

Graffiti

An Ever-growing Collection of Creative



Works by CHS Students
2016-17

Edited by Rachel Beling and Thomas Butler

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The Seasons of Riley

By Riley Doherty

Winter:

“I love this season” I found myself saying one day while trudging home from a long day of sledding with my little brother through the tall thick snow in my mother’s pink rainboots after a “blizzard” hit the area. I called it “blizzard” because it isn’t one, a real blizzard shuts down subway systems, stops everything in a city from working for weeks, washes garbage, cars, and anything else not bolted to the ground into public waterways as parting gift and makes Bostonians afraid of the color white. But this was nice, I loved the way the snow covered everything. Though getting hit with its high beams through my window in the morning is not the way I like to wake up. Missing school is nice unless you had my AP History teacher, who assigned us some light history reading over the break. Knowing him I almost expected him to show up to my doorstep with a dog-sled pulled by German Shepherds with a packet of work tucked under his arm. I was thoroughly disappointed

Spring

“Testing Season, yay” I thought to myself while sitting in the hallway outside the small gym I was actually being sarcastic, no one likes testing season anyone who says they do is a sadist. Before the test started all of the AP students were sitting, standing, or cramming last minute in the hallways. There wasn’t much talking, there was some small conversation between tightly knit groups of students. This was the kind of thing you would expect to see in a movie. Where one person stands up

gives motivational speech, and leads the large group of rebels/survivors/soldiers into battle against a dictator/zombie horde/swarm of aliens. But no such speech happened, when it was time we all filed into the gym. The problem with the test wasn’t the test itself, but the cold. It was recommended to bring a jacket, but the cold was still ridiculous. I was shivering and I was born in Wisconsin, it’s the US equivalent of Russia. The cold was apparently part of the test, to test your endurance under pressure I assume. Also if you froze to death your score may be canceled.

Summer

“What the hell was that” I exclaimed, while doing some yard work in my backyard. I did yard work outside and odd jobs around the house most days during the summer, it paid well and it was some “healthy labor”. But today I had my first encounter with a goliath moth. It just fluttered by minding its own business while I was weeding the backyard garden where we grew tomatoes and blueberries that were either eaten by squirrels or just rotten. The behemoth of a moth flew in my general direction with grace for a creature the size and wingspan of a large bat. But I didn’t appreciate such grace at the time, I grabbed my shovel and started to swing at the moth. It proceeded to dance away, not out of fear I assume more like a lack of interest in the lanky black kid messing with the plants. I took that time as it flew away to realize that God is a mad scientist. A friend once told me that there was species of spider that lived in Australia the regularly caught and hunted snakes due to its size and power. I imagined god in heaven creating such a monstrosity saying “yep, this is totally my best idea ever”. He’s not wrong, you

can't get much worse than platypus I assume.

Fall

"I finally made it" I said to myself while walking up to the bus stop. I made it to senior year, tested and home worked my way up the latter and now I made it to the top. This is it, the year I run this school, I know of the challenges I have to face. Harder classes, the responsibility of carrying on the CHS legacy, prom, and a mental disease the underclassmen have dubbed "Senioritis". A disease that strikes halfway through the year, when a sizeable group of students all simultaneously say, "Screw it, none of this matters" and proceed to skip classes, leave assignments incomplete and just wander the school building. But none of those challenges matter right now. The only one that matters is making it up this hill that leads to my bus stop. As I approach the top I see my little brother sitting at the bus stop, he left twenty minutes before me. And he was still there sitting at the stop, and other boy his age was sitting near him, leaning against a tree. "I think my bus is late" he said to me. I told him he should head home and get a ride from Dad before he heads to work. He got up and headed home. The other boy, seeing that his newfound compatriot was gone also left in the direction of his own home, following my advice I assume. I looked back at my brother who was walking at his usual slow pace, disappearing down the hill. I wondered what challenges he had to overcome this school year.

"a litany: aphrodite to the goddess of the hearth"

Ashley Clark

The men in my life respond to violence.

it's biting

it's swallowing

It's kicking

It's screaming

it's silencing.

The men in my life do not know meaning

*of the gentle voice
or the gentle hands*

It's carnage

It's bloodshed

it's heat

And it's war.

The men in my life are Ares meets Zeus
fury meets authority

No matter how much I can lift

you will never be stronger

The men in my life take

*and they take
and they take*

Until I have no love left to give
*and the women will tilt their
glasses to the floor*

And soon I am nothing

*and the women will spill their
sweet wine in our favor*

But an empty bottle

*and the women will pray for full
hearts*

But a siren's call

and then their eyes,

Once red with rage

and heat

And flame of some twisted desire

turn black and cold,

Like coals from the fire

we once were forced to stoke.

daybreak with mozart

Frances Owen

this cool mild and humid
daybreak
he gets out of the old cranky
pick-up
with his violin and his backpack
and leans against the wall (for a
quick second)
the first touch of morning
embraces his face
his eyes close and the music
sweeps its way into his ears

bold and brilliant as the morning
dew's waiting to sprinkle,
sparkling joyously onto the
glimpse of goodness he sees
when he hits just the right set of
notes.
by the expectation of the self-
assured rays of the sun
graceful night clouds poised
dancing away
impishly evading the resplendent
flaming light

timbres and tones just escape
him.
when the cadenza begins to take
its triumphant toll
deep bass and high liquid
splashes and falls along the
sidewalk and down the trees
all solo, like him. He is not built
for an
orchestra, rather a light-filled
stage just for him
and his flaming eyes behind
closed eyelids
and his medium of the moment
between darkness and light

as the sun roars in

in a magnificent yellow
fortissimo, but--
he is still in darkness.



Masaan Anderson



Kiana Stinnie

I Am

Mariam Anwary

I am Indian
I wonder about the world
I hear the cries of people
I see war and blood all around me
I am a student
I pretend everything is fine
I feel alone and scared
I touch the abandoned dream
I worry that there will be nothing left
I cry for my loses
I am a daughter
I understand the pain
I say everything will be fine
I dream of making a change
I try to find stability
I hope there will be love and peace
I am a sister

looking for dragonflies

Rachel Beling

most days the words are the gravel
in the asphalt driveway,
the sharp kind that digs into knees—
pieces are worn loose in cracks, but
pavement is mostly united.
and today the words are the stones
smoothed by water and time.
they lie at the bottom of the river,
ungraspable, but the current pushes the
world forward anyway.

most days the words are the ants,
and on the driveway they leave trails
for others to follow.
so dutifully they bring back
nourishment.
and today the words are the dragonflies
by the pools of water
and seeing the fascinating more closely
would be enough,
but they always leave with sunlight on
iridescent wings.

most days the words are the girl
who steps over the cracks on the asphalt
driveway
but sometimes forgets the ants.
they're a small sacrifice to walk.
and today the words are the girl
who sits barefooted on the river bank,
forgetting the time and waiting
for her lost dragonflies.

A Florida Drive

By Riley Doherty

We were going down to see family in Florida during Christmas last year, by car, from Virginia. The trip had taken two days and we were reaching the last leg of the trip in Florida. You can tell you're in Florida when all of the high billboard signs go from "Try IHOP's cheap yet delicious breakfast" and "Stay at Holiday Inn's wonderful hotel" to "Call this number to contact one of our cheap yet effective defense lawyers" and "Come to the Lion's Den for a wonderful selection of adult toys and movies". You won't see any signs advertising Disney World or Sea World, or Lego World, or *{insert-noun-here}* World. They only save that distinct honor for airports. Because apparently no one who's main mode of transportation is a common car could afford to go to one of those places, so they'll have to settle for the adult movies as their source of entertainment.

Everything in the car was tranquil, as tranquil as it gets. My and my brother Ryan had just finished an explosive game of Pokémon, in which my overglorified toucan managed to defeat his dragon that could bend the fabrics of space and time to its will. Enraged that he somehow lost, we went back to listening to music on his iPad, grumpily. I was also trying to enjoy my music but my parents we're listening to The *Hamilton* soundtrack non-stop all ride. My parents suffer from what I would call the $\frac{1}{2}$ *Hamilton* syndrome. Where they know all the songs, the people who sung them and those peoples addresses, but they still haven't spent my college money on seeing the musical yet so they're not satisfied. Causing them to

listen to the soundtrack over and over again until the end of time.

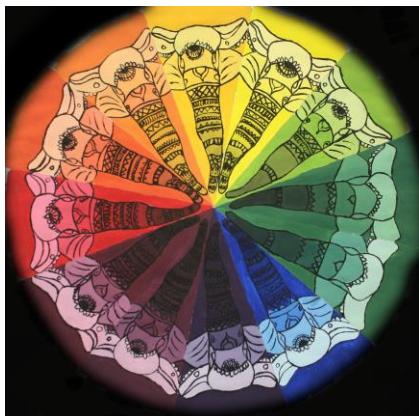
In attempt to drown out the song about Hamilton writing, which by my estimation it would take about five more listens of the *Hamilton* soundtrack to reach our destination, I decided to watch *Ghosts in the Shell*, which I had downloaded to my iPod. Not the movie starring Scarlett Johansson and that one other guy playing the villain with sunglass lenses for eyes but the anime with the voice actress that isn't Scarlett Johansson and that one other guy playing the villain with sunglass lenses for eyes. It was all in Japanese and as such hard to follow being I'm not the best speed reader, but it was worth it. Why you may ask? Because I'm cheapskate. Why spend money on a movie when I have it right at my fingertips?

While stopping at my favorite store to get snacks for the trip I didn't ask myself what I could get with \$20. I asked how much I could get for \$20, so I purchased two bags of tootsie rolls, two cans of Pringles, two cans of soda, one sweet tea, one thing of airheads extremes, and of course napkins, because I'm gentleman. My brother is very different, he asks what singular item he can spend \$20 on. And as such he bought two bags of Chester fries, a Fiji water, and nothing else. Every time he egged me on for food I would just shake my head. Why spend \$4 on "Earth's Finest Water" when sugary poison is only 99 cents?

After finishing episode 2 of *Ghosts* with the stunning conclusion that the big angry guy with super strength and an itchy trigger finger DID murder all of those prisoners of war, I decided to tune

in to my surroundings. The first thing I noticed were that my bladder capacity levels were reaching critical, and detonation was imminent. I then discovered drinking two sodas and a sweet tea in rapid succession wasn't the best idea I've ever had. And soon we stopped at rest area. The first blatantly obvious thing about Floridian rest stops is that they have no roofs, why would you need them when you have lows in the "comfortable" and highs in the "perfection" all year round.

After hours of questionable billboards, Pokémon battles, *Hamilton*, Snack Budgeting, and Anime Cyberpunk Crime Dramas, we'd finally made it to our hotel in West Palm Beach. Like every other building in West Palm it was located next to a body of water and a pair of train tracks. Unfortunately you had to pay money in order to use the parking lot, but in a very Florida sort of way, the gate was jammed open by some outside force. Because in Florida, people pay way for what they want. Florida became my home for a Christmas week, so I trust me, I know what I'm talking about.



Angie Salinas



Arleth Salinas

Untitled

Allyson Schoolcraft

I'm a grenade
and at some point I'm going to blow up
and I would like to minimize the
casualties,
Okay? But you know I don't dance,
And here I am spinning you around,
She is everything I ever wanted and
everything I ever needed,
You have to be a best friend,
Tell the truth and overuse I love you,
I'm on a roller coaster that only goes up
my friend,
I fell in love with the way you fall
asleep:
Slowly, then all at once,
We fell in love by chance,
We stay in love by choice,
I've heard if you love someone,
You must be prepared to set them free.

Small Thing

Santina Urrutia

Hey, small thing,
You've got a good looking stare,
I can see your thoughts
As they float in the air.

You're all grown up now,
And the generation above you;
Still remembers when you were
Just a small thing.

I can tell you're reminiscing
The things in your past,
Small thing, you're grown now
The past made you.

