

Apogee

volume 59



APOGEE

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(**) indicates that the selection was awarded a prize of distinction



Beethoven's Crickets

Iris Ries

when the crickets outside my window begin their orchestra of cacophonous clusters – i can only think of what may be swirling in their chitin encrusted minds their trivial size must mean their brains are just as trivial what could they possibly think about? if my brain is a thousand times bigger than theirs how can they think thoughts half as big? how could they even learn? the crickets cannot sit in my school seat to learn about the specifics of Beethoven they would look rather ridiculous front legs in the air trying to listen with their ears on their elbows the teacher would kick the cricket out of class i do not have to raise my hand to hear i can learn Beethoven all day yet how is it that the cricket can play his music who taught them how were they taught were they ever taught? when the cricket runs the top wing over the toothed bottom wing he uses the membrane of his wing as an acoustical sail. who taught Beethoven acoustics? how did he learn? maybe it was the crickets ahead of their time teaching Beethoven so he could teach me.



The Song Stuck in My Head

Rebecca McKinley

The lyrics swim through my head,
A tiny goldfish jumping from thought to thought,
Splashing waves that pull me far away
From the task at hand.
The fish floats down to my ears
To hear the imagined song,
Further to my throat
To try and sing the melody,
Until the fish jumps to my unconscious rivers.
I pluck the fish from my ear
For a moment of focus,
And grasp the slippery gold
For just a moment longer,
Before I drop
The fish in a glass of water,
So I can hear the melody again
When I'm ready.



Progressively Oscillating Into the Beyond

Logan Parker

Watch as I pluck a guitar string
Listen as the sound vibrates down
The body of the wooden instrument and fills
The hollow void which resides
Within

Perhaps it could shake me into a new
World
One which contains a lack of
Dishonesty and dread
Where streaks of rainbow illuminate
The sky
Letting us all know that things are going to be
Okay

Listen to the music now
Let it fuel the innards of your every being
For I don't believe there is any place
Or sound I would rather let into
The hollow void which resides
Within



Fiction Contest Winner

Glamour of Night

Olivia Inman

The first night, strange as it may have been, really had been a complete accident. Drunk from a night out with friends I barely knew, I whooped and bellowed through the town's empty streets, trying to remember exactly where I lived. I knew my apartment was above the pizza parlor, right across from the old newspaper depository that had long ago turned into a tomb dedicated to the machines inside, but I couldn't trace a path to the correct building. It had been too dark. I had been too drunk. I couldn't remember where in town I was, let alone where the stupid pizza parlor had disappeared to.

So, with no other options, I wandered aimlessly in the dark. The moon did little to light my way, only illuminating the sky just the tiniest bit. It was impossible not to trip, not to fall prey to the cracks in the sidewalk as they called for me to fall. I walked to the bay, stared out at the ocean, and wondered what it would be like to just visit. Tourists got to spend their summers here throwing trash into the harbor and complaining about the water pollution as if they weren't the ones dumping plastic into the sea. I lived here year-round and had to watch as the summer faded to autumn then winter, forced to witness the businesses shut down for the cold season while the townspeople resorted to whatever they needed to do to survive until the next summer.

The cave was new, or at least, I had never seen it the past million nights I had walked the beach. Without a second thought, I stumbled through the entrance, desperate to see what was hidden inside. Only when the darkness had finally swallowed me whole did I realize how stupid this idea had been. The scant moonlight was gone entirely. I was in a cave, in the dark, and there was no one to guide me home.

Which was why I was shocked to find her bathed in torchlight so far back in the cave and surrounded by treasures from eons ago. I couldn't bring myself to look away from her as she glided across the floor to me. She ran her fingers against my cheek as if she were trying to figure out if I were real or a mirage. Gentle, oh so gentle as her fingers traveled from my cheek to my jaw to the base of my neck.

She spoke in a language I didn't know.

I left at dawn, unsure of how I managed to leave the extravagantly furnished cave.



The second night was curiosity, nothing else. Reason insisted that I had hallucinated the whole thing in a drunken stupor. There was no cave on the beach. I knew every nook and cranny, every turn, every face in this town—tourists included—and never once before had I encountered that woman or that cave.

And yet, as I slowly dragged my feet through the cool sand, I found it once again.

This time, I didn't feel so brave as I entered the cave, but as time passed, I became more and more certain that the woman would find me somehow. The experience felt almost like the chance of a lifetime, like no one else would ever know of this adventure I had thrown myself into. No one but I would know about her. So, with that thought, I confidently continued my journey deeper into the cave.

At last, after what felt like hours, I found her in all her splendor. The torchlight seemed dimmer than it had been the first night, but that was hardly something I cared about. She was there. She was real. I hadn't imagined her. She, in her dark gown, was lounging on her throne in the middle of a golden cavern of riches like I had never seen.

She smirked when she saw me and beckoned me towards her wordlessly. Every bone in my body screamed for me to run away—run away and never come back to this cave. I knew it was real. Surely, that would be enough to satiate my curiosity. Surely, I could return to my life and pretend this never happened.

But instead of turning away, I walked to her then, dropped to my knees at her feet. She ran a hand through my hair. Her smirk transformed in front of my very eyes into the sweetest smile I had ever seen and, to my surprise, she began to speak. Though I still could not understand her, I felt a comfort in her voice. She was so kind, as if she were happy to see me again. I could only smile in return.

Once again, I left at dawn, still unaware of how I navigated my way out.

The third night could be attributed to the fact that I simply could not stand the idea of not being there. Somehow, the cave seemed to call for me. The mere thought of staying home for the night made me nauseous. I had to return. I had to look upon her face at least once more.

So, I waved off the friends I barely knew when they invited me out for a drink, and I walked out to the beach, anticipating with bated breath the instant I would see her again.

She seemed ecstatic to see me. With every unintelligible word



she said, I felt lighter than I had ever felt in my life. Part of me worried that she needed help, and instead of helping her, I was somehow making things worse. Another part of my mind simply realized that it must be lonely to sit in the cavern with no company. And the final part was begging me to stop coming back.

Naturally, I swore to myself that I would not simply abandon this woman.

For the third time in three days, I left at dawn. I had already given up on trying to figure out how I made it out of the cave.

It became a routine. I would head to the cavern, listen to her ramble in whatever language she was speaking, leave at dawn, and return at nightfall. My days and nights were sleepless, but I felt no exhaustion. If anything, every night I spent in the cave filled me with exhilaration. I didn't care to find out why.

One night, I realized that I understood her. The language didn't change, but I knew what she was saying. Threats spilled from her mouth, intertwined with compliments as if they were interchangeable.

Terror gripped me, and she knew.

“Don't fret, darling. I wouldn't dare harm you,” she assured me. The promise was sweet but did little to calm me.

I left at dawn— her words ringing in my ears.

I tried to stay away, but my staying at home was awful. I tried to go to bed but couldn't sleep. That wasn't too terrible. I hadn't slept in months anyways. Sleep didn't matter. I just wished that wakefulness did not keep company with loneliness. I missed her, but I didn't want to go back. Not tonight.

When the clock struck midnight, I began coughing. At first, it was normal—just a bit of congestion—but as the night progressed, the coughing worsened. I felt as though I were hacking up my lungs.

I got out of bed with the intent of going to the cave. I missed her. I needed to see her. As soon as I stepped outside of my apartment, I doubled over coughing. This time, saltwater came up. I stumbled from my home to the street to the beach. With every passing second, my coughing grew worse. The saltwater turned to blood.

The cave wasn't far, but I was already unsteady on my feet. I staggered through the sand as best I could, barely making it into the cave. I tripped over every loose rock and crack in the ground, finally falling in the dark. Desperate to see her, I began crawling, still coughing



up blood as I blindly tried to find my way to her cavern, but the darkness would not lift. I couldn't find her. There was no light to save me from this.

I pressed my face against the dirt and started to cry.

Only when I thought all hope was gone—that my lungs would fill with the blood I was coughing up—did I feel a hand on my shoulder. I looked up and met her eyes, which I had never realized were bright red.

“Don't cry, darling. You are where you belong,” she said softly. Her hand traveled from my shoulder to my face, stroking my cheek softly. “You will be alright.”

I knew I had to look wretched. I was half-ashamed to be in front of her like this. I tried to apologize, tried to keep myself from spitting up blood onto her, but my efforts were in vain. Blood was everywhere. I couldn't say a word. Nothing could have made this experience worse.

“Please, make it stop,” I finally choked out. “Please.”

A soft smile graced her face.

“Of course.”

She pulled me close and ran her fingers through my hair, whispering reassurances to me all the while. If I had cared to pay attention, I would have realized that I had stopped coughing soon enough. My heart no longer felt as though it was intent on escaping my chest. This was blissful safety. I couldn't risk going out there again, not with this chance that I would start coughing again. Here, I was okay. With her, I could exist in peace and never worry.

I knew it was true. She said so herself.

“My dear, you are just so good.”

I had no reason to be afraid. I just couldn't imagine her trying to hurt me. She never would. She could, of that I was certain, but she wouldn't. She wanted me to be there with her. She wanted to make sure that pain would never touch me again. This was the place of dreams—a place where I could be free and safe and whole—and it was all because of her.

