

River Voices

Spring 2026

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River Voices is an annual literary magazine published by the English Department at Muskegon Community College. Works are included from current students as well as alumni, faculty, retired faculty, and staff.

We are grateful to all our contributors, and in addition, would like to express special thanks to the faculty and staff members who collaborate to make this publication possible: Becky Evans, Kelli Ann Loughrige, Erin Hoffman, Kevin Kyser, and Tom Henry. Thank you for your encouragement, support, and contributions.

River Voices is sponsored by Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD), Muskegon Community College's English Honor Society. The student members and officers contribute to the magazine, help with editing, and participate actively in the annual Creative Writing and Art Contest. If you are interested in learning more about SKD, please visit: <https://www.muskegoncc.edu/departments/english-communications/>.

If you would like to submit your creative work, we encourage submissions of poetry, prose, essays, art, and photography. Please visit: <https://www.muskegoncc.edu/departments/english-communications/> for further details.

Cover Artist: Danielle Hacker

Cover Artist Statement:

Creativity flows through our community like a river, carrying the many voices and expressions of its contributors. Each piece reflects a unique perspective, shaping a current that is both individual and shared. The flow-ers symbolize growth—how creativity nurtures confidence, connection, and the ability for each person to flourish. Together, these elements capture the spirit of a community united by expression, where diverse voices blend into something vibrant and beautiful.

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ARTWORK

First Place ~ *Glass Blue Birds* by Lauren Burkett

Second Place ~ *The Three Disgraces* by Roberta F. King

Third Place ~ *The Ship of Theseus* by August Hawley

CREATIVE NONFICTION

First Place ~ *Happy First Anniversary!* by Reina Davis

Second Place ~ *The Girl in the Mirror* by Kiersten Kemp

Third Place ~ *My Little Secret* by Jaime Steffes

FICTION

First Place ~ *Untethered* by Paulo Jaloto

Second Place ~ *Button Eyes and Hard Goodbyes* by Emily Sanders

Third Place ~ *White Roses on Mommy's Grave* by Meghan Sonder

PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place ~ *City of Lights* by Reece Bancuk

Second Place ~ *Antelope Canyon* by Ruby Dyk

Third Place ~ *Tunnel Vision* by Monica Mullins

POETRY

First Place ~ *Eurydice* by Liam Snipes

Second Place ~ *every winter is exactly the same* by August Hawley

Third Place ~ *The Creature* by Elijah Parmley

10-MINUTE PLAY CONTEST 2025

COMMUNITY WINNER

The Turing Test by Mike McGreever

STUDENT WINNER

Moments by Iris Replogle

Eurydice

Liam Snipes

How could I be serious
When I burn up at the tune
Of the corvid's song?

When the buzz of the dragonflies—
Tickling the tips of my ears—
Makes me kneel down and weep?

How can you take me serious
When at your feet
I pray like a songbird?

The robins do look a little different here
With a slightly harsher song, but
Incongruent with the nature of things
I would not have looked back

We both know
I strummed your fingers
Like a bass guitar and
The sound of music
Floated from your lips
Into my mouth, down my throat
Forming a lump in my heart

At the very least, I remember
How your body lie naked
Basking on the beach
Under the eyes of the Texan-Italian sun
Despite this, I rolled to my side
Unflinching, the cork popped
And Champaign spilt from the bottleneck
The bubbles tickled your back
Later,
Peeking through the doorway
Whistling, I could hear the opera
In the reflection of the mirror

Your bare skin
Did not take me so seriously

Happy First Anniversary!

Reina Davis

Depression is a scary word to some, but very common to most. Let's say it together, shall we? Depression... and while you're at it, go ahead and add "generalized anxiety" with it. There we go, the perfect combination for... for failure? That's what you assumed for the first twenty-seven years of your life.

You're strong. You're sixteen, and you monitor everyone's emotions but your own. Those do not matter! You cater to Mom, Grandma, your sister, and heck, even your dad. Be strong!

Your little sister began struggling mentally. She became a child guinea pig for a handful of SSRIs in a short amount of time, and sure, some helped for a little while, but then there were the ones that worsened the symptoms. That was very frightening to witness. As you watched her mental health circle the drain, you took a personal oath never to be medicated, no matter how bad things get. You're strong!

August of 2020. Goodbye, Michigan. Hello, Houston, Texas. Your first thought: "Everything is so green." No friends, no family. Just you, your partner, and your two cats. Who knew you were struggling? You did. Push it down, power through, and ignore it.

One year, two years, three years. Wow, Depression has rolled itself into your life like a hurricane rolling in off the Gulf. Can you even recall what you did last week? Probably not, because your brain quietly entered survival mode. You can't work a normal job, you can't regulate your emotions, everything sucks... living sucks.

Dana Hood saved your life. She has been your therapist since you were twenty. Since taking that oath never to be medicated, and dealing with mental illness alone wasn't working, you joined therapy. Prior to moving, you needed her expertise about once a month. Unfortunately, around year two in Houston, your visits became every other week. However, you learned the most in therapy, your favorite thing being "You're not responsible for them. You're responsible to them." In other words, stop monitoring everyone's emotions.

Year four. Therapy has been helpful, but you knew you weren't well. You knew that coming home to your family was what you personally needed to heal. In the summer of 2024, you made the trip across the country to return home.

The fall came, and you had finally hit rock bottom. You weren't working, you weren't hanging out with friends, and most days just became one with your king-size bed. It was time, as an adult, you made the necessary decision to finally seek medical professional help, and in November of 2024, you started your medication journey. The start was scary. *Would you experience the things your little sister did all those years ago?*

Here I am, one year later. For twenty-seven years, I was strong. I survived very dark times. I never let depression or anxiety win. Breaking that oath, a scared sixteen-year-old me made all those years ago, and putting myself first helped me start my college education ten years after graduating high school. I have also formed a stronger relationship with my partner and even myself. But, most importantly, I see a future. That's something I could never envision. I am strong. I am compassionate. I am worthy.

Happy one-year anniversary!

The Creature

Elijah Parmley

I made something once.
It was both wondrous and terrifying.
It shouldn't have existed.
Yet how could I harm my own creation?

Each part of it came from my own hands.
Its inner-workings: a mirror of my own shortcomings.
I say, 'Society fears you my child,
But you will always be beautiful to me.'

I see the fear behind your gaze lift.
Trust cements, and hope floods in.
I see the arm fall, and the danger pass.
But my own trap is already set and sprung.

The other shoe drops, my son,
With your life in my hands.
I cannot bear to let them break you,
So I must.

As the tear drips down my face,
And the light leaves your gaze,
I wouldn't let you suffer.
Checkmate.

The Ship of Theseus

August Hawley



Ink

The Three Disgraces

Roberta F. King



Oil and Acrylic

Words We Are Not Supposed To Say

Meghan Sonder

All the things that have transpired
due in part to how my brain is wired.
I have been told before-and still to this day-
that these are all things I shouldn't say.

But I'm a free spirit
that has been caged.
I am a poet
who has been enraged,
throwing my voice
to keep you engaged.

So enraptured
everything has been fractured
by circumstance and decay.
Now is the time to shout it out!
To wish the pain away.

The lies they all feed us
their words-they disease us-
they say that they teach us
but they only mislead us.

Their voices are treason,
so I can't find a reason
inside of my heart to obey.

Others watch blindly
as they silence them kindly,
with lies and false promise,
swearing they're honest!

Tomorrow's a brand new day!

Untethered

Paulo Jaloto

There he was, out of the blue, at my doorstep. It had been what, five years? Five years of sleepless nights, wondering if he was even alive. I was confused. Angry. But most of all, relieved he was okay. “Where have you been?” Before I could even say anything else, he barged in, gave me a quick hug, as if we had seen each other the weekend before, and shut the door behind him.

It’s funny. For identical twins, we couldn’t have been more different. I’m more reserved, not very daring. I didn’t stray too far, or at all, really, from the path I was expected to take. I look and act as average as it gets. I still live in a perfectly normal house in a perfectly normal neighborhood with my perfectly normal family. He, on the other hand, was a wild, impish version of me. Always had been.

Every time I looked into his eyes, I saw a whole universe. You could tell he wasn’t ever fully present with you. That’s not to say he didn’t care or listen. He truly did. But there was something else going on in that head of his. Usually, an unsolvable problem he was working through, or one of his many unachievable dreams. He was simply fascinating to be around; you never knew what mind-blowing thing he’d utter like it was nothing.

He was obsessed with astronomy. I spent many nights watching him point out planets and stars in the night sky. Once, for Christmas, he got a backyard telescope. I’ll never forget him seeing the rings of Saturn for the first time. He let out a breathless laugh, steadied himself, and went completely silent. Just staring. He grabbed my shoulder. “You have to see this. Come see this right now!” They were spectacular that year, tilted wide toward Earth. “One day, I’ll go there,” he whispered, but with his usual conviction. “One day...”

Right after we turned fifteen, our parents died in a car accident. Our whole world turned upside down. We didn’t really have much of an extended family. At breakneck speed, we were placed into foster care, and don’t you worry, promised we wouldn’t be separated. Well, that was a lie. While he bounced between foster homes for the next three years, I was adopted almost immediately and went on to start my perfectly normal life.

I constantly felt guilty. I got to sleep in a familiar, warm bed every night, never went hungry, and my adoptive parents were wonderful. I saw my brother briefly once or twice a year, and while he never told me how bad

things were, I could tell. There's not much you can hide from your twin.

What I liked most about him, what made him different from me, gradually stopped being cool. His permanently uncombed hair and unkempt appearance used to make him look so carefree. Now, he just looked messy. But his eyes were still the same, with that familiar, almost supernatural intelligence about them.

I went to a local college and got a perfectly normal job. That would've never been enough for him. He easily got into one of the country's top research universities, majored in astrophysics, and even earned a PhD. What a contrast. He published outstanding research multiple times and won award after award. He never accepted any; he was in it for the sake of knowledge itself, not self-glorification.

Then, just like that, he vanished. After a month of not returning my calls and texts, which, to be fair, wasn't all that unusual for him, I drove to his city to check on him. I found his front door unlocked. Drawers and cabinets open, books and papers scattered everywhere, the living room lights still on. It looked like he had up and left in a hurry. I asked his colleagues at the university if they knew anything. Nothing. I contacted the police, which led to an investigation. Still nothing.

For five years, I wondered what had happened to him. Five agonizing years. Only for him to abruptly show up at my house and leave me again just as abruptly.

"It's a long story," he said, after shutting the door. "I just came to say goodbye. I have to get going soon." My own flesh and blood standing right there in front of me. He looked older, tired, but happier than I had seen him since we were kids. I was overcome with emotion. But there was no time for that, apparently.

He told me that, before he went missing, he met another researcher at the university, a neuroscientist. He showed up at his office one afternoon, and there she was, waiting at the door. She mentioned she had read some of his papers and was very interested in his work. Then, she discussed her own ongoing research and how groundbreaking it might be. I could tell he was heavily simplifying things for me, doing his best to put it all in layman's terms.

She had been studying the human brain for a long time and was particularly interested in human consciousness. And this is where it started to get wild.

She theorized that consciousness was an electromagnetic wave that propagated in a higher dimension. Hence, it's never been measured emanating from someone's head. "I'm sorry, what?" While several cortical networks and whatnot are involved in consciousness, her belief was that it is biologically tethered to each person through the thalamus. He had to tell me what that was, too.

It was getting harder and harder to follow by the second. He explained she had been studying and trying to perfect a procedure called thalamic ablation, which is used to manage conditions like Parkinson's disease and chronic pain syndromes. It's safe and non-invasive, utilizing focused ultrasound to target specific nuclei in the thalamus, depending on the disorder. "Where are you going with this?"

"There's a set of thalamic nuclei called intralaminar. They're left alone during those procedures because damage to them can leave the patient in a permanent vegetative state." And what do you know, her grand proposition was that targeting them instead could potentially release a person's consciousness, effectively freeing it from biological constraints.

So, we could be free from our bodily prison. But at what cost? Not to mention the fundamental assumptions being made. Would somebody's consciousness, when unshackled, remain a coherent entity? Retain its memories, sense of self? According to my brother, yes, probably. Hopefully. "I know there's a lot of speculation involved." Yeah, you got that right. And there was only one way to find out.

She had approached my brother because of his extensive research on dimensional theory. They talked all afternoon, and my brother was entranced by her ideas. She had her own private lab and a small team. "Family money." At this point, I wondered how an extremely bright man like my brother could get duped so easily. "Did you get scammed? Is that what happened?"

"No, of course not!" She invited him to work with her on the condition that he didn't tell anyone. Not a soul. "Not even me?" He had felt awful leaving me like that, or so he said, but this was way too big an opportunity to pass up. "Bigger than us, even? Huh." I felt hurt. A twinge of pain ran through my chest. How could he have done this to me? "I'm sorry. I really am."

For five years, they worked on the specifics of the procedure and how it would all play out if successful. He reiterated the basics to me. If they were right, consciousness propagates in that higher dimension at the speed of light. That means upon release, from its frame of reference, it could reach anywhere instantaneously. "It could go from here on Earth, to Alpha Centauri, the Andromeda Galaxy, the edge of the observable Universe, to Saturn, and, as far as it was concerned, no time would've passed."

Yes, Saturn. I let out a laugh; he hadn't changed after all. However, all of this sounded absurd to me. His explanations were intoxicatingly convincing, but this was ludicrous, right? I mean, sure, it was a fascinating theoretical exercise, but it was just that. Theoretical. "So, you disappeared for five years over this? Over something that's clearly unattainable? Is that it?"

"We think we finally figured it out. This is it. And I'm the one who's going to undergo the procedure." My legs buckled. I hugged him and just bawled, begging him to reconsider, as if that would've changed his mind. It was a done deal. His eyes lit up while talking about this; I knew he really believed in it.

The procedure would render him in a vegetative state, or, just as likely, kill him. Either way, they would keep him—or his body—for further research, and I couldn't go see him—or his body. Oh, I also couldn't tell anyone about any of this. Ever. But they were confident his consciousness would be freed regardless, and he'd go to Saturn and wherever else out there in the Universe. I wiped my tears. Knowing I'd never see him again hurt way too much.

Before he left, I asked, "Will I ever know if this procedure has worked? Will I ever have confirmation you're out there propagating in a different dimension or just, I don't know, dead?" He explained that, from my perspective, time would continue to behave linearly like we're used to, and it might be a while before he'd be able to communicate, if ever.

For that to be possible, this higher dimension would have to intersect our own, and we'd have to hope the dimensional barrier is thin enough that his consciousness could draw enough energy from quantum fluctuations or ambient radiation to interact with electromagnetic fields, manipulating them to create oscillations at radio frequencies that, if amplified, could be detected. "Phew."

If all those conditions were met, yes, he would absolutely attempt to contact me. "I promise." In other words, clearly, I would never know if it worked or not, which felt horrible. How the hell would I detect those oscillations? What if none of those assumptions were correct? "Goodbye." He left. I stood there, staring at my door for what felt like hours.

As the months passed, it didn't get any easier. I missed him every day. Every hour of every day. But I had to accept my brother was a unique guy pursuing unique goals, and if that foolish consciousness experiment was what made him happy, so be it. He was gone, gone forever. And I had to move on.

That winter, I arrived at the office one day to find all my coworkers huddled around a TV in the breakroom. A live newscast was on. I couldn't hear the reporter over everyone's chatter, so I moved closer to the door. "...are urging caution, but it is being treated as a possible sign of intelligent extraterrestrial

life..." I went inside the room, trying to get a peek at the screen. "...and three days ago, scientists at the Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array in New Mexico picked up an unusual radio signal coming from the general direction of Saturn..." My heart skipped a beat. "...very faint and consists of a repeating pattern in what appears to be Morse code." The reporter paused. "It spells out the word 'hi.' Researchers do not know how long it's been transmitting..."

I walked out of the building. Didn't even grab my coat. The frigid air bit into my skin, but I didn't care. He'd made it. He'd actually made it, just like he said he would all those years ago. He was free. And he'd found a way to reach back across dimensions to let me know he was all right.

"Hi to you, too, brother!" I yelled at the pale sky.

The Hardship of Music

Ian Pereda

Practice. Practice. Practice.

The word haunted me.

