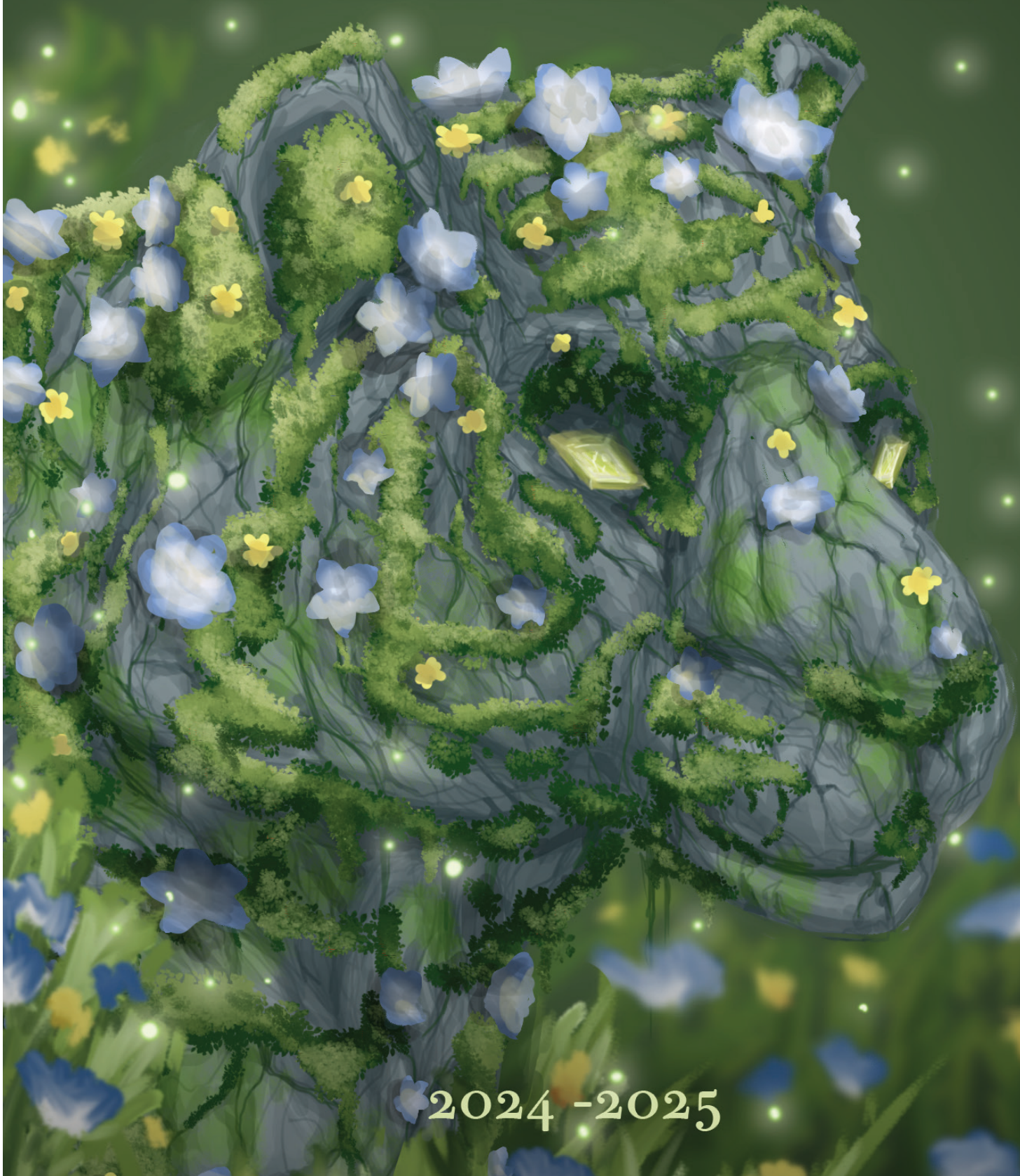


AUBURN HIGH SCHOOL'S

# THE SHEET



2024-2025



# Table of Contents



## Staff

## Photography Competition

1st Place: by Eileen Merrill

2nd Place: by Mary Lyle Rigsby

3rd Place: by Isaiah Chung

## Short Story Competition

1st Place: by Ryo Hardy

2nd Place: by Alexia Roath

3rd Place: by Willow Hyppolite

## Poetry Competition

1st Place: by Kara Funderburk

2nd Place: by JJ Adesemoye

3rd Place: Bella Grace Kimbrell

## Staff Submissions

“I Wish” by Bella Collins

“Lavender Spindrift” by Amanda Nguyen

“Object in Orbit” by Sydnee Seaborn

“Highway to the Sky” by Mallory Lumpkin

“Heroes and Villains” by Reagan Stokes

“Romy” by Kael McReynolds

“Dearest” by Judas Dorsett

“Stroll Among the Wildflowers” by Audrey

Thomas

“March 17th” by Janae Merrill

“Lemonade” by Mason Lehmkuhl

“The Blue Below” by Grayson West

1 “Morning Routine” by JD Higginbotham 23

2 “Wipeout!” by Izzy Kelley 25

2 “Blue-Wing Teal” by Annie Bao 28

3 “My Argos” by Echo Youngblood 29

3 “Fallen Angel Replicated” by Landon Hughes 29

4 “Home” by Sanea Anderson 30

4 “Revival Stroke” by Zunairah Shafi 30

7 “Do the Dishes” by Will Bao 30

9 “St. Pete Grand Prix” by AG Pennisi 31

12 “Mi Corazón” by Salem Vaughan 31

12 General Submissions 32

14 “What Brings me Joy” by Willow Hyppolite 32

14 “Hot Rod” by Gates Buxton 32

15 “Can You Feel It” by Jun Pak 33

15 “Changes” by Jay Lee 33

15 “Love Your Brother” by Christopher Thomas 34

16 “The Creation of Adam” by Joy Ahn 34

16 “Egg” by Joy Ahn 35

17 “Daydream” by Jay Lee 35

20 “Death at Sunset” by Katherine Ketring 36

20 “Portrait” by Lizzy Lovell 40

“Waiting” by Cindy Niu 40

21 “Where I’m From” by Ana Orozco 41

21 “It’s Looking Back” by Luke McLendon 41

21

22





# Staff

## Teacher Sponsors

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Lauren Smith

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Head Artist: Echo Youngblood

VP: Kael McReynolds

Head Writer: Will Bao



## Artists

AG Pennisi  
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Annie Bao  
Audrey Thomas  
Izzy Kelly  
Landon Hughes  
Salem Vaughan  
Zunairah Shafi  
Jackie Lora

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Bella Thompson  
Judas Dorsett  
Mallory Lumpkin  
Reagan Stokes  
Sanea Anderson  
Sydney Seaborn  
Mason Lehmkuhl  
Grayson West  
Liz Robinson



# Photography Competition

Theme: Motion



1st Place: by Eileen Merrill

“Among Many, Known by None”



2nd Place: by Mary Lyle Riggsby  
“The Farmer”



3rd Place: by Isaiah Chung  
“The City That Never Sleeps”





# Short Story Competition

Theme: The Unknown

1st Place: by Ryo Hardy

## “The Feast”

Majdrah sat in the room of white linen and breathed quietly. She was seated on a soft cream blob of unclear dimensions. Around her the proportions of the space subtly shifted, the drooping fabric flowing with the slightest breeze. She supposed that it was some sort of tent from the way it fell. Light drifted in on every side.

A smallish trolley entered from the far side. On it was a silver platter with a few figs, herbal tea, and a roll stuffed with an unclear substance. Majdrah lifted it up and placed it on her lap, feeling suddenly hungry. The trolley bowed.

“Another moment, m’lady,” it mumbly assured her, then returned the way it came.

Majdrah ate nothing, still gazing around. She was not certain how she had gotten here and felt very uncomfortable. She put the tray on the ground, not willing to be sated by anything just yet. Her brow furrowed. This was not right.

Standing up, she was momentarily astonished at the sensation of being solely supported by her own legs. She looked down and was surprised again to be wearing unfamiliar tunic and trousers, waxy yellow, soft, and heavy in nature. Both were purposefully a bit oversized and sagged as she took her first step. With a few more strides she reached the other side of the room. Here the linen overlapped and created a little passage. She glanced back; the room was already dimming behind her. Slipping through the overlap, she was greeted by a sweet, pungent smell and solemn dimness. Before her lay a hallway of sorts, lined on all the walls with richly woven tapestries in jewel tones. They were so tall that the tops on one side reached out and touched the tops on the other side, creating a curved and warping ceiling. Beneath was a carpet.

Long, plush, and intricate in its design, it extended an unclear distance out into the horizon. Every few meters was stationed a dripping candle or two, sometimes accompanied by a small plate with a lightly nibbled cookie. Majdrah eyed these hungrily, but she doubted that they were left there for her, so she let them be.

She began her trek in whatever direction the hallway was taking her. As she walked, she touched the wall with the tips of her fingers. The material felt expensive, but bulky. It might have been inches thick and seemed to recall something ancient. Yet no dust pervaded the air, which still seemed to have a gentle breeze in it. The motion stayed consistent as Majdrah continued walking, as the carpet began to slant down, as the piles of candles became thicker and more common, and as the sweet smell got stronger. Her stomach yowled. After some time, she approached a lump of wax with many wicks that was so large that it nearly blocked the pathway. Scattered by it were more candles, some of them half sinking into it, and a few silver platters with half-eaten flatbreads and honey. Majdrah wondered if the trolley had put them there. Gingerly, she tiptoed past the dripping mound and stumbled into the chamber the hallway had been leading to.

The room was large and high ceilinged, though here again, there was no true ceiling, but merely an approximation of one: long sheets of silk interwoven to create a patchwork of skylights, which lit the room brilliantly. The unused ends reached down all the way to the floor. The warm caramel light that drifted in from the skylights bled into the mulberry strips of fabric and brought the sensation that one was being baked into a pie.





## “The Feast”

Stranger still than this is what was held within this uncanny space. All along the borders were trees: fig, pomegranate, lemon, almond, pistachio, apricot, olive, each reaching desperately for the skylights. At their feet were bushels of herbs, poking out of the gaps between the fabric. They were green as though still growing, but no soil peaked out from beneath them. In the middle of the room was an enormous fire, perhaps six feet across, upon which were placed several stones with breads baking, a selection of tasteful metal teapots, and a variety of pots and pans bubbling away with unclear contents. The whole scene was attended to by a small battalion of trollies, which bustled about in near silence. Some manned the stoves, other tipped vases of water onto the plants, a few ducked into and out of presumed pantries, bearing more ingredients, and yet more took finished dishes steamingly away to some unknown spot. The trollies seemed designed so that they could do all of these tasks quite naturally; they were jointed in key places and their movements were overall rather lithe.

Majdrah had been still for quite some time now without realizing it. Aware now, she shook her head and stepped out into the kitchenyard. It was then that she noticed the immense quantity of candles all over the floor. At their furthest, they were a few feet apart, but they bunched in some areas: around the trees, near the firepit. Looking closely, she realized the food was in fact being cooked on a massive grouping of the candles. She glanced down at her clothes, blithely hoping that they weren't flammable, and noticed that they matched the color of the candles exactly. Unnerved, she carefully trod after a trolley bearing some sort of coconut-flan-type entity, hoping it was heading somewhere outside of the kitchenyard. Her desires were granted when it ducked out between two sheets near the pistachio tree, and she mimicked it gratefully.

