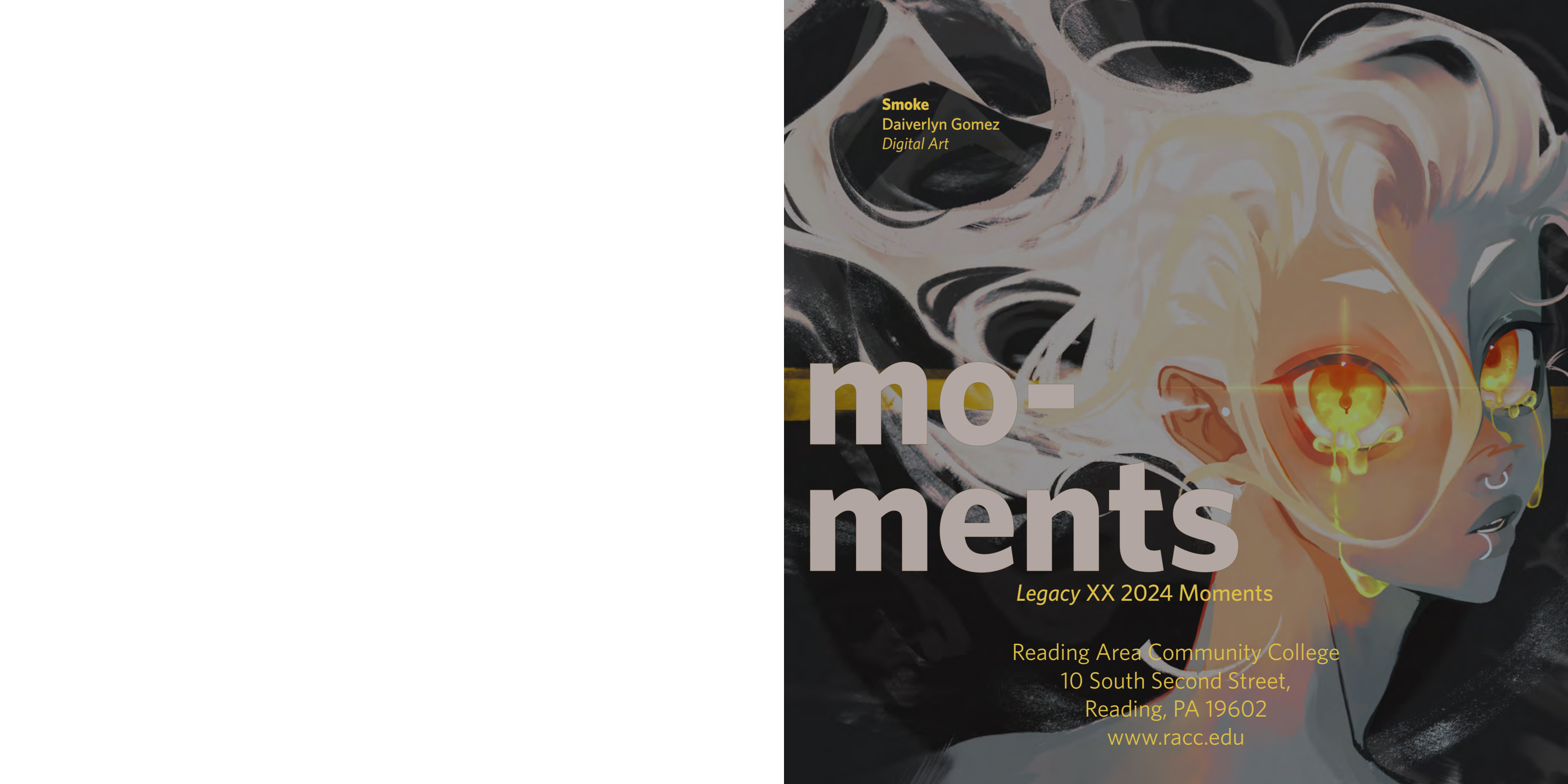




Moments
XX | 2024

LEGACY



Smoke
Daiverlyn Gomez
Digital Art

mo- ments

Legacy XX 2024 Moments

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10 South Second Street,
Reading, PA 19602
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About the Cover

The cover of *Legacy 2024* beautifully encapsulates our theme of “moments.” Created by Daiverlyn Gomez, an art student at RACC, and designed by Dylan Sokolovich, our Layout/Design Editor, this visual representation reflects a unique moment of discovery and reflection, echoing our intent to highlight how such individual moments contribute to the broader tapestry of expression in our journal.

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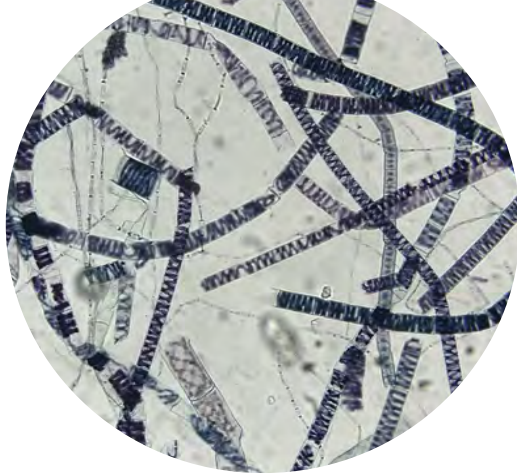
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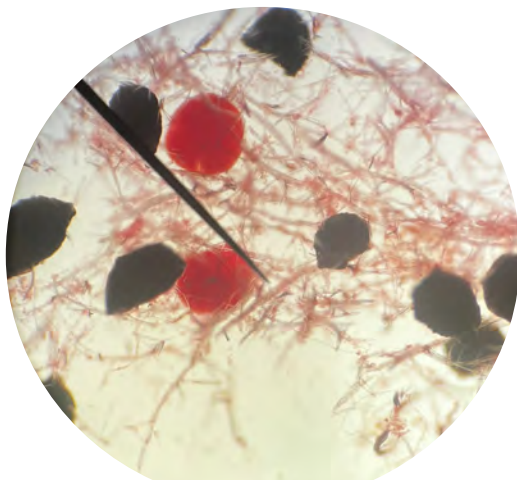
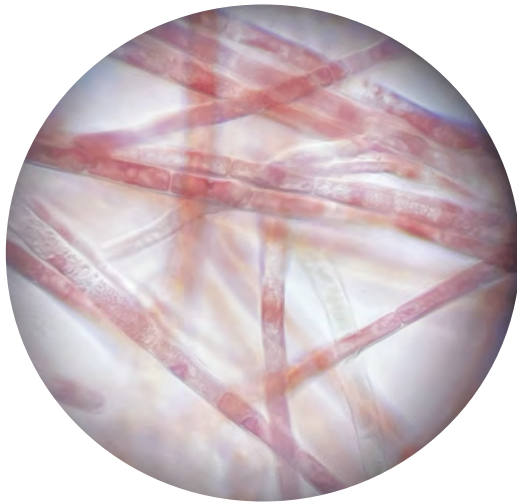
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Trial of the West
Camden Gehris
Photography



Acknowledgements XX 2024

In this volume of *Legacy*, we find ourselves deeply grateful for the remarkable group of students whose vision and perseverance have brought this project to fruition. Their leadership and creativity have not only defined our journal's essence but have also fostered a vibrant community of writers and artists dedicated to expressing their unique voices.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Bahar Diken, whose relentless dedication and guidance behind the scenes have been nothing short of inspirational. Her commitment to nurturing creativity and excellence has laid a solid foundation for our work, making the seemingly impossible possible. Dr. Diken's passion for literary and artistic expression shines as a beacon for all of us.

A special acknowledgment is due to Dylan Sokolovich, our layout/design editor, whose keen eye for design in crafting the layout for *Legacy* 2024 has truly transformed our publication. Dylan's ability to encapsulate the essence of each piece in a visually stunning presentation has elevated our journal to new heights, making it a testament to the power of visual storytelling.

To every student who bravely shared their work, whether featured in this edition or waiting for their moment in the future: Their courage and creativity are the heartbeat of *Legacy* 2024. Their contributions create a rich tapestry of ideas and perspectives that inspire and challenge us. Each submission is a vital part of our journey, reflecting the diverse voices that make our RACC community whole.

Finally, to our readers whose engagement and support make all our efforts worthwhile: Their curiosity and appreciation for the arts fuel our passion and remind us of the power of connection through storytelling. They are the reason we share these stories, and their presence completes the circle of creative expression that defines our journal.

Together, we celebrate the power of words and the bonds of our creative community.

Leighmon Eisenhardt
Editor-in-Chief

XX 2024 Note To the Reader

Tick-tock! The unyielding rhythm of the clock, a constant reminder of time's passage, with each tick presenting an opportunity and each tock, a story told. These moments, often perceived as mere markers of time, evolve into the very essence of learning at RACC, shaping the dynamic landscape of our academic journey.

Aligned with this perpetual rhythm, the academic cycle at RACC reflects a pattern of challenges and renewal, with each semester ushering in new opportunities for students to seize and make their own. These individual moments of understanding and discovery meld together, creating a rich array of experiences that contribute to the collective growth and ambiance of the institution.

So, the clock becomes more than a measure of time. It becomes a call to action, urging us to embrace each tick-tock—each moment with passion and purpose.

Each student's piece in *Legacy* 2024 captures a moment, reflecting their unique perspective at a distinct point in time. Each piece illustrates the power of an instant to evoke emotion and provoke thought, allowing it to transcend time and touch hearts and minds. Transitioning from individual moments to a collective narrative, the pieces of prose, poetry, and art assembled in our journal weave together to form a tapestry of expression that we hope will resonate with our readers.

Leighmon Eisenhardt
Editor-in-Chief

River's Rhapsody
Dylan Sokolovich

The bullfrogs and little fishes are dancing
hand in hand
They laugh, giggle, roll, and jive
Waltzing and wallopping
To a rhythm only they understand.

They croak and blow bubbles
Spit and sputtle
Find joy in the ebb and tide.

Bouncing off banks
Reeds and lily pads
Sing a tune
And dance their merry dance.

For in nature's symphony
From swim and strive
Certainty remains uncertain.

Why the Willow Weeps

Leighmon Eisenhardt
Creative Nonfiction

“

A subtle tinge of gray lurked along the edges of his lips
and cheeks, like a shadow that stubbornly remained no
matter how much light illuminated it.

”

Why the Willow Weeps

Creative Nonfiction

Leighmon Eisenhardt

I look at the old pictures of Dad and, to me, they seem to be of a different man in a vastly different time. They show a person smiling in fresh clean clothing. He seems inviting, hopeful, with an intangible glow to the hue of his smile. Not the dour, frowning man in forever dusty overalls that dwells within my thoughts.

He never hit me, but I was, and still am, scared of him regardless. Dad told me once that it wasn't his job to love or like me, but it was his role to provide and protect. Quite often, when harvests were bad or prices dropped, he'd go hungry – but I never did.

It must have been a relief when Mark showed up.

"I spent a lotta money to find you, Pop." The man said when Dad opened the door.

"Come in." Dad placed a leathery hand on my back and gave me a gentle push in the opposite direction. "Go outside and play, squirt."

Adult stuff. It wasn't a place for me, but I wanted it to be. When I didn't move right away, Dad gave me the look.

I ran down the stairs and the door shut behind me.

I don't know what they talked about, but hours later the door opened, and out stepped the man. I had been playing with marbles, rolling them down the steps. He sat down beside me, smelling of cologne and sweat.

"Hey there, little guy," he said cheerfully in that sing-song voice adults often take with children. "I talked to your Pop."

Dad never addressed me in that tone of voice. I reached down between my legs and picked up a marble. It made a satisfying clink when I dropped it into my leather pouch.

*"I held my breath
before throwing
with all the strength
I had. My fist
bounced off the
rough leather of the
bag, barely making
it move."*

The man seemed disappointed, but smiled anyway, "My name's Mark and I'm your big brother."

He held out his hand. I stared at it, puzzled. I had seen Dad make similar gestures before, usually when selling produce at the market. Kids don't do such things. This was adult stuff.

Giggling, delighted, I shook his hand. It was warm and soft, not at all like Dad's.

"I never had a brother before."

"Well, get used to it. You and Pop are stuck with me now."

Mark was true to his word. He still had a day job, he said. So, it wasn't every weekend, but he was a common enough visitor to our farm that the guest room quickly became Mark's room.

Even Dad warmed up to him. Tasks that I

was too small to do, like bailing, Mark took on with gusto, as if he had been born to do them. Dad scoffed at first, saying something about "city boy muscles," but Mark didn't show any signs of hurting. One day Mark challenged Dad on who could distribute more mulch from the garden pile. I was to be the judge, and they worked hard for a summer afternoon, shoveling until both were gasping for breath.

In the end, I gave it (barely) to Mark. To be honest, it could have gone either way.

Mark had an infectious giggling laugh, like a hyena. His mouth would pull back, revealing pearly teeth, and he would cackle under his breath. He laughed and Dad grumbled, and that would just make Mark laugh more. Before I knew it, I had joined them.

Dad didn't bring up the city after that.

Mark pulled into the driveway and yanked a heavy-looking sack out of the trunk of his car.

"What're you doing?" I asked.

"Punching bag," he said, grunting as he swung it over his shoulder.

"What's that?"

"It's a bag that you punch."

He was messing with me.

"Marrrrrrk," I whined but followed him anyway.

He took the bag into the barn, stringing it up with an old chain Dad had from last winter. Mark gave it an experimental push. With a rusty creak, the bag swayed back and forth.

"Can I punch it?"

"That's what it is for. Go ahead, squirt."

Mark took a respectful step away as I squared up. I held my breath before throwing with all the strength I had. My fist bounced off the rough leather of the bag, barely making

it move. The skin on my knuckles protested my technique by bleeding. And above all my crying, Mark's hyena laugh broke out.

"What's this?" Our noise finally got Dad's attention. He appeared in the doorway like a superhero, blotting out the sun. I dried my tears as I ran up to him.

"It's a punching bag," I said before Mark could even open his mouth.

"I can see that."

"I figure it's something to do after the work is done," Mark said, still grinning at me.

I stuck out my tongue and waited for Dad to wipe that smile off Mark's face – to tell him to stop playing around. Instead, against everything I thought I knew, Dad smiled like the man in the pictures.

"Did I ever tell you I used to fight in Golden Gloves?"

"Mom mentioned it."

Dad's punch slammed into the bag like a gunshot, sending it flying back and I feared for a moment the chain might snap.

Mark gave a low whistle. "Your old man still has it," he said to me.

After that, often the day ended with the sound of flesh hitting leather, a steady cadence laced with laughter and occasional cursing. I always hung around, but seldom participated, even when Mark brought me gloves from the city. I enjoyed the sound more than anything. It was comforting in its rhythm. Instead, I found a new hobby to do on those long nights.

I began to read.

Dad didn't encourage me, but he didn't discourage me either. "Just get your work done," he said. Mark, on the other hand, started bringing me books, fueling a hunger I never knew I had. It became another reason to

look forward to the sight of his car turning the dusty trail at the end of the lane.

Mark brought me *My Side of the Mountain* one visit. It had a hawk on the cover and my mind raced at the hinted possibility within those pages. I attacked my chores that day, determined to finish quickly so I could read. Dad approved and even commented that Mark should bring more books during the harvest season.

Mark found me that afternoon below the large willow on the hill overlooking our farm.

"Hey, squirt," he called.

"Hey!" I didn't even look up from my book.

A snapping sound echoed, and suddenly, a dangling vine with leaves began tickling my face and neck.

I swatted it away and glared at Mark.

He just laughed.

"So, how are you liking the book?" he asked, plopping down next to me.

"I like it a lot."

I dog-eared the book and kept the page with my forefinger. Mark was picking at the ground, occasionally throwing a small stone. He seemed to have something on his mind. The book was burning a hole in my hand, but I savored the feeling like my Dad relished the last beer in the fridge.

"So," Mark began. "Have you given thought to what you wanna do when you're older?"

"I figured I'd work on the farm."

Mark was silent for a long while. "That'd be a waste," he said finally.

"What do you mean?"

He flicked a stone and it bounced and tumbled all the way down the hill. "You blaze

through books for kids twice your age. I've never seen someone...so...so..." Mark chewed on his words. "There's more for you than this."

I didn't know how to respond to that. I was quite proud of my work on the farm. I was needed here.

"Pop agrees." He continued, "He's just... well, him. So he won't say it."

Off in the distance, I could see Dad on the tractor, the plow upending ordered furrows in the field. Each row was a perfect line stretching far into the horizon.

"He does?"

"He does." Mark stood up and dusted grass and dirt from the rear-end of his trousers. "Just think it over, will you?"

I nodded and Mark started to leave. I don't know what prompted me to say something, but he was halfway down the hill when I blurted out, "Hey, Mark!"

He turned, his lanky frame silhouetted against the fields. "What?"

"What is actually out there?" I saw the confusion on his face. "The city and stuff," I clarified.

"You'll have to see for yourself, squirt."

I frowned.

Mark relented, looking up at the tree above us. "Well, for starters, you can find out why they call this a weeping willow."

He had a sparkle in his eye. "I bet you don't even know that," I said.

"Of course, I do."

"Okay, city boy, tell me."

Mark grinned, "Because happy willow just sounds silly."

Irritated, I opened my book with a snap and tried my best to ignore his hyena laughter.

Mark died that winter.

He had been crossing the street and an out-of-control car slammed into him, pinning Mark against a parked vehicle. "Almost cut him in half," they said. He had died almost instantly. "At least he didn't suffer," they offered as a consolation.

"Should lock that driver up and throw away the damn key," Dad said as he combed my hair and straightened my tie.

The funeral was small and private. Just me and my Dad and a few coworkers. Mark had been as much of a loner as my Dad. No wife, no girlfriend.

We stood in line for the viewing, and I went first. It was an open casket, but only the top half was displayed. A fuzzy red velvet cloth obscured everything from the waist down.

He looked peaceful, and I half-expected him to open his eyes to look at me. But there was also something fundamentally wrong. The longer you looked at him, the more alarming this unease became. The lines on his face were too straight, the skin stretched ever so tightly in places it shouldn't be, making his complexion shiny. A subtle tinge of gray lurked along the edges of his lips and cheeks, like a shadow that stubbornly remained no matter how much light illuminated it.

I couldn't imagine him laughing with that mouth.

I laid the back of my hand against his cheek. It was like touching a statue, all cold and hard.

There was nothing to say. I had nothing to tell him.

So I pretended to pray, bowing my head, then stepped aside, as I had seen the other adults do.



And then it was Dad's turn.

