

CAN YOU STAND THE HEAT? CAN YOU STAND THE HEAT? CAN YOU STAND THE HEAT?

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# THE LIGHTER



VOLUME 68

ISSUE 2

# Editor's Note

If you'll allow me, dear reader, I'm going to get a little personal here. I was disappointed with my performance as EIC last Fall. I didn't quite understand why at first—I mean, I certainly wasn't the only one that just simply had a rough semester, and I must forgive myself for that, but I still did my very best to keep everything as the same as I could. Why didn't it feel right?

I couldn't figure it out, but meanwhile, involvement with *The Lighter* continued to reach historic lows. Can anyone be blamed for this, though? After the trauma we've all endured over the past two years? Our existence this century, I think, has been marked by the overall intensification of daily life, of expectations, of aging and mental illness and impending societal collapse, so yeah, I wouldn't want to add another weekly meeting on top of my already teetering pile, either.

I tried looking back. O past EICs, I may as well have said, please give me your ancient wisdom—what the hell do I do here? I was beginning to fear that *The Lighter* may have started to become something that such a celebration of art should never, ever be: formulaic. And was this not the beginning of the end?

Turns out, spending all that time in our office racking my brain did give me the epiphany I needed: if I was going to measure my own success by how similar I could be to the EICs before me, I was going to doom myself, and *The Lighter*, to dissatisfaction. I am not anyone other than me. Isn't it just silly to even try for something that's so obviously impossible?

The truth is simple: I love this organization and all that it provides the Valpo community. I love these pieces, and their creators. And I'm not the only one! Together, Cori, Michela, and I spent time looking back—like, way back—at old *Lighter* pieces. They are so vastly different from today's, but yet, so exactly the same: an aching ode to a brother gone off to war, a recounting of Genesis' creation story with alcohol and parties, a raw poem detailing the events of 9/11 on Valpo's campus. A lot of sex, and even more heartbreak. Then, Michela and I spoke to John Messerschmidt, *The Lighter's* '77-'78 EIC. We talked about what unlikely groups of people can be brought together by art.

This is it, I think. No matter what happens to all the future EICs, to Valpo, to the world—*The Lighter* will live on. As long as there are people, there will be art. I hope these sibling issues, Artemis and Apollo, can provide you, dear reader, with some of this same solace. Each of these contributors have not tried to be someone else with their artwork. They have simply made art. This is why their pieces are so precious. Enjoy them, dear reader, they are yours now.

*Lea Sanchez*

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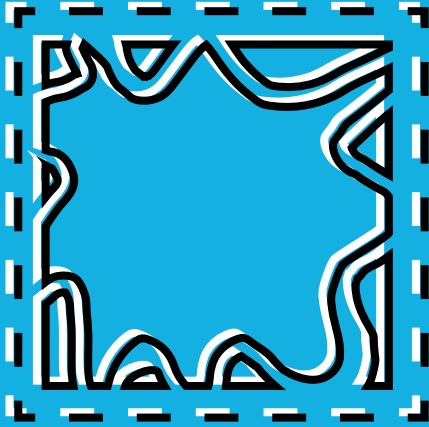
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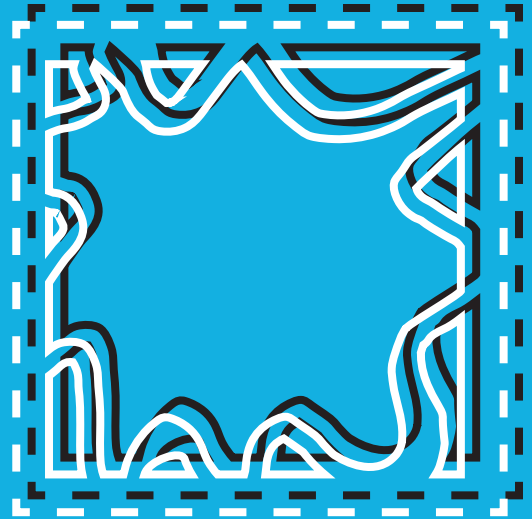
Emily Graves

Maiah Deogracias



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Sunset crests pierce the vast expanse  
Eyeing the graceful wanderings of creatures below.  
Murmurings encompass the land  
And there is infinity

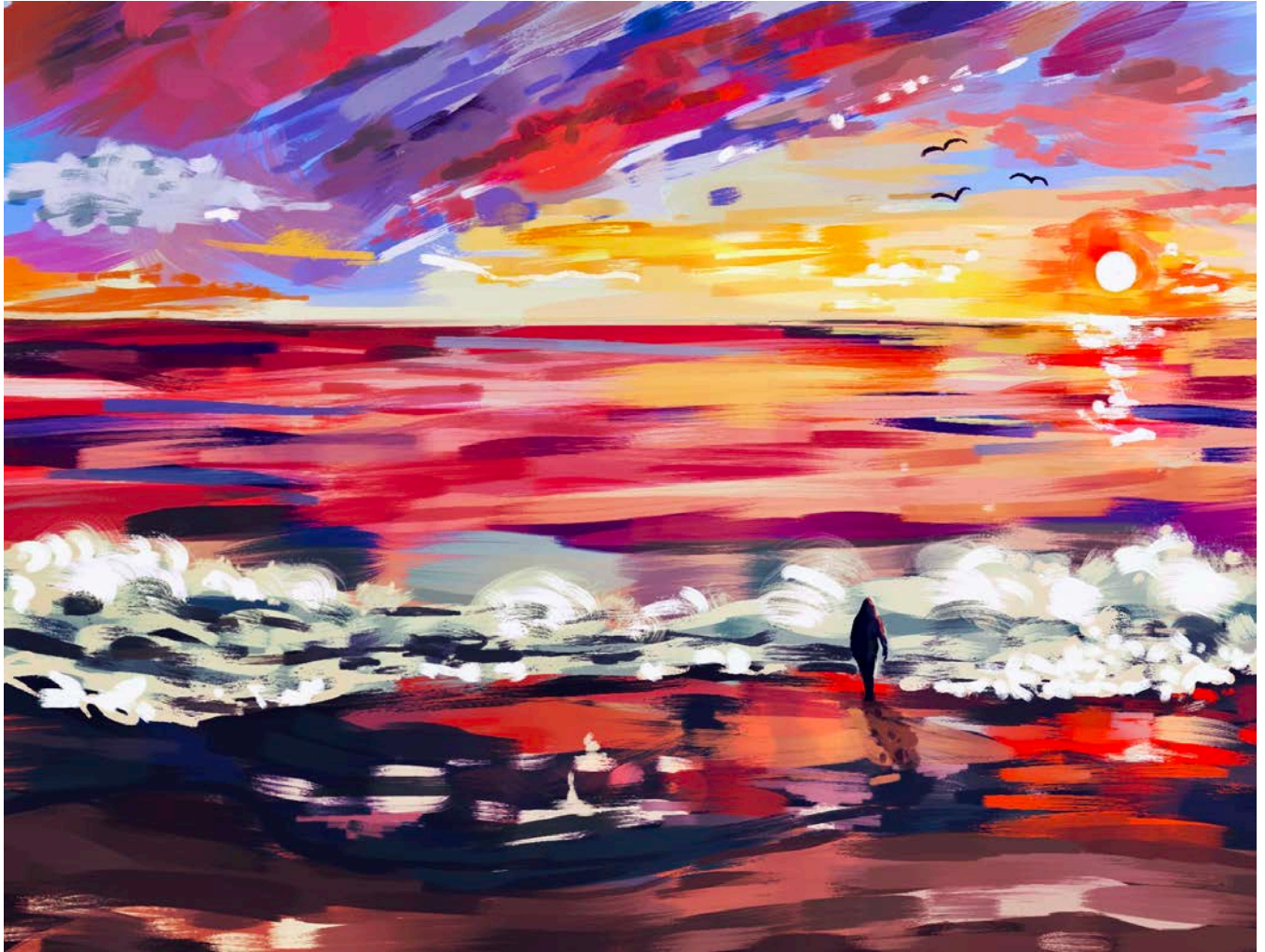
Hazy skies are awakened by  
The realization of a prosperous dawn,  
A prosperous dawn, and the infinite  
Comforts of beautiful sweet heavens.

The skies burn brightly,  
Radiating fiery blazes of peace

But I see none of this  
No, I cannot help but  
Cast my gaze instead at the flames alight  
In you,  
Fierce and scathing.  
I am enthralled by your ebb and flow,  
Thoughts and heart one flesh

At last we see each other,  
The world means nothing if not for you  
And as we ascend into the heavens of bliss  
I cannot help but see infinity.

It is just you  
It is just  
Me and your eyes amidst the strawberry sky













The falling leaf;  
Kendrick Lamar on repeat;  
The stray, threatening crack on a sidewalk;  
Three steps a square.

A curious detour into a neighborhood cemetery.

Finding a strange house.  
Invasively misidentifying Ronald Reagan in a  
painting on their screen porch.  
Invasively cringing at the sculpted mulch woman,  
protruding out of their front yard.  
Invasively questioning the spooky,  
large insect lawn ornaments  
that adorns their home.  
Abruptly walking away  
for fear of being caught.

The eventual return to that same house.  
It's not so strange, when you're by yourself.

Politely passing on a drug deal  
from the unknown, oncoming traffic.  
Getting caught behind a train, in a new town,  
lost, and alone.  
Finding, then forgetting, then accepting  
your boundaries, as well as theirs.

Failing to forget all the memories forged  
on the same pavement,  
concrete beneath your feet.







# Ashley Vernon | Modernity Amongst Ruin Photography





The Irish sang a parting tune  
The day future arrived.  
The past, steadfast,  
It could not last  
For fear of southern lullaby.

Go west, my child.  
My dear, I hear  
Song of northern skies.  
My dear, I fear  
The stratosphere  
Hangs heavy in my eyes.

Run east, Plato.  
East, Socrates,  
Your purpose has been served.  
Although you've been left to decay,  
Both mind and body cast away,  
We're thankful for your words.

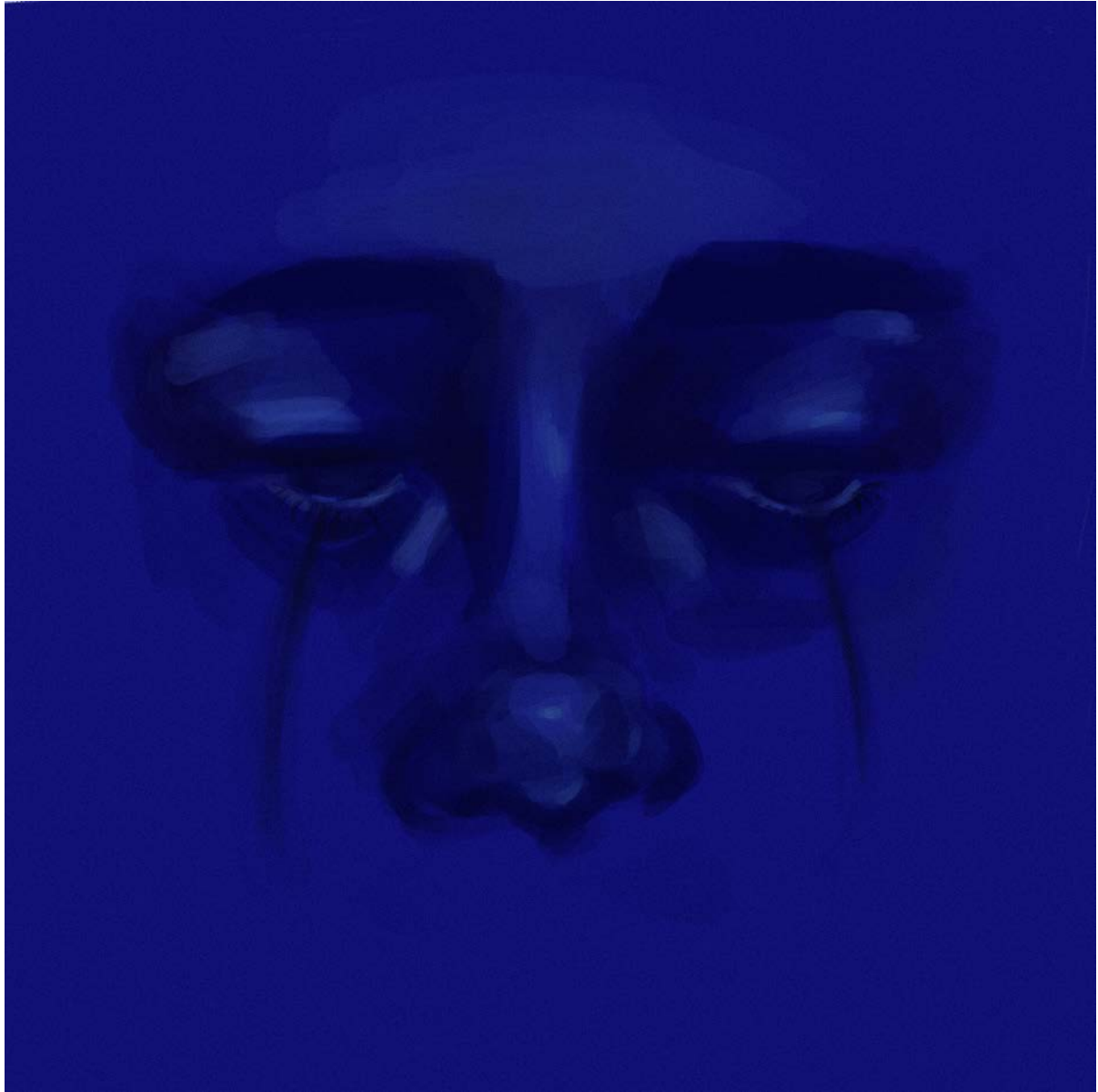
Go west, the foxes  
And the kits,  
From sea to deadly sea.  
Run until you see the sun,  
The west will set you free.

