
"No."
"But you would for cash?" He looked at her until she spun her face toward the window again.
"Engine. Engine, Engine, Engine. Is that your real name?"
"Dunno."
"How'd you get called Engine? Was your momma drunk when she had ya?"
"Dunno."
He hears a small smile in her voice.
"Start up the engine, Engine."
Annie's eyes were still focused on the world beyond the van window. He looked at the back of her head for a moment before sticking the keys in the ignition.
"Okay."

The van started moving, jolting Annie out of her window-gazing. She moved her head to the side, stopping when her eyes landed on Engine. He pulled out of the driveway and turned down the road, navigating through their neighborhood. He seemed calm, taking one turn and then another as she watched his face.
"Wait." She said. The van slowed but didn't stop, and he looked at her. "I left my school book at the house."
"At the house." He said. She looked him in the eye.
"Yes, Engine. Yes."
The car stopped and Engine turned the wheel. He reversed and pulled forward, repeating the process until the van faced Annie's house again. They drove slowly, and he backed into the driveway, returning it to it's original spot. Annie sat in her seat, staring forward at the street. She opened the van door and got out, walking to her front door and disappearing inside. Engine waited about 5 minutes to make sure, and then got out of the van and got his bags out from the back. He walked home, and ate Wheat-Thins outside until the sun set.
The next morning, when Engine got to the park, Annie was already sitting on the merry-go-round.
"Engine." She whispered when he sat down next to her.
"Engine, Engine, Engine. Is that your real name?"
"Dunno." He said softly.
"How'd you get called Engine?"
"Dunno."
"You're a good guy, you know that right?"
They looked at each other, she tilted her head slightly.

"Dunno."



By Allysa Komeotis

By Hudsen Grovom





By Paige Springer

By Michael Everett



Red Stone Soliloquies

By Robert Stimpson

Dramatis Personae:

Samuel: An artist

Kendra: A down to earth geology major

Professor Duncan: A geology professor

SAMUEL and KENDRA enter first, followed by a crowd of STUDENTS. The STUDENTS, with SAMUEL and KENDRA included, mill about, crossing the stage repeatedly. They concentrate on the ground, as if looking for something.

DUNCAN:(Entering, standing downstage center and addressing the class)

These stones you see hold ghosts of times long past.
Red bands of iron run them through.
They are but fragments of a long lost time.
Deposited a million years ago,
back then they were but one long band of stone.
Over a million years the strata were
Deformed and broken to a thousand shards.
The pressures of the mantle on the crust
pushed streambeds up into these lofty peaks.
You'll find intrusions of volcanic rock.
Where stone cut stone and filled it in anew.
Original Horizontality,
can always be relied upon when one
Needs a baseline to interpret the stone

As DUNCAN talks, the students continue to aimlessly stroll. Some of them chat with each other, some seem very interested in the ground, none care what DUNCAN has to say. SAMUEL and KENDRA avoid each other.

DUNCAN turns

DUNCAN CONTD: (addressing audience)

I talk and talk and talk and talk but still
They listen not, they care not what I say.
Why do they not see this magic I see?
These stones of red, this art upon the earth.
Forgive me if I was sentimental.
A million years of clay and silt and sand
lie here conglomerated for our view
ancient iron found water, air, and light,
so dyed these walls into a tapestry.
A tapestry of horizontal lines
and yet a work of art nevertheless.
Then mother nature took her mighty hand.
She pressed upon her broken lithosphere,
new crust born of asthenosphere was made
old material was just brushed aside.
To make new room the crust was bent and rose,
desperate to get away from its mother
skyward it reached, coreward it fell, it broke
and knit itself back together again.
Stretching and bending unconformities
until that tapestry of stone and stone
that has not been made for the eyes of man
was all that could be seen across the land.
It rises here, falls there, then meets itself.
A streak of granite touches with the lime,
a laccolith within the stone sprouts up.
Hold there, a vulture raises up its claw.

SAMUEL: Raising his hand

How do we know from where the iron comes?
That ore which paints these hills all shades of blood.

DUNCAN:

My boy where would it come from but the core?
All that we see has come from deep within
our globe, with iron in its nucleus.

SAMUEL: to audience

"The core" he says, and yet I don't believe.
He must be wrong, for this place tells a tale.
of men and women lost to father time.
These mounts have seen the worst we have to give
they have observed us as we rise and fall.
A great kingdom to the north side faces
an ancient caliphate to the southern.
A state just done with civil war crosses,
so that it might help strike its neighborland.
How could a place that has witnessed so much
be dyed this shade of red by just a rock?
These scientific fools don't see the pain
that was felt neath slate roofs, 'tween granite walls.

KENDRA: to DUNCAN

Tell me, please sir, why are these peaks so sharp?
I heard they have a hundred million years,
and yet they seem new like they rose today
How have they not become dull over time?

SAMUEL: not noticing KENDRA, to audience

These peaks are sharp like iron blades of war
they cut so deep, they'll slash you to your core.

DUNCAN: to KENDRA

Good question, you show great insight my dear.
Your answer lies in the make of these stones.
Aside from the iron which gives them hue,
They are composed of a granite substrate.

This layer is as strong as stone can be

SAMUEL: to audience

This tempered stone will not erode, they claim
they do not see the art in what they say.
We stand amongst a bouquet of knife peaks,
untouched by time as they reach towards the sky,
dyed crimson by the blood of two nations.
I know the wars these fields of red have seen
the warriors who fell for fatherland.
The stone has been shattered upon the earth
by the hatred of the peoples around,
the blood that they have bled, in vain or not,
was all drawn up by deep roots of the peaks.
Their lofty heights turned scarlet from our deaths.

SAMUEL stands, awestruck with his outpouring of emotion. Maybe he begins to cry.

KENDRA walks downstage with another student, chatting.

KENDRA:

This stone within my hand is but a stone.
Its color I would call the palest pink.
It has no streak, and is not reactive.
Its mass is three grams per milliliter.
It is a solid object that is real,
not art, as our teacher seems to insist.
I do not understand how he can teach
or why he has to teach geology.
He clearly is more intrigued by the arts

DUNCAN: to himself, or audience

...the earth is but a giant work of art...

KENDRA:

Which is no flaw or failing of his own
but does not lend itself to scientists,
much less the teaching of the sciences.

DUNCAN:

...they should appreciate it as I do...

KENDRA:

The sciences are real and are solid.
They are incredible because of that.
A baseline for all that we do
must be unyielding and always apply.
to hear him speak, one would think they are
Subjective for each person to decide.

DUNCAN:

...an ever-shifting tapestry of stone...

KENDRA:

But he is not as crazy as that boy.

SAMUEL stands almost offstage, staring (Weeping?).

KENDRA scoffs and walks off. The STUDENTS follow.

DUNCAN gathers SAMUEL and leaves.

Eliana Joy Frederickson

By Selah Frederickson

Ellie and I shared a room for much of her life. At first, it was her white wooden crib and my cheap steel bed. Briefly, while we were moving, we had our own rooms, but then it was back to sharing less than three months later. As soon as she was big enough to climb up to the bottom bunk herself, we got bunk beds. And when I moved to the guest room, she climbed up to the top bunk and slept there.

One day, she asked if I would cuddle with her while we fell asleep. She was young, maybe four, and she began breathing evenly in sleep long before I stopped staring at the wooden planks above us. I turned to look at her in the dim starlight from the window, taking in her long, light brown hair, her eyelashes curled up against her soft cheeks, her little nose covered in freckles. I could feel my eyes filling with water and something warm blossoming inside my ribs, like a sunrise over the flat northern Montana landscape, gray clouds scattered over the orange face of our central star, its majesty almost too much for me. Gently, I wrapped my arm around her little sleeping form and drifted away.

That experience confused me for weeks afterward. I wondered what it was I was feeling, looking at my sister like I had never seen her before. Was it the love of a sister? A parent? I was eight when she was born, so it was possible that I had unconsciously accepted the role as parent for her.

It was her name that finally convinced me: it was joy. I loved her so deeply that I could smile just from the thought of her, laugh just from a picture of one of her silly faces, cry just from the knowledge that I was going to leave her someday. Eliana Joy gave me joy.

My favorite color is you
You're vibrating out my frequency
"Sober Up", AJR

Eliana (Ellie) Joy Frederickson was born on July 30th, 2014, at 10:39 am. She weighed 7 pounds, 4 ounces, and was 18.5 inches tall. Her father, ever the documenter, took hundreds of pictures that day to remember every moment of the day his last child was born. Her mother smiled, happiness radiating from her startlingly blue eyes in every picture.

Mom says that her first three kids cried when they were born, but as soon as she held them close, they recognized her voice and calmed down. Ellie cried, and even when Mom spoke to her and laid her child's head against her chest, she kept crying. We like to say she was preparing for a life of having to speak up to be heard.

"Ellie, a question: how many snails do you have?"
"I don't have any."
"What? You don't have any snails?"
"No."
"Well, how am I supposed to see a snail?"
"We can look outside when it rains."
"Will you look with me?"
"Yeah."
"Okay."

Every couple of years, someone would get the bright idea to do a sermon series about the Fruits of the Spirit at our church. It was especially popular in the kid's services because it made snacks and crafts easy to come up with. There are plenty of Fruits of the Spirit coloring pages out there, free for the taking and printing for the hundred and fifty kids who showed up that Sunday.

To my surprise, we had a Fruits of the Spirit series in my Youth Group once. We spent a week talking about love (God is love, you know), and then we moved on to joy.

The youth pastor told us about the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness, he said, came from the small delights of life: ice cream and video games and that sort of thing. Joy, on the other hand, was something deeper, some-

thing that resonated within you always. When you had a bad day, you could still reach further down and find joy in the big picture. Happiness was quickly over, but once you found joy, it was with you forever.
That's how I feel when I'm with Ellie. She can annoy me, refuse to listen, embarrass me, and make me cry, but no matter how I'm feeling on the surface, I love her underneath all that. She brings me joy just by being near me. Even her residual energy in my life, notes she wrote and pictures she drew, photographs of her sweet face, make my heart swell with a surge of joy.

It's Your endless love, pouring down on us
You have made us new, now life begins with You
"Death Was Arrested", North Point Worship

When Ellie was born, I was 270 miles away. She was at St. Peter's Hospital in Helena, Montana, and I was in Idaho Falls with my grandmother. My parents were trying to keep us updated about how everything was going and what they were going to name her.
Frozen had come out less than a year ago, and my brothers and I were rooting for Elsa as her name, or maybe Anna. I wanted Anna at first, but then I realized that I would rather be Anna (despite being the older sister), and besides, Elsa was almost an anagram of Selah, just without the "h." I figured we could just add the "h" on to the end and make her name Elsah, and then she would be unique among the other children named Elsa being born about the same time.
My grandmother was very confused about what my new sister's name was. At first, she told us Alaina, which I thought was acceptable since it mimicked my mother's middle name, Alaine. Then my grandmother said it was Aliana, which I thought was pushing it with the whole Alaine thing. Around dinnertime, she finally figured out it was Eliana. It took some thought, but I decided this was probably okay - it was kind of like Elsa and Anna combined into one name.
Her name is Eliana, I guess.
Eliana Joy.

We were both young when I first saw you
"Love Story", Taylor Swift

There was a phase she went through from about two to four where Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar was her favorite book. She always wanted us to read it to her. She ate fruit to be like the caterpillar. She played a game on her pink tablet where she raised her own very hungry caterpillar. She had a caterpillar stuffed animal and a beautiful butterfly too. She also pulled her fingers together and said her two hands were caterpillars. She named them Honey and Humphrey. They fought, and a Stop Caterpillar had to convince them to get along. They got bitten by X Caterpillars, and a Unicorn Caterpillar had to save them. They swam in the bathtub and became Dolphin Caterpillars. They played outside and became Bird Caterpillars.
My brothers jumped right on board the caterpillar train. They named their hands long-forgotten names and played with Ellie.
Though I had two hands, I only had one caterpillar. Inspired with incredible creativity, I named my caterpillar nothing more than Caterpillar.

Take pictures in your mind
Of your childhood room
Memorize what it sounded like
When your dad gets home
Remember the footsteps
Remember the words said
And all of your little brother's favorite songs
I just realized everything I have
Is someday gonna be gone

"Never Grow Up", Taylor Swift

Ellie liked to yell when she was younger. In fact, my brothers and I called her Yellie Ellie.
I speculated for many years upon why she yelled so much. Did she like being loud? Did she think she got more attention when she yelled? Had she heard someone else yelling and wanted to copy them?
She would get in trouble for yelling. Parents, teachers, her siblings, we all told her she was being too loud. She needed to quiet down, or she would need to spend some time on her own.
The explanation I finally settled upon was that she was just trying to be heard. My brothers and I had already found a rhythm of coming up with ideas of what to build, what to play, and what to do together every day by the time she was born. She was shorter than us, less articulate than us. She talked, but we didn't always listen. So she got louder.
Now I know, and when my brothers and I start getting too excited and ignoring her, I try to swing back and include her as much as I can. She is as smart and creative as any of us, and now we have to make up for lost time we spent without her input.

