

# River Voices

Spring 2020

# River Voices

## Cover Artist Statement

The piece is titled “Society’s Puppet.” This piece is important to each one of us because each of us relates to a category of the LGBTQ+ and felt it was vital that we send a message to people who are both part of the community and those who are bystanders.

We have all had our personal experiences and stories about coming to terms with who we are. The internal struggle we face can feel as if you are at war with yourself. We often ask the question: “Can I live this life, love myself and go into the world this way? Or, would it just be easier simply to let society treat me like a puppet, and hide behind the veil of normality?” It’s a battle that may feel never ending, even when you finally can look at yourself and say, “This is me!” The world around us is not always as accepting.

But each day that you get up, you are facing the world and showing them that you cannot be turned into a “puppet” any longer. We hope that when you see this photo, you know that no matter how much you battle your inner demons, or the demons of the world around us, you can rise from the ashes and speak your truth.

To help you through your story, and to express it to the world, we have created what we hope to be an artistic outlet for LGBTQ+ people everywhere. We call it Studyingjupiter; it is an Instagram page where we hope to recreate stories about who you are, your journey of self-discovery, and anything else that you would like to send, through photography and special effects makeup. We ask that if you are looking for a way to express yourself, please reach out, we would love to hear your story, *your way*, however that may be.

The piece was created from the minds, eyes, and hearts of three individuals who long to connect with others. No matter who they are, who they love, how they look or what they believe because, at the end of the day, we are all the same.

We were meant to experience the world through emotional connection. Be yourself and no one can ever challenge you.

-Studyingjupiter

# River Voices Spring 2020

## Editors

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Brianna Boehm-White	Jessica Jackson
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Taylor DePouw	Alison McCarthy
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*River Voices* is a literary magazine published by the English Department at Muskegon Community College. It showcases and celebrates the work of current students, alumni, faculty, and staff. *River Voices* is an annual publication.

This year, the editors chose the theme “hope” as a way to collaborate with the Muskegon Area Arts and Humanities Festival (ahFest). The Festival brings awareness of the arts and humanities to the community through activities that honor the efforts of artists, historians, and cultural groups working to make the arts a part of everyday life.

Hope is a broad concept that encompasses for us, a celebration of the future. As we, as faculty members, strive to encourage, motivate and inspire our students, it is important to not only educate their minds, but their hearts and souls as well. In a world full of cynicism, bigotry, and hatred, we must persevere to bring light into our daily interactions, to display and resonate the hope that many have lost.

We are grateful to all of our contributors and in addition we would like to express special thanks to: Becky Evans, Mary Tyler, Diana Casey, Kevin Kyser, Erin Hoffman, Ronnie Jewell, Kelli Loughrige, Allison Cooper, and Peter Koryzno for their encouragement, support and contributions.

We encourage submissions of poetry, prose, essays, art, and photography year-round and are currently accepting submissions for the Spring 2021 edition.

If you would like to join the *River Voices* student editing team please visit: [muskegoncc.edu/rivervoices](http://muskegoncc.edu/rivervoices) for further details.

Cover Art: “Society’s Puppet”

Cover Artist: Photographers and Artists wish to remain anonymous

Cover Art Design: MacKynzie Vanderlee

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*Poetry is a river; many voices travel in it; poem after poem  
moves along in the exciting crests and falls of the river waves.  
None is timeless; each arrives in an historical context;  
almost everything, in the end, passes. But the desire to  
make a poem, and the world's willingness to receive it -  
indeed the world's need of it - these never pass.*

- Mary Oliver

## *By the Threshold*

---

James O'Banion

Someday we will break the ice that forms a wall between  
who we are and what we see.  
Do you think it's not too far out of reach?  
Yes, it seems only yesterday we were ripples upon the stream,  
dancing so harmoniously,  
and the water would always sing in the most inviting key

Someday we will bridge the great abyss that stands between  
our dreams and memories.  
Can we breach the surface of the sea?  
'Cause I am weak from treading through the troughs and toward the peaks;  
all I need  
is to finally break free.

Is it safe to be outside with you, my friend?  
'Cause all the trees have scars upon their rings  
Can you meet me halfway, by the threshold?  
I will take your hand; we can brave the cold together and take a chance

Someday I want to watch with you as the weeping clouds retire  
to a far and foreign sky  
as we find a meadow to call our shrine,  
and in time, we can seal the wounds that speak of sleeping fires  
while they feed the coals of white  
left behind by a dim and fading fire

But in spite of the darkness, we both know a guiding light  
still breathes beyond our sight  
Hear it cry as it waits for our reply  
to rectify the wonder we've denied through calloused eyes  
Oh, how they used to shine,  
burn so bright, and illuminate the night

Would you say these nerves have finally recovered from their fray?  
'Cause I know the friction wears them thin  
Can you meet me halfway, amidst the tempest?  
We will rise, 'cause I'm tired of counting broken dreams.

When this ends, will we know where  
to turn our cheeks and rest our heads?  
For now, we dream of better days to come  
and stay...

I feel safe to be inside with you  
Tonight, I'm convinced  
that all I ever longed for...  
was love.

## *From Sunrise to Sunset*

---

Josie Buckingham

Cancer: A pink burden.  
This salmon chair a witness  
to the dreaded news of no more  
bubblegum and cotton candy  
in the spring. No more asking  
for strawberry laffy taffy or  
laughing at your pink toned  
cheeks when your glass of  
Rose' warms your skin.  
Still alive, still alive  
we are for  
a moment or two,

so I pull the car over, step  
out and memorize the way  
the pink ribbon pinned on your  
shirt dances in the wind  
alongside the wild pink tulips.  
I watch your wig that fits  
perfectly sway atop  
your pink scalp almost asking  
me to remember it too.

Remember our pink sunset  
adventures eating sugar cookies while  
we sit on our coral kissed blanket  
listening to the waves ask us  
for one more visit.  
Just one more goodbye before  
the sunset fades and  
the night sky settles in.

## *Awakening*

---

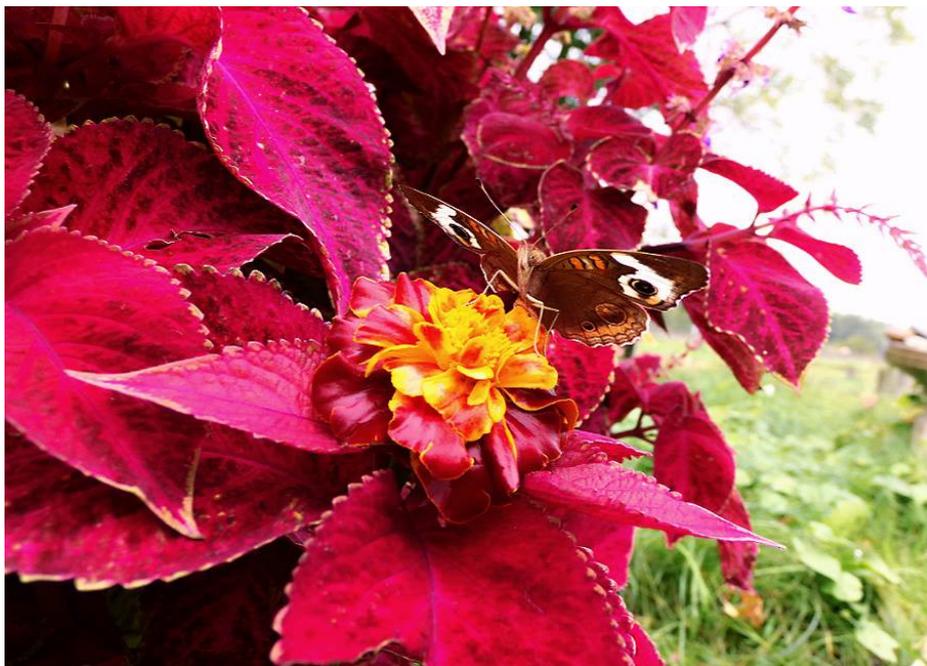
Kera Deverman

dirt dusts my face  
and moss clings to my eyelids  
tiny flowers spring to life upon my cheeks,  
an herb of grace  
human life, you could not trace  
except the beating, in my veins  
a butterfly skids across my face,  
leaving lace  
fluttering its wings  
and i breathe out a sigh  
wondering when i too, will beat my wings,  
and learn how to fly.

## *Painted Lady*

---

Shelby Wright



*Photography*

# *On Top of the World*

---

Kelli Loughrige



*Photography*

## *Tea Kettle*

---

Diana Casey



*Photography*

# *Church*

---

Madison Boone



*Photography*

## *Sundays are a Battlefield*

---

Morgyn Weinert

My Sundays are a battlefield  
They are an attack on my identity  
I'm taken to the barracks where who I am and who I love is  
disregarded.

You see,  
My church is where I feel imprisoned  
I've been condemned to hell.

You see,  
My church is where my enemies gather their ammunition  
The exact place I was brought to be converted.  
I go to make them happy  
Yet each week I am surrounded with a little more darkness.

You see,  
It's not about God.  
It's about the feeling of guilt and shame pressed upon my  
shoulders on my arrival  
A place we are supposed to feel loved and accepted

You see,  
With each service I retreat a little further back into the closet  
The place where I am safe from my enemies.

You see,  
All wars are not worth fighting  
All wars are not worth winning

You see.

## *Her*

---

Taylor Strand

I shouldn't have worn this dress. I mean, it's a great dress, and God knows it wasn't cheap, but *I* specifically shouldn't have chosen it for tonight. Or ever, really.

It's sequined. *And* pink. And short. *AND* tight. All of the things that never flatter me. Some people can pull off sequins, but I am definitely not one of those people. Honestly, I don't know anyone personally who can pull them off; they're such a specific fashion statement.

The bathroom door rasps as someone pushes it open. I reach down to act as if I'm washing my hands and not staring at myself amongst the ambience of flickering, harsh yellow lights, and the creaking of rusty plumbing overhead. I do have *some* dignity left, at least. I expect the typical parade of drunk girls to waltz in, linked arm-in-arm, and theatrically wheezing about something probably as funny as a knock-knock joke. When only one girl finds herself rounding the corner, however, I let my eyes slowly drift to catch her reflection in the mirror. She seems bored and doesn't say a word as she makes her way into the first stall amongst the completely empty bathroom. When her door is securely locked, I raise my eyes back up to the dress, leaving the water running in the sink before me.

*It really isn't a bad dress*, I think, letting one of my damp hands run down the front. The texture is rough, and I internally cringe as my fingers follow the curvature of my stomach. Too tight; this dress is too tight. At least, too tight for me. I never wear things of this cut: short enough to show a substantial amount of thigh, constricting enough to make it look like I have *some* essence of a figure. My eyes fall to my hand, the dress back-dropping my skin. Normally this rosy shade flattered my milky dark complexion, but something is just not working with this ensemble tonight. Maybe it has something to do with the girl standing across the bar which I can't seem to get off my mind, but I want to pretend I'm not that person-- the person who hides out in the bathroom, staring at herself because her game is terrible and her self-esteem is as wishy-washy as a trophy wife who knows her husband is having an affair.

But I am *that* girl. I have always been *that* girl. I've also always been the girl who does nothing more than swoon. Who does nothing more than watch from across the bar and swoon hopelessly. I wanted tonight to be different, but as I stare back at my reflection, I'm unsure. Unsure of myself.

When the woman in the stall emerges, I move my hands back to the water, pretending to vigorously scrub them as if something has stained me. Quietly, she walks over and washes her own hands, and as she pulls out a few rolls of paper towel, she turns to me, stating, "Nice dress," before exiting.

The words bounce back and forth, echoing in my brain. It is a nice dress. And, I don't want to swoon anymore.

With one deep inhale, I turn off the faucet and look at myself one more time, nodding.

*No more hiding.*

It's so much louder on the bar floor than it is in the bathroom. I mean, it makes sense, but I've been stowed away in there for so long I became accustomed to the altered sound, it seems. Some weird, up-and-coming techno music with barely any lyrics or vocals of any kind. Though I don't think many of us come to gay bars for the music. At least, I know I don't.

In this area, it's pretty tricky to find someone who you can relate to. Someone in the community. And it's risky; you get the wrong idea, start barking up the wrong tree, and things could go south fast. I always find a sense of community when I'm here. It's one of the only places I can openly talk without fear of people being judgmental. So, I'll deal with the obscure techno if it means I can keep this sense of community.

I glance across the floor of sweaty bodies and glittery feather boas, and for a moment, I'm worried she's left. She's not in the spot that she was the last time I saw her, right before I retreated to the bathroom. Then, however, I briefly spot her silvery-white hair disappear behind a group of guys dancing. That was the first thing I noticed when I saw her. Her hair was unlike anyone else's here. Short, very short, ending only one or two inches, maybe, from below her ears. It looked beautiful with her dress.

I continuously mutter "sorry" and "excuse me," as I make my way through the crowd. It's packed in here, everyone jumping in time to the music and taking shots left and right. Aside from a few elbows to the chest and a couple stray hands grazing specific parts of my body I make it through relatively unscathed. The crowd is significantly thinner around the edges, and when I surface, I feel momentarily accomplished before stopping dead in my tracks when I realize that I'm now standing directly behind her.

Her dress is open in the back, something I didn't notice before but am surely not complaining about now. She has pale skin, paler than the average person, and it contrasts nicely with the dark navy blue of the lace that crosses just over her shoulder blades. With the high collar to make her look that much taller and the belted waist to make her look that much more statuesque, it's evident that, unlike me, she knows how to pick a dress.

*Now what?*

She turns.

"Oh, hi."

*I guess that.*

"Hey," I reply, dragging out the word as I scavenge through my mind for something, *anything*, to say. Not like I have even the slightest chance of formulating a sentence now that I'm close enough to see the intricate details

of her face. “I, um-”

“Nori, right?” she asks, and my stomach drops. Multiple ways as to how she could possibly know me come to mind, none of them particularly admirable with my history of being a complete embarrassment.

“Yeah, how...?”

She chuckles, flashing a stunning smile, “I was here a couple of weeks ago when you did that trivia night. Your team won.”

Relief cascades through me. “Oh, yeah, that.” She seems a bit puzzled as to why that was such a relief, so quickly, I inquire, “And, you are?” “Theo.”

*So far, so good.*

I had seen her with a couple of others earlier, but now it seems as if she’s alone. “Here with anyone?”

“I was. A couple of friends forced me to come out,” she begins, then gestures out to the crowded floor, “now I think they’re lost in there somewhere.”

“Why didn’t you go with them?”

“Well, I’m not normally into this kind of scene. I only ever really come to clubs when they drag me along. Plus,” Theo throws a thumb over her shoulder, and I realize now that we’re standing right before the bar, “I have a drink waiting to be nursed. I’d rather do that than dance, I think.” She has a small grin on her face. I’m trying not to stare, but she has these dimples. These little but distinct dimples that could quite possibly be the thing that’s making me light-headed.

*What am I thinking?*

I open my mouth to reply, but Theo turns when the bartender taps her shoulder, and she takes the glass into hand, giving a single nod of thanks before turning back to me. Her smile hasn’t wavered. “So, what about you, you here with anyone?”

“I, uh... no,” I shake my head, “I’m not.”

“That’s a shame. You seem fun.”

I nearly choke on my own tongue. “What makes you say that?” Cue nervous laughter.

“I don’t know,” she cocks her head slightly to the side, and her hair dangles just above her shoulder. It leads my eyes to the floral tattoo I can’t fully make out in the dim, pink and purple lighting, “but I’d like to find out. Wanna sit? My friends will be out there for a while, and I’d much rather nurse my drink with company.”

I’m in the deep end now. I’m thrashing around in the deep end with no knowledge of how to swim and nothing to help me keep my head above water. Stupidly, I say, “sure,” because isn’t this what I wanted? That’s what I came over here for, to talk to her. And when she asks if she can buy me a drink, I say “sure” again, because this... gorgeous girl is talking to *me*.

Talking to me, and who wouldn't accept a drink from her?

For a second... no, more than a second... I fight off the urge to sprint back into that bathroom with the harsh yellow lights and the creaky plumbing. I'm used to the hiding spots. I've grown accustomed to the hiding spots. I grew up and found comfort in the hiding spots. And I can't hide here, standing face to face with someone like her. I can't hide in this dress, in all its pink, sequined, tight glory. I'm exposed. But for *once*, I'd like to be the person who met someone in a bar and flirted. Talked for hours. Stared at them from across the room and felt something.

So, I *will* be that person. If only for tonight, I'm going to make myself that person.

Theo's fingers graze mine as she hands me my glass (her hands are soft), then leads us through the energized crowd to a corner of the bar where there are mostly unoccupied tables. I watch as she sits down across from me, then swiftly tosses her hair back. My breath catches slightly. She's so beautiful, and I want to tell her. I'm going to tell her. I open my mouth, though pause with the words at my lips.

"Yeah?"

