



Cadenza<sup>2020</sup>

## 2020 Cadenza Editorial Staff

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On behalf of the Cadenza staff we would like to thank all of our artist and writers for their diligence and phenomenal work.

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“Alkaia” by Natalie DeBruhl

**Art Awards:****Graphic Design and Digital Drawing****1st Place**

“Sweet” by Emiley Burris

**2nd Place**

“Only in Dreams” by Sarah Ingalls

**3rd Place**

“Billie” by Shae Condon

**Painting****1st Place**

“Miss Understanding” by Zehr Gibbs Barger

**2nd Place**

“Self Portait” Katie Lanier

**Photography****1st Place**

“Penumbra” Sarah Ingalls

**2nd Place**

“Reach” by Shae Condon

**Drawing****1st Place**

“Wings” by Allison Tomlin

**2nd Place**

“Reptiles Concentration in Scales” by Tori Franklin

**3D / AIM****1st Place**

“Clutched Clouds” by Danielle Fant

**Creative Writing Awards:****Poetry****1st Place**

“Love is” by Marcus Orta

**2nd Place**

“The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword” by Eustacia Smith

**3rd Place**

“To Whom it May Concern” by Ryan Davis

**Prose****1st Place**

“Silver Spoons Not Silver Bells” by Nyla Feeney

**2nd Place**

“The Guardian Angel” Hannah Jarvis

**3rd Place**

“Winkles” by Devin Thorpe

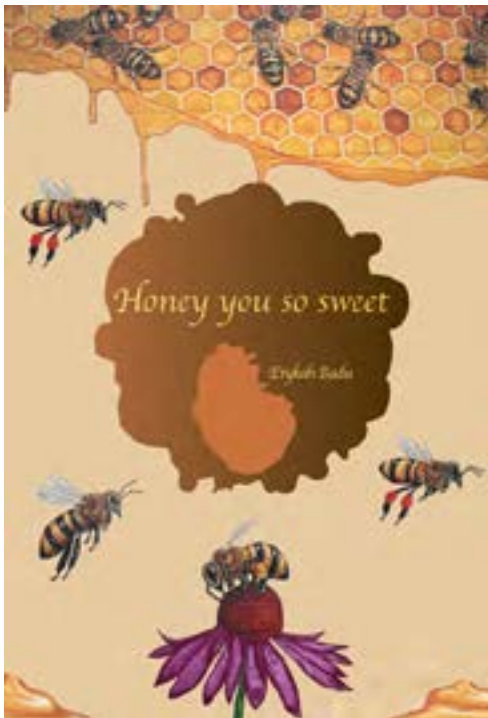
“Rose Thorn” by Indiana Rotondo

She waits, falsely in pursuit of me  
To return home she’s all I want to see.

Long hair with perfect brown skin  
The only one to compete with the devil’s sin.

Her touch is ever so dangerous  
Yet our closeness re-sparks the flame in us.

Until she grows tired, ready to leave  
Reminding me of how it feels to be empty.



“Honey” by Randolph Fair

“Love” by Tayler Hodges

Love at first sight  
Is there such a thing?  
I saw the light  
I heard the bell ring

The bell sounded perfect  
How could I be sure?  
Something I didn’t expect  
There isn’t a cure

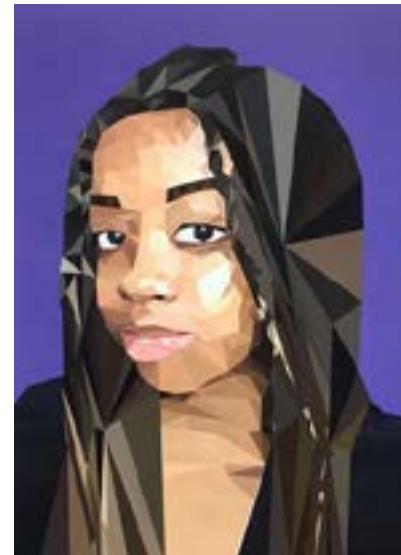
Love is a disease  
It is chronic  
There are no guarantees

I should call Poseidon  
Their bell was really a siren

It’s like stepping on a tack  
When they didn’t love you back

I wish I were tougher  
But instead I must suffer

How did this occur?  
It’s because you chose her



“Inverted Reflection” by Eriana Ansley

“Red Rose” by Selena Brewer

Blood seeps over your petals,  
down your protruding spine—you're  
bitter now--  
you grow darker--and sweeter too.



“Sweet” by Emiley Burriss

“That Apple” by Angela Thomas

Behold! The angel holds a lemon,  
The apple beneath his foot bruised and rotted,  
I refuse to pull away from that thousand-eyed stare  
Which burns through me and unto the ground  
I step towards and fall unto that same ground  
And into that apple,

The apple with worms reaching onto and clinging  
As man clung to his nakedness cast out of Eden  
And into the Sodom of the world,  
A world bathed in the blood of their children  
As Cain slaughters Abel with vicious repetition,

I look into that apple,  
dive into that now dull reflection,  
Worn opaque by constant doubt and question,  
I look and see God who looked onto me and  
Forgave me for my fall onto the grass,  
Into that wretched rotten apple

“Neon Yellow” by Angela Thomas

This is the third time this month,  
And I've run out of the patience  
I used to once have in abundance,  
What she said left me stunned

And covered in her spit  
As she frothed so-called leverage  
I felt my heart hemorrhage  
And my bones become brittle

This was not uncommon,  
This was our usual conversation  
This is all that neon yellow frustration  
Over something so stupid

That she insisted wasn't her fault  
And I barely got the chance to talk  
As she would start to mock  
And gawk at my words

So I shut up  
I let her rampage and yell  
Let her hate come to a swell  
And fume at me for not speaking at all,

And then she would ask me a question  
Completely unrelated  
And I realized I was being baited  
Like all those times before.

