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Anu Bavra  
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Mark De Shetler  
Sawyer Dell'Aquila  
Jordan Ellis  
Erin Gott  
Raquel Guadalupe  
Annie Hays  
Sara Hines  
Diana Katchour  
Catherine Kendall  
Tae Kim  
Callie Mooney  
Mark O'Neill  
Paige Prudhon  
Emme Sabanovich  
Sanjay  
Athena Santos  
Neni Silva  
Chloe Taylor  
Brianna Torres  
Brian Tramontana  
Lily Tsurumoto  
George Vargas  
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# Voices

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Voices is a literary and arts magazine that showcases the diverse voices of West Valley College. It is published once every spring, and is produced by the members of the Voices Literary Club. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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## Table of Contents

Cover: Tae Kim

Tae Kim <i>Flower</i>	2
Mark O'Neill <i>Coming Out</i>	6
Anu Bavra <i>Untitled</i>	7
Noelle Anderson <i>The Fall of Civilization</i>	8
Diana Katchour <i>Doodles From Another Dimension</i>	13
Annie Hays <i>Crossroads</i>	14
Diana Katchour <i>Alternate Universe</i>	16
Emme Sabanovich <i>Peewee Herman</i>	17
Noah Cooter <i>Paper Cuts</i>	18
Raquel Guadalupe <i>One is Nature</i>	19
Athena Santos <i>Creation of a Pheonix</i>	20
Emme Sabanovich <i>Johnny Cash</i>	22
Erin Gott <i>Life's Just Fine</i>	23
Diana Katchour <i>Lost in the Clouds</i>	26
Sara Hines <i>Myrrha</i>	27

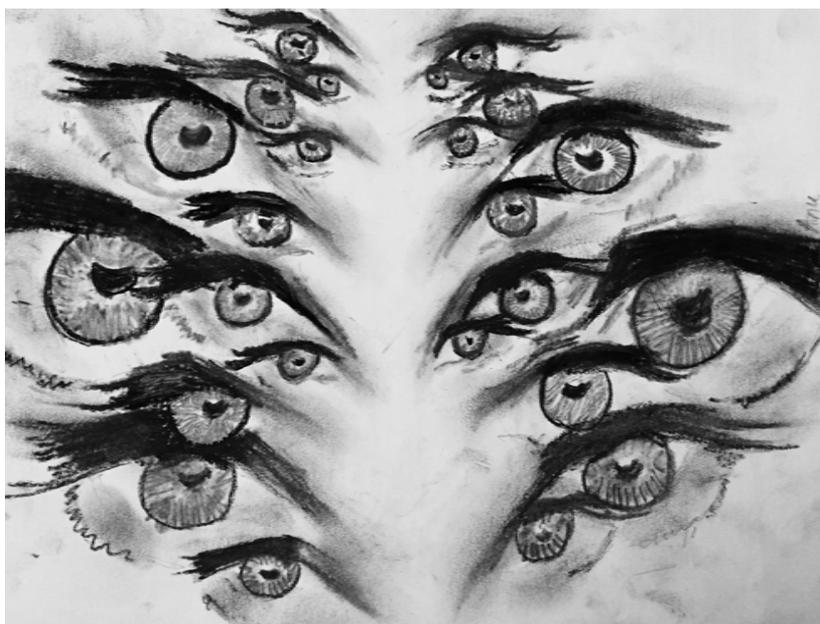
Anu Bavra <i>Untitled</i>	29
Sara Hines <i>BEEautiful Daze</i>	31
Paige Prudhon <i>A Politician's Jacket</i>	32
Sawyer Dell'Aquila <i>Untitled</i>	39
Sanjay <i>Seeking Retreat</i>	40
Noelle Anderson <i>Fire Elemental</i>	42
Athena Santos <i>Lighthouse</i>	43
Chloe Taylor <i>Fashion Illustrations</i>	45
Brianna Torres <i>Did She Say No?</i>	46
Sara Hines <i>Child Chimera</i>	48
Nikki Avila <i>Four Poems</i>	49
Brianna Torres <i>Wonderstruck</i>	51
Catherine Kendall <i>Autumnal Equinox</i>	52
Neni Silva <i>Untitled</i>	53
Lily Tsurumoto <i>Romance</i>	54
Tae Kim <i>Purple Peony</i>	55

George Vargas <i>Last Departure</i>	45
Brian Tramontana <i>Bb Grant Ranch</i>	56
George Vargas <i>Last Departure</i>	58
Emme Sabanovich <i>Bob Marley</i>	59
Sara Hines <i>This Coffee Shop</i>	60
Callie Mooney <i>Untitled</i>	65
Mark De Shelter <i>Dragonslayer</i>	66
Diana Katchour <i>Abundance of Kiwis</i>	68
Matt Williams <i>Evolution of Species</i>	69
Brian Tramontana <i>Untitled</i>	70
Lily Tsurumoto <i>Noah's Arc</i>	71
Anu Bavra <i>Untitled</i>	74
Jordan Zachary Ellis <i>Devil's Discourse</i>	75
Sara Hines <i>Mr. Weathered</i>	76
Catherine Kendall <i>Snow Ride</i>	77
Neni Silva <i>Untitled</i>	85

Sara Hines <i>Realities of a Fairytale</i>	86
Diana Katchour <i>Confused Graffiti</i>	89
Brian Tramontana Dedication	90



Mark O'Neill  
*Coming Out*



Anu Bavra  
*Untitled*

Noelle Anderson  
*The Fall of Civilization*

I don't think you understand what's been done to me and my home.

I remember it as if it just happened. I remember, I remember, I remember.

In this world there is always contradiction. We live in grays while believing it is black and white. Some of us know better. My home rests in a freezing land surrounded by dark waters. But there is life. I've been told that every color can be found in our land, that we just have to look. I had found many things in the ice and dirt. I saw the life in the sky and water. I would go out in canoes with my friend and some older children and we would explore icy mazes. In the darkness of the water I could sense the life beneath it. I sensed the great power in the beings underneath its surface.

My parents and I lived in a village on the outskirts of this land. Our people had been left alone for ages, but then everything changed.

We welcomed them, the newcomers from grand boats quite different from our own. They were peaceful. They told us about their home, that they were travelers, explorers, people who looked for something more in the world. We were peaceful. We gave them food, water, clothes and shelter. We welcomed our neighbors as long lost brothers. They set up a mission here. Then they set up some small houses. They set up some crops. They kept expanding. They seized other

lands from us. And my people, we rebelled. They corrupted our lands. Every year it seemed like colors drained and life dulled just enough to notice it. They told us we were not good, they were good, we had to become like them. So we did. I don't believe that; I know many only pretend.

My mother was the daughter of one of them, my father of this land. They fell in love, or so I'm told. They had me soon after their marriage. My mom wasn't like the other moms here. I told myself it's just her people's way. I believed for a while.

When we were told we were no good, that we could only impede their progress, their crusade, we rebelled. Whispers between us had been going on for a while, hushed disputes that were never told.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, they looked for those responsible. My dad, was one of the accused. I knew it couldn't be him but one testimony of one corrupt person was all it took.

It was the day of reckoning. Our great terror. Our great injustice. Their trial finished. They followed only their laws.

