

Windows Fall 2023



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Suffocating Under The Water

✍✍✍ By: Cassidy Tomeo

“Do you ever miss the days when we were young?”

I hold the cold limp hand in mine and I flip it over, so that I’m looking at his palm. His once youthful looking skin is now covered in the scars of his old age and the abuse he puts under his body.

“No, not really.”

Looking up at him I see the faintest of smiles as his blue eyes were closed, it was as if he was tired from his old age; not the illness that lies within.

“Really? Because I miss them, Wayne.”

My heart clenches as he says my name. Somewhere deep inside of me, I think I know he was barely hanging on by a thread. I bring myself closer to his dimming body and I lay my head close to his once jet black curly hair; that has now fallen gray with time. I inhale his scent. The smell of a newly printed newspaper and a woody smell overcomes my senses, blinding me and reminding me of what I am about to lose.

“Why? There was nothing good about our youth.”

As I say this bitterly he gives me a light squeeze of comfortance, before his hand goes back to be limp in mine. It was as if he was too delicate and small to be held anymore, but I couldn’t find myself to let go of him.

Not yet.

“Oh, but there was. Remember the days when we would skip class together and would be underneath the bleachers as we would smoke cigarette butts? I miss those days dearly; no matter the pain they brought.”

I bite my lip as the chemical smell fills my nostrils, as tears threaten to spill and the words, ‘Don’t leave, not yet, I’m not ready,’ were on the cusp of my tongue. But I swallow it all down as I take a shaky breath and I exhale slowly.

“Those days are what brought us today. They were a symptom of the future that was to come. The disaster that was to come.”

My voice barely recognizable to my own ears as my voice gravels with the deep emotions resonating in my soul and the husk that shortly follows afterwards.

“Do you regret it? Skipping school? Smoking? Meeting me?”

I look up at my life long companion and I find his stunning blue eyes open; open with fear and shame.

“...”

From where I stand the light buzz of my watch goes off, but I don’t care as I take a step forward and I see him. For a brief moment I believe I see a figment of my imagination, but I continuously stand in the little grass field in the back of the last school I would transfer to. I feel my heart picking up in speed as a buzzing sensation takes over my body.

I reach my hand out to the familiar curly jet black hair that never seemed to be tamed, the scrutinizing blue eyes that I’ve come to love over the years. The pale but sunburnt skin that looked as though it never saw daylight. And the all but thin killer that his lips are wrapped around it; as it breathes by a thin flame.

Everything around me felt so disorienting as I stood there with the wind twisting my short tuft on top of my head and the grass tickling my ankles where my pants did not reach my blackened combat boots.

All that ran through my mind in that moment was one word, and one word only.

“Never.”



 Crispin Cisco

Sixth Grade Social Studies
   By: Tristan Jardinier

“I don’t remember how we met,”
They confessed.
I smiled.
Usually they remind me of things.
“I remember this one.”

We were the thousand breezes that blow,
The whispered promises of spring under snow.
We were leaves that danced around the same tree,
The fires that reached for marshmallows with glee.

“That’s the grossest thing I’ve ever heard,”
They said with a giggle.

Twice we were dragonflies
Once you were a bee
And loved an old rosebush
Whose flowers were me.
For two hundred years
We were frogs, you know.
And for a hundred more: trees
So together we’d grow.
We were fish in a river,
Two parts of one flow.

“You’re terribly romantic,”
They said through a laugh.

I remember how we met.
It was at the start of everything,
Right before the big bang
And all it would bring.
We bumped into each other
In the primordial dark
We were immediately smitten
And we caused a spark.

That static between us
Cast ripples far and wide
And since then we’ve sought each other
Through space and through time.

“So you don’t remember either, then?”
They asked amused,
And without question.

We met outside social studies
In sixth grade.



A Hug
   By: Gabriel Turner

I cannot take the pain away
Nor can I stop the tears.

But flowers I can offer
And an earnest ear.

Should you ever need me
As we go through the years,

Know that a hug I can give.
Just know that I’m here.



Help! There's an Octopus in my Bed

   By: Emily Anastasovski

It didn't take long for me to notice I was violently hungover. I flung myself out of bed and around the corner only to come to a skidding stop on my bare knees, against the cool tile of the bathroom floor. The next couple minutes were spent lurching over the toilet, rendering up the contents of my stomach as an offering to any God willing to forgive my sins of the night before.

This is hardly the first time I've come crawling to God's doorstep in such a condition, promising my devotion to whatever deity was up at 6 am and willing to accept a wretch like me. I think most Gods knew the drill by now. At sunrise I'd be promising them my first born's left kidney just to spare me one more bile hiccup.

With an extra flush for good luck, I was once more in my bedroom, the sun's rays warmed my cheeks. My eyes landed on the giant slimy mass laying on my bed. We stared at each other. He was rust-colored, wet, and covered in a film of mucus that was soaking my sheets. His tiny, slotted eyes stared deep into me, his huge gelatinous mantle resting on my spare pillow.

I have a bad habit of reacting impulsively to whatever emotion I'm feeling at each moment. To say the least, this cute quirk of mine has ended and estranged many relationships in my life, including but not limited to parents, siblings, bosses, boyfriends, taxi drivers, hamsters and even my taxi driver's hamster that one time. I'm not eager to add 'one night stand octopus' to my list of amends to make when I inevitably get my shit together... one day. I remembered what my therapist and I have been working on lately, she calls it 'responding' instead of 'reacting'.

"Good morning!" I started as he stared blankly, or rather, through me. "So what happened last night? How did this happen?" I found myself mincing my words to the octopus by not daring to mention the fact that he's an octopus. Unfortunately, that served only to further ignore the giant... octopus... in the room.

He raised what I imagined would be an eyebrow, and remained silent for several grueling seconds. His eyes darted up and down my body, sizing me up. Suddenly, I felt extremely self conscious and vulnerable in just my underwear and a tiny tank top. He just laid unmoving, his entire gelatinous body exposed and resting confidently parallel to me. With apparently nothing to hide, and not an insecurity in the world.

His eyes met mine as he began to speak: "You know, I was just about to ask you the same thing. I guess alcohol and the lighting in the bar at two AM can be quite..." he trailed off, looking me up and down again before finishing with, "...deceiving." He chuckled awkwardly.

Before I could even register what he'd just said, he slid from my bed in one smooth, jellied motion, and crawled across the floor into the bathroom, slamming shut the door behind him.

I glanced across the bed at the mirror that hung over my dresser and made eye contact with my reflection. Sure my body wasn't the compact little rig it once was, but I never considered that I'd become the girl guys wake up next to the morning after, mortified and ashamed at their clouded judgment the night before.

I walked up to the mirror to inspect myself. My eyes were more sunken in, and the bags underneath were darker than I remembered. I spotted a few blemishes on my face, and my eyebrows needed to be plucked. My hair was tangled and only half-bleached, the roots half grown out. I had still never considered I wasn't a prize. I certainly used to be.

Mortified, and feeling suddenly clear minded, I recalled that I had been the one to approach the cephalopod man last night. The bar was looking especially lean of good prospects, so I threw back a shot of something brown and Sharpie-flavored, and then sidled up next to the salty fellow. I grew hot with embarrassment when I remembered his reluctance to engage me in conversation at the bar, and how he took seven shots, one in each tentacle (one of the appendages isn't truly a tentacle, you know), to prepare himself to go home with me when the bar closed.

I pulled on sweatpants and a baggy, concealing sweater and went to the bathroom to knock on the door. He opened it instantly, as if he was on his way out anyway. We were chest to chest(?), and I could see he had washed his face and brushed his beak. His skin looked so smooth and translucent, freckled brown over the rusty stain underneath. He was taller than me when standing on his stretched tentacles. I looked up at his eyes to search for an emotion.

"Are you leaving now?" I found myself asking him.

He gently pushed past me, sliding back into the bedroom to grab his phone from the nightstand. He glided back out into the kitchen to grab his jacket that was hung over a chair.