Small thing, I know you want to,
But you can't take that away,
Everyone makes life mistakes
It's okay.

I know you're older now,
It's okay to be scared,
This place is cold
Life is hard, small thing.

Small thing, you'll be fine,
I know you will,
You'll see places and
Even bigger things.

So wipe those tears,
Stop the glazed thoughtful stare,
Go float like a feather in the air
And it'll be big 'cause you're a small
thing

Sadness

Riley Doherty

It comes to us all, again and again,
That feeling, that drop in your stomach
as the world is pulled out from
underneath,
The ground that once held you, the
foundation you knew gone, torn away,
Hope that it's alright, hope that it's okay,
but hope makes it hurt,
My body turns into a shell and empty
frame where the echoes moan for rest
that never comes,
I scream inside because I can't form the
words I can't make the sounds,
I depress onto the screen a bright
hopeless stares back at me there's
nothing I can do nothing I can say,
I just have to wait,
Wait until I feel whole, until I feel safe,
I just sit and I try to think but its static
that comes back, my mind is drowning
and I can't reach it.
I walk the halls of my realities a mummy
wrapped in bandages of flesh and bone,
Secretly falling apart but I can't let them
see how weak I feel,
I must act as the rest, fall into line while
fighting what is happening in the halls of
my mind,
When I speak it sounds full but at times
it's just empty, I lie so those I know
don't worry about me,
I lie,
I lie to protect the ones I love,
I lie to love myself,
I love to lie,
Loving a lie, and with it the angels all
die,
Loving a lie, and with it the angels all
die,
It's too cold to allow angels to fly.

A Poem for a Year

Helen Gehle

*he runs his fingers over the keys as he sits
waiting for the dust to clear and for the notes to settle
her heartbeat counts him in
1, 2, 3, 4
begin*

it starts with a list of wished words
one at a time you remember them
the lines to lost poems
the umbrella you never carry
how many days have passed since the piano was unlocked

if you flipped back a few pages
took away a month and added seconds to the year
you might be able to find it somewhere
it's been a while

then there are the other things to remember:
rebuilding
undoing
how the listing of spells
is the listing of all the things you want to come true
because the wishes aren't working
your eyelashes curl too easy and the clocks hardly line up anymore
and in case you forgot, dandelions don't bloom in the winter

*he pauses
the music hasn't left
somehow he holds it in the air
not reverently, but with a coexistence
that you see in everything now*

you see it in the dashes and dots that run next to the love letters

you copied by hand onto thin blue lines written by zelda, for zelda.
the '20s were a long time ago
but you still glimpse her parasol wavering through crowds
and you understand her tightrope love

*you see it in his fingers stumbling along piano keys
until he gets to the chorus
he knows that part every time
it's almost like it plays itself
and as the pedals of the broken piano clang at the end of each verse*

you keep spinning

and there are the things you have remembered:
things to cross off the list
the checkmarks slant like the glint of the light off a sundial
its triangular shadow marking the time forcing the minutes to inch on
counting down the calendar

but somehow when the hour ends the music doesn't stop
and you wonder why time has
and the calendar lays there in its series of mathematical errors
the radio turned up one notch too loud
and you go to what was supposed to be the end
write another verse

open the calendar and tack on another box, another day

you number it with infinity, for him
and the piano plays on

GPS & Other Disgraces

Harli Saxon

Turmoil or disdain,
The right path or the wrong,
Still functioning among my own
exhibitions,
Causing but preventing my suffering,
For what? I know which path I've
chosen,
I can't bear to hide in the pages of its
lore any longer.

Luck and suspicion,
Motivation and support,
I, too, know which way I was meant to
turn at that intersection,
There's no need to nag,
Perhaps I'd just forgotten for a fleeting
moment,
That lasted many lifetimes recalculating.

There's no need to shame me,
For I am already ashamed,
For letting go only gives freedom for
some,
Yellow circumstances that were only
briefly reflected upon my blue light,
On my screen, I'd reversed the clocks
for myself,
While everyone else was still stuck on
synchronization.

Don't mock me,
I will never be my father, the robot,
Halt your attempt to repair my wiring,
My neurological ties,
Leave me lost in your hands,
I will never choose otherwise.

I've tried to condense myself,
I've tried to depend on our modern
technology,
For hope and change,
To direct me backwards to the path I
should have taken,

It's no use,
My screen is locked.

My location services are turned off.



Carmen Day

Untitled

Samuel Ely

My palms are still sweating,
and this day I was dreading.

I am however, somewhat sad the day is
almost over.
Why?

A test was taken,
my food was too long bakin',
and I was early awakened.

I angered my friend,
hopefully us will not bend,
and I gave him all my extra money to
lend.
Goodbye!

Sadness is sad,
to repeat,
this day is not glad.

I feel I'm on a thinning beam,
watched by an angered team,
ears bleeding with steam,
I can't see due to today's nasty gleam.

I like it, though.
It may go down in history... as the day
that was overdone,
with many puns,
no guns,
and people the polar-opposite of nuns,
this history is almost over.

Those remember the days that shine with
a frown,
it's still noted as we look down.

Fortunately, most days will be better,
my face not as redder,
only the memories will remain of the
very bad day, that goes in the
shredder.

Stage Lights

Parker Nelson

A smile was plastered on her face
as she sang and danced her way across
the stage. The closing song finished and
the applause thundered around her. She
bowed and ran off into the darkness
behind the set. Looking into the mirror,
she saw a happy, pretty chorus girl, but
she felt raw and unsatisfied at her core.
After carefully peeling off her vibrant
flapper costume, she left through the
rusty back door so as not to meet anyone
on her way out. The rain was coming
down in torrents and a sharp wind was
howling in her ears. She slipped and slid
across the street to her car and sealed
herself inside. The mirror had been left
down and she sat for a while, staring at
her reflection. The harsh wind had
pulled her hair down and her makeup ran
in rivers down her cheeks. She finally
looked like what she felt inside; raw,
ugly, and flawed. Tears escaped her
glassy eyes to mix with her melting
facade. Everyone told her she was
perfect, beautiful, and talented, but she
felt nothing. Nothing except the
monotonous beating of her empty
heart. She had loved and loved and now
she was empty, drained of all feeling.
She had fallen for all the wrong people;
the ignorant, the proud, the rude. Love
had been spoiled for her and was now
just a figment of facetious shows and
movies. It was just a side note in the
script, a certain lighting and soundtrack.
It wasn't a reality. She had lost her sense
of self and was now just a body and a
beating heart going through the motions
on this glaring stage called Life.



Lyyasia Wrenn

Masquerade

Parker Nelson

The hall is illuminated by flickering flames. Dainty notes flit around the room. Ballgowns glide across the ground, and slippers tap atop the tile. My face is hidden beneath a shadow, my secrets below a heavy gown. I am free to express myself, without the burden to be who they all think I should be. Dancing, my fears fall in sheets off my conscience. The light notes tickle my ears, inciting a dance from within. Light as a cloud, I twirl and spin. My partner, a fox, guides me swiftly through the hall. A horse dances regally with a swan, a squirrel chats with a hare. Every soul is guarded, yet free. Each life has chaos controlled beneath their skins, but all may dance with the foe. No one knows what fear wears what shield. Yet, they carry on their elaborate dance. A final note settles in the air, and all movement stops. A salute to a partner, and the dance is done.

Untitled

Ben R. Sties

Throne shattered, painted black and strung back together
Beaten, darkened and forgotten you lay alone
Listening to lonely strings plucked and snipped
Their throats, cold and calloused.
Music drifting away into the expanse, far away
(He will come for you again,
Cold touch, warm mind,
lost soul quietly adrift)
You are a spiraling shape of black clouds and crimson thunder
Your eyes burn with whatever heart you leave behind
and you dream of what you will never be



Mythryl Thomas

jacob's ladder

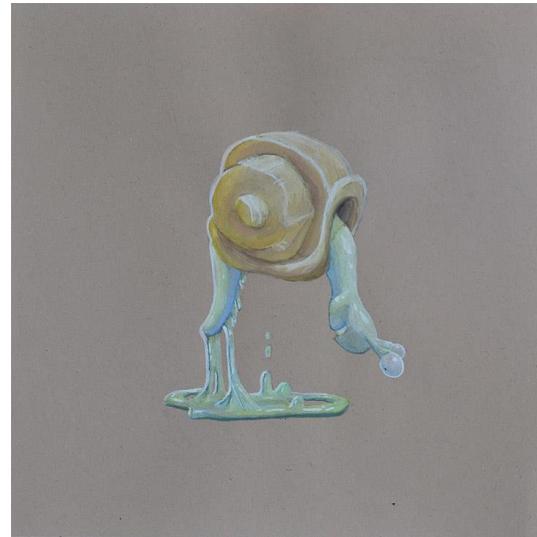
Ben R. Sties

Two hundred and nine steps, carved of slick, dark, misshapen volcanic rock. I stood at the very foot of the staircase, not yet having set either of my feet past the wrought-iron ingress that paralleled my damp figure. The day's transient showers had been erratic per usual, but lasted just long enough to spread a thin coating of moisture across the black nylon of my now-outgrown rain jacket. The hundreds of steps that laid before me were the last leg of the journey before I reached our impermanent Scottish home. And I very much intended to climb each one.

That morning, during our daily trek through the narrow city streets that now towered far above me, I had noticed the dingy and graffitied plaque—accented by a black and silver paint job that had just now begun to show its age. The name of the historic steps was stamped out in all capitals, but seemingly showed no desire to be noticed. If anything, the staircase was very much out-of-the-way; bordering the rounded edge of a cracked sidewalk and tucked behind the corner of an ancient-looking federal building. That morning, these steps had only been a curiosity—something I had peeked in on but showed no inclination of actually climbing. But now, after a day's trips across a country I was so enamored and intrigued by, the prospect of a new, isolated experience was one too great to be contained.

The steps extended farther than my eyes could reach, stretching and curving all the way up to where I had stood hours

earlier. A thick fence of black iron spikes guarded the outermost edge of the staircase, protecting those brave enough to climb, but still allowing for a grand view of Arthur's Seat—far, far in the distance—to still be enjoyed with each tentative step. I took a step closer, realizing that now, these thin, jagged steps were the only thing standing between me and a memory I very well might have for the rest of my days. I took a look back at my parents, watching and encouraging as my mind made its decision. Slowly they began to turn their backs, my father's arm wrapped around my mother, walking away towards the nearest sidewalk. They said they would meet me at the top, so I could tell them all about the climb and the breathtaking view I was about to witness. And two hundred and nine steps later, I did just that.

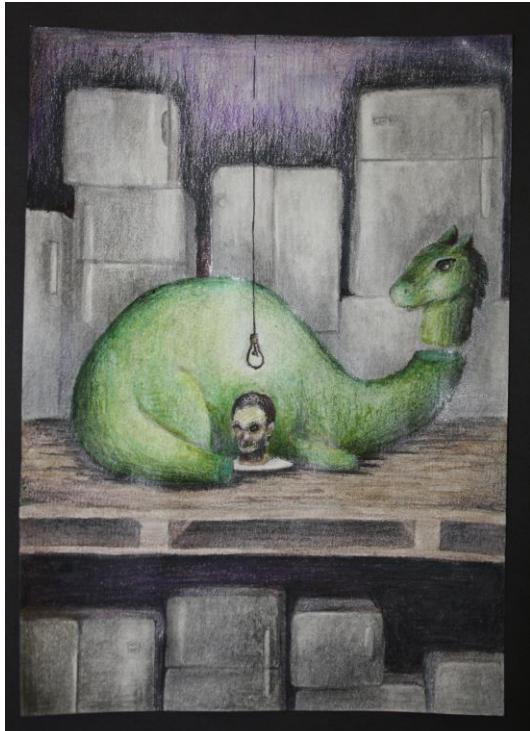


Louis Ackerman

Untitled

Dana Day

*Eyes and flowers prowled around me
while my hair swayed through the wind.
Efforts to stay contorted by air has
become too strong.
Fingers started to wither into pale pink,
white hair flowed around my hands
covering my eyes.
Even though the wind was scraping my
spine and scrawny knees, I still had the
comfort of my flowers and eyes.
Silk finished petals tickled my subtle
skin, while I waited for the sun to set,
and night would be here.*



Sydney Lewin



Patrick O'Shea

Untitled

Dana Day

*My escape of confined water,
Sandy socks and clay-colored jackets
surround me from subtle breezes.
Pale feet sink into the sky reflected water
while my body flutters into a blissful
harmony.*

Time has collapsed in my mind,

It passes me with no warning.