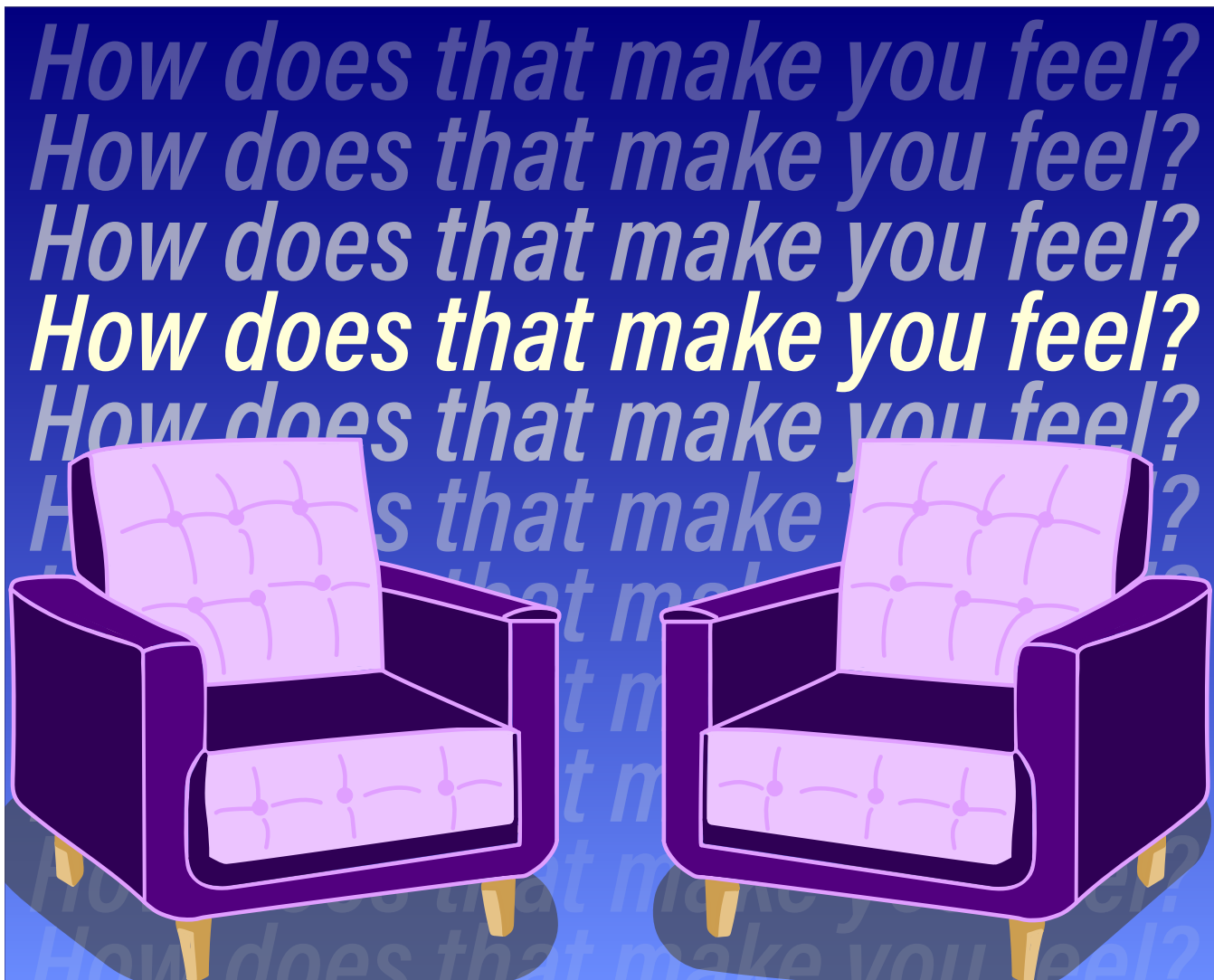
This is our purpose.  
This is our land.  
This song will be our grace.  
Across every sky from north to east,  
Across every sullen face.

Soon the wind will pluck at strings,  
At bells and silver chimes.  
At broken houses and empty things  
To mend our lullaby.  
The great unknown

Carved into stone:  
Manifest Destiny.  
From northern skies  
To sleepless eyes  
And through the boundaries of the sea.

This loveless land  
Shall hold your hand.  
Manifest Destiny.





# Passion on Summerisle by Zion Gifford



# The Lighter's Artivism Spotlight

Passion on Summerisle is a response to the continual assault on the rights, privacy, and dignity of transgender people. It is exhausting to wake up every day and see a new bill being introduced or passed that hurts me and my comrades. Nearly every time I leave or enter the men's bathroom I am either confronted or have to watch other men walk back out to check the sign outside the door before coming back in. One of the world's most influential children's authors writes that because I am autistic I am especially helpless and open to the transgender cult's brainwashing. When I call medical professionals about receiving birth control and mention I am a transgender man, they tell me they are not qualified to prescribe hormone replacement therapy, a completely different thing that I am not inquiring about. When I finally get them to prescribe me birth control and I go to pick it up, I am told that I can't pick it up because an insurance middleman has, without asking, listed me as a transgender woman in their database and therefore ineligible for birth control. My insurance plan through my mother's employment at this supposedly inclusive university specifically excludes coverage for "transsexual" procedures, saddling my family with a \$10k-out-of-pocket surgery the insurance provider considers medically necessary. Every day of my life is exhausting. If I did not have the love of other transgender people, I would die- but I have that love. We do not have to be bogged down in the pain and exhaustion that is forced upon us. We can hold each other, dine together, worship each other, watch 70's horror movies, and fuck forever. | Zion Gifford

I love being trans, and I am never happier or more myself than when I'm with my trans siblings. To be trans is very much, though, to view the man-made world from an outsider perspective. The longer you look, the stranger it gets. This is also true of Zion's piece, and is represented here: the obsession with genitalia, with sperm and egg, with "biological differences" in our daily lives...it's weird. We are made scapegoats for a multitude of problems, but rather than retaliate, we are expected to just die about it. *Passion on Summerisle* does not concern itself with how we are expected to cram ourselves into the ever-narrowing mold of people that are allowed to be happy. When there is no room for joy, we find it in each other - we link arms and walk together. The careful attention to each detail in this collage is stunning, and really speaks to the trans experience: to live with awareness, with intention, and to strain every moment toward love. | Lee Sanchez



Her mind is like the moon.

At times, it advocates for her, representing her entire entity.

Other times, it shys itself away amidst the shadows of those who surround her.

But at all times, it navigates for her, in accompaniment with the stars, on her journey to understand her very existence.

Her body is like the earth.

Nurtured with the hope to grow in bliss.

Each line and curve of her body carries something,

Something no one else can.

They carry the scars of her previous battles and arduous trials.

Concurrently, her body holds the folds of her smile.

Each fold carries its own moment of time that was and is uniquely hers,

In which, she was perfectly and radiantly carefree.

Her body depicts what her mind is thinking, like a scribe, whose one of many jobs is to translate.

Her soul is like the sun.

Orbited by her mind and body as it beams.

Like a sailor, her soul steers through an ocean of choices and decisions that all have the potential to entirely change her life.

But her soul is not on its own.

Her soul is connected to her mind and body.

The mind meditates and contemplates for her.

The body presents her and speaks on her behalf.

Like an eclipse, the soul aligns itself with these two.

Despite what others think, and despite what she may think,

She is not alone.

And she is capable of all things with

Her mind, her body, and her soul.





I sometimes wonder what it will be like to meet God.  
I imagined her as a black woman.  
Her skin, the presence, and absence of all colors.  
She would warn me to look away,  
Because she warns, her beauty will be too much for my mind to comprehend.  
I will die.  
I imagined that she would look like something I had never seen before  
Something that never existed before  
Until now, there she is  
God.  
I imagined her with curves and archers.  
Similar but not near the hills and valleys she placed on earth.  
I imagined her hair thick and intertwined.  
Similar but not near the roots she established beneath the trees  
I imagined her face gentle yet strong  
Similar but not near the gentle breeze she blows on sunny days  
I imagined her lips full  
Similar but not near the wonder she places in the eyes of the innocents.  
I imagined her eyes deep and knowing,  
Similar but not near the splendors that lie within her oceans.  
I imagined that her presence would engulf me,  
I imagined, at that moment, I would look up at her in wonder  
I would have an awakening  
I imagined being filled with intense euphoria  
It is too great  
I die.  
There she is  
God.



Photography

Perception of Igor Mitoraj's Head of Saint  
John the Baptist | Ashley Vernon



The flickering cursor mocks you  
Updating its static position on the page  
Like the silence of a crowd as they wait  
To hear your story.  
Rise to the challenge of “This better be good”  
Or run the risk of humiliating yourself.

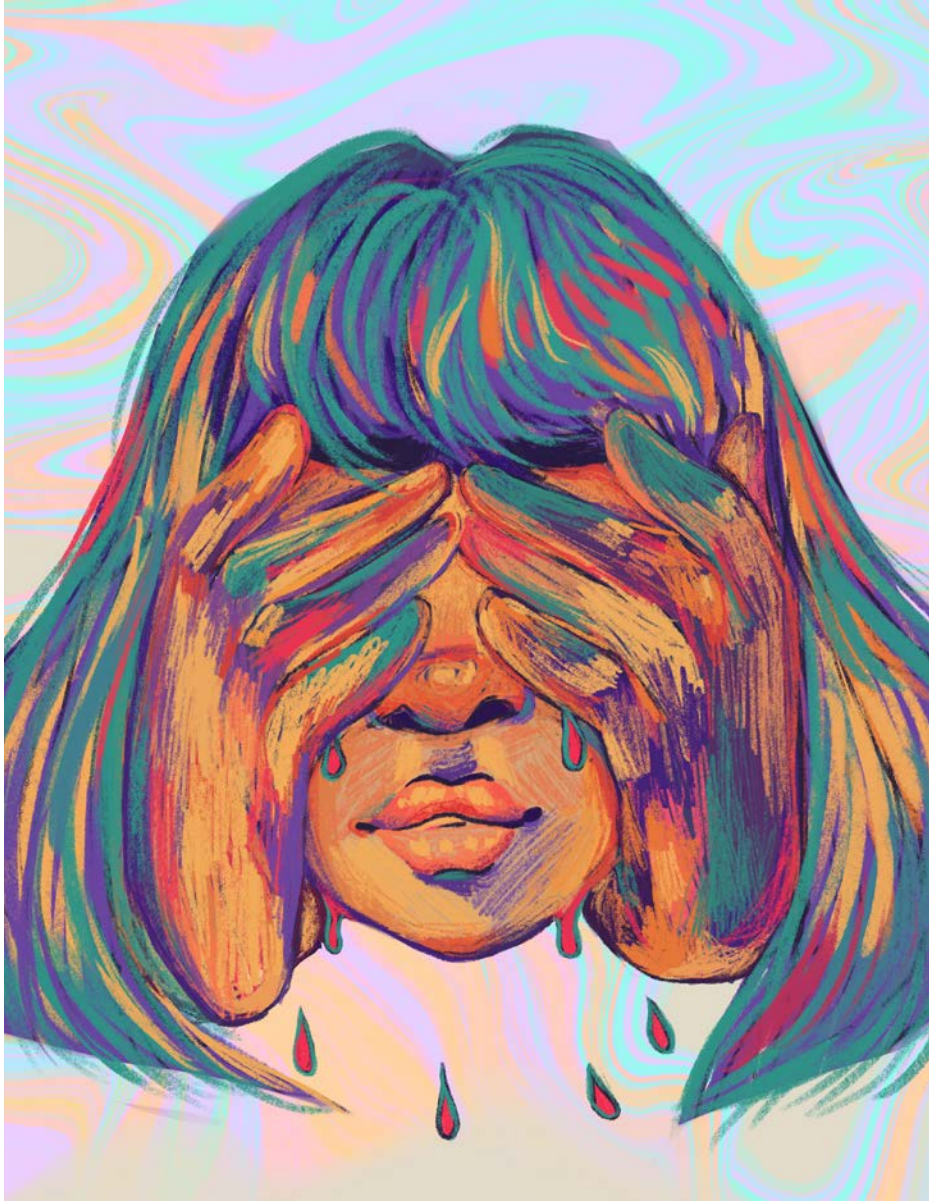
A room expecting to be entertained  
A world waiting to be wowed  
A speaker stands in silence,  
Too used to being ignored to know what to say.  
Is it better to st-stutter and stum-stumble through a  
sentence  
Or to simply sit back down?

Don't let them hear your voice break  
Don't let them see your confidence shake,  
Help them understand  
You're like a fish on dry land,  
Flipping and flopping with no way of stopping  
Hoping the rhyme will buy you some time  
To think of something to say sometime today,

But the fear sits right here  
Inside your chest as you're trying your best  
To speak.

To say something of substance  
Worthy of their time and attention  
Otherwise what's the point?  
Become a talking-just-to-breathe zombie?  
“Weeeaaaaattttthhhheeeeerrrr”:  
“Wonderful weather we're having today”  
It's a waste of breath, but they prefer it to silence.

Silence: the ever-present threat  
Versus a society who, scared, shys away from it  
Yet they shun those who struggle to fill it  
With words that mean nothing, and instead  
Work to instill meaning choosing each word  
With care and compassion  
Careful not to offend  
Those who just this once  
Stopped to listen.





In life, we are all acrobats  
Inching or gliding across that tightrope.  
Ultimately, we choose,  
We choose how we face life's most trying moments  
Some choose to live in hesitation and fear,  
Constantly eyeing the safety net that lies below,  
The safety net that radiates comfort, yet deceives you into choosing a life of compliance  
Like an unforgiving landlord that allows you to stay.  
But at what price?  
The safety net that attempts to swindle you into thinking you have the best seat in the house  
Advertising for a perfect view,  
A perfect view of all your priceless opportunities passing by.  
The same safety net that threatens to seize your most valuable weapon  
Your courage  
The very thing that got you this far.  
You are told to never look back  
But I say do look back,  
Not to hinder your progress, but to see just how far you have come.  
You decide to never let that safety net double cross you again  
To never be tempted by its gentle gaze and open arms.  
Instead, you proceed forward  
With great valor and with your head held up high in defiance,  
Taking it step by step  
Choice by choice  
You do not choose to simply exist in comfort  
Instead you dare to live.

every artwork has an empty beginning.  
my blank skin feels wrong; it bothers me.  
I want to become a gallery.

fill every inch of emptiness  
with colorful, vivid imagery.  
cohesiveness isn't cause for concern.

I'm willing to cover the cost  
and sit through the pain  
to pay the price for permanence.

transform me into who I want to be.  
show me the body I've always imagined.  
grant me comfortability and confidence.

