

The Rook

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The Rook

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Submission Information

The Rook accepts submissions from MSU Billings students and alumni.

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For Writers – *The Rook* accepts all writing including, but not limited to, poetry, short stories, novel excerpts, creative nonfiction, original translations and critical essays can be considered. Due to limited space, works are restricted to 5000 words. Email your written work as a word document or PDF file with only the title. At the end of your document, on a new page, include your name, email address, title of your submitted piece, and a short biography about yourself. Attach the completed file to an email to *The Rook* with the subject line: Prose Submission or Poetry Submission.

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A variety of positions are available including editorial, business, art direction / design and more. To join *The Rook*, send a message to therook@msubillings.edu with the area of expertise you are interested in, your name, why you want the position, and any experience and/or skills you have that qualify you for your chance to be on next year's staff.

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Sigma Tau Delta

Each year, Montana State University Billing's branch of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, sponsors a poetry contest for all MSUB students. This is a chance for students interested in creative writing to be recognized for the quality of their work.

Open to all students in two-year, four-year or graduate programs, the contest awards up to five cash prizes, and every winner also receive a certificate. The judges are faculty in the MSUB English, Philosophy and Modern Language departments and/or local poets.

Winning poems will be displayed in the showcase on the fourth floor of the Liberal Arts Building and published in *The Rook* and possibly *The Retort*.

1st Place

BRRRRAT

by Patrick Landry

Listen as the free-styling Scat Men go BRRRRAT.
The mouths create a band going Up, Down, Down,
Up, Down, Down, as if they're rehearsing their lives.

The short tight lipped man, blonde moustache as a natural cone,
He gives a Wan Wan — *muffled* — See his upper brass horn.
Listen as the free-styling Scat Men mouth BRRRRAT.

Then there's the drum man, the beat man. The Tappity
Tip Man — PPPPutting on the best damn SSSHow.
Up, Down, Up, as if their repetition slips a better life.

The strong one, tall and curved, he's the bass, our friend.
The deep bung —the BOOM — The fundamental drive.
Listen as the freeing scat styling men go BRRRRAT!

The last one, the falsetto. The keeper of the melody.
He slides through multi-pitched WEEeee's — Intoxicating.
Down, Down, Up, as if they're designing a new life.

Shoo-Doo-Shoo-Bee-Ooo-Bee, gives the finale of the show,
Carrying the harmony sharp and flat, loud and smooth
Down, Down, Up, as if they're telling us how to live life.
Hear how the styling-scat of the Free Men go BRRRRAT.

2nd Place

The War, Through and Threw

by Patrick Landry

You wish you held onto the ones you knew
Before the War. The ones you knew through
And through. Like Joe, the one you kissed
Before the War. The one you knew who
Got shot in the arm through and through.

You wish you held onto the few you knew
Before their score. The ones who threw
Away their tar, before the War. Could have
Threw your father's feathers onto deserters you
Knew through and through, before the War.

Nobody blames you, nor the ones you knew
Who threw their lives away. You threw, now through.
Like Clyde, the brother of your friend, your friend too.
He was new to the fight, but threw an ax harder
Than a bullet in the War. Goddamn, he's through.

Yet, you didn't go visit the few, who came back
Worse than you. 'Cept they lied, and layed there
'Cause before the War they knew whoever spit
Chew needed refreshing, and who stood won't come back.
'Specially your cousins. Cowards, through and through.

"Yee Yee" yelled a few, but you wish it were
Your cue to undo what happened 'tween you
And Joe, who left a bun before the War.
Yet you're falling undone, and his procession won't
Have you none. So, might as well take off

Before families collide, like on that Dixie line
Through and through. Didn't own, but didn't want
To give up their God given right to. But it was
A lie, and so was Joe's. But now you see him go by,
Casket and all, smile and jowl, through and through.

3rd Place

Captain's Log

by Brienna Barron

In your bedroom at 4 pm
closing all the curtains
asking “Is it dark enough for you?”

At your therapist's office
covering your mouth
saying “I'm all the help you need.”

With you in the elevator
jamming all the buttons
saying “I've got all night.”

On the bridge with you
breathing in the cold
asking “Do you think it's tall enough?”

With one hand on the wheel,
screaming in your ear
“Down with the ship.”

Honorable Mention

My Battery is Low and It Is Getting Dark

by Brienna Barron

For Opportunity

We're lonely.
We want to learn,
We want to stop being the only ones here,

But we aren't doing so well.
We might hurt each other,
We might break this place.

We're getting scared
We might not be here when they find us.
But now we've created you.

Hey! You wanna go exploring?
Of course you do,
You've been created in our image.

We have given you names
And metal hulls and metal brains
And we have given you names.

So if we blow up the planet,
If we are not here to greet them when they arrive,
Tell them your names.
They're important.
And tell them we said hello.

Honorable Mention

The Fault in Our Bar

by Patrick Landry

you're bored aren't you. no
help to that. but when dew
starts crawling, well, there ain't
no caress or bless to the blues.

your momma always sang loud.
she always bowed, real proud.
she always gave the rebel yell
low and respective in our crowd.

then comes the fault in our bars.
we was always caught, locked up far
from errors, thicker than stank,
some sort of trivial matter, quick tar

spread on the pavement for
staff to park on. we take chores
better than others ever will 'cause
we talk about the tits and scores

a brother will write down and get
in a dream felt *ménage á twat*.
'cept the gunny. he's tired.
he's fulfilled his sobriety lot.

then when your tight, tremendous
sister comes an' gives a horrendous
show but she cannot sing. ha! she can't.
all seriousness, i want her endless legs...

thus explains where we are. but
not for long. no one bright wears
nothing other than stripes, we know
where there's a fault in our bars.

Poetry

John Allenbaugh
Haley Barthuly
Lauren Christianson
Kennedi Ferdig
Kaitlyn Fouhy
Ryan Griffin
Raegan Harper
Owen Howard
Kaylee Kannegiesser
Ashley Keenan
Rylee Kremer
Maddison Lueck
Kennon Nichols
David Omen
LeAnn Omo
Rachel Pekah
Emily Ungefug

Paul Stanley and Paul McCartney in the Studio

by John Allenbaugh

Hey, you can't just walk in here like that,

Like you're Paul McCartney

Like you own the place, but,
you don't pay rent.

Like you're Queen Bitch, but,
I don't see a crown.

Like you're King Shit,
better get some paper.

Like you were born in a barn,
man, shut that door.

Like your shit don't stink,
but I'm holding my nose.

Like you've got a right,
who the hell are you?

Like you're God's gift
Whoa, we already have a bassist.

The Dead Speak

by John Allenbaugh

Broken bottles, empty chairs, feasting on a rabid hare,
Bulging purses, heaping bowls, living with a rotted soul.

Pig is sitting growing mold, another body getting old
Sacred riches, golden pens, justifying any ends,

Stolen fortunes, broken waves, forced into her early grave.
Curdled milk and clotted cream, witnessing the gruesome scene.

“Dirty rats, invade my halls, infest and nest within my walls.
Bloated corpse, stinking death, draws the rats with every breath.
Greedy hands, locking trunk, into the lake the car is sunk.
And then forever she will sleep, and with her secrets she will keep.”

But rats that live inside the halls,
Bore witness from behind the walls.
Bore witness to the evil deed.
Bore witness to the evil deed.

—Ixo

Opulence dripped from the walls, the table, the cold hearth with no fire. Forced
air kept the rooms hot now. Too hot, for anyone who wanted to be comfortable.

Dying to Enter

by Haley Barthuly

I follow the thread
like it will lead to a tiny escape in the wall it doesn't have to
be very tall just
dark like a secret, enough room to where my hands could rest and forget
about this body
and his body and his eyes on her body and it looks like I'm pinning
little red flags on
trees to remember where I've been so that perhaps I
could return if I
end up being unhappy, which for the sake of manifestation I
say is unlikely,
if change has no direction other than that which I allow it. Still, the
compass is too large
to fit through the door, so I hold it like a baby tied to my hip, while
the sun it frames me:
black and white bandit with a daisy chain noose. Marked by
the tug coming from
the other side, from that shadowy room draped in whispers spread thin like smoke
where all must enter
hungry and coughing, confused by the lack of walls, stunned by the nothingness
that once seemed like hands.

Face Paint

by Haley Barthuly

My soul is name-brand
as in westernized as in globalized as in
McDonalds erected behind the Roman Colosseum.

 The medium I hired eats popcorn with one hand, peeks through an archway
 to recall how the tigers felt very satiated & rolled over with ease
 once their stomachs were stuffed & the crowd had left,
feeling equally as satisfied. This gave us all a friendly
reminder of how beautifully anthropomorphized
our perspectives had become. Politics, Eric says, is all
 tigers & warriors & prisoners & never
 being able to distinguish exactly who is what & sometimes when
 one licks his lips you feel happy for him,
the way you'd feel happy for the schizophrenic
who had finally been diagnosed yet still refuses to take his medication
on the account that he loves the voices so damn much.

Another Day in Paradise

by Lauren Christianson

Another day in paradise

The summer sun surrounded by the blue sky beating down on me

I can almost feel my hair turning a lighter blonde

The creamy taste of the best milkshake

Which is often too thick to drink through a straw

The sight of figures doing backflips into the lake water while a faint summer song plays

The uneasy balance when I first stand on a paddle board

Which sometimes results in me giving up and sitting down

The sounds of Jet Ski motors as they glide on the lake

The unsuccessful time spent on the dock trying to catch fish

But instead catching splinters in my hands from the coarse wood which makes up the dock

The search for smooth rocks that are ideal for skipping across the water

The pastel sunset that is accompanied by cool air and good company

The near absence of waves when the sun goes behind the mountains

Almost as if the lake has fallen asleep

The smell of a fire burning as s'mores are roasted under the stars

Another day in paradise

The Piano Soldier

by Kennedy Ferdig

Wars fill soldiers full of fear and hate.
Some soldiers are crawling through hell,
While some wish to be at heaven's gate.
Some die in an unknown enemy cell,
While the rest of them walk away, scared inside and out.

A Russian soldier walks alone, occasionally looking behind,
His regiment is gone and he is the only one alive.
The ambush just 24 hours ago keeps playing in his mind,
He remembers the screams and the cowardliness that let him survive.
He hates himself as he thinks of his comrades he left miles back.

Gunfire in the distance causes him to bolt.
He looks back to search for the origin of the shot,
He trips on a stump and falls over with a jolt.
His foot hurt but he didn't want to get caught,
So he hobbled into a field where he knew he shouldn't be.

In the middle of this field, he thinks he is insane,
For what he sees before him, does not seem right.
He looks at the wood and the beauty of the grain,
Looking at the keys made of ivory so bright,
The piano is a replica of the one that, as a boy, he used to play.

Approaching the piano, his memory has a jumpstart.
His fingers touch the ivory keys and begin to play,
A song that brings him some true peace in his heart.
The soldier is astonished and in dismay,
Because ever since the war started, he could inhale and finally breathe.

Are You There, Craigslist?

by Kaitlyn Fouhy

It's me "Albertson's on 13th." If the manager sees this,
the attraction is mutual.

To the "Redhead at Laurel Walmart" driving a silver Mercury,
I would love to talk to you.

I'm "seeking an old friend" via
the classifieds. Real nice *gal named Allison*. Let me know.

"City Brew dude." Let's have a round
two. It's me Jake, by the way. *What color was your truck?*

Hey. I'm "Billings Peter." Trying to *find an old friend from Ball Bookstore*.
Ball cap, tall, who used to hang out in the back. Maybe you can help a guy out?

Exchanged glances at "Best Western/Southgate"
"You pulled up after me,
Grabbed your bags and headed upstairs
You looked back at me more than once
You had a work truck,
Full of equipment
I saw you headed back downstairs
I watched you grab a box from my room window,
I tried to come back down to catch you
But you were gone..."

(inspired by real-life "Missed Connections" from Craigslist: Billings)

Mid-Morning Aubade

by Kaitlyn Fouhy

I love waking up
to the sound of tires
on wet pavement.

My hand rests on my dogs
side, comforted by the rising
of his soft, steady breath.

The room filled with
a grayish light filtered
through green curtains.

The reward of extra sleep
outweighs running late.
When I finally sit up,

My first thought is:
coffee to warm
my body and mind.

Scooping the beans
that will shape my day
into the grinder.

The groaning blades wake
me up faster than the
espresso roast they prepare.

One tea kettle away
from getting my act
together. Still sleepy.

A few more minutes
before I can plunge its
sweet tar into existence.

Then, I will exist,
or at least
feel that way.

iPhone Slam Poem

by Ryan Griffin

I am your entertainment,
I am the blue bird that tweets
I am the alarm clock that wakes you from your sleep,
your flashlight that guides you in the dark
I am your movie time for superman Clark,
all the information you've ever known
I am your iPhone

Now these devices have done some great things from communication to socializing
even detecting diseases,
but this all in one seems to have missing pieces
with all this internet are we truly connected?
as I've looked around everybody is buried deep in their phones
we are holding it so much that it has changed our pinky bone
no service, no connection
no human interaction at all,
because maybe these cell towers have grown too tall
a shield for society,
a firewall

I am your inattention
I am your ADHD
I am the reason you lay awake and watch memes,
the device that blinds you from human interaction
A world without abstraction,
the reason you know nothing but just to look up information
The device that has taken over a nation,

iPhone 1 iPhone 3 iPhone 2 iPhone 4
Buying the exact same thing just for more
Apple really be playing y'all like a joke
Hey look I got the new iPhone but I'm broke
So if you bought the new iPhone and think you're big pimpin
Just know you're trippin trippin

Waiting
by Raegan Harper

I have waited, am waiting, and will wait.
Waiting for everything to align.
Waiting for my life to make sense.
Waiting for the random pieces to form a perfect puzzle.
Waiting, waiting, waiting.

But these things that I question and wait for...
What is my purpose?
What is my potential?
What is in my future?
They may never be clear,
May never come,
May never happen,
May never be.

I cannot wait any longer
For I would forever be
Waiting, waiting, waiting.

Metal Bird

by Owen Howard

A bird of metal with voice of turbines
Sits in a tree of waxwings and robins
Learning their songs of each color it dines
Streaming music box notes as they login

A bird of metal with wings of foil
Glides down from the tree to the park scene
Repeating songs it's stomped into the soil
Crying a child lifts the bird to preen

A bird of metal with the timeless heart
Dies with all its songs in the child's grasp
Passing, a bird-keep sees a heap of parts
Walking away, a blue chip in their clasp

A bird of metal will live forever
From its small world it will never sever

Nurtured by Nature

by Kaylee Kannegiesser

I am told by Mother Nature that everything I am as a person has been pre-wired and determined by maturation; that my whole life has been laid out since I was conceived. But I am nurtured by my family and friends telling me that I can be and do whatever I want; that I can choose who I am.

Nature explains my biological features while nurture explains how I act and behave.

Nature is when a boy is told, “You are just like your father,” but can nature then explain why he dresses as his mother?

Nature says that tall parents will give birth to a tall child, but what happens when that child isn’t given the proper nutrients or environment to thrive? That baby, who was predisposed to be “tall” by nature, is now far, far below the benchmark for height and weight because of a lack of nurture.

Nature says we follow our parents’ footsteps, but can nature explain how a girl is a first generation graduate of Harvard when she was born into a family of drug addicts? Only graduating because of the fact that she was adopted into a loving and caring new family who nurtured her to success?

I am told by Mother Nature that I will only amount to what my genes say, but nurtured to believe that I can amount to so much more.

Can nurture explain why twins, who were separated at birth, meet for the first time in their 20’s and feel more connected to their twin than to any mother or father who had raised them from the time they were born?

Children are born with an innate ability to learn language, but if their mother never speaks to them, then how and when will this ability be brought to the surface?

I am told by Mother Nature that biology creates a person, but nurtured to believe that relationships and experience create a person.

Instead, I say nature and nurture are one and work together to psychologically and physiologically create a person. Nature without nurture is like a person with a brain stem but without a brain; the person will still function, but will lack complexity.

I am told by Mother Nature AND nurtured on how to be me.

Fake It Until You Make It

by Ashley Keenan

We have all heard the saying
Fake it until you make it
Feeling broken inside but forcing that smile
Faking that laugh at a terrible joke

Surprisingly, sometimes when we fake it, we actually make it
We feel the love of others
The smiles and laughs becoming real
The depression sinking away for a little while

In that short time that we are actually happy
No pills making this happen
Genuine smiles and laughs coming from within
Hoping that life could always be like this

The moment ends
Awkward silence begins to ascend
The serotonin that our brain has released seems to be gone
The effects are disappearing

Then the faking it to make it starts to fade
The fake smile and laugh come back
More forced than the last time
The depression comes back close to the surface

missing **nothing**...

by Rylee Kremer

life was good. you were here and i was happy
then something clicked. i never really knew what it was.
i still sometimes wonder...
first you stopped all communication with me.
second you gave every gift i ever gave you back.
all of them thrown on my bed, i saw it and sobbed
finally you left.
and what i miss is **nothing**.
but what i didn't know was how strong it was going to make me.
it was a reflection. i saw the stronger me.
how did i not see what was to come?
how i did i let myself love you without getting anything from it?
i got **nothing**.
you received everything.
you're gone.
i'm strong.
and what i miss is **nothing**.
 now i'm alone.
 but alone and happy.
 and to this day
 what i still miss is **nothing**.

mimicry from:

kaur, rupi "138" from *Milk and Honey*. Andrew McMeel Publishing. 2015. Print. 138.

The Seed

by Maddison Lueck

We create our new beginning like a flower grows from a seed into a beautiful plant, open and free.

The little flower starts as a seed, small and ugly.

We enter the world meek, miniscule, and innocent.

It grows into a little seedling, searching for the sun's rays and oxygen.

We start growing into curious tots, searching for happiness.

The small seedling is soon a petite flower still in pursuit of rays of life

We are now moving along, still looking for the happy in life

Soon, the adolescent plant is a mature flower-bright, fragrant, free-

Soon we are sprouting into adults-eager, spry, free-

The flower has finally found the rays

We have finally found the happiness

And the flower knows it has given happiness to many

And we know we have given love to many

At long last the flower wilts but leaves seeds for the future

At long last we wither but have left happiness for the future

Derelict Heart

by Kennon Nichols

Isolated for differences,
scared and lost in your own skin,
caught in self-imposed thrall.
Imposed for nothing but self-doubt.

Who can accept this?
This self-sapping derelict heart.
No, no one may see within.
Hide and conceal a poisoned mind
until artficed smile is purest that's shown.
Isolated in a crowded room
by the ramparts built 'round your own derelict heart.

Why love yourself when you craft your own prison?
The unforgivable sin of self-oppression.
Who do you hate when the only one you can blame
is yourself?
Who but yourself can be punished?
Who but yourself is to suffer?

Discontented Squirrels

by David Omen

Squirrels would make good lobbyists
Two show up every day at my house
I see them coming on Scotch pine tree
Then they are jumping on cherry tree
Stopping on cherry tree branch
Looking at the three bird feeders I made
Then looking hard at me in the window
Appearing to be very mad at me
They seem to be saying something.
We can't fly to use the bird feeder
They think I'm a bigot favoring birds
Eating off the ground they calm down
They actually may be thanking me

Growth of a Real Man

by David Omen

What is a real man's man?
The man who never cries?
The man who endures all?
The man who needs no one?

