

The Muse



Frame of Mind

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Dear Reader,

Two years ago, as an unassuming sophomore in the early months of 2020, a friend of mine asked if I would apply to *The Muse* with her and I agreed. Unbeknownst to me, that one decision gave me the metaphorical door I've desperately held onto in the Titanic-esque experience the last two years have been. As weird and unorthodox as my experience on the magazine has been, I found it served as a bit of a lifeline for me—keeping me afloat in the midst of immense stress and confusion and introducing me to a new perspective on life.

In my time on *The Muse*, I've met so many amazing people and writers whose stories and voices have not only shaped me as a writer but will stick with me as I take on the next chapters of life. I want to take some time to thank all the teachers who have sponsored *The Muse*, especially Mrs. Gardner, who took on the daunting task of reviving *The Muse* and has been a wonderful mentor to us in the process. I'd also like to thank the staff members I've gotten to know, especially my Co-Editor, Aiden Riemer, without whom I'd be wholly lost. He has shared some amazing work that has inspired me to better my own writing and has given me hope that not only will we successfully reach a publication date but that this publication will continue on after us. I am forever grateful for the work I have had the opportunity to do with these people and the friendships I have formed in the process. I'd also like to thank everyone who has submitted writing and art for publication this year, the magazine truly would not be possible without you.

Additionally, I'd like to impart some of the wonderful life lessons I've learned in my time on *The Muse*. First, nothing is as scary as it seems. I know that I, like many, can get anxious about sharing my work or simply the proposition of writing something personal or meaningful, but being on *The Muse* has helped me gain the confidence to share with others and understand that much of the judgment we are afraid of is only in our minds. Secondly, anything you create can be art, regardless of how good or bad you think it is. Don't discount your work because you're comparing it to someone else's. Not everything has to be a masterpiece, but the act of creating something of your own can be art. Finally, everything is better with someone else. Although you may want to take on all of your challenges by yourself; don't. No one can take on life alone, and with the help— or even just the commiseration— of others, you can ease the load and even improve the experience. At the end of the day, every fight, every success, every loss, and every experience is better when you get to share it with someone else.

So to those of you who have more time at Mountain Brook; take every opportunity to put yourself out there, do whatever you can to make every creative thought a reality, and take the time to share every smile, joke, and experience you can with the people around you because you never know what you might gain from it.

With this in mind, we at *The Muse* would like to present to you our perspective and the perspective of other students in our 2022 edition— *The Muse: Frame of Mind*.

Sincerely,

Georgia Kate Scott

Dear Reader,

Art is more than just creative; it is expressive. It is a medium in and of itself used by humans to bring our thoughts and emotions into the corporeal world. The written word and artistic depictions alike communicate just enough so that the observer can fill in the blanks with their own mind — their own experiences. The Muse is a place for the young writers and artists of Mountain Brook to publish their works for the eyes of observers to look at and for their minds to contemplate; and this year's publication is nothing short of engrossing.

The Muse, as a class, has, ultimately, been wonderful. Getting to discuss the depths of characters and the structures of differing works has been constructive to my skills as a writer. Receiving commentary for my writings and being able to discuss why I made the main character perish at the end rather than having them be triumphant, and how that plays into the extended metaphor of moral principles garners me empathetic understandings for the editing process and how an observer can view different works.

As a class, it is refreshing. As a group of people who I can turn to to discuss my works and my thoughts on those works, it is fortifying.

The entire publication process has been filled with conversations about the many pieces we received this year and was far more enjoyable than it had any right to be. Hilarious stories and serious poems, eye-drawing pieces of art and photographs that house more than a thousand words have found their way onto the pages of this year's Muse. But, at their cores, each piece of writing and art is contemplative. They provoke thought. They all represent a mind and a voice here at this school. The Muse is simply a home for these works to reside in temporarily; a place for them to mingle and grow. For once they have been absorbed by an observer, they will have found a new home in that person's mind.

Sincerely,

Aiden Riemer

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“Life’s Greetings”

By: Jacob Azrin

Our winter raincoats catch the cold wind’s blow,
As hair stands straight against the falling hail,
And icy pockets push up battered snow,
Decrepit boots trudge to our loves who wail.

Through walls of hell, Persephone’s cries raise,
And melt each flake, each heart, each frozen bast’n;
Thus beams made bright, thus greener pastures grazed,
Shepherds herd futures in forgetful fash’n.

Recalled is pain once yellow paints the leaves,
And each heart once again knows sorrow’s song;
This time, with deeper stronger harmonies,
With flaming frostbit eyes that hum along.

Oh how the seasons blend within the mind!
Life’s compromise: it unifies what’s mine.

“Mortal Awareness of the Nornir”

By: Miller Bryant

Inspired by T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

I went to see my old home

And cried.

The amount of time that has passed weighs heavy on my mind,
and how much of it was taken for granted.

I dwell on the past,

But to dwell on the past removes you from the present,

To focus on the present damages your future plan,

Yet the future is too unsure to plan.

So to when should my mind go?

To where?

If only I could tip the hourglass on its side,

Ceasing its endless stream of life for a moment.

To pick apart a memory selfishly

Without the weight of it on my back,

To appreciate it for longer than it lasts.

“Time flies when you’re having fun”

No, when you’re aware of it.

How to describe a longing so vast?

Putting thought to paper and ink is supposed to bring clarity

Yet all it breeds is a longing more powerful than the last,

It grows.

Perhaps because the answer cannot be perceived,

Cannot be written, sang, or painted,

Only felt tight in your chest,

Growing and gripping tighter and tighter until you burst

Like the membrane of a bubble stretched too thin.

You vanish,

Nothing left but the soapy remains of what you once were.

Urda grips my mind and heart with an iron fist,

And the longing which had been buried beneath life returns with vengeance.

She floods my mind with the sounds, tastes, and smells of my life,

Guiding me to the understanding she wants me to meet.

I see family and friends age and move on.

So *why* is my mind adhered to the past?

I don't know,
I may never know,
I *will* never know,
Until the day I may ask her
And receive the answer from her celestial lips.



Grim Reaper, Bay Mathews



Claustrophobia, Islay Brady

“The Story of a Common Thought”

By: Reagan Riley

Inspired by T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Obtaining the knowledge of what she thinks
I shove it in my arm like a drug
“Just sweep it under the rug,” my parents say;
“Why do you care what they think?”
The dopamine of their words rushes through my veins and to my ego
It might as well be a god to me at this point
Oh PHEME would you let me be!
I want to know what they think
I need to

What is it she says when I walk in the room?
“Why does she look like that?”
What is it she says when I leave the room?
“I am glad she’s gone”

And what if that were true
And what if I were to know
How they truly felt
about me

Their words woven into a sweater of unconfidence
The same one I put on each morning;
But some mornings there are
Holes.
Holes that allow me to make my own thoughts about
Who I am
Who I will be
But then someone fills them with their biting words and ruthless rumors
I don’t know who I am without the cloak of judgements

What is it she says when I walk in the room?
“Why does she look like that?”
Her pristine sweater glistens with incontestable confidence
What is it she says when I leave the room?
“I am glad she’s gone”

But why does it affect me like water affects a seashell;

Breaking it down one wave at a time
Why does it hurt more to not know what they say about me than to know
Ignorance is bliss they say
If that were true, bliss would feel claustrophobic.
But
What do you think?

“The Hated Perfect”

By: Harry Clark

Inspired by T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Loose, Baggy, and small
Are just a few words I recall.
The day begins,
And the worry is what I wake up to.
How can something I created,
I control,
I am,
Be my biggest worry.

The world is a hypocrite.
Nothing is ever good enough,
And jealousy beats up insecurities.

You know, it’s actually pretty
Funny having to constantly worry
About the wind taking me away like a flurry.
I hear that one a lot.
And even when I work hard to get strong,
They claim it’s because there isn’t any fat, just
bones.
Years are spent every morning,
Trying to decide how to make myself seem big,
Yet I always feel small.

20 degree clothes in 80 degree weather.
The thing is I try.
I really do try.
I try to love myself.
I try to cover up.
I try to ignore others.
The crazy thing is, the opposite of me
Craves what I have. Crazy right!?
The regular person wants to be a celebrity,
While the celebrity just wants to be a normal person.

I constantly feel the weight of others’ comments;
Yet I still weigh nothing.

My best friend is sweatpants
And I'm married to sweatshirts.

“A River of Grades”

By: Ella Hicks

Inspired by T.S Elliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

The crusting pine door swings open
To the place where each child walks in wearing a costume
Their faces are covered with masks, hiding their true identities
There is a bustling of silence, yet alone in groups they walk
The erasers squeak and shred their coats onto the slick floor
Children ponder on the inevitable doom

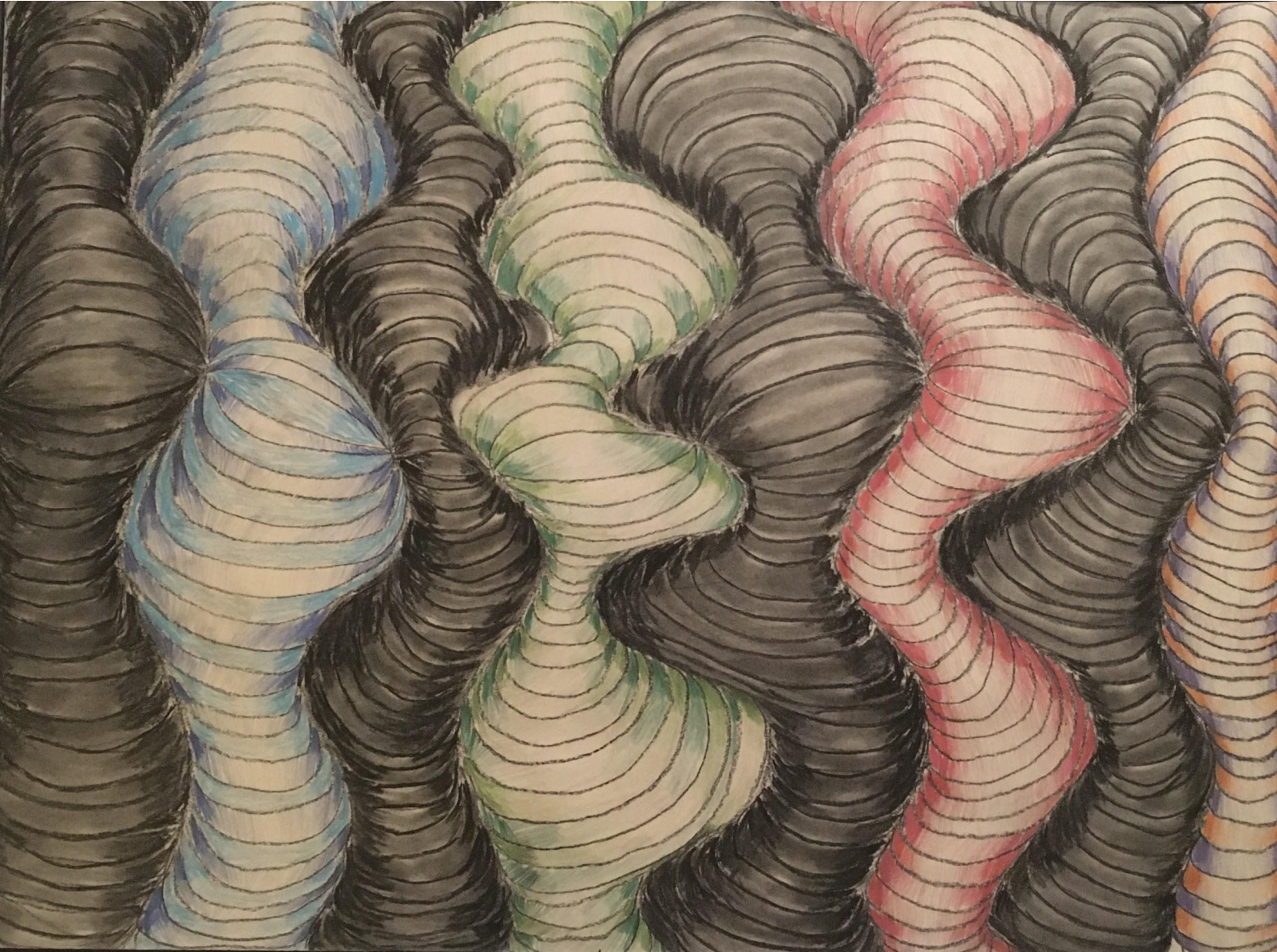
The paper crosses over the boundary
Slick pressed and cleaned white
Hands shaking and grasping to the hope only higher powers can control
Eyes focus and stare, unable to turn away
The mind floods with trepidation
What excuse has not been used for this utter damnation?