Every time my lips ached, every time my fingers cramped, every time I sat alone in my room coaxing sound out of a stubborn reed, I practiced. Ironically, none of this was supposed to happen. In eighth grade, I was offered the chance to learn a new instrument, but I brushed it off with a casual, “Nah, I’ll be fine.” That one decision seemed harmless, but it sent me into high school already behind, holding an oboe I barely knew how to assemble, while my peers were performing advanced pieces.

At first, it wasn’t very comfortable. The oboe squealed unpredictably, and my fingers stumbled through even the simplest scales. While my friends relaxed after school, I sat in my bedroom battling this strange instrument, wondering why I’d ever thought this was a good idea. But something inside me refused to quit. I kept showing up. I kept practicing and believing that I might catch up. My band director noticed that stubborn spark and suggested I try solo and ensemble competitions. The thought of performing alone terrified me, but I said “yes”. That, yes, changed everything.

Each year, the solos grew more complex, and each year, I found myself digging deeper. My days blurred into private lessons, hours of practice, sore lips, and sheet music littered with frantic pencil marks. There were nights I wanted to slam my oboe case shut and never open it again. But with every challenge, I saw quite a progress not just in my playing, but in my patience and determination. I was learning how to keep going, even when every part of me wanted to stop.

Junior year tested that resolve like nothing else. I was preparing a seven-minute, three-piece solo while juggling SAT prep and advanced coursework. I poured over 45 hours into that one piece, often practicing long after everyone else in my house was asleep. When I earned a division one rating and advanced to state, it felt like more than an award; it felt like proof that effort can carry you further than you think possible.

Senior year pushed me even harder. My final piece, “Le Copurin de Tomboue,” was a professional-level and brutally demanding work. I practiced until my lips split, until the music felt stitched into my heartbeat. Walking off that stage, I wasn’t just relieved—I was proud. I had done

something my freshman-year self would have believed was impossible.

What once felt like a burden has become my most excellent teacher. The oboe taught me that progress isn't built on talent, but on grit, the willingness to keep showing up, to push through frustration, and to trust the slow work of growth. I've learned that success isn't about how quickly you master something, but about how deeply you're willing to invest in it, even when progress feels invisible. It happens in the quiet, consistent moments, the ones where no one is watching, and quitting would be easy. Now, when I face something daunting, I don't hear doubt anymore.

Music

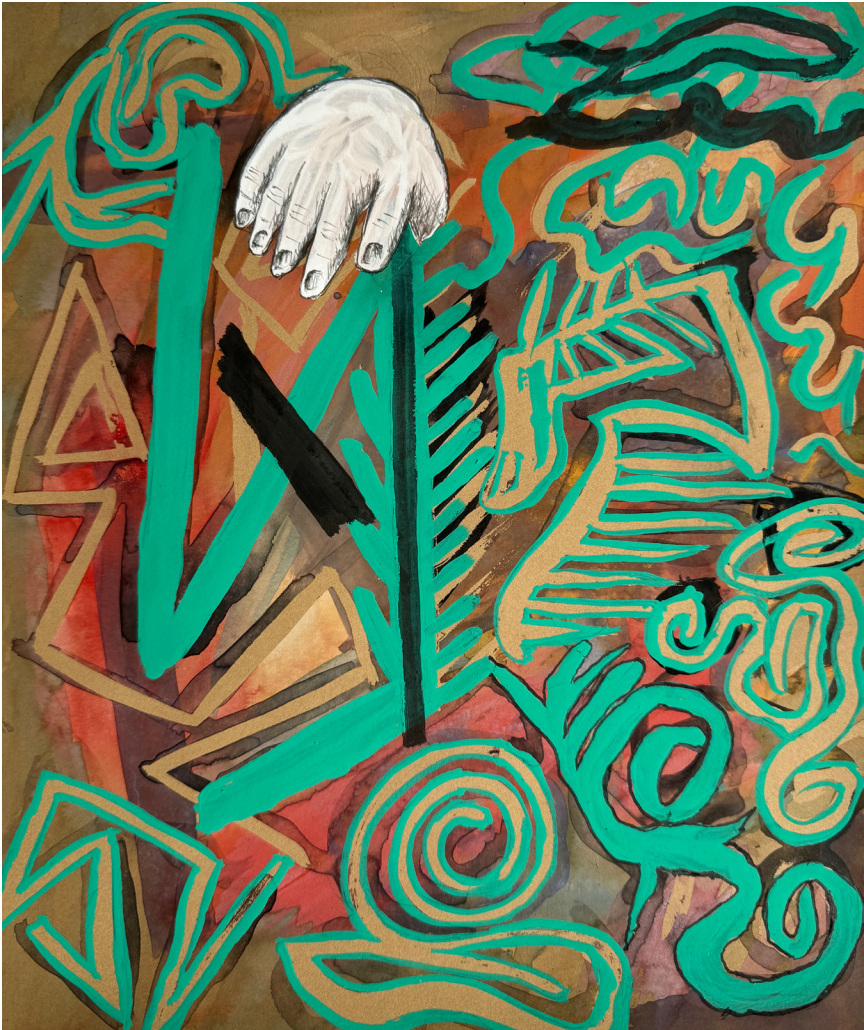
Erin Hoffman



Reductive Woodcut

Cryptic Hover

Erin Hoffman



Gouache and Mixed Media

Germ on the Wind

Erin Hoffman



Gouache and Mixed Media

Birch Forest

Diana Casey



Watercolor and Acrylic

Birch Forest

Diana Casey

She taught us to see,
these trees.
Not just the forest,
these trees.
Our eyes and colors to create -
texture, shape, community.

On my side I lie,
in this forest.
The moon over my shoulder.
The sky speaks of peace,
I am calm, serene.

Who knew
Our brushes
The strokes
Lying in the forest
Feed the soul

Community, serenity, soulfulness,
in the birch forest.

Button Eyes and Hard Goodbyes

Emily Sanders

The machines in the corner beeped steadily, securing their place in the dingy hospital lighting. Mint green curtains swished as the night and day nurses swapped: rubber heels clicking against the floor, pencils pressed feverishly to paper, gloomy light glaring off of the starched hospital bed-sheets.

It was Monday.

Today the hospital seemed to screech, overburdened with the insanities of hundreds of nervous people, all clamoring for answers.

One floor up, newborns announced themselves with bright wails, drawing tears from the eyes of newly made parents. On the floor above that, bones were guided to their rightful sockets, skin was sewn back together, and blood was donated to the less fortunate.

People of all races held fast to hope, clinging to it like a life preserver as they waited. The clocks in the hallway, the break room, the bathroom, ticked onward, pressing forward incessantly no matter how dire, hopeless, futile the circumstance.

Life. Moves. On.

Or does it?

Clarissa happened to be pondering that very same question, all the way in room 2B of floor six. Everyone else had left hours ago- wept soundlessly as they packed up their things and shuffled out the door, dragging their hearts behind them.

She picked at her nails, chewing the inside of her lip to a raw, bleeding sore. *Up* her brown eyes flicked, across to the lonely bed in the corner. Tucked away, forgotten, and yet...always remembered.

Atop it, a pale green rabbit with its head cocked, peering expectantly with clever button eyes. She dug her nails into her palms, gritting her teeth with a bitter snarl.

*What are **you** looking at?*

She thought of muttering it, reciting it, of screaming it over the lifeless plush.

Of ripping the godforsaken thing to shreds, of letting it go up in flames.

She stood purposefully from the chair, aching with every movement; she'd been sitting in it all day, after all. It felt like she'd been sitting in it for months, from the moment of her brother's diagnosis...to his last handhold. Tears peppered in her lashes, collecting like melted snowflakes and racing down her cheeks.

Cancer doesn't care if you are tired.

How weary. How dumbstruck. How angry you are.

It just takes.

and takes

and *takes*.

And goes back for seconds.

The scariest thing?

She could hardly remember it at all, had lost count; so buried beneath her rage, her heartbreak might as well have been lost beneath the earth, as dark and hollow as a catacomb.

She ran a sharp fingernail down the middle of her palm, hard enough to leave marks- an effort to stave off the tears. As if it could help; as if it could change anything at all.

Her heavy footsteps carried her to the bed, bracing her before the purest form of insolence, of denial.

Atop the bed, pressed up against the pillow, the plush rabbit wondered up at her. She glowered at him spitefully. Sitting at his worn-down feet, a golden dollar glinted slyly in the fluorescent lights.

Mikey.

Simple, bittersweet memories sighed down her cheeks, leaving her skin wet.

Her brother, the believer he'd been- was still waiting on the tooth fairy, wherever he was now.

Her eyes feel the rabbit- the same stupid rabbit he'd always insisted on

taking with him: dragging him round to chemo, playing with him in the rain when he'd had the strength to stand in mudpuddles, reading books to the previously-fluffy thing.

Anger nestled in her bones, its warm flames licking through her veins.

She snatched up the love-worn creature, gripping it in her fist.

"You."

It gazed back with gentle button eyes. Inanimate as it was, its nose seemed to twitch in the air, sensing danger under her blistering gaze. A tighter squeeze, and the rabbit slumped over her hand, fabric bowing before her audacious command.

"You."

You stupid, awful little..." she seethed. Instantly, a soft voice chimed in the back of her head. *Awe, don't yell at him! What did he ever do to you, 'rissa?* Mikey sounded.

Clarissa blinked. No. *No.*

Furrowed her brows; willed them to submit to her.

And yet...her whole face seemed to pucker even then, as she contemplated the crumpled, somber rabbit in her hands. Once upright and lovely, now lifeless- all hope strangled out by a single, insurmountable force.

Like burnt paper.

Like wet sand.

Like a house of cards.

Like Mikey.

And suddenly, she could no longer see- only blindly blink as the world became fuzzy and unclear, the lop-eared best friend of her kid brother now the star of the hospital room. Tears choked her voice, warping them to a gargle of wet and wrong and sorrow. An inferno of anger behind her eyes, jesting the tears.

"You- y-you had one job. You....you were supposed to take care of him-"

Slumped over in its new master's grip, it seemed to pout, fabric wilting at the disappointment, venomous heartache laced expertly within her words. *"- to make him feel better."*

She glanced at the bags of fluid that hung from their metal poles, waiting for a patient that would never return. Impossible guilt hung against her ribs, tapping them, barraging them hollow with regret.

“to make him forget,” she whispered.

And it felt good, like that. To release her vengeance upon the one thing left responsible- the fuzziest, doe-eyed, hope-filled thing left. To squeeze it all out until nothing was left but the cold, dead truth.

It all felt *really* good.

For about thirty seconds.

Clever button eyes rested against her, prodding a question.

Her lips quivered, trembled before the gentle creature- shaking until she could no longer force it down. A primal wail escaped her, dropping her to her knees. She hit hard, kneecaps smashing into the tile, tears pouring effortlessly down her cheeks.

It was a stuffed *animal*, for Pete’s sake.

The most unclever, ordinarily boring as they come.

A silly, raggedy, worn-out rabbit, the color of seafoam. It had once been soft, bright, lovely, the day her brother had entered the world, greeting everyone with a loving wail of firstborn life- the cry of excitement for everything.

They were inseparable as shadows from light.

Both had tender blue eyes- one made of muscles, the other of buttons. Mikey had never minded; they were best friends, nearly brothers. They had explored the woods, clambered up the tallest trees in the backyard, built pillow forts, read ghost stories in the dark, and cuddled together at night, sleeping soundly beneath warm covers.

To a stuffed animal, being fuzzy, fluffy, charming was cute- but being well-loved was better. The gradual matting down of fur, from one too many hugs. A lopsided ear patched up and stitched together again from many a whispered secret. A gentle touch to brace against the harshness of the world. A steady hand to hold during treatments. A fur color to transport him to the waves that crested over the beach, far away in paradise; a trip around the world, when his boy could no longer stand.

Clarissa sobbed, releasing him from her grip.

The rabbit seemed to breathe again, relaxing gently against her scratched up skin.

She cradled him in her hands, tilting his head back so he was facing her- watching her with those soft blue buttons.

“I’m sorry-” she choked out, shaking her head frantically. “- so very sorry. You don’t deserve this; you don’t deserve it at all.” She brought him to her chest, gently stroking his soft, matted fur. A soothing, gentle texture, helping to smooth out her nerves.

“You were just doing your job. And you were doing your best....”

She pressed a kiss to his head. The rabbit seemed to tuck in, curling toward her as if to hug her, to comfort her greatly.

“I’m so sorry he couldn’t stay to play,” she cried, running her fingers over his soft fabric ears, tears *plop plop plopping* onto his head. The rabbit sighed lovingly.

My work is not yet finished.

Strawberry

Lauryn Campbell



Acrylic

Discomfort

Hayden Harris



Colored Pencil

The War-Torn Wasteland

Deondrick Watts



Ink, Graphite, and Acrylic

In Her Own Light

Jonah Lyn Hayes



Acrylic

The Girl in the Mirror

Kiersten Kemp

A girl was once given a gift from her grandma. It was the most beautiful antique mirror she had ever seen. Its delicate gold engravings and round shape shone bright in the October sun emerging from her window. She loved it, but she hated the girl staring back at her.

The girl avoided staring for too long. Her skinny legs appeared thick and round. Her toned stomach seemed huge. Her bright blue eyes looked tired and sickly. She loathed the moment she would catch herself looking. She wished she could sculpt herself like clay to make herself more loveable.

This beautiful mirror captured the ugliness she felt. She began to starve herself, and every time she gave into her cravings, she would punish herself. Taking laxatives to flush out her system or shoving her fingers into the back of her throat to expel all the contents of her stomach. After each self-deprecating ritual, she would look in the mirror again, but all she would do is count her flaws like prayers, hoping that one day the mirror would give her the forgiveness she deserved.

Weeks passed, and the girl was doing better. She was passing her classes, spending quality time with friends and family, and playing basketball on her team. She had just won her school's state championship game. For the first time, when she looked in the mirror, she saw someone who was growing instead of breaking.

The girl knew that this feeling wouldn't last. She found her happiness in lodging a razor blade deep into her arms and legs. She would look in the mirror at her scars and scabs, each one a faded constellation of her sadness. She wondered when the girl in the mirror would stop looking back at her.

The girl had a plan. A carefully thought-out plan. She wrote her note, picked out a day, and went through with her self-agreement. The girl in the mirror stopped looking back at her that day, but only because there was nothing to reflect.

every winter is exactly the same

August Hawley

i am standing in the snow and i see
eleven, twelve, thirteen years unfolding when i look behind me:

my sister and i with our snow pants and boots
studying the crystals on our sleeves
and building burrows in the ditch,

a storm so violent that i could escape captivity unseen;
the sound of every footstep absorbed like it
was never there at all,

all the time spent
searching for one of my sister's nicest winter
gloves that disappeared into the snow for good,

the night i was pinned to the ground
and felt saliva start to freeze to my face,

laughing in the school parking lot in denim jackets
not thick enough and hands searching for warmth in
the pockets.

it's true, some parts of me have gone missing
for awhile, only to return when
i see cows grazing at the farm where my dad
used to work
when i was only in preschool, in the the house
my sister may have been too little to remember,
with the flowered wallpaper and ugly carpet.

i wasn't expecting to find anything here,
but here i am.
some parts of me, of course, are gone for good.

accepting this is just as hard
as the remembering, and also as strange,
and also as beautiful.

my life—
a million snowflakes around me
and every star in the sky—
my sister's pink glove, surely smaller than we remember,
long decomposed in the ditch in front of
the house i live in now
or maybe at the school playground, where our cousin
wears pink gloves just like them.

sometimes, you lose things in december
and it seems like they're just gone,
but when the snow melts they're still there, waiting
for you.

and sometimes they really have vanished.
there's no need to be angry anymore, there will be
other gloves. and other memories.
and other selves, even, each one completely unique.
and yet.

The Elevator

Gabrielle Johnson

I've always hated elevators. Not having a stable floor under my feet, the jerking, the feeling of my heart pounding in my chest. I always take the stairs. It's times like right now when I curse buildings for not having publicly accessible stairs. I'm standing next to the doors of the elevator, willing myself to just press the button. I finally work up the courage, telling myself that it will be fine. The elevator dings and I can feel the dread of an oncoming panic attack. Taking deep breaths, I walk into the elevator. As I press the button of the floor that I need, I'm silently grateful that there's no one around to witness the oncoming panic attack that continues to grow in my chest. Just as I'm about to make my escape, the doors close and I'm shut inside. My vision starts to get fuzzy as my breathing picks up pace, feeling like there's a boulder stopping the air from getting into my lungs. Talking myself out of it is no longer an option, so I do the next best thing and slowly sink to the floor. It's better to already be on the floor when I pass out. I try to focus on my breathing as my eyes fill with tears. My vision is clouded with black spots, but I faintly register the tall silhouette of a person.

