

The page is framed by a highly detailed, colorful border. At the top and bottom, two cherubs are depicted in a classical style, surrounded by a variety of flowers including tulips, lilies, and pansies. The border is filled with intricate floral and foliate patterns, creating a rich, decorative frame for the central text.

ANTHOLOGY

Volume 26
A Publication of
Tarleton State University

Anthology

We chose the flower motif for the cover because of the etymology of *Anthology*. The word *Anthology* comes from the Greek words *anthos* (flowers) and *legein* (gather). The definition, according to our dictionary, is a collection of prose, poetry, and visual arts.

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ANTHOLOGY 26

ART IN ONLINE GALLERY

These art pieces have been selected to appear in the 2019–2020, Volume 26 Gallery of *Anthology* and can be viewed online at www.tarleton.edu/anthology.

Daniel Amador
Dictator's True Colors
Motion

Cassidy Balder
A man, duh, in the mirror
Blue
Four Eyes
Remy n Flowers

Kennedy Berry
Attention
A Different Perspective
Happy Dog Days
On the Run
Through the Spring

Klaire Brock
Watering Hole Fun

Taylor Clayton
The Factory Tower
The Fair Grounds
Heaven's Valley
A Sweet Escape

Alexcianna Diaz
Ellis Pecan Co
Versailles Swan

Adam Freeman
True Love's Kiss

Case Galbraith
Vulpes Vulpes

Kaitlenn Gerke
Through a Looking Glass

Morgyn Granville
Dog Portrait

Olya Haun
Counting a Chicken Before It
Hatches
Keeping Time
Life Spent Working

Alex Huerta
Kevin G.
Roosevelt Views
Seth J. 01
Seth J. 02
Streetside

Isabella M. Immormino
The Hunter

Jeffery Jacobs
Sprite Colors
Sprite Neon Pink

Ashley Medeiros
Broken Home
Football Star
Monarch Season

Laura O. Mendoza
Amarillo
Storm

Kaleigh Peacock
Life's a Beach

Mariel Perez
Evolving
Memories

Dakota Stowe
Conscious Lost
Perfect Day
Today Was a Weird Day
Wiggly Skull

Olivia Teague
Conjoined Sunshine

Arynn Tomson
Beetle

Zachary Watson
Mountains at Sunrise
Woods Road

EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS

Our Editors' Choice Awards honor individuals who have contributed outstanding works to this volume. The range of talent demonstrated by these students exemplifies the breadth of creativity at Tarleton State University.

**EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ART CYCLE:
*BEAUTY WITHIN, FIERCE, GOLDEN GODDESS***

Olya Haun

for dramatic, distinctive imagery and composition

EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING POEM:

Ky Bray

for bravely upsetting the status quo

EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ARTIST:

Isabella M. Immormino

for range of subjects and design intensity

WILLIAM B. MARTIN AWARD FOR WRITING EXCELLENCE:

Hailey Garner

The William B. Martin Award for Writing Excellence is given annually to a student whose written material achieves a level of outstanding craftsmanship, creativity, and a demonstration of exceptional nuances that set it apart from all others in consideration. Hailey Garner's contributions to Volume 26 demonstrate these qualities.

DANIEL AMADOR

ABUELITA

Abuelita (Ahb-wuh-lee-tah) — Grandma

Abuelito (Ahb-wuh-lee-toh) — Grandpa

Amá (Ah-mah) — Mom

Apá (Ah-pah) — Dad

Emmanuel stared at his phone, confused as to why Apá was calling him. Apá never called him while he was in school. He always said he didn't want to distract Emmanuel from his education, so what made today different? With the teacher's acknowledgment, Emmanuel excused himself from the classroom and answered the phone.

"Holá, Manny," said Apá. That's how he always greeted him, but Emmanuel, knowing his dad, immediately took note of Apá's tone: whisper-like, not the usual lighthearted tone he always used.

"Holá, Apá," said Emmanuel. "You don't usually call me during school. What's going on?" There was nothing but silence between the two for a few seconds. Apá sighed heavily, which was a dead giveaway that what he had to say was not good. It didn't seem like a long time, but, in reality, that was more than enough time for Emmanuel's heart to sink into his stomach.

"Manny . . . Abuelita passed away this morning."

More silence.

"Are you okay, Apá?" That's all Emmanuel could utter at that moment.

"I'm okay. I'm at peace . . . Abuelito told me that Abuelita accepted Christ in her heart just before she passed." Apá, a devout Christian, fought heavily with Abuelita for years to get her to do that, so knowing that it happened must have brought him some comfort. Though there were traces of melancholy in his words, he truly did sound at peace with everything.

"That's good," said Emmanuel chokingly.

Silence once again.

"I called to let you know that me and Amá are leaving for Mexico right now. We're going to bury her and spend time with Abuelito and

the family. We really wish we could take you, but it's just not safe with all the violence going on over there. You're our only child, and we don't want to risk anything happening to you, okay?"

"Okay, Apá. Thank you for letting me know. Tell everyone I said 'hi' and that I love them."

"We will, Manny. We'll see you when we get back on Sunday." It was Wednesday. "We love you so much. Everything will be okay."

"Yes, Sir. . . . Be careful. I love y'all too." Emmanuel struggled to grasp the news he just received. He didn't want anyone interrogating him, so he fought his hardest to hold everything in for the rest of the school day.

When Emmanuel came home after school, he threw off his backpack and fell back onto the couch in the living room. As he was staring at the ceiling, tears began to pour out, one by one at first and gradually multiplying. Emmanuel had every reason to cry. He and Abuelita lived nearly 1000 miles apart, with him in central Texas and her in central Mexico. This, along with the violent state her part of Mexico was in, coupled with her old age, meant Emmanuel had seen his only living abuelita once in his sixteen years of life. The one time she made the journey to the U.S. to visit him and his parents was when Emmanuel was six years old. He barely remembered anything from that time, not when Abuelito and Abuelita arrived, not when they left, and nearly nothing in between. The only small memory Emmanuel did have of his Abuelita was something he remembered the most, something that gave him hope.

They were sitting at the dining table, something Abuelita didn't have back home in Mexico. She brought her knitting materials with her because, apparently, she loved to knit. She started getting after it, knitting the first part of a small blanket with ease. Little Emmanuel was absolutely fascinated at what his Abuelita was doing, so naturally, he was curious and wanted to give it a try. Abuelita picked him up, sat him on her leg, and carefully placed the knitting needles in his hands, holding the ends with the sharp points for his safety. She slowly started knitting, with Emmanuel mimicking her hand and wrist motions, thinking he was the one who was doing the knitting.

Even though he didn't realize what was going on, it didn't matter to him. Abuelita and her grandson made the most of her visit. Her unforgettable smile and his smile, her even more unforgettable laugh and his laugh, and everything else in between made that sweet

moment much more memorable. Even though it was the only thing Emmanuel remembered from that time, he knew it was something he wouldn't have traded for the world, not then and definitely not now.

Emmanuel was all alone in the home his abuelita once graced, holding tight onto that single experience with a mental grip tighter than God's. Over the next few days, as he lay down grieving, the weight of guilt would press down on his chest. Feelings of self-blame and regret would flood his mind.

"Why did I not try harder to see her again? Did she leave this world thinking I didn't love her?" These questions would swirl around in his head repeatedly. Emmanuel felt those emotional and mental punches, attacking him repeatedly until it became nearly unbearable.

Then, when the pain approached the point of being unbearable, Emmanuel felt an embrace he had only ever experienced once before: from Abuelita. The warmth of it comforted him. He felt her hand on top of his, mimicking that sweet moment he held dearly in his heart. At that moment, he realized ever after her departure, she was still there by his side. It felt permanent, like it became a part of him at that instance. It provided Emmanuel the reassurance he desired. Abuelita would be there to embrace him in all his future troubles. This was enough to aid him in surviving the days leading up to Sunday.

The door opened Sunday afternoon. In walked Apá with a redeemed smile on his face, and Amá shared the same expression. Emmanuel could see his Abuelita's smile in theirs.

"Holá, Manny," they both said gleefully.

He had no words. All he could do was smile and go up and embrace them both in a way he had only felt twice before. Though he never got the chance to see Abuelita again in person, Emmanuel received comfort in knowing that she was still indeed with him.

DANIEL AMADOR

PROFOUNDLY YOU

At first, you seemed
Demure in demeanor
Esoteric in nature,
But,
You appeared amicable.
So, I slowly approached
And got to know you
Then,
With serendipitous brevity,
I found myself ineffably
In love with you.

How whimsy you were
When we watched Lucy
Speak of vitametavegamins.
Oh,
How we, together, would
Devour Jell-O and beignets
While watching animations,
Also,
Dancing in the hibiscus and calla lily.
It was all surreal and bodacious,
Even supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

But our love's milieu was ephemeral.
The eloquence of your vernacular
Luminesced the monstrosity
That was your coquettish ostentation.

You, the one I loved profoundly . . .

GUADALUPE ANGUIANO

THE PROMISE

How did it come to this? What did I do to deserve such injustice? From the moment of my birth, I have always done the right thing even if it meant sacrificing what I wanted most. From the moment of my birth, I have done what needed to be done without questioning the motives as to why it needed to be done.

This darkness is all-consuming. It eats at my soul. As I sit here, trapped in these four walls, I try to keep myself sane. I try to remember the few happy moments in my life, but they seem to escape me. All I can do is remember the harsh moments I have lived in my short life. I have seen more cruelty in my 21 years of living on this planet than a person who has 50 more years than I do. Yet, what can I expect by the way this place is governed? Most of the people here think they live in a utopian society, but they do not know the truth. The few who do know either revolt against the royal family or completely ignore it for the fear that they feel. Yet, I know the truth, and I have not done anything to free my people from this burden.

Ruthless and shrewd parents raised me. They never showed their emotions because they did not have any. From the moment of my birth, they trained me to have no emotions, but I never fully accepted their training. I trained myself to know how to feel, but to keep those feelings from ever showing. I keep them a secret.

I look around me, and all I can see are four walls that keep me locked up. Not a single light can shine through this place. This darkness is all-consuming. It is slowly eating at my soul. How long can I survive it? How long will it be until I have no soul left and I completely resemble those who raised me? I have no emotional attachment to the people who raised me. The only attachment I could say I had to them once would be loyalty. But not now, not after what they have done to me.

I cannot take it anymore! I cannot take this darkness anymore! It is too consuming. I get up and scream, "Let me out! Let me out! I have done nothing to deserve this! All I have ever done is follow your orders! I ignored everything else. So, damn it, let me out!" My screams are ignored. I feel desperate, but then suddenly I feel anger

and betrayal. I let those two feelings fester into a disease that cannot be cured.

Hours pass by, and I still sit within the consuming darkness, but it does not have power over me anymore. I have realized why he locked me up. The reason he did it is beyond cruel. I will no longer let him use me for his benefit. Therefore, I have come to a resolution, and I know what I must do. Suddenly, the door opens. Light floods into the room, and I am blinded by its intensity. I hear his voice, which I have come to hate with a passion. I cannot stand to hear that voice anymore because it belongs to the tyrant father I have come to hate with a passion.

“Athena, you will follow me to the chamber.”

I get up from the floor and start to walk towards the door. Before he allows me to leave the dark room, he says to me, “Athena, you are an example to our kingdom. You must behave accordingly.”

In a calming tone that did not reflect how I felt, I responded to him, “How have I not been an example to our kingdom? I have done everything in my power to appease you, to do as you say and to never question your motives.”

“Yes, from the moment of your birth you have. Until yesterday. You disappointed me yesterday. That I will not forgive.”

My ire is rising, but he does not know it. I respond to him, “Over what are you disappointed?”

“I am disappointed in the way you responded to me after the offer I gave you.”

“You offered, not ordered. Had you ordered, as you are accustomed to do, I would have said *yes*. However, I will not aid your tyrannical ways anymore. I refuse to become Princess Regent.”

“Very well; you leave me no choice.”

He raised his hand and slapped my face with brute force. I fell to my side and, my weight bruised my arm. He thinks to dominate me by brute force. I let him think that. I let him think that he has power over me. It is all part of my plan.

Before he can raise his arm to slap me again, I scream, “Fine! I accept! I will do as you say!”

I get up to face him. I look at his face. I stare into his eyes to see if there is emotion in them, but there is none. His eyes are empty and frigid. His face is nonchalant. Once again, he proves to me that he has no emotions. He turns his back on me and starts to walk away. I start

to walk after him, but I stop myself. I turn back and look back into the dark room. In the room, there is nothing but concrete walls. Those walls will be forever etched in my memory. As I look at them, I make a secret promise to my people and myself, one that will force me to make the tyrant believe he has dominion over, one that involves actions that no one will ever see coming or know about, until the final deed is done. Yet it will grant my people true freedom.

It is a promise that will be remembered by all, especially him, the tyrant. He will remember me as Athena the savage traitor, but the people will remember me as Athena the savior and true princess to the people.

I hear him say, "Athena, will you please hurry up."

I turn my back on the dark room and start walking towards him. I start walking towards a fate I cannot escape from nor do I want to. I will fulfill this promise, even if it costs me my life.