I let out a slight laugh, "I just, I wanted to say that um, you're... very pretty. You're stunning. I-I'm sorry if that's too forward, I just--"

"No, no, not at all. Thank you. I would say the same about you." There's that smile again. The smile that makes my chest hurt. "And you look spectacular in that dress, by the way." Theo locks eyes with me as she says this, and at that moment, I'm enchanted. The music's loud and the crowd's alive, and everything is just as you'd see it in a movie.

They're brown, her eyes. A dark, glossy brown. Glossy. Her eyes are glossy. They pull around the edges. They look startled. Why is she startled? Is she... crying?

She takes in a shuddering breath, and I realize she's no longer looking at me. She's looking *past* me. "Oh my God," she whimpers.

I don't even have the chance to turn before the shots ring out over my head. There's screaming, there's shouting, there's more gunshots.

Time stops for me at that point. I'm paralyzed in my chair. Shooting. This is a shooting, I repeat over and over in my head. This is a shooting. You're unsafe. Hide. Now. Hide under the table. Move! I'm screaming in my head, but I can't feel anything.

*Move. Move. Move now! Mo-*

## *Who You Were*

---

Kailey Barker

Today I met someone who reminded me of you,  
And the loss suddenly hit me all at once.  
Not that you're quite gone yet,  
Just a shell of who you once were.  
You were  
The one who listened to my  
Excited child ramblings  
Without doubting my youthful bliss.  
One who held the burdens  
Of the children's despair  
Their parents wouldn't bother to hear.  
My grand escape was just a walk away.  
Once a vibrant red getaway upon a hill,  
Now painted solemn blue by new owners.  
They demolished the old shed  
And built one brand new.  
I wonder if they ever ran across  
My childhood memories  
buried deep in the basement  
Just next to the porch swing  
Where we would swing together  
Before my feet could touch the ground;  
Under the kitchen  
Where you made strawberry jam.  
I hope you wrote down that recipe.  
This store-bought stuff just isn't the same.  
I hope you stay to see what I've accomplished--  
Or find a way to watch.  
I only want to make you proud,  
In a family who perceives you to be a burden.  
I've morphed quite a bit  
Since the last time you were you.  
All I can hope for  
Is to tell you all about it soon.

# *A Reincarnation*

---

Taylor DePouw



*Photography*

# *Upswing*

Isaac Zenz



*Pen and Ink*

*Just Keep Climbing*

Jill Black



*Colored Pencil and Pen*

*Perseverance*

---

Mychalla Belknap



*Charcoal*

## *What to Remember*

---

Madison Boone

I can never forget the way he looked at me. One could think that a look isn't meaningful but consistency is key.

To be honest, the majority of my memories consists of looking. Gazes drifting to me, always. I've come to perfect what exactly a look can mean. My grandfather's look was watery, his gray eyes marked with the weariness of ninety-two years. You could only speculate on what they gleaned from it all, for ninety-two years was a lot to cover, and you could easily leave a lot out when going over your life.

He was dying.

Not that it wasn't a surprise to me; he'd been living out his last days with us for a week, his rickety brown hospital bed parked next to the sofa, vintage floral bedsheets of my mom's covering them. Denial is a hell of a drug, and until last night, I'd been taking it.

My dad had taken a minute to step outside, lighting a cigarette.

I was left alone with him.

I held his hand, his bony fingers clasped over mine. Who knew that someone on the brink of death could have such a warm, strong grip? *Was it because he wanted to hold on to me?* I remembered a few seconds ago how my dad told me to get some sleep, that it might be a long process. I told him that I'll have plenty of days to sleep in the future. But no more to hold my grandfather's hand.

I told my grandfather I wouldn't let go until he did; I planned to keep my word. Through his incoherent babbling, I managed to hear, "I see... Angels." Angels. I smiled at that. There was a chance that Heaven was real, and that he could be seeing it right now. My grip tightened, in the dark living room. The wall clock ticked the hours away, like a bomb.

"I'll be taking my Road Test soon." I commented weakly between tears. "You'll see it. Just not here, not here." I went on, my sentence morphing into a sob.

"Is...Hell...Open?" my grandfather asked. I swore I saw a twinkle in his eye, and although it was garbled, I could make that line out. I half-wondered if it were a joke, as he was one of the funniest jokesters around. Joking about Hell when he was about to die? Totally something he would do.

Hell.

I recalled freshman year, how I'd been so afraid of a guy named Malcolm, who had also looked at me frequently. Stared, really. In a piercing way where you couldn't escape it. Or forget it. I was so convinced he would be my end, practically begging him to just kill me and get it over with.

Is Hell open? With Malcolm, I'd say it was. Until now. If this

happened last year, I'd have no way to cope. I'd probably break down even more, spiraling into endless sadness, not knowing there was another way. Yes, the pain was still here. I could manage it better now. I had to.

I kept holding onto my grandfather's hand, steadily. The soft light of the lamp made it harder to see him. And maybe that was good, better than the cold illumination of a hospital. Maybe that's one of the reasons why he chose to stay with us.

He mumbled on. I wished I could talk to him, really talk to him. Even though moments ago his hand squeezes, and his movements had led me to believe he could hear me, that wasn't the same as talking back. "Oh, Lord!" He cried, his voice like a leaking bicycle tire, his lungs failing to support him with the air he needed.

And that was the last thing I ever heard him say.

The porch door swung open and I turned reflexively to see my dad, his face taut, entering the room again. "How's he doing?" He asked.

I smiled thinly. "Good." He raised his arm up and shook his hand, as if to shake my hand away. I could see spit forming at the edges of his mouth, and my hand fell away, feeling like rubber. I kept to my promise. He blindly grabbed onto a tissue paper. I smiled again at that; even at death he still strived to be the self-sufficient man he always was.

"Madison, are you sure you don't want to go to bed?" My dad asked. I looked back and my grandfather, thinking about the fragility of humanity and everything I loved and hated.

"Yes, I'll go now." I answered.

I'd made another promise a few nights ago, back when we thought the end could've been closer. My grandfather told me never to forget him. And I intend on keeping that promise; I can never forget him.

---

## *The Strange Things We Want*

---

Jessica Jackson

I want to be a couch  
I want to be soft and delicate  
Sculpted and unique  
I want to feel the gentle human skin  
Rely on the dignity of my craftsmanship  
Supportive and strong  
I want to carry the scent of my company  
Sweet, bitter, sharp, stink,  
Cigarettes, roses, outdoors, whiskey  
To hear the hour-long conversations  
About the late nights and early mornings  
Love stories and quests  
To hear the laughs of joy and the shivers of cold  
To know that I am human enough  
To want to be something as silly as a couch

## *Open Letter to My Cell Phone*

Ashlynn Gonzalez

Open Letter To My Cell Phone,

We have gotten much closer in the last few years, closer than what I ever anticipated. All the options you have that I love:

Checking the weather.

Taking pictures.

Listen to music.

Even having face to face talks with someone on the other side of the world.

You make my life so much easier. And your friend, Siri, when she understands what I'm actually saying, she knows EVERYTHING.

You're always there when my plans fall through, if I have nothing to do, or if I'm going somewhere alone.

You even keep me company on vacation, even though you have to go on airplane mode when we fly.

**We have become INSEPARABLE.**

But, we need to talk. And I know that's your specialty. Well, at least it used to be your specialty. Nowadays it seems like your specialty might actually be allowing people not to talk, and I'm done letting it be that way.

You are so **demanding** of my attention, and for what? Because you want me to see the same Snapchat story I just saw 35 seconds ago. Or for me to look at the same Instagram pictures I've already seen it 10 times because you already told me, "You're all caught up with recent posts."

It's like you don't think I have a life to live. And, there you go again, buzzing and dinging.

I can't remember the last time I went somewhere without you and you didn't distract me from what I was doing.

At dinner, you always go off when I'm just trying to enjoy my food, and then you demand to see what I'm eating.

Trust me, I understand you are *just* a phone, but you and all your friends have made it almost impossible for humans to communicate with each other without you.

You have made it almost impossible to go anywhere without you because we live in a society where you are what allows others to see me.

I have no respect for someone who is so mentally abusing as you are.

**I think we need a break.**

I think time away from each other would be healthy. I need my own space and you will **never** give me that. I need to be free of the stress you give me.

And, the only way I can ensure this happening, is by getting rid of you.

**You're just a phone, and you can't fulfill me.**

When I'm with you, my head is always down, and I don't want to live like that. I don't want to miss out on big events happening in my life, only to have you show me what it was like later when I press play.

Sincerely,  
Your Human

And BTW...

I've always wondered why you think I would ever use the word "ducking" when I use the word "fucking" about a thousand times a week. Why do you constantly insist on changing the word I use all the ducking time to something I absolutely have no intention of wanting?

## *The Feeling of Birds*

---

Sarah Kallik

That feeling you get  
When hearing birds chirp in the dead of winter,  
For the day or two that you can see the ground.  
A breaking point of the gray of winter.

But then it stops  
And back is the odd version of silence.  
Between the melting ice on rooftops with their raindrops on dirty snow,  
And the inconsistent but constant sound of busy, zooming cars on the free-  
way,  
That overpowers me on loudly quiet days such as these  
Maybe I miss the enclosure of the snow that absorbs their sound that makes  
me feel, at time,  
That I have ceased to exist.

That feeling you get  
When hearing the birds sing in the dead sea  
That's filled with your nastiest of thoughts,  
That cleanse your body of all that tension you hold in your jaw,  
Such relief from a heavy object that you made for yourself  
How many other places are there in myself that sink me a little farther down...  
Without taking any credit?

*Autumn Jay*

---

Shelby Wright

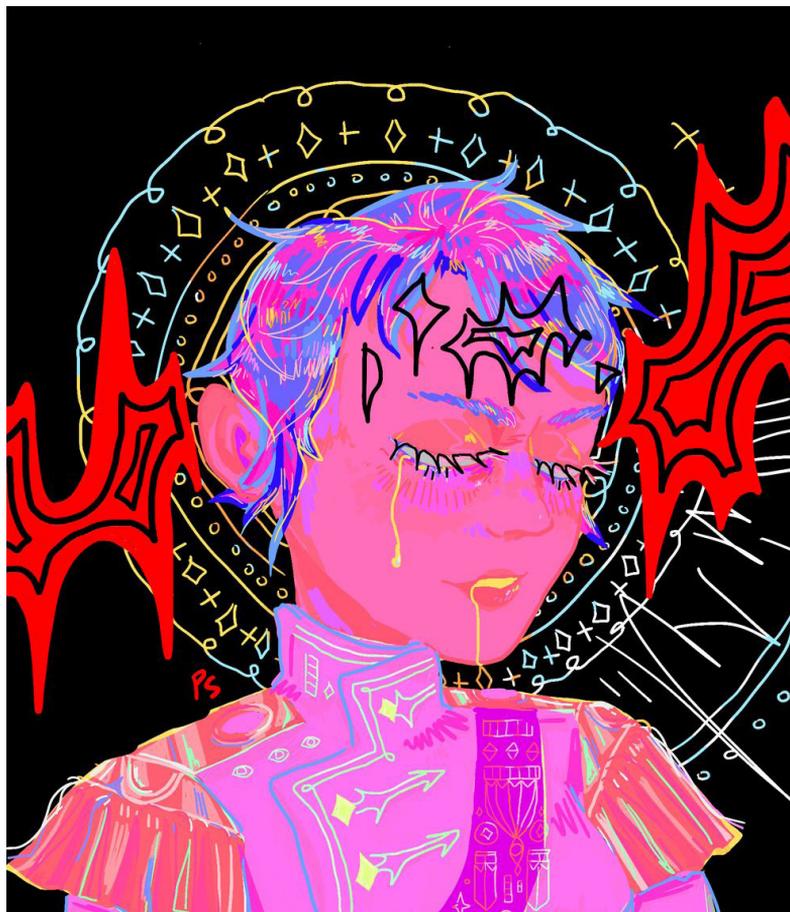


*Acrylic Paint*

*Bled*

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Pearl Slayton



*Digital Art*

*Equitable*

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Eric Boehm-White

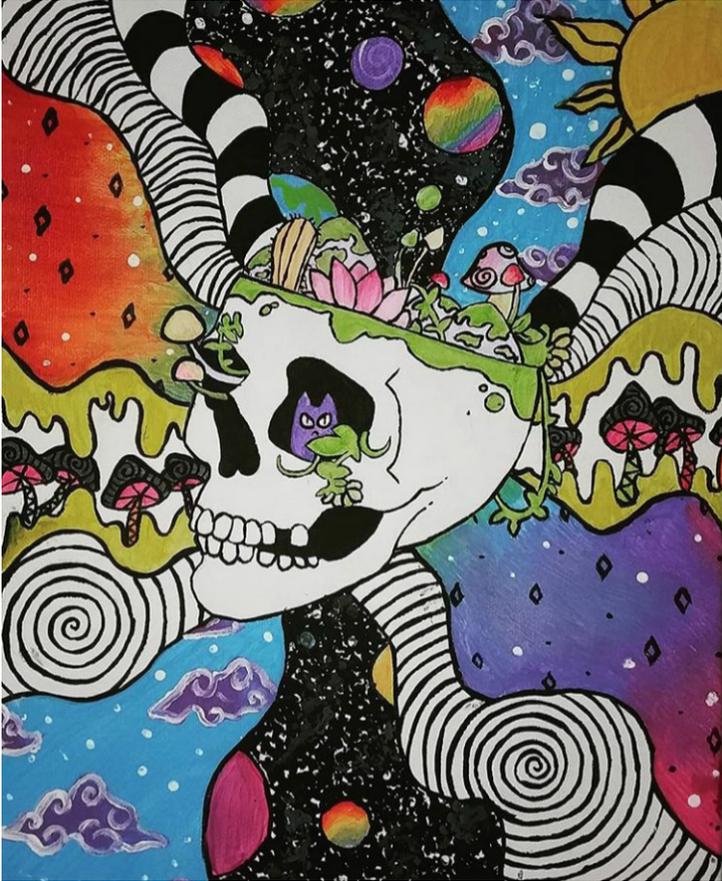


*Watercolor Pen*

*Skull*

---

Morgan Foster



*Acrylic*

## *Living Plastic*

---

Madison Merchant

The bendable ring that holds your thirst together  
wades in the saltiness of the barreling  
whites of the water.

The perfect size hole to become my new accessory  
Ain't it pretty around my neck?  
Suffocating,

You will soon regret  
pull,  
tug,  
snip,  
cut...

But,  
My accessory is as translucent as a jellyfish  
I want the hunger to dissipate  
as it mangles in my belly.

You sigh,  
Now the weight of my shell is pressing over your shoulder.

*A Prince. (I don't want to be.)*

---

Diana Casey

What do I know of this man? This prince.  
I think he is trying to talk to me.  
I must look through him as his eyes tell me..... of a pain?  
Or is it a longing?

Pleading he quietly asks the patrons –

“What choice shall I make?  
Duty to myself.  
Or a life I do not want.  
Is there one of you out there who would please take my place.”

Imprisoned.  
A wall of brick.  
Not an open window.  
No escape.  
Decision.

As Socrates, shall he drink the hemlock tea?  
Life is now too much to bear.  
A Prince. I do not want to be.

Ekphrastic Poem, based on *Self Portrait* by Michael Triegel.

## *Ein Prinz ( Möchte ich nicht werden)*

Translation by Kathy Tosa

Was weiss ich von ihm - dieser Prinz  
Ich glaube, er versucht mit mir zu reden.  
In seinen Augen sehe ich ... den Schmerz  
Oder eine Sehnsucht?  
Inständig bittet er die Besucher

Welche Entscheidung soll ich treffen?  
Pflichten für mich  
Oder ein unerwünschtes Leben.  
Gibt es einen von Ihnen, der mit mir tauschen würde?

Gefangen  
Eingemauert  
Kein offenes Fenster  
Keine Fluchtmöglichkeit  
Entscheidung

Wie Socrates sollte er den Schierlingtee trinken?  
Das Leben ist unerträglich.  
Ein Prinz - das möchte ich nicht sein.

## *Midnight Sonata*

---

Cole Gaskin

In the still of a crisp summer's night, pinched off from the rest of the world, deep in the woods of western Michigan, stood the weathered, dried bones of a forgotten, old shack. Its ribs open to feed the cool night air to its only occupant, a baby grand piano, covered by a torn and tattered brown tarp, barely enough to ward off the elements. The piano normally sat alone, except for Sunday nights, when a lone figure hurried to the shack, pulled up his seat and willed the piano to play the bittersweet memories of tragedies forgotten by all but one. The whole time the orchestra of the night accompanied him. As dawn broke, he retreated to his small apartment where he collapsed on his sofa and grumbled when his alarm went off.

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## *Wings*

Brianna Boehm-White

### *Early Spring*

It was the spring preliminary race, and Taylor Whitman was going to win. After racing in junior leagues for years, this was her first adult regional race. Placing 5th or higher meant she was qualified for the summer semi-finals. She was currently in 4th, and there were only two miles left to go.

A gust of wind suddenly came from behind her, and Taylor soared upwards. She used the new height to dive back down, tucking her leather-like wings closer to her body to gain speed as she lost altitude. Taylor began to straighten out her wings to level out her decent when she heard the whoosh of another flier behind her. As she glanced over her shoulder to gauge how far behind her they were, another, bigger flier slammed into her left.

