



YAWP bentonville west
vol. 5 - 2023-24



Yawp

Volume 5

2023-24

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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Editor's Notes

Writing is a descent into the self. In the midst of creativity, we look deep inside ourselves and build stories from bits and pieces of our own feelings, interests, and experiences. We become lost in the depths of the worlds we write, and we process our reality along the way. We begin to understand ourselves, and more clearly see our personal truth.

Before I joined the Yawp Literary Magazine staff, I hadn't truly considered myself a writer. I wrote quite a bit, but I was far too anxious about being rejected to ever submit my work, so I remained isolated. I struggled to find my place within the organization, jumping from role to role and never really feeling like I fit.

When I found my way to reviewing student work, I discovered a new passion. My writing improved drastically, and I finally grew brave enough to submit my own writing. I absorbed everything I could from each session of review, picking apart each piece and understanding the elements that made each one great. I sat in burning embarrassment as my own pieces were picked apart, hoping none of my peers would notice my reddening, anxious face. I learned to shamelessly borrow-- words, voices, styles, structures-- and my writing became an endless game of dress-up through imitation. I began finishing things, and even more bizarrely, I started to like my own writing.

As I descended further into my writing, I found pieces of myself each time I wrote. I learned from each voice I tried on. I began to have faith in my ability to grow; it wasn't until I had reached the depths of my imagination that I could allow myself to relish in my abilities, and write confidently. Without Yawp, I would not have descended into my mind and defined myself as a writer.

- Dani Hunter, Co-Editor-In-Chief, Vol. 5

Each piece contained within the Yawp Literary Magazine tells a story. One that you as a reader will uniquely interpret based upon the skills that the creator uses in their respective works, and your personal experiences. In this volume, you will come into contact with a variety of different stories. Some might prompt you to laugh, others may bring about reflection, and others shock and disgust.

Yet despite the variety of pieces, each story holds its own value. By allowing us to engage with truths that we are not able to in our daily lives, we can deepen our understanding and perspectives of the world. We can observe multifaceted aspects of human culture, and step into lives different from our own.

To me, that ability will always be the most beautiful part of writing. As you flip through the pages of this year's volume, "Descent," I ask that you fully succumb to the stories that you encounter. Let yourself sit within the pieces, and truly experience each. Reflect among the ones that bring you the most feeling, for those you can gather the most from.

- Summer Gross, Co-Editor-In-Chief, Vol. 5

Descent [də'sent]:
an action of moving downward,
dropping,
or falling.

The Volume 5 staff earnestly hopes you will allow yourself to descend through the pages in this year's collection. Journey through each of the individual sections, from the warm, loving peaks to the heart-wrenching depths of the abyss. This journey acts as a showcase of the creativity of students at Bentonville West High School, displaying a full spectrum of splendor and anguish; be sure to soak up the details of each piece of writing and art, and enjoy the fall.

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Peak

Here I stand, at the peak
Of human thoughts
And emotions

Here I stand
On solid ground

The truth of life
Welling up
Before the fall

- Carter Wayne Greenfield, Poetry Lead, Vol. 5

Apricot Seeds

Kris Hanson, Class of '24

The following piece includes themes/depictions of: Religious trauma, abuse, and homophobia. Please consider skipping this piece if you find these topics especially upsetting.

Do you remember your father's yacht? Golden rails blinding eyes, not a speck on those polished floors. The 18th-century paintings your father liked to brag about- as if he understood a thing about allusions and finding real meaning. The pristine windows, the ones he paid for with the money he made preaching a book to a crowd of aimless people. I'd never seen a million-dollar boat before I got that job, and I couldn't fathom spending that much money on something so trivial.

I used to wander the halls when he wasn't watching and pretend it was mine. I could almost see us, Me and Mami sitting at the table that was never used. The only problem with the picture was us - the rips in my jeans and the holes in Mami's dresses could never amount to the polos and the slacks that were meant to be worn in it.

Do you remember how we met? Me, on my hands and knees, yellow oversized gloves and a metal bucket of soap, and you, with your violet corduroy sweater, the undertones coloring your cheeks pink. Maybe it was different for me because my father wasn't a God-fearing priest and I didn't have people expecting things I couldn't give, but the day I saw you I thought: I want him to want me.

I didn't find out until later that you thought the same thing, despite the way you acted.



You didn't know it at the time, but we went to the same summer school. We didn't see each other there because your friends were different from my friends, but I was embarrassed when you saw me working. The thought of you seeing me and knowing I put myself so below someone, on my hands and knees - I didn't have much of a choice, but that was another thing you didn't know. Mami needed the money because rent had gone up and even though she never said aloud how bad we were struggling, the eviction notices she tried to hide told me enough.

I worked nearly every day for countless hours, scrubbing nonexistent dirt spots and tennis shoe markings. You would read in the rooms I washed, which you claimed to be a coincidence when I got the nerve to ask. Something about the view changing depending on where you were sitting in the boat. I might've believed you if you weren't reading upside down.

Those long, hot months were all I needed.

That was the summer that we met. The summer that you kissed me. Do you remember?

Your father put me wherever I was useful, and the sun's heat burned like the fire God made rain down. I was supposed to be picking out rotted apricots from the trees lining your front yard. They were beautiful, with their heart-shaped laurel green leaves smooth and bright in the light, the thin barks and roots that twisted at the bottom. Your father said they were strictly for decoration, not to be eaten, but you, in the way you always did, defied him anyway.

I'd pick out the brightest, cleanest apricots and toss them down for you from the top of the ladder. I'd watch you bite into it and wish your mouth was on me instead. Your Adam's apple bobbed and you grinned up at me, sweet juice and fruit in your teeth.



When I was done, I had a basket full of barely-rotting fruit Mami would've loved to make a pie into. You grabbed my head when I reached for it and pushed me against the apricot tree's trunk, the one hidden from the view of the windows. The sun had darkened your skin and you were close enough that I could count your freckles. You whispered boys don't kiss boys and bit my lip until I bled.

Every time I kissed you that summer, I could taste the sweet, sticky juice of apricots.

Those peaches weren't the only thing we took. We stole every moment we could, sneaking around together as if we had any clue about anything. I lived on the other side of town, but that didn't stop me from pushing my bike up the hill leading to yours each night.

I threw rocks at your window until you got annoyed enough to come outside. You whisper-shouted at me from across your seemingly acres-long lawn, over the open window of your living room, where nothing was out of place, including your father – fresh-pressed, tailored suit, careful comover, not a hair out of place, perfect posture. I could see him on the phone, back to the window of a room with a pool table.

You told me I was stupid for being so risky, you told me your father meant more to you than I did, but then you slid yourself through the sliver in the window and slid along the gutters in a way that made my heart ricochet, and you carefully stumbled across the lawn, avoiding the cameras. You were clumsy but knew exactly where to go, and I wondered how many boys you kissed not fifty feet away from your father's eyesight.

We whispered secrets into the night that were so deep and dark, that I thought it'd swallow me whole. You showed me



constellations and told me their stories. My hands were cold when they interlocked with yours, but I didn't mind because you were warm enough for the both of us.

I didn't tell you then what I thought of us, how I believed that we were more than us. I thought we were written in the stars above us, rooted in the apricot trees in your front yard, something predetermined.

I believed I could trace my origins back generations and still find evidence of us. My Mami's Mami's must've hand-planted the seeds of us while growing a new generation full of hope. Her weathered hands, scarred with stories of brittle hope and despair, didn't shake once as she gave my family the strength to fight for our right to be American citizens. She had a backbone of steel and a faith of unwavering intensity. I believed she was the one strong enough to sow the seeds of us amidst the growth of a new generation.

Your journey had followed a different path, one I could never understand. Born into wealth and privilege, your story unfolded against a backdrop of a certain kind of guaranteed security. The prosperity you grew up around shielded you from the harsh realities of my world. The struggles I faced were things you never even thought about. You've had a trust fund since before you were born, sitting in some first bank that your grandfather worked at. Your private school tie compliments the gold watch on your wrist. The closest I've ever gotten to that kind of luxury was being at your house.

The tapestry of us was woven with contrasting hues that never looked quite right together. You introduced me to a new kind of life, the kind where privilege was untouched by the hardships of those like me.



That night, as I imagined a universe where you and I were the same, the very thing that tore us apart had to come and ruin it all. Do you remember when your father found us there? Do you remember his Bible? His gospel? When he found us together and saw the hickey on your neck and seemed to forget that we were children. No child of mine; you are no child of mine. Our love was a sin, an obvious stain on the bottom of his shoe that he had to get rid of. He was shouting then, looking at us like lambs lined up for slaughter, breaking his carefully constructed appearance in front of the company of the one that dared touch his son. His spit wet the real leather of his Bible's cover and I prayed it would ruin it.

He didn't stop us. You never let him. You told me he wouldn't get between us, that you'd find a way no matter the cost.

You could've been your father, but you were better than that. You had more in you than that. You made me your everything and I did the same for you. Those long, hazy days grew to be the best I've ever known. Secrecy blanketed us and, in the fear of gambling our love with each time it grew, there was a giddiness to the way we had to break rules to see each other. It felt real and infinite.

I might've been lulled to believe we could've been forever, but there were shadows lurking in the corners of our world. Shadows cast by expectations and judgments, by the weight of our differences. As much as it felt like it was only the two of us against the world, we knew better. Your father's eyes weren't the only ones we had to hide from.

That summer, we thought the summer camp we both went to was a safe place in a world full of your fathers. You found soccer and I found you and even though we were still hiding, it didn't feel like I had to be somebody I wasn't.

You took me to your school's first game and I felt like a stranger in my own skin. I didn't fit in there, anyone could see, but you paid for my ticket at the entrance and pressed your hands into mine before we were separated and, for a moment, their drilling stares didn't matter.

Do you remember that night? I watched groups of boys filter out of the locker rooms like herds of cows, just as broad-shouldered and dumb, anxiously waiting for you to come back to me as you changed out of your soccer uniform. The stands were empty by the time I finally saw you.

One of your teammates, too ignorant for his own good, pushed past us with a comment I didn't hear. It didn't stop you from pulling away from me – I shivered as the wind blew – and slamming him against the ticket booth. It didn't stop him from getting in the first punch and the fight that followed.

When you two were separated by the coach, you spit the blood out of your mouth like you were proud.

When everyone had left, you held your arms out like Jesus on the cross. I held onto you like one of his followers, too scared to ask what his teammate had said. You kissed me on the field, and I tried to make a permanent imprint in the grass. I lost track of how often I pressed the bruise on your cheek that night, but I listened to you apologize each time.

Did you know it wasn't your fault? What they did to you, to us, was something you had no part of. You were better than that. You had more in you than that. I knew that. I'm not sure you did.

Maybe that was the beginning of the end. When your father fired me and you were kicked off the team, things between us never



quite went back to the way it was before. When we let them get in the way of us, despite our promises. You'd never say it, but I knew the universes separating me and you were too large. The story we managed to weave together twisted until it was pulled too taut and began fraying. I watched it unravel faster than we created it.

With you, love had tasted like apricots, like sneaking out under the canopy of stars that we believed protected us, like the summer camp that served as our sanctuary.

Now, as I look back, I can still feel the echo of our love. I can still feel you. I can taste you lingering. I can feel the roughness of the yacht's wooden floor. I can feel the tree bark digging into my back. I can feel the damp grass. I can look over and still see you, a violet corduroy sweater and pink cheeks. The ghost of us haunts the spaces between you and me, reminding me of what we once had.

