The Muse
Stanly Community College
Literary and Visual Arts Magazine 2017
Lorri Barrier

English Instructor
Humanities Department Head
Stanly Community College

Author Ursula K. Le Guin once said, “The unread story is not a story; it is little black marks on wood pulp. The reader, reading it, makes it live: a live thing, a story.” This year’s literary magazine is filled with stories—both poetry and prose—inviting you, the reader, to make them come alive. This magazine is also filled with beautiful works of art in various genres, all inviting you to take a look and see what the artist sees. We are fortunate to have this magazine as a creative outlet for our students, staff, and faculty to share their creative vision. I thank everyone who contributed time and energy to make this publication possible. I consider each piece of writing and each work of art a gift. May The Muse bring you joy!

Josh Gooch

Program Head
Advertising & Graphic Design
Stanly Community College

Each year through our art show, and followed up through the visual and literary collection, The Muse, we, as a campus, are able to take a moment and appreciate the many voices and talents of the creative side of our students, faculty, and staff. The unique atmosphere that campus life brings to each of our daily lives is one that I treasure, and in many ways shapes my visual language as well. Each edition of The Muse offers us archives of this talent that we can say were helpful contributors to the culture here at Stanly Community College, and that is something I am happy to be a part of.
The Muse
Literary & Visual Arts Magazine 2017
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sea Glass by Trisha Little</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Touch of Blue by Paige Wilhelm</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with Fire by Sharon Faulkner</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming Tree (artwork) by Adam Foster</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming Tree (poem) by Adam Foster</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Unknown Lost Companion by Susan Harwood</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Demon Horse by Barbara Finney</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon's Castle by Barbara Finney</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things I Hate by Kennedy Speights</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Summer Afternoon by Ethan Gulledge</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Hood by Robert Richard</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Girl by Michaela Palmer</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Me by Nolwenn Eden Thao</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Hilarious Thanksgiving by Sharon Ward</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Tree by Ryne Osteen</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surreal Experiment by Josh Gooch</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadow Creek by Caleb Herrin</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mirror by Cathryn Struck</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her Beautiful Distraction by Luz Marie Duran</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadvertent Perfection by Alex Sloop</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Sky Cowgirl by Kristin High</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Fish in the Sea by Rhianna Finney</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trembles by Corbin Glover</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Nectar by Cindi Poole</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostrich by Kayly Duran</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Through a Sonnet by Ava Martin</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gota De Agua by Maria Rodriguez</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressionists by Paige Wilhelm</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastel Jewels by Cindi Poole</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Jack by Casey Stirewalt</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosopher by Kenn Doan</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmella's Cup by Elizabeth Canup</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colors of Life by Kayly Duran</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ode to a Friend by Kimrey Lowder</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconditionally by Mkaj Wang</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella by Nina Efird</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Letter to You by Naomi Davis</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Blur at Oakboro Park by Karen Barbee</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January Sky by Caleb Herrin</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Happiness Experiment by John Bowman</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart Matters by Lorri Barrier</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Old Mill by Trina Plowman</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherries by Angel DeAugustine</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck on Pond by Ryne Augustine</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disclaimer: 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, recording or any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the College. Any comments or questions about our publication should be directed to Michelle Peifer, Director of Marketing and Communications, at 704-991-0393 or mpeifer7924@stanly.edu.
“Sea Glass”
By: Trisha Little, SCC Student

Sun and Sand
Shell and Sea
The emotions and events of my life
have turned me into sea glass
And the waves, like years
Tossing and turning and transforming me
I’m not as shiny as I used to be
And what used to be rough and sometimes cutting edges
Are now smooth and cool to hold
I am a piece of Sea glass
Weathered, strong and old.
“A Touch of Blue”
By: Paige Wilhelm, SCC Student

“Playing with Fire”
By: Sharon Faulkner, SCC Staff
“Dreaming Tree”
By: Adam Foster, SCC Staff

The dreamer is a tree by a stream
His imagination shown by his fruit
For what is a dreamer without his dream?
Without an open mind and moistened root

Age old images engraved in the soul
Seen only by the fruit that is produced
The mind reaches deep to the bottom of the hole
The roots of a dreamer probing for juice

Streaming waters billow from an ancient past
Feeding crisp memories of the times forgotten
Stories pour out from a vault so vast
The sweet juices of those fruits thought rotten

Soak in your surroundings and dreams will come
Produce a bountiful harvest and imagine some.
Light emanates through the bare branches of the trees as I hike the desolate forest path. The naked limbs create a web-like canopy casting shadows among the rustling foliage floating through the air between the translucent rays of lights. Pausing to appreciate the simplistic beauty created by nature, I closed my eyes as I inhaled the musky wood air and began to feel every constricted muscle in my back slowly relax. With every new seedling bursting through the loose soil, the winter chill began to dissipate letting the warmth of the spring sun return encasing the Earth in a blanket of welcoming heat. While trying to capture the memory and essences of this moment, an unexpected sound pierced through the limitless serenity shattering the quiet ambience.

