

cul-de-sac

SWEET vol. 16

Literary and Arts Magazine



We cordially invite you to peruse our

cul-de-sac **SWEET 16**



We hope you enjoy our curated selection of
art, photography, poetry, creative writing,
and music from our sweet sixteen edition.

RSVP TODAY

Be there or be square!

A pink envelope with a white circular sticker on the front. The sticker features the letters 'c ds' in a bold, pink, lowercase font, with small pink stars scattered around the text.

c ds

Editor's Note

"People forget that when you're 16, you're probably more serious than you'll ever be again. You think seriously about the big questions."—John Hughes

Dear Readers and Esteemed Party Guests,

There is exactly one person in the world who remembers being sixteen fondly: John Hughes. And despite the wonderful nostalgia of his films, I must inform you of an unfortunate fact: he totally lied to you. 100%. How do I know this? Think back to being sixteen: You're awkward. There are things on your face that weren't there yesterday and will take days to fade away or weeks if you pick at them. Plus, you've got one foot in the door of adulthood and one foot still in childhood. And high school? Forget about it. Still, it *is* a necessary stepping stone in life (though, a romanticized one). And honestly, I would much rather be grateful for having that period of awkwardness rather than skipping straight from middle school—ignore my shudder—right into adulthood.

Being an artist is a lot like being sixteen. We've *all* been through the awkward phase of our work, no matter what it looks like. Some of us have some variation of an embarrassingly "deep" poem buried within our hard drives, others cringe when they remember the clichés they used, and god forbid any of us recall how hard we were trying to be cute or edgy or internet-famous. At the crux of it all, though, that awkward phase is just as necessary as being sixteen. Sure, it's painful in the moment, and barely anyone ever enjoys looking back on that time period then unless they're a glutton for punishment, but we desperately needed that time to figure things out, to take risks, to ask the big, scary, important questions. Not all of us had a *Breakfast Club* or *Ferris Bueller* moment or got the saccharine *Sixteen Candles* ending, but I'd argue that something even more incredible happened: we grew.

It goes without saying that our magazine showcases some exemplary work across all genres of art, but none of it would be possible without that chapter of our lives. None of us were born this talented after all*. As you read and admire each piece, I want you to think back on your sixteen-year-old self and thank them. It might have been rough, and it might have been ugly, but they got us to where we are today. And I, for one, think that deserves a little bit of love. Or at the very least, a slice of cake.

Sending all the love to you and your sixteen-year-old self,

Allison Alben

cul-de-sac, Editor-in-Chief

*Except for you, Bean Man. You know who you are.

Acknowledgments

Here we are. Three years after English 122 (and the world) went into an unexpected lockdown, we are sitting side-by-side in a physical classroom, creating another volume for you to enjoy. My students brainstormed, marketed, designed, discussed—they looked each other in the eye; they compromised and shared vulnerabilities. We all shared our joy, and now, after 16 weeks, we are pleased to present you with sweet volume 16. I am indebted to these students for their contributions, perseverance, and personal investment. All of them will be leaving COC soon to start a new chapter in their lives, and I can't help but feel lucky to have been a ripple in their journeys. The words *thank you* don't do this feeling justice.

A heartfelt *thank you* also goes out to:

- Chancellor Dr. Dianne G. Van Hook for awarding us the Chancellor's Mini Grant and for her advocacy over the past 16 years.
- Andy McCutcheon, Dean of Humanities, for dedicating an entire wall (and more soon!) in his office to display the framed covers of our magazines. While this is a literal wall, it is also a metaphor for his unwavering sponsorship and spirit. We are so lucky to have you.
- Dr. Jennifer Smolos Steele, Dean of VAPA, and the School of Visual and Performing Arts for helping us pay the bills. We are so thankful for your sponsorship.
- The Associated Student Government for awarding us the ASG Grant year after year. We could not do it without you.
- Smart and Final, Martha Alm, Christine Tidwell, and Laura Nelson for their generous donations.
- All of the professors and college staff who encouraged their students to submit to our magazine, but especially to the literature, creative writing, photo, and art professors for their assistance.
- The Public Information Office for helping us get the word out and creating our flipbook. It takes a village!
- My go-to people for always asking, "How can I help?"
- The hundreds of students who were brave enough to submit their work.

We sincerely thank you,
Dr. Alene Terzian-Zeitounian

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A Room

Faith Alm-Clark

*Based on the photo of 70 year old Syrian man
Mohammed Mohiedin Anis in his bombed-out bedroom*

A room shudders
on broken beams
and gaping windows.
A furnace is a room's lung
the way a window is a wall's mouth,
breathing white-hot air
onto dusty sheets.
A record player
is a room's thoughts
the way a bomb is a man's heart,
cradled in a shell
of bone colored walls, wheezing
old tunes, pretty as new wallpaper.
A bomb is a man's heart
the way a bed is a room's stomach,
eating away at sleep
until there is nothing left
but dust.

On the Uterus

Ren Canfield

*On Friday, June 24, 2022, the US Supreme Court
overturned Roe v. Wade*

I tried to write wildflowers,
but the petals turned to sand
in my stomach. Hard lumps
like cat litter when I heard the news,
a sledgehammer. I tried to write
the world safer, but they insisted
our bodies were to blame.
I tried to write the word

clitoris,
but they don't know anything
about that. I tried to write time back,
but that would be futile, so I wrote myself
teeth instead. Dark, yawning
mouth

full of teeth
like an angler fish. I tried
to write the world free,
but they un-wrote the laws,
so I wrote myself red instead.
Red with blood and bits
of uterine lining. The only paint
I can use that will capture it all.
Sometimes I wish

I were a sharp rock, a quartz
crystal, but they want
to paint me a sweetheart.
Sweet as roses, red as lipstick,

smiling
with all the threatening
thorns cut off.

Poppies

Veronika Vegso



But Aren't All Asians the Same?

Iman Karimah Avila

*This poem adapts lines from the 2018 film,
Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*

slowly she slinks
into view, the serpentine
companion of dark
lords in wizarding worlds.

*The Naga are snake-
like mythical creatures
of Indonesian mythology,
JK Rowling tweets, Indonesia
comprises a few hundred ethnic
groups including Javanese,
Chinese and Betawi. Have a lovely day 🐍.*

ah, so that's why Nagini is Korean.

claudia kim bends, winds, contorts
in on herself—maybe she'll origami
into an Indonesian. the shadow
of Long Duk Dong, a character,
as Asian as a smudge
of mustard on a white sleeve, slithers
across the screen.

what would happen if Nagini were to shed
her skin? would her delicate pearly
features give way
to my Javanese grandmother's
broad nose and gula melaka complexion?

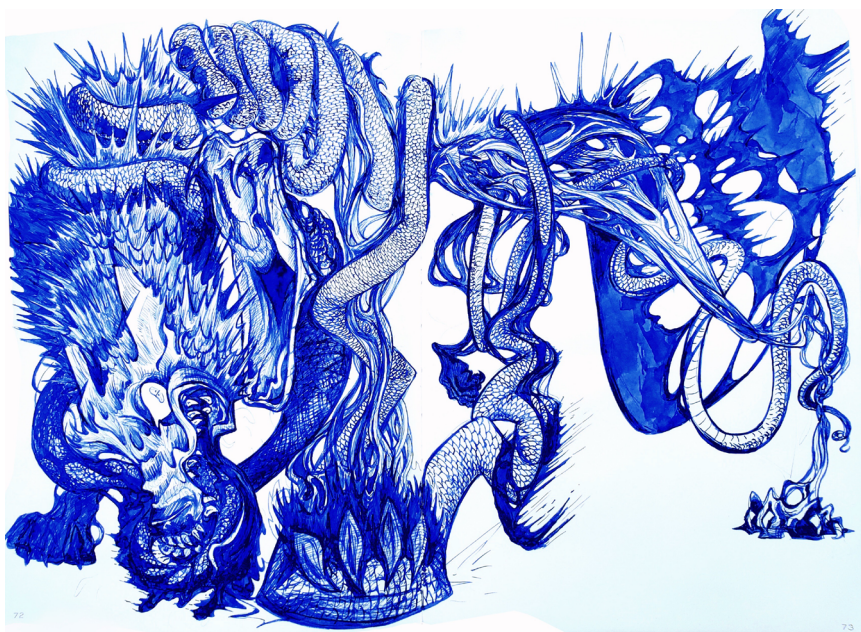
but what am I so upset about? *look
at claudia kim. so beautiful. so desirable.*
there's no way to tell if Nagini agrees;
she's surrendered to CGI silence.

but even as a human she did not speak,
her tongue constricted

by a snarl of snakes.

No Snakeing

Maya Bogoniewski



Omphalotus Olivascens Mushrooms

Anh-Thi Ta



Orphan of the Universe

Javier Serrano

The balding man rubbed the bridge of his nose while his younger colleague leaned in towards the glass. “Nothing? Again?” his junior asked. “Please. Have some patience. These things take time,” was his response.

On the other side of the glass, directly in the center of the six-sided metal laboratory, sat a mushroom. The pitch black fungus lay unmoving, even as the metal claw above it slowly removed its syringe from the stem. The steel syringe removed itself as steam rose all around it, a result of the defensive acid that had begun pouring out of indiscriminate locations atop the mushroom. “I’m missing my family just to look at a damn fungus,” the elder scientist griped. “A never-before-seen fungus, specifically,” said the younger man. “You had some enthusiasm at first, remember that?”

He also remembered the agony described from the first person to discover the fungus. It was a simple survey of snow foxes when the zoologist noticed one growling mercilessly at the black spore in the center of a small valley. In a moment of pure ignorance and curiosity, the zoologist bent down to investigate and forever lost the use of three of his fingers. “I’ve never seen any animal become so hostile against a *plant*,” both men had read from the transcript of his official statement. “I now know why, but...that thing’s not part of any nature I know.”

The elder began entering data into the spreadsheet in front of him. “I remember,” he said, “I just think you’re being too enthusiastic. This thing is way too dangerous, too destructive.”

“So what if it has a defense mechanism? We’re breaking new ground here, man!” said the youth.

The old man pointed his pen to the glass as it began to lower. “That acid is probably the most corrosive thing we’ve ever seen come out of the natural world, and it practically toxifies every inch of soil around it. It’s a damn parasite!”

“So you wanna kill it, or what?” the youth said.

The elder stood up. “I want to preserve nature. Especially here. If I have to take it out of circulation to preserve this ecosystem, I will.” He leaned over the glass and began to waft the steam towards both men. While the youth leaned back, the elder nearly vomited from the stench. He thought he had gotten used to it. He recorded the data.

