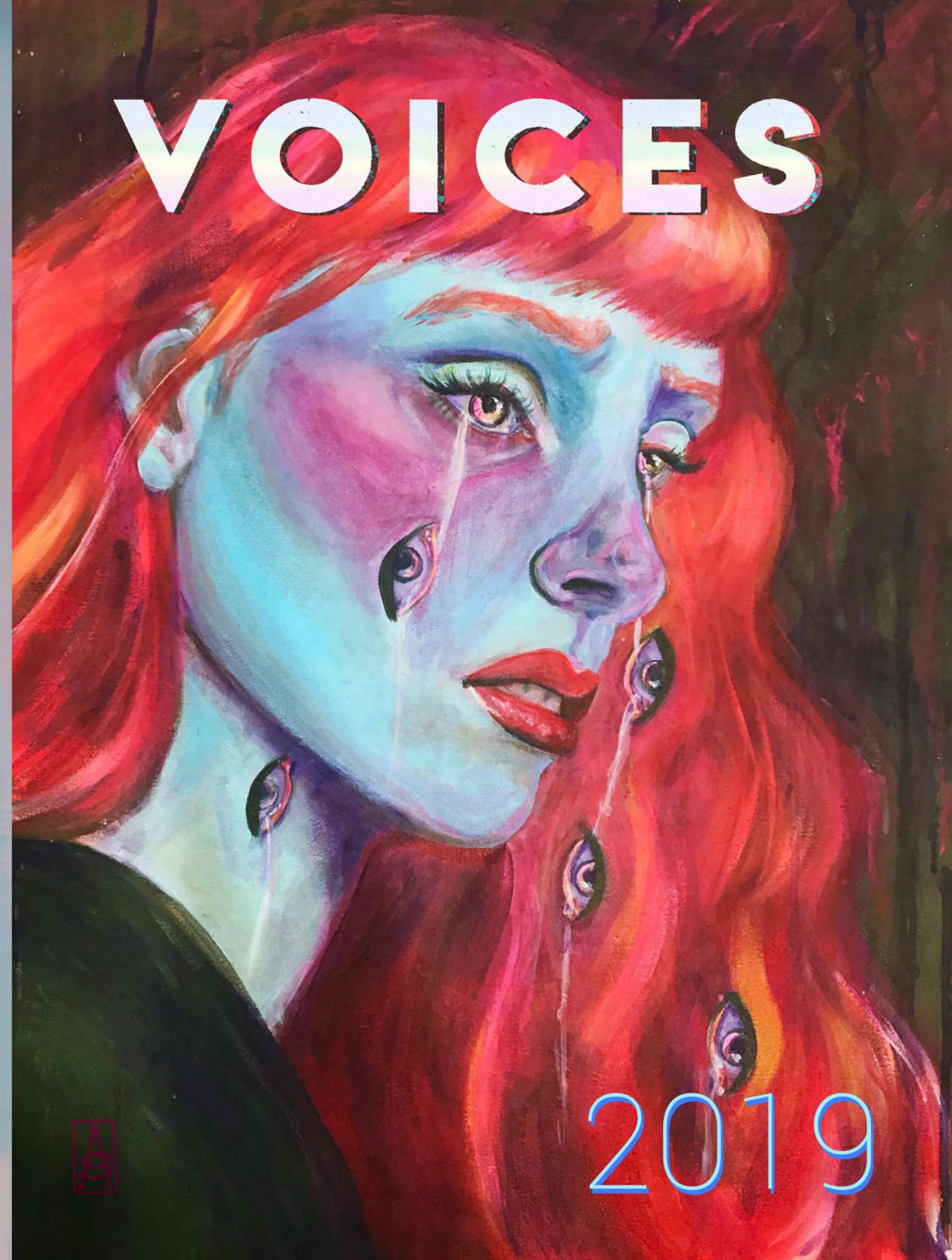


JESSICA ALLEGREZZA
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ANU B.
EVAN BROWN
AVA DIGIROLAMO
C.S. DUTRO ACEVES
JORDAN ZACHARY ELLIS
DANE ERIKSON
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CHRISTINA SHAH-NAZARIAN
ALISHA SOLOMON
MELINDA VAN
RACHEL WOLFORD
THOMAS ZHANG

VOICES



2019



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 Arts Club. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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We would like to greatly thank the West Valley English Department, the Associated Student Government and the Inter-Club Council for their help and support.

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The Longest Winter

Thomas Zhang

The wind weaved its way through the valley and found the village, tucked away among the trees. Six or so clusters of houses, three or four in number, huddling together for warmth under a thick blanket of snow, shivered as the wind permeated their bones. Their windows flickered with light, twinkling like the eyes of the old man who has seen great sorrow and holds great wisdom, and their countenances appeared to withdraw within themselves, vainly trying to shut out the enveloping cold.

Within one of these houses, behind one of these glistening windows, sat Ezekiel, his bushy beard effulgent with firelight, his brooding expression cast into sharp relief by the shadow of his prolific, untamed brow. He stared into the fire, and his eyes, like the bones of dinosaurs' dead for millions of years, hardened into polished coals. These coals would not catch fire. They sucked the stifling heat from the air and dissipated it into their infinite nothingness. Ezekiel gathered his coat more tightly about him and sank deeper into his chair. His eyes snapped from their aimless wandering to find the other chair in the room, opposite his, sitting and watching. The chair had done a lot of sitting in its time, and it had seen much life. It had rocked with the faint humming of a song, had kept time with the clicking of knitting needles. It had held the kind love that need not be expressed, merely felt. It had heard the heated shouts of mismatched expectations and long-hibernating frustrations boiled over. It had faced the wall in uncompromising protest. And it had sat empty witness to reconciling embrace, she in his lap, he in its matching pair.

As it sat empty then, so it sat now, empty forevermore.

Ezekiel put a hand to his neck. His fingers found her scarf and made their way up her handiwork, touching one by one each stitch she had made, admiring her craft. They ended their journey at the base of his chin and settled their way into the fabric, becoming intertwined with the wool. He held his hand there and remembered her touch. Her rough skin would brush his and caress it, tenderly stroking and fussily grooming like a mother cat with its young. But nevermore. Nevermore would she hold his face in her hands, whisper warm and loving reassurances in his ear, or tickle his beard with her hot breath as her forehead rubbed against his. Nevermore would he feel her touch. He felt his face licked by the blaze, seared by it, robbed of moisture. He turned from the fire to the window and discovered tendrils of heat had invaded here too, melting the frost, which ran and trickled in rivulets down the glass. He looked outside to the

bleak, white world, clouded by a foggy window and wavering like a candle in the wind. The winter would last a while longer, and he would have to endure.



Red Grasp

Samantha Pendleton

Loosen Up

Daniel Marovich

“Loosen up”

Back then, my hands were so tiny.
 The fingers didn't match.
 Tiny little struts of bone,
 Ribbons of tendons
 Sticking out at odd little angles -
 I would stand in front of the mirror,
 Flexing my phalanges,
 Awed at the mechanics of my body.

It didn't take long for me to learn how to use them.
 Or rather, need them.
 Because it was either the Christians at school
 Or the father I lost to bourbon and seven
 That taught me that hands
 Weren't meant for showcasing,
 But for the messages they could speak.

I never had much luck.
 Between the progressions of the New Age
 And the bumbling alacrity with which my mother
 Ate it all up
 I was on a diet
 Consisting of Paxils and Wellbutrins, Ritalins and Silerts -
 The pain was incandescent.
 Like a boiling rapid, these angry songbirds
 Crashed like so many waves
 Sinking their hookbills and child-proof talons
 Into the already chaotic orchestra plucking away
 Inside my brain.

The Wild Rumpus became a riot.
 Drunk on emotions and feelings I couldn't understand
 Dazed and confused, lost and abused
 I was a mannequin all done up in skin.
 And I
 Couldn't
 Feel

Anything.

Just white noise at different volumes.

And everyone noticed.

I wasn't seeing how everyone was watching.

Maybe I was too focused on the remedials,

Or maybe I was too busy learning how to be,

But everyone had already put that letter on me

Before I even knew what color was scarlet.

And just like that, I had become a sickness

With a pretty little label;

"Beware: Handle with care."

My hands were still small

When I burned them, trying to feel.

The pain was present but the need to stop wasn't,

And it wasn't long until my attempts at rekindling

The deadness behind my eyes to the land of the living

Were noticed and abhorred.

I was implored;

"Why do you do these things?"

But the questions, they made no sense!

Because this whole time I was trapped

In this wasteland of pharmaceuticals -

Every time I mistepped, my father was there

Communicating the best way he knew how

And I caught the messages, one after another

Right on the chin between the whiskey soaked knuckles -

My papa's waltz was a tone deaf dirge

Of callouses and belt buckles.

So the question, the question

What kind of dumbass question was that?

Why do I hurt myself?

Why do you hurt me?!

I was the half-complete sculpture

Left for the sepulcher

I was the decaying fruit discarded for Buddha

The prayer unspoken

The long shot

The boy without a chance in hell -

Yet still you asked, stupidly,

Apathetically concerned.

I was growing into my hands.
 Bigger now, thicker now
 A man's hands minus the labor
 I was the master, I was the shaper
 The anxiety? Gone.
 Th numbness? Gone.
 The pills? Gone.
 And like a shooting star arcing across the midnight sky
 I shot and blazed away.
 I was a man now,
 Gods be praised.