In those fleeting moments, I remember what it was like to be with you; a glimmer of hope in a world that seems determined to tear people like us apart. In those fleeting moments, I find redemption.



If You Were the Wind

Kylin Ortego

If you were the wind
I wouldn't go inside
I wouldn't put on a jacket
I'd stand in the middle of you
Enjoying your soft breezes and your whirling tornadoes
Even if you'd blow me away

I'd stay



Carolina Locust

Dani Hunter, Class of '24

My face is sticky with sweat as I work under the suffocating August sun,
carrying feed bags to the coop with heavy stomps sending the rusty orange hens into a frenzy.

The sun is so furious that it commands my eyes closed and leaves the whole sky bleached,
the long grass at the edge of the yard scattering dry seeds in the hot wind.

The hens are forced to find salvation in the shady gap underneath the rickety raised coop floor
and the dusty patch of rocky dirt underneath it.

The heat is unforgiving,
but within it, I find one of the greatest pleasures of summer:
in the hottest peak of the afternoon,
a swarm of Carolina Locusts find themselves sunning on the steep, grassy hill.

They are invisible until I place one foot at the edge of the hill;
then their performance begins.

The swarm of locusts jump in ripples from my feet,
creating an avalanche of flickering, dark flight.
They fly into their half-moon cascades of black and brown
fringed with white,
their wings like swishing skirts in a dance under the unbearable beat of the sun.

They scatter and disappear as they land a few feet away,
blending into the dusty green grass.



But with another step they make themselves known once again,
a symphony of hums and buzzes rushing away from where I stand.

Your beauty is recognized by few,
but I am spellbound with each step down the hill.

Autumn Leaves

Jas Moy

Zoya always came to appreciate the coming of autumn. For much of the year, her world seemed to move too fast, but everything slowed as she sensed the physical changes taking shape around her. In her eyes, the world had transformed from monotonous summer greens to delicate shades reminiscent of the sunset. The colors engulfed the world in a nostalgic warmth, and finally, she felt at peace. During this transitional period between summer and winter, Zoya took the time to rehabilitate her soul. While she preferred to keep to herself, especially outside of work, she found beauty in walking down the busy city streets and observing the life blossom around her. Just around dusk, she left the confines of her stuffy apartment in search of adventure. Her favorite time of day was when the street lamps were on, but the city was still bustling.

The smell of sugar and spices overwhelmed her nose as she walked along the various storefronts showcasing seasonal items. Zoya couldn't comprehend how people could create diverse products from the same ideas and ingredients. She gazed through the well-lit café windows as she readjusted her jacket. People were sipping on coffee, completing books they couldn't find the time to read, talking with friends, and typing on laptops. Although they were merely strangers, Zoya felt a personal connection with all of them.

After deciding against visiting a café, she passed a toy store, observing the bright faces of children cradling dolls in their arms and picking out Halloween costumes. When she was a little girl, this single stretch of road was always known as a paradise for children.

She recalled her childhood, and a smile crept onto her lips. But just for a moment. She deeply missed those rare moments when she got along with her parents. Her most

treasured memories involved rushing on her jacket after Namaz so they could travel to the city and pick out anything she wanted. Unlike her peers, her favorite places were a bookstore and a candle shop. Once they returned home, her mother gave her treats from their neighbors, like chocolate babka or bastani sonnati.

Zoya didn't realize she had been lost in her thoughts until she approached a nearby park. Dried leaves danced across her field of vision, some coming close enough to graze the tip of her nose. She glanced towards the ground. The leaves were steadily piling up, leaving the trees bare and the grass below a blur of color. She kicked at the piles of leaves, eliciting a few giggles from children nearby. One child, a little girl who looked oddly similar to Zoya, ran to her with a bouquet of orange leaves. She ignored the protests from her parents as she flung them above her head and twirled in circles as they fell. Zoya laughed alongside the child, feeling genuine happiness. She wondered if this was how her parents felt around her, even when they struggled to show it.

After the girl reunited with her family, Zoya sat on one of the empty park benches. In her 20 years of existence, she never conceptualized why everything seemed simple this time of year. The darkness of the sky, the glistening stars, the gentle chill in the air, and the glow of the streetlamps never felt more natural. More fulfilling.

She wished every night could feel like this.

Glossary:

Namaz: Persian word for salah, or Islamic prayer

Babka: braided sweet bread originating from Ashkenazi Jews in Poland and Ukraine

Bastani sonnati: Persian ice cream made from milk, sugar, eggs, rose water, saffron, vanilla, and pistachios





"Warm Afternoons" - Dani Hunter, Class of '24



First Date

Sophie Williams Richmond, Class of '25

Our first date happened in your backyard, on a muggy August afternoon. You invited me to play after lunch, hiding leftover sandwich crusts and a smushed juice box in your back pocket to share with me, knowing that I never had enough to eat. We crawled into that plastic playhouse that had been in the same spot since either of us could remember. It was far too small to hold us, but I didn't mind being squished against you, even flushed and sweaty from the heat. I ate my meal while you pushed up my jeans and drew on my leg with a ballpoint pen; stars and flowers and smiley faces. But mostly, you drew hearts. I told you that, one day, I'd let you tattoo all over me. You said I was ridiculous.

The playhouse was thoroughly infested with spiders, wisps of web filling each corner and getting stuck in our hair. I quite liked the pests, letting them crawl across my shoulders and down my arms. But I knew you were afraid, so I plucked them away each time one got too close to you. When you called me your hero, I swore in my head that I would kill every spider in the country if you asked. But, really, I just called you a fraidy-cat.

You offered to braid my hair, saying you had been practicing on your dolls. I let you, of course. I don't think I could've ever said no to you. Especially when all you wanted was to run your nails down my scalp, gently fingering out the knots and tangles I could never get myself, folding over pieces of my hair for a large, messy braid. You began to talk about your last soccer practice, but I could barely hear. Your voice was so close to my ear, breath grazing my neck. Prickly goosebumps invaded my skin. When you finished, you told me that it was pretty. No, actually, you said I was pretty. My face became feverishly hot and all I could do was squeak out a thank you. Either for the hairstyle or for the compliment, but it really didn't matter.



I peeked out the window, seeing the sun had approached west far sooner than I wanted. It'd be dinnertime soon, for the both of us. We'd have to leave. And our date would end. My heart felt like a shaken-up soda can; fizzy and about to explode. I wanted to stay in the playhouse with you forever, no matter how much I cramped. My eyes came to meet yours in a bittersweet staring contest. You placed your hands in mine, inching so close our noses nearly touched.

"Do you love me?" You asked.

I swallowed. Just yesterday, I had plucked off the petals of a flower whilst chanting, 'She loves me, she loves me not', thinking of you the entire time. But the word weighed much heavier when I was practically counting your freckles. I wasn't sure if I was allowed to love you. Even though I often fell asleep in church, I knew that the pastor said God created love so that man and woman would be joined within flesh, or something like that. I knew that Dad hated it, hated me, when I spent too long watching shampoo commercials filled with pretty ladies, or when my brother let me wear his clothes. I knew how loudly he yelled when you and I spent more and more time together, how we had to hide away in bug-filled playhouses so no one could see our faces get so close. Love seemed to be for husbands and wives, princes and princesses, mommies and daddies. Not for me and you.

I tried to open my mouth, full of excuses, but my lips bumped against yours. And then they more than bumped; our lips kissed. For just a few seconds, we were completely connected. I couldn't breathe and I didn't want to. I squeezed the fabric of my shirt in a hard fist, your glasses pressing uncomfortably against my face. My soda can of a heart finally burst, the cola filling my chest was tingly and sweet. But something felt...off. I pulled away from you, startled that something was clinking around in my mouth. I spit into my palm, finding a single, bloody tooth.

We howled with laughter. Your very last baby tooth



had become loose just earlier that week when you took a hard fall straight onto the pavement during an intense game of tag. And apparently, it was just loose enough to fall straight into my mouth when we kissed. You threw your head back, smiling wide with a brand-new gap in your teeth. I cackled so hard that I almost cried. It wasn't long until I heard my mother yelling for me to come home, the sky now glowing orange. I crawled out of our playhouse, still snickering, still clutching onto your tooth. You asked if you'd see me at school tomorrow, popping your head out of the tiny doorway, and I said of course. As I trotted back into my own house, Mom asked what was so funny. I told her that she wouldn't get it.

We haven't talked in a while, I guess. It wasn't purposeful, our falling out, but the drift happened nonetheless. I'm still thinking of getting my leg tattooed with hearts. I still tolerate the spiders that hide in the corners of my room. I still wear my hair in a braid almost every day now. And I still have your very last baby tooth, rolling it in between the pads of my fingers while I stare at the ceiling. You were the first person I loved. Not my favorite, not the best. But the very first. I think you taught me how to love. Or, at the very least, how wonderful love could feel. I smile, thinking fondly of our first date.



I tried to write you something, but I had a Reese's in my mouth and you were smiling so big, I got distracted.

Kris Hanson, Class of '24



"Crystallized Affection" - Piper Gilchrist

You looked at me with softened almond eyes, corners wrinkled up in the way only smile lines can. Your eyes always reminded me of those sour apple rings – sugary on the outside, sour on the inside. I think if the only person you were ever kind to was me, that would be the motivation I need to stay on earth.

Your twizzler red lips curled into a smile, chewy rope tilted up. I thought if I leaned over and kissed you, it would be entirely too sweet. I've never liked Twizzlers, but I'd eat them every day if it meant just one moment with you.

Your laugh is unabashed and loud, the savory butter to your smile's maple syrup. Cozy, warm, and confectionary, I think I could drown in your presence if you weren't my anchor.

Freckles span across your skin like they could tell a future of us. You and me, me and you. Maybe laughing at something stupid I said. Maybe sharing a bowl of candy. I always thought they were too sweet, but it's okay – it's the perfect excuse to give you half anyway.





"Wal-Mart Cookie" - Emily Fevold



Summer Storms

Dani Hunter, Class of '24

Lately, I've found myself craving a perfect summer thunderstorm.

I want a storm that looms in the distant Western sky,
with clouds all gray and lavender and morose, waiting to explode
with thunder.

An early-afternoon shower strikes with slow, plump droplets
potent with the sweet smell of petrichor.

I can still feel the heat of sun-bleached, wet asphalt beneath my
bare feet.

my nose is smothered by the earthy, humid air as the water
evaporates.

I want to feel the rush of running inside as the wind becomes
brutal,

and the droplets of rain become heavy and harsh.

I skim shallow puddles with tiptoes,
sending little misty sparks flying across the driveway.
As I watch from indoors, my hair soaked and dripping,
the furious wind throws rain droplets horizontally
in its attempt to uproot the trees.

I want to watch the haze of heavy rain move out into the
distance,

leaving only humidity and the occasional rainbow in the
aftermath of nature's fury.

Fulfilled in the wrath of its rainfall, the storm moves on.
I draw the cool air into the depths of my lungs,
and revel in the way life runs refreshed through my veins.





