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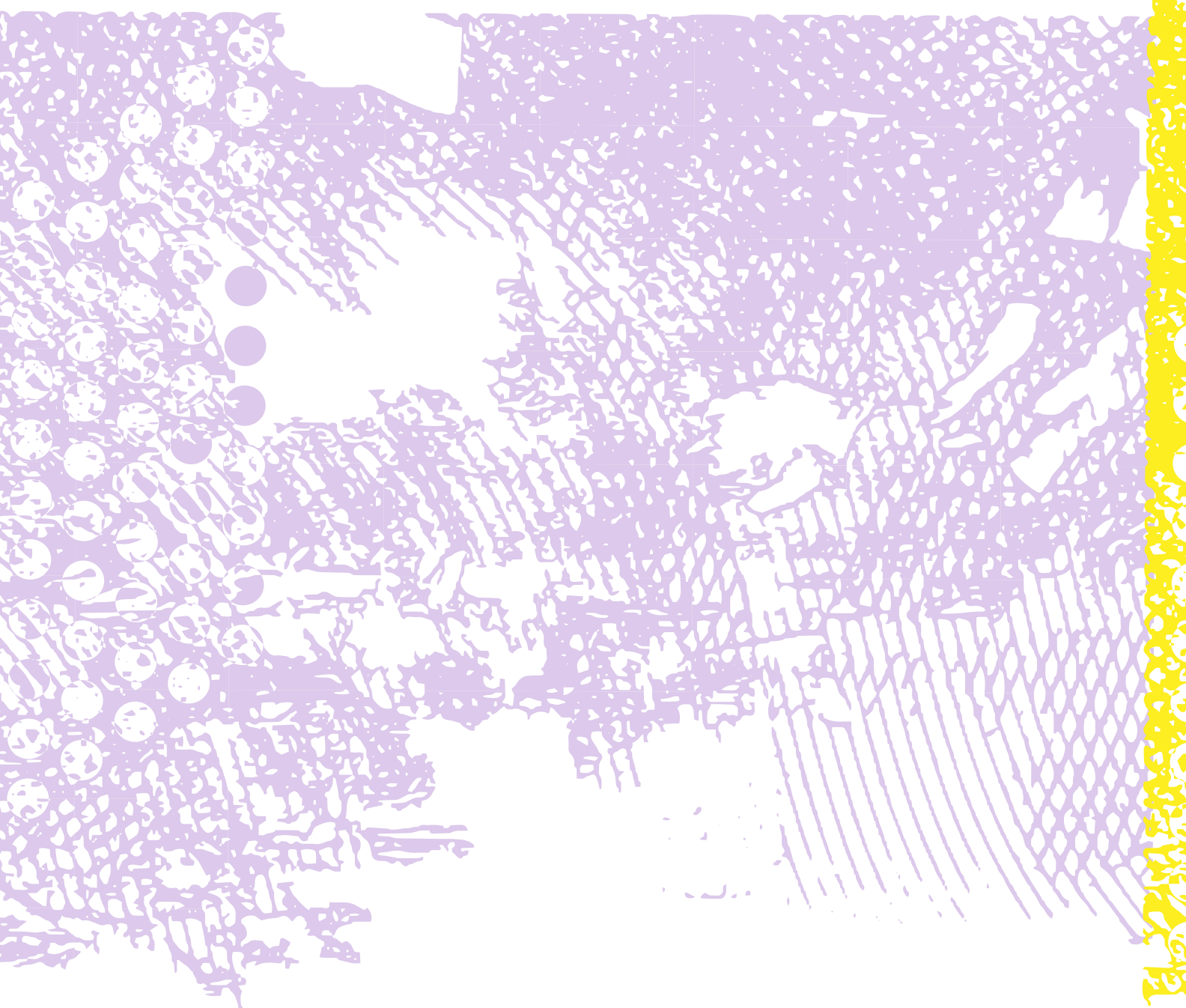
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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter welcomes submissions from all undergraduate and graduate students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation. The Editor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



The Lighter

Volume 69 Issue 2

Editor's Note

To readers, submitters, and contributors of The Lighter, you are exceptional. With you, we can do what we do. What we enjoy, matters. We are an award-winning literary arts magazine and the work we publish matters. Recently, it was decided what is and isn't a core resource. The paintings that we cherish and inspire us to create artwork like "Well Read", "Study of Light on a Pitcher", and "Idle Minds". Art is not a commodity that can be taken and sold. Art lives and breathes on this campus, in our residence hall, in our academic buildings, and in our Brauer Museum. Art is a core resource, and our magazine is a product of its potential! As long as we stand for more than short-term decisions that have long-term effects, we are moving forward in the right direction. The Lighter will always stand as a vessel for creatives to make their mark on the world. Together we will celebrate art and cherish it. Art will live on with and through us. Via Incensa.

Kayla Smith

Selection Committee

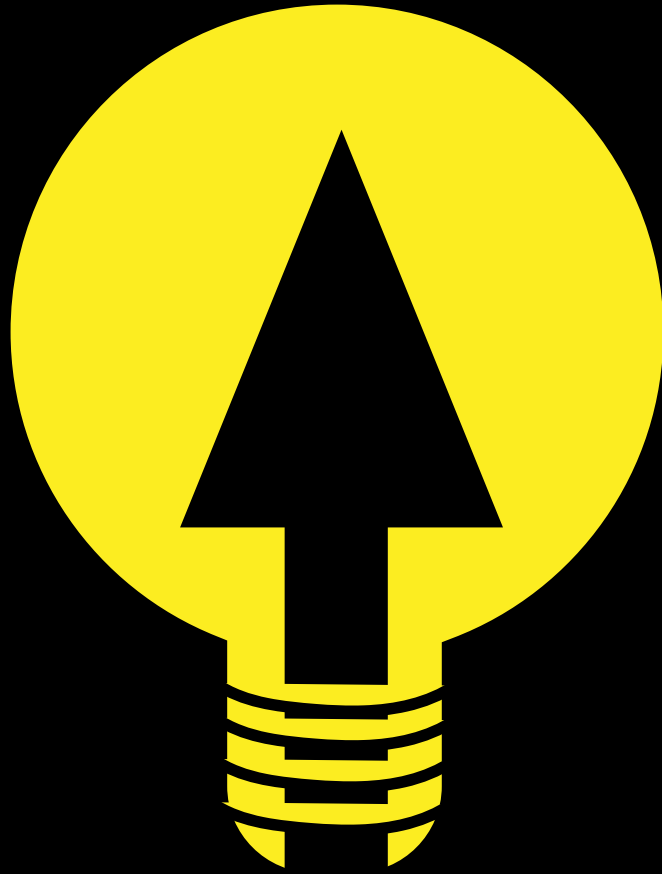
**Cori Laatsch
Maiah Deogracias
Emily Graves
Ashley Vernon
Emilia Beeg
Adrian Elliott
Zion Gifford
Ronan Cassidy**

Meet Incensa
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Acknowledgement

A very special thank you to my staff. It has been a very hectic semester, but you all have been so good to me. I care about you all so deeply and it has been an honor to work with you! Thank you to our advisors Laura Krepp and George Potter, your presence has been greatly appreciated. Thank Jonathan Canning for being such a ray of light and reviving our museum! Shout out to our printer, Gilson Graphics! And last but not least, thank you to our contributors, selection committee, and you, we would be nothing without you!

**-Editor in Chief,
Kayla Smith**



Contributor Bios

Zion Gifford is a junior studio arts major who is this year's teind to Hell. Keep an eye out for him this All Hallows Eve, okay? He'll be the one on the milk-white steed, with a gloved right hand and a bare left. You can view and purchase his work on his website, www.lignincollective.com/zeihan.

Lex Terzioski is a first year creative writing major who enjoys reading and writing in their free time. After graduation, she would like to become a freelance writer.

Jay Bradley is a sophomore creative writing major and an art minor. They really enjoy writing and making any type of art. Their main goal with art is to inspire people to do whatever makes them happy, even if it pushes against the norm.

Brennen Kelly is a junior communications major and cinema and media studies minor who enjoys writing songs and poems as well as taking pictures. Kelly writes for The Torch in the A&E section, covering music and films. Additionally, he deejays at the Source, hosting "Current Mood."

Adrian Elliott is currently writing this while listening to Pat Metheny Group. Don't waste a single minute. Rock on.

Kaelie Eberhart is a senior History major with minors in Music and Music History & Culture. In her free time, she likes reading, listening to music, and writing in all sorts of mediums (whether it be historical research, poetry, or music reviews). In September, she will be returning to one of her favorite cities in the world, Cambridge, England, to complete her Master's in History at Anglia Ruskin University.

Kylie Krawulski is a senior civil engineering student who is enraptured by a wide variety of things from jazz music to birds. She enjoys nature walks and spending time with friends watching movies or playing board games. Kylie hopes to have a positive influence on the world by getting involved with community gardening and social Justice within her community.

Hope Biermann is a junior history major who loves "The Incredits" by Michael Giacchino, Oreos in ice cream, and pulling out profound messages from movies. Soli Deo Gloria.

Reese Hankins is a freshman health science major in the 5-year physician assistant program. Outside of class, she loves to sing and is a part of the Valpo Chorale. She enjoys doing art in her free time as well as spending time with animals.

Ashley Vernon is a Junior digital media arts major who is passionate about art and art advocacy. She spends her free time in the painting studio and walking around the Brauer Museum of Art

Jackie O'Hara is a sophomore creative writing major who loves to write poetry. She hopes to move to Washington to start her career.

Ray Jackson is a sophomore finance major. Ray loves to read the lighter and has decided to try adding something to it. Enjoy!

Hannah Bhakta is a junior biochemistry student with a Spanish minor, and she is a big sucker for nature photography and 2D art. Last semester she studied abroad in Limerick, Ireland and photographically documented her travels around Europe. On Valpo's campus, she spends most of her time in the Center for the Sciences studying or doing independent research. Art is a core resource!

Julia Sullivan is a freshman Communications and Digital Media Arts major. She enjoys playing ukulele and piano, singing, painting, going to the gym, and taking long walks around campus.

Philip Bolton is a senior English Literature major who enjoys drumming, dystopian novels, and still photography. He enjoys exploring both natural and abstract forms in his photographic work.

Emily Fletcher is a junior psychology and environmental science major who loves reading, hiking, and writing poetry. She is an avid fan of cats and spends her free time watching Netflix and going to bookstores.

Nadhia Manthuruthil is a sophomore health sciences major on the pre-PA track. In her free time, she enjoys writing and reading poems.

Ronan Cassidy is a Creative Writing and Marketing major who enjoys writing poetry.

Paige Cesnik is a freshman nursing major with an art minor who enjoys painting, drawing, and performing on stage. Her art is inspired by the beauty of the world around her and those in her life whom she cares about.

Emily Graves is a junior history and art double major.

Shiya Kamra is a second year Health Science/Pre-PA major who enjoys painting and going into nature to take pictures, and just be herself. She hopes to empower people with her skills and contribute to the society in a positive way in the future.

Emma Johnson is a first-year astronomy and creative writing double major who loves space and art. She loves being in nature and walking her dog :)

Momin Mirza has lived in too many places, and is now a graduate student in the Valpo English department. He enjoys playing guitar and listening to music, hitting the gym, and reading in the library. He works as the director for the Rifai Institute and part time at the greenhouse in Neils Science Center.

Daniel Owens is a senior environmental engineering major in Christ College. Daniel works in the campus writing center and has always had a special love for reading and writing inherited from his English teacher mom. His affinity for poetry comes from a fixation with song lyrics since a young age. He finds that while creating songs is a uniquely rewarding experience that can bring words to life, poetry has greater freedoms with expression, time, format, and lyrical focus.

Eric Hernandez is a senior Digital Media Arts major who enjoys graphic design and painting.

Micah Koppang is a freshman Spanish major and Christ College student. They enjoy going to Celebrate, reading manga, and getting into dumb philosophical debates with their friends.

Anna Beres is a senior studio art major who enjoys exploring various types of art as well as reading and writing poetry. She is experienced in fine art areas such as painting, drawing, sculpting, and also enjoys jewelry making, paper crafting, and mixed media projects. She recently has decided to combine her love for poetry and art throughout her discovery and creation of concrete poetry. Anna also runs a small business called Stargirl Crafts and is excited to pursue her business and artistic goals after her graduation in 2023.

Amelia Maguire is a freshman psychology major who enjoys sketching, sculpting, and reading in her spare time.

Korbin Opfer is a freshmen Environmental Science Major from Seward NE. He enjoys reading and hanging out with friends in his free time.