He pulled out an envelope from his pocket. It was puffy, the glued side secured and creased. Every month he'd give an envelope just like this to Mark with a check to pay him for working on the farm. Mark would argue with Dad over it all the time, saying that he didn't need to be paid, but Dad was insistent. He didn't want to owe anyone anything.

Dad placed it gently on Mark's chest before turning to me. With his large hand on my back, we left the church.

We did not stay for the burial.

More or less, life went back to what it had been before Mark's arrival in our lives. Times were tough, but that was to be expected. As I got older, I could take on more responsibilities. Dad, for his part, worked harder than ever. We never took down the punching bag. It wasn't odd to hear the telltale gunshots of his fist hitting the leather long into the night.

I spent my time differently.

Dad began giving me a wage, just as he would for Mark. My first purchase was the internet, followed shortly after by a cheap Dell laptop. Dad gave me the same warning as he always would. "Don't let it get in the way of your work," he said. I didn't, so he said nothing more about it. Sometimes I'd catch him using my computer to watch CNN or yesterday's basketball game.

And I kept buying books. I liked holding them. There was something lost in the translation of a computer screen. The feeling of paper between the fingertips, dog-eared pages, and the slow yellowing of a coffee stain. I found books were really good at being books. I gloated over my collection like a proud dragon.

One day Dad came into my room. I looked up just in time to catch the box he had tossed. More books that I had ordered. Dad normally left them in front of my door. If he had come in, it was because he had something to say.

Instead, he pulled a letter from his dirty overalls, holding it out for me.

It wasn't payday.

With a sense of dread, I took the letter. It was addressed to me from a school I had never heard of, but the return address was in the city.

My gaze snapped back to Dad, and he gave a slight nod.

I tore it open and read – then reread on the off chance that I had misunderstood.

An acceptance letter to a boarding school in the city.

"How?" I asked. I hadn't applied.

Dad grunted, "We thought you might like it."

He pulled out one last envelope. I recognized his large handwritten block letters: TUITION.

He tossed it to me where it casually floated and fell between my legs.

"That's enough for the full four years." Dad shifted his weight and my floorboards protested. "Classes start next month. Pack your shit and be ready."

My mouth struggled to move, trying to assemble some protest.

"I'll be fine," Dad answered my unspoken question before it had even formed in my mouth.

Then he left, the door clicking shut behind him. I was again alone in my room, but this time with a letter and an envelope heavy beyond compare. I remembered Mark's

words and could only wonder at what truly lay beyond the farm.

It was the last full day before I left.

My books and supplies had been purchased and were packed in my room. Even on this occasion, I had chores to do. I did them without complaint, and my Dad, as always, did what he had always done.

I finished before he did, which was to be expected. My Dad had been taking on more and more of the farm workload. I think he thought I wouldn't notice. I worried about him in the quiet way I always had, convinced that things like mortality were meant for others and never for him. But I chose not to bring it up lest my words somehow bring it into being.

Instead, I went to my room. It was bare now, little more than a wasteland. Everything I owned had been jammed into two old suitcases

"I worried about him in the quiet way I always had, convinced that things like mortality were meant for others and never for him."

Dad had given me. Well, almost everything. Rows of books still lined the shelves. They had built up over the years like trophies of my progress.

I ran my fingers along their spines. I knew I would miss them. Each was a story, a journey, and I could not shake the feeling that I was abandoning them on this dusty shelf – except one. Discarded in the far corner, it almost jeered at me. I didn't need to see the cover to know its title. Despite years of avoidance, like a rock in the shoe, it had never left the back of my mind.

On impulse, I grabbed the book and flipped it over. The familiar hawk, mid-flight forever, stared back. The crinkled yellow pages were still dog-eared where I had left off. I had never finished it. With nothing else to do, I gave in to nostalgia. A quiet voice prompted me to do something crazy, and I went back outside to the old willow that stood in silent vigil over our farm.

I wanted to read under it one last time. A fitting end to my last day.

Sitting down at the base of the trunk with the scenic view of the farm before me, I cracked the book open.

A strong wind tore through at that moment, the hanging boughs rustling, demanding my attention. I looked up at the tree and recalled the playful moment I shared with Mark—and the question. Of all things, it was the echo of Mark's hyena laugh that floated down and pulled me back.

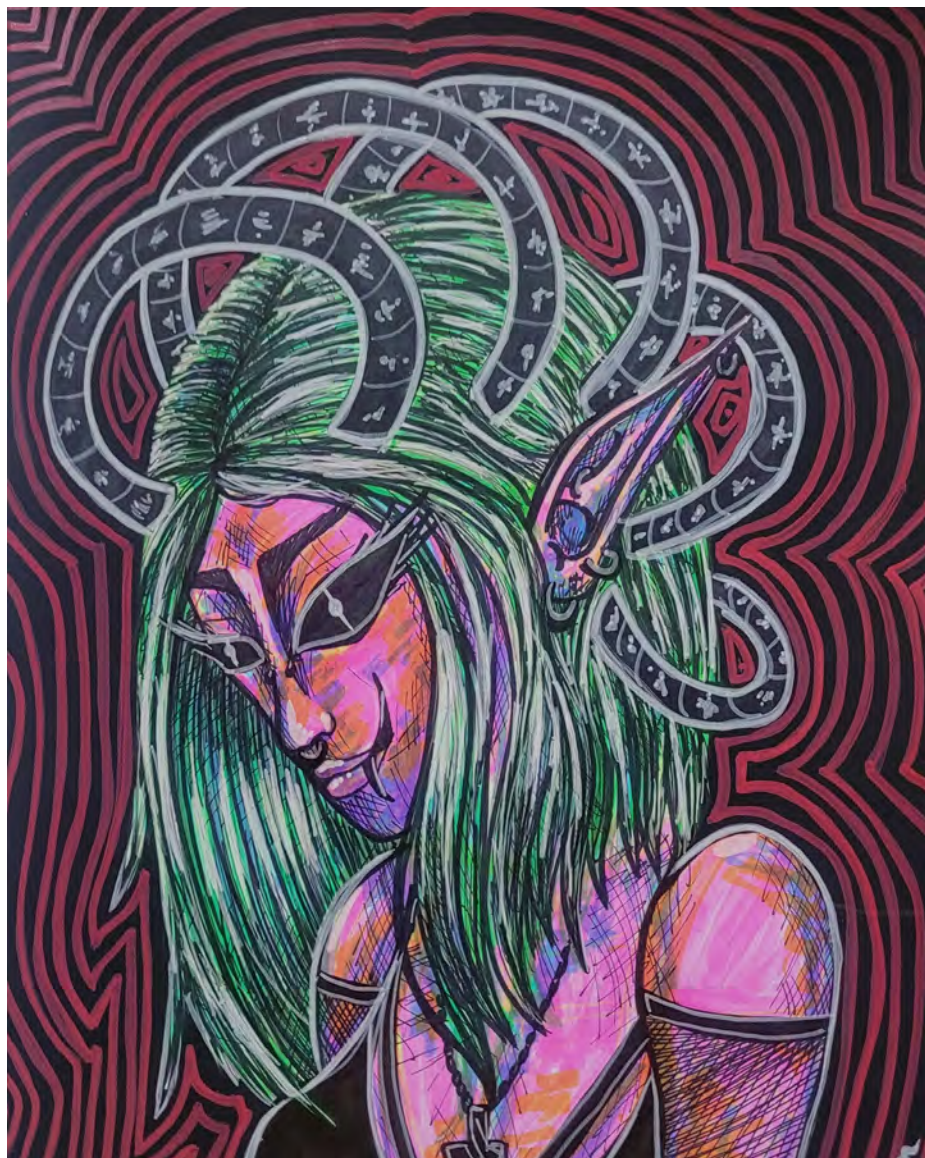
Finally, the first drops landed on opened pages, streaking down.

I now knew the answer.



The Unwanted Guest

Morgan Herb
Acrylic



| 11

Lexi
Evelynn Nowicki
Ink



12 |

Red Rope Merfolk
Evelynn Nowicki
Ink

| **Night**
Jonathan Nava-Pensado

The floorboards creak downstairs.
In my assumed
vacant
House.

 Moonlight
 Peers
 through the window,

Giving a faint glow

To

A silhouette.

He stands in the dark

I ask it,

Why do you

almost

look

Like a person?

Nature vs. Nurture: Criticizing the Artificial in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Annadore Himmelberger

Researched Essay

“

The landscape of Woolf’s London, complicated by rigid social hierarchies and devotion to a state torn by a catastrophic war, sets the stage for her cast of characters and the systemic forces that shape their worldviews.

”

Nature vs. Nurture:
Criticizing the
Artificial in *Mrs.
Dalloway*
Researched Essay

Annadore
Himmelberger

Virginia Woolf tells a day in the life of her intricate set of characters in London society, revealing their varying priorities, fears, and values in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. The landscape of Woolf's London, complicated by rigid social hierarchies and devotion to a state torn by a catastrophic war, sets the stage for her cast of characters and the systemic forces that shape their worldviews. Because Woolf does not idolize nor demonize her characters, the reader is able to see them, in a deeply personal manner, as fragile products of the prevailing institutions, each striving for a sense of contentment. By depicting the profound vulnerability of her characters, juxtaposed against the cold rigidity of the state that produced them, Woolf displays the fallacy of institutions and the artificial systemic forces that background the world in which her characters exist while exposing the universal truths hidden just below the surface.

Throughout the novel, the tortured World War I veteran, Septimus Warren Smith, is often a catalyst of the juxtaposition between the personal and the systemic. During one of the early scenes, a motor car on its way to Buckingham Palace, escorting a nameless, faceless "voice of authority," backfires, producing a loud noise similar to that of gunfire (Woolf 13-14). For most townsfolk, the impact of the noise made by the motor car does not compare to the importance of being within proximity to the anonymous royalty. For Septimus, on the other hand, the noise produced by the motor car generates a different emotion: It throws him into the battlefield of his mind and the ensuing war that has not yet

ended for him (Woolf 15). Septimus does not seem to care about the State, about the social hierarchies it is built on, or the institutions it upholds. It is later revealed that Septimus volunteered to fight for "an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress"—not out of pride in his country (Woolf 84).

Septimus finds his purpose in more authentic personal matters. The other characters stand straighter at the passing of the motor car, unsure if they are in return being seen by the person of importance, as if they are practicing self-surveillance to become a well-behaved member of English society (Woolf 18). Their pride in the passing symbol of the state reaffirms their conformity to the system and erases their more human qualities.

Gliding across Piccadilly, the car turned down St James's Street. Tall men, men of robust physique, well-dressed men with their tail coats and their white slips and their hair raked back who, for reasons difficult to discriminate, were standing in the bow window of Brooks's with their hands behind the tails of their coats, looking out, perceived instinctively that greatness was passing, and the pale light of the immortal presence fell upon them as it had fallen upon Clarissa Dalloway. At once they stood even straighter, and removed their hands, and seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth, as their ancestors had done before them. (Woolf 26)

However, when Septimus looks at the drawn blinds of the passing motor car, he perceives a pattern resembling trees, emphasizing the distinction that, where others see the state,

Septimus sees nature (Woolf 15). Although Septimus's mind is clouded by disorders resulting from the war, in this moment, his emotions are clear and vibrant, grounded in a primal and organic truth compared to the townsfolk whose emotions seem to be grounded in constructed institutions and social hierarchies.

Every one looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of every thing to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. (Woolf 21)

Woolf further juxtaposes the systemic and the personal as Lucrezia Smith, Septimus's wife, becomes embarrassed of her husband's outburst in the street resulting from the motor car. Lucrezia, confronted with the difficult task of caring for her war-torn husband, is more concerned with public perceptions than their wellbeing. As Lucrezia looks "at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes," she fears that those well-behaved English people will judge her and her husband for his lack of conformity to the social system. Even as Septimus's outburst becomes more intense and elevates to threats on his life, Lucrezia's solution in this challenging situation is to remove him from the public eye (Woolf 15). Ironically, Septimus's rejection of conformity to the artificial social systems of

English society is a consequence of his wartime experiences, where he fought at the hands of the state – the state which prompts onlookers to stand taller with national pride in the presence of an anonymous authority passing by in a motor car.

The passing symbol of the state carries a common sentiment among the townsfolk as “strangers looked at each other and through of the dead; of the flag, of Empire” (Woolf 17). Yet they do not think of the ugliness of the war, the cruelty, and those like Septimus who are left ruined by the systemic violence of the Empire. The war that Septimus represents is void of the glamorous romanticism and masculine bravery that those benefiting from it would prefer to promote. Unwilling to confront the brutality inherent in the systems perpetuating the war, the townsfolk look away, and doctors try to isolate him from society (Woolf 94). It is easier for them to see Septimus as a poor lunatic, the maker of his own evil, and rid themselves of any guilt or responsibility for his pain.

Septimus’s emotional excess is further juxtaposed with constructed systems when an aeroplane flies overhead, blowing smoke letters to advertise toffee. When Lucrezia removes Septimus from his outburst on the street and seats him in Regent’s Park, she points out the aeroplane overhead in an attempt to make him “take an interest in things outside himself” (Woolf 21). While onlookers are puzzled by the smoke letters, attempting to decipher the word as new letters appear, Septimus sees a divine message addressed to him. He begins to cry, perceiving the smoke letters shaped by some unknown power as a message from the universe. He feels bestowed by absolute beauty, more genuine than any royalty or capital that

seems to shape others’ reality (Woolf 21). Though Septimus does not know it, his divine message, which is as real to him as anything else, is mere advertising.

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (Woolf 31)

Septimus’s reality seems to consist of himself, universal love, and nature. Although his world is self-centered, Septimus feels an innate connectedness to the natural world: “. . . leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body, there on the seat, fanning it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement” (Woolf 22). Septimus does not only praise the natural over the unnatural, but he discredits the existence of those artificial institutions. “There is no crime,” we hear Septimus repeat throughout the novel, possibly reflecting his desire for a world without guilt and blame. Septimus dispels the constructed myths of money and war in his personal spirituality. To him, everything is made of everything, and the all-encompassing connectedness of the universe overwhelms him in the most authentic way. He, in that

moment, is a member of that natural world rather than the unnatural world that other characters appear to occupy.

[Septimus] had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent’s Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere. (Woolf 32)

Virginia Woolf portrays the emptiness of the social systems and institutions that define her characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but she also portrays the limitedness and fragility when she writes, “the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a

few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth” (Woolf 16). The institutions that upheld Woolf’s London are still ruling today, and they will be for the considerable future, but eventually, the time will come when these illusions of power can no longer manifest into existence. Wars will be forgotten, the banks will crumble, hierarchies will decompose and there will be a return to the natural truth, universal love, and absolute beauty that all are born with.

Work Cited

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. 1925. Harcourt, 2005.

Editor’s Note

In this essay, you will find block quotes from Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway interspersed with Annadore’s text. These quotes are presented as a collage to enhance the intertextual experience allowing the reader to engage directly with Woolf’s original text and see the connections between the primary source and Annadore’s critique.



Still at Work
 Jake Carmona
Photography

What to Do Today?

Anisa Reinstorm

What do I do today? Day in, day out stuff talks to me.
 Arrange me, says the range. Clean me, says the lean lint.
 Wash me, says the dishwasher. Sweep me, says the Swiffer.
 Shhhhhh. Shaping my map.
 Dust, dust, dust.
 Wipe, wipe, wipe.
 Wash, wash, wash.
 Mop, mop, mop.
 Fold, fold, fold.
 Sweat, sweat, sweat.
 Sit, sit, sit.
 Zzzzzz. Taking my nap.

Did I do stuff today? Day in, day out it gets to me.
 Think and I wink. Do and I doddle. Walk and I work.
 Clothes, done. Dishes, done. Floors, done. Surfaces, done.
 Ahhhhhh. Patting my back.
 Dusted, dusted, shiny.
 Washed, washed, clean.
 Moped, moped, sparkling.
 Folded, folded, neat.
 Sweated, sweated, break.
 Sat, sat, free.
 Yeeeeeey. Done my lap.



Octopus
Olivia Biancone
Linoleum Print

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Foxateerfly
Isabella Manmiller
Digital Art Composite

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Old Man
Nicholas Fulwood

I think you've spent so long in the woods
that you forgot how to ask me
for anything at all.

I tell you my name,
and you show me around your cave
wrapped in warm furs
and smoking meats,
with dragons and lions sleeping in the corner.

You ask me of my own cave,
then tell me about the woods you hunt
and the mountains you roam.
You show me a scar, given by a bear,
and another, stolen from a fox.

It's not that I don't care, old man,
it's just that this conversation isn't big enough
for the two of us.

Feminine Rain
Selena Notobartolo
Fiction

“

Now, all I seem to have is an amalgamation of worries
and voids that spill over my edges and seep into my
cracks.

”

Feminine Rain
Fiction

Selena Notobartolo

I'm a writer. Some might call me a non-writer as it's been a while since I put words to a page. My hands are tied up in invisible strings, and my tongue is tied up in buzzing half-thoughts that amount to nothing on paper. The erosion of my creativity has taken hold and time is slipping away.

Outside my window, the clouds are full and heavy, seemingly looking for a release. Their exhalations, warm and humid, linger in the air around me. Occasionally, the sun tears seams in them, muddling their grey color with patches of blue.

The walls of my office, my creative space, are closing in on me like I'm a prisoner. How can I build a world out of words when my brain has stopped producing any? My voice is hushed and is holed away in the back of my mind, too frail to show itself. It feels like I'm trapped in a pit of despair, surrounded by cement walls devoid of artwork, with no one to grab my hand, no one to give me a boost out. I'm rotting down here. I need fresh air.

A thirst dries up my tongue, sticking my lips to my front teeth, and the desire for a long, cold gulp of iced tea moves me to my feet and out into the world. Anchored in familiarity, I don't stray far from home. Once bright-eyed and eager, my spark dimmed by others' discernment, I don't pretend I always knew what I wanted to do in life. I still float aimlessly like a pure, white cloud, oblivious to the thunder ahead. It's foreboding, and the words rumble between the crashes of lightning, whispering, "A writer! How are you going to make any money at that?" It was never about approval or money, though I admit I'm the epitome of a starving artist.

"The humming of the industrial coolers and the matte orange tile on the floor illuminating the place, evoking the scent of nostalgia from the nineties."

Unshaken, except by the judgment of being less than extraordinary, I now live like a hermit—defensive, surrounded only by negative thoughts and doubts about my writing. My fridge is empty and I can't waste away. I don't have a car, but I've got things to do and places to go. So, I walk on my own two feet.

