
Yawp

Volume 4

2022-23

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 Note
Sophia Simmons
Vol. 4 Editor-in-Chief

The act of writing, of expressing the self, is rich in its own variation. Creative expression of any kind can appear completely foreign from author to author, artist to artist. Personal in nature, there is no universally shared trait or meaning across all self-expression. However, this changes in no way the meaning to be found, if sought, in all creativity; the journey that can be taken with every piece in this magazine.

Yawp, this literary magazine, is a high school publication. The artists within these pages, the bright-eyed staff that put them together, and much of our audience are adolescents; young individuals just beginning to unfold our sails and start the long voyage of discerning who we are. Each of us in our own odyssey, wandering through winding passages, occasionally entwining with each other's unfurling stories and learning new insight each time. In my eyes, there is no more elegant way to enrich our expeditions and mature into our truest selves than through creative expression.

In my final year at West, I have the opportunity to gaze back over my three years on staff, and to consider my own metamorphosis. I am endlessly grateful to this publication for providing an unfettered space to connect and grow with other artists, the same space where I've found identity, passion, and the liberating power of discovering one's voice. Readers, if you earnestly seek meaning in the creative works contained here, I promise it can be found. Listen to the clamoring and timid voices alike, their beautiful and sometimes tragic shards of story, consider their potential to inspire your own voyage, and consider creativity's potential to bring to pass your own metamorphosis.

Metamorphosis

[met-uh-**mawr-**uh-sis]

1. A profound change in form from one stage to the next in the life history of an organism, as from the caterpillar to the pupa and from the pupa to the adult butterfly.
2. A complete change of form, structure, or substance, as transformation by magic or witchcraft.
3. Any complete change in appearance, character, circumstances, etc.

From the moment of birth, a perpetual cycle of change and adaptation that is life begins. A metamorphosis, however, is a change that is so grand and momentous that whatever undergoes such a process will be defined by that process forever. There is much to be said about the profundity, permanence, and power of a metamorphosis, but I'm sure within the skin of this book you'll find the soul, young and full of emotion, that belongs to the talented writers of Bentonville West High School; many of them are going through a metamorphosis as you're reading this. We believe this is a word that connects us all here at West; while we may be on different journeys, we can come together with compassion and respect for each other as we learn who we are and confront the adversities that face us.

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*** 2022-2023 contest winner

** 2nd place

* 3rd place

Origin

Everything has to start somewhere in order to become something great. These pieces in this magazine were once a mere thought in the mind of the creator. Now they are a part of something greater: a gateway to promotion and self expression. Starting off as something so small and minuscule, they became an amazing presentation of dedication and perseverance, far beyond what's on the surface.

- Davis Infante, Volume 4 Art + Design Editor

Culture

Sophie Williams-Richmond, Class of 2025

The word ‘Culture’ is ingrained deep into my mind, carving itself into my skull like an unearned tattoo. What is my culture? I know, from the silence that answers the question in my mind, that it was nothing. And yet, it truly couldn’t be nothing. That wasn’t satisfying enough.

I came to the realization once while putting two items into a plastic store bag, having only scanned one. My culture is poverty. I didn’t grow up in vibrancy, in knowing who I was and where I came from. My earliest memories are clouded in cigarette smoke and joined by music played through a broken car radio. I didn’t have one home, we consistently moved for reasons I was too young to understand, and yet all the places were the same. At least similar enough to meld together in my mind.

Tiny apartments with drab, stained wallpaper. Our neighbors were a mixing pot of the lowest members of society. Many would end up dead soon, having made desperate measures in order to get through another month’s rent. I would run barefoot, because my shoes were too small to wear comfortably, through the dingy halls with the other kids of the apartment complex. All of us were sunburnt, had hair unbrushed, faces and hands sticky with food from that morning, and were almost never wearing a fully complete outfit. We’d dare each other to jump from the highest stair, stand on the creaky rail. We had no toys to show off, so we were forced to show off bravery and sheer audacity.

I remember being taught how to steal, how to lie to make sure my guardians avoided consequence. My mother would take me into a store’s bathroom to shove hygiene products into my jacket, because no one would think a child with a smile so bright could be committing a crime right before their eyes. My meals weren’t made of nostalgic flavors, recipes passed down

for generations; I ate what I could make in the microwave while my parents worked late. On those nights, I stayed up far past my bedtime, staring at the television that was picked up on the side of the road.

I would watch young actors, not much older than me, complain that they couldn't afford to plan the birthday party they wanted, in which the audience would sigh for them. I watched their television parents say, "O-kay, just a few more hundred dollars" while I imagined all I could possibly do with one hundred dollars. That night, I'd sleep on our urine-scented couch or my filthy mattress missing a sheet. That night, I'd be grateful that I wasn't spending the night in a car like I was just a month before.

Perhaps, somewhere in my bloodline, there's true culture. There's the colors of a flag that I'd always cheer for, there's flavors that would remind me of my grandmother, there's music in another language I could sing every word to. But, for circumstances out of my control, I'm only nostalgic for cigarette smoke and music played through a broken car radio.

Pomegranate Hearts

Dani Hunter, Class of 2024

As I opened my glistening white eyes for the first time,
into my nervous hands I was gifted a ripe fruit—
gloriously fresh and plenty,
bursting with little beads all crimson and currant,
bleeding out sweet juice the color of wine,
dotted with patches of ivory flesh separating the pods of popping
seeds.

“It’s yours to care for,” the Universe said softly, lovingly.
I listened to Her, and cradled it close,
because of how incredible it was
to hold,
to feel.
To learn to be human,
to love the world around us.

I took my first few steps onto lush earth.
I was vulnerable, unaware of the shadow that loomed over me:
spear in hand, desire in heart.
Power is what it sought, and it would seek it lazily.

The spear burst through the thick layers of leathery scarlet,
through the ivory and the sacred seeds,
scattering the sweet crimson and currant
like red ink sputtering from a cold, metal nib.

“See?” the shadow hissed, gesturing to the massacred fruit within my hands.

“You are broken, my child.

You were born with that hole in your heart;
only I can fix it,” the shadow cooed
as the syrupy liquid velvet
dripped,

.

dripped,

.

dripped
from innocent hands born loving,
yet told they are destined to hate.





His Hands Hold a Strawberry (left)

Jo Rosso, Class of 2024

For this piece, I was inspired by the neurotic habit of chewing or picking at cuticles and skin around the nails, which often leaves a pretty vulgar sight. There is so much beautiful detail in the hands that goes unnoticed.

Scars and blood add a shock factor to many of my pieces. At first glance, viewers may recoil at what they initially interpret as gory subject matter. There is then a tangible sense of relief when they realize that the gruesome hands are merely holding an innocent strawberry.

This piece is an oil painting on a 24x30 stretched canvas, starting with a dark under-painting and building up layers of colors progressively. Often my favorite thing to include in my paintings is an unrivaled cadmium red as a bright catalyst in contrast to the intense darks to bring in the viewer.

Bystander Effect

Luciel Ameling, Class of 2023

She's crying.

Whimpering, snotty, cursing her god. Pitiful, really.

It's strange, how well she blended into the alleyway.

Cracked asphalt, tarnished trash cans, and a girl, curled into the shadows. Silent cicadas, a steady drip from the roof, and screams being muffled into her sleeves.

Upon further inspection, she was biting them; drool and mucus mixing and falling into the cracks like some disgusting glue. The fact that she bothered to quiet her screams at all was considerate of her, though.

It was annoying, how seeing her had interrupted a perfectly good walk down the street. After a few careful paces, it was easier to see her. Not that there was much to see, but there was something fascinating about her. Like watching a horror movie, knowing you'll jump at every scare. Like asking somebody a trolley problem and relishing their unease. Sad. Disarming. Disgusting, how she practically begged for sympathy. After all, that's what she was doing- on her knees in the middle of the alley, weeping and causing a scene. Making herself a victim. There's no other reason to make her affairs so public, so obscene.

Sure, she had a right to be frail, to be upset. Someone more compassionate would stop whatever they're doing to help her. But there are places to be and time limits to manage. Maybe that kind person will walk up to her next. Doubtful. Until then, though, it's her business. She can air her dirty laundry for the whole street to see, scream and drool into her sleeves, but that doesn't make it your problem.

You leave the alley, and walk back to your job.

Lit Mag Conundrum

Kamrie Gassin, Class of 2023

Oh, what to write for the lit mag submission
A tale of a dashing young prince and his dim-witted friend?
Or a sad old woman with a fatal condition?
Maybe a poem, but how should I end?

A song would be nice
With a pleasant little tune
But my abilities would make you think twice
The deadline is approaching, I must submit soon!

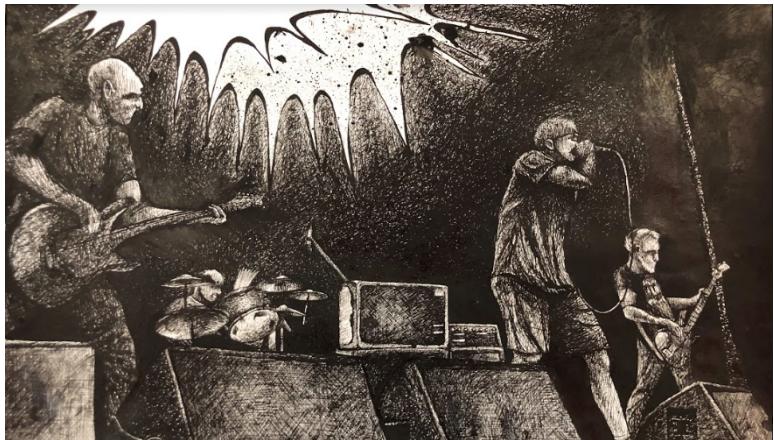
But what to do, what to do?!
I don't know enough facts to write of science
And my brain struggles to think of anything new
The last thing I want is to be an annoyance

Tell me the secret, oh Lit-Magging Masters
What is the key to your creativity?
Everything I do ends up a disaster
I simply cannot write with clarity!

Well, I'll have to find something
Though not a story of love
Or the effects of magic beans
Maybe this conundrum is a chronicle enough!



Sound and Vision - Dani Hunter, Class of 2024



Thank You For Playin' The Way You Play!

Dani Hunter, Class of 2024

A Lovers' Duet

Summer Gross, Class of 2024

Spotlights shone down upon us.

Peering outward, the bright gleams obscured our view of the audience. In the muddled gloom all I could glimpse was the silhouette of rigid, unmoving bodies. Taut with tension, the crowd strained to catch a note of what was to fill the auditorium. Their bodies curved towards our spot on stage, perfectly poised to take in every vibration found in the air. As I vaguely beheld the numerous rows lining the performing arts center, a lump formed deep within my throat.

How were we to play for that many?

Their anxious murmurs to each other grazed against my ears. Yet with their faces veiled in shadow, I could not tell whose lips they came from. The occasional harsh laugh clawed out of the fray at me. I hoped it was just humorous and not as condescending and pointed as it felt.

Shakily pulling in air, it caught in my ashy windpipe.

They were going to eat my mistakes alive, I thought. As the spotlights painted us in harsh, heated tones, I began to glisten with sweat. No doubt shining to the thousands staring intently at us. Laid bare for them to judge on the stage, I wiped my jittering hands on the soft black silk of my dress. I felt more than saw your cool shining silver keys press into my callused fingertips to steady them. The faint aroma of your wooden scent drifted into my too tight lungs, settling in and expanding them to their natural state. Always ready to perform, you focused my thoughts at the exact moment they began to gallop away from me.

I glanced at you in my embrace.

Your beauty on display for all to see tonight, I jealously adored your polished glittering exterior. Nothing could compare to your exquisite grace and talent. While your name was not list-

ed underneath performing artist, I knew your skills and recognition were undeserved upon my own. I recalled our clumsy first touch. Unsuit to one another, we could only converge to create a grating screech. Through countless months with one another, practicing and refining our pieces, we slowly began to adjust.

Despite my repeated struggles, never once did you falter or break, except at fault of my own. You lovingly took the melody and tune I gave you, whether elegant or vulgar, and put them forth into the open air with ease.

As we grew closer I eagerly awaited each session.

Our practice became as familiar as the feeling of breath sliding in and out of my lungs. Like a pair suited to one another as a kite on a summer breeze, I gave you the air you needed to fly, and from there you glided upon ears.

The rustling of the last whispers suddenly brushed past me.

Leaving only a true, empty silence in its wake. The crowd noticed it simultaneously and their bodies went rigid with anticipation. As I shifted in my seat in preparation for what was to come, the light reflected off of your keys, subtly questioning if I was ready. I caught the meaning and gently roamed my gaze over you, letting the adrenaline in my eyes speak for itself. We both knew it was time. With every eye trained upon us, I took one big breath in, and played.

For a millisecond the first note cracked, I couldn't breathe, and your reed split.

But then swelling notes of warmth and depth spilled into the open air around us. Flowing throughout the auditorium, encompassing us all in its soft grasp. It enraptured my body. My fingers danced along of their own accord. Moving with the beat, keeping pace with the winding melody. I did not think of the breath constantly flowing through my lungs out of you. I drew in air by habit alone, and exhaled with precision and strength to the changes in volume.

No longer did I feel the stares of the crowd, or the salty drips sliding down my back.

Only able to envision the feeling and touch of our performance as it enveloped me in its embrace, I was blinded to anything else.

It wasn't until the smattering of applause drew me out of my stupor, that I realized we were done. Everything that had culminated to this point flowed through me. We had started off as strangers yet how infatuated with you I had become. You had long since been more than an instrument to me, but this moment only solidified our bond. As I stood from my chair and bowed deeply, I knew there was no one else I would rather have at my side while performing.

You had become my best friend, and I loved you all the more for it.

Scientific Sacrifice

Sophie Williams-Richmond, Class of 2025

I drew a stiff breath, tugging at the ends of my skirt to straighten it out. The whole ensemble was far too tight, made up of a pencil skirt, frilly blouse with a high collar, and kitten-toed heels. I felt like I was being consumed by the porcelain-colored cotton. I held a glossy white clipboard, which truly had no use, close to my chest. Gold cursive on the back read, 'BRACC Wants to welcome you!'

The Biology Research and Animal Care Center was where I worked, and had been working for at least twelve years. For the majority of that time, I was a stuffy scientist cramped into a shared lab with other inexperienced and overworked peers. The job showed on my tired, pale skin and completely grayed hair. Just a few months ago, I was launched from my station, in what felt like a random gesture, into the desk of a lead advisor. Not one of my analytics were ever picked up by someone and yet I was decided high-quality enough to pick up others. It was baffling but I wouldn't dare to complain. Today, I was meant to supervise the goings-ons at the 'Innovative Zoology' Department, an area I wasn't even aware of until last week.

I rolled my shoulders, trying to remove the years of desk work out of my posture.

"Are you new here?"

I perked up, completely taken aback by the unfamiliar voice, "I-Uh, no sir. I am not. I am waiting for my walk through of-of-the Innov-"

"Innovative Zoology?"

"Right." The man was tall, and clearly an active scientist, as he wore such a stereotypical white coat and had goggles perched on his head of bleach-blonde hair. He looked sort of vague, aimless, and spoke with an indistinct European accent.

The silver tag hanging from his neck was engraved, “Doctor Desltry Jilson- Head Zoologist”

“Usually the supervisors are supposed to start the walk through,” he said.

“That’d be rude, wouldn’t it?” I said.

“Not at all.” He turned around and nodded his head forward, “Let’s get this over with.”

