

apostrophe & ampersand



firsts



Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Apostrophe and Ampersand*, a grassroots literary magazine (a zine!) that's an excuse to make art and celebrate our friends' creative talents. AnA began as a late-night "what if." What if we found a way to combine our dedication to community-building with our appreciation for all things art? What if we found a way to do production as a hobby? What if we started our own publication that was a playful crossover between a seriously produced literary magazine and a hand-crafted indie punk zine? And what if its name was a cheeky homage to a love for alliteration, punctuation, and well-chosen fonts?

Apostrophe and Ampersand is a themed publication. For our first issue, it felt appropriately on-the-nose to choose the theme of "Firsts." Here, you'll find a range of experiences, from a first dog to a first day of college. We'll spotlight the first time "you" encounter representation of a particular and important sort. We'll review instructions for falling in love, and we'll sit with a more sorrowful first: the first time a parent is diagnosed with a terminal illness. And we'll look at how firsts fit into a cycle of beginnings born from endings. Throughout this issue, you'll find poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, photography, and digital illustration. What a wonderful spread!

All the pieces in this issue were solicited from within our community. *Apostrophe and Ampersand* is, at its core, a niche project meant to highlight the cool things being made by all the cool people we know and inspire them to make even more cool things. We also hope that our community itself might grow—that this zine gets shared with folks outside our immediate circle and that those folks reach out to get connected. For us, art is not the end goal, but rather the first step in building bridges.

Want to get involved but don't personally know the founders or contributors of this zine? Come introduce yourself next time we're at an open mic together! Or, start your own zine for your own community! This is a golden age for making and sharing art if you want it to be—and we do! We hope this project can inspire others to foster some indiepunk energy and to get out there making and sharing more art with their community.

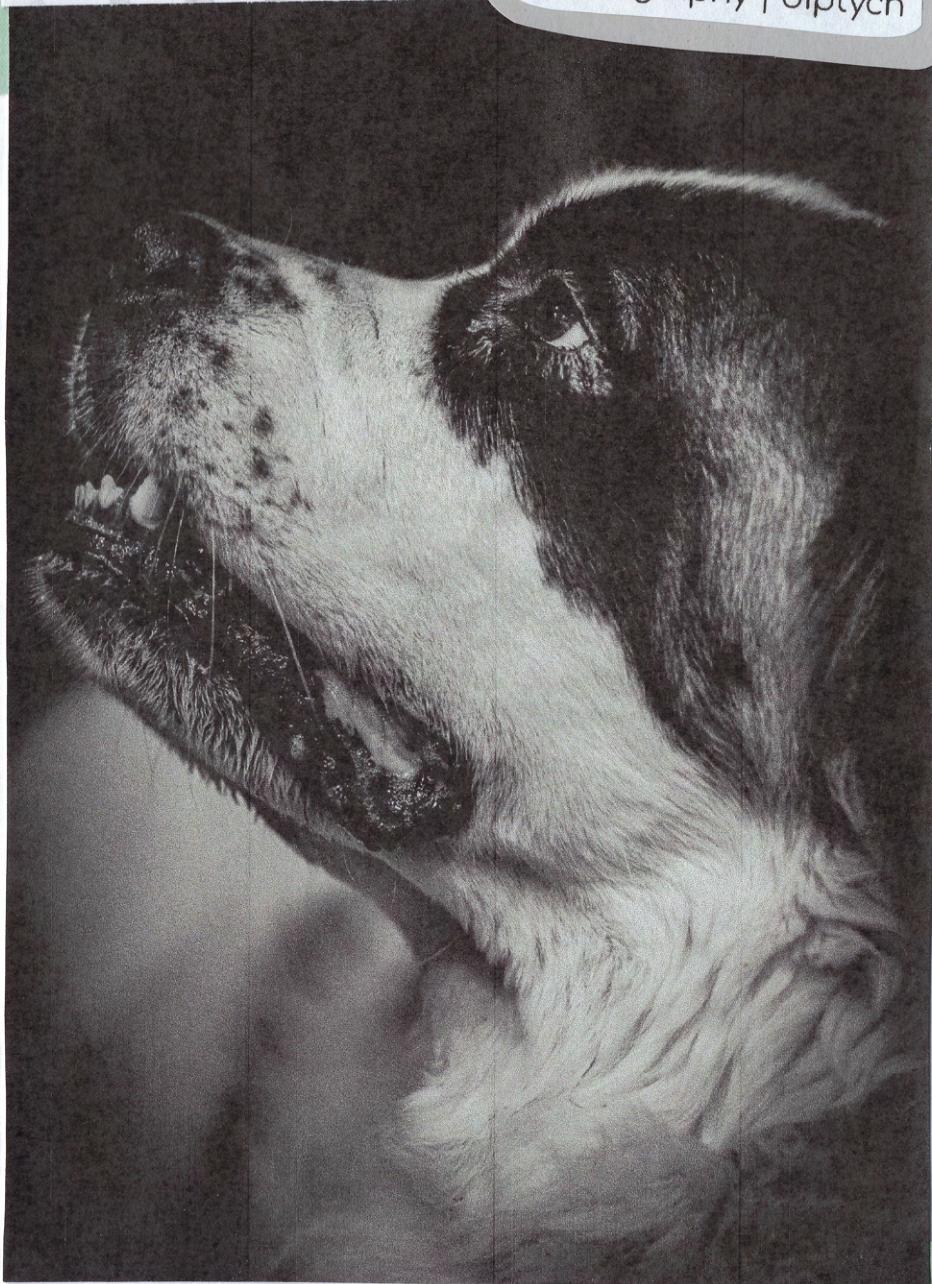
To that end, we wish to thank the contributors to this inaugural issue for trusting us with your art. We not only loved getting to see your work—we loved getting to play with it, to have the opportunity to produce and share it. Thank you for the privilege and the treat, and thank you for your patience and grace as we worked out the initial complexities and challenges that come along with the first issue of a publication. We love you, we see you, and we hope you enjoy *Apostrophe and Ampersand: Firsts*.

