

MHU ARTS AND LITERATURE MAGAZINE 2025

# CADENZ



MARS HILL UNIVERSITY



# Special Thanks

## Advisor

Felice Lopez Bell

## Writing Editors

Braxton Robinson

Cadence Wyatt

Skylar Camby

Kiki Palmer

## Art Editors

Lovelle Williams

Nash Richardson



# Congratulations to our Artists and Writers!

## Art Winners - Judged by Ellen Phillips

### Photography

1st Place - *But I'm Not Really Up for Conversation* by Jonathan Eguia

2nd Place - *Ladder to the Moon* by Micah Lewis

3rd Place - *Warm Beach* Ares Wharton

### Painting and Drawing

1st Place - *Sister In Law* by Seanna Milton

2nd Place - *The Luncheon* by Seanna Milton

3rd Place - *Possibilities* by Nialah Garcia

### Graphic Design

1st Place - *Jesse Owens Tribute* by Jordan Hirigoyen

### Ceramics

1st Place - *Algae Lagoon* by Ty Whitman

## Writing Winners - Judged by Mark Tullis

### Poetry

1st Place - "Dogwoods:An Elegy" by Lillian Akers-Eyer

2nd Place - "Hope" by RayRay Ellis

3rd Place - "ADHD" by Marcos Benitez

### Prose

1st Place - "Writer's Dilemma in Flash Fiction" by Samuel Evans

2nd Place - "A Deer in Headlights" by Cassie Berry

3rd Place - "For Her" by Cassie Berry

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# My Mountain Home

*by Lexi McCarter*

The Smoky Mountains hum a gentle tune,  
Where creeks braid through forests, and katydids sing,  
And dawn creeps beneath an Appalachian moon.

The redbud and oak with soft sways croon,  
A hymn the ancient hills still carry on,  
The Smoky Mountains hum a gentle tune.

In hollers green where wildflowers bloom,  
Old tales are spoken, and souls softly cling,  
As dawn creeps beneath an Appalachian moon.

A whippoorwill warbles out, a ballad so boon,  
With copper stills and smoke as thick as night,  
The Smoky Mountains hum a gentle tune.

Through misty trails, echoes of the past rise and then swoon,  
Where roots run long and memories dig deep,  
And dawn creeps beneath an Appalachian moon.

The hills timeless, their heart a rune,  
The past stands strong, its soul a bond to keep.  
The Smoky Mountains hum a gentle tune,  
And dawn creeps beneath an Appalachian moon.



*Frying Pan Tower*  
*by Victor Nicholson*



*Cemetery Drive*  
*by Kiki Palmer*

# Hold Me Until I Am Cold

*by Megan Walters*

I have the deepest desire to be known.  
Hold me until I am cold.  
Stab a knife into my spine  
and drag it down  
until I bleed out.  
Because only then will I have been known,  
Eviscerated and bloody,  
Vulnerable and torn,  
All my filth laid bare and strewn,  
Sick and hunched over,  
And you call it beautiful,  
The things my skin held inside.  
And I feel the burning heat and sting of love and pain for once,  
And I feel I am known,  
While you hold me until I am cold.

# A Canary in a Coal Mine

*by Larissa Bullman*

The rot sinks in, heavy and thick;  
The decay burns slow and sweet;  
The flame sits low on the candlewick;  
The heart has a finite beat.

Pain acts as a warning sign:  
A silent cry and physical plea;  
A canary in a coal mine,  
Hitting the cage in desperation to flee.

The heart pounds near you,  
A desperate attempt at love.  
How the canary wish it flew;  
How it wishes it were a dove.

Pain becomes more bearable in your presence,  
But it only hastens the decay.  
My being won't find a place in your essence,  
Because your eyes see me painted in shades of sickly gray.

I kneel at your feet as though at the altar of a shrine,  
But my knees give out when I try to stand.  
My wings break like a canary in a coal mine,  
And I come to fear your motionless hand.

Tears pool as acid and toxin,  
For I know, to you, I am nothing,  
But my body knows pain as the sole option,  
And my heart only knows loving.

You study odd little creatures,  
And there's a fascinating love there.  
I can expose my weird features;  
My bones and rot laid bare.

I crave to ask for your embrace,  
But I hesitate, and it's gone.  
My guilt can't bear your face;  
The canary's wings are clipped by dawn.

My eyes don't miss the touch you bestow on others;  
The lack of your warmth lays heavy on my spine.  
I don't know affection, only covers.  
Am I only your canary in a coal mine?



# Wedding Bells

*by Haley Singleton*

Wedding bells, white lace around the hands.  
I pray you'll be there in this life, not the next.  
Wedding bells, offbeat stomping of our shoes.  
I know you love me, but please try harder.

I pray you'll be there in this life, not the next.  
Wedding bells, eyes flutter under the lights.  
I know you love me, but please try harder.  
Wedding bells, muttered words to a tune.

Wedding bells, eyes flutter under the lights.  
Do you know your words linger in my heart?  
Wedding bells, muttered words to a tune.  
The hate you spew hard at work.

Do you know your words linger in my heart?  
Wedding bells, my feminine devotion for a woman.  
The hate you spew hard at work.  
Wedding bells, it drives you apart from me.

I turn to look for you at my side.  
Wedding bells, my devotion for a woman.  
You were never there to walk beside.  
Wedding bells, it drives you apart from me.



*Narnia*  
*by Seanna Milton*



*Star Gazed Oceans 1-3*  
*by Leah Brabham*

# The Escort

*by Matthew Pacheco*

As a soldier takes their fellow to the doors of new life,

Oh, Mom, how it felt to take such a strong one, who had endured much strife.

A hero to many, especially me.

Oh, Mom, how joyful you must be.

To have your three kids, whom you love dearly,

be the ones to bring you through those halls.

Though I wish it would've been orchids and waterfalls

It was your heroism that made your legacy stand tall.

Oh, Mom, in a mere five minutes how my mind races,

To the smile you once gave me and all your silly faces,

the memories everlasting and all their small traces,

Or perhaps the times you wanted one more of our embraces.

Oh, Lord, allow my mind to never erase them.

Oh, Mom, my mind goes back to the time,

the time where you cheered from the stands.

Where from the field I'd try to hush you with my hands,

but a mother's love found no reason to go with that plan.

As my number one supporter, how can I not escort

The one who would've fought for me, even in court.

Through these halls where nurses bow

and the somber silence prowls.

Oh, Mom, to know you is to love you,

and to have known you is to live in a life full of the love you were full of.

In some sort of way, I must say goodbye, oh, Mom.

though you would have loved to stay,

I beleive you are one smile away.

A smile I see in your daughters, the ones who love to play

just like you used to.

Oh, Mom, you never wasted a day.

But today is the day, we must wave.

Wave to you, Mom.

I promise, I'll behave.

I promise, I will try to change

this world—making it a better place.

Though this place was better with you in it,

I believe a goodbye is still in order; see you in a couple minutes.

We love you, Mom.

And though, we ask ourselves how,

we sit in love for you and say:

Goodbye for now.



*Sunset to the Lake*  
*by Keaton Hunt*

# Hurricane Helene

*by Allie Ray*

On September 27, 2024, sometime around nine in the morning,  
Helene began her wrath, a wild weather wail,  
I felt our home shaking as the wind roared around us,  
I could hear the trees thrashing and slamming on our roof.  
I could only hope it did not get worse.  
Then, all of a sudden, there was a bang at our door, it was our neighbors, rushing us to  
move our cars quickly  
before the flood stole them away into the swirling depths.  
The urgency in their voices raced through my heart as we rushed to dress for the storm we  
would soon face, and we were nearly too late.  
I could hear the trees cracking, snapping, and falling near.  
The wind swirled viciously, pushing debris as sharp as a spear,  
as nature's wrath unleashed its force, far too severe.  
Shadows shuffled in, stealing the light away,  
and left us all feeling dismay.  
I could only hope it did not get worse.  
The once peaceful creek turned into a raging river ready to rip,  
so much from so many in its furious grip.  
I couldn't escape the fear that held me tightly without slip.  
Anxiety rushing in like the water and the wind,  
as I glimpsed the damage that had already begun,  
witnessing the bridge that once connected our driveway to the road, gone.  
People's homes and treasured keepsakes, gone.  
People's land was washed away, gone.  
Places of comfort and safety, shattered and lost, gone.  
So many things cruelly ripped from innocent lives who didn't deserve this.  
I could only hope it did not get worse.  
Our neighbors struggled financially to recover from the damage,  
so I set up a GoFundMe in hopes of helping them manage.  
We raised lots of money and were very thankful,  
for all of our friends and family who were able to help us recover.  
Life was an adjustment, lots of new things to discover,  
like how to shower with a camp shower bag hanging on a tree,  
as the rescuers flew over us with far too much to see.  
We had no choice but to drive our four-wheeler into town daily,  
in hopes of updates on family and friends,  
navigating through the heartbreaking aftermath and weaving through the wreckage.  
It made our hearts ache with sorrow, thinking of what could happen tomorrow.  
There was a nerve-wracking silence after the storm,  
and in the stillness that filled the air, my heart sank under the grasp of shared despair.  
I could feel the dust sticking to my skin,  
leftover from the storm as if it was threatening to begin once again.  
We grew stronger and tougher once more, gathered together as if we were kin.  
The people of this community help others to no end,  
doing what they could to make life feel normal once again.  
Opening their shops and restaurants,  
even with no water and limited resources.  
Slowly things began to get better,  
but still so many without homes as winter creeps in.  
It makes my heart ache for those not as lucky as me.  
We reminisce on the past and what life used to be,  
But we must move on even though we still grieve what was once a beautiful town safe from

things like hurricanes but is now destructed, the land disrupted.  
Rebuilding may take years, it's true,  
as the past we once cherished, now fades from view.  
The storm has forged a strength inside,  
once cloaked in fear, now we will stand with pride.



