

A highly detailed decorative border surrounds the central text area. It features a repeating pattern of stylized red flowers with yellow centers, green leaves, and dark green vines. The background of the border is a dark, textured brown. The central text area is a white rectangle with a thin brown border.

Anthology

Volume 22
A Publication of
Tarleton State University

Anthology

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

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Anthology 22

Art in Online Gallery

These art pieces have been selected to appear in the 2015 – 2016, Volume 22 Gallery of *Anthology* and can be viewed online at www.tarleton.edu/anthology.

Maria Beasley
Amity Beach
Little April Shower

Otoniel Chaine
Lighthouse
So Far From Home

Ginny Eichler
Bluebonnets

Abigail Fesmire
Busy Streets
Morning Memories
Through the Looking Glass
Tick Tock
Window to the Soul

Kayla Hansen
Spin of the World

Elexus Hargis
Infinite Blood

Kimberly Hogan
Backroad Travel
Border & Beauty
Monument to Time
Mystery
Peque? O Rio de Amarillo

Kaitlin Hooper
Amber Waves of Grain
Deep
Deep Calls to Deep
The Dog

The Dog II
Hold your Breath
Lemon Yellow
New Year's Eve
Peace
Pieces
Rainy Night, Dancing Light
Still
Still II
Stormy Night

Justin Knippers
Banded Coral Shrimp
Colors of Change
Japanese Flower Shop
Plasma Blue Jellyfish
Sleeping Koala
White Forest Flower

Lauren Motloch
Be Happy
Bone Cathedral
The Boss
College Farm
Flowers
Garden Spider
Kozel
Perfect Petals
Prague Cathedral
Sunflower
Vltave River

Alexandria Presley
Bonfire
Persephone

Stacy Roof
Buddies
Hey, Good Lookin'
MT. Lemmon, Arizona

Shelby Staudenmaier
Mammoth

Molly Stewart
Bird's the Word
Cornered
Country Drive
Drained
Evening Light
Gathering Place
Glen Rose Getaway
Hooked
In Closing
Just Passing By
Left Behind
Perspective
Silos
Slither and Slide
Smoke
Winter Walk
Wonder

Sarah Titus
Aloha
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Campagna Italiana
L'amour? Paris
Turtles in Maui
Urbino

Anthology 22

Editors' Choice Awards

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

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTOR:

Molly Stewart

*For selections in prose, poetry, and art,
with special recognition for the poem "Heavy"*

OUTSTANDING PROSE WORK:

Abigail Fesmire

For "The Dragon Who Became a Boy"

OUTSTANDING BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY:

Meghan Dahlke

Special recognition for "Pan"

OUTSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHY:

Justin Knippers

*For special recognition for photography that
appears in the online gallery*

Creative Arts Day Speaker

Sarah Cortez



Sarah Cortez, member of the Texas Institute of Letters, is the author of an acclaimed poetry collection, *How to Undress a Cop*, and winner of the PEN Texas literary award in poetry. She has edited *Urban Speak: Poetry of the City* and *Windows into My World: Latino Youth Write Their Lives*, winner of the 2008 Skipping Stones Honor Award. She has also edited *Hit List: The Best of Latino Mystery and Indian Country Noir* (Akashic Books) and *You Don't Have a Clue: Latino Mystery Stories for*

Teens, which was short-listed for the 2012 International Latino Book Awards. *Kirkus Reviews* has hailed the anthology as "a consistent, well-crafted collection," while the starred review in *Booklist* says the book "presents stories that are notable both for their authenticity and for their language." In 2012, her memoir entitled *Walking Home: Growing Up Hispanic in Houston* was published by Texas Review Press. A collection of poetry from the urban street cop's perspective, *Cold Blue Steel*, (Texas Review Press) was released to enthusiastic reviews in 2013. Also released to critical acclaim in 2013 is *Our Lost Border: Essays on Life amid the Narco-Violence* (Arte Público Press), which won a 2013 Border Regional Library Association Award for Southwest Book of the Year and the 2013 International Latino Book Award for Latino Focused Non-Fiction (Bilingual). In March, 2015, Ms. Cortez's new poetry anthology, *Goodbye, Mexico: Poems of Remembrance* (Texas Review Press, 2014), was released. 45 previously unpublished poems by poets answer the question: *What do you remember about Mexico?* The anthology won an International Latino Book Awards 2015. Also in 2015, *Cold Blue Steel* was shortlisted for the Pen Southwest Literary Award.

Her work has appeared in *The Sun*, *Rattle: Poetry for the 21st Century*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *the Dallas Morning News*, *The Texas Review*, *New Texas*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Blue Rock Review*, *Pennsylvania English*, *The Midwest Quarterly* and many other publications. Her work is widely anthologized in collections by Penguin, the Great Books Foundation, and other international publishers.

The Myth of the Solitary Writer

Many times people feel as though they must choose between “being a writer” and the rest of life’s duties, e.g. earning money to feed themselves or a family; having a committed, deep relationship with a spouse or lover; even taking care of child or bearing a child.

Perhaps these notions are born from the all-too human tendency to see everything as an either-or dilemma. Thus, whether young or old, student or professor, male or female, we can all fall for this debilitating, false myth.

I would encourage each and every one of you to earn that degree (or not, if you have to first earn a living), give yourself time to acquire the skills needed for your job, and then also write. Get up early, or stay up late. Write during your lunch hour, or after dinner. While your husband snores or your wife does something she adores. I wrote my entire first book in 20-minute spurts after grueling hours as a patrol police officer. You can do the same—think about it: 20 minutes.

The reason I recommend this course of action is that life informs writing with a vitality, a reality, a complexity that cannot result from an ivory-tower approach. If nothing else, life eventually teaches you (if you’re paying attention) humility. Humility and observation form the base of a willingness to connect with people. If you can connect with people, especially if they are different from you, you are not only enriching your writing, your personality, your wealth inside the imagination but also enriching your heart. True heart (in the inclusive, broader sense of soul, mind, emotions, imagination, essence of being) results in writing that is worth both your time as writer and the time of the other as reader.

It will take years to form this heart as well as build the skills you need to excel in writing. Don’t worry about that part. Just begin. You’ll be glad you did, I think. And, yes, being “solitary” is a myth. You need other people and positive emotional connections with other people so you can build a heart to write from. There’s no more “magic” in writing than in any other creative act. What is magic is the formation of heart.

Like I said, just begin. Right now.

Sarah Cortez

Kelly Annestrand
Baptism

emerge.

i spit out dry bones, ashes of
another life.

oceans of grace in my veins
tenderly embrace
all the hairline fractures
i have ever tried to hide.

as You have chosen to forget, so also have You,
in Your love,
helped me to remember no more.

my soul has found its resting place

" . . . and I will make My home in you."

Rebekah Anthony
Bright Star

Oh God, such love. Does it exist?

Where two rivers of the soul unite, flowing steadily, strongly,
powerfully as one

Where once was found two separate beatings of the heart now
resounds a singular and most passionate a beat as ever

One in which two separate beings could never be torn apart, such as
that they never existed alone but were created from the beginning
as one

A single entity destined to share this life, so deeply entwined that
though one may take their last breath, the other breathes so
deeply—so powerfully—passionately, as to keep them both fully
alive

And when they have both ceased, the face of heaven was never found
to have shined so bright.

For in the night sky they find each other.

And home

Unified

Never to be torn apart

Though the mountains and valleys, and the waters and land may call
out their names, search in every direction as long as time exists,
they cannot be found

Untouchable

Unreachable

To be tucked away in the stars, wrapped in each other's arms, gazing
only at the face before them—forever.

Rebekah Anthony

Golden

Song Lyrics

Verse 1

Some people walking around not knowing where they're going,
Too busy looking both ways while the wind is slowly blowing;
But life is so much more than a daydream, a passenger of time.
Oh, so promise me now before you make that climb.

Chorus

Golden, oh my golden child
Go dream, be free, and run a little wild.
You are stronger than any fear that roars against you.
Go dream, be free, and live the life you've always wanted to.

Verse 2

Why do we feel the need to look around so often
While always comparing ourselves to the ones who make the
world spin?
But, child, listen to what I'm saying, your life is something sweet.
Oh, adventure is calling, soon you'll come to see.

Repeat Chorus

Bridge

There comes a point in time
Where you've got to make up your mind.
Will you sit by while the world moves on?
Or will you make that change?
Start living life your way?
Oh, child, wake up and see that you are free.

Repeat Chorus

Outro

Is it golden? Oh, golden. Is it golden, child? Oh, golden.

Jonathan Avítua

Unhinged

I fear I've come unhinged.
Stuck inside this gray hotel room
with the scent of cigarettes
creeping all along the place.

It hangs up among the stale air,
and crawls along the rafters.
Leaving little trails of the paper
dim and yellow 'round the place.

And with each hour that passes
I can smell the noxious gasses,
growing stronger as they wrap around my face.

But still I sit here choking
As the room itself starts smoking
And the world begins revoking
All of meaning, time, and space.

So I sit here pages turning
as my whole world begins burning
and I'm left among the ashes on the floor
among the dingy ashes on the floor . . .

Maria Beasley
Cruel Reality

The note in Seraphina's pocket felt heavier than ever. She crumpled it and shoved it back in her pocket. Her eyes lifted involuntarily to the sea she knew lay just beyond the bend. The sun blinded her as she gazed into the distance, trying to make out the skyline of Indriel that was just a swim away. Life was downright cruel. It was hardly her fault the Princess put her faith in the wrong man and got herself killed. The king didn't have to lose his mind and deem even the slightest glimmer of love a crime. But he did. So what if Thisbe died? Many had died in the war. *Even a part of me died in the war*, Seraphina thought dejectedly.

She kicked a stray pebble. It sunk to the bottom of the river. A part of her wished she could join it.

But then who would take care of Papa and Mama?

And he wouldn't have wanted that. She couldn't help the smile that played at her lips as she thought of him. Oh, she wanted to go to him. No. She shouldn't even be considering it. She would be going against the king himself, not to mention Papa. Rules and laws didn't seem to stop them before, but it was different now. She had responsibilities here, and he had his responsibilities in Indriel.

Seraphina gathered up her dress and treaded carefully through the boggy pathway and tried not to think of him waiting, wet, cold and alone in their cavern. Indriel was a good hour away through water. He would be dead tired from his swim, and she won't be there to warm him.

The dirt road gradually turned into paved marble. The time worn white houses flanked her on each side like chastising old bats. She tried not to think of the crude looks she'd get if they got wind of her plan. Yes. It was decided. She had to see him one last time.

"There you are!" A hard body hugged her from behind. She cringed as Ash's parched lips made contact with her skin. "See you got my note?" he said, a note of playfulness in his voice she had never heard him use before. It was unnerving. She twitched in his arms to face him and put her best smile on.

"It is amusing to say the least." She expertly hid the note in her

blouse.

"You didn't like the name 'Raphael'?" *So that's what all this is about.* She really didn't care.

"We're not married yet, Ashton." She tried not to sound vexed. It was just . . . she never once dreamed of making a family with Ashton Fayette, not even in her wildest dreams. Out of all the people in the kingdom to be matched up with—it had to be him.

But she loved the name "Petraeus." The two of them had come up with that name together in the cavern one night. He wanted to call him "Petur" for short.

She must have looked really detached because the next thing Ash said was "I know I am not him." She cast down her eyes. "But we were meant to be together, Seraphina. Lightfoot would have only brought you misery just like his sister."

"Lysander is nothing like Leianeira!" she snapped. He had no right comparing Lysander to that abomination of a woman. "You don't know him like I do."

"Thank the gods I don't," he fired back. "He's just like the others: a backstabbing thief."

Her blood boiled. She wanted nothing more than to wipe that snobbish grin off his face. Lysander was done with his thieving days; he was king of Indriel now. She began imagining the most gruesome and agonizing fate for Ash, and she was about to achieve just that, when fate just had to intervene.

"Evening, lovebirds," Percy said, strolling their way and looking quite pleased with himself. "My little brother isn't giving you any trouble now is he?"

He most certainly was! But she was not about to tell her sister's husband that.

"I just bumped into him on my way to see Diana," she quickly said.

Ash didn't buy it for a minute. She could see it in his calculating gray eyes. He knew she was just trying to avoid discussing their life together. Seraphina hated that he knew her so well. He was the older brother she never asked for. And to think, by this time tomorrow she would be Mrs. Ashton Fayette. The very thought of it made her want to puke.

By the time she reached Diana's house, her anger had subsided somewhat—key word: *somewhat*. She still silently cursed the king for

being such a bumbling idiot and making her go through with this. Yes, she could run away, but there was no one else left to take care of Papa and Mama. She supposed it was true what they said: the youngest got the worst of the lot.

Diana was sitting outside glowing with pride as she rocked baby Hector back and forth. She was smiling down at him in that serene way only mothers do. Seraphina envied her sister. Diana had married the man of her dreams and was on her way to making a big family like she had always wanted to—Hector was just the beginning.

