The Promethean, Planet Nowhere (2017-2018)

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THE PROMETHEAN

THE LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL

OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY-PORTLAND

PLANET NOWHERE

2017-2018 ISSUE
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Manuscript submissions and correspondence can be sent to promethean@cu-portland.edu. Since *The Promethean* uses a blind review process, contributor’s names should not appear on their manuscripts; instead they should be included in an accompanying email along with the titles of their works.
PLANET NOWHERE

The first week of the semester, our editing staff sat down and tried to come up with a theme for this journal that would encapsulate the Concordia community, with all its beauty, flaws, and in-betweens.

To us, Planet Nowhere means the feeling of hopelessness and the intimidation of the unknown. But it also means endless possibilities and the beauty of the expanse before us. No matter how lost we may be, we can find our way home.

We wanted to build a sense of community within our pages, where people were free to share their dreams, fears, triumphs and losses… and the in-betweens. This journal was a labor of love. It has been a messy, beautiful road to turn an idea into a very real literary journal, and I am so thankful to be a part of it.

On behalf of Dr. Kimberly Knutsen, my Co-Managing Editor Julia Guzman, our wonderful staff of student editors, and our talented contributors, I am honored to present to you the 2017-2018 issue of The Promethean: Planet Nowhere.

~ Sydney Quintana, Co-Managing Editor
“Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don’t just give up.”

~ Stephen Hawking (1942 - 2018)
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The Smell of Blue Grass

*Sydney Rose Quintana*

When the aliens finally come, I’m first in line. But not for the probing, or the brainwashing, or the… crop circling?

When the aliens touch down on this planet, I’m going to be thumbs out, hitchhiking—ready to join them. I’m going to spend my nights floating and becoming acquainted with the stars like they were my old friends that I finally get to visit on their side of town. I’m going to spend my days building massive pyramids on some unknown planet so the natives can marvel at them centuries later and wonder.

When my signal to alien life goes unheard day after day, I’m left to my own imagination.

What is their home planet like? I wonder if they’re born like us, or laid in eggs, or synthesized in a lab somewhere. Do they have marriage, or even love? I wonder if they know the feeling of wanting another more than they want air to fill their lungs (or the anatomically equivalent organ). I bet they do.

Do they have a sky alit with stars and a thriving world around them with animals, plants and kindness to remind them that life in the universe is bigger than themselves? I imagine a place with dogs who can speak French, grass the color of ripe blueberries, and stars so close it feels like they’re going to collide with the planet… except they never do. The stars sit close and share their light as if called to this alien world instinctively; they’d
never dare venture so close to the Earth, or else they’d probably get colonized.

Do they have our same problems? More than anything, I hope they don’t. I hope every alien gets a seat at the intergalactic table, even if some old, conservative alien would condemn them to the kitchen to make some space-age sandwiches because of their sexual organs. I hope they welcome aliens from the struggling, nearby planets with open arms (if they have arms) and open hearts (or the anatomically equivalent organ). I hope they accept the differences from one alien to the next, whether their skin be green, purple or blue. I hope they love who they want to love, however they want to love them. And I hope that they love their planet more than Earthlings loved ours; I hope they value it even though their UFOs could fly them away to the next galaxy over to find a new planet in a nanosecond. Even when they leave their world, they will always go back because it’s better than everything else they’re found out there, even Earth. Especially Earth.

The universe is over 13.8 billion years old. The estimated distance to the edge of known observable space is 46 light years and counting. In the grand scheme of you and me, the Earth is like a person in a crowd of millions, billions, gazillions—whatever *illion* comes after that. However high you can go.

When the sun has long since retired for the night and I’m alone in my bed, clutching at my blankets for their unwavering
I’d like to think that I can feel this endless expanse of space and possibility growing, expanding constantly. I hold on to my blanket tighter so I don’t fall off the edge of the Earth in all the madness and chaos. Dark energy pulls the planets, stars and galaxies away from each other as the universe itself grows infinitely. Stars are born and stars die, and Earth is too far away for us to mourn them. Even after their death, so much of their light is inbound for Earth that we continue to see it for centuries and we take their fragility for granted. Most of the stars lighting our shaky paths are long gone, a supernova of the dead and forgotten, as we are pulled farther and farther away from what could be.

I hope that somewhere in this undefinable universe, even if it’s on some faraway planet that I will never set foot on, there is a place with French-speaking canines, grass you could mistake for an ocean untouched by humanity, and stars you can greet as old friends. I hope beyond reason that this place is out there, but even if it isn’t, it is. Or at least it can be. I’ll be waiting, bags packed.

When the aliens finally come, I’m first in line. I want to see some world, some species of people, get it right. I want to jump down from their alien spacecraft and walk through a field, reveling in the aroma of the freshly cut blue grass, at peace.
History
Shannon Leigh

If you wonder why I can’t talk to you
With the lightness of the past
I would say it’s for my own protection
That, since we’ve spoken last

I’ve begun my trusted alchemy
Transforming you into past tense
And once I’ve gone through all that effort
Talking to a ghost just doesn’t make sense

You see, people tend to leave me
By choice, by illness, or circumstance
And I had to find a way to deal
Or I wouldn’t have stood a chance

Over the years I’ve honed my skills
At “good memory” compilation
Leave aside the bad (it’s a given, no?)
And keep the beautiful distillation

So I’ll frame our snapshots in sunshine
Encapsulate each tender embrace
I’ll look once more, then gently wrap up
My lithograph of your laughing face

I’ll tuck my favorites behind glass
For those, I can’t just pack away
Hang them on the wall while I push down the hall
All the rest, for a far distant day
And once it’s all labelled and organized
Once my fondness gains nostalgic sheen
Once you’re safely a part of my history
Maybe it will feel like a pleasant dream

It still hurts too real, too close, too sharp
To flippantly remember
That’s why I need our lovely blaze
To burn down to a mere ember

So though I pack us in a box
And scrawl your name across the top
It isn’t that I no longer care
I just had to make the missing you stop

Scattered Eclipse © Shannon Leigh
The Fall

Ayla Johnson

A brown leaf trembles,
whispers a final goodbye—
then jumps off the edge.
Hey

How’s it going?

Acknowledged Yesterday at 10:38 pm

Sorry, that was a bad start

Obviously, I saw what you posted online

I put a sad-face emoji next to it

But I worry about how you are doing

Do you want to talk about it?

Acknowledged 10:03 am

Sorry, again

I’m still dancing around it

I’m worried that you are thinking of something drastic

I am worried you are thinking about killing yourself

And I don’t want that

No one wants that

You are a smart and caring woman

Ha. Buster wants to know why I’m upset

I told him

He suggested we go to the dog park and run around

That’s his solution to everything

I told him people problems are different

I’m trying to send you a picture, but this new phone
Just picture Buster on his back
Fluffy paws in the air
Acknowledged 1:13 pm

I’m avoiding the problem again
Hey, listen
I know today was not a good day
But I know you are a good person
Let’s get thru today together
I found someone to cover my shift
I’m going to get some chicken from that takeout place I like
Near where we used to live, I forget the name
Unless you text me not to come over, I will be there in an hour
We can talk about stuff, or watch stuff, or whatever
I will see you soon
Acknowledged 5:47 pm

See you soon
Sent 6:12 pm
Coyote
Or “A Long Night for the Old Man in Cold July”
Josey N. Meats

The chickens were slaughtered on Tuesday. The Old Man knew something was wrong when he arose to only a starch-breath breeze. On an ordinary day, the Old Man wakes up to the bobbling of his chickens; he likes to keep his window open so he can hear their morning gossip.

His house sits in a deep draw, full of thick thistle and cotton ball trees. But the Old Man’s yard is green. On the fresh field that measures about two acres is his tiny house. It is white and green and sits in the corner of the plot overlooking the vast forest below. It has a small porch with a weathered rocking chair planted next to the door. The house is one room with another rocking chair, a wood stove, and a bookshelf holding Stephen Crane and Jack London collections. His bed is in the corner next to the window, and of course, outside the window are the chickens.

Festus, the Old Man’s orange tabby cat, sleeps at the foot of the bed. In the mornings, he crawls over to the window and perches himself on the windowsill—tormenting the brainless birds. On Wednesday morning, all that was left of Festus was a streak of blood on the Old Man’s porch. On Wednesday morning, the Old Man saw her—Coyote. She sank back into the
brush, Festus’s lifeless body draped in her mouth. Her eyes were a soft caramel, but glazed like a doll’s eyes.

*To-night, Coyote, there will be justice.*

The Old Man cradles the rifle his father gave him. The blue steel—cold on his calloused hands. The spring night—crisp. The Old Man’s long and tired face—puckered and pink. He wears a worn flannel and wool trousers, each leg rolled twice.

*It’s 8:37, usually asleep by now... where are you? Surely you must think there is another treat for you tonight.*

Seven minutes pass. Coyote appears. She creeps out of the darkness and into the moonlit field. The Old Man nods off in his rocking chair—creaking back and forth. The Winchester repeating rifle lays across his lap. He wakes.

It takes him a second to focus his eyes and sees her. She sticks to the edge of the clearing—she knows he is waiting. He shoulders the rifle, the metal butt plate cold through his shirt. He lines up the buckhorn sight with the pocket behind her shoulder. The bullet will rip through her lungs and they will fill with blood, killing her in seconds.

*Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.*

A sharp crack echoes across the mountain tops.

Regardless, in the morning there will be no bobbling.
Baby Teeth
_Sydney Rose Quintana_

Losing you was like losing baby teeth.
I thought I was falling apart, losing parts of myself that I so desperately needed.

First time it happened,
I carried myself to my mother, skinned knees and teary-eyed wondering what I did wrong, and aching to turn back time.

My mother told me not to fret,
“Stronger parts of you will replace what you have lost, you are more than the sum of your bits and pieces and broken parts, you are you.”

I didn’t believe her.
I felt the breadth of the gap the way a soldier longs for his missing limb.
Losing you was like a battlefield amputation.

The incision was rushed, rough and careless edges.
I was not ready to be apart
from you, a scar remains.
I still miss you.

But stronger parts of me will
soon fill the gaps that you have left.
Scar tissue heals until
faded marks remain,
I am whole

without you.

Three Queens © Jenn Doiron
Lone Wolf

Alena Willbur

Mother and Father howl in the light of the moon. My brothers, sister, and I follow, our voices creating a rippling song of night. While mother and father stay perched on the hill, I spot movement in the bushes below; a quick rustle of white skipping along. I dart down the hill. *Wait for us!* my brothers and sister bark.

*Ha, Rabbit!* The little thing hops right out of its bush and into another. I lunge after it, but the twins block me and jump in front, clawing my ear. *You! You dumbo!* They all bark in laughter, and I laugh along. I’m not feeling so bossy today. Happy. Just happy. The full moon shines on our white and grey fur like we are children of the sky; our barks and howls play along with the air, our bond as wolf pups binding us together in the pack. We run through the forest, chasing that damn rabbit. Father thumps over and leads us out while Mother barks to not go too far.

We don’t listen.

I howl.
A single note that echoes in rings of sound.
A lone note.
A lone wolf.

Knives of fire shoot from the dry branches and pine. Red and orange tongues lick up my home, my family, my life. Fire consumes the ice white and cloudy grey of their fur, *our* fur; my world ends in fire.

We were just playing. Father led us there, but we were just playing. The fire came with a *BOOM* and before I knew it, I was running, but no one was behind me. A wind of panic pushed me
forward, and I found myself alone on the hill, mother nowhere to be found, my father and brothers and sister—burned to ashes.

——

Full moonlight streams down on my grey fur like tears. Cold winds flow over me. I long for warmth, but not the blazes that come from those wretched, hot knives. Just a soft blanket of sun falling like maple from the bark of the trees. Sweet, warm. No more bitter, cold.

On the hill filled with evergreen trees and pine, I lay, alone, in a dying, whimpering song.

My paws sink into the dirt, and my prints are the only ones that continue on.

Moon 1 © Randilee Sequeira Larson
Pilfered Osculation

Julia Guzman

Offered me my first bliss,
Argued that I wouldn’t miss,
A quick step and firm grip; stolen.

The second was requested,
Demanding mouth and searching hand,
I pulled away, mind now turned to paste.

The third was then tested,
After fearful reprimand,
Slow and steady, went for a taste.

The fourth freely accepted,
Savor each touch as streams do sand,
Arms wrapped, surrounding my too-wide waist.

Hearts unharmed; unbroken
Yet a heavy thought I bear,
No fifth with fingers caught in hair.
The stars appear every night in the sky. All is well.

I remember the looks on their miserable faces. The guards were hicks, fat with southern accents. They frisked nine-year-old Elijah like he was a drug smuggler.

I don’t remember what we talked about in the visiting room. We sat there for hours, playing cards and eating food from the vending machines; our big bag of quarters waned slowly. I remember the patty from the cheeseburger. I remember the potato skins were bacon flavored. I remember that your gray hair had multiplied since the last time we visited. I don’t remember the inmate who took our photos. I do remember the water in my eyes because it was the first time we had been together in years. I remember the old English “D” for the Detroit Tigers in the background of our family photo, now tattooed on your left forearm. I remember the smiles on the prisoners and their families’ faces.

The guards are the ones that needed punishment for the way they treated you all like dirt, and us like criminals. I remember trying not to let my anger overcome me and to appreciate the time we finally got to spend together. I remember the feeling of leaving and not being able to take you with me. I remember the need to escape.
Sticky and humid. Michigan summers left any adventurer’s underwear and socks stained with sweat. Drops fell off my forehead. A slight burn when they landed in the cracks of my eyes. I cared about none of this.