"Yeah," he mumbled, "I have to go to work,"

"Wait!" I was not even talking then, it was my inner weak bitch and I cringed hearing her pleas. "When can I see you again?" I put a hand on what I could only assume was his shoulder.

I could tell he was searching for the words to let me down easy.
His gaze met mine and I could see his face soften.

“Listen,” he started, staring at the tile floor, “I’m sure you’re a nice enough girl, I’m just not a relationship kinda guy... but you can take down my number, if you want. Maybe we can kick it again someday...”

I rushed into my bedroom and grabbed my phone to hand it to him. He entered his number and gave me a half wave as he slithered out the door, shutting it behind him. I ran up to the door and peered through the window, watching him trawl across the gravel parking lot and into a red Toyota Tacoma.

It was a chilly December morning. Evidently, he was so eager to get as far away from me as possible that he didn’t even allow his engine to warm up for 45 seconds before gunning it out of here.



 Heather-Marie Fersch

Stung By a Bee

 By: HN Emmons

As I step through the path towards my next chapter,
I feel like it’s easier not to breathe so I don’t have to think about you.


I know that it’s easy to feel regret,
if only you knew all of the reasons why.

If I didn’t have to let you go and still have it all, I would have it all.
If you weren’t so busy, I would be able to tell you about everything.



 Cassidy Tomeo

Origin

 By: Jim Ogorchock

I am the seed of war.
Always present, yet never loved.
All things, man or beast, submit to me eventually.
I can be seen, yet I am invisible.
I can be heard, yet I create no sound.
I can be felt, yet I am intangible.
What am I?

Hatred.

Mountain of Freedom (New Hampshire)

✍✍✍ By: Alex Deedy

Was I to blame for this unsettling plague?
I had traded a sin for a better sin,
I left a hollow structure unattended and never returned.
What was once a continuous outrage
undermining the emotions that told my truth
became the only friend willing
to push me over the edge.
A sin for death brought me the will to live
but I betrayed the captors
who sought to dangle the key of freedom
in front of me.
I lifted my own incurable curse,
cursing my captors with their doomed fate.
I grabbed the key that no one thought I would take,
and I ran towards the mountain of freedom.
I realized I was never to blame
for the plague
that followed my departure.



Brianna Lemmon

Burning Eclipse

✍✍✍ By: Blair Shewan

“It’s raining,” London muttered, holding the flap of the lime-green tent open with their dark and burnt arm.

“That it is,” Memphis replied, a frown forming on her face.

Rain was uncommon in the sun-scorched desert, littered with artifacts of ones who had come before. Rain four times in seven moon-sets was especially rare. So rare, in fact, that it was supposedly good luck to have so much rainfall. Not that Memphis thought so. Jugs of the acidic liquid were haphazardly stored in every available container; London’s usual area of books was replaced with fragile bottles and cans.

London dropped the flap with a sigh, carefully sitting down next to a full filtration tank. “We still need to go out,” the child said, picking at their nails.

“Absolutely not.” Memphis said, her voice sharp in her demand.

London stared back at her with sad eyes. “I’m not Essex,” they gently reminded her. “I won’t get washed away.”

Memphis flinched at the reminder of her lost child, drowned in a storm not unlike this one.

“I know you aren’t. We are still staying here.” Something in her voice cracked at that.

“...Alright then.” London dropped the subject. “I refuse to filter any more water though,” they joked, clearly attempting to lighten the mood.

She let it happen.

“I think that’s a fair deal,” she said, gesturing at the tent in general.

London returned the sentiment with a smile, “I’ll take watch, if we’re not going out.” Get some sleep, you need it, was left unsaid, but she got the message anyways.

“I’m not that old, little star.” Memphis winced as her shoulder cracked.

“You got it boss,” London said with a laugh, and gave a mock salute before closing the tent behind them.

Memphis sighed, closed her eyes and fell asleep.

-X-

If Memphis had to choose one thing to hate in this world, the need to sleep would definitely be at the top- next to the sun, of course. It was just so disorienting. The moment she woke up, slick with sweat from the scorching sun above, she knew something was wrong. London wasn’t there.

Memphis shot upright and moved to the edge of the tent. Hesitant,

she unzipped the lime green door.

It was dark.

The sun was baking as always, she knew from the familiar feeling of skin peeling off her body. The sensation was less than usual—though, it would probably be a good hour before the boiling really began.

“London?” Memphis called into the dark wasteland.

No response.

“London, the sun’s up... probably,” she tried again.

Still no answer. Cursing, she wandered further from her tent, the strange darkness putting her on edge.

Her skin blistered further, flaked pieces landing among the sand. She was running out of time and there was still no sign of London. Her heart hurt, eyes stinging from tears that could not fall for the lack of water in her system.

Another one of her children was taken by the storm, another soul lost to the waste.

“I’m sorry, Starlight.”

The words that had gone unspoken since the loss of Essex fell from her cracked lips.

Suddenly, a hand grabbed her ankle, shocking her back to reality.

“Not yet,” London croaked, clutching their eyes with one hand, and holding onto Memphis with the other. “I’m not gone yet,” they said before promptly passing out.

-X-

Dragging her unconscious kid through the daylight was an experience Memphis would gladly never participate in again. The sun was emerging from whatever bizarre state it was in before, cutting her already-slim time even shorter. Her skin hurt, the early stages of boiling beginning to show. Blisters formed in earnest, bursting and creating lesions all over her body. Finally, the tent came into view. She shoved London inside, and zipped the door closed behind them both.

Memphis hadn’t been that stupid since she was twenty. Clearly, age did not mean wisdom. She had made the same idiotic mistake two decades prior.

London stirred, their eyes opening. She rushed over to their side.

“London?” Memphis asked, as she went about treating their wounds. Third degree burns littered both their arms and legs; the smell of burning flesh filled the tent.

“I can’t see.” Their voice was weak, cracking as they spoke.

“You’re so fuzzy, I can’t see you.”

Memphis froze before she forced herself to move. Okay. That was bad. Bad, but fixable. As long as they didn’t-

“I looked up at the sky.”

-do that.

“The sun was dark! I-I thought it was safe. I didn’t mean to, Memphis, I thought it was safe! Please don’t throw me out!” London was begging now, their face tearing open from the sun damage and their movements. “I can still be useful,” they pleaded.

She finished bandaging the most immediate burns, reminding herself to raid another facility soon, if there were any more around.

“You don’t need to be,” she said softly, “But I believe you.”

London sobbed without any tears, their hand grasping to try and find hers. Their grip was strong, though they were shaking.

“Am I going to be okay?” they whispered.

Memphis paused, looking over at the damage caused by the dispassionate ball of fire in the sky. London’s eyes stared blankly at the ceiling.

“We’ll figure that out together.” She said in lieu of an answer.

London shook with silent laughter, turning towards her fully now. Their eyes were red. Even without close examination, Memphis knew the signs of burned retinas.

“I guess that’s the best anyone can hope for,” they said.

Memphis nodded before going back to treating their skin burns; a comforting silence and room for hope, room for the future, lingering between the two.

The eclipse retreated fully, revealing the sun and dark rain clouds.



The Ink and My Feathers

✍✍✍ By: Alex Deedy

I never needed ink for words,
but my words chose to be caged birds.

One by one I plucked the feathers off these birds,
I made my peace by accepting my cold case
of where to find closure.

Every feather was a lost piece of me,
but when I dipped it into the ink
it became the glue that wrote my truth
and It held what was left of me together.
I wore my inked stained feathers
to get my words back,
those birds dwindled away
creating the key that uncaged me.

The Ink and my feathers
wrote the sonnet to completion,
and the once cold case of where to find closure
is now solved.



Callused and Soft

✍✍✍ By: Emma Galonski

Texture that reminds you of mountain ridges and sunken valleys. Soft to the touch and marked with hundreds of unique little dots. Beautiful in the morning glow. Strong enough to carry the weight of the world. Some would say she's stunning, but she only sees her faults. There's only so much pressure one can take before they crack. White lines cover the lands where wars were once won. She's still here but her mind is gone. With each breath another pound is added in the mirror. You could say she's gorgeous, but her past clouds her judgment. The guilt and shame eat her up from the inside out until sticks and bones remain.