The truth is hidden from all men
All men are taught all wrongly
No one admits to this falseness
Every man must be really tuff

Men do not really feel anything
Men must ignore all real pain
Men to be tuff with no tears or fears
Men must hide heartfelt rejections

Eventually a man is forced to feel
Eventually a man is forced to need God

Seven Yellowstone Dragons

by David Omen

Muff the mighty dragon
Lives in the land of Yellowstone
Soars in the mountain clouds
Never being ever spotted

Luff the limitless dragon
Inhabits in the Yellowstone land
Flies in the big lake fog
Not ever to be ever seen

Guff the greatest dragon
Dwells in the Yellowstone
Wrestles the grizzly bears
Never will ever be noticed
By being protected by grizzly bears

Wuff the wealthy dragon
Resides in the land of Yellowstone
Flutters in the waterfall spray
Never to ever be spied

Buff the beautiful dragon
Stays in the Yellowstone land
Grazes with the buffalo
Not ever being identified
By hiding in the buffalo heard

Fuff the famous dragon
Abides in the Yellowstone
Hovers in the forest mist
Never ever will be discerned

Suff the silly dragon
Settles in the land of Yellowstone
Plays in the hot geyser steam
Never ever to be ever recognized

All these magic dragons
Get tired of their activities
They go hide sleep in cold dark caves
Then with red hot dragon breathing
The cave are heated to magma

All magic dragons live forever
That is how they had the time
To create the steamy geysers
With the other cool hot stuff
Enchanting the land of Yellowstone

Why Can't People Talk to Each Other?

by David Omen

Maybe no one sees anyone enough
Then we do not know them enough
Not knowing causes not knowing what to say
Not knowing them makes it hard to really talk

Maybe we always judge people
Why talk and then be judged
This being found lacking hurts
It is better to not even talk

Maybe we are all so different
Can't even find anyone like us
Think no one understands us
Why talk if not understood

Maybe we get used by talking
People use talking to control us
Talking to get things from us
Why talk when we will be used

Maybe it is about trusting
Finding people not trustworthy
People have lie to us in our past
Why talk just to be hurt again

Life

by LeAnn Omo

Life is too short to worry about the past
Too short to have a heart that resides in the past
Focusing on stolen kisses under a starry night

But life is long enough to have to worry about the future
Full of harmonious music
And days to spend in the sun

Life is too short to hold a grudge
Or count the wrongs that have been done to you

It is the only long enough to practice compassion
To learn how to forgive but never forget

Life is short
Live the life you love and
Love the life you live

Reoccurring

by Rachel Pekah

Furious beating of my heart.
Sweat dripping, hands shaking,
Roars splintering the air,

The door knob isn't turning.

Breath quickening,
Banging against the door,
The cold coiling and choking,

The door isn't opening.

Steps, far then near,
The floors are shaking,
Screams ricocheting off walls,

The shadows creeping closer.

Shared Spot

by Rachel Pekah

Sun shedding warmth,
Gritty sandstone beneath my grasp,
Sunshiny skies meshing with trees below.

Soft slithering invading my senses,
Constrained panic gripped me tight, stiff silence
followed, as forked-tongue tested the spot.

Shallow inhales strained to deepen,
Strenuously sharing space and sun, while
Staccato heart-beats slow
With each second spent.

The rattle on her tail stayed serene.

Blue Sweater

by Emily Ungefug

Everyone has one, come on, admit it.
It may not be blue; it may not be a sweater,
but you'll all know what I'm talking about.

The sweater who's threads are just the
right kind of soft. The kind that, when
worn, feels like that hug you've been needing.

It's that shade of blue that makes you
feel like you could walk out your front door
with your head held high, not worried about
what your hair looks like.

But all the great things about this sweater
are its downfall. The soft fabric gets tired, the
color fades, and there are only so many holes it
can handle before it falls apart.

SEPTEM MORTIFERUM PECCATORUM

by Emily Ungefug

We see the INVIDIA within you,
when your coworker gets your promotion.
when you scroll through those Instagram simulacrum.
when you feel the green monster lurking behind your eyes.

We see the IRA within you,
when your knuckles won't stop bleeding.
when you lay on your horn.
when your fuse gets a little too short.

We see the CUPIDITAS within you,
when you buy shoes you'll never wear outside.
when you won't round up your pennies for the kids.
when you replace your perfectly good phone with the newest model.

We see the SOCORDIA within you,
when you move on to your fourth season of the day.
when you run out of your snooze attempts.
when your phone is more interesting than your work.

We see the SUPERBIA within you,
when you won't admit when you're wrong.
when you always stop to admire your reflection.
when you refuse to see anyone else's progress.

We see the GULA within you,
when you go for a third helping.
when you hear the scrape of forks on ceramic over the bin.
when you ignore those starving kids your mom always told you about.

We see the LIBIDINE within you,
when you swipe right too much.
when you watch that 10 walk away.
when you just can't help yourself.

Shh...

by Emily Ungefug

I wish I could hide in the silence.
There's always time to bide in the silence.

Sit up straight, look alive.
There are no rules to abide in the silence.

A trip of the toe, a slip of the tongue.
No worries of pride in the silence.

Ordinary life, flourished here and there.
It doesn't need to be glorified in the silence.

Do this or that? Neither is good enough.
Push all the doubt aside in the silence.

Inner thoughts kept locked up tight.
Walls won't be fortified in the silence.

Not good enough, broken pieces.
It's never implied in the silence.

Peace, tranquility, stillness.
They all collide in the silence.

No need to put on that mask.
There's only me by my side in the silence.

Prose

John Allenbaugh

Shelby Anderson

Hannah Bauman

Korrin Dietz

Abby Hamilton

Sami Nesson

David Omen

Johannah Orendorff

Grace Shoyer

Carter Slade

Ashe Sperry

Lucas Sullivan

Emily Ungefug

The Rings

by John Allenbaugh

“Seriously, you coming by tonight, or what,” Charlie asked. His hair was starting to gray around the ears and sideburns. “We came to see you as much as we could but you know how Shelly hates hospitals.”

“Yeah, it's OK, Charlie, self-inflicted, remember?” he shifted and sat up higher on the couch, “If I can rope someone into driving me, I'll stop over tonight.”

“Alright,” Charlie stood up from the bed, smoothed the cushion where he sat, and handed Sam a small box, “I have to go. Training a new guy today. That's from Shelly and the girls, sunglasses. They hope you get better. What have the doctors said?”

“Good luck with that. Doc said they're gone. I completely burned out my retinas,” Sam said, “there's no fixing that.” Sam reached for his water. His hands stretched awkwardly towards where he thought the coffee table to be. He was off by a couple of feet and Charlie handed him the bottle.

“Thanks,” Sam said. His voice was like the sound of a subway train passing underground while you wait in traffic, “I don't know how to get used to this.”

Charlie knew Sam was not coming to the house. He never did anymore. Not after the incident. “Well, two years is a long time out here. You cut it too close too many times, was bound to happen.” Charlie said softly, “It was a moon, from Jupiter. It gave you a false horizon. I had the computer run the numbers. Thought you might want to know.”

“You were right, Charlie, I should've listened to you.” Sam reached up and touched the folded bandage held in place by the gauze around his head. “Doc says two more weeks with the bandages.”

“Just make sure you come and see the girls before they ship you back to Terra. They would be heartbroken. Well, for a day or two, at least.” Charlie walked to the door of the small apartment Sam was renting from the mining company. “Was it worth it?” Charlie asked.

“Tell the kids I said thanks for the glasses.”

Charlie threw a side-eyed grin at the trainee strapped into the heavy titanium chair next to him. “We get all types here,” Charlie said. “We get some come here to hide. It's easy to hide out, so far from anything. Terra is so far away you start to get all squirrely. The docs say it's something to do with magnets.” He jabbed a gloved finger at Jason's chest. “Your magnetic field, in there, it's not in sync with Earth. That's why you can't sleep.”

“I ain't hiding. And I sleep just fine.”

“Yeah right,” Charlie smiled again, “I’ve trained so many of you guys. My advice, take the full hour of detox and remagnetization every day. I know it’s hard. You want to hit the canteen and then hit the sheets, but you don’t sleep. I know. Every day, gotta be every day. I mean, my first two months I spent hours in there. I’ve been out here for ten years. Five years on the outer rings and I still do my 45 minutes a day. You know what that’s like, ten years on the rings?”

The man tried to speak but Charlie cut him off with a raised finger. “I know what the training told you. I’m here to tell you, determination, hard work, that means nothing out here. I’ve lived this long out here because I’m boring. I don’t take risks. I let the computer run the systems and the timers for the shield,” Charlie said.

The man squinted. “I just came for the money. I need the work.”

“Yeah, we’ll see about that, won’t we.” Charlie thrust his hand out towards the new guy, “Name’s Charlie.”

“Jason,” he grabbed the offered hand and shook it.

Charlie surveyed the numerous dials and pressure readings and flipped two red switches on the control panel in front of him. He picked up the radio mic, “Laura, sweet thang, you ready for us. We’re spec out here and ready to go.”

“You got it Charles,” a voice came back, “You are clear for takeoff. I got ya.”

Charlie hung up the microphone and pushed a different red button. “Hold on.”

The engine started slowly and sounded like gears grinding in a very broken transmission.

Jason’s face was contorted in horror and no matter how he tried; the fingers of his giant gloves would not fit into his ears. “Oh, oh no, wow,”

“Don’t worry,” Charlie said, “that stops in about an hour. After she warms up.” “What about that smell?” Jason asked.

“Well, get used to that. It doesn’t stop.” “How long until dawn?” Jason asked.

“Oh, there’s plenty of time. At least eight hours. We should be able to pull four or five tons of ore from the ice.” Charlie looked over at Jason, “are you ready? This is your first time, right?”

“I mined a little on Terra. And, a little on the moon, but nothing like this. What ores are we looking for?”

Charlie reached for the lever that started the engines. “Because there is nothin’ like this. And, the computers are looking for ore. Cadmium, gold, silver, gems, anything the computer wants. This rig once found a diamond bigger than Mt. Everest. I can recognize about half them now but, I have no idea what most of them are, or what they are used for. They found a lot of stuff out here on the outer rings and we go get it.”

Jason grabbed onto the handles that controlled the robotic arm and the drills. They were in a medium duty, ore drilling Alpha-suit. They called it a suit because it had arms

and legs and the miners sat inside the “chest” of the suit. The arms of the Alpha-suit mimicked the movements of the men inside. The miners wore gloves filled with sensors and could manipulate the drill arms by moving their own arms and hands. “Are we going to see...to watch...” his eyes pleaded.

Charlie shook his head. “I wondered when you were going to get to that. A little fast, most new guys wait at least a week or two. You that eager to die or go blind?” Charlie looked at him hard, piercing, like he was shooting an arrow, “Now, hear me. If you want to look at it, do it on your own time and with someone else. I mean, I get it. I understand the draw, but, it ain't worth it. Some things are only for the gods to see.”

Jason clamped his hands firmly onto the levers and locked them into place. The titanium plate in the front of the “chest” of the suit slowly rolled up and revealed a scene that left Jason's mouth wide enough to fit a cow.

“Like I said, nothin' like this,” Charlie grinned.

The sun had disappeared behind the giant planet in front of them and the computer said it was safe to work and it opened the visor.

Jason stared at the huge chunks of ice all around them. “We're so small,” he said softly, almost as if his normal gruff voice would destroy the tranquility of the scene in front of them.

“About a mile. That's how thick the rings are out on the tips where we are. If we were to get closer to the planet, the rings are much thicker. Hundreds of thousands of ice boulders. We only need to deal with thousands. And, find the right ones,” Charlie said. The computer read all the possible angles while the alpha suit swerved back and forth between the huge chunks of ice that constantly smashed into each other and sent them spiraling out in random directions.

“She uses the old propulsion systems but she's my baby. This is what I live for.” Charlie smiled like a kid on a new bike. “Next week, you'll be out on your own. You'll see, everything takes care of itself, mostly.”

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony started to play from Charlie's back pocket while he was standing in line at the grocery canteen on the space station where he and all the miners and their families lived. He juggled the bread, toothpaste, and the bag of potatoes into one hand and fished the phone out of his pocket.

“Yeah,” he answered, “really, didn't take long.” He ended the call and dialed his wife. “I have to run to the hospital wing and then swing by the office. Yeah, I have to file paperwork.

Yes, it has to be tonight.”

Charlie shoved the phone back into his pocket. He finished at the store and took a cab to the hospital wing.

Charlie walked up to the front desk. "Jason Duncan's room please. He's a miner." The man checked his computer screen and said, "Room 229."

"Thank you,"

Charlie walked down the hall and took the elevator up one floor. Jason's room was the third on the left.

"Nurse, is that you?"

"No, Jason, it's Charlie."

"Oh"

"Ah, Jason," Charlie said, "The Company will be shipping you back to Terra in a few days, when you are healthy enough."

"Charlie, Oh, Charlie," Jason turned his face towards Charlie. "I couldn't stop looking. The colors...when the sun came over the edge. Sunrise through the rings of Saturn. The light bounced everywhere. So many colors."

"Yeah, I have heard," Charlie said. His voice was flat, "But, was it worth it"? Jason reached up to his face and pulled at the gauze on his eyes.

"Jason, no, stop, Nurse," Charlie yelled and ran to the bedside, "Jason, what—,"

What Jason revealed from under the gauze were hollow burned eye-sockets that had taken the full brunt of unfiltered piercing sunlight magnified a hundred fold from bouncing off of thousands of chunks of ice that act like mirrors circling the giant gas planet.

"Charlie," he gasped, "I've seen what the Gods have seen. It's beautiful."

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

by Shelby Anderson

“Isn’t this fun?”

The sudden, cheerful squeak shakes me from my trance. The voice belongs to a young lady, same age as me. Her blonde hair is pulled back into a loose ponytail, and she wears the same dark blue overalls as everyone else, that remind me of a greasy, middle-aged mechanic. I fake a smile.

“Having the time of my life,” I say as unironically as possible.

“Just look around!” the woman said with genuine happiness. “We’re on the journey towards the rest of our lives! All of our friends are here, and there’s so much to do! You can dance! You can play games! The time is yours to seize the day!” She is so excited to be on the same train we’ve all been on for the last thirteen years.

“Yeah. It really is great,” I manage to say. I remember I used to enjoy this trip too. I used to wake up every morning wondering what sort of amazement I would find that day. As a child, the cars were more room than I knew what to do with. But I am trapped on these train cars, not allowed to leave until the trip is over. Now, there’s nothing left for me to do; I’ve done everything. All I can do is go through the motions along with the train and pray for some source of excitement or change. As I stand there I can feel the constant buzz of the wheels desperately grinding on the track on an unchanging, predetermined route. I hear the click-clack of the machine. Click-clack, click-clack over and over and over again. Always steady. Always the same. The train keeps going and never stops, until it reaches its destination. And what is that destination? Nobody really knows an exact location. All we know is that it’s a little light at the end of this dreadful tunnel.

For years, we knew the light was there. We always knew this train ride would eventually reach its end. But it was just recently that we have actually been able to see the light. It was small at first, barely noticed. Lately, though it has been just out of reach. My life has begun to revolve around that light. It is my last source of excitement. Everything I do, every choice I make, is guided by this little spark of golden glow. I pray that the light will be as bright as it is now when I finally reach it. I know without a shadow of a doubt that the train will drop me, along with everyone else, at its last stop. My only goal is to survive this train ride long enough to make it to the happy little light at the end of this unbearably long tunnel. But until then, I am on these unchanging tracks, part of the big machine moving toward its end. I am trapped in this long, dark tunnel, waiting for the day that I can finally be happy.

“I’m going to grab a bite for lunch.” The woman’s voice brings my attention back down to earth. “Would you like to come?”

I politely decline with the same fake smile. The girl shrugs and skips away, leaving me to return to my happy little day dream, where I can finally reach the light at the end of the tunnel.

Hear Me

by Hannah Bauman

Go ahead, tell me none of this is supposed to hurt me very much.

Tell me that everything I am saying isn't how I should feel.

Tell me that I'm over exaggerating.

Just tell me it isn't true.

Tell me that as I wait and wait for my phone to ring that it isn't supposed to hurt, that waiting for a text isn't supposed to slowly break me. Just tell me those white lies on why you were late with the smell of alcohol still on your breath. Tell me that at 3 years old you didn't leave me with a drug addict that almost killed me just so that you could go to the bar. Tell me that it was all just a lie. Let me know that you actually care; you do care, don't you? I thought after 4 years of pain it would be easier, I thought after 6 years that I was over it, but then after 8 years I realized that the pain doesn't get any easier, the hurt you made me feel won't ever go away, and the life that all my friends have will never be a possibility for me. I have finally accepted that you leaving never has been and never will be my fault. You left, not me and that has taken me 8 years to finally understand. After you left the first time it was hard, but I let you in time and time again, you let me down, you broke my heart at such a young age.

Just tell me it isn't true.

Tell me that I'm over exaggerating.

Tell me that everything I'm saying isn't how I should feel.

Go ahead, tell me none of this is supposed to hurt me very much.

*Sherman Alexie, *Indian Education*

A – Frame

by Korrin Dietz

The house was basically a green triangle, looking like an oversize tent to the eye. It was not directly facing the street. From certain parts of the street, the roofline came so far down that it almost touched the yard.

As Ross gazed at it from the driveway, he took it all in. The brick fireplace that towered on one side of the house increased its appeal. Perhaps what he found most interesting was the intricate stained-glass window with glass of blues, purples, and whites. It probably looked better from the inside and as the light blazed through. This portion of the house seemed like an awkward square add-on to the normal eye. The house was both gothic and garish. But to Ross, the garage and this square portion only added to the house he believed to describe every portion of him and his life. It somehow brought back memories while also promising a new life.

Ross leaned against his 2018 Range Rover Velar and let the memory wash over him. He saw the tall evergreen trees in the mountains. He saw the blue skies with fluffy white clouds. He smelled the hot dogs as they cooked over the fire and saw his family. He heard their sweet laughter and saw their smiles. He even saw their golden retriever begging one of the kids for a treat in the form of a hot dog.

Ross forced his eyes to open and break up the memory. He walked toward the white wrought iron door of his newly-purchased house, grabbed at the key to turn the lock and step into the entryway, the stained-glass window residing in the small bathroom to his left, and the large open-concept room on his right. This room included everything else: kitchen, living and dining space, and the loft bedroom. All of the essentials. The brick fireplace looked welcome and inviting sitting across from a plush leather couch. He could see the large windows in the loft which let in much light, though gaudy red drapes attempted to cover them. Those would probably be coming down.

As he sat on the couch, he noticed the quiet around him. There were no plodding feet of small children on the floor. No beautiful wife cooking dinner in the kitchen. There was only one bedroom, after all.

And there was no need for more than what Ross now had. Not anymore. But maybe he would get a German Shepherd.

Reflection in a Gas Station

by Korrin Dietz

As a mirror, I've reflected all shapes and sizes of people as they come and go through that door; glance at me and around at these dirty and dingy walls. In fact, I am rather dirty myself with worn spots where there used to be a clean surface. I am a plain and simple square mirror. Some people would say that I'm an antique, but really I'm just dirty silver hanging in this bathroom of a gas station.