This room was also eerily quiet. The walls were now a thick dark knitted wool, shaped into a dome. The air was still. In the middle of the room was an incredibly long oaken table, lengthy enough to comfortably seat three dozen, with matching

chairs to boot. It was laden with innumerable platters, each with its own appeal. Majdrah's stomach turned like an engine starting. There were soups still bubbling, roasted vegetables slathered in tahini, stuffed tomatoes, verdant salads, all manner of loaves and flatbreads, platters of cut fruit, and legions of hash.

Majdrah stood and stared.

### *She daren't take a bite of the feast; it was not for her.*

As if on cue, a woman melted out of the shadows. Her appearance was similar to that of the trollies: highly jointed, slender, and refined. She was double Majdrah's height and had chestnut skin. A cape of brown burlap graced her shoulders. When she moved, the air seemed to bend to avoid her. “Well, hello,” she rasped, her diction technically perfect, yet her speech somehow incoherent, “You're a bit early. The others will be along shortly. Here, have a seat.”

She ushered Majdrah into a chair, bending frighteningly as she politely pulled it out for her. Her fingers looked like they were carved of wood. Majdrah hesitatingly sat down. The spread was as appetizing as ever. Majdrah stared at it sorrowfully. Trolleywoman made herself comfortable at the head of the table. Impatiently, she rapped her glass with a spoon, and a fleet of trollies entered, bringing what seemed to be the remainder of the food. The table saved as the dishes piled on. As the last trolley deposited its offering and skittered out, Trolleywoman whistled. Promptly, the knitted texture of the walls expanded, creating doorways through which entered others similar to Majdrah. They were garbed in the same tunic and trousers, but their faces were veiled. Each took a seat. Soon all the seats were filled.

“Now,” Trolleywoman breathed, “a good batch today. Let the feast commence!”

Everyone wordlessly began to eat. Majdrah wringed her hands beneath the table. This was still



## “The Feast”

not right. Around her, the veiled were munching ravenously, greedily grabbing whatever was nearest to them. As they grubbed, their facial covering seemed to droop further and further off of their heads. Majdrah watched, fascinated. With each mouthful, it seemed that the droop increased, dipping down like milk. When it reached their laps, their hands were caught in it, dripping in turn. The veiled convulsed in unison, their forms giving way, flowing out, falling down- until all that was left in their seats were candles, flickering quietly in the nearly empty chamber. Trolleywoman remained, the food near her untouched. She lifted the candle nearest to her and inspected it, then inhaled its heat blissfully. She turned to Majdrah.

*“It’s always interesting when one gets through,”*

she mused, then whipped her robe around Majdrah, obscuring her in complete darkness. For a moment, Majdrah didn’t dare to move. Then she sensed the space opening around her and started to walk. She walked until she reached a wall, light burlap against her fingers, and she followed it. She hoped that this room wasn’t round. After a while, the burlap changed beneath her palm. It was subtle. It became rougher, more textured, more irregular. Majdrah was concerned, but could not afford to lose her guide, so when she began to get splinters, she gritted her teeth and

sullenly carried on. A dim sliver of light appeared in front of her, brightening as she went along. It revealed two infinitely tall sides to the hallway, receding so far up that it was impossible to tell if there was a ceiling. Majdrah reached out and touched the other side. It was the same consistency of the first side, now almost barklike. The sliver of light was widening in the distance. Majdrah’s breath caught. She started to run. With each step the wall got more wooden, the air turned fresher. Majdrah stared down at her feet. The ground was now soil, bits of grass starting to push out. She watched as it increased in frequency until she was running through a true meadow.

Then the whole world opened up and there were trees and sky and clouds and Majdrah breathed and breathed and breathed. She was really hungry now. An apple tree beckoned her, its fruit drifting tantalizingly into her reach. Thoughtlessly, she grabbed it. Thoughtlessly, she took a bite.



2nd Place: by Alexia Roath

# “Beneath the Depths”

I held onto you as the wood beneath rocked. The rain collided with my face; I could not see. Still, I tried to look up at you. I thought to myself if this was all we would ever accomplish. Your hand tightened around my arms as we both slumped onto the slick floor. Thunder roared above us and bright lightning lit up the night sky. Waves crashed onto the side ship, icy water coating us. I gasp for air while you look for a solution, a way for us to survive. The crew wails for their mothers; they pace for their fathers. Still, I was fixated on you. I thought of all the things we had done, the expeditions we had taken. I remembered your smile on the sandy beach, holding the gold from the chest out to me, cheering, “We made our dream come true.”

That was only hours before. We shared our victory over salted beef and dried beans with ale to wash it down with the rest of the corps. Some of us played dice while others listen to the fiddle and danced in circles drunkenly. The soft candlelight illuminated the deck, the chest hid in the shadows. We didn't mind the rain at first; in fact, we revelled in it. It was the first rainfall we had experienced since the beginning of the excursion. Our celebration quickly came to an end when a crewman ran out from below deck howling that there was a hole in the keel. Rushing to the spectacle, salty water covered my feet, rapidly chasing to my knees. I stared in horror, is this how I die? I felt a hand grasp my elbow; when I turned around, I saw you, concern spreading across your face. I understood you without you needing to say a word, I always have. You treaded toward the door; I followed behind you. As we reached the steps, the ship sunk on one side. I stumbled as you held onto me, I gripped your hand for stability. We climbed up the stairs, attempting to keep our balance. We arrived at the top deck to witness the disarray of the crew. The sky had turned violent as winds blew ferociously. My foot slipped on the sleek wood, but you held

my hand; I felt safe when you did. The ship tilted farther into the water, I watched crewmen lose their footing and slide down to the railing. My ears began to ring as I scanned the scene unfold in front of me. You squeezed my hand and through my drenched hair, I gazed up at you. We dashed across the deck toward a rope we could hold on to. As we ran, a crash sounded and I felt the ship creak, as if something were wrapping around it. I couldn't bear to look; I was too afraid to look anywhere but the deck and you.

And there we sat, on the sodden floorboards. My eyes clouded over, my breath hitched, my mind raced. You sat behind me, holding me close. Before me, the crew, the men I had worked and lived with for years, fell into the darkened, vicious waters. The storm above us heightened, the ship beneath us creaked. I closed my eyes, begging myself to take my mind elsewhere. Your smile flashed in my mind; a crash echoed throughout the atmosphere; I heard wood fall onto the deck. My eyes clasped shut, as much as they could, anything to not face the terror around me.

***I felt water creep up to my ankles; I knew that the ocean was close.***

I knew that what I feared most was inescapable. I opened my eyes. Everything around me was gone. The sails slanted to the side, the deck had gone underwater, we now sat in frigid water. I turned and stared at you, your grip on me loosened. I noticed your face soften; you too knew what was to become of us. I stood up and held out my hand, you took it and stood with me, your thumb grazing my knuckles. The clouds above us raged, the moon attempted to shine through. Lighting crashed down next to us yet I could only

## “Beneath the Depths”

focus on you. A faint smile crossed your face, a smile filled with sorrow. My heart broke as I tried to smile with you.

Water now reached to our waist. We began to tread water, our hands loosening, then separating. I stayed fixated on you, I didn't want to lose my sight on you. Soon my neck was engulfed in the water. I watched your mouth open, but I couldn't hear, my ears were flooded with the salt. You dived below the dark, I tried to follow you. I drew in a breath and plunged my head below the surface. I squinted my eyes in the water, fighting back the sting of the salt. I saw your shadow sink farther into the deep. You grabbed onto my foot, but you were being dragged into the depths. I reached out to you, yet I was too late. Next to what once was our ship, a darkened figure floated, it was resemblant of a terror. A terror I hoped I would never see.

As I stared at it, I felt something wrap around my ankle. I could not move, the fear had taken control of me. It began dragging me in to water. I stared up at the surface, I begged for this to all be a dream, one that I would wake up from and express to you. The last thing I saw was the surface getting farther and farther from my reach. My lungs ran out of air and my eyes pressed shut.



3rd Place: by Willow Hyppolite

# “Hidden in the Woods”

*“Don’t you dare talk to me like that again.”*

It was the same old story every other day. Mosmot was sick of her family, and her family was even more sick of her. They told her that she could tell them anything, but when she did, whatever it was that she told them was wrong. Not in a feel-bad way, but they always thought it was unreasonable. Not only that, but her brother, Parfait, could get away with anything, and got whatever he wanted. So, Mosmot came up with a plan. She was going to run away into the woods.

In the dead of night, Mosmot filled a sack with fruits and water. She also packed a journal which held many tips on how to survive in the woods. She then wrote a note saying she ran into the middle of the town and left it on the table. With hesitation, Mosmot snuck outside and started to walk away. As she started to walk away, she realized that though it may be dangerous, she was free. Her adventurous spirit could wander to wherever she liked, and nobody would get in her way. Unless someone saw her. Which reminded her that maybe she should start running. So, she ran.

After about five minutes of running, Mosmot made it to the woods. But these woods were different, they were forbidden. It’s rumored that whoever enters the woods never returns. After all, it was named The Phantom Woods. But there were absolutely zero reports on people hearing or there being any sightings of any bears or coyotes, Mosmot was very curious on why people claimed it was so dangerous. Without looking back, she passed the wooden do-not-enter sign and proceeded into the woods.

After lighting a stick on fire, Mosmot looked around at what the woods had to offer. There were trees with pink flowers, red mushrooms she knew

to be non-toxic, wildflowers that were pink, white, and vibrant red. As she was walking, a colorful moth flew in front of her. It landed on a nearby tree, which grew plump apples, though some had holes from caterpillars. She put a few that didn’t have holes in her sack and tried deeper into the woods.

Later, as Mosmot was walking down a path of wildflowers petals, she heard weeping coming up ahead. Then, everything went silent and cold. Her fire went out. She could no longer see. She felt gusts of wind, which soon evolved into winds so strong that they physically pushed her around. But these winds felt strange, as it didn’t feel as though they were going around her, but rather through her. That is when she heard someone behind her ask, “What are you doing in these woods? Are you not afraid to die? Or were you sent here by someone to take what I have?” Then, Mosmot fell to the ground in an instant and banged her head on a sizable stone. She immediately was unconscious.

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Feeling a bit lightheaded, Mosmot woke up. She heard the sounds of birds chirping and the wind blowing through the trees. It was daytime, and very bright at that. She watched as maple leaves drifted through the air when she noticed she was in some sort of tent-shaped hut made of tree branches. There was a blanket made up of vines and moss covering her. Then she heard humming and singing.

“... My love, I’d do anything for you. If you’re sad, I’d be there for you. And if you’re in danger, I’d protect... Oh... you’re up! Excuse me, my name is Blugho.”

Mosmot couldn’t believe it. There was a ghost right in front of her. It was talking to her. It was walking towards her.

“Oh my god, I must be insane.”

## “Hidden in the Woods”

“But you’re not.”

“Oh god... am I dying?”

“No, and I am not going to kill you. I am actually going to protect you, make sure you don’t die.”

“Oh... ok... well, my name’s Mosmot.”

“Well hello Mosmot. I hope you like it here. I spend my time making sure these woods are healthy. Oh, and I’m sorry about earlier. I’m not used to any visitors. I’m used to people seeing me as a threat, and I’m scared that one day they’ll burn these woods, which is all I have left.”

That explains why this ghost, Blugho, instantly put out Mosmot’s fire and attacked her. It didn’t take long for Mosmot to remember all the do-not-enter signs, and then the name of the woods.

“Wait... are you why it’s called “Phantom Woods?”

“Yes. And the reason why people want nobody to come here is because the last time people came here, it was this group of three people who were of old age. I was tending to this tree when I saw them, and they saw me. Immediately, at the sight of me, all three of them died of shock. Trust me, I didn’t want them to die, I instantly ran over to try and save them, but I only made things worse. After their death, I wanted to bury them in the most beautiful part of these woods, and I even placed flowers over where I buried them. Regardless, their families weren’t too happy when they didn’t return. After that day, the head of the town forbade everyone from entering, warning everyone that if they did, they will die. The thing is, they know about me, so some time during the night, one of their head members came into the woods and told me that if I ever left or someone died because of me, they would burn these woods, and any woods that I would be found in. Or really anywhere I would be found would be set on fire.