"Ellie, a problem: you're taller than me when you stand on that stool."
"Yeah."
"So I'm not the tall sister anymore!"
"Well..."
"You are the small and I am the tall, but today, you are the tall and I am the small."
"No, no, you are always the tall!"
"Are you sure?"
"Yes, I am always the small."
"Even if you grow up and you're taller than me?"
"I'll still be the small. I'll always be your small, Selah."

My sister has lots of characters that she likes to become.
I believe the original (the OG, as my brothers would say) was called Captain Kwazii, formed from a joke about mixing up two of the characters of Octonauts, a show she liked about marine biology. Captain Kwazii was a pirate cat who didn't always think before doing something but was given the power and responsibility of a captain. Ellie played him well.
Next was Alive Teddy: the companion of the classic young, sweet orphan girl with an evil caretaker who stole all her stuffed animals except a teddy bear, who ended up being alive. When Alive Teddy was trying to trick the adults, she put her tiny hands on either side of her face, her thumbs pressing against her cheeks like the surprise at the end of a game of peek-a-boo.
Dancy the Robot was a scientific creation who could dance, but only with robotic motions. At first, she just had whatever personality traits didn't fit into Captain Kwazii or Alive Teddy, but eventually, she grew into her own character with a love of dance and a heart for helping others.
Squiggle is my personal favorite. Meant to be an alien lizard, she hails from Squiggle Town, where her ten older brothers and sisters are very mean to her. Fortunately, Squiggle learned nothing from the older people in her life, because the signature piece of her personality is that she is nice, no matter what anyone does. In fact, the way to tell if the "real Squiggle" is visiting is to tell her that she is no longer your friend. If she just smiles and gives you a hug, she is most certainly the real Squiggle, and you can apologize and say you will be her friend forever.
Super Worm is the most recent addition to Ellie's characters. His song, personally invented by my sister, sums up the most important parts of his personality:
"I eat omelets and dirt
For breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert!"
Otherwise, Super Worm must protect the world from his twin brother, the aptly-named Evil Worm, who may not be as cruel as he appears, as seen in his relationship with Trap Robot.
The Ellian (Ellie + alien) actually has a homemade costume: green pipe cleaners twisted into little Ellian ears, and two unraveled paper towel rolls patterned with smelly marker, one for her arm and one for her leg. She crosses her eyes and

sticks out her tiny pink tongue and says, "I am an Ellian." Not to worry, she comes in peace.
The characters "visit" every once in a while, before going back to where they came from, returning the "real Ellie" to me. Personally, I think all the characters are pieces of the real Ellie. She is brave like Captain Kwazii, cuddly like Alive Teddy, energetic like Dancy the Robot, kind like Squiggle, hungry like Super Worm, and adventurous like the Ellian.
Every last one of her characters brings me joy.

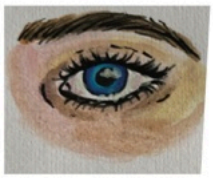
Hello, hello
I'm not where I'm supposed to be
I hope that you're missing me
'Cause it makes me feel young
"Sober Up", AJR

I walked into the airport carrying my backpack and purse. My brother pulled my enormous white suitcase behind him. I was trying to keep it together, needing to be strong for everyone else. It hadn't hit them yet, that I was leaving, but it had hit me. Over and over until I wondered if I had any tears left to cry about it.
I looked at my brothers after I got my tickets. Lincoln, ready to be the oldest sibling. Levi, not fully aware that this was it. And Ellie, big blue eyes staring up at me. She wore a white jumper with bright, colorful flowers patterned all over it. Her hair was messy; we didn't brush it that morning.
That morning. She spread Nutella between two tiny pancakes and put strawberries and blueberries on top of them and gave me my favorite breakfast of all time. I'd had chicken and waffles from Spokane, dozens of hotel breakfasts, and even a breakfast buffet with Disney characters, but nothing quite gave me the joy that those packaged pancakes from the pantry gave me. She made me want to smile and cry, that warm sunrise feeling welling up inside me again. Joy is dangerous.
I gave her a hug. I walked through security, tears dripping down my face as I tried to remember what electronics I had in my bags. I waved at them from the windows, watching her little form against my mom. She waved, tears dribbling down her cheeks too. Then I turned around the last corner, and I didn't go back.

Oh no, don't throw out my legos
What if I can't let go?
What if I come back home, back home?
"Don't Throw Out My Legos," AJR

Friends break up, friends get married
Strangers get born, strangers get buried
Trends change, rumors fly
Through new skies
But I'm right where you left me
"right where you left me - bonus track", Taylor Swift







Eyes

By Multiple Authors

Meeting new ones, another door opening with each
Revealer of emotion unable to hide
Crows feet perched on the peak of a deep, clear lake
Watching the creativity of the world
I look into my mom's tired, yet kind, sharp blue, full of so much love
Broken, but fixable with care
The way they glimmer and gleam like the sun when it caresses the sea
Windows to the soul that leak emotions
Windows to the soul for loved ones to peer in
She was breathing through what allowed her to see
Changing like days, flowing like tides, sparkling like stars deeper than space
Sparkling, dancing, wandering, confusing and often concerning
Seeking the joys of people
Glistening like the soft dance of waves in the sunlight
Each set a different variation of the purest colors of Earth
Kind, yet tired, bright and blue, peaceful when closed, always being used
Eyes





Art by Mia Brinton

Editors Note: Each line of this piece was composed by a member of Sue Stone's 5th period AP Literature class. The lines were then randomly placed together, and it produced this beautiful piece.



By Emiley Ereth

The Coming of Fall

By Elena Shuber

I'm sitting in a damp forest, something I have not done in a very long time. It's muddled with sweet and a bit of sour, devoid of human noise. Occasionally a car ruins the bubble, cast by song and green and sunlight. It finally feels like fall today, you know that one day at the end of August where the light slants a little more, tinted slightly more golden? It won't last long, the crisp tease of the silk wind, but it gives me something to grasp, to hold as a bridge that will eventually cross the river of summer and into the ocean of fall.

Forget Me Not

By Elizabeth Currier

I'm so sorry
Please forgive me
For what I'm going to do when I don't remember you
Remember when we were together
Those memories will last forever
For when I leave I'm not truly gone
My voice will live in your heart like the melody of your favorite song

By Mia Brinton



Happy Years

By Morgan Kaufman
and Jordan Hewitt

The world around flashes before your eyes
Life and death will catch you by surprise
Hopes and dreams vanish before you can count
Despair and dread have an endless amount
Your face is the things you hide behind
Your soul holds the real truth inside
Your smile is a frown that never changes
Your eyes see through all your stages
The horror and sadness of your youth
Many people never knowing the truth
The rain will pour like your tears
Just how the memories tend to smear
Decisions rely on your piers
But you have to remember the happy years



By Dawson Oclander

By Mahana Mobley



The Mind of a Poet

By Andy Roberts

I spent hours,
Trying to pour my soul into this writing,
Only for those in power,
To decide whether or not my work is delighting.

Writing for some faceless person to judge,
Whether or not my writing is even good,
Or at least good enough.
Just so my writing can get misunderstood!

Poets spend so much time spilling their soul,
Into stanzas and lines,
Just for people to call them overzealous fools!
Just for students to be forced to read and whine!

They spill out their darkest thoughts,
Just for teachers to assign their work as homework.
How someone feels isn't something that can just be taught,
Because everyone has their own secret quirks.

So if I decide to send this,
If this gets published,
My dear reader please stay in ignorant bliss.
Unless you want your thoughts to be tarnished.

Do not try to understand me.
Don't try to understand what I mean in this poem,
For the inside of my head isn't something you can just see.
So just know you'll never truly understand this poem.

Brighter in the Morning

By Amelia Sigafoos

I'm dancing in the dark of night
with my crescent moon tambourine
The stars up high, they shine so bright ,
but they're not shining on me.

It's not like you're undeserving
you deserve it more than me
but it seems like you don't have to try
to be, all I aim to be.

I know that I'll never be good enough
no, I'll never be like you.
So I tell myself that it's all for fun
so when the sun rises I'm not blue.

And I'll have to be brighter in the morning
so I'll let myself be sad right now
because if people knew the real me
I would just let everyone down.

If I could paint the universe
I know that you'd still be the one in first,
and I'd always be just one step behind.

I try to love the words I write,
I try to love myself,
but you dominate even in my mind
I can't think of anything else.

Though I feel that I'll never be good enough, and won't ever be like you.
I tell myself it's all for fun,
so when the sun rises I'm not blue.

And it's gonna be brighter in the morning,
so I'll let myself be sad right now
but I know everything's gonna be okay
In the morning I'll be safe and sound.



By Tizer Lindgren

Labyrinth

By Allison Christensen
Art By Michael Everett

A Short Story Inspired by the Taylor Swift Song

This was her labyrinth. With its wide tunnels and smooth stone walls and soft grassy floors and bright floating lights. She knew it well. She did, afterall, walk through it every day. Not always the same path, but always a gentle one. She always came out of the labyrinth at the end of the day. Sometimes it took her longer, but if she was patient, she always made it out. This was her labyrinth, she had nothing to fear here.

Right. Left. Straight for a while. Right. Right again. Left. Straight. Left again. Right. The only sounds were her muffled footsteps on the grass carpet of each tunnel, and her breathing, slow and deep. Down each tunnel, she thought, something different each turn. She thought about her life: past, present, and future. She thought about her friends. She thought about her family. She thought about love. She thought in the silence because it was peaceful. She thought in the solitude because it was simple.

Left. Straight. Left again. Right. Left. Straight for a while. Right again. The floating lights that guided her path changed color in every new tunnel, or was it with every new thought? Both were the same, she supposed. Sometimes purple, blue, yellow, green, orange, or red. Sometimes harsher, sometimes softer, but always guiding her. Always lit. The yellow lit tunnels were her favorite, in those she always thought of things that made her happy. The red lights were her least favorite, they made her think about things that made her angry. But those were few and far between. She was generally very happy in her labyrinth.

Right. A purple tunnel– things she wanted. She wanted her best friend to come home. He left for college a few months ago, and she missed him every day. He was always there when she needed him, but never when she just wanted him. She wanted her future to start. She felt like she was teetering on the edge of a huge turning point, a huge breakthrough. But it'd be a leap she'd have to take. She wanted to take it now.

Left. A green tunnel– things she wished were different. She wished she were prettier, like the girls that always beat her to everything. They'd be nice and say she was their friend but she'd always come in second to them, and she had her whole life. She wished she were smarter, like the people she sat next to in class every day. The people that made her feel stupid, sometimes. She hated feeling stupid more than anything. Wait...she realized she had lost the right thoughts. She wasn't supposed to feel hatred in a green tunnel. There was a loud crack. She jumped and looked wildly around, the stone wall of the tunnel had split. Leaving a small jagged crevice, at eye level, as if staring right at her. She hurried to the end of the tunnel.

A sharp right. A blue tunnel– things that made her sad. She was sad her best friend was gone. She was sad about the state of her life. She was sad she could never be like those pretty girls or smart people. She was sad she felt stupid sometimes. She was sad she was alone.

Crack. Crack. Crack. Crack. They were all around her now. She stood, her feet frozen in place, as her head whipped back and forth watching the tunnel walls as they... crack, crack, crack...

Eventually, silence settled over her labyrinth once more. The tunnel walls were unrecognizable now. The once smooth stone surfaces were tarnished and marred with all of those serrated lines. She reached out and touched the wall gingerly, it was sharp and rough, and she withdrew her hand immediately. The bright blue light dimmed until the tunnel was almost dark. She tried to step forward but her legs were shaky. After a few timid steps, she picked up her pace, and practically ran to the end of the tunnel, eager to leave the sadness behind her.

Another sharp right. A yellow tunnel. The light was dim but she could still make out the tunnel walls. They were cracked and rough here too. Somehow, her labyrinth had changed. No. She had changed her labyrinth. But this was one of her favorite tunnels, she was safe here at least. She thought of her family, how they always made her smile. She thought of the things she loved to do– read, draw, swim. She didn't have very much time for those things now did she? She thought of her friends, how they always made her laugh. Except...when they made her cry. Some friends they were, really. She halted abruptly. What was she saying? She loved her friends more than anything, why would she say that? She looked up, the yellow light was still there, just tinting the air with the warm glow. Then she looked down and jumped, horrified. There was a circle of dead grass at her feet and it was spreading, out to the walls, down the tunnel, and back where she came from. She watched as each blade shriveled and turned brown until the entire tunnel floor was dead.