It was early in the morning, the mist on the water and no one else awake. That's when he came. My father came to me in our family's lodge, his family's lodge. My mother refused to sleep in the lodge during the cooler parts of the year. He knelt down as I had slowly awakened. *Treasured one*, he beckoned. I was grim, young enough to not know the whole story, old enough to at least know it. I hugged

him and wept. He kept his resolve, a warrior's way, show no pain, show no suffering. He sang my favorite song, he whispered secrets the land had told him, truths from the clouds, his love for his family. I wailed and awoke my grandmother and aunt. They wept quietly too. I grabbed his jacket, and I kept holding him, and never let go.

When the sun was higher up, he and the 17 others accused were to be killed. *Justice*, they said. Murder my tears screamed. *Murder, Slaughter, Crime*.

My father stood next. I choked on my tears. I swore that the deep blues and the lights of the sky had changed. Red. My face burned but my hands froze. I panicked and I began to memorize every feature of his face. I prayed to anything and everything.

I swear his eyes whispered my name. They spelled out every syllable, *Amadahy*. His last, unspoken words.

The missionaries cheered. As I kept holding on, and on, I missed most of the action, but I heard her, my mother's cheerful shouts. Along with the rest of her people, happy to put down the so called rebellion.

I learned that I was an other too that day.

They had not been buried properly. My cousins chattered about the restless spirits. Mom wouldn't tell me where my dad was buried. I went to the ocean. Maybe I could find his soul in its depths. I sat at its edge and held onto the warmth.

My mother decided soon after it was time for her to return to her home country, with me. My grandmother

opposed, my aunts and uncles opposed, most of the village opposed. But they didn't have a choice. They had been destroyed with the execution of eighteen innocents. Demoralized, they let me be taken away. Even still, I kept holding on. On the boat I could feel the fur of his coat in between my fingers.

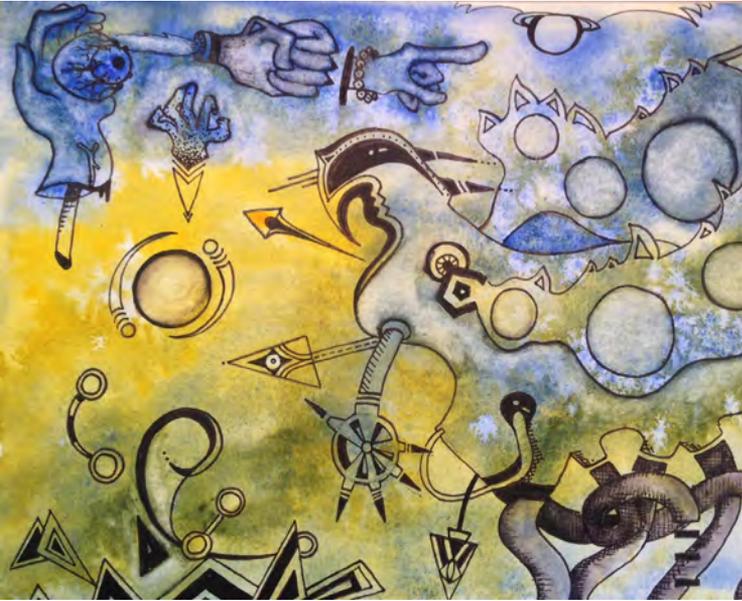
Everything that happened made me hate the new land more. I missed home. She insisted that the kingdom was my real home, had always been. I missed the shells and blue dyes and furs of my old clothes. But I wasn't allowed to wear them. I was staged and dressed and primed and primed. I was the talk at all the parties my mother dragged me to. I looked into a mirror and realized I was only born to be propaganda.

I cried and screamed and ran, but that never worked. I refused her tongue and only spoke mine. She was unhappy with me. She had them come, they took me to a school where I learned to hate myself and my homeland. I cursed her and prayed to the skies and stars and all entities possible to stop it. All my mother said was, "You are so much like your father."

But that doesn't matter so much. What happened to my father and the seventeen others is what marred me. The rest is just ornamentation.

I miss my dad. He took all the compassion I had with his death. But what happened to him wasn't an isolated event. Their empire keeps doing this. Look at what they've done to my home. Look at what they've done to me. My

father was a victim and I was a show piece! And you sit and wonder why I am angry? Look at what they've done!



Diana Katchour  
*Doodles From Another Dimension*

Annie Hays  
*Crossroads*

Hanging in the valley,  
lies a slight town  
shrouded in droplets.

A distorting twilight haze  
covers forgotten secrets,  
hiding beneath its veil.

Over: a decrepit train station,  
a stranded rotting bench  
under a wrinkled woman.

Her chest rises with frost,  
falls in white flames,  
sending tunnels through  
the thin vapor.

Her twistedness  
trapped in willful spirit  
beneath taut skin,  
pins down hope.

Through spans of desolate years,

the bodied crossroads  
turn nourishment,  
to states of putridity,  
leaving larva to feed  
on everything lovely, young, hopeful,  
until nothing's left--but a shell.

An emptiness above a porous pew,  
a congregation of clouds  
creeping through cracks,  
listening for a preacher  
without any words.

Red to green and back again,  
the stoplight colors,  
swirl bereft of signs,  
or signs of wanderings--  
an emaciated town drifts  
deeper down into the gorge.



Diana Katchour  
*Alternate Universe*



Emme Sabanovich  
*Peewee Hernam*

Noah Cooter

*Paper Cuts*

Forgive me, i've been reading.  
Bleeding proves but half as draining.  
Raining words like daggers fall,  
call across the turning sphere,  
disappear, though, just before  
lore of romance finds fruition.  
Intuition washes over,  
clover field or stinging nettle?  
Settle down, or rise as vapor?

Paper notes can only cut  
but half as deep as well-honed blending,  
bending time and hollow space,  
pace of turning pages.  
Ages past since ties have severed,  
endeavored to remove each finger,  
linger, though, do taunting hands,  
strands of plastic ticking slowly,  
lowly is this wretched bleeding,  
please forgive me, i've been reading.



Raquel Guadalupe  
*One is Nature*

Athena Santos

*Creation of a Pheonix*

We sat beneath the ghost gum tree

    Its lightning strike branches

Stand, immobile

Not knowing its power

    Or its purpose

Not knowing the shock it can hold

    Or how far its current reaches.

    Electricity pulses

        From bark to bones

Without caring who it touches

    Only striking, as lightning loves to do,

        In the hearts of the fearless-

            Those who fear less

        Than they should.

Crackling the currents, shattering the stillness

Sucking the sun back into the mouths of dragons

    Their charred, blackened tongues

        Laugh through the haze of burning

veins.

Leaves burn down the ghost gum tree

    They speak of death

        Whispering through the life

            Running through it.

    They adhere to skin

    Burn through flesh

Transforming.

Now our resilience to the flame

Brings fear.

Our chemistry, forever changed.

No more is the heat;

The passion of the clouds,

Drops of gold in the rain.

Only the ripples on a lake

To remind the world that

somewhere beside a ghost gum tree

Ashes will come.



Emme Sabanovich  
*Johnny Cash*

Erin Gott

*Life's Just Fine*

You were born in Lone Pine, Louisiana, the same place your parents were born, and the same place their parents were born. Your parents died there, too, the same way their parents had died there. The thought of continuing that pattern didn't bother you for a long time. It was a nice enough town. You worked in a grocery store, where you worked at the the checkout and made enough to pay rent and didn't think about much else.

