

COLONNADE



*Newburgh Free Academy's
Fine & Literary Arts
Magazine*

2019





Colonnade Staff Members

Advisors: Mrs. Virginia McCurdy, Mr. Ryan Walz

Student Editors: Steven Baltas, Da'nayah Christmas, Sydney Corwin, Therese Fischer, Ada Johnston, Xin Liu, Kamora Millan, Alyssa Similton, Sam Sukhai, Alexandra Tapia, Madison Valenti

Mission Statement

The Newburgh Free Academy Colonnade is a compilation of student work that includes both visual and literary contributions. Its purpose is to create a lasting and indelible memory that immortalizes outstanding student contributions to the arts.

It is with great pleasure that we present the 2019 Colonnade publication. Many of this year's contributions have focused on pattern poetry and borrowed lines to inspire original work. We have also been able to publish more short stories than any previous year. The works included within this collection are truly a labor of time and dedication to the development of expression through a number of artistic media.

Special thanks are owed to NFA Administration, the Fullerton Crew, the teachers of the AARTS Academy, and Mr. Jeff Mitchell at the NECSD Print Shop.



Table of Contents	Author	Page #
“Yesterday’s Clouds Are Still Here”	Abigail Ho.....	5
“Heads in the Clouds”.....	Xin Liu.....	5
“Ducktown Nursery Rhymes”.....	Steven Baltsas.....	6
“Insomnia”.....	Angelina Porco.....	6
“Time Wasted is the Biggest Regret”	Anonymous.....	6
“Sleeping Alone”.....	Samuel Rider.....	7
“Windswept”.....	Sophia Parker.....	8
“Dark Alley”.....	Adrien Chavez.....	8
“Untitled”.....	Julissa Giron Luna.....	8
“The Tower”.....	Steven Baltsas.....	9
Newburgh Project Scenes.....	Acting III Students.....	16
“Fortune Cookie”.....	Xin Liu.....	17
“Saturday”.....	Alyssa Tarantino.....	18
“The Evening Paper”.....	Steven Barahona.....	18
“The Boat Asleep in its Boathouse”	Joshua Garcia.....	19
“Swimming”.....	Veronica Ware.....	19
“This Feeling”.....	SM Hayat.....	20
“Rain on the Roof”.....	Talia Gerena.....	20
“Mission to Mars”.....	Nisheria Weaver.....	21
“All the Times I’ve Ever Seen You”	Samuel Rider.....	25
“Love Notes to M.E.”.....	Logan Gemba.....	26
“Circles”.....	Vincent Domingues.....	27
“Rain on the Roof”.....	Emma Cosgrove.....	28
“Rain”.....	Jennifer Cardona.....	28
“Letters of Antiquity”.....	Roxenne Contreras.....	29
“Memes Make Dreams Theorem”..	Antonio Perez.....	30
“The Evening Paper”.....	Curtis Jones.....	30
“Or A House of Cards”.....	Alyssa Tarantino.....	30
“House of Cards”.....	Ranjira Waitley.....	31
“To the Moon and Back”.....	Nisheria Weaver.....	31
“Fear”.....	Toi Lide.....	32
“Deception”.....	Jazlynn Sotelo.....	32
“Gifted”.....	Da’ayah Christmas.....	33
“A Reason to Shine”.....	Alexandria Tapia.....	35
“All Roads Lead to Everywhere”..	Samuel Rider.....	36
“The Next Chapter”.....	Joseph Bederka.....	36
“True Love”.....	Jennifer Cardona.....	37
“Cornflowers”.....	Olivia Gangemi.....	37
“Thorns”.....	Jennifer Cardona.....	37
“Wennessie Tilliams”.....	Linda Chen.....	38
“A Glass Streetcar”.....	Imani Sumner.....	38
“Lonely Skies”.....	Samuel Rider.....	39
“nothing is forever”.....	Steven Baltsas.....	39
“When the Night Arrives”.....	Deafny Gallo.....	40
“The Performer in the Sky”.....	Mae Richi.....	41
“A World Without Abuse”.....	Matthew Stridiron.....	44
“Better”.....	Therese Fischer.....	45
“The Wind in the Orchard”.....	Ashlee Scott.....	46
“Marsh Birds”.....	Isabella Catanzaro.....	46
“Silence Child”.....	Da’ayah Christmas.....	47
“The Life of Her”.....	Madison Valenti.....	47
“Forward and Back”.....	Leilani Catala.....	48
“Noir”.....	Milan Patel.....	49
”Make America America Again”.....	Anna Brozycki.....	50

Photography and illustrations provided by:

Steven Baltsas, Sydney Corwin, Samaya Rose Green, Ada Johnston, Xin Liu, Timothy Marry, Kamora Millan, Mae Richi, Reagan Roth, and Madison Valenti

Yesterday's Clouds Are Still Here
Abigail Ho

When I was younger
I could look at the sky for hours
My imagination running wild
Creating a whole story with the white puffy clouds.
It all felt so natural...

Now,
I try so hard
To see the story,
To see anything
To feel anything when I look up
But all I see...

Is clouds.
No story, just clouds.
As I anticipate the rain,
It transforms me.

I suppose that's what growing up is
Realizing what could be your entire life,
What could define your wandering thoughts
Really just
Causes a flood in the end...

Until the sky clears.

And then you anticipate the clouds.
And then you anticipate the rain.
And then you anticipate the bluest skies.

And you do this until,
You,
Can once again see as clearly as you did
Yesterday.

Heads in the Clouds
Xin Liu

You're living in a society
filled with people
who will judge you
for what you love,
for who you are,
for what you believe in,
everything that you do,
no matter what it is.
These people will always
find something to judge you on
at any point in life.

You feel like giving up and falling down to the ground,
your mind in a hot mess,
hands and knees bruised and bleeding,
heart shattered to broken little pieces that will never be able to be put back together,
tears that will never be able to return to your eyes
forever remaining on the ground where you believe you gave up everything,
and thinking you'll never have a chance of getting back up,
but no one and not a single thing matters
and you still get back up after every fall.
You're still continuing to do everything that you love,
you're still being yourself to this day,
unbothered by everything being thrown at and said to you,
you're happy with your life and being the real you,
and that's all that matters, so
keep your head deep in the clouds above you.

**Ducktown Nursery Rhyme
Steven Baltas**

**St. Joseph in your wedding spoons
St. Lucy sees through empty rooms
St. Patrick cleanses evil words
St. Francis sings with morning birds**

**St. Nicholas gives us children toys
St. Anthony chases faded joys
St. Catherine burns the factory down
St. Agnes lowers your modern gown**

Insomnia
Angelina Porco

spinning hands of a rhythmic drum
played by midnight fingers
of time that's slowly beating on;
of time that's quickly running out
a pressure placed upon your chest
he keeps your eyes wide open
to only see the shadows
of the sheep that you lost track of
somewhere in the 2 o'clock hour
a solitary shepherd who's forgotten their herd

and so you lie awake
in the infantile morning
the moon just sinking
the hands still spinning
the minutes ticking
the linen rustling
the inhale exhale inhale exhale
and the sound of rain on the roof

**Time Wasted is the Biggest Regret
Anonymous**

**Crumble and fade and--regrets.
Mistakes are made.**

**Time passes.
The head starts to throb like a thumb slammed in a door,
Time wasted from unwanted events.
Silence fills the air,
The mind starts to wander.**

**Stops all actions.
Questions are asked,
Hope is found,
Light leaves the room like dusk after a beautiful day.**

**Heal the wounds.
The open mind is a new found idea.
Make something basic,
Start improving,
Patience is required.
More changes make it what is required.**

**Wishes things would change.
Thinks of the time passed and when one started.
Time wasted is the biggest regret
Time is the longest distance between two places.**



Sleeping Alone
Samuel Rider

**You're shaking alone in your bed.
People are running at you from everywhere.
Sirens are wailing.**

**Every shadow is a man.
All your clothes begin to look like a head of hair.
There's just no way that's not a person
sitting in your chair**

**I am safe I am brave, I am safe I am brave
you repeat to make all the bad things go away**

**But no,
your mind is held in despair.**

**You begin to cry
because it's all over for you
and another sleepless night begins.**



*Windswept
Sophia Parker*

*white and crisp
against dark and red
brick lines the wall, dusty
and dented.*

*bold letters read words of
terror. Words of attack,
and despair.*

*even so, you see purity,
peace and hope. You see
light in the darkness. You
see bright, paper blowing
and dancing down a dark,
hopeless alley.*

**Dark Alley
Adrien Chavez**

Starting down this dark alley
I'm reminded of every time
I've been in the dark.
The evening paper blows down the alley,
Written on it are the words:
"You're okay now."
The wind swipes the paper from my hand,
But I grasped the meaning,
I'll keep them in my heart
and escape this dark alley.

**Untitled
Julissa Giron Luna**

The evening paper blowing down an alley
You have no business, but still find yourself gazing at its mysterious beauty.
You might come upon a pleasant surprise or just yet,
an ordinary piece of paper.
Nonetheless the possibilities it had are endless.
To one man it reminds him of his younger days
when he had roamed about curiously.
To a little girl it's the fairy's magic
making that paper dances oh so majestically.
To an old grandma it reminds her of her wild flapper days.
To a middle aged man it's just a regular piece of paper with no value.
In the end they are wondrous souls blowing down an alley.



The Tower
a personal essay on witches
Steven Baltsas

I wanted to start with the balance of things. Obliteration and renewal. How something can be so cruel in intent but so tender in reflection. The revisionism of the mind is a territorial uprooting of memory fields. Tearing the onion grass from the flower beds and snipping the lilacs for ambiance. Sitting shirtless out of the winter chrysalis. That corner where it is always the miniature summer. Where magic is always swarming like bees.

We haven't had a Memorial Day Parade in many years. I used to think of it as the beginning of the summer. It used to start by the post office, and we Cub Scouts stood behind the Heritage Band. It begins with sweeping Sousa. Trying to hold the flag upright in the carrying belt, the eagle on top swoops side to side. Remember the way America used to feel? Bright and expansive, proud and surreal? It was, and still is a purgatory between two places.

The Scouts and I walk all the way down Quassaick Avenue, but not too far or we'll end up in the city of Newburgh, and black people live there so we can't go there. Weighing heavier, the flag threatens to send the country onto the pavement. It was the greatest sin to let the flag touch the ground. Especially in the eyes of the Catholic War Veterans, who we passed on the street in their lawn chairs with their wives. As we passed, they gave us plastic poppies to tuck into our jangling silver belt loops. There are a lot of conservative women. Empty nesters with greasy perms and gold chains, moms in bejeweled sunglasses and tan capris, grandmas with iridescent wrinkles cloaked in lacey Easter shades. I had always felt them looking at me. Since birth. But it wasn't that cooing grocery store *He's gotten so tall or I bet he'll be a ladies man...* It was silence. Cold. That observatory stare down white people do when they disapprove of something but don't voice it. I could say these women were everywhere - and they were - sisters and sisters of each other. They held some feminine knowledge devoid any urgency, a star-cladded generational submissiveness, the help, piecing together the arts and crafts of the kitchen or hearth. The younger ones stirred in their own perpetual suburban drama they had continued since their senior years. It was as if all these moms had known each other for an indiscernible amount of time and wanted their kids to know each other in that strange, same closeness. They wanted to schedule playdates and host Thomas the Tank Engine or baseball-themed birthday parties. The kids swapped houses, but there was never an empty one (every white family had either a pool or a playset, I had neither). The synchronicity of these exchanges was organized via telephone but then transitioned to Facebook, as we tossed our deep computer monitors and exchanged them for flat screens. When the Recession hit, materialism became a personality trait.

In the 2nd grade my mom joined the PTO. The size of the group I don't recall, but most of the women of New Windsor are interchangeable, that is to say, one could represent an entire chorus of them. There were usurpations of event leaders and baseless arguments at every meeting. These were all Catholic mothers and grandmothers, people who thought they were Irish and detected a scent of Italian. It was not tradition that bonded them but something else: a prideful entitlement. Some of the moms had kids a few years apart and had therefore been members for several years as their children shifted up each grade. This tyrannical system of constant involvement choked my mom. She was liberal, ex Catholic (a nun slapped her for saying the Immaculate Conception was 'phony') and Puerto Rican. I never saw her curly hair as a child, it was always burnt straight. She had a loquacious persona and never seemed miserable. My dad was Greek. The mix was an American dilemma; I was too white to be Puerto Rican but too abnormal to meet the standard of white Catholics. In the seventies, my mom's family moved from crack-ridden Bronx to sprouting Jewish neighborhoods in Rockland County. With this came the cost of assimilation. She was beaten, smeared with racial slurs, and had a rock thrown at her, all within a decade of the Civil Rights Act. Oppositely, my dad was so steeped in Greek culture and language as a child that it isolated him. He showed up to kindergarten barely speaking English. They both worked corporate in New Jersey, making me envious of the other PTO moms.