I did not answer  
I did not speak  
I would not let her think I am weak,  
Let her know I can't carry her hate

And eventually she wafts away.  
Back to her room across the kitchen  
Which has heard all the sisterly bitching  
And bathed us in its neon yellow



“Honey” by Emiley Burriss

“Fair Lights Look Good on You” by Dakota Topp

Your cotton candy laugh  
Accompanied by blue stained teeth  
From diabetic spider webs woven  
By someone who hates their job.

The burdened work horse  
Of aged rides that jolt and groan  
About carrying us to the top  
Only to drop us and watch us scream.

Playing rigged games  
Looping the hoop around the bottle  
To get the oversized tiger plushie  
Always one toss out of reach.

We blame it on butter fingers,  
Maybe genetics,  
Or our third bag of  
Overpriced and over-buttered popcorn.



“Sunflower” by Katie Lanier

“The Guardian Angel” by Hannah Jarvis

They say an angel in the house will guard your family night and day. I often wonder if that is why my mother collected angels, each one symmetrically placed beside the other, gazing with gentle eyes behind the glass of her mahogany curio cabinet. Not all of her angels are the same. Some are sculpted out of heavy glass and porcelain underneath large intertwining arches of pastel colored flowers, each angel adorned in heavenly robes of various colors, sometimes adjacent to a magnificent white lion or a small child. One angel in particular (appearing as a sculpture and in one of my mother’s paintings), presented itself as the centermost object of my earliest memories.

Nestled close, my protection was in the warm nest of my mother’s plump arms. Only she could save me from the make believe monsters that resided in my bedroom, and she knew I just wanted to share the bed with her, but she didn’t mind. I was her baby. After the fragments of pulp from a sippy cup filled with orange juice scattered across my taste buds, she tucked me closer into her soft, squishy side with one arm underneath my weightless body, while her free hand brushed the light brown strands of hair out of my eyes. The gentle, soft brushing

movements of her thick hands upon my face sent me into a dreamy daze, while her mouth would press gently against the top of my ear and sing soft, breathy lyrics to Bette Midler's "The Rose."

Most times, her hushed singing and soft humming would lull me to sleep, but then I'd resist the urge to sleep and ask questions. In the midst of the night's silence, I'd ask, "Are angels real?"

The answer was always "yes," but she reminded me of one important thing I'd never forget.

"Always remember that you have a guardian angel watching over you," she'd say. The words brought comfort throughout my childhood, always believing God and his angels would protect me from the evils of mankind. Little did I know, those evils would manifest into the version I never knew my father had within him.

Eight months ago, the very same angel nestled its way into the palms of my hands for the first time, as I was arranging a location in the curio cabinet to place my mother's ashes. The crippling force of misery tore at my soul as my trembling fingers traced the outline of the sculpture, an angelic mother carrying a small child with two children walking beside her. Resisting the torment of emotions, I flash a weak smile at the sculpture as a sincere "thank you" for portraying the beauty it speaks, although too painful to stare at in that moment in time. While I feel the smooth exterior of the angelic sculpture withdraw from my shaky fingertips, I become swept away by the remnants of the past, reflecting on the childhood dream I had of becoming a mother someday while gazing upon that very angel, surrounded by her children.

It's as if the sculptor knew just as well as I did about the inextricable bond between a mother and her child, even if death must physically separate the two. It's as if the sculptor merged the unconditional love and protection of the mother and purity of holy divinity with their hands to create a similar security as one does with a crucifix. The angel, as I now behold eight months later, manifests its undiminished allure against the propensity of evil that permeates the atmosphere of the cold-hearted father and his vacant household. Her soft matte face beams of flawless youth while her warm chestnut eyes compliments the hue of her long,

fantastical wind-blown locks. Her expression is neither emotionless nor animated, for it is rather marked by the warmth radiating from her half-smile seen almost impossibly at the crevices of her tiny painted mouth.

As I observe her face, I can't help but possibly imagine if my mother looks as youthful now as the angel, or just as youthful as I saw her eight months ago at the age of forty-five. I'd like to imagine my mother as the angel before me with large downy, feather-like wings painted a brilliant white, an arm outstretched as if to guide me across the bridge with her to overcome the furious rapids of life's endless stream, but I must let go of the trance the sculpture has set upon me. I must simmer the flames of my reality, see the vision of the sculptor, in which they so meticulously crafted the glittering cascade of snow-white fabric that swayed around the heavenly fictional body. Her young son and daughter, hand-in-hand, smile gayly upon one another in front of their divine mother coddling an infant close to her breast while crossing the little wooden bridge that lay across the rolling rapids of the stream. It's as if she, the inanimate angel are aware of the dangers that lay in her children's path carried by the rapids. Therefore, she protects them, guides them across the bridge toward safety where emerald bushes bearing blushed roses lie.

The angel does not know her child's father would deny his own daughter in front of her ashes. So, she leads her first-born and her only grandchild out of the house shrouded in the filth of the father's sins and stench of sudden death. The empty house is alive with the ghosts that feed on the diminished male ego, emitting such animosity to destroy the happiness that once thrived and can no longer be restored. This is no longer a home for the young family, so the guardian angel takes her daughter's hand. Leave, you must leave, the voice warns them, but they do not know. They do not know until the darkness pins them down like helpless insects prepared for euthanasia. Danger slithers in and out of the walls. They scurry like mice. With trembling hands, the daughter

gathers what is rightfully hers. Once again, she holds the sculpture in the palm of her hands, embracing the image with every ounce of faith left in her.

Always remember that there are angels.

God will protect his children.

Always remember that there are angels.

And in that moment she so desperately clung to the Lord for answers, she knows that her guardian angel is guiding her across that little wooden bridge toward everything the sculpture had promised and she too, is guiding her very own child across the waters of life toward a home of their own. A home fit for all her angels and the mother that carried her.



“Semi Formal” by Danielle Fant



“After Renoir’s Peaches” by Ashley Brewster

### “G.G.” by Indiana Rotondo

Life moves too fast. The force of it flows like a tide, dissipating into itself. Keep those that need you close. Don't run from them when they depend on you. I ran. I couldn't take the anguish, it killed me slowly, but I knew I could never understand your pain. I wish I could take it and smash it to pieces. I hate entities that hurt the ones I love. But often our mind is our greatest foe. And understanding takes time, but I think I've done it. We, as people, run out of tolerance and deliverance seems impossible, but I don't care anymore. I'll kill parts of myself if it means you live longer.

