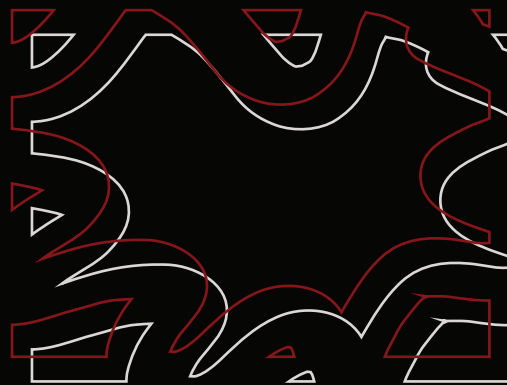


THE LIGHTER THE LIGHTER THE LIGHTER



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VOLUME 68

ISSUE 1

All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate, and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation. The Editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this publication. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

VOLUME 68

ISSUE 1

LOADING...



FLAME ON FLAME ON FLAME ON FLAME ON
FLAZE ON FLAZE ON FLAZE ON FLAZE ON
FLASSE ON FLASSE ON FLASSE ON FLASSE ON
FLAZZE ON FLAZZE ON FLAZZE ON FLAZZE ON



EDITOR'S NOTE

So often, when I reveal to someone that I am a poet, I get the same response: “that’s awesome, but I could never do that.” And I always find myself resisting the urge to grab them by the shoulders and shout in their face, yes you can!! Because in my eyes, of course they can; anyone can. One of the beautiful things about art is that it has no rules, no qualifications for who can and cannot participate. And as we often see in selection committee, people often don’t even agree on when art is “good” or “bad.”

When you were a child, did you not create just for the sake of creation?

We as artists often feel pressure from all sides to commodify our art. It is not always explicit, but it is certainly implied– if you’re not constantly winning awards or publishing your work or selling it, are you really an artist at all? - <3 Lee Sanchez

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Meet Hestia 

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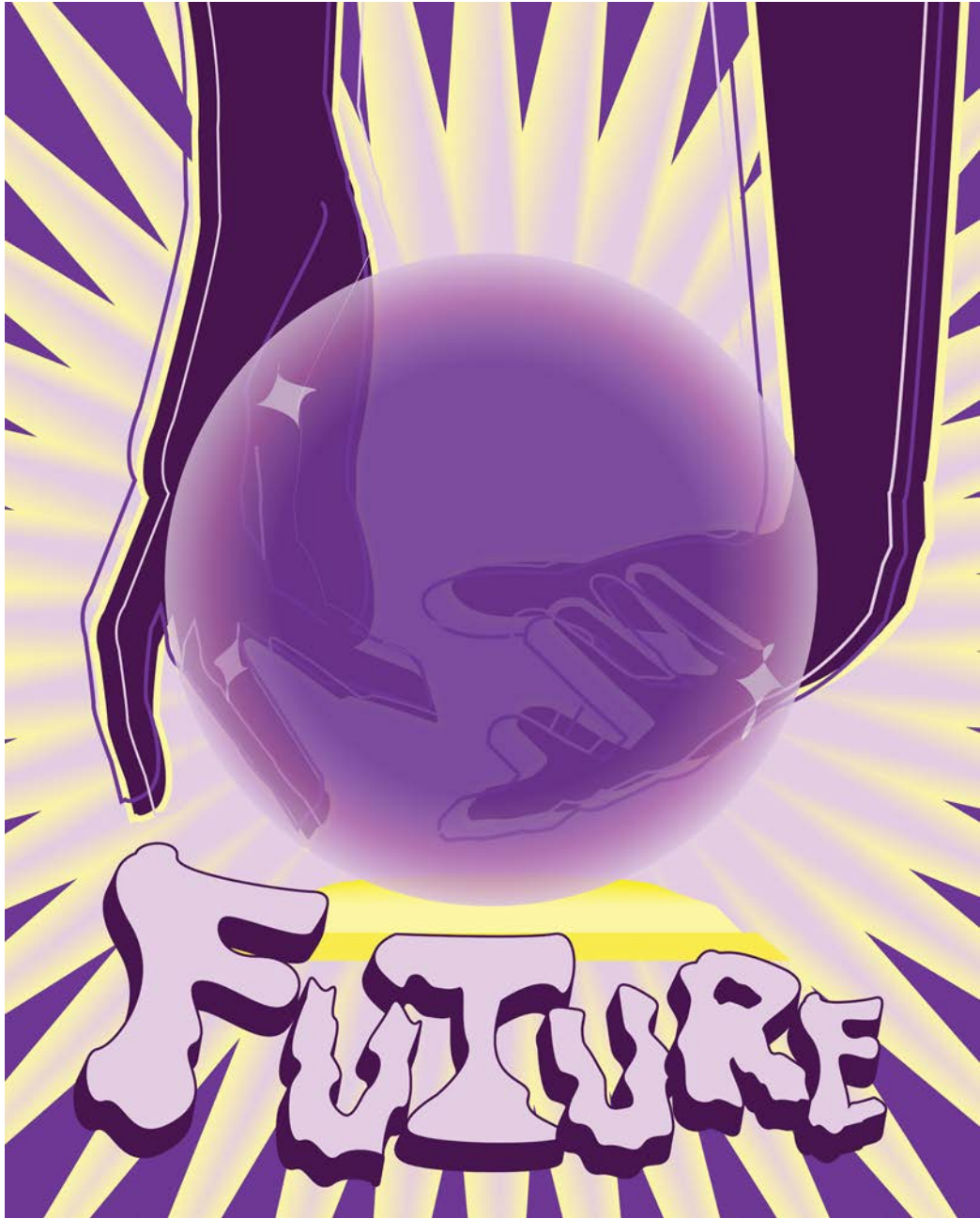
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A stream of fire floats in front of me, swirling lazily throughout the darkened room. Heat radiates from it, an intense warmth that can't quite reach the icy depths of my soul. When my powers first appeared, it was enchanting, mesmerizing, miraculous— it was magic. My fire ignited a hidden spark within me, revealing a burning passion within the emptiness of my heart. When the first tendrils of flame leapt from my fingertips it was indescribable— like heaven and hell combined, it was emotion as I had never experienced before. For the first time, I felt it all— the good, the bad, the angry— I felt everything. Before my powers, I was drowning, sinking slowly toward the bottom of an icy sea with no help in sight. My powers were a miracle, a savior come to liberate me from an aimless life, and I would have done anything to preserve them. But that was then— and this is now.

I always knew I was a freak. Everyone did, really, no matter how they liked to pretend otherwise. “You're just different,” my mother had said, holding me close in the dead of night. “You're... special.” She'd said it kindly, as to protect my feelings— and what an idiotic idea that was, seeing as I had no feelings to protect. Perhaps she had forgotten that, or simply wanted to ignore it, or maybe she was overpowered by some maternal instinct that I could never understand— either way, she coddled me to no end as a child. It never made much sense to me, but then again, neither did most things. Like the tears of the other children when their parents left the school, or the way they spat at me, young voices so full of what I knew to be anger.

“Freak!” They'd yell, sneering at me in a way that suggested I should be upset. “Psychopath!” It was only then that I'd speak up, informing them that I was not, in fact, a psychopath. I would know— I'd been to dozens of doctors by the time I hit school age, all lined up to see what was wrong with me and all, without fail, had ruled out psychopath as a possibility.

“It's the strangest thing,” One doctor had told my mom, the tall one with a bald head that had shone like the fluorescent lights of this particular hospital. I can still remember staring

at it throughout the visit, my attention drawn when my sister Reia innocently asked the man where his hair had gone (and if it was coming back sometime soon). “In Antisocial Personality Disorder, we typically see a limited range of emotional capability, and a lack of empathy— which we don't necessarily see in Ivanna.” The doctor glanced over at me then, inspecting me in the way they all did, as if I were a new exhibit at the zoo. “It's as if she just doesn't have any emotions at all. She can certainly distinguish emotions, and replicate them when she sees fit, but she appears incapable of feeling at all. I'm going to refer you to...” And so it went, for years and years. New doctors, same story— everyone eager to make me someone else's problem. It didn't much bother me— nothing did, really. But my parents were a different story, and eventually they gave up altogether.

They packed up our stuff, moved to a new town a state or two over, and started a new life in which no one would know of my condition. I was 12 by then, old enough to pass as a normal human being, and I trudged through the next three years as if nothing were out of sorts. At first, it was just at school, then in the community, then home. By my 13th birthday, everyone in my family had begun to act as if nothing had ever occurred in the first place. The forced relationship my mother had attempted for years was abandoned at last, and my nonexistent relationship with the father who had always despised me remained as invisible as ever. I never said a thing about it, if only for them— I may have been heartless, but I certainly wasn't brainless. It was only common sense— they put in the time and money for years, and so I owed them a little peace and quiet. My younger sister, Reia, was the only one who maintained interest in any sort of communication with me. She was young at the time we moved, only ten or so, and so she struggled to understand my situation. She would bombard me with questions, shooting puppy eyes at me no matter how many times I told her they quite literally couldn't work on me. “So you can't feel this?” Reia had asked one day, poking her arm with a bony finger. I remember rolling my eyes, an expression I knew to convey annoyance. “I can feel physical things,” I stated, “So yes, I can feel that.” Reia frowned at that. “I don't get it,” She huffed, slumping-

against the car window. Even at ten, she still possessed more teenage sass than I ever would.

“I can’t feel the inside things. Like, love and sadness and love and stuff.” I replied, giving the same answer I’d given the last five times she’d asked. She stared at me from the backseat, eyes searing into mine through the rearview mirror.

“So you don’t love me?” I averted my eyes at her question, choosing to stare at the dashboard in front of me. I could feel my mother’s eyes on me from my left, where she drove silently—probably annoyed that we were even acknowledging my “gifts.”

“No,” I responded blankly, “I can’t.” I had hoped she would understand, from that small addition, that I did want to care for her. I didn’t feel sad, or angry, or frustrated at my situation— and yet still, I saw the emotions that danced through the lives of others, and I wished to know them as well. She didn’t get it, of course— she was only 10, after all, and far too emotional of a soul to comprehend my words. So I just sat as she cried, and my father yelled, and my mother looked at me with that disappointed face that meant nothing to me.

I used to pretend that I had emotions sometimes, just to see what it was like. It never worked, of course, but it was better than nothing. I would play music that was said to evoke a particular emotion and use everything I knew about it to pretend I was experiencing the emotion myself. It was a sick sort of make-believe game, one for children without a heart. It was during one of these instances that the flame first sang to me, changing my life forever.

I had just chosen some “love” music, as I was 17 and love stories were all the rage. I struggled to think of anything to start me off— after all, it wasn’t as though my love life was thriving. I was attracted to no one— and besides, who would ever want to date the detached loner with awful social skills? No, there was certainly no romance in my life. So I thought instead of Reia, the only person who’d ever come close to making me feel alive. It was for I pretended the most, so that she may grow up without the burden of my vacant existence. I may have failed a couple of times— the car incident being just one of many— yet she had turned out alright nonetheless.

At fourteen, she was a beautiful soul already, with so much time to grow. Even the angst of being a teenager couldn’t corrupt her innate patience and goodness, and it seemed as though she had every emotion I lacked to the extreme. She was well-liked at school, fawned over already despite her youth. No, I couldn’t love her, not really— yet out of everyone I’d met, she was the one I wished I could.

It was while I thought of her that I felt it, that ember of emotion within my very soul. Small and barely detectable, but it was most certainly there— and with it, sparks danced from my fingertips. Yet it faded as quickly as it had come, the blackness returning suddenly. Lucid dreaming, I had thought, that’s all. But then it happened again, when I glimpsed Reia across the courtyard— and stayed, this time, the sparks dying down on my hands but not in my heart. The anger came next, then the envy, then the crushing sadness. One after another, emotions flooded me, followed each time by a burst of sparks. The sparks grew stronger with each emotion I gained, terrifyingly large, and I felt wildly out of control. I didn’t bother telling my parents about the magic— it was doubtful they would believe me, and would likely sweep it under the rug with the rest of our problems. So I dealt with it alone, walking on coals for months.

The world seemed to shift around me, everything I knew as “normal” torn away. It was a strange thing, how different knowing was from feeling, how even though I had acted as though I understood I never knew it would be like this. Both glorious and awful, inspiring and depressing, living with emotions was just so much harder. Sure, I didn’t have to pretend to fit in any longer, but I also was suddenly concerned about fitting in when I had never cared before. Each day seemed to bring a different mood— angry, jealous, proud, anxious— and sometimes all at once. It was those days that were the worst, when I would huddle in the corner of the shower and cry endless tears. The worst thing was, I knew there were more to come. I couldn’t help but wonder how everyone had been managing all these emotions without becoming a complete mess— I sure was. Whether my parents knew about my newfound humanity, I didn’t know—id so, they certainly didn’t mention it. I assumed that Reia had-

figured it out— after all, she still followed me around like a puppy dog— but I wasn't sure until the day she burst into my room. It was on the same day I had first felt my flame — that first day I had finally felt everything, all at once. It was a miraculous experience, hindered only when the emotion faded to a normal level, leaving me with a flame I knew nothing about.

When Raia burst in, I was busy attempting to calm the flame that grew from my arms, whilst keeping it from the delicate fabric of my bedspread.

“Get out,” I'd growled, emotion filling me at the sight of her shocked face in the doorway. It felt like annoyance, perhaps with a bit of fear as well— it was so hard to tell them apart. Reia just stood there, mouth open and eyes wide in shock.

“Oh, my god,” She gasped, “You're a witch.” I swore, gesturing her into the room before slamming the door behind her.

“Keep it down, will you?” I'd whispered distractedly, focused once again on my flames. She just came closer, eyes glowing in the light of the flame. Awe filled her eyes— an emotion I had just recently obtained.

“Cool,” She whispered, hand darting above the flames. I pulled my arm away rapidly, shooting her a glare.

“Careful!” My voice came out in a sharp hiss, and I sighed as she cringed away. Guilt— that was another new one, one I didn't particularly enjoy. “It's dangerous,” I said awkwardly, “and I have no clue how to control it.” She had just smiled that contagious smile, so youthful and yet so mature for her years. I can remember it now, glowing like a brand in my mind.

“We'll figure it out,” She had whispered, voice soft and comforting in a way that had never helped before but did so much good now. “Together.” Then she'd sat with me as the flames faded, easing to a warm glow above my skin before disappearing entirely. It was then, when my skin had grown cool at last, that she'd flung herself at me. Her arms wrapped around me in what I knew to be a hug— something I'd avoided for years. Yet I did nothing as she squeezed me, tentatively reaching my arms up to hug her back. It was nice,

I supposed, in an uncomfortable sort of way. Reia nuzzled her head into my shoulder, until only the top of her auburn hair was visible. I'm glad you're finally here.” I smiled at the words, that sense of love flaring in my chest as I rested my chin atop her head.