DAELYN BASSHAM

DESTINATION AORTA

I've found a new place
that I can call home
there are no walls
there is no roof
and it lacks a door.
But still in this place
I hear a strange knocking
that's soft then big
weak then strong
beating more and more.
It is here that I find
a warmth previously unknown
wrapped around me
squeezing tight
not letting go.
And only now did I realize
I am lodged in your artery
completely content
with being suffocated
so slowly.

DAELYN BASSHAM

DISTANCE

You cynical lover—
I am your perfect victim
with my bloated heart
and endless tears.

You hateful adventure—
The strings I so carefully wove
you slowly pick apart
with ease.

You manipulative luxury—
To walk your foreign grass
leaves my garden of comfort
to wither.

You exciting fuck—
Go bother someone else.

REBECCA BEDINGFIELD

TOKI

The dry west Texas heat is unbearable for many people. Most folks would elect to spend the hot afternoons in the comfort of their homes, listening to the ceiling fan hum and waiting for the sweet love of God to click on when the temperature in the house dropped below 75 degrees. The smell of fresh peaches filled our home as Mom and Grandma diligently peeled, sliced, cooked, and preserved each one for another day. Today was not the day or the time to disrupt Mom with unnecessary questions of permission. Besides, I was nine and clearly old enough to make my own decisions. As Grandma continued to prepare peaches, she sipped on a Tab diet soda and shouted the price of a can of Campbell's soup at the television. Grandma would wait for Bob Barker to confirm to her, "The Price is Right," but she would ultimately change her mind and the price by .03 cents before Bob would reveal if her price was right. In the kitchen, my sister and I gulped down the last of our cherry Kool-Aid, and then we signaled to each other to go to our bedroom.

We checked to make sure the bedroom door was tightly closed, which was signified with a "click," and then we began to conduct business. We each counted out our coins we had saved from our endless stream of odd jobs. The thought of having \$2.00 each was a comforting feeling, and we knew our bounty would be plentiful. I carefully placed my coins in my red-beaded coin purse which was missing a few beads and had a stray thread where the beads once were, but it served its purpose, and that was important. As soon as we finished gathering our coins, we heard a "WAP!" as the back door slammed shut. The Boss had arrived. She was our next-door neighbor, who was slightly older than both of us. The Boss always took charge of our adventures. She was, well, bossy and perpetually ready with a new plan each day. We never seemed to mind, and every day with her was an adventure, and today certainly was no different. We scrambled to our feet just as our bedroom door opened and jumped to attention much like army privates on their first day of boot camp. She entered our room, looked at us briefly, and motioned it was time to go. We quickly scrambled out of the house, shouting a

“See you later” to any parental figure within earshot.

As we stepped outside, a wall of heat hit my face and caused me to pause for a brief second as my body quickly adjusted to its new surroundings. The roses in our front yard gave off a redolent and intoxicating scent that always caused me to inhale profoundly and soothed my soul. In the distance, someone was struggling with a lawnmower as the engine rumbled, sputtered, and then finally stopped. The heat was probably too much for the lawnmower as well. The only thing that did not seem to mind the heat were the locusts who were crackling and buzzing with delight. We adjusted our tube socks, mounted our Western Auto ponies, and waited for a car that needed a new muffler to zoom past our house. As we slowly eased our way onto Avenue B, we knew what awaited us, and nothing or no one could hold us back. I was the youngest and the weakest of our trio, but I could not let it show, especially not today. We continued on Avenue B, steadily avoiding the cars that whizzed by us, and then we cautiously turned left onto 15th Street.

The west Texas wind could be a challenging opponent when it decided to rear its ugly head, but today, Mother Nature was on our side. Today there was only a gentle and savory breeze blowing through the air. A mild aroma mixed with freshly pumped oil, sand, and wildflowers floated through the air as our ponies gained speed. As 15th Street wound its way into Avenue A, we heard the familiar and haunting sound of a low baritone “Woof! Woof!” In the distance, he had started to come into focus. He was the mangiest, meanest, and scariest dog-like creature anyone this side of the Colorado River has ever seen. His name was Toki, and he tormented anyone who passed by his sanctuary.

We had been given assurances he would not hurt us, but the look and sound of his bark said something completely different. Toki would pick off the weakest of the herd, and since I was the youngest, there was a high probability he was coming after me. I sat back on my seat, and white-knuckle gripped my handlebars. The basket with sun-faded flowers which accented my ride looked cute, but now this was a deterrent and did not assist in the aerodynamics needed to conquer Toki. I went from a gallop to full-on sprint pedaling my Western Auto pony as fast as I could. As I rapidly reached Toki’s natural habitat, he took off racing directly for me. I kept pedaling as quick as I could, but he was getting closer and closer. Just when he was about to sink

his yellowing teeth into my flesh, his chain popped causing him to let out a “yelp” as he rolled and tumbled on his side struggling to return to chasing me. Toki was tenacious, but this time, he did not get me. I continued feverishly pedaling too afraid to stop, and I glanced over my shoulder for one last look at Toki. He was staring at me and then let out another series of baritone “Woof! Woof! Woofs!” as if to say, “I’ll get you next time!”

A few minutes later, we arrived at Jim’s Superette. As I dismounted from my bike, my heart was still racing and beating so hard it felt as if my eyeballs would pop out of my head, and my legs felt like overcooked spaghetti. But as soon as we opened the doors, the rush of fresh air-conditioned air hit our faces, and we knew we had reached the Promised Land. We carefully walked up and down Aisle 2, examining and surveying every item in stock. We then meticulously spent every penny we had on the best candy money could buy. We indulged in candy necklaces, Sprees, Pixie Stix, Lemonheads, jawbreakers, bubblegum cigarettes, and Dr. Pepper to wash it all down. We loaded all of our loot into my plastic woven basket with the sun-faded flowers, which now served a useful purpose, and headed home. We took extra care to avoid Toki on our return trip. The remainder of the day we relaxed, out of the heat and in the shade of the apple tree, eating candy necklaces, smoking bubble gum cigarettes, drinking Dr. Pepper, and talking about our adventure to Jim’s Superette.

Much like the tumbleweeds of west Texas, life rolls on, and what was in that day is no longer. Although the pumpjacks are still pumping and the sand is still blowing, that is all that remains unchanged. My memories are all that endure of a time long ago when three girls played, pretended, and dreamed, and conquered Toki.



KENNEDY BERRY

BEST OF FRIENDS

KY BRAY

THE UNTITLED FRAGMENT

I am, at 1 a.m., in a fog thicker than
Monoxide, through a cork attached
To offspring of dead broken bones and
Forbidden community, staining a pale paper
Wrapping, with only the cold glow of the
Sentry Marlboro lamp to treat a frost bitten
Spine, tickled with spiders' folksongs,
Afraid.

But a wise moon peaks through coils of
Lazy smoke, and now the end of my nose
Is short to newly born hills and virgin grass,
Still sharp, sleeping in Yygdrasil's dialysis
Shadow that filters sweet nourishment
To the monopolists dirty underground veins,
And there is a silence, a comfortable,
Content silence.

A familiar post is to the right.
The graveyard mourning waves wink
Friendly in passing like books on the
Cart that whimpers by your cell, because
You forgot that a knife is not a knife,
So they are all monotonous and dull,
Once novel, but make a suitable table
To hide under.

I hear a scream . . . maybe not?
The bawl blossoms from inside *me*
Squealing in oily tongues of May nightshade
Flowers, with rejoice unfolding of new Destinies
To be manifested from within my forehead,
Then pioneering down my bones and sprouting
Along yuppy skin; dutiful hairs hear the siren
And mount their stations.

Pale horses and coughing rats do not come for
Underground poets and vagabonds, who shelter

Doomsday disinterested sighs and live timeless,
Distinct, strumming mists of adultery, witchcraft
Prayers—unknown. They whisper sweetly,
The angels and bats are coming, may they wear
Our tongues for remembering to forget remembering
To forget, the inevitable consequence.

ALEXIS BROWN

MR. YEAST—THE LIFE OF A ROLL

Day in and day out, Marv worked to feed his people. Mr. Yeast was a simple roll, created by the hands of the village's bread master. What a short life of joy he had. Birthed in a **duodecuple* batch, he now sat single in a separate cooling rack—stowed away from his comrades. Mr. Yeast loved them; they had risen together; they were punched down together, a whole three times over. Oh, the horror! Marv, the dirty little bastard, cut them to size and tossed them into random pans with about eight or nine other batches before sending all of 'em to the burning pits of hell. The heat was hot enough to blister the skin, but not enough to end their misery as some had hoped. Rumors spread of a chosen few used as sacrifice, burned to a black crisp so the others could be saved. Yes, the life of joy was short lived for every roll to grace the bread master.

On a separate cooling rack, Mr. Yeast sat golden brown and round, full of sweet layers to rip into. Where was his batch, his group of comrades? was a question that troubled him dearly. They sat in a separate wing of the bakery, cooling just the same.

The ol' Gingerbread Man was the one to break the news, an annoying little fucker, but the bakery's holiday scout and trooper, nonetheless.

"They nabbed them. They nabbed them!" said the Gingerbread Man.

"Who?" asked Mr. Yeast.

"Them," said the Gingerbread Man.

"Who?" asked Mr. Yeast.

"*The rolls,*" said the Gingerbread Man.

An odd blanket of calm covered his worries for his comrades. Mr. Yeast couldn't turn away from the Gingerbread Man; he's just a roll. However, he began to lose his salt, as if a ring of snow circled him.

As an hour passed, Mr. Yeast lamented, "What did I do wrong? What did I do to deserve this?" He steamed, as a sense of pity soured his roundness.

Mr. Yeast watched as Marv created all sorts of strange creatures: bread, cake, cookies, custard, and so much more. He watched

carefully as Marv beat them senseless with a mallet, run them over with a rolling pin, cut them to pieces, and tossed them into the flames. The place in his warm little heart turned cold. The place where his joy had once sat gave way to a new disdain for his maker. His sweet layers began to sour.

He watched and watched as Marv chose which batch remained with their comrades and which ones didn't. A wry smile covered Marv's face. As Mr. Yeast noted this behavior, he lost his buttery shine. His creator had forsaken him. Filled with fury, his insides began to bubble and ferment. His new reality prompted his deflation. His shape withered, crumpled like a sun-dried raisin.

As Mr. Yeast began to think of the unknown horrors his comrades went through, his heart turned black. Images of ravaging monsters ripping into their flesh swarmed in his mind. Yelling was so vivid he could hear it. *What joy in life awaits him? Is there any left?* With his conclusion in mind, Mr. Yeast becomes riddled with spots of blue and black fuzz, decomposing over the course of a few days. The rancid smell invokes the spirit to vomit.

**Duodecuple – consisting of 12 parts*

***Das Brötchen – German for the bread rolls.*

Another note: Gingerbread originated in Germany



JASMINE CARTER

ONE COLD WINTER

A soft snowflake floated down gently until it landed upon a warm cheek, melting away slowly as the two touched. His eyes opened slowly as he felt the interaction, bringing his hand up to touch the place where the snowflake once lay. A small cloud left his mouth as he gave a big sigh and looked around him. It was a busy morning and he could see people walking as they hurried along the frozen streets. He noticed every small detail about each person, but it was like the world was silent. He could only hear his slow, steady breathing and his broken heart struggling to beat. The world was silent, but he could hear the voice inside of him screaming: *"Will you die for me then?"* Those words echoed through his mind over and over again, the only thing that he could hear. He brought his hands up to his ears to stop the screaming, but it only seemed to get louder. He couldn't take it anymore. *"Why did you go. . . ?"* he whispered softly. *"Why did you go. . . ?"* he said again, the pain swelling up in his throat.

As he walked back to his home, he kept thinking back to the snowflake that landed on his cheek. How it slowly disappeared but left a stinging, cold pain. He couldn't take it anymore. Everywhere he went, *he* was there. At school. At home. At the park. At the beach. His scent lingered, following him like he had been cursed. It felt like he had been punished. So much guilt swelled inside of him. He couldn't take it anymore.

Slowly opening the door to his apartment, he didn't even bother to turn on the lights. After taking his shoes off, he headed towards his bedroom, his feet shuffling along the hardwood floor. Not paying attention, he tripped over a hard object, falling forward as he barely caught himself on his bed. Enraged, he looked back to see what he had tripped over, but that anger melted away like the snowflake when he noticed what it was. The stinging pain soon came after. Not knowing what to do, he burst into tears, yelling loudly as he grabbed the object and slammed it into the ground. The strings attached to it make harsh sounds as they snapped out of place. He slammed it into the mirror, glass shattering everywhere on the ground. He slammed it repeatedly over and over again until all he had left was the handle.

The pain was still there. He couldn't hear a thing but those words still screaming inside of his head. The images of the cold body lying there flashing through his mind. He couldn't take it anymore.

"Why are you still here. . .?" He whispered gently, looking into the broken pieces of glass that lay on his floor. He cried softly as he slowly fell to the floor, leaning over with the instrument still in his hand.

