

THE SWITCH

LITERATURE & FINE ARTS





The Switch is UT Martin's student-run literature and fine arts magazine that strives to inspire a community of inclusivity and diversity by featuring a variety of artists and authors.

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Meet The Staff

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Letter From The Editor

Dear Reader,

Where do I even begin to describe what a joy it has been making this issue? Our campus is incredibly fortunate to have so many gifted contributors and hardworking individuals, and I am so happy our magazine is able to showcase them. Our volunteer staff devoted their time and energy to reviewing over 150 submissions, a record-breaking amount for our magazine. With our shared sense of purpose, we were able to foster an energetic and welcoming environment at our meetings. The best part of my Mondays was walking into a space of camaraderie, creativity, and spirit.

One word for this issue would be reflective. From fantastical ecosystems to haunted hotel rooms, many of the literary pieces look within themselves to tackle life’s biggest questions. Astounding artwork looks back on history and explores identity and appearance. Our photographers return to the earth for answers, capturing sunsets and wild animals. In their work, our contributors inspire others to look inward and forge ahead.

I would like to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Carter, for her unwavering support and guidance. Her wisdom and commitment to our magazine allow us to prosper as a student-run staff. Tomi McCutchen is also a crucial faculty member who is always in our corner to help us reach publication. Along with our dedicated staff, I am so thankful for our incredible masthead. Our gifted Art Editor, Izzy Merickle, worked so hard to put this issue together, and her talent shines through in the design. Izzy also cultivated our connection to the League of Striving Artists, the student art organization that promotes art through service and leadership on campus. This is a relationship we hope to strengthen as time goes on. Ava Johnson, our Social Media Editor, created exceptional social media content that gave our magazine a voice and personality online. Amber Thomas’s work as Assistant Editor was invaluable in completing the issue, and I will always be grateful for her help and support. I also greatly appreciate Leo Honbarger and Tia Runion’s diligence to the Spring 2023 issue, as they set high standards I was honored to maintain. Without their work, we would not have the opportunity to win third place in the 2024 Southern Literary Festival, further solidifying our magazine’s presence on campus and beyond.

I have had the special privilege to serve this literary and fine arts magazine for all four years of my undergraduate career. The Switch will always hold a special place in my heart, and I cannot wait to watch it flourish for years to come. Thank you, reader, for allowing me to be your Executive Editor and spotlight the creative brilliance that the University of Tennessee at Martin has to offer.

Sincerely,
Ryesa McGehee

Divine Feminine

By Elle Edwards

I am a woman in the way my body is a temple that deserves
To be worshiped. I align with femininity in the way I keep my hair
Long and my nails clipped. My girlhood
Cannot be separated from my existence; kept in the core
Of my belly, an involuntary subsistence.
It is the pleasantness that keeps my soul soft, and the
Dreaminess that keeps my mind aloft. I am
The little girl inside me doting on baby dolls, the little girl
That saw the holes the wrath of men left in the walls. I am
A woman in the way my rage is taught by men, but it
Runs much deeper than could ever be felt by them. So go on,
Enjoy the sweet taste of my femininity. But remember
That you are feasting on divinity. You can deny it,
But we make the world go round. We rule silently,
We don't need to be crowned. We don't need to be the best
Just to prove that we have worth. All these years we've been
Reduced to cleaning and giving birth—yet there is a magic
We hold, a soft and gentle glow; we are beauty
Manifested no matter where we go. They call us
Emotional, dramatic, intense. But when men
Do the same things it makes perfect sense. We were taught
To make ourselves palatable to others all our lives; society
Tells us from the beginning that all we're meant to be are wives.
Men have made it clear all that matters is what's between
Our hips. Even when we give them children we still have to fear
The "Husband Stitch." We must be pleasing to them but
We can never be better. We are only objects meant to benefit
The collector. But we are tired of being carved
To fit their expectations. We are fed up with being left out
Of all the conversations. Because we may be emotional, but
Men are far too cold. We are beacons of love, we don't care
About control. Our cities were built by the
Violence of men. By jealousy and fear to the highest extent.
So you can continue to think that women are disposable—
But we are forced to cope with our anger,
While men's is uncontrollable.

"Mockingbird"

By Rylee Abbott



"Nightstand"

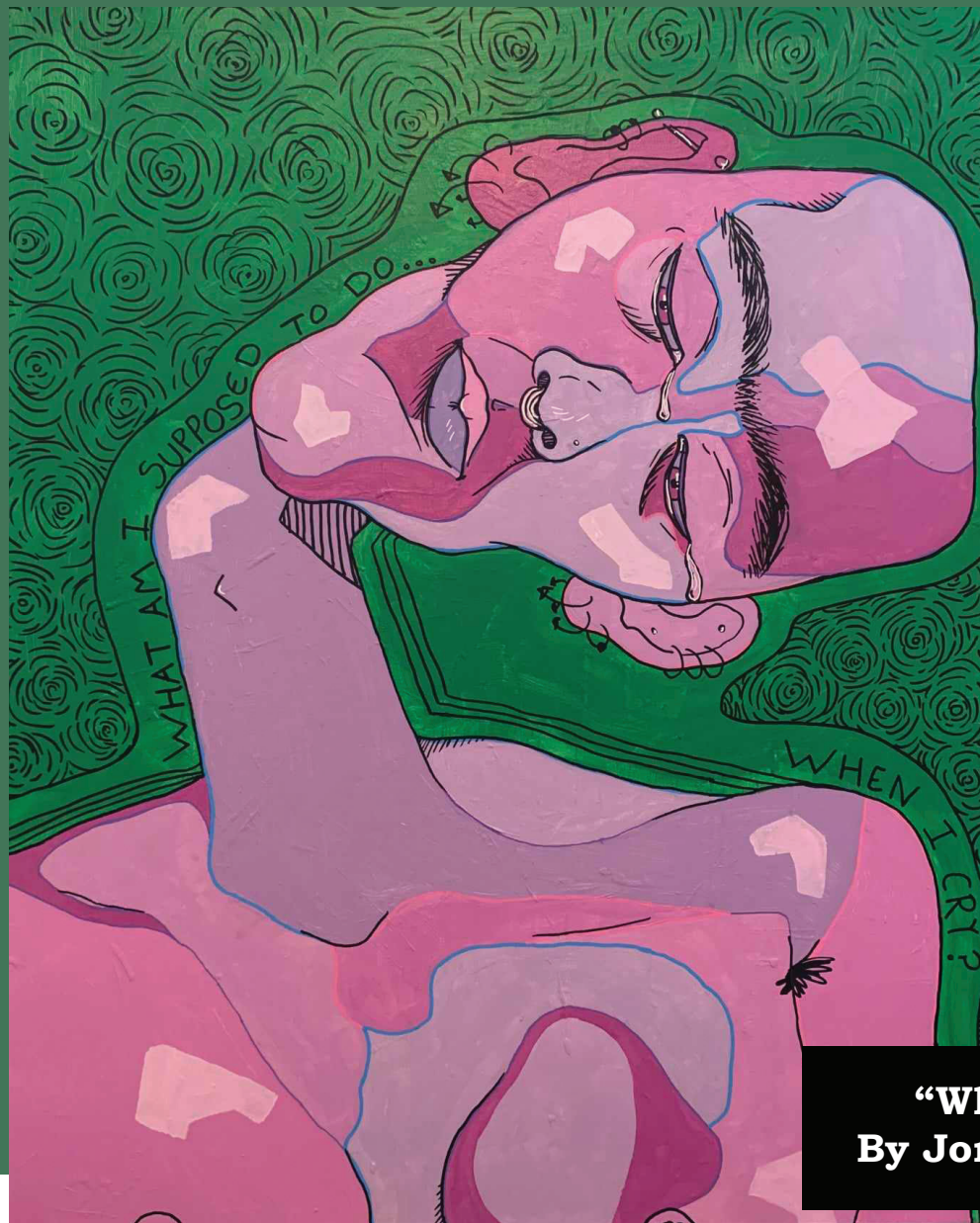
By Natalie Anderson



Rain

By Katie Lownsdale

The rain soaks the world in a melancholic gray.
Coats of black drip like wax from a taper candle.
Hats and boots are only visible through the wet, blurring kaleidoscope.
Concrete flows together as one chaotic river, mirroring the minds of those who walk along it.
Tire tracks cut through the mud, as headlights beacon through the mist and downpour.
Cold as death the droplets are, dripping onto necks and seeping into shoes.
Warmth is lost and forgotten. All is damp and drafty.
Turning up collars does nothing to combat the misery.
Best wait it out, to feel and watch your very soul melt into the water that falls and soon rises again.



“When I Cry” By Jordan Dodd

Moldy Salad

By Haley Straka

It has been two full weeks since you made this chop salad. The lettuce is wilted, and the dressing has soured. The aroma has spread from the kitchen to the entryway to the living room and the hallway. It engulfs the air and leaves no room for even the slightest hint of a pleasant scent. I no longer sit in the living room because of that dead salad of yours.

I grow tired of asking you to clean up after yourself. I grow tired of your sharp mumbled words and the moaning and groaning that fall from your lips. One pace to the right of that salad lies the final resting place for scraps that you have managed to forget exists. I am tired of taking on the roles of mother and maid for you. Throughout the span of this past year, I buckled under the mental weight and let you lead in the song and dance that we played. You kept putting the rudimentary task off for fourteen days and nights. The salad still awaits you but has now grown itself a fuzzy friend. With your science experiment sitting right behind you, words escape you and speak, “You just have a different definition of clean than I do.” Well, I never realized clean was an objective term. With that, I took myself and my definition of clean to my room. Out of sight, out of smell, out of mind.

But now, I’m putting my foot down. I will no longer pick up your forgotten garbage. I will no longer tolerate your gases aflame that you give to excuse your repulsive behavior. I feel displaced, uneasy, unwelcome, and foul in my own home. All because of your damned salad. Why is it okay for me to assist and aid you at every bend of the winding road of life when you won’t lift so much as a finger for me? And I guess I had it coming – overlooking the crimson banners that cling to your persona. But I cannot continue to drain myself to fulfill you. No - I will not do this anymore. I feel exhausted running on empty all the time. And for a while, I was operating on fumes because of you. No – I let you, but not anymore.

I stare at the slab that upheld the bowl. I stare at the bowl that once contained your salad. I stare at the slate and am haunted by the ghost of vegetation’s past. I can still remember the odor of its fuzzified leaves. But when I stare, I feel relief. I am relieved that I am free of its taunt and torment. It took me less than a week after your departure to begin reaping the benefits of your absence. I feel hope, I feel happy, I feel like me again. Oh – but that salad. I guess that’s what we were in time: fresh and alive at the start but dead and rancid at the end. I keep this cautionary tale close to me. My brain will forever carry the scars that your two-week-old moldy salad once left there.



“Dinner for One”
By Abbie Wynn

Nighthawks, 1942

By Ava Johnson

In a cold, lonely diner,
there sat I, a shallow
diluted pool of a man,
holding the best dark roast
in all of Manhattan.

I was watching the clouds,
my face parallel to the sky,
and got the inkling to rest when
one road met another –
seduced by the smell
of fresh cherry pie.

And on that late September night,
with the streetlights the only sun,
I noticed two lovers, and was
reminded that I’ve none.

Like a fairytale ending,
their chemistry is magical,
their embraces repulsively fond;
Lord, forgive me, but if I had
the chance, I’d squash that
fairy godmother, and
her godforsaken wand.

Oh, how I wish I was them:
so blinded with good fortune,
deaf from all the blessed thunder.
but instead I sit alone,
and search for the rainbow
at the bottom of my drink –
that is only getting colder and colder.



“Crystal Neon”
By Izzy Merickle

Temporarily Odysseus

By Ethan Elliott

Standing in your hallway,
That lantern shining dim.
I been here all day and night,
While you danced with him.
I gave you all my time honey,
Why don’t you treat me right?
The storm’s blowing in
Where are you sleeping tonight?

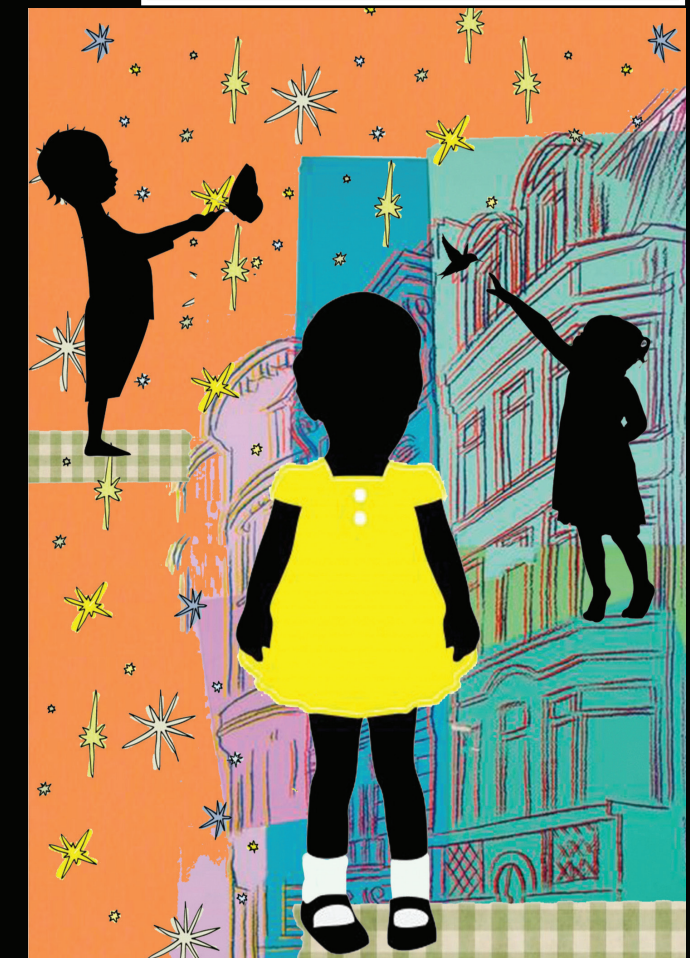
Sitting upon your battlefield,
Yes I’ll stay awhile.
The martyrs are lined up outside your door
Like guilty men on trial.
I gave you all my time honey,
But your eyes don’t shine as bright.
I’d take you in but there’s no room.
Where are you sleeping tonight?