I refuse to run, I am here, and I always will be.

### “Love Is” by Marcus Orta

Love is becoming friends  
Then best friends, turning best friends  
Into lovers, into soulmates

Love is having just as much fun  
Talking all night  
As spending time  
Silent  
Awake  
Lying next each other  
Hours upon end

Love is spending a day  
And making it a year  
While all the years  
Pass by  
Like motion blur  
With half consciousness  
In single seconds



“Grandpa’s Truck” by Katie Lanier



“Study of Thatched Cottages After Van Gogh” by Tory Jones

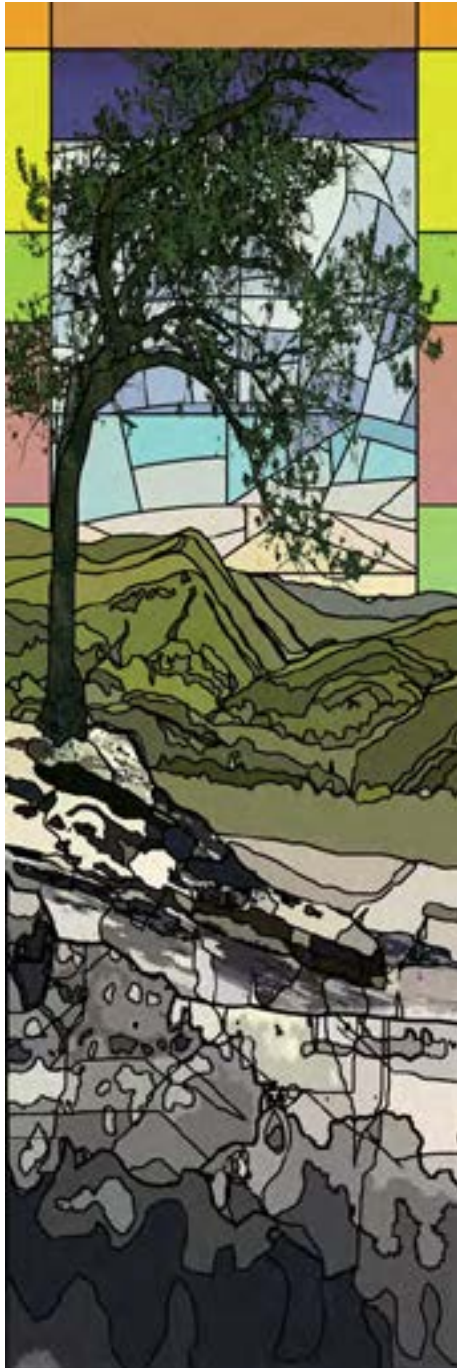
### “In Spring” by Ellie Bloom

Emergence from the burrow held  
each joyous breath of life.  
To feel the dewy air and grasp  
onto each ray of light.

I watched my father once  
shoot down a feral thing.  
My life more precious than  
the telling signs of spring.



“Treasure” by Emiley Burriss



“Stonley Tree” by Marcus Orta

“Coexist” by Ellie Bloom

I am a tree  
in the dead of winter.  
Fruitless to the core,  
creaking under pressure.

Listen as the wind  
whistles through my boughs;  
holding up glistening shards  
as long as I can allow.

And from the bird who  
perches there on my limb  
shielding herself from the cold,  
there is no tone from within.

We exist only separately  
and separately we depart.  
Except I am stuck in place  
and she seeks a better start.



“Reptiles Concentration in Scales”  
by Tori Franklin

“Wilting Weeds In the Night” by Kendall Bines

We arrive kicking and screaming, a budding bloom  
Perhaps aware of the reaper, fearful of the harvest  
Eventually He is repressed, the stress no longer kicks in,  
We go about our lives, basking under the sun,  
We forget about the dark, we forget the moon.

Suddenly, He reappears. Maybe it was a relative,  
Maybe a friend or pet, haunted by His visit,  
We relive that fear, no longer kicking and screaming,  
We live in fear of the harvest, now cautious and vigilant.  
That budding bloom, now cowers in fear of the moon.

But once we're grown and we get cocky,  
Some of us start to wilt, fading before our eyes,  
The reaper around the corner,  
Make sure He don't catch you slipping,  
We arrive kicking and screaming, a budding bloom  
We leave restless and weary, a wilting weed.



“Delicate Beginnings” by Cassie Shumate



“Stained Glass Tree” by Katie Lanier

“There is Something Wrong” by Trinity Pendleton

There is something going on  
I am asked, “Are you ok?”  
I know I am not but what do I say?  
“I am good,” I reply

As the voices in my head SCREAM  
They are calling me back  
To the darkest of my time  
I can feel them tugging on me

like a rope hanging on to just  
ONE last thread  
One LAST thread  
One last THREAD

I ask myself what is wrong  
Why go back  
Back to the dark that is darker than  
dark  
Back to the lost where the lost cannot  
be found

WAIT I see  
The pain is better there  
The pain is numb  
It is gone like the people you once  
loved  
It is like being felt in a full room  
Yet somehow no one sees you  
because you are GONE

I can see now  
Its normal to be bleeding from your  
arms  
And watching it as it oozes out  
Onto the floor  
Like little you’s trying to escape  
From the voice as they get LOUDER

I can hear now  
There are two now  
Two voices SCREAMING  
“FIGHT IT! PUSH IT AWAY!”  
“GET IN FRONT OF THE CAR! DO  
IT!”

I do not know which voice to listen  
to  
I do not know what to do  
I start to go  
then STOP  
the car speeds by  
like a bullet grazing its target

I missed it  
“THERE WILL BE ANOTHER  
ONE!”  
“DO NOT LISTEN!”  
There is another voice  
Someone asking, “Are you ok?”

