

The Muse
LITERARY & VISUAL ARTS MAGAZINE



Stanly Community College
2024 Edition





Lorri Barrier
English Instructor & Humanities Department Head

The end of an academic year is a good time for reflection. As we look back on the year and all that was accomplished, and forward toward what yet needs to be done, there is the quiet pause of summer offering an interlude. As Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, "Live in the sunshine, swim in the sea, drink the wild air." Even for those working or attending classes during the summer, the pace somehow seems a little slower and less hectic. The 2024 edition of *The Muse* invites you to take time to enjoy the work of this year's featured authors and artists. I thank everyone who contributed time and energy to make this publication possible. May *The Muse* bring you joy!



Josh Gooch
Program Head, Advertising & Graphic Design

Every year *The Muse* allows us to pause and acknowledge the diverse creative talents within our community at Stanly Community College. Each edition of *The Muse* serves as a testament to the wealth of talent present here, contributing significantly to the cultural fabric of our college. It is my pleasure to be able to serve in the capacity in which I gather the visual components of *The Muse* from both the classroom and the community with our annual art show. I hope that your time browsing through this year's edition is as enjoyable as the time spent crafting the content within.

Grammar and punctuation in the featured written works respect the intent of the authors represented. The opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily the opinions of Stanly Community College (SCC). All poetry and artwork is assumed to be the original and free expression of the artists represented. The Muse is a literary and art magazine published once a year by Stanly Community College's English, Advertising & Graphic Arts, and the Stanly Early College (SEC) Departments. No part of this material content shall be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, or recording without the written permission of the College. Any comments or questions about our publication should be directed to Nicole Williams, Executive Director of Marketing and Outreach, at 704-991-0281 or nwilliams8263@stanly.edu.

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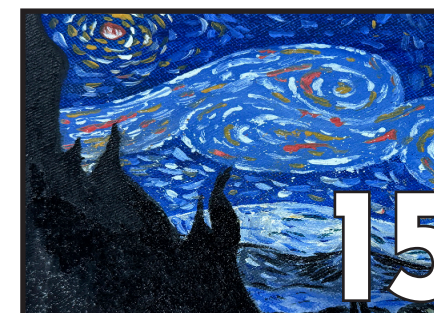
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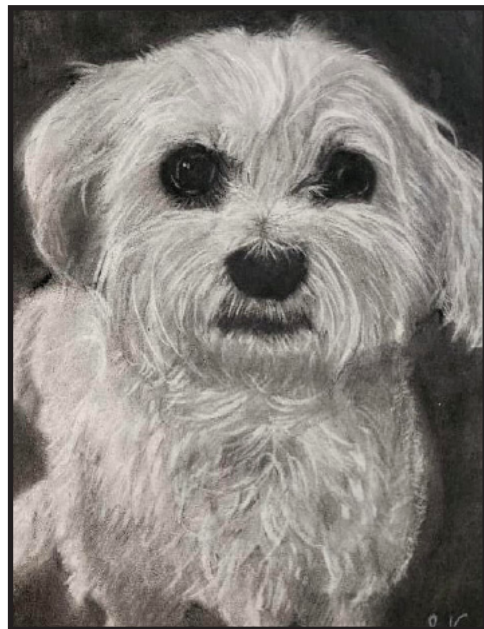
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As It Should

Bethany Westbrook

Amores,
Every step and fall is unfolding as it should;
Every exclamation and whisper is unfolding as it should;
Every soulmate and acquaintance is unfolding as it should;
Every trust and betrayal is unfolding as it should;
Every laugh and tear is unfolding as it should;
Every book and problem is unfolding as it should;
Every conversation and silence is unfolding as it should;
Every flight and stay is unfolding as it should;
Every tree and cloud is unfolding as it should;
Every smile and bruise is unfolding as it should;
Every peace and fight is unfolding as it should;
Every pass and fail is unfolding as it should;
Every deal and loss is unfolding as it should;
Every dance and seat is unfolding as it should;
Every union and heartbreak is unfolding as it should;
Every star and current is unfolding as it should;
Every yes and no is unfolding as it should;
Every passion and lack is unfolding as it should;
Every sunbeam and raindrop is unfolding as it should;
Every breath and death is unfolding as it should;
When it is not as you plan, it is unfolding as it should.



**A Good Boy,
A Great Gatsby**
Casey Stirewalt

Snow Cactus

Jacqueline Bisson



Lost Train

Cha Reyes Tercero

The train left the station with a deafening screech of metal against metal, its wheels grinding as it gained speed. Inside, the passengers were oblivious to the impending nightmare that would soon unfold.

As the train raced through the isolated landscape that was lit by the moon. A sudden jolt sent the passengers flying forward. Panic had hit everyone inside the cars as they screamed and cried for help. People held on to the handrails and each other. They were desperately trying to make sense of all the chaos.

The train control panels were flashing like holiday lights. The brakes tried to slow down the train but failed to at the conductor's command. Everyone finally realized that the train was at top speed and not slowing down.

The carriages were dimly lit. The passengers huddled together for warmth and comfort. Some passengers called 911 while others tried to get the doors open so they could escape. The feeling of an impending doom hung in the air like fog and the terrifying feeling was suffocating.

Hours turned into days as the train ran off the tracks into uncharted territory. The destination was unknown as passengers ran out of subsistence and had no way to communicate with the outside world.

Everyone pressed their faces against the windows as they watched the train rush pass the world. The outside didn't look the same anymore. It had become a nightmare. There were strange monstrous figures in the distance. The people didn't know if what they saw was real or a hallucination from not eating.