Hand firmly gripped on my makeshift torch. Twine wrapped tightly around the top of the stick and tied off, showered in gasoline. Running around the jungle in our backyard, avoiding dog poop, and the singed twine floating down in the dark purple summer night. A 5-gallon red gas can, a stick, twine and you. The smell of smoke comforts me.

I remember my chest rising and lowering like the pistons on a four-stroke engine. Darting through the backyard like a manic child high on sugar. Fear of the sting of bright colored paintballs kept me moving. The green greasy paint left a blinding smear on the goggles built into my black mask with small slits in the bottom. The ventilation was terrible. I used the five maple trees as cover. They always seemed to leave partially exposed limbs I didn’t know were exposed until I got a painful reminder. The red skin raised up under my armor, which consisted of two hoodies, a T-shirt, and a pair of sweatpants snug underneath denim jeans. Turned into a blue and green welt the following day. I wore these battle wounds with pride.

I remember our boxing coach, an old school black man in his early fifties. He had a small gut that hung over his gray sweatpants, and his name was Curtis. Don’t let the gut fool you,
he still had it. We had just taken a water break and class time was dwindling. Push-ups then sit-ups and class would be over. You wore a red shirt and white shorts that rested well above your pale knees as you stretched out over the big inflatable yoga ball. The bulky nineties tennis shoes lost their grip and your head full of curly black hair collided with the concrete floor. Curtis let you sit out the remainder of class after having probably concussed yourself. Knowing you were watching, I flung my shoulders up and down as quickly as I could in weird fishlike movements. I watched grown men beat each other, then hug afterwards, blood occasionally dripping down their noses. Curtis was hard but kind. He gave us an outlet.

I don’t remember cutting up the mango. But I do remember the chunks were neatly placed an inch apart on all three levels of the plastic dehydrator. It sat on top of the counter in the dark garage. The orange yellowish skin was dry. Sweet and chewy on the inside, it always managed to get stuck in your molars. Savoring the tropical fruit, we sat in the doorway to the backyard, the cool draft from the garage grazing the backs of our necks. Bailey lay in the freshly trimmed grass, soaking up the sun until it got too hot. The dehydrator didn’t last long. The tangerines were the end of it.

I remember unpacking the brown box you brought home for me. I watched your hands alternate and energy radiate off your body in a trancelike state. The new drumsticks sporadically
smacked the snare’s rim, leaving little chips in the hickory. You sang along with Thom Yorke over the computer speakers. Eyes closed, paying careful attention to each accented note. Your movements were liberating. I closed my eyes and mimicked you. The rattle from the drum traveled through the air vents, filling the house, letting the world know, *we’re here.*

I remember when you worked for Saturn and we did the promotional stunt for them. I don’t remember watching the game. The Kalamazoo Wings or K-Wings were the local hockey team. At intermission, when the players headed to the locker rooms, we made our entrance. Gliding onto the ice in the black Saturn SUV with our sunroof open, I was strapped in the passenger seat. I watched the orange rubber pucks fly towards the car by the dozens. The SUV was borrowed. The overenthusiastic commentator’s voice brought life into the cold arena. The pucks were autographed in Sharpie. Whoever was lucky enough to make it in the sunroof also had to make it through my careful selection to win the prize. I still remember the sounds of the pucks hitting the sides of the car.

I remember you coached our soccer team for a year. Later I learned you knew nothing about soccer, but nobody could tell. We needed a coach and you stepped up. We flew around the field, not like green dragons, but more like black flies buzzing around aimlessly. I remember our green striped jerseys and white knee-high socks. Occasionally, forgetting which side the
opponent’s goal was on, we shot on our own goalie. The sweet airy donuts and Sunny D or Capri Suns afterward were most kids’ incentive. I don’t remember who we played or any of my teammates. I do remember when a little black and yellow wasp landed on the warm donut in your hand, its feelers investigating the shiny glaze as its wiry legs sunk in. You had no idea until you bit down and the stinger sunk deep into your tongue. A sugary crunch.

I will never get sick of talking about these moments. No matter how high they hike up the prices of phone calls or how much they charge for emails. They can continue to extort the families of prisoners; I believe they will pay for it soon enough. They can never take these memories from me. I put the weed and alcohol down, so I can remember them clearly. I will hold them tight in my mind until the last breath leaves my lungs. I appreciate these memories more than you will ever know.

Gotta go. Love you Dad.
These Days

*Darian Rose Dolan*

Orange light makes sound like static
in between my ears. A fragile sound
like the songs my grandmother used to sing,
like love’s breath on my hair,
like the sun on autumn leaves
on their slow descent to the sidewalk.
I could’ve sworn their warmth felt almost endless.

But blue light makes sound
like an unforgiving hum. A hollow sound
like the room when the world turns off,
like phone calls with my grandmother’s depression,
like death’s hand on my heart,
like the half moon on these shaking limbs
on my slow descent to the sidewalk.
That old sound that buries itself inside my chest
turns me bluer than this long winter.
I’ll hear its song in empty hallways,
in empty beds,
corkscrewing its cold body inside my head.
And I swear,
I swear this feels endless.
Taters

Josey N. Meats

What do I amount to?
noth’n?
Boiled and mashed.
That's all.

I’ve sat in this drawer for 5 months.
Mother got turn’d into a salad last spring.
...and now it’s me turn.

Look at me
So misshapen and starchy
Even on my skin
So heavy it seeps out me pores
And there's a root growing out me heed
This drawer has been stuffy.

We use to amount to something!
T’was the forefathers killed half of Ireland
Now look at us, battlefield of Thanksgiving day.

T’hell with it,
Life is too hard for us potatoes.
Time for me bath.
I imagined jamming her into a roaring fireplace. She doesn’t die though; otherwise, she’d leave me alone with our ugly ass daughter. I say ‘imagined’ like I’ve only done it once, like I don’t picture it three or four time a day. Especially on days like today. She’s out here hollering at me with that big sea bass mouth and those cut up horse teeth yet still managing to look like an ostrich that bit a moldy lemon and the juice squirted back into her glaring eyes. I swear that’s all I hear, day in and day out, SQWAK, SQWAK, SQWAK!

She’s at it right now, in my right ear as usual. She likes to wait until I’m driving because I can’t walk away. I grip the steering wheel until my knuckles pucker and little beads of sweat swell up to the surface. The little sweat beads stink like old bitter melon and horseradish. But I think I’m the only one that smells them. I count the little beads; there’s gotta be at least sixteen between both hands. Well, more like twenty-one? Or thirty? Am I counting the same ones over again?

“Watch out dumbass!” my lady screeches. And yes, dumbass is me. It’s always me. But this time she’s right.

I slam on the brakes and swerve in time to just miss a couple crossing the street; my baby in the back starts wailing like we really did crash. They’re cursing and throwing hands up. The young fresh dude has his arms around his girl. Like he doesn’t want her to die. His eyes dart from her to the car’s hood up to me. He looks nothing like me, but then again he kinda does. Is that how I looked back before I met her? Back before I got dragged to that basement party I never wanted to go to? Back before our eyes met over red Solo cups in that grimy, smoke-filled

The couple storms off like they’re not grateful to still have legs, and I hit the gas. We’re coming up on the railroad tracks we need to cross to get back to my place. I love that rundown piece of shit apartment. The train passes by so close it drowns her out for a couple minutes every night. But not now, not in this minute. The baby still crying, she still cussing me out.

“You stupid ass! You really trying to get us killed. You lucky I said something. Your dumbass really out here driving like your daughter isn’t the car. It’s always the same bullshit with you every time—”

I can’t really hear the rest. Because here comes the train. I can’t see it yet. The safety bar begins its slow descent, soon to be parallel with the tracks. The warning red lights flash like raving strobe lights in my eyes. My fingers grip the wheel. A single bead of sweat runs down the nape of my neck to the crack of my ass. My girl is screaming something—sounds like ‘slow down’ and ‘what the hell are you doing’ or something like that. The train’s headlights come bearing around the corner and the low tenor horn blares its single sultry note. I hit the gas. The engine sputters then rips forward. The train’s headlights wash over me, cleansing me anew. Cutting through screams and wails and epileptic-seizing heartbeats. Maybe finally I’ll get some goddam peace and quiet.
Bluegrass Clippings

*Spring Writing Contest*

The annual writing contest was inspired by the phrase “Bluegrass Clippings.” Of the many beautiful submissions we received, the following winners were chosen by our wonderful judge, Concordia English alumna, Randilee Sequeira Larson.

**1st Place – Blue**
The plotline for “Blue” is written with profound subtlety and patience. The author doesn't make it clear where the story is going in the beginning but instead allows the surrealism of the narrator’s condition to carry the reader along, drawing the audience into what seems like a poetic musing about an unusual phenomenon. Only the strong, punctuated ending reveals a deeper plot behind the poetic reflection and a tragic surprise for the reader. "Blue" represents just how tight a plot can be when an author is both patient and unwilling to waste even a single word.

**2nd Place – Blue Grass Clippings**
“Blue Grass Clippings” reads like a modern horror-mystery set in everyone's most angsty high school year. Although the story is short, the tension begins with the opening line and carries taut throughout each suspenseful step, breaking only occasionally for a moment of teenage-inspired gallows humor. Using colorful phrases, unique imagery, and dramatic storytelling, the narrator slowly leads the reader to a dark and satisfying ending.

**3rd Place – Monochrome**
“Monochrome” is a hopeful and uplifting piece that skillfully juxtaposes the familiar with the unfamiliar. It plunges the reader into a different world and a different perspective on life, one that most of us will never truly understand. The author uses color images in a playful and unique way, allowing the reader to really “see” through the eyes and the art of her colorblind narrator, and while the perspective might be different, the story is charmingly familiar, focused on the unconditional love of a mother and the drawing she holds dear.
Blue

*Sydney Rose Quintana*

1st Place

syn·es·the·sia
ˌsɪnəˈθiZHə/
noun: synaesthesia

1. the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of the body by stimulation of another sense or part of the body

My name was the first rainbow that I could actually touch; I would spend hours creating and caressing the colors with my number two pencil. I could never recall the names of the letters, but I remembered the slight, feminine curve of the light orange, the sharp, angular slopes of the dark purple… writing was like painting. It was like art only I could see the beauty in, and only my mama believed me. Mama never told me that my brain had its wires crossed or that I saw the world wrong. She would just spell out a new word for me on the chalkboard every morning and ask me how the rainbow looked today.

It wasn’t until I was about five that I realized something was different about me. Before the strange looks at school started, I thought everybody saw the world the way that I did. Every letter and every number was a color, and it was these colors that made the words, the sounds, and the stories.

I used to imagine the colors blending together like drops of paint on a palette and each word was the art piece. Even the...
sounds came alive, setting off explosions of color behind my eyelids, technicolor symphonies of shades and hues.

The sounds of violins were rotating swirls of purple and green, weaving together and apart. Trumpets were twin orange wavy lines flowing around and around my head like cartoon hearts. Drums were bumps of violet, each beat a new bang of color in my field of vision. An entire orchestra was colors and sounds spinning and twisting in tandem, pushing and pulling my focus in every direction. Music was always messy with color, and I loved every messy inch.

In a world of color, blue is my favorite. When my mama told me she loved me, it was the palest of the spectrum, a sea of soft, baby blue flooding my vision and wrapping around my small shoulders. That why it’s my favorite of all the colors, on the pages and in my head.

It’s no surprise. Her voice was almost always in shades of blue. When she spoke, it was cornflower clouds, soft and calming and patient. Her singing voice was more of a cerulean wave, bright and happy and slightly off-key. Even when she was mad at me, the sharp cobalt jabs were always enough to make me apologize. Mama didn’t like it so much when I practiced writing my colors on the white walls. I told her that I didn’t like white; it didn’t sound like anything.

The moment that the car clashed against ours like cymbals, my mama’s screams were red. Bright, ugly, violent red.
This red clouded my vision until nothing remained. Only red.

When I wake up two days later, the steady buzz of fluorescent lights and the white of the ceiling are blinding. As if somebody took away all of my senses and left fear in their place. I am drowning in the absence of color, the silence of my world choking me.

“What happened?” I ask aloud, voice shaking. The hum of the hospital begins to look as ghostly pale as the walls surrounding me. My vision floods with tears. Everything hurts, and a quick survey finds my arm in a cast. I feel the pain in my chest spreading all the way to the tips of my toes.

“You were in a car accident, honey. You were asleep for a while, but you’re going to be okay,” the nurse explains to me. In my growing alarm, her voice drips with hazardous swirls of orange and other colors I cannot name.

My vision starts to clear and before I can catch my breath, my bones begin to ache for the color blue. “Where’s my mama?”

I didn’t know that the sound of pity would be such a dark, stormy grey. “Your grandma will be back soon. She just stepped out to get some food.”

“Is my mama with her?” Baby blue, cornflower, cerulean, even cobalt…
I guess I killed her in my sleep.

But nobody really knows for sure. I don’t even know for sure. I just happened to finish mowing the lawn right before the murder took place, and I just happened to be next door neighbors with Carla Meyers, and I just happened to be happy that she’s dead. Now the damn cops won’t leave me alone.

Someone slit her throat.

So I sleepwalk, to the extreme of mowing my lawn sometimes, big deal. I’ve been sleepwalking since I was five.

So I almost stabbed my dog with a kitchen knife—he didn’t die. Close, but not quite. No one knows about that one, though, and I sure as hell wasn’t about to admit that to the pedo-stache-jelly-donut-eating-gorilla excuse for a cop.

But hell, Carla was the one that put used tampons in my gym locker! The damn tampons bled on my jeans and reeked of fish guts, so I had to walk around school in my BO-soaked gym clothes, not a much better alternative. If anything, she was the psychotic murderer. Maybe she killed herself for attention, you know, her last little attempt to get famous yet stay blonde and beautiful forever.