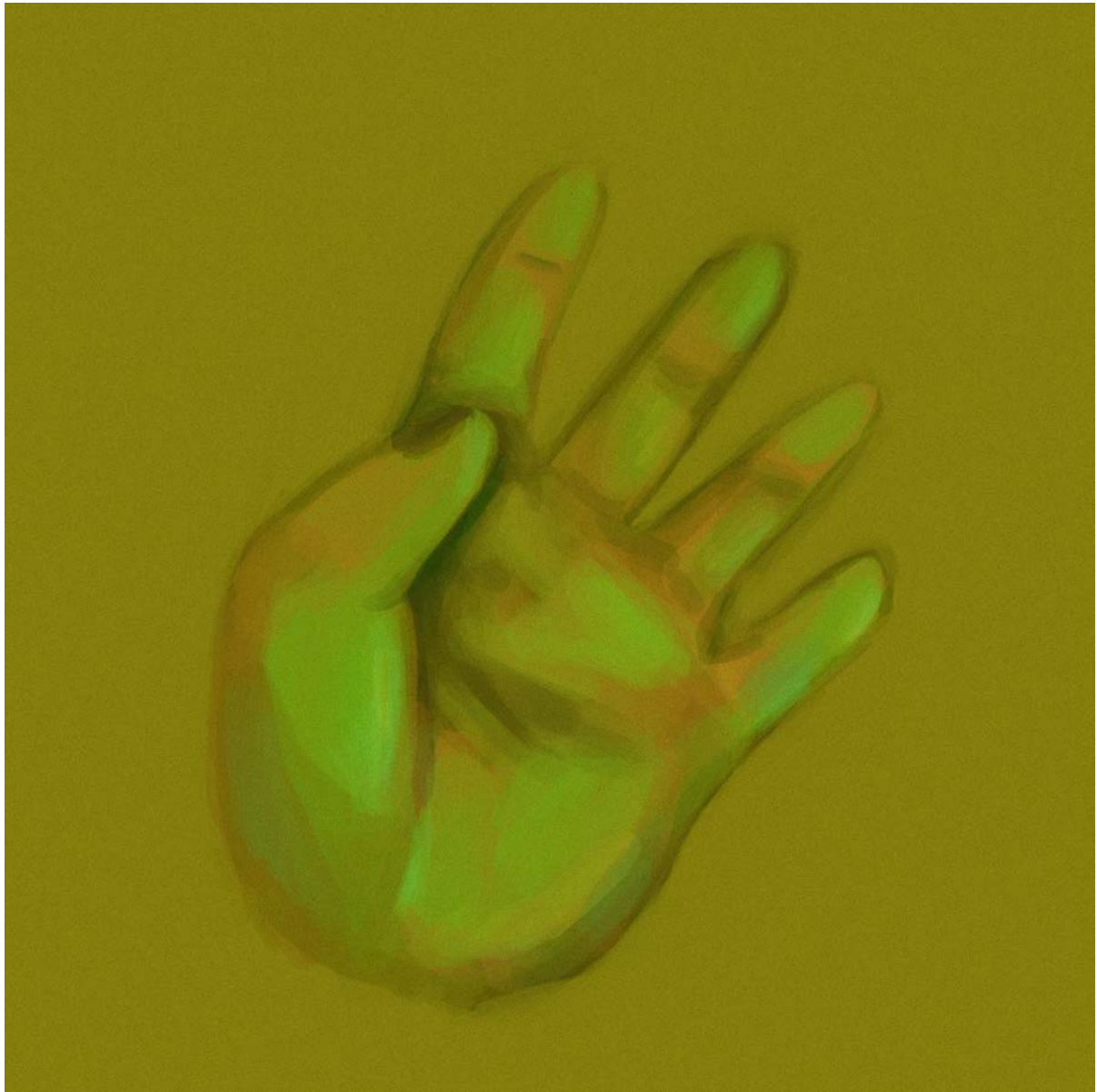
I'll wear my heart on my sleeves,  
I'll embody everything I love,  
and I will be beautiful.











It took a little persuasion, but eventually he managed to convince Teddy to stand outside the door and keep watch. Frank had volunteered to watch the door onto the street in case anyone happened along and decided to poke their nose in where it wasn't wanted, and now Teddy stood at the door to the backroom watching Frank and the empty bank spread out before him. As Benjamin stepped into the backroom, he knew they were as ready as they would ever be. They all had their jobs and positions. There had been some objections raised, but no one had knocked over this bank since 1883 ("50 years, imagine that!"), and in the end none of them—himself included—could get past the thrilling prospect of being the gang to break that streak.

Once he shut the door behind him, the little room was very dark, but its velvety blackness was not quite complete—a little sliver of light at the bottom of Teddy's door illuminated the space just slightly. Just enough to catch a gleam of silver off the mechanism of the safe built into the wall opposite it.

Benjamin squared his shoulders, took a deep breath, and stepped further into the room. Only to slam into a box he had not been expecting, that came up to just below his knees. The bag of tools in his hands slipped, and though he managed to catch it before it crashed to the floor, the jangling of metal within the sack still shattered the quiet of the bank. He swore under his breath.

"Now, what do you think you're doing?"

Benjamin whipped around—the tools clanging again—to look for the source of the voice. In an instant, his heart had started pounding and his breathing had gone ragged.

A light bright enough to burn his eyes suddenly appeared in the little room. Benjamin threw an arm up over his eyes until they adjusted well enough to see that there was a man in the corner of the room next to the door, leaning against a cabinet and looking faintly pleased with himself. In his right hand he held a match, which, ludicrously enough, must have been the light that had almost blinded Benjamin a few seconds ago.

"You haven't answered my question," the man said languidly.

Benjamin let his arm drop and tried to assess the situation. His mind was still blank with the sudden onrush of fear that had just gripped him, but thoughts were beginning to coalesce again. He slowly straightened and tried his best to look the other man in the eye. "I'll answer your question if you answer one of mine," he said, and was thankful when his voice didn't shake.

A grin flashed across the man's face. "Sure, why not?" he said.

# Hope Biermann | Unfinished Business

Benjamin had mostly just been stalling while he tried and failed to come up with a believable answer, and so was taken aback by this response. He was also, now that his thoughts had taken definite shape again, taken aback by the man's presence in the room at all. How had he gotten past both Frank and Teddy? He scanned the man again, and only vaguely noticing the slightly odd clothes he wore, landed at his feet. They were bare.

That might explain it. That might explain a lot of things, in fact. Benjamin sighed just slightly with relief, and felt some of his confidence return. This man probably spent time hanging around bank safes because he was a professional thief, and went barefoot because it was the best way of staying quiet. And really, a professional thief could certainly get past two greenhorn members of a gang on their first heist without any problems.

Benjamin felt a lot more in control again at having that mystery solved. And now he had a question to ask. "Are you part of one of the big gangs in Chicago?" It would be good to know. If he was, there was no sense in making an enemy out of him.

One of the corners of the man's mouth quirked up. "Sure," he said again, and lit a second match.

Benjamin nodded. "Anyone else coming tonight, then?" he asked, and maybe his voice did shake a little this time.

The man in the corner shook his head. Benjamin hadn't really noticed his eyes before, but they were quite dark, and right now showed no trace of amusement.

Benjamin nodded again. No one else coming was good. He might be able to work something out with only this one man.

Now for his part of the deal.

"You wanted to know what I was doing? All right, well, I should think it's fairly obvious."

His voice, tinged with bravado, bounced off the walls of the little room, where the match was making skittery shadows flicker like spiders. The man's eyes were still serious. "You're trying to rob the bank."

"Of course I am," Benjamin said, and was surprised to feel a surge of relief at admitting it.

The man nodded. "Don't," he said.

Benjamin jerked his eyes back to the man's face. All the possible reactions he had been planning against, and then the man went and said something like that. "What? Why not? Are you—" Oh, he was a numbskull. "Oh. You're planning to rob it, of course," Benjamin said glumly. He'd only just met

# Unfinished Business | Hope Biermann

the man, but he had no doubt that if this man really wanted something, he wouldn't be able to do much to stop him.

But the man was shaking his head. "No, that's not why."

"Then why?"

The second match was beginning to gutter in the man's fingers. "Because it's not worth it," he said, and lit a third.

Benjamin said nothing.

"Trust me. I robbed plenty of banks in my time."

Benjamin felt his jaw grow tight. "You think I have any other options?"

The man looked him up and down. "Yes."

"Well, I don't," Benjamin said fiercely. "You know no one can get jobs, and my dad died last winter in the mill, and my mother doesn't get paid enough to take care of all of us, so what else am I supposed to do?" His voice rose in volume until by the end he was nearly shouting. Who was this guy to get such a rise out of him, anyway? Who was this guy to say whether or not it was worth it?

"I think there are, in fact, a few jobs here and there. This bank is in need of a teller, for example," the man said, dark eyes flashing with something that might have been amusement. "Mr. Muldoon's heart failed a couple weeks ago."

Benjamin stared at him. The man gazed back, calm as ever, though there was something in the way he held himself coiled in the corner that told Benjamin he was a lot less calm than he looked. This conversation had flown completely out of Benjamin's grasp, but for some reason hope was sparking in his chest. "Do you really think--you really think I could do it?"

The man smiled, and then let it fade, the flash of amusement gone from his eyes. "I don't know." He paused for a moment, considering. "But I think if you do this, you're never going to be able to do anything else for the rest of your life."

Benjamin looked down at his hands, still clutching the bars and tools and everything he thought he might need from seeing the safecrackers in the movies. He suddenly felt rather foolish for carrying them in here. He thought about Teddy and Frank, waiting outside in the dark, and how neither of them had really wanted to come.

When Benjamin looked back up at the man, he had made up his mind. "All right," he said. "I won't." Then a horrible thought occurred to him. "Will you—will you tell the police?"

# Hope Biermann | Unfinished Business

For a moment the man looked blank. Then he said very calmly, “And how do you think I would explain my presence in the backroom of a bank in the middle of the night?”

Benjamin grinned. He hadn’t thought of that. “All right, then. I’ll go. I suppose it’s only fair to the others—they didn’t really want to be here anyway.”

The man nodded, still looking a little blank.

Benjamin went to the door, skirting carefully around the box from earlier. He set his hand on the handle, and turned to look at the man in the corner. The third match was about to go out, but he still seemed wreathed with light.

As he went through the door, he thought he heard the man say, “Thanks, Benjamin.”

And then the light went out.

Chief Barnes had sent Officer Lamb over to the bank that morning. He was still new to the station, so he wasn’t as irritated as everyone else by the bank’s frequent complaints of strange and suspicious behavior. He was more likely to give them something like a fair listening-to, though whether they deserved it or not was another question.

Lamb now stood in front of the Chief’s desk, hands folded behind his back, eyes fixed on a spot behind Barnes’ right shoulder as he gave his report.

“Nothing much to tell, sir. The lock on the front door had been forced, rather inexpertly, I must say, and the lock to the back room picked open. Nothing had been taken, though, so I can’t exactly arrest anyone. The owner didn’t seem to believe me on that count.”

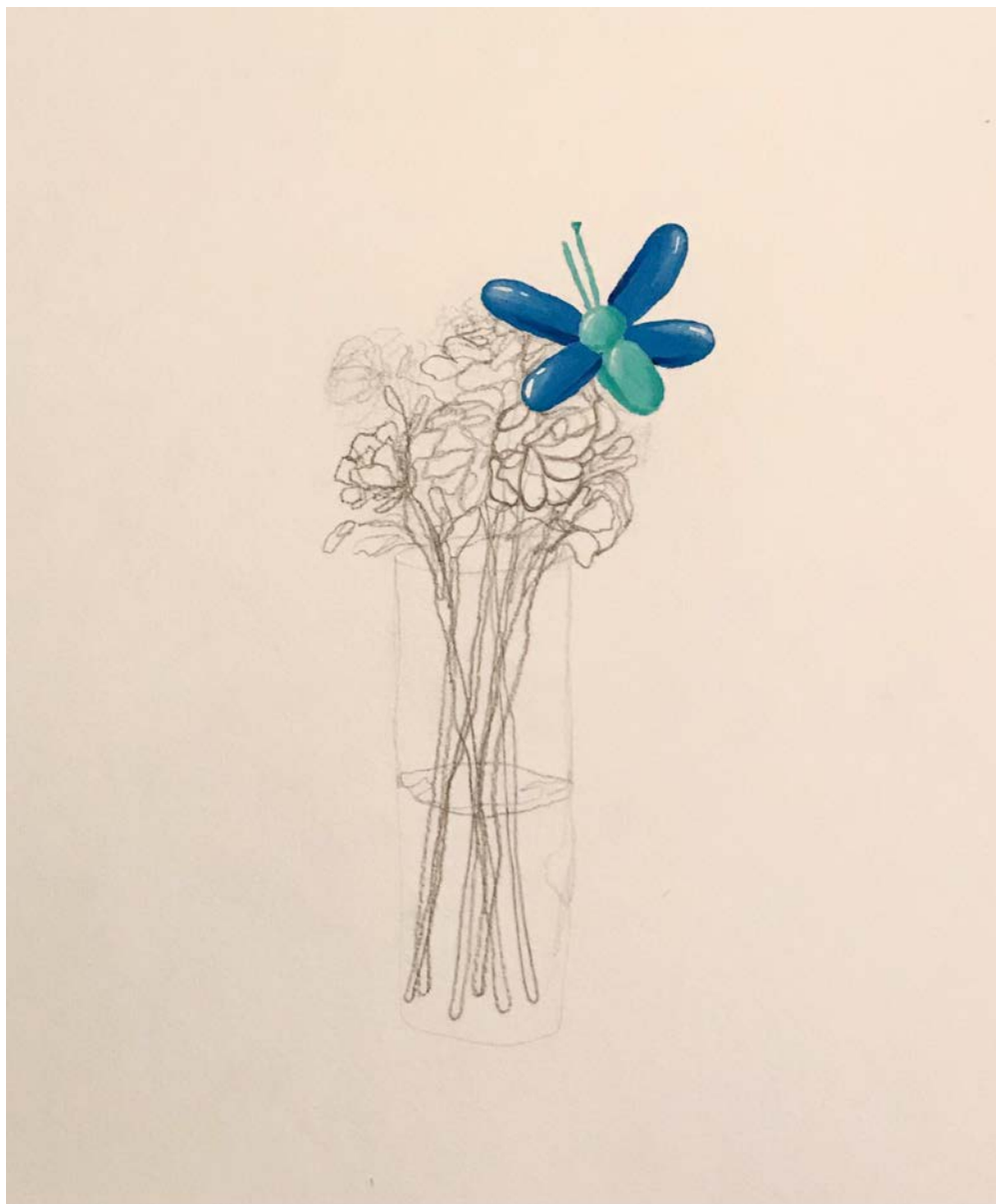
The Chief nodded. That sounded about typical for Mr. Burns. “Well, that’s a little strange, I’ll admit it. Looks like someone backed out and decided not to finish the job.”