Then, Blugho started to cry.

“Just when I thought I got rid of my curse,” Blugho said quietly, before running away, non-tangible tears falling from her face.

“Wait!” Mosmot began to run after her, followed Blugho, desperately wishing to catch up. She knew her life hadn’t been so positive, but she’s never been

“cursed” before. And she wanted to know what the curse was. Besides, she wanted to do whatever she could to help. She’s been there for her friends so many times before and couldn’t bare to let someone down. Mosmot started to pick up speed, but so did Blugho. Blugho had an advantage, as she was a ghost and couldn’t trip on any obstacles, whereas Mosmot could. Finally, she finally caught up to her.

She was in a very well-maintained part of the woods. She saw pots carved out of logs and clay. There were many bushes of primroses and peonies. There were clay benches and birdbaths and a small pond off to the side. And there was this tall stone wall that was painted with paints made from scratch, seen dried up on a thick leaf she assumed was used as a paint palette. The wall was painted to look like the back of a house.

Mosmot found Blugho crying with a sheet of paper in her hand, which she dropped as she ran to one of the benches. Mosmot ran and picked up the sheet of paper. It was a short song. It read:

“Because I Love You

From the day I saw you, how could I not care  
I walk over to you standing there  
You look to me, wondering why  
I cared so much as to stop by

Later when we know each other  
We have a house we built together  
And a beautiful garden made with care  
And a beautiful life that which we share

My love, I’d do anything for you  
If you’re sad I’d be there for you

And if you’re in danger, I’d protect you  
Because, my love, I love you.”

Mosmot remembered the last part from when she woke up. She found it to be very meaningful, but she couldn’t help but remember Blugho. Quickly, she ran over to the bench on which she sat.

“I know it’s a stupid little song,” Blugho said, “you



## "Hidden in the Woods"

wouldn't really understand. To you it's probably just another dumb song about being in love."

"No. I actually like it. Hey what was the curse you said you thought you got rid of?"

"Oh... that. You wouldn't get it.

"But I want to help."

"You can't."

"Then I want to listen."

Blugh hesitated. Then, she told her the story of what happened.

"My curse... is that everything I touch gets destroyed.

Mosmot looked at her, puzzled.

"I fell in love with this one guy, and we got along really well. Before we knew it, we got married. Then there were these men who I think wanted me dead because they really did not like me. One day, while me and my husband were outside in the garden, I was shot by a dart and got poisoned by this chemical. Everything and everyone I touched would be destroyed/die right in front of me. But I had to touch it for a full minute for it to work. Gradually as days passed by, the wood in our house started to rot. The flowers in the garden started to wilt. I refrained from being near my husband, and it felt like torture because I knew that if he died it would be my fault. So, one day, in the middle the night, I called my husband out into the garden. I had a lit match in her hand. When my husband came outside, he thought the match was so that I could see. But as he got closer to me, he noticed that the smell of gasoline got stronger and stronger. When he came to me, he was asking me what was going on and was overall very confused. That was when I put my hand on the side of his face and said, "love you, but if I'm here any longer, I'll poison you." It was when I dropped the match onto the edge of her skirt when he realized I was covered head to toe in gasoline, except for the hand I touched the side of his face with, because I didn't want to burn him. He watched as I was engulfed by flames, and said his final goodbye to me with tears in his eyes. To save him, I had to sacrifice myself."

Mosmot looked at Blugh, tears in her eyes, and

reassured her that the sacrifice she made was very selfless of her, and that those men should have never poisoned her like that.

"Wow, I didn't think you would understand. I thought you would think that there is something wrong with me. Why are you so caring towards me?"

***"Because I would never let someone like you think that they have no impact when they do,"***

Mosmot said. "You may not see it, but you're genuinely caring. And I just know that your husband misses you so much. And you are one of the best people I have ever met, even though you're a ghost."

Blugh looked at Mosmot, a smile growing on her face.

"Thank you," she said, as they watched the birds fly overhead.~

# Poetry Competition

Theme: Rebirth

1st Place: by Kara Funderburk

## “You Spoke, and I Became Smoke”

### I. The Poison

I hope you choke on my name.  
I wonder if you ever say my name without spitting,  
if it ever leaves your mouth without venom laced between your teeth.  
You speak of me like I was carved from rot,  
like my ribs were built to house your hatred,  
like my silence is an altar where you kneel  
just to set me on fire again.  
I have heard the way you speak of me in rooms I'll never enter.  
I have felt your words like hands around my throat,  
pressing, pressing, pressing—  
until I forget how to breathe without inhaling the smoke of myself.  
You rewrite my name in the mouths of strangers,  
twist my shadow into something ugly,  
drag my reflection through the dirt  
until even I start to see it through your eyes.  
And maybe that was your intention all along.  
Maybe you wanted me to look in the mirror  
and flinch.

### II. The Ruin

There was a time when I thought words were just wind—  
harmless, weightless, unable to touch me.  
But your voice is a hurricane,  
and I have spent too many nights trying to stand upright in its wake.  
You do not strike with fists,  
but you have bruised me just the same.  
You do not wield knives,  
but I have bled beneath the sharpness of your tongue.  
And I wonder—  
when you speak of me, do you say it with a smile?  
Do you laugh as you carve another wound into my skin?





## “You Spoke, and I Became Smoke”



Does it feel good to watch me sink beneath the weight of you?  
You name me villain in stories  
where you were the one holding the blade.  
You tear apart my seams  
then tell the world I came undone on my own.  
I watch the walls close in,  
watch the shadows whisper,

watch the faces turn away  
because your voice is louder than mine,  
because the truth was never as pretty as the lies you told.

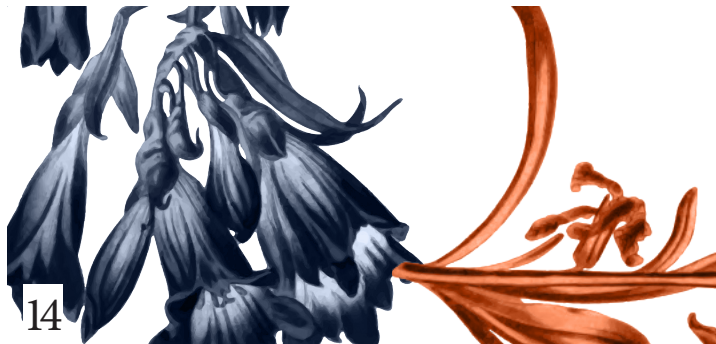
### III. The Rebirth

But I have learned this—  
even after the fire, the earth still remembers how to bloom.  
Even after the wreckage, something in me still stands.  
You wanted me to believe I was nothing but ash,  
but even ash makes the soil richer.  
Even ruins have echoes.  
I wake up, and I no longer check for your words in the air.  
I no longer pull apart my skin  
searching for the places you tried to burrow inside me.  
Your voice, once a hurricane, is now just wind.  
Your name, once a weight, is now just a whisper.  
And I do not hate you.  
Not the way you wanted me to.  
Not the way you taught me to hate myself.  
I only hope that one day,  
when you are alone in the silence you created,  
you realize—  
it was never me you were trying to destroy.  
It was yourself.  
And I hope you choke on my name.

## 2nd Place: by JJ Adesemoye

# “Yet We Rise”

Yet We Rise  
The caged bird sings its sweet song  
You weren't there to sing along  
Yet We Rise  
You called me by my old name  
But I'm born again, I'm not the same  
Yet We Rise  
You stamped your foot down on my neck  
You made my life a train wreck  
Yet We Rise  
I am but a form made from clay  
I was potted once again, to your dismay  
Yet We Rise  
I had to die that death to live this life  
Birthed anew for my father's wife  
Yet We Rise  
Beat me down to bone and blood  
Though we're all sculpted from the same earth and  
mud  
Yet We Rise  
Told me that I was Hell's child  
Who was I then if not ruined and defiled  
Yet We Rise  
You kept reminding me who I was back then  
Because of you, only tears spill from my pen.  
Yet We Rise  
Death knocked on my door and I let it in  
My old self rotting in a coffin  
Yet We Rise  
Too harsh, too dark, too awake  
When I died, everything was yours to take  
Yet We Rise  
You called me by my old name  
But I'm born again, I'm not the same  
Yet We Rise.



## 3rd Place: Bella Grace Kimbrell

# “Anew”

O, my soul, I see you standing there,  
The burden of barrenness too heavy to  
bear.  
Like a tree in the wind on a winter morn,  
I know the frigidness has pierced you; I see  
the wretched thorn.

Spring is 'round the corner; I know it will  
arrive well,  
The beginning of blossoms, the chime of  
the church bell.  
The bride knows her groom is coming, that  
winter is far gone;  
With shouts of joy, she will wake the dawn.

Feel the pain of the thorn piercing your  
side;  
Let spring remind you, my soul, the ache  
will come to die.  
Arise, O fruit; arise, O flower—  
Let spring remind you, my soul, of a Great-  
er Power.

Spring is 'round the corner, rejoice!  
Open your heart for more and make a  
choice:  
To love and to learn, to see the beauty of  
the season,  
As the earth unfolds before you —let its  
song be your reason.

Anew is the heart; anew shall it stay.  
Joy is here in the bright light of today!  
There is a breath of Life to be found in the  
air—  
O, my soul, I see you standing there.





# Staff Submissions

## “I Wish” by Bella Collins

I wish my memory to fade  
as if I'm waking from a dream.

To know I've lived a life,  
a life that can't be seen.

It'd be a gift, you see,  
to finally lose my mind.

The sorrows that've been  
plaguing me, I could  
leave them all behind.

I'd be free as a bird  
who just got the  
courage to fly,

My faith soaring to  
the heavens, a million  
miles high.

This world would pass  
away for me, we both  
know this is true.

And then I could  
spend the rest of  
my life loving  
everything with you.



## “Lavender Spindrift” by Amanda Nguyen

## “Highway to the Sky” by Mallory Lumpkin



## “Object in Orbit” by Sydnee Seaborn

I am like the moon  
In all her precious beauty  
I wane and I wax  
My phases are as consistent as they are long  
And I am not reliable  
Some days you see me appear in broad daylight  
Other times  
It is only at night when my presence may grace you  
I am like the Moon  
In all my ugly  
My craters will catch you afoot and drag you down  
My roundness may fool you from below  
But up close make no mistake  
I am oblong and quixotic  
A plethora of confusion wrapped in stars  
I am like the moon  
Forever just an object in orbit



# “Heroes and Villains”

by Reagan Stokes

A pair of dark eyes stared through a window into a busy bank. Under those dark eyes was a large nose, it looked like it had been broken before, maybe many times before. Under that large nose was a tangled beard, and far above that beard was a deep brown and messy mop of just as tangled hair. It was a face, a hairy and bruised face. In the dark it might seem scary, to most though, it was the face of a kind man. But not tonight, tonight that usually kind face was scrunched in concentration and paranoia and covered in two masks. The first mask was simply black cloth tied around his head to cover his mouth and nose. The second mask was an old hockey mask, repurposed and painted to have purple eyes on it, the hockey mask completely covered the usually kind face. That usually kind face and tangled hair belonged to the vigilante known as Gateway. Gateway wore a mahogany-colored trench coat with several resown patches, a black turtleneck underneath that coat, chipped old boots, leather black gloves, and dirt-stained jeans. It was a raggedy and dirty costume, but it protected his identity and had seen him through several fights. One of those fights occurred just an hour ago, and he left that fight with the information of a planned bank robbery, and now he was stalking the bank, crouched on a ledge where he could spy through a window. Anyone passing by would wonder how he climbed up to that ledge, he did not climb to get onto that ledge.