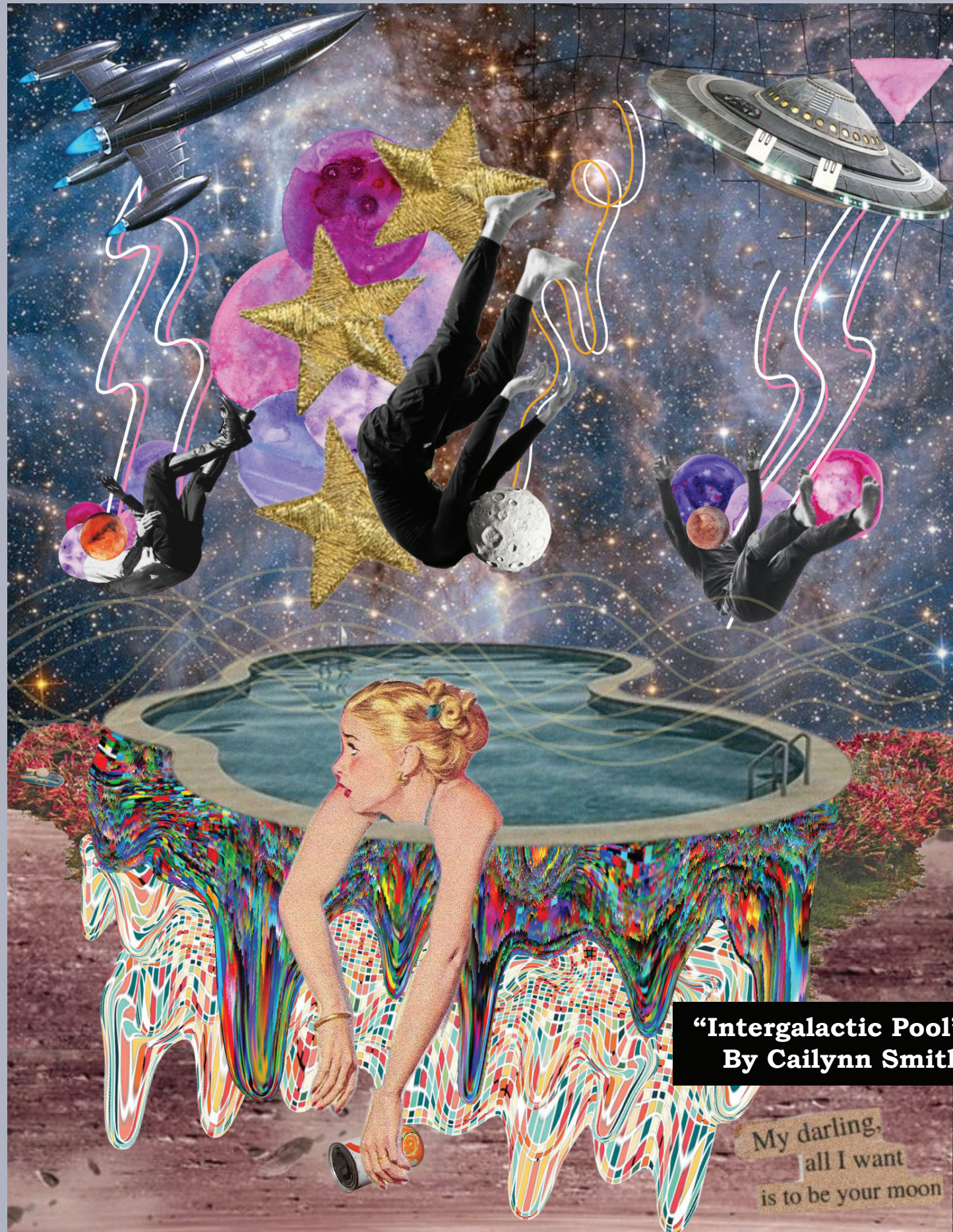
Well the velvet lined alleway,
Stops at your chamber door.
I’m watching the snow come falling down
And cover your wooden floor.
You know I need you honey,
But your heart is locked up tight.
The temperature’s still dropping
Where are you sleeping tonight?

Well that spanish train rolls through the rain,
And I think it’s southern bound.
The moon is white but oh tonight
You won’t find me around.

Now I leaned against your
lamppost,
With my number in my hand.
The line a little shorter now,
I’ll never understand.
Oh I feel just like Odysseus,
Your love’s a war to fight.
Where will you be when it’s over?
Where are you sleeping tonight?

“I Have A Dream”
By Stephanie Hopper





“Intergalactic Pool”
By Cailynn Smith

Ode to an Older Me

By Kathryn Redlund

Stars drape the sky like satin
 Each a single raindrop
 Only bright leaves in a forest
 Only sunspotted freckles on my skin
 Only people passing on terminals
 Shinning like beaten paths
 The frail beaten winds
 Blowing the candle lit stars
 The flickering light passing in the breeze
 Each a raindrop in an ocean
 Each coloured of pigmented skin
 Bright skies dimming their lights
 I was once bright and ethereal in essence
 Now beaten by the decades
 Age carved its presence in my skin
 I am a star
 My tears like raindrops dripping on tin roofs
 My memories swept up in passing winds
 The life passing from my eyes like shadows
 My mother's bright smile
 The old windowpanes dusted with raindrops
 The beaten tree limbs I climbed
 The star lit night skies
 Are memories as aged as my skin
 My skin like skies, white patches
 Fine hair passing in light gusts
 My thoughts like stars in a night sky
 Nostalgia as bright as any sun
 My joints beaten, my bones weary
 Chills that flow like raindrops in a storm
 Their lights like fantasias and symphonies of raindrops
 Like sweat glistening pores on my skin
 Like passing songs of trees singing in the wind
 Their bright song a display, and us the audience
 I am a star
 Stars stand as hallow remnants
 Bright projections of what once was
 Tell me will i still have my stargazing wonder in my passing

“Princess In Training”
By Lily Yates



“A Light That Never Goes Out”
By Sophia Albers

Coal Mine

By Emily Hailey

I guess I should have heard
That bird song while I was digging,
But I was too busy humming the third
Verse I wrote about you.
The shovel kept the beat
As I buried all the warnings;
Mouthing sonnets, kissing your feet,
Pretending the six wasn't six feet deep.
It has always been my plague
To take flight at the first sign of thunder;
But underground the shadows vague
When met with your aluminum smile.
The flaw of emerald green eyes
Is that it cancels out the ruby red
And what I didn't see as I scried
Was the lie to which I was wed.
Fate or choice, it doesn't seem to matter,
My feet will carry me further down.
Visions of your warmth dance to the clatter
Of teeth as I choke on the going up smoke.
And as the air grows thin, my lips finally close.
A mirage, the twin of you, consumed my mind
As my lungs blackened with poison from all the prose.
And in that silence, a bird sings sweetly, treacherous inbind.



The Glass That Never Shatters

By Spencer Quillen

Whispers dance through prisms of light. They speak a forgotten language that echoes off and permeates through the white porcelain floor. A man lays upon that floor, naked; the fat of his stomach squeezed out from beneath him. He is completely still, stiff as a corpse. A beam of light shines upon his face arousing him awake, and his eyes open yet as stiff as the rest of him. His upper back rises and falls to each breath, relaxed breaths still calm from his sleep.

Finally, the man begins to move; he moves his arms from his side to in front, preparing to pick himself off the floor. This requires a good bit of prying. His face is the worst of it, almost like someone glued his right cheek to the floor. Luckily, the man has seemed to already break a sweat, so the salty moisture helps him to separate skin from floor. When he stands, he looks around himself yet notices nothing, not yet. His eyes are hollowed; his breaths calm no longer, getting heavier each second. He looks to his feet, pauses, stuck on the rash-infested folds across his waist and abdomen, oblivious to the absence of his manhood. He sees the porcelain floor beneath him, the deep white stone with speckles and swirls of light gray and tan. The naked man raises his head and looks out beyond the porcelain floor, noticing it is only a small square and that around him surrounding that porcelain square on all sides are pastures of grass and the occasional bed of flowers. There is a blue lake with no moss or algae to his right – a pristine body of water. Behind this lake sits a large collection of trees with leaves withered and colors turned red and brown from the autumn. The man walks towards the lake hoping the water is fresh, desperate for a drink. He gathers speed, his surroundings dissipate, and all that exists is the lake. The man takes no more than ten steps before he walks into something hard.

There is nothing there. The man reaches out and touches nothing, but it is something that he can feel. He looks around his hand.

“Glass,” he whispers to himself.

He glides his calloused fingers across the glass, noticing not a single imperfection in the design. When the man pecks the glass, a very low and nearly indistinct thud responds. Now that he knows it is there, the man can see the sun as it refracts through it. Just barely, it is so distinct that maybe he is only imagining it, but, by the way it looks, there are no doors, no holes, no cracks. The man looks at the four glass walls that surround him, and he can't help but feel like this is a prison.

Far above the naked man, leaves sway through the sky. They travel fast, zigzagging off in many directions. He follows one of the leaves as it is blown closer to him, soaring high above before plummeting down below. The wind courses down the man's broad and rashed shoulders as the leaf enters his glass enclosure. The leaf

floats graciously down now that the wind is blocked by the glass. It sweeps back and forth, and the man watches, his eyes mimicking the leaf's movement. The leaf ends its journey, hard fought, upon the man's feet.

He doesn't wait. The man lifts his calloused blood-shot foot, and the leaf falls. Then he lays his foot upon the leaf, crushing it. The man closes his eyes and almost escapes his translucent reality, but, instead, dread lays its hot ire upon the man's neck. He opens his eyes and realizes he is not alone.

The naked man walks towards the glass, trying to be as close to his visitors as he can possibly get. He pushes and squeezes his body against the glass and stares at his small, playful guests. There are two children, a boy and a girl, both around eight or nine. The boy is shirtless and wears grass-stained blue jeans. The girl, a once-white dress with designs of stemless sunflowers freckled upon it. They both share the same blue eyes and the same dishwater blonde hair, albeit the boy's is short, messy, and curly, and the girl's is long, brushed, and straight. The girl chases the boy – they seem to be playing tag. They run around not too far from the naked man's glass enclosure.

The man smiles. He hits the glass with his palm.

"Hey!" he yells. "Hey! In here!"

They mustn't hear him. They only run around, and, when one tags the other, they both break out in laughs. The man can hear these laughs; they are not faint; they sound to be right next to him.

"Kids! Hey! Over here!" he yells.

The kids do not hear him. They continue to play. The little girl chases the boy, closing in on him with her arm outstretched. The boy attempts to turn around and see the girl while keeping his stride, but he fails, and he stumbles, and the little girl lands atop of him.

The kids dust off silently. They stand and look at each other; their smiles accentuate the sparkles in their eyes. Joy beads off them, but this only insults the naked man behind the glass.

In a blur, the boy taps the girl on the shoulder then turns and runs. "Tag! You're it!"

The girl takes off to catch the boy. The chase heads in the direction opposite the naked man behind the glass.

"No! Wait!" the man screams. "Come back! Help me! Help! Help me!"

The man beats on the wall. Knuckles bare, he punches the wall with all his might. Enough force to shatter his knuckles and break his fingers. But, no bones break, and no pain is felt. The man keeps punching until blood sprinkles the glass. The man throws himself into the wall hoping that maybe it'll break.

But it doesn't. Before he knows it, the man is sitting on the porcelain floor. The man begins to whisper to himself, pleading with himself to wake up. Wake up from this horrible dream. Wake up! Awake. The man falls silent. He sits with his back against the

glass looking towards the sky. Clouds begin to form; a pinkish glow radiates through them. The sun is soon to set, and night is soon to fall.

"What did I do?" the man asks himself. He then yells it. "WHAT DID I DO?"

No response. Not even an echo.

He hears a young boy's voice from behind him. "Eight... Nine... Ten! Ready or not, here I come!"

But when he looks, the man sees no one.

Nightfall comes without notice. The moon lights the sky, and the man lays flat, staring up at that large white thing, that projection of peace. Then, a giggle. The man hears a little girl's giggle. He looks away from the moon and towards the sound to see a little girl, the same from before with the yellowed sunflower dress. The little girl is facing him, looking at him. The man and the young girl are making eye contact. They both stand still and stare hard, not even a blink.

"Found you!" the boy yells from behind.

The man turns around and sees the boy pointing at the girl with a smile. Then, the boy's hand falls as fear consumes the man. The boy's eyes pan to the man's. They make eye contact. They both stand still and stare hard, not even a blink.

The young girl giggles once more, the echoing of misery, and the man breaks his gaze. The giggle turns to a laugh as the man lays his eyes upon the girl. She holds her small finger out to the man, pointing it at him while laughing. The finger holds the man hostage, solid to its point. The boy's laughter joins. It dances with the girl's, swirling throughout the naked man's enclosure. He covers his ears and falls to his knees. His eyes squeeze shut. The laughter grows louder and louder. His hands offer no muzzle for the cackling. The kids begin to beat on the glass. The laughter enters the man's head and pings in every direction inside his skull. A heat, a tension, builds in his chest and travels up to his throat as though he is being squeezed by a fire-breathing serpent. The pain rises and rises and is soon to crush his soul.

"Please!" the man cries out. "Please! Oh, stop! Stop! Please!"

The laughter doesn't stop. Behind his shut eyes, colors begin to swirl through the black before taking form, and fire grows. The fire seems to feed on the laughter, the dooming unhappy laughs coming from small demons outside the man's cell.

"What did I do?" the man yells out. "I didn't do anything!"

The fire behind his eyes then falls, but it doesn't evaporate. Instead, it liquifies and turns from heat to death. Its brimstone orange is outgrown by a deep crimson, and blood fills the man's shut eyes. He tries to open them but cannot. He has lost control over his body. He tries for a breath, but his throat won't open. His muscles won't respond. As the blood begins to fill his ears, his eyes, and his chest, the children's laughter finally becomes muffled, but a new pain has met him. The man gasps for air as blood exits from his eyes, trailing down his cheek.

The man wants to scream but cannot. He wants to scream and tell the children

he's sorry. He's sorry! At that thought, a great nausea rises in the man, and blood comes hurling out his mouth. Behind his eyes, he begins to see light. Within swirling colors blue, purple race through his darkened vision; fireworks go off as he accepts that he is soon to die. He falls to his knees and hits the ground, hopeless, merciless, pathetic.

But, he can't go that easy.

The blood goes. His throat loosens. The man takes a deep breath as his quivers begin to subside. He lays there still with just a moment's peace. The man thinks that the children must have finally gone home to their parents; the night has become too late. Surely, they won't bother him until next sunrise. The man doesn't fear the night, the darkness; instead, he welcomes it. The sightlessness that envelops him allows him to deny his predicament. Denying reality is a man's favorite pastime, and he, despite his circumstance, is surely a man. The man decides to try and sleep on the porcelain through the night with the blissful hope that he will awake from such an immense and vivid nightmare.

The man's eyes never shut before he sees the green of the grass, the pink of the flowers, and the blue of the sky. At the center of the lit sky, the naked man sees the sun, this time burning his eyes with pain, unwelcomed. He brings his hand up to his face, shielding it from the wicked beams of light. He picks himself off the ground, easily this time; his skin does not stick. He looks to his feet, only to the few hairs that have always grown upon his right big toe. He won't look up; he can't look up. He mustn't face the transparent doom that surrounds him. The man closes his eyes and walks forward to the wall, knowing its presence remains close. His breaths are shaky; a far-off eye could see his throat quiver, if only one was there. The man stretches out his hand but only partially before it meets the smooth glass. He knew it was there, but that didn't stop the molten despair that filled him once his hand met his prison walls.

For once, hopelessness doesn't cry out. Instead, it wells up inside him, behind his eyes, and, like the forgotten child, like the spouse left behind, hopelessness leaves his eyes, and vulnerability streams down his cheeks. But, his tears aren't enough for hopelessness to escape. It fills his body and drowns his strength. He lays his head upon the wall and decides that from now on this is how he will remain.