I opened my eyes and scanned the area. I was alone among the aged bark covered giants. Convincing myself I imagined the unusual startling noise, I continued to walk the beaten path focusing on the hidden flora that emerged with the first sign of spring. The noise appeared again and echoed through the damp woods causing me to come to an abrupt stop. The high pitched quick noise sounded like an urgent cry. A barely audible cry of an animal in distress. Each step brought the frantic and desperate cry closer. The heartbreaking sound emanated from an area off the well-marked path. Turning to the noise, I stepped over the overgrown neglected shrubbery and off the route unsure what I might find.

A disheveled pile of underbrush came into view and the sound resonated louder in my ears. Lowering my body on to the damp ground, I looked below the twigs, and leaves and saw the rubble moving with each helpless yelp. Trying to see clearly under the matted mass of dead debris, I squinted and sighted an eagerly twitching nose. The black spotted nostrils opened and closed with every breath trying to capture any remnants of fresh air. A pink tongue emerged from behind perfectly white teeth as the young animal whimpered once more.

I lifted a branch in hope to free the struggling beast and immediately realized the hidden pain-inflicting thorns that existed on each branch that created the animal’s wooden prison. Blood quickly appeared on my pale skin from the wounds as I jerked my hand back away from the pain inflicting timber. The animal sobbed louder and I took my jacket off to use it as a barrier between my hands and the dagger like thorns. As I pulled each branch, twig, leaf, and clump of the dirt from the pile, small paws started to eagerly dig trying to help me with my daunting task. The animal trapped underneath was a young stranded puppy. A frightened creature desperate for freedom.

I cleared an area around his mud-marked face and clearly saw the two caramel colored eyes staring at me longing for help. Presenting my hand close to the young pup’s nose, the dog quickly smelled my unique scent originating from my
skin. Realizing I wasn’t going to harm him, he began to move and yip. He further entangled himself in the intertwining brush. My blood-soaked jacket covered each stick as I broke the countless brushwood apart. As I did this, I repeated calm reassuring phrases to the young animal to ensure him he would be freed. Fresh cuts on my hands ached and throbbed with each movement, as I pulled and tugged trying to free the beast. Determined I rallied through the pain, and the puppy emerged from the earth as if being reborn. He was tasting freedom once more.

Blood started to appear through the white of his fur marking the places the thorns had cut into his flesh. Barely two months old, it was clear he was hungry and scared. Whining, he licked my hand as I examined his body for any serious injuries. Not scared of my touch, he stood there as I looked at every inch of his young canine body. It was clear he was a mutt or a mixed breed. His fur was made up of long soft hair that was spotted with white, black, and brindle patches. The legs of the young dog seemed extremely long and matched the length of his tail. I noticed his sweet disposition, and it became clear this dog was destined to live with me. As he looked up, I slowly stroked his head and with unspoken communication he seemed to thank me for helping him.

Standing up, I startled the curious pup. He quickly jumped and hid behind a tree wagging his tail and carefully peering around the edge to watch me. I began to realize that even though I wanted him to return home with me, he might not desire the same. He was a wild creature and may prefer his freedom rather than the comforts of my home. With a heavy heart, I turned away and began to walk believing our friendship would be reduced to only a fleeting moment. As I took my second step, I felt a sudden weight appear on top of my foot. It was him. The friendly ball of fur pounced again, attacking my shoelace as I moved my foot off the ground. Catching the fabric with his mouth, he pulled the frayed material only stopping to playfully bark and run in a circle. Bending down, his tongue quickly met my face covering my checks with sweet kisses. Overwhelmed with this sign of gratitude, my mouth formed a smile causing me to laugh. Simply staring into his eyes, I stated, “Let’s go home.” He began following every movement of my old worn sneakers back to the beaten path that would take us home.

