



ANTHOLOGY

Volume 19
A Publication of
Tarleton State University

Anthology

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Editors:
Chelsea Gadoury
Carolynn Harwicke
Camille McGehee
Alice Stewart

Publication Directors:
Benedda Konvicka
Marilyn Robitaille

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Students enrolled at Tarleton State University are invited to submit their work for publication consideration online at **www.tarleton.edu/anthology**.

Anthology accepts work throughout the calendar year and is published annually in April.

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Art in Online Gallery

These art pieces have been selected to appear in the 2012 – 2013, Volume 19 Gallery of Anthology and can be viewed online.

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Shadow Palm
Alyssa Bedrick
Aliens
Nude Reclining
Sunflower Pattern
Megan Pruitt Bise
Giraffe Sitting
Safari Bliss
Chelsea Braune
Poverty in Thailand
Christopher Coan
The Architect
Heaven Bound
Scarlet Shades and Blue
The Sea in Me
Upon a Shade of Light
Lauren Cozzi
Bloom
Highway Design
I See Stars Above
Puppies
Pure
Splash
Tropical
Walking on a Dream
White Flowers
Apryl De La Rosa
Red Lipstick
Secret
Seether
What is Love?
Amanda DeBusk
A.M.
Frito

Lisa DeLuca
Greener Pastures
Hope
Julie Easley
Calm Before the Storm
Morgan Mariah Emerson
Kitty
Okapi
Okapi 2
Sherry Gaston
Crepes of Peace
Midnight Snow
One Day in the Woods
A View of Summer
E. G. Hallgarth
Family from Afar
Amber Harvey
After a Nice Shower
Curious
Dog Days
Fiery Passion
Graceful Danger
Hi, Brown Eyes
Pit Stop
Quite the Talker
Kimberly Hogan
Perspective
Grace Krantz
A Quick, Springy Tun
Maranda McGonigle
Boats in Color
Mackenzie McLellan
The Little Thinker
Brittany McLemore
River Road

Hannah Miller
Beauty in Work
Cotton

Klye Millican
untitled

Lauren Motloch
Cottonball Sky
Reflections
Spring Storm
Supper Time

Christine J. Pritchett
Bubbles
Family Dinner Series 01

Amanda Ritchie
Church in Florence, Italy
Next to You, Next to Me
Toasting the Eiffel Tower

Cynthia Robinson
Flaming Rose

Dawn Skinner
John W. at Rock Church Cemetery
Magical Bubbles
Pink Petals
The Wonders of Bubbles

Molly Stewart
Eleven
Flea Market Find
Forgotten
Man's Best Friend
Public Outcry
Reservations

Dana Tucker
Autumn Marina
Marina Office
Mi Amor

Kandace Willett
Cockatiel Friends
Dark Beauty

Marissa Williams
Cow Creek Sunset 02
Puppy Love

Kirstie Wixom
Even Without Color, There's Beauty
Right Exposure

What, Mom?
Yellow Means Smile
Brittany Wonsang
Flames of the Masses

Anthology 19

Editors' Choice Awards

Our Editors' Choice Awards honor three 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.

OUTSTANDING ARTIST:

E.G. Hallgarth

For variety of styles

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTOR:

Molly Stewart

For the scope of work accepted in prose, poetry, and visual arts

For OUTSTANDING COMBINATION OF WORK:

Lisa DeLuca

For the pairing of creative non-fiction and the art that illustrates it

Creative Arts Day Speaker Jan Seale



Jan Seale, the 2012 Texas Poet Laureate, lives in McAllen in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. She attended Baylor and holds degrees from the University of Louisville and North Texas State University. Her poems are collected in eight volumes: Bonds and Sharing the House (RiverSedge Press); Texas Poets in Concert: A Quartet (with 3 other poets, University of North Texas Press); The Yin of It (Pecan Grove Press); Valley Ark, with Ansen Seale (The Knowing Press); The Wonder Is: New and Selected Poems 1974-2012 and Nape (Ink Brush Press); and Jan Seale: New and Selected Poems (TCU Press). Her prose writing has appeared in such places as Texas Monthly, The Yale Review, The Chicago Tribune, Nimrod, and New America. Seven of her short stories were selected for PEN/Syndicated Fiction Projects, with two broadcast over National Public Radio. Her short fiction is collected in two volumes: Airlift, published by TCU Press, and Appearances, from Lamar University Press. Seale held a Creative Writing Fellowship through the National Endowment for the Arts in 1982. She is a member of the Speakers' Bureau for Humanities Texas as well as a member of the Texas Institute of Letters. She and her husband Carl, a conductor and composer, have three sons and four grandsons. More about Seale may be found at www.janseale.com.

We are, all of us, part of a storytelling and story-receiving species. To enhance our lives, whether we are writers or readers of writing, we can all be open to discovery. Julia Cameron, a writing teacher observed, "The capacity for delight is the gift of paying attention." Delight is the payback for close observation.

Animal behaviorists tell us that in a given monkey family, twenty percent of them are sent to the top of the canopy in the forest to act as lookouts for food and for the safety of the group, to call down the news. I always want to be one of those designated story-telling monkeys.

What can we find new in our lives each day and thus celebrate? I make a game of finding something different in my backyard or in a park near my house where I walk. The other day I got close enough to see the throat contours change on a mockingbird as it sang. What a marvel!

Sometimes my dreams leave me in awe of that whole mysterious process. The poet William Blake said, "Everything that lives is holy. / Life delights in Life." Do you delight in life?

There is a story in everything and everybody. Do we give the gift of listening as well as of telling? Do we understand that one's story may be more important than any schedule or budget or report? Occasionally, when I'm tempted to want to "pass" on another's story, I try to remember a line from *The Desiderata*: "Listen to the boring; they have their story too." Listening to a story you've heard over and over, and one that doesn't immediately draw you in, may be a sacrament, a gift to the person who needs so badly to repeat it. The paradox is that if we listen closely enough, and with our hearts, we find that even in the most ordinary, familiar story, there will be something for us as well.

We need to keep our hearts and minds open to the possibility of deeper meanings. If I already know everything I'm going to say in a poem, I probably won't write it. I want to experience what the writing will tell me.

Remaining human in a time-share world allows our interpretation of the events in our lives, our recall, to change if need be, but always to ripen, to enlarge, to be subject to the way we are growing as human beings.

—Jan Seale

2012-13 Texas Poet Laureate

Rebecca Ator
Frozen Fields

Writing by moonlight with hands stiff from the cold.

The frozen carpet of grass has a pure, crystal glow.
The particles of each blade interlock in a rigid structure,
forming microscopic shards of glass.
How can something so harsh in its beauty
be so gentle under my feet?

But I suppose that's it.
Beauty isn't weak.
The things we find most beautiful are,
at their very core,
robust,
uncompromising,
sometimes even cruel.
This is what allows them to be elastic,
forgiving,
to accept the forces that act upon them,
and to return those forces,
with no loss of integrity.

True beauty is unconditional.

Elizabeth Chilton

A Time For Everything

Both had formed habits. She would take the same trip, trek the same half-block, and stop—frozen with fear—in the same spot. They, would pace along the entryway, peer around the window hangings, believing it, doing so every few minutes. Each set of revolving habits brushed along the path of the other...

She had been coming to the same place every day for a month. Like clockwork, she would step off the 12:45 p.m. bus from Ash Street to Wolfe Avenue and walk half a block to the street she had grown up on. The first week of her daily visitations, she could step no further than the hedging that separated her childhood home from the neighbors'. After three weeks, she could stand on the sidewalk in front of the house but could not step across to the narrow stone path that stretched to the front porch. She had been coming to stand at this spot for a week, frozen at some wild unknown, feeling as if all the world were pushing upon her to move forward, forward to a bitter, vicious, painful end. Perhaps, in a month or so, she'd be able to stand at the brick steps that lead to the crisp white door from her past, and maybe a few months after that, she'd be capable of lifting her body, even as burdened with the past as it was, up those few steps to reach out and knock. Maybe then, she'd be able to say what she's been meaning to say, explain, and then move on. A sigh escaped from under the weight on her soul. She shook her head, her wispy bangs falling into honey eyes that shone with apprehension. Allowing her dark tresses to curtain around her in an attempt to shield herself from what was to come, she hesitated slightly, before stepping forward.

Step...step... pause.

Step...step... pause.

Looking up from her steadfast gaze on her miraculously moving feet, she froze in shock at the realization that she was half way along the walkway. A brief smile flit across her face, lighting her eyes to shine with golden depths. Just as quickly as the smile danced onto her face, it slid off as her nervousness took hold again. She began to tremble lightly, either from fear at continuing forward, or from some struggle with her body which refused to listen to her mind's commands to step forward. At last, she merely turned around, and began a brisk walk, needing to go back down the path that stretched forever until it reached the sidewalk, back down the street, back downtown, and back to the temporary comfort of her small apartment.

The sweeping sounds of a door being opened and then the hard smack of it being pulled closed stilled her cowardly movements. A deep rumbling bass called out, squeezing her heart painfully enough to bring it to a stuttering halt.

"Carol. Carol, wait."

Coming to a stop a few feet behind the petrified woman, a man in his early fifties stood and waited for the young woman to turn around. When it became obvious that she would not be turning, the older man's disposition became icy.

"What do you want? Why did you come here? Why have you been coming here?"

Carol spun quickly to lock her honey eyes on a pair so similar to her own.

"Why are you here Carol?"

"I just came.... I came by to..." The short speech she had thought up long ago and had practiced until the words rang clear in the back of her mind at all times, failed her. Worrying her bottom lip gently, Carol tried to find something she could say that would help him understand.

His eyes hardened to cold flecks of yellow topaz. He was familiar with the routine. She would come in need of money to support her addiction, acting meek. In the beginning, they gave in to her desperate pleas, but this caused too much pain, knowing that they were essentially killing her. It was just as painful to deny her, but seeing what Carol was doing to herself was enough to build a sturdy wall around their hearts.

"You know that we won't support your habit. If you want to kill yourself, you'll have to get someone else to help you."

Tears welled in Carol's eyes. It was hard to miss the seething contempt in the man's voice. "But I've....No, I've...."

Still unable to grasp the words that would bring the truth to light, Carol dropped her gaze from the hardened eyes that were determined to bore straight through her own. Such looks reminded her of her past, something she was determined to leave behind. She had made mistakes, had stupidly believed she was invincible to both influence and addiction. Reality had harshly woken her to the filthy truth that was her life. She had an addiction, or, an addiction had her, and refused to let go. When she realized this, she struggled, fought frantically, and finally succeeded in breaking free. Now began the struggle to stay away from the whispered promises that her body still ached for.

Straightening her slumped shoulders and releasing her reddened lip from its torture, Carol lifted her gaze back to those stony eyes. "I didn't come here to ask for money..." The man's look of suspicious skepticism

only spurred Carol further. "I've said goodbye to all of that. I've stopped using."

Pulling up the sleeve of her cardigan, Carol showed the man the scarred tracks on her arms and the absence of fresh needle marks. The man's eyes shone with distant hope. "I'm clean, I swear. I have been for a while. I'm determined to stay clean. I'm tired of having such a dangerous dependency. I promise, I'm through with all that stuff—" Carol was becoming more frantic, the assurances spilling from her rapidly as the silence stretched on.

"Carol. Carol, it's all right—"

"But it's not all right! I've hurt so many people—you. Mama. Joey: Crissa. Ryan... Every day that I shot up, I saw all of you die inside. I saw that, but I still did it... I couldn't stop... I'm so sorry. That's not enough, but I don't know what else to say, and that's not OK—"

"It will be OK, Carol."

Carol drew in a deep breath of cool air, which helped to calm her fraying nerves. "Well, that's part of what I came to tell you. There's this place, up in Rhode Island, they want to help me... to make sure I stay off drugs forever. I'm moving up there, Daddy, to learn how to build a life without drugs. I don't want to feel that dependency ever again, and I'm going to do whatever it takes to make sure that happens."

The conviction of Carol's statement washed over her father, and like a man dying of thirst, he soaked in the refreshing wine of truth, and was sated.

"Do... Would you like to come inside?"

Looking over her father's shoulder at the house that was the backdrop of so many of her childhood memories, Carol sighed. "I shouldn't. I've waited to call the movers until after I told you... It's weird; I was prepared to wait months to gather the nerve to tell you and Mama, but now that I've told you, I don't even want to wait until the weekend to call the movers..."

This admittance drew a booming laugh from her father. As his shoulders shook, and the corners of his eyes wrinkled, Carol memorized each and every deep-cut line, each and every tremble, imprinting the image of her laughing father into her mind, unsure of when she would see the real thing again. His laughter wrapped around her, like a familiar blanket of security from her past, and sank under her skin—into her soul. A sweet smile brightened Carol's countenance as she watched her father calm.

"You got that backward sense of impatience from me." He could now see the changes, the slow but sure return of the Carol before her life of drugs. Her eyes, one of the other things he had given her, matched his

own; emotions expressively conveyed through a myriad of shades of warm honey. Looking at the world by the reflection of his daughter's eyes, he stood, affixed to the image of his life- minus his daughter. Throwing off such thoughts, he could see that Carol was waiting, but for what, he didn't know. "Well, I'll tell your Mama where you're heading, but you better call every once in a while—at least once a month."

The tears that had receded sprang again to Carol's eyes, making the molten gold gleam. The words that failed her this time did not need to be spoken; her eyes carried the message as wind carries a whisper to listening ears.

Thank you.

Carol shifted as if to hug her father, her arms moving slightly from their limp positions by her sides, before she decided against it. Smiling at her father, before turning to continue up the walk at a much more sedate pace, Carol turned only once—at the barrier of hedging – to wave to the figures watching her depart.

He decided to leave the front door open, suddenly feeling that the house was dreary, stuffy, and that the warm spring air, and the wide column of sunlight would brighten the house greatly. Moving through the house, he opened thick curtains and creaking windows. At last, he came to the last untouched window in the house, immediately to the left of the front door, at which his wife stood. Her eyes were still staring at the edge of hedging that their daughter had disappeared behind. Clearing his throat to gain her attention, she half-turned her body to face him, but her eyes still held fast to that spot. He reached past her to throw the heavy curtains open, and in an instant a warm bath of sunlight warmed their skin to a glow. He wrestled to get the wide bay windows open, and when they were finally propped up, a breeze swept through, wrapping the couple in gentle tendrils of scents of the coming summer and the renewal of life. Deep breaths of the air made to shimmer by the golden day washed the two in a similar mindset. Wrapping his arm around his wife's petite shoulders, he stood at the window, looking out across the yard at the memories playing from times just like this...

"What did she want?"

His wife's voice cut through the mirage, successfully grounding him in the present. Those memories, the ones that seemed to glow with happiness and warmth from the spring sun, were of past days. He had held on to them like a drowning man clutching a small sliver of driftwood, but now he knew, could feel, that things would be better. A strong man can win a fight, but it takes a truly courageous man to simply walk away. Looking down at his wife, who was waiting for his reply, he could only smile.

"She came to say goodbye."



Kevin Bostick

Beach Photo-shoot



Alyssa Bedrick

Gone Fishing

Steven Christopher Coan
All That Sleeps

Were the fall to rise in me
As once in days before
Music used to dance these halls,
Gold fell on the floor
Whisperings of laughter rose
Words so ever sweet
And the warmth within my heart...
Once, I was complete
Such a wholeness I recall

Come what may, I won't forget
Winter cannot take
I remember all the gold
All that sleeps must wake

The Voice of Fall

In a moment, fall begins—
Such we may recall.
And the leaves from silver bare
Dance thru winter's hall.
Still, I search the tattered lines
Of tapestry and thread;
Autumn weaves the Golden lace
Of where the angels tread.
Shall we sing of summer past?
What of spring and bloom?
We, the fabric of the stars—
Of melody and loom—
Stand before a weathered pane
And gaze in idle thought;
What becomes of us, my Dear
And the Gold we sought

Steven Christopher Coan
You are All I See

I dreamed a dream, and there it was,
Before my very eye—
And the brisk of summer's eve,
How it lit the sky!

. . . Yet here I am, a shattered glass,
And wine upon the stone;
In me, it has gone to waste,
The beauty I have know.

