



# APOGEE

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# APOGEE

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(\*\* ) indicates that the  
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prize of distinction

Fiction Contest Winner

# Caught Up

Maya McCloud

My grandma's old brown sectional couch pokes into my back as I lay with my head against an ancient old pillow that smells like dust. My hands fiddle with my silk scarf in a poor attempt to get it to stay against my head. My grandma is asleep in her big blue chair with her mouth lolling open as her favorite TV-pastor's 11PM sermon ends, and some other program begins. The other end of the couch contains my sister's still sleeping form. My brother snores unbelievably loud while he lays on the floor. Each time we watch Bambi, it always ends this way. Everyone else is asleep, and I remain awake, succumbing to my own unruly thoughts. This time, my brain was scrambling over the TV-Pastor break down the Old Testament texts through a grainy 15-something-year-old television.

This isn't how I wanted to spend the fall break of my sixth-grade year.

I wanted to get up and walk around the house, but there weren't too many options for me. Besides the living room we were all sleeping in, there was only the kitchen, the bathroom, and my grandma's only bedroom. I couldn't go into the kitchen without my grandma awakening from her slumber and smelling my breath for any trace of my favorite peanut butter crackers. I couldn't go to the bathroom because spiders slink around when the lights are off, and the ventilator makes a ruckus. I dare not ask why I couldn't go in my grandma's bedroom. So, I was stuck on this mothball smelling couch with tears threatening to fall from my eyes and dampen the small, curled hairs that weren't contained by my scarf.

The TV-Pastor had been saying lots of things. About when Jesus snatches all the good folks up out of here and all the sinners are left to their own devices, start killing each other, and then tormented for all eternity after they'd had their fill. He kept describing it as the saints being "caught up." The rapture. I was always told that every sin weighed the same in the eyes of God. If God remembered that I stole my classmate's Capri-Sun, and the rapture happened as soon as everyone says, I would be writhing in the hellfire next to a murderer of a thousand men. If God remembered how I hit a girl for taking a picture of me and showing her friends and laughing, or how I forgot to shave before going

to my friend's pool party, or how I was "acting fast" for wanting my hair in long pretty braids, I would be one of them sinful folks who would be going hogwild without the presence of the saints to reel me in. After all, these were not the actions of a 10-year-old, Christian Woman of God. This sudden sense of self-loathing scalded me.

As time went on, I just came to accept everything as an offense against God whether somebody had a verse to accompany it or not. I accepted it in the way that your mom made something for your lunch that you disliked, but you had nothing else to eat so you just ate it anyways. Maybe sometimes I wanted a Capri-sun in my lunchbox, but I'd just get a bottle of too hot water that had been sitting in our garage. God spewed lukewarm individuals out of his mouth, all my youth pastors would say. You must be hot or cold. Sweating under the spotlight of heaven or burning in the frosty depths of Satan's layer. Doing all that was expected of me or doing literally anything else I thought about doing. I never understood why I needed to pick one or the other.

I stared at the cracked tile ceiling while trying to monitor how loud I was sniffing lest I wake up the never-seen neighbor next door that my grandma always fussed about. Every car horn I heard sounded like the trumpet of God. Every passerby outside sounded like the shout of the Lord. Every click of my grandma's beady-eyed squirrel clock was the voice of the archangel that will sound whenever they descend from the heavens.

My thoughts flipped back and forth like my grandma's big dusty Bible.

*The pastor said we're all born in sin and shapen in iniquity.*

*Well, I never asked to be shaped in any kind of way.*

*Or born in any fashion.*

*But I don't wanna go to hell.*

*I wanna make the rapture.*

*I wanna be caught up.*

It was at this moment that my grandma decided to wake up at some random segment of the news that had started playing on the TV. The low light of the television reflected a fiery blue off her pale features and her crispy black hair. She blinks and scans the room, searching for restless grandchildren. I stifled my tears as quickly as I could.

“Honey, are you awake?” She already knew I was awake. No use in pretending like she didn’t.

“...Yes...” I wiped the snot from my nose with one hand and tears from my eyes with the other. I suddenly felt ridiculous.

“Why are you crying?”

*Why am I crying?*

I suddenly felt all the emotions rush out of me like nothing I have ever felt before. A deadly mix of self-loathing, and anguish that I knew was latent if a simple question like that broke the floodgates. I felt trapped in a constant state of too much and too little, never really getting to decide what I wanted or who I was.

“Grandma...I don’t want to miss the rapture. I don’t want to miss it. You’ll all be gone without me. I don’t want to miss it. Please.”

She stared back at me, maybe not quite understanding what I meant. Or maybe she just didn’t hear me. I wasn’t repeating it. I was already hot with embarrassment at someone witnessing the physical manifestation of all my anxieties. Still, I wanted her to say anything. Anything at all.

“Well, God does not promise us tomorrow. Just ask Him for forgiveness.”

*Ask him for forgiveness?*

“Well-”

By the time I started speaking again, I discovered my grandma had fallen back asleep despite the blathering of a news anchor and my brother’s snoring and the loudness of my fears. I didn’t bother waking her back up. I closed my eyes to rest.

*God does not promise us tomorrow.*

*But maybe I don’t need him to promise me tomorrow.*

*Maybe I don’t want anyone promising me anything.*

*Or telling me I’m forgiven.*

*Maybe I don’t want anyone to tell me anything.*

*Anything at all.*

# Green World

*after Ocean Vuong's "Threshold"*

Alexander Turner

I felt invisible in my body,  
Imagined and formed from the thought

The pinpoint, of the corollaries  
Of the eye were hidden from me

Splashing on my face the water  
freezing as it hit my body.

There was no warmth in the shower,  
and so, I screamed about being warm—

my pain bouncing off the echo  
room filling with steam and I thought of

the violence of the rain and the way  
Pavement tastes to the un-wet tongue.

I kept yelling. It is all I know.  
I felt invisible in my body.

I felt the absence of blood  
Like my body had gone cold.

That day, I paused my yelling  
and I felt like I was being observed

& like a zoo I felt as though my pain  
had become ambiguity—anachronous animal diction.

and then I felt the cool rush  
of the outside world.

There he was. I was pale.  
I felt lost and I turned around

And closed the perception.



# Believer

Kitley Kern

The book of fairies collects  
some dust mite nomads in  
the cracks of her wrinkly spine.

Unopened since the day when  
some God said wings were blasphemous  
and eyes were drained of magic.

# “Lost in the Clouds”

Lindsey Wakefield

Shaping soft textures.  
Scraping fine patterns that  
swirl and cross.

Perched on a cloud seat,  
her fluffy castle now complete.  
On to make story characters.

Down below the story clouds  
life bustled about.  
Day arose then night ascended.

Her hands moulded noses.  
Her voice twittered story lines.  
The story clouds almost complete.