I remember being in a garage sale placed in the dollar section because of my dustiness and what they viewed as dirtiness. My previous owners were so willing and ready to get rid of me. But then this woman walked up to me, dusted me off a bit, said "You're perfect" and brought me up to my old owners to buy me.

Was I a bit disappointed when I was hung in this dirty old bathroom that looks like it should be in an old shed? Yes. But the way this woman had said that I was perfect made me think that I would serve a greater purpose hanging here. A lot of the times I end up seeing the same people over and over again. So I'm pretty lonely most of the time. I believe that I do hang here for a purpose, though.

For example, there was this one time when a most interesting character came through that door. I still remember him as if it were yesterday. He came in and looked at me, almost as if he hadn't seen his reflection in a while, set down his grungy backpack, and then went to the bathroom, still gazing at his reflection that he saw through me. I tried to reflect what I could see in him: someone with a tattered life just barely holding everything together, but yet it seemed like he wanted it that way. He had dirty clothes, and an old baseball cap with long dirty blonde hair and scruffy facial hair. His face reminded me of a mix between the famous Hemsworth brothers that I used to see on the magazines as I gazed down from my place above a table in a young girl's room in one of my previous lives. The man had brown eyes that most would say are nothing too special, but I saw them for what they were: a deep pit of turmoil and heartache that I got the feeling he didn't share with anyone but me. He seemed to be thinking about something. He also reminded me of this person I heard about once in a past room as I was hanging: Smokey Lonesome from *Fried Green Tomatoes*. This was in my distant past. I vaguely remember a mother reading out loud to her young child, and for whatever reason I had liked the way Smokey seemed to engrain himself in the Whistle Stop community. The more I looked at this young man, the more I equated the two. With his tattered and grubby coat over a sweatshirt of blue, faded and well-worn jeans with spots of caked mud, but not too many holes, and even a bit of dirt on his face, the name seemed to fit the more I thought about it.

Then, like some do, he started talking to me. What was it he said again? Let me see if I can remember:

“Well, Chap; it’s been a long road of hitch-hiking with truck drivers and sometimes the occasional Good Samaritan with a luxury car. I even made it through that one rather dodgy character who wanted me to be his ‘partner in crime.’” Here he paused after putting the last bit in air quotes. His eyes got wide with the mention of this guy as he looked down, and I could tell the experience had shaken him. “I’ve got hardly any money, but need some food or else I’ll starve. What should I do now?” I remember his voice being younger than what he looked, yet a bit gruff, as if he had smoked cigarettes for a while or was trying to sound older than he was. I wished I could answer his question and tell him to be Smokey Lonesome, to be the person I thought him to be. Suddenly, a train came rolling past and blasted its horn. It was exactly the type of sign he needed, I guess, because his eyes lit up as he looked into his reflection. “That’s it! I’ll be like the old hobos and catch a ride on a train. Then maybe I’ll find a place to frequent like good ol’ Smokey Lonesome did in that one book...heck, maybe that’s what I’ll call myself from now on!”

All I could think was *yes, yes. That’s exactly who you are meant to be.*

“... a place to frequent like good ol’ Smokey Lonesome did in that one book...heck, maybe that’s what I’ll call myself from now on!”

The twenty-five-year-old male gazed in the mirror for a moment, assessing his reflection as if he was someone brand new. Suddenly he became aware of the possibility of people listening. *Man, I sound crazy talking to my own reflection in here. What this type of life will do to you, I guess.* “Well, thanks, Chap, I better get a move on!” he said as he walked out the door. It was almost as if he could hear the mirror faintly saying goodbye.

He walked around the little convenience store that his ride had dropped him off at, looking for some sort of food that would both fill him up and be cheap. He finally settled on a Snickers bar and paced with purposeful speed to the cash register line. Though two registers were open, each had a line of at least two people. With a sigh, Smokey stood in the one with only two, hoping it would go faster.

However, it was also close to the fried chicken, burritos, and Jo Jos they were serving behind the counter. Just the smell alone made Smokey’s mouth start to water, let alone the sight as the cashier handed a bag to the man checking out. *Nope. Nope. You have to save your money until you get to where you’re going. Maybe someone will be nice like the last driver was and buy you some McDonald’s. Or Taco John’s.* He kept listing the fast food restaurants in his mind until he forced his stomach to stop growling,

and then pulled out the small wad of money he had in his pocket. The man at the front of the line left, and Smokey took a step forward on his rather gangly legs.

While waiting for his turn, he took a gander around the store, and even to those in the line next to him. *How nice their clothes are. No holes. No dirty patches from the mud. They look warm.* There was one teenage girl in particular wearing a purple Carhartt coat that caught his eye. She had pretty blue eyes the color of sapphires that complemented her medium-brown hair pulled into a braid. She and her mother had gotten there after he had, so they were in the other line and just behind him. He decided to smile at the girl. The girl didn't know what to do or think, so she looked away, her cheeks flushing just a little.

"Next please," the lady at the counter was finally ready for him. As he brought his Snickers bar up to the counter and turned away from the girl, fumbling to get his money out of his backpack, the machine beeped as she rang up the chocolate bar. "Is that going to be all for you today?"

"Yeah, I've gotta catch a train."

"Excuse me?" *Man, her voice is gruff. Almost sounds like a man.*

"You heard me. How much do I owe ya?"

Surprised, the cashier looked at the total on her screen. "That'll be eighty-nine cents." But then she looked over at the fried food and below the counter and fumbled around with something that sounded like a bag, also stuffing the Snickers bar in. Lowering her voice, she said "You look starved, man. Here's a little something for the road."

Without looking closely at the bag's contents, Smokey grabbed the bag and handed her the dollar. "Thank you. Keep the change," and began walking out, winking at the pretty girl as he headed toward the glass doors that reminded him of a horizontal prison cell with metal bars across each glass portion.

Smokey had decided to continue on foot down the road, apparently called the South Frontage Road, figuring that the fence that stood as a barrier was bound to end somewhere. On the way, he had opened the bag to find a fried eggroll and a bottle of Coke. *Bless that lady!*

Finishing the food in what seemed like less than a minute and satisfying his hungry stomach, he had continually focused on where the tracks were in comparison to the road he was on.

After passing two interchanges that reminded him of cement replicas of the block-formation bridges he used to make as a kid, he came to a point where there was no fence blocking his escape to the rails. And there was a long line of tank cars, almost waiting

for him to hop on. So he jaywalked across the street and hopped up to grab one of the iron-barred ladders on the side. Already feeling lucky as he hung on with one arm he let his other arm and leg hang off in a jovial manner, the train gave a long wail with its horn and started pumping forward. *What timing!* As the train chugged along, Smokey felt the wind in his hair that felt like a glorious breeze of freedom. He could taste it, too.

The train went by an intersection with cars and trucks waiting as it passed, and many people stared at Smokey as he was on his rather slow but joyful ride forward. Smokey even caught the eye of an open-mouthed old lady with large glasses as he passed with his big beaming smile, and tipped his hat. Replacing the cap, Smokey looked forward to see another cement overpass which the train would be going under, almost like a tunnel. Once it had emerged, he was surrounded by different kinds of train cars. His hands tired, he realized he couldn't stay on this ride forever, and hopped off as the train rolled beside some other cars.

Getting up from the dirt and gravel, Smokey began glancing around one of the train cars, looking in all directions. His eyes settled upon a yellow and metal car that was open on one end.

The side had an emblem on it. *Union Pacific. Huh. I've always wanted to see the ocean.* He went to the open end of the autorack, checking to make sure no one was looking as he climbed in the first slot. While they were rather tight quarters, no one would suspect a homeless vigilante like the reborn Smokey Lonesome to be in an autorack. Lucky for Smokey, he had always had a knack for squeezing into tight spaces ever since he was little. And that was what he did as he inched by the loaded cars.

I wonder if these would be open. It sure would be nice to sleep on some padded seats. He tried the driver side door of the black car that he was by. It opened. *What luck!* And he carefully slid in, quietly closing the door behind him. Crawling in the back seat, he felt his tired body decompressing, ready for shut down.

Just before he settled in to his makeshift bed, Smokey glanced in the rearview mirror of the car, seeing his reflection as well as the vague shapes of the things he had already seen. He thought about the miles he had walked in about an hour. He thought about his new identity, the mirror in that small gas station next to the Interstate that was basically an old building painted with red and gray to make it look newer. He thought about the lady who had blessed him with extra food. He decided he liked it there, but there was no looking back now. He still had dreams of seeing the ocean; already planning to hop whatever trains he needed to in order to get there. He closed his eyes. *Maybe if I get bored of the ocean, though, I'll come back here.*

The Lost Pleiad

by Abby Hamilton

The flashing lights, trill of bells, and excited chatter of the thousands of workers aboard the Sirius Satellite were ceaseless. It never stilled. It grew ever louder, ever brighter, and was ever spellbinding to the outside eye. The people of the blue-green planet below had been fascinated with this incredibly bright star illuminating the night sky for thousands of years. They had created numerous mythologies to account for its brilliance: some say it was once part of a dog, turned to a star by a god, or others say it is a huge ball of gas held together by gravity. The workers of the satellites would sometimes read about these legends of the so-called “Dog Star” when they were in search of a good laugh.

Not that they often had free time. Work was constant on the Sirius. Wish granting was a never-ending task. There was always another person asking for luck, or money, or talent. Thousands of these wishes flew through the giant metal Reception door in the center of the station every second. These dictated copies floated through the air in the shape of golden paper airplanes before pelting to the first free wish granter. The thousands of workers below pressed elbow to elbow at meticulously kept desks, filing and answering wishes with the efficiency of a well-oiled machine. Sirius workers were expected to answer 45 wishes a minute or they were below quota. They had processed the most wishes in a year of all the earthen satellites the last 100 years running. This was why the Dog Star was the brightest star in the sky, the more wishes it received the brighter it became.

Sirius is the best place to work, the wish granters gushed to each other. Always so much to do, and so prestigious. So much better than any of those other stars. Could you imagine working for one of those lesser satellites? They jeered to one another. It was too shameful to even think about. *Especially those shell stars that were so unimportant they didn't even light up*

anymore. The workers would snigger to themselves at the thought and continue with their work.

The Lost Pleiad Satellite was as silent and dark as always. The flashing lights and trilling bells that indicated an incoming wish had not been activated in hundreds of years and Astrid could barely recall the sound, let alone the sight. As she trudged into the empty reception hub, her booted footsteps echoing around the dark cavernous space, she checked the reception door. It was as barren as it had been yesterday and the day before

that. Sometimes Astrid would check every hour, just in case the door had stuck shut and a wish hadn't been able to make its way into the hub. There had once been a time when this door had never closed, and now it never opened.

Astrid huffed a sigh and left the door to begin her daily polishing of the dark light bulbs and the silent bells. The only light source was from the giant observation window above her head that showed Earth and the six lit stars that were the sisters to Astrid's satellite. She unwittingly stopped in place, staring wistfully at those bright celestial bodies. They were brimming with workers and purpose: the two things she longed for above all else. Astrid was the only one left on the Lost Pleiad and she had been alone for hundreds of years.

This was Astrid's world; an empty satellite her only companion. She stared at the other wish satellites brimming with life and the planet full of people with wishes that never reached her. All she wanted was to help one of them. That was her wish: to grant someone else's.

Astrid finished polishing the glass case of a key mounted to the wall before halfheartedly moving on to clean the next lightbulb. She stared at the reflection of the observation window glinting on the light's surface. She could almost imagine that it was lit up because of the mirrored glow. She smiled at the thought and continued scrubbing.

"Ouch!" Astrid pulled her hand away suddenly. The light had burned her... it was lit up? Slowly, other lights in the room around her began to dimly flicker to life. Only about eight of them, but more than she had seen in centuries. The small tinkling sound of a single, small bell began to clear her mental stupor. Bells! Lights!

She jumped down from her ladder and was running the moment her feet touched the ground. The door! She slid to a halt halfway across the room as she was bombarded by a sight she thought she would never see again. The reception door slid open along its tracks and in flew a wish. The beautiful golden paper airplane circled leisurely around the ceiling of the room

before floating into Astrid's outstretched hands. She stared agog at the miraculous sight.

To the lost Pleiad or whoever is out there...

I've never wished on a star before, so I don't really know what I'm doing. But I read about you today. We are learning about constellations in school and my teacher mentioned the "Seven Sisters" but she said you can only see six of them because the seventh is lost. That sounded really sad. To be lost, and

everyone forgets about you just because you don't shine quite as brightly. Maybe not sad, maybe just really lonely.

I understand that. I also have siblings who outshine me. And people who forget I'm even there. I feel lost everywhere I go. Most of all I feel lonely... I'm so lonely and I thought you would understand me best of all, just like I understand you.

So that's why I went searching for you. I read about you and looked at star maps and found out about the best time of night to see you. And then I borrowed my dad's telescope and stared and stared. I waited for a couple of nights and tonight I just barely caught a glimpse of you. A dark shell in the sky. Just like me. I thought you would be the best start to grant my wish.

So here it is if you can hear me. I wish to not be lonely anymore. I wish to not feel lost anymore. I hope you understand.

And oh, my name is Perry. You probably need to know that don't you?

Astrid was staring at the monitor that showed the picture of eight-year-old Perry. It also displayed other information: female, one of three children, blond, American, full name Perdita Lewis... But mostly Astrid just gazed at the picture of Perry and how sad and lonely her eyes looked.

"I need to help her" Astrid muttered. *But how?*

She hadn't received a wish in hundreds of years. And before that... Well, before that Astrid hadn't answered wishes, she had filed and sorted them. Never granting. Just like every other wish worker. They had all forgotten their purpose. They cared more about the number of wishes than truly answering them.

She knew she had once been trained to grant wishes, but an eternity had clouded her memory. *A friend.* Astrid tapped her nail on the table in front of her. *She needs a friend.*

She realized she had also forgotten how to have friends. When the Pleiad had swarmed with people she'd been surrounded by many close friends. But as the satellite had slowly gotten darker and darker, they had left her one by one to work on other satellites until she was all that was left. She couldn't even recall their faces anymore.

Looking at the seldom-used monitor that contained the database of all Earthen information that every satellite was equipped with she called up a search engine, replacing Perry's information. F-r-i-e-n-d, she pecked out slowly on the keyboard.

The response to her inquiry was instantaneous. Millions of results flashed before her eyes. People in a coffee shop, people with linked arms, people with matching shirts, a stuffed tiger and bear, handshakes, running together, jumping, singing, laughing, fighting, crying, sharing secrets. Astrid jabbed out a finger quickly and the screen turned black, ceasing the overwhelming onslaught of information. She massaged her temples.

This is what a friend is, she thought. All of that is what Perry needs; I am going to give her the best friend ever! Astrid pushed back the sleeves of her green coveralls and got to work.

One week later.

What a disaster. Astrid had constructed the best friendship ever. They would meet at a coffee shop/movie theater/roller rink/lake/school/bus! Each was the perfect place to spend time with a friend according to her research, so she thought it would be extra amazing if Perry could meet her best friend in a place that was all of them together.

She had then discovered that a place like that didn't exist. *If only she could make one appear...* but she had no idea if she had ever even had that ability. So, she did more research about what friends did together. Listen to music, tell jokes, give presents, play outside, make crafts, sleep over, do each other's hair, dance, talk, climb trees. Well, all she needed was for someone to go ask Perry to do all those things! That was the answer!

But how to do that... Astrid had no idea. What was the point of being a wish granter, if she couldn't even help one girl? *There must be a way*, she concluded. Then she remembered something.

"Of course!" Astrid exclaimed. She stumbled out of her rolling chair, leaving it spinning behind her, almost tripping over her heavy boots in her haste. She dashed across the small research room tucked in the corner of the giant reception hub to a bookshelf with several copies of the same three books: Organization 101 for the Modern Wish Satellite, Statistical Analysis and Why Coming in First Counts, and The Wish Worker's Handbook: the 307th edition. She pulled down a copy of the handbook and cracked it open; the binding breaking for the first time, the pages fresh as the day it was printed. She scanned the table of contents for anything about granting wishes. There were pages on history, building relationships with desk partners, the appendix of the filing system, and chapters of rules. She turned to the first page and began reading.

Nothing. There was nothing at all. The history was a log of the greatest satellites and most efficient workers of all time. The rules were pages upon pages of laws regarding conduct aboard the satellites. The only mention of granting wishes was a small footnote reminding workers that "*granting wishes was a near-impossible task, and merely considering the wish before sorting it was the much more achievable and admirable mission of the modern-day wish worker.*"

Following this disheartening discovery, Astrid returned to her previous state: absently going through the motions. She shuffled around the reception hub, now avoiding the research room, cleaning the bells and lights. Only two of which still barely flickered with light. She tried to once again fill her mind with numbing fog, but it was always pierced by the image of Perry's lonely eyes. She stewed in the irrelevance of her job. She had once felt such pride for the position she had held for hundreds of years. Now her heart cried for the lonesome little girl who believed in Astrid's ability to help.

Suddenly, one of the two remaining lights sputtered out. Astrid stared at the last lit bulb. Soon it too would be dark, and Astrid would know that Perry had lost all faith in her. This thought made her want to quit for the first time in her life. She had lived hundreds of years mechanically working in a forgetfully ignorant dream where maintaining her lonely satellite was her sole purpose. But what was the purpose of her satellite? If a wish factory could not grant wishes it was useless. For the first time, her home truly did feel like a shell.

Astrid looked around and found that she had absently wandered back to the research room and was grasping Perry's wish tightly in her hands.

"I have people who forget I'm even there. I feel lost everywhere I go. Most of all I feel lonely... I'm so lonely and I thought you would understand me best of all, just like I understand you." She read over that line again and again. She hadn't realized before how right the girl was. Astrid was lonely; she just had never admitted it to herself. And now that she had lost faith in everything she ever believed in, she felt truly lost. Floating solo through space.

I understand you, Astrid thought. You understand me.

Astrid tucked the paper into the pocket of her coveralls and strode into the reception hub with a new-found resolve. She broke open the glass box below the single remaining glowing light and pulled out the encased key. A siren began to wail distantly in the satellite as the floor dimly lit up, indicating a pathway leading to a trap door in the center of the once great reception hub. Astrid followed the path and inserted the key into the door that had never been used in her memory. She wrenched it open, wincing at the sharp screeching sound, and stared down into the hole at her feet. Inside there was a clearly marked sign reading EMERGENCY EXIT and an arrow pointing down into the black abyss.

Perry was a creature of habit. She was sitting in the same park, on the same bench, under the same tree as she did every afternoon on her way home from school. The only thing that ever changed was the book she was reading. She was always alone. Never

joining the kids playing Frisbee or the people strolling barefoot in the grass; none of them ever seemed to notice her. No one did.

Until today. Perry didn't realize that someone was approaching her until a shadow fell across the open book in her lap. Perry startled up and gawked at the strange girl before her. She wore a green work jumpsuit and lace-up boots. Despite this, she looked only a few years older than Perry. Except for her eyes; her eyes seemed so old and sad. But her face was lit up in a bright smile that was aimed at Perry, who stared back in shock.

"My name is Astrid," the other girl said with a slight accent. "I'm lonely and need a friend. I thought you might understand."