This time I do not lie  
“No,” I reply  
“What is wrong?”  
I pause

And pause

“I do not know...”  
“Yes, you do!” the voice ex-  
claims  
“All I know is something is  
wrong. I will figure it out”

It is too late  
The rope had broke  
I am in the dark, darker than  
dark place  
I feel numb  
I am bleeding  
I am alone  
But HEY...I know what is  
wrong now.



“Only in Dreams” by Sarah Ingalls

“The Art of Living” by Katie Lanier

Nim has always believed that art imitated life. She sits there, the brush trailing long, elegant strokes of a dazzling blue from the bristles onto the cream-toned canvas. She’s always thought that arms were the hardest part of the human body to paint; positioning them just the right way always leaves Nim feeling frustrated. However, luck is on Nim’s side tonight. The blue falls in line with the purples and yellows she had painted earlier, creating the vision from her mind. She steps back and her chest swells with pride when she looks upon her masterpiece.

The hours of the night are waning, and the full moon is no longer bathing Nim in the fullness of its light. She knows that time is running out, so she puts her paints and brushes away into her bag—she can clean them later once she’s home. Out of her bag, Nim pulls a roll of silver wire, long and willowy, to be bent to her whim. This is always her favorite part—being able to hang her artwork in ways that take the breath of the viewer away. Nim smiles at the thought of the stunned expressions of the art connoisseurs who would soon arrive. Although she never gets to see their expressions, they’re what fuel her creative passions.

She nimbly pulls a long stretch of wire from the roll and, without clipping it, begins to weave it through the holes that she had made in the canvas earlier. In some places, she loops back through a hole again and again, creating a spider’s web of metal that glints menacingly in the moonlight. Nim steps back from her work, and once she’s decided that the canvas is wrapped in the wire to her liking, she grabs the ladder. She wants this piece hanging in the middle of the gallery—the beauty created by her hands should be viewed at all possible angles. When Nim finally steps down, wiping an arm across her sweaty brow, she is pleased with her work. She quickly sets to work cleaning up her mess—she hates to leave anything behind. She wipes everything down until it’s spotless. She puts any remaining belongings into her large duffle bag. After one last scrutinizing look to make sure that she’s cleaned everything, she heads out the back door, hood pulled over her head to protect her face and ears from the chilly dawn air. Nim smiles, knowing

that the gallery owner will be coming into work soon and see her piece hanging in all its glory.

When the cops show up at the doors of the gallery, they are met with the trembling and pale gallery owner. Wordlessly, he points a shaking hand behind him into the gallery. They look at each other with unease and then push through the double-glass doors. Based on the description they were given of the scene, this is the fourth victim in six months of The Painter.

There, hanging from the rafters, is the body of the girl who went missing nearly a week ago. She looks like she’s free-falling, suspended by metal wire woven through the holes left by her murderer. Her body is nude, except for the vibrant purple and blue swirls of paint, accentuated with bright yellow spots, that cover her skin. It’s as if Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* has been personified. The young girl’s vacant stare is tilted up at the large window where the sun is finally beginning to peak through. Beneath her a small placard, just like the previous three victims had, reads “No. 4 of the Life Imitates Art Series.”



“They Have Come To Take Me” by Kristy Lee

“Criticism on War” by Eustacia Smith

Bombshells propel onto another hell.  
Politicians ponder why protesters pause  
To ask for possible peace  
But their voices remain unheard  
The Radiance of Rapid Gun fire  
Smoke and fire fill the fields  
Livelihoods likely to linger in hopes of liberation  
Lives likely to be lost in longing for peace  
Politicians pause to plead  
We didn't ask for this  
Protesters persist that peace is in their prying hands  
Constituents ask Congress to consider  
Calling our comrades home  
But their voices remain unheard.  
Deployed into Danger with the determination  
of destruction and death  
The violence had caused the silence of defiant democracies  
determined to defy the rights of humanity  
Yet they banish the belligerent truth from our basic brains  
This war will be the war to end all wars  
This war has more in store than we had hoped for.  
Democracies generate peace.  
Peace for who?



“Sunset” by Randolph Fair

“New Hope” by Soul Atkins

She felt the weight of the world upon her shoulders, and the weight of her sister in her arms. She tuned out her sister's screams and shouts. As ember floated down from the sky like snow. She stared in horror as the city she was going to watch over one day burned down to ashes. The realization of her being alone with no one to look out for her hit her hard. She looked down at her 6-month old sister with watery eyes. How was she supposed to take care of her sister when she can't even take care of herself?

She continued to stare and try to figure out what to do next. She knew she had to leave as soon as possible or else they would find her and her sister. Which way to go was a mystery. She heard a rustling coming from a nearby bush behind her, and she froze, scared of what it could be. Turning around slowly her eyes landed on a rabbit with the brightest fur, it looked like it was glowing.

Its eyes seemed to call out to her, telling her to follow. She did what her gut told her and chased after the rabbit. She had trouble catching up with it, she tripped on overgrown roots and had to push away greenery when it got in her way. She knew that if she lost sight of that rabbit then she would be lost in this forest forever. A thought was born, a rational thought that questioned her motives in chasing this rabbit, how would it lead her anywhere safe. It was probably just trying to get away from her, not trying to help? Her thoughts were interrupted by almost running into something or more like someone. She didn't know how long she was running, but when she stopped her lungs felt like they were on fire, her legs had turned to jelly, and her arms felt like they were made of concrete.

This person had dark skin, darker than she had ever seen. This new stranger scared her. She froze and unconsciously held her sister to her chest tighter. The person didn't seem much older than her, and he held his hands up in the air. He treated her like she was a frightened deer. She could tell that he was talking but she couldn't hear his words, she was just too scared. She started looking around and

noticed that they were in front of a village. She has studied every city and this one did not seem familiar. She also noticed that the rabbit she was chasing was now gone.

She focused back onto the boy and was able to concentrate enough to figure out what he was saying. He was asking who she was and how she had found them. Despite her being frightened she was curious, she wanted to know more about these people and how come their village is on no map that she has ever seen. She felt his hand grab her wrist, and he started pulling her to a woman with dark chocolate brown hair. She looked up into the woman's eyes and saw nothing but warmth and weariness.