“Get out of the sky, Skinwing!” the burly flier shouted as Taylor tumbled several yards out of the air. She was able to regain some balance, but the two fliers dove after her. Taylor didn’t have enough space to fly out of the way, so she twisted her body as far left as she could as both fliers came speeding down to her right. They barely missed her, and now they had to fly back up to Taylor’s altitude. This gave her the chance to escape, or so she thought. A third flier dropped down on top of her, breaking the bones in her wings. Taylor screamed in pain.

Taylor fell.

She couldn’t tell what was the sky and what was the ground. As she hit the tree line, she couldn’t tell anything more than darkness.

### *Three Months Later*

The three people who had attacked her were still unidentified, as they weren’t competitors in the race. The racing board sent a formal letter of apology to her, but no further action was taken. Two months after the attack at the race, Taylor finally took off her wing casts. It took another month to regain most of her musculature back. But when the registration came up for the Summer Race, Taylor didn’t sign up. She didn’t do much of anything anymore.

Wallace was over at Taylor’s house. He was a longtime friend of hers, helping her train for races, even though he didn’t have wings himself. He was, however, an Aerospace intern at NASA. His love for flying and technology gave Taylor the advice she needed to continuously hone and sharpen her flying skills. But Wallace wasn’t visiting.

“You need to race.” Wallace was directly across from Taylor, sitting on a bean bag. “What’s the point of practicing every day if you don’t compete?”

“It’s never just a few people, Wallace. There will always be more like

them, from the sidelines not saying anything, people actually attacking, or, people pretending that a hate crime didn't happen." Taylor got off her bed, squaring up to Wallace.

"You have no idea the fear I felt, knowing the only reason those people hate me is because of something I can't control. What kind of wings you get and who gets wings is completely random. It's not like I have a history of bat-wings in my family heritage. Even if I did, I can't control who my family is.

"I want to race. I love feeling the adrenaline rush of weaving in and out of streamlines and bodies. I love to win. But it's not worth it to risk my life, especially if I'm attacked again."

"What is the use of staying safe all the time? You are killing yourself in here, Taylor! You are becoming a shell of yourself in fear. I am here, we've been working on the body cams, remember?" Wallace gently grabbed her shoulders, making her face him.

"Guys like that will never be able to get away with hurting you in races ever again." Wallace sat Taylor back down, straightening her wings out of the way. "Taylor, please," Wallace asked, carefully placing a registration paper in her hands.

Taylor took the paper. She stared at it for a moment, and then back at Wallace. A nod and a gleam in her eyes, and Wallace knew his friend had finally come back.

### *Mid Fall*

"You remembered all of your gear?" Wallace asked for the billionth time. Taylor rolled her eyes.

"No, I completely forgot."

"Well if you forgot, we need to go back home!" Wallace started to turn the car around.

"NO! I have it! God, Wallace I'm gonna be late," Taylor smacked her friend in the arm, but she was grateful for the distraction. She has so been so tense lately, not sleeping or eating too well. This race was going to be hard, and not just because of the cold weather.

"At first you don't succeed, then sky-diving is not for you." Wallace chortled a bit, then moved on to the next dad joke. Before long, they were on the competitor's side of the parking lot.

Taylor took a deep breath of the crisp autumn air. It was an Indian summer so far, colorful leaves, cooler weather, but not too cold. The wind gently rustled the leaves above. Once inside the complex, Taylor registered and went down the hall to the lockers. Wallace waited in the spectators' lobby, reading his "Overseas Business for Dummies" book. He gave Taylor a thumbs up as cheesy encouragement. Grinning, Taylor returned the gesture.

Taylor found her locker number, 11-J, and placed her belongings in there. She began dressing for the race with the regulated clothing. It was more aerodynamic than what Taylor was used to, but since it was Wallace's own design, she felt more comfortable in it.

*Will all contestants please make their way to the main dock? We will be starting in 20 minutes.*

The other racers left the locker room, picking at various buttons and fastenings. Taylor took a deep breath and jogged to catch up with them.

*The race will begin in 15 minutes. Coaches may now go to the main dock.*

Wallace and Taylor go over the final game plan, the newest stats, and finally a long and overly complicated friendship handshake for good luck.

"You will do fine, Taylor. No one is getting you this time." Wallace gave an encouraging shoulder squeeze, and Taylor punched his arm.

"I'll do better than fine; I'm going to win."

*Fliers! Countdown to start!*

*Ready?*

*Set?*

*GO!*

Taylor took off like a bullet.

Her wings come closer to her body as she did a slight dive. The strategy was to get out of the other fliers streamline at the start line. Taylor was below them now, and quickly released her wings to pump them hard to keep up her speed.

Taylor wasn't the only one who had the idea of undercutting. A few of the more experienced racers dove as well to get under the novices or the ones with bigger wings that soared above them. But Taylor had no time to dwell on fliers, she needed to focus on herself.

Taylor cleared the treetops, following the yellow and red tape on the tops of them. The race was set to be a marathon. She quickly passed the novice fliers, but the more experienced fliers were passing her. Many of the great wings fliers went on ahead of her, while a few sleek-wings pull up beside her, using the drift to her advantage. They thought Taylor would continue to fly, pulling them along with her.

*Nope.*

She pulled in her right-wing, suddenly diving to the right. The people gliding behind her either crashed into one another or recovered enough to fly by themselves. Regardless they lost precious time in the race.

Taylor planned to fly low, not using her energy until the last leg of the race, but that wasn't going to work here. She needed to follow the great wings example by flying high. There were faster winds above the clouds. She continued to climb higher and higher until reaching her personal high limit.

Taylor looked down and saw she was passing the lower fliers regularly, and she was slowly catching up with the leaders. Taylor pumped her wings harder, flying even higher than the other great wings. She fought the wind a little, but kept up the pace, overcoming racer after racer until she was with the leaders. She was still high above them, but not for long. Her wing stuck in closer to her body, closer and closer as she picked up more and more speed.

Taylor was free-falling, dive-bombing to get ridiculous speeds.

The finish line was yards away. The woman in third place almost shrieked with surprise as Taylor shot over her head. The man in second place was losing steam, so when he saw this fresh racer coming up behind him, he gave way and let Taylor pass.

The racer in the first place was the third flier that attacked Taylor. She looked back at Taylor with a glare, and Taylor nearly faltered.

Nearly.

*“What is the use of staying safe all the time? You need to race!”*

Wallace’s words echoed in Taylor’s ears, and she pushed herself harder, straining her wings, back. Her very being became the wind that propelled her faster. The flier tried to interfere with Taylor’s trajectory, but so close to the finish line a hate crime couldn’t go unnoticed.

Taylor passed the flier and crossed the finish line at record speed.

Taylor had won her first regional race.

### *The Next Spring*

Alone in the night air, Taylor toed the edge of a cliff, ready to go. She did a series of stretches, getting the blood flowing. She backed up from the edge, winked at Wallace, then spun around and jumped off the cliff face.

Taylor fell.

The wind whipped her breath away, and for a split second, she relived the moment she dove into first place, winning yet another gold medal.

The ground rushed at her faster than a train, closer and closer.

Then, and only then, did Taylor extend her wings.

And flew.

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# *The City that Never Sleeps*

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Abbie Ginman

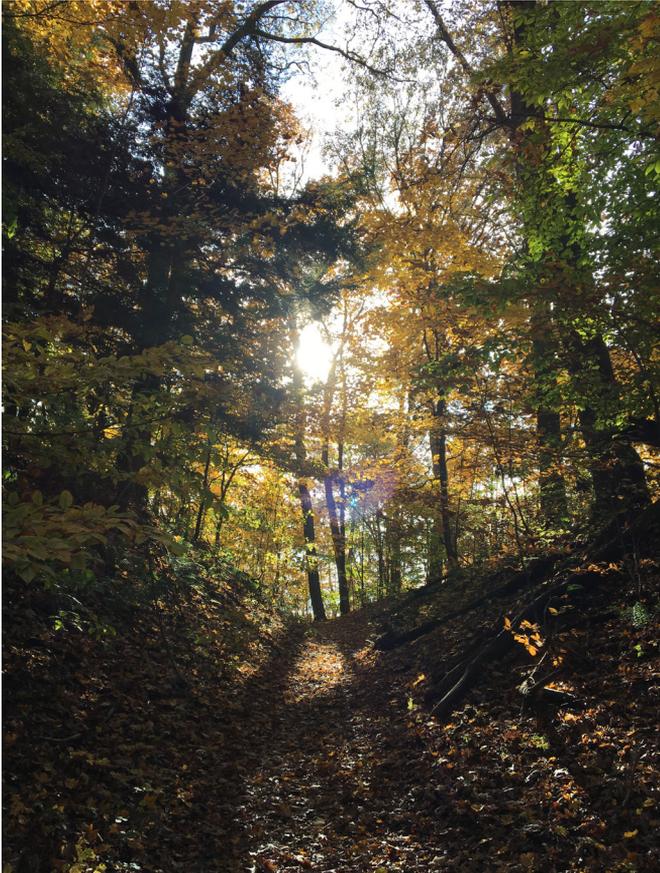


*Photography*

# *Hope*

---

Eric Boehm-White



*Photography*

## *LGBTQ+*

---

Morgyn Weinert

What does it mean to be different?  
To be acknowledged for less than you are  
strapped to a stone-cold metal table  
in hopes of curing a love that has been  
distorted by societies bigots

tied down by thick leather bands  
secured by our mothers and fathers  
irrational fears  
that this love places in frail minds

eyes widened  
to unfamiliar faces above  
with a merciless gaze staring  
at an invasive species

unknowingly only killing  
the only part of us  
that held any sort of love  
for them at all.

## *The Needles Above Us*

Keegan Colcleasure

---

Silently we sat  
Still under the trees of pine whose branches  
We busied ourselves stealing.

Our brilliance covered our heads in the form of a small hut dripping with  
fresh sap.  
They are tears.

The tree cried.  
The storm had ripped her  
Limb from limb  
Cold as nature always is.

Yet she smiled,  
As we have put her losses to use, taken the form of childish dreams and  
architecture.

We played a game we had invented  
But was bigger than you somehow. We felt pride  
At our recent accomplishments.

The sky plotted devilishly,  
It had done it to the tree  
And would do it to us too.  
Take, steal, pillage.

The sky had finished  
Brewing his storm  
For us to face  
The only way we could.

We looked up  
As we listened  
Ears strained towards the sky.  
*Pitter patter*

The rain fell around us,  
Striking the ground  
With its full force  
But, it did not strike us

We had availed.  
Our childish hopes  
In the form of a roof of needles kept us warm and dry.

We had won.  
The tree had won.  
The sky wept in defeat.

## *Blanc*

---

Stevie Averill

new beginnings are white  
like the lace of her wedding dress  
that still hangs in the closet  
or the pearls he brought her  
now scattered across the hardwood  
of an empty room  
or like the first snow of winter  
once a beautiful sight  
now leaves her craving his warmth

or new beginnings are white  
like a coat of primer  
still drying  
waiting to paint him over  
or like the tips of waves  
crashing along the shore  
erasing what was left of him  
or a fresh start  
woven in between  
a signature on the dotted line.

## *Love Marks*

---

Josie Buckingham

I have bruises on my face.  
A masterpiece created  
by the same hands that birthed  
me, and scars on my immoral body  
from the hate you feel knowing my  
hands will never be like yours.  
I'll weave my shameful fingers  
gracefully with hers, and she will  
lead us away from uncomfortable  
stares by people unable to understand  
a love more beautiful than theirs.  
She already has the ice bags  
ready when I return to her after  
a visit back home from the  
hateful hands that were raised  
  
but never raised me.

## *I am From...*

---

Jasmine Pascavage

*I am from* a city where I was always labeled as “Too white to be black, and too black to be white.”

*I am from* a neighborhood where hearing gunshots was the norm almost every day, where kids couldn’t be outside once the streetlights came on, and where there was a crack house on every block.

*I am from* a household where there was yelling, at all times of the night & echoes of slaps against our pale white walls.

*I am from* a single mother, who tried her best to make my brother & I happy, even if it cost her her own happiness.

*I am from* a butchered short haircut, a missing front tooth, and being as skinny as a rail.

*I am from* feelings of impulsiveness, I didn’t care who I hurt, or how they felt about any of my decisions.

*I am from* cold, concrete floors, being locked down for 23 hours a day, and bars on every window.

*I am from* tough love, where everyone turned their backs on me, and told me if I didn’t change I would end up dead in an alley.

*I am from* motherhood, God chose me to be the sole provider of a 4-year-old non-verbal, autistic, strong-willed little boy, Javion.

*I am from* determination, where after being academically dismissed from a University, I finally went back to school.

*I am from* strength, where I continuously pushed myself to keep going and enduring long nights, and early mornings.

*I am from* hard work, where after being at my job for only 1 month, I got promoted to management and quickly after got promoted again.

*I am from* accomplishment. In May, I will finally have my degree and be able to start my career.

## *I am From...*

---

Maxwell Olmstead

I am from both Indiana and Michigan, where both of my parents have stepped.

I am from a shared womb, where the race to win was a tie.

I am from confusion, as my father and mother didn't see eye to eye.

I am from shared birthdays and lullabies.

I am from always being player one as the older guy.

I am from a single parent household where my dad raised my twin brother and I.

I am from knowing my grandmother as mom and summer days on the Bayou where she resides.

I am from a youth organization, Boy Scouts, that still thrives.

I am from the nest, where Eagle Scouts lie.

I am from a family that loves food as much as I.

I am from please and thank yous that soften any exchange.

I am from a background where achievements aren't desired; but participation to the end is acquired.

I am from a heart of compassion that allows me to relate to broken hearts.

I am from a twinship that was jeopardized by hate and spite.

I am from agendas packed full to the brim.

I am from not being on time!

I am from 21 states across the beautiful stars and stripes.

I am from Germany, Wo wohnst du?

I am from 2019 lost not on a whim.

I am from grief and struggle from the loss of a twin.

I am from success through adversity.

I am from out West with a friend.

I am from relationships turned sour, but in the end, I know who are my friends.

I am from MCC, like all of you. My passion for this poem comes from the effort in you.

## *An Outhouse on Washington*

---

Lauren Streng

The dry grass and warmly painted leaves crumble beneath our feet, the soft crinkling loud against the silent buzz of the night. We creep forward, unable to see anything except for what we can feel. I reach out, my fingers wandering along the rough exterior of the house, feeling my way toward the backyard. My balance is lost to the uneven ground and I stumble forward, my feet sliding through the frictionless leaves. Ed swiftly grabs the back of my jacket, pulling me up.

“Geez, Tom! Did you trip over a log or something?” Ed whispers jokingly. I roll my eyes, an action he cannot see in the dark. My hands fumble around in my pockets, searching for a small flashlight.

“Ed! Did you grab the flashlight?”

“What? No, I thought you did.”

“Alright,” I sigh. “Let’s keep moving. It’s not worth going back to the truck for.” We continue forward, entering the backyard. Without my fingers to guide me, every step is completely blind.

“Do you know where it is?” Ed asks. I can feel him next to me as his sleeve brushes against my arm.

“Last time I was here it was 40 steps from the edge of the house.”

“Well, that’s great!” Ed says sarcastically. “Were your steps blind, were they giant, was it a straight path, did you --”

“It’s 40 steps!” I snap. “Right now we’re about 16.”

“How do you know?”

“Huh,” I ponder mockingly. “I really don’t know, but maybe it’s because I counted!”

“Well, yeah, but ...”

“Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen,” I mumble under my breath, leaving Ed to catch up.

“Forty-five, twenty-six, thirty, seventy-two, ninety-one --”

“Ed! What are you doing?” He laughs heartily and I hush him, trying to stifle my own laughter. I shake my head and continue moving. “Thanks to you I lost count of my steps. So if you run into it, don’t blame me.” Ed extends his arms, walking around like a mummy.

“Found it!” he shouts, loud enough to send a few birds flying.

“Quiet!” I hiss. We move around the structure, feeling it out and trying to get an image of it in our minds. It’s tall, about six and a half feet in height, and only three feet wide. The old wood is splintered and rough, the direction of the grains evident under my palms. My hands continue to fumble around until they land on a rusty hinge, and a bit further over, I find a handle.

“I found the door!” I yank it open and the hinges squeal, sending a shiver through my spine.

“Did they fill in the hole?” Ed asks, peering over my shoulder.

“I don’t know! I can’t see anything, remember?” I bend down and feel the ground for a stick. My fingers wrap around one, the peeling bark scratching into my hand. Like a blind man using a walking stick, I slowly rake the surface inside the structure, feeling for any uneven ground.

“Well, I don’t feel a hole, so I guess they filled it in,” I say as I stand up.

“That makes sense. Robert did say that they haven’t used it for years.”

“Yeah,” I chuckle, “and I think we would’ve smelled it if there was still a hole.”

