

Issue 10
Spring 2022

The Agathist



The Agathist

ISSUE #10
SPRING 2022
GERMANTOWN HIGH SCHOOL
409 CALHOUN PARKWAY

Principal: Dr. Wesley Quick

Assistant Principals: Brent Brownlee,
Dr. Syl Burrell, Jeffrey Coleman, Dr. Nason Lollar

Faculty: Jamie Dickson

Staff: Bryn Chappell, Belle Clem, Ryan Harper, Page Hays,
Joshua Herring, Gracia Oden, Guy Rayner, Chloe Vizier, Cannon Williams

Advisor's Note

MR. DICKSON

When I noticed that this edition of *The Agathist* is our tenth publication, I wondered why it was a big deal. Numbers are made up: they're not organically important. Any significance they hold is put there entirely by us. But, isn't the same with words? There's nothing inherently good about *love* or *poem* or *beauty*. Even if worth is artificial, it's still worth.

Look down. There are probably ten fingers on those hands. Think of what hands can do: they can build bridges and perform heart surgery and offer comfort. They can write poems and paint paintings. "The narrowest hinge of my hand puts to scorn all machinery," Whitman tells us. This tenth edition of *The Agathist* was assembled and written and drawn by hands. It's being held by you, reader, in your hands.

Praise to the staff and contributors, and a thanks to the GHS admin who support us through the madness. I press my hands together in a prayer of thanksgiving for you all, and I hope that you'll continue using your own hands to create more beauty in this world.

Table of Contents:

Artwork and Multimedia

Kathryn Land, Cloudy Day – cover
Drew Damon, Introspect – pg. 5
Ryan Harper, Blue Azure Dragon of the East – pg. 7
Kaleb Fox, Clowning Around – pg. 8
Sophia Guerieri, Flocked waters – pg. 15
Leah Rainey, Windows to the Soul – pg. 18
Sarah Lott, Ridin' that line – pg. 23
Kalyb James, Tea Time – pg. 29
Zoe Thornton, Chalky Chuckles – pg. 31
Zoe Thornton, The Thinker – pg. 32
Kaiden Holts, Lanterns and Lights – pg. 39
Catherine Noble, Walking in Charleston – pg. 43
Kalyb James, Citrus Comfort – pg. 47
Catie Noble, Pink Side – pg. 48
Leah Rainey, Leap of Faith – pg. 54
Zoe Thornton, Not a Lap Dog – pg. 55
Alyssa Sager, Eye of the Beholder – pg. 57
Leah Byers, Blue in the Face – pg. 58
Ella Sager, Sunset Waters – pg. 61

Table of Contents:

Fiction

Joshua Herring, Halcyon Nothingness – pg. 10
Kathryn Land, Ghost – pg. 25
Mary Crawford Canard, Bitter Like Honey – pg. 34
Kalyb James, Nightcrawler – pg. 50
Guy Rayner – 25¢ till 2 AM – pg. 56

Nonfiction

Avery Addison, Colors – pg. 9
Avery Addison, Peace – pg. 13
Dani Oaks, Waiting – pg. 20
Anonymous, To My Parents – pg. 22
Brayden McNair, A Letter to my One and Only Companion – pg. 28
Anonymous (2), In Response to Anonymous – pg. 44
Zoe Thornton, Hen – pg. 60

Poetry

Anonymous, Sandpaper Skin – pg. 4
Zoe Thornton, Universal Body – pg. 6
Lee Faul, Crowned Psyche – pg. 12
Mary Crawford Canard, Pessimist – pg. 12
Lee Faul, Sounds of Loneliness – pg. 14
Kalyb James, Words – pg. 15
Zoe Oswalt, Final Act – pg. 16
Georgia Pitcock, Werewolf Eyes – pg. 18
Rachel Parr, The Death of a Childhood – pg. 24
Maddy Macgown, For CW – pg. 30
Jenna Hood, Consumption – pg. 30
Zoe Thornton, Car Rides – pg. 33
Bryn Chappell, Motorbird – pg. 40
Anonymous (2), In Response to Anonymous – pg. 44
Leah Rainey, Time to Sleep – pg. 45
Mariam Bhatti, An Orange a Day – pg. 46
Mary Crawford Canard, Guitar Ocean – pg. 49
Mary Crawford Canard, Wild Boy – pg. 54
Cannon Williams, The Fisherman at the Edge of the World – pg. 59

Sandpaper Skin

ANONYMOUS

Oh, to have a sweet child-like innocence
To think to yourself: nothing could go wrong.
Such comes with a terrible consequence.
To have a complex so mighty and strong
Think I was safe inside my small bubble.
Oh, how I long for that cruel innocence
Think nothing could touch my *skin*, oh trouble
Oh, how I hate that child of ignorance.
Oh, but how I wish I could turn back time
Because innocence had ran its short course.
How I long to take back what was once mine.
For you touched my silk skin with no remorse
Guilt: for my skin was no longer silky
No, no, no— I was a naked plucked tree



Introspect

DREW DAMON, ACRYLIC

Universal Body

ZOE THORNTON

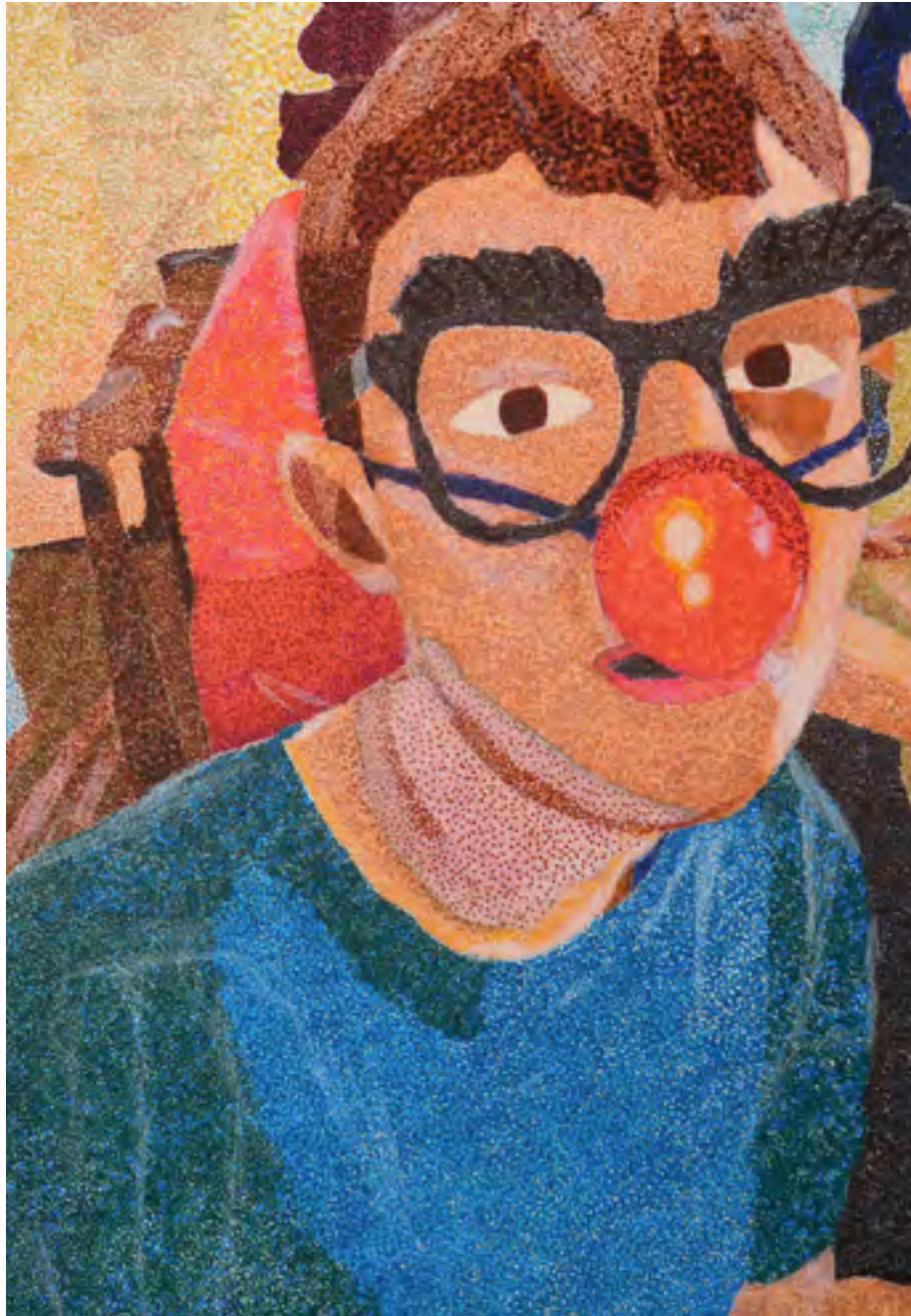
the body is a vessel of the mind.
blazing comets colliding with the soil
stars entangled with one another,
frozen in place.
you might be wondering what space has to do with the body-
with the mind
so, i'll tell you the fallible fate.
the overgrown cogs of the machine
moss clogging the ridges of the brain
the joints of the imaginative
then the vessel stops moving-
burned out like cigarettes on flesh
caught aflame by the dry vines that cling to a thought
the blades of grass are no match for the impact
because comets

care
 little
 where
 they
 land



Blue Azure Dragon of the East

RYAN HARPER, DIGITAL ARTWORK



Clowning Around

KALEB FOX, MARKER

Colors

AVERY ADDISON

Red is the taste of sweet, sticky, apples. When the juice runs down your chin, red is the happiness you feel. Red is also the feeling of fever. The warmth that is unwelcome, but one everyone feels. Red is the feeling you feel when someone you love talks to you. Red is when your cheeks get flushed just hearing their voice. That's red.