Years later, I am awakened daily by the wet cold nose of this once lost dog. We found each other in the woods that fateful day and both of our lives were changed for the better. Answering to the name Remington, he became my loveable and loyal companion. A best friend for my other dog, Lola. My husband’s partner in crime. A babysitter. A guard dog. A vacuum cleaner. Avid collector of tennis balls. An alarm clock and much, much, more. All because this lost wanderer was destined to be found.
“The Demon Horse”
By: Barbara Finney, SCC Student

Night wind hear my call.
Carry my message out to all.
The Demon horse shall run this night
Leaving behind him terror and fright.
His fleshless bones are engulfed in fiery flame
Nothing that he touches will ever be the same.
All who look upon him are struck with fear
His ear-splitting scream is terrible to hear.
Once a mighty war horse, his soul cannot rest
Forever condemned to his fate by a sorcerer’s cruel jest.
A demon spawned of evil to forever walk the earth,
To unholy beings a source of never ending mirth.
Run evil demon, run faster
On this earth, you have no master.
Anyone that rides you will never return
But be condemned to the flames of hell to forever burn.
Run on unholy creature, time forever flee
Till the mercy of time will set your tortured soul free.
“Dragon’s Castle”
By: Barbara Finney,
SCC Student
“Things I Hate”
By: Kennedy Speights, SCC Student

I hate when people think I am less than them because of where I work or how I dress.
I hate the smell of vanilla and cinnamon.
I hate how much I love junk food.
I hate crying in front of people.
I hate when people don’t leave a tip for their waitress.
I hate that people will call almost anything art.
I hate how society views women.
I hate that people can be so mean to other people without a second thought.
I hate that I am a procrastinator.
I hate that I am never on time for anything.
But most importantly, I hate that I hate more than love.
“A Summer Afternoon”  
By: Ethan Gulledge, SCC Student

“Car Hood”  
By: Robert Richard, SCC Student
“Star Girl”
By: Michaela Palmer
“Promise Me...”
By: Nolwenn Eden Thao, SEC Student

Promise...promise me that nothing will change
Promise me, you’ll always stay by my side
Promise me that even if seasons change
Your feelings for me will never die

Promise is such an easy word to say
But our promises mean forever
Many times, we push each other away
But we promised to stay together

Promise me, you will never let me go
Even if we’re at the edge of a cliff
Because I will never let you go
Promises are written in hieroglyphs

Like the seasons, everything is changing
Even promises are meant for breaking
“A Hilarious Thanksgiving”  
By: Sharon Ward, SCC Student

A few years ago, after coming home with a whole turkey and fixings for Thanksgiving, my husband lifted the fifteen-pound turkey to hand it to me. I started to take the turkey, and then we dropped it. The turkey went rolling down the steep, rocky hill right into the muddy, murky Pee Dee River. He went running after it. I started screaming and laughing, yelling “Stop, stop!” He said, “No, I’m going to get that turkey!” I said, “No! Give it to the fish!” He said, “This turkey is okay. It’s been wrapped up.” Then I said, “No, I’m not touching or cooking a dirty turkey that’s been in the fishy-smelling river!”

So, we drove nine miles back to town and bought a fresh turkey. After all this happened, I cooked a delicious, tasty, mouth-watering whole turkey in one of those old-timey, enamel roasting pans and baked a crunchy pecan pie with buttery, flaky crust for dessert. The aroma of Thanksgiving filled the air. We had a wonderful dinner with the sounds of everybody laughing and talking about what happened to the first turkey.

About two weeks later, a friend called on the phone and asked if we saw the boat wreck on River Haven. We asked, “What happened?” Our friend said, “Some guy in a boat hit a turkey floating in the water and wrecked his boat.” It was the funniest Thanksgiving I have ever had.
"Maple Tree"
By: Ryne Osteen, SCC Student
“Surreal Experiment”
By: Josh Gooch, SCC Faculty

“Meadow Creek”
By: Caleb Herrin, SCC Student
“The Mirror”
By: Cathryn Struck, SEC Student

Whenever I stare into it I feel perfect
It pulls me in like an addict.
It whispers to me and draws me near
It made me feel like I had nothing to fear.

The Mirror glimmers like the lake on a cool summer morning
It made me want to jump in like it was calling.
That mirror I did adore
Until it loved me no more.

The Mirror stopped saying I was beautiful
It only screamed I was unusable.
It drew me away and crushed my dreams
Now all I could hear was its screams.

The Mirror turned into a pit of evil and despair
It was a real life nightmare.
It shattered with a crack
When I smashed it with one whack.

The Mirror hit the floor
And became no more.

The Mirror
“Her Beautiful Distraction”
By: Luz Marie Duran, SEC Student
She loved him like she loved a well-written book
She cared for him more than she cared if she passed her history exam
She studied his simple features more than she studied vocabulary
She thought about him as if he were a confusing question
She worried about his future more than her own
Instead of looking into colleges, she looked into him
She was accepted by him but not into a university!