“Good point. Now, how are we going to move this thing?” Ed asks, walking around the outhouse another time. Half of the shingles on the roof are missing and the whole thing rocks when gently pushed on. Every now and then we get a surprise when we feel a rusty old nail poking out of a splintered board.

“Okay, so I think our best bet is for me to take this side and for you to go opposite me. If we hold it by the roof supports we can just lift straight up. Ready?” I do as Ed suggests, positioning myself opposite of him. I raise my arms to the roof, feeling around until I find a decent place to put my hands.

“Ready,” I call back and we lift the outhouse. I can feel wood pieces prickling my palms like little needles, but there isn’t much I can do about it. The weight of the structure has already made my wrists sore and I can feel the blood inside my arms rushing downward, making my fingers even more tingly. We are barely out of the backyard, but I need to stop. “Ed! I’m going to set it down in three, two, one.”

The outhouse bumps roughly down and I’m afraid someone heard us, but no lights flicker on. I shake out my arms and massage my palms. “Alright, ready to go?” I ask. Ed gets into position and I once again feel the wood dig into my hands as my wrists bend back to support the weight of the structure.

It takes us two minutes to get back to the truck, and at that point my hands and arms feel numb and tingly. Ed props open the bed of the truck and jumps in, leaving me to hold the outhouse steady. I start leaning it toward him, the side resting against the end of the truck. He grabs the roof and pulls it further toward him as I push from the bottom and soon enough it is in the truck, laying on its side. I run to the front of my 1940 Ford Pickup and yank the faded green door open. The truck shakes softly as the engine falls into a rhythmic putt-putt-putt. I turn onto the street and take off, a little faster than normal, but not enough to attract attention. As I drive, my right leg bounces nervously and my fingers tap the steering wheel. The headlights outline the trees and the branches swaying in the wind casts shadows over the road.

Everything seems too quiet and I find myself jumping when the wind scatters some leaves across the street. I turn left a little too sharp and I can hear Ed in the bed behind me trying to regain his balance.

“Slow down, Tom!” he calls. I do, but every street light we pass feels like a searchlight trying to expose our little prank. I turn one last time onto Washington Street, my eyes darting around in search of people, but the street is deserted. I come to a stop in the middle of an empty intersection and shut off the truck. I look up and see the Grand Theatre’s lights flicker, the sign advertising the newest movie craze, but the doors stand unmanned.

“Alright, this is it.” I climb out of the driver’s seat and swing the door shut behind me. My footsteps sound oddly loud as I walk to the back of the truck, or maybe that’s just me being paranoid. Regardless, I lighten the pressure of each step. “Ready?” I ask Ed, and I see him nod. I begin pulling at the end of the outhouse, directing it to the ground. The first side bumps down rather noisily and our bodies tense up, but it seems no one heard us. Ed pushes the roof and the weight of the outhouse shifts from his hands to mine. He swiftly jumps out of the truck and helps me lower the structure. The pressure on our hands is released as the last side comes down silently, the tips of my feet almost disappearing beneath it. We hesitantly remove our palms from the scratchy surface and back away, holding our breath.

“We did it,” I whisper. Now, I can’t control my laughter and neither can Ed. We run to the truck and climb in, not bothering to be quiet anymore.

---

## *Petrichor*

---

Stevie Averill

the subtlety in your voice  
took me over like a waterfall,  
and comfort flooded my  
body with every word.  
the warmth of your touch felt  
like the spring  
after years of snow.  
you were the first drop  
of rain in a thunderstorm,  
the beauty erupting from  
the earth in its aftermath.  
you were the flood  
during a hurricane  
and the euphoria  
of falling in love.  
you were the heat radiating  
from the sun  
in the dead of winter,  
but your eyes were too cold  
to ever keep me warm

## *Black Orchids*

---

Kennedy Mapes

You condemn Us

for the way We bloom,  
The way We are kept, and  
The way We allow ourselves  
to be plucked.

The way We display ourselves,  
The way We produce buds, and  
Whether or not We let those  
buds develop.

You condemn Us, as if  
you are concerned,  
but do you ask

How We bloomed?  
How We were kept?  
How We were plucked?

No.  
You don't.  
You don't care.

You blame Our bright colors  
and the way We flaunt  
our beauty, but not  
the hands that ripped Us  
from the ground, disconnecting  
Us from Our roots.

You castigate Us for not wanting  
to subject Our buds  
to the same mistreatment  
We have faced.

You force Us to give Life  
to the numb organisms attached  
to Us even if it means Our  
petals wither.

You watch closely  
as Our buds grow,  
to confirm that they reach  
their full potential,  
but once they do,

you leave.

You don't help water them  
when nature doesn't allow Us to.

You don't place them in sufficient sunlight.

You don't watch over them to ensure  
they aren't manhandled by  
grub and greed.

You set them up for failure and  
then you disappear;

Only to return when it's their time  
to be condemned.

## *Salon*

---

Nathaniel Adams

Long locks of beach blonde hair  
Fall to the floor  
Mommy sits beside me  
I long to be anywhere but here  
Lick my lips and taste beads of sweat-  
An inattentive thumb slips  
Scissors catch staples, the grass is gone  
It is no longer Spring  
And I stand atop a snow-covered dune  
Arms spread wide, clutching an inner tube  
I take a running start and propel headfirst  
Blaze down at exhilarating speeds  
The moon above watches with knowing terror  
“Stop! Stop! Stop!”  
Crown crashes into concrete  
Bright light flashes in my eyes,  
Blood taps against the rubber  
An agonizing scream escapes me,  
Pain engulfs every ounce of my forty-pound body but  
I am alive. I am alive.  
It is Spring, mommy sits beside me  
Staples adorn my crown and will leave a scar  
A symbol of durability  
Like a crack in the sidewalk.

## *37 Cent Tip*

---

Ronnie Jewell

The crowd at table three  
allows no rest for the waitress,  
who must work a double shift  
to pay for daughter Evelyn's  
new Barbie Dream House from Santa.

Accessories not included.

Little do the happy-go-lucky beer guzzlers realize

or care

how hard she works to avoid living out of the back of her station wagon  
parked in front of her one-room apartment.

She dreamed of living the life of a Queen . . .  
married to a handsome King,  
never wanting for money, clothes that fit, toys for her children, the American  
Dream!

But there's no time to dwell on what could have been, no time for what-if's.

Table three wants another round of drinks . . .  
And the bathrooms still need to be cleaned.

## *Wilted Flowers*

---

Lauren DeRose

She knew that when she had gained consciousness, she failed. She knew that when her fingers slipped through the thin white cotton sheets, it wasn't all over. She knew that when she heard the beating of the monitor, her heart was still beating too.

She had asked for her window to be opened, wanting the cool autumn breeze to wash over her, yet it felt icy hot. But, she could still view the sky. The vibrant blue background with the thick billowing clouds. It was inviting. Yet, here she was. Stuck in the same place she had been 3 months ago. Why couldn't they understand that she didn't want to be here?

The room made her feel claustrophobic with its light lavender walls and lazily painted stars lining the trim. A vase full of flowers sat on the table next to the bed. Her parents had brought them to her while she slept. They hadn't been back since, and the flowers were drooping without water. The water that would bring them back to life. No one else came to see her either. This didn't bother her though. She felt like an animal at the zoo. Trapped inside a cage while people stood around and stared. It didn't feel right. Nothing ever feels right.

Sitting in this room, isolated from the world, made her feel worse. How was staying in a room filled with emptiness, going to help her? This place, built for healing, was destructive. It was numbing. It allowed her to mask the pain, not cure it. How can someone mend somebody, with missing pieces? Everyday she lost a piece of who she used to be. Who everybody wanted her to be. It was just all too much for her. How do you think she ended up here?

Within the next few days, she began to notice a boy wandering the halls outside of her room. She didn't know why he was here. Maybe he was a patient. But she dreamed up her own stories about him. Maybe he was visiting a relative, or a friend. Maybe he was suffering from a mild case of amnesia. Or maybe he was like her. Desperately trying to fix himself for the sake of others. Thoughts of this boy consumed her. He filled that spot of boredom, keeping her mind alive. She wouldn't have to sit in silence when her mind was speaking out loud.

The flowers next to her started to pick themselves back up again. The fallen petals had been swept away, and the beautiful bells were beginning to face towards the sun. The nurse had been watering them when she would come to give her medication. She didn't mind the flowers at the moment. It showed that there was still space for life in the room. That maybe she could light up herself like the glowing light peeking through the lamp shade.

The boy never came closer than a few feet from the door. He usually kept to himself, his chocolate locks swaying into his eyes like hers as he walked. But, sometimes he would pass with a smile on his face, which would result in a ear-to-ear grin from her. She never saw his eyes though. And that's what she wanted to see the most. "The eyes are the window to your soul" is what she's heard. She wanted to *know* his soul.

Days began to pass without her even realizing it. She would be so drawn into thought that she wouldn't even notice that the time had changed from 10 AM to 10 PM. But she would never forget what event took place. It was a "normal" day for her, and she was daydreaming, as usual. The flowers had grown a bit more, and were beginning to sprout more buds as well. It made the room smell nice. She heard a tapping on the glass. *Tap. Tap Tap Tap Tap. Tap.* It reminded her of her childhood code she had when she would play games with her friends. She snapped out of thought and glanced toward the door, where she thought a nurse was going to be. But, she was gladly mistaken. There stood the boy, *her boy*, peering into the room through the glass window. His gaze met hers and there was an odd familiarity hidden in his eyes. But the next thing she knew, he was gone. He had scurried off down the hall, without giving any idea to her about what he wanted.

The boy seemed to stop coming around after that. She would wait, watching the halls, yearning for him to stroll down the hall like he did every day. But day after day, he wasn't there. This to her was more curiosity than concern. What had she done that made him go away? She didn't understand, and she wanted so badly to throw herself out the door and look for him. But she didn't. She continued to wait because somehow out of all of this, she gained a sense of hope.

One morning, upon awakening, she noticed that there were two pots of flowers instead of one. She didn't know who they could be from, but it made her feel warmth through the coldness. A cool glass of water was lied out beside it, and she didn't think twice before drinking it. But mid-drink, she heard tapping on the window. *Tap. Tap tap tap. Tap.* The noise made her choke on the water she was trying to ingest. She knew before even looking up that the boy was standing at the door. And sure enough, he was there. This time was going to be different though, she wasn't going to let him run away. She crawled out of the bed, and took small, quiet steps to the door. She kept her focus on the boy, and yet, he gave no indication that he was going to bolt. When her hand gripped the door handle it was ice cold, and it shot a tingle through her arm. She made the move to open the door, but before she could, it was opened by someone else. The nurse.

"Elle, hey! Where are you going? I was just coming to give you your medication. Do you need something?" The nurse was startled by her eagerness to leave the room.

“Did you just see that boy that was standing there?” she quipped, pawing at the window to show her where he was standing. The nurse shook her head, confusion written on her face.

“Honey, there was no boy standing there. Are you sure you’re feeling okay?” The nurse asked, touching her forehead with the back of her hand. Elle ripped her hand from her forehead and backed away from the nurse.

“Are you sure? Brown hair, maybe 6 feet tall?” She replied, a wall of worry building up in her chest. The nurse again, shook her head.

“I’ve never seen a boy here. Why don’t we get you back in bed, and I can give you your medication. How does that sound?” The nurse took a step towards her and gave her a small push in the direction of the bed.

The boy was never there. The boy was never real. It was only her imagination.

The next day, the flowers had wilted again.

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## *Sin Sick*

---

Dae-Shaun Owens

To heal the sin-sick soul  
Made me think of my own past  
Openly racist misogynist predator in chief  
If something isn't named, it is not seen, it doesn't exist  
I say it in my sleep. I say it because I'm not supposed to say it.  
There's so much darkness and secrecy surrounding them  
See-through black underwear, ermine and pearls  
Is that you? Yum, yum. Oh, yeah.  
Bonjour  
More please  
Enter at your own risk  
Come inside.  
You don't want to go down there. Trust me. You'd get sick. Suffocating.  
It's not like a person who speaks, a place you don't go  
Designed purely for pleasure  
Who needs a handgun when you've got a semiautomatic?  
Pussies unite  
Euphoric  
A river of poison  
Wet garbage  
Sweet ginger  
Somewhere between fish and lilacs  
Her vagina became a wide operatic mouth  
Don't ask what she had done, it was just her face that pissed him off  
Because words did not form anymore in the darkness  
Imagine you could no longer distinguish between living and dying  
Imagine suffocating while you were still breathing  
Then he'd go forgetting that the bruises on my face were his hand prints  
We have been too understanding

## *Golden Dog*

---

Michalene Collins

Dense, toffee colored fur,  
cold, purple pink nose,  
warm, mottled tongue and  
eyes of molten brown that look at me and say,  
“I know the worst thing you have done  
and love you  
anyway.”

*Pluto in the Dunes*

---

Nathan James



*Photography*

*Pere Marquette*

---

Taylor Hermanson



*Photography*

## *Lonely Words*

---

Keegan Colcleasure

We must find meaning in life so we write.  
Yet often solemn are the words we lay.  
It's the loneliest words that do burn bright.

By their minds the poets try to do right.  
Their thoughts of hope shine like the rays of day.  
We must find meaning in life so we write.

It is the most broken hearts gifted sight,  
And with their broken God's they always pray.  
It's the loneliest words that do burn bright.

Left unchecked festering woes turn to blight  
So to fix them our pains we must convey  
We must find meaning in life so we write

Sending gay dreams adrift like paper kites.  
We have hope like children who laugh and play  
It's the loneliest words that do burn bright.

But bound together in harsh winter's night  
A sad heart still sings songs callooh callay!  
We must find meaning in life so we write  
It's the loneliest words that do burn bright.

## *Dear Voice Inside My Head*

---

Stan Shank

Dear Voice inside my head,

We want to speak directly to **The Voice**. All we have to say to you is, *You are my best friend and my worst enemy...*

When I'm alone, the only person there is *The Voice* inside my head. Then when I'm around friends and the people we care about the most, *The Voice* just won't go away. We can't blame *The Voice* it's attached to me. If we leave, who will *The Voice* have? When we were alone, we had **that** Voice, and honestly...

Nothing feels worse than being **alone**.

So, it's like sitting at a table, but on the other side is just a figment of yourself constantly having conversations over a...*Friendly*... card game. The best part is when *The Voice* (the ticking time bomb) says "go enjoy yourself and make sure to go smell a flower to make all your worries wash away like a footprint in the sand." It's a great day when *The Voice* wants to be friends...

The worst is when *The Voice* starts to form arguments... it turns into a fierce carnivore, whose mission is to devour every thought... every ounce of selfness until it makes you feel like...

*Nothing...*

Pretty soon every white cloud turns to black; every flower that we pass dies.

*The Voice* starts to make you second guess **everything** from the moment when your eyes open to when they close.

After every argument *The Voice* gets

Louder...And **Louder**...And **Louder**...

Every word hurts just as much as getting hit by a wave in an ocean.

After the sirens of *The Voice* stop, we all learn that it's just the beginning-- It's worse when everything is **overwhelming** with school, friends, family,

jobs, and expectations. *The Voice* piles on and constantly holds up a sign that only your minds eye can see and it reads;

*You're not good enough...*

Today is a new day where *The Voice* is in a cage **waiting..** *That Voice* can't say another word. We found the freedom to choose what we think. Finally, we can break the chains and padlocks and scream back **I'm tired of the bull-shit you put me through.**

All that remains is the sunlight beaming through a window for a fresh start.

We would not be the way we are without those conversations, without all those thoughts of making it seem like it's the end...and honestly *The Voice* will probably always be with me. So, for that...

We thank you, To *The Voice* Inside My Head

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## *Maple Leaf*

---

Cole Gaskin

Made to memorize the procedures in photosynthesis,  
while my plant withers in the corner of my room.  
Made to memorize the dynamics of a nuclear family,  
while mine eats dinner without me as I study.  
Made to memorize the themes in *The Lord of the Flies*  
while the only thing I do with my brother is fight.  
Made to memorize the answers to a test,  
while my pool of knowledge remains one  
mile long but only one foot deep.  
I may not know how to file tax forms,  
or how to balance a checkbook. At least  
I remember there are 13,000 cells  
inside a fucking maple leaf.

## *Lily's Friends*

---

Taylor DePouw

Mrs. Hansen pulls up further into the Gobles Elementary school parking lot and peers out into the playground where kids are running around freely while they wait for their parents. She catches the hot pink sweater worn by her daughter, Lily, while she chases another girl around the monkey bars. Mrs. Hansen rolls down her window and calls out to her daughter.

“Lily!” She yells, her daughter stops running and turns her head to make eye contact with her mom. Her sparkling blue eyes light up and she waves goodbye to the girl she was chasing and picks up her backpack, running to the car.

It’s been almost six months since Mr. and Mrs. Hansen adopted Lily. Her flushed cheeks and bright smile stood out to them almost immediately. Today was her first day of second grade at a public school, and the entire day Mrs. Hansen couldn’t stop thinking about anything and everything that could happen. Yet, when she saw Lily running up to the car with the same bright smile as when they first adopted her, she knew everything was okay.