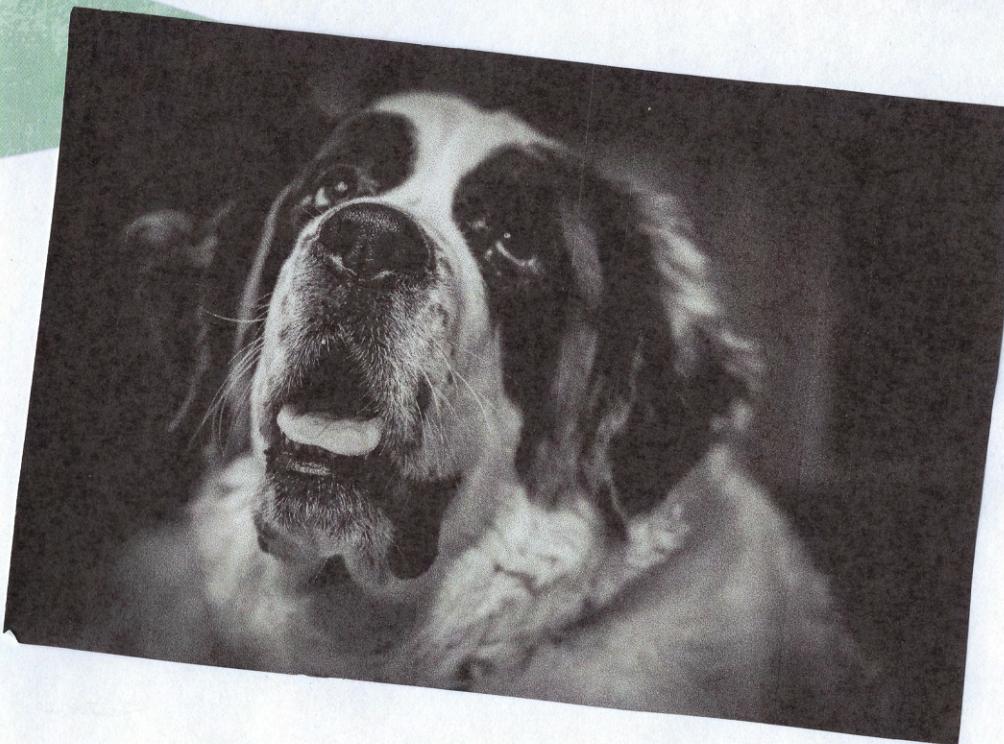
Cheers!
Cam & Danae

First Dog, Best Dog

by Taz Stahlnecker

photography | diptych





About the Contributor

Taz Stahlnecker is a Mexican-American writer, director, actor, and photographer with a passion for storytelling and collaboration. He received a Master's in Musical Theater Writing from NYU and a Bachelor's in Theater Arts from Santa Clara University. His show "To Those Who Love the Moon: An Anthology of Lunar Stories" received a reading as part of More Mas Marami's Writer's Launchpad. Current projects include a new musical titled "Friends for a Night" (Book & Lyrics by Taz Stahlnecker, Music by Durra Leung) and an untitled play that uses Aztec myths as a way to explore traditions and queer sexuality. As an artist, Taz hopes to build and be part of a community that values collaborating with and supporting artists at all stages of their artistic journey.

Instagram: @thirdplaceproduction

A Note to Myself on the First Day of College

by Marissa May Macaraeg Martinez

poetry | 36 lines

For as long as I can remember, you have never been anyone
but yourself

Just a girl, eyes bright and head strong

Your voice hasn't always been the loudest and your face has
never been the prettiest

And that's always been okay with you, mostly because you
never noticed.

For as long as I can remember, you have never known what you
wanted to be

Maybe you're just a girl, eyes wandering and head full

Your dreams will always be far-off and your thoughts will never
shut off

But that's always been okay with you, because maybe one day it
will all pay off.

I used to think that the answer to "Am I going to change?" was
my biggest fear

I don't believe in genies or fairy godmothers (You shouldn't either)

So don't waste your time on magical wishes,

especially the kind that look like your first college kiss

because he won't answer your wishes or even your text messages.

I thought I was trying to be someone who was interesting—
someone who had too many journals for my dorm room
but not enough to hold everything in my head or my heart;
someone whose laugh could twinkle and shine
but whose tears could smear and stain
because those journals, twinkles, and smears could say more
about me than my voice ever will.

You think so much about what others think of you—
judging you because of your major, your public high school, and
the color of your skin

But pay them nothing but a side glance and a gracious smile
and don't let them know that you are on your way to
something more.

You feel like the world is your oyster, waiting for you to fly
Nothing can stop you, not the wet socks the dryer in your
dorm produces

and not the paper that will keep you up until 3 in the morning.
Just return the lost ID card you found and
keep the door open for the person behind you.

Four years from now, you will have learned textbooks and
handouts on theories, histories, and methods
and you will have realized so many things you need to know
about taking care of yourself

You will have been to your first party, turned in your last final,
& eaten your favorite pizza time and time again

Four years later, I know now that you were always that
someone interesting

Eyes bright and wandering, head strong and full

A girl afraid of changing, because flowers can always lose petals too
but I want you to know that maybe we don't so much as change as
become more of who we are meant to be

About the Contributor

Marissa Martinez loves pointing out how nice the clouds and flowers look outside and then trying to replicate that niceness in her writing and art. She is a playwright, poet, zine-maker, and arts advocate born and raised in East San José. As a biracial Leo/Libra/Aquarius girlie, she often thinks about her identity, how to amplify the voices of the global majority, and chocolate fudge ice cream. Marissa's work has been featured by EASTSIDE Magazine, La Raíz Magazine, and Sampaguita Press.



Instagram: @marmaym

what do you think about representation?