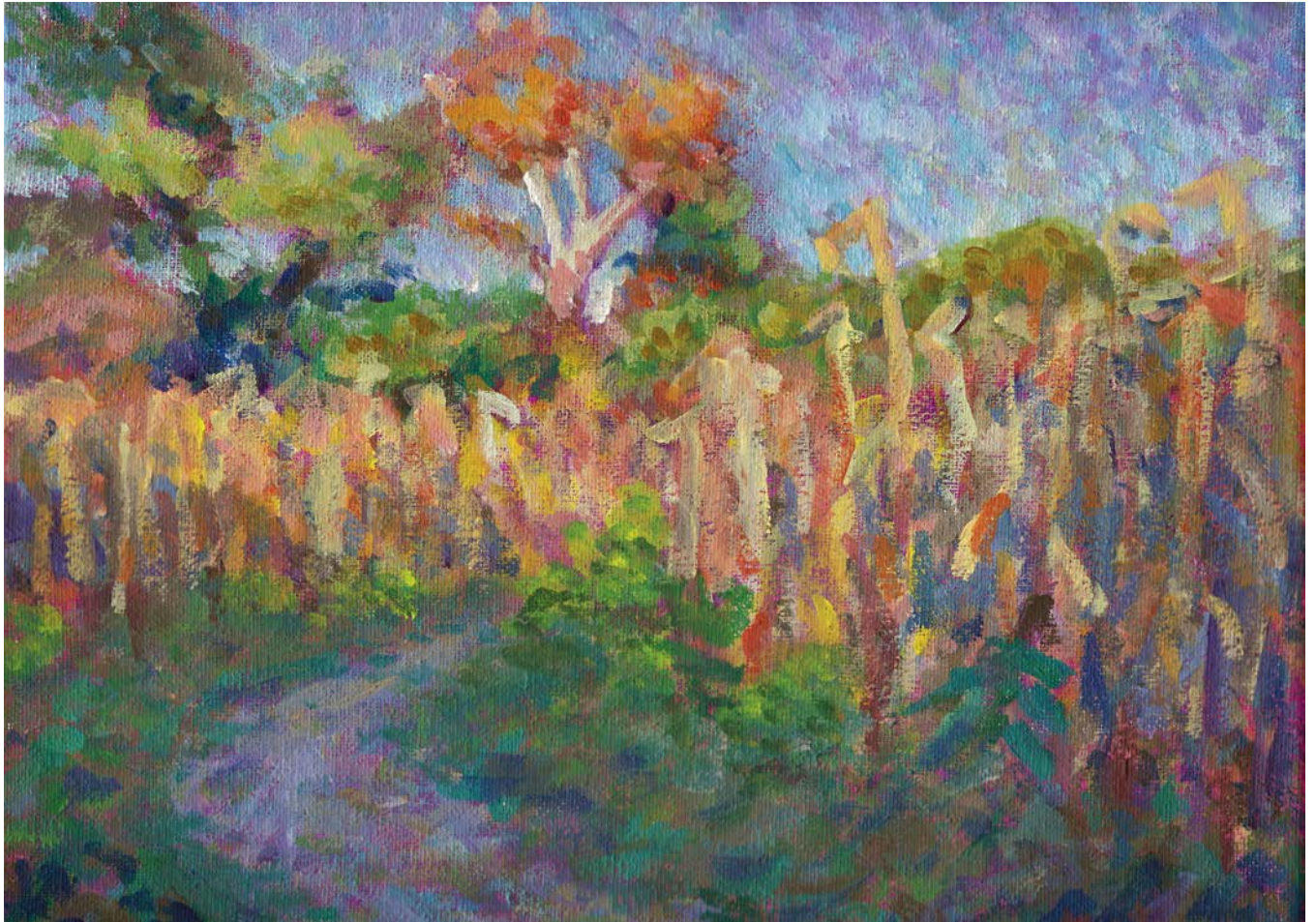
Lamb gave a short nod. “There is one other thing, sir, that’s a bit odd. We found some matches on the floor. Nothing else—just a few matches.”

“And? The would-be-thief needed a bit of light,” the Chief said. He was growing a little impatient. Lamb sometimes had a tendency to be finicky about irrelevant details. “We can’t trace them or anything, I suppose?”

“No, they’re just ordinary matches,” Lamb said, sounding a little disappointed. “The only strange thing is they were never lit.”









Sigma Tau Delta's  
"Reemergence: Navigating Through  
Change" Spring High School  
Writing Contest



The Wind has turned its motion  
The Moon has switched its phase  
The World has changed its outlook  
The Book has flipped its page

Yet, The Peoples words were silenced  
And The Countries Heart has broke  
Now That the states have begun their violence  
All of our minds have been provoked

The world has been turned upside down  
And our minds have become lazy  
When will we stop, the time is now  
If we tried, change could be easy

If we don't stop now we can never turn back  
And we will never know the world we lack  
But no, nevermind keep your brain in a haze  
And just hope that the earth will see better days.

They say you're supposed to find yourself in high school. I thought this cliché statement was absurd until I found myself on the precipice of deceit and betrayal. High school is a dangerous place full of mean girls, bullies, and hormonal teenagers. Navigating through the waters is such a difficult feat for a 16-year-old girl.

My life was different around this time last year. I was doing well in school, I had the greatest group of friends, and I couldn't possibly ask for more. But something started to form inside of me. I didn't know what it was at the time, nor did I know whether it was good or bad.

I grew up in a very church-oriented environment. I define myself as a Christian, but do not support the hateful way in which modern-day Christians act. Christians, today, are full of hatred and judgment, when we should be the exact opposite. Religion should just be between you and God. No one should come between that. My faith was strong, and I was certain about everything. It wasn't until my world drastically changed when I began to question everything.

It all started with the news of quarantine. I remember the exact moment I heard the news. During my 6th-period study hall my teacher, Mrs. Titak, called for us to quiet down and read aloud, "Governor Holcomb has announced a two-week quarantine." My heart began to race as the cheers of my classmates flooded my ears. "Two weeks off of school? Score!" I was ecstatic. As I walked back to my locker, I locked eyes with my friend Madalyn. She seemed upset. I couldn't imagine anyone being upset by this news, but my ignorance blinded me. She mentioned that it wouldn't just be two weeks and that we wouldn't be seeing each other for a while. As she dropped me off at my house, we said our

# Meg's Pernicious Paradigm | Megan Heavner

cheerful (on my part) goodbyes, and parted ways, not knowing what was to come.

The beginning of the quarantine was fun. I didn't dread going to school every day, I could hang out with my friends at any time I wanted, and we had no school. But this got old very fast. I did the same thing every day, and it was becoming monotonous. I still had hope, because the quarantine was about to be lifted in a few days. That was until the news of a month-long, then a two-month-long, and eventually a four-month-long quarantine came out. Curfews started, riots happened, and my social life was diminishing.

This is when I felt my life flood with dread. I've always considered myself a social person. I love hanging out with my friends, getting to know people, and most of all, I love to make people laugh. So I'm sure you can imagine what would happen when you forced me to stay inside with limited access to my friends. I fell into a pit of depression and dread. I had no hope of what was to come in the future. I had some good days and some really bad days, in which I had trouble finding happiness.

When I go through rough times, I go to God with my problems. I pray and ask for guidance and healing. But I didn't this time. I chose the wrong outlets, people, and morals to help numb my pain. I wanted to do things that I swore to myself that I would never, in my life, even think of doing. But I somehow thought that doing those things would help me get out of my pit. I stopped talking to my friends, stopped making jokes, canceled plans to stay in bed all day, and had no motivation to do anything. I didn't feel the Holy Spirit inside of me; I didn't feel anything.

This was my breaking point. I was invited to a party and reluctantly agreed. I couldn't just

# Megan Heavner | Meg's Pernicious Paradigm

walk out of my door, nor could I drive. So I came up with a plan. I found a way to get my hands on a one-time use escape ladder. The day of the party arrived, and I couldn't control my nerves. My mind was telling me to not go, but something inside of me was urging me to, "not be a baby, you have to live at least once in your life." I pushed away my gut feeling and decided to go. At around 9 pm, I set the ladder up. The cold wind of the night brushed against my fingers as I twisted my windows open. My heart was racing as I slowly dropped the ladder outside of my window. I could feel my excitement fighting my fear of sneaking out. I turned on my pump-up playlist and said to myself, "Screw it, you only live once. "

As I took the first step out of my window, I felt nothing but exhilaration. I've never done something so rebellious in my life. The second step was when the fear kicked in. This ladder had metal steps with rope holding each step together. It was anything but reliable. When my foot landed on the third step, the ladder started to clang against the window below mine. "Mom had to have heard that, she hears everything." My legs started to shake and I realized that I couldn't do this anymore. I tried to climb back up but the hinge of the ladder started to fold. "I'm going to fall and break my back. I'm going to fall, break my back, and have to crawl around my house, face my mother, and explain to her how I wasn't content with everything she does for me and felt the need to sneak out."

The only thing I can attribute to helping me climb back up is adrenaline and God. I have no upper body strength; climbing back up the ladder was the hardest physical challenge I've faced. I reached the top and crawled into the windowpane. Everything but my left arm fit inside the window. At



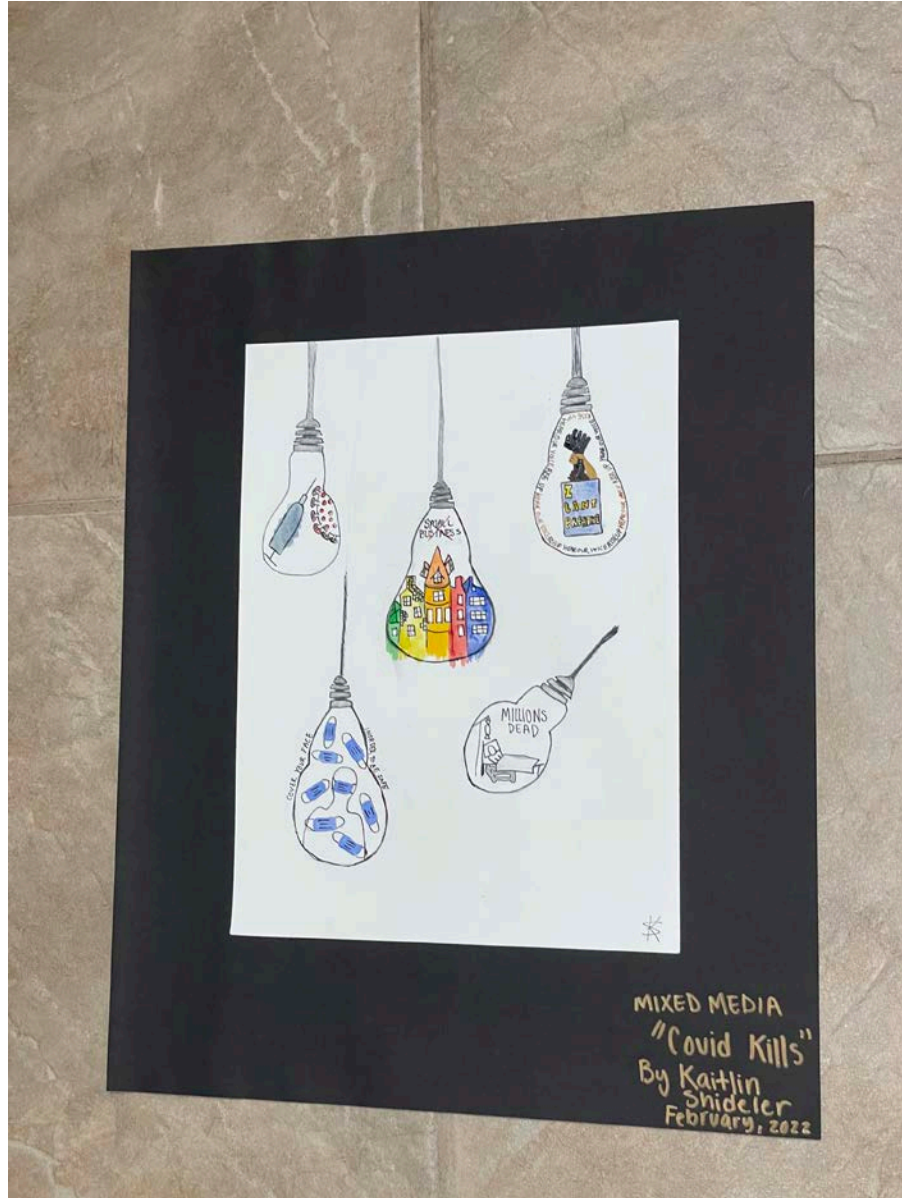
# Meg's Pernicious Paradigm | Megan Heavner

this point, I thought, “you can’t give up now, if you fall, you will die.” I stretched my arm back into the window and fell straight forward on my carpeted floor. I didn’t care if my mom heard me at this point, all I cared about was my safety.

As I lay on my floor in pain, all I could do was cry. I was in shock. An hour later, I put the ladder away and started to pray. I couldn’t believe that I just tried to sneak out, to make other people happy. I had no genuine desire to do the things I planned on doing, but I convinced myself that it would make me happy again.

Regret has faced me ever since that night. I have a new perspective on peer pressure and isolation and their lasting impacts on depression. I’m so grateful I didn’t fall that night, yet still in shock as to how I didn’t fall. I regained my priorities with faith, family, and school. I made the choice to keep climbing. Will you fall, or will you keep climbing?





In the quaint bedroom of your one-bedroom apartment, you stare into the endless depths of the closet. It is something like a black hole, a catch-all where your clothes, shoes, and assorted trinkets go to die. Scattered across the carpet are shoes: a lone bedazzled stiletto, a well-loved pair of moccasin slippers, a right-footed sandal with a broken clasp, and a left-footed sandal with a frayed strap. Some clothes, such as your sweaters and jeans, are neatly hung on their hangers and wait patiently for their next use. Others, like your sweatpants and jackets, lay crumpled on the floor. They have been discarded in either a running-late-rush or a drunken haze, depending on the day of the week.

The shelves, however, are the truly atrocious part of your closet. They are crammed full of relics you are reluctant to let go of. However, it is time to par down your belongings and create some room in this space.

You press up on your tiptoes and pull down the first cardboard box. It is lighter than you thought it would be, so you give it an inquisitive shake as you set it down. You hear the rustling of paper and quirk an eyebrow. Why would you keep a sheaf of papers?

Upon lifting the lid to the box, you find not papers but rather a stack of photographs. They are old and yellowing and bound together with a rubber band that is thin and snaps as you attempt to remove it.

You settle back into a cross-legged position, hand still stinging from where the rubber band bit you. After inspecting the red splotch and giving your hand an experimental shake, you decide that you will survive. You reach for the photograph on top of the stack and gently pry up the edge, cradling it like a broken baby bird in your palms as you transfer it to the carpet in front of you.

After smoothing away the creases and folds, you inspect the image. You are immediately struck by it, recalling the moment the photo was captured in immaculate detail. A wave of bittersweet nostalgia washes over you, the tang of your long-gone past intermixing with the joy of that same past.

The picture takes place in the kitchen of your childhood home. Your home, located in an eclectic part of town, was nestled in a row of houses of varying heights and colors, like a mouthful of crooked teeth. Your particular house was painted light blue and had three concrete steps that led to the charmingly creaky front door.

The kitchen, though, was your haven. Your mother painted it a cheerful yellow, hung short

linen curtains in the window above the sink, and constantly filled it with aromas both savory and sweet. It became a cozy gathering space where your family feasted, laughed, and focused on the warmth of each other's company.

Speaking of your mother, in the photo, she stands at the counter, a blue plastic bowl nestled in the crook of her arm. The counter cuts her in half, making her only visible from the waist up, yet you can clearly tell that she's wearing her treasured green paisley apron. The front of it is covered in flour, as is her arm. Her hand that isn't holding the bowl brandishes a rubber spatula and her face is awash with liveliness as she beams at the photographer. Your mother was like that, always filled with sunniness and verve.

One thousand snapshots make up the picture of your mother. You remember her humming as she whipped up a batch of cookies, singing in a warbling voice in the shower, and glowing with pride as she listened to you talk about your day. You remember her on the beach on the family vacation to the coast, the wind ruffling her curly hair, her eyes alight. You remember her ebullient and drunk on the thrill of being alive.

Mara, your sister, is significantly more subdued than your mother. In the photograph, she is about sixteen and leans on the counter, her hip bone pushed up against the edge, her dark hair falling choppily around her face. Her eyes, like whirlpools of the night sky, met the camera in a pensive gaze, but her lips had been touched by the ghost of a smile. She looks like a Renaissance painting, sans the oft-lamented crop top, chain belt, and skintight jeans.