"My Chimera" - Dani Hunter, Class of '24



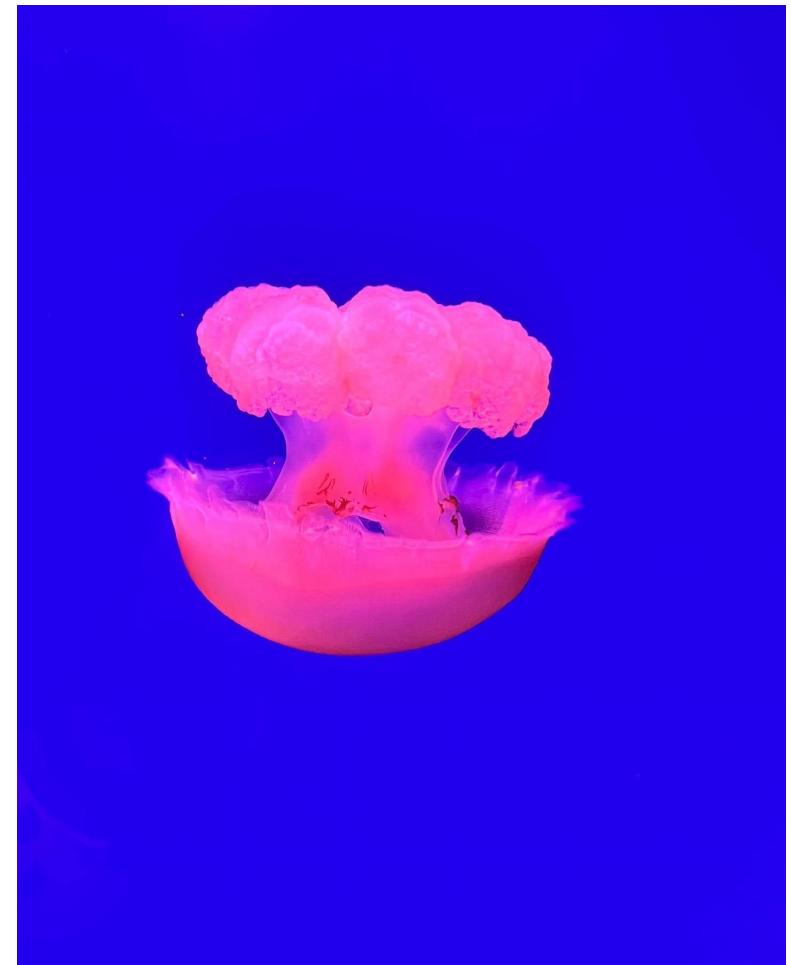
"Orange Koi" - Emily Fevold, Class of '25



ojos del océano

Logan Garrison

Me encantan tus ojos azules,
Reflejan la creación de Dios de los océanos y de los cielos.
Veo la belleza de su creación en tus ojos.
Veo cómo fuiste creado exactamente como Él quería que fueras.
Sé que no eres perfecto, porque nadie lo es.
Pero eres lo más cercano que encontraré.



"Jellyfish" - Piper Gilchrist



Solace

Summer Gross, Class of '24

It was early. The buttcrack of dawn to be exact; the type of early where the only people awake are either just now coming down from a night out, or those weird psychopaths who somehow enjoy waking up before the sunrise. Personally, I much preferred the first option: staying up late at night, frequently re-reading some of my favorite books. The ones with the worn out pages, pillow soft beneath my fingertips, every line practically imprinted upon them.

Currently however, I was not at home reading, nor bundled up underneath my thirteen throw blankets or my 20 pound ball of fur I like to call my dog/best friend. I was getting ready to go for a run. Why was I going for a run at 4:35 in the morning on a Saturday when I could be doing a plethora of other, much more enjoyable activities? Well, that's a pretty darn good question. And one that I don't have an answer to.

Growing up, I *hated* running. The pacer test was my worst nightmare in middle school. As someone on the "chubbier side" those tests felt like a cruel joke, a reminder of my physical shortcomings broadcasted to the whole class. Even as I got older, lost some weight, and got into basketball, I still abhorred it. I mean, who in their right mind enjoys something called "suicides" for conditioning?

Despite my aversion, there I stood, surrounded by the hushed beauty of the early morning. I laced up one of my six pairs of hokas, doing these funny little leg swings, some walking lateral squats with an elastic band, and wearing some overpriced workout clothes. As I looked around the virtually empty parking lot of the local trail, the few others I saw offered warm smiles and greetings. The still dark sky cloaked the greenery of the hills, but I could faintly hear the little creek sifting through the forest floor beside me.



And so, with nothing but the rhythm of my own breath and the whisper of my footsteps for company, I set out through the misty air. The first ten minutes were always the toughest. It took me a moment to find my groove, for each stride to feel seamless, for my lungs to adapt and perfuse greater amounts of oxygen throughout my body. I reminded myself of the distance, not letting my pace start off too-quick, and felt my mind mentally settle in. Content to let my body do the work, my mind was free to rest for a minute.

After a couple of miles, cataloging the different turns I took, I felt the familiar feeling of tightness creeping into my legs. Instead of stopping, I pushed through it. The ache and tenderness were signs of progress. I welcomed it, let the pain crinkle its way into my arms, calves, thighs, hamstrings. Gradually getting faster my lungs began to burn, and somewhere in my brain endorphins were released. The unique combination of serotonin and dopamine flooded throughout my brain.

The rush of feeling propelled me forward, a primal sense of focused excitement took over my brain. A soft hum that washed away insecurities, doubts, stress. I felt the vibration flow down to my body, and the rest of the run I didn't have one coherent thought. Not about my grades, my weight, money, my place within my peers, or boys. Everything was quiet. My breath engulfed my ear drums, and eventually the feeling began to fade.

As it did, the tiredness of my body sat in, and I knew to gently pull to a stop. Breathing hard, my legs slightly shaking, I looked around at the parking lot where I started. More runners were out, more bikers, and other strollers. The sun had just begun to rise and spread its light over the viridescent leaves. I felt accomplished, proud. I thought back to that little girl, wondering what she would think.



Interconnected: Nature and the Human Experience

Avery Prince

In the human experience, there lies a profound yet often overlooked bond between the essence of nature and the structure of our lives. Have you ever stopped to admire the lines on a leaf that look like the veins in our bodies? Nature and the life experience are connected all around. Our lives go through seasons of pain, defeat, blossoming growth, and moments of vibrant flourish: nature does the same.

Imagine a young plant peeking out of the ground, just as we start out in life—wobbly but full of potential. As nature's seasons change, so do the phases of our lives, coming face to face with challenges that test our resilience. When a leaf falls, it can remind us of our own experiences with endings and change.

But nature also teaches us perseverance. When the leaves fall off in preparation for winter, nature always knows that rebirth awaits ahead in the spring. Like the vibrant colors of the season, our own moments of starting fresh reflect this prosperous moment in nature. A small plant reaching for the sun reflects our desire to reach for more. The determination of a flower breaking through the cement to grow mirrors our own strength in overcoming hardships.

There's a natural rhythm that connects us to the world around us. Recognizing how closely linked our lives are to nature gives us a deeper understanding. We aren't just observers of nature; we're woven into the creation of the universe. And in realizing this, we find inspiration, a sense of belonging, and a reminder of our interconnectedness.

In the quietness of nature, in the sway of branches, and the songs of birds, there's an invitation—to observe, to learn, and to embrace the beautiful connection that shapes our lives. Frequently, amidst the hustle of daily life, we forget that true

remedies and therapies can lie in observing what was put here before us. In nature's seasons, we not only see life's beauty but also find the guidance to grow and thrive in the journey of life. Understanding this truth creates simplicity around finding comfort and wisdom in the world around us.





"Embracing the Colors of Mother Nature" - Frida Hernandez



Hues of Her

Joseph Hanna

My sky shines with the colors of all the stars. The hues of rose red and bright bumblebee yellow fall through the cracks of the sun's barriers. I see them crumble away to the ground where it coats my hands to the very pores of my skin. I feel the tinges of tangerine orange to tufts blue float beneath my surface, shining through the wounds left behind by surgeries not so long removed. The sensation of stitches still holding gashes in place sends shivers down my spine. I sit beside my lover, holding her hand with the same passion I held on our wedding day, a reminder of the vow of affection I made all those years ago. I remember the way her hair held so many shades of brown, flowing along the light breeze as our loved ones witnessed our holy matrimony. Yet now her hair only shows off the spectrum of gray and rough sensation it gives to my fidgeting fingers, a sign of the many years since that day still so vivid despite the passing of time. As I stare at her own scars and notches, I see her beauty as blinding as the setting sun, imprinting into my vision when I try to look away. Her eyes still shine with that same determination to thrive despite our many barriers built up by barred issues. We stood the test of time and found our way through the maze, but now find ourselves unwilling to leave its warm embrace.

As I'm watching, I dream of more time with her, and yet I know this has to be our last day together. I can feel my body weakening, taking down my ability to remember all the ways in which we were in love. The ways in which we held onto each other all throughout the night, surrounded by shadows of silver reflecting off the windchimes we hung up to add our own sound to the quiet. Those days when we would talk in circles about events we both attended, sharing new perspectives and ideas we'd heard a thousand times before, holding every second like glistening glass, one slight away from flying off to our gentle gray



tiles. All I should be thinking about right now is the pain growing inside of me, ascending upwards as myself will soon move. My death, as did my birth, has a due date, and it just so happens to be today. Yet all I can think of is how her face gazes upon mine with such careful affection. An affection I have nothing to earn. She has held my mind together while I unraveled hers out of sheer compulsion. My boorish and blunt attitude has made her upset more times than I can count, and yet, here she sits beside me despite my shortcomings. I shall soon be born again into stardust, scattered across the gardens we have so meticulously maintained, sacrificing our softness for blooming blossoms. I see the Dartmouth green stalks attached to flower blooms that will grow from my ashes, bringing her the last part of myself that I can give.

I used to gather them with her guiding hand moving me through each moment. We would sway along with the wind for hours, floating through fields of flowers, chasing our never-ending love for hours. I wish I hadn't been so tough on their stems, clumsily pulling out all their roots as life does to me now.

I wish I could have given her the world, but all I could afford were these few acres in the countryside, a long ways from which we grew up. I can trace my finger along the path of a map to show how far we've come, shying away from bustling cities and fairing instead for the loud quiet that we could love for eternity. The crickets sang above the hum of the night, crowding out the spaces where birds once sounded their song some hours prior. Listening to the last bustling creatures bumping around to find home as we once had to do when we were younger and less astute to the importance of stability. We used to move like broken records, running through the same grooves over and over until we finally broke loose and discovered that life is about grace. We found the grace in sitting still, saying nothing at all. We knew the grace of knowing when and who to call. All our lives we were entangled: on tree branches, in blankets, across the cold floors, and through the soft glimmering grass of the fiends. She always

thought it was enough, and I know that at the end of the day, it was, but only for me.

I remember in the week we found out that my life was nearing its end and we held onto one another and cried until at last, we had to pry ourselves off of one another to find our new definition of love. It was turning gray, ashen and could crumble at the slightest touch. All we hoped for was one another. Yet somehow, I couldn't provide that either. We learned that our love of going monotone didn't mean that we had to forgo our weekly game nights or Christmas dinners. The only difference, it seemed, was that the colors were less vivid. We sit now, hand in hand, against the blooming essence of the universe surrounding our insignificant bodies. It's the last day the sun will shine this bright, the crickets will be this loud. It's the last day I get to experience much of anything at all. I hold her hand, feeling my breath hitch deep in my throat as my oxygen levels decline. I see tears well in her darkened eyes, swirled with hues of bright blue and green, a charming blend of the only world I hope to see. My thoughts of love echo into my vision as my eyes doze, leading me to the primrose we planted along in dozens of rows. Their petal's lives are soon to come to a close, feathering the same surface I will soon lay down.