Elementary school years zipped by.  
Middle school raced to the finish line.  
High school, did that exist?

Castles fought.  
Princesses saved by shining cloud knights.  
She laughed and cried at the cloud stories.

Down below the story clouds,  
a couple sat  
with high school yearbook in hand.

“Alene?  
I don’t remember her in our class.”  
“Ah, she lived in the clouds.”

# Fragmented

Hann Lucas

A new day, a new person  
Nothing ever feels the same  
I can fall asleep as one person,  
Waking up as another  
And I just  
Deal with it  
My mind is unstable like a puzzle where  
None of  
the pieces  
    fit together  
Like a shattered mirror that only  
Reflects the brokenness inside  
Names and faces come and go  
Yet, to entertain them would be nice  
A different name, a different style  
A different Me  
The feeling of not knowing who I am  
Comforting, yet chilling  
Fragments of a whole, trying  
And trying  
And Trying  
To make a person  
Names, names, names.  
People, new, unknown  
Who am I?  
I am Fragmented, but I am Whole.

## Fiction Contest Winnner

# Tying the Knot

Elliot McKinley

I glare at my reflection as I pull the knot of my tie apart yet again. I can do this. Just take a deep breath and try not to think about the looming presence of the court appearance coming in only a few hours. Or how my entire marriage to Arthur hangs on the outcome of this case. Shaking my hands out, I cross one end of the fabric over the other, and mouth the steps to myself as I work. Two years in a physical body and I don't even have the dexterity to tie my own tie. Following a web tutorial certainly isn't helping me grasp the concept any better either. I wrap one strand of fabric around the other and hold it in the air for a moment, going through the steps once again.

Concentrate on the damn tie, Lincoln. Wrap the thick end around the back once again. Or was that too many times? Dammit, I'll have to start all over again. Shake the knot out, even out the length of fabric. Wrap the thick end around the front. Hurry up and finish so Arthur doesn't see this moment of weakness. I've had more trouble adjusting than I'd like to admit, and I'm sure Arthur is fed up with it. Teaching me to walk, eat, even use the bathroom on my own. None of those are how you want to see the person you love. I swear, he should've quit loving me back when I was in diapers at nineteen years old. Instead, he loves me even more.

"Link?" Arthur asks from the other side of the door, "You all good in there?"

My tie looks like a toddler's craft project. I take a deep breath and prepares myself for the worst as he pulls open the bathroom door. Arthur glances down at my tie and frowns.

But I'm too stubborn to admit defeat. I continue working on the steps to my tie, following Arthur out of the bathroom and toward the car. The atrocious plaid tie that our friend insisted would look great on me, steals all of my attention. I manage to get my fingers stuck in the knot, and stare at Arthur in defeat for just a moment.

My own voice breaks as I whisper to him, "I'm so nervous." I recognize the buzzing in my stomach, like I swallowed someone's phone while it was set on vibrate. My nerves are completely out of control again. "What if they deny my humanity again?"

"If they deny us, then we can work on getting your new documents together. I think it's ridiculous that you have to get re-evaluated every time you petition for your humanity, but I guess that's

why I don't make the rules. I'd disagree with everyone too often."

I glance at Arthur's far more collected appearance (compared to my own). At his dark curls tied back out of his face and his expensive suit he stole from his brother over a year ago. Arthur insists we don't need the money and fame of his family, that he wasn't upset when he was disowned after not only coming out, but choosing to marry an AI on top of it all.

Sometimes I wonder why Arthur gave it all up for me. Sure, we were childhood friends, but I'm a different person now. No matter what, there will always be some part of me that struggles to be human. So why would Arthur give up the luxury cars, mansions, and personal staff just to be with me? I understand doing outrageous things for love, yet I can't help but worry he'll regret this somehow. But I remember how Arthur is all I could ever need in the world, and I know he thinks the same of me.

Arthur tilts his head to the side. He must know I'm deep in thought. "What's wrong?" he asks me.

"Nothing," I say, painting a quick smile on my face. Diving into all of my doubts about my own humanity and the struggles we've gone through in the last year wouldn't be the best idea at the moment. Stay positive. Especially for Arthur. "We should go, we don't want to be late." I leave the bathroom and grab my suit jacket from the couch, slipping it on as I walk out the door, and returning to my tie.

Arthur trails behind me, running around the apartment to grab his keys and his glasses. We make it all the way to the car before he realizes he forgot his wallet, which he has to rush back inside to get. We've still got plenty of time before we have to be in court, but he runs like he's being chased by a pack of angry dogs. He doesn't want to mess this up for me, even though I insist this is for both of us. Our relationship needs my humanity.

The drive to the courthouse passes in a tense silence that I think must compare to astronauts riding toward their launchpad. There's an anticipation for the possibilities if everything goes according to plan, mixed with terrifying dread for what could happen if things go wrong. The process for proving humanity only gets worse as time goes on, requiring more and more documents after each denied human status. If this appeal doesn't work, then I've got to add five new documents to my ever-growing pile. We've already got a three-ring binder full of my exams, evaluations, and records, along with anything else that could possibly be useful in providing proof of my humanity. The process alone takes far too long, all the exams and evaluations from all kinds of professionals to make sure I'm "truly human." They're only a bunch of pointless hurdles to make it impossible for any AI to become human. But it's been done before, and that's the important part.

My hands shake as I continue to tackle my tie. Nerves buzz in my stomach to the point where I barely remember the steps to the task. Do I wrap the long end around again, or go ahead and pull it through? Ugh. Untie the fabric and start over.

Keep wrapping the thick end of the fabric, counting the times until I can slip my finger under the loop I've formed. Take the thick end and feed it through the loop. Some part of my mind hears Arthur making small talk, adjusting the radio, and doing everything in his power to make me comfortable. However, I'm too focused on this damn knot. Never mind my impending reminder that I am not, and never will be human. The day I was downloaded into a computer was the day I lost my right to humanity, but I'm still willing to give it a shot. I've been denied my rights too many times to give up after only the second or third denial of my humanity. Doesn't change the fact that it stings to see the AI marking on all my documents, despite how desperately Arthur tries to hide them from me.

Arthur's hand squeezes mine at a stoplight, and he takes his eyes off of the road for a moment to smile at me. I'm too anxious to move at the moment. Regardless, Arthur seems satisfied by whatever response he thinks he received.

We reach the doors to the courthouse, and Arthur stops my fumbling over my tie for just a moment. "Do you want help?" he asks. I glance over at the guards, the ones who must surely think I'm lesser than them if I can't even tie my own tie.

"I'll get it. Don't worry," I assure him.

Once we reach the doors, we have to show our IDs at the doors, revealing my inhuman status in an instant. Arthur receives the proper paperwork, and I receive nothing because, legally, I'm his property. By the end of the security lineup, I'm marked with a stamp on the back of my hand as a permit for being here, so I can't be arrested as a rogue AI wandering around the courthouse.