“Inadvertent Perfection”
By: Alex Sloop, SEC Student
I sit and watch the clouds of reds collect;
The sun attempts to shine its way through,
But with no success; its bright blinding has no effect,
And only complements the clouds with a red hue.

Let their size illuminate my illusion,
With angels constructing houses upon their tops;
A landmass decorating my delusion
Until the clouds dissipate and my delusion stops.

But all that shines dull and dim is fading,
And all that entrances my eyes must go.
For the sun suppresses its beauty whilst waning,
And I watch as the sun dips down low.

The clouds hold a beauty that they cannot sustain,
But I know their perfection will come back again.
"Her Beautiful Distraction"
By: Luz Marie Duran, SEC Student

She loved him like she loved a well-written book
She cared for him more than she cared if she passed her history exam
She studied his simple features more than she studied vocabulary
She thought about him as if he were a confusing question
She worried about his future more than her own
Instead of looking into colleges, she looked into him
She was accepted by him but not into a university!

"Inadvertent Perfection"
By: Alex Sloop, SEC Student

I sit and watch the clouds of reds collect;
The sun attempts to shine its way through,
But with no success; its bright blinding has no effect,
And only complements the clouds with a red hue.
Let their size illuminate my illusion,
With angels constructing houses upon their tops;
A landmass decorating my delusion
Until the clouds dissipate and my delusion stops.

But all that shines dull and dim is fading,
And all that entrances my eyes must go.
For the sun suppresses its beauty whilst waning,
And I watch as the sun dips down low.
The clouds hold a beauty that they cannot sustain,
But I know their perfection will come back again.

"Big Sky Cowgirl"
By: Kristin High, SCC Staff

"Only Fish in the Sea"
By: Rhianna Finney, SCC Student
I woke with a feeling of uncertainty and discomfort. A strange, premonition-like feeling enveloped me almost as a warning of what was to come. Maybe it was last night’s dinner, though maybe this was an issue much deeper than I could understand whilst being overcome by grogginess and my hatred of the morning.

Sipping from my morning brew, I couldn’t help but notice a slight tremble forming in my grip. My hand shook as I brought my mug to my dried lips, splashing the scalding coffee from the sanctuary of its containment. As my morning progressed, I began to question the whereabouts of this unpleasantness that seemed to drape itself over me. It was nearly uncanny how sudden these symptoms came to be. Could this be sickness? Stress? Whatever it was, I knew that I would not be able to take it for long.

The trembling was only the beginning. I could never have imagined falling so suddenly into this misery. Though it was a warm, summer’s day, I could not stop myself from giving into the consistent shivers. My attempts at restoring my warmth only brought about a much more vigorous chill, a chill that crept its way down to the bone. I talked myself into sleep by implanting the idea within my mind that this near torture would cease by sunrise. I was wrong.

One often longs for placidity and solitude. The silence of a tranquil moment is something that can only be described as angelic; however, that is only so until one finds himself making sense of the silence. Nothing is truly ever quiet. Whether it be the darkest pits of my own subconscious, or something far greater, I swear that whispers linger in still air. Three weeks have passed since the dawning of this torment. I no longer dream, but rather witness my nightmares as my reality. What crude being is becoming of a once virtuous soul? What was once concern was being manifest into anger. Why was this happening to me?

I could not stand to see myself this way. Because of this I have learned to avoid mirrors. No longer
did I see myself reflected in the glass, rather what looked back noticed me. Just as a patient on bed rest, I had become too ill to venture outside of my house. I could not be seen in my current state. With the phone line unplugged and my mail collecting itself into mounds beside my door, no longer did I attempt to connect with the outside. Today, something ignited a spark within me that had sat dormant for far too long. Without a thought, I forced myself into my vehicle and began to drive. I had no intentions to arrive anywhere, nor did I plan to turn back. This was an escape. The sudden comfort of being anywhere but alone with myself began to relax me. For the first time since the beginning, I allowed myself to let go.

I awoke. Oblivious to how I managed to return home, I sat up with aspiration. As I came to, I felt a familiar chill creep down my spine. To my dismay, I was met with horrid confusion when I noticed the sleeping body of someone opposite of me in the bed. A familiar figure, one I have become all too comfortable with, though one I had not seen in quite some time. Beside me lay someone’s un tarnished body, peacefully asleep. This couldn’t be real, though never

had I felt more alive. I did my best to shake him awake, but it was at first to no avail. Pressing my hands against his skin was a feeling like no other. The warmth of his flesh was so familiar, yet so surreal of a sensation.