A sound of crunching comes from behind him. The kids, he thinks. They're not real. He won't look.

The crunching again, louder this time, up higher than before. Are they climbing?

Once more, the sound grows louder and higher. A thought enters the man, and, as soon as he thinks it, hopelessness falls away. The sound is cracking, the man thinks. Glass is cracking.

The man turns around, his heart warming. His eyes meet the source of the sound. The glass wall has cracked open. A hole has formed. A hole that can easily be walked through. Outside this hole are green grass, pink flowers, and blue sky.

The man stands there staring at the cavity in the glass and at the sunlight glimmering a glorious display of colors through the cracks. He stands there frozen, timeless. Glory and youth wash over him, bathing him in bliss. A smile begins to form as he takes the first step towards the wall.

There are no peripheral thoughts, no consideration of reality, no remembrance of the past. There is only what is beyond the cracks: the green grass, the dandelion specks floating through the air, the flowers far off forward covering pastures, the forest of trees with orange, red, and yellow leaves to his left, and a clear blue pond surrounded by lilies to his right. The man lays his foot onto the grass rather slowly; though, not because he expects it to turn to stone, to trick him like his prison has done before. No, he wants to admire the soft ground and the squish of the moisture hidden beneath the dirt. The man hears the squish, feels the ground.

He is free. A light giggle breaks out of the man's mouth and quickly turns to a laugh. He feels the brisk wind flow across his back and down to his feet. In any other instance, the coolness of the wind would have him shiver, but now he, instead, stands tall and stretches out his arms. The man breathes in deep; the smell of fresh water fills his nostrils. He had the mind to go pick some flowers, but that can wait. He has all the time in the world now. The man heads over to the pond and bends down to the water. It sparkles, so pristine and clear that he can see his reflection. He ignores the rashes caked upon the sides of his face, the lifelessness behind his eyes, and the rotten look of his teeth; he doesn't even notice these things. He's free!

The man cups his hand to pick up some water, bringing it up to sip a drink. Yet before fulfilling his thirst, he sees, in the corner of his eye, a person. The naked man drops his hand, letting the water fall, turning to the person in the corner of his eye near the forest of trees in the distance. This is a small person—a short-haired boy, shirtless and wearing blue jeans. This is the same boy from before, but different somehow. He is crouched down picking at the grass. The man starts to walk towards him. As he gets closer to the boy, he begins to hear the boy singing. The singing grows louder with every step the man makes to the boy, but the man can make out the song as soon as he hears it: "All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel. The monkey thought 'twas all in good sport. Pop! goes the weasel."

The boy begins to repeat the singing rhyme when the man has reached him.

The man crouches down beside the boy, and he says, "Can I play with you?"

The boy looks up at the man with a blank face. The boy stares at him for many seconds, a blank stare, thoughtless. Then, the boy smiles and pokes the man hard.

"You're it!" the boy shouts before jumping to his feet and running off away from the man.

The man can't help it; he's like a child once more. The man runs off towards the boy, playing this wonderful game of tag! He chases him and watches as the boy's short hair flows behind his head and as his jeans ripple through the wind. He runs after the

boy through puddles of water and fields of flowers and finally into the thick group of autumn trees where the boy disappears behind the darkness of the leaves. The man stops and looks around, giddy and full of adrenaline from the run. He cannot see the boy. He thinks he must have hidden.

Playfully, innocently, the man calls out, "I'm going to find you!"

The man begins to jump and swing around trees, expecting the boy to be crouched behind each one. He turns around a tree with the thickest and darkest of bark when, at once, he sees the boy far off, no less than fifty feet away. The boy is facing him with tears rolling down his soft face. His legs are being caressed, restricted, squeezed together, and held down by black vines growing up from out of the ground. The vines slither their way up the boy's legs and around his torso, finally reaching his neck. The man's smile falls, and fear envelops. The boy speaks.

He doesn't yell, yet the man hears him as if the boy has spoken directly into his ear. "Hide."

The man doesn't hesitate. He turns and runs, breaking through the trees before he finds the biggest one that he can see. He heaves his body behind it, opposite the boy, and pushes his back against the trunk, trying to conceal his overly large figure as best he can. The jolly has left him, replaced by a wretched agony. He looks around and sees the forest no longer for its beauty. It's dark, ominous. The ground is dead. He can hear the wind whisper and crackle; it laughs at him and his misery. The man hears footsteps through the wind, quick and light. Then, the young girl with the yellowed sunflower dress leans down and looks at the man with blank, wide eyes. She places her small lips to his ear, leaving only enough space for the wind.

She whispers, "Found you."

On both sides of the man, only feet away, black vines break out of the ground and reach towards the skyline. They break through forward farther than the man can see. The vines begin to curl and writhe about, consuming the trees, consuming the sky, and consuming the ground. The man rises and runs! The vines are etching closer to him, dancing through each other, havoc tearing through the earth. Far off, the man sees light breaking through the trees, and he runs straight for it. When he meets the light, he breaks through the trees, outruns the vines, and escapes the forest into a pasture of grass. The man falls to his knees, out of breath, out of energy, and turns around to see if the vines still chase. The forest lies empty with, other than the trees, no evidence of such detrimental vines.

The man sees the shape of two small bodies walking out of the dark, evil forest. His stomach folds upon itself, and his mouth tastes sour. The boy and the girl walk out of the tree line, holding hands, with smiles across their faces.

"You're not free yet," says the boy.

"You'll never be free," says the girl.

"Leave me alone!" the man screams.

He picks himself up and begins to run. To where, he doesn't know. He only runs.

He runs forward, and, at one point, he turns and all that surrounds him is grass. He can see grass and grass and grass for miles. But, wait. Far off, the man sees a man. A man! The far-off man that has his back turned and is dressed in a nice black suit. A man! The naked man runs towards this fellow companion, and finally he reaches him.

He stands only feet away from the other man and he says, "Hey! You! Where's town? How do I get out of here?"

The man in the suit then turns around, and the naked man sees himself. He sees his own face, not rashed but clear. He sees his body: fit, not fat. He is wearing a nice suit, and the hair on his head is groomed. He makes eye contact with himself, a living breathing mirror, but a mirror that lies. A smile forms on his other face.

"There's blood on our hands," the dressed man says.

The naked man looks down at his other hands and sees blood dripping from them. Then, he feels warmth dripping from his own.

"No," the naked man whispers, and the dressed man's smile grows. "No!" the naked man screams and turns away.

He runs again, for the last time, for he makes not ten strides before he smacks into something hard and falls to the ground. If he had been constrained by the laws of reality, he would have fallen unconscious, but misery has rules of its own. The man looks up and sees smears of blood where his nose cracked against the glass. The hole in the wall is not there anymore, nor was it ever, yet it was always.

The man lays his head on the porcelain floor and cries while agony wells up inside him.

Outside the naked man's invisible prison, the boy in the grass-stained jeans and the girl in the yellowed sunflower dress have paint brushes and a large bucket of black paint for each of them, and they are starting to apply the thick opaque ink to the glass.



"Weight of Mental Health"
By Matthew Mancusi

Ode to a
Plucked
Flower

By Hayden Miller

O tiny flower
blooming across the lawn
only lasting a week
even when
I try my hardest
to preserve you,
your death
still hangs heavy on my
dirt caked hands.

why do you bloom
only to die?
why bless the world with
your beauty
with nothing to gain?
we steal your petals
to place in our homes
to pretend you are still
alive
a hollow memory
of what you once were.

beauty is fleeting.
you bloom
to share your fragrance
with the world
you bloom
so we will see
the world in color
you bloom
so we will know what to
miss
when you are no longer
here.



“Blessed and Thankful”
By James Crowell

“Refuge”
By Izzy Merickle



The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

Psalms 9:9

Broken Kingdom

By Artez Williams

I'm the king of my own broken kingdom.
Crumbled and shattered pieces are scattered across the floor, Brought down by a
darkness so unexpected,
Not even God could have foreseen it.
No light of heaven, no winged warrior, no saving grace would have protected me. A
demon, a devil, a vile agent of darkness came with a purpose, guided into my life by my
own welcoming hand.
Like the snake with Eve, my own trusting nature was my own forbidden fruit, I willingly
took a bite as the foe sank their teeth into me at the same time. In my kingdom, I was
king, but I was a blind,
This serpent came disguised as a jester and made me the fool. A smile, a laugh, a kind
word,
Trickery was their greatest tool and my biggest weakness.
They say heavy is the head that wears the crown,
But the dark foe proved I never owned my crown.
Fooling everyone and everything, they came like death,
Quickly, quietly, and sinister.
It wasn't until it was too late that I saw through their dark-looking glass, And then I fell.
Like the angel who dared to defy God,
Like the girl who leaned too far into the rabbit hole,
Like the son who flew too close to the sun.
And with my glorious fall, I brought my kingdom down with me. This broken kingdom,
once so great and so proud,
Now lays broken with me in it.

Metal Dragon, Metal Mouse

By Elea Corson

The roaring of
Metal and
Rubber shake
My stomach

The terror
Of highways
As callous,
Cold graveyards

I hate cars,
I hate cars,
I hate cars,
And yet

I see a
Shadow out
My window
It flies

Alongside
My itty, bitty
Motorized
Metal mouse

And it runs
On 18 legs
And it bellows
Fire ash

And if only
I was smaller
I'd think dragons
Were real.



**“Untitled Vase”
By Matthew mancusi**



“Spinning Away”
By Abbie Wynn



“Untitled Textured Bust”
By Matthew Mancusi

Where the Rivers Swell

By Ethan Elliott

What’s wrong with me?
Why can’t I think?
My conscience is always off somewhere
When my nerves are on the brink
Daylight’s slowly creeping
Through the windows of this all night
motel
I think I’ll go for a little walk
And sit where the rivers swell

I used to see so much beauty
In that cloud that hides the sun
I was writing novels in my mind
Don’t even know how I got them done
Now the engines are all rusty
I have nothing left to tell
Just gonna sit and skip some rocks
Here where the rivers swell

Watching the smoke erupt
From the chimney pots covered in
melting snow
See the sun beating down upon the
sidewalks
Where all the people come and go
Oh I hear them bluebirds singing
Hear the clanging of the church’s bell
And I’m just sitting here with my
thoughts
On the shore where the rivers swell

The old museums weathered with time
Portraits left out in the rain
Across the river a stone visage lies
Some rocks and sand now all that
remain
I wonder what the sculptor was thinking
What story did he have to tell?

And I wonder if there was a day
Where he sat where the rivers swell

The Bones Under Shiloh

By Rachel Haney

Something is trembling beneath Shiloh
below the sacred moss that crawls
around the deep flaring birch trees.
It shakes the goldenrods of Chalk Bluff
and scatters the American Ladies from
the leaves of the persimmons.
Long before civil times that brought
fragments of strange war, and much
further down through the cold, clay layers,
and time that swallowed them, lay
quaking these chambers of ancient
houses. The pounding of flaked axes
reverberates off hemispheres of half-
moon jars. The willows and box elders
of Snows Bend drop their roots down
suspended in fields, once the audience
to a beautiful, mysterious people
now interred in the chest of the earth.
Can you feel it, hickory trees of
Coffee Landing? When the first mothers
and fathers held their palms to the sunlight,
and delighted in your shade; when their
children filled your leaves with vibrations
of their lungs. The very lives of them
tangled with yours, irises of Mulberry
Creek. Can you feel them striking now
below the surface through limestone
and time? They’re calling to the fire
sitting high in the hills – to the great
moon that watches at night.
Mounds of tepid memories are the legacy
they left behind. And I say once more,
there is something trembling beneath Shiloh.



“Elk”
By Rylee Abbott

I Dream of a World Better than Death and Dying.

By AK Mayberry

Of a world where a father does not lay his hands on his daughter
Out of anger
-or for any reason-

Of a world where a mother loves her son beyond his gifts
And celebrates his flaws
-because it reminds them of their mortality-

Where a daughter does not wake up with tears in her eyes
Without a mouthful of yawns and sighs.
From bad dreams and restless sleep
Her mind travels and makes her weep.

Where a son belongs and is loved so true,
His eyes shining the brightest blue.
Like an ocean, river, or sea,
Bring that world better than
Death or Dying to Me.



“Freedom”
By James Crowell



“Resistance”
By Stephanie Hopper



“Wax Warmer in Red Glaze”
By Sophia Albers

A Maiden Departed From Life

By Spencer Quillen

A man from deep beneath comes
He says “Your dark chariot awaits
It is to take you to the underworld
For that is all but an angel’s fate”

You argue your life was a speckled dream
You’ve been grand and deserve some peace
The black robed man then stares at you blank
He says “You are heading to a feast”

You enter your dark chariot
For a meal is much obliged
The horses neigh as you make way
To the land of crimson skies

The journey lasts for millenia
Yet it is over in a snap
Beyond the trees are blood filled seas
You are oblivious to this trap

When the horses halt, you are jarred awake
There is no time for sleeping now
The black robed man offers his hand to take
While life farewells you with a bow

Why bother with the past, you think
Your new home is all around
You’re a gal of which the highest rank
Even here you will earn your crown

Your mystic guide then leads you down an ever dark and winding path
Along the sides, your posture renown, people offer you their wrath
You see no reason in their callous remarks, so you return to them no plea
After an eon's season, days eternal dark, your guide stops you at a sea

"Within this sea your fair feast awaits," he says, "Swim down deep to reach the shore
You'll flee your strength and meet your fate, for the waters will rot your lying core"
The blacked robed man departs from you, a maiden departed from life
You place your hands into the blue, the waters meet your skin in strife

You submerge yourself in the water
Where the darkness has no bounds
You ponder only on what is to come
As you swim deep to the ocean's grounds

You reach the bottom of the depthless sea
And never once do you draw a breath
You arise over the waterline
Meeting the sickening smell of death

You come out of the mystic water
This is no more than a dream

For around you sits your many true exhibits
The crystal clear mirrors showing a feign

You look at them, and you look back
When did your beauty fall rotten, askew

You sit spread along the table while you stand afar firm and stable

These cracked gray reflections are not you

An emerald tear falls from your eye
As your many selves laugh and play
This evil you cannot recognize
Your innocent beauty fades away

When did you become so cruel and cold
You were cherished by many, adored by all
Now that you sit at your table the truth is bold

Your malevolence is disenthralled

"This is no feast," you ponder that thought, "But then, a feast for who?"
You are within the belly of the beast, you fought, but now it is time for you to lose
Your hall of mirrors crackles at you, to them you are a game
Now that you are a viewer, witness the true meaning of their pain