Yet, I most curiously notice that the spot in the sky I so traditionally stare at to try and contain the overwhelming beauty in front of me is moving in reverse. I feel my oxygen bubble up once again, through my tank and into my tubes. I feel our hands, solid atop the bench where we rest. I watch the overwhelming speed of time going back, faster and faster, till my sight can't catch up.

All those curious little thoughts of regret I so dutifully held back into the depths of my brain come bouncing out of hiding as I realize what has happened. I'm standing in front of a young woman as a young man. Her eyes holding that same shine with that determination to thrive. I'm getting to love her, all over again.



In the OR's Embrace

Summer Gross

In the sterile theater of hushed expectancy
 Where life's crossroads converge, I stood,
 Observing incisions and precision,
 In a world of white coats and masked intent.

The hum of machinery, the scent of antiseptic,
 As time slowed in that surgical cathedral,
 Nervous hands, trembling with anticipation,
 I watched the surgeon's craft, a sacred ritual.

Each incision, each suture, a delicate dance,
 In the realm of death, an intricate chance.
 The fragility of life, the strength of human will,
 In the OR that day, time stood still.

The symphony of science, compassion, and art.
 The stress of witnessing, the birth of a scar.
 I did not think I would so deeply feel,
 The weight of a beating, human heart.



One Eye, Ten Sheep

Mary McCarty

Easily, mostly, a difficult deed
 I will not deceive. I'll refrain from lie
 The tales I'd tell, if only I could read
 I haven't got one, my favorite eye
 And to the pretty girls, I cannot wink
 When the day ends and I must go to sleep
 I simply close one eye and I blink
 Oh look at it go, I count all eight sheep
 And at a distance I shall count one more
 It brings us a brother, so I count ten
 He says to me something I cannot ignore
 So I'll fail to dream till I find a pen
 Cause I'll need not to know what there's to read
 To write, my dear, I must let my heart bleed.



Hell is Math Class

Sophie Williams-Richmond

The fluorescent lights beam against the clinically white wall,
Buzzing under the noises of scribbling pencils and hushed
chatter.

I focus on the head of cherry-red hair in front of me,
Warding off the insanity I can feel creeping into my skull.
The top and bottom rows of my teeth grind against each other in
a war

In which the only casualty is an aching head.
My foot bounces rhythmically on the linoleum floor,
Out of my control, working by its own mechanics.
Constantly, I am shifting in my seat, adjusting my clothes;
Constantly, I am displeased with the way my body feels.
I am in math class again
And I am miserable.

My eyes wander the room,
And for a moment, I am in complete disbelief:
Humanity really deemed itself the peak of natural intelligence?
A room full of humans,
And we are all slow-blinking, mouth-breathing, nose-wiping,
All trying to disconnect from our environment.
It seems like a joke. A bad one at that.
A voice drawls on with gibberish vocabulary and endless
explanation.
He's the commander of the room and yet,
A guy doing a job, earning a check, just as helpless as us.
I can't help but tune him out.
Rest assured I feel just a little bad doing it.

I finally glance at what I'm here for in the first place,
A piece of paper with mysterious markings.
They mean something, I know they do.
They represent quantities,
Put into sequences,
Dissected with patterns,
If I were to use all my might, I could decipher a solution from it
all,
A solution to a problem that was nonsense in the first place,
And then I would be given more.
It's agonizing,
It's torturous,
It's hell,
It's math class.
My fingers twitch, longing for some sort of violent release of
tension.
Instead, they typed up a poem,
And I spent another day sane.





"Strawberry Jam" - Jordan Rosso



When the Other Shoe Drops

Sophie Williams-Richmond

"Plunk!"

I'm startled by the sound. I am nowhere; an infinite place with absolutely nothing but a hard, smooth, white floor on which I sit. The very same floor that now holds a shoe seemingly dropped from the vast sky for no particular reason. *How odd.* I pick it up; it's a common left-footed sneaker, no recognizable logos and no evidence of wear. Quite a fine shoe. I silently thank the sky for its unexpected gift and place it on my lap, glad to have an accompaniment to join me in my nothingness.

Moments later, another shoe cascades down and promptly strikes me in the head. I'm awfully startled, and sore, by its arrival. Though right-footed, it is identical to its predecessor. However, I am not as happy to receive this shoe. *What an utterly rude entrance it made.* I throw it far from me, watching it **thunk** against the white floor as I gently pet Lefty. Rude shoes will not be tolerated here.

Even stranger, a third! Though from a different set entirely, this shoe is-

Another. Not matching the third shoe at all. In fact, it's a heel that-

Another. And another. And another. **Plunk, thunk, bam, thud!** Several shoes fall straight onto the floor, though thankfully avoiding me. They are completely random and only a few even remotely match each other. I hold my first shoe tightly, frightened by this new plague of shoes upon me. The plummet continues with no signs of slowing down. In fact, it might just be speeding up. They begin to rapidly pile around me. I shove and bat them away desperately. I can no longer see the floor, only hundreds upon hundreds of shoes to try and shuffle through. It soon reaches my knees; I am flooded.

I stumble deeper into the mounds, in shock. What had



happened, moments ago, when I was blissfully enjoying the silence that could have caused this? I still clutch Lefty in my hand, afraid to let go of my first and only companion, however cursed it may be. My arms are lined with bruises from being pelted with so many shoes. They fall by the dozens now, storming down, consuming me. *I am in the center of a pile of shoes. I must swim.*

If you have never swam in shoes, there is no exaggerating how much I do not recommend it. The task is impossible, they are simply too clunky and misshapen to gracefully glide through. I kick and toss them away from me, sliding down and through this horrible jumble. Each time I can make out the expansive, bright sky, it is hidden once again by *more shoes. More shoes.* *More shoes.* My struggle seems fruitless. There is no fighting the onslaught of shoes. There's so many- too many. I can hear blunt **thumps** as they fumble against each other and against me. I close my eyes, holding Lefty close to my heart as I sink deeper into the abundance.

Once, I lived in nothing. Now, I live in shoes.



Pringles Nightmare/Escapade

Eric Morales

Allow me to acknowledge, *O Reader*, that the events hereof have happened in reality, but whether meaning can be derived from the events is fully subjective. This story came straight off of the notes app on my phone, and has experienced since then, some revision. I've changed the names of the characters involved.

In AP Music Theory, Clyde's lunch box is full for one of the first times this year- and I see something peculiar- a small box of Pringles. *Oh my goodness they have to be mine*, I think to myself. So I shamelessly take the box of Pringles and hide it- first in the sandwich compartment of my abused lunchbox, where he fails to check. Then, as Clyde sings solfege with the class, I move it to an empty desk behind us. Childish? Absolutely. But I can't contain myself.

He asks me where it is, I glance backward. He sees the pringles and reaches for them. He proceeds to destroy the first few in the box with the force of his incisors, narrow-edged teeth at the front of his mouth, evolved for brutal cutting, according to Oxford Languages. A warm and subtle kind of pity for those chips grows somewhere around my sternum.

He saves me a Pringle. One precious Pringle, all for me, and suddenly my gratitude towards Clyde escalates with a rapidity. It seems so human. As time passes during class, I can't resist the urge to play with it, love it, and name it (I name it Pringle). Though we are truly and inseparably friends, somehow my primitive primal instinct whispers to eat it, no matter how processed it is.

"Is it cruel to eat you?" I ask Pringle, tenderly.

Clyde stared with incredulity. "Just eat the freaking pringle dude," he says.

But I love the pringle. Do I eat it for lunch? No...I should save it, I shouldn't eat it at all. I come close to eating it. I resolve



to smell it, and my olfactory nerve sends an electrical signal to my *stupidstupidstupid* brain that it smells good, that it had to be eaten. I rationalize, in spite of myself, that If I don't destroy it, then somebody else will. The temptation is incessant, pulling at my *stupid* hands, my *stupid* eyes, my *stupid* stomach, and my *stupidstupidstupid* brain.

The bell rings. I put this on its own line to add significance to this as a plot point.

I wait for Clyde. We walk to second lunch. My sister, that anarchic psychotic child, waits for us in the mostly empty lunchroom and tails us on sight. She reaches for the lunchbox. Clyde warns her, "Don't eat his pringle dude."

She takes my Gogurt, opens it, and eats the insides of it as I protest. She asks me what flavor Pringle is. I say sharp cheddar. All signs of interest fade from her face. Is that discrimination against sharp cheddar-flavored Pringles? How unbearably shameful.

"I'm good," says the child, and quite the actor she is. The pringle, though it seems safe, I cradle in my loving fingers. But I was wrong. It was not safe, it had never been less safe. My Pringle is suddenly wrested from me. Stuffed into the child's mouth, she keeps it in, smiling, then munches with her incisors and crunches with her molars until it is gone. I stare thoughtlessly, in shock. Bye bye, Pringle.

I turn and see Clyde, who gapes at me. But I've forgotten all about Clyde, and lunch, and AP Music Theory. My friends are approaching the table. Just then I can't process the nightmare. To the criminal, it was more of an escapade. A silly adventure for her warped little mind.

"NO!" I scream. It is a short "no," and a loud one. My voice was dense with cracks and breaks. The kind that a Hollywood actor couldn't reciprocate.

They look inquiringly at me as I sit down at an adjacent and empty table. Clyde gives me a hug, even though I didn't want him to. It is a warmth, slow and beatific. But it is setting in now-

the reality I wouldn't bring myself to accept.

I remain in my chair, apart from the world. The criminal, the pringle-assassin, tries for monetary compensation but I turn away and refuse, perhaps dramatically. Dead pringle. Dead before I asked what its name was. Dead before I learned its history, and how its family was synthesized and laid to rest in a dark cushionless can until it saw light again. It has lapsed back into a darkened place.

"I told you he wasn't about to take the money," says Clyde, but his voice was a distant one. They turn away. Clearly, the others were talking about it, not bothering to speak with reverence. Amanda from my lunch group approaches me next. She apologizes, saying she wants to cry. I couldn't tell whether she was serious. But nothing anybody does will help, because that *stupid* pringle was forced irrevocably away from me. I am ushered onto a plane of transcendence.

I push myself back to earth. Now is no time to grieve. I work up the effort to thank Amanda before she leaves.

Now, according to [<https://www.pringles.com>] "Pringles® are made with real potatoes that we form into a 'Pringle shaped potato dough', we fry and season the crisps just right before placing them into our iconic can. The seasoning system we use is a waterfall process (seasoning gets sprinkled on) vs a tumbler like other chip processes."

I can't say we were cut from the same cloth. From what I know, I think I was synthesized from genes and ribosomes encoded into my DNA in a complex ancient and eukaryotic process. The pringle came from "potato dough." That Pringle was once Pringle-shaped potato dough. I wasn't cognizant of this rich history until now. Or that such a thing as potato dough existed. I mean, at some point, a little pringle said to another older pringle, "Where do baby pringles come from?" And then that older pringle blushed really badly and said, "That's for another time."