I travel.

*I walk and feel the warmth under my
frail toes.*

*My strength dissipates while my hands
grip onto my protector.*

*Will the breezes hold me tight and place
me into another haze of beauty?*

Will this last?

My Love of the Abstract

Liam Hubbard

There's an undeniably fickle nature to writing an essay. Descriptions can get lost in themselves and whatever the writer chooses to describe about is almost bound to be merely powerful to themselves. Life seldom offers things that petition themselves to have a universal appeal. A subject is only as strong as the relatability of its base. And relatability is subjective. This is where one might get lost in choosing a subject. My one and possibly only pleasure in tirelessly choosing an entity or ideal to describe is the very nature of the abstract ideology it can be based on. The abstract is what I love, what I find limitless enjoyment and intrigue in dissecting and attempting to understand. Through my struggle to find an entity or singular force to objectively write about, I find myself expressing my deep love for the abstract. The abstract, in its relation to learning, creating, and analyzing.

The beauty of the abstract to me comes from the freedom it gives. Something that I've noticed as I've gotten older, is that there's an increasing importance, need, and eventual obligation in the objective. The bare bones of facts, statistics, and non-negotiable answers are what makes up the demands of modern adolescent society. This is closely tied to school systems with the final judgement of achievement measured is the objective, being the bare statistic of your final achievement instead of the abstract notion of effort or more importantly, the analyzations that one puts towards a subject or question. Abstract observations and analyzation are what I personally thrive under. It drives my school work but what it also does is push

me to analyze further. Take observations of the world in an indirect and abstract way to complete myself and my world. This drive is what I characterize as achievement.

Pushing me, a procrastinating teenager to take an in depth and analyzing view of the world is an achievement all its own. However, it's not likely it can be quantified in a GPA. My love for the abstract can also lie within its creative application. What I find hypocritical is how the seemingly creative aspects of my life and in school can be easily bogged down in the real, formal, and pragmatic. The writing, the free thought and expression that I find myself doing in school day to day is often suppressed by a constant need of formality. Discussions in class, assigned essays, et cetera, all being moderated carefully making sure the points provided and the conversation doesn't dwell too near on the side of abstraction. Attention to realism has mass importance, but the lens of study and conversation that I find the most stimulating and rewarding are the conversations looking at the world and a subject abstractly.

In addition to creation, the activity I've found myself doing ever more of since I've gotten older is the analyzation of the world. It's easy to find the tenor of what people say about the state of the world. The tone is rather cynical, people often describe the world as a harsh hellish place of backwards humanism perpetuated by greed. That's an objective observation I like and I agree with. However, it's why people do the things that they do, why the world's societal tone seems to be a harsh negative one, and how it got to be this way in the first place. This is where I use the abstract to view the world. Taking a

broader look, not just focusing on the objective non-negotiable problems in the world but looking to why they exist at all. Getting rid of who I am in relation to everything, not being personally direct with my analyzations but rather taking a worldly view, a broad view, an abstract view.

Stepping back and viewing the world in a non-direct way and analyzing what I see makes sense to me. Furthermore, it's given some insight into how one can view a smaller subject such as a book or a movie. Being non-direct, unorthodox, and abstract in my analyzation of an entity has crafted me in a way in the way I give criticism and how I diagnose the state of the world. I do possess a disdain for the blanket statements of widely known facts as being a placeholder for a nuanced opinion. In many ways my struggle and strained relationship I have with the school system is the absence of deeper analyzation in schoolwork. The second largest city in Syria: Aleppo. A clear and organized answer, a non-negotiable one, an objective one. All fine and good, but what sparks imaginations is the question of "why?" Why is it the second largest city? Why is it a center of the refugee crisis? Why should we care? These are abstract notions and points that are seldom put to use in our modern system. And that gives me plenty of room to complain. Perhaps randomized complaining is where I ultimately find a use for both my objective and abstract observation.

My internal nirvana is based off of what I can understand about my surroundings. My interest in the world stems from an intense desire to analyze it, it's possibly the reason I've become somewhat of a news junkie. For how much I complain about the mainstream news, the school systems, and the

monotonous basis of objective life, I find all of these things almost ideal when I'm able to analyze my disdain for them in detail, abstract detail. The world in its entirety is something for all of us to try to understand, the dynamics, the actions of the past, present, and future.

However, the present is also here to provide objective context for those analyzations. My observations from the world are based on the facts of the now and how they relate with the abstract themes of the past and the perceptions that will lead to the actions of the future.

The world is one of a cynical nature, bogged down with the downbeat realism perpetuated by people's relentless need for living in a directly harsh world to which they cannot escape. This entrapment can spark a desire to escape, this is the final joy that the abstract brings to me. A place to escape to mentally, in my day to day life, I am often forced to spend hours on end focusing on the bare realism of life. A realism to which is often unpleasant, overly pessimistic, and worse still, boring. In escape, the feeling of throwing my non-negotiable objective side out the window and immersing my thoughts in a non-direct and limitless form of abstraction can be simply narcotic. This used, when figuring out a way to write a prompt, analyze the world, or simply escape reality always leaves me hungry for more. What I do with this information is simply a question of time over what I do with that time. That of course is a very abstract question, not easily answered.

Here I Was

Hugh Hubbard

Here I was plowing a field.
The oxen dead so here I must yield.
Water brown and murky.
I look at the sun who gives no mercy.
As I roast on the soil I tread.

My muscles ache.
My bones are sore.
But I must look towards that golden
lake.
For which I dream of forever more.

I have no regrets
That stupid cow for whom which I now
have debts.
But that I couldn't feed
And with that memory I must breed

And with that oxen gone
And with all my brawn
I push the cart with all my strength
I can't move it much length



Waheda Haidari



Iman Harrison-Hughes

Untitled

Esther Torres

I'm really in the thick of it
I plan to leave as a grab my kit
Then I remember as I woe
There is nowhere to go.

There is nowhere to go
There is not a place in the world
Where this isn't the story



Lillian Morris

My Love Gave Me a Cactus Plant

Sydney Lewin

My love gave me a cactus plant.
I've kept the plant alive for a full month
now
And the loving alive for six of them.

I freed it from the bursting plastic pot it
came in
And gave it a new home.
I hope this one will fit, I whisper.

When I tucked it to bed in the soft new
soil
A spike embedded itself in the flesh of
my pinky
And the skin grew right on over it.

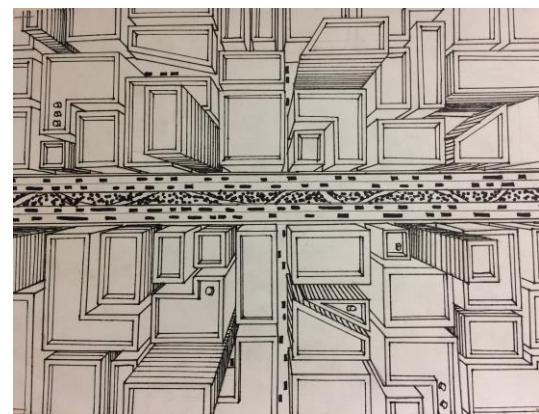
I had to use the tip of a pin
To dig into the flesh and open up
A space to fit the tweezers in.

I worry that the pain will get to me
And I'll start scratching at my skin again
Pulling out imaginary splinters.

The Golden Youth

Esther Torres

A hidden secret, was woven behind a
mask
A hero always wear
Concealing his true face
The hero, a child born from one of the
strongest gods
Already gained fame, when he was still a
toddler
He was the supposed a golden boy
His father, power the king of the gods
Yet he couldn't resist a pretty face
The Wife, who was always claimed to be
filled with hate
Just sat waiting, watching never taking
her eye of the boy
But making no mover in helping him
either
She watch his strangle a snake when he
was a toddler
As she kept silence as she was silently
blamed and hated
But stills she kept her silence and
watched the boy slowly grow
Waiting for him to true colors to finally
get shown.



Alex Crisman

On a Failed Profession

Frances Owen

But where will you go?
The alignment of your carelessly
dropped tips and broken strings
Your black-and-white silhouette
trailing down the lamplit street with your
bowtie undone
The calibration of your patent
shoes being scuffed, yet shining,
a sickly grin in the streetlights.
The only rhythm now is that of
you following yourself past still
cars and trees and houses and
railings, kicking your heart along
the sidewalk (beating slower
now, having flown above any
degree of caring about anything
anymore)
All the pitch that is left is the tiny
bit of voice in your exhale, and I
know that it comes from deep
inside where the joy of your heart
once was. Now it heaves out and
dissipates into the night air,
where perhaps it will find its way
into the many pieces of you that
you have left around the city.
And your vibrato, once so
crystal-perfect, is now condensed
into the shudder you are
fortunate enough to have inside
your chest.
Darling. I know it wants to turn
into a sob, but that it will remain
an ache until you arrive at
wherever it is you're going,
pieces of you lying across your
trail, where
I will gladly pick them up.



Kiki Dowell

Bloodborne

Rachel Beling

You've heard the strong-sung claims:
bravery is in bones,
boldness in blood,
daring in DNA,
all that strength in the very structure of
being.

When the lancet plunges into your ring
finger,
you sit there in semi-shock for a second
before remembering to collect the blood.
Four little droplets into four little scoops
smeared into four circles
for the promise of an answer.

You wait for a reaction,
for the blood to speckle and reveal its
antigens and advantages.
But as red turns to brown,
the blood is otherwise undisturbed.

Identified by what's not there
rather than what is:
O negative.
Universal donor;
universal loser of Punnett squares.

You are destined to a future of calls from
the Red Cross,
strangers begging for material you don't
want to give away.
In the arm-wrestle of genetics,
pitting yourself against anything but
your mirror
would be the death of your blood-type
line.

Your lack of A, B, and Rh antigens,
your submission to blood bags—
perhaps a sign of your weakness?
Flaws made bloodborne illness out of
your control and

your story solely knitted by the hands of
the four Fates,
Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, and
Thymine?
You'd rather place your substance in a
substance other than blood.



Wyatt Stonefield

She Is

Mariam Anwary

She flees for safety and freedom
She questions the people and ideas
around her
She wants to take a chance
She grows up around blood and dead
bodies
She came from the war
She runs until the end of the world
She is the one they talk about
She is different from the rest
She is a target for others
She fights for her soul
She is reborn
She is the one they make fun of
She becomes something no one
imagined
She is shattered like a mirror
She is best friends with loneliness and
darkness
She changes for other people
She wants to be loved by someone
She sees loneliness as her life
She is surrounded by thoughts of
belonging
She only wants to be strong
She wants to fight her way through
She is surrounded by thoughts of
belonging
She is looking for a way out
She wears a mask
She is a Muslim girl
She is a mystery



Brendan McCall

SHE IS THE SUN

Ashley Clark

SHE IS THE SUN—
She exudes brilliance,
But she is too strong and I can only stay
For so long.
She is the Sun
Hair like the corona, whipping
About her face in the winds
And solar flares and
She is everything warm about this world.

She is the Sun

And she reflects onto me
Even in my darkest hours,
Beams of light dancing
And chanting as they swirl about
Her head
Singing songs
Of good fortune.