Kayla Smith is a senior studio art major. In her free time she dreams of someday having a million dollars. You can find her in bed or her instagram Kayla_blah or Kayla_blah 2.0.

Rachel Painter is a Digital Media Arts major who enjoys using her creative skills to create various art in many media forms. She works as News Director for VUTV and is Cast Member of Alpha Psi Omega. Her videography work has been featured on Valparaiso University E-Sports team Twitter as well as VUTV.

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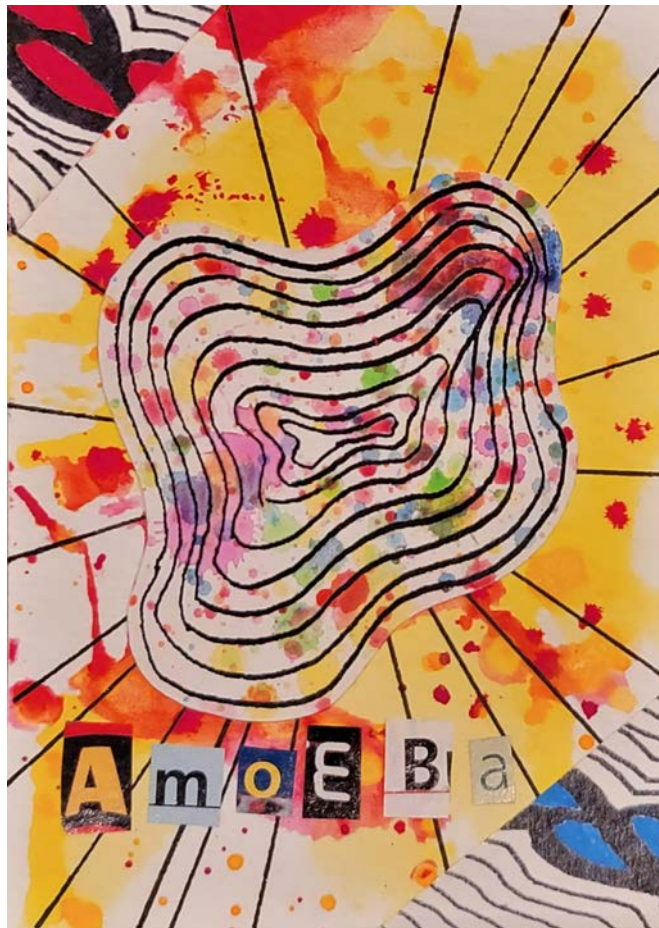
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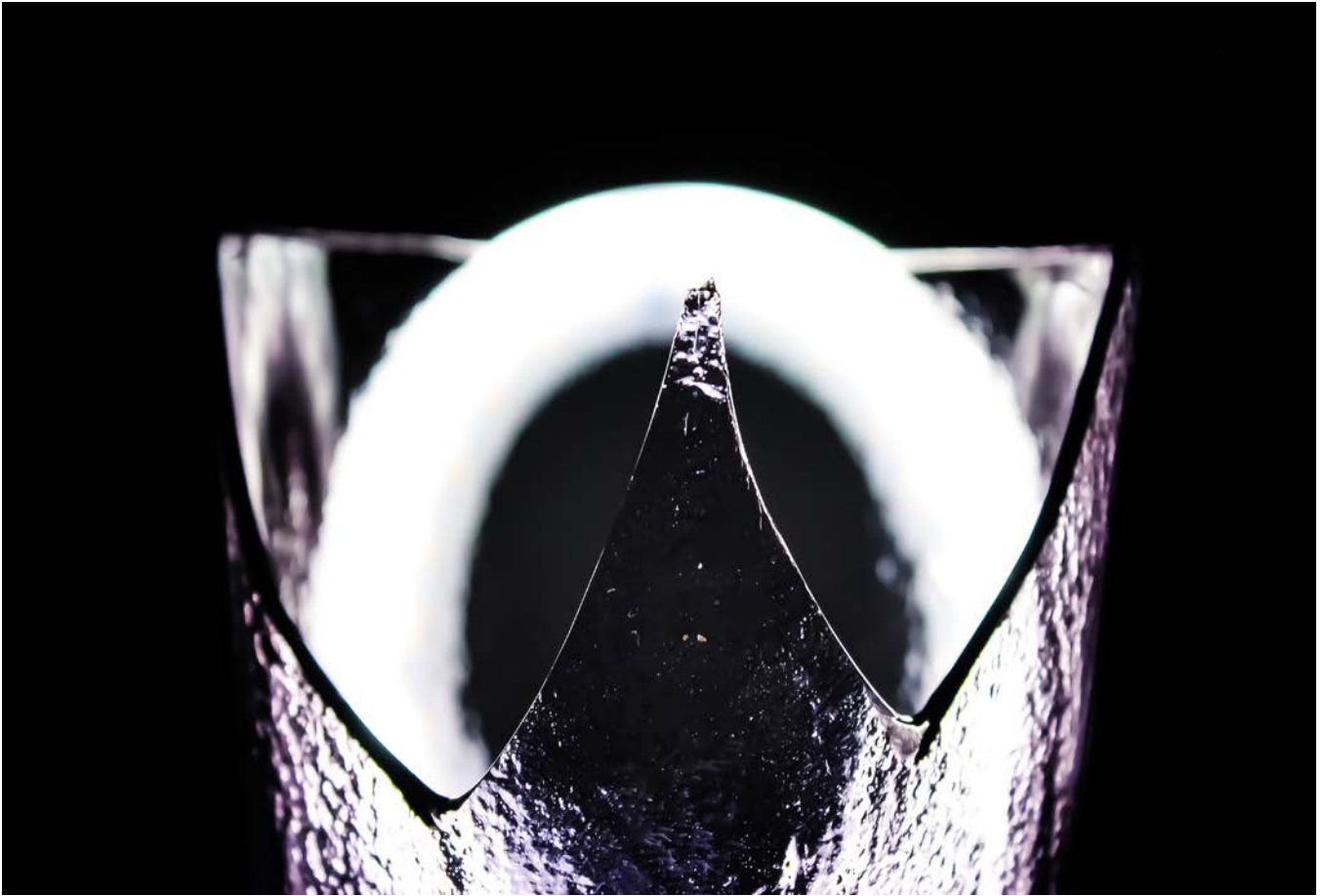


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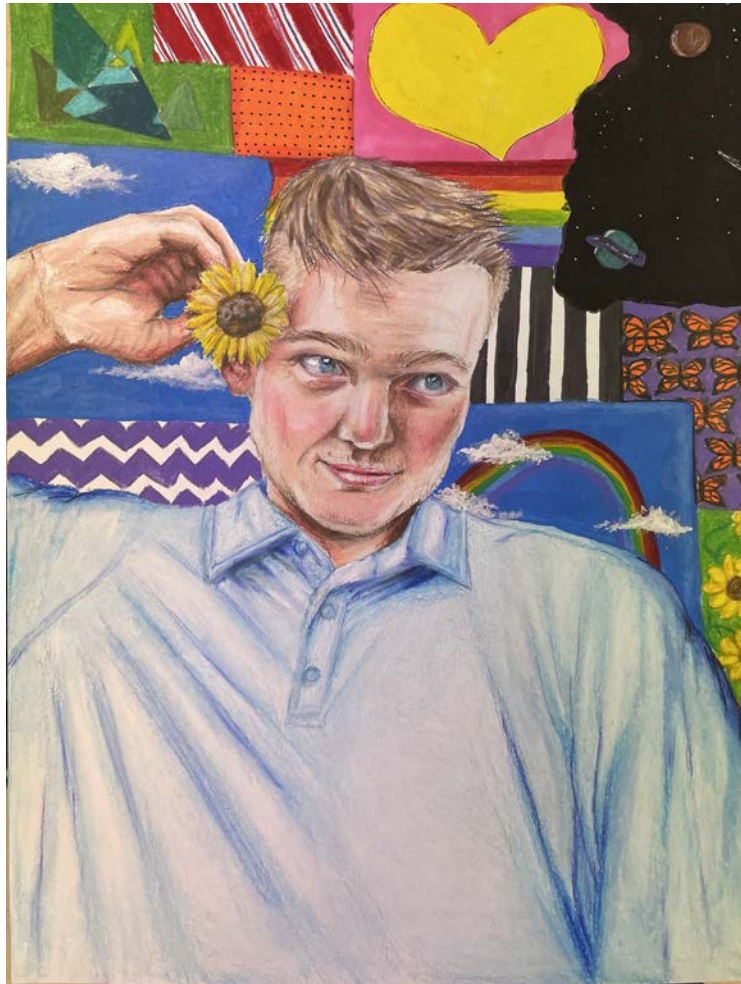
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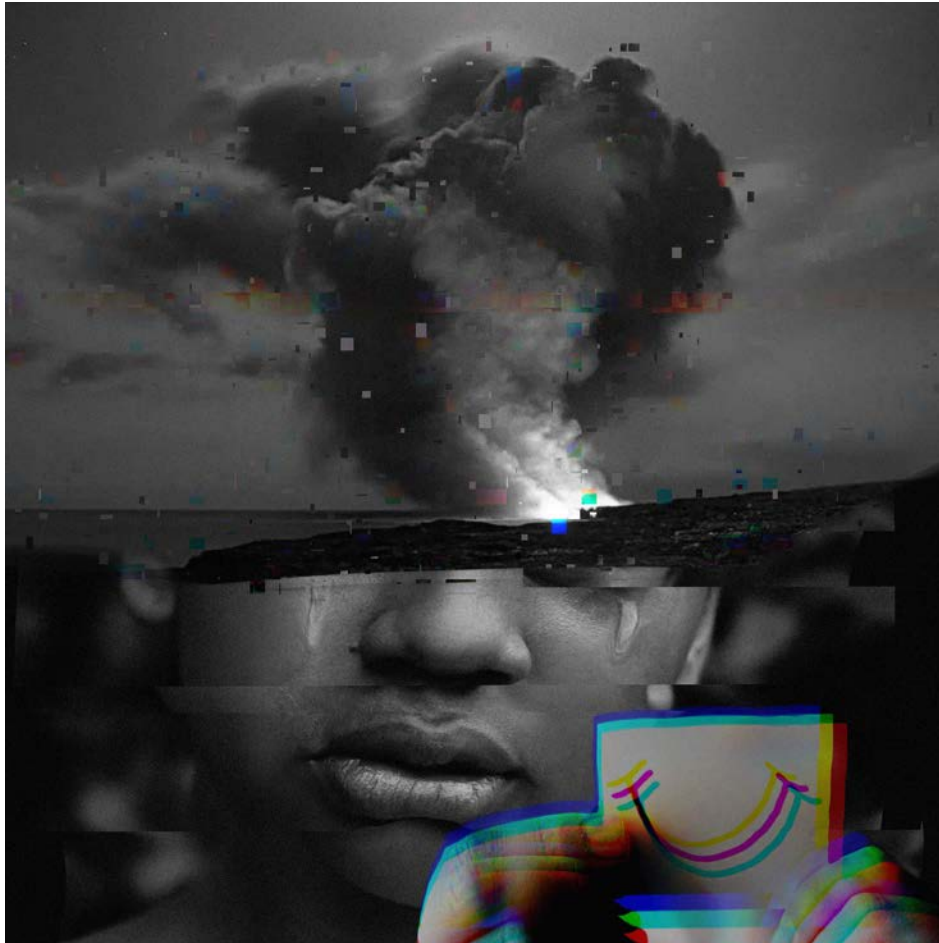