Gateway stared through the window, the bank was surprisingly crowded. Many men talked on their cellphones. A woman soothed her young son who was crying. A blond bank clerk looked like she was half asleep behind the glass. Gateway wondered if the unknown robber had changed his mind, maybe he heard that he got ratted out, or maybe he wanted to wait for a less busy day. Suddenly, Gateway spotted a suspicious figure. A man sauntered into the bank, he had light brown hair that swooped up, and he wore a sports jacket. Gateway studied the man, he had an aura of con-

fidence, he was the only person in the bank who looked excited to be there, and that sports jacket was a really bright red. The man's head swiveled around, looking all over the room, his right hand was up and snapping to a nonexistent beat, his other hand stayed clutched to his sports jacket. Gateway looked at the sports jacket again, the man's hand was on the jacket like he was trying to cover up his waist...or cover up something attached to his waist. The man was about to reach the front where the blond lady was working, Gateway moved his hand up to his ear, and concentrated. A rip. A hole. A hole in the air. In space. A portal was opened up by Gateway. One side was by his ear, and the other was hidden under the desk, right within earshot of the suspicious man and tired woman's conversation. He could hear the man speaking first.

“Kier Manchester is my name”

The woman looked down and typed into her computer, she looked up at him with sleepy confusion.

“I don't see anybody by that name in here”.

“Maybe you spelled it wrong. Try again”

Gateway's eyes were focused on the woman as she redid her search in the computer, he looked back at Kier at the same time as her. He saw the gun in Kier's hand at the same time as her. The woman no longer looked tired. Gateway tensed, ready to open a portal, but didn't yet. He watched to see Kier's next move.

“Don't scream. Don't panic. Don't press any buttons. I've got a different name for you. You're gonna transfer as much as you can into that account. Do you understand me?”

The woman nodded in quiet terror and shakily typed as Kier spelled out a new name. He specified a new account that was only made a few days earlier. The woman started to transfer money, and Kier tucked the gun back in his pocket, he started to turn around, but stopped to threaten her one more time.

“If you do anything besides what I've told you to

## “Heroes and Villains”

do, I won't hesitate to put a bullet through your head.” The woman nodded and Kier walked over to the door to the bank. He pulled back out his gun and shot one bullet into the ceiling. There was screams and gasps. Kier yelled over the commotion.

“Quiet down now! I said quiet!”

The crowd slowly quieted down, even the young boy got the message.

“Fantastic! Quickest crowd to get silent yet! Congrats.”

Kier surveyed the crowd and pointed his gun at several men.

“You boys! Come forward. Everyone else sit against the far walls and stay quiet.” The men he selected warily stepped forward as everyone else followed the instructions.

“Now, you guys are gonna go through, take anything that isn't bolted down, and barricade the front door. If you refuse or sabotage...”

Kier walked over to the mother, and snatched up her son by his shirt.

“...I'll kill the boy.”

The mother begged. The boy cried. The men got to work. Kier through the boy onto the floor and pinned him down by putting his foot on his back. He kept the gun pointed at the boy as he surveyed the work.

Gateway opened a portal under his feet and dropped down into the corner of the bank. He opened another portal and pulled a rock from it. He launched it at Kier and it slammed into the back of the criminals head. Kier looked back, his body rotated slightly, his aim was off. Gateway opened a portal under the boy and closed it just quick enough so the boy went through and Kier's foot landed on empty ground.

“Who did that! WHO DID THAT?” Kier screamed at the terrified crowd. “Hey. Over here.”

Kier whirled around to the corner of the bank. Gateway stood there. Menacingly. “And who are you supposed to be? Batman?”

“Nah, just a guy who can show up long before the police, and deal with demons like you”


Kier didn't try to hide his rage, he lifted up his gun and fired a shot at Gateway. Gateway opened

a portal the size of his body and the bullet went through it, the shot landed somewhere in Antarctica. Gateway opened a second body sized portal behind himself and turned into it. He stepped out behind Kier and jumped into action. Gateway wrapped his left arm around Kier's neck, and hooked his other under Kier's gun-arm. He pulled Kier's arm back, trying to force him to drop the gun. Kier's free arm punched at Gateway's face, and his feet kicked at Gateway's legs. A good punch loosened Gateway's grip just enough, Kier slipped his head free and tried to sidestep away. Gateway held onto his arm, but with Kier's new position, the gun was barely an inch away from being aimed at Gateway's face. Both of Gateway's hands grabbed onto Kier's arm to keep it away from his face. Kier struggled as Gateway beat his arm, Kier slipped free right as Gateway got a good hit on his wrist, and made him drop the pistol. Kier stumbled a few feet away, and Gateway stood over the fallen weapon. They eyed each other in a western style standoff for a few seconds, then they both sprung into action. Kier dived for the gun but Gateway kicked in away, he tried to stomp on Kier but the criminal rolled away and sprung back to his feet. Kier charged forward and punched Gateway in the face, he reeled from the hit, but quickly regained his balance to strike back. Kier ducked under the punch and jabbed at Gateway's stomach. Gateway backed away and opened a small portal next to him, he punched his fist through it and the fist came out the other portal right next to Kier's face, the fist struck him hard in his ear. “OW! You freak! How are you doing that?” Gateway didn't grace Kier with an explanation, he just took advantage to his enemy's weakness. He jumped up to close the distance, and shoved the criminal in the chest. Now that Kier was off balance, Gateway tripped him and opened a portal underneath him. Kier fell through and exited the portal fifteen feet in the air. He crashed hard onto the floor. Gateway ran to where Kier lay, and kicked him in the ribs. Kier grabbed wildly and latched onto Gateway's leg, yanking hard and making him fall. Gateway hit the ground and Kier launched at him, wrapping his bare hands around





## “Heroes and Villains”



the vigilante's throat, choking him. Gateway opened a portal underneath them, making them both fall through. Gateway threw his hands over his head to protect it as they fell sideways through a vertical standing portal, and slammed into the bank's front counter. Kier's head banged against the tough edge of it, and his hands came free. Gateway kicked away and gasped for air as Kier struggled to rise up, using the bloodied counter as a crutch. They both paused to catch their breath, waiting for the other to make the first move. Suddenly, a bang came from the barricaded doors, and the combatants finally registered the police sirens that had been going off for the past half a minute. A police voice projected through a megaphone, screaming commands and questions, Kier was distracted trying to listen, and Gateway made his move. He jumped on top of Kier, and started punching at Kier's face with all of his strength, trying to knock him out, or at least stun him until the police were able to break down the doors. Kier kicked Gateway in the stomach and punched him in the face. Gateway slammed Kier against the counter and hit him with a powerful right hook. Kier sucker punched him in the throat, and pushed him away. Kier stood up and leaped, landing squarely on Gateway's chest, completely knocking the air out of him. Kier jumped off of him and scrambled to find the gun. Gateway struggled to get up as he gasped for air. Then, he heard the click of a gun reloading, Gateway snatched his head up and looked for where the sound came from. Kier stood across the room, gun in hand, aiming at him. Gateway tried to muster up the energy for a portal, to catch the bullet or maybe cut the gun in two, but the ringing pain kept him from concentrating. Gateway dived to the side as Kier let off his first shot, the glass barrier above the counter shattered, the banging on the doors sped up as the barricade began to collapse. Kier fired off another shot and Gateway rolled to the side to dodge, his roll was interrupted by the wall, his leg slammed into it, hard. His body was twisted against the wall, he looked up as Kier took his aim. Gateway tried to get up and roll, but he was too slow. Kier's finger slipped

onto the trigger...then one of the civilians body slammed him, the bullet, uselessly, hit the ceiling. Other civilians joined the first man, and helped him hold Kier down. Gateway got up and looked at the display of bravery, they saved his life, just in the nick of time. He saw a teenage boy recording on his phone, Gateway had never been caught on video until now, he didn't have time to think about the consequences of that as the mother of the boy stepped toward him.

“Thank you sir, you stopped him, and saved my son. Who are you?”

“Gateway. I am Gateway.”

“Thank you Gateway, you're our hero.”

“...Thanks.”

The barricade fell and the doors burst open, several policemen charged in and started barking orders, the civilians moved aside for them to grab Kier. The women watched the police handcuff Kier, and when she turned back to the hero, he was gone. That night, across the town, several people unknowingly had a new era of their life begin. A sophomore boy tossed a baseball high up into the air of his room, and then created a bubble that only he could see that slowed down the time around it, making the ball fall several times slower.

A college freshman stood in her fancy house, she picked up a silver vase and concentrated hard, after several seconds, nothing happened. She felt a sudden, yet familiar, wave of hunger and weariness. She walked towards the kitchen to see what dietary meal her mom would be fixing tonight. Out of sight, the vase slowly turned from silver to gold.

In a middle class house near the local university, a couple slept happily, unbeknownst to them, they were going to wake up with very strange powers. In a cave just outside the town, a Witch brushed their hair out of their face as they read future telling cards, they read very badly. The next morning, an era of chaos would envelop their town.

THE END.





## “Romy” by Kael McReynolds



## “Dearest” by Judas Dorsett

On a sunny winter morning,  
You made me smile  
Sitting on a park bench.  
And I opened my eyes.  
Touching the hand of God,  
The spirit of friendship .  
I gently kiss her lips.  
I wade in eternity  
To feel a moment like this.



## “Stroll Among the Wildflowers” by Audrey Thomas



## “March 17th” by Janae Merrill

March 17th  
Her birthday  
It's been years  
but I still remember her face  
Freckles  
Dirty blonde hair  
Green and blue eyes  
All smiles  
I can never forget her  
Thought we will likely never meet again  
She's always there  
A handprint on my heart

## “Lemonade” by Mason Lehmkuhl

Lovely, squeezed lemons on  
Eternal sunny days  
Morning saturation to afternoon breezes,  
Overpowering sweetness,  
Nothing changed about how you slice it,  
And the slice is for accessory,  
Decoration makes sugar, water, and lemons  
Endearing and an all-time classic



# “The Blue Below”

by Grayson West

I descend the basalt slope down into the ravine. The moss and grime, which coats every surface, makes traversal all the more difficult. The tide should not return for another hour, allowing me time for details. I begin to walk along the sunken ravine, slipping on green-stained rocks as I try to avoid the sea life which still scuttles on the drying sand. As I walk farther and deeper into the ravine, I see the far wall in the distance. There is a light there. A blue glow emanating from a gash in the stone. I hasten my approach, curious and excited to see what could be lurking in the deepest part of this undersea crevice.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I near my objective, the slime on the rocks becomes more slippery, so I look down to glean a cause. The moss has turned to an iridescent ooze that coats each surface like a single layer of wet paint on canvas. I swipe my finger across one rock and the slime sticks to me. It is a biting cold.

I scrub my hand on my trousers, praying to never feel that grime on my skin again. I trudge on, avoiding the iridescence at all costs.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have been staring down for so long that I did not notice the gaping wound in the rock right in front of me. The blue glow is stronger now, pulsating between radiant brightness and dim blandness. I approach the maw before me, lighting my only flare. There seems to be a turn in the tunnel, preventing me from seeing the exact source of the brilliance. Twenty minutes left. I will have to be quick during my retreat to land. I force myself into the chamber of blue. I cannot turn back so close to this mystery before me. I look to the walls and ceiling of my new environment, and I am reminded to be swift. Every inch of stone is made silky by the iridescent ichor. I walk deeper into the tunnel, not a far distance, but enough of one to make me more nervous than

before. I am at the bend, and I forget my anxiety for a moment as I round the corner. But only for a moment.