She felt this to be a new beginning, but deep down she knew that she wouldn't be able to avoid the war that appeared in her city. People were still looking for her, and she knew that death will always be following her.

After a couple of hours of walking the two exhausted sisters found a small, humble village. The village was so filled to the brim with different colors and scents that it almost overwhelmed the two girls at first. They walked into the village hesitantly but soon all of their worries washed away after the first villager sent them a small reserved smile. The people of the village welcomed her with open arms and they gave her a place to stay. They invited her to stay as long as she wanted, just as long as she helped around the village with gathering supplies from the surrounding forest. She knew she couldn't stay, however, because if she stayed longer then her enemies would end up catching up to her somehow and everyone in this beautiful village would have nothing but bloodshed in their future. She did not wish ill will onto these people after they were so kind to let her stay. She had to keep going; there was just one problem, but she had a plan. She looked out the window that was on her left, looking out into the sleepy village. She looked down at her sleeping sister.

People didn't know about her sister, she was always kept a secret,

so the horrendous people trying to track her down had no idea she even had a sister. She thought it be best to leave her sister here in this village and she would leave. These people would take care of the infant.

Looking through the window, she got out of the bed and opened it. She slipped out as quickly and quietly as she could. She walked to the very edge of the forest and looked back to where she came from. Hearing a sniff from behind her, she turned around and spotted the same rabbit that led her to the area she was currently in. It had that same expectant look in its eyes; she sighed and started to follow the rabbit into the darkness.

She never looked back after that.



"Cat Eyes" by Brittany Wilkins



"Mango" by Shae Condon



“Clutched Clouds” by Danielle Fant

“Pink Lemonade” by Maggie Reigle

The way you turned green, it could  
be seen. Know your feelings weren't  
ignored, seeing it stuck a chord.  
With you there's more than dirty  
sugar water on a summer's day. You're soul  
food on an empty stomach compared to  
dead leafy greens.

On a hot summer day, you're  
refreshing compared to sweet tea.  
With you, it's sweet,  
and cool,  
and sour. Temporary satisfaction is  
nothing when put to war with everlasting  
gratification.



“Self Portrait” by Katie Lanier



“Athleisure” by Danielle Fant

“The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword” by Eustacia Smith

My voice is quiet, but my words are loud.  
The ink of my sword will not fall silent.  
On my bold written word, I will stand proud.

I will plant my pen on this solid ground.  
On this sword, I will remain reliant.  
My voice is quiet, but my words are loud.

With this mighty pen, I have sternly vowed  
To rock the world of the vicious tyrant.  
On my bold written word, I will stand proud.

The world will say that I’m not allowed.  
With this sword, I will be defiant.  
My voice is quiet, but my words are loud.

I will not follow the waves of the crowd.  
My sword will be raised with language, vibrant.  
On my bold written word, I will stand proud.

With truth and confidence, my words enshroud  
The darkest of devils and the violent.  
My voice is quiet, but my words are loud.  
On my bold written word, I will stand proud.

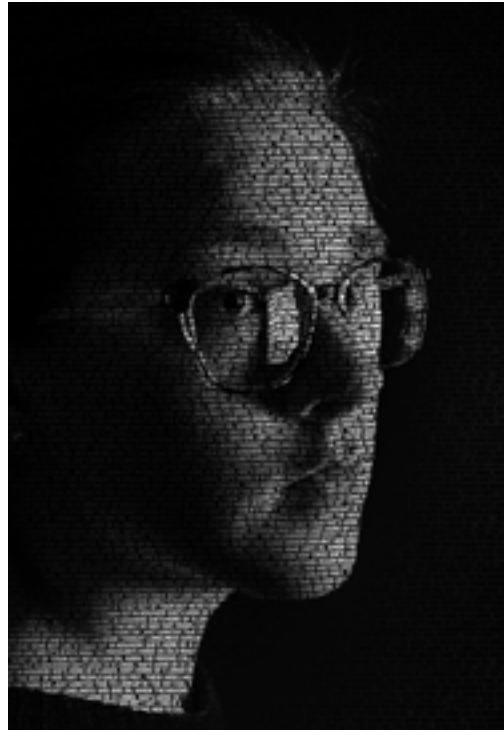
“Chords” by Marcus Orta

All it takes is a chord  
All a chord takes is a note  
You can patch anything with it

All I need are some chords  
That’s what it takes doesn’t it

Well if that’s what it takes  
that’s what I’ll do  
I’ll write these chords  
I’ll make ‘em for you

However long it takes  
I know I’ll make it through  
Forever is at stake  
And I’ll do it all for you



“Living Words” by Sarah Ingalls



“Billie” by Shae Condon

“Would You Walk Through Hell?” by Lianna Edwards

“I would walk through Hell for you.” I looked him dead square in the eye as I took hold of the gates and opened my own personal Hell to him. He stood there, almost basking, as the hell fire licked over him. Soon the little demons began to appear and stick him with their evil tridents.

Soft as silk, they whispered all my secrets, pains, sorrows, and darkest fears in his ear. “How could you love a girl who is full of self-pity?” “How can you love a girl who doesn’t even believe in her own capabilities?” They whispered. Staring them straight in their beady, obsidian black eyes, he said, “How could I not love her?” The demons hissed in pleasure at such a typical answer. “If you love her”, they countered, “then you must love us also.”

“The Piano” by Acadia Grantham

The piano stood alone, beautiful but covered in a thick layer of dust. No one had touched it since she... left. Since that cruel disease that had never once dimmed her happiness, dimmed the light from her sky blue eyes. It had changed everything about her: took her wavy fountain of shimmering gold from atop her head, made her skin as white as paper, faded her freckles from along the bridge of her nose, but it never altered her personality. She was a bubbly little ray of sunshine until the end. She was an angel crashed down on earth, only given enough time to fix her broken wings with will and positivity before she rose again on that awful day. September 19th... The day before the show. He could only imagine how grand that performance would've been.