But style grievances and all, this is exactly how you remembered your sister. A unique mix of reserved and outlandish, intelligent beyond her years, and the embodiment of 'still waters run deep.' You, the younger sibling by four years, weren't necessarily Mara's companion of choice, but you still ended up being her confidante. Your memories of her are cloaked in the moonlight of late nights spent awake talking, her dark eyes glittering as she whispered about any number of things. You see her posed on the porch for her homecoming pictures, regal and poised, her manicured hand on her hip and her gaze on the camera. You see her learning to drive, an air of expertise about her even though she should have been scared stiff.

Your father was the one who taught Mara to drive. He watched from the passenger seat with

# Shelby Prybell | Nostalgia

patience and calm, content to spectate but also ready to intervene at any moment. This is how he's positioned in your photograph as well. He's barely in the frame and he's reclined back against the kitchen wall, his arms crossed against his chest and a broad smile on his face. His eyes watch your mother, amused by her glee, yet his body is tilted toward your sister.

This is your father. A protector from a distance, but a warm presence nonetheless. Warm. His grin, the depth of his eyes, the way he'd lift you up in a bear hug when he returned from work. This is where Mara learned her silent strength; your father is a pillar. Whereas your mother had a thousand different faces, in your mind's eye, your father's face is constant. He was kindly and gently dropping you off for the first day of school. He was meticulously helping you paint your nails on your right hand, his brow furrowed as he struggled to master the stubby brush. He was bidding you *adieu* with a kiss on the head as he left for his job.

There are only three people in your photograph. Your mother, your father and your sister. This begs the question: where are you?

You suppose you are the photographer, age twelve. Bubbly, with a mouth that moved a thousand miles a minute, and a wannabe artist. You flitted from medium to medium, whether that be painting or sculpting or photography. Photography, at age twelve, had been your lifeblood. You spent hours bent over the camera, capturing the same scene a million times over, trying to find the perfect shot. Did you ever find it?

As you replace the photograph in your box, you smile to yourself.

Yes.

When you perch on your tiptoes to reshelve the box and then finally leave your room, you don't see its true state. You don't see the water stains on the paper-thin walls, or the threadbare holes in the carpet, or the questionable stains splattered around your IKEA bookshelf. You don't feel cramped by the tiny New York floorplan, you don't smell the dust and rot, and you don't hear the skittering feet of your newest roommate, a beige skeleton of a mouse.

When you think of your childhood home, you don't remember its true state. You don't remember that it was dated and cheap and not well-designed. You don't remember the peeling paint and dying shrubbery and the two constantly-fastened deadbolts on the front door. You don't remember

that the kitchen had chipping Formica countertops, cabinets hanging by a single screw, and sticky tiling framed by stained grout.

When you think of your mother, you don't remember her true state. You don't remember the mood swings and the happy pills, the rows of orange prescription bottles lined up on the counter. You don't remember those happy pills being consumed liberally in the morning and sometimes at night, too. You don't remember the burning scent that pervaded the kitchen when she scorched dinner, and you certainly don't remember finding her hysterical in the garden. You don't remember her falling asleep on the living room floor, mumbling about nothing, or the trip to the coast when she cried in the bathroom for three hours.

When you think of your sister, you don't remember her true state. You don't remember the hidden booze, the late-night vomiting sessions, or the frequent slamming of the front door as she stormed out on her latest enemy. You don't remember her hissing for you to not tell your parents, her slipping out the window at two in the morning, or the mascara smeared under her eyes as stared into the mirror. You don't remember the haunted look in her dark eyes, the gauntness of her frame, or the cigarette burns revealed by the homecoming dress.

When you think of your father, you don't remember his true state. You don't remember that his job, which he claimed left him swamped, caused him to disappear for months on end. You don't remember that the 'friends' he had over, all those women, were more than just friends. You don't remember that the day he dropped you off for school was the only day he ever showed up at your school. You don't remember that the day you waved goodbye, he disappeared for twelve months.

You see it all in a golden glow, painted in a wash of childhood glory and familial ties and bittersweet nostalgia. You ache for it, in fact, ache for your cozy kitchen and your mother's cooking and your sister's secrets and your father's dotting smile. You see that photograph that you took once upon a time and are consumed by love and longing.

Because who you've loved, where you've been, and who you are has all been romanticized by the slow march of time.

“ru·ti·lant: glowing or glittering with red or golden light.”

And there, again, went my memories  
Glimmering red and gold

There was my laugh against my father's chest  
And the smell of my mother in the spring  
There was the color red of the neighbor's brick house  
There was the color gold in the wrapping paper on my birthday gifts

It was Christmas, and I was 7 years old  
It was Christmas, and every memory was vivid  
Rutilant  
Shining red and gold

There was the anticipation of a full stocking  
There was my grandmother telling me not to spill the cookie crumbs  
I asked for gifts and I received  
I was surprised when I received  
There was innocence  
And there was a bright red nose on a toy reindeer  
There was a glowing gold star on top of the tree  
It was no longer Christmas  
I was no longer seeing in red and gold

I was learning to swim  
And while I could remember the feeling of cold water on my skin  
No memories were so strong as those that came with winter time  
There were smells, for smells always lingered the longest  
But there was no glimmer, no rutilance  
I did not worry just yet  
That would come again in December

It was Christmas, and I was 9, I was 10  
I knew what I believed about Santa Claus  
And I would not let any fifth grader tell me otherwise...  
But I was beginning to doubt  
And the red nose on the reindeer was beginning to dim  
My mother replaced the battery  
Rudolf did not glow any brighter



# rutilant | Lauren Hefner

Another year came and went  
What had I done in that year?  
My brother aged again  
Had he not just been a baby?  
My father aged again  
He never looked any older, not to me

It was Christmas, and I was...  
How old was I?  
I asked for gifts  
I felt guilty when I received  
What color had my favorite ornament been?  
What color had my childhood stocking been?

I still did not worry  
I did not hold on any tighter  
To those little things that seemed meaningless  
Not yet  
And that was my biggest mistake

Christmas snuck up on me  
Stole me from the spring  
(For had it not been spring just days ago?)  
And set me down in front of a tree wrapped in twinkling lights

I do not remember my first Christmas  
But I also do not remember my tenth  
My eleventh  
My twelfth

I remember feelings  
Gratitude, excitement, the anxiety of falling asleep on Christmas Eve  
I do not remember days  
I do not remember the last holiday I spent with my childhood dog  
With my grandfather

# Lauren Hefner | rutilant

I do, however, remember the best hug I ever got from my grandfather  
The red flush of his cheeks as he spun me around  
I remember the gold color of my dog's fur  
The clicking of her nails on our hardwood floors

And when I dig for something  
Anything  
To remind me of what my tenth Christmas was like  
My eleventh, my twelfth  
I come back from those blurry memories with a warning sign  
Shining red and gold  
Telling me to cherish every Christmas  
Every moment  
Every person  
And there, again, go my memories  
Glimmering red and gold

watching the time go by  
day after day getting darker  
watching the world outside drown deeper and deeper  
isolated, friends at arm's reach yet nowhere to be seen  
watching it get worse and worse  
we're all falling and falling  
alpha, delta, omicron, flurona  
one by one coming after us  
no hope, all loss  
the layers on our faces keep getting more and more familiar  
life was getting better once, the layers coming off  
families coming together, friends coming together but then  
it all fell again, the layers coming back the decrescendo  
of sickness became a crescendo again the world is watching  
closely, but not close enough we're all still deep in this  
never ending story  
when, oh when, will it all finally end ?

*Monday.*

My mother's digital card swipes filled the kitchen, blasting out alongside tiresome late night commercials. They were the sort that mindlessly repeated and babbled about just about anything, playing in order to fill up airtime with something other than blank static. My only saving grace was the music pulsating in my left earphone. I had the right one removed so I could hear the occasional comment my sister excitedly spoke — she was creating clay cows for her Etsy shop. The clay cow looked a great deal like a table and had a comically thick neck, but it was cute in that odd sort of way.

It was getting pretty late out, but we weren't growing tired. It seemed we never did, for it was always us three in the quiet kitchen come two A.M. The hum of the fan and the plastic shuffling of the curtains was the only thing to be heard besides the collection of devices. It was a calm night like that, the type that's worth remembering but will be forgotten anyways.

It's odd how we remember the worst things. My psychology teacher — now, I'm not psychology's biggest fan — taught his class that people value loss more than they value gain. I think it was loss effect or loss aversion, maybe. I think that's partly why we value grief so deeply, allowing it to overcome us in spite of all the fortunes that have come our way. It's dumb. It's human.

I hope those clay cows and quick card shuffles will be remembered come a year or two instead of the quick misfortune that came before this very moment. Because, right now, the wind is blowing in from the crack in the screen door and my sister and I are joking so kindly about how her cow looks like rigatoni that I

wish to remember this in place of the misfortune.

I don't believe I will, for humans aren't made for that.

And yet, these words will remember — isn't that the point of this all?

*Tuesday.*

The bottom of my school-issued laptop's computer screen displayed the temperature as it always did, but this time it seemed particularly cruel, for this time it was minus four outside and still dropping.

Now, there's nothing wrong with cold weather, but apparently minus four was "too cold" for snow to continue falling (according to my mother, at least). I wasn't quite convinced of it—in reality, a short meteorology phase taught me that "too cold" wasn't exactly a thing, but I didn't think all too hard about it. I wasn't thinking all too hard about anything, right now.

I had a cheap set of purple headphones playing folk music, the type of music that sounded calm and careless kind of like snow, at a nearly unpleasant level. At the same time, repetitive music from a phone game was playing aloud over and over as I watch my little block character trip, jump, plop, then die. Again and again and again.

I turned my headphones up some more. Words were leaking through. Reality was leaking through. My computer screen dimmed; I dragged a finger lazily over the keypad and watched my neon block character die with a faint explosion. I wasn't even using my laptop, but the superficially complicated chart of sediment size and water velocity I had pulled up was making me feel productive. Noise, noise, games, noise, charts, add

more noise.

In psychology, we learned about something called “gate control” or the “gate control theory.” I couldn’t quite remember which and I didn’t really care—I was never big on the subject. I was one of those people who thought psychology was just people slapping labels onto obvious phenomena and making a big fat ruckus about it. All the same, this gate control thing was the reason why we grabbed a foot after smashing it onto that perpetually painful edge of a bedframe or coffee table. Overstimulate it, lessen the pain.

I think that’s why I was blasting two sorts of music, playing a mind-numbing game, while glancing at this stupid chart on a glowing computer screen while imploring those stupid cold clouds to just start snowing. I think that’s a great deal why technology is a bit dangerous, sometimes. It’s gotten real easy and real quick to drown it all out, too easy and too quick.

### *Wednesday.*

Eggs and prepacked sausages sizzled on the stove while mumbling frustrations came from the living room of a video game gone bad.

Molly—a pleasantly overweight dog who had a length of twice her width—was staring longingly out at the flurrying snow, peeping out of the screen door. She would run out then in and out again in a constant state of flux, trailing wetness wherever she went. It made the fake tile flooring of the kitchen horribly slippery, but we paid little mind.

My sister still dozed downstairs; she didn’t enjoy breakfast, so no one bothered to wake her yet. She was like her mother in that way, eating once or

maybe twice in a day in a massive amount. My dad was adding dishes to the sink—it was my job to clean all of them, but I’d do them later. Dirty dishes towered besides the sink laying in wait, mainly coffee mugs and empty soda cans. My father would take the cans out to the garage and smash them, recycling them and getting a few cents or whatever it is. He had a knack for recycling anything and everything he found. He was frugal like that, always looking for money we didn’t need.

Outside, it had begun to snow, flakes falling languidly. It was a pleasant shift from the ash that sifted down only a few days prior. A big wildfire had hit some towns up west, took out a couple dense neighborhoods. The smoke had looked like storm clouds or dust being kicked up in the foothills, but then we smelt it. The falling ash was a product of flames mixing with dried grass, wooden siding, and photographs from families. Really put stuff into perspective. An hour more of that wind-fanned-fire and that ash would’ve been our home, too.

Molly was still staring out the door, but standing up, this time. She really liked when the snow started falling. I think we all did.

In December of 2019, in the only bathroom in my house bulging with family members eager to see, I gave myself a bowl cut, or rather a colander cut as none of the bowls in my house fit over my head. I am someone who has always had my hats on the last snap. Fifteen minutes later, in order to undo the damage done, my sister took a twenty dollar electric razor I bought at Target the night before, and, with reckless abandon, shaved the remaining hair off my head. Unbeknownst to her and myself at the time, she had left me with a clean slate, a fresh start.

Four months later, I became very familiar with the four walls of my room. Everything was static. Time was still. Yet, my hair now looked like a porcupine. Despite the days molding together, the loneliness and heartache quarantine ushered in, and the cold emptiness of zoom, my hair grew. It was about one inch long when we went online, and inch by inch, literally, I got through the pandemic.

At one inch, like many people, I took up hobbies. I did not bake bread or whip coffee, the hobby that chose me was dance. Everyday I played indie music from my iPhone speaker at full volume and danced in my front yard. A rare car drove past one day and my face turned red. I then moved my party to the backyard which had more space anyway. My neighbors were not akin to this hobby, but they had listened to my siblings and I play a complicated version of quidditch in my front

yard everynight growing up. Everynight, without fail, the game devolved into a disagreement about the rules, so they were accustomed to the noise coming from my overgrown yard. I had grown up dancing but quit the year before going to high school. It was familiar, known. Nothing at one inch was familiar, everything was a new revelation, a new experience. I danced to feel comfort, to be hugged.

At the length in which I looked like a middle school boy, one and a half inches, dancing no longer plugged the hole in my heart left by isolation. I was beginning to mourn the loss of school or, rather the loss of structure, the loss of something to do. At one and a half inches I took up listening to podcasts. Every minute of my day was filled with a voice in my ears. Podcasts occupied my thoughts. If I turned the noise off I would have to think about how lonely I was, I would have to grieve the loss of school and structure. The constant drone of someone's voice saved me from my own thoughts.

At two inches, school had ended and I had nothing to do. Cross country didn't start for another month and podcasts started to make me think, which was never good. I cried a lot. Two inches was, physically, not a good look for me. At two inches I biked to CVS and bought two boxes of hair dye, one blonde and one blue. I posed the question on my private Snapchat story, consisting of my closest friends, if I should dye my hair

blonde or blue and every person who responded said neither. I settled on blonde. In my bathroom, which has held my hand through many hair changes, many breakdowns, I coated my hair in thick smelling boxed hair dye. As with all my hair transformations, it did not turn out well. It was so yellow that at one point, someone told me I looked like Donald Trump. The very next day I went to a hair salon and got it fixed. At two inches, probably coinciding with my blonde breakdown, I also started going to therapy.

