

ORPHEUS

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Orpheus

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Spring 2025



The Lyre of Orpheus Place Among the Stars
Drawing by Eduard von Engerth (1818-1897)

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All submissions to Orpheus must be typed and must contain the following information: name, phone number, local address, class, major, and hometown of the writer/artist. All artwork and photographs should be submitted in camera-ready black and white. Editorial and other staff positions are open to any current Lindsey Wilson College student based upon experience or interest.

The ideas and views expressed in Orpheus are solely those of the writer/artist and do not necessarily reflect the ideas and views of the editorial staff or those of Lindsey Wilson College.

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Front Cover Image, “Nyhavn: Color Wheel Canal” by Emilee Milby
Back Cover Image, “Stitched into Soul” by Malaki Caldwell

Preface

From the Faculty and Student Editors

... Orpheus was alone when he invented writing.
His manic drawing became a kind of writing when he sent
His beloved a sketch of an eye with an X struck through it.
He meant *I am blind without you*. She thought he meant
I never want to see you again. It is possible he meant that, too.
— “American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin”
American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin, by Terrance Hayes

We open this twenty-sixth annual installment of *Orpheus* by noting its numerical synchronicity with the English alphabet. And while it’s just a random coincidence that the numbering of this year’s edition matches the number of letters contained within the language, it nonetheless feels like a meaningful one because this journal aims to celebrate the creativity of not just the alphabet but also our many contributors who play with the power of the alphabet through their works. *Orpheus*, the literary arts journal of Lindsey Wilson College, each year goes through a submission and review process with an editorial staff to best determine the pieces that will be compiled into this volume that hosts a wide variety of student creativity across campus. We believe that this year’s edition showcases not only the majesty of the letters of our language and their infinite permutations but also of the creative and artistic power of our campus as a whole. We hope that while reading this year’s volume you will experience the full range of intended reception, from affection to zen and every emotion that falls alphabetically in between.

Each and Every

Dakota Boaz

Every time you call me worthless,
I want to prove to you I am not
Each time you say I'm stupid,
I try to show you how much I know
Whenever you say I'm hard to be around,
I try to make it easy for you
I am constantly told I am loved and valued and worth something by the people I love
Except for you
I have had to learn how to build myself up, where you insist on tearing me down
I have had to learn to love myself, in the places you left in me to hate
I have lived my life in a way that makes me happy, something you could never feel because of
me
If you ever truly cared, like you say you do, then it is too late to do anything about it

The damage has already been done
And the repairs have been made
I have fixed myself
Where you broke me

How Can I?

Dakota Boaz

How do I let it go?

I said I want you, I said I love you, I sang your praises

But I can't make you love me

Now, stuck in limbo, I can only hope to be near but not dear

I want to love you, I want to shower you with all the love and life and joy you deserve

I don't want to feel the unrequited love of tragedies long past

It doesn't hurt, it lingers and punctures my very core

To try and fail would be less painful, to crash and burn would let me let you go

But I can't fail, or succeed, or even try

And I can't blame you because it was never your fault

And I can't blame me because it isn't mine either

No one is at fault, no one is to blame

And that is the real pain.

Journey, ad infinitum

Dakota Boaz

To go on forever, never taking the opportunity to rest,
Some long for the safety of home,
Others want to travel onward,
But what of those who long for both?
Are they the ones who vanish from our lives, only to return later on?
Are they the ones who look for something, anything new in the mundane?
Do they never find balance? Are they stuck trudging forward? Do they lose themselves in a life
of their own making?
To want both means that you can never truly find either,
Journey, ad infinitum
Wander without end

Dandelion

Aven Bryant

You are a dandelion in spring,
sprouting through harsh concrete
unremarkable, yet invaluable.

Your roots are bitter, your petals sweet,
your resilience hides in the sunshine yellow
and every attempt to rid the streets of your quiet beauty
falls flat in the face of your fortitude.

You make bitter, healing teas
and the sweetest of syrups,
generously sharing your strength
with a world that cannot respect it.

Doused with poison, dripping
like acid rain
onto the infinitesimal society below;

You are a protector,
a resource,
a flower,
a work of art.

You do not insist upon yourself
except to persist,
because it is more than you;

It is the bees,
the ants,
the spiders,
the mites,
the worms,
the mice,
the opossums,
the squirrels,
the humans.

It is life that persists because you persist.

Keep growing, dandelion,
you are hope.

The Path

Aven Bryant

You are
wretched cherished

In the Light of His
Love wrath

Your Flesh is
Sinful holy
created by His hand.

He will offer
Salvation damnation
To those who believe in Him.

He will offer
Grace wrath
to enemies of His word.

You are of
God Lucifer

You are of
Sin holiness

You are
Righteous damned

You are

~~nothing~~

more than the sum of your parts.

Black, Buzzing, Beguiled Spot

Morgan Bryant

There's a wasp nest in my attic. It nestled there when I was born. The buzzing is incessant and distinct. It is my personal metronome. My mother tells me stories about the wasps in the attic—that they're up there dancing. I imagine them in tutus, a wasp choreographer swaying its stinger on beat with the buzzing. Sometimes I imagine myself as one of the wasps. It makes me feel...well, I don't know.

My room is right under the spot where the nest must be. The buzzing is most intense here, and over the years, the wood has darkened to a grimy, ashy color that creeps down and infects the girlish, pale pink wallpaper. The pink is not my choice, but my mother's. She coated the room and me in the color through ballet paraphernalia, collected from years of teaching ballet in our garage.

"You're going to be marvelous," she whispered, massaging my shoulders, muscular from lifting the younger girls in her classes. "Stop saying you don't mind holding the girls. I need to find a couple of boys for everyone, don't I? Stop all that heavy lifting you do, it's unfitting."

She did find boys, and still, she made me do ballet. It was the only thing I was good at, and the wasps were a constant reminder of that. They buzzed in applause whenever I thrust the girls into the air and bowed to them, but never when her 'boys' held me, or when I did anything other than ballet. Their noise accompanied me as I shivered in ice baths for my aching muscles, replaying the sensations of soft velvet leotards against my fingertips.

The buzzing changed when I met Thomas.

Thomas courted me by coming over under the guise of coaching sessions with my mother. He was already a premiere danseur, so why he would need coaching sessions with her was beyond me. I spent every night between him and my mother, being lifted up in the air or enduring his bows to me as 'practice.'

"Take his hand!"

"Jump in his arms!"

"Kiss his cheek!"

"Bow to him!"

My mother barked all these, not appreciating my hesitations. The buzzing mutated into an agitated tone when I'd take his hand. I don't think it was applause.

I began to realize that Thomas was not really there for my mother's lessons. We still danced, but alone, and I warmed to his nightly presence in the studio, then in the house, and then in my bed. Three years later, we reached my, and my mother's, culminating day. He reached out and rubbed my artificially flushed cheeks, painted pink to make my white garments shimmer. His cold hands made me unconsciously flinch underneath his touch. He left to take his place beside his groomsmen. My mother appeared behind me, kissing Thomas on the cheek on his way Out.

"I was so worried, I thought- well. He's such a good man. You had me there for a bit, but you found a good one." She readjusted my dress. "He's all we could've asked for."

After the ceremony, my mother left the house so we could enjoy the family home in private. "Enjoy the bedroom," she said, winking, "as a gift from me. Also, that black, buzzing, beguiled spot above your bed isn't very romantic."

Sitting with Thomas on the large, soft bed, I found myself in a peculiar position: I couldn't relax without the droning white noise of the buzzing. There were many nights traveling

with my ballet company in which I found myself in the same restless conundrum. The buzzing had become a necessity for relaxation. I couldn't handle this new room. So, I gently grabbed Thomas's hand and danced us playfully to my girlhood room, humming.

Laying on my childhood bed, I jerked under Thomas who was star-fished and fumbling like an amateur dancer. He lurched forward, covering my face with his chest, kissing along my hairline. My head started to hurt as I kissed along his jawline, smelling his choking cologne and hearing the agitated buzzing from my ceiling. I wiggled and peeked out past his broad shoulder at the black spot, taking deep breaths to try and escape the dominating scent, my kisses becoming more infrequent.

"Just ignore it, baby," he said, sliding his hands up my throat to my cheeks, "They're just Bugs."

I said they weren't just bugs, they're wasps, and they're loud, and they're causing me a Headache.

"Oh, they're causing the headache. So convenient that you always seem to have a headache whenever I do this," I made a noise, my eyes darting to him for a moment and back up as I gripped his shoulder, "Or this," I let out another startled noise and forced him off, my nail catching on his shoulder, causing him to hiss. I saw a bloody nick bubble to the surface of his skin. My eyes then firmly fixed on the dark spot on the ceiling, not for the buzzing, but to avoid his gaze.

"You scratched the hell out of me, over some dumb wasps." His body shifted on the mattress, off of me. I sheepishly glanced at him and back at the black, buzzing spot. I knew that there were a million reasons why he could be mad at this moment, but I knew the main one: Denying him this, on the first night of marriage no less, over wasps? If I were him and I had a woman like me, I'd be mad, too.

"I'll solve this," he snapped, jamming his pants onto his legs and reaching for a long-sleeved shirt, the spot of blood staining the fabric. "I'll grab a broom and knock the nest down. Then, I'll stomp it to death."

I begged him not to, but he didn't stop. He stormed down the hall, me following, and yanked down the attic stairs, climbing up with his broom. I waited there in front of the old, creaky steps, picking at the finger I had scratched him with. I peeled the portion of skin I carved out of his shoulder from under my nail. It fell onto the step like a petal. I tried to think that maybe this would be okay as I stood, frozen. I then heard him holler and rush down the stairs with a few wasps hanging off him.

A slew of profane words followed as he stared at me, flush-faced and accusatory. He slammed the hatch up, plucking the few dangling beasts off his shirt sleeves while still glaring at me, and with a mighty stomp from his still-waxed dress shoes, crushed the stragglers to a black and yellow pulp. I attempted to apologize, after all, I couldn't control my headache or the wasps.

He looked at me and said, "Let's just go lay down." Abashed, I agreed, guiding us to my mother's old bedroom, away from my now-tainted girlhood room.

Things got marginally better, but halted because of her: my mother. Thomas and I were already in a strained position as newlyweds, even before adding in living with my mother in a decrepit, wasp-infested house. The funny thing about wasp nests is that they are such a commonly uncommon nuisance that most people hope they die off naturally, like I did. My mother heightened the pests to Thomas. She'd whisper to Thomas like she thought I wasn't

listening, even when she knew I was.

“Just get an exterminator, kill them, and get it over with.”

“You tried that, remember? That’s when you turned to ignoring it. Look where that’s left Us.”

“Well, maybe it isn’t the wasps that need to leave.”

They’ve been talking like this for months now, muttering back and forth together. I poked my head into the living room and they shifted on their shared couch, moving apart. I asked what they were talking about.

“Dealing with the wasps,” Thomas started, a flair of buzzing surging through the house that made my bare feet twitch, “and us.”

I asked what about us.

“Whenever we suggest anything about those wasps, you turn it down. Whenever I try to take our minds off those wasps, you ignore me. Whenever I try to think about anything but those wasps, their buzzing and you talking about them is all I hear!” he spat, grabbing his coat and pulling my mother up with him. “So, we’re going out for a while, until you deal with it.” I asked how long ‘a while’ was.

“A while.” He said, leaving with my mother. She waved, smiling.

I stood there, my feet unconsciously settling into a first position plié as I picked at my fingernails. I found myself beginning to move toward the attic, stumbling in a strained dance until I reached the string leading up to the stairs. The image of my mother leaving with Thomas melted into that of the hatch as I looked up.

The hatch has the same worn wood and black splotches that are the accenting features of my girlhood room. I’ve never been up in that attic—all through my childhood, I refused. It was where the wasps were and where I shouldn’t be. I gently caressed the cord, the length of it quivering from hardly being touched except for a few occurrences since the house had been standing. My thumb brushed near the tip, massaging the small metal piece that always hit Thomas on the forehead whenever he walked underneath it. I massaged it further, finding myself skittering underneath the hatch, en pointe, gripping the string until I gave it a hard tug. The stairs hit the ground with a dusty, echoing thud, and I fell out of my position to avoid being hit. I looked down at my feet as I stood, dusting myself. My feet were bleeding from my toenails digging into the wood.