They were housewives, and it seemed that their minivan was conditioned only to drive to Price Chopper, sports practice, school, the pediatrician's, Sacred Heart Church and back home. Ball season was the highlight of the year; great training had to be done for it in the winter months, mostly in man caves or garages. Dads perfected the pitching windup to a flamingo stance. Batting was practiced so much that balls would sometimes smash windows or end up in drywall. Then the Ace of Diamonds would open up, and Ruscitti Park, and kids would try to walk between them on the train tracks, following the towering field lights like they were UFOs. On game nights, the moms would claim a spot on the bleachers before the crowds filled. There were teenagers hanging around doing drugs and texting on flip phones, shooed away with intensive staring. Then came the biting and a golden haze that flooded the outfield, levied by the shadowy backstop. Mosquitoes. Gnats and gnats. Hit with Coach bags. It would be a while until the game began, and I was locked away at home but could feel the anticipation through cicada Morse code.

I was always an unusual boy.

Once, I built an amusement park out of Legos. I was obsessed with mythology, Harry Potter and colonial America. My best friend was a girl, and so I became accustomed to the peculiar violet planet of girlhood. I sat in her pink room, furnished by fairies, playing a simplified Für Elise on an electric keyboard. We dreamed of Paris. We longed to understand closeness. Sometimes we even shared her dad's computer chair and watched YouTube (with the door open). She was Puerto Rican, too, and due to our complexion, we both passed as white. There were broken plastic chairs in her front lawn, and I was worried people would think I was "ghetto" for being there. In 3rd grade we went down to see the tree in Rockefeller Center. At St. Patrick's Cathedral, her mom gave her money for a candle offering to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Catholicism was always more alluring to me than Greek Orthodoxy (the sight of kids showing off their saint bracelets in school made me want to have one). The girl asked me why I didn't light a candle. "If you don't light a candle for Mary, she's gonna come kill you in your sleep!" My mom would often tease I had many "crushes" to gloss over the fact I sought friendship in girls and not boys. In fact, at a party once I had tried on the girl's plastic princess heels and painfully walked around. I had been pressured to wear them; they didn't feel right. But I had no athleticism either, I was terrified of catching. Back then America was girl and boy. Tiaras or footballs. I stumbled through the room of adults at that party. A hush landed. Some woman with a man haircut pulled my mother aside and said, "We need to talk."

I was conditioned to think that the sons of Irish-Italian males were American perfection. The more traditional families were the blue collar ones, the white collars always seeking some form of unattainable advancement. It seemed as if they wanted Kennedy-level representation with a conservative tint. How I wished I looked like them, with their adaptable hair, precise noses and pale skin. My hair was thick and wavy, my nose like a musical triangle and my body covered in Greek body hair. “You’re like a gorilla,” one told me. “Why are your eyes that big?” “Why doesn’t your mom just stay at home?”

I was invited to an Irish boy’s house once. I never knew what had happened. A PTO mom ruled that home. She left a voicemail late that night. “Your son said *one of the most adult things* I ever heard a kid say *in my life*. I’m letting you know that Steven will not be allowed to come back here and play...*ever*. My husband and I are in shock still. You have a nice night.” My mother knows what I said but vows to never tell me. After that the rift between me and the other boys deepened, especially with their baseball careers.

Whatever the result of their game, they take the glory home. The parents drink excessively and unclassily in segregated areas of the freshly-cut and smelling backyard. The kids are either night swimming or playing manhunt around the neighborhood. The Little League Fair in June drew them to the neon lights on the outfield beach. Maybe that weekend they come home late, cutting through Calvary Cemetery with cotton candy and tempting the Old World below. It suddenly becomes cold (that statue of Mary definitely just moved). Other nights, they have terrorized streets by ding dong ditching heathens. And maybe cycled farther than they should have. Behind the fields, where the neighborhoods descend into the former properties of tycoons and their extravagant mansions. Most had mansard roofs. There were widow's walks and balconies sagging from improbable windows. There were oxidized fire escapes and stained glass portholes beneath noticeable skylights. These then were railed in by spiked crestings from which bird carcasses were impaled upon and leafy nests abandoned.

“*I dare you,*” someone would say, “*Run up and touch the door, chicken!*”

The one thing that united us kids was our taste in pure mystery. Ultramysteriousness. An innate curiosity that most of the moms dismissed immediately, or tried to. “Oh, that old castle-lookin’ house? Used to be one big place, they just split it into dirty apartments is all.” But the questioning would continue into school, and I found a way to be included. I produced a resident of that house, a boy from my aftercare program. “Oh, the castle apartments? They’re just old,” he said uneventfully. Soon after that, his family quietly moved out.

The big kids often enticed our fascination with talk of the Tower. The Tower was the oldest part of the school building. Built in 1911, it originally held kindergarten through 8th grade before the front addition was added in the fifties. It sat a great distance from Quassaick Avenue, quiet, still and looming above suburbia. In its shadow all the great Memorial Day parades came to a finish. The windows were long on both floors and seemed to peer out. The roof was large and geometric; two triangles on each side conjoined to form the center of the H-shaped building. The attic windows were boarded up and bats had shimmied through them. The back was a hill we could see the river from. Always overgrown, that forbidden playscape, with strange concrete circles resting in the ground like giant quarters. We were cunning children and found many sources to extract fun.



One warm day, we flocked to the fence which bordered a backyard; a tiny neighborhood was below the school. There was a roar of laughter, and kids went back and forth to find their friends and report the news that an old fat man was outside mowing his lawn without a shirt. He knew we were laughing at him, yet he persisted. The Tower sanctioned these kind of experiences. She was fond of humiliation at random. It is worth noting that while the Tower was architecturally unique, its state of disrepair was immeasurable. It had suffered generations of neglect. It was placed on that hill as if its legs were open, spread out crisscrossed in beds of weeds and coarse onion grass. This was not a lighthearted position, more of a desperate one; a mother completely alone and in labor. A muted screaming that materialized in an unfathomable darkness that transcended the lives of the teachers and students within its walls. She was, like the mothers of New Windsor I knew, holding secrets. Murderous in calculation, and manipulative with her nurturing. We loved the Tower and we wanted to learn all about her. She let us know her blackness.

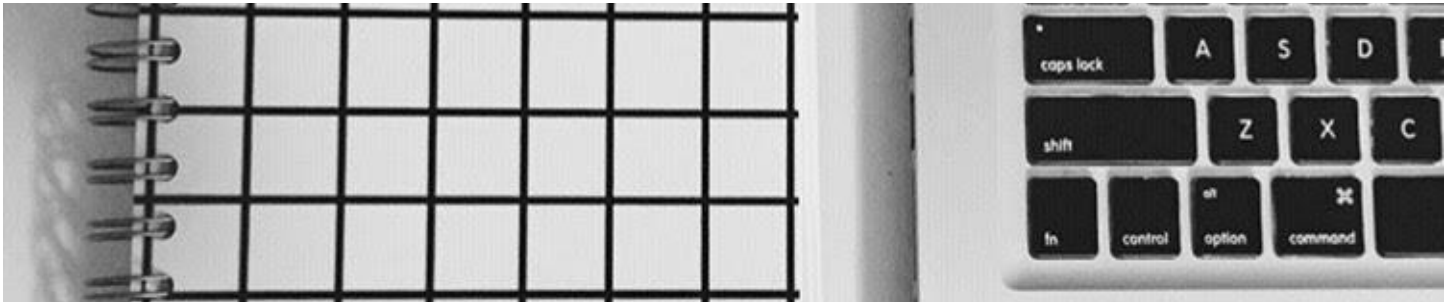
In the 4th grade, my mother had been excluded from so much of the PTO's planning and she was near quitting. After a long commute, being ignored and excluded was exhausting. One night, as they were planning the Christmas Spaghetti Dinner, some daughters and I snuck out of the room and made a run for the Tower. We were now students of the Tower (4th graders were upstairs, 5th grade on the ground floor) and were summoned to her. The courtyard in front of it was bustling with leaves, weaving between the dead thorny bushes that were the Tower's skirt. That autumn scent of school was still in the air. Pilgrims and hand turkeys, faded by the sun, were taped to the windows. I remembered how the moms had once nearly ruined a class Thanksgiving play. The teacher cast a Mexican boy as William Bradford. In retaliation, the moms bought their sons pilgrim costumes to outshine him. When the pilgrims were dying of some miscellaneous disease, William Bradford rose from his sickness to actually vomit in the trash. The moms watched intently.

The Tower was empty, the vaulted entrance hall cold and pale like the inside of a large bone. I could feel, even then, an enormous dread. The height of the ceiling was fathomless. It was dark up there, that was certain, and shadowy webs hung from above. There was an eerie flickering from the stairwell.



Memory can be interesting, there is so much gone but so much retained. In this process there are some gaps of time, unknown locations and faceless people. One of the daughters with me is completely faceless. A little blonde girl that moved away. Tears moisten where the face should be. "*I don't wanna go...*" The Tower was laughing at her little soul, coercing us in heavy sighing, a reminder of how quickly it would all be over. How, if we didn't take this chance, we would never know what she had lured us there to see?

The flickering from upstairs? It was the bathroom light, hitting the porcelain sinks and casting milky shapes over the peeling walls. The doors were large like the windows, as if they were the thresholds of giants. There was a bookshelf near the railing with dusty textbooks on the history of New Windsor. A handsome young minuteman on the front. We had never touched him, but when we did, the pages disintegrated in our little hands. My classroom was feet away; I stepped into the darkness and from the window saw the lights of the castle house. I realized then that the Tower was trapped in its gaze for a century. A harsh glance of painful disapproval, one I had become accustomed to.



In that classroom I was born a writer. It began one morning, when I awoke from a nightmare. A voice told me to write about a fish who escapes a seafood restaurant and returns to the sea. That day, coincidentally, my teacher gave us each small writing notebooks, where every Friday we would read aloud a story we had written. By recess I had begun the story of Fishy McFishFish and successfully premiered it. It was widely renowned, and for a few Fridays my classmates intently listened and even created their own spinoffs. My teacher was an Italian woman near retirement, still drilling us in cursive. She became fond of me and my writing and she encouraged me enough to pursue my fish stories. There was one critic. A violent, disgruntled boy who was the hidden nephew of one of the PTO moms. One day, he walked up to me and stabbed me with a pencil. It had struck my side, and the gash he would've liked to see became infected with evilness and doubt. My teacher calmed me afterwards as I cried from the shock, and she told me to wash my face off, that everything would be all right. It felt as if she was apologizing on behalf of the Tower. I never read my stories aloud after that. I had reached that awkward age where kids become aware of others. Nevertheless, I continued writing in secret, focusing on my collection of mysteries.

"Let's go downstairs," a daughter whispered. We crept down to the basement, where, until recently, our music classes had been held. Black mold was found in the walls, and they moved the music elsewhere. There is a room we hadn't even known existed. The door of which was opened wide, despite it always being locked. The walls were green; a silver door beckoned us further. Closer and closer. Touch and courage. Behind the silver door.

Behind the silver door there is a room of brick. Crimson brick, from the river brickyards that employed Polish and Slavic immigrants at the turn of the century. Arching brick that holds the building up, arches of time and suffering shoulders. The language of the room is not English, and it reminded me that the blood in all of our veins does not speak English. It speaks in age-old utterances that break us all down to our core. There may be old pipes on the ceiling. And oh, the smell, the stench of death in that room is unearthly. Mold and rot is as pungent as the grave of someone wicked. In the center of the room is an image that will stay with me forever. In the center of the room is an altar. An altar demanding flesh and blood. In the corner, there is an enclosed hallway with no end. Just as I was about to enter,

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING DOWN HERE?" a voice screeches, the piercing sound in turn making us scream. It was the moms. The old black janitor (who used to sing soulful personalized renditions of "Happy Birthday") grimly motioned us to get out of the rooms, locking the door. "Why wasn't that locked to begin with?" a mom demanded. "There's mold in there, are you letting our kids near mold? Cause I will te-" He hit the floor with his broomstick. "No, ma'am!" he boomed. "I's the one to blow the whistle! For years I been sayin' the Tower's full of mold, Lord knows what else, downtown's done nothin' 'bout it."

That was the night my mom officially quit the PTO. She had given up trying to assimilate into housewife culture. Suburbia bored her, and I felt her frustration as she navigated the drama, trying to retain what poor quality friends she had. My parents provided for me in their own way, detached from consumerism. What existed then was a spectrum between God and Santa Claus. That night I held my ear to my parent's door. "You won't even believe. Those moms are such-" my mom started. "Such what?" I asked slyly, creaking open the door. "Oh, honey, those moms are *witches*."

