



YAWP

bentonville west
vol. 2 - 2019-21

Yawp

Volume 2
2019-2021
Bentonville West High School
Centerton, Arkansas

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains
of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself, 52"

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Editors'

Notes

When given time to step back from our day to day activities, it is then that we get the chance to evaluate what is truly meaningful to us. Through these past two years I have realized that little in life can often be proven to be constant, and much of what we rely on to make up our lives can be snatched away in an instant.

Something that I believe to be constant if you so choose for it to be is the ability we have to impact others. Even through a time of isolation it is important to remain vulnerable, opening yourself up to meaningful relationships, experiences, and personal growth. The creative spirit is an opportunity we must not take for granted in regards to fulfilling our sense of humanity in those ways. The power of writing and creativity alike allow us to not only escape from the world we are living in but also help us to embellish it to bring out all that this life has to offer. The words that you will find between the covers of this book do just that.

I challenge you to explore the works in this book with vulnerability and empathy towards the creators involved. This book is a gift. This program is a gift. Each and every student and faculty member involved in the creation of this book and this program are gifts that I will hold dear to me forever.

- Kaylee Jacobs, Editor in Chief, 2019-2020

Writing is the form of self-expression that dances between the reality we're imprisoned in and the freedom that comes with a wild imagination, all while being bound by the words on a page. One can escape from the suffocating pressures of day-to-day life or eternalise a mundane masterpiece. Or even find peace in the in-between; merging our truths with their innermost thoughts and creativity. And perhaps it is that beautiful fluidity which gives writing its allure.

The past year has been incredibly difficult for everyone. The birth of COVID-19 caused our reality to completely shift. We need writing now more than ever. Within these pages lies the work from the 2019-2021 school year, because every voice deserves to be heard.

Every reality, every fantasy, and everything in-between.

- Dardyn Mitchell, Editor in Chief, 2020-2021

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Reality

Editor's Note

Reality is an existence that is absolute, not subject to human decisions. An existence that is self-sufficient, an existence in which the world is in its truest form.

- Mallory Alcocer

Untitled Essay

Sophie Price, Class of '20

Today, I am writing this essay. Tomorrow, I will go to class. Yesterday, I took the ACT. None of these things are wildly unique, but while I was participating in these tasks, somebody was in a car accident, or stayed home with strep throat, or got a job promotion, or had their first kiss. Everything that a person experiences can have some effect on their thoughts and feelings about life, but the way we respond can show more than anything the fact that each human is inherently different and a complex being. Every person is given a certain amount of lives that we do not realize we have. Some people get just one, and some seem to receive thousands. Either way, our experiences, perceptions, and mental state all play a part in shaping us around these blips in time.

A near-death experience is characterized by a person experiencing death, or escaping it, but going on living. These range from getting into a car accident and coming out of it without a scratch, or suffering from Sudden Cardiac Death and losing your pulse before you are revived. This even includes events that are mentally wearing, such as the death of a family member, or watching somebody pass on with your own two eyes after being hit by a car. Events like this happen every day to thousands of people, and it can put a person in an altered state of mind. Within each person's life, there are life-changing and life-ending events, and these have a certain wear on you. We can think of these lives like a video game character. Say you start with nine lives, like a cat. You can get hit by the enemy, and lose a life. But you can also be revived by a fellow player, or pick up more as you play the game. Some players may be better at combat, and will remain with all nine little hearts up in the

corner of the screen, but they could also crack under pressure when having to complete seemingly trivial side quests. Just like these video game characters, we win some and lose some lives within our continued state of consciousness, influenced by experiences in our day to day lives.

No human conscious or subconscious is uniform to any other. So how can we all feel the same about these experiences? Our perceptions of certain events are what make our responses different from one person to the next. A person who was abused as a child is going to respond differently to a breakup than a person who was raised in a loving family because psychologically, their childhood had different effects on their perceptions. In these situations, the abused child has most likely lost a few more lives than the loved child because their life was full of more hardship and decay. We can infer the loved child would have more resources to help him heal after this, but the abused child may never have had that opportunity. Two people, with incomparable lives, will have incomparable responses and coping mechanisms to a relatively normal occurrence. Getting a little more serious, when dealing with the death of a parent, there are dozens of factors that could influence how you are affected. You could have had a poor or fantastic relationship with them, or still lived with them and taken care of them, or maybe you had not spoken in years. All of your past experiences influence your feelings, reactions, and your life.

In the crowded neural interstates of our brains, one brimming billboard is your mental health, your psychological and emotional wellbeing. This is where your experiences and perceptions start to show their impact. The "wear" that has been mentioned is mental wear, and your mental health is going to be the figure holding the controller, deciding whether you get revived. After going through something mentally

draining such as failing a test, you may not have the energy to find that extra heart lying around right away, but maybe you do a couple of days down the road. It is when you have gone through the more intense physical or emotional trauma that the gap begins to get larger. The abused child may not ever have the will to retest or study extra hard for the next one, and that is a lost life. They get into a car accident and survive, but do not seem to have the will to be more careful next time, because the figure with the controller has been revived too many times to keep looking for lives. These experiences are influencing their perceptions and their perceptions are making them weaker.

Perhaps we all do have the same number of lives, some just get tired and spend them much quicker than others. Or maybe reality is a construct and all of these experiences and perceptions are preprogrammed into this giant simulation that we call our lives. Either way, somebody had to have these connections and chemical reactions in their brain to understand that the human mind, body, and soul are mosaic, and we live and die every day. It is only when our brains get tired that there is no revival.

The Necessity of Emotion in Relation to Knowledge Proved Through “Wit” by Margaret Edson

Dardyn Mitchell, Class of '21

Scholars are, usually, a person with vast knowledge pertaining to a certain field. With this knowledge they explore their familiar concept, attempting to view it from different perspectives and dissecting the information at a surface glance in order to investigate a deeper, or more philosophical, meaning. However, some scholars, much like poetry professor Dr. Vivian Bearing, forget a very important aspect: the emotions that come hand-in-hand with knowledge. One cannot have analysis without feelings, or feelings without analysis. In Margaret Edson's screenplay, "Wit," the author utilizes Dr. Vivian Bearing's battle with cancer to show her relationship between her emotions and her work, in order to encourage one to live for themselves and their emotions, instead of solely dedicating oneself to work or knowledge.

One of the best examples of Dr. Bearing being naive to emotions happens within the first 15 pages of the play. She had been trying to pick apart the poem, "Holy Sonnet X" by John Donne, and she simply couldn't fathom how life and poetry coexist and influence one another. "There were students on the lawn, talking about nothing, laughing. The insuperable barrier between one thing and another is... just a comma? Simple human truth, uncompromising scholarly standards? They're connected? I just couldn't..." She had buried herself so deeply into her work that she couldn't even understand normal human interaction. The relationship between two people and the joy that they can find in each other. She can't comprehend how

emotions, such nasty and pesky things, can relate to something as refined and intellectual as poetry. To her, there is no feeling in poems, they're just words strategically placed in lines and stanzas to depict a straightforward meaning. When in actuality, poetry is the most passionate form of self-expression in fine arts. The words don't just tell an answer. They craft a silent masterpiece without the use of paint in order to convey emotions that have no names, that are too intense for a mere, single word. But Dr. Bearing doesn't understand that, because instead of living her life for herself, for her emotions, she did so for her work.

However, as Dr. Bearing slowly starts to succumb to cancer, she starts craving the very emotions she had never felt. The ones she had never shared. On pages 58 through 59, she says, "At the same time, the senior scholar, in her pathetic state as a simpering victim, wishes the young doctor would take more interest in personal contact ... the senior scholar ruthlessly denied her simpering students the touch of human kindness she now seeks." Kindness is created from empathy. An emotion so very powerful that it changes the course of lives. It's born from being able to understand the emotions that another suffers through, and kindness is how those who feel empathy let another person know that they acknowledge their feelings. Instead of letting them be in pain by themselves, they attempt to alleviate the pain through acts of pure, authentic kindness. A kindness that Vivian doesn't understand. She had always been Dr. Bearing, the hard working and brutal poetry professor, before she was Vivian, a person with emotions that shouldn't have been snuffed out by lifeless analysis.

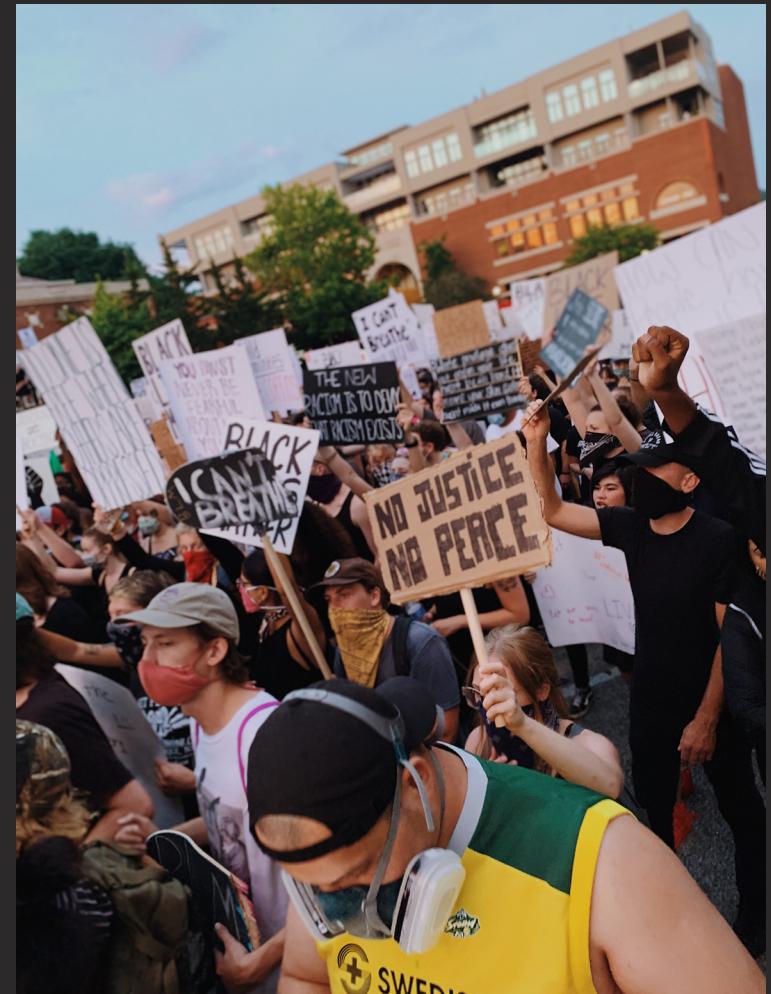
When Death approaches, people tend to seek comfort and cope in the ways that seem familiar to them. The things that soothe them. Vivian Bearing's teacher appears to her and

says, "I'll recite something by Donne." To which Bearing states, "Nooooooooo." Instead, the childhood story book that caused Vivian Bearing to fall in love with literature, "The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies" by Beatrix Potter, was read. In her final moments, she did not want to read something by Donne, her favourite metaphysical poet whose words are drenched in analysis and the emptiness, due to her lack of emotion, that she forced his poems to take. She wanted to read the book that sparked the passion that moved her to become a poetry professor. She wanted to feel again. That had been a time where she felt unequivalently. Had she kept that same love, that same passion, that same book in her heart, then her life wouldn't have been bound to knowledge. She would have experienced a much more fulfilling life. A life more than work. She would have lived for the young girl who found joy in learning new words.

"And death shall be no more, *comma*, Death thou shalt die." Death cannot be without Life. Life cannot be without Emotion. Literature cannot be without Emotion. Margaret Edison makes that incredibly clear in "Wit," an emotionless, poetry professor's journey to find herself. To find her emotions.



Mallory Alcocer, Class of '22



Mallory Alcocer, Class of '22

My Friend

Minh Ho, Class of '24

"There she issshhh!!" Mrs. Ngoc exclaimed in a muffled manner.

"Oh my gosh, isn't she just the most gorgeous little jewel you've ever seen?"

My older brother, who looked as if he wanted to correct mum that it was actually a boy, instead just settled on watching quietly from behind her back with listless eyes.

I, on the contrary, kicked my foot away from my mother's clingy embrace wearing a brand new pair of beady eyes. And my own curiosity flooded into intoxication.

"Is it a rat?" I said, wrapping my arms all around the metallic cage.

"No, honey, he's not a rat. He's a dog!"

Dog? Is that the name for a giant rat breed? I wanted to ask.

Though it was obvious when the creature sprung up from within the bars that my question would answer itself. Indeed, mum was right; this was no ordinary rat living under my shower.

I felt it.

Tender and soft. As my fingers gently ran through his thick layer of fur, the warmth from beneath his flesh graced, jolting my entire body in an electrifying sensation.

I sensed it.

He came into my arms like my bundle of joy. A neatly

Trigger Warning

Graphic violence against animals

wrapped present gifted by my favorite mystery Santa. I could almost hear the jingles of his festive bells, feel his generosity, see his giant bag of coal, and he could hear me rejoice in appreciation under his ecliptic shadow, even amidst this sweltering summer.

It tasted me.

I saw it, stretched out like a ladder to my chin, that drew a line of saliva across my cheeks and onto my hurriedly closed eyelids. His little heart bounced with zeal, out of its own body, tumbling against mine.

Then I had an epiphany.

In that instance, I found myself undergoing a feeling that couldn't be shared if some sewer rat was squeezed as hard as it could against my chest. A feeling that I wouldn't bear even if my mum, my dad, my brother, and dead grandma all grouped together for a suffocating family hug. A feeling that enticed a loss for words in my toddler's curiosity, and brightened the inside up like a world of unlit candles engulfed within a deadly wildfire.

My legs staggered before me and lost their posture, but it was only common sense looking back from now. No greater way would describe it than a simple, deceitful affection.

"Haa, you..." My chuckle resounded as the 'dog' fell over on his back. Which left him contorting in dejection and squirming to bounce back. I didn't let him of course, and I was hardly alone. The three other people in the room and I swooped in to attack the beast while it was still down. An endless barrage of panting and belly rubs galore ensued, followed with endless laughter into the night.

I was a happy boy.

Still to this day, I hug the remains of this memory dear to me. As if it was those old and nasty sweet-stuffed dinosaurs my mum had already thrown away. Yet, my hands still desperately dangle onto the barely hanging strings of it all.

The winter that followed that fated meeting, I sauntered down the lonely sidewalk on my way home from school, zoning out in admiration of cozy hues and dead leaves gently landing along my footsteps. Every forward stride broke a lulling crunch, as if my boots had sunken down into a path of Kentucky Fried Chicken layered like an ocean, like snow of the southern country.

And at the end of the road I raced myself to, a golden Corgi greeted me.

“Milu!” He basked in joy and nudged my legs with a wet nose.

“Hi buddy, I missed you.”

Milu barked as if lightning had just struck, bounced backward, ran two full laps, and finally sat down with his tail wagging like cotton candy on a stick on New Year’s festival.

It was around this time that I started considering him as a friend rather than a hot dog. I cherished him like my own younger brother. A sense of duty to protect my precious overtook my heritage, and my hands healed as they stroked through heaven.

The blissful flood of richness distracted me as a man in a black suit pulled up on the sidewalk with an old motorcycle. Like all men in fancy clothing, I had mistaken him for my dad’s client at the time. Usually, they would come to discuss business and drink with him in the dining room. Then it would reek of alcohol, cigarettes, seafood, and the stench of sweating, old,

middle-aged men for days.

He scouted around, pulled out a pack of cigarettes, and smoked it.

“Stay.”

“Dogs should be outside when we men are present.” I repeated what my father had told me during the lecture. Dogs were dirty, savages, and pets for our amusement. We... are the ones who deserve affection. The lecture echoed, it was hammered in my head, not once, twice, but hundreds, thousands of times. It was common sense.

He crouched down like an obedient servant and stared at me with beady eyes.

I took one last look and turned my back to face the lock on the metal gate. The clouds, which seemed to have been ghostly white just a minute ago, poured down in a heavy storm of hail.

Sigh... I couldn’t leave him like this. A chill ran down my spine as I thought about my father’s stern voice. As I made up my mind to confront him later, I was surprised to turn and see the man in the black suit stroking Milu’s head. Almost as caressing, tender, soft... our eyes met.