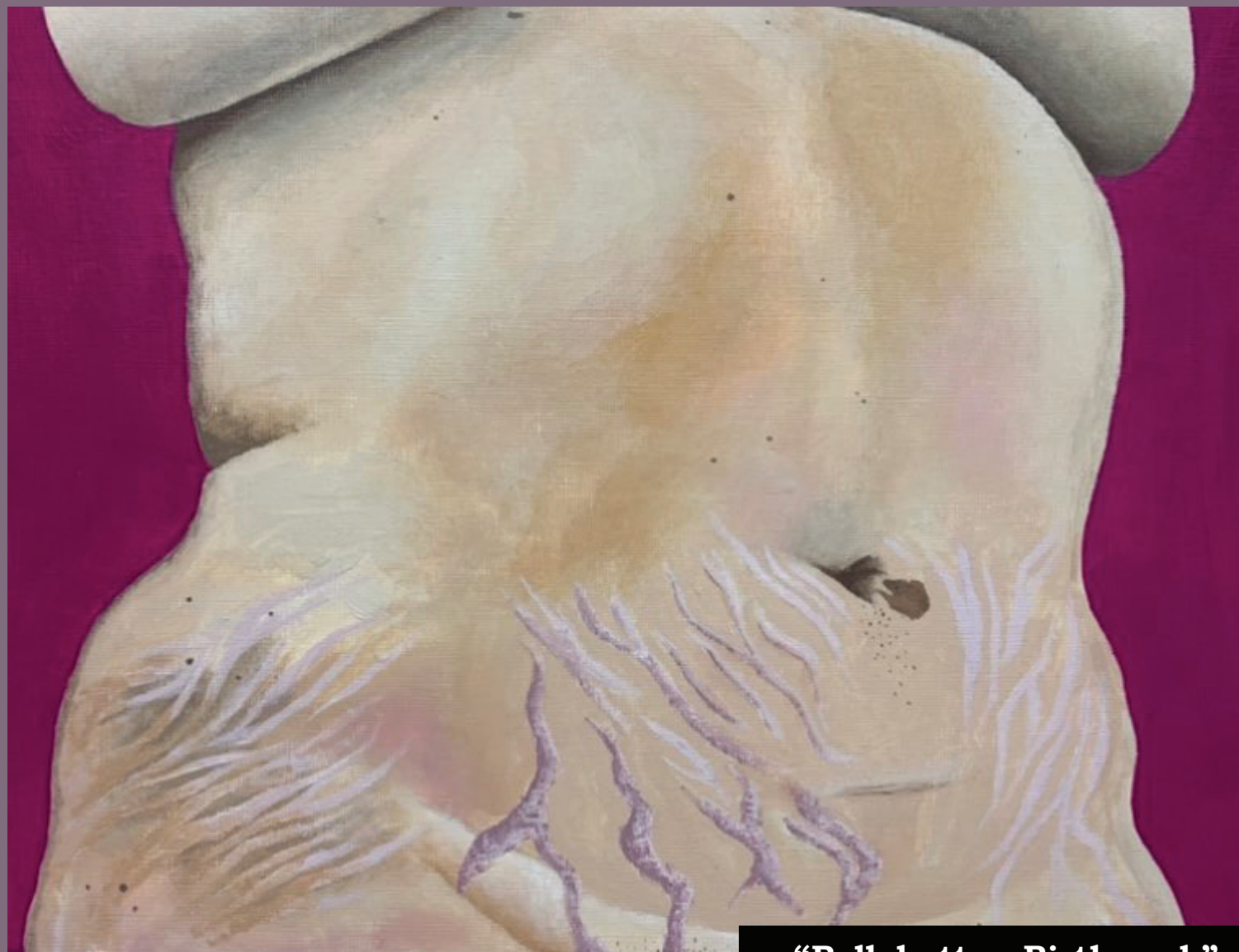
If they are evil, yet they are you, then your life was life's calamity
Of Hell's retrieval, this is yet a preview of your eternal profound insanity
You refuse this pain and flee from strength's weight, you reenter the waters to escape
your strife

This is your vain, the waters your fate, a maiden departed from life

"Fort Pillow Blues"
By Lily Yates



"A Game Of Cat and Mouse"
By Emily Brown



“Bellybutton Birthmark”
By Jordan Dodd

Musings

By Katie Lownsdale

Why must we always be?
 Why can't we simply not be?
 Why must we live between bits of concrete
 Instead of floating in the air like abstract bumblebees?
 Oh to be free! Oh to fly!
 Let us soar among the clouds, there into the sky!
 If we are to hate our lives
 Does that mean we wish to be dead?
 Surely not...
 Though living doth we dread!

Don't Watch Me Sleep

By Ava Johnson

i feel so cold and naked
 with my defenses wrapped
 up in my purple blanket.

i must keep my feet covered; i
 don't like the man with red eyes.
 i have felt the touch of his hand
 before and i'm not sure if i survived.

all the radiators are rattling
 like fresh pearls in a jar. my clam
 jaw is broken – my mouth is open,
 but morning is still so far.

the man with red eyes is inching
 closer, crawling, creeping,
 can somebody, anybody, protect my body?
 i can't run away when i am sleeping.

he knows the agony on my face; he's
 visited beyond my foolish wit; yes,
 Night Heron, i am afraid of the dark, but
 more so of your eyes that glow in it.

the night is not a sadist, but the
 red-eyed man giddily drinks my tears.
 (he has told me he is sorry so many times,
 the words have started to sound weird.)

even awake i feel his long fingers, aching
 to meet my tired flesh – every now
 and again i wake up bruised from
 all of the immortal raven pecks.

i foraged for every dream lord: i looked
 for Sandman in every dimension. i
 considered psych wards because of
 him, totally embarrassed by his
 attention.

i searched out every witch, but even
 Hecate recognized his name. i
 pursued every exorcist but they had
 already massacred your grave.

Night Heron, watching me so
 intently,
 it is true that a touch is a touch. but
 unfortunately a look is also a touch
 and yours lingers far too much.

for all of these years i have left
 you alone – so don't watch me
 sleep – i'd like my dreams to be
 my own.

How Far He'll Go

By Caitlyn Hargett

His fingers curled around the side of the metal balcony, soaking in the cold wind. His other hand held an empty bottle of soda with the design slowly peeling off. The door to the veranda was pushing warmer air against his backside. The creaking of the small apartment terrace is a distant comfort to his ears. Amir closed his eyes to hear the movement of the door's curtains, tasting the last of the orange soda, and feeling an inner sense of home. The previous weeks before this was filled with stifling silence and empty, cold air. However, while he was moved by the familiarity of everything around him, there was still an incredibly large amount of space next to him.

"Amir, come here and help me fold these clothes," someone called from inside the room leading to the veranda.

He enjoyed one last inhale of the city fumes before heading back inside. Amir shut the door closed behind him as a tiny animal cut through the space just before it closed. He was still engrossed in his thoughts as he looked around the room. The bedroom was pale yellow and decorated in tiny fairy lights. The furniture, such as the dresser and side tables, was all golden oak. His bed was decorated with a green plaid comforter that matched the rug closer to the door.

"Mio caro," the sweet voice hummed in amusement, "did you hear me?"

Amir placed the bottle on the dresser and pressed a finger to his right temple, predicting a terrible headache.

"Don't call me that," he whispered harshly.

"Why are you in such a bad mood? Do you want to talk about it?" the voice said.

He turned his head away from the noise and kneeled to the ground. His hand seized the books splayed across the mahogany floor before discovering what they were. "Were you going through my stuff?" his voice grew.

Amir didn't give the other person time to react as he slammed the photo books into the bookshelf behind him.

"I told you countless times that you don't touch anything in this room!" he yelled. The magic in his veins was growing hotter by the second as he felt the pounding in his head.

"I just..." he furrowed his brow. "I wanted to know more," he finished.

Finally, Amir craned his head towards the voice in sheer anger. As soon as he made contact with those blue eyes, his heart fluttered while the magic in him cooled. The apparition looked concerned as he fidgeted with the half-folded clothes in his hands.

"I told you... You don't need to know anything. You're not-" he hesitated and couldn't muster the ending of the sentence.

"I can become him. I can become your Zaccaria," he pleaded.

Amir looked away and towards the photobooks on the shelves. No one could be him. There was no amount of forbidden magic in the world that could bring back his light, without a price. The ghost that inhabited his lover's apartment was proof of his failure at necromancy.

He dug his fingers into his hand and turned back to Zachary. "Leave me alone."

Reluctantly, Zachary left him alone after gathering the last pieces of clean clothing. Amir dug under the dresser beside him and pulled out a box. He blew the dust that littered the top of the leather casing, coughing as he inhaled a cloud of it. He tore the top off and dug around through the trash inside of it. With a hesitant hand, he pulled out a tiny piece of chalk from the bottom. The sight of the object caused him to shake with a mix of fear and hope.

He stood up and started pushing the bookshelf to the bed to make more space. Once a significant amount of space was acquired, he knelt to the floor again. Amir drew numerous amounts of strange, occult symbols. He was lucky enough the chalk ran out as soon as he finished. He looked down at his hands and felt the fire growing uneasy.

Amir used a quick spell to nick the tip of his pointer finger. He sat back down to retrace the figures. Then pressed both his hands and his forehead against the floor. He whispered multiple things quickly under his breath. His blood was racing as the pounding of his headache was a feat to ignore. Suddenly, he felt immense pain in his left hand. It was as if someone was burning his skin slowly. He bit down on his tongue and fell to his side on the ground, holding his wrist with an iron grip. He screamed as a mysterious symbol appeared on his hand, "I'll do it this time! Just bring him back!"

Instantly the veranda door slammed open, a cool summer breeze washed over him, and the pain was just a dull reminder.

A familiar voice called out in concern, "What did you do?"



"Coopa Scoopa"
By Alexis Carter

Love as Written to My Better Self

By Kathryn Redlund

My love -
Words like maple
Sweetness clinging
To my tongue
To sooth such
A bitter palate as mine
Lingering for a chance
To utter even
A declaration for how wondrous
A feeling
That of our love is.
The speechlessness
Like molasses
Of how it's even more
Than they can express
Designation of you, of us
Sitting, just behind
My heart,
Leaving each palpitation
To bring warmth
To the very arms that hold you.
My love -
I am beside myself with admiration
For all I know to say
Is that if our love were luminous, it would shine far brighter than
any star on the satin night skies could. Every hair on your head like
seas of light, so gentle to the caress of my hand with white warmth
stealing even the harsh shadow cast off our backs.
Is that our love would ebb and flow like the rise and fall of the sun's
last kiss on the tides before the darkness of night envelops each wave.
How I yearn for you to know
Even a glimpse of how tender
A feeling it is to love and to be loved by you.



“Untitled 2”
By Kathryn Redlund

Belonging

By Katie Lownsdale

Bury me.
Bury me deep below the streets with no names.

Call me.
Call me back though I'll never go forward.

Save me.
Save me from the never-ending spiral of misery.

Live them.
Live the delusions that cloud and distort the ways of life.

Don't be afraid to let your mind wander
Farther than the scope of the sky.

They can't get you if you're safe inside your head.
So let that be enough. For now.

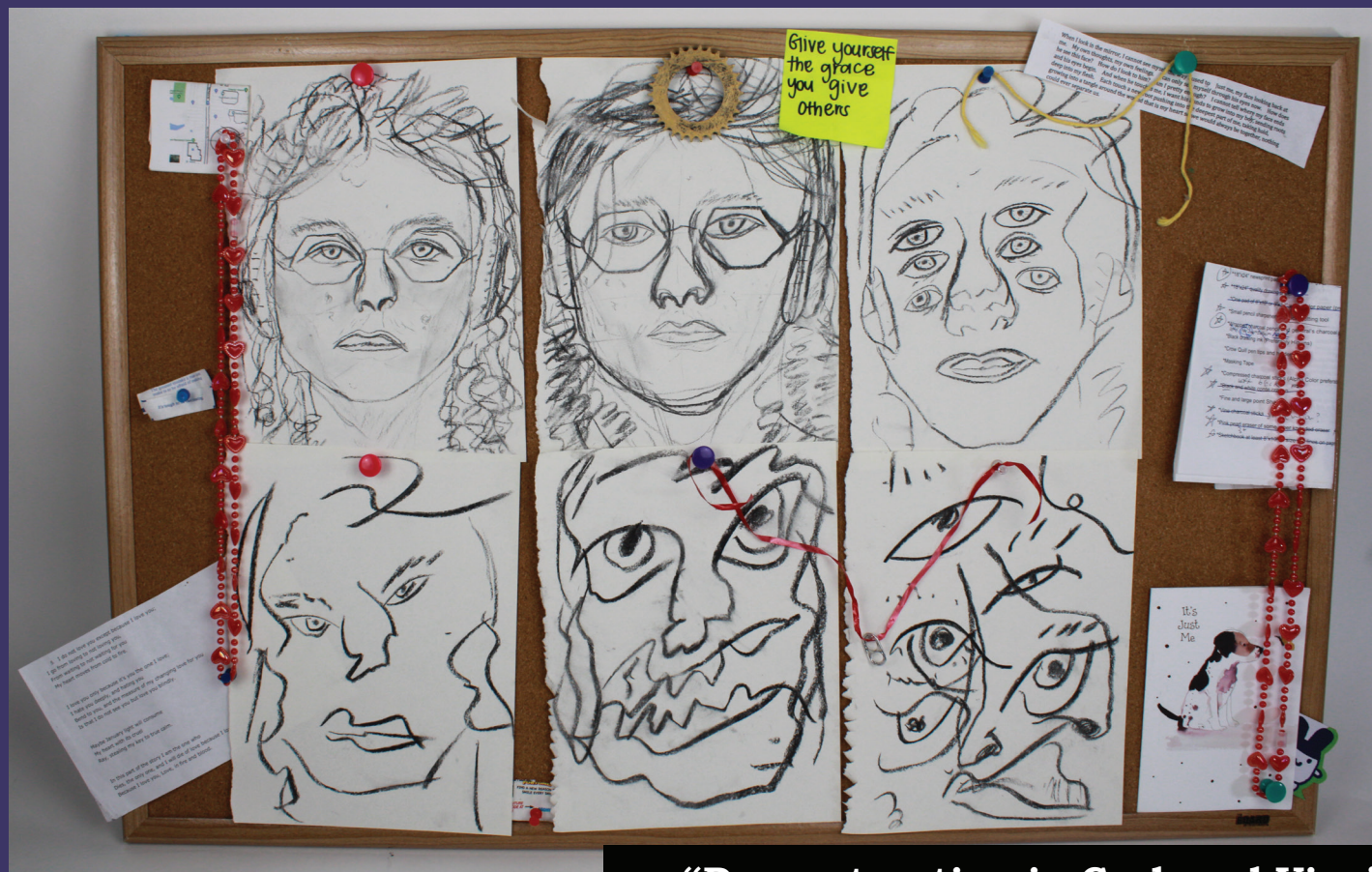
Open your arms wide as everything that's ever been and everything that ever
will be envelopes you and takes you home.
You're where you should be.

The rush of wind and water fills your ears.
But the sound brings comfort, as all worries become inaudible in the climax of
sound.

Listen, listen, listen.
Then don't.

If you don't listen
The whispers can't hurt you.

Put them where they belong
So that you can go where you belong.



**“Deconstruction in Cork and Vine”
By Moira Mathis**

A Night in Room 309

By Ethan Elliott

It was far past sundown before I finally encountered a building with burning lights.