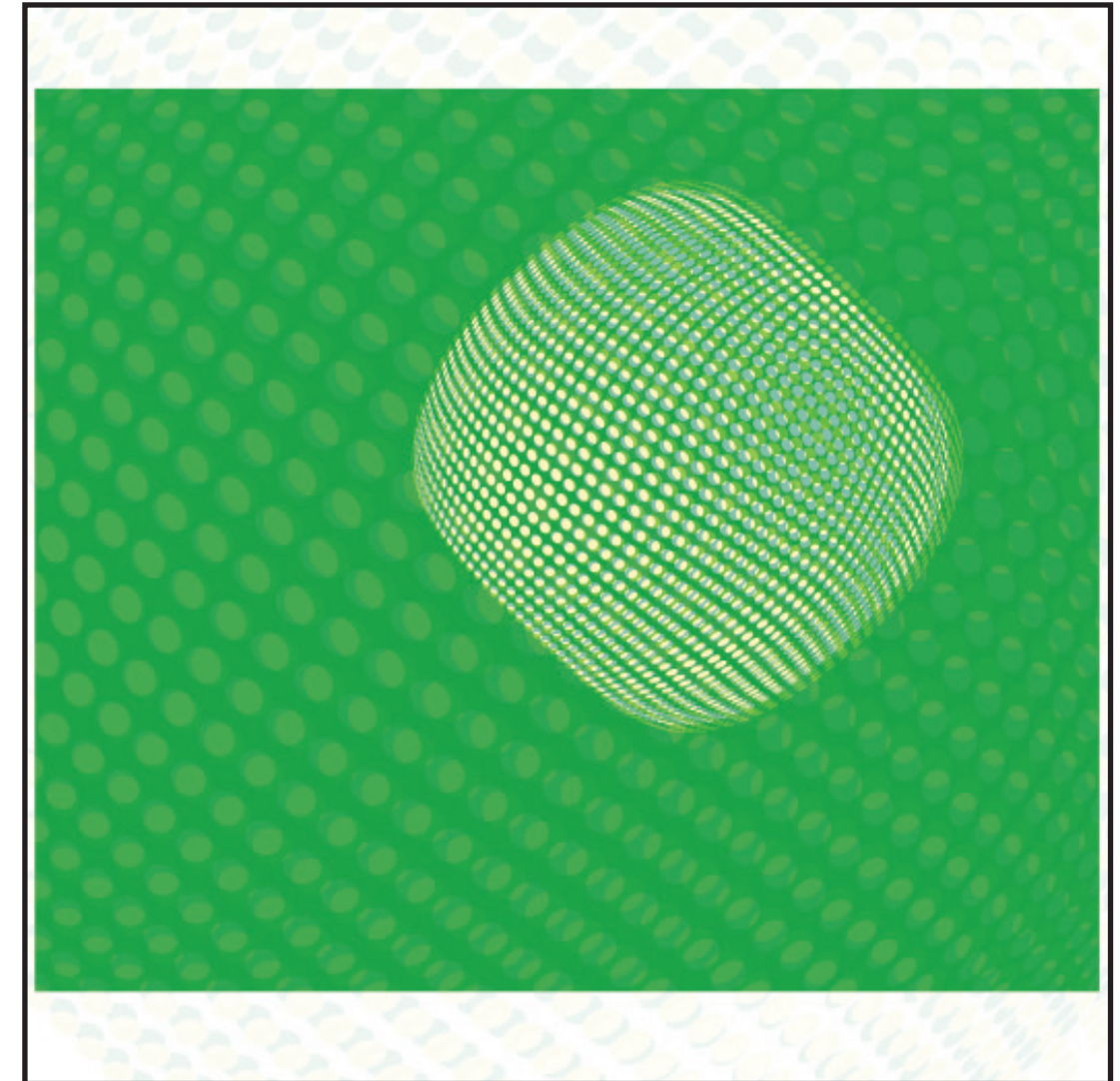
As time passed, the group began to fight. There were no allies and no trust. They turned against each other trying to survive the madness. One by one, they either jumped from the moving train meeting their end or retreated into a corner mumbling to themselves. They had lost all sanity.

The train went into a dark tunnel and the passengers entered a void. The train lights died, and the carriages were in complete darkness. There were whispers and touches from things that were not the passengers.

It became silent for a moment before screams were heard all around them.

Some were torn apart like pieces of paper as they cried and begged for mercy. Others covered their ears and hid under the train seats to cry.

Suddenly, there was light. The blinding sun greeted the remaining passengers. and the train stopped with a screeching halt. The survivors stepped out of the train and rejoiced for they had escaped the clutches of the runaway train. Even though everything they heard, felt, and saw will forever haunt the deepest part of their minds.