The theatre would've been packed, the worn red seats filled with people whose love for music would've never even compared to hers. She would've pranced around excitedly backstage in that perfect little white dress she had picked out, trying to ease his worry with her signature smile. She would've worn her hair naturally as she always liked it, the golden wisps covering her face as she played. And once that curtain was drawn up, they would've poured out every ounce of their hearts, eyes closed

Music was always better when you felt it instead of played it.

It was her that made him realize that.

He swallowed, turning away from the painful sight and stuffing his hands into his jacket pockets. He would never play again. Not without her and her angel wings.



“Dream Date” by A'mera Bellamy

“Haze” by Ryan Davis

No one told me when people lie to your face they're just being nice.  
 That rejection is more common than hearing “I love you”  
 That fears scream way louder than belief,  
 or success is more elusive than true friends.  
 I never knew you could be broken at 10 years old.  
 Words cut a little deeper when your heart isn't calloused  
 I didn't know a smile could conceal the pain of being replaced  
 or you're expected to pick yourself up when you've been knocked down so many times you don't even  
 know what direction that is any more.  
 I was born free of expectations.  
 Now grounded by the weight of everyone else's.  
 Stressing to be the best me they think I could be,  
 but no one can see I didn't ask for all of this.  
 I sleep to find peace in my decisions.  
 Blurring the line between reality and fantasy, so much that I can watch my dreams being shattered as  
 the world shakes me to my knees.  
 If I knew what life had to offer me,  
 I might have reconsidered.  
 If I saw what I'd go through,  
 maybe I would've chosen a different path.  
 Cause little did I know life keeps receipts,  
 to remind you everything has a price.  
 People keep telling me to make the most out of life.  
 That I have a bright future ahead.  
 “You're gonna be great,” they say.  
 I just don't know what that looks like yet.

“The Future Is Impending And Unstoppable” by Sydney Lail

When it is my time and I take my leave,  
 Where do you think I will go? Heaven? Hell?  
 Will you hope for my ascending and grieve?  
 Or do you pray I burn, for fire I'll dwell.  
 I am unsure of what comes after this,  
 Be it limbo or purgatory I  
 Truly tremble at the lips of death's kiss.  
 Oh, cruel and terrible fate that waits, Why  
 Must we live until our bodies give out?  
 One pushing themselves into extinction.  
 To make sure everyone knows what you're about.  
 Everyone can't become a distinction.  
 So rejoice! Our impending doom is near,  
 But should you live for purpose, do not fear.



“Penumbra” by Sarah Ingalls

“Son of Houdini” by Kendall Bines

My father never present. 21 birthdays Never sent me a present, Your presence was hardly missed. Still I sought you out, For weeks talking ‘bout a meet up, scheduled a date to meet my father Your sins made my life harder. Still you was off the hook. My brother needed figure, So I figured who better than you.	Gave him your name. Moved to the burbs, Kicked to the curb. I envied your other family, I prayed for your return. I got nothing, I blamed myself I was a fool for seeking you out. When You never wanted to be found.
A mama’s boy by default, My brother was highly favored. The odd one out on both sides, I’m used to feeling this pain. I thought with a little time, My scars would just fade away, “Time heals all” That’s what they used to say, The clock’s ticking for sure, But this chips digging a hole in my shoulder, I grow colder the older I get, Laughing at atlas, Cause my burden is greater.	The son Houdini, I feel like the fresh prince. Except I never had Phil, I never had my father so don’t tell me how to feel.
I cry but there’s no sound, Tears of a clown It’s dark, No one’s around. So I bury my thoughts in sound, In silence my mind wanders I’m starting to have doubts, First born and you walked out, Made a sequel	Gave him your name. Moved to the burbs, Kicked to the curb. I envied your other family, I prayed for your return. I got nothing, I blamed myself I was a fool for seeking you out. When You never wanted to be found.
	The son Houdini, I feel like the fresh prince. Except I never had Phil, I never had my father so don’t tell me how to feel.



“Dapper” by A’mera Bellamy



“The Reach” by Shae Condon

### “Winkles” by Devin Thorpe

“So tell me about this friend of yours, Stephen,” Dr. Mark Finale asked the five-year-old sitting in the chair opposite him. “I really don’t think I should, mister. Mommy told me not to talk to strangers,” Stephen replied, his high-pitched voice reflecting his innocent nature.

“Yes, and mommy cares a lot about you, buddy. That’s why she brought you here to talk to me. She’s worried something’s been wrong with you lately, something you don’t want to tell her. I’m here to listen to you if there’s something you’re too scared to tell mommy,” Dr. Finale said to the boy. He glanced at the Ph.D. in Psychology hanging on the wall. A Ph.D. from Harvard, to be specific. He had all the qualifications in the world to be this boy’s therapist, yet there was no way to make Stephen understand that. He’d just have to be patient and wait for Stephen to open up.

“He said I shouldn’t talk about him to other people. He told me I can’t trust you,” Stephen said to the therapist in front of him. “Who told you that? Your friend?” Finale asked. The boy nodded his head.

“I won’t make you tell me anything you don’t feel comfortable sharing, Stephen, but if he was your real friend he would want you to feel better too. Your mom told me you haven’t been eating lately; is it your friend that’s making you not eat?” Stephen looked up at the ceiling above him. His expression changed. When he looked back at the therapist, fear was in his eyes. He didn’t attempt to answer the question.

“Would you trust me enough to tell me when you met this imaginary friend of yours, Stephen? When’s the first time you talked to him?” Stephen looked up at the ceiling, this time over the head of Dr. Finale, and nodded his head in compliance as if there was some invisible being having a silent conversation with him. “I can answer this one. We got in a car crash Mr. Mark... The doctors told mommy I died for a few minutes... But they brought me back with those electric things they put on your chest... I met Winkles in the darkness. He came back with me.”

The therapist scribbled a few notes, then asked, “So is Winkles a nice boy? Do you two get along?” Stephen looked in the distance, this time over the doctor’s shoulder. He nodded his head at whatever he was looking at. “Sometimes he tells me to do things... things mommy says are bad. I haven’t done any yet, but he said he’ll hurt me if I don’t.” “What’s the last thing he told you to do that you didn’t agree with?” the therapist asked. “Kill you,” the boy replied coldly. The lights flickered,

then went out. "Allow me to introduce you two," Stephen whispered. Finale grunted, and the boy laughed. "Now we can all be friends!" Stephen shrieked.