But like all such stars
 They burn brightest but briefest
 I was swallowed by the maelstrom of my own effigy.
 Peter wasnt coming to crow,
 The frowns began to show,
 And no amount of wishful thinking
 Could undo the awful tick-tick-ticking
 Of the broken bell top clock
 Deep inside my chest.

Its been years now, since I've contemplated that reflection in my mirror,
 Myself examining those tiny little hands.
 And I gotta say,
 There's so much I wish I could tell that little boy
 Playing with his fingers.
 I could show him how to shave,
 Teach him how to talk to girls,
 Maybe even how to drive -
 But I can't no matter how hard I try.
 Not because he's gone
 But because he's..
 Because he's..
 me.

Older and wiser.
 Equipped with a story
 Because its dangerous to go alone.
 And the lesson?
 Is that regret is a dinosaur,
 Best left in the tar pit;
 That hate and hurt?
 Are the only easy things in life.

And that life?
Life is a story -
Of all these things
Walking towards the horizon,
Holding either a sunrise or a sunset.
If only you just let..
Yourself
Be.
Free.



It's All Clear Now

Anu B.

Jazzy

Juliana Meduri

I brace my tongue
To tuck behind my teeth
Jack's dead
tell Nick

This isn't fair.
Living hadn't happened yet
I don't know if he chose this.
You need to stop crying
or else
you're just as hollow as these folk

Bob knocked the wind out of me
My jacket is damp

Happy Birthday will never
sound the same
We scaled fences to get here
Closer to him

This poem is dedicated to Jack Rossiter Callaway (1998-2016)



Making My Face

Anu B.

Tick

Thomas Sargis

I spend a lot of days imagining what I could be working towards.

Vivid pictures of towering realities, fragile as distraction.

I spend lots of time in caution.

Compelling fantasies of

ubiquitous shame.

As we've learned

No shame can outclass

The sprawling agony of knowing

you'd not once valued myself worthy an opportunity.

My lethal misstep was believing success was what I needed.



Shall We Dance

Anu B.

Fruit of Life

C. S. Dutro Aceves

I heard myself think, “What a day.” A gentle smile spread across my face. “What a day, what a day,” I thought. And it wasn’t the Crimson Clouds gratifyingly set against the Aquamarine Sunset, or the Forested, Green, round, rolling Hills. It was the wholesome Tranquility that richly permeated them all. The kind you can feel fuzzily rest in your belly and the top of your head. It was then that I heard it again. That eerily familiar whisper. The sly Silver tongue slithered on my skin and it crawled up like Spiders on their cobwebs. I knew the Peace had lasted as long as it could, and I didn’t reach out to grasp it. I just turned around and left. I could still see the Vitality and Glory of Nature through the corners of my eyes...

Time, nonetheless, has never been on anyone’s side. It functions in illuminating or Eclipsing ways. It exists as a framework for Reality but is Infinite and almost immeasurable by our Senses. I don’t know what I ate yesterday, but I could tell you the Story of how I thought this Bird I saw when I was a child looked like one, I had seen in a Dream before. And I remember it. Do you know what I mean? And there’s no use in fighting it. The arsenal Time has against us would annihilate even the most skillful sage if it were ever so inclined to. The good thing is Time is Patient. We have ample Time in a day to Experience Life. But, One instant you might be plucked out of Reality, and the next plopped into a puddle of your own particles and juices. Set afloat the Currents of the Universe. At least, that’s what I’d like to think happens after Death. Albeit, a Rainbow Bridge into a Heavenly Wonderland would be equally awesome, or perhaps a Reawakening in a new body and mind, in a different Life perhaps. In the end, I’d rather just not Die altogether. “Saves on introductions and goodbyes.” I remember hearing that once... Life cannot be Created or Destroyed, only transferred. Ah, finally a soothing thought. Well, sort of. Order and Chaos collaborate on Reality.

I opened my eyes solemnly and stared out of a window at the dim Dawn of morning Light. I turned on the lamp on my nightstand and put on my glasses. A Candle, the picture of my Mother and Father, and the Gold amulet of an Ankh I was gifted by them as a child all brought me back into my Reality from the Dreamworld. The hazy exit from a Dream is always dazing to me, especially this one that I’ve had so many times before. A copy of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance seemed the most Earthly, with its worn Yellow pages, and creases from my crude handling of it. My small Dog was still on its side, and was looking at me adoringly, lightly wagging its tail. I sat up and stretched my arms high, and then took a moment to Breathe.

That day, before I awoke, I was a Lion. I was waking up from a nap, shaded from the scorching desert Sun. The prowess of my uncurled paws caught my attention as I lay there, long sharp claws like a Scorpion's stinger, thick veins and tendons swayed and shifted under my tremendous moving weight as I started to move. I pushed up my head and chest with my right arm. I braced my left paw onto the ground and pushed up and back, tensing and stretching my arms and chest and neck with a stretch reminiscent of a deep bow. I let out a hefty yawn, with a light roar. I got up onto all four arms and legs, strong as Tree trunks. I could feel my tail flick side to side, slowly and calculated, like a Serpent. The stretch of the Dunes before me shone brilliantly with the morning Light reflecting on the grains of Sand. I knew I ruled over this land, yet I saw no one around me. I stared stoically at the vast emptiness that, at times, I remember had been so full of Life. I heard a snickering behind me that I recognized from the many Times I had been here before. I did not immediately turn, for I knew this old trick. "ALONE..." I heard it coarsely hiss, "NOTHING LEFT..." The Words stung for a moment... "RUINED..." They shrilled. I stood steady and strong, but my vision had become clouded and narrowed by Fear. My Animal instincts were kicking in. I was ready to attack. The cackling became louder and in greater Numbers. I sensed them right behind me. A lone Raven took flight, cawing above me. I spun around, claws unsheathed, teeth snarled, growling, and saw a Clan of crazed Hyenas descend onto me, thrashing about hysterically. Somewhere past the horizon Herds of Zebra and Elephants drank Water together, as the solitary Raven was gliding overhead.

Once I had recollected my Earthly thoughts and habits, my morning routine came automatically. The practice of work and study seemed to Breeze by that day. Work is a tedious routine, as are our studies sometimes, but the Fruits of it all seem to be worth it. We wouldn't all be doing it if not, right!? Well, at least, the phrases I heard so much growing up got me through it. About how we must work hard to get anywhere, and that it's the Dream, and that without it we're lost, and the rest of them. That day the phrases felt bleak. They felt empty. I did my work effectively, but I did not see the Light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps I've been looking down the wrong tunnel. Well you've got to make a mess to clean it up, right? The disorder seems to come no matter what, though. Perhaps it is our job to clean it up.

I'm usually amiable and polite to the rest of the People out there. We're all just trying to get by, I figure, make a Living and whatnot. There's not much more to be said on that, other than that a little extra bit of Kindness never hurt anybody. Quite the opposite really.

That day I probably seemed intently ambivalent towards most things, completely distracted as I was so focused on my Dream. Damn. That Dream had always struck me as alarming! ...Obscure and absurd as

it was... Me? A Lion? Hah! A Sheep maybe, idly being herded, wondering of nothing more than what is next to eat. Surrounded by Wolves dressed up as Sheep, probably... Definitely. There are definitely Sharks in the water, even in humble businesses like mine. Some won't hesitate to take a bite out of you if they get the chance. The common Element is money. Cold, hard cash. Something so Lifeless, detached, yet, how it influences the masses and brews Storms in our emotions! I have an appreciation for the results of some money systems and institutions, mainly hot and cold running Water and Air conditioning, but I can't help but feel that we could have all these commodities, and more, if we were all given equal chance to collect and utilize this thing called money. Currently it seems like many of us have the cards stacked against us. Or that a few have a stacked deck, or trump cards up their sleeves.

I enjoy my Time spent in Nature very much. Growing up I found delight in everything this World offered through the Earth. Each crawling creeper and Woodland critter in the Great Outdoors. Every Flower, Grass, and Weed. The raw, immortal Minerals in all their shapes, sizes, and colors. They all seemed to have their place and purpose in Nature, and, despite what some gardeners would tell you, they all seemed to Create the Harmony of the Forest itself. Life is not without conflicts of interest, even among the closest Plant relatives. Small differences are enough to fill an Ocean between People. Or, was it, Plants? People and Plants are more similar than some care to believe...

The Trees are the most wonderful part of Nature, I think. They are the Keepers of the Forests. The Guardians of the Ancient Earth. They are the vast and diverse populace of the Woodlands. They come in all shapes, sizes, and Personalities. I've never met a Tree quite like another.

Anyway, that day I took a bus out of the city to the Woods and started walking. The towering Pines and intricate Oaks had weaved their way up the Hill I was facing. A steady stream of Crystal-clear Water had formed a Creek passing by me; I hoped to find the Source of it. I found the start of a Deer trail and began to work my way up. I think I took that hike to center my thoughts on this whole Dreaming business, but in that moment my Heart was set on the Water's Spring. I remember the Sun was high in the Sky and Clouds were scattered in between the shades of Blue. I walked at a steady pace, watching for Stones and Pebbles in my Path, but observing the sights and sounds of Nature around me. The Blue Jay's song and the beat of its wings. The Light shining through the Leaves and Boughs. The trickle of the Creek over Rocks and Mud. Somewhere, far away, a Falcon cried, while an orchestra of Crickets droned on.