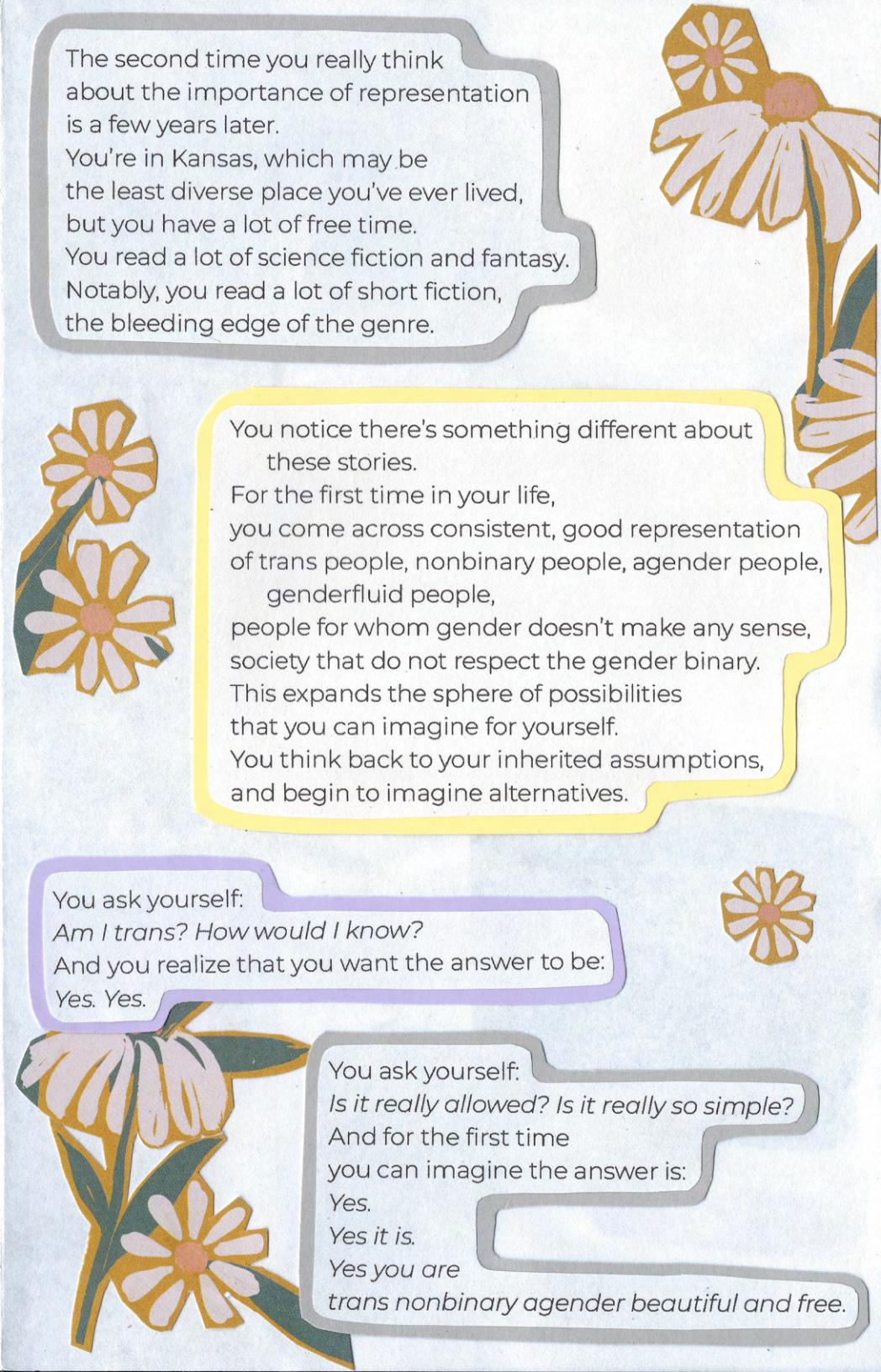
by Cam Coulter

poetry | 55 lines

The first time you really think
about the importance of representation
you're in college, studying feminism.
You still think of yourself as a man.
You don't think you have other options,
ways out
of being your own cop, judge, and jailer.