Seraphina leaned against the new white fence, waiting for Diana to notice her. She was beginning to regret even coming. He would be here any second. She scanned the row of houses for him. Though deep down she knew he wouldn't dare come this close to town. Hector saw her first, blinking rapidly with his mama's eyes. Seraphina couldn't believe she already had a nephew when Diana and Percy hadn't even been married for a year yet. It was too fast . . . too soon. She wasn't ready to let go of the old days. He began to gurgle and reach out to her with his soft baby hands. Diana slowly looked up, and her worried-stricken eyes landed on her.

"You look as if you have seen Death himself," she said in way of greeting, clutching Hector tighter to her bosom.

In a manner of speaking, she had been seeing Death for the past three months, but she wouldn't tell her sister that. It was the law—she shouldn't be even having these thoughts. She was just going to have to get used to the idea of marrying Ash, even if it made her sick to her stomach.

"I just thought I'd come see you before tomorrow." Seraphina took the seat next to Diana. "It is the last time I'll be free to see Hector." She smiled fondly down at her nephew. Diana gladly let her hold him, but she saw right through her.

"I know it's hard," Diana said, placing a reassuring hand on her knee, "but you'll learn to love Ash. He's a good man," and she sounded like she meant it. Seraphina bit back a crude remark. Diana had been lucky, unlike so many others. She had already been living a life of bliss before Thisbe's death.

"I'll go put a pot of tea on." Diana disappeared in a flourish of red and gray through the entryway. Tea was Diana's solution to everything. She would much rather brew a pot of herbs than deal with her problematic little sister.

Once she was sure Diana was out of sight, she dug her hand into her pocket. Hector wiggled around in her arms, as if he knew she was doing something naughty, and mama would spank her if she found out. She didn't care.

Seraphina's hand came out empty.

"Looking for this?"

She bolted upright, nearly dropping the baby.

Ash stood by the white fence holding the note in a vice-like grip, and he did not look happy.

"Meet me tonight. Our usual place," he read out loud, articulating each word as if it were vermin. "We need to talk."

If it weren't for Hector, she would have clawed him.

"It is none of your concern." She stood, making an effort to stay calm.

"It absolutely is my concern!" He ran his scarred hand over his face. "I am your fiancé."

"Don't give yourself airs," she said, grabbing the note out of his hand before he could toss it in the gutter. "You have Thisbe to thank for our so-called engagement!"

He reared back as if he had been slapped.

"I am sorry," he finally said. "Do what you will, Seraphina. It won't change tomorrow." And just like that, he was gone.

She will do precisely that! This was her last night of freedom, and she planned to make the most of it. Besides, one night couldn't hurt, right? She'd be back in time for the slaughter that was to be her wedding. After all, it didn't matter what she wanted or needed, she had a duty to her family first.



Rebecca Cox

What Are You Lookin' At?



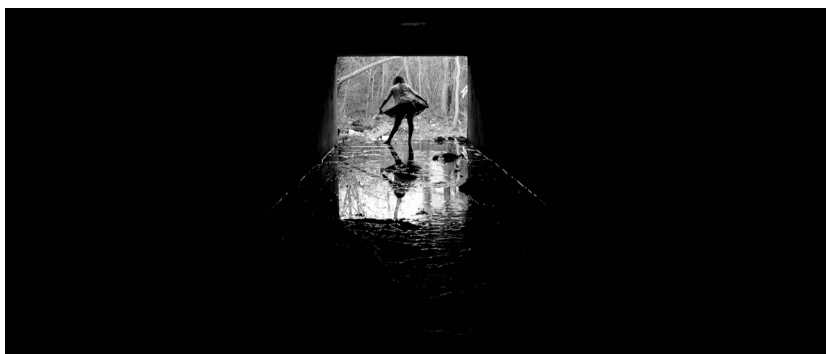
Meghan
Dahlke

Decisive
Walk



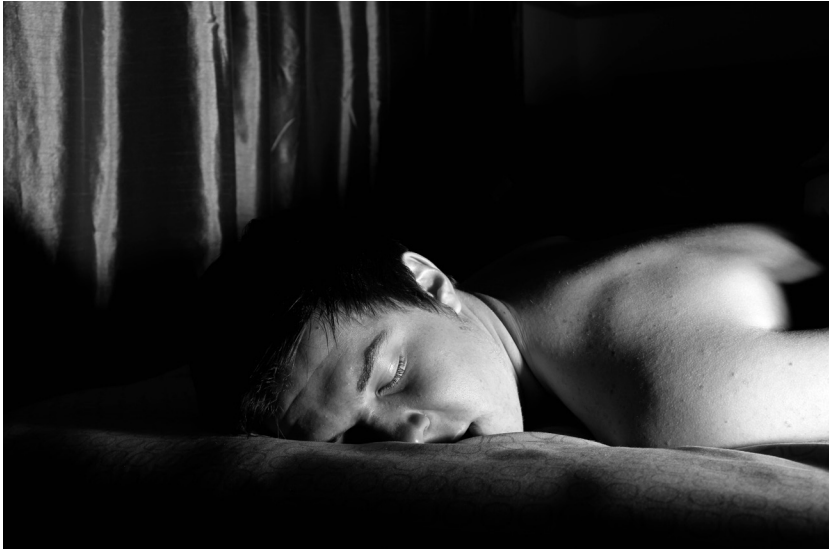
Meghan Dahlke

Gomer



Meghan Dahlke

Gypsy Feet



Meghan Dahlke

Helping



Meghan Dahlke

Pan



Meghan Dahlke

Sleeping Bear



Meghan Dahlke
Untitled

Beverly Diamond
Bellus Calamits

D. Eliz. B.

Ours

As bright as the moon's dulcet lullaby
Beaconing mournfully to universal lovers' unrequited desires

Ours

As passionate as the roaring sea's foxtrot with the passing typhoon
Untamable, wild, unforgiving

Ours

True as the rising sun and the nightingales' concord breaking the fast
of the morn

The warmth of the moon

The chill of the sun

Submerged into the eclipse

The haunted saccharine call of darkness

Like Pluto enslaved by gravity

Tethered by our fleeting existence

Love cast us into the wind, setting everything ablaze

It makes you burn through the skies and ignite the night

Like a phoenix

Our Love

As deceitful as an unreachable, intangible slice of fanciful perfection

Our Love

Like two flames burning too bright impulsively

Singeing the feeble pure rays of hope

Our Love,

To see it burn, die blacken, and change
Was a special pleasure

Our Love is the most sadistic combination of unrelenting, maddening
chaos

Our delectable, delicious poison

For better

Or

For worst

'Till death do we part

C. Jaybell C. "Burning"

Ray Bradbury *Fahrenheit 451*

Abigail Fesmire

The Dragon Who Became a Boy

Long ago, dragons roamed the earth. The wisest and most peaceful of creatures, they harmed no one, hated no one. They were the protectors of the life of the earth. Although they lived upon the earth, they loved to roam the stars, twisting their silver bodies in flashes of light among the dark, still skies.

Although the dragons were kind towards all, man soon grew afraid of them, and one by one, the dragons began to vanish. Whispers began to be heard that the dragons were now hunted for sport or were captured for the great kings of the land. The dragons soon realized that they would either need to become some of the most vicious creatures upon their fair earth or be eradicated. The elder dragons met upon their great volcano nightly to discuss this dilemma. Some roared that they should retaliate and destroy the humans. Others felt that they could harm no one, not even men, without nullifying everything they stood for. Finally, one old, wrinkled dragon had a proposition. They would send their young away—far away where man could never find them. Then the older dragons would bring them home after the war or would join them in their new world if it became apparent that there would be no hope of reclaiming their right to remain upon the earth.

Quickly the plan was made. The first two younglings that were chosen to leave were brother and sister, barely three-moons old. Their parents accompanied them one cold autumn night, far past the moon and through the constellations. The younglings could not yet fly the long distance, so they were carried on the backs of their parents. Finally, they landed upon the planet carefully chosen by the elders. Many scouts had been sent out to all edges of the stars. In the end, they had all been happy with their planet. Although considerably smaller than Earth, it was uninhabited and responded well to the healing powers the dragons poured onto its damaged and barren surface. Within weeks, grass, flowers, and plants of all kinds had blossomed, creating the perfect spot for the young dragons to hide in safety. It was here on this beautiful planet that the parents left their young, promising that they would return for the two young dragons and that others would soon join them.

No one knows if the parent dragons realized that they would be the last dragons the brother and sister would ever see. The younglings waited patiently, constantly scanning the skies for their brethren, but no dragons ever came. Every night, they would watch for the dragons that were promised to come for them. But with each night's disappointment, they began to check the skies less often.

The centuries passed. The brother and sister grew—no longer weak younglings but majestic young dragons in the prime of their youth. They spent their days frolicking about the passages, spiraling through their dark tunnels, and having races around their pleasant planet, content with their world and basking in the company of each other. Some nights, they would lie down in the soft grass and look up into the starry world beyond and wonder what happened to the other dragons. The brother had suggested that they could now fly and go search for them, but his sister quickly pointed out that they could not fly forever and that they were both too young to remember even what their home had looked like, let alone its location.

Their entire existence might have remained in that peaceful, although lonely, bliss, had it not been for the ship that appeared out of the stars. Neither of them knew what to make of the strange metal thing when it crashed into their meadow. They were even further perplexed at the strange two-legged creatures that emerged from its belly. The brother dragon was curious about these creatures who could fly among the stars—these creatures from another world. His sister was wary. Perhaps she could remember the tales of old, of the countless dragons who had been murdered by the creature known as “man.” Regardless of why, she did not trust these creatures and fled to their tunnels beneath the surface, begging her brother to come with her. The brother obeyed and followed his sister, but after a few days, his curiosity became too strong, and he began to observe the strange creatures from a distance.

One day, he was spotted by a creature he had determined was the young of this strange species. It called something in a harsh language he could not understand. More creatures came at the young's call. The brother was pleased; they wanted to meet with him!

However, his joy soon turned to terror. Loud sharp noises suddenly rang through the air around him, causing him to flatten his ears against his head in fear. Someone threw a net over him, but he tore through it easily. Roaring in anger and heartbreak at this

betrayal, he turned to flee back to the tunnels. As he slipped into the cave, something struck him in his shoulder. He gave a great roar in pain as silver blue blood trickled off his silver scales from the wound in his shoulder.

His sister came racing when she heard his roars. He could sense her fear and concern as he felt his own shame rising. She had warned him of the strange creatures, and he had been too blind to believe her. She used her flaming tongue to distract the hostile creatures as he slid deeper into the planet's tunnels. She quickly caught up to him, nosing his wound in concern. He winced as he tried to use that leg. The wound was deep.

In the tunnels behind them, harsh yells slowly crept closer. The creatures were approaching quickly. He would not be able to outrun them. They looked at each other in despair, both knowing how this would end. For what could two young dragons do against such evil?

The brother dragon wept. This was his fault. He would be the end of himself and his sister. Through his sorrow and remorse, he heard his sister singing.

The dragon song.

In horror, he raised his head. "Sister, no!" he howled. "Do not do this! You must not do this! Not for me!"

With a sad smile, she shook her head and continued her heart-wrenching wail.

The brother felt his eyes closing. No! he thought. I must remain awake. I must remain awake for my sister. I must remain awake. I . . . must . . . remain . . .

He never remembered his scales sliding off to reveal cool smooth skin. He never remembered his snout shrinking and his teeth retracting. He never remembered being blown on gentle dragon breath through the dark tunnels and out into the cool evening air. And he never remembered being a dragon.

When the humans finally stumbled triumphantly into the passageway, all they found was a single dragon lying in exhaustion, victorious in her final task to save her brother. Contented, she bowed her head in submission as the humans advanced.

Years later, tales were told of a dragon who became a human. Many said that the female dragon sacrificed herself for her companion. Some said that a strange boy had suddenly appeared that night with a large jagged scar across his shoulder. People whispered

in the dark alleys that perhaps the dragon was not dead and that one day he would return to set them free from the evil men who had imprisoned all of them. None of them ever looked twice at the quiet young man who passed them in the square each day. If they had spoken to him, he would have curtly assured them that he was no more other-worldly than they were. Yet he could never explain the pangs he felt as he lay under the night sky and watched the constellations slowly turning. Nor could he ever explain the dreams he sometimes had of flying through the stars on silver wings.

Abigail Fesmire
Just a Memory

Most people can't remember the first moment that they came into existence. For me, however, my memory of that very instant is still one of my sharpest. The first thing I saw was the shop window. It looked as if once upon a time it had been an old drugstore. Peering through the broken, dusty windows, I could see the faded, cracked leather on the overturned chairs and the remains of what must have been a splendid jukebox in its time. The wooden floorboards looked splintered beneath the thick layers of dust, dirt, and withered leaves that had accumulated over time. Some decrepit cardboard boxes were scattered across the floor, old newspapers, magazines, and garbage spilling out from where the boxes had overturned.