I hear him softly curse through the ringing of my ears. The rough timbre of his voice is enough to realize that it's a man. Next thing I know, I feel him sitting right next to me. He's not touching me and it takes my brain a second to realize that he's talking. His voice is smooth as honey, with a roughness hidden just below the surface. He's talking to me, random things are spewing out of his mouth. He's telling me about his day and then starts talking about himself. He loves the color red, and his favorite food is pizza. Through my haze, I realize that my panic is subsiding. The ringing in my ears has stopped, and it feels just a little easier to breathe. The black spots in my vision are slowly fading. Taking a breath of relief that the panic attack is calming down, I glance up at the man next to me. He has stopped talking and is just staring down at me.

The deep inhale of breath gets caught in my throat, because holy crap! This man looks like he came right out of a book of Greek gods. He has brown curly hair, and his face looks chiseled to perfection. He seems to notice me staring at him because he smirks a little before asking, "Are you alright?" I can't seem to form any words, so I just nod like an idiot. He smiles at me and I notice that he has dimples. Just then the ding from the elevator seems to jolt me out of my trance. I'm cursing myself for letting him see me like that when he stands from where he was sitting next to me.

“I better get going,” he smiles down at me, and in the blink of an eye, he’s gone. It takes me a minute of sitting on the elevator floor to realize what just happened. That was so embarrassing! I slowly rise to my feet, rushing to get out of the elevator before I get trapped again. I realize then that I didn’t get his name. I walk forward one foot at a time in hopes that I will meet my mystery man again.

The Most Vibrant Moments

Isaac Cosmo Falk

Some of the most vibrant moments are just right before the rain
Each purposeless point is priceless and precious in retrospect
Now that you're gone, the worlds changed, life will never be the same

I've started singing those silly songs you always sang
Trying to figure out how all your stories intersect
Some of the most vibrant moments are just right before the rain

Trying to find joy, scooping with something meant to strain
Screaming at me because I had overslept
Now that you're gone, the worlds changed, life will never be the same

Our final phone call, that late night farewell filled with pain
Tears and sobs long after the calls disconnect
Some of the most vibrant moments are just right before the rain

Missing those last special years with you that left as quickly as they came
Apartment days, chemo brain, a strange time for us to reconnect
Now that you're gone, the worlds changed, life will never be the same

The best parts of you I try to retain
Learning to love the parts of myself you would neglect
Some of the most vibrant moments are just right before the rain
Now that you're gone, the worlds changed, life will never be the same

Whispers of Nostalgia

Jonah Lyn Hayes



Photography

Heeyyy!

Kelli Ann Loughrige



Photography - edited with Pixlr and Prisma

The Secret Garden at Moondancers Meadow

Kelli Ann Loughrige



Photography - edited with Pixlr and Prisma

City of Lights

Reese Bancuk



Photography

Grasping for Air

Javi LeBlanc

I can't see
I can't breathe
Dark and confined
In my own mind
I don't understand how I am
How I work
How I think

I can't see
The normalities of society
I feel caged
In this field of hate
This world is unforgiving
Your words are piercing

I'm grasping for air
This world is engulfing
Though I still try
To reach the light
Of hope

My Little Secret

Jaime Steffes

That day was like a lot of days in my young life- where I was left scared, alone, and trying to figure out how I was ever going to move on. At fourteen years old I had already experienced more than most adults, especially the bad. After a series of trips through the foster care system, after dealing with abuse in my family's home. I've read that "In Michigan, there are approximately 10,000 children in foster care" (Foster Care, 2025). I hate knowing this, because I was once a part of that number, and no one unless they're in that 10,000 really understands what it means to bounce around from place to place with no real house to call a home. Their main goal is to reunite families together if possible. So, after I had bounced around a few places, I was eventually placed back home with my mother and stepfather. The last place I wanted to be. I walked out the door and disappeared. Only this time, my mother had given up on me. She was tired of searching and dealing with endless phone calls and visits from the police. And I was left to maneuver through the big world alone. And that is what brought me to that moment, sitting in that room, holding a beautiful baby boy. It was my saddest day, a day that would change my life forever.

Just four months shy of my fifteenth birthday, the thought of me being in the hospital having a baby was not a very pleasant one. I could feel the whispers, the stares, the negative utterance given by anyone who felt they had an opinion or some unsolicited advice. You could see the embarrassment on my mother's face when taking me to appointments- hiding me away in the house for the last few months so that none of her busybody friends would have the chance to spread rumors about "her." None of it was about how I felt. It was a tragedy beyond her capabilities to acknowledge that her social circle would find out that [another] daughter of hers had a baby so young. My oldest sister was only fifteen when she found out she was pregnant. I could see and feel the shame in her eyes every time she looked my way. I felt that she would try to look anywhere else but towards me if she had the chance.

And here I was lying in a small room alone. A faint light from a lamp sitting in the corner next to an empty bed adjacent to mine- one left empty to give me the space to myself; to say my goodbyes to the baby boy I held sleeping soundly in my arms. Trembling with fear and petrified, really, because I was being told by everyone involved (especially my mother) that I was too young to care for a baby. At any moment, a family was going to walk in that door and stake claims on the life I had brought into this world.

It was Christmas morning when my mother discovered I was pregnant; almost seven months to be exact. I had hidden my "little secret" successfully after returning home (until that morning) from anyone I knew. My mother

had always bought my twin sister and myself the same size clothes, and this day was no different than the rest for her. But the secret I had been hiding could not be contained any longer beyond the Christmas nightgown draped over the bulge in my belly. My stepfather had pulled her aside and voiced his concern about the difference in size between us. He said to her, "Little girls don't just get fat in their stomach." So, my mother came to my room where I often found solitude. She poked me in my belly and looked at me with pure horror as her finger rested on the firm surface of my very pregnant belly. She knew instantly that her husband was right in his assumption. I started to cry, and at that moment, I also had a sense of deep relief. I was exhausted trying to keep that secret. I had tried to tell those around me several times over the months, but fear took over every time. What was I going to do?

After the stir of the holidays was over, I discovered that the choice was not mine at all. My mother made several appointments for me. One to see a doctor, a baby doctor, an OBGYN. That is a doctor that monitors women's health and babies as they grow in their mothers' wombs until they are ready to join us in this big world, an important part of the pregnancy experience. The other place she took me was to Bethany Christian Services, an adoption agency: "Founded in 1944 on the simple but powerful principle that every child is made in the image of God, [they] are the largest Christian child and family organization in the U.S. motivated by faith. They serve clients through foster care, adoption, refugee and immigrant services, and family strengthening services" (Bethany Christian Services, n.d.). She had made the choice that I was too young to care for a baby myself, and she was also unwilling to help me. The adoption agency would help her to be rid of the "problem" that I carried snug inside me. Bethany Christian Services helps birth mothers (me) to maneuver the process of giving a baby up for adoption. They provide different options for a closed or open adoption, choosing a family for your unborn baby (if you want to), counseling, and peer support groups. My mother was unwavering on the choice she had made to the point she had convinced herself it was mine. The choice to give my "unexpected surprise" away like he was a gift at Christmas or a birthday. The choice was taken away from me. I never wanted to give my baby away. I went along with all the appointments my mother made for me, buying time until I could figure out a plan for myself. That time never came. Everything just happened so fast.

So, there I was, lying in the room alone, holding my beautiful baby boy waiting for the door to open and for the family to take him away. I smelled his hair, ran my fingers across his face, his lips, his ears, and the small of his nose. I counted each finger and each toe and memorized each wrinkle and took in the color of blue in his eyes and smell of his breath. I tucked him sound asleep into his car seat, and they took him away. While my baby boy may no longer be mine, I sit with relief that he will live happily with a permanent family. He won't have to jump through foster care like I did, and that's all I can hope for. He's safe and sound and won't have to worry about what home he's going to next.

The Blackened Star

MK Miller

You were my star, so bright, so loving;
Now you are dust in space, so cold and unforgiving.
Where once there was warmth and care, now there is only a hateful spite;
When there was once a beautiful garden, so fair, now there is an all-consuming blight.
How could I not see this day coming?
How did I remain ignorant to you, my star,
Falling from the sky
How could I neglect to notice your core darkening?
How could I, not acknowledge your cry. . . ?
Tell me, my hushed sunshine, did I fall too far to your dying heart?

The Imposter

Elijah Parmley

A careful creature who prowls in plain sight,
Lithe, graceful, and fierce
Yet I, *I* cannot be hidden.
Loud, stumbling, and anxious

A world of weaponized academia,
The predator doesn't need to study.
Confident, bold, and agile
Yet I, *I* must climb.
Foolish, ambitious, and hungry

The animal instinct to feed,
Governs their living.
Forceful, stubborn, and strong
Yet I, *I* must be stronger.
Aching, tired, and sore

Wearing achievements as camouflage,
So that I might be hidden amongst the chaos.
Yet, somehow...
They *know*.

White Roses on Mommy's Grave

Meghan Sonder

The season is mid-autumn. The leaves have all changed to their brilliant hues of bright yellows, oranges, and reds. While the ancient trees have retained many of them, many more have already fallen upon the ground; their colors standing out all the more against the grey stone masses protruding from the earth. The sun seems much too bright, and the sky much too clear to bear witness to the events about to transpire upon this hallowed ground. Still, with a certain air of stubbornness it persists in its attempt to brighten the darkest of times with the light dappling this tract of land reserved for the dead.

The man standing before the heavy iron gates watches his daughter run through them. She does not yet understand what this place is and he has not yet figured out how to explain it to her. Rather than the solemnity that he and his son have arrived with, she runs with the exuberance of a child anticipating a slumber party among friends. He has told her where to go and has let her run ahead because of her insistence on finding the one they have all come to see. He does not find it at all strange that she should want one last moment alone; one last conversation with her mother before her hopes are snuffed out with the crushing of the innocence every child must eventually lose. Watching her now, misunderstanding in her sweet childish innocence his heart broke just a little more.

Her long black hair billows behind her with the force of her bounding steps as she races along to the place she will find her mother. Intent on one mission, she has paid close attention to the directions her father gave her and quickly finds the black granite stone set in a lonely corner off of the paths made through the soft earth. She stops abruptly in the center of the path and frowns with what seems like disappointment. Despite this, she continues slowly off the path towards the polished black stone. She carries with her a small, silk black pouch, its contents known only to her. Softly it swings back and forth at her side. When at last she stops her careful steps in front of the stone glistening with the light of the sun dappled through the treetops, her pouch alone continues its silent motion at her side like a pendulum counting out time. There are beautiful flowers and a name inscribed on the stone as well as numbers that she silently reads and quietly wonders at their meaning.

Amillay E. Beckly
May 16, 1969-March 24, 2006

At first, she stands staring wide eyed, waiting. Her father had told her that this is where she would find her mother, but there was no one here. She knows she will not have much time before her father joins her at this very spot. Self-consciously she looks down at the ground and only then does she notice the freshly turned earth in a mound before her feet. Breathing deeply, she gathers the courage to speak the words she has rehearsed so many times in her mind, but it does not come quickly. A quiet breeze gently blows through her hair, causing her to look all around her in wonder and finally, her courage built up as much as a child's courage can be, she speaks. She knows in her child's heart that this gentle breeze will carry her words to wherever it is her mother has chosen to go.

"Why did you leave, Mommy? Where did you go? Daddy won't tell me. He only says that you went away the night I was with Nana. I know you said it isn't right to listen to conversations I'm not supposed to, but I heard him tell Nana that there was a lot of blood. Why was there blood, Mommy? Maddox leaves all the time. He stays out late. Sometimes he doesn't come home at all. I think he's doing bad things. He says it doesn't matter because you're gone. I hear him and Daddy fighting a lot."

She hangs her head in sorrow at her own words. Despite her despair, she does not cry because she knows her words have been heard. Suddenly she raises her head, eyes wide as she stares at the stone before her. It is as if she has forgotten something that she has just now remembered.

She exclaims, "Oh! I have something for you!"

It is only now that she seems to think of the silent pouch that swings at her side. With great, almost exaggerated care she lifts the pouch and pulls it open. The drawstrings shorten as the opening widens. Reaching into the silken abyss inside, she extracts a single white rose. She stares at it for a few seconds before walking up to the stone, taking care to avoid walking over the mound of fresh earth. Silently she sets her gift on top of the glittering surface before quickly backing away. The quiet breeze ruffles the soft petals, but it remains where she has placed it.

"I hope you like it!" She exclaims excitedly, "I got it from Mrs. Hemly, the florist who lives next door. I asked her for it because I remembered what you said. If I take something without asking, it's stealing."

The sun seems to shine a little brighter at these last words, as if signaling its approval. It is this change in light which draws her attention to the sky and the trees which have formed a luxurious canopy over this spot. Like the petals of the rose, the breeze gently ruffles the leaves that have stubbornly remained on their branches. Blinded by the dappled sunlight, the girl turns her gaze back to the ominous black stone. Its polished surface glistens in various areas as the shadows of the leaves dance across it.

She watches silently as a sudden calmness wraps about her. So mesmerized is she by the dancing shadows and the comfort brought on by that enveloping serenity that she doesn't notice the shadow which approaches from behind.

While the hand gently placed upon her shoulder is familiar, she is still startled out of the tranquility she has experienced. Looking up behind her, she is saddened to see her father's familiar, yet somber face and understands that it is now time for her to go.

"Worry, go wait by the car with Maddox," he says softly.

With a sigh, she turns her attention to the mound of earth before her, and the stone before it, "Daddy says I have to go now, Mommy. We all miss you..." Hearing her father sigh, she pauses to look back at him and the sorrow he can't seem to hide from his eyes. "So, please come home soon."

An obedient child, she turns and begins her walk back toward the car. The exuberance she felt when she arrived is now gone and her pace is slow. The sun now hides behind storm clouds that seem to have rolled in quite unexpectedly and she hears thunder in the distance. The soft breeze has now turned into a gusting wind which whips yet more leaves from their precarious hold on the branches of their parent trees. She watches them as they flit through the air and lightly flutter to the ground in brief periods of stillness. The leaves left to decay upon the ground are picked up by the same winds and swirled in funnels along the path before her. She doesn't understand why, but this troubles her. As she crosses the threshold out into the land of the living, a feeling of sorrow fills her as she wipes a stray tear from her eye.

The man now standing before the stone turns and watches his daughter as she makes her meandering way back up the path that will lead her to the car. He is still unsure of what to say, how to convey to his youngest child things he didn't want to believe himself. Once he is sure she is well on her way, he turns back toward the stone.

For a long while he can do nothing more than stare. After a time, his stare becomes a glower as anger overcomes his grief. He feels the wind gradually gaining force as it blows the leaves carelessly against the exposed skin of his face and hands. The sky darkens and the thunder rumbles louder as if reflecting his rising temper.

Though he wants to shout he finds himself unable, "How could you do it, Amy?"

Though his voice is strong, it is hoarse from the grief, to which he has found himself a slave. He has so many questions. He wants a great many things, none of which, the silent stone can nor will provide.

“Why would you do it? Your family needs you. I need you. You could have talked to me. We could have worked this out together. I would do anything; give anything to see you smile, to make you happy again. Wirry doesn’t understand. I can’t bring myself to explain; I just can’t find the words.”

Interrupted by the crash of thunder, he stops. His anger becomes rage at the thought of his daughter as his mind continues its relentless circle around how to explain why her mother will not come home. With this thought, his anger boils over and he begins to shout as though it has torn away his restraint just as this storm would tear away the remaining leaves from the treetops.

“If I wasn’t enough to keep you here, did you even think of your children? Maddox understands but just how do I explain it to Wirry? Do I tell her the truth? That Mommy committed suicide because she couldn’t stand the idea of being alive anymore? You didn’t realize that you were killing us all that night. But you did. You killed us all.”

With his last words a soft, clean rain begins to patter to the ground. In silence, he stands and allows it to soak him, hoping that it will wash away his anger. Instead of cleansing him of his anger, however, it merely masks his tears; tears he has been holding back until now. He has forced himself to be strong for his children’s sake, but his strength is fading fast.