I slowly approached the front of the stairs, a trail of blood following. I began to half climb, half drag myself up the steps, quivering at the thought of what I’d find after the nest had festered for nearly 25 years. The lack of sunlight made it hard to determine what I was seeing as my head peeped up into the forbidden space. I saw two thin lumps that were planted into the floorboards. Those papery lumps grew up into thin poles rising into thick columns. They connected at a midsection. Two spindly branches spread out from the sides like the poles that were holding the entire structure together. Two lumps, each the size of my palm, stuck out from the torso, with wasps crawling around two touchable, almost attractive, tips. A thin pole led to an even larger lump with papery strands flowing down the back, alive with larvae and a writhing swarm of wasps. An oval hole, a mouth, had rows of larvae squirming, spilling out and hitting the floor with a grotesque pith. My God, it’s a head, a woman’s head, a woman statue. I gawped at the horrific humanoid mass, nearly slipping down the steps as my feet began to sweat and mix

with my bloody toenails. Unluckily, I still had a firm, white-knuckled grip on the ladder. I told myself it was a nest made by simple creatures, an unfortunate coincidence to look so alive.

Then the nest, no, she twitched and began to move as I gripped the ladder so hard my palms ached. She set herself into a first position pli  , and then, crunching her papery nest self, settled to be en pointe like I had been. She jumped bounds around the space, larvae squishing under her toes, making a mushy gray and black crust of sludge around her feet. Gagging and shuddering, I tried to make myself go back down the ladder as she squished and danced. Then, she jumped right in front of me with a hard thump. My breath stopped. Larvae hit my face. She bowed to me with a papery extended palm.

I took her hand.

Nowhereland

Morgan Bryant

October 2nd, 1989

Beth came by again today. She asked how the house was, if it was necessarily to my liking. I think it's all well and good, regardless of the circumstances. She says it'll help clear my mind, that it'll help me write, that a place out in the middle of nowhereland that only the informed know and the deer graze is perfect. But, to be frank, I just have no inspiration. Yes, I can journal well and good to myself. And yes, the grounds have a lot to them: a worn out home that only generations of generations could imbue with mix matched wallpapers plastered on every square inch, an empty sheep pen that still has the traces of ewe births and ram plops on the edges of molded straw, and a lone little shed that lives on the edge of the property. She tells me that she's glad that she found this place for me, that it'll do me good, but I just don't know. My first course of action is to get myself acquainted with my outside surroundings, but it's nearly always raining here. I do wish Beth will come by more often.

October 16th, 1989

Almost every time I take a shower in this house, I find myself tracing the outline of my form on the fogged up glass. I don't know why, maybe it's because I wish to trace my womanly form. I find myself going around the area of my chest, the folds and forms that naturally occur, the area of my slanted and softened shoulders, and my long hair. I trace them over and over until the fog dissipates, leaving nothing but a nude and damp version of myself and smudge marks on the glass. I clean it religiously afterwards. Funnily, maybe my heightened sense of femininity is due to the fact that I learned from the last time Beth popped in, which will apparently be her last for quite some time, that only individual women have lived in this house. I was perplexed, given the elaborate wallpaper plasters all over I had assumed they were put up by generations of families with varying tastes. However, Beth was quick to note that in fact there were not any families except for, well, the continuous line of unrelated single women. And that, in a weird sort of sense, they were a family and community shaped by their femininity and imbuelement of this house. Most had cared for the sheeps that used to occupy the now abandoned pen, and they all ended up coming and going in some sort of way without anyone really noticing. Apparently most would say they found a better opportunity, would say the sheep helped them see something, but no one really heard much more about them. Can animals really help people see things? I know people say their dogs help them through things, Beth swears by Sumo, her big Newfoundland, but sheep? Really? I beg to differ.

October 30th, 1989

Perhaps it's because Beth hasn't been here a while, and I've been poking myself around the property and causing a stir, but I found on the edge near the old shed some wild sheeps and even a goat or two wandering. They noticed me nearly immediately, and started to flock over to me as I came over to the shed. I used to think goats and sheep were the same, especially the rams, but they're different, I think? There's a good 12 or so, so they followed me as I cracked into that small shed. It was a fright, lined with books of which I couldn't understand, and paintings of well, goats and sheep. Some regular, you know the stereotypical pastorals that would make Shakespeare himself weep with joy, but others were, well, something that's for sure.

The one that struck my eye the most was a painting of great detail, like *Witches' Sabbath* by Francisco Goya. The figure in the center had a large goat or ram's head (again, what truly is the difference, reader?) atop a muscular man-like frame. The only thing distinguishing the monster from man was the head, a simple flicked tail that looked like a pile of skin and fur above his bottom, and the copious amount of body hair that covered the figure. I wish I could do the image justice and simply doodle it, but unfortunately my journaling skills don't equate to artistic visions. The figure itself was gripping a large blanket that spread out over the bottom of the work, containing the images of female faces in the throes of pleasure as he held it. Finally, the frame was made of beautiful wood that again, I cannot necessarily say, and had a golden plaque near the bottom that simply said "Natas." I don't know what compelled me to, but I grabbed the large painting up, and with a trail of sheep and goats behind me brought it home. Maybe it'll give me the inspiration I need.

November 3rd, 1989

Heat's been on and off the past week or so, not that I really minded with the fireplace in the living room. Also, I've been tending to the sheep and goats most of the time, they have now found occupancy in the abandoned pen. It seems as if they're almost familiar with it. That they've lived there once and are back again. I feed them often, and I can't help but find myself sitting in there with them, petting them and caring for them with my journal. There's this one black ram I've found myself particularly drawn to, his head looks so strangely like that painting that I've hung above the fireplace and find myself just simply, mesmerized by. I've named him Natas, as per the golden plaque. He butts his head against my shoulder when I sit in the pen and write, he's actually nudging me right now as I've been writing in my journal, clearing up messy word choices. Besides cleaning up my words, I'm just feeling so inspired whenever I'm near him. But I will also admit, reader, I have this bad, eerie feeling in my chest. Like sometimes at night, when I'm dozing off in the living room, and I am sure I've made sure all the sheeps and goats in the pen, I feel like, well. I feel like I hear the huffs of a large animal in my home. To my knowledge of basic ecology, though again I don't know the difference between a goat and a sheep really, I should be the only animal in this house. I hope.

November 5th, 1989

Of course Beth had to stop by today. I would have said a month ago I would be begging for her to drop by, but today I was going to hand bathe Natas. He provides so much inspiration just from his mere being near, and he reminds me so much of the painting. I write endlessly when he's around, he's quite definitely my favorite out of that flock, so it caused me quite an upset when I saw her car coming around the bend. Beth only came by to say this would be her last time, and provide me with a large bag of goat and sheep feed. She said that after this time there wouldn't be any point in stopping by anymore, especially after my admittedly snippy attitude with her. I can feed these damn goat sheep things, I don't need her going out to buy the feed when I perfectly am able to. But besides that spat, it was actually quite a well and good occasion. We talked and I told her about what I've been thinking about and feeling, such as these thoughts of feeling that concern me. Mainly, the thought that Natas in both painting and ram form is roaming around the halls at night. I admitted to some degree, as I will to you reader, sometimes I wish he was.

November 18th, 1989

My night was disrupted by a horrific noise. It was the kind of noise you automatically

consider catastrophic whether you visually see it or not. I had bolted out of my bedroom in nothing but my nightgown and socks, sliding along the old hardwood as I emerged into the living room. My painting!! My painting fell!! The very frame was fractured and strewn about the lip of the fireplace with other portions all over the floor, in all its splintered wooden goodness, and the gold plaque was laying in the still smoldering coals leaving it unintelligible to read “Natas” on it. The painting itself was pierced in the center by a fire poker, and to be honest it made me weep just seeing it like that. My painting. I gathered it as best I could, and went over to the broken down work, and as I peeled it back I was appalled at what I saw. The ram figure, I had affectionately also named Natas to keep in continuity with the plaque, was no longer there gripping his moaning women filled cloth. It was nothing but the dark greenish background that looks as if Vincent Van Gogh was doing a darker greener background similar to The Green Parrot. I was concerned. I write this as I’m trying desperately to doze, I’ll check on Natas himself tomorrow. I hope he’s alright. I also wonder what has come of the ram in the painting; I have the broken painting sitting in the chair in my room.

November 19th, 1989

Even worse than the painting falling, Natas himself is gone! I wept in the pen openly, the sheeps and goats looking at me with sorrow themselves. I searched everywhere, the woods, the home, deeper into the pen, and most importantly that shed. The shed itself seemed reorganized not by my hand, all the paintings and pleasantries were gone. To put another way, the shed itself was completely empty. It was nothing but a rickety old shed, filled with cobwebs and well, me, and the odd sheeps peeking through. I found myself unable to stop weeping seeing this. All these people, who had gotten inspiration and wrote and painted and did all these wonders, all their works were gone? Gone just like my Natas. This community of creators that lived here, all their work was gone like it withered away from lack of appreciation. But I was appreciating it! I was, I appreciated all their inspiration just like I appreciated my Natas. I miss my Natas. I would give anything to see him. He gave me inspiration, he hung over my mantel, he lived in my pen. I hope he comes back and I can fulfill this community of inspiration. I think I would do just about anything for that.

November 29th, 1989

To my delight, Natas came. It was scary at first, I was laying in my room, mourning the loss of him and the painting. But then out of the corner of the door frame as if that itself was the framing of his previous abode, I saw him, standing there, gripping his womanly blanket. He was much like his painting counterpart, a tall masculine figure with the head of a ram, and a hairy frame that covered the majority of him. He said if I came with him, I wouldn’t need to worry about inspiration anymore. I thought about that, not having to worry about inspiration. Wasn’t the whole point of me coming here to find said inspiration? But then he added, that no one values inspiration anymore, it is only the collective that does and I could be a part of a collective. A collective that does value inspiration, an echo chamber of intelligence and divinity and importantly pleasure, all inherently feminine features he said. I thought about this, the major writing I had done was this, I was worried that I wouldn’t have anything to provide to this community of feminine collective inspiration. He said it wouldn’t matter, that this would be read, and revered, and that if I were to go with him he would ensure that these thoughts I have laid out were not just read by me, but by everyone. To my delight, dear reader, I hope this has come to pass.

The American Educational Truth

Morgan Bryant

School bell rings outside.
Fills and swells with children
ready to have their minds
filled and swelled with
'true' knowledge.

"Today we learn about history."
The children are excited for this
'History.'
They've never heard of it.

"Today we learn about *American* history."
The children grow more excited.
They've heard of *American* history.
But never just
history.
Not anymore.

"Remember to pray before we learn about
American history."
The children pray,
hands folded and
Christ like.
The children who want
mats
or spaces of
meditation
or
nothing at all
are not there.
"Too ideological."

"George Washington chopped down his cherry tree.
Or was it an olive tree?
An olive branch?
No, we don't do those."
It was a cherry tree,
or was it?

"Ronald Reagan cracked down on crack, not on Blacks."
It was crack,

or was it?

“American slaves never were treated *that* bad, they—”

“I’ve read in a book that they were treated that bad, worse.”

The children gasped.

Is this history?

“You’re mistaken.

They say they didn’t,

your parents say they didn’t,

I say they didn’t,

so they didn’t.”

The American Educational Truth.

“But the book I read,” spoke the child,

“Said they did. Harriet Jacobs wouldn’t lie.”

The child held the book up.

The instructor shook his head.

“Silly child,”

The book was quickly replaced by

Harriet *Stowe*,

“We read *Stowe*, not *Jacobs*.”

“Why?”

“It is un-American to read a *Jacobs*.

A *Stowe* is a deeper truth.

A truth that says

we weren’t all wrong.”

The children nodded along.

“What if they are wrong?”

“They are not.

Our government, your parents, me.

We are not wrong.”

“But—”

The children were growing restless.

The knowledge that was swelling in their minds was

Un-American.

Their parents didn’t want this? *They* didn’t want this.

Or did they?

Unacceptable.

The child and the ‘*Jacobs*’ book were

quickly

taken away.

“Now.

American slaves were happy and not treated badly.

No American, especially white, was in the wrong.

No white American is ever in the wrong.

America was never wrong.