Out Of Focus

Josh Gooch



80z Pattern
Aiden McNeill



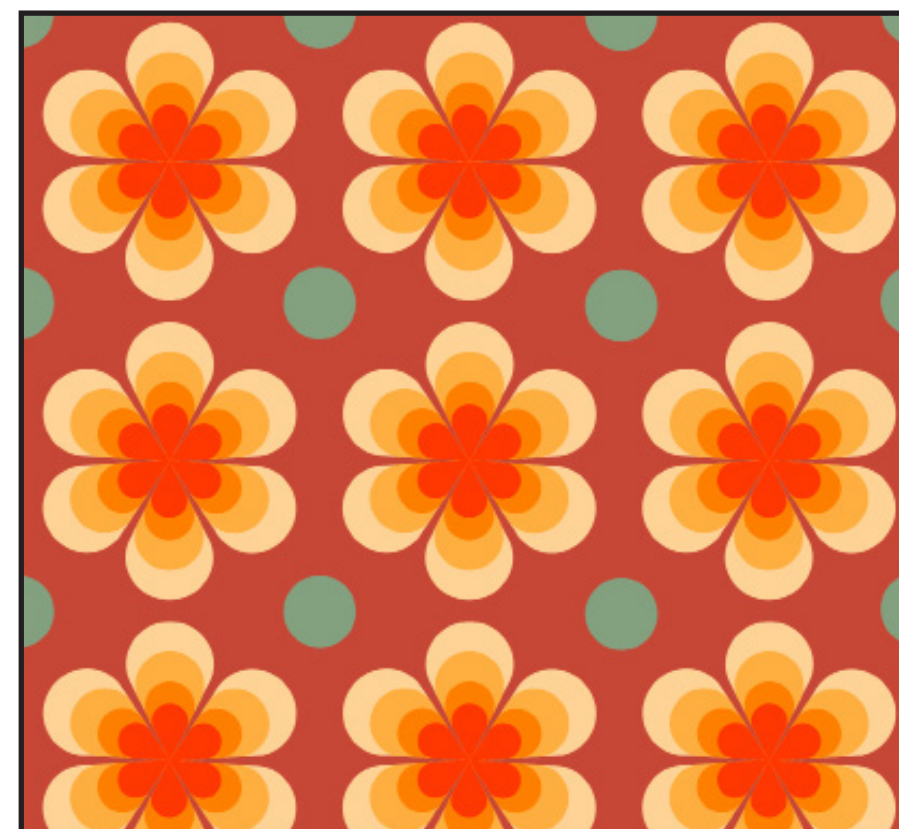
Rosy Maple Moth
Autumn Allois

Kindness Matters

Canon Joffson

Kindness matters way more than people think. Everyone at some point in their life has heard the saying, "It's important to be kind to everyone; you never know what someone is going through." But how many people actually listen to that saying? I have been to school with people who have been bullied their whole lives, just because they were born with special needs or born differently than people are used to. I have befriended some of these bully victims. The meanness of some people is almost unbearable for me to stand sometimes. Kids at my middle school would throw stuff, hit, and / or verbally abuse special needs kids just because of their appearance. So those kids would sit alone to not be hurt physically or mentally by the bullies. Even though I got looks, I went and sat with the kids. Turns out, some of them were having negative thoughts about themselves and life in general. I'm no therapist or perfect child by any means, but the mental health of the kids I sat with got better just by simply being kind. But had I not sat with them or been kind to them, there's no telling what could have happened.

So truly be kind to everyone. Even the tiniest amount of kindness can be life changing for someone.



70s Pattern
Michaela Palmer

Heartache

Annie Ashby

Please, please, please be alive. I was throwing rocks and rubble aside and digging as tears streamed down my face and my hands bled. Camden is still alive, I kept telling myself.

In the distance, I could hear tires screeching on the road behind me. I turned around and there was Sam. I ran over to Sam but when I reached him, I lost my balance and fell into his arm.

"Where is Camden?" Sam asked as he stroked my hair to calm me down. I looked up into Sam's big, deep blue eyes and started bawling. Through my tears, I told Sam "I couldn't save him. One moment he was talking about the future and then the next he threw me out of death's way."

My knees buckled at the thought of losing Camden. Sam pushed me back and looked down into my eyes and told me that it wasn't my fault for his death. I pushed myself back, looked at Sam, and said "Camden is not dead, he is just stuck." I fell back at the thought of him being dead. Sam ran to me. "I know you're in denial that he's dead, but you have to face it."

I looked up at Sam's face and I could see that he was hurt by the fact that his best friend could be dead. He hugged me tight like there was no tomorrow. I felt safe in his arms. The whole world just stopped in time. The next thing I knew, I was asleep in his arms.

"No, No stay away from me!" I yelled, running away from a figure. Crash. "Turn around Jewly. Let me see the person who killed me," the hooded figure said. I got up off the ground, but I fell again.

I looked back and saw the figure moving fast towards me. "Jewly don't run from me, I love you Jewly" The figure was reaching out to touch me. "Jewly, Jewly. Wake up, Jewly. We need to go." I slowly opened my eyes and looked up and saw Sam looking at me. I turned over "The sun is too bright".

I felt Sam lift me off the ground, "Good you're awake. We need to get on the road if we want to go get supplies before the sun sets again."

He set me down in the passenger seat of our jeep. He hopped into the driver's seat and started the car. As he was driving, I felt guilty. Looking out the window and wondering what heaven would be like for Camden.

Life has always been a hard concept to understand. We were born to die, and when we died, it is always a wonder. I looked over at Sam and I could tell that he was trying not to focus on Camden being gone. "What are you looking at?" I heard Sam say. I realized that I was staring at him. "Nothing," I replied. I looked back out the window. Where are we going to get supplies? Nothing looks the same anymore. Looking out the window I asked Sam "Do you think many people are still alive after the invasion?" All he said was "I don't know."

I looked over at him. His blue eyes, his shabby blond hair, and his tattoos. They are all just perfect like him. I truly wished that he would have asked me to prom instead of Camden. I just didn't want to hurt Camden's feelings by telling him no. I knew that Sam wasn't happy that I went with Camden. I look over to see that we are pulling up to a warehouse. When the car stopped, Sam came and opened my door. I jumped down. "So what in this warehouse are we getting." Sam looked over at me, smiled, and said, "This is where we are going to be living at the moment."

Sam must have lost his mind. It was a long day cleaning up the warehouse and making it livable. Sam sat down hard on the couch. He sighed and then got back up and walked over to me. I was looking out the door at the front of the warehouse. "The world has changed," I murmured.

As I was talking, I felt Sam wrap his strong arms around me. I leaned back into his arms and just stood there looking out. It was silent, peaceful, and safe. I turned around to look at Sam. He looked down into my eyes. I felt like melting. He is adorable when he looks at me innocently. We held eye contact for what felt like forever. But I couldn't look at Sam like this. I can't have this feeling for him when I have the guilt of Camden dying. I remember it all. We were looking out at the school grounds outside the doors of the gym during prom. Camden and I were holding hands and talking. We were watching the beautiful lake. Geese were flying with the moon on their wings over the pond. I had looked over at Camden and I met his dark shallow brown eyes.

"Jewly," Camden had started. "I want to protect you Jewly. Not just now, but forever. I want to be always by your side. Jewly, will you be my official girlfriend?" I looked at Camden. Why me? Why now? You know that I like Sam. I have always liked him.

I was going to open my mouth to say something when I heard "Move, Jewly!" BAM! I hit the ground. I rolled over to see what had happened, but when I did, all that I saw was that the gym had fallen on Camden. I started yelling for Camden to see where he was. "Camden, Camden, Camden" I ran over to the pile and tried to save Camden, but I couldn't. I couldn't do anything.