Orange is the feeling of fall and fire. It's the taste of pumpkin pie at thanksgiving dinner. When you're surrounded by family and friends, or when you step outside, mid-November, and take a deep breath of the fall air, that's orange. Orange is also warmth, but it's more natural than Red. It's hovering your cold hands over a crackling fire.

Yellow is joy. It's the blinding, pure, unyielding joy that is only present in the rarest moments. Yellow is the feeling of the sunshine your face. Yellow is the sound of a child's laughter. Yellow is the color of lemons. When your lips pucker and the sourness hits you all at one time, or when you're drinking a fresh cup of lemonade, that's yellow.

Green is the color of earth. It's the ground you walk on, the grass you have picnics on, the branches you swing from, the flowers you pluck from the soil. It's the dewy grass you wake up to each morning. It's the fragrant flowers that are too innocent for this world. It's the huge, lingering oaks that nearly touch the sky. That's green.

Blue is my personal favorite. Blue is more solemn than the others. It's listening to your favorite sad song on full volume. It's also the color of water. Blue is anything from the vast oceans, to the tears that run down your cheeks. The puddles you stomp in are blue, as well as the pools you can float for hours in. It's peaceful and lonely. It's blue.

Purple is much harder to explain. It's where blue and red meet. Two polar opposites coming together to make something beautiful. That's exactly what purple is. It's a symbol of reconciliation. When you wrong your best friend, but in the end, they forgive you and all you can do is cry and smile, that's purple.

Colors aren't just something you see, they're something you can feel. You can taste. You can touch, hear, and smell them too. That's the beauty of colors. Put them all together and you're left with a promise. A promise for better days to come.

Halcyon Nothingness

JOSHUA HERRING, TEXT AND ILLUSTRATION

A single vessel, shimmering, a bead of silver against the swirling canvas of violet nebulae and inky nothingness. It floats there, adrift among currents of gravity and matter, not swaying, not spinning. It just floats.

The pilot breathes a deep drag of oxygen, savoring each molecule as they filter past his teeth. He was sickly. The ship had long since engaged its last resort protocols, siphoning oxygen from his body for reuse. It was painful, excruciating, even, but necessary.

His distress beacon pinged, the only sound apart from the respirators and other machinery keeping him alive. He did not speak--there was no one to talk to--but his lips moved, muttering prayers and nothings in a feeble attempt at continuance.

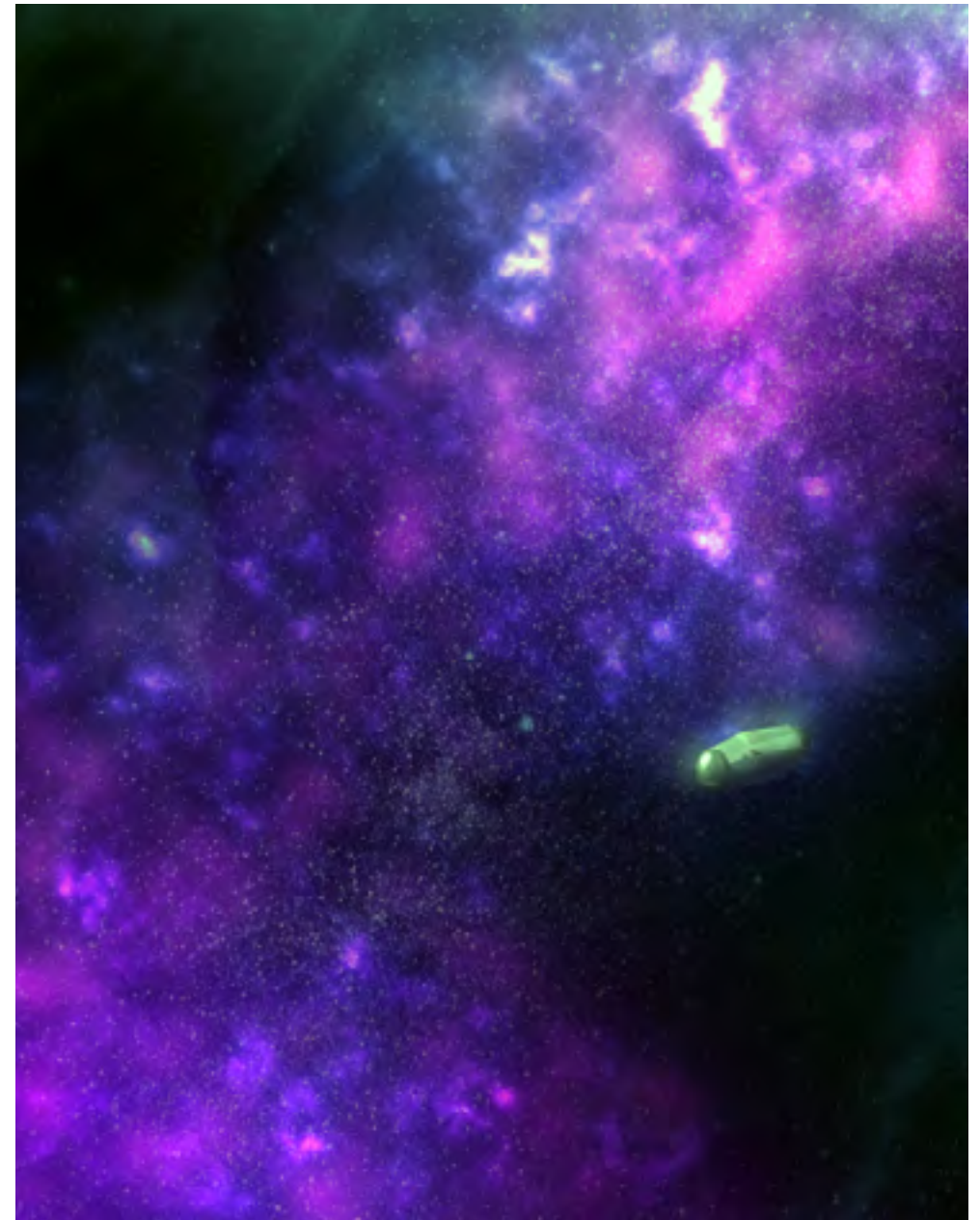
He lifted his hand, brushing past the stick and to the console, reaching for a small photograph, his fingers fumbling until it was secure in his grasp. He tore it from the peeling tape that secured it to the metal, slowly lifting it to his face.

She always had that smile, he thought, caressing the photograph with his thumb. He remembered that night under the stars, laughing and drinking away sorrows yet to be.

"When will I see you again?" she asked him.

"Tomorrow," he mutters, smiling at the thought. "Tomorrow."

His hand dropped, the photograph falling to the floor, as he stared out into the vastness of space.



Crowned Psyche

LEE FAUL

The crown of the body, a sight to see.
Full of nerves that snake and protect the crown,
Simply a wonderful, blessed decree.
The brain is elegant like shiny gold rounds.
Dreams in gold and cream creep through my psyche,
Plaguing my waking, fruitful memories.
Men surround me as Christ the Almighty
They fear God like in documentaries.
The crown and dreams mingle like sprawled cable lines.
Brains drinking dreams with dehydrated means
People rely on dreams like five to nines
Emotionally stunted like machines
Both sit at the table head yearning for more
Although both have been heavily ignored.

Pessimist

MARY CRAWFORD CANARD

If the wall is gray, it's pitch black to me
Saying that pitch black is the only pitch that I can see
They tell me to look up, but I can't help to stare down
They say it's sweet music, I can't hear a sound
I can't sleep without thinking of the worst
I can't wake up without remembering it hurts
For what it's worth, I race with what it takes
But the noise that I hear, it's ringing, I break
See this, see that, it'll leave me for dead
What'll really kill me, I've found, is this cynical head
I shrivel in the sun and shake in the rain
Lamenting with this poor, old, pessimistic brain

Peace

AVERY ADDISON

The calm after the storm, the rainbow after the rain, the stillness after any tragic event, that's peace. When Faulkner said, "Peace is only a condition in retrospect, when the subconscious has got rid of the gnats and the tacks and the broken glass of experience and has left only the peaceful pleasant things--that was peace. Maybe peace is not is but was," he was mostly right. When you're enduring the trial you're facing, peace is not usually evident. After all is said and done, you must look back and realize that you've overcome those obstacles and you're at peace now. However, there are some circumstances where you can reach a sense of peace in the midst of your troubling experiences.

Anxiety and stress have always been a difficult obstacle in my life. Right before a game or a big performance, anxiety fills my head and chest and the walls close up around me. While this storm of discomfort rages inside of me, peace feels unattainable. This fear is what Faulkner refers to as "the broken glass" in my experience. However, after the final whistle blows or the curtain closes, immediate relief rushes over me. I feel at peace. The violent sea that once overcame me, is calmed. I can breathe easier, see clearer, and think better. I feel this sense of peace after the storm inside of me is over, not during.

In some instances, however, peace can be attained within the unpleasant experience. Some people call that the eye of the storm. When everything around you is dark and cloudy, yet you can close your eyes and find an unyielding peace within you. For me personally, that comes from my faith. Knowing that I am not in control and someone greater is holding me in their hands, that gives me peace, no matter the tribulations I face. There's a song by Mosaic MSC called "Tremble" and the first verse reads, "Peace, bringing it all to peace, The storm surrounding me, Let it break at Your name". When life gets a little too much to bear and the weight of my burden is too heavy, I sing these words and it never fails to bring me back down to reality. With the right mindset and this reminder of unshakeable faith, no storm is too great for the presence of faith.