The storm intensifies around him as a bolt of lightning cuts across the sky, and for a brief time, illuminates the dark stone he faces. Thunder quickly follows. The storm is closing in. He realizes he must leave soon, but he is not yet ready. He continues to watch the rain as it steadily falls and the earth which swallows it. It is then that he notices the single white rose placed atop the dark splendor of the stone which remarkably has not been blown away. It reminds him of the bouquet he grasps tightly in his own hands.

With a deep breath, he prepares to say his final goodbye, but the storm drowns out his words. In one fluid movement, he throws the bouquet of white roses on the mound of earth converted to mud from the rain. Turning on his heel he walks away. Without looking back, he can sense that the petals, torn from their stems with the force of his throw, are now swirling in the wind he fights against. The naked stems are all that remain lying upon the earth before the grave marker where his wife has been laid to rest.

A Year Later

Ronnie Jewell Jr.

Goodbye?

No!

Hello!

To a new beginning.

To a new chapter.

To a new forever.

Well, perhaps not forever, but at least for now.

Live in the moment.

Look forward to tomorrow

And all the tomorrows to come.

Follow the rainbow

(or at least the “yellow brick road”)

or whatever color you choose.

There may not be a pot of gold at the end.

But maybe a bottle of wine

...and a friend.

Breaking Up Isn't Embarrassing

Kendall Hibbard

In the beginning, I was upset, embarrassed, and ashamed
when you left me.

It all seemed surreal,
as if this past year was wasted.

But the first time someone asked me if we broke up,
I thought I would be able to say:
“We broke up, a mutual agreement,”
not “they broke up with me.”

Then maybe no one would know I was crying,
wishing, and reminiscing every night before my
dreams swept me off of my feet,
and released me from the pain of our new,
well, my new reality.

I cannot remember when I started to realize;
Feeling and being alone is not actually that bad.

Even though you didn't love me back,
that doesn't mean my love was embarrassing,
or something to be ashamed of;
it just means my love isn't for you.

For now, my love is reserved for me, and only me.

Inspired by:
Françoise Gilot, ‘Le Singe Dans le Palais Venetien’

Vegas Blossom

Kyron Zoet

Wildflowers erupt, earthly shackles without resistance
Reaching for anchorage unknowingly
Setting failure imminent, though not cause to cease
The tulips, iris, and lilies tie together
Bound by present and past ventures
Genetically compelled to bloom into vulnerability
Isolation surefire extinction
Devotion a fool's investment, defeat an inevitability
Though wise bouquets wither with worry
The colorless petals fall, faded
Once was bright, but easily persuaded
Buds feast on fellowship
So, the foolish flowers remain aloof
Floating endlessly through clouds dense with vigor
Accepting peril, thoughts toss twirl and toil
Impending consequence, having soared
Certain crash into disappointing soil

Beauty Can Grow Anywhere

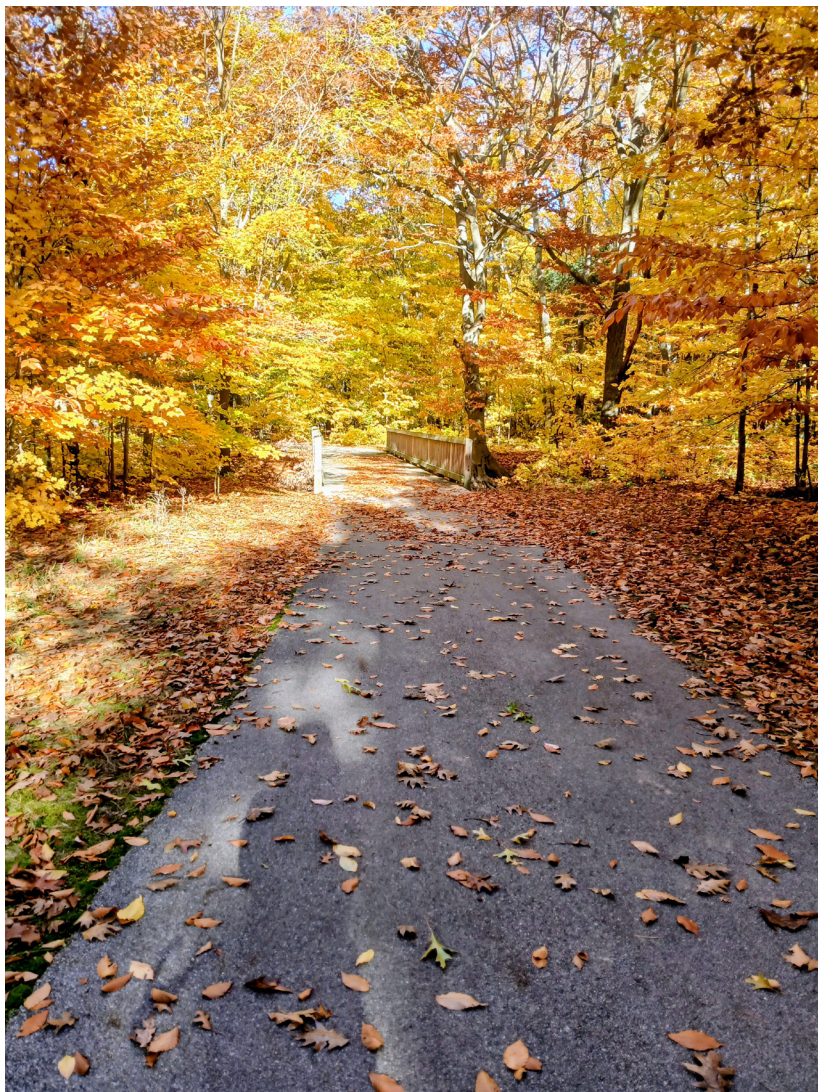
Alyssa Skofic



Photography

Hofma Preserve

Ruby Dyk



Photography

Upstanding Pine

Hunter Poore



Photography

Droplets

Reese Bancuk



Photography

The Ground That Never Dries

Tom Henry

Pop! Pop! Pop!

And we were children who jumped onto the floor.

And we were neighbors and friends and family.

And we were having a birthday party at *abuelo's* house.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

And bullets cut through the windows,

through the walls,

through the television set,

through the *loteria* cards on the table,

through the toys on the sofa,

through the kitchen,

through the Virgin Mary statue on the shelf,

through the bottles of Big Red,

through the *barbacoa*,

through the *caldo de res* on the stove,

through the pictures of the cousins on the shelf,

and

through the chipped paint of the old walls *de la casa*.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

And we raced to check on our friends and family.

And we put the infants onto the floor for safety.

And we hurried our relatives deeper into the house.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

And we lived as the cars raced away.

And we looked into each other's eyes for life.

And we checked each other for holes.

And we were thankful to be alive.

And the people outside on the sidewalk laying lifeless.

And we said our rosary again.

And we were thankful.

And we were thankful.

And we were thankful.

And authorities arrived to file the report.
And no one saw anything.
And investigators collected casings.
And no one saw anything.

And the ambulance and the *bomberos* collected the men from the sidewalks.

And the bodies were heavy despite the holes and the loss of blood.
And the coroner tagged them.

And we were angry at the *pendejos* who died on the sidewalk.
And at the *pendejos* who fired their guns and drove away.
And that *abuelo's* home was in the *barrio*.
And that we were *en Los Estados Unidos*.

And we cleaned up our home,
And the holes reminded us.
And the holes reminded us.
The holes reminded us.

And we washed the blood-soaked sidewalks with a garden hose.
And we washed the sidewalks.
And we washed the sidewalks.
And the ground dried but never dried.
And the stains never faded.
And the children played on this ground.

The Turing Test

Mike McGreever

CHARACTERS:

JACK RICKER, Nobel Laureate, Physicist, and Computer Scientist, 35

ADA HOPPER, Biologist, 35

BEVERLY, Graduate Student, 25

SETTING:

A Research Lab in the Near Future

SYNOPSIS:

A computer scientist and a biologist explore the fundamental nature of time, reality, and love.

ACT I, SCENE I

SETTING:

A research lab is represented by a table with an in-progress chess game, some books, papers, and two chairs.

AT RISE:

PROFESSOR JACK RICKER, 35, stands on the stage, hands in his jacket pockets, smiling, motionless, lost in thought.

Noticing the audience, he comes to life. His manner is friendly, warm, and relaxed. Kind and inquisitive, but a bit disheveled, Jack is very much the absent-minded professor.

JACK

Have you ever experienced déjà vu, that bizarre feeling that you've been somewhere before? I get it all the time. Sometimes I feel like my life's an endless computer loop, running through the same problem over and over.

That's not a bad thing - some problems are so irascibly fascinating I'd gladly spend forever trying to solve them. Working on them is like the challenge of winning a chess game--

(JACK pauses and goes to the chess board, staring at it. He starts to move a piece, then stops. He returns to face the audience.)

It's the joy of getting your first clean run of a computer program, or the excitement of falling in love.

(A long pause as Jack, distracted, stares into the distance.)

Yes! That's what it's like. It's like falling in love.

(Jack turns and looks at something he senses is there but cannot see. Frustrated, he turns back to the audience.)

I almost had it. I nearly had it. But now... it's gone.

(DR. ADA HOPPER, 35, enters. She is pretty, neat, and precise. When nervous, she fiddles with her ring.)

ADA

Professor Ricker? You wanted to see me?

(JACK looks confused.)

I'm Dr. Ada Hopper. You've been leaving peculiar messages on my phone all week. I would have ignored them, except you are a Nobel Laureate, so--

JACK

Yes, yes! I do apologize. Your university mug shot doesn't really do you justice. Based on your picture I was expecting some unhappy bird-like person, but you're really quite lovely.

ADA

Thank you, I think.

JACK

Good! Pleasantries are out of the way, so let's you and I have at it. I read your paper on the formation of memories, and I couldn't put it down. It occurs to me that you and I are working on the same problem.

ADA

Really? What does memory formation have to do with computer processor design?

JACK

Everything. I won the Nobel for designing a quantum computer, but now, I'm taking it to the next level. My new computer will be truly conscious.

ADA

Like ChatGPT?

JACK

No, no. Chat GPT is a large language model. It sucks crap off the Internet so that English students don't have to write term papers. My work is entirely different. I want to redefine artificial intelligence, so that a machine can experience joy, regret, even love.

ADA

To what purpose?

JACK

I love computer science. I thought it was high time for it to love me back.

(ADA laughs.)

People are already using AI for medical diagnostics and counseling. Don't you think these tasks could be done more effectively if the computer could actually feel the emotions of the users, the way humans do?

ADA

Computers can simulate emotions, but they can't experience them.

JACK

Your research suggests otherwise. Computers are digital, all ones and zeros, but the brain is fundamentally an analog device where thoughts and memories exist in multiple states, the way a particle exists in multiple states in quantum physics.

ADA

What does this have to do with my research?

JACK

You've transferred memories from one rat to another, but you've limited yourself by experimenting on rodents. What if you transferred memories from a person to a computer?

ADA

A simulation?

JACK

No, an actual memory transfer. You can call it a "simulation" if you prefer, but in the end, who's to say what's real? Are you familiar with The Turing Test for artificial intelligence? I sit on one side of a screen. You send me text messages, and I try to figure out if you are a computer or a real person.

ADA

Yes, I know what The Turing Test is. But chatbots can carry on conversations now.

JACK

The computer speaks, but it doesn't feel or understand. I want to move far beyond text manipulation. I want to make The Turing Test a double-blind experiment. What if the computer thinks it's human? What if in some fundamental sense, it is human?

ADA

If you could transfer human memories to a computer, that would be remarkable. A sort of immortality. Einstein could work on the Unified

Field theory until he solved it.

JACK

If he solved it.

ADA

I think he would. What do you think?

JACK

I think I've found a most remarkable partner.

ADA

A partner? Or an employee?

JACK

Well, I'm the Nobel Laureate, and this is my research project. You'll be working for me.

ADA

I won't. We need each other. We each have half the puzzle piece. I can transfer memories, and you can place them on a microprocessor. We'll work together, as partners. Equal billing, equal credit.

JACK

You are both visionary and totally fearless.

(ADA wanders over to observe the chess board.)

ADA

That's how you win the Nobel Prize, right? Seeing what others can't?

(Beat.)

Mate in 3 moves. Queen H4, Rook D3, Knight F5.

(JACK stares at the board, amazed.)

JACK

Ha! Yes, partners it is! We share all our research. My name goes first on the papers, of course.

ADA

We'll toss a coin. That's how it works in quantum physics, isn't it? Coin tosses and rolls of the dice?

JACK

You read my paper. I'm impressed. Most people don't understand quantum computing.

ADA

I followed most of it, but you lost me with the entangled particles. Two particles, separated by vast distances, each with the opposite spin, one controlling the other.

JACK

No, not controlling, but working together, like partners. Here, let me show you.

(Speaking louder.)

Alexa, play some dance music, please.

(Music plays.)

JACK

Something a bit less frantic, please. This is a physics demonstration, not *Dancing with the Stars*.

(Music changes.)

(To ADA) Let's dance.

ADA

Excuse me?

JACK

You stay there, and we'll dance together, as if we were actually touching. We'll start with a simple box step.

(JACK holds out his arms as if he were holding ADA. He starts dancing. ADA, standing several feet away, follows his lead. They mime dancing together, separated by several feet.)

See? Two entangled particles always have the opposite spin. The instant one of us moves, the other moves, too. Imagine two particles, mirror images, separated by vast, endless space, but forever synchronized, forever entangled.

(They continue to "dance" together.)

ADA

But if the particles are separated, how do they communicate?

JACK

That's the mystery. Einstein called it "spooky actions" and it's why he rejected quantum physics.

(ADA dances closer. They are almost touching. JACK, startled, steps back.)

Alexa, stop the music.

(The music stops.)

ADA

Do you think it's possible for two people to become so entangled that nothing can ever separate them?

JACK

Quantum theory describes elemental particles, not people.

(Beat.)

But it's your research on memory transfer I want to talk about. Based on your paper, the simulation should start on a memorable day.

ADA

Yes, because stronger memories are easier to transfer. If you had to choose the most unforgettable day of your life, what day would you pick?

JACK

It would be the day I won the Nobel Prize. Not the ceremony, that was just a bad fish dinner, but the day I realized my research was finally coming together.

ADA

I would choose the day I met my husband.

JACK

That's very romantic, but since I haven't met your husband, I'm stuck with the boring old Nobel Prize.

ADA

You can't meet my husband. He died two months ago.

JACK

Oh. I'm sorry for your loss. I noticed you were wearing a wedding ring, and I assumed-- He must have been a remarkable man.

ADA

Yes, he was.

(Beat.)

So, in this computer simulation, would it be possible for us to introduce real people who could interact with the simulation in the virtual space?

JACK

Interesting. I hadn't thought that far, but theoretically--

ADA

And this third-party visitor, could she guide the consciousness towards the correct solution?

JACK

She? (*Looking around.*) I have this strange feeling of déjà vu. Something's not right.

ADA

Sit down, Jack. Sit down and stay calm. Deep breaths.

JACK

I feel like I've been here before. I know you.

ADA

Yes. Our research was a success. I quantified your consciousness and you figured out how to imprint it onto a computer chip. But each time we run the simulation it destabilizes, and the program freezes.

JACK

Yes, I remember now. I started the simulation on the happiest day of my life. But it wasn't the day I won the Nobel Prize, it was--

ADA

It was the day that you and I found one another. It's today, Jack. Right now.

JACK

(Astonished.) Today is the happiest day of my life.

ADA

(Fingering her ring.) I'm wearing our wedding ring. Do you remember what you engraved, on the inside?

JACK

Yes. "Forever Entangled."

(*Beat.*)

Ada? I love you, Ada--

(*JACK reaches for her but then freezes.*)

(*The stage lighting noticeably changes and becomes brighter as BEVERLY, a confident, 25-year-old computer scientist wearing graduate school grunge, strides onto the stage, electronic notebook in hand.*)

(*JACK walks to first position, hands in his pockets, frozen and smiling at the audience, as per the start of the play.*)

BEVERLY

That's it, Professor. The simulation froze again. I'm rebooting the whole system now.

ADA

I got farther this time. We're almost there.

BEVERLY

Closer each time, but we never get there. When he realizes it's a simulation the whole system crashes.

ADA

This is going to work. I know Jack's in there.

BEVERLY

We've been doing this day and night for 2 months. Professor Ricker's dead. You need to stop torturing yourself.

ADA

Yes, but the Turing Test--

BEVERLY

Believing something is real doesn't make it real.

ADA

That's the problem with The Turing Test, isn't it? Who's to say what's real? Let's start again, please, Beverly.