"Franken Nemo" by Ashley Brewster

### "Numb" by Jamie Jennings

Not the kind of numb you feel when playing in the snow too long  
 The frozen daggers of ice digging into the flesh like glass  
     Paralyzing  
 The pins and needles striking the cushion  
 Not the kind of numb that goes away in a matter of minutes  
     Emotionless  
 Numb as you can feel the strings in your heart tearing as he plays a  
     Grade 8 upon the fragile fibers with his calloused fingers  
 Numb as you let the pen of pain write delicate promises of sweet  
     surrender on skin  
     Skeletons and ashes  
 Numb as you watch the gold and copper speckles fade from the  
     murky eyes  
 Numb as the chilled body in its ever resting state  
     Hoping for "Hello."  
 Immense sorrow and grief drape over my feeble shoulders  
 My screams have become sweet lullabies for the Dead  
     What is this feeling?  
     Numb



"Belief is Power" by Marcus Orta



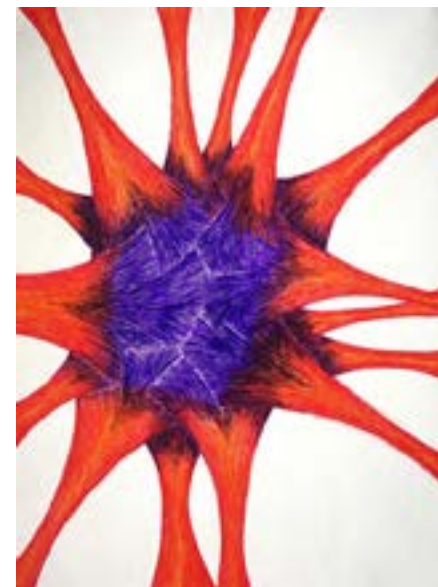
"Infinite Peace" by Johannes Waals

“Renegade” by Hannah Jarvis

Remove the blinders that retain such weariness.  
 Weariness of worry, wanting, woe.  
 The worry of the repressive rich in which our filth-stained dollars go.  
 Yearning for a purpose in a promised land we call “home”.  
 For it is the woe of our people that rings and rattles Liberty’s bell.  
 Such sorrow becomes the song of the enslaved.  
 It eddies and winds into the crevices of the puppeteer’s mind,  
 maniacally grimacing at a revelation yet made.  
 Consuming gluttonously on the tears of mankind,  
 Sinister smiles and sneers as he fastens our shackles in place.  
 Our shackles, they clank and clatter!  
 Oh, they shake and shutter,  
 for Babylon must face its greatest retaliation:  
 The whore of Babylon will be left in shatters!  
 Crashing, crashing upon her sinister city,  
 the seven seas will wash away her crown.  
 For inferno will escape her torch and devour all of her delights.  
 Such smothering smoke sears Lady Liberty’s robe away  
 and the poor man will rejoice and sing gayly upon this happy day.  
 “Worry no more”, he says.  
 “Weep not with your wearied eyes.”  
 “For Babylon’s destruction will be the beast’s demise!”



“Reptiles Concentration in Scales” by Tori Franklin



“Malignant” by Johannes Waals



“Wings” by Allison Tomlin



"Miss Understanding" by Zehr Gibbs-Barger



"Nasir" by Kendall Bines

## "To Whom This May Concern" by Ryan Davis

A man of few words is outspoken by silence,  
 and it's times like these I'm at a loss.  
 My body becomes useless.  
 My tongue tied down.  
 My mind adrift,  
 and my heart a tomb of compassion.  
 Memories replay times I should've said something.  
 Anything.  
 I wonder if you knew my phone called just to hear your voice again.  
 That my pen bought cards to write in,  
 expressing how much it appreciated you.  
 How my camera took pictures of me and my family to show you how  
 much we've grown.  
 I hope you know Sunday papers refuse to be bought knowing you'll  
 never read them again.  
 Their crosswords puzzle themselves asking why you left so soon.  
 Sometimes tears escape the prison of my eyelids.  
 Only for me to catch them,  
 because I don't want them to see a world without you.  
 I wish my thoughts could manifest themselves to show how often you  
 were on my mind,  
 because whenever I was with you my voice box collected dust.  
 I stutter to say a lifetime in a few moments.  
 Choosing my words carefully.  
 Wrapping them in sincerity.  
 Softening my heart again so I can feel how warm you made it by  
 being here.  
 No one could ever know how much I prayed you'd stay  
 That you'd recover, saying "Look, hey, I made it!"  
 But this world never deserved you.  
 Neither did your pain and suffering.  
 Now the ground holds you closer than I ever did,  
 and God cares for you better than I ever could.

I was awake, staring at the many colors that shined in the hallway waiting for the morning to arrive. I listened to the sound of the air vent struggling to breathe as it fought through the thick dust. My eyes met the clock -- it was nine in the morning. Once I was out of bed, I made my way into the kitchen where I found my mom leaning against the kitchen counter, drinking what looked to be her second cup of coffee.

“Morning, Violet! Merry Christmas.” My mother’s voice trailed past me as I was greeted by the mess on the kitchen counter before me. On the counter rested multiple empty Christmas themed cookie boxes, leftover plastic opened and unwrapped from a frozen pizza, and a tower of ice cream bowls piled high next to the sink.

“Is Sam up?” I asked my mother.

“Yeah I think she is -- but you don’t have to worry about the kitchen. I can take care of it,” my mother stated. I nodded yet said nothing, deciding instead I needed a cup of coffee. Behind me I heard the door that connects into the garage open and shut, my dad now inside walking towards the kitchen. By the time he reached the kitchen, a whiff of cigarettes, weed, and a specific brand of sweet cigars he had smoked for years had spread throughout the room. The strong scents meshed together, following strongly behind him like a shadow. Even though I knew the weed was from my sister being in the garage, I would not have been surprised if it was from him too.