But the red spray paint on my locker says otherwise.

PSYCHO!
I roll my eyes and don’t even bother to open it. When I turn around to head to U.S. History, Didi’s wide googly-eyes are about to pop out of their sockets, and her frizzy brown hair seems to pop out of her head more than ever.

“Oh my god Rae, who did this???”

“Shut up!” I hiss through my teeth. People glance over at us, and I roll my eyes. I decide I won’t go to class and hope they clean it by tomorrow. “It doesn’t matter, Di. It’ll blow over once they get something else to talk about. I think I’m gonna ditch. Wanna come with?”

Di scrunches her lips and shrugs. “Skip class? I don’t know…I have a test coming up…”

I don’t expect any other answer from Di. She is a great friend, of course, but a goody-goody, like ties her shoes perfectly and listens to whatever her mother says kind of goody. “You always have a test coming up,” I say.

“I know, but…”

I sigh. “It’s okay, Di. I’ll see you later.” I get the hell outta there just as the bell for first period rings.

* 

In the small town of Ojai, California, the sun sears into your skin almost every day, and thus fries the grass yellow. Unless you’re my mother, of course. She’s obsessed with keeping up an image, as if in some constant competition with the neighbors, especially since I was accused of murder a couple nights ago. So
our grass is always lively, earth green and mown into diagonal lines. She gives the landscapers special instructions to do so.

But at night, the dark shades of the sunless sky dye the grass blue.

It’s my favorite time because, for a minute, the universe and the earth are one: I can lie in the grass but fly in the sky. Like right now.

I close my eyes in the cold grass on this late summer night, but something closes around my wrists:

Handcuffs.

Lightning strikes my heart and I jump up, breathing hard. I feel my wrists—bare. I shake my head at myself; the cops have me paranoid now.

A cut of wind slices through me and the trees rustle and the grass sways. Goosebumps pop on my arms and hair rises on the back of my neck, making me believe someone is watching me. I glance behind me, near my neighbor’s house—Carla’s house.

Shadows from the tree on their front lawn hover over the white house. Branches crawl toward a window that used to be Carla’s. I know that’s her room because, whenever I happened to be outside, I would see her sneak out that window, or a boy sneak into it. She was that stereotype of a girl who loved to sneak out to parties and kiss boys who didn’t love her but served as a verification of her beauty and desirability.
I’m the girl that doesn’t really give a shit after her first heartbreak: the infamous Tristan Summers. Golden curls, sun-kissed tan from surfer mornings, and a twist of green and blue life in his eyes.

Let’s just say he’s another reason why I hate Carla Meyers.

*Thump.*

My body jumps and I scan my surroundings for any movement among the trees, behind the houses, in between the bushes or even across the street, but only the wisps of shadows crawl amongst the yellow glow of the streetlights.

I look back at my house, but all the lights are out: Mom’s asleep. Dad’s working his night shift at the mental hospital.

Then there’s me.

Still sitting alone under the pale moonlight.

*WHAM.*

My head pounds and I try to scream, but a hand covers my mouth and panic fries my senses: I have felt this hand before. It’s unmistakable—warm like the summer sun, like soft gold, like–

I wake up covered in black and blood.

“I know you killed her. I saw you,” he says, his voice dark and quivering.

I’m still lying on my front lawn, but my blue jeans and grey t-shirt are soaked in red, and his shadow stands over me. I recognize him immediately.

“Tristan? What’re you—”
“You killed Carla.”

I roll my eyes. Great. First he cheats on me with Carla, then he accuses me of murder. I sure know how to choose them.

“Yeah, okay?” I stand up and face him, crossing my arms. I’m not afraid of his bulging arms and trembling fists at his sides.

“I saw it.”

I grin and laugh. “Yeah, okay. Whatever. How about you leave me alone?”

I start to head back inside, but before I can even move, his hands wrap around my neck and squeeze.

Air exhausts out of me; my green eyes bulge and stare into his, which are blue and green like the grass. His jaw tight and body shaking, he reaches for a pocket knife and motions it across my throat and—

\textit{Slit.}

*

“Rae? Rae? Raeeee?” Didi’s voice calls to me and sunlight pierces into my eyes. I’m still lying on my front lawn, and Didi stands over me.

I nod, but my hands shake. My vision; blue grass. Tristan. A nightmare?

“How long have I been out here?” I ask Didi.

Her eyebrows knit together. “You don’t remember? You ditched school then texted me to come over to drop off your homework. . . ”
She hands me a stack of papers. I don’t remember, but I play it off. “Right. Thanks. I’ll see you later, Di.”

I stand up and walk toward my front door. “Ow!” I trip over a rock and catch myself with my hands. The gravel digs into my palms and scrapes of blood drop out from the skin.

“Rae! You okay?” Didi helps me up but I shake her off and stare at the rock I tripped over. And the grass clippings near it.

“I’m fine. . .”

That’s when I see it. On the grass clippings. Then the memory slams into me.

“I have to go,” I say, then sprint into my house without a word. I go up the stairs of the empty house—four bedrooms, three people, and wood floors equal a ghostly echo whenever I walk into it. Maybe that’s why I like being outside of it.

I grab a pair of white yard clothes in my room and go to my garage for the yard waste bucket.

The sun sears into my skin and sweat breaks from my pores. In my front lawn, the grass clippings are green in the sun.

I remember.

I took a nap that night. The night of her murder.

But then I woke up. Or, “woke up.”

I was about to mow the lawn that evening, the time where the grass dyes into a blue as the sun falls. And I saw Carla. Carla
and Tristan sneaking out from her room and whooshing tongues. They laughed.

They laughed at me! Hahaha, oh my god, what is she doing?

Carla giggled, flipping her hair off her bare, tan shoulders.

My knuckles squeezed the lawn mower handle, turning white. I bit down on my tongue; red rust poured out—blood.

Blood.

Blood.

Silenced her. Squeezed her throat and reached for a pocket knife and—

Slit.

The blue grass clippings clump at the end of the lawn; I forgot to clear them up the other night. I bend down and get ready to dump them inside the yard waste bucket, but I stop.

Because there it is.

Small, but noticeable.

Among the grass clippings, a bloody pocket knife stains my white gloves.
Monochrome

Kristin Rothell

3rd Place

I grew up in a world of monochrome, clean cut and two shades. Black. White. Everyone spoke of vibrant color, greens and blues, purples and pinks. Splashes of paint on every surface, infusions of color beyond the wildest imagination.

My imagination was all I had.

I dreamt of a place where color was granted to me, the names foreign to the different hues, but beautiful in their mystery nonetheless.

I created every detail with an exactitude that surprised my friends, my family. I told them of the beautiful bluffs that roared a glaring pink, splashed with deep purple waves, rippling with bright blue grass, littered with lavender and pale pink trees. The dirt was green, the roots of the plants a deep, pulsing orange that bled a dirty red. The sky was a collision of aquamarine and soft yellow, intermixed with angry, roiling dark blue and brown clouds.

Rain fell like fire, bright oranges, yellows, reds, cascading down in seemingly endless torrents that graced my world with patches of their marvelous tones left behind on my blue grass.

The sun shone high above; yellows, blues, and a shade or two of orange intermingled and aided the incongruous world in its effort to survive.

The pages I drew came out in black and white, littered with smudges that to everyone else looked like amusing mistakes, great vistas drawn in stark contrasts. But to me . . . to me the sheets sprang to life, sung of a time when perceptions didn’t matter and imagination ran free.

To me, this world was what I wished mine was.
I wished I could see those gorgeous cliffs, surrounded by every color imaginable, intermingled and mixed together into beautiful displays of abandon.

---  ---  ---

Crayons lay before me, an expectant disbeliever eyeing me as he handed me one of the waxy sticks. I had never drawn in color, the concept as alien to me as the dreams I leapt into with anticipation every night.

BLUE

The grass.

A smile lit my face as my hand flew across the page, eyeing each crayon’s designation carefully before putting it to work.

PURPLE

The waves.

PINK

Trees.

GREEN

Dirt.

The colors wove into each other as my creation came to life, uncaring of the disbelieving eyes that bored into my skull. I didn’t have a care in the world as I spread my vision across the pages.

My hands ached.

My spirit soared.
I set aside the last crayon, a mere nub, its substance pressed and rubbed onto the previous white expanse of unused possibility. My heart was pounding, threatening to burst from my chest before I got the chance to meet the eyes of my curious onlookers. It was not fear that overtook me, it was an elated feeling of freedom, a freedom to share myself with those I loved and have them see what it was to live a life in monochrome.

Their faces were as I expected; my sister’s eyes bulged in incredulity, my uncle’s shone with barely suppressed tears of emotion I could not name. It was my mother’s face that filled my entire being with a sense of relief; she looked at me as though I lit up her world, as though before she had merely existed and after having finally seen me, she could truly live. She looked at me with eyes so full of love, hope, and faith it made my colorless life well worth it to give her that.

*It’s amazing,* my uncle said.

*I can’t believe it,* my sister murmured.

My mother had no words. She gently took my hand in hers, a connection of fragility and love, and brought me to my feet. She pulled me closer until I could taste the dainty Safari perfume and eye shadow on my tongue, until my face pressed against her beating heart and my world coalesced into that one, pulsating movement. It never faltered, her heart, the steady beat pounding against my head and reverberating through my entire being until it lulled my own into its dependable rhythm.

*I’m so proud of you,* she whispered in my hair.

The words were everything I had ever dared dream I would hear, and I melted further into her embrace.

*Thank you.*
The words went unspoken, but I knew from the slight tightening of her arms around me that she heard, and understood them.

---

The piece from that day hangs, framed and arranged together in a sort of collage, upon my mother’s office wall. I have created others for her, drawn her things that existed, before, only in my imagination, and that I have dared to put to paper just for her. But the first remains her favorite.

She says it is because it was the first day I allowed her to see what she had known was there all along.

She says it is because it means the most to me.

She says it is her favorite because she would relish the fact that she had blue grass clippings on her shoes from mowing that overgrown cliff face.

I think it’s because it was the day she saw my soul and she didn’t blink twice at what she saw, and we have never once looked back.

I think it’s because she loves me for who I am and those pages, preserved behind glass, represent the day I found my family.

I think it’s her favorite because living a monochrome life doesn’t mean I can’t bring color into everyone else’s.
Nothings
_Tijera Johnson_

He called her _my love_

Those six letters
wrapped warmth
around her heart
as tightly
as his hands
wrapped around
her body
when she
forgot her place.

He called her _pretty_

Six letters that
placed her on a
pedestal so high
she’d never
survive the fall.

He called her _unique_

Every trait
that made her
self-conscious
he praised
as special.
As different.
Trained her
to be grateful.
He loved her
despite her faults.

Her therapist called it

trauma

All six letters
left her

broken

but wanting to be

healed

Now, when a man
tries to reduce her
to nothings,
she calls herself

worthy.
**Proximity**  
*AYLA JOHNSON*

There is a man across the sea.

I do not know him.

On Friday, I woke to the sound of his tortured wailing. He was closer then—floating just beyond my defenses. I could see his eroded smile; his sandcastle ruins. He had picked away at his dignity, leaving him scabbed all over. For a moment, his red hands looked familiar, but a wave of uncertainty washed the thought away. I have not recognized him since.

Each day, the man drifts further off, a shrinking silhouette against the horizon. I think he is drowning. Water crashes violently over his head and seaweed tentacles form unbreakable knots around his waist. His wiry arms undulate like white flags in the distance and sometimes his desperate pleas carry on the wind—

“…mean anything.”

“Just talk to…”

“DANIEL, PLEASE!”

—but there’s no one around for miles. No one who can help him.

I cannot help him.

I am an island. I was formed by molten rage rapidly cooled in an ocean of tears. My heart is hardened like igneous crust. I am new territory—no longer fit to settle.
You and I

Alena Willbur

I really loved You
but I was so used
to being
a
single
letter
I was never
Me

I tried to be
with You
and he said
I, I am Yours
then offered his hand
of letters
cascading in an alphabet
of smiling dance

but I
could not give
another letter
or else
she would
no longer be

You shed
his r and s
for I to keep
but I could not be
riS or Sir
that was not Me

Black, starless night
I left kisses
in the hollows
of the pillow
next to You
and,
    as a
single
    soul

I
    left
    You.
Abandoned Canvas

Julia Guzmán

Acompáñame
Only for a moment, I ask you to be my companion;
I ask you to sit by my side and watch my girasol bloom.

Ayúdame
Only for a moment, I ask you to help me;
I ask you to hold my blueprints and déjame huir from the faded edges.

Hábleme
Only for a moment I ask you to speak to me;
I ask you to describe what I make you feel and allow your hands to envolverme.

Escúchame
Only for a moment, I ask you to hear me;
I ask you to listen as my hilos tear and consider the weight they carry.