The Hospital

Avena Vang

I opened my eyes, and it was in the middle of the night.

Apparently, I was in the hospital, but I don't remember what happened. I got up from the bed and walked to the bathroom to shower and get myself ready to go back to bed, but when I entered the bathroom, I heard something shatter from the hallways and so I left the bathroom and went to the door where you enter the hallway. When I opened the door, I didn't see anything that got shattered, so I looked both ways of the hallway and I didn't see anything or anyone; it was like no one was in the hospital. I walked back into my room and fell asleep. The next morning when I cracked my eyes open for a little bit, there were nurses fixing up the room and checking up on me, so I opened my eyes and spoke to the nurse that was near me and asked her what happened yesterday because I heard something shattered to the ground, and I was shocked when the lady said, "What are you talking about? Nobody was here at the hospital last night."

I was still concerned about what happened, but after she said that I didn't say anything else after that and went back to sleep. Five hours later, I woke up and the room was empty, I had to use the bathroom, so I left the bed and went to the bathroom. I washed my hands, but while I was washing my hands, I heard something break or fall to the floor so I turned off the water and went to check. I walked over to the door and saw that my door was opened, but I remembered that the door was closed when I went into the bathroom. I said to myself, What in the world is going on, am I going crazy or is this just a dream? I walked to the door and checked both of the sides of the hallway, and yet again, nobody was there, and I didn't see anyone around.

The hospital hallway was silent until I looked at the floor and saw red droplets. It surely couldn't be blood, right? I followed the droplets because they seemed to be leading somewhere in the hospital. The droplets seemed to be taking me down to the second floor and to a room that was on the left side and it was almost the last room. The droplets were in front of the room. The room number was 220, but I knew we weren't allowed to go in other rooms. I opened the door and walked in anyway, but nothing was suspicious about the room until I looked to the left and on the wall, it said, "Please help me, the mystery cannot keep extending, they are bad people and you are the only one that can help. Sincerely, P." The words were spelled out in blood. I stared at the words shocked and anxious, and then I saw someone appear in front of me but I could see who.

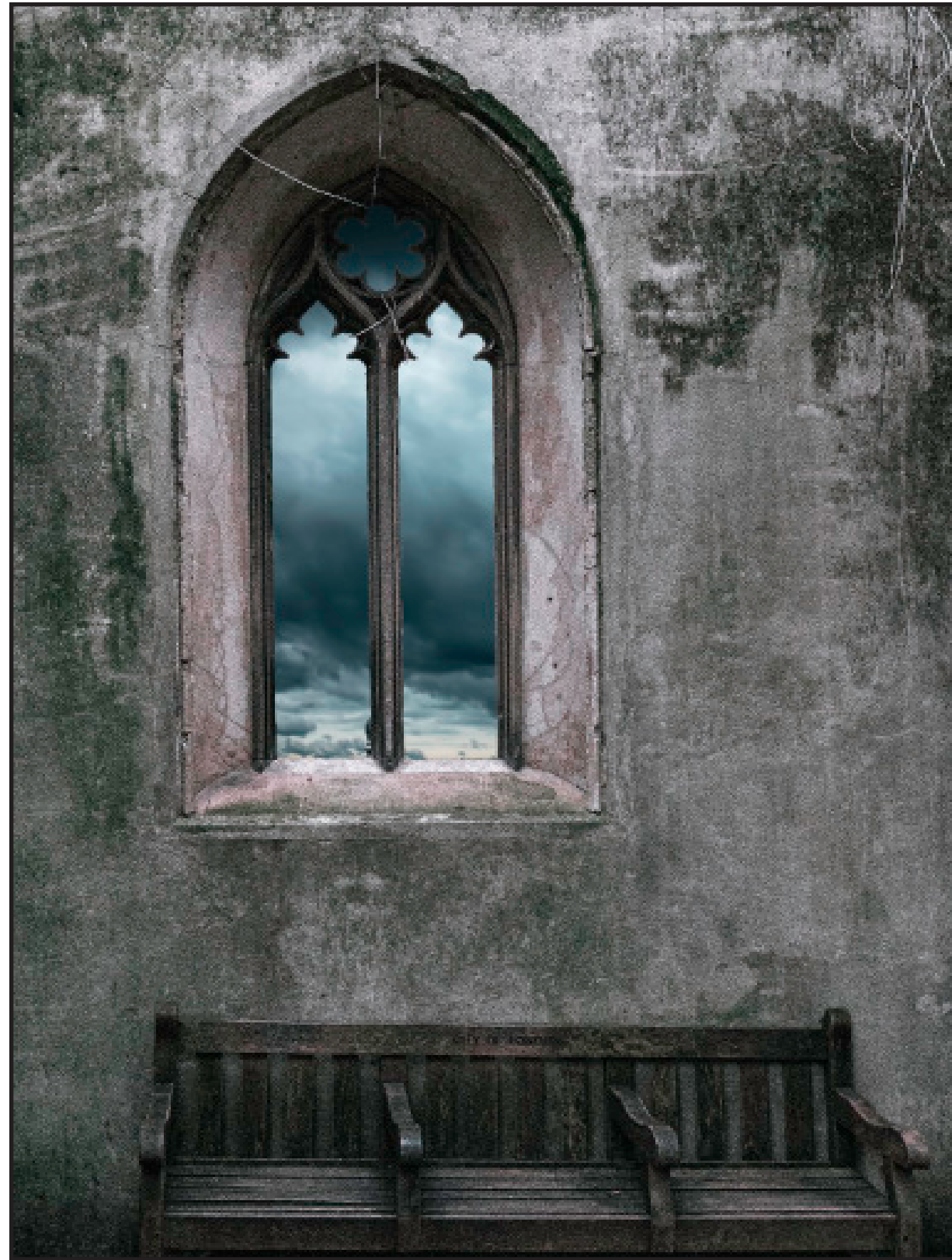
When the dark figure appeared, I ran out of the room and ran as fast as I could to my room and go to bed. When I got to my room, I locked the door and hopped in bed, hid under the blanket and tried to fall asleep. The next day, I woke up instantly and looked at my nurse and she was surprised to see me awake early. The nurse asked me if I was okay because I woke up fast and looked like I saw something horrifying. I asked her about the room and the nurses said, "Why? Did something happen?" I told her about the incident that happened last night, and she looked at me weird and confused. She said, "Room 220 was an empty room because a person went missing there and days later that patient was sitting on the bed and then disappeared."