The days were growing shorter as autumn swept in on the winds, casting most of the day in bleak October twilight and throwing the reflection of a cold orange sunset upon the surface of the bayou. The small town in which I was presently residing seemed wholly desolate and deserted. The streets were cold and quiet, with a cool breeze blowing up and down the empty roads, and an air of sadness enshrouding each of the dilapidated buildings. The coachman had deserted me just outside the county line and informed me that I must continue my journey on foot if I wished to go any farther. Being of a non-confrontational, silent disposition, I merely nodded my head in reluctant agreement and started toward town.

I traversed the ancient empty streets until finally the lights of a modest lodging house came into view. Immediately upon entrance, I was greeted with the grotesque embrace of a large cobweb, the webbing of which was so thick that my vision was badly obstructed. I found myself flailing about like a drunken man. It seemed inevitable that I would soon lose my footing in the darkness until my body encountered a solid figure, stopping me dead in my tracks as though I had run into a brick wall. The figure then struck a match, and the candle in his hand was illuminated. I cleared the web from my face and saw before me a hulking, brooding man with a thick dark beard that virtually hid his lips and portions of his large nose. His eyes were dark save for the reflection of the little flame within them.

“Good evening my good man,” I greeted him, removing my hat. “Do you happen to have a spare room for a tired man?” I asked.

The man did not answer, but merely gazed into my eyes with a sort of curious look, inspecting me as though I were not a live man of flesh and blood.

“Do you have a spare room?” I asked again, unsure of whether he had heard me the first time.

Still, his countenance remained unchanged. Just as I was about to ask again, he extended his right arm and dropped a cold, rusted key into my hand. The key bore the inscription “309,” indicating my room number. I looked up into his dark, glowing eyes and nodded.

“Thank you,” I said.

He nodded back, assuring me that he was at least capable of understanding what I said. The man then began to light a few more lamps within the dark room, adding a somewhat cheery atmosphere to the mold-laden walls that surrounded me. A staircase soon came into view, and I began at once to mount it. It led me to the base of a drafty hallway that breathed a similar air of desolation as the rest of the building. I proceeded down the hall, walking so carefully as though I were afraid of raising the dead that no doubt resided in the rooms.

As I made my way down the hall, I could not help but peer curiously over my shoulder from time to time. I could not articulate why, but I was filled with the terrible apprehension that I was being followed. I feared I would turn my head and see a ghastly phantom standing before me, veiled in all the dirt and decay of a lifetime spent in the soil. But each time I turned, I saw only the same gloomy darkness that seemed to stretch a mile throughout the building. Upon reaching my room, a sudden sound fully aroused my fears. I had paused before my room to procure the key when I heard what sounded like heavy footsteps plodding along the floor. I turned my head in the direction of the sound but saw only the same darkness.

Presently my heart began to pound with such force that I suspected it was stretching my vest! The footsteps continued towards me, sounding only heavier and heavier with each step. I pressed myself firmly against the door, bracing myself for the

cold hand of an invisible intruder. By and by, the footsteps stopped in their tracks and slowly died away as though retreating from where I stood. I heard the wooden stairs strain and creak as the sound grew further and further away, until there was nothing but silence and darkness once more.

After several aching long minutes in torturous silence, I finally wiped my brow and said to myself, “I must be more tired than I had ever thought!”

I hurried to unlock the door. I entered my room and shut the door as quickly as I could, closing myself off from the forlorn darkness outside. Once I had calmed my racing heart, I began to look around the room and was wholly pleased and utterly shocked at the contrast between the bedroom and the gloomy halls just outside. The room was pleasant and, as far as my eyes could tell, very clean. An immaculately large bed suitable for 4 or 5 persons stood in the center of the room, and a grand fireplace stood at the base of the opposite wall. The fireplace almost seemed to beckon me, as though it were requesting I light it and invite its cheeriness into the room.

I gladly accepted its invitation, and soon the whole of the room was bathed in its yellow glow. After undressing and preparing myself for bed, I opted to sit by the fire for another few moments hoping the gentle crackle of the flames would soothe me to sleep. I sat there for many moments musing on the events of the day and telling myself I must never be allowed to become this tired again. Lord knows what sights and sounds my weary brain would conjure up next time!

Before long, the rain began to set in. It was falling softly at first with low rumbles of thunder coming intermittently before strengthening into a real evening gale. I listened to the symphony of rain dancing along the roof, and soon, memories of bygone days and bygone people rushed over my mind like ocean waves.

By and by, I began to get drowsy, and just as my eyes had seemingly closed for the night, the fire went out all at once. This could not have been the wind, as the windows were bolted shut. The room became eerily cold in an instant, and I looked about the room for a cause. I came to the conclusion that I was simply imagining things in a disoriented haze and began to cross the room towards my bed. Just as I began to lie down, the same sound of heavy footsteps sounded in the hall. This startled me fully awake, and I found my heart pounding steadily again.

“Is someone there?” I shouted at the door.

The footsteps grew only heavier and heavier. I knew someone must be heading towards my room! I flung myself into bed and groped about for the bedclothes as the sound only intensified.

“Go away!” I shouted. “You have no business with me!”

Just as the words escaped my lips, all was suddenly quiet again. I kept the covers close to my face, revealing only my eyes, and fixed my gaze firmly on the door. Because of this, I did not notice when the mist came in through the window. It slipped in through the bolts and the locks, through the rain and the wind. It was a frigid, blue

mist that rose into the air and hovered directly over my bed. The room too became frigid, so much so that I began to see my breath rising before my eyes.

A painful, tortured wail suddenly erupted from within the mist, “Esmerelda! Esmerelda! Esmerelda!”

And I knew once and for all that the events of this night were not of my creation, and I would soon be face to face with a visitor from beyond the grave. The mist lowered itself closer and closer to me and began to twist and distort itself into the face of a man! Two cold, gleaming eyes slowly manifested out of the vapor, and a pale, ancient face followed it. Its expression was one of remorse and utter sadness, I had never seen a lonelier looking soul in all my life.

Suddenly, the brows furrowed, the eyes widened, the lips curled, the head tilted, and the specter said, “Esmerelda?”

“Come now, man!” I said. “Do I look like an Esmerelda?”

The specter recoiled at my exclamation, and I could see now that its whole body had come to form. Judging by the fearful expression on his face, and his reaction to my words, I could tell he was just as troubled by my presence as I was by his.

“Why, you have no reason to fear me, friend,” I said warmly. “But who are you, and why have you paid me a visit tonight?”

“My name is Charles F. Hornbaker,” the spirit said. “I died on April 19, 1775, at the Battle of Lexington and Concord.”

“My word,” I said in astonishment. “You were a great patriot then, my friend! I could have gathered from your attire that you were involved in combat, but I would have never guessed the magnitude of your service! Here now, let me make up the fire, and we can talk more at length.”

I made up the fire and offered my friend some brandy. We sat opposite each other and conversed for the better part of an hour, all the while the rain fell steadily along the rooftops, having finally quieted to a gentle pitter-patter. Finally, I built up the courage to ask the question so presently on my mind.

“Tell me if you will, how did you come to lose your life?”

“Bayonet to the throat,” he said dismissively. “I have told the story so many times I’m frankly annoyed with it! I wish to leave it at that if it’s all the same with you.”

“Of course,” I said. “But if I may, did you feel a desire for any vengeance against the fellow whose bayonet pierced your throat?”

“Not for a moment,” the phantom said. “No redcoat ever came after me for vengeance after my bayonet pierced their throat. So why should I hold myself in such a higher regard? It was war, and I’m not losing my head over it.”

“I’ll consider the matter closed then. But with the closing of one matter, I cannot help but open another. Might you tell me about this Esmerelda you came haunting this room for?”

At this, the phantom’s expression returned to the same lonely countenance it had

worn when we first encountered each other.

“She is the love of my life, the love of my eternity,” he said, rising from his chair and floating towards the window. “I loved her more than the air within my lungs, and I told her if there was an eternity I would love her there as well.”

“What became of her after your demise?” I asked.

“She passed before I did,” he said somberly. “A cruel sickness took her from me in the summer of 1771. She was so young, and her beauty never wavered for a moment, as I’m sure it hasn’t wavered in all the centuries since.”

“So why did you come to me then?” I asked curiously. Why this room?”

“It was in this room that she breathed her last breath. You are its first occupant in over a century. Once I knew that there were again lights burning in this room, I had to know if my love had finally returned to me. Alas, she has not, and I am forced to search for her once more.”

“Now wait just a moment,” I said, arising from my chair. “This room sure is clean for a room that’s been abandoned for so long, isn’t it?”

The phantom’s head rose suddenly at this, and he began to look about the room.

“You may inspect all you like,” I said, “not a speck of dust in sight.”

“But it makes no sense,” he said. “I have been haunting room 209 for nearly two hundred years and...”

“Room 209?” It was at this moment that I realized my poor friend had made a tragic mistake.

“My good man, this is room 309 of the Still River Inn.”

“The Still River Inn? I’m looking for the old hotel just outside of Madisonville.”

“Oh, my poor soul, that building was torn down a decade ago due to its neglect and disrepair.”

“Are you certain?” the phantom asked with a look of exhaustion and mortification upon his face.

“I am positive. My family hails from Madisonville, and I am merely passing through this town as a matter of business.”

The spirit hung his head low and slumped himself back into the chair, holding his hands over his eyes in frustration.

“How could you haunt the same building all these years and make such an error?”

“I waited so long for her to return and soon began to think that perhaps she is wandering the earth in search of me. So I began to wander myself. I wandered aimlessly through the world for nearly fifty years, searching every lonesome house, every foggy, abandoned street, every corner of every city I passed. All to no avail. So please sir, have some sympathy for a poor soul weary from years of solitude upon the earth. Nobody is perfect, and everyone makes mistakes.”

“I certainly sympathize with your situation, but there is still one thing that baffles

me. If you’ve covered the quantity of ground I presume you’ve covered in all that time, if you’ve been waiting all these centuries, and yet you still have not found her, has it ever occurred to you that she simply isn’t here? That perhaps she moved on? It is far easier for women to move on than it is for men, you know.”

“No, she must be here! She must!” he exclaimed angrily, rising from his chair.

“No need to get excited, friend, but I implore you to really consider what I’ve said.”

“On her deathbed, I held her hands and told her we would be together for eternity!”

“Well yes, but was that mutually agreed upon? Did she agree to that?”

“Well, uh, not directly, she couldn’t speak well at the time, you see.”

“So, legally, she has no obligation to stay here.”

“Oh hell,” he said, and any life that may have still been burning within him fizzled out in an instant.

He stood there torpidly for a moment with more sadness and dismay upon his face than could ever be imagined.

He said in a sheepish tone, “I can hardly recall a time when a man has made himself look a bigger fool.”

“My friend you mustn’t be so hard on yourself,” I said, placing a comforting arm around his shoulders.

“Sometimes people just want different things. You know, my wife and I fought endlessly over the notion of moving to New Orleans, as she wanted to live in New York City. New Orleans versus New York City, wandering the earth together versus moving on; the two are not so different.”

He shook his head slowly and said, “Your kindness is appreciated, but how can I reconcile with the fact that the very fate I sought to escape had come to pass centuries ago; I shall spend eternity alone.”

“Oh no don’t talk like that; you’re as good-looking a spirit as I’ve ever seen.”

“You really think there is any hope left for me?” he asked.

“I’m sure of it! She doesn’t deserve a loyal soul like yourself. I understand the sorrow you are currently embroiled with, but it is okay to not be okay sometimes. I know you will find somebody else. There are plenty of spirits in the cemetery!”

The spirit cracked a modest grin.

“Thank you, my good sir,” he said. “I have disturbed your rest quite enough for one evening. It is time we part.”

He finished his brandy, thanked me again for my time, and passed through the door. I could again hear the thud of his heavy boots walking the halls. The footsteps paused for a moment before resuming, I could imagine my poor friend stopping in the hallway and hanging his head. Perhaps wiping a lonesome tear from his eye and musing on the last two hundred odd years he has spent in search of his lost love. I felt sorry for him and hoped with all my heart that he would be able to move on.

After the events of the night had long passed, and the morning sun was within an hour of rising, I was again startled awake. The same sound of heavy boots outside my door aroused my attention and was followed by the sound of a key turning in the door.

“My good man!” I shouted, “Have you returned? You must move on my friend! She was no good for you anyway!”

At this, the doorknob turned, and the door slowly swung open. But the figure standing in the doorway was most certainly not Charles F. Hornbaker. No, it was the tall silent man I had encountered downstairs. The same dark beard that enveloped his face, and the same cold eyes lit with the flame of a candle. I shuddered at the sight of him and froze with my blankets covering my face.

The man shut the door, locked it, and began to cross the floor clumsily towards me; the floor creaking so much I began to think it would give way.

“How now,” I said. “What do you want? Get away from me!”

He reached the side of my bed and paused. He towered menacingly over me and looked deep into my eyes.

“What are you going to do?” I asked nervously. “Smother me with my own pillow? Stick that candle in my face before you burn the whole building down? Do you have a knife you are going to thrust deep into my chest? Speak to me, man!”

“I aim to do nothing of the sort,” he said in a jolly tone.

The fact that he was capable of speech astounded me more than any other event that transpired that evening.

“What do you want with me then?” I asked.

He turned and took a seat on the edge of my bed, nearly bending the whole thing over!

“I could not help but overhear your conversation with the phantom,” he said.

“I see. Then you would like me to hold my tongue about the whole thing so as not to ruin the reputation of your business?”

“Not exactly,” he said. “You see, my wife and I have been on bad terms for many years now. I was wondering if you had any advice for me?”

All my fear was alleviated at once, and I laughed more heartily than I had in ages. I clasped my hand upon his broad shoulder and said, “Pour yourself some brandy my friend, and help me light the fire, we will be here for a while.”