"I'm sorry. . .," he whispered softly.

He grabbed a piece of the broken glass, slowly rising as he headed towards the bathroom. He stared into the bathroom mirror, all of his feelings beginning to overwhelm him. He brought up the piece of glass to his neck and closed his eyes slowly.

That voice echoed through his head, growing louder and louder as it screamed as if it was trying to break out.

Then suddenly. . . it stops.



TAYLOR CLAYTON

THE BAKER



TAYLOR CLAYTON

THE SIDE DOOR



TAYLOR CLAYTON

HOMECOMING QUEEN

HAYLEY DANLEY

EDEN

It's halfway between midnight and dawn in Eden, that still hour when even the night owls have gone to bed, and the larks have yet to rise. The air is heavy, like a stifling blanket thrown across the sky. The night waits with anticipation to be stirred by a breeze that never comes.

My mare paces beside me, her hoofbeats muted across the wilted grass that has been trampled by countless feet. She trusts me absolutely, following the lead of a child a fraction of her size. Her skin is slick with sweat. If it were colder, steam would rise from her heaving sides.

It's a dark night with the omission of the moon. We are each of us exhausted, craving sleep. The night is quiet, providing a different kind of repose. The day held both triumph and defeat, as days are apt to do, but it is the night that soothes and smoothes my mind until neither matter.

My mare ran hard today, trying her heart out for me. She loves to run as much as I do. I press my palm against her withers, feeling the heat radiating from rippling muscles. She's still too hot to be fed and tended. We have plenty of time though; the night will wait for us.

So we loop a familiar track beneath the starry sky. It's quiet now, the silence only broken by cicadas who call to us from the treetops. We weave through sparse trees and rocky ground, making more footprints and hoof-prints along the familiar track learned by daylight long-since faded.

We are all dead on our feet. Even though the night is all but never-ending, it's not unpleasant. The stars are out, shining like jewels against the inky black without the competition of incandescent bulbs. My mare is quiet and calm by my side. It feels like Eden to me. I have heard it said that a bad day can be erased by a good night. In this case, what seemed like an inconsequential night erased the bittersweet events of the day. The frayed edges of that day decay under the gentlest thought, leaving only the vivid memories of my mare, the night.

HAYLEY DANLEY

THRILL OF THUNDER

The sky is bruised purple
 swollen with thunderstorms.
We rush through chores outside
 before the downpour hits.
The wind comes first
 bending trees before it.
Thunder cracks and slams,
 my heart shudders.
Lightning forks across the sky.

The first fat raindrops
 burst against my skin.
Slow at first and then faster,
 bullets pelting the dust.
We bolt for the house,
 our feet beat a tattoo.
I tip my head back and laugh,
 thrill trickling down my back.
The scent of rain diffuses
 fresh and sweet.
Water droplets seep between my lips.



ALEXCIANNA DIAZ

N. MAIN ST



ALEXCIANNA DIAZ

SW PETROLEUM CO



ADAM FREEMAN

BIRD IN FLIGHT



ADAM FREEMAN

BURGHLEY HOUSE

HAILEY GARNER

ACTIVE

I stare at the plate in front of me with the yellow sunflowers that dance around its borders, vines wrapping around its components. These are the “happy” plates, as my mom calls them when she takes them out for guests and holidays. Though it is hard for me to focus on the delicately hand-painted flowers, I stare at the contents of the plate, entranced, though, maybe for the wrong reasons.

Meatloaf. Maybe 150 calories, probably more than that because of Mom’s huge helpings. *Why should meat be made into a loaf anyways?*

Salad. Maybe another 150, the salad dressing sure is fattening. Not to mention the croutons, bacon, boiled eggs, and cheese. *Why couldn’t we let anything be simple in this household?*

Lumpy mashed potatoes robustly glistening with golden butter and clusters of orange-yellow still melting cheese. At the very least, 300 calories ALONE. *Picking up a mouthful, the cheese expands, connecting my fork to the plate. It makes me cringe.*

Sweet Tea. A whole freaking 75 calories if I’m lucky. *Ok, this is ridiculous, there is nothing wrong with a good ol’ glass of 0 calorie water.*

Don’t get me started on the homemade cobbler and Blue bell ice cream. *Not every meal has to be washed down with a mouthful of sugar, Mom.*

Ok, let’s do the math: 675 for dinner if we are being generous, and like a million more for the dessert that will be forced down my throat if I don’t get away fast enough. *Who am I kidding, if I don’t eat dessert, it will be carried up to me in my room regardless.*

The talking around the table grew louder and louder with every scrape of forks and knives on ceramic plates. The screeching made me want to flinch. Dinner should not be surrounded by people squawking like a freaking gaggle of geese. It made me want to run out of this room, strap on my shoes, and sprint my way to the community park ten minutes away from my house. I swear my heart is beating faster than it should be and probably loud enough for my brother to hear beside me (yes, even over the screaming my family calls conversation). Looking down at the plate in front of me makes me want to bawl my eyes out and yell at everyone around me at the same time, but I smile, noticing my mother’s wandering eyes.

I scrape off the maroon goop of a sauce that clings desperately to the top of my meatloaf and try to put enough meat on my fork to be noticeable. I take a bite. My grip on the fork is unwavering and white-knuckled. I can feel the calories moving through my body, landing on my hips, my thighs, my waist, my face. Instantaneously, my body recognizes the grease that leaves a loaf shaped ring on my plate as I move the meat loaf around, cutting and slicing it in to minuscule portions. *Gross.*

I don't have a problem. I just know what I want. If I am not hungry, I don't need the food. Simple as that.

I smile as the table full of family around me erupts into gales of laughter. I shovel a few small bites into my mouth, usually when someone glances my way. Some of the salad disappears, as I try to shake off the Italian dressing dripping off the otherwise healthy green leaves. The rest of the food goes into the paper towel in my lap. . . or swirled around my plate, creating a mosaic from my every-day torment.

My brother and uncle leave the table, I quickly follow suit. I skip up the stairs, taking two at a time to feel the comforting burn of my thighs burning calories. I feel strong. Every step counts, and I know it. I get to my room, close and lock the door. Stripping quickly out of my hoodie, I stand in the bathroom. The full size mirror in front of me shows me what I need to see:

A flat stomach that is still cramping from the grease and fat that I just ingested.

A collar bone that can be fully seen, one of my features I absolutely never want to lose.

Hips that are comprised of a beautiful curved outline. Maybe not the idea of curves that most girl's strive after, but it sure looks dang good on me.

My shoulder blades that are perfectly formed, looking like wings could sprout at any time.

Maybe a few pounds less and my spine can show off my posture even more. A few pounds away from my perfect.

I look *delicate*, I look *pretty*, and I know I cannot lose this physique. I Can Not.

I wrap my fingers around my arm, able to fully encapsulate the circumference. I run my hands down my stomach, across my hips and feel how soothingly smooth and flat the surface of my skin is. My

heart beats more regularly now as I throw on a raggedy, oversized t shirt, leggings, and running shorts with long fuzzy socks that help cushion my running shoes.

I run down the stairs, making sure to hit every one. Each step, my own form of therapy. I grab my phone, turn on my running app and yell to my mom, "I gotta go run, big race in two weeks! Just a few miles and a cool down walk!" This would buy me an hour, tops before someone comes after me.

Not waiting for a reply, I turn up the music on my phone and head out, determined to lose the maybe 400 calories I just ingested. I definitely did not need that many, I feel it. My stomach is bloated, a sure sign I ate way too much.

Each footstep is therapeutic. Every deep breath rejuvenating my soul. Every step leads me closer to perfection, closer to no stress in my life. I wouldn't trade it for anything. When I run, everything is peaceful, everything is at ease.

Fifty-five minutes of methodical jogging and sprinting go by, only ten minutes of walking tops, and I find myself just a few blocks from my house. Checking my running app, I pick up the pace, determined to burn at least forty more calories before I reach the front door.

I came close.

I made it to the first curb on my block when my ultimate bliss was interrupted. When my exaggerated breathing became hitched and my in-and-out blurry vision became dark. I passed out twenty feet from my front yard, where my little brother watched me fall. Falling and hitting my head on the hot Texas concrete. Feeling my teeth and bones crack together until the oblivion took me.

* * *

I saw the way my daughter would play with her food. She would swirl the mashed potatoes, hiding pieces of meat in their shallow depths, not to be seen again. She was always watching, catching me looking at her plate as worry took deep root in my heart.

I spoke to our family doctor, told him about the way she fears me watching her eat. How she will no longer eat dinner at the family table and only takes breakfast to go on her way to school. How her running was every day at school and every day after.

Though, when he asks questions, the answers didn't make her look too bad. She always had makeup on, her high pony tail and the latest fashion strung across her body, especially her favorite hoodie.

She is happy. She smiles and laughs at the right moments. She plays games with her brother and goes to the movies with friends. She is not worried, straight A's at school. Her brown eyes glisten with happiness, her nails always painted a beautiful pastel pink. She is beautiful and lively, the picture perfect straight-A high school popular student.

My family doctor said not to worry, girls go through this phase. Thinking about weight and dieting is just a ritual teenage girls now go through while trying to make their own path in the social media influenced world we have today.

I believed him.

I believed him until my beautiful blonde haired, brown-eyed, cross-country loving, all-night-texting daughter passed out during her afternoon run.

I rushed her to the hospital. She got four stitches on her face and a needle in her arm.

Eventually, she got a tube in her nose and a backpack of Ensure in the chair next to her, ready to be lugged around when she gets up to walk away.

Not to mention the hospital stay, arranged by the doctors in formal white jackets when they noticed she weighed 91 pounds. Now, they make her work for every privilege, a phone call, a walk outside, a friend to come visit.

My baby girl was in the danger zone, five foot seven and a measly 91 pounds.

Pounds away from her heart giving out. Pounds away from losing my baby girl to all-encompassing oblivion far too soon.

HAILEY GARNER

THE AFTERMATH

When my sister came home, she was different. Different in a good way, I hoped. It was hard to tell as she lies in bed with the TV on so loud it drowns out the rest of the household. She still smiles when she sees me, but I don't know if I believe her.

Why is she already home?

My little sister was a whopping 86 pounds last time she was home; 86 pounds may have been generous in my opinion. She looked better. But it had only been two months since she was home.

Why is she already home?

When she came home, I had hope. She would eat her meals with us at the family dinner table. But when Mom started to work nights again, the family dinners began to fade away. Mom no longer watched her every step, ever move, every little bite. Instead, there was money left on the counter for pizza and frozen meals in the refrigerator.

My sister did cook for a week or two. She made us salads, pan seared chicken breast—lots of vegetable and fruit sides. Then she stopped cooking and started eating in her room. I watched her occasionally; she would take a full plate with her and come back with the plate washed and ready to put away in the cabinet.

Eventually, she just grabbed a mini orange and a few crackers. She drank water by the gallons.

Why is she already home?

She is no longer allowed to participate in sports, so she takes to doing sit-ups and squats in her room. I hear her in her room, jumping around, and then she walks out sweating and breathing hard. Sometimes, I have no clue what she is up to as she thumps around, always seemingly heavy footed.

I don't think the hospital did its job. If they did, why is she losing weight again? She came back 102 pounds. Now, when mom weighs her, she is down to 97. Not enough for mom to worry because she is holding steady.

But I don't think mom knows about the rocks in her pockets or four shirts she wears. I am scared she sewed pebbles in the seams of her shirts and jackets and had tucked them into her shoes. Surely, she

wouldn't, . . . but maybe she would.

You see, I can tell when she tries to maneuver out of meals and into exercising. I see when she manipulates her weekly weigh-ins. After all, it has been a year next week from the date she came home for the first time.

But my sister laughs when I bring it up, hinting at her problem. My mom isn't home long enough for me to show her the little quirks my sister has picked up. And she is so stressed working nights that I don't think she could really handle it. Maybe, if mom doesn't see it, I'm being too overdramatic.

My sister is educated; she knows the dangers, and she is so smart. I know she wouldn't hurt herself; she wouldn't hurt me. After all, she promised me she would never spiral down that never-ending hole of worry again.

I don't know if I believe her anymore, but I am going to trust her. I love her, I trust her, I believe in her.

After all,

My sister is smart.

My sister is beautiful.

My sister is amazing.

My sister is everything I have always wanted to be

My sister has been helped.

Why is she already home?

My sister weighs 86 pounds.

HAILEY GARNER

EULOGY OF YELLOW

She wore yellow everywhere she went. She would wear her tattered, yellow, cloth bracelet tied around her dainty wrist or a simple, yellow, lace ribbon wrapped around her mousy, brown hair that sat in a bun on top of her head. On the days she felt bold, she would wear her yellow sundress. The one with the little, white, sparkling daisies sewn into the bottom. On the days she was not so bold, she would wear the yellow-gold heart locket passed down to her from her mother. She almost always wore yellow shoes, whether they be yellow laced up Converse that had definitely seen their day or fancy new lemon, yellow heels that gently clasped around her tiny ankles. She always radiated out into the world around her, always the brightest thing in my view.