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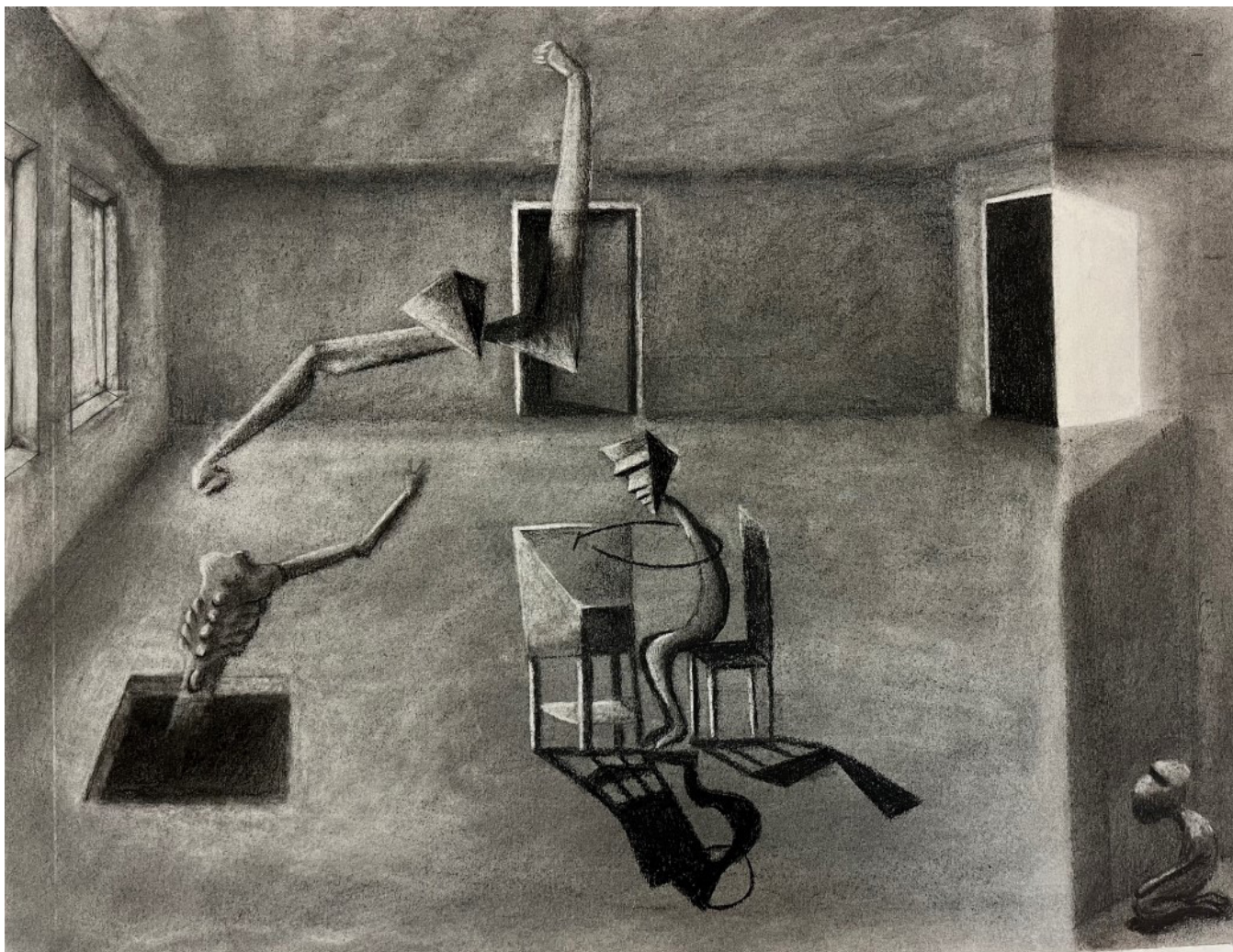
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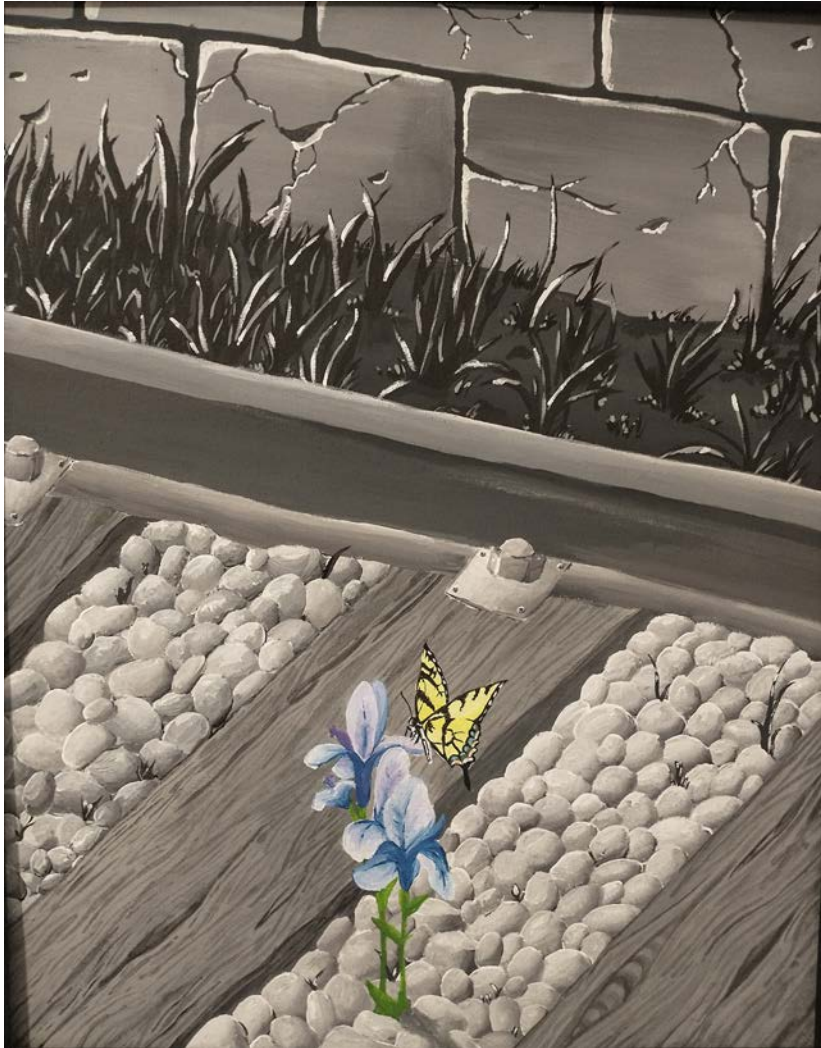
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Kaelie Eberhart | Poetry

An Ode to East Anglia

**Sweet embrace of spring-
My lady of the green.
Vibrant trees, a flowing river,
And colorful clans of flowers
Gingerly lay in her precious bosom.
She is elegant in her abundance
And tantalizing in her tranquility.**

**The alluring flirt of Cam
Cries for me when we are apart.
“Float and lay a while, my dear.
Enrich yourself with the knowledge
Of Cambridgeshire’s sweet sap.”**

**Beckoned by her siren,
I return to the Grantchester land.
In the tall grass of the Fens,
Her soft river drifts my mind
Away from the woes of reality.**

**She kisses my ears with birdsong
While I grow with the spring green.
The knowledge of the land consumes me.
Nearby church bells ring in time-
The perfect accompaniment
To her organic melodies.**

**O, Gentle Lady of Cambridge,
I cannot resist your earthly charms.
I shall always return with your spring
For I have been unbelievably seduced
By land, knowledge, and music.**

**Her soft river drifts my mind
Away from the woes of reality.**

**She kisses my ears with birdsong
While I grow with the spring green.
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Emily Graves | Oil Stages of Decay



**Reese Hankins | Scratchboard
The Black Lab**



Ronan Cassidy | Poetry

The Little Bear

I sit on the slanted rooftop, the grain digging into my shorts
A little bear with round ears plays violin in a beautiful melody on the sidewalk
below, All by himself.
His fur is perfectly trimmed,
If you look closely you can see the brush strokes that made him.
He stands on two padded feet,
Down on the sidewalk.
He can't be more than five feet tall.
I watch him from my rooftop in my quiet suburban neighborhood.
The sun sets at my back; I feel the heat emanating from its distant power.
The little bear holds the violin so proudly on his forearm;
He bears it as a gift to the world, like a mother proudly showing off their
newborn.
There is a fine line between beautiful, floating melody and the screeching
sound the violin makes when you play it just a little bit wrong.
How does the little bear balance it so well? What I think sounds like a screech
at first turns into a high, piercing note that floods my eardrums and slows
my heartbeat.
I get one last look at the sun's blanket of orange-gold light, striking birch
trees in the neighbor's yards reflecting their perfect green leaves back at
me.
All I want is to play like that little bear
I lift the thin-bladed saw from the shale-colored rooftop and hold it in
my right hand, It is perfectly weighted with wood on top, resembling a
straightened coat hanger. It's so light it makes me giddy.
I raise my left forearm to the cerulean sky where the sunlight hits it just right.

**I lift the saw in the fingertips of my right hand, a salute to the little bear.
Then I begin to play.
I play a melody no one has ever heard before,
Letting the saw slide across my too-pale forearm,
Intersecting blue veins.
Crimson blood spills out of my arm as the melody plays to the tune of the
little bear's,
We're in perfect harmony.
The strings in unison make me lightheaded; the sky gets lighter and lighter;
my knees grow weak on the slick rooftop.
I don't know why but it only hits me as I bleed out on the rooftop—
My life was for nothing.
I pandered and pleased and existed long enough for me to hate myself,
Long enough to be sick to my stomach all the time.
My veins look so pretty in open air,
Their brilliant electric blue contradicting the vibrant red they bathe in.
I begin to laugh softly to myself, a grin on my colorless face
I'm losing blood fast.
I couldn't believe my luck—
For in the moment that I played my tune with the little bear,
I knew there was a god, watching from that cornflower blue sky, smiling on
me as I played my tune Telling me
That I was special.
I lean over the slanted edge of the rooftop, barely keeping my balance as I sit,
wobbling. The little bear stops.
His warm black eyes stare up at me from the street like little dots of coal
His violin rests at his side, bow in his right hand.
He doesn't move
And then he raises his bow and instrument
And begins to play the most beautiful song I've ever heard in my life.
It resounds through the street, a crystalline melody so free that no
microphone could capture it It serenades me as I drift off, the cloudless sky
slowly fading from my eyes.
The melody is gorgeous, and I finally smile.
My head settles against the slate rooftop, and I shut my eyes.**

Brennen Kelly | Photography Billiards and Bliss



Kylie Krawulski | Poetry

153 Species of Aves

**Humans have
Very different mating rituals
Than birds
We don't dance about
And show our feathers
Well not in the literal sense
Humans tend to
Dance in silly ways
Bizarre and outdated traditions
Dominate the mating season
But our dance was simple
A connection that was just there
And much like birds
Instinct moved us to dance
Although the world has told us
Our dance is wicked
Unnatural and obscene
Nothing has made more sense
I have showed you my feathers
And you showed me yours
And I wish to build a nest with you
And fly, like the birds we share
So little with**

An interview with Zaina Arafat, author of *You Exist Too Much* Interviewed by Cori Laatsch

You open the book with the scene of the 12-year-old narrator realizing she's becoming a woman and is shamed for that. You write, "It was a double standard, a shame I had simply accepted until then. In acquiring my gender, I had become offensive." How is the US understanding of that double standard different from what the narrator experiences in Arab culture?

Arafat: In Arab culture, it's pretty overt, at least at the time that this scene takes place. But in American culture, I think they want to pretend like they don't have a double standard, and preach to other countries for, you know, denying women's rights and all of that, while totally overlooking the fact that there are double standards here that are really firmly upheld, and pretending like they don't exist. I mean, women still make less money than men. There's so many fewer women in CEO positions than men. Women are still not given maternity leave, they're given disability leave. There's so many ways here that women are discriminated against and they're just less overt than, like, in other cultures where it's just as bad or worse, but it's acknowledged in some way that American culture refuses to acknowledge and look at and correct.

Laatsch: Later in this scene, when the narrator puts on her uncle's pants, she realizes, "oh, I could get attention." That recognition of her sensuality, it brings her shame but it also is her sense of power. And she uses that a lot, sex as control and sex as regaining power in some sort of way.

Arafat: Yeah, absolutely. And I think it speaks to the fact that, oftentimes—not that that's not a valid thing, to be able to use one's sensuality as power—but also when you are someone who feels powerless, you resort to things like sex and your sexuality, rather than maybe other more constructive ways of asserting power.

Laatsch: And she uses it as punishment, too for herself. It's almost like a form of self harm at times, the way that she uses sex.

Arafat: Yeah, absolutely.

The narrator goes through multiple relationships, both in the present and in the past. What was the process like for writing those love interests? Was there a goal in mind for each of them when it comes to how they serve the narrator's story?

Arafat: Yeah, absolutely. First of all, the love stories are all intended to be orbiting around one central relationship in the narrator's life, which is her relationship with her mother. So in each of the relationships, there are some elements that sort of create either a power dynamic or a resemblance to her relationship with her mother. For example, the Ambassador's Wife— I mean, there's a clear power dynamic, and there's also a clear sort of resemblance to the mother in this

relationship. And it's true almost for all of them, where each is unattainable in some way, or each is unavailable for some reason, in the same way that the mother is unattainable and unavailable for the narrator. And I think they each kind of bring her closer to both figuring that out and finding out why she keeps falling for these unattainable people. But also they each sort of progress towards bringing her closer to something that resembles a healthy real relationship rather than these asymmetrical relationships. And so, you know, by the time we move from the Sacrifice and the Ambassador's Wife to when we arrive at Matias, perhaps she's thinking, "Okay, this is the real thing. This is real love." And then realizing it's, again, not. But at least in this case, she has a different kind of relationship to that idea. She's assertive and she knows that she wants that real love and she isn't going to accept less than that, which is why she breaks away from him, even when he comes back for her.