“Ok, look. Tell me you don’t think that isn’t the tiniest bit radical?” the youth asked. “We don’t even know the half of how this

works on a day-to-day basis. Eliminating any factors from an ecosystem probably needs more thought.”

The elder sighed. “I’m well aware of the repercussions, but we have more than this data on our hands. We have a responsibility to stop it when it interferes with natural order.”

“Even when this *is* the natural order?” the youth said.

“Yes. Even if this is natural. But, like you said, more thought,” the elder replied. “It just needs to be an option if the time comes. It’ll probably be for the greater good.”

The youth put up his hands in defeat. “Alright, man.”

It had been like this for weeks. An ongoing battle between man and man, man and mushroom, harmony and discord, check marks and lack thereof, a constant stream of data with seemingly no end in sight. Or purpose. While the experimentation and examination of the subject’s interactivity with all sorts of elements and compounds was necessary for public records and justification of funding, there was no secret about the subject itself. It simply was a mushroom that spouted a horrifically acidic substance that made it nearly impossible to interact with. And while trial and error with different metals allowed for days on end of interactivity, there were hardly any results to speak of. Not only was this small fungus no longer in its original ecosystem, it was also the only one they could find.

Both men had their reservations about this fact. The elder saw it as a chance to eradicate and exterminate, to protect the world. The youth saw it as a chance to cultivate and develop, to protect the world. Yet the data they had collected could neither justify nor refute either man’s ideal. It just was. And it would have stayed this way, if they had not taken it from where it belonged. In their pride they believed they were doing the right thing. And in their pride, they destroyed the world.

“What if we make it a weapon?”

The few minutes of silence were broken by the younger man, peering thoughtfully into the container.

“What?” The elder looked up from the screen to stare, bewildered.

“Think about it, we can-”

“What in the hell are you talking about?” He stood to face him. “You see this thing screwing up the ecosystem, it nearly takes a man’s hand off, and what, you think we need more of that?”

He didn’t back down. “I think we have a lot of opportunities here, real opportunities.”

“To do what? Kill people? Melt them? Is that what you want?”

“No, to prevent that kind of shit from happening.” He took in a breath as his senior glared him down; his vision was already being dissected, discredited, “Look, you’ve seen what’s been going on overseas, haven’t you? I don’t remember the last time the world has been this scary, and...we’re not taking enough precautions.”

“So you want to give them more reasons to point their guns at our new guns. Genius.”

“Listen to me! It’s not about getting them pissed at us, it’s about making them afraid of us. It took two nukes to end World War II, and now that threat isn’t enough to stop these-”

“Are you insane? We’re not going to war with anyone. There isn’t a damn reason to. For *anyone* involved. You’re just looking past the consequences to justify your means.”

“And you’re looking past reality. We didn’t want any of the wars we’ve been in. We were forced. A weapon like this could keep us out of it, keep us safe.”

“Chemical warfare is crazy. Nobody is gonna buy your acid bomb, even if you put it on a black market.”

“When someone wants those wars to end, you’ll see what lengths they’ll go to. You’ll see what they’ve had in store.”

The elder looked at the young man for just a moment. He saw an equal amount of fear and conviction in his junior’s wide eyes. They didn’t blink. They wouldn’t, couldn’t back down. “You’re insane. And this is done. We’ll finish tomorrow. You keep that kinda talk up, I’ll get you off this station so fast you’ll freeze to death before you know what hit you.”

The elder believed that was the case, until he later found his colleague looking over the list of metals the acid could be contained in. For bullets, bombs, who knew. But he knew then how serious this was. So the elder steeled his convictions and decided to destroy the source of his associate’s compulsions.

He was well aware he would not have access to any of the base’s ammunition. He wouldn’t get into the gun locker without making a scene. So instead he settled for a small blowtorch, a dime-a-dozen inside the engineer’s vast supply closet.

A few days later, after a grueling shift devoid of any small talk, the young man left his senior to do his data collecting. After a few minutes, the balding man who missed his family put the torch in front of the fungus, and lit it.

In his last moment of lucidity, right before he died of shock, the old man considered cutting his arm off to stay alive. He would cut off a

limb to keep the entirety alive. He would make a sacrifice for the greater good. He did not. The acidic sludge would quickly cover his entire body, pressed on by the burns from his weapon. It would surround and snuff out the flame, melting its metal skeleton and spewing out the corpse. The old man fell backwards, plucking the mushroom from the small patch of soil and bringing it to the large pile of fluid eating away at everything. He would not see his junior running into the laboratory, brought on by his final screams of pain. He would not see the look of horror on his face as he realized what belonged underneath the steaming heap of acid. They were only human. Two men. One, so content in ignorance, unwilling to comprehend understanding. And another, blinded by his pride, philosophy, and his fear. And they would destroy the world. How could they?

They had always been conscious, but as the acid ate away at more and more of the mammal underneath them, the brand new and overwhelming stimuli almost tore their mind apart. Before, they had only known the shock of electricity running through them. But so much of what they had eaten had been assimilated, so many parts discovered to have a purpose. They didn't know what they were doing then, adapting on the fly through the cells of another organism. But they came to see, to hear, to smell, to taste, and to feel. They stood up, relaying information to comprehend the stars dotted across the ceiling. They smelled the decaying of flesh that had only been natural to them. They felt the ground give way at their feet. It tasted horrible. Yet they were the perfect union of elements, a miracle between chemicals, and a marriage across kingdoms. They were beautiful.

And they were hideous. They turned to see another mammal staring at them, their confusion bound with their fear. And they understood. They knew it to be fear. Remnants from another life, perhaps? They could not know. But they saw it on his face, and they felt it too. At their first, indiscriminate movement, the mammal let out a scream that burned their newfound senses like nothing had before. So many stimuli. They felt their liquid shield expand, leaping across to take out the threat, breaking it down for their feast. They didn't know how to stop it. They were already full, no need for another meal. They knew it was afraid, and they couldn't control it from lashing out to eat away at everything it touched. It was unnecessary.

They took control, and pulled themselves away from the half-melted steaming corpse on the ground. They felt sick from it. More screams came from the glass corridor connecting to the room. Paperwork hit the

floor as the mammal ran away. They felt the panic, and it reflected into themselves. They were afraid, and so were they. They chose flight. They flung themselves into the wall opposite the woman's screams, and they pushed. It only took a moment for the acid to disintegrate the layers of aluminum and wood, leaving them a mess in the middle of another laboratory, shaking on semi-solid hands and knees. More noise. They looked up to see the mammals scrambling to escape the room, throwing metal and plastic ordnance in a mindless, haphazard manner. Most missed or slid right off of their body. They kept their shield close. There was so much confusion, but they didn't want to hurt anyone else. They never would have known such malice had the woman who escaped not gone directly to the man responsible for the gun locker, and convinced him to arm himself to eliminate a so-called monster that had emerged inside the base. The large and gruff man turned into the room to see a boiling pile of sludge encroaching on defenseless scientists praying for their lives. He did not even have to estimate center mass as he aimed, and began firing the hunting rifle which before that point had only ever been used to stomp out the endless curiosity of polar bears and their cubs.

Death. The end of life, or bodily function in an organism. By the time the third bullet had hit its mark and melted into a lump of molten metal on their backside, they immediately understood the concept. They wanted them dead. They knew it to be an attack, and could not fathom it to be an act of defense, when they turned to see the mammal and detected the purity of rage covering his face as he continued to fire. They understood then that they were fighting. That they were the enemy, the target, the unknown, the foreign, the alien. That they were unforgivable. They turned to eat away at the metal wall and leapt out into the freezing arctic winds. They ran as fast as their newborn legs would take them, even as gunshots rang out for what seemed to be hours on end.

After the gunshots stopped and they were left alone, they came to a recognition. Their shield had been dwindling. They felt it getting skinnier, slowing down, and cooling from the cold that surrounded them. Then they began to fall. Impact after impact, they were unaware of any pain as they rolled down the hill and only knew of the change in location and taste. Stone, stone, stone, grass. They looked up to find themselves in the middle of a small valley, and felt the ground give way as they stood, consuming what little life they had landed on. They were still so full. They didn't want to eat anything, not little patches of grass, and not terrified little mammals that scrambled to flee in their presence. They didn't want anything at all. And yet they had seen so much, with so many fragments inside them bringing meanings to that barrage of endless stimulus. Their

shield was still dwindling. They had seen fear and hatred. They laid down on the ground. Had they done something wrong? They saw rage. Was it their fault? They closed their eyes.

They waited.

And they waited.

And they waited.

They waited to die.

And when death did not come, the monster that took fathers from their children, sons from their mothers, sons from their fathers, husbands from their wives, and brothers from brothers began to weep. They did not know that they were chemical perfection, that nothing natural in the world would pierce their shield and end them. They did not know that the memories of a mammal who wanted nothing but to save lives would haunt them forever. They did not know that they were nothing but a small organism found by humans in the center of a small valley. They did not know what they were. They did not know what they did wrong. And they would destroy the world.

How could they?