*Bahamian Lightning Storm*  
by Jerry Lewis

# Dear Helene

by Cierra Williams

I look around me and feel like I am in unfamiliar territory.  
These can't be the beautiful mountains I love.  
This can't be the same city I've lived in my whole life.  
Western North Carolina, why do you look so different?  
Helene, what did you do?  
Why have you slipped past the flattened plains and busy highways?  
Why did you bring those raging winds and flooded streets?  
We tried our best to protect so many from you, but you seemed to follow.  
Did we anger you?  
Helene, why have you blockaded so many of us from escaping?  
Why have you taken entire towns?  
Chimney Rock, Boone, Swannaoa, can you hear me?  
I can't see you anymore, where have you gone?  
Did she take you with her?  
Helene, I don't understand.  
Why have you left me shaken to my core?  
Did you know the sound of rushing ambulances scares me?  
Did you know trees laying to rest against their will makes me cringe?  
I can't even stand on my own. What more do you want?  
Helene, do you see what you left behind?  
Do you see how we still haven't recovered?  
Do you know I had to leave thinking Milton was going to do worse than you?  
Helene, do you know I haven't been home in a month?  
Do you know I haven't seen a sunset in the mountains since?  
Do you know I had to spend my last, so I could eat and put new clothes on my back?  
Helene, you separated me from my dad.  
Do you know he's been alone for more than 2 weeks?  
Helene, why?  
Helene, do you know the mountains are still standing?  
Dear Helene, you challenged us, and we won.

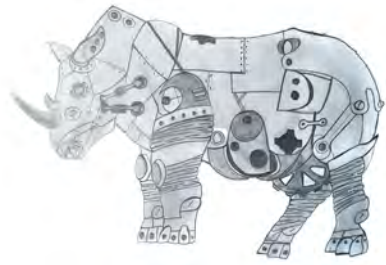
# Bracing a Hurricane

*by Kat McDonald*

Ashen clouds begin to materialize.  
I watched them foming, rolling in, picking up speed and strength  
All the while threatening me.  
I ignored the pending storm.  
It's been building for a while.  
I'm sure it will dissipate before it makes landfall.  
Occasional drops hit me, I wipe them off my skin  
Goosebumps prickling my arms.  
The storm will disappear before it hits me.  
I know it will.  
I can still see the sun above me.  
It's going to be okay.  
For now, it's okay.  
It's a tropical storm at best.  
Nothing I haven't been through before.  
Oh.....my insomnia is back.  
Oh well, it was bound to happen.  
Oh.....well....that made me flinch.  
Nothing came of it...but still.  
I look through the windows, watching drops pitter patter against the glass panes. I know it's coming.  
Deep down I always knew.  
Was it the familiarity? Curls I can still feel in my fingers, tattoos I could trace in the dark.  
Was it loneliness? Nights spent reaching out and finding a warm spot instead of cold, empty sheets  
Was it the sunny days in between the storm surges?  
I don't know.  
Being scarred by the storm before?  
I guess I was wrong.  
I never came up for air enough before the next one hit.  
I'm not talking about weather.  
I'm talking about a barrage of verbal abuse, raining down on me pelting me with its needle-like rain.  
Freezing my skin, painful cold seeping into my bones.  
You're a bitch, hopeless, you're not worth it.  
Mental abuse so twisted, whipping like wind so thick and sharp I can't hear or open my eyes. Slicing through my hair and driving me out of my mind.  
Why can't I join the Army? Max will die and it'll be my fault?  
How? Why would you say that? It was always my dream!  
Because you knew it would work.  
I'm not crawling under barbed wire or practicing live fires.  
I'm sitting at home with boarded-up windows as a storm rages outside.  
Deep rotting regret buried inside me  
As I let you control my future and change me.  
Hands put on or near me in a way they shouldn't have.  
Tornadoes of incidents that cause me to go underground and hide until it was over. An eye of the hurricane that is so comforting, giving false security that this storm surge subsided.  
Then, of course, another one hits.  
It wasn't like this before?  
Well...it wasn't bad before  
...it wasn't this bad before.  
Days after days of rain



Floods swallowing me up until I feel I can't breathe.  
 Restless sleep and spikes in anxiety  
 Shaking my whole world.  
 Please just hug me, play with my hair.  
 Tell me it'll all be okay, something!  
 No? What do you mean you comfort me enough!?  
 Clearly not, because I'm at my breaking point.  
 Here you go again, whittling me down.  
 Yes. You're right. You're always right.  
 How could I be stupid and disagree?  
 You know better, you always have.



*Grinding My Gears  
 by Kat McDonald*

I agree with fake sincerity, tears pooling in my palms.  
 I refuse to meet your eyes, I don't want you to see the  
 windows to my soul. And how you shattered them.  
 Broken, bleak, bitter eyes that overflow more often than not  
 And when a real natural disaster hits  
 Me and my dogs are left behind.  
 With all the ugliness happening already, how could I have seen?  
 The weather picking up, the sleets of rain, not a tropical storm, it's Hurricane Helene.  
 Real, not metaphoric floods and disaster struck and that was the last of it all Watching as  
 the lights go out in Asheville and we're cut off from the rest of the world. No reception,  
 misperception of the danger  
 I can't take this anymore.  
 I have to evacuate to get out of the whipping winds and catastrophic downpour. Constant  
 distress as I finally give in and call SOS.  
 What would have happened if I saw the storm for what it was?  
 And fled instead of bearing it?  
 If I didn't uproot my entire life and move across country  
 For a storm to unleash its full wrath in a year's time  
 Too late for that.  
 Now I'm wading in receding water  
 One dog in my arms, the other in my heart.  
 I did this to us, but at least I got us out.  
 I finally see past the clouds.  
 A week after I'm ecstatic that you're gone.  
 The debris piled on houses, still muddied broken streets.  
 A month after I'm angry, crying about what you put me through. The power's back on and I  
 have water finally.  
 During the holidays I feel empty, you were my life for years.  
 Do I miss good memories with you? Do I hate you? Why can't I make up my mind?  
 Christmas lights adorn fixed light structures like it never even happened. By New Years I  
 don't think about you as I get my New Years kiss. I'm moving on, my heart healing.  
 Love more genuine than you ever gave me.  
 Buildings are opened, damages repaired.  
 Now 4 months after and I'm angry again  
 Fuming at what you did, more so the aftermath.  
 I drive by the River Arts District, panic-stricken  
 Remembering this road was drowned just months before.  
 It seems I can't fully move on from either.  
 I'm too scared to love anyone else.  
 How blissful someone else's love and affection felt,  
 I pushed it away, too uncomfortable.  
 The nicer he is, the more I pull away.  
 I have freedom, comfort, and affection  
 But I don't want any of it.  
 You trained me to do without

To take insults and everything else you hurled at me.  
Now sincerity isn't security.  
It's a snake waiting to strike  
To fill my heart with venom and tear me apart.  
I can't recover. I look over my shoulder and you're there.  
I can recover? No, this won't beat me! I got this!  
I don't know.  
I'm so unsure.  
Another storm furies inside me  
My mind pulled to and fro in a rip current of constant indecisiveness. Years of bracing abuse  
and control.  
With every storm that hit,  
my head went down and mouth would shut as I was trained to do. I'm built for this  
treatment.  
Board up and prepare for when it happens again  
Because it will, it always has.  
Now I have to learn to be loved for real  
To accept affection without regression  
Not believing it's all an act.  
I have to learn it's okay for someone to love me.  
Just because someone else's version was warped  
I look at clothes and accessories that I had before and after you I don't want to dress the  
way you "preferred."  
But I don't want to dress to spite you.  
I want to be me again, the me that you didn't create.  
Imagine having an identity crisis over a pair of sunglasses. To an outsider, it's stupid.  
To me, it was my whole life.  
A damn accessory stands between who I am and who I was shaped to be. Imagine that.  
Others are still recovering from a natural disaster.  
I lose my mind over my imaginary one.  
To hell with the sunglasses.  
That problem can be sorted another day.  
Stepping out of my dorm, the sun rises over the mountains. The storm is over, I still see  
some clouds.  
Some days will be a light drizzle.  
Others will be a downpour.  
But some, even if only a few for now  
Will be bright and sunny like this one.  
There is comfort in freedom.  
Though the aftermath of both storms are still felt months after, It's hard to relax,  
To feel the wind and not expect it to pick up,  
To look at a sprinkle and not expect a downpour,  
To accept love and not expect abuse.  
It's a vicious cycle.  
With the water subsided and the ground dried,  
I can rebuild from the ground up.  
I don't have to build a house tomorrow.  
The city of Asheville is still rebuilding after all this time.



*Freedom Flying*  
by Kat McDonald

# What About Me

*by Cierra Williams*

What about me threatens you?  
I am human, just like you.  
I am God's child, just like you.  
So what about me threatens you?  
Is it the color of my skin?  
Because your skin is a different shade than mine?  
Is it because I am a woman?  
Surely not, because you wouldn't be here if it wasn't  
for a woman.  
Is it because shackles don't dangle from my body?  
Weighing me down, keeping me from standing up  
for myself?  
Is it because you can't take my body for your own?  
What about me threatens you?  
We all live on earth.  
We eat the same.  
We breathe the same.  
So why am I treated so differently?  
Is it because I have a voice?  
Is it because I can do what you can?  
Is it because we eat the same?  
Because we breathe the same?  
Why does being a Black woman in America bother  
you?  
This is my home, too.  
I was raised here the same as you.  
So what about me threatens you?