The Christmas Spaghetti Dinner was bizarre. It was overly and obviously planned; the cafetorium was trimmed with garland and kaleidoscopic bulbs that burned to the touch. The duct-taped wall padding was plastered with plastic panels of red brick. The lunch tables had assigned seating by family. All afternoon the moms had been setting up, pushing us aftercare kids out. They talked and gossiped about the kids in the program, mocking the pregnant NFA girl who sometimes came to help with snack time. Most days she chainsmoked and told me about her film class. This day, she was defending children from ignorant banter. "Listen, trailerpark, I'm callin' your manager and you *will* be fired," a mom told her. The girl never came back for snack time. Our counselor said that she had lost her baby.

"Jingle Bell Rock" ricocheted through the cafegymatorium. Parents were taking their seats, waiting to be served by the "elves." Teachers emerged from the kitchen in elf costumes to indifferent applause. The lot of them were older women of a strict tradition that had been in the school since the early eighties. For some reason, kids were asked to wear Christmas pajamas (the attire of a lot of school functions) and we sat and watched *The Polar Express* projected onto the stage. All night long I felt people watching me. I was some intruder to them, some Grinch who had slipped in to ruin the holiday and endorse a secular agenda.

During the movie, groups of kids would be called up to a table to get hot cocoa and marshmallows. Carefully, they returned to the floor, holding the cup skyward with both hands. By the time I went up, the hot cocoa was nearly gone. I ran up excitedly, but a mom stopped me. "*Ahhnananana*. Go back. You already got some mister," she said coldly. "No I didn't," I insisted, looking to the other mom beside her. "I don't remember him," the other one grinned. She served me with that Mrs. Claus instinctiveness, an inborn servitude. I can remember the ringing of the steaming cup, the noise-gaining power as it filled with Swiss Miss. She looked into my eyes, her crucifix pendulating in anticipation. "Thank you." I was careful with it. The cup was filled too high and the marshmallows were skating around on top. Something caught my attention from the other end of the cafegymatorium. The line of elves had stopped serving. Moms in red sweaters were intermingled with them; maybe they had been *their* teachers too. They stood there, a semblance of classical womanhood, staring directly at me and whispering to themselves. Smiling pleasantly in a straight line against the back wall. Moms everywhere, everyone I saw, staring at me. I spilled the hot cocoa all over myself, feeling it soak through my thin pajamas and burn. When I told my mom how I had felt, how everyone was looking at me, she told me I was imagining it. "But...they made me spill it! The moms were talking about me and looking at me the whole night. They made me drop it!" I hysterically explained on the car ride home. It still remains one of those great childhood Christmas mysteries. In tune with the ancient fireside wonder of the holiday.

My mom was never one to believe in the brutality that some of those women had ingrained into them. They abused their power and thought they ruled the world. For some of them it was an addiction. Murder through discipline. An assistant teacher once badgered a black girl for saying "library" wrong. "There's no such thing as a 'liberry'! Say it right or you're not goin' to the book fair!" She would throw our desks down on the floor, yelling crazily, "Clean out your desks!" Going row by row, she eradicated and exposed the insides of all the desks. I once saw her sort through a collection of lost teeth.

As time progressed, things seemed to become stricter and stricter. Especially after the whole Tower basement and spaghetti dinner fiasco. Our principal knew my name now. She was the Tower personified. A Pagan goddess threatening drought if she was not obeyed.

My 5th grade teacher was the principal's parallel and the complete opposite of my 4th grade teacher. Though they both shared the same number of years, she told us on the first day of school that when she had begun teaching she owned a paddle. That was their difference. That, and the fact that this woman was chillier. She had a bite to her, a memorized revue of pain infliction and proper punishment. Her pride was immense, as if she was certain her approach to teaching was world-renowned and that she should serve as an example. The only one who never cowered before her was the principal. We had a system in the Tower called the Rabbit, in which the principal could broadcast movies on every TV. I remember watching a history movie where a man's leg had to be amputated. My teacher sat back, not even turning the volume down. No one was spared from the agonizing sounds of the saw.

I was horribly bullied that year by three boys. It was a daily occurrence. Whatever was different about me became a stench that year. It made me so noticeable to them and there was nothing I could do to hide. They taunted me for my clothes, my voice, even my eyes. They counted me as a girl. To stop the bullying, they told me I had to make fun of a disabled boy. I could never do it, and so he and I were spewed with homophobia before we even knew what that meant. Towards the end of the year, I drew a picture of the boys as hobos. It sparked immediate outrage. The next day, I was called down to the principal's office. It was a small, conceited room with an imposing hot pink stiletto tape dispenser. "Sit down, Steven." My bullies sat against the wall, staring down in silence. "Did you say these boys lived under a porch?" she asked flatly. I was shocked. She held up a drawing of the boys, drawn wildly and sloppily in black marker, living under a dilapidated porch. Atop it was a happy white family and birds flying away into an orange sun. "I never - I never drew that!" "You did." "No, they drew that! They called me gay!" She had no response. I began to cry out of frustration, knowing they had drawn it, knowing that I would fail once again at making someone believe what had happened to me. The principal's glare was impenetrable.

"Stop crying, you're a *boy!*" she said fiercely.

The end of 5th grade came a month later. We went around getting classmates to sign our yearbooks. "Good luck with those curls in your hair," an Irish boy scribbled in mine. At an assembly, I was given a special award by the librarian and a group of teachers I had never seen. The John W. Elbridge Award. It came with a heavy book wrapped in brown paper. Kids rushed around me to see what it was, tearing it away themselves. It was a dictionary. I had remembered seeing the name, before the PTO voted to throw out the older library books. The spine-embedded mold had begun to make our eyes sting. The inside covers had John W. Elbridge printed in red. The assistant teachers snatched the old books away from us, tossing them into a garbage can with delirious laughter. I never saw a teacher from that school again. The librarian moved to Rome. The principal retired. The 4th grade teacher is missing. The Board of Ed plans to demolish the Tower, which has been found to contain asbestos.

And I have just begun to forgive magic.



The Newburgh Project Acting 3 students

(Downing Park. A spotlight goes up on center stage. An INTERVIEWER and a MALE DANCER enter from different sides of the stage and meet at center. The INTERVIEWER taps on the MALE DANCER'S shoulder, trying to get his attention.)

Interviewer:
When did you start dancing?

Male Dancer:
Two thousand...four-two thousand fifteen. I do some backbends and stuff. One time...the camera lady she was like "Oh, I saw you on Water Street" she's like "I saw you walking...that backbend walking almost caused a collision! I almost died on the roads that day!"

Interviewer:
Do you think that you could be yourself in a different city?

Male Dancer:
(Pleasant) No. Any other place it wouldn't be the same. It doesn't have as much...energy. I would like to stay. This tree at Downing Park, I used to sit in it, which was my parent's favorite tree. I used to go there a lot. I still reflect on that park. My parent died and - it's just not the same when I go there, when I go in the tree. She said when she dies...she hopes the tree...is like her reincarnation.

(FORMER LIBRARIAN enters and takes to a side of the stage, a spot illuminates her in a nostalgic light. She is clearly separate from the action of this act, a passing breeze.)

Former Librarian:
There was a greenhouse. At Easter time, there were flower beds all over the place that you walked through, by that white gazebo. Tulips and daffodils, then for summer it was all rose bushes. It was absolutely glorious. Everybody on Easter Sunday took a walk through the park. There were peacocks there, and ducks, and the little store....

(FORMER LIBRARIAN vanishes as CAFE OWNER enters.)

Cafe Owner:
My husband and I own a...cafe that's in the middle of Downing Park, which is in the heart of the city. So, with that, we also have the Downing Park Planning Committee that works together to - revitalize and rejuvenate the park as a whole. So there's a lot of activities that take place using the park as a whole: the amphitheatre for performances and yoga instruction, then the um, getting together to do...park cleanups and using the pond, we're hoping to get ice skating on the pond this winter, bring that back, cause that was a major past time older people remember and want back.

Interviewer:
What sort of people visit your cafe?

Cafe Owner:
Actually, a lot of people have now found the cafe, people who have never even visited Newburgh before. Along with that, the older generation that has been here their entire lives, remembers the Shelter House. They have come back 'cause it hasn't been open in...at least two decades. They've come back to...go through some of the memories...the good memories they had as children.

(All exit.)

Fortune Cookie

Xin Liu

A fortune shaped cookie
that usually contains a paper inside with your “fortune” when you open it,
some may believe that the fortunes are real while some others don’t,
I wasn’t the type to believe in these things
but everything on my mind changed when you stepped into my sight,
I didn’t know if it was just coincidence
that the two of us would randomly meet up,
just weeks after I read a fortune out of a cookie
that was randomly chosen by my own hands,
or was it fate, calling out to tell me that the two of us could actually be a thing
after all those moments in life that brought us together?
But in the end, you were nothing.
It was like everything that had been said in the fortune turned to crumbs and washed away
as if someone had walked all over the cookie,
left the leftover bits out in the open
as the droplets of a sudden rainstorm
wetted every bit of the crumbled cookie and turned to mold,
bleeding the dark blue words of the rectangular shaped paper to white
till there’s nothing left on the ground where the cookie used to be.
The spell of the fortune broke and faded away
to where I would no longer be able to grasp it anymore.
Even if I was determined to chase after
the fortune for hundreds of miles
or swim into the deep dark blue ocean
or fly a space rocket into the outer universe
where it blends into the billions of stars and galaxies,
none of it would have been worth it
because none of the words in the fortune
became what I wanted of you as I crossed the line of infinity.
All I developed in the past six years
were unstoppable dreams, thoughts and tears for you.
In those timespans, I could not let go of what had happened
but this year, I learned to let go of what is unfortunate
even if the start of all of this was caused by
a fortune in a cookie.

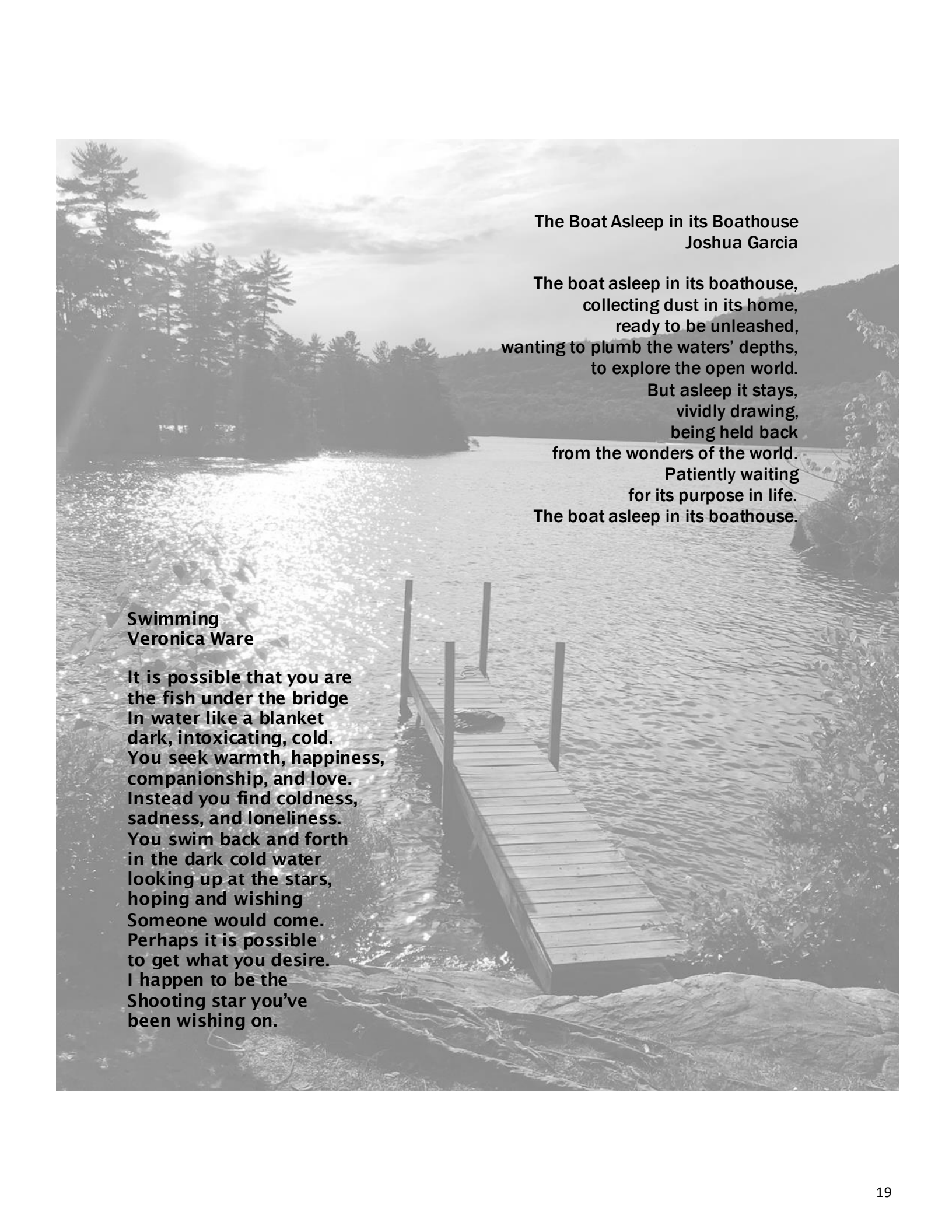


Saturday
Alyssa Tarantino

The sky is clear,
A deep purple with a fat full moon seated center
It's quiet here
My tongue tastes like Coke and your head is heavy on my shoulder
You're warm
Like a memory
Warm like fresh film from a Polaroid camera,
Warmer than a sunburn on a summer day
Where the bees dance lazily with the wind for a partner
And the clouds as their ballroom
Don't you wish we could dance with them?
But we can't
Not right now at least,
So let's just focus on the stars
And the sky
And the watchful eye of the moon
Hold my hand
We'll stay warm together
And we can dance with the bees one day.