She wore yellow every time I was in her presence. I would often see her at our town's dingy, rusty bus stop while we waited for our rides. That is actually where we met, sitting on that rickety wooden bench that has one of its legs torn off yet surprisingly still stands steady. This is the bus stop right in the middle of town, a five minute walk from my front door and eight minutes away from hers. I would always say hello and be blinded by her warm, yellow glow and dazzling, white smile. It was on that old, creaky bench that we slowly, intricately fell in love.

She was adorned in yellow when I realized that yellow was the color of my love I felt for her. I wanted to be bathed in her golden, light aura so bad that my soul craved to adopt her ways. I fell in love with her never-ending joy, her smile, and her bounding, bubbly laughter that always focused my attention wholly on her. She was all encompassing.

She was swathed in yellow everyday of her life until I found her encased in a tomb of red. She didn't show up for her bus on Tuesday. I missed my bus waiting for her on Wednesday. On Thursday I made my way to her house, the one on the corner near the family-owned grocery store. The house with the yellow shutters on the windows and daisies planted along the window sills, and I opened up her unlocked white front door.

I found her.

On Tuesday, she wrote herself a checklist of things she had to do and left it on her coffee table. On Wednesday, she ate all of her favorite foods. She bought pizza for lunch from the restaurant a few blocks over and had a feast of chocolate for dinner. On Thursday, she wrote all of her loved ones letters sealed in pristine, white envelopes and dropped her scruffy, little dog off at a doggy daycare. Then, she took her beautiful life into her very own hands sitting in an overflowing, lavender-scented, hot, bubble bath with candles lighting up the otherwise dark room.

She was drowning in a flowing sea of scarlet when I noticed the water leaking from the bathroom door into the hall by her kitchen. The blazing afternoon sun was streaming in through her protective shutters. She no longer breathed as the red continued to stain her lungs. I followed the murky trail of water streaming from under her closed bathroom door.

It was already too late when I opened the bathroom door and saw the blood leaking from her skin. Hours too late, the paramedics told me when they took her from my arms. Too late when I picked up the white envelope with my name labeled on the front and noticed the drop of blood on its seal. Far too late when that beautiful, lace, sunshine-yellow ribbon, now stained and streaked with the color of tarnished rust fell from her hair while she was being taken away from me for good.

When she wore her yellow, I believed her to be invincible. She radiated a spark of pure sparkling happiness that seemed to originate from her hidden away, innermost soul. Or at least, I believed it so. She had a life of the purest intentions that ended with a bloody result. I wish I could remember her cradled in yellow, the color I believed her essence to be. I never could see that, through the glaring, yellow color of her life, the red was slowly seeping out.

I am terrified that I will only remember her color being of crimson. I do not want to remember her only for the secret red stain on her soul. I will always be haunted by the fear that I will only remember her life as she ended it.

She lived her life bathed in the most beautiful and dazzling of yellows, only to be buried in the most glaring and paralyzing of reds.

MORGAN GRIBBLE

THE GULF

The stars stare back at us
As we trace constellations
Like we trace each other's bones
With fingertips
Ocean breeze carries the secrets
We whisper

Ever changing tides
Reclaim the sands
We stand on
This world has no reason
To remember us

We catch the wind between our fingers
Arms wide open

We look into the eyes
Of the ocean, of a beast
That could swallow us whole

We sit at the mouth of it
And dance on its lips

MORGAN GRIBBLE

THE SHEARS

Bowen's Funeral Home sinks in his rear view mirror. His white knuckles grip the wheel as the truck make twists and turns his mind doesn't direct. The procession leaves in a cloud of dust, but he does not follow it.

The radio static is not loud enough to drown out his thoughts; his mind drifts absently, but he becomes alert thirty minutes later to the smell of pine trees lining the drive of his childhood home.

Gravel slides beneath the tires as he pulls to a stop, shifting the truck into park and stepping out. His hand reaches towards the trees as if searching for a familiar hand. As he slips the branch into his palm, the memory of the dirt and pine ignites within him. Being a young boy then, he doesn't remember much else about that summer, nothing except the trees – the trees that he would grow to hate in his teenage years. Every teenage angst would be reckoned with trimming, trimming, trimming the trees away from the drive with rusted shears.

Now, years of neglect has left the trees overgrown. The pines sprawl into the gravel, strong roots pushing over gravel so old and smooth it is nearly dust.

The thin brown hair on the man's neck stands straight up as he yanks a branch from the tree, then another and another. The pines shake as his rage grows. Then he flings one of his shiny black leather shoes and watches as it barrels into a mass of branches. The action knocks his lanky figure off balance, throwing his body backwards onto the gravel.

His heartbeats ring in his ears as he picks himself up from the dirt and returns back to his truck. Without a second thought, he decides his next course of action and steps on the gas pedal, racing down the driveway so fast that the pines blur in the windows into a green wall. He feels trapped and pushes the pedal further.

Reaching the end of the drive, he sees the brown, wooden house. It looks just as it always has. The water hose lays tangled in the yard. The bird bath, half full of stagnant water, will attract no birds. Flower pots with dry dirt and dead flowers litter the area nearby the porch, which itself is vacant and rotting.

The appearance is hauntingly familiar. Twenty years ago, he returned to this place, and after mere minutes, he swore he would never return again. The tears he shed that day are gone now, the sting of betrayal replaced by tears of loss he has not yet let slip down his cheeks.

Actually, it's his anger that pushes the tears away now as he makes his way towards the shed to find the shears. Through dead grass and broken lawn gnomes, he finds the decrepit shed, but it is locked. Cursing in frustration, the son turns to the house and scans the back porch for a small black box. He quickly finds it under a blanket of dust behind a dead house plant. Slipping the key into the door, he slides the glass open, shaking the stained yellow blinds that conceal the innards of the house.

Bottles are everywhere, and the house reeks of cigarette smoke and cheap beer. In his childhood, the opening of the door would release the smell of chicken and dumplings. At sunset, the sounds of children and the soft singing of his mother could be heard as she stirred the dinner pot night after night.

The past and memories of the home are too far from him now. His present rage causes him to focus on the cheap rugs laid out to cover drunken spills and cigarette burns in the shag carpet.

His quest is for one thing only: the key to the shed. Rummaging through drawer after drawer, he finds nothing but waste and debris. In frustration, he turns to the dirty kitchen counter, which is covered with countless glass bottles. In a fit of anger, he flings his arm across the lot of them, sending them all crashing to the floor. His scream masks the sound of breaking glass.

There it is. On the kitchen floor, tied to a faded red string, is the key to the shed. Dusting away the glass shards, he holds it tightly in his hand and makes his way towards the shed. Quickly unlocking the door to the deteriorating building, he enters and finds the rusted shears.

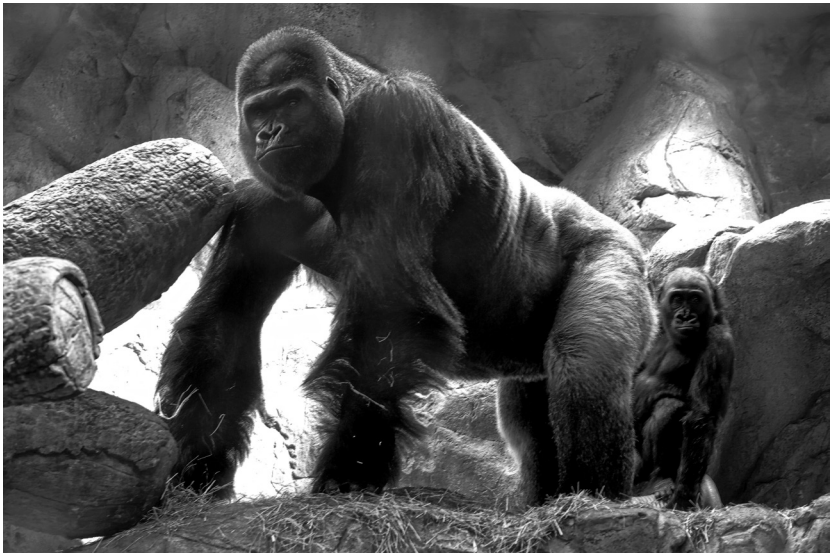
He leaves the shed door open and returns to his truck. Tossing the shears in the bed, he throws the truck in reverse and speeds quickly back down the drive. Once he reaches the tree that he assaulted earlier, he jumps out of the vehicle with eagerness.

Sloppily, he rips off his silk black tie and feels the smooth silk for a moment before tossing it into the cup holder.

Grabbing the rusted shears, he leads the device to the tree and

slowly opens the blades in anticipation. He then notices something on the handle that he had never paid attention to before: a signature. "David Thompson," his father's name and his own namesake, is inscribed in thick black permanent marker right below the black handle. David runs his finger over the signature to reveal it further when a tear falls onto the corroded metal – the very first tear that he let escape.

That single tear leads to another and another until David finds himself weeping in the middle of the drive. He staggers towards a tree and leans heavily against it, the only support keeping him from sinking to the hard ground. There he sits in his black suit, weeping against the pine tree, and holding the rusted shears to his chest.



OLYA HAUN

DISPLAY OF SUPERIORITY

DALLAS HEDGES

ECHOES

He stared ahead, trying to keep his mind clear. Barely audible in the dense underbrush of the forest, he could hear his horse's hooves. That's what he chose to focus on: the crunch of the leaves, the sound of twigs snapping. His horse knew where they were going and stepped confidently, allowing his mind to wander freely. He was grateful because he was unsure if he would be able to lead otherwise.

Other than the horse's steps, the silence around him was deafening. No creatures stirred; no wind blew. As they got closer, even the trees disappeared, a reminder of what happened and what was lost.

If there was any new growth, the darkness covered it. Surely a year's time was long enough. He hated to think the damage was that severe. He shook his head and closed his eyes, focusing once more on the sounds of the horse's hooves. It had changed slightly. There was less underbrush, more rock. The sound became louder, no longer any soft ground to mask the noise.

His eyes opened at the change, suddenly on alert. His heart raced, praying no one was around and he wouldn't get caught. Despite his year's absence, he knew the citizens would be looking for him. They had chased him out with a warning to stay away from their kingdom.

He just wanted to talk to her . . .

The horse found the path and began the long trek up to their destination. There was no way someone was up here, not at this time of night. Still, he couldn't relax. He'd been afraid to even make this journey, but eventually he could not stay away. The longest they'd been apart before was a month, and yet a year had passed. She would be upset with him for being away for so long. He had to apologize.

For everything.

Finally, as his horse entered a cave, walking a well-remembered path, he released the tension in his shoulders. Only he knew that this cave existed. Hoofbeats echoed, and the rider found himself counting the echoes. The number stayed the same, never increasing never decreasing, and yet they drew closer. From this distance, he could feel the heat. Fidgeting in his saddle, he wriggled out of his coat and laid it across his lap.

It was her favorite coat for him to wear.

He saw light and knew he was close. He brought the horse to a stop, and there was sudden silence. The echoes still rang in his ears as he carefully dismounted. He trusted his companion not to leave as he turned towards the light and carried on alone.

The heat grew more intense as he drew closer, and his mind kept flashing back to that terrible night. He had found her still, unbreathing. He hadn't been able to make it on time. He barely even saw her before the eruption . . .

He felt tears spring into his eyes but shook his head. She wouldn't want him thinking that way.

He heard the pop of lava and knew he was close. He looked up, seeing the stars. This was it, where the castle once stood. He felt her presence, like a warm blanket covering his shoulders. He found a rock and sat down, taking a moment to just look around. There was no sign that this used to be their home, no sign of the happy life they once shared together. Only destruction remained. Had he known that this was a volcano and not a mountain . . . He would not have built his castle here.

But he had, and it was too late now.

He stared into the lava, silent. His thoughts began to take over and he let the memory engulf him.

He remembered the party. They both loved playing the role of hosts and often invited people over. That night was no different. She had seemed a bit distant all evening, but he assumed that she simply felt ill. His guess was soon proven correct when she pulled him aside and told him she was going upstairs to lie down. He gave her a kiss and encouraged her to get some rest. He promised to join her after the guests left. She smiled at him, thankful for his love and kindness. After returning his kiss, she turned and headed down the hall.

That was the last time he saw her alive.

He returned to the party, where the guests were still energetic and eager for a night of fun. With her presence gone, he felt a sense of unease for the remainder of the night. He tried to push it off, wanting to be a good host and entertain his guests, though he could not shake the feeling that something was wrong.

The party lasted for hours, his guests continually getting more and more drunk until they all stumbled out the door to their waiting carriages. He'd purposely stayed sober, his feeling of dread not letting him drink even a single glass of wine. The last person had barely left when a servant came rushing to him. Something was wrong with the queen. His heartbeat quickened as he ran up the stairs. He cursed

himself, knowing he should have listened to his gut sooner and come to check on her. The door practically flew open when he pushed it the raced to her side.

She was still, eyes closed. She hadn't even changed, still wearing her evening gown. One look at her pale face, and he knew something terrible had happened. He collapsed to his knees beside the bed, grabbing her hand and praying to the heavens for a pulse.

There wasn't one.