My Path had led me to a Pond. More than a Pond, it was a dip in the Creek where Water was stagnated. The Water was murky and Algae-ridden, withered Leaves piled around the edges. I could not get near as Poison-Oak and Blackberry Bushes surrounded it, creating an impene-

trable venomous barricade. My foot caught on the Thorn of a Bush momentarily, but I was quickly set free, and it only left a small scratch. Once past it I heard the deep croak of a Toad, and I quickened my pace. I was not scared, necessarily, at that point, although I knew it had croaked at me.

The Sun had settled Three-quarters of the way across the Sky and was beginning to Hearten its Golden Rays, and its heat began to wane. “I should head back soon”, I thought and attempted to orient my inner compass. My thoughts were in the Hills I had just crossed and the Valleys I had just travelled when I first saw Her. She was crouched low and was observing something on the Ground. She collected small pieces of Plants and Flowers and put them in a leather sack around Her shoulder. She wore a Black garment, nothing like I had seen before, and Her hair was long, dark, Sun-kissed, and tangled. I was far enough to stay hidden –out of my own wariness– and watch as She passed, picking and plucking Plants along the way. I think stayed hidden so long that I drifted into a slight slumber, something like a trance. I remember Dreaming vivid fragmented scenes, like some absurdist film. When I opened my eyes, She was crouched over me, staring with her own Two eyes that pierced through my Soul. Her eyes were Red, Yellow, and veiny around the edges, and One eye’s iris was a deep Emerald Green, while the other was shaded by the Greyed wispieness of blindness, scarred by something. They were open wide and slightly twitching. Her stare was of astonishment mixed with curiosity and concern. Her slow Breath kept me mesmerized, despite my internal Terror. My Heart was thumping, and my Words and cries could not reach my mouth. Her stare changed from bewilderment to amusement in an instant and a tilt of Her head. She stood up and moved back a few feet away. She lifted her right arm and pointed with One long, Twig-like finger. “That... way...” She whispered in a rasping Voice. She grinned at me with thin lips and tall Pearly teeth. She turned and left. I saw Her walk into the Woods, behind a Tree, and almost immediately a Raven flew out past me.

I was far too bewildered, myself, to disobey. I walked and walked until my own Reason took charge again. “This isn’t even the way back Home! Geez, what a fright!” I must have thought, “If I start Home now, I should make the last bus back.” But my Journey had already taken me elsewhere. I had cut across the Plain I had been walking through when I heard the gushing of the Basin I was seeking. I went through a clearing in the Bush and stood, completely dumbfounded, on the other side. The dazzling, translucent Spring had formed a circular Basin around the Source and it poured out a Fountain of Crystalline towers, ebbing and flowing up and back down again, succumbing to Gravity’s Force. The shallow Basin spread out into streams of Liquid Silver, connecting to the Creeks around it. The edges sank deeper into the Ravine from which the Water sprang.

Rose Bushes had formed around the banks of the Basin. Red, White, Pink, Yellow, some Black. On the other side of the shimmering Geyser I saw a single Tree, on which an Abundance of Apples had grown. I had always Loved Apples. The Golden Red hues and sweet fragrant aroma attracted me like a Fly. Before I knew it, I had stepped into the Spring, in an attempt to cross for my treasure. I don't know why, but I kept walking through it, sinking deeper and deeper. I was plunged into the Spring by its strong undercurrents and pulled through the Byzantine Rivers Under-ground. I think that that was when I Died. I was sputtered out back onto a Rocky Ridge, on the other side of the World, or possibly deep within the Earth's Core. It may have been on another World, altogether. Not that it matters now. It was then that I saw the Crimson Clouds and the Aquamarine Skyline. The rolling Green Hills. It was then that I remembered where I came from and where I was going. It was then, too, that I heard the slithering Secrets of Old Jimson Himself creeping up my spine. It was then that I turned around and left, because my Fate was Elsewhere. So, I rose as an Eagle, and soared.



Use Your Imagination

Anu B.

David

Dino G. Petite

Rock of earth,
 Mineral of life.
 Amorphous and vague, dormant he lies.
 The will of man bestows this stone new life.

Skin of rock,
 Bone of carbon.
 Crafted by a mortal's fleshen hand,
 A masterpiece of joy and passion, the earth has been transformed.

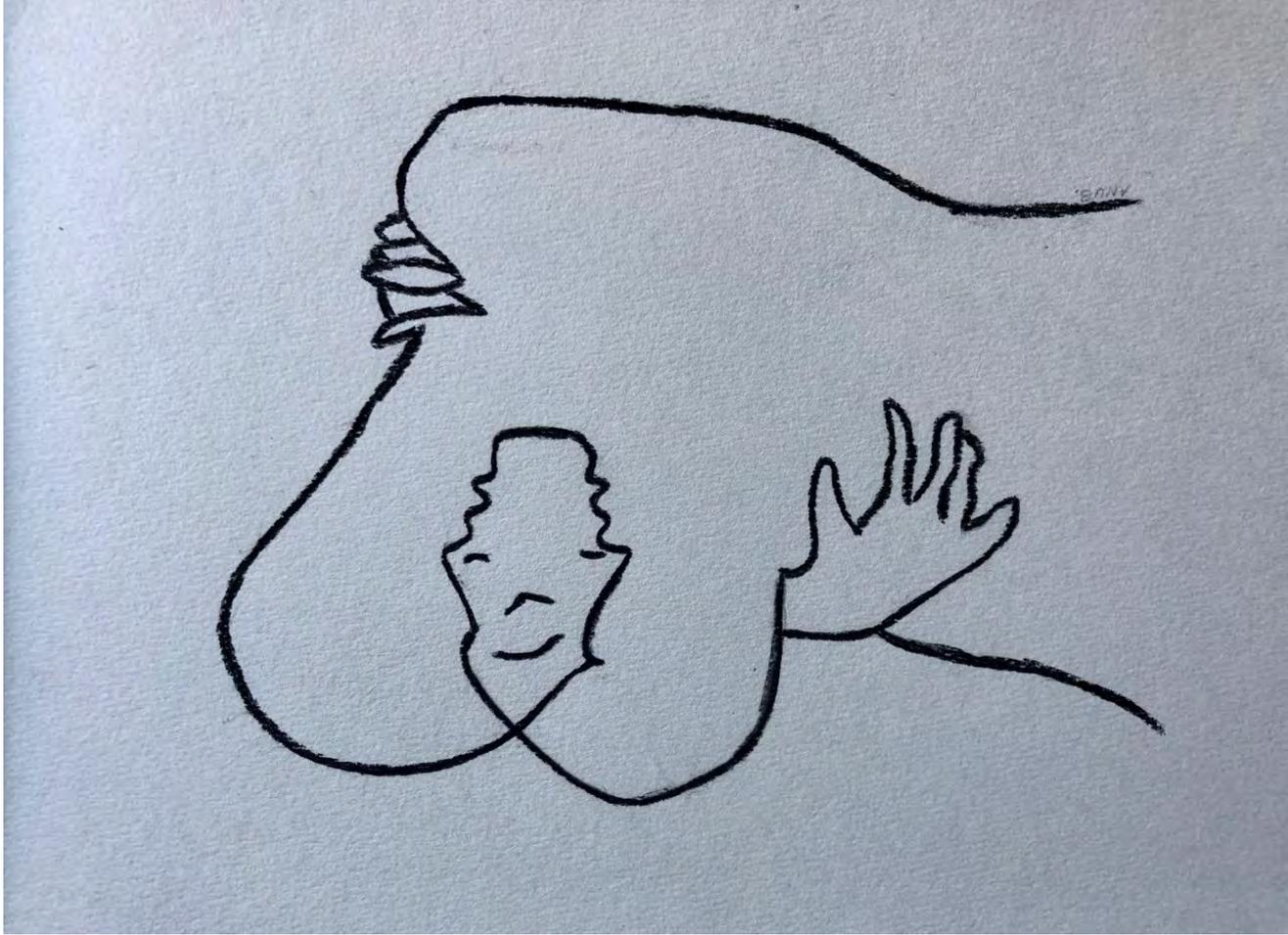
Man of marble,
 Heart of stone.
 He now stands motionless through time.
 Created in David's image, he is praised by all.

Veins of quartz,
 Blood of lime.
 Time passes, he who was once revered is slowly forgotten.
 A legend, a relic; he fears what it means to be unknown.

Soul of brimstone.
 Mind of ash.
 No mortal turns their gaze upon him, they all pass unbeknownst of his plight.
 He is alone, only the stars are witness to his endless silent agony.

Eyes of crystal,
 Tears of rain.
 Water streams down his long forgotten face.
 He is only visited by the aeolian wind, and must face his solitary fate.

Weathered stone,
 Decaying rubble.
 Those he once knew have since long returned to dust.
 King David, lacking the strength to stand any further,
 With hollow eyes affixed on the setting sun; finally falls.
 Eroding into the earth that all becomes one.



We Are One
Anni B.