(BEVERLY hesitates, then nods. She turns and exits, typing into her pad as she walks.

The lights dim again as JACK restarts as before. The only difference is this time ADA watches, gradually drawing closer.)

JACK

Have you ever experienced déjà vu, that bizarre feeling that you've been somewhere before? I get it all the time. Sometimes I feel like my life's an endless computer loop, running through the same problem over and over.

That's not a bad thing - some problems are so irascibly fascinating I'd gladly spend forever trying to solve them. Working on them is like the joy of playing a great chess game--

(JACK pauses and goes to the chess board, staring at it. He starts to move a piece but stops as ADA speaks.)

ADA

Mate in 3 moves, Jack. Queen H4, Rook D3, Knight F5.

(JACK does not move the piece. He returns to face the audience.)

JACK

It's the joy of getting your first clean run of a computer program, or the excitement of falling in love.

(A long pause as JACK distracted, stares into the distance.)

Yes! That's what it's like. Like falling in love.

(JACK turns and looks at something he senses is there. He stares directly at ADA.)

(ADA reaches out to him. She brushes her hand gently against his face.)

(JACK senses her but cannot see her. Giving up he turns to face the audience again.)

I almost had it. I nearly had it. But now... it's gone.

(ADA, overcome, covers her face as JACK struggles to remember.)

FADE TO BLACK

To My Dear Childhood Friend, Jill

Ronnie Jewell Jr.

You were my first “best friend” on Grove Drive
Pulaski, Virginia 1975.

How we loved the snow days away from school.
Oh, what fools we were!

The blistery cold boots too loose for our tiny feet.
The Saran Sandwich Wrappers gripped with rubber bands around our snow
gloves

to avoid frost bite.

Runny noses, watery eyes, cold winds that made our bodies ache.

Yet we still did not want to come inside to the warmth of the fireplace and
Mama’s hot chicken noodle soup.

Then one day you moved away.
All the way to English Forest Road.
Just down the block and to the right,
At the very end of the street.

But it might as well have been Paris, Brazil,
Or even Kalamazoo.
You were no longer my childhood friend next door.

Now here we are in 2025,
Far beyond just down the block to the right,
At the very end of the street.

I ventured off to Michigan,
And you found a new home in Florida.
But we’re still just a text away.

Not nearly as nifty . . .
After all, we’re both now in our fifties.
But at least we still have our teeth,
And you have Walt Disney.

Through the Pages

Remi Bueche



Digital Art

Tranquility Garden

Jonah Lyn Hayes



Mixed Media

Untamed Embrace

Monica Mullins



Photography

Cloudscapes

Elsbeth Lamont



Photography

The Cloud Weaver

Gabriel Vink

I am the assistant to the Cloud Weaver. That mysterious figure with skin and hair as pale as the clouds he weaves. He says that his name is Gale. I think he chose that name himself. He rides across the skies in his airship with its red sails, feathered wings, and four bird legs with talons at the end. He flies where his work takes him.

My work is much lower than Gale's: I keep the airship clean. I patch up the sails when needed. I check the wings for injury. I feed the airships furnace stomach. After every day's work, Gale always tells me, "Good work, Finlay. Get some rest." I'm glad to be appreciated because I did the job right, but I feel as though I could do more.

On days with less work, I watch Gale work. I see how he is the Cloud Weaver. He begins by mixing elixirs that would be the envy of any court sorcerer if they saw them. With the elixirs made and bottled, Gale finds a spot in the sky that calls to him and begins. Out on the deck, he wields his looming staff and plugs different elixirs in. The top part of the staff is complex with many pieces whirling and twirling, moving up and down, working the mixture of elixirs through the loom, and creating a cloud.

I've wanted to help Gale in his work for some time now. I finally worked up the courage and told him, "I want to help you weave clouds." Gale replied by trying to comfort me, "Your work is very important, Finlay. I couldn't run this ship without you as assistant. You work hard and you do the job right. You don't need to take on more responsibilities to prove your worth."

"No," I responded, holding my ground and position, "I want to learn how to weave clouds because I want to learn how to weave clouds."

Gale smiled, "We'll start tomorrow."

The next day, I joined Gale in his workshop to create elixirs. He had set some ingredients out for me and took his time to instruct me, "The most important part of mixing is to do it with care. No part of this process can be rushed."

I tried my best to follow along. I crushed some of the strange ingredients down and poured them together into the bowl.

I must have added one too many ingredients and poured them together too fast as a wild, unfinished cloud expanded and filled the workshop. Gale gave a small reassuring laugh, “Accidents happen. Just make sure to learn from them.”

We headed onto the deck. Gale had a spot already in mind for me. He handed me the looming staff with the elixirs plugged in. He made sure I held it right, talking about how it operates, “It works on ambition. You have to want it, but you also can’t force it. Not wanting it enough shouldn’t be a problem for you, Finlay; however, wanting it too much will cause the cloud to become jammed upon itself, creating a terrible storm.”

I tried my best to find the balance between wanting and demanding. I held firm in my position, trying to get it to work. The loom reacted, spitting and sputtering, but it wasn’t producing a cloud. Gale gently grabbed my arms, “Easy,” he said. He had me sway them back and forth just slightly. Soon, the loom moved smoothly and a cloud escaped it. A bit grayer then usually, but still light and fluffy.

Gale praised my work, “Well done. Very well done. It may cause a bit of a drizzle, but that isn’t a problem.”

“Oh?” I responded.

“No. Rain is often necessary. What we want to avoid are bad storms.”

Gale took the looming staff back. He looked at me and said, “Good work, Finlay. We’ll go over shapes and get more into storms later. For now, I want you to appreciate the sky we helped create.”

Gale continued his work as the Cloud Weaver, and I did what he requested. I sat and watched the skies. The vast blue sky, the fluffy clouds, and the bright sun although I made sure not to look at it directly. I had spent so long watching Gale that I had forgotten to watch what he created.

The clouds really were beautiful.

Where I'm From

Ca'Mya Jackson

I'm from a place where
your time is racing.

I'm from a place where you have to
watch your every step.

I'm from a place where you
never know when everything might end.

Where I'm from might be scary but
it's also very beautiful.

Where I'm from there is
always light in the darkness.

Where I'm from there Is
joy, love, and hope.

Where I'm from there are
good and bad days, but there is always tomorrow.

That is the
beauty of where I'm from.

Jewelry

Laura Soprano

My grandmothers brass ring,
with a little turquoise stone on the top.
My mothers old locket,
inside is a picture of me and my dog.
A bracelet my best friend made me.
In third grade out of braided string.
My first pair of earrings,
they were my sister's,
made of diamond.
A rosary passed down in my family through generations.
My mother's mother's mother owned that piece,
and many before her.
A set of bangle bracelets,
my father molded them for me in the garage.
A bracelet I made in middle school,
matching with a girl I no longer call a friend.
She still lives in my heart.
Each piece holds a story,
a little part of me.
They hold meaning,
memories of those I love,
and those who came before me.

it's always something

Rachel Trejo

sometimes i lose myself in it all
running out, its your name i call
cool air reaching my warm skin
as you turn i feel my head spin
let me reveal what i've left unsaid
though you'll cut in, shaking your head
your words meet mine with indifference
while my mind runs interference
i'm sure you didn't mean it that way
it was comfort you wanted to convey
of course my love will be reciprocated
my heart, no longer armor-plated
and i'm right back where i should be
hearing you say that you love me
but I'm staring at those stars i stuck to my ceiling
i guess i will always be dreaming

Acceptance

Elijah Parmley

Nobody wants to be other.
Abandoned outside, stuck looking in.
Yet everybody gets a label.
Pushed to the outskirts.

We all want to be free,
Independent of expectation.
Yet, we always divide,
Why do we live this way?
Categorized and trapped.

A suffering world,
Built on exclusion.
Now imagine instead:
A world full of chosen I's and not forced We's,
Would it be so bad?

They say life is what you make of it,
Yet what life have we made?
Poverty, war, division, and pain.

They tell me who I am,
I disagree.
They say to 'find yourself.'
But I am myself.
Who else is there?

Reliving Defeat

Kyron Zoet

“Five!... Six!...Seven!” Roared a pride of wrestlers, clumsily crashing into the mat room wall hands first, abruptly halting them before the coach’s whistle sent them into a crazed sprint once more. *Tweet!*

Off they went, tires gripping the tarmac while their engines produced too much horsepower for perspiration to moderate. Even so, they pushed through. Exhaustion ripped the power from the lions’ roar as they closed in on the hunt’s conclusion. “Nine!” *Tweet!*

Leading the pack on each repetition was a dingy pair of Asics, tattered from countless sprints. Their vibrant, youthful red scraped, slid, and shifted to a muted, dull hue from countless scraps, sprawls, and scrambles. Droplets of sweat painted the mat as it rained from their bodies, for their stretched-out t-shirts could drink no more. Their bodies labored as will alone permitted them to continue their pursuit. For the last time, they barrel into the wall, throwing caution to the wind. One by one, dropping like flies, they crumpled to the ground with relief and sank into the soft floor.

Within the weathered shoes were Albert Rhinestone’s feet. He had an unassuming posture about him, the kind that easily blends in, a stark contrast to his early days of mischief. He had been trying to work himself toward isolation, shutting others out, yet he maintained good relationships with his brothers on the team. As he undid the flimsy laces, he heard the same old hollerin’ as usual. “Man, if he can whoop us with those, imagine he got some real shoes to work with!” they joked. Playing along, he shouted back lightheartedly,

“These shoes got plenty of life left! Especially if it’s you, I’m wrestlin’!” The room shared a couple of spirited “OOOOHHHH’s” while the mood was high.

Calling them wrestling shoes in their senile, deformed state would be dishonest, though. After years of soaking-wet workouts without a day’s rest to dry, they had worn and deteriorated into a floppy mess. Resembling a sock from a trampoline park much more than anything an elite athlete would use to achieve glorious victory. Crisp white socks gleamed through the rips and non-existent material lost to time.

Albert clasped onto the back of his heel one at a time and removed the form-fit sock-shoes from his already half-visible feet. Throwing them aside,

the Asics' lifeless forms spilled out, landing belly up as if they were rotting whales baking in the sun after a relentless shark onslaught. Stitches spread out at the seams like whiskers. The rubber outsoles were worn through at the balls, revealing fresh insoles, the kind that looked like they were filled with transparent packets of blueberry jelly. Despite their condition, Albert was determined to abuse them further with no planned retirement. It isn't so easy surrendering such sentimental shoes.

"One last reminder, Guys!" Coach boomed, "Don't forget lots of rest. It will be a war tomorrow, so prepare accordingly. And Rhinestone... Get some new shoes for Pete's sake." Once again, and with more fire, the room lit up in laughter. After a while, the team disbanded, and only two remained. Albert collected his cloying artifacts, too soppy to relinquish them to a life of ease. He held them close to his chest as they headed for the exit together.

The room was empty and alone after they had left for home together. Upon arrival, a distinct smell blasted Albert's nose like a right hook. His mother, Mrs. Rhinestone, had prepared a nutritious supper, anticipating his appetite. She inquired about the boys' day. He humored her, but his words lacked depth; his mind was still elsewhere. Hastily, Albert wolfed down the delicious chicken breast and steamed broccoli combo, eager to earn his strawberry dessert. Further incentivized by the weight of his body, a grueling practice always amplified gravity, forcing him into hibernation early. Quickly, the boy dreamed away the night while his body was hard at work repairing the damage accumulated through training. The past emerges within his fantasies as usual.

Rejuvenated by the healing powers of an eight-hour slumber, Albert sprang from bed. In the kitchen, he briefly entertained his mother's conversation while scarfing down an omelet. "Slow down! I thought you didn't even like school! Why are you in such a hurry to leave me?" she teased. Wishing the best, Mrs. Rhinestone squeaked in a final reminder, "Don't forget your lucky shoes that Dad got; Love you!"

School passively washed over Albert that day. His mind was elsewhere. The meet. Or something else?

His consciousness began only as he extracted the mature Asics from his adolescent wrestling bag. Before long, they would head out to war with Albert; he was counting on them to linger, just a while longer.

Loudspeaker fuzz accompanied the announcer's strong voice. "At 132 pounds, Albert Rhinestone!" he thundered. The crowd responded

with moderate applause; Albert could not hear it as his mind was elsewhere, consumed by the final gift his father imparted to him. A dashing pair of cherry red Asics. They chirped like courtside seats at an NBA game. They sparkled under the spotlight long ago, when the man who raised him watched mat side without fail.

One last time, his father would accompany him on the mat. They strutted towards the center, father and son. Waiting for them was a wide, but thin, red ankle band armed with velcro at each end. Albert knelt to pick it up and wrap the band promptly around his crew sock. At such proximity to his beloved Asics, he noticed fatal gouges accrued during warm-ups. Before now, his mind had been elsewhere. Hope lost, Albert realized for them, it was a kamikaze mission. Sweat dripped from his stoic nose as he looked down at the shoes. His body shuddered helplessly centerstage as he was ripped apart from his father, all over again.

Hajj, Inshallah

Liam Snipes

I am dozing
At an angle of 45 degrees
And I feel
Little brown toes pressing
Gently into the small of my back
Tired and dusty—
Albeit physically and financially able—
From walking the sacred pilgrimage
His knees are scraped
From kneeling before
Masjid al-Haram
He is the closest I've ever sat
To piety
And yet
He is heading home
To Chicago

And the American standard is
Bumping book spines into my elbow
Loud and boyishly unashamed
His words glaze over
His well groomed teeth
Shiny, slick, and *meretricious*
To me, they taste filthy
And I hate him
Only because I speak his mother tongue
And because I know the English word
For bitch
And maybe because his voice
Reminds me I'm going home

Hashtag Conversation

Erin Hoffman



Gouache and Mixed Media

Beach Day for a Turtle

Iris Replogle



Acrylic

Glass Blue Birds

Lauren Burkett



Watercolor and Colored Pencil

Antelope Canyon

Ruby Dyk



Photography

eulogy for fish and roadkill

August Hawley

i think i may have told you, a long time ago, that when
i was young my father bought fish after fish
from the corner aquarium of a walmart supercenter,
even though he could not keep any of them alive.
half of them were supposed to be mine,
the other half my sister's.
but i was small—i needed a stool just to be tall enough
to put my nose to the glass and be eye to eye
with these creatures that were supposed to belong to me,
but never did for more than a few days.
you should know that i wasn't sad because,
although i knew about death,
i didn't understand that fish were alive. and my dad was never
disturbed by the sight of them
floating at the top of the water, so i didn't know that i
should have been.
now, i look back and i do not remember what
species of fish we were bringing home just to bury;
i do not remember if i named them. i don't know if they ever
looked at me, the benevolent
but unfeeling god that spared them fish flakes and
watched them suffer, if they studied the scratches on my face
and fingers. i wonder if they understood that i was alive,
if they knew more about the world than i did.
i hope, like you in the street that night,
aching for a young buck as he took his last breath,
that somebody on this earth knew enough to mourn them,
and to bear witness.
what a miserable and remarkable gift, to deliver
the testimony of a final moment and feel a dull blade
between the ribs when something dies, to love it as it's leaving.
he was alive. this mattered; it matters, still.
i think that's what the poets must mean when they say pain
is beautiful.

Moments

Iris Replogle

CHARACTERS:

JAX, young adult, they/them

THE DEPRESSION, Speaks in a dramatic and impossibly cheerful manner

AT RISE:

JAX is slumped down in a chair, asleep. THE DEPRESSION wanders into the room and stands over them grinning with menace.

JAX

Mmmmm... (*Opens their eyes.*)

THE DEPRESSION

Hello!

JAX

Ahhh! DEPRESSION!? What are you doing here? I just woke up!

THE DEPRESSION

Yep! And you seem to have woken up late... again! Feel guilty now!

JAX

Do I have to?

THE DEPRESSION

Oh, yes. Indeed, you must.

JAX

But that's what I always do. Can't we change it up a bit?

THE DEPRESSION

(*In a singsong.*) Guilty, guilty, guilty, oh yes you must feel guilty! You woke up late, what a fate, everyone must really hate- youuuu! Feel guilty!

JAX

Fine...

(*After several moments JAX stands.*)

THE DEPRESSION

And, what do you think you are doing?

JAX

I'm going to go to the bathroom and brush my hair. Then I'm going to take a shower.

THE DEPRESSION

Oh, really?

JAX

Yes.