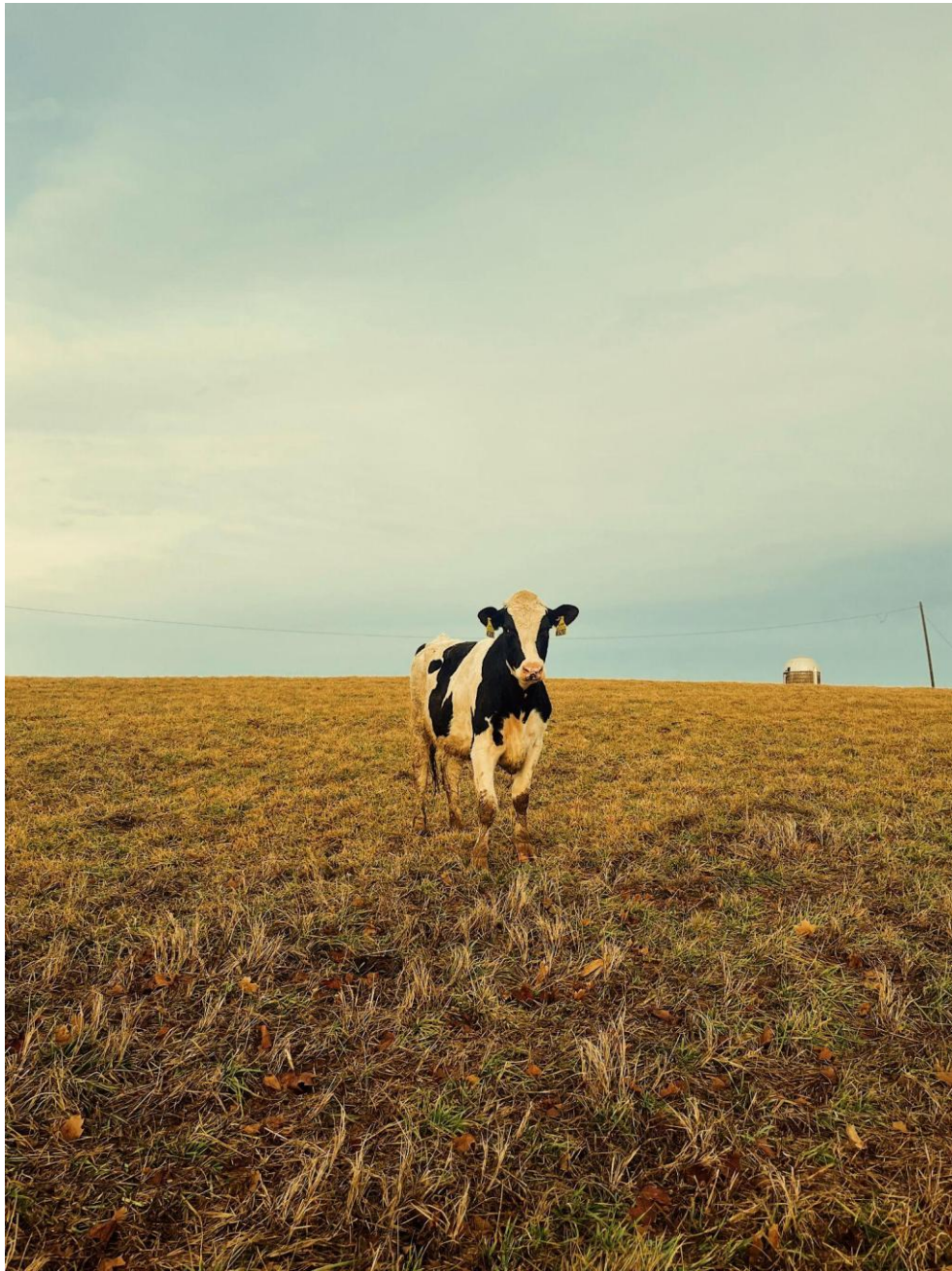
America will never be in the wrong.

Never.”

The American Educational Truth.

Neighbors

Mattie Coomer



Rockland Breakwater

Mattie Coomer



The Current

Mattie Coomer

Looking at the water
It seemed like things
Might not fall apart.

Something in the stillness
Seemed infinite—
Sure.

Breeze in the rooted trees
Hearts pumping deeply
Sureties
taken for granted

Except what we couldn't see
Was the current running underneath
Can't take you until you let it
Until you quit fighting against it

Trying to catch up
With thoughts in circles
Ripples rolling to the banks
Gently, then not at all

No matter what we said,
The sun was going to set
Good intentions can't make it
rise every day
Other plans and places to be
But something held us there
In peace.
That's why I couldn't see
How you could leave

Like water
Slipping through my fingers
Pulling me under
Should have known better
Than to wade out too far

Meditations

Yejun Choi

Many people try to meditate for mental health. But most of them are not sure about the ways of meditation. I am also confused because there are so many opinions such as “Focus on your breath,” “Be grateful for today,” and so on. After I searched a lot, I finally found the answer and I want to share it. Do not push or pull, just leave your memories and stay in the zero.

“Imagine the empty space. There is nothing in there. Stay in the space.” This is fundamental to meditation. But it is not easy to do it because of memories. When you try to meditate, memories come to mind. There are two kinds of memories. First are positive memories of your attractive moments in the past. The second are negative memories of your regretful moments. During meditation, both memories are harmful. I would explain how each of these interrupt meditation.

In the case of positive memories, people tend to pull the memories. They want to recall moments such as winning the game, getting a good score on an exam, and so on. Then the memory fills the empty space with positive emotions and you cannot stay in the meditation. In the other case of negative memories, people want to push them away. The moments such as making a mistake, doing shameful behavior made them anxious and they felt guilty. Then the memory fills the space with negative emotions.

You don't have to sit and close your eyes to meditate. If your mind is zero, you are in meditation. Whenever the memory comes up, you should not respond no matter if it feels good or bad. Just let them alone. This is meditation.

First Love

Sara Crosslin

The words “first love” make me cringe.
Is he really your first love if he left you crying every night?
If he left you questioning your entire existence?

The words “first love” make me cringe.
The way his words rolled off his tongue so effortlessly.
You know in the end it was because he was used to saying them.
You know he said the same words to you that he said to many different girls.

You know in the end it will never work between the two of you.
You will keep trying, that’s just who you are.
When you love, you love too hard.
You keep trying to fix someone you never broke.

In the process you end up being the one broken.
The boy you were ready to marry, just gone.
The words “first love” make me cringe because when I hear them, I think of you.

Out West

Brendan Dahncke

When a bison is born their fur coat is an orange almost red color. When the calves are grazing next to a fully grown bison herd they tend to look like little dogs next to them. That's where the nickname "red dog" comes from for these young creatures.

I listened to this audio guide I bought from the souvenir shop the whole time we passed through Yellowstone. Even though dad told me that we weren't going to have time to stop and do anything here I wanted to grab something just to say I've been there.

I didn't respond as I was watching this lone bison in the distance stroll fluidly across the horizon. For what it's worth, Dad insisted on going around Yellowstone to get to Seattle so this was our compromise.

While I wanted to grab a tee shirt or coffee mug in the shop, I saw this audio guide, and I felt like I'd be able to take in more of Yellowstone since we'd only be here for a few hours. The guide was only two hours long, so I got to listen to it twice through before we officially exited the national park. This was my first time ever being in a national park let alone Wyoming, but having this guide made it feel like I was here longer than I was in a good way. Once we left the park, I slept for most of the remaining part of the drive. There were around 10 hours left, but I stayed up for most of the day, because I was pretty excited about seeing Yellowstone.

"We're here." Dad said to wake me up once we got just outside of Seattle.

"Wow, weather is just like Alex said it'd be". It was raining, but it felt like a special rain. It was just rain at a steady downfall almost like background noise to go to sleep to. April is my favorite time of the year, but the rain just made it seem like it was its own season here. It didn't feel quite like spring.

Alex just bought this apartment and it was very nice considering he just moved out here and just settled in. As we parked outside he came out to get us.

"I was starting to think you guys got lost," said Alex with a smile.

"So this is what Microsoft money gets out here?" Dad wanted everyone to know how proud he was of his son working at Microsoft.

Alex walked up to me and gave me a hug and made sure to remind me that we're still going to play Madden: "Don't think I got rid of my Xbox and you're getting out of Jordan Love throwing touchdowns all over you."

"Just because this is your apartment doesn't mean you get to play with the Packers," I told Alex.

The walkway up to his front door had a low spot and I stepped right in a puddle that got my shoes wet.

"I got a pair of Nikes in here for you Chip, don't worry." No matter the circumstances, Alex would always come through for me.

After dinner and a couple of Madden games, Alex pulled out an old Halloween costume that he wore when we went out trick-or-treating one year. I remembered this costume because it was the year we both went as Power Rangers, and looking at the costume reminded me of mom. Alex bought both of the costumes for us right after I told dad I didn't want to go trick-or-treating that year. I can remember that Alex acted like he didn't remember me telling me dad that, but he surprised me with it the day of Halloween that year.

Mom used to always take us trick-or-treating. Alex was the one who handled it the best when Mom passed. I knew that he was only acting strong because he knew more than anyone that he was the one who had to step up in the family. Alex was the one who had to drive me to school every morning and make

sure I made it to basketball practice on time. Dad didn't have an option but to pick up extra hours at the factory to help make ends meet for us.

Alex stopped slacking off in school so much and made sure to get into a good college. But this costume that Alex dragged out, and to keep hold of it this whole time, it was almost like it was his way of reminding me that I was the reason that he stepped up not only for dad but for me as well. Alex keeping the costume reminded me of all the letters I kept that we wrote back and forth, while he was at college. Although it was hard for me to see that he still had that soft side to him, this small gesture of his made me feel all the tough love that he gave me when he had to be my second father.

The Muse

Brendan Dahncke

Venturing into the mindscape of true creativity,
The maze that requires to be most heedful.
Constant pursuit in this activity
Constantly running to the same ends.

Crafting of this art is in and out
Of itself but sounds like gratification
Upon one's grail; while never meant
To stay, the muse ebbs and flows.

Although it never seems to last long,
Temporarily seizing this creative
Nectar simultaneously harmonizes
Your soul with your mind.

Lukewarm

Anna Dangelmaier

Smear the blood off your thin, cracked lips
Just to spew some strange scripture-filled preamble
Laced with words we can't define
A segue to the crooked shambles
Of the last great poet's poor, fickle mind

Ode to our lovers
Our failing mothers
And the two young brothers that you leave behind
Will they learn our sorrows from the Revelations?
When their cup runs empty will they fall behind?
Will the worm try to burrow through their crying eyes?

Figure eights around my wrists
While the fruits start to rot and fall
Squint my eyes as they try to blind me
What is the remedy for a witness who bears God?

Build our cathedral on the edge of the margin
Something sick and evil slithers right inside
Fetch our communion from the moat of muddy water
Our distorted Jordan, a toast to drinking until we die
Red sky rising and the coyotes cry

Toss and turn while the song of the serpent sings you into a lonesome sleep
Hitched breathing through a lucid dream
The eyes in the window are staring back at me
Hide beneath the covers and count the wolves dressed as sheep

Figure eights around my wrists
While the fruits start to rot and fall
Clench my teeth as they peer inside me
What is the remedy for a witness who bears God?

A heart as heavy as sculpted marble
On the edge of a nightmare, I can hear you plead
Drenched in sweat and the blood from your belly
Hand me your rib, soaked in anguish and irony
A cross dripping in irony!

Nike's Victory

Trinity Deaton



Heaven

MaCayla Falls

A laugh from the other room.
The wind blowing through the trees.
Saying I have to leave soon.
The buzzing of honeybees.

Brownies cooking in the oven.
Leaves changing for the fall.
Staying up past ten, laughing.
Hearing the bird's chirping call.

Silly pranks that never stop.
Stopping to smell the roses.
Getting tea, or a soda pop.
Squirting with water hoses.

Googly eyes everywhere.
Evening sitting on the porch.
Playing cards without care.
Sunday singing hymns at church.

Sometimes I hear you still,
Even though you aren't here.
They say it takes time to kill,
Though I hear you year after year.

I was afraid you would fade once,
A mere memory stashed away.
Now I know you'll never leave because
I didn't know how hard it would be to stay.

Staying here while you've been gone
Is the hardest thing I've had to do.
Yet I have faith that one day soon
Seeing you will be my best dream come true.

Someday we'll be together again,
And our laughter will reach the sky.
So, I will see you soon, my friend,
Someday in heaven, after I die.

Island Shapes

Atavya Fowler



ADHD

Alondra Fuentes-Nava

For most people, it looks like a lack of attention, recklessness, or laziness but they don't realize what's really going on inside. It's not a lack of attention. It's too much attention, all at once. It's overwhelming, like a cup that's always overflowing with acid.

It's a constant battle with the mind. It feels like being split in two: the one who wants, and the one who doesn't.

Sometimes, it's like torture. A never ending uphill climb. Where others walk, you have to run just to stay in the same space, at the same time.

It's not just distraction, it's dysregulation. Emotionally. Mentally. You fight so hard not to break down at every little thing because it's a battle with your own mind, and it works against you.

As you grow older, you learn to beat the system.

But it's only to be accepted by a society that still doesn't understand you—and that fight often leads to burnout.

It's not inattention. It's a war, and you're not in control,

Your mind is.

It's going quiet after a lifetime of rejection. Because eventually, you start to expect it. You've always been "too much," "too different," "too quiet" or just slightly off. You don't fit in and you care too deeply while trying to act like you don't care at all.

But with time, you start to learn: life isn't supposed to feel this hard. And that realization brings comfort.

Because now you know there's never been anything wrong with you.

You're just different.

And you're living in a world that wasn't made for you.