Loss Meets Stages of Grief

Kassandra Arreola

loss meets stages of grief

If I ever lost you
I would stand there in disbelief
because I would have lost a part of me
the part that made me whole

if i ever lost you
i would try to build a time machine
to take back that thing i said that i didn't mean
four months ago
that upset you so

if i ever lost you
i would suddenly become religious
and place the blame on a higher power
rather than on myself

if i ever lost you i would lock myself away
until my skin resembles the shades of the moon
and my skin collapsed against violently against my ribcage
which would prompt my mother to say : "mija, me duele verte asi"

if i ever lost you
i would hope that one day i would wake up from the nightmare
and find myself in your arms instead

if i ever lost you
and i would always remember
you were the greatest lover
i will have ever had the privilege of being loved by



Grim an' Grisly

Felicia Alvarenga

Spring Cleaning

Taylor Ferguson

The floor is always dirtiest in April, when the snow turns to slush and the rain dredges up frozen ground, turning it into slippery mud. Some weeks ago, my husband had left to catch a train in the cold, early morning, wearing a camouflage uniform and carrying a duffel bag over his shoulder. All that was left of him were large, heavy tracks in the doorway from combat boots caked with mud. I had mopped those up as soon as I saw his silhouette disappear over the bend of the hill.

My boys only ever make things dirtier. One morning, as they ran in from outside, they flung open the screen door with a clattering sound, letting in the crisp air and tracking mud throughout my precious kitchen. I gave a half-hearted shout in the tender way mothers do and reached for my mop once again.

I guided my mop carefully over their muddy footprints. They dotted the floor in looping patterns, echoing childlike playfulness and careless whimsy. With each sweep, a tiny shoe was erased, one by one, until it appeared as though my mop was chasing an endless trail. Despite the grime, I was thankful that fun and games were the meaning behind the mess my children caused. My mind drifted to their father—to the chaos that would follow in his wake. He would yell and fold his belt into a loop, and my boys would flee from him into the kitchen; he would hunt them like deer, and they would hide from his scolding hand and seething tongue by veiling themselves behind the folds of my dress. I gripped the mop's handle tightly, fingernails penetrating the old, sodden, splintered wood.

He was away now; but instead of hunting game, he was poaching men. I could just see him in the reflection of the tiles. A malevolent shadow moving through dunes and shattered structures, tracking enemy soldiers through the obscurity of the dusty, opaque combat zone. I could imagine the apathy in his eyes...here came a shiver. It was as if I could smell the burning buildings—no, the burning people?—and I choked. I felt myself inching out into an open battlefield while decisive bullets whizzed overhead. A shot from an artillery gun flung itself with enormous effort over the hill up ahead, mercilessly tearing apart the barricade before me and sending another eruption of dust and debris my way. It consumed me, and the dirt was suffocating in my throat as I was buried alive. The world was a fragmented sea of silt, and I was part of the ruin.

With the force of a tidal wave, I thrust my mop over the floor and gritted my teeth. A flash of anger, and then it was gone. So was his dark reflection—it was just a kitchen floor now, with neat little piles of dirt waiting to be swept away.

As I continued to clean, my mind ambled off: into my hands, through my mop, and out onto the floor where it lingered. Vinyl tiles multiplied and expanded until the floor was an endless, muddy expanse that stretched into the horizon. Each cluster of dirt contained so many tiny specks—soldiers, like my husband, so insignificant and small. Easily felled. I struck each one of them down with a swift movement, and suddenly my hands were like gunfire and rain. In an instant, each of the soldiers vanished, knocked down on a cold, clean battleground. I used a bruised wrist to wipe beads of sweat from my tense brow.

He never much liked the way my forehead wrinkled while I cleaned up after his muddy tracks. I used to whistle a tune while I did my work, but after fifteen years I found myself wringing my mop's neck tighter with every movement of my arms as I dragged its ragdoll body across the dirty floor.

A shout from upstairs interrupted my thoughts, and I identified the voice of my eldest son. It was followed by a scuffle—then came a thud, and I knew his brother had been flung onto the floor amidst a petty argument. Violence without reason. My mind was drunk on a mixture of bitterness and sorrow as I pictured them kicking and howling like two animals, dogfighting on the dirty floor.

They were the spitting image of that man in the trenches, whose harsh hands were perfectly suited to pull triggers and end lives. He was still out there, lying in wait like a beast of prey. But there were others—his enemies, an army against him—who were hunting him, too. A flood of bullets would come cascading down, persistent as a torrential downpour.

Choking back my own disgust, I plunged my mop into the bucket and imagined water filling its imaginary lungs. Then drown, cried my tired, battered mind.



Penny Dreadful

Emily Armann

Please Don't Go

Nicole Oates

Solitude is all she knows
Her chalet, dusted in white
One stoplight town, but no one drives
The white slowed
She walked outside, bundled but unprepared
Words was all she cared about
But her eyes are dying like the rest
An old magnifying glass is all that can aid her
In her thirst for meaning
New glasses would stop the hand cramps
So it's worth the hike
She didn't know what storm lies ahead
That the rest of her would weaken and die
Just like her parched eyes



The Dollmaker

Emily Armann

Buttascotch

Kassandra Arreola

The sweetest thing I ever tasted was butterscotch.
You pronounced it “buttascotch.”

I curved like the “s” around your lips”
And watched silently as you sang the words to every rap song
In awe of the hum you substitute words for

There was no sweeter thing than that.

That, to me, was buttascotch.
And then came the day you embraced me like you missed me

That, to me, was buttascotch.
Running up the stairs to your room,
as if we were criminals

That, to me, was buttascotch.

But the sweetest taste came when you told me “no more.”

No more driving up to see the city lights.

No more tugging on your mind at night.

Page 8

The sweetest taste came when you left.

I sat and let the taste melt away

At times, i still hear you rapping “hail mary”

You’re buttascotch.



Split

Emily Armann

The Mantis

Ava DiGirolamo

A single bulb lit the room in which he sat. Unshaded yellow light reached up the wall, extending onto the ceiling, bent with the 90°-degree angle of the room. The light had little to touch except for the desk by which it sat, the neatly made twin bed across the room, the empty white walls which contained it, and the body of the man himself who sat at the desk. He had a pen in hand, head down, eyes scanning his work. He sat still. Only the dust particles floating obliviously through the air moved in the room. His face, sickeningly lit only by the left profile, held a certain unbalance which would have spurred disquiet in the ordinary passerby. He held his work steadily in his hands, staring at the paper intensely, judgmentally. This was everything, this was it.

Dear Mantis,

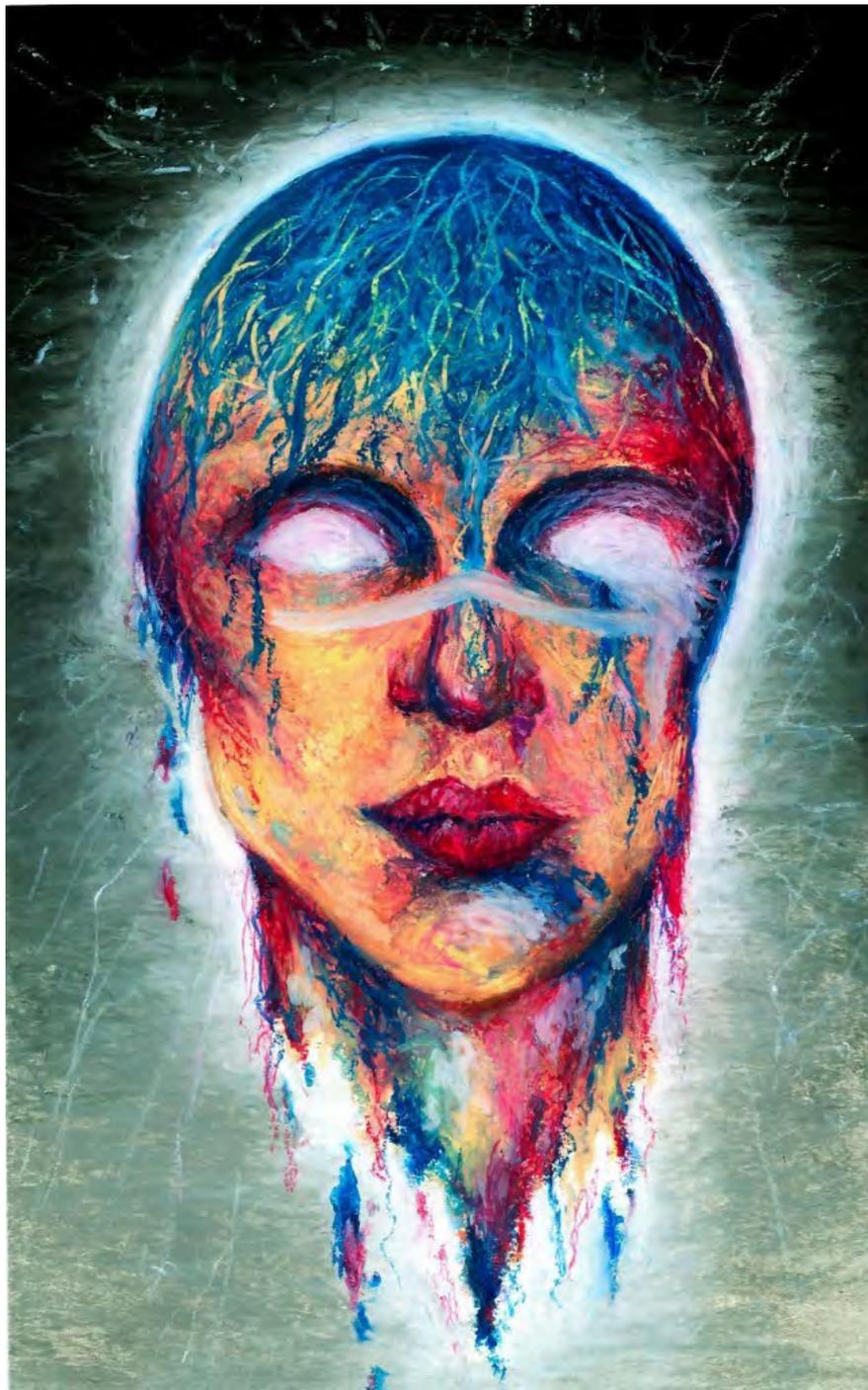
I thank you, for sticking around. But there's something that I want to ask you. Why do you stay if all that you do is sit and stare? We have shared a great love, you and I... I know that you are in pain. You must think me so selfish, when you're the one suffering and I'm here rambling on and complaining about my own needs. I do have needs you know. I philosophize on the state of the world, ponder the changing of the leaves, describe the pattern of the stars to you. All these things I go on about, day in and day out, when all I really want is just a single word out of you. Don't you love me at all? I want you to think of me at the beach that night, where I laid eyes on you for the very first time. The sun was setting, and the sky was on fire, but you looked so cold. That was the moment that I knew I had to have you. It felt so right to be on the sand that night, to feel the thunderous waves emanate through my body. I could see that you felt it too, the power of the waves- so massive that they cause the earth to tremble. You are a wave, my love. You cause me to tremble. What is it about you that terrifies me so? I believe it is that frozen stare... there's some dark secret hidden there. I dream about your eyes at night, they follow me when I enter your room, and they watch me when I take flight- through the past into distant memories and beyond the infinite. Beyond the infinite, that's how far your eyes can see. But mine can't. So, I sit and wonder about the magic and mysteries you encounter constantly. Where are you? Where have you gone? You won't tell me, I've tried to ask, tried to force it out of you... Are you happy now that I'm giving up? I love you as far as my eyes can see, but your darkness has clouded and blinded the one that loves you.