I huffed. I didn’t want to ‘get it over with,’ I wanted to do a good job. I wanted to observe, learn, and improve! My mind questioned exactly what sort of scientist Dr. Jilson thought he was. He led me through a hall which, strangely enough, had windows despite the structure being underground. As I walked past, I looked into a window on my right side and noticed in the black reflection how I nearly blended in completely with the walls on my left side. All my features and clothing were strikingly similar to the smooth, stark white walls of the lab. I suddenly felt like a ghost, wandering the hall. I shivered.

“Here ‘e are.” He stepped aside as the automatic entrance doors slid open. It wasn’t like my analytics lab at all. There, it was a bunch of us sitting hip-to-hip on long tables, hunched over our papers and laptops, all grumbling about the opposing data and unrealistic numbers. This lab was made up of a long, winding hall that connected many open, spacious rooms fit to the needs of the individual scientist.

I tightened my best grin. “It’s lovely, where shall we start first?”

He hunched his shoulders. “Wherever you want.”

I could’ve punched him just then. His careless attitude was making me seriously mad. Instead, I tapped my pen against the blank clipboard and marched towards the first room. There, two scientists dropped chemicals into various fish tanks, which seemed to make the minnows very happy, not so much the trout. The one bass was dead.

Next, a man with uncombed hair took ten minutes to

explain to me why Netherland dwarf rabbits were an absolutely crucial part in man-constructed evolution. I decided to leave him be with hard work. Me and the oh-so-enthusiastic Dr. Jilson trailed down the winding hall, each scientist more excited than the last to explain the thrilling stuff they had been working on. The structure of lower fins on shark species, the effects of adderall on a gorilla, the mating possibilities between a hummingbird and an eagle. At one point, a woman grabbed me by the shoulder as I was beginning to walk off and claimed, “Ma’am, you have to hear this. I need you to stay here and listen to this.” I nodded along for nearly an hour more with her.

“I didn’t know someone could care so deeply about kangaroo birth,” I said to Dr. Jilson as we walked away from her rants.

“We’ve been waiting for you. Supervision is our favorite time of the month,” he said, completely monotone.

I pursed my lips. “I see. It’s very different from my analytics lab. Er, my old one.” On our supervision day, we’d scramble together a powerpoint with as many graphs as possible. It’s hard to make equations look fascinating when you can’t directly see the result. We’d always come up with the solution and then hand it off to other labs, likely physics. That was where the real actions happened, the stuff that got you picked up and moved ahead. I don’t know what I did to earn the same treatment.

“I bet.”

“Yeah.”

We walked in silence for a few more paces.

I blurted out something I shouldn’t have, “Do you even care about your job?”

He stopped, swept around to the front of me, and only then I noticed just how much he towered over me. My heart dropped to my stomach. I could feel his warmth and catch a distinct smell of horribly masked body odor. “I care about my job

more than you, or them, or anyone in this god-forsaken company could ever know. I'm not a careless monster, I'm a scientist. I work, and I work, and work and I keep going because there is a goal and it's good, and I am going to get there. I don't care what it takes, I just," he hesitated, and got the sort of same desperation in his eyes as many of his coworkers had, especially the lady who had grabbed my shoulders. I thought he would do the same as her, but he stood like a pillar, eerily still. "I just need to figure it out. I love my job, ok? It's all worth it." He turned around like he had just said something awful, but I was inspired.

"Of course," I said, "my apologies. I know what it's like to deeply care about your job and your accomplishments. Even a... crappy one."

He huffed, "I bet. C'mon."

I followed him down the hall, a new fire settled deeply in my heart. Every number I had entered had to eventually amount to something, didn't it? Every time I nodded along to the wacky experiments of the Innovative Zoologists, I gave them more initiative, more encouragement for what was both creativity and discovery. I twirled a white hair in my pale finger as the word science settled cozily within my brain.

Dr. Jilson walked with an extreme purpose now. The hallway lights were greatly dimmed, although I could see a blue light just from a corner not far off.

"Is this an aquarium?" I asked, trying to keep up with his long steps.

"No," he said, "it's mine."

The air suddenly got chilly and very still. Rather than an open room, his space was a dry, freezing glass container emitting a sky-blue glare from every direction. I squinted through the intense brightness, "I see. Well, I can't, actually. What's in there?" I found myself yelling over a mechanical humming that started up as Dr. Jilson pressed some buttons on a keycode. A small section of the glass slid out, revealing a doorway.

After that, everything happened so fast.

Just moments after getting enlightenment on my career, the very same man that provided it gave a hard shove to my back, making me fall forward into the absolute frigid environment. The first thing I noticed was that my hands and knees got freezer-burnt from the metal floor, immediately. I tried to gasp but simply couldn't. I was surrounded by a supreme lack of air, leaving me completely panicked. Next, I noticed the hissing. Inhuman rasps, something incredibly vile and crude sounding. Evil sounding. They got close to my ear and I didn't dare move. I could feel the hard shell of the sound's origin brush past my body. Some parts were smooth, like the exoskeleton of a beetle. Other parts, the limbs it seemed, were incredibly spiny. One spine caught my thigh, easily tearing into the skin. I winced, nearly screamed, but found no air to do so. The whole room smelled like rotten meat.

The hissing creature ran its countless amount of spined limbs across my own, ripping me open. I whimpered out, panic clouding my judgment, and pulled up from the floor. I could feel the freezer-burnt parts of me pulling off. I crawled back, speed held down by my tight clothing. I couldn't see the creature properly, my vision was blurry and everything was bathed in a blue hue. I noticed then just how much I was bleeding, all my clothes that were so incredibly white just before, now soaked in the dark liquid. The large, spiny figure trotted toward me, making that vicious noise. It was toying with me, I could tell.

My shallow breaths grew thin. I looked towards the window, barely seeing a tall silhouette on the other side, watching. I reached out, sobbing freezing tears and painfully numb, I reached out to my only chance of survival. The silhouette turned around. I wanted to scream. I couldn't scream. I was silent as I became prey to the worst agony imaginable.

Solitude

Calvin Lee, Class of 2023

In the two million years before us,
One-hundred-seventeen billion is what it took
For you, me, and about eight billion others
To stand here and face each other,
And to face ourselves.

And so when I give to you a look of acceptance,
That look is one-hundred-seventeen billion more.
And as much as it is for me, you sigh,
And so do the one-hundred-seventeen billion before.

For you're entranced in language engorged with heat.
You swoon at sights of a lovely morrow,
Where two become one, then one becomes many.
And many become one-hundred-seventeen billion more.
I ask you,
"Why?"

You say no feeling more
could satiate that warmth you adore
from a fire made from two,
And that the cold of night invites
a bitter chill to kill
the hopeless loner who lives and dies in blue.
But is that true?

In solitude, I find a company innumerable and reticent.
Within myself a fire ignites,
not from the hands of a languid loner,
But from the hands of one-hundred-seventeen billion more,
I am fulfilled.
I say this fire is all I need.
Fire-borne solitude



Retained - Emily Byrd, Class of 2023

Quilts

Brooke Loughman, Class of 2025

Quilting: the act of joining together fabrics to encase a warm padding, usually accomplished by stitching the textiles together. The craft of quilting, one practiced habitually by grandmas, kind women in a church body, maybe a mother. The art of quilting, of bringing together stand-alone pieces, pieces of which were not meant to be one, and marrying them, joining seamlessly into a union built on warmth and time.

Wrinkled, callused fingers working delicately to place each insulating cotton in place, ensuring each is in place so that maybe, a quilt would be cherished. The gifting of quilts is not uncommon from the aforementioned crowd. A baby blanket, given months of preparation and planning, given to a child that may never see the quilt after its 10th birthday. Or maybe, god maybe that quilt is passed to its child, and that child's child, snowballing into the generational treasure status. Quilts, despite their months of effort, the blood and tears that are insulated within are never consistently cherished.

To sing the praises of quilts one must seek and exalt their misstitches. The imperfect, incohesive: the final hem that broke the maker, almost so perfect, just a little to go. When I find a quilt, lay it over my examining table, my sewing kit standing at attention, I fix them. I fix their wear, their stains, their rips, and shreds: the wounds. I never touch the misstitches; who am I to change the DNA embedded in? To alter their sense of self, so acutely which I know is not my place, not my purpose. I chase out the rooted stench, the filth, give them a fresh pair of clothes. Then I hang them on the mantle, pristine and folded, awaiting for its time to once again be brought back into a nuclear repurpose.

The only consolation, the only saving breath of my heart

when I see a quilt, love and initials hand embroidered on, laying discarded in a Goodwill, is knowing that the person who made it won't know the difference between the body of a loved one, and the body of my cat. Quilts, unloved or lost by recipients, line my walls, floors, and plush surfaces. Tea kettles, gloves, and rabbits coat the newest welcomed guest. I scooped her cold limp fabrics into my arms, beelining to the front of the Goodwill checkout line. The employees never quite match my excitement, but that is the root of reason for my collection.

Over the years I've found quilts lie dormant until found. They aren't the setup to a fantasy novel; they do not awaken for those lost souls of a long standing lineage, finally found to be a destined force. They awaken for those who find need in them. My cat, for example, would scratch and tear up anything too frilly, too soft, too delicate. So when he was allowed to have one of my quilts, he treated it with softness I had never thought him possible of. I joked with the tabby that the author of the quilt had spoken some kindness into him, but the agreeing-stare-meow combo I got in return settled my silly theory.



Conch Shell - Kristen Wells, Class of 2023

My Heritage

Piper Gilchrist, Class of 2025

A war in one's head may cloud their mind,

From a family's point of view in emerald hue.

Freedom is almost out of range of one's grasp,

When the door of jagged blue appears.

Many hours of torture of crashing waves,

Beautiful green and gray fade into sight.

They step onto the meadow of peace,

Of home of Lincoln down to nature's blessed state.

Though one motherland be smaller than home,

It becomes home for generations to come.

Nonetheless if someone knows the bloodline of mine,

The journey is what counts most,

In this day and age... This is my home.



Strausbourg, France - Kamrie Gassin, Class of 2023



Iceland - Kamrie Gassin, Class of 2023

Medicine

Eric Morales, Class of 2025

There are writers who can't resist
Who love to spin a webby mystery
For us to solve—to watch us
struggle with their masterpiece
Struggle to escape and know
And laugh as we wring out
Our wrinkly, pained, strained, brains
There are they who indulge themselves

And others who love
To create for themselves alone
Hide their pieces from the world
Letting them die
in the frostbitten cold
Afraid of the critics, and those
who can't keep their cruel and
unapologetic mouths shut

And it's a harsh world, true
Yet is it selfish to stow away
The medicines to the problems of
Others—my medicine
So instead we create for them
Always only for them, altruistically,
Yet we must conceal the vain hope
For something in return

But I'm off track
Poets who are givers, and
Make their works easier
To interpret, and allow us
Their words of compassion
And their words of anger
And of fear
And of emotions not unique to them
My medicine

Escape

Joseph Hanna, Class of 2025

I have lived in many places that include the beautiful benefit of never being alone. Alone in your room, you can hear people fighting beneath the floor and feel the walls shake with their voices. The floor is carpeted to hide the dirt tucked between each atom, each insult shoving more grime down its shaggy surface. My room is my haven away from the people outside, all the adults with their rules and exclusion and all the kids with their stupid ideas of normal. This room is the place where I can breathe air without flies hitting my tongue, a place without the tangled tribulations of prey and predator. I lay the carpet with blankets and murder mystery novels, card games and the old bandages from bad days. This place is one that my parents call a privilege, since the walls don't leak too badly on rainy nights and the window shows me the glorious sight of paved pathways filled with flickering lights. To me, this place is a castle, filled with all my servants, little ants moving my half-finished dinner to their quarters, nestled in my textured walls, a symphony of ladybugs dancing in my light, moving across their dead in a graceful sensation that sends shivers down my spine.

I create novels and write words in my shaky hands, I find ways to cram details into comic strips and diary entries. They're all about the dirt and the bugs, the friends who shove my face into the harsh concrete out by the playground, the parents who see me as an unruly monster. All they see in me is their failures, the bruises he leaves blazed across my arms showcase all the days they wish they could have without this life. The staircase up to my cell is the best part of this hell, a space without the staring sockets and bugs to play with, like the scorpions with their biting hands and caterpillars so anxious for their new form that they forget who they are. There are dozens of staircases in this maze,

a staggering disaster of design that makes escape impossible. This whole place is a zoo, a place to be observed by the suits and nonchalant destruction. This whole place is a nightmare, funded by our sweat and blood. Our bones and hair hold this crooked constitution together, our sacrificed the only barrier against the streets. We wrote our lives away the moment we dared to live and wonder why these four walls shake with our anger. We hold all our rage within this cage we built and see those we love fall to their own hatred.

My biggest dream is to escape, to find a place far away from this hierarchical ladder and be a giver, be like those ads on TV where someone with a kind smile hands a starving child free food. I want to be like the pigeons roosting on my roof, just close enough to keep tabs on the overgrown mess of humanity but just far enough, removed to live how she likes. I think I'm getting there, the crumb trails on the floor are how I eat, pieces of old rotten fruit and old preserved foods from frankenstein cans. I typically only sneak out for crumbs once the scary ones are out of the house, at work or trying to find a way to escape their minds. They always come back smelling like fire smoke and old grape juice, but I don't mind too bad because it gives me time to make my move. I sneak out of my dreams and into the real world, feel the ants crawling on my toes, tickling me awake and the hard, century-old mattress biting into my shoulder. My door creaks open and I see my mother, standing in the doorway, staring into my open eyes.

“Your school called today,” she screeches through her rotting teeth, “They say you showed a story you wrote yourself. A story about how we treat you when the doors are closed.” I feel my organs fall through my stomach and my palms coat themselves in sweat, as if any barrier will save me from what must come next. She takes me by the wrist and shoves me into the wall wailing on and on about respecting her privacy, her life. “What we do to you is none of their business, you hear me? They

won't understand how difficult you are to raise, how much you hurt us." I shift in my clothing, feeling every sound engrave itself into my skin.

"Okay." I whimper through my shaking sobs. "I won't tell them anymore. I thought you would like it, I'm sorry mother."

She looks at me with a stabbing stare that I feel in every muscle, making them tremble under the weight of her disappointment. As she slithers back to her cave, I crawl back into my cage, the place I will forever remain if I'm not more careful. I failed my mission tonight and can feel unrest clawing at me, so instead of trying to sleep I use my trembling hands to turn on my light and read. Typically my books are joyful little snippets of the outside, but today's gives me more than that. It is a book about a girl not trapped by physical bonds, but an emotional connection to her family. Yet one day she has to escape death itself, pictured through a dark cloud of lightning forming above her on a sunny day. Her death looms above her, forever foreshadowing how the story should end. She winds across highways, mountains, sasquatches, dragons, and deserts to avoid the inevitable. She runs from her comfort zone at a full sprint to find some semblance of living. I set my eyes on the great beyond and wonder if I could live too.



Serenity - Maggie Treat, Class of 2026

An Authentic Anatomy

Joseph Hanna, Class of 2025

Earth's many layers of recreated stone are more than simple rock. The thousands of ways it can change with just a bit of force, a change in direction, makes it the most versatile non-living object we know of. The crust is filled with life, a unique occurrence of one in a trillion trillion, but just beneath the surface is the mantle, fiery and vitriolic in its natural state. The mantle cannot support anything but blazing bricks, it instantly melts any other object it caresses, a ruinous touch that it is forever cursed to continue. And the center, a fickle and uncertain thing, completely evaporates most who try and pass its test, making only the very few elite refined into a ball in which all the lowly rest circle around like children near a campfire. Forever curious as to what might happen if we were to fall inside its chaos, how we might be transformed.