They will say, “You’re a failure! You’re a fake!”
A complete disgrace
Time wasted on nothing but the letter C
Not an A nor a B
Maybe it will be hidden or stuffed away
Until it appears on the silver screen in the home of judgment

The stall doors bang open, cackling in disrespect
For they know of the disgrace, yet laugh in its face
Rivers stream from the face, escaping the dam
Shush, be quiet, the ears in the walls listen closely
Sneakers squeak by and the door slams shut
A sigh creeps out of my chest, interrupting the silence

The fate of the inevitable has already been set in stone
Nothing new—nothing old—could turn back the time
I am stuck thrown in with the fools, the weak, and the cheaters
Drowning from the flood of the dam
The mind becomes swamped

Yet a sound breaks through the fog, “Brrring”
Onto the next, move past the bad, but the thoughts still remain flooded unable to clear
out



Depth, Douglas Shook

“Scholastic Addiction”

By: Ameila Tynes

Slow mornings and the sleepless nights of stress
Are the familiar signs of school burnout.
Like Martha, unable to stop and rest,
We work until there’s no more room for doubt.

Each senior says they long for their release.
I will admit, I frequently complain,
But somewhere in these halls resides my peace.
Deep down, I love this academic game.

It's more than letters on a report card,
And more than numbers out of thirty six.
Enlightenment is like a drug that’s hard.
Each day I thirst for education’s fix.

The thrill of learning I will not forgo!
What is this life if not to strive to know?

“Trapped”

By: Reagan Downey

Within these walls we are kept
Until we have nothing of our curiosity left.
Friends or foes, foes or friends,
We may not know until the end.
For change we came, but we stay the same
In this prison we will remain.
As the outside world comes near,
We will only continue to fear.
Only able to glance at the sun,
We wonder what our life has become.
Turn our backs, bat an eye,
We watch the world go passing by.
Our lives controlled by a number above our heads,
Many begin to wish they were dead.
As the end begins to near,
We look up into the atmosphere,
And once we begin to dream again,
We realize we have a chance to live again.
Educate the children they say,
They're just trying to keep the change at bay.

“Fourth”
By: AC O’Flinn

Hanging upon the wall with only three silver thumb tacks sticking precariously in my papery, slick flesh—seeing as the fourth one fell out long ago—there I stood, spending each day watching over the old, abandoned room. The room never seemed to change, but it is still different from what I remember when I was first put upon the wall.

Back then, the windows were nice and clean, giving me the perfect view to the outdoors and the once beautifully cut lawn. The paint along the walls and door used to be pristine and colorful, and the fan dangling gracefully from the ceiling used to move along the fastest setting even during the coldest of winters.

But things have changed.

Now, the windows are dusty and cracked, and what can be seen outside of them only shows the overgrown lawn and vines that creep up along the house. The paint so thoughtfully placed throughout the walls and door is now chipping and has lost the vibrance it once had, and the once graceful fan is left precariously holding onto the ceiling by only the wires.

It felt like nothing ever changed in this room, but at the same time, everything changed.

One day, the person who used to fiddle with that fourth thumb tack that stuck in my bottom left corner fell asleep. The dark skewed my vision of them, but I could still tell there was something different, and after that night, I never saw them again.

When the thumb tack fell out of that corner, they were not there to replace it or frantically search the room to find the one that fell out. When the windows began to dust over, they were no longer there to wipe them off with a cloth. When the baseball from the neighbor’s house hit the now cracked window, they were not there to go tell their parents about the incident. As the fan was falling from the ceiling, they were not there to get their dad to screw it back up to its fixture.

They were gone.

I was used to them leaving every once in a while to go to a friend's house or on the occasional vacation, but this was different. Even me, standing up against the wall, corners held down, could tell there was something different about this long absence. The wails and cries of the other people just a room over, the footsteps that ended just in front of the room, never to open the door, and then the final time the lights flickered off in the corridor, that was just barely out of sight, only came to prove this unsettling notion.

However, I continue to stand here day after day, week after week, year after year. There are no more footsteps. There are no more wails. There are no more lights. It is just me along the wall, looking out at the old, abandoned room. I have given up hope that they will return. I have given up the hope that they will put in the fourth thumb tack to fix the painful position in which I have been for so long.

There is nothing more I can do, for I am only a poster in this room with dusty windows, chipped paint, and the fan falling from the ceiling.



Frank, Emma Hunt

“The Cow Goes Moo”

By: Aiden Riemer

The noises began to trickle in. Their sensitivity made even more prevalent by the lack of vision. Soft whispers, a delicate tapping against the eardrums. The shuffling of feet, dragging across the inner ear. The ringing of a bell and the *shbing* of thin metal on cloth, both were uncouth piercings of the vestibular nerve.

Yearning: *Oh god, oh no, Oh god, oh no. Please, I'm begging.*

A strain in the back of the voice, the onset of tears, the start of a sob: *Oh god, oh no. Charlotte.*

A shock of bumps exploded from the skin as the cool metal tip touched, teasing on the sternum.

Charlotte, I love you, but “Don’t!”. The final word exploded out, escaping from the thoughts, entering the material world. The knife plunged deep.

Blood dripped, dripped, dripped to the floor.

* * *

The town was small. Smaller than most, but it was accentuated by the largeness of the country that surrounded it. Small, tiled rooftops snuggled up along the base and side of a moss colored hill. Cows roamed within the limits of their fences. Farm houses and their adjacent buildings speckled the landscape for several miles away from the town. A small yellow cab *vroomed* along the countryside road, approaching the town. The sun hung low in the sky.

The driver, with an accent, full of rural undertones, said, “What brings you out here?”

His passenger, sitting in the back, caught up in her own thoughts, staring at the dots of cows, blinked a few times, widened her eyes, “Family matters.” Her tone was definitive, self-assuring. She meant what she wanted to say.

The driver shot a glance in the rear view mirror. She was still looking outside. Her sky blue button up tucked tightly into her gray pants. Her light brown hair rested in a bob above her shoulders. One of her arms laid on her baggage which rested on the seat beside her. She wore sneakers.

“Sweet old granny staying here?” He asked.

“No.”

“Visiting your parents?”

“No.”

“Those children of yours moved out to the country?”

They passed close by some cows now. “Yeah. That’s it.” Their bodies were stagnant bulks in the field. Their only movement came from their mouths. A constant chewing. Before the driver could speak again, “You wouldn’t know her, she’s new.” Her face turned forward as she spoke, her eyes following suit from her side window to the front.

The driver's eyes darted back to the road, staying there.

“Is that all?” She continued, tightening her grip on her baggage.

“Ma’am?”

“Is that the only question you’re going to ask me?”

The driver swallowed, “Yes.” A moment passed. “What’s your favorite cut of meat?”

“Excuse me?”

“Well, there are a lot of cows out here. It just popped into my mind and you asked if I had any more questions.”

She looked at him in the rearview mirror, “I like the chuck.” The driver didn’t take his eyes off the road, “A tough cut, but flavorful.”

“I don’t know many folks who like the neck.”

“Cows’ necks are strong. And I like good, tough meat.”

Any other possible questions or conversation topics were cut short by the arrival of the car into the small town. Charlotte quickly thanked the driver, paid him, and got out. She didn’t entirely dismiss their conversation, though. It stayed with her as she looked about, searching for signs of a hotel.

She pulled out her phone from her bag and flipped it open. There was no service. She put it back.

The town was unearthly quiet. The small, mostly one story buildings, left room for the sun’s rays to easily seep their way across the tightly packed, cobblestone roads — which there weren’t many of. The hills were easily visible over the short roofs. Small when viewed from afar, but up this close, directly adjacent to them, they gave off a constricting feeling. A feeling that made Charlotte find herself small, confined, fenced in.

Across the street, a butcher’s window was all but vacant; filled with cuts of meat. The sign above read: *Hank’s Hand-Cut Herd*. It’s white paint was beginning to chip away, and the hand painted words dripped down to the bottom. Charlotte’s eye caught another sign in her vision. It didn’t say anything on this side.

She carefully walked down the sidewalk opposite to the butchers and the other sign. Her eyes darted here and there, her head moving subconsciously with them.

“MOO!”

Charlotte’s eyelids bolted up, pinned to the top of her head. Her body stopped moving after colliding with the child that had yelled “MOO!” at her.

The child presented themselves with a grin, as if proud of their capability of saying “MOO!”.

Charlotte, confused, said, “Wha-”

“MOO!” This one was blurted out in a flash.

Charlotte’s pensive face took on new depth, “Excuse me?”

The child stared. Its eyes were a wide, almost button-like black. They took a breath in, tightened their lips, and quietly, forcefully whispered, “Moo”.

Charlotte turned around. The car she arrived in was gone. The street carried her eyes down the road she entered on. Beyond the buildings were the large hills she came over. She felt even smaller.

Clip clap, clip clap. Coming down an alleyway behind Charlotte, the rush of footsteps was easily discerned echoing off the buildings, carrying all the way through to the green of the hill she was looking at.

Turning, Charlotte found herself face to face with a larger person, the smaller one beside them. Actually, he was quite a deal larger. He stood a head and half taller than Charlotte. She had to move her neck in order to meet his eyes.

She opened her mouth, “Hello, sir.”

“Ma’am” His face was straight. Straight and lean. The square lines of his jaw were defined by the stubble of a new beard. His eyes were similar to the child’s: an unnerving large black, made even larger in Charlotte’s mind by the confines of the hills. His flannel and jeans looked worn.

Charlotte took a breath. She’s never been one to pry too deep into people’s personal affairs, and when she does she tends to get attached. Like with her husband. Her husband that no longer returned her phone calls. Her husband that she hasn’t heard from in a week, now. Her husband who hasn’t kissed her in a month, who hasn’t smiled, or laughed — who hasn’t been with her.

Jack; the thought filled her mind. You and your darn research. Just let these people be. I know culture variance is your passion, but...

Charlotte took a breath and, putting aside the obvious oddities, said, “Is there a hotel?”

The man replied with a flat, “No.” There was a flicker in his eyes within a few moments of silence. The black of the pupils seemed to shrink back to a somewhat normal size before he blinked and they returned to their black button roundness. “But you can come with me if you’re looking for a place. I — we,” he motioned to the child, “Don’t live too far out of town.”

“Well, that’s kind of you,” Charlotte’s eyes lingered on the buildings down the street, “And since I only need to stay the night,” now looking the man in the eyes — those uncomfortable, gentle eyes, “I don’t see why not.”

The child replied with a smile, its lips straining near the far ends of its cheeks.

The man turned. The child followed suit.

Charlotte waited.

After the man was a building’s length away, a window creaked open across the street; the oil-lacking shutters echoed with a resonance, filling the emptiness of the town as quickly as possible, and vanishing with a fraughtness; the splintered wood groaned in refusal. The unmarked sign was above it. The man stopped, the child continued. A faint wind tossed his shaggy brown hair. Charlotte’s skin became like the countryside; covered in bumps. She brought her arms close to her chest.

The man turned his head towards the window. With a slam, it closed violently. It would have been off-putting to Charlotte, save for the glimpse of a human hand she saw reach out to close it.

His side facing eye was an empty pit as Charlotte found herself looking back from the window to him.

She clenched her arms a little tighter.