You weren't sure how many days you'd been on the road by the time you rolled into Comfort, population 2,363. You didn't know why the sign stuck in your head when all the others had slid away. The buildings in the downtown looked old, like they'd been pulled straight out of sepia photos, untouched by time.

You didn't plan to stop there long, but you needed coffee. The cafe was the first place you saw, so you parked and walked in.

"Mornin', honey. Just make yourself right at home." The woman behind the counter gestured at the empty seats. You sat at the counter, since you were the only other person there. The place was old, worn wood and seats telling of better days long passed. "Now, what can I get you?" The woman behind the counter had a voice like amber. You ordered a coffee, plain, and looked at the decor. The wall behind the counter was covered in the type of signs that every place like

this seems to have, saying things like *The more you tip, the nicer we are!* The countertop was smooth wood, worn down in places by hands and plates. Everything in the place looked old. Some of the tables had cups and plates on them, waiting to be cleaned up, but it seemed like the woman who had greeted you was the only one working there.

The woman came back with your cup of coffee, and smiled at you. "Life's just fine here, honey." You expected her to try and make more conversation, but she didn't. Not that you were complaining. You finished the cup and paid her in silence. She didn't talk to you again until you were walking out the door. "See you around, honey."

You got back in the car and keep driving, and didn't think anymore about Comfort, until you passed another town with the same name. The sign stuck in your head again. You didn't stop this time. It wasn't until after you'd passed all the way through that you realized the downtown was almost identical.

You focused on the road again instead, and the wide horizons of the desert filled your mind until Comfort, population 2,363, was left back where it belonged, miles away on the road.

The third time you saw the sign, you pulled to the side of the road right in front of it.

You stared at it. Comfort, population 2,363.

You turned around, and started going back east.

The fourth time you saw the sign, you'd been driving east for hours and hours, but the sun hadn't moved. The sign

stood in the same place it had been before. Comfort, population 2,364.

The cafe was still the first place you encountered. The woman was still the only other person inside. She smiled. "Welcome back, honey. You seem a little lost. Why don't you sit a while." It wasn't a question. You sat down at the counter. The woman's smile was warm, but her eyes were colder than the desert stars. You didn't know why you'd stopped. You didn't know why you'd left in the first place.

"Life's just fine here, honey," she said. Her smile grew wider. Her teeth were sharper than any you'd ever seen before. "It's all just fine."



Diana Katchour  
*Lost in the Clouds*

Sara Hines

*Myrrha*

I am no Propoetides, prostitutes punished by Venus  
Now stones thrown at any female judged in their likeness  
I am no white lady, perfected ivory by Pygmalion  
I am terracotta blazed in Hades fire for my sins punishment

It would seem as though the fates have sealed my deal  
Form held in your pages, imprisoned forever perfectly still  
Another inescapable confine, I endure for love forbidden  
Two sides to every story, yet mine remains unquestioned

The tale of a daughter indeed loving her father  
Is exact as an arrow, Eros shoots at his spoiler  
I ask you though to ponder, why a girl barely woman  
Seduced her paternal protector, love born of innocence

Now in an era, where women finally have voices  
I hope both sexes ears now recognize the difference  
My father was an abuser and led me to believe  
He was the lover that I desired, more than I dreamed

The young men didn't have knowledge like he indeed did  
He taught me to keep quiet and to do worse than fib  
He would sneak in my bedroom and then have his way  
He told me if I told, my life would end horrifically

This tale is untold, like so many youths endure today  
Whether male or female, when parents scar them sexually  
Young are looked at from judgmental high held brows  
Elders looking down- "You must have done wrong! Some-  
how!"

I want those who are damaged to undoubtedly know  
If you have suffered in silence, to you, I bestow  
The tears that I bleed through my bark and sharp thorns  
It is for your precious souls my embers burn smoke



Anu Bavra  
*Untitled*





Sara Hines  
*BEEautiful Daze*

Paige Prudhon  
*A Politician's Jacket*

Ben turns over, his foggy mind wondering what sort of bird has such an infernal squawk. His body still feels heavy from sleep, and, after burying his head under the pillow, his mind begins to relax again, the thoughts of the bird fading away as he begins to drift off to sleep once more. Just as he starts to snore, there's a squeal then a *thwack*.

"What the hell?" Ben asks, his voice slow and lazy, like a cloud floating by on a summer breeze.

"Oh, don't be such a wimp," Alex retorts. "I just threw a pillow at you."

Ben kicks the pillow to the floor as pulled the comforter back over head. "Mhmm."

"Turn off that alarm, would you? It's giving me a headache."

Without another word, Alex turns around and shuts the door behind him.

Ben's sleep mind considers this, unable to concentrate over the sound of that damn bird—

Ben's eyes snap open. He jumps out of bed, hitting the beeping alarm as he grabs the first pair of pants he finds on the floor and hops around, trying to tug both legs on at the same time. When he finally manages to put everything on properly, albeit messily, he runs out of the room with his toothbrush hanging out of his mouth and his hair sticking up wildly.

“Good morning, sunshine,” Alex says with a snicker. “I see you’re well prepared for your interview this morning.”

“Get me a cup of coffee, would you?” Ben says, spewing toothpaste everywhere. Alex grumbles, but pulls down a tumbler from the cabinet and dutifully fills it with coffee and milk.

“No sugar!” Ben yells from the bathroom. Quickly, he examines himself in the mirror.

His shirt is only tucked in on the right side, he’s not wearing a belt, and his eyes have a slightly crazed look, but all things considered, not bad.

With his shoes in one hand and his bicycle helmet in the other, Ben plops down in the dinky kitchen of his shared apartment and eyes the coffee Alex places on the counter.

“No sugar?”

Alex rolls his eyes. “I’ve been your roommate for the three years and you really think I haven’t figured out by now that you like four sugars in your coffee?”

“Very funny,” Ben says, but sips it just to be sure.

“Thanks.”

“No problem. Good luck with the interview. This is the one at the Senator’s office, right?”

“Yeah,” Ben says, swallowing the lump that’s formed in his throat. “I spent all night researching.”

Alex whistles. “Look at you, Big-Shot. Interviewing with the Senator.”

“Don’t remind me,” Ben says. He tugs on his blazer and prays that the grey clouds outside don’t decide to prove

the Weather Channel wrong.

“You’re gonna nail it!” Alex yells as Ben shuts the door.

Ben pedals down the quiet streets, thoughts buzzing through his mind. He’s lucky that Alex was up early this morning, or he would’ve missed his shot at his top choice internship. As excited as he is at the thought of getting his start at the Senator’s office, he can’t shake the nagging feeling that he’s about to blow it. Without a thought, he reaches into his pants pocket for his dad’s lucky button.

His stomach drops.

Reminding himself to stay calm, Ben checks the other pocket in his pants, then both the ones on his blazer.

*Okay, he decides. Now you can panic.*

He spins the bike around, nearly hitting a trash can, and rides as fast as his legs will allow back to the apartment. When he gets to the complex, he drops the bike on the sidewalk and sprints up the stairs.

“Where’s my button?” he demands as he throws the door open.