I cannot see you anymore. Our love has decayed, it's falling apart.
Goodbye my Mantis.
Mournfully,
-Me

The yellow light flickered, and the man jerked his head toward the bulb watching to see if it would fail again. After a few moments he returned his attention to the letter, folded it twice with precision and slipped it into an envelope. He rose from his chair and crossed the room deliberately so that his pace never slowed or stopped, opening the door and passing through it in one fluid motion, he entered the hallway. The beat of his steps was rhythmic, growing more intense the further he traveled down the hollow corridor. It seemed to stretch on forever, the grey walls expanded further and further away from him as he walked on. His heavy steps would not be silenced, no matter how conscious he was of the movement of his legs and the placement of his feet. The sound echoed in his ears- thump, thump. Thump, thump! ThumpThump! THUMPTHUMP! God it was dark in that awful crypt! God it was so empty in that suffocating sarcophagus! And yet it never ends, her door moved further beyond his grasp with each thump of his boots. He stopped in the darkness, closed his tired eyes, took one long deep grounding breath, and reached out for the door handle. To his surprise, his fingers found it, and grasped it tightly. He felt the paper of the envelope in his other hand and traced tight fast circles on it with his index finger feeling the subtle texture of the white surface. Another deep breath, then the turning of the handle, the opening of the door, the rush of cold air as he entered her domain, she liked it cold.

He flicked the switch, and the space was illuminated. She sat in the corner, on the floor, back propped up against the wall- as she always did. Hair dangled over the right half of her face, the left side of her jaw was visible, hanging half open as if she had been frozen amid speaking. Her legs folded beneath her and her arms hung at her sides. Her wrists met with the floor, and her hands lied still, palms up, fingers curled ever so slightly. The little one on her left hand appeared to be bent at a strange angle. She wore only a bathing suit, so that most of her figure was exposed. The skin on her legs was bruised and unnatural. The black marks on her arms were deforming. Her stomach was bloated and uneven. Her eyes, open, gazed upward slightly. They were glazed over with the unmistakable mark of death. They screamed at him through the fog.

He kneeled to face her, and gently pushed her hair back behind her ear. "I can't let you destroy me anymore Mantis, you won't rip me to shreds," his voice was weak. He placed the letter in her lap and kissed her forehead with the tenderness of a lover. He stood up and left the room, forever.



Eye Sore
Emily Armann

Board Meeting

Evan Brown

I seem ready
for these clients,
arms folded firmly
into one another, eyes
& mouth & tie bar all shining
like polymers, parallel
to whiteboard & podium,
a covert reflection beneath me
of shoe polish,

but really
the suit I put on
today is hardly my own:
Imported wool, silk, & leather
don't quite forge
to my person as if I
robbed the store mannequin
whose unblinkingness I now bear
in this boardroom.



Overtaken by Nature

Emily Armann

Dirt

Stephanie Anderson

Beneath the earth I am buried
depth in dust, the concrete cage, daffodils
it's alright to be blind for a while
let this peace live somewhere unseen-
a product of absence,
of heartbreak, of long hallways, of sweat-sticky cheekbones
I quit squinting at the sun,
waiting for submission, waiting for the light to come,
see the soil inside skin that cracks
in eyes, nose, and hands-
Look up.
this path to easier air

Maybe we stay underground
just a while longer.



Her

Irene Hernandez



Coral Reef Bleaching
Geary Auer



Undead End

Jordan Zachary Ellis

What do you do when the world ends without you? Reminisce? I mean you are kind of forced into that. Do you just... exist? Try and live as if it's always been like this? Is that even possible?

The whole god damn world has gone to hell, I thought to myself, staring up into the dark clouds that formed my ceiling. This little slice of suburbia is all I have left, and that's if you can really call this place a home of any kind. The wind from over the hills sent a shiver down my spine as it passed through me. I turned away from it, looking at more hills that formed the valley which surrounded the town.

I looked back up at the clouds, noticing the color had become at least a few shades darker than just a moment before. It had been nothing but sunshine and rainbows, and then suddenly out of nowhere the clouds kicked in.

The sudden switch had been unexpected, how was I supposed to prepare for anything like this? Nobody taught you in school how to prepare for the apocalypse. Then again, how can you teach something that was so... out of sight? As it stands, the universe did not wait for the world to wrap its head around the end times, it just kind of... let things end.

A few drops of rain landed on my nose, falling off the bridge and onto my right hand. I felt my hand form into a club, almost envious of the raindrop, tensing at the thought of how life was before all this. As I looked down at my fist, I watched it bloom into an open palm identical to the other and put my face gently between them, hoping they could hold back the tears if not the memories.

This warehouse rooftop had become my new home since the switch and although it was uncomfortable, it really did feel like the only home I had had since I lost her. An intense chill came biting through the wind, stabbing at my cheeks and causing my whole body to shudder for a moment. I thought back to when I lost Hannah, and I could feel the flood-gates opening.

The heat in your cheeks and under your eyes before your face floods with tears.

I felt something hit the back of my neck and looked around, but nobody could possibly be here. I had isolated myself very well on this rooftop. As I kept looking around from where I sat, my back against a small cement wall of about waist height. I began feeling more little pecks

all over my body. The sleet had just begun to pour from the heavens above, bringing an icy irony to the hell I now found myself in.

I adjusted my legs so that I stayed seated, and my feet were planted flat on the ground to help me get up. It seemed getting up was becoming more and more difficult each day, as was falling asleep. The back of my eyelids had become a movie screen of my deepest and most heartfelt memories.

I had a life before all this, right? These reflections were not just false manifestations, were they? She had existed, life had existed, I had existed before all this... We had to...

I put my right hand flat on the ground and used it to push myself up so I could see how the rest of suburbia was handling the sleet. What I saw from over the edge of the warehouse absolutely blew my mind: it was just like any other overcast day. Cars lined the streets, red and white lights clashing as the flow of traffic moved along. The silhouette of a bird could just barely be seen against the dark backdrop of clouds. Everything was exactly how I remembered it, peaceful and organized. And then I made possibly the biggest mistake of my life and blinked back to reality.

Everything, for as far as I could see, was vacant as a blind man's eye. The only cars lining the streets were rusted and empty, having been out of order for years on end now. I could hear the moaning and groaning of lost souls looking for their way, but the sight behind the sound is what was important. The Undead littered the streets, limping in search of their next meal.

These... things, they took Hannah from me. They took the entire world, and it happened so quickly that nearly nobody made it through the change unharmed. Some lost arms or legs to the Undead, some lost their minds. Those that were not so lucky lost something much worse, their loved ones. In five years now I have run into three living human beings, and thousands of reanimated corpses.

In groups the Undead became ravenous, like a rave where flesh was the drug of choice. They seemed to live off human flesh, but this little suburban area had gone so quickly that it was hard to tell what they ate. I knew they followed me whenever I left the warehouse, the moaning is so loud it's hard not to know.

They brought with them the sight and smell of rotting flesh everywhere they went. Some seemed to hold up well, only missing patches of skin, revealing raw red flesh beneath. Others, however, could cause even the sturdiest stomach to turn. Arms that were bent in the wrong direction from an unexpected fall, body's being riddled with holes like swiss cheese, some of the Undead were merely the torso and head of their former selves, having lost their lower half somewhere down the line.