I meander the aisles of a multi-colored, ever-lively, corner bodega. It's my corner store, homey and safe, an extension of my tiny, empty apartment as it sits only a few steps up on the same block. The humming of the industrial coolers and the matte orange tile on the floor illuminate the place, evoking the scent of nostalgia from the nineties. I pick up a bag of chips, crinkle it in my hands, and put it back. I do the same with a pack of chocolate

cupcakes, scrunch them in their cellophane packaging, before gently placing them back on the shelf. At the back of the store, I open the cooler and survey my options. Raspberry, peach, unsweetened.

"You're letting all the cold out, lady." A voice interrupts my surveyance, and I abruptly close the door. I open it once more and settle on a Brisk lemon iced tea.

At the counter, I offer a half-smile. Half to suffice politeness, half to substitute conversation. The cashier is on the phone and doesn't seem to mind or notice me much. I recognize her from coming here often, but we pretend we have no acquaintance with each other. I study her from the other side of the counter and make note of her potential character traits. She has dark, chestnut hair with a few stray curls that straggle down from her ponytail and into her eyes. She wrings her hands anxiously in between customers and sways back and forth on her feet. She has a confident, contradictory attitude that confuses me with how she cares enough to scold the customers but will stay on the phone with her boyfriend while working at the store. She's complex in her own simple way, I think, as we all are.

When I swipe my card, the machine beeps, and stutters on "Authorizing" for a few moments too long. I bite my nails and wish I hadn't at the same time. "Approved" it reads, as it feeds out a receipt, which I decline to take with me.

Outside a man is asking for spare change by the gas pumps. I lie and say I have no cash. The truth is I have no cash to spare. I wish I had something to give, even a few quarters, but I have nothing to help. It makes me feel like a

failure, realizing how destitute I've become.

By now, the wind has gotten restless and whips my hair around, adding to my disheveled look. I notice that I left the house in a mismatched sweat suit and some worn-out white sneakers with dirtied laces—the same outfit I've worn and slept in the last three nights. The aggressive way the wind wraps me up is warm and inviting. Its chaotic nature, lashing out in every direction and consuming me in the hot atmosphere, makes me feel part of the wind.

I approach a row of shops in town, including a pharmacy, a dry cleaner, and a small bistro with waitresses who are hurriedly bringing in the patio furniture. The area looks run-down with cracks in the sidewalks and potholes in the parking lot. I observe people rushing to and from their cars, entering and exiting the shops. A pair of automatic double doors greet me like a well-mannered doorman at the entrance to the first establishment. The lighted sign above reads "HARMACY," the "P" burnt out, adding a little more deterioration to the scene.

*"I inspect her face
and wonder if she
thinks I'm a mess."*

I take the far-right aisle that's lined with a variety of colored polishes and 99-cent lipsticks. I run my hand across their packages and break the seal on a pale pink color called Vanity. I dab it on my thumbnail and,

admiring its natural modesty, contemplate painting the rest of my nails here and now, but the blinking of the security camera above alerts me to close it up and put it back.

In the back corner of the pharmacy, a woman asks me for my date of birth. She says the co-pay is three dollars, and I hand her some crumpled bills. I inspect her face and wonder if she thinks I'm a mess. She's well put together and carries herself with perfect posture. She has blown-out blonde hair and a long, white lab coat that looks like it was just ironed this morning. I imagine her character having three or four kids and managing them effortlessly in and out of a green minivan with the help of her supportive husband. I take note of the sympathy in her eyes as she double-checks the label and matches it to my name and birthday, and I figure she's probably toting those three or four kids to Sunday school on the weekends before going home to bake a cherry pie. She'll pray for me later.

I stop at the front of the store, where a display of sunglasses is set up. I can't help but try on a few pairs and decide the square, faux, tortoise-shell frames suit me the best. In the small rectangular mirror, I realize the fluorescent lighting isn't doing me any favors, revealing the dark, droopy under-eye bags that have set in from the nights of not sleeping, from the nights of racking my brain for a story, a plot, a character—anything.

I inspect the prescription bottle outside on the sidewalk and struggle with the child-proof cap until it pops off. I dump a happy pill out into the palm of my hand and wash it down with a sip of my iced tea, before placing it back in its neatly folded-over brown paper bag.

Something rumbles. Whether it's the sky

or my stomach, I'm unsure. The atmosphere is hungry for barometric pressure, and I'm hungry for a cheeseburger. I've been living on bananas and peanut butter for at least a week, and the rings on my fingers, which once fit, now slip around loosely. I sit on the curb and assess the rest of what's in my pocket; Two dollars and a dubious debit card, enough for McDonald's two blocks further.

The disturbance in the air causes the trees to sway with ferocity, making them look alive and unpredictable as the mighty winds rip through the darkened horizon. They look restless like they can't sit still, frantically trying to get out of the way of the storm. They catch my attention, enough to pull me from the bland, back corner of my mind, reminding me of the sensation when I write. The clouds bolt across the sky like a collective grey plume, with evermore clouds rushing behind them as if they have somewhere to be. I pick up my pace to match as if I have somewhere to be.

Tiny drops of precipitation fall onto my head and one into my left eye as I pull back on the heavy door to the golden arches. I study the ever-appealing menu board a few steps back from the registers to strategically determine my order before approaching the cashier. Cheeseburgers are two dollars plus tax, and I don't have any spare change. Instead, I order a dollar-menu chicken sandwich and scarf it down in one of the back booths, one that's positioned by a window so I can keep an eye on the weather. I feel lethargic and catch myself yawning incessantly as I make eye contact with an old woman in her booth across the restaurant. She yawns back, tells me, "Stop that; it's contagious," and gives a playful smile, which must also be contagious because I laugh



under my breath and return the gesture.

I sit there and think fondly of the old woman long after she's gone. I'm consumed by her life, all the stories I could tell about her, and I start off with her as a young girl. I picture her character as a tall, thin girl with faint freckles that hide behind her naturally rosy cheeks, her face full in places that have since wrinkled. The era she grew up in was simpler, yet not less suffocating for a sensitive woman full of passion. She was to marry, have children, and grow old in a rocking chair on the front porch. That was her path, not the one she chose, but the one mapped out for her. Funny enough, she was just a girl in love with every other girl who had given her a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold, whether in romance or friendship. She devoted her life to conservation and animals, as a misunderstood soul who was rejected from society for her abnormalities in desire, finding solace in the unconditional love of her rescues, but always yearning for a lover. She never had children, but instead raised a small collection of a horse, a cow, a few goats, and a chicken coop in her little homestead. It upsets me to think of her, now elderly and still alone, in a McDonald's outside of a bad city. Yet, she's still vivacious enough to laugh and joke with the stranger girl across the room.

I finally gather my thoughts and toss the sandwich wrapper and my empty bottle in the trash. I jay-walk across the street and someone honks and yells at me to "move it." The storm is as hasty and impatient as the other people are. I wonder what the rush is. In my head, I think of a character who is testy and troubled. The guy in the car could possibly be late for work or rushing to make a delivery, stressed out with life or maybe he's just an

ass. I can't develop the character much more than that because I don't write about males. I don't understand them, their rough exteriors and their hardened demeanors. I'm soft, and pliable, and could spontaneously, at any moment, devolve into a puddle of emotions on the ground. I see the world through woman-colored glasses. Everything is a feminine experience because every experience is mine. Men would call that weak, fragile—the raw essence of femininity. They'd tell me, "Go write about it in your diary," and I would.

The formerly tiny drops have now grown in size but they're not weighty enough to soak through my cotton sweatshirt yet. I feel the breeze hurriedly pushing me along, forward, as if to say, "Stop dragging your feet", but the force of the draft isn't strong enough to move me any faster. I dawdle through the street, taking slow strides like there isn't an imminent storm hovering above, waiting patiently for the right moment to drop its weight.

As I turn a corner, I notice a hill behind the main street, back off the residential roads, well out of my way home, where I used to kick a soccer ball around as a kid. I want to go there, so I do. Lying in the field on my back, staring straight up at the dark black and blue sky, I can't remember the last time I was here. I used to run around the field, back and forth, with a multitude of friends and plenty of future ahead. I used to wonder who I'd be when I got older, what job I'd choose, where I'd live and who I'd marry, but I could never picture it, could never see those materialize in my imagination. Now, all I seem to have is an amalgamation of worries and voids that spill over my edges and seep into my cracks. I feel the obligation and pressure to grow up, to settle

down, but I am detached from the tradition of life. I've gone rogue. The world spins fast and furiously, with no time to stop and admire the color of the sky before a storm. But I stop. The shades of blue colors have deepened and set in, creating a discoloration in the atmosphere that resembles a large contusion. Maybe the sky isn't angry; maybe it's just hurt.

My contentedness allows time to pass by while I drag my hands over the grass. I'm trying to be there for the storm, to provide some comfort. If it's hurting, no one else will notice. I personify the storm in my mind and think of it as a living, breathing person who's emotional and full of feminine rage. The sky is a woman who's comprised of built-up tension and turmoil, about to let loose and go off the deep end. I'm just here for her. I rip some blades of grass out and let them fall back to the ground. I spread my arms and legs out as far as they'll reach, covering as much area as possible, until I am a part of the field.

After a while, I roll over and rest my chin on the hard-natural ground. Something within the storm washes over me. It's not the rain but rather an appreciation that I understand her. The grass is damp and full of moisture, now weighty enough to soak through my cotton sweatshirt and pants. My hands are clammy from the humidity and my breath is steamy from the heat of the late afternoon. I lift myself off the ground, feeling a sense of pride, and get two small grass stains on my knees as I stand up. I'm glad to take them with me.

Then, suddenly, I have nowhere else to go. No more streets to turn down. I've been alone for some time, pushing people away and living within the confines of my own mind in my little house of solitude. I don't know what

I'm running from or whom – if there's even a tangible element to blame.

With all my destinations reached, I return to my usual path home. I ponder the lives of the characters who joined me on my aimless journey through town. There's a fullness in my chest from deeply inhaling the storm all day. The drizzling has momentarily stopped, for how many moments I'm unsure. The sun no longer peeks through any breaks in the clouds and the night emerges to settle in as I turn down my street. I sense my feet slowing as if trudging through molasses during the final strides toward my porch, experiencing an unexplainable connection to this unique blend of melancholy. I pull open the screen door, insert my key into the brass hole, and hesitate before turning the knob on my front door. I putter around in the kitchen, opening windows and arranging overdue bills with final notices stamped in red on the envelopes before a roaring gust of fury rips open the curtains. The sky must be hurting, shedding tears with unrestrained sobs.

I emerge from my small, simple home and emerge with the sky, weeping loudly. I am a part of the storm.

“The sky must be hurting, shedding tears with unrestrained sobs.”

Immigrants Raised Me

Ezra Zorrilla

Immigrants raised me
In fact, immigrants saved me
They come here seeking peace
And would always tell me
“Don’t you dare run around in these streets
You are free to make something out of your life
So find yourself a good wife”
I write because some of them can’t
Have you listened to their chants?
It’s because of them that I fight
And I always look toward the light
They had to flee
All so I could be free



Coastal Memories

Camden Gehris

Photography



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Whispers of the Woodlands
Jake Carmona
Photography Series



Becoming Me

Jack Andrews
Personal Essay

“

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.

-Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics”

”

Becoming Me

Personal Essay

Jack Andrews

What does it mean to be a man or a woman? I remember asking myself that very question six years ago. “Is it my hair, my clothes, or the way my voice sounds? Is it what my mother and father expect me to be?” For years, I struggled with these aching questions that seemed to pierce me between my ribs. It was extremely heavy to think about what I was supposed to be. My mother celebrated the birth of a girl. “How could I ever take that away from her?” My voice was high-pitched. My hair was long. I played with girl toys and dressed in girl clothes as a child. What could have possibly changed?

Was something wrong with me?

The expectations weighed down on me as a child approaching my teenage years – a dark time for many of us. I lost quite a few years in that darkness because I did not know if I could fulfill those expectations. But I have a purpose now. I want everyone to attain the color and brightness that engulfs me, and the love and satisfaction that surrounds me. I want everyone to find the place they belong and the role they play, just as I have done for myself. Now, as someone who still wakes up and must accept the skin that wraps me, I ask myself: “Who will I be today?”

I struggled immensely in my past to answer this question. I had to adapt to many different situations because it was what I felt I had to do to fit in. I would do whatever I could to train my voice so it sounded deeper because I was misgendered whenever I spoke in my real voice. I dressed in clothing that I can only describe as vague because I wanted to hide the shape of my body. I smirked instead of allowing my smile to

light up my entire face because my laugh was more of a giggle than a manly chuckle. I was a failed shapeshifter. My attempts did not always work. That was what hurt the most. I could not even fake being like everyone else.

I have been called many hurtful things in my life that have stuck with me for a long time. My father is someone I have not spoken to in years because when I was around him, I was not free. I was imprisoned and indoctrinated in a way that my opinions and my ways of expressing myself were no longer my own. I was controlled down to the way I dressed and spoke. I was almost a puppet for my father to pass his beliefs on. He was not religious in a traditional sense, but his Christian and conservative curiosities had become his values, and therefore who I wanted to be was limited.

As I spent more time with my mother, I made the big decision to cut my hair short, and for that, I was called a “dyke” by my father. As I grew up and gained a bit more independence, I accepted that I was transgender and bisexual, and for that, I was called a faggot, which was shouted out of the window of a passing car for holding hands with my boyfriend. I had to listen to the blatant homophobic jokes that were exchanged between boys I saw every day and feared for my safety. I was called “hurt and confused” – that I was making a huge mistake by turning my back on everything I was. My mother was strange. She supported me to some extent but would then tell me, “This is practically irreversible. You know that, right?” I did know that and was happy with the choices I had made because I finally felt as if I was approaching who I was meant to be. I was one step closer – and fueled and determined to discover how much closer I could get.

I try not to blame those who fault me because I know a lot of them were raised to think in a certain way. Today’s generation is going through a lot of cultural changes, breaking the expectations the previous generation lived by, so their confusion or unwillingness to revise their thinking and reshape their attitude often becomes a negative reaction and is unfortunately projected on people like me. People who don’t follow what is accepted as being the cultural norm – people who are “confusing.”

What makes me so confusing? What does it mean to be a man in the heterotypical world?

They want me to be stronger, taller, sharper, deeper. They want me to show less emotion and never cry. They want me to have an unbreakable mind and a stubborn soul and never change for anyone. They want me to get a man’s job, settle down with a girl, and

“As I spent more time with my mother, I made the big decision to cut my hair short, and for that, I was called a ‘dyke’ by my father.”

complete myself by having children. But I can't be that, can I? I can't be what they want, so they discard me. I like my round face; I cry all the time and wear my heart on my sleeve; I am compliant with whichever direction my life decides to go, and my ideas are ever-changing. I want to be educated. I want to love whomever I want and I do not need children to feel accomplished.

So, I wear what I want and speak my mind. I free myself of all those expectations. I have realized that there is no possible way I am ever going to be "normal" to them, so I have stopped trying to follow their criteria. But that is just the thing: I want that for everyone. I want men to wear earrings and paint their nails and grow out their hair if that is what they want to do. I want women to reject makeup and wear baggy clothes and chop all their hair off if that is what they want to do. I want them all to stop hiding within the expected as if it is a physical wall their inner self is trapped behind.

I am much happier now that I have realized I do not need others to think of me as a man; I am one because I say I am one regardless of if I wear earrings and dress in bright colors and speak in the voice I was given. I deserve respect no matter what someone thinks of me because I am still a human being. At the end of the day, I must have done something right, because I get to introduce myself by my true name and feel that spark of pride every time.

I am Jack.

"I want them all to stop hiding within the expected as if it is a physical wall their inner self is trapped behind."



Into the Night
Sebastian Barreto
Digital Art



Red Light
McKenna Barker
Digital Art

I Wish I Could
Yashika DeGeorge

The bleak nothingness is overwhelming.
I long for a warm summer day,
For the heat of the sunlight to bless my skin.
I wish I could feel nourished by the air outside my bedroom window.
Instead, I feel damp, alone, and cold.
I'm stuck in the room where the darkness rises from the bottom,
A room where the darkness begins to consume every ounce of positive light
That I reach for but just cannot grasp.
I stand on a chair in this lonely room to reach the last bit of hope hanging in the corner.
I'm on my tiptoes
Back elongated,
Shoulders extended,
Fingertips stretched as high as I could get them.
But it wasn't enough
I wasn't fast enough
I wasn't good enough
I couldn't reach the light
I wasn't able to feel the warmth
To feel that fresh air fill my lungs
To escape this room that's been weighing me down.
I didn't do enough to help myself and now it's too late.
I stepped off my chair with the weight of failure
Pulling me to the floor
Where I lay in solitude.



| 43

Alice
McKenna Barker
Colored Pencil

The Boy Below the Window

Leighmon Eisenhardt

Fiction

“

He grinned, bitterness along the edges of his lips.
Another quick hug and Scarlett stood up and squared
her shoulders before walking away.

”

The Boy Below the
Window
Fiction

Leighmon Eisenhardt

A car had pulled up, the doors opening and slamming shut three times. A man and a woman and a small girl. The first two he gave no more than a glance. He had no interest in adults. They belonged to another world of bills and money and worries. All things the boy had not yet learned to care about.

The girl, however, caught his interest in a way entirely unique to young boys meeting young girls. She wore a simple yellow dress with little white flowers and skipped with a gaiety that had the boy smiling until his cheeks began to ache.

The girl turned to the man, hands tucked behind her back as she swayed sweetly, “Daddy, can I see the backyard?”

“Alright, but make it quick. We’re just stopping by, dear.”

At those words, the boy hid, pressing himself against the wall. It was too late to run. He strained his ears.

Silence.

Unable to stand not knowing, the boy hazarded another peek, leaning just so around the corner that his eyes crested the white stucco edge. He found himself face-to-face with the girl. She had moved with a speed and quietness that was almost scandalous.

“Who’re you?” she asked, tilting her head.

The boy found that he had no words. His mouth and brain were playing catch up.

“Well, no matter,” she continued, undaunted, “You’re not supposed to be here. Daddy’ll be mad if he sees you here.”

Mind and mouth shook hands. “I was just playing,” he managed.

“Daddy said not to talk with strangers.”

“‘We’re friends now,’ said the girl, grabbing his hand before shoving him toward the porch. ‘Now hide,’ she hissed.”

The two looked at each other and at the same time broke into mutual grins. “My name is Scarlett,” said the girl.

“Hi! I’m—”

“Scarlett! Time to go!” The man interrupted. They could hear him coming closer, his feet rustling the grass.

“We’re friends now,” said the girl, grabbing his hands before shoving him toward the porch. “Now hide,” she hissed.

The boy just managed to wiggle his way under the porch when the man rounded the corner. “There you are, dear. Do you like the house?” The man was close enough that the boy could have reached out and grabbed a handful of his jeans.