At three inches I was happier. I felt loved. Cross country had started. It is a confusing sport as it brings me so much physical pain, but so much internal joy. Every morning I had the privilege of getting up at sunrise to drive to Sunset Hill and run down the familiar trails with my team. In the way that dance was familiar, cross country brought that same feeling. The familiar rhythm of feet hitting the dirt path, the buzzing of the powerlines during hill workouts, the smell of wet dog during rainy practices, it filled my heart with so much joy. I am not good at cross country, I am not fast, but cross country was something warm. It saved me from myself, it saved my life.

When we went back to school, no one recognized me. My hair had grown from the bald I left with in March and had changed color. School came and went. Everyday was once again the same. Life was returning to “normal,” a word everyone has overused. My hair was back to brown,

and I began to heal from my loneliness. It is at this length that I got my license. A week later, in the parking lot of Valpo high school following my performance at our high school’s improv comedy show, my side door collided with my friend’s bumper and left a nasty dent in the side of my sister’s car, which remains today. I like to think of the dent as a permanent reminder of me while she is at college. Four days later, as I was eating a bowl of ice cream, I realized that it did not taste like anything. I took another bite, and still, nothing. For two weeks I remained in my room and left only to use the bathroom and pick up my meal outside the door. Yet, my hair still grew.

Eventually, my taste came back. The taste of every food had returned to a familiar palette, except peanut butter. For the whole summer, I could not smell it without having the urge to vomit. Whilst dealing with my peanut butter issue this summer, I had been given a state park pass from someone and went to watch the sunset at least once a week with my friend. We would pack up her fiat convertible with blankets and put the top down driving on 49. When I shaved my head I did not realize that I would miss the feeling of the wind knotting my hair as we drove. The wind blowing through my hair made me realize I had not used a brush in months, I hadn’t needed to. Running my fingers through my hair was always enough.

I still dance occasionally, though I have

# Elisabeth Murley | Untitled

new hobbies now, ones that don't remind me of one inch. I knit. My friends have each received multiple hats. I don't listen to podcasts anymore. I am not afraid of my own thoughts. In a month I am dying my hair blonde again, this time in a real salon, not my bathroom, not a Hair Cuttery. I want to be happy and blonde. I am now happy. I want to apologize to the girl at two inches. I want her to feel happy, healed. I was mean to her, vicious. She was never good enough for me. But she is good enough. In all her flaws, her impulses, her tendency to grab scissors and chop a piece of hair off when life goes wrong. I am proud to say that I have not cut my own hair in months. I have a new car, a dentless car. I am now dentless. I can smell and taste. After months of hating peanut butter, my lunch consists of a PB&J everyday. And, while it is winter, my friend's fiat often has its top down, driving on the highway. This time I don't only feel knots in my hair, I feel ice too. I have grown. My hair has grown. It brushes my shoulders now. You can no longer tell I shaved it. The only remnants of my bald head are the pictures I took and the St. Baldrick's t-shirt hanging in my closet. I have even met people who did not know I shaved my head. They only know me now. They didn't know two inch.



# Lee Sanchez in conversation with Philip Bolton, President of Sigma Tau Delta at Valpo

**Lee Sanchez:** Did anything surprise you about the pieces you received, or about the contest as a whole?

**Philip Bolton:** I was surprised at how the contestants' entries helped me view my own early pandemic-era experiences in a new light. They led me to revisit that time and think about how it influenced who I am today. It was an unexpected - but very welcome - part of the judging process for me.

**LS:** Why is it important for us, as university-level organizations, to encourage and seek out art from high school students?

**PB:** I believe we should seek out work from high school students because we can provide young creators with a special semi-professional platform that enables their work to reach a larger audience. It also gives them, as potential Valparaiso University students, a sense of the great opportunities that our scholastic community has to offer.













i'm just a drunk poet  
who fell in love with the lyrical verse  
i thought you were

finding truths in your sober lies  
learning to rewrite  
each new stanza twice

until i put an end stop to our story  
so there's nothing left but a blank space  
and a drunk poet

who'll write about our intoxicating love  
that's no more but will last forever  
in a shakespearean sonnet

you hate the hauntings of your old addiction  
but you'll only have yourself to blame  
for getting involved with a drunk poet

Beauty is the golden thing  
That creeps between the cracks of time,  
That whispers through the aching years  
To pull the soul back into rhyme;  
That lights the skies of circling minds  
And tears the heavy clouds away;  
That calls the names of wandering ones  
And points their hearts to endless day.



i'm  
15, she/her, bisexual, vegetarian but i swear i'll be vegan one day, diagnosed MDD, undiagnosed OCD, no bipolar but it runs in my family so, midwesterner, white, used to be afraid of dogs but please don't judge me, always feel desolate at night but so loved in the morning, goldfish keeper because i don't have a best friend anymore, can't stop making original characters but never any plot lines, been an ache in my ribs lately, i think sometimes i hurt myself on purpose but i don't know if it's with boys or sharp things or both, i once had to get a staple in my skull when i was young because of a damn dog is this enough for you? i'm sorry in advance for anything i might say. is this enough for you? i'm sorry about my voice, i can't make it stop, it's a compulsion, is this enough for you? i thought i would be allowed here, have i convinced you, am i small enough yet? should i go get damaged some more before having an opinion, it's no trouble at all, really, i was born for such paradoxes, is it enough for you? i have a thousand gargantuan friends but i am my top monthly viewer.



All he had was bread and butter, for all those days of his buoyant youth. Children outside the community had cell phones and televisions and PlayStations, but Jeffery had no such thing. Nor did his brothers and sisters, all six of them stuck in that little white house while the rain poured down. It was the pain of Amish youth, the eternal boredom that would later morph into peace. And so they watched their mother as she cooked that butter and bread, churning and mixing and whisking away. Johnny complained and Luisa cried, but Jeffery did no such thing. Instead, he watched – watched, and observed.

Jeffery was glad for those moments as he slid open the sleek metal oven, pushing the tray of bread deep inside. It had been quite a while since he had baked bread like this, and even longer since he had churned his own butter. In fact, he hadn't even owned the proper materials, and had hired

a shopper to retrieve them. Jeffery supposed he should be more careful with his money, with that awful lawsuit in the works and the divorce settlement to consider. He couldn't bring himself to care, though. Money was addictive like that. The more you have, the more you want – and Jeffery had a lot. Not that it mattered anymore. Nothing seemed to matter these days. Not since he'd lost both his company and his wife in the span of a week.

It was Lindsay who had helped him pick out this apartment, back when the future seemed so promising. She'd loved the sleek, modern look of the place, admiring the ornate mantle above the fireplace and opulent art dotting the walls. Jeffery couldn't help but smile at the memory of that day, of the excitement glimmering in Lindsay's eyes when he'd signed the papers. The same excitement that was reflected in his own eyes, too. Oh, how

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far he had come since those days in the small white house! He had a luxurious apartment in the upper east side of New York City, a blooming app start-up in the works, and a beautiful wife by his side. Yes, life had been good back then. He only wished he had known the real reason for the sparkle in Lindsay's eyes – wished he had seen who her eyes landed on while he was hunched over those papers.

A crash sounded in the adjacent room, shaking Jeffery from his trance-like state. He frowned, peeking his head around the doorframe. He let out a shocked laugh at the sight he found – Fluffy, his hairless cat and best friend, had knocked over one of Lindsay's glass figurines. It was the one shaped like a rose, the one that had mysteriously appeared for her and the only one she insisted he return to her soon. It was mere petals of glass now, sparkling like revenge on the marble floor.

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“Fluffy!” Jeffery exclaimed, swiftly sweeping the cat into his arms before she could get into any of the glass. “Bad girl!”

Fluffy just blinked up at him, as if she knew he was secretly grateful. Jeffery sighed. *Well, there isn't much point in reprimanding the cat*, he thought to himself. Fluffy had never much liked Lindsay anyhow. Perhaps it was her lack of tact in holding her, or maybe Fluffy could sense Lindsay's objection to her existence. Lindsay had argued vehemently against getting her, claiming that there was no point in a hairless cat.

*“It's ugly!” she'd exclaimed, eyebrows quirking in that way they always did when she was angry. “I am not getting an ugly cat, Jeff.”*

And yet they'd bought Fluffy anyways, Jeffery taking a rare stand against Lindsay's whims. It was true that the cat was ugly, but he couldn't

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resist her – and besides, Jeffery knew he was ugly too. It was what he had told Lindsay that day, reminding her that she loved him anyhow. Or at least, he'd thought she did. Until two weeks ago, when his company had gone under and Lindsay had cruelly informed him that she'd been seeing Jack for the past year. Jack, his landlord who coincidentally found himself unable to lower Jeffery's bill for the upcoming month.

A beeping sound interrupted his thoughts once again, and Jeffery realized with a start that it had been sounding for several minutes. He released Fluffy to the ground, the cat meowing indignantly at being held for so long. He wandered into the kitchen, turning off the churn mindlessly. His shopper had misunderstood his request, bringing him an electronic churn rather than the old-fashioned hand churn he had hoped for. The poor woman was awfully confused when he told

her of the mistake, eyebrows furrowed politely. She couldn't understand why Jeff Bell, former CEO of an app start-up, could possibly want a hand-operated butter churn. Like everyone else Jeffery had met in the last decade or so, she'd assumed electronic was the best option. Jeffery couldn't blame them – he was just as guilty of the assumption, settling far too easily into comfort with the devices he was taught to mistrust.

It was just as well, though. He hadn't churned butter in thirteen years, even longer than he had gone without making bread. Couldn't bring himself to, not when Ella had loved his butter so. A memory flashed through his mind, lightning-fast and extraordinarily painful.

*"I think you're even better than my mother at that," Ella teased as she watched from the kitch-*

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*en chair, eyes sparkling with mischief and laughter.*

*“You’d make a great housewife.” She laughed as Jeffery bristled, just as she’d surely known he would.*

*“So, what?” Jeffery shot back, acting offended despite the smile that snuck onto his face. “I’m your mother, then?”*

*“I sure hope not.” Ella wrinkled her nose. “That would make this awfully strange.” Warm arms wrapped his center, and a piece of Jeffery’s heart came alive.*

*“Yes,” he agreed, “I’m not sure Bishop James would approve.” Ella rolled her eyes, ever the rebel. It was part of what Jeffery loved about her – she was different than the other girls in the community, as if she were simply born too explosive for this place. A living flame, forced underwater.*

*“In two weeks, who cares what Bishop James thinks?” Ella shot back, an eyebrow quirk-ing in what he knew to be excitement. For in two weeks, they were to begin their Rumspringa, the two years they would spend outside of the Amish community. At the end of those years, when they were eighteen and more knowledgeable about the world, they were to choose which world they wished to remain in. Jeffery knew Ella wished to remain in the outside world, knew she was fully prepared to leave the Amish community behind for good. It was hardly surprising – with a rather harsh father, a mother who died in childbirth, and no siblings, there was little to lose.*

*Jeffery had no such assurances. Sure, his family had problems – indeed, one of his siblings was only half his sibling, a result of his mother’s affairs. Yet still... to leave his family and the comforts of home, to face that terrifying world of*

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*artificiality and danger? It would take courage Jeffery wasn't sure he possessed. He hadn't told Ella, though – wasn't sure how to, when she was all too excited about their life together outside.*

*“I can't wait,” Ella finished, hope coating her words. Jeffery snuck a glance behind him, to where she still clung to him. Rays of golden light streamed in from the window, landing softly upon her honed-brown hair and seeming to make it glow. In that moment, Jeffery couldn't help thinking that she looked like an angel.*

*“Me either,” Jeffery admitted, smiling to himself. He resumed churning the butter, each push of the churn pulsing in time with his hopeful heart.*

A chime rang suddenly in the corner, a harsh wake up call jerking him from the dream-

like depths of memory. A notice from his Alexa, the particular beeping noise that meant all things Lindsay. He'd programmed it that way in those awful few days *after*, insistent on noting every little thing about her. He knew he ought to delete the programming, but... he couldn't keep himself from wandering over to where his smartphone lay, face down on the couch Lindsay had picked out herself. It was a notification from Facebook, indicating that she had posted once more. Jeffery wasn't particularly surprised to find another photograph of her and Nick, beaming from the rooftop bar of some luxurious restaurant or another. The type of place he could have taken her, back when he had money secured in the bank. Jeffery wondered faintly if Ella would have desired that sort of luxury, whether she would leave him just as Lindsay had. Something inside him screamed, resisting the thought the way Fluffy resisted a bath.

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He couldn't believe Ella to be so shallow – bright, sunny Ella, who wanted nothing more than to experience life.

Jeffery shook the melancholy thought from his head, scolding himself inwardly. *What's wrong with me tonight?* For it had been years – so many long, glorious years – since these thoughts had tortured him so. He forced himself to keep scrolling, desperate for that technological numbness that had long since become his crutch. Jim and Lisa from the old office were getting married – cute, although Jeffery couldn't help but be jealous of their ease. They weren't the ones held responsible for this ridiculous lawsuit. He scoffed to himself and continued scrolling – and there it was. One of those annoyingly prevalent pop-up news articles, bringing death and despair to the light environment he wished Facebook to be. Yet it was more than mere annoyance that ran through Jeffery's mind

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at the article. He was angry, and shocked, and absolutely terrified at the headline flashing on that utterly powerful screen.

## ***Local epidemic devastates Amish communities throughout Wisconsin.***

His fingers seemed to move of their own accord, utterly separate from his consciousness as they pressed down on the article, scrolling desperately through the text.

“Fatalities have been reported in Amish communities nation-wide. Dozens remain on the brink of death in the most extreme of communities, where many have refused medical assistance.”

Suddenly Jeffery was not in his apartment, nor was he in New York City at all. Suddenly, he was in that small bedroom he loved so, sat upon the bed belonging to Ella's sister.



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*Ella lay upon the bed opposite him, looking utterly at peace as she slept although he knew her body was anything but. He knew little at the time about biology and the immune system, but anyone could see the way her body was fighting to exist with each passing moment. Even now, clear bags shone in the pallid sheen of her lovely face. Jeffery's face wasn't much better, eyes rimmed red and lip eternally quivering. His eyes burned as he caught sight of the newspaper peeking out from under Ella's bed, the date two days before.*

*Tragedy befalls Amish communities in the face of prevalent Swine Flu.*

*It seemed Ella had paid little attention to the headline, though. She had circled the date in a pen of sparkly pink, with a written addition of "five days!!" and a smiley face doodled next to it. It was this that made Jeffery break, more than anything*

*else – that stupid smiley face, the absurd pink shade of the pen. All so bright, so bold – so Ella. And suddenly, Jeffery was angry. Angry at whatever pig had brought this flu in the first place, angry at the way Ella's father had insisted on refusing the medical assistance she needed despite even Bishop James's advice. Angry at himself. In a way, Jeffery felt responsible – as if the world had known he would choose the community over her in the end, believed that he loved this world more than he loved her.*

*Jeffery was angry, alright. Angry to leave the world he had once loved behind for good, fleeing to the artificial horizon with hardly a glance in hindsight.*

This time, it was the scent of burning that awoke Jeffery from his trance. He cursed to him-

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self as the scent flooded his body, rushing to pull the bread from that annoyingly powerful oven. He barely felt the burning of the pan on his palms, barely noticed the way the smoke poured from the door. He saw only the bread, darkened from the heat but not burned altogether. Salvaged, in the way Ella hadn't been. That hole inside him grew as he sliced the bread mindlessly, gathering the bread and butter into a bowl. A poor imitation of the wicker baskets of bread his mother would lay out for them, back in the days it was much simpler.