Hannah and I had managed to stay holed up in our suburban home for a few months before we were no longer able to scavenge food. After that, we went searching through homes in rural towns, travelling as we found it necessary. Eventually, we found a warehouse to hold up in. We had gathered what little resources we knew of, taking seeds from the local grocery markets and spreading them around various grassy areas, hoping they would grow as the months went on from natural means. And then the unthinkable happened.

Our idea of spreading seeds had worked, and when running out to scavenge supplies we were able to find fresh produce growing in the yards of various houses of the city. We had yet to run into any other survivors but had managed to find a safe place to stay than our old house. The warehouse had been abandoned long before the end of the world, and we only go in by breaking a small window on one side of the building. As it turns out, it belonged to a sporting goods store, which gave use a lot of camping and hunting gear to defend ourselves with.

One day, we decided to do an extra supply run, hoping to find enough food amongst the few houses we had not yet searched to last us an extra week before the next scavenging trip. While Hannah was out for the run, I was to gather all the hunting supplies and organize them into different boxes, which were to be held safe and out of reach on the warehouse's rooftop, so I agreed to stay behind and finish the job.

I finished the task long before Hannah came back and whittled away the time by pacing around the warehouse, making sure every doorway was blocked except the small back door we used as a safe passage to enter and exit without being detected by the Undead. We had essentially converted every single other door into just another part of the wall. Old plywood and cinder blocks formed the coverings, old clothes and blankets that had been scavenged were used to fill the space between the floor and doors, so as to better sound and sight proof the warehouse.

I decided to wait for Hannah on the roof, where I would at least have a vantage point on her arrival. I climbed up the rickety aluminum stairs that led to the rooftop latch and climbed up onto the roof. The reason the food and clothes and hunting supplies were on the roof was that the latch was so difficult to use and then crawl through that none of the resurrected would be able to make it through. It was the safest place we had so far found in this new hell.

I walked over to the edge of the roof and laid down on my stomach to stay as hidden as possible. The sun was setting but it was not yet dark, a beautiful pinkish orange struck the sky like blush. As I turned from the sunset, I saw the beginning to the end of the world. Hannah was running full sprint down the street the warehouse was located, with at least twenty of the Undead following her closely.

I immediately jumped up and shot through the latch, grabbing a handful of arrows and a bow as I did so. Muscle memory led me to our hidden entrance. As I reached it, I flung it open and bolted outside to help Hannah however I could. I set the first arrow, and as I reached the open street, I let it fly right past Hannah into the skull of the Undead immediately behind her.

“HANNAH!” I screamed out, letting another few arrows find home in the heads of these reanimated corpses. As she got to the fence surrounding the warehouse, I realized I was out of arrows and jumped back to our entrance. I had to make sure to be ready to get the door shut behind Hannah as quickly as humanly possible.

I could see her running towards me, the hands of our foes just inches behind her back. I reached my out arm and called to her.

“Come on, Hannah, you’re almost there!” and as the words left my lips, it happened.

She had grabbed the arm I extended towards her, but she was not being moved towards me any faster than before. I pulled hard, almost too hard, fighting the truth I had already subconsciously accepted; her face was scared but accepting, tears enveloping her eyes. My hand was slipping down her arm, I could feel her diamond tennis bracelet at the base of my palm, sliding with my hand rather than her arm.

“I love you, Otto.” Hannah had cried to me, smiling while she was dragged away, her bracelet falling off her arm and entwining between my fingers. As I lost my grip on Hannah, I fell back to the ground, the warehouse door slamming shut. Within seconds I could hear the screams as Hannah lost her life. And, just like that, the world had ended.

So here I stand, alone, afraid, yet brave. Here I stand, looking down upon a crowd of the very creatures that took the one thing left that mattered. The world had not ended when these flesh-eating reanimated corpses took over, it ended when they took Hannah from me. I looked over the edge, I hadn’t tried to hide from these things in years, if they took me, I would be one step closer to finding Hannah. I walked over to the box of arrows that still laid upon the rooftop and picked out the three that looked the sharpest. As I lined them with the string of my bow, I let loose all three, finding their target within the minds of the foul beasts. I slipped on some of the ice the sleet left behind and found myself staring at the sky. I could not tell if the water around my eyes was my own or from the rain, but I did not care. It was a release from these thoughts, and that was just fine with me.

After a few minutes, I was able to see clearly again. I wiped the tears from my eyes, reaching into the inner pocket of my black jacket, and retrieved Hannah’s diamond tennis bracelet. I let it fall between my fingers, feeling each individual diamond. It remained, after all this time, my one last physical connection to Hannah.

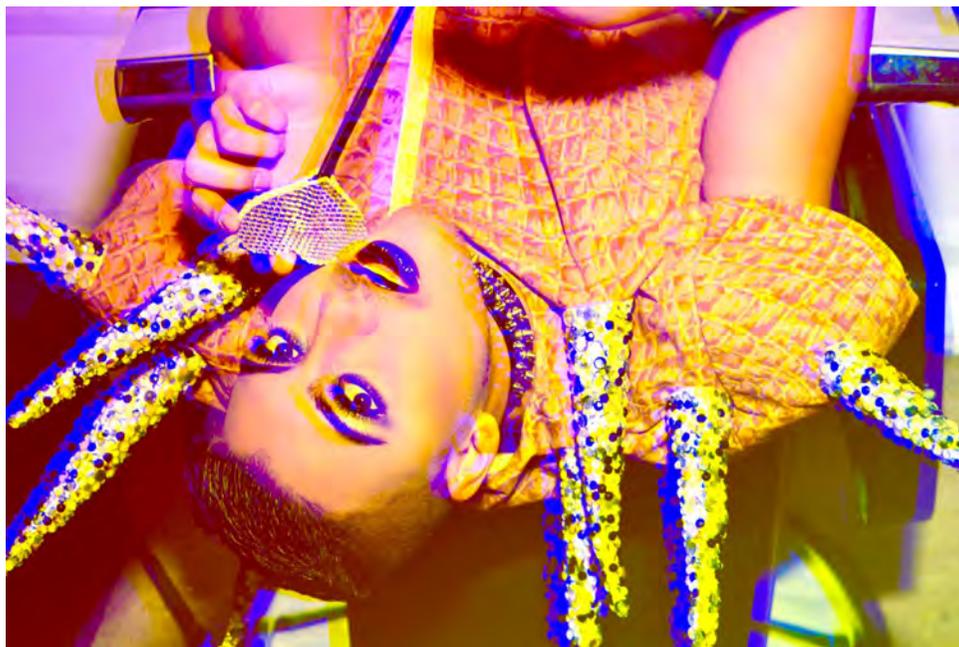
Okay, this will be the last one, I thought to myself as I returned the bracelet to my pocket and picked up one last arrow. I walked to the edge of the rooftop and scanned the crowd, looking for the nastiest, most rotten corpse I could. As I walked around the perimeter of the roof, I came to an immediate halt with the loss of my breath.

About 300 yards away, the rotting corpse of Hannah stood unmoving, staring at me. I could feel my heart stop as I looked at her. Half of her arm was missing, while five years of being dead had caused most of her face to rot. Still, there could be no mistaking her, I had spent too long with that memory to mistake her zombified corpse.

I knew what I needed to do, but I just couldn't do it. I could feel the tears falling like the rain, sobs like thunder filled the air around me. I had to watch her die, just so I could kill her? Is this some kind of sick demented joke? Yet, I could feel my hand reaching into my pocket. The bracelet came out with my hand, and without thinking I began to twist it around the arrow's head. The world had ended, Hannah had ended, now it would be time to find my own end.

As I stared across the distance between us, I could feel my hands shaking from the heat of my cheeks. Once again, I lined up the arrow with the bowstring, taking my time. I pulled back, holding the arrow and string as I took my aim. I could see the bow itself shaking, but I knew I would not miss my mark. Everything around me became black as I let go of the arrow and watched the bracelet land as firmly in Hannah's head as the memory had been in mine. With one final breath I fell onto my back and lost consciousness with only five words racing through my mind:

"I love you too, Hannah."



Life of the Party

Irene Hernandez

Break Through

Jessica Allegrezza

This
good-bye
Door
was unfurled
So,
wind-swept,
She
took flight.