The Evening Paper
Steven Barahona

Giving people knowledge
Informing people what's happening
Decades passed, used less and less
Soon forgotten
Replaced by the future
Thrown away
I lay in the streets
Abandoned.
A breeze slowly picks me up
I am the evening paper blowing down an alley.

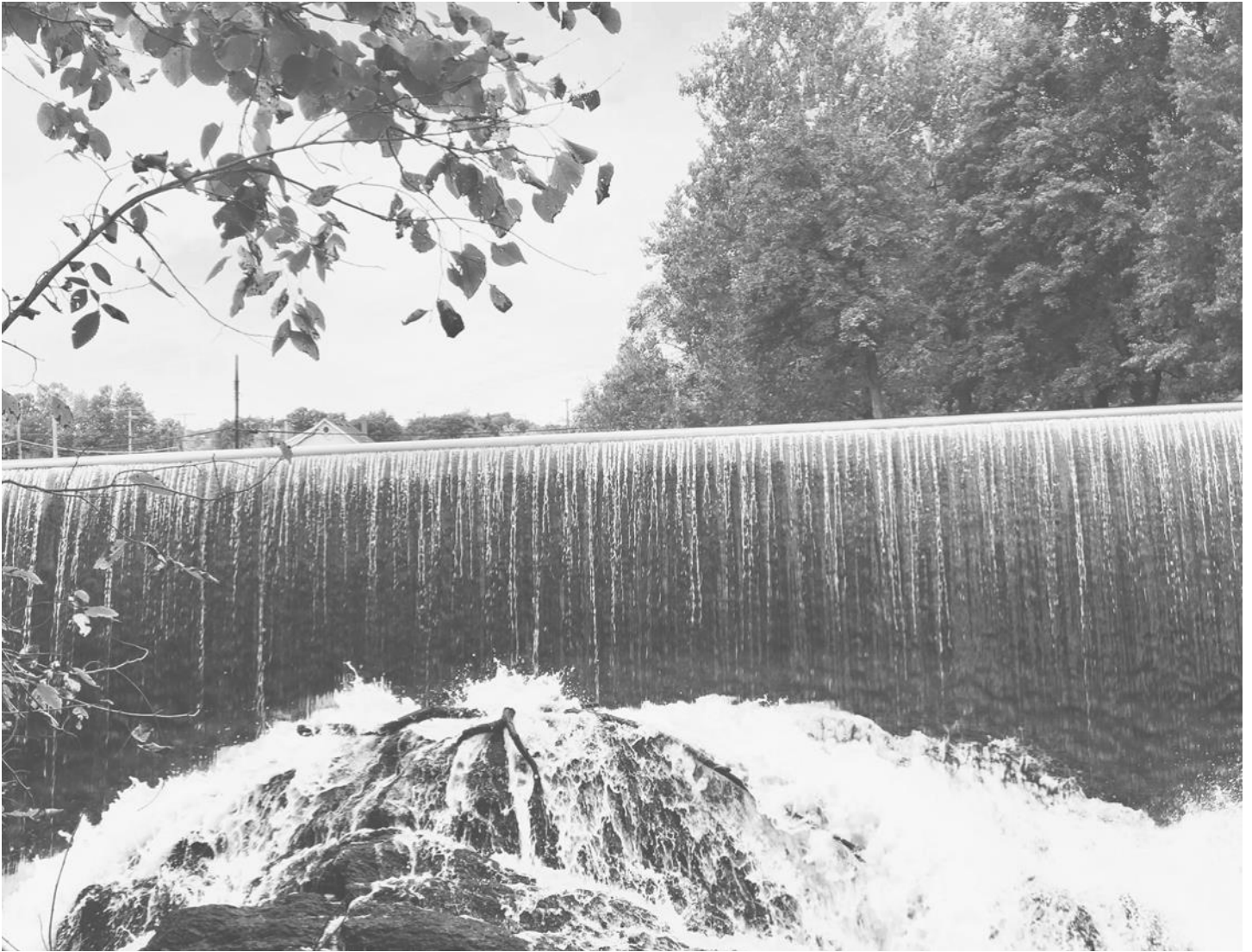


The Boat Asleep in its Boathouse
Joshua Garcia

The boat asleep in its boathouse,
collecting dust in its home,
ready to be unleashed,
wanting to plumb the waters' depths,
to explore the open world.
But asleep it stays,
vividly drawing,
being held back
from the wonders of the world.
Patiently waiting
for its purpose in life.
The boat asleep in its boathouse.

Swimming
Veronica Ware

It is possible that you are
the fish under the bridge
In water like a blanket
dark, intoxicating, cold.
You seek warmth, happiness,
companionship, and love.
Instead you find coldness,
sadness, and loneliness.
You swim back and forth
in the dark cold water
looking up at the stars,
hoping and wishing
Someone would come.
Perhaps it is possible
to get what you desire.
I happen to be the
Shooting star you've
been wishing on.



This Feeling
SM Hayat

**This is all over and around us,
It is an unseeable entity.
The air we breathe carries it.
However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
A force that is nothing but invisible.
We know that somewhere it's out there.
Nothing that can be seen physically,
Only something that can be felt,
And that feeling brings people closer.
That feeling is love.**

Rain on the Roof
Talia Gerena

The first drop fell down,
sliding down my cheek
making me flinch
Into the house I go,
Taking cover.
As the rain pounds on the ground,
sounding murderous
I gaze out the window,
lightning starts to pierce through the sky.
The noise is startling.
But the only thing keeping me calm is,
The sound of rain on the roof

Mission to Mars

Nisheria Weaver

Walking on the spaceship, I can sense that the world is falling into ruins behind me. Fire burns the skyline. I turn to watch the crowds of people boarding other spaceships, carrying all types of items, Uprooted from their homes, children cry, clinging to their parents, unsure of what's going on.

All of a sudden, a loud roar comes from the distance. I lean to look around only to see a giant wave heading towards my direction.

I immediately start yelling orders for everyone to hurry and board the spacecrafts. In this moment, the realization of what's going on actually hits me: the world is ending.

My name is Jem Lasting, and these are my last moments on Earth.

Two days before.

Waking up and starting my daily routine, I got dressed and get a hot chocolate from the old beat-up McDonalds.

"Extra whipped cream," I said to the cashier. She gave me a annoyed look.

Maybe if she knew who I was she wouldn't have given me that look. She came back with my hot chocolate and put her hand out for the amount I owe, three dollars. So I, of course, gave her three dollars and a penny.

"Keep the change," I said, smiling as I walked to my car. I turned up my radio and sipped my hot chocolate during my thirty-minute commute.

Around the last ten minutes of my drive, I looked up to see a bunch of aves, or birds. They were all flying west to east.

"Okay, that's weird." I looked back at the road only to see a herd of sheep in front of my car; I quickly slammed on the brakes.

I spilled what was left of my hot chocolate on my lap. Again, I noticed that the sheep were coming from the east and heading towards the west. I just shook it off and honked my horn. I was already late for work.

Getting to headquarters, I quickly grabbed a lab coat to cover up my legs. The not-so-hot chocolate left a stain on my pants.

"Hey Lasting!" I looked up too see Spark, one of the other head astronauts on the job.

You see, my job has been to get everyone who is still alive off this planet and hopefully to Mars. So maybe, just maybe, we can start all over. We were set to head up to space in a month or two. We had planned on assigning everyone a spaceship and a tiny designated luggage area. There are three spaceships in total: two for people and one full of supplies and seeds for planting when we can start our new lives.

"Jem! Wake up and get up here! You have to see this!" Spark shouted. I quickly moved up the stairs and into a climate-controlled room.

“Look at these charts! They’re catastrophic! The weather in Hawaii is below 28 Celsius while Antarctica has white sandy beaches and a massive underwater shift just happened, creating a large underwater volcano!” I looked at Spark; he clearly hadn’t slept in days.

“So are you saying what I think you’re saying?” I asked, hoping I was wrong.

“It looks like we might have to leave Earth a month ahead of time,” Spark said.

“Is there any way this could be wrong?”

Spark did not make eye contact with me but just looked down and shook his head no. “We aren’t ready. We barely have any supplies on the ships to say the least. We would have to get the last fifty people who are still alive to evacuate to headquarters in case of an emergency.”

“Well,” I said, “Everything will have to be sped up. Tell everyone to gather the last supplies and Wednesday must go on as planned.”

The course of the next day and a half were hectic to say the least. Supplies were loaded into the ships from sunup to sundown while charts were checked and rechecked all day.

Wednesday

In the morning, I headed straight to work since no one was at McDonalds. They would all be getting ready to board the ships with their belongings.

Already, I was having such a bad morning: no hot chocolate and I would undoubtedly have to deal with a bunch of crazy people today.

Once at work, I raced toward the office of Stark and the other pilot.

“*Lasting!*” I turned toward a man by the fridge.

“McGraw,” I said with much disgust in my voice.

This, ladies and gentlemen, was my ex-boyfriend and the third pilot of the “supplies” spacecraft.

“How are you doing on this fine day?” Just hearing him speak made me want to vomit.

“Well, considering that I’m speaking to a low-life cheating scum, my day could be sooo much better!” I said with great sarcasm.

Before McGraw could reply, the loud speaker came on: “*Everyone report to the loading docks to store your belongings and find your seating arrangements.*”

So Spark, McGraw and I headed to our post outside of the spacecrafts to welcome everyone in. I had twenty-five people and Stark and McGraw had all our supplies.

All of a sudden, a loud roar came from the distance. I leaned my head over to look around only to see a giant wave heading in our direction.

I immediately started yelling orders for everyone to hurry and board the spacecrafts. In this moment, the realization of what’s going on finally hit me: the world was ending.

* * *

As I am about to close the door to the spacecraft, I hear yelling.

“Wait, Wait!” It’s the girl from McDonalds. She’s carrying a bag of clothes. I open the door and quickly run out. I grab her bag and we run into the ship. I close the hatch and run to the front.

I flip a switch and Stark and McGraw pop up on a screen. I put on a headset, “We need to get out of here *now*! I thought we had a month left? Why *now*?!” Then I realize that there are people behind me.

“Alright everyone! Take a seat. We will be lifting off momentarily.” Everyone is silent. It is only when I bellow “Come on, take a seat!” that they scramble to get in a seat.

I look back at the screen, “Are you guys ready?” McGraw looks determined.

I flick the button to turn the engines on only to feel a large push against the spacecraft. I quickly move the screens to the side so I can see outside.

A large wave is covering all three spacecrafts. “Spark! McGraw! Do y’all think we can get out of here?”

“Yes, turn on your boosters; once you’re in the sky, turn on all jets. We need to get to Mars in at least two days.” Spark says.

McGraw and I nod, “Alright! On three! One!” I click on the lights and turn to make sure everyone is seated.

“Two!” I get in my seat and close a hatch that keeps me separated from everyone else.

“Three!” I click the jet button and the spacecraft jerks. After a couple more seconds, we’re in the air.

“Ooo!” I hear in the headsets. “Alright, let’s get this show on the road!” Spark says.

“Putting all my jets on. Turning my headset off; if you need me, flash me.” I put my headset down and go to check on everyone.

* * *

Over the next day and a half, we journey two-thirds of the way there. We just have to pass the asteroid belt. Once we get over the belt, then it’s home sweet home.

I’m sitting in my seat when I see red flashes. I quickly get up and put on my headset.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. We have about ten minutes until we reach the belt. Get everyone seated.”

I quickly tell everybody to sit down and put their seatbelts on. I turn the outside camera on so everyone can see the asteroid belt as we pass it.

There seems to be no issues. Five minutes pass. I see a red planet.

“Alright! Let’s do this!”