The client was a man of enigma.

His fingers stroked and gently massaged the dog. They curved and rode down its back to tail, grand like a slide. His nails curled up and held the dog’s fluffy rear end with glamor. With only one motion, Milu had fallen into submission in no time and panted greedily for more.

It relaxed its tail, and the man continued on the endless act of comfort which resembled peak expertise.

Other dogs gazed with envy, including myself, a human coveting the techniques. It was genuine jealousy I had, wishing to be brought in his arms, to feel what it felt of ascending heaven. The man appeared like a saint to Milu, after the lying devil had abandoned it. I swallowed my regret and watched with solitude.

I was glad to see him happy.

The man paused. He lifted its paws into the air and gazed down the belly. The fat which jiggled like jello showed how well it was fed. Being owned within this rich neighborhood of plump aristocrats. Yet always treated as a toy.

I blinked apologetically and hesitated before pulling myself up to reach Milu. I didn't want him to catch a cold in the heavy downpour.

Then he stopped and watched me without being able to hide the astonishment in his eyes.

His hands suddenly curled up to form a fist and yanked hard on the dog's tail. Milu's face, which was just more flowery than the sun, distorted like the devil. It yelped in pain as it was lifted up like a ragdoll into the air. Its paws and legs kicked back and forth in a desperate struggle of escaping the man's grip.

"Hey! What are you doing?" I cried out.

"STOP! He's in pain!!"

I threw my body towards the towering giant without any hesitation. Slamming into his lower region as hard as I could, but unable to budge an inch.

He scoffed out spit as he was tackled by me and bitten by Milu.

The 7 year old body I was so proud of from constant

imposed martial arts lessons every night brought me the confidence to be able to protect him...

But reality was cruel.

The man threw a kick into my abdomen and sent me flying several feet into the concrete ground. I screamed as I felt the momentum shatter my ribs like a sledgehammer.

With his other hand, he strengthened his grip and made Milu release his teeth. He was yelping so loudly, it was difficult to tell the difference between it and the horrified shrieks.

...I... felt helpless as I crawled on the ground holding my stomach.

I couldn't move.

I couldn't breathe.

I could only sit still and watch as he dropped the weak little boy into the trash bag tied to his motorcycle.

The man pulled out a metal pipe from his other bag.

He readied it and swung, striking the bag with the poor one inside...

Once.

Again.

And again.

And again...

....

Every time, the sound of the metal pipe rang in my ears. I felt my heart sob.

Yelps came out, then slowly became whimpers.

As the cries got weaker and weaker...

Only after the whimpers became too little to hear did he finally end the brutal act.

From the pitch-black bag, red blood dripped down.

It dangled lifelessly like a blob of red meat.

And I sat in the rain watching...

As the man took off with my precious friend.

His back shrank into a dot and disappeared almost from existence.

And I watched...

....

I didn't have anything to say.

The case was reported to the local police who, with drunken faces, told us it couldn't be helped. My parents cried fake tears and repeated their same words.

It couldn't be helped.

They told me Asia was a mysterious land. Dogs were toys in some places, and they were food in others.

I've seen it time after time when passing by the flea market, where they would display skewered dogs like they were fine dining steaks.

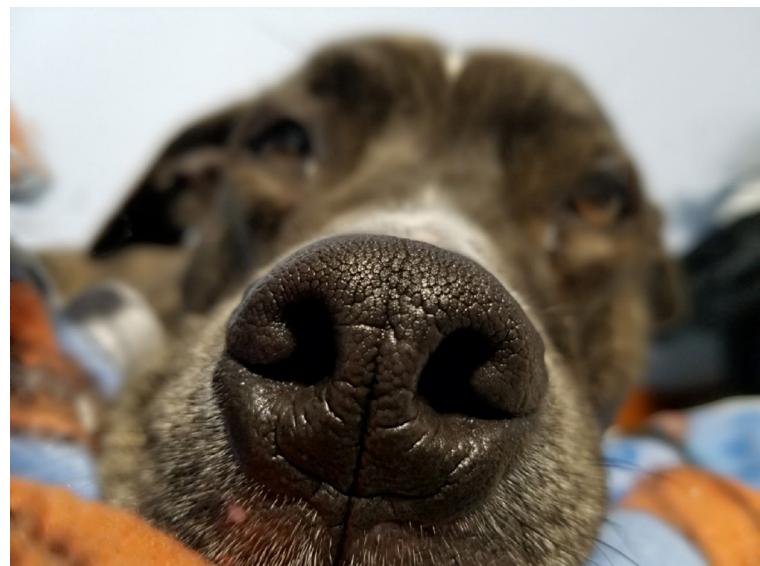
It was culture.

I couldn't deny it and went to sleep that night seeping tears into my dreams.

I wished he would be in heaven as of now, but I knew truly that he was kept along with all the other merchandise in the butcher house. Ready to be bisected and skewered and

served.

I might drive by the flea market one day and see the same friend I had years ago.



Evan Alley, Class of '21

Conversion Therapy

Evan Alley, Class of '21

The room was warm with pink painted walls. So many posters and trinkets left messages of God's words. They were supposed to be assuring and sweet, but I had a feeling this woman wasn't exactly the best person to talk to about my problems. We did our sessions in her office, which had two chairs for the guest. She sat behind her desk in a chair of her own. I had asked my grandma to help me find a therapist. I was at my breaking point and I needed some help. Of course, my grandma wasn't exactly a believer in normal therapy. She only believed in the Christian kind. My first session was on a Thursday in July. I walked into the office that smelled faintly of old books and sat down in front of the therapist. The woman with wrinkled, weathered skin looked wise and kind, despite her goal to convert my entire being. The events that followed took place in a church, on the side of a highway somewhere in Iowa.

Instead of talking about my problems with the woman, in the first session she started with her story. She was an overweight woman who dated other girls because they seemed to be more accepting of her appearance. She had children and raised them with her girlfriend for many years. That changed after she lost weight. When she looked thin, she was receiving attention from both sides. She made sure to mention she liked all the attention. She went on to say how she found the word of God then and decided she wasn't actually a lesbian. The woman left her girlfriend and married a man because the Bible told her being gay was a sin. Not only am I gay, but I'm trans as well. When I talked to her about this, she made sure to say being transgender is a sin as well, although she didn't know where it

said that in her Bible.

I should have left that day and never came back. It wasn't worth my time or vulnerability.

In the next session, I opened up and talked about all my problems all while crying. I told her things I didn't tell anyone else. I just wanted a diagnosis but it seemed no one cared enough to help me find it. I just wanted some way to make sense of these emotions.

Why was it so hard to tell me how broken I was?

With each passing session, my tolerance and respect for the lady plummeted. My words were twisted and changed to fit a Bible verse I couldn't make sense of. The homework involved me reading the Bible and writing down thoughts I had. If I didn't do the homework, she wouldn't help me.

I became an expert at passive-aggressive messages etched into paper.

I didn't understand why it was so hard to help me without preaching a religious message. Was that all I was worth? Just a verse in a book I didn't understand?

By the sixth session, I was tired of playing this game. I was tired of going there and pretending to be complacent to fit into this woman's obscure puzzle. I was tired of being used by others to satisfy an agenda.

I guess I was lucky to only have one session left. I don't remember the conversation we had. My mind was focused on the elephant in the room.

Sitting in front of me was a gift she had brought as a final message. A pink bag, filled with pink tissue paper. The gift? A pink Bible and a pink notebook.

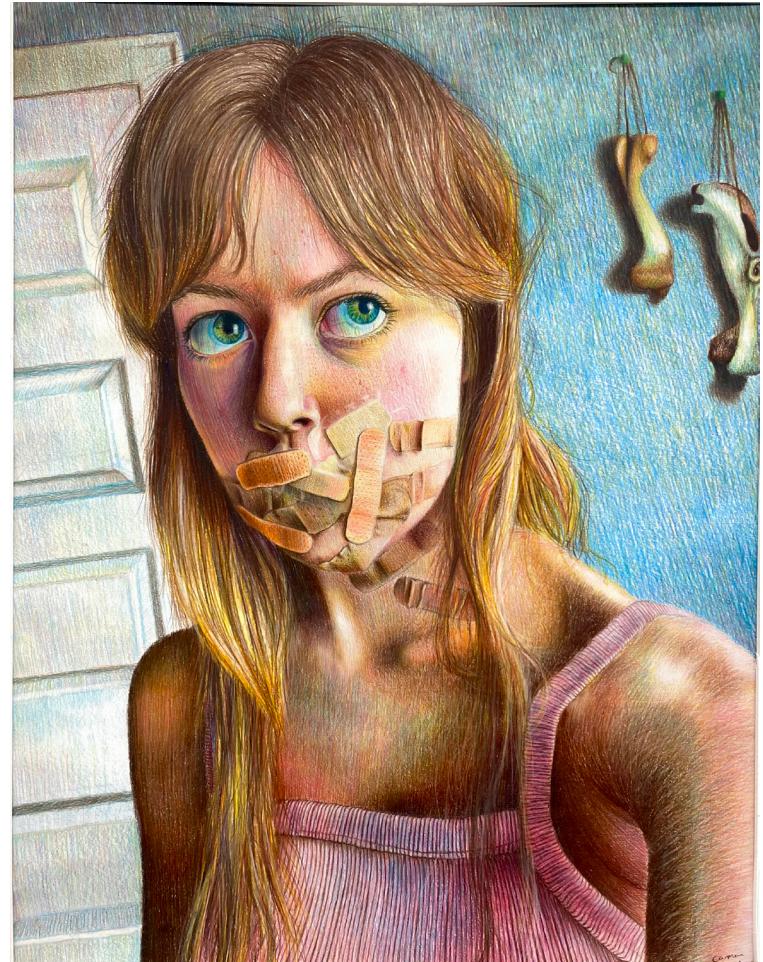
She gave me this as a silent message. To her, I would

never be the boy I see myself as. To her, I was only the color of the blanket my doctor wrapped me in moments after I let out my first cry.

I'm just pink.

I've never liked that color.

Conversion therapy isn't illegal in that state, so the religious counselor and ex-lesbian won't face any charges.



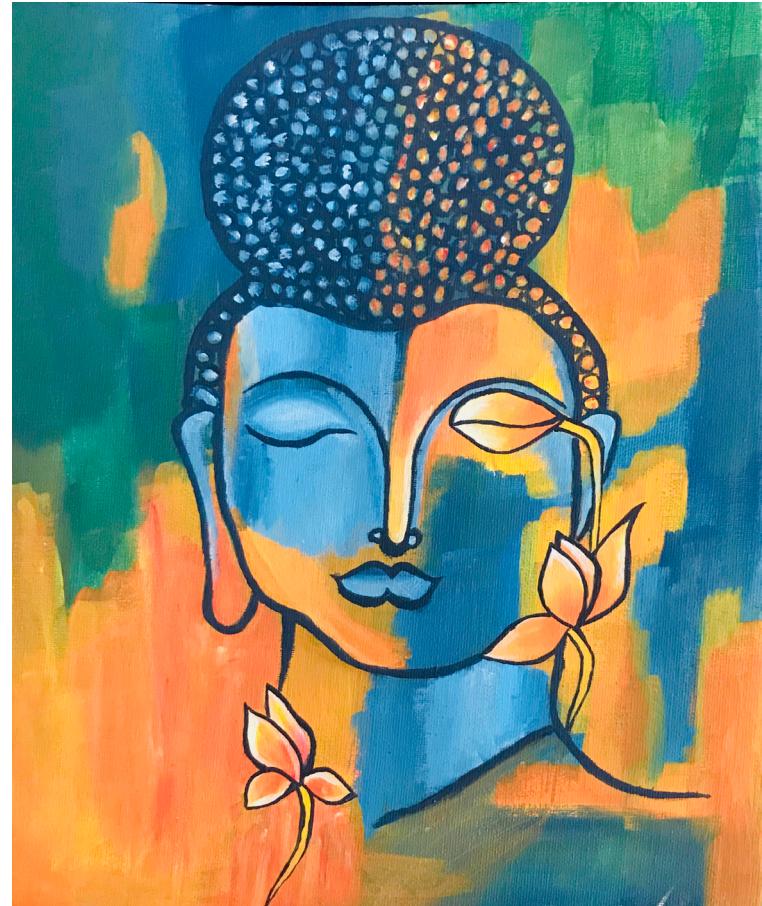
Carmen Clayton, Class of '22



Julia Falk, Class of '22



Abigail Simpson, Class of '23



Harshini Mahesh, Class of '23

Memoir

Temitayo Aruna, Class of '24

Stepping into America is like walking into your first class on the first day of school, gazing at the classroom and students, as well as the teacher you're going to be seeing for the rest of the year. Or when you travel for a competition to a place far away and you see the conditions of how your fellow competitors live. Maybe even the first time you meet your significant other, the unknown lifestyle that's about to be revealed to you as soon as you meet them.

My point is, when you enter a new destination, you never know what to expect from it, you don't know if it will bring you happiness, you can't help but be furious when the place is mentioned, or it could be neither, and you just feel no emotion toward it. For me, it was palm sweaty nervousness, then the fear of being neglected because I didn't look the same, then the excitement of the fun activities I'd yet to discover, then emotions that I had never felt before.

We had just run out of cereal and milk. My uncle slipped his bright brown shoes on, slid his keys off the hook and clenched onto them.

"I'm going out for some groceries, if you want to join, come now!" he said with his voice booming across the living room.

We were living at my uncle's place at the time because we had just recently moved, and hadn't acquired a home yet. We were new in this environment, so at every chance he could, my uncle wanted me and my family to join him on trips as small as grocery shopping and, of course, with every chance, I took it.

I sprinted out of the kitchen, flying past the living room, almost crashed into the main doorway, and then carefully put on my sandals and stood next to him, patiently waiting for my two other siblings to join us. Once they finally came, we all went into the garage and got into his shiny, smooth, silver car that still never fails to amaze me every time I see it. We got inside the car and sat quietly on the way to the store.

We arrived, and I felt like gravity was coming for me. Immediately, I noticed that we were one of the only people that had a dark complexion. Nigeria is definitely a different climate from Arkansas. It was always hot, making our skin dark. I tried to find consolation in knowing my siblings were also dark, but I realized that they were lighter than me, they looked African American, while I looked like I was from the jungle. It was one of the first times I really felt out of place, like I was Elmer in front of all these elephants. I grew stiff, and stood there, gawking at everyone around us. I wanted to go back inside the car. I didn't wanna go inside after seeing how different I looked compared to the rest. My brother softly shook my shoulder, snapping me back into reality, and we went into the store.

As we set foot inside, I felt a sudden chill, and it wasn't from the freezing temperature of the grocery store, but because of the vast difference between American supermarkets and Nigerian ones. There was so much space, enough to fit everyone from my previous school, and there were an unlimited amount of carts left for us to pick from. There were so many choices of food, ice cream, chips, bread, pizza, drinks, and they were all found in one store. It felt like I could run down and try to find the start of the aisle but would go on for hours. The colors in the store were vibrant, like a color pallet had been splattered everywhere. It was as though I had entered one of my imaginary castles that I used to use as a coping mechanism for bore-

dom during school in Nigeria. I felt delight, joy, exhilaration, ebullience, like a fairytale had come true.

My uncle grabbed a cart, and we went ahead and browsed the store. My eyes were mostly on the snacks.

We had made it to the cereal aisle.

"Which one?" My uncle inquired while gazing at the cereal and then back at us. I went ahead and picked the frosted flakes.

"This one." I said as I dropped it inside the cart. Then we went to the milk aisle and my uncle picked one and placed it into the cart.

At that moment, all I could think about was the differences between even the smallest things that were done differently. In Nigeria, milk was mostly powder, and was usually mixed with water until you got it to the consistency you wanted, but in America, it's already done for you. The milk isn't in cans, it's in gallons, which are huge compared to the size of ours. Suddenly, that brought sadness to my thoughts.

There were so much more efficient resources here than in Nigeria. Even though my family and I were considered to live lavishly in Nigeria, we didn't have connections or access to these items, not to talk about people who had less, way less than us. People who lived in the streets or didn't have proper homes had to sell food during traffic, would go car to car to give away the only resource they have to gain money for food.