What is there to do but weep
For all that has been lost?
They tell us not to cry for such...
And yet I feel the cost.

Every drop that slips away,
A thirst I cannot fill.
Soon, there shall be but a drop,
And yea, the last shall spill.

Oh, to taste another kiss
To take this from my lips!
But alas, she's long away,
And far beyond these ships.
Every now and then, I feel
That she is drawing near,
As if the glass so shattered there
Was all to let her hear.

I cannot say what comes of it,
For I am here and now,
But this I may, for on my heart
I bear a solemn vow:
I have searched the earth and sky
For beauty hidden there—
Still I search, yet I have found
No sight to thee compare.
For what you are inside of me
Is deeper than the sea,
Richer than the finest wine—
You are all I see.

Jacqueline Cordova
The Owl

By nightfall I traverse the road of the gods, only the gem of heaven
can tame me.

My wisdom is legend, as well as my beauty

Thus I am shunned to darkness by those fowl, envious ones.

Some will tell you to see me is good luck; others will whisper evil is
lurking.

Though I prefer peace and solitude, I never can resist a breezy battle
dance.

My sight is superior to all other creatures, for I have an advantage.

Sometimes they say I have horns.

I laugh at such nonsense.

You ask me who I am and I echo your inquiry.

Brooke Cummings
How to Feel Nothing

If only
I could lock my emotions
into a tiny little box,
with six or seven tiny keys
to make them all unlock.

I'd throw one in the ocean
and I'd put one
in the desert sand.
Every key'd be hidden well,
never to be found again.

For I now know,
sometimes it is better
to be blank
than it is
to be broken.



Morgan Mariah Emerson
Smoke Study



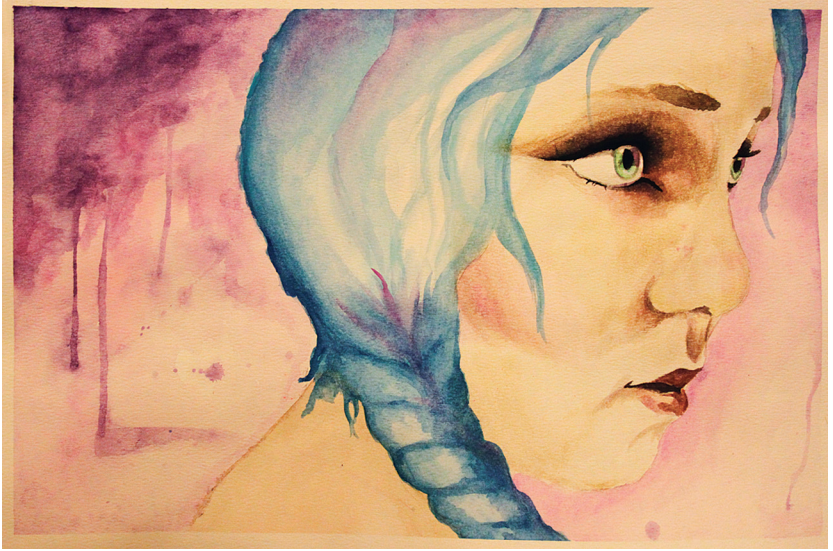
Amber Harvey
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Sherry Gaston
For the Love of Boys





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Confinement



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Swirl

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Something Blue



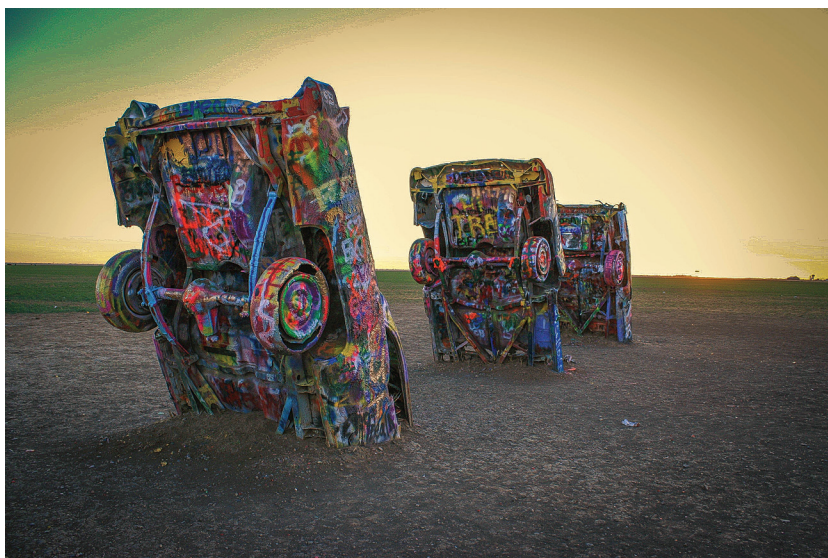
Sherry Gaston
April Surprises





Dawn Skinner

Hope



Lauren Cozzi

Cadillac Ranch



Molly Stewart

Rain on the Farm

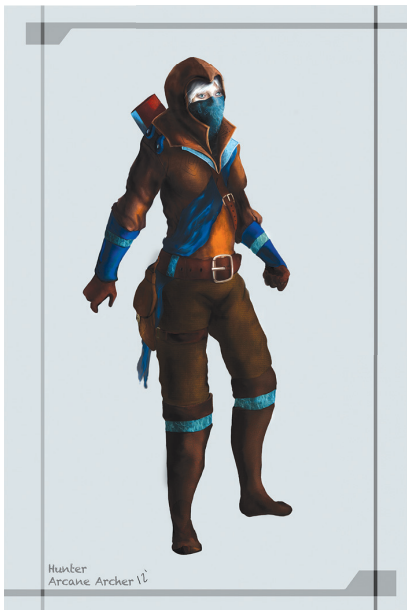


Molly Stewart

Damp



Melissa Crosby
Zee

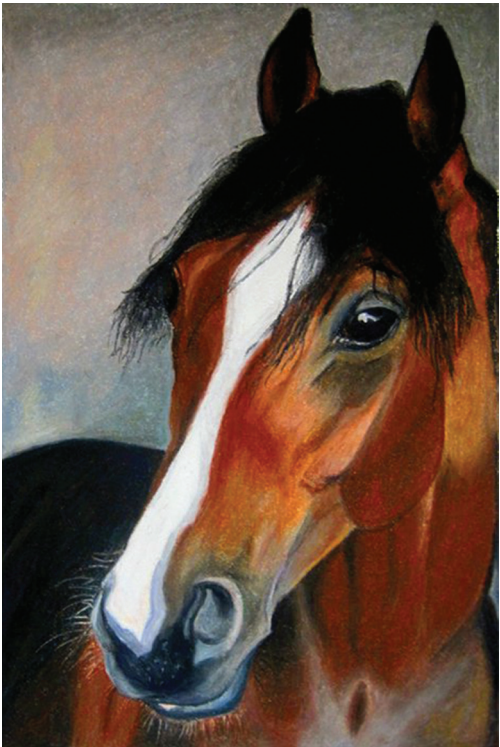


Melissa Crosby
Hunter



Melissa Crosby
Merc

Lisa DeLuca
Well-Armed



Lisa DeLuca

Self Portrait

Lisa DeLuca

Well-Armed

Over the course of a lifetime, everyone at some point experiences one or more defining moments that profoundly impact their character or transform their outlook on life completely. Marriages, births, deaths, and spiritual revelations are all universal models of life-changing incidents. However, these events are not always so common, and their significance can often only be understood and appreciated through the perspective of the person who is being directly impacted. In this case, that person is me. I have not been around long enough yet to experience many deaths, births or marriages of my own. The single most significant moment that defines me as a person, an artist, and a horse enthusiast is my experience of painting and meeting the racehorse “Well-Armed.”

My love for horses and art began at a very young age. When I was four years old, I drew pictures daily and gave them as gifts to my parents and other family members. When I was eight years old, I took my first horseback riding lesson. It was immediately clear that I had found my gift and niche in life. When I was not riding, reading, or talking about horses, I was drawing them. Many of these early experiences I credit to a man named Bill Casner.

Bill Casner, who I know respectfully as Mr. Casner, is a polite man standing six feet and three inches tall, who has a warm smile and a powerful, intelligent voice of understood authority. He is a Tarleton Alumni and for years was the co-owner of WinStar Farm in Versailles, Kentucky. WinStar is home to an assortment of prestigious racehorses including Super Saver, winner of the 2010 Kentucky Derby, and many others of equal status. However, I knew Mr. Casner as a role model before I knew him as a successful business man.

As an eight year old, monetary status and industry prestige were easily overlooked. Such things are unimportant to a child when compared to admirable character and kindness. If I was asked ten years ago who Mr. Casner was, I would have simply said that he is the nice man who lets me ride his horses and teaches me how to rope and chase cows down the arena fence. If I were to be asked the same question today, I would answer that he is someone who gave me opportunities of such gravity that I was not able to comprehend until years after, and wanted nothing in return except to pass on a wealth of knowledge and lessons of character that

cannot be found in a textbook or classroom. In me he saw potential, which he took on with patience and generosity; for that, I am forever in his debt.

This past year, after taking art classes and polishing my artistic abilities to their finest, I decided that the best gift I could give that would express my appreciation for Mr. Casner and all he had done for me, would be to paint something of great value to him. I knew it would be only appropriate to paint a horse, but for the artwork to adequately convey my level of gratitude for Mr. Casner, it could not be just any horse. So, I took matters into my own hands, and asked him which horse meant the most to him.

"Well," he explained with a smile and modest simplicity, "my favorite would have to be Well-Armed. He is a very special horse."

With only the name and photograph of a beautiful bay horse, I set out on the adventure of creating a masterpiece. Being a gift to Mr. Casner, I wanted the painting to be absolute perfection. A mere replica of the photograph would not be sufficient. In order to be successful, my painting had to accurately depict all of Well-Armed's personality and quirks—a difficult task considering the fact that I had never met the horse in person, and probably never would. Instead, before I even pulled out my paper and pencil, I researched every video, article, and picture I could find on the internet about Well-Armed. What I found came as a surprise.

I found that, ironically, Well-Armed was not in fact "Well-Armed" at all, except for a big heart. His flawed conformation set him apart from other racehorses. His front legs were turned inward, making travel less efficient. This anatomical defect led to two severe injuries that almost cost him his life, let alone his racing career. In other words, the odds were against him; however, Bill Casner saw great potential in Well-Armed, much like he had seen in me.

In my research, I learned that after being put through two years of therapy by Mr. Casner himself and recuperation from his injuries, Well-Armed was ready to race again. He went to Dubai in 2009 for the Dubai World Cup to race against the best horses in the world. Before I read any further, I pulled up YouTube on my computer and searched for videos of the 2009 Dubai World Cup. I noticed that not long after the gates opened in Dubai, Well-Armed took the lead. I could barely hear the crowd roaring wildly in the background of the video over the intensity and excitement of the announcer who, with an English accent, was shouting Well-Armed's whereabouts into the microphone as if nobody else could see.

"Well-Armed at the two-hundred meter mark, he's giving them something to catch! Well-Armed five lengths in front, six lengths in front, seven lengths in front..." The counting continued until Well-Armed

crossed the finish line, a record fourteen lengths ahead of the second place horse, and claimed the world's richest prize in horse racing: six million dollars. "And it's Well-Armed; it's America in first!"

Needless to say, I was feeling a lot of pressure at this point. Not only did I want to prove my respect and appreciation for Mr. Casner through my artistic ability, but now I also knew that my painting of Well-Armed had to live up to the real Well-Armed. I did not want to shame such an accomplished competitor with anything less powerful and awe-striking than he was, so I pulled out a large piece of textured paper, a pencil, and my trusty oil pastels.

I worked a few tedious hours a day for several weeks, carefully pressing the soft pastels into the rough paper in tiny increments, smudging each hue at just the right spots. I scraped away hair-thin lines of black pastel around Well-Armed's lips, eyes, and the lump of his chin to depict the abundance of whiskers that he had. I spent the most time on his eye. I knew I could not afford to mess up the eye; that was the feature that most defined his personality. I worked on the eye until I had reached painstaking accuracy, after the last crucial smear of white that gave it its gloss and dimension. I sharpened the navy and black pastels relentlessly, until I had gotten each messy tassel of mane that tumbled down carelessly between his large ears, which had depth in the light and were highly attentive. I even used extra blue and gray on his muzzle until I swore I could look at the painting and feel his velvety nose on my palm. Then, after days of staring critically at the finished work and finding no flaws, I was satisfied.

The next step was to deliver the professionally matted and framed painting to Mr. and Mrs. Casner while they were in town at their ranch in my hometown of Flower Mound, Texas. I drove my truck carefully, and although the summer sunlight flickered persistently and warmly on my cheek through the row of trees that welcomingly hugged the Casners' long winding drive, I could not help but to feel anxious. I had done my best but could only hope that the artwork truly did Well-Armed justice and would impress Mr. Casner.

I pushed my worry aside as Mr. Casner welcomed me into his house, and I followed him confidently through his entryway. My nicest cowboy boots made the sound of my footsteps echo off of the Spanish tiles, up the walls where several other incredible paintings hung, and down from the highly elevated, dimly lit ceilings. We walked to his kitchen, where we talked for a moment before Mrs. Casner unwrapped my gift. Mr. Casner was not as animated with excitement as his wife was after first seeing the painting, yet I could still tell by the quiet admiration in his eyes and the delight in his smile that he treasured my hard work.

"Look at that eye... That's Well-Armed's eye alright. You nailed it." Any worry remaining in me was now gone. He tilted his head and considered the painting for another moment before turning to his wife. "The girl can paint," he said, raising his brows with a chuckle. Mrs. Casner nodded and smiled in agreement.

"I tell you what," he said, addressing me as he adjusted the ball cap on his head and tucked his thumbs casually in the pockets of his jeans, "how would you like to meet Well-Armed?"

"...Meet him?" I clarified, wondering how that would be possible. "Of course, I would love to meet him."

"Well, he's in town. What do you say we drive down to the barn and you can see him?"

I obviously jumped at the opportunity, and accepted the invitation with great enthusiasm; so there I was, back on the long winding drive with the rows of trees and the warm evening sunlight. I took the right fork in the road, following the strikingly realistic statue of a mounted cowboy, slouched in the saddle and pointing casually in the direction of the barn. Once I met back up with the Casners, I trailed them through the rows of stalls until we got to Well-Armed. Mr. Casner halted him and led him out into the barn aisle.

When I saw the horse in my painting for the first time, it was as if we were old friends. I knew his story and every peculiar feature he wore with pride. As I felt his velvety nose and whiskers on my palm and looked into the depth of his eye, I could still hear the announcer shouting in the back of my mind:

Well-Armed five lengths in front, six lengths in front, seven lengths in front..."

Although Well-Armed's messy tassels of mane tumbled down carelessly from between his large ears, his regal, breathtaking presence had an air of prominence and humble superiority that could not be ignored. There was one thing I was finally sure of: I had been successful in portraying Well-Armed's greatness in my artwork.

...And it's Well-Armed, it's America in first!

The experience of learning about, painting, and meeting Well-Armed is one that I will never forget or take for granted. He taught me to recognize that there is potential in even the most unlikely prospects, including myself at times, and that there is no such thing as an unrealistic goal, because anything is possible with enough endeavor. Ask which horse means the most to me, and I will tell you: "My favorite would have to be Well-Armed. He is a very special horse."

Sean Fletcher
The Tunnel

Trapped in the tunnel
The darkness taken
the canary's croaked next to the light now fading.
The earthen smells like dust they fell
Don't you know the tunnel's coming down?
Push forward; keep moving, to stop is unsure
the flame flickers and is no more
and the bats of suffocation descend
Clutch the chest, clenching contractions
upon thudding desperation, panic drives
forward momentum.
You're still alive but inside you're shaken
lost in a place that has no direction
Rat packs creep between the seams of seamless reason.
Do you hear them creeping?
Failure. Uncertainty. Death. But worse than that,
the thing that springs you from this groove
Is the reason why you cannot move.
No light, no life, nothing at the end
and to descend you know is futile.
But then...a dance of light, a spark, a match head's delight
decide to take this dance
to tempt the fates to make a mate of a future not fully contemplate.
There is light to see, no longer overwhelmed
For the light in this tunnel is the one you light yourself.