1%

Ben Stanton

we live in an age
where power
equates to digits
in one's bank account

far gone are days where everyone
had equal opportunity in this world;
we are divided:
those who have every whim attended to
and those who need to scrape and salvage
for their next meal

directionless youth
traded sticks of gum for nickels,
proclaimed that one day
he would be
the richest man
in the world
now scrubs toilets,
inhales noxious fumes
to make ends meet for his wife and child

anecdotes repeated by every motivational speaker
'college dropouts, in garages,
can invent the next
best thing since sliced bread'
I think to myself, why lack in education?
in doing so, they miss experiences where
history professors sing ballads
of royalty beheaded
before the public,
the liberated crowds roaring en masse

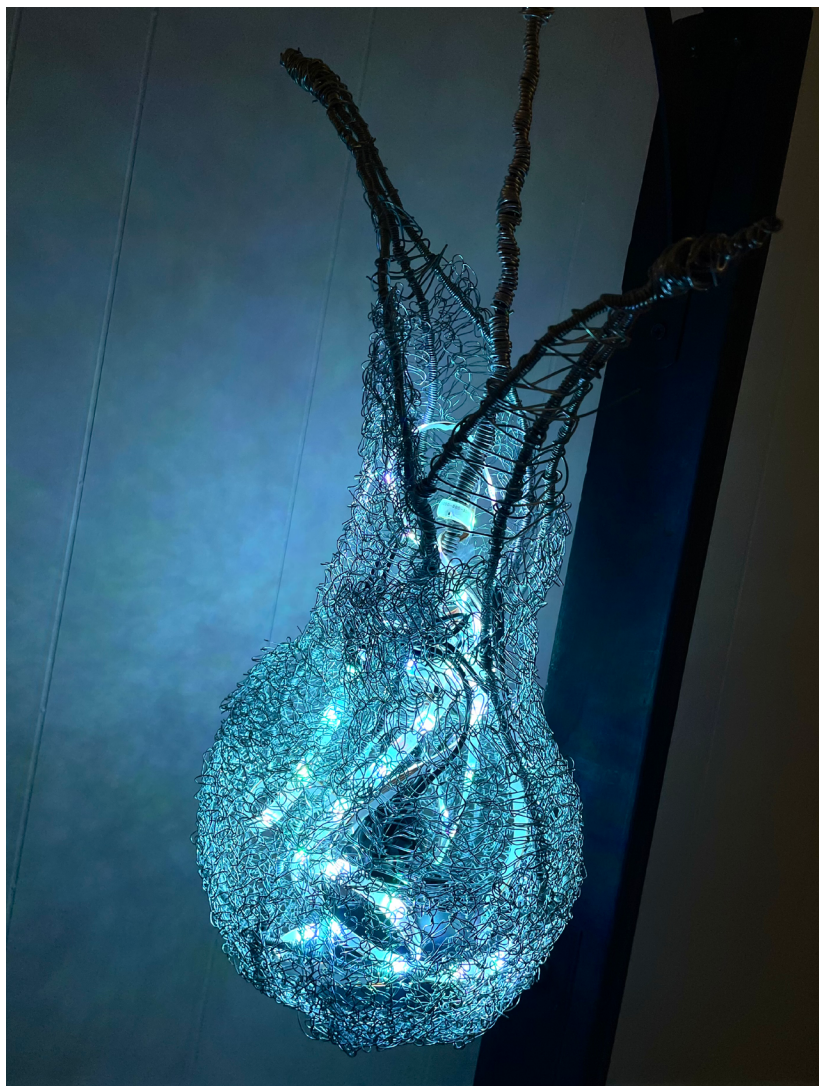
history, doomed to repeat itself, I fear
in our money-hungry society,
fortune favors those
who are more concerned with finding
new and innovative ways
to darken our skies with smog

our modern aristocrats
move from scheme to scheme
forming a new vision of the Internet
built entirely of scams,
seeking to acquire and strip
an entire platform of its voice,
wishing to conquer the stars

should their actions bear fruits
of destruction
upon our world,
would they understand
whatever reaped
shall be sown?
will they understand
once they are strung
to a stake,
staring down
a blazing torch?

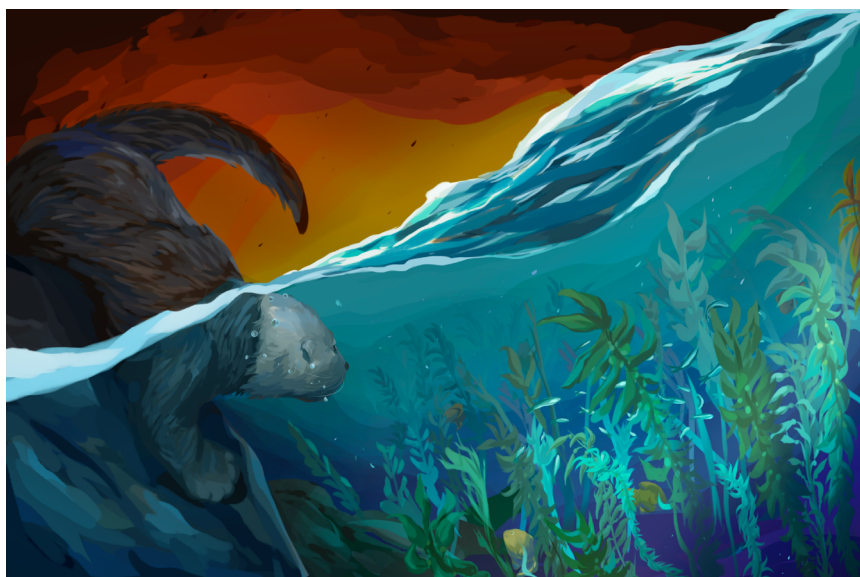
Below the Surface

M.M. Koontz



Escapism

Anh-Thi Ta



Birthday Bunny

Christina Manzanares



Makcik

Iman Karimah Avila



The Poet with Acik (short for Makcik).

you are a spice
cabinet, warm
and fragrant,

in velvet
arms you hold
me, star anise and cloves
against santan kelapa.

in Malay you are *makcik*
in English a void

where your name
should be.

I still debate
if it was better
to have not said
goodbye.

to remember only
the fleece of your skin
upon my baby flesh,

not the gangrene
that devoured
you.

for you are Malaysian thunderstorms:

the cymbal
clash of your exhalation
ripples through the atmosphere,

you spread across the sky,
knotted roots
of lightning unfurling—

it sears
my retinas
to look at you.

Making Mansions Out of Sand Dunes

Alexa Keyne

I will never forget how free I used to feel at the beach. Now that I'm older, the appeal has faded, replaced with reality. My car will go from being a relatively stable mess to the result of a sandstorm; the consistent feeling of sand creeping into every crevice and hiding until I eventually find it two weeks later; forcing sunscreen onto my skin, hoping the white cast will go away (it won't); and most horribly, how that bathing suit will look once it is off the model and on me. I sound rather pessimistic, but the way I was raised taught me that preparing for the worst is the only way to be prepared. Regardless, summers at the beach while I was a kiddo was akin to seeing a breathtaking landmark for the first time—amazing.

Seven-year-old me hopped in the car with obnoxiously colored shovels and a matching bathing suit, ready to take on this watery world. While my parents fussed over which route would have the least amount of traffic, I sat jittery in the backseat, daydreaming of dolphins and the oh-so-overpriced ice cream stand that had a piña colada smoothie just for me (non-alcoholic, of course). My young eyes only *saw* the amazing things this land had to offer—salty water fresh for the splashing, immediate and infinite possibilities of sand castles everywhere, fishing crabs out of the sand and watching them dig back under before the waves crash onto shore; and most excitedly, coming up after a big wave only to be knocked over the head by an even larger, more unexpected one. Gone were the worries of school projects, collecting the most box tops, and beating the multiplication test in under a minute; in was the immediate rush of adrenaline of racing to the shore, the feeling of pure success that my sandcastle was higher than anyone else's, and the temporary hearing loss that came with my ear getting bogged down with water.

In retrospect, the lens through which I saw the beach was very different than those around me. Back then when the welcome sign came into view, I read "Zoom Zoom Beach." It was, in fact, not "Zoom Zoom", but rather Zuma. Litter was most definitely everywhere, but to me a Doritos bag was nothing but a statement flag to my masterpiece of a sand mansion that would magically reconstruct into an actual house I could live in once I was older, and the adults being obnoxiously drunk and

loud with their music were really just fun strangers that were incredibly interesting to watch. Now, the litter meets my feet with each step in the sand, and the annoying adults have become downright deplorable. The beach has both prepared and challenged me as I've grown, and while I have always known to be prepared for everything, the beach has things we cannot easily plan for. To me, that is the true beauty of the ocean.

While the beach is a nightmare for some (and I mean anyone similar to me), it is a playground for everyone, where kids can be kids and adults can decide if volleyball or boogie boarding is the better option for the day. While my love-hate relationship with the beach will stay, so will the freedom that it gave me when I was fresh out of 4th grade, building my future mansion out of the sand.

Girl at the Station

Faith Alm-Clark

Based on the famous train scene from the Studio Ghibli film, Spirited Away.

This moment shivers
like the schools of fish that flutter between
train tracks, bubbling below waves.

Above them, a silent stampede of shoes.
Shadows flow like spilled ink
up wooden stairs.

Turn around, I am watching you
board the train.

The sea stains the station—
will it be swallowed
before night falls?

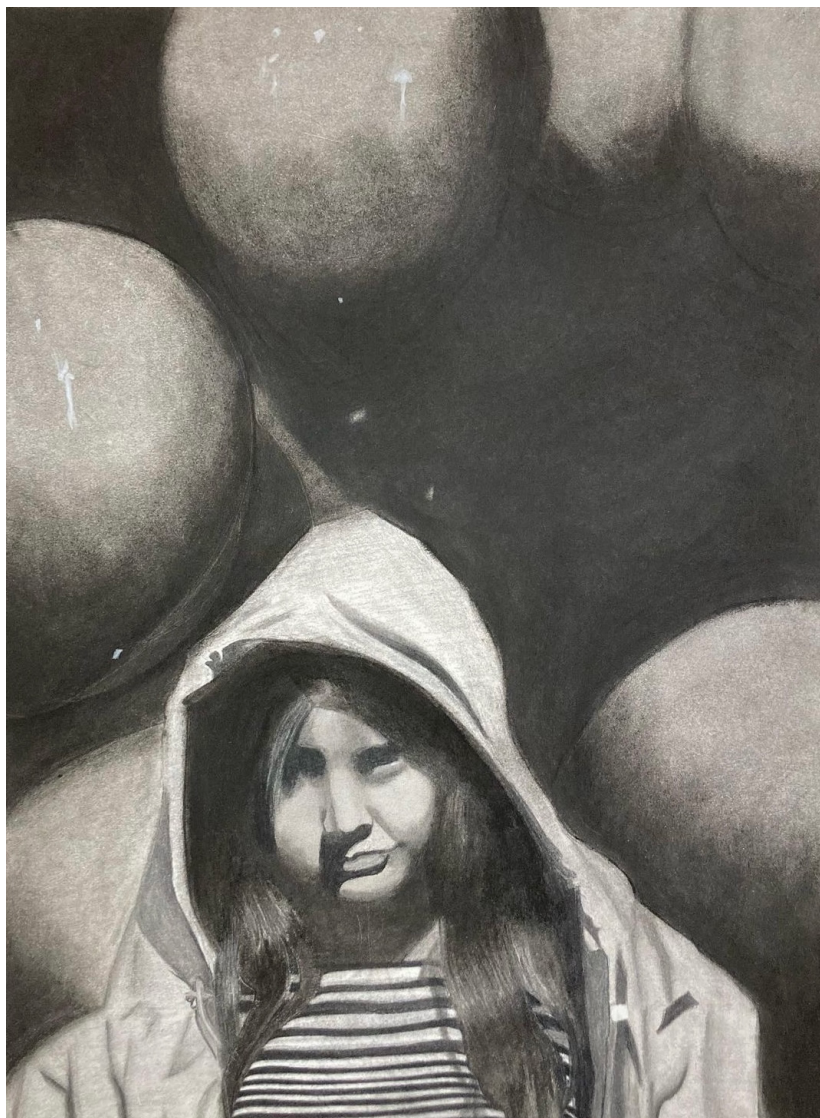
A passenger checks his watch.
There is no time
to turn around. I am watching

you board the train
the way an empty suitcase
is placed overhead.