The nurse explained how the patient went missing again after they returned to the hospital and that apparently that patient was never seen again and that the file was still in their system. I thought to myself, what did that person in my room want with me? I told the nurse that the message was signed by a person, and she had asked who signed the message as she was curious. I told her it was someone's name starting with the letter P. I asked her if that patient's name started with a P and she said "That patient's name did start with a P and her name was Penelope Collins. She had told me once to help her because apparently something or someone was after her, but I don't know what happened after that because she left the hospital without a trace." I was wondering what mystery happened that made her disappear. The nurse also said, "The girl also told me she knew the secret of the person who was chasing her, that's why she's on the run because she knew something that wasn't meant to be seen or heard but she apparently heard it because it happened in her business office."

Also, Penelope Collins lived on Maidens Road and the house number was 361 but her house had been abandoned for years now, and no one heard of her since May 16, 1897". As shocked as I was to hear the story, I realized Penelope needed my help but how could I figure out what she wanted to tell me and what the mystery was about?

Should I continue the story and journey of Penelope Collins' mysterious disappearance?

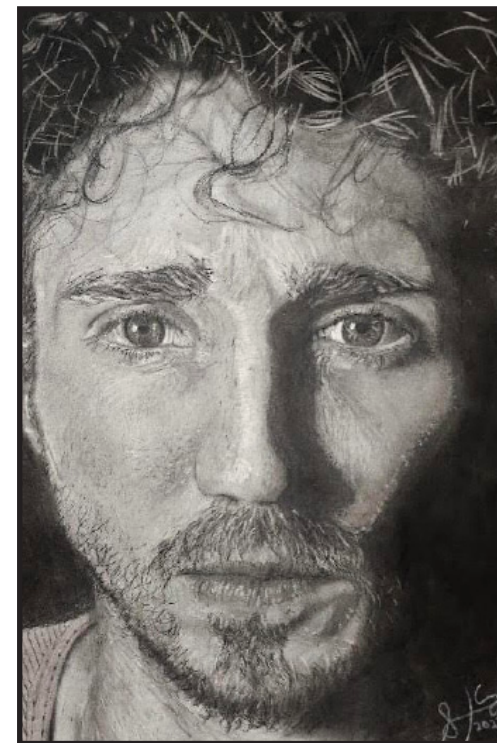
To Be Continued...



Now Seating
Josh Gooch



Textured Van Gogh
Margaret Wood



Self-Portrait
Casey Stirewalt



Van Gogh's Tile
Margaret Wood

The Midnight Secret

Jasmine Bautista

Emma Thompson, a brilliant and tenacious detective, had always been drawn to the darkness that hid within the human soul. Her keen sense of observation and insatiable curiosity made her an amazing investigator. Little did she know that her own life would soon become entangled in a web of mystery and murder. It was a moonlit night when Emma received a call about a murder at the prestigious Thompson Manor, a sprawling estate that had been in her family for generations. The victim was none other than her cousin, Amelia Thompson, a lively and determined young woman with a promising future ahead of her. Emma rushed to the scene, her heart pounding with a mix of grief and determination. The manor's halls were filled with whispers, the air heavy with suspicion and sorrow. As the family gathered in the drawing room, Emma's eyes scanned the room for any signs of deception. Among the grief-stricken faces, Emma noticed a peculiar glimmer in her aunt's eyes, Lady Victoria Thompson.

Something was different. With a heavy heart, Emma confronted her aunt, demanding the truth. Lady Victoria's voice quivered as she hesitantly confessed: she had discovered Amelia's lifeless body that morning, but she didn't know who could have committed such a horrendous act.

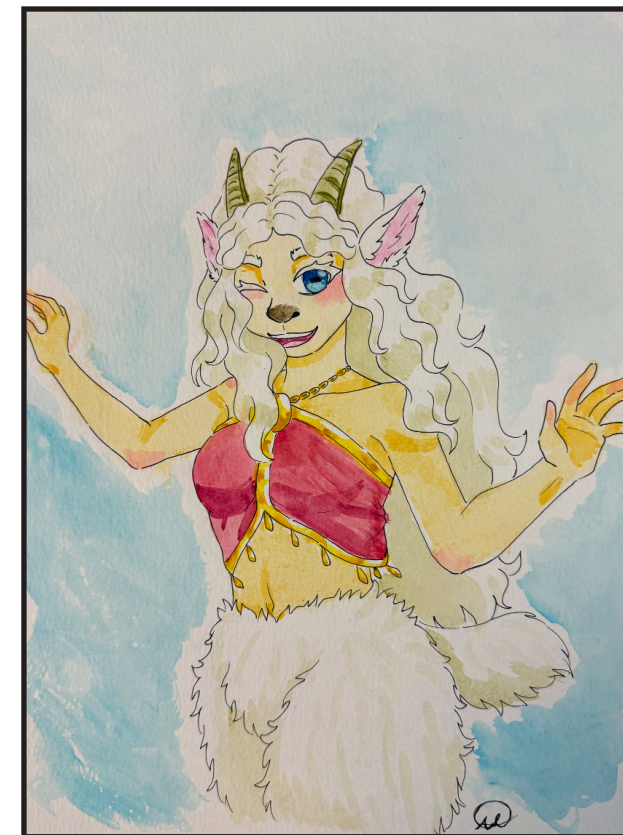
Determined to uncover the truth, Emma began her investigation. She meticulously examined the crime scene, searching for any clues that could shed light on Amelia's final moments. The room revealed no signs of forced entry, suggesting that the killer was known to Amelia. Emma's mind raced with possibilities. She questioned the staff, each member holding valuable pieces to the puzzle. The loyal housekeeper, Mrs. Jenkins, spoke of a heated argument between Amelia and her alleged lover, Oliver. The gardener, Mr. Wilson, mentioned a strange man lurking near the manor the night of the murder. And then there was Sir Reginald, Amelia's suitor, who seemed to have an alibi, but whose motives were shrouded in suspicion.