King of Drink

Brandon Grider

In a place where corruption flows
As water to each one of those
Men who left both charge and duty
To rot and drink devil's honey

Amongst them one sinner stands high
And each night you will hear his cry
He rose and held his empty glass up
And praised what he drained from his cup

"I've something to say of my drink"
"It makes me brave it makes me think"
"It makes me bold it makes me strong"
"It proves what I knew all along"

Now sat on his round wooden throne,
Quite pleased with the gall he has shown.
His boldness shocked them all and called,
All patrons to their feet enthralled.

They take to a start preparing,
To honor this lord uncaring.
They all dance, revel, and sing,
And shower praise on their new king.

But through all this drunk jubilation,
Behind his faux proud countenance,
Hides a shame that lies unspoken,
Of a life through whiskey broken.

His poison's truth he doesn't tell,
How it leads him to deepest hell.
It makes him weak, it makes him cry,
It makes him distant, makes him lie.

He decays far beyond his age,
And casts love down with wrathful rage.
It's cost him peace within his head,
And forced his kin to claim him dead.

His sodden empire built this day,

But with is people fades away.
And all ye men who in cups sink,
Come cry "All hail the King of Drink."

The Crows Nest

Brandon Grider

There is a tale that has grown itself fame,
Of a treasure long sought that none can claim.
For at the top of a sycamore tree,
Far above and beyond that you can see,
Sets a small nest with a crow in it perched.
There lies the treasure for which many searched.
Far too many men have challenged that rise,
And climbed to the nest and claim the crow's prize.
And the more that people would try and fail,
All the more it would serve to spread the tale.
Soon would be a line as long as the day,
Of those who would take the treasure away.
None who'd scale the limbs saw the prize in them,
Before the ground would come up to meet him.
But no one would read these poor souls their rites.
For the next would be thief made for the heights.
All for the lesson often too late learned,
That a fate wrought by greed is a fate earned.

The Honey Jar

Brandon Grider

Back when I spent my hours,
Playing amongst all the flowers.
Without a worry or care,
Living in the meadows, so fair.

A man saw and said to me,
“I’ve an offer to make you bee.
You seem so independent,
So consider this proposition.”

“You work towards your mission,
Without your hive’s recognition.
Work for me and you’ll go far,
Come make honey inside my jar.”

I, convinced with his banter,
Climbed inside his glass decanter.
And set to work long and hard,
Making honey inside this jar.

I worked with pride and with skill,
I worked until my glass I filled.
I felt as though I was a star,
When I looked upon my filled jar.

The man returned and said to me,
“Now we’ve just to discuss my fee.
Conditions be what they are,
I’ll take some honey from the jar.”

“A spoon since you used my place,
Another since I kept you safe.”
He listed fees as he carved,
And stole more honey from my jar.

Against his crime I wrestled,
So with lid, he closed the vessel.
“I think you forget what you are.
You just make honey for MY jar.”

So now I may not relax,

For he will come collect his tax.
Forever in my prison barred,
Making honey here in this jar.

Let Me Live in the Woods

Bryton Hawkins

I really really really want to live in the woods
Please please please
Put me in the the woods
For the love of God, why am I not in a forest
No one could stop me
I'd sleep in a cave
Eat berries and thistle root
Collect nuts in the fall
Hunt for rabbits all day
My friends could visit, sing by the campfire
I would die so quickly out there
Maybe a branch falls on me
Or I eat the wrong mushroom
But that's ok
I'd stay alive for a bit
And at least I would be lucky enough to die in the woods

Winter Wonderland

Caitlyn Higdon



Appalachian Fever

Kaleb Humble

Just nabbed the last pack of Reds
Off the shelf of the local pump station.
The station attendant didn't recognize me,
But he should know the words stamped on
The back attracts all who see.

"Three out of five smokers die," it read.
I've never sighed with as much relief,
Called my friend to tell the good news.
"Eternal cleansing— minus
The side effects," I said.
It'd roughly be a coin toss, a pretty sweet deal.

I Cracked them open impatiently,
Shaved them down to butt burners, one by one.
This wasn't my first time,
And wouldn't be my last.
A cycle of Appalachian fever,

That ravages these hills,
Where people smoke anything that kicks,
Stack double-wides like mansions,
And praise a God that
Left them here to crumble,
That lures them back
Long after their sentence has ended
To these misty monuments—
Reintroduced to their favorite game.

Sustained by this ritual,
Until the odds of perishing
Increase once more.
Teetering on this tightrope,
Trying to escape the being of
A lone leaf swirling in a gale.

Like each castaway that came before me,
A family lineage that's become
A void of recollection,
Bald by age thirty,
Living on mercy checks,

With pennies to pass down,
Besides a trash pile of novelties,
That's made me who I am today.

And as I pull out, heading South on 27,
I bask in comfort having already
Stretched my expiration date.
Cars passing, giving me coal dust kisses,
Reminding me I'm right where I belong.

God's haven for the damned,
Playing the human lottery,
While I prepare for tomorrow,
Waiting for this all to end,
Ready to take my final exhale.

Prairie Phantoms

Kaleb Humble

The matted mane filled with
Oil and tears of my Father,
Rests upon my shoulders
In the belly of December,
As I watch the haunted tree lines,
Where he first picked up the family rifle.
Fields speckled with death's blues,
Cattle begging for a savior—
Fences serving as fishnets for the wind.
The frozen country guiding prairie phantoms,
To the old man's doorstep, and his herd.
Howling, claiming their first victim.
The old man looking down,
Seeing what he left behind.
And what remains— me,
Behind the barrel still stained with his blood.
Firing to turn the night back into day,
And to one day be the warmth
Of a kid who has yet to feel their coldest winter.

Star-kissed Lullabies

Kaleb Humble

One day we will all combust,
Scattered by our failure to persist,
Like the fabled amber faces
Flickering in the dimly lit sky.

Offering only glimpses of
Our triumphs and heartaches,
And subjection of those who
Found comfort within the
Wistful stillness of unknowing.

Withering as they're the last of their kind,
A poster board for the past,
Singled out by masses on the golden path.
Feeding the universe's expansion.

Each constellation,
Separated by borders that once intertwined,
Lost within bands of tears.
Shedding dark matter
Pent up since the dawn of time.

Gifting newfound power
In the things we swore
We'd never leave behind.
Our shadows, consuming the
Lands that gave us life.

Earthborn dreams sacrificed,
Our souls sold for a clean slate.
So our offspring can learn nothing
At the cost of everything,
Just to achieve self-manufactured serenity.

Faltering in the embrace of the
Vacuum of sovereignty above.
That emerges as the only resolution
For the abyss resting below.

Permanently orbiting out of reach
Of our cherished ancestors,

In search of the final frontier.
Until fulfillment loses meaning,

With no home in sight and nowhere to go.
Singing half-forgotten star-kissed lullabies
To remind us of all we've lost.
Hoping a blip of life comes near,

Before the words fragment,
Dismembering the soft, tranquilizing hymns,
Once voicing a generation's salvation.
Before only faint mumbles
Leave our Godless bodies,

And there is nothing left to do or say.
Before lullabies lead us astray,
Becoming what we want them to be,
Amidst our cycle of decay.

Beauty in Time

Anna Johnson

Sometimes I wonder if the faults I once saw
were always there, quietly waiting,
hidden in the folds of my own reflection.
I often think of how I never saw
the true beauty in myself
until I looked back at old photographs.

As a child, I never pointed to my nose
with disdain,
never shrank from the curve of my stomach,
or concealed the tiredness in my eyes.
I praised my rosy cheeks as a "natural blush"
and smiled when I was called pretty.

Why is it that now,
We struggle to accept what once felt so simple,
so true?
How cruel it is, that society teaches us
to believe beauty fades,
that it wilts like a flower,
withering as time passes.

But beauty is not fleeting.
It is not a mourning dove's song,
soft and sad,
fading into silence.
Beauty is like a pine,
growing, evolving,
reaching toward the heavens with each passing year.

Beauty is endless.
It is in all of us.
It doesn't look at the elderly and turn away,
shying from the lines that mark a life lived.
No, it lingers,
it holds on—
it grows more visible in the strength of age.

The wrinkles near the eyes show
a woman who smiled often,
the sagging cheeks tell stories
that fell from her lips like soft rain.

Her brittle teeth speak of meals shared,
of years spent nourishing those she loved.

Wrinkles and age are not signs of fading beauty,
just as a large nose is not a flaw.
They are God's design,
perfect and crafted in His image.
Not all faces are the same,
and therein lies the true beauty—
in the oddities, the differences,
the glory of the seldom seen.

So no, beauty is not bound
by society's narrow vision,
not by the fleeting thoughts
it pushes upon us.
True beauty comes from the love of God,
radiating through the soul of every man and woman,
a light that never dims and will never grow cold.

The Day Adorn

Anna Johnson

It was a lovely Sunday morn,
The doves outside the day adorn.
The sun shone bright, the dew was cast,
On glistening blades of growing grass.
Such peace, yet how I often stray,
And miss God's gifts throughout the day.

How many times I've failed to see
The wonders God has placed for me.
His world, His plan, so full of grace,
Yet I rush on, a hurried pace.
I wonder if He made it all,
To lift me when I feel so small.

The trees that sway, the winds that call,
Are signs that He attends us all.
Each morning light, each feathered wing,
Reminds me of His love, His spring.
The earth, so vast, yet every part
Is touched by God's eternal heart.

I've walked through days, blind to His care,
Forgetting He is everywhere.
But in this moment, still and true,
I see His beauty shining through.
The world, it spins by His design,
A masterpiece, both pure, divine.

And here, beneath the skies so wide,
I feel His presence by my side.
Each gentle breeze, each bird in flight,
Reflects His peace, His guiding light.

For What?

Jesse LaGrange

The road outstretched before me
Like the hand of a salesman coaxing
That I go further than I can
With offerings of a freedom
From a boundless maze without center
Only to wander in forgetful variation
One for another: exchange –
The only hand we can hold
And to whom we were given,
It is the fire which melts our wings
And wakes us from the winding lull
Of a hopeful imagination

Little Anna Wolfe: A Retelling of “Little Red Riding Hood”

Jesse LaGrange

Little Anna Wolfe sat at the edge of her bed smoothing out small circles next to her in the ruffled sheets. Her room was dimly lit by the single yellow bulb in her ceiling fan, whose light was mirrored in her gleaming eyes as tears stroked down her cheeks. She had not wanted to do it, but her mother had said there was no other way: they needed the money. She knew her mother would make her do it again because they always needed the money, and she had listened to how the man downstairs would yell at her mother if she did not have the money. But she could not, would not do it again. She turned her head and looked down at her shoulder, it was already changing color. It was so painful. She hated the man downstairs. But what could she do? Her mother said the police were bad people too. She stood up from the bed and wiped her hands across her eyes. She left her room, went quietly down the stairs, and slipped out the front door.

The city was a beast lurking in the aftermist of a rainy evening, glowing with the life of pale streetlight and the throb of downtown bars in the distance. Anna scurried down the shadowy engraving of sidewalk between the stained and crumbling buildings that cradled her street. Her mind continued to writhe with hatred for the man downstairs. She longed for death: for him, for anybody, for everybody. She wanted him to suffer in a way beyond her own pain and humiliation. Her innocence was gone now, but not her repulsion. She walked beneath a streetlight and saw her shadow placed by its pale beam onto the wet pavement. The shadow was black and without detail, her own reflection in the earth; for a moment she was the darkness and could control its power. Walking out from beneath the streetlamp, her shadow disappeared, and she had resolved to bring the darkness unto him.

But how? Torture him? No, he was too strong to be held by her. Death would have to do: death is quick. But even if she did manage to kill him herself, the police would take her away from her mother. She did not want that. What could she do? The darkness of the side-streets and alleys frightened her. What if someone else reached out and grabbed her to make her do it again? She turned and looked down the alley she was passing. Squinting into the darkness, she was startled to see a man bundled up next to a dumpster. Her heart began to race, and she noticed a glass bottle sitting next to him. Glancing up at the street sign, she sighed with relief noticing that she was on Huntington, so the man next to the dumpster must be Mr. Red. Everyone at school said he had killed someone before, but she did not believe them. He always smiled and said hi to her when they saw each other, and had once said he would do anything for her mother. Would he still? Anna wondered.

...

It had been two weeks, and it was time for another visit from the man downstairs. He would arrive within the next hour. Her mother had told her to stay in her room, but she would not do it again. Sneaking out of her room, she went to find Mr. Red.

It was dusk, and the streets were warm. She walked quickly – but not too quickly, so as to properly time her return home. When she made it to Huntington street she looked for Mr. Red. She found him next to his dumpster and pleaded:

“Mr. Red! Please, help! The man downstairs is beating my mother!”