THE DEPRESSION

That sounds like an awful lot of work, don't you think?

JAX

Not really. I think those are pretty average things that people do when they get up in the morning.

THE DEPRESSION

Hmm... I think those things will be hard for you though. I wonder... oh never mind...

JAX

What?!

THE DEPRESSION

Oh, nothing much. I was just wondering if maybe since that normal thing that everyone does is hard for you... Well, maybe that means *you* are a failure?

JAX

(Points at THE DEPRESSION.) See that's what you'd like me to believe-

THE DEPRESSION

Just a thought. Harmless really, but you should probably consider it. Frequently.

JAX

Yeah but- grr! *(They wave their finger helplessly.)* I'm going to go get ready. *Don't* follow me.

(THE DEPRESSION follows JAX into the bathroom. JAX stands at the counter and stares straight ahead.)

JAX

You seem to have followed me DEPRESSION.

THE DEPRESSION

So I have! Well look at that! Do you know what you should do? I'll give you a hint. Go back to bed! Hey! Hey Jax? Guess what?

JAX

No thank you.

THE DEPRESSION

Okay, I'll just tell you then.

JAX

That's okay; you really don't have to do that.

THE DEPRESSION

I think you might be worthless! Isn't that food for thought? Great analysis of mine, don't you think?

JAX

(Rubs their hands over their face and groans.) Please just shut up, will you?

THE DEPRESSION

The more I think about it the more I'm quite sure it's true. Oh wow, Jax you're definitely worthless! For sure. Hey, how does that make you feel?

JAX

I'm depressed... *(They put their arms on the counter and lean down with their head bent.)*

THE DEPRESSION

That is the idea, yes.

JAX

I have to brush my teeth too... I forgot about that.

THE DEPRESSION

What did you say?

JAX

(Straightens up.) I have to brush my teeth; I'd forgotten about tooth brushing.

THE DEPRESSION

You forgot about tooth brushing!? What a failure! Be ashamed, very ashamed.

JAX

I think I'll just brush my teeth instead. *(They start reaching for the toothbrush.)*

THE DEPRESSION

You ran out of toothpaste last night though, remember? So, in order to brush your teeth, you have to go into the kitchen and get the new toothpaste from that drawer where you always stuff things you don't want to put away and-

JAX

Okay! Fine! Fine, I'll skip tooth brushing for now. I'll take a shower instead.

(JAX pushes away from the counter and starts to walk across the room. THE DEPRESSION smirks.)

JAX

You're going to make this difficult, aren't you?

THE DEPRESSION

Who me? Oh, definitely.

JAX

Fine, shower's out of the question then. *(They turn back toward the counter.)* Hair brushing? Can I do that?

THE DEPRESSION

Brushing your hair is probably out of the question as well.

JAX

Oh really?

THE DEPRESSION

Yep.

JAX

What if I just did it anyway? All I have to do is brush my hair. Not too complicated.

THE DEPRESSION

(Snorts.) Sure, not too complicated! All you have to do is pick up one foot, set it down. Pick up the other foot, set it down. Then you'd be close enough to reach it... then all you have to do is lift your arm up, extend it out, maybe lean forward a little, then close your fingers around the handle! So simple *really*.

JAX

Shut up.

THE DEPRESSION

Lift it up, place it on your head. Pull it in a downward motion- ouch it found a tangle! Tip your hand this way then that, untangle the tangle. So easy. Lift your arm-

JAX

Oh, screw you!

(JAX grabs the brush and waves it wildly at THE DEPRESSION! THE DEPRESSION ducks away from them, as they shout and continue to wave the

brush.)

THE DEPRESSION

Well!

(JAX brushes their hair smugly while THE DEPRESSION scowls. When JAX is finished they set down the brush and smile.)

JAX

Now for breakfast. *(They walk into the kitchen.)* Ugh... it's such a mess in here!

THE DEPRESSION

(Is gleeful once again.) Oh, yes it definitely is! I told you to put the dishes away last night.

JAX

No, you did not.

THE DEPRESSION

But did you listen to me? No. No you didn't! Would you like me to sing a little song for you JAX?

JAX

No, thank you.

THE DEPRESSION

Are you sure? It's a good one! It's about you!

JAX

Let me guess, it's about how I didn't put the dishes away and how that probably means I'm a failure? And how they are going to keep piling up until I have no dishes left and then what will I do?

THE DEPRESSION

(Starts to singsong.) Oh, JAX is a failure! Their dishes aren't clean! Or put awayyy!

JAX

Stop singing! I get it already! Ugh! I want to go back to sleep...

THE DEPRESSION

(No longer singing.) Oh yes, you should!

JAX

I can't; I have to work.

THE DEPRESSION

My job is to make *you* miserable.

JAX

Mission success.

(JAX takes a deep breath in, THE DEPRESSION is gleeful, JAX lets out the breath, running their fingers through their hair.)

JAX

I need to eat.

THE DEPRESSION

Ooooo! Now, that, I think, will be a challenge! Good luck!

JAX

Grrr! I need to eat.

(JAX walks over to the fridge and opens it, THE DEPRESSION follows.)

THE DEPRESSION

(Mock offended.) What did I say?

(JAX ignores THE DEPRESSION, setting about the process of making toast.)

THE DEPRESSION

What?! What is it? Hello? Hi? Hello? Hello! JAX! Hello! JAX! JAX!!

JAX

I'm ignoring you.

THE DEPRESSION

And how is that going for you so far?

JAX

Grrrr... I have to go to work. *(They start towards the door only to stop.)* I haven't taken a shower yet!

THE DEPRESSION

Oooo! You wanna know what that brings to mind?

JAX

Nope.

THE DEPRESSION

It brings to mind the word... let me think here.

JAX

I know! What if I don't let you think? What if I just do this instead?

(JAX runs in a circle waving their arms around and screaming. THE DEPRESSION frowns. JAX stops running and stands still again, panting

slightly and grinning.)

How about that? Was that nice? What did you think? Shall I do it again?

THE DEPRESSION

The word that comes to mind is ewww.

JAX

(Stops grinning instantly.) I really hate you.

THE DEPRESSION

That's funny 'cuz I make you hate yourself!

JAX

I don't find that particularly amusing.

THE DEPRESSION

You wouldn't.

JAX

How do you manage to make every word that comes out of your mouth detrimental to me in some way?

THE DEPRESSION

(Proudly.) It's a skill of mine.

JAX

Yeah. Well... I don't have time for your skill as I must go to work.

THE DEPRESSION

What about that shower? Hey! JAX?

JAX

What is it now?

THE DEPRESSION

Aren't you still wearing the clothes you wore to bed?

JAX

(With sarcasm.) Why yes, *lovely* Depression, so I am.

THE DEPRESSION

You don't plan on wearing them to work do you? That would be quite disgusting. You know, you are pretty disgusting.

JAX

I do not plan on wearing them to work, I plan on taking a shower. And you can shut it. I am not disgusting.

THE DEPRESSION

You'd better look at the clock.

JAX

The clock? Why? I'm doing well for time.

THE DEPRESSION

Don't you remember how you woke up late?

JAX

Yes. But I just looked at the clock. I've got time.

THE DEPRESSION

Maybe just look again though.

JAX

Grrr. Fine- Oh my *word*! How did it get so late it was literally just- agggg!

THE DEPRESSION

See I told you-

JAX

Shut it! Keep shutting it! Never stop shutting it! Yes, you have won; I don't have time for a shower! Good for you, one point for THE DEPRESSION! Now I'm going to go put on some nice fresh clothes and I'm going to wash my face. You stay there. Can you do that? Do you have it in you? Eh? Great.

(JAX stomps away, they wash their face and pull on a sweater. THE DEPRESSION follows in brooding silence.)

THE DEPRESSION

What if you just skip out on today?

JAX

On work?

THE DEPRESSION

Yeah. On work.

JAX

Ha! Very funny.

THE DEPRESSION

It's another one of my good ideas.

JAX

I don't think I'm ever going to place the word '*good*' in a sentence that has anything to do with you. Unless the sentence is '*goodbye*'.

(They wave at THE DEPRESSION.)

THE DEPRESSION

How clever.

JAX

(Smiling mock sweetly.) Oh, how delightfully sarcastic you are! Would you like to stay home today?

THE DEPRESSION

I think I'll just come with you. Along for the ride. That's me!

JAX

Fantastic. And shall I also hold the door for you?

THE DEPRESSION

Yes, you should.

JAX

Just wonderful... exactly how I wanted to spend my day.

THE DEPRESSION

No, it's not.

JAX

No, it's not. But I might as well make the most of it.

THE DEPRESSION

And how's that going for you?

JAX

I really hate when you ask me that question.

THE DEPRESSION

I know. Isn't it great!?

JAX

This way Depression. I must be off!

THE DEPRESSION

Wait! Aren't you just so tired!?

(THE DEPRESSION lies on the floor and grabs JAX'S ankles.)

JAX

Not listening!

THE DEPRESSION

So. How long do you think I'll be sticking around? Do you think- oh I

don't know maybe forever!?

(JAX takes a step dragging THE DEPRESSION after them.)

JAX

I do think that sometimes yeah... but you know what I just remembered? My co-worker just adopted a cat.

THE DEPRESSION

You couldn't have a cat. I'm around too often. You wouldn't be able to take care of it.

JAX

And I really want to see pictures of their cat.

THE DEPRESSION

JAX? Hello! Are you listening! Can you hear me JAX!?

JAX

Yes, Depression, I can hear you. You know when I fought you with the hairbrush? Ha! That was a good moment. Quite grand. I think- seeing pictures of that cat will be similar.

THE DEPRESSION

Did you know you make no sense?

JAX

It makes sense to me. You've made things really hard this morning. But there were a few good moments too. Good moments amidst the hard ones. And do you know what DEPRESSION? The good moments are worth it.

CURTAIN

One Day

Lillian Ver Duin

This Place is a home
Like no other will be
But there is a home
I see in my dreams

A home that is waiting
Waiting for me
Out there somewhere
A future unknown
For now we will wait
A future untold
And I'll see you next
Just us alone

Alone in my dreams
A future we hold

The Other Side

Reese Bancuk



Photography

Tunnel Vision

Monica Mullins



Photography

Fall Hues

Monica Mullins



Photography

Sunset Paradise on Lake Michigan

Kassidy Lamblin



Photography

Suncatcher

Jules Porath

The marble sits on the edge of a bookshelf, forgotten for the moment. It finds that it does not mind. The smooth, dark wood it sits on makes a nice resting place, and dust has not yet collected on its gleaming surface.

The child whose shelf it currently inhabits once played with it often, rolling it down blocky, multicolored slides with other sphere-like objects. It commiserated with rocks, ping-pong balls, and occasionally a group of peppercorns that the child smuggled from their mother's spice cabinet. The other objects were treated much more harshly than itself. As it is a fragile being, the child's parents had scolded them more than once for the small scratches and chips that had begun to mar in its transparent surface. The marble remembers huffing about when the blemishes first appeared, but, after years of being tossed around, it now wears the pockmarks with pride.

"Look at me," the abrasions announce for the marble. "I have been played with well, and now I will wait until I am found and used again."

It gazes around the space, huffing a laugh at the new additions. Posters of the child's favorite video game characters cover the electric blue walls; each one hung a little crooked. The layout of the room changes almost monthly due to the child's wild imagination, and the small glass orb gets jostled around more than once, settling into each new location with ease. It is not unhappy with occasionally observing its quarters from a different perspective.

This time, it is rolled behind a pair of chatty, untouched books. They mutter to each other about grammar, dialogue, and, most importantly, the contents of their stories. One announces in a boisterous voice that it is a great epic, where the hero defeats the monster and gets the girl, with no small amount of tragedy sandwiched between its used leather cover. The other spews poetry verses and semantics of symbolism in a whisper, only raising its voice when in a heated argument about the use of a semicolon. The marble forms its own opinions but stays silent. No need to interrupt their banter. The child may remember it eventually, and it will be handled again. Maybe it will once again encounter the energetic peppercorns and mention these lively books. The dried berries would laugh, and laugh, and laugh.

After a month, the marble settles in. Usually, the arrangement of the room would have changed by now, but perhaps something else has taken the child's attention. The space grows cooler as summer comes to an end. The books, so caught up in their transgressions, never detect the marble—and

if they notice at all, they never bother to say “hello.”

Time passes, and winter arrives for the year. The bright blue walls are a reminder of the clear sky the objects could see out of the window in the warmer months. Dust begins to collect on the marble, softening its shine. It spends the hours listening to the rattle of the heater shoved into some corner of the room and the howling of the winter wind just outside their warm room.

One day, a stray ray of sunlight manages to hit the marble from its relatively secluded spot, startling it from its midday slumber. A spectrum of hues emerges from the glass sphere, scattering lines of color from its uneven sides. The books finally seem to notice it. The poetry book, mid-sentence, cuts itself off with a dramatic gasp.

“You never mentioned you could do that!” it gripes, its pages fluttering with annoyance. The epic, for once, goes quiet, and seems to be contemplating the soft light making the golden lettering on its cover glow. The poetry book fills the silence after a beat, sputtering out, “I mean, I always knew, it fits my format.” Convincing no one, before turning to the epic, both staying unexpectedly silent as the ray of sun moves on.

As the light fades, the marble does not give a sigh of defeat. It sits in the corner of the bookshelf, dusty and forgotten. The sunbeam has moved on, the rainbow gone, but the memory of light lingers in its tiny scratches. It finds that it does not mind. After all, it has been played with well, it has dazzled these indignant books, and it now cherishes the impression of what it felt like to catch the sun.

How Fine a Day to Be Alive

Caleb Klein

The air smells so sweet, and the sun warmly meets,
On my skin, as it shines to strive,
And the grass is so soft on my well wintered feet,
How pleasant a day to be alive;
And so, I walk on through those well wintered woods,
Which have sprung as the spring arrives,
And I hear the birds singing oh so sweetly,
How fine a day to be alive;
And here are the flowers with the buzzing bees,
To carry nectar back to their hives,
For the buzzing bees know the nectar is sweet,
How sweet a day to be alive;
When I look to the mountains, what do I see?
Majestic and magnificent to my eyes?
I see a towering wonder—a mighty work of God,
How wonderful a day to be alive;
I see the brook in all its bubbling wonder,
Its soft tinkling, and I realize,
How wondrous is the Lord to make all of this beauty,
What a beautiful day to be alive.

Origins

Madison Boone

A little boy sits on the edge of his bed
He's fixing a radio in the twilight
He yearns for music beyond his head
Soft whispers of jazz, and he holds through the night

A precarious innocence, that of only a child
Who wants to be loved and understood
To live unguarded, so wild
Who searches always for the good

A little boy is woken up at sunrise
With dapples of purple and yellow and black
A sight familiar for his eyes
Yet he asks- "what is it that I lack?"

From running around the yard
Calling himself super
Daring himself to guard
To lace up his own sutures

He grows as tall as the trees
In between the sands of time
He fails to ask please
He takes what is mine

Memories slip away, and oh, they fade
Miniscule ripples on a pond
He owns his own blade
A puncture, a song

To ensure to never be forgotten
Pain recycled, etched into my brain
Of love grown sour and rotten
Years on, fresh as the morning rain

A little boy learns worthlessness, how to feel like dirt
A strong resolve to bare no resemblance, to forge his own way
A little boy learns how to hurt
Just in different ways

In the throes of power and control
Lives the scared little boy
Who yearns to have an understood soul
But instead chooses to destroy

A little boy sits at the edge of his bed
At the age of 25
His hands are a sordid red
He gets what he wants; memories alive
In exchange for a part of me that dies

FFWD

Ronnie Jewell Jr.

Far back in the traces of my memory,
From the days of my youth I recall,
How I (as a young boy) was intrigued
By the symbols on a picture that hung on the wall.

Four letters: FFWD

I asked my devoted father to explain the meaning to me.

He picked up his mother's Bible
And carefully selected the words
Found in the first book of Samuel,
And this is the story I remembered I heard:

How Jonathan, the King's beneficiary,
Unselfishly gave up a crown
In a Fraternal Friendship With David
That love and truth might abound.

The theme of this beautiful story,
First told in the pages of Ruth
Shall find us together forever
In friendship, love, and truth.

Epilogue

Ronnie Jewell Jr.

I see them on a Sabbath morning,
Dressed up in their Sunday best,
Going up the Hill to sing over loved ones departed.

And watch them open their Windows to Heaven
Humming through the scale to the key . . .
The Key to Eternity.