An apple is much the same to these layers, sweet and sour in all the right ways, able to change taste day by day, but always distinctly itself. It's a wonderful midday snack, but one wrong crunch on the core and you're destined for a tombstone containing your name. Making you nothing more than a grave plot because of a grim mistake. Or maybe it's done more often as an escape from the deceptively refreshing taste of this fruit than by ignorance, done by those filled with fear of what might be worse than death. I used to never understand those who took cyanide for their own demise, pip, pill, or otherwise. But after taking that first bite, I understood why people risked so much for just one more bite, one more moment of bliss despite the taste of rot rolling across my tongue.

The apple will lie, telling you that the only way to experience proper taste is through accepting what it has to offer. I need to accept the flaking skin, squidgy flesh, and corroded

cores of what I am given. To be grateful for the love that has died because it gives me a chance to be reborn. If I do not listen, I am not worthy of the apple I hold in my fragile hands. They will say the apple is fresh, that the black veins symbolize maturity. One that shows it is becoming true, an object to be adored. Despite my nausea, I take my second bite. The death I hold within my body will one day make me just as ripe and ready to be devoured by the same hungry souls who raised me.

I will show my true anatomy, every single aspect of my flesh and bone shall be revealed to the council, relentless in their examinations before the slaughter. If I do not hit their qualifications, then they forcibly inject faith through tools made of rusted iron, jabbed underneath my skin and forced to walk like a puppet alongside them for as long as it takes. My brother was one of them, but he ripened quickly after his transformation, lessening the harsh retribution our family was faced with due to his resistance. One day, when this decomposing council is ready to be reborn and sprout again, stronger against disbelievers, against tyranny, against everything beyond their realm of power, I will demonstrate to them the power of an authentic anatomy.

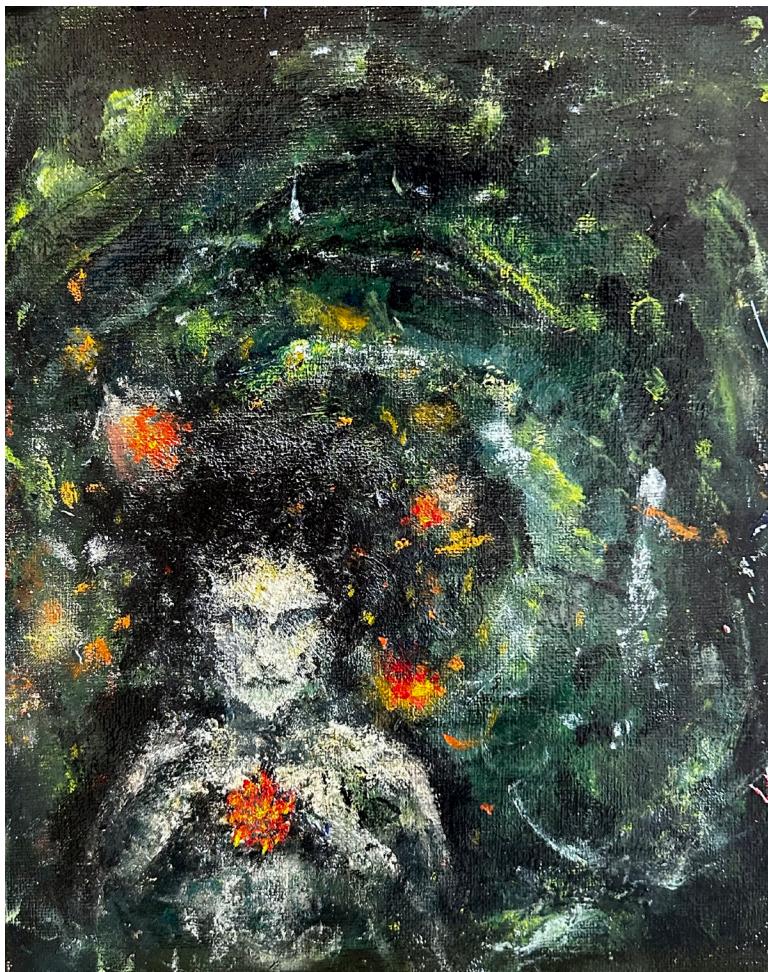
learning to swim

Kristen Wells, Class of 2023

the water rises
the salt stings
soon it will fill my lungs
and i will forget how to breathe

but for now i listen to the melodic tide
as it pulls me in closer
and closer

there are others along the horizon
floating effortlessly through the waves
and i can't help but wonder
who taught them how to swim?



Sea, Swallow Me - Dani Hunter, Class of 2024

Blanket of Peat

Indigo Clark, Class of 2024

I was entombed in a blanket of chemical reactions that slowly deteriorated my body, but not fast enough to release my soul into the heavens. Taken so violently while I was sound asleep. Many believe I was drugged when I was taken so soon. Sixteen years old and dealing with a curved spine that caused me to walk on my right foot. This caused me to cast aside my left leg. My swollen right foot ached when I roamed this Earth because all of the pressure was on it. Two thousand years ago when I could breathe the fresh air into my lungs, and within those years I was brutally taken from it. The people who took my life strangled me with a woolen waistband with all their might, and even that didn't sacrifice me. To finish the job of taking me from my earthly body, they plunged a knife into my clavicle.

The first time I was found was by a couple of peat farmers trying to harvest what was around me. They didn't expect to find me in the condition I was in: shriveled, leathery skin and coppery locks, half of it shaved off by the people who took my life. I wasn't exactly what many expect to find within those confines. My prison finally revealed me to the world and I rejoiced. The men ran away screaming that I was the devil! What did they mean? I'm only sixteen, forever frozen in time within the moss. Please don't leave me here, I deserve more than this. I deserve to breathe the fresh air that once filled my lungs. Soon they brought more people to me. Thinking they'd finally set me free, I was okay with it. Sadly, these people were just as corrupt as the last two. These monsters ripped out locks of hair, my teeth, and some of my bones.

The rest of me was left behind petrified. The peat grew back over me, suffocating what little hope I had left. I just wanted to finally be at rest, but I doubted I would ever be saved. There

are more like me out there in deep peat bogs, pleading to escape what they called their afterlife. We were taken too soon and used as sacrifices, or just plain murdered. Scared and alone and nowhere for our souls to roam.

Years later I was found in my disheveled state once more, but something was different this time around. These people had curious looks on their faces. Were they going to rip me apart too?

They carefully took me away, and not just parts. Well, they took what they could, as not much was left of me. They looked over me and my cloak which kept me safe for as long as it could. My body gasped for the air I was deprived of for so long. Carefully they learned of my life and why I was in such a broken state. They used my bone structure to reconstruct my face into its beautiful state, and I no longer look so ruined. I can be at peace now. Finally, I am at peace from my grueling existence. I even gained a new name throughout this. They call me the Yde girl.

My soul can finally be at rest and safe from the bog that held me captive. Finally, they released me from everything that tortured me. I hope one day the ones like me who were left in such dismay will finally be free. I hope that they will tell their stories to those who find them. I know that they don't care much for our peace, just for our ways of living, and even our ways of death. But, when they release us from the bog and give us a proper goodbye, we are at peace! No matter if we're enclosed in glass, we finally get to tell our story, and finally we are laid to rest.

Wonder Killed the Weak

Joseph Hanna, Class of 2025

Wonder Loom is both a branded kids toy created in 2013 by Choon's Design and a monument to many children's childhoods. The toy comes in a colorful box showcasing dozens of different bands and a foot-long plastic board filled with pegs. This board is the main attraction, the only part of a wonder loom you can't buy separately. It's the only distinction that makes it more than a box of mini rubber bands crammed into small and crinkly plastic bags, that was then shoved into an undersized cardboard box. Wonder Looms are the original product, but there are subproducts that go by many names which include but are not limited to Rainbow Looms, Alpha Looms, and Finger Looms.

There are many questions that users have had over the years that Choon's Design have kindly answered on their official frequently asked question section. Yes, every product on our page is certified to be Phthalates-free, Lead-free, Cadmium-free, Chromium-free, Mercury-free, and Arsenic-free, but we cannot confirm that our competitors guarantee the same, so it is best to buy from Choon's Design incorporated for your own safety. Yes, beads can sometimes stubbornly stick together or cling to the package, but a bit of our patented silicone oil drizzled onto the surface forces them apart to their natural and isolated state. Yes, there are defective bands; there is no cost effective way to save every bracelet you make. You are going to have to be patient and make sure never to use the 3% of bands that will destroy your current craft. Your satisfaction is our greatest concern, however some faulty links are going to get through and you must destroy the weak before they destroy you. And yes, the bracelets fade and stretch the more they are exposed to the sun's rays, so we suggest you keep your loom bracelet collection locked in a musty, dark

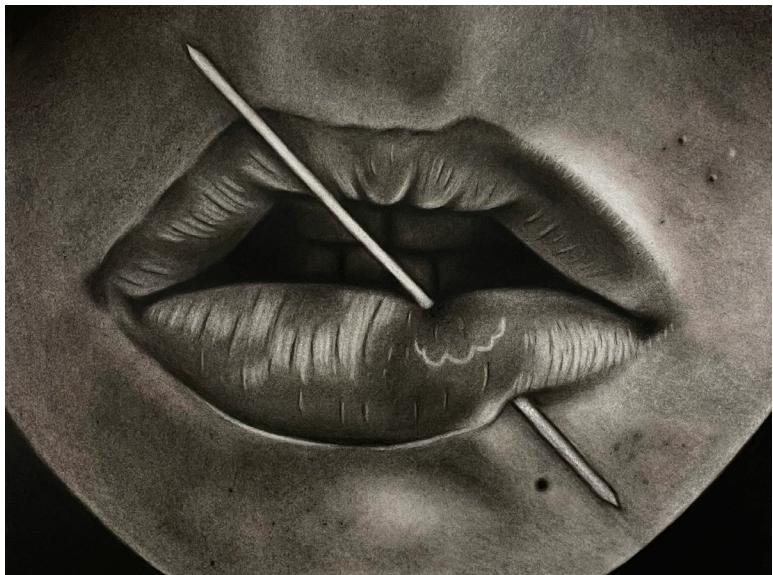
closet, but if you must expose their skin to harsh reality please add a high SPF sunscreen atop to keep it safe. In addition, our 30 day return policy does not apply to any purchases made with gift cards. Any defective packages received through gifted money from another makes it immoral for Choon's Design to return faulty content. After all, they got it just for you. In case you're still on the fence on our impeccable quality, we were voted the winner of the 2014 Toy of the Year Award, the best of the best.

This officially makes the action of putting rubbery plastic atop solid plastic the most cost-effective way to entertain children without investing in expensive technology like Apple phones and tablets. Overworked parents working three jobs now have the perfect solution to their problems. Now instead of spending their weekends finding fun ways to help their children grow creatively, they could throw a few bracelet designs at their head and watch them sit still for days, weaving neon hues into personalized jewelry. Many parents switch their tactics from constant contact to throwing them into their room with twenty-dollar looms and leave them to their useless devices. The adults talk all about the miracles that the Loom works, causing all of their friends to get one as well. Eventually the children stop interrupting their parents' date night to ask to visit friends. Kids were further distanced from each other than any other decade through technology, and Wonder Looms sped up the process. A child's only friend had to be the Wonder Loom for their own good, for their parents' sanity.

You want a kind mother, don't you? Then stop interrupting her calls and go back to the fifteenth single-loop bracelet you've made that day. Throw them out the windows for the birds to consume and destroy. Or shove it into the containers cluttering your otherwise empty room. Don't mind the infections festering in your mind, the misleading daydreams of a happier

life are lying to you, those scribbles you call drawings won't get you any farther than docked points on a test. If you want to be happy, you must forget your dreams. You have to leave those frivolous hopes of being an artist behind before I leave you. Be someone we need, like a doctor, maybe if you were a doctor you could have saved your grandfather. Be a nurse, or a biologist, or an environmentalist, do good in the world instead of writing tired old tropes in a new font and redrawing those ridiculous people you call heroes. Maybe if you were a bit smarter and a bit quieter we could have saved you from yourself. But your stubborn stupidity keeps your body on the spikes, the pegs on this board of life will only destroy the defective, and you're starting to tear at the seams.

We should have never brought you home, paid for by someone else's card, because there is no way to take you back, all we can do is watch you writhe away in your weak ways.



Pierced - Kristen Wells, Class of 2023

Variation

It's blurred reflections and rippling waves. Warped perceptions that leave us blind. It's a fall through oblivion. Open air greeting our unsteady mind and bodies, as we try to grasp onto something true and unfaltering

Variation is an in between, of reality and imagination, of a beginning and an end, and of nothing and everything. It cannot truly be defined, or held in place by time, space, or tangibility. It exists outside of and within all. It simply is.

Life is complicated, yet is almost guaranteed to display mutability.

- Summer Gross, Volume 4 Treasurer

Musings in the Painted Field

Dani Hunter, Class of 2024

Under a light-cerulean sky of brushstrokes, vibrant green hills of oil paint stretched towards the horizon. An array of blooming cadmium reds and yellows dotted the fields; bees journeyed across the fragrant flora, from tulip to violet to zinnia. Twisting viridian ferns grew under the shade of towering trees with twisted, skeletal branches that grabbed the sky. The brushstrokes of the scene changed with the sun and wind; the painting lived. And within its elaborate golden frame, there was much life to be found.

Underneath a tree with rustling leaves of sap green, a figure stood, her long, white dress flowing with the palette of colors in the field. A cool wind smelling of sweet flowers and linseed oil gusted against her side, throwing strands of golden-brown curls across her smiling face; as the wind died down, they rested once more at her cheeks. She was painted with porcelain skin, and wide amber eyes filled with the warmth of a dream. As sunbeams shone down upon her face, she felt the spirit of nature embrace her, and she could no longer contain her joy. She dashed away from the tree, throwing her arms out and feeling the gusts of wind dance with the fields. She laughed delightedly as she ran through hills covered in life abloom.

She stopped at the bottom of a hill, still giggling with delight, and settled down beside a field of poppies. A bumblebee caught her eye: it was changing. The brushstrokes of the painting were always changing—the scene was alive after all—but this was different. The contrast between the individual sections of color on the bumblebee intensified as the form became sharper, more angular. The distortion spread to the patch of surrounding flowers. It seemed the wind of her world had stopped.

She quickly looked down at her own hands. She gasped

in horror as she realized they were changing along with her surroundings.

Soft ferns became jagged, twisted lines. The foliage lost the texture of brushstrokes on thick oils and grew smooth with washes of flat color. The Lady in White straightened her posture and examined the fields: she needed to look for a cause.

A figure approached at the horizon. As the figure walked closer, the fields only turned more askew. The foliage around her now looked as if it was built with shards of stained glass.

The Lady in White felt fury burning in her cheeks. She could see the stranger more clearly now—she looked absolutely absurd, she thought. The stranger had wild hair in shades of electric blue, purple, and indigo. Parts of it seemed to stand on end, moving gently in the breeze like frizzy down feathers. Her face had swirling lines painted beside her eyes, and she was covered in bits of glistening, metal jewelry.