Me alejaré
Only for a moment, I will pull away from view;
I will let myself disminuir and gather dust in the silence

Recuérdeme
Only for a moment, you will remember me;
You will remember my texture and con cariño think of how patiently I have waited.
Abandoned Canvas © Julia Guzman
Grief

Alena Willbur

Textbooks sprawled on the floor and loose-leaf papers painted with scribbles and arrows: failed attempts to make sense of the tremors and aches that coursed through her blood and bones. Nothing in the thin pages of thick textbooks could tell her what poison was in the sharp needle that pierced through her heart, because nothing and no one could ever have predicted such a tragedy. She lay on the cold, wood floor of her bedroom next to that mess and stared at the white clouds on the ceiling. Rain, saturated with salt, fell from the watery clouds of her grey eyes. A picture burned in her sweaty fist. “No no no no no,” escaped in breaths of wind from her lips. Please bring them back, I’ll be better, I swear, just bring them back—bargaining prayers choked any other thoughts. On the floor, she lay. On the floor, ocean waves hovered then crashed down her cheeks over and over and over again until a hand reached out—a hand reached out—a hand reached out and said, “Your family’s dead, but you are—”
Everything Will Be Given Back
*Darian Rose Dolan*

You find her submerged in holy water,
roaming empty cathedrals,
silent in the confessional,
speaking in tongues,
a hymn kissed into the skin:
hallowed
and
anything but.

she is the warm glow of glass-stained windows
the sacramental wine on your lips
you’ll find God in her breathing and
before anything else they will teach you how to love
the right way and
the first thing you will learn is that
you love
the wrong way and

she will become that heavy ache
from all the stones they cast so you
pour holy water down your throat and
baptize yourself in the bathroom sink
you wash her deep enough to drown and
then the exorcism comes like a drought
and
for so long you are a
desert.
here are the ways in which she comes back to you:
you will learn how to speak her name and suddenly the sky splits open and she is the genesis flood
she is divine retribution
she is torrential rain
she is a monsoon and she is Pouring out of you,
and
you are ready to love her the right way.
Dreadfull Love

Ayla Johnson

I spun my hair like cotton so my locs could set me free. Escaped a white prison of beauty on the wings of a great hawk and saw, at last, the world with precision. Uncoiled truth in every knotted strand: the snake is your old foe, not mine. I am a goddess—Medusa rebrought to life. I wear a crown that slithers; twines.

I praise each connection to long lost roots. Like water, history runs down my back. Entwined with love, these vines of mine salute a people forever under attack. No longer do I dread the hangman’s noose— I dread black threads and let the ropes hang loose.
My Hand

Faith Bowman

I’ve been experiencing a slight tingle in my right hand lately. It started off low and subtle. Kind of like a buzz that you hear right as you screw in a light bulb and the wires spark up with electricity. I had never felt it before, and recently it has been getting stronger. The light buzz has now developed further into a warming sensation. It brings me back to my childhood when I owned a snake. The synthetic sun that came from the heat lamp was now directly over my hand and moving its way up my arm.

When I went outside, the breeze rolled over the peachy hairs. When I closed my eyes, I could feel every hair move with the wind. It calmed me. In that moment, I thought of every moment in my life when I had been touched by the wind. It doesn’t ask for permission to graze you. It can be soft, whispering in your ear, kissing your neck, and making every hair rise upon your body. Wind can also be violent. Whipping you in any direction. Pushing and pulling until you are forced to give in.

I sit at my desk, as I have been sitting for the last ten days. I am holding my favorite mug, heated from the sweet, warm, chocolate milk. Wrapping my fingers around the handle, my skin is met with the cool, ceramic handle. I start to take a sip, but find no strength. Before I can even lift the beverage, my arm disappears before me. I am left with a hideous stump. A maze of zig-zagged scars and stitches distorts my false reality. Furious tears bring back the memories of the wind and the sea and the boat, and the rope. I reach for my mug and take a sip. The counterfeit buzzing returns to the limb that I lost to that violent wind.
Supermarket Flowers

*Sydney Rose Quintana*

I used to think I knew
who love was.

love was red roses,
candy hearts,
endless declarations,
sparkly decorations,
bottomless love.

love will never have a bad day,
and will never make you cry.
love will always treat you right,
and will always love you back.

Then I met love.

Now I think I know
who love is.

love is saying you’re sorry,
even when you don’t like love.
love is not knowing what to say
sometimes, and that being okay.

and when the words are not needed,
love is needing, and being needed back.

love is not always red roses.
love is more like supermarket flowers,
sometimes a little damaged,
but always there,
love.
I Saw Your Handwriting

Darian Rose Dolan

A familiar
bubbling of letters,
a reminder of how your hands
held steady then.

But when I think of your hands
I think of that night when
they were pale,
gripping onto the wheel
of that cold fast machine
against herds of
dazzling and dizzy light.
I think of the steel splintering,
how those hot sparks spilled
over the asphalt like stars.
I think of that hundred mile per hour collide,
how the world must’ve moved
away from you.

I saw your handwriting
in its bright pink adolescence,
and I thought of you

floating
Tweets to Your Last Kiss

*Anonymous*

In February, we tabled and gave you a simple task: “Write a tweet to your last kiss, 240 characters or less.” To view all of the tweets we received, visit [@PrometheanCU on twitter](https://twitter.com/PrometheanCU) on twitter.

The love
The joy
The licks
My dog

Your kisses are above average, but less than 7… LOL

I wish my lips stretched 1,006 miles.

It burned me, but as always, my greatest vice drew me in for another painful taste – coffee.

A cat booped my snout.

It was rough, but the whiskers were warm.
A Kiss

Alena Willbur

skin;
blue fire
excites
my heart to jump

lips;
spilled wine
rolls
my body down

tongue;
burn of whiskey
dances
to my soul

mind;
nothing
is quite
like this.

- a kiss
Secrets

Elizabeth G. Stottlemyre

It’s as dark as death and 12:12 in the morning. Her 4’11” stature silently slinks toward me in the middle of the night, a baseball bat in one hand and a bag of rock climbing chalk in the other. She slowly lifts the bat over my head while simultaneously flinging the powdery chalk into the air, blinding me.

Before I can feel the crushing blow to my skull, my eyes open and relief floods through me. In the bed with the cushy mattress pad, no more than five feet from mine, I can make out the tiny figure of my best friend, Carly, curled like a puppy with a full belly in her yellow comforter.

Why would someone that sweet want to kill me? I try and push the reason from my mind, yet what I have done is impossible to forget. My entire body is riddled with grief and an ever-present fear hangs over me. I revealed her deepest secret to the world and she will never forgive me.

“It’s fine Alex. Really… Don’t worry about it,” she whispers with a half-smile. Her eyes, one green and the other
hazel, stare into me, unwavering. “Now that they know,” she says, “there’s nothing I can do…”

Her hair flicks out like snakes’ tongues as she walks away, our conversation over. I lean toward her as she stomps off and hear her mumble the words that will ice my bones for the rest of the day: “But there’s nothing I won’t do to you.”

I can’t sleep. When I do catch a brief fragment of shuteye, my mind replays our conversation over and over like a bad song on the radio, haunting me. Image after image flashes in my mind, revealing the dread that I now associate with her beautiful, heartless smile. I wonder how long it will be until she strikes.

If only I had never mentioned her dreaded sixth toe.
A Cat

Liana Parks

A cat sits at a window
Watching the world go by
His yellow eyes go up
His yellow eyes go down
He turns his head from side to side
And grooms his little paw.
The cat sits in the window
Inside a nice warm house
And watches the children run by
Laughing at their foolishness of staying in the cold.
Joined by another cat
My royal kitty sighs
And leaves his station to find a perch
Somewhat more dignified.
No cat sits at the window now
Their amusement all used up
And now I suppose they go
To lie by the fire and rest.
The Kitten and the Mermaid

*Rik Spruitenburg*

The fluffy white kitten walked along the bluegrass and came to a rock at the edge of the water. She let out a heart-rending meow.

As it so happened, a mermaid heard the cry, and while she avoided the surface world, she could not deny the pitiful sound and swam to investigate.

The mermaid, with her hair the color of the sun, found the kitten on the rock. “Kitten, why are you so sad?”

The kitten replied, “I’ve lost my person, and I am so lonely.” She lowered her head.

The mermaid, her skin white and creamy like vanilla ice cream, felt her heart melt. “I will spend time with you so that you are not lonely.” And the mermaid started to sing.

The kitten purred contently for a minute, but just for a minute.

The mermaid, her scales as green as seaweed, paused her singing. “Is everything okay?”
The kitten replied, “It is good that I am no longer lonely, but now I notice that I am hungry.” She lay down on her rock, which was warm from the sun.

The mermaid left with a splash and returned in a moment. She placed three fish on the rock at the kitten’s paws. The kitten nibbled at the fish, and the mermaid returned to singing.

When the kitten had eaten all the fish, the kitten purred contently for a minute, but just for a minute.

The mermaid, her eyes the color of pirate gold, looked carefully at the kitten. “Is there something else?”

“I had a collection of toys and treasures I had collected. I kept them under the sofa. But now I have nothing.” She looked up at the sky.

The mermaid smiled, and then dove under the surface so smoothly there was no splash worth mentioning. “There, this should be to your liking.” And she placed a crown made from coral upon her furry and fluffy little head. It was a good fit, heavy enough to stay in place, but light enough to wear all the time.
The kitten purred contently for a minute, but just for a minute.

The mermaid, her nails the color of pearls, turned her head at an angle to try and get a better look at the kitten. “What now, Pussycat?” she said, hoping it did not sound like she was out of patience. She was not out of patience, but she was starting to wonder what she had gotten herself into.

“The crown reminds me of my person. As a princess, I have a responsibility to my person. I’m supposed to help her remember when to get up and when to go to bed, and when to go to school and when to brush my hair. She will be lost without me. But I will never see her again, or our blue castle.”

The mermaid looked around at where the kitten sat and saw many wooden and brick houses. “Is it that blue house over there?” she asked, pointing three houses away.

The kitten turned and let out a joyful meow. “Yes, that is it! Oh, thank you mermaid-person. I will never forget your kindness today.”
And the kitten went back to the house and found her person, who then brushed her fur. And the kitten purred contently for a minute, and then a minute more.
Mustachioed Menace

Sarah Foster

There are none like you—
Conceited, corrosive, and cruel
Vile and lasting, nothing to do
There are none like you
Oh, let that be true
You are evil’s precious fuel
There are none like you—
Conceited, corrosive, and cruel

Hate festers unwanted but strong
Despite effort it won’t take leave
While it remains, I can’t last long
Hate festers unwanted but strong
Poison, pain, sing their song
This will pass, I must believe
Hate festers unwanted but strong
Despite effort it won’t take leave

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned
I am above such petty things
But here I am, in anger adorned
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned
Who I once was, I’ve already mourned
Your actions, a new person brings
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned
I am above such petty things
When the Beat Breaks

Kathryn Jones

beat
It’s coming.
beat
It’s lurking.
beat
It’s happening.
beat beat
Can you see it?
beat beat
In your bones can you feel it?
beat beat beat
The depths of my soul quake with it.
The nerves in my brain shake with it.
beat beat beat
Can I catch it?
Can the choices of my past,
The actions of my present,
The confines of my future—
beat beat beat
beat beat
beat beat beat beat
All I’ve worked for,
All I’ve wanted,
All I’ve needed.
beat beat
Crushed.
Canned.
Caged.
beat
It was once a dream.
beat
Now a daydream.
Silence.
Broken.
I am nothing but a ghost,
Murdered by doubt,
Haunted by regret.

Tarot Card © Josey N. Meats
Retrograde
Darian Rose Dolan

The boy with goat eyes learned a new word each week and tried to use it at least three times. The same way he liked to say her name underneath his breath each night, hoping to send its sweetness into his subconscious. He had always been a dreamer, sewing balloons onto his shirts when he was younger in a feeble attempt to lose some weight. But she, this girl, was no dream. She had forest fires for eyes and her kisses always tasted like cough drops. She ran through his veins with the swift electricity found in her smile.

Elle.

The girl who liked to wear white summer dresses. The girl who always tucked her caramel hair behind her ears when she got nervous. He fell in love with the details, like how she would tap three times when she was thinking deeply about something or how she crossed her eyes just enough while gazing at Christmas lights so they looked like stars. He always could tell when she was having a bad day. When she was sad she wrote with pencils instead of pens and bit her lips until they bled. She was art, soft and sweet while in your face with beauty and pain and joy all at the same time.

She was a beauty amongst beasts. But she still fell in love with him. Everyone called him devil, demon, Satan, or monster. But it was always the worst when they called him nothing. The hallways parted around him in the way marbles scatter from the places they are dropped. People avoided him like the plague, even though last time he checked goat eyes weren’t a symptom of Ebola. Yet everyone still kept his or her distance. This was why he never understood how the most angelic thing he had ever seen had also seen him.
“Look! These ones can make you look like a cat,” Elle chirped. She turned the glow of the laptop screen towards Fitz. Pictures of cat-eye contact lenses from shades of brown to hot pink filled the webpage.

Fitz shifted on the bed, his neck craning away from the thesaurus he had been skimming. His eyes squinted at the bright screen.

“Yeah, so I can look even more freakish? No thanks,” he said, returning his gaze to the pages in his hand.

“Ooh. What about these all black ones? Very spooky. But also kinda hot. Like, I’m here to steal your soul in a super sexy way kinda vibe.”

A laugh burst from Fitz’s lips. “Elle,” he said. “You can stop now.”

Elle gave him a wry smile and placed the laptop at the edge of the bed. She curled up next to him, laying her left leg over his lap and her head on his chest. “I don’t see why you even want any. You know I love your eyes…”

“You know, I’m beginning to worry about you,” said Fitz.
“What?” Elle lifted her head from his chest. “Why?”
“Because you think goat eyes aren’t extremely terrifying. Which they are, just b-t-w.”

A small laugh escaped Elle’s lips. “You’re so dumb.”
“You don’t have some goat fetish do you?”


---

It was 7 in the a. m. and he was not about to deal with losing his shit in biology class.

I’m gonna lose my shit... Or my stomach. Oh god.

It seemed to stare up at him. He glanced at the small blade in his fingers. His hands were shaking so badly that it
looked like he had a severe case of Parkinson’s. He decided to set the knife down before it flew out of his grip and into some poor unsuspecting classmate.  