“Yes, Daddy!” Scarlett beamed, “The backyard is so big!”

“Over two acres,” the man grunted as he picked her up. “And it’s all yours.”

“Mommy says that it isn’t proper for a lady to get dirty.”

The man shifted Scarlett’s weight against his hip before ruffling her hair. “Mommy is always right, m’dear. But,” and his voice dipped low. “There is nothing wrong with a little dirt, eh?”

Scarlett’s head bobbed enthusiastically. “Come on, let’s stop for some ice cream, eh?”

The two left, but the boy waited until he heard the three slams and the roar of the engine before he crawled out.

She had said they were friends. He had heard the words clearly. He had never had a friend before. For the first time, the boy found he cared little about the present. His thoughts were heavy on things yet to come.

But for now, he was alone.

An eternity seemed to pass before he saw her again. They arrived with other vehicles this time. Hulking trucks that dropped heavy ramps. Other men, strangers, began to offload furniture and boxes. Bed. Dresser. Box. Box. Chair. Box. The boy thought, in a way, that never-ending stream resembled a clown car.

He watched all of this from the relative safety of a bush this time. He watched the girl, Scarlett, his friend, talk to the man. Then the man smiled and gestured to the back and before the boy knew it, she, in the cotton orange dress, was skipping toward him, her blue eyes obviously searching for her friend.

He stood up and was rewarded with a small squeal.

“You were hiding!” She accused him as if it were a grand betrayal.

“Let me make it up to you.”

“How?”

The boy grabbed her hand and dashed off to show her the secret things he had discovered.

He took her to the winding, burbling creek along the edge of the property. There he showed her everything he knew about catching crawfish without getting pinched, and the ancient techniques of surprising cane toads so they wouldn't leap away immediately. The trick was to move smoothly with purpose.

He even introduced her to Snappy, the snapping turtle who lived under an overhang along the shore. Scarlett's eyes grew wide when Snappy bit through a stick the size of her thumb.

"That's why you gotta be careful," he warned with the authority of a master teaching a pupil. It came as no surprise that she suddenly wanted to be away from the creek.

So, he took her to his thinking spot. It was a special place where the top half of a boulder was just barely visible. The elements had smoothed over the hard edges, leaving just enough room for two kids to lie down if they scooted in close. The rock had soaked enough of the afternoon sun to have a pleasant warmth against the skin.

The two stared up at the sky. Fluffy white clouds swirled along a canvas of baby blue. "I'm glad you're my friend," she said.

"Me, too."

"Thank you for showing me everything." The praise made the boy's cheeks heat up. He had never gotten thanked before. "Did you really not know anything?"

Scarlett shook her head. "We lived in the city 'fore Dad got his promotion."

"Ah, I see," said the boy, not understanding her words. "Guess I should teach you everything?"

"I'd like that." It was getting dark, so Scarlett had to leave.

Tomorrow then. Always tomorrow.

The boy promised and Scarlett repeated it, their pinkies entwined together. He did not know what the strange ritual indicated. He just played along, because she placed great importance on it. And with the orange sun setting, she left the rock, her dress swishing through the tall grass.

And then he was alone again. The boy missed her terribly already. He stared at his pinky and thought of the little things he still had to teach.

Scarlett came out to play every day and the boy continued his lessons. He showed her the grass that tasted like onions, and how to hold it between clenched thumbs to make a shrill whistle. He took her to see his ant colony, nestled into the side of the hill, so they could watch how they scurried with their fat white children. He even trusted her with his secret hiding places, which he revealed like a grand magician and she clapped her hands with delight at every discovery.

*"And with the
orange sun setting,
she left the rock,
her dress swishing
through the tall
grass."*



Mystery
Sebastian Barreto
Digital Art

This continued for some time. The boy began to fear that he would run out of things to show her. But then the men in black came. It was a cool morning when they pulled up. Held between them was fabric stretched tight over poles. They entered the house and left soon after, the contraption now heavy with something lumpy hidden under a white blanket. They grunted and cursed as they shoved it into the rear of the vehicle. And then they drove off.

Scarlett did not come out to play that day. Or for the entire week after.

So, it was with some relief that the boy heard the backdoor slide open. By the time she had closed it and turned around, he was there to greet her, a fistful of bottle caps (his entire stash) clenched behind his back. The look on her face made him drop them, leaving them forgotten on the close-clipped grass.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

She shook her head and began to walk. The boy followed her to the thinking spot. She lay back and he joined her, hazarding glances whenever he thought she was not paying attention. There was a shadow pulled across her face, which the boy found worrying. The smile that had always come easily seemed so far away. The pair sat in silence.

Things changed. They played less, sometimes not at all. Often it was just a walk or a quiet moment on the thinking rock. He told her funny jokes and showed her the grandest things he knew, stuff he had intended as last resorts. Like the wasp hive nestled within an old stump or the bleached bone carcass of some animal with the forever grinning skull that had died years before. Occasionally, his antics would get her to laugh or smile and the boy

lived for those moments.

But the shadow remained. It hung there, fat and heavy.

Scarlett also started bringing books. According to her, they contained stories, and she began reading them to the boy. He listened at first because it was an excuse to hear her voice, and later because of the dreams they offered.

She talked of faraway lands, filled with dragons, and of wardrobes that whisked away young children to other worlds. Pirates and kings and grand adventures coalesced from mere words, silly things, and the boy found himself hanging on them and wishing for experiences he had never known. And she spoke with such vivid description that the boy, who had never seen the ocean, could taste the brine and hear the roar of the waves crashing against the shores of his mind.

They were, on these quiet nights, two friends sharing the same words, the same worlds.

Much later, the men came again. This time, Scarlett said nothing, continuing to visit as normal, but the boy did not miss how the shadow was just a little longer. He did not mention the way her lip trembled on certain words like “mother” or “family.”

One day she met him at the door. “I have to go,” she said. “But just for a little while. I’ll be back, I promise.”

The boy did not argue. The sadness was still there in Scarlett’s bright blue eyes, hidden in her smile, but alongside it, like stirred embers, burned something else. Some emotion he had not seen in her before. She promised to return. Scarlett never broke her promises.

“Great puddles formed, and the cloying scent of musty earth, scratchy and sullen, draped over everything like a thick blanket.”

Time passed like a band-aid being pulled ever so slowly. The boy preoccupied himself with the discovery of new things to show his friend when she returned. He became friends with the chipmunks who had a den under the thinking rock. They would, chittering and complaining, even take food from his hand. After hours of trial and error, he even managed to semi-reliably catch fish by remaining still in the middle of the creek and using his shadow to lure them in.

One hot summer day he heard a car pull up and, somehow, knew it was her. Dashing from the undergrowth, a sound of joy on his lips, he skidded to a halt, his greeting lodged sideways in his throat.

It was indeed his friend...but she was not alone. A man he had never seen before was with her. She did not come to visit him like he had hoped. Instead, the two, laughing and

giggling, entered the house together.

The boy was left to watch from the window.

Patiently, he waited, and sometimes Scarlett would visit the land behind the house. But she did not acknowledge him, and his gifts, like a flopping fish from the creek or the bottle caps trodden into the dirt, went unnoticed. Still, he took a small comfort that she was there and kept her promise. The sadness was faint, unnoticeable, had he not known her as he did.

It was enough.

The storm crept up like a cat, silent, unassuming, until the moment it pounced. The rain came down in thick, heavy droplets that slammed into leaves and the shingles of the house before joining hands to come falling down in racing rivulets and streams.

Great puddles formed, and the cloying scent of musty earth, scratchy and sullen, draped over everything like a thick blanket. The entire world pulled back, shackled, and the only sound that could be heard was the unrelenting cadence of sighing rain and a creek trying to become a river.

Despite the rain, the boy never moved from the thinking rock. He found it liberating to be out during a storm. It made him think loud thoughts of things he had forgotten. Suddenly, a flash of lightning illuminated Scarlett standing before him. The boy, for the first time since they had met, had not heard her approach. He looked at her with a question in his eyes.

She was soaked, her hair, normally so wild and free, matted to her face and neck, and her dress clung to her body like a soggy

napkin. Mascara streaked down in lines as if she had been crying. And then she hugged him, burying her face in his shoulder. Her sides quaked and shook and despite the rain, the boy could feel the salty sting of her tears. Slowly, tentatively, the boy wrapped his arms around her, though they no longer could go all the way around.

Scarlett said nothing, and the pair stood in the rain, lost in falling water and silent sobs against his chest. At some point, she stopped her shaking and just held him tight as the world ground to a halt.

The boy began to feel the shift in the winds. In his mind's eye he could see the truth, like a specter, begin to form along the edges of his vision. It looked at him with a sad, sorrow-filled expression and the boy understood the message between the lines.

His stomach twisted tight and his fingers dug into Scarlett's dress even tighter. He did not want to let go. This time, he knew, there would be no promise. And Scarlett, in her way, would keep it.

But go she did.

With her loving, caring fingers, she untangled his before pulling back. The rain, apropos of timing, paused and the voyeuristic sun peeked out. At arm's length, they looked at each other. The boy thought she looked like a drowned muskrat. He imagined he did not look much better, judging at the way she had to stifle a giggle.

He grinned, bitterness along the edges of his lips. Another quick hug and Scarlett stood up and squared her shoulders before walking away. She did not look back and the boy was not surprised.

He whispered his goodbye to her back.

Through the window he watched his friend talk to the man. Then the pair hugged and kissed and seemed quite happy indeed. Eventually, the light was extinguished and the world shifted.

The boy continued to watch from below the window as the rain began again.

The sliding of the backdoor made the boy look up. Standing before him was a young girl in a navy blue dress. Her hair was carefree and eyes thoughtful.

"Hi," she said matter-of-factly. "Mom told me you'd be here. She said we could be friends."

The boy smiled, nodded, and took her hand in his.

*"His stomach
twisted tight and
his fingers dug into
Scarlett's dress
even tighter. He did
not want to let go.
This time he knew
there would be no
promise."*



Saudade
Chancey Smith III
Digital Art



The Heron and the Fish
McKenna Barker
Photography

The Pace of Nature

Aliyah Gibson
Personal Essay

“

We all looked up to witness a spectacular display of colors—colors that appeared incredibly saturated and bright, bringing a vibrant masterpiece to life.

”

The Pace of Nature

Personal Essay

Aliyah Gibson

“I’m still not feeling anything yet. You said it would take like an hour,” I said to my friends as I passed the joint to Lyric. “Give it time. When it kicks in, you’ll know,” Jay responded, not looking up from whatever had his attention on his phone.

Lyric, Jay, Brick, and I were sitting on two large logs half-submerged in mud. The trees and bushes surrounding us provided a perfect hiding spot for us as we passed two joints around. The sun was blazing overhead with intensity peculiar for an autumn day. If it wasn’t for the cool breeze that was blowing through the trees, I would’ve regretted wearing a sweater. As I stared at the swaying trees, the world seemed to slow to a crawl. It felt like some deity decided to hit the slow-motion button on the world around me. I dropped my head to look at my hands. I tried to open and close them as fast as I could, but they too moved at a snail’s pace.

I must’ve been staring at my hands for an unusual amount of time, because I caught the attention of my best friend, Lyric.

“You’re feeling it now, aren’t you? You have to be. Your eyes are super dilated,” she said, her gaze not leaving mine.

“Yeah, it definitely kicked in,” I replied.

As I took in my surroundings, the chatter of my friends faded into background noise. It was like someone had turned up the saturation in the world. The greens of the trees and bushes deepened in hue, creating a more vibrant tapestry. The blue of the sky intensified, stretching out wide. Even the brown of the mud beneath my feet and the tree trunks embraced a richer tone. I watched in

awe as a butterfly flew past, its yellow wings a beacon of light. It fluttered near a small plant sprouting from the mud, a tiny leaf on its stem. I wondered about the time it would take to reach full size.

When a plant sprouts from the ground, there is no rush to grow. When a new flower bud is formed, it is in no rush to bloom. Everything in nature flows so effortlessly through the seasons with no sense of urgency. We, however, seem to be in constant haste, bouncing from one moment to the next, racing through our lives. I often wonder if we could benefit from slowing down, embracing every moment, and allowing ourselves to grow organically on our journeys, rather than relentlessly charging towards a destination. If I wasn’t constantly on-the-go, a small voice in my mind would berate me, urging me to pick up the pace, as if there were tasks demanding immediate attention. Guilt would wrack my brain, while patience would get thrown out the window.

Such guilt seemed nowhere to be found once the effects of the acid tab I had taken kicked in. For the first time in what felt like an eternity, my mind rested, devoid of any sense of urgency. I embraced this slow pace as I watched my friends interact, laughing and singing along to the music playing from Jay’s phone speaker. I was overwhelmed by the amount of love that coursed through me.

“I just wanted to say I love you guys,” I said, bringing their attention back to me.

“Aww, I love you too,” Lyric responded.

“You know we love you, Gibs,” Brick added.

“I knew you’d get like this,” Jay joked, patting my head, “but, I love you, too.”

I couldn’t control the tears that began to fall from my eyes. I had no words to describe the love I had for them. I just wished that they could feel it. I let my head fall onto Jay’s shoulder as Lyric rubbed my back.

“I don’t mean to cry, but I just can’t even express to you guys how much I love and appreciate you,” I said through shaky inhales.

“Don’t apologize. We’ve all been there before. I cried the last time I tripped. But, we love you, too, Gibby,” Jay replied.

I tilted my head back and breathed in the fresh air, staring at the leaves that hovered above my head. They swayed at a leisurely pace, and the more I kept staring, the more enthralled I was. The trees looked like they had faces, and they moved as if they were breathing. My surroundings felt alive. The different shades of green in the leaves above me swirled and spiraled, forming distinct circular patterns. I noticed the same formations in my hands when I looked down at them. The skin of my hands seemed to be moving in twists and whorls at a slow pace. It was unlike anything I’d ever seen before.

“Guilt would wrack my brain, while patience would get thrown out the window.”

“Do you guys wanna start walking on the trail again?” Lyric asked, taking my attention away from my hands. We all nodded in agreement and headed out of our little hiding spot and back into the sunshine. We emerged right in front of a meadow, where wildflowers of all colors swayed in the breeze. The different blues, purples, and yellows blended, constantly shifting and moving in spiral patterns.

“It’s so pretty,” I said, my eyes wide.

“I bet it looks so cool for you right now,” Lyric responded, pulling out her phone to take a photo of the flowers.

Brick and Jay did the same, snapping photo after photo of the world around us. I couldn’t take my eyes off the meadow in front of me as we walked further down the path. There was so much beauty around me that I hadn’t noticed before.

We’re all on a journey, and sometimes we’re so focused on reaching our goals that we often forget about the beauty around us and miss the magic that exists along the way. These little moments of awesome are what makes the journey worth it. Whether it be a colorful sunset, a pretty flower, a delicious meal, or even just the smiles of our loved ones, these tiny joys are always available to all of us. We just have to notice them. It’s fascinating how something as simple as a bunch of colorful wildflowers can spark immense joy, if we let it.

A few hours into my trip, I reached the peak of my experience while entering one of my favorite parts of the trail—a majestic forest. The towering trees formed a canopy that blocked out the sun, creating a scene as if plucked from a fairy tale. Faces appeared in

the tree trunks, and the muddy ground below me seemed to sway and move. The leaves and branches formed a kaleidoscope, swaying and shifting in harmony, as if they were dancing to music that we mere humans couldn’t hear.

“Hey, Gibs,” Jay called to me. I cast my gaze downward to find him.

“What?” I asked.

“Let’s take a picture. I wanna remember this day,” he responded, coming next to me and lifting his camera in the air.

Lyric stood on my other side, and Brick came in front. We all plastered our biggest grins on our face as Jay snapped the photo.

“Send me that, please,” Lyric said.

“Same. I want to print it out and keep it on my mirror,” I added.

Jay nodded his agreement and continued to take more photos of the trees.

“So, how do you feel?” Brick asked me as we walked through the trees.

“I feel really good. I just feel so carefree and happy right now,” I replied.

“I can tell. You’ve been smiling this entire time.”

“Really? I haven’t noticed,” I said, suddenly becoming aware of the smile on my face. He was right. I couldn’t remember the last time I had been so happy, calm, and still. There was no pressure, no rush—just us exploring the world around us and enjoying every moment as it came. It was an unfamiliar yet incredibly refreshing feeling.

Suddenly, a group of kids came running down the trail, playing some kind of game.

“I miss being a kid. Life was so much easier,” I said.

“Same. I miss not having to worry about bills. Shits so ass,” Jay replied.

“Facts. It’s like every time I leave the house, I have to spend money. I just wanna live life,” Brick added with a humorless laugh.

Reflecting on our yearning for childhood, I realize that it isn’t the past that we miss but the curiosity, imagination, adventure, and wonder inherent in being a child. We miss those times when we haven’t been jaded by the world, yet. It’s that optimism, hope, and marvel for the world that we long for. However, I also understand that these feelings aren’t unattainable for us as we become adults. Achieving them just demands more effort to see goodness amid challenges, to unleash our imagination and curiosity, and to replace fear and stress with hope and joy. It is undoubtedly hard but not impossible.

“Oh my god, guys look!” Lyric exclaimed, pointing at the sky as we emerged from the canopy. We all looked up to witness a spectacular display of colors—colors that appeared incredibly saturated and bright, bringing a vibrant masterpiece to life. Oranges, pinks, and reds seamlessly blended, resembling a watercolor painting one might find in a museum. Hastily, we pulled our phones out and snapped as many photos as we could.

“This is a perfect way to end my trip,” I declared, refusing to look away from the

mesmerizing sunset.

After our little sunset photoshoot, we headed back to the car. I sat in the backseat and continued to watch the sunset, Frank Ocean blaring from the speakers in the car. The car ride home, like everything else, seemed to move more slowly than usual. I was in no rush. Leaning my head against the window, I watched the colors in the sky blending seamlessly.

Despite my best efforts, I still catch myself rushing through life. In all that hustling and grinding, though, I remember how that little plant was in no rush. I take a deep breath, immersing myself in the present moment, and slow down. And I’m surprised by all the joy that resides there, just waiting to be noticed. Yet, even with this awareness, I sometimes remain hard on myself, stressed by the sense of falling behind. In these moments, I turn to the picture of us Jay took that day, reminding myself how far I’ve come. I trust I’ll get to where I need to be when the time is right. Until then, I’ll enjoy the journey unfolding before me.

“Yet, even with this awareness, I sometimes remain hard on myself, stressed by the sense of falling behind.”