Sounds of Loneliness

LEE FAUL

Acid rain dribbled on the stars,
The suns lonely gaze blessing the dirt.
Ice melts as dark water kisses his warm lips,
Stones clash and yell against the soft padded earth.
It's quiet; the kind of quiet that makes loud people nervous
The kind of quiet that makes people think someone is following them,
The kind of quiet that haunts.
The earth wakes to bright rivers and dull skies,
Ash gingerly peppered on her frail skin.
And a beam of solid bright light rains down from the heavens
A beautiful blessing before turmoil.
Seconds fly by and it is loud again,
Noise that would hurt the ears,
A loudness that would give concussions.
A loud ringing that could be taken as a warning.
And with a final sinking feeling of silence,
The earth weeps under pressure and crumbles,
Reduced to a beautiful once was.

Words

KALYB JAMES

Words can be wonderful,
With each one flowing out of the mind,
through the fingers and onto the page they find

They go fast
And maybe they will go terribly slow,

And sometimes must backtrack
flow they ensure To

They may rhyme,
 they
 may
 fall.

And sometimes words just don't work at all.
They can break, but can also mend
Words can be mean the beginning,
Or also the end.



Flocked Waters

SOPHIA GUERIERI

Final Act

ZOE OSWALT

Sounds of a wailing cousin permeated the quiet
solemn sound of the graveyard

It was a calm day in February
The air whistled a lively tune and the sky upheld a tranquil feeling

We all walked into the graveyard trying not to step on the graves
All of us doing little hops around to not be disrespectful

The pallbearers unloaded my grandmother from the Rolls Royce hearse

Her kids sat in their assigned seats in front of the casket on the emerald
green carpet

Our pastor spoke his rehearsed words and shook the hands of the
siblings
The pallbearers followed suit

I took a rose off of the casket
It was a bouquet of pink pastel roses
Her casket was eloquently decorated

Even in death my grandmother was keen for pageantry

I looked to my left and my cousin was wailing over the casket
I looked to my right and see the friends of my JoJo crying

It felt so rehearsed
Like everyone had experienced it
before and this was just another event

The crying was expected
Makeup smearing was inevitable

There is a stiffness in the air while everyone
Anticipates the family's next move

The wailing of my cousin jumps down
The throats of the attendants

Unable to breathe without hearing the screaming
Scraping within my mind

Hearing her sob shattered the mold

Nothing felt expected anymore

We were all stumbling through the next moments
Hoping to not fall apart

Trying to grasp at anything that felt real

My hands kept slipping
The sweat kept me from keeping them still

I wiped them on my sweater over and over

Trying to wipe away the scent of death and
The feeling of formaldehyde on my hands

I couldn't move
I stood there
My eyes fixated on the ornate trunk

It felt like I was in the condemning box with her

Werewolf Eyes

GEORGIA PITCOCK

I never really cared for my eyes.
In a family full of blue-eyed little girls,
There was me.
Brown-eyed and gap toothed.

I always wanted blue eyes.
It's not like I purely disliked my eyes.
But blue eyes got compliments,
Brown eyes didn't.

They looked like rain on a spring day.
Deep as the ocean,
Brilliant sapphires and aquamarines.
As bright as the sky on a clear summer day.

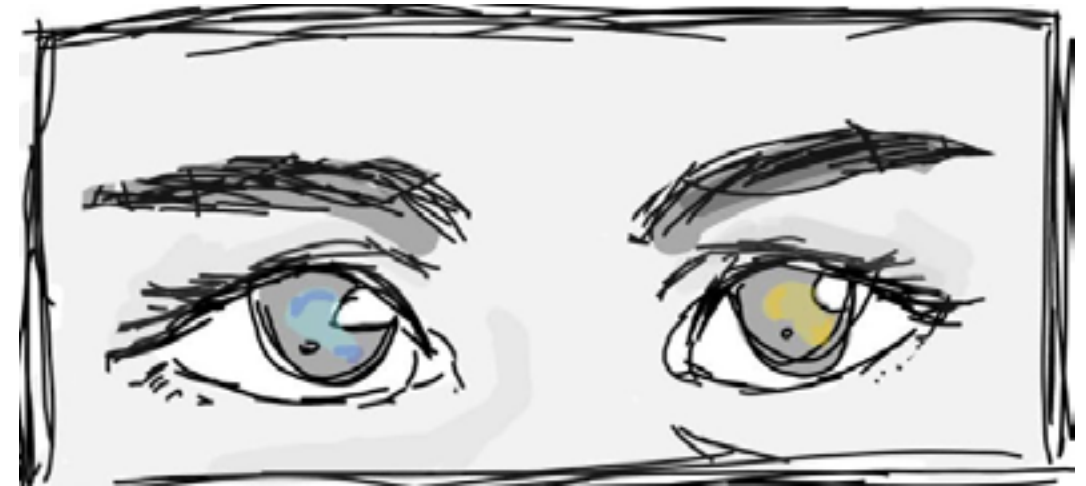
It didn't help that my eyes didn't work right,
Everything was blurry.
The leaves on trees blended into blobs
And the words on signs melted into one another.

So not only were they a dull brown, but they were hidden
By thick glasses with nose pieces that dug into my skin.
Bright purple and green frames with lenses that would get dirty
and leave specks across my vision.

My eyesight never got better,
But one day I got contacts that left a
Little blue ring around my iris.
That would be the closest I ever got to blue eyes.

As I got older, I started to appreciate my eyes.
I could look directly into the sun.
I wasn't supposed to do that,
but I still did.

One day my friend told me I had werewolf eyes.
"They're brown with gold around the middle.
Sometimes it's like they're glowing."
I started liking my eyes a little more after that.



Windows to the Soul

LEAH RAINEY, DIGITAL

Waiting

DANI OAKS

When someone is hurt, what do you do? The instinct is to help, care, and heal what's been broken or hurt. Now if it's just a stranger, you may care less, but a family member, well it's a completely different story. Especially if the loved one is almost dead. The panic sets in, heart going fast, breathing heavier than normal, and head spinning. 9-1-1 is on the way, they say to stay calm, but how can you in a moment like this. The life of someone is on the line, and they want you to stay calm? Foolish you may think, but you need to stay in the right mindset. Looking into the head it's chaotic, almost as if alarms are blasting into your head for impact. State of denial, you may say, "this can't be happening, why now, why them!" or, "It's a nightmare I'll wake up and they'll be okay. Everything is okay. Wake up, wake up!"

Nothing.

You're still there on the ground holding them to your chest, it's still dark. Nothing changed except the sounds that are now outside; the shining colors go through the window. Crying still, nothing but hope that they'll survive. It all seems to be going in slow motion yet, everything is happening so fast. Paramedics come through the door, asking for you to move so they can get the body in the ambulance. Neighbors coming from their own houses wondering what's happening. Everyone probably woke up from the sounds of sirens on their street. The only light they have are streetlights and the ambulance lights. Asking questions to get an answer to how this happened. Trying to tell them through the lumps in your throat, the voice cracks, and stutters in your voice. They ask you to come with them so someone will be there when they wake up. If they do that is. Sirens blasting as the vehicle makes it way down the roads, not much traffic to how late it is. The ride felt silent, even with the sirens it was quiet, the atmosphere seemed dead. Nothing to grab or hold for comfort during this moment. The body is petrified, sobs and gasps can be heard in the small trunk, hands and body shaking due to all the anxiety that was built up.

The trip felt short, getting out of the vehicle now, they're rushing to get them into the hospital. Doors fly open, other doctors and nurses rushing to help them. Running with them you come to a halt, someone

says, "You can't proceed from here, wait in the waiting room." You do as told and sit in one of the many chairs aligned on the wall, at least it's somewhat comfy. The room wall is a nice soft blue, bright white lighting to reveal the room. It's cold, the sound of air conditioning blowing through every room. Alone you are, waiting, could be there for hours, and it's only the middle of the night. No sleep, even though it may be a good idea to rest while waiting, you can't. Too much has happened, yeah, they may wake you up to go somewhere else, but your head is running a marathon at this point. Outside it's quiet, nothing but the vents blowing, and the sounds of doors opening and closing. Feet running up and down the hallways from above or below.

It's started to settle in that you're sitting in a hospital waiting for news or to be called. Head now thinking, why did they do it, did they think it would end well, did they think of the people they would leave behind. No probably not, they did what they thought was best for them, and that was to get away. It's never the solution to any problems even if some look at it as a way for a solution. No longer sobbing, but tears dropping here and there, sniffles, and hiccups. From all the commotion, a stinging pain in your head has come, a headache they call it, all the stress has built inside you. Thinking now with the thoughts of them either recovering and waking up or passing away while trying to be saved.

The sun starts to rise, bags under the bloodshot eyes, tear stains all over the cheeks, and head still pounding from the previous hours. Birds chirping, the winds howling outside, along with the trees rustling against the hospital walls. Some people have come and gone in the waiting room, yet it was still quiet. You feel numb due to the lack of sleep, nothing is there, no emotion, no news, just nothing. Emptiness is set at the pit of the stomach, a lack of hope, but it's still holding on. All there is to do is to wait for something, anything. Just stay awake and wait and they'll be okay. Just a little longer.

To My Parents

ANONYMOUS

To my parents,

I wish you would listen to me when I tell you who I am.

I wish you would listen, then you would hear how much of your own messages I took to heart. When you told me to love everyone, I listened.

Why can't you?

I don't even think you listen to yourself sometimes.
You speak of loving unconditionally, yet I hear how you talk about people who do not look like you.
Why can't you show them unconditional love without judgment?
Judgment IS a condition
And it is not love.

You say that you love me, yet every essence of me you despise.
You hate that I don't fit the mold that you created when the doctor said,
"It's a baby girl."
I'm sorry I'm not your little girl
I am your child.

I hate the expectations of womanhood,
Don't get me wrong, I love women,
They are powerful creatures,
But society has too many standards,
I would rather just be seen as a person.

Gender is a performance, and I didn't join the cast.

I know you hate the name I picked out.
Even behind those cheap smiles and playful laughter, I can see the anger in your eyes.
You belittle my experience with your gaze.

You don't take me seriously.
Is it because I'm a child?
Is it because you perceive me as a woman?
Or because I voice opinions that you disagree with?
I wish I knew...