“There’s no hotel, so come,” he said, and he began to walk once more. The child was almost to the other end of the street.

She exhaled from her nose. “For Jack,” she whispered.

The man and his child lived through one of the valleys of the hills beyond the town. The walk was filled with the crunch of feet on cobble, the occasional, uncanny, following eyes of the child whenever it looked back, and a grunt from the man every so often. The sun was being swallowed up by the hills to their right. Its bright rays turned to dull waves of ambience that accented the curvature of the mountains of grass, and the specks and dots and motes of the cows that adorned them. The sky settled to a deep blue as they neared the house — not yet black.

Now’s a better time than ever.

“You know that man who came into town a week or so ago?” Charlotte asked. Her voice started soft, and ended in a questioning tenor.

“I’ve seen a man from the city, by the looks of him.”

Charlotte’s eyebrows raised, surprised by his candidness. “Where would he be staying, since there’s no hotel?”

“With someone. We’re a welcoming people.”

Charlotte stopped walking. “Could you actually take me to where he’s staying?”

The man continued. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t-”.

“I don’t know where he is.” A cow in the distance mooed. “And it’s too late to go asking around. We don’t want to disturb them.”

Charlotte began walking again, picking up her pace. *The sooner I get through the night, well, the sooner the morning comes. And with it...*

A small building came into view. It was a cozy little cottage. The chimney was smoking, and faint light came from inside. Flatter fields stretched for a mile or so around it before returning to the common bumps and lumps of the hills. There was a well near the far side. A little bell hung over it.

A cow had wandered up close to one of the gates as they neared the door. A soft chewing noise came from it. Jarringly the man stamped up to it and let out a guttural grunt: *Gah*. The cow was motionless. The man let out another: *Gah!* The cow’s chewing was interrupted but it stood its ground.

“Get inside,” he said. It was almost a whisper.

“Come again?” replied Charlotte.

“Get inside.”

“Do you need help with —”

“Get inside.” It was almost a plea.

Charlotte heard the banging of a door as she noticed the child wasn’t with them anymore. She looked from the man to the door, then lingered on the cow. The man almost opened his mouth to yell, but Charlotte crunched her way to the door. From behind her, an indiscernible squabble was coming from the man.

The bell dinged once as the wind picked up.

The cottage was homely. More homely than the town, at least. The fireplace against the far wall was on its last bit of fuel, and the brass pot that hung over it steamed with the smell of stew. On the left wall of the main room were two doors. One was ajar, opening into a bedroom. The shadow of the child could be seen, its head hung over looking at something in its hands. Charlotte disregarded them. On the right was a table, and cabinets beyond that. She put her bag down beside the table.

She moved to a window that looked on the road they had just come from and found the man had stopped grunting at the cow and began to make his way to the door. The cow had moved back a few yards. Entering, his deep eyes fell on Charlotte, then the pot over the fire. As he neared the fire some lines on his face were more discernible. He looked agitated. His lips were subconsciously pressing together, and his nose was slightly flaring. He blinked consciously, as if trying to keep himself awake.

“Is everything all right?” Charlotte backed towards the cabinets on the right side of the cottage.

“The stew is ready. If you’ll bring me a plate, I can serve you.” His tone was almost docile— opposite of his appearance. He kept his gaze on the fire. He hadn’t opened the pot.

Charlotte studied the man before looking at the cabinets. She decided to open a drawer that might contain the utensils.

“The top one on the left,” he said.

Charlotte paused.

“Top. Left,” he added.

Charlotte breathed, looked at her chosen drawer. It had some washcloths. She closed it, and focused back on the man. His eyes hadn’t left the fire. She opened the top left and got out three bowls.

“We just need two.”

“What about your kid?” She darted her view to the bedroom, the shadows inside made less distinct by the midnight blue outside.

“Just two.”

Charlotte breathed. She breathed again. Her hands put back one bowl. Her feet walked her over to the man, and as they did so, her mouth stated, “I never got your name.” Her feet stopped a few feet away.

“It’s Bueford. But you can call me Ford.”

“And your kids’?”

His eyes never left the fire. The flames casted their slender, consuming dance into his pitless black holes. The smallest bit of white peeked out from the sides as if they were yelling for release from an unholy punishment. The flames enclosed the edges of the black circle, imitating a ring of fire. Breathing in and out, moving their red streaks and orange blazes closer to the center, and backing away; encroaching on the very soul of this man that hosted such a black, dark, now fiery essence.

“Come again?” he almost jested.

Charlotte let out a breath she didn’t know she was holding. “What’s in the soup?”

“Herbs. Some vegetables. It’s a broth really.”

“No meat?”

“It’s got carrots.” His voice batted away her questions like the tail of a cow against gnats.

“Yum.” It sounded forced. Her brow clenched down as her mouth strained up.

Ford took her bowl, lazily poured her stew, and handed it back. Charlotte found herself staring into his eyes. The heat from the fire almost made them water. Her eyes fluttered.

He filled his bowl, took one long blink, and stood, walking himself over to a seat at the table.

He invited her to join him, and Charlotte found herself doing so.

Minutes passed. It was quiet, a time for Charlotte to think. She was unnerved by this man, and the lingering thoughts he left inside her — questions for another time. *He can’t be bad. He has a kid. He understands what it means to love, to protect, to be human. I’ll thank him for the meal and stay the night.* Her eyes fell upon the spoke near the fire. *I don’t need to sleep. Tomorrow I’ll find Jack, and we’ll be home. Safe at home.*

“Thank you for the meal.” She said, as she put another spoonful into her mouth.

Ford hadn’t touched his food. He seemed to know her question before she asked it. “I’m not hungry.” He put his hands on the table, they looked strong. Pushing himself

away, he stood and walked to the open door. He stepped inside for a moment before returning with a pillow and a blanket. Both looked homemade. Frayed at the ends and edges with scratchy, raw cotton. He placed them on the table next to Charlotte.

“You can sleep on the carpet in front of the fire. It’s the warmest there.”

Again, Charlotte noticed his eyes shrink for a split second. She felt safe for a moment before he blinked, then her eyes avoided his.

“Thank you.” Her tone tried to hold onto its assertiveness, but the dark of night had fully set in, and the flames were dwindling. The shadows they cast blended into the darkness of the night. The wind outside could be felt through the bottom of the door.

Ford returned to the bedroom without another word. The door closed with a lack of finality.

Charlotte kept her eyes on the door for a few breaths. Pushing herself swiftly, but smoothly, away from the table and then lifting herself from the chair, she made her way to the spoke. Taking it from its place on the wall, she carried it with her to the carpet, pulled the blanket over her, and closed her eyes.

She didn’t fall asleep.

The events of the day began to set in. *My journey to the country, the little town, the hills surrounding me then and now, the cows and their insistent chewing, the man – Ford – and his supposed kindness; his child, an unnamed, wide eyed – Her thought broke off – and those eyes, so docile, yet uncanny, wide, yet vacant, and sad – above all else, they were sad.*

Charlotte straightened up. She didn’t know how long it had been. She might have fallen asleep for a few minutes, but couldn’t tell. Her knuckles were as white as her eyes from holding on to the spoke. As her vision adjusted to the void that surrounded her, they fell on where she left her bag. It was still there.

Standing up, she almost collapsed back down from the rush of blood to her head. It made her feel vulnerable, like she was swimming, aloft in the air and open to the harms of the world. The blood took a moment to settle.

Her feet took her over to her bag. The floorboards beneath creaked in a low pitch. Kneeling down she opened it and took out her phone, flipping it open to check the time: It read nine-thirty. And, to Charlotte’s surprise, there was one bar. Her eyes went wide and a flurry of thoughts and emotions rocketed through her mind. *Jack.*

She could try and call him one last time. *I can try and call him one more time.* She was here now, in the town. He was supposed to be here somewhere. *Maybe he’ll answer me now.*

Her finger pushed the call button. It rang. She heard the faint ringing come from her phone.

It also came from somewhere else.

Charlotte’s muscles tensed. Every nerve in her body was on end. Her white knuckles were stagnant, gripping onto the phone. Her eyes were stuck open. She didn’t breathe. Her ears, though the sound was faint, picked up on Jack’s ringtone, an annoying Discovery Channel medley. Her chest carried the weight of her entire body, and Jack’s.

She found it difficult to turn towards the sound. Her body was stuck in the molasses of deep thought. Until, she was certain. *Oh god, it’s his.* And her head turned around instantly. The second door, the one that was closed when she entered, was the source of her feelings – the source of the sound.

Her body raised itself from the ground. Her feet, taking steps towards the door, sank into each floorboard.

She reached it. Her body was encompassed in a blackness. The warmth of the fire was gone; the wind from outside whistling, almost cooing her. Her breaths were short and conscious. The call from her phone ran out. The sound was gone.

She opened the door. The knob was cold.

A descent presented itself to her, beckoning her, the previously faded sound begging her to come to it. "Come find me." It whispered in Charlotte's mind.

I know what's waiting for me. She started her descent.

The stairs led down, down, deeper, opening into black abyss, more empty than the blackness upstairs, save for a trickle of iridescence in the near distance.

Charlotte turned her phone on once more. Its illumination bestowing upon her immediate eyesight a dirt floor and support beams.

She pressed the call button once more.

The sound of Jack's ringtone, with a damper, echoed around the abyss. Charlotte took a deep breath. Her feet began to walk her across the dirt. The light gave her the smallest bit of information before her next step.

I know what's waiting for me.

The ringing grew closer, closer, stopped. Her phone ran out of its call time, but Charlotte continued. The iridescence was close by.

I know what's waiting for—

Suddenly, she stumbled. Her front foot caught on a lump that lay near the iridescence, and she fell. Her hands stopped her fall, but became an unseen red from the friction of the unforgiving ground. Her phone skidded for a second before coming to a stop against the lump.

Its light, along with the light from the iridescence, was enough to make out the lump.

I knew what was waiting for me.

Her eyes were sore. Sore from the straining in the dark, sore from her fatigue, sore from the welling of tears. Charlotte looked at the iridescence. It was a faint light coming from the ceiling. It was a cylindrical shape leading all the way up to the surface.

She glimpsed some stars up there.

Then a lengthy shadow covered them up.

It moved back and forth, and as it did so, a bell rang out, echoing all the way down to her. Subconsciously, Charlotte's heart began to race, her breath quickened, and she began to feel the pain in her hands.

"MOO!" It came down from the cylinder. *The well. Did I know what was waiting for me down here?*

Quickly she stood. Quickly, two firm hands placed themselves on the side of her shoulders and lifted her up, carrying her fully into the iridescence of the well.

I thought he was a good guy. But he will do anything for his child...

Tears descended from her eyes. They instinctively closed.

Shbing.



Changing Tides, Ellie Usdan



Wooden Basket, Emma Hunt

“It Was You In the End”

By: Ellie Foshee

Inspired by T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

In the end, we were always alone.
Our whole life lived through monotone,
like the dull night sky
against the swaying mist of trees;
All that is,
the unattainable glee.

Isolation is inevitable.
At some point in time,
you’ll find no one holds the other end of your line.
A slow descent into the abyss,
so unhurried, yet so hastened.

No one cautions,
It was you in the end.

There never was that person from the rope
that let you fall from that oh so familiar slope.
Use your eyes and you can see,
there never was that person from the rope.
It was simply your shadow
grappling away at your last string of hope.

Laying at the bottom of that same ravine,
is a mass of rubble and ashes,
also known as that same defeated machine.

Like a semicolon,
you could finish your sentence,
but instead
you keep down your head,
and fall back into a foggy existence.

Imposed in the Garden of Eden,
lying not to God,
but to the one who feels their soul is a burden.
You discover once more;

It was all you in the end.

“Directions”

By: Hayden Hawkins

Inspired by T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

How must one know what path to follow in the journey
Of life? Take a left or go straight,
But with no laid out signs.
The possibility of the unknown provides both excitement
And adventures,
Along with the chance to succeed or fail.