That moment also brought my thoughts to my father. He had grown up poor in a tough housing. He would have to carry water on his head and walk for hours trying to sell as much as he could for money. Some days, there was nothing for him to eat. It hurt me to think about the fact that my father had

to wake up wondering where and how would he get food to eat. I felt privileged growing up having everything I needed given to me, getting to travel to different places, including America, and not having to struggle like my father did to get food. It made me grateful for where I was and where I am.

It amazed me how many thoughts I went through, just because we went to a grocery store. It was revealed to me how privileged I was, without even realizing it. The whole rest of the day, I reflected on what I had thought about. This grocery trip gave me the knowledge that when arriving at a new place, you become very aware of what is around you. You come to know your previous place, whether you're better or worse off than those living there. You come to feel emotion that you didn't know you could ever feel just by noticing the little things surrounding you. You are opened to a new understanding of life. New destinations are a part of life you can never reject. You have to learn to embrace the knowledge you gain from them, and can't pretend it's not true simply because you don't want it to be. You also have to realize in every case, you're still better off than others in another place far from where you are. You should be grateful with every chance you have for what God or life has given you.

A Letter to My Younger Self

Dardyn Mitchell, Class of '21

Dear Younger Self,

It's me. Well, technically it's you, but that doesn't really matter. What really matters are the things I tell you about in this letter. You'll never read this, but I so wish you could.

First things first, don't go to the store on December 16th, 2017. You didn't want to go out in the first place. It was so cold that the icicles clinging to the bare Red Oak tree in the backyard were shivering and the air was hazed with barbed snowflakes, and the thought of leaving the tea-stained air and the gentle hum of Friends in your bedroom made you want to sob. But you went anyway because the fridge was an icy wasteland and you couldn't recall the last hot meal you ate besides Momma's tomato soup. And instead of taking your car, like a normal person, you decided to walk. You walked because it was the first flurry-born blizzard of the season and you remembered when you used to graze glossy glaciers like this with your sister. And when the crunching of snow and the labored breaths and the unease began to crawl up your spine, you kept walking.

Run.

Next, when you say no, you mean no. I know that seems like a stupid thing, something almost as inconsequential as walking to the store during a blizzard or having your words swallowed by a growing surge of voices, but you need to hear it. On December 17th, 2017 you'll think of the word no and how it failed, much like how a robin's wings will fail it the first time it attempts to soar. When you're my age you'll be drowned in a

Sermon on how the word “no” means “no.” The once sacred waters will rush in with thinly concealed taunts and you’ll ask your friends what the holy word means. Just know that you’ll choke on a watery laugh whenever they say “yes” and that your eyes will sting due to the fall of the divine.

Learn to swim.

And finally, don’t feel the need to smile. I am on the edge of seventeen and I need you to wear your emotions like armor. Forge your fear into steel, bind your bitterness to bronze, and anchor your anger to aluminum. Remove the insincerity from your smile, override the enthusiasm with honesty, and break the bonds of bright eyes. Understand that it’s okay to be sad even when the Sun shines, realise that you don’t have to smile everytime someone says hi, and know that you can have bad days too. And if anyone asks why you’re upset, look them in the eye and say,

“Because I hurt too.”

I wish I could tell you how many times I’ve cried myself to sleep at night. At 3:47 in the morning when the world stops turning and it’s just us and our thoughts—and that’s dangerous. Don’t give Pain the power to control us, we are a young woman with her entire life ahead of her. Don’t give into our deepest, darkest desires that make angels from demons.

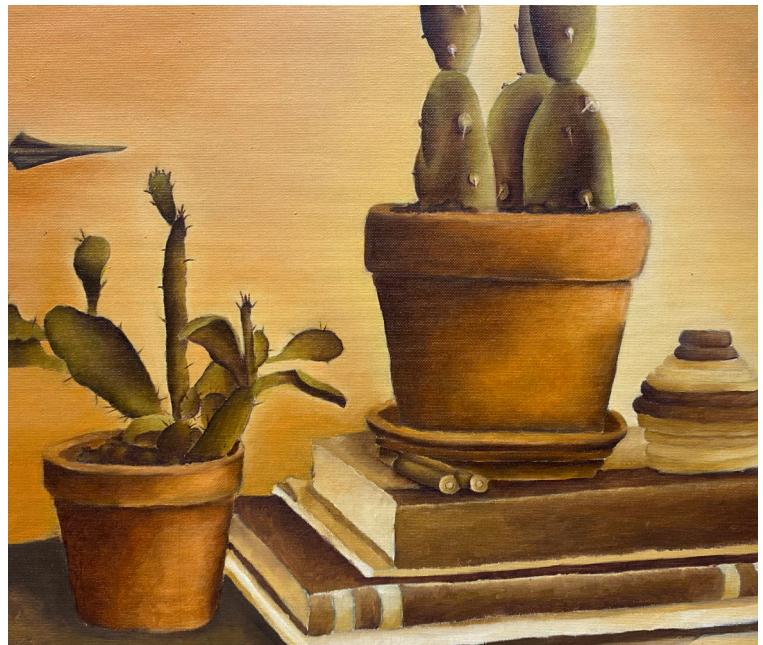
You are my Younger Self and I want nothing more than to give you this letter, because I like to think that if I did, then everything that’s wrong with us now would be fine. But you needed it. You needed to walk to the store that night, you needed to learn that our, your words have meaning even if they’re violated, and that you can feel whatever you need to feel because it has to hurt. The Pain lets you know we’re alive. Younger Self, we’re human too.

Sincerely,
Your Future Self

P.S. Don’t forget to bring a pencil on your first day of junior year.



Kari Vasquez, Class of '21



Jackson Grimes, Class of '22

Armless Tag

Nicolle Bruni, Class of '23

As a trembling fourth-grader, the best way to keep warm is, clearly, to pull your arms out of your sleeves, into your jacket, and up to your chest. Right? Well, I thought that was the best idea as I walked towards the frigid outdoors for recess. Outside, this idea proved effective; I was nice and warm. Many of my friends saw my innovative idea and decided to try it too. Although having our arms in our jackets kept us nice and toasty, it limited our motion. We were rendered incapable of playing any of our normal recess games. One of the young girls piped up with an idea.

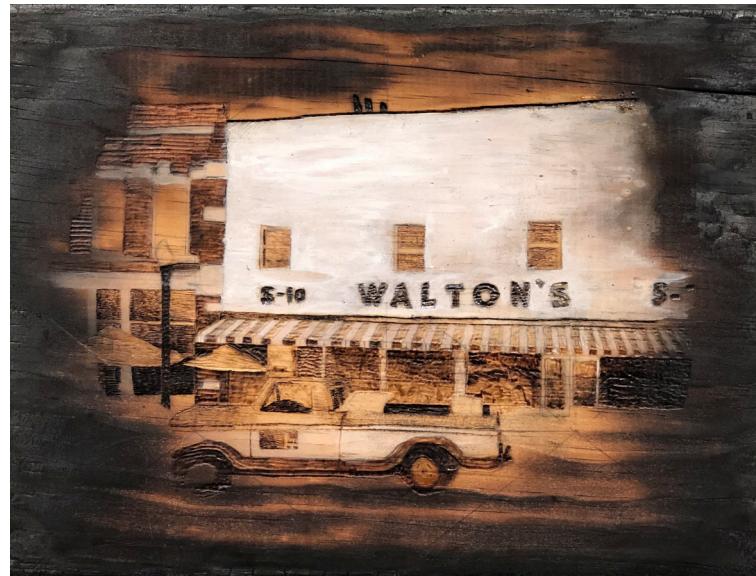
She presented the idea of playing tag with our arms still bound in our jackets. Armless tag is what she called it. Being the little know-it-all I was, I quickly came up with a rebuttal. I argued that if one of us tripped, we would be unable to catch ourselves; we would fall onto the asphalt. After some debate, we came up with a semi-safe way to play. We would have to walk instead of run, and to tag, you would lightly tap. In our little brains, this sounded like a fantastic plan that would keep us safe. News flash: tag is excruciatingly boring when you have to walk, so of course, we slowly progressed from walking to speed walking and from tapping to bumping.

We had played a few successful rounds with only minor complications when it all went downhill. Claire, an outsider to our group, did not care for our rules. She shoved Brianna, launching her backward into me. As she made contact with me, I face-planted onto the ground with no way to brace for impact.

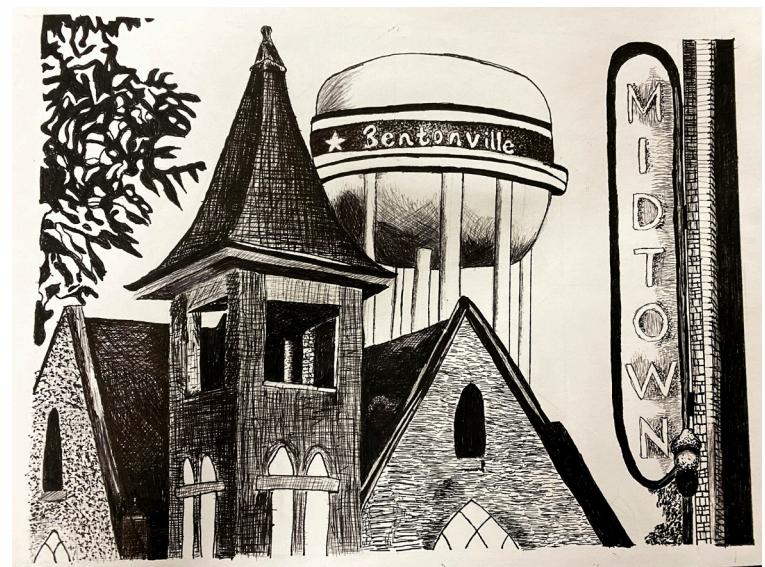
I slammed my head into the asphalt knocking myself unconscious. To no one's surprise, this threw all of my friends

into a manic frenzy. By the time the delirious little girls had gotten the attention of a teacher, I had stood up; my nose now slightly turned to the left and profusely bleeding. The teacher, not knowing the severity of the injury, sent me inside by myself. I somehow found my way to the nurse's office. When she looked up to see my face and clothes covered in blood, she decided to call my parents. I am sure I looked like I was a part of an attempted murder. After my parents picked me up and took me to the ER, we found out my nose was broken, and I had a severe concussion. The good news was my skull was not cracked like the doctor thought, and in practicality, I got a nose job before I was ten years old.

As a result of my loss of consciousness, I have very little memory of that day. I have had to compile what little memories I have with the various stories I have been told. Some alternate stories I heard were: Brianna tripped instead of being pushed, so it's all her fault, I hit my head on a metal pole (not sure where the metal pole was), I was running so I fell, or it was my idea to play tag. What I do remember is that I was cold, so I pulled my arms in my jacket, and I thought playing tag was a bad idea; armless tag was not my idea.



Kendall Thornton, Class of '20



Alexis Peoples, Class of '22



Ivy Rodriguez, Class of '20

Eccedentesiast

Mallory Alcocer, Class of '22

When you hug someone you love, you count every second.
I feel his breathing, his lungs growing bigger then smaller
against my body.

I hold on, clinging to his heat, my heart still quivering.

He told me he loves me, he loves me so much.
As my arms are wrapped around his abdomen, he doesn't care
about my scars.
All he wants is me, he doesn't care about the bruises covering
my neck.

When I feel his touch I lose myself, I am forever his.
My eyes begin to blur when he moves towards me, and his hand
dances across my cheek.
I fell for his love, it pushed me to the floor and kicked my heart
till my love spilled out.

I know he loves me, he tells me every time.
Every kiss, every bruise, every hug, every slap.
His love covers my body with pain, but he doesn't mind.

His voice is beautiful, like nails on a chalkboard.
It surrounds my ears and kisses my brain.
Tearing apart my skull till the blood drips to the floor like little
red hearts.

I am his girl, he'll always stay with me, no matter how small I feel.
 He'll always pick me back up, no matter how hard he pushes me down.
 And once I stand he doesn't care how torn apart I am.

Her

Dardyn Mitchell, Class of '21

She tastes like watermelon Jolly Ranchers.
 Sickly sweet and addicting.
 Sugar resides on the mouth of a girl who smiles just a little too bright.
 A little too wide.
 A little too genuine.
 A little
 too
 sweet.

She looks like something out of a daydream.
 Her skin supple and dewy and covered with bronze freckles, a mere shade lighter than her skin.
 Her skin of forgotten riches suppressed by the pressure of nameless, lifeless faces.
 The skin she's been consumed by.
 The skin she covers with foundation that's a little too light.
 The same skin I've spent hours holding and loving while listening to her heartbeat.
 The skin that holds her.
 Her, who is hypnotised by the melody of a grand piano.
 Her fear of the dark.
 Her hate for her skin.
 A hate she didn't have as a young girl.
 A hate that wasn't born,
 but taught.
 And how she looks at her skin and only sees all the things it leads to.

She feels like an unended symphony,
Just about to reach her crescendo.
Until she's silenced by the wave of fear that possesses her when
she hears sirens.
She told me she feels like
the victim,
the bystander, and
the criminal
all at once and yet not at all.

I held her hand and felt the blood abandon my fingers as she
told me the story
Of an innocent who couldn't breathe.
Of a girl who never got to see the next dawn.
Of a boy who's phone was warped into a weapon.
She screamed and yelled and cried when she told me of my
privilege
and I listened.
Listened to how I would've lived
while she would've been murdered.
I was stuck on that word.
Murdered.
And I learned.
I'm still learning.
Learning about
the girl who always shares her watermelon Jolly Ranchers,
the girl I fell in love with.
Murdered.
For the color of her skin.
The skin that holds
Her.



Madeline Boss, Class of '23



Madeline Brock, Class of '20

Let This Be What She Needs

Joseph Jolley, Class of '22

She's felt the pains of loneliness,
The signs that sorrows sent
They've put her mind into distress
Until she feels all spent.

The voices in her head, they sound:
“You don't deserve a try”
Through crying all the tears, she's found
The strength to keep her head held high.

She wonders, ponders, and reflects
On all the pain she feels
A simple question's what comes next:
“Your love for me is real?”

I look into her turquoise eyes
They're shining, twinkling bright
The smile I give her in reply
I pray fills her with light.

I Won't Say I'm in Love

Mallory Alcocer, Class of '22

Why couldn't you have hated me?
Hated me enough for you to stay.

Why did you have to say you loved me?
Couldn't you have let me suffer with you, rather than by myself?
Because I will live in agony if it means I can wake up next to you again.

I'm disappointed in you for ruining what we had.
I'm disappointed in you for telling me that you didn't want me to hate you.
I don't hate you, I don't think I ever could.
But I hate that you act like this never happened, that we never happened.

I was too good for you. I still am.
You know that though.
You know what you did ruined us.
You know that I'm in pain because you were reckless.
But I need you to know that because of you my heart bleeds every night.

I have never been left so broken over losing someone.
I have no idea how to cope.
A feeling like this has never stayed long enough for it to take over my life.

A feeling leaving me with an ache in my chest, torturing me and shredding my insides.

I blame you, you replaced the girl I once loved with someone I can hardly look in the eyes.
I blame love. But I won't say I'm in love.



Anumi Wickramasignhe, Class of '22

Rain Dance

Emma Myhan, Class of '20

The task of understanding myself is one I carry heavily, like dead weight on my shoulders that I can't seem to set down. I lug my own heart story into the doctor's office and it succumbs to an open analysis, an autopsy of emotions strewn across a table to be poked and prodded in an attempt to encompass my internal dialogue in a simple sentence.

They find that my head and my heart are in constant conversation. In times of understanding, they compliment each other on what they're wearing or talk about the weather of my internal atmosphere. Yet on the days my rope strands fray, they play tug-of-war on my brain stem until the pain causes rain under my eyelids. They borrow each other's clothes until the floor of my subconscious is cluttered with mismatched socks.

In the early morning, they tiptoe cold feet around my internal expectations, careful not to wake the dreamer from her comatose sleep. They argue about rations for the upcoming storm. The breeze quickens and the whirling of the weather vein grows ever louder as it spirals, tightening my smile across my face like the double knot of a shoelace. It grows wider from ear to ear with every turn from east to south to west to north. Wind blows my arms above my head and mascara pours from my eyelashes, growing weeds in the ground around my feet as they pivot and break the mud-soaked grass on which they stand. The air lifts my dress to fly around my upper thighs as I close my eyes. And I am twirling.