He didn't even have the time to process this information before he felt the tremors. The ground below him was shaking, cracking. A servant forcefully ripped him away from the bed, desperate to get to the door. He turned to look at her again, his love, his entire world, just as the cracks widened and the bed fell . . . and disappeared. His eyes went wide, and he screamed her name, trying to make his way to the sunken hole. Somehow, the servant was able to get him down the stairs and out of the castle. The rumbling was louder, harder, as he stumbled down the mountain. He didn't even pause to see who was behind him. The most important person in his life was gone already.

Now, sitting beside the lava, his heart broke for the millionth time, and it was suddenly too much. He felt the sobs in his chest first; then they surfaced in the form of tears. He buried his face in his jacket, the jacket she'd had made just for him because she said it matched his eyes, and he let himself cry. He hadn't since that night; he hadn't had the time or opportunity. But here, in this mountain that was once home, he was finally able to let his tears flow.

He screamed her name over and over again, apologizing for letting this happen to her. He wanted to go back, go upstairs with her, make her better, race down the mountain with her, save her, be with her.

But he couldn't.

He didn't know how long he sat on the rock sobbing, but his voice was hoarse, his throat was dry, and he had no more tears left to cry. He carefully stood, tucked the tear-soaked jacket over his arm, and made his way back to his horse.

Awaiting the masters' return, the horse had not moved an inch. He unsteadily clambered onto the steed's back, and they left the cave. The echoes of the horse's hooves remained consistent, the number he counted the same as when they came in. Outside, dawn was approaching. He nudged the horse gently, wanting to make it to the forest before being seen. He listened carefully to the sound of the hooves, hearing the hard ground slowly transform back into the dirt and leaves of forest undergrowth. It was only then that he felt safe.



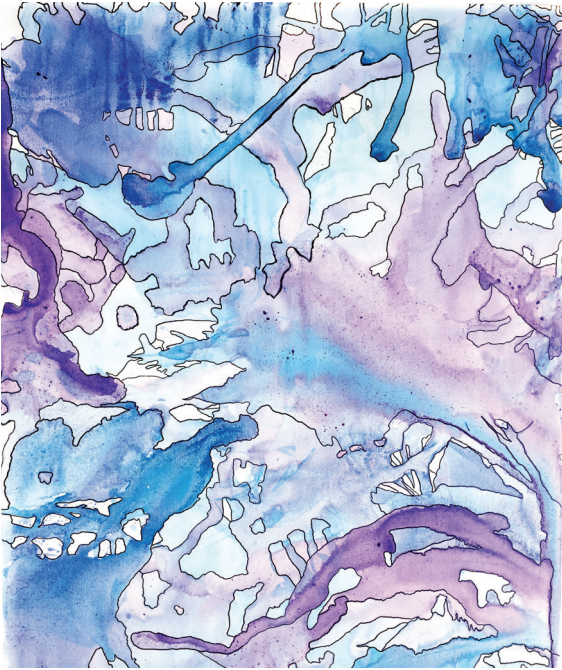
ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO
HEAR NO EVIL



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO
SEE NO EVIL



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO
SPEAK NO EVIL



MARIEL PEREZ
ADORN



ADAM FREEMAN

WELSH FARM



OLYA HAUN

FAMILIAR CALM



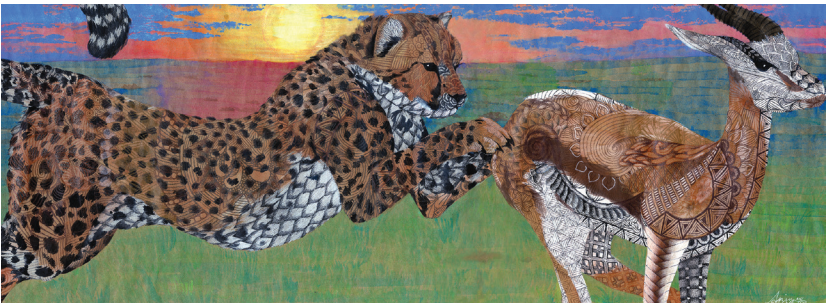
TAYLOR CLAYTON

THE RED DOOR



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO

ROOTS OF MY HERITAGE,
DESCENT FROM AFRICA



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO

SNATCHED



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO

GREGGE DI SOLI



KENJINIQUE DAVIS
SUNSHINE GIRL



KENJINIQUE DAVIS
MY DOG MISSY



JUSTIN SABLAN

QUEEN



ASHLEY MEDEIROS

BREAK OUT



AMBER MOON

UNTITLED



OLYA HAUN
FIERCE



OLYA HAUN
BEAUTY WITHIN



OLYA HAUN
GOLDEN GODDESS



MATTIE SULLIVAN

EVERLASTING POWER



TAYLOR CLAYTON

FLO'S V-8



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO
BRITTLE BONES



KENNEDY BERRY

DADDY'S HANDS



OLYA HAUN

SOLITARY SEA DRAGON



TAYLOR CLAYTON

THE STORY OF AN INDIAN



ZACHARY WATSON

WINTER PRESENCE



ISABELLA M. IMMORMINO

LADY IN WHITE

DALLAS HEDGES

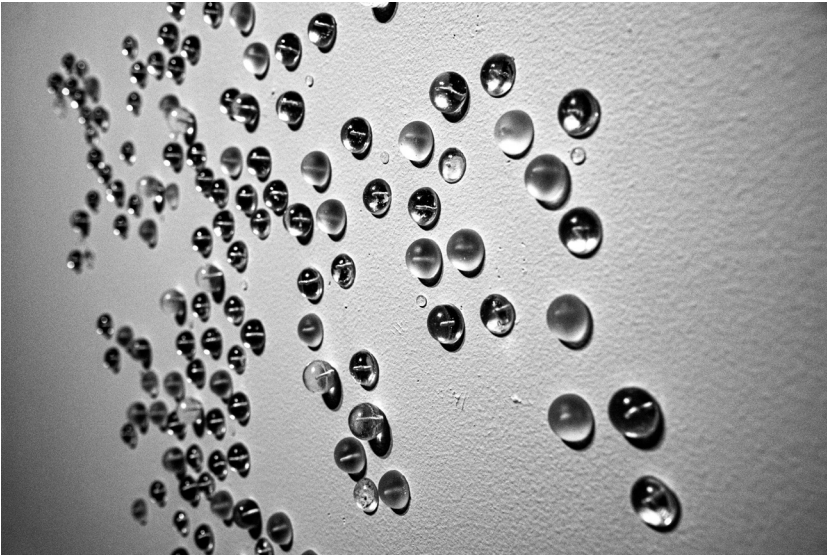
MIDNIGHT PB&J

Aspire, I do, to make a peanut
Butter and jelly like you. The bread
Cut in triangles and globs of jelly
Drizzling out the side. The first bite is
Euphoric, the taste
Familiar, yet somehow better at this late hour.
Gelatinous and smooth textures blending in
Harmony, creating a snack that is
Irresistible. My growling stomach
Justifies the time, something needed to
Kill the sound, so why not a PB&J? I
Lick my lips and pour a glass of
Milk. I ask my mother for a
Napkin and she
Obliges. The lines on the
Paper remind me of a
Quilt. It's easy to
Resist the
Sounds of my brother's protests as I
Turn to you.
Understanding crosses your face although I say nothing
Vocally.
With a smile. You grab the jars, the knife imitating a
Xylophone as you scrape the bottom clean.
You hand me a PB&J, and I eat it with
Zealousness.



ALEX HUERTA

WALL DROPS 01



ALEX HUERTA

WALL DROPS 02

AMBER HUFF

SONGBIRD

Sing for me my darling,
with your voice of tenor tone.
Run your fingers down the frets,
and make me feel at home.

Serenade me gently,
and watch me catch my breath.
You gratify my aching needs
when your voice envelops me.

*I am not your songbird
because I am my own.
I only sing for myself
and for myself alone.*

Sing for me my darling,
Grip your hand around the neck
rest the poplar on your thigh
and perform to your breadth.

*But I am not your songbird.
As I say, I am my own.
I do not sing when beckoned,
I croon when I am alone.*

Yet in your absence, I still hear
your heartbeat thrum a song,
an echo of a recent past
to let me know you are my home.

Every night my songbird sings,
but what he does not know —
is that music's more than voice and ear
it is the tangent of alone.

ADRIANNA IVY

DIALOG

As she waits for him, she sits on the bench watching the world go by. It had been a while since she had last seen him. She remembers his face, scraggly and wrinkled, a wicked smirk stretched across it. She grimaces at the thought and shakes her head trying to erase it.

She then sees him as he struts up. She can only imagine what would most likely be a sly smile on his face, covered now behind the old, navy hoodie he wears.

"You rang for me?" he says in a booming voice. She shudders even though it isn't cold.

"Yes, I wanted to speak to you," she says meekly.

"What about how you broke my heart?" he thunders.

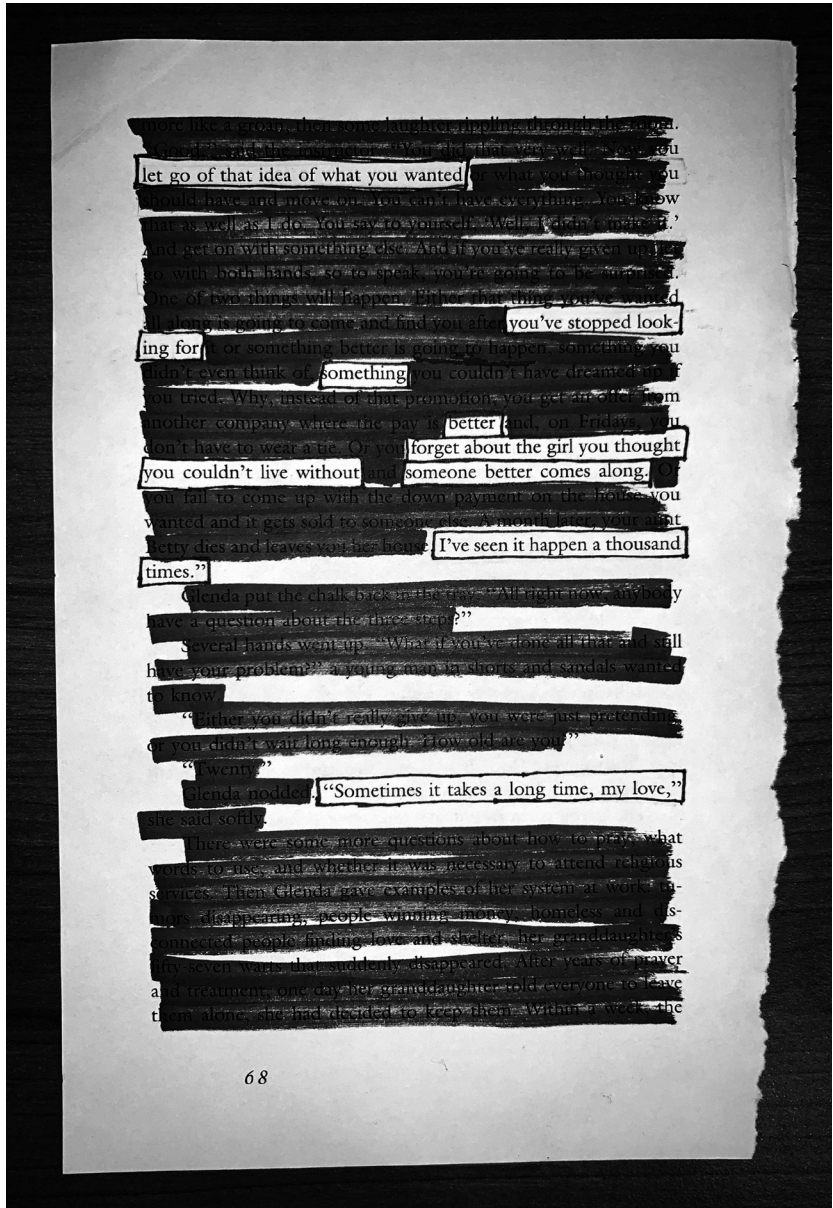
"No. It's a little more serious than that," she says quietly, looking down at the ground.

He sighs and sits down next to her. "You know you can tell me," he says more quietly.

She sits in silence for a minute afraid of his reaction. "I'm pregnant," she says.

BELLE KRUZAN

BLACKOUT POETRY



more like a punch, when you laugh, it's a jolt, it's a shock. You
 let go of that idea of what you wanted. What you brought you
 and get on with something else. And if you're really, really, really
 to with both hands, so to speak, with no other way to go, then
 one of two things will happen. First, that thing you've wanted
 all along is going to come and find you after you've stopped look-
 ing for it, or something better is going to happen, something you
 didn't even think of. Something you couldn't have dreamed of.
 you tried. Why, instead of that promotion you get an offer from
 another company where the pay is better. And, on Fridays, you
 don't have to wear a tie. Or you forget about the girl you thought
 you couldn't live without and someone better comes along.
 you fail to come up with the down payment on the house you
 wanted and it gets sold to someone else. A month later, your best
 Betty dies and leaves you her house. I've seen it happen a thousand
 times."