As he awoke, his discomfort was immediately apparent. I followed him into my kitchen as he prepared coffee in my favorite cup. Enraged that he had yet to acknowledge me, I made my presence clear in any way I could. Grabbing his hands, I shook him enough so that splashes of coffee leaped from his mug. He reacted to my touch not how one would expect, but with a tremble.

“Sweet Nectar”
By: Cindi Poole, SCC Staff"
“Ostrich”
By: Kayly Duran, SEC Student
“Thinking Through a Sonnet”
By: Ava Martin, SEC Student

*Inspired by “Thinking Out Loud,” a song by Ed Sheeran

To mine own loveth, whose heart I holdeth dear
I speaketh to thee from deep within
Words from mine own heart thee needeth to hear
So at lasteth, I shall begin
Darling, our loveth shall last until we kicketh the bucket
Maybe even after, our souls shall liveth on
Thy hands holdeth the strings and I am the puppet
If not you I am forever alone
Taketh me now into thy embrace
Under these stars did lie thy lips on mine
Our memory nothing can erase
Our life together shall beest fine
Darling, our loveth must have been planned
Because twas found here right where we stand.
“Gota De Agua”
By: Maria Rodriguez, SEC Student

Drip, drop
The melancholy constellation
A endless cycle of preservation rotation
Drip, drop

Soaked-through shirt, drenched with water on a Monday
What a shame, the bookshop was only a mile away
I search for shelter
Drip, drop
The rain starts pouring in
A smile appears on my face as I race
Refreshing flecks of cool water drop onto my face
My parasol useless, I seek shelter
Drip, drop
A doorway is held open for me
A relief I feel as if I’ve won the spelling bee
I step into the warm ornate bookshop, my shoes click and clack
A surge of sweet cinnamon aroma fills my nostrils to the back
I found shelter in the shop
The rain stops
“Impressionists”  
By: Paige Wilhelm, SCC Student

“Pastel Jewels”  
By: Cindi Poole, SCC Staff
“Captain Jack”
By: Casey Stirewalt, SCC Staff
“Philosopher”
By: Kenn Doan, SEC Student

Trudging by was a mad Philosopher,
A wise but senile character
With crusty lips abused by his long rant
Of fears that mankind is but an ant.
He groans, “We are insignificant turds,
Players--fools--in the stage of the absurd!”
With beggar’s clothes and a lazy eye,
His heathen words were treated like a lie.
By the righteousness of his burning Pride,
In this pilgrimage, he shall gladly ride,
To make his fellows know man’s feeble fate
And cast aside their happiness and hate.
“Carmella’s Cup”
By: Elizabeth Canup, SCC Student

“Colors of Life”
By: Kayly Duran, SCC Student
“Ode to a Friend”  
By: Kimrey Lowder, SEC Student

I love books.  
The smell of the worn pages.  
The riffling sounds of flipping through unconsciously.  
The black and white that instantly turns to magical colors when I begin.  
I love books.

Staying up late at night and fighting back sleep to finish just one more chapter.  
Taking a moment to myself to come back to terms with reality after reading the final page.  
The tears rolling down my face during the heartfelt moment that I wish could have been the end.  
I love books.

The feeling of purchasing a new book even though I know I have hundreds at home I still haven’t read.  
The stacks taking up space that could only be used by them.  
The texture of the pages as they slip under my fingers as I mindlessly continue on.  
I love books.

The way the pages absorb the small light I strain to see by in the wee hours of the night.  
The joy in finding the exact book I needed in the moment.  
The way the spine rests in my palm as if it were meant to be.  
I love books.

I love every feeling associated with them.  
Every smell they emit.  
Every sound they rhythmically toss through the air.  
I love books.

They’ve been there for me when all else seemed lost.  
They’ve caught my tears and stolen pieces of myself that will never return.  
They’ve listened to my incessant droning and held onto every word.  
They are my true love.  
My true friends.  
Books.
“Unconditionally”
By: Mkaj Wang, SCC Student