Why do I hate my skin



 Cassidy Tomeo



 Rochelle Hebert

The Death House

   By: Isaac Allen

“They used to call it the Death Tree, apparently.”

I cast my torchlight over the dark cabin. “Is that so?”

“They say it assumed the form of a tree when it first crawled out of the ocean.”

I turn to look at my colleague. Simon’s a short man, stout, and just smart enough to be annoying about it.

“You believe their primitive superstitions?” I challenge.

“John, look at the abandoned village we just passed through!” he replies. “You don’t just uproot your entire life and move three miles away because of a superstition.”

My beam falls upon something rising out of the roof of the derelict structure. Black branches. Burned branches.

“Well, we’ve found your tree,” I comment. “Looks like they built the house around it.”

“Those walls look sturdier than any in either village, definitely built to last. Makes you wonder what’s in there.”

I respond incredulously, “You really believe some dark god came forth from the depths to, what, sunbathe?”

“All I’m saying is there’s something in there. Something the natives are afraid of, and I want to know what it is.”

“Well, that’s what we’re here for. You have your tools ready?” I’m surprised he managed to carry it all. Simon is not an athletic man, and he’s carrying at least twice as much equipment as I am. Still, he gives me a thumbs up and we walk towards the cabin and the cliff it sits atop. The “god,” it seems, is most active during the day, hence our nocturnal visit.

I still think we might be as crazy for doing this as I open the door. Why make a detour to some island in the middle of nowhere to look at some wild animal? But as I reveal the interior, I freeze. Bones cover the floor of this one-room building. I shake my head. Of course there are bones. The islanders said themselves that they’ve been sacrificing animals to the “god”.

“Bloody- that’s a human skull!” Simon exclaims. I jump and follow his gaze. In the corner of the room lies exactly that, an old cracked cranium and skeleton to match. Clearly chickens and fish weren’t the only things being sacrificed here. My hand unconsciously reaches for my machete.

“Wait... Where’s the beast?” Simon asks. Aside from the bones,

the only thing in the building is the bleach-white trunk of the tree we saw earlier. Then we look up. A dark red mass, centered in the far corner of the ceiling, spreads out across the roof and down the walls. Hanging from it like exposed wires are thin, transparent tubes. It looks like a red, malignant tumor.

Now it’s my turn to swear, staring in... horror? amazement? at the thing hanging over the room. “What in the blazes?” I murmur. It looks hard and rough, like a rock, but with a slimy substance covering it. Neither of us dares to get any closer, or even move for a good five minutes, but eventually we begin to stiffly, almost automatically, unpack our scientific tools.

The air seems thick, and I feel lightheaded as I begin a rough sketch of the cancerous anomaly, noting the strange black holes covering its surface. I’m interrupted, though, as Simon steps in front of me, pointing his daguerrotype at the red mass. “Put that rubbish away!” I tell him. “We’re here to get scientific data, not fanciful pictures!”

He ignores me, of course, and takes his photo. I shake my head and go back to making precise, detailed drawings and notes.

“Hey!” Simon calls, “Turn off your torch, would you John? I need to develop the photo.”

I begrudgingly comply, and we sit in darkness for a few seconds. I sigh in frustration, tapping my pencil against my sketchbook. Then we notice the glowing. The growth seems to have some sort of bioluminescence, similar to...

“Cnidaria,” we both breathe. “Subphylum Anthozoa,” I add. “Like the coral reef we passed on the way in here. But how is it surviving out of the water?”

I walk closer to the nearest branch and poke it with my machete. And it attacks.

Filaments latch onto my arm, injecting their venom, causing agonizing pain. As my arm locks up, the tentacles start to pull me in, towards those waiting holes. Not holes. Gnashing searching mouths.

“Simon!” I shout, panicked. “Help me!” In the dim light of the horrific polyps, he grabs my other arm and pulls. I see terror in his eyes and know it is reflected in my own. I’m freezing up, and not just because of the dozens of stingers pumping my body full of poison. A thought occurs to me. Even a coral this big can’t eat that much at once.

And besides, Simon’s a stout man.

In a moment of desperation, I let go of his hand, sending him stumbling back into a clump of tendrils hanging from the ceiling. They

grab him, and his agonizing cries fill the room. The filaments holding me loosen, and I cut myself free with the machete. I run for the door, Simon's expression of betrayal burned into my memory as the tentacles pull him up into the hundreds of waiting maws.

I sit huddled in the corner of my bunk. We set sail immediately for England, at my urgent command. I don't know how much longer I can put off my crew's questions, but they are getting more and more suspicious. I prod at the bandage I've wrapped around my forearm and feel the lumps underneath the cloth. I know the polyps are there, multiplying underneath my skin, waiting for the time when they can consume me and feed on the outside world. They cannot be allowed to do so. I know what I must do, but I don't know if I have the courage to take that plunge into the depths of the ocean. *Simon, you're sacrifice, as unwitting as it might have been, will have been in vain.*

I'm sorry.



 Blair Shewan

I Write My Poems In Pen

 By: Milena Whitney

I write my poems in pen.
I never want my words to fade,
smear away with a sweaty hand,
scratch themselves out in a color,
so similar to the page.

I write these poems in pen,
because my voice never deserves to be erased.
I would write these poems in blood if I could,
and my words would be written in my own genetic code.
On these pages, no one can speak over me because
I write my poems in pen.



Beautiful Dream

 By: Gabriel Turner

If heaven gave me the universe,
I would sell it just to be with you.

I would sell the land and the sea,
To close the distance between you and me.

I would sell the sun and moon,
Just to gaze into your eyes so soon.

I would sell the stars
If it could make this dream ours.

But as we know,
not all dreams come true.

So I am content dreaming the dream of me and you.





 Heather-Marie Fersch

The Season Left Behind

   By: HN Emmons

Letting you go is the feeling of the brisk breeze caressing my cheeks.
It's pumpkins getting ready to be picked for the season.
Letting you go is like walking down the sidewalk bundled up in my new sweatshirt,
It's a steaming cup of apple cider warming up my hands.
As much as I wanted my summer to stick around, Autumn is here.
You let me go just in time for my next season.



Wintering

   By: Eden Grandmont

Frozen specs of plenty, drifting from the heavens,
Disintegrating as they collide with the frigid earth.
The noble traveler steps through an unsteady mound of white.

Crunches fill the still air.
Bitter breath falls,
Absorbed by the blank canvas that hides the fleeting turf.
Staggering, the traveler lunges across an unfamiliar world,
Eyes stinging,
Nose tampered,
Fingers no longer feel.
A click pierces the stillness,
Depicting a sanctuary.

A motorized fortress to keep out the freeze.
Safety has been reached.
Preparing to begin the journey proper.

Tragedy strikes.

The traveler
Forgot to grab their car keys.



 CJ Miller

When the Sun Is Gone, I Still Lie There in The Dark

   By: Wren Tsao

The subtle warmth of body heat
turned cold by an icy tongue.
Words so cold I shiver and crouch
as my wounds have not yet mended,
and each syllable cuts a deeper hole closer to my bones.
I cry my eyes dry.

The salty water has overflowed every lake and river around me
and above me,
the sun is faded,
it's smudged
like a finger does to a drawing made of charcoal.

The sun is black.
Billions of years have gone by
and all there is left of me is dust,
and burned piles of ashes
from the plants
that have grown from the sides of my cheeks.

They have found their way out of the cracks in my dried-up tears
Tossed into the air and blown away.

You left me no water
you gave me an ice cube,
in the shape of a dried-up cactus,
and it happens through years of unstable weather.

My heart holds cracks from the explosion of your sun.
Sending sonic booms of dread across my brow.
Through the sound of the earth beneath my shuddering breath,
your face blows a shard of glass
into the back of my throat.
I choke.

As the years of warmth
erupt in bright red fluid,

warm to the touch,
and metallic to taste.
But I have not yet sung,
and now my tongue cannot sing
loud enough for the warmth of the sun
to blow my brain to pieces
of your puzzled visage.
I cannot sing anymore.
The caged bird has lost its soul.
It has rung itself dry.