Turning from the window, I saw that I was standing on a faded cement sidewalk that ran in a square around a rather ornate, yet small, courthouse. It must be summer, I realized, breathing in the warm, sweet smell that follows as the sun sets in summer. It was clearly early evening; the crickets had just begun their evening chorus, and couples leisurely walked around the square, seemingly oblivious to the young, confused boy standing alone in front of the only abandoned building on the quaint square.

"Hello? Excuse me? Can you help me? Hey!" But the passing people continued to walk past me without even a sideways glance. "Please! Somebody! Where am I?" I caught my breath as the truth struck me: they couldn't see me. Even though the very thought of it was ridiculous, something within me confirmed it. At that instant, I realized that I had a purpose, a mission. Although I had no idea what it could possibly be, it had to be something only I could do. Until then, for whatever reason, my existence seemed fated to be acknowledged only by myself and the god that had for some unknown reason placed me in front of an abandoned building.

At that moment, my attention was drawn to a couple with a girl probably around four- or five-years-old strolling down the sidewalk towards me. "But, Daddy, he is real!" The girl was squealing earnestly, tugging on her father's faded jacket. "He's right over there! See?" To my astonishment, the girl turned and pointed directly at me. Hesitantly, I walked over until I was standing mere inches

from the girl with the blonde pigtails who was still pointing at me insistently.

"You—you can see me?" I whispered, staring into her sparkling aqua eyes.

She giggled—it was a bright, infectious sound. "Of course, silly! You're my imagi- . . . imagi—"

"Imaginary friend?" her father offered with a sigh. It sounded as if he had been through this exchange many times before.

"Yeah! That!" she squealed. "But that word is hard to say. I'm just going to call him Mr. Friend! Is that OK?" she asked, turning to address me.

"Sure," I agreed, smiling back at her. It's not like I had another name. At least not one that I could remember.

But with her last statement, a sense of relief had washed over me—I was her imaginary friend. That's why I had suddenly begun to exist, with no memories at all, because I only existed as a part of this young girl I knew absolutely nothing about. For some reason, I felt strangely content about this fact.

From that moment on, we were inseparable. Everywhere she went, I went. The more time I spent with her, the more entranced by her I became. Her name was Melanie and in my mind, there was no one who could compare to her. She was bright, friendly, outgoing—quite the opposite of me. She was playful and kind. She would often go out of her way to make people smile. She could make me laugh like no other. Together, we would go on the most incredible adventures. Deep down, I think I knew it couldn't last forever, but I didn't want to believe it.

The years flew by in a glorious blur. Before I knew it, we were in middle school. Melanie was always worried about what everyone thought of her, of her clothes, her choices in hobbies, her interests, her looks. She didn't talk to me anymore when there were other people around. She said people would think she was crazy. She would talk to me though whenever we were alone, and we would often stay up to the early hours of the morning just laughing and talking. As for me? Well, I spent a lot of time tripping people who messed with my girl or hiding the cellphones of those who made fun of her. Of course, I never let her know that I was the one behind the bullies' string of "bad luck."

Everything really started to change once Melanie hit high-school.

She was so focused on her friends, her grades, and cute guys that (much to my irritation) our late-night conversations dwindled. It took me until the spring of her junior year to suspect that she was intentionally avoiding me. We had a horrific fight. I will never forget it. At one point, she had yelled at me: "You're imaginary! I created you! And now, I want you to leave me alone! You're nothing but a daydream, a child's overactive imagination! Don't ever talk to me again!" Those words burned in my memory and still do to this day. The one person whose company I had always craved now wished to pretend I was nonexistent. The girl who gave me life regretted doing so. And my best friend of all time now wanted me to never talk to her again. Of course, that didn't stop me from talking at her. But she tried not to answer back.

One night, she had a nightmare. I awoke to see the tears streaming down her face as she tossed and turned in her sleep, weeping as if her heart had been broken. I quietly stole to her side and gently rubbed her back until her sobs subsided and she relaxed in my arms. Gently stroking her long wavy blond hair, it hit me: I had fallen in love with this girl. Still holding her, I felt the tears fall down my own cheeks as I realized that I truly must have been cursed by God. For how could a figment of a girl's imagination ever dream that the girl would love him back?

The last time she talked to me was in her sophomore year of college. She had been spending a lot of time out late at night. In an effort to respect her and her privacy, I had been restraining myself and had been trying to stay out of her hair, at least when she went out with her friends. But her staying out quite late had suddenly began to occur with a greater frequency.

Needless to say, I was worried.

Anything could happen to my girl. Anything.

And I wasn't there to save her.

I still remember that night like it was yesterday. I paced up and down in the living room, peering out the windows every few seconds. *Where the blazes could she be?* The clock chimed in the background, reminding me that it was late—far too late—for a girl as sweet and beautiful as my Melanie to be out alone. My hand was on the doorknob when I glanced out the window one last time. My grasp on the doorknob slipped as realization washed over me like a bucket of ice water. Melanie was getting out of a little blue car, laughing and

talking to a dark-haired man who was sitting in the driver's seat. Then, brushing her long hair out of her face, she leaned over and kissed the man square on the lips.

A crushing feeling filled my chest, making it feel as though I couldn't breathe. I leaned against the wooden door frame, holding my chest, my head reeling. I felt the blood rush to my face and red threatened to overwhelm my vision. I could hear my heart racing and the ragged sound of my breath in the silence of the empty living room. Melanie's mom had a rose-scented candle burning in the kitchen behind me, and the sickly sweet scent seemed to overwhelm me and threatened to suffocate me in its treacherous embrace.

Even now, I can't smell roses without feeling the ache that only a shattered heart can leave.

She must have known what was wrong when she walked into the house. She just sort of stared at me, a pity I had never seen before in her blue eyes. She tried to walk past me, but I grabbed her arm. My voice seemed to come from a distance as I tried to ask her "why?" *Why him and not me?*

But I couldn't get the words out.

I think she knew what I was thinking though because she wrenched her arm coldly out of my grasp. I know she said stuff, I remember watching her lips move in fury and disdain. But for the life of me, I can't remember what she said.

All I remember was standing there, not thinking, just staring into the eyes of the woman I thought I loved.

A woman who now despised me.

As if she knew once more what I was thinking, her gaze softened for a moment. Perhaps she was remembering a time when I was not someone to be feared or hated. Maybe she was remembering her "Mr. Friend."

But the moment was gone, and so was Melanie, up the stairs to her bedroom. I heard the slam of the door and the click of her lock, but it was her sobs that got to me. I don't know how long I stood at the foot of those stairs, listening to her sob and knowing I wasn't the one to help her. Not this time.

After that night, I didn't speak to her. I followed her around like always, but I made sure to keep my distance. After all, I didn't want anything to happen to her just because we couldn't be together, at least not in the way my heart yearned for.

My life ended on May 9, 2004. That day haunts my memory to this moment, a day full of regrets and what-should-have-beens.

The day Melanie got engaged.

That of all days had to be the day I decided to follow Melanie out on her traditional Friday night dinner date with her scum—I mean boyfriend. I distinctly remember the weather was particularly gorgeous that night. The flowers were in full bloom, their sweet fragrance lingering in the warm breeze that blew through my hair as I walked on the sidewalk around the town square. I had overheard Melanie say on the phone that she would meet her beau at the new Italian cafe that opened down on the square, so that's where I was heading.

As I stepped in front of the large windows of the cafe, I froze, my blood running cold. Melanie was sitting at the table right in front of me, her hands clasped over her mouth, tears streaming down her cheeks as she was nodding her head faster than I had ever seen someone do so before. I was about ready to pummel whoever made my girl cry when I saw her boyfriend, kneeling in front of her, an ominous little box in his outstretched hands. As they embraced and kissed, people around them clapped and cheered, I quickly spun around and ran.

I don't know how long I ran or when the tears started to flow, but eventually I found myself leaning against a telephone pole and crying like a teenage girl in a Nicholas Sparks movie. As I hastily tried to wipe the tears away, I heard sirens. Not just one, but many. It sounded like our small town had sent out the entire cavalry. Suddenly, my blood ran cold as I realized the sirens were all heading back towards the town square.

Back towards Melanie.

I sprinted back, praying to whomever had placed me on this horrible earth that she would be all right. I knew it was irrational. There were over 6,000 other residents in this town. The likelihood that something had happened to her was miniscule, but my heart still raced as I skidded into the town.

I stopped dead. Four police cars, a fire truck, and two ambulances were all parked around the little Italian restaurant. In that moment, standing there, looking unseeing at what was going on before me, a little voice in the back of my head reminded me of something: this is where I first existed. Right here. In front of an old abandoned

drugstore that had since been turned into a cafe. Perhaps, that should have been my first clue.

Charging through the throng of people now surrounding the little cafe, I caught bits of conversation.

"I heard he was drunk."

"—wasn't he mad at his wife? Cheating, wasn't she?"

"Terrorist, I'd imagine. Did you hear—"

"—any dead? Don't know yet?"

"—still need to secure the perimeter."

When I finally made it through the doors and through the cops who were trying to keep everyone from pushing past their barricade, I didn't see Melanie anywhere. The cafe was a disaster zone. Blood was splattered everywhere. Patrons were sobbing, screaming, as they held family members injured in the rampage. A body of a middle-aged man was sprawled across the bar, a bloody gun still clutched in his hand.

Finally, I spotted her kneeling on the floor. For a moment, my heart stopped. Fearing the worst, I hurtled across the room, dodging paramedics and leaping over bodies. As I got closer, I let out a breath as I realized she was uninjured. She was kneeling amidst a pool of crimson blood, clutching her fiancé close to her, whispering to him. In horror, I looked down into the face of her boyfriend for the first time and saw . . . myself. I watched as I struggled for breath, blood streaming from a jagged bullet wound to the chest. I saw the paramedics sadly shaking their heads as the other me writhed in the arms of my Melanie. And then I saw myself gasp out a prayer.

"God, if you can hear me, please let me live. Let me keep her safe."

I saw myself shudder one last time, heard Melanie's anguished screams, and saw the paramedics declare myself—Brandon Chasten—dead on May 9, 2004 at 7:02 p.m. And in horror, I realized God had answered my last prayer. He had sent me back again to protect my Melanie—the love of my life. Sinking to my knees beside my own dead body, it struck me: if I had not been jealous, if I had actually protected Melanie like I was supposed to, I could have prevented all of this from happening.

Instead, I was kneeling on the bloody wooden floor, staring as

they loaded my dead body up and helped my sobbing fiancé to an ambulance.

Many years have passed since that day. I never again went back on my vow to protect Melanie. Wherever she went, I went, too. She never dated again after my death. She kept herself busy with a local orphanage and with the youth group at her church. She painted portraits and traveled the world. I never failed to notice though that she always kept a picture she had taken of us together in her wallet at all times. She would often take it out and smile, sometimes wiping back tears as she did so.

Today, I am standing by her as she gets ready to start her new journey. My girl is old now—tired and riddled with the cancer that has overtaken her body. She is surrounded by her friends from her church and even some of the kids from the orphanage. I can't protect her or help her now. So, I just move to the corner of the room, letting the kids get close to see her. Suddenly, her head shoots up and her blue eyes meet mine. A truly breath-taking smile spreads across her face.

“Brandon?”

Abigail Fesmire

Of Beauty and of Mathematics

“P^rofessor? Sir?”

“Keep up, lad!” the bearded man called from up ahead of him as he strode quickly along the cobblestone road.

“Um, P-Professor Tising?” the young man panted, nearly dropping some of the books he was carrying. “Sir, m-might I ask where we’re going?”

The man stopped so suddenly that the student almost ran into him. “Why, lad, didn’t I tell you already? Tonight is the meeting!”

“The what?”

The bearded man scoffed. “The meeting, boy! The meeting of ‘The Friends of the Philosophical Sciences’!”

“Ah, yes.” That would explain it. Professor Tising had spoken of nothing else for the past week. He was foolish to have let it slip his mind. The student walked faster, struggling to keep up with the long paces of his professor. He supposed that he should count himself lucky. After all, he was studying under one of the greatest mathematical minds of the century. It was a privilege to be his student, even if all he did was carry Professor Tising’s books and straighten up his papers for him. Professor Tising seemed to believe that the art of studying mathematics was an art best done alone, and so, the student had yet to learn anything from his master other than that Professor Tising was not the most organized of chaps.

The professor stopped once again, this time in front of a small pub. “We’re here!” he exclaimed jovially.

The student narrowed his eyes as he took in the old paint that was peeling off the old sign and the windows that looked as though they had never been cleaned. “*Here?*” the student asked in disbelief. “*This* is where you and all your university fellows meet once a year?”