As Emma investigated deeper, a shadowy figure emerged a mysterious woman named Evelyn Blackwood. Rumors whispered of a long-held grudge against the Thompson family, and Emma couldn't ignore the connection. She vowed to uncover Evelyn's secrets and her potential involvement in Amelia's murder. Late one night, Emma followed Evelyn to a dimly lit alleyway. Her heart raced as she confronted the enigmatic woman, demanding answers. Evelyn's eyes flickered with a mix of fear and defiance as she revealed a shocking truth. She had been Amelia's childhood friend, but jealousy and bitterness had consumed her, leading

her down a dark path. Evelyn confessed to murdering Amelia out of envy, driven by a desire to possess the life she felt was rightfully hers.

Emma's world shattered as she realized the depths to which jealousy could drive a person. With a heavy heart, she arrested Evelyn, ensuring that justice would be served. As the case concluded, Emma couldn't help but reflect on the fragility of trust and the darkness that could lurk within even the closest relationships. She had solved the murder of her own cousin, unraveled the mystery that had haunted her family, and brought a killer to justice. The Thompson Manor, once filled with joy and laughter, now held a lingering sense of sorrow. But Emma's resolve remained unshaken. She vowed to protect her family's legacy and ensure that the darkness would never overshadow their lives again. Through the trials and tribulations of her own personal tragedy, Emma Thompson emerged as a formidable detective, forever driven to seek justice, expose secrets, and navigate the intricate webs of the human psyche.

Her journey had only just begun, and she was prepared to face whatever mysteries lay ahead.



Koyuki
Autumn Allois

Life Is What We Make

Kimarie Furr

We are tiny in the great big world of ours
Time is ticking with each choice we make
The hurt we experience may lead to Forever scars
We always question which path to take
Anger is everywhere
To think this is fair
This is the norm
A social storm
We need to raise our bars
And stop being so fake
We could all be superstars
Instead, we all cause each other heartbreak
We're running out of air
But do we care
We need not to conform
Because we still have to perform
Evil and good are in constant spars
Life is not a test you can retake
It's not like a game of Solitaire
The choice of ours
Life is what we make.



Woman In Sky
Maria Rickaby

The Dream Land

Desslyese Garcia Hernandez

Many come to America because they want a better life,
Or they want their children's future to be brighter than the sun. But now many
kids are afraid to go to school,
Guns have more rights than a woman,
Drugs have taken over,
And taking care of your health costs more than you would have imagined.
So is America really the dream?
Or have we made this perfect image in our minds?
Maybe that's the dream we so long for.



Dove Illusion
Josue Munoz

The Tadpole and The Fish

Emery Atkinson

Once upon a time in a little pond, lived Tad and Flipper. Tad was freshly hatched along with his brothers and sisters just like Flipper. They were alike in many ways despite being a tadpole and a fish. Both Tad and Flipper enjoyed racing around the pond and playing Hide-and-Seek around lily pads. They became the best of friends and spent all their time together. Together they planned out the rest of their lives and were extremely happy. However, about 7 weeks later Flipper realized Tad was losing more and more in races, and it was becoming harder for him to swim around the pond. Not long after, Tad appeared with two legs. Flipper was very confused; Tad and all of his siblings were growing legs, but he was not. Is something wrong with me? he questioned.

As the weeks went by, Flipper began to feel lonely. Tad and Flipper started to see each other less and when they did cross paths, Tad would spend most of his time at the water's surface. Hide-and-see by the lily pads turned into Flipper playing while Tad sat on top of the pad. No longer would they eat meals together as Tad started eating foods too big for Flipper. It seemed that while Tad grew, Flipper's happiness shrunk. More often than not, Flipper thought about drifting off into the murky waters. Flipper missed his best friend and depression started to set in when finally, Tad noticed it. Even though he was almost a frog now, he put in extra effort to be there for Flipper. Each day Tad would make his way to Flipper's part of the pond and spend time playing with him as it was unsafe for Flipper to come to him.

One day, however, he was halfway to Flipper's when his tail came off. Swimming was now difficult and wore him out. He decided to take a break on a lily pad and then continue. Tad was resting when a fly swooped by that he thought looked delicious. It was just out of his reach, but as he stretched to get it, his feet left the lily pad and he hopped. That had never happened before, and he quickly wondered how far he could hop. Tad swam to the edge of the pond and hopped out. He began hopping all around, completely forgetting about Flipper, enjoying his new skill. Tad wandered all around and eventually got lost. While he scanned his surroundings, he thought about all the good times he and Flipper spent together. Tad hadn't realized how much he had missed Flipper until these past couple of weeks when they started hanging out again. With these thoughts in mind, Tad gained recollection and began making his way home.

As Tad made it to the shore, he thought he saw Flipper. What was Flipper doing on this side of the pond? Little did Tad know, Flipper was terribly worried. Tad was supposed to be at Flipper's an hour ago and Flipper was worried something

had happened to Tad. That's why he decided to venture over to the other side of the pond. He thought his best friend was hurt and he would do anything to protect him. Their friendship meant the world to him, and losing Tad would destroy him. So as Flipper swam as fast as he could he didn't think about the dangers ahead, but instead only of his friend. Conversely, Tad saw the danger. He tried to warn Flipper, but it was too late. Before Flipper could react, a snake opened its jaws. Many memories fluttered through Flipper's mind as he passed, but the ones that stood out were the memories with Tad. He would do anything for Tad, even if that meant dying.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).