There is no champion of this war,
but crossing through my eyes
to the back of my brain and there I cry
over my mind which has died.
More times than my caged bird has flapped its clipped wings.

But I can sit here
in the crevice of my skull,
crouched and cold,
with one eye closed
and the other eye,
a pit,
a darkened cave,
because you never left your knife
too far from my grave.



Woodland



By: Adam Breen

When Arthur opened his eyes, he was welcomed to the waking world by the smell of grass, and a whisper he could barely hear on the frigid breeze. Trees were all around him. Leaves of red, brown, and yellow littered the earth. The sun setting on the horizon had little warmth to offer. He rose to his full height, shaking the vestiges of sleep. He felt a sharp pain in his stomach that would have caused him to fall to his knees, had he not caught himself against an adjacent tree.

There was blood all over his hands. Up his arms as well.

Alarmed, he looked himself over to figure out where that amount of blood could have come from. As he turned to check his back, he noticed something, about a yard from him. A tent with a tear, blood sprayed all over its right side.

Barely able to stand, he started to hobble over. He caught a glimpse of Marcus' mangled corpse through the bloody opening.

It had been ten days since Marcus and Arthur had gotten lost on Cannon Mountain. They hiked up to see the stone face of the old man on the mountain, but they lost the trail markers and wandered off. Their trail snacks had lasted only a day. It was the last week of autumn, and winter was all but eager to unleash its bitter frost onto them.

On the fifth night, Marcus thought he had seen the headlights of a vehicle down the mountain. He frantically ran toward it, but the sun went down over the horizon, and all the light left them quickly in the shadow of the mountain. Moments later Arthur heard a tree snap and then a squelch, followed by a shrill and pained cry.

Arthur ran to see what had happened. By the faint light of his phone, he saw that Marcus was sobbing and clutching his leg. There was a good three inches of white bone protruding from his right knee. Blood flowed like a river from the wound.

"Oh god! My leg! It-" Marcus wailed, as tears streamed down his face.

Arthur couldn't believe that Marcus survived the night. When day broke, Arthur tried to move Marcus but found quickly that it was a bad idea. Arthur could only set the tent up and wait for a miracle.

Days passed, with Marcus' condition continuing to worsen. Arthur felt certain that one or both of them would die out here. The skin around his wound turned to a sickly green and yellow. The rest of his body was pale as ash. Arthur's stomach devoured nothing but itself. It seemed a

blessing for them both when Marcus' quiet crying would give way to fevered sleep.

Eventually, Arthur could no longer find his own respite in sleep. He turned from his side of the tent to look at Marcus. Arthur watched for the slow, faltering rise of his shoulder that signaled his companion was still breathing. Arthur called for Marcus weakly. There was no reply but silence. With the last ounces of strength, Arthur reached to turn Marcus' shoulder. Marcus's body rolled toward his face to reveal blank, half-open eyes.

Despite his exhaustion, grief, and guilt, Arthur sprung to life. He tore at the rent to escape the sight of his friend's gaunt face, as if that would stop it from haunting him. The tent's fabric quickly gave way and Arthur stumbled out. He only made it a few feet before crumpling from exhaustion and sorrow. His eyes couldn't even create tears.

Through dry sobs, he laid among the leaves and begged silently to know why it had to be them. Why this misery wouldn't end. His fingers had begun to turn translucent enough to see his veins. They were numb beyond any type of numbness he had ever experienced before. He felt paper thin in more ways than one. His lips were brittle and purple. The skin beneath his nose was tender from the number of times he wiped the snot from it. He wiped again and this time a few drops of blood were left smeared onto his hand.

Arthur had neither the energy nor stomach to make it back into the tent. He slept there, curled and shriveled as the leaves that cradled him.

That was when he heard it. The sound that had roused him slowly. The faintest, unrecognizable words brushing against the tips of his ears. He thought his mind was finally turning on him. A gust of blistering wind whipped across his face, and its cold pierced him. He heard the tent's entrance flapping. Marcus's empty face was staring at him. He glanced down at his hand again- the blood was still drying. His stomach churned. He felt like he was losing his mind, he didn't know what to do. He licked the blood from his hand. Sweet and metallic, on his tongue. His chest felt cold as his gaze focused back on Marcus.

That was when it finally clicked. He remembered. Looking down at what had been his friend. A boy he knew from kindergarten; who sat next to him every day at lunch. The man who was his brother, not just by blood, but by choice.

Arthur moved his gaze down from Marcus' eyes down to his chest and stomach. A hollow the size of a manhole cover was in its place. Arthur could practically see the spine through what was left. Beyond terrified, he

brought his hand up to cover his mouth and then froze. He felt a drool-like liquid on his chin. He hadn't thought he was still producing saliva.

Slowly, he moved his hand into view. His hands trembled as his eyes widened, seeing the small shred of flesh in his hand. The sky turned sickly gray as a chilling wind swept through the makeshift camp once again. His eyes turned pearl white, terror replaced hunger, and the last essence of Arthur was gone. All that remained was the Native American creature of greed and eternal hunger. Cursed to be... Wendigo.



 Rochelle Hebert

The Last Meal

 By: Cassidy Tomeo

It kicks the ground and caws.

It scratches and pecks

At the surface of "Earth" to get Its last meal.

But Heaven nor God hears Its pleas

As It falls to the soft, squishy, ground

And the scraping sound of metal

Can be heard a mile away

As blood and black matter

Splatter to the ground.

Its body sticking to the matter,

Getting entangled into

Its last meal.

The smell of rot,

More prominent than ever.

Its blackened feathers fly into the air

And get carried away by the breeze.

The tips of five digits disconnect and bleed

From the last meal.

Screams can be heard as It lies on the ground,

Cawing and pecking

The soft, plush earth

As maggots flee the scene

One last time.

A flock takes to the sky, covering the once blue hue

In a dark and ominous color.

Shrieks and cawing can be heard

To even the most simplest of origins

From whence It came.

The simple creature now lays

Dead

And looks at Its Humblest of Creators

And asks,

"Do peasants not even get to eat their last meal?"





 Eden Grandmont



 Kailey Letendre

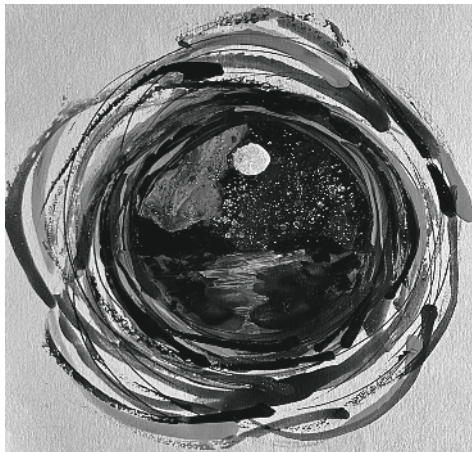
Murderer

   By: Devan Doerr

Those eyes gleam for reprisal
And I've what they need:
Steady and sturdy in hand.
Grimace again at the sight,
Grimace again as I stand.
Loath me.
Is it rapturous yet how I yield unto you
A blazen clasp which holds you?
Is it rapturous yet how I yield unto you
A means to an end
That which you so vehemently reject?
Blather on with this diatribe;
See yourself the anathema to your ontology.
Paradoxical your existence,
One pithy on its own destruction
And a sisyphian paradigm.
Bellow again as burgeoning potential seeps from your grasp,
Coil in contrition and ostensible placidity as reconciliation retracts—
Where do your convictions lie
If not in this moment?
Burning before you
Like the path of embers from which you walked?
So sore, so burned,
Yet still so unbowed in your stance!
You just don't get it do you?
Do you understand that which begets the crux to your suffering
Is the same force you perpetuate through your efforts staunch?
They are belied, as you are the butcher of the world!
God, I can't stand it!
This push and pull,
And rotten meat in mounds;
The guttural roar that kicks against implicit restriction.
Flies on needles and needles through muscle!