The landing is difficult; one of my tail wings breaks off and there is insane turbulence.

“I’m good! Let’s just get this security blanket up.” The tops of the three spacecrafts open and a bubble appears that will keep us safe in case the air is not breathable.

“Prepare to disembark!” McGraw says.

I give everyone my pep talk and tell them that it is safe to head out. Going to the front, I open the hatch and I breathe in deeply. “Fresh air? FRESH AIR!” I shout with glee. I run out into the bubble and look out.

Before I know it, Spark comes running out and hugs me. We look out into the stars as we see Earth, a small speck in the distance, slowly break apart.

“We’re home!”

Over the course of the next couple of months, we build up small homes and make gardens. There is no form of life but we are growing food and planting trees. There is underground water.

“It’s a start.” I exhale. I look back at the small village we have made for ourselves. “*A new start!*”



All the Times I've Ever Seen You
Samuel Rider

The first time I ever saw you
It was like my breath was stolen
Your personality so bright
It shone
Even in the darkest of endeavors
You bring shame to the sun and all of its stars.

The second time I ever saw you
My eyes widened
With warmth
At the beauty
Bestowed to you
Both inside and out.

The third time I ever saw you
I felt fire
Rush to my ever so cool features
Riling not the butterflies in my stomach
But the dragons.

The fourth time I ever saw you
I could feel my skin tense
My nerves teased me
Just by the sight of your beautiful chiseled face
That yet
Still held so much mirth.

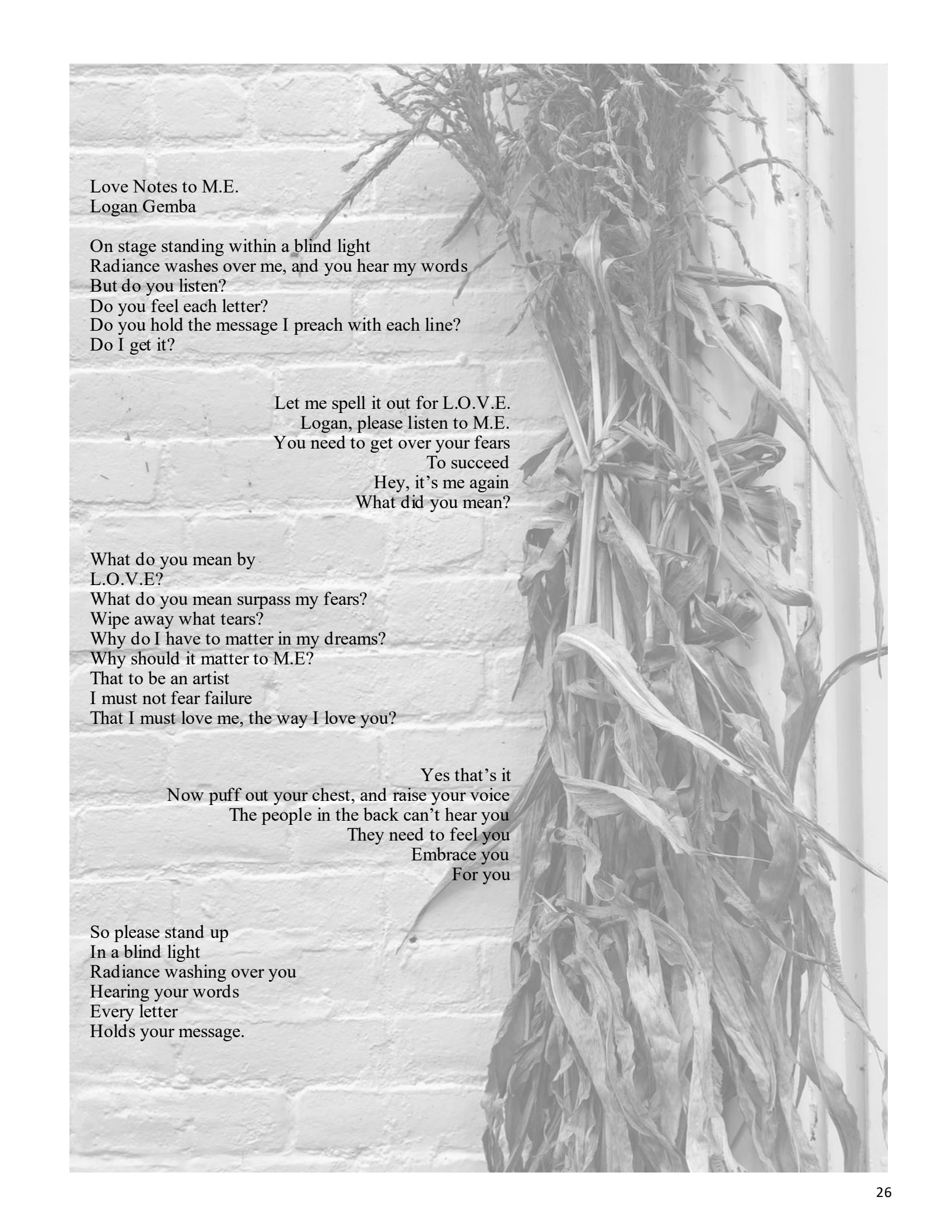
The fifth time I ever saw you
I fought the shivers
Transcending my spine
Controlling the longing to be yours
And holding on
To my weak frail self
Just from seeing your beautiful mouth
Carved into a smile
That could bring light to me
Even in my darkest hours.

The sixth time I ever saw you
I held tears back
Realizing you could never love me
But I still loved you
From the largest parts to the bits and pieces.

The seventh time I ever saw you
I was outcast
Something I never truly desired
But had to do to stay safe
You looked at me
With such betrayal
And my entire world crumbled at your disappointment
Your body huddled in indifference
Yet I only saw beauty
Because I loved you too much.

Today I wish to be kissed
But not by your pretty red lips.
Today I wish to be given the kiss of death.

As I close my eyes tonight
And fiercely wish to depart this world
My last thought will always be of you.



Love Notes to M.E.
Logan Gemba

On stage standing within a blind light
Radiance washes over me, and you hear my words
But do you listen?
Do you feel each letter?
Do you hold the message I preach with each line?
Do I get it?

Let me spell it out for L.O.V.E.
Logan, please listen to M.E.
You need to get over your fears
To succeed
Hey, it's me again
What did you mean?

What do you mean by
L.O.V.E?
What do you mean surpass my fears?
Wipe away what tears?
Why do I have to matter in my dreams?
Why should it matter to M.E?
That to be an artist
I must not fear failure
That I must love me, the way I love you?

Yes that's it
Now puff out your chest, and raise your voice
The people in the back can't hear you
They need to feel you
Embrace you
For you

So please stand up
In a blind light
Radiance washing over you
Hearing your words
Every letter
Holds your message.

Circles
Vincent Domingues

**You can see circles everywhere you go,
Up at the top and even down low.**

**They are the shape of wheels of fast moving cars
They are the shape of most planets, including Mars.**

**You see them in sports, like on basketball courts,
You see circles in every sort.**

**They are seen in walls, they are seen in halls,
In every season, even in Fall.**

**As you can see, circles are part of your life,
They might even help you get your own wife.**





Rain on the Roof
Emma Cosgrove

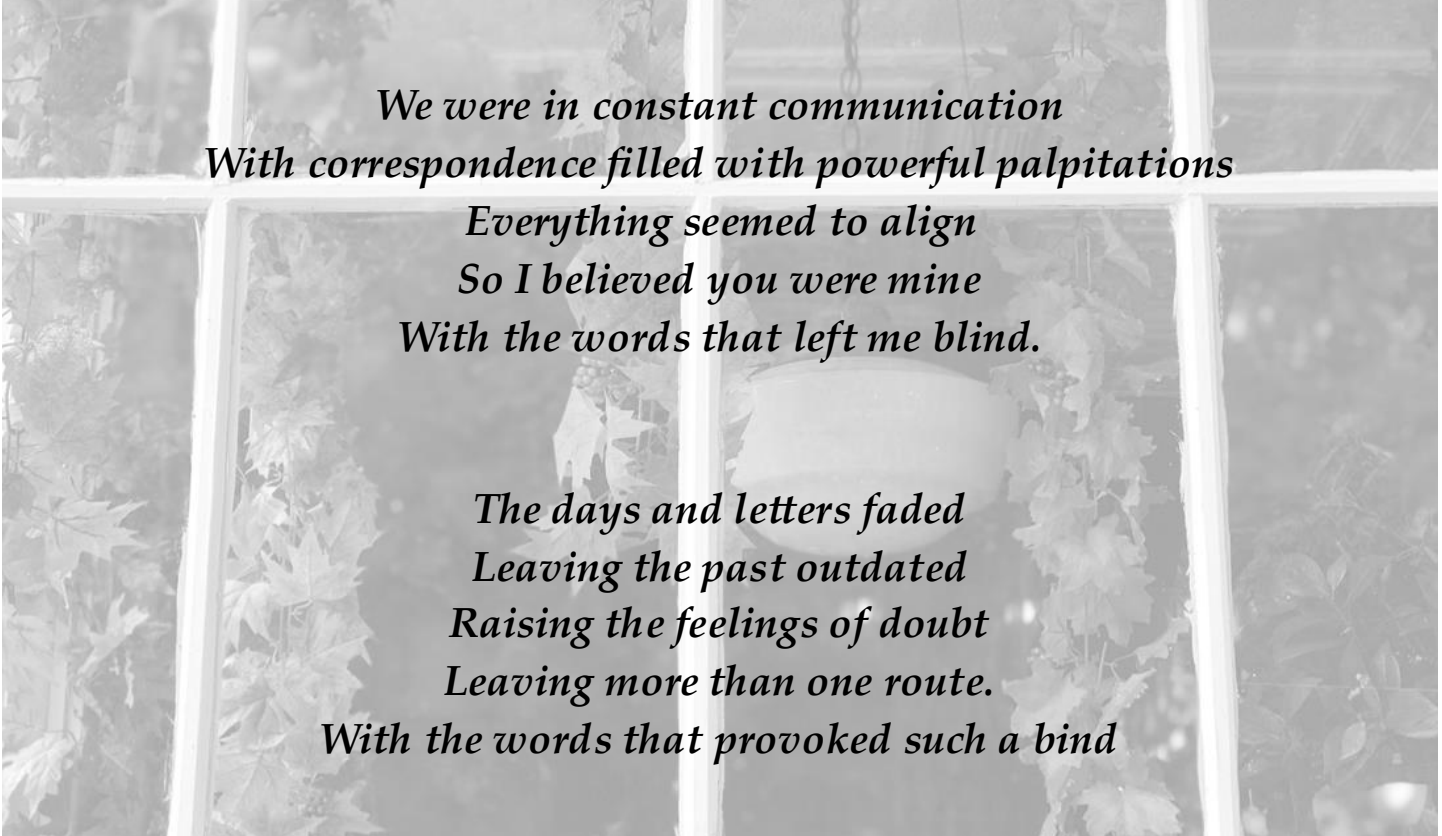
May the pitter patter of rain
on the roof lift your spirits.
May your sorrow fade away
just as the rain trickles off the roof.
May your heartache ease as the rain
begins to lighten up.
May the sound of the rain comfort you.
May the sound of light rain falling on the roof
ease your mind.
May the rainbow after the shower take your breath away.
May the sun shining through the clouds
be enough to make you happy,
for I am the sound of rain on the roof.

Rain
Jennifer Cardona

To the ones that ask:
“Why do you only write about heartache?”
Tell me,
Could you describe the warmth of the sun,
If you lived in a world where it only rained?

Letters of Antiquity
Roxenne Contreras

Colored and designed with memory
Were the letters that you wrote for me
Every word seemed so genuine
My eyes shimmered like sunshine
With the words everlasting in my mind.



We were in constant communication
With correspondence filled with powerful palpitations
Everything seemed to align
So I believed you were mine
With the words that left me blind.

The days and letters faded
Leaving the past outdated
Raising the feelings of doubt
Leaving more than one route.
With the words that provoked such a bind

Now these letters are filled with memories
Filled with your deceit and treachery
Displaying my glowing infancy
Gone ever so instantly
Love-letters, yellowing with antiquity.



Memes Make Dreams Theorem
Antonio Perez

**If memes make dreams
 And dreams are memes,
 Then memes make dreams
 Dreams make memes
 Dreams make dreams
 And memes make memes.
 There is a perfect
 Equilibrium and cycle
 Between
 Memes
 And dreams.**

The Evening Paper
Curtis Jones

Just a piece of paper
 Everyone just passes by
 They couldn't come any later
 And still don't bother to say hi

It's floating about
 Trying to fly
 But it's simply a newspaper
 That shouldn't even try

Again we go
 Failing to make them cheer gladly
 It might interest you to know
 I was the evening paper blowing
 down the same alley

Or A House Of Cards
Alyssa Tarantino

Don't call me weak
 or fragile,
 Unless you dare to knock me down.
 Don't call me gentle
 Or sensitive,
 Unless you try to blow me over.
 For I am a river,
 A forest, and a raging storm.
 I am not a dandelion
 Or a wilted flower
 Or a house of cards,
 So don't call me dainty
 Or afraid;
 You haven't earned that right,
 Nor do I think you ever will.