Why I Write

by Sami Nessian

I Write for My Education

My education has always been something that is extremely valuable to me. I know that it is a privilege that most people do not get, especially women. I also know that what we are given so generously is not something to be taken lightly. An inspiration for me has always been Malala Yousafzai. Yousafzai is an empowering woman in the Middle East who has gone to extreme lengths to get an education. A favorite quote of mine from her is “The extremists are afraid of books and pens. The power of education frightens them”.

Your education is your voice in the world and how you can make a difference. Writing is such a powerful tool in this big and intimidating world. Writing is something that stays forever; it can speak to people without saying a word.

I have been raised on love and to give all that I have into everything I do. Not everyone has had this similar advantage in life. Writing is underappreciated, something most take for granted. I have met some of those who have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write. At a young age being forced to work to help support their families, stopping their education at age 6. I have seen the struggle of them trying to read instructions, and then instead resorting to acting out the pictures that are shown. I wish for everyone to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. Write for 10 minutes a day with the pen and paper you have easy access to. Take that extra ten minutes out of your day to absorb information and bounce ideas off of the teachers. Every single one wants you to succeed. The only person stopping you from progressing is yourself.

My First Yoga Class

by David Omen

I was in my first yoga class and it was a really scary dark room. I think I was the only man. Maybe the man that I would later hide in a dark corner with was there. We didn't want the yoga ladies seeing what we were doing. That is not being able to do yoga. There was a bunch of women in this dark room with candles. They were talking about the life force coming in people. I was wondering, if I was with witches about to cast a life force spell on me. Do I want this life force in me? What is this life force? The yoga lady teacher then started putting us in yoga poses.

When we got to the triangle pose, the yoga lady teacher said, "This is a good pose to get the life force in." I'm thinking, finally, I will find out what this life force is. The yoga lady teacher comes and adjusts my triangle pose and it hurts even more. I then decide I'm safe in yoga class. This life force is only pain. I have only run 28 marathons and over 600 races in my life so pain is nothing. I'm already full of the Life force and no room for more life force to come in. I'm still going to yoga classes and feeling the pain so I must be overflowing with life force by now. I must even have more life force in me than any of the professional yoga ladies that can really do yoga. This life force was all collected with me being really bad at yoga.

Silenced

by Johannah Orendorff

The lone Tyrannosaurus was wandering the mountainside. She was extremely tired and heartbroken. Her last offspring had passed away, shortly after hatching from the egg, and she had already killed her mate. She was known as Widow by the local herds, because she has killed three of her mates, and she was avoided at all costs. She was alone now on the mountainside, with only the silence to keep her company.

It was a sunny day; Earth's first flowers were blooming, giant ferns were waving in the wind, and a new yellow bug, called a 'bee' was buzzing about. Life looked as if it was flourishing, but in truth, the ground was extremely dry. The seasonal rains had been overdue for a few months now, except for the odd heavy rain that lasted two minutes, and the watering hole was drying up. The herds of different herbivores were moving on to cooler, lush areas of the continent where they could get their fill of food, and rest for a few days without being hunted. However, a few straggling herds remained, so the predators were now competing for food for their offspring. All except Widow. She was tired and thirsty, so she went straight for the watering hole, ignoring all of the smaller mammals that scurried out of her way.

During a drought, it is very common for predators to ignore their prey whilst drinking. The predators and prey will drink the water together in perfect harmony, no longer in fear of each other, for they know that the water is more important to their survival. Widow went to drink the cool, clear water, along with some lost Triceratops, happy and content. She wasn't going to provoke them if she didn't have to.

Triceratops, along with many other ceratopsids, were dangerous creatures. Large, tank-like animals with a massive, fan-like frill jutting from the back of their skull, coupled with two long, spike-like horns protruding above their eyes, with a smaller, triangular horn above their nose. They had a temper, and they could leave a predator with a serious, even fatal injury. Widow herself had a large scar on her leg where a similar dinosaur had impaled her just a year ago.

After she drank her fill, she left the watering hole and went to the Plateau. The Plateau was a dry spot of land that rose up above the valley and contained some caves, one of which Widow lived in. She came to the top, and looked over the land. Along the bottom of the Plateau, the wide, green valley ran as far as her eyes could see. South from the Plateau was a large lake, filled from a river that leads directly to the ocean, now only half-full from the drought. Pterosaurs roamed the skies, squawking at every animal they flew over, and giant herbivores wandered the wide valley searching for greener food.

As she turned to go into her cave, she felt something. She felt as if, the winds had changed, and everything was going silent. She looked around, sniffed the air, just to be sure that nothing was stalking her. Even large predators like the Tyrannosaurus can become prey. Once she was sure everything was alright, she turned and slept in her cave.

Something was happening, even as she slept, and it wasn't good.

When she woke up, the sun had dipped to a low point in the sky. It was probably close to three hours before dusk. She sniffed the air, and took a long look around the broad, endless, dry valley. There were a few patches of green, and in those patches she could see some small herds of Edmontosauruses getting ready to lie down and sleep for the night. It was time to start hunting. If Widow didn't start hunting now, the valley would be full of Dromaeosaurs, pack hunters with terrifying sickle claws on their toes, stalking the sleeping herbivores. If enough Dromaeosaurs were around, they would overrun Widow, with their sickle claws and sheer numbers, and kill her quickly.

But just then, as she was turning to go down to the valley, she sensed something. It was that same feeling that she got earlier, but it was more unnerving. She felt like this might be the last time she would hunt, but she wasn't sure as to why she felt that way.

Curious, she looked to the sky. That was when she saw it. She saw a yellow glow coming from the sky. It was bright, almost as bright as the sun. It wasn't there before, so what is it? she thought. She ignored it to the best of her ability, but she still felt like the valley was too silent, and that the world was quietly collapsing with each passing breath.

Down in the valley, all is quiet. It is twilight, and Widow is quietly stalking a lone, old Edmontosaurus. She was about to start the chase when a bright light flashed in the night sky, followed by a loud, thunderous boom. Everything went silent. All of the dinosaurs looked south toward the light. It was brighter than the sun. Widow felt something, like alarm bells going off in her head. That same haunting feeling she got earlier. She now knew what it meant. If she didn't leave, she wouldn't survive. She turned and ran.

A massive shock wave came crashing through the trees, knocking Widow and the Edmontosaurus down on their backs, bursting their eardrums. Widow got up as fast as she could and began to sprint north. As she was hurrying along, she bellowed a deep and powerful cry. She was warning all of those that she could to turn away and escape. Some understood her message, and the entire valley burst with life. Every creature that had legs was galloping out of the valley. Every creature that could fly was flying away. Every creature in the great lake was swimming down into caves and crevasses to escape the danger.

An aftershock hit, knocking more trees and animals down. Widow was running as fast as she could, charging over bushes and smaller animals, pushing through trees, hurtling over rocks. Just as she thought she would make it to safety, the ground opened up underneath her. The earth began to swallow trees, rocks, animals, and everything that was in its path. Widow was able to grasp onto a small tree trunk with her powerful jaws, and pull herself up out of the tear. She finally pulled herself out and darted as fast as she could to her home up on the Plateau. By the time she made it, there were rocks falling out of the sky, some as large as boulders, hurtling into the ground at high speeds. Widow was able to make it to her cave, but just as she got there, her world went black.

When Widow woke up, she was neck deep in the pile of rubble that used to be her home. She woke up, but couldn't see. The world was covered in flakes of dark dirt. The sky was black. It was hot. Once she let her eyes adjust, she saw the horrors that the falling rock had brought. From her vantage point up on the Plateau, she saw grey ground. All the animals were buried or crushed by ash and rock. The trees had been uprooted by the shock waves. Spots in the valley were on fire. The lake had begun to wash down the new ravine that had formed as a result of the blast. She looked to the horizon. There was nothing but red and yellow flame licking the trees and turning the sky to a silty grey.

Widow walked around the Plateau to see what damage had been wrought. A large chunk of the Plateau had fallen down into the new ravine that now split the valley in half. All of the caves in the Plateau had caved in, much like Widow's own. She looked back out over the once great haven for dinosaurs, big and small. No pterosaurs roamed the skies, no herbivores roamed the grasslands, no lake shimmered in the sunlight. Widow let out one deafening, sorrowful roar to see if any creature had survived. All that answered her was the silence.

Adam

by Grace Shoyer

Adam,

I knew I would miss you when you were gone, but I didn't expect you to be so gone when you came back. We could have been strangers.

You used to be fragile and that was a good thing. Talking to you is still like pulling teeth.

It used to be because you were shy. Now it's because you have secrets.

You said the three rules of boot camp were Be Fast, Be Loud, and Follow Orders. But I can hardly hear you and you're slow to joke with me- slow to laugh. It used to be that every sentence was punctuated with a laugh- at least a smile. I mourn the boy I knew. A calloused man has grown where he stood.

I'm afraid that the pessimistic people around me are right. They say the Marines are especially known for breaking their recruits and molding them into the perfect soldier-like Adam out of clay, but you were already Adam.

Love,
Forever and Always

Different Types of Car People

by Carter Slade

After I complete my homework, I lay down to watch YouTube videos from some of my favorite artists. On the homepage, I am met with titles such as “Car Guy Stereotypes” and “Different Car Enthusiast”. Upon reading these titles I think of the various types of cars I see at meets around town. Each owner differently crafts and modifies a ride to fit their needs. In reality though the mods, looks, and people are the same. For those reasons, people fall into three categories: the appearance person, the tuner, and the ricer.

Appearance Car Person

An appearance person bears a ride in immaculate condition no matter the day. With a car in basically factory condition: not a speck of dust will be sighted inside or out of their vehicle. If a fingerprint was to be detected on any unwanted surfaces, then it would be immediately wiped away with no traceable evidence that it was even there. These cars remain in garages as much as humanly possible where the owner will wash, polish, and detail the car. The car in question they drive must be, undoubtedly, pleasing to the eye. The owner will, most certainly, clean the engine bay so splendidly that meals from a five-star restaurant could be served on it. An interior of elegance must come standard within the car. People will turn their heads at breakneck speeds to get a single glimpse of the beautiful car rolling down a street. Lights from cameras will constantly be going off to catch the beauty that would blind the driver of the car if they were not wearing shades. As the car sits in the sun at a car meet, people will be caught off guard by the magnificent, glossy paintwork on the car. As the day moseys along a crowd will accumulate over the car like vultures waiting for their prey to keel over. The spouse of this person will certainly display jealousy towards a car that receives more attention.

Tuner

The tuner type will push the limits of what a car can be. They are infatuated with enveloping their hands dirty and having a tool in their hand. Tuners mod a car to resonate vicious, yet pleasing sounds to them. If this person were to ever take their car into a shop, you may need to check if they are feeling alright. One day they may be swapping the suspension, the next they will be installing a larger turbo in their car. A slow car such as a Toyota Prius with a little inline 4 engine, in their mind, could be

changed into a V8 twin turbo monster with the right modifications. Usually, though, they will stick to easily moddable cars that either originated in Japan or inspired by Japanese cars. A tuner car on the outside will be a sleek and aerodynamic looking. For a tuner, they express their creativity by making a unique ride. Many people will enjoy listening to the reasoning behind particular mods. Along with this at a car meet, they will often not challenge others to race them, unless it is for fun or to show up a smack talker. Once a tuner creates their perfect build on a car, 3 months later they will be onto a new project car.

The Ricer

What can be said about the ricer? The ricer . . . well, the ricer is a person who fantasizes about driving cars from the “Fast and Furious” and scoring with a hot chick. They buy the most useless \$50 mods that do nothing but add to how crappy the car looks. In their minds, as they put on various types of stickers they think “This should add 5 horsepower to the car”. If you hear a fart can it is a warning that a ricer is coming. When installing a spoiler onto their car to them the larger the better. It does not matter that the spoiler may not add to the usefulness of the car, spoilers only add to the style. The rims on the car will cost more than the car itself. Instead of a turbo, they will install a turbo whistle to make their car sound as if it were fast. When they do install a mod that could increase their car performance, they screw it up by installing the mod incorrectly. Ricers will only know the basics of cars, but when it comes to something that they do not know they will over confidently give you the wrong answer. If they acquire a car that comes with VTEC, they believe that no one will ever be able to beat them in a race. At car meets, they will always trash talk other peoples cars, and if challenged to a race will always make an excuse to get out of the race. The car community enjoys a broad spectrum of different groups to include, but when it comes to the top three these are the ones that come to mind for everyone. The appearance person a knit-picky individual that keeps their car expertly maintained no matter what. The tuner who loves to work on cars, pushing the limits of what a car can be. Certainly not last, the ricer who thinks hood scoops are for every car and putting a body kit on their mom’s Honda Civic is an excellent idea.

Hunger

by Ashe Sperry

“We ate it day after day and grew,”* we ate nothing but lies. Lies told to us by the people we were supposed to trust. The people we voted into their positions. False promises of futures better with them. Saying we will fix what has been broken. They lied to us those days we sat in front of a television and watched ad after ad. Each ad had nothing really to say except a dig on the other candidate.

There was no information it was just bashing and we soaked it in to blind to see what was coming.

Now these people that we voted on are in office these people that we don't even know. And yet they have control of most of our lives. There are checks and balances but they're only really controlled by how much corporate businesses pay them. Whether that be “campaign contributions”, or through their marketing campaigns. These government officials changed from what the framers set up. The two party system of democrats versus republicans has turned into just that. A battle between the two, there is no idea of a compromise left it's my way or the highway in their minds.

Somehow that is the world we live in now. The world is always changing and evolving to new heights. At this point there is so much tension and worry. Foreign country's at each other's throats over resources, developed countries forgetting the struggles of developing countries, and finally conflict and strife just between ordinary people. We come accustomed to conflict and we live for the show whether that be the drama the suspense or the gore. We sit in front of the television and watch crime shows, glued to the TV. We like the suspense and the worry of what's going to happen next. Not only that but what would we do in the situation how would we react. We sit and try to direct the television to the outcomes we want or what we believe is best. We assume that the struggle is fake that people are not starving as we sit lazily by chowing down on a McDonald's burger. We believe that we have all the answers and yet we sit idly by not helping just believing we know everything.

*From Sherman Alexie, *Indian Education*

Naked

by Lucas Sullivan

Unfortunately, there is a well-documented duality that exists on and about a blank piece of paper. Whether that paper has lines, accents, frills or even folds, like a naked body, there is a sense of excitement upon seeing any naked piece of paper, especially when presented in an enticing situation. Except, of course, the paper's roses and wine or champagne are a sturdy desk and a pen or pencil. Regardless of its maker's natural and intended marks, the paper, like the body, when presented so invitingly, tempts even the most devout writing abstainer into jotting down a line or two. Similarly, this temptation exists, while barely spoken of, in active writers, who are working on other pieces presently, whether those are stories just begun, ones an author has been writing and grown bored of, and even pieces that are authors' lives' works, which they still love very much, yet have become frustrated with or tired of on a lonely night after a hard day's work.

Of course, the excitement cannot last forever. Even if the first stroke of the pen is wonderful, and the following sentences beautiful, the slow creep of boredom returns. The author reads and rereads the words written and, while the writing of them invoked a sense of righteous euphoria, upon review, they read just as every piece the writer has ever written has ever read. Here inlies the duality. The blank piece of paper holds it temptation, for most, only as long as it remains blank. This can prove to be disastrous, and the most tragic of these affairs are those when quality paper is wasted and crumpled with short, sweet attempts at beautiful stories printed upon them. Certainly, there are less tragic, yet equally unfortunate instances, in which a poor and flippant author leaves behind him a trail of thankfully unwritten works. Yet which each abandoned creation, a piece of paper is left crumpled, also.

Despite the beauty, temptation and tragedy surrounding a blank piece of paper, there also exists an equally recognizable, yet less achievable magnificence on and about a paper which contains meaningful works; always, in my opinion, things which should be regarded as art. Regardless of subtitles like author, drawer, painter, or poet, artists know the value and potential each blank piece of paper holds, as most of us do. The artist's difference reveals itself when we examine their behavior towards and treatment of their art and the paper on which they compose it. The artist may become frustrated, but never leaves nor deserts his art. The greatest artist, too, makes mistakes, yet their distinction lies not in their lack of regret, but the lack of crumpled pages left behind them and the absence of erasings upon the page. In these ways, when the artist crafts his art onto a piece of paper, he does not only retain the paper's beauty, but evolves it, forever enhancing and sharing the duality of the two; the artist and the paper, without which, there can be no art. We should all be so lucky to find our artist.

Halos and Horns

by Emily Ungefug

Sometimes I really wished alcohol worked for me. That would make the whole situation so much more bearable. Even if I wanted to act drunk, and no one would question it, what would be the point? I suppose the bar had charm, but the wood paneling on the walls was warped and tired, sagging down from the ceiling in places. Most of it was filled with the regulars, drunks who could barely manage to hold down a job instead of spending their entire day here. Cracking my neck, I pulled the pack of Marlboros out of my leather jacket, tapped them against the palm of my hand and stuck a cigarette between my teeth. The acidic scent of butane hit my nose as I lit the end of it. Might as well do something pleasant while I waited.

“You can’t smoke in here, man.” The bartender lost his nerve when I scowled at him. You’d be surprised how much you can get away with when you have an effective glare. The calming burn was familiar in the back of my throat, though it didn’t help to ease the boredom. I took another gulp of the whiskey in front of me, wishing I didn’t have to be in this dive bar on open mic night, even if the ear-numbing chatter of the people around me helped tune it out a bit. My foot bounced against the brace on the barstool as I looked at my watch.

“Do you have to do that?” I rolled my eyes, exhaling a mouthful of smoke after another drag. It would be stupid for me to think that I would get to work this job alone. Celeste hopped onto the barstool to my left, looking extremely out of place with her cream-colored sweater and platinum blonde hair. Of course they would assign us to the same case.

“I mean seriously, just because it can’t hurt you doesn’t mean you should do it.” I glanced at her from the corner of my eye to see her bright gaze burning a hole in the side of my face. Another lungful of carcinogens left my mouth and conveniently, she was sitting close enough for the smoke to float toward her like a friendly breeze. She glared poison at me and waved it away from her face.

“Grow up, would you?” she snapped.

“Hello to you too,” I said with an eye roll and another swig of whiskey as the bartender noticed my company. Celeste was much more inviting than I was, so his face brightened when he walked up.

“What can I get for you, sweetheart?” he asked.

“Laying it on a bit thick there, buddy,” I muttered to myself around another drag. Celeste drove a quick elbow into my side, forcing me to exhale before she turned a sickeningly sweet smile on the poor bastard. Her voice dripped honey.

“I’ll have a Blue Hawaiian, thanks. It’s on him.” Her charm radiated like an uncomfortably close space heater.

“You got it,” he replied with a wink and a smug smile before disappearing to make the Smurf drink.

“So I’m buying you drinks now, huh?”

“But really, why are you smoking in here?” Celeste asked, ignoring my question and backtracking. I shrugged.

“I’m bored and wanted something to do. Plus, I get a kick out of how much it ruffles your feathers.” The bartender came back with her neon blue cocktail, complete with the little umbrella. I earned another glare from him as I took a drag.