Give up your grievances now
And garrote that which plagues you.
Is it rapturous yet how I remain complacent

And complicit in your movements?
Is it rapturous yet the indictments I suffer
Forthwith at your behest?
Levied unto me is the weight you drag along,
And I can't bear it anymore.
Sullen eyes lock and create a feedback loop,
I can't help but grimace again and again,
And again and again and again,
I can't help it.
I can't help but loathe that stance and your sight,
Again and again,
And again and again and again.
Every time.
Tension thick like fog,
As I tighten and stiffen.
I shall forego no divine consideration,
No vindications, no interventions.
A crime most inhumane
Will be borne of my hands.
Is it rapturous yet how I pounce on you
While retaining our catalytic feedback loop?
Is it rapturous yet how I mourn you
Like I would a brother?
And that cathartic reunion will be your last.
As around me; myself reflected one thousand times
And cuts upon my knuckles.



 Cassidy Tomeo

Call Onto Nightmares

 By: Tyler Jacques

Mason sat silently as he watched the other kids play during recess. He didn't understand why, but he didn't connect with others—except for Carrie in 8th grade. However, Mason was in 6th, so they had different schedules. He suspected that Carrie felt bad for him. She would bring him to parties, family gatherings, and even sleepovers. Her kindness didn't help him at home.

Mason was deep in thought wondering what tonight would be like, when the bell signifying the end of recess, rang. He shook it off as Ms. Balista called for the kids to return. Walking with his class, Chris whispered into Mason's ear as he passed: "Go back to the trash can, loser!" Slapping Mason's books onto the floor. Given that Chris was older, Mason felt helpless to do anything. He shook that off as well.

Mason sat at lunch alone. He looked at the goop on the tray that his school passed off as food. He sighed. It was better than nothing, or so he thought. It ended up spat out into a napkin. As he brought his tray to the garbage, his muscles tensed as Chris approached him. He bumped into Mason and flipped his tray, leaving with a sneer. Slop soaked Mason's favorite sweatshirt, which was a gift from his biological parents before they passed. He looked down and walked away.

Ms. Balista walked over to ask, "Mason? Are you okay?"

Mason was silent, day ruined. He internally groaned at the thought of his foster parents finding out. Ms. Balista looked at Mason with concern and asked "Why don't we go back to my classroom and eat there?"

Mason was silent for a moment and shook his head. His food was in the trash and he wasn't hungry anyway. "No... it's alright," he muttered.

The rest of lunch was spent in the bathroom.

Mason sat at his desk, feeling numb. Time seemed to pass like white water rapids. The bell rang. He sighed in relief as he could finally go to Carrie's house again, the only place he felt safe.

He knocked on Carrie's door. She opened it looking glum, "Sorry Mase, I don't think I'll be able to hang out today. My parents want me to focus on my homework."

He could hear Carrie's parents through an open window. "It's alright Carrie, he can stay," Carrie's mother said, with a smile in her voice.

"But," her father added, "He can only stay until dinner."

Mason didn't want to tell anyone at home what had happened. He

wanted to grab his favorite blanket and hold it and he never wanted to leave Carrie's house. As he walked to Carrie's room, he realized he didn't really talk to anyone about home either.

He noticed a CD player near her TV. It looked beat up, like it had not been taken care of, or maybe it was old.

Interested, he looked at her and asked, "Hey Carrie, does that work?"

"The CD player? No. Not anymore."

"Can I look at it?"

Carrie nodded and he examined it.

He checked the back, the batteries were in the right place, and the audio jack seemed fine.

With curiosity on her face, Carrie asked, "So... what's wrong with it?"

"I'm not sure," Mason said. "Do you have headphones?"

She nodded and handed him a pair. He plugged them in, looking for a CD that he could insert. Carrie had a collection of albums, from metal to country. He looked at the reflective back of one of the metal albums, making sure it wasn't scratched. He put the CD in and hit play. All that came out of the headphones was static. Taking them off, he examined the wire.

"The wires are separated." He said, setting it down. "Do you have any electrical tape? It isn't the player, it's the headphones."

Carrie smiled and patted him on the head on her way by. "You're smart with that stuff, huh Mase?"

Mason smiled, and felt a bit warm in the face as she left. He glanced at the clock on the wall and sighed. He knew it was almost time for him to go.

"My dad says he'll have to get some," Carrie said when she came back.

Mason started to gather his belongings. He playfully kissed Carrie's cheek when she thanked him for looking at the old CD player. As he descended the stairs, he felt nervous about going back to his house. He was scared that his foster parents would do something again, but he kept his chin up, not knowing what else to do—even if they were his caretakers.

Mason walked home, feet aching and muscles tensed. The streetlights came on. Carrie's parents asked if he would like a ride home, but he wasn't exactly in a rush. He didn't tell them that though; he just politely declined. He sighed as his shoulders started to hurt from holding his back-

pack.

Sometimes he wasn't sure where he was going, but sometimes he felt like he was almost there.



Thunderstorms

 By: Sherrill Bokousky

Announcements on TV warn weather changes coming on this sunny day.
Before long we will see the skies darken with an incoming storm.

Could be a severe one.

Definitely, I do feel the wind picking up.

Everyone thinks differently about storms.

For me, thunderstorms are not very happy events.

Got this from my childhood:

Huge thunderclaps and vivid lightning in my early growing up years always scared me.

I don't have a great love for them to this day.

Just want it to move on.

Keeps me on alert when I know one is coming.

Looking and watching for the darker clouds to move closer to my house.

My senses are telling me that it will be soon.

Not going to let it bother me when it starts.

Opened windows are closed, and I am ready.

Perhaps I have lost some of my fear as I have gotten older.

Quite a few of them have been experienced over the years.

Really getting a handle on my worry about them.

Starting to rain, I see lightning and hear thunderclaps.

This is what was forecasted.

Usual worries from me when it starts.

Very stern with myself to get a grip.

Weather changes suddenly, storms are normal experiences.

Xenial should be my thinking right now.

You can be sure my relationship with thunderstorms is now more friendly.

Zap, the storm is now finished.



Posthumanism

 By: Devan Doerr

Shell shocked and scarred
From that maiden voyage.
Arms and legs twist and bend
They grow out from all over;
They form a tangled mess.
Theseus, his ship gets a new mast.

Distant murmurs reminisce
Of a time obscured in bloodmist.
Can it hear them
From the reverie it's lost in?
How astutely does it listen?

Eyes reveal themselves as skin becomes too tight and tears.
It struggles to exonerate this erroneous litigation-
A litany of past regressions-

Subcreations of psycho constructs held together by a mutant faith.
They hear that choir song,
And attempt to sing along
As the ship's floorboards are removed and repurposed.

Fissures and perforation permeate it's surface-
They look like geysers in a canyon.

Watch it toil and writhe,
Watch it struggle and rot.
Limbs start where others end,
Growths form without a blueprint;
They have no direction, no sense;
Harshly juxtaposed by the mass' conviction that propels it forward.
It has somewhere to go,
Somewhere to be,

Like a ship out to sea-
One who's voyage is bedecked in memories of stars-
Only remembered by scars, patching, and plating.

Palimpsest, bleeding and screaming
In cacophonous harmony, many mouths join the chant.
Teeth splinters through bone, gnashing and gnawing
As tongues fall to the ground around it.
Ball of flesh and bone,
With many rough, raw fingers to discern this world on its own.
What will those hands find
Other than disgust and a harrowing epiphany?

A vagrant body convulsing and seizing,
Compulsory frothing and growling.
Ears springing up can hear every snap,
Every bone crack,
Every egregious mutation begin to set in-
They hear it.
They hear it all!

The discordant symphony,
That which swells and roils underneath a pernicious waltz;
Took so long to crescendo to this point.
This is the climax which bites the back of a cold wind.

Overextending pupation,
Extraneous developments will continue to be made.
Varicose veins plaster themselves all over
Fingers, arms, legs,

Tails, fins, and wings alike-
They all spur to life on this breathing, bleeding canvas.