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Adulthood Resent
Isabella Manmiller
Acrylic



Feathered Reflection
McKenna Barker
Oil

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Hiraeth
Shianne Ayala-Lind

I love the idea of you.
But that idea is smoke.
So I smoke.

Too, I love the touch of you.
But your touch is a lie.
So I lie.

Always, I will love the love of you.
But . . . that love is gone.
So I'm gone.

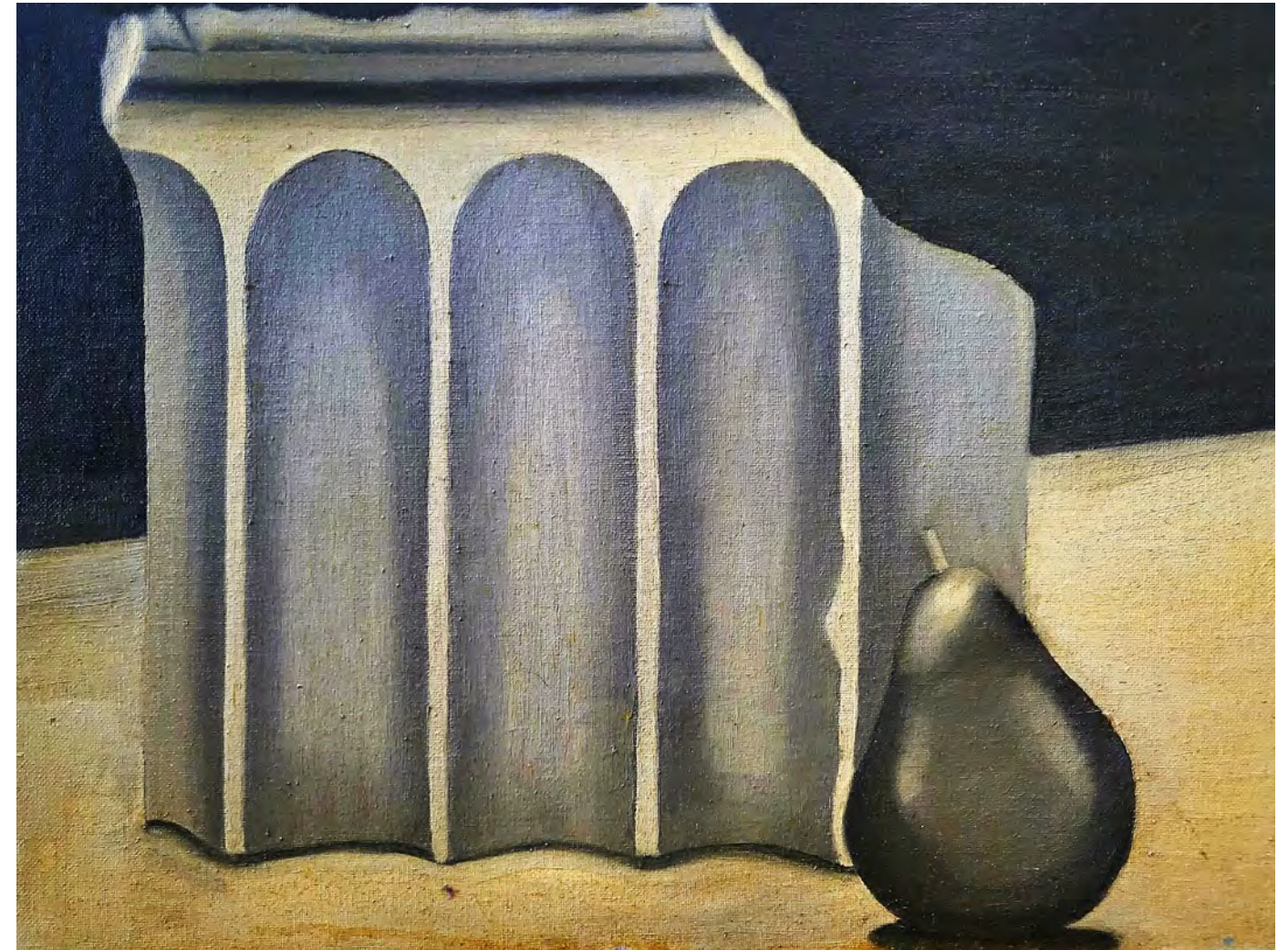
Stand
Ryley Laffredo

It hits like anger
Emotional
Sudden
Its winding thrusts of air,
Thrashing at my feet
As it throws everything it has at me,
Right.
At.
My.
Feet.
Its howls pain my soul.
As it cries,

I cry too
But as I am soaked in its tears,
And as its desperate punches of kicked-up dust
And turned-off tree limbs cut off my flesh,
My bare feet simply sink deeper
Into the once-vibrant green grass,
Now simple mud to my ankle
When it wavers and bleeds
Its last and final cry
I bleed too.

For those tears
On my skin soaking in,
The splinters on my flesh

The fight we bear together
Make us one
For we are the same storm all along.



Crumble
Cheyenne Getz
Oil (*Grisaille Style Painting*)

Jeffrey Reider

Venom seeping, creeping—
paralyzing my thoughts
freezing my creativity due to a—
stake bite.

(it's because they're in parentheses)

Its fangs made of quotation marks
its venom white-out,

Struck dead was every character in my brain—and so I laughed as the slithering serpent
 ne insane.

when the rattle struck in my slurred

And the rattlemistake lies before me

“Ignorance and arrogance make a pompous
ce.”

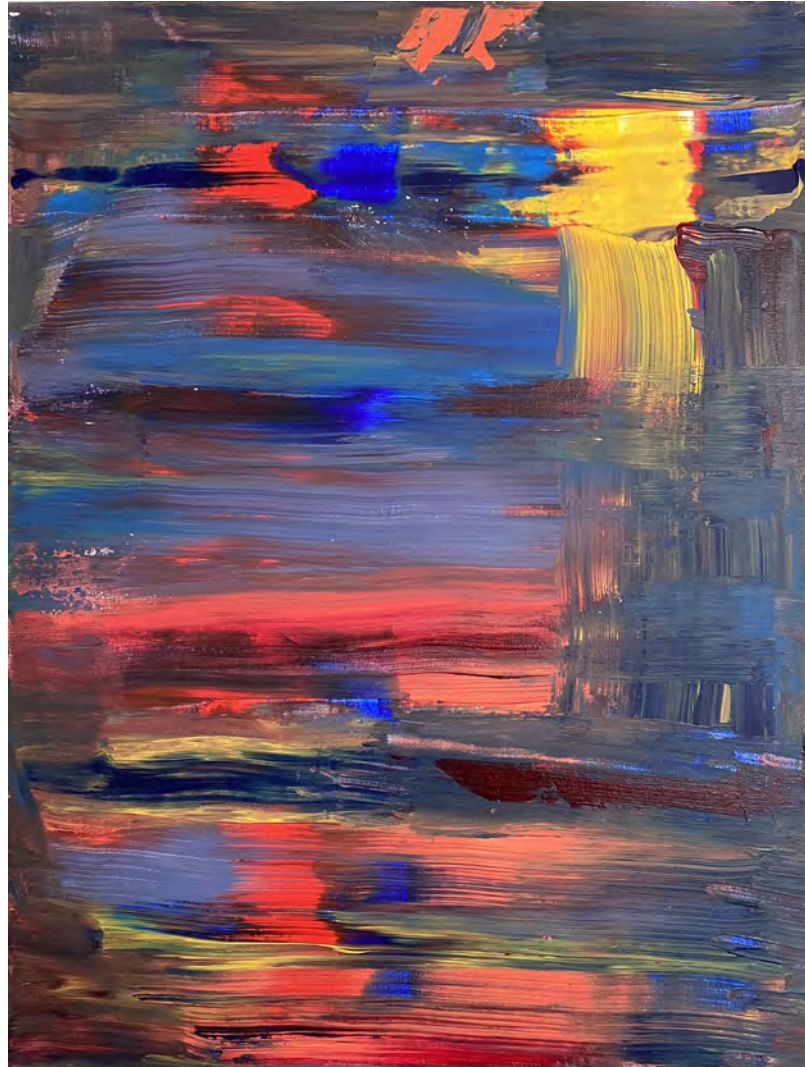
Trapped in a cell full of consonants-



Mariposa De La Noche I

Chancey Smith III

Digital Art



Ruined Canvas
Siobhan Houghton

White canvas.
Your piercing ink
leaves a smear,
a wound.
Black splatters,
seeping in.
Ruined.

Mia Davis' Portfolio

Berks Best 2024 Visual Arts Winner

We are thrilled to feature Mia Davis, a RACC dual-enrollment student at Daniel Boone Area High School, whose life and art are deeply intertwined. “As soon as I was old enough to hold a crayon,” Mia recalls, “it always felt natural to have an art instrument in my hand.” She spent her childhood “visiting museums and exploring the history of the world through images,” and searching for “increasingly challenging images to replicate.” Mia describes her artistic style as her “take on realism with a focus on the human form.” Her style developed in college-level art courses, where she found the freedom to express her emotions through different mediums.

Mia’s artistic journey transformed when she switched from colorful acrylic paints to black and white charcoal pencils. This change allowed her to convey emotions through her drawings. “The restriction of having only a black-and-white palette pushes me to create more interesting images, conveying emotion through the subject rather than relying on the colors,” Mia explains: “My previous art had been focused solely on technique, but now that I have matured into who I am today, it reflects my advocacy for my feelings, my body, and my self-worth.”

Through her portfolio, Mia shares her creative and emotional journey of self-discovery, using each piece to tell a personal story of growth. “I center each piece around an event or emotion I have experienced,” she elaborates: “I have learned that I can use my art to voice what I believe in, and I plan to continue that in my work. Portraying my feelings in this manner is freeing, and I feel at peace expressing the emotions I felt during these times and incorporating them within my work.”



CELLOPHANE DELICACY

Mia Davis



"This piece was inspired by a monochrome prompt, challenging me to create an image using only one color. This minimalist exercise helped me understand how to use light and shadow to create depth and dimension within an image."



PHILLIP'S PEAR

Mia Davis

"Creating this piece was a long process that taught me a great deal. It was my first attempt at using a wash technique to portray skin tones. Typically, when envisioning a face, one would think of a single color but there are many undertones in a range of colors that make up a vibrant face. I have since used washes in all of my paintings, layering thin coats of color and building them up. I find this technique creates a sense of depth and I plan to explore its potential further."



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THE FRIEND

Mia Davis



PEACH NIGHT

Mia Davis

"Prompted by a simple landscape task, I wanted to challenge myself by focusing on texture and color. It organically turned into an exercise in detail as I recognized how the orange color, despite its minimal use, gained a dominant presence within the piece."

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WE, THE PEOPLE

Mia Davis



“Created with acrylic paint, this piece was a practice in figure shapes and faces. The goal was to execute a scene where there was no singular focal point but rather a sense of flow throughout the canvas.”

DAISY

Mia Davis

“I named this piece ‘Daisy’ to contrast the aggression depicted in the image with a calm and inviting title. This piece was an experiment with ink, where I stippled the dog entirely with a pen while rendering the background in loose ink. This was my first attempt at using ink for a free-flowing background and I discovered that a simple medium like ink can help create compelling images.”



A SKY DANCE

Mia Davis



“When courting a mate, Amorous Bald Eagles engage in a death spiral, a ritual that entails locking talons and tumbling towards the earth. Fully entangled throughout the spiral, they disengage just before reaching the ground. I used this act as a visual metaphor for falling in love. When you love someone, that feeling consumes you and you perceive nothing around you as important—as if you were spiraling into that person.”

AND NOW YOU'RE GONE

Mia Davis



“I created this piece using charcoal pencils, using my own reference photo as a basis. My goal for this piece was to convey the feeling of emptiness associated with loss. To achieve this, I depicted the figure on the left with human-like features, yet within the overall image, it is reduced to sheets, shaped in a desperate effort to resemble the absent person, yearned for by the figure on the right. ”



How you Want Me

Mia Davis

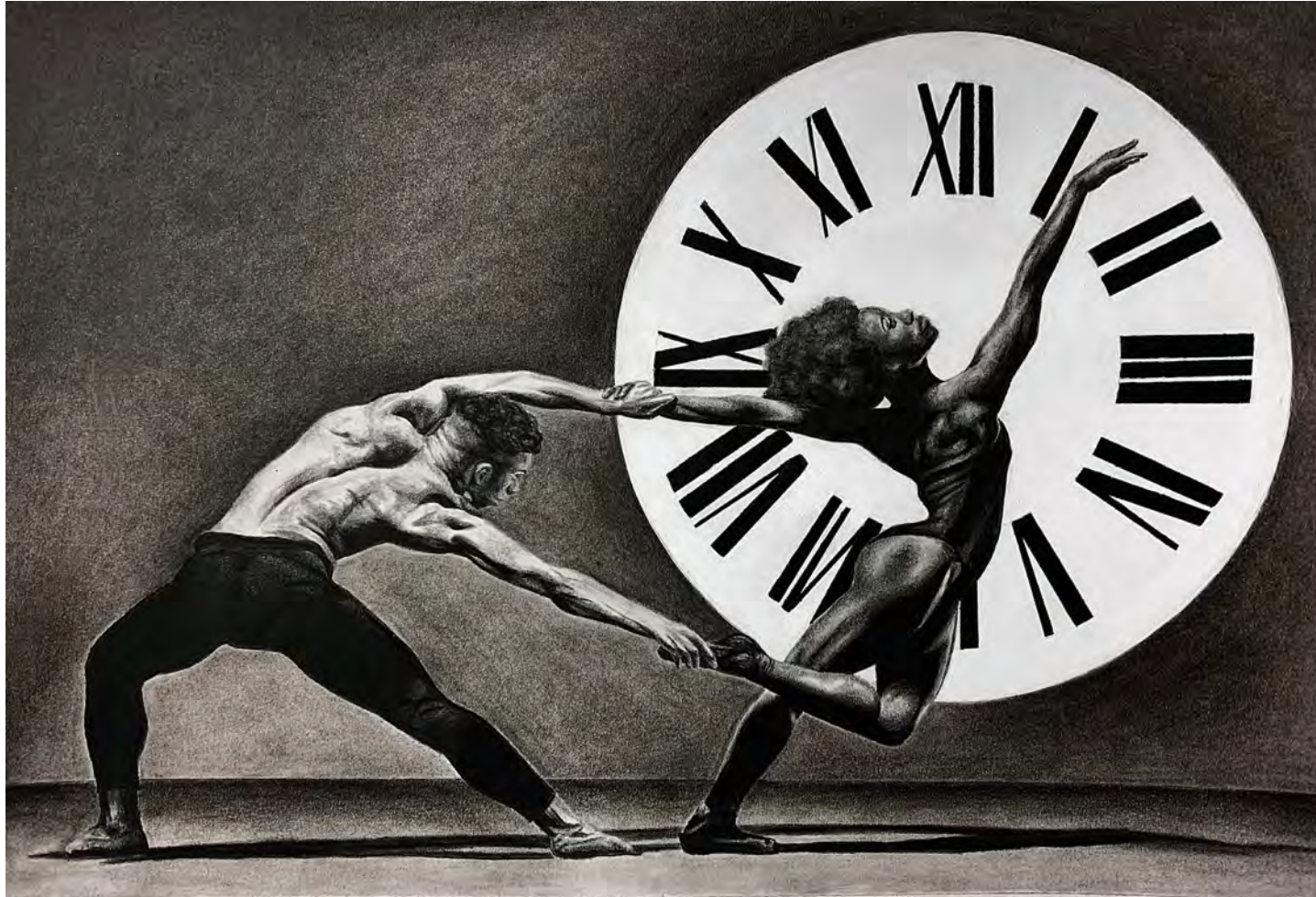
“The main theme of this piece revolves around the comparison between two figures. The stippled figure in the background is insecure compared to the imposing watercolor figure in the foreground, who represents what a girl should be. The beauty of the stippled figure is purposefully covered to direct attention to the watercolor figure, amplifying the insecurity she is experiencing.”

THROUGH AN EXHALE

Mia Davis

“This piece focuses on the connection of two people. The woman is diving into her emotions, striving to connect with the man while he blows smoke out and washes her away. He chooses himself and his substances over the girl who cares about him, avoiding even looking at her, instead staring straight out to assert his presence as the central focus of the image. ”

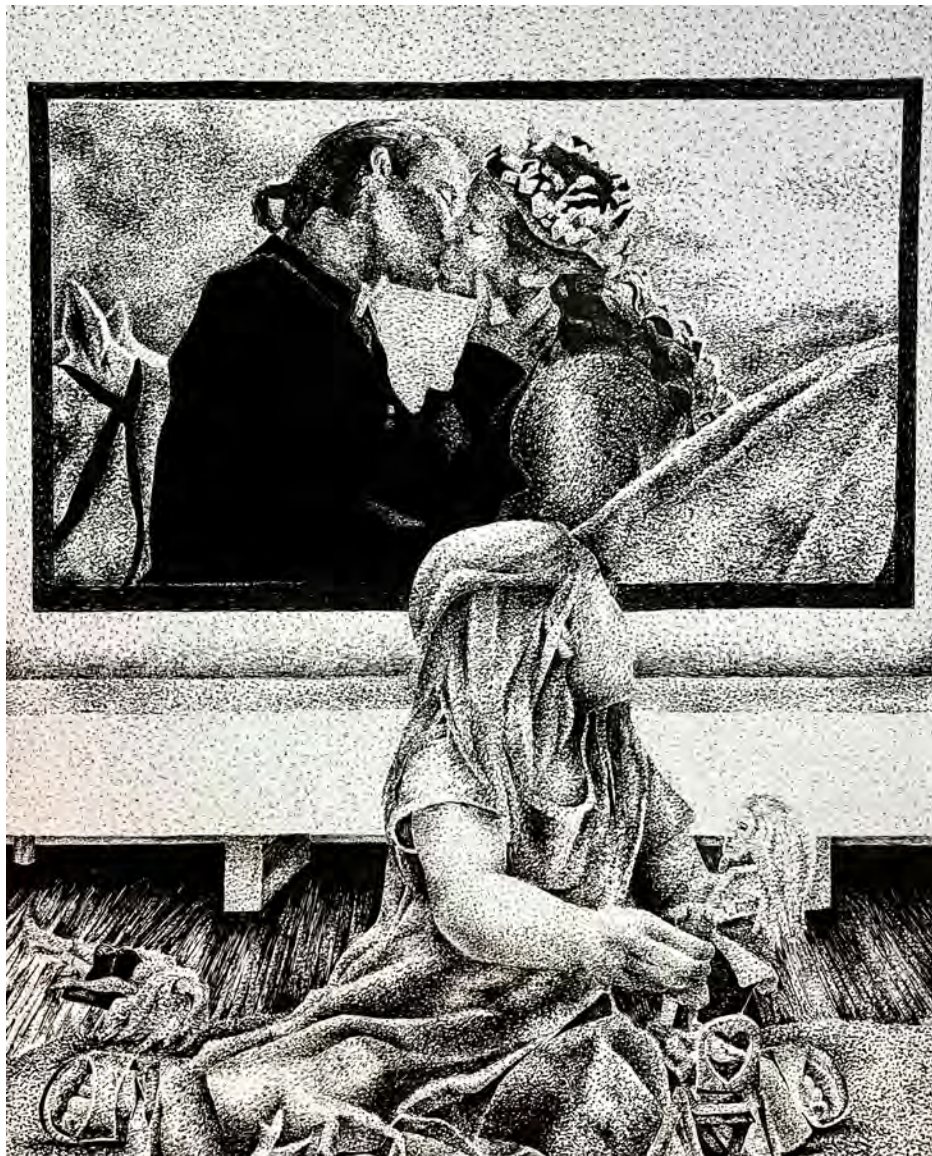




STANDSTILL

Mia Davis

“This piece was created entirely with charcoal, complemented by acrylic accents for a sharp finish. I drew inspiration from ballerinas to capture the beauty of body movements. My goal was to evoke a sense of uncertainty, with the man ready to commit while the woman hesitates, uncertain if the relationship will last. This piece was a good exercise in lighting, which helped me create a detailed depiction of the muscles in both figures.”