Three Little Pigs

Autumn Allois

The Torch of Unity: A Symphony of Hope

MaryBeth Russell

From gleaming shores where dreams take flight,
A beacon stands, majestic, bright.
With torch held high, it warmly calls,
To seekers, yearning through life's thralls.

"Give me your tired, your huddled masses,
Yearning to breathe free," it compassionately passes.
"Send me the homeless, those tempest-tossed,
I'll grant them refuge, no matter the cost."

With open arms, it welcomes all,
Regardless of how they may stand or fall.
A symphony of cultures, colors, and creed,
United, we rise, fulfilling our shared need.

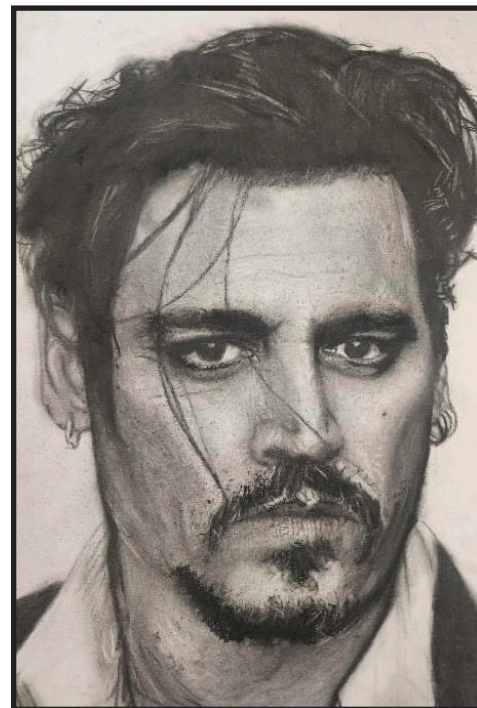
For in diversity, strength is found,
The melting pot, a sacred ground.
Embracing differences, we intertwine,
Together we thrive, in a world so fine.

Yet challenges persist, as time goes by,
Injustice and inequality, we cannot deny.
But the torch still burns with unwavering might,
Illuminating the path toward a fairer light.

So let us honor this legacy true,
For it reminds us of what we can do.
To build bridges, not walls, in our quest,
To cherish humanity, and love manifest.

In the spirit of "The New Colossus" we stand,
Hand in hand, united in this land.
A poem of hope, compassion, and grace,
For the world we envision, together we embrace.

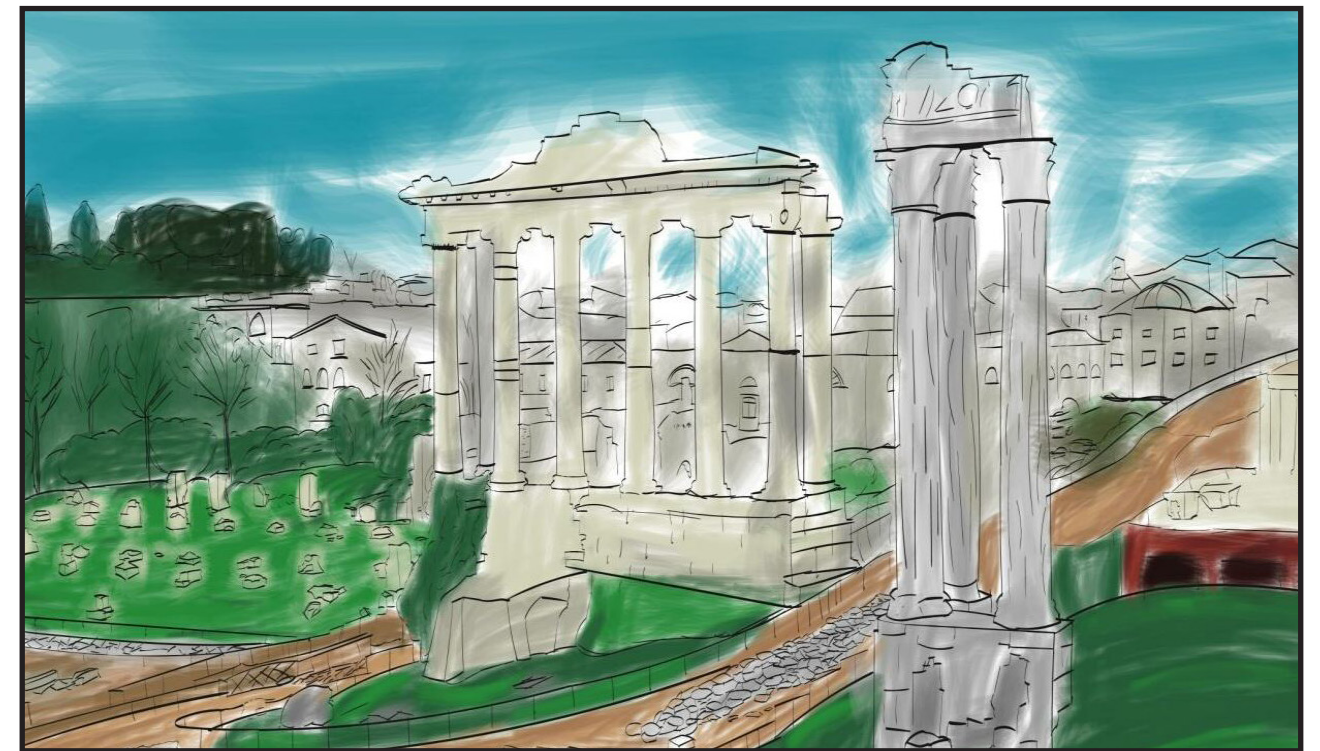
Johnny Depp
Casey Stirewalt



The Pieces

Bella Barkcand

I once heard someone say that we carry a piece of everyone we have met. At first, I did not quite understand. I thought we had met too many people for that to make sense. But now I think I finally see what they meant. I see it in how my grandfather and mother always say the same thing when they find something funny. I see it in how I think about my old lunch lady who said I had a pretty smile and called me polite every time I smiled and said please or thank you. I see it in the way every time I see someone sad in a public place, and I compliment them because of the woman at the beach who was nice enough to call me pretty when I was having a bad day. I see it in the way that every time I think about summer, I also think of the girl who sat with me in the back of the building at summer camp because I was nervous about being in a room with so many strangers. I see it in how I wear my grandmother's necklace and earrings daily to always keep a piece of her with me. These are the things that I carry with me every day. These are the things that make me who I am. These things remind me that even the smallest things can impact someone greatly. Without my family or kind strangers, I would have never understood our importance to others.