Samantha Messick, Class of '20

Watermelon Sunglasses

Amelia Hladick, Class of '22

I am from watermelon sunglasses,
Gymboree and baby detergent.
I am from the brick house
at the end of the cul-de-sac,
From the broken porch swing and rain.
I am from the Mother's Day rose garden,
and the trails through our woods.

I am from travelers,
a man and a woman consumed by wanderlust,
from Regina and Thomas.
I am from the Durbin fourth of July parties,
cornhole championships, and long car rides.
From ever-changing destinations,
and never-ending yellow brick roads.
I am from I will pull this car over and
Don't make me come back there.

I'm from quiet suburbs, sidestreets, and small towns.
From decisions and questions and breakdowns.
From the mardi gras beads, suffocations and scissors,
the dog fights, urgent care, and emergency vet visits.
I am from freezing pictures in the snow and ice,
stress and change, the smell of fresh paint,
and the furniture imprinted carpet.

I'm from handmade doll clothes and old western movies.
From bookcases filled with manuscripts,
and a basement full of paintings.
I am an artist, a musician, and a reader.
From a brilliant grandmother, and generations of painters,
writers, craftsmen, and soldiers.
I am a traveler,
and I am from watermelon sunglasses.



Destiny Eberhard, Class of '20

thud

Matteo Taylor, Class of '22

when i met you, i was stuck on what i used to have.
 new things are scary.
 new things aren't worth it.
 new things aren't comfortable-

next thing i knew i was

F

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(for you, if you didn't catch that)

and when i hit the ground
 the air was knocked out of me with a *thud*.

my lungs burned and tears pooled
 i felt every part of me ache.
 longing for something less painful.
 something more familiar.
 something less *new*.

my chest screamed for air.

but when you reached down to help me up,
 and i looked into your
 beautiful
 storm-blue eyes,
 i couldn't have taken a breath if i wanted to.



Amy Prejoles, Class of '20

Home

Isabelle Walker, Class of '20

I watch the leaves fall down, and all in time,
 Three months I lay in wait the sweaty sun.
 Now bears and bees begin their sleepy climb,
 To cozy hollow trees they wait for none.
 The earth will raise a groggy wave goodbye,
 And I will watch from frosted window panes,
 The mist of morning sinking from the sky,
 Thin stretch'd the warmth of summer leaves its stains.
 A reminiscent memory of sleep,
 Fall's fireplace will never have me miss
 The humid air of summ'r I will not weep
 As much as I for sweet autumnal kiss.
 No season can compare to such as Fall,
 Nor have I thought the world to be so small.

Dementia

Isabelle Walker, Class of '20

She dances the waltz on the thick brown carpet,
 Only one set of heels makes imprints as she moves slowly,
 slowly.
 The record spins with static,
 The curtains are closed,
 A perfect stage of intimacy.
 She is holding someone.
 One of them is not there.
 Or neither.
 Teardrops adorn below,
 In the shape of a heart.
 There is warmth around her, and she remembers the abyss.
 It feels like
 A man.
 Her hands are weaker now.
 The portrait of the two hangs with dust,
 A lonesome memory which is now escaping her,
 For the last time
 As she
 Dances.
 Dan—
 Ces.
 Danc—
 Es.
 D—

Of Cracked Coffee Cups and Flowerless Gardens

Dardyn Mitchell, Class of '21

The rain is starting to drown out the tea in my cracked coffee cup,

it's cold and quiet and I can hear the rain's aching sobs in the garden.

"Adulthood is like this," graveled my Mother,

"Time flows as the rain pours.

It doesn't matter where you go, it'll follow you anywhere."

And I remember laughing with her, going as far as to call her dreary.

I was wrong and she was right. The world is dreary.

The water streaming down my hand from the cracked coffee cup

reminds me of a time where the days blur and adulthood doesn't stalk me anywhere

I take my stride. Puddles begin to make home in the lifeless garden

that once held life dancing off petals. The life would pour from the vibrant flowers that were planted by Mother.

That's what she told me to call her, Mother.

It was on a day just like this, just as dreary.

The humidity was pressing against every pore and she drank from the same cracked coffee cup,

but she held it more like a chalice made of diamonds, and this garden

was her kingdom. A kingdom of velt night that could be found anywhere.

I wish I was anywhere
but here, a place where the shadows of Mother
don't lurk and instead of a garden
it's a graveyard of dreary,
Cracked coffee cups.

And then maybe I could find beauty in a downpour.

But that will never happen as long as the rain continues to pour
and there isn't anywhere
a lost soul can hide, not even in a cracked coffee cup.

Mother,
she was a woman of veiled secrets and dreary
dreams; I used to wonder if she would let me burn before the garden.

When I was little, this was my stage, this garden
was where I would pour
and purge the dreary
thoughts that were sown anywhere
she could reach, she loved to sew, my Mother.
She would be proud of me for not shattering the cracked coffee cup.

I've always wanted to burn this garden, shatter her cracked coffee cup.

Pour kerosene in the flower beds so it flows like rivers in honor of my Mother.

I want to destroy anywhere she sowed dreary thoughts as she listened to the rain sob.

But here I am. Mother would be proud.

2020 ASPA Longer Poetry Superior Rating



Madison Solis, Class of '21

to dance alone

Matteo Taylor, Class of '22

Her sour toxicity wafted across the room and made his eyes water like he took a swig of vinegar and whiskey. She staggered over seductively and asked him about his day, feigning interest. Her melodic laugh echoed with a disguised and yet ever so baneful distaste for the man across the table. He pretended not to notice. Men around them watched with jealous eyes, envying him for sitting across from her. At least that's what he hoped, for they were staring with either envy or amusement with knowledge he lacked.

Was she cheating? Again?

No, she wouldn't.

Unless she would.

He had to fix this somehow. Reassure her that he was enough. He offered her his hand to dance and she took it as gracefully as ever. He just had to have faith, that's all. Her steps were aggressive, pushing him back and forth to the rhythm she decided was right but felt oh-so-wrong to him. His were purely defensive, his feet doing their best not to get caught up and trampled by her determined dance.

He stumbled once and she dropped his hands without hesitation. He begged her not to let go, to give him one more chance. He'll dance better this time. But she quickly shot him down
“You'll be fine, I'll be back.

Don't be so insecure.

Don't be so needy”

All the things he didn't need to hear.
But I digress.

When she walked away the song soon changed to one he could enjoy all by his lonesome.

He spun to the beat and a smile overtook his tired features.
He twirled and stumbled and laughed because as foolish as he looked, all he wanted was to enjoy the music.

He stopped dead in his tracks when she caught his eye once more, dancing with another man down the bar. Her new pet looked just as exhausted as he had.
And just as desperate.

He became worried again. Helpless. Dependent. He needed her. He needed to get back to her. But he walked only two steps closer when he realized how much better his feet felt without her stepping on them all the time.

He saw the man she danced with now and how unhappy he looked, trying nonetheless.

Well... fuck trying.

And in that moment he realized it takes so much less effort to just
dance alone.



Konner Brown, Class of '21

Tranquility

Kassidy Haggard, Class of '22

I lay supine on the fine sand,
one hand turned down,
floating in the idyllic water
as it laps against my shoulder,
tries to pull me in, pull me under.
Unable to find purchase,
it instead only succeeds in
washing muted grains from
my sensitive skin. Sea foam
pearls stick to my hair, pink,
like the waves, which are
sanguinolent with my life.
Glazed, my eyes are lustrous
and dark, and a cherry fingerprint
sits on my forehead, drying.
Stroking my cheek with a ghostly
pale hand, I begin to drift off into
something much kinder than life
as salt begins to crack my skin.



Amy Prejoles, Class of '20

The Holiday Spirit

Kaylee Jacobs, Class of '20

Teeth chatter quickly
Begging for return of warmth
Amidst winter frost

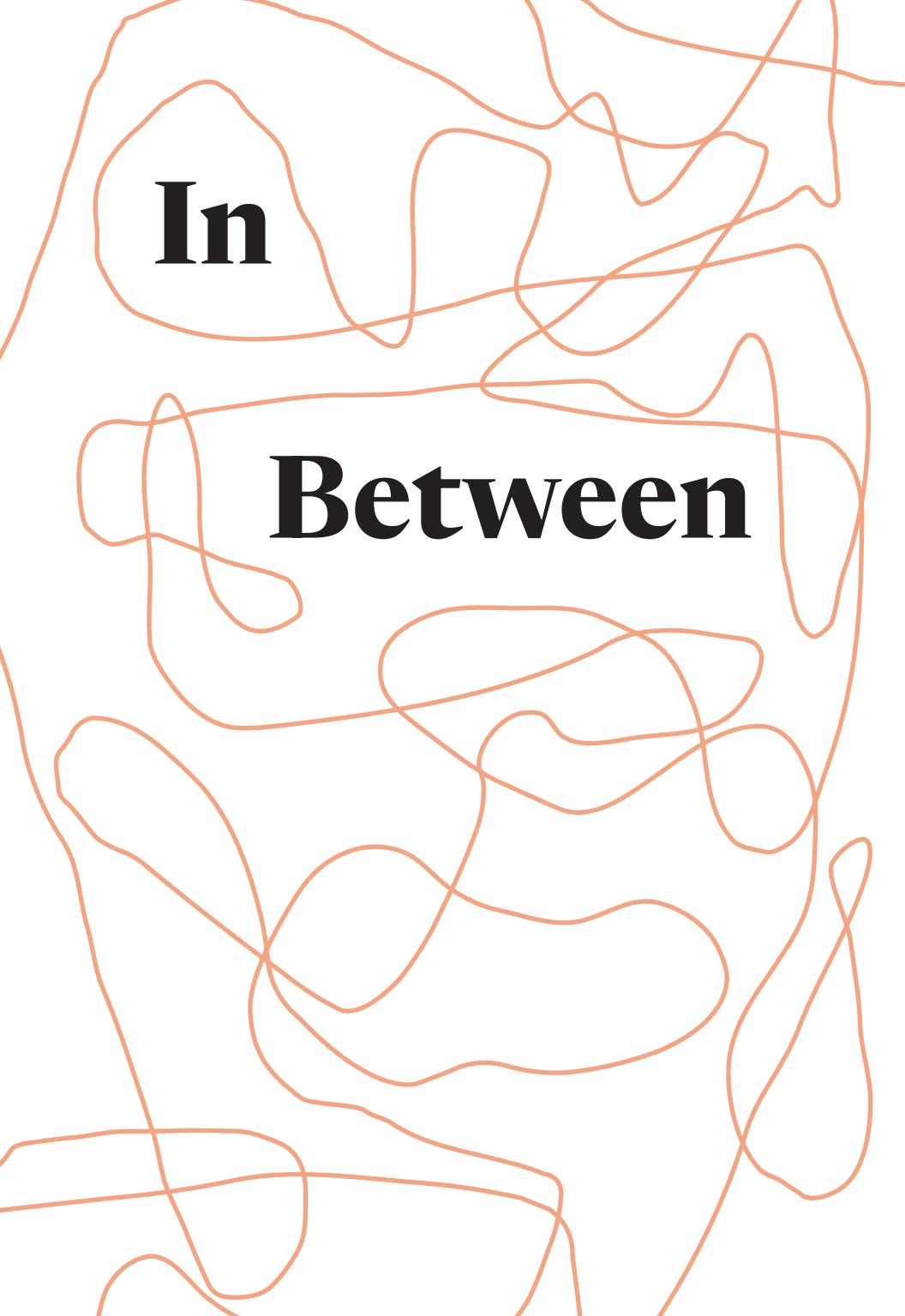
Noses form icicles
Bitten by a bitter wind
Losing all feeling

Lips slightly parted
Placed around a heated mug
Burned by rich cocoa

Lungs filling now with
Soulful warmth, brought by the care
Of an act of love



Zhenya Nommesen, Class of '24



In

Between



Editor's
Note

It's in the still air of a silent classroom. Sunlight streaming through the opened windows and illuminating the dancing dust that shines like gold at the acute tilt of a head.

It's in the itch pestering your fingers. The itche and sudden twitches in the empty hand that lays limp on a too bare desk. A desire starting to unfurl itself from the corner it sleeps in.

It's in the subtle shift. That minuscule moment when the world explodes into becomes more. And then it's gone before it's even truly begun. But it lingers.

And you stay there.

Trapped between the dull classroom and something just waiting to be written.

- Dardyn Mitchell



Erica Hilger, Class of '21

Snapped Pen

Sophie Simmons, Class of '23

The Man

The man in the mirror leaned forward, shrouded in darkness, and stared intently at his reflection. His pale face was scrubbed clean and his short black hair was combed neatly back. He straightened his tie yet again, lining it up exactly along the lines of his impeccable suit. He needed to look his best at work today. Finally he stood, casting his eyes about the small apartment. He could see very little but for the dim light drifting in from the direction of the open bedroom door. Shuddering, he turned his back on the room and left the apartment, stepping outside.

The cobbled street lay under a thick blanket of fog that gave everything a dull color and blurred edges. The afternoon sun was hidden by the smothering gray fog but the air was still muggy and hot. Between the cracks in the stone, puddles of darkly colored mud absorbed the dim light and reflected warped images of the world above.

All was silent and motionless in the stifling air except for the lone man who was meandering down the middle of the street in his finest suit and tie. He knew there were no cars around, and the sidewalks were even muddier than the road, so he stuck to the middle. He kept his head down and his eyes on his feet, picking his way around the puddles to keep his polished shoes clean. He was on his way to work, to the office across town. He frowned, trying to remember exactly where the office was, but kept walking. He was certain that the office was in this direction. That was all that mattered. Getting to the office and away from the bedroom door he had left open. As he

was squinting through the fog, trying to see if he was getting any closer, he noticed an indistinct silhouette moving towards him. He backed up apprehensively; no one else was supposed to be on this road.

"Who's there?" He shouted hoarsely as the wavering shadow grew closer and closer.

Finally the hazy outline took shape, revealing a raggedly dressed man covered in dirt and grime. His long, uneven hair was tangled and greasy, his face was streaked with mud, and he was dressed in threadbare rags. He was out of breath and covered in sweat like he had been running for a long time. However, he approached slowly, holding his palms out as if to show that he meant no harm and was unarmed. His eyes flickered back and forth as though he were ready to flee at the slightest sign of danger. When he finally stopped the two men were no more than 10 feet apart.

"I'm Steven," the ragged man said slowly. "Can you tell me your name? Are you okay?"

The man frowned. Why would he ask if he was okay? And what did his name matter? Maybe he had misheard. He could barely understand Steven, his words sounded quiet and slurred. Combined with his ragged appearance, the slurred speech made the man all the more wary of Steven.

"What do you want?" the man asked accusingly.

Steven put his hands up again, trying to put him at ease. "What are you doing here? Don't you know the streets aren't safe?"

The man laughed, he thought he understood now. Steven must have been making some kind of joke. "What are you talking about? Why wouldn't the streets be safe?"

Steven looked at the man incredulously. "Why? Don't you know? Surely you've heard of the others, just look at the blood, the debris! It's everywhere!" He gestured wildly, pointing at the street, the walls of the buildings surrounding them, his own face. As he spoke he stepped closer to the man, sounding more and more agitated with every word. "You have to get out of here, we have to run before the others come! Hurry, come with me!"

The man suddenly realized Steven wasn't joking at all. At this point he knew he was either crazy, high, or drunk, although it was only noon, and was probably dangerous. And should a fight break out he doubted he would get any outside help. The blank wall of fog hid anything much farther than 10 feet in any direction. Frightened, he stumbled backwards and threw up his hands to try and stop Steven who was advancing towards him, aggravated and distressed.

The moment he did, Steven jumped, startled, and cried out, "Your hands! What happened to your hands!"

The man looked down and noticed for the first time the thick, dark red liquid that coated his hands and dripped down his arms, leaving crimson streaks. Now that he noticed it, he realized it was everywhere, staining his suit, tie, shoes, and leaving a trail of droplets on the ground, although it was hard for him to see through the thick, slow-moving fog. When he didn't answer, Steven repeated, "What happened to your hands?"