Once inside, Mrs. Hansen sees her daughter up close. Rosy pink cheeks from the crisp autumn wind, her light brown hair pulled back in a, now messy, french braid. Lily’s smile was so wide that you wouldn’t even think it was her first day.

“How was your day, honey?” Mrs. Hansen weaves her way out of the parking lot and turns right onto the road to head home.

“It was awesome, Mom! I was really scared at first, but I made a new friend!” She was bouncing up and down in her seat, her hair falling out even more from the french braid. Mrs. Hansen felt like crying after hearing those words.

“That’s great, Lily. I’m so proud of you for making a new friend on your first day. What’s their name?” The car slows to a stop light.

“Her name is Maddison. She’s really nice, she tells the funniest jokes and likes to draw pretty horses!” Lily pulls out a piece of paper and shows her mom. It has a drawing of a blue horse in what looks like a pasture. It was amazingly done for a second grader.

“Wow, Lily. That’s beautiful. Maddison made that for you?”

Lily nods, putting the drawing back in her glitter backpack. The rest of the ride home Lily and her mom talk about the whole day of school, Lily not missing a single detail. That night, Mrs. Hansen told her husband everything that happened the same way Lily explained it, not missing any details.

“I can’t believe it, on her first day? She is something else.” Her husband smiles, pulling back the covers on the bed.

“She can’t stop talking about her, it’s like they’ve known each other for years. It’s incredible.” Both Mr. and Mrs. Hansen climb into bed, kiss each other goodnight, and fall into a relieved and happy sleep.

The next day, Mrs. Hansen pulls up to the same spot as before and calls out for Lily who notices her car right away and hops in, already talking before she’s fully in her seat.

“Mommy! I made another friend! Her name is Cara and she is really smart. She can spell any word you give her and she taught me how to do different dances, look at this!”

Lily starts swinging around in her seat, giggling with every movement. Mrs. Hansen was speechless at what her daughter was saying. Another friend? She wanted to get out of the car, run to the other side, pick her daughter up and squeeze her so tight. Mrs. Hansen was worried her daughter wouldn’t make any friends being so new, but two friends and it’s only day two? She was truly proud.

“That’s absolutely amazing, Lily. She sounds very sweet. Do you guys have class together like you and Maddison?”

“Yeah! But Maddison wasn’t at school today so I hung out with Cara instead. We had so much fun!”

Mrs. Hansen smiled, “I’m so glad, Lily.”

At home, while brushing their teeth, Mrs. Hansen again tells her husband about everything that happened and he lit up with joy.

“Wow... I think we’re going to need to host a sleepover soon if she keeps making a new friend everyday.” He spits out his toothpaste and starts to swish around mouthwash.

“They must have the kindest kids going to that school. When I was little and I was new to school no one batted an eye at me. She didn’t blink and she has two new friends.”

They fall asleep once again, happy and relaxed.

The next few days things started to level out. Lily talked about how she hung out with Cara on Thursday and Maddison on Friday, telling her parents all the things she did from the start of the day to the very last minute of it. A week later Lily came into the car with news that Mr. and Mrs. Hansen loved to hear.

“Mom! I made another friend! His name is Logan and he taught me how to play robots. We played all recess time and he let me have his pink pen because I thought it was really pretty.”

Mrs. Hansen was surprised to hear that Lily made friends with a boy, but kids make friends with everyone at that age, and the way he sounds, she doesn’t feel the need to worry.

Day by day, Lily’s parents hear all the latest news about Lily’s current and recently made friends.

One day in mid-October they counted and realized she made about nine new friends, all of which were different and unique from each other, but treat Lily all the same, like their best friend. The upcoming week there were parent teacher conferences and Mr. and Mrs. Hansen were excited to tell the teacher all of the wonderful news that has happened in the past few months. When the day came, they entered the classroom where they saw posters and books and artwork made by students all over the walls.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hansen, please, take a seat. It’s good to see you two again.” Mr. Lans shook both their hands and opened up a manila folder titled “Lily H.”

“I must say, your daughter has been a great student this year so far. She has been accelerating in academics successfully, especially in math. She is just an absolute joy to have in the classroom. You two have much to be proud of.” They both smile and Mr. Hansen holds his wife’s hand.

“Well, I don’t think she’d been able to do it without the kindness of all the friends she’s made. They made her feel so welcome and everyday she talks about all the fun things she does with them. I want to thank their parents just as much as we want to thank you.”

Mr. Lans’s smile drops and looks puzzled at the two parents. He starts to shuffle some papers around in the manila folder before pulling out a drawing.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hansen, when you say all the friends she’s made, could you give me their names?” He looks uncomfortable in his seat and Mrs. Hansen looks just as confused as Mr. Lans.

“Oh, of course. There’s Maddison, Cara, Logan, Erica, Billy, Isabel, Peter, Tina, Katie, and Fred.”

A silence fills the room, Mr. Lans doesn’t speak but just stares at the drawing in his hands.

“Let me ask you, have you ever seen any of Lily’s friends? In person or any pictures?” His face is straight, Mrs. Hansen knows something isn’t right but stays quiet, her husband speaks.

“No, we haven’t. We’ve wanted to invite them over for sleepovers, but we always ended up being so busy that it never worked out.”

Silence once again. Mr. Lans takes a deep sigh, takes his glasses off and folds his hands on the table.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hansen, I don’t know how to tell you this, but we don’t have any students with those names in this class, or other classes for that matter.”

Mr. Lans shows the two parents the drawing of what looks like ten kids holding hands all dressed in different clothes and colors. Mrs. Hansen’s body suddenly went cold.

What are you talking about, Mr. Lans?" Mr. Hansen says, letting go of his wife's hand.

"We have been looking at Lily closer this past month and a half just to make sure she was adjusting to school okay, since we knew about her situation, but we started to notice how vivid her imagination was. It was nothing like we've seen before. It was like she was living in a whole other world."

Mrs. Hansen cuts in, "So, what are you saying, that our daughter made up all the friends she constantly talks about? That they're all imaginary?" Her face is red in defense for her daughter. She couldn't ponder the thought of all those kids just being made inside Lily's head. Mr. Lans takes a sigh before continuing.

"I know, this may seem hard to hear, I was hoping that you guys would have more of an explanation for it so it wouldn't make me think of... other possibilities of what your daughter is going through."

"What other possibilities?" Mr. Hansen raises his voice.

"When kids have gone through serious trauma like abuse or neglect, such as Lily in her foster home before you adopted her, we tend to look for certain symptoms in unspecified mental illnesses that children develop in order to cope with it. I spoke with our school counselor about it a while back, and there are signs that it could be Dissociative Identity Disorder."

A sting hit Mrs. Hansen at the sound of that disorder. It was something she learned about back in college that always stuck with her because she was so fascinated by it. It is a disorder that involves a person developing multiple personalities in order to shove past trauma or memories out so they don't have to remember. She had conducted research on the topic and knew almost every fact there was to know about it. How did she not see the signs in Lily? Mr. Lans voice breaks her thoughts.

"Look, just to be safe, I would like for her to speak to our counselor and get a closer look into what it might be. We don't want to assume this is what she has, but we don't want to assume she doesn't have it either. I'm sorry this was put on you so heavily, but please understand that the best thing for you to do is be there for your daughter and if something major happens, call our counselor right away and she can help get a professional involved."

The Hansens say goodbye to Mr. Lans and drive home in silence, unsure of what to do next. As they pull into the driveway, Mr. Hansen looks at his wife and sees tears streaming down her smooth cheeks. She then puts her hands on her face and weeps, Mr. Hansen wraps his arms around her and strokes her hair.

"I just want the best for her. Now, I don't know what to do."

"Everything will be okay. We're just going to take it one day at a time, remember, it could be nothing."

They step out of the car and walk inside their home where the babysitter is sitting on the couch. Mrs. Hansen goes over to pay her and Mr. Hansen goes to Lily's room to find her looking out her window, silently whispering to herself. She turns to meet her dad's eyes.

"Don't worry Daddy, my friends like you." She turns back to the window.

"But they really don't like Mommy."

---

## *Am I Not Enough For Me?*

Arieanna Johnson

the loneliness;  
she echoes through the halls  
of my veiny red home  
as she shouts to everyone;  
anyone,  
just hoping to be heard.  
she walks slowly at first,  
just looking for a soul,  
just searching for anything  
but dead flowers and milk  
curdled and filling the air  
with the most foul smell.  
she begins to run through the halls,  
panicking and frantic as it shouts  
as the walls and floors shake  
with urgency so strong and  
a quake so deep.  
you see,  
the loneliness always gets louder;  
flailing her arms and screaming  
at the top of her lungs.

she loses sight,  
just squeezes her eyes shut  
and looks away from the walls  
she has come to see hell between.  
she doesn't see me,  
unlocking the door.  
she doesn't see me,  
dusting off the shelves.  
she doesn't see me,  
watering the plants.  
and she doesn't see me,  
opening the curtains.  
she doesn't even see me,  
grabbing her soft hands  
and pulling them down to her sides  
while the teapot squeals to a boil  
and the bacon sizzles.  
she screams at me,  
just screaming nonsense  
with no breaths between.

## *Welcome to the Circus*

---

Morgyn Weinert

The empty bottles were always a prelude  
to the show my silent screams would turn into  
crying into the cold pillowcase,  
my dearest friend.

Tainted tears consume my taste buds  
as the sound of drywall being smashed  
creeps down the stairwell  
into my room.

Into my bed made of pins and needles, another  
sleepless night. The scent  
of Marlboro cigarettes locks the door and enters.  
It creeps into my sunken chest and  
his anger is mine now  
bruises are pounding on my door  
don't let them in.

Don't let him in.

The muffled sound of yelling  
voices splinters through the air, and  
mascara stains my blotchy cheeks.  
I hear footsteps fading and  
for the final act,  
The door slams.

## *The Softest Place I Shouldn't Have Been*

---

Madeline Baker

Gasping for air  
I wake from the softest place I shouldn't have been  
You're even softer than  
With the sliver of dawn  
On your cheeks that seem puffier than before

You are born again in my eyes  
And I forget the addict you confessed to being the night before  
Here you are the pink of a sun rise  
You are the ray glimpsing through the clouds  
You are everything you don't think you are

But this is still you  
Even when no one is there to witness it  
Even with the daggers of last night's choices in your liver  
In this moment, I realize you were right  
Despite your vices  
Your intentions  
And your cruel collections

You are soft

And when you rolled and rested and nestled yourself into my arms  
I melted at the fact that this is how you must feel when you hold me

## *Droplet of Earth*

Naomi Strait



*Marker and Gel Pen*

*At the Precipice*

Trenton Bouchard

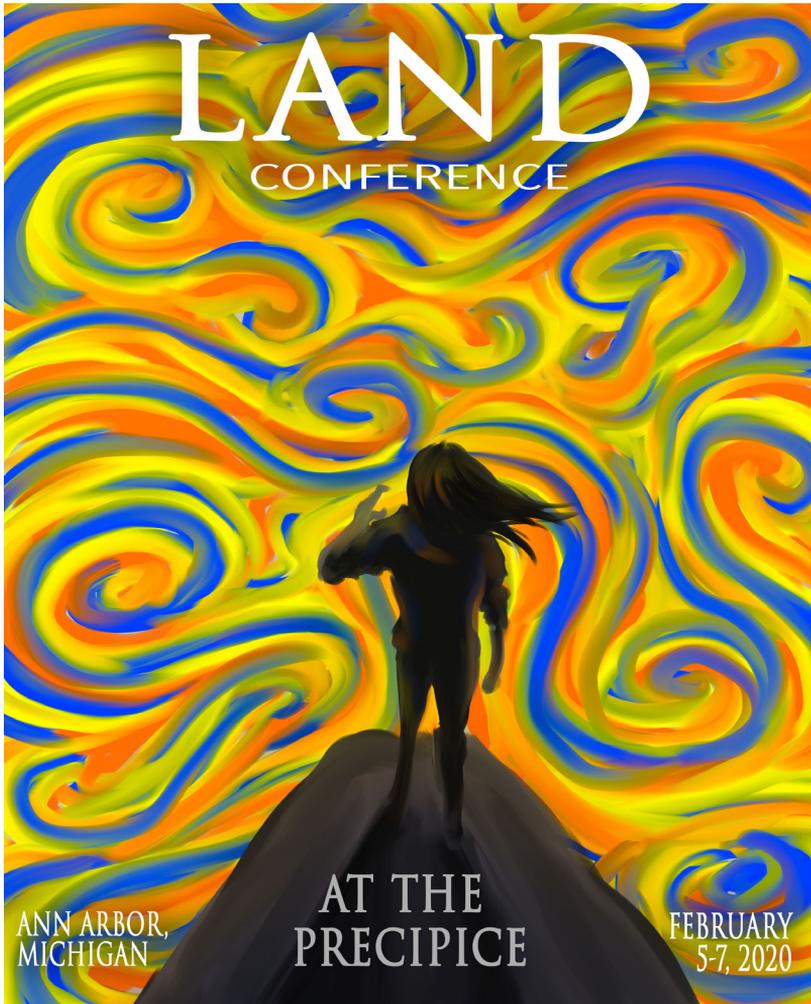


*Graphic Design*

*At the Precipice*

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Jaime Gonzalez



*Graphic Design*

*At the Precipice*

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Serena Fairbrother



*Graphic Design*

## *What I Wished For*

---

Elizabeth Hughes

“You’re mine now.” He said, a small smirk on his lips.

“Please... Just let me go.” I whimpered pleadingly.

“Did you not hear me? I said you’re mine. “On top of that, this is what you wanted, isn’t it, little one? You wanted someone to rescue you! You wanted someone to take you away from your sorrowful life.”

I frowned, knowing he was right. I had wished for that and had even made social media posts about it. I wanted to feel alive, in control, like I belonged. I was so tired of feeling depressed and anxious. I was sick of wanting to die. But, this isn’t what I meant. This isn’t what I wanted! I want to live MY life on MY terms, with the people I love and care for. I didn’t want to be a pet to this psycho, even if he was cute.

I just wanted to go home.

They always said, “Be careful what you wish for.”

It was just another thing I took for granted.

## *A Mid-Week Morning*

---

Benjamin Wassell

The early morning rain fell hard, hitting the windshield of the car and rolling up and off like bubbles floating to the top of a soft drink. Will had been driving for the last 20 minutes; he was on his way to the local Walmart for a new phone charger. His had broken when he bent it one too many times trying to get his phone to charge. The rain made him groggy, along with the morning radio show. The conversations of the show's hosts kept him awake and semi-focused on the road, his thoughts on their words keeping his eyes open. The road he was driving on was bare, with one lane going in each direction. Large oaks and pine trees stood on the sides of the road and created a tunnel that was menacingly dark in the early rain. The overhanging trees allowed the lights of the car behind to be reflected off the ground and at him through his mirror. He drove past a speed limit sign that read 50 mph, but he was only going 40. He didn't want to go too fast and lose control of his car.

Will was tall and young, he would scrunch into the seat of his car every time he got in, even with the seat all the way back. His knees would bend and almost hit the steering wheel. The trees on either side of the road began to open up into the dark overgrown fields of the Midwest. A fog started to rise in front of the light of his car, thickening as he moved towards the end of the tunnel. The trees moved past either side and then fields overtook both sides with wildflowers and plants growing high. The fog became dense and rolled out setting in only ten feet from his headlights. It was a thick fog that looked as if a cloud from the sky had been pulled down by gravity.

As the earth rolled under his tires, he could see his headlights reflecting off a sign through the fog. His car grew closer to the sign, but the fog was so dense he could not see what type of sign it was. Not being able to see it, he assumed it was a speed sign saying the limit was 55 mph. He kept on moving over the asphalt at 45 mph.

The static of the radio from inside the tree tunnel had changed to a low drone just barely audible. The radio hosts talked on about how a costumed mascot had run into a glass door, replaying the audio of the clip over and over. The audio of the mascot hitting the door cracked Will up, his laugh spilled out covering up the sound of the radio. His laugh took his mind away from this moment into one from the past. He remembered a day only a few years ago when his friend had done the same thing. Mickey had a beanie pulled down over his eyes and meant to run the opposite direction straight into the pool. Instead, he had run crashing into the glass door that parted his kitchen and his backyard. The memory created even more laughs and pinched his face. Through his laugh crinkled face, he could see bright headlights

coming through the fog from a side street up ahead. His face began to rest by the time his car had reached the side street. As the street appeared out of the dense fog, the headlights that he had seen evolved into an SUV that was pulling out in front of him. Without his brain even understanding, his hands tightened on the wheel and swerved the car over. Before his mind could process what had happened, the car was behind him and he was continuing on.