House Of Cards
Ranjira Waitley

She stares back at herself
Smiling as she breaks down.
her long white gown
spilling on the stairs of
her bed. Her brain
unsteady and
emotionless. She
repeated these words
constantly trying to remind
herself. She is not the wind in the
orchard. The plums on the counter,
or the house of cards.
But deep down she knew
She was.



To the Moon and Back
Nisheria Weaver

I love you
To all the stories you've told me,
I love you
To the memories we had shared,
I love you.
You always told me to shoot for the moon and stars.
I love you
And even though you're gone,
I love you
To the moon and back.



Fear
Toi Lide

Lurid reflections appear on the wall
They whisper a grim reality,
There can be no escape
For Fear is knocking on your door

The very bane of our existence
Taps his claws on the splintery wood
Tearing away at the fabric of your mind.
Your worst enemy

He imprisons Desire
Conspires with Violence
And drags you down to The Reaper
He is the king in this jungle of life
And rules it with a iron fist

Suppose you opened the door to him?
After all, the levees eventually surrender
The Reaper comes to collect
And darkness returns to consume Earth

He is the inevitable and
Now at last the time has come

The brittle wood becomes debris
Mutilated by his claws
He has broken through

The lurid reflections echo the cries
And noises of the jungle
There is an ominous cracking in the sky
Synchronize your minds and see
The beast within him rise

Deception
Jazlynn Sotelo

A woman's charm is fifty percent illusion.
I must wash away my silliness
to find myself at the white columns.
I must stop playing the music.
I must cover the light bulbs or
just light candles lest the clarity turns him away.
I must forget what happened to me,
put down the booze, put on a smile,
act like a lady, act like her.
How can I when I have this leg?
I must allow only the glass slippers
on my feet to be transparent
is what she says as she gently powders my face.
Some of it sprinkles onto the lily -white dress
that was once hers.
Remember to lure him with deception;
secure the horn.
I think it is one -hundred percent,
at least with me.
The doorbell rings with an echo-no!
Oh, how I want to fly to the woods,
but she gives me a stern, frantic look.
I give her what I can.
A faint, apologetic smile.



GIFTED

DANAYAH CHRISTMAS

Hello, my name is Erin Slater and I am here to welcome you to your new home. I am 21, and I am not the girl I once was but I'll get to that in a minute. Right now I want to tell you a little story. I think it's quite the tale but then again I'm biased.

It was the fall of my seventeenth year. I lived with my mother and father and that was it; I had no siblings. I wasn't allowed to leave the house. They kept me trapped within the attic. They made it my home and said the outside world was dangerous, that they were only protecting me. They rarely left the house and when they did, it was never together. One always stayed behind to make sure I didn't break any rules, and there were a lot of rules. But one night mother and father felt that they deserved a night off and went out of town for the first time since I was born. That was their mistake for I waited by the sealed window until the sun had gone down. I grabbed the wooden chair from my lonely little table and threw it at the window. I went to my closet and took a bag out from under the floorboards where I had food and clothes. Carefully I climbed out the window, jumped and landed on my feet the way a cat would, and set out to discover the world.

I didn't know what was so dangerous about this world. It was quite beautiful, honestly. I had discovered a city roughly a week after my escape. It was bursting with life. People were everywhere laughing, exchanging things, doing normal human things. One nice woman bought me this thing called ice cream. As I sat on the bench with my frozen treat, a group of men in white coats slowly approached me. They seemed kind and we had a lovely conversation. When I told them I had run away, they offered to take me with them to a beautiful place where I would be safe. So I did.

The men took me to this thing they called a "van" and helped me inside. Then it started moving and took us away from the city. I watched through the window as the tall buildings and crowded streets disappeared behind me. I think I must have fallen asleep at some point because one minute I was staring out the window and the next I was in front of a large white building. It was crawling with men and women in white coats. I was ushered inside by one of them and taken to a small room with a strange bed and no windows. After a few moments sitting alone in silence, a Whitecoat walked in. His name was Adam; he was a doctor in the facility. It was his job to make sure I was healthy, and introduce me to this place.

He told me in I was in a place called The Stratumo, a safe haven for those with mutated genes, apparently known as Gifteds. He said I was a Gifted. Adam told me my mother and father had kidnapped me when I was a child because of my gift; I was a very advanced psychokinetic. I was told that they wanted to use me for evil so my false parents locked me in the attic in order to break me and use me however they pleased. Adam said a scientist here heard about me and my great gift and searched for me so to protect me from my mother and father. They were glad they finally found me and brought me that this place was built to protect those like me. Here, they could train me to control my abilities in useful ways.

By my 18th birthday, I was proving to be a force to be reckoned with. Adam said I could rule the world. I told him he was biased; Adam and I had begun seeing each romantically a few months after my arrival. Over that year, the other Gifteds and I had become close as well. For the first time in my life, I felt at home. The Whitecoats said we were all safe here.

Three months later, a young man was brought into the training room where the Gifteds and I trained. He was bloodied and bruised. Quite honestly, I hadn't been sure if he was breathing. Annabelle, a young healer, was called over and asked to aid. When she knelt and began healing him, the boy's eyes suddenly snapped open and he began screaming in agonizing pain. I was asked to use my Gifts to soothe him. Annabelle and I were to follow the Whitecoats who carried him into the infirmary where we could finish the task. When Annabelle finished healing him, she was asked to leave; I was to stay there in case he woke up. Adam said he trusted me with this very important job. He claimed that the boy was an escaped criminal, known for killing Gifteds. He was captured by the Whitecoats for questioning and then execution. Adam had to check on some things and left me and the criminal alone. I was there for at least two hours, bored out of my mind. I began dozing off just as the boy began to wake up. He made a sort of groan that woke me up. I knew that I was supposed to put him back to sleep but he looked at me and pleaded with his big green eyes not to. He looked too kind to kill my people. Before I could say anything, Adam had entered the room to check on me. When he saw that the boy was awake, he dismissed me, leaving me with many unanswered questions.

It was four days later when I saw the boy again. It was after lights out. Everyone was supposed to be asleep but he stood beside my bed hovering over me and staring. I woke to see his green eyes directly in front of mine. I wanted to scream but I couldn't. I couldn't do anything. He must have drugged me in order to kill me. He sat on my bed and said he had to tell me something. The full truth, that what Adam and the Whitecoats were telling me was wrong. Slowly I felt myself regain control over my body.


He said his name was Parker and like me, he was a psychokinetic—a Gifted. The truth was everyone here was a government experiment, including me. We were not born this way. We were made this way. Our parents volunteered for this little project. These mothers and fathers believed their children would be stronger, smarter, better than the average human, and we are, just not in the ways they had thought. My parents changed their minds after seeing how the government treated the older Gifteds, so they ran away, and hid me from the Whitecoats. The truth was when the Whitecoats found me, it was not on accident they had been searching all the years. They were in that area because the night my parents went out, the night I escaped, the Whitecoats killed them. Adam was among the killers, the man I loved, killed my parents in cold blood. This “safe haven” was not made to keep us safe; it was to trap us. They did not want to help us. The Whitecoats were doing exactly what they made me believe my parents did - weaponize the Gifteds. The Stratumo was the enemy, and they made us believe they were opposite. Parker told me they used him to kill those who were insubordinate. He hated every second of it and began to rebel, and eventually tried to escape. He was unsuccessful and they hurt him bad. The only reason he was alive was because they had questions, now they wanted him dead. That night we planned the perfect escape not just for us, but for all the Gifteds in the facility. We used our Gift and communicate telepathically with all the Gifteds. The next morning at his supposed execution, we would strike.

We all acted perfectly normal that morning, training as if nothing was wrong. Around noon, Adam came for me saying they had a job for me. I gave a small hand gesture to the Gifteds in the room signalling that it was time. I was brought to the execution room with Parker. Many Whitecoats surrounded waiting patiently to see what I could do. Waiting for a show, I was sure to give them one. Adam spoke eloquently to Parker about his “crimes” and his punishment for it and told me to use my gift to stop his breath. Adam said he was heavily sedated so it would be no trouble, but he was actually wide awake. I looked at Parker and smiled as I turned to Adam and focused. Willing his brain to turn to mush, his organs to liquify and seep out of his skin and watched the man that betrayed me sink to the floor in a puddle of his insides. That's when Parker made the other Whitecoats in the room pass out long enough for us to get out of the room and get the other Gifteds. There was roughly 100 of us but there was 1000 of the White coats, all of them armed but we were ready to fight. Some of us got hurt but we managed to get out without losing too many of us. Once we were free, we ran. We ran until we could run no farther. We found a clearing far far away from their facilities deep in the woods. We built a community for others like us. We built the community to grow our numbers and one day fight.

The Stratumo never cared for us. They planned to use us to control the human race. But we won't allow for that. Together we will work together and take them down, expose the government for what it truly is. They are the Mutators, changing who we were meant to be in order to use us. They are the enemy. Our time will come for us to take them down.

So that's my story, how this all began. Three years ago, I was a scared girl who just wanted to see the world. I suppose I have accomplished that in ways I never even dreamed. Three years ago I left the only family I ever knew and traded it for a much better one. Three years ago we built a community out of nothing and now our community is thriving. Some of us travel back to that place and save the new Gifteds. Some of us keep our resources flowing, make sure we have food and shelter and clothing. Others care for the children and help our new members learn to use their abilities to help our community thrive. And there is Parker and me. It was unanimously decided that we would be in charge of everything. Truth be told, a pair of psychokinetics make an excellent pair and as I'm told pretty great leaders. Three years ago, I was nothing more than a weapon to be hidden or used. Today? Today I am a leader.

I want to welcome you all to your new home, The Sanctuary. Here you will be safe, and unlike the Whitecoats, we mean it. I hope each and everyone of you blossom into the best possible you that you can be. Forget who you were told to be. Your new lives begin today.



A Reason to Shine
Alexandra Tapia

I would fall
If it meant making their wishes
come true

I hope when I pass
They're looking at the sky
And not back at the ground

They helped me
cry a little less
laugh a lot harder
and smile a lot more

I happen to be lucky enough
To be with them but
I also happen to be the
shooting star

To my friends
Who I would love
no matter the
distance

All Roads Lead To Everywhere

Samuel Rider

When you're walkin' down that fine

road to tomorrow

don't let no potholes or no speedin' cars deter you

don't you sit when your legs is tired

don't you fall when you is famished

don't get hit by them cars lookin' to get to they destinations

reach your destination

anything else

anyone else

don't matter

because you need to reach

the tomorrow that is destined for you.

The Next Chapter

Joseph Bederka

After many years, the time has now come,

To prepare ourselves for the near future.

At first we may just find it to be dumb.

At first it might just seem hard to endure.

It's a new beginning for us young kids,

rather an opportunity to shine.

We just need to close our eyes, shut our lids,

And take the future and say "it is mine."

For some it will be such and such a thrill.

For some it will simply tear them apart.

All that you need is the drive, and the skill,

And most importantly, a loving heart.

The future is near, keep yourself steady.

Do that, and you'll certainly be ready.

True Love
Jennifer Cardona

The sweet words you whisper in my ear,
"I love you."
I let the words sink in.
"I'll never leave you."
I let those implant themselves in my heart,
"I promise, there's no one else for me."
I watered the roots in my heart.
I didn't know what I was watering.
I wish I paid more attention,
For the very love I was watering
Grew into a tree with poisonous apples.
I took a bite,
I fell
Into a dark hole of sadness
From which I will never wake up.
True love's kiss can't save me now.



Cornflowers
Olivia Gangemi

To the field of cornflowers at dusk,
Following the path,
Cold at night,
Warm at day,
Playing in the fields of miles of blue,
Where ladybugs and rabbits hide,
Lucky and virtuous,
Reaching up to the stars,
Smiling,
Bright.
The cornflowers show me the way.

Thorns
Jennifer Cardona

*They don't describe our love as beautiful
Anymore,
They think it's scarred,
tainted,
toxic,
and obsessive.
Although, there's beauty in the pain you bring.*



Wennessee Tilliams

Linda Chen

The distant piano goes into a hectic breakdown
The dark evening sky watched over
The bright bustling city
The New Orleanian jazz swept the streets
Dancing with the sound of a distant streetcar
She searched for this streetcar
Getting lost in a mist
Running through her mind
She pours herself a drink.