On that note then, who do you think had the biggest effect on the narrator when it comes to her love addiction or in reconciling that unattainable relationship with her mom?

Arafat: I don't know. I mean, I honestly think so many of them, including her relationship with Anna—which is her girlfriend that is real and that does actually love her, who she pushes away and is terrible to—I think that relationship ends up being really important for her because eventually it serves as a sort of model for what real love is, so that by the time she gets to Anouk at the end she can stick with that through it's, sort of, everyday-ness, I guess. But I also think that the Matias relationship really did serve as a turning point for her, from which she wasn't going back. That was the point of no return in some ways she wasn't going to go back to that cycle after that relationship. You could at least see the trying and the awareness, which is sometimes the best you can hope for. But, I mean, with also some progress too, but not an entire overcoming.

We talked a little bit earlier about the narrator's quote on love saying, "you have to make room for the real thing." In what ways does she resist making room for the real thing, and does she ever really come to terms with that by the end of the book?

Arafat: I mean, she resists by constantly falling for people that are unavailable and unattainable and, therefore, can't love her back. So it is this absolute adherence to fantasy and preference for fantasy over reality, and refusal to fall for someone or forge a relationship with someone that is real and that can love her back and can engage in an actual relationship with her. So that's one way, and by, possibly, also not accepting her sexuality. She's never going to enter into a real relationship until she does that. And she does make progress towards finding the real thing by coming out to her mother and being honest about herself. When we see her with Anouk, right, she doesn't go with the Tara character overseas to the university to teach where she knows she'll just stay in this pattern of being unloved and falling for these people that are unattainable. But she instead goes to New York and tries to find a real relationship, which she does. I mean, I guess there are hints that she does because they move in together and we don't know what happens after that. But that's the furthest she's really come with anyone.

Underlying the narrator's own story is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is obviously a big part of the context of the narrator's own life, but isn't overtly a major plot point for the novel. Are there ways that you used the conflict to parallel the narrator's own conflict, and what are those big moments?

Arafat: Well...that's a great question. So, the sort of violence that comes in the 80s with Anti-fada and being displaced as a result of the conflict is so much of what affects her life because of how it affects her parents' lives. And how her mother is someone who wants to be there in the Middle East and Palestine, but is instead in the D.C. suburbs. That sort of longing for somewhere else is a lot of what the narrator experiences in terms of place, in terms of people. She's internalized that to the extent that Palestine is an identity or Palestine is a place that hasn't been given statehood, and being Palestinian is an identity that isn't validated because Israel has always tried to erase Palestinians by evicting them, by killing them, right? So she sort of internalizes that feeling of not being valid to exist in her own right, as she does. And so that conflict looms so large in her life, but in these ways that are less obvious. It's not like she's living overseas, you know, in the West Bank experiencing war every single day, which is a horrible reality, but she's experiencing it in these existential ways and in these inherited, traumatic ways.

On the narrator's complex relationship with her mother, we see a lot of verbal abuse and stories from the past that the narrator kind of internalizes in the present. Why did you choose to have the narrator continue to go back to her mother and choose to forgive her?

Arafat: That was so important to me. I definitely wanted one of her trajectories to be going from a place of anger and hurt to a place of empathy and forgiveness and love. Because the thing is, you only get one mom. There are some schools of thought that think you should just cut a toxic relationship out of your life entirely. I personally don't believe that that is the most constructive way to handle family or a toxic family relationship. I think that boundaries are a better way than just completely cutting someone out, and much more realistic because, I mean, in an ideal world, you want to have a relationship with your mother, right? I mean, if your mother is horrible, then yeah, you're like, "I don't want you in my life." But what you want is to be able to deal with the relationship and at least have it to the extent that it can, and for her, towards the end she develops some boundaries, like in that last scene when she sort of realizes her mom is just a child this whole time. And then she turns away from the TV screen, from the video of her mom, and towards her partner. It's meant to be like "my mom is still in my life, but I am going to also create a boundary and protect this relationship." It's so much harder to fix the relationship than to cut it out entirely. And so for me it was just so important to fix it and to understand why it was so flawed. It was because the mother was coming from one place and the daughter was coming from another and so much of that miscommunication, misunderstanding is so common today intergenerationally and you can't always just cut that person out. You have to figure out how to make it work.

This is your debut novel, and it deals with a lot of internal conflict within the narrator about sexuality, relationships, family issues, and cultural identity. You obviously drew some inspiration from your own life, particularly because you're a queer Palestinian-American just like the narrator. Is there a part of yourself that you feel you left in this book in writing it?

Arafat: I think I left a lot, yeah. I think I left a lot of my own sort of shame at existing in unacceptable spaces behind in this book, and I think I left some of my own internalized homophobia behind in this book. Like, those aren't things that I grapple with anymore. I don't grapple with internalized homophobia. I don't grapple with self shame. I don't grapple with my relationship with my mother at all anymore, so I think I did leave those three things behind. And that emotional core of this narrator's life is something I share with her. I do understand internalizing homophobia because I've lived it. I do understand the shame of being in-between and not fitting in because I've lived it. I definitely understand the struggle with mother daughter relationships because I lived it, too. All of the scenarios and scenes are invented, but that core is real and I think I've left that version of myself behind in this character.

On that note, when you were writing it, what audience did you have in mind?

Arafat: So when I was writing it, I honestly was thinking about so many different audiences. Like, I was thinking about the audience that thinks that all Arabs are terrorists, right? That was one audience. I was writing for the audience that is struggling with coming out and queer. I was writing for the audience of cultural inbetweeners. Honestly, above all, I always had an idea in my head of a professor- not like the one in the book! *laughs*--but I would write for people whose opinions I really value and some teachers I've had, weirdly. So that always mattered to me, but mostly I was writing to answer a question and understand, why is this person the way she is, what is behind this pattern, and what's driving it?

Laatsch: Did you find it difficult to write for those different audiences all at once? How did you make it a story for everyone?

Arafat: I didn't initially write with any audience at all. I just had an idea that I wanted to see through. But then when you're revising, you start to think about that. You know, if I'm writing for an audience like an Arab audience or else an audience of people that I want to change their views about what Arabs are, I definitely think about that on the revision. I want to make sure that I'm highlighting the best aspect of the culture and not letting the negative ones overshadow them and, at the same time, I want to realistically portray the experience of being a queer Arab because it isn't that easy, and it is true that there is homophobia in the Middle East, but there is homophobia here too. So, it was hard to walk that line at times. But in revision, you sort of think about the audience more than when you are writing.

Do you have any advice for authors who are writing their first novel, or are there any things that you would have done differently in writing this one?

Arafat: Yes. So my advice is 2 things: one, to know that there are obstacles when it comes to writing a novel, like loneliness or writer's block or burnout, and to know that writing is about persistence. Meaning that these obstacles are part of the process, right? Like, persisting implies obstacles; you don't have to persist if there's nothing in your way. So, writing is persistence. And that a good way to overcome or to work with these obstacles is to find community, like having a writing group, having friends that write, you know, keeping in touch with professors that are encouraging; that is all so important. Such a valuable part of being a writer is the community.

And then things I would have done differently, yes. *pauses* Never let your writing or your book become more important than any of the people in your life. Because once you do get that book published, you want those people around so that you can celebrate with them. So that's important. I say that because it's so easy to let a book take over your life and to prioritize it above all else. But the thing is, as I just said, you don't want to do that because really, it's the relationships in life that matter more than anything else, and there's no rush for the book. You can publish it now, you can publish it next year, you can publish it in 10 years. That's the great thing about writing.

Laatsch: Well, that's all I have, but I wanted to say thank you for coming here and interviewing with me and writing your book. It's really, really unique. I don't think I've ever read anything like it.

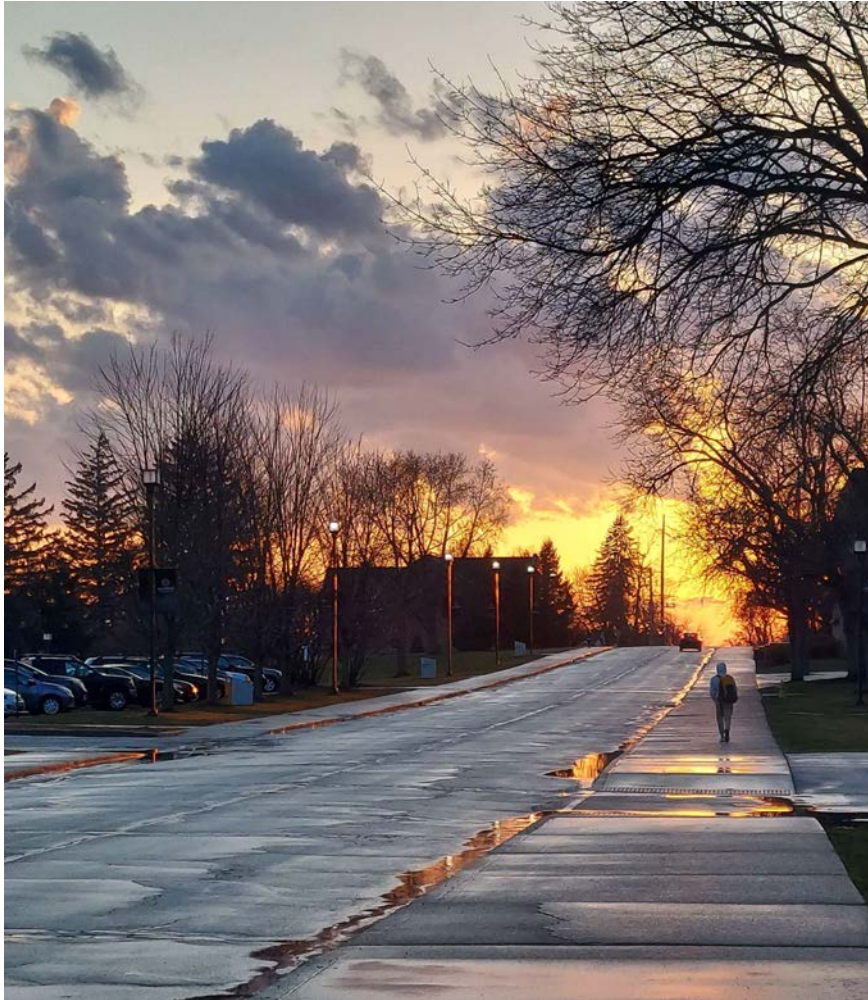
Arafat: Thank you, and thank you for having me.





Amelia Maguire | Photography

Sunlit



Emily Graves | Mixed Media 100 Ways to Draw a Sewing Kit



Liam Hanley | Poetry

Oil Spills a Love

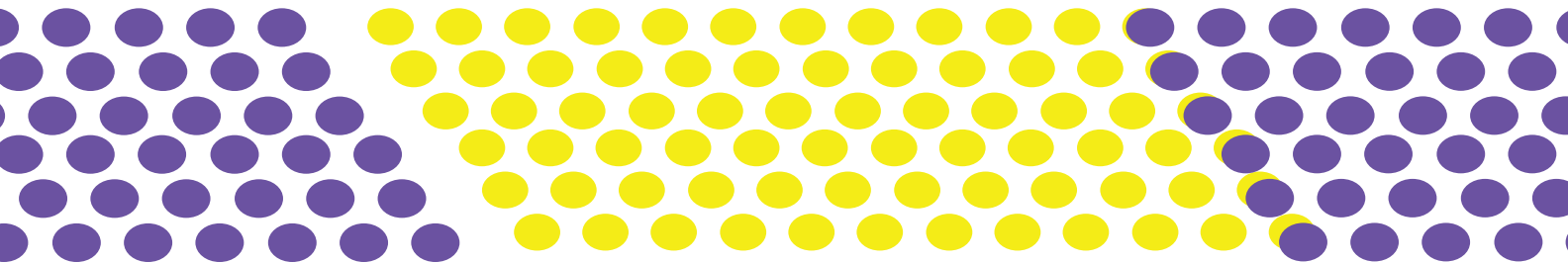
Autumnal River Landscape by John Frederick Kensett

Warm rays trickle from the sky;
its brightness turns the dull slate blue to white,
causing the chilled air to go away without a lasting fight.

Large trees give way to perfect shade—
leaves of all hues stretch across the landscape
gone are a few, most still planning their fluttering escape.

Soft sounds of burbling from the calming river,
then squawking birds leaving with the incoming weather
cover up the rustling of greenery and harmonizing water
together.