The man stared at his hands, not understanding Steven's question. Nothing had happened to him. He closed his eyes, trying to remember. He was going to work. He was just walking to work, away from his apartment. But where had the red come from? Suddenly he laughed out loud, making Steven

jump again. It was ink, he remembered now. A pen had snapped in his hands. He laughed again then smiled at Steven.

"A snapped pen."

Steven gave him a long, bewildered stare.

"I snapped a pen in my hand. The ink leaked onto my hands. I can't believe I didn't notice until now."

Finally Steven seemed to understand. He nodded slowly, and repeated quietly, "Snapped."

The man nodded, and slowly started walking away until Steven was swallowed up in the all-consuming fog. He kept staring at his hands, chuckling to himself every few seconds. "A snapped pen. A snapped pen!" He felt his shoes splash into a puddle, but kept staring at his red hands. They were shaking. Why were they shaking?

• • •

Steven

The man in the mirror leaned forward, outlined by dazzling light, and stared intently at his reflection. His name was Steven, and his face was as filthy as ever, although it had aged somewhat since the last time he had seen it. He had little time to linger in the abandoned museum, but the mirror had caught his attention. It had been a long time since he'd been anywhere near an intact mirror. Finally he stood, casting his eyes about the pulverized statues and ruined paintings in the bright room. Light streamed in from a pair of shattered skylights. He shuddered and turned away from them, stepping back out onto the road.

The cobble street lay under a hot afternoon sun that cast everything in a harsh, bright light. The humid air pressed down on the street and the heat was almost unbearable. Be-

tween the cracks in the stone, puddles of bloodied mud absorbed the glaring light and reflected warped images of the world above.

Steven sprinted down the middle of the street, although being in the open for long was risky. The sidewalks were almost impossible to navigate, covered as they were in seemingly endless amounts of rubble and debris. They were far worse than the roads because the Others had targeted the dense crowds of panicked people trying to flee across them during the first attack. In a large city like this there had been too many deaths for any possibility of cleaning up, although the Others had taken most of the bodies anyway. Steven was one of the few survivors left in the city. They had all banded together after the first attack and built a settlement in the vast network of subways and tunnels beneath the city. At first some survivors had tried to go their own way, but soon they all disappeared or came running back to the survivor's tunnels when they realized it was the only safe refuge from the Others.

Steven had been on watch duty near the entrance of the tunnels when he spotted the man through his binoculars. He was walking out in the open, slowly limping his way down the street. Steven didn't have time to grab anyone else; if the man was still in the street for much longer he was a goner. He grabbed a first aid kit, some water, and the long hunting knife he always carried with him. He knew it wouldn't do him much good if he was caught by the Others, but he didn't feel safe without it. Then again, he never felt safe.

He sprinted through the city as fast as he could, ducking into open doorways every few minutes to catch his breath. He had hardly been outside since before the first attack had happened, which he guessed was over a year ago. No one really kept track of time anymore. Steven had long since grown used

to the safety of being underground and every second under the vulnerable, cloudless sky was a nerve racking nightmare. His paranoia had him jumping at the smallest shadows and diving behind doors at the smallest noises. Twice he nearly turned back, but he kept going knowing that he was likely the only chance of survival the man had.

When he finally turned onto the street where he had seen the man, he slowed down. He had to be careful, it was likely the man would be carrying a weapon of some kind (like most survivors) and Steven didn't want to risk a fight. He waved at the man but he didn't seem to notice him. He continued walking forward slowly and called out to the man, but he didn't seem to hear him. As he got closer he noticed for the first time the absurd outfit. The man was barefoot, like many survivors whose shoes had fallen apart, but he was wearing a once-expensive suit that was now tattered and covered in dark stains. It was a ridiculous thing to wear when mobility was crucial to survival, not to mention the intense heat and blazing sun of the day. When Steven was hardly more than 15 feet away the man finally looked up and shouted, sounding surprised, "Who's there?"

It was such a strange question to ask, "who's there," it seemed like he couldn't see Steven at all. He wondered if the man might be blind, but when he moved closer the man backed up warily and looked Steven up and down. Steven made a calming gesture and tried to appear harmless and friendly.

"I'm Steven. Can you tell me your name? Are you okay?"

For some reason the man frowned, he didn't like the question, nor did he answer. Instead he asked accusingly, "What do you want?"

Once again Steven tried to calm him and asked, "What

are you doing here? Don't you know the streets aren't safe?" He didn't understand why the man wasn't running for cover. The man's response couldn't have been more unexpected. He laughed at Steven's concern and asked, "What are you talking about? Why wouldn't the streets be safe?"

Steven looked at the man incredulously. "Why? Don't you know? Surely you've heard of the Others, just look at the blood, the debris! It's everywhere!" He was so shocked he could hardly respond coherently. He gestured at the puddles on the street, the destroyed buildings surrounding them, even his own face which he knew was marked by dried blood from a past injury. "You have to get out of here, we have to run before the Others come! Hurry, come with me!" he yelled anxiously. He knew they were running out of time.

He stepped closer to the man, thinking maybe if he grabbed his hand he could pull him into the nearest building where he could explain the attacks. How was it possible he didn't know? But before he had even taken two steps, the man stumbled in fear and threw up his hands as if to protect himself. Steven gasped and physically jumped at the sight of the hands. He hadn't noticed before because the man had kept them behind his back, but his hands were covered in fresh, dripping blood. It ran down his arms, dripped from his fingers, and stained his tattered suit. Steven cried out, "Your hands! What happened to your hands!"

The man looked surprised as well. He stared down at them for the longest time until Steven asked again, "What happened to your hands?" The man still didn't answer, he just kept staring. Steven couldn't see any injuries on the man, although it was hard to tell because of the suit. Suddenly the man laughed out loud, making Steven jump again. Why on earth was he laughing? Then the man looked up, and gave Steven a disturb-

ing smile.

“A snapped pen.”

Steven was bewildered by his answer. What, a pen had snapped in his hands and scratched him? No scratch from a pen could draw that much blood.

“I snapped a pen in my hand. The ink leaked onto my hands. I can’t believe I didn’t notice until now.” The man looked back down at his hands and started laughing again.

Steven finally understood. “Snapped.” He nodded slowly, thinking over the man’s appearance and confusing remarks and reactions. The man had snapped. He didn’t know if a loved one had died somehow or if the blood was his own, but something tragic had happened to the man and he had finally snapped. Even now as the man stared at his hands they started shaking. He limped away slowly, chuckling to himself and making no attempt to avoid the filthy puddles underfoot. Every once in a while Steven heard him whisper to himself quietly, “A snapped pen.”

Steven shook his head sadly. He didn’t think he could help the man in any way, nor would the man let him if he could. He was lost in his own isolated world, a world in which the Others didn’t exist and going to work was the typical thing to do. A world in which a loved one’s blood was little more than the scarlet ink of a broken pen. Steven doubted the man even knew his own name. They were out of time and there was nothing he could do. Still shaking his head, he turned around and started running back toward the settlement. He couldn’t be caught by the Others. He couldn’t let himself turn out like the man. He couldn’t let himself be snapped.



Annika Beckett, Class of ‘21

Diamond Sky

Maysa Willis, Class of '23

"Tell me a story," she whispered. She knew it was far too late to be awake, but curiosity poked at her mind.

"One more," he replied back, "but then we have to go." She slowly closed her eyes, envisioning the story she was to be told. A grin lit up her face, for she knew this story would not be so unfamiliar.

"There once was a girl like you, living in a far off place. A place where the days were long and the platinum roads longer. Here, vibrant mushrooms peeked out from the soft ground, and the trees stood hundreds of feet tall. It was never too hot or too cold, and the rain never rudely dampened the atmosphere. The sand on the beaches was precisely placed by the ocean's calm hands and the sun baked every single grain to perfection. This place was a Polaroid, perfectly placed in time, perfectly planned. Knowledge thrown around like confetti, for they knew there was nothing to question when all the answers were knowledgeable. All the lines met perfectly, and the circles were all perfectly round here. Well, except for one thing. When the days died down and the moon woke again, the lines began to fold. Two diamonds emerged before this place, waiting to be stolen. And this girl was to be their savior."

The story came to an abrupt end after the boy realized the little girl had fallen asleep. As her shallow breaths broke the newfound silence, the boy drifted off to sleep too. Not all stories have a definitive ending.

The Freedom in Summer

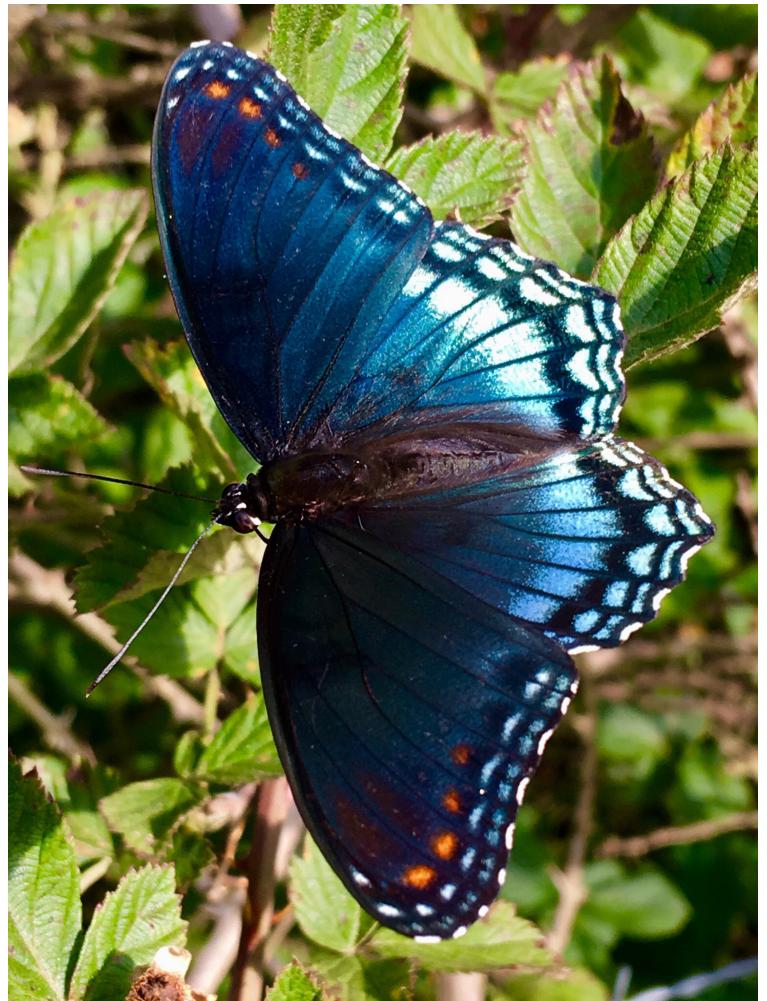
Destiny Eberhard, Class of '20

I walk through the lilac and foxglove painted fields saturated with the sweet smell of citrus. Reaching up, the moisture in the air collects on my fingers and I use it to shove back the frizz that sprouts from my head. My skin glistens with sticky sweat that has adhered to it and slides down my body in rivers and pools in my shoes. Joyous chirps sound from the wandering birds as they glide past. Freedom rings in their songs and echoes through the peaceful field. I could listen to that song for eternity, if I was permitted to. Smacking my lips together, the sweetness of honey with a contrasting sour of lemon in the air awakens my stomach and the emptiness it consists of. Sitting down, the grass and dirt squish beneath me and I glide my fingers through the flowers as if they were hair, trailing them down into the damp earth. Dirt crumbles between delicate fingers and showers back down to earth, covering a worm as it wriggles away to freedom. Stretching out, I pluck off a flower from a nearby bush and twist the stem from the bud. Seeing the sweet nectar dripping from the stem, I place it to my lips and taste the sugar as it slips over my tongue.

"I remember when I was younger, we would go and pick the wild honeysuckles and we would laugh as the fresh taste soothed us." I inhale, hoping to catch the memory on my tongue. "I know that you can't understand what I'm saying, but I'd like to imagine that you can understand what I am feeling. This feeling of freedom that comes with summer." The sun glares strong and the rays of warmth soak into my skin, tinting it red. "Even though it may seem uncomfortable at first, if you just take a second to enjoy the simple pleasure of a field stained with beautiful flowers, or maybe even the odious beads of sweat

that drip down your back.” Standing up and dusting soil from my pants I gently sweep my arms out towards the field surrounding me, as if I was in a dance with the breeze. “If you take a second to enjoy and take in all the little details, you will find that it is quite marvelous. Bewitching even. Like walking through the rain, squinting into the sky as the droplets drift down your face, neck, and arms until you are completely soaked, but it’s okay because it’s entrancing.” Bending down, I caress the petals of a daisy, the velvet petals extending towards the sun as bees buzz, bouncing from flower to flower. “When you really look—and I don’t mean with your eyes, but with your heart—you will find that it is very difficult to not see the beauty in things.” Releasing a sigh I shift my gaze back to the sun-filled sky. “But like I said, I don’t really think that you will understand,” I say to the birds that dance through wind.

2020 ASPA Short Story Honorable Mention



Mary Edwards, Class of '20



Austin Miles, Class of '20



Austin Miles, Class of '20

My Colorful World

Shaylee Clark, Class of '24

I wake up in a field of lavender. Their lovely, light purple petals bring out the emerald green of the stems and surrounding grass. The crisp green of the spring tree leaves brings out a smile in me. I look up to the vast, baby blue sky and the white, cotton candy clouds fill my view. It's like an enclosure where kids put their ladybugs and crickets once they've been caught. I turn to my left in hopes of seeing a friend. Instead, I find a lush green forest. The thriving trees stand tall like the soldiers in my story books which I read by the sparkling moonlight. The greens and browns of the secluded forest blend together like canvas paint. I'm reminded of the paintings that mom and dad made me paint. I wish that they could go up in a museum so other kids like me can paint gorgeous bright paintings.

I turn to look behind me and see the most magnificent building. It is crystal white with gold trim all the way around, beautiful and poised. I love the look of the building. I walk up the white steps, passing two lion statues guarding the door on either side. They're trying to keep intruders out. The silver grey color of the lions pops out against the white background. I walk through the castelike doors. The inside is filled with statues and paintings. The building is an art museum! It is breathtaking, I can hardly believe I get to explore it. I walk past countless, distant realities that have been captured by art. The paintings are filled with love, joy, and color. Finally I sit down on a bench. The cushions are bright, blood red and they are comfy. I look up at an old, mouse brown clock. The hands strike two. I had become bored of looking at the paintings when I realized they were all distant realities I will never get to see. They make me

feel insignificant, nothing but a small speck.

I walk out of the museum to see a colorful park. The bright greens, reds, yellows, and blue blur my tainted vision. I'm happy to see a park again, but this one has no children except me to grace it. I bet the park feels indescribably lonely without any kids to play on it. What is the purpose of a colorful park like this if no children enjoy it? Where are the dirt and the woodchips? I sigh because I too feel lonely, so maybe if I play in this park we will both be comforted. I kick up the dirt, hoping to help the playground feel like a playground again. I wonder why kids no longer play here anymore. I trot over to the monkey bars. The squeaky monkey bars look lonesome like an isolated flower in an unplanted garden. I climb around on the monkey bars like a monkey climbs a tree. I try to imitate a monkey, but I do a better job imitating a dead monkey because I fall off. After dusting off my blue jeans and midnight tennis shoes I begin walking away. I turn to wave goodbye to the park like it's an old friend at the end of the most amazing playdate ever.

The street is lined with beautiful colors, but I dread the walk back home. The vibrant ruby reds and the lemon yellows keep me from feeling sad, but they cannot stop the sky from shedding a few tears. A light drizzle of clear pebbles fall from the dark sky. The sky is depressed and I can't fix it. I let the little drops of rain hit the ground, so the ground feels its sadness. The clear pebbles turn into clear stones. The ground is covered in little lakes. They look like fun, but mama and dad need me to get home. That's when I see it. My house is the only black house. The aura of my house is evil and bad. My house is an old Victorian house that seems to fall apart when I take a step. I climb up the dreadful steps to my dreadful evil house. It then dawns on me mama and papa aren't home.