“How many times have I told you, boy? We are known as ‘The Friends of the Philosophical Sciences’!” The man said pompously, stroking his beard. “We are a long and ancient tradition that—”

“Why, I’ll be! Professor S. B. Tising!”

Professor Tising turned sharply towards the sound of the squeaky voice that interrupted him. “Pythagoras!” Professor Tising strode

forward and threw his burly arm around the wizened old man who had just hobbled up. "Boy! Come over here!"

The student obediently came over, deftly balancing the stack of books he was still carrying.

"Lad, this is my mentor, my teacher back in the old university days. This is Professor Samos Metapontum." The old man bowed so low the student wondered if he was about to fall over. "But all of us students called him 'Pythagoras' due to his Greek heritage and his love of the triangle."

"And the name never left," the old professor chuckled, straightening up. "Shall we go in then, Professor Tising?" He motioned sweepingly towards the dingy pub.

"After you, my dear fellow!" Professor Tising laughed, beckoning for the student to follow them into the pub.

The student let out a long sigh before eventually following his teacher into the crowded establishment. Not for the first time in the several months he had been under the professor's tutelage, he wondered what on earth he had gotten himself into.

"Another round on me!" Professor Tising shouted to a roar of appreciative applause. The student dearly wished that he was somewhere else. For the past two hours, all that Professor Tising and his six friends had done was reminiscence over their younger years and proceed to drink more alcohol than the student secretly deemed wise.

Thankfully, the student had the advantage of sitting by the only window in the room, a dingy little window that gave one a glance into the world beyond. As he glanced out the window into the dark evening, he suddenly sat up a little straighter. A woman—no, a lady—had just walked under the nearest lamppost, and the sight of her had taken his breath away. She was truly gorgeous, he thought. He watched as she carefully stopped beneath the yellow glow to check on the parcel she was carrying.

"I say, chaps, look what we have here!"

The student jumped. So enthralled in the woman's beauty was he that he failed to notice that the old professor Pythagoras had come up behind him. "What a creature!" the old man sighed. "She really is a

pretty little thing”

“Nonsense!” cried the balding Mr. Witt Genstine from his seat across the room. “You can’t seriously say that she is beautiful, Pythagoras!”

“But she is!” the student spoke up, unable to hold his tongue. “Come and see for yourself!”

Many of the men came rushing over, sloshing their various mugs as they all jostled around the small window. Mr. Witt Genstine just laughed. “You’re all, fools,” he chuckled, taking another swig from the flask he always kept at his side. “Don’t you understand? All concepts of beauty mean the same thing—nothing. Absolutely nothing.”

“Balderdash!” snorted Mr. Ares Totle, a tall gray-haired man who was peering intently out the window. “Beauty is the characteristic of the person—it is a part of them.”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Totle,” Pythagoras agreed sagely. “Beauty is what rules the universe.”

“Nonsense!” A short plump man untangled himself from the crowd at the window. “Beauty cannot rule the universe! Beauty is the servant of logic! Why do we say that one is beautiful? We say one is beautiful because one is not ugly—it’s as simple as that! Logic is the true queen that all must pay.”

“Rubbish, Dr. Leibniz!” scoffed Professor Tising. “You are always so full of yourself and your ‘logic.’ Beauty has nothing to do with logic!”

“Oh really then? What do you think of beauty then, Professor Know-It-All?” sneered Dr. Leibniz. “Enlighten us, please.”

“It’s quite simple, really,” answered Professor Tising after he had finished draining the last of his mug. “You see, my friends,” he began, speaking to the room at large, “how do we know that someone is beautiful? We see a woman, for example, and we say ‘Why, she is a handsome creature!’ But what is it that tells us that she is pretty? I shall tell you: it is the mere nature of man!”

“Come off it, lad, you’re drunk!” laughed Mr. Witt Genstine. “You’re a man of science—of mathematics! You surely don’t believe in sentimental hogwash!”

“I certainly do not!” snapped Professor Tising. “But I do believe that it is a part of our nature to be able to identify beauty immediately. Who among us has to look at a woman and say to

himself 'Well, she has nice hair and a pleasant smile and she is not too large . . . she must then be beautiful'? Friends, we never have to judge whether a woman is beautiful: we innately know!"

"And that, my dear friend is where I would have to disagree with you," came a slow voice from the distant corner of the room. The student twisted around to spy an old rather frail man sitting alone across the room. "I had not planned on engaging in this conversation for I find discussions so tiring this late at night," the man sighed.

The student struggled to remember the name of the old fellow. He knew that Professor Tising had introduced him at one point.

The man continued, "I would have been content to have just observed this fascinating exchange but, my good Professor Tising, you have made an error."

Professor Tising looked taken aback but quickly regained his composure. "Why, Sir Ato, I believe my theory is sound, but please, explain!"

The man sighed again. "Your theory is based around the fact that man can simply know beauty at first glance, correct?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Well, therein lies your very problem: your assumption that beauty is merely based on the physical."

"But, it is, isn't it?" guffawed Professor Tising.

"It is the logical conclusion," Dr. Leibniz pointed out.

"No, it is not," Sir P. L. Ato said quietly. "Beauty is not tied to the physical. Beauty is beyond all physical realms. Tell me, would that woman still be beautiful if you were not here to see her?"

"Of course!" laughed Professor Tising.

"How many times must I tell you!" Mr. Witt Genstine cried. "Beauty is futile!"

"Oh, hush, Genstine!" Pythagoras squeaked firmly. "Let us hear Sir Ato out, for he is a wise chap and is well-known throughout these lands for his knowledge! Of course, she would still be beautiful, dear friend!"

"Well, then you have just confirmed that you agree with me," Sir Ato said sagely. "If beauty can exist without someone being present to observe it, then beauty must exist independently of the physical. Beauty needs nothing from the physical world to make it not beauty."

"There is logic in that as well" Dr. Leibniz remarked slowly.

"What Sir Ato says rings true." They all turned in the direction of

the monotonous deep voice that was coming from the large man who was still standing at the window. There was a momentary silence until the man continued, still in the same slow voice. "Beauty—what is beauty? As Sir Ato argues, beauty still continues to exist even when no one is present." He paused, looking around the room. "But, my friends, if there is nothing physically present, can beauty be truly manifested? Can it truly exist without the physical realm? Never!" He said abruptly, slamming his hand against the nearby table for emphasis. "Friends, beauty may not be of the physical realm entirely, but it is still clearly governed by the laws of the physical world. Beauty is truth that is inexplicably tied to the physical as well as the immaterial. "

"See? See? I was right!" crowed Professor Tising. "Beauty is tied to the physical, as dear Mr. Kant just stated so well! So my theory still stands!"

"Nonsense!" cried Sir Ato.

"Logical!" agreed Dr. Leibniz.

"This is all a load of poppycock!" grumbled Mr. Witt Genstine.

"Fascinating!" exclaimed Pythagoras.

"Unheard of!" fussed Mr. Totel.

Before long the student's ears were ringing with the non-stop bickering as each man argued that his concept of beauty was the only truly accurate one. Glancing out the window again, the student saw that the woman was still standing beneath the lamp. She had pulled out a piece of paper from her bag and was looking around and then looking back down at the paper again. Without a word, the student slipped around the arguing scientists, glancing back briefly once more before he slipped out the door. They wouldn't miss him.

"Lads, take a look at this!" Pythagoras suddenly cried from his seat near the window. The argument had by now slowly died out as the effects of the many, many drinks began to affect their wits. Crowding around the window, the group was reminded once more of their argument as they peered out the dingy window to see Professor Tising's student offering an arm to the lady under the glow of the street lamp.

"That impertinent scamp! I never even saw him sneak away!"

Professor Tising chuckled fondly.

"Perhaps," Mr. Witt Genstein hiccupped, "she really was a pretty thing after all."

They all murmured sleepily and settled down into their seats once more.

"You know," yawned Sir Ato, "I've quite forgotten what were we even discussing. Was it beauty? Or was it mathematics?"

"Sir Ato," Dr. Leibniz chuckled, "at the end of the day, they are equally logical."



Abigail Fesmire

Silence

Taylor Hamilton

The Descent

The reflection of the fire in his eyes was perfect; orange devastation and the glint of charring metal blended with his brown irises, a look so sinister only he could give it justice. I could tell he was pleased with me. I had done exactly as he said—*Kill the girl, and leave no evidence behind*. Fire seemed the obvious choice, and now I enjoyed my reward. The inspired look on his handsome face sent chills through my being. It was the same addictive feeling I got as I swerved the car and stole the corrosive life from that girl.

“You did well, my love,” he whispered.

Crackling flames and that sensuous tone made for the perfect applause. If he were proud now, he will be ecstatic when I reveal my full plan. Not now, though. I must secure the perfect moment; only then will he know my true value.

As I watch the smoke twist in horror at its freedom, I can’t help but allow a satisfied smirk. For now, I am his pet, but soon I shall be his queen, and he will bow down in light of my excellence. His love for me will overflow until he is a puddle of blood and admiration. Soon he will know my wisdom, very soon.

His lanky shadow turned to walk away, away from me, away from the perfection of what I’d done. My stumbling footsteps echoed against every tree in this shadowed section of woods. They were nuisance to nature compared to his graceful stride, the first sign that the darkness in him was growing. The legend says it takes three kills to become a Dark Hunter—an unholy number of sinful deeds. One of his eyes was already starting to turn a pure shade of onyx after the crash, his second kill. The first he rarely ever speaks about outside the nightmares that reside in tormented corners of his mind where the darkness has yet to seep. During these rare fits, he rambles on about a past he struggles to forget and a decision that saved his family from a familiar man who couldn’t control the evil inside him. He will be stronger though, he swears through gritted teeth.

If my own plan works, I will reach this same goal. I will be strong and determined with an unyielding sense of confidence in my dark acts. Fully in control, I will become a Dark Hunter, killing the supernatural creatures that threaten my existence, striking fear

into those who don't respect me, just like him. I will become a beast disguised as a beauty, mauling the weak for the high, embracing the confusion, the struggle, the kill.

"What will we do now?" I squeal, eager to be one-step closer to my dream.

His footfalls cease, and his body goes rigid. I feel the rush of air before the pain finally sets in, and I'm on the ground. I dig my fingers into the wet earth and suppress a growl. "You are one tiny insect in my grand scheme. Do you really think your thoughts matter?"

My heart rattles in my chest. I've never seen him get this angry before. I should feel like I've let him down, disappointed in myself for upsetting him, a familiar feeling of weakness and fragility from the past that never went away. Instead, it's all I can do not to smile. I've finally won. I have crawled into a confined space beneath his tan skin, and only drastic measures will release my claws, leaving deep cuts that ooze reminders of where I once held.

"Good. Your fear makes you quiet now, doesn't it? Fear of me, fear of what I am becoming." He takes a step closer to me and rests his hand on my head, speaking suddenly in a more reassuring tone. "Embrace your fear, love, and never forget your place again."

A drop of blood, tickling my skin, travels down my chin, falls free, and catches in the pale strands of my hair. A noise breaks through the mocking silence, escaping from the valley of my lips, spewing freckles of blood onto his shoe. He grabs me by the arms, yanking me up to just below his infuriated glare.

"What part of this seems funny to you, insect?" His grip on my arm tightens, only making me laugh harder at his dramatic attempt to maintain control. I feel the tension in my body release and welcome the freezing in my veins that replaces it.

He shakes me, forcing the attention I no longer need to give him. I've made my decision, and I accept the price. After a deep breath of the changed world around me, I look up. The blood rushes back to my hand as he staggers back, mumbling. "How is that possible?" The jealousy in his voice is evident. He wants to be me now, to feel the power that I now know.

A mischievous grin interrupts the smooth skin of my cheek. With a once familiar lack of grace, he falls to the ground, as my eyes turn black. "Now," I stand up, brushing the dirt from my palms as I saunter towards him, "what shall we do?"

Terror marks his face. The moonlight creates shadows beneath his cheekbones that make him look even younger, like a small child awaiting punishment for his crimes. Seeing him frail, skittish, and uncertain, I almost feel sorry for him, the sad animal that has manifested in front of me, almost. Now he will know how I have felt every day of my life and every day I've spent with him.

I hold out my hand, and, like a fool, he takes it. He was never meant to be a Hunter, not with that remaining thread of trust he holds so dear. This was always my destiny—to overpower him and gain the clarity he tried to keep from me.

His head makes a ghastly crack against the tree trunk I toss him towards. Bits of blood-tinted bark scatter on the ground and cover his deep brown hair. Dazed, his limp body sinks with a groan, like the weak prey he has become, but I hold him steady by the neck and relish in the feel of his rapid heartbeat against my palm.

"You won't hurt me. You wouldn't know what to do without me." His voice is nothing but a forced whisper, struggling to make a sound beneath the weight of his transformed fate. In response, I close my fingers tighter around his perfect throat, burrowing my nails in just enough to make him understand my new form. A single strand of thought swims to the front of my mind. Even I amaze myself with this conjured cleverness.