“Let’s just hope this guy shows up soon. Sitting this close to you is sun-bleaching my jacket.” She frowned, an expression that didn’t fit her face, and looked down at her hands.

“Why are you always such a jerk?” Her soft voice carried over all the noise.

“You’re really asking me that question?” I chuckled. When she didn’t have a snarky comment for me, I sighed, blowing smoke out my nose like a dragon. “Demon? It’s in the job description.”

“Doesn’t mean you have to be an ass,” she muttered under her breath before sipping from her brightly colored straw.

“Whatever, babe,” I said, taking a final drag before snuffing the cigarette out on the bar top. A small vein in the bartender’s forehead pulsed as he watched me. I shrugged with a cocky smile.

“Really?” she barked, annoyance clear in her voice. “That’s disgusting.” I chuckled.

“Well, at least I’m not smoking anymore,” I quipped back, shrugging with a cocky smile. Celeste rolled her eyes, and the bartender’s face turned an unhealthy shade of red as he overheard.

“Then she told me that Jacob said-” Celeste chattered aimlessly next to me, her feet swinging as they hung over a foot off the ground, not even reaching the footrest. She already caught me up on her life since the last time we worked together, and even though it had been almost 200 years since we were first assigned to the same case, she still hadn’t realized that I didn’t give a shit. The bar was bustling now, all of the regulars sitting in their usual spots completely drowning out a local band. There were a few stragglers who had wandered in from the street, melting in with the usual patrons who were avoiding their problems.

“I wonder why this is taking so long.” Finally, something she said had actual relevance. She finished her third drink and was absent-mindedly stirring her little straw around.

“Maybe he’s just not going to show up,” I said.

“Stop it, Ethias. He has to.” She chewed on her bottom lip, a long-time sign that she was more worried than she let on. I shrugged, pulling in the past puff of another dying cigarette between my teeth and exhaling, sending smoke in her direction again. Cele waved it out of her face and glared at me.

“Would you knock it off?!” she snapped.

“Why? It’s not like you’ll get lung cancer or anything.” I chuckled at my whit.

“That’s not the point! It’s annoying as hell!” Her tongue tripped over the curse.

“Fine, keep your halo on.” I rolled my eyes. Angels, always so touchy. I was about to throw back the last of my whiskey when I was jolted forward, spilling it across the ashy bar top.

“Aw man! My bad!” I turned to see the floppy-haired drunk guy staring at me with wide green eyes. He had tripped over his own foot, falling onto the barstool to my right when he tried to sit down, and ramming into my back. He and the woman with him sat next to us, and it was pretty clear this wasn’t their first stop. He was about ready to fall over, and she looked like she was going to throw up. The hangover would be fun.

“No worries,” I said. The bartender begrudgingly slid another glass of whiskey my way.

“I’m Aiden, and this is my girlfriend, Gabby.” His words slurred together into one long jumbled mess, the booze giving him confidence to speak to an intimidating stranger. He threw his arm over Gabby’s shoulders, pulling her close. She giggled quietly before holding a hand up in a half-wave.

“Hi.” Interesting. Maybe this wouldn’t be as boring as I thought.

“I thought I knew you from somewhere!” My tone did a total flip, dripping with charisma and charm. The guy’s forehead crinkled as his girlfriend looked at the cocktail menu. Drunk people: they’ll believe almost anything.

“Ethias? From Holly’s birthday party? This is Celeste.” Much to my chagrin, I leaned back toward her and threw an arm around her shoulder. At least the humans didn’t see her try to lean away in disgust as we touched. My hand gripped her arm tightly, forcing her to play along. It came off like a friendly side hug, but I let go as soon as the façade was set.

“Oh, hey man! Good to see you.” Even if he didn’t believe me, he would probably play along to be polite. Aiden’s goofy grin almost made me feel bad for the guy. Almost.

“You guys going to be here for a bit?” He paused for a second after I spoke, trying to think through the alcohol-soaked haze in his brain.

“Yeah, I guess so. Barhopping tonight.” The bartender noticed my change in demeanor, and when he came to get their drink order, he looked like he was ready for a shift-change.

“You can add these guys to my tab.”

“Thanks, man!” Aiden said with drunken enthusiasm, clapping me on the back.

“Sure, Ethias, party with some mortals just because you’re bored. That’ll get you on your boss’s good side,” Celeste muttered next to me, quiet enough that they couldn’t hear us. I shot a dark glare at her before I turned back to the task at hand.

I wasn’t sure how they were still conscious. After a ridiculous amount of shots and too much beer, the two humans were lucky they hadn’t gotten alcohol poisoning yet. I signaled to the bartender for another round.

“Fine, but after this I’m cutting you all off,” he said stubbornly as he went to the other side of the bar. There was a light tap on my shoulder and I turned back to my unwanted partner.

“What are you doing?” The confusion was plain on her face. I raised an eyebrow. “We don’t have time for your unexpected generosity. What happened to laying low until the mark shows up?” Her voice was sharp. She was so blindly oblivious. My voice was low enough that the humans behind me couldn’t hear it.

“You didn’t read your job report very well, did you?” I said, stopping her mid-ridicule. Her mouth snapped shut and she leaned around to glance at Aiden. When she drew back, a blush crept up her cheeks at the blunder.

“Yeah, now you get it. Better keep him in sight to make it fair, right? I wouldn’t want you falling behind just because I figured it out first. That wouldn’t be much fun now, would it, Angel?”

“Don’t call me that,” she growled, glaring at my smirk.

“Why not? It makes a good nickname. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ve got a soul to catch.” I winked at her before turning back. I was behind my quota, so I needed as many souls as I could get my hands on. The man and woman were leaning toward one another, and as he whispered in her ear, a drunken giggle escaped her lips. Suddenly, he pulled away from her and threw an arm around my shoulders. I swayed with him and plastered a dopey smile on my face.

“Hey! We were gonna hit one last place up before calling it quits.” Aiden leaned a bit closer to be heard over the music. His breath wafted into my face but I maintained the act.

“Yeah? That’ll be cool. Have fun, man.” He turned back to Gabby and smiled like I was someone who didn’t get the joke.

“You and Celeste wanna come with?” It was pretty considerate that he was making this so easy for us. I didn’t take the time to ask Celeste what she thought, but chuckled, slurring my voice the appropriate amount.

“Hell yeah!” I pulled Aiden up with me, his laughter shaking against my side.

“Come on, Gabs.” He grabbed her hand and hoisted her up, planting a sloppy kiss on her cheek. I took my wallet out of my pocket and dropped a few large bills on the bar top. The bartender could call me a dick all he wanted, but he couldn’t say I didn’t tip well. Celeste’s barstool scraped along the floor as she followed, her arms crossed over herself as she tried to hide the pout on her face. Supporting the weight of both unbalanced humans, Celeste and I managed to get them outside, the cool air rushing through the door. That air seemed to sober them up just a little bit, enough so the two of them were able to stand up on their own at least.

“There’s a small place not too far from here! This way!” With little thought given to his surroundings, Aiden stepped off the curb, Gabby’s hand grasped in his. Celeste went to follow them, but then I heard the sound of tires squealing against the wet asphalt, and I grabbed her shoulder, hauling her back onto the sidewalk. It wouldn’t have hurt her, but reflexes I guess. The timing couldn’t have been better. The car veered down the road, tires squelching against the pavement as the driver hit the brakes. Time slowed, and the two humans froze in the middle of the street. Acting fast, Aiden shoved Gabby away, valiant until the end. She went careening out of the way, her foot catching on the curb and her hands stretched out toward Aiden as she fell backward. Celeste darted forward and caught her beneath her arms. Then metal collided with bone and a sickening crunch echoed through the startled crowd.

“Aiden! No!” Gabby strained against Celeste’s arms, but the angel held her fast as tragedy ensued. The car shrieked to a halt but it was too late, Aiden was sucked beneath the front bumper and silence fell over the area. Gabby wrenched her arms out of Celeste’s hands and darted forward, feet skidding on the wet pavement as she slid to a stop next to the broken body. I looked down at my watch, tuning out Gabby’s screaming as people began to notice what happened. Aiden lay gasping on the ground as his blood formed a halo around his head. His eyes were wild as Gabby’s hands flitted around, trying to stop the bleeding, but there was nothing she could do. No one noticed as Celeste and I faded into the background, up against one of the buildings lining the street, waiting for something that only we knew about. Strangers gathered around, some on their phones recording their own personal snuff films. Others tried to help keep Gabby calm while a Good Samaritan was on the line with emergency services.

“I always hate this part,” Celeste said, hugging her arms close. There was a small twinge in my chest as I heard the woman’s pained scream when she realized Aiden probably wasn’t going to recover from this, but I shoved that human part of me aside. The seconds ticked by on my watch and then it happened. With the last remaining ounce of his strength, Aiden squeezed Gabby’s hand, whispered something into her ear and went limp.

“Get ready,” I muttered to Celeste. She nodded, a grim set to her mouth. From there, Celeste and I waited for the soul to arrive. It took a few moments, but eventually from the center of his chest, a blue glow began to radiate, flowing outward until it enveloped him from head to toe. Of course, only Celeste and I could see it, so when an ethereal form slowly sat up from the spot where Aiden’s body waded in its pool of blood, the demeanor of the crowd didn’t change. The figure started to materialize, taking shape as it looked around at the commotion. Startled eyes, a nose, and a mouth contorted in confusion formed, and a phantom copy of Aiden sat on the ground, sharing legs with his former body. His eyes fell on his grieving girlfriend, her head in her hands as she wept.

“Gabby?” Understandably no response.

“Gabby! It’s okay! I’m okay!” He reached out to comfort her, but when his hand passed through her shoulder, he finally seemed to notice the blue glow that had faded to a faint outline surrounding him. He stood, eyes still on his hands as he tuned into the screaming and chaos around him.

“Aiden,” Celeste’s calming tone cut through the crowd and his eyes snapped to us. He glanced down at his body, then behind him, the cogs turning as he realized that we were indeed looking at him in his present state instead of the empty body on the ground. He glared suspiciously.

“You guys can see me?” He walked through the crowd, avoiding people so he wouldn’t bump into them, and kept glancing back at Gabby. A kind old woman had given her a sweater.

“The only ones who can, actually,” I replied, leaning against the building with my arms folded. He froze in front of us, confusion plain on his face. Then a smile broke across it, and he chuckled.

“This is just a really weird dream, isn’t it?” His smile faded when our expressions didn’t change.

“You’re not waking up from this, Sweetie. I’m sorry.” Celeste always handled the sympathetic sides of the job better than I did.

“Let’s just get this show on the road. I have better things to be doing right now,” I cut in, cracking my knuckles. Before either of them could protest or ask questions, the world around us began to fade, edges softening and blurring until the only distinguishable features were splashes of colors. Sounds faded too, finally taking us away from the shouting and inevitable sirens. When even the colors were gone, the three of us were left in a flat gray landscape.

“Wha-” Aiden began, but he froze when I put a hand up to silence him. This wasn’t the place for questions. When colors finally began to return, they weren’t the same ones that had disappeared. Varying shades of eggshell, white and beige melted together into the generic colors of an office. The conference room formed around us, complete with a

large circular table, deceptively uncomfortable chairs, and floor-to-ceiling windows embedded into the east and west walls. The cityscape on either side of the room was nothing special, skyscrapers shot up from the ground, surrounded by smaller buildings with traffic weaving between them all. Set in the north and south cream colored walls, two doors sat opposite one another each with their own ornate decorations in silver and gold, respectively. When the room solidified around us, the two of us took our seats at the table, Celeste on the same side as the silver door, myself with the gold door to my back.

“What happened?” Aiden asked, a quaver in his voice. I gave him credit for trying to stay calm about the whole thing.

“Well, I have some bad news for you, bud. Have a seat.” I motioned to the chair between our two sides of the table before leaning back in my place and propping my boots on top of it. Celeste glared at me from across the room. Oh well. Aiden plopped down in the white leather armchair. “This is a place where souls and people like us,” I motioned to Celeste and myself, “go when someone dies. And in this case, that soul would be you.” Aiden looked at the angel next to me, trying to figure out if this was some kind of joke.

“So I don’t know you from Holly’s birthday party then?” His voice was flat, realization finally dawning on him.

“Do you even have a friend named Holly?” I mused, smirking.

“He didn’t have to trick you like that,” Celeste interjected.

“Really? I know you think they’re probably ‘nice people’, but they wouldn’t have stayed around if they thought we were strangers,” I said, crossing my arms again.

“You don’t know that,” she snapped, always defensive.

“Oh come on. I know your kind is supposed to see the good in people, but you can’t seriously be that willfully ignorant.” The tension in the air was growing thick, until Aiden cleared his throat. The irony of a human breaking up the discussion was not lost on me. Celeste and I turned our attention back to the soul, sitting quietly across the table from us, his hands folded in his lap and his glow reflecting on the windows behind him.

“Would either of you care to tell me what the hell is going on? Where are we? What the hell happened?” His face remained suspiciously calm as he stared at us; I sat up, removing my feet from the table, straightening my jacket and leaning my elbows against the wooden surface. Celeste beat me to the answer.

“Of course. You must be so confused. You see, there are a lot of things that people can’t explain, because they just don’t understand, and it scares them.” I never understood why Celeste tried to explain situations like that. As if a soul wasn’t confused enough.

“Huh?” Aiden’s face muddled like I knew it would. Figures. Celeste took a breath.

“Well, there’s no easy way to-” I cut in before she could blather on and make it more complicated.

“You died. You’re dead. No other way to put it.” I leaned back against my chair with my arms folded.

“Are you kidding me?! Really, Ethias?!” Celeste snapped, her voice jumping an octave. I shrugged.

“I just cut the time of this whole thing in half, so you’re welcome.” I turned back to Aiden, and if it were possible for a soul to lose color, this one did. His wide, deer-like eyes stared back at me like I was a truck on a highway at night.

“I... I’m dead? That’s not right. I don’t feel dead.”

“That’s an advantage of it. At least you don’t feel anything anymore. Anyway, you have a choice to make, my friend.” I didn’t give Aiden much time to process what had happened. That was the only small form of sympathy that I allowed myself. Don’t let the soul think about the fact that they died. Other than that, to be honest, this was one of my favorite parts of my job; when the human has to make their decision. Watching the realization dawn on their scared and confused faces, it almost made the job worth it.

“What’s that?” Aiden said, voice shaking. Celeste jumped back in with a side glare at me.

“To choose between the Land of the Holy,” her nose scrunched a little as she continued, “or the Land of the Fallen.” Aiden snorted and cut her off, his voice incredulous.

“You mean I have to pick heaven or hell? Is this some kind of joke?” He chuckled, a noise bordering on hysteria. So much for not panicking.

“Now, before you decide,” I interposed, “I know my colleague’s name for my workplace didn’t make my option sound too great, but there are some things for you should know. I know how most people think of Hell. The place with the fire and brimstone, eternal damnation and all that, but honestly, it’s not that different from your world, except with more of the perks.” When he stayed silent, I continued, ticking options off on my fingers. “You can eat what you want; drink what you like, with none of the consequences. You can do pretty much whatever you want, and all you have to do is sign this contract.” From a file folder that appeared on the table with the rest of the room, I pulled out a fairly thick stack of papers, fine print and all.

“But you should know about the better choice,” Celeste snapped, more at me than him. “Come to the Land of the Holy, Aiden. Then you’ll know real peace. No more fighting, no more anger, no more hurt.” She mirrored my action and pulled out her own contract.

“Yeah, if you don’t mind singing show tunes and wearing white dresses all the time,” I muttered loud enough for him to hear me.

“That’s better than chaos 24/7.” Celeste quipped back.

“At least chaos is better than having restrictions on practically everything you do.” It was always surprising if our jobs didn’t devolve into Celeste and me arguing. Neither of us was sure why our superiors pitted us against one another.

“Okay! Would you both just shut up and let me think for a minute?!” Celeste and I froze at the sudden outburst, leaning away from one another after the quarrelling match. We turned to look at Aiden, composing ourselves and waiting for his answer.

“I have a few questions,” he said, taking a deep breath to steady himself. Silently, the two of us nodded and I settled against the back of my chair, folding my arms in front of me. “If I go with this dude, then I can do whatever, right?” I nodded, smirking. “So you’re some kind of demon then?”

“That’s right. It’s a pretty good gig if you ask me.”

“Would I be a demon too?” I chuckled quietly at his ignorance.

“Of course not. The only way that could happen is if one of us recommends you for it after a trial period. We would have to see that you caused an exceptional amount of destruction in Hell. Then we would refer you to our boss and he would make the final decision.” Aiden’s brow furrowed in confusion.

“Your boss? What, like the Devil?” he said, skeptically. I shrugged.

“He prefers Lucifer, but if you want to call him that, go for it.” His face fell a little, and it settled for him that this whole thing was real. We weren’t bullshitting him, or trying to trick him. He shook off some of his shock and turned to Celeste.

“Now, if I went with you, then I would never be angry or sad again? Never have to worry about stupid little shit all the time?”

“That’s right. I know you’ve had a tough life, but you would never want for anything. All would be provided.” Man, I knew Celeste was by the book, but she could at least adlib a little.

“I thought what you did in life determined what happened when you died. That’s why you’re supposed to be good and go to church and stuff, right?”

“Propaganda bullshit. Featherheads think it’ll help people choose their side when they die. That’s got nothing to do with it.” Celeste glared poison at me from the other side of the table, but before she could yell at me, the soul asked something that very rarely came up.

“And what if I say no to both of you?” The glares dissipated immediately and Celeste and I shared a quick glance, forgetting our squabble for a moment before turning to one of the few humans who had found the loophole. I sat forward, bracing my forearms against the table.

“Then your soul would be trapped on Earth for eternity as a ghost,” I replied bluntly. Aiden looked between us for a moment.

“But neither of us would recommend that,” Celeste said softly.

“Why not?” He questioned.

“Because then you would never be welcome in either Heaven or Hell,” she responded. “Whether you believed in them or not, that’s where human souls are meant to go. If you don’t, you would eventually go insane, forgetting all your human memories, or that you were human at all for that matter.” Celeste was gripping her wrist under the table, turning her skin even more pale. I just didn’t want to deal with the consequences, but she would actually feel sorry for the guy if he chose it. I cut in.

“You would become a poltergeist, drawing attention to yourself from the mortals around you. You’ll devolve, watching your friends and family die and you being unable to join them. The humans will exorcise you. Which wouldn’t be so bad but then you’ll turn into a wraith and cause some real chaos. That’s when my colleagues and I will be forced to take care of you ourselves, and believe me, pal, that’s not something you want.” I finished my spiel and he took a second to process.

“Why’s that?” His voice wavered just a little. I’ll give him credit; he was taking all this information better than most people would. Celeste and I shared another quick glance and she nodded once, so I held my tongue so she could take over.

“Because the ghosts that get exorcised by demons are the worst of the worst. That’s the hell that most humans think of. You would be tortured beyond belief every day as punishment for your crimes, only to be restored and experience it continually for eternity.” Celeste’s voice was soft and comforting. If there was one thing angels and demons could agree on, it was that you never wanted to be exorcised by one of my kind. “Take a minute to really think about it, okay?” Celeste finished and folded her hands together on the table. A few minutes passed while Aiden battled with his thoughts and options. I looked at my watch again.