I turn around and the once dreadful steps turn into happy colorful steps. I skip down the happier steps and begin to jump into the little lakes outside my house. I jump a little too hard and splash water in my face. I wipe it away and then I look up to see a little girl in front of a blinding white light. The little girl has a white jump rope in her right hand. She has been the first person to ever come to my sweet world. I walk over to the girl but something feels off. I notice a flight of white marble steps. They are so pretty and they call my name, but when I look down I notice I'm disappearing again. I look down and shake my head. When I look up, the girl looks at me sadly and then she walks into the light. Before I disappear fully a tear slides from my face. When I come back to reality my mama and papa are waiting for me. The doctor is messing with my IV. My mama and papa sit near me and take my hand. I would miss my mama and papa dearly, but my lovely world is just so beautiful. I would rather live in a colorful world than this grey and sorrow filled hospital room.



Jaci Sandefur, Class of '21

Mercy

Mallory Alcocer, Class of '22

I love the way
The way you skillfully
took apart my sense of self

Took away my
My ability to have
a way of truly loving

I'm not sure
Not sure of why
I feel like I'm bleeding

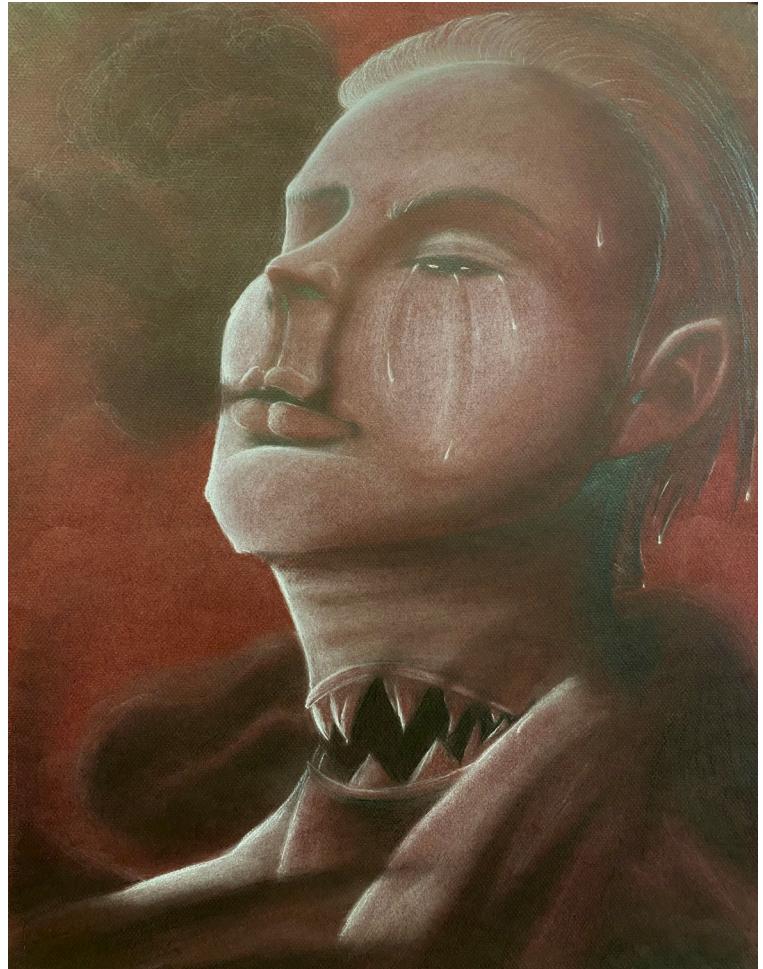
You are the
The only thing I
am capable of feeling anymore

All I can
I can ask is
why must you do it slowly

This life moves
Moves so sleepily and
I can't wait for an end

May I sleep
Sleep with the others
you have taken away

Gone by you
You have no mercy
Mercy mercy mercy



Chloe Bracht, Class of '22

Untitled Poem

Shelby Fischer, Class of '23

This is the beginning,
Where the seeds are planted,
Slates wiped clean.
This is hearing the bullet blaze into the sky
You begin the race,
Blood pumping, adrenaline flowing.
This is hearing the ice cream truck,
Or the sun pouring its rays through the window.
Your favorite song on the radio,
Water emerging to life
Creating an outline
As you splash into the deep end.
Imagine flowers on your doorstep,
Watching the sunrise
And later getting lost in the
Night sky
Think of blowing out candles,
unwrapping a present,
Flying a kite, or learning
How to ride a bike
This is the music of wind chimes
On a spring morning,
a new day,
This is chapter 1.

This is the middle
Where you find twisted necklaces
Lights begin to flicker.
Seeds are blooming.
You trip over shoelaces,
Proudly rushing you to the hot pavement,
Scraped knees.
Pain shoots through your legs,
The opponent seems miles away.
This is getting stung by a bee,
Stubbing your toe on the sharp corner of the table,
Dropping your favorite ice cream cone.
Losing wind to power the kite,
Fighting off the sticky spider web slapped on your face,
Or walking as the frozen lake cracks beneath your feet.
This is water trapping your chest
Making it hard to get air.
Shoulder to shoulder
In a hall with tight walls.

This is the end,
The lights turned off.
Finish line is crossed.
You finished last.
Heart is racing steadfast,
Feeling each beat as it leaves your body.
You're numb as you try to regain focus.
The sky filled with dark, monstrous clouds
Soon pouring buckets of rain,
No stars to light the sky.
Assigned to lock the door,
Flip the sign,
Close the curtains.
Let your heart rest.
This is the end.



Ashley Uskert, Class of '20

Recollection

Destiny Eberhard, Class of '20

"Okay, but what was it like?"

"It was beautiful. Not in the traditional way, not in a way that it was flawless, but because of its flaws. Every little thing was perfect in its own way. At night it was so dark that you couldn't see two feet in front of you, but it wasn't scary, you weren't worried about being in danger. It was peaceful and everyone was content. And during the day we would travel around, admiring our surroundings, and we never went hungry because we always had plenty of food." I pace as I talk, and try to recall the events from the night before. "Everyone got along, everyone was happy, all the time. It was perfect. It was a perfect world."

"But doesn't it get boring?" He asks.

"Doesn't what get boring?"

"Always being perfect. Isn't it exhausting? Aren't you afraid of messing up?"

"I guess so."

"I don't know man... Yeah, it sounds good in theory, but in reality people are just too screwed up. We don't know how not to worry. We will always find something wrong and try to fix it, but in the process we ruin other things and then we try to fix those and it's just an endless cycle of problems. Humans are creatures of creation and destruction, we're never satisfied with what we have and will do whatever it takes to obtain what we want. Even if it's at the expense of others. If there ever was a perfect world, we made sure to destroy it." He says it casually, as if he had been contemplating this for a while.

"But if you never had a need for something and never had problems in need of fixing, you wouldn't fix things just for the sake of wanting something better."

"That makes sense, but we are only human, right? We don't live in a perfect world so we will never know how we would react in that situation. It's the argument of nature vs nurture. Are we inherently destructive or were we taught to never be content?"

"This is too confusing" I sigh, apathetic towards the conversation. "There's no point in dwelling on it, and besides it was just a dream."

Sleep

Emma Myhan, Class of '20

Thud.

My eyes fly open for the first time, as a breath escapes my lungs into the stillness of the night. With my back to the bedroom door, I carry on a staring contest with my bed frame and trace the grain in the wood as well as I can in the dark.

My eyes feel heavy.

It's probably just the cat knocki—

Thud.

That damn cat.

I roll over and squint at the digital alarm clock resting on my bedside table. 1:47 AM. Pulling myself out of bed, I slump across my bedroom floor as my feet trail close behind. The door screams as I open it slowly, screeching through the darkness. I wince. The house seems to inhale as I step from my bedroom and into the inky hallway. I travel towards the living room, rubbing my eyes in an attempt to focus the shapes around me.

Where is that cat?

The living room seems bigger in the dark, a large square room with couches and a flat screen mounted on the wall next to a door that leads to the back deck. I walk across the room and switch on the porch light to reveal a small, fluffy silhouette pacing back and forth behind the door. My voice rings through the empty room.

"You want in, huh?"

I turn the bolt lock and pull the door open to let him slip through.

"You gonna let me sleep now? C'mon."

Closing the door, I scoop him up and head back towards my bedroom. He jumps from my arms and onto my bed spread, curling up at its foot. He starts to purr. I climb below the sheets after him.

"Now you stay quiet." I remark.

My eyes feel heavy.

The red glare of my digital alarm clock slips under my eyelids at the last second. 1:53 AM.

Thud.

My eyes fly open for the second time. I shoot up in bed.

"That's it, you're going back outsi—!"

I'm stopped short by the purring that buzzes through my dim bedroom. The weight of the cat on the foot of my bed rises and falls to the rhythm of his relaxed breathing. My heart jumps to my throat as my hands reach for the bottom of my desk lamp and fumble their way to the switch at the top. Light floods my room, illuminating the clothes strewn across the floor and the half empty water glass resting on my dresser. I hold my breath as I turn in bed, careful not to creak the mattress, and drop my feet to the floor. I stand up slowly.

Thud.

Down the hallway to the left.

Crap, did I leave that door unlocked?

My brain screams to hide somewhere, in the closet maybe, but my hand reaches for the doorknob and twists. It sticks with a force like it's being turned the opposite way. I jerk away and flip the lock. I can hear my breath echoing back and forth between my bedroom walls. I've had nightmares like this before, dreams where I would pick up my lamp and swing its heavy end across the head of a shadow behind my closet door. But tonight every movement seems to resonate through my bedroom like a gunshot, and I can barely bring myself to take a step forward.

Thud.

The red glare of the clock says 2:04 AM.

*Dad's asleep by now, and mom isn't on call tonight, is she?
Maybe she's home early.*

I take a deep breath and try to coax my heart rate down. The doorknob turns easily this time. The door piercingly announces my presence a second time as I move around the corner and out into the house.

In the living room, the door is bolt locked. I think back to the cat.

Did I lock that door? I must have, I think.

The house is dark except for the dull white fridge light in the kitchen and the lamp light coming from the door of my bedroom. I walk back past the kitchen toward my parents' bedroom door which is hanging barely ajar at the end of the hallway. It's open wide enough for me to slip through to avoid the creaking of the hinges. I take slow steps through the pitch black room with my arms outstretched as furniture takes shape

around me. Squinting at the bed, I try to make out my dad's sleeping figure under the covers. Suddenly, pain shoots through my shin as it slams against the bed frame. A cry escapes my lips and my heart jumps to my throat.

Ugh. Way to go, stupid. You'll wake up Dad.

I stand frozen next to the bed, waiting to make sure he's still asleep. There's no movement. My eyes finally adjust to the dark to reveal the slept-in sheets on an empty bed. I let out a breath.

That's what that noise was.

I wander back through the house letting the bedroom door creak behind me. My voice resonates through the vacant hallway.

"Dad? You gotta warn me next time. My god, you freaked me out."

I turn the corner around the kitchen doorway and step in front of the fridge. The clock on the front glazes the room in a dim blue light. 2:10 AM. I yank the fridge door open and squint through the white light as the cold aluminium spreads through the palm of my hand. Looking for something easy to eat, I become aware of the sound of breathing moving through the kitchen. I hold my breath and it continues, much heavier than my own. I can barely bring my hand to move the fridge door.

Dad?

The light inside the fridge switches off and the room is dark again. I start to pull the door closed and the breathing intensifies, growing closer. My hand shoots away from the handle and my heart starts to race as I run back across the open floor of the kitchen. Something catches my foot and I fall towards

the floor but I'm caught and held as my wrists are forced down to my sides.

"What the—?!"

I try to scream as a clothed hand reaches across my mouth, muffling my sound. I see the murky light of the refrigerator clock start to blur. 2:12 AM.

My eyes feel heavy.

Thud.

I hit the floor.



Anumi Wickramasinghe, Class of '22

Evan Alley, Class of '21

Splat

I had the task of returning him to his regular golden color. Getting him in the washtub was a task on its own. In trying to lift him, I was covered in the muck and mud that coated him from head to toe. He didn't notice my struggles, though. He mocked me with that open-mouthed smile, his dirty tongue lapping to the side, curving to the angles of his teeth.

The walls were covered with mucky soap water from The Beast shaking his coat. I had the task of returning him to his regular golden color. Getting him in the washtub was a task on its own. In trying to lift him, I was covered in the muck and mud that coated him from head to toe. He didn't notice my struggles, though. He mocked me with that open-mouthed smile, his dirty tongue lapping to the side, curving to the angles of his teeth.

It didn't take long for the odd scent, something similar to wet shoes, to drift around the room. My jeans had been rolled up to my knees to avoid getting wet but that didn't help at all. It didn't matter how hard you tried to prepare for the bathing of Beastly, you wouldn't escape without getting soaked.

I'm sure he took great pride in coating me in his mess.

Foamy strawberry soap sat atop his occiput. When I had originally dumped the fruity body wash onto him, the color was a pale pink. Now it was shades of mocha brown and light greys. Hopefully that meant I had cleaned the majority of the dirt from the animal's undercoat.

His large paws and even larger body made it difficult for me to find my own footing in the tub. I'm sure he was unaware of my struggles though, he was more focused on trying to shake the water off his coat. My hand was at the base of his muzzle to prevent that outcome. I had learned that trick from the shows on tv. Lately I have been watching a lot of it. Animal Planet, history channels, as well as a channel based upon a time

in England. It talked about the myths and legends of dragons and knights.

I imagine I would be training as a knight if I lived back then, but I don't have a dragon to fight so Beasty will have to do.

The mongrel moved to pull away from my grip and I could tell he was about to jump out of the tub. To prevent him from escaping, I wrapped my arms around his mane and gave a firm, "No."

The Beast settled down but, in my efforts, I managed to get my shirt soaked. I couldn't tell if this had been his plan all along because he only ever wore that slightly droopy, amused look. Those brown eyes in contrast to his golden fur as he tilted his head to observe me. There was just no way to know at this point.

His furry tail thumped against the side of the tub as if he was mocking me.

The padding of small feet caught both of our attention. Beasty's ears perked as much as their angled shape could manage. My little sister peaked into the washroom and grinned to reveal her missing front tooth. I knew that smile all too well. That was enough to send dread to my chest.

The three-year-old held up a ball she had stolen from Beasty a few weeks ago. That got the mongrel out of the tub in a little under three seconds, leaving behind a dripping waterfall from his still dirty gold coat.

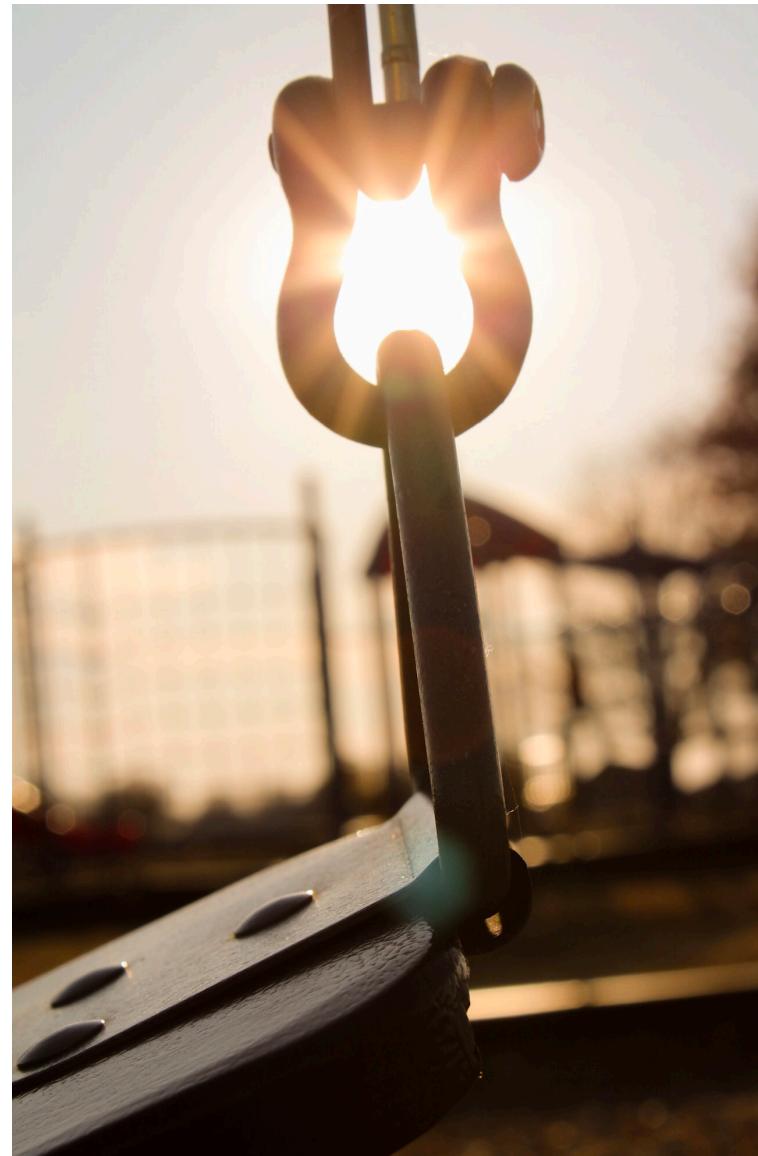
"Beassie!" The little goblin slurred as she ran off. I suspect that was her plan all along.