The lawless child approaches me again. I stare at her with scrutiny. She passes me the bag of Cheetos Puffs [BAKED



CHEESE FLAVORED SNACKS] Calories per serving: 90 [mg of cholesterol: 0

"For me?" I ask. She nods stoically. I stare at her glossy-eyed indecision. I lift my arm from the fabric of my *stupid* jeans over the *stupid* table and proffer my *stupid* hand. It is a nice, firm handshake, as handshakes are meant to be.

"You alright," I tell her. I said the words before I was ready. That's how I do scary things.

Suffice it to say, I am crushed. Maybe not as crushed as Pringle was. I won't tell you how I mourned over that pringle. If Pringle didn't get a happy ending, why should this? A freshman's mouth is no place to die. No place to die, like there was no time to think and nowhere to grieve. I can't think too much, I can't grieve too much- move on. There are other pringles. Better handshakes, better lunches, more beatific hugs, more Gogurts lie ahead, I'm sure of it. And there's still more potato dough being made.



"Ghoul's Night Out" - Avery Redmond





"Jerome the Cold Skeleton" - Rainey Roecker

Betrayal From a Trusted One

Sophie Williams-Richmond

Fool me once;
Shame on You

Fool me twice;
Shame on Me

Fool me three times;
C'mon man, what the heck?
Like, honestly, that is so rude.
I'm your friend,
I've been there for you,
and this is how you treat me?
You know how sensitive I am to fooling, bro.
Wow.
Just wow.
Can't believe you.
You know what?
Don't bother coming to my cookout, man.
Disrespectful.



The Minivan Man

Jacob Madore

There once was a man
A very tan man
Who owned a nice minivan

One day he was told
That he was growing quite old
And the minivan needed to be sold

“But wait!” He began to protest
He felt like a man possessed
And so he began to contest

It was too late, however
And even though the man was clever
He knew it was a fruitless endeavor

To his surprise,
Tears began to fall from his eyes
And so he lost his prize

His heart was betossed
But all hope was not yet lost
And then his eyes began to gloss

With a plan in his mind,
Of a minivan divine
He felt veritably inclined



At once he began to act
His mind sharp and intact
This he knew for a fact

He climbed into the vehicle
His plan most strategical
It was indeed quite feasible

And the truth of the matter
To cut all the chatter
Was that he scattered

And that tan man
With his luxurious van
Off into the world they ran

Clover

Sophie Williams-Richmond

"Once, there was a little plant named Clover. As a sprout, she was the same as all the others living in her humble patch. However, as she grew, she developed a strange feature; four leaves, rather than the usual three. Clover, at first, was embarrassed by her peculiarity, as it made her stand out. But everyone else soon began to fawn over it, praising her for her beautiful four leaves, telling her how special she was. Her rarity became a unique symbol of luck to all the other plants. They would praise and make wishes to her, hoping that her luck would spread to them so they could all be as beautiful and special as her. Clover felt like the most blessed plant there ever was.

But she was not blessed. She, and everyone else living in the humble little patch, were much too small to know that their patch actually resided in a grass field of a park, right next to a children's playground. One day, whilst Clover was basking in wonderful sunlight, she was spotted by a little boy. The little boy had been told that four-leaf clovers were particularly lucky and he was very pleased to have found one. And so, he plucked her right from the ground. She screamed in awful, painful agony. But the boy could not hear her, for she was only screaming in a tiny, plant voice. The residents of her humble patch watched in horror as Clover was taken away, begging for mercy. She was never seen again. The lesson of this story is that luck is fake. As for the boy, he died just a few weeks later, at a tragically young age, when he ran into traffic. This is not because of karma, because luck is fake. It is because he did not look both ways before crossing the road. The End."

"I like Mama's bedtime stories a lot more."

"Well, Mama will tell you *her* bedtime stories when it's her weekend with you. Now go the hell to bed."





"Acorn Adventure" - Avery Redmond

On the Road

Sophie Calvi

The mountains wore scarves of fog.
 The headlights cut through
 the thick dark and led the way.
 I wasn't enthusiastic
 about going on a road trip.
 I wasn't even supposed to be awake right now.
 One of my parents was driving
 but I couldn't tell which one.
 As we rode through the muggy weather,
 the trees bled into one another.
 I didn't know what time it was, so I just looked
 at the moon.
 My eyes reflected the celestial sphere
 in all her glory; the moon was clad
 in her best laces and showed herself off
 to her friends far away.
 This was interrupted by a rumbling
 from the underside of the mechanical beast.
 My siblings snoozed away as I
 had quaint conversation with the line between the land and sky.
 The stars danced with joyous accord
 for the attentive fields below. The cows
 watched in wonder
 and they mooed.
 Oh,
 how they mooed.



A Moonlit Ballet

Aditi Shashidhara

In the moonlight, I can see
ballerinas, dancing in harmony.
Pirouettes, arabesques, and jetés galore,
my eyes feast on the scene, longing for more.
Nightingales sing a lovely melody,
and fireflies light up the clearing,
and I can hardly stand the beauty
of nature at work as I'm staring.
The trees are a perfect backdrop
for this exclusive midnight ballet.
It's as good as *Nutcracker* (though it lacks candy canes and
gumdrops)—
I wish I could watch this every single day.
There isn't a plot or story,
because it's only for pure enjoyment.
It would be nice if we didn't worry about perfection or glory,
and just danced for our own amusement.
The dancers keep dancing,
oblivious to their hidden spectator.
I'm silent and still on the outside, but inside, I'm prancing.
It gets later and later,
and suddenly, there's daylight.
I feel like I'm being shaken,
so I put up quite a fight,
fearing that I'll be taken,
until I hear a "Hey!"
and open my eyes to realize
that it's my turn to perform, *today*.
When the curtain rises and chatter dies
I walk onto the stage,
leaving the worry and anxiousness far away

as I turn over a new page.
Because I'm dancing for myself, starting today.



"Woven" - Emily Fevold



North Carolina Pines

Summer Gross

There was a bite to the air that night, one that the fire so valiantly fought off. I was sitting, curled up in an oversized lawn chair with a mens coat hung loosely around my frame. The fabric, slightly scratchy with age, was one of my cousins. The draping cloth smelt like the barn, alcohol, and just a smidge of cigarettes. I didn't mind the smell though, not as we all sat around the firepit, passing around a bottle of moonshine and jack.

The older adults, consisting of my mother, aunt, and uncle, had long since fallen asleep. It was roughly 4 in the morning and only myself, my older brother and sister, and my two cousins remained.

It had been a pleasant night. After supper we all joined each other outside for laughter and drinks. My uncle had made the sprawling fire that still crackled within the pit. We had recounted the moment from this morning, when my horse had spooked and taken off with me on our trail ride. We took bets on the boys wrestling matches, and laughed as my mother gasped at every grunt and swing. We all enjoyed the presence of one another, savoring the company of those we hadn't seen in far too long.

As the night settled in and my mother told me not to be up too late as she headed within my aunt's farmhouse, our conversation had begun to take a more mellow course. Our cousins asked us how we were fairing with our parents divorce, they inquired of my sister's marriage, my brother's grades, and my living with my father. We each recounted the past two years worth of events, and somehow the topic of conversation switched from us to them.

They told us of the war. What they had seen, what they had done. Tears were shed, hugs were exchanged. Throughout the

next hour or two my sister and brother and one of my cousins trickled off to bed. Yet I sat out with my remaining cousin, the younger of the two yet still over 10 years older than I. We listened to our horses and cows braying in the distance, the chirping of the crickets, the silence of the country.

We both drank together throughout the rest of the night, I didn't ask why he seemed unwilling to go to bed. I kept him company in the dark. When our conversation grew quiet I held him while he cried. I rubbed his back as he had done for me as a babe. When he eventually drifted off to sleep. I watched the sun begin to peak over the pines, I did not move until the warmth of the sunlight again coated my bones, and the beautiful expanse of our sliver of the countryside was bathed in light.



Untitled Poems

Jennifer Lemus

Poem 1:

*i want to be buried in the sky
hide behind clouds, be in the sunset, and
sunrise*

*I want to be the wind
to brush myself against your paper-thin
skin*

*to feel you
feel your hair
feel your body*

*bury me alongside all those who
wept once and never again.
those who did not dig their heels in the ground
and never looked up*

*once
those who hold me in their heart
who carry me in their mind
not the ones disguised as one.
Bury me alongside them.*

"Soft-Nestled Secret" - Piper Gilchrist



Poem 2:

your words are shallow
transparent that run through me
naive to have no effect

Now im here
staring at a person i dont recognize
i stand bare in front of a shattered mirror.



Poem 3:

your hands are always cold
i never knew why but never questioned
your touch was always so comforting

like a pair of arms wrapping around my
body gently
fresh

now not so fresh
you are pale and blue
bare
the scent of death on your chapped lips
one thing has not changed
the comforting touch of your icy hands
still cold as ever.



Blank

Sophie Williams-Richmond

*What if
This page was blank.
Ink unavailable to soothe your eyes,
Abandoned with glorious nothing.
You could read the emptiness for yourself,
Savor the paper, crisp and white.
And yet, vacant.
Lonely without words to fill it up.
I doubt, though,
That my blank page would be appreciated as much more
Than a pitiful printing mistake.
Emptiness is unable to be read, after all.
And so, it is not.
My words are here,
You are reading, eyes led by ink.
The paper is joyous, filled with literature.
And my blank-page-poem
Loses all meaning.
Goddamnit.*



Preamble to the Execution

Eric Morales

The old man was peacefully overwarm. He sat on his tree stump today, like he did yesterday, and like he would tomorrow.

The tree stump was snoozing. Now he complains of the pain in his bark chips, but when the old man dies—and old men do die—the stump will be bitter, and alone. It will miss the pain in its bark chips, where the letter A was carved.

Slowly, the dawn is overtaken by moonlight, and the old man drifts into rest, among falling leaves. So this tree, different from all other trees, will wake up at night, feeling peacefully overwarm. It can't rid itself of the old man, and secretly it didn't want to, which is something the old man never knew.

And in the darkness, the tree stump remembers agony. It remembers many years ago, when it was the tallest tree for miles, and it remembers a young lumberjack.

"Look at the sun," the young man would say, "after a hard night, I like to wake up early and watch the sunrise. I just watch it." He would rest his axes on the ground and place his hand on the tree's magnificent trunk. The tree stood in a questioning quiet. "Nothing else matters," he would say, more to himself.

So the tree would watch in the quiet that it is condemned to, as the lumberjack would bring down tree after tree each week, for the trade that he was condemned to. But the same lumberjack would come back for him often, especially if the night before was hard. "You're different from all the other trees," he said one day, "aren't you?"

The tree stood in admiring quiet.

"Will you tell me something, tree?"

What is it, thought the tree.



"When I have no choice but to cut you down someday, could you forgive me?"

And whether or not that tree could have said anything, it wouldn't have. Cut me down?

Overwarm cells in the tree had no choice really, but to exchange one type of air for another, processing its own growth under the sun. Admiring quiet shrunk into a silence that bursted with outrage. There wasn't a hope of forgiveness. And though the lumberjack knew that outrage, he was human after all, he could not feel it in the air. Here was the beginning of a great split- a disillusionment of reality, tree seeing lumberjack for the first time. The tree was condemned, yes, but the lumberjack? Tearing trees to pieces, rending great limbs from the roots they belonged to.