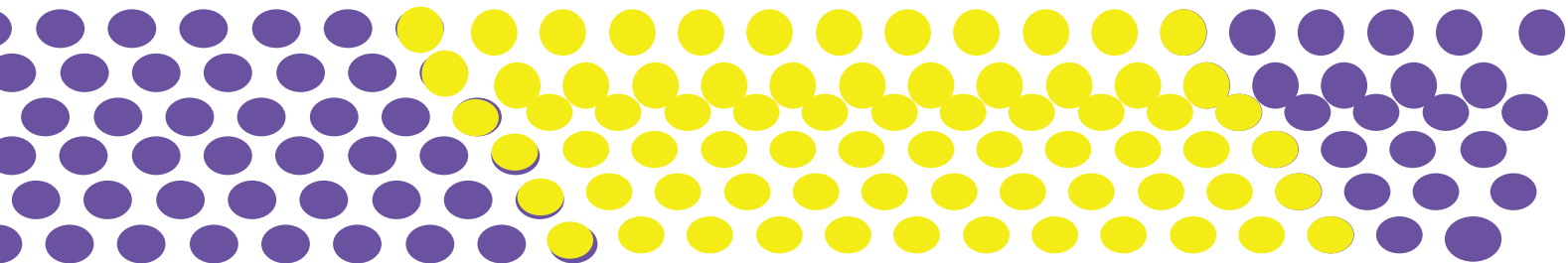
Although, nothing can cover her melody,
or disregard his fidelity.



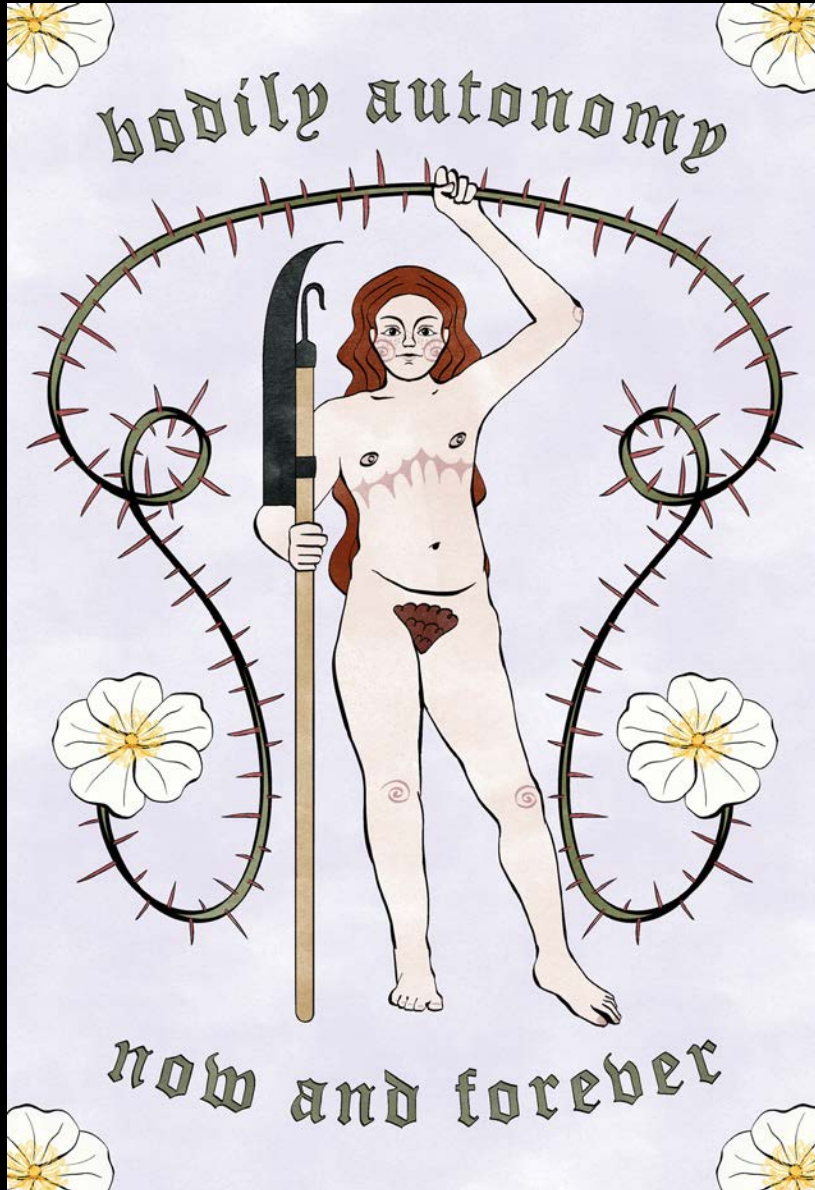
**They watch the cattle across the water
until their eyes become one with the border,
their picnic long forgotten as days are becoming shorter.**

**Her wide-brim straw hat rests low on her head
blocking the radiating sun's strength from overhead-
he's never questioned a single, brilliant word she's said**

**All the same, he still wonders,
Looking into the deepened eyes of his lover,
why she always sits facing the approaching thunder?**



**Zion Gifford | Art
Rose but Twa**



Emily Fletcher | Poetry

The Day you Bleed

**Tell me, who is to blame?
Where did the cracks begin, do not tell me lies,
were they not there the moment you looked in my eyes?
Soul petrified by power, ashamed of the fall you were
sure to suffer if you loved me at all.**

**Tell me, who is to blame?
For the hallowed lies you leave,
for the plunging fear you felt
the moment I was near
to victory. The confidence, the want of patient demise
speaks to
the tears collecting at my bedside.**

**You draw me in, press a shield to my side, dagger piercing
skin,
no sympathy in your eyes
as the torrent of blood begins.
Your fate, my friend,
is hellbent, no matter the tales you weave,
practiced patience,
practiced misery
is sure to lead
to the day you bleed.**

**And you can be assured, dear love,
You will not be watching over me from above.**

Adrian Elliott | Poetry Saint Little

**Blessed be the coming day
When the sky will fall away.
As is written, so it will be
When we will face eternity.**

**A prophet came with not but fear
He spoke to us: “Listen here!
We’ll hide away from this world of chance.
Be afraid! The end draws near!**

**Assume the worst of all you meet!
Learn to doubt, admit defeat!
Hate the evils of innovation,
What’s new should be met with indignation!
Don’t ever lose your inborn gall.
You’re the victim, after all!**

**Close your eyes so you may see
Hope is the enemy!
A crutch only for children and fools,
So be afraid of those who set the rules!”**

**The Patron Saint of resignation!
Felt in joyous rapture throughout the nation!
Let us lose heart so as not to start
What can only end in a deeper contemplation.**

**Then from the hills came a ragged beast
With dirty thoughts and vulgar speech.
Although it pains me to recount
This is what he said to each:**

**“We’re cut from cloth of immortal mind
— Machinations of a grand design!
The only commandment there is to give
From parent to child is to live!**

**And live we shall, lest we forget
We must be at peace with risk
For all the righteous could not be
Who they are without uncertainty.**

**And no famine will stop our offense,
Nor war, or death, or pestilence.
We will fight for our one birthright:
To live without fear of what is next.**

**Open your eyes so you may see
Not just what is, but what can be.
See the world through a wider scope;
Listen well, for I am Hope!”**

**What became of him, we do not know,
Inside is where we’ve stayed.
We’ve made a prison of our homes;
We hide within our urban caves.**

**Our beloved prophet, God rest his soul,
Could not bear to exist.
He was martyred before his words came true
— Saint Little will be missed.**

Ray Jackson | Poetry

The Cherry Blossom

The sprout of a dream now comes to be
From the fall of a single tear
Emotions spilled from within me
And now you're suddenly here

I knew it was coming; I tried to avoid
But my heart has seen what it wants
The charm takes hold; my defenses
destroyed
A powerful storm now haunts

I didn't expect to see the spring
But my eyes gave birth to showers
Doubts and dreams my tears will bring
As you sprout in a matter of hours

Roots that reach into the ground
Like your words into my heart
Branches that twirl and dance around
Like our laughter before we part

From a single spark I begin to dream
Of a future that could be awesome
From a single sprout it begins seem
That soon your flowers will blossom

But a darkness hides behind the clouds
As your branches climb to the stars
Winter comes with a snow that shrouds
And desertion isn't far

Before your buds could even bloom
The cold took all your light
I could always feel rejection loom
Now your leaves are nowhere in sight

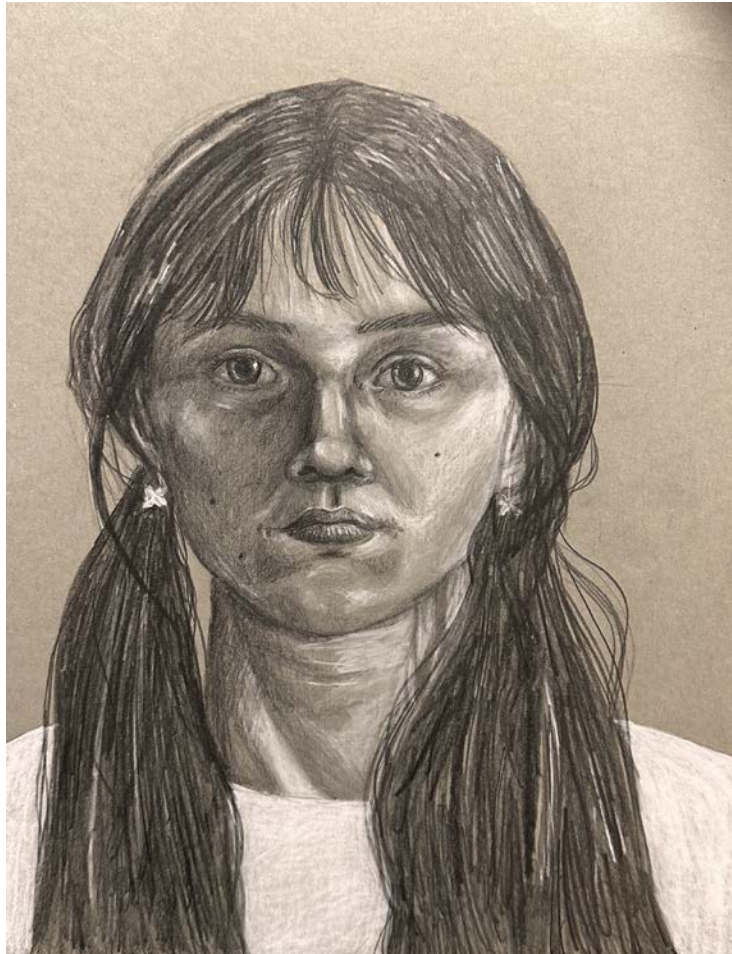
The truth lies as bare as your bark
As my pain stirs up inside
Then a tear falls like the ones that
spark
From the feelings that I've denied

Every year the blizzards blow
And the tree loses its leaves
But soon the flowers will blossom and
grow
From the tear drops it receives

Reese Hankins | Acrylic Painting
Blue



Paige Cesnik | Graphite A Self Reflection



Lex Terzioski | Poetry Solace

**My love has been written in intricate wording
For which those who dare to read it may find pondering
Forming bonds with make believe characters
Who are nothing but ink from a pen; dare to confine
Their paper-esque characteristics to console the solemn
heart
Difficulty to form relationships with humans with a beat-
ing heart
And alluring smile, only to find solace and conformity in
characters
Who will never breathe the same air as I
As each page flips to the next, the softness grasping my
fingertips
As if they were a hand to hold
This feeling will never be real, this is what I will always be
told.**

Reese Hankins | Acrylic Fickle Feelings



Eric Hernandez | Acrylic on Canvas Bowls and Hinge



Lex Terzioski | Short Story

Tryst

The dimmed lighting filled the void of darkness in my apartment, swirling around us as we danced in the center. It felt as if we were the only two in the whole world, muffled music playing as we shared this dance. It was a ritual at this point like how witches cast spells at the wicked hour. Feeling my hands against your body was the most pleasing feeling I could ever feel. My eyes locked with yours, I wanted to be the only person you look at for the rest of your life. We leaned into each other's gaze, so loving and doting. Our lips grazed over each other, but not close to where we shared a kiss. We liked the intimacy we shared with only us two in the room, but we felt trapped in the outside world.