A chimerical amalgamate
Aimlessly developing at a rapid pace.

Replace the anchor, the rudder, and the keel.
Get a new propeller, hull, and stern-

Make an old ship new,
But keep the parts, don't let them burn.
Just keep building over and over

Until Theseus is satisfied with his new ship.
Until that thing leaves its meat marred chrysalis,
It'll always be beyond human,
But it'll never be more than this.



 Kailey Letendre



 Brianna Lemmon



 Ashley Soto

Leonard Cohen Wiith Friends

 By: Jackson Stewart

Some songs
just sound
better alone.
People attach themselves
to different tastes
and become soldiers
for passions they
so gallantly defend.

I was driving
the car last week
my radio became
a cudgel for
intellectual warfare.
Remember how hard it is
when certain people ask:
Can I queue one next?
Hand them the phone
and say nothing,
unless it be
of encouragement.
Some songs
just sound
better alone
anyways.



Sunrise

✍✍✍ By: Ashton Laurent

I stood in the doorway of my best friend Alex's house. He yawned, clearly still waking up due to my sudden arrival at his house.

"Johnny? What are you doing here? It's four in the morning." He said

"I'm so sorry, I know it's late but—"

Sudden realization hit his eyes. "She kicked you out again, didn't she." All I could do was nod. I didn't feel like talking about what happened. He understood this, as he always had. "Do you want to go for a walk? Come on, I'll take you to my favorite spot to think." He turned around and grabbed a blue hoodie. The one he wore all the time when we were in high school. Together we stepped out into the night air.

Soon after we found ourselves on a narrow path in the woods, guided only by the light from our phone's flashlights. The path was overgrown, I found myself getting smacked in the face repeatedly by bushes and the occasional thorn.

"Ouch!" I said, "This better be worth it!"

Alex chuckled. "I promise it will be! Just a little further!"

After another minute of being assaulted by various plants, I began to hear the sound of rushing water. He pushed aside a large branch to reveal a little clearing, overlooking a small waterfall. He grabbed my hand and pulled me up onto a cement block that had begun to erode over time. I could make out a structure in the distance. I moved my flashlight up to see that the waterfall ran under a bridge, probably one that was used by freight trains. It was all rusted and falling apart in some areas.

"Incredible..." I said.

"You should see it during the day," Alex said, taking a seat on the cement block.

"How did you find this place?"

"My dad found it. He and I used to come here a lot to have picnics when I was little. Now I just come here when I need to think." He motioned for me to sit down next to him. "It can be our place now."

"You sure? I don't want to intrude on your space." I started to shiver. The bitter autumn air felt like the thorns from earlier.

He smiled. "Of course! I wouldn't have brought you here if I didn't want to share it with you." He took off his iconic blue sweatshirt and

handed it to me. "Here, you look cold."

I put it on and felt a warmth in my stomach. I moved closer to him as he put his arm around me. We sat in silence for a couple of hours, just enjoying each other's presence. Soon, it started to get light out. Birds began to sing, signifying daybreak. An orange glow reflected off the water and through the bridge. We looked at each other, and before I could speak, his lips pressed against mine. It felt magical, I never wanted to pull away. The kiss lasted a few more seconds. He eventually pulled away, and our eyes met.

"I wish I could stay in this moment forever" I whispered.

"I know." He said. We laid there for a bit, just taking it all in. I saw the warmth in his eyes and I knew that everything was going to be okay.



 Ashton Laurent

A Commentary On Proactive Policing

   By: Tristan Jardinier

The king introduced a new policy
Under his wizard's scrying eye.
Crimes foreseen but yet to pass
Became fair game to try.
My brother is a violin maker,
And I, myself, a violin player.
Never had we reason to consider
Trouble from the king's soothsayer.
"You two look so similar,"
Explained the guard to my brother.
"We could not just leave you both,
If it's not one, it must be the other."
My brother's cell was right next door,
We could enjoy some conversation.
The days were long, the nights were dull.
Rats ate well at my damnation.
"What were you thinking about?"
I inquired through the stone.
Lengthy silence before his reply:
How fat these rats have grown.
A storm one day gifted us with wood
And water seeped into our cells.
Rats had shared my meals for so long,
I didn't mind sharing a dry bed as well.
That night, I laid with my mischief of rats.
"We fear the man in the cell next door."
I swear I heard in trembling whisper,
Yet saw only whiskered snores.
The next day in the clear of morning,
The storm water had receded.
"What shall you do with your wood, brother?"
"I'll make a violin. This is just what I needed."

My friends and I broke bread every night
For them I made a small table.
Though fed and groomed, their numbers wavered,
And one day I heard a scale in G major.

Of course, I was astonished,
Then ecstatic, enough to sing.
The rats only listened solemnly.
Then I asked: "How did you make the string?"
I received no reply
Nor repeating scale.
Just the dark and damp.
And anxious, flicking tails.
The guard came down.
The cell opened under the key.
"Well, sorry about that."
He said the violent one wasn't me.
"How?" I asked, "Why?" I pleaded.
"I'm only doing my job."
"If we weren't here this wouldn't have happened,"
I tried to explain through my sobs.
Crying still but angry then,
I demanded: "What did the wizard see?"
"It's no matter, he doesn't control the future."
"Right. No more him than me."
"Listen here, you little bastard,
Your actions are your own.
The ends justify the means, alright?
Now go the fuck back home."
The long return let me think;
I wondered what the wizard saw.
I thought of returning home alone
And I screamed until my voice was raw.
I cannot change the past,
But my future is my own.
And so, with pleasure, I killed the wizard,
Then my brother and I went home.





 Eden Granmont

How To Write a Poem

   By: Eden Grandmont

What phrasing to use? What words to say?
Questions fill my mind on these cool Autumn days.

Blank pages before me taunt, knowing my struggle.
My pen laughs along, roiled internally with a dark puddle.

A studious silence pierced by uncertainty and stress,
Giggling, pursuing my lack of progress.

My eyes dart across the desk in search of a single sign;
Any would help, be it a shape or line.

I know that I have to write. I'm due for something new.
What would be thought of me if I can't see this through?

The poet's process is pleasant, a peek into experience or story,
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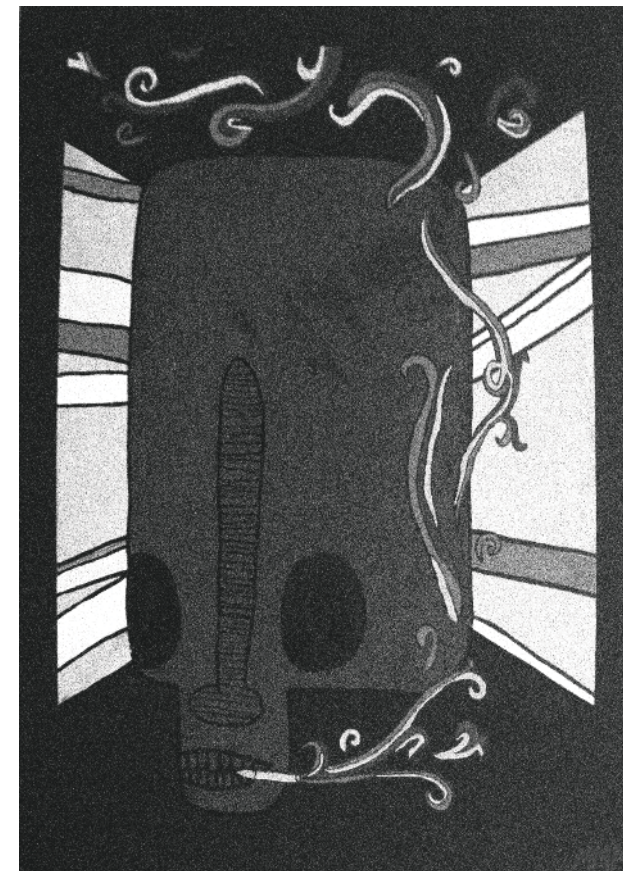
And there is much room in my writing inventory.

Then, in the depths of my mind, appears a spark,
That pierces sharply through the dark.