“Me too,” I said. That was the moment— the one where I realized just how true that statement was. Starting then, things went much better with Reia by my side. Together, we learned about my powers, my capabilities, and how to control it. Even when I moved out at 18, I saw her often, ensuring I spent at least a day with her each week. It was a year of bliss, of fun and power— not only from the magic itself, but also the sort of power that came from doing it with her. I had thought we'd been sisters before, but we hadn't— not really, at least. Not in the way that counted. Only once I had emotions was I able to care for her as I should, and enjoy her company the way I should have all along. It was during this time that I met Cove as well, during this time that he had managed to worm his way into my healing heart, and help me in ways I didn't know were possible. It had been one of those bad days when I met him, one of those days where emotion seemed to smother each and every part of me. I had fled to the park, gasping desperately for air. The world seemed to close around me, preparing to swallow me whole, when I bumped into him. I'd walked away almost immediately, still not used to all the manners and niceties of polite society.

“Hey, wait a minute,” He'd called, jogging up behind me. I forced myself to calm down slightly, spinning around to face him. He skidded to a stop, brushing his hair out of his eyes. “You practically knock me down and I don't even get a hello?” It had taken me a moment to understand he was joking, to adjust to the playful banter of casual conversation. Even with my heightened ability to socialize, I mainly kept to myself, still not entirely caught up to the subtleties of human interaction. “Sorry,” I murmured, turning away once again. As far as I was concerned, the faster I could finish this conversation, the better.v“Wait, I'm sorry,” He called, “It was a joke.” He sounded so sorry, and so wretchedly sincere, that I conceded to converse with him. He caught up with me once more, blue eyes twinkling in the sun. Hi,” He said, panting—

lightly, "I'm Cove." I took the hand extended to me, ignoring the electricity I felt as our skin connected. Attraction was so new to me then, so foreign.

"I'm Ivanna," I had said warily, "Nice to meet you." And it all seemed to move so fast from there— coffee dates, picnics, that one day when all my secrets came out— they came and went in a blur of growth and wonder. And in that year, I wondered how I could have ever tried to ignore him, because he was everything I wished to be and more. Where I was serious and withdrawn, he was jovial and friendly. For all of my tears and breakdowns, he was a constant presence of comfort and warmth. With him, I healed— I became someone else entirely. Someone that I once thought it impossible to become. It was a year of beauty, of love, of happiness like I'd never known before.

Footsteps sound on the cold stone floor, echoing lightly in the silence, but I can't bring myself to turn towards them. A gentle hand lands on my shoulder, and I resist the urge to lean into the warmth of his being. Cove's presence tickles my soul, reaching further than the flame, but it remains icy all the same. Nothing can warm me anymore— not after her.

"You sure about this?" His voice sounds from near my ear, breath raising goosebumps on the sensitive skin.

"How could I not be?" My voice sounding weakert-han I thought, throat raw from yet another tear-filled day. He turns to face me, and as our eyes meet something breaks inside of me. "She was my sister." A dry sob escapes my words, a parched fragment of the pain that still festers inside. Reia was innocent, clear of all crimes besides being in the same room at the moment my powers betrayed me. Grief creeps up in my gut, an awful burning sensation that scalds me slowly. "It was all my fault." It comes out in a whisper, and I give into my urges at last, allowing my shaking body to settle into the comfort of Cove's strong arms. He doesn't press me, although I know he wants to— after all, he spent the entirety of two days trying to lessen my guilt. It was no use— the fact was, I killed my sister. My powers killed my sister.

"You'll lose everything." His voice is soft as he speaks, running his hand gently through my auburn hair, and

I can tell he's close to tears. "I'll lose everything." I squeeze my eyes shut, dreading the conversation to come. It is the drawback of my plan, I know— without my powers I will revert back to my previous state of living, unable to feel even the most basic of emotions. It means giving up everything I've gained— it means giving up Cove.

"You won't lose anything but me," I murmur, refusing to meet his eyes.

"That is everything." His voice breaks, and I shudder at the pain he emits.

"It's the only option. I'm too dangerous with my powers, I could hurt you—

"I don't care!" Frustration permeates his tone, and he runs his hand quickly through his tousled curls, eyes ablaze with a painful passion. "Come on, Ivanna, don't you care that we'll lose all of this—

"Cove...I bite my lip, guilt rising in my stomach at the thought.

"—we'll lose this, and you'll lose everything—
"Cove, listen—"

"—and you won't be able to feel anything— "I don't want to feel anything." I'm yelling now, tears streaming shamelessly down my face as I whip around to face him. He stops talking at last, filling the chamber with a tense silence. "Do you understand how painful it is to even be alive right now, to take a breath when I know I took my sister's last? To know that I could do the same to you?" Shock fills his features, and I sigh gently. "I can't let you get hurt because of me," I whisper, "I won't." I search his face while I speak, scanning for any signs of understanding. "I need you to accept that. Please." Resignation settles on his features, and I smile gently as he grasps my hand, pulling me close.

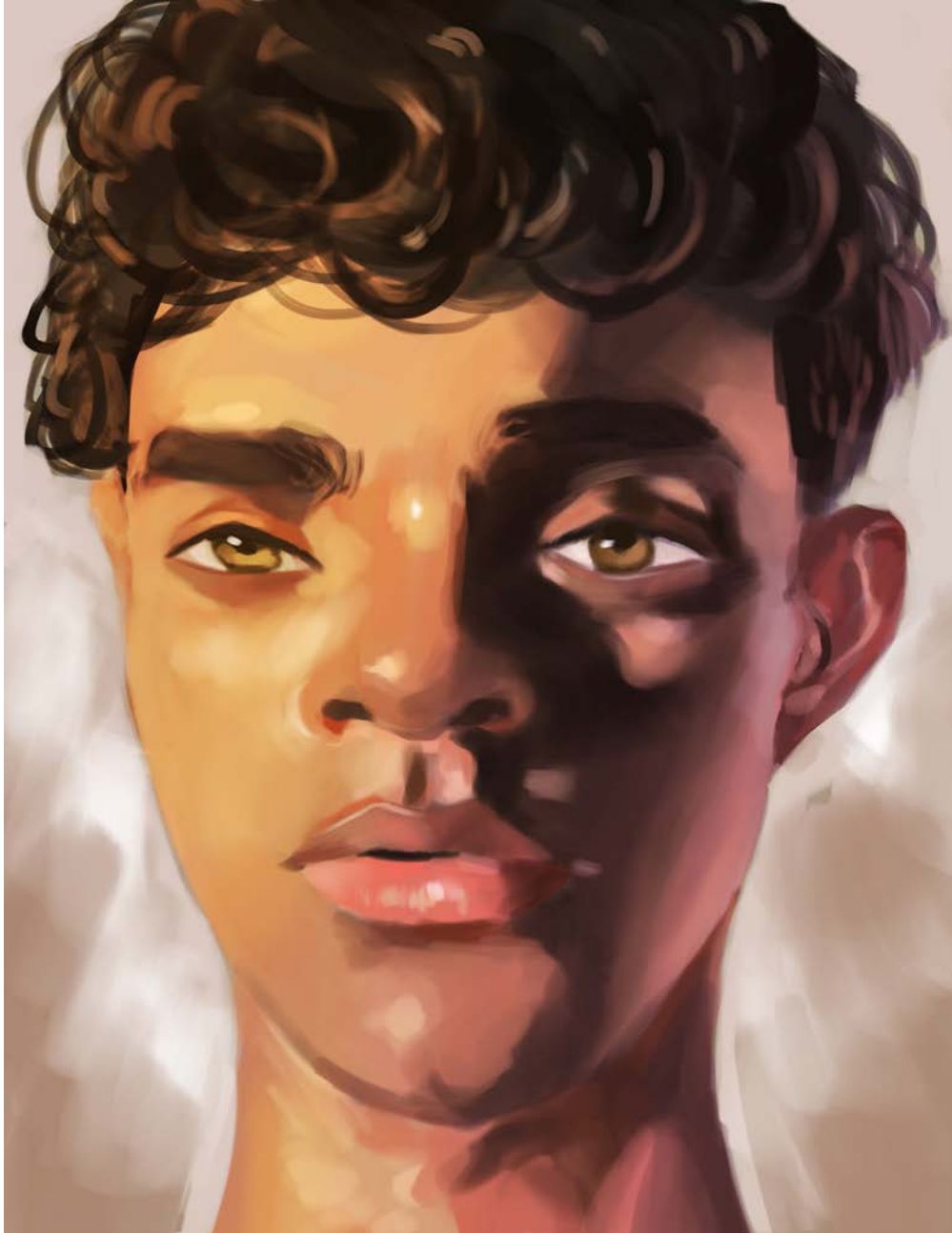
"One last time?" He asks gently, face inches from my own, and I give a watery nod. His lips meet mine, and I relish in the feeling. Despite the saltiness of our tears and the grief still crawling in my bones, the kiss is magical, and I feel almost as if I'm flying, leaping over trees and mountains and rivers. I savor the emotion that runs through my veins and into my heart, savor the ability to feel. As Cove draws back slowly, something changes inside of me, and in that moment—















“Yes, I have known Love.”

I have felt that pronounced absence of self,
that pit filled by Other’s dream.

I stumble towards its edge and step onto air.
To know the precipice is to anticipate the fall,
fear wastes away at the sound of Lover’s call.





Beneath the waves and below the tides
Under moonlight, starlight hides
Innocence lost like angel's wings
Fear of freedom, darkness brings

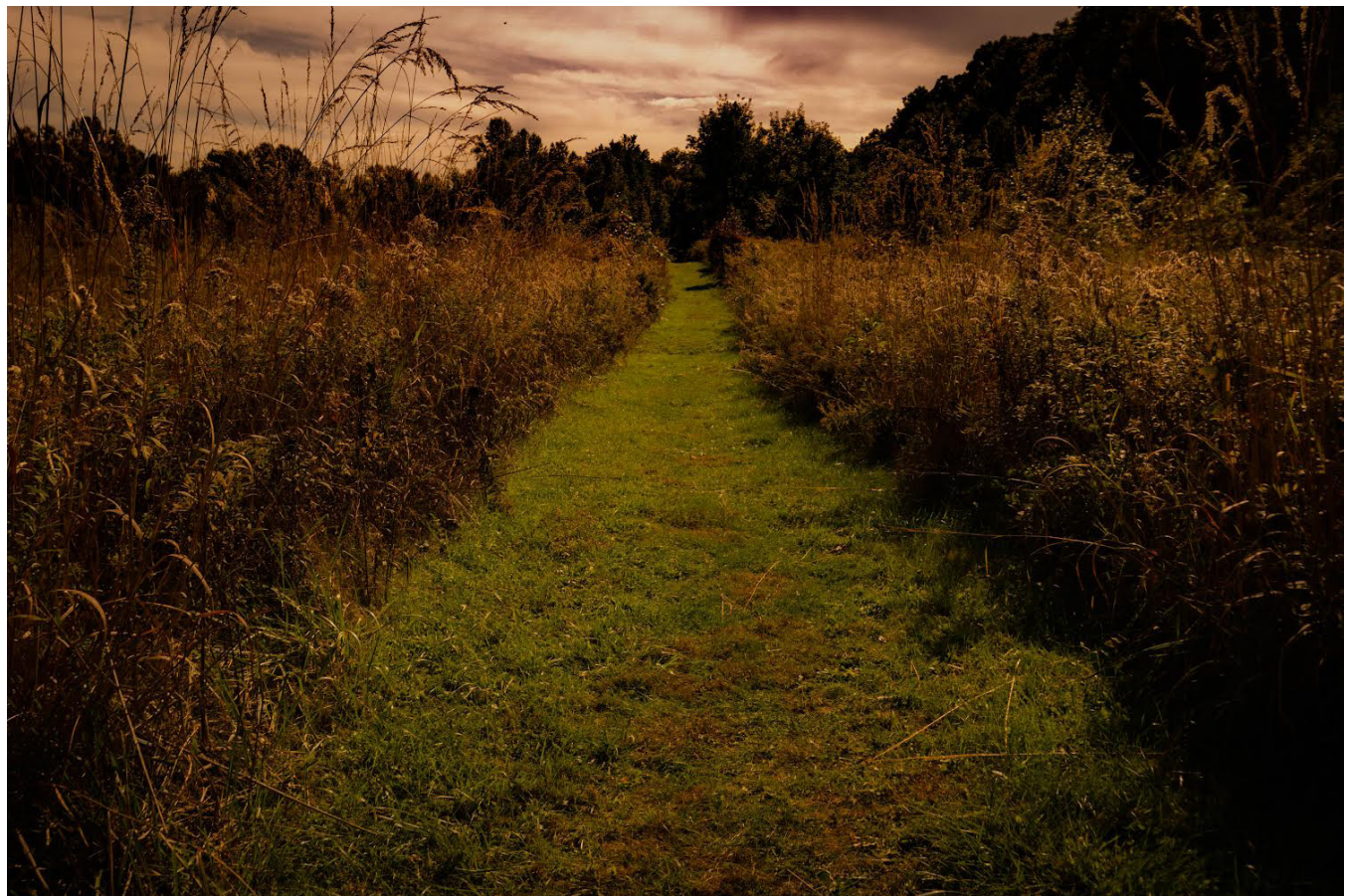
Water like glass, reflects the sky
A pool where sorrow goes to die
Silver skips across the waves
Flowers rest upon the grave

One heart lies against the throne
Roses bloom among the stones
Kingdom fall and paradise lost
Torn hearts will forget the cost

Snow now rests where love had grown
Petals far gone, in the wind blown
Come to rest upon the sea
Come to me, come to be









My world's falling down around me;
Rubble is starting to surround me.
I feel my stress start to rise,
If only I could shut my eyes.

The ground under me starts to shift,
Neither of my legs can I lift.
The strength to struggle can't be found,
As my legs sink beneath the ground.

The air, it has become stagnant,
Attracted to me like a magnet.
Its weight pushing upon my chest,
Forcing my lungs to take a rest.

At this point hope has flown away;
Night has swallowed the light of day.
My brain fades from what it has wrought,
This is the end I never sought.





The Lighter Presents an Interview with Writer and Valpo Alumni Tommy Dean

Tommy Dean graduated from Valparaiso University in 2006 with degrees in Criminology and Creative Writing before completing his Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing in 2010. He specializes in writing flash fiction, and is currently editor of *Fractured Lit* and *Uncharted* magazine. Find more on his website tommydeanwriter.com, or on Twitter @TommyDeanWriter.

Michela Tenuta: What was your experience getting into this profession?

Tommy Dean: I wanted to be a lawyer, and then I realized that I don't see things in black and white. I see things in very gray, and [I see] multiple sides of things. And so I don't think that was ever going wasn't part of my personality, even though that's what I thought I wanted to be. Then, I took a creative writing class with Professor Byrne and fell in love with writing. And then just before I graduated, I applied to a whole bunch of MFA programs for creative writing and didn't get into any of them. I just wasn't ready, I don't think. So, I went and did social work with my Criminology degree. I worked with kids to help them out in their community. I did that for quite a while. Then, I went and got an MFA at a low residency program, which just means you're on campus only twice a year, ten days each time; the rest of the stuff you do at home with your professor and your cohort. So I did that from 2008 to 2010, started publishing some stories, went and got a Licensure Only for teaching special education in middle school, and went and did that for seven or eight years while I was still writing. And now I run two literary magazines that I get paid to be the editor for.