No, no, no, no, no, was all she could think as she looked around the tunnel, confused and mortified by what she had done. She seized fist-fulls of her hair, and spun in a slow circle, hoping her labyrinth would go back to the

way it was. Her breathing was heavy, and her heart rate was climbing by second. She had to fix this; she had to keep going. She couldn't just stand here and wallow, while the very fabric of her reality changed before her eyes. She gathered what resolve she had left and continued on.

A left this time. Oh no. The red light that greeted her around the corner was harsh and haunting. Her footsteps were loud now, as the dead grass crunched beneath her feet. Her peaceful silence was gone, and being alone was more frightening than it was calming. She tried to stop herself, but her thoughts landed on the people she hated, both those that deserved her anger and those that didn't. She didn't want to hate her friends, hate her family. There had to be something else she could hate. She wouldn't let her labyrinth control her thoughts anymore. She looked around at the cracked walls, the dead grass on the tunnel floor, the red lights that had started flickering, and it came to her. She hated her labyrinth!



Instantly, the walls behind her shuddered and rumbled, then started to move. Closer and closer together. Quite literally, closing in on her. She watched petrified as the tunnel narrowed, until the walls right next to her threatened to swallow her whole. Then she ran. Ran headlong to the end of the tunnel, as fast as her legs would carry her. She skidded to a halt and rounded a corner but didn't stop running. The walls here were moving too, faster now. She kept sprinting, heart pounding and lungs stinging.

She ran and ran and ran until finally, she couldn't run anymore. She stopped in the middle of a circle of tunnels. She doubled over in exhaustion, resting her hands on her knees. Many painful breaths later she stood up and looked around. The tunnels surrounding her were barely wide enough to walk in now. The dead grass beneath her feet looked more black than brown, and the lights in every tunnel were dim and faded. She spun in circles several times trying to decide which tunnel to take. She had never been to this part of her labyrinth before, she would've recognized it if she had. She was confused and indecisive, and continued to spin in frantic circles. Then, dizzy and disoriented, she looked up to steady herself. She realized she was standing under a gray light. She had never seen a gray light before.

Almost as soon as she looked at it she started to worry whether she would ever get through her labyrinth. If she would be trapped in it forever, wandering an endless maze of her thoughts, unable to escape. It occurred to her that she was very, very lost. She didn't know which way to go and there was no one to help. She was afraid of her labyrinth now.

Every light she could see glowed with full vibrance for a fraction of a second before all extinguishing the next instant, leaving her in impenetrable darkness. She screamed and buried her face in her hands. It was useless to try to navigate the labyrinth now, she'd never be able to find her way in the dark. She collapsed to the ground and hugged her knees to her chest. Then the tears came, gushing down her cheeks, silent at first then accompanied by sobs and shudders. Her whole body shook with despair and fear and anger. She was completely and utterly alone. No one could help her and she knew no one would care to anyway. She cried so much she couldn't breathe.

And she thought too, she couldn't stop thinking. She thought about her life. So much of it had been wasted, all the opportunities she didn't take– all the times she didn't say something she should have or didn't do something she needed to. There were so many things she could be doing now to make sure she had the right future, the future she wanted. But what if she wasn't good enough to have that future? She couldn't handle the pressure now, what would she do when the stakes were higher? If it felt like the end of the world now, what would it feel like tomorrow?

She thought about all the people she loved and how little she actually meant to them. Her friends ignored her or they chose other people. They'd all talk to each other and she always felt separate, left out. All the classes and hang outs she'd spent watching her favorite people have fun without her. If she wanted to be included she had to be the one to make the plans. She was so afraid she was annoying them, she'd ask and ask and ask until she'd

cause the response she dreaded.

She thought about all the people she had been in love with. None of them had ever loved her back, and she knew they never would. How could they? She was broken and sad and boring and a shell of a person, who could never be herself. She was clumsy and silly and she cared too much. She gave too much of herself too soon. She wanted things she couldn't have with people she couldn't have either.

She was so unbelievably alone. Even if she made it out of the labyrinth, which she knew was impossible, she'd be alone. That was her fate…

Breathe.

She lifted her head slightly.

I'm here. Just breathe.

She looked around. There was definitely a voice coming from somewhere. Her body still shook from crying and her breathing was still labored, but now she was more focused on the voice than her own sorrows.

Breathe in, deeply.

So she did.

Breathe out now, slowly.

She did.

That's it. Again.

She did. The lights flicked back on.

Keep breathing, you've got it.

She took another deep breath. The tunnels widened once more.

Just a few more deep breaths.

She inhaled through her nose, and slowly exhaled. The grass softened, and greened again. Then she took another breath in, and exhaled gently. The tunnel walls mended.

There now, better?

"Yes, much," she answered.

I was worried about you. Are you okay?

"I… I think I am now," she said, nodding to herself and standing up, "You really were worried about me?"

Of course, I love you.

"You… you do?" she asked, not daring to believe it.

I do.

She believed it.

The labyrinth looked familiar again. She could find her way now. The voice had saved her. She was falling, but the voice caught her just before she hit the ground. She was lost, but the voice gave her directions just in time. She was dying, but the voice was her lifeline. She would be alright now.

She chose a yellow tunnel and set off. It wasn't long before she saw the white light that meant she had reached the edge of the labyrinth. She made it through, like she had every day before.

—

I opened my eyes to see him staring at me with a very concerned expression.

"Thank goodness!" he said, pulling me into a tight hug, "Please don't ever scare me like that again!"

"I.. I'm sorry," I said, melting into the embrace.

"Don't apologize. I'm just glad you're okay. What's going on with you?"

"Just got lost in my head I guess," I sighed.



By Vesperia Bacon

Where I'm From

By Andy Roberts

I am from felons and addicts.
From prison visits and long road trips.
I am from running in the woods to play games,
Mostly of make believe,
(Pine needles stabbing at me when I fell,
It tickled and itched, but nothing ever hurt more than it should.)
I am from games of I am the king,
the rocks are my subjects
and my artillery.

I am from grimy diners and heavy cigarette smoke,
From Joyce and Mick.
I'm from the get-over-its
and the I'll-give-you-a-reason-to-cries,
from the Put your book down! Go be a kid!
I'm from long camping trips
mostly spent swimming in the frigid lakes
And sleeping on the tough jagged rocks occupying the ground.

I'm from Mary and Bob, rafting on rapid rivers and fishing in bare ponds for fun,
dog whining, kids crying, adults fighting, and fires crackling.
From bruised arms of roughhousing
and wiping away the blood from all kinds of
scratches, scrapes, and bloody noses.

Hidden away in a bookshelf were the photographs and letters
all from Josh,
waiting for when I could be held by him again.
I am from generations of runaways,
hoping to find somewhere better,
from hoping we do not wind up the same as the ones we ran from.

Art By Will Eaton



Cravings

By Morgan Jones

I always thought I'd have found a meaning by now
I thought I'd have a life and a unique sound
I thought I'd be on stage or have a high GPA
Or maybe I'd have ended it all in a generational rage
But I found highs in mediocre lives and backseat affairs and judgmental stares
I found lows in reality shows and high school plays and acting my age
I hit middle ground with grainy sounds and burning nights and parking lot fights
Then I lost God in an aching thought and a broken plea
Learned the only god is greed

All the Right Things

By Miranda Sheafor

I still feel bad
About every right thing
I started out so good
But now I've only ruined dreams
Exactly as I should

I can't quite forget
Every evening
When I watched you walk away
Thought to myself
She's not coming back
So pack your bags, well
Run away
Go before she leaves you first
Make the airport by midday
Stop pretending you can change
When we all know you're the worst

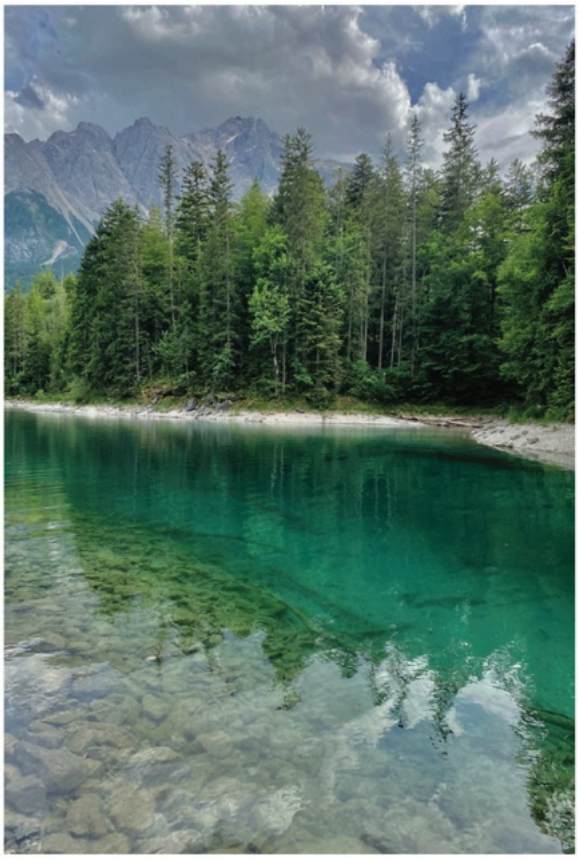
I tell you all the answers
But deep down I know I'm wrong
You got here first
But we both know
You can't stay very long
I see you slip away
I watch you melt into the fray
And think
This is all the end of things
I never should have stayed

I broke your pencil in the fourth grade
Splinters scattered on my desk
Your stories lost their meaning
And left me with the mess
I guess I stole all of the pieces
Ran them far as I could go
But I never fit the puzzle
So why'd I ever think I'd know?

I thought I'd try to fix you
Make one thing really right
But we knew it was a lost cause
I guess I never was real bright
We all knew I never broke you
But you still can't see the shards
I watch you keep on running
Until the world's been fried and charred

They thought you'd been the answer
I thought at least that you were mine
But the path has gone all blurry
Now I see it for the lie
I stood up one night
To speak my piece
Have something real to say
But my lips failed all the words
My brain had locked away

They're drowning all around us
And you tell me to walk on
We're moving for the two of us
But not everyone is gone
I lost your smile at the bus stop
And your hand back in New York
I'm reaching for your heart beat
And what all of this was for



By Brayden Brisko

Interesting

By Fox Kolar

I am now walking through plants. All that's left are plants. Even the animals are gone. The birds stayed for a while, and if birds were around I'm sure there were fish too, but all of them left eventually. So my days consist of looking at trees and grass and bushes and blue skies. Sometimes, I come across a trace of humanity. A road sign not yet swallowed by the earth, or a building that miraculously stayed standing, or at least stayed existing, despite the devastating storms. Mostly though, the humans are long gone.

I didn't necessarily mourn them after they left, but I did miss them. They were interesting creatures. I liked watching their progress, and I took great joy in finding a specific one to follow through life. I was happy when they were happy, and sad when they were sad, and I always yelled at them when they made stupid decisions, which was fairly often, but they could never hear me. I suppose I treated the humans like they treated their television shows. I suppose I treat life like the humans treated their television shows. I have observed life for millennia. But now there is no life to observe. So, I wonder.

I am now walking through the rough brush of the Washington State forest. Although it isn't Washington State anymore. Just a forest. I almost expect to see something. The impulse to interact with life still hasn't gone away. It never goes away. I guess that's reassuring. It means that there will be new life eventually.

When the big lizards roamed the earth I was naive enough to think that I would live among them forever; generation after generation. We were eternal. I was eternal. They were not. When the dinosaurs died out, I thought that was it. Some of the creatures survived and went on to evolve and become new ones. None of the survivors were interesting enough for me.

I roamed the earth for a long time.

Eventually, something was running around again. Something interesting. The new creatures were curious things that stumbled around and grew in numbers slower than most other species. Originally, I thought they would die out quickly. But they got good at hunting. And they were all over. I traveled quite a bit back then, and they had made homes almost everywhere I went. It was only after I had been observing for a while that they really surprised me. They created fire. And made farms. And every single group of them developed communication. I watched them hunt and conquer. And when they had conquered every other creature, they hunted and conquered each other. They grew and grew and grew. They were beautiful and horrible and sorrowful and delicate. They had a long run living this way.

They eventually destroyed themselves, the humans. They were ultimately selfish, and they created their destruction. Again, I don't mourn them. It would just be nicer with them here. I had gotten so used to their presence.

I am now running down a decaying roadway in the rain. It's the only road I've found in a long time. I don't know how it's still here. Even the plastic is gone now.

This is the last of humanity. It's only a tiny stretch, and I don't end up running very far because the path ends quickly. This road will be gone soon. I will be happy about that, I think. The end of an era. And every time an era ends, a new one must start. When it does, which I suspect it will soon, I hope it treats me well.