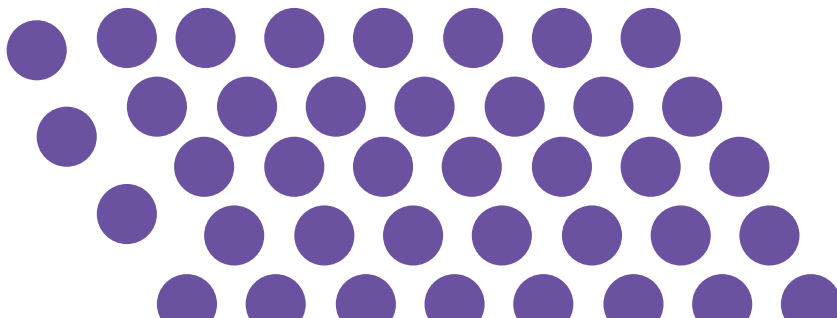
Our love is forbidden in our society. My hands cannot feel your skin in such an intimate way in public, it is frowned upon. I cannot show the world how much love and admiration I have for you. It feels like I never will. We are just two very close friends in their eyes, nothing more. Even when we go on dates, we cannot let our love be recognized. I feel your hand slowly graze against mine, I let you hold my pinky finger. I do not dare look in your direction, for I fear someone may peek.

Your husband knows about us, yet he says nothing. He knows how much you love me and how you deny your attraction to me. You think it will help, the lying and the denying. It doesn't. It enrages him because he loves you, but he knows you do not love him back the same. You call people like us an "abomination" and say how we will be sent to Hell for all eternity. You blame me for your attraction; you think I'm the devil who's bewitched you. Yet, you touched me first. You loved me first. I wish you would stop blaming me for your desires we have to keep in secret. The only place that we share our love is our rendezvous.

I remember the first time we met. I do not think I fell deeper in love with anyone else but you. Your red rouge on your lips and cheeks brought out the color in your eyes. The way your wavy, brunette hair laid perfectly below your shoulders. You are perfect from the outside, but you are flawed within. I still remember the lipstick stain on my cheek, I wanted to keep it forever. If I did, I would have been locked away. Don't you remember the first time we made love? How gentle and consuming with passion it was? You didn't want to hurt me, you made sure that all I felt was love.

I still think about you to this day. I haven't seen your face in fifty years, but I bet it is just as beautiful since the last time I saw you. I hope within this time away, you've made your wishes come true. I hope you got the cottage along the seashore like you've always wanted, a Saint Bernard since you enjoyed having a sea dog, your three children that you always told me about bringing into the world someday. I hope this all came true for you. I do not know if I will see you

again before I pass away, but I want you to know that I still love you. I know you are better off with him and society approves of that. You will always be my first love, forever and ever. I didn't know I could love before I met you. I hope you remember the giggles we had, when we danced in the living room in the middle of the night, when we laid naked in bed and talked about life. Everything we had. You are the best thing to have happened to me in my whole life, and I will die knowing that.



Philip Bolton | Photography Halo

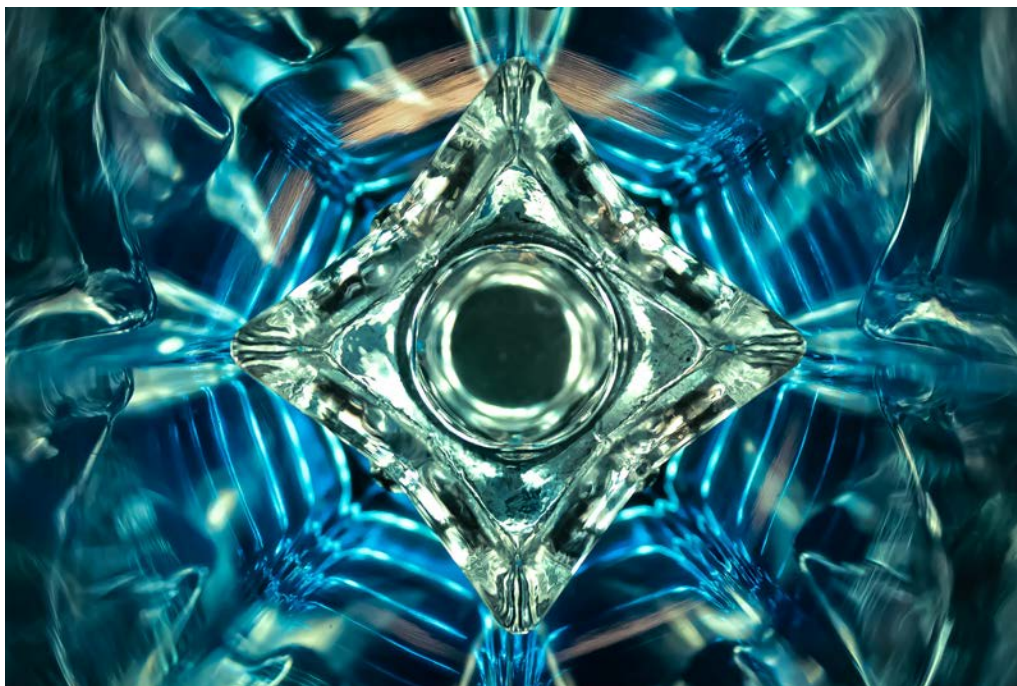


Hannah Bhakta | Photography Dividing By One



Philip Bolton | Photography

Glass Star



Rachel Painter | Photography Picnic with a Cooling Tower



Adrian Elliott | Poetry

The Jungle

**A monster crawls atop the trees,
Hides poisoned sticks beneath the leaves.
A jungle beast will bare its teeth
Just outside of where you can see.**

**An intruder stalks the forest floor,
Across the swamps and sycamores.
An ape most foul incants a growl
— effigies of the hounds of war.**

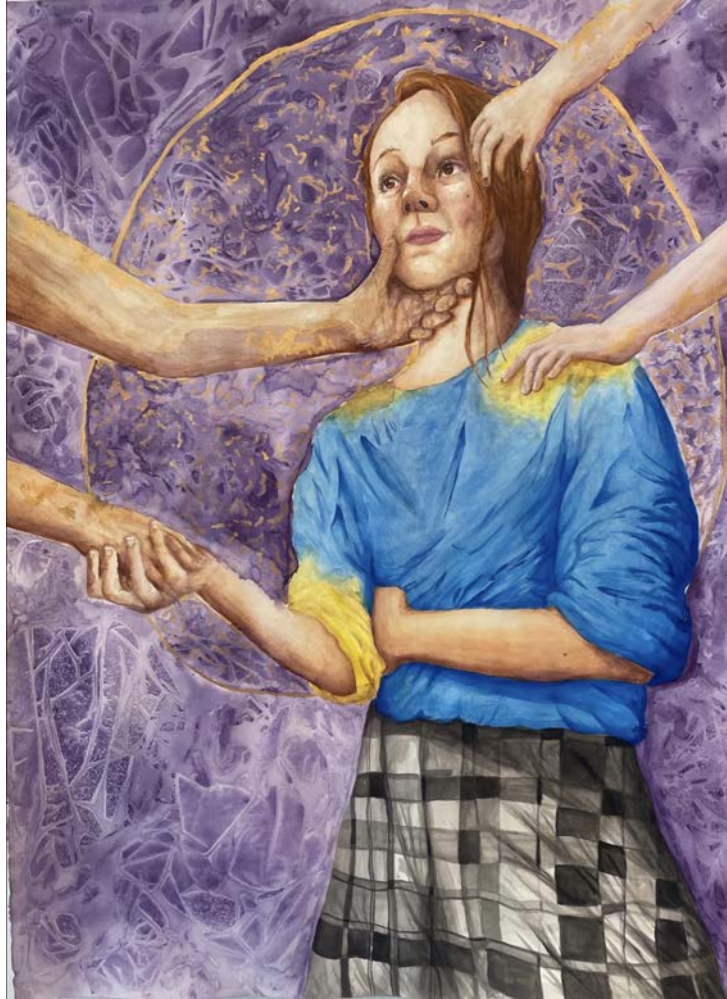
**We have no choice in our actions.
We have no stake in this game.
We are the mouthpiece of someone we've never met.
Maybe you could say the same?**

**A snake swings low to hazard a bite
— A silver glint in darkest night.
Many miles the prey has walked
Only for him to lose the fight.**

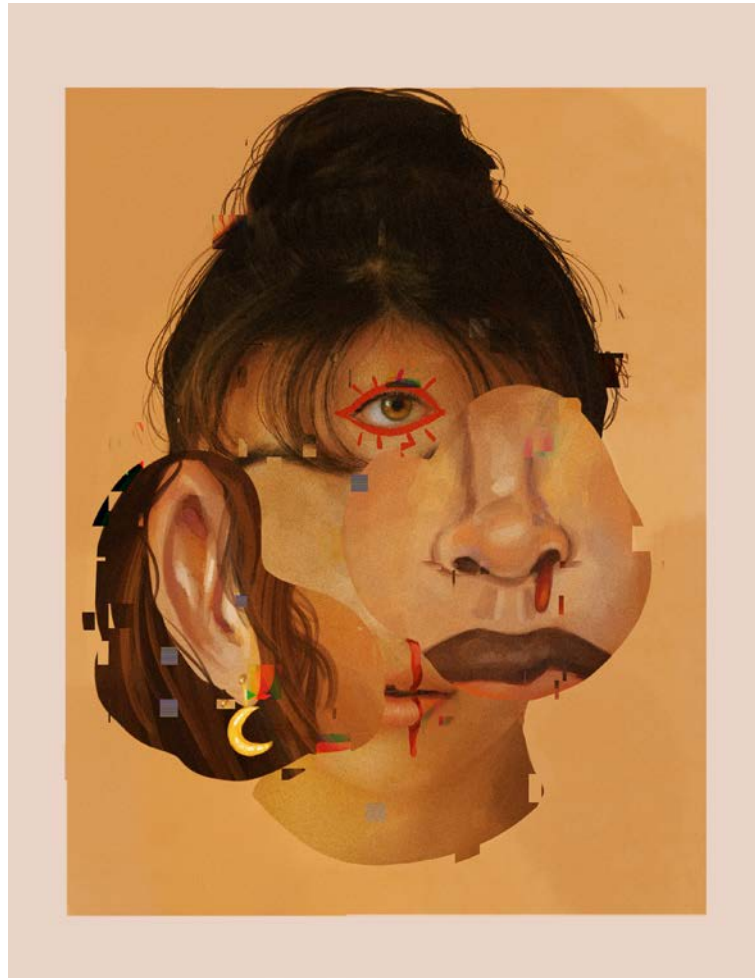
**When men are called to be monsters,
When beasts are in high demand,
Don't expect a fair death,
Or an apology, much less,
Just a grave in a cold plot of land.**

**No men who walk into the jungle
Ever return fully alive.
Some keep their body,
Few keep their soul,
But the jungle has claimed their mind.**

Paige Cesnik | Watercolor Helping Hands



Kayla Smith | Digital Media Reconfiguring



Emma Johnson | Poetry Dance

**what amount of rain
could keep you away?
a drop
a drip
a drizzle
a downpour
a derecho?
because i wish
to dance in it
and be drenched
and be free**

**if this life
you do not live,
who will live it?**

Emma Johnson | Poetry Meteor Showers

**you wished time would stand still
our eyes fixed in the sky
that night. do you remember?
how it was meteor after meteor
streaking through the abyss,
a cascade through the cold night.
were the stars jealous of us existing
for a moment, so close together?
were the meteors envious
of how we could last, almost forever?
i saw you. you saw me.
without a glance in between.
but time did not stand still
bringing our beings back to earth
when i look up
the stars still dance
in the cold night air
but time doesn't stop
and you're no longer there.**

Julia Sullivan | Poetry Fractured Dreams

**Elucidating enigmas with zealous ambition,
That orphic reverie of a cerulean sea
Where wanderlust morphs to euphoria
And incandescent concinnity is without volition.
Yet trepidation easily permeates consciousness,
And impalpable schemes conceive ghoulish fiends.
Sanity dissipates and hysteria overtakes
Forthwith, vivid nightmares capsize dreams.**

Emma Johnson | Poetry

ode to the morning missing in winter

**gentle is the morning as the sun
dances atop the tips of the trees,
recalling the green of the leaves,
reigniting the color
of the season your soul is singing to-
day.**

**delicate rays restore quiet hope in
grace,
the harsh edges of the night
lost to the light,
this light lost in the limbo of love.
gentle sun in fresh morning air
crawling quietly over your face as
you wake,
glowing an amber hue
promising you:**