“What? Who’s the man downstairs?”

“The one who always asks for the money.”

“Gray? That jackal. Let’s go.” Mr. Red got up, several bottles clattering next to him as he stood, and followed Anna back to her house.

It was dark when they arrived, but the blinded window panes were glowing yellow. There was a ruckus inside. Anna and Mr. Red stood outside listening to the muffled commotion:

“Where is she?”

“I don’t know, I told her to stay in her room...”

“Don’t lie to me! This shit ain’t free. I told you if you don’t have the money, you better have her ready, otherwise it’s going to be you.”

There was a crash.

“No! Please! I’ll find her!”

Anna spun toward Mr. Red and said “See, I told you. He’s beating her!”

Mr. Red ran up to the door and burst in. “What’s this?” the man downstairs demanded.

Anna came to the doorway and watched as Mr. Red threw the first punch. After they exchanged several more back-and-forth punches and a short grapple, the man downstairs pushed Mr. Red against the corner of the table, tripping him backwards onto the floor. The man downstairs shoved the table to the side and leaped onto Mr. Red and started beating his face. When Mr. Red finally quit moving, the man downstairs stopped and looked up at Anna. She screamed and ran out the door. The man downstairs jumped up and chased after her. She had barely run ten feet from the steps when he caught her. Anna twisted and clawed at his wrist as he dragged her by the throat back to the house and up to her bedroom.

Стихотворение о прелюдии С.В. Рахманинова

Jesse LaGrange

Awakening beneath a dogwood
Speckled with white flowers
Fresh with rain's majesty
And a new sun whose light
Is weaved through wet branches
And ringed flowers resending
Promises of past and future ages
To brightly withered spirits
In a dream everlasting
Of life's perfect imaginings

A Letter I'll Never Send

Zachariah Lawson

Dear Mom,
Or should I call you something different?
I feel like I don't even know you.
You gave birth to me,
Yet, you're a stranger.

I was raised in foreign homes.
Abandoned by the woman who was supposed to love me.
The one who was supposed to raise me.
I don't get it.

I get angry at times when I sit and think.
I think about the days that it was us.
You and your 6 kids, finally all together.
I was 9 then, telling myself this wasn't going to last forever.
Because of the cycle you had me in.

I wish every day that I can turn back time
To rewind the clock before you met him.
To stop the abuse he brought onto your own kids.
The physical and emotional pain he caused.
Did you even care?

All you could do was sit and watch.
You could've helped. You should've helped.
You had a choice.
But you weren't strong enough and you chose him.

I'm paralyzed from the view of needles in your arms.
From the tears he caused when he pinned me to the wall
His hand, a noose around my neck
And the view of you, just standing there.

The hurt you've caused will never fade.
The tears you caused are forever on my face.
I've hated you for the longest time,
But this letter is my farewell to that.

I no longer hate you
I wish the best for you I do
The little child you now have now,

I wish the best for him too.

I hope you love him.

I hope you choose him over everyone else.

I hope he never lives in a stranger's house

I hope he never endures the pain you can cause.

Protect and cherish him.

Make this one count.

Let him be the end of this cycle that was;

The cycle full of pain and chaos.

Selfishly, I sit here and thank you.

Thank you for the hurt

Thank you for the pain

Thank you for becoming the stranger you are today.

Without any of it,

I would not be who I am.

I would not have found my family.

I would not have found what real love is.

The pain you've caused will forever be there

A reminder that a triumphant victory awaits

For when my time comes,

I will have peace with what was.

Through the pain, I have found hope

I am strong, for it did not break me

The now is all I have, all I can focus on

The future is bright for me.

Signing off,

A kid who once felt the weight of your absence,

But now stands tall,

Embracing the light of a hopeful future.

The Love of God

Zachariah Lawson

In a hammock swaying to and fro,
I gaze up at the sky's brilliant glow.
The leaves rustle gently, birds chirp their tune,
As I bask in the warmth of a lazy afternoon.

With each gentle sway, I feel my worries fade;
I'm reminded of a love that's never swayed.
A love that's constant, strong, and true,
A love that's always there, guiding me through.

As I lay here, in the arms of nature's embrace,
I feel a deep sense of peace, a sense of grace.
And I realize with every breath I take,
That God is with me, every step I make.

His love surrounds me like a warm breeze,
And in my heart, I feel a deep sense of ease.
For in this moment, I know without a doubt
That God loves me so much, inside and out.

So I lay here, in this hammock's gentle sway,
And give thanks for His love, every single day.

The Yellow House

Zachariah Lawson

“If walls could talk”
They would tell of the hurt they saw,
The pain he caused,
The screams they heard,
Or maybe, they would say nothing at all.

I wonder, did it hurt when he hit them?
When he left those walls beaten and bruised.
I wonder, did his fists hurt them as badly as they hurt me?
Did those walls share my empathy?

I couldn't tell you the conversations we had,
Those walls and me.
The tears they wiped from my face,
When I cried out to God begging him to take away the pain.

The way those walls held me,
Giving me peace in a time of chaos.
The comforting touch of those walls;
Oh I wish I still had their company.

I had no one else there
To guide me through the maze that was life.
No one there to grab my hand and wipe my tears.
So I turned to what I knew couldn't hurt me.

Those walls couldn't hit or scream,
Those walls just sat there, listening.
I wonder, did it hurt when I got so mad
And put a hole in one of them,
I hope they forgave me.

Maybe they actually understood me.
Those walls were the only thing keeping me alive.
Being my only reasons to fight,
To make it to bed every night

The Yellow House holds so many memories.
Good and bad
Was it to be my forever home?
I could have only hoped

A New Angle

Jerrica McFarland



Simply Why

Jerrica McFarland

he asked her why
why she said
why do you wear your clothes
the way you do, he says
because nobody ever looks
let me rephrase
no one ever looks at me
in public
they scrutinize and ignore
but will text
me in the wee hours to see more
the clothing hides
me from most
but not all
doesn't that hurt you he whispers
not anymore *I'm used to it*

Peek-a-boo
Jasmine Mitchell



Futility

Tezon Mitchell



River

Tezon Mitchell



The Lich King

Tezon Mitchell



Misguided Illusions of Reality

Rishab Niroula

To all those uncaptured words swung by,
To all those memories came passing by,
Am I as old as my dream is?
Or is it a recreational fantasy to think by?

Just the mere ability to hear things
Oh lord when will i get my senses back
Or will I just pass by like everyone else without realizing it?
How long shall I hear to be able to finally feel?

Will I be ready when life calls me back?
Or will it be the last moment rush?
Will it be quick, slow or the crush?
Do the feelings hurt even after the flush??

Should I admire stars, heaven and the sky
Rhyme the unsung, beyond my little ball of tears and joy
Is it guns, pen or the mike I need to pick
Just for my dissatisfaction to be depicted...

Threads

Rishab Niroula

Maybe the threads matter
Those that connect us, those that cling us from falling apart
Those that runs in and inside of us
Those that we make among us

I like to call them threads, symmetrical which arrange our systems intact
Threads which strengthen themselves time and again to keep us moving
Threads which we get nostalgic reading a poem, like the mirrors which we relate inside our heads
threading a meaningful connection.

Some threads which we put everyday to distance ourselves from the real self or the unreal energy inside
the thread.
The threads of reality which y'all believe I need to visualize through your eyes,
The vicious virtual self satisfying cycles and system you have created
To distant myself from the real purpose of self discovery
And still i wear your threads pretending I feel pretty good
Trust me we will be long gone merely as the words but in different books...

The Wizard of Oz Color Wheel Project

Abigail Oswald



A False Eschatology

Yesh Singayao

“The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.”

...

“One will be taken and the other left.”

“Where, lord?” they asked.

He replied, “Where there is a body, there the vultures will gather.”

...

The priest climbed up the rungs of the ladder, step by step, to the top of the tall oak. Ancient crosses, made in a time long past, swayed back and forth in the wind, suspended from twine on the branches. Near the top of the ladder stood a man, his face half-covered with a hood. He tied a noose around the neck of the disheveled man standing below him. The priest stopped and thrust a crucifix in the condemned man’s face.

“Kiss the Son,” the priest muttered. “Lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled.” There was silence for several moments, and then the disheveled man shuddered. “No.”

The priest’s face remained emotionless. He gestured down to the friar at the bottom of the tree. After a few moments, the Communion Host was elevated for all to see.

“Adore your Savior and greet your God, Anabaptist!” The condemned looked up and stared with disdain and defiance in his eyes.

“The Savior is not in your Eucharist,” the Anabaptist said through gritted teeth. “It will not save you. Only those who accept the believer’s baptism will be redeemed. Christ’s new millennium is near! I see Matthijs, the Second Enoch, at His right hand! The martyrs will be avenged!”

The priest scowled. He climbed back down the ladder, step by step. Halfway down, he looked up and nodded at the hooded man. There was a sharp cry, silenced by a sudden snap.

Anno 1534 was the year the Faithful of Munster expected Christ’s coming. But only the vultures came, to pick at their dying flesh.

...

It was the end of the world, Imka was sure of it. The New Jerusalem had fallen. But a new one would surely arise. The new millennium was near. The visions revealed this to her. She had seen burning arrows raining down from Heaven on the sons of men, rivers of blood that flooded their banks and filled the sky, a burning city—

Munster.

And water, fire, pitch, and brimstone that covered the ungodly earth. She prayed for more understanding. But the Lord was silent to her. Some of her brothers and sisters claimed she was ill. They gave her herbs. The visions went away. But it was because the devils began to torment her, out of revenge for prophesying.

She would lie down and close her eyes, and she would suddenly awaken. The shades would bind her so that she could not move. They would whisper into her ears and tell her the terrible things that they

would do to her. Other times she would hear her father and her mother talking to her. She would open her eyes and see that they had arisen from their graves. She fled from their torment into the forest.

On the third day, she heard the crying of an infant. She followed the cries to a small clearing. She saw a great rock, beside which lay a muddied and tattered bundle.

A child. Alone?

She picked up the bundle and unwrapped it to look at the infant's face. She let out a scream and flung it against the rock.

A calf's head. Abomination. Corruption.

The monstrous infant began to cry again. *It is still alive.*

She covered her ears, trying to find relief from the human yet monstrous cries.

Then, she saw something shine in the tall grass. She came closer and saw it was a sword, rusted and bloodied.

Strike it dead. Strike it. Abomination. Corruption.

She took the sword and raised it above her head. Then, she heard a voice.

Watch.

She looked around frantically for who had spoken to her.

Watch.

She looked down at the bleeding bundle. The infant had spoken to her.

Trembling, she turned it over to look again at the monstrous child's face. It stared at her with dark, empty eyes. It began to convulse and spit out blood.

Watch.

Watch.

Watch.

Your Lord and God Cometh.

He cometh.

Its eyes rolled into the back of its head, and then it went limp. She threw away the sword and began to run. She covered her ears again but to no avail.

He cometh.

He cometh.

He cometh.

She collapsed and began to cry. She did not understand.

What do you want from me, Lord? Why? Why? Why? Then she heard another voice.

Peace.

She turned around and saw a man, who had one head, but three faces. He had three mouths and three noses, and his faces shared four eyes.

Who are you? She asked fearfully.

I am the Morning Star. Who is, and was.

Who is to come.

I died, and behold I am alive.

I have the keys to death and Hades.

Imka dropped to the ground and began to kiss his feet.

What do you want from me?

To pick up my sword.

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

**I have come to set a man against his Father.
A daughter against her mother.**
Then from out of his mouth came a rusted, bloodied sword.
**The Godly must punish the wicked.
Enoch and the prophets must lead the people.
Into the new millennium.**

Three bleeding suns shone over the trees, and vultures circled overhead.

...

False messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible,
even the elect.

See, I have told you ahead of time.

So if anyone tells you, "There he is, out in the wilderness," do not go out. Or, "Here he is in the inner
rooms," do not believe it.

For as lightning that comes from the east is visible in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

...

The people fell on their knees before the prophet from Haarlem.

What does she see?

He laid his hands on the woman, called Imka. She began to tremble and scream.

Peace be with thee, sister Imka. She collapsed and convulsed. She began to speak in an unknown
tongue.

It is the Heavenly tongues! The voice of Angels!

Those who called themselves Melchorites let out a great shout and turned their eyes toward heaven,
thanking God for this miracle. Even those who had doubted her began to weep.

What does she say? He laid his hand on her forehead and began to interpret.

*She is in a field. She is looking above her, and she sees a great army, hovering above in the sky. It
carries blasphemous idols, images, and relics in the vanguard, and behind them stands a seven-headed
dragon. The whore who sits upon this beast, wears a crown, and on it is written—*

Mysterium.

Then, behold, an angel, flying in the midheaven, who proclaims—

Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come.