"Oh, Honey, you are but an insect in my grand scheme. Do you really think your opinion matters?" He scoffs at my delight, or so it seems as I dig my nails in deeper, more blood flowing in small streams into the crisp, white fabric of his shirt.

My plan is unfolding just as I expected, albeit sooner than I would have liked. I couldn't let this opportunity pass me by. The chance to finally show him what I can be, to entrance him with my capacity for malice and deceit. He now sees me as his equal, I am certain. I stood by his side, the weak submissive, helping him achieve this cherished darkness but forbidden from pursuing the same goal. Now I will experience what he kept me from for so long.

Wheezing breaths sprinkle blood on my porcelain skin, crimson reminders of each second I let him survive. With a final jerk of my arm, he falls to the earth and the solace he was so eager to reach.

I admire my work, an awesome creation abound with evidence of my new self and the respect I demand. There is something magnificent in the destruction of what is right, of the cage that holds

our souls in place. Mine flew free with his final breath, leaving me to embrace the darkness and all the possibilities it promises.

Alone, I wait, as the darkness creeps through my being, relinquishing any trace of weakness on its wicked trek. We could have experienced this together, this enlightenment, if he had not held me back and kept these secrets from me. The fear in his eyes as I approached him made it clear that he was never strong enough to accept this gift. He would have failed like the man in his nightmares gone crazy with the insatiable greed that led to his demise.

I slide to my knees, brushing my fingers tips across his lifeless face, feeling no sorrow for this sacrifice. He was lucky, really, that I allowed him the glory of being the final piece of my dream. The darkness will be my new companion, the driving force of all that I do.

The world around me looks brand new, so eerily quiet that I imagine a faint heartbeat coming from my lost love. Then I hear a shuffle in the distance, and behind every tree, dark eyes reveal themselves, closing in around me with screams like banshees. Soft at first, but louder as the rush of darkness flushes out the last of my remains. Their voices cry out from every corner of my mind—no mouth, no teeth, but they slice into me, clawing at the walls of my self-control, ordering me to kill or be killed.

I glare at him, shouting, *Why didn't you tell me?*

The screeches crowd around me, demanding my attention. My eyes jump from one demon to another without focus. He was right; he was always right.

What have I done?



Justin Knippers

The Mighty Silverback

Ashley Mata
Grey

Birds flying on a cloudy day
An old woman, bundled in a dark coat
The bark of a tree that has lost all life
Smoke billows out of a chimney
Rain begins to pour from the sky
The monochrome of winter
is something I live for.

Ashley Mata
Moments

The staccato taps of the clock,
seconds that pass by.
Moments I can't get back,
no matter how much I try.
Careless words said in careful times,
relationships on the divide.
We can't get back what once was ours,
it's all lost to the tide.

Rachel McDonald

Run

My feet slapped the ground loudly with each stride. I was running at full speed, the trees just a blur around me. The forest surrounding me was unrelenting. There was no way out, but I wasn't giving up yet. My bare feet were bleeding, but they were numb. My mind was racing, trying to take in my surroundings and search for a way to reach open air. I couldn't climb a tree, or they would catch me. I yearned for a clearing, to see the sky, so I could fly into the clouds like a bird. The footfalls behind me were getting closer. My eyes raked the darkness ahead of me one last time.

I saw something. It looked like a cottage, maybe.

I pushed my body harder, finally having a goal to strive for.

I was close to the cottage when I cut in too close to a tree. My long, blonde hair caught on a tree branch that I narrowly avoided with my face. A good chunk of my hair painfully separated from my head, and the rest came free of the knot it was tied into. The distraction slowed me down. I could see them over my shoulder now. I arrived at the door and realized this was no ordinary cottage in the forest. It was more like a vacation home. It was two stories high and the roof seemed to rise above the treetops. Perfect.

The ornate door was heavy, almost difficult to push open, and I had no time to swing it shut behind me. The open doorway gave me one last look at my pursuers. They were closer than ever. My breaths were now coming in short, desperate gasps, and my heart was beating so fast it seemed to vibrate my body. I took a few seconds to look around, searching for my escape. There were two staircases in the foyer, and I chose the nearest one, hoping it would lead me to the roof.

I dashed up the stairs, aware that my time was running out. I pumped my legs faster, knowing my life depended on my speed now. I made the second floor and stopped dead in my tracks. The entire floor was empty, laid out before me. There were no rooms, and I couldn't see any windows. It looked like some kind of loft. Heavy footfalls thundered through the entrance downstairs. I panicked and froze for a few seconds too long. I knew I would pay for my indecision.

I risked a peek down the stairs. I needed to know how many I would be fighting.

Shadows twice my size were climbing to the second floor. They were cloaked in all black, their jackets and pants fitted to provide them with more speed. They had a patch sewn on their jackets that signified who owned them. My own baggy white shirt had painted me as a target in the dark forest. It was ripped in several places, suffering from the same fate as my lost hair. My cloth shorts were barely hanging on to my waist. My food supply was running lower than ever, and I was rationing. My figure was a stark contrast to the hunters. They looked to have an advantage over me in every aspect. They had size, numbers, strength, and stamina.

The first one to reach the landing was familiar. He bore the scars of meeting me before, and he wasn't going to make the same mistakes again. He barked orders to the others, and they spread out before me. I raked my brain for new tactics, searching for a way I would come out of this alive. I decided to wing it and straightened out of my defensive stance. I could easily take half the group, but altogether, they would rip me to pieces.

I opened my mouth to speak when I saw my salvation. It was shaped like a square only two feet wide. And it led into an attic. Unfortunately, it was directly above the lead hunter's head. I knew if I was careful, I could get out of this. The hunters were built for tracking and killing, but I was built for survival. I was smarter. I could do this.

"Good evening," I said cheerfully. I gave a short wave. My voice was strong, as I hoped.

The hunters were startled. The one in charge narrowed his eyes at me. We were only several feet apart.

"You're not gonna make this hard again, are ya?" he growled. I eyed the scars along his jaw and smirked. I could smell his breath from my position. It carried a stench resembling that of an animal that was hit by a car and left to rot for five days. It summed his appearance up well. He had beady black eyes buried into his face. His face was scruffy and patchy, as if his facial hair didn't grow properly. His face was flushed, but the scar was a pale streak, like a star shooting across the sky.

My laugh filled the room. "You brought more this time. You're not afraid of me, are you?" I closed the gap between us in two strides.

My knee and the hunter's groin connected with a dull thud. He was surprised. That's what I needed. The others were grouped behind the leader as if they didn't know what to do. Some were still standing on the stairs. With strength that was a little more than human, I gave the hunter a firm shove. He staggered, but didn't fall. His fist connected with my cheek and blood splattered my lips. A low growl erupted at the back of my throat. A fire lit in my eyes.

The others were beginning to react now. In desperation, I tried to push him again. He leaned backward and gave me the opportunity I needed. One solid roundhouse kick toppled him into the others. I even heard one fall down the stairs. The others rushed toward me, but my hands were already pulling the attic hatch down. My arms pulled my body weight into the attic, and I searched for a window. I found one at the other end of the room. Bingo!

The attic was tiny, not even I could stand to my full height. It smelled strongly of sawdust and the odor a home gets when it is no longer used. I ducked low and ran to the window, reaching it easily. The others were crawling into the attic now, but they had a much harder time orienting themselves. The space was much too small for them to traverse deftly. I wrenched the window open. The full force of cool fall air blew back my hair. I inhaled a breath of clean air and swung myself out the window, reaching for the roof.

I was right when I thought the building reached the treetops. I could finally see open sky above me. I relaxed, taking in the vast sky. I could go anywhere I wanted. I knew they would come for me again, as they have so many times before. But for now, I was free. The hunters were scrambling toward me, but it was too late. I saw their mouths moving, but I couldn't hear what they were yelling. My legs gathered under me on command, and I launched myself as high into the air as I could.

My wings snapped out, and with one hard flap, I took to the air.



Morgan Mee

Crossed

Kelsey Morgan
Freedom

The sounds of the city filled my mind with a constant hum of noise; a dull release from my joyless day. My shoes clicked against the cooling concrete as I made my way to the apartment where I lived, past bustling people and honking cars. As the familiar surroundings passed by, my thoughts turned to memories. I saw the bright future I had planned for so young, the hours of work I spent studying in college, the big move to New York in the hopes of accomplishing my dreams. At this point, my memories darkened as I remembered the only job I could find, the people there who think of me as an over-ambitious joke, and the boss who didn't have an ounce of kindness in his huge, chain-smoking body.

My pace quickened as I realized how trapped I really felt. My cheap heels slammed into the sidewalk until I found myself running. My vision blurred as my feet pounded down the crowded walkway, racing towards something I didn't know. I blindly pushed through crowds until I noticed my apartment building directly in front of me. My legs carried me to the garden on the rooftop where I fell to my knees in undisguised anguish.

The tears ended as suddenly as they had begun as my blurry eyes landed on a bird cage on the other side of the small garden. The cage held two beautiful white turtle doves. They sat on a branch in their small cage, huddled together as if to accept their fate of lifelong captivity. Their melancholy eyes watched me as I inched slowly closer to them. As the distance between us grew smaller I began to notice just how defeated the two doves really looked. Their powerful wings hung limply at their sides while their graceful necks bent towards the ground, unable to look at another person who would treat them like a painting in an art gallery.

My heart ached, not only to see these poor creatures so beaten by life, but also to realize that I must look exactly like them. Once I reached the cage, I saw that the only thing keeping these birds from their freedom was a simple metal latch. The setting sun cast an orange glow over the small garden and caused the white birds to glow with brilliant color as I grabbed the tiny latch that held them. At the movement, the birds straightened and seemed to understand the

meaning of my actions. I took a deep breath the flung the latch open.

The door burst out with the beating of wings and a small puff of loose feathers as the birds flew up into a future of freedom and potential. They circled the garden twice in an overjoyed “thank you” as I raised my arms and twirled around to watch them. Tears ran down my face again, but this time their salty tracks fell past a smile. “If you can be free,” I said “then so can I.”

Kelsey Morgan
Shadows

What do our shadows think of us?

Are they sympathetic to our problems?

Do they laugh at our mistakes?

Or do they simply not care for their living counterparts? I like to think they are the soul. Rather than a ball of light in our chest, maybe souls are our ever-present, dark mirror images.

Our shadows see the world with us, catch us when we fall, hold us in the night, and stalk us throughout the day.

They say the soul is our true self. Well, maybe that's why some people are afraid of their own shadow. Maybe they're scared of who they are.

Or maybe they see that they're exactly what they never wanted to be.



Lauren Motloch

The Camp

Ashley Page
One Year

One year. That was the most hopeful time frame they gave her. One year. It was still a pretty decent amount of time since she and her family had been bracing themselves for the “You only have six months to live” speech. She shifted on the hospital bed uncomfortably. She wasn’t quite sure how to feel. She was angry. She wanted to cry, but the tears in her eyes seemed frozen in their place. It didn’t matter. Tears would not prolong her life, much less the condition of it. She was determined. She intended to do what any rebellious teenager would do: the exact opposite of what the person of authority wants.

“I think now would be the appropriate time to discuss the progression of the illness. Toward the end, it will become pretty hard, and with such a short matter of time, I suggest maybe making the best out of it. I don’t think she’ll be fit to finish school . . .” The doctor’s voice trailed off in the distance.

She was going to perform the ultimate act of rebellion which was nothing short of necessary in this type of situation. She was going to live. She was going to really live, not like a person who was dying, but like an infant who has filled its lungs with its first breath of fresh air. She was going to live like the world had never been discovered and that it was her divine right to explore it. She would go on with her life and ignore the hurtful questions that no one seemed to have the answers to. She didn’t deserve this at all. Three hundred sixty-five days, give or take, and then it was all supposed to be over. There was still room for progress, or maybe some treatments would be developed by then. That’s all this doctor kept saying. She got up and slowly walked towards the door holding the pamphlets from the doctor wishing this was all a dream. She did what she knew how to do best. She forced the monster of a mystery disease down into the trench in the back of her mind and locked it away never to be reopened until the day her secret would be buried with her. She would go to a new school this year, start all over, and do everything that she could to move past this. It was her junior year, and if she could somehow manage to add any extra classes to her schedule, it could be her senior year.

She started the year off sitting at a table in the cafeteria alone. She was very quiet, kept to herself, and, being the new girl at school, she didn't seem to give her a reason to want to talk to anyone. She sighed as she watched an attractive guy walk toward her direction. No one knew what she was going through, and through their ignorance, no one cared. That wasn't their fault because it's not like she walked around with a "cancer patient" sign taped to her chest. She brushed a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

"Why do you always sit by yourself?" he asked sitting down across from her. She blushed and looked down at the table.

"I . . . I don't know . . . Maybe I just have no one to sit with," she replied.