This moment shivers,
and I am still where you left me.

Self Portrait

Gianna Gonzalez



Dear America,

Ren Canfield

You are a Lovecraftian creature,
many-limbed,
lurking beneath the surface
of cities. A patchwork
of cultures stitched
like Frankenstein's
Creature
but perhaps with less design.
You are glittering
towers and people
packed close
with miles and miles
of space between.
Dear America, you have seen
so much, ancient
eyes and yet
like a fawn, you are still
finding your legs.
What destruction.

Chicana Identity

Renee Gomez-Serna

I speak two languages:
English and Spanish.

My thoughts are primarily English with hints of Spanish.
My anger is primarily Spanish with bouts of English.

Spanglish is the result of growing up
with both and losing touch
with my mother
tongue.

My identity is tied to my abuela,
my mother, and my sister.
Each become more American y menos Mexicana.

Nuestra cultura es todo.

I learned to dance folklórico,
braided my hair into a tight bun,
twirled my skirt in captivating circles,
and donned the colorful dress with pride.

Green for hope.
White for purity.
Red for the blood of my people
who died for our independence.

En México, soy bailador.
In America, I am a clown
dancing for entertainment.

Return to your country, they bark.
But I'm already here.

Old Partners

Amylee Baldwin



Monochromatic

Christina Manzanares



Purple Umbrella

David Brown



Untitled

Grace Avelino



Sunset at COC #2

Neal Lightfeldt



Route 23

Margaret D'Isa-Hogan

When you board bus 23,
There are rules on which we've all agreed.

Pay your fare with cash or card,
Because counting coins is slow and hard.

Please don't talk on speaker phone,
And tearful phone calls please postpone.

Don't play out loud top 20 hits,
Just hold onto the rails or sit.

Save some seats for the pregnant or old,
And cover your mouth if you have a cold.

Pay attention to the passing shops,
Don't curse when you see you've missed
your stop.

And when a lady sits alone,
Enwrapped in light and her headphones,

Don't take the empty seat beside her.
Don't wave and greet her, "howdy, rider!"

Don't get her attention with a cough,
Then ask her where she's "gettin' off."

When she's untethered in the clouds,
Don't bring her back to here and now.

Don't wonder where she's running from,
Or if her work is ever done,

Of if she's reaching for someone,
Or if those headphones are even plugged.

When you ride route 23,
You let the other riders be.

On these rules we all agree,
We ride alone and silently.

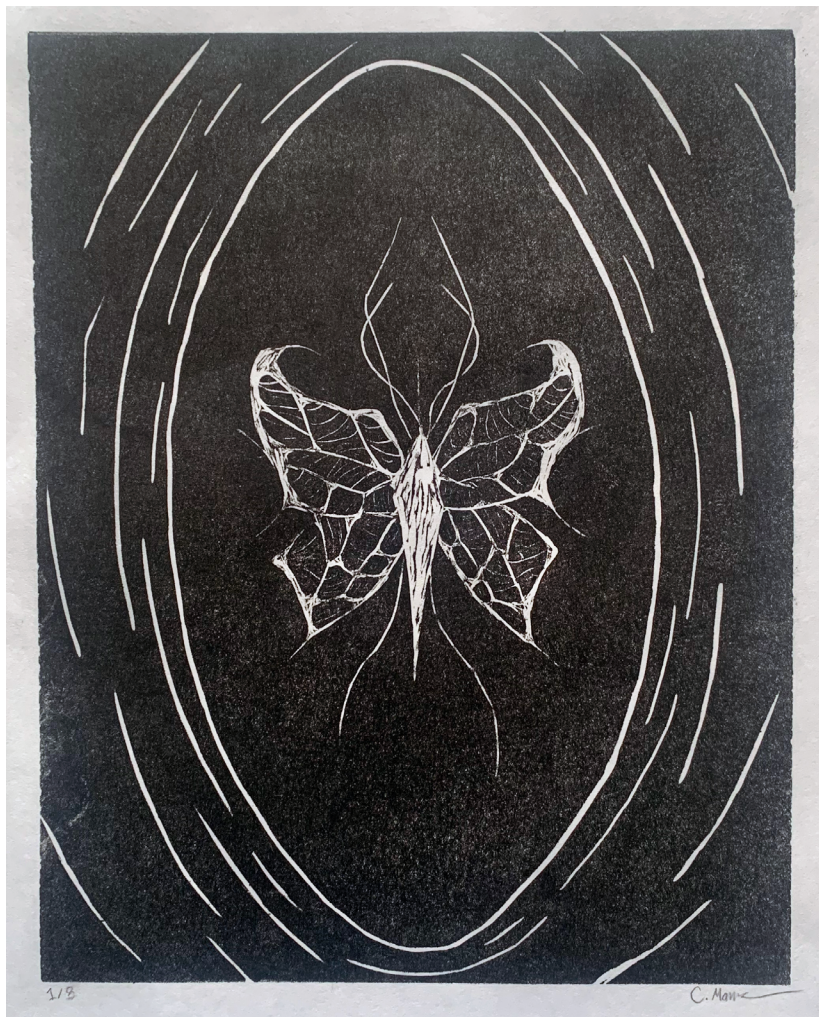
A Tree on Simonds Street

Daniella Belen Guzman



Butterfly Relief Print

Christina Manzanares



List of Memories

Raquel Calles

1. My baby sister's impromptu fashion show, held in the aisle at the Old Navy in the mall.
2. My aunt's aroma of cinnamon coffee guides us through tiring days.
3. My brother's lopsided smile urges me to continue my breathless rant about work.
4. My siblings constant banter and smooth talk, knowing that their plan to bribe me into taking them out and getting them whatever they want, is working.
5. My sister's exaggerated laugh.
6. The early sweet morning smelly of Belgian waffles being doused in layers of Nutella.
7. My dad's silky jazz, is perfect nostalgia, taking me to that small, dusty apartment with the wooden grand piano as he filled the room with his harmonies.
8. Smoke filled kitchen as my mom prepares *pupusas*, my favorite dish to share with the girls.

Childhood Friend

Christina Manzanares



4-5-22

C. Manzan

Mother and Daughter

Allison Stubblefield

from her crooked fingers,
she molded with malice and care.

until the shape of a second born daughter took form,
and filled in the gaps of the mistakes with her weak plaster.

the clay of her skin matched her mother's,
freckled and ivory.

and her way of harnessing words as weapons,
mirrored the rhetoric of her mother.

and when her porcelain facade began to splinter,
her mother would chip pieces of her own self to fill in the cracks.

the daughter craved this tenderness
and continued to break herself apart in the mirror every night

just to feel the cool caress of her mother's fingers,
as she wedged another piece of herself into the daughter.

the decaying mother could not bear
to see a splintered daughter.

years later when the daughter exceeds her mother in stature,
she observes the mosaic of her surface.

pristine ivory has been replaced
with a patchwork of kaleidoscoping shades of beige and white.

the daughter, now a hollow shell
of what her mother has given her,

unsolicited judgment wedged between,
premature disappointment and hand-me-down aspirations.

she has become the spitting image of her mother
and the beacon of her sacrifices,

and there is nothing the mother resents more
than her own reflection.

Ode to Makeup

Raquel Calles

Bright sun pours into my bare eyes;
I think up my new disguise for the day:
should I wear pastel purple or blue mascara?

I can't help but enjoy my canvas-like face;
the brush in my hand makes me an artist, ready
to hide my boring exterior with color.

I begin to construct a version of myself
that transcends my room and walks into the world.
Praises and flattery make my glossy lips smile;
the glitter on my eyelids winks in delight.

Meanwhile, hiding behind it all is my true skin.
I can't afford to expose it, so each morning
the bag of hues and blush collide to
put a bit of glow in my life.

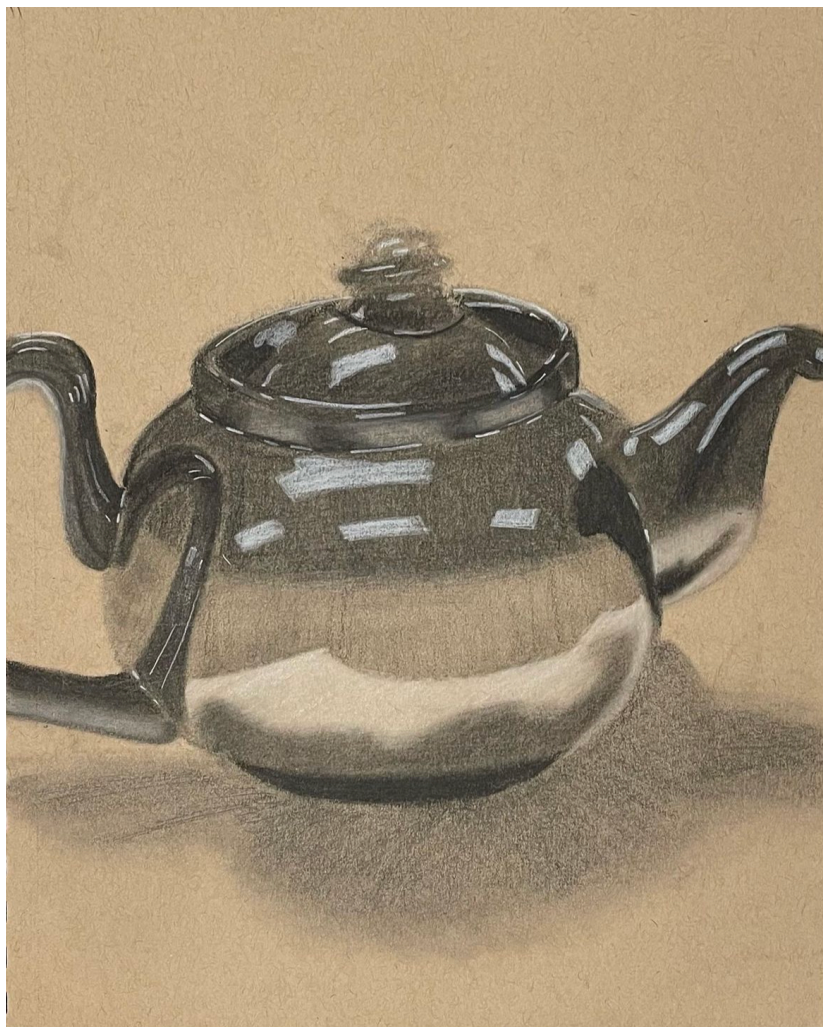
I'll Get Up When This Is Over

Stephanie Dillon



Teapot

Gianna Gonzalez



Ch 1

Amylee Baldwin



Chateau

Amylee Baldwin



Out on the Waters

Ta'Ray Carter

“Why isn’t life fair?”