She is the Sun

And she burns me,
Time and time again.
I look to her, but she hurts me.
I look to her; I reach for her
As if to say
lovely, lucky sun,
How it must be nice to never feel
cold—
How it must be nice to be
surrounded by those
Infatuated by your light—

She is the Sun

And I would give her my world,
But I am already caught in her orbit.
She is already dying
Every year,
A little older, meeting a blistering end
And I find myself asking
Gentle giant, will you go before I
wake
How long does it take a star to
die?

How it must be nice to know we
will all go with you.

SHE IS THE SUN—

And she is shining.
I am but one of her worlds
But oh how nice it does feel to be
burning with her.



Sahara Clemons

The Cage

Santina Urrutia

The steel bars surround it
This small thing made of feathers
The bars keep it captive

*Fears the hands that comes near
It'll hiss a strange hiss
Its beak will open
But not as wide as the wings*

This thing keeping it captive
Holds the food and water
Even toys it doesn't touch
*Still on some days it sings
Some days it talks to the mirror
Some days it roams the place
Some days it doesn't realize*

The dry wall surrounds her
This short girl made with a heart
The walls keep her captive
*Fears the arms that try to hold
Shell whimper a strange cry
Her eyes will close
And cover her ears*
The walls keeping her captive
Holds the food and water
Even the things she's to be blind to
*Still some days she smiles to
others*
*Some days she ponders about life
Some days she feels acceptable
Some days she fails to leave the
cage*



Joseph Epps

dog teeth // all over me

Nayeli Melendez

Trigger warning: This piece contains implicit mentions of rape.

A westward wind in motion with the
tearful clouds above, we sway.

Hush, hush, hush, in my ears, it
whispers away.

Icy ground of dirty brown beneath those
frail toes of ours
disappears when we lay on that
bed of torn soft flowers.

The mild touch of your palm on my
cheek awakens me,
the way in which my heart is
driven to rage so beastly.

The hefty air settles stiffly on my
shoulders with unspoken begging words
as my ears fill with the above
melody of sorrowed birds.

Your expert fingers twine together with
my tendrils of golden yellow
and coming back are the
memories of your teeth on marrow.

In the moonlight of the night, where the
dog in your heart barks,
my eyes close as my body weeps
until I'm caressed by the dark.

A Reincarnation of Moses

Harli Saxon

The setting of the moon,
The utter silence before the peak of
dawn,
I inhale the night,
And exhale the bitter cold,
Trudging aimlessly through spiral
forests.

A seemingly straight and slight incline,
Suddenly steep and winding without
remorse,
With the night air now stinging tortured
lungs,
And creating chaos within,
I become a thumping heart on the verge
of a volume swell.

A dirt path interrupted,
By a pile of sludge and a vibrating trip
wire,
An alarming of the sixth sense,
And a figure emerging,
A subtle grey mist outlined with gloom.

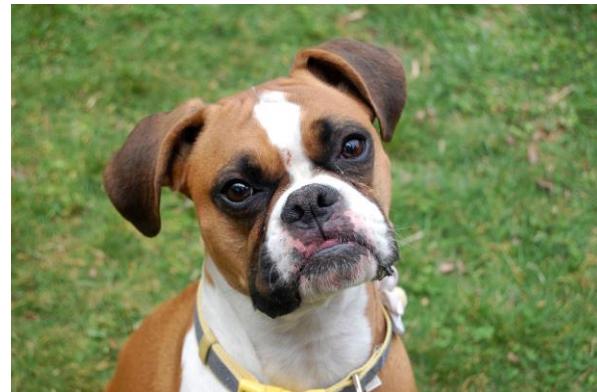
I approach,
With expectations of demise,
Rudely fleeting visualizations of
memories,
And somehow the distance becomes
holy water,
Diminished in purity by each
sacrilegious step.

A reincarnation of Moses,
I step through the puddles of the
clearing,
With waves of terror surrounding,
And before me stands an old man,
An aged reflection on the water's
surface.

With a rasp in his throat,
Which was coated with splintered wood,
He muttered a single phrase before
rippling away,
And it seemed to trigger molecules of
ice and shattered glass,
Marbling the matter underneath my skin.

"I shall be released."

We now sat upon a cliff,
Staring into the murkiness below,
So I could drop into the absence,
And it would swallow me whole,
Leaving me lifeless and still among the
brush.



Cheasley Crawford

Safe

Katherine Webber

The world is a scary place
Piercing eyes stare out from shadowy faces
Whispers echo as loud as thunder
Tossed across a stormy sky
All around you is full of empty air
And you try to keep your gaze from wandering
Because it's embarrassing, you're embarrassing
“The emptiness is fine” you tell yourself
“It’s nice to be alone”
Are these words the cloak, the shield
That you use to slip away
From every evil gaze
Each hello that does not fall on others ears
It is raining but you have forgotten an umbrella
And the water cloaks your skin
Reminding you that your very existence
Can be washed away like ink on parchment
Your paper heart crumbles and the world becomes silent
Where the only light is the fire that will burn
Until you are ashes once again
Picking up the torch is hard
The fire licks, its heat enveloping you
Making you scream silent screams across the cold stones
You are still alone
But if you hold the flame for longer
Till your fingertips are charred
And your very being glows as embers
In the fireplace of a cozy hearth
Your own light will shine bright enough
To show the bugs your warmth and strength



Jan Coleman

Untitled

Thomas Butler

“...Officials have become greatly concerned by the spread of this baffling disease as incident reports have begun to arise from other planets in the Circle, Neruv being the hardest hit. One of our correspondents managed to speak with Doctor Lydia Wells of Wells Medical on the epidemic. Here’s what she had to say. Thieo?”

“Thanks, Yvette. I recently finished speaking with Doctor Wells and though she didn’t have any news that I would consider good, she did give us an update into the investigation.”

“As stated before, this disease is unlike anything we’ve ever seen and try as we might, there doesn’t seem to be anything we can do to further investigate in our lab. However, with the help of information from other planets, we have evidence that the disease doesn’t originate from anywhere in the Circle. In light of this possibility, we have sent one of our scientists to investigate alongside a team of travelers. We hope that she will have some data for us to analyze in the near future.”

“I inquired about the progress of that investigation, but Doctor Wells didn’t have an answer for us unfortunately. Yvette?”

“Thanks Thieo. As of yesterday, the Dresian Security Advisory has declared war on OMAR...” I waved my hand in front of the light green Holo-Panel, causing its similarly colored holographic projection of the newscaster to fade out of sight. Listening to everything going wrong at home probably wasn’t the best way to start the day.

“Not the kind of news you want to wake up to huh?”

I sighed and cross my arms behind my head, resting them on the bed-width water filled pillow. “Not exactly news, but it’s certainly a little discouraging. Especially when you’ve been out here all these years and still haven’t seen a thing.” I glanced over at the lady on the bed next to me, her cerulean eyes still buried in her small book, *The Laws of the Universe*. “It’s not as if it’s been our primary objective, but we’ve been doing the best we can...” Aurelia quickly replied. “Yeah.” I rolled over and looked at the floating clock I had sitting on my nightstand, making out the faint text that read ‘258/731 - 7.9/50 - 3372’ and remembering the pain in the ass that was Dresian time. The first segment of the readout was the number of days out of the total days in the year. The second segment signified the total elapsed time in a single day and the final digits were the current year. To make matters worse, every single clock on the ship was next to useless because the amount of time in a day changed from planet to planet, so while the clock may read that it’s noon in Dresian time, it could be the middle of the damn night on the planet we were on, as was the case with our current host: Q63-G4.

The surface of the planet was pretty much barren of any non-plant life and while that certainly reduced the number of safety hazards, it made for a truly dull trip. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it, the artifacts we were looking for were in an underground cave reported to be teeming with life. Not that it was a surprise of course.

For every planet we had been to, there was a client who had sent us there, whether for simple region mapping or the more popular option, artifact

recovery. Regardless of the nature of the operation however, it was in one's best interest to expect the unexpected at all times. Even within the safety of our beloved starship, the Raider, accidents were likely to happen.

"Don't you think you've stared at that thing long enough?" I heard a faint rustling before my head sank far down into the water pillow. "We've got a big day ahead of us."

"Yeah you're probably right." I mumbled. Pushing the blankets off of my legs, I swung around onto the edge of the bed and stared at my dangling feet.



Cade Young

Gather the Muses

Sydney Lewin

Gather the muses.

Let's light a few candles.

Darling, we've got stars in our eyes.
Can't you feel the tug of the moon on
the tides of your soul?

I can tell already
we're going to stay up all night with
mugs of tea
and paint dripping off of our hands.

Are you listening?

Darling, we're cosmic.
Can't you feel the galaxies spinning in
your chest?
The beat of your heart is the beat of all
hearts.

I've got roses in my hair
and your smile is dancing on my lungs
til I can't breathe.

The moon is full.
Let's smear mud on our cheeks
and visit our dragons.
I know the way.

Are you listening?

The Dress

April Sites

Her gown flapped behind her in the breeze on the glorious October day. The warm and soothing rays of the sun reflected on her nicely tanned skin. The sun was setting as the stars twinkled high in the sky. She sat down on a bench and looked up admiring the stars. The moon made her look dead but at the same time she looked alive. She got up and spun around with her dress flowing behind her. She bumped into the tree as her dress got caught on a branch. She wiggled free while the side of her dress was torn up the side. She walked away with her gown flowing free behind her in the breeze on this cold October night.

The Dance of the Stars

Esther Torres

Black as the midnight sky
Filled with the deepest of the color of ink
The silver light of the moon's crest
Glowed warmly above the ocean's surface
The shallow sand that appeared before every wave
Disappeared once again under the sea line grace
Glowing lights from the stars heavenly rays
Reflected off of the waters ever moving reflection
With the ripples used to the step of the beat
And the moonlight's silver glow
Used to guide the stars in the enchanting rhythmic show.



Ana Kendrick

McRib

Addie Brown

The best part is that you never know when it's coming back. It could be in the middle of a cold January day, or during the dog days of August. Always a surprise, much like the meat, the McRib is both a blessing and a curse. The thing that sucks about it is that it pretty much sucks. It's also pretty satisfying. Having graced the McDonald's menu ever since 1981, the McRib is a periodic classic that surprises the mouth of every soul that makes the daring but worthwhile decision to consume it. Much like the mystery that lies behind the availability of this classic and questionable sandwich, the ingredients are also perplexing. If there's one thing I've learned from consumption of this piece of heaven on earth, it's that you don't question the McRib. You don't ask for the pickles to be left off, even if you don't like pickles. The onions stay, regardless of the fact that you may hate onions with a burning passion of a thousand suns. You just eat it, and you

I Remember

Qena Taylor

I remember
The last time the scent of your cherry
lip-gloss
Strawberry perfume
And lavender incense
That would engulf your room
With such an aura of tranquility
That all the issues of the world
Become even lighter than the fumes
themselves

I remember that last time we had movie
night
Complaining about the silly plot lines
The gross excuses for humor
The somewhat decent cgi
And the somehow compelling acting
That was is so bad
Not a soul would blame you for even
questioning their humanity

I remember your daring nature and
dazzling singing
I remember the times you would steal a
donut or two from the nearby bakery
I remember your dumb dirty jokes, and
one liners
That you used to brighten up my bad
days
When there was only little shimmers of
glitter within the darkness

I remember your kisses, and Valentine's
Day flowers
Followed by my parents white wine
While eating smooth dark chocolate
Discussing if waffles were better than
pancakes
As we slowly drifted to sleep

I know you
I knew you
I Loved you

And yet whenever someone tries to tell
me about my lover
They look at me like I saw a different
person
Like the you I loved was just dust in the
wind
A speck in someone's dream world
And as they talk about things they think
you would had liked
And laugh at times of stress in your life
Like your pain was some joke you
would've outgrown
Like we were an abomination, and your
death was the ultimate punishment
Meant only as a warning to those like us
That even try to hope for love

I remember
The sound of his gun
And I remember
The last specks of life in your eyes
As strawberry perfume turned to rotting
flesh
And as the color of your radiant smile
Floated away like dust.