Whatever your reasoning is, it does not matter.
You should still listen to me because I am a person.

I have value because I am.

~~Your daughter~~
-Your child



Ridin' that Line

SARAH LOTT, INK

The Death of a Childhood

RACHEL PARR

i can probably count on one hand the times

that i felt like a real child.

the years have gone by-

leaving a thin veneer of youth painted

over a heart forced to grow too soon.

it has only been sixteen years

and yet-

i'm fighting not to feel so old.

where did my childhood go?

my life has been packed away.

neatly labeled cardboard,

the last scraps of a life i never had.

fading away behind strips of packing tape.

a year from now,

i will be getting ready to go out on my own,

all on my own.

the death of a childhood.

where did she go?

Ghost

KATHRYN LAND

[her]

It was cold when she escaped. The earth was cool, the air crisp. She let it pass through her. When her feet met the path, she paused, admiring the solidity of the ground. The reliable, yet ever-changing base which held her being. It was a comfort to call it home.

She started off, taking care of avoiding every fallen leaf, paying her respects for their descending dance,

down,

down,

down. They were her brothers, her sisters, her friends – she dared not open their eyes.

The sandy trail widened when she came within throwing distance of the road. She glided onto the broken asphalt, cracked from its years of use. It was as dark as the sky and as gnarled as a beech tree, yet eternities their junior. A shivering breeze accompanied her sigh, and she continued on her way.

Past the place where the oak once stood-

A friend long gone.

She placed one foot in front of the other, gliding across the path, once dirt, then gravel, now paved. She knows where she is going. Like a compass, her heart guides her back. Back to the smell of honeysuckle in the summer, back to the familiar whisper of gossip in the trees, back to the long, lazy days spent basking in youthfulness. Back to the time before.

It looks different. Where there was once a house, small and homely, built with care, now sags a hovel. What was then the laughter of a family, is now the burdened moan of a fractured life. She enters through a hole in the wall

And remembers.

It was during the summer, on a day which had begun with the sun peeking over the treetops, smiling for its love, beaming for his bride. The birds were filled with song. "Be back by dusk, be safe. I love you."

If only Mother knew.

She slipped into the lake. Her friends accompanied her, the blissful noise of children permeating the air with song. The day had grown darker, but it could not dampen their mood. The children basked in their own sunlight.

-She opened her eyes. She did not know how she had gotten here. It was vile. The water had coated with a layer of shiny gasoline. Runoff from the highway built in the time after. The rainbows refracted off the surface were sickly, and she could bear it no longer. Tumultuous waves crashed in her mind, and despite her resistance, she was back. -

The clouds began to weep.

The sky was pierced by the cry of a grieving glare.

The children left with haste.

She was frightened.

The flashes continued.

She slipped under.

...

She now stood in a field; her sheer body braced against the breeze. She plucked the memories from the ground; wilted and aged from years of neglect. They were all gone. The girl wandered through the rows of stones, searching. Classmates, friends, strangers, priests, widows, babies, soldiers; until she saw them, there, half covered by leaves long dead and dry, an angel standing guard.

The girl placed her feather-light fingertips upon the weathered slate. She could feel the coarseness of her father's hands as they sheltered hers- like the sandpaper he had used to smooth the oak beam above the fireplace those many years ago. Father had surprised Mother with the mantlepiece for Christmas, donning it in mistletoe and fir cones. The girl couldn't wait for Mother to return- she had been in town buying the Christmas feast: a turkey and yams. The girl waited by the door until the sharp, winter air filled the home, snowflakes chasing each other until finally resting upon the child's wool-covered feet. The girl grasped her mother's bone-thin hands in her own, leading her towards the gift, so meticulously crafted by her father. The laughter that night was more melodious than bells, the house warmer than summer.

But that was long ago. Her hands retreated to her sides, hugging herself, trying to hold on to the phantom warmth. The wind blew, the trees shook. The birds were silent.

She wept.

The spectral figure sunk to the ground where the third tombstone should have been-

-if they had found her.

She longed to be cocooned between her mother and father again, she longed for the touch of a hand, a fond embrace, a piece of what had been lost. Her misty anguish consumed her. The girl could not return- she knew she could not. She sat at the threshold, tracing lines in the dirt. The sorrow was deeper than any chasm, and she allowed herself to sink.

Back into the earth- her steadfast love. She allowed herself to be taken in again, next to her father, with his dark hair blowing in the wind, his face blurry through the glassy surface- he couldn't see her. She called to her mother, beside him, daggers carving lines down her face. They fell as she felt herself loosen from her mortal ties. She didn't want to go. She begged them to look, to search. The wind blew, the waves crashed, and the mud hid them from view.

She melted into the ground; they were one and the same. She grasped the roots of trees, waltzed with the ants, the beetles, the slugs. She felt the earth's trembling heartbeat, beating time to her macabre song. The being curled up beside the sunken patches of earth and fell

fell

fell

into a mournful slumber.

...

The doves nested there. Squirrels clambered up its bark, playing hide-and-seek with shadows. Butterflies found respite from their journeys. When snow fell, the rocks remained untouched. Rain poured, but not a drop reached the slate. The sun cracked its angry whip, yet the tombstones felt no sting. The ever-youthful pine provided shelter, a home for all beings.

Hers was stolen, so she became one.

She was Home.

A Letter to my One and Only Companion

BRAYDEN MCNAIR

To Coffee, the only friend who has access to all my secrets:

We've been friends before I can even remember, from quiet laughs at grandma's house to tears here at home. Do you remember the first time we met? I asked grandma could I have a sip of you, I'll be honest I thought you were chocolate milk, but don't be hurt: I love you just the way you are. After our first meeting we became fast friends. My parents thought I was too young to talk to you, but grandma always made a pot of you for her and me. I didn't have you at home so we would usually meet at grandma's house.

In 9th grade for my birthday grandma bought a Keurig for me, it was love at first sight. As soon I got home, I fixed everything up, then I made my first cup of you. I got this feeling of accomplishment. After that moment we talked and talked, you listened to all my dirty secrets, things I wouldn't even tell my family or friends. When I was stressed, you were there to calm me down with your bitter taste. When I was depressed, you were there to give me warmth. Our relationship has grown and evolved throughout the years.

You will never know how much you mean to me; no one has ever cared for me as you have. You were the first to see my tears, the first to really listen to my pain and not reject me. Oh, coffee I hope we stay together forever and ever. You have accepted in all my stages and I have you, from warm to cold, sweet to bitter but, you were the same to me no matter what.



Tea Time

KALYB JAMES, WHITE CHARCOAL

For CW

MADDIE MACGOWN

Love is like how the sea meets the shore and
Is persistent no matter how many
Times it is taken away from the sand.
Love is like a day, so bright and sunny,
And another one to come like seasons
It could be long and miserable like
Summer, chilled and quick like winter by then
Cozy and comfortable like Autumn. Might
It take forever but love will never
Die, it will live on forever until
Someone gives up on it, but forever
Does not mean always for everyone, still
Love is everlasting and will be
Always the greatest thing about life