Grace Kantz
A Quick, Springy Tune

Full Score

A Quick Springy Tune

Grace Kantz

The image displays the first system of a musical score for the piece "A Quick Springy Tune" by Grace Kantz. The score is written for a full orchestra, with the first system showing the following instruments: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. The music is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Flute and Oboe parts begin with a melodic line, while the Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, Violin 1, and Violin 2 provide harmonic support. The Viola and Cello parts play a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The second system of the score continues the musical development, showing the Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello parts. The Flute and Oboe parts continue their melodic lines, while the Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, Violin 1, and Violin 2 provide harmonic support. The Viola and Cello parts continue their rhythmic accompaniment.

Emryse Geye

If I Only Had a Heart

right atrium.

i never remember how to spell the
name of the color of your eyes
so sometimes I drive by your house
because the saw mill is right around
the corner&i can check its name&
maybe i will see you but then
i remember that you are not home.

this place isn't where we belong,
you salute&move on&i languish.
our lives are forbidden&i have
always loved apples but one day,
i will have to ignore the pull of
Gray's Lumber&keep driving.

right ventricle.

he said he loved the way
i hiked up my jeans&gave
me a dozen paper roses;

carefully placed thorns to remind me.

do you remember catching me?
waiting for me? welcoming me back?
i lied, counted to ten&he was there.

i worry i will forget&so i ask:
silent words, they buzz around my ears.
would he still write letters?
stuffed envelopes to fill my days?

i imagined the pattern of you—
all green&brown&grey&then
i had to miss you—
your irises as dull as tin.

watching from my desk, i want to understand.
i rip old wounds open with my teeth.

give me more than this, i need validation.
give me more than this, i need.

left atrium.
i counted&i have:

five bug bites from the last
twenty-four hours.
four of them are from mosquitoes&
one of them is you.

i told myself.
i wrote reminders.
i held myself to a higher standard.
i picked until i bled.

six minute phone conversations&
two hour plane flights&
three years of waiting too long.

i have an itch&
i think that maybe it's an itch that
i have to scratch.

left ventricle:
once, in his uniform,
he smelled like my father.
a corrugated roof after the
rain when he would breathe.

we might have been infinite:
hands stretched across millennia.

i am unaccustomed to this.
but i almost read your letter&
i would have lain, neglected like
a half-opened bottle of champagne
forever, if not for those words.

we are unretractable.
i am not your satellite.
&you are not sorry.

Emryse Geye
May Twelfth

there are strands of you that
i would like to pull into myself,
wrap myself around like a ribbon
tied into a braid:

your fingers,
your laugh, and
your

unyielding,
undeserved,
uninhibited kindness.

i would like to wear you like a plait;
weave your eyelashes into my hair.

i would like to push into your ribcage
until the fingers of bone intertwine in prayer.

i would like to string myself up,
bound and knotted and gagged,
abandon myself to these
frosted falsities i feed you

it is easier to be broken
in someone else than to
be whole and just alone.

there are men
other men

that i would like to
wear like a jacket:

their arms
thrown around my shoulders,
their collars
draped over my breasts, and
their forms
limp and lifeless on my floor

when i discard them.

vaguely dull buttons,
jagged empty zippers, and
pockets that will never be filled

Emryse Geye
Ode in October

one.

Jocelyn sings a small song&
it echoes.

there are birds&
there are feathers&
they are tremulous
on her tripwire.

why would we search&
why would we inquire&
why would she blow air
into my lungs?

there is nothing but the notes, like
there is nothing but the sun at the dawn
nothing but the song,
there to fight back the dark.

Jocelyn sings a small song&
it soars.

two.

she walks across campus,
inherent.

let me swing
by your earlobes&

i will shine
glowing insincerities&

resounding.

i hear her heels click&

my hips square
in response.

if i curve these shapes
in reflections,

could they roll on
your skin&

rattle in
the jar of your voice?

we were asked

for secrets
for spider-thin loyalty
for dime-turn performance.

but Kassie&the small rebellions
are playing on my temper&

i will not be refused.

three.
sighing out of the
corners like a lover's breath,
the hope in the box

waits&i am there.
the smell of turpentine&
the heat on my cheeks

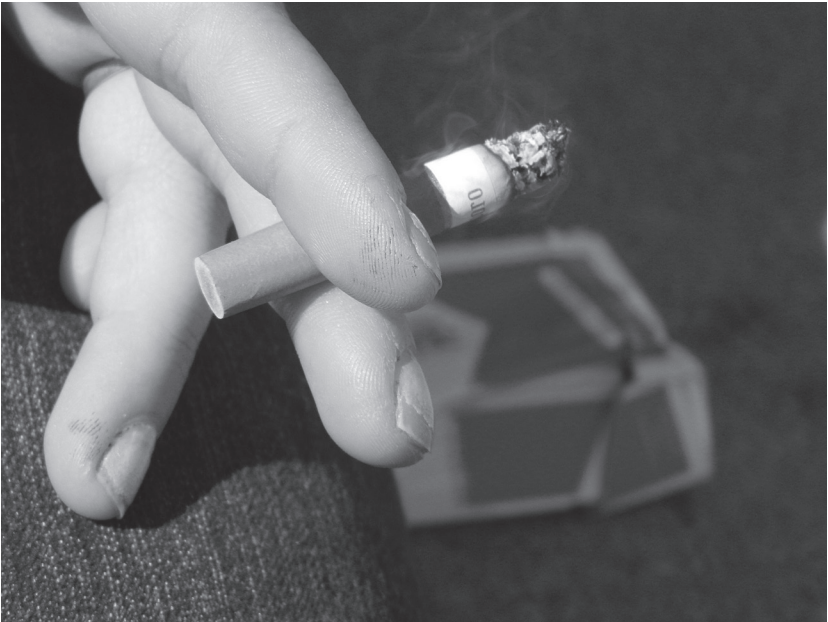
lingers as his gaze
constructs my body from line
&hue. Tyler paints,

speaking little. the
last time I was there, he took
shots of my face in

a way i've never
noticed; my body in a
way he always had.

lipstick tastes fake&
i don't know what to say&
he goes out to smoke

then, hands touch briefly
&i wonder which parts of
this song i will sing.



Marissa Williams

Light One Up



Marissa Williams

SXSW

Anna Gilley

Our Stories

Dad started to laugh as I wheeled him fast down the hallways of the nursing home, though the nurses didn't seem so amused, as we raced out the doors to the garden outside. When I stopped pushing him and settled him into his favorite spot, he asked "Do you remember that summer's day long ago, the one when we went fishing at the lake? You were about six when I took you there for your first time; you were so full of questions." He laughed.

"... And you had all the best answers," I replied chuckling.

"Do you remember catching more fish than me that time?"

"That time? Don't I always catch more fish?" I said with a grin.

"Hush, you weasel. Take this advice: never rub in a man's face that you can catch more fish than him; it hurts his pride." He looks at me from under his glasses.

"I'll take that advice to heart, Dad."

"Mhmm... I taught you to hold onto that rod and never let go." He says going back to our past once again.

"I remember your saying as such just, in a louder tone of voice." I smile and he returns one as well.

"Well, my dear daughter, I'm about to teach you that the things people hold onto the tightest, have to be let go eventually, even if it pains them to do so," he says solemnly.

"Dad, what are you talking about?"

"I am saying I will not live forever, and eventually you will have to let me go. I tell you this now because I know you; you will make yourself sick with depression and wither away because of it. I don't want to have to watch my daughter from above suffer such pain; I'm trying to prepare you to let this old fish go."

"Daddy, let's not talk about this," I say with tears in my eyes.

"Sweet child, we must . . . because you need to stay here when I'm gone and not be sad and lonely, but Marry and have children and tell your children stories we share, the stories of mine and my father's before me, to keep memories alive with stories worth telling, stories with lessons and full of love."

"...but Daddy, I don't know all the stories."

"That's why I brought this up to you today; I want to start telling you all my stories."

Giving up on trying to get him off of the solemn subject, I asked "Where do we start, Dad?"

"Come, sit. We have many matters to talk about today."

Two years later, I have been married and have given birth to my first child, a beautiful little girl. Dad was there for my wedding to walk me down the aisle, or roll, if you would rather call it that; he rolled, and I walked. He fell pretty ill the next year but managed to stick around to see his first grandchild. My daughter is now two months old and only falls asleep to my voice telling her stories of her grandfather, the stories of heritage, and of heart and lessons that she one day will learn herself and share as her stories for her children. Then when I am older, and I'm the one in the nursing home garden, I will tell my daughter that she will have to let the rod go, and I will share my stories, my father's stories, and his father's stories with her children. This way, no one is ever gone but is in our hearts, our stories, forever.

Justin Hawkins

European Vacation

Absinthe, release me,
By grace of green wings, from the
Shackles of language.

First World Problems

Wouldn't you know it
Existence to spout about,
And nothing to say.

Indistinguishable

Urchins, ferns, creatures old,
Dissolved by time one-million fold;
Atoms bought and then resold
Collect in wombs to become our own.

Justin Hawkins

Jitters

And in that second,
Perspective explodes
Your actions have stretched
That once wound road
Whose asphalt barrel
Points straight from your eye
To your past's mistake
Which can't be denied.
You're left in suspension
While under your toes
Existence is shifting
To what, you don't know.
But one thing remains
The same among others:
This is your fault
And she won't recover.

Justin Hawkins

Peace in the Leaves

I want to be naked
And roll in wet grass,
Play with some bugs,
And things like that.

I want to build forts
Of pillows—perhaps stones—
And feed myself pretzels
With only my toes.

I want to fill rubber,
Red-green balloons
With slips of pink paper
Displaying haiku
Pertaining to times
Littered with sunlight
So that when they rise
And 'burst' leads to 'flight,'
Riddles and Rhymes
En route to earth might
By chance catch your eye
And bring you delight
From thoughts most sublime,
Suggesting some Kite,
Surely divine,
Did know of your plight
And held you in mind
Enough to rain leaves
Of paper to find
Pieces of Peace.

Joshua David Hernandez
Fight Inside

There we sat verbally copulating.
We'd pause now and then; thinking, contemplating.
We'd smile and laugh, nearly cry.
Both knowing, neither asking why.

Then came the fight inside you'll never know,
Here, my last defense so it won't show.
Overcast, as I stare off into the distance,
But there's nothing left of this resistance.

There's nothing left that I can do.
A subtle glance and all is lost.
Lines once clear, now all are crossed.
Lose control, the red in me,
Now exposed for you to see.

Perfect symmetry, shapes intertwined.
Close my eyes to leave behind.
The flawless moment gray and dead;
Simply formed inside my head.

Joshua David Hernandez
Into the Storm

I warned myself
saw it all coming my way.
The distant storm,
they'll pack up and flee at break of day.
A walk through the brisk morning air,
all alone I pause to stare.
Cuffs wet by the morning dew
distract my thoughts
but heedlessly they turn to you.
Though the silent fog rolls in,
I am found.
For the silence is the loudest sound.
The vacant boats at dock
sway to bid me farewell,
as I gather the ropes and set sail.
My mind tells me it's crazy
but no one else can see
this thing inside that's driving me;
a ship alone, lost at sea.
My hands bleed upon the oars
as I row hard against the tide
now exposed, nowhere to hide.
Frayed emotions, but to calm the storm,
unearth this love and keep you warm.
But what is there in an analogy?
Still to face the waves of reality.
You turn to those closest,
not there by choice,
lost as well.
Then let go
as I scream behind until I lose my voice.
Ventured in for but one,
you've sailed away,
how am I undone?
Not at all what I'd hoped to be,
just another ship lost at sea.

Camden Lawless

Kissing Meagan

Poppa always called me “buddy.” If I’m to be honest, I don’t believe that he ever knew me by name. He never knew—or never remembered—though which one is worse I don’t know. I was five years old at the time when he went away: not quite a baby but not quite nearly a man. I would suppose that most people call it “childhood,” yet it didn’t seem to be a child-like time to me, for poppa was gone, and momma... well, it was as if momma did not want to admit that he had gone away at all. You see, momma told me that one day, poppa had realized that he had an itch in his pocket which only Miss Cleveland could scratch, (she was our neighbor to the left of the old driveway, and shouldn’t be confused for Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, who lived at the other side of it). So, on that day, poppa had gone to get his itch scratched and had in some how gotten lost.

I think that poppa was perhaps a simple man, as I have made that walk many a time, and it’s hard to lose one’s bearing over so short a distance.

Now, I would never judge my poor poppa, but none the same, I cannot help but wonder about how I would be changed if I had some man-ish figure in my early, “formation” years. I often heard the family talk of such things at picnics, gatherings and the like. They said it was a wonder that my mother never remarried—as she was such a pretty woman—but I knew why momma never fancied another man: she was just awaiting poppa’s return. She always told me that eventually poppa would lose his itch and find his way back home. For a good many years I believed her, but after this long bit of time, I am beginning to have my doubts. I don’t believe that poppa ever intended to return. Now, I know for a fact that his itch did come back around, because I found it the summer of my fourteenth birthday.

Miss Meagan Julliard, with her momma and daddy, had moved next door to us in winter of the year before. They moved into the house at the left side of the old driveway, the very same house owned once by Miss Cleveland of the Itch. They came calling once or twice, and momma and Mrs. Julliard seemed to muchly enjoy their conversations. Meagan was a quiet girl—Mrs. Julliard once said she had been a very sickly baby—so I didn’t seem to have much to say to her for all of that winter, and our conversation didn’t change during the spring. But as I said, I found poppa’s itch that summer, and Miss Meagan helped me find it.

It was quite warm that day: the shirt I was wearing was well-soaked by sweat when Meagan and Mrs. Julliard rang the doorbell on the front

of the house. Momma and Mrs. Julliard commenced to talking about the weather and such, declaring that it was hot enough to fry eggs on the concrete, though why anyone would want to do a thing like that is beyond me. Upon momma's insistence, Meagan and I went to play out behind the house, in the tall reeds that grew up by the river. As usual, Meagan and me didn't have much to say to each other, but I did tell her that her dress was awfully nice, which made her to giggle. It was a funny noise, but having heard it, I couldn't help but smile. Being close with her felt to be a normal thing and she seemed to enjoy my company as well. At the river, I took my shoes off and rolled my britches up to keep them from getting wet. Momma always got angry when I did not roll my britches. Meagan sat on the bank and watched while I dug in the mud with my toes, looking for shells and such.

"Come here!" she called. I came out of the water and sat with her by the river. We had sat there quietly for many minutes before she asked me if I would like to kiss her.

To be honest, before that time I had never considered kissing a girl, but right then it seemed to be the proper thing to do, though I was unsure on how to go about doing such a thing. Once, I had looked through an open window and seen Mr. and Mrs. Cooper kissing, but they were in bed and I hadn't seen them too clearly. Apparently, it was an unusual day for Mr. Cooper because he was normally out of bed before seven, but on that day, he and Mrs. Cooper had lain in for close to an hour after eight o'clock. I figure that sometimes, a man just needs to kiss.

I told Miss Meagan that I had given it some thought and I had decided it would be proper to kiss her. She giggled again, so I supposed that she was favorable to the idea. She wriggled closer to me and made a strange face, closing her eyes and scrunching her mouth up. I was at a loss as to what I should do, so I smiled, because momma always told me that if I were to be in doubt, I should smile and bring a light into someone's day. It felt strange to be smiling and kissing all at once but I tried my best. She brought her face right up to mine and put her lips against my teeth. At the time, it seemed to me that kissing wasn't all that people talked it up to be. Meagan looked surprised and opened her eyes.

"No, William," she said quietly. "You go like this."