\*\*\*\*

I run screeching from the gash in the ocean floor. Three minutes before the tide returns. Three minutes to get away from here forever, lest I be devoured by this evil. I sprint over and between the rocks, cutting myself as I fall on every other stone. I do not care. All else is secondary to my immediate escape. I run and I run, slipping in the sand. There is no end to this chasm of death. No way out of this evil ravine from beneath the waves.

\*\*\*

It's everywhere and it's cold. It's killing me. It's a poison. It's latched onto me with every slip on the rocks. I can't die like this. I can't go covered in this. No. I won't. I must get out, I must. I will not let this icy evil be the last thing I feel. I see the slope ahead. I can make it. I will.

\*\*

I'm there. I clamber and I climb, desperate to reach the top of the slippery stairs. They're stairs.

I claw at the sand and the mossy rocks, and I hear the tide coming in. I cannot be trapped here. I will not be trapped here. I will not be swallowed by the depths. I won't.

\*

I'm out. I made it. I feel all of the cuts and bruises all at once. My exhaustion hits me like the tide that is now filling the ravine. I'll burn my clothes and burn that iridescence. No one will know of its existence. Never will I come back here. Never will anyone hear of this place. Never will anyone meet the unspeakable horror which I encountered today. I swear all this as I stand here, looking down on the ravine as it fills with the endless torrent of the ocean.



# “Morning Routine”

by JD Higginbotham

I was stirring my coffee one Saturday morning, a year or two back, when the apocalypse began. Now, I was none the wiser, since I live in Springfield, Oregon and this all began in an Argentinian cave with a bunch of crazy monks, a cult ritual, and a poorly trained percussionist.

Where was I? Oh yes, the apocalypse.

It really wasn't a particularly big deal to me. I was much more concerned with the sugar in my coffee, and if you had told me that the entire political and economic state of the world would be overturned, I really wouldn't have cared.

I did feel a sudden overwhelming sense of dread and panic, but I attributed this mostly to the rehearsal I had in a few hours with a truly dreadful director. Thankfully, he went quickly after the world did. Come to think of it, this has been a very solid few years for me. I lost my job, my sanity, my friends, and my family all at once, so nothing can keep me from sitting around all day and doing little of anything—which is truly all I ask. The only part of the apocalypse I can't quite get behind is the creatures of unimaginable horror, strength, and size that prowl outside, constantly hungry for another taste of the species they've nearly left extinct. They get on my last nerve. When they got my uncle Robert and that squeaky voiced correspondent on the evening news, I was rather pleased, if a little uncomfortable with the means in which they did so, but I quite liked my mailman, and he didn't deserve the mauling he received. I now live each day by and large the same, save a lower frequency of grisly attacks on a nicer day. My daily schedule is usually something like this:

At 5:00 AM, I wake up screaming. I then grow bored and stand up from my heap of torn blankets, soft towels, and dirty clothes.

Today is going to be a good day.

I look in the dingy mirror at my sunken face. My long, mangy, knotted hair, splotted with grey, partially covers my face, patchy with stubble.

As I dress myself in my least tattered clothing, I

stare at the sticky notes attached to my mirror and read out my affirmations. “I will work to be the best version of me!” I say with passion, “I can!” I read with vigor, “I will not be torn to shreds by a vicious creature of unknowable origin!” With these affirmations, I manifest my fate into the world and give myself personal power.

I realize my hunger and quietly creep down to the ‘kitchen.’ I can't really call it a kitchen in good conscience, since a more apt name would be ‘the small corner of the warehouse I'm holed up in that I scourge around in for rats, large beetles, or other haute cuisine of this hellish economy we live in these days.’ That rolls off the tongue far easier than kitchen. Depending on the day, I'll either leave having eaten a nutritious breakfast with snacks packed for my travels, or completely empty handed and starving.

I then go to The Market to see if anything of quality is on sale. The Market used to be a quaint little mom and-pop convenience store, but since Cynthia Henderson, the wonderful woman who ran the counter, was shot down in a property dispute with a man who, by pure chance, was my dental hygienist, Bob Henderson has turned The Market into a sort of black market trade. He doesn't want goods or socks (socks are America's main currency now since all logic has been thrown out, so why not pay with socks?), he instead will give you anything your heart could desire in exchange for hours in his service. An hour of militia service is worth about \$1.23 right now, but the economy is in flux, and many economists see intense inflation in the market on the horizon.

The two gangs have been fighting, without any pause, save for April Fool's Day, which is sacred to us all (since the world is very stupid now.) Since the battle almost never stops, you are expected to perform your service hours immediately and will not get your purchase until you have done so. My dental hygienist has a large gang, with fascinating social structure, service expectations, and real



## “Morning Routine”

estate polices. The stories that could be told about them would be much more interesting to read than my daily routine.

I would apologize for going off on such a tangent, but I live a very dull life, so I really have no other way to waste your time than to write about The Market.

Usually when I'm at The Market, I look for food, but it's never on sale, and I'm not in a good enough place right now to enter service for very long. Last week, I found a table that would fit very nicely in 'the small corner of the warehouse I'm holed up in that I scourge around in for rats, large beetles, or other haute cuisine of this hellish economy we live in these days.' If I see something on sale that I need, like a new bike (my last one was consumed by a living pile of lava), I report to the battlefield, turn in my service card to the foreman-my dentist who has become Bob's second in command due to workplace drama not unlike the soap operas I always auditioned for-and get to work.

The fighting is terrifying and violent, but I tend to come out generally unscathed. There was one occasion, however, where I was chased off of the battlefield by a horrifying being: made entirely of the screams one makes when someone comes up behind them and suddenly starts speaking. This creature chased me until we both fell into a dark, murky sewer.

“We need to work together to get out of here.” I said firmly, mustering up all the courage I had.

“Yeah, that seems entirely reasonable. I can hold off on attacking you for a while if it means I can get out of here safely,” it seemed to say in response, though I really couldn't be sure. I really wish I could've taken Startled Screaming I in high school, instead of French I, which is much less useful. I've met close to 12 or 13 scream beings since then and only one French 'person'; it was really a waste of a class credit.

Me and the scream being kept walking and eventually reached a small tunnel which we crawled through with some difficulty. On the other side was a cavern full of rat people, which confused me, since usually those two beings are separate. They regaled us with what I'm sure was a very interest-

ing story of how they became the way they are, but I was much too focused on what I might have for lunch to really pay attention. After a boring story that I couldn't transcribe if I really wanted to, which I really don't, so I won't, I asked politely where an exit may be. This was taken as quite an insult as the leader of the rat people, Mouse, apparently named this before his transformation, was only

halfway through his story. In the sewer based societies, manners are of the utmost importance, and so I was quickly shown the exit, which was exactly what I was hoping for, but I was also banned from The United Provinces of Rats, People, and Ratlike People, which was very unfortunate since I was going to vacation there next winter. I've heard it's nice there, so it's a real shame.

I seem to have forgotten where I was. I have a habit for telling tall tales and I can get very wrapped up in the fun. After my service, I look for any trinkets I might be able to pawn off for a sock or two ( Alright, fine, there's a better reason we use socks as currency, but it's much more fun if you put no thought into it and just accept the silliness of it all), but if I can't then I'll head to my warehouse and begin my favorite portion of the day. After a brief supper in 'the small corner of the warehouse I'm holed up in that I scourge around in for rats, large beetles, or other haute cuisine of this hellish economy we live in these days,' I sit on my bed for hours and hours. Every few minutes, I say to myself:

“Gee, Frank, you really ought to do something more with your time, there's all sorts of activities you can get up to, and there's a world of potential friends outside to meet, go on out there and live!” I think this and then plan out a new life for myself where I bloom socially, and start exercising more, and finally saving up my socks to buy a nice new warehouse. (Fine, since you keep insisting, I'll explain it, but I'm not happy about it. Right when the apocalypse began, a philosophical mind spoke into the sky seeking the answers to his burning questions, ending his breakdown by screaming:

“Why, world!? Why should the world more resemble Hell than Earth?” Taking this very personally, the soul of the world gained a voice and said in



## “Morning Routine”

response,

“Do you really feel that way?”

“Y’know what, I do! This has to be Hell, everyone is suffering and monsters roam around and torture us, I dare say I’m correct.”

“Well darn, I guess you’re right.”

“And since we’re on the topic, I’ve seen a flying pig, I’ve seen the dead come back alive, and my buddy Eric paid back his gambling debt, all of which I didn’t think could happen until Hell froze over.”

“Those do all seem quite unlikely.”

“And we agree that this is Hell?”

“Of course.”

“And we both think that those events could not occur until Hell froze over?” “Quite right.”

“So then why, by all logic, is the world not frozen?”

“Huh, I hadn’t thought about that. Maybe that’s how it ought to be.” The soul of the world then used all of its energy to send the world into a sort of neapocalyptic ice age, with snow covering the ground 14 months a year and ice covering the landscape. Because of this, everyone’s feet became very frigid, so we all started to covet socks, and

before anyone had the chance to breathe, most vendors would only accept socks.

As I sit in my bedroom, planning out a better life, I make sure to think of every last detail of my new, quaint life, before (oh I really love this part) continuing to just sit there. This rumination makes me feel even worse but it gives me temporary hope, which is all you can ask for these days. Laying down for bed, I think of how lucky I am to still be alive.

A canary with eyes for teeth and teeth for eyes claws at my window.

Nature is beautiful.



“Wipeout!”  
by Izzy Kelley

# “Father’s Problems”

by Bella Thompson

He came home from a long day of cutting wood. There was a famine over the town and he knew that dinner was going to be scarce that night. He came home and put his axe near the door. His wife and stepmother to his two kids, Kerry, greets him as she’s making dinner, which looks quite pitiful to be honest. The family has their dinner, if you can even call it that, and he sends Hansel and Gretel to their bedroom to sleep while he talks with Kerry.

“We won’t last long if we keep this up,” she said in a hushed voice, as if discussing a forbidden topic.

“I know, but what are we meant to do? To keep going is our only option in this life of ours,” he said in a tone of utter defeat. He hadn’t even considered what was going through Kerry’s mind until she began spewing forth her thoughts.

“We have to get rid of them. The kids, I mean,” she whispered to him. He looks absolutely astonished that she would even think to bring that up, let alone actually consider it as an option.

“Absolutely not! Those are our children, how can you say that? They may not be yours by blood, but they are certainly yours as much as they are mine!” He couldn’t believe what she was saying to him nor could he understand why she was trying to convince him to abandon them. His wife huffs in annoyance, seeing as he wasn’t automatically agreeing with her.

“Fine. But don’t be surprised if you come home tomorrow and they aren’t here,” Kerry said bitterly before turning her head away from him in an arrogant manner and leaving to go into their shared bedroom. He was shocked and confused. He knew that she had always harbored this strange and utter hatred for Hansel and Gretel, but he never knew that she hated them to this extent. He sighs and runs his hand over his face before following her into the bedroom to sleep, for he had

work the next day. He went to bed with a hopeful optimism that she wouldn’t follow through with her words, that she was just bluffing to try and get him on her side. Although, he struggled to ignore the one thought in the back of his brain telling him that she was being honest.

As much as he didn’t want to leave his kids with her because of the looming thought of her words being true, he had to go to work, as he was his family’s only source of income. The following day, he left for work to chop a vast number of logs for a shamefully low amount of money. He comes home, exhausted from being overworked, and is surprised to see Hansel and Gretel there, waiting for him to get home.