How do you know which way to turn?
Trust in His plan or set off on your own?
College, careers, companies, or children.
Dreams can be shattered or come true,
Wishes, perhaps, unfulfilled.
Maybe that journey was not meant for you,
And another is paved out for you to follow.

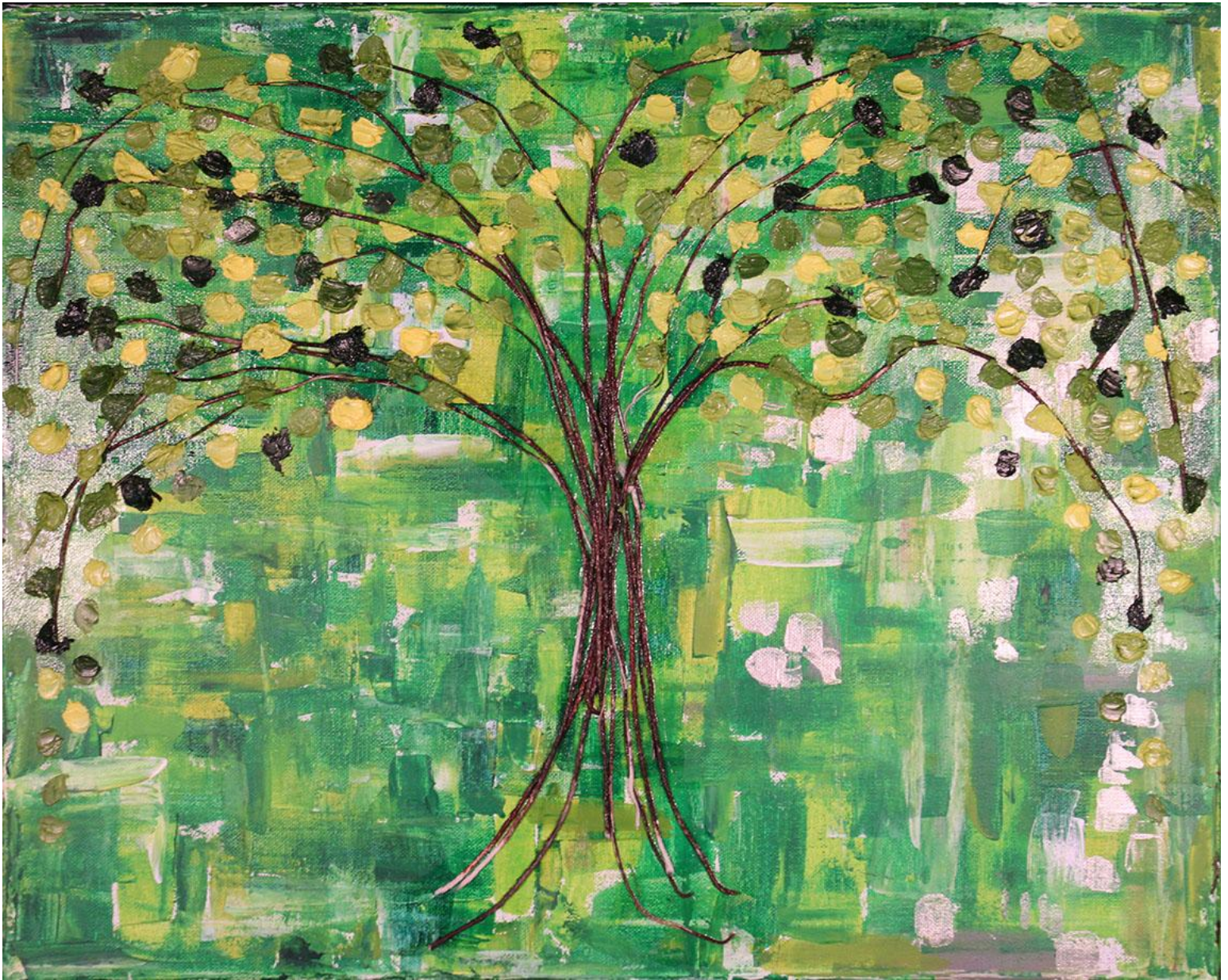
Moving away from the place you call home
To enter an unknown world of crowded dorms and musty lecture halls.
No longer in a familiar place,
With new challenges I’m ready to face.

Once turning sixteen, you’re expected to mature.
Oh just grow up.
Receive that perfect score on a standardized test
And you’re automatically considered the best.
Accepted or
Rejected.

So how do you know which way to turn?
The pressure builds to make a choice,
But you are scared to use your voice.

You are at a crossroads:
Left, straight, or right?
The time to wear a cap and gown
Is drawing near.
How do you know which path to follow?

There are a variety of answers and choices to make,
But only you
Can decide what to do.



Tree, Lillie Wright



Blooming Hand, Ellie Usdan

“Dedication”

By: Andie Hites

Inspired by “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

They fold and fold and fold and fold
My hands are hard at work

The words will melt like sugar crystals
Piercing those who try to speak

My mother’s mother never spoke in words
She spoke stirring, baking, spending all day
Capturing laughs and smiles, aching words

Her hands fold and fold and fold and fold
Her hands are hard at work
Our backs are old

Old age aching as the counter is much too low
The bend in my spine is my artwork
An empty imitation of my favorite artists
Bedridden with paint on her sheets

I am no great suffering artist
I make no martyr
And yet my painting continues
Paint with my sweat
A salty love
“Here is my energy, here is my time, here is my dedication, here is my color”

This salty love
It will stain everything with every color
It will stain this dough with unwelcome sugar
Too sweet to keep in anyone's mouth
And it will keep the words from coming out

They fold and fold and fold and fold
My tongue lies cold

“The Stain”

By: Aiden Riemer

The door slammed. It shut with such a force that changed the atmosphere immediately, but not unfamiliarly. Vallteri's feet came closer and closer, but not to me, thankfully. The last noise before he stopped at our father in the living room echoed off the hardwood floor and rang through my brain, begetting a constant memory.

“The cars ran out of gas.” His words came out slurred; he had something saturating in his mouth.

Our father looked up from his phone, “Then go fill it.”

“But it ran out of gas.”

“Then get more gas.”

“I would if the car had any gas.” He swallowed his excess spit.

Father pondered, however his eyes lacked the glint of curiosity.

Not more than four seconds passed before Vallteri turned to me, his eyes edging toward my pocket.

“No,” I replied at his glance.

“No, what?” It wasn't a genuine question. “Just lend me a couple bucks to go buy some cigs. I'll get you a pack.”

A stood from my chair, “No”.

He took that to heart. As I was turning to leave he grabbed my arm. I tried to pull away but he pinned it against my back. I was pushed to the ground in that same instant. My dad made a move, but before he got up, my wallet had already left my person.

“Thanks.” At least he had the decency to say that.

He sniffed and spit at the ground. The black tar expelled some of its goo onto my face as it hit, before settling on the floor, next to similar colored stains.

“I don't need gas, I'll just walk to the store.”

The door opened, less furiously than it was shut. “Leave it unlocked.”

And it closed just the same.

“Solstice”

By: Georgia Kate Scott

The air encloses her throat,
Thick and forceful, like a vacuum
Siphoning her peace away.

Around on all sides
The giants seem taller,
The days seem longer
They reach so high
They almost touch,
Almost,
Block out the sun.

But the air, oh the air,
It pulls itself in and back out
Exposing the sand on the beach as the tsunami approaches,
Leaving behind a minty wake
Only to consume the sand once more,
Moments later.

The world joins in it's waving motion,
Pulling in and away, in and away,
They seem unaware of their own actions,
No reason behind what they do yet they join in the motion
They create the commotion

For what is the sound of the waves disappearing
If not joined by the cacophony of leaves rustling,
Of birds squawking,
And of structures rearing.

Rearing, pitching, lurching
All about, inharmoniously,
Almost ceremoniously
They come together, singing,
Yes, singing,

A crescendo of voices,
United in song,

Calling out to her,
From the eye of a hurricane.



Reflection, Ellie Usdan

“The Stairs”

By: Georgia Kate Scott

She threw her bike into the manicured bushes outside the gates and sprinted through the winding gravel walkways, her eyes on the rapidly setting sun. The gravel sprayed up and scratched her bare ankles and muddied the hem of the pale blue dress she had attempted to hike up. She took no notice, her eyes still fixed on the sunset that was increasingly hidden behind the roof of the house she was approaching. As she reached the door and whipped it open, she pushes shoulders back and her gait slowed. She now stepped lightly inside the warmly lit entryway and carefully shut the door, hoping the sound of her panting were muffled by the general din and the heavy oak doors separating her from the guests dining on the other side. She glanced down at her feet and attempted to dust the blood and dirt off before dropping the skirt and turning towards the mirror. Her cheeks were flushed and her hairline had begun to gather little beads of sweat. She frowned and attempted to adjust the somewhat crooked neckline of her dress to hide her broad shoulders in the hopes that her mother would at least refrain from commenting on them until after the guests had left. As for her cheeks, she attempted to take some deep breaths to cool off and lessen their color; they remained obnoxiously rosy. *I suppose it's no use*, she thought to herself, knowing her mother would still find fault in her appearance or her tardiness or her “affinity for unladylike exercise”. She reached for the ornate door handle but stopped after a sideways glance in the mirror revealed the unkempt state of her hair. She grasped at it, running her hands through the tangled ends and attempting to smooth out the hairline, frizzy from sweat. Just then, a door behind her swung open and the family’s butler stepped through, humming to himself and carrying a tray with flawlessly polished silverware. He stopped for a second, locking eyes with the reflection of Delphine.

“You’ve certainly done it this time, Miss,” he said with a kind but reprimanding sigh.

“Have I missed the whole meal?” she asked, worriedly turning to face him.

“Quite nearly; I was just delivering the silverware for dessert—”

“Ah, well dessert is the only part worth eating anyway.”

She smiled and returned to looking at herself in the mirror. “Yes, well I’ll be sure to pass your regards on to the chef,” he said, pursing his lips.

Delphine took no notice and continued to disconcertedly play with her hair. “Oh, honestly, I can’t fix this mess. I’m just going to have to put it up.” She opened the drawer in the table below the mirror but closed it again a moment later, dissatisfied. “You wouldn’t happen to have a hair pin, would you, Morris? Or something that I could use as a hair pin?” she said, turning to him once more.

“Perhaps a silver spoon,” he smirked, motioning to his tray.

“That’s very funny, Morris. Truly. You are a comedic genius,” she said, peering at his tray. “Oh, this will do quite nicely,” she cheered, selecting a small, three-pronged fork with a slim but ornately carved handle from the tray and placing it in her twirled up hair so that only the engraved end showed at the top of the updo.

“Now, Miss—” Morris began to protest.

“Oh, Morris, what difference will one fork make, anyway?” she crooned. “Alright,” he sighed, reaching for the handle of the oak door. “Besides, it’s a cocktail fork not a dessert fork,” she added jovially.

“Is it really?” he laughed, glancing at his tray, “Well I’d better go fix that, then.” He slid the tray onto the table and opened the door for Delphine.

“Thank you, Morris,” she whispered before walking through the doorway.

“Good luck,” he whispered back, shutting the door behind her.

The room fell quiet as soon as she entered. Her father waved his hand at her and said, “This is my daughter, Delphine.” She curtsied slightly in acknowledgement, her eyes remained up, however. One of the two women in the room shot a slight smirk at the other but it quickly vanished when she met the eyes of the other woman who, despite her polite smile, had a menacingly cold glare as if she was daring the other to speak. Delphine’s mother had this effect on nearly everyone. Although the woman dropped the smirk wordlessly, Delphine knew that the glance would earn her hours of lecturing and punishment in the days to come. She silently crossed the room to the seat next to her mother, lowering herself into it.

“Nice of you to join us, Delphine, and just in time for dessert,” her mother said, spitting out the words in a hushed tone.