Jeffery hated that bread. He hated that it wasn't burned, hated that the butter still melted into pleasure on his tongue. More than anything, he hated that he could save a measly loaf of bread and not Ella, who he had loved so. Oh, how he had tried! He had begged whichever doctors he could find, pleading for them to go against her father's advice. Jeffery had even gone as far as to beg her

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father himself, screaming through his tears.

Jeffery had failed, though. It was why he created Jeff, why he made sure he graduated from Harvard and was as successful as possible. He was powerless as Jeffery. Powerless against the ways of the Amish he'd grown with, who he wished he could hate. Jeff, though... Jeff was charismatic, persuasive despite his questionable looks. Jeff had the power to enact change, to create an app aimed at training doctors in natural remedies.

Until Jeff failed, too. The app fell apart overnight, one remedy gone wrong dashing the dreams he'd worked so hard to enact. It wasn't long before Lindsay followed suit, insistent that she not be married to a business scandal.

Sat all alone at that impeccable dining table, Jeffery wished. He wished he had a solution for all of his problems, wished he could help the

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Amish communities he would always consider family. More than anything, he wished to turn back the clock. He wanted the days of the past, from the scent of warm bread and sound of rain to the sensation of throwing his cap in the air. He wanted Lindsay, and the glamorous future he thought they'd live. He wanted the life Ella had planned for them, circled in sparkly pink ink.

He didn't have any of that, though. All he had was bread and butter, butter and bread. Jeffery couldn't help but wonder if that would be enough.

She was looking at us,  
as we were walking inside.  
She didn't want us to run, didn't want us to hide.  
Her mouth was wide, inviting us in,  
She said she was one of us, one of our kin.

It was the Brandt Elevator Blues,  
Brandt Elevator Blues

We took a step inward, expecting no harm.  
We fell for her words, we fell for her charm.  
She had our trust, innocence in our eyes,  
If only we knew this was just a disguise.

It was the Brandt Elevator Blues  
Brandt Elevator Blues

Once the door closed, there was no leaving,  
Our fate was sealed, we had no time for grieving.  
Our ascent into hell was ready to start,  
The only thing I could feel was the beating of my heart

It was the Brandt Elevator Blues,  
Brandt Elevator Blues

The clock was ticking, the end was near,  
We heard a loud bang and were filled with fear.  
The lights shut off, and she started to drop,  
What once was beating, came to a stop

It was the Brandt Elevator Blues  
Brandt Elevator Blues













# In Conversation with John Messerschmidt, '77-'78

## Editor-in-Chief of *The Lighter*

**Lee Sanchez:** This semester, we spent time going through some issues from the recent past, and then from very long ago. And it was a really interesting experience. So, I'm so glad that you're here to talk with us ... Just to get an overview, when were you here at Valpo?

**John Messerschmidt:** Back in the Dark Ages. I started in '74 and graduated in '78. I should probably be able to do the math, but I can't. So, it's over 40 [years ago], whatever it is.

**LS:** A while back.

**JM:** Yes, a while back. [laughing]

**LS:** At that time, what got you first interested in *The Lighter*?

**JM:** Back in high school, I had been the Editor-in-Chief of our literary magazine there ... called *The Essence*. I'd had a [poetry] class when I was in 9th grade in high school, taught by a sweet little old lady ... and I don't know how many 9th grade boys write poetry, but I was also in the wrestling team, so, I don't know, figure out what's going on with me. But I enjoyed it. And so, I just wrote poetry through high school and was the Editor of our magazine there, I think, for two years. And I got to college and said, 'I can do it, why not? I'll give [*The Lighter*] a shot' ... And I was Assistant Editor as a junior, and then I thought I'd give [the Editor-in-Chief position] a shot as a senior.

[The Fall 1977 issue has] a candle on the front, a dandelion on the back. The idea was kind of like, you blow out a candle, you blow a dandelion. I guess part of it is, what do you live and breathe on? You live and breathe on submissions, and you can't beat it out of people, [so] I'm curious ... do you have too many [submissions], a lot, enough?

**LS:** This [semester] we got ... significantly less [submissions] than past years ... I remember when I was a freshman in 2018, [there were many more] submissions. I recall they were pretty vocal with the [published submitters] that the acceptance rate was [very low]. But now this semester, we

have [less] pieces that are getting rejected by the committee, but ... I just feel like we have all great submissions. They're all just wonderful, so despite having less, they're very quality.

*JM:* Everything was in the stone age when I was [involved with *The Lighter*]. And you have to put a flyer, I don't know, in the bathrooms, on the dorm walls or whatever ... It was tough. And then you get, you know, 72 [submissions] from one person, [laughing] and ... you want to encourage people ... quench not the spirit, right? ... There was no faculty that was looking over our shoulder. We kind of shied away from racy [submissions]. It's not mine to censor, but [you have to ask], does it have merit on its own as a work of art, or is it just someone wanting to be explicit? So, we were probably pretty tame in what we did.

*LS:* We've been discussing this semester that [in] so many of these older issues, the submissions are a lot more light-hearted. Particularly the ones from the 80s [have] a lot of, as you said, racy works, but there's just so much humor, especially the further back you go. And pretty much all the poems we get now these days are sad and dark.

*Michela Tenuta:* It's nice that people are using poetry as an outlet, but I do kind of wish that ... we had a little bit more variety. Reading the old editions, the poems are so funny and so lighthearted. So that part at least has definitely changed.

*JM:* I had hoped we would have more stories, and that's a tough thing too, because you can't really publish a 30- or 40-page story ... We had to deal with the hand we were dealt ... You rise and fall on your submissions—we were thin that first [issue] and maybe a little thicker the next [semester]. But I will tell you, we were actually the Indiana Collegiate Press Association literary magazine of the year my senior year.

*LS:* That's great! We have continued to go to the ICPA contest [for] many years; we have continued to win awards.

*JM:* Yay!

**LS:** We have plaques and all those awards in our office still from [ICPA].

**JM:** I'll have to come in there sometime and look. When I was there, we had an office in the old student Union. I [once] did an all-nighter there. I had a Greek class and I had to study and study and study, and it was the only place that was open all night.

[When we were making the book], and this was again in the stone age, it had to be type set and then it was printed. There weren't digital files back then. I remember taking stuff and putting it on the photocopy machine. I think we had a couple of people review [each submission]. So, it was kind of clunky ... And you have to say, 'well, when do you want to have it published?' And then you say, 'well, it takes two weeks to do this, to print it and two weeks to get it typeset.' It was kind of crazy, very clunky. Thank God for digital files.

**LS:** We're really curious about the culture and atmosphere of *The Lighter* at the time. We have a paid staff of six and we've got our selection committee. What did those teams look like [for you], and what was the general feeling?

**JM:** I think I was the only paid person. Maybe the assistant [too]. We had no other paid staff. And [the rest of] the people all kind of did it out of the kindness of their hearts. I went and looked up [a picture of] the team that was actually taken in the bowling alley here. The assistant editor, she's a Valpo Professor, Susan Holman! [Back] then it was pretty much a bunch of volunteers who did it for the love of art.

**MT:** I like that dynamic. Just a team of ragtag individuals ready to go.

**JM:** We were! Outside of [*The Lighter*], I don't think we ever were in the same social circles. We were very different kinds of people, which I think is probably okay. I think it's good.

**MT:** Yeah. I think that's true for us as well; this is pretty much the only way that we even know each other. But it works; it's good.

*LS:* It does. It's weird to think about, actually.

*MT:* Can you just tell us about an experience or an aspect [from your time with] *The Lighter* that has stuck with you the most?

*JM:* I often have dreams at night that we don't have enough submissions. [laughing] It's a job, right. And, you know, at the beginning, maybe you're kind of coasting, waiting for something. It's like, I've been paid all semester and we have to produce a product. This is not an hourly job. So, the dream is: we're near the end of the semester, there's hard deadlines and we don't have submissions. What do we do? So that's maybe a negative side.

I think, though, Michela, you made a good point. I wound up meeting and working with people that [would] not have been in my social circles. And I think before me there was ... the hippie generation and stuff like that. So, some pretty wild people. I was not, but I met some very interesting people. And I think I learned something about management and leading and getting a job done. Because, Lee, as you and Michela know, [you have] many ideas that you want to do, but a lot of stuff happens. You just have to wing it; this is the hand we're dealt with. We're going with it.

Part of it is, I think, to get as many people involved as possible. You need this big funnel because some people will drop out over the years. And eventually, maybe one of those people becomes, like I said, [part of] a succession plan. And that's something we found. If only five people really care about this, you only get submissions from five people, and the rest of the campus won't care. But if people feel like, 'we're being heard, we have a voice,' then you might draw more [interest]. And then, submissions may not be an issue.

*LS:* That's what it's all about. That's what it should be all about, is giving people a voice. Thank you for that.

*JM:* I'm thrilled that somehow, I may still have some value.





“My Lord; my God!” you said, amazed; for then  
You could no longer doubt. You, those who saw  
Love, touched and heard, must have been filled with awe.  
Oh, what a gift you had, you chosen men.  
Removed, torn, riven was the veil; need for  
Debate had passed; reality was proved  
As He, in whom all things do live and move  
Now lives and moves again. “My God; my Lord!”  
Doubt gnaws and haunts us still, yet faith fights on.  
Men and women, the old, the young: the blessed,  
Yet those who do not fully know. The dawn—  
Grace, peace—will come, and put our fears to rest.  
Our eyes will see, when with the day of grace  
Dreams end, lies break, and we stand face to face.



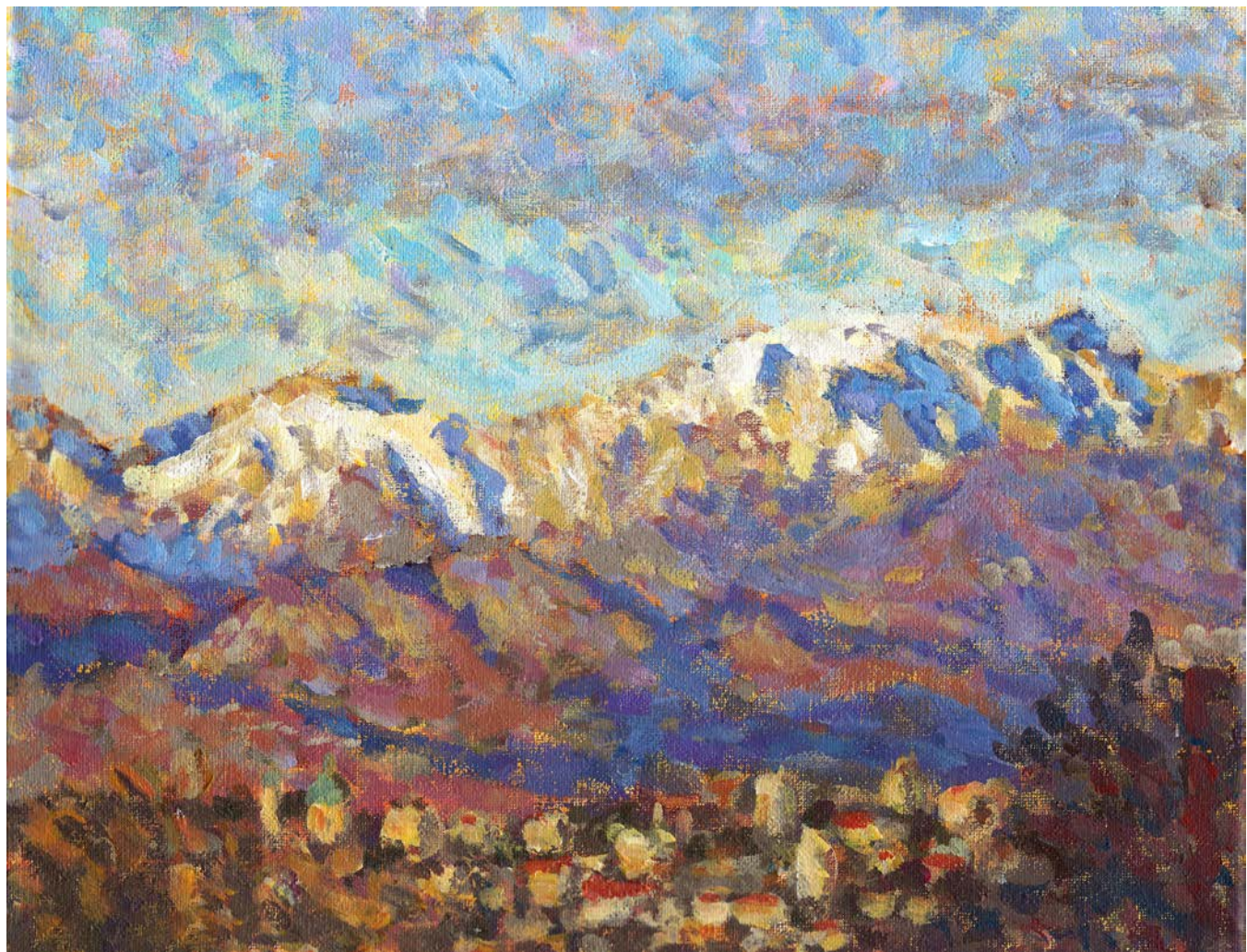
He wishes to tell you stories every time  
You see him.  
His stories are grand and glorious, his stories are comforting,  
They soar across the skies  
And descend into your soul.  
They are everything

They are everything because  
They are you,  
Your family, your ancestors.  
He knows the history of the universe  
But more importantly,  
He knows the history of what makes you smile and cry,  
How your heart has sailed through a lifetime of  
Tragedy and paradise.

I have learned who I ought to be  
Because of him.

And, I have realized  
As the world progresses and ceases the existence of a thousand souls,  
Including his,  
Including him,  
I ought to be a storyteller too.  
Because they know the secret of the universe:  
To give the world a beating heart, an unbounded soul.

Someday I'll tell his story  
And the world will heal again



Our collective consciousness  
Compiles memories of the time we've spent,  
With borrowed time we all were lent  
We were all led back to here.  
Contradicting ideals  
Are laid to rest in dandelion fields,  
Where justice needs no court appeals  
And hate burns up in atmosphere.

Goodbye my golden ratio,  
My element 119.  
I'll breach the gates of paradise,  
And scrape the edge of pristine.  
I have felt that sublimation  
Thanks to the source of all creation,  
I'll ride away from this station  
To the place inside my dreams.

Past the rings of Saturn,  
Past Cydonia on Mars.  
Where country has no meaning,  
Where I can touch the stars.  
Past this flesh of phosphorus,  
Past carbon's loving embrace.  
I'll ride away from these friends of mine,  
Past the human race.  
I'll wave goodbye to gravity,  
To strings and atoms too.  
I'll set a course for the divine,  
And that's where I'll find You.