“Dad! Dad! You wouldn’t believe what Kerry did!” Hansel cries out to him as soon as he takes his coat off. He just sighs as he turns to his two beloved children to hear what they have to say about his wife.

“What did she do, Hansel?” He sighs a bit, hoping that they won’t say that she tried to abandon them somewhere, trying to see his wife in the best light and continue to be in blissful ignorance.

“Kerry led us into the woods today and left us there. I heard you guys talking last night and I went outside and got some rocks. I used the rocks as a trail when she led us out there and we followed them home,” Gretel said, calm as can be. He looks a bit shocked and disappointed, but on the inside, he couldn’t find himself being surprised at all. He was just disappointed that his optimistic belief in her was crushed so utterly. He sighed again, thoroughly disappointed in the woman he vowed to love eternally.

“I’ll talk to her,” he said as he walks past his children, gently patting the tops of their heads as he passes, and into his bedroom. He found Kerry sitting on their bed and facing the wall with her back turned towards him. He crosses his arms over



## “Father’s Problems”

his chest in a stern manner as he stares at his wife’s back.

“Why did you actually go through with it?” His voice is stern and he can hear his own disappointment in his words and tone. She turns her head towards him.

“You know why I did it. Honey, we barely have enough food for two people, let alone two adults and two growing kids! We’re struggling enough as it is, we can’t afford to keep them here along side us and you know it,” she said confidently, as if she doesn’t see any flaws in her own logic.

“You know that’s not the real reason you want them gone,” he said in an accusatory tone. Kerry just sighed, not wanting to admit aloud that she truly hated Hansel and Gretel to the father who helped create them.

“That’s not true at all! You know I love our children, they’re just the sweetest!” Her voice was a bit strained as she tried to compliment their kids and her smile was forced as she tried to convince him that she truly loved them. He stayed silent, not looking convinced by her obvious manipulation tactics. His wife just huffed out of frustration and turns back to face the wall.

“You have no idea what those brats put me through every day! They’re so hard to teach and they refuse to listen to me. So I thought, why don’t I show them what happens to kids who misbehave? Then they’ll want to listen to me!”

He couldn’t believe the words that were coming from her mouth. She was so much different from the woman he vowed to love forever and called his own with a big grin. He felt like he didn’t know her at all, and that all their time spent together was just some sick façade. It was then and there that he decided that he couldn’t stand her attitude towards his kids any longer. He knew that the connection between them was severed and had wilted away in that very moment.

The next day when he was walking home from work, he had a strong feeling that something wasn’t right. But as much as he wanted to run home to check on Hansel and Gretel, he was far too exhausted from chopping wood all day

and could barely muster up the strength to walk, let alone run. He got home and was just about ready to collapse when he noticed that Hansel and Gretel weren’t waiting by the door like they usually were. They usually waited for him to get home to tell him about their day, but today was different.

Suddenly, he wasn’t so tired anymore. His main priority was now Hansel and Gretel, getting proper rest didn’t even register in his mind. He rushed into their room to look for them, searching through their closets and under their beds as he called out for them. His wife stood in the doorway, watching him frantically look for his beloved children with a sickly satisfied expression.

He found himself more angry than he had ever been before, furious that she would do something so monstrous behind his back. The burning rage inside of him radiated off of him, adding to the tense environment Kerry felt as she stared at the man who was glaring at her. The arguments that ensued were loud and harsh. Words that should have remained unsaid were thrown out into the open. Accusations that should have stayed in the brain suddenly flew out their mouths.

For the first time, he found himself wanting to go to work, just to avoid being in the same area as Kerry. Before he went to bed that night, he started organizing the necessary papers he would need for a divorce. He slept on the couch that night to avoid Kerry, to avoid looking at her and remembering all the things she said about his kids.

For the next few months, he was miserable. He had gone through and divorced Kerry, and she fought hard to try and take everything from him. Hansel and Gretel had still not come home and, beginning the day that they went missing, dedicated his time after work to searching the forests nearby. He felt just about ready to give in to his growing stresses and exhaustion from overworking himself and not getting enough sleep.

One day, he was sitting at home on the couch. He felt so exhausted that he couldn’t bring himself to get back up. He was supposed to go on his regular searches in the woods, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t bring himself to face the inevitable disap-

## “Father’s Problems”

pointment he would

feel when, time after time, he wouldn’t find any trace of them and would have to return home empty handed. It was such a harrowing experience to return home with nothing but grief and sadness over the time he spent looking for them instead of taking care of himself.

He heard the faint sound of Hansel calling out for him from the woods, and suddenly he sprang up from the couch, revived by that singular sound. The thought crossed his mind that he might have been hallucinating, but he didn’t want to risk ignoring it if it was real. He rushed outside and found Hansel and Gretel running out of the forest towards him, their hands and pockets full of expensive jewelery and authentic gems. He was so utterly happy and shocked to see them that tears start to stream down his face. He welcomed them joyfully into his arms and gives them a tight hug.

Hansel and Gretel hold out the expensive jewels and gemstones and chant over and over that they’re saved and that they can be happy again. He couldn’t tell if they were referring to their crushing poverty being saved from the jewels or that they’ve returned home and can be together as a

family again. Either way, he couldn’t have been more happy to see anyone in the world. He sold all the lavish necklaces and bracelets, keeping only a handful of the gemstones for himself and his kids. With the money he made from the jewelry, they weren’t under any more financial stress and could finally be at ease.

He listened to Hansel and Gretel’s story of how they met the witch who lived in a house made of candy and she tried to eat them. He listened as they explained how they ate her house and then killed her in self defense, and how they stole her jewels and gemstones. He listened to them explain how a white duck had carried them across the river and brought them back home.

He was extremely confused about their entire story. A witch who lived in a house made of candy? She tried to eat them but they shoved her into an oven? They were brought home by a duck who carried them across a river? Honestly, he didn’t care much for how they got back; he was just happy to have them with him once again, fairytale story and all.



“Blue-Wing Teal”  
by Annie Bao



## “My Argos” by Echo Youngblood

Your memories cling to my clothes  
Like cherry blossom petals  
from a now barren tree.  
And I cant help but hesitate  
and run my fingers across them,  
breathe in their scent,  
one last time,  
before i let them fall.

Spring will come again,  
New buds will coat my life in bliss,  
But I'll let the dead branches stay,  
or craft them into something,  
maybe a wooden cane,  
So we could walk together again.  
but for now,

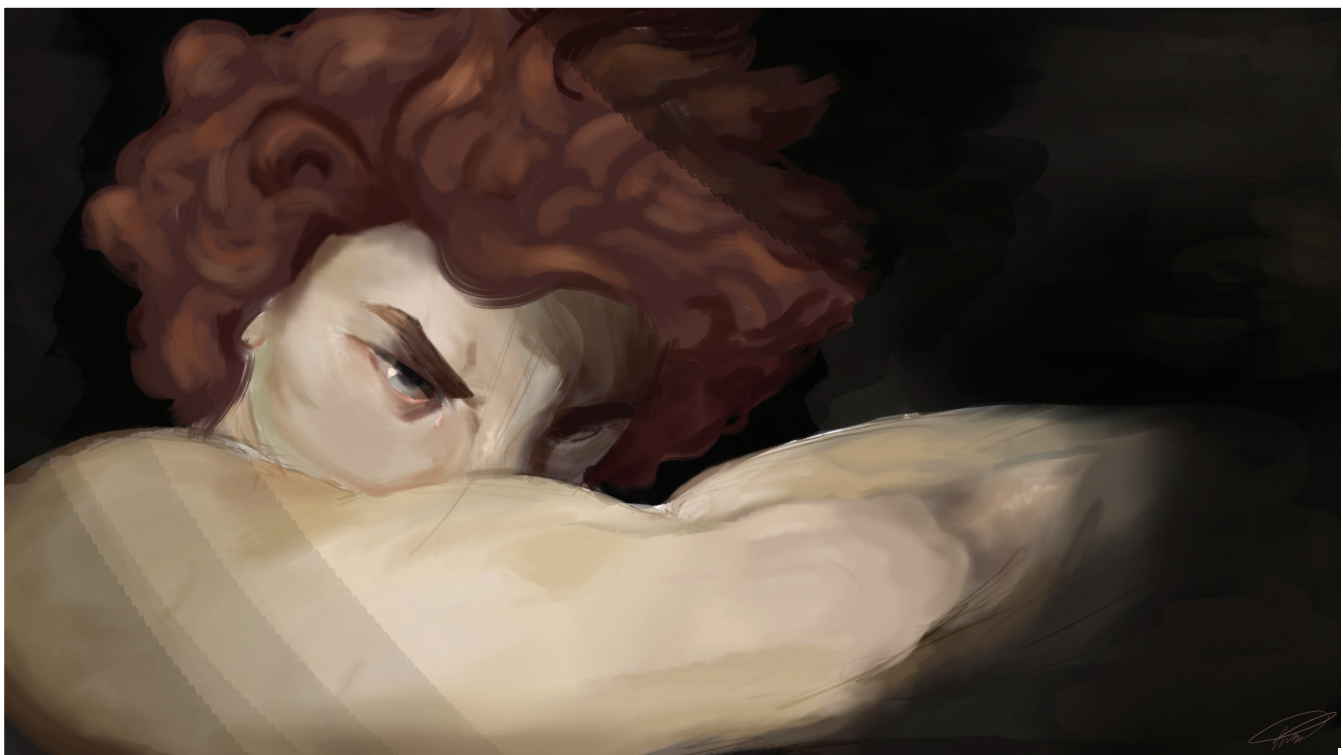
I'll let tears fall instead of flowers.

“A tribute to my best friend., whom I had to  
let go of during the process of putting this  
magazine together. I love you Jerry. Theres a  
million things I could say, but above all else, I  
am honored to have had you in my life. I will  
never forget you.

- RIP Jerry -  
May 1st 2025, One of the goodest boys in the  
whole wide world”



## “Fallen Angel Replicated” by Landon Hughes






## “Home” by Sanea Anderson

I love my birthday.  
The balloons, family, and most importantly the candles.  
The burning flames sitting on top the pink fondant And the wax  
falling off the sides  
As I inhale  
through my lungs  
i concentrate in my mind  
My wish.  
I dream of a house  
With no number against the newly painted door  
I dream of a room  
Where i come home and i clean my room And not a random  
lady every week cleaning my area  
I dream of a bathroom  
With all of my products sitting on top of the sink And not hav-  
ing to put my items in a bag under the sink  
I dream of a life  
Where I’m not lying my head where hundreds of others have  
lied And my body does not stand where hundreds have stood  
I wish  
For my home.



## “Do the Dishes” by Will Bao

“Do the Dishes”  
I asked him  
He refused  
“Make me.”