It was time to call reinforcements.

With a deep breath, I called out, "MOM!"

I didn't hear what she had told my sister but soon she returned with the still wet, untamed animal. I sent a scowl her way and as a retort she tossed the ball into the tub. There wasn't any time to react to the racing, sixty-eight pound mass springing into the tub. In moments, a fresh spray of water showered over the tub and walls.

Splat.



Ashley Uskert, Class of '20

Vinegar

Matteo Taylor, Class of '22

when i say your name
it feels like i'm gargling vinegar.

my throat burns and my tongue recoils.
my lips peel back and my eyes water.

you
are a sour memory.

all of the beautiful moments we spent together are
biting and
bitter.

skating hand in hand,
twirling under the neon lights.
i can almost hear your melodic laugh...

it makes me nauseous.

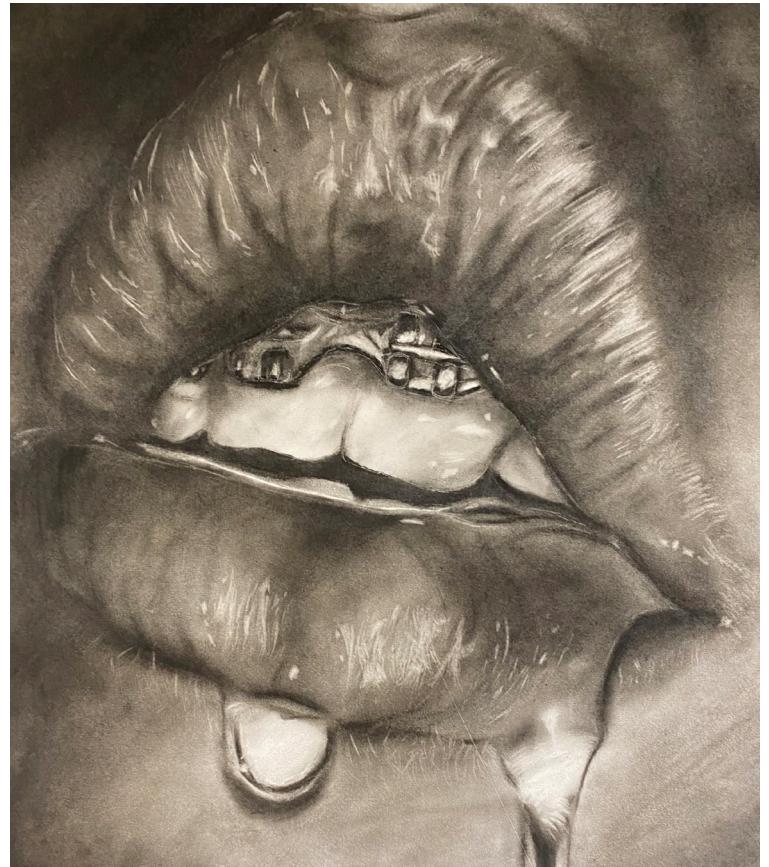
making caramel apples and
penning portraits of one another in the dim glow of fairy lights
lining the headboard of your all-too-familiar twin sized bed.

an acetoous memory drifting along in a
sea of
“i miss you so much but you left me so not
really”

beautiful wonderful you.
you left
me.

you left me alone.
you left me on purpose.
you left me here.

i try not to miss people who left me on purpose too much.
so i only visit your grave
sometimes.



Chloe Gladden, Class of '21

there's a slur for boys like me

Matteo Taylor, Class of '22

i am sugar and spice and
everything nice.
he is pine and paint and
string.
he knows he'll never be a real boy.
but it's okay,
neither will i.

2020 Short Poetry Superior Rating, Best of ASPA



Kaylee Jacobs, Class of '20

Two Sides

Elise Griffin, Class of '20

The smell alone was intoxicating, rich dark chocolate mixed with raspberries and the bouquet of Pinot Noir. It draws me in closer with each embrace.

The smell alone sent my stomach squirming.
Reeking of stale cigarettes and the rancid stench of warm
garbage.

It drives me away every time he draws closer to me
with a malicious grin and glint in his eyes.

The touches leave my skin tingling and buzzing.
Soft caresses have a trail of goosebumps wherever they travel.
It leaves me flushed and sensitive for hours.

The touch had my skin crawling and revolting in disgust.
Harsh scraps have a trail of goosebumps wherever they scuff by.
It leaves me feeling grimy and used, like a cheap whore.

The soft press of lips against mine comes from love.
I feel as though I am cherished and loved whenever I am
Surprised by him.

The marks he leaves behind are no longer kind
No longer out of love, only out of anger at my incompetence.
I feel as though I am the trash on the heel of his shoes.

I didn't know that it would change so fast.

The night he proposed was the best night of my life. He changed my life for the better.

The night he lost his temper for the last time
was the worst night of my life. He changed my life
For the worst.

He is wonderful with our children, adoring them.
I am happy in our little house by the docks where the
wind plays with my hair when my love and I stroll.
The best moment of my life is when his hand is in mine.

I am six feet under, my case unsolved.
My mother and children are still mourning for me.
The worst moments of my life are finally over.
I can still feel his hands clasped around my neck, no air
entered my lungs when I desperately clawed at his hands.

I don't know what I did to deserve this.

I will love him for the rest of my days,
he adores me with trinkets and his love.
My children will grow while our love will deepen.

I am a rotting corpse in the ground,
all because I trusted that man with kind eyes.
My children will grow up without a mother.

I gue ss th is is wha t tea chers war ned me Dru gs wo uld do

Cammy Bowlin, Class of '20

Layin g in you r be d, soft blan kets your mom boug ht you so lon g ago cov ering your le gs up to you r thighs.

Sug ar dissolv ing on you r tong ue. The bitt er swee t remind er of yo ur las t trip.

Clou ds dance d across the ceilin g. Fallin g in love wi th each other, wispin g and twirl ing to a tun e ou t of bea t.

Litt le sta rs dance d acro ss you r skin, warming you r arms up in patc hes.

Thig hs melt ing like candl e wax. War m and fuz zy. Lo w, sof t mu sic mixed wi th thoughts drift throu gh your brai n.

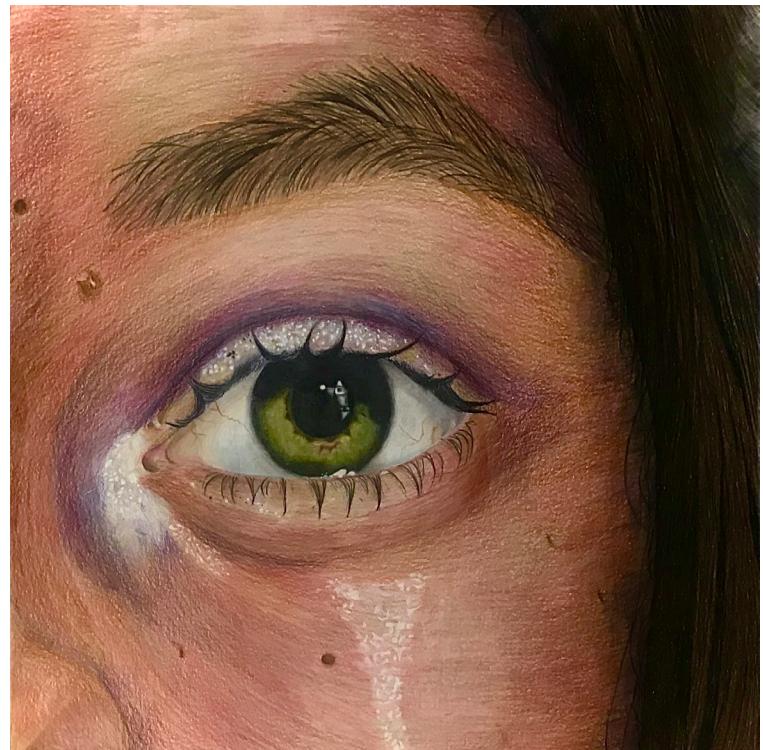
“loo k wha t go d did to us man.”

“G od did nt do that, you di d “

“I thi n k i rui ned mys e lf”.

t hats just the bra in tal king .

Th is is for the day dream ers. For the dro p out s. For t he little esca pes you wi shed wou ld was t for ever. The warm er it ma kes you fee l, the soon er y ou ll lig ht on fi re.



Sam Silver, Class of '20

The Constant Fight

Destiny Eberhard, Class of '20

Death's cold hand grips my fading soul, and whispers in my ear.

I am here, I am here, I am here.

You have nothing more to fear, for

I am here, I am here, I am here.

Life grasps my bare feet and holds me near.

I am here, I am here, I am here.

Please do not run in fear, for

I am here, I am here, I am here.

The battle is endless between

life and death

who tug me either way.

Fighting for my affection.

Until one day

I

am

thrust

over

the

edge.

.

.

.

here I am



Evan Alley, Class of '21

Lullaby

Isabelle Walker, Class of '20

I crack and peel
I start to feel
My edges wilt and fray.

The pulsing pump
Of each heart thump
Begins to fade away.

And as my soul
Released its pull
My body starts to sway.

Beneath abyss
Its cold-pressed kiss
Of where I'm bound to sleep.

A lonely star
Shines from afar
It calls me to the deep.



Olivia Fenyvesi, Class of '20

Babel

Emma Myhan, Class of '20

i.

smoke-sodden sleeves hang
over frozen palms, barely
kissing fingertips.

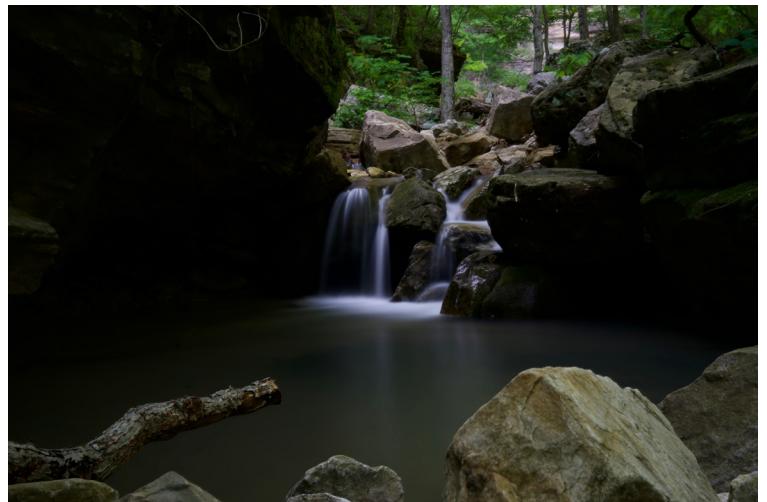
ii.

behold the new and
placid layer of white flake,
inviting fresh prints.

iii.

inhale the vacant
wasteland that once nearly touched
Heaven's crystal face.

2020 ASPA Short Poetry Honorable Mention



Austin Miles, Class of '20

I m a g i n a t i o n

Editor's Note

In the mind's eye it lay, quiet, faint,
awoken only by a gnawing hunger
which arrives without warning,
takes and consumes in an intoxicating flurry
before going dormant—
for days, weeks, seconds—
until it arrives again
and the vicious cycle repeats.

- Cassidy Haggard

Inhaling Happy

Matteo Taylor, Class of '22

Rolling a joint in the middle of a field is exactly what she told herself she wouldn't grow up to do. She licked the thin paper carefully, the smell of marijuana drowning her senses. After a couple of hits, she felt the smoke cloud her brain and was quickly distracted by the glowing plate of craters above her.

Making eye contact with the moon feels like standing in the sky's spotlight. Looking back up into its steely gaze is chilling and brought goosebumps to her skin. Tonight, she would steal the moon.

She put her lips to the translucent paper filled with the door to a new world and inhaled again. Then she stepped towards the sky, reaching out with eager hands. Tripping over treetops and stumbling into the pool of stars. Self-assured hubris and determination fueled her quixotic mission. She knew she could get to the moon tonight, she just knew it.

She yearned to pocket the moon before sunrise. To cling to it night and day. To take the alluring and unearthly satellite from all those still on the ground. She deserved it.

Taking a drag from the rolled joint in her hand, she felt the world around her explode with color. The visions assaulting her unprepared eyes were elysian and entirely awe-inspiring. She could taste the moon's surface. The call of redemption was almost tangible.

Every mistake she had ever made
forgiven

by this ethereal celestial body begging her to take him from his atmospheric prison.

She shoved clouds aside
Tumbled over and beyond the constellations
Touched the rough surface of her prize
And then she fell.

Like an angel she plummeted to the unforgiving earth, her cries into the dark sky mimicking that of an abandoned child. Her back hit the ground abruptly and knocked the wind from her chest.

Waking up hours later she squinted her teary eyes against the sun.

The moon was gone.
She checked her newly shattered phone to see just one text.
"how much did you buy?"
She thought about her response for a moment too long. She felt foggy.
"doesn't matter. it was laced."

Psychosis

Matteo Taylor, Class of '22

Part I

uncomfortable

confused

unmedicated

if you're listening,
hear me.

don't let my words slink by unnoticed.

taste the dull and bitter tang of the experiences that gave me
these stories to tell.

feel the longing for redemption that lingers in my ever-desper-
ate heart and mind.

know why i am how i am.
i have yet to figure that out myself.

when faced with a plethora of
delusions,
the human consciousness implodes.

a prime example being when i wake up in the early hours of
morning and become entirely entranced by the ethereal silhou-
ette gracing my window, asking me oh-so nicely to go on an
adventure with her.
her melodic voice is almost irresistible.

she reaches out
her crystal-esque nails trace a line down my jaw
enticing me
tempting me

what's one night?
one walk.
an adventure...

but i know my parents wouldn't be too happy if i disappeared
like that.
again.

some nights, however,
she doesn't ask.

she shakes me awake violently and unapologetically, screaming
at me to get up.
we need to run, she says.
it's too dangerous here.

those nights she becomes much much harder to ignore.
and sometimes

i just can't.

you see, i live in a world unlike your own.
the colors and sounds bombarding me each day and night are
near indescribable.

the feelings and sensations of invisible hands tugging my unex-
pecting arms to new planes of existence leave me tongue-tied
and begging for them to stop.

i just need it all to slow down.

but time doesn't work like that.

the echoing voices within the walls of my own damn skull inure
me to the feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness they try
so hard to instill in me.

if i close my eyes i can feel myself being tossed haphazardly
into a sea of uncertain illusions and realities that are somehow
beyond my understanding,
even though i'm in them.

some days i feel like i'm the sole survivor of a sixteen year war,
standing traitorously over the battlefield that my life has inevi-
tably become.

looking at it all
taking it all in..
it makes me furious.

i scream indecipherable curses into the world, but they fall on
deaf ears, as always.

i look down at my hands and cry,
my vision blurs and nothing makes sense anymore.

i see the doctor on monday

////

psychosis - January 17th, 2020
11:37 AM



Reagan Ptacek, Class of '22



Baby Bottle Filled with Seawater

Angel Myers, Class of '20

I don't really look around anymore, I kind of just live here. I swallow my pulse in rhythmic gulps and use the eye drops that you gave me. They have started stinging a little more in my pupils than usual. I watched you pour salt into my tea this morning before I poured it into sections of a pretty glass tea cup. My old teddy bears and I sipped with squished smiles. My consciousness filters out the salt and holds it at the tip of my tongue for safe keeping. And if I can hear you walking toward me, I'll pretend I'm under water. I count your footsteps with the seconds that I'm holding my breath. And when you reach me I will take a deep inhale, pretend water is filling my lungs. When you touch me, I will taste the red metallic like it's melted ice cream. It's warm and sticky and the blow gives me brain freeze. I don't want to look around anymore. I don't want to live here.