I'm just standing here now. I'm at the end of the last human road on an earth that no longer belongs to humanity and I wonder if there will be more. More roads. More anything. More life or laughter or family or struggle. I wonder if I am the last creature there ever will be. I wonder if I will be here until the sun explodes as the humans said it will. I wonder if I will keep humanity within me until then. I might stay here, mourning for eternity. I think I am mourning. If there will be a new era, I hope it treats me well.

And I hope it's interesting.



By Zander Taylor

Love in a Live Oak

By Robert Stimpson

The big old southern live oak is a giant standing in my path. His knuckles drag the ground as he stands sentry afore me.

Momma'd always tell me the live oak is the best house a man can have. The way its canopy arcs over'll protect you, and the way it's branches dip low'll give you a dry bed. The nuts are food and the leaves sheets and the trunk stays warm all winter what lets it never lose its leaves, even when the hills get mighty cold at night. She said they call it the live oak because none'd ever seen one dead, but once momma went to bed papa told me that was horseshit. Don't matter much now what papa thought. Nobody gives a damn what the six feet under think. Don't matter much now what momma thought either. My Caroline is waiting for me, and momma cain't stop me finding her.

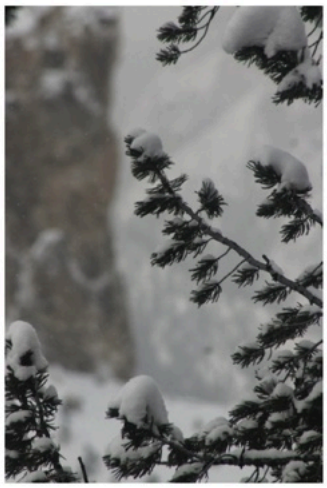
I first saw my Caroline next to a big old live oak. Thatn had been a whole lot better cared for than the beast in fronta me now. Tall and proud it was, standing straight with the branches curving out at the top. Not like my Caroline. She had been just as fine and proud as that tree, but was hunched down under it in one of her fits. Then again, I cain't say this monster here is worse off for not having been cared for. looks pretty dang healthy to me. Its branches might stoop and touch the dirty earth, but they're big around and strong enough and they never quit at growing. Not like me. I might be strong and big like the tree, but I stand up tall and I quit growing years back.

Every week or so my Caroline sends me a letter with onea them damn little postage stickers on it. I don't know where she gets them from, and neither does momma. If I leave the letters at the postman's house without one, he gets all huffy and says he caint deliver it. That's the difference tween Caroline and me. We might be just as poor but she was raised right. Her momma knew where to get the damn little stickers and how to find food coupons and where in the county to send your girl to schooling. My momma knew how to live off what the hill's'll give you. How to survive on chestnuts and live oak shoots and how to bed down where it was dry enough to sleep but ain't so dry the snakes'd want to share your bed. She knew the schooling that the thorns and the kudzu'll give you, and Caroline's momma knew the schooling that the manor houses and the plantations'll give you. Two kindsa poor I suppose.

While momma taught me about the hickrees and the snakes, papa taught me something else. Nobody much cares what the six feet under think, but they can tell you things. Papa was the last boy given to the first line of shine runners on this sidea Old Mine Mountain. He showed me how to build a still, build it high so the raccoons cain't get in, and fill it up with corn and sugar, maybe some barley and cuttings from the roses if momma was feeling her best. How to let it sit and how to know from the smell of it when to bottle her up. After momma showed me the paths the deer use, papa'd show me the paths the runners use. The ones that even the deer cain't find, with thorns and a big old live oak growing over them, that'll let you get close enough to taste Bensenville without being seen by one lonely resident of that forsaken town.

Papa also taught me real fast why I don't wanna let them see me. Vigilante bullet cuts your head just as sure as a runner's does. And at least the runner'll bury you.

Caroline'll get mad if she doesn't get letters, and I can't have her knowing she's too good for me, so I run em. But that big old live oak is in my way. If I'd brought an axe or a saw or even a hammer, I'd get to knocking. Instead I have to start picking my way through the tangle of branches. That was the other thing momma'd said, thorns don't like growing under a live oak. Sure enough, there's thorns all around but not under him. As soon as I'm able, I reach for the trunk. Its too big for three men my size to stretch our arms around. Good thing there's no three of me. Just one big man, a knitted bag fulla shine and letters over one shoulder and a knotted hickree walking stick over the other. And just like momma said it'd be, the trunk is warm under my hand.



Let it Snow
By James Moore

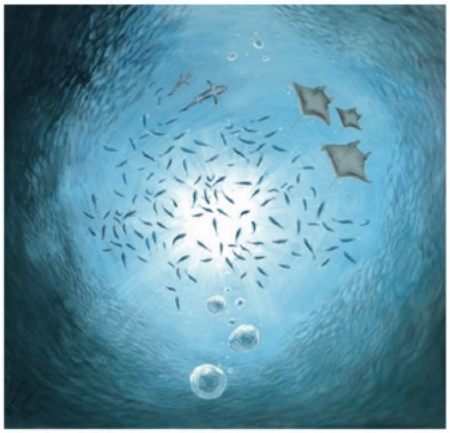


October Rain By Joelle Tooke

Cherry Tree

By Malachi Finch

The sun sends ripples of light down that illuminate a cherry tree. Under a tree, animals peacefully sleep. There are three dogs, two with matching spots and another with dark brown fur, all under the cherry tree. Next to the dogs are three cats, two of the brightest orange and one white with black spots, all under the cherry tree. More animals appear, slowly floating from the leaves of the tree. Small fish swim in the air, and lizards race around the trunk, all under the cherry tree. Bunnies nibble on the grass and tease the cats all under the cherry tree. People come out from behind the tree trunk, all young but knowledge past their age is in their eyes. They take care of the animals till their owners arrive, whispering their words to the animals and comforting them all under the cherry tree. A boy stands in the heat of the sun looking onwards towards the tree, knowing that is where he belongs, that is where his joy is, but he can not go yet for he still has a purpose in the sun, so he will stay until that purpose comes to him, standing in the blistering sun wishing for the things under the cherry tree.



Ocean By Liv Perry



Bridge By Cadin Tate

Of Peach Trees, the Sea, And Memories

By Caili Lowney

"Will you be content, being the bride of a god?"

"Yes, I will."

Her mother's hands carefully brushed through her hair. "Will you be content leaving? Will you be alright, leaving us?," her voice now shook. Hana didn't respond, her response only a shaky breath accompanied by the sound of a comb gliding through her hair.

She stared at herself in the mirror and didn't recognize who looked back. No longer was there the baby-faced girl who scraped her knees and threw a tantrum. A young woman stared back. Dark clouds had made home under her lash line, her lips turned downwards into something that was almost a frown. Her hair had been woven into a tight braid, entangled with a silky red ribbon. Where had the time gone? When had she lost her baby face, when had she become such a tall child? Looking in the mirror, she couldn't help but look back at her youth.

The smell of stew, fresh air, of peach trees in blossom. The golden fields of wheat, white waves hitting the rocks, glowing orange at sunset. The sound of laughter, of secrets being exchanged, of childlike banter. The feeling of red cheeks and butterflies, of sopping immature tears, of familial embrace.

It all made her heart ache. Hana didn't know you could miss something you've only ever known. She wasn't ready to leave, she lied when she told her mother she'd be alright being the Sea God's bride. Staring in the mirror at the unfamiliar young woman, she looked incredibly forlorn. Her brows had now contorted into an expression of pain, and her mouth quivered. The woman behind her feigned a scowl, "Stop crying, you've prepared so vigorously for this,", and despite her frank words, her voice remained unsteady. "I'm sorry,"Hana hiccupped. As she attempted to compose herself, she remembered every apology she still needed to say.

She was sorry for yelling at her father when she was eight, her childlike pride had withheld an apology since then. She was sorry for pushing that boy down running in the field, he had scratched his elbow as a result. She was sorry for breaking her mother's favorite vase, she had denied it vehemently when originally accused. She wished she still had more time to go and apologize, on hands and knees with utmost sincerity. She didn't have the time.

Her mother was right, she had prepared for this all her life. In her village of peach trees and seawater, she had spent her whole life preparing to marry the Sea God. She had chosen to be the bride, and volunteered herself to leave for the sea. To leave her town, and transition to a different stage of life, of possibilities as vast as the ocean, prosperity, and ascension. She had looked forward to it, but felt now that the day had arrived, she wanted nothing more than to stay where she was.

"Are you ready?", her mother asked, placing the last pin in her hair.

"Are you?", she asked her mother.

The look in her mother's eyes softened into an abject gaze.

"No, everything has gone by too fast".

The fabric of her dress brushed against her knees as she walked towards the cliff. The people of the village lined the path, with sad smiles and soft waves of goodbye. Hana scanned the crowd. She saw her neighbors, whose chores she used to aid in, who she brewed tea for on stormy days. The boy from her childhood who she pushed in the fields, who split sweets and shared laughter with her. His bangs brushed against his brows, the expression on his face was unreadable. The small girl who she treated like a sister. Whose tears she wiped, books she read aloud, and favorite lullabies she sang. She looked ahead, to the edge of the cliff, and saw swirling waves of blue, green and white ready to swallow her. Hana took one last look back at the village. The people, the golden fields, the houses lining the shore, the fruit trees blowing in the breeze. She loved it so, yet it was time to part ways.

She stepped forward to the edge, whispered, "Goodbye", and jumped.

Nightingale

By Fiona Kuntz

Come little wanderer, in between the weeds;
Come little questioner, high up in the trees.
Up upon some bough, sits the Nightingale;
Come a little closer and he'll tell you a tale.

His smile's full of beetles, his eyes are inky black;
He'll tickle the mites in his silver beard as he shoulders his great sack.
Centipedes burrow inside his hair, he smells of rotting earth;
Moths take shelter inside his ears; his nails are caked with dirt.

He only steps in shadows, quiet as a whisper wind;
He's best seen at sunset, sunlight dare not touch his skin.
The outside world will turn its head, as he brushes his soiled coat;
He'll beckon you come closer, while he shakes the spiders from his throat.

"Here in these forests, many secrets lie;
Beings here so ancient, they've forgotten how to die.
Insects, they know, as some of the first to walk the earth;
They're older than the flowering trees, they're older than man's birth.



Bookish By Emma Allred

Mighty Eagle By Alyona Zimmerman



"They've seen civilizations go about their merry way.
They've watched as molded skeletons turn over in their grave.
There's a silence in this forest, simple sound cannot penetrate.
The insects will be watching as you cross the pearly gates."

He'll rub his lichen temple, curious what you seek.
He'll gesture to his giant sack and ask if you will take a peek.

"The knowledge inside this sack, the answers to the universe.
Spirits, legends, tales of olde will satisfy your thirst.
But traveler be wary, there is a warning I must give you first.

"Every winged insect, was once as you are now.
Subsequent to enlightenment, they spoke the sacred vow.
There is not a thing they did not know, a thing they had not heard.
But they found themselves whirring,
Shrunken,
Unable to speak a word."



Forest By Liv Perry



The Dragons Cave By James Moore

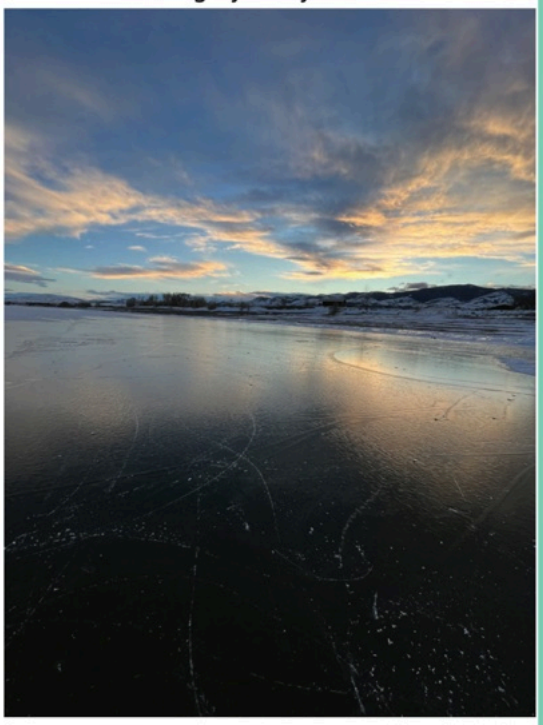


Otter Play By Lily Berrin

By Breelyn Nelson



Skating By Patty Hartman





By Taya Munden

I AM GRASS.

By Ava Kittrell

I am grass.

Born from secluded, nurtured dirt; fed by plentiful, delicious nutrients; and grown with gentle, clean waters.

I am growing.

Every day, I will be longer and stronger, and I will prevail over inferior plant forms.

Every day I will greet people in the mornings, afternoons, and whenever they please like personal support to their daily lives. Every day, they will expect more of my beauty as I flaunt a sparkling emerald green, sparkling chlorophyll underneath a burning morning fire.