I love the morning rise of the golden inferno.
Where the lemon rays of the bright star caress
the auburn colored leaves and the winter blue.
Fragments of the frigid winter mix with the budding spring
And a brief emerging summer breeze flows through the grass of the days.
It is all the seasons that combine
that I embrace the one who conceived me as a child,
One out of a million scope, from one end to another, with many blessings.
She is the sun, the sun who ships a new day flourishing the flesh of a suckling child.
She loved me before the first thunder of my heart beat.
The summer breeze surges the powerful waves,
but she is like an anchor holding me in place.
When the autumn leaves start leaving the trees naked,
she nestles me with never-ending blankets, covering my imperfection.
As autumn falls, the blizzard storm engulfs my petals,
withering me away with its wrath.
She warms me up with a simple peek of her rays hovering over the clouds.
With her grace, she gives me faith as spring flourishes,
my stem sprouting with thick petals.
I love her love.
Guiding me as I crawled through hell’s blazing flames,
she cradles me from my endless tears.
When blossoming into a little devil, she showered me with her unconditional love.
In the world’s depth of I, she held my hands,
telling me winter will pass and spring will come.
Afraid that the sun may never rise again,
she opened her arms wide, embracing me as I cried in her arms like a child.
I love the golden peaks of the morning
where her lingering smile lightens the darkness hovering above me.
Through the changing seasons, I love her unconditionally, just as she loves me.
“Ella”
By: Nina Efird, SCC Student
“A Letter to You”  
By: Naomi Davis, SCC Student

I met you during a hard time in my life, and you showed yourself to be my outlet for all the hurt and pain I had been through. You quickly became my safe haven, the one I relied on for everything. I left everyone for who I knew was the one, forsaking all and keeping none. I fell into you.

Every time you came around my heart leapt for joy, but my mind felt something different. I never knew that the blue skies I saw in your eyes would soon turn to gray, and the sunshine in your heart would soon turn to rain. My emotions became a burden on you, and I became a bag that you were forced to carry. I was never good with rejection and you knew that. My heart was heavy and my eyes stayed low for days on end. My nights were spent drowning my pillow in my tears, hoping to feel your love again. My heart no longer did tricks for yours, yet it curled up and pushed away from you. You had a tight string on me that refused to break, despite the pulling on my heart and soul, your strings were stronger.

My body began to change; stress has a way of doing that to a person. I knew I had to break away and soon I did. I finally took the time to myself to learn who I was and to try and rebuild what you broke. Once I was ready, I opened up to someone else with all the walls I had up, and ready to defend myself at any cost. I saw the blue skies in his eyes and the sunshine in his heart, yet his skies matched mine and his sun shined its light in my shadows.

His voice is like a calm breeze in spring, and it seems crazy at first but his heartbeat brings peace to my soul. He teaches me how to love the things I hate about myself, and to see the small things in life. I don't have to move fast for him because when you go slowly, you learn to appreciate everything. The tears I cry now are of happiness, and my pillow stays dry because anytime the tears fall, he's there to catch them and repair anything that could have bruised. Love isn't something that makes me tired anymore, my heart does flips and turns all the time. Love is something that makes you happy, something that you never get tired of giving because if it's real, you're always getting it back in return.
"Creative Blur at Oakboro Park"
By: Karen Barbee

"January Sky"
By: Caleb Herrin
"The Great Happiness Experiment or, A Misunderstanding at 12C"
By: John Bowman, SCC Faculty

Why should this time make me nervous? He pondered the question, but only after he knocked on 12C. This was the third door in the two hours he had been to at the hotel. He still wasn’t sure what to say. Hi! I’m Will. I just won the lottery but my wife hasn’t been faithful, so I don’t want to tell her. I’m just giving the money away so she can’t take any of it. Would you like some?

“No, no, no…” he muttered, remembering the first time he had tried that. The tenant—an aging man in his boxers who was watching aerobics on a laptop—had laughed in his face and slammed the door. It did sound absurd, and it was. But I just want to make people happy, that’s it. It was worth repeating to himself, as mantra, as motivation to knock on the next door.

The second door he knocked on had been worse. The cops got involved. The woman made some wild accusations against him. Pondering it now from the brief moment of objective clarity that comes while waiting for something to happen, Will had to admit it did seem a little fishy to knock on a lady’s hotel door and offer her money.

Footfalls fell close to the door and for a split second Will felt panic rise. Will this person call the cops too?

His heart skipped a beat when the door opened. It was another woman. The worst scenario played out in his head. He stepped over those feelings and instead concentrated on her, trying to see the person before him.

She had clearly just been roused from a deep sleep because her eyes were bloodshot. Her makeup ran in rivulets down her cheeks, tracing black eyeliner channels all over her face. Will frowned as he studied her disheveled appearance. He hesitated again.

“Yes?” she said boldly, staring him right in the face.

“I—” he began, unsure where to go. “I, uh.”

“Well, what is it?”