“Yes, it is nice of me, isn’t it?” she replied in a falsely unassuming tone. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her father wince at her inability to hold her tongue. He said nothing. Both Delphine and her mother twisted up their faces in disgust and turned towards the table, smoothing the tablecloth with their fingers and sitting in a passive aggressive silence. Someone less afraid of the mother and daughter than the female guest or more attentive than the male guest might have commented on how remarkably similar the two looked in that brief moment, but not a word was uttered. Instead, Delphine’s mother reached for her glass of wine and took a sip, and the two’s appearances returned to their usual states; a stark contrast of each other, much like their personalities.

The female guest simpered awkwardly and forced out a slight smile. “You seem to be a very busy young woman,” she said. Delphine could feel her mother’s knuckles go white as she gripped the crystal glass in her hand tighter.

“Yes, I do find quite a few ways to fill my time, don’t I, mother?”

Her mother let a sickly-sweet smile commandeer her face, making it look wholly unnatural in contrast to her pointed, angry features. “Yes, she does...,” she said to the guest rather than her daughter, placing her glass on the table. Just then, Morris entered the room, once again carrying the tray of silverware. He was followed by a younger man holding a tray of desserts. The young man stood nervously by the door while Morris comfortably made his way to the table. Only her father showed his notice of this, glancing at the door as they entered and adjusting his posture ever so slightly, almost as if he was relieved. Delphine snapped back to the conversation as her mother continued, “...in fact, Delphine is very active in the community. Wouldn’t you agree, dear?” she leaned forward so as to make eye contact with Delphine’s father at the other end of the table. He remained quiet, much to the chagrin of his wife, as was evident not on her face but in her eyes.

Morris, who was now behind the two placing the polished silverware in front of them, smiled politely at the guests and said, “Ah, yes. We are all very proud of our young miss. She is very often showing her grace and charity at the chapel down the road,” he winked at Delphine.

Her mother sat back in her seat and grimaced, “Yes, in fact she was there just before this and must have run late.” Delphine’s father allowed himself to exhale in

relief, as if he'd been holding his breath before. Morris waved his hand at the young man in the doorway, who quickly walked over and placed the dainty porcelain dishes, each holding a small pastry garnished with a mint leaf, in front of the diners. When he was finished, he stood next to Morris apprehensively. Her mother dipped her head ever so slightly and Morris made a slight nod in response, exiting the room with the nervous young man in tow.

Delphine could physically feel the dinner drag on. The guests seemed to be unaware of the annoyance they caused both mother and daughter in their long-winded conversations and apparent lack of intention to ever leave, though Delphine was secretly thankful for their seemingly unending stay as it was postponing the inevitable lecture/argument coming from her mother. Eventually, the guests found themselves at the door— the wine making it hard for them to tell if they had done so on their own or with the encouragement of Delphine's mother.

The slam of the door seemed to jarringly shift the atmosphere of the house. Delphine looked at her father, who looked back at her worriedly. Neither of them had to wait for the mother to turn the corner to know the smile had dropped from her face, and both knew it was no use trying to prevent the inevitable berating they were about to receive. The temperature in the room seemed to drop a degree with each muffled footstep. Delphine's father stood up, setting down his drink and preparing himself for the coming offensive. She stepped into the doorway, her cold expression highlighting the wrinkles of her face— a result of years spent scowling.

"Lucille," he began apprehensively.

"Sit down, Richard," she spat. He did quickly and silently, to the disgust of both his wife and daughter. "Delphine," she said, turning towards her daughter.

"Mother," Delphine pushed back.

"Don't," her father whispered to her.

Delphine ignored his protest, "Tell me, Mother, what is it that bothers you now? What little qualm have you found with my appearance this time? Or is it my personality that you take issue with tonight? Do tell me, I am so looking forward to hearing what you have to say."

"You ought to learn to hold your tongue, your rudeness will not be tolerated. Your father and I—"

"Oh really, my father and you? What, pray tell, does my father have to say about my behaviour? What does my father have to say about anything, ever?" Delphine cut her off, standing to speak.

"How dare you speak to me this way? You will show your father and I the utmost respect," her mother shouted, incredulously. Her father sank deeper into his chair.

"When will you learn your station in life, Delphine? You are a lady. You will hold your tongue, you will accept the punishments you incur, and you will not parade yourself about town on that stupid bike of yours like a monkey in the circus!" she screamed.

"I will not! You may think yourself a lady but I certainly will not pretend to. I know my station in life, I am the daughter of a spineless man born into wealth and a cruel, calculating woman who married up, neither of whom know the slightest thing about the real world!" Delphine stormed out of the room, rushing to the staircase.

Her mother followed close behind. "You insolent child! You know nothing of the truth! You will ruin this family if you are not careful!" she cried, but Delphine did not give her the satisfaction of response. Her mother stamped her foot and yelled, "Morris!!"

He had been listening from behind a door and hastily entered the room, "Yes, Miss?" he said.

"Find that bike and dispose of it, I won't entertain this foolishness anymore," she demanded.

"Lucille," Richard protested from the doorway of the dining room.

"No, Richard, she needs to learn," she said with finality. Morris glanced at him, but he said nothing.

"Very well," Morris sighed and walked towards the door.

"She was right about one thing," Lucile said.

"What?" Richard asked.

"You really are spineless."

The next morning, a paper boy stood at the door, speaking in a low voice to Morris. Delphine could see them out of her 2nd story window but couldn't make out what they said. As soon as the door was closed, she ran to the top of the staircase, hiding just behind the wall on the landing so as not to be visible to the people at the bottom of the stairs. In hushed whispers she listened as her mother and Morris spoke worriedly. "Ma'am, it seems that there's been a fire at the chapel," he waited for her response with bated breath.

"Well we shouldn't worry so much before it's necessary," she said, hopefully.

"Right, well, I don't mean to cause any unnecessary worry, but they are saying that an inspector is coming from the city to investigate," he replied.

"An investigation? Into what? As far as we know this was a fluke," she demanded.

"Yes, well, there were many people moving in and out of the chapel last night and.. They're not sure if everyone has been... located," he whispered, increasingly lowering his voice as if afraid to say every next word. The volume didn't matter, Delphine heard his words ringing loudly in her mind. She became dizzy, her vision seemed to strain itself, and the world faded around her. Suddenly, the hushed conversation at the bottom of the stairs (which had really already fallen into silence) was disrupted by an unconscious Delphine loudly tumbling down the grand staircase. Her body landed at the bottom, contorted and splayed out, revealing her bruises and scratches, some new and some old. The disruption seemed to release the two from their frozen state, sending the mother into an intense tizzy. She ran about the house like a chicken with its head cut off, searching for something she couldn't seem to name, muttering things she couldn't quite express with words. Morris rushed to the young lady's side, lifting her and adjusting her position to be more comfortable, or at least to appear more comfortable. He adjusted the fabric of her dress to cover the blemishes on her limp appendages. Lucille loudly re-entered the room, spinning like a top, and stopping to face Morris where he was seated on the bottom step. Her eyes seemed to glaze over the motionless body of her daughter. "Morris, we needn't worry just yet," she said, smiling unnaturally wide and brandishing a few empty wine bottles she had clearly dug out of the trash like a frantic raccoon. Her husband entered the room behind her, his eyes falling first on his daughter, brushing past the distraught Morris next to her,

and falling on the back of his wife, dramatically holding several bottles in the air as if she were about to juggle them.

“Lucille?” he asked.

She turned around, her eyes wide, “Richard, we needn’t worry. Perhaps our guests will truly be friends. Or perhaps our truest friend will save us after all,” she said brazenly, shaking the bottles in the air triumphantly.

“I—I—” he stuttered.

“Three bottles, I mean, I hardly had a glass, there’s no way she’d remember even the thought of Delphine at the church, I mean, three bottles,” she babbled on. Delphine’s father stooped to pick up the newspaper lying on the floor, as if it had been carelessly tossed on the table and slipped off without anyone taking notice. He stood slowly, reading the headline. His eyes rose to the mirror, once again falling on the serene face of his daughter where it rested in Morris’s lap.

He turned quickly, sucking in his breath. “Where was she, truthfully, last night?” he asked.

No one responded.

“Where was she really last night?” he demanded, his voice louder than it had ever been. Lucille stared at him blankly, in a state of momentary shock, as if she had never heard his voice before. Her grip faltered and the bottles fell to the floor, shattering. She clenched and unclenched her fists and stared down at the glass shards before quickly exiting the room as if in search of something else. Richard’s eyes hadn’t left his wife. Even now, they were fixed on the vacant space she had left behind. He turned in the opposite direction and fled the room, leaving Morris alone to stare at the scene that had so quickly developed in the once unimportant room. A chilling quiet seemed to fill the space, falling calmly like a blanket of snow on everything inside of it.

“Nous”

By: Anna Bella Foster

Inspired by T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

In the depths of my torment,
I see no light.
Irrational thoughts I seek to forwent,
My sanity is nowhere in sight.

Peers from past time turned their backs;
My husband sent me with only a knapsack.

Oh how I dread this awful place!

As I grope the cold and bare walls
I find myself entering my mind.
And though I roam the white empty halls,
Not a sane soul could I find.

I am only met by a nurse with a single wish,
To shove pills down my throat, three in the dish.

She says in a beguiling tone,

One for Fear!
One for Anxiety!
One for Delusion!

Aristotle would understand my mind;
My feet on the ground, my head in the cosmos.
Aristotle would understand my mind;
Encapsulated by the motions of stars.
And as I travel beyond the North Star,
I sink into a black hole.

One for Fear!
One for Anxiety!
One for Delusion!

Oh how I longed to be a doctor!
Most said I was a natural.

Graduating top of my class,
Medical school was easy to pass.

But no longer could I hold a needle in my hand
Without my palm beginning to quiver.
What if I hurt them?
I thought with a shiver.

One for Fear!
One for Anxiety!
One for Delusion!

I see a shadow at the end of the hall;
I struggle to open my throat and call,
Sam, my darling, have you come to take me home!
But the shadow fades, and I am alone.

“Wounds”

By: Aiden Riemer

Bloodied

Drip

A wounded knight leaves the battlefield,
Sludging through slog and slime
Trudging on to another time

A battle won or lost

Is a battle still bled for:

The means to an end,

But is it your end

The end you desired

Hoped for

Drip

The end that your means were bleeding for?

The forward march of feet

Stomp

The retreating mind wanders

Stomp

Stepping in time to his hearts beats

Stomp

Feeling the only rhythm

He, himself, can cling to

Can sing to.