“What... what is,” The Lady in White yelled to the stranger, unable to find the words she desired in her distress. “What are you doing to my fields? What is up with your—” The Lady stopped and stuttered, gesturing towards the stranger’s absolute mess of hair. She had never seen anything like it before. “You. Your—”

“My hair?” She chuckled, ruffling her teased hair and attempting to finish the Lady in White’s stumbling words. “Looks pretty striking huh? Anyways, I’ll be right out of your hair in a second,” she said in a bubbly voice, walking onwards towards the horizon. Her jewelry chimed with each step.

“The flowers here were once delicate, but now appear as if they’re made of glass!” The Lady in White shouted.

“The distortion follows me wherever I go,” the stranger said, a slight twinge of sadness crossing her face. She shrugged her shoulders. “It’s temporary. I have a question for you, Miss Lady in White,” she mused as her countenance brightened. “Who says this is an act of harm?”

“You warped my fields into shapes and colors of nonsense!”

“Yes, but your clearing is still alive, and the flowers are still magnificent,” the stranger said thoughtfully.

“They aren’t as they used to be,” the Lady said.

“They are different,” the stranger said, kneeling down, admiring the vivid foliage catching her eye. “But— oh, these ones are just beautiful!”

The stranger picked two golden-orange tulips, placing one behind her ear and holding the other out in front of her face. The flower was made of crisp lines and vibrant shapes, with jagged petals made of twinkling, stained glass. She handed it to the Lady in White, who hesitantly grazed its petals; they were surprisingly smooth. It glistened in the sunlight.

“Your valley has great meaning, Lady in White,” the stranger said as she continued walking towards the horizon, attempting to reassure The Lady, who listened as she admired the glistening flower. The words lulled in her mind as they echoed in her conscience.

When the Lady in White took her attention off the wildflower, the stranger was no longer in front of her. She was already a few dozen feet away, walking confidently across the land. The fields had faded, and the foliage regained its thick texture and soft edges. Her world had returned to normal, yet melancholy had settled within her.

The cadmium-toned wildflower, frozen in time, contrasted against her soft hands as the sunbeams hit.

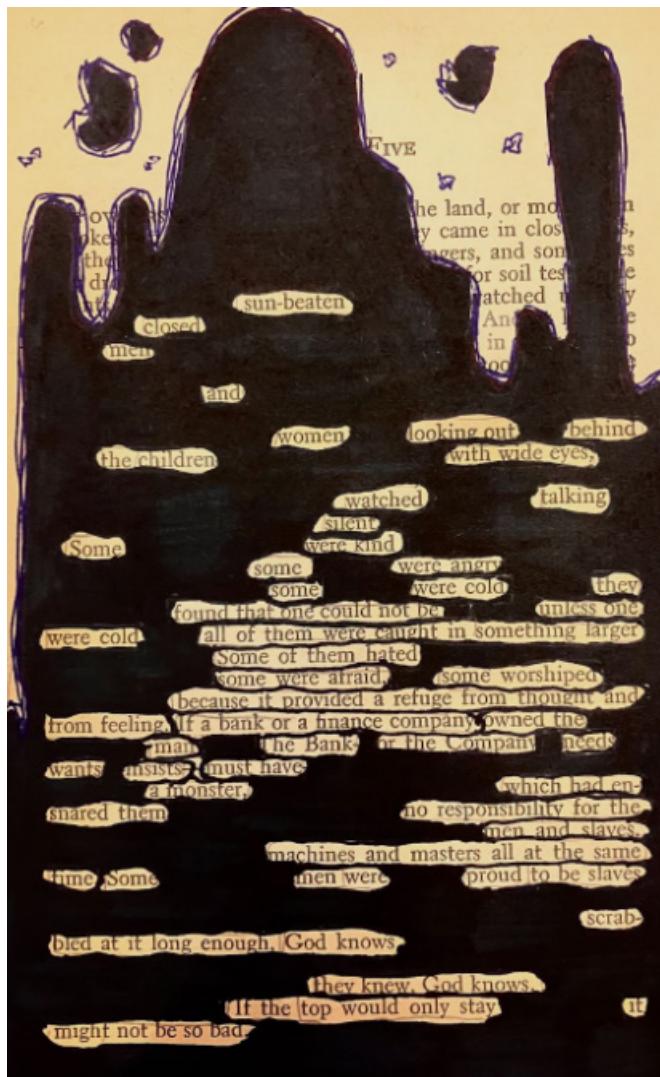
She walked back to her ash tree and sat down underneath its blanket of leaves. As she stared at the stunning petals of the wildflower, she couldn’t stop thinking about her encounter with the stranger. She could now only see a silhouette on the horizon.

The sense of normalcy in the fields was short-lived. The brushstrokes of sky developed into storms as small swipes of

ivory-black mixed with the cerulean and white sky, creating puffs of mottled gray. The storm clouds expanded across the sky and scarcely sprinkled fat droplets of rain onto the fields. The Lady in White sat disenchanted, sheltered under an umbrella of leaves, but the storm was destined to come closer, and the rain was destined to intensify.

She placed the flower behind her ear, just as the stranger did, looking towards the forest north of her fields where the stranger was venturing: a dense collection of pines and cedars scratched with ink. She stood up briskly, brushed off her dress, and began journeying towards the trees at the edge of the field, attempting to catch up with the stranger. The distortion would begin to take over her vision once more, but she didn't mind.

She couldn't let a single frame be her only understanding of the living painting.



sun-beaten lives - Pristina Parker, Class of 2026

Aura

Samira Radjabova, Class of 2023

The dewy, excruciating, humid air of a small village in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, filled my nostrils as I took a suffocating breath, trying to stay awake as the flies buzzed around my ears.

“Uncle, I’m just going to take a quick nap,” I said in an exhausted tone in the imperialistic language, Russian. He nodded, and I proceeded to lay my head on his lap. As the gentle strokes of his fingers ran through my coarse hair, I fell asleep. I dreamt. I dreamt of a fulfilling life, a happier life perhaps. I dreamt I was a bit older than I was in the village. I dreamt that I was fully accepted. Whether it was my identity, choices of love partners, or culture, I was embraced with an unknowing peace. Shocked as I walked around this absurd Reality, I stumbled upon the apparent disintegrating road of my childhood street, Walker Street. I felt a familiar sense of loneliness, remembering the nostalgia that encompasses my birth home. With my older and wiser body, I saw my child self playing alone with her toys. As I walked towards her to feel her touch and grab her attention, I tripped and fell, seeing that the cause of my fall was because of a particular figure, perhaps multiple ones. The last thing I saw was the child’s face crying; she and I didn’t know why. She just cried.

The reality I was in became engulfed into nothingness, black with some light in certain areas. I yelled until I became tired and started getting used to the fall and the darkness. I relaxed my body in acceptance, hanging on a thread of my sanity. In one of those mysterious bright spots, a strange masculine figure’s hand grabbed me. Ashamed and embarrassed of showing any vulnerable emotion, I stubbornly used his hand to raise myself up and immediately let go, wiping my hands against my pants. I noticed we were separated from the enigmatic border of black and white. He pulled me away from the blackness, but I couldn’t make out who he was, despite the exposing illumination

reflecting off his face. Before I knew it, he was gone, leaving a sense of déjà vu. Like I knew him, but I didn't. Dumbfounded, I began to explore my new Reality. But by the time I could, I woke up drenched in bullets of sweat with a towel on my forehead, and no longer in the village but in my own home back in my minuscule town in America.

My mother came into my room, informing me that I was staying home sick. Lost, I asked her what day it was. She said it was August 1st, 2022. 2022? It's been eight years since I was in my home country. What part of my so-called "reality" was a dream? And what was real? The memories of the past 8 years were alien to me. Like another person was telling the story, not myself. The brain fog consumed me like emanating mist in the early morning, and I got up from my bed and went downstairs with a familiar smell of plov, a traditional dish in my culture. A strange sense of relief overflowed me; although that Reality was something I secretly longed for, change inevitably intimidates me, and there's a strange comfort that fills the void of my sadness. Sadness, what a melancholy word. A voice that sounds like my mother's, chants in my head:

"Qizim,* what is sadness? That's only an American concept, you need to refocus."

Snapping back, I sit with my father. What is he saying? I'm not sure. With every spoonful of rice I introduce to my mouth, more words become slurred in the background. After I finished eating, I left the table in a bad mood, so I left quietly, unnoticed, confusing tears excreting from my eyes. I wash my swollen face, and I look at myself in the mirror, and suddenly I'm in the school bathroom, looking at myself. How long have I been standing there? I go back and greet my friends for lunch, and everything comes back to me. The hand that reached out to me was surprisingly two people in one, my partner and my best friend. Swirling with the same cultural burden, they knew where I came from, who I was, and what I felt. I came home holding on

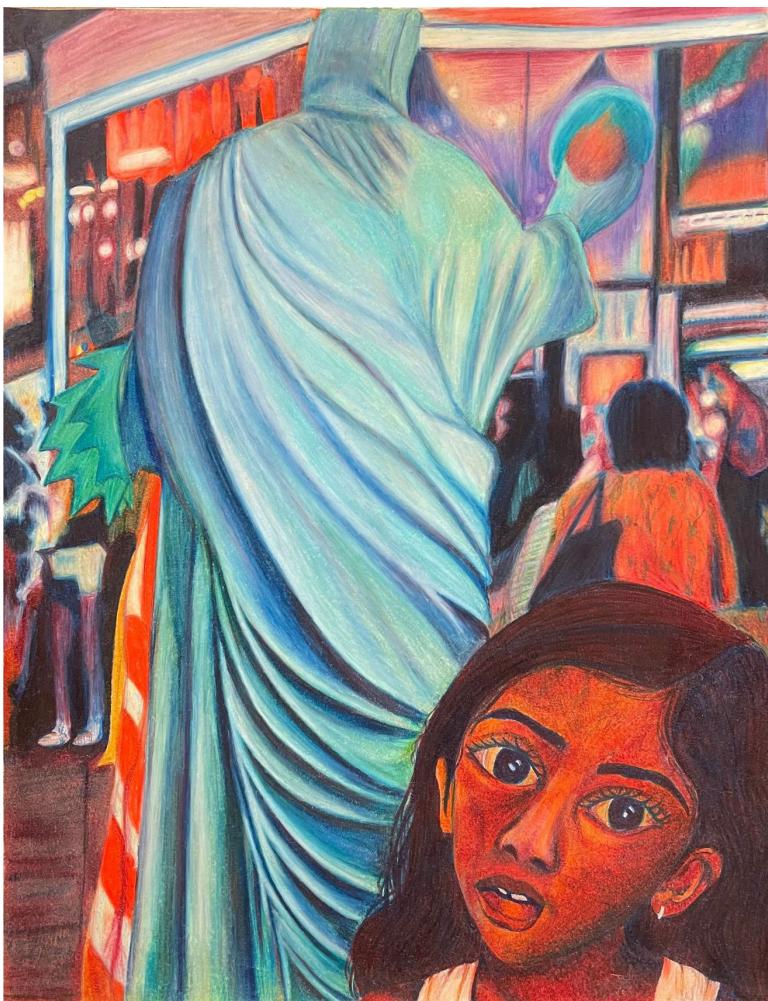
to the drops of reciprocated nurture I experienced and used it as motivation to continue on to my next seconds, my next hours, and my next years. I laid my head down again, not on my uncle this time, but on the strange figure.

“I’m going to sleep,” I said in my non-native tongue, English.

“Goodnight,” I say.

“Goodnight, Qizim.”

**an endearing way to address someone in Uzbek*



Untitled - Maahi Sethi, Class of 2023

Beautiful Faces

Summer Gross, Class of 2024

Leaping forth
with sails undone,
Soaking up the passing
sun.
Stars so bright
contrast the blackness
at night.
and your smile
made me run.

burial shroud

Summer Gross, Class of 2024

Distorted lies from within your breath
trailed down my sweaty back
Caressed by whispers that
raised doubts and insecurities upon my skin
Parallel to the grooves of bruises
you raked your hands on top of
My body braille for a story
you crafted, Laid bare
for all to see

I smothered your lingering filth
under soft clouds of blanketing white
Wrapping myself in the silky white shroud,
letting it enclose the secrets
You put upon me

The gentle cloth
lapped at the tears effortlessly
streaming down and around,
A giant tissue to smother anything
I let leak out

Empty and void, A wraith,
I waited for someone to open the door
Yet I could not bring
myself to unravel from the soft pure cocoon
embracing my defiled frame
Despite the fact that these sheets felt as stained as me



Martyrdom - Jo Rosso, Class of 2025

The Machine

Mia Bonifazi, Class of 2026

“Are you sure that’s going to work?” I asked him as I dropped my cigar into the ashtray next to me, pretending I hadn’t burnt myself.

“Of course it’s going to work, I made it right?” My friend’s voice said, a laugh bringing up the words.

I remember laughing like that.

Both our ears perked up at the sound of the machine humming to life, the gradual build, the enlightening echo that filled the entirety of the warehouse. Others perked up too, I remember, messing with their dog tags with the same hint of anxiety that had been stirring inside me. The same, deep-rooted worry that had nailed me down at night and wouldn’t go away until morning. It had been there for weeks, months, or maybe even since the project started, but it all but disappeared when I looked at it. I looked up at the marvelous mechanism he built and designed: the feat, the peak of human achievement. There it was—The Marvel. The Savior. Standing in front of me like a redwood tree, slowly growling as it began, stretching open its mechanized eyes. Gears twisting and turning like bugs. A beautiful, hand-carved slap in the face of nature who said we could never overcome her. Each little bobble, or whatever Caesar called them, in their place. The whole colossal structure towering above and watching us with, I had guessed, a hint of pity. Like it knew something we didn’t yet and felt bad.

But it was just a machine, I had told myself; nothing to worry about. I breathed out, feeling oddly serene in its shadow. Yet staring up at it, it was hard not to feel small. Tiny. Like you were hardly important in comparison to its quaking mass. But it was understandable.

It could solve everything. Every little problem,

everything you ever had complained about! I looked down to Caesar, eyes wide and shining like he was young. Smiling brightly like he was a kid again. He couldn't help it, it was everything he ever wanted. It was his creation. His chance. He couldn't be bothered to contain his excitement. Why should he? He was going to be crowned a God by soldiers and civilians alike. If they found out about it.

(They did, oh they all did)

I looked at him, thinking about how everything was going to change once and for all after today.

(Really change)

After years of work, it was here. Nothing was ever going to be the same. For the best, of course.

(Of course)

It was always for the best. I smiled, his joy infectious. The worries that filled me like water in a glass gone; after all, it had been too late to turn it off anyways.

(I should have turned it off)

"You're going to change the world, Caesar," I had told him. I remember it so clearly, laughing slightly at the fact that us, humanity, would be in charge after today.

(Laughing, isn't that funny?)

Nature unable to keep us from accelerating, expanding to new heights. The power of it would have been, was, intoxicating.

He smiled at me.

"We're going to change the world, Jonas! Me and you!" he told me. Our laughter fizzled as the old tape began to die in my hands. Crackling and spluttering, it all came to a quick end. Ironic, if you ask me. First our voices whined and shook, then they became high pitched and inhuman until, finally, it turned to an echoing silence. Then the video of it, the small little frame of video, warped in silence. Exaggerating itself like a cartoon before it turned into a black pit of nothing. Nothing and silence, that's all that was left of my little tape. It's alright. I just wanted

to watch it one more time. God, I don't even know how the tape managed to last this long. Or why I kept it. I laughed softly with the past. The crisp, warm past. It kept the tears from rolling down my face.