*It’s a sheep’s eye. Not a goat. Not a goat. Not a—oh shit.*

He could feel his hearty breakfast of Cocoa Puffs and coffee climbing up his throat. He knew about 70% of the room was staring directly at him, waiting for a reaction. He wanted to spite them all with a cool collectedness, but he couldn’t keep it down.

“Ex-excuse me,” he mumbled as he pushed away from the dissecting table and out into the hallway. His lightheadedness caught up with him as soon as he made it out the door, and he had to lean against the wall to keep from passing out.

*Classic Michaels. Goddamn biology with its shitty ass eyes.*

He leaned over and held his head in his hands, trying to will the nausea away.

“You too?” a soft voice spoke next to him.

Fitz turned to see her. She had brown hair that barely brushed her shoulders. Her deep green eyes held the smallest freckles of gold within. She gave him an understanding smile, her head slightly tilted to the right, with dimples framing each corner of her lips.

“I get queasy at the thought of sticking a knife into anything.” She mimicked a small shudder. “Guh-ross.”

Fitz laughed and nodded his head. “Yeah, not really my thing either.”

Her smile grew wider. “I’m Elle.”

“Fitz.”

“Like Fitzgerald?”

“Yeah. Both my parents loved The Great Gatsby and for some reason thought that a last name could work as a first name.”

A bell-like laugh slipped past Elle’s rosy lips.
“At least they didn’t name you after a letter in the alphabet.” She gave him a teasing look that pulled at his chest in a way he didn’t understand. “It was nice to meet you, Fitz. But I got to go. See you next class!” She flashed a quick smile and strode down the hallway and out of sight.

Something about her lingered with him. Whether it was her sweet scent or the comfort of her smile, he wanted it to stay.

---

“Do you know how you got them?” Elle turned over on the grass to face him.

Fitz turned his gaze upward to the night sky. They had driven out to the best lookout he knew of, a large grassy hill at the top of the local graveyard.

“No… But if I ever find my parents I’ll be sure to ask them.” He turned to give her a smile, so she would know this was something he wasn’t sad about any longer. “Growing up where I did, I had a lot of people trying to tell me who or what I was. Some tried calling me the antichrist.” He chuckled. “Even the nuns didn’t take me in, so I just ended up either in the system or on the streets.”

“So they never told you anything about them? Your parents?”

Fitz shook his head. “I don’t think my parents even had the decency to introduce themselves. Maybe I am the antichrist.” Elle laughed. “You’re too nice.”

“I am not nice.”

“You are so nice. Don’t lie.”

The cool nighttime summer air pressed down on his chest.

“Sometimes… Sometimes, I wish I knew.”

Elle looked up at Fitz earnestly. “Knew what?”

“They. Myself. Why I have these goddamn devil eyes.”

Silence hung in the air around them, thickening it.

“Sometimes I don’t ever want to find out.”
What good was an empty chest but a place to collect dust and remind him of what used to be, what used to beat, before? What good was to come of the stones in his stomach? What of the blades in his throat? He never considered there to ever be a Before and After. He had always known to never make a home in a person, but she always left the porch light on. Everything they were, everything she was, had always been a hurricane thunderclap. It was a bright intensity, an electric magnetism, something that burned too hot and too fast for either of them to keep up.

They didn’t quite know where it went wrong, just that one day something went missing. She started writing all his letters in pencil and her lips became constantly cracked. There was something so casual in the way she said “I loved you” that made his stomach twist. Then there were the bad nights, the nights where he could feel fury in his fingertips. Conversation became competition as she curled his open palms into fists and caught his words, just to twist them into things he never meant. He threw fighting words at her like “I love you” and “Are you proud of me?” and felt so goddamn insignificant every time he tried.

She said that she was suffocating for something she wasn’t ready to die for, but how could she suffocate on the air he needed to breathe? She was the storm that left an unforgiveable quake, and week after week it still sent tremors up his spine. She left echoes everywhere. He didn’t think he would ever forget her dewdrop laughter, or the papercut curve of her smile, or the constellation of freckles on her back. He wouldn’t forget any of it, and he hated himself for that.

It was easier for him to kiss strangers than it was to kiss her. Kissing girls at parties was fun and simple, but kissing Elle
felt dangerous. It was like he was standing on the edge of something, figuring out if he was ready to fall.
   He stood there, looking like an idiot.
   “So, I guess I should say goodnight?” Elle stood by a dark gate, her white cotton dress giving a slight hint to the curve in her hips. She slightly swayed in the wind, the nighttime air touching all the parts of her he wanted to.
   Elle tilted her head and raised an eyebrow, that similar smirk tugging at her lips.
   He had to do it.
   Fitz moved towards her; he could feel his heartbeat in his throat. Their faces grew closer and closer as he closed his eyes. Then it happened. A shockwave rolled through his body as her lips closed around his. She tasted like lemon and honey and he could feel the heat from the blush in her cheeks.
   How could someone be so sweet? he thought.
   Elle’s fingers knotted through the back of his hair as her tongue slightly teased his lips, and it drove him mad. He pulled her even tighter to him.

---

“I just don’t see how you could be mad about this,” Elle said.

Fitz squeezed his fists, his nails digging into his palms.
“You were flirting with him right in front of me. How could I not be mad about that?”
“It’s called being friendly, Fitz. You should try it sometime.”
“What are you even talking about?”
“You push everyone away and then blame them for your own isolation. You know, maybe—just maybe—you wouldn’t be so ‘alone’ if you at least tried talking to people.”
“How can I hold up a conversation with someone if they won’t even look at me? How Elle? Please, enlighten me. Because I’d love to know.”

Elle groaned. “God Fitz. Get over yourself. No one cares about your eyes, okay? I love your eyes and I love you. If people turn you away because of something like that, they don’t matter. But if you don’t try, you won’t ever make any friends.”

“I don’t need them. I have you.”

“Fitz…”

“What?”

“I can’t be anyone’s everything.”

---

“Okay, don’t look until I say so. Okay?” Elle floated off into the bathroom as Fitz lay patiently on his bed. They had been dating for five months now, to the day.

“My eyes are closed.”

He could hear the door open and Elle’s light footsteps as they made their way into the room.

“Oh okay…you can open your eyes.”

Fitz sat upright on the bed and saw her standing there. The black lace of her lingerie hugged her petite hourglass frame. Elle did a slight twirl, then stopped and looked at him expectantly.

“So?”

“You look goddamn perfect.” Fitz gazed in awe at his girlfriend, struck with the disbelief that this, that she, was his. “Come here,” he said, a smile growing wide on his face.

Elle pranced over to him, and he wrapped his hands around her waist. He kissed her neck and brought his fingertips to her spine to play with the ribbons that held the thin lace together. He could hear her breath quicken. He dragged his lips lightly up her neck, across her jawline, and up to her ear.
“I just don’t get it.” His voice was weak and he hated it. Elle looked at him from across the table, her thumb nervously rubbing the off-white coffee mug she held in her hands. Her eyes were damp as she looked back down again. She hadn’t drunk any of her mocha, and now it had gone cold.

“I—I don’t either. I didn’t mean for this to happen.” Her small voice grew impossibly smaller. Her lips began to quiver and she bit it to make it stop. The taste of copper dripped into her mouth.

“What do you mean? How could you say that?” Fitz could feel his stomach twist. He looked over at the other tables in the small café, making eye contact with an aging man who had probably been watching the whole time. Fitz’s face grew hot and he quickly broke his gaze to stare back down at his own table. Some couple had scratched their initials into it with a butter knife, with “4 evr” underneath. It made him sick. “Why…”

“What?” Elle looked up at Fitz. Her round watery eyes looked straight into him. She shouldn’t be allowed to do that anymore. How could she be upset right now when she was the one tearing him apart? How could she be so selfish?

“Why?” he asked. His eyes burned into hers. He didn’t even know if he cared for the answer. But he wanted her to hurt as much as he did.

“All we do is fight… And I wanted to be happy. I wanted us to work, more than anything. I mean it. I just—I don’t think it can anymore.” She couldn’t even look at him. Her eyes darted everywhere in the café but never dared to rest on him.

Fitz sat in silence. He felt like he was having an out-of-body experience, like he wasn’t there anymore. Not in the café, not with Elle, not anywhere.

“I still love you. I always will.” Elle gave him a look of weak hope. A second passed and it faded quickly as her
expression grew dim. She looked back down at her cold coffee, her small voice shattering the walls. “But I’m not in love with you anymore.”

He choked on the words as she said them.

---

“I love you so much it makes me sick.” Fritz grabbed Elle in his arms and swayed with her. “Okay? I said it. I love you.”

Elle laughed and turned around to face him, her eyes warm and full of something that looked like home. “I love you too.” Her smile stretched so far across her face Fitz thought it might break.

They stood outside his truck, the doors left open so the soft sounds of the radio could fill the warm summer air around them. They had brought a million blankets that overflowed from the truck bed so they could stargaze all night. But then decided to take a break to dance on the grassy field.

Elle closed her arms around him as they rocked back and forth underneath the starlit sky. Fitz buried his face in her soft hair. They stood like that for a while. They could’ve stood like that for his entire lifetime.

“Forever,” Elle whispered.

“What?” asked Fitz.

Elle looked up at him, her face glowing in the moonlight. He swore that he never saw someone so beautiful, so perfect.

“I’ll love you forever.”
Blossoms © Jenn Doiron
Modern Myth

Ayla Johnson

Good Girl
unfolds slowly
like hyacinth in spring.
Ruffles some feathers, then spreads her
new wings.

Freedom
beckons. Good Girl
heeds the old siren’s call.
Flirts with bartender, smiles like
new doll.

Bad Boy
picks his women
like tulips—for beauty.
Quickly offers to buy something
fruity.

Late night.
Red meat. Red wine.
A pomegranate meal.
Poor Persephone. New Hades—
same deal.
The Mind of an Alcoholic

Payton Gillis

“The cops are coming!” someone yelled. We quickly turned off the music and the lights in my friend Kelsie’s house.

Aggressive shushes and worrisome “oh no’s” of my high school classmates filled every room. Most of the two hundred people crammed into the house huddled or crouched down to the floor. Except for me. I had a different plan than to sit and wait for my Minor in Possession to be handed to me.

The first thing that came to my head was: Run. 

My egocentric, irrational, and completely plastered self thought my future was over.

So, I did just that. I ran, thinking it would make everything better.

I weaved through the people kneeling on the white tile floor and finally made it to the back door that sat partially open and lopsided. I glanced up along its left side to see its upper hinge dismantled… probably by some drunken idiot. It creaked as I quickly pushed it open, just enough for my body to squeeze through. I stumbled into Kelsie’s unfenced backyard, and the door wobbled back to where it had rested prior to my arrival.

I began my journey. My thoughts started to race as fast as I wanted my feet to. This can’t be happening. Where am I going? Where did Kelsie say the pathway in her backyard was? I can’t see it. All I see is blackberry bushes. It’s fine, just go. Go as far as you can away from this stupid house. The only thing I was certain of in that moment: I had to fix the mess I was in.

I sprinted straight into the sticker bushes. I didn’t think about how much it would hurt, or the consequences that might come from my decisions. The thorns and vines tugged on my clothes, trying to reel me back. But I couldn’t turn around; I was
already in too deep. I stumbled in deeper. Further and further away from home. My whole body: numb.

That morning, I woke in a pile of sticker bushes. A hot ray of sun pierced through my dry eyes to the back of my numb skull.

Trapped in my own mess.
This was the closest I’d ever come to understanding my grandfather and father's alcoholism.

---

Harvesting an addiction is easy, you just have to have the capability to run. Away from life. Away from all your problems. An addiction is something that seems so great in the moment, like a little break from reality. Euphoria.

Addiction is what often looks to be the perfect berry on a sticker bush. But once it’s plopped in the mouth of its picker and swirled around his or her tongue, there’s a different outcome than expected. An unripe berry. There’s nothing worse than a berry that was taken too soon. They’re hard to swallow.

My grandfather was that berry picked too soon.
His death, hard to swallow.

I never saw him drunk… or so I thought. I only knew him for his laughter, the crackling chuckle in his voice. The way his black eyes squinted and rosy cheeks lifted as his throat let out a burst of light that could brighten a room. He was always a jokester who never took life too seriously. He would make puns out of anything he could, down to his goodbyes—“See you later alligator.” Every time I saw my grandfather, he left my cheeks sore from smiling. He couldn’t hurt a fly, my clueless self thought as he tickled me to death. Apparently he wasn’t always the man I knew. My grandfather’s alter ego lived on through the stories of my family members.
Two years before my grandfather's death was the first time my grandmother let me have a glimpse into the history of his alcoholism. “It only took him twenty years of dealing with two DUIs, punching holes into walls, and roughly a dozen 911 calls for him to finally call it quits. Just in time too, almost took the kids and left his sorry ass… You see this fake tooth? The bastard punched it out, the kids saw the whole thing. Blood everywhere.”

Sadly, my grandmother, my father, my aunt, and I were all blind. Blind to the lie we so desperately wanted to believe in: his sobriety. The quits we had prayed for a decade ago weren’t the ones we received. Little did we know, the rage was the only thing that stopped. He repressed it into the pit of his soul. The drinking continued. His alcoholism went from scary to silent, which in the end was even harder to grasp. He tried with all his might to hide it from everyone and did a damn good job of it for ten years.

He accepted his decade long token of sobriety just shy of his date of death. April 15th, 2015. My grandfather devoured a half gallon of booze then drowned in a hot tub. The only thing he left behind was an empty plastic bottle of McCormick's vodka, floating over his sunken body—his suicide note.