Ruins
Aiden Mcneill



In The Garden

Mary Rickaby

My Grandma's Love

Kirsten Bowers

Footsteps rush across the kitchen,
My grandma makes her way to the oven.
A woman of faith, grace, and intention,
With sweetness and fragility interwoven.
Like the warm jam found in doughnuts,
Her words incite a feeling of familiarity.
Like the healing of a bruised cut,
She can calm the soul with a simple melody.
The reassuring words she mumbles,
Full of many affirmations.
Her handwriting gives letters a reason to dance,
And calms any frustrations.
Though I could say more in this poem of she,
I'll leave it at she inspires me.

When Things Fall Apart

Kaitlyn McAuley

When things fall apart
you want to fall too
You stumble like a little kid who can't tie her shoe
But keep your head up high
And look to the sky
For there's always a light nearby.

How Can I Hate You?

Telan Huneycutt

I can still feel it,
My love and my hate.
Both of which you've managed to create.
Yet still I fantasize,
About how strong our love would be,
If it weren't for your lies.
You would be sitting right here,
Holding me so dear.
Then we would go to our place,
Our own secret space.
Our beautiful ladder.
There I felt as if I truly mattered.
You would kiss me so sweetly,
Until I felt our love deeply.
I would cry in disbelief that this love was ours.
You held me gently as I wept in your arms.
You would smile and say,
That everything would always be okay,
As long as we're together.
I'd tell you that our love would last forever.
Yet here I lay alone in my bed.
Thinking of the words we never said,
And the ones mindlessly spoken.
Reminding myself of your promises, now broken.
Your promise of a love so infinite,
That even the angels would be jealous of the light within it.
So, I guess that makes us both liars,
Overcome with our love's desires.
I wish my love wasn't as great.
I wish my love was weaker than my hate.
But how can I hate someone,
Who made me love myself?



**Balloon
Town**
Aiden McNeill

Perseverant

Callie Ball

A shade of crimson cloaked the skies,
As a young warrior said his goodbyes.
He must leave his family to fight in a war,
Even though he had ne'er fought in one before.

It was a gruesome battle on a starry night.
This inexperienced but bold soldier began to fight.
His vow to protect his family stood fast;
Nevertheless, his luck could ne'er last.

He lay on the blood-filled battlegrounds,
Hundreds of men howl horrifying sounds.
His mind wondered whether he would live.
Thankfully, he had given all he could give.

God imparted mercy for the man's devotion,
For he served God with great commotion.
The Bible says to spread the word,
And the man did so continuously spurred.

Though injuries severe the man would recover.
With God on his side, he would ne'er again suffer.
His time to journey home had come,
He yearned to be away from the scum.


The man's family welcomed him home with open arms.
They rejoiced, for he was safe from all harms.
His perseverance was greatly rewarded,
Ne'er again, having to see so much so sordid.



Plants
Michaela Palmer

Editorial Illustration
Rhiannon Trent

PASSPORT

	Name: Devil Ray	
	Scientific Name: Mobula mobula	
	Class: Chondrichthyes	
	Habitat: Mediterranean Sea & East Atlantic Ocean	
	Conservation Status: Endangered	
Weight: 3,600LBS	Width: 6-9ft.	Length: 17-20ft.

In The Waiting

Cassidy Ball

It's the waiting that does it.
That slow, burgeoning sense that
It's out of my control.
No worry, no endless thinking
Could incur its presence any sooner.

I've known, known for a while I'd say,
That when you know, you know.
And I reckon I know.
If there was just some way, maybe,
That I could know you felt the same.

I thought that twenty would do it.
Twenty years, long years of waiting.
Waiting for you.
Now here you are, and yet,
You're further from my reach than before.

It's the waiting.
The patience I must kindle daily
To know that perhaps, you haven't forgotten me.
Maybe, you still feel the same.
Just a look? Just a gaze? Just a smile?

I think it naught after all we've seen,
All we've been through.
My notions could be wrong;
I'll spend my time hoping for what's right,
And dreaming that right is you.

Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.
Time will tell.
And so will patience.

Black Swan
Jessica Jordan



You Loved Me, Right?

Keyli Garcia

I changed for you because I loved you.
You loved me, but why didn't you change for me? When I did for you.
I didn't want someone better,
I wanted you to be better for me, but you didn't change for me.
You chose to change for her.
I never asked, but did I even mean something to you?
Did you even want me?
Did you ever love me like you said you did?

For My Noah

Felcia Ennis

In the twilight's amber glow, you once stood so graceful and tall,
A silhouette faded; a noble spirits fall.
Your hooves whispered on the earth, a soft, rhythmic plea,
As you ran with your mare, your final spree.

Beneath your tree, a solemn scene,
As the sun dips low, casting shadows serene.
I still hear your raspy nicker,
As you so looked forward to your evening dinner.

Your breath was a whisper, a hymn to the night,
A graceful surrender to the fading light.
A majestic creature, once wild and free,
Now cradled in our living room for your eternal sleep.

The pasture sighs, as you took your leave,
Your spirit departed; your soul begins to cleave.
Nature mourns, as does your grey mare.
I wonder what she sees through her distant stare.

As the stars weave your tail in the sky,
The essence of your being now fly's high.
Gone from our pasture, but not from my soul,
Your memory lingers, as an eternal foal.