Lee Sanchez: Wow!

TD: Yeah, it was a long, winding road, but it all worked out.

LS: What was it like trying to get published as a new writer?

TD: It was very difficult. Lots of literary magazines and journals, even ones that weren't super well known, only accepted a small percentage of stories. And the [saying that you need] 10,000 hours of practice has been debunked a little bit, but I actually think in writing, it still makes a lot of difference. And I wasn't

writing as a kid. I started writing here at Valpo my sophomore year, so I hadn't been writing very long. And so [I] was trying to submit stories and getting a lot of rejections— a lot of rejections. But it's part of the business at this point now, and it took me a long time to figure out that the writing is the art side, and publishing is the business side. But it was hard in the beginning to separate myself from what I thought was my best work, and it was, but it was still just immature, for a lack of a better word. I still had to do a lot of writing at that point. I think I really came into publishing around 2011, right after [completing] my MFA. I went through all that and got advice from professors, and I think I ended up publishing 30 stories or something that year, which is a lot. Not all of them were big name journals by any means, but from that point, it had been six or seven years of writing here at Valpo by myself, then the MFA program. That's when it took off, I guess.

LS: Can you describe your experience as the Editor of *Fractured Lit* and *Uncharted* magazine?

TD: One of the first things I learned about being an editor was that it isn't just about picking the stories that you love to publish. There's a decent amount of administrative work between filling out contracts, getting contracts out to writers, talking with writers about their submissions, about the errors they might have made in submitting, and getting them back on track and making them feel better about the fact that we're not rejecting over small typos or if you left something out of your cover letter. It'll be fine; we really care about the story. But one of the exciting things is just having people trust you as a person and as the editor of the magazine. Even with our first year, I think we got almost 6000 submissions, which made us feel really good and humbled that people were willing to trust us with their writing, because it's not easy to submit your work, especially [to] somebody you don't know or a journal that's just getting started. So that was one of the very cool experiences, just getting [submissions from] all these writers that I love, or writers I didn't even know.

I didn't care about writing at all when I was in high school, and they're writing on par with anyone else that we publish. And then I think, too, [something that] was a little surprising— I knew we would send a lot of rejection letters, but I didn't quite understand how many we would send. We can only take 40 stories a year, and like I said, [we received] maybe 6000. So 0.8%, I think, is what we're accepting right now, which is a bummer, because we'd like to publish more. We do pay our published writers either \$50 or \$75, [and] a lot of journals don't pay.

MT: What is your favorite part about being a professor of creative writing?

TD: My favorite part is just helping students make their writing better. That's the most basic way to say it, but to make them feel validated in what they're choosing to do. To feel inspired to continue to write. It's so easy to want to write, but [it's also easy] to give up or listen to all the negatives. There's no money in it, but that doesn't mean it's not a worthwhile pursuit, either. And I know it can be a little lonely in writing, or in any creative field, because it is a kind of singular event that you do. Only after it's completed do you go out and find a reader or viewer— a witness-er. So, it's nice to be able to give writers feedback early and often.

LS: I definitely relate. I work at the Writing Center here on campus, so everything you said totally makes sense, especially wanting to make writers feel validated. Most of our clients come in and they're like, "yeah, it's not really good, I'm not really a writer. I don't know." So at the Writer Center, we say our purpose is not to make the writing better, but make the writer better.

TD: Exactly. A lot of writing is really just a willingness to sit with that uncomfortable feeling. It's hard in a mental, kind of cosmic way, because you just want to do well. And I think most of us think, "of course I can sit down and write," but it takes a little more than just wanting to do it. It's a continuous thing. It's kind of like exercise in a way. It's definitely exercising a kind of mental muscle.

MT: Can you describe your writing process?

LS: I'm also curious to know if your writing process has changed

over time.

TD: It has changed in a lot of ways. In the beginning, I think I was like most writers, and you just write as much as you can without much idea of form and structure. And now that I write primarily flash fiction, I focus more on the structure or the word count and trying to keep everything under 1000 words. And in order to do that, I actually write very slowly. I write almost line by line, maybe a way a poet would write. And if I come up with a word or an image that I think is cliché or too conventional, instead of moving on, I'll stop and start to cycle through, like, "what's my third idea? What's my fourth idea?" in order to dig deeper into either the word or the image or the character. "What is the action that they're doing?" Like, "oh, this is what everyone would do. I don't want my character to do what everyone would do, because that's boring." Whereas in the beginning, I would give myself as much room on the page as I felt I needed, and would just write and write and write and write. But then I'd be like, "well, how do I dial this back? And how do I revise?" So now I kind of revise as I go. And I think if it's not your process, it can definitely stump you. You can block yourself as a writer, and you'll be like, "oh, I don't know what the next word is, I have to stop," which you don't want to do. You want to try to get as much on the page as you can, because it does give you something to work with later. But I do a lot of revisions in that first draft. Before, I might have gone through, like, 20 drafts. Now I might go through, like, three or four drafts. But that's my own process, if that makes sense. And I'm not saying that every time it's the best story ever, either— sometimes they come out whole, and sometimes they don't. I'm not a write-every-day writer. A lot of people like to say, "can you call yourself a writer if you don't write every day?" Well, of course you [can]. If you think in writing and you want to write and you do write, you're a writer. I fit it in between everything else that's going on. And then there are moments where it just feels like I have to write in order to feel whole if it's been a couple of weeks, or a month. So as much as I'd like to write every day, it just doesn't happen.

LS: You probably don't want to force it.

TD: No, and I'm not one that will just sit there staring at a blank page necessarily, either. I like to have some kind of genesis before I sit down.

LS: Just for fun, what's the best and worst writing advice you've ever received?

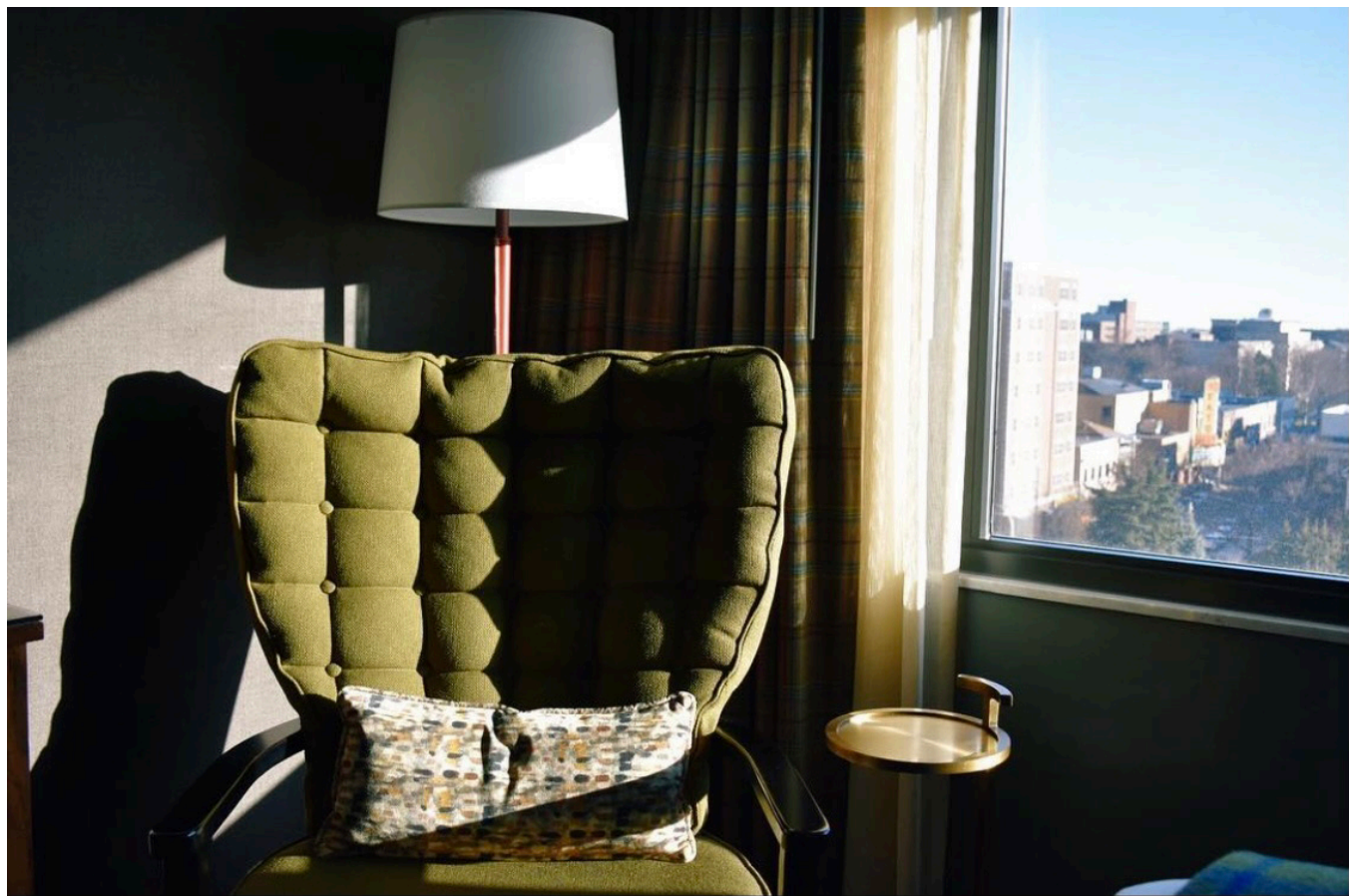
TD: I've received a lot over the years. I've probably given a lot over the years. I think the best advice I've been given is probably to let the character lead the story. Instead of [you] as the writer leading the story, let the character lead the story in order to see where that takes you. Because as the writer, you can sometimes jump in too soon and stop the character before you find out what they want to do on the page, which all sounds like I'm moving around puppets or something, but it's really how I feel about it. There's lots of bad advice. I think the worst advice really is that you have to write every day in order to be a writer. I think that's just not true. And it does more harm than good, because, like we talked about before, you do have to have a certain confidence to be a writer and come to the page when you're ready. And [by having] that guilt like, "well, I didn't write yesterday, and I didn't write two days ago," it's really hard to sit down and focus yourself if you're feeling guilty about not showing up the other day.

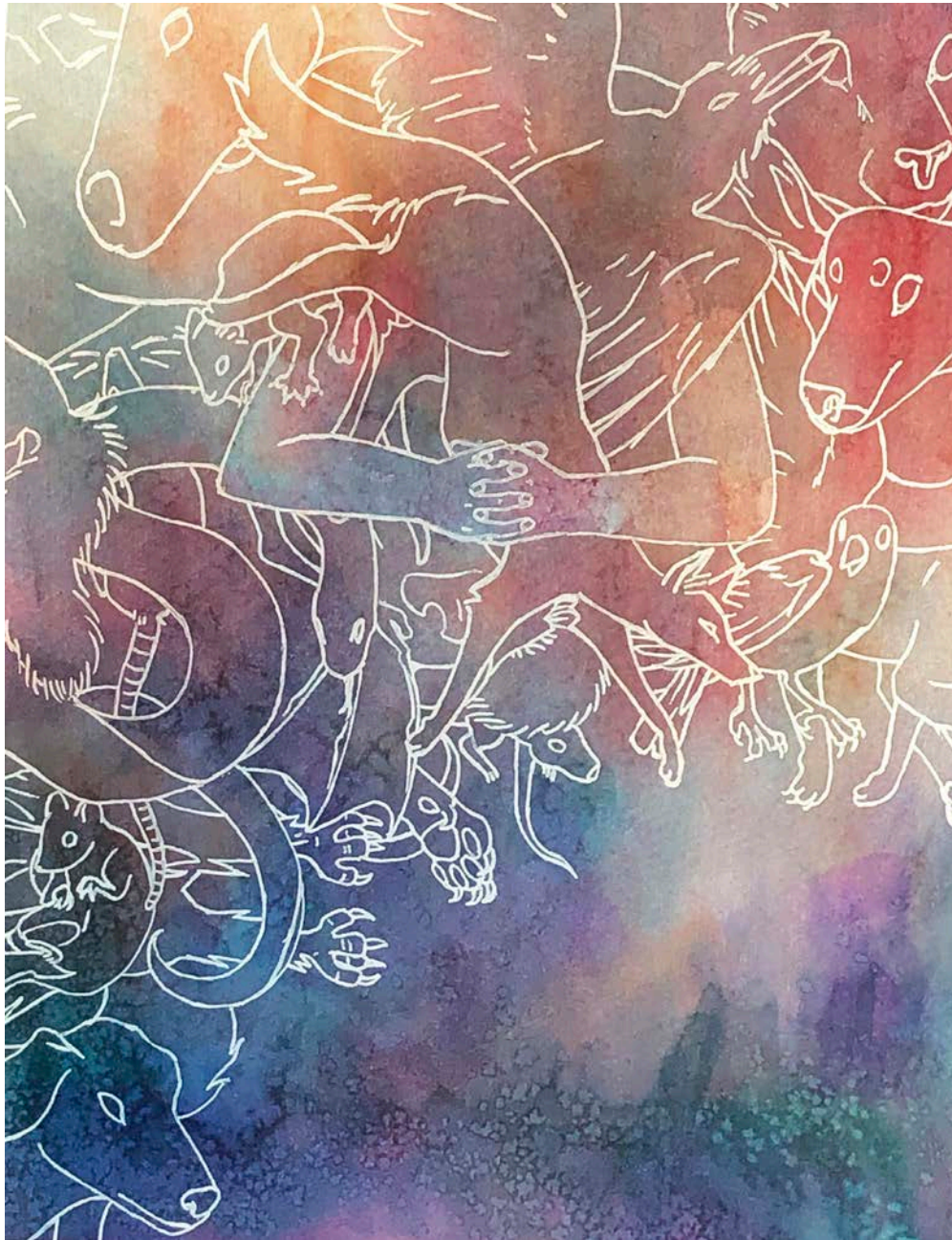
LS: What is your own advice for young writers and artists?