---

The worst part of the morning after my horrendous and blurred night was waking up to no one but the glaring sun. As my eyes squinted open my stomach contracted. My clenched hand moved closer to my bloated belly… ouch. My stomach tightened more intensely with every passing second. Oh no. I moved my knees up to my chest and turned onto my side. This is bad. My dry mouth began swallowing even though there was nothing to swallow. The uncontrollable clenching of my throat made it hard to breathe. Come on, just do it! I felt the warmth reach from the pit of my stomach up to my chest and to the back of my throat. I could taste it. Here it comes. My eyes squinted and
my body jolted forward as I let out a cloudy white liquid; it splashed onto the dark purple vines of the blackberry bushes, seething down to the layer underneath. Tears ran down the side of my cheek as I dry heaved. *Stop... there’s no more. Stop.* I finally gasped for air. Relieved that my stomach no longer held the toxins I had consumed the night before, I lay there with my eyes closed.

Afraid any movement would set my stomach off again, I remained there and didn’t move an inch. The stench of puke sat in my nose. Its putrid taste festered between the crevices of my teeth.

However, that became very unapparent to me once I noticed I was alone.

---

Like humans, blackberries repopulate. Their seeds carry the DNA in order for their offspring to have the same traits and attributes. As far as I know, my grandfather was the first of my family that successfully planted and grew this atrocious blackberry bush—alcoholism. After my grandmother became unexpectedly pregnant with her second child—my father, Shannon—my grandfather's bush grew like it would die tomorrow. It engulfed anything in its path: dishes, chairs, walls, and hearts. Everything it touched lay shattered in its suffocating vines. My grandfather ended up laying the perfect soil for my father’s seed to sprout. My father, like me, was born with a susceptibility to addiction.

However, he let his get the best of him.

My father didn’t fall far from my grandfather's blackberry bush. His anger, tangents, and screaming were all something I recognized from my grandmother's stories. The way my father fearlessly gulped the lurid poison was, in a sense, the way a sword swallower performed the plunging of a sword down his or her throat. Bravely, and with no hesitation. His Cherokee
Indian hands lifted a full glass of booze up to his lips every night. By the time nine o’clock crawled around, I began reliving my father's life through his adolescent eyes. He was the man he once hated, and I was him: the ten-year-old locking himself in his room, hiding under a blanket curled up in a ball on his twin-sized bed. I’m not sure about him at that age, but all I could possibly think as this familiar monster beat my pink-painted door black was:

*Don’t let my seed fall too close to his.*

---

I slowly lifted my head. My hands and forearms pressed against the sharp blades of the thorns that slowly, yet firmly, pierced my discolored skin. The vines of the blackberry bush spun and intertwined like barbwire. Its blades snapped under me with the adjustment of my weight. I looked down at my legs that were completely covered in blood. It became apparent to me: I made a big mistake. My weak arms gave out from under me and I fell backwards in disbelief. *There’s no fixing these wounds; what’s done is done.*

Even with the alcohol still pulsing through my veins, I hurt everywhere. I lay there for a few moments, looking up at the clear blue sky, and asked: *How am I going to get myself out of this mess?* Every minute that passed I could feel reality setting in. The agonizing pain shot through my body with each minute, increasing in intensity as my liver broke down the alcohol. It finally hit me what I had to do: *Walk. Slowly. Try not to get more tangled in my own mess. I’m five feet away from where the grass meets the bushes.*

I stopped thinking and started doing.
I got myself up.
I made it back to where I was:
where life meets addiction.
I know the consequences of this liquid.
I’ve seen it, I’ve lived it, I acknowledge it,
And I refuse to become a product of it.
I believe there’s more to life...
than ruining your own,
than hurting your loved ones,
than lying,
than dying.

---

What’s ironic about blackberry bushes is even when you tear them down, they never completely go away. You have to be careful when you’re susceptible to growing this invasive species. Always stay alert. It festers where the soil is vulnerable, where you might least expect it. Fight it. Don’t let it lurk where it’s not welcome. Don’t let it consume your path. Don’t let it be forgotten. But most importantly…
don’t run.
My Own

Shannon Leigh

When I find myself in the darkest night
Sunk deep in a landslide pit
When I look up for the star-strewn sky
But can see just the smallest bit

When I cast my eyes back to my feet
And see there my dreams, my hope
When I shut my eyes, suck in deep breath
Yet can’t see how to flip the slope

That’s when, through the stillness
I hear the flutter of approaching wings
And a soft humming murmur begins,
Building till the voice, it sings!

When in my blindness, hopelessness
I think I’m all alone
My guardian angel
Wraps me in such tight embrace
That I feel I have wings of my own
Red, White, and Blue

David Rule

“Never go with a hippie to a second location!” my dad shouted, a vein bulging out of his forehead. I didn’t respond, I just stared blankly at my father. I was sure I’d heard every word but had no idea what he could mean.

“New ovens wash Kristen’s tennis racket!” he shouted louder.

Now that just can’t be right.

I thought a moment and decided I was getting nowhere. I turned to walk to my room. I felt a boulder land on my shoulder. I flinched and looked to find the boulder oddly hand-shaped. My father spun me around and continued shouting. I noted that with each passing second my father’s vein bulged further and further out of his face; soon it would droop down over his right eye.

Instead of turning and walking, this time I maintained eye-contact with my father’s forehead and slowly backed away. I was too afraid to even glance down, so I stared at the pulsing red worm desperately trying to escape his face. After bumping into everything in the kitchen, I made it to the doorway. I could feel my father’s hot breath on my face as he towered over me, screaming at the top of his lungs. “Now! Just! Clean! The! Ketchup! Packets!”

Hold on, that made sense!

“The ketchup?” I asked in a quiet voice.
“Yes! Clean your goddamn ketchup off the table!” my father thundered. The vein exploded. Ketchup went everywhere.

---

I rubbed my eyes and looked down at my shirt: no ketchup. The large kitchen table, however, was covered in ketchup packets that had been opened and tossed aside. My father stood, arms crossed, in the doorway, blocking my path to freedom. His face was bloated and red, as if the vein had flooded back and filled his face.

I barely had the energy to stand, so cleaning was a nightmare. My arms dragged across the table, sweeping the packets into a pile and smearing the stale ketchup across the table. I thought to myself, *I’ll win this bet even if it kills me.* I had been awake for fifty-eight hours. Two more and I would win the hundred dollar bet with my best friend Steven.

After what felt like an hour, my dad got fed up with my progress and pushed me out of the way. He scrubbed the table clean with a towel, grumbling something about my intelligence; I wasn’t really listening.

I ran my fingers through my greasy hair, the ketchup on my hand pushing my short bangs upright. I collapsed into a chair. I could feel the warm sensation of stale ketchup spreading across the bottom of my shorts, but I didn’t have the energy nor the willpower to do anything about it. I shifted my gaze to the clock on the microwave: 9:13 P.M.
So close! Soon I can die a hundred bucks richer.

I stayed in the chair, and for the next fifteen minutes tried to calculate how many more minutes I needed to stay up.

I gave that up and started counting seconds. I got up to forty-seven before forgetting and starting over.

10:58. 10:59. Dear God, please make it go faster.

After what felt like an eternity, the microwave finally showed my new favorite number: 11. Instantly my head dropped, hitting the thick wooden table with a thud.

---

My dreams were filled with ketchup. The thick, sweet liquid inched through my veins. I looked down at my arms and could see the crimson seeping out of my pores.

I looked up from my hands into the mirror suspended in front of my face. I opened my mouth to scream, but more ketchup poured out. It dripped from my eyes and gushed out my ears. My hair fell out, and in its place was a steady stream of ketchup.

I tore my eyes away from my reflection and looked around. I was in a room of pure red: shocker. The thick, salty smell filled my nose. I could feel my feet sinking into the warm floor. I dove straight through a wall and found myself outside on my driveway. Ketchup ran along the street outside my home like a river. It dripped from the trees like small red waterfalls.
Rivulets oozed upwards to form grass in the yards. I slowly stood and looked around.

I heard a noise, familiar yet distorted. A quick yelp came from my left. I turned to see my neighbor’s dog—at least I thought it was. It was the same size and shape but made entirely out of hot sauce.

The red-orange form charged at me. Its large body dripped, and as it came closer, more and more fell away. It crashed into my leg, splattering the sticky liquid over my shoes.

This is getting ridiculous.

“So you fell asleep, I knew you couldn’t do it!” said a voice behind me. I spun around. My friend Steven was standing there, perfectly normal.

“I made it the sixty hours! You owe me a hundred bucks!” I shouted.

“Oh please, don’t be so ridiculous. You barely made it twenty-four hours, let alone more than double that.”

My jaw hit the soft, wet concrete. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I was positive I’d made it the full sixty hours, and now I wasn’t going to get my reward? Unacceptable. The hot, salty smell of ketchup filled my nose, up to my brain, and I did the only thing I could think of. My right arm swung out and hit Steven right in the jaw. His entire head exploded, spraying more red liquid all over. His body fell sideways and dissolved into the ketchup driveway.
I ignored what was once my friend, and looked around. The only thing I saw that wasn’t red was the moon. Brighter than the sun, the moon stared down at me. Its beautiful, pure white face shone down. I stared as long as I could. It came closer and closer, larger and larger, until it blocked out the red sky and was the only thing I could see. I felt it slam into my eyes, filling my head with bright white mayonnaise.

---

I pried my eyes open and looked around. My vision was blue. I could tell I was in my room, but everything was an unnatural cyan and distorted. My ceiling fan swam and wiggled. My ceiling shimmered like water. I sat up, and the icepack fell off my face.

I dragged myself out of bed and threw on my favorite navy jacket and jeans. I’d find Steven and get my goddamn hundred dollars.
Editor’s Note: Acknowledging Loss

Julia Guzman

Like many in our community, I’ve repeatedly found it difficult to talk about this subject. I know the topic of gun violence has been widely discussed and, with the string of events that have come to pass, is emotionally consuming. Despite the controversy surrounding gun control, our editors felt we still needed to address it in this year’s journal due to how heavily it has impacted our community.

Everyone seeks solace and understanding, but people find closure in different ways. Some people need to argue about what we could have done, and are doing, to prevent or respond to these situations. Some people need to feel safe and secure. Some struggle with how to respond, many feeling disconnected from distant events, yet obligated to take action.

Writing, although small and seemingly insignificant, is a way for us to take action, to speak, letting everyone around us know that we are not oblivious to the loss, confusion, and tragedy that has scorched our world. We openly acknowledge that we too have been affected; we too have needed a warm blanket, sleepless nights, and a friend’s backbone to come to terms with what we now know.

To all those who were lost in school shootings, we value your lives and all that you were, and we mourn what you could have been.

This next piece may not give closure to all who read it, but perhaps it could remind our community of its part. We are spectators, behind the fourth wall. While we cannot directly change past events, we can act with our newest understanding of our world reflected in our every step.
The Gunman

Angelyka Cava

Knowing it will be my last day, I stroll into school thirty-seven minutes late with a smile on my face. I am not graduating, but I feel more accomplished than the people who will soon wear their raven-colored robes and matching tasseled hats, parading around the auditorium to receive their hard-earned diplomas along with a handshake from the principal. Today I have plans to do just what the administration is too chicken and lazy to do: hand out punishments that will actually make my schoolmates pay for their crimes.

My backpack is five pounds heavier than usual, causing my back to hunch over a bit. Normally, I can’t afford to lose a couple of centimeters, but today it doesn’t matter. Once I stand in front of them with my gun, I’ll tower over everybody. I imagine the look on Jason’s face. He’s in the prime of his life right now, a popular high school senior. Basketball MVP with tons of worshippers and a smoking hot girlfriend. He doesn’t want to die. I decide to shoot him in the legs first, making him think he has a chance of recovery, before I come back to his immobilized body and check his name off my list of targets.

Sucker.

Gently, I set my backpack on the floor and take a seat in the back row of Ms. Brown’s pre-calculus class, in the middle of yet another one of her monotonous, never-ending lectures. She’ll be the first one to go.

~~~

Proofs are an unfortunate mix of boring and complicated, and topics like this make Clara wonder why she decided to become a math teacher in the first place. It really isn’t worth it, especially when you’re stuck at Wintergreen High School.

https://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol26/iss1/56
district doesn’t pay you nearly enough and the students don’t give a shit.

Except one, Caleb Taylor, who aces every quiz and submits every homework assignment. Well, except for the one due last week. He never turned in his practice problems from the end of chapter 10. For some reason, Clara couldn’t bring herself to mark it as a zero in the gradebook. It would taint his perfect grade. The funny thing was you wouldn’t expect much from him. He always sat in the back of the class, jacket hood covering his earphones. Sometimes she could hear the striking thuds of heavy bass and speedy drumming whenever she paused her lesson to take a breath or clear her throat.

Clara’s star pupil isn’t paying attention. He never does. So why does she bother droning on?

There are only five minutes left. She begins discussing double identities, but watching paint dry would pass the time faster.

At least until she releases a shriek like an alarm, a high-pitched warning that causes everyone in the class to jump out of their seats.

~~~

*What a dumbass.*

Because Ms. Brown captures all my attention, I let most of the class escape. But whatever, she was my number one target anyway. I hate everything about her, from her stupid Cheeto-colored hair to the “I Care About You” sticker plastered onto her desk. If that were so, she wouldn’t have stood there like an idiot as she witnessed Jason jabbing his elbow into my side, creating an impact that slammed me against the wall a couple of days ago. She wouldn’t have run off before he ripped my backpack from my weak clutch and emptied its contents all over the floor.