Now their voices ascend to high notes,
Drifting back to the key of middle C,
As they weep and sing over those same departed.

Voices now down low,
As they rejoice on those Sundays long ago.
Singing songs of the Redeemer.

And how they met Him in the Skies,
Ending on a note of triumph!

We shall rise!
Oh, We shall rise!

Enigma

Madison Boone

Like nails on a chalkboard
My memories of you
The heaviness of your sword
The windowsill basil, in bloom

There was an ocean pouring out of me
Pouring from an empty cup
The ocean was pulling me in deep
Yet, it was never enough

We look at each other, staring in the mirror
A half-smile, sharp shadows lining our faces
You threatened to leave minutes ago, left me in tears
A heart cut up in all the tender places

You unbutton your pants
And I unbuttoned my soul
A precarious dance
To give, to be known

Overexposed, your hands held my heart

I was gentle and pure with trust
With forceful hands, you ripped me apart
I was faced with a corrupted lust

Maybe it was hidden in your persistence
I was called property, object, hole
And you forced through my resistance
The names, I thought were a joke

Yet I was your enigma, a fickle being
Oh, so desperate to be known
All the past pain and trauma, you were seeing
And you took it, and created your own

We look at each other under harsh fluorescent lights
Flashes in the dark, and I notice your purple hair
I still have the scars from all those nights
For you turned my life into a nightmare

Comfort, A Dangerous Ally

Kyron Zoet

In the middle of Platte Lake, you sway to the natural wake. Turtles pop up to say hello before resubmerging into the divine water. Their gentle ripples bounce against the hull of your kayak after their calming splashes settle in your ear.

The queen of nature bakes everything in sight from above, including your skin, and that piece of metal screwed into the kayak that melts it with every careless tinge. Suppose the ones responsible for its construction may be forgiven, after all, it's still keeping you dry. Though if you were to get wet, it probably wouldn't hurt; it might even serve as a good refuge for the unrelenting blast-waves persisting overhead.

You settle further into your cushioned seat, carefully bypassing the metal man-made booby-trap. With fingers interlocked on the back of your head and feet kicked up onto the bow, you listen to a flock of feathers flapping together in the distance. Committing to their careers, the birds exude swagger on their free flight; You envy the clarity of their life's purpose. They stretch over the horizon, out of sight. Their path left your gaze in the view of an unsightly telephone pole, and unfortunately for you, that does not come and go so easily. It's none of your concern, though, so back to the water you go, surrendering yourself to its will.

As your shoulders relax, your elbows follow their lead, and your arms drop like leaves. Water hugs your limp fingers, "Ah, the water is quite nice," you think to yourself. Heavy eyelids make consciousness a fleeting luxury in the miraculous wonder of nature's beauty. Peacefully floating with no particular direction; rest will do just fine.

The Game of a Tyrant

Romero Hopkins

I stand tall with my people, my brothers and sisters. The last stand. We face the very icon of tyranny. She looms high over Her subjects on the farthest ridge from us, the militant men and women of Her kingdom stand ready before Her as if terracotta warriors. Firm, hardened by years of service and abuse. I stand at the head of the legion of rebellious men and women of the world. Tired of Her tyranny. Never before has anyone attempted to overthrow the Queen. I size up Janika. The sight of Her boils the very marrow in my bones. The memories of the wasted years I spent as Her “husband” flood my mind as I attempt to stop Her heart with the coldness of my gaze. My anger threatens to uncork itself as She passes a glance over the field, Her troops, my war party, and finally me. She looks bored with it all. I am forced to turn away, ‘lest I should waste my anger on hollow threats. Rather than tell, I will show. Facing the crowd of men and women, all with loved ones, all demanding freedom, I see now that they wait for me to pour courage into them. As the weight of the unspoken request rests itself on my shoulders, I falter, and my eyes seek the ground. I breathe deeply. My lips part. I decided I will not lie.

“The lot of us stand here today, dead men already. I have gathered you but in this, the time for action, I alone cannot bolster you. Rather, I have a request. That whomever should make it from this battle, whether free or slave, remember those who fell today. Remember me. I am Jarod Lokier. Husband the fifth, to the Tyrant Queen. And I fought here today for the freedom of my people, as a true Prince Consort should.” ‘Prince,’ I choke-up on the word. Tears come to my eyes. I am no Prince. As I look out on the faces of the people I am meant to lead, I feel more a génocidaire.

Still, I postured tall. My somber words dissipated in the air about the crowd and my heart grew heavy. The moment, near too much for me to bear. It was easy – to gather men and women who would rather die than be subject to the Tyrant Queen – Yet, now, I wondered what came next. If, perhaps, I would have done better for “my people” if I had simply stayed the fifth ‘*King*’ (as she liked to mock) and been that Woman’s fifth favorite toy.

A voice, hoarse from exposure in the mines, broke the silence. he said, “I am Lambert Kiirk. A lux Miner. I fight so my children will be free from the mines.” A thin man stepped forward, through the crowd. He wore a leather gambeson three times too large and wielded a rusty pickaxe on his shoulder. Proud and with the conviction of ten men, He stood tall and

proudly to the right of me.

Soon another voice, as sweet as a song, a woman clad in shimmering silver plate mail stepped from the crowd. She wielded a large blade made of steel, embossed with gold down either side in ornate patterns. She carried the blade awkwardly in her left hand. She was missing the right. "I am Valentina Calime. The old guard to the Queen. I fight so that her diabolical whims can harm me no longer." She approached before setting her place at my left side and facing the crowd.

Silence again. Until another voice, a woman. Then another, a man. Yet another, a girl, no older than eighteen. One after another men and women announced themselves. The healthy and infirm alike, the cowardly and stalwart, the young and old. They would make themselves known to all who would listen. They would have their presence observed by the Tyrant Queen.

I turn and raise my blade. The Queen is standing now. The smile on Her face, only slightly visible to me at this distance. Yet, this small tell betrays Her. She fears. For the first time in what may be a century, She fears. She raises her hand lazily. Her troops unsheathe and take up a forward ready stance. The sound of unsheathing blades and clatter of improvised weapons in untrained hands rings out. I am heartened anew, "Our soul bolsters our cause! Our hearts ground us! The blood that we share shall grant us victory!" my voice emboldened as I level my blade towards the enemy.

A snap rings through the air. Sharp, yet echoed. Where there should be shouting there is silence. Where there should be the clamber of feet in a charge, silence. It deafens me. Panic seeps into my flesh. I look around and see no other souls on the field. Only me and Her. She has begun the descent from Her ridge, towards me. My blade arm buckles now. I am hit with a realization in the form of a deep emptiness: not only is the battlefield empty, but there is not another soul on this planet. Panic sets itself into my bones. I falter. The ground is so close now. The air, the clearest it's ever been, untainted by the breath of others, yet I cannot catch any of it. My vision blurs. I dare a glance at Her as she menaces closer and closer. So gentle, the sway of her gait. Her "fear", wider, and nearly ear to ear. Panic now streaks through my heart. I do not want to die... Selfishness. What of the brave souls now vanished? Her own troops? vanished. Her ruthlessness? My heart cannot bear it. My lips part, against my commands. A simple, whispered, order. "Stop." To Her? To me? I cannot tell. My arms, the only thing keeping the ground at bay. I dare a glance again. Her footsteps bleed into hearing as the ringing in my ears subsides. The sharp rasp of soft hands being brought together now reaches me. Her sword in

the dirt at the ten-foot mark she approaches. My vision vibrates. My heart threatens to burst my chest to a sinuous mess upon the ground. Through the nauseating thrum of the blood in my veins, I can hear her speak as she approaches me. "Jarod! All this for me?" Looming over me, She giggles softly. I don't pretend bravado. I can't. And now, She begins a noise I'd never heard. In the decades of servitude I had to endure, I had never once heard Her laugh. Yet, now, She near bellows. I'm glad for the noise. It almost eases my soul. I am reaffirmed that I am not entirely alone. So happy I am that I feel I must smile, almost. Rather, I use the last of my strength to prop myself up onto my knees. It is the last defiant action I take. I look into Her eyes though I cannot focus on anything. As I sit lazily, drained of hope, of power, put neatly in my place in this grand game of Hers, She mocks me with a look of surprise. Then, her sickly taunts begin.

"Oho! Look here! Still some fight in you? Oh, I cannot begin to tell you how proud I am of you! This was, far and away, the most enjoyable attempt yet!" The ringing reaches my ears again and I become sick. I didn't think I could drain anymore, but it is now I feel my complexion become drawn. She continues. "You outdid yourself, Jarod! It's usually assassination attempts from you. This time though? Rallying the people, rousing speeches, cutting off supply lines? Well, you're almost a real general. I hadn't any clue you could be so tactical! Maybe if you had exhibited this kind of skill in the first place I'd have kept you! Hah!" A shift. She maintains a strained humor as she continues. "Oh, who am I kidding, if you'd have done any of this in the first place I'd have written you off as a failure and discarded you." At this, She becomes very much less amused. She looks about, at the empty miles of land around us. "Yes," she sighs, "I assume you'd be dead actually, upon further thought." She crouches in front of me. Scowling now, she sighs, "Oh Jarod. I'm afraid this was your last hurrah. I hope I'm wrong." I'm trapped in my kneeling position, our eyes locked. Hers almost somber behind the noticeably receding glee she holds, mine clearly unfocused, manic, and wild as my mind frantically attempts to make sense of anything going on. I search my mind for answers, her face, the environment, I even begin to explore how I feel about the mixture of emotions being produced inside me for answers.

Suddenly, as if jolted by lightning, I am forced out of my panic and into awareness. I inhale deeply. The world coming back into focus. Her fingers, outstretched, retracts from the bridge of my nose as I am suddenly rushed with a flood of understanding of what She is truly capable of. I shrink. I twist. I try to escape the feeling. The feeling of comfort. I know my enemy, what She is capable of in full, and I feel comfort in the fact that I am able to truly let go. It was always for naught. I am terrified yet pleased with the revelation. When it truly sinks beyond my brain stem into my

heart, I give up the fight. A dumb smile plasters across my face, and I am struck with a disgusting euphoria that makes my body twitch gently. "Please," I murmur. My hand raises gently of its own accord as my pathetic plea is carried away on the wind. Her voice only barely brings me out of my stupor as She walks back to the ridge She sat on, what feels like ages ago. "Stand up. Finish the battle. Make it fun." I wince, the want to nod emphatically itches at the nape of my neck.

I kneel for a half hour. I take fifteen minutes to stand. I take another ten to balance my weakened knees. I gather myself just in time for her to conjure back her sickeningly ostentatious throne. She waits, expectantly. As if waking from a dream, I feel released from a spell. I furrow my brow, my anger boils again at her disinterest. A melancholic feeling bubbles in my center. I pick up and wield my blade. A click resounds throughout the world. The sound of unsheathing blades and clatter of improvised weapons in untrained hands resounds around me. My voice carries across the field, emboldened by my battle spirit.

Stoic, statue like soldiers rush towards us. We charge to meet them halfway. The Thing on the ridge inspects its nails.

The 7 bs

Kendall Hibbard

books, before boys, because boys bring babies.

boys suck.

boys are possessive, and aggressive,

aggressive and possessive.

maybe even more possessive than satan himself.

they love to hurt those who are still purer than the cleanest water on earth.

oh no! don't forget to take your pepper spray

with you when you take the garbage out!

and don't get too close to your car or they will cut your achilles,

throw you in the trunk and take you away!

books before boys because boys are brutal.

Sunrise by the Lakeside

Aracely Garcia



Photography

Look Back At Me

Lauren Burkett



Graphite

Campsite #27, Interlochen State Park

Roberta F. King



Black and White Cut Paper

Waiting for a New Beginning

Lillian Ver Duin



Photography

Ghosts

Madison Boone

I drown in the thick grey syrup, in the small room
The heat strangles me, the way I did with you
Your parents are outside, maybe watching cheesy movies or the news
Time slows down, and I embody the gloom

Your hands on my thigh are sharp and insistent
You look at me expectantly, waiting in the dark
Like clawing from an unknown beast, persistent
Still uncertain, yet you start

I know what it is like to be swallowed whole
To be spirited away to a pain unknown
Haunted by memories, or maybe I'm the ghost
Infected by you, I am the host

Haunted by your rough, uncaring touch
Maybe I'm the one who's really dead
For I became a stiff corpse
Shackled to your bed

Emergence

Aracely Garcia

I've always seen beyond what lies on the surface,
A vision beyond the visible, truth laid bare in the eye.
Eyes are mirrors, revealing the beat of a soul,
A glimpse into the heart, the essence of self.

A single sweep of a gaze is all I need
To read the room, to discern the hidden intentions at bay.
Friend or foe, jealousy, envy, arrogance, disloyalty,
The list is never ending, but I know it in the tightening of my chest.

I once lingered too long in places where my worth was muted,
Where my sight traveled further than anyone else dared.
No longer do I silence that tightening in my chest.

Hear me now, those who will listen:
Never let those who wear pride like a crown
Make you feel small enough to bend to their unworthy bounds.
Our silence is not weakness; it is the undercurrent beneath calm waters,
The storm gathering before we rise.

Never trade your worth for company,
For staying dims the light that is uniquely yours.
And if you ever find yourself standing in another's shadow,
Remember: you were never meant to be invisible.

Bittersweet

Madison Boone

I'm an unripened cherry
Hanging on the vine
Sour to the taste
Awaiting the right time

I'm bitter to the tongue
And turning deep red
And when you kissed me I thought
It was all in my head

I'm a fledgling with no flavor to bare
Young petals have fallen only yesterday
You fell for her sweetest stare
And I fell into dismay

Words honeyed like nectar
Her vines embraced
An avid collector
You let none get to waste

I'm alone on my branch
As fresh breath meets the trees
You said no to romance
But you only meant, to me

As new stars spatter the night sky
I am unmellowed, incomplete
What you're looking for, not I
For what you want is sweet

Muskegon Community College in Three Acts

Roberta F. King

Act One 1977-1979

Wonderment

The modern structure of the college confused her. She was perpetually late for classes and frequently lost because of it. Three floors were spread out in a squarish plane with multiple turns in a perplexing order. Floor two was ground level, floor three happened to be the lower level, and floor one was up. There was no wayfinding signage then, just unhelpful room numbers. It seemed like the place she needed to be or wanted to go was across the campus courtyard and creek, in view, but far from where she stood.

There were no bells to let her know it was time to be in the room and the classes started at odd times—9:10 AM or 2:20 PM. She cried in the stairwells between floors. She hated being lost, late and feeling stupid.

Herb Hoffmann, her American History instructor, scared her. He stood bolt upright and spoke loudly with such certainty she didn't even think to question his worldview. She had to take the class twice to get a passing grade. She overslept the 8:10 AM class often.

In Principles of Sociology, her lifelong values regarding feminism, inequity in race, class and gender developed, took hold. Doris Rucks was the first Black professor she ever had. Her own mother—also a teacher—had Black colleagues, so the idea of a Black teacher wasn't foreign. But Mrs. Rucks, was different. Sometimes dressed in African print caftans and she spoke zealously of the summer-long community-building and research projects she led in Gambia and Zimbabwe.

Was it Ken Foster, or maybe Lee Collet? One of those gentle-voiced men taught her Art History in a warm, narrow, dark room. With her chin propped up on her hand, eyelids fluttering, she listened to the magnificent and often twisted stories of artists and while looking at slides of their art, which she one day planned to see.

Her ceramic pieces were awful; if they didn't blow up in the kiln, she ruined the lopsided, lumpy vessels with poor glaze color choices.

She was sure she'd ace Reproduction and Embryology from the kindly Mr. Kane, who would often punctuate his lectures with an enthusiastic "How curious!" as if he was also learning something for the first time. Despite

her interest in sex, she pulled a C in the class.

Her writing fared much better. Mrs. Pataky, looking proper in her classic wool suits, pumps and flowing scarves, liked her poems and essays and encouraged her to write. Her only As and Bs came from English Composition and Creative Writing. She learned Journalism principles from Bruce McCrea, with his gravelly voice and smoker's cough. More than a few times in her professional writing career, she sketched out the inverted pyramid for interns or new coworkers. She wrote a few articles for The Bay Window student paper and stood in thigh-deep snow taking sadly overexposed film images of the National Snurfing contest. For her PE credit, she took a Ballet class from Judy Brooky, but her lack of physical coordination was a source of embarrassment. Still, the creativity and rigor of dance intrigued her, so she wrote about the dance program and interviewed dancers instead. Subjects that evaded her were embraced in writing.