“Well!” I said, clapping my hands together to diffuse the tension and end the silence, “I’m going to be late for another appointment, so we kind of need a decision here, bud. What’s it going to be?” Aiden took a lingering glance at both of us before looking down at his hands.

“I think I’m going to have to choose the third option. I can’t leave Gabby by herself. I’m the only one she has left.” Damn it.

“Are you completely sure? This is a decision you can’t take back, you do understand that, right?” Celeste probed.

“Yes, I’m sure. Like I said, I’m the only one she has left. I can deal with the rest later, but I need to be there for her.” I sighed. Luc wasn’t going to like this, but what the hell was I supposed to do about it? It wasn’t like I could force Aiden to choose my way; otherwise I wouldn’t have such a strict quota on my mind all the time.

“Fine. It’s your exorcism,” I said spitefully, pulling a third folder from a hidden drawer under the table. I flipped to the correct form and took out a pen from my jacket pocket. I slid it across the table to him and he caught it before it rolled over the edge. I pointed to various markers. “Sign here, here, here, and initial here.” Aiden signed all the appropriate lines and handed the pen and papers back to me, I snapped them back into place in the folder and whipped it out of sight. I hope processing had fun with that one.

“So now what happens?” His voice was quiet. Celeste and I stood up and he followed.

“Now, you go back to your world. Have fun being invisible and dealing with that. We’re done here,” I barked. Then the world began to shift once more, colors fading and blurring until they shifted back to the saturated blue and red flashing lights, accompanied by emergency vehicles and a coroner’s van. The three of us stood off the side, Celeste and I cloaked from the mortal realm to keep us invisible to the humans around us. Aiden’s eyes fell upon the tarp that now covered his body, blood seeping from under the plastic, and they eventually found Gabby sitting in the back of the ambulance, blanket wrapped tightly around her as the EMT’s took her vitals. Her face was blank.

“I hope everything turns out for you, Aiden. Please just be careful,” Celeste said with a gentle smile before stepping back under the eave of the building. I stood by his side for a moment as he gathered his courage to begin his new afterlife. I clapped him on the back, startling him out of his thoughts. He looked up at me warily.

“I hope for your sake that I don’t see you again. I wish I could say you’ll do fine, but who are we kidding?”

“You’re not very good at pep-talks. Has anyone ever told you that?” Aiden threw back at me, eyes trained on Gabby again.

“It’s been mentioned. Good luck, man.” I walked away, back to Celeste as Aiden slowly made his way to his girlfriend. I hope she was worth it. When I stopped next to the angel, I leaned against the brick wall, sticking another cigarette between my teeth and breathing it to life with a lighter. She had a faint smile on her face but it wasn’t one of those bittersweet smiles; there was too much smugness in it for that.

“What’re you so happy about? It’s not like he took your offer either.” The smoke from my lips curled and twisted up into the air, whisked away on the breeze. She glanced up at me.

“I know, but I wish I could be there when you tell your boss that you lost another one.” Her smile got a little bit bigger, and I rolled my eyes.

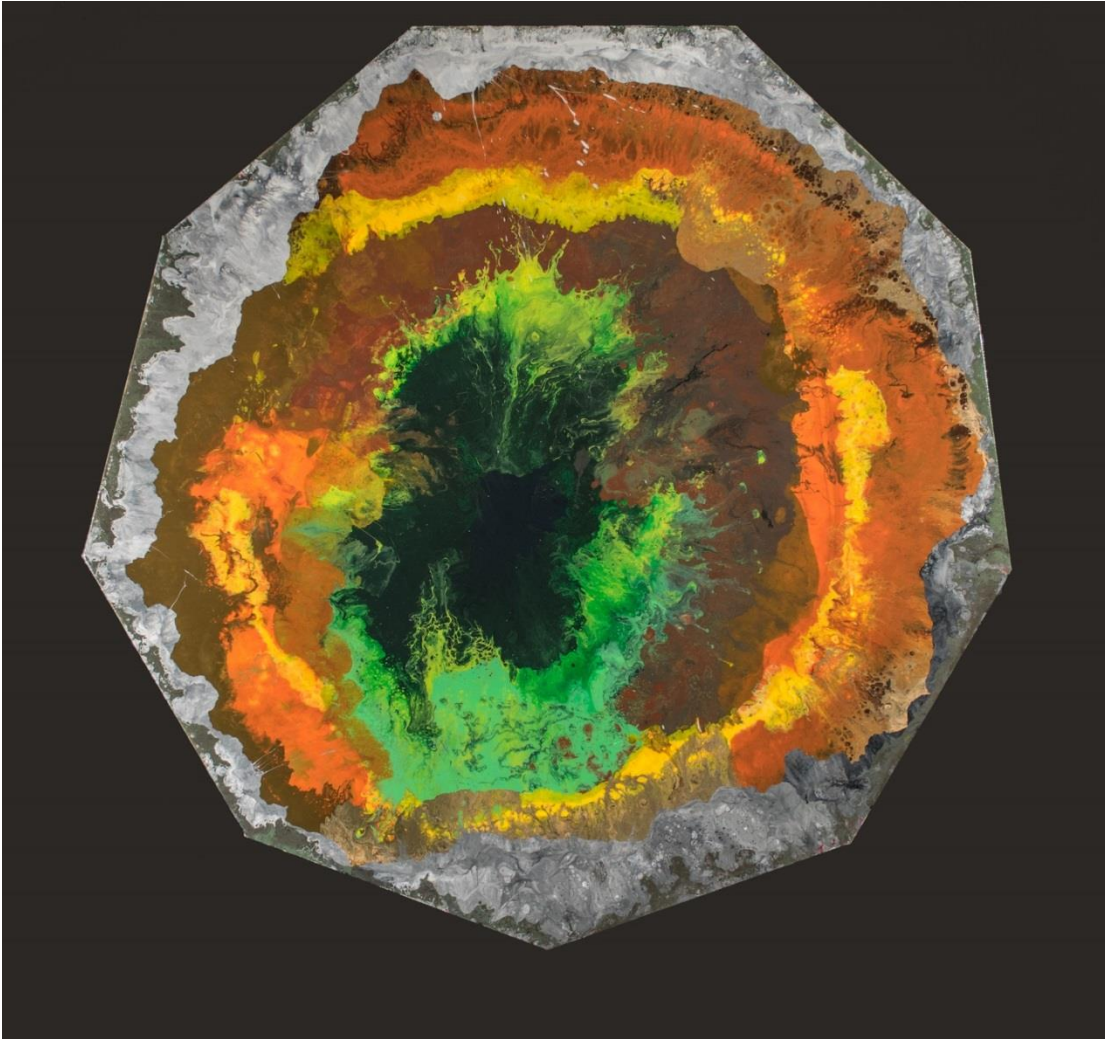
“Whatever, Angel. I doubt your boss will welcome you back with tea and cookies when you tell him you screwed up, too.” My lip curled up when her smile dropped off her face like lead.

“Now, if you don’t mind, I have a shark attack victim that I need to go visit. He’s a bit past his expiration date. Catch you later, Angel.” I pulled up the collar of my jacket and shot her a quick wink before walking off, cigarette between my teeth and hands shoved in my pockets.

“You’re such an ass!” she called after me. My chuckle was lost in the breeze as I turned the corner and disappeared into the air.

Artwork

Keri Adams
John Allenbaugh
Ivy Bird
Courtney Dickerson
Taylor Evans
Elizabeth Fisher
Hannah Harsha
Elizabeth May
Karlee Park
Terri Porta
Olivia Ruesch
Morgan Syring
Alice Zeeb