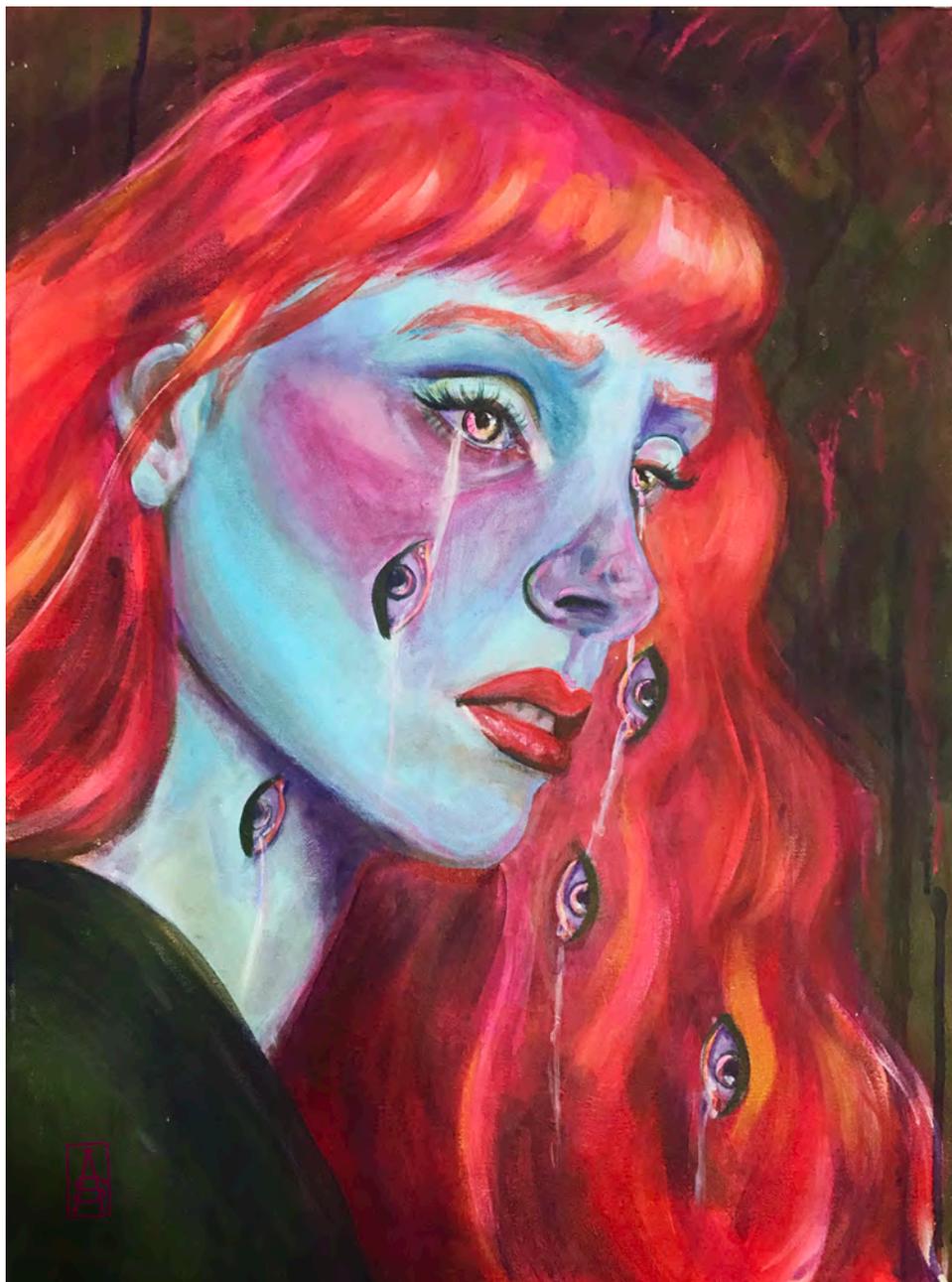
Lovers Dance

Kalina Karbowski

Heed

Paul Anggo

As Our sun cries and fire runs the sky,
Our seas burn in oiling tears,
Our endless skin pile in shed,
The roots of Our hearts bleed in darker colors.
We have forgotten Our Mother.
She whispers never in warning, but in death.
We live and die together.



Cry Baby

Alisha Solomon

Small Magics

Chiara Harleman

Oma's hands cradled the bunny gently, gnarled wrinkled fingers running soothingly over the animal's back. Crouched down, watching through the fence, she could almost feel the rabbit's soft plush and tripping heart beneath her own fingertips. Her feet shifted in their glitter sandals, and she held her breath as the hay crinkled. Oma was preoccupied with her task and didn't even twitch, sitting in the golden afternoon sun and holding the small creature on her wide thighs.

In that moment she herself was a wild animal, and she stayed frozen. Her wildly powerful childish stubbornness the only thing stronger than the electricity that flooded her little limbs. If she were a dog, her ears would be quivering and standing at attention, attempting to pick up the slightest whisper of her grandmother's gentle murmurings to the rabbit. The sun was warm on her face where it flooded around the gently curved edge of Oma sitting in the rabbit pen. The soft slope of shoulder and back faced her, but she could still make out the movements of the thick fingers on her lap as she grasped the rabbit firmly in one hand. The motion of the other hand was powerful and authoritative, not at all what she usually associated with the hands that detangled her curls or sprinkled Vanille-zucker on her cream of wheat. All she heard was a gentle snap, followed by a quick prayer and a gentle hand on the small body.

Sitting on her small chair and drinking from her small cup in the small kitchen, she watched. A serious gaze and studious quietness focused on her Oma. Her brain was abuzz attempting to connect the small pile of muscle and bone to the creature she had seen before. She was a big girl, she told herself. She understood how the world worked.

When she ate she knew where the meat came from. Oma remarked that she was unusually quiet today as her knife came down upon the red mass of flesh. Wasn't it her job to cause at least a little bit of trouble? No? Well then be a good girl and get some potatoes from the Kellar for me.

Carefully, she walked down the dark steps, her hand above her head gripping the rail firmly. Her other hand gripped a small flashlight. As she descended into the darkness, she wondered if this was how the rabbit felt in its final moments. The slow cold and soft mildew smell of the cellar crept up around her with the dark. Hurriedly, she tossed potatoes into the bowl her grandmother had given her. When she finally escaped past the top step, she felt even wilder. Her heart raced and the small hairs all over her body stood up. Like fur.

As she sat at the table peeling the potatoes and listening to the soft buzz of the radio, she watched Oma cook. It seemed almost like magic

to her. Like Hexerai. Oma, she mused, would be a good witch of course. Even though her nose was hooked, and her teeth were missing when she did not wear her dentures, she always smelled like sweet herbs and the hard chunks of old soap she kept among her folded clothes. Her voice was raspy, but her singing soothing and perfect. And the soft fluffy golden halo of her hair, done faithfully every Sunday under a dome at the hairdresser, could not possibly be black magic.

The smell that arose in the kitchen did not at all smell like the rabbit enclosure or the potatoes of the basement. It was a metamorphosis. From her childish viewpoint, magic. Sitting on her mini-puff in front of the TV, her mouth watered. She had seen the meat go into the bubbling boiling water, the potatoes shredded and molded. The various things from small jars that Oma had added to her bubbling pot.

Again, in her small kitchen chair, she watched Opa. He mechanically thrust the food into his mouth. Her first bite rested on her fork. Oma had pulled the Klos apart for her, drowning it in gravy, and had rewarded her good behavior all day with one of the rabbit's large hind legs. For a growing girl she said, and the other would go to her grandfather. The red purple sauce from the Rodkohl mixed with the gravy on her plate, like a strange vegetal life-blood.

What sat on her fork was now indistinguishable from the rabbit she had known. She once again repeated the steps from that day in her brain. Oma had not wanted her to watch. Young girls, she had said, have plenty of time to learn about the ugly side of the world. Besides, Oma did not want to scare her little city grandchild.

That was precisely why she had needed to watch. Starting kindergarten next year, she told herself, she was not a baby. She could handle anything. She must. How could it be different from the small deaths she herself caused every day? Picking a daisy. Separating a blackberry from its mother-vine. Crushing the ant tickling her leg. Plucking a blade of grass from its brothers and sisters to pinch between her thumbs as a whistle.

Eat, her grandfather commanded, before it gets cold.

Quickly, she pushed her fork between her lips. As she held the rabbit on her tongue, she fancied she could almost taste the wild grass he ate, and the sun that warmed his small furry back every day. The creamy gravy was as soft as the cow's stomach that had given the milk. The herbs as wild in her mouth as their formations in their rock walled bed. The sweetness of the apple tamed the earth of red cabbage. Everything held together by the sticky starch of the potato dumpling, as beautifully predictable as the potato itself. The nuances of non-human life were absorbed by her little body, mind, and soul. The food slid down her throat. The rest of her musings left her mind as she reached hungrily for another bite.

Oma sat eating quietly, content with the small magic she had made that day.



Temptations

Kalina Karbowski

Heart

Brenda Ngyuen

I pictured this heart as a fragile thing, susceptible to scuffs and breakage, something that would shine with good care. I made sure to keep it safe, away from careless hands and commotion, polishing it every night. I breathed over its surface and wiped away the condensation again and again. I cradled it like a child; I ordered it to stay still. I covered it in scarves so it wouldn't fade in the harsh light. I protected it, I saved it, I watched it crystallize and harden like sugar on a string. The heart gained strength. People said I had a mighty heart. It grew unwieldy, and soon everyone could see it.

My heart was on display. People gossiped about it. Artists scrambled for their pencils at the sight of it. Some demanded it. I lent it to others with reluctant hands like it was a favorite book. The more people I met, the more my heart was passed around. Some held it to the light and turned it so. Some chose to play with it, and I did not deny them. Some dropped it and acted as if I couldn't tell. What I didn't know was that I would not be able to wipe away the smears of countless fingerprints on its surface.

Then, as hearts do, it would start to crack open. Finally, it would shatter in my hands, and I would be left alone—off-balance, dull, muted. It's beginning to happen, the breaking. Only I have noticed it so far. My light is dimmer, everything is dimmer without its usual radiance. I toss my heart up in the air hoping people won't notice the dark. I come out only in the day and enjoy what external warmth I can. In short, I was afraid.