Clenda put the chalk back in the tray. "All right now, anybody
 have a question about the time wrap?"

Several hands went up. "What if you've done all that and still
 have your problem?" A young man in shorts and sandals wanted
 to know.

"Either you didn't really give up, you were just pretending,
 or you didn't wait long enough." How old are you?"

"I went."
 Clenda nodded. "Sometimes it takes a long time, my love,"

she said softly.

There were some more questions about how to pray, what
 words to use, and whether it was necessary to attend religious
 services. Then Clenda gave examples of her system at work: in-
 juries disappearing, people winning money, homeless and dis-
 sistent people finding love, and she left her granddaddy's
 bed. Her granddaddy disappeared. After years of prayer
 and treatment, one day the granddaddy told everyone to leave
 them alone. He had decided to keep them with us, work the

ASHLEIGH McCRAW

INSANITY

Thoughts swirl through my mind
Fragments, pieces, shards
Wrapped up in a tornado
Twisting, twisted, black
Turning from blue to grey in my mind's eye

The pressure mounting
The thoughts cracking, blurry
No holds to climb out of the clouds
The light hiding in a corner

My focus shifting, sliding
Sand through my fingers
Trying to hold on
Nothing to hold on to

Create, be creative
Be cold, be calculative
Be passionate, be dispassionate
Be passive, aggressive
Be sweet, be strong

Disappointment
Despair
Giving up
Letting go

Focus
Settling down
Clarity

I'm nothing
And everything

Cold, strong, sweet
Here
Enjoying the sun
Broken and scarred in so many ways
Alive, but a little insane

KRYSTAL MOEBUS LES CHANT DES OISEAUX

Score

Les Chant Des Oiseaux

Krystal Moebus

The image displays two systems of a musical score for the piece "Les Chant Des Oiseaux" by Krystal Moebus. The score is written for a string ensemble and is set in the key of D major (indicated by two sharps) and 3/4 time. The first system includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The second system includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The score features various dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte), *sub. p* (subito piano), and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a *mf* dynamic for Violin I and *mp* for the other instruments. The second system starts at measure 5 and includes a *mf* dynamic for the Cello and *mp* for the other instruments. The score is marked with a copyright symbol (©) at the bottom.

2

Les Chant Des Oiseaux

10

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 10 through 14. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first violin part (Vln. I) begins with a half note G5, followed by eighth notes A5, B5, and C6. The second violin part (Vln. II) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The viola part (Vla.) starts with a half note G3, followed by eighth notes A3, B3, and C4. The cello part (Vc.) plays a half note G2, followed by eighth notes A2, B2, and C3. Trills and accents are indicated above the notes in measures 10, 11, and 12. Trills are also present in measures 13 and 14.

15

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 15 through 19. The key signature remains three sharps and the time signature is 4/4. The first violin part (Vln. I) starts with eighth notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, followed by a half note D5. The second violin part (Vln. II) plays eighth notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, followed by a half note D5. The viola part (Vla.) plays a half note G3, followed by eighth notes A3, B3, and C4. The cello part (Vc.) plays a half note G2, followed by eighth notes A2, B2, and C3. Trills and accents are indicated above the notes in measures 15, 16, and 17. Trills are also present in measures 18 and 19.

KRYSTAL MOEBUS MAKANI

Score

Makani

Krystal Moebus

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with three staves: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Bassoon (Bsn.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system (measures 1-6) features dynamic markings of *mf* for the Flute and *mp* for the Oboe and Bassoon. The second system (measures 7-12) includes a fermata over the first measure of the Flute part. The third system (measures 13-18) features a triplet of eighth notes in the Flute part at measure 13. The score concludes with a copyright symbol (©) centered below the staves.

2

Makani

19

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 19 through 23. The Flute part (Fl.) begins with a melodic line in measure 19, featuring a half note G4, quarter notes A4 and B4, and a half note C5. The Oboe part (Ob.) has a whole note G3 in measure 19, followed by a whole note C4 in measure 20, and then a melodic line starting in measure 21. The Bassoon part (Bsn.) plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout the system. Dynamics markings include *mf* and *f* with hairpins.

24

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 24 through 29. The Flute part (Fl.) has a melodic line with a slur over measures 24-25, a half note G4 in measure 26, and a half note A4 in measure 27. The Oboe part (Ob.) has a whole note G3 in measure 24, followed by a whole note C4 in measure 25, and then a melodic line starting in measure 26. The Bassoon part (Bsn.) continues with its eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics markings include *mf* and *f* with hairpins.

30

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 30 through 34. The Flute part (Fl.) has a melodic line with a slur over measures 30-31, a half note G4 in measure 32, and a half note A4 in measure 33. The Oboe part (Ob.) has a whole note G3 in measure 30, followed by a whole note C4 in measure 31, and then a melodic line starting in measure 32. The Bassoon part (Bsn.) continues with its eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics markings include *mf* and *f* with hairpins.

ALVARO MUNOZ

LEG LOSS

On the morning of January 20, 2030, students were returning to Texan State University. Jill's alarm clock went off at approximately 6:00 a.m. but her class did not start until 9:00 a.m. She always liked to wake up extra early to get her workout in and to prepare for her day. She lived on the fourth floor of Biennial Hall, which was one of the newer halls that had just been built. It had very nice amenities, spacious rooms, study halls, and a big lobby.

Jill was a very creative junior, and her favorite hobby was to write fictional stories. She wrote horror, comedy, romance, tragedy, and anything else she could think of. She was a very athletic person, too. She loved to play soccer, and she was very good at it, too, but her school only offered Intramural soccer. Jill lived in the dormitory with three other girls her same age who were all in her same field of study. She was an engineering major, but she loved to write and to be physically active all in the same day. She was one of a kind.

That morning was colder than usual in the lower twenties. She had set her smart thermostat up to eighty degrees, using just her voice. This was one of the features of her dormitory that she loved the most. She didn't have to get up from her bed to change the room's temperature. Her window had a lot of condensation from the cold air outside. It was sunny, and she had forgotten to close her blinds before she went to sleep. The sun was shining inside her room, brightening up everything.

Jill got up from her bed, and after both of her feet touched the floor, she stood for a few seconds unable to move. Then she felt lightheaded and fell backwards onto her bed unable to break her fall. Lucky for her, she was right next to her bed. She got back up, wondering what was wrong with her. She was feeling fine right now, so she proceeded to take out her yoga mat and begin her workout. After she was done, she felt fine. Better even. Throughout her workout, she did not feel a single difference.

Later, after she had eaten and dressed for school, she headed for her first class, which was nuclear physics. She bundled up in a thick hoodie and wore two layers of pants. It was also very windy that day which made it feel even more cold despite the sun being out. She got

into the elevator and descended to the first floor and went outside. An electric driverless trolley that she took every day to her class was always waiting at the exit of her dorm, so she did not have to be out in the cold too much. The trolley was smaller than a normal SUV, but it could carry a total of ten passengers because it didn't have a gas engine or a driver. It was basically a box filled with ten seats, but it was a real trolley after all. It was very warm inside the trolley. When she arrived her building, she got off the trolley and on to an electric scooter to reach the entrance. The engineering building had just opened after being under construction for the past year. It was three stories tall and had a skybridge made of glass from which you could see in any direction. It was built ten years ago, but recently it had gone under a renovation that added a big nuclear research laboratory for students. The building had grown quite a bit since it was last constructed. Two minutes later Jill reached the entrance. The entrance had glass doors that you could see inside. Every classroom had glass walls that you could make translucent in order to create a little privacy when needed.

Jill entered the building and began to climb the stairs to the third floor, which was actually six flights of stairs. Although the elevator was a few feet from the stairs, but she always preferred to take the stairs. After the first flight, she felt fine. She went on to the next flight of stairs, and her heartbeat increased slightly. By the third flight of stairs, she started sweating, and her legs began to feel heavy. As she reached the fourth flight of stairs, her legs felt even heavier, and she was breathing faster now. She needed to take a rest. She noticed that two other students were also resting on that flight of stairs, breathing heavily and sweating. One of them started to move again onwards and onto the fourth floor. As he climbed the last steps, he did it very slowly, turned the corner and disappeared. "You too?" Jill asked the other stranger.

"What?" the stranger replied. Embarrassed, the stranger continued to the next steps and disappeared at the fourth floor.

Jill also continued to climb, but this time slower than when she first began. She reached the fifth, then the sixth flight of stairs, holding herself by the handrails for the entire time. Her calf muscles were aching as if she had just done a heavy workout. As she reached the third floor, every one was walking very slowly. Some students were resting on the chairs in the panoramic glass skywalk, breathing heavily and sweating, even though it was not that warm inside the

building.

When she entered her classroom, she sat next to one of her classmates. "What is going on, Ty?" she asked him.

"I don't know. Everyone seems to be really tired for some reason," he replied.

"Really? And what about you?"

"This morning I was feeling fine, but as soon as I started to climb the stairs, I started to feel weak in my legs," Ty replied.

"The same thing happened to me just now!" said Jill. The professor walked in. He was a tall male wearing a long white lab coat with pens in one of his chest pockets. Breathing out a deep breath of air, he said jokingly, "I am out of shape. I need to start climbing stairs some more." Class went on and during that time, everything was as if normal. No more pain, or weakness.

When class was over, it was time for lab on the first floor of that same building. As Jill got up, her vision was starting to fade, and she lost her balance for half a second, but she was quickly able to compose herself, so no one noticed. As everyone was walking out, one of her classmates tripped on her own feet and was not able to brace her fall. She hit her head on the side of the door. It wasn't a hard hit, but it was hard enough to leave a painful bruise. "Are you okay?" the professor, who was nearby, asked. "I hit my head, and I don't know why. . . I couldn't move my legs for like two seconds," she replied.

"Oh my, let's get you some help," he offered. She was able to get up again and together they disappeared inside the elevator.

Jill continued down the stairs towards the lab on the first floor. As she descended, she felt like her legs were going to give out. "Not again!" she thought. She started to breathe heavily, nervous because something was clearly wrong with her, and she didn't know what it was. Some of the students were going down the stairs normally, but others were descending slowly.

Then one student randomly fell as his legs gave out. He dropped his laptop as he fell and landed a few steps further down. His heavy backpack dragged his body down the stairs a little further. The others rushed to help him. He had bruised his elbows, knees, and face.

Jill, more scared now, climbed back to the third floor to use the elevator. The elevator's sudden drop caused her to nearly lose her balance, but she grabbed the safety rail, catching herself. She started breathing heavily again. As she reached the first floor, some of her

classmates were entering the nuclear laboratory, much fewer in numbers than normal.

She wanted to go to the doctor to get some help, but she didn't want to miss her class. She entered the near-empty classroom and sat on a table by herself. She couldn't concentrate. She kept thinking of her fall this morning, her weakness climbing the stairs and the other two students who had fallen in front of her. "Am I next?" she thought to herself.

Her phone buzzed, and she received an email from the professor that he was not going to be able to attend class. Jill scrolled further and read his explanation: "For some reason this morning I was not able to get out of bed at all. I am currently in the emergency room, and I will keep you all updated." Jill's heart started racing. Her body temperature and breathing increased, and she started sweating profusely. She was having an anxiety attack. She noted the time on her phone, looked at her watch, and then removed it. The anxiety made her look in every direction and feel as though she might have to run from someone. Then she realized that she was the only one left in the room. After a few minutes, she collected herself, gathered her belongings, and left the lab.

Now she was set on going to the health center. As she was walking, she heard what she thought was an ambulance siren. It was very loud and very close, but she could not see it. Everyone was walking slowly as if there was a lot of wind. As she passed by the art building, she saw a student with leg stabilizers trying to get on a scooter. She approached him walking normally as her legs were doing fine at this moment. "Hi, what happened to you?" She asked trying not to be disrespectful.

"Apparently everyone around here is catching the virus that's going around. First it takes your balance away. Then it gradually takes out your legs. If you don't act fast enough, it will paralyze your entire body. I heard some professor got paralyzed."

"I know him!" Jill replied. "He was supposed to come in to class, but he said he couldn't get out of bed. Do you know what this is?"

He answered, "I called my family, and let them know. Apparently, they're fine. I think it's just us. My grandma says it's Polio, but I thought that was extinct."

"It is extinct!" she yelled. The boy rode off on the scooter, and Jill's heart was racing again. "Am I next?" she wondered. "Can I get rid of it?"

She finally made her way to the health center. Walking in, she saw lots of students in the reception area. Some had crutches, others had leg stabilizers, and others were in wheelchairs being loaded on to driverless mobile hospitals to be transported. From the distance, an emergency siren grew louder and louder. This time she could see the ambulance. It parked right in front of her. From inside the health center out came a gurney that had a blue tarp covering something. She imagined it must be a person. Quickly they loaded the gurney into the ambulance and with lights and sirens, the ambulance left.

Jill told the man at the front desk her problems and that she needed help. Since a lot of other students had come in with similar symptoms, they were at full capacity and could take only seriously ill students. Jill could still function somewhat normally, after a quick check-up with a doctor and a few nurses, they decided she should go elsewhere. She felt a little relieved; being in a place filled with sick students would've given her another anxiety attack.