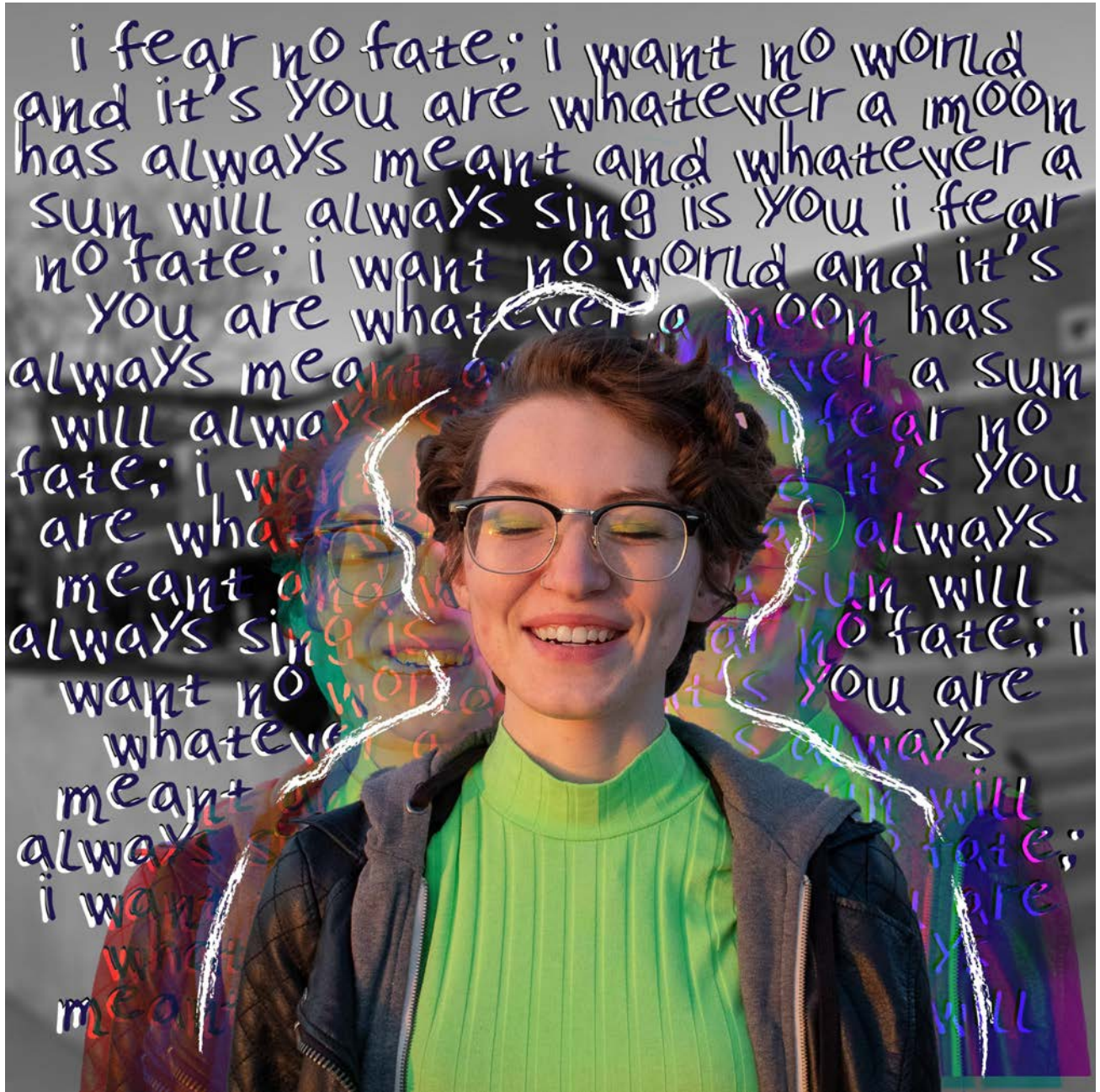
TD: Take yourself seriously. Give yourself time and space to do your art, and think of publishing last. Like we talked about before, get as much writing and reading in as you can in order to fine tune your craft. But also have fun, right? Don't do something if it's torture. It's one thing if you have to write for class, but no one's making you [write outside of that]. So if you can, then you absolutely should have as much fun as you can. Keep that sense of play, because once you start publishing or editing other people's work, you start to think about the business and publishing side of it a lot more. And you can lose that sense of play. You start to feel like everything needs to be published, or everything needs to be read by someone else. It's not always true.

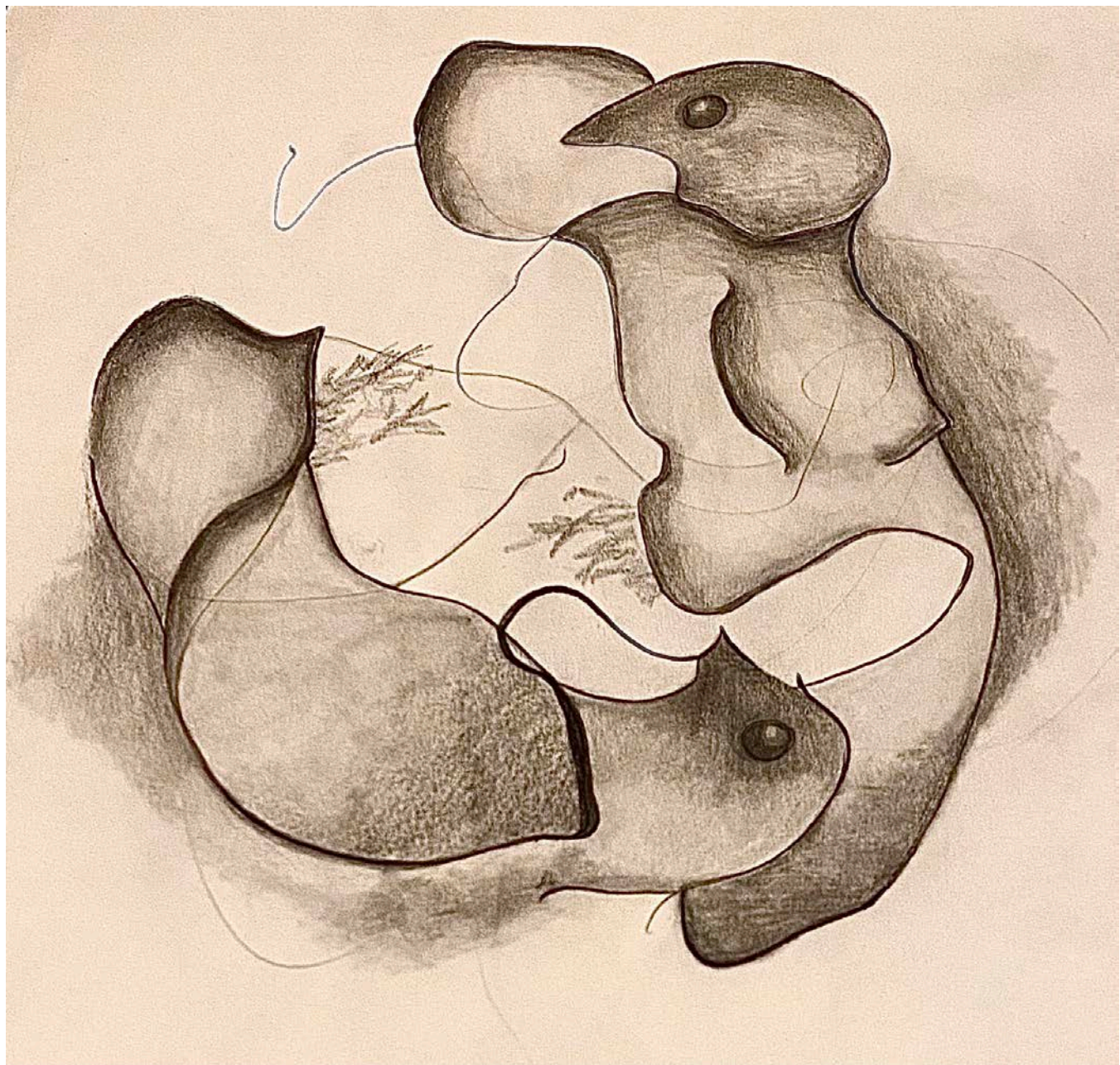
LS: I know I have my archives that will probably never see the light of day.

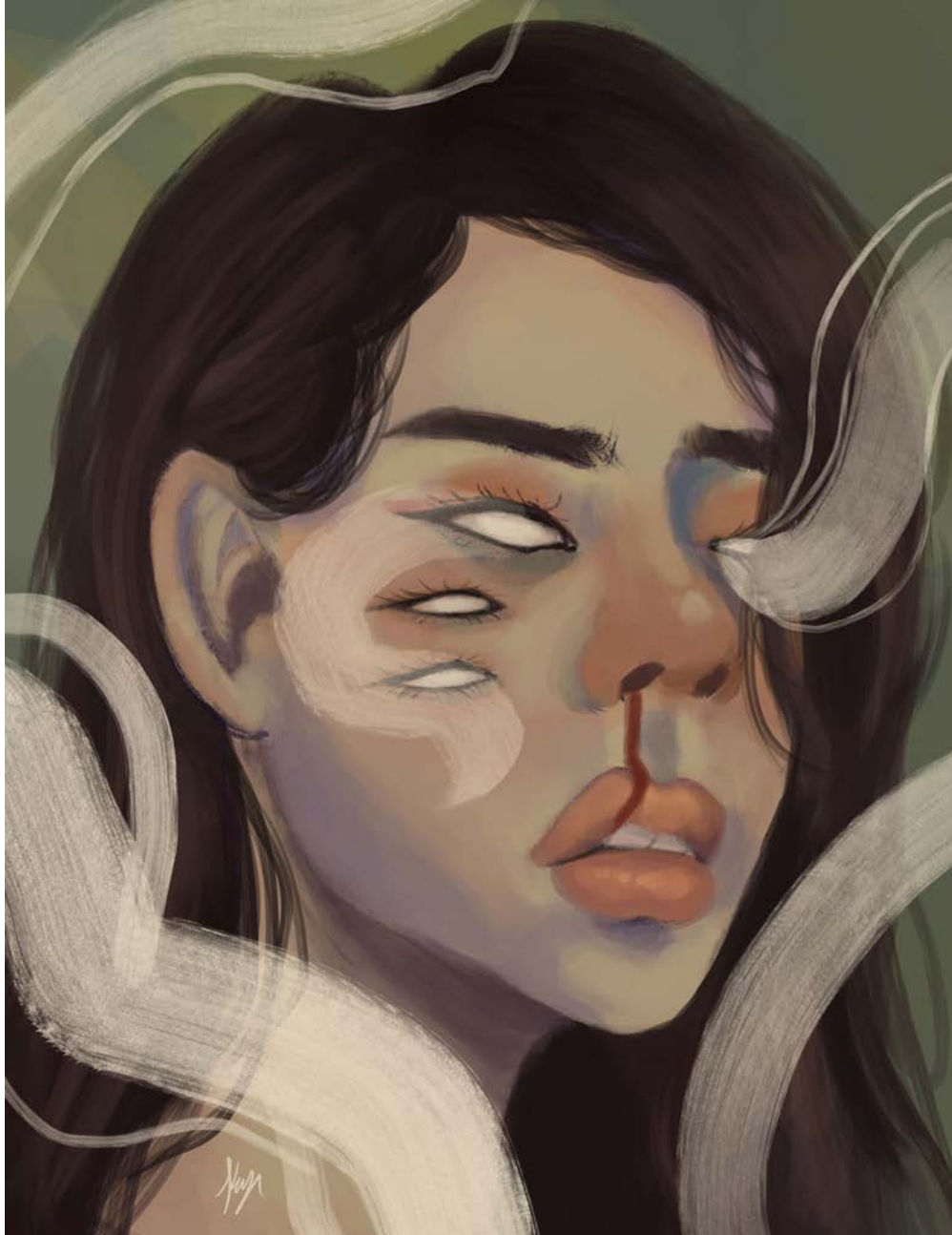
TD: Right. But it may have been the poems that helped you get to the other poems that you do want to share. You just never know [which will be] the link in the chain that gets [you] to your best work, or your most read work. So sometimes you have to write it, even if it's going nowhere. That's a hard thing about writing— to know that you're going to do something that may not go anywhere, but it leads [to some where] later on. You just don't know it.











Eva sat on the floor of her grandparents living room. Her Barbie dolls clutched tightly in her small hands. She made them walk across the floor, their heeled shoes sinking into the carpet. She made their blonde hair swing behind them as they walked. She mimicked them, her blonde curls swishing behind her. She wanted to be as pretty as her Barbies when she grew up. “Keep your stomach sucked in, you don’t want to get fat.” That’s what her grandmother said to her as she passed by going into the kitchen to make dinner. The grip on her Barbies slackened and the little girl frowned looking down at her stomach.

Her high school girl classmates had abs. She wished she looked like them. She quickly stripped, shoving her clothes into her gym locker and pulling on the loose white practice shirt. “God I’m so fat!” One girl exclaimed, clutching her stomach. Eva sighed and looked down at herself, then what was she? Her stomach growled in protest from not eating, but she didn’t care. Being pretty was more important than being hungry.

She stared at herself in the mirror. Her collarbones jutted out from her body. Her blue prom dress hung from her body, the twenty safety pins not quite keeping it secure enough. Her blonde hair dull and limp around her face, she couldn’t risk losing more of it from her curling iron. She smiled at herself in the mirror, skin stretching tightly over her cheeks. Her blush contrasted starkly with her wan skin. When she collapsed at the dance, she couldn’t understand why everyone was worried. She was finally pretty. Couldn’t they see that?





The world is an unjust place,
Where the guilty roam free
While the innocent languish,
In cages, like animals.

Where people listen with rapt attention
To every boldfaced lie,
But every fact
Falls upon deaf ears.

Where those who are different
Are ridiculed or harassed
To inspire uniformity
At the cost of individuality.

Where people desire freedom
But only for themselves
Unconcerned with others' rights
So long as theirs are unthreatened.

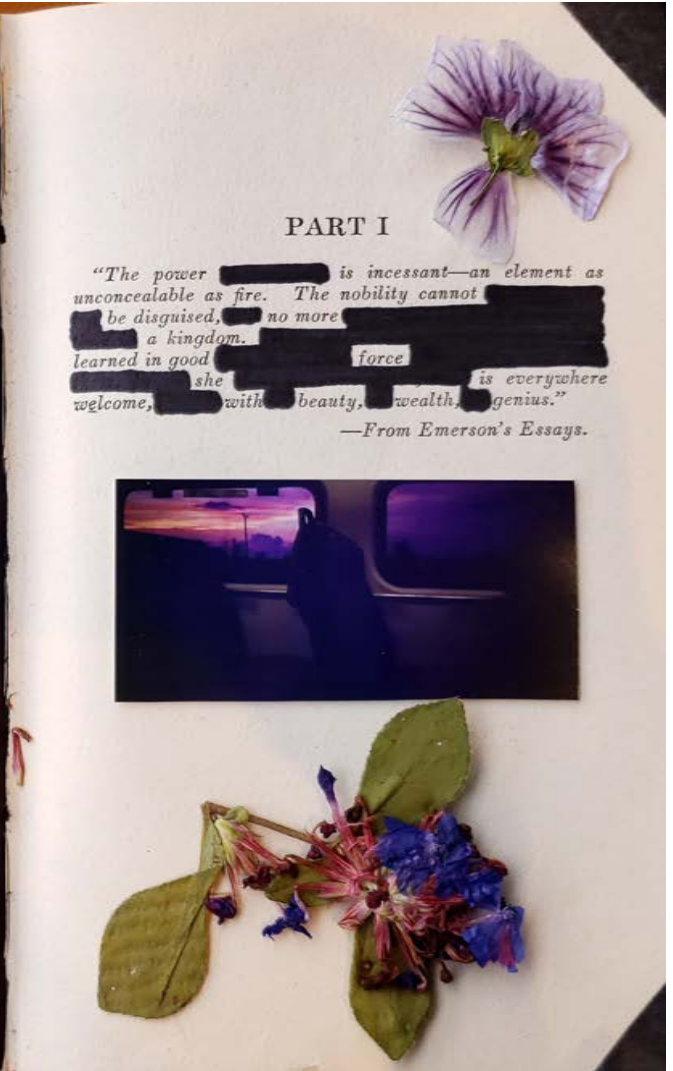
Where science is twisted into
Something scientists can't recognize;
Butchered and sewn
Into an abomination.