Time to Kill

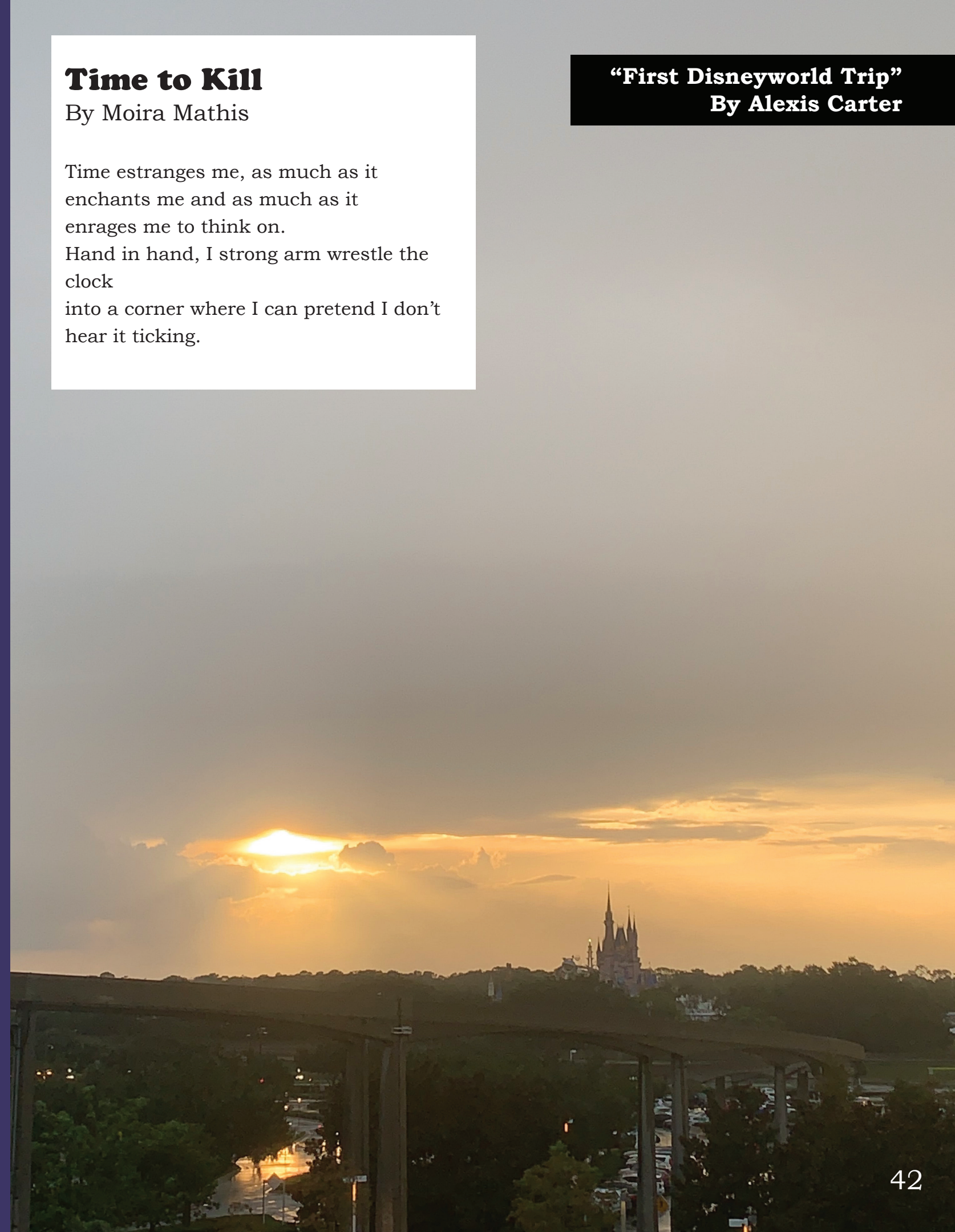
By Moira Mathis

Time estranges me, as much as it
enchants me and as much as it
enrages me to think on.

Hand in hand, I strong arm wrestle the
clock

into a corner where I can pretend I don’t
hear it ticking.

“First Disneyworld Trip”
By Alexis Carter



The Battleground

By Elle Edwards

Your heart is an overripe fruit I hold in my hands.
Bruised and bleeding, on my skin you are leaking;
The ground is cold and dry where the blood lands.
The grass is dead, and this crown you’ve placed on my head
Seems to me to be a bit misleading.

You stand tall in the barren field I’ve led you to
With juices and berries, and tales full of fairies,
Standing strong against every storm I rage at you.
Like a pillar rising high, up into the fog-filled sky;
Offering me something solid to hold onto.

This isn’t what you asked for, yet you take it all the same,
Trying to mend the damage for which you aren’t to blame;
You plant flowers in the arid dirt and build for us a fire,
And promise me that from keeping the flame you never will retire.

You say to me: “All I want is to build a home.
For you and for me, somewhere safe for us to be.
A safe house in the storm, somewhere all our own;
A place that I know flowers will grow
As long as with love they are sown.”

And I think to myself, I could let you plant flowers here.
Grow fruits in my soil, but would my land you spoil?
A land of dead flowers and rotting fruit is what I fear;
Once you’ve had enough of me; there is no guarantee
That one day you won’t just disappear.

You have seen me for who I really am: empty and cold.
Any day now I fear that my games will soon grow old.
But every morning you stoke the embers of that ever-burning flame,
And every night the fire inside me shrinks a bit in shame.

And then one day I realized that I didn’t need my fire anymore.
Yours burned bright, and protected us from the night;
I realized I couldn’t remember what it looked like before

You planted these daisies, when the sky was still hazy,
And this field was the battleground of eternal war.

I offered you paradise when I had nothing to give,
My fruit stolen with greedy demands and abused by selfish hands.
Yet with my anger and imperfection you still chose to live;
Working hard each day so that I could say
That I know what love is.

And when I saw how well our valley was thriving
And that we’d been doing more than just surviving,
I realized how much we had done all on our own
So I said to you: “All I want is to build a home.”

Sadness

By Katie Lownsdale

I lost a love I never knew I had
It feels so good and yet it feels so bad
I wonder if I can escape this pain
Or if it’s caught and lost inside my brain
I sit and think of how I can’t go on
While other people always have such fun
Is it just me who looks the other way
And never says the things I want to say?
I close my eyes and try to block it out
But all the noises only make me shout
The shadows always seem to shroud my doubts
And nothing I do ever seems to count
Dreaming blinds me when I’m still awake
And when I speak my hands perspire and shake
Why can’t I find a place to truly be
The person whom I wish the world could see?
One day I shall find a way around
This sadness to which you and I are bound



“Tornado Warning”
By Emily Brown

Pomme de Trembler or My Failed Imitation of Great Men of History

By Grant Bivens

I haven't slept in 2 weeks
And the potatoes are pulsating
Breathing a thick soupy breath

I saw a Divine face next to
My aunt's boyfriend's portrait of
Abraham Lincoln
The white horse that Mussolini rode on
Did Napoleon stay up like this?

I have my inclinations goddammit!

But alas
No man determined for greatness
Has ever seen breathing potatoes
Or divine and ecstatic images
Beside mounted old timey
Generals with plantation houses

I made myself aware
In no way would I ever arrive for authoritarian greatness
And so I came home reading books

Now I have 2 temples canonizing me
A 2 fronted war
A reign of terror in my bed
A planned invasion of Russia in the coldest winter

I could never learn anyway



“Untitled 1”
By Kathryn Redlund

Often I Think of the Moon

By Morgan Tinin

when the moon sunk low in his dreary mood he
caught us tangled in clumps of grass. beside one another our lips
pressed soft we didn't notice or mind his peeking eyes. so
the moon was a friend that summer and fall
keeping watch on the creek and the lawn and the moss.
we shed our layers like dust in the spring and remembered our
time by the moon's new approval.

then love moved back love moved forward moved fast
and the moon's eyes grew wide as he witnessed it all.
your footsteps rang hollow my bearings grew
small and our line in the sand became a trench.

after that when the moon peeked through the atmosphere's blinds
he saw only me.
I would shout "it's just me! look away! go away!"

I thought he wouldn't listen, but he did.

you and I met again like old lovers do
but the moon was no longer our understudy.
every year since I have waited for his wink
for his melancholy glow
melting our field.

I stare at you and the windless tall grass.
We search the dark curtain sky together.

An Open Seat

By Ava Johnson

a pinkie resting so close to another
peripheral sight seeing

seconds lasting longer...

a shift and a sphere – broken
seeing heat in the air

a fallen
strand of hair

silent slideshows of moving mouths
a glance at Donatello hands
picking at my blueberry bush skin

a look away gives a chance

a small dimple on a cheek
(shaken off with innocence)
eyes like an untouched creek

my mouth
your velvet instrument



“Skies Are Prettier in the Cornfields”
By Alexis Carter

Whalefall

By Elea Corson

The Ever Flyer

With four gliding fins and a thin, oval body, the Ever Flyer never needs to descend. She rides the air currents above Home, feeling their warmth beneath her wings. She thinks to herself:
Ye others may stalk through the dirt, but I am queen of the above and everything I see.
I am far larger and higher than thee, and so my thoughts are grander as my mind is

brighter. I am the goddess of winds and devourer of all.
And she feels very proud of herself, soaring as a shadow beneath the sun, blanketing the world below. Scanning the ground, she spots a scampering thing against the backdrop of tan and white. She adjusts her flight, turning her wings to bank right and catch another current carrying her downward. The little thing is truly not so little, but just the right size for her mouth. It walks on four strong legs and leaps between the shoulders and bones of Home, close to the highest elevation, yet falling ever short.
Not as I.

Graceful and swift, the Ever Flyer turns into an arrow, shooting down from the sky and grabbing onto the unsuspecting Bone Leaper. The creature bellows and bucks as she sinks her teeth into its back and lifts it into her cloudy domain. Everything is over in the breadth of a second.

The Bone Leaper

Hearing the screams of her likeness, the Bone Leaper turns an eye to the sky and breathes deeply.
Arrogant monster. Flying and eating and forgetting that one day you too will fall from heaven, and I’ll be the one munching on your broken corpse. You’d do well to remember that I am queen of Home’s shoulders and its bones laid bare as white marble beneath my hooves.

So she scoffs but still keeps a wary eye on the tan hide ground for the shadow of the Ever Flyer. She seeks out fungi as she does, those yellow and orange mushrooms growing from the skin of Home. She walks along bones both bare and hidden, searching from one shoulder peak to the next. Eventually, the Bone Leaper finds a sunset crimson hoard in the shadow of the neck and begins to eat, only to be interrupted by the squeaking of some horrid scuttling thing snapping at her from the boughs of the fungi. What little wretch—!
The startled Sting Biter charges her, biting her nose and hissing till she shrieks and thrashes, knocking it back with her horns and stomping the life out of it.

The Sting Biter

Watching her friend get trampled, the Sting Biter hisses and retreats away from the mushroom sanctuary. She scales the tan skin of the neck and bites through tender flesh till a hole appears big enough for her to crawl into.
Beneath the outer layer, the Sting Biter burrows through sinew and muscle, following a cavern system ever downward until she emerges in a hollow chamber lined with colossal curving bones. She latches onto the red walls and scuttles around cocoons of Acid Spitters, looking for an exit. She finds it in a collapsed hole in the cavern’s roof where bits of white rib bones peak out into the sunlight.
She doesn’t think as those larger beasts do. She doesn’t curse them in her mind

or think herself lofty, but rather takes all in stride while seeking out her next meal. Back on the surface of Home, the Sting Biter pulls herself over the lip of some broken skin and starts picking through the mini growth there: bacteria and fungi small enough to fit in her tiny mouth as she wraps her tongue around them, pulling them from the skin.

Little chittering grows louder behind her, and she rotates her eye 180 degrees in a flash. There, breaking through the skin, is a line of Skin Burrowers marching in unison. Looking for corpses, they don't notice the behemoth next to them until it's too late. In seconds, her tongue crashes through their troops, snatching four Skin Burrowers at once and dragging them into her gaping maw.

The Skin Burrower

Marching in line, each of one mind, the Skin Burrowers suffer losses in the dozens as they break the surface of Home. They smell the rot of a sizzling Beak Breaker baking beneath the sun and seek to collect their dues. But the formation is soon lost, and the hoard breaks off as a Sting Biter tongue intrudes.

Quickly, they retreat around open muscle and protruding rib bone, as ranks march back towards a porous opening in the skin. Inwards, they dive ever deeper, legions crawling beneath flesh, little mouths munching as they burrow. They see nothing, but they smell everything. The scent of their own, the scent of Home, and the scent of food above the dome.

A little red rogue breaks off; its back is the color of an open wound. Behind it, soldiers follow, oblivious, running themselves into the broad, bright air. There, sizzling anew, is a tan and red carapace-hewn Claw Clicker.

She is as dead as a day-flying Dim Watcher, though her hard shell protects her corpse from the upper fauna of the Ribs. But the Skin Burrowers don't mind; they love the crunch sound of breaking shell. With the speed of an Ever Flyer, the main course is soon open to the world.

How tragic then when the little band of rogues is flung from the corpse by its kin, a second Claw Clicker looking to cannibalize an unfortunate relative. As blood flows from the open corpse, the cheated red soldiers begin to protest.

The Claw Clicker

Appetite satiated and suddenly assaulted by a Skin Burrower force of a hundred strong, the Claw Clicker makes a tactful retreat down from the Ribcage of Home and across the hills of Abdomen. As he scuttles, he laments: Dear sister, please know it was never my intention to eat you. It was only because I was terribly hungry, and you were terribly dead. I do not regret eating you. Sorry.

Such is the life of a scavenger, and he is a very small scavenger in a very large world, most of which he'll never see. It was here in these scattered pores where he first

crawled from an egg sporting tan carapace and a hunger for meat. However, he soon found that the abundant skin of Home was too tough for him to bite or rip through, so he learned to rely on others.

Clean-up crew for the clean-up crew. I'm wasted like this.

But there's little use in boredom or regret or saying sorry to dead corpses that can't hear you. He can only meander forward, emotionally and physically. The little Claw Clicker clacks his way around cavern pockets and patches of bloodless flesh, aiming to descend the Abdomen dunes and head for the oasis at their center. It had just rained after all, and there would be other fauna there, and it has already been a few minutes since he last ate, and maybe—

A thunderous cacophony shakes the ground of Home, but even as the Claw Clicker pokes his head up to take a look, a barrage of hooves crashes down around him. Everything goes red then black.

The Hide Render

Stomping and snorting, the herd of Hide Renders rolls across the Abdomen hills creating tracks of torn flesh as they race. Taking the lead, the old mare throws her sinewy neck and howls, storming on carapace-armored legs down towards the central oasis ringed by sun-kissed fungi. To her herd she calls: My memory remains! The rains have come again to flood Abdomen's great lake. Here there is water and company as the lake is a well-traveled meeting place. Let's rest here, they're expecting us.

And so, the herd gallops down the hillside, their trails of ripped flesh drawing scavengers and bloodsuckers alike from sun-bleached skin pores. Adding these newcomers to the scores of drought-weary denizens, and soon, a crowd begins to form. Vibrant movement and a cacophony of sound welcome the old mare as she snorts and stomps and bucks and howls. This will be her fifth and final journey to the oasis, but what an ending it makes!

However, all this noise also attracts the wrong sort of attention. As the old mare dips her head to drink, she notices ripples in the water and rumbles beneath the ground. The storming and stomping of her clan masks it at first, but in due time, danger rears its head.

She jolts upright, screaming a warning when before her, out from the flayed ground, opens a terrible, chasmic jaw. It lunges up through the upper fauna into the midst of the oasis, its mouth taking six of her kin at once. In misery they shriek and howl, but it's all she can do to keep her balance as the ground cracks open and the Vein Crawler joins the fray.

The Vein Crawler

Few others dare call themselves colossal in the presence of the Vein Crawler.

While the Ever Flyer blocks out the sun, the Vein Crawler stalks the underground through the bloodstained passageways of Home. He returns to Abdomen now from the long-running corridors of Left Leg, hunting after the thundering Hide Renders. With Home’s old veins running dry, he must now find food as other fauna do and so to Abdomen he goes and gorges.

The Vein Crawler dances under sunlight to the sounds of screams and shrieks, sucking bodies of bloody meat into his all-consuming maw. Only when the sun begins to dip below the darkening horizon does he finally slink back beneath the skin. He plunges into a vein and wriggles his way up to the long-quiet caverns of Heart, leaving behind a mass of messy remains.