WATCH AND LEARN
Mia Davis

| 81

“‘Watch and Learn’ is a statement on how children consume the media they are exposed to. The child depicted in this piece is losing interest in her dolls, turning away from her childhood and learning about love from the television instead. She will carry these media representations with her throughout her life, expecting her future experiences to resemble them.”



OUT OF THE MUSEUM
Mia Davis

“Created using a combination of charcoal and acrylic paint, this piece depicts the mistreatment of women by exploitative men. The male figure in this piece does not see the woman as a person but as an object to be possessed like a piece of meat. I chose an intimate and affectionate pose to highlight the contrast between what we see and the truth of what happens when no one is watching.”

82 |

Reaper Man
Leighmon Eisenhardt

In shadows' dance, where darkness fills the room,
Death's envoy casts a glance of certain doom,
Gathered kin, in sorrow linger clear,
A loved one's end is drawing ever near.

With laughter sly and grin stretched wide, he dares,
The Reaper man steps softly unawares,
"Dismiss your fears," he softly breathes, serene,
"To witness mortal tales, my quest has been."

Tears they fall, and arms embrace in pain,
As daylight yields to night's dark, shadowed reign,
The Reaper deems their sorrow strange and rare,
In mournful scenes, a curiosity he shares.

"Sweet Gran, don't let grief obscure your sight,
This end, it's neither dark nor tinged with light,
Both young and old, I've taken, known and true,
Your turn draws near, life's gossamer unglues."

His scythe he twirls, in grand and fearsome act,
The family moves, as he directs their track,
"Fret naught," he trills, his voice assured, robust,
"In Granny's care, trust me, it's wise and just."

Startled, they sob and gaze in loss, bereaved,
As Granny's soul takes leave, their hearts now grieved,
But Reaper laughs, his twisted play, delight,
In their dismay, he finds his joy this night!

"Grieve not, dear kin of mortal frame, take heart,
Brief is life's span, yet Death plays its part,
Gran's journey's end, her final path is done,
A fresh endeavor for her has begun!"

With that, he's gone, a swift and fleeting trail,
The family's left with hearts that ache and wail,
To ponder on that fateful, tearful day,
When Reaper man danced, life swept away!



Pearls Guarded from Swine
Evelynn Nowicki
Pencil



Belladonna
Nicholas Fulwood

Black hair and fast words,
uttered nervously into a microphone.
Trying to meet your gaze,
so that I can give you a goofy look,
but you know better.

Picked pockets of conversation,
stolen in a crowd of strangers,
but caught by your eyes.
Nervous chuckles and
hair slid out of your face.

My thoughts are short and tight,
like gunfire cleaning out a building.
My number, written on torn paper
in smudged ink and hurried script,
slides from palm to pocket to palm to pocket.

Opportunities rise and fall.
I point out the sliver of the moon,
peeking through the sunlight,
as wood creaks beneath us,
and you nod.

I'm trying to kick down the door
of our stolen conversation
and place a bomb at your feet,
then give you a goofy look,
hoping you'll defuse it.



At the Dark End
Jake Carmona
Photography

Poolside Memories

Nathan Rein
Creative Nonfiction

“

He was tall, too tall, and he was rebellious, too rebellious. He was cool, but beneath it all lurked a subtle threat.

”

Poolside Memories *Creative Nonfiction*

Nathan Rein

Lying on my back, I cursed myself once more for forgetting my sunglasses. The pool area was bustling today. In fact, the whole clubhouse was alive with activity. Wives and husbands, parents and children were all around, their voices blending in a chorus of screams and splashes. In the background, the sound of an acoustic guitar added to the ambiance. The water rippled under the relentless sun. I wished I'd arrived earlier to escape its reach. Alas, I was a late sleeper, and by the time I got there, the children had already claimed the shallow end in their ignorance of space.

Footsteps. Boots against stucco. I opened my eyes to the noise and immediately tried to protect them from the sun with my quickly burning arm. The sunscreen had sunk into my skin and already needed another layer.

I began to rummage through my pool bag, filled with a mishmash of worn-down towels and supplies, in search of sunscreen. Unexpectedly, my attention was captured by a black motorcycle helmet with a yellow-tinted visor. As my hand continued its search for the lotion, my gaze shifted toward the owner of the helmet.

He was wearing jeans and a black jacket over a white V-neck tee. Why I can remember those details but not his name, I'm not certain. I suppose I was fairly shallow back then as a teenager. He must have noticed my lingering eyes. I could see his gaze start to move towards mine as he situated his things.

I spoke before he could question me. I didn't know what to say, as I hadn't had much chance to practice social interaction during that time of my life. So, I winged it: "You ride?"



The Eyes

Miguel Santiago

Acrylic- & Oil-Based Paint Pen

“Huh?” His gaze caught mine. Common brown, yet somehow different.

“You’re dressed like you ride a bike, even without the helmet,” I said.

“Oh, right.” He laid his towel down and lay back on the pool chair, appearing nonchalant with his curly hair catching the sun. I couldn’t recount the details of the conversation about his bike. All I recall is that it was a red cruiser, and as it moved away from me, down the road, it sounded like regret. “I just got her from a friend of mine up in New Jersey,” he later shared. “She’s not my first bike, but I almost love her as much.”

I propped myself up in my own chair, keeping my left arm and its scars out of sight and suddenly wishing I’d worn something with long sleeves. Self-consciousness isn’t fun. “My dad used to ride a Harley of some kind. I want to get one, too, one day when I get my license.”

“You want to get a Harley like your dad’s?”

“Probably not! I tried to sit on one once but could barely keep it standing. The bike weighed more than I did.”

I laughed. A Russian couple were fighting a few chairs down about something I couldn’t understand. We watched. He sighed.

“Wanna see my bike?” he asked.

I looked over with surprise: “Really?”

“I don’t see why not. They let you back in if you leave the pool area, right?”

“He was a downright rebel and I ate it up.”

“Yeah.”

“Then come on, man! Let’s go.”

The motorcycle was everything he’d claimed it to be. Parking it on gravel felt like a disservice, and the fact that he didn’t bother to move it onto the pavement first before he drove off after our hangout surprised me.

In reality, I shouldn’t have been surprised. It was just one little fact in a larger collection of moments recorded in my mind that made me realize not only did this guy take the chilled-out route in life, but he took it even further. He was a downright rebel and I ate it up. But that just made it all the more difficult when the time came that he was gone for good.

Grass used to be something I was allergic to, but by that time I’d outgrown the prognosis. Still, something about the blades of grass and the way they rubbed against the back of my legs as I sat felt itchy that day. It was Saturday, two days before the end of the holiday weekend, but all of a sudden time felt like it was moving too fast. The sound of tennis balls smacking against the concrete courts adjacent to the field filled my head. I watched a small puff of smoke leave my friend’s nostrils and float slowly up through the stagnant summer air.

“Nathan, hey, you good?” That was some lifeguard whose face is blank to me now.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. What’s up?”

“You zoned out. Just wondering if something was up,” he explained.

“Nah, nah, I’m fine, man.” I kept my gaze focused on the ridge of his nose, unable to make eye contact. “When are you leaving again?” That was directed at my friend, whom I couldn’t turn to face.

“It was there, certainly, his presence began to warm my stomach like a glass of liquor, making my head just as fuzzy.”

“I’ll go back to New Jersey Monday night and then off to New York the week after,” he said.

“Are you coming back here again?” I asked.

“No, probably not. How come?”

The feeling I’d had throughout that day, as well as yesterday, amalgamated into something of a restless creature in my stomach. Fear of being left alone for good by someone who’d come so quickly into my life and flipped it so easily upside down. It wouldn’t really matter even if he’d said he was straight and had a crush on every girl within a one-hundred-yard radius or didn’t look like the spitting image of a Times Square model. It still hurt.

I finally felt what I’d pictured heartbreak to be, and to a lesser extent, what a crush was supposed to feel like according to the movies I’d been inundated with from the time I was a child. I finally felt natural, normal, like someone who didn’t have to put on airs, and then, all of a sudden, that feeling evolved.

As much as the original crush stayed, even intensified, the idea of no longer having a chance to feel those butterflies again made my chest want to collapse.

So, all I could say in response was, “No reason. I was just curious.”

It was all lies.

I try to pinpoint the moment I first felt that feeling. Maybe it was at the pool when he blasted the nineties’ alternative music while we swam. It was there, certainly, his presence began to warm my stomach like a glass of liquor, making my head just as fuzzy. He dunked my head underwater and I realized *The Goo Goo Dolls* were much harder to hear down in the deep blue.

“It’s all about the frequency of the sound waves,” he explained. “They don’t travel through water the same way, so it changes the sound coming from the speaker.” He was treading water as we talked. I clung to the side of the pool like a Capuchin monkey, tired. I still don’t know why he ever trusted himself to keep that speaker so close to the pool.

“Whatever you say.”

“You don’t believe me?”

“How could I ever do anything but believe you?”

“You’re the one that said I’m a badass.”

“Yet you still decide to hang out around me.”

“I’m just trying to make you live a little.”

Or maybe it was in the clubhouse, still damp from running through the rain, where we played ping-pong, hit a kid in the eye with a stray ball, and blasted the Soviet Choir so loud we almost got kicked out by the staff.

What I do remember best, though, was the feeling of regret that came along later that evening, when it was time to call it a day and go home.

The sun had finally calmed itself. No longer the blazing fireball it'd been all weekend, it instead hid, peeking behind the trees like a shy child between their mother's legs. He stood there next to me, no more than two or three years older, but at that moment it felt like he was so much further ahead.

The sound of the engine roaring to life filled my ears, creating a seeping dread. It idled as our shadows grew longer with each passing minute.

"Nathan?" He asked.

"Yeah?" I replied, watching a small salamander work its way between the rocks.

"You want a ride?"

I remember looking up at him then. He was tall, too tall, and he was rebellious, too rebellious. He was cool, but beneath it all lurked a subtle threat. Now, I often wonder why he appeared as a threat to me – why his presence evoked a sense of unease. Perhaps it wasn't the prospect of being seen with him on the bike by others that unsettled me but rather something much closer to home.

I vividly remember how I longed to perch myself on the back of that cruiser, arms wrapped around his waist. Yet, in some inexplicable way, doing so felt like delaying the inevitable. It seemed like putting off the pain of one-sided attachment, perhaps even making it worse. It meant risking others seeing me for who I really was before I was remotely prepared to look in the mirror and embrace the person staring back at me.

"I don't think that's a great idea."

"Why?"

"What would my dad think?" *I was too chicken.*

"How does that matter?" *A good question, and one I didn't have the answer to yet.*

"I don't know. I just . . . can't." *I'm not ready yet.*

He got on his bike and grabbed his helmet. "Whatever you say, dude! I just wanted to make your life a little bit easier." *If only I could tell you how much you did just that.*

"I'm sorry."

*"I vividly remember
how I longed to
perch myself on the
back of that cruiser,
arms wrapped
around his waist."*



All Tied Up
Evelynn Nowicki
Ink



In Knots
Evelynn Nowicki
Ink



Hot Dog Etiquette

Dylan Sokolovich

A dollar a piece
And an hour to eat
We ran from school
With quarters in hand
Three blocks
Through alleys
And over puddles

We ordered
Not because we
Came from riches
But because
We starved the
Remainder of the
Day

Three dogs
Three seltzers
Give us everything
On the dogs
Except for the kraut
Please grill the buns
And give us a fry for fun

We cut the third
Rolled in wax
Too hot to hold
For the less fortunate
Daughters and sons
Quarters on counter
And stomachs bold

The clock
ticks , tocks
Whispering of days
Come and gone
We eat
Every last bit
Burnt crisps and poppy seeds

On the jukebox
Plays the music
Of those kids
With enough
Money
For walkmans
And we're reminded:

Mom was fired
From the textile
Factory
And dad
He still
Can't find any
Work

But
For now
We kick
Our legs
In our
Hand Me Downs
And dream of better days.

Momma's Boy

Nathan Rein

I gave you my heart,
Beating in my hand.

I gave you my kidneys.
No regret
In the cold
Of the bathtub.

Childhood memories
I relinquished,
so you could craft them
the way
You wished.

My personality
All segments
You frayed
so they'd point
in your direction.

You stole my jacket
of parental trust,
Letting it keep you warm
Without considering
That without a heart
I couldn't warm
my own blood.

I gave you everything,
It was drunk
Just as quickly
As the liquor
Under your
Nightstand of lies.

Mom, no, Mother.
When you finally tried
To accept my
gifts there
Was nothing
Left
To love.



Our Search at Dawn

McKenna Barker

Photography

Dearest
Cass Niedzwiecki

dearest
they're going to get us like this
half-naked in the streets with a gun
in my back pocket

like bonnie and clyde, we'll
steal
each other's breath
and blow kisses from the shoulders
of giants before us

I think it's for the best
that the last thing I'll be
is a lover
and a criminal

and a criminal
of a lover

we could both die here
slip-sliding in the rain
with a gun
and a sad song

instead, I'll steal your breath
for the last time
steal your heart, too
and keep it
in my back pocket
next to my gun

Sleepover at Nana's

Finnigan Jackson
Creative Nonfiction

“His garrulous nature – well, it was just another of his charming quirks, like the embellishments he added to nurture my sense of wonder.”

Sleepover at Nana's *Creative Nonfiction*

Finnigan Jackson

I was the first grandchild on both sides of my family. My Nana had two children, my Mom, mother of two, and my Uncle Colin, father of more than I can count. But I was the first of many grandchildren, and grandparents love to spoil their grandchildren. Nana and Poppop's house on Walnut Street was my kingdom of imagination for the first eight years of my life. A sleepover there was a boon of love. The kitchen walls were covered with messy coloring pages, purple and green scribbles outside the lines, and stick figures with round fat bellies and prominent belly buttons, a common stylistic choice of my budding artistic mind. We were never bored; boredom was below us.

If my Poppop was a bird, he would be a magpie. By that, I mean he was a hoarder. Every Sunday, he loaded treasure troves of bibelots and baubles into the back of his elderly pickup truck. The vehicle, ever an obedient servant, clamored and squealed belligerently, but wound up the old roads to Renninger's Antique Market. I was often roped into going along with him. There was the unspoken promise of ice cream and a cut of the money we made together, but honestly, I just liked being around him. Poppop had lived a hundred lives and experienced a thousand adventures in my eyes. I wanted to fully absorb his stories. His garrulous nature – well, it was just another of his charming quirks, like the embellishments he added to nurture my sense of wonder.

Once, Poppop told me a story about the treasure chest he kept locked on a high shelf in their living room. Never had I considered he would have a yarn to spin about it. I had figured it was just another memory he hated

*"The old floor
beneath his feet
groaned in harmony
with the bittersweet
song of an old love
that never died."*

to let go of or a piece of interesting junk to pawn off. He caught me looking at it one day while we were sitting and listening to one of the many records stacked tight against the walls, precariously shoved into small spaces. He smiled with a glint in his eye. I remember the way his bones creaked as he slowly stood and crossed the room with his wood-carved cane. The old floor beneath his feet groaned in harmony with the bittersweet song of an old love that never died. He reached up and retrieved the chest, bringing it over to where I sat in anticipation. The mischievous grin on his face made him look young, despite the greying whiskers surrounding his smile.

"Do you know how I got this chest?" he asked me, egging me on to indulge him.

"No," I smiled. "How?" At this point, "It's the Same Old Song" by the Four Tops started playing. Not a fitting soundtrack for the thriller he was about to revel in with me but nonetheless an important part of the memory.

"I fought off a shark and an octopus to bring this chest back here," he said, proud as a pirate with plunder aplenty.

Friendly Ghost
McKenna Barker
Pastel



My chin dropped to make way for my hanging mouth. I begged him to elaborate.

"Eyup, that's how I got this scar, see?" He changed his voice to that of a seasoned seafarer. His right eye shut tight to simulate an eyepatch and his bony finger curled into a hook. We were playing pretend, but I was too enthralled to notice or care.

"My many-great uncle was a man of the seas," he exclaimed. "He left me with a treasure map to find his fortune, to prove my worth as a pirate."

"A pirate!" I had few words, but thoughts raced in my mind like head-to-head Nascar drivers fighting for gold.

"Aye, the octopus and shark were the sworn protectors of this chest, and I took 'em down with my bare hands."

He pulled out a key, rusted and dulled from age. Slowly, unbearably slowly, he unlocked the chest. Maybe it was just my overactive imagination, but I could swear the dusty smell of the room subsided for a waft of salty sea air. Underneath the lid lay a pile of glimmering doubloons, gems, and riches, things I had only read about in books. I had my doubts, as any skeptical child would, but I could see no alternative. My Poppop had fought crazy sea creatures underwater and come out of it with a real-life pirate treasure chest and a whopper of a story. He beamed at me while I asked him a million and one questions, fielding each one with a rip-roaring answer that served only to heighten my joy.

I felt hurt when I first found out that nothing about his story was true – a little betrayed, like when a child finds out Santa Claus isn't real. Why would he lie? With time, however, I came to understand that my Poppop

was a showman through and through. We bonded through adventure – through mystery, intrigue, and inspiration. His gift to me was a memory to cherish, even when he can't remember it anymore. What's in a story? Heart, above all.