The blood seeping from her chest and dyeing her cream sweater crimson is a hypnotizing sight that I could stare at for
hours, but hearing the screams from the hallway reminds me to get going. My next target is in the classroom next door, and I have to catch her before she runs off to her boyfriend like she always does.

~~~

Tilting her chin at an angle adjacent to her craned neck, Jessica stared at the Millennium Force. Over three hundred feet tall with uncovered carts traveling at almost a hundred miles an hour—there was no way in hell she would ride that damn contraption.

“Please baby, do it for me,” Jason whispered, folding his arms around his girlfriend. As usual, her shiny hair glistened underneath the sun and lent a fruity scent to the passing breeze.

“No way,” she replied, pushing him off her. He knew well that she was afraid of heights. She couldn’t even walk next to the railing on the second story of the mall.

“You’ll be fine, hon. Trust me,” he said, wrapping her dainty wrist with a gold charm bracelet the color of her hair, a gift enough to convince her to go on the ride, as if it physically made her braver. She should have known that the jewelry wouldn’t stop the ride itself from being way too fast, nor would it prevent her from barfing up her half-digested french fries right after, but that didn’t stop her from regarding it as a good-luck charm.

Whatever sort of bravery her bracelet gave her in the past is gone now. Over time, its embrace around her arm became cold and unfamiliar, distant like her boyfriend. He sure chose a great day to skip school. Underneath her desk, she can barely breathe. It feels as though any noise will call the terrorist to her location. There’s no way she’ll survive today. Every kid at school either envies or loathes her. Fog clouds her mind, preventing her from deciding how she wants to spend what might be her last moments on Earth. But trapped in a pitch-black classroom, she doesn’t have much to do but wait.
When you’ve memorized your targets’ class schedules, all lockdowns do is make it easier for you to find them. As soon as I bust into Spanish II, I turn on the lights and start scanning the room for the curly golden hair that could only belong to Jessica.

I want to stare at the faces looking up at me that now know their lives are in my hands. Maybe I looked like that whenever Jason put his hands on me, ready to strike. It’s interesting how simply holding a gun can change everything, giving me absolute power over the hundreds of people in this building. But I don’t have much time; I still have two more targets.

“WHERE’S JESSICA?” I roar at a volume that I didn’t think possible for me to generate. When I say those words I notice a faint cry toward the front of the classroom, and find my target’s normally comely face distorted into a monstrous shape, tears streaming down her face. I can’t believe this ugly, pathetic creature used to star in my dreams. Let’s see her turn me down now.

Jessica never would have expected quiet little Caleb Taylor to be the sole person responsible for this lockdown. How could he do something like this? He was a nice kid, harmless even. Before today, the only offensive thing he ever did was remind their teachers of homework assignments. And why is he targeting her? She hasn’t ever said two words to the guy.

“So, the winter dance is coming up. I recall mustering up the courage to ask you to this gathering last year, but you not-so-politely declined. You’d go out with any guy, and you weren’t even dating Jason back then, so what didn’t you like about me?”

Oh. So they had spoken before.

Caleb grips the trigger tighter. “One more chance. Would you like to go to the winter dance with me?”
No way in hell. A night out with a criminal seems like a fate even worse than death. Yet Jessica whispers, “Yes.” She’d say anything to get out of this position, cramped legs and a pounding heart to match her throbbing headache.

“How pathetic.” He squeezes the trigger.

With her brain flowing in a sea of blood out of the newly-created hole in her head, Jessica looks better than ever. The serene expression on her face makes her look like she will awaken from a pleasant dream in a few hours. In stark contrast, the rest of the people in the room stare at me with eyes the size of car tires. They’re lucky I don’t want to shoot them. Too lucky.

But then I spot a pale-skinned girl with hair the shade of the starless night sky a couple of desks away from where Jessica lies, without any emotion on her face. I head for her next. “You’re not scared of me?”

She doesn’t say anything in response, and I search her face for the slightest hint of fear. No bulging eyes, no nostrils flaring, no downturned lips. Her lack of concern irritates me, and I point the gun a few feet away her head. “You’re completely fine if you die today?” I say to my new target, not giving her any time to respond before I send the bullet flying into her skull, blasting her blood all over the sides of the desk under which she sits.

As soon as I see her take her last breath, I rush to my next destination, where two of my targets should be.

Three days ago, I began the list of people at my school who absolutely deserved to die during a very boring chemistry lesson. The only names that came to mind were Ms. Brown, Jason, and Jessica, but I nearly filled the entire sheet of torn-out college-ruled notebook paper trying to figure out the most efficient route to take out all three of them. Unfortunately, I
didn’t think of the possibility of anyone seeing this scheme and left my work unblocked.

“What’s that?” asked Andy, the guy forced to sit next to me. We exchanged homework answers sometimes, but other than that we never really talked.

I passed it over to him, and I don’t think he took it seriously, adding the name “Kevin Kaiser.” I didn’t really know anything about Kevin except for the fact that he was a senior still stuck in a lot of sophomore-level classes. “I’ll shoot him for you if you don’t tell anyone about this,” I said.

“Sure, whatever.”

~~~

After a bit of research, I learned that Kevin is in the same first period class as Jason, world history, just a few doors down from Jessica’s Spanish class. This should be easy.

Running down the hall I’m faster than I’ve ever been, not needing to avoid Jason’s legs aiming to trip me. It only takes me about a minute to break into Room 208, where all its inhabitants are perched on the far side of the room opposite from the window, as if that would save them. Kevin is the second guy in line I see, and I aim for his chest. The mess spills onto the people on both his sides, but they’re too scared to be disgusted.

I scan the classroom a few times, but Jason is nowhere to be found. I could recognize his signature scent of overbearing Axe cologne and ridiculously deep butt chin from a mile away, but neither are present in this room. Is he seriously absent on the day that karma is finally going to bite him in the ass?

There’s no turning back now. I can’t find where he lives and go to his house in this short amount of time, especially when the cops will be on my tail any minute. If I’m going out, I have to go out in a bang.

I cock the gun and prepare to wipe this entire room of any sign of life besides my own.
Whether your eyes are open or closed, it doesn’t matter. The room is so dark that you can’t tell the difference. With the warmth of the bodies of your peers nestled in the corner of the classroom as far from the portals separating you from the rest of the school as possible, you almost feel safe. Comfortable, even. But the announcement you heard a few minutes ago about an unexpected lockdown shortly after loud screams and the sound of a gunshot prevents you from feeling any sort of ease. Over time, the number of the gunshots increases, and you have an instinct that you’re next.

Maybe you’re praying. Maybe you’re wondering if you were nice to your mom before you left for school today. Maybe you’re imagining what it feels like to die. But it doesn’t matter whatever you’re thinking. When the large glass window shatters into hundreds of pieces and the light of the hallway enters, you know that you’re seconds away from your imminent death.

The gunman is someone you’ve seen around school but never really paid much attention to. You try to memorize his face, but when the gun is in front of you that’s the only thing you can see. Until everything goes black and all you can feel is a sharp blast of pain, then nothing at all.
The Healing Tree

Emma LaGoy

Steady, steady.

She focused all her energy on her hand that quivered as she placed the glass in her kitchen cupboard. Shaky breaths escaped her lips as she lowered her hand. Her mind had been so crowded this morning she thought doing mundane tasks would put the constant record player of frantic thoughts on hold for a moment. And it did, but as she looked at her hand that was still racked with tremors, her focus shifted.

She traced her shaking back to her veins that were not circulating blood correctly. Her veins led her back to the broken muscle nestled inside her ribcage. She lost all vision of the white kitchen around her and every sense was overcome with the aching in her chest. You see, she had a small fracture that split even deeper after months of negligence. That small crack had started to fester and ache.

The sharp outlines of the white kitchen faded into view when the cracking of ceramic bounced off the walls.

Shit, shit.

She fell to her knees, her favorite black-and-white coffee mug now surrounding her, shards scattered on the tile floor. Panicked, she swooped twenty shards together in a pile and cried out as one edge punctured the skin on her middle finger. The trembling stopped. Warm crimson dribbled down her knuckle.
if it was the only blood left in her body, she began to deflate. First, her veins collapsed. Then every organ felt as if it were a popped balloon.

She couldn’t feel a thing.

Before her muscles had the chance to disintegrate, she grabbed her keys and walked out the door.

---------

The skin around her knuckles was stretched thin and translucent as she kept a firm grip on the steering wheel. She didn’t have to think about the turns she was making; her hands led her to the concrete graveyard. She needed to see it.

*Just once more, once more.*

As the rubber tires drove through the parking lot, she ran over the white lines that cut out perfect rectangular spots. She stopped in one next to the shopping carts. With one turn of the key her engine stopped and she took in the thick silence of her old car.

Her eyes shut for just a second. The night sky was a dark blue when she opened them. No stars were able to shine through as black clouds cast a blanket over them. Next to her, her husband’s frustration grew hotter. He always hated stopping by the grocery store late at night. The black mirror in her hand lit up and shook her arm. The words would not stop flooding into her phone. They were always relentless, taunting her to read them one by one as the screen smiled back.
He shook his head. “You don’t have to do that.”

She couldn’t help it though as her thumb pressed down on the silver ring. The cracks in her phone ran above each word, but no matter how skewed the glass was, the screen still displayed the letters perfectly. As she took in each syllable, her blood began to curdle. The whole earth around her stood still, and the mush inside of her head was the only thing still spinning.

Hot tears ran down her face, and each gulp of air scratched her throat. He reached out his hand and placed it on her back. But even the warm circular motions his hand made could never begin to repair the gashes that soaked into her cotton shirt. He could never understand the strong roots of friendships that were strengthened with years of laughter and hardships. He would never feel her surrender as her roots began to wither that night with the words that were now etched into her trunk:

*Selfish, shitty.*

Those words sent cascading cracks through her whole being that branched out to reach even the tips of her toes. And it was those words that had opened up the sore upon her broken muscle. It was those words that put her key into the ignition once again, and she drove towards the grassy edges of the graveyard.

-------------

Spring must’ve been near, as her skin did not recoil against the wind like she had grown used to. Instead, she was greeted with the sweet warmth of sun cutting through the chilled air. She
couldn’t recall how long it took her to drive to this open field from the graveyard, but judging by how far the sun had begun to lower into the horizon, this day was coming to an end.

One tree stood in the middle of the grassy plain, and now, in front of the yellow sky, it looked fake, like paper. This was the kind of place that teenagers would run off to when the stars illuminated the dirt beneath its branches. A great place to make out, someone said to her once.

The branches were long and winding, and their smallest leaves tickled the ground. Stepping under the tree cover was like entering a house, its greenery thick like drywall. She fell to her knees and the budding clovers beneath her felt like a soft picnic blanket. The wind quieted for a moment, and the tree bent down its ear to listen to what the girl had to say.

“This earth doesn’t feel like home anymore,” and with her confession, a tear slipped onto her cheek, dried and began to itch.

The wind picked up, and the long branches stretched out to embrace her like a mother holding a newborn. As soon as the leaves rested upon her shoulders, the tree could feel it all. It saw right down to the roots this girl had planted in the warm loose soil. There were dark masses of air beneath the ground where stronger roots had rotted away. The tree wept as it felt the girl’s pain and was overcome with her darkness.
The tree sighed and stretched its branches further, searching through every part of her and gasped. *Hope is not all lost,* the wind sang into the girl's ears.

Her hair whipped around her face, blinding her sight. Sepia-toned memories flashed before her.

The pride of her parents as they watched their daughter begin a new life.

Friendship that had come and gone, and the love it had left behind.

A boy who had so eagerly, without hesitation, promised her everything.

The losses too were shown to her again. But she could see the stronger fiber that grew back when her heart was broken.

Her hair fell down around her, and she rested on the plush ground, breathless. The tree straightened up, its trunk solid once again. Tears fell in a steady stream down her face and soaked into the dirt beneath her. She was not sad, she was overcome with the life and the truth that surrounded her.

From the cracks that had been formed that night, new flowers began to bloom from her chest. They lifted their leaves up towards the sky. They struggled to find warmth, as the shade from the tree above was thick and stretched far across the grassy field. But through the darkness, her leaves grew wide and could drink in the patches of light.
The Outcast of Planet No-Where

Aynsh Kumar

Discarded into the overwhelming shadow of poverty, he sat homeless, hopeless, helpless. The soiled clothes hung limply on his withered body, barely shielding him from the elements. The vitality of life drained from his deeply weathered face, his cheekbones poking hazardously through his thin skin. Years of hardship made themselves known by the scars disfiguring his body and the wrinkles carved into his cheeks. Plump bags stood out beneath his diluted eyes, accentuating the heavily-lidded gaze that slowly flickered from vacant face to face. His knees folded loosely underneath his resting elbows as an unfettered finality hung crushingly on his emaciated shoulders. His knuckles were swollen with age, red from the bitter chill, his palms slick with grime, his fingers gnarled and stiff. The bones of his cupped hand seemed frozen in the position of desperation, need, yet extended in hope.

The jingle of change echoed in the frigid air as he waited with the Styrofoam cup for the next passerby to take notice. However, not one passerby even glanced his way.
Not the fashionable soccer mom, with immaculately manicured, shell-pink nails, as she ushered her bundled children to their highly acclaimed private school. Not the recently promoted chief executive in his Armani pinstripe suit and tie, frantically rubbing at the fresh coffee stain blemishing his lapel. Not the model-like blonde bombshell in her Versace trench coat and Christian Louboutin heels, who happened to walk right past the mangled figure. Her perfume lingered in the air as the click click click of her stilettos on the cold hard pavement faded down the street.

All the while he remained, waiting, his hand outstretched and his heartbeat growing fainter. The only treasure, his purpose, lay next to him. The ukulele, an instrument that once was played vivaciously by him, lay beside his gnarled fingers. The years of weathering masked the youthfulness that once existed. Before the war, he’d belonged to a band that traveled around the states, and he was known for his laughter and charm. The light thrummmm of his ukulele echoed in his ears during his brief flashes of nostalgia.