He smiled and leaned forward extending his hand. "Now you do. Mark. Nice to meet you . . . ?" he left the question open waiting for her to fill it with the corresponding answer.

"Angel," she replied with a smile.

"Well, Angel, I hope I'm not being to forward, but I would love to take you out to lunch today," he said. He was very handsome, and she couldn't even begin to understand why he would be single. One year: that was the silent demon sitting in the back of her mind, taunting her every time she was with him. That was where everything started. Their friendship blossomed into a beautiful relationship. They were best friends, and she knew that she could tell him anything. However, she couldn't bring herself to tell him about the cancer.

She was growing more and more tired each day. At least with cancer you know what it is, where it is, and that there are only so many things that can be done. This doctor's visit was different. The doctor was whispering something to her father who stood with him as they stood in the corner of the doorway. She wanted to know what they were saying, but by the way they were looking at each other, she was happy that she couldn't hear them. The doctor handed him a prescription for some pain killers and medicine she could take at home to better accommodate her situation. "Make things bearable," were his exact words.

She left and sat in the car silently on the way home. As they pulled up to the house she noticed Mark sitting there with a bouquet of flowers in hand. Her father parked, and she walked over to Mark feeling the exhaustion setting in.

"I wanted to surprise you," he smiled handing her the flowers. Her expression was fairly blank. "Are you okay? Where have you been?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I'm fine. I was just at the doctor," she replied leaning against the car.

He looked concerned. "Is everything okay?" She nodded.

"Just a physical. Thanks for the flowers, babe; it means a lot." She leaned forward and hugged him.

"Come on, let's go out," he said walked toward his car.

"I'm feeling a little tired, babe," she replied.

"Oh, well, we can just go to my house and watch movies. I'll even cook for you," he smiled. He was the perfect boyfriend—sweet, kind, caring, smart, and loving. He was every girl's dream. She nodded and looked at him feeling a tear beginning to form in the corner of her right eye. This time she let it fall. How could she leave him? She loved and cared about him so much, and the last thing she wanted to do was break him with something as tragic as falling in love with a dying girl. She shook the thought from her mind. "Hey, what's wrong? Don't cry. Are you okay?" he pleaded pulling her close. "Oh, gosh no. I'm fine. Just got a little emotional; you're really sweet, and it's been a long day for me," she wiped her eyes.

As time progressed, she began to feel significantly better. She hadn't needed any surprise doctor's visits for a while, and the last one she had was pretty good. There was hope for her yet. She was beginning to feel like maybe her life would be normal. Maybe the possibility of growing old with someone was going to happen. As class dismissed, Mark grabbed her backpack from beside her desk. "Are you ready?" he said with a smile.

As she stood to leave, she could feel all of the blood rush from her head. The world slowed down, then her blood froze in her veins, and her heart pumped liquid fire at a speed that couldn't be healthy. She collapsed and crashed into the floor. Her body trembled. Mark ran over to her and grabbed her up in his arms. She was struggling to breathe, and he was terrified that she would stop. Blood spilled from her mouth. Soon the EMTs were carrying her away on a stretcher. He left school and rushed to the hospital to be with her, calling her parents on the phone to explain what happened.

When he arrived, his beautiful girlfriend no longer looked like herself. She was hooked up to so many machines. The sound of the

heart monitor made his own heart seem to skip a beat. She looked like she was dying, and sitting there holding her little hand in his, he just wanted her to wake up. She slowly opened her eyes and looked at him. He could almost see the light fading from her eyes. "Angel," he asked pleadingly, feeling his eyes begin to water.

"I'm dying," she said quietly.

"No, don't say that. You're just sick or something. We can figure this out."

"I wanted to tell you in the beginning. I didn't want you to be worried. I just wanted to feel normal for once. I only have a year left," she began to cry. Tears poured from her eyes making her heart monitor beat faster. Mark bent down to hold her.

"Babe, please don't cry. We are going to make it through this together. Everything will be okay."

He carried her into the house. She had been asleep the whole ride back from the hospital. He couldn't believe that they had been together for eight months already. She had to outlive the expiration date the doctor had given her. Sadly, she had gotten weaker over the past few weeks, and most nights she just stayed in bed. She rolled over in bed and looked at him sitting in the chair next to it. "Hi," she said.

He sat on the bed next to her. He hated to think that at any given moment he could lose her. He couldn't even imagine what she must be going through. He leaned down and gently kissed her. She smiled at him. He hadn't seen a smile like that on her in a while. "Don't look so sad. I'm fine," she said looking up at him. He let a group of tears collect in his eyes and roll down his cheek. She wiped them away.

"Don't leave me, Angel," he cried. She could hear his voice cracking, and she wanted more than anything to be able to tell him that she was going to live forever, but she couldn't even convince herself. "I just love you so much, and I'm so in love with you. No matter what, nothing can change that. I won't ever leave you, Mark. I promise," she said hugging him tightly. "Besides, we have a very important anniversary coming up," she smiled.

"One year," he replied with a weak smile.

He stood at the end of the aisle behind the door looking at their picture. He listened to the voicemail on his phone of her saying she was running late, not to worry, and that she loved him very much. He put his phone in his pocket and looked down at the ground taking a

deep breath. All the surrounding noise was gone, and the only thing he could hear was her voice in the back of his mind. He could hear her saying that she loved him and that everything was going to be okay. He thought about how she would say that one day she would marry him and they would have lots of cute puppies because she didn't want to have babies and be fat for nine months. He closed his eyes and relived the memories. He felt like he couldn't breathe. He opened his eyes and slowly walked forward. Step by aching step, he made his way down the aisle alone. He could feel the eyes on his back as he trudged forward. When he made it to the front of the aisle, he dreaded looking down into the shiny black box. He took two more painful steps forward and stared down at the pale stranger in the casket. Tears poured from his eyes and he let out a cry that sounded like he had been stabbed. He felt a rage and anger building inside of himself that he wasn't sure how to control. He wanted to punch a hole through a wall. How could this have happened? As he stared down, everything in his mind was telling him that this wasn't his Angel. This was some other poor girl. She wouldn't have worn that much makeup. At least she was wearing a beautiful outfit. He leaned down and placed one last kiss on her forehead. The thought of death made him almost want to gag. "Happy Anniversary, Angel," he wailed. He sank to his knees and cried. She was gone and on the day that they had promised to cherish.

After the funeral, he tried to compose his shaking hands as he placed a bouquet of fresh red roses on the casket. "You didn't deserve this", he cried as he watched the casket being lowered into the ground. He looked at the promise ring in his hand. He was going to give it to her today. He was going to promise that one day he would get her the real thing and he would spend the rest of his life with her. On that day, his heart broke, and he was never the same. The only love of his life left him behind, and he was silently praying that another would never leave him again.

Deona Richardson
The Cost of College

A, B, C, 1, 2, 3

One thousand for you
One hundred for me,
K through twelve is always free
But what about the college fees?

I'm not poor
I'm not rich
I'm in a ditch,
What do I do?
How can I pay?
The only way is to pray.

Do I work or do I try?
These decisions that make me cry.
Do I succeed or do I fall?
Only I can make the call.

Then appears, a strong large man
Who calls himself big Uncle Sam.
He offers me a pretty cage.
In disguise, it's government praise.
It promises me a loyal friend
And many, more abundant amends.
It gives me aid in return for a cell,
And helps me achieve and excel.

I work real hard, and I'm finally done,
But my problems have just begun.
My cage appears
And locks me away
Until the day that I can pay.

I start my job and slave all day.
I try real hard to make it go away.
Year after year
Day after day,
I manage to slowly chip away.

A, B, C, 1, 2, 3
I paid you, now you pay me.
Life is hard and has a fee,
So good luck in finding the key.

Elizabeth Rugg
Don't Try to Find Me

Covered faces
I only whisper
Finding traces
Constant shivers

What is winter
Without lovers?
Try to touch her
Subtle whimpers

Elizabeth Rugg
Flowers Cannot Grow
Song Lyrics

Verse 1

Reach out as far as you can,
Just grab the other one's hand.
It doesn't matter why or how,
It doesn't matter why or how.

Verse 2

Tries to find you, tries to hold you,
Tries to let your dreams control you.
You'll never gain your conscience back.
You'll never gain your conscience back.

Chorus

You confess it all to me,
A well-structured plea.
But you're far too excited
For something unrequited.

I wish that I could feel,
And it's all too surreal.
There's a million stars above you,
And I cannot love you.

Verse 3

Just start to tell a joke
Everything's fine he spoke
Babe, the mountains'll still grow
The mountains'll still grow

Verse 4

Running away is far too easy
My wishes won't come true
I wanted dreams, you see
But the dreams, they wouldn't have me