*Respiration*  
*by Seanna Milton*



*More Than They See*  
by Sagar Karlsson Rowa

## List of World War II Bomber Pilots

*by Elinor Maloney*

"Masters of the air," bomber pilots in World War II.  
"Soar," taking off to go abroad and fight Hitler.  
"Pre-flight," pilots check to make sure the plane will fly.  
"Around the Clock," flying to Germany from Thorp Abbots, to bomb Krauts.  
"Every second is a little death," pilots seeing their friends get shot down.  
"I can fix it," having to hold on to the friends that stick around.  
"Rack 'em' up and knock 'em' down," getting revenge on Krauts.  
"Kind of beautiful," seeing the skies before the dogfights happen.  
"The Bloody Hundreht," America's most destroyed bomber group, 732 died in total.  
"One day in Hell," pilots downed, now being interrogated by the SSS.  
"The enemy below" was captured and now held in Stalag Luft III.  
"Punching, though," having to take your anger out on friends instead of the Kraut guards.  
"Stories over poker," pilots sent to rehab because they have seen too many friends shot.  
"An impossible ask," pilots being asked to sign up again, cause they're all gone.  
"Unchosen transfers," choosing the Black pilots over white ones cause they're not spies.  
"Long winter marches," the Krauts are losing, so you get moved from camp to camp.  
"Horrors," toes breaking off from frostbite, because there are no more shoes.  
"The flag," finally, the American flag is lifted in the air, and the Krauts surrender.  
"Surrender," it's time to go home and recover from the horrors.  
"Celebrating," getting drunk with the people left alive.  
"Going home," one last pre-flight check, and up to the sky one goes.

# Selfless as a fault

*by Skylar Camby*

"You're a doormat, darling," I said.  
Still, you offered no reply,  
So I followed everyone else,  
Wiped my shoes on you,  
And simply walked inside.

"You're covered in dirt, darling," I'd say,  
But I don't wash you off.  
I hold my breath.  
I give you space.  
Still, I hear no response.

When you finally speak,  
It's not what I wanted to hear.  
You tell me, "Your steps are uneven,  
Your face withdrawn,  
Was it something I've done?  
Did I do something wrong?"

I close my eyes, then,  
Unable to watch on.  
As you're walked over—  
again, and again.  
I head to the backdoor,  
Patience worn thin.

I pass through the door frame,  
And struggle not to picture—  
You and I, before their words became scripture.  
The mountain we made, crumbled under the fissure.  
People-pleasing and pain are such a dangerous mixture.



*Morning Chores*  
*by Kaitlyn Johnson*





*Still Life With Apples*  
by Nash Richardson



*The Luncheon*  
by Seanna Milton



# Hot Ones *by Skylar Camby*

In a shady looking building built on bricks and suspiciously tarped windows, noises of clucking and raised voices filled the air. "Nuclear Nugget sounds way more intimidating!" One of the co-leaders of the chicken fighting ring declared, slamming her hand on the conference table.

"Feather Fiend is way better! Nugget? Are you trying to make everyone hungry? This is a Chicken fighting ring, not a hot sauce company," the male co-leader scoffs.

"You think feathers are more intimidating than a nuke?" The first woman scoffs again, standing and pointing across the table in an accusatory manner.

The man on the other side joins her to stand, throwing his hands up in the air and leaning forward, "you've clearly never been tickled by a feather, and it shows!"

"Oh yeah? Well, you... you've never been nuked and it shows!" She cries out.

The man stands there for a second before he stares up at the ceiling, "You don't say."

The Leader of operations walks into the room then, whistling. He carries a bucket of chicken in his hands.

"...What is that?" The woman asks hesitantly.

"Oh, new shoes! Don't they just make my legs look so—you aren't talking about that. Ahem." He stops posing with his absurdly ugly crocs and looks down at what he's holding instead, "Oh, um, chicken?" He quirks an eyebrow, looking at the front of the bucket as if to confirm his answer.

"Yeah, we see that. There are chickens reported missing, sir. Does that happen to ring a bell?" She snarls.

"I'd imagine it decks the halls," the other man snidely remarks, before looking at their leader's shoes appraisingly, "and not bad, they do really accentuate your uh... personality."

The woman glances at him with a baffled expression, "What are you on about?"

"You know, the Christmas song—"

"No, I'm talking about the shoes. Don't lie to him. Those are the ugliest shoes I've ever laid eyes on, and I have looked at a lot of feet in my lifetime," she snaps.

The male co-leader pauses and blinks, before deciding to unpack that later.

"Yeah, yeah. Chicken missing, huh? Was probably Chickpea, or maybe it was Ricky? Whichever one kept "cooping"—ha-ha, copping an attitude. Oh, by the way; there's a couple more missing from the enclosure. Do find them for me, please?" The leader says, unaware of their conversation, before helping himself to another chicken wing.

"You can't keep eating our staff!" The male co-leader cries in exasperation.

"Can't I? Why don't you two quit running around like chickens with your heads cut off—good one, me—and find our missing chickens, hmm?"

From around the corner, Feathric shakes his head at Nugsby, trying to dissuade him. Nugsby hesitates, feathers bristling with nerves; until he hears the words that push him past his beaking—no, breaking—point.

"Well, you know what Paul says, if they didn't want to be eaten then they'd blow up the building!" He laughs at his inside joke.

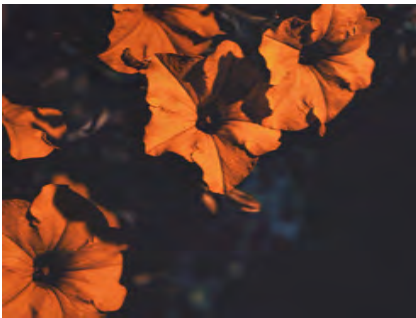
"No, I don't know what Paul says. Paul is another chicken, Sir, he just makes chicken noises. In fact, he's probably in your bucket right now," the woman draws.

The chickens face each other as they listen to the meeting. They turn their beaks to one another. Nugsby pulls out the detonator with his wing, and looks resolutely at Feathric like he has something he wants to convey. Feathric reaches out to take hold of his other wing. Nugsby's beady little eyes lock onto his friend's before he finally cocks his head and opens his beak, "Ba-gawk".

The building is shaken by the accompanying explosion.



*Do Not Disturb*  
by Seanna Milton



*Untitled*  
by Zachary Rumley

## Little Lamb

*by Skylar Camby*

Words on tongues like paperweights—  
Pen to paper, I hesitate.  
Ink bleeds through onto a blank page.  
I feel my heartbeat; like a rabbit in my rib cage.

The eyes in my back, like thorns.  
I both love and fear their laughter.  
My nerve wilts like roses, deprived of water.  
I am but a fool and a daughter.

This lamb dreams of open fields,  
But bares her neck for the slaughter.

# For Her *by Cassie Berry*

"I remember when those men came to me and told me they were making a show about me. It was a lovely day. The sun was shining, and I was on laundry duty, so the work wasn't too bad," I said softly in the sweetest southern accent I could manage.

"Miss Caiman. That was my producer that talked to you." The woman across from me sighed. I couldn't help but envy her. With her colorful clothes, careless smile, and cageless attitude. "I was told that you lied to them, and in our agreement, you said you would be honest and not exaggerate the truth."

"I was a writer, yes, but I am telling you I didn't kill that last man." I looked her dead in the eyes as I stated what I knew to be true.

"I'm not calling you a liar, Miss Caiman. I'm just saying we can't slander your sister on national television."

"But it was her! She killed her husband! Sure, I had gotten away with the first murder, but she framed me for that one!" I exclaimed this with my whole chest, and the woman sighed and looked down at the scribbles from her producer.

"It paints a lovely picture. Your sister gave you the murder weapon. But that knife wasn't at her house before the murder, it was at yours. Perhaps you should spend your time in prison writing about this little make-believe story, but not on our show."

"You're asking me to lie then," I stated defeatedly.

"No, I'm asking for the story you gave the court."

"But that's the lie! You need to understand that I unknowingly lied. I thought I killed him. I really did. The whole thing was a blur, though. I just remember waking up covered in blood and that knife on the table. I started cleaning up when the police arrived, and by then it was too late. They found two bodies in my house, when I only killed one. Two bodies, two different weapons. Jagged. That's the kind of knife I used."

"Jagged? As in serrated?" the woman questions.

"Yes ma'am. The last one died from a straight kitchen knife. I thought it was strange only after I was brought into custody. But after a month in this cell, I realized that my sister gave me that knife a few days before her husband died. She told me that she loved me and thought I should have this knife as it was our mother's."

"Why did she give you your mother's old kitchen knife?" the woman wondered.

"It wasn't our mother's. The strangest thing was I believed her lie, simply because why would she be untruthful? The knife wasn't important until it came back as the murder weapon of the last victim, my sister's husband. A murder I don't remember. Covered in blood I didn't shed. She framed me," I stated in despair.

"Why would your sister frame you?" the woman asked.

"I told her about the murder... About the man that tried to hurt me. It was self-defense! I didn't want to hurt him, but it was me or him. After I realized what I had done, I shoved him into the basement. I never told anyone until my sister came over to complain about her husband. She said he reminded her of Mom. I didn't think about that till later, but she must have wanted him dead and me behind bars or worse."

"Why?"

"Because she feared me. I look and act just like her. Like our mother. I have her name and attitude. And I always tell my sister to control herself just like my mother did." I looked down as the woman scurried to write down everything I said.

"Don't you understand that you are to hang for these two murders Miss Caiman?"

I should never have let her in. I should've kept my little murder a secret. I should've gotten rid of that knife. My thoughts raced as tears started to stream.

"I'll die protecting her just like my mother did."







*Suwannee River National Park*  
by Marlee Bishop



*Glacier Mountain Park*  
by Kayleigh Mallore



*Oulanka*  
by Khamani White Carr



*El Yunque*  
by Fernanda Osuna

# A Deer in Headlights

*by Cassie Berry*



My hands are cold, but the world around me seems to burn. It has been four days since the war started and I watch as another mushroom cloud covers the sky in an icky brown. It has tones of red in it that make it look like the devil himself is watching over us. I grab Uriah's hand and pull him close to me.

"Let's go," I growl. He follows alongside of me as I walk past the abandoned cars and houses that used to be homes. The goal was clear, move south and hope life up there was better.