PROPERTY OF ARTHUR J. YORK

Neither Arthur nor I ever comment on the stamps. We'll go home and wash the stamp off in silence later, neither of us wanting to remind the other of its meaning. I remain silent as Arthur speaks with the officers regarding what we need to know about our hearing. I am not allowed to speak unless spoken to, and even then, I can only speak with Arthur's verbal consent. Here, in a place of legal proceedings, I am his property. In every sense of the word. The officer points us in the direction of the appeals court, even though we've been there before. I'm sure she knows we've been there before. Arthur has been all over headlines for it. "Former Millionaire Heir Loses Appeal For AI Humanity" or "Heir To The York Empire Loses It All Once Again" or

some other bullshit article like that. And those are just the nice ones. The worse ones call me things like his “sex doll” or call him the “most famous fuck-up”.

We never comment on the headlines either.

Waiting for our hearing must qualify as a form of illegal torture. Straight-backed wooden chairs with a flat square of cloth serving as a cushion. Shuffling of papers and feet as other cases are heard. The dull drone of the judge’s voice coming through a speaker embedded in the plastic panel between him and us. The air stinks of body odor masked by strong cologne and mint gum. Too many people here hiding whatever they’ve done wrong. Makes me wonder if I’m in the wrong for trying to be human. A click of briefcases shutting makes me shift in my seat. In my peripheral vision, Arthur’s leg bounces up and down beside me, and I set a hand on it to comfort him.

His dark eyes dart to meet mine, then return to the case at hand as if it’s a monumental event to be witnessed. In reality, I think it has something to do with fencing and property lines. The case brings the image of Arthur and I having our own house to mind, easing some of the tension in my body. We could move out of our trashy apartment with holes in the walls and a serious mouse problem, and we could have a place all to ourselves. Maybe even a family if we want that someday but thinking like that is still far off. (For the time being, I can hope we never have to go to court over fences. Seems ridiculous, in the grand scheme of things. Besides, I think this appeal for my humanity is more than enough court appearances for a lifetime.)

The tie is still in a state of disaster as the case before ours is finishing. And I’m forced to go to Arthur for help. “Can you, uh...” Why is it so hard to ask him? “Can you tie my tie for me?” I ask Arthur.

He nods, turning in his seat to face me. His hands move with expert precision, tying the knot in a matter of seconds. Something inside me breaks at the sight of him easily conquering a task I’ve been struggling with all morning. I don’t deserve to be human at this point.

Once the current case has ended, our case is called. “York verses the State of Ohio,” someone announces. My legs tremble as I make my way forward, careful to stay behind Arthur the entire time. We take our seats, hand over our papers, and let the hearing begin. My heart collapses as I wait for the judge to speak. Though, once he does speak, I wish he would stop.

After almost no time, I realize the judge will not be on our side for this case. Consistently referring to me as “it” or as an object aren’t good signs. Honestly, if the judge calls me an object one more time, I think I have the right to use his gavel against him. Hit him in the head, stick it so far up his ass that it comes out the other end, something like

that. It's a simple case—I've passed all the exams, Arthur has all of the paperwork, and we have everything organized for the judge to see.

"I agree it is rather complicated, Your Honor, but if you look at his tests then you'll see he's passed the sentence exam twice," Arthur explains, fighting to keep his voice even. We couldn't have afforded an attorney no matter how hard we tried, and attorneys aren't guaranteed for petitions for humanity. So, Arthur is stuck defending himself and, by extent, me. Because I certainly can't defend myself in court. I don't even have the right to a trial.

I have to admit, I don't know where my anger toward the judge is coming from. Arthur once told me that sometimes extreme hopelessness or despair can manifest as anger. I couldn't tell you if why I'm wishing for violence against this judge is related to hopelessness, but I do understand that it is a bit excessive. That doesn't stop me from feeling angry, however. I have every right to be angry with the man who thinks I'm an object just because I spent some of my life in a computer.

"Yes, but the same documents point out that you have failed to meet other requirements to gain the human status," the judge explains. I study the name card on the plastic divider between us. Judge Laurance Andrews. Sounds like an asshole.

Did Judge Andrews drop out of school after second grade or something? It says right on the papers that I either passed every examination, or I have the proper waivers and paperwork to excuse the few I was unable to complete. Part of me wants to go up to the podium and shove the papers in his face the next time he blatantly ignores me, but the more rational side of my brain knows this would solve absolutely nothing for me nor Arthur.

"Your Honor, I believe I have the proper paperwork," Arthur insists.

"The documents fail to reflect your AI's status at the time of the examinations. The names on the paperwork do not match the name listed for your program."

I can only assume he hasn't read my case. A person with as much education as him should understand what the hell an alias is and why, in the cases of AI, it counts as a valid form of identification. "He is addressed as Lincoln in the paperwork. It's listed as an alias, which can be used for AI when their program serial number is longer than twenty characters—"

"—at the discretion of the official overseeing the exam," Judge Andrews says, speaking over Arthur. The disrespect alone is more than enough room for anger, so I have to fight to keep all of my emotions in line. "I do not have a statement from the exam proctor stating that this name was an acceptable way to address you."



“Dammit. That’s the issue with having your friend’s mom issue the sentence exam—you don’t think about things like this, even though she’s given the exam at least a dozen times. But we have to try to reason with this man, or else I can’t marry the love of my life.

Arthur’s face scrunches as he thinks, clearly going through the same thought process I am. “Your Honor, the proctor only addressed Lincoln by his alias for the entire exam. I would say she understood.” His voice breaks near the end, and he winces at the sound. All I want in this moment is to take his hand and tell him it’ll all be fine. But even I don’t know if I believe that. I won’t be getting my humanity this time. I already know it.

“The laws surrounding identification for AI are quite clear. And you simply don’t have the proper paperwork.” He shuffles his papers, the papers that decide my humanity. “You’ll begin the process over again, this time properly, and then you may make another case. Human status denied. You’re dismissed.”

Arthur nods and turns away. Even though I’d like to throw a tantrum like a child, I keep my emotions in check. I’ve grown a lot better at that in recent months. At not letting my emotions overwhelm my actions. Still, I’m left wondering why the world can’t be even a little fairer. Sure, there are people who have it a lot worse than I do, but I’m not even considered human in the eyes of the law.

My future husband reaches for me as we exit, leading me out of the courthouse and to our car. The world blurs around me as he gets in, and somehow, I’m able to make myself do the same. I shut the door, and Arthur speaks.

“Don’t worry about him. We’ll get everything done and try again in a few months.”