Where empathy is alien,
Apathy is universal,
Hate is commonplace,
And love is outlandish.

However, among the chaos
There are those who fight valiantly;
Not with sword and shield,
But with open hearts and open minds.

Yet, they are vastly outnumbered
Amidst the hordes of barbarians,
Who attack relentlessly
And without a shred of mercy.

They know the battle is lost
Still, they meet fate with arms outstretched,
Smiles on their faces,
And unburdened by regret.

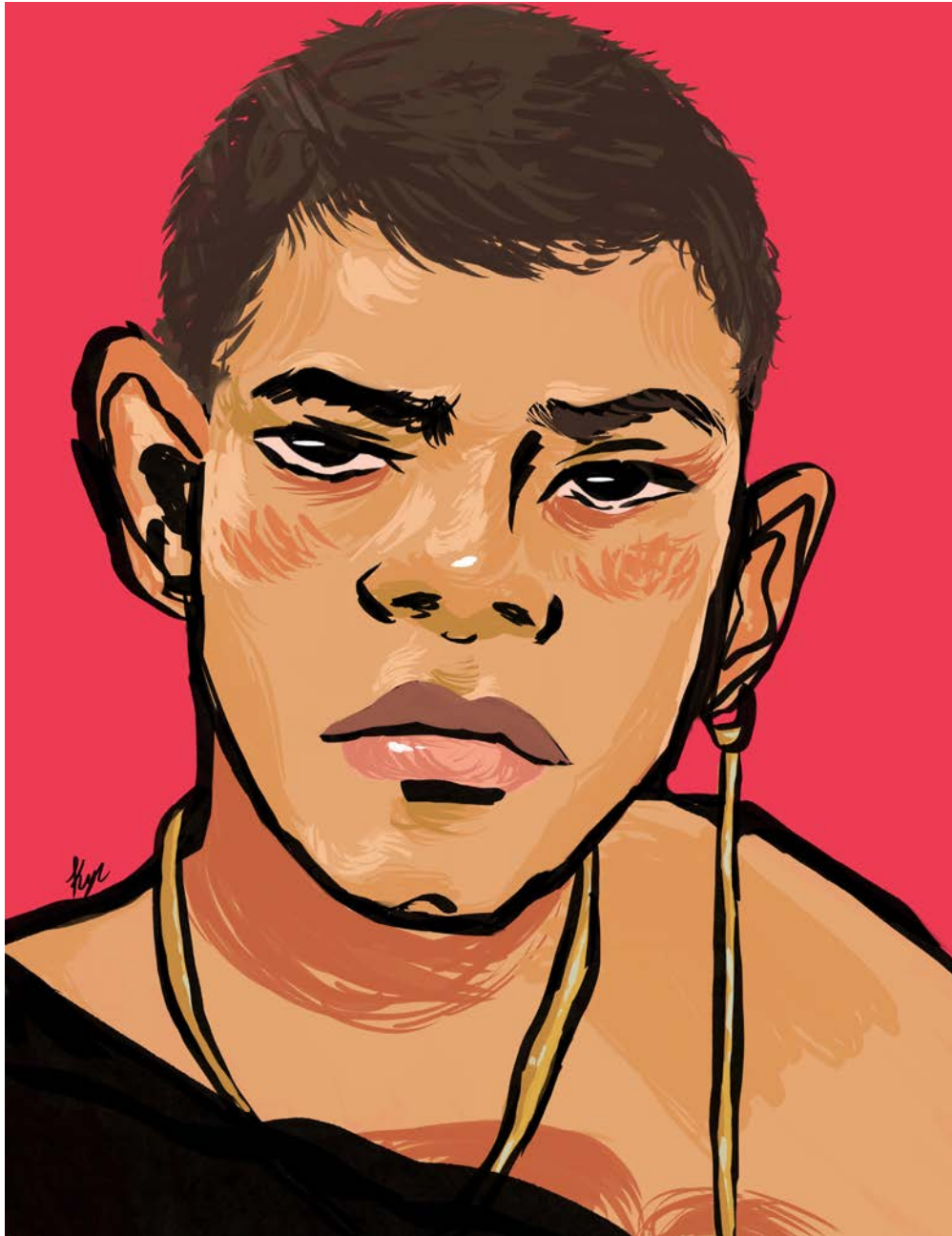












I'm not an athlete but there's still plenty I'm running from:
being broken up with for the second time in my
bleak two-person list of romantic relationships,
forcefully facing a place far too similar to environment-based trauma,
filming my first occupational independent project with foreign gear,
and ruminating thoughts of resuming therapy.
All of the above, of course, complicated by the continual stress of college life.

I'm coping all right.
I'm playing music constantly, to avoid the silence amid my spiraling thoughts.
I'm spending my days with one foot in reality as I dissolve into dissociative daydreams.
I say "present" even though I'm not really, truly present; a phantom of the person I am.
If I can set aside the stress, school is a welcomed distraction, but I'm running out of work to do.
All this to say, if I can seem present, I might seem okay.

But there's darkness behind these eyes you're not allowed to see.
Here I am turning this pain into poetry.
Light.
Not the darkness, but a cigarette.
Drown.
Not the background noise, but my abusive thoughts.
Swallow.
Not the doubt, but the gel-coated levity that disappears with too much brevity.

Maybe Houdini had the right idea: shut myself in a safe to feel safe,
close the locks and swallow the key.
A copycat died not from the water pressure,
but from the constraints of the pressure he put himself under
because he couldn't free the constraints of the chains,
or swallow the river like the World Serpent Jörmungandr.

tretched to transparency.
so thin my fragile flesh
could be ripped
from muscle to bone.
yet, all i think:

Done.

taut like a drum.
too tight to create
anything but a dull thwap
with a mallet's whack.
no rhythm, only wind—

Done—

carrying clouds of pus and blood
across swirling skies,
over louring waters,
and whispering secrets of
receding strangers.

Done.

trapped in purgatory,
but with the realization
that it is reality.
i hold my head and my face warps
as if dragged with the wind.

So Done.

soundless,

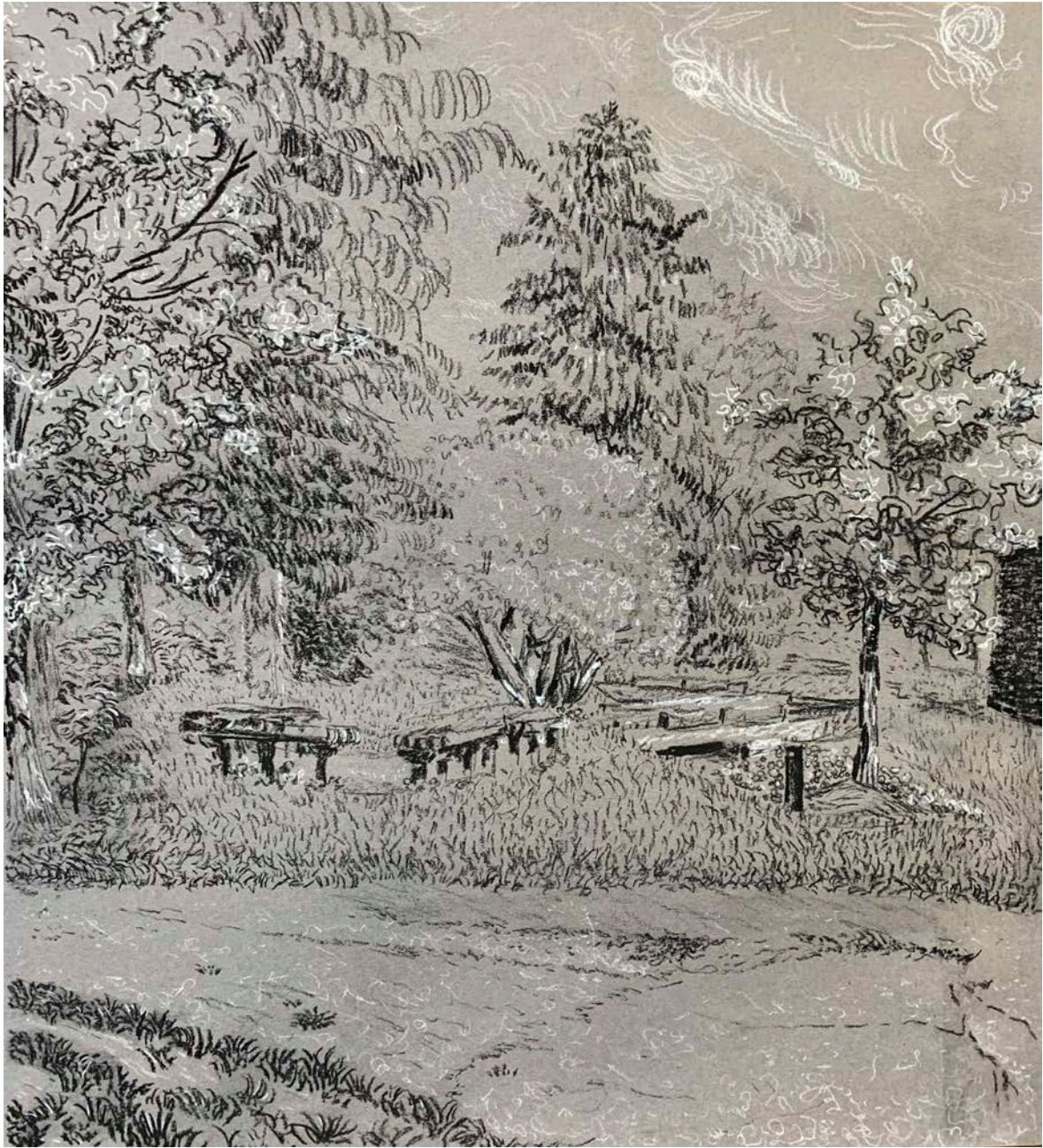
i scream.