She put her hands on my face and made my lips scrunchy, like a fish when it is blowing bubbles at the aquarium. It felt tingly when she touched my face, so I put my hand on her face and put my lips on hers. This felt more natural, so I tried it again, and again. It seemed that I had a talent in kissing, because for every day of that week, Meagan came to our house and she and I would walk to the river to kiss again. Another week came along and went like that, when one afternoon, Meagan and her

mother came to the door accompanied by another girl. She was taller than Meagan, and her hair was of a darker, brown-like color, but they had faces that were very similar. Mrs. Julliard said that the girl was her daughter, Daisy, who was home on vacation from a College. The women went to the kitchen just as always, while me and Meagan and Daisy walked down the grass to the river. Daisy pulled off her shoes and went into the water and Meagan sat down at the edge of the river. I supposed that Meagan wanted to kiss again so I sat down beside her, put my arms around her shoulders and made my face like a fish.

"What are you doing, William?" she hissed at me.

"I am kissing you."

I wasn't sure why she asked me, because we had kissed many times before and I thought that she would know by now that we were kissing. I moved my face to hers again, but she pushed me on my chest and I was rolled into the mud. I didn't know what Meagan was trying to do, but she had made my shirt soiled and I knew that momma would not at all be pleased with me.

"Bitch!" I didn't exactly know what the word meant, but I had heard momma say it to one of the cars that moved in front of us on the drive to the grocery. I knew that it was one of the angry words momma told me were to be used for special times.

Meagan got tears in her eyes and ran back to the house. I hadn't known that 'bitch' was such a painful word, but I felt that I had used it correctly: she had muddied my shirt and I would likely receive a good talking to from momma for it. In the river, Daisy had most probably seen Meagan run away, but didn't seem to be much concerned. Still, she did walk through the water and leave the river to sit with me, since Meagan had left me only in the company of myself.

"Hello, William," Daisy smiled to me. It was a large sort of smile, like the kind Mr. Cooper wears when he has kissed Mrs. Cooper until an hour after eight o'clock. Momma wasn't wrong about many things, and she surely was right about smiling, because Miss Daisy's smile brought a light into my day. I suppose I didn't give it proper thought, but suddenly I felt that kissing Miss Daisy would be the proper thing to do. I made my face just the way Meagan had shown me and put my lips right on Miss Daisy's. Right away I could tell that there was a large amount of difference between kissing Meagan and kissing Miss Daisy. Daisy had a funny coating on her lips that tasted bitter to me, and Daisy kind of made a squeaking noise when I had kissed her.

"Goodness!" she breathed out when I moved my lips back from hers.

"Now where the hell did you learn to do that?"

"I watched fishes," I told her. She laughed, and told me that was most unexpected, but that I should look for girls of my own age to kiss with.

"Oh!" she said suddenly. "Have you and Meagan kissed?"

I explained that we had, but I didn't think she was interested in kissing much anymore.

"Well, I think that's a shame," Miss Daisy said, leaning over to put a delicate kiss on my lips, "because you are good at it."

She gave me a friendly sort of wink and then stood up, putting her hand toward me to pull me up from the ground. When we walked across the grass toward the house, she told me that it would be best not to mention our kissing to anyone. Miss Daisy said it was harmless fun, but that my momma might not approve. I had already decided that it wouldn't be proper to tell momma about the kissing with Meagan, as it might remind her of poppa's itch. Momma never had much good to say about kissing. She said it was like a lie that no one ever said out loud, though I still do not fully understand what she meant by that.

Two or so days later, Meagan walked to our door without her mother. She said in a low tone that she needed to have a serious conversation with me. We went out and sat on the porch steps where I had played when I was a young baby. It was a little rough to sit on, but it was okay, since her serious talking didn't take much time at all. Meagan said that she hadn't meant me any harm when she pushed me, but that I had hurt her very much when I called her the name. Then she told me that she had looked back to see me kissing Miss Daisy, so she never wanted to walk down to the river with me ever again. I nodded and told her that I understood, but to be honest, I didn't. I never saw Meagan after that day, but on one week in spring and for a few weeks in the summer, Miss Daisy would come to our house, and she and I would take a stroll down to the river where we would do a kissing that was much different than what Meagan taught me. The new kissing was quite near to the way Mr. and Mrs. Cooper had kissed on the day I saw them through the open window. I wondered if Miss Daisy had seen them too.

Ever since that summer, I've kissed a very large amount of women. I think that sometimes, I kissed when I ought to have kept my face to itself, but every one of them had a different feeling and a new kind of tingling. All the lips and the flowery smells and touches from soft fingers on my face were like the new rain on grass behind the old house. It brings a fresh color to the ground and it builds up the river. There are some times when not much seems to be well and things start to pile up inside of you, pushing down in your chest, and I suppose that kissing is just how people keep from getting all crazy inside. Momma once said that kissing is only a lie, but she was wrong about poppa. I figure that she could be wrong about this as well...



Brittany McLemore

Reel Life



Christine J. Pritchett

Crystalline

Devon Lozano

Don't Leave Me

The city had long since fallen silent. It was supposed to be like any other week. It was supposed to be just another supply run to the business district, and then back to camp. But there was a snag in the plan, a distraction that came in the form of a crying girl in an SUV, surely no more than five years old, her terrified screams falling on deaf ears to the guttural grunts from the Risers on the ground below her.

Like so many others, the girl and her family had been forced out into the city in search of food. Or maybe it was medical supplies. It was impossible to know at that point, and really, Alex knew it didn't matter.

What mattered were the Risers. Alex had a small window of opportunity to run past them while they were so engrossed in the meal they had just won themselves in the form of the screaming girl's parents. It would have been easy. She left her jeep running at the end of the street by the ruined remains of a Wal-Mart Supercenter. No, the problem wasn't the Risers.

The problem was that girl.

Alex didn't want to notice her. She didn't want to feel obligated to care, but she wasn't sure she could take the screaming. It was a horrible and sickening sound that she would have believed to be impossible for a child to produce if she hadn't been hearing it for herself.

No child made a noise like that six months ago before the infection. But then again, that was before, when people stayed on the ground after they died.

Now it was different. She had been home for the final news reports. They had called it a pandemic—a mutated strand of a live rabies virus that could infect the brain stem of even deceased hosts and trot them around powered by a single, driving force: to feed.

That was right before her neighbor and best friend had thrown herself through Alex's living room window like a rag doll. She would never forget how Tasha had appeared the last day she had seen her. How her eyes were glazed over and rolled into the back of her head.

How she seemed indifferent to the gashes that had peeled back her once beautiful face, revealing only exposed teeth and a ruined jaw bone. How Tasha hadn't exactly walked but lumbered toward her like a functional drunk, clawing and biting and screaming.

Alex had screamed that day. Just like that little girl was screaming while the Risers ripped into the stomach of her mercifully dead father, using it as a sort of bowl while they devoured the fresh meat with less grace than even wild animals. At least animals would fight each other over food. The Risers just consumed the meat of whatever they could catch until everything that could fit into their mouths had been devoured.

But it was for the best that they at least ate what they killed. A single bite or a scratch was all it took to stagnate the mind and turn a human from a unique individual to a walking parasite. Those that managed to escape with their lives often found themselves facing a worse fate: they became one of them—a Riser.

At least if a victim was consumed before he or she turned, it was one less for Alex to worry about.

"Goddamn it," she mumbled under her breath as she observed the scene from the relative safety of a locked department store. She made her way to the locking metal gates and slid them open, running out onto the street. She pulled out her .45 caliber pistol from her back pocket as she carefully combed the area, searching to see if the Risers weren't too distracted with their Mom and Pop Continental Breakfast on the passenger side of the SUV that they might notice her.

They did not, prompting her to walk around to driver side, softly opening the door. "Hey," she said in a quiet tone. "Little girl, come here. I can get you out of here."

Though why Alex had bothered to go the discrete route at all was questionable at this point since the girl inside only started screaming louder.

One of the Risers stood up off the ground, the rotten corpse of a middle aged man. He looked around aimlessly, his lower lip split and hanging loosely over his chin exposing rotten, chipped teeth that could not contain the gnawed intestines that hung out of its mouth like a grotesque sausage link. The Riser let out a lifeless groan—more than likely just gas escaping through its mouth rather than an actual attempt at speech—and crouched back down next to its kin and continued to gorge.

"Little girl, please—" Alex tried again, but it was no use. The child was in shock, screaming uselessly for her mommy and daddy while she rocked back and forth in the passenger seat. Deciding there was only one way to pry the child out of the SUV, Alex reached inside and plucked the girl up and began to drag her out through the driver side door.

The girl screamed even louder now and struggled against her.

"STOP IT!" Alex hissed in a whisper-scream while she held tightly onto the girl's wrist, forcing her to look up. "You have to go with me now."

"B-but my mommy . . . my daddy . . .," she managed to say in between broken sobs.

"They wanted you to be safe," Alex finished for her. "Now come with me," he ordered.

The child relented, burying her face in Alex's stomach. "Don't leave me," she said in a muffled cry.

"I won't," Alex replied, picking her up and holding her as she set off in the opposite direction. "I promise. Now I need you to be a big girl and close your eyes and cover your ears as tight as you can."

The girl obeyed.

Alex took off running at her best speed, carrying the girl along with her. She had made it half-way back to the jeep before she saw two Risers round the corner in front of her. She immediately stopped, staring at them breathlessly.

The Risers turned toward her. A woman, once in the prime of her life, glared back at her with sick, unnatural gray-white eyes, her blonde hair smeared with dirt and dried blood. Her nose was missing.

It was hard to determine anything about the previous existence of the second Riser other than the fact that he had to have been one of the first infected. His skin was blackened and cracked, revealing moist, postmortem fluid and pus oozing beneath. His lower jaw was entirely missing, and his limbs were bent at unnatural angles.

At first, neither Riser looked to be going on the attack, and Alex had almost fooled herself into believing they hadn't seen her.

And then they made that ungodly sound. Had they been alive, they would have been screaming. Yet the only sound that they were able to produce in this state only gargled out of the remains of their mouths. Alex wasn't sure how they even still had vocal chords at this point,

but she could have sworn she heard them ripping with each second that scream penetrated the air.

The sound alerted others. Dozens more called back from behind her, and then the undead screams of hundreds more around the city, all of them now locked onto their location. The little girl's crying picked up once more, though she was drowned out by the sounds of the dead.

Alex knew all that was left was to make a run for the jeep.

She raised her gun and fired a single round. The head of the crippled, jawless Riser exploded in black and maroon gore. She shifted her gun and shot again, dropping the second Riser. She was able to clear a path, though the sound of the gunfire only drew them closer to her.

She pumped her legs as hard as they would carry her, leaping over the hood of an abandoned Lexus and sliding across the top. By the time she had made it to the Wal-Mart parking lot, the infected dead had resurfaced and were storming toward her from every corner. She quickly put the girl inside the passenger seat, then climbed inside and floored the jeep back toward the highway.

The Risers screamed at them and threw themselves against the jeep. Alex ignored them and pressed on. There was a loud thump with each one she rolled over, followed by a satisfying wet crunch as the tire sank on top of their rotten bodies.

Yet this slowed the jeep down, and that precious loss in speed was just enough to allow one of the Risers to throw itself against the driver side window, smashing into it while it clawed for Alex. She swerved the jeep while she tried to fend it off, ignoring the screams from the panicked girl while she grasped her pistol and raised it up, firing it into the ravenous corpse. The hollow point crushed through its head, leaving a fist-sized hole in the Riser's face before it crumpled off of the jeep.

Then from the passenger side, the window broke, followed by more terrified screams.

"MAKE IT STOP! MAKE IT STOP! MAKE IT STOP!" The girl cried while she ducked down into the leg space beneath her seat, trying to get as far away as possible from the creature that was pulling and clawing at her hair.

Alex pointed the gun toward the passenger window and fired. She had missed the Riser's head, but the force of the bullet was enough to

knock it off. A second later, the jeep lurched up then crunched back down again.

There were no further incidents as she pulled out onto the empty highway, and there was nothing but the sound of the little girl, still crying, in the otherwise stillness of the ruined world.

"Hey . . .," Alex looked over at her, then back at the road. "Hey, kid, why don't you come out of there, huh? You might hurt yourself on the glass."

The girl said nothing.

"What's your name? I'm Alex."

"H-Haley," the girl managed.

"That's a beautiful name, Haley. You don't have to talk about what happened. It's okay. You'll be safe where we're going. Think of it like a survival camp. Did your parents ever take you on one of . . ." She trailed off there as she looked over at the girl and really got a good look at her.

Her skin was pale.

Her eyes were bloodshot.

Portions of her hair had fallen out in clumps on the ground.

". . . Haley?" Alex pulled over on the side of the road. "Haley, give me your arm, please."

The little girl complied.

How had Alex missed it?

How had she not seen it when she got the girl out of the car?

"My arm hurts," Haley said absently, looking at the savage bite on her tiny bicep where she was missing a sizable amount of skin. All around the injury, her skin was already turning black. A small trickle of blood fell from her ear and ran down her neck. "Alex? Will you fix me?" She looked up at the woman, tears and dark blood filling her eyes.

Alex looked away from her, her lips trembling furiously as she put her hand tightly over her gun. "Yes. Close your eyes, baby. I'll make you better."

"Yes ma'am," Haley replied, her voice already diminishing as she covered her eyes with her hands.

Alex steadied the gun against the little girl's head, regarding her in silence one final time before she pulled the trigger.

Susan Lyons

Answer

I see lightning flash
across darkened clouds in the distance
feel the weight of the air
pressing down
and the taste of ozone
in the back of my throat
I anticipate
That long calm
stretch of silence that follows
the space
the tension rising
poised
waiting
for the low rumble
that breaks the silence
the sky opens with a gasp
a wet curtain
feels like an answer
to a prayer

Susan Lyons

Awake Again

I taste the tang of salt
And deep rolling waves of breath
In my ear
Whirring fan
Purring weight on my leg
I feel
Home
Nestled in your crook
I feel
beautiful
Savoring
Silence
Calm

Early Morning

bright mirrored furrows
steaming mist in early morn
dust by midday sun

Susan Lyons

The Quiet Place

bone tired
and in that state of mind that invites reflection
even when I'm in the mood to just smash the mirror
and watch the light play across the broken shards
on the floor
But reflections games the name
and I catch myself drifting
how good it felt
how alive I felt
nervous, anxious, but beneath it all
a deep calm
a spiritual sort of calm
a feeling of absolute completeness
and for the first time I don't feel a sob choking my throat
that quick brief pain and echoing sadness
like dropping a pebble in a pond
there that quiet subtle ebb of loss
That will always be there I think.
But I'm savoring instead
how I felt awakened after a long sleep
the bloom after my long dormancy
brief but spectacular
I'd forgotten what that felt like
That's the moment I rest in
The quiet place in my mind
waits

Rhonda Martín
9/11 Sestina

Look elsewhere for surrender.
May your hate
Keep company with the fires
Wrought that 11th day,
When Americans fell from death planes
Reigning heroes.

Murderers cannot be heroes.
Bloodied hands try forcing surrender
With peopled planes,
Innocent tools of hate.
We must never forget the day
Two cities disappeared in fires.

We watched boiling fires
As they engulfed our heroes
Leaving trails of death. a day
None would surrender
To black plumes of hate
Killing mangled planes

Who would have thought planes
Would ignite buildings of fires
Belching viscous hate
Down, covering heroes
Unseen. would you have us surrender
On another day?

Will you forget the day
Murderers on planes
Held hostage our surrender?
Captive people in fires
Creating heroes
From the inadequacy of hate.

The belly of hate
Bloated the day
It fed upon heroes,
Gutting planes
With daggered fires
Too hot to surrender.

Although hate flew planes
On the 11th day, remembered fires
Baptized fallen heroes. America will never surrender.



Marissa Williams

Faith and Love



E. G. Hallgarth
The Baptism
of Jesus

Michael Francis Machart
Abel's Sorrow

No more do I find the path of my fathers.
His Herd leading me to clean waters.
Furrows and lines everywhere,
Blocking our path without a care.

Fighting and fencing, my brother's plea.
No longer clear, no longer free.
I have hemmed in His Herd and portioned off His Land,
That my brother can plant in his barren sand.

Michael Francis Machart

One Hundred Fish on One Hook

In the sea I fished today.
Catching a bounty if I do say!

One hundred fish on just one hook!
Under the water, take a look!