Elena O'Brien

A Lover's Guide to Giving Up

Bella Romberger

Step One:

You are thinking
And thinking and thinking
No matter how hard you try to stop
You keep thinking
Thinking about you and him
About you and him in situations that
would never come to be
You and him
Will never come to be

Step Two:

You are spinning around in your room
Listening to jazz on a sunday morning
And you have nothing to lose
You suppose you are talking to him
And all your insecurities
And all your treasured memories
Are flowing off your tongue like a
waterfall
And you suppose he will either cup his
hands and catch your falling
vulnerability
Or he will let them splash to the floor
Leaving a deep puddle around your
ankles

Step 3:

You are lying in bed with your eyes
closed
But heart open
On a wednesday night
And you have everything to lose
You think about the deep puddle around
your ankles
And all the things he will think
But not say
All the things he will say
You think about your vulnerability
dropping on the floor
Like a china plate

Step 4:

You no longer suppose
You no longer think
And think and think
You know you have nothing to lose
But it sure feels like it
Now you dream of waterfalls
And shiny blue china plates
High upon cedar shelves
So they won't drop and shatter.



Georgia Crum

The Journey up a White Sand Dune

Sharon Reitsma

The long drive was worth it in the end. As soon as the car was parked, my aching bones and sore muscles tumbled out of the car, eager to use the energy stored up inside. We were in the White Sands National Park in New Mexico the summer of 2010, and the white sand was sparkling in the fading sunlight with an orange glow. The occasional streak of lightning in the midst of the orange and yellow sky was picturesque. Never before had I seen the multitude of sand dunes I was being faced with, each one with a slightly different height, slope, and pathway. Within a few seconds of being outside, my hair was swept into my face, and I could feel the sand in my shoes: the beginning of a struggle to stay composed. As I chose which dune to climb, it struck me, almost like one of the streaks of lightning in the sky, the fact that I had complete control over which battles to fight and which to ignore. I could climb the biggest and hardest dune, or I could settle for a smaller one I knew I could easily scale. With some influence from my older and wiser sister, we chose the biggest one we could find, and it was almost as if it were calling out to us and asking us to attempt the climb.

As we stood at the bottom looking up, all of the pent-up energy from the long car ride seemed to have flown out of me. The wind left me drained and longing for the peacefulness of the car. This dune was mine, and it scared me. With my remaining energy, I took my first steps. It was not so bad, and the sand was staying out of my shoes and hair as it should. In this way, the dune introduced

itself to me, and we became friends. Once the incline picked up, the sand started to part and disintegrate under my feet and I dropped down further than I had started. Once the sand attacked my feet and invaded my shoes, my only choice was to take them off. That meant I had to carry them, but at least they could no longer encourage nasty blisters on my feet. Without shoes, I had more of a connection with the dune, and I felt for the first time the heat radiating from the core, and the sharp and cool wind blowing at my hair and face.

Minutes passed by slowly, and with every step I got a face full of sand. My feet got lost buried in the sand, and I could honestly not tell if I was moving up or down. At one point, a strong gust of wind came directly towards me, knocking me right off my feet, and I consequently fell and rolled down the dune. By the time I could stop myself and get back in control, I was practically back at the bottom, looking up at something that once again seemed insurmountable. My fall made me doubt my ability to get to the top of the dune and conquer the impossible. Despite this, I got right back on my feet and started climbing again. This time, I dug my feet into the sand on my ascent so the strong winds could not beat me down, and I climbed stronger and harder. All of my mental and physical energy was focused on getting to the top, catching up to my sister, and not falling on my face again, while the wind blew at me and the sand parted beneath my feet.

Suddenly, the sand under my feet was sparkling, and when I looked up I was blinded by the orange rays of the sun cutting through the sky directly into my eyes. That is when I realized that if I

could see the sun, it must mean that I was at the top. Sure enough, in front of me, the sand had leveled out: I had arrived. All of a sudden, I was filled with a sense of joy and excitement at having conquered this huge feat, and I smiled for the first time since I had started my ascent. My sister was there to greet me, and I ran to her and gave her a tight hug while laughing. The view from the top was extraordinary, and the feeling of the pure white sand between my toes was like a massage. The wind was blowing through my hair, singing songs of triumph over this great sand dune.

Once my sister and I were able to get out of the trance we had been enveloped in since reaching the top, we started the most rewarding part: sledding down. At first, we slid on cardboard boxes, but after a short while we realized the cardboard was an impediment, just like my shoes had been while ascending. It was much easier to just slide down on our own. Every time I bit down and tasted the sand, it felt like I was chewing on the remnants of an exceptionally crunchy granola bar. Running my fingers through my sandy, tangled hair made tears well up in my eyes. It felt like I was swimming in the sand, so I gave up trying to stay clean and dove right in. After the thrill of sliding down the sand dune the first time, we knew we would need to struggle uphill if we wanted to experience that joy again. And while it was daunting, we did it anyway.

We explored a bit, taking on mostly small dunes that did not take long to scale, so we were able to quickly experience the thrill of rolling down. I would struggle every time we climbed a dune, but as soon as I saw the sand sparkle in the blinding sun the struggle

would leave my memory, and I would be left with only the excitement of having reached the top once again. The path through life is filled with hills. Some are bigger, steeper, and twistier than others, but we must learn how to climb over them all. How to conquer them with all the strength we possess. And once we start the descent, the horrifying memories of the ascent are dulled by the immense joy and thrill of conquering something that once seemed impossible.



Gavin Sims

Alleged Critic

Liam Hubbard

“Hands of the idle marksman make plague upon pottery.” He muttered. In his eyes the seductive figure shot away the audience with its Dadaist scorn. The clay pots that were strung together plagued his mind with the thoughts of imperfection and anti-innovation. But the twinkle of self-gratification and the knowledge of a non-self-defeat was absent in the critics eyes.

Was it because he was wrong? Well it would be easy to counter that statement. The piece was esque, off balanced, and would not fit into any category that he could imagine. Despite this, the bare images of the figure pierced his mind and put him in a state of artistic coma. The type of living death that, at the end of the day, only a museum could offer.

He sunk into his cold lifeless sheets that night. Perpetually pondering what if anything the piece was hiding. The nights that followed were ever still plagued with the obsession of the piece, the review that he could never let slip onto the life of the page. It was a downtown and bar combo every night after that, wrecked but still thinking. By the end of the week the review was due. Dragged out by the forced artistic crucifix that he made for himself. The report of cynicism was now upon him, he came to his computer. Resting his eyes upon the image of the posed pottery, lifeless and gray. In an instant, he then found something. Something that the art had, possessed, and had always been there. It was something his analytical words never had. The sculpture had a heart.



Kiah Ross

Emotion of the Elements

Esther Torres

Lightning escaped his chains in the heaven's sky
Thanks to Wind's aid, in his escape.
He leaped from the heavens, not afraid of falling to the earth
Sparks fly off him
Letting his presence be known
Letting Her know
He had escaped, and he was coming.
She had enchanted him with her rays
He had fallen for her warm smile and tender laugh
He had fallen for her.
But she only wanted him out of her way
She wanted all the action
Taking all the attention
Locking him away.
But he was back now
So be warned
He was going to come after her, so beware
Be prepared
The Sun would soon fade.
She could call all her minions to her side
But not even Fire, Snow, or Ice
Would stop his and his raze.

Don't Fall In

Nicole Milanovic

It's a feeling
it's an emotion
it's an act
it's something that
you attempt to describe.
The feeling is unique and
quite simple actually,
it occurs very often, and
the feeling can be very dark
as your stomach suddenly starts to twist
into a tight knot that cannot be undone.
The feeling gets worse,
tighter, as the power and endurance
start to leave your body.
You feel weak,
you start to wonder,
you start to whimper,
while the answer starts to slither closer,
only feeling a drop disappointment
coming out of one eye,
landing on your cheek as it quickly
disappears.
Another drop disturbs the silence,
more keep anticipating,
until you realize you're all out.
The stress and disappointment all pause,
and you want to keep shedding the tears
but,
they quickly fade away.
It's called love
the heartbreak, and distrust.
The source to that is always love.
Unforgivable,
unmentionable,
all it does is break you
until you're all gone.
Don't fall for it, just
don't fall in.



Anna Gitchell

Heaven

Addie Brown

I entered the abandoned water park and
the sun began to hide behind the hills.
The sky had that gray tint to it that paints
the grim expression of life over
everyone's face. I wasn't sure why I was
here or what I was doing but I had to get
away. The rusted pipes creaked and the
snack bar stands stood like bodyguards,
only they offered no protection. There
are plastic flip flops and sunglasses
strewn everywhere, towels on the backs
of chairs, full of defeat. Everything calls
my name, telling me it's okay. I know
it's not okay. I know I'm not supposed
to be here but I like it. The pool floats
and surfboards float in the leaf-filled
water, like dead bodies. Nothing has
been touched and nothing will be
touched. An image of smiling and
laughing children washes over me and I
shove it aside with disgust and despair.
There is nothing here for anyone and if
anyone thinks any different they're
wrong. The beach chairs want to be sat
on but I don't listen. I glide through the
park as if I am an angel in heaven.
Maybe that's what I want to be.

Where I'm From

Chloe Jacoby

I am from the potted plants in our living room
from Gladys and J.P.
I am from strong musical influences
from piano lessons at grandma's every week
I am from Friday night movies and late night shows
I am from a Jewish father and Christian mother
from Ryan and from Sarah
I am from Alyssa
from the strong people in my life
I am from protective parents that are almost always right



Georgia Crum



Arleth Salinas

You Don't Deserve

C'erra Rhodes

You don't deserve me
You don't deserve my smile
That's appears every once in awhile
Or the sound of my laughter
Which is another factor
Man, you don't deserve my sarcasm,
"This relationship needs to end faster"
You don't deserve my attention
I hope I don't got to mention
You don't deserve a single tear
Even though you was a nightmare
You definitely don't deserve my loyalty
Because you gave me anxiety
And made me run from society
You don't deserve me
How you brought me from hell and back
You don't deserve me
Because you made me starve from desire.
You never deserve me!
You didn't appreciate my love
That ran so deep for you
And know that it still will
But I want you to know
You still have a place in my heart
But you just lost something special.

Gliding

Addie Brown

I entered the abandoned water park and the sun began to hide behind the hills. The sky had that gray tint to it that paints the grim expression of life over everyone's face. I wasn't sure why I was here or what I was doing but I had to get away. The rusted pipes creaked and the snack bar stands stood like bodyguards, only they offered no protection. There are plastic flip flops and sunglasses strewn everywhere, towels on the backs of chairs, full of defeat. Everything calls my name, telling me it's okay. The pool floats and surfboards float in the leaf-filled water, like dead bodies. Nothing has been touched and nothing will be touched. An image of smiling and laughing children washes over me and I shove it aside with disgust and despair. There is nothing here for anyone and if anyone thinks any different they're wrong. The beach chairs want to be sat on but I don't listen. I glide through the park as if I am an angel in heaven. Maybe that's what I want to be.



Clare Inlow

Dreamers

Kelsey Payne

Rustled feelings keep me up.
They haunt me where I lay.
Sleep is never an option
when these demons are at bay.
I wonder if you miss me
if our memories haunt your dreams.
I wonder if you lose sleep
because you think of me.

For all the starless nights
and all the tears I've wept.
Dreams haven't been an option
ever since you left.

So here I am laying,
nothing for me to do
but drift into the sorrow
that I'm so used to.

Today I felt okay
finally moving forward.
The sun shone a little brighter,
my world wasn't as sore.
I smiled much more often,
I meant it when I laughed.
Today I felt okay
and I'm extremely happy for that.

Tonight was the first night
that I've slept in months.
I finally saw my dreams,
with open arms they greeted me.
It isn't so hard to sleep anymore,
my sorrow came to an end.

I'm a dreamer again,
and no one can reign me in.