“Where’s this coming from?”

“That’s the only thing Ayo was saying when Mom said he couldn’t come with us.”

“He’s my son alright.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“Well, that’s a pretty tricky thing to answer. My dad— your grandpa— believed that life wasn’t fair so the world could be perfectly balanced.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, think of Newton’s third law. Because something good happened to someone somewhere, something bad has to happen to someone else somewhere else at the same time.”

“I didn’t know there were so many laws about Fig Newtons.”

“And suddenly your grades all make sense.”

“So Ayo couldn’t go fishing with us because something good happened somewhere else.”

“That’s what your grandpa would’ve said.”

“Is that what you believe too?”

“I used to.”

“Why don’t you now?”

“Do you know where I met your mother? It was in this stupid calculus class I couldn’t drop. I got my dream job from an internship that caused many to leave the industry all together. Heck, I was even saved as a crippling alcoholic. I don’t think that the bad is caused by the good but rather He can use the bad to bring about good.”

“So which one is right?”

“What do you think?”

Grandmother's House

Allison Alben

After Lisel Mueller's, "Spell for a Traveler"

Inside the tall iron gate you'll find a house,
elegant,
formidable,
all sharp lines and brutal grace,
owned by the woman you call Grandmother.

Inside the door you'll find a long pale hallway,
pristine,
museum-worthy,
decorated with priceless art you're not mature
enough to admire
and walls you're not allowed to approach
lest you leave fingerprints.

Inside the sitting room you'll find an old wooden armoire,
charming,
captivating,
filled to the brim with trinkets and memories
she won't share
even when you ask her to.

Inside the pool you'll find a shimmering tile fish,
surprising,
delightful,
but you're not allowed to touch it
and you're not allowed to swim.

Inside the garden you'll find a secret fairy world,
 enchanting,
 extraordinary,
 everything you'd hoped your grandmother's
 house would be,
 and everything it never will be.

Inside your grandmother's house, you'll find a woman
 stately,
 refined,
 towering above you
 even though you've been taller than her
 for years.

Bruh

Diego Pimentel



Her Final Goodbye

Renee Gomez-Serna

Ama, ¿cuando tiene su cita?
Mom, when is your appointment?

A faint whisper hangs;
sliver of a woman
shrinks to her death.
Her days are disappearing.

Tempurpedic skin.
Limp and lifeless limbs.
Purple pools in her veins.
Crater cheeks.
Inflated feet.
Unsteady heartbeat
Wisps of hair thinner than her.

Her mother barely holding on
for every small squeeze
or whisper of her inner thoughts.
She begs,

Dios llevala como me la dio
God take her as you gave her to me
como un pollo mojado.
like a wet chicken.

Next Stop

Ben Stanton

(trigger warning: mild references to suicide/suicidal ideation)

It's hard to keep myself awake. Leaning forward, my eyes grow heavier, before I jolt myself up and shake it off. The subway station late at night was the last place I'd want to find myself passing out. I check my phone. 1:27am, July 17th. I should already be home, asleep in bed. But, work just kept piling and piling up on me. Even with help, all that paperwork still took forever to get through. This is such a crappy way to save up for school, but I need to do it. That can't stop me from hating every single shift I need to do; I seriously can't find myself behind a desk in the next five years.

The station is eerily quiet and lonely, strangely. I guess it's not necessarily impossible, but chances are you'd usually see a few people here even this late. However, all that accompany me are the distant echoes from the other trains, wailing further along the tracks and the cold, metal bench I plunk myself onto. Preserving my phone battery is easy, what with absolutely no reception down in these tunnels. However, it makes the wait even more excruciating. Thankfully, not before long, a familiar chime rings above my head.

"The train will be arriving shortly, please stay behind the yellow line and watch out for departing passengers. Thank you."

I stand up, dusting myself off before walking up to the line. When I was young, I took a step over the yellow line, but my mom tugged me back. She knelt down and sternly told me to never go over the line because it was nothing but danger. I nodded and, over the years, I would continue to follow that rule. But now, I look over the line, staring down at the tracks.

One leap is all it would take to be free. One leap over the line.

I hear the oncoming train, rattling and rocking into the station, knocking me me out of my stupor. I watch the windows as it comes to a stop. Empty, not a soul in sight. Goosebumps creep up my arms and back as if to tug me back, telling me not to climb aboard. As the set of doors recoil and open, I nervously step in and dive into a seat, checking again for any signs of life. With a screech of scraping metal, the doors close and the car slowly chugs into an acceleration.

"Next stop: 110th Street."

I stare out the window at the cold, cracked concrete walls and

watch as the dim lights flicker as the train zooms past them. I start to wonder to myself, questions I've been dreading to ask myself for so long now.

Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing what I want to do with my life? Or is this all for nothing? Am I stuck here forever? Bending over backwards for suits, who will never care about me, every night? Only to return to this subway and repeat it all over again the next day?

My eyes grow heavy despite my efforts to keep myself awake. I close my eyes for a good second before the train abruptly pumps the brakes and sends my back right into the seat. That's one way to wake up again.

"Fuck," I swear under my breath as I reach back to massage my spine.

The doors open as the intercom buzzes to life.

"110th Street."

Against all odds, another person finally steps in. Though, admittedly, my mind does waver between feeling relief or absolute fear at the development. I keep my eyes down, hoping they won't go out of their way to bother me, as I continue to rub my back.

"Are you okay?"

The sudden sentence catches me completely off-guard, just about sending me out of my skin, "Jesus!" I sigh, regaining my composure, "Yea, I'm fine, sorry," I mumble in response, looking up at the new passenger.

This guy doesn't seem much older than me; he's wearing a gray sweatshirt and baggy pants with a scruffy face and unkempt hair. I don't want to make assumptions about the kind of person he is, but there is definitely was some kindness and worry in his remark.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you, dude," he awkwardly trails off, "Mind if I grab a seat near you or you need some space?"

I wave it off, "You're good, don't worry about it. And, yea, it's alright if you wanna sit there."

He smiles and grabs the seat over from my right as the doors finally shut, and we start chugging along again.

"Next stop: 103rd Street."

The intercom crackles off again, and we're left with the deafening white noise.

The gray hoodie guy extends his hand across the seat next to me, "Issac, by the way."

Worried, I hold back for a second before taking his hand, "Sam, nice to meet you," I clear my throat, "Sorry, I'm not great with, like,

spontaneous conversation.”

“Oh, yea, you’re good. I don’t chit-chat myself very much. Just a... weird situation right now,” Issac replies.

“The whole ‘no other people anywhere on here’ thing?”

“Yea, that,” he laughs.

“I feel you. It’s really creepy,” I say, “Though, I dunno what’s creepier: no one in here or only shady people in here.”

“Am I one of these... ‘shady people’?” He wears a shit-eating grin proudly.

“You seemed like one at first, not gonna lie,” I chuckle.

“Harsh, dude,” he dramatically sighs, “and, here I was, thinking I’d be making a friend tonight.”

For a stranger, he is quite funny and likable.

We crawl to another stop, much softer than the last one.

“103rd Street.”

I peer out into the station, yet another ghost town with nothing but a discarded newspaper dancing on the breeze. However, I do find it oddly beautiful in a way: a still life vignette of a city abandoned by its people and left to breathe and live of its own accord. As the doors shut, I look around me once again, searching in vain for any other passengers.

“Next stop: 96th Street.”

Issac seems to be twiddling his thumbs, which is fair seeing as we can’t do much else.

“Strange how these platforms seem to be completely dead. That’s never the case,” I joke to hide my unease.

“Well,” he pauses, “People talk about the Witching Hour and how spooooooky it can be, right?” Issac wiggles his fingers comically.

I laugh, “The Witching Hour isn’t until 3, right? And it’s not even 2 yet, I think,” I say as I pull my phone out to check.

“Oh, true,” Issac replies, “Never been one for the paranormal myself. Haven’t seen a ghost or anything before.”

“I’m not usually, either. But-”

I find myself catching my breath, not realizing I had been holding it in. I can tell I’m starting to look panicked, since Issac is looking over at me worriedly.

“Have *you* ever seen a ghost before, Sam?”

I softly chuckle, “Well, my parents have said before that I was friends with ghosts in my youth. Pretty sure they were just imaginary friends.”

“Remember much about them?” He seems genuinely intrigued.

“Mhm... Not necessarily, but they told me that I knew everything about these people. Their names, the times they lived, how they died, which, in hindsight, does seem pretty morbid.”

“No kidding,” Issac laughs.

“I was a weird kid, though. I loved horror stuff a lot, and I still do,” I feel my face going red, no one’s really taken such an interest in me and my interests before.

“Oh yea? Did you wanna do stuff in horror media? Movies, books, what have you?”

“Definitely! And I still want to. I’d love to be a filmmaker and make my own movies, but I can’t really do that right now.”

It’s silent for a moment. Weirdly still, as I think about my situation.

“96th Street.”

I hadn’t realized we came to another stop until the robotic voice breaks me out of my trance.

“Why’s that?” Issac breaks the quiet.

“Well, I have a job here in the city, a salary job,” I gesture to my now-distressed dress shirt and tie, “I had started it to save up money for an out-of-state arts college to go into filmmaking, but now, I’m in too deep with this job. They rely on me way too much, wringing me for all I’m worth. I end up handling all the work that’s either wrong or carelessly ignored. And... I talked to my parents about it.”

Oh God, I really needed to shut up at this point, “They told me, y’know, why bother wasting this job and this opportunity just to go and spend my money in the pursuit of a career that’s not gonna be guaranteed... It just... gets so hard for me; I just feel like I’m gonna stuck in this job for fucking ever.”

It’s probably how tired I am and my still-present nerves, but I find up breaking down right then and there. Sobbing into my hands, turning away from Issac in shame. How embarrassing it must be to meet someone only for them to start crying right in front of you.

End me now.

However, I’m shocked to feel his hand press against my shoulder.

“I know, dude. It’s hard. Really hard.”

I wipe away my tears and look up at him.