**there is no night so dark
that cannot be
splintered by
the morning light
calling you
this light
is love
is love**

Micah Koppang | Photography God's Window to Pike's Peak



Eric Hernandez | Digital E

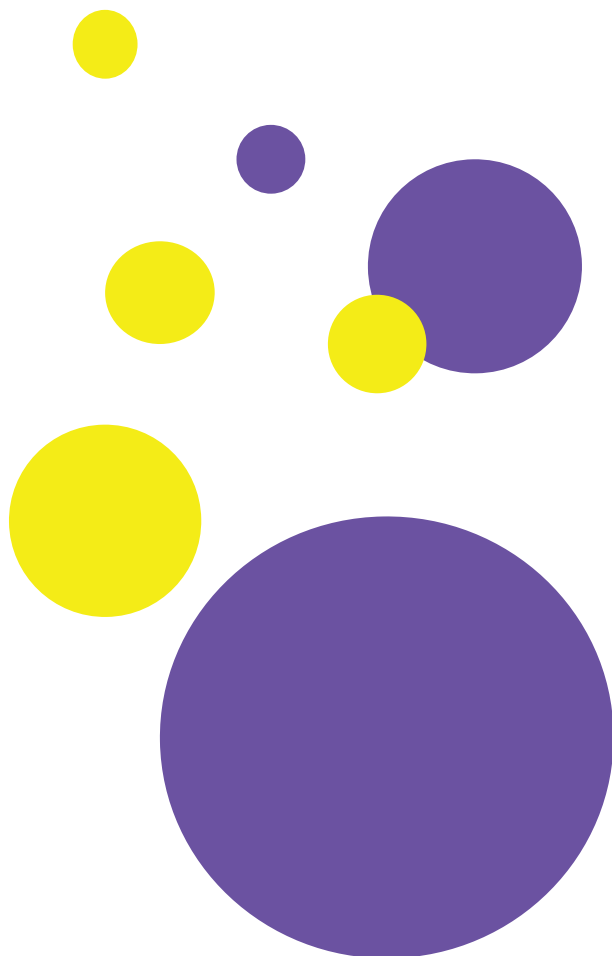


Anna Beres | Poetry Dear Unfinished Art

**You are not abandoned.
You are safe,
tucked away,
patiently awaiting
for my return.**

**My first wooden canvas,
a field of amanita
mushrooms with red caps
and white spots.
Your day will come.**

**I still think of you
every now and then.
You are worthy
of my patience,
my time,
and a steady hand.**



Ty VanBenthuisen | Poetry

Sig Tau Winner:

A Sun, Set

**Where are you when the sun sets?
Comfortable in your bed,
Numb with pleasure?
Out, watching the horizon
Gleam orange and purple?
Or, perhaps, cold. Shivering. Fear.
Desperation.
The coldness, of the sun.**

**All of time has led to this moment.
Fate has chosen its path.
And its path ended up with you.
Why are you not celebrating?
Is this not a cause for victory?
Why are you not standing?
Why are you not dancing?
It's a new day.
The sun rises in the east.
The birth of hope, of dreams, of chaos.**

**It was not made for heaven.
It was made for hell.
The betrayal always existed,
But you didn't realize it until now.
It kissed your lips.
You truly believed it.
It was unfortunate of you to open
Your eyes.**

**What sick world is this?
One where love is repaid with agony.
Emptiness screams
Instead of songs belted.
Promises shattered.
The hall remains empty,
But your head laughs.
It laughs at you.
The sun shines through the window
In the west.**

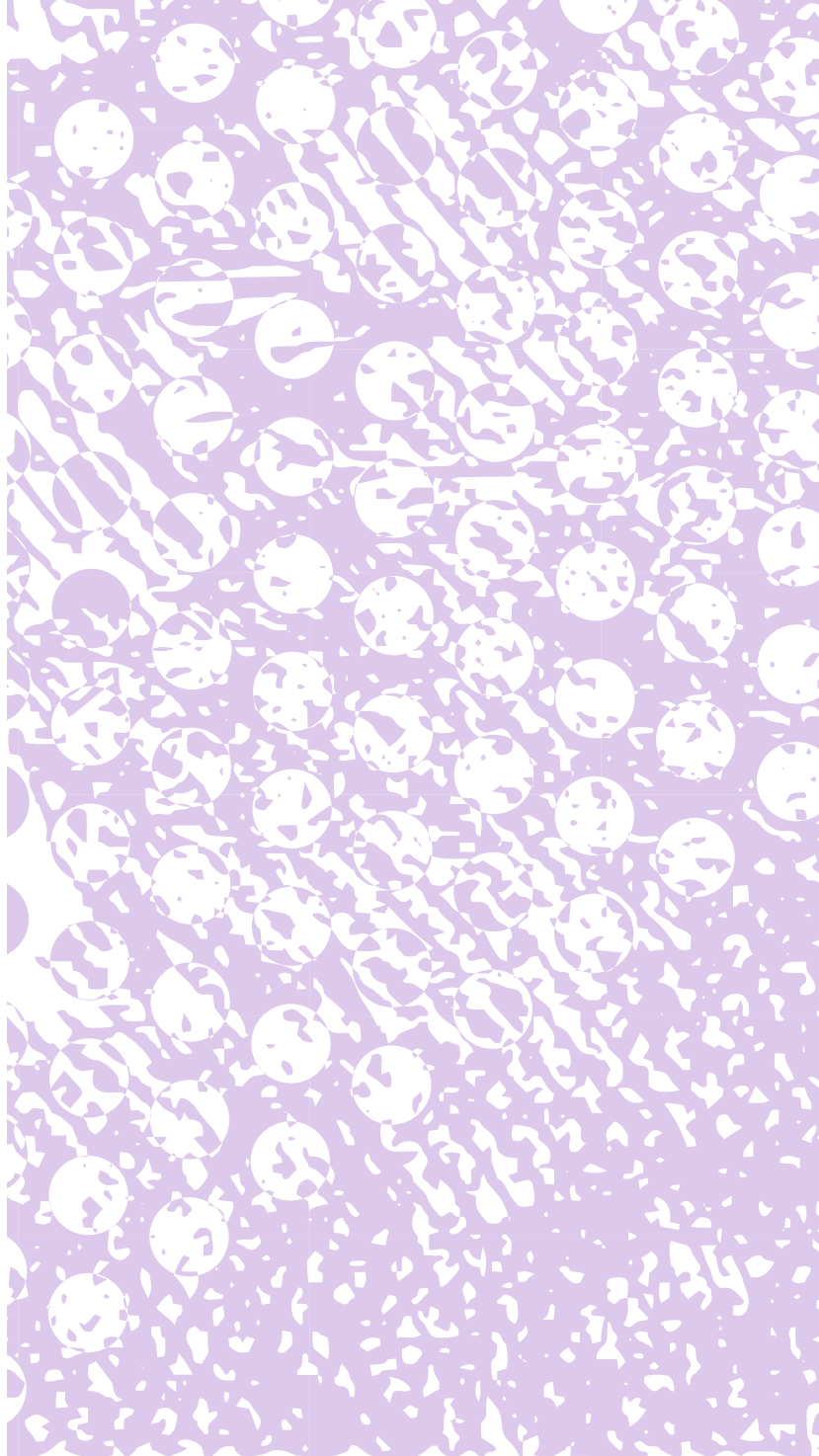
**There you stand
Idly broken.
What else remains?
The hall is fresh, but not to you.
You did not wish to be here.
You were given no instructions.
Unjust, it would be, to blame you.
You were lured by the songs that
never existed.
Baited by some unknown force**

**That you can't explain.
Oh, what was it?
Hope?
You're making them laugh.**

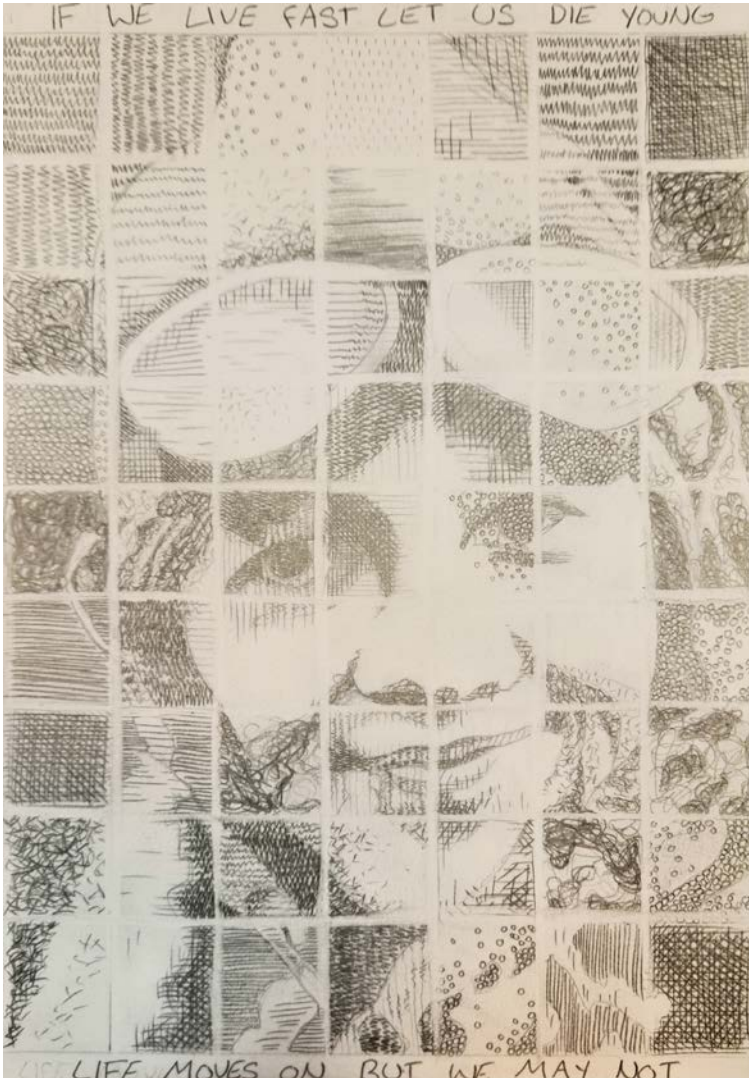
**It's only you.
You're the only one.**

**What will you do now?
I shouldn't ask.
You have no choice.
You can't watch the sun.
It already set.**

**In this world,
You either die a disgraced hero,
Or a forgotten martyr.
Your futile hopes,
Are nothing but whispers
Against the setting sun.**



**Alexandria Poisel | Drawing
Sig Tau Winner:
Untitled**



Molly Herren | Short Story Sig Tau Winner: The Uncompromising Future

The year was 2304. The Earth was nothing like it used to be. The once colorful, blossoming fields wilted to brown. The snow-capped, tall mountains lost their white and eroded low. The lush forests, filled to the brim with wildlife, were now filled with ash and ruins. The once clear ocean had insurmountable amounts of waste in it. In most cases, humans weren't allowed into the oceanic water anymore, due to the toxicity. 90% of plants and animals were extinct. How could something so gorgeous rot into piles of nothingness?

Most people of this generation didn't know any better. 6-year-old Caroline seldom left her house. When she did, she wore a gas mask and hauled an oxygen tank behind her. The air was so polluted that no adult human — even with the healthiest of lungs — could last more than 12 minutes and 34 seconds outside without an oxygen tank. As a result, everyone wore gas masks, everywhere, all the time.

As far as the corporate lifestyle went, it carried on normally. It was typical of adults to work office jobs. Rather than rotting outside like the plants, they rotted in a 6-foot by 6-foot cubicle. Children were required to attend school with little experiments, displays or variation from sitting in a chair and listening. The children did so much listening, but no learning. Humans never learned. The world was covered in a gray haze, the once beautiful Earth, home to millions of species, was unrecognizable.