Consumption

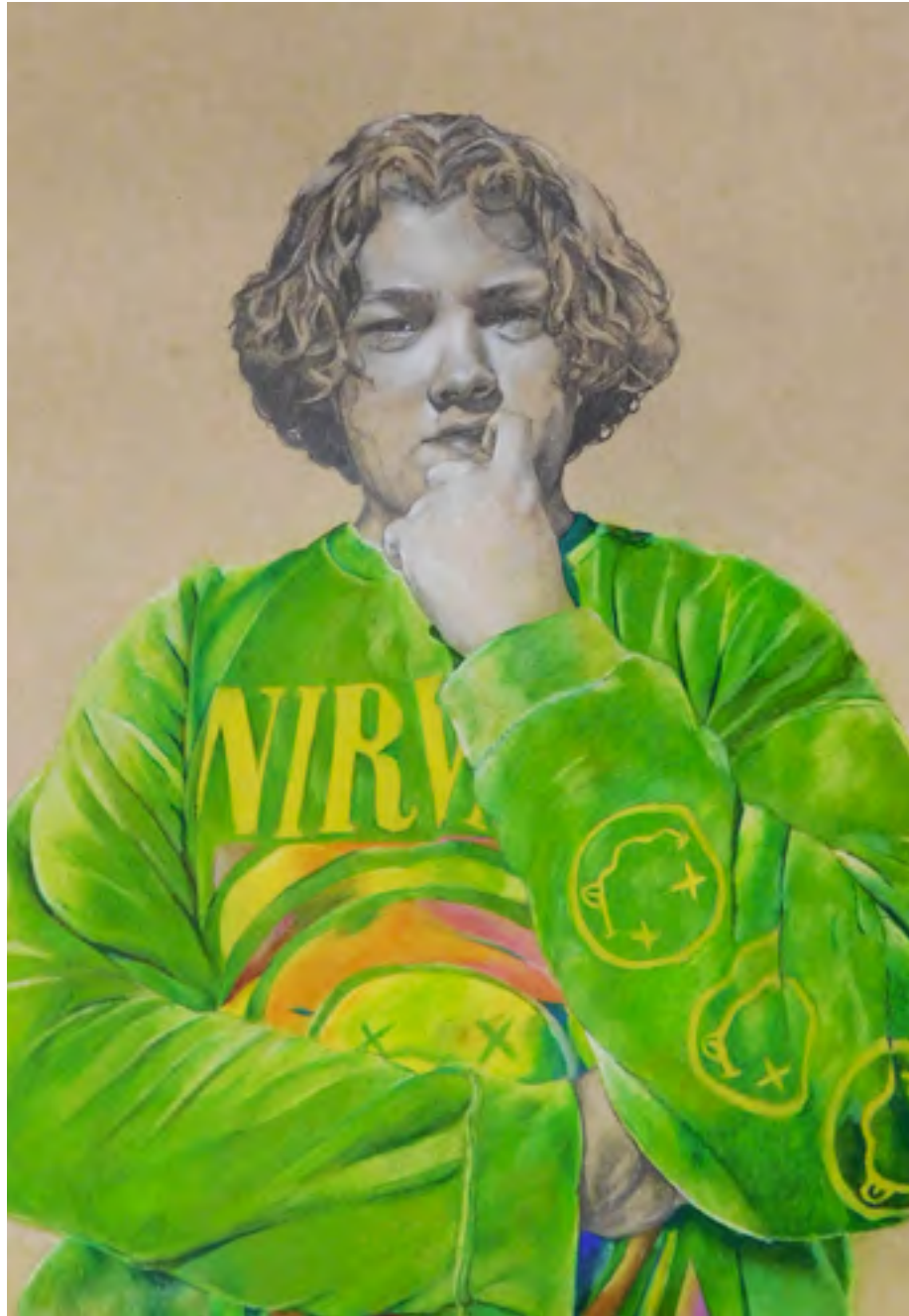
JENNA HOOD

Loving someone is a consolation,
Something to make you feel better about
Living. Oh, it supplies the sensation
Of lifting from life the burden of doubt.
But then, you see, it does not help anymore.
It splits the brain and weighs heavy one's very frame
Until love becomes a thing to abhor.
All you can think, all you can feel is pain
Before cruel duality casts its shade,
Darkening your dejected mind for life.
Who knew that delight could be of such aid
To the dreaded rival it finds in strife?
What hope is there when the virtue of love
Is rewarded with a grief undreamed of?



Chalky Chuckles

ZOE THORNTON, WHITE CHARCOAL



The Thinker

ZOE THORNTON, MULTIMEDIA

Car Rides

ZOE THORNTON

the passenger seat of your car smells like me-
Victoria's Secret Bombshell perfume
there's a small streak of dirt on the glovebox from my
muddy converse
mushroom stickers are in your cupholders
minecraft figures are on your dashboard
in that passenger seat, one of your hands belongs to
me,
intertwined with mine.
i sit shifted, scanning your side profile with a grin.
your perfect nose, the shape of your lips
the sun gleams through your windshield and fills your
eyes
these cheesy poems aren't as smooth as the hue of blue-
green that wraps your pupils
but before you ask,
yes, i have a staring problem.

Bitter like Honey

MARY CRAWFORD CANARD

"Oh, the children just love to hear you play, Mr. Case. That violin of yours melts like honey, that's what they say." Henry strummed a fair tune and played the honey down to its sweet center, where he charmed up all the honeybees and spring bugs that fluttered by. No tune sounded sweeter than Dixie Nayer though, who would often come by to hear what the children had to say.

"No finer compliment than that, Mrs. Dixie. Oh, and don't mess around with the formalities. I'm mighty pleased to be called plain ole' Henry." When Henry played the violin, the harmony swelled to the upper boughs of every tree. The notes hung and softened, and then turned and danced up higher. The birds would trickle down in pairs, falling off every branch slowly and swooping along with the wind as if the music carried them on. It breathed life into every tree.

Wilting bark would spring a beautiful chestnut brown and sparkle with silver undertones until its skin appeared a fallen star tucked and rooted inside the Earth. His music could shadow even the richest man.

Henry laid down his bow against the peat of the moss. Dolls made of old wood and straw danced on their submissive strings that so chained them to the Earth. He let them continue to move in their trance, hopping and skipping and following the tune.

"My daddy says you don't do nothing, Mr. Case, 'cept for playing that violin of yours. Says you don't have the dignity; says you won't get a job. What's that mean, Mr. Case?"

Marmalade Nayer with fawn-colored pigtailed and so innocent, was swatted harshly by her older brother Ethan, who believed himself to be grown and mature. "You don't say things like that, Marma."

"And why's that? Daddy said 'em."

"That doesn't mean you should. I'm mad sorry, Mr. Case. Marmalade don't know nothing except morning come and the smell of honey biscuits."

Henry patted down beside him, where the moss was drier, and

where Marmalade could proffer feet against the broken tree stumps. He watched her patter over, fluttering toward the dry peat with arms like butterfly wings. His hat tipped over his head, raised so that he could flash young Marmalade with speckled kind old man eyes.

"Your daddy right, Marmalade. I don't have much to my name. Don't have a job either." Henry reached for his bow; his fingers firmly gripped upon his violin. He smiled at how young and promising Marmalade's eyes were, that shined with stringing curiosity and unchained freedom. He split the cry of shackles with a fierce phoenix drop of a violin's soft whimper.

"You see, there's not much of me; not anymore. But I won't let him have it, your daddy. Or any of the others for that matter. You see, that's all I got with me. My violin and my dignity. And they play quite a tune." His Jiggling dolls danced along, following his beat. His hands moved rhythmically with the bow, casting such a spell that it seemed as if both doll and man were one. He tipped his hat back, old Henry did. He tipped it back far so that a shadow creased over his eyes, cascading broken dreams in darkness and far away from the spread wings of butterflies. He moved slower, more somber, and crackled the dolls in a movement that seemed utterly defeated. Both doll and man hung the tune. Fatigued crows' wings formed in the shadow of the rotting logs.

"Daddy don't know nothin', Mr. Case. Don't know how to play violin like you do." Marmalade said.

"That right?"

"Yes sir. It's the sweetest thing I've ever heard. Want to play some myself someday. Want to play just like you do."

Henry laid his violin down along with his bow. The dolls ceased in their dancing. Their strings hung limp at their sides. Henry looked along at the cars, and the water, and out beyond that.

Beyond he knew there were limber trees taller than buildings, and waters never ceasing in their spread. The logs beneath him felt bare, and the peat of moss too familiar.

"Never play like me, Marmalade. Play a richer tune. Play a happy one. Play a tune that lands you in security. I'd like that. But never play like me."

Henry sat among the logs, and that shadow of crows wings carefully wrapped up the broken sound of the violin in stained white cloth. He tipped back his hat once more. "It's setting up there, butterflies. Don't want Dixie to think I'm keeping y'all too long." He set down Marmalade on the bare peat again and dug in his pocket deep until his hand held two cherry mash chocolates. They looked like swan wings.

"It's a treat for being my favorite audience. Tell your mother I said hello."

Marmalade turned around followed Ethan upon their track up the hill, past the trees that always looked brighter than the rest, past Aunt Dayla's and on through the Bennet residence. She held her cherry mash tight, though some remnants of sorrow, sorn sadness still seeped from its sweetness.

"Look what you've gone and done, Marma." Ethan unwrapped the back folds of his cherry mash, and his words sounded slushed and puzzling in his mouth as he talked.

Marmalade fiddled at her own cherry mash, though she was never able to open them like her brother. She wore a sour face.

"How's that? I haven't gone and done nothin'."

"Yes, you did. Spewing all that stuff about daddy to Mr. Case when it wasn't none of your business. Sees, that's why I'm able to go past Aunt Dayla's place by myself and you aint. Sees, sees!"

"Haps' I'll never be grown up if I can't says as I like then." Marmalade stuffed the crushed cherry mash in her mouth, the wrapper torn and riddled with chocolate bits from her struggle to open it.

They walked in the southern air silence, where the setting sun sent sweet shafts of hot summer heat through the wind. It couldn't keep them long though; it couldn't keep her long. Marmalade, who could never hold her tongue.

"Did's I really hurt him?"

Ethan threw his candy wrapper into the wind.

"Somewhat, Marmalade. Deep down, I feel somewhat." He paused.

"Never mind, that though. Mr. Case understands us, us children. He understands your loose tongue. In that deep down somewhat, he understands you meant no harm."

Marmalade nodded and threw her crumpled wrapper behind his. It swept up in circles, following the track of the smoking heat until it landed upon the ripples of Sherril's Pond. The ripples began its track, and the wrapper would forever float out of sight.

The house greeted them with a warm cherry light that buzzed with the glassy noise of nighttime mosquito hawks. Up on the porch, underneath that peachy velvet glow, was the mama known as Dixie Nayer. She had waited up on that porch for a while, her strawberry blonde hair disheveled in that humid southern way that made hair look like damp pine straw. The time ticked in her eyes.

"He must play quite a tune if it keeps you on so long. What's that around your lips, Marmalade?"

She licked her thumbs and wiped the bits of cherry and chocolate from her cheeks.

"Mr. Case real nice, gives us a cherry mash. Says we're his favorite audience."

Her thumbs led teary trails across Marmalade's cheeks, running slowly down her face until her arms hung limp at her side.

"Oh, Mr. Case wanted us to tell you he says hello! Ain't that nice of him? He's so neighborly."

Mama nodded, finishing up the laundry she had stacked up in the small basket beside her feet.

"Yes, how nice." She murmured. "Hello to you too, Henry."

Marmalade sat down at her feet, and Ethan upon the windowsill. She took out the twists in her hair and flung them to the ground, letting her hair succumb to the humidity.

"That's silly, mama!" Marmalade giggled. "Mr. Case can't hear

you from all the way out here.”

She folded atop a daisy dress. “Oh, but he can. That Henry, now he’s something remarkable.”

“Do you know him that well, mama?”

She straightened out a steel-lily saturated gray skirt out and placed it beside the blue brock boulder briefs. Her hand motions flowed effortlessly, in a tedious movement as if she had been doing so all her life. “Old friend of mine. That’s all.”

Ethan folded in tight his pockets. “How’d he used to play?” He thumbed the windowpanes, leaving greasy, dirty thumbprints along the clear glass.

“How’s that?”

“How did Mr. Case used to play? With his violin, did it ever sound different?”