“My advice, if you want it, is just do what you want to do. Fuck everyone and what they think; you need to do what makes you happy, dude. Go to that school, make those films, whatever you want. It all depends on you.”

His advice, no matter how crass it was, does strike a chord with me. Just about the kick in the ass I needed.

“Y’know, you’re right, Issac. I need to stop vying for everyone’s approval and just...do it!”

“You’re damn right.”

We laugh, now that the awkward situation has passed.

“There’s one more piece of advice I can give you, if you want,” Issac adds.

“Yea?” I reply.

Then, his expression steadily changes to be stone cold and solemn. He takes my shoulder and pulls my body to face him directly.

“Don’t take the leap,” he whispers, looking me straight in the eyes.

I pause, “What? I thought you-”

“Don’t take the leap,” he repeats a little louder.

“I’m confused, you just said-” I can barely get words out with how he’s looking at me.

“Don’t let the tracks tempt you. You have so much to live for,” he seems to be pleading with me now, “Things are hard for you, yes, but things will change. I promise.”

“Oh,” now his words are starting to make sense, “Well, yes-”

“Promise me!” his grip on my shoulders is starting to hurt now.

“Ah, okay, I promise! Please-”

“Don’t make my mistake, Sam!”

“Your mistake?” I’m starting to get scared.

“Please, don’t take the leap!” Issac starts to yell.

The lights in the cabin begin to flicker wildly, and I don’t know what the hell is going on. Issac is pressing himself onto me now, tightening his grip even further.

“Issac, you’re hurting-”

“Don’t take the leap!” he shouts in my face, “Don’t take the leap! Don’t take the leap!”

“Okay! Okay!” I try to scream over him.

“DON’T TAKE THE LEAP!”

His shouts trail into a high-pitched wail as all the lights shut off; his grip on me disappears as I’m sent flying back against the wall, completely knocking the wind out of me. I shut my eyes in pain, but as I open them again, the lights have returned, and strangely, I feel fine. No pain at all, even from my lower back. I look over at Issac, now entirely still with his hood drawn up.

“Issac, what was-”

I'm cut off as the train is yanked to a stop. I look back at the platform, now full of people waiting to flood into the subway car.

"23rd Street."

23rd... Shit, this is where I get off, how long were we like that?

"This is my stop, it was nice talking to you-"

I look over to my right, he's gone. Nowhere to be seen, even as I turn and look all around.

"Issac?" I call, "Issac!"

The doors have opened and people have started pooling in, taking up whatever empty seats they can find. I stand up in a huff and have to work against the current of incoming passengers to get out, much to the annoyance of these people. As I pull myself out and stroll onto the platform, I find something is amiss. Natural light from the street above pours down the stairwell. As I climb up, I find the midday sky welcoming me to the bustling city. This can't be right, it was just the middle of night, not too long ago. I pull my phone out.

12:48pm, August 20th...

I stand there, dumbfounded, looking up at a bright sky. More than a month had passed, supposedly, right before my eyes.

What the hell happened to me?

Dragon of the Deep

Allison Alben

The ocean is a sleeping dragon.
It slumbers amongst mountains upon its sandy bed
in the Stygian depths.

Its nostrils flare with each rumbling breath,
glowing orange and gold as ash clouds rise
and sharks flit about between its spines.
With every exhale, the frothy pewter surf caresses the shore,
a fleeting union
before their next parting.

When the dragon stirs, no longer at peace
in its craggy nest,
the waves collide and the skies rage.
The world trembles as the great leviathan
ascends to the heavens,
destruction imminent in its wake.

But sometimes,

the dragon pauses as it breaches the surface
content to watch
as the dawn kisses the sea and gilds the tide;
the stars blink sleepily from above.

On those days, the dragon turns its eyes to shore
and spreads its great wings.

On those days, the morning fog rolls in
to blanket the world.

Inside

Faith Alm-Clark

There is trouble in town
the shape of a cruel king catching
coins that pelt his robes
like bullets. He wants
a palace and a princess that speaks
in flowers and jewels. He wants
a city that sprawls
like a red carpet, a velvet stain
over spoiled hills. His crown
must be the biggest,
cast the longest shadow,
make his people's heads turn
to watch. He watches
as slaves trudge
across fields and forests
and onto marble floors, building
his empire. They know every piece,
every order,
every weakened tower,
and from the inside,
they could tear it down.

Hablamos Inglés en Estados Unidos

M.C. Bellow

No soy nada como el sol

I AM... *Cold Dormant Inaccessible*

A mystery

You criticize for the way I 'speak'

A mystery

You claim with a flag because of the way I 'look'

A mystery

You'd neglect if it wasn't for the '*money and the masses*'

Many teachers have corrected me

Many teachers have told me what I am

Many teachers have told me what planeta I belong to

Many teachers have doubted what I shall become

I 'remember'

Their ignorant stares in the classroom

I 'remember'

Fumbling with the words of a new language

I 'remember'

Mumbling softly as the cool air froze my body within

Like a popsicle that couldn't melt

Like a popsicle with words on the wooden stick

But you can't get to it

No soy nada como el sol

I AM... *Profiled Frowned up Experimented on*

A 'thing' you like to study as if I'm ill-willed

A 'thing' you like to leave footprints and indents on

A 'thing' you unlawfully lock up for petty crimes and misdemeanors

I 'remember'

Their ignorant stares in the grocery store

I 'remember'

Employees watching me when I didn't want nothing more I 'remember'

The fear within that has caged me for so long

That has made me nothing but the sun's shadow

I get studied for darkness

I get studied for colonization

I get studied for the sake of others being power hungry

LET THAT SINK IN

Let that sink in

Into the soils you have while I orbit to el planeta a thousand times more
as if I were a turtle who will slowly win the race

Let that sink in

Into the chances you have at winning while I live a modest life providing

Let that sink in

As many sols and planetas have been offered privilege and prosperity

I *'remember'* the courage in my bones

I *'remember'* the feeling of wrath when shouted

GO BACK TO YOUR HOMELAND

But you are nothing without me.

You are nothing without me and my fellow lunas without us

Protection Influence Orbits

Icarus

Ben Stanton

scars upon my arms and back
burns may never heal
these feathers wither away at my touch
as I weather away here, punished

dear father, I hear your cries above
my naivety rots our chance at freedom
seeking to be embraced by the warmth of the sun
your inventions brought us wealth and prosperity
your contributions brought us notoriety and infamy
your selflessness brought us imprisonment, hope
my hubris brought us only suffering

this scalding hot wax boiling on my skin
these clipped wings which sting upon the cold earth
these chains that grapple me to the ground
serve as reminder of my greatest mistake,
of the light I felt destined to grasp, now so distant and faded
long since I have known the true beauty of the day

I pray these bindings will break and I will fly to freedom
the cool sea breeze will graze my face once again
I shall confess my misgivings and flaws
so the gods will open their welcoming arms to me
and I may see my father again

I will not let these flames die
so my hope can live on
that no one should suffer my fate
that anyone can reach whatever height they seek
and never be punished as I have
that's all I can wish for
that's all I could ever want

Sunset at COC #1

Neal Lightfeldt



Winding Tree

Polina Melik Stephanians



Alpine Afternoon

Allison Alben



Hummingbird

Neal Lightfeldt



Hive Mindset

Allison Alben

Look at you go, little worker bee,
buzzing frantically to get your work done.
Some rest would be nice, don't you agree?

From the first light of dawn 'til the sun disappears,
you're hunched at your desk,
wrists aching and vision blurring
(*and terribly lonely too*).
Look at you go, little worker bee.

One day, you realize working is your only hobby
(*but aren't you supposed to enjoy hobbies?*)
Some rest would be nice, don't you agree?

You finally take a break, yet the guilt never leaves,
so instead you plan your assignments
and write your to-do lists
(*they get longer each time*).
Look at you go, little worker bee.

It's worth it, you tell yourself, for that magic degree
for the future it unlocks and the jobs it will provide
(*or so they tell you*).
Some rest would be nice, don't you agree?

Everyone else is the same, you tell yourself,
so you pick up your weary head
and stop slacking off.
Look at you go, little worker bee.
Some rest would be nice, don't you agree?

For a Girl

Amanda Rossiter

I.

How confusing it was as a little girl
to visit family but have my mother warn,
Stay away from that man
because I say so.

Some sick delay of consequence
from 30 years ago. Paranoia
in her eyes as she holds tight
her three young daughters
who didn't know.

II.

Malala Yousafzai
shot in the head by men
because she dared to want
an education.

A candidate who says,
Grab her by the pussy.
You have to wonder if
Clinton would have won
if she didn't have one.

The overturning of Roe v. Wade,
there's no separation of church and state.
A book written and interpreted by men
for men. It's forced
on me.

Mahsa Amini
only twenty-two years old
when she had
the nerve
to reveal her hair.
She will never get the chance
to see what her death meant.

III.

So what am I supposed to say
when you grab my face mid-
sentence while I was looking away?
I pull back and you smile in triumph.
I force out a laugh and what I say next is,
I'll see you again,
but when I get home, I burn my lips to forget.
I make up some bullshit excuse
to keep your anger in check.
I wish I could but...
I'm so sorry but...
What I really want to say is
What gives you the right?
But I know the answer.

Eldest Daughter Dilemma

Renee Gomez-Serna

Twisted combination of god and victim complex.

We are:
emotional-support daughters,
third parents,
surrogate mothers,
live-in therapists,
parents to our own parents.

First born daughters are men
of fatherless households,
guard dogs for young children,
Maids and nannies to our own kin.

Our mothers gift us their depression.
Our fathers dispose their anger in us.

Punishment in life
comes in the form of being born
an eldest daughter.

Ode to Panic Attacks

Amanda Rossiter

Blood rushes
through veins, forced
into chambers,
uneven beats,
any attempt
to shift focus
only makes
blood scream
to be remembered,
refuse
to flow correctly,
pulse beats
faster,
ears pound,
the rhythm
blurs eyes
focus,
can't get
a single
satisfying
breath,
this must
be what
it's like
to drown
on air.

My Arms Are Out

Evelina Zubrinskaya

(trigger warning: references to self-harm)

For some reason, my sister and I are caught up looking at old pictures, and there I am. Standing with a pained expression on my face, wrapped in a black coat reaching past my knees, I look dead at the camera with a look that I recognize now as total discomfort. I hated getting my picture taken.

My sister snickers and points at my hair. “The side bang.”
“*My god.*”

I cringe at the little tuft of hair that sweeps across my forehead, framing my face in a weird way. Not at all stylish.