She smiles as she holds a blue rose in her hand,
Admiring the candle's reflection.
Dancing in the candlelight
His beautiful eyes she sees as
The blue rose slips from her hand
Shattering its delicate blue petals.
What is broken is never the same
Backing, slowly, into the shadows
What happened he did not foresee
And taking his chance, he left
For nowadays the world is lit by lightning!

A Glass Streetcar Imani Sumner

Sick people make
Such deep, sincere attachments.
Their mind always there but absent,
Reality their main combatant.

The human heart
Is curved like a road through mountains.
We try to float but we're only drowning.
There's no time and everyone's counting.

We stretch for not realism,
But magic.
Because we now our fate is tragic;
Reaching peace but reaping havoc.

We're all riding
A streetcar named desire.
Stoking our desires like fire.
Waiting for our dreams without work to
transpire.

We're left in a world,
Devoid of inspiration.
Bound to trivial obligations.
Burning with the slow implacable fires
Of human desperation.

Lonely Skies
Samuel Rider

Let me fly
For I've been caged
My entire life.
Told to be someone
Other than myself

I know not the reasons why
Nor the methods used
I know no reason they should care
Nor the purpose of their persistence.

All I know is that I am
The shooting star in a lonely sky,
The moon that appears beyond the clouds,
The subtle drizzle of rain after the longest drought,
The light in the darkest corners of all beings,
But most importantly,
I am me.

**nothing is forever
Steven Baltsas**

**a nervous breath, a broken sigh
in these you left me wondering why
tell them i've gone out singing
that i would never dream again
my shower mat was smeared with bugs
my bedroom floor in souvenir mugs
the fan above me buzzing
what was the point of it anyway?**

When the Night Arrives
Deafny Gallo

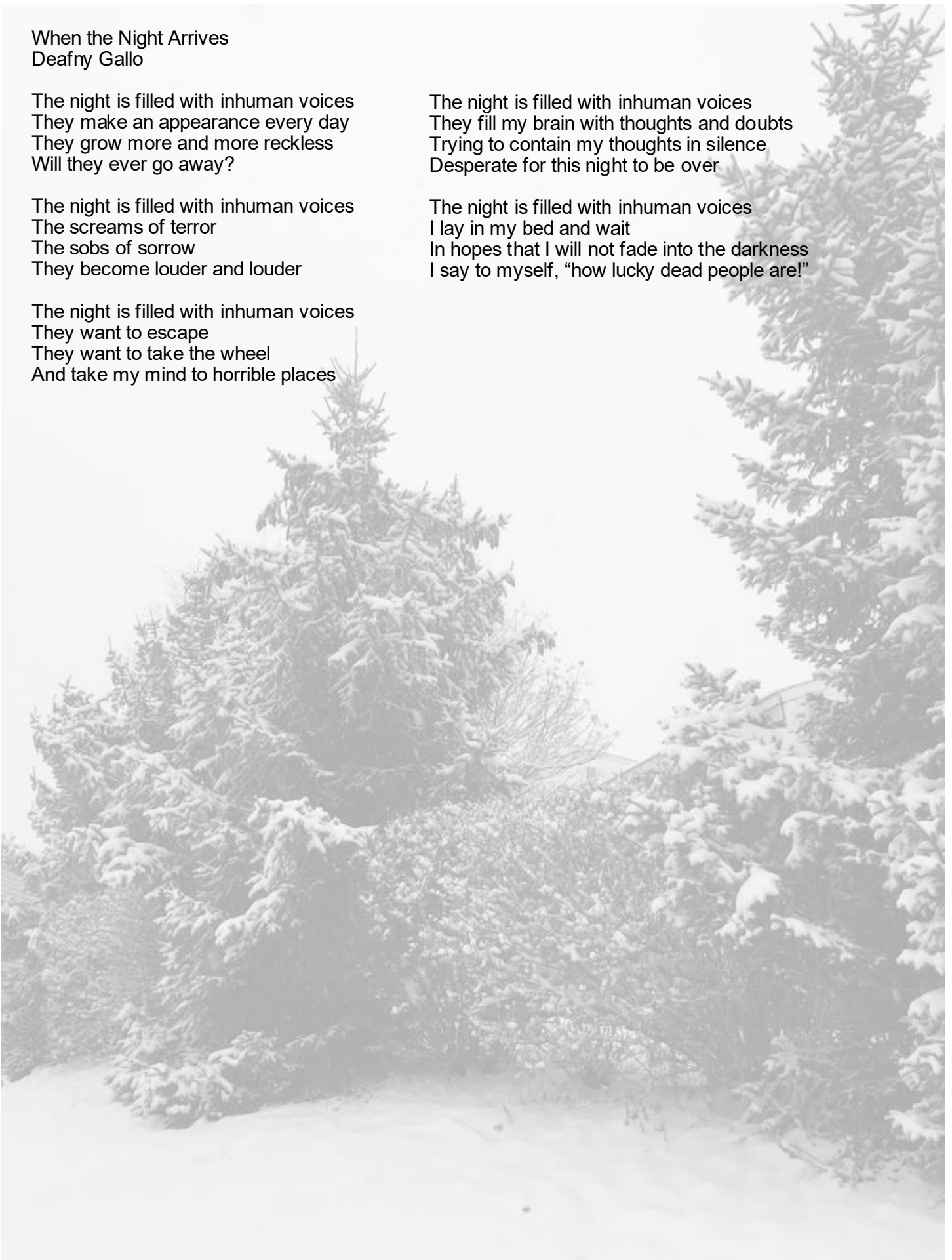
The night is filled with inhuman voices
They make an appearance every day
They grow more and more reckless
Will they ever go away?

The night is filled with inhuman voices
The screams of terror
The sobs of sorrow
They become louder and louder

The night is filled with inhuman voices
They want to escape
They want to take the wheel
And take my mind to horrible places

The night is filled with inhuman voices
They fill my brain with thoughts and doubts
Trying to contain my thoughts in silence
Desperate for this night to be over

The night is filled with inhuman voices
I lay in my bed and wait
In hopes that I will not fade into the darkness
I say to myself, "how lucky dead people are!"





The Performer in the Sky

Mae Richi

Every morning, the people of Earth awoke to golden light filtering through their windows and the other various crevices of their homes. It was a subtle reminder of the day that lie ahead, as well as a motivator; a companion. It was what the people needed, as it brought them warmth, vision, and energy. For these lovely awakenings, the people accredited Good Morning.

Good Morning was young in appearance, yet her body was curved in a way that gave her an aura of maturity. Her skin was very dark with a warm undertone, yet so smooth it glowed. Lovely Good Morning wore loose white silk wrapped around her like a dress, and many golden accessories that emphasized the glow she emitted with her skin alone, from her five-pointed headpiece to the adornments on her sandals. Around her neck, a necklace was draped over her collarbones, decorated with blue glass beads. The light shining through them is what made the sky blue.

Every single day, Good Morning danced around the entire sky, bringing light to everybody in the world. Everyone received equal amounts of daylight and nighttime, and for that, she was regarded as fair and just. People loved Good Morning, and based their entire concept of time on her and how she danced. She, too, loved the people, but not because they idolized her. She admired humanity's intelligence, and their displays of artistry--especially when they danced. Seeing people unified and together, spending time with each other, was the fuel to her passion.

Oh, how she longed to have somebody dance with her, too.

Sometimes, the loneliness was difficult for Good Morning to bear. After all, she was a lone performer, cast into the sky with the responsibility of giving all the people in the world precious sunlight. She had nobody to accompany her besides the clouds, who were mute and incapable of speaking out how they felt besides when they cried or fought, bringing rain or storms to inhabitants below.

As pained as she was, Good Morning continued to serve the people she loved from afar, ignoring her feelings of solitude and inferiority to prioritize *them, and them only*.

On one brisk, cold afternoon, however, Good Morning's feelings got the best of her.

It started with her leaping from cloud to cloud, landing on pointed toes and matching their lightness with every move she made. She snapped her fingers and turned to face her left, opening her eyes that were once closed amidst performing. She saw something unfamiliar, and stopped in her tracks, squinting to get a better view.

First, what Good Morning saw appeared like an odd shape; a sketch in white pencil set on pale blue paper. But then something clicked, and the shape moved. It walked with long legs, gracefully stepping on the clouds like they were flat, solid ground. Since it stood on two legs, Good Morning easily figured out it was a person just like her. Another sky dweller!

A grin slowly spread across her face, and joy overcame her. Good Morning forgot everything else she knew at that moment, and just began to run as quickly as she could towards the stranger, towards his direction. She ran around the sky, as she could not pass across it. Though she moved quick, he did not notice her until she called out for him.

"Wait!" Good Morning cried, outstretching a hand, a universal plea.

The cloud walker turned around and looked, eyes widening as he tensed. A long, velvety hoodless cape hung delicately over his shoulders, and blew behind him as he started to flee from Good Morning, scurrying off like a startled deer.

"No! Wait!" Good Morning repeated, more desperate in her tone as he vanished from sight in a gust of wind that knocked her back, gone all of a sudden.

All of a sudden.

That's all it took for her to fall on her knees, hand still outstretched as she broke apart slowly, tears clouding her vision until she could no longer see. She broke into sobs that made her entire body quake, her shoulders violently rising and falling inconsolably.

Good Morning had been alone for so long, and the very moment she could have company, it appeared just to be a trick played by her imagination. The realization of her loneliness dawned on her and crashed into her like a tidal wave, a pile of bricks, a landslide, an avalanche. Heavy, cold, unbearable. She couldn't act like she wasn't hurt anymore. She slowly stood to her feet, light-headed and drained after crying so much.

Everything was still blurry and her balance was weak, but with her long silk robe dragging behind her, she trudged miserably without a bounce in her gait, slumped shoulders jittering occasionally with a recovering snuffle. She headed down towards the very bottom of the world, where it was frigid and dark; a place of full solitude. When she finally arrived, she fell back down to her knees and went limp, laid awkwardly on her side, then curled up, knees close to her chest. With her heavy eyes shut, and she dozed off.

She did not return the next day, the day after that, the day after *that*...

The clouds grew worried for their great Good Morning, yet without her presence, they were cold. They tried to cry, but it came out like ice and snow, falling upon the people quite heavily. It caused them all to become shut in, the weather too disastrous for them to do anything outside.

Months passed before Good Morning finally opened her eyes, relieved as she stretched and stood to her feet. The barren ice land below was the same as it was when she came. Unaware of how long she had slept for, she walked back up and stood on the clouds, who cried snow instead of rain. In confusion, her brows furrowed and her nose scrunched momentarily, as she knew clouds only cried snow when the weather was colder. Looking down at the people, she became utmost surprised.

The sky below them had been grey and gloomy, as there had been no light and the clouds grew darker as they became heavier in her absence. Piles of snow as high as the houses people settled in blocked entrances and exits alike, shutting the people in, as the outer world was too cold. The wind blew briskly and incessantly, blowing away the last leaves that the naked trees were barely left with. Good Morning felt shame settle into her all over again—it was her fault things turned out like this for the people who she loved. She got caught up in how she felt and hid away for so long, she didn't even remember.

That did not mean that Good Morning was to run away again, however.

This was a problem, indeed—a problem she had created herself due to her negligence of the population below her. But she was more than well aware that it was a fixable problem; one that could only be fixed by herself, for she had the power to bring the people light.

To bring the people warmth.

To bring the people life.

A small snap of her fingers—a small filip—was all it took for her to get started. Music played in her mind as she slowly stepped ahead, raising her arm over her head and tilting her chin up before standing on her toes and leaping gracefully. Her warm glow began to permeate the clouds, golden little glowing crooks that progressively grew through them now starting to become visible.

Good Morning's eyes opened and she smiled slightly at her progress, gradually getting more and more into it as she got a hold of the situation. She leapt, she pranced, she spun and she danced; oh, she danced, until she was sore and tired with a relieved smile, looking above.

The clouds were no longer dark, spirits lifted by graceful Good Morning's dance of return. Their blissful performer of the sky was back with spirit even stronger than before, and they couldn't help but cry out of happiness.

"No, no, don't cry," Good Morning started reluctantly, a little nervous laugh bubbling from her shaking her head. But she realized their tears were a good thing. All the snow had melted from the ground, but the ground had been left thoroughly infertile and arid. Trees and flowers practically seemed dead as well. The tears of the clouds were settling into the drought and replenishing its life, plants rising back to life in their lush, green glory. Beauty had been restored, and when the rain stopped, people excitedly looked out of their windows before rushing outside to revel in its return.