Kaylee Jacobs, Class of '20

The Artist's Friend

Anna Logan, Class of '22

I opened my eyes fifty nine years ago, back when my artist was young, but still talented. The first thing I remember seeing was his face. His face is handsome, I thought. Handsome with his eyebrows furrowed in concentration and his lips pressed in a thin, trembling line. Then I noticed all the other portraits hung on the wall behind him, always bright and happy and with the image of a girl who looked very similar to myself. All of them were made with rich blues, bright yellows and fantastic greens. I was so thrilled to see what scenic world he would create for me. When my background appeared, though, it was made of dull greys, fiery reds and hot, searing whites. What had I done? What had I done to cause him to look at me with that burning anger in his eyes? What had she done? He forced me to scream—forced me to show my agony to the world. Then those trembling hands raised a pen and gave my suffering a title: Revenge. That young man stood, packed up, and left without another word. I've been hanging here, burning inside these golden walls—these hellish walls—for fifty nine years. People pass by every day and look at me, commenting on what a fine job my artist did. Then, they move on. They don't hear me screaming for someone to help me, to save me. They couldn't even if they could hear my cries. No one can save me. I've grown tired of the screaming, but it's all I can do. That's how my artist made me. Sometimes I still see him, but now, when he looks at my face, I don't see anger. The only thing I see in that old man is regret.



Yevgeniya Nommesen, Class of '24

The Beginning of a Collection of Sorrow

Kassidy Haggard, Class of '22

I

More often than not it's the feeling of eternal desolation that's linked—right now, but hopefully not forever—to my being, but in that split second it was the plunging of my stomach coupled with the startling impact of realization.

My breath capsized into cold and murderous waves as my body filled with bees. They buzzed, and buzzed, and buzzed. I felt right then that it would be easier to just let them carry me away into the darkness, to let my mind fall into the soft contours of its hold, to let my muscles soften, to let pieces of my being fall away like leaves off a dying tree, so that every fear and worry would wash away and I would be subject to a never ending peace.

But I held gingerly, if not solidly, to the feeling (or maybe it was really nothing more than a hope I'd built into a thing far too grand for something so wishful) that things would be righted—a capsized boat brought to rest on its hull at the bottom of the cold, dark sea.

II

God's tears fell and we knew we weren't weeping alone.

Our collective anguish was heard through screams that lit up the sky like blistering fireworks as the celestial sphere opened up and let its pain out in thundering sobs, which shook the foundations of our world. Our own shoulders shook in tandem upon hearing the news, upon the realization of our colossal loss.

Regret bloomed in our chests and each missed opportunity, each word unsaid, was a sharp pang in our hearts as our tears pooled together with the rain, mangled under the waves of the tsunami we created. Our world went to ruin, and we began to decay along with it.



Ashton Addison, Class of '22



Madeline Brock, Class of '20

Untitled

Melody Unger, Class of '20

Let me ponder your amusement, handsomely.

I will speak in ordinary words.
I must sacrifice my melted throat as
a servant to a helpless crowd.

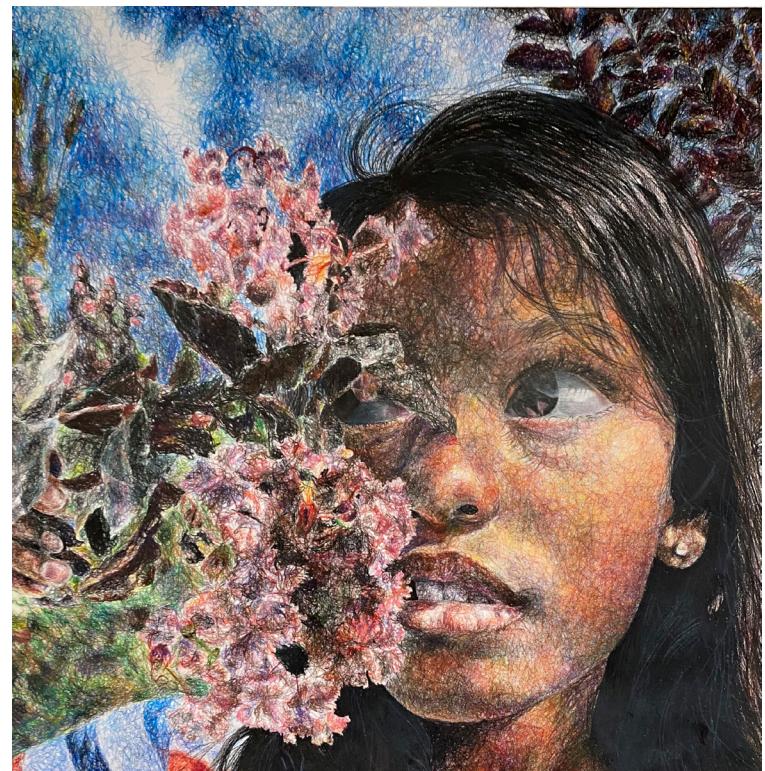
Because you would not understand
the way ink flows from my lips-
bleeds in my eyes. Sheet after sheet
of sudden, damaging bulbs.

You are the lamp. The bulbs do not
light for you.

I worship a crow, the instrument of war.
You run a mammoth over a twig,
yet trip on a spoon in the drawer.

The spoon, a carriage to the kettle. A
creep passenger implodes at the
scent of dinner.

This, you would not understand. So
I pour sugar in your coffee and I call it cream.
This bulb, indeed, lights and your eyes are now
blind to the battle.

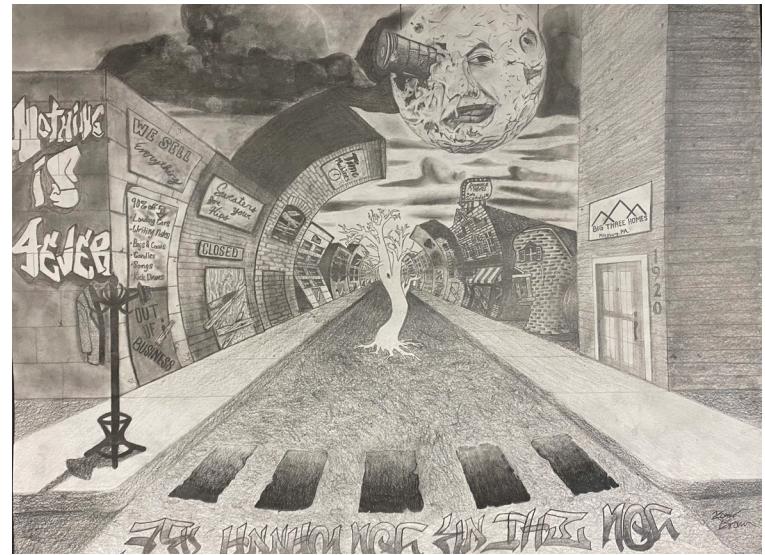


Anumi Wickramasinghe, Class of '22

The Land That Never Existed

Emily Davolt, Class of '22

I believe I am floating away,
 Take me far from here,
 To the Land of silky words and
 Laughing flowers,
 Where it snows while warm
 And where nature blooms,
 Let me sit and wait
 For something new,
 The new will ask for a dance,
 And we will waltz off to the Land,
 To the Land of wispy clouds,
 Where pretty women's wings
 Grow long and elegant,
 And where the children's tears never flow,
 I want to see the Land,
 The Land That Never Existed.



Konner Brown, Class of '21

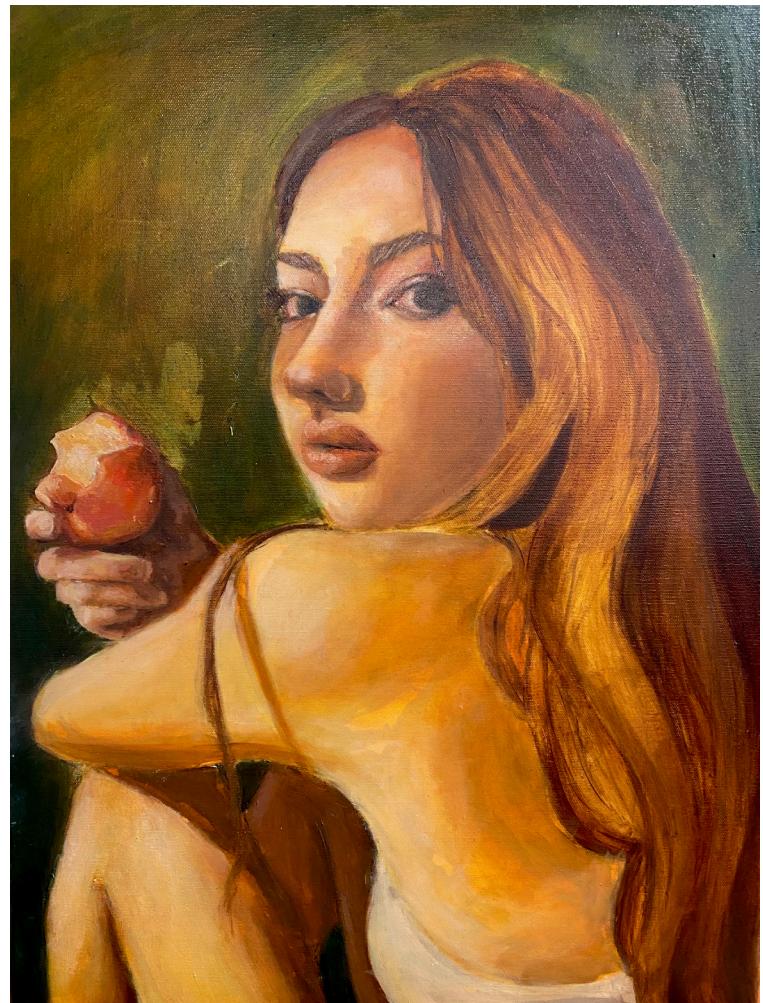
Greek Tragedy

Kassidy Haggard, Class of '22

All I know is that I bleed like you,
thick and crimson and sticky with life.
When I'm crying I know it's futile,
you'll never see the pain and regret
etched in the planes of my face—
the lines of which are so aggravated and obfuscating
an artist would render herself insane trying to mirror them—
you'll only feel the knife lodged between your ribs,
hastily lain there by your own hands.

I imagine those reposeful hands shook like leaves in a greedy
wind
at my lifeless (but not dead) form
as death took hold and guided you to your self-destruction.
Because of your misadventure
I'll only feel the blood at my wrists,
the wounds so cerise and bright as my life
pours and splashes against the floor,
smearing my pale funeral dress,
blackening your shirt.

Candles flicker around us,
fire angrily gnawing at their wicks.
My father lit them between silent tears
as my mother tore her hair out in the next room.
They feel so warm but I'm still so cold--
I fall against your chest and the red mats in my hair.
As I breathe in your scent one last time
the room blurs like it did when we drank all your mother's wine
It's rust tinged and deathly sweet.



Reagan Ptacek, Class of '22

The Solemn Slinker

Isabelle Walker, Class of '20

Circling the island,
The nor' eastern grumbles
And collapses about itself
Crashing upon an old shore.

A frail ghost

Slinks across the sand,

Making a home

Inside a willow tree.

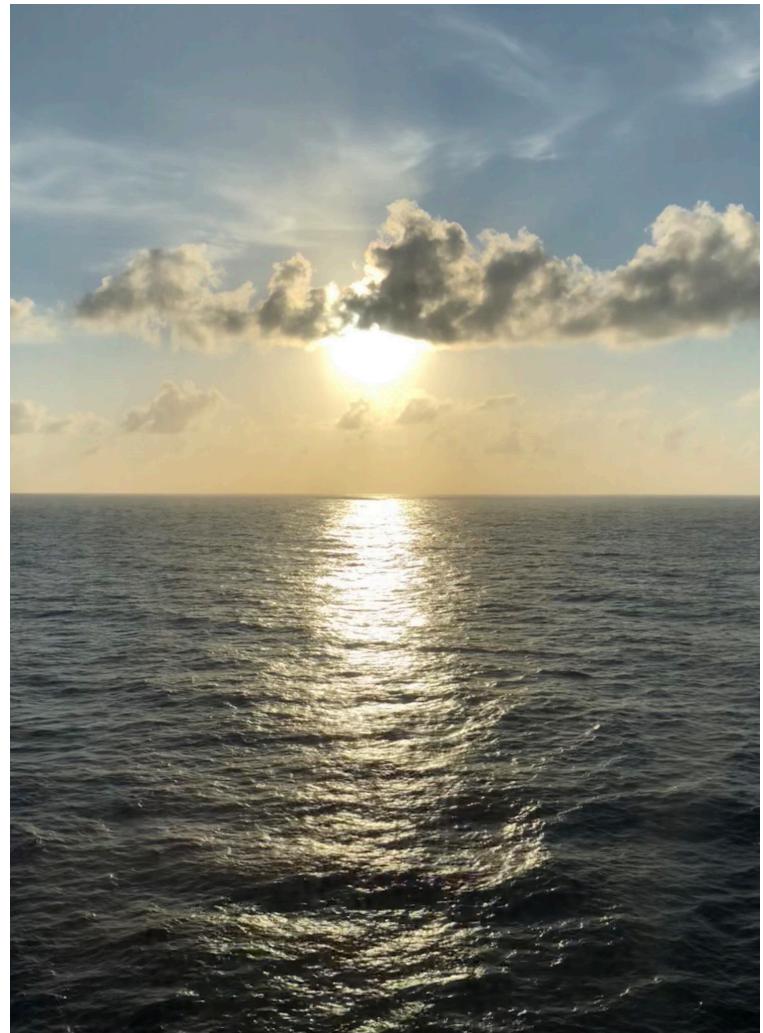
It feasts

On a product of curiosity

And carelessness,

Basted in sky tears.

The solemn slinker
Sinks his teeth
Into warm sparkling blood
Spilling from a tepid hide.



Madylene Mclemore, Class of '21

V-Day Poem for the Masses

Cammy Bowlin, Class of '20

He was my gravy
But I wasn't
His biscuit



Chloe Bracht, Class of '22

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BWHS English and Fine Arts Departments - Thank you for cultivating a love for the arts and a belief in the world-changing power of words.

Library Staff - Thank you for your endless support of our publication. Between encouraging students to submit writing, providing materials and space for us to make signs and banners, and giving us a safe place to go and talk about the books we love, you do it all. This building would not be the same without you.

Once Upon a Time Books - Thank you for your belief in our young program and for giving us a platform in the community. We can't wait to see where this partnership will lead.

BWHS and BPS Administration - Thank you for valuing and supporting our program. We look forward to representing our community for many years to come.

Students of West - This publication is created by you and for you. We are quite literally nothing without you. Thank you for trusting us with the pieces into which you pour your hearts and souls.

Editorial Policy

Many pieces were submitted to the BWHS literary magazine staff for consideration in this publication. Those pieces were anonymously reviewed and then either accepted or rejected through class discussion and democratic process. Submissions were accepted on merit of literary technique, individual style, and richness of language. Accepted pieces were then sent through a final stage of editorial review, during which editors specific to the medium of the piece conducted a final review. Pieces were minorly edited for grammatical errors and either rejected or sent to final publication. All edits were conducted with the highest care to preserve the authenticity of the original work. As much as possible, we showcase one original work per page in an effort to expand and enhance the experience of encountering each piece.

We do not plagiarize.

We value the power of language. As such, we believe that when profane language is not used for gratuitous effect but rather to enrich authentic expression, it has literary merit and therefore belongs in a magazine celebrating artistic endeavors.

The ideas and views published in this magazine do not represent the ideas and views of the Bentonville West High School student body, the BWHS administration, or Bentonville Schools.

“I sound my barbaric yawp
over the roofs of the world.”

- Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself, 52”

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