Act Two 1984

Love

After leaving the community college, she earned a BA in journalism and lived in Chicago for a time. Ronald Reagan was President, and the unemployment rate rose into double-digits. She returned to Muskegon to her parents' home to regroup. She wasn't planning to stay long. Muskegon felt dark, heavy and dull. She signed up for an evening drawing class at the college for two reasons: to learn to draw and to meet men who liked art.

From her previous experience in art classes, she knew that in a studio setting, there was plenty of time to get to know other students while sketching trees on campus, when hands were immersed in clay or while cutting paper with an X-Acto knife. Her time at school in Indiana and living in Chicago sharpened her interest in visual art and writing about artists.

The art department was housed in a big echoey pole building, located at the far reaches of the college property, and adjacent to a woods and a nature preserve. At the top of its stairs was a loft, a student break area with an overflowing ashtray and empty styrofoam cups.

"Can I bum a smoke?"

She handed him a pack of Marlboro Lights and her Bic.

His name was Mike. He'd recently graduated from Grand Valley with a BFA. He was a talented artist, one of those people to whom art came easily. He excelled in figure drawing and never needed erasers. Like her, he'd

moved home to weather the recession. He was taking the class to keep up his drawing practice. Over the next few classes, they moved their easels next to each other and quietly chatted, told jokes, knocked knees, shared pencils, and fell in love. During class breaks, they'd kiss at the top of the stairs or in his old Cutlass Supreme in the poorly lit parking lot.

They were engaged a year later and married the next. They both quit smoking and received an incomplete in the class. Their art professor, John Walson, danced with her at their wedding reception.

Act Three 2022-2025

Return

The siren call of the college beckoned. People over 60 years old could take classes for free. While not quite retired, she owned a public relations firm and worked classes into her flexible schedule. Drawing, painting, figure drawing, Improv for Actors and 2D Form brought her back to campus over several years. As an older student, she found she could concentrate more closely on the assignments and discovered confidence in art-making that she didn't have in the past.

Surrounded by young people, some just out of high school and others in their mid-20s or older, she relished their fresh conversations and listened to them talk as she drew or painted. Sometimes she'd offer advice or ideas to them, but knew she was probably older than their parents, and they likely didn't want to hear her wise insights. When the instructors asked what music the class wanted to listen to, she knew all the words to their Spotify choices—"Hits from the 80s," "Rock from the 70s," "Dad Rock," and others. It amused her that the other students loved the music of her eras. She requested Bob Dylan, Billy Strings and Jason Isbell—it was her contribution to their ongoing music education.

Now, she walked the buildings confidently—the wayfinding the college provided was just what she needed. The new art and music building, with its polished floors and art installations, was now part of the college itself, not an across-the-parking-lot afterthought. She participated in her first active shooter drill, standing in a dark, locked classroom, whispering to the others near her and thinking hard about death by a gun—a thought that had never crossed her mind before now.

The cafeteria area or the "discoteria" as she and her friends called it in the 1970s when disco dances were held there, was gone. Where a disco ball once hung, sound clouds buffer voices and carpet quiets hurrying footsteps, and in its place is a lounge with comfy chairs and vending machines.

Spaces at college had changed, but the light flowing in through the big windows, memorable art in the halls, and students hanging out or snoozing in the Gerber Lounge remained. There were big new additions to the campus, like the library, yet everything new felt familiar in its design, perhaps staying true to the vision of architect Alden B. Dow.

Her favorite spot in the college, since the very first day, overlooks Four Mile Creek and the courtyard from the corner of the first floor. Sometimes ducks paddle around, and the path along the creek is dotted with leaves. In warm months, students relax on the grass or sit at tables reading. The sharp angles of the building's continuation across the creek are iconic of the entire campus's feeling. This familiar view always gives her a deep sense of connection to this place where her past and present are intermingled.

River Voices

Contributors

Reese Bancuk is a student who loves to travel, has been to all 50 states, and wants to see more of the world. He's very interested in getting into more photography once he gets a better camera. He finds inspiration for photos through Instagram and sees the world in another way; every view is beautiful, whether nature or man-made. He spends his time working and with friends; he also draws in his spare time.

Madison Boone is a Muskegon Community College and Central Michigan University Alumni. She has been writing since she was six and won third place in Muskegon Community College's writing contest for a non-fiction piece in 2019. She is currently studying to be a Veterinary Technician. She loves to cook, go on hikes, swim, write and read. She hopes one day to publish a book and travel a lot. She is vocal about being a trauma and mental health advocate. She loves her Husky, Blizzard, and a good bowl of pasta!

Remi Bueche is a student that's still deciding what she wants to do for a career in the future, but she has many passions—writing, drawing, playing video games, and playing violin. But her biggest passion of all is reading! Mention a book around her, and she will not stop talking!

Lauren Burkett is getting her ASA at MCC with plans to transfer and study design in some form. She is inspired by music, film, video games, history, and human nature.

Lauryn Campbell is a high school senior who loves to do art! Her favorite things to do are paint and scrapbook. She hopes to go to college to pursue education to become a Physician Assistant. Her favorite things that inspire her paintings are photos of her life and travels.

Diana Casey is in her second year of retirement exploring various art forms that include watercolor and acrylic painting, collage, sketching, and more. This last year she is back to competitive dancing with her dogs Paloma Linda and Chili Roja. This requires more creativity to alter music, develop and sew costumes, create choreography, and of course! train Paloma and Chili. Look for us this summer at one of many Michigan State Parks camping. It is great fun to take multiple walks in a day, create art at a campsite, write poetry, and relax in the beautiful outdoors.

River Voices

Contributors

Reina Davis is a late in life college student starting her college education at the age of 28. She's pursuing her teaching degree and plans to teach 1st grade once completing college. She's a cat foster for Harbor Humane Society and owns two cats, one of which was a foster fail. She has a dog named Bleu. She's currently employed with the Boys and Girls Club of Muskegon Lakeshore.

Ruby Dyk is a student interested in the world of nature and all the beauty it contains. She finds inspiration by being outside.

Isaac Cosmo Falk is a young but influential student who is determined to find success. He is currently pursuing the creation of his own business and plans to further his education at GVSU in the coming fall semester, while living out of a camper van.

Aracely Garcia is a student here at MCC who hopes to travel the world, letting different cultures shape her experiences and inspire her work. She aims to share the richness of these journeys through her writing, connecting readers to the diverse stories and perspectives she encounters along the way.

Danielle Hacker is in her third year at MCC and is so excited to begin her freelance career in the fall. She is pursuing a degree in Graphic Design Entrepreneurship and a Certificate in Web Design. In her free time, she loves to draw, crochet, and sew.

Hayden Harris is a Psychology Major who has always loved doing art in her free time. She shows her growing knowledge through an abstract lens in the art world.

August Hawley is studying at MCC to be an art teacher and spends his free time drawing, writing, and taking photos. He began writing poetry in 2018 and drawing portraits in 2020 and never stopped!

Jonah Lyn Hayes enjoys experimenting with hands-on art pieces that blend free-form design with real-world representation. She is heading to Ann Arbor to study architecture and design at the University of Michigan, where she hopes to strengthen her skills and fully embrace her creative potential.

Tom Henry is an English instructor at Muskegon Community College.

River Voices

Contributors

Kendall Hibbard is a science and arts student who will be majoring in Fisheries and Wildlife Management after MCC. She spends her time in the summer running fishing charters on Lake Michigan, and her time in the winter going to college full-time, while still engaging in her hobbies - hunting and fishing.

Erin Hoffman has been involved in the art community since early childhood. She was first published at age six in a local Fort Wayne, Indiana newspaper, *The Sentinel*, for her visual interpretation of “A Sunny Day.” She is currently a full-time tenured art instructor at Muskegon Community College teaching Printmaking, Art Appreciation, Drawing, Painting, Figure Drawing, Contemporary Art History and 2-D design.

She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2001 from the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa and received her Master of Fine Arts degree in 2005 at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Both degrees are in printmaking. Her work mixes relief printmaking techniques with intaglio, lithography and hand-painted material. It uses historical and politically themed imagery to examine aspects of contemporary American society. In addition to artmaking, she enjoys gardening and spending time with her dog.

Romero Hopkins is an engineering student finding out that his lifelong knack for storytelling and love for the written word may turn into an unintended career in writing. He enjoys spending time with his family, being a storytelling beast as a Dungeon Master, and always looking for opportunities to grow beyond himself.

Ca’Mya Jackson wants to study abroad learning about different countries, cultures, and exploring art to find the beauty in life and to write more. This is her first time sharing something she wrote, and she hopes everyone can connect with it.

Paulo Jaloto is an immigrant from Brazil who has lived in the United States since 2021. He decided to go to college at a later age than most, and this is his first semester at MCC. He has found it to be a challenging but very rewarding experience, and once he earns his associate’s, he plans to transfer to Western Michigan University to pursue a flight science degree and become a pilot. He enjoys rollerblading, ice skating, photography, and music.

River Voices

Contributors

Ronnie Jewell Jr. is a recent retiree from the English Communications Department at Muskegon Community College. Although he misses his MCC family tremendously, he is happy to be back home near his mother, sisters, nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews. Life is very much slow paced in Virginia. Everyone is friendly and calls him “Honey,” and he’s learning to say “y’all.” Retirement is great! Lots of time to read, write poetry, compose music and spend time with his family. And even his fur babies are learning to meow with a southern twang.

Gabrielle Johnson is an aspiring author who hopes to become an English teacher along with writing books. She loves to read, write, and do jigsaw puzzles in her free time.

Kiersten Kemp is a child development student who loves to spend time with her dogs, friends, and family. She uses her writing to spread awareness of the darkest parts of depression and anxiety.

Roberta F. King is a lifelong Muskegon resident and has been fortunate enough to have traveled and seen much of the art that was inspired by her first art history class. She’s also an avid reader, cyclist, hiker, writer, and aspiring artist.

Caleb Klein enjoys many hobbies, including learning languages, playing music, growing plants, creating art, and, of course, writing. He also enjoys physical activities such as soccer, martial arts, backpacking, camping, kayaking, and biking. He loves to be outdoors and to learn about the Lord and His beautiful creation. Caleb also loves being with his family and likes to eat fruit.

Kassidy Lamblin loves photography, as a side interest, and plans on becoming a dental hygienist. Her biggest inspirations for photographs are beaches, nature, and insects!

Elspeth Lamont is a current student at MCC. She has a background in Social Work, Chemical Dependency Counseling, and Yoga Therapy. When released from the hospital and work with LVL Counseling, she spends a lot of time outside. She observes the Esbats and aspires to emigrate.

River Voices

Contributors

Javi LeBlanc is a student who saw an opportunity for extra credit in his English 101 class. Javi is a senior at Whitehall High School who almost never writes poetry. He wanted to try to not only receive the extra credit but also have fun with poetry. After writing this poem, he really understood how to put emotion into his pieces of work. Not only enjoying the assignment but getting rewarded with extra credit afterward.

Kelli Ann Loughrige is the Muskegon Community College English and Communications Department Support, a Muskegon native, a proud military family member, and an alumnus of RP, MCC, and WMU. Her fur kids and family are her everything, nature is her solace, and she can never live without creativity.

Mike McGreever's short film, *Plans*, was shown on PBS in New York and his first full length play, *Lincoln's Children*, was performed in Minneapolis this fall. Mike's short plays have been performed in London, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Santa Cruz, and throughout the country. Mike was honored to be able to visit Muskegon Community College to see *The Turing Test* and to help Michigan prepare for our upcoming war with Canada

MK Miller is an aspiring author who seeks to inspire others just as many authors have inspired her. When not writing, ze can be found reading at home while her cat, Fluffy, lays on zir chest purring or arguing with her African Grey parrot named Pearl.

Monica Mullins is a high school student at Holton High School. She is a dual enrollment student. She finds inspiration in nature and sports.

Elijah Parmley is a first-year honors student who has a lot of goals, but he's not always sure which version of himself would be best suited for reaching them. He finds inspiration in the quiet struggles of every day; his poems draw from the mindful explorations of identity and ambition.

Ian Pereda is a Business Student who hopes to experience new opportunities in the business world. He enjoys playing musical instruments and enjoys hanging out with his friends.

Hunter Poore is a first-year college student. He enjoys classic rock and his record collection. He has a love for holiday decorations and making others smile.

River Voices

Contributors

Jules Porath is a sophomore at Muskegon Community College. They enjoy playing video games, reading, writing, and listening to music. Jules is passionate about insects and spends their free time caring for their three fish tanks. They hope to become an environmental conservationist and work to protect endangered species.

Iris Replogle is an author and artist currently editing her novel, *The Little Yellow House*, while also working on a second novel and occasionally getting sidetracked to write short stories. She lives with her two wonderful cats, Firefly and Millipede, a menagerie of plants, and the odd bug that comes inside during the winter months.

Emily Sanders is a 2024 graduate of Spring Lake High School, currently attending Muskegon Community College for an Associate's Degree in Science and Arts. When she's not writing, she can be found baking, painting, singing showtunes, playing with her dog, or performing onstage in MCC's drama club. In the future, she plans to pursue her passion for creative writing at GVSU, in hopes to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Writing so she can one day publish books of her own.

Alyssa Skofic is enrolled in the Early College Program with Muskegon Community College. She enjoys pursuing photography in her free time, capturing anything she finds beautiful.

Liam Snipes is an aspiring nursing student who was born and raised in Illinois. Despite his constant missing of the cornfield life, he developed a love of writing poetry directly after moving to Michigan. He currently works as a store manager at a pool and spa store during the day and an at-home caregiver at night.

Meghan Sonder is a communications major, who hopes to use her writing in future career endeavors. She aspires to write a book and finds inspiration in everyday life and good coffee.

Laura Soprano is a general studies student who enjoys crisp fall weather, her two cats, and lots of eyeliner. She finds inspiration by listening to music and finding beauty in the mundane and simple. She would like to visit Italy someday. She is not sure what she'd like to be when she grows up, but she loves writing, decorating, and spending time outdoors.

River Voices

Contributors

Jaime Steffes is a 45-year-old mother of four from Muskegon, Michigan. She has two beautiful grandchildren and two dogs. She recently went back to school to finish her degree, which she had started many years ago. She enjoys art, crafting, and painting.

Rachel Trejo is a first-generation college student who enjoys writing and reading in her free time. She hopes to attend law school in the future to help those like her dad, who achieved legal status in the United States six years ago.

Lillian Ver Duin is a dedicated early college student who tries to add art everywhere she can and in everything she does. Often doodling, drawing, or daydreaming in her free time, she is deeply inspired by nature and human connection.

Gabriel Vink grew up in Grand Haven, Michigan. For most of his life, he didn't have any idea what he wanted to do with it. Over the years, Vink found an appreciation for writing his stories and ideas down. Now, he still isn't sure what he'll do for his career, but he hopes that he can at least write in his free time.

Deondrick Watts is an aspiring artist that's currently striving to spend his life writing, drawing, and crafting stories in the form of comic books. As a matter of fact, according to him, the piece published was based off of a post-apocalyptic story concept he's had since middle school! He even had plans to submit a fictional short story to coincide with his painting, but unfortunately, he couldn't find the time to work on it. But don't worry, Deondrick isn't fret up about it, since there's always next year!

Kyron Zoet is a 21-year-old wrestler born and raised in Michigan. Currently attending Muskegon Community College, he works to improve general skills while unsure of his life's purpose. With a sharp curiosity, he challenges the status quo and rejects any preconceived notions. A free spirit with aspirations beyond common consumer greed, Kyron values freedom, family, and friends. After receiving his associate's degree, he plans a multi-year excursion to the Pacific Northwest, where he intends to shred some mountainous terrain on his splitboard.

National English Honor Society Members

Sigma Zeta Chapter

Jonah Lyn Hayes
President

Casey Gould
Vice President

Maria Basaj
Secretary

Remi Bueche
Social Media Coordinator

Current Members

Maria Basaj
Remi Bueche
Isaac Cosmo Falk
Aracely Garcia
Casey Gould
Jonah Lyn Hayes
Lillian Hendrian
Romero Hopkins
Gabrielle Johnson
Brenden Robar
Emily Sanders
Hannah Smith
Liam Snipes
Meghan Sonder
Gabriel Vink
Delanie Wydeck

Faculty Advisors

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