"Elizabeth?" Uriah tugs at my pants. I look down as he smiles up at me. "It'll be right." I chuckle a little at how cute he is.

"All right, Uriah. It will be all right." I correct him as I pick him up. "Let's find your mommy," I say as I put him on my back.

Uriah is not mine, but he might as well be. As of four days ago, I have a son. I never thought that I would be a mother, but I seem great at it. Uriah is my son and I love him. The first time I saw him he was weeping. An Arabic boy in front of a burnt house. Another victim that was taken down by racism. The war that has caused everyone's early deaths rages between three countries, America, China, and Iraq. Uriah has very traditional Arabic presenting features. With his nose and lovely locks of dark hair. I sit him down again and grab his hand.

"Elizabeth, that kitty looks funky." Uriah laughs as he watches a cat vomit up something unnatural. The smell alone is enough to make you pale. The animal is skinny, and it looks so sickly. It continues to puke, and I start to feel woozy. I draw back from the cat, or lack thereof, as Uriah attempts to walk towards it.

"Uriah!" I grab his arm and pull him towards me. I suck at this whole "being a mom" thing.

As we continue to walk, getting farther away from the cat, I see a somewhat nice looking car. It seems to be about 7 or 8 years old. It is beat up, but it still has tires. I try to open the door, but it is locked. It's funny how four days can change your entire life. How just five days ago was Wednesday and I was at the gym working out. How my only reason for living was to become an Olympic champion, but now I'll be lucky to even find a dumbbell.

I smile as I wrap my hand with my flannel. I pull my arm back and punch the window, but it doesn't break. I laugh and continue to punch it. Finally, I see it crack and I start punching harder. I feel a warm liquid run down my arm, it smells of iron. Then the window gives way and the alarm starts going off. Uriah grabs my leg with one hand in fear and with the other he covers one of his ears.

"Elizabeth! It's LOUD!" He yells at me as I hotwire the car. Once it is cranked up, the alarm ceases. Uriah grabs my bloody hand and kisses it. He wipes my blood off of his mouth, climbs over me and sits in the back.

"Why don't you sit up here with me?" I ask and his eyes light up.

"Can I?" he smiles widely.

"Yeah, now get up here."

He buckles up and frowns when I don't.

"My mommy says you have to buckle up." His face smooches into an unhappy scowl. I sigh and give in. As I drive, I look around at the freakish animals and the dead. I lived such a healthy life up until now. My future was clear, no gold, silver, or bronze. No metal, just cancer, if I live that long. Soon enough I'll look like that cat. Shriveled up, vomiting and wishing for death. If only I was wealthier, I would be elsewhere. The moon? Mars? It doesn't matter. Where I am now is Hell and I feel as if life only gets harder from here. The planet is in shambles and when every human on this planet dies, this dystopia will become Earth's utopia. I wish the good went to colonize other planets, but I know that ship is full of Christopher Colombis that will destroy another planet like they destroyed ours.



I slam on the brakes and swing my arm out in front of Uriah. A creature stands in front of the car. A deer? No. It stands on its hind legs and stares at us. It has antlers that are too big for its body. I freeze for a moment as it looks into my soul.

"Elizabeth?" Uriah sounds frightened. "Monster."

But I sit there, in fear. As the sweat dries off me, I realize tears are streaming down my face. My God, its eyes are red, and the red skies reflect in them, making them look as if they are glowing. It is Lucifer. He has come for me. We sit there for what feels like hours. I realize that I can move. I put my foot to the pedal and the pedal to the ground. The creature moves out of the way and watches us go. I pray as we dangerously drive through the debris on the roads. Until suddenly I realize there is no more gas. We drift as we fly down the roads. Going a hundred miles per hour, I try not to press the brakes. We need gas, but I do not want to get out of this car.

We slow down to a rest way, and I cringe at the thought of having to leave the safety of my seat. I get out and walk inside of the store. It is a mess inside and I sigh as I walk behind the desk. I press the buttons and generously give myself three hundred dollars of gas. I look around at what little food is left and smile when I see a can of Spam. As I make my way to the wonderful "meat," I feel as if something is watching me. I hear cans being tossed around and slammed against walls. When I look behind me, a raccoon attacks me. It is rabid and it looks as if it is on drugs. It charges at me, and I grab a broom that is within arm's distance. I hit it and I continue to hit it, until it stops moving. I grab snacks and throw them on Uriah. I grab the pump and start filling the car up. The fluid flows for a while, then stops suddenly.

"25 dollars? That's all this damn pump has?" I sigh as I put the pump back on the hook. I need more gas, but I'm not going back into that raccoon nest to use a different pump. I sigh and once again we are back on the road with a half of a tank of gas.

On the road for an hour and we are a little low on gas once again.

"I wanna go there!" Uriah yells and presses his hands to the window. I smile as I pull into an abandoned amusement park.

We get out of the car and walk through the arch. This place takes on an eerie glow in the light of the sulfur clouds. I soon get a bad feeling that washes over me.

"Let's go, Elizabeth!" He pulls my arm and drags us deeper into the spookiness.

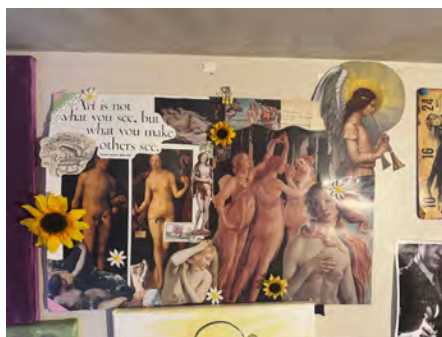
Suddenly I see it. The Beast. Its eyes glare at us, and I am unable to move yet again. Uriah grabs a toy off one of the game booths.

The Beast walks on its hind legs to us, and it is then I realize I have legs. I pick Uriah up and start to run, but the cryptid runs, too. I run as fast as I can; then the thing pushes us to the ground. Uriah is screaming, his shrill voice ringing in my ears. Why is it doing this?

"What?! What do you want from us?!" I scream as it viscerously rips at Uriah's throat. After Uriah stops moving, its deathly gaze lands on me.

"I'll see you in Hell." I smile and welcome Death with open arms.

Yet he never comes, not physically.



*The Art of the Body*  
by Cassie Berry

# I Am a Dandelion

*by Cassie Berry*

I am a dandelion.  
With my bright orangish-yellow hair  
And a smile on my face.

Like a dandelion, I represent the celestial bodies.  
I am the sun, bright and yellow, shining bright for all  
to see.  
I am the moon, puffed up yet soft, a gentle lover.  
I am the stars, scattered throughout the universe,  
searching for a home to land.

I am a pollinator,  
Giving life to those who need it.  
My bees find refuge in my soft petals.

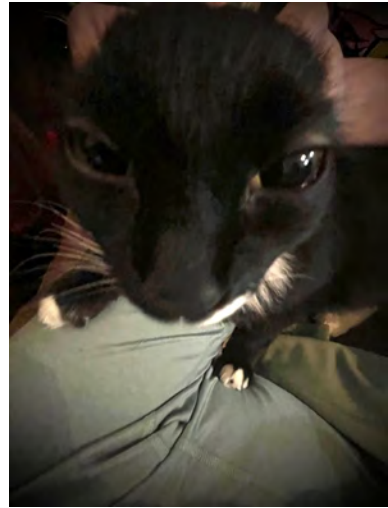
I am a protector,  
My leaves are sharp  
And pointy to protect my soft, fluffy heart.

I am endurance,  
The first plant to grow back after the wildfires called life burn us away.  
I can blossom on the hard, hot conceit;  
I will not be fried by the hatred of others.

All these things that make me beautiful  
Are the very things that make others call me a weed.  
If I am a weed,  
I will take over your lands and spread my happiness as I go.

Because I am a weed,  
I will grow my medicinal roots so deep in the ground that if you try to dig me up,  
I will just come back.  
As this is my home and no one will kick me out.

I am the sun, moon, and stars.  
I am a pollinator and protector.  
I am endurance. But most importantly,  
I am a weed, and I would not change one thing about myself. So, why would others?



*Proof of Extraterrestrials  
by Cassie Berry*



*Sister-In-Law*  
by Seanna Milton



# We Fragment

by Cadence Wyatt

My soul is tucked between my lungs  
Broken into fragments.  
I have not lost the pieces,  
Just hid them around the world.

One piece is in my childhood room  
On the matted-down carpet,  
Between two crying children  
And the one holding them close.

One is on a trampoline  
Watching a summer sunset,  
Understanding that this is (was) the last time  
I'd get to enjoy vacation.

One sits in a school building  
Between a cafe and cafeteria,  
Watching movies, making jokes,  
Forgetting what made school so bad in the first place.

One sits on someone else's bed  
Mourning a loss that hasn't happened yet.  
One sits in the woods  
Mourning a loss that happened too long ago to remember.

There's a fragment in my backyard  
Begging a pet to come back that couldn't hear me  
Until she found me again  
And apologized for leaving.

One sits on a farm surrounded by children  
Every Thursday, five to seven,  
Climbing trees and cleaning stalls  
A sibling to fourteen kids.

One is in a different country  
On a rooftop over a city,  
Watching school kids play for hours,  
Getting locked out under clear starlight.

A large one dances around that playground  
Learning games from a language it doesn't understand,  
Repeating names we will never forget,  
Sofia, Dana, Dorothy.

The happy fragments sour with time,  
Reminders of how it used to be.  
The saddest fragments sweeten,  
Highlighting the lessons they teach.