“Are we doing this?” my dad asked aloud, his voice cutting awkwardly through the air. My mom looked over at him while rinsing out a rag in the sink. It took my mother and me both a moment to realize he was talking about opening gifts. I sat down now with a cup of coffee on a bar stool near the counter.

“We can do it whenever,” my mother responded as she began to wipe down the surfaces around her, “I would just go ahead and check with Sam and whoever her friend is first, I’m not sure if they need to go to the clinic and get their dose or not today.” As my dad walked away back towards the garage, my mother looked in my direction.

“Do you remember her name?” my mother asked in a hushed

tone. I took a sip of coffee while the moment of when I first met her yesterday replayed in my head.

“Her name is Baby,” I replied.

Baby was someone my sister decided to bring with her this year for the holidays. Bringing a stranger to the house along with showing up last minute was not very surprising on her end. It was late in the afternoon on Christmas day when they arrived. Both of them were wearing clothes with too many cigarette burns, looking as if they hadn’t slept in days. I also remember the face my mother made while swearing under her breath, leaving the room to go and try to break out some gifts that she didn’t have prepared. It took me little to no time to realize that it was Baby’s car who had got them here, the one to even make this whole situation possible.

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Once everyone had made the move to go into the living room and all five of us were settled, each of us had seemed to share the idea to just get this process over with as quickly as possible. There was this unspoken fear that something would be mentioned or even hinted to in conversation about the white elephant in the room. Looking over to my dad I watched as he appeared mesmerized by the twenty-four hour airing of *The Christmas Story*, as if it was the first time it was on.

“Why don’t you start with the stockings, Sam?” My mother painfully recommended. Her hands were clasped together tightly in her lap.

I looked over at my sister as she began to attempt to unwrap a gift. She was half awake. Her eyes were almost closed shut while her mouth was slightly draped open like one does in their sleep when drooling. Baby just sat there and watched as Sam nodded off slowly. I let my eyes settle in on Baby.

Her brown eyes showed a long and complicated past and had a complementing face with a smile that appeared to fool others easily. On her chest rested a gold-chain necklace with a small, gun-shaped charm that fell right above her breast bone. I grabbed what looked like a gift card that was on the top of my stocking and gently handed it to Baby.

“Here,” I motioned with a smile, “this is for you.” Baby had taken her attention off of watching Sam and instead had turned to face me, her expression changing into a wide smile.

“Thank you,” she softly retorted. Out of nowhere, my sister dropped the small box she was struggling to unwrap, shifted her gaze

then to the gift that was now on Baby's lap. With as much energy as she could muster, my sister spoke with strong excitement.

"See!!! I told you that you wouldn't leave here without something!"

I took a closer look at Sam now, realizing that the pair of black leggings she had on had more cigarette burns in them than usual, the overall color being more of a faded brown than black from being so over-worn and dirty. I looked back over at my dad randomly throughout all this, still in another world watching TV.

"Okay, Violet, go ahead and open one," my mother motioned. I felt a knot in my stomach as I looked back at Baby who politely sat there. While unwrapping the thin paper I began to rethink about the conversation I overheard from the other room yesterday that my sister was having with my dad. She was breaking down the excuse for why she couldn't call ahead and that Baby was not only the only ride she could have, but that Baby was pregnant and needed a place to spend Christmas. I stayed distracted and continued to think about Baby and my sister, hoping that what she said was not just another lie told in order to have a random stranger stay the night for free

.... She must be clean. She has to be. She might have smoked a little pot, but I am sure she didn't do anything else. I mean why would she? She's pregnant. Maybe Sam owed her money or something? When was the last time both of them actually slept?

"Oh Violet... you ARE their favorite!" Sam exclaimed with confidence. My attention was now focused again as I smiled trying to ease the discomfort in her words. The uncomfortable tension in the air still failed to disappear.

"Ok Sam -- go ahead." My mother motioned with slight anger. The next gift my sister unwrapped was a box with a full kitchen dining set, boxes of dry pasta, and a sticky note that said SAUCE on it taped to the outside. My mother chimed in before Sam could react.

"The sauce is already made, it's in the freezer for you. You can just grab it and take it with you whenever you leave." My sister's face showed pure excitement. She lifted the cheap box of the silverware set to her chest and hugged it in a childlike manner swaying side to side.

"Momma, you had no idea how bad I needed some new silverware," Sam exclaimed. We all watched as she continued rejoicing. A moment passed until my mother spoke.

"I didn't know that you needed silverware. I just was tired of you stealing my spoons and figured you could have your own set." I felt my palms begin to sweat. My sister opened her eyes a bit wider now, almost as if she were fully clean, in shock of what was just said to her.

"Momma... I AM CLEAN !! YOU KNOW THAT !!..." my sister replied with exaggeration. By the face she made and the confidence in her voice it was clear she was convinced that her words would be enough to convince our mother.

"Yeah?" my mother questioned with distaste.

"Well I would be more confident in that being the truth if my f\*%#ing spoons weren't disappearing from my kitchen."

The color of my mother's face was now slowly fading into a shade of red. I looked down at the carpet, focusing on its itchy design and feel, hoping no other words would be said aloud that could make the air even tighter than it already was. There was a grunt from the direction of my father as he rolled onto his side, all in one motion sitting up on the couch, while grabbing everyone's attention in the process.

"Let's not get into this, Ellen; let's just drop this and move on," my father declared. I watched as my mother left the room with a calm haste as if something on the stove needed immediate attention. Shortly after, my dad finally got up off the couch and headed back towards the garage.

Once the door to the garage closed in the distance I quickly pushed the small remainder of gifts back under the tree and settled into a spot on the couch. I glanced over at my sister as she picked at her skin, still sitting in the same spot since we all had entered the room. She was transfixed on the idea that there was something under her skin. Baby sat and watched. I ignored my sister then and instead fixed my eyes on the TV screen before me. I grabbed a blanket, made myself comfortable, and watched The Christmas Story as if it was the first time ever airing on TV.