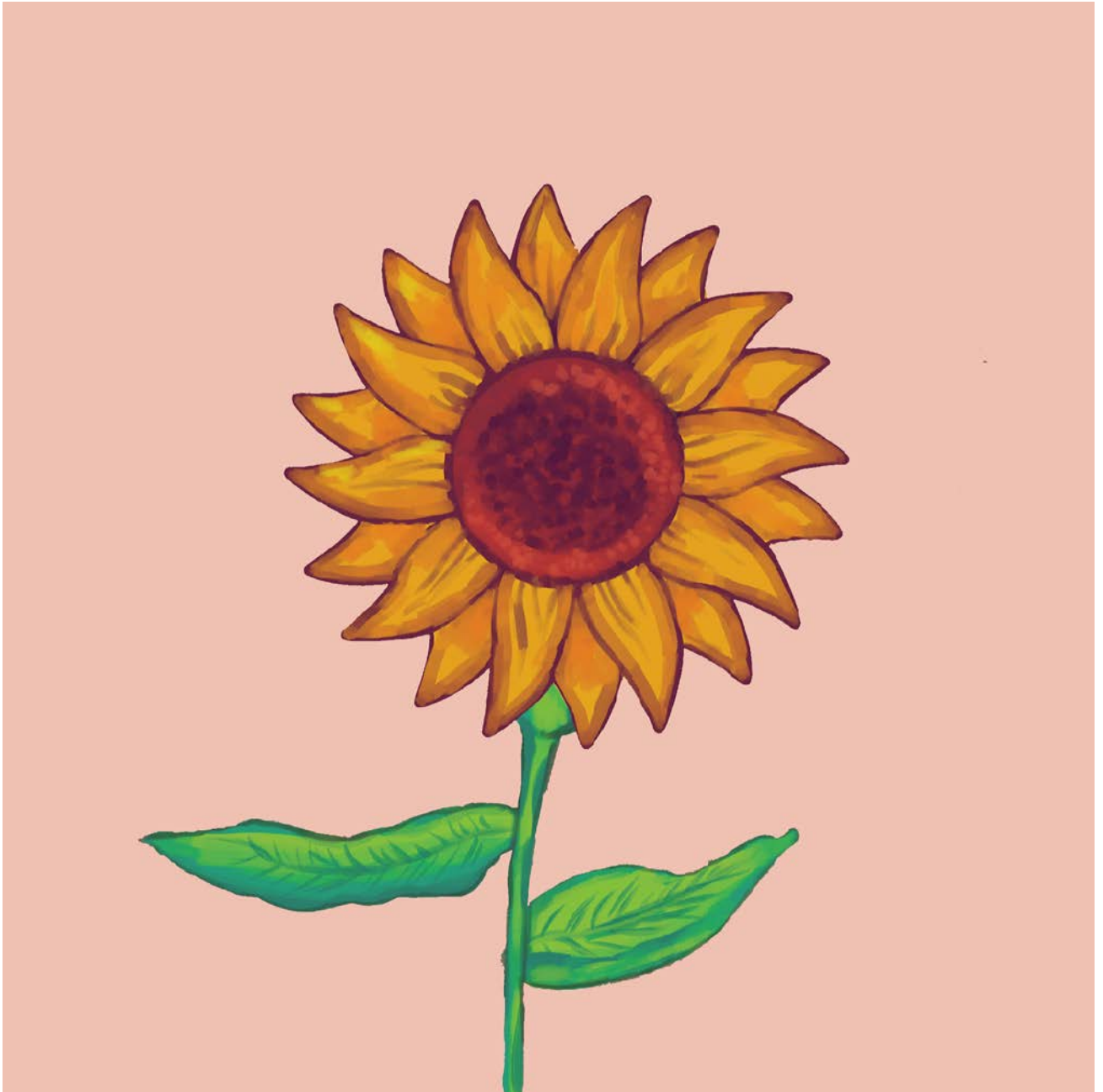


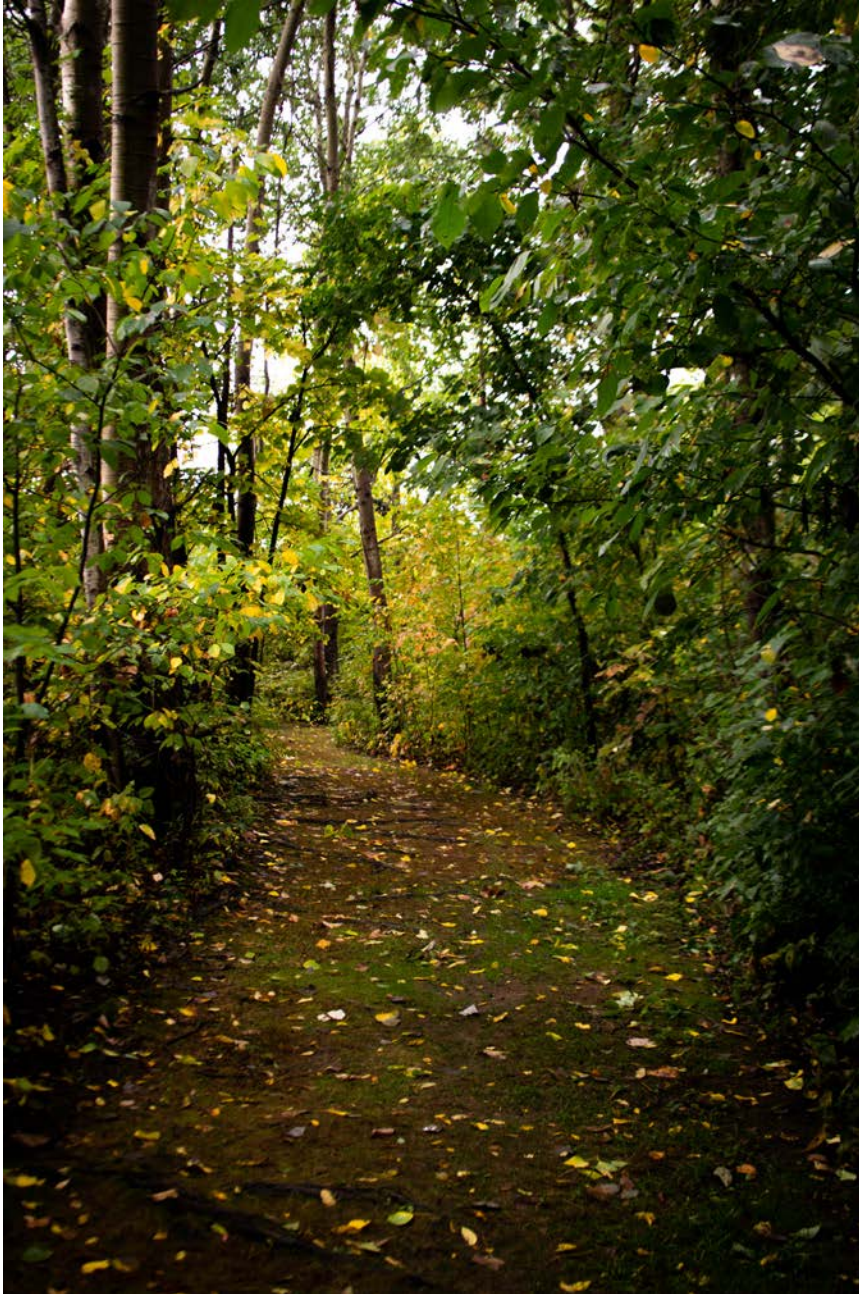












Lamenting my relatively straight-laced life (the only thing straight about me), my mom exclaimed, “God, you need to get laid!” I laughed it off, but the unspoken secret of my asexuality weighed on me. “Asexual” is a difficult label to have—not that we need to compare or qualify the difficulty of labels in a community of people with marginalized identities—but it’s difficult because we live in a generally hyper-sexualized society where claiming the label “asexual” is often met with a great amount of resistance and ignorance.

Like a lot of LGBTQ+ identities, being Ace (the shortened form of “asexual”) comes with an intense amount of denial before eventual acceptance. You yourself fall into a lot of the same thought patterns that allosexual people (who do experience sexual attraction) have. “What if I just haven’t met the right person?” To which I have finally landed on the answer of: it’s not who you’re with, it comes down to the capacity for attraction. For example, I’m also a lesbian, meaning I do not possess the capacity (or desire) to have romantic relationships with men. Being asexual means I don’t have the capacity (or desire) for sexual relationships. However, I am technically graysexual, which lies more towards “sex indifferent” than “absolutely no capacity for sexual attraction,” which yes, made questioning my sexuality for a second time much more difficult.

Further complicating this process is the idea of libido: the biological sex drive, which in people with a uterus, happens around the time of ovulation. Where no matter how much I reinforce the fact that I don’t want kids, that I am not straight, that I don’t care about sex, my body pretends I’m society’s definition of a “good woman”: one who wants her own biological children, one who loves men, and one who wants sex (preferably after you’re married because Christian ideals are also expected or otherwise in the majority). It’s in those moments when biology spars with psychology

that the questioning and doubt are amplified, where I question the questioning and wonder if there’s any way I can fit society’s mold, where I’m secretly convinced that that’s the only way to accept myself. But then I started tracking my ovulation, and suddenly the monthly-mini-identity-crises had less power over me.

If nothing else, I hope this accidental lecture helps illustrate how damaging championing dominant beliefs can be and how important it is to instead champion representation and education. So, no, mom, getting laid will not solve my problems.

Life's only valuable emotion gets lost in time
As people need magic potions to make it alright.
The heart aches through everything is what we
keep in mind
As we down that potion just one more time.

One more time... that's what they all say
A thousand times later and nothing has changed.

Why

Three words is all it takes to keep you in the same
place
Three words is all it takes to show that you will
never change

I hate you; I love you; we use them the same
We can never move forward if you are not playing
the game.

Cause love is life's valuable emotion, but you hold
it above my head
Like a noose around my neck
I say I'll jump
And you say go ahead

I jump and say I hate you
You turn and say I love you

You walk away and leave me but always come
back screaming

I love you; I love you
We can make it alright
I love you; I love you
We can make it this time

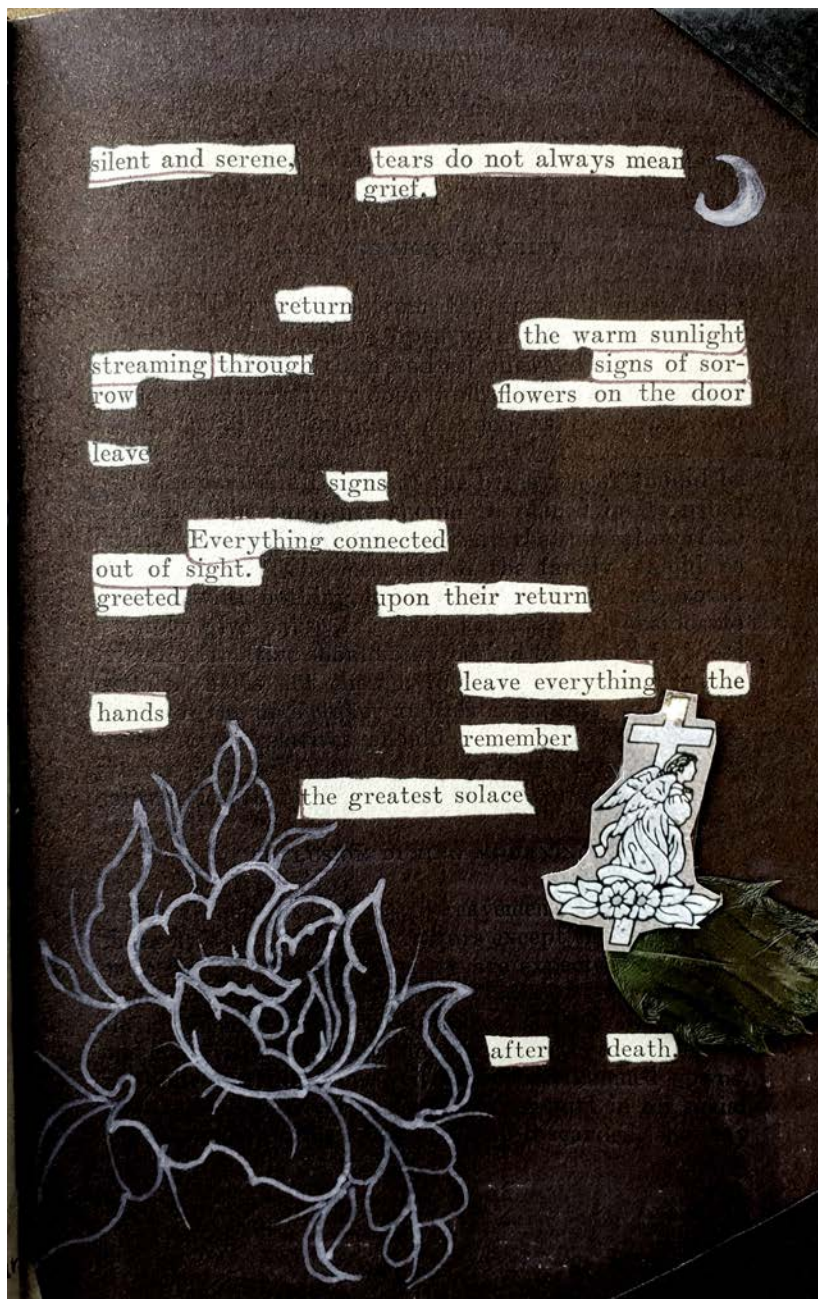
One more time.... That's what they all say
A thousand times later and nothing has changed.

You would think we would learn from our mis-
takes,
But love is life's valuable emotion, it dictates the
moves we make.
So we're stuck here in the heart ache,
Never moving forward,
And never can we change.

We both take this potion each and everyday
To hide the truth with a smile on our face,
Cause love is life's valuable emotion, but it's over-
run with fear and hate.







The orange starfish charm laid covered in the dirt. She barely saw it as she walked by, but the silver glint from the sunlight caught her attention. She crouched down, reaching slightly under the rhododendron bush. She rubbed the dirt from it, some of the dirt sticking in the cracks of the charm. The starfish sparkled slightly from the sunlight. Flipping it over, she found an inscription: ND 1997.

The woman waited for the cries of her newborn baby. After thirty-six hours of labor, she yearned to hold her baby in her arms. The delivery room was a flurry of activity, nurses ran around the room, the doctor's face was blank, and her husband stood at her side looking as though the life had drained out of him. She stopped pushing and still heard no sounds of her baby. Why couldn't she hear anything? Later when she was discharged from the hospital, she stood where the tide met the sand. Harsh wind blew through her hair. She clutched a small charm tightly in her hand, the points of the starfish digging into her palm. She looked down at it, at the inscription on the back. Her little Natalie Day, gone forever. She hurled the charm as far as she could into the ocean.

The girl flipped the starfish back over, still crouched in her position by the bush. She noticed one leg of it chipped slightly, worn over the years, dull silver instead of the sparkly orange.

He found it in the rocks. So small he didn't know how he saw it. He smiled; his girl loved these kinds of things. He pocketed the starfish charm in his overalls. When he got back from his fishing trip, he would give it to her, and a ring too. The choppy waves rocked the boat side-to-side violently. From the color of the sky, it was only going to get worse from here. The small crane they had on deck to lift the heavy crates started swinging more erratically from the wind. He needed to secure it better, make sure no one got hurt. At this moment the waves crashed, and the wind howled. The crane tipped slowly, he jumped out of the way, but it still clipped him on the shoulder on the way down. It jarred him, knocking the breath from him and slamming him on the deck. Pain shot from his shoulder. The impact from the deck dislodged the charm from his pocket, rolling end over end to the gap where it disappeared over the edge and onto the shore below. Another violent wave pushed over the edge causing the crane to roll over more. He was unable to move out of the way.

She brought the charm closer to her eye, inspecting every detail. Tiny bubbles were etched along the edge. She liked that detail. It reminded her of her childhood when she would go to the beach with her grandma, the salty air and sand between her toes. They would always make a game out of how many starfish they could find under rocks. Some nestled up against the white barnacles. She remembered once how she sliced her finger on one, trying to touch the starfish. Her blood mixed with the sand and her finger stung from the salt water. Still, finding the purple and orange ones, ones with long spindly arms and ones with short stubby ones, those were good times. She smiled at the thought. She stood and placed the charm in her pocket. This was hers now.



deepest waters

I wander the waves of your soul

endlessly wading

grasping for your hand

gasping for your fresh air

alas, I drown.