Mama pressed down the last of the clothes and carefully picked up the basket. Her fingers looked hot against the woven cusps on the side, red with fatigue. She tried pushing back her hair, but the humid wind kept rushing forward and tumbling it down again, making her beautiful complexion look sad and tired. Her eyes caught the stars above, holding their glare. She wouldn’t take her gaze off their stretched-out mass.

“Oh, yes. Back then, when that violin of his was just a mere child, he would play with a bow covered in blessed stardust and send chills down our spines. He played that violin so high that all of us backwater kids made plans to go somewhere, far out in the galaxy. Hoping at least one of us would prick a star from that luscious void. That violin’s song granted wishes with its notes, and sung blessings with its tune. Henry was a one-of-a-kind man.”

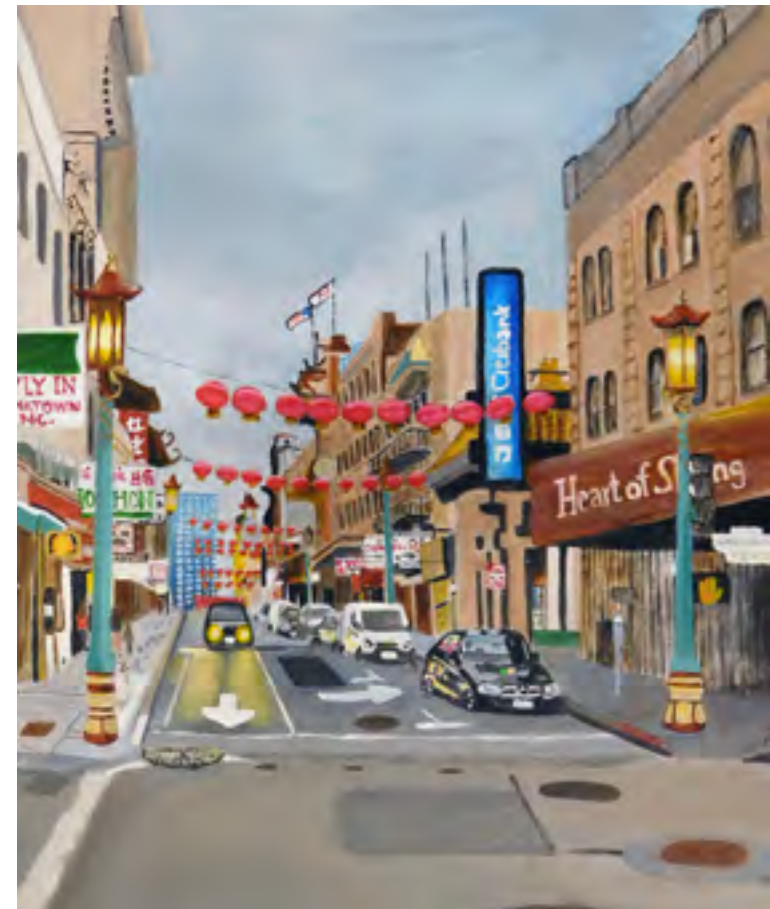
Marmalade picked at her hair, fawn-colored and crisped with the nighttime breezes. “Was, mama?”

The mama known as Dixie flickered, and like a memory, flashed, until for a fleeting glance, ever so fleeting, there was Henry. Dirty hair, blond freckled, starry eyed, with a flower in his palms and a song upon his chest. He was tan and smiling and waiting. Waiting, waiting, waiting

for the moment when one would fall, his cusp open. The wait was so long hat the flower turned gray, and the flashes toward dismay, and Dixie was left with ragged hands twitching along the woven basket cusps.

She tightened along the basket cusps, and that fire light in her eyes that were so strong, they could hold a star, suddenly vanished. She turned toward the door.

“Your father fixin’ to be home soon. Go get washed up. Wouldn’t want a working man kept waiting. Waiting, waiting.” Then, she walked inside, leaving her scarlet red hair tie loose along the rocking chair and her regret hanging on the porch, too low and too hidden to see the stars.



Lanterns and Lights

KAIDEN HOLTS, ACRYLIC

Motorbird

(a study of motorcycles and hummingbirds)

BRYN CHAPPELL

You're dwarfed by others on the road,
Your wings a circle of blur.
You weave amongst Eagles,
Firebirds, and Skylarks,
Who mistake your buzzing closeness,
And swerve to avoid your sting.

Be pushed from the factory nest,
See sights you would never have dreamed!
Newness of life distracts you from rest,
And hopefulness builds in your chest.

Hours before the dawn,
Onyx headlights blink open,
And survey surrounding lawn.

When the Cat longs for a stroll,
Talons on your back show you how to run.
Without direction in control,
Your flight into the setting sun,
Not quenching to your soul.
The cycle is getting old

You purposefully hop
On the edge of a twig.
From gasoline blooms,
You ask for a swig.

Stop at red lights,
Fly past green buds,
Oil stains on clean porch.

You ride to a cement garden of fuchsia blossoms,
Where the Cat offers pungent nectar.
You accept, gorge yourself at the command,
Your gurgled cries that your belly is full
Muffled by flowers and fuel.

An emerald, crimson, Caribbean blue,
Metallic feathers shine on silver skies.

You turn a branch into a home
Where icy predators are insulated out
By carefully selected furniture
And green sprigs of life,
And where chirps are kisses.

A wide, cement nest
The Cat doesn't want to keep warm.
Always, when the ride is over,
Back to the cement nest,
And turn off the light,
Wait in consuming darkness
For something to move.

Until the kickstand malfunction,
Lying abandoned on your side,
Taking back your wishes.

Until the kisses stop.
Your mother settles her head
Into the clump of gray puppy fur
She gathered, thought you would like.
Her needle nose begins to dip,
The pine straw ceasing rhythmic sway
And warmth slowly fading away.

Your tag was switched for one that read "antique,"
But you hadn't thought time passed that quickly.
Sure, your front wheel flits from side to side,
And the Cat has been using another one of you lately
That can go faster, longer.
When you reach out to it,
It stares blankly, unresponsive,
Meditating horsepower.

Fragile, hollow bones
Sink back into the earth.

The Cat drove you one last time to a field.
Told you this was a special trip.
You were loaded onto a truck,
As if you didn't know your way around town by now.

But you hadn't been here.
The Cat rolled you down
And leaned you against a tree.
The Cat gathered some dirt
Placing it on your back,
And leaving you there.
Seasons of rust build upon you,
Descent tantalizingly slow.
A skull and crossbones decal
Tattooed on your chest during youth,
Scowls up, defying natural order.
After countless immobile years,
You beg to be found by the vultures
Just to fly again.

Even the carbon you excreted into a mildewing sky
Indifferent, refusing to cast warmth or threat upon you.



Walking in Charleston

CATHERINE NOBLE, ACRYLIC

In Response to Anonymous

ANONYMOUS (2)

In reply to Anonymous, who made that heart-wrenching poem last semester about being just a face:

I hope this message finds you. You are way more than just a face. You are more precious than diamonds; more valuable than all the gold and jewels the world could ever contain. You are brighter than the nearest stars; more special than the very sun that shines. I may not know you, and I may not ever meet you, but that doesn't make you any less valuable, and sometimes, history has shown that people who felt they weren't important later went on to become great people. You have a special story inside of you; what you're going through proves it. You are meant to shine brighter than any star; be greater than anything the world has ever imagined. You are loved—so loved. Yes, you are so much more than a face. So much more. You only need to open your eyes and see the wonders and blessings that are in store for you and you alone.

You are enough. God bless you.

Time to Sleep

LEAH RAINEY

The gentle sound
Of crickets chirping;
The trees rustling peacefully
In the ever-soft breeze.
Subtle flickers of glitter from the lava lamp
Flash and flutter against the walls.
The stars twinkle outside
Silently talking, silently wishing
Me a peaceful night's slumber.
Rest pulls at the corners of my mind;
Sleep tugs at my eyelids.
Soft blurs of memory
Flow through my mind,
Laying down the foundation of my dream.
The day is done; the night is come.
Now is the time to sleep.
Sleep..
Sleep...

An Orange a Day

MARIAM BHATTI

Pierce the belly of the sphere

Rip it apart

layer by layer

feel the pulp hurry through your fingers onto the surface

Your hands now sticking to one another

And your fingernails dry with clementine residue

You tear off each piece with ease

As if God had intended instructions on where to peel

But you don't savor the feeling

Instead, you devour like a barbarian

And grab another to rip apart



Citrus Comfort

KALYB JAMES, ACRYLIC



Pink Side

CATIE NOBLE, ACRYLIC

Guitar Ocean

MARY CRAWFORD CANARD

There's that air to music
Which reminds me of the color gold
Or the sight of falling sand, soothing souls
When the rift comes in, I'm on the tide, in the ocean
Sinking to the sound of guitar strings and drum thumps
I'm brought back up with the piano
Black and white paintings held in an endless complexation
And the slight of their keys hold me in a daze
Until I'm broken out by the pop of mixed radio
And tunes that look like the eye of a watermelon seed
And feel cool like summer rain
And in every destination, I'm standing surfaced
In a manner of joyous bliss that I can only describe as the
Voice of music

Nightcrawler

KALYB JAMES, TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Stars gaze through the empty night as two young children amble away. It's steps relentlessly approach, signaling their impending fate.

"Over there. We might be able to hide in that cave," whispered the young boy, his exhausted limbs aching with every step he took. It didn't help that he had to aid his companion, who was now standing somewhere between life and death. "We might be able to rest in there."

The girl, eyes heavy with her clothes in shreds and stained with blood and dirt, could only give a simple nod as a reply as pain constantly shot through her body, yet growing number by the second. The boy, an arm wrapped around his neck to support his friend, steps into the open jaws of the stony hillside as quickly as possible.

The boy hauls the girl into the stony depths of the hillside, avoiding ledges, stalactites, and slippery surfaces as he listens to ensure their aggressor is far behind them. He finds an area a good distance away from the entrance with just enough light to be able to treat the young girl's leg and sets her down on the cold rock.