I got one nibble, then I got one bite.
Then that first fish must have died of fright.
Water so clear that I could see,
Another fish sneaking up on me.
It made a dash and then made a grab.
Quickly eating up that first fish I had.
Next came a red fish tearing through the water,
Picking up speed to join the slaughter.
A blue and green fish swam through the sea,
Lunging and plunging for the feeding frenzy.

One after another, I just sat in amazement.
Thinking there is no way I'm going to get this to the pavement!

Oh my gosh, did you see that!
A shark just bumped my boat and knocked off my hat!
I then proceeded to spill my cup,
As I watched that Great White eat all my fish up!

The shark seems to have a problem, however,
It no longer seems to float like a feather!
Sinking away into the deep blue sea,
With ninety-nine fish in its belly.

This is the part when I get sad,
My pole's not strong enough to reel in all the fish that I had!
I held on for as long as I could,
But then my line ran out as I knew it would.

Lawrence P. Matherne

Destiny

Many people walk along the crowded sidewalks of Manhattan. They go about their business and lead the lives they set out to lead. As for Trevor, he was no different than the others. Every day was routine; get up, work, gym, home, dinner, and bed only to get up and do the same thing the next day. As Trevor wakes on the morning of October 7th he felt something different about himself.

While walking to lunch the thoughts running through his mind that morning stuck, and then it happened. Once their eyes meet there is no stopping the forces of nature. It was as if they were meant for one another. A sense of duty in other relationships has now been destroyed by the overwhelming feeling of love. What they thought then to be true love, now they know to be false. Destiny has brought them together by chance. The forces of true love quickly take over. Trevor takes his time. There is no rush. He has waited his entire life for this, this very feeling. They are both lost in the moment; he inside her as well as her being inside him. Until now this feeling was unknown; thought to be known in their present relationships but . . .

They pay close attention to every part of the other. Every detail is deeply thought about; no part is left unexplored. Every moment is taken advantage of; not even a second is lost. The pleasant action of stealing a kiss, showing, telling, and thinking about true love is all they want for each other. Throughout their entire lives they two mesh into one. Together there is no worry only achievement, no pain only strength, no battles only peace, and no heart break only love. He is compelled to pour himself into her as is she for him. Their bodies melt and is quickly absorbed by the other.

He thought to himself, this is what life should be and everyone should experience this feeling. In a moment he then blinks and they both continue to walk forward back into their boring, normal, unfulfilled lives. As he continues to walk to lunch he can't help but think should I turn around. Trevor thought the whole premonition was crazy and continued to walk to lunch. Little did he know, she turned around to look at him with a smile.

Lawrence P. Matherne

Home

His head lays on his duffle bag
His body lays on the Earth's loose rock
Society calls it war
He calls it home

Victoria Concordia Crescit

Never enough conquest
The way of the west
Imposing their way of life on the helpless
War after war, what a mess
Compassion, false; conformity true
Just wait, they will soon take over you
They will use the mighty strength of their army
They do not understand that Victory Grows from Harmony

Lawrence P. Matherne

The Silent Professional

*What was before is left behind;
what never was is now.*

Pythagoras via Ovid

As they leave the known for the unknown
Nervous yet ready
Packed, trained, and prepared to do the unthinkable.
For what?
Freedom! So you say.
He feels lifeless, not human
As the engines roar, the loudest of noises cannot break his
concentration.
Suddenly light becomes dark.
Understanding and accepting their fate,
Their transportation seems more like a casket
The door opens
The blood rushes
Their time has commenced
The unknown as now arrived
You think he jumps for glory, excitement, fame
He knows he has jumped into death!

Mackenzie McLellan
Ground Mall

Cement or marble?
White stone or gray?
Emblem or carving?
So many decisions, but still there I'll lay.

These details, the roses,
adjoining vases full or empty;
Families haggle, and what does it show us?
At the time, extravagance seems so tempting.

Do the spirits, the angels, what have you,
gossip on whose marker is most grand?
"Wow, a prime local, and fenced in, too?"
Is that what really happens while visitors stare and stand?

Money must be a worry for the shopping family, so tense.
Would choosing the cheaper option be something unforgiving?
Is love for the passed away measured by funerary expense?
Nonsense.
Cemeteries are for the living.

Mackenzie McLellan
Lavada

Like cream into coffee,
Something changed her.

I'm not sure just what,
I'm too young to know, really,
But something changed her irrevocably.

I read her old yearbook where people signed,
And I think, is this the same woman?

On some level I understand it,
But that doesn't change the anger I feel.
She contradicts and she blames;
Give her a sweet story and she'll say the world's going to pot and fly
with it.
Man does she soar.

She's addicted to wine and negativity.
She's awkward when I say "I love you" on the phone.
I'm probably the only one who's told her that in a while.

Life's irony would make the woman who detested aging go
prematurely grey at 29.
People cling to youth when they aren't allowed to have it.

She used survival skills.
Although she loved him, she'd never forgive him for the crap he
pulled.
Good wives didn't do that.
She cooked breakfast, but resented the years he when he was no
longer there to eat it.
She felt relieved, but missed him.
She just kept going, just kept surviving, and took it out on the ones
who loved her most at Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter

I know why she clings to her beauty.
I know why she clings to her hostess abilities.
I know why she picks at her first born.

I blame everything, but her, for it.

Resentment, bitterness, respectability, all poured in
like cream into coffee,
& I'll never know Lavada,

Mackenzie McLellan

Run

Amidst the cold, I cherish the rubble,
Fretting that forward years won't recall
The greatest thing that was.
Bogart said it'd come down seven-fold.
They, themselves, couldn't have known, though.
I look on and see the firing-squad, such smooth movements,
and I run.

Mackenzie McLellan

Something Synonymous with Sorrow

What was before is left behind; what never was is now.

--Pythagoras via Ovid

Unrecognizable danger.
Complete imperceivability.
Look closer. Look closer.
See that there? That chain?
It's linked to a reaction.
The catalyst?
An anonymous monster,
a stealer of light,
a tricker of trust,
a cowardly soul.

We weep for what has been taken,
for what has been lost.

Guilt lies not with the guilty,
fault's felt but misplaced.
Those who chose silence:
you dangerous fools.

This ill-begotten happening. Feeling.
What it wasn't was the changing of leaves.
What it was was the hacking of a tree, still green,
just because the sapling—weak, and the axe edge—sharp.
Unrecognizable are the rays that have been clouded.
Lost is what could have been.

We weep, and our tears race to the roots
where no axe can reach.

Mackenzie McLellan

Tough

The faucet was part of a system so old that it screamed when the water ran. Probably due to a combination of old pipes and rust, the sound emitted through the metal and plastic sink stained by tenant after tenant over the years wasn't pleasant, and this night it only added to the atmosphere she felt had been surrounding her since everything changed a few hours before. Shrill. Everything was shrill. The screaming sink was shrill, and the glaring, yellowy cream expanse of the walls, undecorated, was shrill, and the moments sitting in her short-term memory were of a shrillness of a different type altogether.

The noise still blasting from the faucet found her lost in this haunted reverie and brought her back to the present because she was startled how this awful noise had never startled her before. She'd lived here for a year, and she was just now noticing it? She quickly realized she hated it—abhorred it—along with everything else about the bathroom. She abhorred this standard-issue half bath with its 1970-era dark wood cabinets and white counter tops flecked with matted gold-ish flecks. Cheap didn't have to look so ugly. Even the color surrounding her was as overwhelming as the piercing noise spewing from the faucet. The walls must have once been off-white, but over time the paint had to have gradually yellowed because no one would buy paint this color, the color sickness. This ick yellow was brighter to her than if the walls had been a vibrant orange. That was a fact; her mom had painted their dining room bright orange back home a few years ago for reasons still unknown to the rest of the family, but it surprisingly never bothered her. It never even nearly irked her like this color which was currently furrowing its way under her skin.

As she acknowledged her hatred of this room she could never avoid for long, one plain yet loud characteristic at a time, she began to have more of a reaction to it than she had towards anything else that evening, which is something considering only a few hours prior she had hazily shuffled to her car and drove off in the opposite direction of what seemed like hours of the greatest fear she had ever experienced. Thinking of her mom again, she thought how for a split-second she had contemplated calling her on the way back. But the moment of need was taken over by the words she knew would be said. "Why did you let yourself get in that situation in the first place? I raised you better than that." Everything was always a

reflection back on her. She really couldn't blame her mother though right now. She would've been right. She shouldn't have put herself in such a situation...she only knew one friend there, but she lost sight of her after he pulled her under his arm, handed her yet another beer, and started talking to her.

The noise, still streaming, pulled her out of her head again, and as her breathing swiftly and steadily increased due to this awful tainted creamed wall color blinding her eyes and the ear-splitting noise escaping from the sink, she started to panic until a bodily reaction that often occurs during times of complete disarray of the self brought her back to center.

After she vomited into the toilet, which was the only object in the room that was allowed to be plain, she turned off the screeching faucet and closed her eyes to block out the taunting walls. She would have left the bathroom altogether if she could've stood to be on anything remotely soft like carpet or a bed. She didn't want soft. She didn't want comfort. Maybe she should've called her mother, then. No, she wanted the absurdly pebble-printed linoleum that further made the bathroom what it was. Man, she hated that bathroom, that floor. Yet, she couldn't leave it. She sank to the ground, her back following the detested wall all the way down until the buttons on her back pockets scraped the cold floor before stopping once she lay flat finding an unknown comfort in the fact that nothing was hugging her body, nothing was imposing on her or her space—not the floor because it was flat, not the sink because it was silenced, and not the walls because she lowered two walls of her own. She lay still like that for hours—eyes shut, head to heels on the falsely pebbled floor, completely and purposefully immobile and utterly awake. Sleep would have been too risky. She'd always been a vivid dreamer. She lay there and nothing moved except for the tears that seeped out of her, making their way through the heavy black of her eyeliner and even heavier mascara taking bits of charcoal hue with it while it traveled on gravity's predictable path.

When her tears matched her body and remained still, she let her eyes open fully. She picked herself up and adjusted her gaze to the rotten vanilla haze of the walls with the accent of the sharp dark cabinets in her peripherals, acknowledging the hatred she had for the bathroom again, but not dwelling on it. She would not dwell; She'd move on. She'd be tough, just as she was raised. She moved her gaze from the wall and stepped to the sink without looking at the little girl in the mirror whom she didn't want to see like this. Eyes cast down and face stained with soon to be removed remains of synthetic beauty, her hand slowly turned on the faucet until the noise gradually reached a full scream.

Mackenzie McLellan

When I Run

My feet drum to the beat of the world,
persuaded to a rhythm brought on by the music;
No, they decide the music; they make the notes.
They push the world around with every turn-over—every revolving
step.

Whichever way I'm going, the world's going the other,
like the most massive treadmill ever for this less than mediocre
runner.

I feel connected to everything once I sink into the pulse of the road.
My thoughts are constantly with whichever season it is
and how it gives a different flavor to the suburban and asphalt route
than the last one.

My feet keep that beat,
My breath does its best
While the warm sun shines subtle but direct.

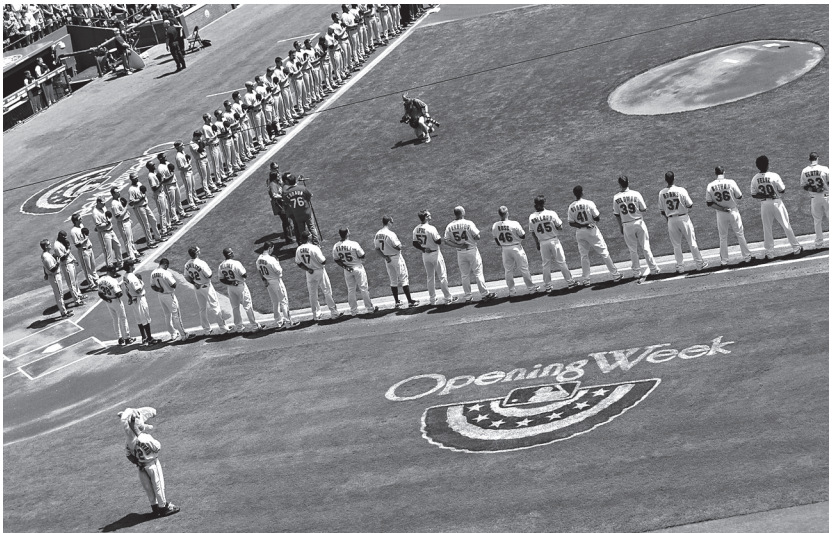
I feel the rays intertwine with my eyelashes and they knot together.
The sunshine starts pulling them upward and off the pavement to
formally acknowledge this beautiful weather.
The knot tightens and tugs and I shift my sight upwards, and I feel a
part of it all... despite the discomfort in my side and less than smooth
breathing.

I heard once in a song that to live is to fly.
But running's livin', too.
Like life, it hurts,
But it certainly feels good, too.



Abby Jones

Ugly Love



Justin Green

Opening Day Lineup

Ashley Parker

The Mystery of Angels

His voice a smooth tenor
A smile on his handsome face
His shadowy hair hiding slate gray eyes
That were more expressive than humanly possible
The picture of perfection
But perfection is not real
Blink twice but still there he is
Confidence glowing through flawlessly carved features
Until the image fades
Leaving the world a better place
Just by leaving a single feather on the hearth

Tranquility

His voice a smooth tenor
A smile on his handsome face
His shadowy hair hiding slate gray eyes
That were more expressive than humanly possible
The picture of perfection
But perfection is not real
Blink twice but still there he is
Confidence glowing through flawlessly carved features
Until the image fades
Leaving the world a better place
Just by leaving a single feather on the hearth

Marcus Parks
The Soul

What is the soul? Is it a ball of light in the individual that houses our thoughts, dreams, personalities and existence? I heard throughout my life that the soul would exit the body when the time came, but mine never did.

My eyelids became too heavy, and the mouth too tired. My throat was too weak to form words, and the body too cold to prove existence. Even though I had died I still saw the world and still heard the voices of the living. Where was this Heaven that the preacher spoke of so highly? Had Jesus forgotten to retrieve me? Had I even been accepted into his grace?

I could still feel. My skin lingered with touches of the living. Touches that prepare us to be dead. The other touches were those of comfort, but not for the dead; for the living. I wanted to scream out, I wanted to move and tell all those who wept for me that I was still here. I even wanted to protest as they lay me into the box, but my body would not will it.

Golden hair like honey. Hazel eyes.

Free will was gone to me. It seemed to dangle just inches from my hands, but they would not reach out and grab it. So, I was left to suffer the funeral, suffer the procession of shuffling shoes. And when they put me in the ground, my throat would have been sore from screaming, if I could have screamed.

Looking around in this tiny box I realized I was left with just myself and my thoughts. Such a maddening concept. I was unable to move, and my limbs would itch with the notion, the desire to change position. I was unable to breathe, and I could still feel the collapsing of my chest and my lungs as I begged to inhale sweet air, sweet life. I was unable to speak, and therefore was left with deafening silence. When you're six feet below the ground, all there is is silence. Even if I could speak, I imagined I'd not hear myself.

A voice like rain.

That lead me to the thinking, since there was nothing to do but think, of the soul; my soul. Was the information about the soul taught by writers and preachers false? Maybe the soul did not ever leave the

body. Maybe it was the way of the universe as a sick joke to make our suffering eternal. Maybe this was what Hell was supposed to be.

I was under the assumption that when we died, the soul left with our last breath and our last heave of the chest. Maybe by that token, we lost our souls little by little from the moment we first breathed. Maybe the true way to share the soul of another is by the simple kiss. For in the world between worlds, where tongues would dance a fiery passion, the breath would be shared. Maybe the souls would dance too. Maybe we took bits of other's souls with us after we shared love.

Fingers. Soft fingers.

If we breathed out our souls little by little, then maybe we died with the simple core of them. If a child died, then would he be trapped for eternity with a full soul that yearned for self expression and self identity? Maybe the soul already knew itself, and it was our jobs to discover the soul through our interactions with one another and ourselves.

A newborn crying.