*Elijah comes, who reveals the presence of the Anti-Christ. And for this, he is driven away. Then
behold, comes Enoch—*

Jan Matthijs!

*—who baptizes the people with water, and for this he is slain! Then behold, the people rise up from
the ground and into the sky, and they slay the Beast, the Whore, and the armies of Antichrist. And then,
He who rides on the White horse, whose cloak is dipped in blood and who wears many crowns, shall
come! And the Angel who is standing in the sun will cry to the birds—*

Come gather together, for the Great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the Flesh of all people, free and slave, great and Small.

The Melchoirites began to scream, shout, and cry, convulsing and shaking in joy at the coming of the new Millennium. They walked in procession toward the city in the far distance, dazed in ecstasy, and speaking in heavenly tongues. They carried with them pitchforks, knives, and threshing flails. They would bring about the coming of Christ with the shedding of the blood, just as they had been told to do.

The vultures followed, in preparation for the coming feast upon the Faithful.

...

The soldiers tied Imka to the wooden ladder, while a bonfire in the square burned brightly. Her brothers and sisters had all been sentenced to hang by the authorities of Amsterdam. The vultures picked at their dead flesh. The carrion would not get to pick at her body, however. She would burn in the flames. The prophet from Haarlem, however, was not among them. He was nowhere to be found.

The soldiers tightened the rope around her wrist until it began to bleed. She cried out and looked into the howling and screaming crowd of townspeople. Her heart began to beat faster. She saw the three-faced Christ standing in the crowd.

Why have you forsaken me?

A hideous and unnaturally stretched grin spread across his face. Imka blinked, and then she saw the prophet from Haarlem. She began to tremble.

Why have you deceived me? What are you?

I am nothing, just as you are now.

I don't understand...

It is written, If I have the gift of prophecy, and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. You incited your brethren to kill, without pity. You tore out love from their heart. Now, they are nothing, and you are nothing, just as I am. You made an altar to fear. You said it was for God, but it was for me, and for you.

Imka blinked again. He had disappeared. The soldiers lifted up the ladder until she was face to face with the raging flames. The heat took her breath away. She felt faint, and her vision became clouded by the smoke. Her eyes welled up with tears, but they offered no relief. She looked upward, one last time.

"Oh God, turn not your face from me," she whispered in a trembling voice.

"Forgive me. Must I die without comfort?" A blurred shape flew over her face.

She heard the fluttering of wings.

"Thank you..." The soldiers let go of the ladder, and it fell into the fire.

The year in which she expected Christ's return was *Anno*, 1535.

Only a dove came.

End.

Famine: A Tale of the Thirty Years War

Yesh Singayao

Jakob Krafft cautiously approached the dilapidated and ruined village. As he got closer, he could see a corpse lying in the path ahead of him. Jakob gritted his teeth and tightened his grip around his clasp knife.

“You will not be afraid of the horror of the night...of the arrows that fly by day,” he muttered as he began walking forward in a crouch. “From the pestilence that creeps in the darkness...from the pestilence that destroys in the noonday...Whether a thousand fall on your side and ten thousand on your right, it will not affect you...Yes, you will see with your eyes, and see how the wicked will be rewarded...” As he moved closer and closer, he could see that the first body that was lying in front of him was that of a woman. As he got closer, he could see that her clothing was tattered and dirty, but untorn. Krafft stopped dead in his tracks. In his experience, any soldier, Godless as they all were, whether Swede, Hessian, Croat, French, Spaniard, Italian, or German, would have had his way with a captive peasant woman, before killing her. He could see, that she had not died by a soldier’s hand.

“P-Plague! Plague!” he uttered in terror. He hastily unwrapped the white scarf around his neck and covered his mouth and nose. He then began to slowly move toward the dead woman’s body. He held his breath, as he stopped a few feet away from it. The corpse’s skin was a sickening darkish yellow. The cheeks were sunken, and its open eyes were just as yellow as the skin. Then, he noticed something green protruding from the corpse’s mouth. As he leaned in closer to get a better look, he began to tremble. He stared down into the mouth and could see that there were torn-up blades of grass in it. Jakob breathed out a sigh of relief. He felt a twinge of joy in his heart. It was not the scourge of war that had killed the dead woman, nor the scourge of plague, but that of hunger. He had seen grass in the mouths of dying peasants before. It was a final act of desperation, to drive away the pain of hunger.

“Oh praise be to God!” he muttered gratefully. He stood upright and took another deep breath. He wondered why he didn’t recognize it sooner. He wondered why the grass in her mouth and not her jaundiced skin and emaciated face, didn’t lead to him recognizing hunger. He almost let out a laugh of relief, before he looked, inadvertently, back into the woman’s lifeless and jaundiced eyes. The joy he had in his heart was dispersed in an instant, and in its place, shame crept in.

Oh merciful God, he thought in horrified shock. I’m praising the Lord, for the slow and agonizing death of a fellow Christian! What’s happening to me? He felt a sharp pain of overwhelming anguish and pity, tear through his heart, in addition to the sting of the previous shame. He gagged. The deluge of emotion made him feel sick. If his stomach wasn’t empty, he would have vomited.

The woman looked to have been a few years away from middle age. Her disheveled hair was growing long. Her dress was caked in mud and dirt. Her fingernails were also sickeningly long. It was wretched. He thought about how, that if she had lived in happier times, how she could have been a happy matron. Bouncing a toddler on her knee, while watching her eldest child go off to be happily married. But, here she was, lying dead in the road, like a despised and rabid dog. He began to tremble.

Should I leave her like this? He thought Shouldn’t I say a prayer for her? He looked over at the crucifix that hung around the body’s neck and sighed. No, no, I’m no papist...when death comes, it’s all over with prayers...and besides, she probably would have wanted the rites of the Roman Church to be said over her by a priest...not the heretic prayers of a Calvinist Hedge preacher...but now...would there truly be any harm in doing it? Jakob stared at the dead body for a few more moments, before slowly pulling out the bible from his sack. He paused for a moment, staring silently at the worn-out cover of the Luther

Bible that had been passed down to him. Jakob opened the book and tenderly flipped through those worn-out pages. Some had grime and dirt on them. Others, dried blood. He stopped at the eighth chapter of Romans. He focused his gaze on the thirty-fifth verse. He paused for a few moments and then began to read aloud, the words that his father had said to many dying, wounded, sickened, and starving people before, and the words that Jakob had tearfully recited over him as he lay dying from a wound caused by a Hessian's bullet.

"Who will separate us from the love of God?" he said in as solemn a voice as he could. "Tribulation, or fear, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all day long, we are respected like sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we overcome far, for the sake of him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor principalities nor powers, neither things present nor things to come, neither high nor low, nor any other creature will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord...Amen..." Jakob paused and lingered on those words. Then he closed the bible and then closed the woman's lifeless yellow eyes. He then looked towards the ruined village in the distance.

There could still be people alive there... there could be souls that are suffering from the physical pang of starvation...I can't help that...Oh God, I wish I could...but can I not give them spiritual comfort at least? Does not everyone deserve that in the hour of their death? Who cares if they are Calvinist, Catholic, Lutheran, or even Anabaptist? Are we not all the same? Jakob looked on in the direction of the village for a minute or so, before he stood up, and began to walk. As he came closer and closer, he spotted more bodies lying on the road and the village lanes.

The bodies that he saw as he got closer, were gaunt, and emaciated. Nothing more than skin and bone. They were half naked, and for the most part, were barefoot. Jakob saw at least a dozen of them. Men, women, and children. He went over to each one to check for any sign of life. Some were pale, others were jaundiced. Some, like the body of the first woman he encountered, had grass in their mouths. Others were clutching bark, and roots in their hands. The body of one man was even clutching a half-eaten mouse in his hand. Some of the bodies had insects and flies crawling on them, others were being gnawed upon, by squeaking and hissing rats, and a few were being pecked upon by carrion fowl. The words of the prophet Jeremiah began to ring aloud in his head. I will send four kinds of destroyers against them, declares the Lord, The sword to kill, and the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy...

After checking the body of a child, who could have been no older than six or seven. He staggered to his feet and looked around at the emaciated bodies again. He then opened up his bible again and flipped to the tenth chapter of John.

"For my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," he said aloud. "And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand..." He paused. There was silence. "And they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand!" he repeated in a louder volume. He stopped again and listened intently. There was nothing. "Is there anybody that can hear my voice?" My God, is there no one left alive here?

Jakob walked into the nearest hovel, and when his eyes had adjusted to the dim light, he saw the body of a woman lying on the floor. Slumped over a nearby table, was the body of a man. On the table itself, were acorns, roots, and bark. He checked the two bodies. They were dead like the rest. Then, he noticed a small pot hanging over the fireplace. The pangs of hunger attacked his stomach. Driven by this pain, he put his Bible on the table and looked down into the pot. He saw dozens of small bones and a skull. He looked closer and saw that the skull had belonged to a cat. The bones looked to be picked

completely clean. He was about to walk away in disappointment when he realized that none of the bones had been broken open.

Can it be? Surly not...He took one of the bones and broke it in half. His eyes widened, as he looked at the darkish-red flesh inside. He hastily put one-half of the bone between his teeth and began to hungrily suck out the marrow. Praise be to God! After sucking out the first half of the bone, he moved on to sucking the marrow out of the other half. Then he took another bone, broke it again, and started sucking anew. Before he broke open his ninth bone, he stopped and chuckled to himself.

"If you find honey, do not eat more than you can bear," he recited from Proverbs. "Or you will get tired of it, and vomit it." Not wanting to be gluttonous, and thinking it to be prudent, he grabbed the bones and put it in his sack to have for later. He turned around and realized that he had nearly forgotten about the two bodies that were lying in the hovel. Oh, Jesus...their ignorance was my succor...God, have mercy on their souls...

Jakob walked out of the hovel, more pensive and disturbed than he had been before. Then, he heard loud creaking coming out from one of the nearby hovels. He rushed in, hoping to find another living soul. Instead, he felt the color and warmth drain from his face as he saw what was within. There were the bodies of a young couple, probably not even in their twenties, suspended from a beam, by ropes around their necks. The wind blew through the partially rotted walls and made their bodies sway back and forth, like fruit on a tree caught up in a strong breeze. The body of an infant, lay on the floor wrapped up in a dirty bundle. Ants coming in rows, from down the walls, and through the floorboards, were crawling all over the infant's body, who shared their meal with clumps of writhing white maggots.

Jakob stepped out and vomited outside on the grass. His heart beat fast. A cold sweat started coming down his forehead. "The Lord is my shepherd..." he muttered in between rapid breaths. "He will feed me...Oh God...will lead me...fresh water...And though I have walked in the valley of dark...you are with me...your rod...comfort me...oil...life...Oh, Jesus...help me..." Suddenly, he heard a loud groan from another hovel.

Jakob froze. His heart started beating faster than it had been before. He could hear that there was somebody still alive. However, he felt that something was terribly wrong. He put his bible back into his sack and drew out his clasp knife from his pocket. He slowly advanced toward the hovel and stopped beside the entrance. He turned his head and looked inside. Jakob gasped and felt all of the breath leave his body.

On the floor of the hovel, lay the half-rotted corpse of a woman. The corpse's blouse had been torn apart. The torso was cut, completely open, from the chest to the stomach. He could see down into the inside of the body. The heart had been cut out, and so had the lungs, liver, and kidneys. One of the kidneys, partially devoured, lay beside the corpse's hand. Pulling the putrid guts and entrails from the body, like how one would pull rope from a spool, was a half-naked and emaciated old man. As he pulled the guts out, he put them into his mouth and devoured them. Animal-like, grunts and groans came from his throat.

Jakob stood there, staring in horror and disbelief, as the old man pulled the slippery guts from the young woman's corpse. He felt as if he was going to faint. Then, the old man stopped and stared right at him. The disheveled old peasant, looked at him with wide yellow eyes, that sunk deep into his jaundiced face. He dropped the entrails and smiled a wide blood-stained grin at him. Blood and bits of gore dripped down from his opened mouth. With a trembling hand, Jakob lifted up his knife towards him. "S-Stay back!" he said in a trembling voice. The old man slowly stood to his feet, staring and smiling all the while.

“S-Stay away!” The old man grinned wider and took a step forward. Then he outstretched his arms as one would do when expecting an embrace. “Come and eat, Johan,” the old man said in a low, hoarse voice. “Our Lady has heard our prayers at last. Look, your sister is here too. Come and eat, you look starved!”

“N-Not another step!” The old man let out a laugh and took another step toward him. Jakob lunged forward and thrust his knife into the old peasant’s belly. The old man let out a shriek of pain.