bluest skies

staring into them

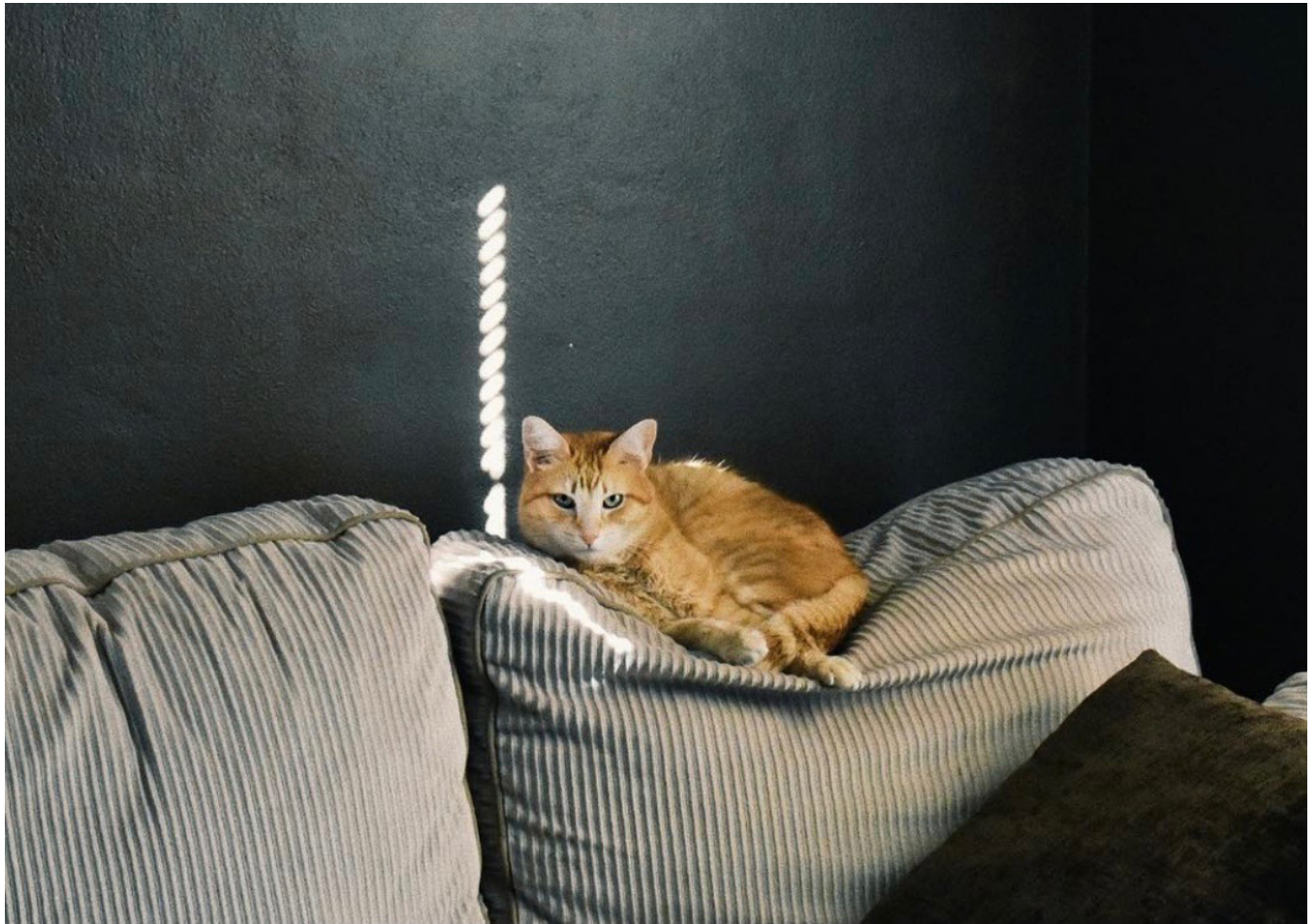
my soul and heart soar

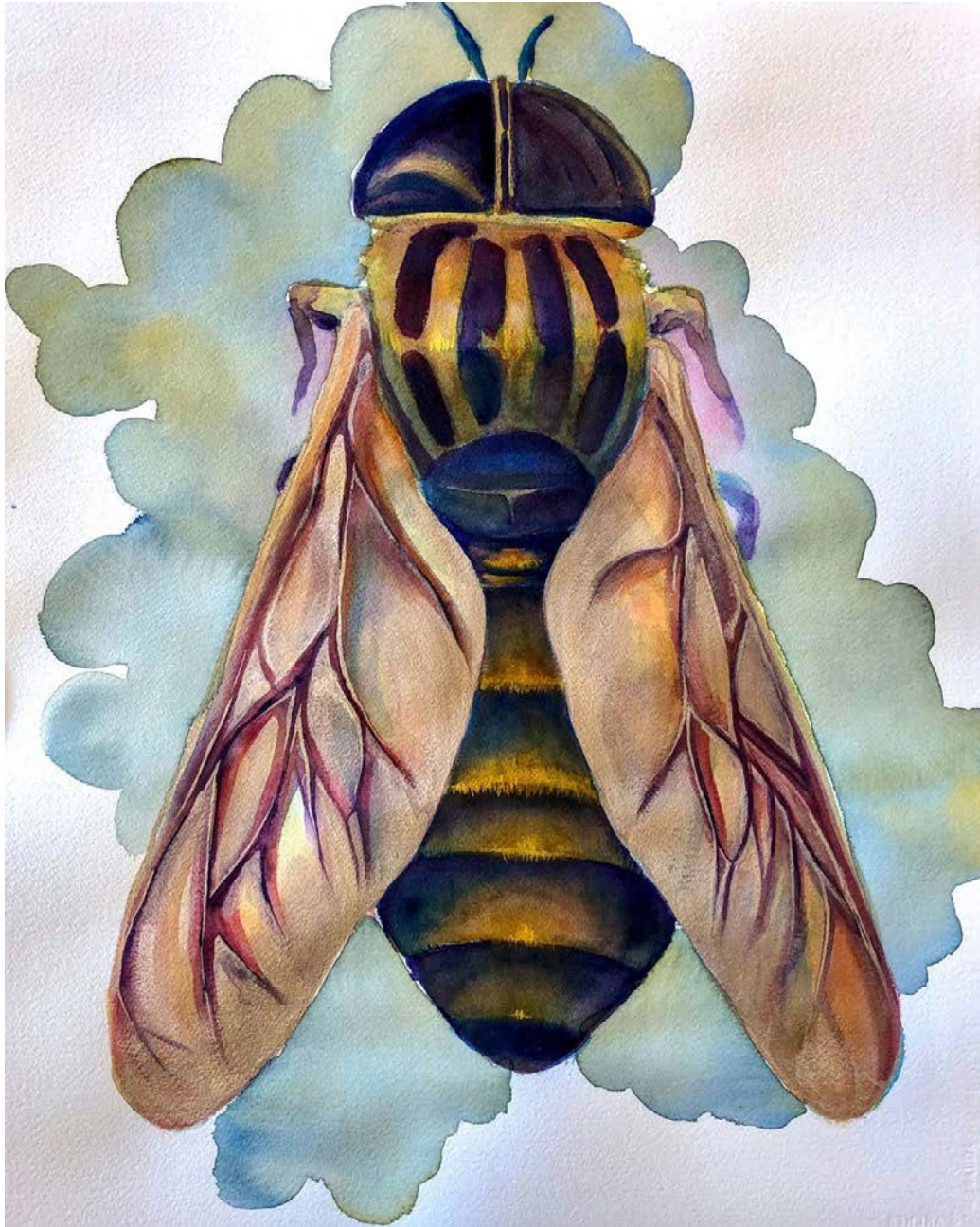
I fly

you look away

and I fall.







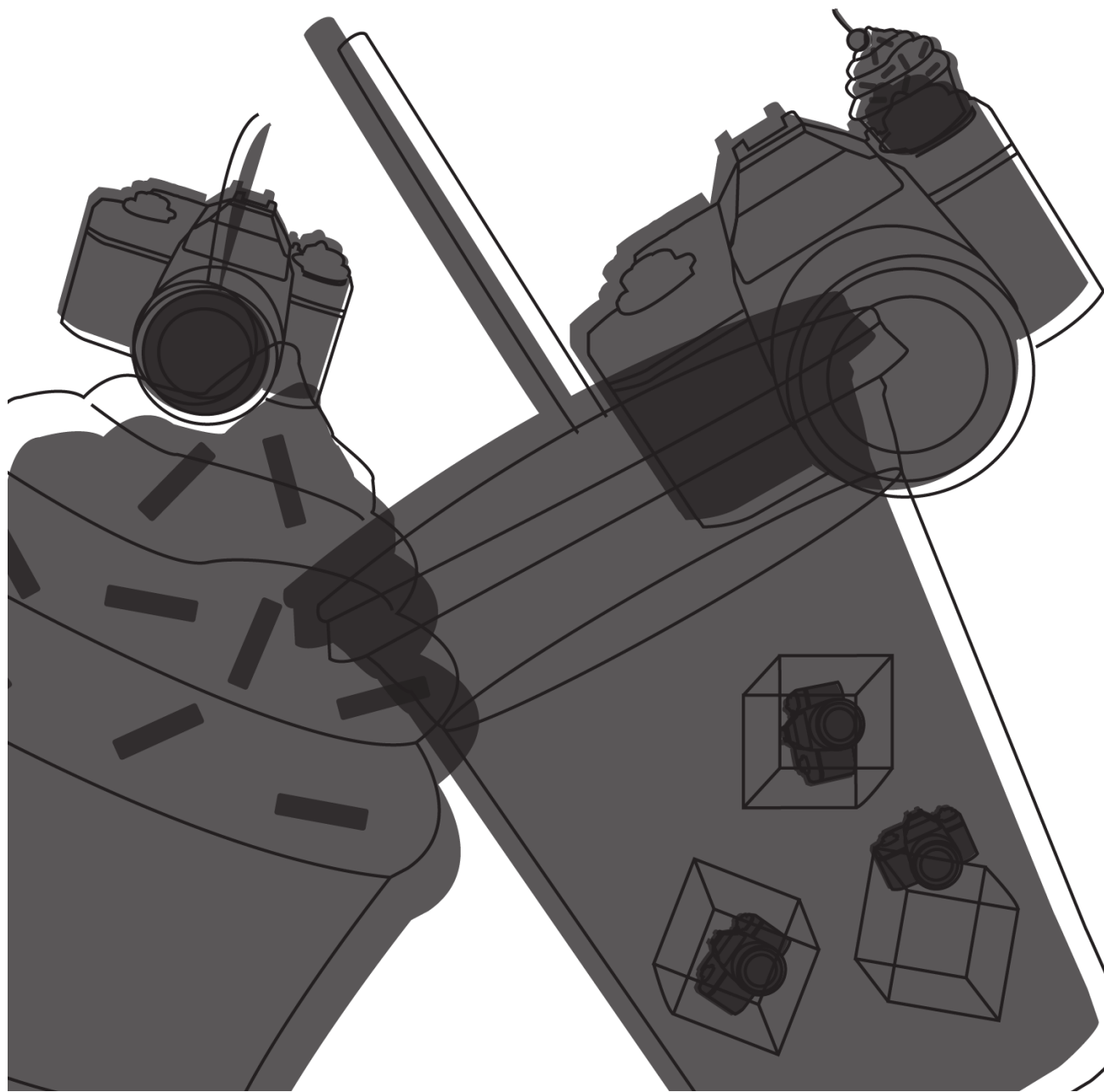


Professional espresso machines scream
Yet, in this cozy cafe, I'm at peace.
The scalding frothed milk poured in coffee, steams.
Holding the cup I feel my stress release.

It seems a strange kind of love I suppose.
This sordid affair involves roasted beans.
Lust: double dark chocolate Milanos
Consumed once daily by whatever means.

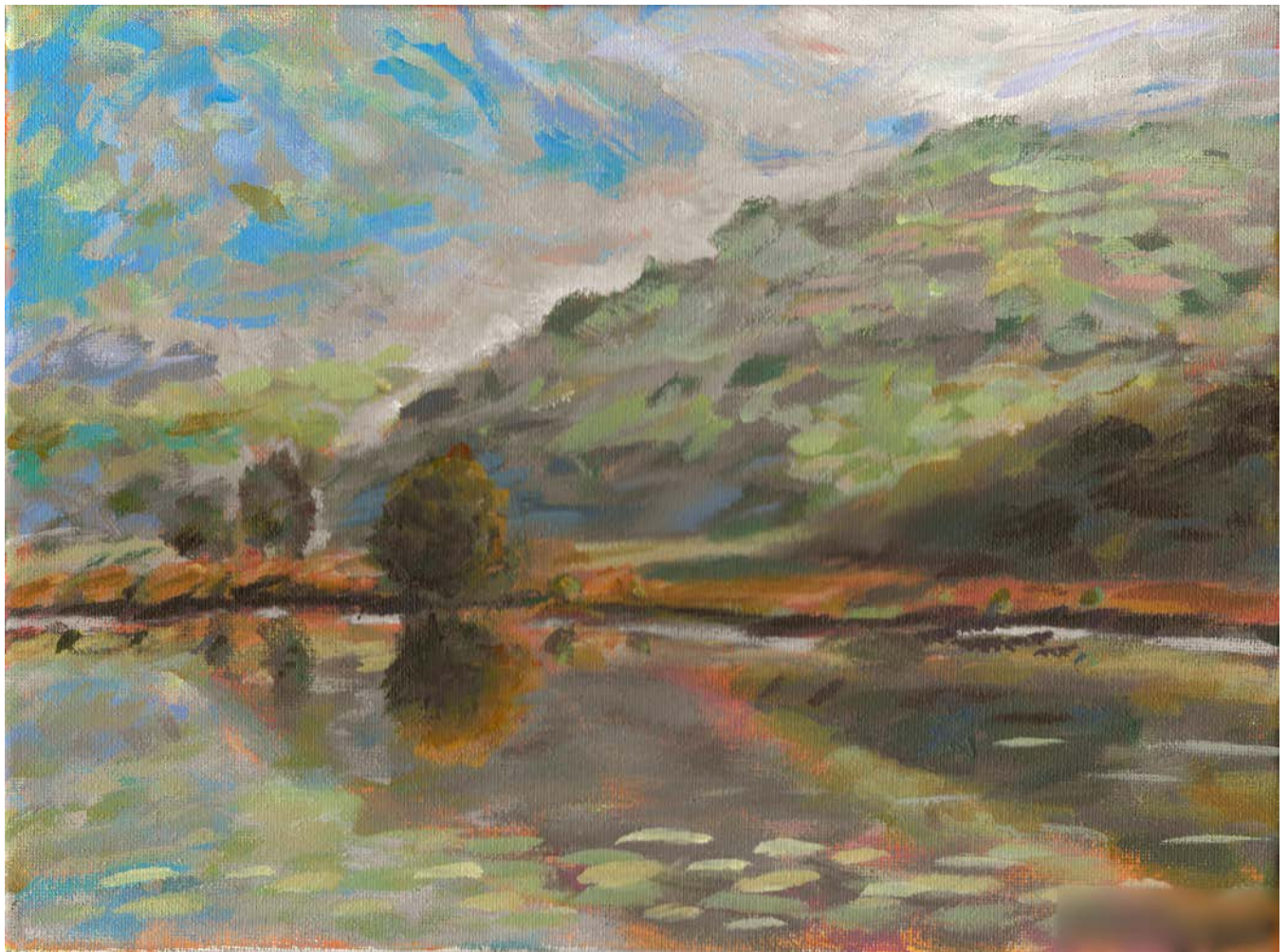
In the silent stillness of the morning,
Coffee brews alongside some Mourning Doves.
The addiction begins without warning,
A godly gift descended from above.

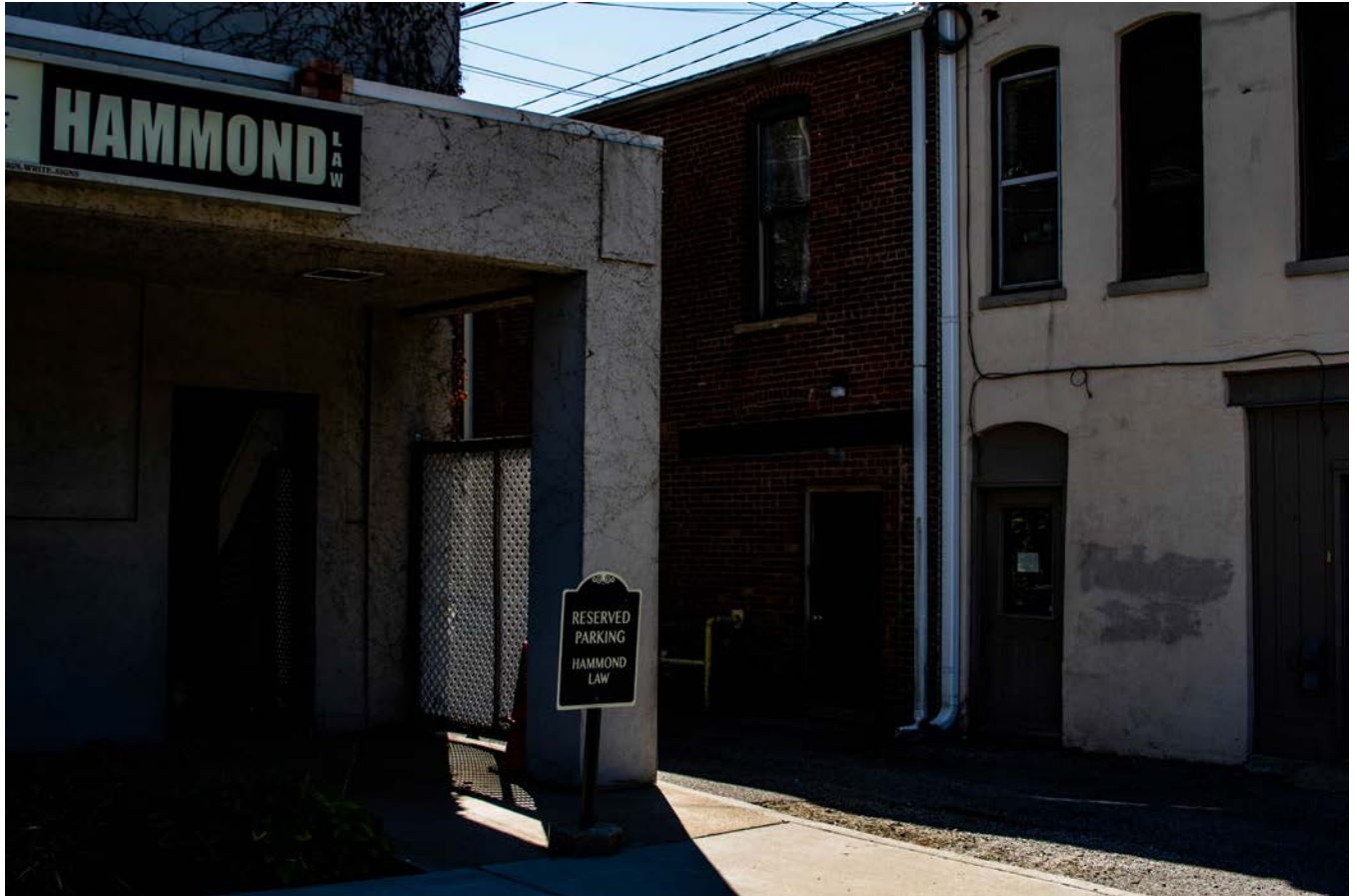
Serenity shared between sips, a sigh escapes my lips,
Mug held tight in a protective grip, drink drained with a tip.