Drip

Sword in hand

Slipping, Slipping

Blood on body

Dripping,

Stomp

The sword slips

Bloodied

Blood

Drips

Hidden behind cloud and fog

The empty sun emits its rays through the bog of the sky

As it turns on its invisible wheel
Passing the time

Blood drying
The knight is far from dying
His eyes look down
The field is far from view
A single tear,
Stomp
No, many,
Crying

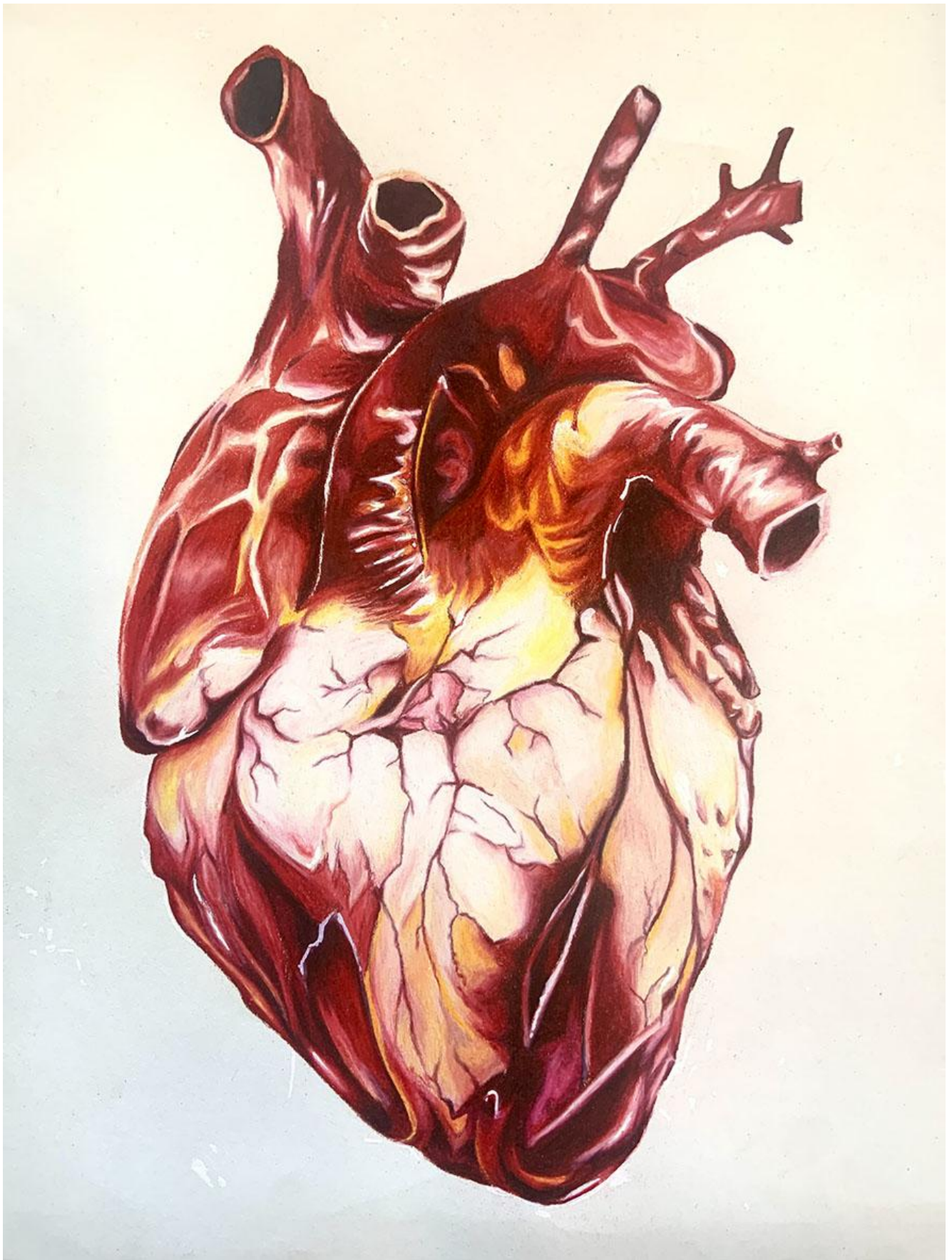
Tear ducts release,
With tears a plenty
The plasma has tightened in his body.
Without, there is no blood
But scars a many
Within there is blood
And scars a many

Each tear is lost
Stomp
Purposefully

A job well done
A bodily battle well fought, and won
But to the coup d'états of his own
Drip
Emotions.



Wings, Lillie Wright



Heart, Bay Mathews

“The Foolish Drink”

By: Edward Sokol

Inspired by “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot

Drip, drip, drip.

The arid and mundane diner of Sunny Loo

Murmurs a hollow tune.

Empty.

I sit collectively among familiar thoughts,

Thoughts of alienation, seclusion,

Thoughts absent of hopes and dreams.

Drip, drip, drip.

“We close soon.”

I know.

You told me last night

And the night before and the night before.

Monotony whispered, “look.”

The dripping stopped.

Alone, forsaken, forlorn,

A wandering and watchful eye of scorn.

A couple enveloped in harmony, tranquility, and consummate love.

A ping of backbiting envy crept

And the shadows began to slink.

I took another swig

Of the bitter tang and finished.

The dripping resumed.

“See you tomorrow.”

A dollar. No, perhaps two.

Yes, two dollars.

“See you tomorrow.”

Sidewalk, sidestep,

Side talk, my ear stalked

“I love you.”

What a funny word.

Not a word, no, an intertwining,

Binding and circumscribing attempt to curb your loneliness.

Ignorance is bliss, mind you,

But ignorance is ignorant without a slap on the wrist.

Blissful, wistful, wishful love,
I too was once aloof, a stooge
To the cynical loop of flying doves.
Before the booze.

In my parlor
Drowning, no longer frowning,
Once the bottle is empty.
Gurgled, irrigated,
The seal is broken.
“Please, put the bottle down.”
Oh to be told that.
I was overtaken by fatigue,
But not the kind that yields you dreams.
3.27 A.M.
A thump on the door.
Mr. Wilson.
“Here.”
No, it is much too late.
“Here.”
Oh but perhaps a taste.
A bitter reality is hard to digest,
But a bitter libation provides sanguinity.
“It helps me feel better too.”



Still Life, Emma Hunt

“The Game I Used to Love”

By: Grayson Long

Inspired by Claude Mckay’s “America”

Even when she brings feelings of great joy,
I find myself raging from time to time.
I have known her since I was just a boy,
the era when everything was sublime.

I see the ball flying through the thin air
which prompts me to dive into the hard clay,
to the batter, who knows it is not fair,
I catch the ball and take his hit away.

In the box, seeing strike one and strike two,
I feel as if I am an ant on a leaf.
The ball comes in, “Three!” says the man in blue,
I walk back to the dugout, head filled with grief.

I only wish to be back in my prime,
Back in the days when I loved it every time.

“Eros and Psyche”

By: Amy Beth Hudson & Georgia Kate Scott

To love one like my Eros is to love
The stars upon which wishful mortals dote.
Him ageless never seeing Charon’s boat
Could not to human calls fall from above.
His Psyche dwindles like the candle of
A flame that burns so hot its wax does coat
The very hand by which love’s heart was smote
And flames as candles die by morning dove.
Though Psyche vanish by her candle’s end,
The love we hold will last like dear Selene,
Remaining still, although her form may wax
And wane with Father Time’s unyielding trend;
The moon is even there when new, unseen,
Unfaltering though time may by us pass.

“Fallen Blade”

By: Aiden Riemer

A parry to the right, a dodge back and a small jump to the left. I tried to keep him on my right side, my good side. Our swords rang out, metal swooshed and clashed. Each opposing length of sword sought out an opening, big or small. To my back, the fire of the village roared more than ever. Our battle took place outside the front gates, now charred black from falling ash, and closer than they had been moments ago. Boiled leather was all that we wore. The heavy and hot chainmail was too much for us now. Plus, dexterity was our friend – more his than mine.

Clang! The downward slash of my zweihander was stopped immediately by his shortsword's blade. Our swords were in a deadlock. He pressed on and on, and if he won I would be too far off my balance to riposte. However, if I kept pushing down and down he would buckle under my might and the fight would be mine. The ending mattered not to me, though. All that mattered was time. The people of the village were escaping. So the longer I was here, stalling for them, attacking this madman that besieged our home, all was good.

An explosion rang out behind us, and our stalemate was broken. Falling debris from the buildings found their place around and in between us, forcing us to back off and take a quick breath. That quick breath was all he needed. The sorcerer, previously too occupied with our duel of swords, now had ample time to concentrate and cast his spells. Devastation bent the knee before him, and chaos was his to control. I charged, screaming, hoping to break his concentration. The second I reached him I slashed him from shoulder to waist.

Nothing. Nothing happened. Nothing before my eyes changed. Though, I felt nothing – nothing from my right arm, nor my right wrist, nor my right hand. They were all gone.

My sword, once long and mighty, lay in pieces on the ground, dull and shattered. Blood rained from where my arm used to be. Deep, crimson life left my body, as if it knew its home was falling into shambles – as if it knew its home was burning to a crisp. *Oh. So that's all the time I was able to give them?* My entire right side was covered in red; my shoulder to my foot looked as if dark cherries had been mashed and smeared and left to rot. A spray of my life-giving liquid splashed on my face. *That wasn't long enough.* I was half dead and half alive, and it was visible. My knees buckled. I hit the ground. *I need my chainmail back. It'll keep me warm. Warm... like the fire in my town.*

A devilish cackle echoed through my ears, bouncing back and forth in my brain, overtaking the sound of the roaring fire. A cold, sharp point pricked the back of my neck. *If only I had more time...*

“More than just a clock”

By: Reagan Riley

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

I never stop ticking.

Whether it be the first minutes of a life

Or the last few minutes a person will have on this earth,

I never stop trudging.

I move at a consistent rate.

Even if you reset me, you can never regain time that has been lost.

Oh! What could have been in the time you miss,

What regret you must feel for all those moments:

The ones you waste on your phone

The ones you waste rejecting your own body

The ones you waste in isolation, crying over something you won't remember tomorrow.

But what good times you get to have!

Smiling, dancing, laughing,

Even I have fun watching you

wishing one day I could climb off this wall

And smile,

And dance,

And laugh.

But for now,

I belong on your wall.

Counting away your minutes and watching you rush out the door when you notice me.

All the regrets I wish I could have,

all the pleasure I wish to gain.

But you get to enjoy them

So *enjoy them*.

Live your life as if the ticking sometimes stops,

And you can breathe.

Learning to love yourself in the moments you regret the most

Finding spots in life where the ticking ends and pureness begins.

Because I am filthy, full of a detrimental history,

So become the pureness as you desire to be

And watch the ticking of your life begin to fade.

I'll keep my persistent pace,

But don't worry about me
My circular shape and numbers to twelve is all I'll ever be.
But to you, I am a life:
The dash between two years on a gravestone.
So fill me with fun,
Because all I really am is a dash mark.
How will you use me?



Dance of the Dead, Leah Redler



Flowers, Alyson Johnson, Austin
Langton, Leah Redler, Anna Baten,
& Lilly Papapietro

“Oda al Manzana”
Por Rosa Downey

La mañana,
Oscura.
Mi cuerpo,
Cansado,
Busca tu rojo brillo.
Redondo, corpulento.
Tu crujido,
Un alivio en el silencio estridente.
Tirar en una ensalada o poner en un
sándwich,
tu sabor ácido, es perfecto en todo.
Pero, cuando yo no pueden dar mi
mejor,
Todavía, tu estas aquí para mi.
Con una variedad de sabor
Tu estas aquí para mi.
En la mañana, en la tarde, en la noche,
Tu estas aquí para mi.

“Ode to the Apple”
By Reagan Downey

The morning,
Dark.
My body,
Tired,
I looked for your brilliant red.
Round, full
Your crunch,
A relief in the deafening silence.
To throw in a salad or put in a sandwich,
Your acidic flavor is perfect in all.
But, when I am unable to give my all,
Still you are here for me.
With a variety of flavor,
You are here for me.
In the morning, in the day, in the night,
You are here for me.

“Iron City”

By: Coleman Clay

Inspired by Carl Sandburg’s “Chicago”

I have heard you are the last true city below the line. The line that once raged war
among thousands of friends and families, that the world stopped to watch.
Evidence is shown in your still figures, the still figures that were stripped from their
roots.

A spiteful city never given the power of a state.

You once kept some apart because history told you to, then had the so-called protectors
oppress people of the city because history told you to.

Maybe you have improved

Bustling,

Vast,

Diverse city,

Now your streets sound like falling hail, hail that comes down hard from dusk to dawn,
however ceases to a blue sky metropolis at the light of day.

A metropolis of valleys and neighborhoods that rival at contention yet form to a greater
union.

An area of warm people that treat you as they would their runaway dog, and remember
you as they would their runaway child.

You're a city of bright lights and coliseums that shine over the halfway-teams that play
there.

Your streets run flat, hilly, and inconsistent with different people around every stretch.

The city has come far from history.

Casted from Iron you chant loud and bright as you look to the future, a future of greater
union and greater people.