Jill walked to her dormitory in the chilled air. Over the course of a few days, this disease had disrupted everything in the university. The cafeteria staff was no longer working, so no food service was available on campus. The gym was empty, and no one was able to play intramural soccer. None of her three roommates was home. She called them, but their phones went straight to voicemail. For the rest of the afternoon, Jill just stayed in her room. She never called her family because she did not want to worry them.

She didn't much for the rest of the day and felt nothing else that night — no pain, no weakness, and no dizziness. She streamed movies until she fell asleep, momentarily forgetting about everything that had happened to her and everyone else.

At 6:00 am, her alarm rang. Jill awakened slowly from her sleep. She could hear her alarm, but she couldn't reach it to turn it off. It kept ringing. After a few seconds, it turned off on its own, and now she could hear noises outside her room in the common area. "Are they back?" she thought to herself. She tried to move her legs to stand up and to get out of bed, but she couldn't. She wanted to lift her hand, but she couldn't. Even turning her head was almost impossible. Once she realized that she could not move, that she was paralyzed from her neck down, she let out the loudest scream ever, but no sound came out.

ANA PENAESTRADA

FEAR

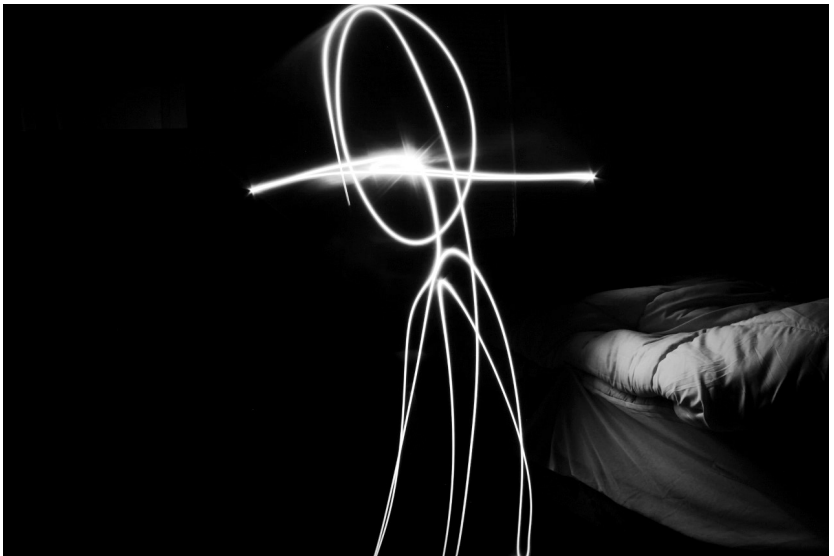
It's the hands around her neck
taking her last breath.
It's the finger over the trigger,
Ready to pull, ready to kill.
It's the chain made by many years
Repeating the same lies she hears.

Will she ever speak?
Right at the edge she peaks
A little flame of hope to be picked.
Was it enough?
But furthermore,
Was she enough?



MARIEL PEREZ

RAY 01



MARIEL PEREZ

RAY 02

CLAIRE ROGERS

THE BOTTLE

tears that should've fallen
were quickly dried up.

words that should've been spoken
were immediately swallowed.

memories that brought pain and heartbreak
were promptly suppressed.

the only productivity of this is
that it fills up the bottle.

CLAIRE ROGERS

GROUNDED

Wendy grew up.

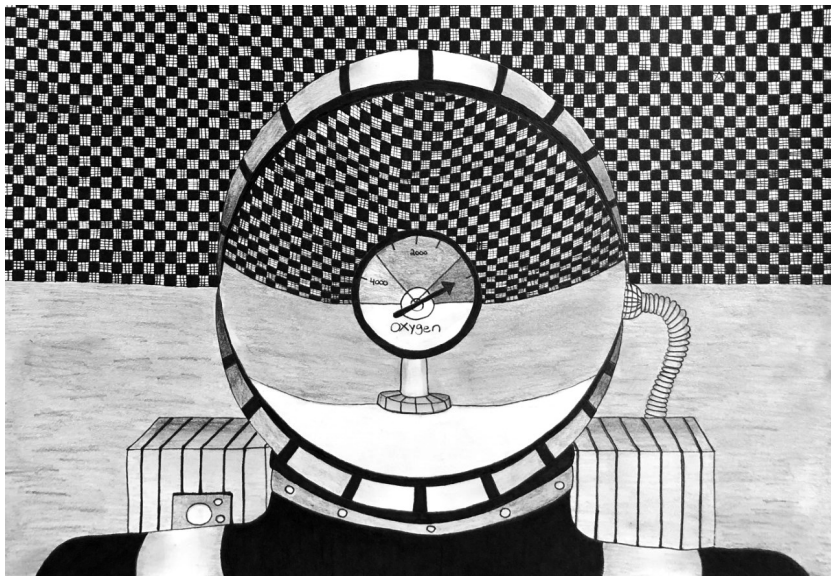
She never forgot.

Never forgot the adventure.

Never forgot about the boy that taught
her how to fly.

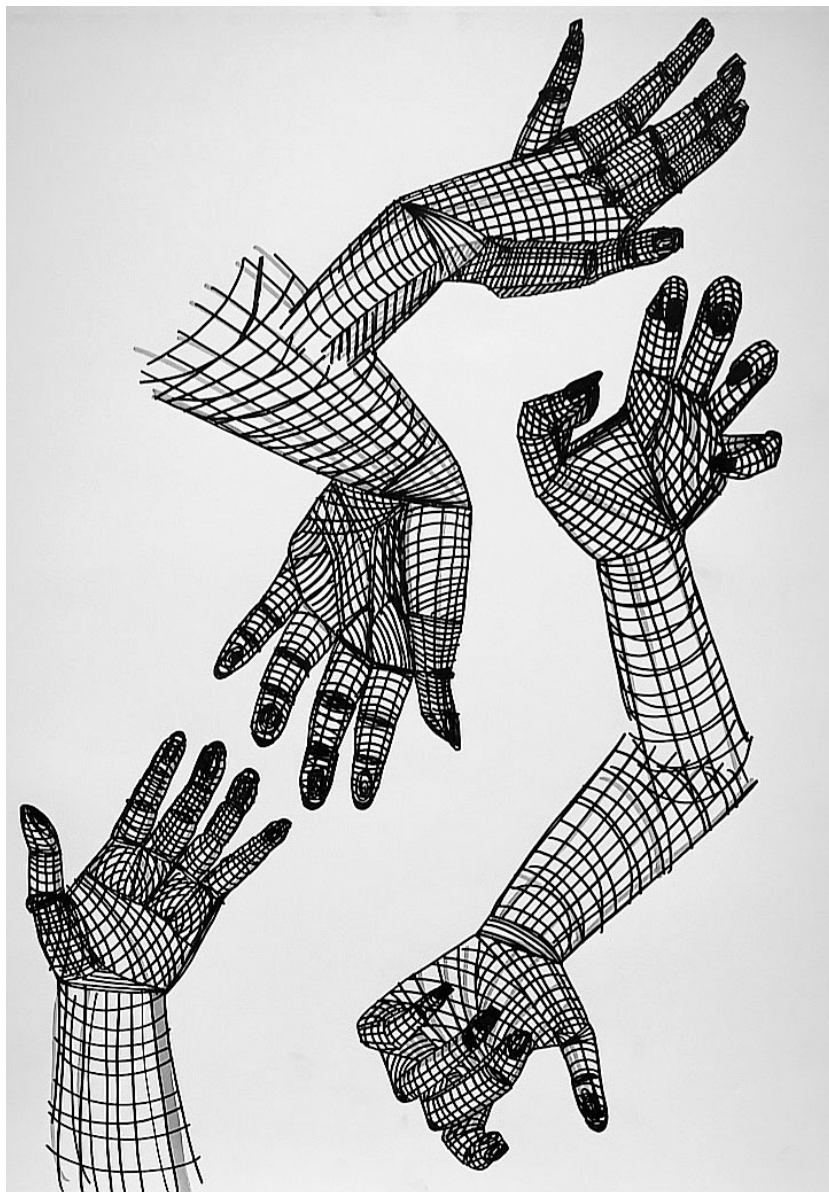
Never forgot the magic.

She just forgot how to get her
feet off the ground.



VIRGINIA SIMS

ANXIETY



DAKOTA STOWE

HAND STUDIES

ARYNN TOMSON

COMFORT

I sat there
Still
Head nodding forward
Eyes wide
I looked down and stroked your hair
Bright ruby strands

You always had trouble falling asleep
you said
But with me you were dreaming in seconds

So I sat there
I stayed to give you rest
But now, I'm the one who's restless
And you're falling for someone else

ARYNN TOMSON

NIGHTMARES

You were scared
At the thought of losing me
Nightmares told you so
I assured you I am here

And that's where you left me

ARYNN TOMSON

PARADISE

I spent all my life
Longing for home
I found it
in your sea foam eyes
and within your arms

ALANNA WHITE

AUTUMN

HAIKU

Death is freedom won.
Drained leaves dance along the dirt,
Alive—we are bound.

ALANNA WHITE

BIRDIE

ODE

Somewhere there is a Bird.
He sang to me at dawn,
And slept next to me at night.
But also, somewhere,
Is the chance that since he
Is no longer caged,
I will not be able to find him.

ALANNA WHITE

BLUEBERRY

Memoir

If I could do anything, I think I would leave the drab air of this small town behind me. Maybe I will escape through my window under the concealment of the night sky and run. The black dog that barely belongs to the family across the street would chase me and bite at my grey sneakers; his obnoxious yelps after I kicked him would wake up my dog who stays in a permanent position watching out of the window. A thick layer of grey pollution would slowly find a home in my struggling lungs until the burning in my chest became too much; my legs would soon turn into sandbags that my fatigued muscles could no longer support. I would still hear my dog frantically trying to dig through the window. There is no doubt it would inevitably wake up my mom. Thinking of leaving my mother, or the possibility of her leaving me, pumps enough adrenaline through my blood that I become silent as the waves of anxiety elevate the pounding of my heart and hyperventilate my lungs. That fear that screams in the center of my mind is enough to make me look away from the promising window and climb into bed.

Earlier this morning, I saw my mom sitting at the scratched oak table, her chronically bloodshot eyes moving back and forth reading the words on her computer furiously. The bi-focal glasses slid further down her nose every time her excessively maintained eyebrows furrowed to focus on a word. Her eyebrows expressed the most on her face. In periods of anger, they would rise to meet her hairline; when she was confused, they drew down to hood over her vision, and when she was focusing, they would knit together to meet in the middle. It's just what they did on their own accord.

She looked up at me as I entered, sitting back to take a drag from her vape. She hadn't smoked a cigarette for over three years, Now it was the repetition of taking something to the mouth which traveled deep into the lungs that her clipped wing. But her breathing was getting easier every day, so I didn't hound her too much about the vape, although a part of me wished she would go back to the nicotine buzz from the cigarette to release tension. But she assures me, "If I ever get that worked up, I'll just go back to smokin' weed." Her

reasoning comes from being a product of the 60's as well as living through the 80's. She would often tell me with a mock grin on her face, "Hey, if you remember the 80's, you didn't do 'em right, okay? Tha's all I'm sayin'," her eyes glinting with the memory of secrets from a decade past, memories that did not parallel the woman in front of me at all.

"Good mornin'," she said after a long exhale of vape released from her lungs. The smoke hung in a cloud around her face as I walked over to her spot at the head of the table and bent down to put my forehead on her shoulder. Her arms wrapped around me in our ritual morning hug, wrapping me in a momentary comfort before I pulled away and the worries of the day started.

"Mornin'," I mumbled as I reached for a toaster strudel that sat on the cutting board. She always managed to make breakfast for the seven people who lived there from the time she woke up at 4:00 to the time she left for work at 7:00. She opted for themes of the morning to give us something to look forward to. Monday and Tuesday, there would be a bowl of our choice cereal to greet us. Wednesday's and Thursday's fare was oven-made French toast and hash browns. On Fridays, she made sure my brother had cinnamon rolls on the table after he got out of the shower, and Saturdays were toaster strudels and bacon; the catch of the day was to get that one blueberry pastry amidst a sea of apple. My taste buds were overwhelmed as I bit into an apple.

"How'd ya sleep, Punkin?" she asked while bringing the vape back to her mouth to take a drag. She looked at me through the top of her glasses.

"Apple," I commented around the food in my mouth. "But good. You?" I looked at the pastry in my hand in disappointment. I should have gone with my gut and chosen the one next to it. That one looks like it would be blueberry.

"Like a baby," she said drawing her pitch up in the end. Her eyes went back to the laptop screen as she replaced the vape in her hand with the mouse. That was her third laptop within two months; the other two were victims of a liquid spill on the table that charged a path past the papers and bags straight to her HP. I felt bad every time, and every time she got angrier. "Y'all know. What is my number one pet peeve about the house?" she said after the second laptop got ruined. Her eyebrows were drawn up to her hairline to let us know

this was not a light topic. "Shit on the table," she would finish. "Y'all know that." She had a right to be angry with us. With an elementary student, two college students, a daughter who was an acting stay-at-home mom and her boyfriend, it would be reasonable to assume that everyone would pick up after themselves. Yet most Sundays after church, she found herself cleaning the chronically messy house anyway.