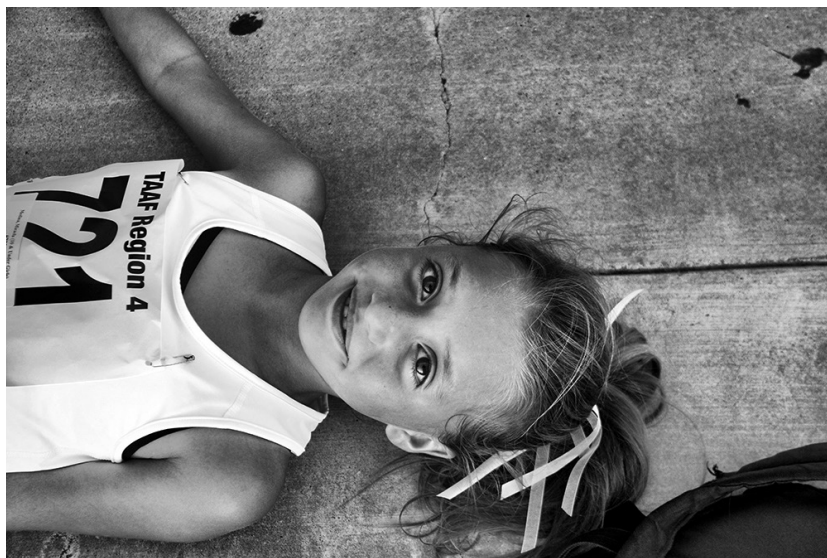
Repeat Chorus

Outro

I can't want what I don't know
And flowers cannot grow
Flowers cannot grow



Molly Stewart
Birds on a Line



Molly Stewart

Endless Summer



Molly Stewart

Tub Talks



Justin Knippers Walkway of Fushimi Inari Shrine



Otoniel Chaine
The
Beginning of
Art



Alexis Brown
Jade Ornament



Abigail Fesmire

The Doorway



Molly Stewart

The Water is Fine



Justin Knippers

Welcome to Cozumel, Mexican



Sarah Titus

Gondola in Venice, Italy



Molly Stewart

Plunge



Kaitlin Hooper
End of the Day



Kaitlin Hooper

The Horse



Athaliah Grant

Theodore Roosevelt



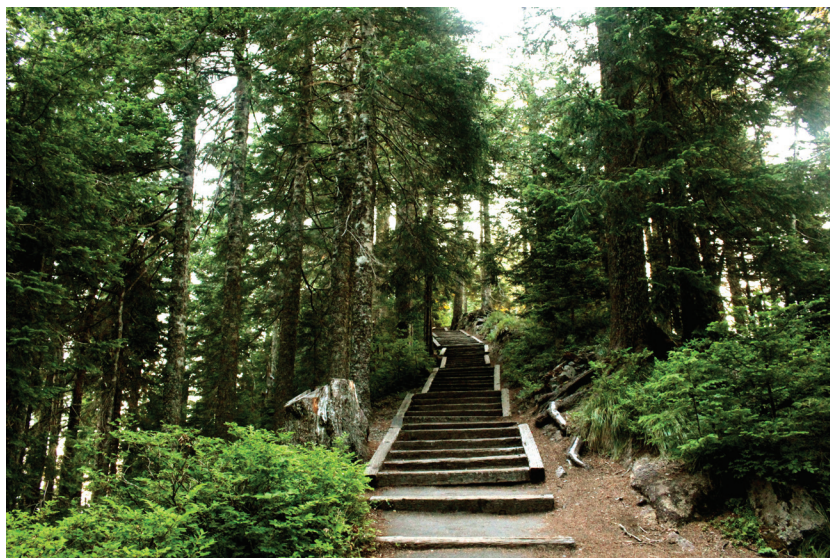
Athaliah Grant

Searching for Life



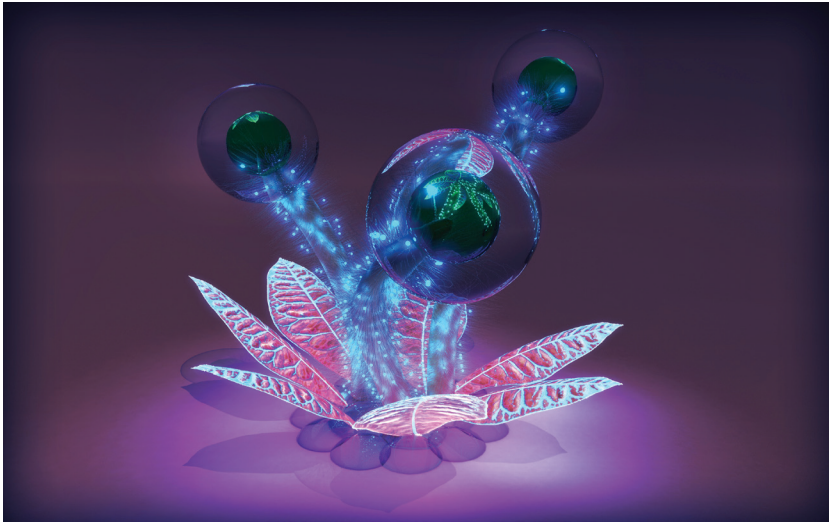
Justin Knippers

Windy Mountainside



Otoniel Chaine

There is Always a Way



Phillip Mullen

Specimen I



Rebecca Cox

I'm Still Here



Kaitlin Hooper

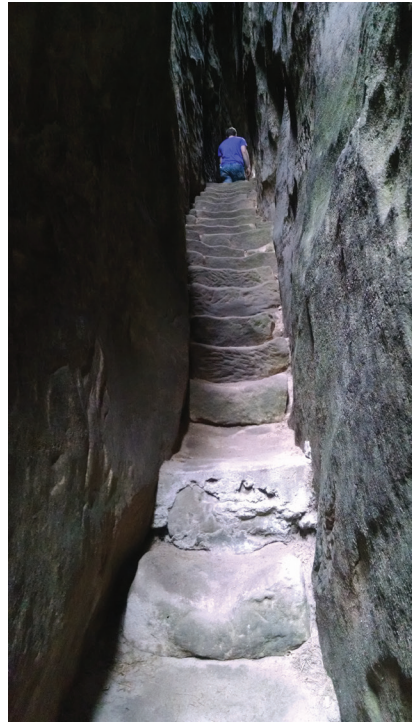
Roses



Molly Stewart

Pier Review

Lauren Motloch
Between the Rocks



Kaitlin Hooper

Morning Light



Stacy Roof

Days Gone By



Molly Stewart

Structured

Molly Stewart

The Great Drought

It was the year 2096. The United States was consumed in Water War I. Many troops were stationed on guard surrounding the largest military base our nation has ever constructed. The base was built of twelve-foot high, armed-guarded and well-lit security fences, which ran the perimeter of the Ogallala Aquifer, spanning across a total of eight states, from Texas all the way up to a small portion of South Dakota and Wyoming. No one knew for sure exactly how much water our government had in the facilities, but we did know whatever amount it was, it meant nothing to any of us. Our faucets ran dry years ago, and the rations the government issued were not enough. I watched as my children died one after another from dehydration, dracunculiasis, and cholera. My sweet Aaron's legs were covered in ulcers, white worms splitting out of his skin, as they deserted their now useless host. I watched Sara's eyes go hollow and leave me, unable to keep my gaze or focus on anything in this world. And Anastasia, sweet little Ana, left limp lying on her bed, lips parted, as dry as the soil that piled in pyramids along her window pane.

All three children continued to draw the same picture until their arms grew too weak to grasp the pencil. It was a picture of a green plant of some sort, sprouting from a dry and cracked earth, reaching toward a blazing sun. It was the same picture every child drew as they reached the end: a last hope, or wish, or perhaps a vision. Some assumed the children were able to reach into the afterlife and bring the living back a piece of promise from God. Others reasoned that it was only natural to focus on one thing, one precious thing so many of us held in our own imaginations. We grasped at it with despair like a child being torn from the body of their decaying parent—the latest victim of the Great Drought—hoping that it would all be okay somehow. We knew better though.

The drawings, whatever the meaning, were of no significance. They offered no reprieve from the dull ache in our throats, and didn't soothe our skin, stretched drum-tight around our bellies, swollen from hunger. Still, like good little Americans, we hung each drawing on our rusty refrigerators. Reminders of the life we once had. Reminders of the children we once had, now dust-stained and

dead like so much around us. When I look at Aaron's last drawing on the fridge along side his sisters' I am reminded not of my children, or of life before the drought, but of Earth's power to swallow us whole. I'm reminded all that comes from the earth must again return to it, and comforted that our government cannot hide from that truth. The dry soil of this great drought will soon crack open wide enough to swallow us all, and no fence or wealth or greed can change that.

Molly Stewart
Harvey

With dark eyes and long dark hair
Her frail frame shook the bed
Teeth exposed, vicious! They said.
She lay in the snow for three days, you know?
Someone saw her blue car and phoned it in, I heard.
Now she shuffles in place
And drinks a lot.
And sleeps with strange men
At strange hours.
And there's the way she smiles sometimes,
Distant. Always there but not quite there, you know?
And the voices . . . God, the voices.
They're constant!

Molly Stewart
Heavy

I've felt the weight of your bones
As your hips lay heavy on mine
In the quiet heat of summer.

I've felt the weight of your bones
as your knuckles pressed into my chest
in an argument over a TV dinner.

I've felt the weight of your bones
as your heavy hand patted my back
while I wretched, awaiting the birth of our first child.

I've felt the weight of your bones
The week after you'd been laid off
As the doctor gave the diagnosis

but never have I felt the weight of your bones
As I did the day I carried them in a box
to the earth, waiting your arrival.

Molly Stewart Pain Killers

Sometimes I get high on prescription painkillers and fall asleep while my two-year-old crawls around on the floor, often playing with the doorstep. Ironically, I presented the *Dangers of Doorstops* at the research symposium in Florida last fall, offering up a wide range of affordable products for parents as an alternative. They have all kinds of solid, one-piece stoppers out there. You'd be surprised. Products with titles like "Mommy's Little Helper" and "Informed Parent Plus." Yet here I sit, pill bottle in hand, bedroom door closed and locked, ready to clock out for the day while my two year old works to unscrew the choking hazard we have no need for, but keep anyway.

There's something about painkillers that just do it for me. I dislocated my shoulder playing in our church's adult softball league, one year to the day before Olivia was born, and I have been working up to taking roughly twenty-six pills a day for the last seven months. I don't look like an addict. I live in a red brick, two-story house, identical to every tenth house down from it, in a planned community with three pools and two tennis courts. My name is Amy Adams, and I wear Ralph Lauren polos and white, pressed linen slacks most days. I have an Early Education degree from the University of Mississippi, and before I became a homemaker and headed my local "Mommy Mafia" Facebook page, I worked as a research assistant in the Family of Consumer Science and Education department at my alma mater. My closet is color coordinated, for God's sake. I lead the marriage group Bible study at my home twice a month. My husband Ben and I have one child. One boring, fat child, whom I care for twenty-four mind-numbing hours a day, seven horrid days a week while my husband Ben sells insurance and fucks the office secretary on the third Thursday of the month. In photos we are that family—that perfect, white, pristine family you're lucky to receive a Christmas card from once a year that you proudly display on your fridge. *I know people like that*, you think. *I'm going to be like them*, you think. Inside, it's tough to swallow.

I watch as Olivia plays behind the door. The one damned thing in this big box that isn't childproof and she gravitates toward it—her

father's genes at work, I'm certain. I watch her juggle the endcap in her fat little fingers, dropping it one, two, three times, as she attempts to find her fat little mouth. I witness her pleasure when she succeeds, that little maniacal smile forming, the corners of her mouth pulling up into her dimples. I watch as terror slowly creeps onto her face. Her pale skin turns blue. No sound—just wide blue eyes. *Surprise my fat little girl, yes, surprise! Your fat little throat cannot accommodate that! The square peg won't fit in that fat little circle!* Her body stretches instinctively, trying to maneuver itself around the object lodged in her throat. She sits down and then slowly slumps over, defeated. I watch, still unmoving. Offering no help. No relief. I side step her lifeless body and move down the hallway to the kitchen. Turning on the stovetop mechanically, I then retrieve a can of Spaghetti-O's from the pantry. I open my pill bottle and retrieve two elongated, white pills with flecks of pink dotting their surface. I steal a sip from my daughter's juice box and send the pills floating down my throat, gliding, without hinder. *Silly girl, that pill was too big to swallow, wasn't it? Stupid, fat child!* The can opener slices through the metal can, and the smell of cheap processed tomato paste fills the air. I empty the contents into a pan and place it over the heat on the stove. I walk into the living room and lift the cordless phone off its base, carefully pressing the digits 9-1-1. In my most distressed voice, I scream into the receiver, *"She's choking! MY GOD! Help me! Please help me! My baby!"* I drop the receiver and walk into the bathroom. Splashing my face with scolding hot water, I pinch my eyelids and cheeks until welts form. In intervals I scream, *"Breathe baby, breathe! Breathe for mommy!"* until I walk back to the phone and shout my address before dropping the receiver once more. Walking back to the room, I lift my child's lifeless body into my lap. She's heavy and cold. Her face is blue and somehow satisfying. I push hard into her chest with the flat of my palm. I touch my lips to hers, sweet, apple-juice kiss. The last. I wait. The paramedics arrive and take her away.

"She's gone," they say.

I stare off into the distance, focusing on the picture on top of my nightstand: a photo of Ben and I, *before* Olivia. I fight back a smile and cover my face as I sob. *"MY DAUGHTER. MY ONLY CHILD! MY GOD, HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? I JUST TURNED AWAY FOR A MOMENT TO STIR HER LUNCH ON THE STOVE! MY BABY! MY LITTLE GIRL!"*

Molly Stewart
Peelings

Sometime between the eighth period bell of a spring day in seventh
grade
And walking through my front door to an afternoon snack waiting
He laid me down in the tall grass of an alleyway
And removed my shirt carefully, with scratchy nails and hot, heavy
breaths
And with exposed breasts, cupped in his small hands
He kissed me so hard my mouth went numb.
He pushed his hips into my thighs until a bruise formed.
A purple-blue mirror of my feelings for days after.
Later that day, when I separated Oreo cookies
Between talks about homework and soccer games
I saw particles under my nails of the earth I dug into
And when my mother told me to stop playing football with the boys
After she saw the grass stains on my denim
I cried into my pillow
And didn't know why
But I felt as if something inside
Had been peeled away from me.

Molly Stewart

Plight of a Schizophrenic

I was twenty-five
When Sam came alive
Soft spoken,
Whispering *why*

My wrists were bound to the bed,
Or so they said-
Consequences of the injury
I had to my head.

Anne came next
Mean, and fat.
She spoke louder, swearing mad
When she spoke, she spat.

That next year my baby was taken away
"better at Uncle's"
I begged them, I pleaded
let her stay

The marks on her back
They weren't from me!
the fat lady Anne!
-Had to be!

but my feet won't stop moving
Shuffling about
And Anne & Sam won't stop talking
Won't shut their mouth.

I don't think the meds are working
And Anne's getting mean
She tells me **it's not worth it**
She says **it's a dream**

Molly Stewart

Sam whispers no
But I want to wake up
So Anne gives me the knife
And tells me to **cut**

As the blood slips away, out my veins
Anne becomes nicer
Sam begins to fade
And I'm left alone with my reflection
in a puddle of pain.

Molly Stewart
Professed Loss

I met you in spring
With a boisterous voice
Budding,
You were beautiful in bloom,
Vibrant and strong,
With polished petals,
And long, crafted roots.
Your thorns,
Planned and projected.
What they did not allow in intimacy
They made up for in purpose.
You were so focused on growth
Cycles of seasons, each spent in the sun.
You inspired me
And still do.
I left after the rain
And returned to find you withered and weathered
A filament of your mother.
A shell of your former self.
I reached out to you once more,
Your thorns now dull,
Worn away by disease,
Wilted at your stem,
But it was too late,
Your vase sat vacant.

Molly Stewart
Rain in July

Phantom stars fall into fiery shadows
that pressure a memory of you.
Illusions of a bright past
Where embers are absolute,
and the fire inside of us burns blisters
into our hearts.
Wounds that break open
and awaken new pain
with the slightest touch:
a memory,
a starry sky,
a summer night.
Like the earth,
I am disturbed by rain,
Falling from a summer night's sky.

Molly Stewart
Rear-View

I slow to a stop
on a country road
that intersects a farm.
I'm being watched.
By large eyes like brown marbles,
a strong jaw
That sways with the rhythmic
Scoops of open and close,
Like the screen door on the porch
Pop never fixed.
Bones that rise,
far and wide,
behind soft brown ears,
pierced with yellow tags:
Permission to
roam on this green grass.
Bones, white and long
like the outstretched arms
of my mother,
gathering clothes from the line
before the storm.
A speckled hide,
like the bird's eggs
I found in the wild oak
my eleventh summer.
His tail swats the flies
like a whip
my grandfather used.
He lowers his head,
and I can't tell if it's the weight of the horns,
or the weight of my watch,
but brown marbles reach somewhere
deep inside of me
to images of our farm
and I lower my own head
with the weight of these memories.
I shift back into drive
and leave it all behind me.