You think diverse, positive representations
of all people—
both in this lived reality
and in our imagined worlds—
is a vital way
to expand the sphere of possibility,
to uplift and help liberate
those people,
marginalized people,
people not like you.
You get the idea, in principle.





The second time you really think about the importance of representation is a few years later.

You're in Kansas, which may be the least diverse place you've ever lived, but you have a lot of free time.

You read a lot of science fiction and fantasy. Notably, you read a lot of short fiction, the bleeding edge of the genre.

You notice there's something different about these stories.

For the first time in your life, you come across consistent, good representation of trans people, nonbinary people, agender people, genderfluid people, people for whom gender doesn't make any sense, society that do not respect the gender binary. This expands the sphere of possibilities that you can imagine for yourself. You think back to your inherited assumptions, and begin to imagine alternatives.

You ask yourself:

Am I trans? How would I know?

And you realize that you want the answer to be:

Yes. Yes.

You ask yourself:

Is it really allowed? Is it really so simple?

And for the first time

you can imagine the answer is:

Yes.

Yes it is.

Yes you are

trans nonbinary agender beautiful and free.

You don't just unlock your jail-cell door—
you fucking walk straight through it
like a superhero tapping into a power greater
than yourself,
phase-shifting into a realm where freedom
is possible,
where you fit in your own damn skin.

Through your own lived experience now,
you get the idea.

About the Contributor

Cam Coulter is a little softie who likes to meditate over the word "indiepunk." They think incessantly about ethical technology, speculative fiction, and intentional community and will talk your head off about digital accessibility and the commons if you let them. They write about science fiction and fantasy for Skiffy and Fanty, and they blog about social justice, simple living, community, and spirituality at The Ruined Report. Their poetry has appeared in Eternal Haunted Summer, Eye to the Telescope, and Polu Texni.

camcoulter.com

Instructions for love

by Marie Eglan

poetry | 212 words

Step one

Start slowly. Leaning into the discomfort with raging yearning desirous passion is not necessarily advised. For short-term fires that burn as fast and hot and bright as magnesium, jumping in to someone's heart full force may be the best option. However, if presented with the possibility of failure or a potential lack of interest, the waters must be tested. The rejection isn't really the worst part of it—it's the embarrassment of having read the situation wrong, of imposing your own desire onto your entire perception of the situation. So start slowly and listen, listen to everything she has to say. Listen to the words she has for you, and maybe try not to think about them too much at the time and instead remember them for later when you're alone and can obsess over them properly. Then again, detachment from the situation is also imperative. Basically, the initial stage contains the largest margin for error due to lack of knowledge of the other person (this statement will seem silly and ridiculous once later stages are reached).