Arthur’s statement sounds like saying not to worry when our home is burning down around us. Everything we’ve hoped for has to be pushed back for months, all because I didn’t get one document. How is he handling this so well? My plans for my future are crashing down around me, and I have to figure out how to deal with it. He can’t be this calm after dealing with that man.

“I know,” I tell him, even though the thought of starting everything over sounds too daunting to me. Makes me never want to try for my humanity again. “It’ll be fine.”

It certainly won’t, yet he believes me. “Yeah, we’ll get through this.” Arthur leans across the center console for a quick kiss and pulls away to start the car. He makes small talk as we drive home, but I can’t even bring myself to respond. When we reach our apartment, I make no move to leave the car, so Arthur comes around and opens the door for me, coaxing me out of the car like I’m a scared animal.

“It’s okay, Link. It’ll all be okay,” Arthur tells me as he wraps an arm around me. He helps me up the stairs as I grapple with a level of emotional exhaustion I’ve never had to deal with before. At this point, I’ll find it a miracle to be able to make it to the couch and collapse. I can’t even cry. There’s no point in it right now.

Arthur unlocks the front door, ushering me inside and settling me on the couch. “I know things didn’t go how we wanted them to today. But just know that I love you. I’ve always loved you and I will continue to love you regardless of how the law classifies you. The government is bullshit, and you and I both know it.”

He sits beside me, and the couch groans under our collective weight. I’ve known Arthur through the various stages of my life, and I swear we’ve been thinking of marriage the entire time, even if we were both too scared to admit it. From being in a computer, something my human brain cannot comprehend at this point, to becoming a human and learning how to function on my own. Learning to eat, walk, talk, even use the bathroom on my own. Then came the tough part—emotions. I had to learn what my body was telling me through various physical and mental cues. How what I felt for Arthur was so different from what I felt for my other friends. Why I couldn’t imagine spending a day of my life without him.

“Are you going to be okay?” he asks. When I don’t respond, he continues speaking. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“What if I’m not really human?” The words slip out of my mouth before I can stop them, and it opens a floodgate I can’t close again. “What if this is the universe’s way of telling me that I’m not human, and I really need to stop trying because I’ll never actually get that damn marker on my ID saying I’m a human. What if we never get married? I just want the government to recognize that an AI can marry just like anyone else, but they don’t care. I’m going to be stuck in this state of AI-human limbo for as long as I live, and I don’t think I can handle it.”

My voice breaks into a sob at the end, and Arthur holds me close to him as I sob and cry into his chest. “It’ll all be okay. I promise. We don’t need to get married for our love to be real. All that matters is us, here together.”

I love the sound of that. Us. Not me, and not him. Us together, a unit.

“But I know how important legal marriage is to you,” Arthur continues. “And I want to support you in that. It’s a long process, and we’re in the thick of it right now. I promise we’ll get everything sorted out. I just want you to know that I love you regardless of what that marker on your ID says.”

He presses a kiss to the top of my head, pulling away when my

cries come to a close. He wipes away my tears with a smile that sends me tumbling into tears again. Arthur helps me stand, leading me toward our bedroom and to the bed. He takes off my suit jacket, neatly putting it away in our closet while tears run down my cheeks and splatter onto my thighs. Then he moves on to my tie, undoing the knot he crafted what felt like years ago. Today has held enough pain for a lifetime, and I hate the thought of going through it all again once we get the paperwork and evaluations together, even though I want to do this. I need to be considered human in the eyes of the law. For my own sake.

The plaid monstrosity comes away from my neck, and Arthur goes to put it away too. When he returns, I grab his wrist and bring him closer to me. “Thank you,” I whisper to him. “Thank you for everything.”

“You don’t need to thank me. I know you’d help me if I was hurting. It’s what we do.”

“I just...I don’t know what I’d do without you. I can’t imagine my life without you, Arthur.”

A smile breaks through on his face. “Well, you certainly wouldn’t be able to tie your own tie.”

# My Belt

Ryan Storm

I can't find my belt  
My partner is inviting me over and I can't find my belt  
My blue denim jeans are sagging and I can't find my belt  
I've looked in my closet but I can't find my belt  
I frantically look all over my house but I can't find my belt  
Stress is rising and I can't find my belt  
I'm texting my partner that I can't find my belt  
I'm so frustrated because I CAN'T find my belt  
I'm getting angry because I can't find a FUCKING BELT  
Nowhere in this tiny house can I find my belt  
It was in the one place I had convinced myself I wouldn't find my  
belt  
I experienced so much over a belt  
My stupid fucking belt  
How can I stress myself out so much over my belt

# In the Fall

Alexander Turner

*"In the fall the [...] was always there."*

*"The photographs did not make much*

*difference to the major because he only looked out of the window."*

*-Ernest Hemingway, "In Another Country"*

At some point I'm told when the pollen fell in spring  
I realized I had never been to Milan and might never go.  
It's terrible there and I felt it through every alert ringing.

Faces, and the spaces in between them seem to be echoing  
Becoming enumerated elegies—it's terrible here.  
Grocery store carts continued to roll across the tiled floors clacking

Rolling past the diary aisle, pushing forward and I am left wondering  
if I say It's terrible here all the time.  
Faces are posted on the news recalling

1918 when it occurred there and then here, as it were, reappearing.  
The people exist only in photographs then and they felt their own losses.  
And perhaps now as it's terrible here those who risk their lives yearning

do not have time to look, at themselves, or out windows, or to wring  
any grief from their hands or mind as they risk their lives.  
It is terrible here and yet

In the fall, it is always here, terrible and recurring.  
And we were told not to go to it as if you could only get it from travelling  
to Milan.  
In the fall, it is terrible here and the memory of the photos of broken  
scarred hands are blurring,  
fading like a forgotten short story because someone has died.

# A Compilation of Idioms

Abby Moore

## 1. "On Thin Ice"

No one ever knows where we truly are  
until we almost fall. In an instance,  
the ground cracks beneath us, splintering all  
around. Can you escape the coming hell?  
Or will you nosedive and be forced to say  
farewell?

## 2. "Birds of A Feather Flock Together"

Within our home flocks, we always soar.  
But if we chose another feather to explore,  
can we ever return to our first flock?  
Will they accept that we can move on? Will they put blocks  
up and keep us from coming home? Must we stay  
with the new one we choose, not able to portray  
the flock from which we came?

## 3. "Wearing your heart on your sleeve"

As we cry and scream,  
people always see. We cannot seem  
to hide our grief from those closest to us.  
But would it not be easier, to keep from such a fuss  
If all our emotions stayed inside, never to be touched?