As I lay in the box, I'd lose the passage of time. Time would be but a word; an empty word. For eternity had no time, no sense of continuation. Death was the end without an end. Maybe during a certain fraction of time, our souls would find solace in the graveyard. I heard once that during a certain time of the night, spirits would walk the earth. I imagined that when this time occurred, our souls would rise from our graves, little balls of light, swirling in a mix of wisps and energy. Combined, our souls would light the graveyard, and the grass would be bathed in an eerie glow as the wind raked through it. Our headstones would be illuminated, and for a time we would remember who we were.

A name.

But then we would return to the box; to the never speaking, never breathing, never hearing world of non-existence. It was the ultimate prison, the final sentence of life to a confinement for a crime unbeknownst to us that we had committed.

As the passage of time becomes more of a memory, we wonder why we are so foolish to believe in God.

Rachel Peoples For Whom I Bled

Darkness kept my eyes from seeing; fear forbade my heart from beating

As I stared into the bleakness of despair not long ago.

Cries of anguish filled all hearing; all the while I kept on peering,
Peering into isolation that was wrought by grief and woe.

As the darkness still persisted, peace my bidding still resisted;
Heart and soul were burning, burning with the memory of my deeds.
I was surrounded by the crying of the souls now slowly dying,
Souls who had been sold for riches of a pretense of a creed.

What I'd done in long years past would not flee memory, but would last

For all eternity and longer, torturing me with late remorse.

Hope was as imaginary as the faiths unrest would bury;

Myths, illusions mocked our pain with the regret they would endorse.

How we cried out for redemption. Might there hope of exemption
From such nightmare as described the cloud that shrouded every
view?

Could there be such a salvation as provided restoration

To the life that did exist before the darkness did ensue?

Wolves now circled preying, preying on the souls long been decaying
Circled closer, ever closer, our hope ready to devour.

I bowed my head so to concede as darkest demons now were freed
To feed their starving misery; how they had yearned for this dark
hour!

Sharpest teeth were snapping, gnashing; at my throat they now were
lashing

Dripping with the blood of ancient spirits long ago consumed.

With racing chills I heard a shout that surely was not from my mouth?

And it was raised to divine ears, begged "Save me from deserved doom!"

Earth and sky and all creation trembled from their aged foundation
 As a breaking, splitting crack resounded from the reddened sky.
 Garbed in robes of purest white, a holy host appeared to sight
 Preceding Him whom ancient prophets called magnificent Most
 High.

The darkness fled before His face, now searching, seeking out a place
 Where they could escape the wrath that now ensued from His scarred
 hands.

With a Word they all were felled; by breath of God they were
 compelled
 To fall and praise the worthy one before whom they just could not
 stand.

He must have heard my desperate plea—now turned His fiery eyes
 on me

And took my thorny, bloodstained crown and placed it on His holy
 head.

He then removed my tattered coat and on it, in His blood, he wrote
 Redeeming words that did read "A forgiven one for whom I bled."

Hanna Purser

Together Forever

“How does it look,” Alex asked her sister as she twirled excitedly in front of the mirror. “Perfect! You’re going to be the most beautiful one there,” her identical twin sister told her. “I still can’t believe you got asked to the prom by Michael,” she squealed as she left the dressing room. Alex smiled until she looked in the mirror again. Looking back at her was a thin, beautiful girl with long, straight black hair, and her eyes, the most unique thing about her, one pale blue, like her sister’s, but one a very pale green. But this isn’t who she saw. She saw a fat, ugly little beast whose hair wouldn’t ever do what she wanted; her eyes, two colors, like a freak. Her dad didn’t love her, so why should anyone else. She shook her head as she stripped off the long sleeve dress. It was black and beautiful, but she thought it would look better on her sister. She pulled on her clothes and walked out to Abby, who was eagerly waiting.

“Uh, hey, Abby. I guess this means you already have a date to prom?” The question came from the cashier, who Abby recognized as the junior in her theater class. Excitedly she answered, “No, I don’t. My sister, Alex, does.” His face brightened, “Well, do you want to--? Wait, Emo Alex got a date before you did!?” Alex, who had always been shy, said nothing, and shrunk into her hoodie. Abby, who was used to having to talk for her sister, retaliated, “Don’t call her that! I have no problem with her getting a date! No, I won’t go to prom with you! I won’t go to prom with anyone who won’t accept my sister, too!” Alex, who was trying to disappear in her hoodie, muttered, “It’s cool, Ab. Just leave it, and let’s go.” Abby moodily paid for the dress and stalked out. “Alexis, you need to stand up for yourself! If you let them get away with it, you will be a laughing stock for the rest of high school. Having been shot down on this topic before, she hesitated before adding, “Lex, are the rumors true? Are you really ‘Emo Alex’?” They were the only riders on the bus home. Alex had her face hidden from Abby. “Alexis Michelle, let me see your arm, baby.” Alex still didn’t move, so quietly Abby bargained, averting her eyes from her sister, “I-I’ll show you mine if you show me yours.” Shocked, Alex looked at her sister in disbelief. Abby was pulling back the sleeve of her white shirt. Alex could see the scars and healing lines across her pale skin. They really were identical.

Alex pulled her sleeves back, not taking her eyes from Abby’s arm. Their scars matched perfectly. “Lexi, does anyone actually know about you, or

are they all just rumors?" They had both pulled their sleeves down, and Abby had taken her sister's hand.

Staring at her lap, Alex answered, "Uh, just rumors as far as I know. After Dad stopped paying attention to our makeup, I went dark, just because I could. I hurt. I didn't know what else to do. You were dealing with what dad did to you and I was with what he did to me. I guess the rumors actually started when I met Jake, and we started hanging out. What about you? Does anyone know?"

Abby shook her head as they climbed off the bus, "After Mom left, Dad slipped into the bottle, and you pulled away from everyone. We started fighting so much. I was scared Alex."

That night Abby snuck into her sister's room. "Alex," she whispered, "Are you still awake?"

Alex groaned back, "No," but sat up anyway and asked, "What's up Abby Rae?"

Abby crawled in bed beside her and whispered, "I've been thinking, let's trade places tomorrow. I'll go to your classes, hang with your friends, and you do my stuff."

The next morning Alex and Abby dressed each other. Abby was sure to put a blue shirt on Alex so her green eye would look bluer. "Ready," Abby asked, pulling the black hood of her hoodie over her hair.

"Let's do this," Alex said, putting her arm around her sister. They walked to school together like usual, but this time when they met up with Abby's friends, Alex went with them. Abby fell behind and walked alone. "Um, Ab, not to be rude or anything, but have you gained weight?"

Alex looked down at herself, then replied as Abby-y as possible, "Um, no. I think it's just this shirt. It's too big." Abby's friends accepted this answer and carried on laughing and joking, but Alex's mind began formulating a plan.

"Hey, Alex! Wait up, chick!"

Abby's head snapped up, and before her stood the most handsome boy. She had seen Jake before, but never up close. Trying to bring out the right Alex attitude she said,

"Sup, Jake?"

He got closer and looked closely at her, "Alex, are you okay? You look really thin." Abby nodded, but still Jake stared into her eyes, making her want to melt. "Hey, what's up with your eyes? One's not green anymore. You and your sister didn't trade places, did you? You're not really Abby, right?" He laughed. His laugh sounded like an angel's chorus in her ears.

She laughed a bit and said, "Nah, I wouldn't last a minute with her preppy friends. Mine do this for a while after me and Ab get closer. One of her's goes greenish."

They went through the day without being discovered, but on the way home they were busted. Alex was still walking with Abby's friends, and Abby was walking behind them.

"Hey, Emo Alex." A red car sped by, and the driver had his head hanging out the window. It was Justin, the cashier who wanted to ask Abby to prom. "Emo Alex! Here are some razor blades! Why don't you go cut yourself?" His hand came out the window. Something shiny flew towards Abby. They hit her, and she fell.

"ABBY!" Blood, there was so much blood. "Alex. Alex, you have to listen to me. I love you."

Alex opened her mouth to tell her sister she would be okay, but all that came out was, "I love you, too. I'm gonna miss you, Abby Rae."

Abby smiled, and then winced in pain, "Go to prom. You look beautiful in that dress."

Abby's breath became shallow as she whispered her final words, "I don't regret switching places with you. I love-." She never got to finish the sentence.

Abby's friends had called 911. When the ambulance came racing around the corner, Alex quickly slid one of the blades into her pocket and climbed in to the ambulance beside her sister's now lifeless body. She endured all the doctor's endless questioning. Then, the police finally arrested Justin, and within days he was prosecuted.

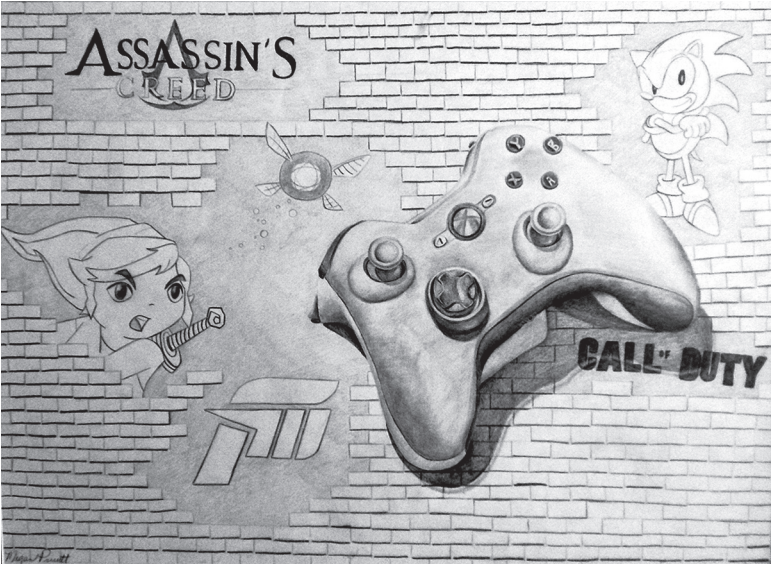
Prom came, and the night passed slowly. She wore the dress and danced with Michael. That night, when Michael dropped her off, she walked down the street. The blood still stained the cracks of the sidewalk. She kneeled where her sister once stood, then reached into her pocket. Her tool of peace wrapped in a letter:

Jake,

Abby was in love with you. I'm sorry we switched places and didn't tell you. You have always been my best friend. I'm sorry I have to do this, but my sister and I were never meant to be apart. I fulfilled my sister's final wish, so, now it's time for me to go. I love you.

Love,
Alex

She gently unwrapped the blade and cut her face and neck as her sister's had been. Lying on the concrete with her blood spilling out, she found what she had lost, her sister. Abby reached down and took her sister's hand, "You shouldn't have come, Lex, but I'm glad you did. You're gonna love it here!" Alex smile said, "Together forever." Their childhood promise echoed as the twins walked away, hand in hand.



Megan Pruitt Bise

360



Lauren Cozzi

Bold

Tiffany Rains

One Won't Hurt

Her screams tore through the darkness. Piercing the stillness around her. She fought with every fiber of her being. It wouldn't make any difference in the end. Only the old barn owl in the loft would bear witness to the brutal crimes committed on the chilled October night.

-----o-----

She was pretty. Unlike those pencil-like, Barbie wannabes, Lexie had curves and class. She didn't dress to get the attention of every boy on campus. College wasn't about the boys or the parties for her. She was going to make a better life for herself. After ten years in and out of the foster care system, she had been determined to get a degree.

Three years into school and Lexie finally fell to the peer pressure. Midterms broke her spirit sending her stress level over the edge. She had to get out. She'd go crazy if she didn't do something, anything.

"Come on," Alex pleaded with a strong side of whine. "One party won't kill you. Loosen up! Have some fun!"

"I don't have a costume." Lexie was running out of excuses. Her homework was done and she had just finished her last midterm.

"You're in luck," the mischievous grin could almost be heard in Alex's sing-song voice. "I just happen to have two costumes. Wouldn't you know, one just happens to be your size. What a coincidence, right?"

"Right," Lexie rolled her eyes. She had already made her decision. "Give it to me," she sighed.

Alex was literally bouncing with excitement. She threw the costume to Lexie and continued chattering about how awesome the party would be. Lexie just blocked her out and dressed in the less than modest fairy costume.

The music was blaring. Lexie searched the room for a familiar face. She counted at least six of Alex's ex-boyfriends, a couple of girls from her freshman dorm, and a handful of people she had tutored over the past year. They were obviously regulars on this scene. No wonder they failed remedial courses.

"Remember," Alex yelled over the music, "have fun! Meet some new people."

Lexie found a corner of one of the less crowded rooms with an open seat. A fully charged phone in hand; she would at least have some form of entertainment. With any luck, no one would notice her. It took just over an hour for the last of Lexie's luck to run out.

"Hi there."

Lexi looked up to the source of the voice. He was tall, clean-cut. Handsome. She was leery, but his friendly smile gave her a reassurance.

"Hi."

"This isn't really your scene, is it?"

"No. Not really."

"Come on. Let's go outside. It's not so loud and definitely not as crowded."

She looked at his extended hand. Her head told her no. This wouldn't be a good idea, but tonight wasn't about good ideas. Tonight was about letting go and having fun. She reached for his hand. Outside the temperature was dropping. The cold front was blowing in from Oklahoma.

"So where are you from?"

"Around," she never knew how to answer that question.

"You're not much of a talker. How about a drink?"

Lexie nodded. One beer wouldn't hurt. The man reached down into a cooler and handed her a bottle. She popped the tab effortlessly.

"Impressive," the man said with raised eyebrows.

Lexie shrugged. She had learned a few things the short time she lived with her mom.

"Well, I'm Chad. What's your name?"

"Lexie."

Chad continued to attempt conversation. Lexie sat on the railing around the porch. Looking through the windows at the happy party-goers, Lexie saw Alex attached to her latest fling. She just shook her head. That girl, you just couldn't help but to love her.

Lexie took another drink. The hair on the back of her neck stood up. The taste was different. It was subtle but different. She took another drink, but this time couldn't taste it. She waved away the thought. Stress was really getting to her. She finished her drink just as Chad handed her another.

She was halfway through her second beer and felt like she was on top of the world. Smiling, she looked up at Chad. He moved towards her. He bent down and kissed her. She felt the butterflies in her stomach.

"Let's get out of here. Wanna go back to my place?"

She nodded. He took her hand and led her to a car parked on the street. He opened the door. What a gentleman, Lexie thought. He drove out of town. Making turns, this way and that, Lexie wouldn't have been able to find his place sober. After twenty minutes, he pulled up in front of an old barn.

"You live here?"

"The house is on the other side of the barn."

"Oh." She was too far gone to question him.

He opened the door for her, helping her out of the car and walked her towards the barn door. He began to grip her arm tighter and tighter.

"Ouch, you're hurting me!" Lexie tried to free her arm.

He just clenched tighter. Pulling her into the barn and closing the door. He forced her to the ground and cuffed her hands to a pole. She could tell by the look on his face she wouldn't make it out.

"They'll find you. They'll find you and convict you and you'll go to jail. Or you could let me go and no one will ever know."

"Honey," he said with a laugh. "No one will find you, no one will find me, and I won't go to jail."

"Yes," she screamed. "The police will find you."

Laughing he cut her off.

"Oh sweetie," he touched her face. "I am the police."

Cynthia Robinson
Numb

I'm trapped. It's all around me, I can feel it. I'm consumed in it. I'm unable to find my way out.

I've struggled for five years to get away from it. Somehow it's found me once again, and I can't escape it. It's too overpowering to run from and go on with my life like nothing has happened. Nothing will work this time. I have to face the facts whether I like it or not.

I'm shaky all over, but my body isn't moving. I feel very clammy. My bones feel ice cold, but I am warm to the touch. Nothing feels right to me. Everything seems all wrong.

Things seem so dark. The light will never come again. Happiness seems so far away. I can't remember the last time I was truly happy, when I didn't have to put on a front so people wouldn't see what has consumed me. I'm encased in complete darkness.

The darkness that I'm absorbed in has made it unbearable to speak of. When I talk, if I am able to talk, it is very little and has nothing to do with my condition. I'd give anything to be okay again, to be just like everyone around me. I see everyone else acting as if life is wonderful and things are great. I see how alone I am when no one comes to talk to me in the morning or sit with me at lunch or even cares to be anywhere near me.