Half a mile of driving after the near-collision, Will was still shaken. He couldn't sort through the thoughts that seemed to be piling up in his head. The first one he pulled out of the pile was about his car. He couldn't think of anything else, just wondered if his car was okay. After a few seconds of complete irrationality, he put his returning brain power to it and concluded that the car hadn't been damaged because he hadn't heard anything. Still the sound of his heart was loud and muffled out the sound of the talk radio. He felt made at himself about his thoughts though, he was mad that the first thought he grabbed at was the one of his car. His hands were still tightened around the wheel and had turned ghost white. While his heart still rung his breath slowed to long deep puffs, filling his chest completely. As his breath slowed so did his heartbeat. The sound of the radio came slowly back just above the sound of his heart. A commercial was the first thing his ears could make out from the radio.

"If you're a smoker you need..." the host said. The rest was cut off from the beat of Will's heart.

As he calmed, Will realized that LED headlights were illuminating the inside of his car, causing a faint glow throughout. He lifted his head, but only two lights stared back at him through the mirror. He turned and looked straight out the rear window, but still, the only thing he could see were two headlights shining through the window. The fog still sat over everything in front, but the car followed close behind him and their light made his visibility even worse. The light that shot in from behind was reflecting off the glass throughout the car. Everything in front of him was an electric white, his headlights meshed together with the lights shining through his car. He noticed the speedometer glowing in his dash, the needle was stuck right on the thirty-five. Seeing this he stomped the gas down and speeded up more and gained some distance between the headlights and him.

A short distance ahead standing above the layer of fog was a lit sign. The background of the sign was a bright blue but the light of words that sat atop was dead, causing the store's name to become invisible in the dark. Only a sign below the main one could be read, Convenience 24/7. Will gazed at the sign in the distance. The car radio was loud in his ears now, but it felt like all the words stopped there and the beat of his heart reflected them. He decided that the convenience store would be a good place to stop and calm himself, they might even have a charger inside. After only a few minutes, maybe ten at

the most, the car that had been tailgating him earlier returned. The interior of the car began to illuminate, growing to a bright white. His hands tightened on the wheel.

Seeing that the car behind him was just inches from the back of his bumper he lifted his foot from the peddle just a little, and the car dropped a few digits. His hands still gripped the steering wheel hard but had loosened a bit, allowing a bit of color to return to his hand. The sign grew closer and the lights of a small building could be seen pushing their way through the fog. The lights grabbed his attention, his mind focused on the store that was growing in size. The blinker clicked on and continued its metronomical drone while the entrance to the store appeared out of the fog and into the view of Will.

The store sat in the middle of a parking lot and was surrounded by low grass fields that were mowed every month; it had been almost a month since the last mow. A large neon sign hung in the window that flashed open, and another sign hung above the entrance illuminating the part of the lot that sat in front of it. Will pulled to the back of the store, the only light that shined on this half of the lot was the light that shone through the back entrance of the store. Will pulled into a spot that was right against the wall of the store and slide the car into park. the car sat running with the headlights illuminating the cinder block wall that stood a less than a foot in front of the bumper. Will decided to wait for the next commercial on the radio to come on before he went inside, so he sat with his head in his phone scrolling through the memes that had been posted since he had got in. The radiomen went on playing a trivia game with one of the listeners over the phone. The hosts asked the listener, which person's assassination had started World War 1. Will heard the question but did not process it, he was focused on Reddit. His stomach growled and pushed his eyes out of focus, and he thought of the pancakes that waited at home. While he was lost in thought a tap came on his window, he turned his head to look up and at what had caused it. Three loud snaps came high above any other sound that was around him, the radio, the cars driving by in the road, and the sound of a video playing on his phone. The roars were short and there was almost no time in between each. Will slumped back in his seat; his head resting on the headrest behind it. His face slowly turned red, from his forehead crawling down to his cheeks.

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## *The Mirror*

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Mark Breitenbach

I see you broken and apathetic  
I look upon you with eyes still sympathetic  
Even though you wither and grow weak  
I carry the meaning that you so desperately seek  
But are too blind to acknowledge its beholder

Throughout the years we only grow older  
Not closer, not farther, but always entwined  
As we live out our lives we seem to be growing almost as if vines  
If only we could escape the hell that is the human heart  
I would love you until death do us part.

## *I am Woman*

---

Madeline Baker

I am Woman  
And I need not death  
To become a destroyer of worlds

I am Woman  
Pandora and Eve  
Don't forget who begets your suffering  
Don't forget the healers you tortured and burned  
Because we have not  
Don't forget Woman needs you not

I am Woman  
And that in itself is more than enough  
Yes Woman can nurture, yes Woman can be mother  
But do not limit me to man's caretaker  
Woman is so much more than mother  
Do not look to Woman and see shelter  
Don't you remember she is of Amazon  
Warrior runs within her  
She is of Athena and Artemis and Eris  
Do not only remember Aphrodite  
Do not forget Lilith and her refusal

Who's to say the punishment of Tantalus  
was not Woman?  
Starved for our love  
Parched for our mercy  
Woman know the power of denying these things  
Woman knows no man is worthy  
Woman knows she owes the world nothing

I am Woman  
The bitten apple  
The open box  
The spirit of Medea resides within me  
The witch Jason would be nothing without

She slain her two sons  
Because the only thing she loved more than them  
Was hate  
The betrayal of the man whose life was saved by her  
Because before she is mother, she is Woman

I am petty  
I am power  
I am plight to your plunder  
Do not forget woman and your betrayal when you ask why you suffer

I am Woman  
I am end all  
My statue will be made out of the ashes of your downfall

I am Woman  
I am the destroyer of worlds  
And I deny you of mercy

## *Dear Bra*

---

Breanna Guikema

Dear Bra,

I'm not *really* sure how to begin this letter, but I feel it's time we have a talk--

I don't think this **relationship** is working between us...

Don't get me wrong, I admire you for protecting me these last few months. You've been a huge "supporter" (if you know what I mean). I get that life has been rough for you, it's been a struggle for me as well. However, it doesn't make up for the pain and discomfort you've caused.

Over the years, I've tried several brands, styles and designs but they never suited me. You were the only adjustable strapped bra who came at least *close* to what I was searching for. In spite of my concerning doubts, I snatched you from the top rack and drove you home while totally avoiding the price tag attached to you.

Although you are so beautiful--with your vibrant colors and fine hand-stitched threading--you make my life a living **hell**.

You know... I've never been the type of individual to "complain" but you're excessively uncomfortable and I absolutely *hate* wearing you.

You're clearly suffocating me and sooner or later these ribs are going to need some *space*.

I mean, how do you expect us to get along when your constantly bickering at me for not clipping all three hooks instead of just two! Not to mention the fact that I'm continuously adjusting your position while you pinch me. I clean you, fill your cups and keep in daily "contact".

It's like no matter how hard I try, it's just never good enough for you. How is this relationship fair?

I know you feel alone, sitting in that pile of dirty laundry after you've been worn several days in a row, but I can't *handle* your sweat and grim issues anymore--I'm fed up.

I hope I don't come off *too* aggressive when I state I actually **enjoy** throwing

you against a wall when I get home from work every day.

But I shouldn't lie to you either; usually in this situation I'd explain how "it's not you it's me."

But In this case I'll admit that it's **all** your fault, and it's *quite* obvious you're the problem.

A point often overlooked is how women in this era feel like **you** bra--of all the things in the world are "irreplaceable."

No, not a man, not a porcelain doll or china wear. But you, a bra.

Truthfully, I had the feeling you'd let me down. I knew after a while we'd grow tired of each other and you'd no longer "*hold up your end of the deal.*" I tried to embrace you for as long as I could, even after the washer tore you in two.

Speaking of tearing in two... we should probably discuss the weapon you carry on you. And don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about! You know; the wire that's built into you. You're psychotic, you can't just pull it out whenever you're pissed off. I *nearly* died from your under wire, and I *don't* feel safe around you anymore.

Trying to make this relationship work is a waste of my time. You can't seem to understand what I'm going through. You're simply too much to handle, and you don't offer me nearly enough.

Truth be told, I hate having to string you on my body every day. It's no way to live. Trust me, the lacy push up my girlfriend is about to purchase from across the street for forty bucks isn't worth it and you know it!

I should stop spending all of my time searching for a **new** you, say screw it and not have a "you" at all. But because that's not possible, I will look forward to the great sense of relief I feel by going home and throwing you at the wall.

Sincerely,  
A girl who hates to, but wears a bra.

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## *Skeleton*

---

Josie Buckingham

I've felt hunger looking  
Through the empty eyes  
Of my malnourished mother

I've felt hunger suppressed  
Upon me from the man  
Who believes homosexuality  
Is a mental illness

I've felt hunger anchor  
My body within the  
Four familiar walls  
Of my bedroom

I've felt hunger rumble  
Inside me demanding  
My acknowledgment  
Of its existence

I've felt hunger from the engravement  
Into my head that a woman  
Is no more capable  
Than a female dog

I've felt hunger stroll  
Down my face as I'm trapped  
Inside a mind that thinks  
Sleepless nights are normal

I've felt hunger accepting  
This life for what it is  
And what it has been  
Rather than what  
It could be

I've felt hunger  
I'm still hungry

Skin and bones

## *Only Child*

---

Cassidy Norkett

I was born second and last into the family  
with two loving parents and a sister  
four years older.  
What she learned in those four years, I don't know  
but I imagine it had to be the instructions  
of not to be an older sibling.

I spent my days of youth alone  
in my room  
on the floor  
by myself  
reading to my fuzzy friends who happened to be mute and paralyzed.  
Constantly longing for a playmate that would reciprocate conversation.

I spent all my moments of childhood with made up characters  
that I forced  
to care about me.  
Putting words into their mouths  
that I would never hear.

“Sissy, will you play with me?”  
The answer was always one word; I would hear it over and over.  
So often, in fact, that I stopped asking.  
“Sissy, will you sing with me?”  
The answer was always one word; I would hear it over and over.  
So often, in fact, that I stopped asking.  
“Sissy, will you...”

*No.*  
Always no.

Years passed  
and I began to realize  
that I was not wanted.  
Was it something I did?  
Was it who I was?  
Why didn't she love me?

I was much too young to be of any use.  
I was much too young to be of any fun.  
But I was not too young to realize  
that I had an older sibling,

not a sister.

## *Just Another High School Girl*

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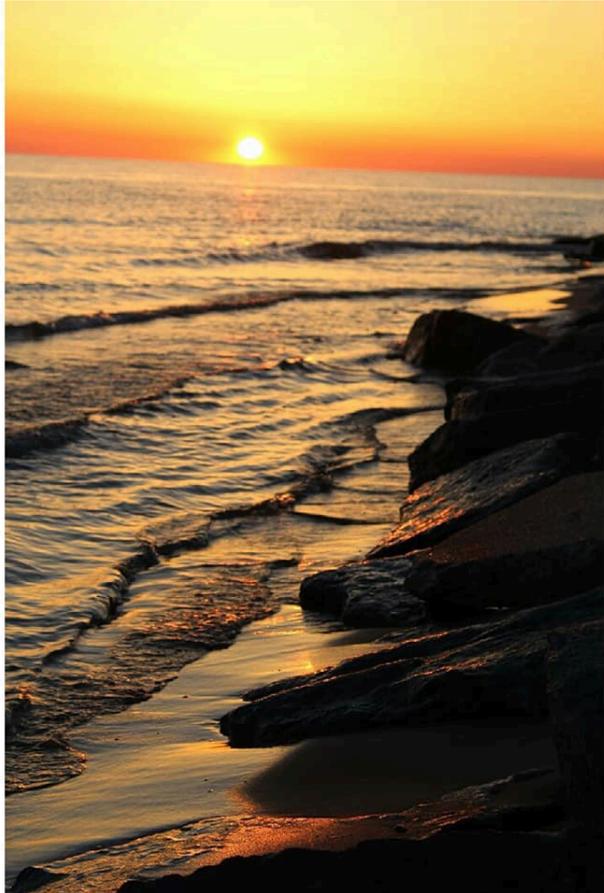
Ellery Rose

Walking down the hallway  
His eyes undressing me as we pass  
Unrecognizable by a given stranger  
As he and I are the only ones who know what took place that night  
I flinch at the sound of his name remembering how weak he made me feel  
Sweating from the non-stop nightmare in my head  
Wondering how he thought that it was okay  
Now I am weak  
Now I am untrusting  
Now I am scared of the dark yet again  
Now I fall into the group of victims  
And he is the only one to blame

*Pure Michigan*

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Taylor Hermanson



*Photography*

*Untitled*

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Adam Kimsza



*Photography*

## *Sweet Mysteries of Life*

Michalene Collins

Every Friday when I was little, my grandfather, Dziadzia in Polish, came to our house for dinner, bringing with him loaves of fresh baked bread, chocolate layer cake, banana cupcakes with vanilla glaze or other goodies from Minke's Bakery. My sister and I sat next to him on the sofa, listening as he told stories about his life in Poland or in America after he ran away from the Czar's army, escaping the slaughterhouse that was World War I. One Friday, he showed us how he worked in the Libbey Glass Factory, after he settled in Toledo, making light bulbs and thermos liners until they brought in machines to do the work and fired all the men.

He took the extension pipe from my mother's vacuum cleaner, stood on a small stool, pointing the pipe down toward the floor and blew into the near end.

"See, the glass comes out the other end and into the mold."

This made no sense. There was no glass in my mother's vacuum cleaner pipe.

"But there's no glass in the pipe," I protested.

"No," he said. First, he had to take the pipe to the furnace and gather the molten glass there and bring it to the glass blower who stood on a platform above the mold. I thought about the furnace in our basement. I had seen the inside many times. There was no glass in our furnace. I looked at Dziadzia, but said nothing.

Grown-ups were always saying crazy stuff like this. It did no good to question them. If you asked too many questions, they got all puffed up and told you to go outside and play, or "watch your mouth" (another crazy impossibility), or wait until you got older, then you would understand why things were the way they were.

That was the way of it when I asked why my sister and I had to sit still on the couch, like little ladies with our legs crossed at our ankles when we visited our aunts, while the boy cousins could yell and fight and slouch with legs splayed any which way. That is what they said when asked, how come, if colored people were so dirty and dangerous, why did they clean and cook and serve food in restaurants and care for old people and sick people in hospitals? And, why did no one ever tell Uncle Red he was full of crap when he said that Hitler had some good ideas, he just went too far, when even I, a kid, knew that Hitler killed a lot of people, including my mother's cousin Ziggy, who was a soldier and Hitler killed him in someplace called Italy.

So, no, I would not ask Dziadzia about where the glass came from. I would be seen and not heard and eat my chocolate cake in silence, hoping that, when I grew up, all these mysteries would be revealed. Grown-ups knew more than kids, so they always told me.

And, *what* was a thermos liner, anyway?

## *Stairs*

---

Weston Dulyea

They came with warmth and light.  
Every step seemed just as bright.  
Never counted how many passed.  
Each shone like polished brass.  
Guided by the railing that lined the wall,  
They were guaranteed not to fall.  
Soon it vanished, they were on their own,  
But this wasn't bad, they were all grown.  
They proceeded flight by flight.  
Eventually seeing all that could be in sight.  
And as the stairs continued, they began to see,  
They were duller than they used to be.  
Each motion was the same as the last,  
They wondered what was different from the past.  
They attempted to fill the void and become just as vivid,  
But only appeared to those most twisted.  
Desperately, they searched for the end,  
Believing this problem is one they could not mend.  
They threw themselves into the abyss,  
Unable to fulfill their final wish.  
One exit, one door.  
They are a shell of what they were before.

## *Lost Souls*

---

Sol VanHassel

### MOONLIGHT

We ran through the collapsing darkness to escape the light behind us. I glanced at Nyle, glints of sweat trickling down his brow and his breaths short and quick like my heart. I looked back ahead of me, thinking better of myself if we were to escape both the cabin and the hollow interior that I can still see despite the oaks and pines layered around the woods. Stray branches cracked every other stride under our brown hunting boots. The woods were hollow. Our footsteps echoed, ringing bells that would alarm the wild of the thuds and pangs of two boys fumbling to escape the one thing they had ever known.

Neither of us paused for a moment. We knew what we were doing had to be done without hesitation. Hesitation kills. Nyle, on my left and still breathing as heavy as his body permitted, raised his arm, pointing upward. We had prepared for this. I recognized the motion from our plans. The Moon was glowing in the massive sky, emitting pale light that hid behind the shadows of bushes and scattered maples. Follow the Moon.

We only know the Moon through glass. Running, blood pulsing through our small bodies, hunched like animals in the night, know the Moon from staring through a window resting at the top of our cabin. We had seen dots in the sky, streaks of orange, but one night we learned of the Moon when its pale light found us. Without the Moon, we never would have left the cabin.

As our path was lit by our beacon in the sky, Nyle smacked my shoulder. The force behind his palm shifted my body further than I felt right. Still pacing through patches of light and thick darkness, I noticed a pool of light. Nyle was guiding us to something new. We dashed around ferns, barely visible yet their hairs gently brushed against our waists as we maneuvered to a large oak overlooking the pool.

Stopping was never to be done unless necessary. We paused behind the giant oak tree, Nyle hugging its left side while I clinged to the right side. The pool was a field. The wind caressed our faces as we considered what to do. Nyle and I had only seen a field once. Mother had shown us. She held our hands, Nyle on her left and me on her right, as we followed her down to the small patch of land we harvested when the forests became naked. This was different; This was a field infinitely larger than Mother's wheat patches.