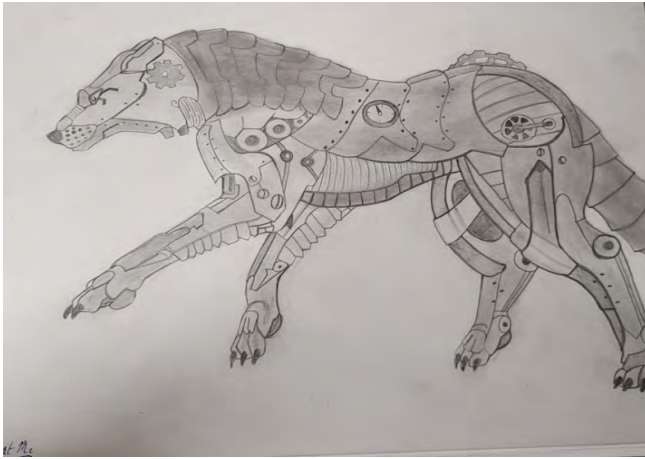
Yes, my soul's in pieces.  
Your soul's in pieces, too.  
I wouldn't take a single fragment back  
In the end, would you?



Jack  
by Kaitlyn Johnson



Views in Venice  
by Allyson Kirkman



*Letting off Steam*  
by Kat McDonald

## Lazarus *by Cadence Wyatt*

I remember when you woke from the dead,  
When the lull in your step became shallow.  
It stopped matching your typical, rhythmical tempo,  
And you became all shelled and hollow.

Your ambling movements drew my attention  
To what didn't work quite right anymore,  
What made noise when it wasn't meant to do so,  
And how it didn't seem to hurt you at all.

When your joints stopped fitting in their sockets  
And your tendons snapped at any forced contractions,  
I realized, then, that you weren't you anymore.  
You held no call to your previous attractions.

But you spoke so softly of where you had been  
In those days before you became what you are,  
You'd disappeared into a glorious place  
And you sure told me all that you saw.

You spoke of a glorious freedom you found  
Where your wounds were not bleeding and raw.  
And I realized, too late, your need to return  
To the bright voided, painless, hall.

I sit by your tomb for the second time, Lazarus.  
I knew waiting was pointless all along  
For the sweet melody of release was too tempting.  
I know, for I'm humming the song.



# The Observer *by Jennifer Quintero*

I have always loved to watch  
and notice all the little things,

like the way a bird nestles  
under a bush on a rainy day,

or how sunlight shines through  
the windows of a cozy bookstore.

I love the droop of dying flowers  
And the composition of a rusty alley.

The way a father playfully ruffles  
his five-year-old daughter's hair.

A boast of genuine laughter  
among good friends never fails

to make me smile, although  
I wonder if it's strange to feel this

distant to the world around me.  
Maybe that's just who I am.

Maybe it's in my nature to simply look,  
and appreciate it all. I fill my lungs

as I observe, and I can't help but feel a  
throbbing joy at all the world has to offer.

Oh, how I love to watch  
and notice all the little things.



*Box Kingdom Blues*  
by Lily Akers-Eyer



*Shoreline*  
by Kaitlyn Johnson



# That Lingering Echo

*by Jennifer Quintero*

We didn't realize it then,  
the way we begged our mom for money  
for those lopsided Spiderman popsicles at the ice cream  
truck.  
Kids full of light, with sticky hands and innocent smiles.

We begged our mom for money,  
for brand new stuffed animals and pretty dolls.  
Sisters full of light, with sticky hands and innocent smiles.  
She told us to sell homemade lemonade.

We played with our worn-out stuffed animals and pretty  
dolls;  
such a silly venture--a beacon of hope.  
Tiny hands offered people mouth-puckering lemonade,  
their faces wrinkling, torn between pleasure and disgust.

The lucky venture became a beacon of hope.  
As they ran around the grass barefoot,  
their faces wrinkled, torn between laughter and childish  
pettiness.  
Mom held a bittersweet look in her eyes.

We ran around the sprinklers in the grass  
on a sweltering summer day,  
as mom gave us that bittersweet gaze.  
Those rough nights and faraway memories lingered in her  
mind.

It was just a hot summer day, right?  
We didn't realize it then,  
just how those magical nights and dream-like memories  
echoed,  
and Mom,  
who made them all worth it.



*It's Cold & I Can See Her Breath*  
*by Lily Akers-Eyer*

# Two Yellow Flowers *by Jennifer Quintero*

Aqua could only smell the strong, musty stench of the chapel as she followed the small crowd. Everyone's faces were downcast in sorrow, the memory of her friend swimming in their minds. The shuffle of feet echoed across the shallow chapel walls, the sound dull and somber. Aqua looked down at her feet, aimlessly following. Her mind was empty. Her heart, shallow. She was completely nothing. Utterly useless for feeling anything. Her eyes bored into the ground, blocking out any and all surroundings.

Carrying a couple yellow flowers in one hand and holding Momma's hand with the other, she clutched the flowers to her chest tightly as she trudged with heavy steps. Aqua winced as they approached the doors, the blinding sunlight shining down on them.

As they reached the graveyard, Aqua finally glanced up to see Mernie's parents up front, Momma and Papá behind them. Her friend's parents walked politely with little sadness in their steps. Mernie's mom stared at the casket, barely blinking and completely lost in thought. Her dark hair was tied back in a casual but neat bun. Mr. Callahan looked around with his sharp green eyes and hands behind his back, glancing down every so often. Occasionally, he would take a glimpse of the watch on his wrist. The expression on his face was blank and completely unreadable. His shiny blonde hair contrasted against the dark suit he wore. The goatee on his chin was neatly shaved.

People kept their distance from the two as they walked, looking at them from the side and whispering to each other. There was something off about Mernie's parents, but Aqua wasn't told what. She could only guess what had happened between their family.

She had only seen Mr. Callahan two times: once when Mernie transferred to her elementary school, and another when he took her out of class one day. After that, she hadn't seen Mernie for a whole week. Aqua tried to ask her about it but she had avoided the topic at all costs.

Aqua squeezed her mom's hand as her eyes looked at the casket. The empty casket. Her mom squeezed back and turned to her with a reassuring gaze. Underneath her blue eyes lay a deep, sorrowful feeling she couldn't hide from her daughter. She had lost a friend too. Aqua's throat tightened as tears began to well up in her eyes. She drew in a shaky breath, accidentally making a wheezing sound. Some people turned to find the source of the sound, while she examined the shoes of her parents. Momma wore black heels over her tights, while Papá had ebony leather dress shoes and white, ankle-length socks. A blade of grass was stuck to the side of his shoes. Aqua barely blinked as she inspected them, trying to distract herself from her surreal emotions.

The sound of the pastor commencing the ceremony broke her out of the gaze. As the solemnity dragged on, various people cried, even Ms. Williams. She took out a tissue from her pink purse and blew her nose quietly. The teacher had despised Mernie's mischievous acts and pranks but always found the time to listen to what she had to say. Whether it was something as silly as telling her she had stuck googly eyes on her parents' car, or something so serious it had to be discussed in private, Ms. Williams would always listen and be there for her.

A few words were said by people such as Mernie's mom, Ms. Williams, and a couple of her friend's relatives. Momma pulled out a folded paper when it was her turn. Aqua had intended to speak, but she couldn't bring herself to do it when the day came. She wrote down her short speech and gave it to her mom, so she'd read it instead. As Momma read Aqua's words, people who weren't crying before started getting teary. Some even wept, putting their hands over their mouths. They took sight of Aqua, realizing how much Mernie meant to her. A true friend. Someone who made her smile when she was having a bad day.

Someone who just loved being around her and playing with her. Someone who stood up for what she thought was right. Someone who was silly, fun, and kind. A wonderfully exciting person that was now gone. Missing. Dead.

After the ceremony was done, Aqua peered at Momma, giving her a signal. She nodded, understanding. Her mom walked over to the pastor as people were readying the casket-lowering device. They spoke a few words and Momma glanced at her. Aqua's grip tightened around the flowers, preparing for what's next.

She moved slowly towards the casket. There was a light sheen on the dark wood as the sun gradually started peering out of the clouds. A light and warm breeze softly came, making people's clothes ruffle in the summer wind. Aqua inspected the flowers. The two bright yellow flowers drooped downwards, reflecting the day's mood. She had found them outside her house and thought it would be nice to bring them. Remembering the time when Mernie ate a flower just like them, she quietly sobbed, reminiscing about those happy times. They were so long ago.

The cracking in her heart weighed heavily on her chest, choking the air out of her. She was a brick wall, crumbling down and turning into dust. Into nothing. Nothing but smithereens of a shattered heart and soul. The gaping hole in her chest felt as empty as her best friend's casket.

Aqua took a shaky breath, tears running down her cheeks, and gently put the flowers atop the shiny wood on her tiptoes. Two flowers were buried that day. One died a hollow death, and the other was left completely broken.

## Sweet Grief

*by Jennifer Quintero*

Ever since that summer morning when we were kids,  
I kept seeing you wherever I went. Your colors were the  
yellow-orange brushstrokes in a sunset. Your humor was in  
people's crooked smiles and silly dances. Your mischief was in the  
vibrant graffiti along train stations and bridges. Your laughter was in the  
upbeat rock music that played at the local thrift store. Your soul was in  
every golden flower I passed by. Your heart was in the  
homemade chocolate chip cookies my mom would make.  
But ever since that winter night of the field trip,  
you've started appearing in my eyes, a weariness creasing the bags  
under them. I still keep seeing you wherever I go. Your colors are the  
dark hues of the night after a sunset. Your humor is in  
people's watery eyes and frozen faces. Your mischief is in the  
washed-out graffiti along train stations and bridges. Your laughter is in the  
angry metal music that plays in someone's car. Your soul is in  
every dying yellow flower I pass by. Your heart is in the  
cold and stale chocolate chip cookies I left out for you on my front porch. Your  
body is as lost as my own mind, but your memory is forever instilled  
in my eyes—a sweet grief that pains my days.