“Jesu Maria! Help! Help!” Overcome with panic, Jakob stabbed the old man thrice more in the stomach. The old man fell on his back, choking on blood. His legs started twitching and trembling. His hands spasmed, rapidly opening and closing. Dull, choked rattles came from his throat, and blood, bubbling like foam, flowed from out his mouth. Jakob grabbed the door and slammed it shut. He took a few steps backward and then collapsed onto the ground. Tears began running down his face and started to shake uncontrollably. He put his head between his legs.

“W-Why? Oh God, why?” he muttered. Then in his mind, he heard a whispering voice. It was calm and soft, but terrible and cutting.

If you will not obey me, and walk against me, I will meet you in anger, And I will punish you seven times for your sins, that you shall eat the flesh of your sons and daughters...and to those who remain of you, I will make a cowardly heart in the land of their enemies...And let one fall over the other, just as before the sword...And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall devour you.

Jakob gripped his knees and looked up at the heavens. Then, in between sobs, he began to pray. “Amen...we submit to you...” he said in a trembling, broken voice. “The sword, pestilence, and famine you have sent for our manifold sins...and so, we submit our cases to your inscrutable judgment, oh, Lord...but please, do not forsake us...please...have mercy on us...”

...

The Passive Night

Yesh Singayao

“‘Curse ye Meroz,’ Said the angel of the Lord!” cried the pastor from the pulpit. “‘Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty!’”

...

And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth...

...

And War, which for a moment was no more,
Did glut himself again: a meal was bought
With blood, and each sat sullenly apart
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left.
All earth was but one thought—and that was death
Immediate and inglorious; and the pang
Of Famine fed upon all entrails.¹

...

The lone soldier stood on the parapet, while he shouldered his gun and stared at the distant silhouettes of cannons in an imposing redoubt. Save for a slow-burning fuse, for keeping track of time, and a smoldering cord match that hung from his weapon, he was surrounded by darkness. He stood there unmoving. Then, a shadow started to move in the far distance. He unshouldered his gun and brought its match up to his mouth. He blew on it, illuminating the rest of his face.

The soldier’s hair was long and disheveled, and one side of his face was burned and covered with a black powder. His eyes and cheeks were sunken, his forehead was creased, and his beard was full of gray hairs. But he was not old.

After the match started to burn again, he re-shouldered his gun and went back to watching the moving shadow. Then, he made the sign of the cross. “Gate of heaven, pray for us. Morning star, pray for us,” he muttered. “Health of the sick, pray for us. Refuge of sinners, pray for us. Solace of migrants, pray for us. Comfort of the afflicted, pray for us. Help of Christians, pray for us. Queen of Angels...”

Suddenly, a hand came from out of the darkness behind him and gripped his shoulder. The soldier whipped around and shoved the shadowy figure to the muddy floor of the trench. He leveled his weapon, ready to give fire and raise the alarm, but then a voice cried out to stop.

“It is only me, Sergeant!” The soldier hesitated but kept his weapon raised.

What is the watchword!” he growled. “Tell me now, or I swear, by God, I will shoot you dead!” There was silence for a few moments.

“*Legitime certantibus corona!*” the voice finally cried out. The soldier lowered his weapon.

“*Jesu, Maria!* Devil take me!” the soldier swore. He grabbed the burning fuse and held it up to the other man’s face. He grumbled and lifted him to his feet. “Not just one Devil, hundreds!” he continued. “Thousands, and whisk me up into the clouds! What are you doing out here, Father?”

¹ Excerpt from, *Darkness*, by Lord Byron.

“Why else would I be here, my son?” the annoyed chaplain replied. “To take care of my flock. And why do you keep swearing? Do you soldiers always have to be so Godless? Calling upon Our Redeemer, Abyss of All Virtues, and the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, most chaste, while in the same breath, calling upon all the devils! What is the matter with you?”

There was silence.

“Godless?” the soldier replied quietly. “I am not trying to do that. I am sorry Father, I lost my head. You know that I would never do that.”

“Of course, my son,” the priest said with a sigh. “You were one of the only ones here in the company who went to the Forty Hours’ Devotion. That is why I am here. To see if I can comfort a soft heart.” The soldier turned his head and looked back over the parapet into the darkness. Then, he placed his weapon on the wall of the trench and leaned on the parapet.

“I am sorry, Father,” the soldier said. “I do not want to talk with priests as of now. Even with you.”

“And why is that, my son?” the chaplain asked in alarm.

“It was because of those Friars, Father, who were preaching in the town square today. They told the beggars and all the starving townspeople, who were eating the grass growing in the street, that it would endear them to God if they died of hunger. Then, a woman came from out of the crowd and fell on her knees before them. Her skin was jaundiced, and her eyes were so sunken into her head that they almost looked hollow. The child she was holding in her arms was so emaciated, truly, it almost looked as if its bones were about to pierce through the skin.”

There was a pause for a few moments. Then the soldier continued.

“The woman begged the Friars for some bread so that she could relieve her hunger and have milk for her child. And do you know what the Friars said? That it was better to kill your own children if you had nothing to feed them, for it was better to starve than to surrender their city to heretics! By the wounds of Christ, they talk as if the Devil himself and all the armies of Hell are camped outside these walls, but are they so bad? They elevate the Host, and some celebrate *Corpus Christi*! Tell me, Father, would it really be so bad to surrender to those we have something in common?”

Silence.

“It was quite terrible of the Friars to say that, in that way,” the chaplain finally said. “But, just as our Redeemer suffered for us, we all must learn to endure this suffering for this just cause. Just as His sacrifice made us holy in death, so does our sacrifice make the Faith stronger.”

“Forgive me, Father, but has this war made us any more holier?” the soldier replied sharply. “Has it made the Faith stronger? From what I can see, we have only sunken deeper into mortal sin and depravity, and have only lowered ourselves to the states of animals. I have seen women crawl on their hands and knees, in the sewers, to catch screeching rats. I have seen men snatch scraps of meat from the mouths of dogs, then strangle them, skin them, and hang the carcasses in the market stalls to sell for a Ducat apiece. The civil authorities have desecrated all the cemeteries, dug up the bones, and ground them up into powder, to mix with water, to make bread. I have seen a comrade, possessed by God knows what devil, run to the filth and manure in the street, and devour it with such avidity, that he claimed to find it as good as bran bread!”

“You must keep courage, and have Faith, my son!” the chaplain interrupted. “We are in a war being waged for the souls and hearts of mankind. We must endure all of this madness, for it is all to God’s purpose. Saint Amos said, ‘When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?’ And did not Saint Isaiah the Prophet, echoing the voice of God, say, ‘I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things?’”

The soldier suddenly raised his fist. The chaplain recoiled, but then the soldier stopped and groaned. He put his hand between his teeth, and he began to gnaw on his fingers.

“Do you want to know the worst I have seen, Father?” the soldier went on. “On the twentieth...we went into a house with the civil guard. There was a cobbler, his wife, and an old woman. They had a child, a daughter who was three. Maybe they were also bewitched by that old crone, I know not. What I saw, Father...the bone, the head, cured and gnawed...the ears chewed...the tongue cooked...all the limbs, put in a pot, boiling...”

The soldier paused to catch his breath, then continued.

“We took the cobbler and his wife to the tree in the square, and then, we tied their hands and hung them up by their wrists. The cobbler started to howl and whimper like a mad dog, saying that the best of it was the brain and the heart, all while begging us to let him go, saying he could not help it. The wife had more control. She cried out bitterly, saying that she could not bear to see her child suffer, nor bear her own hunger. She said her love for her child pleaded with her, but necessity cried out that it must be dead. Necessity prevailed, and she took up a knife...Three days later, we burned the cobbler alive in the square. We strangled the poor mother first before we burned her. The old woman had died in the meantime, but we did the same. What else could we do? If this hunger continues, the people will start eating their bodies as well!”

The soldier paused again and began to pull at his hair.

“When they blew the mine under our trenches, I saw a comrade, whose clothes were aflame with black powder, which burned him. I carried him to shelter and set him against a wall. I talked to him, but he could neither see, hear, nor speak. A surgeon ran past, and I called out, asking if there were any possible means to cure him. The surgeon looked at me and said no. I then approached my friend, and without feeling, I cut his throat. The surgeon started to scream at me, saying that I was wicked for doing such a thing. I answered him simply, ‘I pray to God, that if I should be in such a state, that someone might do as much as I have done, to the end that I may not suffer.’”

The soldier buried his face in his hands and began to breathe heavily.

“I dream about him, and the Devil, and all the dead, laughing and weeping. I see my wife in the midst of them. Her skin is gray, and her hair falls out. Her skirts are stained with bloody flux. She holds our unborn daughter in her arms...we would have christened her Elisabeth...I see them, even now, Father! Help me!”

The soldier threw himself on top of the parapet and began to quietly weep. The chaplain stood there, silently for a while, unmoving, staring into the empty dark. Then, he placed a hand on the soldier’s arm.

“Blessed are you that mourn, my son,” the chaplain quietly said. “I know, how terrible it is, to lose sight of that light, to be left in the darkness, without sweet water...to taste nothing but bitterness. But, I pray, listen. Meditate, and reflect on these words...” There was then a silence, save for the soldier’s cries.

“Be merciful to me...for I am in distress,” the chaplain began to say. “My eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief...I am forgotten as though I were dead...I hear many whispering, ‘terror on every side’...But I trust in you...Let your face shine on your servant...be silent in the realm of the dead...He showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege. In my alarm, I said, ‘I am cut off from your sight’. Yet, you heard my cry for mercy...Be strong and take heart...”

The soldier’s gasps and sobs grew weaker and softer, and then there was silence.

“Father, may I be granted absolution?” the soldier asked, weakly.

“Of course, my son.” The soldier wiped away the tears from his face and knelt before the chaplain. He crossed himself and bowed his head.

“When was your last confession, my son?” the chaplain asked softly.

“I do not know, Father,” the soldier said in a trembling whisper.

“And your sins?”

“Most everything, Father. More than I can bear. For these and all my sins, I am truly sorry.”

“Here is your penance, my son. Meditate on all the mysteries, and take what little comfort in the words I have just told you. I pray, suffer all these terrors and anxieties, and I promise that you will be led through that dark night of the spirit...”

“Lord Jesus, Son of God,” The soldier said with a shuddering gasp. “Have mercy on me, a sinner.” The chaplain extended his arm and placed his hand on the soldier’s head.

“Deus, Pater misericordiarum, qui per mortem, et resurrectionem, Filli sui mundum sibi reconciliavit et Spiritum Sanctum effudit in remissionem peccatorum, per ministerium Ecclesiae indulgentiam tibi tribuat et pacem. Et ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis.” The chaplain lifted up his arm. With his hand shaking, he scrawled the sign of the cross in the air. *“In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.”*

“Amen.”

“Let me take your place for a while, my son, and watch the line, while you rest.”

The soldier sat down and leaned against the wall of the trench. “Thank you, Father,” he whispered. He began to slowly close his eyes.

“Light guided me,” the priest began to murmur in a trembling voice. “More surely than the light of noonday, to the place where...I knew who...was awaiting me.”

The soldier listened as a gentle breeze began to blow over the trench.

“Night that guided me...more lovely than the dawn...transformed in the Beloved...He stayed sleeping...I caressed him...the fanning of the cedars made a breeze...With his gentle hand...wounded my neck...lost in oblivion...All ceased, and I abandoned myself...”²

To these words and the breeze, the soldier drifted off into sleep.

...

And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death...

...

אֵלִי אֵלִי, לָמָּה עָזַבְתָּנִי

*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*³

...

End.

² Excerpts from, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, by St John of the Cross.

³ Hebrew and Aramaic: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The Calm Before the Storm

Alivia Stines



Misplaced Blame

Lilly Streeval

Was it my fault?
When you took your anger out on me,
You lit a match and threw it on a pile
of gasoline,
Yet somehow I got burned.

I have been told I am too sensitive,
I can't hide my emotions,
My expressions,
When I tried to reason with you,
You screamed in my face and said,
"This is just women sh—"
Was it my fault?