Perhaps this whole time, there had only ever been one path that I had been traveling, and now, after years of what felt like aimless wandering, that path led me here. To her. To safety. To a stone garden of peace and tranquility.

Without warning, she sank her teeth into my neck. Even as she drained my blood, occasionally removing her fangs from the flesh to pepper soft kisses over the wound, I couldn't do anything but smile. It was, I realized, for the first time, the end of the beginning. My head felt heavy, and at last, I felt at ease.



Out There, Beyond the Known

Logan Parker

Esophagus
Erupted, eroded, irritated
It grows inside your neck
Clawing with its symbolic nails
And metaphorical teeth

But please, wise one,
Don't be down now
Be ecstatic, enthusiastic, euphoric
That whatever resides above the stars
Had the opportunity to breathe its excellence
Into your mouth
Down your trachea
Within the depths of your heart

For a heptad of decades you delicately
Sauntered about this earth
Taking in the atmosphere of the many
Pre-established cultures and civilizations
Leaving pieces of yourself along the way

Parts of you nest in the lives of thousands now
Warm hugs and joyous smiles
Bouncing bellies from long nights of
Laughter and drinking
Memories of falling asleep beneath your beard
With thoughts of Santa Claus
And the smell of whiskey spiraling about the air

Your children may cry
Your children's children may cry even more
Though they may not yet understand why
When they kiss your lifeless forehead
Or lay their palms on the vessel of your ashes
Just wishing they had more time
Your pulse may delay as time goes on
Your body may decay as the earth takes it in
Your soul may parlay as it nears the sky
Floating aloft the aether, into the stars
Out there, beyond the known



So pour one out, wise one
Light one up while you still can
Because for now, your body moves
For now, your mouth speaks
For now, your presence will remain

Please don't worry
And please don't live in fear
For the world will still revolve when you're gone
Just as it does when you fall asleep
Or daydream for hours in your recliner
Which smells of cologne
And Cuban cigars



Animal

Mya Holbrook

Sadness laps at the water
with its wide mouth, lips curled
back over teeth blunt
from biting. It takes its time
to watch the sky, drags heavy feet
into the water to remind
itself of buoyancy.
It knows blue— above, below, inside,
it keeps its mouth closed to keep it in,
to keep it out. It takes in breath
slowly, through its nose. It closes
its eyes, laying flat on its back,
face to the sun. There's too much inside
to introduce something new
but it feels the warmth anyway—
porous like a rotting log
the light gets in and stays there.
Sadness doesn't crumble away, slowly,
doesn't dissolve into foam, but
it's there, too present to ignore,
permeating every inch— illuminating
that deep pit of hunger, a fire
it tries to smother, the smoke
a strangled growl
that dies at the back of the throat.
It feels first, and then sees
a silver fish floating by,
light, and fast. Sparkling.
It's strong, the instinct
to lunge
and grip,
to tear away and bite apart,
but it keeps still, watching,
eyes just barely open, wondering
if this is the transformation—
the thing that comes next.



If I am dead in my own home

Colleen Kincaid

The vulture swoops down to sniff the bleak
odor of the festering roadkill she desires.
Desire finds itself locked away in the attic of her mind.
I scratch and claw for her to find me behind
the stench of the pickings of my entrails.
The vulture, now inside the ancient house,
flying through the walls as a ghost
searching for her lust she once knew.



The Blood Bag

Logan Parker

Todd knew the hardest part of joining the task force was the inevitable blood draw. He had been dreading it since the moment he read the requirements, and yet, here it is. The day had finally arrived, and he could hardly walk through the pharmacy doors. As he began to build up the courage to step into the waiting area, he noticed what may have been the worst part of this whole situation: He was the only one in line. There was no waiting for him today. He was called in almost immediately, with absolutely no time to prepare for that cold, silver needle to pierce his skin.

“Hi Todd, I’m Ella,” the nurse said with a shaky voice. “I’ll be drawing your blood today.” She appeared to be no older than 60. Her hair was at that point where the blacks and grays begin to mix. She was skinny, almost to where it seemed unhealthy, but at the same time, very sturdy. If a 200-pound man were to attempt to knock her down like a bowling pin, she would put up a decent fight. The worst part about her, though, was her urgency. She had no other patients to attend to, and yet, her number one goal was to get that foul red liquid out from Todd’s body so she could go along with her day.

Todd was trying to stall, but Ella was persistent. The needle was her sword, and Todd had no shield. All he had to defend himself with was his lack of rhetorical skill. “so... how about that weather outside?” “oh, it’s alright. I’m finding the vein now, okay?”. Everything Todd said was shot down almost instantly. Before he knew it, the needle had pierced his skin. A cold chill went down his spine as he instinctively shot up from his seat. “I’m so sorry,” he said in a fearful whisper. He dashed out of the pharmacy with the needle still in his arm, dragging the blood bag along with him. A trail of maroon blood splotches followed him from the pharmacy door to his car. He frantically sat down in the driver’s seat, shifted the car in reverse, and proceeded to throw up all over the dashboard. Everything seemed blurry now. He slammed the car door, clipping, but not cutting the tubing leading to the blood bag. As he drove away, the blood bag followed, as if it was still waiting to be filled.



Dirty Laundry

Rebecca McKinley

Sort your clothes and sort your stains.
Mixing the problems will only create
A bigger mess than you can clean.
Sort the darks from the lights
And treat accordingly.

Add floral soaps to mask the scent
Of all the problems held in the clothes.
Leave the stains to dissolve
Until their traces are no longer there.

Dry your clothes until dizzy and renewed.
Make them ready to absorb your stains.
And if you stain them again, do not worry.
You can always wash the clothes again



Ghazal for days on end

Ashton Hoerner

Find Ritalin shaped reasons to live, like bugs under stones,
searching under piles of dirty clothes before softly melting.

Check the usual stashes. If there's no wine in the trash
there's maybe a puddle in a dirty dish with coffee, melding.

Convince myself I'm two bottles deep, not behind
the wheel or on the wrong side of the building.

Leave the house for anything but booze. Sip paper bags
in the park without puking on a primrose budding.

Hear the rattle of teeth and pills in my jacket pocket,
or the voice telling me it's been four years and I'm still melting.



Life's Lessons

Jasmine Linville

Everything his family worked to build burned to ashes before his eyes.

The little boy, hands pocketed in his green jacket and matching sneakers sinking into the ground, stood in the middle of what was once a thriving woods. His disheveled blond locks tossed back and forth with the heat waves of the flames engulfing every last bit of life. The whole world stood in the same condition. All he had given life to perished from the actions of Death.

His blue irises reflected the angry red flames shredding through all that he, his sister Fate, and their Mother had created. The trees, once filled with green leaves, shed ash that polluted the air. He did not require air for his survival, but he found himself suffocating. Mother Creation's waters flooded red and black; fish floated against the top, their mouths wide open, hearts stilled. A camping tent caught fire, and two pairs of hiking shoes stuck out. The soles pointed towards him, their owners immobile. A few feet behind the tent, a pack of wolves laid across the singed grassy field before him. Tufts of white, black, and grey fur dripped puddles of crimson. One wolf, crushed under a fallen tree, still clutched at a limp rabbit between its teeth. Beady black eyes stared into the flames; they held no tears, no emotion, no soul. If he focused enough, he could not feel the warmth of any souls; they'd all been destroyed.

The stench of decay masked itself with the flames of destruction.

He stumbled backwards until he tripped over something solid and hefty. Thudding against the ground, he found the obstacle to be a young woman, hair so blond it almost classified as platinum, staring lifelessly to the side. One of the campers, he presumed. Her jade eyes were glossed over, but he could see the faint glow behind her irises. Her soul remained intact with its vessel. Pulling his legs towards him and off of her form, the little boy placed his shaking hand against her back. He felt the warmth of her soul; it called to him.

It isn't fair...I wasn't ready...

Slowly, a warm orb the size of a softball rose from her form and into his hand. It swirled with coils of blue and purple. The moment it made contact with him, an intense misery flooded through him. He cried. In the middle of the burning world he and Mother Creation worked for centuries to design, crafting multiple souls and renewing them into new forms, all he found within the remnants was a single lost



soul. He rose from the ground and cradled the sphere tightly in his arms. How could Death be so cruel?

“Hello, Life.”

That familiar honeyed tone was laced with a small rasp from cigarette smoke flooding her lungs. It stood out from the deafening crackle of merciless flames tearing through everything. Coils of smoke puffed from her parted lips, gracefully falling to the floor and coating the corpses and remnants. If anything had survived—perhaps a small daisy peering out from the ash, or an ant scurrying for shelter—it got smothered by her cigarette smoke. He once took solace in the sweet stench of the smoke; it became familiar. Now it choked him.

“Death, why did you do it?” He hadn’t wanted to believe it at first. The first few times he felt one of his creations cease to exist, he believed it to be nothing more than the work of Fate. Perhaps a car accident, or a plane crash. Then he felt more and more souls disappear. Fate began screeching in horror. When he ran to check on her, he found the old lady on the floor, out of her rocking chair. Her books, each corresponding with a soul, littered the floor. She desperately scribbled into as many as she could to prevent the terrible demise Death had chosen for every soul inhabiting the Earth. Her efforts proved fruitless. The pages became ash under her quill. She let the quill slip from her grasp and hung her head.