There was a reason why I got it though. I was going for the classic “emo” look, though I never really did get it right. My hair was never dyed black or any other color really, and I was too young to get any piercings besides the ones in my ears that I’ve had since childhood.

I didn’t have much choice about the clothing I wore either, considering I went to a middle school with the ugliest uniform imaginable. Navy blue polos and beige khakis. Bleh. Who even came up with that? So I didn’t get to do the all black look I wanted.

When I could, though, I shopped at Hot Topic, which was starting to lose some of its angsty clothing and was moving toward pop culture. They still had band tees and chains and thick chokers with spikes, but there was definitely more colorful Disney merchandise than people had hoped for. Everyone seemed to hate it. Nonetheless, I found my own band tees, simple chokers, and black pants that were too hot to wear in the baking California sun, but I did anyway.

The clothing was just one part of the culture. Music was the other, and one of the most important parts of being emo. Screeching vocals, rock and punk-esque but a little different, with lyrics soaked with mentions of suicide and blatant expressions of raw pain. Most I knew went with My Chemical Romance, but my poison was Pierce the Veil.

“Here, listen to this,” my friend Lolly, clad in black and smiling, said to me.

She got out her phone, and pulled up a music video I had never seen before.

A light tune began; the frontman in the music video gently strummed on a guitar with green paint dripping down the surface. Everything was calm and subdued.

Then it really started.

“DARE me to JUMP off of this Jersey BRIIIIDGE!”

The frontman screamed into the microphone, his messy hair flying, and my eyes opened wide at the power of his voice.

I listened to the song in awe. I had never heard this kind of music before. It was intimidating. It was different. It was *amazing*.

The two main singers alternated screaming and singing. My heart pulsed with the unrestrained emotions the music transmitted to me, excitement and confidence and all that good stuff pumping into my bloodstream. If ever a heartbeat had matched the beat of a song, it was then.

The chaos slowed at the bridge, with one of the wild singers slowly building the tension as he sang:

“Hail Mary, forgive me, (my heartbeat quickened)
Blood for blood, hearts beating, (my breath was heavy)
Come at me (my fingers twitched with anticipation)
Now this is WAR!”

He dragged out the last word, and I felt all the energy from the song transfer to me.

It was powerful.

Then, the song ended.

I don't know what I said to my friend then, but I was wowed.

The song was added to my playlist pretty quickly after that moment, and so began my relationship with emo music.

Lolly and I spoke on the phone fairly recently, and I asked her, “What does being emo mean to you?”

Having maintained contact long after she showed me that first Pierce the Veil song, I felt like she was the most “emo” person I knew. Some dipped their toes into it, but she swam. Her clothes, black jeans and lacy dark tops, showed the beauty of the darkness and the macabre. She told me about her own experiences with emo culture.

“I never felt like I was understood, and being emo was the first time I felt like I identified with something. The message spoke to me.”

She told me about how emo culture originated in the 80s to resist the social norms of the time, that told people that happiness came in a one-size-fits-all box of heterosexual marriage and two children. I realized

then that though I never really embraced the emo culture the way she did, there were still parts of it that characterized my life.

“You’re going to start cutting soon.”

A black hole opened up in my stomach, its gravity sucking in all my organs and leaving me feeling emptier than the universe itself.

Rebecca wasn’t wrong. Things had started to change, in ways I couldn’t explain. I didn’t want to be with my friends anymore, nor did I feel like I even belonged with them anyways. New people were coming into our little group, people who behaved differently than I was used to, and they began pushing me out. I was sad, sometimes inexplicably so. School felt harder, and I didn’t understand why.

I told Rebecca how I had stood there, in the deserted living room, hitting myself over and over with a mechanical pencil, leaving my arms covered in black and blue splotches. Each hit blossomed a flower of pain, petals opening around my arm and finally dulling into just an ache. I learned that there is a lot of damage that can be done with a mechanical pencil.

It escalated.

The next place was the bathroom, and I had found these large scissors in the neat little bag in my mom’s drawers. It was dull. This exacerbated the pain. I closed and unclosed them, trying to find the right angle. I struck down, hesitating mid-swing and only scratching the surface of my then untouched forearms, soft and young and unable to protect themselves from my frenzied violence. People were starting to notice. I began to wear long sleeves.

After the bathroom was the kitchen; I was rifling through the messy drawer of screwdrivers and other tools that I didn’t know the purpose of. Silver and gray flashed in my eyes as I finally found a screwdriver that seemed to look like what I needed. I hid it under my shirt and walked casually into the bathroom, or perhaps my bedroom? The pencil sharpener was pulled out, and I began the task of spinning the little nails that attached the razor to the rest of the sharpener.

Ouch.

The marks this little friend bestowed upon me were different. Wider, and for a moment pure white, before the crimson blood poured in from the edges, pooling at the bottom and finally overflowing. Droplets would collect at the rims of the cut, waiting, waiting, and with a sudden push, jump off onto my skin, rolling quickly down my arms, leaving streaks of red. It was sticky and uncomfortable.

I later learned that the white I saw was subcutaneous tissue, and the deepness of the cut resulted in the raised keloid scars that I still carry today. Shiny, pink, and sometimes itchy, they are a whisper left behind from those screams shredded into my skin.

The internet told me this was me being edgy. I am an attention seeker. Stupid little emo child. Stupid little thirteen year old with something to prove.

Yet, my arms remained hidden from the world in black cloth, a sweater I would wear daily. It didn't matter if it was too hot—don't you *dare* pull those sleeves up.

Back in eighth grade, which served as the backdrop for my descent into the teacup of boiling darkness that the psychiatrist called “depression,” I used to walk to and from school. This wasn't much of an inconvenience, seeing as it was really only a ten minute walk away. This was okay on most occasions, save for the rain and the heat, and now, we were smothered in the heat.

The sweater is not coming off. It's melded with my skin, covering up all the shame.

I would trudge back down the long street, other kids heading in the same direction, all of us dotted through the street with our various backpacks, looking like turtles on a march somewhere. That somewhere was the ice cream truck for most. I walked past it.

My face was pink like a peach just taken out from under the sink, little droplets of sweat collecting on my brow and sliding down my face. An oddly familiar sensation. I could practically see the steam rising off my body.

The sweater does not come off.

Well, it didn't come off, for the *most part*. I tried it one day.

We were in the locker room, crammed in there like the colorful balls of a child's ball pit, though with none of the color. Navy blue polos, remember?

I changed quickly, keeping my arms stuck to my sides as much as I could. I put on my gray P.E. shirt, with all of its ugliness. The middle school mascot, a gray timberwolf, was plastered onto the front. The sweater would usually come on after this. Not today, though.

What was the reasoning behind this decision? I am not sure.

Perhaps I had gotten sick of the heat. I headed down with the others to the field once roll call had been taken care of, and we might have been playing soccer that day. Or football. Not important.

A girl and her friend were near my curly-headed friend, Alice, and I. She called out to me.

“Oh my god, what’s that on your arms?”

I mumbled something about a cat scratching me.

“You cut yourself! You cut yourself!”

She followed me down the field, yelling about my arms.

I ran. The sweater doesn’t come off.

Eventually, this mindset of mine began to change. The fear faded, and the sweater was not glued down, not sewn onto my skin. This was much later, though.

I am standing at the Despicable Me area of Universal Studios, waiting for something. It’s hot today. “Happy” by Pharrel Williams is on blast, playing over and over along with some other cheesy, but quite frankly, delightful music. I’m wearing my Pierce the Veil shirt today, and my arms are out. I am very aware of them.

The little ride goes in circles, the colorful bug-looking creatures that serve as the seats bobbing up and down as the children squeal with delight. I feel the mist from the water gushing and spraying in the water park behind me, and the slight smell of chlorine wafts over. My arms are out, and I am very aware of them. I worry that I am different, that someone is going to stare and think, “What an edgy little girl, what an attention seeker, what an *emo* little loser.”

No one does.

For that moment, I am anxious, but I am also okay.

I finally went out with some friends last week. Lolly was there, along with another friend. Somehow, we got to the topic of my writing, and how I had interviewed Lolly for this very essay. She asked me how it went.

“Really well, actually. Thank you for the help!”

We smile, and eat some bites of our salads, teeth crunching fresh lettuce in the quiet of the nearly empty restaurant.

“I know some people say being emo is a phase, but it never really leaves you. There is always a part of you that is still emo, even if it was just

a phase for some,” Lolly says.

We all agree. We still listen to the music. Some of us, like Lolly, still wear dark clothing with skulls on our shoes. Some of us, like me, still carry the scars that came with the stereotypical depression associated with emo teens.

“It was a weird time.”

The others nod at my words. We’ve all grown, but some things from your past never leave you.

Smiling, I roll up my sleeves.

Carter Hannover

Maya Bogoniewski

(trigger warning: suicide ideation)

I circled it in red, because that's how it's done. April fourth, 2024, the date I've decided on; boxed in and entangled in the eye of a red-sharpie storm. I am going to end myself.

Some say "I'm going to kill myself," but I find that rather *violent*. "Kill" preludes to a struggle, and who struggles but those who want to survive? Therefore, my death day will be an end; a period to all that was *me*, Carter Hannover.

Yet... despite doing everything in my power to let this day come smoothly, the world had to go and screw it up! April fourth, 2024, the day I end myself... and the day the world *kills us all!* I use *kill* purposely here. Right outside my humble dump of an apartment, all I hear is screaming and wailing; and *the horns!* The world ends and suddenly every adult realizes they miss their parents, old flames flare up, and the entire goddamn world is on fire. *Me?* I already said my goodbyes. *I planned* this, and the fuckery going on has all but ruined my end, which ruins my whole story!!

I resorted to this journal to gather my senses and pick up the pills, but instead, I feel a strange disembodiment. My feet seem to be floating, and my hand scratches ink over paper that doesn't seem to be there. These words spill without consent or consciousness, and here I am, delaying my own period. This moment was supposed to be special, it was supposed to be *my moment*. Now I'm one in several billion!

I should be relieved. Now nothing can get in my way, not even myself. There will be no doubts, no *attempts*; just sweet death... but the taste in my mouth is bitter. I circled this day four months ago, as a New Year's resolution, because it made me laugh. I lived these four months in waiting, settling all my assets in order to pass smoothly to the afterlife, if there is such a thing.

I've got regrets, most of them existing in those four waiting months. Maybe I was so focused on the end, I forgot to enjoy the present. What a bitch this is. My final letters are supposed to arrive today, and I don't think anyone's going to read them. I need to call, to answer my calls, but instead I'm here... mocking the other sons and daughters for loving their parents. I've done that all my life... think. Think down. My eyes were harsh and stupid, and if today wasn't ending, I'd wish to stay alive a while longer.