Molly Stewart
She Reminds Me

Three words:

Each said with the pound of a tiny fist

In a tiny palm,

A decision made

In a way

That seems like the fairest thing I've ever known

Paper; Rock; Scissors; Shoot!

Her eyes wide

Fixated on the symbol my hand has made

Fixated on the decision signed in a language I nearly forgot I spoke

What stage or date was it when this stopped?

Blended lines cut into over time

Fair judgment crushed by the weight of older rocks

Delicate and drab like a piece of paper with stale remnants of brilliant
words

Erased by adulthood

Three words

in a language I nearly forgot I spoke

She reminds me

Molly Stewart
Spinning

What is it about tire swings
Lost in a dizzying spin
That can be so rewarding?

Is it the feeling of falling sideways?
The blur that unites blue sky and green trees?
The rise in the pit of your stomach?

Is it the invisible pull?
Fingers plucked from the rope—
White-knuckled resistance?

Or is it the return?
The promise of stop—
That all motion eventually halts?

Is it the savior of a foot to the earth?
Or the outstretched hand of a friend—
Reaching in to save you from the cycle?

Or is it the uncertainty in your gut?
Leaving you drunk on your doubt—
In knowing these moments are fleeting.

Molly Stewart Storytellers

Once a year, under a harvest moon, an old Cherokee woman is granted a night of youth. In telling her story to another she learns that the real magic is found, not her youth, but in her heritage.

Once upon a time this land belonged to my people. The season's shadows have collected like leaves in trees; my stories have faded over time, to muted browns quietly falling away. My once gvhnige hair is now gray. My skin now hangs from my bones, wrinkled and thin. My ears have grown and my hearing lost. Though I have misplaced most of my sight, my eyes are the same dark pools of brown that looked upon this moon years ago. I do not look like much: an old woman, worn with time, but I am of the Cherokee people and in my blood there is *magic*.

My heritage is in Tennessee, but my grandfather, Unaduti Jessee, took the great walk to Oklahoma, and here I sit. Tonight is the harvest dance, and there will be music, food, and laughter, all good things, but the moon is my most anticipated guest. For tonight is the night of duninhdi, and tonight, I will dance.

My father used to tell me it was not coincidence that the earth has four seasons and we have four souls. He would point up to the moon and say, "*My Ayita, your asgina runs in cycles with the moon and, like the moon, you my dear, are fullest in the harvest. A day will come when your light feels dim and your bones grow weak. Remember, my Ayita, your light comes from your soul and just as the moon parts the darkness, your soul will still light your path long after your bones have failed to walk it.*" His heavy hand rested warm on my knee, and his voice was low and dry, like the Oklahoma creek beds in late July. When he spoke, I felt him in my spirit. I still do.

As I hung the disco ball in the middle of the room in preparation for the center's annual fall dance, I thought of the night I made my wish. I noticed my reflection in its plastic mirrors. The warped image on the ball is gracious. My wrinkles are stretched and erased, like earlier years, before my skin folded with age.

A familiar slant of light begins to sneak across the laminate floor,

and I'm brought back to the present. The moonlight is reflected in the disco ball's mirrors and light dances across the room. I whisper, *Ayita*. The name my father spoke at my birth; the name that translates to *first to dance*. The moon keeps her promise. I stand with ease, weightless. My bones do not crack. I do not need to brace myself or use the hand of another. I stand strong, like the Cherokee blood running through my veins. I move with grace, my silk black hair swings heavy like a pendulum, well into the small of my back. My skin is tight once more, like hide stretched over a drum. *Thank you*, I whisper to the moon; *Wado, my old friend*. I close my eyes, and I hear the rattles and drums of my people, the Tsalagi.

I take Mr. Walter Jennings' hand and ask for a dance. He sits lonely in the corner, as he does every year, quietly mourning the passing of his wife one year ago. As we dance I whisper my story into Walt's ear.

On a night long ago, under the full harvest moon, I stood over the fresh earth piled on top of my father's bones and asked the moon for a favor. I requested she grant me my youth until I too return to the dirt. I pleaded for one night each October when I may become young again, able to dance as my name, the name my father chose for me, beckons me to. On that night, the Great Spirit wind rustled the leaves of the towering oak guarding my father's grave, and it was so. Now, one night a year, I return to my youth to dance as I did as a child.

Walt shuffled back from me and with a look of sadness said, "That's just old Ind'ian folklore, Hun. Stories. Nonsense. How come I've never seen you here before? We only have one Ind'ian here and she is in her nineties!" I sighed and returned my head to his shoulder.

After our dance he thanked me and said he had not danced like that since he was young. I smiled and said, *Walter, my story, my peoples' stories, are not folklore. The white man thinks our magic is in our pipes and chants. Our magic is in our spirits, renewed by the harvest moon, refreshed by our fathers' stories. My story is my heritage and it sits inside of me.*

Walt leaned in, and his yellow teeth parted to say, "Honor this old man by taking a walk with me under this magical moon." I agreed, and once outside we walked until the lights of the senior citizen center faded behind us. The moon directed our path into the pasture adjacent to the building. Once alone, Walt said he had a story of his own.

I watched as he smirked, and his face began to contort. His flesh began waning, rotting away from his bones; his teeth extended and sharpened, his eyes became hollow and dark, like a rabid animal, and settled on me. His ears curled forward and arching backwards he let out a shrieking howl. "I, my dear, am the great Windigo, and tonight under this harvest moon I will consume your flesh, and spirit, and youth, just as I have my wife, just as I have many women under this very moon, years before you, and as I will years after you are gone! For your death grants me life!"

I am of the Cherokee people, and in my blood, there is *magic*. Along with my flesh, Walter consumed something that cannot be contained: my asgina. It creeps up his throat and slides off his tongue, permitting me my galieliga ending, *making storytellers of us all*.

Molly Stewart
Sunscreen

What a pleasurable embrace
Warmth on my shoulders
My neck
My chest.
I feel you on my face;
I close my eyes and breathe you in.
I forget
Until you remind me
Oh how you remind me
That despite being millions of miles away
Your warmth is a slow burn
That will eventually leave me blistered
And scorned
And yet again
I thought I'd win
With SPF fifteen

Molly Stewart
Variants of Wait

I see it in the shadow
Of memories I've tried to forget
Or at the very least
Remember differently
Like the cross of your arms
And the pull of your posture
Away from me
I see it in the days since you've called
The sadness that never quite leaves
The rock atop granite
Heavier than the stone it rests on
Anchoring you to this Earth
Assuring me you're somehow still here.

Lisa Szwejbka
One Step Forward

Empty soulless faces fill a dank white room,
Staring blankly at the cream colored walls.

Left, Right

Left, Right

Left, Right

I hear the steps.

Teasing,

Taunting,

What I wouldn't give to walk free again

Shackles clanging loudly against my cold metal chair

Reminding.

Freedom, a concept lost on most

Peace, a concept lost on all

Resentment remains.

"Are you ready?" a poisonous voice whispers

"Am I ready?"

A loaded question

A panic-inducing question

Voice shaking

Nerves exposed

Yes

Left, Right

Left, Right

Left, Right

A door opens.

The blank faces look.

The judge enters.

Left, Right

Left, Right

Left, Right

The echo stopping in front of me

"Walk with me."

The invitation extended.

Waid Thompson
Our Fireworks

Fireworks or dynamite
Either one ripples
Ripples through the deep blues
Ripples through measure
Not a scale
Not a ruler
But a clock
Where identical is unheard of
No mirrors
No illusions
The match and the fuse
Nothing understands
The explosion
The ripple
The connection



Ana Catarina Vitorino

Ana Catwoman



Ana Catarina Vitorino

Gorgon

Richard Whitten

When All She Has Are Tears to Shed Soldiers Angels

Off to heaven an angel goes
With a handful of tears from far below

The angel opens the book of years
Every page is filled with tears

From her heart to her son
A mother's words come undone

No words need to be spoken
God knows a heart is broken

When all she has are tears to shed
The price of freedom there is said

At God's throne the angels know
At the foot of the Cross long ago
A mother wept, words would not flow

At the foot of the Cross are a mother's fears.
When words won't come there are only tears

There long ago, a mother could not speak
There long ago, tears were prayers at Jesus' feet.

Sometimes there are no words for angels to carry
There are only tears for them to ferry

There at the throne above the angels go
With a book full of tears from far below

The angel opens the book of years
Every page is filled with tears

No words need to be spoken
God knows a mother's heart is broken

With love and mercy from Heaven's street
Angels are sent to guide her soldier son's feet

Rachel Williams
Silent Moments

It was the silence I remember most. Not the screaming matches, slammed doors, pillows wet with tears. But the quiet we settled into when we were done fighting. The silence that said what neither of us could: *I give up.*

Fighting means we're still trying to fix the problems pulling us apart. But when all the insults have been hurled, when every threat has been made, and when every exasperated gesture has gone without comment, the only thing left to do is sit in the unbearable hush of a relationship giving in to the end. You're both just waiting to see who officially ends it first.

That last night, I'd made a mistake. I'd sighed too loud. He noticed. "What are we doing? We haven't been happy, not for a long time. What are we waiting for?"

"I don't know." I really didn't. I'd tried to figure out a way to salvage what we'd had but to no avail. "Do you remember the moment you knew you were in love with me?"

He put his head in his hands and shook out a no. "Must we do this now? Do we have to drag this out?"

"Please."

A heavy sigh left his lips as he sat on the kitchen stool. While he thought, I settled in across from him, holding my mug of hot tea tighter than usual. I remember the steam rising up, wondering if our flimsy ties together would dissipate as easily. Finally, he spoke. "It was the first time we went to the farmer's market. You were wearing that ridiculous straw hat, during your hat phase." He chuckled, and I realized that I couldn't place the last time I'd heard the sound. "I was looking at some berries while you were at the flower cart. You looked over at me and peeked through those giant sunflowers. You looked so happy. I wanted to see that smile every day."

I looked down at my hands. "Wanted." My voice sounded so empty. My mind was full of the number of times he'd bought me one of those giant sunflowers—bad days, celebrations, just because. As it fogged around us again, we sat in the familiar silence until he asked me the same question. I knew without hesitation. "It was just after that actually. You came over to me at the flower cart. You picked

up a smaller sunflower and tucked it into my hair. Then you smiled down at me before placing the softest, sweetest kiss on my lips. I imagined a lifetime of kisses like that."

He nodded slightly. "Imagined."

Silence once more. And again, he broke it.

"I'll be out next weekend. You always loved this apartment more than I did anyways." With those parting words, he picked up his key and walked right past the stack of bridal magazines and picture of us from two Christmases ago. Then he was gone. And I was left with a new kind of silence and a worthless ring.

Rachel Williams

What I Didn't Know, Found Out, and Know Now

When we were together, I didn't know what "manipulation" meant outside of a vocabulary test. I didn't know that it was you letting friends tell me of girls flirting because that would send me into a jealous spiral faster than if you laughed it off while kissing my neck. I didn't know that you played me like violin strings, taut and shaking while you enjoyed the melody. I didn't know that "love" was just a word you used to describe the sensation of watching me cling to a future that would only end in destruction. I didn't know that you had no plans to stay, only to watch with a smile as I fell apart, with no clue how to introduce myself without your name too.

I found out how it feels to not know who you are. I watched as my grades fell in clumps around the bed I couldn't crawl out of. I found out how easily weight finds a home when you're not there to pick it out and shove it down my throat. I found out how to be in love with myself, with life, with art. I grew flowers in land you called infertile. I wrapped myself in scarves of reminders that I am not someone else's opinion of me. I smiled more at the sky than I ever did after kissing you. I found out that "alone" and "lonely" are not synonyms. I found out that threading a needle through wounds was better than you watching me unravel.

Now, I know a man who kisses the seams of skin I have stitched back together and tells me that he will never tear me apart. I know how it feels to be touched with hands that care more about making me feel loved than pointing out every flaw. I know how to laugh as he says he doesn't deserve me because there has never been a sentence so absurd. I know how it feels to be called "sunlight" and actually feel the part. I know what it is to be a partner, not a plaything. I know where I belong because home is not always a place, but a person. When I look at him, I see a future that will never end in ripped petals and torn flesh.

I know now that you are an empty shell of a boy trying to heal the bruises his father left by gluing them to my body. I know now that you have been left as shattered and broken by a girl who taught you how it felt to be a victim of a sick game. I know now that you broke my wings so I couldn't fly away first.

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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 twenty-two years. Since founding the journal with students Jimmy Hood and Cris Edwards in 1995, they have read literally thousands of submission and worked with student editors from a variety of majors.

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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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