“Welcome back. I take it the interview didn’t go well?” Alex says into his coffee cup.

“Not funny, Alex. Where’s my lucky button?”

“Chill, dude. Isn’t it in that box you keep under your bed?”

“No,” Ben says, forcing himself to take a deep breath. “I took it with me on that interview last week at the Washington Post, and I thought it would get lost if I left it on the

counter, so I put it in an envelope.”

Alex’s eyes widen.

“A white envelope? With nothing written on it?”

Ben groans. “What did you do?”

“I may have recycled it?”

Ben slams the door and runs down to the bicycle. He’d heard the garbage truck come while he was getting dressed, just fifteen minutes ago. He can still catch it.

He grabs the bicycle and rides the opposite direction from his interview. He’s gonna get that button back if it takes all day.

As he pedals faster and faster, he can almost his father’s hand on his shoulder.

*“It’s okay, Benny, I won’t let go until you’re ready.”*

*“I’m scared, Daddy.”*

*He puts something small and round into Ben’s hand and gives him a reassuring smile and a little push.*

Ben’s knuckles tighten on the handlebars. He’s not losing that button.

He scans the garbage cans as he whizzes past. They’ve all been emptied already. It’s not hard to follow the garbage truck’s trail for a few blocks, but then he reaches a fork. There are some little shops and businesses on the streets in front, and he can’t see past them to see if any of the houses beyond have had their trash emptied already.

Exhaustion and despair settling over him like the clouds above, Ben rests his head on the handlebars. It’s hopeless, and he doesn’t know why he ever thought he

could stop a garbage truck and find one envelope in the mounds of waste.

He lets a few tears stream down his cheek before turning the bike around and lazily biking in the general direction of his apartment. He's lost his button and now he probably won't even be able to make it to the interview in time. Why bother even if he can? He's just going to ruin it anyway.

Ben pulls up in front of the apartment, allowing himself a single glance in the direction of the Senator's office. As he reaches up to unbuckle his helmet, his phone buzzes in his jacket pocket.

"Hello?" he says, willing his voice to be steady.

"Hi, honey. I just wanted to wish you luck on your interview today."

"Thanks, Mom, but, I'm, uh, not going."

"What?" she says, making no effort to hide her shock and disappointment. "But you were so excited about this one! Weren't you just saying how it was the perfect way to start your career, and—"

"Mom, I just can't do it. I'm going to screw it up, and they'll blacklist me and then nobody will hire me, and—"

"Whoa, Benny, sweetie, calm down. Nobody is going to blacklist you and you're not going to screw it up. Why would you think that?"

The panic momentarily forgotten now rears its ugly head and shame colors his cheeks.

"I lost Dad's lucky button."

There's a long silence on the other end, and Ben

knows that this is it. This is the unforgivable sin. Everybody will shun him, including his own mother, and he's going to be blacklisted, and he'll never be able to work again, and—

“Benjamin, listen to me, it's a shame that you lost that button, but your father would understand.”

“But, Mom,” Ben whines, “It was from his lucky jacket, the one he wore every election day. He never lost in that jacket, so as long as I had the button I was going to get the internship, but now I don't have it, and I lost it, and—”

“Benjamin,” she repeats. “Take a deep breath and *listen*. Your father won every election he ran in because he was a good politician and a damn good man and people saw that, so they voted for him. You get jobs and internships and good grades because you're a good student and a better man. Your father would be proud of you, was proud of you, and losing a button won't change that.”

Ben mulls this over, absently rubbing his own jacket button between his two fingers. The material of the jacket is cheap and the button is plastic, but if he uses his imagination, he can almost feel the silky material of his father's blazer, thin in places from years of wear.

“Well, son, wish me luck!”

*Benjamin climbs down from the counter at the sound of his father lumbering down the stairs. He isn't supposed to sit on the counter, but it's the only way he can reach the Cheerios on the top shelf.*

“Good luck, daddy.”

*His father ruffles Ben's hair lovingly and pats him on the*

shoulder.

*"I tell you what, champ, when I get home tonight, we'll practice riding on your bicycle. How's that sound? Maybe we'll be able to take off those training wheels by this weekend."*

*Ben nods excitedly.*

*His father pulls him in for a hug. Ben's cheek is pressed against the soft fabric of his father's jacket, the exact color of the crack under his bed that his father inspects every night before announcing that all the monsters are gone.*

*"I'll be home before you know it, Benny. I love you."*

*The door shuts with a thud that echoes in the empty house.*

*"You're going to that interview," his mother announces, snapping Ben back into reality.*

*He glances down at his watch. "It starts in ten minutes, Mom. There's no way I can make it in time."*

*"Okay," she says quietly. "It's your choice."*

*Ben looks down. The second hand races around the clock's face, taunting him.*

*"Bye, Mom. I'll let you know how it went."*

*He hangs up and pumps his legs faster than he ever imagined he could. He doesn't even notice when a few rain droplets hit his cheek. The only thing he feels is the familiar weight of a well-worn navy blue jacket on his shoulders, right where a hand used to rest.*



Sawyer Dell' Aquila  
*Untitled*

Sanjay  
*Seeking Retreat*

Divine architect; dissembled  
in society's prison of somber,  
We suffer from forgetfulness,  
a mistaken identity;  
Dis-connected.

Truss of cosmic law  
Sustainer, Pure Stillness;  
Pure Spaciousness,  
Unchanging witness of changing ages,  
Existence.

Few have ventured beyond  
despairs of "i-ness," through  
Landfalls of habitual doubt-  
Into the innate  
Unbound.

Few seek to be subsumed  
in the source of celestial song;  
To see the unseen, to hear the unheard  
in daily vespers of  
Meditation.

Those who seek

Truth rediscover

The 'I' behind all eyes,

Revealing the implicit journey of Being;

Oneness.

That I Am,

that I Am.



Noelle Anderson  
*Fire Elemental*

Athena Santos

*Lighthouse*

There's a ship coasting the horizon  
Silhouetted in the sun

With the night as her cargo.

Waves rake her across the water  
Rocks threaten her with holes,  
Hope leaps from her planks;

She is wrecking.

Her people have abandoned her-

Feeling safer clinging to the wreckage left behind

The tides have taken hold

Begging for the anchor

Never lowered.

And yet she sees a light,

Inspiring her to move on.

Moving forward with all her force

Battered

Determined

Knowing

That once she reaches the shore

She will

Inevitably

Crash

and

Shatter

The sea has claimed a prize

Gold and gunpowder  
Dripping from the heart of her  
down into the waves.

She focuses on the beam,

Finding solace in the night

Peace- raining down, through the knowledge that

Even though she is crashing

She has finally made it

Home.