Here, dangling within Ribcage, lie his brood of eggs under the hungry watch of hanging Acid Spitters and squirming Vessel Eaters. With Home’s blood drought and the death of his mate, the Vein Crawler holds little hope of hatching his brood and can now only leave them for these mindless parasites.

In silence, he abandons his eggs and crawls upwards through the depths of Home. From the chest to the jugular and to the hollow caverns of Head, he finally spills out from the right eye socket. Here he is met with a stunning vista as an orange-pink sky extends into twilight and the lands beyond Home grow dark.

Weary and wishing to be alone, the Vein Crawler suddenly feels a slight prick on his back. But, when he turns around, all he sees is a little Dim Watcher with a Vessel Eater in her mouth. The miniscule parasite wriggles and squirms in vain until the Dim Watcher bites down with a squish.

The Dim Watcher

The Dim Watcher has no fear of death. From the dark hours of the evening until the first hues of dawn, the little flying scavenger is the queen of Home. Even allowing the Vein Crawler to impede on her territory only speaks to her unending benevolence; it doesn’t matter how big he is.

She flutters at him, the giant brute, munching on the Vessel Eater in her mouth, a sign of tribute well received. It’s no miracle to her that he doesn’t eat her. It’s the natural order of things. She kicks up a racket, hopping around his back, digging her little nose between his scales, hunting for other hiding tidbits and tasty stowaways, completely and utterly oblivious.

Perhaps he isn’t hungry, perhaps she’s too bland, or perhaps the night is too peaceful, and the view is too grand. Regardless, it’s to her benefit that the Vein Crawler finally shakes his head, accepting his strange little companion and settling in for the long night. Like that they remain until, stomach full, the Dim Watcher alights into the twilight air and leaves her behemoth subject to his bizarre stargazing.

From the eye socket, she flaps and flutters to the tip top of Head. In the distance, the Ever Flyer circles lazily in a fit of lethargic, half-sleep; she’s in no condition to care

about the loud morsel intruding in her air space. Thus, once again, the self-proclaimed queen gets a pass.

From her vantage on this cloudless night, the Dim Watcher can see all of Home. From the tip top of Head and its shaggy, brown hairs to the mountain peaks of the Shoulders and down to the Chest and the caverns of Ribcage. From there lie the foothills of Abdomen which branch off into two segments, the rightmost being little more than a boneyard, while the Left Leg still boasts muscle and sinew. All of Home lies prone, propped up against the greater greenlands and their strange, rocky plateaus.

Those lands don’t interest the Dim Watcher, it’s the red meat of Home she craves. In midair she shakes herself, feathers exploding in all directions, before diving down once more to rejoin the feast.

[End]

Short and Sweet

By Melissa Massey

my dress was too short
i have been thinking
and that’s what i’m going to tell Them
when someone asks me
“what were you wearing?”

maybe
i should say
my dress was too short
but it was my favorite

i should tell Them
i was excited
to spend the night at His house

or
how i would do anything
to feel like
i was loved

i should tell Them
how my princess nightgown
was so uncomfortable
while brushing my teeth
praying for everything to come off

could i say? how i didn’t tell
my mom when she picked me up the next day
or my teacher the next day of kindergarten

or anyone

perhaps
i will just tell Them my dress was too short.

Prematurely

By Nicholas Andrews

As a child, I remember the lessons you so freely taught,
that which throughout many seasons I thought I had long forgot
You, however, left like a flower plucked prematurely,
had bloomed but still had life, still had lessons, still had a story

As days turn to nights, and nights turn to day,
days turn into years, and years forget yesterday.
But, the impression of you, stained in my mind
fails to fade or wither with time

Little did I know,
these lessons would never fade
of love and light and hope,
that you so willingly gave

Powerline Perspective

By Rylee Abbott

Perch. Preen. Pride. Poised.

He's sitting high on his power line!

He pauses. Let this one pass. This one is prey. Peaceful until permitted to strike.

The same cycle passes for him. Hunt, eat, sleep, hunt, eat, sleep.
He likes it! Priorities are placed! Pity isn't given to prey, but each piece is used
plentifully.

Predictable, but only in part.
Wild and untamable.
Have patience.
Never try to understand the hawk on the perch.
Just as peace falls on the powerline,
He'll soar away.

Explanations: Extended

By Lydia Honbarger

She wants to drink me,
To drink the world, she thinks
But I am no Savior

She thinks freedom is my Sheets,
She doesn't know I already threw them out.

Freedom

It's within her,
But I am no guide

She reminds me of what I am,
a Soldier.

No, I cannot heal the broken,
and peace does not fall from my lips,

But I will find the Stoic's path again,
That I may become her guard

Steadfast, I will keep to her pace,
Mapping Safety where she points

But there is a Sword attached to my side,
She fears it

I would have laid it down for her,
I would lay it all down

Aching, I watch her leave my path
Her cowardly steps, I no longer hear

She refused to sit in our sins,
So she vilifies and destroys my virtue

Conviction sets a course for us

Its wet stone slides along justice's blade

I swallow the sword when it prompts me
The dull knife nicks the innards of my neck,

But her stone grinds on,
The sharpened edge searches for her

Run ragged,
Sprint scared

Conviction will come for you.



"The Year 2024"
By Megan Flowers

Stolen Youth

By Elea Corson

I sing, I sing
For the child in me
I sing
For I lost her today

She's gone and I pray
You'll guide her away
To green fields I dare
Never see

Because I would burn them
With the harsh touch of me

Do you think
The wind knows
Where old trees grow
Where spirits laugh and play?

Do you think
The wind flows
Across rivers aglow
And dances the twilight away?

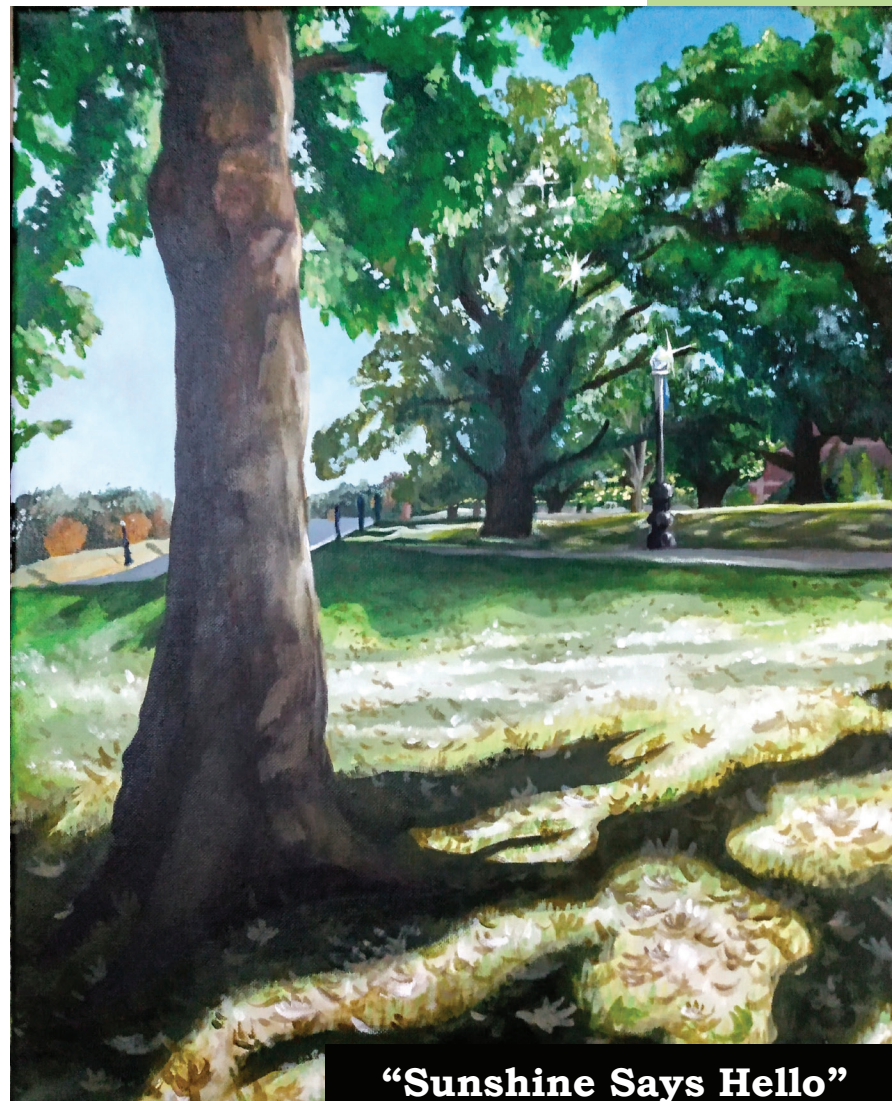
Do you think I will follow it
When earth buries me?
Do you think I will fly
When I'm dead?

Do you think my soul
Will be nourished and whole
When my being is torn
Into shreds?

I don't know where we go
When the world awakes
And we're forced into bodies
Like these

I don't know but I think
You lie there with me
Under trees reaching skyward to
Stars

And we'll laugh there anew
With the children we slew
In a world very blissfully
Ours



**“Sunshine Says Hello”
By Megan Flowers**

Girl In A Country Song

By Adria Veile

When a woman walks into a bar wearing boots and no jeans,
it is not her thighs a man should notice first. Especially when
her boots are not crackling – patched together with sun-stained leather
grass blade scratched and dew-soaked – I know her face
must look the same; all smile lines and dimples crinkled in dust, roadmaps
to every place she's ever been caked in the rivers of her brow bone.

I wonder if you drink whiskey or wine. The way you wear
your skin makes it difficult to tell your boldness bursting
from your chest like the bluebonnets tucked between leather lips and
your legs, slowly slipping through the spaces between your teeth.
You are no stranger to sunburns – I glimpse sweat-smeared tan lines where
calf gaps hide and green imprints on your thighs, your toes where the grass has
bowed to kiss you. Never has something been so content to cradle a woman,
kissing the contours of your body, coating legs in vibrant hickies.

How gloriously unashamed you are!
Of the splendid splotches traveling up your thighs, your legs, comfortably resting in
creases created by crossed knees and breathing with the currents beneath your breasts.

I wonder when man will cradle woman like grass does.
She props up her boots, heels smearing gritty freckles on the bar's face.
Bluebonnets beaming upside-down boldly framing the bronze of her
skin against sprouting sod. She leans forward and whispers her order to
the bartender. He smiles, a mirror of her own, gleaming and sticky with dust.
Over the chatter of the bar I know he compliments her – his eyes
locked on love-cracked leather, a gentle nod to the blue remnants of spring determined
to walk with her. Her cheeks glow a soft red sunrise, blooming starkly against the
green of her. He knows when a woman walks into a bar with boots and no jeans, it's not
her thighs a man should notice first.

If Ghosts Exist in Rooms like Mine

By Morgan Tinin

I hope they're ghosts who read.
Do they watch
me close my blinds?
Do you think they write poetry?

I'm sure
I'm not much of a muse.
I'm sure they steal
my odds and ends.
I hope they like suburbia,
magnolia cones and soda cans.

I wonder if my visions
are projected on a screen
Great White sharks eat
ships for lunch
and walking coffee beans.

Birthday notes
lay bedside
just for ghosts to reap.
Are my thoughts their trading
cards,
do they wonder which to keep?

Small

By Elle Edwards

I have always wanted to be dainty and delicate;
So soft and small you wouldn't dream to hurt me.

I wanted to be out of the way and convenient,
As if that would somehow make me more worthy.

All my life I was told that my presence was a burden
That others didn't have it in them to bear.

I wanted to appear as fragile as I felt, so that
Others would know to handle me with care.

But I was always too loud, too much, too difficult—
A lost puppy bumbling around at your heels.

When I wanted to be a doll on display—
A picture perfect reflection of your ideals.

But I always seemed to be too square and sharp,
My temper either too hot or too cold.

Even when I tried to smooth my edges
I was never soft enough to hold.

So when you let me in your bed at night
I tried not to take up much space.

I was glad that I could keep you warm,
But I still knew I was out of place.

Because once the sun came up I knew that
The bed we shared would be too small.

I would shrink to the edges of your vision,
No longer worthy of space at all.

So I softened myself to become more palatable
And tried my best to be easier to swallow.

Splitting myself into bite sized pieces,
Or emptying myself until I felt hollow.

But in the end I meant less to you
Than crumbs scattered on the floor.

Something so minute it invoked irritation;
My existence by itself a chore.

So when you swept me up and tossed me out,
Like I was just waste you needed to get rid of,

I pulled myself together and saw all I had lost,
And decided to stop shrinking myself for love.

"Tigger"
By Rylee Abbott



Hello From Up Here

By Ava Johnson

little gazer,
 i can spot you from lightyears away.
 next to Brother Sol, i am just a lamb.
 a burning one.
 your friends are licking their lips
 for a taste of mortality.
 but they would not watch as I fell,
 they would not see my blue flame

growing hotter-
 No. they would just
 perish.
 but i know my path would
 catch your little eye.
 i touch you by
 sticking out my finger of fire,
 and pretend to stroke your face.
 if it wouldn't ruin you,
 little gazer,
 i would leave this hostile place.

This Tennessee Hotel

By Rylee Abbott

Good afternoon, sir!
 Good afternoon, madam!
 It is so lovely to see you here, on this bright and sunny afternoon.
 I am truly sorry to have disturbed your midday snack.
 I simply had to come and see the sight myself.
 After all, you only make this trip once a year!
 This long journey you've made!
 All these miles, and I am the one to get to witness your beautiful feathers.
 I get to see the way your head shines that brilliant green color.
 I get to see the way your lady is mottled with that beautiful, natural tan and black.
 The timing simply couldn't have been better-
 The floods and what not giving you a beautiful place to swim while you dabble for this
 afternoon feast.
 For this midday luncheon.
 You are so far away from home for your vacation.
 Seeking out the warmth of your wintering grounds.
 Many may complain of the rain.
 The farmer's field saturated.
 The student's clothes; soaked running from one class to the next.
 Yet I know that I, for one, am grateful to see you.
 I am grateful to hear your quacks.
 I am grateful to see your little feet poke out of the water.
 I am grateful to see you take flight.
 It was nice to see you, mister and missus mallard.
 I hope your trip home is a safe one.



“The Memory Room”
 By Emilie Head



“Harmonious Toad”
 By Izzy Merickle

To Be a Boy

By Quinn Gilmer

I wish my skin
Were made of clay.
To be able to mold my body
To fit my image.

I can feel it burn as I
Rip
Tear
Squeeze
Shift
Push
My skin into a form
That fits what I feel.
My bones crack,
My joints slip.
All to achieve
Something unattainable.

I am left
A disfigured ghost
Of what I used to be.
Simply wishing
I was born a boy.



**“Watermelon War Tears”
By Megan Flowers**

I Am a Wildfire

By AK Mayberry

When my house burned down
Everyone turned the other cheek.
Continued on like everything was normal.
But not I, causer of the fire.

I am the wildfire that ravages and saves and disturbs.