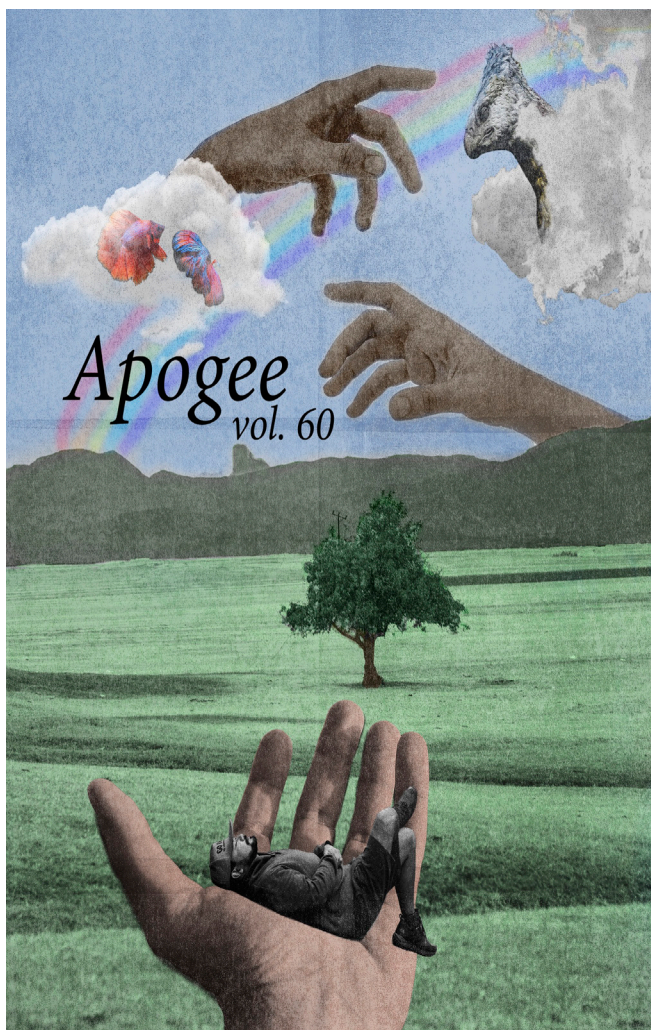
As our tears fall and our cheeks become flushed,  
We have hatred for our hearts for letting people see.  
No one wants to be on display just because the heart has a fee  
for our strong suffering emotions.

## 4. "Every Cloud has a Silver Lining"

When the rain falls, and the world feels a mess,  
we must only look up to see our actual progress.  
Never has a storm cloud kept raining, this  
one will end too. Do not get caught in your abyss  
and miss the way the sun shines through.