“I’m Will. I was just passing through and decided that, ah—”

“You have five seconds.”

“Okay,” he steadied himself, “I was just passing through and decided that this whole hotel needs to be happy. I want one happy place on the entire Earth, just one. I need to think that one place on the planet can be happy, if only for a little while. So, uh, is there—“ he thought about the cash, about just handing her a stack of hundreds and walking away, but 12B, the last room he visited, made him shy away from anything so conspicuous, “—is there anything I can do for you?”

Something in her face twitched. She would be beautiful without all of that mascara running all over her cheeks, he realized.

“Just please go away,” she said quietly before slipping back inside her room. Will’s heart sank in his chest. He stood for a long moment at the door, wondering if happiness anywhere under any circumstances was possible. Not here, not today, not with me, he told himself. On the other side of the door Will could feel 12C’s eyes upon him, watching through the peephole. He had a lunatic moment where his hand twitched and he almost reached out to knock again. She needs a hug, he thought, and then we can talk about happiness. The closed door loomed over him, a quiet monument of despair.

In the end, I can’t fight what I am. I’ll just go back, hang my head in shame. There is no saving anyone, even with money.

The room had a touch of mold to it, but Faith never noticed. She entered, threw her bags on the floor and then fell to the bed, letting the past hour flow from every pore of her body.

Sonofabitch, she hissed through tears into the pillow, pounding it with both fists. She kept this up until the pain in her ribs kicked a bit. She paused mid punch, waiting for the pain to subside.

She moaned, rolling onto her back to stare at the ceiling. That’s when the tears really started, fast and free from her eyes, tracing their way down the sides of her head, down her cheeks when she adjusted her position so that she might hold her knees and rock back and forth. The pain in her ribs
ebbed as the tears caught trails down her face, forming along familiar paths that illustrated the rage she had bottled for so long.

She wasn’t sure what bothered her the most in the situation: That he had hit her again, that he didn’t care, that she had to flee (with nowhere to go), or that she had maxed out the last credit card to get this room. The thought that it might be all of those things at once drove her to weep harder for the desperate hollowness her life had become. Her sobs formed deep in her chest, rolling along long-dormant fault lines to her throat, rumbling forth. Over these little earthquakes she barely heard the gentle knock.

She composed herself like a champ. Why not? She had been doing it for years. A woman couldn’t live with an abusive politician without knowing how to suck one up for the team.

Naïve to a fault, she opened the door of 12C without even looking through the peephole. And didn’t Bill hate her for her continued harboring of her innocence? Hadn’t some of his anger come out in just this way, with just that demeaning tone that stripped her of all humanity: ‘Stupid, stupid, Faith! You’ll open the door for anyone!’?

“Yes?” she asked, staring straight at the stranger. She did not recognize him at all, so she felt no reason to hold back the pain inside; shockwaves rolled forth from her eyes, seeking any kind of acknowledgement, any comfort in the other, the intruder.

“I—uh—“

But here was no solace. They never care. They just see a woman, something to use.

“Well, what is it?” He didn’t even see her, though he did have kind eyes. He looked right through her. A long history of random bursts of anger drove her to a sudden horror: What if Bill sent him? What if he’s looking for me?

“I’m Will. I was just passing through and decided that, ah—“ the nearness of the names sent new tremors through her heart. Her pulse ratcheted up dangerously, pounding in her ears. Please, you stranger, you intruder…please, you must rescue me or leave me alone.

“You have five seconds.” She stammered on the words just slightly.

“Oh, I was just passing through and decided that this whole hotel needs to be happy. I want one happy place on the entire Earth, just one. I need to think that one place on the planet can be happy, if only for a little while. So, uh, is there—is there anything I can do for you?”

“Just please go away,” she whispered, barely able to contain herself.

I want one happy place on the entire Earth? This was too much for her. As she closed the door, a wave of laughter mixed with bitter tears crept into her face—how naïve! How utterly naïve! Bill would have no trouble dismantling Will.

She needed money to get away. She needed a hug, a helping hand. She needed someone who would love her and not treat her ill. She needed a man who wouldn’t cheat on her and then blame her for the affair. (How well she knew the definition of gaslighting! How little that enabled her to get away from it.)

She needed anything but some loon offering to make everyone happy.

And yet when she shut the door she couldn’t help herself. She looked through the peephole at him, trying to will him to knock again. He stood for a long moment at the door, shaking his head slowly. A new mad thought stole upon her:

Please, mister.

Please just knock again. We’ll run away together. You seem nice enough. You have kind eyes and a gentle smile.