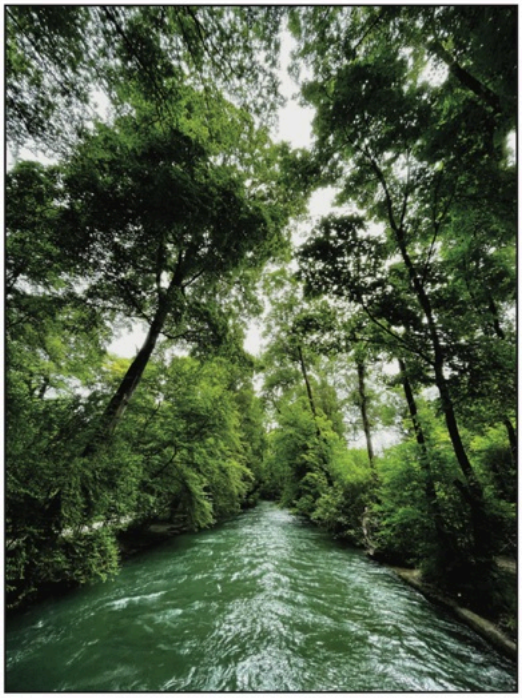
Can they see?

They love the soft green locks that spurt out of precious soil. They love the scent of morning dew seeping beneath my loamy home in their backyards, filling their noses with the scent of damp topsoil and freshly watered bugs. They love the complementary touch of my insignificant life against their own.

Can you see?

Soon, there will be a time when I am not so beautiful and lush. Now, there is a time when, to your eyes, I am ugly and rigid. Then, there was a time when I was once used as a young family's favorite picnic spot. Since, only prying fingers and kicking rubber soles will find me any use.

By Luisa Hocquel



I am still grass. Yellow and rigid; depressed and crunched; wistful and snapped.

I am still growing. Feeding my roots, watering my body, and minding my soil.

They can see me. My dying potential, the smell of neglect, and an overbearing presence that I will hold over their heads until the day they perish like I had.

You can see me. One day, rejuvenating my youth. One day, regaining my pride. One day, recovering my ambition.

For now I may feel crushed and fated, but not for any longer. Simple grass will shatter the illusion of guilt and conscience, and a light will shine upon me and my dolor peers—an orb full of hope and salvaged prosperity.

No more shall grass feel disgraced and trapped for appearing tarnished and sulked. End is necessary for all steps you take, and this too will end with a bitter taste on your tongue and nothing more.

Grass is still grass. No matter the time, day, year, or weather. No matter the place, people, quantity, or quality.

Grass will take beauty and grass will take grace as hero. Just as grass will take plainness and grass will take brute force as villain. Two sides of the same coin pit against each other can never touch superficially, but under the surface, We are united in sameness.

We Sync, I Sink

By Aliester Salome

The cherry blossoms begin to fade from a white to a blushing pink; the waterfalls rush and rain with mist; the petals that litter the white waters are carried away.
We are surrounded by trees of green pines, crimson maples, and silver willows.
But the pink trees are the ones that keep my eye.
Below us, water overlaps rocks, and left-over twigs dance in the stray pools.
I squeeze your hand; you squeeze mine.
In sync, we feel our hearts beating as one; my pulse sinks into consensus with yours, and our melodies become one.
The first step you take is the first step I take, we become one with the running river.
The water is at our knees. We splash and swipe towards each other.
We are alone again, the gravity of our hearts only forcing us together once more, and, as one, we begin to sync with the water.
Our knees and our thighs; our stomachs and chests; our shoulders and heads.
Us. You and I; me and you. Our hearts as one.
Pink still has my eye.
The cherry blossoms are still falling and drifting. The water still covers the air with mist. Pink petals still capture my eyes first. Water still overlaps rock. Our gravity, however, is no more.
There is no hand to squeeze back; there is no pulse to match.
Two melodic heartbeats are now solos in two different songs.
No more first steps to be taken; there is no one to splash and swipe at.
I continue to sink, but there is no one to sink with.
It is no longer We are alone again, but that I am alone now.
One heart, beating solo.
Each hand alone.
But pink still has my eye.



Axolotl By Áine Cleary

There's a Maelstrom in my Head and a Black Hole in my Heart

By Alli Christensen

There's a maelstrom in my head,
It spins and spins and it won't stop.
The currents contain all the thoughts I dread,
Thoughts that catch me and spin me too.

There's a black hole in my heart,
It pulls and pulls and it won't stop,
The darkness hides the feelings that tear me apart,
Feelings that consume me and pull me in too.

There's a maelstrom in my head,
It destroys and destroys and I can't make it stop.
The vortex churns with words said and unsaid,
Words that pain me and destroy me too.

There's a black hole in my heart,
It grows and grows and I can't make it stop.
The gravity tugs at people right from the start,
People that I love and help me grow too.

Sometimes I hate the maelstrom in my head,
But it does slow down;
It does help me think.

Sometimes I cry because of the black hole in my heart,
But it does draw the right people;
It does help me care.

So I deal with the maelstrom in my head,
Even when it spins and spins and won't stop,
Despite the currents containing the thoughts I dread.

And I live with the black hole in my heart,
Even when it pulls and pulls and won't stop,
Despite the darkness hiding the feelings that tear me apart.



By Kylee Hamper

By Brayden Brisko



Epitaph to a Warrior Fallen

By Robert Stimpson

Somewhere Lies …
Taken before her time
Beloved Daughter of Orléans
Mother to her Motherland
Child of the people of Domrémy
Cherished by her people

You were granted to us in our hour of greatest need. Through you we found the salvation we had so long sought. You saved us from the foreign invaders, from those among us who wished us ill, and from the depredations of the great evil we shan't dare name.

When you were still l'enfant, a Nursemaid who had never laid eyes on you came to us. She told us you were coming. That you would deliver us from danger, while you would deliver l'anglais from our fields and from our homes.

Even l'anglais knew you would come. The wizard to their beloved Arthur, Roi des Bretons, told him you would hold the Banner to end our suffering.

You came to us and we did not know what to make of you. You walked with the stance of a king, in the clothes of a soldier, carrying the weapon of a knight, wearing the body of a girl.

You were met by us at Chinon, tested at Poitiers, examined at Tours, and accepted at Fierbois. You impressed us at every turn. After a century of war, Saint Michel and le dieu gave you to this land and we did not deserve you.

Your battles are known to all who matter, they need not be repeated. In four days you gave us Saint-Loup, you gave us Orléans, you gave us Saint-Jean-le-Blanc, you gave us les Augustins, you gave us les Tourelles.

Let our progeny know that you were not without mercy. Your crossbowman gave l'anglais the offer to surrender; the letter tied on a string around his bolt.

Your unending vigor gave us the Loire. Then still you asked naught of us but your banner, your blade, and men to your command so that you might go further to bring end to the ambitions of le Duc d'Bourgogne.

You took from us our Dauphin, the son of Rois Charles VI, and gave us Rois Charles VII.

When the traitorous Duc broke our peace at Lagny-sur-Marne, you did not fail us or let us fall. When Compiègne was beset at every side, you sallied with your outnumbered force to their aid. When you struck at Margny, we were not there because we did not know to be. When you did not return from Compiègne, we feared. When Jeanne d'Luxembourg told us you were at her castle, we wept. When we heard that Cauchon of Beauvais was there, we lost hope.

We have not found you yet.
We know we never will.
You gave us ourselves.
They tell us you were at least given a final sacrament. Too much for a heretic, they wrote. We know that you are not a heretic.
France weeps for you, your home weeps for you.
Arc weeps for you, Jeanne

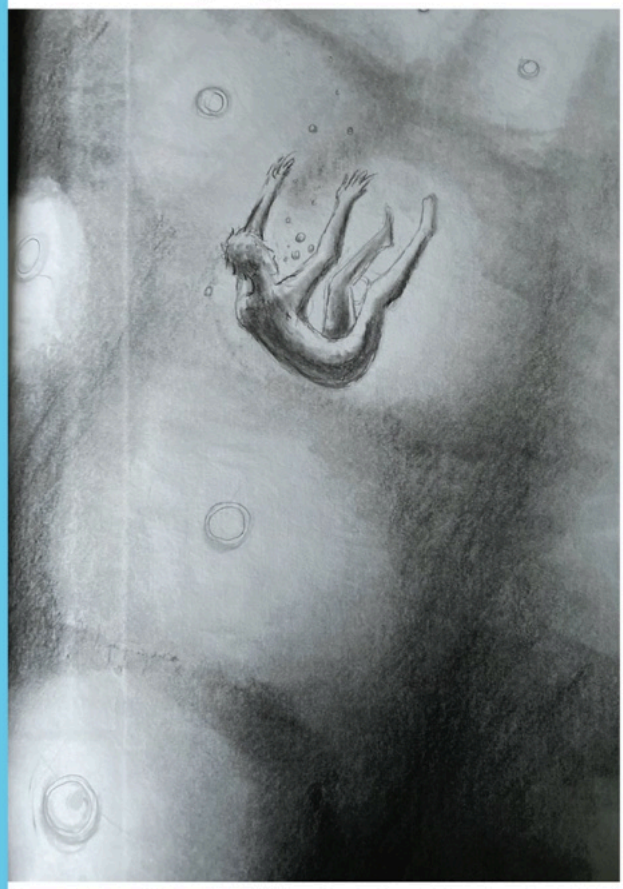


Lone Wolf By Alyona Zimmerman



By Lily Carlson

By Grayce Wilkins



The Falling Star

By Emery Todd

A – A single star fell from the sky
B – Beckoning to any
C – Child who may still be awake.
D – Dark though her window was
E – Ever still she watched the star
F – Falling through the frosty air
G – Gracefully trailing its golden light.
H – Her eyes followed the
I – Icy star as it
J – Joyfully raced toward the earth
K – Knowing when it hit, its
L – Light would shatter into
M – Multiple pieces in the
N – Night-touched grass
O – Or would simply
P – Perish upon impact. The young girl
Q – Questioned whether the star
R – Realized it was plummeting
S – Straight down
T – Toward its
U – Unavoidable demise. The bright speck
V – Vanished into the trees, leaving the child to
W – Wonder what became of the
X – Xanthic stone. She
Y – Yearned to search for it as a
Z – Zephyr lulled her to sleep.

Sometimes the Stars Make Me Cry

By Elisabeth Shockley

Often when I pull into the driveway and it's dark, I lean the car seat back, open the skylight cover, and look out into the night. For various reasons there frequently isn't much to see besides a murky puddle, infinitely deep but never dark enough to be blinding. It is on these nights, during a time for myself that I so highly value, I feel I can just exist. I won't be judged. The cosmos, ever observant, does not have bias. I say this in comfort, or perhaps out of protection. Sometimes what I think is self-described as articulate and intense. Other times I have to sit in amazement at my own potential for stupidity.

Nevertheless, there are glimpses of poeticism. Recently I've found myself caught in the concept of the dichotomy of love. Its existence is harrowed as complete joy and yet it is a promise of pain. Love is a beautiful horror. Its fires can light up the night sky to the dark side of the moon, beyond the edges of the universe rivaled by only the sun and brightest stars; or it can burn you into the ground, down to the blazing core of the world matching the flames and pain of hell. Often it presents in tandem, simultaneously, or resultant, for there can be no love without loss.

The ultimate danger within love is that its muse starts to be seen everywhere. First, it's the songs that play on car rides, shared headphones, and speakers. Then, it's places visited together, introduced to one another. Finally, it's everything they do, everything they say. Who we love begins to define us and create us. My playlists are filled with songs my friends once introduced me to for the first time. My favorite spot for coffee is where I once met for a date. My go-to jacket for outings is one that a crush said looked good. These things spread until anything with a hint of remembrance becomes a constant memory. The people we love are all around us: my cousin is in the shows I watch, my best friend in the podcasts I listen to, my past partner in the colors I see.

We never truly stop loving. Once our hearts decide that they care for someone, they can never change that decision. That's why loss hurts: our love continues to reach out but no longer has somewhere to find solace. The ache can ease, but it doesn't go away. The pain can be covered, but it can never be hidden. The best aid is more love, a reminder of why we tried in the first place. My heart remembers everyone it has ever loved and everyone who has ever left. In denial it leaves a place for them, refusing to shrink but demanding to grow larger, to love more, and to expect more pain. Everyone I have ever loved remains in my heart. I see them in the stars.

I can see my friends' deepest desires, their aspirations, how desperate they are for their future. I feel my own wants, who I wish was in the car with me as I simply look and think about the mystery outside of what I know. Similar to the depersonalization of looking in a mirror for too long, losing a connection to the reflection, staring up can soon turn into staring out. Observing the infinite cosmos and the possibility of every universe, every scenario that could ever occur. It reminds me of how every person on Earth has their own extensive life, how I will never be able to know all of their stories, or even just one. There is so much I don't know, so much I will never be able to know. But when I get home, and I lean my car seat back, and open the skylight cover, I can know one absolute.