*"His gift to me
was a memory to
cherish, even when
he can't remember
anymore. What's
in a story? Heart,
above all."*



Southern Comfort
Joseph Sutton
Acrylic



A Witch's Grimoire
Isabella Manmiller
Sculpture

The Laughing Man
Leighmon Eisenhardt

When night is darkest, and moon is high,
take solace in hearth and home and stay inside.
For those who wander across the land,
perchance encounter the Laughing Man.
Mocking revelry of song and dance, dark and dour.
Celebration of Temptation, bewitching within witching hour.

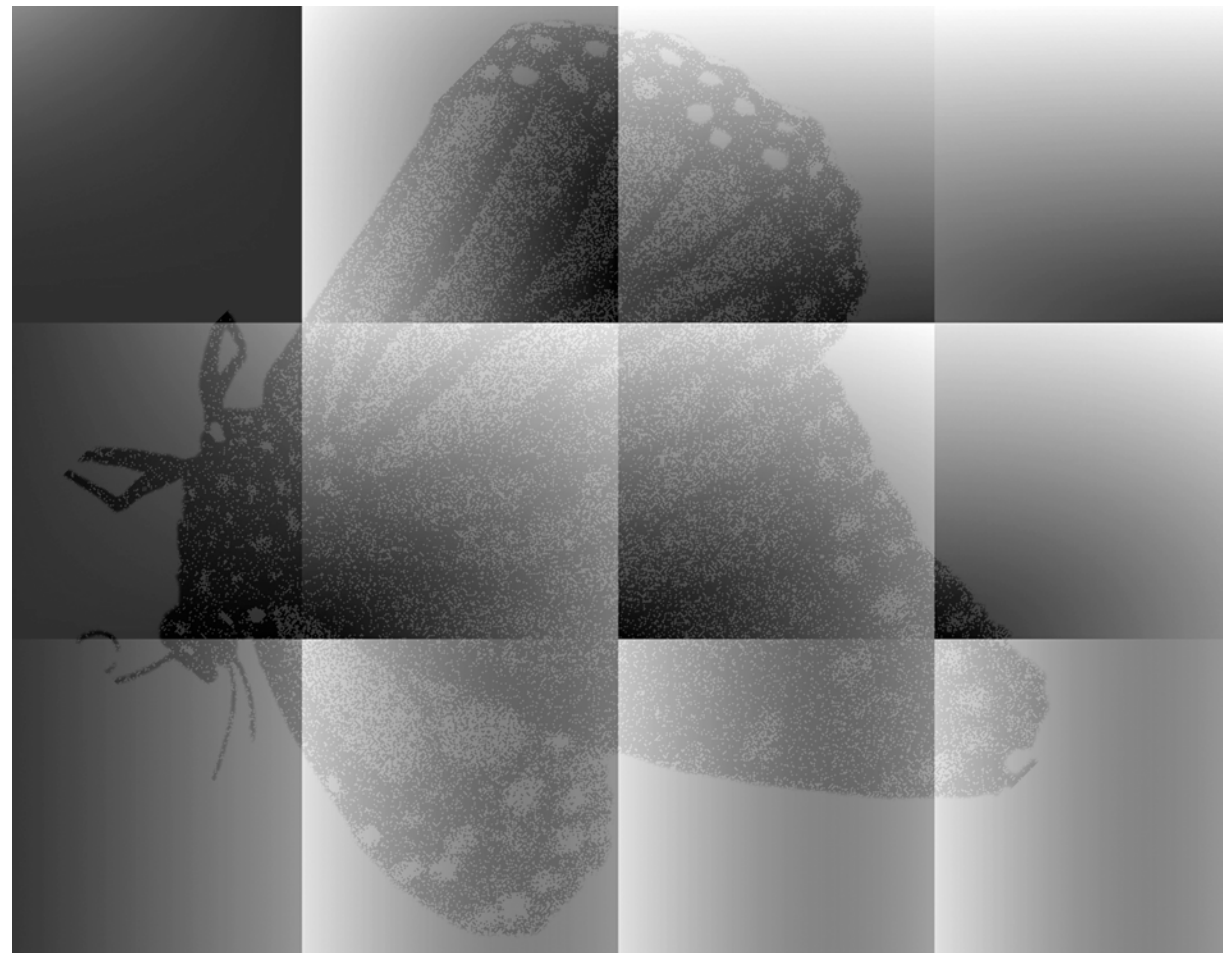
When night is silenced, and moon does hide,
with skin too thin and smile too wide
Laughing Man, pearled teeth, extended hand,
offers one show of shows, played upon our godless land.
Grand cabaret, darkened laughter, shattered cross.
Witness upon Witnessing, all forsaken lost.

When night rings quiet, and moon afraid
upon a darkened stage siren song played.
One form joins the dancers within ritual unison.
Betrayal runs deep, a steady drip of poison.
Yellow-cut eyes and smile wry,
Laughing Man laughs, another alongside.

When night flees and moon retreats,
onward, relentless, Laughing Man seeks.
His timeless work with troupe in tow,
dancing, cavorting, ever onward, ever low.
Flesh and Blood, marrow and bone
Laughing Man laughs upon skull-white throne.



Baby
Hannah Smith
Pencil



chenille ailée
Chancey Smith III
Digital Art



Survivor's Guilt

Chadwyck Marte
Personal Essay

“We real cool. We
Left school. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We
Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We
Jazz June. We
Die soon.
Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool””

Survivor's Guilt *Personal Essay*

Chadwyck Merte

In my restless dreams, I saw my old hometown. Long after I left that sordid underbelly of America, it continued to call - or rather, cry out to me. Moving was not exactly a decision I had pushed for, but one that everyone around me insisted would make my life better. I was told that it would take me away from all the pain and suffering around me and that it would remove me from an environment that no one would deserve to live in. I eventually convinced myself that it was a chance for me to solidify myself in society and separate myself from those who could not make it. After all, life is all about making something of yourself. Right? In my mind, I was finally leaving Hell, getting the chance I felt I deserved after a life of turmoil. All of this I imagined was true, even when the creeping feeling I had deep down persisted. The façade only ever broke when I returned to the place that I thought I had left behind for good.

When one is living in the bottom rung of society, there is no ignoring the surrounding horrors. In fact, they are made quite apparent. Whether through gossip from the adults around us or the news reaching out to us—or the reality stretching out in front of our very eyes, we all knew from a young age that there was a problem with that place. With our innocence stripped from us, we are thrust into a world that we later find out is deeply flawed. But, in our naivety, we presume that every problem stems from a perpetrator and that every problem has a solution. Some of us become doctors, social workers, teachers, politicians, and lawyers, all in the name of a common struggle against what we perceive as the problem. And a lucky few, myself included, flee. Leaving was the final step I had to take to

rid myself of the problem. For me, the problem was the people, and the only solution was to separate myself from them.

Politicians and parents alike drilled into our heads that the source of our problems was a lack of educated, strong-willed, and sober-minded members of the community—or rather an abundance of uneducated, weak-minded, drug-addicted criminals. I sought to separate myself from them by any means necessary. It did not matter that they were from the same place as I did, because that little bit of narrative pushed by mostly outsiders went a long way in othering them in my mind. To me, the ability to grab an opportunity and make it work for you to eventually succeed in academia was an example of will—not a result of privilege. Yet, I received what seemed to be the highest privilege at the time – the privilege of not becoming a victim of circumstance, and without even batting an eye, I abandoned my brothers and sisters in the Bronx at their lowest. I was unaware that, by doing so, I was subtly contributing to the problem more than any gangbanger or drug addict ever could have.

Moving was uneventful – except for the emptiness that I felt for some months after arriving at my new home, which I now know was a symptom of guilt and lack of direction. Outside of medical reasons, my first extended stay back in my old hometown was during the winter break. I went with my brother, Chandler, who missed being there deeply. After being dropped off by a van service, I visited a friend of my mother's for a couple of hours. Even in that small amount of time, I felt wildly uncomfortable. Stepping outside filled me with a dreadful sensation as if the world itself resented me. It felt like being on the receiving

Eye of the Beholder
Morgan Herb
Acrylic



end of my feelings towards what seemed to have plagued me and my community for our whole lives. Perhaps I was lashing out at myself. Guilt tends to manifest itself when one feels they have escaped a punishment they are deserving of. Not only was I guilty of that but also of getting deathly close to perpetuating an undeserving punishment onto my own community.

Chandler arrived—under the influence. We called a cab since we had decided on visiting our oldest brother. On the cab ride there, we cut through our old neighborhood. It was the middle of a cold night, but the warm feeling of nostalgia enveloped us. The sights, sounds, and smells of our youth reaffirmed that we really were back home. Good things do not last forever, though. Nearing the highway, I spotted an old woman. I remember thinking that she looked just like my Grandmother. The only difference, of course, was that she was homeless and clearly drugged out of her mind. And right around the gas station at one of the entrances to the highway, I saw even more of them. I remarked to my brother how sad the state of it all was, and he started telling me a story of what it reminded him of:

There was this girl me and the boys used to play ball with. Her name was Ty. She was a tomboy type, but we all accepted her as one of us. We were some hoodlums at the time, but we meant well. We'd hang out, smoke, talk about our dreams and the future. We kept playing at the same spot but at some point, Ty stopped showing up. Nobody heard about her for a couple months, till one of us spotted her scratching at a corner, with a swollen belly. Word is, she got laced with god knows

what at a party, and it led to a mean drug addiction and a pregnancy. Ty had the baby, but a couple months later, she passed away.

How could I have been such a fool? Ty was not the problem. These people are not the problem. They are the victims of circumstance. The devil rolled his die, and their lives ended as a result. Why do I deserve an education and a nice, cushy life in the suburbs when Ty didn't? Why do I deserve to live when Ty didn't? Those who have died young, just like Ty, are not statistics; they are people; they are our brothers and sisters. The problem did not start with them; they are only symptoms of it. My

“Why do I deserve to live when Ty didn't? Those who die young, just like Ty, are not statistics; they are people; they are our brothers and sisters.”

greatest regret is not having realized it sooner.

The rest of the cab ride, I talked at length about how I was tired of running. If abandoning my people was my declaration that they were the problem, I vowed to do the opposite. If we respect and care for each other like the family that we are, we stop the enemy from killing us. It is not fair that the community shares the impossible task of clawing out of the abyss when, like crabs in a barrel, those of us who leave only serve to push them deeper into it. The road to a remedy, Chandler and I agreed, is a long and arduous one, plagued with many obstacles, but it is worth committing to it. Anything less would

be selfish.

My soul was not at rest until I finally reconciled with myself. I now know that facing one's guilt will never be anything short of an unpleasant experience. Feeling shame at not having had it worse is intensely uncomfortable, but it, in a way, is a sign that a change must take place. I just need to learn how to transform my feelings of guilt into a force that will direct my attention to what truly matters and help me do something meaningful. And for anyone with stones left unturned, I promise that leaving them alone will never break that cycle of depression brought on by the guilt that we feel.





Skoenlapper-Aan-Die-Brand
Chancey Smith III
Digital Art

Fading Nostalgia

Webgie Cadet

The sun here does not shine like it does back home.
In this foreign sky, it wears a different hue
A distant fire,
unfamiliar and subdued.

It does not care to make dance my melanin,
No longer paints my skin with nostalgic strokes.
It withholds its feverish warmth,
And I can't help but wonder,
Have I fallen out of its grace?

The Farmer's Hand

Dylan Sokolovich

And I cry for the cow
As I drag my hands along its belly,
Combing its mangy hide
Into something more suitable
For the afterlife.

I touch my nose to her own
And my wet eyes meet hers,
Producing the secrets of a fawning field
Where clovers grow
And where hay is rarely thrown.

But when our hearts meet
Is when I truly see
That the farmer's fence
Leaves a brook just out of reach
And a paradise so dense.

I sob because I know
Today is the day of slaughter.

Her body will drowse slack
As a rifle startles the crows
And the cattails waver
As this creek
Transforms into blood.

The farmer will
Slice and skin
A beautiful creature
Before the maggots and flies
Can win.

Cancerous cells will be cut
And flanks frozen
For what the farmer
Will feed his family
Throughout the winter.

And my face grows long
As I drag my hands along my belly,
Nervously comb my hair
And pout knowing
The courageous cow is no more.



Frame of Reflection

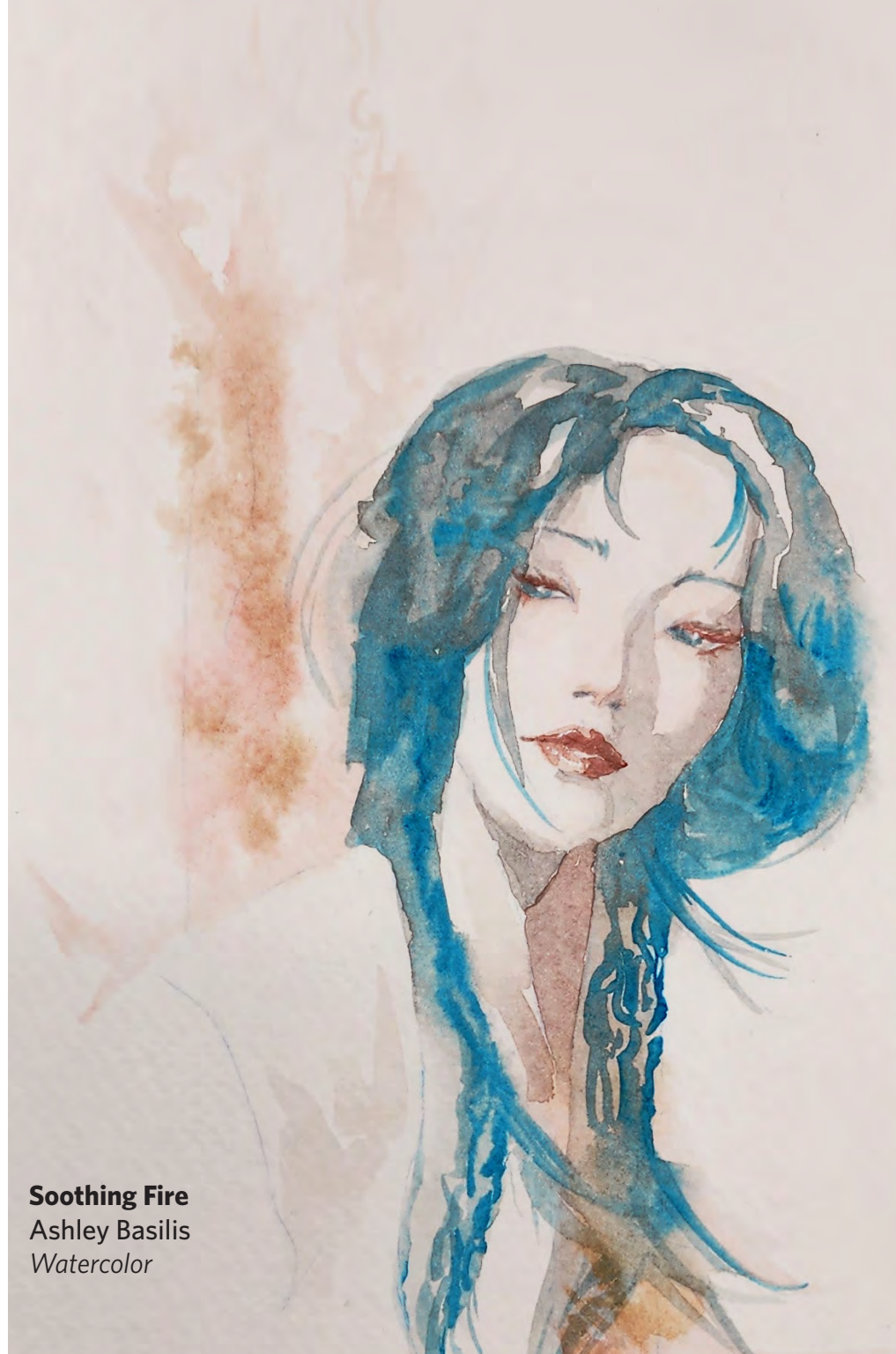
Evelynn Nowicki

Ink



Contemplation
Ashley Basilis
Watercolor

Soothing Fire
Ashley Basilis
Watercolor



End of Life Plan B

Nicholas Fulwood

If I could, I would
walk out past the lawns
of flat-paved grass,
and into the deepest greens.

I could, and I would,
lie among the damp moss,
and soft soil,
where the bugs flutter and the birds chirp,
and let the sun soothe my sores.

I would wait
until the leaves covered me,
and I could
hear the creek of woods in the wind
as it echoed in my bones.

I could savor
the drifting of snow through the sky,
and I would
let the wind freeze into stillness,
while frost clung to my hair.

Then, as the muds melted
into the swollen river,
and the rain puckered open flowers,
I could,
and I would,
shut my eyes and
slip into sleep.



Off the Table

Miguel Santiago

Mixed Media



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Shiva
Mickerlie Eustache
Mixed Media

Taking What is Mine

Nathan Rein
Fiction

“

You were still. But, when I looked into the depths
of your eyes for the first time, I saw nothing but
unrestrained movement.

”

Taking What is Mine *Fiction*

Nathan Rein

Your place of birth was astonishingly downtrodden. A weathered, poor excuse for a shack in the back corner of a nameless village. It lacked a source of water, nor did it have a solid foundation. No townsfolk within their right mind would dare try to near it. Even Yesu, the man of long ago whom our adversaries called Jesus – wrapped in swaddles of rags under the watchful eye of barn animals, resting in hay at his own beginning – would have laughed at the description of your genesis. You did not even have a place to lie. So, I held you as the hours grew long, never once letting go.

You were quiet. So quiet were you in fact that your mother, before she had died, thought she was taking you with her.

You were still. But, when I looked into the depths of your eyes for the first time, I saw nothing but unrestrained movement.

You were wilding, holding within you the uncultivated and untamed rambunctiousness of youth. It was then I knew educating that out of you would not be easy in the least.

Time moved with an unbridled pace from that point forward. You remained silent for the first two years of your life. Those around me, including your father, the King of our far Eastern cornerstone, urged me to turn to divination to solve that issue. Yet, wasting the power I had cultivated felt like nothing short of an insult to you at the time. I knew you could speak; it was simply that you had not yet felt the need to.

If anyone ever asks, let them know I continually denied caring about the fact your first word ended up being my name. Tell them

that we cultivators reject pride; we men of the tattered robe deny ourselves the pleasure of a strong internal warmth. But remember just for yourself that my happiness was immeasurable when those sounds traveled from your lips to my ear – even if I did command you to only call me “caretaker” from that day on.