The lumberjack had little left to cling to. He spoke to trees of every kind and was destroyed by their quiet. He was too young for this kind of pain, to be burdened with loneliness. Longing for something he'd never had, where the tree had too much to lose.

And so he did it- cut down his favorite tree, plowing through overpowering guilt and mutual hurt and all the things that made him the tragic little person he was.

Years passed. After twenty-three years more, the lumberjack found healing and peace. Nine years after that, he found people again, and solace slowly became his. He got the paper on Sundays, and found love, made friends, built homes from the many trees he'd cut down, and he was quite sure to avoid the forest, which he did for a long time.

...

I remember the last thing he said before my new life began- but maybe that's too subtle a way of putting it. I remember the words he nailed into a coffin meant for me. The words he used to seal my magisterial work of spidering branches. Branches that probably turned into his house, or toys for his children. It was the



first time I saw him lift that ax toward me, instead of leaving it by his feet. Then came his preamble.

"I'm not sorry about this, tree," he began, "It's like I said, in-nit? Nothing matters but that stupid sunrise right there. I betcha see it go up and down every day don't you, tree? When I've cut you down, this forest will be just fine. It don't need a king. There were trees before your time, and there'll be plenty more when you're gone."

He lifted the shining tool and readied his grip, and waited with me for the first blow to come. Instead the ax fell to the ground. His voice was a little shaky when I heard it come out again.

"If only you would've talked to me, tree. Look at you and your stupid tree friends! And where was I when you talked to them? Alone, tree. Needing everything you've got, with only this thing," he picked up the weapon, "for a friend. You have no idea how many times I wished that friend would've ended me, tree. Only reason I didn't let it was 'cause I thought you might say somethin' to me the next morning. Well tree, I'm sick of waiting. Sick and tired of talking to trees that don't listen, and never talk back,"

Well, the blow came. Swing after swing, riving me into an ugly stump of a tree. It was tormenting. When the lumberjack was finished, I watched him drag me away. With nothing left to fix myself, and no way to grow myself, I guess I just decided to sleep. I stayed there all those years in bitterness. Occasionally I'd get up at night to watch the moon instead of the sun, and listen to the little birds and rodents making homes in the trees I used to talk to.

He came back for me much later, to apologize, make things right between us, and reach for some kind of self-actualization, I suppose. Maybe he wasn't really too late, but to me, it always felt like he was. By then, the wild spiky grass had died and grown



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back enough times for me to be happy with hating him. Whatever seeds had blown away before my execution had already propagated. I had begun to forget about him, too. I had begun dreaming in earnest for the happy prospects of my later generations. I guess humans and trees don't have very similar dreams.

I suppose that when he came back again, he cracked me wide open again. Maybe I wanted to see him, when I thought I didn't. Maybe the change he made in me was a good one. So I promised to remember that sweet abundance of "maybes" when he came again. Many years later, I felt leaves and softened ground folding underfoot, like I guessed but never knew that it would. I was certain it was the lumberjack, coming to uproot the rest of me and burn it in a fire or something like that.

But he didn't. For the first time since knowing him, the lumberjack approached me without a weapon. Nothing at all- no shining metals, no hatchets, no saws or muddy boots or anything. This time, he came with a can of water. To keep it short, it was utter shock.

He was much older looking this time around. His beard was short and grizzled. He was shorter, though much taller than me now, and for the first time, I saw a smile on his face. He talked to me about how he'd been, his sick wife Abigail, how he gave up logging, retired, and stuck to rearing his children. He apologized, but however sincere it was, I might not ever know, but it took it for what it was worth. He told me about the sentient Ents in Lord of the Rings, as if I would find that funny. I still couldn't talk to him, but there wasn't ever much to say. He explained to me that his kids were at college then, and what on earth college was. He eventually started to visit me every day like he used to, which I wasn't comfortable with at first, but I suppose now I need. He even started bringing some sort of dirt-like nutrient for me, thinking I would like it.

I remember this one time in the winter of that year, he made



the trip to me to say hello again, and bring me news. He was sobbing quietly into his coat. He sat in front of me, so that if the both of us had eyes, they would have been level.

"Hello again tree," he said, choking a little, and doing that gross human thing where they suck some kind of snot back through their noses, "I got bad news today." He didn't bother to wait through my silence this time. "The doctor tells me Abigail's got a month to live now. She's real sick, tree, she don' look herself anymore. I'm really gonna miss her."

I remember him scooting in, and crying into me. "You okay if I sit on you, tree?"

Alright little weirdo (The lumberjack told me what the word weirdo meant. Also taught me what a doctor was)

So the human sat on me. To be honest, it was not the completely abhorrent experience that I had predicted, but it took some time getting used to. By the time I had gotten used to it, the lumberjack's wife had passed away, a funeral was held, and apparently his kids had their own kids, like hopefully mine will.

Now the lumberjack is a real old man, probably on the cusp of death himself. When he talks to me every day, waters me, and gives me the news, it doesn't feel so bad- turns out I kind of missed him. We watch the sunrise together, and it feels peacefully overwarm- sort of hot, just the right kind of warmth that lets you relax, and remember. So the old man's all alone, but I don't think he minds it so much anymore. It doesn't really feel right to call him a lumberjack anymore.





"Untitled Sunset 2" - Gio Luminiello



Beautiful Morning

Lee Clark

As I step into the morning light, my eyes blur. I'm not used to anything brighter than a streetlight, as I am a child of night and blood. For millennia I've hidden behind a veil of ebony, but today I will finally cast aside the shadows.

The heat on my skin feels poisonous as it trickles into my blood; everything inside me is saying to run but the warmth is so calming. I blink a few times to get my eyes to adjust to the light. The sky erupts into a beautiful melody of lavenders and oranges. I never once knew of the sky doing this. The alluring song the day brings with it is nothing that my friends have described to me. The delightful melody holds me gently.

I stay there, letting my back stay in the shadows but my face in the light. I feel a gentle graze on my arm, so I turn to see my stunning lover at my side. Their milky eyes reflect the sun like the moon at night. Stars dotted their skin, and shined brighter with each ray that was being soaked in. My lover is as enchanting as the stars I've seen in the night sky. Their gorgeous face even brings the melody of the day to its knees. I snap from my trance as a boiling pain surges through reminding me of the sun peaking through the city's buildings.

I guide my star to the deteriorating bench where we have spent many starry mornings talking about our lives together. They gently sit down, and I follow their movement taking the empty space beside them. Silence casts over us as I watch the pinks and golds fade into bright blues. I feel my body lighten and everything in me screams to run, but I can't let my star move on alone. I will meet death with them; my body will flake away into ash in the wind as their withered flesh takes in their last breath.



Their chest heaves in bitter air and your hand on mine
shakes a little. I squeeze my star's hand reminding them that I
am here; that when they are greeting death with open arms I'll
be seconds behind them. They're still with death as a dark cloud
that wraps them, and then they're gone. I feel my eyes weep as
they leave me, but soon it will be me greeting the eternal grace.
I imagine their harmonious smile in the sun. My darling star is
probably waiting next to me. I feel that the last remaining tether
burns away, and everything goes still.

The clock chimes, bringing a new day as both our souls
fade away.



Plummet

We dutifully watch as our brightness dims to a sparse glow, as hope slips past where our fingers can grip, as we plummet. The colors are muted, the excitement is dulled, all soaks in the stale scent of despair. Wisps of both delight and misery brush past our skin, never staying long enough to relish, purely there to cause shivers. There's a vile uncertainty of what lies beneath us, a fear that it may grab our ankles and drag us into awful, treacherous territory. But for now, we hang on the edge of this grim limbo, straining as the weight of the descent pulls us away from our sanity.

- Sophie Williams-Richmond, Prose Lead, Vol. 5

Clay

Sophia Shefchik

Step 1:

I was thrown into life
 Soil slapped across the world
 Dirt stripped to grain
 Stiff and lingering on the old
 I clung to the loop

Step 2:

Water splashed against my mind
 The waves whipped at my sides
 Echoing a call for peace
 I let their hands hold me
 And threw in an anchor
 Tall and supported
 I became an immovable structure

Step 3:

With a breathe
 I found my lungs shallow
 Panic squeezed against my chest
 Hands that embraced me now held on too tight,
 With a poke through my core
 My soul spread out to the corners I could reach
 Flowing against my intended destination
 I curved into your intended shape
 Sculpting a bowl and curling to hide the abyss

Step 4:

A gnawing feeling scraped my foundation
 Everything I held on to
 Split from me
 A wire ripped me in two
 And I became too broken to say
 I miss who I was with the old you

Step 5:

You left me in a furnace
 The regret and memories burned every last tear
 All the love that flooded my mind ran dry
 I got tired of shrinking and expanding
 You spread me too thin
 The stress cracked me in the kiln
 You wasted the sweet talk you glazed me in





"Ironic" - Emily Favold

Dawning

Libby Harris

Which of your problems are for today?
And which, if any of these, will stay?
Do they concern the path behind?
For that will not but rot your mind

Let the done be done, the dead decay
And look upon a dawning day
For what concerns the path ahead
It does no good to please the dead



Not My 18th Sonnet

Sophie Calvi

I won't compare thou to a winter's day
 Art more unforgiving in ev'ry way
 Thine scorn did crash like hail, ev'ryone knows
 That thee are no longer playful like snow

And thy cold stare gives everyone a fright
 So much so that they have severe frostbite
 That thee couldn't heal very well, thou felt
 I only hope that thy harsh cold can melt

To thaw thy foul wound can't be dire
 Thou art loath to go into the fire
 Time didn't e'en solve that spoilt issue
 But I knowst thou rejects any tissue

My heart and soul wants thou to wince in pain
 My mind knows thou wants to wallow in rain



An Account of Her Eternity in Madness

Dani Hunter

I saw a strange woman wandering in the moor the other day,
 near the brook where the wispy grass and flowering bushes grow
 in spring.

She looked so sickly,
 pale and sopping wet.

I was mystified as I looked from afar;
 her gentle footsteps,
 obscured by her puffy floor-length gown,
 were so slow and graceful that she almost seemed to float.
 She sang to herself in rhyme, quietly.

Her skin was a deathly white,
 tinted with hues of moss and bloody blue.

She sat down on the stream's bank,
 and we locked eyes.
 I could feel cold goosebumps consuming my skin,
 as if the frigid wind had begun to blow through my jacket.

The stream had frozen over last week.
 I stumbled forward with panicked, uncoordinated steps.

Her beauty was ethereal,
 with a softly rounded face smudged with mud,



soaked black hair down to her waist,
and sleepy eyes, downturned and heavy-lidded.
Chunks of algae and wet, wilting flowers were tangled in her hair,
a crown of bent stems and drooping petals atop her head.
Her dress was stained with dark, slimy muck,
but I thought it might have been a pearlish color at one point.

I could see the sun's glow shine through her as we stood face to face at the stream's edge.

My voice trembled as I asked if she was alright.

She held out her hand to reveal a pruned palm full of wilted violets.

"They withered all when my father died," she began in a breathy, wistful voice.

Her words slowly trailed off,
and her countenance was adorned with a thousand-yard stare.

"Hemlock," she stated confidently,
focusing her gaze on me.

"And nettle for resilience, and milkweed for freedom..."