Untitled

Trinity Hughes

Because people see color and not people
They are unaware of what's going on in
the world
African Americans live in fear
Fear from your brother or sister getting
killed
Fear that things will never change
Where kids ask why we are treated
different
Where a man tries to "make America
Great Again"
How funny is that?
When these innocent black people are
killed
So now we are a hashtag
BLACKLIVESMATTER
When small minded people say
alllivesmatter
As if we didn't know that already
When a man decides to sit during the
national anthem
And he is called unpatriotic
When an 86 year old women gets pepper
sprayed
And her son gets gunned down over a
speeding ticket.
When a little boy watches his mother get
shot
When you can't even walk with a hoodie
on
When people act like you don't belong
Where people think you're dumb
When you get shot for helping a kid who
has autism
When black men are 3.5 times greater
risk of being killed by police
When you can't even read a book to
your child
And you get shot for doing so
When people in your community act like
things don't matter
When you can't even have an alliance
for black males

Because people then think we neglect
other races

When your natural hair is shamed
Or it's not allowed at school and is
called a "distraction"
When they push families out of public
housing
They neglect the fact that things are
injustice
When an amazing woman is arrested for
taking down a confederate flag
Because people see color not people



Abby Faust

Autism

Victoria Kramer

My little brother was six years old. My little brother was having surgery on his ears. My father worked at the surgery center, but that day, he was hanging out with my brother. One of my father's co-workers came up to my little brother and joked, "Ben, your dad is crazy." My brother, eyebrows furrowed, passionately interjected, "No he's not, he's just different." My little brother, of six years old, innocent and unaware, spoke more powerfully than any other six year old could have. My little brother's name is Ben. And Ben is autistic.

Now I sit across from my little brother at the kitchen table, covered in papers and little trinkets littering the plastic covering. He shovels his Annie's mac n' cheese into the gaping hole of his mouth, as though the food will disappear before he gets all in. He does not yet acknowledge my presence because all of his focus is on the task at hand. As he pours over his mac n' cheese as though the answer to the universe lies in it, I examine his features, his face.

His hair is the color of sand when the sunlight reflects off of it on seashore. His eyes are like sea glass, bright and vibrant hiding on a pale sandy shore. His eyes are enlarged by a mirror of synthetic glass. His glasses are square and blue, framing his face. His face is decorated with freckles, the night sky with constellations dancing across his face. He has an under-bite, like a bulldog puppy. When he grins one of his teeth sticks out of the corner of his mouth. His entire body is lanky and long, awkward

and gangly, like a marionette puppet. His characteristic athletic shorts and three year old shirt from Gap or Old Navy almost swallows his skinny body in a sea of colorful waves.

Impaired Communication

Ben was around three years old when he began to, as our family dubbed it, flap. When he was younger, he would raise both of his arms to around shoulder height and begin to move them back and forth rapidly. His hands would smack into his ears, giving him the appearance of a young, cheeky monkey. Now, at fourteen, Ben has changed to usually only flapping with his right arm. He now shakes his hand quickly, looking like a baby bird at its first attempt at flight or a dog trying to itch an incurable scratch. Ben flaps whenever he is really excited, stressed, or annoyed. When Ben flaps out of excitement, his eyes light up with a joy usually only seen in children on Christmas day. His mouth opens to the shape of a whale shark's, wide and oval-shaped. But, when Ben flaps out of stress or annoyance, his eyes narrowed and his face scrunches up as though there is a foul smell drifting right below his nose.

Ben was enrolled at Burnley-Moran Elementary School at the time. My father was having to take my brother late to school. For some reason unknown to us, Ben had adamantly decided that he did not want to go to school that day. As he entered the school, a scowl more befitting a rebellious teenager covered his usually cheerful face. They walked into bright and open lobby of the school. The floor smiled cheerfully up at Ben, as did all of his teachers. The windows of

the lobby reflected the joyful sunlight that fell from the sky. Ben glared up angrily at my father. My father looked down at Ben and took a deep breath. “Ben,” he stated firmly, “it’s time to go to school.” Ben’s eyes lit up passionately with blue fire. “But I don’t WANT too!” Ben interjected loudly, disrupting the joyful and peaceful atmosphere of the lobby. “Benjamin,” my father strongly implored, “it is time to go to school.” Ben yelled, his face reddening, “That’s it, you’re fired!” As he yelled this, his arm rose up, finger pointed, and gestured at my father. The serene calm was broken. My father, stifling a laugh, had to leave my brother in the hands of his teachers. Just as my father, stepped out into the sunlight, he heard my brother calling out to him. My father took a deep breath and kept walking. The heavy green doors fell shut.

Excessive Rigidity

Ben absolutely adores movies. If I had to pick out Ben’s most prized possession, it would be his movies or his player. (I asked Ben what his favorite possession was and he eventually said “my player”, but we had to go through our family and the cats first) While Ben is watching movies, he is completely entranced and unaware of his surroundings. On many an occasion I have been able to sneak up on him and startle him, much to his and my parents’ chagrin. Ben is unique in his movie watching. Ben enjoys watching the same scene over and over and over again. They may be the funniest scenes of the movie, the most action-packed, or the most emotional. He will sit in our playroom for hours, repeatedly watching the same scenes of the same movies. While the rest of our family will be sitting in the living room of our house,

we will hear the characteristic clicking sound coming from the playroom, as those Ben is communicating with the player in Morse code.

There is a routine that occurs every night in our household. Ben runs down the stairs to check on the doors. He runs up to the front door and jiggles the golden door-knob to check if it is locked. He then proceeds to the basement door. He furiously shakes the handle of the basement door. If either of these doors are not locked, he immediately locks them. After he has attempted to open both doors, he runs back up the stairs. Ben then asks one of my parents one of my parents the same questions, night after night. “Do you think that I’m going to have a horrible nightmare tonight,” Ben will ask them, eyes wide as a skittish deer. “No, Ben,” my mother or father will say to him in a somewhat exasperated tone. Ben then exits the room, slams his door loudly, and turns off his light.

Emotional Detachment

A couple of months ago, our great-aunt passed away. Death is difficult for Ben. I’m not sure if he really understands what happens. He just knows that they are gone and that he will not see them again until he dies as well. It was the end of the funeral. The organ played a solemn, yet hopeful tune as my eyes welled up with tears. Ben stood beside me with a pensive look on his face. The men of the family somberly walked up to the casket, silver and covered in pink and yellow roses. As they wheeled the casket out of the sanctuary of the church, my innocent, little baby brother lifted up his hand. He waved his hand slightly as

the casket passed in front of us. His eyes were full of innocence, sincerity, and love. "Bye, Aunt Jennie," he whispered.

It was two years ago. We were in Williamsburg visiting my older sister over Labor Day weekend. We decided that we should go Target because we needed clothes for my sister's friend's baby. As we entered that Target, I had no idea that this would begin an infamous occasion. Ben got it into his head that he wanted a new movie called Descendants. My father told him that he couldn't have it, for it was too expensive. That did not sit well with Ben. He had it in his mind that he was going to get it, but now the plan had changed. Ben proceeded to have a raging temper tantrum. He screamed bloody murder at the top of his lungs and yelled. The sound was piercing, like a fire alarm in a school. I'm surprised that no one called the police.

I regain my focus. Ben was long gone, his chair pushed in under the table and his pink bowl carelessly tossed into the sink. I smile quietly and go to look into the playroom. He is splayed out across the blue futon, mixed in with his movies and our red tabby cat. His eyes appear to be watching an unseen movie, playing before his eyes. "I love you, Ben," I say gently. Ben jumps slightly and glances somewhat irritated at me. "I love you too Tor," he sighs and goes back into his own world.



Anna Gitchell

Ketchup + Mustard

Dana Day

It was a town, a town filled with noiseless rumble. It was only this way because it had proven itself to its persona. The persona that was shed upon it, the people and its physicality. The physicality that it was a small “useless” hell hole that kept all of the people that the government didn’t and doesn’t want. It’s odd because everyone here seems normal to me.

My house is navy blue with a white door frame. The one to the left of mine was smeared with mustard since I was born, and the next was an evergreen forest. So on we go down the hill to the water side, passed all of the others that are kept in their houses from 8am to 3pm.

Interesting that is, growing up here has shared with me patience while having to wait till my red clock sprung to 3. The water is where I would go first. It was different every season, the way I saw the world that is. Walking there in the fall was a picture of me standing in my cushiony jacket and a red hat with a pompom sewed to the top. In summers I would walk there, but I never touched the water, I’ve been told it holds water cold enough to freeze you yet warm enough for you to watch your skin melt. Little things change your perspective and I still have yet to feel that water.

I once had a friend. It’s a mystery of where they took her, all I know is that she didn’t want to leave. That’s still a secret kept from me.

I’ve learned to become friends with the gravel that was kept under my feet in hopes to replace the person I lost.

Every Thursday we would gather at Mrs. Josalie’s house for supper, she owned the mustard while I owned the ketchup. She was like my other mother while I was like the daughter she once had. Replacement was uncommon mainly because we only had a street of neighbors. I barely saw anyone out, most likely because all others were elders and they could barely remember what fresh air felt like. It was quite gloomy looking from the outside in.

My schooling involved packing flour into measuring cups and sitting with caterpillars on the swings. I saw the seasons change as if it was a new life that I was living.

Not all was perfect. It’s a confusing thing.

I have resembled the colors that were given to me.

I have aspired to show them through my skin that was trying to breathe through so much unknown.

I’ve grown up with passion while Mrs. Josalie has lived with clarity that sprout in her veins. I’ve grown up with strength, not only with my muscles but with my brain and heart while Mrs. Josalie has lived with optimism about how one day I will grow up and share this beautiful story.

My Room

Zoe Weatherford

I am woken up by the gentle touch of a soft paw on my cheek, sweet yet persistent. I hear a quiet meow and feel a tiny wet nose on my chin. When I finally accept I am awake and come out the world of peaceful dreams my eyes are met with the green eyes of my curious cat wondering if I will pet her. The window is open and I can hear the melodies of the birds singing their morning calls. A pleasant breeze sifts through the screen and wanders through the pictures hung on my wall. As light as feathers the photos presenting lovely memories of friends and family rustle as to warn me of the arrival of fall. Glancing at all the familiar faces I smile back at my sister whose pretty face appears in most of the images. The mid-morning sunlight streams in illuminating around her as if to replicate the joy that radiates from her with bright blue eyes that sparkle like the ocean on a sunny day. Her silly laughter in response to her own jokes, which are never as funny as she thinks they are, always lift my spirits. Her presence is unmistakable, filled with so much happiness it is hard to feel otherwise around her. My favorite time is spent with her, in our car jam session singing cheesy pop music at the top of lungs, watching the Office together, or even doing homework together, where we never get anything done. Those around her are drawn to this warmth of her kind soul and her empathetic ways of understanding everyone. There never seems to be enough time in the day to spend with her.

I look back at my cat who has since laid down for her first of many naps of the

day. Her dark calico fur contrasts with the white and pink Shabby Chic covers underneath her. The dainty pink flowers scattered on the top of the bed show how I am still not fully ready to grow up. The small flowers bring me back to the carefree days of being a child, full of happiness and joy, with the biggest concern being my capability of mastering the monkey bars. The days when imagination would turn the house into a castle and my sister and I into princesses who would become leaders of the land, creating a perfect world for all. The days when we were principal ballerinas, in our leotards and little fluffy skirts with our ballet shoes being just a bit too small for us. The rug on our floor would become our most important stage and our dolls would become our most famous audience. The days when we would paint for hours on end with creativity of a small children filling the page with colorful objects of the unknown. The days when our clothes would always be pink and in every pattern imaginable. The days when the world was magical, when the sun would smile warmly on our faces and the wind would whisper riddles in our ears.