Reported you twice,
And not a single sound since,
I was told by others,
It wasn't my fault,
I was for some reason scared they wouldn't believe me,
I am only a woman;

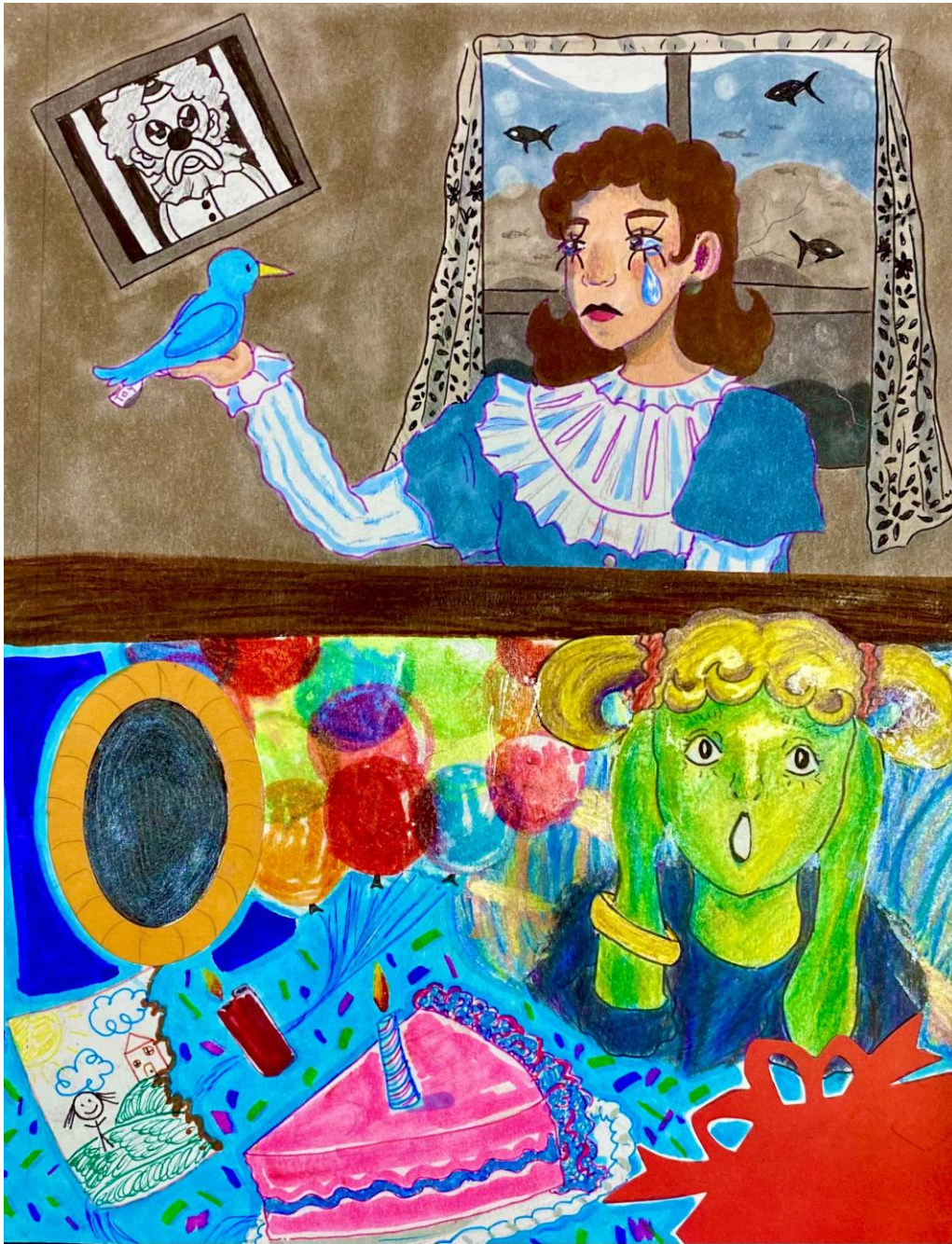
I am still scared,
Of you,
It's your fault,
I heard your voice the other day,
And my bones curled,
I was back,
To the day I was attacked,
A day-walker flashback,

I want to be safe,
Feel it,
But I am alone,
Stumbling in the dark.

Was it my fault?

Abandoned Girlhood

Hailey Turner



An Excerpt from “Smarter Than I Sound”

Megan Whitson

During this game of narration, I must remain docile^[1],
My body is not my own.
It belongs to the writers, the President, and every other observant eye.
God forbid they be unobservant!
Yes it belongs to mankind, but how desperately it is trying to be reclaimed.
The mountains are singing me home.
Their melody is fried chicken legs and pone bread,
Patterned dresses picking tomatoes,
Golden sun and dustings of freckles on formerly smooth skin,
Honeyed hips and Proverbs 31 and someone who swears he'll love me the right way.
It's a compelling tune that is threatening victory.
It is pulling me out of the dresses with zippers and into the ones with elastic.
It is not afraid of growth or the ways that meals and love and little babies make our bellies a little bit softer.
It does not abhor the hair that grows where that in Hollywood never dares.
Because hair is a sign of a living thing.
And living things grow and change and reproduce without shame.
At least, most do.
Now, the world prides itself on remaining stagnant,
humanity has lost its humanness.
Body and soul, women can never relent the seduction of girlhood,
And boys can never become men quickly enough.
So, when traveling back to this dichotomy of the young and the old,
The starving and the hairless,
The dead eyes everywhere,
I zip myself back into the little clothes so I can begin speaking the little language^[2] again.
The kind that binds and restricts and knows nothing of mountains or woods or the people who live in them,
But rather, it uses its fluency to depict people as *mountain people*,
“APP-UH-LATCH-UHH”
Because, in the little language, adding one adjective can subtract so much from a subject
It will subtract the stretch marks and softness of my skin,
It will shave me bald, prepubescent, *sexy*,
It will quiet my grin into a somber smirk as if I know some big secret of academia and success and urban development and “f-ability”^[3].
It will assure me with a snarky voice, “Thank God you never went back. It's about time you correct that accent though, nobody can take you seriously”
It will keep dropping pennies^[4] and storing them inside of me and the copper will turn green and rot my stomach and my joints and turn my face sallow and sick.
But that is alright, because my waist will be flat and I will be pale and sickly and remind everyone of some beautiful and tragic Tubercular Victorian Child that is so romantic and revered.

Most importantly, all those annoying lumps and bumps and ridges will be gone.
I will no longer be the mountains,
I will look and speak so beautifully, so flatly, so much like a monster^[5].

^[1] Bartkey, “Foucault, Femininity, and Patriarchal Power”

^[2] Gee, “What is Literacy?”

^[3] See Comedy Central’s “Last Fuckable Day”

^[4] Friere, “The Banking Concept of Education”

^[5] Bridwell-Bowles, “Discourse and Diversity: Experimental Writing in the Academy”

La Comida de Venezuela

Sergio Ybarra

Tequeños golden, with cheese wrapped tight,
And dulce de leche, a sweet, creamy bite.
From hallacas wrapped in banana leave's care,
Venezuelan food, a love we all share.

Notes on Contributors

A.J. Ayala is from Naples, Florida, and he graduated with a degree in Christian Ministries. A member of the LWC men's wrestling team, he is now pursuing a master's degree in Business Administration.

Dakota Boaz is a senior from Leitchfield, Kentucky. He is a Human Services & Counseling and Psychology double major. He enjoys singing, writing poems, going out and exploring nature, and his pets.

Aven Bryant is a senior English and Women's & Gender Studies double major, with a minor in Communication. Aven lives in Perryville, Kentucky, and spends free time crocheting, quilting, and watching scary movies with their fiancé.

Morgan Bryant is a junior from Shelbyville, Kentucky, double majoring in English and History. Her interests include drawing, watching films, and playing board games.

Malaki Caldwell is a junior from Bentonville, Arkansas, who is a Media Studies major with an Art emphasis. His interests include lino printing, embroidery, and bike packing.

Mattie Coomer is from Cave City, Kentucky, and she double majored in Christian Ministries and English. In her free time she enjoys playing tennis, reading, and doing calligraphy as part of her own small business.

Yejun Choi is an exchange student from Busan, Republic of Korea. During his time at Lindsey Wilson College this year, he has enjoyed learning more about the United States and connecting with the students here.

Sara Crosslin is a freshman from Manchester, Tennessee, majoring in Psychology, and she is a member of the LWC women's wrestling team.

Brendan Dahncke is from Vienna, Illinois. He is a Business Administration major with a minor in English who enjoys watching movies, shows, and exploring nature in his free time.

Anna Dangelmaier is majoring in the Nursing program, and she is from Liberty, Kentucky.

Trinity Deaton is from Breckinridge County, Kentucky and is a psychology major. She likes to focus on her studies, but when she's not, she loves to read or just hang out with friends.

MaCayla Falls is from Campbellsville, Kentucky, and is double majoring in Biology and Psychophysiology. She enjoys writing poetry, playing tennis, guitar, piano, and scuba diving.

Atavya Fowler is from Nassau, Bahamas, and she is majoring in Art with a Digital Art Emphasis.

Alondra Fuentes-Nava is from Columbia, Kentucky, and is majoring in Psychology. She enjoys anything crafty or creative plus non-academic reading and writing.

Brandon Grider is from Columbia, Kentucky, and double majors in Theatre Arts and Arts Administration. He enjoys playing guitar and 3D printing.

Bryton Hawkins is from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and is a Sustainability and Environmental Studies major. He enjoys the outdoors and gardening.

Caitlyn Higdon is a Biology and Psychophysiology double major with a double minor in Chemistry and Psychology. She is from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and enjoys traveling, hiking, scuba diving, reading, and photography.

Kaleb Humble is a senior majoring in Communication and is from Monticello, Kentucky. Outside of academics, he enjoys writing poetry and reading fiction, playing guitar, and singing.

Kayla Koerner is a December 2024 graduate from Richmond, Kentucky. She majored in P-5 Elementary Education and Christian Ministries. She currently teaches 5th grade reading and loves performing in theatre.

Anna Johnson is a history major from Lily, Kentucky, who enjoys writing poetry, and she takes particular inspiration from nature and the writings of Robert Frost.

Jesse LaGrange is a senior from Burkesville, Kentucky, who is majoring in English, and he enjoys reading, creative writing, studying languages, and music.

Zachariah Lawson is a junior from Williamsburg, Kentucky. He is majoring in English. He is the current student body president, a student ambassador, and a peer mentor. He loves nature and traveling.

Jerrica McFarland is a senior from Tompkinsville, Kentucky. She is double majoring in Criminal Justice and Women's and Gender Studies. She enjoys reading, communing in nature and watching films.

Emilee Milby is a sophomore from Elizabethtown, Kentucky who is majoring in Art Education, and in her free time she enjoys making art, studying art history, going on walks, and watching movies and television shows.

Jasmine Mitchell is a senior Media Studies major and History minor from Campbellsville, Kentucky, whose interests include photography, singing, and art.

Tezon Mitchell is a Digital Art major from Campbellsville, Kentucky. His interests include painting, photography, and gaming.

Rishab Niroula is originally from Nepal and is pursuing a master's degree in Technology Management. He enjoys writing when he gets inspiration and loves to work on web design and development.

Abigail Oswald is a junior from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, and she is majoring in Engineering Mechanics.

Yesh Singayao is a sophomore Political Science major from Vine Grove, Kentucky. His non-academic interests include reading and writing.

Alivia Stines is a freshman from Columbia, Kentucky, and she is majoring in Human Services and Counseling.

Lilly Streeval is a junior from Columbia, Kentucky. She is majoring in 5-9 Middle Grades Education with an emphasis in English. She enjoys crocheting, reading, writing, and spending time with her cats.

Hailey Turner is a junior from Columbia, Kentucky, who is majoring in Human Services and Counseling. Her non-academic interests include art, music, and singing.

Megan Whitson is a sophomore from Laurel County, Kentucky, who is double majoring in English and Communication. She enjoys traveling, writing, and choir.

Sergio Ybarra is a freshman from Venezuela who is majoring in Recreation, Tourism, and Sport Management.

The Legend of Orpheus

The ancient Greek mind was both subtle and skillful and the legend of Orpheus (pronounced **or' -- fee - us**) amply epitomizes this. Orpheus ('he of the river bank') was the son of Apollo, god of poetry, and the Muse Calliopé ('she of the fair voice'), who gave birth to him on the banks of the Hebrus River in Thrace. Such was his power of verse and song, he could move the trees and rocks and tame wild beasts. He was given the gift of the lyre by Apollo. When his wife Eurydice died from a serpent's bite during their wedding celebration, Orpheus, in his grief, descended to the underworld - no easy task for a mortal - to attempt to win her back from the land of the dead.

Arriving at the judgment seat of Persephone and Hades, rulers of the underworld, Orpheus began to sing his lament for Eurydice. So sweet was his voice that the dead, including Eurydice, flocked to hear him, weeping for the beauty of the upper world, which was lost to them. Persephone and Hades were so moved, they chose to let Orpheus take Eurydice back to the world of daylight, on condition that he not turn to look at her until they had reached the upper world. Hermes, the guide of souls, led them on the arduous journey back to the land of the living.

With his foot on the very threshold of the day-lit world, Orpheus, whether from impatience or anxiety, turned around too soon - Eurydice was not yet out of the realm of the dead. Because of the edict of Persephone and Hades was irrevocable, Hermes was forced to lead Eurydice back to the eternal darkness. Though Orpheus wandered for days through the dark caverns and tunnels of the netherworld, pitifully calling out his wife's name, he never found her again.