Chloe Taylor  
*Fashion Illustrations*

Brianna Torres  
*Did She Say No?*

Have you ever smelled spoiled milk? I have.  
It swirls around in your nostrils  
And never fades  
Much like the thick smog that  
Permeates the cities  
A pungent aroma, like onions or garlic  
A deafening smell that engulfs glass lenses  
Splits the willow tree  
Forcing animals to take cover.  
A mechanical bull thrashing about  
Leaving unexpected bruises between your thighs  
Its putrid carcass lingers in the shadows  
Preying on the weak  
Eroding every inch of caked on flesh  
Until suddenly—  
Its gone.  
Its gone and you find yourself missing its  
Rancid acquaintance  
Fearfully awaiting its presence  
Like a horror film  
suspenseful, domineering,  
Pompous.  
It reeks of molded sour cream  
Just a dollop  
Moistness that makes you cringe

And dew drops melt  
Acid down your cheeks  
Gagging on each gulp of air

*She asked for it.*



Sara Hines  
*Child Chimera*

Nikki Avila  
*Four Poems*

*MESSES*

Maybe I wasn't the mess. Maybe everyone else was. A neatly contained mess. All bottled up feelings and suppressed emotions. They just couldn't see the beauty in my tears.

*PUZZLE PIECES*

She could never be the way she was before. There were pieces she couldn't get back. Those she didn't want back. But whole wasn't beyond her. Not anymore. He made her new pieces, expanded her borders and settled in.

She could never be the way she was before. They could be better.

*FREAK-SHOW*

It was pathetic really  
her attempt at belonging  
people shy away from  
the strange, lonely  
and depressed  
They watch, they wonder,  
they walk away

*TORTURED ARTIST*

I was so sure. Absolutely positive that I'd lose myself in love. That this torture would end...and how terrible would that be? Steal the pain, steal my ability to write. But oh was I wrong. I didn't lose a damn thing. I found everything. All those little nuances of word I couldn't before touch. The ones you had to be happy for. The ones you had to know love for. I didn't lose myself in you. That's foolish. I found parts of me I didn't know existed.



Brianna Torres  
*Wonderstruck*

Catherine Kendall

*Autumnal Equinox*

Fiery cauldron sinks behind a stitchery of briars  
Against the twilight sky,

As thrush's dulcet tones ring out like vespers,  
Final songs before dark subsumes daylight.

In that liminal space

The bird's song commingles with those of crickets,  
To usher in the stars and rising moon.

Cool of autumn settles over trees, brambles, birds,  
And inside I shiver, retrieve my knitting,

Knit, purl, knit, purl, against the coming cold,  
Dissembling fingers concealing

The ache that clogs my throat.



Neni Silva  
*Untitled*

Lily Tsurumoto

*Romance*

I listened to the thrum of  
soldiers trudging through sleet, of their ankles bitten by  
sharp icy teeth, like a babe nips her mother's tit, without  
understanding. Of the pain they cause her.

It sounded like rain down a metal roof, dripping down onto  
toes loose in the mud, caked around the heel, filthy. A child  
playing, in the pungent  
emerald green, flowers drenched, hair matted to her cheeks,  
red and lips opened like an 'O' breathing excited little snuf-  
fles of clean, virtuous air.

Legs spread wide, bosom bunched above  
crossed arms, painted nails, of dark glitter and blue. Alone,  
analyzing, tapping a pencil against the notebook in her lap,  
eyes cast up. Not a man in sight, not a face in thought, not a  
single sensual thing  
about a bare thigh, dripping with moonshine in the dark and  
quiet privacy of the  
night. Her toes curl and uncurl comfortably, like a cat with  
the swish of its tail.

Crescendo, morning glory covered in dew. Asterisms, ada-  
gio, AC/DC, gloomy room.

Sunrise, bleeding gums. Before everything she was person,  
and I remember too.



Tae Kim  
*Purple Peony*



Brian Tramontana  
*Bb Grant Ranch*

George Vargas

*Last Departure*

The murmuring of crickets serenade the warm suburban neighborhood.

With the street pavement radiating heat like a clothing iron,  
ready to straighten  
any wrinkles from a careless past.

The heat evaporates the moisture of the freshly mowed grass  
into humid dampness, hugging and breathing around bare  
skin,  
ready to disrobe anything.

The evening night unknowingly melds into the early morning,  
with each day provoking more goosebumps than perspiration.

Approaching it's last minutes of Summer,  
The heat begins to realize it's limits and dissipates farther.

The dance was over  
and no more moves were left.

A consolation between two souls, shared their hidden motives.

Nobody was there to bother, except for their own insecurities

Recounting moments of, secret smiles, intense gazes,

Intentional words with hidden feelings, and brief fixations  
interrupted

by apprehensions.

There was no denial  
in what they were both seeing

But, for the boy, he couldn't  
keep his promise to her.

For his fate was waiting for him  
in a greyhound bus  
the next morning.



Emme Sabanovich  
*Bob Marley*

Sara Hines

*This Coffee Shop*

Sam was a quiet man, keeping to himself at the corner coffee shop. He arrived every day at promptly 4:45 a.m. Not too early and not too late. The coffee shop opened at 5 am. Some mornings he would have to wait until 5:15 a.m., on others, 5:30 a.m. He did not mind. He would smell the morning air and witness New York City coming alive. Sam found beauty in every sunrise and magic in everyday occurrences, such as how steam billows through street manholes up into dark skies. Not only would the steam make him hungry for a black and white cookie, he also imagined it to be creating clouds made by humans. Which really if you think about it, from Sam's point of view, are still clouds made by nature. His reasoning being that humans are made by and born from nature, so, therefore, it was indeed nature creating them. Even in the month of June, a morning in an New York City side street brings the fog of autumn. He would watch this, and he would smile, just as he always greeted the opening workers with a smile. No matter how tardy they were, he always turned them around with a joke or a big tip. He knew all the workers by name, especially Clare. Clare was his favorite. Sam showed up at this coffee shop every day, from the age of sixty-nine to his final visiting age of ninety-six. As the years passed, all new employees began to know his name before he knew theirs. He always sat at the same table, the one facing the workers, not the busy outside street; this

always brought up gossip and questioning from the staff.

“Why is he always alone, yet always smiling? It doesn’t make sense. Why wouldn’t he want to people watch and see all the life going on outside?”

Never did the staff want to ask him why. Since he had such a way about him that made them enjoy their workday. No one dared to break that perfect silence with questioning.

So, Sam sat, day-in and day-out, the same routine, over and over.

Some of the community began to look at him as a statue to gawk over or an equation to theorize, but most liked creating fable fantasies. Still, no one ever asked him why. No one ever took the time.

One particular summer morning was just like any other, except that Sam came into this coffee shop his final time. He waited just like he always did and greeted Clare as she opened, with a smile and the same joke about the human weather. The only difference this day was that, along with his tip, he left a letter with a post-it note attached to it. The post-it read:

*“Please, Make sure no one opens this letter but, Rose.”*

Clare ran out after him to find the meaning of his letter. But

she was too late. Sam was gone.

Two hours later, a young man entered this coffee shop, wide-eyed, brow furrowed and sweating. He was breathing so heavily as he burst through the doors, that he had to bend over and place his hands on his knees while he caught his breath. Clare noticed it was her old co-worker Justin. He was holding a letter crumpled in his fist. Clare noticed its envelope was the same antique cerulean blue as the letter Sam had left behind. Intrigued, she rushed to help Justin to an open booth. Justin proceeded to tell her in an out of breath speech, that a woman named Rose had just passed away at their coffee shop across town, that she suddenly had a heart attack. She had been coming to their coffee shop for decades. Always sitting in the same place and always facing the workers just like he remembered Sam. When the ambulance came, he noticed the letter. Gasping Justin said, "I apologize, Clare, I just couldn't resist, it all happened so fast! I took her letter and read it. Well... I just... Look for yourself, Clare! You're never going to believe this!"