Good Morning grinned, euphoric within yet physically worn out, about to fall and lose her balance again. She stumbled and staggered before tripping over her own foot and falling back with flailing arms. A strong force, however, seemed to have caught her, and wrapped her in a warmth that was unfamiliar but so welcoming, so *alive*. Slowly, through fluttering lashes, Good Morning looked up, and saw a face that seemed utmost familiar, the person holding her against his chest with both arms securely and protectively. Oh, was he beautiful. Dressed in armor like a knight, his skin was cool and pale like porcelain, eyes a silvery blue that shone like untouched mineral pools in rich caves. His hair was brown and wavy and fell over his face in a way that framed it, like a work of fine art, handmade with precision by a romantic artist down below.

At that moment, when she looked up at him, it clicked.

“You...” Good Morning wearily began, “You’re the stranger I chased months ago... who disappeared without a trace...”

He frowned at that statement, brows arching in an expression that was firmly upset, but not with her; with himself.

“Allow me to explain to you why I ran,” he responded in a voice so smooth, just like honey, melodic and sweet; more pleasant than anything she had ever heard, “and to apologize for abandoning you. I shouldn’t have done what I did, regardless of my reasoning.”

“Well, what was your reasoning?” Good Morning raised a brow.

He paused and sat down with Good Morning still in his arms, before beginning again.

“My name is Good Night. I was a guardian for a king and queen many years ago, in a kingdom where the living standard was practically so high that even the impoverished owned a precious stone,” he recounted. “A bitter witch from a hidden village tucked away from our knowledge wanted to take our wealth for herself. To do that, she had to find a way to get the kingdom’s guard down, and to do so, she cast a curse on me to send me high into the sky where I could not reach the earth anymore.”

Good Morning was not as much weary as she was calm now, listening intently to Good Night’s story.

“Every now and then, the curse makes me fade in and out of visibility. I have a cycle where I consistently go from being visible to gradually invisible, back to visible and so on. It’s like a pendulum, you know?”

Good Morning nodded in understanding, not wanting to disrupt the sound of his voice.

“And during my periods of invisibility, I like to watch you dance,” he confesses with a shy smile and a slight chuckle. “But I’m ashamed of myself, for not being able to stop the witch from getting to me and the kingdom. It would be an embarrassment to show myself to you.”

Good Morning looked at him with big eyes, eyes that were chock-full of empathy and pity for the man. Yet she spoke nothing, just slowly slid her hand up his forearm, to his wrist, to grab one of his hands in reassurance. He gazed at her longingly and sniffled, tears welling up in his silvery eyes. She pulled him closer to her, draping her arms over his shoulders and letting him hold onto her and just cry. Just to let out what he had felt for so long.

When he seemed to have calmed down, Good Morning grabbed his face delicately and wiped away his tears with her fingertips, reassuring him with soft words of all kinds. Telling him he is not an embarrassment, a failure, and that none of this was his fault.

“I would like to spend more time with you, really,” Good Morning sincerely swore. “You’re my companion of the sky. One of a kind,” she smiled sweetly.

That caused Good Night to snort, grinning slightly and pressing his forehead to hers. “I’d like that as well.”

Many other nights occurred like this whenever Good Night was visible, whether that be fully or not. They met and did many things together; they talked, held onto one another, watched the people, admired the world from above. And most importantly, they danced. They danced in a way that caused Good Morning’s glow to illuminate Good Night’s armor, appearing to the people below as the moon, a guardian to all at night.

Even when Good Night was invisible to the eye, Good Morning still felt a warm presence that clung to her and lingered like that of the first time they met. And she knew that from now on, she would never be alone again.



A World Without Abuse **Matthew Stridiron**

This story is told from the perspective of a wife who faces domestic abuse from her husband, Ivan. It won third place in Safe Home's First Annual, "I Can Make Change" competition.

The smell of orange-scented candles hits me as I step into my dimly lit apartment. I can see my husband to the side, who meditates after a long day of teaching karate. Tea always calms him, so it is something I must do for him. Heating the water on my only cooking pot gets rid of the cold he dislikes. Mixing the herbal ingredients produces a life-enhancing fragrance in the midst of our somber apartment.

The tea's aroma doesn't take very long to get his attention. I don't have to say anything for him to walk to our small wooden table and wait for his drink. When I give him the tea, he only nods in approval and gestures for me to sit down. Such behavior has become natural and routine for us. I must act with amicable sentiment towards him, unless I seek to unleash his wrath.

"Ivan, I've got great news for us! My manager's giving me a two dollar daily pay raise cause of that large construction project I led. We got it done a month early."

Only after hearing about the raise did Ivan raise his head. His eyes widen at the realization of what this means, and it becomes clear he wants to learn more.

"Daily? Does this mean that..."

"Yes it does! I've done all the calculations before I left work today. If I save almost every extra dollar I earn for the next two months, then we should be able to leave this place for somewhere nicer. It's something we've both wanted for years, but I'm gonna need your help to make this a reality. Remember that money I lent you a couple months back?"

"Yeah. What about it?"

"You're going to contribute a little to make this work out."

That's where my plan comes to a standstill. Ivan gives me a puzzled look and lays his hand on his cheek. I know he's going to object, but I need to listen to his concerns. Without him, I can't get anything done.

"This place isn't all that bad actually," Ivan says.

"Yet you promised me you would look at other houses. We agreed that in a few months, we wouldn't be able to afford rent here. We can't even afford proper heating."

"Well, you've lived in worse places."

"What are you talking about?" I say.

"Remember your uncle?" Ivan grins.

I want to take several steps away from him for bringing up my uncle. He knows how cruel he was to me as a child. Everyday in my uncle's household, I was expected to follow all three hundred rules in his rulebook that demonstrates how to be respectful to other men. Whenever I broke one, my uncle pulled out his long leather whip and beat me. I still have some of the marks he gave me. While my experiences taught me to conform to his standards, it taught me one other lesson: women are powerless in the presence of men. I shake as I reply back.

"Ivan, please don't mention my uncle. You know he makes me feel weak because of his cruelty. You shouldn't bring up..."

Ivan's rage awakens. He stands up and slaps me hard on the cheek. I broke rule fifty-eight: don't tell a husband what to say. Ivan's sudden response knocks my breath away. Time stops around me. My tense muscles prevent me from moving at all, and I can only feel my burning cheeks.

"Never. Tell me. What to say." Ivan scolds.

Now there's nothing left that can change his mind. Just like all my other ideas, my hopes and dreams of leaving this apartment are doomed. I can only foresee my husband and I being swallowed by the enormous wave of debt we have. Now stuck in this house of horror, tears crawl from my eyes once again. Ivan, not wanting to see my sadness, directs me into my bedroom where I retreat under the bed sheets.

When I married Ivan, I wanted my children to have the childhood I lacked. I wanted them to look at Ivan and I with a smile and run to us saying, "Mommy! Daddy!" The division in my family, though, made this impossible. Despite staying together for over ten years, our marriage has never been "we" or "us;" it's always about him—Ivan. My children notice how he disregards us, but I still believe they can have a bright future if Ivan just abandons his cruel ways.

My role as the wife has kept me confined, isolated, and powerless within the work and domestic spheres. My friends outside of work keep whispering amongst themselves, "Why isn't she around us anymore? Does she want to be around us? Are we despised or not important enough?" Of course I want to be with you! I'm just trapped! Help me be free!

Worst of all, I can't save Ivan. People have noticed that Ivan's fantasy of becoming a legendary karate master has gotten to his head, causing him to be isolated. Not even his best friends know how to approach him, but I do. I want to help my husband; however, my actions are confined by the moral code I must obey. I shouldn't have to worry about breaking rules when it comes to helping my own husband.

If I were free from the oppression within my household, my friends, husband, children, and I would all benefit. I could finally go with my friends to do things we used to do, and when my children see their happy mother, hopefully their positivity touches Ivan's heart.

Better
Therese Fischer

I love March mornings
When the birds are chirping
The breeze sways, I've got all day
Buds are blooming

And nothing is warmer
Than the month of December
Sweet pine
Holiday time
Snug in my sweaters

But one thing is better, and that's you

My mind it's fine
I feel it racing like the wind
You win
I wanna know all the words to the song
that you play on and on, on and on, on and on
But it's my fault
And your call
You can't define fair at all

I live for the sunsets
The kind that you can't forget
Blazing red, yellow and pink

There's no need to think

Long walks on the beach
As far as the eye can reach
Soaking in salt, sun and the sand
Getting some time to tan

But one thing is better, and that's you

My mind it's fine
I feel it racing like the wind
You win
I wanna know all the words to the song
that you play on and on, on and on, on and on
But it's my fault
And your call
You can't define fair at all.





The Wind In The Orchard
Ashlee Scott

It swishes past
Night and day
Whipping around corners
and whistling through trees
Leaves scattering and
Papers swirling

It swishes past
Howling like wolves
Trees swaying
Leaving behind the fresh smell
Of blossoming apples
You are the wind in the orchard.

Marsh Birds
Isabella Catanzaro

Like the marsh birds suddenly in flight
she has left. Her departure
explosive and unforeseen.
Loving someone such as her is difficult.
But I can't help myself.
She will forever be in my heart.
I am her prisoner.
Her impulsive and fearless nature
makes her chaotic
But also feel free
Like the marsh birds.



Silence Child
Da'nayah Christmas

You silence my voice
Because I am a "child"
As if somehow
That makes me less intelligent
Unable to hold my end of an argument
As if my age means somehow
I know less than you?

You tell me to be quiet
Because God forbid
The "child" knows more than you.
God forbid I voice my opinion,
That I speak up because I care?

You tell me stop arguing with adults
Because it's unfathomable that the
"child" is right
I just want to pick a fight.
That's what it is, huh?
It has nothing to do
With the fact that maybe you're wrong?

No, of course not
Because you are the adult
And I am the "child"
So that means you are always right
And I am not.
And I need to just shut my mouth,
Right?

The Life of Her
Madison Valenti

The woman all alone
Sitting at a table
Where no one else was
In the corner of the café,
Shunned by a heartbreaking society
Because she was different.
She was blind.
All she saw was an empty void.
She wanted tea
To help soothe her emotions.
When she raised the cup to her lips,
Someone spilled it on her
And mocked her
For she cannot see
And the blind woman's tea cup
Was shattered on the floor.
Shattered like the mirror of her dreams.
For she couldn't see who did it
But even she saw
The horrible society we live in.

**Forward and Back
Leilani Catala**

**What you are talking about is brutal desire,
So I can only assume that
You have never experienced all that I speak of.
It simply cannot be true that
Desire could hold a meaning greater than any love.
For it is an accepted fact in society, that
Love is all that is to be strived for.
We must not waste life thinking that
A temporary desire is worth the time of day.
Do not allow them to fool you. Remember that
If you wish to discover true bliss,
You must search to find your other half.
Do not listen to those who say that
Love is impossible to find.
The truth, for many, is that
Love has opened doors once thought to be nonexistent.
Name one instance where
The love of another does not make a person complete.
But we must accept that
Love
Peeks out from the darkness of the night sky, as nothing but
A little silver slipper of a moon.**



Noir (an ode to *A Streetcar Named Desire*)
Milan Patel

**The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away.
The canary bird still sings as if she is welcomed. Her voice solemn, yet gay.
She feels entitled to spending hours in my bathroom and drinking my liquor.
She thinks that life is a highway, where she can just go down the long road and stop
Whenever she desires.**

**Whether I like her or not, she is my wife's sister.
She has no one, not even Shep Huntleigh for her to call mister.
She is greedy, self-centered, and slithery, like a snake. She calls me barbaric, but what is she?
The Napoleonic Code allows me to control her and put her in her place
Whenever I desire.**

**She ruins my poker and bowling nights and threatens me with a bottle spike.
How could I criticize her for losing Belle Reve. She was in such a terrible position, like
when she messed around with a seventeen-year-old boy and at the Hotel Flamingo for pleasure.
Yet, she thinks we are stupid enough to believe her struggle so that she can stay here
Whenever she desires.**

**Such a swine who disrespects me, my intelligence, and my race will regret it.
She has dug herself so far into the hole that she will continue falling through the endless pit.
I did not live through Salerno a lucky man to return to such a wretch.
I will make sure she feels the wrath she deserved when she first stepped foot into my household.
I will express to her the tiny spasm of man in contrast to the sustained power of the Almighty.**



Make America America Again
Anna Brozycki

**We've had this date with each other from the beginning!
You were tempered in steel and christened in blood-
yes, strength is the song you sing.**

**But I sing of your promise, your golden dream.
Stare into the looking glass and see what you could be.
Reflections of the past become the vision of the future.**

**Are you dying, or waiting to be born?
Perhaps you are both; a paradox, a beacon and a curse.
You are Death, destroyer of worlds.**

**You are Freedom, winged in the endless sky.
You are an ancient promise, a new promise, made in your people's hearts.**

**But not made in reality.
The world slips from your desperate grasp,
but you won't set it gently down.**

**Remember why your people sing.
Remember what the dreamers dreamed.**

**Quickly, before you forget!
The steel of America does not stain, but
Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are.**