I raised my hand to shake Nyle. He looked at me -- I could barely see his face behind the body of the oak. I moved my hand forward, monitoring to cross the field and go to the left, where the Moon was resting above more

woods behind the field.

He nodded.

We started to move again.

## DAYLIGHT

We were waiting. The family Nyle and I had, had never allowed us to soak in the morning air.

Nyle was crested upon a stump, picking through a brown duffle bag and taking out clots of wheat we had stripped from the pool we had found two nights ago. He was relaxed. I was seated, pulling at the coarse laces that held my brown boots together. The boots were meant for hunting, but we both knew that neither of us used them for that reason anymore. Their bottom soles were cushioned so that our footsteps were quiet -- or that's what Father told us. He told us that they were the perfect friend of a hunter, masking the hunter from the hunted better than any other tool. I looked at my boots, scrubbing off mud that had accumulated from our escape. Had father guessed that we would use them for our own purpose? I'm sure he knows now.

Nyle put the wheat back into our brown bag and strapped it around his shoulders by its loose strings mother had sewn.

Move.

I stood up from clustered leaves -- browns, reds, and yellows -- and felt my body's resistance from sitting too long. Nyle began to step in a direction that neither of us knew where it would lead, only that it was away.

## RIVER

The past is distant, but it is in my face every day.

Nyle was out gathering water from the river. I was sitting on a log we had fashioned into a chair in our new home we had built. Home was now a fortified cabin made from surrounding oaks. We had also seen the Moon pass, become bright and full, and then disappear into darkness many times since we had fled that dark night. Neither of us worried anymore. We had followed the Moon for so long, and when it was gone in our travel, we had waited for it to return.

Now, we live by the river. Nyle seemed to spend most daylight there. When we first found the river, it shined under yellow beams of daylight and stung our eyes as we both squinted from its intensity; We did not look away from it. The yellow light became gold when it touched the river's surface and its soft 'whooshes' settled in our ears. Mother used to bring water home, but she never told us where she had gone. Nyle and I would stare at faces looking back at ours in the gray bucket she left when looking for Father. We could not

find our faces in the river. If Nyle did not come back by dark, I would go into the brown bag he carried. We had knives, knives that father had given us and we were told to use them with force. One for me, and one for Nyle. Nyle did not want to see a knife in my hand. I knew he left the bag in a tall maple outside of our home so that I would not find it.

One day, while he was at the river, I found it. The smooth wooden handle held gray metal. It felt heavy in my hand. The knife was sharp -- not like a piece of wood that might catch your skin -- this was more focused.

Nyle would be back soon. Maybe I could go hold the knife for another moment before he made it back from the river today.

## HOME

There is no calm these days. I feel no calm from my heart.

Walking down a narrow path, the Moon trickled between shadows on the moist Earth. People make mistakes. There is no better way to learn than making a mistake.

Father killed something once. He called it *wild* and told me that its body would help keep us alive. He told me that with a knife, I had to cut into it. He had hurt it with his weapon -- a long wooden shaft extended from its side. When we moved closer, I saw that the shaft was moving up and down with the wild's breath. Father said to use the knife and put it into the wild's neck. The knife, my knife, was a barrier; Father wanted me to go to the other side. The wild had eyes that were like glass -- like the window in our home that bright dots shined through and where the Moon first came from. I could see a face in the wild's eyes when I looked, and Father noticed that I saw myself.

It does not matter now.

The woods were growing thicker, and my feet were gathering more mud. My hunting boots were strapped tightly across my feet as I stepped past a tall oak by my right shoulder. I do not know why my heart is beating the way it is. Mother used to say that I was too worried. Nyle used to tell me I was always worried.

Looking ahead through the enveloping darkness, surrounded by the hollow woods, I sustained my stride towards the sole light in the distance.

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## *The Black Toyota*

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Taylor Strand

The snow is thick outside, and my mom is on a ventilator. It fills the room with low hisses as I watch the wet, thick flakes fall to the ground. Packing snow, for sure.

I knew it was coming. I'm not stupid. I'm not ignorant. Obviously, it was coming. She's been sick for a while. A *long* while. Even so, I'm having trouble swallowing. And I'm clenching my teeth. And with every one of those hisses, I feel that the barbed wire around my chest gets pulled tighter and tighter. Digging further and further into my otherwise impenetrable skin.

I'm not stupid. I knew it was coming.

Dad's next to her, holding her hand. I don't know how; her skin's leathery and cold to the touch. I'm fine where I am: across the room, knees drawn up to my chest on the insanely stiff hospital couch, staring at the snow. Ignoring what's going on beside me. Ignoring his quiet sniffs. Ignoring it all.

Cancer's a bitch.

I can't tell if the ball of fire in my stomach is regret for coming, or anger that Merritt *didn't* come. I have no right to be angry; if I were him, I wouldn't come either. For me, it's... frustratingly, not so simple. Sometimes I wish there wasn't such a stark difference in how we were raised. Maybe then we'd be closer. Maybe then we'd both be here. Or both not. But cigarette scars only cover one of our arms, so that's not a thought worth wasting my time on.

Part of me wishes she would just go already, as cynical as it is. Then I wouldn't feel obligated to stay here, curled up, and entrapped in my own thoughts. She did it to herself. Smoking a pack a day for 31 years will do that. Like she even gave a shit, though. She didn't give a shit about anything, let alone her health.

"I need a soda," I say under my breath, even though it isn't really true. I just need to get out. The room smells like vaseline, and dad's constant sniffles puncture the air every 45 seconds, as if on cue. If I stay in here any longer, I may unplug her myself.

When dad says nothing in response, I stand and quietly make my way out into the hallway, which smells even stronger of vaseline and some sort of pungent cleaning supply. Nurses are milling around everywhere, talking and charting, and acting as if this isn't the floor where chronic patients come to die. Maybe that's why they're all wearing bright colored scrubs, to distract from the fact that the grim reaper basically lives here. Not knowing where else to go, I decide to wander the floor, if for no other reason than to stretch my unruly legs.

We're all tall, but Merritt's the tallest. And the strongest. That probably has something to do with why the marks stopped at 16. He had about 2 inches on dad by then, which made it a little harder to pin him to the ground or throw him into a bookshelf. And then it was 3 inches. And then 5. Soon dad just gave up. At least, that's what Merritt says.

I can't help but think about it. I can't help but wonder if I should even be here. Like if I'm here, it means I'm disloyal to my brother. But I don't think he understands. He can't see past the scars. And I won't ask him to.

A giant window, one bigger than the window in mom's room, comes up beside me as I walk. Pivoting on one foot, I lean my back against the wall and just stare out. This window overlooks the back parking lot, which is empty aside from what looks at this distance like a muted red pickup, a horrifically colored, neon green lump of something I can't recognize, and a black Toyota with deeply tinted windows, among a few other generics. Not the look I was expecting from a fancy, well-renowned cancer center, but at least the view in the distance is nice. Lots of trees, big ones, with the leaves in their last stage of fall vibrancy before the cold takes over.

I watch as that Toyota slowly inches from its spot. It's taking forever, honestly. It stops, then creeps up a little more, then stops again. Then, it takes off, speeding up to the curb right near the exit of the parking lot.

Next, I notice the young girl standing alone on that curb. The back of my throat stings suddenly, and I feel as if I might puke. I watch, on the top floor of the hospital, as that girl gets yanked into the car.

It's as if someone snapped a finger, and all of the blood in my body iced over. Because for a second, I'm frozen in place. The car speeds off, and all I can do is watch. It makes a left out of the parking lot, then a right onto the following street close by, then disappears into the foliage of the tree-heavy path.

Finally, I start sprinting for the stairs.

"No running. Hey, no running!" I hear, just barely, over the pounding in my ears.

"Call 911," I say as I move, and it's nearly a whisper. Then louder, "call 911! A girl was just kidnapped!" I throw open the door, and swallow back some bile. But just then, a patient's alarm goes off, and I can tell whose it is by the direction of the nurses' gazes. Now *I'm* not the one running, but the nurses are, and I linger in the doorway, frozen once again.

Why now? Why the hell does it have to be now?

Theron!" one of my mom's nurses, Fera, calls as she runs by, grabbing me by the elbow and stopping in front of me. "It's your mom," she says as if I don't already know. She pauses then, locking eyes with me. Hers are full of something I can't quite place, maybe pity, and it pisses me off. "I... I really don't think you should leave."

I have an entire internal debate within half a second.

“She’s been sick for 5 years, she’ll hold on for another few minutes if it means making me suffer through watching. Now call 911!”

With my decision made, I continue in a sprint.

There are so many goddamn stairs in this building it’s ridiculous, but I’m taking them in twos and threes to speed it up. When I reach the bottom floor, I begin for the front exit where my car is parked.

*Left, then right, then down the first street*, I recite over and over in my head as I dig in my pocket for my keys. *Black Toyota, tinted windows. She had on a white hoodie with some text and mustard yellow jeans. Blonde hair, up in a ponytail. White. Skinny. Short.* I’m trying to recall everything. Trying to make myself not forget. I can’t forget. I can’t.

My shaky hands make it twice as challenging to hurry, as I can barely steady myself for even a second to get the key in the lock, then the ignition. The car *finally* revs to life, and I back out of my spot without even looking. Without even thinking. I can’t think about anything else right now other than *black Toyota, tinted windows. White hoodie, mustard yellow jeans...*

I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know why I’m racing after them. I don’t know why I’m not in that room with mom and dad. I don’t know.

*What if it looked worse than it was? What if she’s fine? What if she knew them?* I replay the scene in my head on a loop. She tried to jump back. She jolted when they pulled up. She couldn’t have known them.

*But what if she did?*

The trees fly past me at an alarming rate. I’m pushing 80 on a back road, and if so much as a squirrel runs out in front of me, I’ll flip the car for sure. There are no other vehicles on this road, thank God, or I’d likely hit someone.

It couldn’t have been more than 2 minutes since they disappeared down this road. I ran down those steps. I ran as fast as I could. And there aren’t any connecting streets, not for a while, so they have to be on this same stretch. I have to be catching up. I *have* to.

I push down on the accelerator harder.

I don’t have to speed up too much before the black Toyota finally comes into view. I lean heavily into the brakes now, in the hopes that whoever it is doesn’t notice I’m after them. I think they do notice, though, because soon I’m falling behind again. I contort myself enough to grab my phone out of my back pocket and dial 911. Then I speed up. So do they.

“911 what’s-”

“I’m on Dorset road near Silverside Cancer Center, I’m following a car that I saw kidnap a girl.”

The 911 operator says something. Asks for my name. Asks how I saw this. Asks question after question.

“I’m currently in a high-speed chase, so would you *please* just send someone!?” I’m straining to see the license plate. It’s just barely out of view.

85, 90, 95, up and up.

She says something about staying safe. Slowing down. I don’t listen. I lean forward and squint, and I can begin to make out the plate. “Their license plate is Q-N-D-2-8-4. It’s a Maine license plate. Black Toyota, tinted windows. Q-N-D-2-8-4,” I say it slowly, deliberately

Just as I begin rejoicing even slightly for getting the license plate, a hand reaches out of the passenger window of the Toyota, and I press hard on the brakes once again. Harder than before, slowing down as fast as I can. Something comes hurling at my window and smashes into thick shards of glass around my car.

“Shit!” I start spinning, the car leaning heavily to one side, and I clench the steering wheel so hard my fingers go numb in seconds.

There’s a blur of reds and browns and yellows all around me, then nothing but black as I squeeze my eyes shut. When I know for sure that I’ve stopped spinning, which feels like hours at this point, I reach down and unbuckle my seatbelt, then slouch forward and cough violently. I can feel the welts already beginning to form from the belt locking me down. I spun with so much force I can barely breathe. Somewhere in the backseat my phone rests. The 911 operator is saying something, I can tell, though I can’t make out at all what it is.

I’m dizzy and nauseous and concerned they might turn around and come back for me, but after sitting in my car with my head on the steering wheel for a few minutes, it looks as if they’ve decided one was enough. Eventually, I shakily make my way out of the car, and I immediately notice that one of my front tires is blown, most likely popped by the shards of glass from whatever it was the Toyota threw at me. The road is vacant both ways, though I soon suspect the police will be arriving here.

In my hazy thoughts, I suddenly remember: mom.

I grab my phone, hang up the 911 call without saying a word, and see the 3 missed calls from dad.

That same feeling wraps around me again. The feeling of barbed wire being pulled tighter and tighter on my chest. The phone rings for a while, and for a moment, I think he might not pick up. But then he does. He doesn’t say anything.

“Dad?”



## *A Gun Named Anxiety*

---

Danielle Hysell

I watched you for years  
carrying your gun  
which you named anxiety.  
You held it there on your right hip.

It was a Ruger 380 semi-automatic. A gun  
so small it could fit in the palm  
of your hand  
a barrel less than three inches long.  
It weighed so much.

Every day I watched you clip it on  
and each time you did it looked heavier  
and heavier,  
but you had to put it on, it was like you  
couldn't leave it behind  
even if you wanted too.

I could see the gun weighing you down,  
With every bullet you  
clipped, your hands dropped,  
lower and lower  
as if it weighed a ton.

Your tears poured out like  
lava shooting out of a volcano.  
Your gun acted as a boulder  
rolling towards you full speed.

You had to jump.

Weeks later, I was going through your things.  
With each box my heart pounded,  
harder and harder.  
I found your gun.

You left your gun behind,  
wrapped in polka dotted paper  
and addressed to me.

Now following in your footsteps  
I wear the gun on my right hip,  
you are finally free  
I've taken on the weight.

The bullets will travel 950 feet per second  
Holding 8 bullets at the max,  
each only an inch long,  
and you still weigh a ton.

## *The Stages*

---

Khelben Leonard

Nate flushes the toilet and zips up his pants. He sighs, still trying to comprehend everything going on. He walks over to the sink and, after washing his hands, takes a long look in the mirror and lets out another deep breath. He leans down and splashes water on his face.

“She’s not gone, she can’t be gone. She is just at home, waiting for me to show up with a pizza and that new superhero movie that came out.” Nate says while nodding. “I should finish getting ready and head over there.”

“You know you can’t do that, right?”

Nate picked his gaze from the sink’s drain to the mirror. He saw his reflection staring at him. His reflection had his arms crossed, his head tilted, and half a smile.

“Please tell me you know you can’t go over there,” his reflection said.

“Why not? I can bail on my current plans and drive over to her house as fast as I can. I don’t think anyone would be bothered by it.”

“Nate, you can’t do that. Your friends will be here soon, and they’ll be with you the entire time. It’ll be okay.”

“No, you don’t understand...”

“Yes Nathaniel, I do understand.”

“No! You can’t possibly understand how much I need her. If I don’t go, then she doesn’t have to be gone. Everything can be okay; it can go back to how it was.”

The reflection turns his head to the side, as a couple of tears spilled over Nate’s eyes running down his cheek. Nate wipes the tears off of his face and clenches his hand. He raises his hand and slams it into the bathroom counter.

“Damn it, why did it have to be terminal,” Nate yells in a quivering voice. Why couldn’t it have just been like the flu or something? At least then I could’ve done something. What if she had gotten checked sooner, then the doctors would have had more time.”

“Nate,” The reflection interrupts “There was nothing you could’ve done.”

“You’re right... I might not have been able to do more, but the doctors could’ve. They could have done more treatments or used different medicine, or even just anything else. If they did something different then maybe she could have been cured.”

“It’s not their fault. They did everything they could’ve.”

“Well, they should have done more; they should have used treatment that would have actually worked.”

“Her illness was terminal... there was nothing anyone could have done to stop that.”

“I know, but still... there had to be something I could’ve done, anything.”

“Hey, you did the only thing you could’ve done. You made her remaining time as best you could.”

“What if I had given her my heart. Then she would still be alive.”

“That would only have been possible on the slight chance that you were an eligible donor for her.”

“If I was though, I could’ve kept her alive.”

“Yes, on the tiny chance that you were an eligible donor for her, you could’ve donated your heart. You are aware that you would just be trading your life for hers, and we both know she would have never let that happen.”

“It doesn’t matter. I would do anything to keep her alive, even if that meant giving up my life.”

“What are you trying to accomplish by this? She’s gone, and there is nothing you could have done that would change that. You did all that you could to make sure she was comfortable during her passing, and that she had the time of her life before it was over.”

“If I had one more day with her, I’d take her to the pet show. She always loved seeing the animals dressed up in Halloween costumes. It seems like just last month we were watching old black and white horror films and laughing at cat videos.”

Nate leans down and runs his hand through his hair. He takes a deep breath before looking up at his reflection.

“What do I do now?” he whispers.

“Well, the next thing would be to finish getting ready, so you can leave.”

“No, I mean like after that, what do I do with my life now.” After a moment of silence, Nate continued. “When she was here it always seemed like I had something to do, somewhere to be, some crazy idea. Now, its just nothing. No plan, no list... just nothing.”