I will sit in the car,
and I will stare at the Stars,
and I will cry.

Dancing in the Moonlight

By Wyatt Gant

Brian swung one leg out of the police car, his boot stamping into the mud of the road. He clambered out of the passenger-side door into the cool night air. The heavy rain instantly drenched him, his uniform cap doing little to protect him. Brian gazed off into the swampy woods that lined either side of the road. Off in the distance, he could see the dim orange lights of surrounding houses and the vague silhouettes of naked trees, their bare branches stretching up into the cloudy night sky. The air was heavy with the fetid smell of the swamp and the earthy smell of the rain. The sound of the rain impacting the bountiful vegetation, the roof of the police car, and the mud of the road created a cacophony of pattering. The headlights of the car created a feeble zone of illumination that stretched into the night for a few meters before being swallowed by the night.

The house stood just inside the cone of light. It was a squat, ugly, wooden affair that was once a pale white color, but had been worn and muddied into a dull beige hue. Leafy ivy and vines clung to the side of the house so thickly that the wall almost seemed to be made of them. Several dusty glass windows were set into the walls, with dim, flickering lights visible behind them. The sound of music and loud, indistinct voices talking, occasionally punctured by the sound of a baby crying, emanated from the house. A small porch ran along the front of the house, constructed out of wood that was somehow in even worse condition than the rest of the house. A dim porchlight was situated above the door to the house. A small cloud of flies swarmed around the light, their buzzing almost audible from where Brian stood. The flies were always bad at this time of year.

John climbed out of the driver's-side door of the car, the impact of his boots splattering mud across his pants. He grimaced at the heavy rain before tromping towards Brian, his fingers playing with the hunting knife that was affixed to his belt.

"You know, just because these backroads don't technically have a speed limit, that doesn't mean you should go 70," Brian said, not looking away from the house.

"Maybe I drive better when you shut the hell up. Besides, we made it here safe, and the big guy had enough time to get a nap in." John rapped on the back window of the police car. A quiet groan sounded from inside the car and John stepped back quickly as the door swung open. Andrew, a portly, older man, climbed out of the back seat, hurriedly clapping his uniform cap over his head before the rain could soak his nearly-hairless head. Andrew walked around to the front of the car, entering the cone of illumination, and Brian followed closely behind him. John motioned for the two of them to wait as he went around to the trunk of the police car. He popped it open and rummaged around for several seconds before returning to where Brian and Andrew stood, a shotgun clutched in his hand.

"Hey, no. This is just a 415. We don't need that," Brian said quickly.

John grinned. "Think about it. I flash this thing, and those backwoods fucks will quiet down real quick. The noise complaint will be solved and we all get to go home."

"Do you have any idea how many codes that violates?" Brian said frantically, glancing towards Andrew for any support. Andrew just shrugged casually. Brian sighed in irritation before starting to make his way towards the door of the house. Andrew followed closely behind him, with John bringing up the rear.

The three men stepped onto the porch, the brittle wood creaking under their weight. Brian raised his hand and knocked on the door.

"Louisiana police! Open up!" Brian called, doing his best to sound authoritative.

"You guys wanna get dinner after this?" Andrew grumbled. Brian glanced towards him. Andrew was an older, more experienced officer than Brian or John. His right cheek bore a large scar, a trophy from some long-past escapade. Brian heard the house's door creak open and began to turn towards it, his eyes still on the faded trench that had been carved into Andrew's face.

And then Andrew's head exploded. The entire world slowed to a crawl. Brian stumbled back, losing his foot on the slick wood of the porch and tumbling back into the mud. Andrew fell backwards, already limp. John shouted something, his voice sounding strangely quiet to Brian. Brian forced his eyes towards the door, spotting a middle-aged man in a flannel shirt. In the man's hand was a revolver, the black metal glinting beneath the porch light. Brian scrambled to draw his pistol, but John was quicker. The man's chest erupted in a field of red blossoms as the shotgun's report rang out. The man flew back, landing on his back inside the house. Brian glanced at Andrew and immediately wished he hadn't. A black puddle of blood had already formed beneath Andrew's head, and rivulets of blood ran down from the entry wound. Brian turned

away from the sight and spewed what was left of lunch into the mud. John rushed towards Andrew before recoiling.

"Shit," John whispered quietly.

"The guy... is he dead?" Brian choked out gesturing towards the man's body, still fighting the bile in his throat. John approached the spot where the man had fallen, keeping the shotgun trained on him. Brian shakily climbed to his feet before walking towards John. John stood stock-still, just staring at the man's body. Brian opened his mouth to question him, only to stop when he observed the man's corpse.

The shotgun had torn through the cloth of the man's shirt and a wild pattern of tiny holes leaked crimson blood into the fabric. However, tiny lumps slowly slid beneath the man's skin. As Brian and John watched, one of the lumps wormed its way towards one of the shotgun wounds on the man's chest before squirming through the wound, revealing itself to be a larva of some kind, no more than an inch long. More of the larva began to surface, tunneling through the shotgun wounds or bursting through the skin along the man's arms and neck. One of the man's eyes bulged grotesquely before a larva squeezed itself through the jelly-like surface of the eye. Brian expelled what little remained of lunch onto the porch. John just stared in horror.

"We're both seeing that, right?" John asked, his voice sounding abnormally high.

"Uh...yeah..." Brian said, hating how scared his voice sounded.

"Hey! Anyone else in there?" John called into the dimly-lit interior of the house. For a few seconds, his only answer was the quiet music playing from somewhere inside the house. Then a woman's voice spoke.

"Yep! We're just in the sitting room!" The voice called cheerfully. John turned towards Brian, his eyes wide. Brian looked back, his eyes equally wide. John started to enter the house, stepping over the man's body and crushing several of the larva as he went. Brian drew his pistol and followed close behind him.

The interior walls of the house were covered in a dull yellow wallpaper. Flies clung to the walls and ceiling, with the occasional light fixture being swarmed by the insects. Tiny white specks covered the ugly caramel-colored carpet of the house. Brian stooped to touch them before realizing that they were fly's eggs. He quickly stood up, frantically brushing his hands on his pants. The two men slowly rounded a corner, revealing the sitting room.
The sitting room was a small room that was filled with people of all types. Men in flannels, a woman in a sundress, an old man bent over a walker, even an infant who sat on the floor. An old-fashioned record player sat near the back of the room, and quiet melodic music spilled from it. All of the furniture had been pushed into one corner of the room and messily piled atop each other. As John and Brian rounded the corner, every person in the room turned to look at them. Both men froze.
"John..." Brian whispered warningly.

The woman in the sundress took a step towards the men and John quickly shifted the shotgun in her direction. The woman stopped moving and smiled, just a little too happily. Brian saw something shift along the woman's hairline. A large lump slowly squeezed down the side of the woman's face, working its way along her cheek, past her too-wide smile and too-empty eyes. Brian took a step back, observing the other people in the room. All of them bore the same lumps, distended bulges that wormed their way beneath their skin. The woman in the sundress took several quick steps forward, raising her arms as she charged at John. The shotgun's report was deafening in the confines of the house. The woman's body fell backwards, the majority of her face sheared away by the blast. Every person in the room surged forward towards the two men. Brian turned and ran, desperately charging away from the sitting room and deeper into the house. John stood his ground, and Brian heard several more reports from the shotgun before he heard John shout as he was forced to the ground. Brian risked a glance back, looking just long enough to see a man in a raincoat, his face bulging with larval lumps lean towards John's throat and bite into it, tearing out a chunk of flesh and silencing John's shouting. Brian gagged heavily, but found his stomach had nothing else to expel. He kept running, continuing his desperate charge away from the carnage.

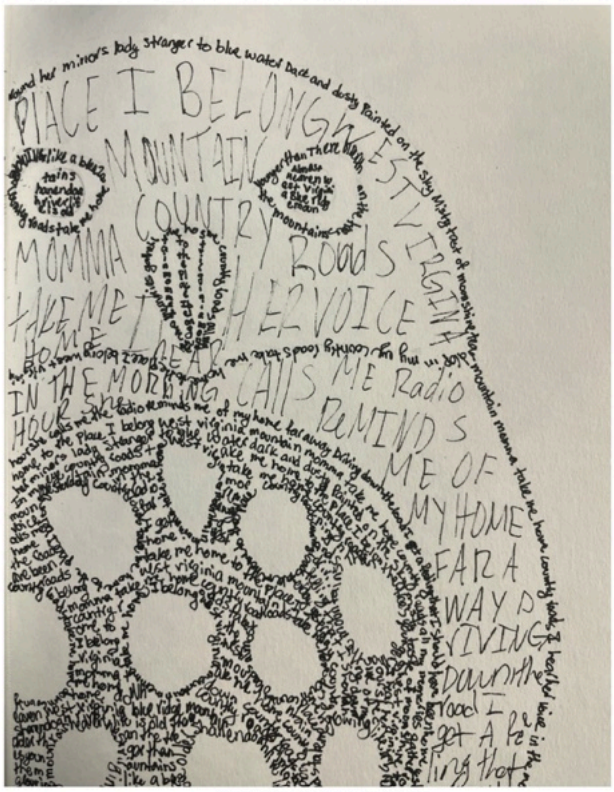
Brian slammed the door to the basement behind him, breathing heavily. He didn't remember how long he'd been running for, but it seemed as though he had finally found a safe place. He just needed a few moments to collect his thoughts. Brian slid slowly to the concrete floor of the basement, trying to slow his frantic breathing. The basement was cool and dark, but was small enough that Brian wouldn't have been able to lay down. Brian scooted along the floor until he was facing the door. He clutched his pistol tightly, however useless he thought it would be. John's shotgun had taken care of a few of those freaks, but the handgun was not nearly as powerful and they'd overwhelm Brian eventually. He'd end up just like John. Brian forced those thoughts from his mind.

He just had to focus on...

A loud slam resounded from the basement door. Brian scrambled backward, his pistol flying from his grasp as he pushed himself against the wall of the basement. A second slam reverberated through the room and the door was thrown open. And there was John, standing silhouetted against the half-light of the hallway behind him. John's throat wound slowly bled down the front of his uniform and his left forearm seemed to be entirely missing. Regardless, John smiled happily and looked towards Brian with too-wide eyes.

"Hey, Brian!" John called cheerfully.

Brian lunged for his pistol, screaming as he moved, but John stepped forward quicker, swinging his remaining arm into Brian and pushing him back. Up close, Brian could see the wriggling lumps beneath John's skin and the tiny white specks of fly eggs that were clustered inside the crimson sinew of his throat wound. The impact of John's fist threw Brian against the concrete wall of the basement. It wasn't enough to knock him out. As John scrambled to reorient himself, he saw John draw his hunting knife. Brian wished John had knocked him out, because then he wouldn't have to witness what John did to him next.



By Taylor Murphy

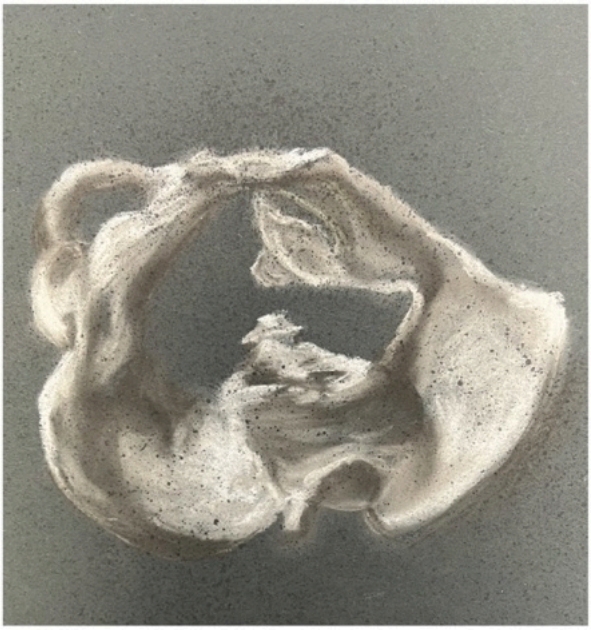


By Jayden Dupler

Out of Orbit

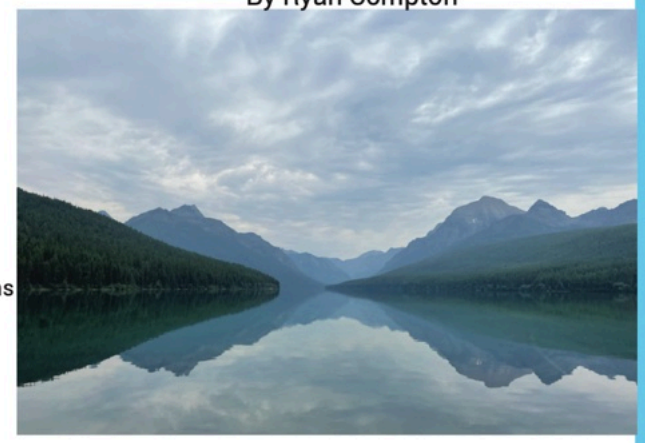
By Elizabeth Currier

Your voice is like a melody that sings a song my soul yearns to hear
Your smile is like a drug I am intoxicated
Your eyes gleam like molten pools of gold
I am falling into their depths
Your lilting laugh is like poison that runs through my veins
It ignites fire in its wake
Yet as you float further away
You will always remain in my orbit
Close enough to touch
But never to hold
To have but never to hold



By Lou Sechrist

By Ryan Compton



The Break Away

By Kjehl Campbell

Our Earth is our womb,
Us as a species,
all our idea and advancement,
Makes up the fetus of known space and time...
However, anyone can decipher that the departure of the womb or "birth" is an inevitable fate of
the fetus...
The walls close in,
Something is going wrong,
All comfort of this warm home is being stripped...
Our war and rape is this building discomfort,
it builds and builds,
And then birth into the new world comes...
Our species' birth will be the break from all hierarchy, ideology, and Anarchy...
Division dissipates,
One unified people broken away from the cradle,
Shooting for the stars...
It is no process that is designated to practice or meditation,
But rather a process that has always gone on...
From chemical reaction to body modification,

These events have continued in building to the end point of our three-dimensional reality,
Or our birth...
So, don't worry,
It's going to happen,
The question now of the individual is whether they'll accept this inevitability...