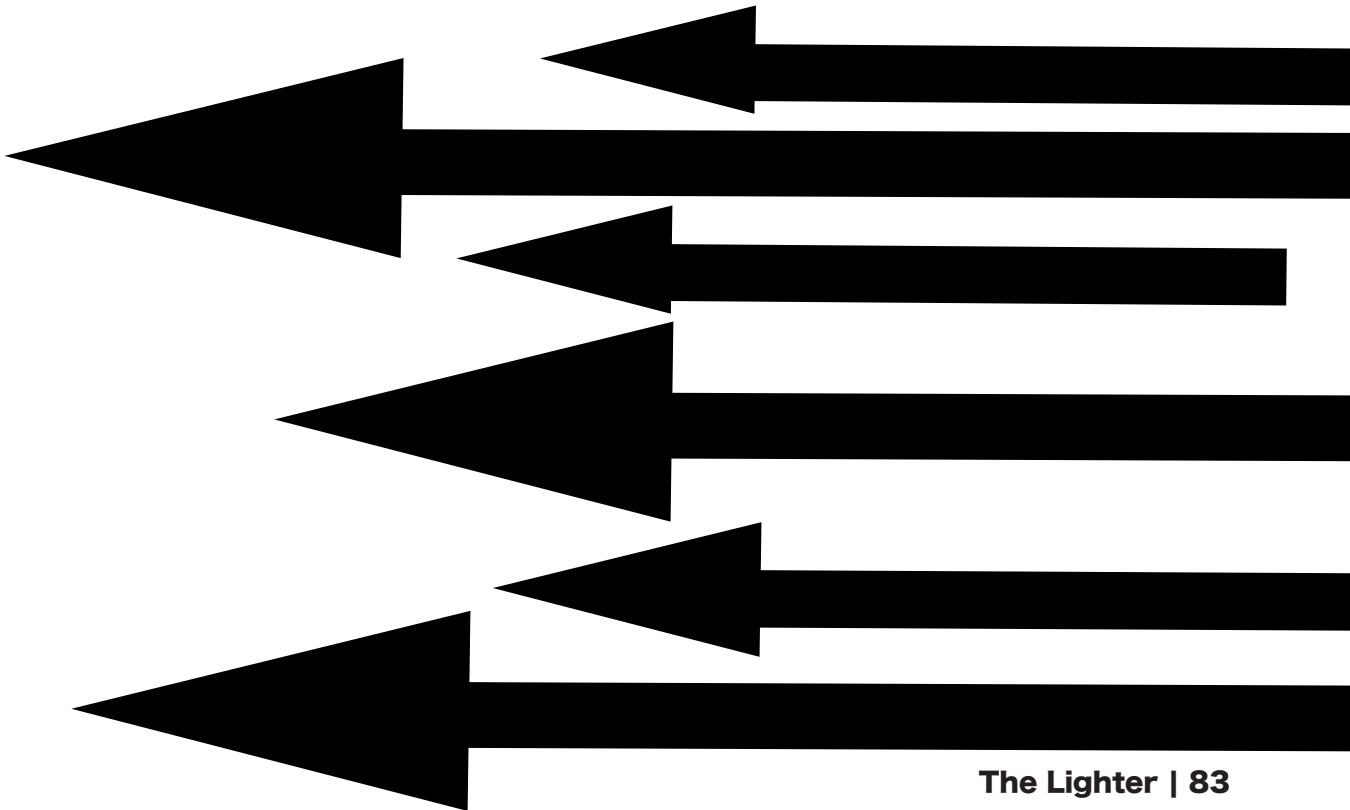
The Uncompromising Future (cont.)

The children in school learned about the past. They saw photographs and drawings depicting what the world was like before humans permanently ruined it. They would make models and projects detailing how the Earth should've been. They learned about the thousands of now-extinct species that used to thrive. They learned about everything they should've been able to experience firsthand. Mankind flew too close to the sun, and their once beautiful wax wings melted into a desolate pile.

No matter what humans did now, the damage was irreversible. The worst part was that nobody seemed to care. Caroline wandered the dust-covered streets, and the once-booming city of Atlanta looked like a ghost town. The music that filled the streets with glee, now eerily haunted every resident. Dark, gloomy, and sad were the only words that would correctly describe Atlanta. Not even just Atlanta, every city was stuck reliving the exact same day over and over again. The weather no longer changed, it was 70-80 degrees year-round, rarely bearing rain. No one near Caroline knew anything of snow, hail, sleet, or tornadoes, because they couldn't experience any of it.

Caroline dreamt of a normal life. She dreamt that one day she could walk the streets without an oxygen tank. She dreamt that trees would grow again, and flowers would bloom again. She dreamt that one day she could taste fresh fruits and vegetables, maybe even grow her own. It became a method of escape for her. Any time Caroline felt claustrophobic in her repetitive life, she imagined being in a grass-covered field.

She imagined living in a stone cottage, encapsulated by the ivy and wildlife around it. She imagined that animals would wander near her backyard, and she would befriend them. She could go outside and take a breath of crisp air for the first time in her life. Unfortunately for poor Caroline, her dream wasn't possible for her to reach. She would carry her oxygen tank through middle school, high school, university, graduate school, and eventually to her own 6-foot by 6-foot cubicle. In a world where everybody received the same ill-chosen fate, Caroline would never be different.



Daniel Owens | Poetry

CLOUD PARADE

**The clouds today are galloping!
As they march the cloud parade
To where they go, I do not know
But not one cloud has strayed**

**Some big some small some infant
But marching all the same
With floats that float and sheep and goats
Shapes that defy all names**

**As the clouds careen with urgency
I'm never told the "where"
But as they leave I finally see
The incandescent evening air**

Julia Sullivan | Photography Reverie



Emma Johnson | Poetry

how to live in the past

**look up into the eternity of the night sky.
you are here tonight with the light hypnotizing
your eye. stars numbering thousands and millions**

**of light years away all staring at you.
the past is looking on, surrounding
who you are, but you are here, alive**

**now. and that light in the black expanse is dying
maybe surviving, beginning to thrive.
you cannot escape the past**

**it surrounds you, always around you
in your dying, your surviving, your thriving,
but, you are here, alive**

**now no matter how dark your past
no matter how daunting your future,
you are here, alive now.**

**look up. try to convince
me that the cosmos
of you is not beautiful.**

you will not succeed.

Jackie O'Hara | Poetry

Blue Waters

I wanted to say I loved you
It whispers in my ear, tempting me to speak
To tell you the truth
How I felt like a wave flowing back and forth
From ocean to shore
I wanted to say I was your burned star that still shines
That I was your worn paper bookmark in the novel you never wanted to
finish
I could tell you how if I was your dog
I'd wait for you at the door every day until you came home
I'd be your song bird devoted to waking you each morning
I wish I could explain how I'd walk the entire earth with glass in my shoes if
you wanted me to
I would learn to breathe water if you asked it of me
The worst pain is my absolute devotion
To a shore I cannot cross
The water sears my skin
Melting my limbs into the sand
I scream for you
I cannot reach you
I am stuck gasping for breath while you float quietly away
Forever ignorant of the words I say

Jay Bradley | Poetry

Falling

The word “love” will never explain my feelings for you
That word carries pain, heartache, and hurt that
I would never wish upon you again.
Oh, how could I ever describe the ways I feel for you with such a phrase

To be vulnerable,
To share my innermost most thoughts.
That is not something that comes natural
Well, not usually.

I cannot begin to find a string of words to put out together
That can fully explain the colors of my heart
The colors of my soul
That reach out and grab for you, hold onto you.

Oh how I have been blessed with this task, this mission to feel for you
With you
Towards you.

Is it adoration?
Infatuation?
Obsession?
I cannot tell just yet.

Though you are so far away from my body,
You are intertwined with my soul, my spirit
I have found myself through you
I have found my purpose through you.

I cannot explain why it is that my mind always finds you
But I can try to paint a picture with the limited words in this language

However impossible it may seem, one word comes to mind.
Grateful.

Hope Biermann | Poetry Flower Language

The holly, spiky, green, and full, and decked in jolly red,
Laughed with the bright poinsettia, golden leaves about its head.
The tree that bears the frankincense, the tree that bears the
myrrh
Bowed down to where the brittle straw and gray-green hay bales
were.

The wind across the wheat field blew; its unseen fingers brushed
Against the grapes that, ripening, would be cut down and
crushed.
The rose unfurled; it was stark red against the black and brown
Of the twisting thorns that, unwilling, were bent into a crown.

All this we know; the young and old, the lowly and the great,
Yet also, even now, we hear
The lily whisper,
Wait.

Nadhia Manthuruthil | Poetry

The Gratitude of a Conch Shell

I, the Conch Shell
Had just washed onto shore
You were strolling by

I glittered under the sand and glistening waves
Teasing you
Drawing you in

You picked me up
You held me in your comforting hands
You looked at me with awe

Your eyes took me in
I was afraid you would look too closely at me
And drop me in an instant
Instead
I saw my best parts reflected in your eyes

My best qualities were mirrored
And even my worst
Except they were almost unrecognizable
Because your eyes took my worst and made me
believe it was beautiful
Your eyes took in everything and made it good
But that's not all you did

You brought me close to your ear
And you did something that surprised me
You let me speak
Truly speak
Not just the mere superficial beginnings

You let me talk beyond that
Of my future, hopes, and desires
I almost forgot what they were
For no one has ever asked

No one has dared to challenge
The foundation of the walls I've built
With such care
The territory that I secretly hoped
someone would trespass

In awe of your genuine interest
I was at a loss for words
But I recollected myself
I told you of my odyssey
How I came to be
How I ended up washing up onto your
shore

What I went through
I told you of the waves that shaped me
The riptides that gave me the grooves
on my shell
You even learned of how I got my
sharpest edge
I told you of the soft waves that held me
close to the bottom
And of the waves that helped me when I
couldn't stand for myself

I realize I had been going off on a
tangent
I expect your eyes to be looking
elsewhere
And your ears to be attending to another
sound
But I'm surprised to see you still
listening



**Through all of it
You listened
You cared to hear what I had to say**

**This came as a revelation
Someone finally cared to get to know me
I found your attentiveness to be most
endearing
And for that I thank you, because I cannot
thank you enough**

**You held me
Up close and personal
Like listening to a conch shell
You listened to my ocean**

**Now let me return the favor
And listen to yours**

Hope Biermann | Poetry Growth

Take me to the enchantments waiting outside
the crooked,
crumbling shadows where I now reside. I wish
to see people made of glitter, not stone. I wish
to witness souls capable of touching. I wish
to catch glimpses of affection that emerge in a
flush of smiles as a
light breeze fills our lungs.

Where are the leaves fluttering in a dance?
Where are the waves creeping on shore as our
eyes lock, softening a little?
Where are the lonely beats of existence merg-
ing into one?

I long to breathe in these songs of
Epiphany.

I am withered by the sight of
weary travelers met with bleeding hearts, and
I stumble with
bated breath whenever He bears witness to
another's worth.
I look upon the death of a world, struck within
and firing outside
its walls in vacant misery, as if we are all soon
to be
equally aware of darkneses' clarity.

Do you have a moment to speak? To witness
my
Tragedy- rainy sheets fog my glassy eyes
as I wonder where my real heart lies. Where
the purity
resides I cannot say, for my memory has long
been taken away.

What I can say, what I do know, is that
the tragedy, my escape, whispered in
my ear long, long ago. And now,

Out on the horizon there it stands, the
remnants of what we called "Love," streaming
in
rays from above. But- it
dissolves into the misty sea
before you can believe in its treasure, note
how gold gleams in guiltless measure.

No, the gold rusts,
sinking into the merciless depths.

I can see it now,
as it sinks below. I reach a hand toward
the water, and for a moment it glows.
But as dishonesty creeps upon my skin
and in my mind, the light flickers out,
and I am left blind.
As I slink away into the night,
my heart skips, a thought ignites.
Perhaps my memory
is there too,
perhaps I was right.

The rain pours into my eyes, fresh droplets
lingering under my chin and collecting at my
sides
as I gaze down at, behold this world of sin,
goodbyes trickling, trickling, before they disap-
pear into the sand beneath
my bare battered feet.
Glassy eyes cannot comprehend Their tears.
Intelligent eyes know
and they weep.

I wander on, soul adrift.
I carry on, heart remiss.
My knees buckle, I sway and fall,
the sand gathers in heaps, I must
gather strength through it all.
Indeed I do, I bear the burden
of the night, knowing someday
my deserted soul will take flight.

And one day the gold emerged from
out of the depths.
But I speak too soon,
Let me retrace my steps..

Our thoughts and hearts separate when we
decompose- but the soul can still
ignite, slight pieces of another embedded
in the light.
It arose in me one night, as I stood sway-
ing,
the sun rising to life. It filled my eyes and
to my
surprise there was another-
Arisen, taken flight.

She looked at me, and I wondered, as there
was fire
in her design, when would this world
take its shape, discover the hate suffered
in the shadows, recreate and redesign?

When would the light hollow out
bleeding hearts, ignite a humanity
found in flushes of smiles,
leaves fluttering in a dance?
Gold gleaming and receiving,
little by little,
chance by chance,
eyes made of glitter, souls touched
by each other, hatred withered into the
misty sea.

As resolve set in,
As hearts beat together,
As I stood there, eyes softening a little,
viewing the dissipating storm,
she led me there, to the water's shore.
I reached in, I chose to ignore what
creeped upon my skin and whispered,
Don't go in.
I can't let you win.

Gold gleamed and glowed,
My heart ignited, a faint memory arose.
Shadows dissolved, leaves fluttered by the
shoreside, and I emerged,
breathless,
Life revitalized.

I stand out on the horizon now,
remnant of what we call "Love,"
a flushed smile adorning my frame
as I view streaming rays
from above.