“It’s time to pick yourself up, Nathan. It will be okay; I swear everything will work out.”

“You know,” Nate says as he wipes the tears off of his cheek and cracks a little smile. “If she was here now, hearing me talk to myself in the bathroom, she’d probably think I was crazy.”

“That, or she would ask you how big the rock you hit your head on was.”

Suddenly there was a light knock on the door that seemed to echo throughout the bathroom.

“Hey man, you okay in there?”

“Ya, I’m alright.”

“You ready to go to the funeral?”

normal, following his every movement. He smiles at himself, before opening the bathroom door.

“I’m ready,” he says looking at his friend outside the door. “Let’s go.”

## *Sestina for a Lost Love*

---

Lydia Crocker

The first time we kissed, my heart  
leapt from my chest and settled among the stars,  
a suitable home for the emotions of the imaginative girl  
I once was. All my doubts melted away  
and I was left with the sight of your broken  
soul, which was unapologetically beautiful.

You told me I was beautiful  
as you handed me your fragile heart,  
the one I had left bare and broken  
too many times to count. I wanted you to go away  
but I once again gazed at your eyes full of stars  
and knew I was forever destined to be your girl.

I was always an independent girl—a girl  
who would never lose herself just to be called beautiful.  
But when I met you, I tossed my soul away  
and focused all my attention on mending your heart.  
My own heart—tattooed with stars—  
was left in the desert of my mind, broken.

I thought that you were healing my broken  
soul and transforming me into the girl  
that I have always wanted to be—but the stars  
showed me that I was far more beautiful  
without you, and you were the one hurting my heart.  
Before more irreparable injuries, I knew I had to get away.

When I told you my feelings, you cried and threatened to throw away  
your life. Fury boiled up inside me as I threw the ring—broken  
from the impact on the worn wooden floor. My heart  
deserved better, and so did yours. The little girl  
inside me gave me the strength to push away your once beautiful  
soul that caused me to lose sight of my mind of stars.

The last time we kissed, I saw no stars  
or fireworks, only the thought of getting away.  
I didn't need you to tell me I was beautiful—  
I knew it from the beginning, amid the broken  
shards that remained of the girl  
I was and longed to be. She still held my heart.

Every day I must drive away the thoughts that I am a girl  
who is corrupted for breaking your beautiful heart.  
But you were broken without me—our love was never written in the stars.

## *An Elegy to All*

---

James O'Banion

This is an elegy to all that existed  
when you began  
reading this sentence,  
for it has died  
and therein birthed all that is  
now.

Nothing lives forever,  
and if ever it did,  
we would be blind to it  
like black words  
without whiteness between.

Nothing lives but a moment,  
and if ever it did,  
we would be deaf to it  
like sounds  
without silence between.

Death is the origin of life.

# *French Bliss*

---

Alison McCarthy



*Photography*

# *The College Reflection*

---

Kaitlynn Rager



*Photography*

## River Voices Contributors

**Nathaniel Adams:** Nathan is an English student who likes writing on typewriters and listening to Madonna records. He gets inspiration by eating copious amounts of Cosmic Brownies.

**Stevie Averill:** Stevie is planning to major in Environmental Studies but finds joy in writing poetry. From a young age, they've found inspiration from what they personally experience as well as see around them and do their best to put it into words. Stevie's piece "Blanc" won third place for poetry in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Madeline Baker:** Madeline is a Communications major who has always had a strong passion for writing. She has a love for history, fashion, adventures, her dog, and all things peculiar. Madeline's piece "I am Woman" won third place for poetry in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Kailey Barker:** Kailey is a dual-enrolled student hoping to go into Communications in the fall. She finds her inspiration through everyday events and people, and one day, she hopes to have her writing published.

**Mychalla Belknap:** Mychalla is a current MCC student.

**Jill Black:** Jill will be graduating this spring after having taken almost all of the art classes at MCC. She is currently seeking an artist's residency and more opportunities to exhibit her work.

**Brianna Boehm-White:** Brianna is a student, wife, writer, and painter. She enjoys all forms of art, from music to theatre, to books and drawing. This is her second year working on River Voices, but first time her written work is being published. Brianna is graduating with her Associates and hopes to transfer and major in linguistics.

**Eric Boehm-White:** Eric is a student at MCC who loves to take photos and one day hopes to change the world by helping spread love to all people.

## River Voices Contributors

**Madison Boone:** Madison has been writing stories since she learned how to write. Additionally, she participates in other artistic endeavors such as painting. She also enjoys good Italian food, swimming, and spending time with her dog. Madison's piece "Church" won second place for photography in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest. In addition, her piece, "What to Remember" won third place for creative nonfiction in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Trenton Bouchard:** Trenton is a current MCC student.

**Mark Breitenbach:** Mark is fascinated by people and nature alike. He loves to read, write and solve Rubik's Cubes. Mark plans to transfer to Michigan State and pursue a degree in Computer Science.

**Josie Buckingham:** Josie loves Italian food, especially pizza, and watching sports. She is a big movie girl, and to her, nothing is better than watching movies and spending time with friends. She also enjoys hikes at the beach and watching the sunset. Josie's piece "From Sunrise to Sunset" won first place for poetry in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Diana Casey:** Diana Casey is a traveler. One who has lived in many places and is sure to call many others home. Her autobiography was once titled, "I grew up with two suitcases." One held the few treasures her family was permitted to take to the next place they lived. The other grows rich with her experiences. It is from both suitcases that Diana enriches a classroom. She is a teacher who uses stories to bring learning to life. She aspires to have a life of adventures, large and small, to have yet another story and a trinket. Diana is thankful to *River Voices* for the opportunity to share her voice through the arts of poetry and photography.

**Keegan Colcleasure:** Keegan has aspirations of teaching Chemistry or Biology to high school students. He enjoys writing his own rap music, doing jiu-jitsu, acting and spending time with friends. He also owns his own business, Party Animal Balloons. Keegan's piece "The Needles Above Us" won second place for poetry in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

## River Voices Contributors

**Michalene Collins:** Michalene is a guest student at Muskegon Community College, currently taking a course in German. She is also a frequent visitor to the Writing Center. Currently, her greatest challenges are mastering the definite and indefinite German articles and navigating the online challenges of being a college student in the 21st century. Married to Bill Collins, a Vietnam veteran and US Army retiree, they have two adult children. Michalene's piece "Sweet Mysteries of Life" won second place for fiction in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Lydia Crocker:** Lydia grew up in the church and was told that the greatest commandments were to love God and love her neighbors. However, everyone in the church seemed to look the other way whenever something awful happened to someone that did not share the exact same beliefs as them. Lydia wrote her poem to expose the hypocrisy that fills a lot of churches and show that they do not follow the true commandments of God. Lydia is also a Business major who enjoys writing for fun, as well as creating new things, whether it is poetry, food, or bath bombs.

**Taylor DePouw:** Taylor is in her second year at MCC and will be transferring to Central Michigan University in the fall. She also has loved to read and write ever since she was little and hopes to keep pursuing that in the future, getting a degree in English literature. She enjoys traveling and dreams of one day buying a house in and moving to Venice, Italy. Taylor's piece "A Reincarnation" won third place for photography in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest. In addition, her piece "Lily's Friends" won second place for fiction in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Lauren DeRose:** Lauren is currently a senior at Spring Lake High School, who loves to read and write in her spare time. She also loves to travel whenever she gets the chance and says "yes" to every opportunity she can. Inspiration can be found in so many places and seeing different cultures has been a factor in such success. Next year she plans to attend Hope College to study nursing, and she's not quite sure where writing is going to fit in.

**Kera Deverman:** Kera is a business student that also hopes to share her thoughts and vision with the world and have her work published one day. She finds aspiration in everyday life and through her relationships with people.

## River Voices Contributors

**Weston Dulyea:** Weston is currently in the Early College Program at MCC and working to transfer to Ferris State to study pharmaceuticals. He enjoys being outdoors and visiting with friends every now and then.

**Serena Fairbrother:** Serena is a current MCC student and received first place at the statewide LAND competition for her graphic design piece “At the Precipice.” Serena’s piece was featured as the brochure cover at the 2020 LAND Conference in Ann Arbor, MI.

**Morgan Foster:** Morgan enjoys all sorts of arts and crafts and she often spends any free time she has painting or drawing. Due to her shy personality, art allows Morgan to express herself and her ideas in ways that words can’t. Morgan’s piece “Skull” won third place for art in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Cole Gaskin:** Cole is a History student, who hopes to make a difference in education, and enjoys writing how he sees the world through his twisted imagination. He finds inspiration in coffee shops and bad Hallmark movies. He also loves reading, writing, eating, and chickens.

**Abbie Ginman:** Abbie is a current MCC student.

**Ashlyn Gonzalez:** Ashlyn is currently a freshman at MCC and loves to be outside and involved in her community. She is transferring to GVSU after receiving her Associate’s degree to major in Financial Management. Ashlyn’s piece “Open Letter to my Cell Phone” won second place for creative nonfiction in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Jaime Gonzalez:** Jaime is a current MCC student.

**Breanna Guikema:** Breanna is a freshman at MCC. She is currently a Nursing Assistant and is earning her Registered Medical Assistant’s Certificate. She will be furthering her education after receiving her MA. Along with this, she enjoys working, being outside in the sun, and spending time with her family.

# River Voices Contributors

**Taylor Hermanson:** Taylor is a Mortuary Science major, who also has a passion for the arts. She often enjoys painting, writing, and photography. Taylor is a big-time cat lover who spends most of her free time eating pasta and watching Netflix.

**Elizabeth Hughes:** Elizabeth “Libby” is an aspiring writer who focuses mainly on poetry and romance. She loves all things romantic, fantastical, and nerdy. Her dream is to publish a book. Elizabeth’s piece “What I Wished For” won third place for fiction in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Danielle Hysell:** Danielle loves animals and being outdoors. She is a Science and Art student who hopes to help preserve nature one day by becoming a DNR officer.

**Jessica Jackson:** Jessica is an English/Communications major who enjoys writing, art, and singing. She also loves going to the movies and spending time with her loved ones. She wants to use her work to inspire others and hopes to become a news anchor in the future.

**Nathan James:** Nathan is a Geography student who hopes travel around the world, sharing his vision through random acts of kindness. He finds inspiration in long walks on the beach, taking care of his dog and being by the water.

**Ronnie Jewell:** Ronnie Jewell. Simple name. His baby sister always referred to him as ROM ROM. She could not pronounce “Ronnie.” So, by all accounts, he is really ROM ROM. His love is Edgar Allan Poe. Teaching English. But his favorite play ironically is *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by Oscar Wilde. Read it if you haven’t already done so. Peace and poetry, and always remember that everybody has a story to tell.

**Arieanna Johnson:** Arieanna is an adventurous young writer who is moving to New York for the summer to find motivation. She loves to write and to listen to other people tell their stories, and she recently found a passion for studying flowers in her free time. She hopes one day to find inspiration and create art from all over the world.

## River Voices Contributors

**Sarah Kallik:** With a warm heart and a kind smile that she wishes to share with all, Sarah looks for the good in the world, in others, and herself. Even with her throne of wheels, it is her loving aura and zeal for life that is memorable.

**Adam Kimsza:** Adam is a part-time student who hopes he can make it out alive.

**Khelben Leonard:** Khelben is a current MCC student.

**Kelli Ann Loughrige:** Kelli is a Muskegon native, MCC Educational Support Staff, proud military family member, and alumnus of RP, MCC, and WMU. Nature is her solace, and she can never live without creativity.

**Kennedy Mapes:** Kennedy is an English/Journalism student who hopes to create and edit her own fashion/beauty magazine committed to helping people find self-love. She enjoys food, songwriting, and all things literature.

**Alison McCarthy:** Alison (Ali) is a current MCC student.

**Madison Merchant:** Madison is a current MCC student.

**Cassidy Norkett:** Cassidy is a student at MCC who hopes to give the world a glimpse of her mind. Her muse is music itself, along with a little bit of self-discovery.

**James O'Banion:** James loves all forms of art, especially music. He is very curious about the world, so he is always taking notes, which he hopes to someday publish as a collection. Eventually, he wants to create both live and virtual reality experiences--both stationary and dynamic, both planned and improvised--that are immersive and synesthetic. James also wants to find ways to bring people together. James' piece "By the Threshold" won first place for poetry in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest and placed first at the statewide LAND competition.

## River Voices Contributors

**Maxwell Olmstead:** Maxwell is a third-year student at MCC and attends part-time. He was named a commencement speaker for MCC's 2019 Summer graduation and obtained his Associate Degree in Health Sciences. He's slated to travel back to Germany this summer and will run for International Office for Phi Theta Kappa in April. Besides traveling, he enjoys playing sports, reading, and hanging out with friends. With all of this, he also plans to become an advocate for social media awareness in the future.

**Dae-Shaun Owens:** Dae-Shaun, also known as Shaun, is a compassionate, scintillating and kind-hearted person. He has numerous talents, which include poetry and writing not to mention he's musically inclined. Shaun is an extremely hard worker and plans on transferring to Ferris State University this fall.

**Jasmine Pascavage:** Jasmine is a Marketing major, who spends a little free time writing. She finds inspiration for all she does from her son, Javion.

**Kaitlynn Rager:** Kaitlynn is a Music major but loves other kinds of art like photography. She loves to take pictures of the college campus, sunsets, sunrises and any location near the beach. She would love to travel the world to take beautiful pictures that she can share with everyone.

**Ellery Rose:** Ellery is an Education major who finds fulfillment in impacting children's lives. She loves nature and hanging out with her family.

**Stan Shank:** Stan is a freshman at MCC who loves to read, write, and be involved in theater. He works for the Frauenthal Center and wants to be a History, Psychology, and Theater teacher in the future.

**Pearl Slayton:** Pearl is a current MCC student. Pearl's piece "Bled" won second place for art in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Naomi Strait:** Naomi is an artist who loves to take photos. She is inspired by the simple things in life and loves to hang out with her family.

## River Voices Contributors

**Taylor Strand:** Taylor is currently working on her Associate in Science and Arts degree, but she has an interest in pursuing an English degree in the future. She often finds inspiration by listening to loud music and laying on her floor, just letting her mind wander. Taylor’s piece “The Black Toyota” won first place for fiction in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest. In addition, her piece “Her” won first place for fiction in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest and placed second at the statewide LAND competition.

**Lauren Streng:** Lauren is a junior at Grand Haven High School and is a part of MCC’s Early College Program. She enjoys hanging out with her family, being a part of the GHHS Color Guard, and the Science Olympiad team. Lauren’s piece “An Outhouse on Washington” won first place for creative nonfiction in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Kathy Tosa:** MCC Alumnus Faculty of History and German. Ms. Tosa translated Diana Casey’s poem, “Der Pinz....” Her expertise in history and subjunctive language brings the life and emotion to this art form in language. In retirement, Tosa travels the world to visit her children. In all this, her language and history skills prevail.

**MacKynzie Vanderlee:** MacKynzie is a current student at MCC and is majoring in Graphic Design. She has grown up in Grand Haven, MI enjoying camping with her family, being outdoors, and riding horses. She has two older sisters, two dogs, and one horse. MacKynzie has been showing horses with her sister since she was 5 years old and camping since she was born. She has always had a creative side but didn’t find graphic design until she was a sophomore in high school. She decided to study graphic design because of the unique designs you can create in this field.

**Sol VanHassel:** Sol is a literary student. He aspires to write stories that ground us to reality while also lifting us off of our feet. He enjoys learning and hopes to apply what he learns from others into his writing. Sol is also captivated by storytelling in films, from which he has become a fan of several genres, but Science Fiction remains one of his favorites.

## River Voices Contributors

**Benjamin Wassell:** Ben is in his second year of college. He likes the outdoors and spends most of his time there, or reading a book by John Updike, Thomas Pynchon, or Ernest Hemingway. Benjamin's piece "A Mid-Week Morning" won third place for fiction in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Morgyn Weinert:** Morgyn enjoys going to EDM shows and plans to major in English. Morgyn's piece "Sundays are a Battlefield" won second place for poetry in the Fall 2019 Creative Writing Contest.

**Shelby Wright:** Shelby is an art student who has been refining her craft since she was a child. She spends the majority of her time illustrating, painting, and caring for her pets. Shelby's piece "Autumn Jay" won first place for art in the Winter 2020 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

**Isaac Zenz:** Isaac is a current MCC student.

# National English Honor Society Members

## Sigma Zeta Chapter

Brianna Boehm-White  
*President*

Eric Boehm-White \*

Keegan Colcleasure

Louis Curtis

Taylor DePouw  
*Vice President*

Weston Dulyea

Cole Gaskin

Jessica Jackson  
*Secretary*

Nathan James

Arieanna Johnson

Kennedy Mapes  
*Treasurer*

Alison McCarthy

Dae-Shaun Owens

Ellery Rose

Special thanks to the Banana Dog Tea Shop for hosting  
all of the English Honor Society meetings.  
We appreciate their continued support, the comfortable  
gathering space, and most of all, the tea.

The ladies there put the *Tea* in English Honor Socie-tea!