By Caitlin King



By Evelyn Dachs

Unnamed Poem

By Keiran Boyle

And so we watch,
A spectacle turned back upon us,
Forcing We to look, to act, to move.
To think more, write more, to pry above
The floorboards of a nation. To hear the
Cries for help through the opaque fog.
But the cries piercing the murk sound like
Change. The cries get clearer, they cheer, not a violent chant, a
Vehement nonviolence, peeping over the promontory,
The last bit of light, of hope, at
Dusk.

Then suddenly it is dark. They tell us we shall
Not try, continue to cry, forget about "all this."
They tell us to leave.
To go back to our countries, our closets. They call us
Sheep, snowflakes, slurs, words that taste bitter.
They hurt. But we shall not retaliate, or
Strike with violence, for peace hurts better
Than war. We shall strive to grieve.
Grieve death, suffering, cruelty, then
We shall choose

Peace.



By Ruby Foreman

Authors Note: This poem is written in the Golden Shovel form, and is based on Amanda Gorman's poem, "The Shallows" In golden shovel poems, the last words of each line make an already composed poem.

Life in Death and Death in Life

By Logan Anderson

I strolled through the forest, holding the soul of a deer who had just been shot during hunting season. I carried it to the barrier. But right as I was about to walk through the barrier, I saw something. Knowing my job was set on a specific time; I carried it through the barrier. When I walked back through the barrier, I went to see what I thought I saw. My footsteps left a trail of dying flowers and grass behind me. I placed my hand on a tree and peered around it. My eyes deceived me; I couldn't believe what I was seeing. A wonderful woman carrying a soul, but she was carrying it down, she placed it in the stomach of a sleeping fox. I began to blush at the sight of the beauty I was seeing. But I didn't realize that my hand was on the tree for too long. It began to crack and fall. I watched as it fell backwards. The figure looked up right at me. It looked at the tree beside me and the trail of death following behind me. A disgusted expression formed on her face as she haughtily looked away and began to walk away from me. I wanted to follow her, but the sounds of distressed souls called me back to my job.

I walked back in my footsteps to not kill anything else. I picked up the soul of a mother deer and her calf. I looked around and saw the two hunters walking away with grins on their faces, leaving the bodies behind. I picked up the souls with a frown on my face. I wanted to do something, but I knew it would disrupt the flow of the universe; Death can't interfere with the life of other living species. I had grown to accept that; I had been doing this job since the beginning of time. When I picked up the souls they stopped calling out, they gained a sense of peace, they became warm and bubbly in my hands. Their pigment of color changed too, from a cold dark red, to a light soft yellow. I carried them back into the barrier where they formed spiritual bodies similar to their physical bodies. I watched as the doe, and her calf touched heads and walked off. Seeing those reuniting moments between mother and calf is what allowed me to carry on with my job.

My job never allowed me to rest though, there were always souls calling out for help. From the smallest bacteria to the largest creature in the world, I always had something to do; it was never a slow day, never a single soul for the day, there we millions of souls I had to carry and care for.

It was a dim day on this specific day, like the world was filled with a sorrow that it couldn't express. This day I walked towards the cry of a dolphin and found a momma dolphin, chasing after a large shark, with what I'm assuming was her calf in the mouth of the shark.

Behind the mother dolphin I saw a small soul trying to follow. I picked it up and began to walk after the dolphin. As death it's my duty to allow the soul to say their goodbye to their care giver if they die young. When the dolphin stopped it cried out a feeling of true pain, true sorrow; I don't blame it, I couldn't say I felt for it; I had never had a child of my own, or any real emotions, but I could sense its pain, having carried off countless young animals I had grown a pain when I heard a mother's cries. I held the soul up to the dolphin and it gently touched the dolphin. The dolphin stopped crying for a moment, as if it could feel the child's presence, before it swam away with great sorrow. When the soul was done saying goodbye, I carried it through the barrier.

I watched as it formed a spiritual body. It didn't swim away, it stayed there watching the barrier, like something else would come through.

"Why do you wait?" I asked it, curious on why it didn't leave and join the others.

"My momma will need me when she comes here, and I'll be there for her," The dolphin clicked.

I smiled warmly and put my hand on the side of the soul's face, "Your momma will be very happy for that, I promise, she'll see you again" I walked back through the barrier and continued my job.

I walked into a hospital for Veterans. A soul called my name from one of the rooms. I walked in and saw people holding the hands of the Veteran. The soul was already saying goodbye to all of his relatives and

friends. When the soul saw me, it greeted me as an old friend. I picked it up and said to it, "You can rest easy now, you've full filled what you were sent here to do" I carried it through the barrier and watched as he turned back around towards me.

I let go of the man's soul, he was a fierce and proud veteran of the army. He'd done so much in his life and I felt proud carrying his soul. When we reached the barrier I let him go and watched him walk towards the light beyond the barrier He turned around to face me a smile on his face "Thank you" He gave me a hug and saluted me before walking off deep

towards the light beyond the barrier.
"Good luck, Ruby" I said saluting him back. I walked back into the hospital as they wheeled off his body. I placed my hand on his chest as he was wheeled past me. "You did good"
Then there was a soul calling to me from outside. I walked past all the rooms when I saw someone wheeled past me, she was panting and screaming as her husband followed beside her, his hand getting crushed by the women grip. And behind that bed was the women I saw before carrying a soul. I stopped to stare at the figure, but she did not the same for me. She walked past me with disgust on her face; her nose up in the air, making me feel inferior. I followed her with my eyes as she walked past me never turning my head. I went back to my job. I walked out of the hospital to see a car crash.
I watched as a soul began to rise out of a body on the ground. People gathered around the body, just watching, some had their phones out to record, some were rushing inside to get help, not knowing that the paramedics were already coming. "He's dead," I heard one of them say. I knew he was, but I needed people to know before I took his soul.
I nimbly moved between the people as they posted their videos and pictures to their small devices, to get praise from strangers in the shape of pixel hearts.
The soul seemed to know who I was, and why I was here. So, he pleaded with me in silence "Please, I can't leave my daughters, they need their father,"
I looked towards the hospital as paramedics ran two little girls into the hospital on separate gurneys. "Come on, just hold on a little more, you can do it" I said to the spirit, rooting it on. The body suddenly jolted. Someone saw that and rushed over with an AED. "Yes!" I screamed. I watched as the spirit began to crawl back into its body, fighting agains the force pulling him away from his body. He opened its eyes and smiled at me. He gave me a weak thumbs up as he was carried off in an ambulance. I waved goodbye as the ambulance carried away the saved soul.
I turned back around to the hospital. In the window I could see the woman staring at me. I only looked at her for a moment before I was drawn away by the sounds of another soul.
Our paths crossed a couple of times over the next couple months. Each time she seemed to be more hostile towards me, she never talked to me, or would touch me, but I could feel her hate radiating from her soul. After eons of being Death, you can feel the type of soul you're carrying, which is why I know how to treat the souls to make them comfy before they go into judgment, but this soul, the soul of life seemed to be everything. Like she'd been through everything and yet nothing at all, like she was newly born.
I was in someone's house as she had died in her sleep from high blood sugars. Surrounding her body were containers of ice cream, McDonalds, Burger King, Dunkin Donuts, and more. She had died with the TV on the news channel.
"Recent events in Ukraine have lead to a war going on between Russia and Ukraine"
A foreign feeling filled my soul, "Why can't humans ever learn, fighting has never stopped fighting, it's only cause more fighting, and more deaths of innocent people" I carried the soul past the barrier and let it go to judgment. I spent the next couple weeks wandering the world. I cared for some scuba divers in the ocean, some who died of old age, and some animals who'd fallen victim to the food chain. But then I began getting hundreds of cries from Ukraine and Russia. "It's started" I cried softly. I began to make my way across the world towards Ukraine.
I spent the next 12 years in Ukraine and Russia practically running back and forth between the countries. Because I had to stay in Ukraine and Russia, the death around the world had piled up. So, when the war ended, I had to work triple time for the next couple years to finish carrying all the souls away. Each time apologizing for having them wait for so long for me, for crying out for so long.
After I had caught up with everything it felt nice to slow down and just go back to casually caring for souls. I watched carefully for the next couple of years after going back to normal. I did that because wars are never just one and done there are always aftershocks; like an earthquake, people can't let go of their feelings and hold onto grudges. But thankfully this time, the war was one and done, to my surprise.
I was in a hospital watching another spirit leave its body. The man from the car crash so many years before had finally lived his life to the full. I greeted him as an old friend as he did to me.
He told all about his life, his highs and his lows, what happened after the car crash, and what happened after the war. I stood by his bed holding his soul as he talked, I listened gladly to him, after so many years it was so nice to hear a soul talk about the good in their life. When he was done, I walked him to the barrier. On the way I had caught a glimpse of the women. She had seen me too, but she was doing her job. I waved goodbye to the soul as he left me, reuniting with his

ancestors who had been waiting for him.

A smile broke my tough face. The feeling of my face bending into a smile made me smile more, it felt nice. But my smile was cut in half when I fel and heard the cry of a newborn child in another room.

I slowly walked into the room and saw that the mother was crying as she held her newborn child. I looked at the spirit floating gently above the infant's body. The women looked at the soul shocked, she tried to force the soul into the body, but it only cried out in pain. I grabbed her hands gently and lifted them from the soul.

“You can't take it; she was meant for greatness!" The women said to me beginning to cry.

“I'm sorry, but I can't choose when someone dies, it's just my job to make sure they're comfy in the afterlife" I picked up the soul and began to carry it to the barrier. Tears streamed down my face, and I began to audibly cry as I carried the infant's soul. I looked at the soul. My soul pieced together what her future would look like. She was destined to solve so much for this world, she would stop wars, find a cure for humanities horrible gluttony, and even invent space travel. I stood at the barrier holding the soul. “I'm sorry," I whispered.

The women cried by the mother. The mother refused to let her baby go. The women held the blankets crying into them. Then the mothers' cries changed. They became up lifting, happy, joyed. The women looked up to see me holding the soul in the child's body.

I watched as my arm began to change. It changed colors, from a black color to a vibrant green. It hurt, bad, I was in pain, but I wasn't going to let go of the soul until it had settled in its body, until the soul had fused with the infants heart. When the baby began to scream and cry I knew I could let go. When I did the body rejected my hand, it threw out my hand with such violence it had broken it. I fell on the ground grasping my arm.

I looked at my hand and saw it looked like the women in the room with me. The women didn't say anything she just got up and hugged me. “Thank you" She said.

“I couldn't do it, she was destined to save this world, I couldn't let her die without helping the world," I looked down and saw her hand and it had changed. Her hand looked like mine and my hand looked like hers.



By Gage Harne

Death Listens

By Pinelope Williams

The strings felt like razors against my skin, yet my fingers floated along them—it's where they yearn to be. Hard wood pressed itself against my aching abdomen. My mother's house has never felt so full. The drab furniture almost swayed with my melody, mother herself dancing in her wake. With my melancholy tune swelling, something apparent stuck out to me. In the corner of the living room, I could hear a ticking, almost a rattle, acting as an uncanny metronome. My head lifted upwards and my eyes met his.