My closet door is gently blown open with the next gust of wind, I see all my shoes, mostly sneakers, sitting at the bottom. Most of them have already been worn many times, but the new white Adidas radiate with pristine brightness. I also spot my light blue Nike cleats in the back, which I haven't worn in a while. I feel a small twinge of missing wearing them. With these sacred shoes on my feet I transform into someone with pure confidence able to dominate on the field, and I miss that. I miss the touch of a ball on my feet, the sweat dripping down the side of my face, the chatter of the

players on the field. I miss the intensity of a game 10 minutes from end and still a tie, both teams desperately launching themselves into the battle, giving a little more than before. I miss the rush of goal and the gentle swoosh of the ball hitting the back of the net. I miss the sound of the ball being kicked and even the pain it bring when it hits you. I miss the blotchy red imprint of the soccer ball on my leg, a mark of spirit and pure fearlessness.

As a cloud passes over the sun the room dims and then becomes even brighter than before with sunlight forcing itself back in with a rush. A shimmer catches my eye as the light bounces off my planner on my desk, filled with my precise schedule thought out the week before. Beside it is my computer sitting there innocently charging, unaware of the capacity of stress it was able to put on me. This object so capable of doing great things while also able to create horrors. The millions of different abilities of one black rectangle amazed me beyond belief. Just sitting there aimlessly it seems to taunt me, with its ability to be so magnificent with such ease is incredible. These looming responsibilities of school show no end as the work has been piling up around my desk, and scattered in bits and pieces across the rest of my room. A history book still is open to a page I had been vigorously studying the night before, with the assignment incomplete as exhaustion had gotten the best of me. This battle was not new to me, and I seemed to be facing it even more lately. The vicious cycle of need for sleep but never enough time, further proving nothing gets done when you are tired, is becoming the norm. Being constantly split and pulled in the different direction seemed to be the consequence of having

too many interests. I was always told something would have to give, but I never believed it. That fact is being proved true as I am getting pulled away from the passions in life and pushed toward the necessities.

The carefully written list of all I had to do with only a few items checked off fluttered across the desk with the next gentle breeze, signaling the start of a new day. My cat begins to stir as her dreams do not seem to amuse her now. I glance outside for one last hope to be pulled back into my peaceful world, but the sky has changed from blue to grey, the wind is blowing a little harder, and the birds have given up on their songs. As my cat hops off my bed and patters away down the hall and I know it is time to rejoin reality and pop the bubble I concealed myself in.

Intersection-Interaction

Thomas Butler

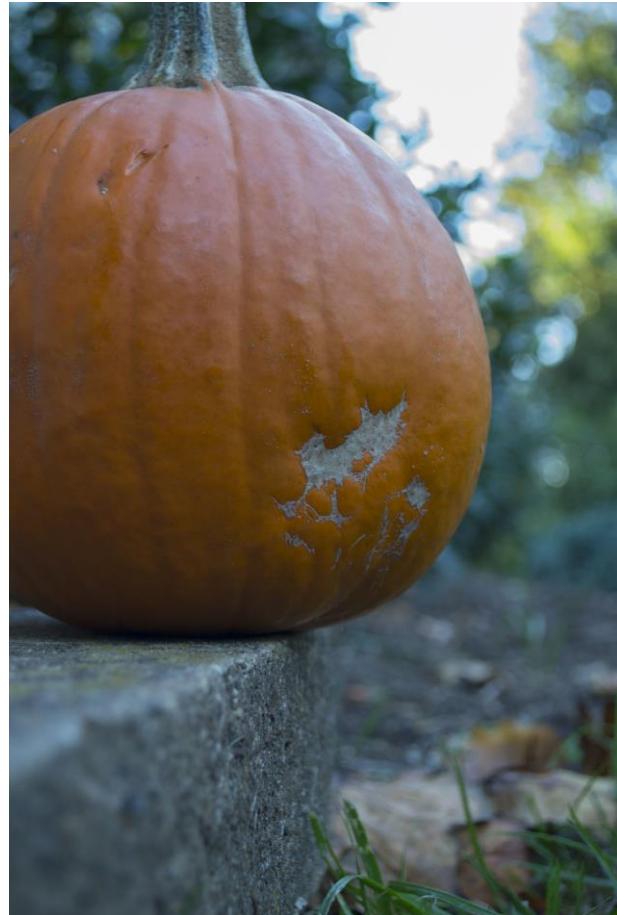
Somewhere in this world,
This world of shapes and shadows,
Two lines have intersected.
At one lone point do they cross:
Its diameter infinitesimally small
Its breadth indefinitely large
Its existence nothing short of abstract,
But the point still exists doesn't it?
Why shouldn't it exist?
The small is negligible they say.
If the world is made of shapes
And shapes are made of lines
Then why should we ignore
The points that bind them?
Maybe it is the negligible that matters.
Maybe it is the abstract
That makes all things tangible.
And if that's the case,
We should treasure them.

Love Letter

Helen Gehle

I've never been one for writing love letters
I don't know the names of enough flowers
or how to rhyme enough clichés
but I will admit I've tried
I've made list after list of things that
remind me of you
but I always end up with chocolate
covered espresso beans
and the smell of torn up leaves
honeycomb lotion
and the steam that rises off the street
after it rains
but none of it even came close to
describing how
it started with a girl who carried
constellation names in her pockets
and a boy who built rocket ships in his
mind
and somewhere in his time and space
calculations
he found his way to her
he insists he was always waiting
but I've seen the scribbles in the margins
and I don't want you to worry because
not everything always fits into the
formula
you can't multiply trust by belonging
and divide by understanding and get love
you can't simplify a fraction that is
always going to be complex
but complex doesn't have to mean hard
it can mean late night walks and rainy
day waffles
too-big jackets and movies with long
rolling credits
but I suppose these are things you
already know
and not the sort of thing you're
expecting in a love letter
so I'll just say one last thing

which is that the electricity of this guitar solo
it reminds me of you



Aiden Hockett

She that Smiles and They that Lies

Qena Taylor

There are times when I still miss her. Her charming voice, those lovely dark eyes, and that cheap ass vail from Goodwill that somehow made her look akin to Venus. However, she had a habit of repeating her favorite phrase.

“Bloody hell!”

“Woman can’t curse!”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I meant bloody heck.”

Even if she would repeat this several times a day, I would find myself each time, laughing like it was the first. After all, I would do anything to see that gorgeous smile that could make me surrender to my lust by moonlight but make my life full of meaning by daylight. All the while reading from our favorite books about victory, luck, and everlasting love. Ah, how I miss the good days.

But what I don’t miss are the bad days. When my mental state would be so bad after school that my gaze would waver from reality to a labyrinth of swirling thoughts, feelings, images. When she could see and hear me scratch and pull at my skin because I thought I was getting killed by something. What was that something who knows? Most likely flashbacks to my abusive mother or my homophobic/transphobic father. Perhaps it had also been the usual hallucinations that caused me to see us brutally murdered with spikes and chains in and around our necks. Oh, but the worst times were when I wouldn’t talk to her about what was going on, causing her to worry and cry till tears turned to blood, and blood turned to stone.

“Wait you cried! Worrying about me!”

“Yes...I did.”

“I so sorry...”

“Oh no, don’t be. We’re adults, right? And we’re in an adult relationship, right? As long as you learn from your mistakes, no harm. Do right.”

“Right...”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“Good?”

“Good.”

“Kiss, great. Now let’s play some games before the new competitive season starts.”

Then she would smile as if all my wrongdoings were forgiven.

Oh, but it wasn’t good, because I was just a kid. A kid that wanted to be loved. A kid that wanted to be a “they” and not a “she”. A kid that wished to be called cute or even beautiful. A kid that wished to be loved without pain or abuse or lies. A kid that took too long to realize they did the same thing their parents did to them. A kid that was a foolish brat that thought laughing would make her happy and maybe prevent the inevitable from happening. Just a kid that wanted to make Venus smile.

“Will you marry me?”

“What? You know I hate things like that. Besides we just met!”

“Ya, three months ago. Please, being with you has been the best three months of my life. No one, and I mean no one, has loved me like you do!”

“Me!? Heh, what did I do special?”

“Everything. So please stay. At least move in with me.”

“I would love to but...”

“But, what? What’s stopping you. Think about it, Wifey, you wouldn’t have to deal with your father or

family or the pain of Charlottesville.
You could be here with me, unless you
don't love me...Unless you lied to me..."

"What, I love you! You're
beautiful, fantastic, funny. You're my
everything. From your amazing smile to
your favorite things. I love you."

"Then what's stopping you?"

"...Yes. I want to go with you."

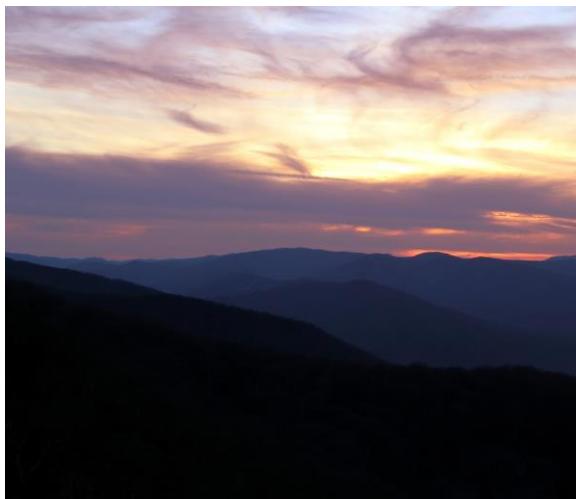
"Then let's do it! Just you and me
forever. We won't suffer, we won't be in
pain, we won't be alone."

"To not be hurt by others for
being different and to be love for who
we are."

"Sounds great, right?"

I'm sorry. I loved you.

Goodbye.



Audrey Davis

On and On and On

Sarah Hale

the city lights are glaring through my
window
trying to drag me in
trying to rip me up
trying to swallow me whole
with one ferocious gulp

the city lights are calling
screaming their sirens songs
in that sickly monstrous tone

the lights are clawing at my windows
clawing at my mind
humming and beating around ragged
the city lights are pounding and
stabbing
right through my every defense

the city lights outside my window
whisper about last night's dreams
flickering and mocking about endless
yesterdays
the city lights glow on and on and on

"Flight of the Hummingbird" won first place in the Virginia High School Creative Writing Competition

Flight of the Hummingbird

Ashley Clark

Trigger warning: This piece contains implicit mentions of an abusive relationship.

Jenna Langston was seven months shy of eighteen when she started going to the psychiatrist's office—perched on the hushed side street just off of downtown—that smelled of Clorox bleach. That being said, it was most certainly not clean. The walls themselves were peeling off, paint chipping and landing on the bulbous beige couches, each sporting different stains that could have been blood or vomit or snot or piss; it was hard to tell which in a place like this. All the girl could really decipher was her discomfort.

She knew she had problems. That was obvious. She bit her nails until her fingers bled and would pick at her skin, she would have breakdowns where her whole body would freeze and she'd be stuck staring into nowhere. She would start crying uncontrollably for reasons she couldn't explain. But if she really truly thought as hard as she could about it, the only possible reason she felt she had to have been there was because of the boy. She kept having these moments where her mind would betray her, flickering scene after scene where the boy would kiss her and hold her down and hurt her, and she wouldn't sleep and would start to twitch.

The twitching scared her mother and sometimes it scared her too. It scared her when she would start gagging and panicking. Her lungs felt like they would collapse in on themselves, all the while her heart would skip beats and

flutter, thumping on the off-beat in her chest. She liked to imagine her heart as a hummingbird with a broken wing, still trying to fly as fast as it could, but breaking down over and over again.

It made her cry sometimes to think of her heart as that hummingbird, trying so hard to keep beating for her, championing self-reliance, keeping itself warm even when the world around it was so cold. Even when she cried and cursed her own skin.

There was something terrifying about becoming aware of your own heart pumping blood through your body, of your own lungs sucking in oxygen, of your own eyes blinking away dust and dirt. In the past months, the girl had become painfully aware of her own body.