The boy squints at the girl's leg through the fading moonlight. There he can make out her injuries, several cuts on her skin with a medium gash taken out on the back of her calf from where she had been bitten just minutes earlier; it was leaking crimson blood as the girl merely gazed with a now oblivious indifference.

She's probably only half-conscious by now; Can she even feel anything? the boy thought.

"Hey... h-how bad... is it?" the girl struggled to get out in a desperate attempt to break the silence.

Origin, as the boy was called, somehow managed to pull the words from his dry throat, "Well, it's obviously not good. The main issue is the large hole in your leg, I can close the other cuts with my magic, but you need something of a much higher level than what I can muster to do anything more than stop the bleeding."

"Do what... you can," gasped the girl.

"I'll warn you now: it's going to hurt. I can't use healing magic – the most I can do is keep the wounds closed so you can heal faster and lose less blood, but you won't be out of danger until after we get you some proper treatment." Ori paused to catch his breath, "And it

doesn't seem like we'll be going anywhere for a while." Ori notices the girl's eyes start to close and he promptly gives her a quick shake. "Hey, Luna, don't close your eyes."

A distant roar reminds the two of their desperate situations, causing them both to flinch in fear.

It's a miracle that you are even able to stay conscious right now – not that I'm in much of a hurry to see you passed out. Ok, lemme think, I've got enough magic to close the wounds, and I can stop the bleeding in her calf, but if we don't get out of here, we're still pretty much screwed. Think. Think! "To get back to the village, we need to get back through at least half of that forest, but the problem is we can't get past that damn monster – just what hell is that thing anyway! Ugh... this sucks! Neither of us can fight that thing, obviously, plus not including its night vision, it already has our scents so sneaking past it is out of the option..."

"That's funny..." Origin's thoughts are interrupted.

"What?"

"Even now, you still have a talk to yourself when you're thinking."

"Wait, I wasn't saying all that out loud, was I? Also, you're pretty talkative now for the state you're in."

"One: Yes, you started mumbling around when you started talking about getting back to Minerva Town. And two: my head is clearing up since you stopped the bleeding, so I'm pretty much fine now." Luna gives a weak smile.

Liar, "You're clearly still in a lot of pain right now, even if you can somehow stop the shock from losing so much blood, so save what little strength you have left and let me think of a way out of here."

"And exactly how are you going to do that when –"

"Ok, one: if I can get some peace and quiet to think, then I can get us out of here. And two: you don't have much of a place saying that when I was the one who found you laying on the ground about to be eaten by that... uhh"

"Nightcrawler –"

"Nightcrawler, yes, thanks. And three..." Ori started before ceasing dead in his tracks. "Wait, do you hear that." He began, suddenly on alert.

"Wha-"

"Shh." he interrupted.

A low growl was heard from outside the cave, the shadows cowering in the glowering moonlight beside the two children as they immediately welded themselves to the stony wall – their only saving grace – as

cave, checking to see if its prey had run into it. Luna winced as the two were forced to move silently along the wall, her leg pulsating with pain with each and every step.

Crap! I should've done a better job washing the scent of her blood away. Crap, crap, crap! How are we gonna get out of this?

As the beast prowled farther into the cave, the children slid farther into the cave, the three locked fervently in a cold dance of death. Step, sniff, growl. Step, shuffle, freeze.

The silence of the cave felt like cold steel pressing against Ori's skin, or maybe that was the wall, he couldn't tell anymore. Every drop of water, every scratch of a nail, every small critter that caught the Nightcrawler's attention made him flinch.

Don't come over here! don't come over here! Please, just give up and leave!

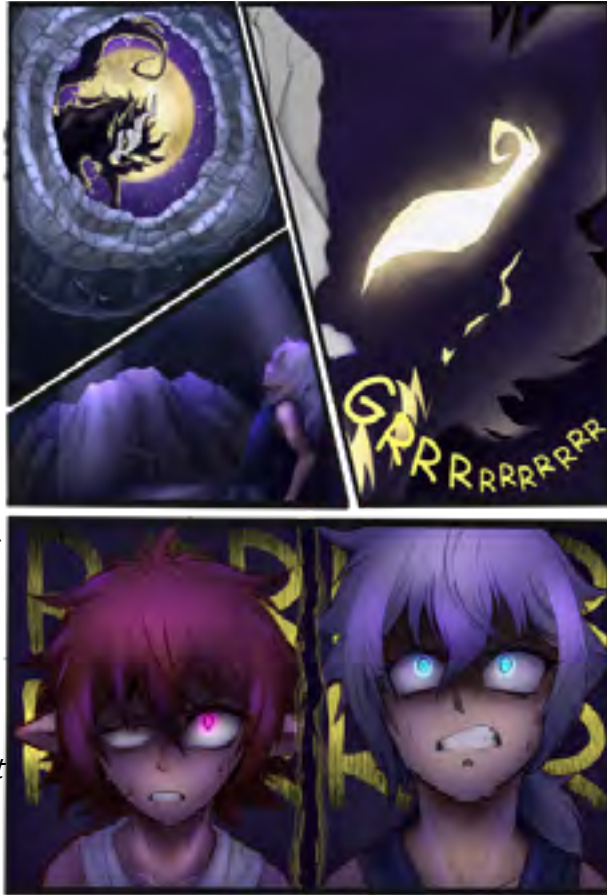
Suddenly, as if replying to his pleas, the Nightcrawler turned and walked away, seemingly completely content with not catching its prey, its claws retracting and the cease of its growling.

YES! C'mon, just a bit further. I can't believe we might get away from this thing. If we can just wait it out a bit more!

Ori felt himself relax slightly upon the thought of the Nightcrawler leaving and them returning home safely.

Huh, weird. He thought. Something feels oddly familiar about this situation - as if I've had this feeling before. Oh yeah. I remember one of our teachers had taught us about it before.

"That feeling – the one where you have a chill down your spine followed by the deafening sound of impending doom rocking around the pit of your heart, remember it well," Ori remembered his teachers saying,



"It's something that all people can feel unconsciously, but you have to learn to feel it at all times. If you don't, you could very well end up dead by dawn, especially in that forest..."

But why am I remembering that?

Again, the words of his teachers rung through Ori's head, "Night-crawlers have a specific trait about them, when they are aware they've cornered prey but can't locate its exact location, they tend to act like they've given up on the hunt, retracting their claws and walking away in an unusually content looking gait. Do not fall for this trick, it's a ploy set to get their targets to relax, causing a specific form of mana to be unconsciously released from their aura. Be aware of it, and don't ever relax until daybreak if you are being chased by one, because they never give up on prey they've set their sights on."

Oh, I see. Ori thought as he suddenly felt a chill down his spine, his stomach tightening, and the trembling grip of Luna's hand bearing down on his arm.

Ori looked at Luna's terrified face; following her line of sight, he looked at the hole he hadn't noticed was in the roof of the cave they were in. And there it was – yellow eyes glistening, teeth bared, claws fully extended, and a chilling smile across its half-hidden face. Quaking, Ori could only come to one conclusion.

So then this feeling; is bloodlust.

Wild Boy

MARY CRAWFORD CANARD

When you run west toward the hillside
Let the wind pick up your ears and throw them back so you hear not a
sound
But the deafening of the gales
And the voice of the woods whispering, calling that mutt heart
Toward the edge of its splendor, where you will run free
For the rest of your days
Chasing the sound of the creek, and the shrill of the birds
And the scent of life
That only you, young pup, can pleasure

Leap of Faith

LEAH RAINEY

[click to play!!!](#)



Not a Lap Dog

ZOE THORNTON, OIL PASTEL

25¢ till 2am

GUY RAYNER

January, twenty degrees outside, and here I am, doing laundry, five miles from home, alone. I can still see my trail leading home in the snow outside, thoughts crossing my mind as to why I hadn't done this sooner, all while the sound of the washer buzzes in the back of my head. I have work in the morning, check my watch, "2 AM." I sink my head into my hands, "so tired," all I can say to myself. "Ding Ding!" I don't wanna socialize tonight, just kept my head in my hands, closed my eyes, guess I passed out.