"Whata you doin'?" I asked, her pulling out a chair to sit at the table. I picked up a piece of the turkey bacon that sat on a paper plate next to the board.

"Just tryin' to figure out how much I owe the government," she said with her eyebrows stretched to her hair line.

"Income taxes?" I questioned. She works as a financial coordinator in a dentist's office that she recalls being with for "five long years. Five very . . . *very* long years." And in those five years, they have taken away her 401k, as well as her chances of getting insurance, something she had been without since she divorced my dad six years ago and something that wrecked her taxes ever since. She was too poor to pay for regular insurance yet made too much to qualify for ObamaCare. She was in the middle of the ocean without a sail, or even a boat really. Humorously, the people who could save the stranded lady would easily cruise by, yelling at her, "You're not good enough," as well as, "You're too good," so it was hard when every semester I would tell her how much my classes were going to be and her face would fall telling me that she doesn't have the money. She would shake her head with her eyebrows drawn together saying, "But I can help with any books you need. Or labs. Howbout your labs?" I smiled at her and told her of my collection of Barnes and Noble gift cards I had been collecting for three years of Christmas's to pay for books, but she could help with labs if she wanted too.

"D'you know how much yet?" I asked her, as I picked up a piece of turkey bacon that sat on a paper plate.

"No. It's tha insurance that gets me. Every year, man Every *freakin'* year." Her head was shaking in disapproval, like it did the day she saw a note from my brother's teacher explaining his ill behavior, while simultaneously implying that he be put on medication for ADHD, to which she would say, "He's seven years old. A seven-year-old doesn't need steady medication. Just let his brain mature. Like seriously." This was her argument for his year of

second grade; but this year, his third grade year, she decided to make the jump and medicate the hyper child. This had no effect on his consistent A/B grades; maybe if we were to study his behavior for a day, a difference would be made apparent. He still acts a bit unruly at times to me, but the father he never knew died on impact after falling asleep at the car wheel. So, after seeing the young boy meet this man whom he fantasized about for the first time in a casket gave me insight to the damaged boy's behavior.

"Yeah," was my response. I didn't know what else to say. Just like she can't help with me and my sister Autumn's classes, I can't help with her taxes. I can't help her with health insurance either because that would be an entire two weeks of work for me. I just couldn't help. And I hated the feeling of helplessness that came along with that. It made my chest constrict around my heart to see a woman I admire, someone I strive to be like, struggle so much through life. I looked at her green eyes again, studying the yellow in her irises as they flicked back and forth to read. And on her skin, underneath patches of yesterday's makeup, discolored sunspots adorned her cheeks from days spent in the hot Arizona sun when she was three and then in the scorching New Mexico sun when she was ten. Her nose had a flick of red zig zagging on the end from her time in the bitter-sweet winds of Alaska, where her father talked her into swimming naked in the glacier water when she was eight. My eyes drew up to the piercing in the left upper cartilage of her ear, a silver piece with two asymmetrical dangling stars, a piece that I cannot remember her ever not having and, upon my wondering of how long she had it, her response was, "Oh, man . . . I don't know . . . Long enough for it'ta be rusted together in the back."

I picked up another piece of bacon off of the plate. "Is Autumn up yet?" I asked, sizing up the meat whose body was seventy percent burnt. There were always six pieces like this, six still floppy, and four just right. An unfortunate product of her distracted mind, a mind that doesn't wake up until two cups of coffee have been consumed but starts breakfast way before that limit.

"No. She ended up in my bed last night," she said, picking up her vape to take a hit. She held this one a little longer than before, then, positioning her mouth, she blew the white cloud in the opposite direction from where I sat. I watched the heavy white tendrils dance through the yellow streams of morning light and dissolve into air.

"Why?" I asked, putting my attention back on her. My eyebrows drew down over my eyes in confusion.

"I don' know. Said she was havin' nightmares." She took another hit, blowing it in the same direction.

"Oh. D'you know what of?" I asked. Autumn dreamt a lot. For a time, she was the only one who had bad enough nightmares to need to sleep with mom, and then the puppy I got as a graduation present passed away, and dreams of abandonment, as well as the death of my brother, pushed me to do the same as well. I remember waking up that morning crying to Mom, telling her the heart wrenching reality of my subconscious. She made my brother crawl into my top bunk that morning in order to give me a hug, in order to show me everything was okay.

"Nah," she said, shaking her head at me while not breaking focus on the computer. We sat like that for a while as I continued to eat and she continued to type and click vigorously.

I sat as she worked; I relaxed as she stressed. And I got \$1,200 back in taxes while she owed \$1,200. And she refused to let me help her saying, "No. That money can go to your college next semester." Even though I tried to tell her that next semester was already covered by the nanny job I got this summer, she still refused, concluding that next fall and spring semester were set. I can't help but admire the heart in her. How invincible that heart is that calls out to love with every thump.

When I hear her stories of growing up, they invigorate me: the trouble she didn't get into when she and my aunt beat up a girl in the McDonalds bathroom, the idea of her pale and thick makeup paired with parachute pants, the embodiment of a rebellious teen who didn't fit in anywhere in the small Weatherford High School system, whose principal even wanted her gone. Yet she was number one or two on the tennis team, depending on if she beat Regina Wilder that week or not, as well as being a long distance track star. The things she did, the crazy things that I would never do. Her experiences make her story, stories that I will never come close too, stories that I long to make on my own, yet to which I can't seem to find a good introduction.

If I could do anything, I think I would stay here. In this small town where ten generations of my family were born as well as died. The promises of a better future I made long ago in my heart to my mother would keep me running. Maybe I will buy my mom a tiny house in

the country or pay to get her into some business classes of her own. The stories will bite at my grey sneakers, and my chest constricts knowing I won't be able to appreciate them until they are a part of history. But I will take the time to stop and think of them when I can.

I think of opening that window I stared out of last night, filling my lungs with the cool, moist air and being content. That's all I have to be right now — content. And that is something I can do. These thoughts flow through my mind as I take a bite out of another toaster strudel, and my taste buds are overwhelmed as I bite into the blueberry.

“Blueberry,” I said around the pastry in my mouth.

ALANNA WHITE

UNREQUITED LOVE'S

ODE

The heart is a prostitute
Lending herself to company.
Should I teach her to be frugal
No one will grab her.
Should I teach her to be open
Everyone will exploit her.
How does she desire so strongly
But never desire me.
Why does she continue to pound
When she hates me.

ALANNA WHITE

WAKING UP

HAIKU

If sanity burns
Embers of blue surround me
Licking skin from bones.

MADISON WHITEHEAD
ARTIFICIAL

Gabby makes me
 think of bubble gum.
Loud, sticky, gets in places
where it shouldn't, easy
to burst its bubble, and
leaves a funny aftertaste
in your mouth,
very sugary—
not in a good way,
and sometimes you really
want to smack it

MADISON WHITEHEAD
COPY WRITE

It's always fun
to sit down
raise my pen
to begin
a poem of my own
only to find
the only words
were those of the last song
on the radio

MADISON WHITEHEAD

IF I WAS GOOD AT ART

I. I'd have a girl with chestnut skin looking towards the sky
And amidst her flowing black hair you'd see tears in her green
 eyes
Her narrow hands would clasp upon her soft pink blouse
And from there a large fisherman's hook would sprout
The lie would hoist her chest up high against the background of
 blue
Where, if one looked closely, they'd see music lines and notes all
 through
And if they were the type to try and understand this work of art
They'd learn that she was drowning in music that tugged upon
 her heart

II. When I was a little girl, I loved mythology
And this is a story that really stood out to me
When Hera convinced the other gods to overthrow their King
And how Lord Zeus retaliated, altering their thinking
The scene that most stood out to me was Hera in the sky
Bound in golden chains as she cried and cried and cried
Tears soaking her porcelain face, her white toga dragging in the
 wind
Her perfect curls coifed atop her head as she sagged in chains that
 chafed her skin
In the end her husband could no longer stand her cries
And he let her go with promises that she would no more try
But that scene of utter agony has stuck with me to this day
I'm not sure why, all I know is that it frightens me in some way

- III. Take a lovely blue sky dotted with clouds
 The type you'd see on a perfect day
 And have a hand reaching up and right
 That starts peeling it away
 Like wallpaper being torn away
 From a house pretending to be a home
 And from behind the white backing of a lying sky
 Lies the cracked, broken concrete of paved stone
- IV. The Rite of Spring is not what it seems
 There are no flowers in sight, nor anything green
 'Tis a ballet that begins with a stage that is dark
 And pale maidens that flit, jerk, and pause around like terrified
 larks
 Red fabric is thrust from vise to vise
 As dark, burly men watch and decide whom to sacrifice
 'Tis a dark tale of a virgin sacrifice
 Yet it is this tale that lingers in my mind's sight
 I see a pale maiden who is naught but bone
 With her shift pulled over her face as if to atone
 And behind her looms a dark, wild man
 Who holds a stone knife firmly in his right hand
 His left comes across the pale virgin's waist
 Streaking blood in a mark deciding her fate
- V. In charcoal swipes against a sheet of white
 Emerges a sparrow that died in flight
 With the shape of the chest like large shavings of wood
 And wings spread out to fly, if only they could
 The chest itself is empty, there's nothing there
 The heart's the first to go when life disappears

- VI.** A black cut-out of a child, distinguishable only by size,
Contrasting against the bright, blood red background
and in this child's vise,
a black pinwheel which hides the sign that led to 2,700,000's
demise
- VII.** On an oil canvas smeared thick with olive green,
I'd have a dirty room, a sight preferred unseen
to the right would be a green bottle spinning, the left of that
another hitting a wall
below I'd have a pile of clear, green, brown glass shattered as
alcohol
soaks into the disgusting, dust covered, once-was-red floor;
an example of what could be happening behind closed doors

MADISON WHITEHEAD
LITTLE FICTIONS

The professor calls these
 “little fictions”
and I don’t think he’s wrong
Poems *are* flights of fancies
 words artfully arranged
to paint what brushes can’t
Yet still I find
 where most fiction lies
I write my deepest truths

MADISON WHITEHEAD

MADNESS?

Is this madness?

 If only it was, then everything

 Would make sense

The feeling of drifting,

 the dizzy vertigo

The odd fear of being seen

The feverish haze, the listlessness

the chills that won't go away

The limpness and lack of care

The lies through hollow teeth

shining through gleaming eyes

The acknowledgement of disappointment

 which strangely isn't there

The truly odd fact of how

 I really cannot care

So is this madness?

 I do not know

 There is no voice to tell me so.

MADISON WHITEHEAD
A MINOR VEXATION

Dear Teacher,

Q is from James Bond, not Star Trek.

Sincerely,

2nd from the left, 5th row

MADISON WHITEHEAD

MUSIC

God, I wish I could dissolve
into color and sink into
sound while flying on heart beats

 To melt into movement
and heat and animal
instincts

 To roar and run and purr
sensual, graceful, honest
floating while tied to gravity
hurts

I wish to sing with my entire
 being with my mouth in
 silent accordance

God I wish to dissolve
 and spread into the sound
and soak into the rhythms
that match my heart

MADISON WHITEHEAD

MY LOVE AFFAIR

The meat slides gently between my lips
Possessing the most unique and succulent of flavors
My mouth nibbles and nips and outright bites
And when the deed is done all I can think is there is no truer love
Than the one shared for bacon

CARLY ANNE WORTHY

SURGERY

Count down from ten

Ten

How lucky am I to be in an OR
To have surgery on my broken skull
To try to put the pieces together again

Nine

My brain shakes trying to stay awake
As if it is under attack
It resists the need of help
But my neuro fluid seeps out of my skull
Into my body

Eight

My heart starts to race
The fluid starts to fill my veins and rushes into my heart mixed with
blood
As if my own body was toxic to myself
Killing me from the inside out

Seven

I code on an OR table
What was meant to be an easy surgery
Became a death bed
Having to be careful not to spill more spinal fluid into my body
Compressions didn't seem possible

Six

I start to lose consciousness within my own brain
I see a light
And no longer hear a thing

Five

The count down is almost over
My brain swells against my damaged skull
My heart can't keep up my head is spinning
And I no longer keep score

Four

I let go of all things
There is no more trying
There is no more fighting
My brain has always hated me
Having a mind of its own it's escaping

Three

It poisons my body with its fluid
The nurses and doctors stand as I get scanned and shocked
I can feel the tiny electricity strike my heart
It is up to me to come back or not

Two

I slowly feel the prayers of the surgeon
He wants me to awake to make peace within my body
But peace fled a long time ago
My skull has been cracked and I hated my brain
My body can take its processing

One

I let my spirit leave
My brain cells die
My heart beats its last goodbye
And there I lie
In my own puddle of lies

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