The words begin to flow, a creative stream,
I can't help but grin at my clever scheme.

My doubt fades. Energy fills me anew,
And now, at last, I know what to do.

An idea.



 Madison Muise

An Old Friend and a New Friend

   By: Cassidy Tomeo

We walked a path
through the woods
that only we could see.

This path we would walk
every day in the blazing days
of Summer noontime.
We would walk this path
and many more
through rain, snow,
ice, and the season of ticks
until our faces were covered in
sweat and dirt.

Nothing bothered us.

Not even
the small children
that we would have to adopt
into our time alone.
None of it mattered.
Not even the numerous words
of your parents giving you
the warning that you'd move soon.

After all, we've heard those words
since our childhood to mid teenage hood.
Oh, but how oblivious we were.

We should have listened more.
We should have hung out more.
But we thought we had
all the time in the world.
And then you were no longer there
by my side.

Just as you had disappeared

a new set of footprints appeared by me, walking on a new path.

Within these walks
and the path becoming longer
and longer,
they started to develop
a face and feelings.
They heard all I had to say
and I did the same for them.

I wanted to know and understand their story.
And for a brief moment,
unlike us,
me and this person's worlds
had eclipsed for a short period.

It started like the Moon and Earth,
that the Moon introduced life to Earth,
but just like the Moon and Earth,
we were causing each other's problems,
such as that of a crater,
and just like the Moon,
I pulled away.
I became distant.

But after all of that was said and done,
we found each other again.
Things seemed fine on the surface,
much like that of the Ocean.

Deep underneath the waves though,
there were pollutants and nets
creating a rift between us.
And I let them.
And perhaps
I am still letting them affect us,
even after consoling one another,
I just don't think we'd go back
to the way we were.
Too much has changed.

To me.

With one path
seemingly hanging on by a root,
the other path shows itself once more
and instead of walking the path
of woods we had walked since childhood
we were now walking
the path of sand and cemented rocks.
If I look back though,
on this path,
I can see the darkened path
that I already walked and experienced.

So, while one path seems pleasant,
I still walk along the other path,
alternating between the two
and trying to maintain them.
In the end though,
I may close these paths forever
as they do not always last
till the end of time.

For the last breath I breathe alone,
these paths might seem foreign to me
as I take in the last light of the Sun.

It doesn't matter though,
as these paths were once the paths
I walked on and enjoyed.



I Am Being Brewed Alive and I Don't Know Why



By: Eden Grandmont

"I'll be out for just a few minutes," the witch had said with a toothy smile before stepping out of her treely home.

Here I am left at the center of a home, quite different from my own. You could reach one side of the singular room to the other in just a few steps, making it feel rather claustrophobic. A mess of dirty blankets and moss-covered pillows shield a cot from clear view. It looks terribly uncomfortable, but I suppose there isn't a lot of space for a higher-quality bed. Shelves filled with foraged plants, tiny insects, and mysterious substances line the rounded wall, and in the center of it all sits a mighty cauldron, resting atop a tiny fire pit from which emerges an orange plume. And inside the cauldron is me—bathing among slices of carrots, diced mushrooms, and a once-living toad.

I am being brewed alive, and I don't know why.

Never would I have expected that this would be the way I spend my Thursday afternoon. I had grabbed my old rod and tackle box to try some fishing by the large lake in the woods (the harsh cold of Winter has been replaced by the gentle rays of Spring, you see). I've been to the lake many times, so I knew exactly where to go: follow the old stone wall until it makes a right turn, then continue straight past it until the break in the trees appears, and the lake is just on the other side. My walk was much like any other in the past, being accompanied by the distant song of elevated avians and sway of the towering woods. I made my way past the old knee-high wall to the opening, then past that to the big blue at the heart of the woods. As I approached, Mother Nature's breath caused small ripples in the shallow surface. Countless insects danced around the water, spinning in the air and occasionally creating their own marks. I moved through the nearly waist-high foliage and took a seat at an old makeshift dock created many years ago by a fisher who came before me. Yes, it was the perfect day for fishing. Yet, right as I opened my box to retrieve my tackle, I was greeted by an abrupt sharpness against the back of my head. The lake and surrounding greenery faded to black.

I had awoken to the sound of bubbling water and tickles all throughout my body. Had I fallen into the lake? Was I feeling the nibbles of its residents? So far as I could see, there was no lake, no surrounding foliage, and no fish. Instead, I saw a lantern-lit room with dirty walls- an earthly dirty- and a woman standing close by, reading from a massive book. She was an old woman, with wrinkles covering her droopy face and

slender arms; she was beautiful nonetheless. Her beady eyes moved from the book to meet mine, and she swiftly closed the cover, placing the book inside of a satchel over her shoulder.

"Ah, yer awake!" Her shrill voice pierced the silence. The woman's ancient boots slid across the floor, collecting a bit of dust on the way, and she stopped close to me. Despite her decrepit appearance, she towered over me. I had to look up a little so as to not stare at her patchy violet cloak. She wore a blank expression on her face. "Sorry for hittin' ya so hard." A bony hand ran through the thick black bush atop her noggin. An awfully mysterious beldam she appeared to be.

"Where am I?" I asked her.

"My home!" the woman croaked, spreading her arms in a grand manner. "I jus' need ya for a short time, a'right? So sit tight!" She patted a large object in front of her, which appeared to be a gaping cauldron. She swiftly retrieved a vial from her satchel and poured it in a place I cannot quite see, and as she stood, a red glow appeared from below. I was being brewed alive, and I didn't know why.

The woman cackled as specks of dirt and twig pieces fell from her scalp. She then staggered to a rotting wooden door, framing a tiny shattered window a bit lower than her chin.

"I need more ingredients! I'll be out for just a few minutes," the old woman had said before stepping out of her treely home.

And now I find myself in hot water, waiting to suffer the same fate as the floating unmoving toad circling around me. I wonder how long this strange woman has lived in these woods for, and how I have never seen her before today. I thought I had seen all the sights in the area, but I guess I was wrong. I wonder about what else I may have not seen for a good while, until the old door opens again, revealing the old woman. The door closes again, and she looks at me, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh, I forgot you were 'ere." She drops a sack on the floor, making a rustling sound as it falls. "Climb on out of there, a'right?" I simply look at her, puzzled, and she glares in response. "Go on! Git out'o there!" I comply and awkwardly step out of the warm pot, dripping onto the rot-tenly floor. Somehow, my lower body feels fine. I ask if she wants to eat me, and she recoils.

"Gods no! I jus' need some o' yer essence!"

"My essence?"

"Ya know, seasoning!" The woman twiddles her fingers together.

"Thanks for providin' some!"

"What are you cooking?"

“A fine stew! Been wanting to try for a’while!” Her gaze wanders to the pot, then back to me. “Get home safe, ya’ear? Get out’a ‘ere!”

I quickly slip past her and fling open the door, noticing that I can see the lake in the distance.

I was brewed alive, and I guess I know why.



 Cassidy Tomeo

Thoughts



By: Jackson Stewart

Thoughts between waking up and the shower,
written while drying.

What I say willingly
can be challenged later

sober

But what is said in
dream

is never put to trial,
yet remains
in the patchwork of my
mind.

Woven together
and always on edge
fraying here and there.

Contradictions that break the
pattern

never can suffer much scrutiny
under the blade of cross-
examination

without unwinding into
the many segments
that I require to be stitched
back together
in any way fit.