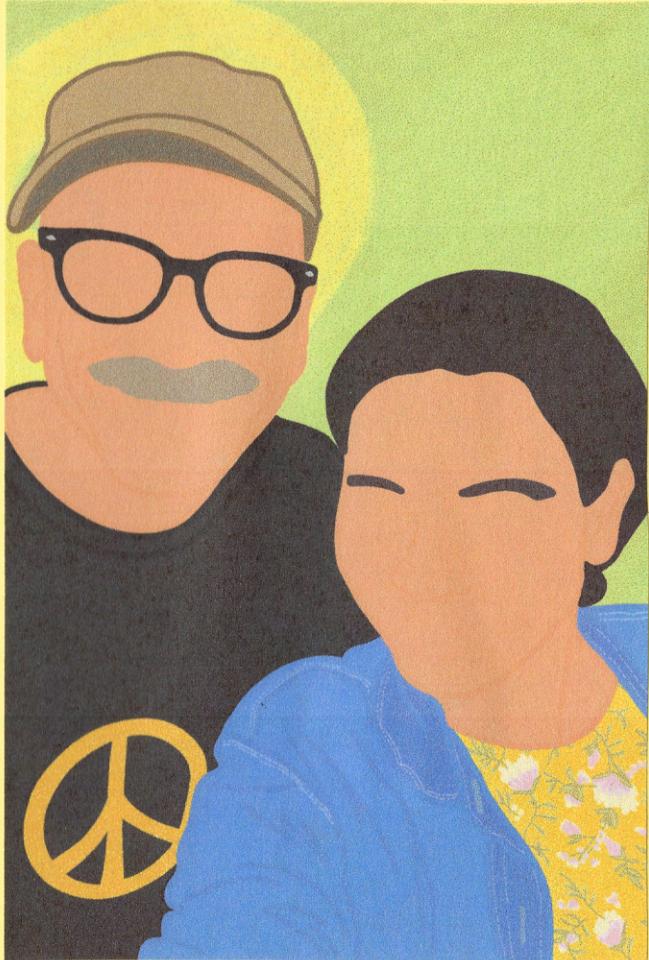
Step two

So now you've found it. You've found all the answers and you can give yourself a self-congratulatory handjob or take up a new sport, like smoking cigarettes. [this is total shit]

Unreality & the Yellow Blouse

by Yentli Soto Albrecht

creative nonfiction | 433 words



*It's okay, it's alright
It's true terror in the middle of the night
Give in if it makes you feel better
So surrender, so surrender*

*I'm a shotgun filled with paint
And I'm too big to operate
And I just throw my limbs around
I grow, grow from the ground [...]*

*But lately I'm feeling down
And in my nice dream, I could see your blouse
It was bright yellow and it made my day
I grow, grow from the ground*

— “Surrender” by Ball Park Music (2012)

I've been listening to “Surrender” by Ball Park Music on repeat. It could have been written about my life. How it felt to accompany my dad in the last year of his life; to hold him as he died of ALS. How it feels to know I'll probably die the same way in 20-30 years. How it feels to throw myself into preventing this terminal neurodegenerative genetic disease in my own life.

Remember that on the day my dad was diagnosed, I wore a yellow shirt to accompany him to appointments? I thought no matter the results, somehow everything would be OK if I wore a happy yellow. He died a year later.

True terror in the middle of the—

Remember when we were new to rotating my dad at night? “I'm so sorry, but can I ask you to rotate me? I can't sleep,” he called to us for the fifth time that night. That was sadness and torn pride in his voice. After a lifetime of easy sleep, he had just lost the ability to rotate himself comfortably. For the rest of his life.

I'm a shotgun full of pain—

Remember that first night? I sobbed next to you, muffling my cries so Dad couldn't hear me through the cracked doorway. I felt guilty that I could still rotate and that he never would again. I felt terrified, recognizing the near certainty that this was my future. That's the moment I decided that I'll fight with all I've got until then.

So surrender, so surrender—

But when ALS hits *me*, I'm choosing the end date myself. I can't live like that. I'm not strong enough.

I don't know yet what "give in if it makes you feel better" looks like. Maybe I have nothing left to give or, on some days, it's hard to imagine the chance to feel better.

For now, I still allow myself the belief that a yellow blouse can buffer the terror and pain of the worst days of my life, surprising myself with the unreality that it somehow does.



About the Contributor

Yentli Soto Albrecht is an MD-PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. She recently went public as a genetic carrier of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). This piece was initially written to be anonymous, but Yentli now wishes to share her experiences publicly. Read her full author's note online.