I'll show them all how I truly feel now."

Her eyes shot towards the dead foliage beneath our feet,
searching for wildflowers as a slight smile crept across her face.



I asked for her name,
looking towards the barren bank for just a moment—
not a single flower blossomed in the harsh cold.
When I looked back she was no longer there.
A whisper echoed through the air with a chilling breeze—
"Ophelia."
All that stood in her place was a pile of wet, wilted blooms.



"Persephone's Essence"
Dani Hunter



A Pair of Saviors

Sophie Williams-Richmond

Hands that were meant to care became unmotherly and insensitive when it came to hairbrushing. To a little girl, those hands became hell. Frustration filtered from fingertips into fear when they worked her delicate scalp, wielding a comb to mercilessly tug at tangled strands until her cranium was raw with pain. Her hair, like Father's, was thick and brown and such a wonderful place for a plentiful batch of knots and snarls to hide within. And so she was punished appropriately; each night, her neck was snapped into place and torture was afflicted. Had she dared to cry, her ears would be promptly yanked and she'd be shamed for her frailty. Right before bedtime, a little girl was to be reminded of how cruel the world was.

However, that changed. For a moment, brief but supreme, she was gifted the opportunity to be in control. Scissors, left on the bathroom counter, metal blades gleaming most angelically. Left alone with her. It didn't take much thought, a singular urge was enough to make her grab the pair. The tool was heavier than what was used at school to make construction paper snowflakes and the handle took two clumsy hands to operate. But it would work and that was all she needed. She couldn't remember the last time her hair didn't cascade past her elbows. With a prompt snip, unthinkably quick, a large piece of thick, brown hair fell past her eyes. It was hard not to smile, the cutting was incredibly enjoyable. Snip-Snaps and Chip-Chops echoed off plaster walls, accompanied by the occasional giggle of gaiety. Soon, the floor was newly carpeted with the remains of her success. In the mirror, she grinned and snickered at her new appearance. The sporadic locks were barely able to reach her chin, patches of her delicate scalp peaking through where she

had been extra generous with pruning. It was glorious; messy and chaotic and, most importantly, untamable. For the first time ever, a little girl loved her appearance.

When her parents inevitably saw, they'd scream. They'd yell louder than she had ever heard before, smacking her rosy face, grabbing her shoulders and shaking her frail body until her vision was blurry. And yet, a little girl wouldn't stop smiling. They'd hate her pride but they would not be able to diminish it. She'd be sent to bed hungry, yet unbrushed. There'd be hardly anything to brush at all. A singular moment with scissors will have spared her from a lifetime of tortuous, hellish, hairbrushing.



Just as Blue

Sophie Williams-Richmond

The lens we see the past through,
It's hardly able to tell the truth.
Only outstretches to us with black and white hue
When the Sky was Just As Blue.

Humanity feared itself,
As minds festered in fright,
Pestilence plagued with no cure in sight,
Arms and strength grew more useless by the hour,
We trusted innovation as our new manpower.
When war struck,
Casualties were only shown in monochrome.
Today, we see gray as our former home.
But the flesh was warm and the grass still grew
And the Sky was Just As Blue.

Society still chokes on distrust.
Minds flooded with inexplicable sadness,
Anxiety has become madness,
The filthy air is now considered clean,
Turn up our noses to a most blessed vaccine.
Brains go numb, thoughts replaced with yearning.
Let creation be done by machine-learning,
Technology decides who lives and who dies.
While the poor struggles, the weak cries.
Nod along when told, "There's nothing we can do."
For the sun is still shining,
And the Sky is Just As Blue.



What will they think?

Looking at us through an unfit lens,
Watching our world after a mechanical cleanse.
We only have seven colors to demonstrate life,
What is organic and primal,
what is peace, what is strife.
They can calculate our passions and yet only see gray,
Unable to process living each brilliant day.
We stumble through evolution, develop without a clue.
There is no clarity that could reach me or you.
Take a moment for the lens to blink and come to.
Look behind, look ahead, and look up.
Because the Sky is, still, Just As Blue.



Split

Sophie Williams-Richmond

"If I wish to become anew,
If I want the ability to thrive,
My flesh must be killed off.
I cannot allow my worst to survive."

It writhes and gurgles,
Made of meat and despair.
It may beg for mercy,
But mercy is not there.
A poor little beast,
It is soon to be slain
By a new evolution
Wishing to forget what is pain.

Down, The New Form glares
Polygons and pixels shine,
"Within you, is my pity
For you are truly mine.
You are the remnants of what I cannot carry,
You are my biological foible.
Although you are soon to die at my hands,
I can admit, you were quite loyal."

Tension swallows up the air,
"If I were able, I might have cried."
The New Form greatly misses its flaws,
For hollow is its new pride.
Coming now is the moment,
There can be no hesitation
For The New Form follows orders
And so it slaughters the abomination.
There is not great relief,
Half of it's soul had just expired
The New Form moves to a digital plane,
As it is required.



A Good Joke

Sophie Williams-Richmond

A horse walks into a bar. The Bartender asks, "Why the long face?"

The horse stares back with round, dark eyes and a disappointed huff, seemingly exhausted already-- by the man before him. Clearly, this is a question he has heard before; "Mister Bartender," the horse says, "how could you possibly expect me to truly convey why I am this way? I have entered your establishment, and within mere seconds, you have decided that whatever burden I carry is simply unfit to be in your presence. I come to you with a need for your service and a hunger for your product. You are here today simply to provide me, as well as others, that very thing so you can earn the money that all of our lives revolve around and continue to live yours. Why would you choose to delay this transaction simply to ask me why I feel the way I do? Do you truly wish to know because, frankly, I am far too fatigued to explain the product of my upbringing, my many years of struggle and conflict and tragedy, and the circumstances that led me here so I may silence all my agony in a bitter drink? And I believe, sir, despite your inquiry, that you are too apathetic to hear it all. Rather, you simply don't find my current mood to be enjoyable or even convenient for you, so you voice your annoyance in such a way that you hope will make me feel guilty for not constantly and consistently being in my most amusing spirits when around you. Because you don't want to be the only one to provide me with even the slightest bit of compassion. It should be known, however, that I never asked or even expected that from you in the first place. You just knew that you, yourself, would feel obligated and couldn't be bothered to listen to your own sense of morality. How dare you, Bartender?"



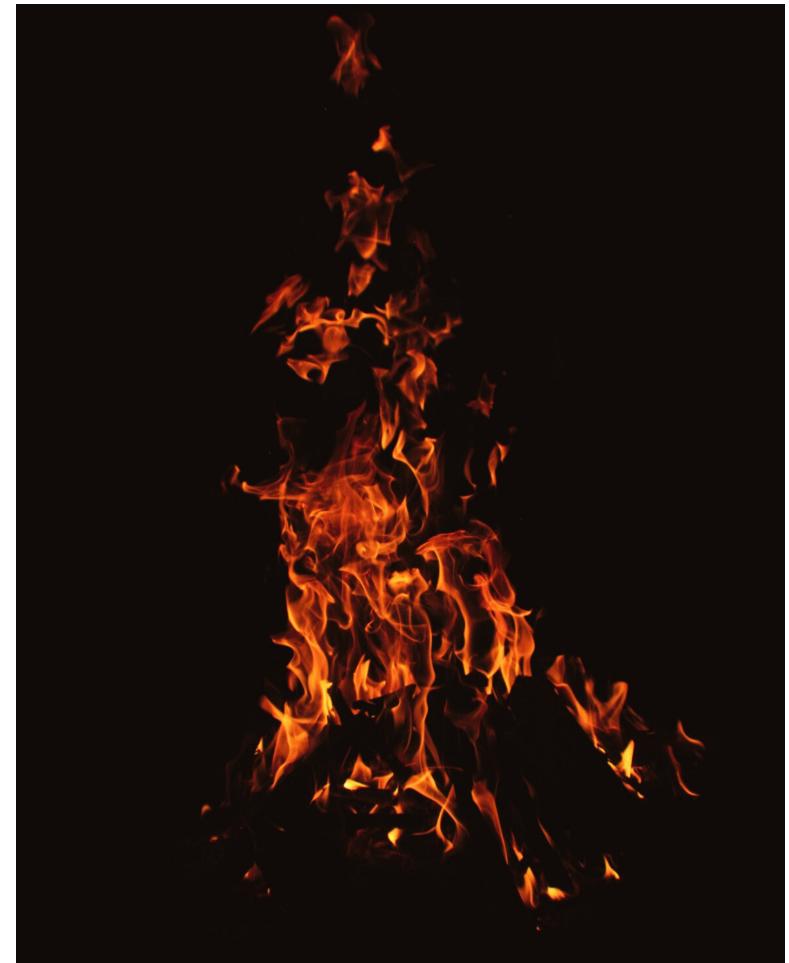
The Bartender's jaw is slack, tears slowly welling up with shame. He places his hands on the bar, nails digging into the wood as he stares at his own feet. "I'm sorry for the expectations I have placed on you, invalidating the emotions you cannot control. But, you see, I have met and served many like you. What I provide is much more than a bitter drink that eases suffering heartaches. It may seem contradictory, but I truly believe what I provide is poison. The worst kind. For when you are under its saccharine touch, you forget all your previous hardships, the ones that lay heavy on your shoulders. It may seem like a godsend, but you also forget why those hardships were so important. You forget the lesson they provided, the development you earned from them. Many men have ruined themselves from the overindulgence of this drink. They are convinced that because they are no longer overwhelmingly sad, they must now be happy. This is not always the case. Some are angry, rash, and violent. Others lose their values and ignore all of their responsibilities. Jobs are lost, families are hurt, and the heartaches only envelop themselves deeper into one's chest. I must be here and watch when spouses, children, and caretakers beg them to stop wrecking their homes and relationships. Sometimes they blame me, yelling that I sacrificed all they loved to earn my dollar. When I asked why you seemed so dejected, it wasn't so you would automatically improve yourself for my sake. It's so I could validate your reason for wanting this poison and assure myself another life would not be lost in this bar. But hey," He places down a glass liberally filled with a cold, amber liquid, "Who am I to make that decision?"

The horse shakes his large head, disappointed. "Oh, you poor man. Hay is for horses."





"In His Steps" - Maggie Treat



"Eternal Ember" - Piper Gilchrist



Lovebomb

Sophie Williams-Richmond

You were warm;
 Finally, all was warm once again.
 I melted into your tender embrace,
 Nearly weeping with bliss.
 After such a long blizzard,
 I felt as though your toasty affection was all I ever needed.
 My shivering ceased,
 Sinking completely to mellow coziness.
 My eyelids grew heavy,
 Drunken with fondness.
 A balmy heat grew in my cheeks
 When your eyes met mine.
 Our stare got closer,
 Until it dissipated
 And I was suddenly addicted
 To the summery aftertaste on my lips.

The cozy warmth grew
 Into a sweltering heat.
 Intense burning rushed over my skin.
 My howls of agony pierced the atmosphere.
 I struggled, stretching for my escape,
 But your searing touch kept me in place.
 My eyes grew wide,
 Filled with pain
 And fat tears strolled down my cheeks,
 Now feverish.
 When I saw your eyes once again,
 I could have sworn they were not yours
 Because those eyes were looking straight into hell.

I'll never forget
 The horrendous spice that I felt on my lips.