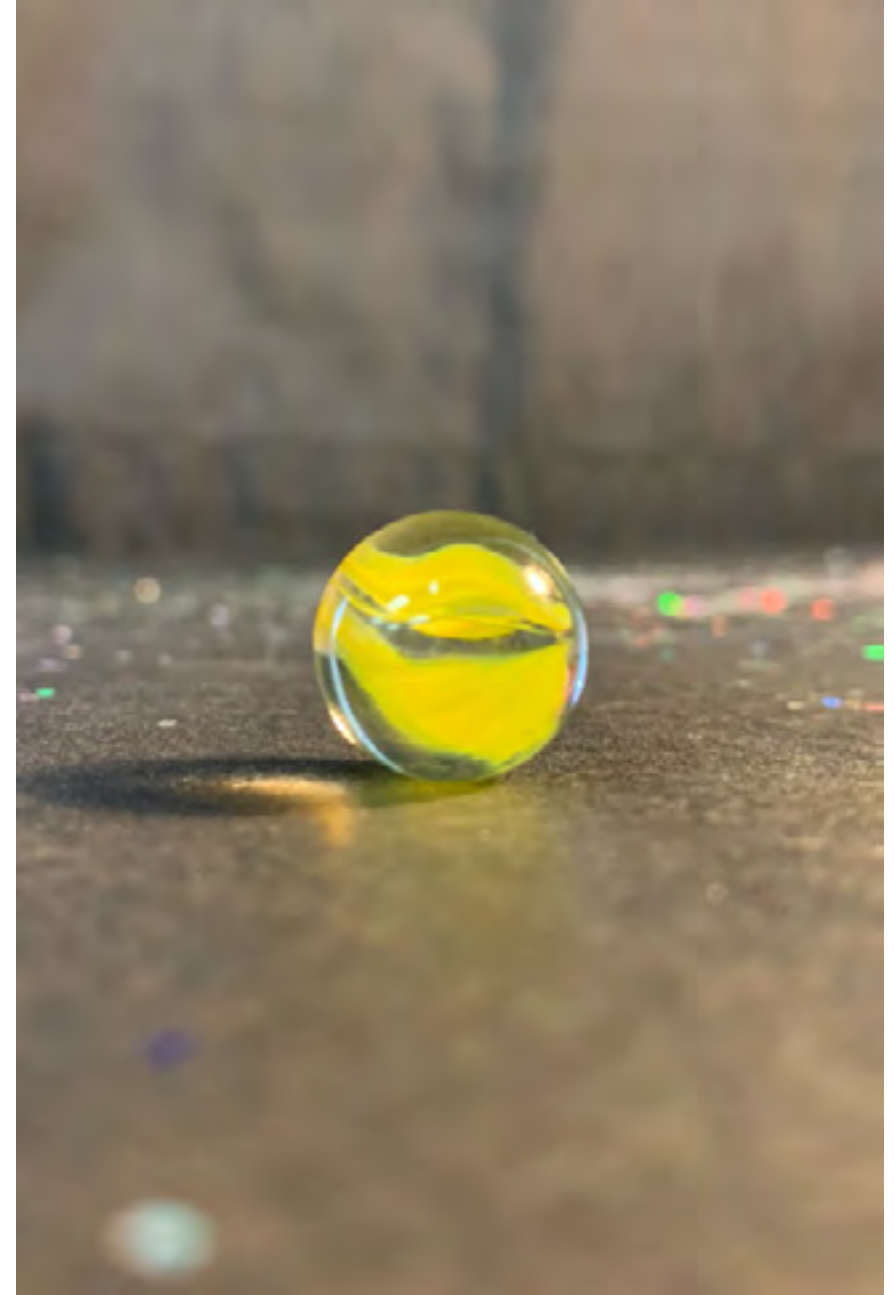
It was cold outside that day; I'd say about twenty degrees. I have work tomorrow, and yet all my clothes are dirty. I checked the clock, "12 AM." I should be able to make it to the laundromat, still that's five miles away. My head throbbing, bad déjà vu. Grab my bag filled with clothes, my wallet, and my jacket, don't forget to lock the door, It's cold outside.

The wind from the outside hit me, got jolted up from it, can't hear the washer anymore, turned around. Finally saw the guy who walked in earlier, eyes wide, it was me, standing above my clothes. Shove my head back in my hands, snap out of it, you're seeing things, you're just tired. Can't relax, did I just see myself? I'm scared to look back at it, I'm freaking out, what the hell is happening?

Finally pulled my head out of my hands, slowly turn around, no one. Where did he go? Where did I go? The buzzing moved to the front, check the washer, clothes are still going, just like my head. Must be really tired, was probably just seeing things, was I? Calmed my mind, best I could at least. Hear my heart beating, helps calm my nerves. The beats get louder, faster, why am I not calming down? Flashes of light through my head, vision tunnels, that's not my heart beating.

The outside cold, my jacket isn't doing shit, sheets of snow cover my tracks behind me, Or did they? All I want is to get this over with, why didn't I just take off work? déjà vu, why won't it go away? I'll be there soon. I see the lights, "midnight mat," finally I can get this over with. déjà vu hits harder the closer I get, maybe it'll go away once I'm inside, "Ding Ding!"

The beating gets louder, closer, sweat pouring, or is that tears? Can't see anything, is that thing still here? Am I still here? Fall to the floor, it's cold, I wanna go home. The beating, it's so loud, the washer is screaming, why won't it stop! "Beep Beep Beep" clothes are done, quiet. The beating, the throbbing, the flashing, all gone. Still can't see, vision returns slowly, I'm alone. Look around, alone. it's January, twenty degrees outside, and here I am, on the floor, crying. "Ding Ding!" I don't wanna socialize.



Eye of the Beholder

ALYSSA SAGER, PHOTOGRAPHY



Blue in the Face

LEAH BYERS, ACRYLIC

The Fisherman at the Edge of the World

CANNON WILLIAMS

The mahogany canoe rested at the edge of the splintered dock
Showing its age with the chips and scratches on its bow

The soft crunching of boots revealed the presence of a man
His wrinkled face hidden behind a torn straw hat

A rusted shotgun was slung over his shoulder
Fastened there by a worn leather strap

The man sets his tackle box and fishing rod down
And begins to untie the boat from the pier

His wrinkled and calloused hands showed
The toils and struggle of his past

He steps lightly into the boat
Swaying it rhythmically with the ripples in the water

He set out onto the lake
Taking one last glimpse at the rotten dock behind him

It was never easy to look at the rift

Streaks of blue and purple light skewed themselves across the sky
While red and orange clouds floated in an endless circle, stretching
towards the horizon

All of this centered around a purplish-black circle
A gaping mouth that beckoned you to get swallowed by it

The landscape around the rift was surreal as well
Collections of fauna and flora seemingly warped and twisted by it

Trees of massive size yearned endlessly towards the sky
While grotesque and unbelievable animals wandered aimlessly

Underneath the fisherman himself was a labyrinth of horror
A vast lake that extended deeper than man dared to go

Distant ripples and rumbles from far below
Betrayed sets of abominations beyond comprehension

Hen

ZOE THORNTON

I spent an unhealthy amount of time with my grandmother.

My parents worked throughout the day. My father would leave in the afternoon and wouldn't come back until the drunk folks stumbled out of the bar. I'd grip the railing and step off the bus, only to see his work boots disappear behind his truck door. I wouldn't see him again until his scratchy stubble kissed my groggy cheek at 3am. My grandmother's wooden porch had yet to be built. Instead, there was a concrete staircase that led up to her front door. She'd stand at the glass door and greet my older brother and me. She wore the same 2 shirts, rotated between the same 2 shows, ate the same 2 meals. Her old box television sat on a rickety stand with cords tangled along the wall.

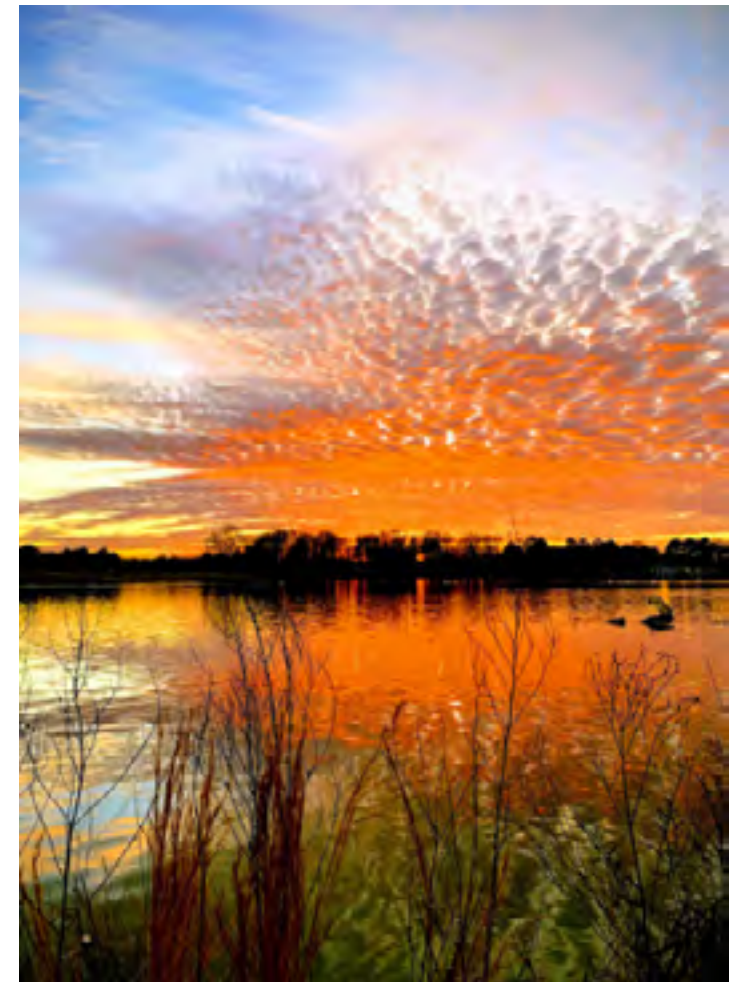
The colors were desaturated, and the audio faded periodically. I never heard the end of it from her- I just wish I could have done more to help.

I never understood the concept of death. I never understood anything. My grandma would sit at the dining room table, shuffling through envelopes- I'd bring over the Ziplock bag full of random trinkets and a board game cutout from the back of a cereal box. We had started collecting die, various board game pieces, Lego coins, and other junk to use as player pieces. I would ask her if she wanted to play- but was left to shift the weight from my feet and rub her back as she sobbed.

I've never been good at comforting others. Especially as a 7-year-old. I wish I would have known what to say to her. I hated seeing her relapse into the past so often- but I felt that she had forgotten each time she told me the same story. Each time she told me to not make the same mistakes. Each time she told me to not let anyone walk over me. Each time she would complain about being codependent. She would be disappointed with how tight my grip is on the past. I'm so scared of softening my fingers and burning my palms. I hate the texture of rope and wire.

Once again, I never understood the concept of death. I thought she was laughing. I wanted to laugh, too. The property was overgrown, and the last pecan was hanging from a branch. So was he- and I thought she was laughing.

Her recliner was shaped to her aching hips. She was so very grateful she didn't need a wheelchair- but as she aged, so did her bones and tolerance for friction. The hospital beds were comfier than the one in her bedroom. Her couch was the comfiest of them all. She was so grateful to be home- so grateful to get some rest. I should have told her goodnight.



Sunset Waters

ELLA SAGER, PHOTOGRAPHY