"We changed the world..." I said, voice quaking, the truth taking its own meaning on the once-joyous sentence. I laughed psychotically, falling back on the grass, thinking it would keep me from breaking down, the entirety of my life's irony hitting me harder than a gunshot to the head. I laughed like I was going mad, because I was, shaking and shivering and shaking and shivering and shaking and shivering although I hardly care anymore. I called out to the intoxicated rivers and oceans, poisoned with oil from humanity's stained hands. I uttered a shout for the trees, burned and cut to stumps by us. I cried out to the mountains, their tops crumbled from humanity climbing them. I let out an outcry to the animals, slaughtered by the machine's misfire and our lack of empathy. I allowed myself a hushed sob for humanity, most of us silenced in an instant once it all went wrong, and it all went wrong so very quickly. So, so quick that I didn't know until I was the only one standing. Standing and surrounded by bodies... all those bodies... everywhere... all... around...

I slowly lifted myself back up to a fetal position, looking like the mortified animal I was, trying to wipe away tears as I stared out to the burnt remains of the lab we had made it in. It, The Savior. Ha... 'Savior.' It all sounded so funny now. So terribly funny that I thought I was laughing again. I knew, I always had known, it was too good to be true. I had been the rational one! Me! HA!

My eyes took in every burnt body, each body ravaged by vines from the time spent just laying there, and all the people who were lost from simple mistakes. Simple, simple mistakes. My eyes swept over Caesar's grave, betrayed by the thing he called his greatest creation, a 'Savior,' as if his name knew his fate before him. It was an unmarked grave, but hell, it was better than what

everyone else got. Too many dead too quick; hardly any alive to bury them. Whole cities dead in a flash; bodies piled in streets. But not me. No, I couldn't die like everyone else. I had to live. What a piece of shit it is, to live. I looked out to the world, once so green now turned black. We were going to change the world, me and him, and now I stared out at a burning one. I guess he was right. We did change the world, didn't we?

I could feel my skin now, my bumpy skin that looked like scurries of insects were crawling underneath it. I was trying not to look. It would make it worse than it already was. And the bulging, purple veins that covered my skin head to toe were already terrible things. A deserved thing too. My eyes turned back to The Lab.

The Lab that made that disaster. Our Lab, even though I was no engineer. It was still there. I could see it. What a horrible thing to see before you die.

I laughed softly, dying by the irony as it took my last breath. Irony, irony, irony, that's my story. Nothing was solved that day. Everything just went wrong, because humanity was wrong to try to overcome mother nature. To fix every little detail. To be... powerful. Are we powerful now?

Still, I stared out at it. The Lab that changed the world, I thought, my brain fizzing out like the tape, empty black bottle in my hand, I felt it boil and my mouth froth. This is what I deserve. I deserve this. I'm so glad. I'm so glad to be going. God, I'm laughing again aren't I? Well, it's a funny thing, the world! The world took one last bow and faded to black around me, like a thick blanket shielding you when you were young, hiding you from the horrors on your TV.

And I swear, I swear, I heard the soft murmur of machinery starting as I let my eyes close.

Old Ways and New Doors

Mia Bonifazi, Class of 2026

“Old ways won’t open new doors,” I said.

“New doors can lead to old ways,” they responded. I thought about it. There was a long, winding pause where they thought too. I smiled at them.

“Old ways repeat old paths—” I attempted to convince them. “Old paths are where old comforts lie,” they rushed to say, cutting my

thoughtful voice off before going hush.

“Old comforts don’t last forever,” I said, my voice solemn and slow as it

took on a tone of its own creation. He looked at me. I looked at him. He looked around him.

Behind.

Above.

To the left.

And to the right of him.

His eyes caught themselves on the faces of others—beaten, worn from time, or simply tired

faces that filled the seats around us. He looked back at me.

“Old paths are all some know,” they trailed off, thinking of themselves maybe as they became hush.

I stood up and patted them on the shoulder, smiling. They got up with me.

“Then you must make, discover, new ones,” I said, gesturing to the bright blue door that appeared

to my side as it always did. They smiled, a hopeful or fearful smile maybe, as they took a step towards the door. I gently pushed them through the door, catching the surprise on their face as they fell through.

Sometimes a push is all they need, I learned.

As I turned around, a new person sat down. I smiled at them, I sat down across from them.

With my smile still gleaming, I said to them, “Old ways won’t open new doors.”

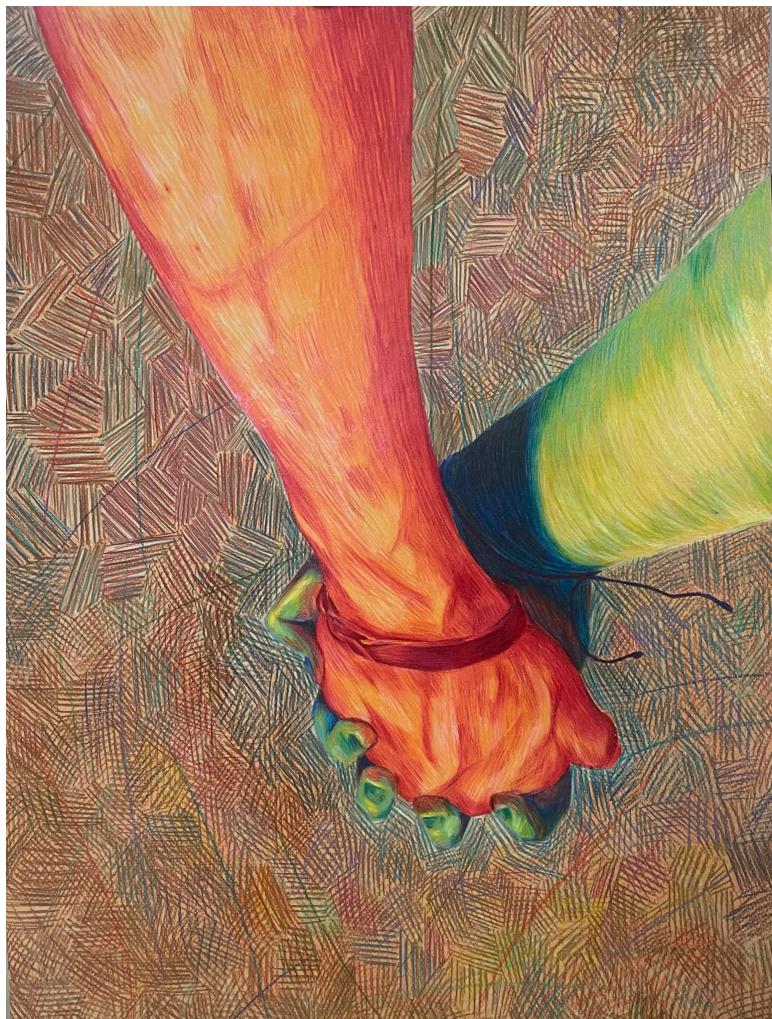
“New doors don’t always lead to new places,” they responded.

I smiled.

I thought about what they said...



Void Trip - Daniel Ratliff, Class of 2023



Guide - Emily Byrd, Class of 2023

Charming's Conflict

Daniel Parkin, Class of 2023

Cue the ballroom filled with blurred faces and all I see is yours.
The face that twists my dreams into nightmares, yet the face that
was kind to me.
You couldn't dance, although you did for me.
After being with you, I couldn't dance either.
When the music stopped, so did you.

With no forewarning, you ran away.
Only a slipper to remind me that you existed.
One that I hoped you came back for, so I waited,
I waited until the ballroom lights were gone and I was alone in
the dark.
But you never came back for your beautiful glass slipper.

I tried to put together a story that would give me closure.
The closure that you left for a reason and not just because the
song ended.
Maybe you left so that I would follow, where no one else could
interrupt
Or maybe I said something wrong, a thought that crept out and
offended you
But after a year I never could, and all I have is a slipper to show
for it.

Love is easy for one hour and thirty six minutes.
But once the credits roll, there are no cameras to keep the scene
going
You remove your mask and return to the life I am not a part of
Assuming that my admiration was a part of the mask I wore
Not of the face underneath

I convince myself that the slipper fits a foot and not the hand.
I try to put together the pieces of you that you left behind,
the story I thought you left for me to find.
But the story I thought you left was one of my own creation,
the glass reflecting the mask I wore back at me.

The only way to get what I want is to give up what I have.
Leaving the slipper on the steps where you left it,
not waiting for your return or stressing over the mask you wore.
Putting my own back on to hope someone can fall for it,
just like I did for you.

Neighborhood

Denver Thaley, Class of 2026

I'm painting a neighborhood.

As I build the shape of the first house, I can hear the light murmurs of passers-by. I happily plaster the bricks for this house. Ingredients of vibrant colors surround me, patiently waiting for clarity contrasting their current abstraction. With the stroke of my brush, I'll detail a bright red chimney. I envision the dark puffs from the chimney wafting next to tranquil scents of pastries next door. *Mutter, murmurs, whispers,* forming behind me. The comments decay with the windows delicately added, I think I'll build a neighboring bakery.

I'm going to paint a neighborhood.

Before doing so, I turn around, showcasing my house, the mere start of my symphony. Applaud behind me begins to turn coherent. I turn around, working on a nearby bakery, fading the blurs of transparent inattention. I ever so slightly shift my gaze back at the carefully completed house. The chimney is mundane, missing a puzzle piece, it seems. I conjure black clouds echoing from it. When suddenly a sparks of approval corners the house I molded. Fastly disintegrating commentary flooded my brain as I define the bakery again. The sudden silence sends me a hint of vertigo, and the paintbrush attempts to fall from my hand. Long, unbearable silence follows before I focus back onto the smoke that sprang from the dusty brick chimney.

I want to paint a neighborhood.

Instantaneously, people crowd my painting again, whispering, muttering, anticipating for my next move. I thaw from my frozen movement, I forge a fireplace easily seen peeking through the curtains of the completed house. Like an orchestra starting their first song in a concert, the sound of an almost complete harmony stings my ears. I'm able to silence it in my

head. Another pause, then I paint the grass this comfy house rested on. The percussion hushes as I realize what the assembly is requesting. My audience acclaims my work with cloy grins, encouraging me to keep painting.

I wanted to paint a neighborhood.

I turn around to char the grass, as well as begin hesitantly fabricating triangular strokes of red. The radiant paint overlaps the uncompleted, abstract bakery I had forgotten of. I cover it hastily with a discolored sky. The paint splatters on weird parts of the canvas, making the painting look uneven and discordant. I stitch together withered floorboards. The sounds of compliments rumbles into a disorganized concert of entropy. It was becoming deafening, I can't tune it out anymore. Terrified of the applause, mortified of what I had done to this house, I still continue holding the paintbrush again, letting my hands fall off my ears.

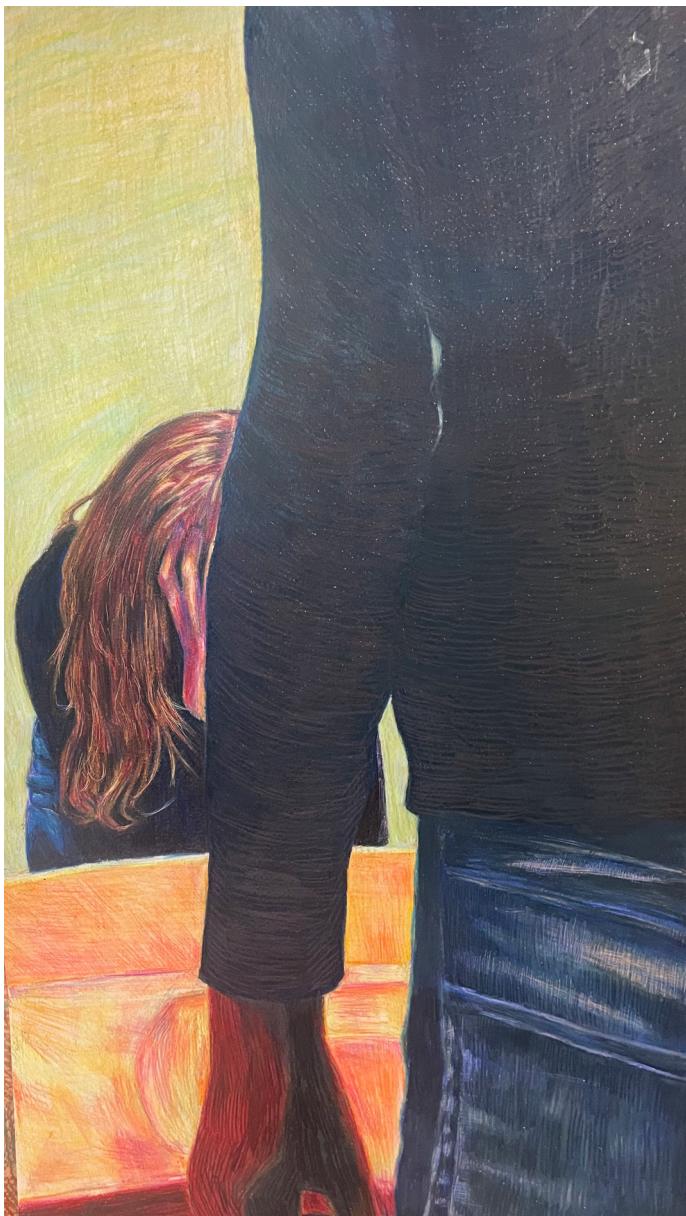
I don't need to do this.

I devise gardens and trees, yet despite my quality efforts, the flattery snowballed into angry shrieks. The noise felt like an ice-pick hammering at my skull. Pick. Pick. Pick. I impulsively clawed at the canvas, removing the greenery from sight. I took the shard of paper fragment of now joyless endeavors and ripped it to shreds. I throw it at the taunting smiles, expecting a change of attitude, but none came. The confetti continued their repulsive adoration. The paintbrush sounded like several knives engraving the surface of a chalkboard as I coated the canvas with jumbled wisps of orange. Watercolors prick my eyes while paint scraped across every corner of the canvas. I stumbled back, looking at the final result.

I didn't need to do this.

A lifeless house in an empty field, engulfed in fire. Celebration drowned my thoughts as I stood there like a showcased mummy.

This wasn't what I had wanted.



Reflections - Emily Byrd, Class of 2023

Merci

Mary McCarty, Class of 2025

"There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor."

-Charles Dickens (A Christmas Carol)

He's just like his father, a respected man known to act from the kindness of his heart.

Not a penny to his name but his generosity flowed like the riches of a well.

His name murmured through the crowd, substituting in conversations from his absence.

A smile painted on his face, ginger hairs sprouting around, dimples denting his cheeks, and the crooked nose he had inherited from his father.

How dare he be so vile and blink the stolen eyes when hers are closed for eternity?

How could he possibly look with her gaze after taking her from me?

His birth had been the death of my beloved,
Merci.

He's just like his father.
A murderer.

I had never found it possible for her eyes to lack their vibrant blue spark, but when I look into his, I understand just how horrid the sight is.

Though the color was of a dangerous current, her stare reminded me of a lively wave brushing my troubles to shore, complimented by her golden locks dangling to her waist with ribbons corresponding to whichever dress she decided to wear that early morning.

His reminds me of the lives drowning helplessly, to the point where the screams haunt me in my sleep, when I sleep.

His needs fuel endless all nighters, nightmares and night terrors. He's nothing like my sweet, dearest Merci. He cannot compare to the grace merely implied to her name.

It wasn't strange to catch a glimpse of Merci skipping through the patches of Marigold or taking naps on the soft cushioning of petals.

Occasionally, she and I would have to spend hours together sorting through the shine of flowers and hair, leaving only the prettiest ones tangled with a braid.

Her soft giggle still rings in my ear.