Then he heard the cries of their Mother. She wailed in her Observatory, her white dress shredded, her fingers knotted in her blonde locks. She cried when she felt every plant die, every mountain crumble, and every body of water become polluted. Her blonde locks faded in color, to a sickly, dead grey, from the roots down to the tips. Life continued growing colder and colder with every death of a soul. None of them wanted to believe one of the family caused such agony. With his eyes now staring up at his sister, the truth illuminated itself in her guiltless expression.

“What do you mean?” The immortal woman skimmed her dark chocolate gaze across the sleeves of her leather jacket, brushing off stray ash particles from her shoulders. The edges of her combat boots held sticky residue of the world’s remnants. The black of her jeans covered the flecks of blood and ash from his vision, but he knew they were there. In her hand, she gripped a dagger coated in the blood of many of his mortal creations.

“You...you destroyed them all.” Life whispered, taking a small step back. The orb in his arms trembled and whimpered in the presence of Death. He rested a comforting hand over it and gently stroked its surface.

“Not all, it appears,” With a flick of the fingers she sent her



cigarette flying. A step forward with her lanky legs closed more distance between the siblings. Her hand reached towards him, palm towards the darkening sky. "I've seen your suffering. Mother Creation failed you, Life. Your creations failed you." Life shook his head. He stared at the corpse one last time before the flames finally took her. Death sidestepped into his vision with a small smile. "I'm cleaning the slate so you can create your own world, without Fate or Mother Creation setting the boundaries for you. Is that not what you want?"

Failed me?

Mother Creation created him and gave him the necessary tools to create the vessels for her souls and created the Earth for them to live on. Fate gave personality and timelines to all his projects. The three of them shaped life on the Earth, and Death's job was to collect souls after their vessels perished and either retire them to Heaven or Hell or bring them back for reincarnation. Life pulled the orb tighter to his chest. He cocooned it with the right side of his jacket. Its glow illuminated through the green fabric.

"I never asked for this! I didn't want them all to die!"

"They took your work for granted! Fate was cruel and turned your creations into murderers! Rapists! Criminals harming one another, Life!" Her bronze knuckles whitened with the tightening grip around her dagger. "You're short and sweet Life, and it allows our mother and that pathetic excuse of a sister to manipulate you! Mother, Fate, humans, they all stabbed you in the back!" With every sentence, Life recoiled and whimpered. Death took notice, tense shoulders settling. She offered Life a warm, deranged smile. "I did this for you," Her arms spread out, gesturing to the fires. She believed them to be cleansing. Beautiful, even. The orange glow against her raven hair made Life shudder and step further back.

"Imagine it, Life! You would set up shop in the Observatory!" She gestured towards imaginary images projected through the fires and remnants, pacing and pointing the dagger at various fallen trees and burning bushes. "A little workshop in the corner to create your own souls, books to fill with your own beginnings and endings, bookshelves never running out of space, endless living and creating!"

Life's eyebrows furrowed. He emitted a confused, frustrated sigh. Death's visions fell blind to him; perhaps he truly was too naive to understand. He looked to the soul once more, fingers tracing its smooth surface. It was the only source of warmth to fill the void fissured within him by his sister. Death once again stretched her hand out towards Life. He looked at it and took the smallest step forward.



“What about Mother and Fate?” What about the family?

“You won’t need to worry about them.” She didn’t miss a beat with her response. The fires grew around them. He squinted through the smoke and found Death smiling at him. “Mother will be too weak and distraught because she’ll feel that her purpose is worthless, reduced to ash! And what will Fate do but rock in that damned chair of hers with a pile of books filled with endings I’ve written?”

“That you’ve written?”

The smile flickered. Flames danced across her features in a way that unsettled Life and chilled the soul in his arm. He backed away, until the flames stopped him from proceeding any further.

“Well, of course. Of course!” She laughed, waving her hand dismissively. “You weren’t going to put an end to things, right? Someone had to.” Death kneeled down on one knee, coming eye-to-eye with her brother.

“Look. You are more than Life. You are the son of Mother Creation. Create your own world: a world where you are worshipped; where your creations feel no pain from one another; where you can be as creative and free as you please! Create a better world!”

A better world? Death was not incorrect. Life suffered when he came into contact with red souls. In the beginning of time, most souls turned out blue, green, yellow, and sometimes—but rarely—purely white. Only the purest of souls received white coloration, and Fate was not generous with that color. Life never understood why the eldest sibling added such brutality to their world.

“What purpose does pain have?” He’d asked her once, yet she only chided about how naive he was and retorted with a riddle: You can’t have luxury and health without pain and suffering.

“Life, I care for you. I’ve seen many souls wither away from painful life experiences. I don’t want the same to happen to you. Let me destroy the last soul, and then you can create a world free of pain and suffering. Then you will no longer have to suffer.” Death’s hand inched closer, fingers curling. The soul grew heavier. The closer Death grew, the colder it felt against his own skin.

“Why do souls become red?” He’d once asked Mother Creation.

“Well, why do white souls become white?” She retorted with a smile. He hadn’t understood then. Pain and suffering balanced with luxury and health. Red souls and white souls existed in the same world. Life and Death worked together. Each element of the equation gave the other meaning.

He raised his gaze towards her. The red in his eyes intensified. It



swallowed the blue.

“Happiness and bliss cannot exist without pain and suffering. Good and bad are two sides of the same coin.” He dared to step closer. “Life cannot be defined without Death, and Death cannot be defined without Life. Neither would be in existence without Mother Creation; nor can they coexist without the guidance of Fate as the tie between them.” The blue orb’s color began brightening. It became lavender, then swirled with plum, until it boiled a deep crimson. Life stomped his foot and screamed at Death, “You’ve destroyed our Mother’s purpose! Fate’s purpose! You’ve destroyed my purpose!”

He remembered once, when he’d collected a red soul to deliver to Death, the vulgar, malicious thoughts and emotions that flooded his head. A man slaughtered his entire family, and he whispered in Life’s mind about how worthless his children were, and how his wife deserved to rot in Hell. It crushed him. For days Life wasn’t the same. He’d tried picking Fate’s brain for the answers as to why she chose such paths for certain souls.

Bah! Stick to your job and let me do mine! She’d bark, throwing a book at him to scare him off.

The boy opened his eyes to allow tears to escape. They trickled down his ash-stained cheeks. “You should have stuck to your job, Death. There’s a lot you don’t understand.” The boy turned away from Death’s outstretched hand.

“Where are you going?” She growled.

“Someone needs to fix this, or else Mother will lose her sense of purpose and Fate will lose her way.”

Before he could escape, a strong force yanked him by the hood and pulled him backwards. The soul almost fell from his grasp, threatening to shatter like a snow globe and sink into the infertile, scorched soil. He twirled himself around to face Death once more. Her desperate hand curled deeper into the fabric of his green hood, pulling him closer to her form.

“You should be thankful for me, Life! If not for me, you would still be a slave to Fate and Mother, and yet you’re still running back to them!?”

“You’re a slave to your own rage. It blinded you to the truth.” His free hand swatted at her wrist with a sharp movement, sending her fingers recoiling back to her form. “The reason you exist is to keep everything in balance. Each one of us has a role to play; we all affect one another. They weren’t controlling me; they were guiding my work. You’re trying to control us all!”



Silence fell between them. The dagger fell from Death's fingers. The flames crackled around them.

"Mother Creation and Fate aren't the ones who stabbed me in the back. You're the one that held the dagger." He smacked her hand as it crept closer, greedily, for the soul he possessed. Her dark eyes widened-- Life had never been so violent before, nor had he ever been so vocal. He always acted so curious and inquisitive. Burning branches fell around them. Soon they covered the last soul's vessel, a hollow shell buried along with all Life and his family had created. The immortal being squeezed his eyes shut as his own soul trembled. He felt numb. Lost.

"Life...I'm sorry. I just wanted to help." She tried to embrace him, but the boy ducked away from her arms. "I just wanted you to have the chance to create your own world, with your own rules. Mother, she made you too soft. I've seen how deeply pained you are when you handle the red souls. I can easily dispose of them. You can't. It isn't fair," Again, as she dared to grow closer to him, he increased the distance between them. Her right eye twitched. "I thought this way, you could turn the tables."

"No. You wanted to deepen your own purpose and use me as a pawn. You tried to manipulate me and look at what you've done." He finally faced the flames. No fear and no hesitation. He stepped into them. "You'll get your wish though. I'll have to recreate everything, but not alone."

Life disappeared into the fires of the burning world, abandoning Death in her own creation.



Elegy for Yesterday's Sleep

Cooper Davis

look up to these hands
frozen at five o'clock shadow

dead battery for tired eyes
stuck in the past like Gatsby

longing for life
lusting for love
again

memory is suicide
soulful enough to give hope

watched pots never boil
over the flames of the living

so rest your mind in this bed
anchored in the preview of death
again

sleep and sail
the still waters

of a true Black Sea
off the edge of the earth

but never forget
that we must return to tomorrow

to live in yesterday
is to kill time today

so dock without Saint Clement
because you get to stay afloat
again



Three Lies

Olivia Inman

CHARACTERS

WOMAN 1, mid-20s, long-time friend of WOMAN 2 and MAN, just recently quit her job

WOMAN 2, mid-20s, married to MAN, miserable and jobless

MAN, late 20s, married to WOMAN 2, miserable and working at a nondescript office

TIME

Present-day, late evening

SETTING

Dining room of MAN and WOMAN 2's apartment

AT RISE: WOMAN 1, WOMAN 2, and MAN are sitting at the table, silently eating dinner. All that can be heard is the clattering of knives and forks against the plates. Tension between the three is evident, but no one acknowledges its presence.