But he turned. He left. She stayed at the peephole a long time, thinking about things, about life.

In the end, I can’t fight what I am. I’ll just go back, hang my head in shame. There is no saving anyone, not without a little money.

She composed herself like a champ. Why not? She had been doing it for years. A woman couldn’t live with an abusive politician without knowing how to suck one up for the team.

Naïve to a fault, she opened the door of 12C without even looking through the peephole. And didn’t Bill hate her for her continued harboring of her innocence? Hadn’t some of his anger come out in just this way, with just that demeaning tone that stripped her of all humanity: ‘Stupid, stupid, Faith! You’ll open the door for anyone!’?

“Yes?” she asked, staring straight at the stranger. She did not recognize him at all, so she felt no reason to hold back the pain inside; shockwaves rolled forth from her eyes, seeking any kind of acknowledgement, any comfort in the other, the intruder.

“I—uh—“

But here was no solace. They never care. They just see a woman, something to use.

“Well, what is it?” He didn’t even see her, though he did have kind eyes. He looked right through her. A long history of random bursts of anger drove her to a sudden horror: What if Bill sent him? What if he’s looking for me?

“I’m Will. I was just passing through and decided that, ah—“ the nearness of the names sent new tremors through her heart. Her pulse ratcheted up dangerously, pounding in her ears. Please, you stranger, you intruder…please, you must rescue me or leave me alone.

“You have five seconds.” She stammered on the words just slightly.

“Okay. I was just passing through and decided that this whole hotel needs to be happy. I want one happy place on the entire Earth, just one. I need to think that one place on the planet can be happy, if only for a little while. So, uh, is there—is there anything I can do for you?”

“Just please go away,” she whispered, barely able to contain herself.

I want one happy place on the entire Earth? This was too much for her. As she closed the door, a wave of laughter mixed with bitter tears crept into her face—how naïve! How utterly naïve! Bill would have no trouble dismantling Will.

She needed money to get away. She needed a hug, a helping hand. She needed someone who would love her and not treat her ill. She needed a man who wouldn’t cheat on her and then blame her for the affair. (How well she knew the definition of gaslighting! How little that enabled her to get away from it.)

She needed anything but some loon offering to make everyone happy.

And yet when she shut the door she couldn’t help herself. She looked through the peephole at him, trying to will him to knock again. He stood for a long moment at the door, shaking his head slowly. A new mad thought stole upon her:

Please, mister.

Please just knock again. We’ll run away together. You seem nice enough. You have kind eyes and a gentle smile.

But he turned. He left. She stayed at the peephole a long time, thinking about things, about life.

In the end, I can’t fight what I am. I’ll just go back, hang my head in shame. There is no saving anyone, not without a little money.

Her hand slipped to the door knob. Chase him, she thought wildly.

Try something. Anything.

Will paused around the corner, just out of sight of 12C. Am I really defeated so easily? he wondered. Can I just go back and knock once more? Should I? She had such nice eyes, in spite of the runny makeup.

He hesitated just a moment. A sudden sound startled him, making him choose.

For the rest of his days he wondered what would have happened if he went the other way.
"Heart Matters"
By: Lorri Barrier, SCC Faculty

Ninety-five years is a long time.
A long time for life to pull on skin,
push on bone, squeeze a heart to
the point of bursting. It is her heart, they said.
Though the wound is in her leg.
Her heart no longer strong enough to force blood
down long roads of capillaries and veins.
In the absence of blood, the wound won’t heal.
Her flesh red and cracked, the blue and black
shades of a bruise reaching up her calf,
spreading to a hollow, just below the knee.

On her wedding day, my grandmother’s skirt
came just below her knees.
Her long, slim calves held her body steady
while she stood in the grass next to my grandfather.
It was a navy blue suit, she told me,
while I stared at the old image in black and white.

Today, dark blue skin covers her limbs,
the marks of age and illness.
It is her heart’s failing.
A failing heart that is still strong enough for love,
and I sit and cry for her lost, beautiful legs.
We are not guaranteed perpetual youth or beauty,
But once upon a time, she had both.

Yesterday, I hugged my grandmother.
She sat skeletal in her chair, smiling.
She said she loves me. Loves us all.
The lesson pricks painful and deep;
it is only the heart that matters
in the end.
"The Old Mill"
By: Trina Plowman, SCC Student

"Cherries"
By: Angel DeAugustine
SCC Student

"Duck on Pond"
By: Ryne Osteen
SCC Student
Albemarle
141 College Drive
Albemarle, NC 28001

Locust
102 Stanly Parkway
Locust, NC 28097