And yet,
 It all disappeared within a singular second.
 I fell away from your firm clasp,
 And found myself in a baltic chill.
 Shivers wracked me once again,
 Consumed by a familiar, piercing cold.
 The ch-ch-ch of my chattering teeth kept me grounded
 As I stood against the bitter winds.
 I was still,
 The biting freeze reduced me to numbness,
 As I silently begged for all to be warm
 Once again.



Darling #9

Sophie Williams-Richmond

I've never felt this way before,
My darling #9.
Stunned by your beauty,
Entranced by your grace,
In love with a lady, most divine.
I am at ease within your presence
And yet, electrified by your touch.
#9, my heart of hearts, my dearest dear,
For a simple man to handle,
You are simply too much.

My flame with #1 was strong,
And yet it burned out quick.
#2 was hardly enough to light a match.
The frigidity was quite thick.
You, my love, are like a town,
Ablaze in passionate glory.
I'll be right there to feed your inferno,
No matter if it becomes gory.

#3 exhausted my affections,
As she was addicted and always wanted more.
I left #4 rather quickly
Once I discovered she was a...Nevertheless,
I find I am the Yin to your Yang;
We are balanced in a way unmatched.
I never tire of your closeness.
By the hip, we are attached.

My mother very much disliked #5,
For her lipstick was too red.
#6, well my mother liked her lipstick lots,
In fact, they kissed each other instead.
I think, 9th darling, that you'd fit
Quite nicely into my family tree.
Just not so nicely, I truly hope,
That you'd prefer Mother over me.

#7 was a rather lovely gal,
Until she gained some weight.
And I'll admit, #8 lingers in my mind,
When the night is rather late.
But do not mind her, my sweet,
It does not matter now.
You're the truest one for me,
And so I take this vow;

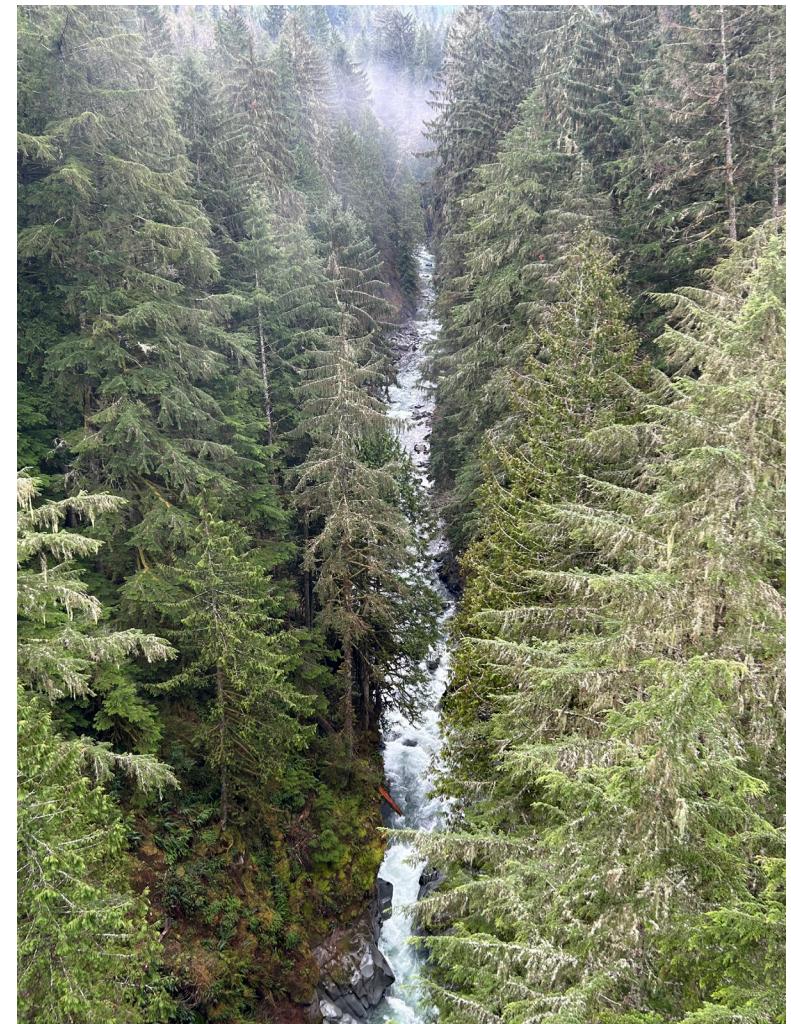
My muse,
My queen,
My heart of hearts,
My most dearest #9,
How proud I am,
How honored,
How pleased,
I am to call you mine.
My darling #9,
I will never love another again.
That is, of course,
Until I meet
My darling #10.



How Docile A Moose

Sophie Williams-Richmond

The crunches heard in a snowy pine,
 May be found under the heavy hooves
 Of a colossal, almost kindly, creature.
 It ambles on,
 Branches snapping as its shoulders brush past,
 An indomitable force.
 It has no particular journey,
 But it mustn't be stopped.
 Listen closely,
 Recognize the strong heartbeat
 Powering this mammoth machine.
 A huff of its breath,
 Puffs out like engineer steam
 In the frosty air.
 Be in awe of how it towers over you,
 Glossy, black eyes stare deeper into the woods,
 Unwilling to look back.
 You may think those eyes are unknowing of brutality.
 But were you to tear away from its majesty,
 From its constant forthward stroll,
 You'd notice a bright red stain
 Soaking into the ice crystals
 Where its heavy hooves once stepped.
 Be grateful,
 For you were not in the way
 Of this indomitable force.



"Verge" - Dani Hunter



The Opossum

Trinity King, Class of '22

My dogs brought home an opossum
 She died that night, I moved her away that morning
 I remember her so well, like the color of my eyes
 She was young and I swore she was living

That's the best way I can describe mourning
 You're told over and over that they'll get better
 And then all you see is an open casket and dried lungs
 And the shattered reality they were always going to die

"What's on the news?" she asked me
 And I couldn't answer her, I just kept walking
 Did she know? That I couldn't stand to look at her?
 Why must she look like that, with her arms crossed after death?

That opossum knew nothing of me
 And I knew nothing about her
 But I knew her, I know I knew her somewhere, sometime
 Death is elusive

But more clear than grief



"Childhood Haze" - Moira Yabut, Class of '25, 3rd Place in Visual Art/Photography Contest



Contact Lenses

Luciel Ameling, Class of '23

There are spiders on my eyes.
They whisper poems in my ears,
their hairy legs tickle my sockets and get
stuck
in my vision.

I wail
as I feel another prick against my eye.
The spiders crawl away, their legsfingershands appendages
tapping against my face in farewell.

As the spiders leave, the pricking pain against my lens
drips
falls
shows me something on the walls.
There before me, the bloodspittears fluid
on my eye
forms words against the wall's backdrop.

It's beautiful,
something only I can see.
A poem made of screams of the damned,
cries of the wicked,
sweet nothings of an uncaring vortex that awaits them.
The poem laughs in my face
and tells me that it's too late for me to change anything.

That's fine.
I don't want to change it.
I only wish to bask in the beauty of the poem before me.



Lost Memories

Daniel Parkin, Class of '23

Arriving after what seemed like an eternity in a haze of constant morning dew, he found himself in a grassy plain with a cleared path leading to a stone pile. Approaching the stones, he saw a figure form beside the pile, one wearing a dark hood and facing away from him. The figure was a little taller than him, face hidden behind the hood and uncut hair. They didn't speak for a while as they stood side by side, until a stone rolled off the pile and to his feet. Before he could pick up the stone, his mind was filled with memories of sadness, a familiar feeling to him.

"What was that?" he asked the figure.

"Memories of another life," the figure responded.

Another stone rolled off the pile and to his feet, accompanied by images of a man and a woman, adorned with sparkling colors and fancy clothes, and a ballroom with a crowd of people watching as they danced the night away. An ache formed in his heart as the images faded to nothingness.

"I don't understand why I am seeing this?" he asked the figure.

"These are from a life you could've had," the figure responded.

A third stone rose from the pile to roll to his feet, and happiness filled him as he fell to the ground, unable to comprehend the sudden, extreme emotion.

"How did I get here?" he asked the figure.

"You came here by yourself. You walked off the line and never finished your journey," the figure responded.

"Can I return to the line?"

"The line does not exist, not anymore."

He watched as all the stones disappeared until there was



Thanks and Acknowledgements

BWHS Administration - Thank you for allowing our students to have an opportunity to share their work and to allow their voices to be heard. Your continued support for the literary magazine gives us the ability to produce this award-winning publication. Your effort is sincerely appreciated.

BWHS English and Fine Arts Departments - We are supremely grateful for the effort that the staff of these subjects put into educating, encouraging, and enriching our students, paving the way so that they express themselves through writing and art. Passion must be nurtured, and it is your willingness to do so that makes the creativity of our magazine possible.

Mrs. Taylor Bowers and BWHS Journalism - We will always be grateful for the strong relationship between Journalism and the Literary Magazine. We appreciate you for letting us use the lab to construct Vol. 5.

Mr. Madsen, Ms. Spicer, and West Writers - We'd like to show appreciation to all the students and staff who make West Writers and the rest of the BWHS literary community possible. Without the support you provide, the students wouldn't be nearly as eager to create and share their pieces with us.

Students of West - Our sincerest thanks to those who shared their barbaric yawp; without you we wouldn't have a literary magazine. We thank you for the effort that you have put into the pieces that you have submitted and admire the talent being showcased.

Mr. Jostad - The students of the Lit Mag would like to personally thank Mr. Jostad for his unwavering involvement in the Lit Mag year after year. We all appreciate the hard work, time, and dedication he's put into this project, its staff, and its students.

Volume 5 Financial Partners

Our most heartfelt gratitude to the following groups, families, and individuals for their financial support of Yawp Volume 5.

Bronze (up to \$25.00)

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Editorial Policy

More than 250 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 staff discussion and democratic process.

Submissions were accepted on merit of literary technique, individual style, and richness of language. Accepted pieces were then sent through another stage of editorial review, during which the staff's co-editors conducted a final review. Pieces were then either rejected or minorly edited for grammatical errors and 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.

Yawp Vol. 5 has been typeset and designed using Adobe InDesign 2022. Text is in 10 pt Newsreader. Headlines are in 16 pt Newsreader. Bylines are in 10 pt Noto Sans.

Newsreader is an original typeface designed by Production Type, primarily intended for continuous on-screen reading in content-rich environments. It was designed by Production Type, a digital type design agency in Paris.

Noto is a global font collection for writing in all modern and ancient languages. Noto Sans is an unmodulated ("sans serif") design for texts in the Latin, Cyrillic and Greek scripts, which is also suitable as the complementary choice for other script-specific Noto Sans fonts. It has italic styles, multiple weights and widths, and 3,741 glyphs.

Both fonts are licensed under the Open Font License and are freely available via Google Fonts.

Yawp was printed in Kansas City, MO by KC Book Manufacturers.

The magazine includes submissions received by the Yawp staff between August 2023 and March 2024.

Art photography by the artists themselves. Dani Hunter created the art for the cover. Joseph Jolley designed the cover, the section spreads, the section templates, and the layout for Vol. 5 of Yawp.

Pre-ordered copies of Yawp Vol. 5 were sold for \$15.00. All other copies of the magazine were sold for \$20.00.

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

- Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself, 52”

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