The war is over,
And all bleak and all bland;
Barren streets filled with ruins
Half-buried in sand.

And the sky is hung low,
In an ashen display;
Stone-white, as a warning:
They've gone the wrong way.

Bombs falling, trees toppled,
The world in flames;
Now the last of them fade,
No possessions save names.
The twinkle of moonlight
Bathed Earth in a glow,
That those trudging survivors
Will never now know.

Phosphors and sulfurs
Poison their air;
And chips of iridium
Flake from their hair.
Children all stillborn,
With water that burns,
And ashes all scattered
With no need for urns.

And thinking back now,
When the future was bright:
How naïvely they ushered
Themselves to this plight!
The cities all crumbled,
The roadways all cracked.
May there never be time;
May they never come back!

The snow now shines bluish
On the desert's ash floor;

With only the corpses
Can they ponder the war.

Lee Sanchez | Music Box Girl

inspired by “la petite fille de la mer” by Vangelis

Poetry

the dark velvet blanket of night envelops
her as she walks down that old familiar street,
footsteps echoing off the crumbling brick.

at the end of the block, a front door.

it is not attached to any home, standing upright
and bare in the midnight air, but she knows
better than most what will happen here.

she turns the knob
and is greeted only by settled dust and musted
memories. it is, and is not, precisely what she expected.

upstairs, the music box.

she turns the knob
and out flood the sounds, and oh, how they ache
when they touch her, piercing right through her chest
and reaching the very pinpoint of her delicate heart...

the music paints right onto the darkness
behind her closed eyes. there is a girl
and she is melting with joy, laughter
bubbling out of the box's rotating center.

if only
 if only
 nothing had changed.

she closes the box, pockets it, and leaves
behind only footprints in the dust.





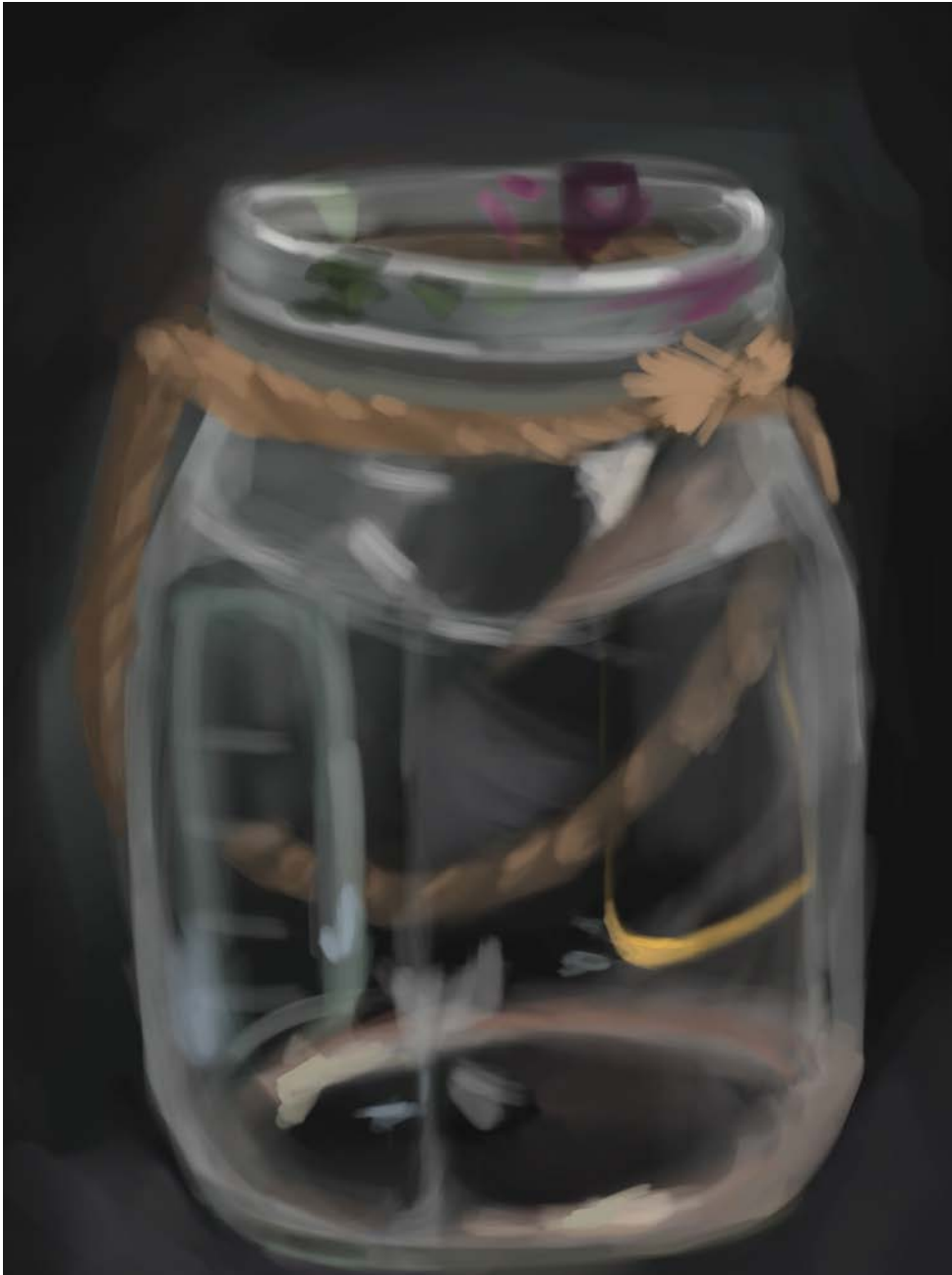
They are fragile—
These soldiers we send
to fight our wars,
These servants that labor
without pause.

They are powerful—
These stones we throw
or set upon each other,
These ranging shots
in our hunt for truth.

They are our ghosts—
These searches
in the dark,
These scissors rattling
in the junk drawers of our minds.

They are never enough—
These two hands
cupping trickling water,
These points
reaching to infinity.

They are all we have, for now—
These squiggles upon the page,
These embroideries of the air.



CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Brianna Ares is a senior International Relations major with double minors in German and Spanish. In her free time, she likes to attempt to backflip and harness train her cat to go on walks.

Hope Biermann is a sophomore history major with a deep fondness for hot chocolate, playing Bach music, and the golden hour. She hopes to be able to make time to actually read *The Lord of the Rings* someday. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Hannah Bhakta is a sophomore biochemistry major with a minor in Spanish who enjoys painting and photography. She focuses on nature scenes from around the world that feel magical. Throughout the week, Hannah can be found doing biochemistry research in Neil's and CFS or making graphics in the UPC office. Hannah is also a resident assistant in Lankenau and loves spending time there with her team and residents.

Brook Burbridge is a sophomore astronomy major and art minor. She enjoys reading and drawing, but loves painting most.

Maiyah Deogracias is a sophomore Communications and Digital Media Arts double major and Humanities minor. Her primary mediums include graphic design and photography. In her spare time, she enjoys visiting all the coffee shops.

Aidan Doyle began his journey at Valpo in 2018. Aidan enjoys writing almost as much as he enjoys reading.

Kayla Fluegeman is a senior creative writing major with a theatre minor and an individualized image making minor. She was first published in *The Lighter* for Volume 67, Issue 1 with her one act play.

Zion Gifford is a Studio Art major who was born on an extraordinarily hot and moderately breezy evening with his eyes wide open. He has been alive for approximately 580 years. He likes attending concerts in peoples' basements, storytelling, and kisses on the hand.

Katlan Gomez is a junior Business management major, Public Relations minor. She enjoys singing, dancing, and doing pretty much any form of art in her free time. She has three pets; a turtle named Tank, a dog named Maddie, and a cat named Eva who are her world.

Emily Graves is a sophomore history and art major who loves museums and legos.

Natalie Gut is a junior Theology major from Dayton, Ohio. She enjoys music, reading, and photography. She mostly does portraits and occasionally more abstract photos.

“Doc” Janowiak is a biology major from Moscow, Idaho, studying for a career in scientific research. His creative pursuits include photography, creative writing, and journalism, and he enjoys artistic works which highlight under-represented aspects of the human condition as well as the interface between science, politics, culture, and art (high and low).

Hailey Kadolph is a Senior Studio Art major with a creative mind that is always on overdrive. She loves to work in nearly all mediums: oil paint, photography, ceramics, graphic design, and more. She takes solace in the seemingly little things in life, (besides art, of course) like rainy days, beautiful music, warm sunlight, plants and poetry.

Desirae Kahn is a freshman biology major who enjoys drawing and nature. The most important thing to her is her buff tabby, Otis.

Danielle Kneusel is a sophomore psychology and creative writing major who enjoys reading, writing, dancing, and painting. She is currently working on a dystopian novel, which she hopes to one day extend into a full trilogy. Danielle is involved in several activities around campus, including the Kappa Delta sorority, dance ensemble, and tour guiding.

Ruth Magana is a sophomore Environmental Science Creative Writing double major. She loves to read and write in her free time.

Christopher Malon is a senior mechanical engineering major who enjoys photography and sketching in his free time.

Kurt Metzger is a junior music education major, who picked up painting as a hobby during the summer of 2020. He loves to paint landscapes of places he visits in order to capture their feelings and memories in a unique way.

Kiana Nunez is a freshman biology and chemistry double major who loves to read, create stuffed animals, and play chess in her free time.

Ashlee Pendleton is a senior psychology and creative writing major who loves art in all its forms. She is excited to celebrate this love by enjoying other people’s art and by creating her own.

Kyra Peterson is a freshman digital media arts major who enjoys doing digital art in her free time. She has been drawing for 6 years, and her dream job is to be a graphic designer.

Lee Sanchez is a senior Psychology and Professional Writing major who cannot help but to throw themselves fully into the best parts of life, whether that's poetry, love, or just their warm, beckoning bed at the end of a long day.

Sabrina Searcy is a senior art and biology double major who enjoys writing, drawing, and spending time in nature.

Kayla Smith is a junior art student, who may or may not be a cryptid. If you listen very closely you can hear her complaining about not being a millionaire.

Kylynn Smith is a senior Studio Art major with an interest in tattooing and the fine arts. She occasionally writes poetry, and can usually be found with an IV of coffee trailing behind her. Never really helps, she doesn't sleep. But hey, worth a shot (or three).

Michela Tenuta is now a senior psychology major (woah), who occupies her days by driving around her green fiat and sipping iced chai.

Kara VanHimbergen is a junior Psychology major with minors in Creative Writing and Digital Media. She'd like to assure you that she's okay despite the angst-filled content.

Emma Vicari is a senior political science and theatre double major. She enjoys experimenting with light in her photography.

Aden Wade is a sophomore exploratory study major who enjoys his time with nature and architectural surroundings.

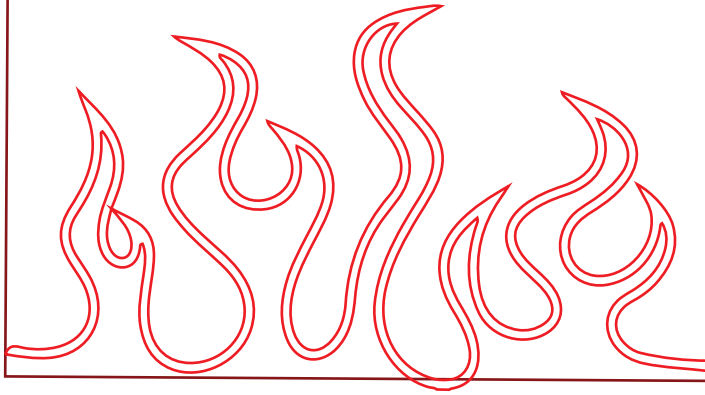
Alexis Winters is a Junior digital media arts major that loves to draw and be surrounded by nature.

Dominic Yanke is a junior Spanish and biology double major who enjoys playing chess and volunteering. He has been twice published in Valpo's Spanish literary journal "Letras" and was a finalist for best poem both times.

Amanda Yonushatis is a senior digital media major who loves her family and enjoys photography. Photographs documenting our lives and the people we love are so important to have. When she isn't photographing her family and friends, you can find her hula hooping and eating fire at the local Chicago Full Moon Jam.

Acknowledgements

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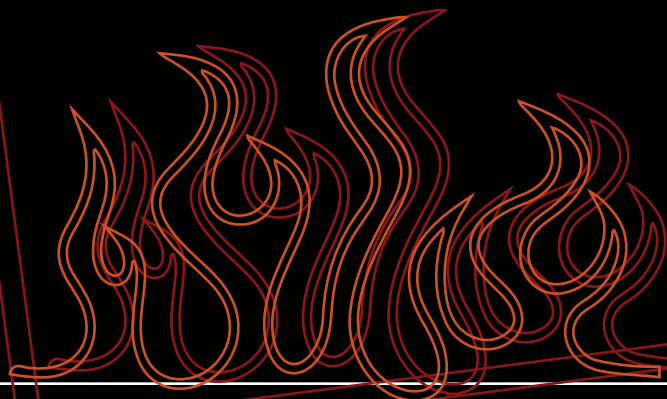
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