Now it's evening; streetlamps blink to life, chatter spills onto the streets. We sit by the window, my heart and I; or rather I sat, because my heart demanded to be held. It was always in someone's hands. We are savoring the stillness of the quiet together. How much longer do I have? My heart has no sense of time. I've cradled and cherished it the best I could, but it's only a heart, it doesn't know one pair of hands from the next.

Though it's begun to fall apart, my heart is still as needy as ever. It's supposed to help me love others but it can't even love itself. It'll switch hands over and over and over again no matter how many times it's thrown against the wall or kicked into the gutter. It won't stop until it's ground to dust.

Soon it will be time for us to go out. We'll emerge smiling together. I'll give it a quick polish and a quick kiss before it will start to roll off my fingertips. When it returns more bruised than before it'll again settle in my chest like a dark anchor, freezing me where I stand.



A Summer at Mo's

Juliana Meduri

Sitting on the Beach

Jordan Zachary Ellis

I still remember the waves,
bronze, often rolling over
two beautiful blue pools
that blocked the entrance to
the greatest garden ever seen.
Thoughts pouring out like a waterfall
upon the beach we drank our beers on.
You wanted a house atop a mountain,
a shaggy brown dog out back and
sunflowers beside the front porch,
and a nice dirt path that would
wind down the mountain to our little cove.
Not too far from the city, just far enough
to not be bothered by the others.
I still remember the waves,
violent, that came crashing on
our beach. The water receding, I was
waiting for the next wave to wash
over, but it never came. The fish flopped
back in, I watched them squirm and jump,
but somehow the water never returned.



Afterlight

Madeleine Meredith

Untitled

Josie McGuire

You're just a seed in your Mother's womb.

You have no eyes, no mouth, no arms, no legs, but nonetheless, you know the feel of Her damp dark breast enveloping you, there, in the endless soil. Your blind little torso is shaped like a bean; your ribbed shell slightly cracked to the touch.

Soon, your flesh strains against your nut-skin, squirming, pressing red hot hot hot until it cracks and you shed this old body behind, your umbilical cords worming further down, down into the Mother. Rustle the leaves of your hair against the roof of earth, feel the long fibers of your body

curl

and

stretch.

And live. A wispy flag, a starry bulb shiver in sun. You know your purpose on Earth, it's for the stray wishes of children and lovers.

a whispered prayer, and then your helpless seeds must scatter.

she loves me, she loves me not

You wither at the question. Shivel you inside your Mother's belly, and She eats, as the parts that She molded to form you crumble,

slumber in shambles inside intestines

Your Mother's throaty smile caresses the last remnants of your body. It is strange how content at the last you have become.

It's important to be true to yourself, even if you can't live up to the expectations of society; yes, one ought to be true to oneself, that's what matters, not these arbitrary life markers or whether others find you appealing, you think cheerfully, as you fade into the eternal black from which we have all sprung. *i love you* Mother says and you say *i love you too mommy*

i love you too.



The Cap't

Madeleine Meredith

Deer Tallow Smearred Hand

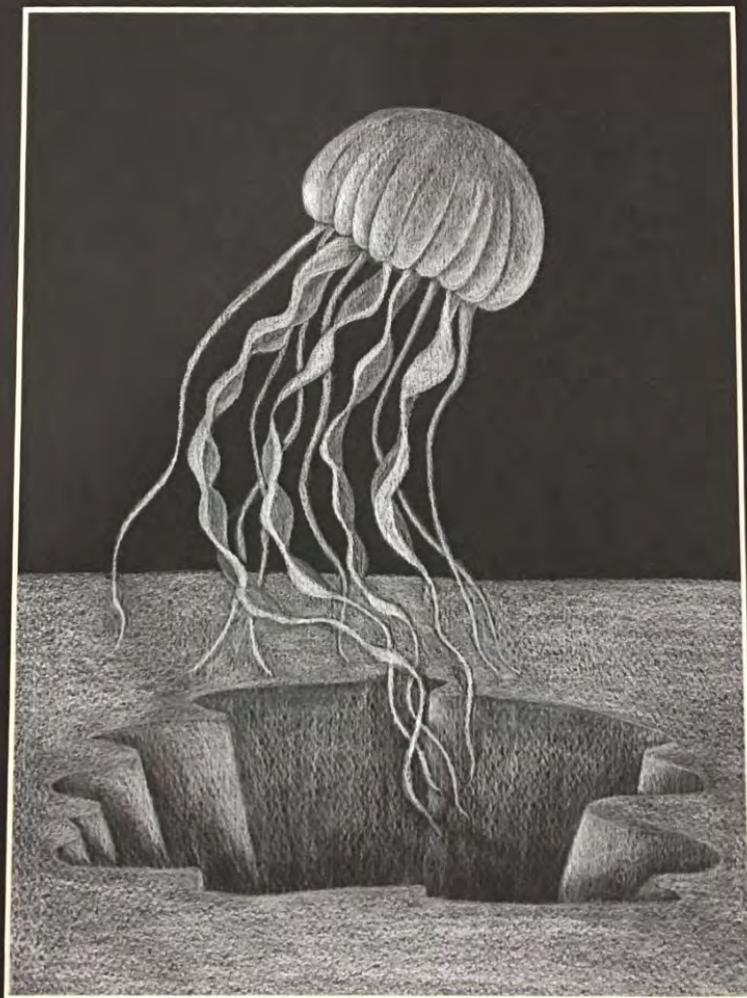
Dane Erikson

Peering round
 A galaxy I cannot see
 Nor even scratch an edge.
 Too much inwards
 To outwards,
 With no flaunting flow of will.
 It's like following a strict pattern
 To breathe.

Why can't I dance with trees?
 Why can't I make a move without the hawk's red glare?
 Why can't I call roses how I see them and name every one?
 Why can't I hurl a fang into soft boar's meat?
 Why can't I...

Run barefoot in the rosary
 Swing around the fountains lip
 Kiss the moon good-day upon a blush
 Guzzle gasoline and spit hell fire
 Tear oranges limb from limb
 Let my barbaric yawp echo
 Let my blood pump and boil
 Let my fingers dig into the soft green earth
 Let my innards become food for bees
 Invite the good people to
 Charcoal etch my skull,
 Like kids do to gravestones.

Why can't I



Jelly But Not Fish

Christina Shah-Nazarian

If These Walls Could Talk

Juliana Meduri

I was born to be fixed.

I have seen many warm summer nights and freezing cold days. The days that sun beats through the trees onto backs of humanity. The days that snowfall stops societies from stirring. The days I have seen are infinite but numbered, all depending on my creator. I allow myself to be surrounded by tall redwoods that have the same fate as I. I am one with the absolute.

Free is how songbirds feel when the sky is boundless, and dirt is thousands of miles away. Within the moisture of the fog that few get to grasp. Being bound to freedom is a falling leaf that has no direction but has a destination.

When Alexander died there was a sadness deeper than any could put into a sentence. The limited time he had been obligated to the Earth and the people on it was full. Like a belly after an immense meal, Alexander filled people with happiness they could not speak of. Alexander was undefinable and completely relatable, able to make everyone in a group of people feel wholly unique. In some ways, Alexander still does. He haunts me, enabling him to be boundlessly free, within me. He lingers in the rooms with stains of accidents and life alike. Stains of love and hate and everything in between.

Dying is slow, but death is quick. Flowers die, trees die, even humans die, but Alexander experienced death. Although he knew of his limited days, Alexander's spirit left his body within a matter of moments. It is moments like these that the world pauses from its usual rotation. I feel it. To all who knew him, Alexander is a daily reminder that nothing in the world is definite. When someone imperative leaves the world, the future is unimaginable and the people who knew them are puzzled. But the world resumes turning.

The birth of new leaves brings a joy that not even spring could evoke. When Jack was born, spring had sprung. The sun created slush and a warmth on the face of young children. Flowers bloom into a perfect shape that represents peace and love that no other thing can replicate. The perfection yet gracelessness of a child's first steps amazes anyone who observes. When that shameless child grows to be the definition of grace, the world turns even faster to maintain balance. Many springs passed along with summers, falls, and winters. More new leaves appeared. More flowers bud with the sun shining. I watched those flowers bloom.

I was born to be fixed.

My foundation falters, the shingles of my roof need to be redone,

my walls crack. Countless stains on my carpet, imprints from millions of feet walking through the front door. Holes in my walls from disputes going too far, cracks from when the faults shook. I am costly, but I am loved. I am a haven to all who walk through my threshold. I am a vessel for generations.



Let's Play a Game
Christina Shah-Nazarian

Signal Flare

Rachel Wolford

Upward arc of letters
Starburst of syllables
Glinting shower of words
Scattered love poems
drift down to upturned faces.
If I aim high enough
will my beloved see?



Mirror Gem

Christina Shah-Nazarian

Little Bird (who lives at Dachau)

Liz Maglio

Little bird, sitting high in a tree
Why do you sing your melody
When sorrow's ghost wails
a lost lament
like music on the wind

Do you cry for the unnamed
Or are you singing
a song of hope

Maybe you're a sentry
Brave little bird
Ready to sound the alarm
a sharp warning cry
To those who do not see
Such an inhumane atrocity

Little bird
Perhaps you are a guide
For all the lost souls
Waiting for peace
Maybe you protect the memories
Of all that were lost
And help visitors find their way

Or maybe
You're just a bird
Joyful for a brand new day.



Crimson Wind
Melinda Van



Ocean Shells
Raquel Guadalupe