*Moth and Floral Mug  
by Ivy Blauser*

# Parallel *by Peter Klisiewicz*

Edward truly missed his uncle, as odd as he often was. Attending the distribution of his estate did help, however. Now adorning the mantle above Edward's fireplace were the various odd trinkets and effigies assigned to him through his uncle's will. Some were shiny and gold, others wooden and withered. A particularly plain lump of dull copper stone piqued his interest, for it bore no resemblance to any particular figure or image like the others. Next to the fireplace was the old and immense grandfather clock he also inherited, the long-tarnished metal engravings having done nothing to dampen its mighty chime.

There was no desire in Edward's heart to sell any of it. He had little sense of greed but did have an immense and insatiable desire to determine the origins of his new belongings. Most curiously, what was the origin of this copper rock? It didn't seem to be a figure of religious or occult interest, nor did it bear any resemblance to an ancient tool his uncle may have found in an amateurish archaeological adventure. He went to pick it up and as he did so the clock loudly chimed, startling him.

In surprise he tightly squeezed the rock and in an instant felt an immense sensation grip his body, like that of a wave in the ocean pulling along his body. His vision blinked as he darted his head left and right in confusion. His house had seemingly disappeared, and an endless sage green horizon stood in its place. The hue was completely uniform and visible despite the seeming absence of a light source. The ground, the air, there was no visible way to distinguish it! It felt as though he had no place in this world, no way to gauge where he stood.

Now Edward began to feel the coolness of his sweat begin to drip down his face. He was terrified, not for himself, but for his children. Was he now forever separated from them in this strange place? Has this new horizon itself superseded reality? A small bead from his skin now fell, landing on the ground. Edward began to think more clearly and took back control of the body he realized had been paralyzed in fear. He began to think through his senses. He could smell nothing, and his taste brought no sensation either. But he could still hear as the ticking of his clock still droned on. As he listened more and more, it grew dimmer. Eventually the sound faded completely. Edward began to wonder if he had truly gone anywhere; perhaps only his perception of the world had changed. He now began to hear a great buzzing.

He looked around and saw a mass of some grey smokey substance quiver and convulse in the distance. Curiosity overtook him and he began to walk slowly and carefully through his maddeningly indistinct surroundings. As he approached the lump, he realized it dwarfed him in size by several meters in width and feet in height. Its form seemed to be ever-changing, as columns of the substance that composed the mass erupted from the body like flares from the sun. The tendrils poked and groped blindly around from the central mass, and Edward observed that its texture resembled that of fuzzy mold that may form on long unattended food. Thin wispy and almost ethereal hairs lined it all around, some shedding and floating away into the air. He noticed that the strange buzzing was being emitted from the thing. Suddenly, the mass began to bulge and heave like a thick syrup rolling down a flat surface. It now seemed to be shambling towards him! Beginning to feel far more wary, he began to think of a way to make his leave.

He once again remembered the stone in his hand. He had been tightly gripping it, and so he decided to release. Nothing happened, so he once again gripped it tight and felt another sensation take hold. As his vision blinked once more he found himself several paces away from his mantle. The ticking of his clock began to return in volume as the buzzing began to recede. He dropped to the ground on his knees in relief and realized his movement in the strange green realm correlated to where he now stood. Was the stone merely altering his perception as he walked across his floor? Did he find passage in some sort of parallel world?

An idea began to force itself onto Edward's brain: he could have his family observe him! They could tell what happens when he grips the stone. He called over his wife and

their children and told them what he had just experienced. He asked them to watch, and to tell him what happens after he grips the stone. His wife questioned if they shouldn't give the stone to a more scientifically adept man, but Edward had no patience. This was his discovery! It's not like he was in any danger the first time!

As he began his demonstration, he felt his vision blink for a third time. A horrid buzzing quickly stunned him as he came face to face with the squirming grey mass he had observed at a distance before! In surprise he stumbled back and dropped the stone, and quickly an ethereal coil wrapped around it. He screamed and lunged for the esoteric rock, but the grey mass flashed and disappeared from view. For a brief moment, Edward tensed up. His thoughts began to scream and chase each other in his head. In denial he began to stammer and grope around the ground that once contained the beast and his precious stone. Suddenly he heard screaming, for father, for husband, and he began to yell and beat at the ground. Tears now fell onto the green floor, marking at last his position in the endless sea of hue.

Desperately, he began to run towards the source of the noise, yelling affirmations to his family so impossibly close. Buzzing briefly invaded the area as well and the screaming cut off, and he fell once again to the ground, crying and curled into the fetal position. But he couldn't have gotten his family harmed! They couldn't be dead now! Surely they were now running to safety from that grey monstrosity. Their sounds merely faded from his ears, much like how his clock eventually grew silent on his first trip to his new home. As this reassuring thought flew through his head and Edward began to rise, the chiming of his clock rang out, only somewhat quieter than before.



*Algae-Lagoon*  
by Ty Whitman





*But I'm Not Really Up For Conversation*  
by Jonathan Eguia





*Monsteral Leaf*  
by Savannah Stamish

## A Pointless Plat of Poetry

*by Peter Klisiewicz*

Warning: The following stanzas in this poem were only vaguely influenced, not created, by sentient intent. The words originate from no meaningful origin beyond a non-sentient and absurdly abstracted algorithm that creates output from input.

Beneath the sky, where shadows play,  
The winds of time drift slow away.  
A whisper calls through branches bare,  
While echoes linger in the air.  
The moonlight dances on the stream,  
A fleeting touch, a distant dream.  
The stars above, they softly glow,  
As quiet winds through meadows blow.  
In silence deep, the world unspins,  
Where stillness rests and peace begins.  
Each moment lost, yet never gone,  
As night embraces breaking dawn.

Addendum: Wondering what the meaning behind those words was? I couldn't tell you. I didn't write them, but you could try asking nothing. That's who wrote the poem after all. Did you like it? Perhaps the rhyming scheme was appealing, maybe the imagery made you happy. Your answer is important, because nothing will feel pride or shame because of it.

Addendum: Normally writers enjoy writing and readers enjoy reading, but that first part got cut out. Should we cut out the second part?

# Dogwoods: An Elegy

by Lillian Akers Eyer



Dogwoods bloom in May and  
May was probably the last month on my mind when  
I saw the forecast on the TV at the glossy hotel lobby  
where we sat stuck while  
Everything I knew  
blew away and washed down the river  
I used to leap into when I  
was 13 & thinking

the world was a thousand shades of mine to conquer.

Dogwoods bloom in May  
And maybe they would have been okay in the house even after the water rose  
but  
why would anyone choose the burning building when  
their chalky sketches of Batman and Baby Yoda were like ashes underwater and  
their crayon boxes were turning brown  
Escape feels safe

I would have gotten in the car too,

Dogwoods bloom in May,  
& Maybe everything happens for a reason, she tried to tell me while she passed me a  
pamphlet  
& Fuck that, I whispered, because 7-year-olds should stay here loving Star Wars instead of  
where they found their bodies, which was in Tennessee,  
which is to say the wave crashed when their car stalled  
And someone must have called their dad

because he wasn't around  
because he was away on business

Because he came back, only to find his beautiful boys swept away by  
the river

I used to leap into

when I was 13 & thinking the world  
was a thousand shades  
of  
mine to conquer,  
when  
the water  
was still green

and Felix and Lucas  
were still here  
and the blossoms were still white, and  
the dogwoods were in bloom.



*Arachnophobia*  
by Kat McDonald



*Ladder to the Moon*  
by Micah Lewis

# A Ghazal for Humanity

*by Lillian Akers Eyer*

The raindrops caught in the wind reach out to touch my face, to trace my scars.

Decorating & defacing my face: these scars.

Sometimes, they're hard to see, some scars only come out in a song,  
But we all have these hands, knees, spirit, heart, and face scars.

Some of us do a better job of hiding them,  
With foundation or fitness or funny one-liners. These are no commonplace scars.

There is metal inside my grandmother's knee, a mark on my face from a mistake, there are  
Stitches that remind a second-grade boy to use his brakes, smile lines tracing my mother's face, Scars—

You can burn evidence, you can burn bridges, you can smear out mistakes,  
But you can't erase scars.

There are scars marking the land, acres of forest scarred like flesh, marred by wildfires,  
There are fields in Yellowstone pocketed by the tracks from coyote pups' playful chase.  
Scars—

These are the history books and the ballads of our mistakes and our miracles.  
These are our stories— Because we are no database. These are human race scars.

# To The Floor *by Abraham Alexander*

It's 3 a.m. on a Sunday.  
I am drunk off my ass.  
I see sound and feel colors,  
Floating in a plane so far removed  
That I am the only thing in existence—  
And then I hear it.

You call to me with your siren song,  
A lullaby of silence, steady and sure.  
You pull me in, cradle my weight,  
Soothing my soul with your quiet embrace.

I fall to you, oh blessed being—  
Always present, always supporting.  
Ode to you, my oldest friend.  
My comrade.  
Ode to you, the sacred earth.  
Ode to the floor.  
Ode to the ground.

For when all is said and done,  
I will return to you one final time.  
I will return to you,  
And stare up at the sky,  
Dreaming of the life that passed me by.

And as the days pass and suns set,  
I will become one with you, my greatest love.  
Ode to you, sacred earth.  
Ode to the floor.  
Ode to the ground.  
Ode to living.  
Ode to passing.



*Double Cheeked Chuck  
by Savannah Stamish*



*Parts and Service Room  
by Nash Richardson*



# College Love *by Aurella Kowalski*

From across the street, our gazes meet.

A silent spark, a love unknown,

we didn't realize that later, one of us would cheat. When we saw each other, we were still alone.

A louder spark, a love to which we may be prone. Our hearts grow fond, friends at last.

When we see each other, we aren't so alone.

We make plans and chat, platonic for this act.

Our hearts grow fonder, something more.

We test the waters, try new things.

We make plans and eat, willing to explore.

We've committed to this love that quietly sings.

We've set sail, found our things.

Our love soars on this little campus.

We've put it out for all to hear, it now has grown its wings. It soared so high, we sang it to the masses.