What'd I'd do to have her with me is far more grand than the struggles I bare for the pathetic replica of myself standing in her place.

If she were here, she'd preach to me of happily ever afters from her soft berry-stained lips, her voice roaring soundly, skipping the articulation as a secret whispered onto silk till it sang no more.

When the first gust of Winter brushes my flesh, I think of her last breath wasted on nothing more than an offspring.

Nothing had ever hurt me more like the unforgiving faith of my loving Merci.

Does Love Win?

Celeste Cisneros, Class of 2023

I blank at the name of God.

For he did not teach me love nor affirmation.

And I shed the blood of my ancestors, for their adoration has not
ever grasped the bright of day.

Still,

My heart thumps at thy sweet sin that my brothers and sisters be
slaughtered for. Yet, my heart will not waver.

No matter how much I deny, deny, deny.



Gospel - Jo Rosso, Class of 2024

Hades: Alive

Joseph Hanna, Class of 2025

SPRING

A beautiful sun rises upon my elegant little home. One I have known only for a few months, but has already grown to be lovely. It's a tiny residence, covered in weeds and filled to the brim with cracks and chips in the wall, held together by vines of various types. The life of the valley saves my roof from finding the ground. I desire to feel the same thrills of travel I did in my younger years, finding wonder in every piece of earth around me. The only place I find it now is here. Usually, I walk around foraging for my next meal and reminiscing over the beauty surrounding me. In my mind I mostly recall the beautiful spaces between the horizon and wherever I wandered. The breathtaking views that not even a god can describe through the various artforms we have at our disposal. I still attempt to capture that feeling, drizzled upon dozens of canvases. All unfinished, cowering in the deepest corners of my abode, as they wait for the day I may let them see the light of fabrication again. Even in my most artistic moods I don't concern myself with getting the paintings right, because no matter how my mind might shift the past, it will always remain in some form or another for the living to admire. I hope one day those living on my oasis learn how to create in ways I failed.

SUMMER

There's something off about today, I wake up as I usually do, but there's sound. It's separate from the many sensations and activities of life going on outside. There is a voice, delicate as glass and yet as empowered as steel humming a tune I do not know. I look out to see which of my children has created a song.

Except I haven't created this being, she seems to be formed of dead wood and charcoal, dead and burned. All that is alive seems to wilt in their touch, she makes flowers shudder and the grass shiver. Her hands are covering my precious garden in disease, fueling the nightmares of the young and putting cracks in my floorboards. I asked her who she was, and she said she is named Phanes, what a strange name. It sounds similar in fashion to the names of my many flowering buds, yet she is too bleak to flower. I ask her if she knows of creation, but she only responds with a despondent stare. I hope that one day I may learn what makes her act like a curious cat dragging a dead robin onto my doorstep.

FALL

Phanes and I have grown close in a way I hadn't expected. Whilst I was climbing a tree, she was trying to hold onto a lively branch to no avail, and I fell. It was terrifying and thrilling at the same time, I had avoided her for years in fear of her murderous fingertips. She stumbled down with me, and flowers all around her were turning to dust, like a flame had burned the ground. Yet I was fine, a bit scuffed up, but unaffected by her touch. At first I was confused, unsure of how to feel about the development between us. Then it happened: she laughed. Her laugh was golden and more lively than any sapling I had cultivated. It was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard, the way her voice moved the air. In that moment I realized that she was more complex than I thought; she is not just a harbinger of death, but a cultivator of affection. She lets life leave this world in dignity, giving life meaning in death. I may create every blade of grass in this moor, every budding flower and slithering snake, but I give them nothing to work for. They may move, but they are otherwise no more significant than a rock. Matter that hardly ever transforms into something new. She transformed me that day, gave me meaning.

WINTER

The world is too quiet. I cannot hear my beloved's breathing next to me. The wind is strangely present in my hearing. I cannot hear her gentle humming as she crumbles the fauna beneath her feet. Where is my sense of curiosity and joy? I search for her throughout time, through every forest and plain, through the piles of snow on mountain tops, in the depths of the ocean. I search the ends of the world for one thing: love. And now, here I am, once again discontent in staying the same. At some point in my wondering, I find her. She is behind our home. Her soul is long gone, body cold, pulse gone. Her physical form is smiling, and I can't stand her final moments of happiness. I hear my roof start to crumble, the magma below me starts to rumble. There is space in my heart for only so much breaking. I do not need to see this false haven if it doesn't hold her soul within its limits. There is no point to this ground, the sky is not deserving of my affection. Nothing in this feeble crafts project gone wrong is worthy of my time. The oceans do not deserve to hold waves, creatures do not deserve to feel, none of it holds a flame to the wildfire of pure affection she provided. I will make sure this world burns and writhes for as long as I am alive.



Untitled - Emily Fevold, Class of 2025



The Family - Adrian Quinney, Class of 2023

False Esperanza

Sofia Aguilera, Class of 2023

Cuando escucho ese canción me acuerdo de nuestros momentos
juntos

Aunque no todos eran buenas agredezco lo que me diste
Un lugar seguro donde vivimos nos dos
Un espacio especial para que huirme a que llamo mio

Yo te conocí como un ángel caído del cielo
Mi ángel de guarda con corazón fuerte y alas de acero
Pero tu eres un ladrón en disfraz y yo ingenuo
Me robaste el corazon y mi alma se marchitó
Pensé que lo mas difícil era amar
Pero me equivoqué porque para olvidar siente imposible

Crecí creyendo que algun dia me amarias
Mi debilidad siempre será la fe que tengo por nosotros
De cualquier manera continuaré viviendo en mi propio ilusiones
Sufriendo para falsa esperanza

(English translation)

When I hear that song I am reminded of our moments together
Although not all were good I am grateful for what you gave me
A safe place where the two of us live
A special place I can escape to that I call home

I knew you as a fallen angel from heaven
My guardian angel with a strong heart and wings made of steel
But you are a thief in disguise and I was naive
You took my heart and my soul withered away
I thought the hardest thing was to love
But I was mistaken because to forget feels impossible

I grew up believing that one day you'd love me
My weakness will always be the faith I have in us
Either way, I will continue to live in my own illusions
Suffering for false hope

Red

Summer Gross, Class of 2024

Frigid and unflinching,

your remarks

sliced their way

down my throat

Like a blade made of

barbed wire.

Catching and dragging upon

swaths of delicate skin.

Unleashing a stream

of words so tangled and convoluted

that I gagged and choked

upon the afflictions

contained within.

In agony,

unrelenting and laborious,

I tried and failed

to cup it all in with my hands.

Through the clamor in my ears,

I could vaguely discern

the laughter in your voice,

As you sickly delighted

in my endeavors.

You hungrily

gazed at what was pouring

from my windpipe.

Your eyes gleamed,

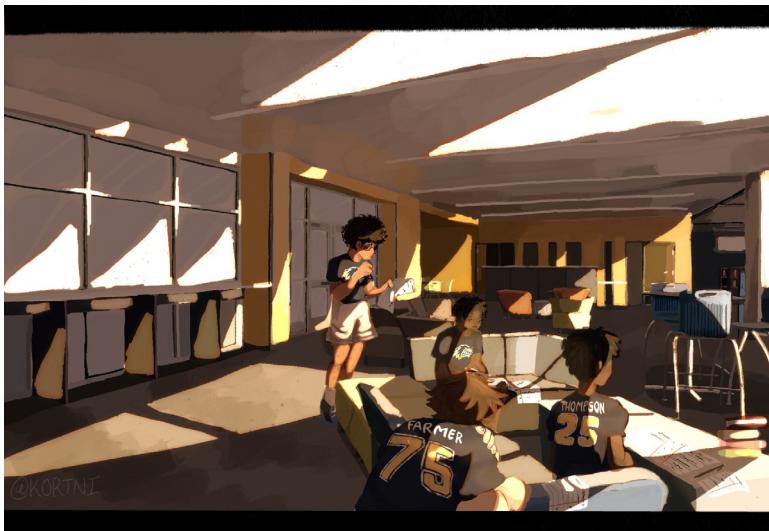
and a dribble of drool

fell from your upturned lips.

Your depraved hands, neatly filed, and

shining with cleanliness
clenched and opened
in anticipation and excitement.
You looked like you were
ready to leap out at me,
Astonishing you hadn't tried.

The absurdity of the
portrait you
still managed to portray
allowed me the clarity
to sift through my choices.
I knew in my final moments
with the blood rushing out
I had to stain it all with red.



Grades Come First - Kortni Kelly, Class of 2025



I'm Not Sick - Kortni Kelly, Class of 2025

Mom Brain

Mary Grace Jostad, BWHS Art Teacher

Light shines through the blinds in the early morning. Spots dance on the floor and walls. “Is it wake up time?” a small voice shatters the thick silence.

NOOOOOOO! my heart sinks as I realize this, in fact, is not the day he learns to sleep past the break of dawn. Just let me sleep. I keep my eyes closed.

I should just get up. There's no point in pretending to sleep now. Breakfast is waiting to be made. Coffee to drink.

Cereal or waffles? Syrup or honey? Crocodiles or fast shoes? *So many options. I should just decide and dictate. It would be so much easier. No. It's important for his little brain to make decisions. And would it really be easier? The inevitable disagreement isn't worth it. Options are good.* I pour a cup of hot coffee. Just the steam of it clears the remaining cobwebs clinging to the hope of more sleep. breathe it in.

I love them more than I ever thought possible. The curiosity in their eyes. The joy that lights up their face when they smile.

She's awake. “Moooooomma! Tum! Here!” A smile breaks across my face. I push the cobwebs aside. She is greeted with bright eyes and a big smile as I enter the room. A much different reaction than I gave him. I should probably work on that. I don't want him to think I'm not excited to spend time with him. Will he internalize these interactions? Will that be how he thinks of me some day? Begrudgingly engaging the new day? Longing for more sleep? Gosh, I hope not. I've had more time to wake up. It has nothing to do with him or her. It's just time. I'll go to bed

early tonight. Maybe that will help.

Cereal or waffles? Milk or no milk? Crocodiles or fast shoes? One pony or two? *Options are good. breathe. My coffee is cold.*

Lunch. Clothes. Potty. You can't take a book in the car. No legos. No cookie smoosher. Okay, you can bring one toy. *Must remember to take it in at the end of the day. This is how the car gets so messy. One toy a day. Breathe.*

I love you. I'll see you after school. Have the best day! Big hug.

I hope they know how much I love them. I hope they have a great day with their friends. They make good choices and their friends are nice. Will he get sad today? Will he be scared? Will she be sad or throw a fit? I shouldn't coddle them so much. I want them to be confident and know they are strong and smart and funny and caring. I want them to be happy. God, how do I teach them to be kind?

We need mayonnaise from the store.

A Perimeter Tour of Lake Rayburn

Peter Madsen, BWHS English Teacher

There are no grunting exertions,
Or straining efforts of power
But rather, a slow drift,
Taking in the trees
And the breeze
And the hills.

Docks, young and old, boast flags and rusted License plates,
posted to indicate
Collegiate allegiance or loyalty
To homeowner's first state.
Lawns stretch and gape
Between immodest
Retirement dreams
And thin, tilting
Fishing cabins,
Weather-soft
With moss.

But my favorite are the turtles basking legion on Partially-
submerged trees and rocks, taking the Sun as it comes. There
is jostle and shift on My approach. The clumsy hordes clamor,
Knocking their shells together, and fall
Plopping into lake and safety, and all
Below the surface, the water allows
Grace and expression and pull.
The turtles glide down and
Away as I pass over.

Though one ancient fellow with tremendous shell and Tired
expression does not budge. Instead, he blinks, Once, twice, and
turns his head. The rusty Fishing hook jutting from his chin goes
Slowly with him. The old lake turtle
Sees and feels and tastes the many
Grasping attempts of man, but
He remains unimpressed.

Reclamation

If languages are like the oceans, then words are the lakes, rivers, and ponds that we dabble in. Our word choice is the reflection you see on the water's surface; you might see a starry night sky with clouds of mystical purple hues, or the sun in the sky nestled within the bright baby blue. You could see me, or you could see you.

We are constantly changing as that is the way of life, but not all changes are equal of course. What makes a metamorphosis special is that it is momentous and life-defining. Reclamation is where we look at what we've done and who we are; what do we make of it? In those moments of hesitation and uncertainty, a spark of beautiful humanity becomes a fire that conflagrates our mind. In the proceeding works, talented writers depict within their works themes that display what we felt belong somewhere on the spectrum of "Reclamation"; where that fire is either embraced, or it consumes all.

- Calvin Lee, Volume 4 Poetry Editor

After Ever Happily

Daniel Parkin, Class of 2023

A funeral. Not the best start to any story really, but it's where mine begins. It was 2007 when I was barely old enough to understand what words meant, more than just being the mouth noises that people made. It was for a family friend's teenage daughter; I am not quite sure what she died from, it might have been a car accident or an overdose or both.

But it wasn't the body in a box or the constant chorus of crying that had my attention, but a boy sitting alone in the row behind us, wearing an old suit that was too big for him and neatly combed hair. He looked intensely at the coffin without a tear in his eyes, as if studying its shape. In such deep thought that he didn't even notice the big head peeking over my mother's shoulder right in front of him.

Soon the coffin was carried away and the boy didn't move a muscle. It wasn't until an older man put his hand on his shoulder that I noticed a slight twitch on his freckle-covered face. The two didn't speak as they left together with the rest of the crowd.

Did you know that it's common to go out to dinner after a funeral? I had always thought it was just that one instance led by the girl's parents, but I found out recently that other people do that too. Apparently it's not as common to invite the dead girl's ex-boyfriend to said dinner, as I found out recently as well.

The boy used to date the girl who died; I never knew what caused them to split before death forced it. But I spoke to the boy only once, that same day at the dinner when my parents left me alone at the table.

"Do you know what happens when a boy chases a girl who doesn't want him for two years?" The boy asked me from the table beside mine. I was still trying to figure out what words to say in response when he continued, "He keeps chasing after she's

gone, because he is used to no response.”

He went on to talk about how much he loved the girl and that he wished he never hurt her the way he did, but he started to talk about another girl, one still living, and as my parents sat down beside me, he said one last thing to me.

“Fairy tales had it wrong, the knight doesn’t return to the girl back home after the princess leaves, he waits for her to come back.”

Had I learned the right words, I would have told him that the princess is dead and isn’t coming back. But he left, didn’t stay for dinner, and the older man didn’t follow him. I never understood why he decided to speak to the only person who wouldn’t understand, but I think he wanted to talk and just be heard.

I don’t know where the boy is today, if he is even alive, but I would like to think that the princess came back, maybe not the way the knight had hoped, but in the way that he can finally live happily ever after.



A Walk Through Time - Kristen Wells, Class of 2023

Reflections

Calvin Lee, Class of 2023

Another page,
A chronicle, a page for each one of you.
Time's hands to turn the pages, and
My blood for ink.

I'm anxious to read the next one

Flipping back to pages I swore were written,
but finding them absent.

I've lost many pages, beautiful and terrible alike.
I close the book to read another day,
But can't help but shed a tear for every letter lost,
Beautiful and terrible alike.

I keep you alive by written words in blood.
Elegant fonts, for a gorgeous face,
And each emotion behind it to illuminate your spirit;
To pull your soul into the paper.

I can't help but look upon your page and feel a sense of ill,
But writing truthfully causes painful memories.
Pages reappear, where it was written right.
I begin to notice how deceiving my eyes have been.