# Cover Contest Honorable Mention

Sydney Byerly





# Cover Contest Honorable Mention

Peyton Lewis





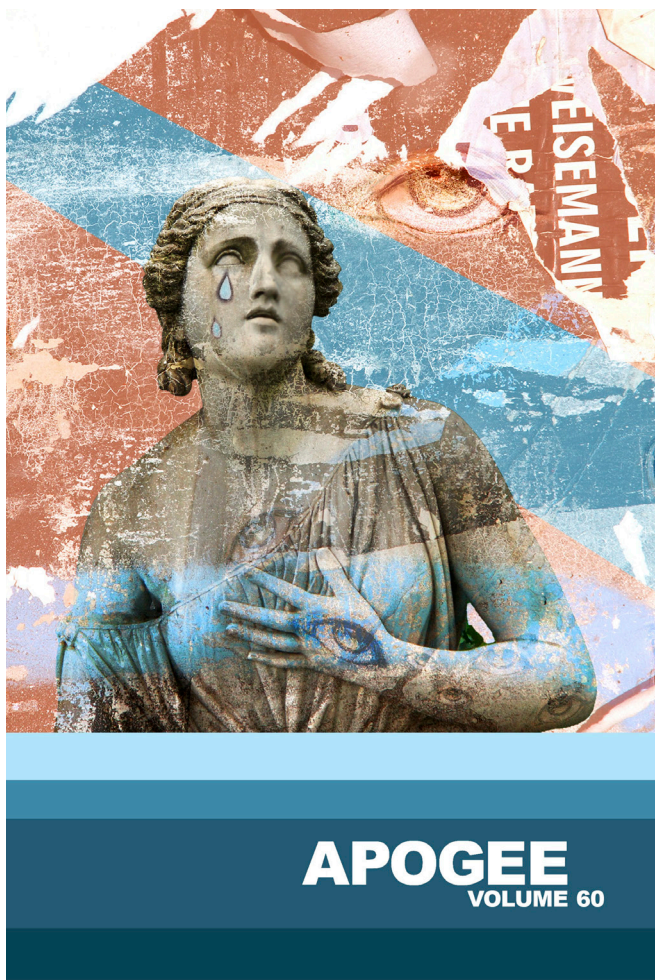
# Cover Contest Honorable Mention

Chase Hartlage



# Cover Contest Honorable Mention

Emily Cumbee



# Peeled

Emily Cumbee





# Newlyweds' House

Sophie Taylor



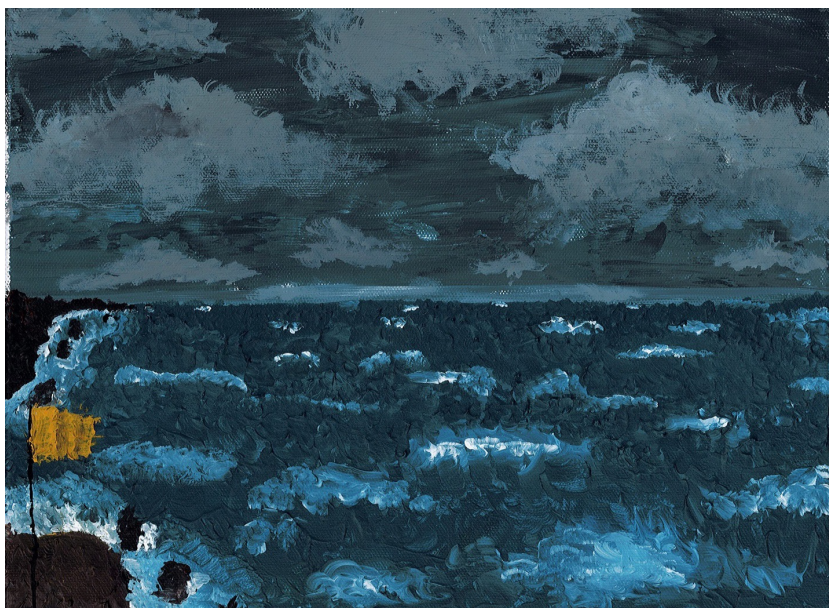
# Butterfly

Sophie Taylor



# A weathered flag that's by the sea

Sophie Taylor



Visual Art Contest Winner

# **The Edge of Sleep**

Kassian Frey



# Debonair

Kassian Frey





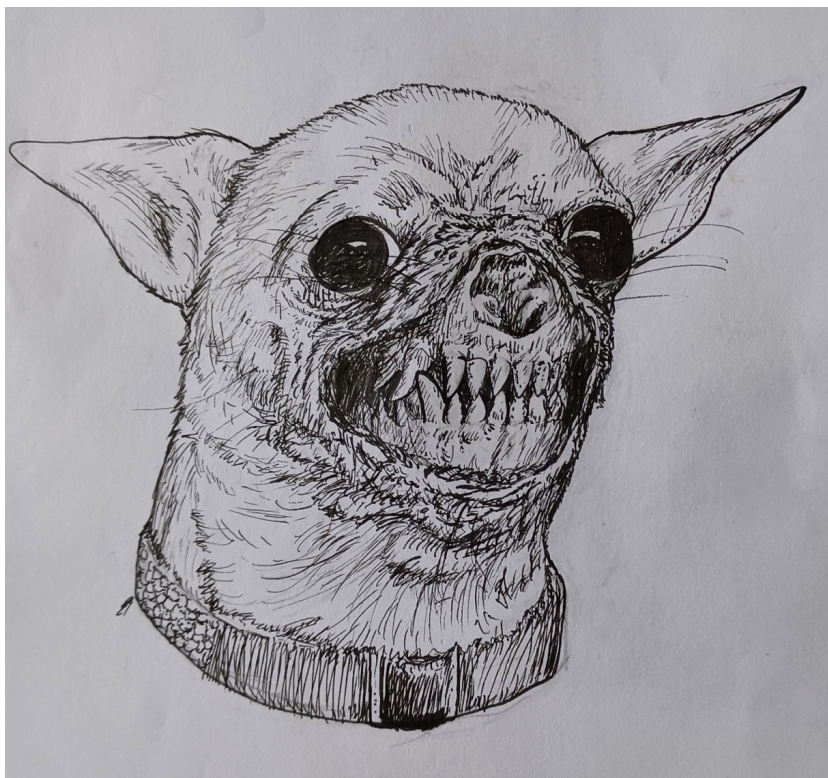
# Smoke

Kassian Frey



# Vermin

Garrett Fogle



# Muppet Gremlins

Garrett Fogle





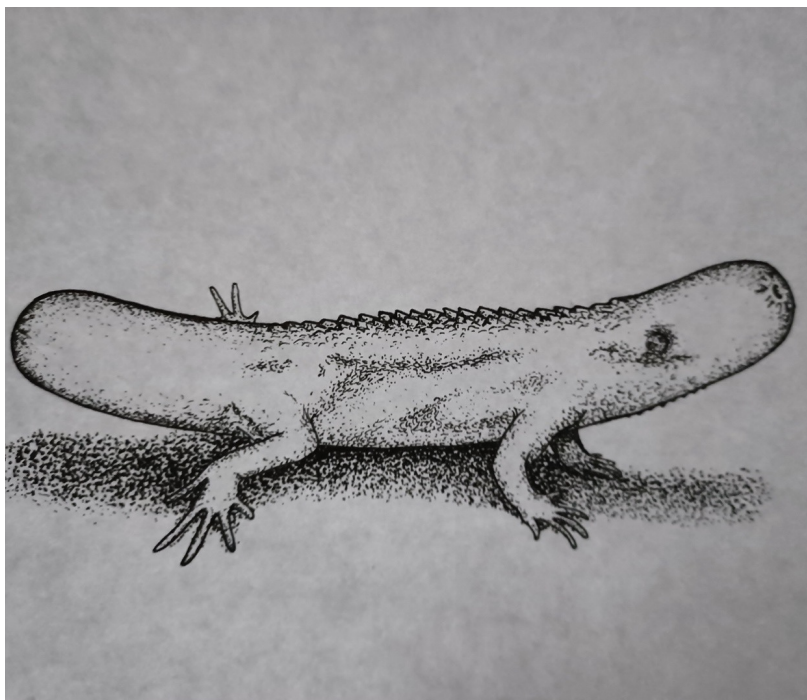
# Swanye

Garrett Fogle



# Glizzard

Garrett Fogle



# Glizzy Goblin

Garrett Fogle



# Campus Lamppost

Cooper Davis

what a remarkable thing to see  
that tall black metallic structure  
plucked right out of film noir &  
planted like a budding capless  
mushroom yes this pillar pollutes  
light into the night but we love it  
still imagine the Greeks dancing  
around this phallus of Dionysus  
wine-drunk & naked & chanting  
for his blessing of fertility yes  
believe in this beautiful being  
worship this beautiful monolith  
see it shine on an early wintry  
morning in January & like a  
hypnotized bug you will come  
to this phallus of luminosity

# Bicycle Thief

Alexander Turner

A two-wheeled man found  
near the dead end of the rounded road  
creased and then re-dried and refolded for the way in which  
he might be allowed to reintroduce  
himself, whole but hollow, memory

I had never seen my real father cry  
and I saw him rub his sun-torn face and stick his hand  
in his darkened hair and rest the hands that worked with bikes  
touch the area of which he rarely spoke  
always, medically and manually, silent

When the real man saw me in his  
prisoned locked crooked toes beneath  
the black abyss of the prison of his own choice  
and this man who would smooth out curls  
set restless in the chair in the mauve room that held his brother—who  
looked bright but was soon  
fading in the wide wide room.

The air conditioner saw the little red fabric sway and dance  
just like him I thought  
and I had seen him sway and dance many an evening to a song of my  
choosing  
but here I was without song and without dance, but he was as usual  
without the word of those he had lost and tried to forget.

He had built what the destroyed vessel had rode  
and even though the clear, concise soul was elsewhere  
I could see it in his eyes now, and after all  
the two had shared the cyclical now found cyclically destructive circles  
and the death of man without a motor is no good  
if the those who wrought destruction live.

With his furrowed lips and scrunched skin sitting in the mauve room  
I was pulled away by somebody else  
my father.



# Zombie Greenhouse

Kitley Kern

It sits under the sunlight, her brain, on a white platter. The plump pink vines wiggle around each other, pulsing with life. While she sits, undead, waiting for it to be ripe enough enough enough, flies get stuck to her elastic drool. She waters the brain, when it looks dry, with a pail of blood she keeps by her chair. When bugs get close she swats them away with violent grunts, then she pats the brain to make sure its safe. Soon, the day will come when she misses a bug. It will crawl inside the almost perfect fruit and tear through its most delicious nerves. She won't notice the small creature is in there, until she goes in for the harvest, and it explodes with rotten knowledge. Pieces of it will get stuck to her face and she will not be able to tell the brain from her own stinky flesh. She will clean up the mess and begin to grow another on the same plate, her hunger will never end.