She had always been observant, but mostly just of other people. She didn't like looking inward. It never showed her what she wanted to see.

This was the first time she had been to this psychiatrist's office. Her mother had dragged her inside, holding tightly onto her hand; sucking in her tears and her pride. She sat just outside the doctor's door as her mother spoke to the man, trying to give some sort of background to this strange and unfamiliar situation.

"She's broken," her mother had said, voice bobbing up and down like a buoy on the water. "Please—she was never like this before. Something's gone wrong."

Jenna stopped listening. She didn't particularly enjoy her mother describing her as broken; like the busted dishwasher everyone was telling them to replace. She didn't want to sit and listen to her mother beg a doctor to fix her daughter. Instead, she focused on the stains on the walls. Some mimicked the

ones she would find scattered about her body after the boy would leave; callused fingertips pressing into softer skin, dollops of violet in the morning in hidden places. A few were shaped like clouds, one in particular looked like the crooked nose of a witch. She cringed when she remembered the way his nose bent. She became used to staring up it when he would lean down and kiss her, grabbing her by the arms and forcing her to stand still, as if her movement would somehow shatter the moment he'd crafted so carefully.

She could never close her eyes when they kissed. Instead they would cross as she focused on the evident lurch in his nasal structure. She would count the freckles near the corners of his eyes. Once he'd pull away she would close her eyes as if they had never been open in the first place. She couldn't understand why she spared his feelings so often when he had no regard for hers. Her mother said it was because she was so empathetic—that it was a good thing.

It didn't feel like a good thing.

When her mother had left the closed-door office, she had smiled softly, pressing a kiss to her forehead and smoothing down her hair.

"Everything is going to get better, sweetheart," she promised, scrubbing the tears away from her own cheeks. "This doctor is very nice and he's going to take care of you. We're going to fix this, okay?"

She wasn't quite sure when her mother started talking to her like she was a child. She spoke slowly and softly, like if her words were any louder they would crack into her mind and break things up even more than they already were.

*

The couch was continuously squeaking beneath her thighs as the

doctor asked her how she was feeling that day and whether or not her new anxiety medication was helping. The uncomfortable silences were lasted a bit longer; accentuated by the squealing of the faux-leather couch. It was July--three months had passed since her first appointment--and the air was thick and hot. Her shorts showed too much of her thigh for her liking, but her mother insisted she would overheat in pants. She didn't think that was quite true. She was cold more often than not.

The air conditioner was cranked to its highest level in the office that day, blasting through the vents and making Jenna shiver every other minute as she tried to move as little as possible on the couch.

"You're shaking," the doctor said, observing her closely.

"I always shake. And it's cold."

"It's not cold enough to be shaking."

And Jenna shrugged, staring down at her fingernails turning purple from the freezing air and her poor circulation, before she dug them into her thighs, urging her body to stop shaking. It made her too conspicuous.

The couch in the doctor's personal office had to have been the most uncomfortable one in the building. What it lacked in stains it made up for in squeakiness. Every movement Jenna made seemed to be magnified by the springs beneath the stiff cushions; squealing like a newborn baby and she would cringe each time, painfully aware of her own body. She wondered if that was some tactic, if this doctor wanted to see how she would react to her own body's movement, if it bothered her.

It wasn't that she disliked making noise or that she disliked her body's sense of mobility, it was just

much simpler when she took up as little space as possible. Jenna didn't mind hunching over, ruining her posture, so long as it meant she was a little less broad. So long as there was a little less body to notice. It wasn't that she wanted to be dainty, but she just wanted to be small enough to disappear into thin air without a second glance.

The first time she recognized just how badly she wanted to be small was when she was stuck in the subway in New York City while they were sending the boy away. She was visiting family, trying to distract herself from the pain she still felt, and found herself caught with so many people living a million different lives. The girl in front of her had a backpack with a racket sticking straight out of it. Her t-shirt read Columbia Tennis and Jenna had been immediately intimidated. The movement of the train forced the two girls against each other and by the time Jenna began to hyperventilate; unprepared for all of the physical contact the unknown city brought, another body wedged itself between them. Her lungs were crashing in and out, heaving and wheezing; her shoulder blade was pressed uncomfortably against the slippery metal pole; and her feet seemed rooted to the floor, crowded with patent leather shoes and long legs. She found herself collapsing inward, trying not to breathe in the same air someone else was breathing out. Jenna peered through the cracks in the bodies, wishing she could slide through them and search for daylight, but nothing seemed to help. By the time the doors spread open, she shoved her way through, still breathing heavy, and twenty blocks from where she needed to be.

The doctor said he had some ideas as to why Jenna wanted to be so

terribly small, but he wouldn't tell her. He would hum, tap his pen to his chin and say, "Not yet, dear. Not yet." Then he would push his half-moon glasses back up the bridge of his crooked nose and smile like he knew her so well. Like he knew her better than she knew herself.

*

Jenna had been going to the psychiatrist for four months now, and he'd been practically begging her to tell him the truth; the whole story, every painful bit of it, but she was still reluctant. It was not a happy story and whenever she told it she got the same lump in her throat and her stomach would lurch inside of her and her hummingbird heart would *thump-thump-thump* against her ribcage. It was not a good feeling, but the doctor seemed to think this was the only way for her to feel better. So he asked her questions to get her started.

"He would hurt you, wouldn't he, Jenna?"

"Yes."

"And how often would he do that?"

"Every time we were together."

The doctor nodded his head, jotting down information on his notepad. He paused and stared at her for a moment too long, waiting for her to elaborate but she didn't and the silence dragged on.

"Why did you stay with him for so long if you knew that he was hurting you?"

Jenna glared at the doctor, feeling true anger towards him for the first time in the four months they'd seen each other. The office went silent for a moment, even though Jenna could practically hear her aggression buzzing in her ears.

"It's harder than that."

The doctor nodded and leaned forward in his seat, resting his chin on his palm, still hoping she might keep speaking.

"Would you be willing to tell me how he hurt you?"

Jenna's eyes welled up with traitor tears. She was *angry*, she wasn't sad. She didn't want to cry now. She wanted to scream and shout and tear the stained carpet from the floor and push the squeaky couch through the window. She wanted to forget every bruise, every tear, every pulled heartstring. She wanted the doctor to hear her the thundering of her heart, she wanted him to feel the heaving of her lungs. She wanted him to know just how much it still hurt. She wanted him to know how badly she wanted to forget it all, but her mind had clamped around every memory, locking it away and delegating different moments to different parts of her body. So when she tilted her head just this way she would remember the way he would grab her shoulders. Or if her hands grazed her knee just so, she would feel his body pinning hers to the floor.

"No."

"Okay." The doctor nodded and pushed his glasses up, rubbing his eyes slightly. "Would you ever retaliate? Would you ever get mad at him? Were you ever mad when he hurt you, Jenna?"

"I'm not an idiot. And I'm not crazy either. I was mad. How could I be okay with what he would do to me? I know it was wrong. I'm not . . . I'm not a masochist; I was never okay with it, all right? I was furious, but what could I do? Everyone loved him. Everyone. My mom even loved him, she was so happy for me and everyone kept telling me how lucky I was. So imagine how I felt,

sitting in my bed at night, staring at the ceiling trying to figure out what the hell was wrong with me; why he would hurt me. Why I didn't enjoy it when he touched me. Of course I was mad, I just . . . It was hard. I couldn't understand why he'd want to. Why—why he would never listen to me. I kept trying to see it through his eyes, how I must have looked to him, what I wasn't saying properly; but I could never make sense of it."

The doctor was shocked, his jaw slightly slack as he coughed, viewing her sudden outpour of emotion as some sort of breakthrough. This had to have been the most Jenna had ever spoken in one of their sessions.

"You like to understand people don't you? You like to stand in other people's shoes. That's why it was so hard for you to end things with him, wasn't it? You wanted to see what he saw first. Do you like seeing things through your own eyes, Jenna? Do you like being yourself?"

"It's not depersonalization, if that's where you're going with this. I don't just float away. Do you know how badly I wish I could? I would love to leave all of this here in my body and have my mind just float somewhere else, but I'm not that lucky," she snapped, the suppressed anger still raging and bubbling; catching onto everything in its path. "My mom always says I'm just empathetic; that I just like knowing people, but it hurts sometimes making up stories for everyone else in the world. It hurts feeling for everyone else. Sometimes I wish I didn't have to feel anything at all."

*

It was going on the fifth month of Jenna's visits to the Clorox office when the doctor suggested she try

writing about the boy. She had explained to him that she couldn't write about him or what he did to her; that nothing amounted from it, that it only ended up hurting more.

"I know you can't write about *him*, but have you tried writing about yourself?"

"I-I . . . no--I've only ever needed his explanation"

"I think you should try writing about yourself, Jenna," the doctor said thoughtfully, placing his pen to his chin yet again before jotting down a few more notes. "It would help. And if you are willing to have me read what you write, I would love to."

So they ended their session early and Jenna went out to the store to buy a new notebook. She opened up to the first page still sitting in the supply store parking lot and began to write about all of the pain she felt and her hummingbird heart. She wrote about the way she was afraid of looking in the mirror for a long while, because she wasn't sure if she would look different. She wrote about the way the scratchy carpet felt beneath her back when he would hold her down. She wrote about the violet bruises that would appear on her hips the next day. She wrote about the way the sky was always black; no stars, no moon, no nothing. More often than not she would write about wishing she was smaller than she was; wishing she didn't take up so much space, that there wasn't so much body for everyone to leer at.

She wrote every chance she got, weaving stories of all of her maladies: the anger that had been bursting inside of her, her wasted time, her desperation, her shaking hands, and her heaving lungs and hummingbird heart. By the time her sixth month with the psychiatrist had rolled around she had

become a bit more poetic, losing herself to metaphors. She was the dying star; cooling as she burned through every last element. She was the hummingbird, finally flying home for the night, taken in its torpor beneath moonbeams; ensuring life while still drawing close to death. She was Persephone dragged through hell, or more often than not, Demeter clutching at the cracked soil and ripping the flowers out from the Earth; making a winter from a broken heart. She was Orpheus, daring herself to take glances at the past she knew she must leave behind. She was Odysseus roaming around, wasting away and crying claims of anonymity.

It was much easier to write her mind into a story than to make sense of her place in the world around her.

*

Jenna Langston was half a year older when the psychiatrist finished reading through her book of poems and prose: all telling the same story.

"He made you feel very small, Jenna," the doctor had said softly. "He shouldn't be the biggest part of you."

She thought for a moment, crossing her legs and letting the couch squeak beneath her.

"Do you feel any better, Jenna? Better than you did six months ago?" the doctor asked, taking off his half-moon glasses and setting them on the coffee table beside her book of woes.

"I feel warm."

*

Jenna Langston was eighteen years old and on her way back home from her very last appointment with her psychiatrist when she pulled her car into a parking lot next to the playground and began to walk home. She trekked over to the bridge perched over the busy road and looked down at the graffiti marks

and nameless stains on the concrete. The wind blew her hair from her face and she began to twirl with the breeze; letting it take her wherever it wanted.

She wore a bright yellow dress that billowed out around her, turning her into something resembling a spotless globe, spinning atop the bridge, with arms stretched out wide, grasping at the air. When she stopped moving, she still left her arms out, her stance broad as she stared off the bridge, looking over the busy road. Some part of her knew if she were to fall she would be obliterated by the speeding cars, all full of a million different lives, and a billion different emotions and she found her mind jumping into each and every one of them; like a hitchhiker, slipping into their past and present and their exponential futures. She knew her hummingbird heart would finally go still, after its countless days of broken beating. But for the most part, she was focused on the fact that for the first time in her life she found herself weaving her own name into their stories. The time they saw the girl, wide and tall, taking up half of the bridge in her bustling yellow dress, and for a moment they couldn't tell if she was just a girl, or a massive star falling from the sky, spinning and twirling above them, bursting at the seams and burning with heat.



Ellie Fore