*Bluegrass. Bluegrass. Bluegrass…*
He remembered with all his strength, reached back and managed to create the light *thrummmmm* that took him back into a mirage that was his reality in the past.

The change lay dead silent in the frigid air, glowing in the sunlight as he waited with the Styrofoam cup for the next passerby to take notice. Now he was part of the ostracized on a desolate planet, a planet of no-where, and no hope.

Suddenly, the mangled mass stopped staring. He closed his eyes and for the moment, seemed at peace. No one took notice.

Cast away under the shadow of poverty and society’s selfishness, his wasted carcass lay. His gaunt legs no longer folded neatly beneath his body, but splayed chaotically across the sidewalk, impeding the flow of traffic.
Free Shadow

_Alena Willbur_

My shadow  
  runs in dreams  
galaxies  
  constellations  
  swirling and bathing  
in night and sun  
never wrinkling  
never  
  growing up  
breaking through skies

brimming heart  
  of untainted laughter  
  like the boy  
who flew to  
  the second star  
  to the right  
she went  
  showered in pixie dust  
she went  
  free
Pop!

Josey N. Meats

“Wait for someone you love.” That’s what Mother always said. Well, it happened and now we’re on his front porch smoking a cigarette. My first time and I don’t even know this guy’s name. Two first times. My first time smoking, as well. I know… a cigarette. Eh. Taste good? No. Feel good? Yeah.

He comes up behind me, presses his body against mine, and runs his clammy fingers up my body. I squirm.

— Well, was it good for you?
God, he’s a sicko!
— Whatever.

I rip away from him and go inside, through his room into the only bathroom. I sit down to pee. The dried urine on the seat is like crusty Top Ramen powder. The state of the bathroom doesn’t reflect his taste. It’s piss-ridden, and yet he has Ralph Lauren towels and Gucci cologne. I look at myself in the toothpaste-splattered mirror. I look…used.

I realize I am wearing a faded orange sweatshirt my dad gave me. And I can see him. I see him cheering for me at my soccer games, taking me to the father-daughter dance. Tears run from my eyes, stealing my mascara, leaving a charcoal trail.

My phone buzzes—the Lyft’s here. I stand up, throw up, and walk out. As I leave, I notice a picture of a woman propped up on his nightstand. She’s smiling—powdery pink lipstick, hay-colored hair with electric purple ends. Short skirt, long jacket. She’s beautiful.

He’s still on the porch and we don’t speak. I get in the Prius and it speeds off into the Portland night.
She wasn’t Nirvana. None of them are Nirvana. These are hookups, not lovemaking like Mommy and Daddy. A sigh of guilt slips through my lips as the girl’s Lyft drives away.

I go inside. In the doorway my nose runs—I wipe it. I can smell the sweet, treated tobacco on my fingertips; they’re orange from the shit. I should quit.

I wander into the bedroom and start ripping off the sheets, then douse the room in my favorite scent: Guilty by Gucci.

My eyes catch the reflection of her picture. I pick it up, admiring her. All her Beauty. Tears swell and blur my vision—Oh, Nirvana.

A thought ping-pongs through my brain and drains out of my mouth with a chuckle:

— Well, did you enjoy the show?

I stand in silence.

My phone buzzes with some notification about a tweet sent out by the president. It’s 3:27 a.m. It’s only twelve on the West Coast. She’s awake.

At 12:27 a.m. the phone buzzes across the glass nightstand, but Nirvana is fast asleep. She wakes up at 6:15 a.m. She showers, drinks dark drip coffee, eats some cinnamon spice oatmeal, and does her hair. Curls today—let it be natural. She throws on her newest white and orange pantsuit. She then adds the finishing touches: a Tiffany watch her father gave her for graduating from Yale law. And two spritzes of Guilty on her neck. Now, she looks at her phone. She reads the three words he has sent her.

She replies with a mere acknowledgement. It reads: Read: 7:21
My Dead Crushes

Gretchen Anderson

When I write I think of them most
A short story, a letter, my analysis paper…they are here
Can their silky, red inspiration span the years?
When I think of them do they hear?

I imagine his voice a rum-soaked bread
And hers a hot tear caught in a palm
I think they love me and yet they haunt me
They tickle my ear and whisper “not enough”

My career, my family, my life are dwarfed
As I worship them at their tea-stained paper shrine
My cruel master and mistress know the language of love
Alas, they speak no such words to me

Perhaps one day we’ll have the love of friends
We can talk and drink in the gold café on the golden street
Where all are equal and love abounds
Until that day I will labor in vain
Until that blessed, releasing day, I will bear the pain in my heart
and my brain
To My Sisters and Brothers  
*Josey N. Meats*

*Slavery has never been abolished from America's way of thinking.*  
~ Nina Simone

Sisters and Brothers,  
Yes, you, my Black sisters and brothers.  
I want to apologize.  
I want to be able to apologize,  
But “I’m sorry” isn’t enough when an entire history  
is under the ownership of other human beings.

It isn’t enough when  
“I can’t breathe”  
Echoes across the “land of the free.”  
It isn’t enough when  
The failure to use a turn signal  
Ends in a death sentence.

It will never be enough when  
Only a few of these modern lynchings are broadcast,  
And they happen every day.  
It will never be enough when  
white families just eat their dinners and watch the news:
“Aw, that’s awful,” they say—their response to this cultural genocide.

Sisters and Brothers,
We whites will never be as strong and proud as you.
In fact, we never should be.
Sisters and Brothers,
We whites should stand beside you, shoulder to shoulder
In a nation that is built upon a foundation of Black bodies —

Unfortunately, the same hands that wrote “all men are created equal” were wet with the blood of slaves. It seems “the American way” is only two things: Hate and Greed.

yours,

a white child of God
Love

_Alena Willbur_

He’s the stars above—
sugar rain
burning death’s black
cloak of night
sweet bursts
of cosmic candy—
Light.

_Primcess_ © Dominique Donald
Labels

Randilee Sequeira Larson

On Sundays I wear a rosary and worship Satan
Draped in horns and halos alike
I sit in a state of superposition
Neither Satanist, nor Christian
My pagan phrasing lures heresies to my tongue

Such as:
For every 2 there is 1,
In every moon there shines a sun
Black and white, female and male
These weaved tales bind our minds
And fail to capture all that we are.

Your brain is grey
Make sure you see the shades

Because somewhere between red and blue
Lies a lavender hue
More useful than any other shade

We’ve forgotten how we were made—shrouded
and wordless
without purpose
or label
worthless yet loved
untouched by thought
and bathed in emotion.

Why do we insist on this boasting?
On this loathing?
On these self-contained slogans? 
We’re all token
And by our own decision.

I don’t understand
Why we preach individualism in lieu of friendship
Why we celebrate the expression
But neglect the collective.

There has to be a
Middle ground to all of this.
A way to bridge the shit
and come closer through it.

I don’t have the answers,
but I’m hopeful

That this boastful group of individuals may come together closer
Not as fathers or mothers,
not as daughters or sons
But as one.

Without labels.
Let us turn the tables.
Let us rebel with love.
Let our civil protest be found in joined hands
and gentle intolerance.

Let us take back this land,
Let us take back ourselves
Let us reclaim all that we are—
And let us do it despite who we are.
CONTRIBUTORS

Gretchen Anderson graduated from Concordia in December 2017, with a BA in English. She lives on the Oregon coast, and loves to read and write poetry in her free time.

Faith Bowman is a junior psychology major and student athlete on the volleyball team. Other than hoping to own two pugs when she grows up, her aspirations include wanting to become a full-time sloth, napping an average of fifteen to eighteen hours a day. When she awakens from her slumber, she spends her time hanging out with the people closest to her, as well as busting out shows on Netflix left and right.

Angelyka Cava is a second-year accounting student with a minor in communication studies. Originally from Battle Ground, Washington, she chose to attend Concordia due to its proximity and similarity to the high school she attended, CAM Academy. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music and writing. Currently, Angelyka is working on two full-length novels, one of which is an extended version of “The Gunman,” and hopes to publish both in the future.

Darian Rose Dolan rehabilitated a ladybug once.

Born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona, Dominique Donald came to Concordia on a whim and has not looked back. She grew up in a diverse home of many colours and shades. Being independent is what she desires, coming from a single parent home. She grows and stands at a place where equality is a necessity. Womanhood was and is her home. She is a proud first generation woman and fights for equality among all. Thank you!
Jennifer Kamalei Doiron is a sophomore at Concordia pursuing a nursing degree. Jenn was born and raised on the island of Kauai, where she developed an interest in photography at a young age. She loves hanging out with all her friends, watching movies, and listening to music.

Sarah Foster is the youngest of four children and has three nieces and two nephews. Literature and writing has always interested her. She started her education at Concordia as an English major and fell in love with history and theology. Now, she is an interdisciplinary studies major with a double emphasis in theology and English and a minor in history. She hopes to go into service and ministry when she graduates this spring.

Payton Gillis is a student at Concordia aspiring to become a nurse. She enjoys Oregon, her home state. If she isn’t nose deep in a textbook, you can likely find her by a beach, lake, river, waterfall, or wherever there are dogs. Although she has a mild obsession with large bodies of water and pups, she finds time to volunteer and give back to the community through Friends of Trees.

Jalyn Gilmore is a senior English major. She is currently working on her senior thesis, a memoir titled Warm Hands & Drinking-Chocolate.

A self-proclaimed hermit, Julia C. Guzman spends a fair amount of time reading alone in her room. She’s working toward a bachelor’s in English, but will likely spend many years wrapped up in the family business. Despite this, she hopes to someday write something unforgettable. She lives split between the angels of the Golden State and the river ports of the Genus Castor Architects.
Ayla Johnson met a Wanderer while exploring her wilderness. They told her an awakening is coming. “The sun is its leader and the dawn is its army.”

Tijera Johnson is a sophomore majoring in secondary education. She likes to think about the world and different scenarios. Sometimes she writes words to the scenes in her head.

Kathryn Jones is a Concordia community member.

Henry Knutsen is a sophomore English major from Las Cruces, New Mexico. He hopes to help families affected by incarceration find early learning and family support programs. When not writing, some of the things he enjoys are road trips, rock climbing, hiking and discovering new music.

Ayush Kumar is a senior in the Honors Program, with a major in biology and minors in psychology and Spanish. As a college student, he enjoys science writing and research. After immigrating to the United States from the Fiji Islands, he had to practice and learn English quickly. English is his third language, so he hopes to one day improve his writing through practice and diligence.

Emma LaGoy grew up in Vancouver, Washington and has always loved the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. She is now living in Portland with her husband, Austin, and their cat, while she finishes school. Emma is studying elementary education and is passionate about working with kids. When she graduates, she hopes to move back to Washington and give back to her hometown by teaching in the same school district that she attended.
Randilee Sequeira Larson is a 2017 graduate of Concordia’s English program. Her senior thesis, a memoir titled Savages, won the honor of Thesis with Distinction.

Shannon Leigh hails from a land with sunshine and celebrities in abundance, but the rain drew her upward and now she calls the Northwest her home. She studies the healing arts, but when her soul yearns for its own brand of medicine, she dabbles in word crafting and rhythm forging. She delights in chocolate, night skies, and dogs. Last, but in no way least, she loves her mama, sis, bump, bean, dubs and cuppa!

Andrew Marriott is a Concordia English major and an athlete on the baseball team.

Josey N. Meats is a junior studying English. He is the president of Concordia’s chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. On some nights, when lacking inspiration, he rolls out of bed and howls at the moon.

Stephen Newhall is a senior at Concordia majoring in English and minoring in Psychology. He enjoys writing, reading, and playing video games. He plans to use his writing skills in a medical or business environment for purposes such as grant writing, but his dream is to write and publish his own books, fiction and nonfiction. Stephen is looking forward to pursuing his master's degree and embarking on new adventures in his educational and professional careers.
Liana Parks is in her fourth year out of five at Concordia, having added on an extra year in her switch from nursing to English. She is Portland born and bred and always carries her umbrella. Her desire is to become an English teacher in Japan. For now, she enjoys reading, watching TV, and hanging out with friends. The most important things to her are her family and doing everything for the glory of God.

Sydney Rose Quintana is a psychology major who loves to dabble in English literature. Originally from Los Angeles, social justice and sunshine run through her veins, but a love for sweaters and good coffee has brought her to the City of Roses. You can find her either mid-rant about feminist literature or stopped to pet any dog in her path.

Kristin Rothell, a name never spelled correctly by Starbucks employees (like…ever), belongs to a girl who loves to lose herself in the pages of a good book and only comes up for air when the last page is turned and the real world beckons.

David Rule is twenty years old and a sophomore. He has been writing since middle school, but never very well. In high school and college, he took every writing class he could, and it has finally started to pay off. His short story, "Red, White, and Blue," was the product of very little sleep and close proximity to some spilled ketchup. He hopes you enjoy this very strange story.

Rik Spruitenburp is an English major at Concordia. He lives in Aloha with his wife, Sabrina, and two cats, Snazzy and Bunni. He’s quite approachable. Just say “Hi” or email him at rik@ladybast.com.
Elizabeth G. Stottlemyre is a freshman in the Honors Program, about 5’9” tall. In her spare time, she throws javelin, eats cookie-dough ice cream, and goes on adventures with her two best friends. She has no artistic ability but she is very athletic, which makes up for her pathetic attempts at stick figure drawings. She collects dictionaries and old records.

David Swan graduated from Concordia with a degree in English in 2017.

Alena Willbur is from San Diego, California and has been writing since she was a young girl. She is currently an English major at Concordia, and continues to work on her writing projects in hopes of attending graduate school and becoming a published author. When she’s not writing, she loves to be at the beach—in the ocean and sun.