In public, I seem like everything is doing well. Once I arrive to my own personal space of my living quarters, I curl up in the furthest corner of the room. I shake all over as the hot tears roll down my cheeks. Darkness is all around me. I begin to rock back and forth in my corner. To ensure my safety, I cling to my legs and knees. I dig my fingers into them to prevent myself from wrapping my hands around my thin neck and squeezing as tightly as possibly can. My airway will slowly close, making me discolored in the face. My head starts pounding from the lack of air.

I release my grip, gasp for air. My hands shake more than ever. Tears are becoming more abundant. My vision is blurred. Breathing gets very hard. Red marks remain on my delicate neck. The pain made everything okay again. I close my eyes tightly to make the tears stop, hoping that my breathing will become easier. My mind is going crazy with memories. I'm searching for a specific memory.

A person. I have to find that memory. I need to find it, hold on to it for dear life. It's my only way out. Life is meaningless without that memory, without that person.

I have found it! I see a face. A male's flawless face, with dark skin, deep brown eyes, soft sweet lips, and short brown hair. It wasn't just a face, it was his face.

I know who he is. There was something about him that was important. Something I knew and have to find in my scatter brain. I have to figure out what was so important about this man.

I remember a name: James. James C Brooks. It was his name. It meant something, but what? I have to know. It has to be here, somewhere.

LOVE . . . I found the word love. Did he love me? Did I love him? Which was it? I need to know. Its life or death now . . .

I know the word love is a strong word. You must only use it when you mean it, but how do you mean something like love. It's a feeling. I've experienced it before, I know I have. All I can feel is loneliness, sorrow, and weakness, but I had love once. I just need to find it again, and I may get to see the light.

The memory came in full force now. I could see him holding me, looking into my eyes deeply, passionately. He took my hand in his and kissed it ever so lightly and spoke softly to me saying three simple words, "I love you." I heard myself say it back in the same tone. I had gotten my answer: we were in love with each other.

That was just it, it was only a memory. I couldn't remember how it felt to love him and to have the feeling in return, a feeling I couldn't feel anymore. I used to love him, but I could never again. I wish I could. Another memory came in a fast.

It was just a picture though. No words. No movement. Just a picture. A picture of him. He was in a tux. He was at a wedding. Not just a wedding but his wedding. His wedding—He was getting married—getting married to my—my—my best friend—or the person I remember as my best friend—He loves me. We were lovers. Were—He loved me. Loved—both past tense—He loves my best friend now—not me—I want love—My heart is breaking because of the betrayal—

I want to know what love is again. I slowly open my eyes. They are red from crying so much, so hard. Things are so unbearable now. The room is filled with darkness. My heart is like a black hole. I can feel nothing. I want to feel the pain release its everlasting grip on me.

Only death can make the pain go away—death. I would have to have died for all the pain to disappear. That would be my only hope. I dare not think of my fate if I couldn't make the pain go away.

Another memory came to mind: his lips pressed against mine. I knew how I was supposed to feel when remembering this. I couldn't feel the way I was supposed to. I didn't know how to feel that way anymore.

His soft, sweet lips pressed up against mine. I should have thought about how warm he made me feel when kissing me. I could not remember how my heart should have felt heavy at the seeing the memory. Fresh tears swelled in my eyes as I opened them only to see I was sucked into the deepest set of darkness in the room. Not a drop of light could be seen in the small room. James didn't want me anymore. I could remember all these things. He didn't want me.

There was not peace at mind for me. I started to hyperventilate. The room was spinning, not that I could see anything but complete black. I was getting dizzy. My stomach was turning. I couldn't remember the last time I ate. What food that was left in my stomach was about to escape it. I had voices in my head. It was screaming. The voices were yelling at me, telling me I'm not good, saying I'm no good. They said I might as well be dead, that I was worthless and unwanted. No one needed me here. He didn't need me.....

James, whoever he was, didn't need me. I could do nothing for him. I was no good for him. He deserved so much better than me. He deserved my best friend. I could remember only things that happened in my past.

Looking around the small space I was in, I spotted my phone sitting on the ground across the room because it light up ever so slightly. I had no energy to get up and walk to go get it. I used what little strength I had left just crawl and reach the phone. I slide it open and curled up on the ground. My head lay lightly on the rough carpet. I looked at the messages that I so rarely looked at. I had a message or two from a person called Jason. He seemed worried about me and wanted to know if I am okay. This James had sent me a single message saying "I love you with all my heart." I was supposed to feel all warm and fuzzy inside but I couldn't. My face was damp from tear; my whole body was moist from having the cold sweats. James didn't love me—He was married to my best friend—How could he love me with all his heart?

I was doomed. Nothing could save me now. My life was destined to end this way. It's how things should be. I had no hope, no reason to live. I had nothing for me in this lifetime. I had nothing for me here. NOTHING! Life needs to end for me—I was taking my last breaths. It was almost over for me. I could feel everything going pitch black . . .

I opened my eyes only to see my vision distorted. I caught a glimpse of light, and my eyes shut and refused to open again. I heard a woman let out a high pitched scream. I heard someone yelling to call for help. Chaos was all around me; I could sense it but could not see it. My hearing suddenly halted, and I took a final breath. All my senses seemed like I couldn't use them any longer. Everything just froze, and things were ice cold . . . ice cold . . . ice cold . . . death.

Kyle Russell

The Death of Reason

I simply sit and stare
My eyes fixated on the bright lights ahead
The end has finally come and is welcomed with open arms
All of the war and devastation culminate upon my front door

Is it that I have chosen its manner?
Could it be that death has met my wishes?
Or maybe it is simply a gesture of respect
One offered to an adversary such as I

I could have never imagined the end
A world of seemingly perpetual existence
Gruesomely brought to its knees
And beheaded before my very eyes

My love lies beside me
Her eyes covered to hide from the pain
The light beckons us toward it
Deep down neither she nor I can find the strength to move

It is honorable to die for a cause
Our cause became blurry years past
Blurred into the future we tried to change
Leaving no hope for those who still fought

For centuries the world become increasingly simple
Intelligence and understanding swept under the rug
Despised and abhorred for knowledge
Caught and killed for our thoughts

Machines of war thunder even closer
And a wretched sulfuric odor fills the air
My love and I walk toward the light
Gentle streams of tears roll down my face

Tears do not fall for our deaths
But for the death of logic and reason
For understanding and compassion
For the world as we knew it

I understand a basic principle
To contemplate the eternal, one must understand the mortal
To contemplate the future, one must know the past
And to contemplate death, one must have truly lived

A single tear splashes to the ground
The last that will ever be shed for us
My love and I are the last of our people
We embrace one final time and charge into the light

Sarah Snyder
[It all made sense]

All things were together. Then mind came and arranged them.
—Anaxagoras

It all made sense.
The universe held the sky, the stars.
My feet moved forth firmly on the path in which I walked.
The pieces fit together with no struggle or vicious force.

One day I looked up.
My eyes opened wide
in the eye of the storm.
The stars were all on the ground,
The fire and light
were beaten out of them.
They were never the same.

My feet were high above my head.
The path in which I walked
twisted into cosmic abyss.
The pieces were everywhere.
They wandered through space
searching for the perfect fit.
There were no perfect fits.

It all made sense
at one time.
But now I was in the presence of a glorious mess
and filled with more life than I could have imagined.

Sarah Snyder
Life

Take me to places I've never been.
Give my eyes the capacity to see
beyond what is tangible
and feel
beyond what is material.
Give my heart the capacity to touch
souls rather than skin.
Lead me into the darkness
so that I may lead people out of it.
Make my voice strong
so that I might be heard
resounding, resounding.
When hurting hearts remain quiet
bring me peace
so that I might be level-minded
and ready.
Bring me your spirit
and your passion
so that I might show the world
you are beautiful, you are beautiful.

Sarah Snyder
Take Me There

“Time has a funny way of dealing with things,” Mrs. Elsie expressed to me through a slight mouth with shriveled, yet dainty, lips. I looked at her with a perplexed grin on my face and found myself entangled in the spirit of her energy. *What have those hands touched? What words have those lips spoken? What has that radiant heart felt?* As I reached for my glass of lemonade and took another sip, I felt a ray of sun touch my skin, making me feel at home. I’m lucky, I thought. I’m lucky to be sitting here in the presence of a long-lived soul, sharing a pitcher of lemonade, talking about dreams and life and the past. I’m lucky to have someone who is home.

I looked into Mrs. Elsie’s blue green eyes. Her vibrant red hair had turned to white, and laugh lines and crow’s feet had appeared on the surface of her skin. Her body was much less limber than it once was, but those eyes seemed not to have aged at all. They seemed to have the same fierceness they did the day they opened for the first time. *Eyes that have seen so much. I want to go there, I thought. Show me, I want to see too.*

“Mrs. Elsie?”

“Yes, dear?” Her southern drawl echoed through the windows of the sunroom. She lounged back in her white chair, adjusting the daisies in the flower pot that sat on the table next to her. She ran her finger across each petal, feeding the life in them, as if she was helping them grow with a simple touch.

“Can you please tell me a story?”

“Oh, honeychild, can I tell you a story. I can tell you a thousand stories, but I doubt Father Time would allow us enough hours for you to hear them all. What do you want to hear a story about?”

My chin rested upon my curled up fist. I glanced at the gold ring with the freshwater pearl that wrapped itself around my pointer finger, then at my small, soft hands and thought, young hands. Then I looked at Mrs. Elsie.

“Tell me about the first time you fell in love, the moment when your world was changed forever, when you could truly feel it in your

blood, the moment when you knew he was the one who would be your home.”

Her eyes looked back about sixty years and seemed to take me with them. Father Time had given us a handful of hours, minutes really, to retrace Mrs. Elsie’s steps on his long and precious path.

“It all started in 1952 in Shiloh, South Carolina. Eddie’s family and mine were good friends; they’d helped each other through harvest every fall. I had always seen him at family gatherings, and his eyes would always seem to stumble across mine. I’m not quite sure anyone else noticed at first, but I sure felt it. Eddie had a charisma about him; I like to think it rubbed off on me a little bit throughout the years. People were drawn to him, wanted to be near him. But I was scared. I wasn’t the old lady I am now. I wasn’t brave or full of lightning. To be honest, I was pretty plain. I wasn’t the young lady people noticed. But somehow he did.” Mrs. Elsie paused and stroked the white curls that lay strewn across her shoulders. Her mind was in a different place. Suddenly her eyes turned their gaze once again and she came back to me.

“I’m sorry, honeychild. Sometimes I go back there to that time and stay for a while. Sometimes I even forget I’m still here.”

I gave her a reassuring smile and said, “It’s quite all right, Mrs. Elsie. I’m not in a hurry.” This was a moment in time that would forever be locked away in the vault of my heart. It was one of those moments that resonates and will be with you until the end, a moment that no one could take away. *This is what living is about*, I thought, and a warm essence filled my lungs.

Sarah Snyder
Waltz

His spirit stirs up
a yearning inside of him and he stands.

He sets his eyes on hers
and the music begins.

Swing.

Feet fall together in a gentle,
intense motion.

She can't hide her smile
and she would never want to.

I miss this image, these two souls
dancing together

on a tiny floor,
in a tiny kitchen.

Sarah Snyder
Wrinkles of a Wandering Soul

The old man stands thinking
of a time when thinking was easy.
He stands and stares at a tree,
a lone tree in a constantly moving world.
He doesn't move, the tree doesn't move.

He stands and stares and thinks
that the wrinkles that encrust the tree
encrust the skin
on his hands as well.
He stands alone, the tree stands alone.

He thinks back to the life that he has lived,
the people he touched,
the people he ruined.

Why is he still here?

He is gone in a second,
just like his old man thoughts,
but the tree still stands
to testify to a life
that no one remembered.

Molly Stewart
Catch and Release

Somewhere between grass-stained jeans, and
Laying in the sun just to appreciate the breeze, and
Fishing trips, catch-and-release, and
Hide-and-go seek, you can't catch me, and
Summer-sweet, street light reminders, and
Simple rules, Keepers are Finders, and
Happy souls, carefree and full, and
The first friend who didn't come home, and
Getting a taste of life after this, and
Trying to hold it all as it slipped, and
Discovering first loves often don't last, and
Losing your self as you create your past, and
Finding yourself in the shade of the setting sun, and
Hiding in the shadow thrown by the things you should've done, and
You take what you need and pass on the rest, and
You find time to lay in the breeze, catch your breath, and
You recognize life isn't to keep, but catch-and release.

Molly Stewart
Fire Extinguishers

My mom shook me from my sleep. "Get up. Come into the hall. We need to talk."

As I threw back the quilt and unfolded my body, stiff from sleep, I squinted at the clock on my bedside table. It was five in the morning on a Saturday in November. I slowly made my way out of my bedroom and into the hall where I found my brother, sitting arms crossed at the top of the stairs. We exchanged glances and seemed to both be thinking that one of us, if not both of us, was about to be confronted for something we had done the night before. My brother had a friend spend the night, and he was peeping in my brother's bedroom at the end of the hall, likely wondering the same thing as my brother and I: *Who did it, and what did they do?*

"Boys," my mom quietly said in an unsteady voice, which hinted toward what was to follow. "There was an accident last night. There was a fire. Finley—Boys, Finley's house caught on fire last night. He was inside. He didn't make it out. Boys—Finley is dead."

The depth of her words hung in the air. Every letter of every word seemed to float slowly down my throat, creating a knot, then carry downward to my lungs taking my breath, and finally piling into the small opening of my stomach where it hardened like a stone.

We didn't cry. Not my mom. Not my brother. Not me.

I don't remember much about how we dropped off my brother's friend or the hour-long drive to my Uncle's house. I just remember arriving there.

As we pulled up, I saw the fire trucks, police cars, and an ambulance lining the street. I saw the yellow police tape fencing off the perimeter of the two-story house, or what was left of it, anyway. The remainder of the walls stood eerily outlining every would-be room, which could now be seen from the street. The house, once white, was now gray. Smoke and ash stained the wood siding.

It was November, and the leaves had changed to brilliant hues of red, orange, and yellow. His house stood in a street of painted historic homes, lined with colorful trees, like a black and white photograph in a lineup of colorful, happy paintings. It was so surreal. It felt like a

dream until I heaved open the heavy van door and stepped onto the yard. The leaves, coated in gray ash, crunched under my feet, and the sound made it all too real. The air smelled of sulfur. There were ash particles floating through the air, like snow. In the yard were pieces, remainders, of my uncle's belongings. I bent down and picked up a page from a book. It was from *Killer Diller*, a book I wasn't aware my uncle liked until that day. I later bought it and have read it every November since, in some type of twisted ritual I created to cope with the pain of his death.

My mom's voice interrupted my thoughts, and she called me over to her. She stood next to the angel. My uncle had purchased a large stone sculpture of an angel and placed it in his garden. The stone sculpture now sat eerily over the desolate yard; its stone was clean except for one ironic smudge of gray under one eye, which resembled a tear. My grandmother still reflects on that angel and the ash under its eye. Losing him made all of us cling so tenderly to so many tiny things. We grabbed, with the impatient hands of a child, at anything we thought might ease the pain, justify there was a God, or help us feel close to Finley again. The truth of that day, the horror and tragedy of it all, sat in each of our stomachs like a stone. We all knew our rituals, the angel, or our religions could not bring us any real comfort.

I listened as my grandmother, between sobs and gasping breaths, pleaded with the firemen and police officers. "HE HAD A LARGE DOG," she cried. "IT COULD HAVE BEEN THE DOG YOU FOUND!"

My grandma was eighty years old, and Finley was the youngest child of five. She lived with him up until a month before the fire. The visible pain I witnessed that day made me wonder the about extent of pain she felt inside, which could not be seen.

A few days later his memorial service was held in the Episcopal Church he attended regularly. As I walked through the hall of stained glass windows, I understood why he loved the place. It felt like church. It felt like an old, sacred place with a story and history. Two things my uncle loved so much.