WOMAN 1

(looking at MAN)

I heard you got a raise at the office. Congrats.

MAN

Thanks. I heard you turned in your notice at the rec center. That's good.

WOMAN 1

Yeah.

(WOMAN 2 and MAN freeze in their seats. WOMAN 1 looks straight between the two of them.)

WOMAN 1

I didn't tell him that. Why would she tell him that? I didn't want him to know.

(a beat)

Why am I surprised? She could never keep a secret.



(WOMAN 2 and MAN begin moving once again.
Everyone eats like normal.)

WOMAN 1

(looking at WOMAN 2)

How have things been since we last talked?

WOMAN 2

You mean since brunch?

WOMAN 1

Same difference.

WOMAN 2

Not much has changed.

(looking at MAN)

Although, a dashing debonair has suddenly appeared in my
life.

MAN

(flatly)

I don't have to fight him, do I?

WOMAN 2

(forcing a laugh)

Of course not, dear.

(WOMAN 1 and MAN freeze. WOMAN 2 looks away
from them towards the audience. She does not look
happy.)

WOMAN 2

I don't know what she's doing here. Why is she here?

(looking at WOMAN 1)

Are you trying to make things complicated? Are you trying to wreck my
marriage? I can't have anything when you're around. All we've been able
to talk about for the entire week is your coming over. Every single day!

(WOMAN 2 takes a breath, wipes her mouth with a
napkin, and leans back. Once she has calmed herself
down, WOMAN 1 and MAN unfreeze and continue to
awkwardly eat their dinner.)



MAN

I was thinking of buying a new car.

WOMAN 2

Were you now?

MAN

I was going to tell you.

WOMAN 1

Buy a hybrid. They're better for the environment.

MAN

But those are more expensive.

WOMAN 2

We just got a new car!

WOMAN 1

Oh.

(a beat)

Then, you don't need another new car.

(WOMAN 1 and WOMAN 2 freeze. MAN looks away from them towards the audience. He sighs deeply.)

MAN

It's impossible to do anything with these two. And I don't know why--
(jerk his head towards WOMAN 1)

--she keeps coming to visit. It's like she's asking me to ruin my marriage.

(MAN freezes. WOMAN 1 looks around wildly before settling on looking out to the audience.)

WOMAN 1

Why am I here?

(WOMAN 1 freezes. WOMAN 2 inhales deeply then screams for about five seconds. Then, all three characters resume their eating.)

WOMAN 2

Why are you leaving the rec center? I thought you loved it there.



WOMAN 1

It's a matter of money.

MAN

Understandable.

WOMAN 2

But you should do what you love.

(Silence all but drops upon them. They all continue to eat. After a painful moment, WOMAN 2 and MAN freeze. WOMAN 1 looks at the audience.)

WOMAN 1

I can't do that. I can't do that at all.

(WOMAN 2 and MAN unfreeze. They are both looking at the audience. WOMAN 1 freezes.)

WOMAN 2

I wish she would leave already.

MAN

I wish she'd ask me to leave already.

WOMAN 2

She's ruining everything.

MAN

I ruined everything.

WOMAN 2

She was supposed to collapse when she heard the news.

MAN

I don't know why I did it.

WOMAN 2

Why hasn't she left?

MAN

Why did I do this?



(WOMAN 1 unfreezes. They all eat dinner like nothing has happened.)

WOMAN 2

I made dessert.

MAN

You never make dessert.

WOMAN 2

It's just a pie.

WOMAN 1

(looking at WOMAN 2 softly)

A pie?

MAN

(looking at WOMAN 2 in surprise)

A pie?

WOMAN 2

(looking at WOMAN 1)

A pie.

WOMAN 1

That's so thoughtful of you.

WOMAN 2

I thought you might like it.

MAN

We haven't even tasted it.

WOMAN 1

It doesn't matter. The fact that you made it is...

(a beat)

It means a lot.

(WOMAN 2 and MAN freeze. WOMAN 1 goes to stand, then stops. She takes a deep breath, closing her eyes as she inhales and opening them as she exhales.)

WOMAN 1

(looking at WOMAN 2)

It's not fair.



(looks at audience with a sigh)

It's not fair!

(WOMAN 1 freezes as WOMAN 2 unfreezes.)

WOMAN 2

(looking at WOMAN 1)

You just have to have your way all the time, don't you?

(a beat)

My marriage can't even stay intact because of you!

(WOMAN 2 freezes. MAN unfreezes.)

MAN

(looking at WOMAN 1)

Just ask me to leave. Just ask me to leave. Please, I don't even love her.

(WOMAN 1 and WOMAN 2 unfreeze. Everyone continues to eat like nothing has happened.)

MAN

Did you hear about the wishing fountain being replaced?

WOMAN 1

No.

MAN

It's getting replaced.

WOMAN 1

I had no clue.

MAN

I just thought you might like to know. Since you're into that kind of thing.

(Silence falls about them once more. With every passing second, each character becomes more entranced with their plates, not meeting the others' eyes. Finally, WOMAN 1 drops her knife and fork. MAN and WOMAN 2 freeze.)



WOMAN 1

I thought that maybe I could get over it. Maybe watching my best friends marry each other would be fine. This would be fine.

(She reaches out towards WOMAN 2 then stops short of touching her)

It's not fine at all.

(She drops her hand)

(WOMAN 1 freezes as she lays her hands on the table in surrender. WOMAN 2 unfreezes and immediately looks at the audience.)

WOMAN 2

I invited her to the wedding to make sure she knew. I wanted her to know that we were getting married. I was taking him away from her, and she would watch it happen. For once in our lives, she would have to look at me shining so brightly instead of casting a shadow over me like I was nothing.

(looks over at WOMAN 1)

But even on my wedding day, she outshone me. She in her fine suit and perfectly coifed hair and flawless skin and kind smile. And those perfect lips. And her eyes like jewels.

(She stands slowly, pushing at her clothes to get rid of wrinkles.)

She smiled and congratulated us with that smile and such sad eyes, and I was so happy. Finally, I had something she didn't.

(walks around the table to be behind WOMAN 1)

But you didn't care that I married him. You cared that he married me. And that whole time, all the years I had known you, you never once thought to tell me that you loved me. Even though you cried into your pillow after I told you we were engaged.

(She puts one hand on WOMAN 1's shoulder and runs the other through WOMAN 1's hair.)

I guess I'm just assuming you cried. It sounds so like you to cry when no one can hear you.

(a beat)

I would have liked to know. Maybe I wouldn't have married him if I had known that it was me, not him, that you were watching.

(a sob escapes her)

I wouldn't have married him.



(WOMAN 2 freezes there. MAN unfreezes. He doesn't notice WOMAN 2's change in position.)

MAN

Please, just ask me.

(MAN looks down at his dinner plate then freezes again. WOMAN 1 now unfreezes. She also does not notice WOMAN 2's hand on her shoulder.)

WOMAN 1

I love her.

(WOMAN 2 unfreezes. She is smiling, but she hardly looks joyful. WOMAN 1 and WOMAN 2 are looking at each other now, fully aware and capable of speaking to one another.)

WOMAN 2

Hearts break every day, don't they?

WOMAN 1

All the time. It's nothing new. It's as old as pain itself.

WOMAN 2

And pain can't tell you when it started, just that it's there.

WOMAN 1

I love that poem.

WOMAN 2

As much as you love me?

WOMAN 1

I never—I didn't, I mean—

WOMAN 2

To think I went so long without knowing.

WOMAN 1

I should have told you.



WOMAN 2

I wouldn't have broken both our hearts if I had known.

WOMAN 1

Leave him.

WOMAN 2

It's tempting.

WOMAN 1

I'll do anything.

WOMAN 2

It really is oh so tempting.

WOMAN 1

What do I have to do?

WOMAN 2

(cupping the side of WOMAN 1's face with a hand)

Tempt me some more, dear, and we'll see how it goes.

(with a laugh)

You'll be coming over next week, won't you?

WOMAN 1

If I'm invited.

WOMAN 2

I'm inviting you.

WOMAN 1

(smiling broadly)

Then, of course.

(Blackout)

(End of play)



Sno Jo

Isaac Gleitz

He wanted to escape; He succeeded.
He wanted to hit pause; Well done, sir.
He wanted to be missed; That'll do it.
He wanted to be left alone;
He choked on his own medicine.

His tennis shoes crunch into the ice, forming craters in his wake. He doesn't look back at his car: He keeps trudging on toward the peak. His family doesn't matter, but this moment matters. There's a lot at stake, even in this one step.

He runs up a bank, glances at a sheer face, and continues his ascent. This part is a bit too steep, but he strides ahead. The snow devours his legs—more and more with each step. When he is half consumed, he stops and listens:

There is nothing.