COME CHILD TELL ME OF THE WRONGDOINGS I HAVE DONE UNTO YOU.
From ashes I rise, with roots of a tree like a sequoia.
DID YOU KNOW SEQUOIAS ENDURE FIRE, AND IT HELPS THEM?
(to some extent)

I burn and rage, destruction, warmth, and salvation.
YOU FEAR ME BUT, IN THE COLD, YOU NEED ME.
Fire, element of the south, source of passion, red, and fierceness.
why would you take away things I love and hold so dear?

I AM NOT SENTIENT; I DO NOT TAKE OR GIVE. I DO NOT TARGET OR AVOID.
Humankind turns the other cheek. Placing consciousness and personalization
upon the beast of flames.

I weep,
I have forgiven myself.
(fear is a healthy thing to have)

A Roadside Eulogy

By Rylee Abbot

Today, I buried you.
There’s no telling how many people drove past you.
There’s no telling how many people swerved so you didn’t get guts on the bottom of their vehicle.
I saw you.
And I didn’t leave.
I didn’t drive away.

Today, I buried you.
I picked you up from the road.
I held you in my arms.
You’re so very soft.
What a life you must have lived.

Today, I buried you.
I drove out to a spot I visit rather frequently.
Its view gives me a unique kind of peace.
The calm water.
The green grass.
The tall trees.
The gentle breeze.
The smell of the autumn mast littering the ground.
It was beautiful.
I wish your live eyes could have seen it.

Today, I buried you.
I found a log facing the water just away from the old gravel path.
I laid you down.
I closed your eyes.
I placed your arms so I could convince myself that it was no more than a peaceful sleep.
I made you a blanket of leaves to keep you warm while you rested.
And I buried you there.
In that beautiful place.
I couldn’t leave you on the road.
To be smashed.
And unappreciated.
And forgotten.

Today, I buried you.
With the calm water.
With the green grass.
With the tall trees.
With the gentle breeze.
I’ll find some peace knowing that you rest near it.
I didn’t drive past you.
I didn’t swerve.

Instead, I buried you.
And I am so grateful that I did.



“Fall is in the air!”
By James Crwell

About The Artists

Born and raised in Clarksville, Tennessee, **Rylee Abbott** never was much of an outdoorswoman until she came to college. She enrolled at UT Mar9n as a Natural Resources Management major with concentrations in Wildlife Science and Fisheries Management in the fall of 2022, and since then, her passion has only exploded as she learned more about the world around her. Through photography and poetry, she has learned to appreciate things from the tiniest flower to the biggest hawk, as well as capture their essence for other people’s benefit.

Sophia Albers is a senior at UT Martin, majoring in music with an emphasis in art and communication. She particularly found an interest in ceramics after taking a beginner level course. Despite her main interest leaning into ceramics somewhat recently, she is proficient on trombone and currently holds principal chair in the Wind Ensemble. In her free time, she likes to play video games and draw digitally. Music, art and nature are her main sources of inspiration.

Natalie Anderson is a freshman majoring in studio art at UT Martin. In her free time, she enjoys reading fiction and creating art. Nightstand was inspired by what could be found on a nightstand as well as waking up to the sound of your alarm for classes.

Nicholas Andrews is a Secondary English Education major at UT Martin. “Prematurely” was inspired by the reflections of his grandmother’s sudden death in 2019 just before her retirement and the close relationship they had.

Grant Bivens is a third year English, Spanish, and Philosophy. Grant writes poems in his free time and lives in a cabin in the woods outside of Martin.

Emily Brown is a first-year Graphic Design major at UT Martin. She has enjoyed creating and drawing since art class in kindergarten. In her free time, Emily likes playing the piano and volunteering in LSA. The idea of cats and enemies inspired A Game of Cat and Mouse. Tornado Warning was inspired by taking cover in the bathroom during a Tennessee storm.

Alexis “Lexi” Carter is from Kingston Springs, TN and a junior Parks Administration major! She loves taking photos of sunsets, sunrises, animals, all sorts of things! The three pieces that she has published are all of different sunsets that have way deeper meaning than anyone will ever know. She has over 10,000 photos in her camera roll, and she believes all pieces of art tell a story, some tell so many! She encourages everyone to take photos of different points in their life, so they can look back and say that they made it through!

Elea Corson is a 1st year Plant and Soil Science Major with an interest in creative prose and poetry writing. She also dabbles in illustration and enjoys reading and hiking in her free time. The short story, “Whalefall,” was inspired by the intricate ecosystems created when a whale dies and falls to the ocean floor; “Metal Dragon, Metal Mouse” is a lighthearted interpretation of the fear of driving on the highway; and finally, “Stolen Youth” discusses the melancholy, and even horror, of growing up and transitioning, both physically and mentally, into adulthood.

James Crowell is a third-year Mass Media and Strategic Communication major with the Sequence of Digital Media and Content Production at UT Martin. He enjoys capturing photos of God’s creation. In his free time, he enjoys reading his Bible and learning more about God, sharing the Gospel, and going to the Baptist Collegiate Ministry on campus!

Jordan Dodd is a Senior Studio Artist at UTM and will be graduating in May 2024. They work primarily in painting and pastel drawing, creating both realistic and abstract self-portraits. They like to use their art as a way to explore their identity and various aspects of their body, and they plan to continue this practice in graduate school.

Elle Edwards is a sophomore majoring in English at UT Martin. They enjoy writing poetry and fiction, and in their free time, they like to read, write, hang out with friends, and watch history documentaries. “The Battleground” was inspired by having to learn how to love after having your trust broken; “Small” is about feeling like you take up too much space; and “Divine Feminine” is meant to capture their complicated relationship with femininity as a feminine-presenting nonbinary in a patriarchal social structure.

Ethan Elliott is a 2022 UT Martin graduate, having earned a bachelor’s degree in Mass Media and Strategic Communication. I’m currently working as a reporter and photographer for my local newspaper The Hickman County Times. During my time at UT Martin, I was heavily involved in student publications. Specifically, the college’s newspaper, The Pacer, as well as Taking Flight, the school’s magazine. Additionally, I performed in several theater productions. Writing is one of my passions, along with photography and acting, and it’s something I’ve done for so long it feels as natural to me as breathing. Whether anyone takes anything deep or profound away from my writings or not, if nothing else I hope readers can walk away having at least found some entertainment. I only wish I could have taken advantage of the fact that The Switch allows video submissions now! Next year, next year.

Megan Flowers is a junior Studio Art major. She has been an artist ever since she was little, and she always tries to tell her story through her art pieces. Everything has a meaning even when you think it doesn’t. Question everything including yourself.

Quinn Gilmer is a third-year Graphic Design major at UT Martin. He usually works in painting, drawing, or digital illustration, but occasionally dabbles in writing. In his free time, he makes plenty of art, usually through pottery, fiber arts, or printmaking. His art attempts to explore the concepts of gender and gender expression, as a way to show his journey through exploring his own.

Emily Hailey is a third-year Marketing major and Graphic Design minor at UT Martin. She enjoys all things creative, including various mediums of art and writing. In her free time, she enjoys reading and hanging out with friends. Coal Mine likens the idiom “A canary in a coal mine” to the blindness one can have to the truth of a relationship in its early stages.

Rachel Haney is a fourth-year creative and professional writing major. She enjoys writing poetry and nonfiction. In her free time, she enjoys traveling and reading. “The Bones Under Shiloh” was inspired by research into the rich indigenous history of Tennessee. Its purpose is to honor those who first inhabited the lands we call home. Rachel lives in Middle Tennessee with her family.

Caitlyn Hargett is a third-year student majoring in Secondary Education: English. She’s particularly fond of crafting romance poetry and stories, finding joy in bringing her characters to life. Her latest short story, How Far He’ll Go, sparked by an idea from her youth, features characters she’s developed throughout her life experiences.

Emilie Head is a senior graphic design major at UT Martin. She enjoys mixed media, drawing, and digital photography. In her free time she likes to go for walks with her cat, read, and watch her favorite shows. Her work “The Memory Room” was inspired by childhood memories and bittersweet nostalgia. Every element was inspired by her childhood or past.

Lydia Honbarger is a dual major studying chemistry and geology. She spends her free time bike riding, and is always looking for time to spend outdoors. The poem is inspired by life’s tendency to make you cope. The piece relies on the dichotomy of knives being both a teacher and a curse.

Stephanie Hopper is a senior Art Education major at UT Martin and finds joy in utilizing mixed media materials and fibers in her work. During her free time, she loves spending time with her dog, creating art, and reading. Her artworks, “I have a dream” and “Resistance” draw inspiration from the civil rights movement, aiming to shed light on social racism prevalent in our society.

Ava Johnson is a fourth-year English major at UT Martin. Her passions include reading and writing poetry and creative nonfiction, as well as reading classic American novels. “Nighthawks, 1942” is an experimental ekphrastic poem, based on a popular oil painting, that she wrote for a Poetry Workshop assignment. “Hello From Up Here” was influenced by her interests in astrology. “An Open Seat” was inspired by a UT Martin guest speaker who encouraged poets to emulate the feeling or emotion of a scene rather than speaking about it directly. “Don’t Watch Me Sleep” is a poem that is meant to make the reader feel fear or uneasiness, but is also a metaphor for the haunting nature of PTSD that often arises when you’re falling asleep, alone with your own thoughts. The writers that have inspired her the most over the years are T.S. Eliot, Philip Larkin, E.E. Cummings, Sylvia Plath, and John Steinbeck.

Katie Lownsdale is a first year UT Martin student who is currently majoring in music. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and playing/listening to music. Katie’s inspiration for writing poetry is based solely on her desire to communicate how she perceives the world with others. Writing allows her to not feel quite as alone and to hopefully help others feel similarly through the reading of it.

While surrounded by music a visual artist was born. **Matthew Mancusi** was born June 24th, 2001, in Kansas City, MO. He is currently studying at The University of Tennessee at Martin to get his Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in Studio Art. Though Matthew grew up exposed to the different aspects of the art world through his opera singing father, Matthew did not truly delve into the visual art world till he began college. His main area of focus of art is on three-dimensional sculptural art as well as ceramic functional ware. Matthew’s artwork focuses on mental illness and how it affects the lives who struggle with it on a daily basis. Matthew’s goal is to bring awareness to mental health and end the stigma that comes with talking about it.

Melissa Massey is a third-year History major at UT Martin. She enjoys writing about things that are hard to talk about and nature, especially when they intertwine. She enjoys reading, writing poetry, knitting, and playing with her dog, Picasso. She loves art and movies, and She is really interested in the idea that art is supposed to be uncomfortable. “Short and Sweet” is inspired by the question many people are asked after they are sexually assaulted: what were you wearing?

Moira Mathis is a first-year theater student at UTM. They’re an actor first and foremost, but want to use college as a way to become well-rounded across the arts and humanities. So far they’ve explored visual art and dance, but look forward to playwriting and directing, possibly poetry or choir in the next year. Time to Kill resulted from complicated feelings about the sharp progress of time in college and life in general. Deconstruction in Cork and Vine was a way to show an unease in identity as one evolves through trying experiences.

AK Mayberry is a third year Geology major at UT Martin. In their free time, they enjoy playing Sims, writing their book, writing poetry, horseback riding, and enjoying nature. Their work “I Am a Wildfire” and “What I See” are both inspired by their

house burning to the ground in February of 2020. Their poem, “I Dream of a World Better than Death and Dying,” was inspired by the abuse they and many others have gone through. They had to come to terms with many difficult, traumatic things over the years, and writing poetry was how they got out of survival mode to cope.

Izzy Merickle is a third-year graphic design major at UT Martin. In addition to digital designing, she also enjoys painting, photography, and reading. She spends a lot of time creating artwork and t-shirt designs for the apparel brand that she co-founded, Cactus Grove Designs. “Harmonious Toad” is a digital collage piece that reflects the peace and contentment that can be found in nature, “Crystal Neon” is a photograph taken to capture the bright luminosity of a jukebox mixed with the abstract shapes created by a crystal gem, and “Refuge” is an acrylic painting that was inspired by the Bible verse Psalm 9:9 to capture the peace and shelter that she finds within her faith.

Hayden Miller is a third-year English Major at UT Martin. She enjoys writing poetry and creative fiction. In her free time, she enjoys doing crafts, watching movies, and reading. “Ode to a plucked flower” is a reflection on the fleeting timeline of life as it can be observed.

Spencer Quillen is a second-year English major at UTM. He enjoys writing, reading online articles, and gaming, and he can usually be found doing any one of those things at any given time. The poem “A Maiden Departed from Life” and the short story “The Glass That Never Shatters” might be eerily similar in theme, and that’s due to them both exploring the potential consequences of failing to confront our flaws and the cyclical, delusional nature of life, death, fate, and misery.

Kathryn Redlund is an enigma of a person yet also a bit of a stereotype. They are a graphic design major with a Japanese minor at the University of Tennessee at Martin. They are gay, pangender, autistic, and among anything else mentally ill in several ways. Their special interest is mushrooms and they are highly obsessed with Hozier. The artworks “Untitled 1” and “Untitled 2” are each 18x24 In. charcoal still lives laid out in tone. “Love as Written to My Better Self” is a testament to the loving relationship that the author has with her girlfriend. “Ode to an Older Me” is a sestina that explores the act of aging from the perspective of an older version of the author.

Cailynn Smith is a senior Fine Arts major at UTM. She enjoys ceramics and mixed media arts. In her free time she enjoys experimenting with different art media, reading, and playing with her dog. Intergalactic Pool was inspired by the feeling of unrequited love. This emotion is represented by vintage magazine clippings and the vast void of space.

Haley Straka is in her fourth year here at UT Martin. She graduates this upcoming December with a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration of Behavioral Sciences. She works at the Student Recreation Center here on campus. She has a dog named Stiles after her favorite Teen Wolf character. She is originally from Chicago, Illinois but moved to Obion, Tennessee a few years ago.

Morgan Tinin is a fourth year Creative Writing major at Murray State University. They enjoy weekly bar trivia, online spider solitaire, and the board game Scattergories. The structure of Often I Think of the Moon was influenced by Destiny O. Birdsong's Love Poem that Ends at Popeyes. If Ghosts Exist in Rooms like Mine is the result of insomnia.

Adria Veile is a third-year English Major at UT Martin. She loves to write poetry, prose, and creative nonfiction. In her free time, she watches Netflix and will read anything she can get her hands on! "Girl In A Country Song" was inspired by a piece of art created by another student at UT Martin.

Artez Williams is a Senior Communications major at UT Martin. He takes pride in creating different forms of art such as drawings, poems, story telling, etc. He spends his free time either working at his job on campus, the Recreation Center, or out and about running.

Abbie Wynn is an Art Educator from Paris, Tennessee. She is currently degree seeking at the University of Tennessee at Martin. She has a robust studio practice of ceramics, mixed media, and printmaking. Her specific techniques for these mediums are wheel-throwing, paper collaging, and linocut relief printing. A common theme in her work is the concept of home.

Lily Yates recently graduated from UT Martin with a NRM degree. She is passionate about wildlife conservation, useless historical facts, and fingerpainting. Lily can best be summarized by the phrase "Born to piddle, forced to paddle."

Thank you for your support!