Morning Present Day

by
Keri Adams



The Rat
by
John Allenbaugh



Crow Design

by
Ivy Bird



Colorful Siblings

by

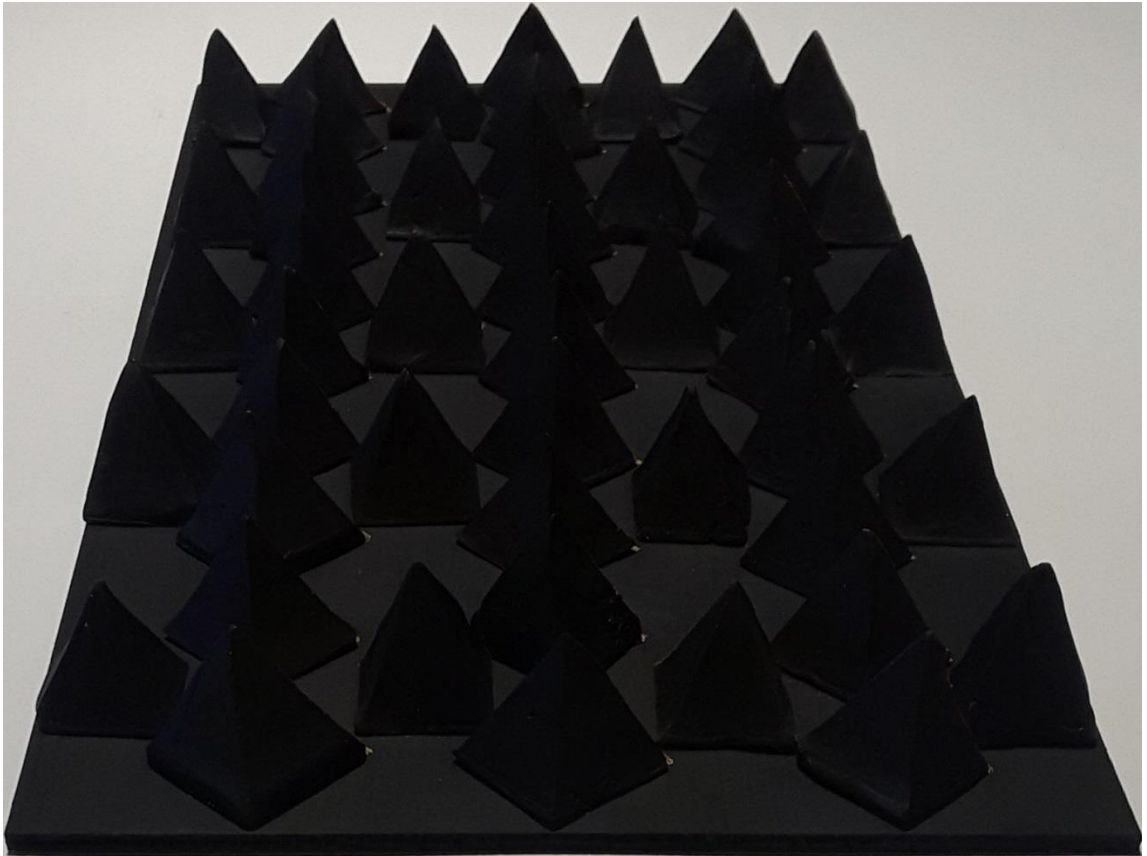
Courtney Dickerson



Hamburger Cake

by

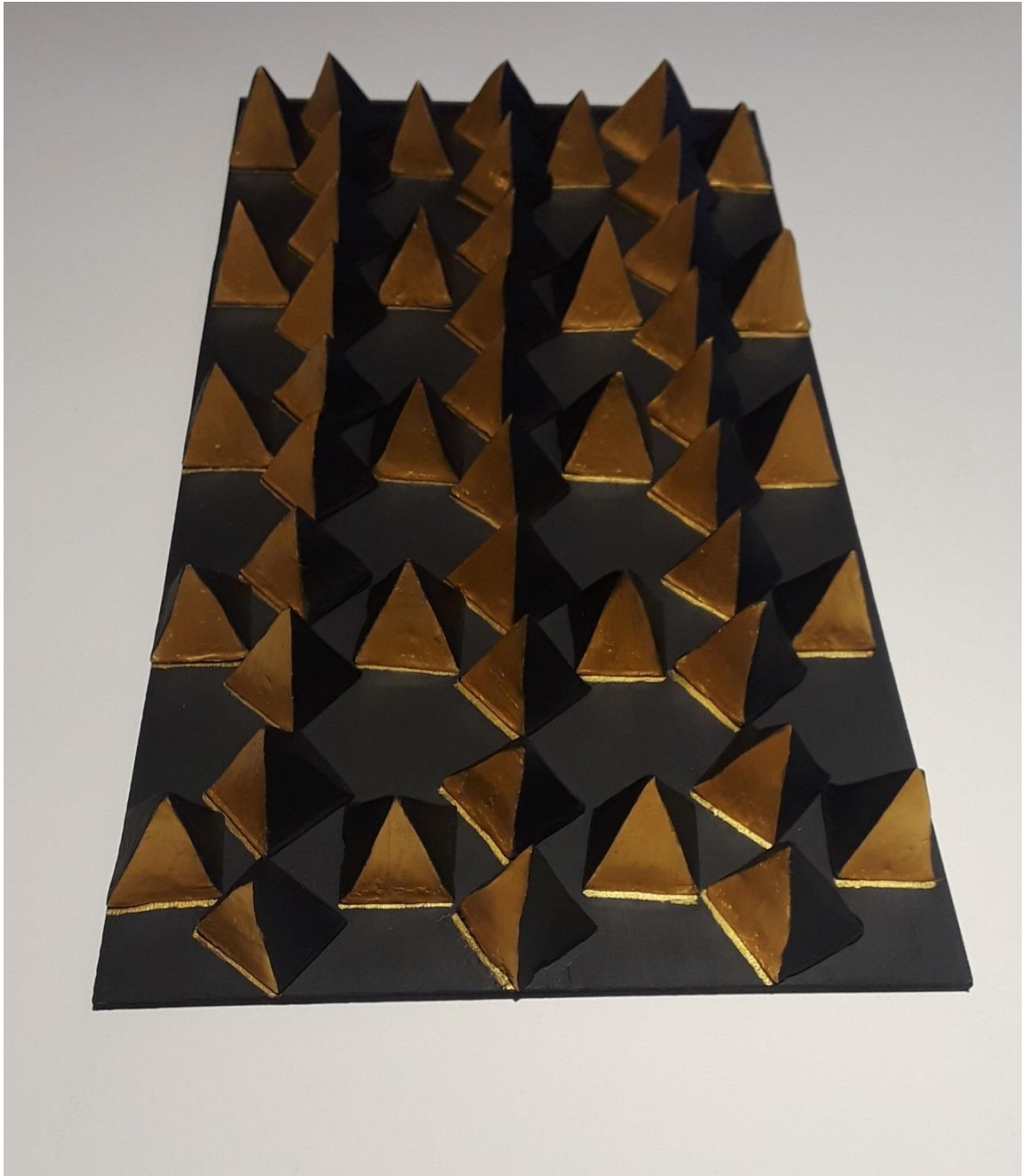
Courtney Dickerson



Positivity is Perception 1

by

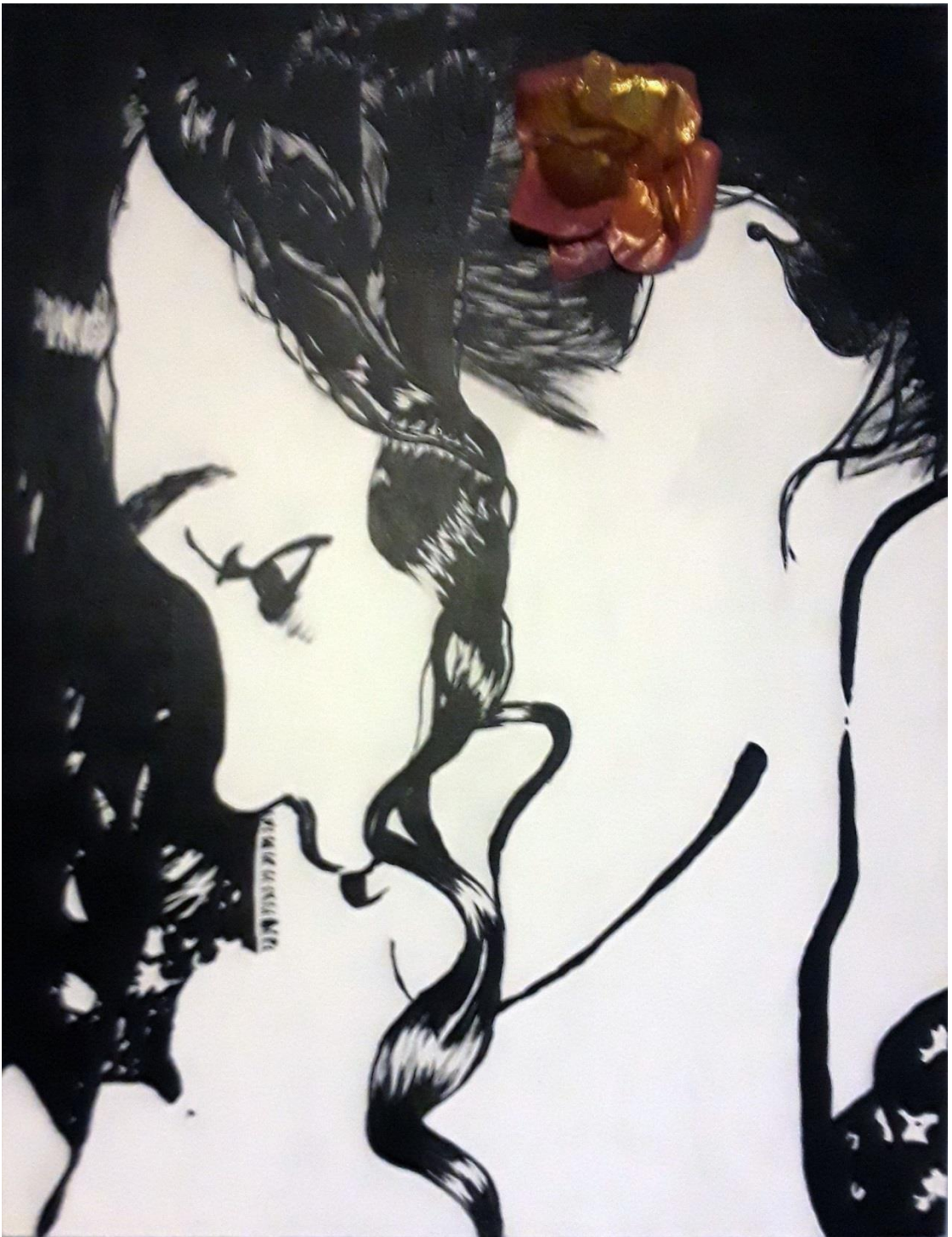
Courtney Dickerson



Positivity is Perception 2

by

Courtney Dickerson



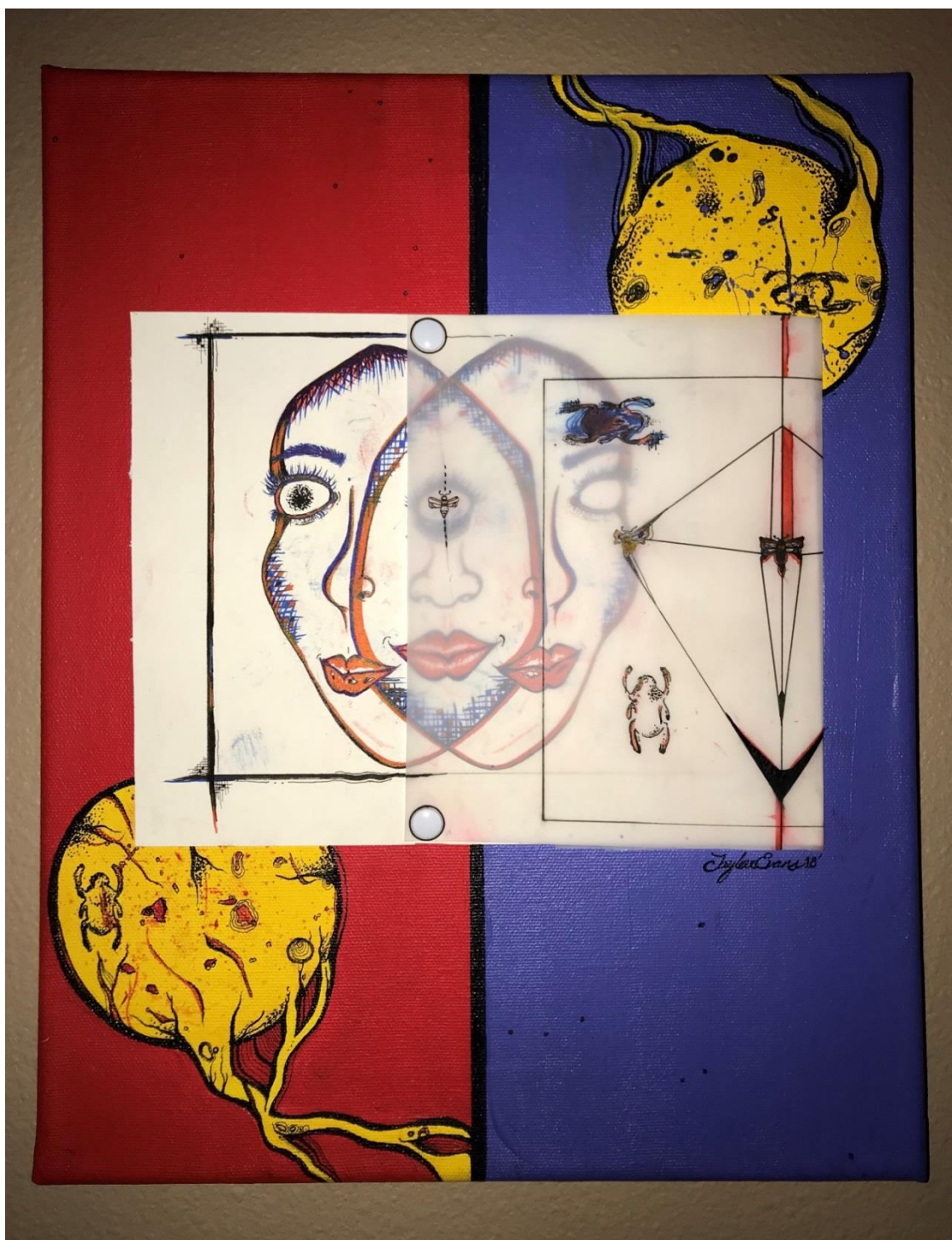
Self – Portrait
by
Courtney Dickerson



Inner Self – Portrait

by

Courtney Dickerson



Split
by
Taylor Evans



A Moment in the Mountains

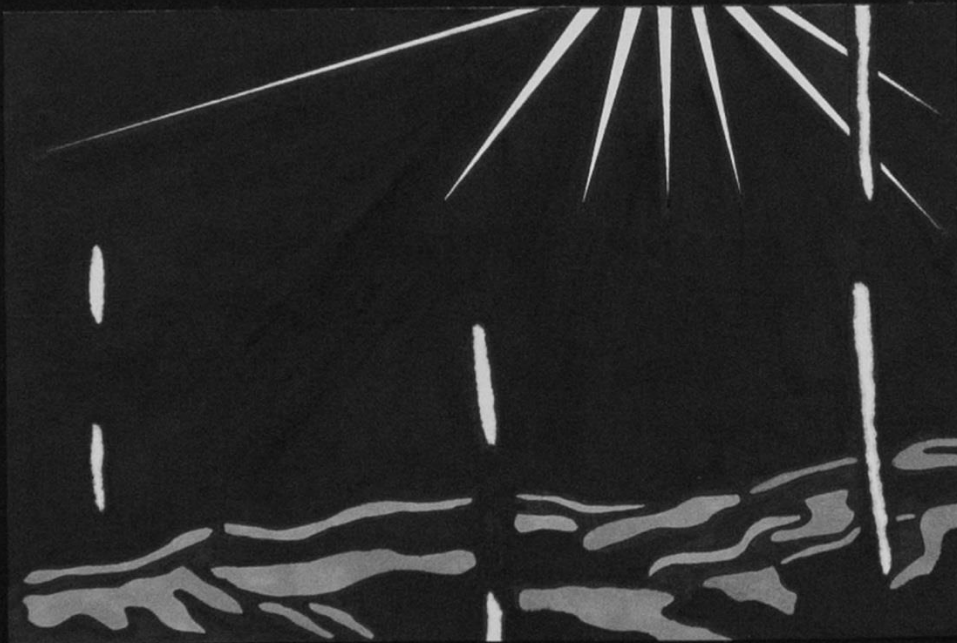
by
Elizabeth Fisher



Once Upon a Time

by

Elizabeth Fisher



Elizabeth Fisher 2014

Rays
by
Elizabeth Fisher



Bridge Vista

by
Hannah Harsha



Cobbs Red Barn

by

Hannah Harsha



Down on the Pond
by
Hannah Harsha

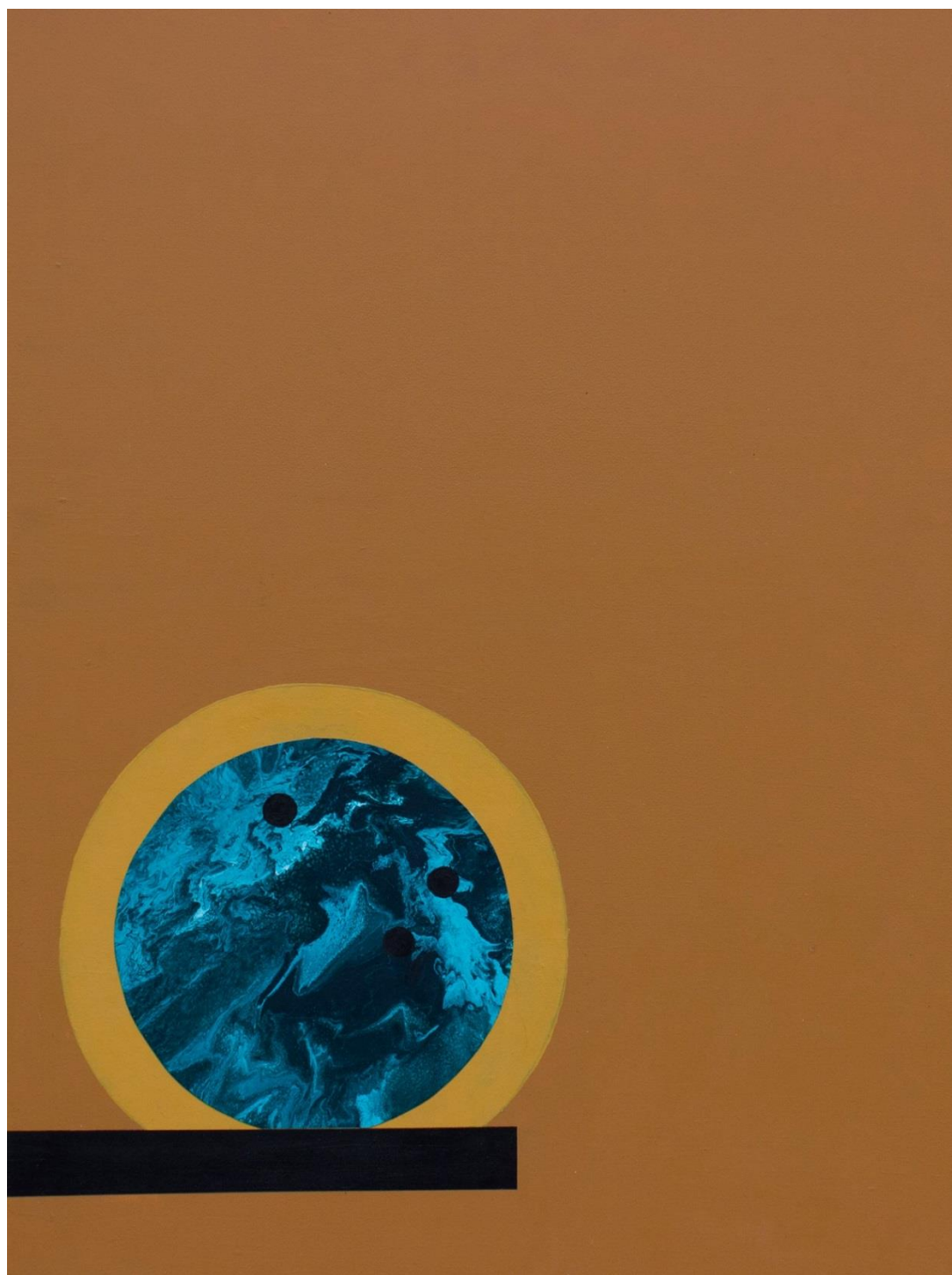


Crisp
by
Liz May



Inertia 1

by
Liz May



Momentum 1

by
Liz May



Momentum 2

by
Liz May



Revolving Steps

by
Liz May



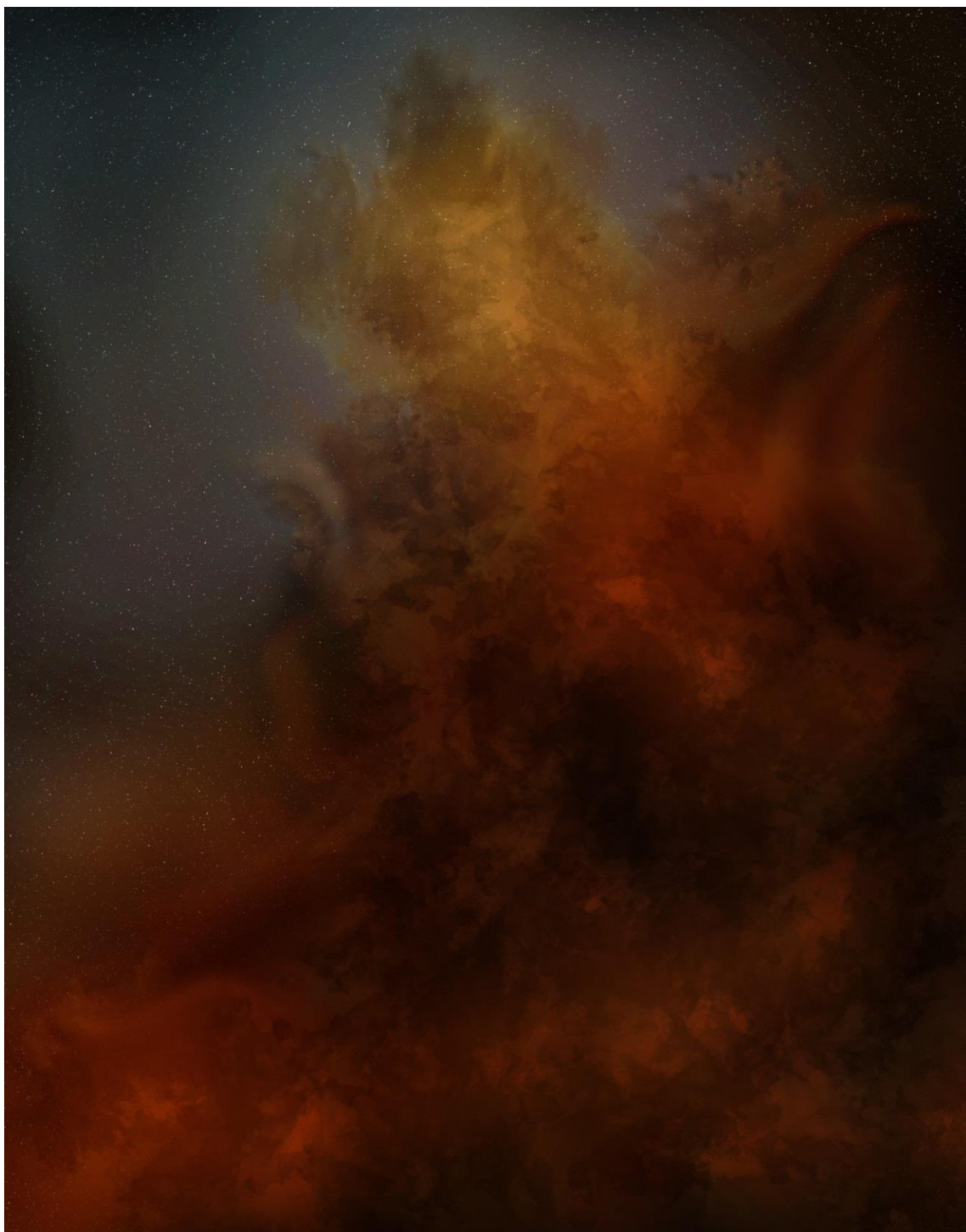
Sour Kid

by
Liz May



Two One Liners 1

by
Liz May



Dark Nebula

by
Karlee Park



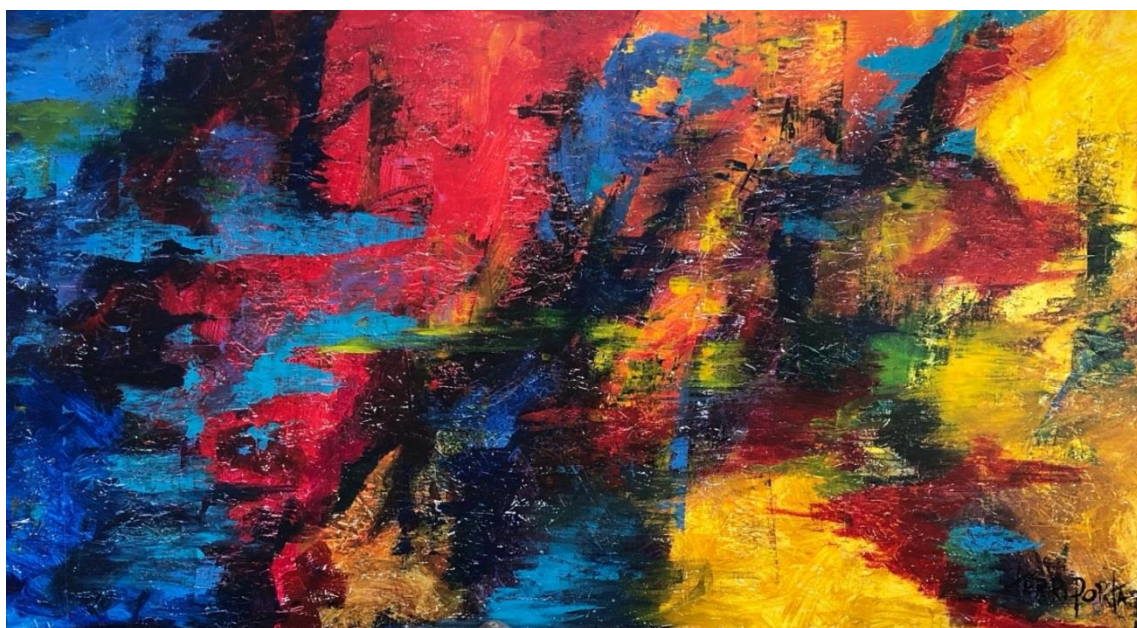
Field of White

by
Karlee Park



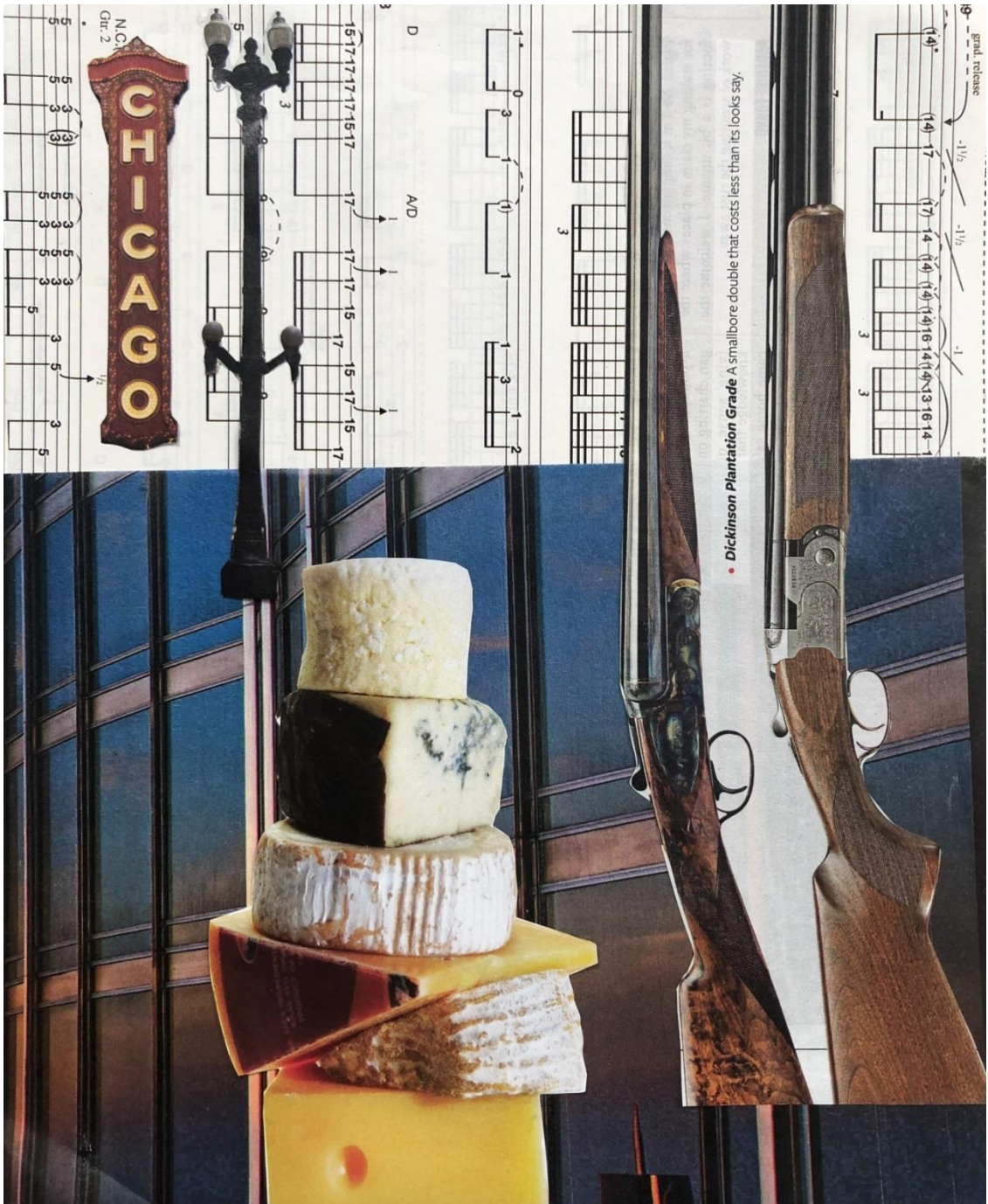
Desperado

by
Terri Porta



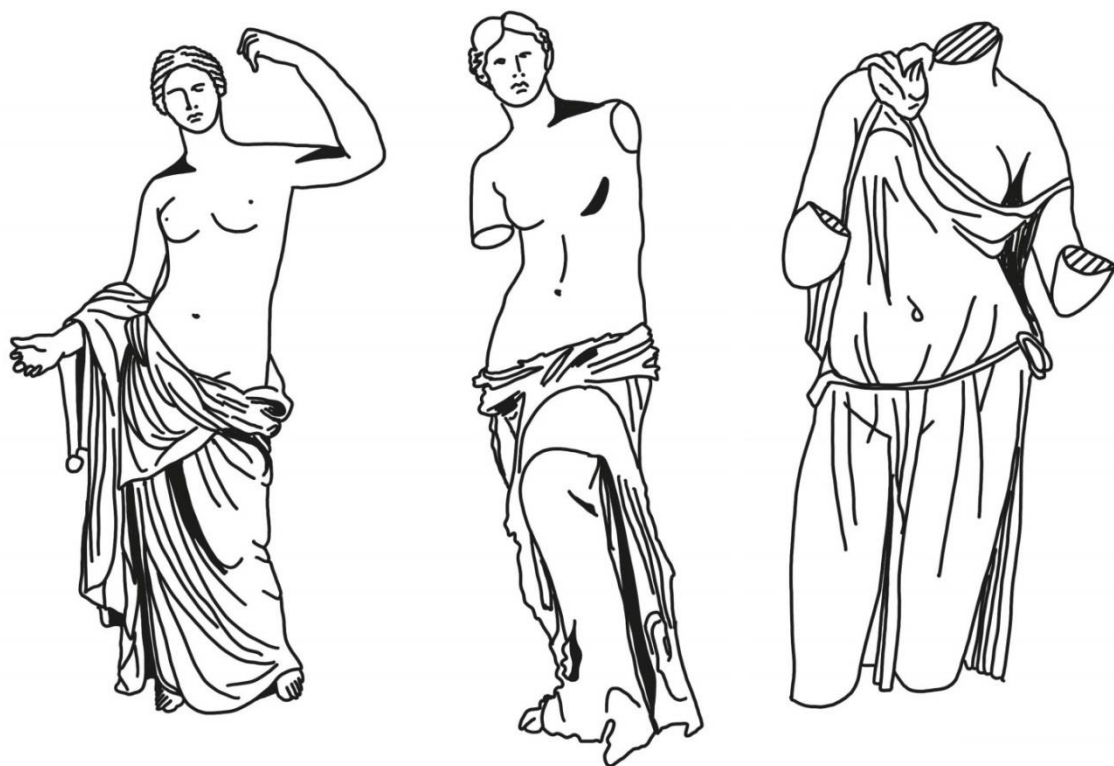
Intuition

by
Terri Porta



Protect Our Cheese Right

by
Olivia Ruesch



Three Classics

by

Olivia Ruesch



Van with a Town

by
Olivia Ruesch



Repetitive Expression (Pause)

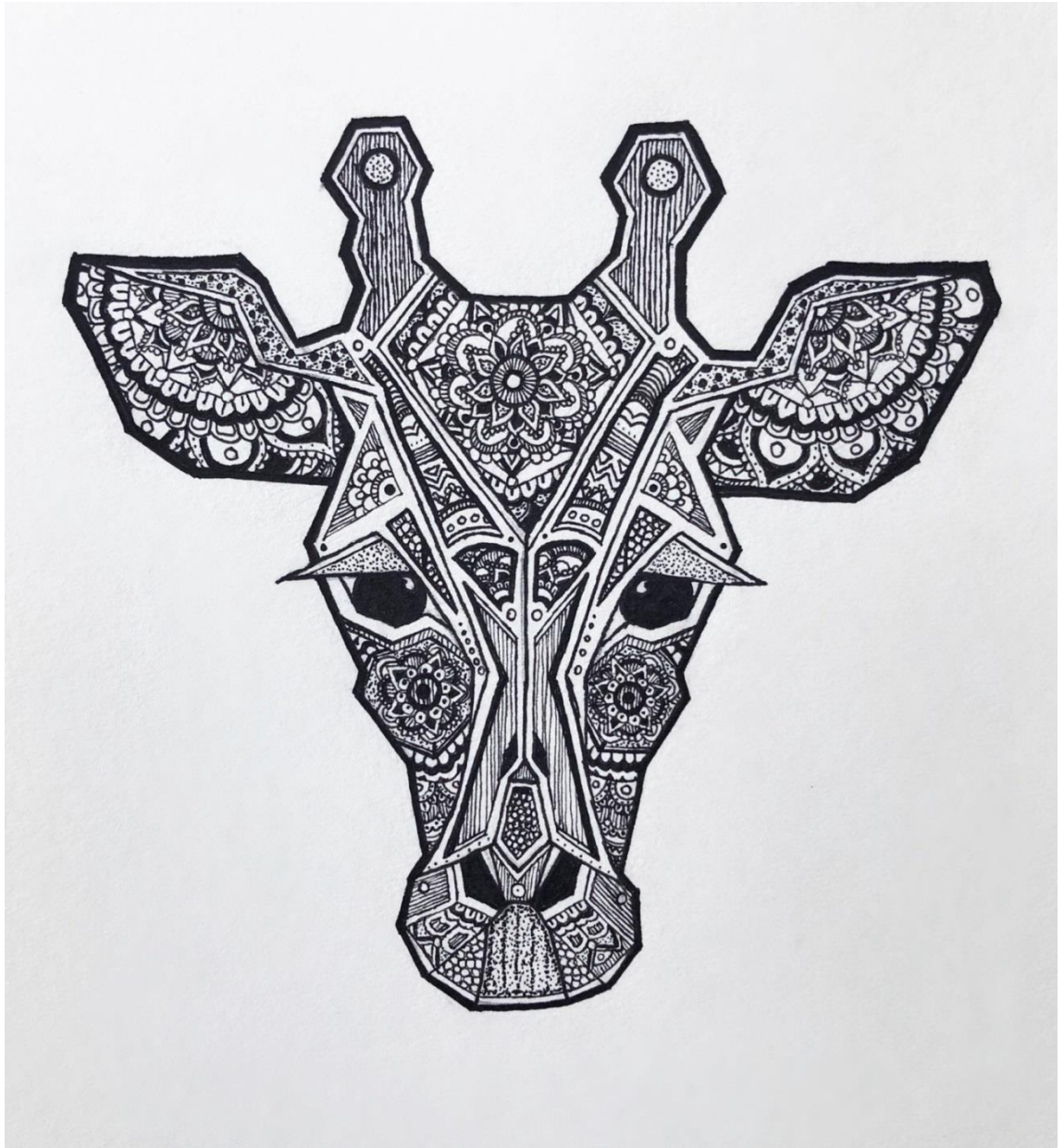
by

Morgan Syring



Repetitive Expression (Profile)

by
Morgan Syring



Giraffe Thoughts

by
Alice Zeeb

Biographies

KARI ADAMS is a senior at MSU-Billings with a pending Art Education and Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She began her college career at MSU-Billings and briefly studied Graphic Design at MSU-Bozeman. She left college to pursue a career with the Walt Disney Corporation, but returned to Billings to raise her son. Kari reapplied to MSU-Billings to complete her degrees in Art Education and a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Art is her therapeutic outlet and Billings is where her support system lives. Attending college at MSU-Billings was the perfect fit for Kari's life. Getting back into the studio reignited her passion for creating fine art. Kari is in the home stretch to attain her degrees. Her path will soon follow the steps of past educators who have paved the way for artists and future teachers. A Masters in Fine Arts will be the next step in Kari's journey of art. She will continue to produce works that highlight the human influence in nature, and especially in Montana, in her studio while she finishes her college career.

SHELBY ANDERSON is a senior at Skyview High School. Earlier this year, she was affected by a severe disease known to all who enter a public high school as senioritis. This disease causes laziness, anxiety and restlessness and is commonly caught by seniors during their final semester of high school. Shelby was greatly affected and often struggled to focus or even gather motivation to perform simple school tasks. Shelby finally overcomes this heartbreaking disease when she earns her diploma on her eighteenth birthday, and makes a full recovery. In her published piece, she explains some faults in the current public school system.

HALEY BARTHULY is a senior at MSU-Billings. She is majoring in Political Science with a minor in English.

HANNAH BAUMAN is a senior at Skyview High School, currently enrolled in dual credit classes. After she graduates in the spring of 2019, she plans to pursue a business degree at The University of Montana. She spends her free time hanging out with friends and family or working at her part time job.

IVY BIRD creates works that are inspired by her cultural heritage being of Native American decent and a member of the Crow tribe. She comes from a very traditional family that is strongly connected to their culture and upbringings. Much of her family has gone on to pursue different aspects of art from teaching and producing Native art. Ivy hopes to follow in these footsteps with a new form being ceramics with Native inspiration something not often seen amongst the northern plain's tribes. Ivy creates ceramic pieces with native designs from the Crow tribe as well as other tribes but primarily the Crow. Each art piece that she creates has Native influence from the choice of color, design, and structure that is being built. Ceramics is her way of connecting with her love of art and bringing about a new and interesting technique.

LAUREN CHRISTIANSON is a senior at Skyview High School. She enjoys traveling and spending time with friends. She intends to obtain a Bachelor of Science

degree in Nursing. However, she is still undecided about which school she would like to attend.

COURTNEY DICKERSON has spent all of her spare time growing up focusing on school and expressing herself through her artwork. She is interested in many different mediums and loves to try new ones, but anything she can do to keep her hands and mind occupied is enjoyable. Her current artwork ranges from drawings, paintings, and sculptures, to gifts for family and friends. Throughout her life, her biggest support system has always been her family, especially her father, who is also an artist and a big inspiration for her. Because of this support, it helped Courtney spend more time working toward doing what she loves. She believes that a world without art would be dull, boring, and extremely unhappy. Courtney is attending MSU-Billings and studying Art Education with a minor in Chemistry.

KORRIN DIETZ is an aspiring author who was born and raised in Montana. Graduating in the spring of 2019 from MSU-Billings, she plans to write more fiction and expand her writing capabilities. With a Bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing, she hopes to one day get either a collection of short stories or a novel published and expedited throughout the world.

KENNEDI FERDIG is a senior at Skyview High School and considers herself an unconventional artist. She is a dancer and loves all kinds of art.

ELIZABETH FISHER is a non-traditional Elementary Education major and Art Education minor. Her time volunteering and working at Head Start Preschool inspired her to choose this path for her education and it is an honor to be part of the MSU-Billings community. She was born in Japan and has lived in many places since. She lived many of her childhood years in Terry, Montana, eventually graduated from Gypsum, Colorado, and has since lived in Lockwood, Montana for the last 20 years. She is married and has two sons, aged 7 and 9. The family enjoys spending time outdoors together camping, hiking, and snowboarding.

RYAN GRIFFIN is a senior at Skyview High School. He is a student athlete, preparing to attend college in the fall of 2019. He loves the outdoors, fishing, and some good jokes.

ABBY HAMILTON is a freshman at MSU-Billings on the Women's Soccer Team. She is originally from Lander, Wyoming. She is majoring in biology and hopes to go to medical school once she graduates from MSU-Billings.

RAEGAN HARPER is a senior at Skyview High School and is part of the dual enrollment program. She will be graduating in the spring of 2019. She plans to pursue a degree in nursing that she will use in the field of healthcare in a variety of ways. She

enjoys participating in softball and has a love for traveling. Her published poem describes the craziness that she feels currently in life. The poem also depicts the unknown of everything in life and can be related to any aspect of uncertainty.

HANNAH HARSHA is studying Art Education at MSU-Billings and has been featured in the Student Juried Art Exhibitions in 2017, 2018, and 2019. As an artist, she enjoys mediums like oil painting, charcoal, and pastel. Recent forays into printmaking and sculpture are shaping her educational experience. As well as many hours spent in the studio, she is often found at the Academic Support Center working as a writing tutor. Recent achievements include being a contributing artist to the Billing City Hall Mural and being actively involved in the MSU-Billings student chapter of the National Arts Education Association.

OWEN HOWARD is a senior at Skyview High School. He submitted to The Rook because of a college writing class he is currently attending. He has lived in Billings, Montana his whole life. And his favorite color is green.