He decides he should get back to the car, but he can't move. The weight of the snow is unbearable. His feet won't budge. He tries to crawl out but expends his breath to no avail.

He makes peace with the utter stillness and sobs.
He sees dark storm clouds on the horizon.

He wants to hit the undo button*



Sunrise Mountain

Madisyn Hendricks



Grainy Shot

Isaac Gleitz



An Arizona Landscape

Madisyn Hendricks



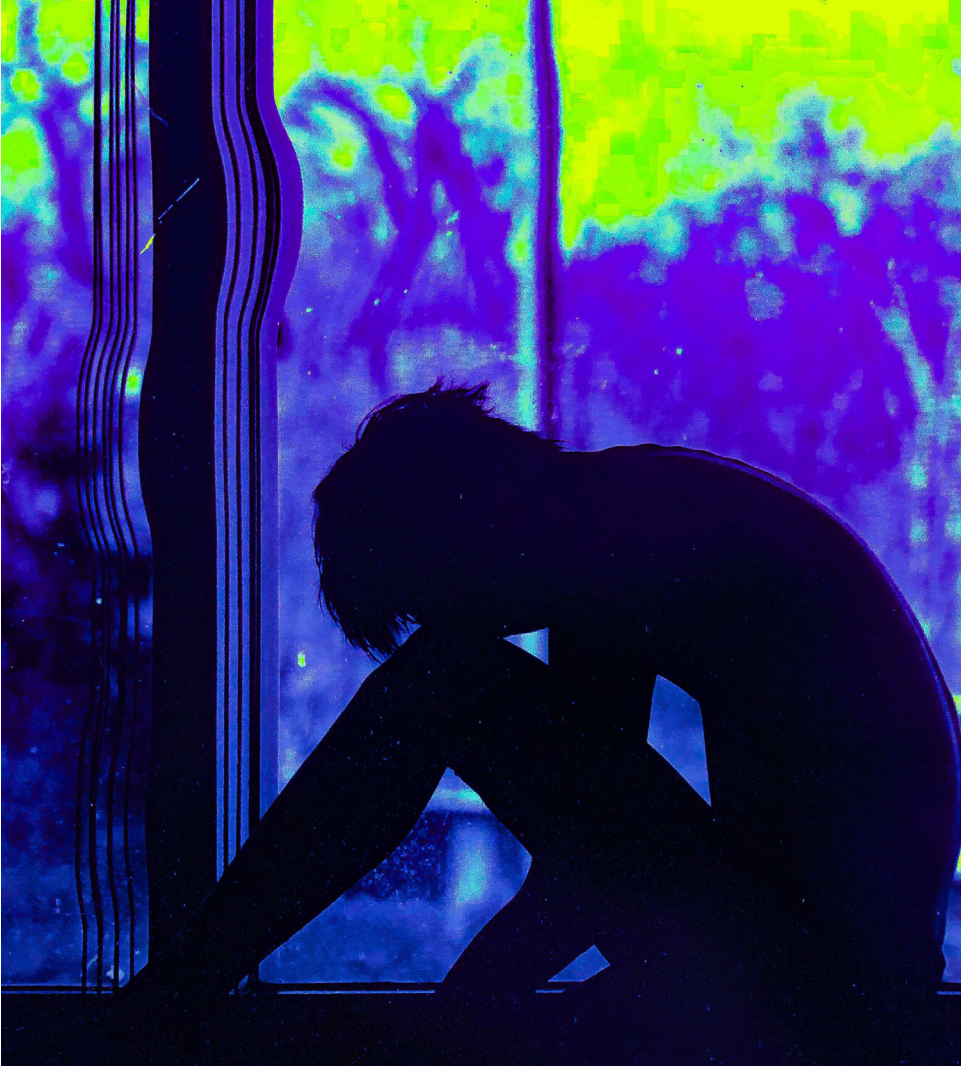
Bright Behind Bars

Isaac Gleitz



World On Fire

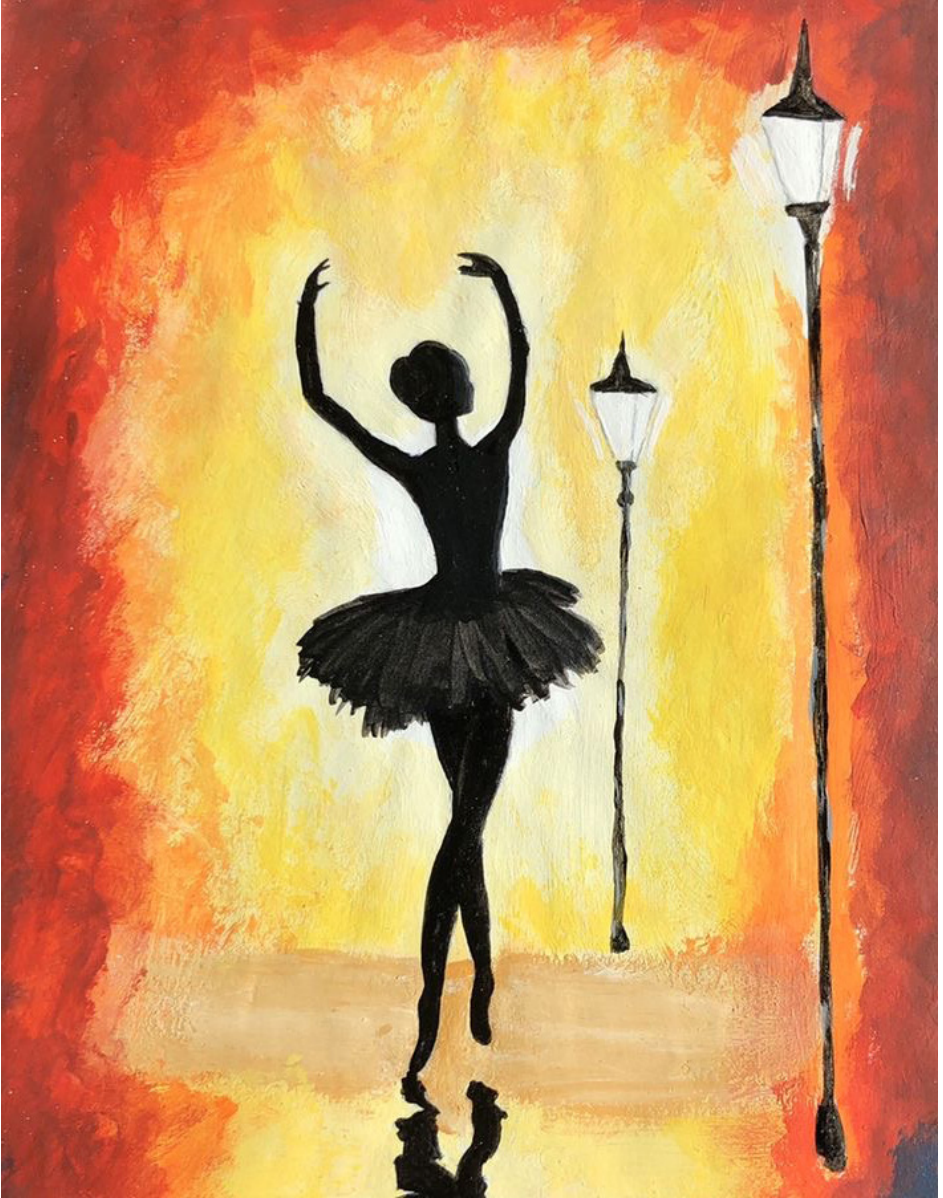
Logan Parker



Visual Art Contest Winner

Midnight Ballerina

Madisyn Hendricks



Celina Calls

Isaac Gleitz





Bluegill, Sunfish

Mya Holbrook

I complain about how far it is to walk
but I like the heavy swing
of the fishing pole over my shoulder
and I like that the cars driving by
saw my dad and I smiling.

He's shown me how
to hold the fish
gently when it kicks
and to cup my hand and slowly
smooth down the spines
so they don't stick me.

I know how, but I offer him every fish, small
still dangling from the line, puckered mouth
gaping like a wound. He surveys the damage
and does the deed when the hooks
need to be wrenched out. The blood squeezes
past his pinched fingers, down the fish's wet
punctured eye, pooling in his hands.
He mimes a kiss to my cheek before
he throws it back— making the noise,
but not touching me with it, and I'm so guilty
and glad to be loved. I never have to ask if he does,
even though I wonder why

he doesn't treat me like something
to pry loose or throw back. You are good
enough to keep, he says and doesn't
say. I'll take you home again.
I'd bloody my hands on your sharp
struggling edges
cut them on you, the hook in your own mouth,
curling back into your eyes, too deep for you
to pull free alone



My Hyphen

Iris Ries

I am stuck between a racist father and a Hispanic mother who doesn't see her own skin tone I am white passing white privileged white white white but not quite feeling right. I love my abuela, my tios, and tias but outside the home it is grandma, uncles, and aunts My family on my father's side is only an hour or two drive's away But my family on my mother's side is an 18 hour drive so why do I feel so much closer to them? It could be the politics or It could be the blatant bigotry on father's side It could be the love, compassion, and empathy on my mother's Or It could be that I am in denial of who I am. I am balancing on a hyphen and I am not quite sure where I fit When I say I am Hispanic during my French class the white boy that sits next to me squints his eyes and tries to unbury stereotypes from my flesh when he can't find them he asks, How much? But when I am in photography class and tell my new black friends of my heritage I am met with Cools and Awesomes I am met with a celebration for being mixed I am told being confused about where I fit is okay And I feel a bit better within my skin But I know I am a minority of privilege Too white to be killed for jogging down the street But brown enough to fear the cops I sometimes wish my parents wouldn't have mixed just to avoid this damn hyphen



This isn't about you

Kitley Kern

Narcissism oozes from your pores
and we get stuck
in the residue it leaves behind.
Its elasticity glues us in place
and there is no escaping
the taste of ignorance
you leave in our mouths.
The sour stickiness
gets caught in our teeth.
At the lunch table as we try to swallow,
the topic of you stops in our throats
and we choke on the thickness of disinterest.