Colors

by danaexgloria

short story | 430 words

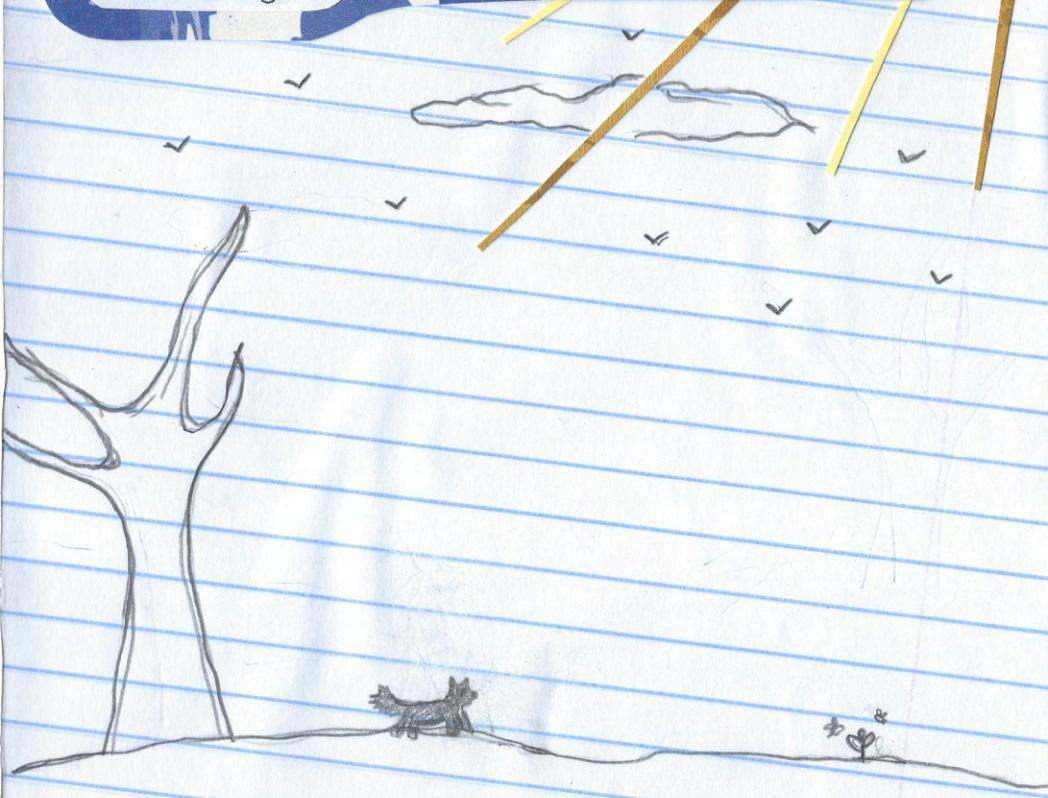
Even in death there was color. The trees, white. The dirt, blackened soot. A gray, gloomy sky with textured puffs of cloud overlapping like too many blankets on an unmade bed. To common eyes ignoring that white is all colors and black both the absence and a color in itself, there was naught by dreary monochrome. They exiled the landscape to vague memory, and it lived as a dying relic.

But war did not take all. When the fireworks display of flung curses snuffed out at the final toll, the rich red blood soaked deep into the tapestry of the newly-stained earth. (Black is not always the absence.) In some days, a pale pearlescent pink wriggles underground, feasting, birthing, dying, feasting. In weeks, blue visits on the wings of a passing bird. In months, a mottled brown brings a bit of warmth, as burrowed critters emerge from their out-of-season hibernation. In a year, a golden gleam—the eyes of roaming beasts who stalk the space between rotting ancient trees. They pad on the fresh green of hungry moss and young grass. (Even a curse cannot stop the relentless march of time.)

The people have forgotten. Tragedy is best left in the past. But the fungus remembers. And it marks the graves of the dead and the scars on the land. It paves a path of danger and safety. It signals the places to escape. (Be careful where you escape to.) And the fungus knows when curious minds can't resist the call. It welcomes her, shows her the work that's been done, the progress that's been made, the stuff still left to do.

If she stays, she will never finish. She will die here and join the ghostly chorus. She will toil the endless toil, a lonely little thing with no renown or reward. But if she stays, they will feel her love. They will see her effort, read her notes, sleep in her home, travel her paths. They will know what she worked for, and they will take up her mantle. They will also die. But the next will follow, and the next, and the next. And one day, a young mage will wake up, their lips ready to dispel the minor curses that settled with the fog, and they will feel that today is different.

The crowded clouds part. The trees turn to watch. The birds freeze. The beasts hold their breath. A single stream of light breaks through the gloom, and for a moment the world glimmers and the fungus sings. The mage beams, and the work begins.



About the Contributor

danaexgloria is a swamp creature who collects parables. She relishes in the macabre and is happiest when slurping sweet nectar from the bottom of a boba cup.

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