“The Small City Called Mountain Brook”

By: Jackson Beatty

Inspired by Carl Sandburg's “Chicago”

The many feet walking across the streets
Flower shops on each side of the block
Restaurants with the best eats
Village to village the young kids flock
The city full of meaningful thoughts

The faces of the children and mothers as they rush from park to park
Dogs roaming the fields until dark
Fathers rushing home from work to walk with their children to their games
Practicing everyday to become the best, the basketball and volleyball teams bring the
small town their fame
Come and show me another city with smiling faces proud to be alive, lining the streets
every holiday to show how much they admire
Working together to give back and help the others thrive
Cunning parents from generation to generation, show how to make each one proud
Community joins for all sports, filling the stands and screaming loud
Adventuring
Astonishing
Hardworking
Rewarding
Through it all, laughing with friends and all
Under all circumstances, laughing as a young kids should
Bragging about all you've got,
Under the skin, the heart in the meaning of it all

Walking through the mountain tops, filling the streets with wood
Proud to be apart of the safe town
Hoping that each person continues to flood

“My Summer Home”

By: Mary Frances Springfield

Inspired by “America” by Claude McKay

My mom and I, we drove straight through those gates
Where birds in treetops sing a cheerful song.
I found my room, my counselor awaits.
Indeed, we wished this month we could prolong.

We lit the fireworks on the Fourth of July.
The Alpine surprise brought dancing and fun,
And on Trip Day we traveled far and wide.
It was pure joy to play under that sun.

On Lookout, that highway above the clouds,
We sang those songs, those lovely songs of old.
Red, green, and blue, for our tribes we yelled loud
And then the leaves, they changed, from green to gold.

Friends for life, I hope soon again we'll meet.
Desoto's home to me, my mountain top retreat.



Desolation Caverns, Nicole Hatton

“Books”

By: Reagan Downey

Like Charon, guide me to a world afar
An opal coin the gift card in my hand
Thy binding covers keep the world in bars
As far away as you dare to expand.
But magic and madness couldn't hold no more
Against reality, the greatest plight,
The glass of windows shattered on the floor
The barren rubble remnants of a fight.
Upon the ashes cities are reborn
Again, a better city is rebuilt
But molded to match worlds like my own, scorned,
With fruits and flowers, a surrounding quilt.
Oh! Though I do not visit everyday,
A place of comfort may thou always stay.

“A Euphoric End to a Story”

By: Oliver Salter

Inspired by T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

The warm sun radiates from above
Easing my skin as I slouch back in a chair.
The winds slowly floats by my head
Telling me, “You have nothing to fear!”

Time is of no essence, as though it will last forever,
Despite a guaranteed eventual demise.
Like a piano playing slow, soothing sounds
A feeling of euphoria brings ease to this impending reality.

I have experienced the extreme light, and now dark,
Bringing a final awakening upon me
Clarifying everything physical and divine.

It tells me, “it’s going to happen soon,”
To which I respond “When?”,
Putting on a fake face
Despite the dark rumbling clouds swirling in my mind,
“It’s going to happen soon,” it repeats once again.

I stare out into the horizon as the sun begins to set
A great ray of light shines into my eyes once more,
With the end of my personal desert highway in sight.

I rest my head back as I begin the final mile,
Now I will complete my adventure with a smile.



Otherworldly Arch, Jack Johnson



Plane, Mallie Altman

“Hector”

By: Georgia Kate Scott

“It has been a lovely day indeed,” is what I said to the young woman as we stood in the elevator, waiting for the doors to open again. She had an energetic way of being that made her kind eyes glitter and her bright voice lilt. She seemed, in a way, charmingly thrilled about the, as I would describe it, shocking news we had just learned. Though I don’t think for her it would be so “earth-shattering” as it was to the rest of us. No, she was still youthful and had no reason to be in any way bothered by the grandiose notion of destiny. I am sure to her it all seemed more exciting than even I could pretend to imagine. And in many ways it was so. Sure, she had much to learn about the severeness of reality, but, in light of recent events, we had much to learn from her about this new world. This world that, as of this morning, didn’t even exist in dream form. At least, not to me.

~ * * * ~

I wake up to the sound of faint screeching, as if someone a few walls away is having some strange episode. As I climb out of bed I remark to myself how strange the sound is, like a shriek being repeated but in different accents. As I put on my favorite suit I mimicked the shrieks to myself—quietly, of course. I try to listen for words, but they seem to be few and far between. Mostly just varying shrill sounds. I decide it might be nice to try this as an experiment with my students. On my way out of the door, I elect to buy my coffee this morning as the remnants of my last cooking attempt had turned the kitchen into an isolated dystopia of its own. The young boy who lived a few apartments to my left is standing in the hall. He and I walked to the subway together every so often, I found his character to be an interesting study— ever changing as it was, as all children are. By the time we reach the base of the stairs, he is telling me that his younger brother had managed to let a seagull into the apartment. I suppose this was what the shrieking was, nevertheless, I decide that I will still try the screaming exercise in class today. Rather than overload him with information he probably does not care to know, I say “I didn’t think there were seagulls in the city.” He tells me that is the same thing his mom said before she started chasing it with the broom. I wonder to myself whether the physical exertion— particularly in a ridiculous manner— might affect the overall sound of a scream. We part ways at the subway station, but this young man has given me much to think about on my ride to the university. Before I have even reached my stop, I meet another interesting character. This one a young woman. Not really a *young* woman, probably closer to nearing 30 than anything else, but everyone seems young when you yourself are old. This young woman is sitting in a seat by the door, writing fervently into a water-damaged notebook. I say water-damaged, but the stains seem to point towards a different liquid. She seems a little detached from the world the rest of us live in. Somehow she manages to give the appearance that her mind is not tied down by gravity in a way the rest of ours are, as if it is allowed to wander to places no one else could ever

even see the gates of. I notice she is shaking her pen violently. I pat about my coat until I find a pocket with a pen in it and hold it out to her. She has a somewhat harsh gaze, I observe, as she takes the pen from my hand. Though I don't believe there was any malice or intent to seem intimidating because she places her own pen in my hand as she takes mine— an act I can only imagine was done out of confusion. She returns to her writing without a second glance, so I pull my arm back and examine the pen. Vivian Brown is engraved on the body of it, in a rather boxy script. I consider all the things I might learn about her from this pen and this silent exchange before slipping the pen into my coat pocket and standing up to make my way out of the now open doors.

~ *** ~

I suppose she was the first character I met that day, the first of many. Though I didn't yet know of her significance.

“The Fruit of Doom”

By: Jackson Short

One day, a teenager in a village far away was bored and decided to go on a journey. He left alone without telling anyone. On this journey, he ventured from forests to beaches, mountains to valleys, and rivers to glaciers. He spanned the world, going many places no human had ever laid eyes on. He encountered many new creatures that were previously unknown, such as monsters, talking animals, and even human-like life. These are many stories for another day, but the one we will talk about now is one instance when the boy came across a strange looking fruit. The boy was very hungry, so he decided to eat the fruit. Unfortunately, the boy did not know that, among the locals, this fruit was known as the Fruit of Doom. Legend has it that the fruit would drive anyone who eats it to become an objectively terrible person. They would become self-centered, power hungry, crude, narcissistic, and brutish. Meanwhile, he continued on his journey, not yet aware of the effects of the Fruit of Doom - he would really never be aware due to the ignorance it causes. Throughout his journey, he had been a bit of a player, but now, he began to pass down the genes that the Fruit of Doom had inserted into his DNA. The boy absolutely pulled with his immaculate game, causing the DNA of the Fruit to spread throughout the world. As time passed, the Fruit genes evolved to only take effect on a person between the ages of 12 and 17. Back to our adventurer, a ways into his journey he ran into a wise, all-knowing spirit called Mirakuru. Mirakuru told the boy that he must be more kind and selfless, and he would watch over him at all times, or else the boy would be punished. The boy briefly tried to be better, but soon gave up and was in denial about the sheer power of the spirit. After only a few short weeks of his old ways, the spirit tracked down the boy. At the time, the floor of the Earth had become quite unstable, so the spirit decided to sentence the boy to a useful punishment. He turned the boy into an enormous tree, later dubbed the Great Tree of Doom, and sent his roots under all of the places the boy had traveled, stabilizing the Earth. Sometimes, the boy gets a surge of frustration and lashes out, and you can feel the ground shaking when he shakes his roots.



Koi, Anna Ryan

“Under the Earth”

By: Tyler Wadlington

Under the earth lies another world filled with water. This world is the deepest part of the sea, and creatures of various sizes, colors and shapes swim freely. Some fish are miles long and have millions of teeth, with skin as thick as leather, but others are only inches wide with no teeth and travel in packs. Although the smaller fish are harmless by themselves, they can take down a fish ten times their size when they're in a pack. A certain group of small fish were called the Shambas, and they ruled the underwater world until a massive fish with metal skin and teeth like needles thought he should try to take over. He gathered some of his other fish friends and started on the journey to take over. The big fish all lined up in front of the Shambas' palace and yelled their war cry for all of the Shambas to hear. The Shambas gathered their army and faced the larger fish in the open sea, where the Shambas had the advantage of free swimming and grouping up. They fought for days and days until, finally, the Shambas were defeated. They just did not have the ability to stay in groups while there were dozens of big fish to kill. Therefore, the big fish claimed the power and decided to name themselves. After arguing about it, they named themselves the United Fish of the Underworld. They created a government where a vote's influence is based on the fish's size, so the small fish could never rule again. The United Fish have ruled since then and are starting to explore the overworld. They have sent fish to swim in the overworld's sea and report back what they know. So far they have not found much, but if they keep looking, they will soon discover us humans. This could cause another great war and will be the downfall of one of us. Until then, we will both live our own ways.

“THE CUCUMBER”

By: Georgia Kate Scott

Although I’ve spent all my life
Changing with the winds of time
I just can’t regret
The way things ended up.

In my life, I’ve seen so much
I look back on my past and
I miss the world I used to know
But I would never leave the world I know.

As a cucumber I spent my youth
In the fields I grew of green
Surrounded by identical friends, oh
I remember the sweet blowing breeze
As it whisked away our cares each day
And never left thoughts of sourness, no.

But in my life there’s more than youth
And life as a vine-ripe fruit
I have more to say
Before it’s too late.

I was pulled from the vine
Away from world I
Had spent so long accustomed to
The only world I ever knew, oh

The vinegar it seeps into you
And within yourself you feel a change
A brand new attitude rises up, oh
In my soul I became someone new
So far from that carefree breeze I knew
And with no way of getting it back, no.

I’ll admit I haven’t always
Looked so kindly on my life
But now I know so much more
And I’ve seen more of the world

I just want to let you know
All the things that I have learned

In my life I have been through it all
But as I near the end of my time
I don't regret a second of it, no
As I prepare to say my goodbyes
I want to save you from my same fate
And teach you to appreciate your life.

“The Adventures of a Fork”

By: Simms Sledge

The life of a fork is not as bad as you would think. I start my day hanging out with friends and family, and then I start work. My owner, Emily, loves cereal, so we have it often. I usually stay clean because the milk washes off my tarnished silver, so it's one of my favorite meals. One meal I HATE is sesame chicken. It smells terrible and it always gets stuck in between the divot on my handle. Plus Emily always forgets to clean me off up there, but, other than that, I usually like the meals she chooses.

Let me tell you about my first adventure into the real world. It was during my third week in Emily's house, and she was going out on a lunch date. His name was Jim and he was a very cool guy. He and Emily bonded very well and I liked it. Although this was cool, it was not the most interesting part of the day. During Emily's walk home, I rode in Emily's purse. It's usually very messy, but that day it wasn't. Just as I was getting comfortable, the bag dropped. And all I could hear was “JIM, JIM, JIM!!!” Jim had gone into cardiac arrest and was dying. Emily dug through her bag, shoving me aside to grab her phone. She called 911 and before long the paramedics arrived at the scene. Once Jim had been carted off, an investigator came over to search Emily's bag. And the crazy part is yet to come. He accused Emily of giving Jim a drug and said that I was the murder wepon! This set me off and I started to become furious. We were taken to the police station for further questioning. Myself and the bag were left in a box that was taken by a police officer. When Emily was cleared she picked me up and we went home. And this was my first and last adventure into the real world.

“Frode and Gro”

By: Aiden Riemer

The town was lost.