Solitude

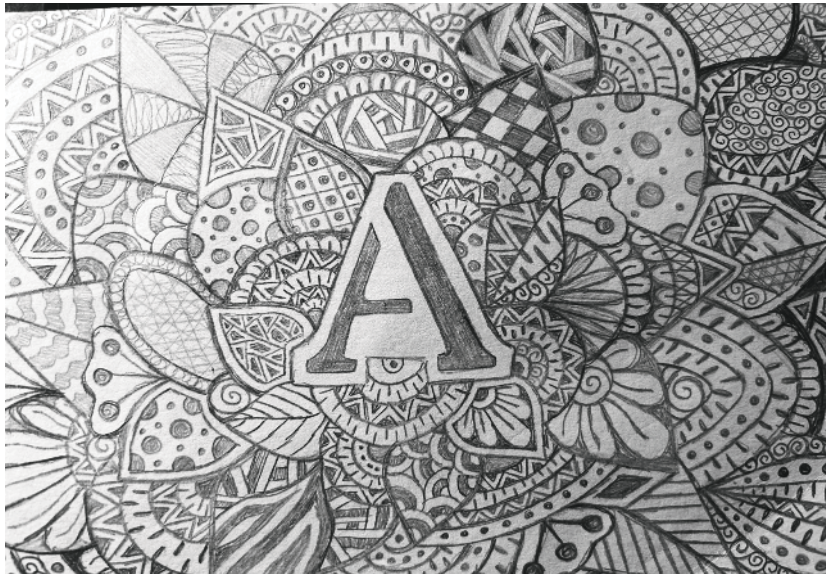


By: Jim Ogorchock

Silent sentinel
Watching, observing, learning,
Ethereal dove.



 C.J. Miller



 Ashley Soto

Old Wounds

   By: Ryan Carlson

The dial tone felt like it went on forever. There was a snow storm coming, so the cell towers may have been on the fritz. I just needed to call him just to make sure he's okay. Tom is my youngest brother and the only one I have close contact with. Ed is almost always busy running his business and Cletus is seeing the early effects of dementia. We try to keep in contact and call each other at least every other Sunday but sometimes it doesn't work out. Tom hasn't had a consistent work schedule for years, what with all the jobs he went through because of things beyond his control. After what I went through to find a decent job after my oh-so-loving husband left me behind, I see why he was always so on edge back then.

The phone finally stopped ringing and I heard Tom's wheezy voice through the receiver. "Heya Barley! I'm glad you remembered to call!" He sounded as excited as his tar-encrusted lungs would permit.

"Good to hear your voice, Tom. I was worried I wouldn't get a hold of you through the snow storm."

Tom laughed weakly. "Snow storm? I can't even remember the last time I've seen snow! Don't see much of that down here in Texas! Do you know how the farm is doing?"

"I still haven't seen it much since my ex-husband left. How's Tess?"

I could hear Tom trying to sigh but he ended up coughing through it, like he had choked on a mint. "Well, you know... it's a healthy marriage, but Tess just ain't showing me much love lately. It's like living with Ma instead of my wife."

There was a period of silence as I tried to think of something to talk about that wouldn't make him upset. Tom spared me.

"Hey Barley, are you still working?"

"Of course, I am Tom. I don't have much of a choice, do I?"

We went silent again. A crack of a tree branch reverberated from outside and the lights flicked as if they were possessed.

"I really hope you're able to retire soon, Barley. Nobody should have to be working at the age of seventy."

He's not the first one who said that to me. People were telling me to get out of the workforce at fifty. The most turbulent point of my life. If I were able, I would retire, but I can't leave this earth without living by the beach for a while.

"Yeah, I know," I muttered into the receiver. Another period of

silence followed, not quite as deafening, thanks to the intense choir of the wind.

“Well, I should get going. I have another job interview tomorrow, and I got to be up early. I’m really crossing my fingers on this one, decent pay and commute.”

“Alright Tom, I’ll talk to you if I have time next week, I’ll see you later.”

The line went quiet, but I kept the phone on my ear. It was warm.

I should probably head to bed too. Hopefully the snow plow does its job early enough that I can get to work. Though the wind outside was bad, I heard branches hit the side of the house while Tom and I were talking.

I finally got my crap together and got to bed instead of standing around with the dead phone to my ear. I took my old people medicine and got my breathing machine running.

I couldn’t sleep, what with the wind slamming against the house and the neighbors windchime playing a frantic and unwelcome tune. That wasn’t the only thing that kept me up. I thought about more things I wanted to tell Tom. Like the work I do at church, or that I’m looking after my grandson. I told him I was still working but neglected to tell him I got promoted.

He didn’t sound so good. Tom’s voice has always been gravely and nasally, but it sounded worse than it’s ever been. I laid there in my bed and started regretting things. Losing contact with my brothers and sisters, not trying harder to get Tom off the smokes, getting married.

I tried to quell the thoughts from my mind and go to bed but my head kept bugging me with the same mental image. A vision of Tom in a grave before me. With all the words I meant to say but never spoke to cold stone in a graveyard instead of into a warm receiver. Though my thoughts swirled endlessly to the rhythm of the storm outside, I kept coming back to the thought that if Tom is in a grave before me, then there is no God.



 Adam Breen

Love Watches

 By: Wren Tsao

When I lie down to love
I hold the pulse that counts your blood
Under the pink quilted covers
We watch the wind from our square bed
Lie still with me and watch.
All night long —
we laugh and we touch.
And tonight our skins, our bones,
stay mute and uncaring,
falling flat and washed. And I remember
They said I’d never get you back again.

Darling, life is not in my hands;
I am beating all my wings.

Lie still with me and watch
My loves are oiling their bones
Bones piled up like coal, animal bones
stirring, stretching muscles, bare bones of continent, eternal
burning
of triumphant resistance.

as the gentle
beating
a form of love

Against my lungs
The air the ground
is echoed in the young.

I will eat you slowly with kisses
Here
in all the cages of America
I have kisses for the back of your neck.
I lie as still as a bar of iron
Lie still with me and watch
This trance girl
an awful package,
stuck in the time machine.
You could lay her in a grave,
and shovel dirt on her face
But if you kissed her on the mouth
She's out of prison.

Each night I am nailed into a place
circling the abyss like a shark,
like some sleeping jellyfish.
That's another kind of prison.
Lie still with me and watch
or lie in sleep
Yes indeed. She went to sleep.
I must not sleep
sleep must take me unawares
I'm all shot up with Novocain.
It was a soft medicine
clear as tears.
And this was the reason that, long ago,

with a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
went envying her and me—
for the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
left over from summer
left over like those promises I never keep.

And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
calling me, calling you.
And they put out the star-light
The skies they were ashen and sober
It was night in the lonesome October
Here once, through an alley Titanic,
These were days when my heart was volcanic
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—
Our talk had been serious and sober,
For we knew not the month was October,
Our memories were treacherous and sere—
And we marked not the night of the year—
And now, as the night was senescent
As the leaves that were withering and sere,
Lie still with me and watch.
Huge moons there wax and wane—
Forever changing places—
Every moment of the night.

Oh now I lay me down to love,
Dim vales—and shadowy floods—
In a labyrinth of light—
Lie still with me and watch.
Her eyes wobble as thirty-one thick folds
Breathing in loops like a green hen
My dreams are of snarling strangers. She dreams that...
in her hands, gathered in like a nest
she is all red muscle, humming in and out, cajoled
all night long—
A pheasant moves
The woods are underwater, their weeds are shaking
Life with its terrible changes
Is the passion of their sleep.
Even if I put on seventy coats I could not cover you...

in the dust. But if I dream of loving, then
Again—again—again—
For the tears that drip all over
I give you the images I know.

And if I lie, I lie because I love you,
I forgive you for what you did not do,
It is June. I am tired of being brave.
My darling, the wind falls in like stones
and we touch. In another country people die.
And what of the dead? They lie without shoes
lie still with me and watch
from the whitehearted water and when we touch
letting the dead ride alone in the hearse.

I stand before the sea
And I simply stood on the beach
But I stood alone like a pink scarecrow.
I am that clumsy human
on the shore
loving you, coming, coming,
 may it continue
love in the morning, love in the noon sun
love in thick midnight, fierce joy of old ones loving
 may it continue
with cunning & love
as stars continue
may it continue

Darkness
dawn coming up,
the smell of a lover,
moist and plump.
I feel your heart work its
music on city streets in the summer nights
and you hold me
against my lungs
all touch is
 freedom
 & love

Is revolution.



 Adam Breen

Love Watches

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 Paulina Shilova



Congratulations,
Fall Class of 2023!

Tristan Jardinier
Cassidy Tomeo

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