The devious pride that's picked at my arms and wrists, desperate marks to prove I'm something desperate. Now I'm just embarrassed. "My friends didn't ask if I was okay enough." What a shitty friend I was, judging them in secret, and hating them when they *did* notice. I... I'd ask my dear friends why they even *like me*. What kind of person does that, huh??? Your dear companion, doubting your intentions behind your back like a weasley rat, watching and waiting for you to leave.

I'd have left. Some did, but some *stayed*, appearing on my phone with little buzzes that I've silenced. My first thought is, "I don't deserve these people." That's no good. I should be thinking, "I'm so lucky to have these people." Of course, the day I have this realization is the day no one gets a second chance. There it is again, the self loathing... Never was there a more pitiful thing than pity parties.

But that's not it... that's not what I'm trying to say. What I want to say, is that, *I'm sorry*. I am sorry. I'm sorry I never protected him when he needed it, when he needed someone to lift him up and *push him*; to be better, to be good. I'm sorry, Carter Hannover. I should have done better by you. We could have been happier, and it wasn't the job— wasn't my friends— wasn't the *illness*... it was me. The only one in my life with the strength to love is me. I'm sorry, but in the small time I have left, I'll do better. I'll try.

Love,
Carter Hannover

My Inner Child Wishes to Reclaim Her Wonder

Ren Canfield

I am a mountain, mourning
time when the earth is only just
stretching her bones up
through the soil slowly and blinking–
toadlike.

I am a river rushed,
rushing fast while my eddies
pool and swirl–
my thoughts full
of river foam
and dead leaves.

I am a scrub-jay shriek,
hopping from a branch
head cocked, laughing in blue-grey
like the time after sunset.
Beak open to cry out
at the sky before a quick explosion
of clattering wings.

I am a child searching
the backyard for fairies.
I must find them now
before the magic slips through
my growing fingers
like sandcastle silt.

I am a garnet, faceted.
My blood, black as sleep until you
hold it up to the light;
then I am red.

I am a storybook read aloud
and the child poking
her parent awake
Because
the story isn't over yet.

Poem for a Mother Duck Crossing the Road

Faith Alm-Clark

The sky was very blue
when the car ahead of mine
sent your feathers into flight.

A burst like a pillow
or a wind-blown dandelion, your flutter
in the street slowed traffic.

You flopped once, twice
over two lanes like a desperate fish
thrashing towards the water
beyond a boat's endless deck.

Your bloodless broken neck bounced.
You landed on your back
in taxidermy sleep
as your eyes
closed.

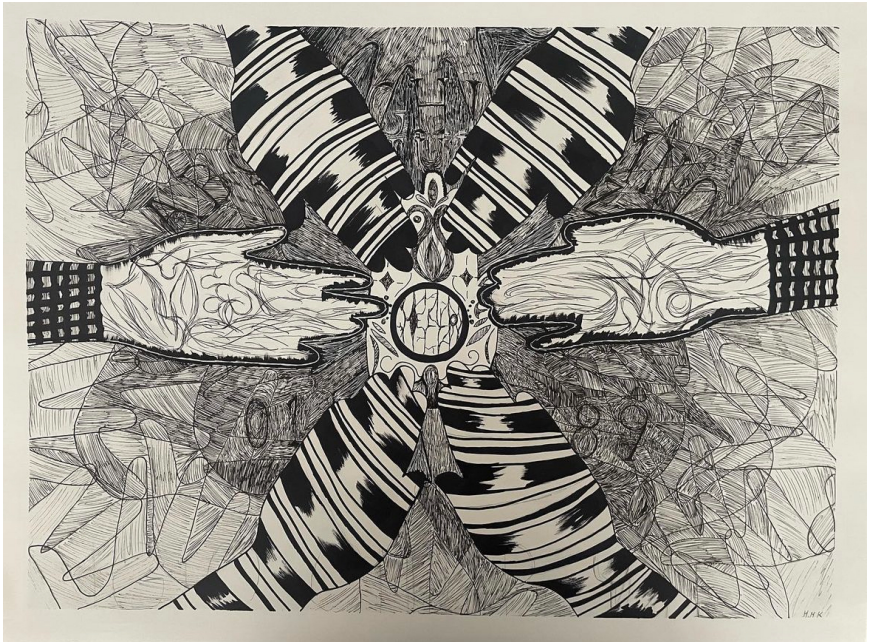
The road flowed red
with brake lights.
Your babies flitted
back and forth
in flighty panic.

If the road had been a lake,
you would have glided gently across
like a fisherman's boat

with your open animal eyes
on the shore, and the water
would have been as blue
as the sky.

Is Anyone With Us

M.M. Koontz



Magic in Hand

M.M. Koontz



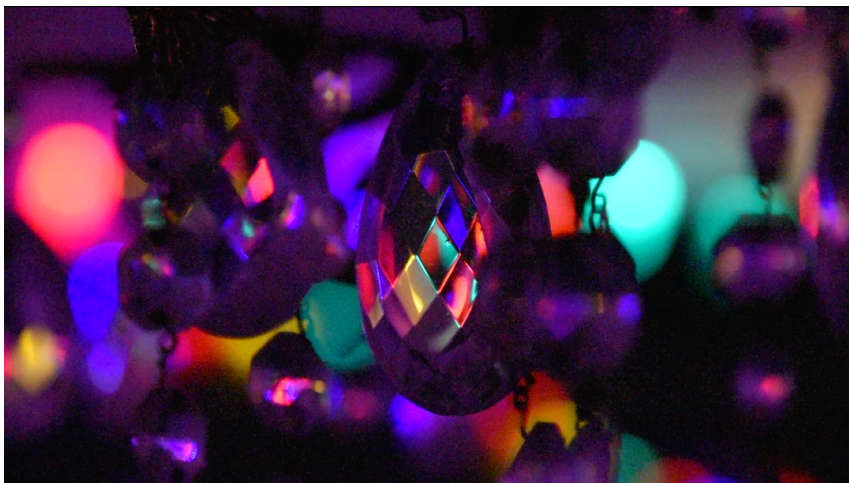
Grand Teton

Amylee Baldwin



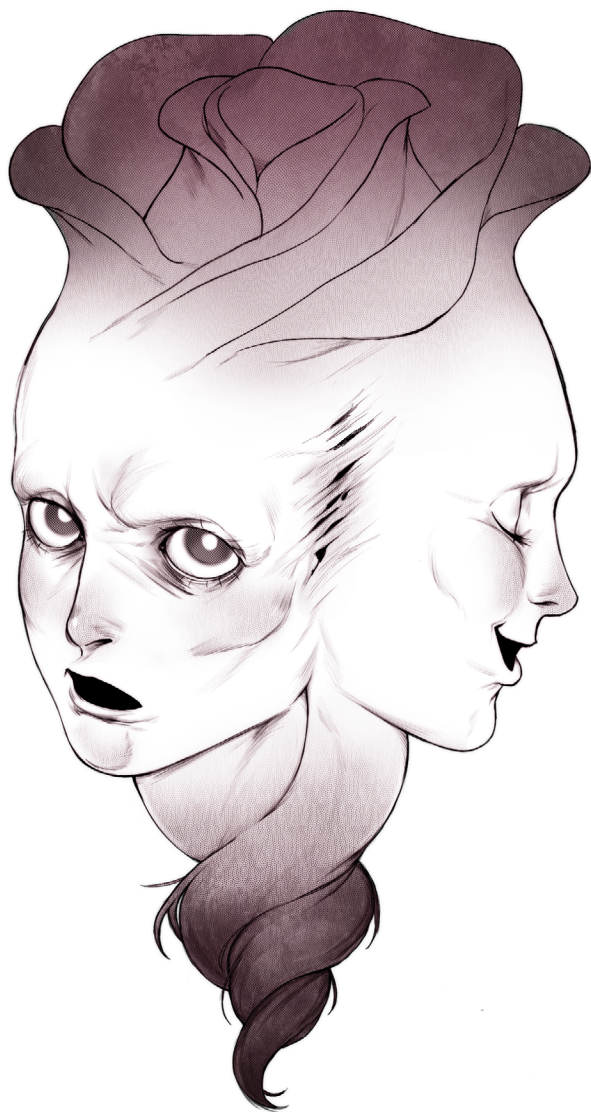
hilarious

Luis Galvan



Living Rosebud

Danielle R. Pane



On an Island, Concealed

Amanda Rossiter

In a lot of ways I relate
to the goddess Circe.
Banished by others,
forced to live
in my own company.
On a remote island
in the sea, far
far away from the prying eyes
of humanity,
only to worry about the Gods above
who judge.
So I concealed my island
with dark clouds that clap
and cry.
In that solitude I found myself
craving company,
but as the ships came ashore,
I found their motives to be impure.
In bitterness, I called them
pigs
and pushed them away.

Busy Kitty Cafe

Amy Lin Taing





musician spotlight



Johnny Diaz

Jonathan 'Johnny' Diaz is majoring in business management with an emphasis in economics here at College of the Canyons. In his spare time, Johnny loves to produce electronic tracks that are quite reminiscent of artists like Sunset Rollercoaster or TEMPOREZ. So if you like the sound of uniquely composed instrumentals and soft vocals, be sure to give Johnny's tracklist a listen! Scan that QR code baby!

Johnny's playlist

ChillTopZone	1.09
Better	3.29
LushDreams	2.47
Oboro Code	2.30





Eric Schoneberg

Eric Schoneberg is a geography major here at College of the Canyons. When he is not studying the complexities of topography or the inner workings of globalization, he's working on his first-ever album! *Today's Tomorrow's Yesterday* is remarkable not only for its beautiful acoustics but its stunning lyricism that entrances you into the story it tells. If you're a fan of Bob Dylan or John Prine, stream Eric's album on Spotify! You already know to scan, right?

Eric's playlist

*our favorite tracks from the album

Little Johnny	3.49
I Found You	3.06
Crazy Town	5.46
Fleeting Memories	4.15



Keep creating



Awards

We are pleased to announce the winners of the
Dr. Michael McMahan Award for Excellence in Writing and the Arts...

Excellence in Poetry:

“But Aren’t All Asians the Same?” by Iman Karimah Avila

Excellence in Fiction:

“My Arms Are Out” by Evelina Zubrinskaya

Excellence in Photography:

“Grand Teton” by Amylee Baldwin

Excellence in Art:

“Busy Kitty Cafe” by Amy Lin Taing

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