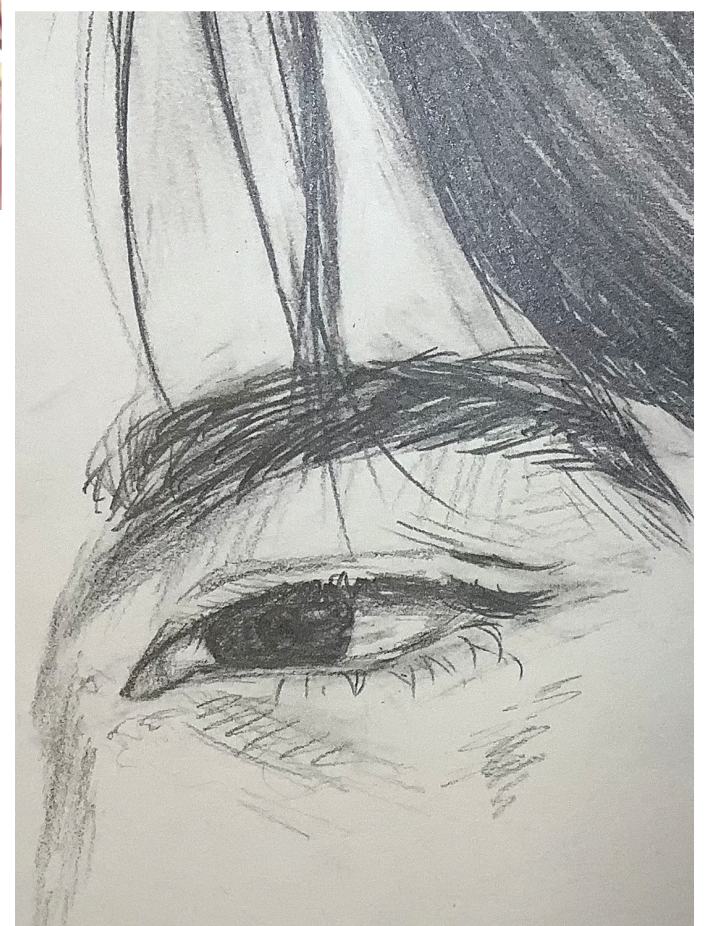


## “Revival Stroke” by Zunairah Shafi





“Mi Corazón”  
by Salem Vaughan



“St. Pete Grand Prix” by AG Pennisi



# General Submissions

## “What Brings me Joy” by Willow Hyppolite

Painting brings me joy.  
I've always loved painting.  
When I was younger,  
I painted on my dolls.  
Now, I paint for people.

I love the way paint looks  
When you are mixing it.  
The way the colors swirl  
Around and eventually mix,  
It looks so wonderful.

The scent that paint has,  
Specifically my white acrylic paint,  
Is so specific, it brings me back to  
Art club from summer after 2nd grade.  
It brings back many cheerful memories.

The feeling of wet paint on my hands,  
Eventually covering them,  
And then drying.  
It happens if I spend the night painting,  
Sign of a successful all-nighter.

I don't know how paint taste though.  
I'm shocked I haven't accidentally  
consumed wet paint before.  
Although, I know I've consumed  
a tiny amount of dried paint before.  
It's quite flavorless.

The sound of paint when  
You squeeze out the very last bit,  
Attempting not to waste  
The now scarce color.  
The sound of a paint tube's last breath.

I'm glad I taught myself how to paint.  
I love people's reactions  
When I surprise them  
With their favorite things  
As an artwork.



## “Hot Rod” by Gates Buxton





# “Can You Feel It”

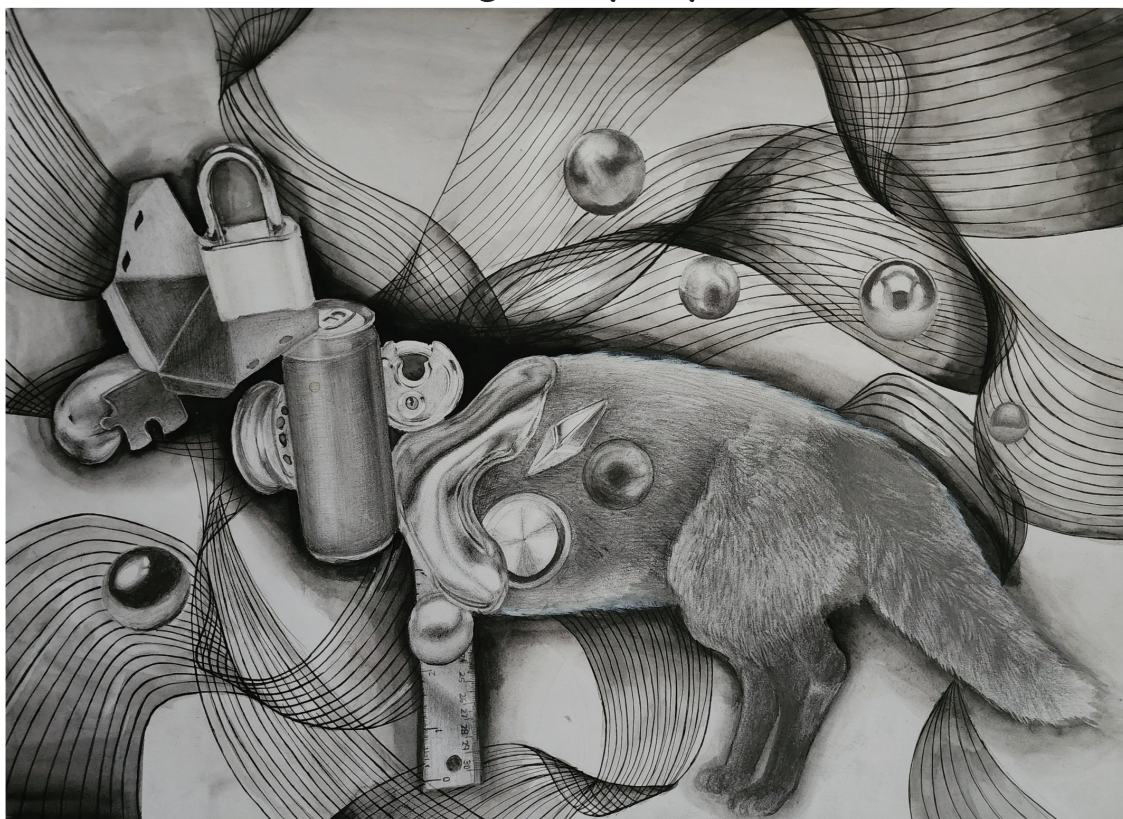
by Jun Pak

The piles of trash gave texture to the warm waters of the Arctic. On the piedmont of the towering trash-bergs, there wandered the so-called Garbage Bear. It was rumored that his polypropylene-fur was once an immaculate fluff of white, taking on the same hue and texture as what they used to call “snow.” Garbage Bear’s life was very complex: eat, sleep, hide, repeat. Though he found feasting on the food-stained plastic containers and slumbering afloat on pointy mattresses pretty straightforward, it was the latter of the list that troubled him the most.

As the night died, beams emerged along the already temperate waters, rusting the surface with a vibrant orange glow: a warning. Hurrying to the nearest natural, waste made sanctuary, Garbage Bear shielded himself from the potential deviations of his comfort. But his unwanted companion

wasn’t discouraged by his childish tactics—its indomitable spirit resembled an electric motor, radiating through any plastic obstacle in its path. Then the sky came crumbling down; plastic hadn’t been the best choice in shelter material in the presence of his enemy. Exposed to the dangerously hot air, Garbage Bear sat in the remnants of his refuge, embracing the now-burning sensation of someone watching him—a relentless spotlight scorching him and his surroundings. Then came the chemicals, which entered the bear’s body without warning. Without being able to fight the darkness that now shadowed him, the once mighty polar bear toppled to the human made earth, creating another cell of braille on the sea of trash—a type of braille the blind failed to read.

## “Changes” by Jay Lee





## “Love Your Brother” by Christopher Thomas

Love your brother as yourself  
Even if  
He is of another mother  
For this brother  
Too shares the same struggles as yourself  
Love your sister as yourself  
Even if  
You understand her not  
For this sister  
Too endures the same hardships as yourself  
Love everyone as yourself  
Even if  
They seem so distant  
For they  
Too suffer just as you and need compassion just as yourself.  
Love your brother as yourself  
And one day  
When you desire love yourself  
You too will have a brother who loves you as themselves.

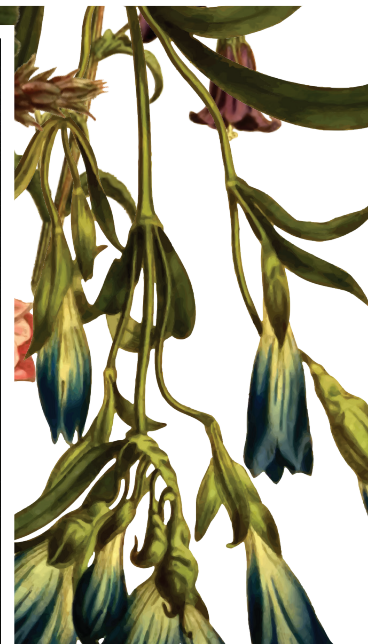


## “The Creation of Adam” by Joy Ahn





“Egg” by Joy Ahn



“Daydream”  
by Jay Lee



# “Death at Sunset”

by Katherine Ketring

The steps into my favorite shop were followed by a girl's question. “Can someone buy me a scoop of ice cream?” She had a sort of misty look to her. I never looked at the wispy figures that would pass by. I knew never to get involved in any trouble that would get me put in a psych ward. I don't know when I started to see them. They seemed clearer when I was younger, and I was luckier since they would usually be brushed off as an imaginary friend. I'm not sure if they're ghosts or if they're some embodiment of the earth as it has evolved. I never asked as a kid and now, I feel like, I've lost my chance.

I glanced momentarily at the girl when I got up to the register and saw her look straight into my eyes. I tried to play it off as looking at the display of sweets in front of me, but she noticed my eye contact and asked me the same question.

“Can you please buy me a scoop of ice cream?” I surprised myself as I looked at the cashier and asked, “Can I have a scoop of ice cream? The cashier politely responded, “Of course, what flavor would you like?”

The girl caught on and whispered to me as if someone might overhear, “Chocolate with whipped cream.”

I look up and tell the cashier, “Chocolate with whipped cream please.”

I paid, grabbed the girl's order, and headed to a secluded bench near the shop. The girl watched me with wide eyes as she followed me. Once we finally sat down, we didn't immediately start talking. She sort of just stared at me holding her ice cream. I hesitated before asking “What's your name?” She responded quickly, “Emily!”

I held out the ice cream and watched her eagerly reach for the bowl. Emily smiled toothily as she took her ice cream. Through her mouthfuls of the slightly melted treat, she asks, “How come you can see me?”

“I'm not the one who chose to see ghosts.” I pause before adding, “Or whatever you are.” “I'm a ghost;

I remember all of my memories.”

I take a chance to actually look at her. I could see how young her face was and how slim, and pale her skin looked. Her eyes were a misty blue, but I couldn't tell if they were misty because she was a ghost or if they looked like that when she was living. She looked about the age of fifteen and was wearing a loose flowery dress with a dark green beanie on her head. A bit of chestnut-colored hair peeked out.

Before long she finished her ice cream and looked up at me. I could tell what she was thinking. If she was going to have to part ways with me or if I would allow her to tag along. I grabbed her empty cup from her and threw it in the trash. I sighed as I thought about the rule I set about not interacting with these ghosts. I got up and gestured for her to follow me. She happily followed me while sparing a glance at the trashcan I had just thrown the ice cream cup in. I opened the door of my car for her, which must have looked strange to anybody else, before getting in the driver's side and heading towards my apartment.

While we were stuck in traffic, I turned and asked her, “What do you want to do?” She thought about it for a bit before replying, “I'm not sure.”

“Well, think about it for a bit. We have time for you to gather your thoughts.”

The rest of the drive was quiet as she looked out the window with a whimsical expression. Like she was looking fondly at something she'd missed for so long. It was weird pulling into the parking lot and having to get out to open the door for a ghost. I thought of all my neighbors looking out their windows and pretended to look for something in the glovebox.

The moment we walked into my apartment Emily started to look around. She looked at my game console and a bookshelf filled with novels and old college textbooks. She wandered to the kitchen and looked through the spices. Then she looked up at me and said,



## “Death at Sunset”

“Can I play on your game set?”