Our love was soaring on this little campus,

but you found someone who was more grounded. It was soaring so high, but now it crashes

I didn't think you'd ever do this; I feel so clouded.

You found someone, she was more grounded, solid in her abilities, something I'm still working on. I never thought you'd do this; I'm truly shrouded. A piece of your game, I feel like a pawn.

Solid in her frame, I'm forever comparing.



*Untitled*  
*by Zachary Rumley*

# Multiple Jeopardy

*by Aniya Dajai*

Split personas of misogynoir.

Identity always under fire.

Forever unaware of who we are.

Split personas of misogynoir.

Plagued by that consciousness, brought up by Du Bois.

Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire.

Split personas of misogynoir.

Identity always under fire.

# Spinning *by Jocelyne Lowery*

My father once told me

"The most dangerous thing you will ever do is drive a car."

It's a weapon of destruction, dangerous, a battering ram.

I remember, I remember so vividly and not at all  
My mind's protecting me, but I don't need this wall.

They don't tell you how it feels to be behind the wheel, and you can't feel, you can't steer.

Spinning, spinning, spinning.  
Oh God, I'm spinning, there's no winning.  
I'm far from grinning, someone make it stop!

Don't touch your brake, I remember that  
It'll make things worse, I'm already about to die.

Crash, I don't remember.  
The world is too bright, it's too loud.  
I'm spinning, spinning too fast.

Radio's out, I can't stop, I'll drop.  
The mountain's tilting. What if I go off the side?  
Is this how it ends?

Crash, crash, still spinning, there goes the sign.

Why am I stopped?

I'm stopped . . . stopped?  
I've stopped.

Silence, the spinning's stopped. I'm shaking, quaking, why can't I cry, oh God, did I die?

No, no. I'm alive, radio's dead, but I'm not.  
I'm shaking, in shock, but spinning's stopped.

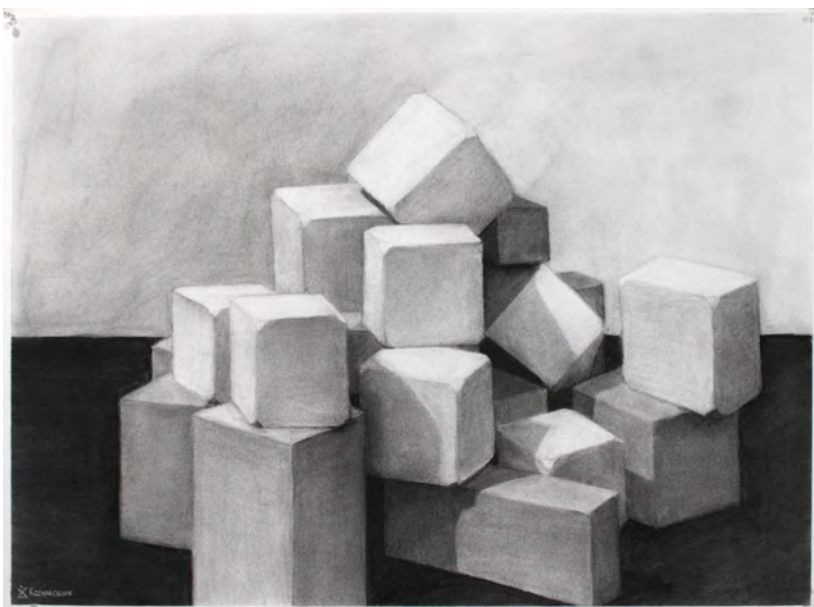
Thank God the spinning stopped.

I can think, take a drink,  
I look in the mirror, face is pink.

I'm parched, but can't move, I can't move.  
Dammit, move!

Oh God, I'm alive, it's a win for me.  
Bruised and battered but lacking a scratch  
on my body.

And everything's finally stopped spinning.



*Still Life Tower*  
by Nash Richardson

## Nuts *by Cadence Wyatt*

This was beyond odd.

It began with a single peanut nestled between piles of carrot sticks. It wouldn't be that big of an issue if he weren't deathly allergic to the pesky seeds, but all that came of it was him throwing out the carrots and going about his lunch as usual. Charlie knew it was probably nothing; his mother loved honey-roasted peanuts, and she was probably snacking on them while packing his lunch. It would be a risky thing to do, but his mother never was really all there.

The next time, it was more concerning. A single peanut lay in his mac n' cheese, and he just barely caught it in time. He mourned the cheesy goodness as he threw it out and decided to scold his mother this time. He couldn't keep losing bits of his lunch. She had apologized and promised to keep the peanuts put up when she made his lunches in the mornings.

It went away for a while, with no peanuts in sight, but still, he was wary. He checked his food every lunch just to be sure.

This was beyond odd.

When he opened his lunchbox, he expected his usual, cold chicken nuggets and fruits and veggies on the side, but instead, he found a sandwich. Stranger still, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He gaped at it for a while before throwing the whole meal in the trash, resigning himself to eating something he made himself when he got home.

Was his mother trying to kill him? Trying to do away with him because he was too fragile to eat something as simple as a peanut? Or was she just losing it enough that she had no idea what she was doing? He didn't understand why, but he did know what he had to do now.

The next morning, he left the house with a lunch he packed himself. His mother sat in her recliner and watched him leave, giving her a skeptical look as he went. Once the door was shut, she sighed to herself.

"About time he started packing his own lunch," she grumbled. "Even if it took him thirty-two years."



*Sting Like A Bee*  
by Brendan Seibeck

## The Chosen One

*by Lovelle Williams*



*Jackie Robinson*  
by Kyle Blake

You were the Chosen One before the league,  
Lebron on the cover of Sports Illustrated,  
hooping with the greats like Mike<sup>1</sup>,  
And drafted #1 from a high school.

Rookie of the year; expected.

First All-NBA; expected

Back-to-Back MVP; expected<sup>2</sup>

Then, THE DECISION that changed basketball

Moved to Miami with a mission<sup>3</sup>

2 remarkable rings

2 more MVP's

And the golden glory of the Olympics.<sup>4</sup>

Then, The Return.<sup>5</sup>

Time to battle the brothers.<sup>6</sup>

"This one for you Cleveland".

Something we never seen.

You changed the scene.

Off to Hollywood habits,

Won the quarantine quarrel,<sup>8</sup>

Broke the Scoring Record It's over.

You still going we don't know how

Raised your rookie even though you still run like a child.<sup>9</sup>  
The Kid from Akron is The KING Now.

#### Footnotes

1. There was a pickup game containing LeBron James and NBA player at the time like Micheal Jordan. LeBron reportedly did amaze to say he was a high school kid.
2. Accolades from his draft date Jun 2003 to July 2010
3. Referring to LeBron's decision to leave the Cleveland Cavaliers for the Miami Heat in the 2010-2011 season.
4. Accolades from 2010 to 2014
5. Referring to LeBron's decision to leave the Miami Heat and return to play with the Cleveland Cavaliers.
6. Referring to Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson who at the time played for the Golden State Warriors. They were famously named the "Splash Brother".
7. This is when LeBron was traded from the Cleveland Cavaliers to the Los Angeles Lakers.
8. During the 2020 NBA season the playoffs were played in a contained area due to covid with no fans. LeBron and the Lakers were the champions of the season.
9. Drafted 53rd overall in last year's LeBron James Jr. Or Bronny James got drafted to the same team as his dad LeBron.

## Styrofoam

*by Megan Walters*

I am made of Styrofoam.  
I am made of firm rubber bones,  
like chewing gum that's gotten too hard.  
I am not flesh and blood.  
If a needle pierced my lungs,  
would I deflate like a balloon,  
or would I bleed, too?

I am made of gel  
that fills the cracks of metal joints.  
Would a scalpel struggle to pass  
through the muscles between my ribs  
or glide through with a squeak,  
painless as stuffing bursts out?  
I am not human, after all—  
not at all like you.



*Cubist Still Life*  
*by Nash Richardson*





# ADHD

*by Marcos Benitez*

Procrastination blast, affecting my workstation  
My lack of concentration, so much frustration  
I wrote these notes this morning as my brain was mourning: "Why do  
you wait so late at eight this morning?"  
"Leave me alone!" I yelled and dwelled  
ADHD, that's my diagnosis,  
an HD Hypnosis.  
I am ex-Marine who needs his caffeine to be a well-oiled machine  
Adderall after all, my last call, a wormhole—  
Sore throat, a lab coat, my head floats, my lifeboat.  
I'm trapped in my head, I'm wrapped in my bed.  
I need my energy like mitochondria  
but my brain bleeds, hypochondria.  
"Take a break, your grades at stake,"  
But I complain as my eyes strain.  
It's ok to have this sprain in my brain,  
But it sucks to explain my smooth brain terrain.  
It takes me forever to be somewhat clever; however, that's hardly ever.  
Today's the day, now or never.  
I am out of ideas, I want to eat tortillas.  
Should I talk about my cat and how he likes to eat rats? "You don't  
have a cat."  
Oh yeah--but I want one  
A fat cat, to call at, a brat at my doormat,  
An Istanbul cat, Turkish and somewhat quirkish.  
A smelly litter box brings the health department to my apartment.  
Toxoplasmosis is the prognosis.  
My brain is choking, useless and revoking, chain smoking and croaking.  
I need some brain power, at least for the next hour,  
New exploration, Mayflower.  
Commence brain defense, a dense fence at my expense. Brain layover,  
is it over?  
What am I talking about again?  
Oh yea, my struggle with ADHD



*Will He Erase Me*  
*by Aero Seagle*

# An Ode to Love

*by Raven Bailey*

In the daylight I found comfort.  
Taking the form of draping limbs  
lounging on the couch of my second home,  
laughing with old friends I no longer recognized.  
Sitting there like a demonized God  
asking me to drink the holy water.  
His voice is weary and heavy,  
coated with venom from his past.