Justin handed her the wrinkled letter that looked years old. He watched catching his breath as she read.

*My Dearest Samuel,*

*I traveled all the way to NYC with nothing but the clothes on my back and the thought that I would be reunited with our family. I have sat in this coffee shop day-in and day-out. You told me that*

*our daughter worked here, you would meet me here, and we would begin again. I am tired, I am weak, and I can no longer go on. I am writing this hoping someday you will receive it. This thought alone is letting me leave this world. I have waited long enough. Today has to be the day I die; I can feel it. I am ready to meet on the other side now.*

Rose

Clare looked up from the letter to meet Justin's eyes. She realized he noticed the same antique cerulean blue envelope she was holding in her hands, matched the one sticking out of her apron. He looked at the letter and back to her. In that single glance, she knew Rose could no longer open the letter. Rose was gone now, and she knew in her gut that Sam was too. She held in her hands the key to a decades long mystery. She felt no guilt as she tore open the letter. She slowed herself as she unfolded the page, and she read each word with the care she felt towards this stranger, whom she knew so little and yet so well.

*My Dear Rose,*

*I have sat in this coffee shop day in and day out. I have watched our daughter grow from a young girl into a woman. She is going to college, acting on Broadway, and has two beautiful children. I am weak, and I am tired. I have sat here thinking we would reunite and let our girl know that we never wanted to give her up. That we were just two young kids doing what we thought would be best for her, hoping someday to become a family. My days of thinking*

*this are gone, along with my hope. The clock has run out. I leave this letter for you in the case you ever do show up. Your daughters name is now Clare. She is the bright-eyed, forever smiling brunette, who never wears a frown even when it rains. She is the smart one who always makes sure that your order is just right, and gives out hugs from time to time to all the regulars. She is just that kind of woman. Clare might not have been raised by us, but she reminds me so very much of us. When you finally come to this coffee shop, you won't believe what you see in her, not even with your own eyes. Life is like that. It has a funny way of blinding us from all that is and what could be.*

*Samuel*

Clare dropped the letters and fell to her knees. She never imagined she would ever find her birth parents. Especially not like this.



Callie Mooney  
*Untitled*

Mark De Shelter  
*Dragonslayer*

Dragonslayer

There she goes,

Dragonslayer,

Conqueror of savage beast and powerful foe

Dragonslayer, She

One who aspires for that which lies above the blue skies.

Devoid of the murk of our mire,

The weights and blights of our crass culture do not sully her.

In one hand she holds Excalibur, rightful heir to holiness

and heroism, In one hand she wields Gungnir, measurement

of strength and glory. Dextrous in linguistic, manual, and

mental

Foes worth of her few be .

Her battle cry, every word passed from her lips able to rattle

spines, Yet, on command,

soothe those of must turmoil.

Her movements precise and graceful, A manner of self, car-

ried proud,

For her alone.

Her instincts refined in their savagery, Arguments or duels,

words or rapiers Equally lethal in her capable grasp.

Surround her, have every manner of foul underhandedness

Every predator, every wicked silver-tongued serpent of hu-

man form All eager for conquest, all thinking to best her.

Yet she answers to none but One above

And in her answers, her valor, her swordplay, finesse, crafts-

manship and chivalry, She gives them not for courtliness or

appearances or vanity.

Her power comes from truth of heart, From conviction.

May she yet be covered in wound and scar and breakage  
without end, Endless battles and victories battered into  
knees and wrists,

Bones broken, twisted, fractured,

Helpless shackles constantly crushed under the unstoppable  
force of her determina- tions,

Unscathed eternally

Besides the pained fruits of experiences and challenges of  
her own design, of her own sport, of her own permissions

Trophies of her quest for innumerable victories.

How I wish to be the winged back that takes her to the skies  
and spires beyond it,

To turn scales and scars and draconic hideousness to en-  
ablers of her ascent To play as companion to her adventure

To accompany her journey from foe to foe

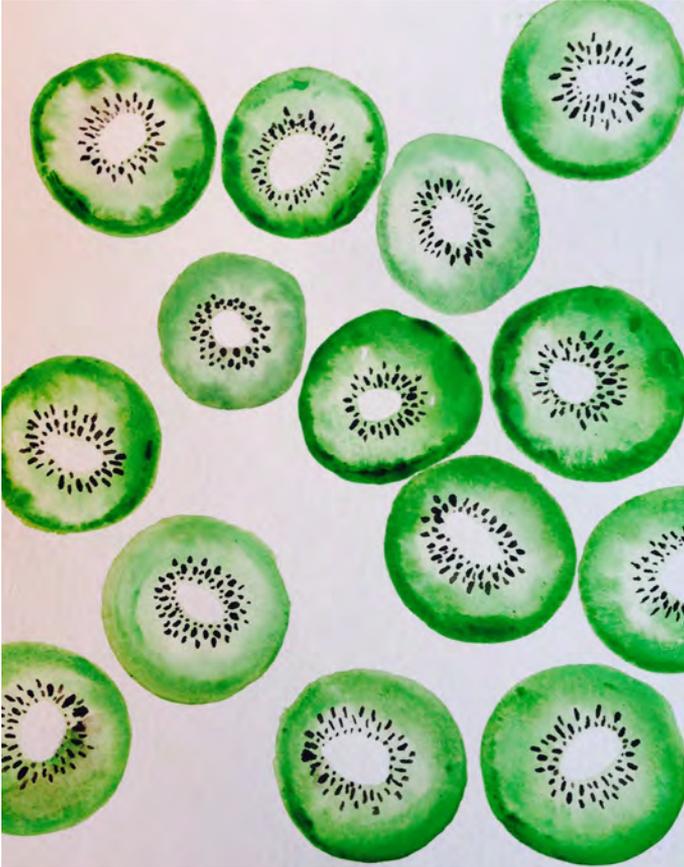
To have her pluck the sword from this stone heart and wield  
it for goodness! Let I not be mere beast for your conquest, a  
mantle ornament of beheaded firebreather,

Best our existence be as partners Operation in synchrony, I  
the beast to your glorious beauty

The creature of night to your knighthood and valor My  
black, cragged chitin to your shining armor Darkness paral-  
lel to your guiding light

A dragon

For the dragonslayer



Diana Katchour  
*Abundance of Kiwis*

Matt Williams  
*Evolution of Species*

As the tree grows  
Consistent, yet muted,  
The river flows,  
Boisterous and unrefuted.

As the flower blooms  
Spontaneous, yet predicted,  
The storm looms,  
Overbearing and unafflicted.

As the sea bird nests  
Comforted, yet vigilant,  
The wave crests,  
Powerful and indignant.

As the man apprehends  
Impetuous, yet confident,  
The earth bends,  
Conquered and despondent.



Brian Tramontana  
*Untitled*

Lily Tsurumoto

*Noah's Arc*

*Series: Cold Science // Volume: Bridge in the Rain Chapter 1#*

*Noah's Arc*

Muddied loafers drag over the tuile viridian  
the cobbled street, a quilt of silken mineral wool. water  
washes over it gently, motherly hands rubbing out stains  
from unruly children.

Pouring rain floods from the moat of his cap.