KAYLEE KANNEGIESSER is a senior at Skyview High School and the Billings Career Center, taking a dual credit college writing class. She is a leader on multiple teams and boards in the community including a board of directors member on the Student Advisory Team, an executive officer for HOSA-Health Professionals, a School Stem Officer, and a captain on the varsity softball team. In the fall of 2019, she will attend the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota on a softball and academic scholarship to become a nurse practitioner. After graduation, she plans to do mission work in order to educate and heal those who don't have access to health care and information on disease prevention. Then she intends to work in a hospital to gain more skill and experience in the hope of opening her own practice someday. The inspiration for the published piece came from her passion and curiosity in psychology and the medical field.

ASHLEY KEENAN is a senior at Skyview High School. She participates in basketball and track. She loves to ride horses, dirt bikes, swimming and do anything outdoors for fun. She has a loving mom, dad, and sister that she lives with, along with her loving cat, Biscuit. She plans to go to MSU-Bozeman in the fall of 2019 to begin their nursing program.

RYLEE KREMER is a senior at Skyview High School. After graduating, she is attending The University of Montana to pursue a career in Speech Pathology. Outside of school, she loves to go to youth group, play with her cats and dogs, and watch movies with her family.

PATRICK LANDRY now understands the benefits from reading everything he can get a hold of for writing. It has taken a long time to get his Bachelors of English (12

years on and off, changing his major three times). He writes a lot with whiskey. He has won prizes in the 2011, 2018, and 2019 Sigma Tau Delta poetry contests. There is poetry in everything we say and do.

MADDISON LUECK is a senior at Skyview High School and plans to obtain her Masters of Professional Accountancy.

ELIZABETH MAY works primarily in a two-dimensional platform with digital techniques, drawing and painting as the medium. In her process, she focuses not on photography as a finished product but the ways in which a photo offers imagery that can be digitally altered. This method gives a feeling similar to the manipulation or workability of painting and drawing. Her work is aimed to influence the viewer to question their place as an individual in the situation, moment, or scene. Viewers will receive a fragmented experience of the work following its composition and carefully altered representation of recognizable objects. Her work often references consumer culture, digital reality and cyberspace. Prevalent is her inquiry of the development of homogenization, uniformity, and the shifting of individual behaviors and habits in congruence with the masses both on a cultural and global scale.

SAMANTHA NESSAN is a senior at Skyview High School. She is enrolled in a dual credit College Writing course which has helped her pursue and grow in her writing. It has been something she has enjoyed doing throughout her life. She will be attending Grand Canyon University in the fall of 2019 where she will pursue a degree in pharmaceuticals.

KENNON NICHOLS is a senior at Skyview High School, graduating in the spring of 2019. He is passionate about chemistry, physics, engineering, and mathematics. He is somewhat socially awkward and aesthetically awkward and therefore, shy and reclusive. He aspires to become a robotics engineer, but have a side passion for world and historical language and religion.

LEANN OMO is a senior at Skyview High School in spring 2019. She will double major in Equine Science and Political Science. She enjoys riding her horse Bandit, reading, watching television, and playing with her dog Sasha in her free time.

JOHANNAH ORENDORFF is a senior at Skyview High School, taking a dual credit enrollment course in College Writing. She plans on attending MSU-Billings for the 2019-2020 school year, then would like to transfer to MSU-Bozeman to finish her schooling. She wants to attain a Ph.D. in Vertebrate Paleontology, minor in Chemistry or Genetics, and wants to travel the world to discover new species of prehistoric creatures. She is currently the principal cellist in Skyview's Philharmonic orchestra, captain of the varsity swim team, the Secretary of the Tri-M Music Honor Society chapter at Skyview, and the Co-Chair of Communications of Skyview's Business Professionals of America

Chapter. She wants to show people that anything can be achieved with just a little hard work. Her published piece showcases her love for dinosaurs, as well as her preference to write stories for all ages.

KARLEE PARK is a mass media major at MSU-Billings with a minor in art. She loves every art form, but photography is her absolute favorite. She is from Bigfork, Montana, so the trees, flowers and mountains fuel her passion. She also really enjoys creating space scenes in Photoshop by using her own photographs as planet textures.

RACHEL PEKAH is currently a junior at MSU-Billings. She has been pursuing an English degree, primarily in literature, but she decided to try her hand at creative writing. It has been an intriguing experience, and she highly recommends it.

TERRI PORTA is an award winning Montanan oil painter with a deep love for the natural world. Her paintings have an impressionistic style and a realistic viewpoint. They are loaded with rich texture, layers of content and brilliant color. They express her childlike wonder for the vastness of Montana and the spiritual and physical roots that feed our soul.

OLIVIA REUSCH was born and raised in Billings, Montana. As of spring 2019, she is a sophomore at MSU-Billings working toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She is an artist and photographer. Her mediums include oil and watercolor painting, drawing, printmaking, and digital art.

GRACE SHROYER is a senior at Skyview High School. In the fall of 2019, she will be attending MSU-Billings with a focus in art.

CARTER SLADE is a student at the Billings Career Center. He has lived in Billings Montana since 2003. His interest includes learning about cars, skiing, and playing with his dog Gilbert. He wants to get a degree in Chemical Engineering while owning a Subaru WRX.

ASHE SPERRY is a senior at Skyview High School. She is a very athletic person that runs a lot. She tends to be well versed in politics and the outside world. She tends to focus on what's wrong with the world more than what I see is right.

LUCAS SULLIVAN is an aspiring Software Engineer at Montana Tech. He writes to make people think about the way we think. When he writes, he feels as if he is philanthropically trying to express the connections he sees in the world. He loves his fiancée Ana and hates poetry that doesn't rhyme.

MORGAN SYRING was born in Billings, Montana and raised primarily in the Eastern part of the state. She has been encouraged by her family to create art from a young age, from her paternal grandfather pushing her to trace the animals she liked out of informational books to her mother snatching paintings that had been thrown away and displaying them around the house. Morgan is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a focus in painting and drawing. She often incorporates multimedia elements in order to explore the materials themselves and her own identity.

EMILY UNGEFUG is a senior at MSU-Billings, graduating in the spring of 2019 with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and an emphasis in Creative Writing. While she does write poetry occasionally, she prefers to write pieces closer to short stories and would like to eventually complete a novel.

ALICE ZEEB is 22 years old and from Billings, Montana. She went to the University of Montana in Missoula for her first year of college then transferred to MSU-Billings to finish her degree. She is currently a senior graduating May 2019 with a Bachelor's degree in Organizational Communication. She is also a member of the National Communication Association Honor Society, Lambda Pi Eta. She has always had a love for art, but in middle school, she found a deeper interest in Zentangle art. Her submission took her over a week to compete, without the use of a ruler and in ink. She likes the challenge of not being able to erase the work she is inspired to create. In the future, she hopes to be able to use her creativity and passion for a challenge in a position as a Marketing Coordinator or Director of an organization.