Frode stood on the outskirts, eyes glossed over with the haze of smoke. It rose from each and every building. Even the temple.

Why the temple? He thought.

The Sword in his left hand, chipped on both sides, its glint lost, dripped blood onto the calf-high grass.

The cracking and crashing of wooden beams sounded instantaneously, without echo.

Years it took us to build our lives here, build those buildings — our buildings. Have the gods no mercy?

“Have the gods no mercy!” Gro screamed. Her dress separated her knees from the itch of the grass. She knelt beside her husband

Frode stepped closer, and knelt beside his wife. His arm grasped her head, hugging it to his chest.

“Your heart beats...” Gro said. “Don’t — don’t let it stop.”

Frode said nothing. The horns of the fire reached to the heavens. Frode turned his head likewise. *They mock them.* The stars seemed to shine less that night. Her majesty the moon even hid her face, turning away from this disgrace of mortal beings.

War cries carried across the grassy plains, vanishing into the curtain of night around Frode and Gro. They came from the village — the village that is no more.

“We must leave, my love.” Said Frode.

Gro nodded and stood, swallowing hard.

After placing a kiss on his wife’s forehead, Frode turned, with her in arm, and the two dashed through the grass, hoping this act came to an end, and the curtains closed around them.

* * *

Crickets chirped in the grass. Birds sang in the nearby woods. The sun’s rays rested over the valley, comforting the land, holding it gently, like a mother. It was past half-day. The mountain range to the West was capped with snow. Spring was beginning in the land of Trynmark, and the town of Thyndal was enthralled.

The town’s wooden buildings, an earthly brown, were not out of place amongst the lively green grass and vast blue sky. A large temple stood in the middle, its steeply angled roof the only one touched by paint. It was symmetrical — enough — on both sides: the depiction of woman, outlined in orange, her arms rising toward the heavens, was flanked by kneeling mortals, their heads looking upon her beauty; between her outstretched arms, streaking lines of blue and curving purples exploded, enveloping the remainder of the roof in their mysticism.

At the front of the temple was a yard large enough to hold the people of the town. Children laughed as they chased one another, parents watching them. The adolescence gathered in gender-defined packs. The elders sat at carved wooden benches, talking, eyeing.

Frode and Gro were taking part in the may pole, both tying ribbons of pink around it, smiling all the while.

The bell at the top of the temple sounded. Its echoing ring carried through the wide streets of the town. A man dressed in a robe covered in a sheepskin shaw, hobbled out of the temple. His walking stick was carved in the likeness of the purple and blue symmetry on the roof; at the top of it rested an amethyst orb, no larger than a fist. His white beard was thin, like his hair, and they both came to rest at his sternum. From the years of wisdom he held, his face was long and wrinkled, but he lacked no teeth.

A hush came over the people in the yard. Their eyes looked upon the man with reverence.

He held the walking stick in two hands before him and cleared his throat, "Today, my people, we celebrate not only the birth of a new year, but the continuance of us." His voice was weathered, but strong; standing alone at the apex of a mountain, proclaiming to the wind, "We are here, we are still here, and we will remain here. Trynmark is the land of our people, and so it shall remain." He paused, gathering his thoughts.

Opening his mouth, the chieftain sang the new year's song of welcome,

*Down from the stars we fade into life
Up from our slumber we commence our deep strife
Straddled so softly, on her back we rest
Her beauty enfolds, and we are left
To our own devices, to our defects
To all and every and none neglect
Our star our star how it shines so bright
Our sun or sun how we are brought alight*

The old chieftain turned his head down in finality. The only clapping came from the elders, a few of which did so. But the rest of the townspeople repeated the final words, "We are brought alight." Many heads turned toward the sun. The children smiled, the adolescence squinted, the adults were stone faced.

Frode turned to Gro and held her hand, a smile adorning his face. Not but a moment later, a hand grasped his shoulder and turned him around.

"Frode," his voice was husky, his build husky, his small amount of facial hair was almost childish, "Happy new year."

"The same to you, Jimson." Frode replied, his smile lessening.

"Might we talk alone?" His eyes looked over to Gro, who was still holding on to one of Frode's hands.

Frode turned to his wife and his bright smile returned to full; he nodded. His eyes still held uncertainty. She got the message and walked over to some of the elders.

Jimson let go of Frode's shoulder and led the way to a road between buildings, out of the way. One was a tailor, the other a stainer. Jimson's eyes dashed this way and that, as if trying to watch a fly.

Jimson spoke. "Now, Frode, you know me. You know I don't like being lied to. I don't like this... this... blasphemy."

"Blasphemy? Jimson, what are you talking about?"

"Not blasphemy against Her Beauty, no, no. Blasphemy against the people. 'Our people'." Jimson's eyes rolled. "He talks blasphemy against us. We live here in a paradise, there's no doubting that. No, no, there's not..."

"Get on with it Jimson."

Jimson took a breath. "They will come for us. It is inevitable—"

"Let us have our peace then."

"Is that what you want, truly? Frode. Please don't tell me that's how you think."

"That's how I want to think."

"It's how we all want to think."

Frode nodded.

"But we can't. We will forever be on the run. Gods, even the elders know that."

But this doesn't concern them. They both thought. *They have made their peace with this town; at least the land around it is peaceful.*

Frode said, "Then let's hear it. Your proposition."

Jimson gave his faint smile, though his eyes sank. It was a face of finality.

"No," said Frode. "I will not stand for it."

"But you must, we all must, we..."

"Jimson, the mountains are not our domain."

"Nor is this land, Frode!"

"But here we are!"

"And here we shant remain!"

"Enough! Now you speak true blasphemy. Shame on you for using such a word the way you did. I shall not stand in the midst of a blasphemer and have my mind diluted."

"Do you not think that is how the Kyn's thought?"

Frode exhaled through his nose. "I have already given thoughts to the Kyn's conviction."

Jimson paused. "It's been over three hundred years since a section of Cerridwen has broken apart from the main church."

"No." Frode paused, "Now it's only been four."

Both went quiet.

Frode continued, "They will come for us, there is no doubt about that. Running away, Jimson, really? Do it. See where that gets you. I'll be enjoying my time in paradise, here, with Gro."

With a bolstered stance, Frode turned from Jimson and walked away, locking the conversation in his mind, leaving it be for now.

Walking out of the darkened sidestreet Frode shielded his eyes from the bright sun, almost disappearing behind the mountain range. The white snow at the mountain's apex embodied the light, cresting the peaks with a celestial awe. Frode would have woken up to that celestial awe four years prior. Now he will fall asleep to it.

As Frode returned to the clearing in front of the temple, the evening feast began. Wild pigs were roasted over large fires, their burning meat dripping and sizzling. The elders were helped by some of the women and children as they placed greenery across a couple of tables. Barrels were being rolled in from other streets; Frode recognized that some of them were branded with a tavern's signature, while others had groups of families hauling generic barrels.

The feast of Cerredwin's light.

Frode turned his head to and fro, searching for Gro. He smiled when she found her spicing up one of the cooked pigs.

"You're an artist, Gro." Fro said.

"An artist of food? I do believe that's called a 'cook'," Gro replied.

"Well, I wanted to make it sound more elegant."

"Of course you did."

"What is that supposed to mean"

Gro smiled. "Come, let's sit."

She motioned over to a log bench, finely sanded and lacquered.

"You're an artist of wood," said Gro, putting her hand in his as he sat down beside her.

"I do believe that's called a carpenter."

"And I wanted to sound elegant." She mocked the word.

Their eyes met for a moment before the sun finally vanished behind the mountain tops far away. The celestial awe dissipated from the valley, but the two sitting on the log bench didn't notice. Nor did they care.

The evening was celebrated with full stomachs and storytelling. Faces that were there, four years ago, and understood the weight of their actions, exchanged looks; brows furrowed and lips tightened, but all had eyes of grit, determination; all agreed that what they did was right, and just, even under Her light, Her beauty. Songs were sung and dances danced. The little ones enjoyed themselves in utter bliss and innocence. The older ones enjoyed themselves in drink; pushing away nagging thoughts, gnawing conceptions. Burning bright with their warm beauty, for they were the essence of Her, the bonfires shone and twinkled in everyone's eyes.

With her beauty, even here in the dark, a subtle contentment filled the air of the late evening. The children laughed, the adolescents played games, the adults enjoyed each other's company and the drinks, and the elders began to retire, save for a couple with their eyes gazing up to the heavens, though it was blocked by the border of stars.

Frode and Gro stumbled over to the elders, rising from the grass they had fallen on — the beget of their drinking.

“Ornn!” Frode called out to the man.

Ornn tilted his head down and gave a smile to the approaching couple.

“A lovely night, isn't it?” Ornn replied.

“Yes, quite.” Said Gro.

Ornn's wife tilted her head down and laid it to rest on the shoulder of her beloved.

“You're up rather late.” Said Frode. He and Gro sat down on the grass in front of their elders.

Ornn replied, “I'd rather spend this day awake and tomorrow asleep. The stars aren't quite like this every night of the year.”

The four of them turned their heads skyward. The stars twinkled in response, like tiny holes poked through the blanket of night to the eyes of Frode and Gro. Or, to the eyes of the elders, a quilt with designs left up to the imagination. If one were to look down from those stars, they would see four sets of eyes, each with their own twinkle, each with their own rumination.

“The moon is rather bright tonight,” said Gro. “Like one big star. Or a collection of them.”

Ornn's wife spoke, “But where does she get her light from?”

“Hild.” Said Ornn.

Hild closed her mouth.

“It's fine.” Said Gro.

A moment of silence before Ornn spoke. “I just don't want others to hear.”

Gro tore her gaze away from the sky to look around. “Others won't hear,” She said.

The rest of the town had mostly retired. There were a few slumped silhouettes sitting on benches, and one or two stumbling back into the streets of the town. The only sounds were the finality of the embers from the grand fires, and the silence of a town at rest, at peace.

“Cerridwen's light is gentle,” said Gro. “I do enjoy Her beauty, but Cerridwen's light can be looked upon without strain. I agree with you on that matter, Hild. On the matter that Cerridwen's light is more gentle than Hers.

Hild spoke again. Her voice was quiet, serene, an embodiment of the town at rest. “I'm glad you're here Gro. Forgive my previous words, for they were rash. The gods can be confusing for the minds of mortals, and it's a shame that we must live like we do.” Hild's head turned to the mountain range. “It's sad that we must live apart. Though I

acknowledge why, I must say I do not understand.” Her eyes came back to rest upon the couple before her. “It is you and yours that must lead our, our... our minds into the — well, abyss I suppose. But I don’t mean to sound ominous.”

“They know that, dear,” said Orn. He put his arm around her.

Hild took a breath. “It is nice that Ornn and I got to see life over the mountain range, have a life here. It is nice. Gentle. Like her glow. But, those are not words I would use to describe those back in Kyn. Sadly.”

“I’m glad you’re here as well, Hild. That we are here together.” Gro stood and laid a kiss on Hild’s forehead. Ornn’s as well. She then reached down to her beloved and helped him up.

With a smile Frode said, “Goodnight. Rest well under the beauty of both Her and Cerridwen.”

Gro echoed those words.

The younger couple turned and walked back to their home.

The twinkling eyes of Ornn and Hild followed them smiling.

Their smiles quickly vanished when the twinkling in their eyes became red and orange, and their ears filled with the distant sound of war cries. The base of the mountains was lined with celestial contempt.

“a flower’s dissertation”

By: Eleanor Elkus

life, you show me your most beautiful side
in the form of a clear, blue sunny sky,
of a day spent alone but occupied
by my real need to wonder “who am i?”

life, there are times you make me feel such joy:
the soft fall of rain; the knowledge i’ve grown.
but a spin of the earth and it’s destroyed.
all that i’ve worked for; all that i’ve known.

petals drift and gather on the hard ground.
frost’s coldness makes even the sun seem small.
darkness closes in, and there’s no one around.
no one to lean on. no one to break my fall.

my body gives up, and leans down below.
but a new flower catches me, saves me from the snow.