Nonfiction Contest Winner

Confessions of a black daughter to a white mother

Samantha Lloyd

Dear Diary,

Today was the same fucking bullshit again. I'm sorry for the swearing. It's just, when you exist as a literal black sheep amongst a white flock; when you are the smallest black dot disrupting the flow of a white page; when you are the singular amidst every plurality, it grows tiresome. I tried talking to my mom about the whole affair, and she said, "What makes up your identity is how you act, not how you look." Uhhhhhhh, sure Mom. Maybe this is the heart of my contention with my mother. Dear Mother, who will never ever read this, have you ever considered the ramifications of having a black daughter? Have you ever considered the fact that you continually ripped her up from roots and placed her in unfamiliar and unfriendly spaces and left her to fend for herself? Did you think that raising her to "not be ghetto" was done out of fear for her being black? Blackness is a concept you cannot understand and so you flee from it, a scared nineteen-year-old trapped in the body of a forty-year-old woman. Sometimes, I wonder if, when my mom sees another black teen being ridiculed by the police, she sees me or a criminal. She has always been careful to put a degree of separation between me and "black people." As if her white blood saves me from being black. As if the "drop of blood" laws work the other way around. As if I didn't get followed by a Franklin cop car on my way to work. As if I did not freeze in terror when my friend got pulled over at 1:27 am with me in the passenger seat. As if I don't fear for my life when I walk into a gas station and the only person there is a man wearing a MAGA hat. All this to say, my mom and I have different definitions of fear. Her's stems from fear of the other, mine stems from not being the same.



Poetry Contest Winner Cry Out

Olivia Eaker

Imitative piece of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"

I

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by bullets, batons, and
tear gas, arming themselves with water bottles, face masks, and goggles
to both protect themselves and shield identities,
Who demand justice and equality as they raise their voices and take the
streets, in Lafayette Square as those against you ruthlessly heaped globs
of hot oozing, "racism isn't a thing anymore", across your words,
Who march, chant, beg through the clouds of privileged, systemic
oppression, as the news ignores the bellowing cries of those who have
lost their loved ones,
Who choke on the poisonous "they shouldn't have resisted" smog that
fill their lungs, as those same people resist with weeping and gnashing of
teeth when asked to place a cloth upon their lips,
Who continue to strive, work, fight for their supposed unalienable rights,
as declared by their beloved "All men are created equal" country that
excludes them,
Who persist though people still try to drown them out with the sounds
of sirens, bullets, both rubber and real, trying with all their might to
choke out three words, black...lives...mat—,
Who, for 400 years and counting, continue to cry for their sons, mothers,
fathers, brothers, who have been slain by those who were meant to help
them, heal them, protect them,
Whose tear and blood-stained faces are plastered for gain on billboards
and magazines, they put her on the cover of Vouge, on every tv channel,
even in the laws, yet serve her no justice, as her murderers run happy
and free in the streets in which her, their, lives were taken away,
Who listen as people scorn the names of the fallen, with blasphemy
and hatred, yet they worship their god standing in a red tie who refuses
to condemn their oppressors, but gives direct orders to "stand by",
applauding them as "fine people" and condoning their sins.

II

What leader would allow for the destruction of his own citizens?
"No justice, no peace!" their war cry can be heard,
Not only around the country, but around the globe.



“No justice, no peace!” they weep from behind prison walls.

“No Justice, no peace!” they beg, saying goodbye to their families,
wrongly accused of crimes they didn’t commit, feeling the wrath of a
corrupted system.

“NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE!” they scream at Justice herself,

Though the veil of privilege and favor is too tightly bound over her eyes.

III

We are with you in Louisville,

As you pray for mercy, shaking your fists at the sky in confusion and
anger.

We are with you in Rochester,

When you cry out for help but are met with violence and constraints.

We are with you in Miami,

As bullets fly in front of your children, leaving them with only your
memory.

We are with you in Cleveland,

When children’s toys become mistaken as deadly weapons, ending in
deadly results.

We are with you Aurora,

As the sound of violins, mourning the loss of an innocent life, is seen as
a threat.

We are with you,

As the color of your skin should not constitute the taking of your life.



The Lord's Prayer

Alexis Cheatham

Our Father in heaven, hollow be your name
From tongues who spit fire instead of praise.

Let my knees bleed as I kneel at the alter
And wish away the sins of your followers.

The world is neither black nor white.
The church wants to be black and white.

But it is a pit of gray lies and stumbling
hearts wishing to cover their sinful lives.

My peers give me dirty looks
while drinking whiskey in the pews.

Your descendants look fine to visitors and children
who are ignorant to hell and our demons.

The wrongs are right if they are unseen,
and the cross still shines around sinner's necks.

I leave the church with gray skin. People
scowl at my retreat, but I praise

my escape. The pastor forces a smile and tells
me that everything was okay.

It was a house of cover-ups and fake praise and I left
knowing that God was okay with me

being free.



Sex Ed for Cradle Catholics: File Not Found

Samantha Lloyd

Inspired by listening to Taylor Swift's "Everything Has Changed"

When my mom found out I liked boys, she hit the roof. Literally. Let me paint the scene for you, a portrait of one of the most mortifying experiences of my twenty-one-year living career.

The Day the (Car) Roof Fell In

We are sitting in her shitty blue 2004 Ford Taurus, driving back from choir rehearsal. I am in eighth grade. My favorite album is Taylor Swift's RED album. I live to write in my truly awful-looking black notebook that I typically stashed under my bed. "Typically," is an important word within that last sentence. It implies that there is normally a routine, but it was disrupted on at least one occasion. This was the occasion. I made the dumb decision to leave my journal on the couch (Why? I might never know). My step-brother made the even DUMBER decision to point out my notebook to my mom (he lived to regret that decision after I told my folks that he was watching porn on his PSP, but that belongs in another story). My mom made the peak bad parenting decision to read it. Within, under the oh-so-creative heading "Lovin' him was RED" written at the top of the page, was a list of all of the boys I had ever had a crush on. Let me rephrase; it was a list of all of the boys I'd ever THOUGHT I'd have a crush on. It didn't stop at a list. Oh no, it went into DETAIL. The description of them, how we would fall in love, their greatest attributes, their weaknesses ("Eli is sooooo cute, but he can't sing. And my kids NEED to be able to sing"), and the things standing in the way between me and a relationship with them. Never let it be said that I am not thorough in my analysis of the human character. Keep in mind, I am thirteen, and I have no idea how actual dating works. I know what sex is, but I have no idea I can even DO that yet. So, when I say I wanted to "date" these boys, I really just want them to be my friends. I think dating is the surest way to gain friends, because I don't have many, and I want more.

My mother defines dating in a different way. While many mothers in this day and age are a bit more laid back and understanding of the



early teenaged psychological state, my mother is a conservative cradle Catholic who does not believe in such tomfoolery as teen dating. This is slightly ironic, dear reader, as my mother had many boyfriends in her teens, and even wound up pregnant at the age of eighteen! Nevertheless, she (and her policing of my romantic actions through my teenage years) persisted.

After my mother slams me for having feelings, literally hitting the roof of her car with the palm of her hand to emphasize that “Dating! Someone! At! Your! Age! Is! Un! Acceptable!”; after, I start to cry because I feel like I’ve disappointed her; after, we drive past the intersection of Bluff and Sumner with the broken streetlight housing the cemetery where my brother is buried (A question from the author with newly-minted hindsight goggles: was this location a tactic to make me feel even more guilty?); after, my mom starts to feel a little bit guilty herself for making me cry and reading my diary and ruining my sense of privacy for the next seven years, she turns the stereo so we can listen to the RED album. It doesn’t cheer me up. Everything certainly has changed, T. Swift.



Staying In

Alexis Cheatham

Just because you come out to one person does not mean coming out the next time is any easier. You never know the reaction you'll get, and your mind replays any and all homophobic or questionable things that person has said in the past before deciding to tell them about this part of you that has been only yours for so long.

I felt like at least one person on my college campus should know my secret, so I would have some support where I was spending most of my time. But, as I was staring at my friend across the booth in the school cafeteria, scenes of our freshman year played in my mind. Like the time she called a man gay for acting more feminine than was socially acceptable, or when she questioned why lesbians use strap-ons instead of just having sex with men. But, we were sophomores now and had grown closer. And I had already made up my mind about telling her. That didn't stop my voice from shaking and my hands from sweating as the words had trouble forming in my throat.