A white face and dark, dark eyes held my gaze. The etiolated surface was so disparate from his eyes, they were more void of light than Vantablack itself. Unfamiliarity flooded my nerves, yet the figure's toothy grin soothed me. Each enamel mass gleamed at me, encouraging me to show them mine. His clothes were prosaic and simple: black and gray articles of cloth draped over his frighteningly thin limbs. For a moment, I stopped playing. My eyes dug into his and I really saw him, and for once, someone truly saw me.

"Hello," I greeted him with a soft, genuine smile. "Can I play a song for you?" I paused and then, before he could even respond, I continued, "I wrote it myself." The peculiar man nodded, his immutable expression ostensibly growing upward. I could feel my own lips curling into a childish grin. An innocent giggle jumped from my throat and suddenly, I couldn't sit still anymore. This is all I've wanted.

I needed air. I clutched at the ephemeral air around me, my lungs reaching up from my throat to inspire it. My heart pumped blood with useless oxygen throughout my body, it's fluent dance becoming laggard. With a barely beating vessel, I smiled once more and played for the familiar stranger. My sore, calloused digits crushed and slid along the strings. The searing, exquisite pain spread to my bones, completely bypassing the nerves and muscle.

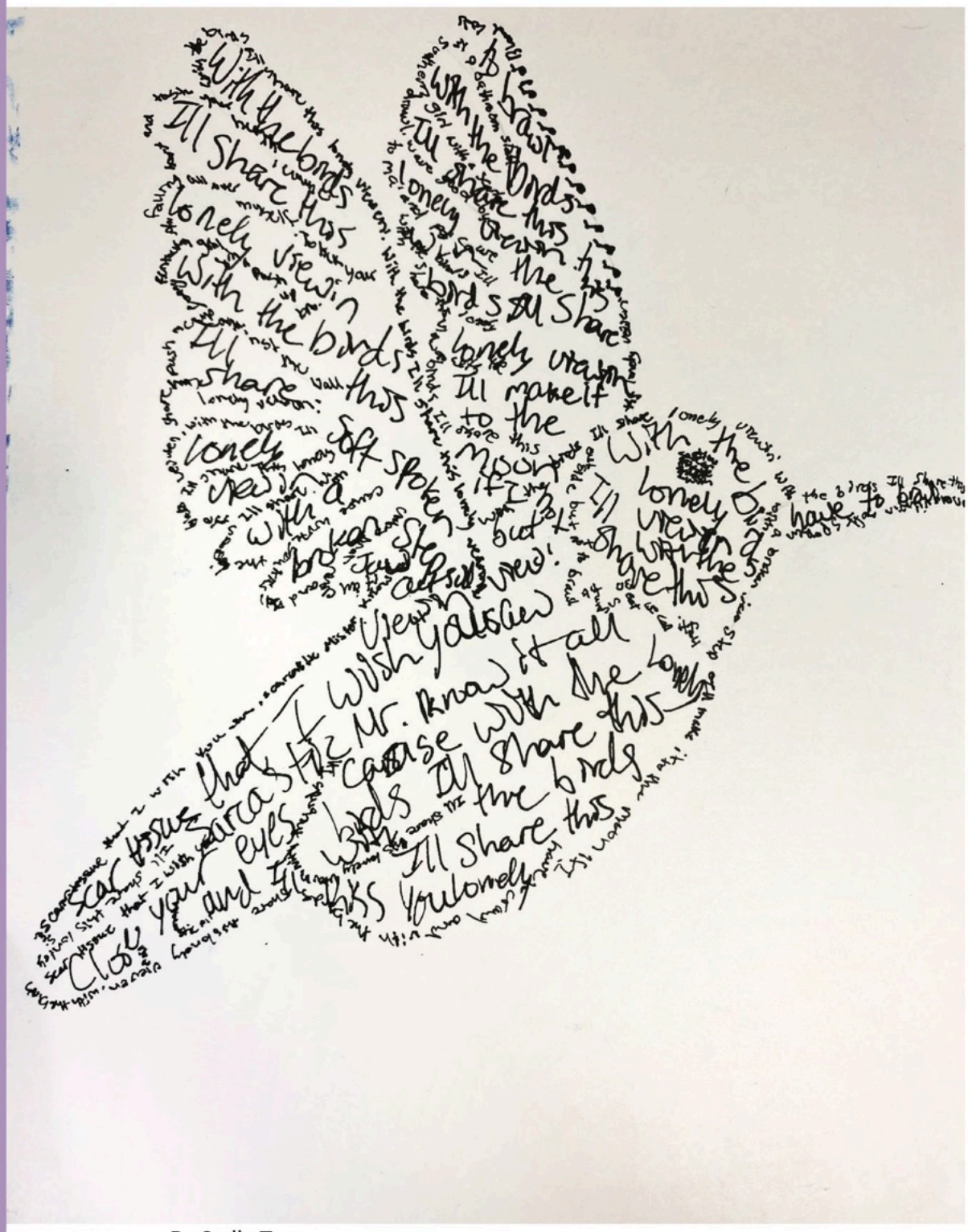
I continued to play for my one-man audience; I played and played and played, even when I couldn't play anymore. And then it stopped. My pain stopped. The glass swimming in my skin dissolved into my empty bloodstream. The elephant jumping in my skull, the beetles gnawing at my brain, the snakes swimming in my veins, the ineffable, prodigious affliction ceased to be. With such superlative relief it was as if my sempiternal torment had never existed in the first place. My suffering had completely diminished and I played better than ever before. With one concluding arrangement of euphoric chords, I ended my song with one final exhale.

The man towered over me, in awe. His arms ascended and his hands rattled together: he was clapping. I smiled, my lungs still, and I directed my legs to meet the man. I lifted my expiring arms and hugged his torso. His spindly limbs turned warm as my fingers grazed his ribs; just like the strings they glided on before. Tears threatened to spill from my eyes and with one last look around, I blinked once more and kept them shut.

"Thank you."



Something About Eden By Thomas LaFave



By Cadin Tate

Before the End

By Hailey Cox

It wasn't fair. We all had our childhoods stolen by The Sickness, and we would never get that back. It would probably never go back to normal either.

I would often sit and let my only good memories drift through my brain like the clouds I used to watch. I remembered the old house in the country with the river running beside it. My brother and dad and I would go out and catch toads with our bare hands and run around like mad men until the sun went down. Then, we would start to smell the delicious dinner cooking inside, and Dad would go in to help. My brother and I would continue our imaginary adventures, pretending the dog was a noble steed and we were two knights that fought injustice in our kingdom. After a while, our mother would call us inside and we would enjoy a mouth-watering, home-made meal, followed by freshly baked pie. As long as anyone lived, they could never forget the taste of my mother's apple pies. They were truly and fully, the best thing I had ever eaten. After that, we would all climb up the hill and catch fireflies in jars and lay in the tall grass and watch the stars. I still remembered the feeling of the nighttime summer breeze softly moving my hair around my face, the warmth of my brother on one side of me, and my parents on the other. When the winter rolled around, our parents would throw an extravagant birthday party for James and I. A delicious cake, followed by a snowball fight, and then the best part: Presents. Every year, my brother and I each got one gift on our birthday. It was always something small, but magnificent. One year, though, our parents couldn't afford any gifts. Of course we were a bit disappointed, there hadn't been any presents for Christmas either, but we were so content with our lives back then. According to what our Dad told us later on, I had said,

"It doesn't matter, I have James!" and hugged him. We were the perfect family, but something was missing.

Then, Avery came along. I immediately knew that they were the most important thing in my entire world. James was jealous at first, but when he started to spend some time with them, he realized how incredible they were too. We would bring them with us on our adventures, gently showing them the wonders of the river and the beautiful view that we were so lucky to have right out our back door. They were our little explorer. I took a picture of Avery one day, when they were about two years old, in a sun hat, sitting in the beautiful garden that my mother and James planted, smiling up at my camera with a beautiful glimmer in their eyes. That was the thing about them: no matter what that kid was put through, they never lost that light. Even though almost every joy in our lives was ferociously ripped from our young hands only five years after Avery was born, they still held on. I kept that faded polaroid with me through everything to remind myself of why I was still going.

Nature or Death

By Rachel Drake

The great aspen had seen the five stages of grief over, and over, and over again. She had seen tears. Of course. Enough tears to water her roots for years. but she had also seen those that screamed their sadness out. Asking their love why they couldn't stay for them. Dropping to their knees in front of a headstone long after their voice was gone. Some had leaned against her trunk asking whatever god might answer to bring them back. To take them instead.She had seen parents visit their children, lovers meet their past loves, children visiting their siblings. Smiling wistfully at the granite, and telling their beloved of new news. And even though she had viewed those things she had never once felt those emotions. For what was there for her to mourn? Perhaps she could not grieve because she had never loved. She mulled this over, but eventually she decided that it was fine with her. No one had ever loved her, so when her roots tore up, she would go with no scream, no whimper because no one would hear it.



Pretty Bird By Lily Carlson



Pura Vida By Madison Burda

Notes From The Editors

Without art in our world, it would be impossible to connect with people. Whether it be music, visual art, writing, speaking, sculpting, or other media of creativity, those who choose to create have vast influence on society. Art has power in our world, and this magazine perfectly highlights that. Allowing creative people to be published offers an opportunity to spread light in our community, as well as awareness for important issues. These students create, just like every artist creates, in order to connect with their peers and their community. Artists create so they can have an impact on individuals, even if it is only one person, for that is the purpose of art. Pen and Ink serves as an opportunity for people to continue creating. It also serves as inspiration for people who are seeking out ways in which they can express themselves. Art is vulnerable, and to put yourself out there is challenging, so I commend these artists for their vulnerability. I have been honored to carry on this Helena tradition, and am thrilled to see so many high school students partaking in the arts. These artists inspire me, and I cannot wait to see just how these fantastic individuals change our community, and our beautiful world.
Thank you for this opportunity to create.

-Keiran Boyle

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Whether you are one of the selected artists, a proud friend or family member, an unpublished writer, a curious passerby, or anyone in between, thank you for caring about creative work made by very young individuals. It can take a lot to put yourself out there through writing and art, especially when you are young and still trying to decide who you are. So if you are someone who took the time, even passing, to look through this magazine, thank you for caring about something that is incredibly important to so many people. And if you are someone who submitted to the magazine this year, I cannot commend you enough for your creativity, vulnerability, and bravery. I hope your work will continue to be meaningful and impactful to you, whether you were selected or not, and that you keep sharing it with those around you. Because I guarantee if you do, you will find someone else who thinks it is meaningful as well.

-Miranda Sheafor

INDEX

Emma Allred 43
Logan Anderson 58
Meika Arensmeyer 12
Vesperia Bacon 36
Lily Berrin 45
Keiran Boyle 57
Mia Brinton Cover, 30, 31
Brayden Brisko 38, 48
Madison Burda 65
Kjehl Campbell 55
Lily Carlson 50, 64
Alli Christensen 14, 34, 48
Áine Cleary 47
Ryan Compton 55
Hailey Cox 63
Elizabeth Currier 31, 55
Evelyn Dachs 57
Tom Davidson 18
Sara Jeanne Dorrington 10
Rachel Drake 64
Jayden Dupler 3, 7, 54
Will Eaton 37
Emiley Ereth 31
Michael Everett 34
Ruby Foreman 57
Selah Frederickson 26
Wyatt Gant 52
Hudsen Grovom 22
Kylee Hamper 13, 16, 48
Teddy Harman 4
Gage Harne 60
Patty Hartman 45
Felicity Heinzie 11
Jordan Hewitt 32
Hailey Jones 18
Morgan Jones 37
Morgan Kaufman 32
Caitlyn King 17, 56
Fox Kolar 20, 39
Allysa Komeotis 22
Fiona Kuntz 43
Thomas LaFave 61
Lynae Leeper 9
Tizer Lindgren 33
Caili Lowney 42
Romeo Malone 7
Serif Michel 7
Mahana Mobley 32
James Moore 40, 41
Lanay Morris 10
Taya Munden 46
Breelyn Nelson 45
Dawson Oclander 32
Shelley Olsen 4, 13
Liv Perry 10, 41, 44
Izaak Ramirez 4
Lynsey Read 4
Autumn Richeson 15
Andy Roberts 33, 37
Hannah Rosine 8
Aliester E. Salome 18, 47
Lou Sechrist 55
Miranda Sheafor 38
Elisabeth Shockley 51
Elena Shuber 31
Amelia Sigafoos 33
Paige Springer 23
Brailey Sublette 6
Bridger Sullivan 9
Robert Stimpson 6, 40, 49
Zander Taylor 8, 39
Cadin Tate 41,62
Emery Todd 50
Joelle Tooke 41
Lillian Ware 5, 19
Aiden Weber 9
Grayce Wilkins 50
Pinelope Williams 61
Alyona Zimmerman 43, 49