## Poetry Contest Winner

# Mercy

Maya McCloud

Their own definition of Mercy  
Was written in blood  
And inked in sweat  
From the backs of their  
*Bretheren*.  
The Merciful God  
So easily becomes their reason.  
Of course, *Cain* shall be  
The lesser brother,  
Made to wander the earth.  
An outcast in his days.  
It is only by their Mercy  
That he would be branded  
With the black swath of shame.  
Made to work unyielding ground  
From which his own brother's blood  
Cried out.  
He is redeemed  
But at what cost?  
The glory of profit  
Lay on the back of those  
Who were saved  
From the blasphemous  
*Pagan* land.  
Flayed  
By *The Saviour's*  
Merciful hand.

# The True Trans Agenda

Elliot McKinley

I want to say I always knew  
That there was some force inside  
Telling me who I needed to be  
But I didn't know shit until I turned thirteen  
Until things started changing that I couldn't ignore  
Stuck in a body that was not me  
Growing into a person  
That was not me.

I want to say I was living a lie  
That I never told the truth  
And held the secret until I died  
Even though I didn't know the word  
Until I was practically an adult  
I had no way to tell the world  
That was not me.

I want to say I am grateful for where I'm at  
That I am happy to be here and thrive  
Because the true trans agenda is being grateful to be alive  
When so many others in my situation would not have survived  
But I cannot imagine being grateful  
For the never-ending spiral of anxiety  
Screaming and crying  
That is not me.

I want to tell everyone, all at once and never have to say it again  
That was not me.

# #31

## Cooper Davis

To R.

With discreet and deep brown eyes he signed to join the Division III ranks. And just like that, there he was in the oppressive August heat: black Nike gloves, curly chestnut hair under a navy cap, a proud blue and gold jersey for #31...

Football and baseball (the typical all-American sports), those were his – but this was football season, the time for tailgating, deafening music, and only slightly excessive partying. Yes: fun times and fellowship. One fateful night, after a victorious game day, he met a lonesome boy outside of a drunken fraternity party, one that seemed to especially pique his interest. The young man was in a rather tight-looking T-shirt embellished with rosebud graphics. The night air had cooled; they shook hands.

“Nice to meet you,” he said to the boy.

“You too.”

“So, um, what do you do here? What’s your thing?”

The boy thought for a moment. Together, they caught sight of two majestic, golden lion statuettes glinting in the full moonlight near the facade of the purple frat house. They were identical.

“I like to act,” the boy said as some athletic guys came out of house.

“Oh, no way! Me too. I did some theatre in high school myself.” He paused. “I used to joke that that’s what turned me bisexual.”

\* \* \*

A couple of blissful days later, at the first practice since the last celebratory win, things carried on as usual atop the colorful turf field. The running, the tackling, the throwing of the leathery cowhide ball, everything in the sultry September afternoon. But something had changed underneath it all.

When #31 replenished at the water station, a look of disgust came across teammates’ faces that was never quite there before. They would drink from a different spout. Where he showered, they would shower elsewhere. When he tried to talk or laugh with them, they would push him away... “weirdo; queer; fag...” and with a coldness characteristic of merciless, unloving gods. A fractured team.

It had now become clear that they knew the very thing he feared to share the most.

\* \* \*

When the homecoming game at last arrived with the chilly October breeze, the effervescent teammates unsurprisingly delivered another victory – all but one. The team and spectators alike would partake in more frivolous celebration. But the roster now lapsed between thirty and thirty-two. He had freed himself.

# Pane... bianco

Alexander Turner

On a Tuesday, tungsten lights drip on  
I remark let's leave the room and you

*I am taking a sip of alcohol*

The flask reeks of seaweed  
embodies the presence  
of eighty men aching for  
Mr. Panebianco  
and the fact his Cadillac  
is for sale.

You are nervous about having to say something  
Speaking for a man who often butchered his words.

*Put that away!*

Pointless psalms sweaty psalms  
and that Hawaiian disaster wedding  
ordained by Mr. Panebianco  
and now this actual pastor  
jokes about the Cadillac

When it's your turn you speak

*Some men seem larger*

I watch your words  
Freeze, struggle

*...life itself*

You seem to pause, and you seem to reach for a podium  
that is not there.

*Pete Panebianco seemed...*

And it seems like you're done?

*That's—that's it.*

You sat down next to me and  
remark about how you hated that man.

Blue Hawaii by Crosby plays over the loudspeaker.

*You know his name literally meant white bread?*

# Fish Tank

Kitley Kern

The tank water was sparkling back then – when I was barely tall enough to peak into the brightly lit rectangle filled with fish. I would ask dad to turn on the bubbling volcano, and I could lose time making them follow my finger. All different types. A goldfish named after a Disney star, a sucker fish that would hide in her hut all day long, a pitch black fish with huge eyes, some of the neon minnows that glowed under the black light, and a scary slim eel-looking thing. He had a large head filled with sharp teeth and his body swam like a flag whipping on a windy day. One night, I went to look at the fish, and there was a long skeleton at the back of the tank. The eel-thing was dead, and the other fish had his flesh hanging from their mouths. I cried for a long time, never really able to grasp how the beautiful fish could have eaten the monster of the tank. I was always worried it would be the other way around.

# That cold, awful feeling

Kassian Frey

When I told you your boyfriend died. How I'd witnessed the crash. Called the cops, stood with them as they filed the reports. Surrounded by piercing red and blue lights that lit up the dark.

When I told you it would be okay. How I stroked your hair like a prophecy; made waste to tears and faltered voices. Let the room fill with your sorrow, your grief.

When the evidence started lining up—not to the men on the investigation, but to you.

How you looked at me—stared me in my eyes—gaze wide from another lens.

How you figured it out, unveiled my secret, let loose the folds of what I'd been hiding, but darling, no one will ever believe you.

No one will believe that I killed your boyfriend. Your honey, your sweet. Your forever-Samael.

No one will believe that I killed him the way you swore I did. How I orchestrated the whole thing—led Sam towards the street in the heat of argument, right as a car flew by.

How I knew the man in that car. Told him when to come. When to speed up, how to hit him.

No one will believe you, but now that you know, I've lost you.

Lost your honey-warm smile and your crystal shine.

Lost your soft, lilting laugh and your aberrant touch.

That cold, awful feeling.

When I realize I no longer have your friendship, your kindness, your closeness.

When I realize I no longer have a chance.

I killed Samael. For us.

For us.

I saw what went on behind those blood-stained windows. The lies you told, woven delicately past shaking lips. The bruises you hid, covered up by your hand, or your collar, or your hair—such delicate, smooth hair.

I saw, and I mourned, and I took care of it.

Can't you see?

Can't you see what I'd done for you?

You tell me to confess. To turn myself in, to own up to the sins I've blackened myself with, but if anything, you're the killer of your own life. And why shouldn't you be locked up for that, too?