Once she was occupied, I went to go work on dinner. This absolutely went against the rules I made against interacting with ghosts, but I decided I might as well just make a couple of small things; it had been a while since I had anyone to eat with. I ended up cooking some spaghetti along with some potstickers, some mini sandwiches, and a fruit bowl. It was a random assortment of foods, but I liked the variety. I prayed she wasn't vegan or had some health problems. Then I realized she was a ghost and probably didn't have allergies anymore. I felt proud of myself as I called Emily to the table for dinner. I started to serve myself. I was three bites into some spaghetti when I realized she hadn't touched any of her food.

“What's wrong?” I asked.

“Sorry,” she said, “I just haven't had a dinner like this in a while.”

She reached for the food and started to serve herself. I tried not to watch her as she took the first bites of her food. I didn't want to put unwanted pressure on her to like anything I made. I was relieved when I saw her start to become more comfortable and serve herself more food. Even though I had to clean more dishes and search for containers to put leftovers in I felt happy that she enjoyed herself.

I made sure to lay out comfortable blankets and pillows on the couch for Emily once it started to get dark. I watched her fidget a little before sitting down on the couch. She looked nervously at the floor while she muttered,

“I can't really sleep anyway so I don't need a bunch of pillows and blankets.” I thought a moment before striding into the kitchen and grabbing a bowl.

“You like popcorn?” I asked.

“I like popcorn... and M&Ms.”

I smiled and began to search through my cupboards. Watching movies with a dead girl wasn't on my bucket list but it was definitely interesting, and this definitely went against every single rule I had made for myself. I watched as she lifted the blanket and got into the makeshift covers, I arranged. She looked up at me before whispering,

“Thank you. You really didn't have to do any of this.”

I wasn't sure what to say back to her. I turned on the TV and handed her the remote. “Go crazy,” I said.

The night was full of Disney movies to chick flicks to horror films. I was able to stay awake for about a quarter of it.

While we watched “The Princess and the Frog” I thought of all the rules I had made for myself. I wasn't supposed to talk to ghosts or offer them anything much less everything I had in my possession. I wasn't supposed to interact with them at all. Then I thought about Emily eating at the table and how her shoulders started to relax as she went to serve herself more food. It can't be that bad to break the rules once. I would do this one thing and then go back to how it was.

I woke up the next morning to Emily sitting on my couch snuggled in blankets while watching “The Incredibles”. It looked like she was almost done with it which wasn't surprising since she had the whole night. I stretched out before heading to the kitchen to make some waffles. It was a special occasion, so I got out the chocolate chips.

“So, have you decided what you wanna do?” I spoke up.

Emily looked up in surprise like she wasn't expecting me to actually remember my offer. Her brows furrowed for a moment before saying,

“Road trip maybe... I don't know if you have time for that though.” She mumbled. “That's perfect! I have some time off of work so we can head out whenever today.” I said.

I in fact did not have time off. I hurriedly took out my phone to text my boss and tell him I was sick. The morning was filled with packing and making a list of places to stop at.

“Ok so far we have, the beach, gas station slushies, hike, camping, the last Harry Potter book on audio, and sunset.” I listed off

“Sounds great!” She exclaimed.

I couldn't help but smile at how she bounced on the balls of her feet. She bounded down the stairs and skipped her way to my car and waited for me to open the door. Road trips always seemed so



## “Death at Sunset”

boring to me, but this was the first time I genuinely enjoyed myself. She would gasp and look at me whenever a plot twist happened in the book we were listening to, she would point out weird signs on the road and talk to me about her favorite memories of her life. How she spilled slushie on her shirt when she was ten and ended up making a dinosaur out of the stubborn, blue stain with her mom. She talked about learning to rollerblade with her dad and little brother and how she still has the scar from scraping all the skin off of her knee when she fell on some rocks.

She had so many beautiful memories that seemed to light up her eyes as she recalled them. She talked about sad ones too like how her pet dog passed away when she was twelve, or when her Grandpa died, and how she had missed going to the movies with him and getting ice cream afterward, chocolate with whipped cream. She had so many questions about my life like what college was like and if my roommates were jerks or what classes in high school were like. There were a lot of questions about high school and what it was like. If the school food was sludge like in movies or if the teachers actually yelled out “Detention!” In front of the class.

We pulled into a gas station and walked through the doors to get our first thing on the list: slushies. I got a blue one and she got a mix of cherry and pineapple, the best combination according to her. “Next stop is the beach!” I hollered.

Emily sipped her yellow and red concoction and looked out the window. “Have you ever gone to a school dance?” She asked.

“I guess. Why?”

“What did your dress look like?”

“I wore a dark blue dress, it was sparkly and flowy I felt really pretty in it.” She nodded and continued sipping on her drink.

“Mine was gonna be green, and silky... my friends said I looked good in green.” She said.

We listened to our audiobook until we got to the beach. She practically jumped out of the car and bounded for the water. She looked back at me and cheered when I held up buckets and shovels.

We made sandcastles and she talked about beach memories.

“I remember when I was five, I got sand in my socks after walking on the beach and I ended up putting them with the rest of my clothes. I had sandy clothing for the whole trip, it was horrible. I remember my mom trying to get it out of my clothes before it got in the car seats.” She laughed.

“I wish I visited the beach more often as a kid,” I said.

“Why not just visit more often now?” She asked.

“I don’t really know. I guess life just got in my way.”

“I say screw life and just go more often.”

“I wish it was that easy.”

We said goodbye to our sandcastles and went to our car. I made sure to thoroughly remove any sand sticking to my feet before getting in the driver’s seat. We drove to a campground, and I laid down the seats in the back of my car so we could set out blankets and pillows. I propped up my laptop and we watched cartoons I had downloaded. The next morning, we set out to hike. She knew a surprising number of trees and plants and pointed them out as we walked, telling me about each one’s defense system and what they attract. It was one of the most entertaining hikes I had taken. We hiked to a stream and looked at the tiny fishes darting around.

“I remember I had a fish when I was little. I found it upside down one day and my mom said it was taking a nap.” She said indifferently.

“Aw poor fish.”

She shrugged. “I didn’t really have an attachment to it.”

The afternoon was spent retracing our steps back to my car and stopping to eat at a fast food place. She scoffed at my food.

“I can’t believe you like chicken nuggets.”

“I can’t believe you don’t.”

“Burgers are so much better.”

“What if I don’t like buns?”

“Then eat a taco or something.”

We laughed, or I laughed is what it looked like to employees who were staring at me. I picked up our stuff before they could assume anything else, I





## “Death at Sunset”

noticed the sun starting to go down and hurriedly started my car. I drove back to the national park we hiked at and started looking for a good clearing to watch the sunset. I found a good clearing and a place to park. I laid out my blanket and we ate our food. She looked over and twiddled her fingers as if wanting to speak up. I looked at her and waited. “I was really excited to go to a school dance.” There was a long pause as she blankly stared at the sky.

“I was really excited to go, me and my friends were already planning to go together the year before. They all agreed that I would look amazing in green.”

Her voice started wavering and she cleared her throat.

“I um.. I had a dress in mind and everything but... I got sick.”

Her last word ended with a slight hitch in her voice. I could see her eyes becoming glossy.

“My dad tried to make it possible for me to go but- I got weaker and my mom got worried so... I stayed home.”

I could see the disappointment on her face even now.

“It’s not like I didn’t hang out with my friends afterward. Like we had a sleepover and everything but I just.” Her words began to trail off.

“Pretty soon I couldn’t go to school and then I couldn’t even stay out for too long before becoming tired, then it was not being able to leave the house, then most days I couldn’t even leave my bed without getting too dizzy.”

She paused and wiped her eyes her words becoming wobbly.

“I found the papers.” She blurted.

“They were in my parent’s dresser. They were getting a divorce... they were just saving it for after I-”

Her voice began to break more. Her throat hitched whenever she began to talk again. I waited for her to calm down and she kept going.

“I felt guilty for leaving my little brother to deal with my parent’s divorce, you know? I mean, I knew they would argue about me a lot and what to

do.”

I could hear her choke back sobs.

“I knew that they were spending a lot of time and money on me. I heard them arguing a lot when they thought I was asleep. My mom couldn’t accept the fact that I was going to die and my dad kept telling her they needed to let me move on.”

She sniffed and wiped her eyes.

“I was staying for my mom, most of the time I was on painkillers, and I kept getting thinner and thinner. I couldn’t stand hearing her sob in her room. I think my dad knew and they had a big argument about it. He told her that they needed to let me go and couldn’t keep me here for their own selfish wants, that it would only lead to my suffering.” She took a deep breath and wrapped her arms around herself.

“My dad came into my room one day and held me while he talked with me and told me I could stay if I wanted to but that they would support me if I wanted to pass on.”

Tears were running down her cheeks.

“My mom took it really hard. I remember my parents planning it with Hospice. The nurse that was taking care of me came to my house and made sure I was comfortable. I remember her chatting with me and my family as they were waiting for my death. Dying was kind of scary at first but I remember feeling really peaceful towards the end.” She chuckled.

“I remember looking out my window and seeing the sunset, and I realized I had never properly watched one. It’s kind of weird right? I should have been thinking about how my little brother would be without his big sister or how my parents would move on, but instead, I was regretting not ever sitting down to watch a sunset.”

She looked into my eyes. I realized that tears were running down my face. She smiled and reached out to hold my hand.

“Thank you for everything. Thank you for letting me have one last chance.”

I looked back towards the sunset and began to feel her hand leave mine. By the time I decided to turn back to look at her one last time she was gone. I

## “Death at Sunset”

packed up my things and headed back to my car. I drove until I found a rest stop and slept in my car. The next morning I started my drive back home. The sunrise hit my car and I looked down at the empty slushie cups in my car. I pulled over, put my hands over my face, and began to sob. My shoulders shook as I felt the weight of my emotions fall onto me all at once. It wasn't fair. She was such a good kid, she didn't do anything wrong, it wasn't fair. Why did it have to happen to her? She was so young. Why did she have to die when she was just a kid? The weight of our happy moments dragged on the edges of my sobs, drawing them out of my throat.

I wiped my eyes, started up my car, and continued driving. I had a lot of ghosts I needed to talk to once I got home.

## “Waiting” by Cindy Niu



## “Portrait” by Lizzy Lovell





## “Where I’m From” by Ana Orozco

I am from green hills that whisper secrets in the wind,

From petals that dance in the sunlight,  
And rivers that hum songs of ancient times.

I am from where melodies are born,  
From the streets alive with rhythm and rhyme,  
Where the heartbeat of the land sings.

I am from the ocean’s embrace,  
It’s waves whispering stories to those who listen,  
Guiding hearts as if they were ships lost at sea.

I am from my father’s wisdom,  
Wrapped in the warmth of his words,  
And my mother’s quiet strength,  
like the steady flame of a candle in the dark.  
“Love your roots” and “never forget”,  
I carry their voices,  
like echoes in my chest.

I am from Latin America,  
A place that blooms even in adversity.  
A land that walks without legs, but never stops,  
Where passion runs through the veins of its people,  
And every song carries the fire of a thousand

souls.


I am from the golden dust of Barranquilla,  
And Medellin’s Mountains that cradle the sky.  
From streets where the air smelled of dreams,  
And the stars seem close enough to touch.

Now I am here,  
In a land of new beginnings,  
Where my heart stretches between two worlds,  
Grateful for the path I walk,  
Yet longing for the soil where my story began.  
I am the notes of a song yet to be written, The  
brushstroke of a painting not yet completed. And  
a quiet promise of tomorrow,  
Held in the palm of today.

“It’s Looking Back”  
by Luke McLendon







"Rivetting, full of  
twists and turns,  
and beautiful charm."

-Tarry Pritchett

"Witty, clever, and joyful."

-Kneel D'Grass Tison

"Whimsical and  
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is a joy to read  
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-Albort Ennsten