I'd hate to change your story to one I'd want it to be,
But I've only got so much blood in my body that I am willing to
bleed.
I'm dismayed, at how things have come to be for me,
But I can no longer write this fiction.

You feel just as I do, estranged and detached we've become.
I suppose, it's better this way.
Better to shed the blood, and let it dry.
Better to leave a wound open only once,
And to leave the old scars to fade.



Liquid Leather - Zach Bishop, Class of 2023

Fathomless

Sophia Simmons, Class of 2023

Tucked away beneath the earth, concealed in cavernous depths,
resides the splintering frame and agitated pool of a disfigured
well.

It warps and bends the surrounding stagnant, granite walls.

A wide-faced boy with coarse, short hair
falling through his cracking stone foundation,
crash lands in this twisting crevice of dreaded vision.

Under the yellow shadow of noonday sun,
he finds himself gripping
the belligerent rim of this liquid capsule.

He peers at its mirrored surface,
a reflective void so flat, untroubled, projecting itself bitter.
and calls it bottomless.

The bristling floor is quite within sight
—just—
outside mortal comprehension.

Were the young, lost man an old, learned professor,
he'd have labeled that well of scattering, beating drops
“the human condition,” or, “x, y, z.”

But youth's scrutiny called it bottomless
and was less wrong than the wise

Brand New Skin

Joseph Hanna, Class of 2025

I love to cook, to create flavors and new ideas from bland ingredients. I have plenty of experience and plenty of tools to make something worthy of praise from those I serve. Yet there's one tool that I struggle to understand, one that seems so simple in its design and somehow throws me for a loop in every instance I try to tread its path. My cutting board, my oversized plank of wood used to protect the stone beneath, an object meant to hold the messes of my skill from flowing over my flour dusted counter.

Typically it's meant to be used for cutting. Vegetables, fruits, meat, emotion, relationships. I have mastered the most complex dishes, creme brulees and fresh tomato pie, boiled cow's head and german chocolate cake. I have crafted the menus of countless restaurants, changed the world for the better with my skilled hands and metal pans. I have mastered the art of every aspect of my craft except for the most elementary. I cannot properly use a cutting board, I cannot balance my ingredients on its wobbling and cracked surface. Every time I use it, I end up with a few extra scars, a few more defining features trailing across my skin. It's a curiosity that I have made it so far on such a rickety surface, coated with molds and disease from improper cleaning. A neglected and soulless part of my lively kitchen, the only aspect of my career left unloved.

Somehow I always seem to manage to live my life despite this painful truth. No matter the odd stares I gain from flaunting its lethal surface while riding the bus to work. I hold onto the only sin of my collected existence atop my bony lap, each bump in the road bruising my thighs and the fingers that hold my view of the world in place. I fall in line with the crowds of the false believers, the beings I call my fellow coworkers. They are the farthest from being my fellow anything, but in some ways are much closer to salvation than my tainted self. Each day their

piercing gazes burn my skin, reminding me of my mistakes and of their successes. Each cut on their cutting board is another wound, a soon to be scar. The only way I survive the day is knowing there won't be another for a very long time, for I am almost to my next phase.

Today I bought a new cutting board, pristine and flawless across every atomic portion. It is all a cook could hope for, a wonder of washability and unworn wood. Its surface is as soft as a baby's skin, lacking only the humanity of a living child. I wonder if its eyes would look like mine, I wonder if its knuckles would be coated in mud like the children I see running over my neighbor's lawn. If this perfect person truly existed, would I be fully forgiven for my sin? A life for which I have no understanding of the value of life. My soul is unable to replicate or love those who hold love for me, but maybe this reborn board could care about the wood I have carelessly thrown away to selfishly caress my perfect vision of what a cutting board ought to be.

Maybe in a world where my son feels cared for, he would live a life outside of four walls. Maybe a world where I am nothing more than a creator is the one in which there is some sanity. My son is such a young boy and yet such an old soul, living a life filled with death. He hoards jars of dead creatures and plants, creating terrariums full of termites and mold. He is my world and I am nothing more than a hindrance to his happiness. I tell him to leave the ants outside, keep the dead for their graves. All he gives in return is an ice cold glance and constant defiance. Oh what gleeful joy the world would be if it had more of him and less of me. Oh what grand gestures the government would make to keep his wild mind tamed. They would find hard metal helmets and electric contraptions, sharp knives and tightly knotted rope, a vial of harsh poison and gorgeous porcelain all for my sweet baby boy.

My plane of existence limits me to only gifting my son earthly and lively objects for his desire but maybe, possibly in

finding a brand new skin may I find a way to help him show the world what perfection he truly is. I pick up the cutting board, certain as to how I may finally please God and the ones I love, and I begin to master the art of what I don't yet know.





Beautiful interior/False face - Emily Byrd, Class of 2023

The Rose Petals are Already Rotted

Senjuti Chanda, Class of 2023

Open, rotted clots of tarred blood
disguised as sparks of
unconditional love,
violently drizzle through
her gentle entity
filled with raw purity.
Why does it always
seem to end this way?
Her mind offers sanity
as a plea to
bribe her heart
to stay with the rest of
her soul.

“It will be okay,”
her mouth conveys.

However, the fatigue under her eyes
is quick to disagree.

While vomiting away her sins
from past unrecognizable actions,
an unknown identity stood with
a scarlet bouquet.

In closer retrospection,
she knew who he was.

His rough, calloused hands,
delicately choked
her sorrows away.

The familiarity of the
darkness dedicates
her healing.

As she lays on the floor, bleeding
out while creating

a puddle of
unsensible happiness,
outsiders only saw the
true misery she refrained.
Within her personal prison,
she only recognized
how his cold, calloused hands,
held her soul delicately while
plugging in her wound
with the rose petals.

He kept them in his
torn, old pockets,
for such a moment to
have occurred.

Ode to Thorncrown

Carter Wayne Greenfield, Class of 2025

Made of glass, it welcomes all in
to this place where nothing's hidden
where all their sins are laid to bare
and they are shown that He does care

Supported by a web of beams
always for strength on them it leans
like how the Lord has weaved our lives
with love for us, this He contrives

Built on stone foundations, it stands
resolute in these barren lands
just as us, this monument stands
never to fall, held by His hands

I danced with death at midnight

Rachel Willett, Class of 2023

I danced with death at midnight,
We waltzed under an ebony sky.
They beckoned to me five minutes 'til,
And they held me firmly by the waist and hand.
We masqueraded, you could say, in our very own ballroom
I saw a stranger yet in their eyes felt my father,
Watching,
Waiting.
The music was slow, as was anything then at that point,
They let me go at my own pace
Every

Step

I

Took,

A question.

We were waiting for a call that I couldn't answer to.
They then pulled me in close, and I was pulled in the between
And they whispered in my ear, their hollow words echoing in my
head.
Their hollow words echoing in my head.
Their hollow words echoing in my head.
Their hollow words



Untitled - Hope Littrell, Class of 2023

Chains

Sophia Simmons, Class of 2023

*Massachusetts Bay, pre-Revolution Colonial America
Late in the evening, the sky is swelling with dark gray clouds
and torrents of rain. Thunder and lightning fracture the sky. The
entire city, Boston, is tensed for the coming storm.*

Porter Hall is striding through a dimly-lit passageway of the HMS Finch. A much younger British soldier carries a kerosene lamp as he escorts Porter deep into the lower decks of the warship. In the wavering light, damp, cramped walls creak and the floor slowly tilts. Porter's long, angled gait compels leather shoes and engraved buckles over warping wooden planks. The redcoat is hurrying to keep pace. Porter is a driven businessman, a highly-valued merchant who has no time for the dragging of feet. When they finally round a corner, finding a solid metal door filling the hall, he stops a few paces short.

“And here is the room, Mr. Hall—the brig, I meant to say,” the young soldier chatters. Slightly out of breath, he’s scrambling to drag a skeleton key from his coat. “The Captain had a table and chairs brought out so you wouldn’t be troubled to stand, Sir, he greatly appreciates your business these recent years as I’m certain you’re aware. The visit will hold a quarter an hour—I must say, Sir, it really is something to meet the man I’ve read about—” Porter only nods in response. He has an excellent memory and is well prepared for the coming fifteen minutes, dreaded as they are.

The redcoat unlocks the door and heaves it back, putting all his weight into dragging the momentous iron gate open. Porter breathes deeply, strictly controlling the flow of air in and out of his lungs. Some more, there less. It’s a negotiation, breathing. Everything is, of course. He takes the lamp from the waiting soldier, squares his shoulders to the gaping frame.

Stepping inside, he lets his gaze wander. The confining room is colorless and bleak. All harsh lines and lifeless tones. Every surface is completely bare but for a crooked table and pair of dented chairs, all fastened to the floor. Try as he might, Porter can't avoid the entity occupying this brig forever. He approaches the table, sets the lamp down, and takes the only unoccupied chair. Seated, Porter slowly raises his eyeline from the grimy table. And there is Briar.

Though bound to the table, clad in irons, his hands are incessantly restless. Spasming and drumming, thumb flicking in flicking out, black and yellow nails tapping. Arms covered in poorly-inked tattoos: a sloppy cloak concealing an eclectic collection of mistakes. Why the present is any more bearable for him, Porter doesn't know. He refrains from shaking his head a little. He doesn't want to start out that way. Briar is skinnier than he was last they met, and weathered, wearing only the tatters of a filthy linen shirt. Through matted strands of tawny hair, he is staring back at Porter with a secondhand set of eyes.

The Finch rocks in the silence, and Porter steadies himself with one arm.

“Briar.”

“Father. What news from home?”

“The family is as well as can be expected,” Porter replies curtly.

“And mother? How does she fare?”

“Just the same as last you visited. I suppose that was after last March.” Porter could dredge up the events of last March, when Briar was nearly imprisoned for disturbing the public peace and threatening a British scholar. He could also reprimand Briar for the way he'd treated his mother then. He would be well within his rights to. But Porter knows Briar's attentive facade is only temporary, so he leaves it at March.

“I should think you don't presently have much pride for your son,” Briar begins, voice conspicuously thick.

"It certainly doesn't appear as though the week has been kind to either one of us," Porter replies mildly.

Briar slumps even more in his chair. He casts his eyes down at the table. His hunched shoulders would tell most he feels ashamed, defeated. For Porter, the stance just confirms what he already knew; Briar wants something.

"Well? Are you not going to divulge the circumstances of your arrest?"

"I see little reason to." Briar is still holding onto the sorrowful tone of a repentant son.

Porter sighs. "Really. And why is that?"

"Is it not obvious?"

"No."

A drop of water taps Porter's shoulder. He angles his gaze to the ceiling and observes a small crevice in the wood dripping slowly. Even this deep within the ship, sheets of rain pummeling the Finch are faintly audible. Porter listens to the storm increasing in volume while he awaits Briar's response. He thinks the hesitation is a good sign. Perhaps Briar is considering the truth.

"Father, we are both all too aware of the injustice of British courts trying colonist citizens. Patriots such as I have witnessed innumerable incidents of persecution, corruption, bias—"

"Briar! Do you mean to insinuate that it was an act of persecution and bias that you were arrested for assaulting a British officer?" Porter seethes, calm manner forgotten.

"I mean to insinuate that a young man should not be forced to face life-altering consequences for exaggerated charges or for standing against tyranny!"

Porter laughs dryly. "And there, revealed, is the true motive behind this meeting. I see you wish to escape consequence altogether."

"I am not the party to be accused of ulterior motives.

The oppression of Britain is the force which consistently exaggerates and outright falsifies charges for the greater purpose of demonizing colonists in the papers, all to justify the unjust taxation of our people who are not even represented in Parliament!"

"Must I remind you that it is the British who have postponed your trial at my request, and who permitted this very meeting? Or had you got to thinking that visitations are common amongst military prisoners?"

"You have some gall, father, to defend the nation and people responsible for bleeding your own kind dry. The people who steal from us to finance the inane expenditures of a greedy, half-mad king. The people who would not give us our God-given right to representation within government if the security of their nation depended upon it!"

Briar's intense, impassioned expression is outlined by the flickering lamp. He leans forward as he speaks, gesturing broadly with his hands, chains rattling in response.

"Briar, this well-tread debate has little to do with our present predicament."

The storm seems to have picked up even more. The brig tips back and forth and distant booms of thunder accentuate the torrential rain. That unceasing dripping is quickening in pace.

"The nature of British oppression has everything to do with our present 'predicament.' Who informed you the details of the accusations?" Briar demands.

Porter grits his teeth. Another heated speech is most likely coming. "Williams," he says reluctantly. Briar has had a jaded view of Porter's trading partner, Nathaniel Williams, for years.

"I suppose I could have guessed!" Briar yells. "That redcoat has attempted to turn your affections against me since the earliest days of your ill-begotten partnership!"

"Williams is no redcoat, fool."

“I am astounded once again by your willingness to side with the enemy before your own son. The evils of the British—”

“Briar, this never-ending discussion leads us nowhere.” Porter raises his voice to cut Briar’s speech off. “Could we not instead—”

“Being the blood of a cowardly loyalist leads me nowhere,” Briar spat, ‘loyalist’ laced with all the malice a word might hold.

Porter breathes in and out, slowly. Words like these are not new to him. Years of these heated, cyclical arguments have thickened his skin. He searches for a way to move the conversation forward.

“Perhaps I shall go, then,” he says simply.

Briar’s next words die in his throat and fear crosses his face. His tone changes dramatically.

“Father, I asked you here as your son. I am in desperate need.”

“What need could you have for a cowardly loyalist of a father?”

Briar isn’t put off by the pointed question. “You have connections, father. Williams, your numerous clients and suppliers, talented friends. Deep pockets. It would be but a small task for you to convince the appointed judge to drop the charges.”

“Convince? Bribery!” Porter shouts. This, he was not expecting. “How could you ask this of me? To solicit the corruption you yourself condemn!”

“After all the British have done, is it so—”

“Absolutely and resolutely not!”

“You claim to be a patriot despite your dealings with the British! You cannot deny the abominable sins of—”

“We have argued upon this very subject a thousand times, Briar! I would that we move on, only your insistence of circling the past impedes all progress, all consensus. How would you have me to act?”

"I would have you liberate your son," Briar's voice drops. He leans forward, whispers fervently, "Could it really be so much of a burden to counsel with Williams and have the charges dropped? Is the cost truly too high when my life is at stake? You well know the punishment for assaulting an officer—death. Will you let Mother lose her only child? What kind of a father would allow his son to hang when it was within his ability to prevent it? Counsel with Williams. I beg of you, help me."

Porter sits back in his chair. He rests his head in his hands, trying to shut out the howling storm beating the ship around him. Could he? The idea rolls through his mind. The ramifications of Briar's proposal are difficult to imagine. Enlisting his partner of trade in bribery, and of a judge no less. Porter shivers. The drip is streaming like a faucet and water sloshes across the floor. Another thunderclap shakes the brig. Porter is considering a new angle to his plight. Perhaps there was never any choice to begin with. Water pools around his ankles and seeps into his shoes. How could any father let his son hang?

The entire brig lurches sideways. Porter jerks his head up and throws his arms around the nearest table leg. The kerosene lamp is launched off the table as the entire room rolls to the right. This isn't a wave. It's a cataclysmic shift, and the entire world is tipping away. Briar's half-realized yell is cut short as, in that moment, one of the brig's walls collapses. Freezing water and splintered shards of wood explode into the room. Porter desperately clings to the table leg as he is doused by the rush of water.