In the midday I found freedom.  
Taking the form of loose hands  
planted firmly on the steering wheel,  
driving to a fast food chain in a crowded car.  
Resting there like a neutralized weapon  
asking me to lick the blood.  
His voice is casual and light,  
coated with laughter from his present.

In the nighttime I found safety.  
Taking the form of honey-pooled oceans  
analyzing the deepest parts of my soul,  
searching for answers that I did not have.  
Laying there like a humanized Hades  
asking me to eat the pomegranates.  
His voice is gentle and deep,  
coated with love from his future.



*Jesse Owens Tribute  
by Jordan Hirigoyen*

# My Take on Faith

*by T.J. Burske*

Been struggling with a lot, pastor said surrender – so without further ado, let me. I still suffer, find it hard to mutter the words to describe what I call real true faith.

Misrepresented by people using God's name in vain, causing the oppressed pain,  
Call that last line a lament, cause what I said I meant, but I'll tell you how I healed through  
faith.

It ain't some magic spell, or some product your pastor sells, claiming your life will be all rosy and dandy; that's a scam, and this isn't prosperity gospel, because that's an all-feel fool faith.

Provides me purpose in life, overcoming all my strife. When all else fails, I lean on it. Given all I need, I ponder and reflect, about my journey to an all-new construed faith

It's like being paralyzed with nowhere to go, Christ is my crutch, giving me direction, I'm still broken, but it carries T towards what is needed deep down, that fulfill-you faith.

# Grandma and I *by Hannah Todd*

Oh, the places we'd go, just Grandma and me,  
From mountains so tall to the wide-open sea.  
We'd wander through forests, we'd skip through the town,  
With her guiding smile and my giggly sound.  
We'd go to the lake with our fishing poles ready,  
Grandma's hands were so sure, so calm, and so steady.  
She'd teach me to cast and to wait for the bite,  
"Patience is key, dear; the fish will delight!"  
Then fireworks would sparkle and light up the sky,  
We'd sit side by side, watching colors fly high.  
With oohs and with ahhs, we'd cheer at the view,  
And Grandma would whisper, "The stars love you too."  
At the table with Rook, we made quite the pair,  
We'd plot and we'd scheme with a sly little stair.  
"Bid high!" she would say, "We can win, have no fear!"  
With Grandma as partner, the victory was near.  
To the ice cream shop next, we'd skip down the lane,  
I'd pick something sweet—she loved to  
Delight me and I never complained  
Drip, drip, went the scoops as the sunshine would gleam,  
Oh, nothing was better than Grandma and Ice cream!  
"Adventure's out there!" Grandma always would say,  
And she made every moment feel just like a play.  
Her wisdom was endless, her hugs full of cheer,  
With Grandma, the world was much brighter and clear.  
Now she's off on her journey with Stanley again, both side by side with Jesus in heaven  
A place full of love, Her love is a light that will always shine through,  
And wherever I wander, Grandma's there too.

# Degree

*by Alex Oleschuk*

Four years at Mars Hill  
Four years of my prime  
Four years to climb that hill  
Four years of grind

Three different dormitories  
Three different head coaches  
Three different automobiles

Two Bs for me  
Two fans, cause there's no A.C.

One Liberal Arts degree



*Mom Jeans Casserole  
by Savannah Stamish*

# Tossing Stones *by Jacob Bailey*

Down by the creek I stood alone, all the while tossing stones,  
Throwing them up, down, and around every which way until my secret spot was found  
By a girl whose eyes shone more than any earthly jewel or stone.

As we grew, the love I held for her did, too,  
And even as the autumn leaves fell, I continued to fall deeply under her spell.  
When I proposed with a ring that dazzled blue,  
She, with starlike pinpricks of tears in her eyes, said “I do”

Years later, even after our children had grown, our love burned as brightly as an inferno.  
Our love was incomparable, as it satisfied all our needs.  
My love soon fell ill just as the changing leaves,  
And in an instant my love, my wife, my EVERYTHING left me all alone  
Just as I was in my youth when I was tossing stones.



*Light of the World*  
*by Kaitlyn Johnson*

# Communion Hymn

*by Nicholas Varner*

Take my hand (because it's Yours),  
and watch my blood become  
You. Say to all I am, This is my body,  
and I will say, Amen.

# Hope



*by RayRay Ellis*

Marigolds dance in the wispy wind of spring,  
Twisting and swaying like swan dancers.  
Foam-white waves crash and sing,  
Emitting their own tumultuous melody.  
A withered, widowed crone who's lost everything  
Stands in the middle of the miraculous land,  
Taking in a seemingly unflawed world as she clings  
To the gnarled, knotted cane of her late husband.  
She sighs a sigh that catches on her heartstrings.  
And for the first time, she smiles and thinks,  
"Maybe I didn't quite lose everything."



*Warm Beach*  
*by Ares Wharton*





*Portrait In Jazz*  
by Nic Varner

## Southern Drawl Brawl

*by RayRay Ellis*

I always hated my southern accent.  
The way I'd use the word y'all.  
It followed me wherever I went  
For as long as I could recall.  
It was something I learned to resent  
As it was a sign I was from Tennessee  
It was never something that I meant,  
But it nonetheless came to be.

I really hated my southern drawl,  
so much so that I underwent  
A process of eliminating my y'all's  
In hopes of easing my discontent.  
It felt like a way to repent,  
A way to finally make myself free.  
It became something I tried to prevent  
But it nonetheless came to be.

One day I noticed that my drawl  
Had finally begun to relent.  
My accent sounded so small  
And I realized what that meant.  
At first my time felt well-spent  
But then my brain started to disagree.  
I didn't want to feel discontent,  
But it nonetheless came to be.

I started to miss the way I used y'all,  
A clear sign I was from Tennessee.  
I learned I didn't want to lose my accent  
But it had nonetheless come to be.



*Echo*  
by Amaya Casiano

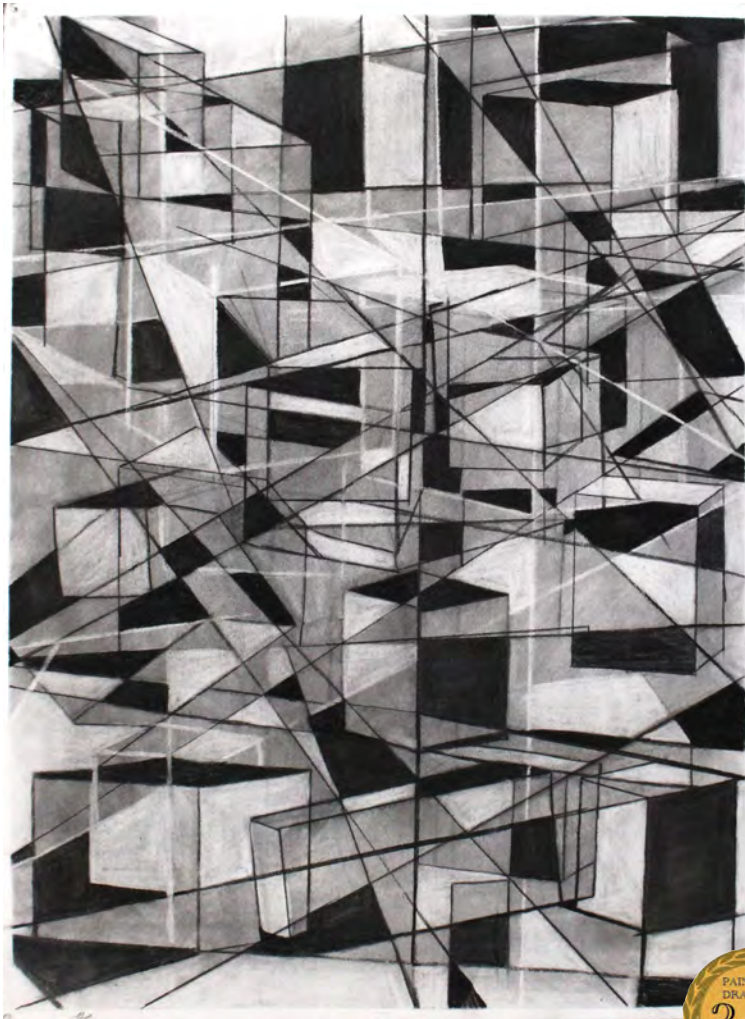
# Writer's Dilemma in Flash Fiction



by Sam Evans

"He sat there staring at the blank page, waiting for the words to just pop into his head. He never had experienced this despite his colleagues' constant use of the term, "writer's block," but he was trying to break out of his comfort zone like Richard Branson. He wanted to try something new, but he currently felt like the Scarecrow trying to give directions. Everyone was tired of his usual Hallmark stories, predictable and uniform, methodic even. Right as he was about to give up..."

The train stopped, I put away my pen and pad and got off to make my way to the office for a day of crunching numbers.



*Possibilities*  
by Nialah Garcia



# A Special Thanks to our Judges!

## Writing Judge - Mark Tullis

Mark Tullis is a life long addict of classic literature and good books. Writing short stories is both a creative outlet, and poignant catharsis. The words of John Steinbeck capture this theme: "If there is a magic in story writing, and I am convinced that there is, no one has ever been able to reduce it to a recipe that can be passed from one person to another. The formula seems to lie solely in the aching urge of the writer to convey something he feels important to the reader. If the writer has that urge, he may sometimes... find the way to do it."



**Explore his work on Audible!**

## Art Judge - Ellen Cavendish Phillips



Featured in Victoria Magazine, Ellen Cavendish Phillips combines her love of nature, fascination with people and her whimsical imagination in her wide variety of artistic creations. As a double major in Art and Biology in college, she graduated and began working in the Biochemistry Department of Emory University while at the same time painting and teaching art. Using her children as muses, Ellen continued to paint, teach classes and attend workshops and in 1989 began to specialize in painting portraits before she began to experiment with figurative sculpture with work in two and three dimensions creating paper lace cut banners and fabric art installations for churches.







MARS  
HILL 1856  
UNIVERSITY