After our family gathered in a reception room and met with the church rector, the services began. We participated in a family march, pew by pew, filled with family and friends of my uncle. I sat on the front row between my brothers and stared at the decorative urn which held the ashes of my uncle. I couldn't help but wonder if those were really his ashes or a just a pile of dirt containing portions of his

remains, dust, and his burned possessions. I spent the entire funeral service thinking that thought or versions of it.

After the service concluded and every person at the service came by and hugged us and apologized as we smiled politely and shook their hands, the rector gathered us and asked if we'd like to say our good-byes. In small groups of three, we took turns going into the rector's office and viewing the Zip-Loc bag which contained my uncle. Again, all I could think about was whether or not this was truly his remains and, if so, how much cremated remains resembled things I had swept into a dust pan the week before.

Once everyone said their good-byes, his ashes were sealed in the urn and placed in a metal box in the wall, much like a post-office box, with his name, birth and death date, engraved on the front.

Finley's death reminded me of a story he'd tell me growing up. "Fire Extinguishers," he called it. It was about the death of Woody Guthrie's sister, Clara, whose body was consumed by flames in her home. The similarities now haunt me. I can still hear his powerful voice which, when telling a story, would put listeners into a trance.

"Woody, —it's Clara," he'd say. I'd hang on those words. Even after hearing the story more than once, I always hoped Clara would recover or live through the fire.

Finley's death has consumed me in the way his stories always did. It is like that day, that fire, consumed more than his house and belongings and body. That fire, in a way, woke me, too, from my sleep and reduced so much of his legacy, along with his life. In his ashes, I didn't see his brilliant red hair. I no longer hear his booming voice or his telling laugh that started with air pushing through his nostrils and ended in a donkey's bray.

Death, like kindling, sits quietly and patiently beside us all, waiting to be set afire. Once ignited, it engulfs each of us, extinguishing our lives and reducing us to small bits of dust, either bagged or boxed, which our friends and family will cling to, hoping to cope with the reality sitting their stomachs, like stones. As leaves in November change color and dry, plaiting into footfall traffic and sinking into their final resting place in the dirt, we, too, return to the earth. And left here are just photographs, memories, stories told of our lives. Finley was a storyteller. His life, like a story, can be found on tongues and trees, in Angel sculptures, in photographs and memories, and in the lines of the book *Killer Diller*.

Molly Stewart
Love Leftover

With his hand raised
White-knuckles
Screaming bravely
Clenched fists gave way
To the truth we both know.
Through his yellow teeth
Off his violent tongue
Came words, like bumbling bees
which stung.
In heavy breathes and blows
He hammered into me
The truth we both know.
Truth, like light,
Crosses our paths
In the same familiar slant
Like words hurled on calendar days
We should be celebrating.
Instead in verse
Hushed and rehearsed
In private rooms
We tally ways we hurt each other.
Like shades of gray,
We've become perverted versions
Of the truths we both know.

Molly Stewart

My Heart Burns for the Love of that Girl

Sweet-tarts of calcium
You crunch in my teeth and
Travel down my throat to,
Soothe the angry beast who
Sleeps inside of me where
My child grew
From the size of a pea to
A six-pound four-ounce
Heartburn-evoking
Baby who
Turned me into
A mother who,
Has had heartburn
Every day for the
Last seven years and,
Now eats calcium sweet-tarts
Like every day is Halloween.

Season's Shadows

Season's shadows,
Collect like leaves in trees.
Fading over time,
To muted browns,
Quietly falling away.
Traveler in memories,
How fog creates depths,
In steps along paths.
With the who and if
Becoming ideas of past.

Molly Stewart
Rings

These rings remind me of who I am now
Bound to you, forevermore.

Around my fingers, waist, and under my eyes you'll find your
promise
No sign of leaving and these parties I throw are getting crowded
Too much of myself to take and I always come close to breaking.

You sold yourself so short, for so cheap, for so long, that now you're
alone in a crowded room with familiar faces, in every breathe, in old
places, and you're turning blue
but it's only noticeable to you.

The same air, could it have changed? It feels so thick in my lungs now.
It's so hard to take it in now.
Like a cigarette smoked for comfort.
What a beautiful lie.

I've cut the ties that held me to the shore
Drift away with the tide and maybe I'll find a view I never knew
before,
Everything looks better from a distance, anyway.

So I empty myself in fragments, pour out my soul.
The rings are less restraining, when there's little left to hold.



Susan Lyons

San Francisco Dream



Maranda McGonigle

Boats in Grey

Natalie Stringer
Delusion and Denial

Society keeps feeding me candy made of delusional and denial
But candy is so very good
And fantasy is oh so much better than reality
So when society tells me that out in the world there is a ...

*guy who is cute and funny but not so cute that he knows it but also shy
and awkward yet confident and smart but not arrogant and kind and
thoughtful and can breathe fire and fly and hold his breath underwater for
hours and has magical powers and free wi-fi and always has gum*

And a ...

*job where I can make a difference and make a ton of money and have the
weekends off and travel all over the world and meet interesting people yet
still have time for a family and a social life and can solve crimes and have
a wacky sidekick and a wind machine that follows me around and a white
unicorn that comes when I whistle*

I nod my head wildly, grin moronically and
Take another bite of candy

Meaningless Talk

No one is listening
They are all talking
But no one is listening
They are merely listening as people do
When talk is superficial
Endless pleasantries, empty, easy topics, shiny things
Talk to fill the silence
In the center stands a girl
Curious girl, whose eyes seem to yearn for a different kind of talk
A kind of talk where people are actually saying something
A kind of talk where people are truly listening
Talk that means something
She calls for something more
No one is listening

Natalie Stringer
Quicksand

When I was a child
I had a fear of quicksand
I was convinced it was
Going to be my end

Then I grew up
And I realized that there were
A million other things
That would probably kill me
Before quicksand

Except now I'm

Stuck waiting for something, anything to happen
For my life to begin

Struggling against a never-ending loop of meaningless routine
With no passion or motivation

Sinking in a pile of stress and anxiety
With dangerous mind games as my only company

Stuck facing a world full of cruelty and stupidity
Struggling against a society full of people who will
Walk all over you to get what they want
Sinking in a world with so many problems
And people who are too ignorant or arrogant to see the solution

Stuck, Sinking, Struggling....

When I was a child
I had a fear of quicksand
I was convinced it was
Going to be my end

Natalie Stringer
Sad Little Thing

I think about her sometimes
The girl who was ignored
She was a sad little thing
She didn't have friends or parents (even though she did)
But they had other things going on and no time for her
Which she understood
I think about how she never said anything
How when she did it went to deaf ears
How she would sometimes get angry and sad and feel like breaking
But never did
She didn't want to be a burden
She just wanted to keep the peace
I think about how she constantly got pushed aside because nothing
was about her
How they all forgot everything
Because they had other things going on and no time for her
Which she understood

Dana Tucker
Metrophobia

Fear of Poetry

Dead Poets Society
notwithstanding
his fear of poetry went way back
to 4th grade
when a prim and proper
mathematically-minded
teacher
used something akin to
Pritchard's Introduction to Poetry
to rate the novice writings
of her young poets

one by one they read aloud
one by one she ranked and measured
 their innocent creativity
classmates responded
with giggles and squeals
 at the most inappropriate places

his own masterpiece
though not quite Keats or Shelley
was not bad for 4th grade
 for a first
 (and last) try

for years
rhythm and rhyme
slant or straight
alliteration and assonance
connotation and denotation
dead metaphors or living
made him sick with fear and

squeamish

until

a girl named

Sophia

spoke to his deepest

yearning

and he declared

his love in verse

Wrapped in love's embrace, you whisper to my heart.

I'm breathless with the beauty of all that you are.

Sophia blushed and smiled

as he reclaimed the poetry

that had been

missing

from his heart

Metrophobia cured

by love

Dana Tucker

Mountain of Shame

he let them down
did what he said he would never do again
could he climb out of the pit this time
or was he too far in
 hopeless

forgiveness
offered, a golden gift
sadly squandered
could he go on
 trailblazing
 climb the summit
 traverse to the other side
 see the valley spread out before him

move
he told himself
one step at a time
 foot before foot
 accept mercy
 forgiveness once more

climb that mountain
 of shame

Dana Tucker
Reborn

Return to the place
of rebirth,
source of inspiration
and strength,
where sky streaks azure and tangerine,
and God whispers tender in your ear
"My Grace is sufficient."

Breathe deep,

where beauty of nature
and spirit collide.
Water on rock,
crimson to snow.
Forgiveness proffered,
grace received.

Remade.
Reborn.

Dana Tucker

The Sadness Will Never Leave

head in hands
 hopeless
indescribable anguish
 older than years
hallucinations
 desperate delusions
 mood shifts of dysphoria
the artist painting his tragedy in third person.

darkest depression stealing all
 color and joy
light snuffed out
 leaving a palette
 gray
 blue
 black.

dreams of beauty
 mere mortals could never see
drown in absinthe
 shot in the heart.

On the Threshold of Eternity
 find healing.

Response to painting by Vincent Van Gogh, On the Threshold of Eternity (or Eternity's Gate) painted in 1890 just a few days before Van Gogh shot himself.

Dana Tucker
Zucotti Park

Mid September, 2011
New York, New York

Home of
Arturo De Modica's *Charging Bull*,
symbol of financial optimism
and prosperity,
head lowered,
back on its haunches ,
ready to charge,
guarding Wall Street.

And I,
a virgin New York tourist,
joined other sightseers
wanting to witness
the flaring nostrils
on that angry,
dangerous beast,
not realizing
an iconic image of New York
was about to be castrated
by protesters in
Zuccotti Park,
only steps away.

Hundreds of clamoring dissenters
assembled that day,
called together,
Facebooked, YouTubed, Twittered.
Occupying Wall Street in makeshift tents and sleeping bags,
they scrawled their message with fat markers
on scraps of boxes and bent cardboard
for all the world

and
the six o'clock news reporters

"We are the 99% "

That day,
Zuccotti Park welcomed them,
open-armed.
Free speech,
peaceful protest.

And I,
climbed back on the tour bus
and wondered if
I was part
of the
99%.

Drowning

He lays in the bed beside his wife. Her breathing, in and out, like the tide. Only a few inches from her, yet the gulf between them, impassable. They have drifted apart. Hardly a touch, seldom a meaningful word.

He is tempted to leave, cast everything aside. Tempted by the coffee barista who knows his name, with flirty eyes and sexy smile. Tempted by his office mate who smells like gardenias. Tempted by memories of who they were.

For richer or poorer, in sickness and health, if close or apart, till death do they part. The vow keeps him there. Reeled in.
At least for tonight.

Emily VanKirk

Fire

The burning never stops. Not really. I might get some minor relief, some quiet from this riot in my gut, but never freedom. I burn from the lack, the want the need to feel the warm sweetness on my tongue. Some poor soul's life pouring into me, their hopes, their dreams, their denial, and their memories. It has been so long that their memories supplant my own. I no longer hold fast to memories of my past, recollections of childhood or family dear. I know their pains, and their roots well, each blending with the next. My own simple images surface on occasion, a blonde woman with sadness in her eyes, and patience in her mouth. A dark man whose face I can never clearly see. And of course, my beloved Ann. She's the reason I am what I have become. This is all because of her. It seems too close to have been almost eighty years past now. I remember that bright morning, the sun burning away the mist. Ann. My beautiful older sister, my idol, running ahead of me in the grass. We weren't supposed to leave the house; the surrounding woods were full of dangers according to Mother, and we, mere girls were not equipped to protect ourselves. But Ann was fearless. I remember, vaguely, the ribbon slipping out of her hair as it streamed out behind her. I chased after her, tripping over my skirts, following her from the yard, to the edge of the woods and deeper still. I remember the sudden emptiness. The darkness. Somewhere along the way, as I had pursued her, I had lost her, I was alone. If I try, I can barely remember wandering the dark thickets, lost hopelessly. I curled up, scared, crying, and alone in a cave, having run so far and so fast I exhausted myself. What I don't remember is the pain. The bite of teeth in skin. The burn. And grateful for that I will ever be. I woke up, alone and now changed. Different. Somehow I knew I couldn't go back. I tried anyway. Arrogantly, and insolently attempting to defy what Mother Nature had told me, I went back to my parents' home. Guided by a strange new sense of direction, and protected by a strength I didn't understand, I arrived shortly before nightfall a day or more after I disappeared. My parents were distraught, and my sister was completely changed. I didn't understand at first, and I came forward, not knowing what I had become. It wasn't clean, and it was not quick. I knew nothing, and I dream about it still! But now, things have changed and I along with them. In this world of cars, and clustered homes, children wander still. I watch from the shadows, envious of their unremarked innocence. And when they wander too far, things change. But I know now, and they don't have to remember either.

Jade Walker
My Kind of Hero

This man is in the Coast Guard,
he saves lives,
he understands his fellow shipmates,
he has gone to active duty twice since 9/11.
They call him Chief.

This man is a principal,
he works at an alternative school,
he does things he doesn't like to do
or want to do, to help other people he works with,
he helps his fellow teachers,
he understands the students, their problems,
their issues, and their purpose.
They call him Mister.

You may understand how he is a hero in the Coast Guard,
you may even understand how he is a hero being a principal,
but he's another kind of hero...

He helps me when I ask,
he raised me to have self-discipline,
he scolds me when I need it,
he praises me when I deserve it,
he is becoming a better Christian,
he is becoming a better man.
I call him Daddy.

Jade Walker

That Eleventh of September

Today we remember the loss of thousands.
those twin towers
the war being fought
Never forget
The pain and the loss.
Freedom has a cost.
We will never surrender.
Today we remember
That Eleventh of September.

Editors

Chelsea Gadoury is from Stephenville, Texas. She is a junior with a double major in Sociology and Political Science. She has a love for music and taught herself how to play guitar and sing. She enjoys singing at various venues and has had the opportunity to meet many people in the music industry. She also has a love for language and studying different cultures. Upon graduation, she hopes to travel the world and work in the criminal justice field. She is a student assistant in the Office of International Programs.

Carolynn Harwicke is a graduate student of English at Tarleton State University. She is studying to teach English at the collegiate level. She spends her spare time with her family which includes her boyfriend, her son, and two friendly rats. She believes in making new discoveries every day.

Camille McGehee is a freshman at Tarleton State University double majoring in English and history. After earning her degree, she plans to travel abroad, learn about different cultures, and use that knowledge to write historical fiction novels. She enjoys hunting, camping, hiking, and kayaking. She also loves working with children and enjoys being a “Big” in the organization Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Alice Stewart is a senior majoring in English at Tarleton. She enjoys reading and writing poetry, playing video games, and kittens. Alice plans to graduate in December of 2013 and find a job working for an LGBT news publication.

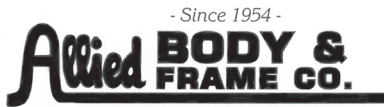
Publication Directors

Benni Konvicka and **Marilyn Robitaille** are professors in the Department of English and Languages. They have been co-publication directors of *Anthology* for the last eighteen years. Since founding the journal with students Jimmy Hood and Cris Edwards in 1995, they have read literally thousands of submissions and worked with student editors from a variety of majors.

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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.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Ator	Camden Lawless
Alyssa Bedrick	Devon Lozano
Megan Pruitt Bise	Susan Lyons
Kevin Bostick	Rhonda Martin
Elizabeth Chilton	Michael Francis Machart
Christopher Steven Coan	Lawrence P. Cisco Matherne
Jacqueline Cordova	Maranda McGonigle
Lauren Cozzi	Mackenzie McLellan
Melissa Crosby	Brittany McLemore
Brooke Cummings	Ashley Parker
Amanda DeBusk	Marcus Parks
Lisa DeLuca	Rachel Peoples
Morgan Mariah Emerson	Christine J. Pritchett
Sean Fletcher	Hanna Purser
Sherry Gaston	Tiffany Rains
Emryse Geye	Cynthia Robinson
Anna Gilley	Kyle Russell
Justin Green	Dawn Skinner
E. G. Hallgarth	Sarah Snyder
Amber Harvey	Molly Stewart
Justin Hawkins	Natalie Stringer
Joshua David Hernandez	Dana Tucker
Abby Jones	Emily VanKirk
Grace Kantz	Jade Walker
Megan Klassen	Marissa Williams

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