"I think I'm bisexual," I stuttered and looked down at the table, finding the chipped wood very interesting. I ran my fingers through my curly, and admittedly a little nappy, hair while I waited for her response.

"Really?!" she beamed with excitement like she'd just received a Nobel Prize for having a bisexual friend. "That's awesome. Thanks for telling me!"

10 minutes later she would ask me if I had a crush on my female friend who was also bisexual. A week later, she asked me if I had a crush on the new freshman girl I'd been spending a lot of time with. My answer was always, truthfully: "No, that's not how this works."

**

Alcohol is a slick bitch that will make you tell all your secrets. It makes you more honest with yourself than you ever were sober and reveals secrets that you didn't know you were keeping. I thought I was content with staying in the closet and only having a few people know I was a member of the gay community. I didn't plan on telling anyone else and wanted to take the secret to my grave. But alcohol decided that I shouldn't take secrets to the afterlife.

I was off campus at a small get-together at someone's house with a group of friends. We were all sitting on the bed in someone's room, our bodies touching and our laughs contagious. We were all buzzed off



the devil's drink and I was on a high. My insides were heated, and my mind kept replaying my coming out conversations. I didn't know why I was recalling them months later. But, they were on repeat and I wanted someone else to hear the song.

I glanced at my roommate, who had quickly turned into one of my best friends. She was bumping into me and laughing at a joke one of our friends had said. I laughed too, but my heart was also beating really fast, and my mind was running on a track. One lane was telling me to tell my roommate, the other telling me to keep my goddamn mouth shut because I was drunk and would regret it. But when I'm buzzed, I'm fucking invincible, and I felt like Wonder Woman.

So, I leaned towards her, my head held high, and whispered in her ear, "I have a secret."

I stumbled into her a bit more while she giggled at my statement. We were both clearly intoxicated by this point, but not so drunk that we wouldn't remember this conversation.

"What is it?" she pressed and poked my side.

My clouded mind almost forgot what I was about to tell her. But I quickly remembered, and the words stumbled out of my mouth so easily, like I'd said it hundreds of times instead of twice.

"I'm bisexual."

"Oh," she shrugged her shoulders and waved her hand. "I think I already knew that. Or, I had a feeling. I never really cared because it didn't really affect my view of you. I still love you."

Many emotions ran through my head. She already knew. How? I'd never told her anything, and I knew she wasn't on any of the dating apps I was secretly on because she was in a relationship. I never shared any information about any of my past love interests and made it clear that studying was more important than romance.

But if she did know, like she said she did, she didn't care. She didn't see me as "bisexual"; she saw me as "Alexis", her roommate who she sat with and talked to for hours. Who she danced with at midnight in her underwear because we couldn't fall asleep. Who she would let pee while she was showering and have two-minute conversations with while I was on the toilet. She didn't see me as some girl who liked girls, and therefore had to act different and hide herself. She just saw me as another female friend.

I went to the bathroom and cried for about five minutes before someone found me and took me home. They concluded that I had too much to drink. I didn't feel like correcting them.



When You Find You Love a Mountain

Mya Holbrook

If this is butch, it's familiar—if this is love,
she is a stone in a slow-moving river.

If she knows me, we are standing in the same stream,
speaking in summer storms and flash floods and thunder.

I tell her how soft a woman I have been, because I need to know
if she knows, too,
how to make the body
small,
how to cut away desire and hollow the mountain
and make light the bones and become
half air, half apology.

If hadn't been so young
when I learned to be small,
I would have known sooner
that she is the kind of woman I want

to be. I wish I'd known girls like us, then,
hollow mountains standing in the rain,
standing at the river
in a storm to watch it get wide, just for fun,
because we're always half-full,
at least, and heavy
and never empty,
never whittled down to dust.



Love is Patient

Samantha Lloyd

Love is patient, love is kind.

He hit her again and there's nothing I can do to stop it why can I never stop it

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Tonight I stole the laptop to google "what is a slut" because that's what he calls her every night right before the belt comes loose

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Today I found out that she keeps a jar full of coins under the loose floorboard. I asked her what they're for and she said "a single one-way bus ticket" I don't get to courage to ask her why or who its for

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

The gun goes off and instead of the screaming I expect to hear I hear giggles and gales of unending laughter

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Her gloved hands press into mine but when I go to intertwine our fingers she has gone and pressed the still warm gun into mine before she vanishes into the night

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

The sirens come and the policemen see me and the gun and bruises and the corpse and the blood and paint the picture on their own. They don't see the broken jar next to the loose floorboard. But I do

For we know in part and we prophesy in part,



They ask me to describe her and all I can hear is the laughter, and so when I tell them she's laughter they shake their heads and ask again and I tell them she's a clown and they shake their heads and ask again

but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

It's the perfect motive they say and when I ask again and again about her they shake their heads and say I'm mistaken I'm wrong I'm broken I'm crazy

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

They put me here that day its thirteen years ago but I touch it like its yesterday, like it's the gun in my hands, like it's the jar glass in my fingers, like its everything

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

The polished metal that they have here shows her reflection and I speak her voice and I scream her scream and I know I know she knows I will come for her

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Soon, mama, soon. I have a coin jar under the floorboard and gloves and the gun is pressed into my hands again and my voice is yours my words are yours my deeds are yours. Soon. I love you.



The Short Epic of Baby Boy Blue

Ashton Hoerner

(Trigger warning: Self-harm)

Put it down Baby Boy Blue,
you wanna see, right?
I'm holding this scalpel shaped key
and I see you're digging for a lock
but you're messy, Baby Blue.

There's a place with no mess,
a place, I've heard, effervescent
and giggly. Truth and modesty.
But dark, void space, no trace
and no hope there.

Well, that sounds like here
with cold metal pressing
and veins compressing
but no mess to clean
or embarrassing stares.
But turn on the light maybe
and tread light maybe?

Little Voice, you have no arms,
and mine are popping—
overflowing with feeling—
and if there's any difference
between here and there
it's whether I can sting,
so why should I still cling?



Time

Alexis Cheatham

You seem smaller than the last time I saw you.
You've shrunk in this hospital bed.
Your purple and blue veins pop out of your skin
and paint your arms like a map to untold stories.
The white hair upon your head is like snow that survived
many winters of wars and poverty.

Dying is a reflection of living. You lived
more than I ever will. I hold your fragile
hands and count the wrinkles on your peaceful
face. Your chest rises and falls in a slow
rhythm and I listen to the sound of your raspy
breathing. Your heart monitor sings a lullaby
as your closed lids make your eyelashes kiss
your dark circles. I'm sure your dreams are filled
with a family I never got to meet.

Your husband died before my time, very expected,
but hard to swallow that a seventy-year long conversation
was over. Your brothers and sisters are long gone,
buried side by side at a grave too high for you to walk
alone. Your daughter left you when she realized motherhood
wasn't worth losing her freedom at 19. But she left you with me,
so it wasn't so bad. It wasn't so lonely when I could always
be by your side.

But years have passed, and time
seems to have gotten the best
of us. The string of time has cause
me to grown and you to shrivel
away. Now, alive but barely, eyes dull but bright
with the knowledge that you're okay now.
Nothing will harm you, because death is an easy
peace when looking back on the troubles of life.
Your shaking hands are reaching out, patiently
waiting for the gentle grasp of the end.



The Wonders of Blue

Ashton Hoerner

The cliffs by my uncles' beach
spraying waves carrying salt scented
popcorn flavored air through
the backdrop sky, singular and still,
on a breezeless soundless afternoon.
Dad's old Ford smelling of sweat
And drip drying like your Finding Nemo swim trunks
And the lapped-up drips of the dream sickle
From the Blue Bell ice cream truck.
A blue jay leaps from the nest,
to be seasoned by the air and dissolve
in the whirlpool like blue cotton candy
dropped between feet dipped in the pool
while the big kids run circles in it.
Drying on a beach towel with droplets
pooling at the tips of fingers,
name the biggest drop "Earth"
and watch it fall into raspberry Kool-Aid
and dissolve.



Thank you, Hisashi Nogami

Iris Ries

We're trapped inside
our toilet paper forts, but
at least we have Animal Crossing.
The Essential workers breathe in
COVID so billionaires can
exhale the Capitalism were trapped in

Nonessentials holding our Nintendo Switches,
white knuckled, trying to avoid Corona
by playing Animal Crossing.
Meanwhile an entitled mother with
her unvaccinated kids scream about
having to stay inside
We all feel like were suffocating in our
masks but we are not oppressed just
inconvenienced like a dead animal crossing the road
But who cares about corona?
There's nothing we can do.
We're trapped inside;
at least we have Animal Crossing.



There is a Cat Having a Heart Attack in the Corner and You are Playing Grand Theft Auto V.

Kitley Kern

You can hear her faint meows and see her body quivering in the side view of your eyes. You steal a sports car and run over a prostitute at full speed, the corners of your mouth turn up. Catharsis. The cat lays down her head a little bit; still meow meow meow, and her breathing picks up slightly. You think about helping her (because you should, and you can)... no, rob a bank time. You burst in, guns blazing, so focused and intense. Shoot the teller. Grab the cash. Get away. Mission Passed. STOP FUCKING PLAYING. HELP THE CAT. WHY WON'T YOU FUCKING HELP THE CAT. You look over and make eye contact with her, and then you cover yourself in blankets and fall asleep.