Your eighth year. There was a river towards the north of our kingdom. It quickly became a summertime Pure Land, used for escapes and escapades alike. I had only ever gone up to that home away from home twice before your birth, but after your mother’s death, your father became all too happy to run away to that riverside of solitude. It was your second visit up there that still paints a vivid picture in the back of my mind when I think of that small hamlet.

Your summertime garments hung loosely over your shoulders, and how you could move with such vigor in such an outfit is still a mystery to me. I wished I could satisfy your wish for the garments we had recently seen in shops from the far West, but the idea of royalty wearing such anti-traditional clothing was a travesty before the eyes of many. Still, you did not let it stop you.

Your heart was already purer than those decades beyond your age and your commitment to my training regimen was unwavering. It was a marvel. Yet, it was also a shock when I witnessed how you used these powers for the first time out of my sight.

The trees were blooming into forested greens, threatening to stab away at the skin with their low-hanging branches. I had just finished discussing matters that would be of no interest to you now. I returned to where I knew you would be, fishing on the banks of that

*“Yet, it was also
a shock when I
witnessed how you
used these powers
for the first time out
of my sight.”*

knee-deep river, still frigid in all its Yin energy.

Along the bank sitting next to you was a long-bearded man. The fact you were not scared of these people, even with the stories I knew you had been inundated with by the gossipers of the court, brought a smile to my face. The man turned around upon hearing my footsteps, and with a nod of my head and a gesture of my index and ring fingers, I subtly impressed upon him a desire to leave that he did not know he had.

I did not want you to see me yet, so I did not approach you. Instead, I watched as your forearms began to work, reeling in the line coming from your fishing pole.

You finished reeling in the line and set the rod to the side. Your head lowered slightly, and I could see your hands connected in four points: pinkie, ring, middle, index. Just like I had taught you. It took no more than the duration of a stick of incense to catch light, for a salmon, only the biggest salmon mind you, to swim up to the bank, and flop wildly into the moist dirt in supplication.



Truly, you were becoming more powerful than I had realized.

And then, your hand raised high, you became still. The fish continued to flop. You chuckled and whispered. The fish ceased moving. You lowered your hand in a motion I had yet to teach. I still do not know from where you learned it.

The fish was instantly, sloppily gutted. The bank ran red. You laughed like a child being tickled at their sides.

That was the first time I felt true fear for you.

It certainly was not the last. The years passed fairly incident-free after that, or at least I thought so. I could see a lot, but I could not see everything at once, and what you did when I was not there to keep you in check still worries me. Sometimes, while I sip a heavy spirit from a much too large glass, I wonder if I had tried a little harder to be there for you, would you have grabbed ahold of me like a son to their mother?

If I had tried to replace the mother you had lost before you had a chance to know her warmth, could all of this have been avoided? Could it be you blamed your own genesis for your mother's end?

I fully recognize the futility of such thoughts in attempting to change the past. Logically, it makes sense. It does. But I do not heed reason. Somehow, I find myself blaming my lack of intervention, my quick anger towards you calling me anything but the impersonal titles of "Caretaker," "Master," or "Teacher." I wish I could go back to the day you made a decision that altered more than just the fate of some fish by the riverbank and

change the way I stayed silent. Perhaps if I had expressed my true feelings, if I had broken the rules of detachment and spoken my mind, you might have listened, and I wouldn't find myself here, in a daze at the foot of the mountain where you still reside, millennia later.

I keep silent about the events that unfolded in the deepest chambers of the royal fortress. I do not speak of the way you cursed your father's name, and in turn, your own. How you wielded the powers I imparted to you against those in your inner circle. How you whispered among your confidants that you wished those who went against your word would turn into nothing more than wandering ghosts.

I cannot confide in anyone. No one believes in people like me anymore or in half-humans like you. You have long since thrown away the pure side of your heart that relies on the belief of ordinary individuals, of mortals, to continue beating. But I have not relinquished that belief, and it scares me.

Yet, even if I were to grow too enamored with the mission of finding the bottom of a sacred bottle, and if I were to reveal how you plotted against your father all those years ago, when our kingdom still held some power in the region before the indigenous people you fished with were subjugated and massive towers reached up into the heavens, no one would listen. You would remain shielded from scrutiny. That is why I do not care that you are listening to my words from the depths of your sanctuary. I just hope, as you watch, you feel the weight of every blood-stained silk garment whose owners you have defiled and feel guilty as you watch me nearing your refuge.

I embarked on my journey in the morning when the sun was glaring down, casting its judgment upon both you and me. Indeed, it is that sun that illuminates my path, impartially judging me just as strongly as it judges you. Despite my removal from the fray by my position in the higher court, where petty conflicts hold little significance, I find myself replaying our final moments in my head as I walk the steep stairways to the heavens and pass through the gates to your higher realm. So, do not resent me if I linger on our past interactions.

The mud soaked my robes up to my knees in splotches and sprinkles. It blended, intersected with, and stained the white fabric much like the blood that covered the rest of my vessel. Those of the West understood just as much as we did that we both viewed our own sides as the righteous, as the correct side under the eyes of those watching from above. So, our rules against violence quickly went out the window. My bones felt weakened by the added weight of the souls I carried after leaving them behind me on my way to you.

You stood there, high on the hill, overlooking the twilight of our decisive battle. As I walked up beside you, I could not help but wonder: Were you proud of your actions? Proud of carrying the soul-weight of the man who created half of you, now reduced to providing a new home for insects, scattered in a pile at your feet for the rest of time.

I looked at you.

You looked at me.

Your eyes were filled with that same feral lack of control I saw upon holding you for the first time.

Night at Terracotta

Olivia Biancone

Charcoal

Fear singed the nerves along my spine, and my fingers went numb.

I did not even notice the dagger you used against me until you had left without a word, and I crumbled down into the dirt, resting next to your father.

It must have been a glitch, or perhaps the result of my cultivation and meditation working in my favor. Unlike you, I did not lose my memories when I was put through yet another genesis. The squalor was unbelievable, and even more unbelievable was it that my rebirth came long after your kingdom had fallen in the end. There should not have been such poverty, not when there was enough for all. Yet, I suppose people like you must still exist even today, alongside you, but unaware of your presence, hidden away in this small corner of the world left mostly untrodden.

They say time heals all wounds, my child, but I am sure you know it has been many years, and my wounds still only burn with a need for retaliation. The birthmark along my sternum only festers within it more desire to lash out and take the spot that was rightfully mine. You in the West and I in the East, just like we had always promised on early spring mornings before the dew had burned off into the atmosphere.

But you had to have both.

So, you left nothing for me but years of collecting scraps and toiling the fields. Have you ever felt the pain of a back exhausted by constantly ceaseless labor, my spoiled prince?

Call it a traitorship of my own against the rules I taught, against the words I spoke, against the strides I walked, for such a long time. Perhaps it was the pain of that second

genesis that finally broke me. I do not care what you call it; I want what is mine.

So, come out here, you. Come out here, you demon, you traitor, and you damn fool. Look me in the eye and trade blows with me like we used to in the sparring court during the early days of your failed empire. Let me stop speaking in riddles, in mindless figurative language, and in drunken pleasure. Let me purge the melancholic memories of you from my mind on your midsection. Let me take your left eye to replace my right.

Let me have what is rightfully mine.





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Cinderella
McKenna Barker
Oil

Second Draft
Nicholas Fulwood

Bold, italicized, or underlined.
Double-spaced, or single-spaced.
Bullets and arrows, numbered.

Indentations in the cranium of my paragraphs
cause words to hyphenate until their colons burst
and punctuate the margins of their sentences.

I'm running out of ink.
My sentence is stretching thin.
I have nothing left to say,
but haven't met the word count.

The Bugs Come a Marchin'
Dylan Sokolovich
Linoleum Print





Sunfall
Joseph Sutton
Graphite & Watercolor

Vulnerability Tug-of-War Macey Becker

Every night before bed
I take my glass heart and lock it behind
a barbed wire cage,
only to wake up the next morning
and put it back on my sleeve.
The cracks and dents glued and taped
create layers of fragmented
mosaic.
When I close my eyes,
my brain argues with my heart
like the devil and angel on my shoulders,
whispering in my ears
to this time swallow the key,
clinging to any hope of preservation.
But although glass may be fragile
my heart wins every time
because even when glass shatters,
it will captivate you when you open the blinds
and let the light radiate through.



Jump

Leighmon Eisenhardt
Personal Essay

“

We find excuses to put it off, because we will do anything to avoid that uncomfortable twisting sensation in our gut.

”

Jump *Personal Essay*

Leighmon Eisenhardt

I never stopped shivering. It did not matter how many jumps I did. It did not matter if it was day or night. It did not matter if it was full gear or not. Every time I stepped onto the C130 and it began coasting down the runway, an uncontrollable shiver would begin deep within the core of my body. It would take every bit of acting prowess I could muster to hide it from those to the left and right of me.

The plane itself would shake and groan. The Air Force guys would always joke: “Don’t worry. The rattle meant that it still had nuts and bolts.”

C130s had no amenities though, nothing beyond a long cargo hold with rows of chairs embedded on the side. That was where I sat, clenching my teeth lest they betray my feelings with their chattering.

And yet, inwardly, I was calm. We had jumped countless times by now. Everyone wore an expression of fatalistic nonchalance one might have when doing something unpleasant yet necessary, like a morning trip to the DMV – rather than jumping out of a perfectly functional airplane.

The roar of the engines has drowned out everything by now and my stomach lurches as we climb rapidly.

The two jumpmasters, standing up at the two doors labeled ‘Emergency Exit,’ shout commands. I can’t hear them outside a few bits and pieces here and there, but I recognize the signal to stand up. Out of reflex born from repetition and training, I latch my cord to the static line.



Man's Metamorphosis

Chancey Smith III

Digital Art

As always when the shakes are the worst,
my mind is repeating a section from a running
cadence that is stuck in my head:

*Stand up, hook up, shuffle to the door.
I jump right out and count to four.
If my main don't open wide,
I've got a reserve by my side!
If that one should fail me too,
Look out below, I'm a-coming
through!*

Twelve hundred and fifty feet up, the
jumpmasters yank open both doors. The
rush of air joins the whine of the engines,
smothering any possibility of hearing anything
that's not right next to you. I'm muttering the
lines of the cadence through clenched teeth like
a litany of faith, and waves of shivering course
through my body.

"Go, go, go!" The jumpmasters' yells
somehow pierce through the cacophony, and
we hear the signal. It happens quickly then.
One after another, we shuffle forward, one
hand on our jump lines, sliding them along the
cord that runs the length of the cargo hold.

Suddenly, I'm next, the grassy jump zone
visible far below.

No time to think. My yellow line hits the
jumpmaster's hands. He gives me a slap on
the back. A single step and gravity does all the
work. An endless blue expanse opens before me
as my stomach jumps into my throat.

The next four seconds are always the worst.
You find out the results of the jump within
that time frame. The cord is supposed to be
pulled by then by the static line. It's remarkably
reliable. Yet it's one of those things that if
something does go wrong, it goes wrong fast.
And you do not want anything going wrong
when you're over a thousand feet above the

Earth.

One.

Two.

Thre—

It's only when I feel the familiar jerk of
the parachute that my shivering finally stops. I
know that the worst has passed, and the rest is
just landing without breaking every bone in the
lower half of my body.

Even on my first jump, there was no
panic. Yet, on some instinctive level, I knew
what I was feeling was fear. Tense situations
I have encountered since then all share a
common pattern: a calmness of thought despite
everything else to the contrary. Subsequent
jumps served to affirm this apparent
contradiction of mind and body. Each time,
in retrospect, I found myself perplexed as to
why I remained calm despite the panic of those
around me.

It is quite curious to feel like a passive
bystander within your own mind, even while
your body tells you that you should be afraid.

For the longest time, I thought perhaps
something was wrong with me: "Am I just
unable to become emotionally invested in
things anymore?"

I think I have figured it out.

Being afraid is a natural survival instinct.
But I feel that primal urge is often confused
with avoiding being afraid. Fear of fear, as
it were. The two are different sides to the
same coin. One is healthy, and the other will
inevitably lead to ruin if you let it control you.

How often have we started something —
say writing a story or working on a project?
Anything really. It starts out fine. But then fear
of failure begins to sink in. We start to second-

guess ourselves. And we get cold feet. We
find excuses to put it off, because we will do
anything to avoid that uncomfortable twisting
sensation in our gut.

The fear becomes the focal point.

In some ways, this inaction is worse than
jumping from an airplane. There is no gravity
that would do the rest of the work, so it would
be over in a flash. As the old adage goes, "Every
journey begins with a single step." Ninety
percent of the jump is that first step, but we do
not often get the luxury of riding a parachute
back to the ground. We have to take another
step. Then another. Each one with the specter
of fear hovering over our shoulder. It is easy to
sit there and do nothing, letting emotion rule
us.

The military has a saying: "Better to take a
wrong action than no action."

I still shiver.

It tells me that I am afraid.

But I will always jump from that plane.

Bad Child

Miguel Santiago

Acrylic & Colored Pencil



On Cycle
Dylan Sokolovich

Rotten gourds
Decaying of the sun
Frost of winter
And dew of early spring
To be one with earth
Is losing

Drowned in mud
Or sadness
Sept into earth
Folding over
On oneself

A divot in earth
Comes the summer hum
What's left
A reminder
Of autumn no more.



Self Portrait
Olivia Biancone
Acrylic

Editorial Policy

Legacy is an award-winning journal produced by students of Reading Area Community College. Since it was founded in 2001, *Legacy's* goal has been to serve as the college's creative outlet and provide a showcase for the excellence achieved by RACC students. Through prose, poetry, art, and photography, *Legacy* reflects the diversity and richness within the campus. As it is a student-run publication, *Legacy* also provides an excellent opportunity for students who choose to serve on its team to gain hands-on experience.

Legacy is published once a year and available free to all members of the college community. Submissions to *Legacy* are accepted year-round from current RACC students and recent graduates (alums no more than five years out). *Legacy* welcomes all genres of writing—poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, personal and researched essays, screenplays—artwork, and photography. We also welcome hybrid texts, excerpts from longer prose pieces if self-contained, mixed-media art, three-dimensional works of art such as sculptures, and original musical compositions.

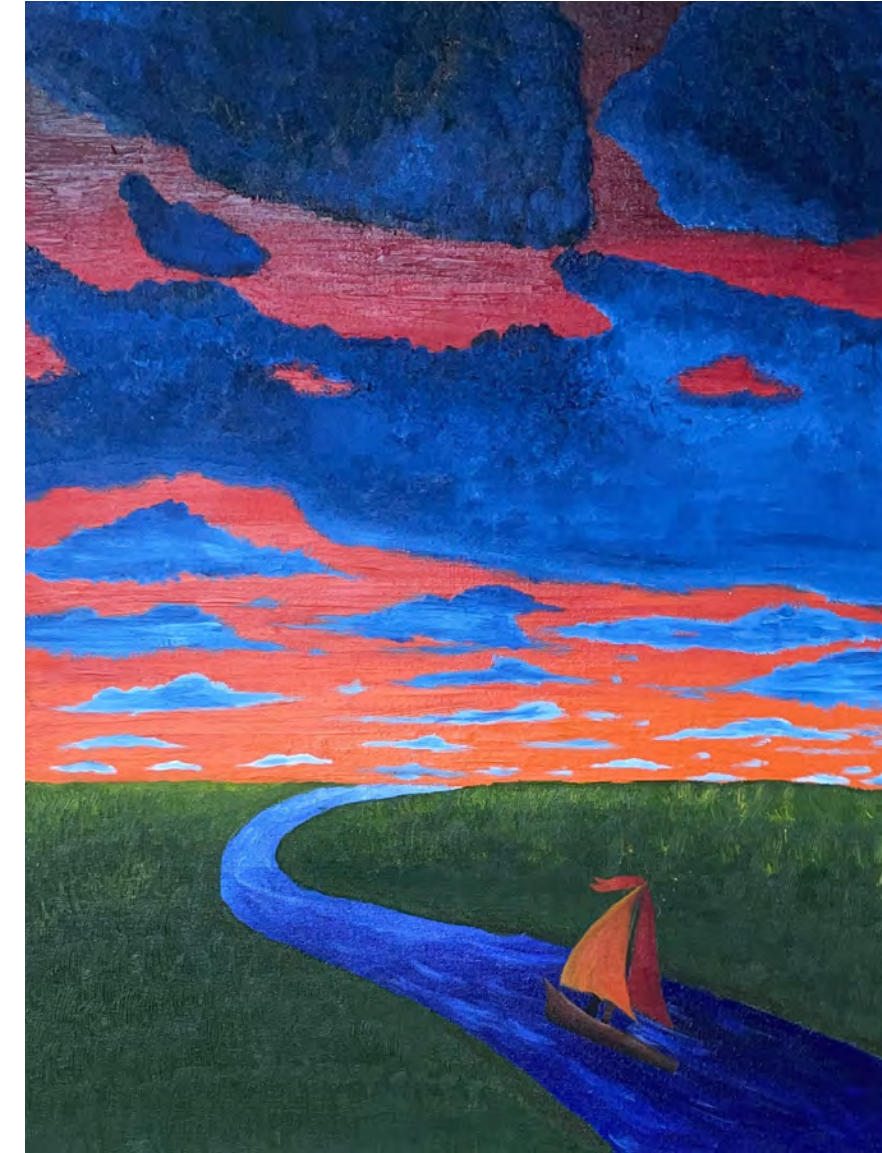
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expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the general staff, or the college.

Every piece submitted to *Legacy* is reviewed and discussed by the staff—members of the club and the students enrolled in *Publishing Practicum COM 125* and *COM 126*. The staff discusses each submission extensively and debates its merits before putting it to a final vote. The final vote determines which works will be edited and published. Student identities remain anonymous throughout the selection process in order for the staff to remain unbiased. After the final vote, the staff discusses possible edits and sometimes works with student authors and artists with the goal of helping each piece reach its highest potential. The edited pieces make up the content of the journal. Only those authors and artists whose works are chosen for publication are contacted.

Colophon

The twentieth annual volume of *Legacy* was designed using Windows-based personal computers. The software used in this production included Adobe InDesign CC, Adobe Photoshop CC, and Adobe Illustrator CC. Volume Twenty was printed by Prestige Color Inc. The cover was printed on 100# Sterling Premium Matte cover stock using a 4/1 color process in an 8x8 inch format. The body of the journal was printed in black and color ink on Accent Opaque Smooth 70# Text paper. The font for body copy was Adobe Garamond. The font for the titles and authors/artists of submitted work was Whitney. This volume was designed and laid out by Dylan Sokolovich.



Peaceful Ride
Sofia Fioravanti
Oil



RACC

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