He locks eyes with Briar. His shackled son is also gripping the table as the brig shudders and sways around them. Briar is yelling something to Porter, but the words are swallowed by the tumultuous noise around them. Creaking and groaning, distant calls, shouts, screams. Porter stares back at Briar. His only thought, after everything, is a crippling desire to comfort his child. He opens his mouth to shout something back.

Another earsplitting crack throttles the room; a colossal beam crashes through the buckling ceiling. It slams onto the table, shaking the entire crumbling brig. Porter reels from the impact, coughing up dust and seawater. He cries out, frantically searching for Briar through the chaos, but the beam has cut him out of sight. Porter tries to stand but is yanked back towards the table by something.

He looks down. Chains. There are thick black chains binding Porter's arms to the tabletop. He lightly runs a finger along the steel grasping his skin, taking in its tightening grip. The chains are growing, moving. Porter's panic and the surrounding pandemonium bleed away. The chains are reaching up, snaking around his arms. Porter's confusion, determination, fear, all dissipate in the face of this new horror. The chains suffocate his vision, consume his mind. They're stripping his soul of its most basic humanity as they greedily crawl along his skin. Merchant, loyalist, patriot, husband, father, are all ripped away as the chains wrap around his torso, legs, ankles, feet.

Porter is all that is left. A caged man screaming, "No, no, no, no!" He's drowning in chains that are growing, twisting, grabbing, feasting on him in front of his petrified gaze. Another surge of water rips through the room. The weight of the bonds drags him down towards the rising water level. Porter pulls and panics and struggles against the devouring steel as water roars over his chest and neck and face, still climbing. He shuts his eyes and writhes. The water crests his head, fills the brig.

Porter is gasping now, choking on the seawater flooding through his lungs. Frenzied waters are pulling him into a black abyss, their biting, bitter cold eats away at his skin. Sinking, sinking.

Now, Porter can feel only one sensation. Now, there is only wretched steel.

The remains of the HMS Finch are disappearing into

oblivion. Black water is frothing around shattered timber and strangled strands of rope and sail. When the last cleaved corner of wood is consumed by the bay, the only sound to break the mournful silence is the quiet rattling of steel. Chains.



Untitled - Maahi Sethi, Class of 2023

The Clocktower

Sophie Williams-Richmond, Class of 2025

Shall I describe it,
My doom?
Shall I describe my doom to you?
Revisit the tower that caused my very death?
As you wish, O'Lord.

It was the clocktower,
A clocktower higher than any sane man could fathom.
Its coned roof reached well above the clouds,
Its chime shook the land,
Its bricks older than any man could remember.
I stepped in,
Into the bottom of the tower.
From then, I was destined to my death.
Above me were many gears and switches
Coated in the orange texture of time.
They churned every second
And caused a beastly growl,
So prevalent, I became dizzier with each second.
It was the devil's roar, I suppose.
Only Lucifer could make such a noise.

Once a minute, something would click.
It was impossible to tell what,
For if you would have looked up,
You'd only see an infinite spiral of the gears.
But, way above, something clicked.
With every click, I was sure the building would crumble atop me.
With every click, my heart raced a little closer to the door
From which I came.
Foolish I was, O'Lord, for I stayed.

I sat and watched as the clocktower planned out my death.

I knew what was next.

Once an hour, it would chime.

From my home, I heard it chime once an hour.

It signaled my wake and my rest.

I was exhilarated to hear it up close for once.

It clicked,

Then it chimed.

The chime shook the lands.

The chime, so incredibly thunderous,

So indescribably internal,

Shattered my bones instantly.

I lay before you, O'Lord.

I lay on glittering clouds,

In front of pearly gates,

Only to admit most human ignorance.

You built the glorious clocktower,

Higher than any sane man could imagine,

And waited for such a simple-minded creature,

Made in your image,

To test its limits.

I have been tested,

And I have failed.

I lay dead,

At your feet,

O'Lord.

My bones, now made of dust, rather than rock.

I have described my doom.



Wave Sculpture - Kristen Wells, Class of 2023

To Cry on the Paper

Calvin Lee, Class of 2023

Saline sadness plunged into pristine paper;
pooling blots of smeared ink
coated the dreary paper in depression and despair.
The shaky pen stroked,
the snot oozed,
the emotion meant to make us reel...

With all this written about,
“Oh, me,” and
“My sore heart,”
it’s easy to overlook the one in true peril here.

You’ll see that the paper has drowned to death
after having struggled in a deep black sea of sorrow.
If it is still alive
after having the immense weight of one’s trauma
heaved and then slammed upon it,
then surely,
it will scrape and claw its frail body from under those black,
lemon-scented Hefty garbage bags,
find a cliff ledge that’s nearby but fit for the job,
and finally dive,
“header-first,”
straight onto the rocky ground.

The poor paper,
punctured and poked from its jagged and rocky deathbed,
uttered faintly its last wishes;
“Oh, how I wish to be something more
than a table
at the back of its classroom,
with angst, disrespect, and immaturity
inscribed upon my holy face...
Blegh.”

My dear writers, to whom it may concern:
The paper is not the table at the back of the classroom,
but your canvas.
To cry on the paper cannot be more
than torture or homicide.

For a canvas wishes for nuance and intricacies,
beauty and grace,
and a message
that uplifts or weighs on the hearts of man,
and does so in a fashion akin
to Nature and Her ways.

A canvas should not have
a deep scar on its psyche,
or be on its knees with its hands clasped together
while pleading for its life at whatever cost.
For that is to cry on the paper.



In My Head - Zane Prejoles, Class of 2024



Marigold Dreams - Zane Prejoles, Class of 2024

Resignation Letter

Kamrie Gassin, Class of 2023

Dear —,

After an appropriate period of deliberation, I have come to the decision to tender my two-week notice from Chick-Fil-A.

Please know that I still maintain a high level of respect for you as a manager and supervisor, and I thank you sincerely for the support and assistance you have offered me. I have been proud to work for Chick-Fil-A over the past several months; it has been a journey that has provided me with an unparalleled foundation to move forward to new and exciting opportunities.

As such, I have decided to become a professional pirate. It has always been a dream of mine to live the life of a swashbuckling corsair, beholden to none and master of all I survey. Once my crew of unabashed rogues is assembled, we shall take to the capacious expanse of the high seas to pursue fortune, fame, and hair-raising adventure.

Our path may not be filled with the chicken-nugget comforts and frosted-lemonade marvels that Chick-Fil-A provides, but we shall nonetheless move forward to carve a name for ourselves in the annals of bold insurgency and death-defying derring-do. Once I have a keen blade at my side and the Jolly Roger flapping high above me, I believe I will find my true calling.

Please note that I am currently accepting applications for First Officer if you are at all interested in applying. I will provide a full medical and dental plan, which will offer immediate coverage of all maladies other than scurvy and the occasional bout of rickets.

Sincerely,

—





Woven Bridge - Senjuti Chanda, Class of 2023



The Sky is Our Ocean - Calvin Lee, Class of 2023

Senses Within Regret

Senjuti Chanda, Class of 2023

Melancholy was the only way to describe his mindset. Feelings of broken nostalgia masked by a wave of nausea. Blazing sun started to scar his skin peachy rose while the chilly water numbed his toes indigo. One hand stored away in the pockets of his faded-out bottoms, the lint giving it company.

Rotten seaweed was flushed up to the shore and fogged his nostrils with the revolting stench. The bitter smell spiraled the pulsations in his head as his other hand tightly clasped over his bruised lips to prevent another disaster. Within his confusion, he fell into a dream of a small wooden boat. His internal shame was personified as a passenger beside him, the pair drifting away past the horizon.

Unpigmented silvery seagulls screeched on the empty shore, yet not a single noise registered to human ears due to desertion. His eyes only felt familiar when they were closed, locked away from reality as his mouth also swallowed the key. Only the name Marcus constantly played in his cognition.

As he opened his gray eyes, his iris captured such a prominent picture: the everlasting beauty of the sunset as the oranges faded to a rose-like pink, complimenting the sea salt's soft aroma. Such an overwhelming atmosphere was never to be understood by the ones like him who hid in the shadows of regret.

Paralyzed by his surroundings, he understood that each grain of the hot, muddled sand crawling beneath his toenails were all individual, and held an unique story of origin, all of which were ignored till now. As the sun dimmed down entirely and Polarius was visible from the navy-blue hue, he wished he had been born blind instead of achieving this illusion of choice.

A Woman(’s) Remains

Mary McCarty, Class of 2025

Life depends on the touch of a woman.
She's not allowed to make mistakes.
She can't afford to be tired, or agitated.
She mustn't ask for help or walk away.
She can't leave.

We need her to stand high, but not too tall.
She has to be assertive, but she can't be too loud.
She will be strong, but not the strongest.
She has kids to raise and a husband to support.
She needs the time to heal what wounds time has inflicted.

They'll judge her if she can't.
Her husband will grow to hate her.
Her children will love to blame her.
They'll all ask her why she couldn't, or how she didn't.
They'll fail to understand her.

They'll fail to appreciate her youth and will undermine her well
into her golden years.

Her husband will confuse her requests as "nagging."
Her children will brush away her worries as a sign of ignorance.
Her peers will stare uneasily, unable to fathom the abuse she
takes.

But everyone must die.
Death accepts all despite how one lived.

I appreciate every wrinkle and every bag, each strand of gray
in her hair, and the weight of her skin, things that she was
previously ridiculed for.

I'll handle her remains with a deep sense of care.
I'll try to love her in a way she couldn't.

I make sure to cherish every moment she won't live to remember.
After all, I owe her to take care of the legacy she left behind, as
well as to keep her secrets.

My respect for her holds strong as I scrape away the flaws
hoarding her beauty.

I hold the responsibility to give her life.

Sewing the wounds leaking any evidence of death, warming the
veins left cold with chemicals resembling life, bringing the color
back to the drained complexion of someone's scapegoat for the
last viewing.

I slather on creams and dust every crevice to sharp, lively fibs
plastered on lost faces from palettes of my lies as a mortician.
Every sore that once burdened her is covered with ease.
Each flaw she couldn't manage was removed effortlessly.
Any trace of the unfortunate truth is sealed with makeup,
awaiting burial.

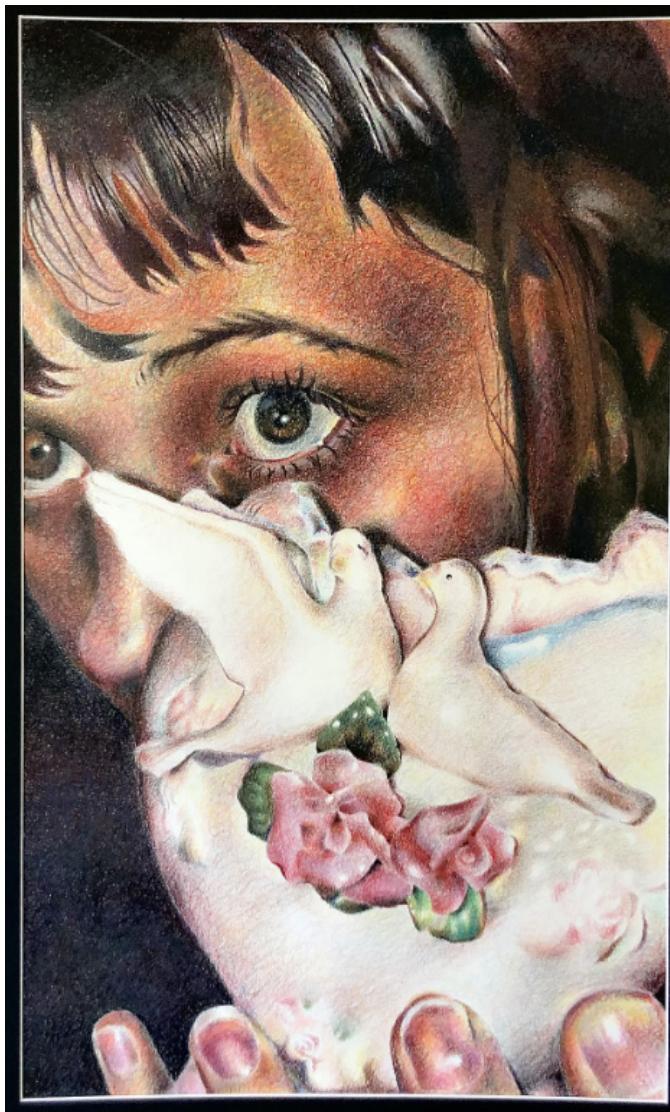
As I fix her, her family continues to grieve their loss—they'll sob
into their sleeves, begging to have her back to comfort their
sorrow.

But they'll never experience such love again.
They can never abuse the right to possess her ever again.

I bring back her identity lost with a conscience.
I sleep like the dead later in the night



Speaking from the Heart
Adrian Quinney, Class of 2023



Untitled - Yevgeniya Nommesen, Class of 2024

Volume 4 Original Music



The Ugly - Zach Bishop, Class of 2023



Far From Awake - Ezra Taylor, Class of 2023



Untitled Composition - Shantom Chanda, Class of 2026

Frost on the Hearth

Calvin Lee, Class of 2023

A raven rested upon the tree's twisted branches.
Leaden with the frigid morning mist,
She bellowed into the empty air,
And into the baby-blue sky the wave of her shriek
Seeped into the thick brown trees;
Their boney arms felt her sharp breath.
She flew off, having stolen my spirit away.

I put out a fire that once hugged me warm,
Then surrounding colors began to dull and grey.
After months of crackles and snaps, and of hot air caressing my
face,
I extinguish her smokey hands, and breathe in her remnants.
This won't keep me warm any longer.

With the smell of fading smoke crawling out of my lungs,
Night approaches with its hearse.
Calmly awaiting the arrival,
I step throughout my house to think of what once was...

Amber and orange rays of tired light rests in front of each
window,
Affronting a mass of dark shadows and even darker memories.
The body of the hearth that once let warmth embark its journey
into my heart;
It lay now contorted and defiled after all of these months.
Now, I tread, barefoot upon its lifeless surface.
It's too cold to stand on, so I go and I sit down elsewhere

The moonlight illuminates the skeletal remains of
What once was a living house, full of vigor and pumping with
blood;
The moon casting its light like headlights, gesturing me to stand
Up and out of my wooden chair.
After sitting alone in the shadows and dark places,
I know my time is drawing nearer.

Her hand gently, calmly twists the doorknob.
Her fingertips push open a creaky wooden door,
Her shadow joining the many others
Upon these dying wooden floors.

Covered in the wisps of a flowing,
Pallid dress, a pale face
With long black hair stares softly
Into my being.

The cold air breaches the bony structure of this place,
Letting the outside pour in.
The wintry chest bones of the frost push against mine.
Her chilly fingertips glide across the skin of my arms then my
face.
I inhale her icy breath, numbing all of my senses.
The door was left open during the dark hours of night, letting the
cold seep in.

A dove rests upon a blossoming tree,
Its white flower petals and dark-green leaves
Reaches up to touch her pale wings.
My absence left her bereft,
After all these years seeing me wake
To embrace the sun's golden gaze.
She pushes a note from deep within her lungs
And out past her beak;
“When will I see him again?”
She flies away, feeling as if she's been robbed.

Amidst the life and renewal of spring, after a harsh winter—
Amidst a shining, brilliant smiling star—
Inside of a wooden house deep within the forest,
Stands fatiguing walls, full of distant and fading screams, pleas,
and cries;
Floors that have bathed in the salty blood of the eyes.
In the spring, still, lies frost on the hearth.

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Editorial Policy

More than 300 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 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.