That was John, a humdream kind of  
man, brain crickeling, crackeding, and fizzling ever so quiet-  
ly. Softer than a snuffle  
between content slumber, hushed  
like bristled wheat (chittering offended gossip to one another),  
subtle as the dopdop bird as it rolls dopdop berries from  
the cuckoo's nest. A thief's thief is  
the truly precocious one, precarious two, dare say precario-  
cious as three.

Which sounds downright incredubious,  
so two is quite enough. Therefore this journey starts with a  
pair. One John and one Jane.

Jane was a magician, a witch of physics and other diabolich  
alchemies.

With a bad case of Glauco-somatisis, a lazy lazuli eye and a evergarious personality. She subscribed to the doctrine of the Eudaemons, and practiced crafting experituals where she spoke to Maxwell's demons who set upon her shoulder, whispering contratempting fantasies of entropacity.

July 1st, the occult beckoned her to their brick mausoleum, Scotland Yard, clad in indigo robes, they ringed round the mahogany oracle, like sultans with their tall stiff hats, and requested her praxis, the art of forensiks, a relatively new sorcery, an unventured field even for the O-Mega Academagea, Chair of Nanthro-Philosophisticates.

And so the warrant was issued and she was dispatched.

"No." John declared with finality before he eventually digressed. John had bingy honeybells ripe to pick, fink rosenwiggles that absolutely must be watered, wrily socks to fold, woolberry bushels set to dry, and plenty of rose hip jam and dopdop marmalade to brumble into shelvebins and cranooks of masons. And so much more, he reminded Jane as they sat in the train and he passed the hours listing each chore that certainly ought to be being

done about now.

And so our pair departs;

Because, a single is lonely, a menage trois is obscene and we  
daren't add one to three when we head East.



Anu Bavra  
*Untitled*

Jordan Zachary Ellis

*Devil's Discourse*

Chance has danced off a dozen times,  
Shadows give light to the Devil's  
grin.

A Succubus to sway in the  
shade; A vampire inspired  
narcissist.

The void reminiscent eclipses the ethereal,  
Casting dark and slow like ink in water.  
Entangled in her exquisite ends, entranced  
As a moth flying for the flame, barely  
believing.

Whispers within call forth will,  
While desire distances itself with  
distraught

Intentions mirrored with malevolent motives,  
Closer still she swings and sings.

That melody of malice is a mirage,  
Like climbing to the edge of time.

It falls upon forsaken ears  
fervently,

Looking to lay nest next to more muses.



Sara Hines  
*Mr. Weathered*

Catherine Kendall

*Snow Ride*

Hiking up her woolen skirts, Abby swung into the saddle with an ease that belied her anxious thoughts. What if Doc Johnson wasn't home? What if she couldn't find him? Swallowing hard, she gripped the reins tighter and bent low over Belle's sturdy brown neck, her bonnet pulled forward, head lowered against the swirling snow. She dared not look back for if she did, she might not have the courage to go. She tapped the heels of her high-top shoes lightly against Belle's sides and the mare broke into a trot. Abby knew not to urge the horse to go any faster or the mare would wear out long before they made the two mile trip to town. The snow was swirling faster now as the wind rose. Sunset was still an hour away, but the incoming storm had already rendered the sky the color of slate. What little light remained was fading by the minute.

When they reached the main road, Abby urged the horse to a canter, a gait Belle willingly assumed. Abby felt a surge of affection for the old mare. "Good girl," she whispered, leaning down over the horse's black mane. She scrunched as low as she could in the saddle to avoid the wind and stinging snow, which seemed now to be mixed with sleet. Why, oh why did they have to move the cattle from the north pasture today? But she knew why. Because the storm was coming in. Because if they lost even one of them, they wouldn't be able to pay the loan. And if they

couldn't pay the loan, they would lose the farm. If only, Abby thought, she had not taken time this morning to track down Lola, her pet milk goat, before helping Daddy with the cattle. If only she had found Lola quickly and they had gone to round up the cattle in the morning, as planned, instead of at two in the afternoon. If only she had remembered to latch the gate and Lola hadn't wandered off in the first place. Abby bit her lip to keep from crying. Daddy was right to be cross with her—they should have left much earlier. If they had, she wouldn't be on this deserted road alone in a snow-storm, and Daddy wouldn't be—

“Stop it!” Abby told herself firmly. “You can think about it after you find Doc Johnson.” But she couldn't stop thinking about the sight of that bone protruding from Daddy's leg, his grimace as he ordered her to go fetch the doctor.

Abby had always been proud of being her father's right hand man, so to speak, since she was an only child. But today she wished she had older brothers like her friend Mary did, boys who worked in the fields alongside their father. Abby was fond of saying she would rather be out herding cattle or plowing a field than sitting in a corner, sewing a stupid seam. But right now she longed for the comfort of Mama's clean-swept hearth and the smell of stew and biscuits. Sewing a seam by lantern light sounded infinitely better at the moment than riding through snow and sleet.

The sky grew darker, the wind colder. Abby tucked her coat tighter around her, but it didn't block all the snow. Her toes were numb in her boots despite the two pairs of

Mama's tightly-knitted wool socks she wore inside them. She wondered if she was getting frostbite. She had seen men who got caught in blizzards and lost fingers and toes to the cold...or worse. It wasn't a pretty sight. She wondered if Daddy was getting frostbite. She had taken the saddle and blanket off Daddy's horse, Two-bit, and sent the animal back to the barn. Daddy had gathered the horse-warm blanket around him. But was it enough? Abby trembled.

It was nearly dark when Abby and Belle reached the edge of town. Thank God! They passed the first house, dim in the fading light, the Martin place. It was snowing so hard that the familiar houses looked alien, ghostly mounds along the road. They were coming up on the church, and next it to the graveyard, its headstones like crooked teeth in the dying light. Though she couldn't read the stones in the dark, Abby knew the inscriptions on the two markers in the middle, third row back, by heart. Josiah Baker, born and died 1860. Thomas Baker, born 1862, died 1864. Her brothers. Mama had already lost so much.

Finally she reached the Johnson place. There was a light in the front window. Pulling Belle to an abrupt stop, Abby jumped to the ground, stumbling a little from the numbing cold as she climbed the three steps to the front porch. She pounded on the door as hard as she could.

"Doc Johnson! Doc Johnson! My daddy's hurt bad—I need you to come right away!"

The door opened, but it was Mrs. Johnson standing there, her pleasant face registering dismay as she took in

Abby's disheveled appearance.

"Child, come in, you'll catch your death! They're saying it's a blizzard." She reached out and grasped Abby's arm. The house radiated warmth from the woodstove and smelled wonderfully of bacon and cornbread. Abby suddenly realized she hadn't eaten all day.

"I...I can't," Abby stammered. "My dad broke his leg—it's really bad. He couldn't ride. I have to find the doctor. Where is he?" Abby resisted the woman's attempt to move her toward the house and stood firmly on the porch. Fear clouded Mrs. Johnson's kind face and a line appeared between her brows.

"He went out to the McCamish place hours ago, dear. Melanie is having her baby. I don't expect him back in this weather; he'll probably have to spend the night there. Where did you say your daddy was?"

"Out in the north pasture, about a mile from our house."