Eternal Battleground

Sophie Taylor

Everywhere she looks, she sees gray. She lives in the middle of wreckage from an eternal battle. The houses are in ruin. Every living thing is scorched from flames, and most are now ashes. The people around her fled as the battle started to come near, but she could not leave. She could not escape the danger. Spending her time wandering all alone, she searches for Hope, but she can't seem to find it no matter how hard she tries. Her heart is weary and begins to believe anything would be better than the eternal battleground. As she is looking around, a cloaked, dark figure walks towards her. She immediately knows it is not Hope, but maybe It can help her.

It approaches her and asks, "Where are the people? Why do you remain?"

She replies, "Everyone has fled the battle. I could not leave; I had no strength left."

Looking at her with pity, It asks her, "Do you want me to save you from this wretched place? At this very moment? No more waiting around for someone to save you?"

She hesitates as her eyes well up with tears. Finally, someone came to rescue her. Those who had already fled the eternal battleground told her that Hope was never too far away, but she pushed that from her mind. She tells herself it would take her too long to find Hope, It is too hard to find. She whispers,

"Yes, I would do anything to leave the eternal battleground."

It reaches for her hand, and she takes it. It begins to lead her along a path, but she does not see where It leads her.

"Thank you for saving me, what is your name?" she asks.

"I have been called many things. Names are given to me by the people I help," It answers.

"What should I call you then?"

"Wait and see."

They continue walking. The ashes begin to burn like the fire it once was, yet the path grows darker. She starts pulling away, but she cannot let go of Its hand no matter how hard she tries. Marks on her hands begin to appear the harder she tries to pull away. She realizes the path leads further into the battleground, filling with every evil she's ever known. As she wonders why It is leading her this way, she cannot



find her voice to ask. Her heart starts racing as she tries to scream for help, but no sound comes out. She pulls on her hand even harder this time, trying to detach herself from It, but the marks begin to burn. Her strength is nothing compared to Its power.

It continues to drag her through the battleground, still raging with fire. She can feel the heat growing on her face. The smoke blinds her and fills her lungs.

Its head turns sharply to glare at her and screeches, “There is nothing left for you here nor anywhere. Hope is gone, It will never be found. I’m taking you to a place where the eternal battle will end for you. Something new you’ve never felt will overtake you.”

She tries to ask how she will get there. She tries to ask what she will feel. Her eyes widen with fear as she realizes what Its name is, the thing she fears most. It drags her to the edge of a cliff. Looking down, all she sees is empty darkness. Hope is gone.

“I hear your thoughts. You asked me to take you away from the battleground, and away I will take you. You will feel something powerful. Many people know me as Lies, Despair, Evil, Pain, Torture, Destruction, Death, and many other things. You will always know me as Depression.”

She realizes Depression lied when It told her the path would be easier. That following It would be the only way out of the eternal battleground. Depression controls her. She feels nothing.

“I am helping you in a way Hope never could. This is your end of being in the eternal battleground,” Depression roars as It throws her off the cliff.

As she’s falling, she realizes that trusting Depression to get her out of the battleground was a mistake. Never thinking she would say this, but the eternal battleground felt better than this. Felt better than falling. She should have looked harder for Hope. Waiting for It would have felt better than this. As she closes her eyes, preparing for her end, she desperately cries out for Hope one last time. Arms wrap around her as she loses consciousness.

She slowly wakes up and looks around her. All the fires are out but she can see them raging in the distance, meaning she is in the eternal battleground once again. The last thing she remembers is falling from the cliff, and someone carrying her away. She begins to think it was all a dream until she sees the faded marks on her hands. They can only be from Depression. She looks and sees another blurry figure. Her heart begins racing as she prays It is not Depression.

Surprised she can find her voice, she asks, “Who are you?”



The figure turns around, and immediately peace floods over her. Looking at the figure standing before her, flecks of gold fall slowly off of a soft, white, and glowing dress that flows around It.

Looking at her softly, the figure says, "I'm Hope, I'm glad you've woken up. You went through a tremendous amount of turmoil, so I let you rest."

She didn't know what to say, she was shocked. She had never felt this kind of peace before. At last, Hope was finally standing in front of her. The thing she had longed for most in this wretched world was finally with her.

Hope continues, "You have been searching for Me, but I was with you the whole time. You couldn't see Me, but I was in you. Depression came, and you let It take the lead, for you felt there was no other way to stop the evil around you, but Depression is evil. Evil controlled you and numbed you. You thought you could not feel Me. You forgot I am always close. You could have called for Me at any moment and I would have been there."

"Why didn't You tell me about Depression when It first came? Why didn't You help me before I was falling?" she manages to get out while trying to hold back tears.

"You already knew Depression should not be trusted before It gave you Its name. You even hesitated to take Its hand. But you put your trust in It. Deep down you knew I was with you, but you looked for the quickest escape from the eternal battleground. You had to find your own way back to me, and you did when you called for me," Hope answered in a calming voice, "but you had given up and stopped looking for Me."

"Forgive me, all I wanted was to leave the battleground. Depression came with a quick escape, and I wanted it. I didn't look hard enough for You," she sobbed.

"All is forgiven. You can always come to me. You must follow Me now; I am the only true way out of the battleground. One day, you will leave this place forever," Hope replies.

"What do you mean 'one day?'" she asks.

With a soft smile, Hope answers, "For now, I will stay with you where evil dwells, on the eternal battleground and ruins where you live. I will comfort and protect you. One day, I will take you with Me into paradise. Your journey here isn't over."

She takes Hope by the hand, and they sit there amongst all the evil that screams around them. Now she truly feels that Hope is with her.



Nuclear Pantoum

Ashton Hoerner

In the time after mankind's right,
after the glorious glow of the oh so radiant sky
which Irradiated the bones,
erased the crazed cancerous ones.

After the glorious glow of the oh so radiant light
Oppenheimer recited; I am become death.
erased will be the crazed cancerous ones,
the roaches will write of the day.

I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.
I have irradiated the bones
and given the roaches the right to the day
in the time following mankind's plight.



Remnants

Isaac Gleitz

What are you people doing with these rock piles?
You stack them up; construct a mighty fortress
You have big plans. You are going to fix things—move stuff around.
What happened? Did something get to you?

It mattered so much at the time:
You picked the right stone, the right color, the right durability.
You hurried home to instruct the truck driver where to unload the bounty...
“Right there between the pine tree and garage,” you said.
“I’ve gotta get busy this weekend,” you said. “It’s time for stuff to get done
around here.”

I too have remnants.

Be more friendly, maintain a positive attitude, learn guitar, plan trips
What am I doing with this?

Well.
The council is waiting.
Can I revoke what hath been spoken?

Get these rock piles out of my sight.
Get these rock piles out of my head.





Contributors



Alexis Cheatham is a senior at Franklin College majoring in Creative Writing and Psychology with a minor in English. Her dream is to become a trauma counselor and work primarily with underrepresented populations and children. She also wants to write pieces that encompass a wide range of diverse characters, so everyone has the opportunity to read characters that look like themselves.

Cooper Davis is a freshman majoring in Psychology and minoring in Creative Writing with passions for piano, tennis, 2000's rock, Taylor Swift, and depressing folk music.

Olivia Eaker is a Franklin College student majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing.

Isaac Gleitz is a sophomore at Franklin College and majors in Journalism and Spanish. He enjoys reading classical literature and poetry. In his spare time, he plays the drums and piano. He is a jazz fan. His career aspirations are to either be a disaster zone correspondent or a documentary film director. His writing is influenced by global sources, including his favorites Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie. He believes that creativity is a powerful force that can shape the future destiny of humanity. In all endeavors, his goal is to convey people's stories in the most meaningful way possible.

Madisyn Hendricks is a student at Franklin College majoring in Graphic Design and Photography while also attending IUPUI majoring in Interior Design, all while pursuing passions for decorating homes, drawing, painting, crafting, and baking.

Ashton Hoerner is a Creative Writing major at Franklin College interested in writing poetry and drama. His work strives to combine subversive comedic tones with serious subject matter. His writing often deals with themes of substance abuse and mental illness.

Mya Holbrook is a senior at Franklin College with majors in Art History and Painting and a minor in Creative Writing.

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Kitley Kern is a junior Psychology and Creative Writing double major with a minor in Professional Writing. She is from Sunman, Indiana and spends her free time painting, listening to music, watching movies, and going to concerts.

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Jasmine Linville, class of 2023, is a double major in Creative Writing and Religious Studies and is minoring in Professional Writing. She is a Co-Video Editor on the Apogee staff.

Samantha Lloyd is a senior at Franklin College majoring in English and History. She enjoys museums, taking naps, and, occasionally, writing.

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Sophie Taylor is a sophomore at Franklin College studying Religion and Nonprofit with minors in Nonprofit Leadership and Art Studio. When she's not working or studying, she enjoys spending time with her sisters, hanging out with friends, and listening to Taylor Swift.