I saved you. Cared for you, loved—

And now you're staring at me. Deadpan. I can hear your breath quiver through the darkness of the house. Can see the glint of horror in



your eyes as the glow from the lamppost outside reaches in through the windows like claws.

You take a step back, and the warm glow highlights your face—makes it the only thing I can see through the quiet. It's a faint hum, but it's like I can feel you trembling; feel your small heart racing.

You're afraid of me.

My chest tightens, and a breath draws tight through my lungs.

You shouldn't be afraid of me.

"He was... hurting you."

My voice sounded torn now—defeated. As if simply looking at your face could kill every part of me and crumble all the walls I'd built up. And it could.

You, staring at me. Terrified. Stunned. Frozen.

What happened to the time you blushed when I spoke to you? When you put a hand to your mouth when you laughed, embarrassed. When your hand brushed up my arm, subtle, or you gently pressed into my side if we stood together.

You shifted in place, clothes rustling. At this point, I know your feet, your legs, your everything are begging to run—to get away—but something holds you in place.

Could you be reconsidering? Have you finally come to the realization that I'm not a threat?

There's something in your eyes that's foreign to me. Something I never see—only when people have made their minds clear on something.

You've come to a decision, a heavy one, and I don't know what it is, and I'm hoping it's to be with me, to realize I'm the man you've been looking for, that I'm the ONE, but when you take a step forward, and your breath hitches, and a sob catches your throat, I know that's nowhere near the truth. It's nowhere near the truth, it's nowhere near the truth, and now you're crying, and your eyes are full of tears, those sweet tears I'd coaxed out of you when you mourned Samael's death, when you mourned your other loved one's deaths, but I am not dead, and I am no longer your loved one, and oh god, what are you doing?

I'd been so absorbed in trying to get to you that I hadn't realized what lay in the darkness of the house. You say something, something shaky, something small, and I know exactly what I've walked into.

I step back.

That cold, awful feeling.

It slides down my back like water, like ice, like blood—and it's not until an explosion of noise rings out and I'm on the floor and people are shouting commands that I realize I'm soaked in it. The blood, *my* blood.

Chaos fills the house, and the darkness breaks way into bodies—loads of them, policemen, soldiers, I can't tell. Over the noise, and the roar of steps, and the shuffle of uniforms and guns, I can hear your voice.

Your delicate wails, the soft sobs of your heart poured out.

Even now, you cry for me. Deep down, there's still a part of me inside you. The part of me you loved before you found out I'd killed Sam.

Even now, you cry for me.

As a flurry of hands pin me down to the ground, even though I'm not moving, too stunned by the impact of the gunshot to be present.

As those red and blue lights streak the insides of the house, painting it bright like the belly of a star.

As a group of people drag me away, careless when they know they're unsupervised.

They won't care to treat me. Won't care to patch me up, stop the bleeding, hold onto the last strings of my life that are slowly falling away; but it's not like I'm going to survive anyway.

This is a more peaceful death. Better than one in a cell or a chair.

This is more peaceful, because I can still hear your voice; still feel your presence, even as they drag me away.

I always loved how you cried. How your face would scrunch up as if wounded, and your lips would quiver and part, broke way to show your lovely teeth.

As the last ebbs of life pulse through my body, I close my eyes and focus on you. On an image of you smiling, on your sobs, on your civilian pleas to one of the officers.

I killed Samael, and now you are free.

You should be grateful for me.

# Contributors

**Sydney Byerly** is a sophomore at Franklin College majoring in Journalism with a minor in Graphic Design. Her passion is to relay individuals' stories through her written and visual communication skills because everyone has a story, they just might not know how to share it. She is also involved in Pi Beta Phi and The Franklin.

**Alex Coleman** is a freshman at Franklin College studying Graphic Design. He has worked for several media outlets and recently worked for the NBA G League. After College, he plans to work in the sports media field.

**Emily Cumbee** is a junior at Franklin College majoring in Graphic Design major and minoring in Creative Writing. She is from Cloverdale, Indiana, and enjoys spending her free time watching movies, spending time with friends, and creating new artwork.

**Cooper Davis** is a junior majoring in History with a minor in Creative Writing. He holds interests in poetry, literary fiction, artsy films, piano, and the music of Taylor Swift and Björk. His favorite writers include Michael Cunningham and Ocean Vuong.

**Garrett Fogle** is a Franklin College student from the town of Brownsburg and has been drawing for most of his life. He strives to encapsulate the beauty of the everyday world. He has experience in working in a tattoo shop.

**Kassian Frey** is a freshman studying for a degree in Creative Writing. Outside of academics, he spends his time drawing, playing the piano, and dreaming up stories. It's his goal to create pieces that inspire emotion and make others feel seen. So far, he's drafted three novels, and he strives to publish them in the future.

**Chase Hartlage** is a Junior at Franklin College majoring in Business Marketing. He is originally from Louisville, Kentucky. Chase enjoys playing soccer for Franklin College and prefers flats over drums for his chicken wings.

**Kitley Kern** is a senior psychology and creative writing major with a minor in professional writing. She is on the woman's golf team and a member of psi chi and sigma tau delta. As hobbies, Kitley loves to paint, listen to music, and dye her hair. Her writing mostly focuses on the mind, emotions, and religion. Her cat, Luca, can't read, but he loves her stories.

**Peyton Lewis** is a senior at Franklin College majoring in Public Relations. He is from Martinsville, Indiana, and enjoys creating designs

for professional and collegiate sports teams.

**Hann Lucas** was born in Danville, raised in Plainfield, and has finally settled in Indianapolis. He's always had a penchant for the creative arts, with drawing being the first foray into such things. Since then, he's been making art, writing stories, and drafting poems. He loves to make pieces that reflect himself as a person, typically relating to mental illness or physical disability. It's a stress reliever that he enjoys greatly.

**Maya McCloud** is a junior majoring in biology and minoring in creative writing. In her free time, she enjoys playing Dungeons and Dragons, spending way too much playing video games, and having a good laugh.

**Elliot McKinley** is a junior majoring in English and Creative Writing. When they're not writing, they enjoy reading, building miniatures, and playing video games.

**Abby Moore** is a Sophomore at Franklin College who is majoring in English with a minor in professional writing. She loves reading, listening to country music, and hanging out with friends. She works at The Write Place at Franklin College to help other writers.

**Ryan Storm** is a senior business major studying finance from Madison, Indiana. He does not often write poetry but chose to make this piece immediately after the stress of not being able to find his belt to describe the unreasonable anxiety it brought him.

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

**Alex Turner** is a senior at Franklin College. In his free time, he enjoys reading, watching films, and playing too much Boggle.

**Lindsey Wakefield** is a senior with a Psychology major and Spanish Minor. She would love to be a therapist and novelist. Action and fiction are her favorite genres along with poetry.