Alarm washed over Mrs. Johnson's face, followed quickly by the mask of reassurance grownups use when they don't want children to worry. But Abby couldn't be more worried than she already was. And she was fourteen, not a baby. She squared her narrow shoulders and took a step back from the Johnsons' doorway.

"I'll go get him," she said firmly. Before the older woman could say anything else, Abby had turned on her heel and clambered back into the saddle.

“Thank you ma’am,” she called to Mrs. Johnson, who shook her head slowly as Abby rode off.

It was completely dark now, and Abby could see very little. She squinted as she peered into the swirling snow, trying to get her bearings. The McCamish place was, unfortunately, on the far end of town. She could only walk Belle now because it was so hard to see and the snow was getting deep. No other horses or buggies were out, though it couldn’t be much past 5:00 p.m. *Everyone else is inside, next to the fire*, Abby thought sadly. She willed herself not to cry.

When they finally reached the little white clapboard house belonging to Timothy and Melanie McCamish, Abby left Belle in the front yard and climbed up the steps, her feet like blocks of ice. Tim McCamish came to the door almost immediately.

“Abigail Baker! What in tarnation are you doing out on a night like this?” He took her arm firmly, pulled her into the house and shut the door. Abby scanned the small parlor.

“Where is Doc Johnson?” Her teeth were chattering from cold.

“He’s tending to Melanie. She just had the baby, a fine boy. But why are you out by yourself on a night like this? Didn’t you hear? They’re saying it could be a blizzard. You shouldn’t be out there!”

Abby’s lips began to tremble. “My dad...his horse fell in a ditch when we were tending to the cattle this afternoon—it’s broke real bad; I could see bone.” I need Doc Johnson to come right away.”

The young man frowned. "Abby, it's not safe to travel. No one should be out in this weather. You know what can happen." Abby did, all too well. Tears began to roll down her cheeks, and she didn't try to wipe them away. She made every effort to steady herself.

"He needs help," she pleaded. He won't make it if we leave him out there alone." The last of her resolve crumbled and she began to sob. Tim McCamish awkwardly eased her onto a worn settee and tucked a colorful quilt around her. She couldn't stop shivering. From the corner of her eye, Abby saw the good doctor emerge from the tiny bedroom. There were deep smudges beneath his eyes and the lines on his face looked deeper than usual. He knelt down in front of Abby.

"Where exactly is your father," Dr. Johnson asked her gently.

"North pasture, about mile from our homestead."

The doctor asked Abby to describe what happened, and what the wound looked like. He listened without interrupting. The telling took less than two minutes. When she finished, he sighed.

"I'm probably crazy to go out there," he told Abby and Tim, "but I can't leave a man out in a snowstorm with a compound fracture." He turned to Tim.

"Saddle my horse while I finish with Melanie and gather my things."

Tim looked surprised but did as he was told. Doc Johnson went back to the bedroom, and Abby heard brief

mewling, a woman's soft voice murmuring something she couldn't quite make out, and then silence. Doc Johnson emerged with his bag and settled his woolen coat on his shoulders, wrapping a heavy claret-colored scarf around his neck.

"Thank you, Dr. Johnson!" Abby rasped.

"I'll do my best," the doctor told her. "And I want you to pray while I'm gone, okay?"

"I will," Abby promised. She curled up under the quilt and started to pray, but quickly sank from consciousness. It seemed to her that no more than a few minutes had passed when she awoke to the dry sound of a newborn's cry and the smell of coffee. She started up, stiff from sleeping on the settee, but able to feel her toes. Tim was bent over the woodstove, cooking something that smelled like manna from heaven. He smiled when he saw her watching him.

"Ready for some breakfast, Miss Abigail?"

"Did Doc make it in time? Is there any news?" she asked. She looked outside anxiously. Everything was white, but the sun was out. She could see a slice of brilliant blue sky.

Tim's brow crinkled slightly. "I haven't heard anything yet, but the storm didn't get near as bad as they said it might. All we can do is hope and pray. Oh, and I put your Belle in the barn last night and fed her; she's fine."

"Thank you," Abby said quietly, realizing guiltily that she hadn't given Belle another thought once she entered the Johnson house last night. *Mama must be frantic*, she thought,

with a fresh surge of shame. *She doesn't know where we are.* She pictured her mother pacing back and forth in front of the snow-filled landscape beyond the window, her brow furrowed, her slender hands clasping and unclasping themselves the way they did when she was worried. Abby whispered another prayer under her breath.

Hours later, fortified with coffee, biscuits, and gravy, Abby saddled Belle, who seemed none the worse for wear, and headed out. The drifts were deep but the sun was shining. Just as she turned up the road that led to her family's homestead, Abby saw a fine black horse and rider coming the other way. Doc Johnson! Her heart pounded. As soon as he saw Abby, the doctor pulled up, smiling.

"Your daddy is going to be just fine, young lady. He should be able to walk again in about six weeks, though he might always have a limp. He won't even lose any toes."

"Oh, thank God!" Abby breathed. "Thank you so much for going to him. I was so scared!"

"All in a day's work, Little Lady," the doctor said, tipping his hat in her direction. "Now I need to get home; I expect the missus is pretty darned worried about me at this point. You take good care of your daddy now, you hear? And keep that goat locked up from now on." He winked at her.

"I will!" Abby promised. Belle pricked her ears and picked up speed as they headed for home, following the path the doctor had forged through the snow.



Neni Silva  
*Untitled*

Sara Hines

*Realities of a Fairytale*

There once was a Boy  
Upon a time not long since past  
Who played his roll as troubled and toiled  
Yet unlike a fairytale it was indeed a fact  
He moped along  
Spirit weak while persona strong  
A visage of a Man  
To actually be one- was never in his plans  
He stands all alone  
Company for his misery unwelcome  
You can hear it in his tone  
Its the most deafening silence  
The world has ever known

Far-Far Away

There was this Girl  
Growing up was a rule  
Not welcome in her world  
Never seeming to escape  
Loves cruel fate  
She never stopped believing that one day  
Like an ever after  
The love would reciprocate  
She lived for the beauty, the happiness, the dream  
That one day a real boy

Would be all that he seemed

Fate met with Destiny and devised a scheme

They were oh so proud

“We make the perfect team”

“The boy will go here and the girl will do this”

And so it was perfect!

For the girl and boy to know they both exist.

“Ha! There is a factor you two always miss”

“ME!” said Freewill “These stories...

They all have this twist!”

The girl and the boy were worlds away

Yet longing to keep something, anything!

They decided,

Come what may...

“We are friends and we mean so much,

Although amazing the feelings we feel when we touch,

Stay apart and stay friends...

I think we must....”

See the boys heart was taken

And the girl gave hers to him

So they were both equally broken

And had nothing left to give

Hearts aching and yet filled with pride

They will live out this life  
Gripping each others sides  
splattered as ink  
In the big book of friends  
To keep each other company  
While their hearts can mend

A thousand years from now  
Many galaxies away  
The girl and boy will live in love together forever...  
Well... that's what Destiny and Fate  
Will eternally pray!



Diana Katchour  
*Confused Graffiti*



*This 2017 issue of Voices is dedicated to our beloved professor and friend, Brian Tramontana.*

*Thank you for everything.*

*“Go, change the world.” ~ Brian Tramontana*