Weaponizes insignificant memory,  
Worth their agony in gold

Sugar-rush, party of ten,  
Room for you and all your friends  
Moon Pies, surface lies: we're fine.  
Honey buns and gatling guns:  
The First Battle of Bull Run  
Then The Gettysburg Address

Pinball and pacer tests  
Dances and donut holes  
Stitches and solemn stares  
Foam planets, smart alecks,  
Home Depot, hand-sanding  
Safety pins, numbered sins  
Planted tree,  
He saved me.  
Make it stop!

Leave me alone, just let me be.  
Dead, but alive in memory.



We were gathered  
in green pastures,  
Naked, and coated  
in dirt and resin.  
The sky was clear and bright.  
And rain fell from above.

We all washed away  
the debris that stained our skin,  
But when the stains kept,  
we reached out and held each other's hand,  
Preventing one another from scrubbing  
through skin, tissue, and bone.

When the rain stopped,  
we looked around and saw  
the dirt that lingered on ourselves.  
And after looking for only a moment,  
we made little fuss  
about the blemishes  
that christened our flesh.

For we knew that  
no matter where we were,  
And how we looked,  
we could not escape  
such pressing scars,  
But proudly make peace  
with what remained.



Soar like Icarus, the heavens' delight.  
Borrowed wings weigh more, but all the same, fly.  
Matchflame, my saving grace, pierces the night.

Heed the white-feathered Saint's call to ignite!  
Black clouds and ashen wings rise in the sky  
and soar like Icarus, the heavens' delight.

Salvation by firelight, burning respite,  
a glowing mirage flickers within my  
matchflame, my saving grace, piercing the night.

This little match shines brighter than limelight,  
but as flame grows low and embers die,  
I fall like Icarus, the heavens' delight.

A simple spark cannot cure a heart's blight.  
As these soot-stained feathers fall from on high,  
matchflame, my saving grace, pierces the night.

Take up your torches, see the Sinner's plight.  
If the sun were enough, would we still try,  
to soar like Icarus, the heavens' delight?  
Matchflame, our saving grace, pierces the night.

# Contributor Bios

Mercedes Airgood is a Communication and Expressive arts major who enjoys photography as well as painting.

Brianna Ares is a senior International Relations major who enjoys dancing and going for walks. She also loves to travel and explore new places.

Hope Biermann is a sophomore history major who is prone to humming Beatles songs, staring at the sky, and launching into long speeches on why Obi-Wan Kenobi is her favorite Star Wars character. She also likes spending time with her family, playing music, and writing. Soli Deo Gloria.

Kyle Boisvert is a Senior English major, with a minor in Spanish and Psychology, who enjoys watching, discussing, and consuming all things related to film and other fiction. He likes to take walks and listen to music in his free time, as well as watching (and talking over) movies with friends.

Brook Burbridge is a sophomore astronomy and art double major who enjoys painting in acrylic and drawing with charcoal. She's president of the Society of Physics Students on Valpo's campus.

Nick Davis is a senior digital media major who loves to create. He began with altering clothes in high school, but has since expanded his skillset into graphic design, web design, and photography. His favorite part about creating is the connection that he makes with the client or muse. He says, "There is just something about combining my ideas with someone else's to create a new reality while discovering who they are as a person."

Maiah Deogracias is a sophomore Communications and Digital Media Arts double major. Her mediums of choice are digital photography and graphic design. In her free time she loves going to all the coffee shops and traveling.

Aidan Doyle is a Psych major with a fondness for malaise, ennui, and other valuable senses.

Adrian Elliott is a student without a major who, quite frankly, has no business sticking his nose into an art contest. Apparently, that will not stop him.

Emily Fletcher is a sophomore psychology and environmental science major who spends her free time writing, watching her favorite movies and shows with friends, and eating way too many sweets for her own good. She also loves the outdoors and finds her writing inspired by the beauty all around her. She hopes to someday publish her short stories and poetry, and own a bookstore with lots of cats.

Kayla Fluegeman is a senior Creative Writing major with minors in theatre and individualized photography who, if you can't tell, loves to create.

Zion Gifford is a studio arts major who was born on an extraordinarily hot and moderately breezy evening with his eyes wide open. Every night he pulls out all of his teeth, and every morning they grow back in sharper. Emily Graves is a sophomore history and art double major.

Hailey Kadolph is a senior Studio Art major, and is proud to have her work in every issue of The Lighter over the 4 years of her time here at Valpo. She is creative and chaotic, and unsure of her own existence. For all you know, she doesn't even exist. There is no proof anyone exists, only evidence...

Danielle Kneusel is a sophomore psychology and creative writing major who enjoys writing prose and reading poetry. She is working on publishing her first novel while writing her second.

Teagan Knoop is a sophomore accounting and finance double major from Valparaiso, Indiana. In her free time, she loves to take photographs of her friends and travel.

Cori Laatsch is a sophomore Professional Writing major who is basically a grandma in a young person's body.

Nadhia Manthuruthil is a freshman health sciences major on the physician assistant track who enjoys writing poetry, traveling, and baking. She began writing poetry in fourth grade and her love for poetry has only grown. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Charbel Messavussu is a senior Psychology major and Social work minor. She enjoys creating art when she's inspired. She feels that art should be an emotional experience. She often creates her work in a heightened emotional state and strives to make her audience find personal connections within her work.

Kurt Metzger is a Junior Music Education student. He enjoys painting landscapes to understand places he's been to on a deeper level.

Sarah Padilla is a junior psychology major, with an art and Spanish minor. They enjoy making arts and crafts, as well as playing video games in their free time. In the future, their goal is to become an art therapist.

Kyra Peterson is a freshman digital media arts major and art minor who enjoys digital painting in her free time. For more artwork, search @ky.graceful on Instagram.

Lee Sanchez is a senior Professional Writing and Psychology major with concentrations in the simple joys of humanness, celebrating art that sucks, and building an identity that is much more than just fitting into whichever mold is assigned. Straight from their heart, they thank you for reading The Lighter.

Kayla Smith is a full time junior art major, part time cryptid. She spends a lot of time wishing she was a millionaire.

Kara VanHimbergen is a junior Psychology major with minors in creative writing and digital media. She loves exploring psychological concepts in creative writing; take that, stifling academia!

Ashley Vernon is a Sophomore Art and Digital Media Major/Art History Minor. She enjoys being creative in mediums such as photography, graphic design, and ceramics. She often draws inspiration from subjects such as nature, architecture, travel, and human behavior.

# Acknowledgements

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Richard Severe, for his continued advocacy for The Lighter, for students, and for art;

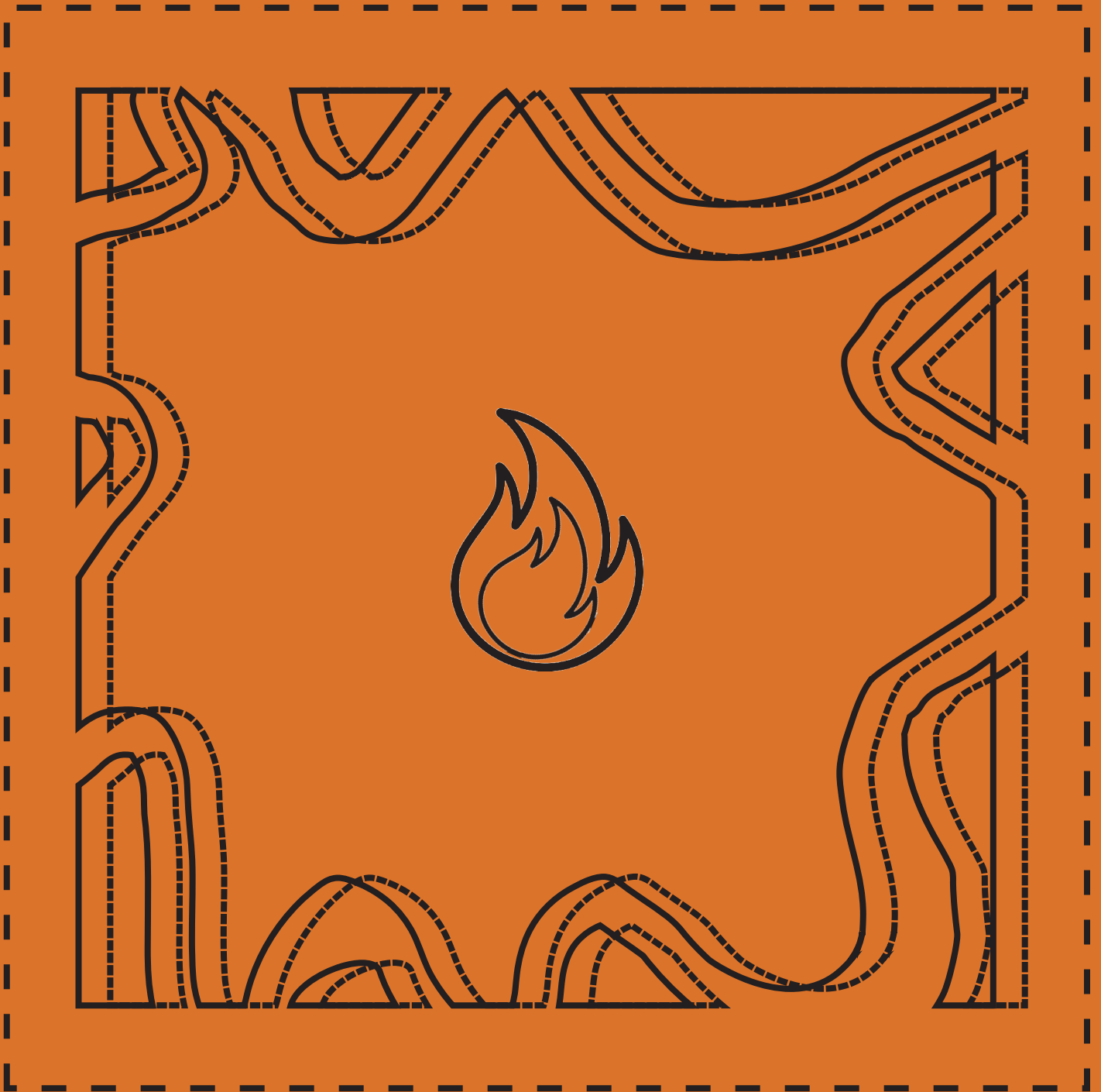
Philip Bolton and Sigma Tau Delta, as well as the following students, for allowing us to publish these ten students' incredible pieces: from Munster High School, Regan Newby; from Wheeler High School, Megan Heavner; and from Valpo High School, Elisabeth Murley, Lauren Hefner, Magdalena Gootee, Angelika Villarroel, Shelby Prybell, Clara Erdelac, Kaitie Shideler, and Keira Rhein. Please, don't stop creating!

Our selection committee this semester, for their flexibility and continued dedication to their peers' artwork as I very suddenly reinvented the entire selection process;

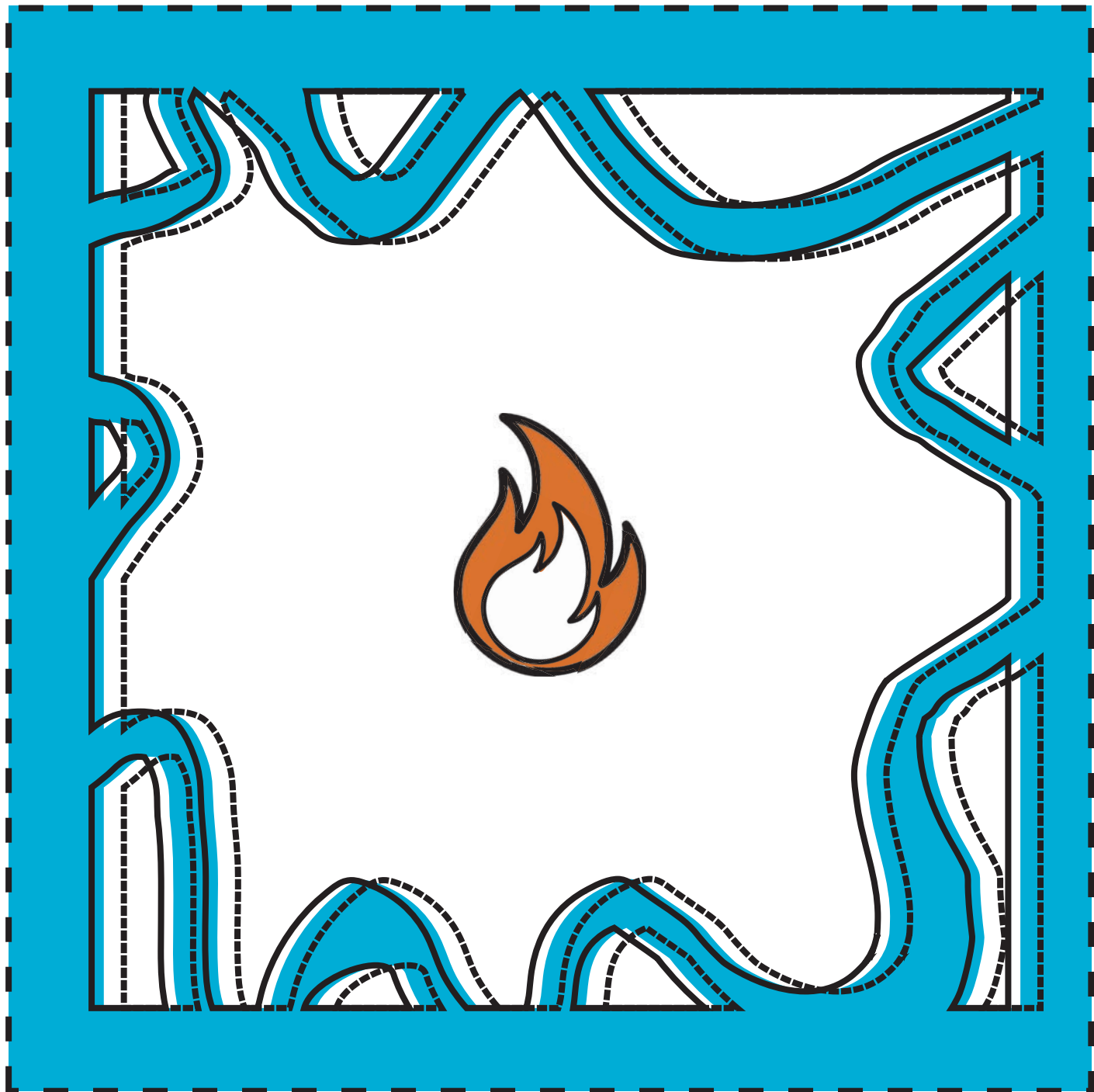
And finally, a huge thank you to Kayla Smith, for keeping us all sane, for designing these books with such love and care, and for being the best EIC the world has ever seen—wait, that last part hasn't happened yet. Well, next year!

Each of these people now hold a piece of my heart. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

*Lee Sanchez*



CAN YOU STAND THE HEAT? CAN YOU STAND THE HEAT?



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