

seed

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

“Pieta” by Jasmine Willis.....	4-5
“The Hero” by Charles Box.....	8
“Spring Haiku” by Gabe Ayala.....	11
“Eternal Storm” by Chalice Tackett.....	12
“Windowless Halls” by Emily Hurley.....	14
“Neutrality” by Chalice Tackett.....	17
“Searching for Evil” by Chalice Tackett.....	18
“The Hidden Paradise” by Mike Calhoon.....	21
“Untitled” by Kylie Couturier.....	25
“Rain” by Charles Box.....	26
“Rain” by Madeline Jory.....	27
“The Ocean” by Tracy Berry.....	29
“Have You Ever Wished” by Chalice Tackett.....	31
“The Eye” by Jasmine Willis.....	32
“The Sea in the Sky” by Michelle Driessnack.....	37
“The Strings” by Jasmine Willis.....	42

PROSE

“Shadows of the Past” by Allison Sabourin.....	6-7
“Beauty is an Ugly Thing” by Jasmine Willis.....	10-11
“The Pursuit of Victory” by Gianluca Simmonds.....	35
“Hetero” by Elijah Stevens.....	38-40
“Tyler” by Leila Bond.....	44-47

ART

Auburn Kelton.....	Cover
Sharon Balogun.....	4-5
Anuska Narayanan.....	7

ART CONTINUED

Anonymous.....	8-9
Jessi Rogers.....	11
Anuska Narayanan.....	12-13
Leila Bond.....	14-15
Angela Cheng.....	16
Sharon Balogun.....	19
Anna Swann.....	20-21
Anonymous.....	22-23
Sharon Balogun.....	24-25
Leila Bond.....	26-27
Anonymous.....	28
Jessi Rogers.....	30
Katie Cartee.....	33
Michael Duthie.....	34
Katie Cartee.....	36-37
Michael Duthie.....	41
Leila Bond.....	42-43
Katie Cartee.....	47
Chalice Tackett.....	48-49
Sharon Balogun.....	50-51
Auburn Kelton.....	Back Cover

MUSIC

“Chiusura Piacevole” by Michael Duthie.....	27
“The Village Hidden in the Moonstone” by Michael Duthie.....	28
“Loveshade” by Grant Park.....	37
“Battle! Legendary” by Michael Duthie.....	49

Pieta
JASMINE WILLIS

We think the forest
From which we rose
Is not a part of us
Until we join it again.
We forget
Few are our wants
Because the Earth that birthed us
Nurtures us in its bosom.
We cannot see our Mother
Because she is not like us.
Her hands are tough, gnarled trees.
Her milk is cool spring water.
The chest upon which we sleep
Is soft, spongy soil.
And she throws upon us a blanket
Knitted from the leaves of her hair.
She has seen her better days
Way back in Paradise,
When we knew from whence we came
And how.
Now her bosom is empty.
We have stolen her ribs
To birth ourselves,
And we build our homes



Atop her cavernous carcass.
The lullaby
Of her screams
Lull us to sleep
And we wake
Each morning
To her moans
Of sorrow.
Mother
Mourned over the body of
Son
We
Thrive within the corpse of
Mother.



Arthfael looked calmly at the training equipment and brought his sword out, smiling. He felt so comfortable when he trained. It was where he could truly be himself.

Astra's image flashed before his eyes. Her worried face and caring personality made him smile. He liked her, and he hoped that she liked him too. Their kiss was still on his lips, and he was glad he did it, but he would have to be careful around her brother.

He started to train, moving his sword so fast, it was a blur. He made his mind go blank. He wouldn't think.

It felt good to have nothing on his mind as he moved through the motions. He hit targets again and again as sweat glistened on his face and started to run down his back.

He stopped with a gasp. A flashing sword. A rainy night. He pushed back the memories. He didn't want to think of his past.



How could he have thought that his relationship with Astra could work? He was dangerous; he couldn't trust himself.

He liked her, though. Whenever she was around, he wanted to go up to her and embrace her. He didn't want to let her go.

He sighed and released his tension. He didn't want to be alone again, so he resolved never to think of the night that destroyed his life.



Photograph by Anuska Narayanan

THE HERO
BY CHARLES BOX

Why, oh why do I fight?
Not one appreciates my help.
I fight for the light, yet I am forced into the dark.

I protect the people, I fight the evil,
But am shunned as a dark being.
Why, oh why do I fight?

Once I saved a baby from impending danger,
Yet was pushed away as a dangerous stranger.
I fight for the light, yet I am forced into the dark.

I stop those evildoers' plans from becoming afoot
Yet I am blamed for the plans they commit.
Why, oh why do I fight?

After the thunderous battle was been fought and won,
The clamoring people can only complain of the damages brought.
I fight for the light, yet I am forced into the dark.

People never change, they want a hero to protect them,
Yet they fear me the same as the villain for the heroic deeds I do
for them.
Why, oh why do I fight?
I fight for the light, yet I am forced into the dark.

Artwork by Anonymous

BEAUTY IS AN UGLY THING

BY JASMINE WILLIS

Beauty is an ugly thing. It is not blind like love; no, it sees—sees well—and excludes. From the narrow tunnel of its vision it selects those crafted from the mold of a pre-fabricated template and snubs the other contestants with a vain, remorseless glance by way of apology. If love is accepting, beauty is denying. Because I do not fit—do not conform—to that self-destroying mold, I am not beautiful. My eyes are not the perfect shade of that desired hue, my lips are not full or my cheeks rosy, my hair is not spun of angel's thread, and for these uncontrollable faults I am not beautiful. If my skin is too pale, or too tan, or too brown, or too blotched and pimpled, or indeed of any complexion which is not the smooth perfection detailed in the formula for beauty, then I am not beautiful. I am not the height of a building; I refuse to starve and gag myself so that I am able to fit into a child's clothing, and for this I am rejected acceptance into society. If I am myself—nay, if I am human—, then I am not beautiful.

Beauty praises such things as façades and deception. Morality, individualism, talent, intelligence, creativity—all are repulsive in the eyes of beauty, and should be left to the ugly, inferior members of society. What has happened to the times of old, when nature was praised as beautiful, and when, consequently, all people were beautiful because they were borne of nature? To us nature today is an abhorrible, untamed—and untamable—beast, and that which is not perfect or slathered in its body weight of makeup is not beautiful.

The effects of beauty are unspoken and unacknowledged, but not unfelt. They—the beautiful people—parade about with their heads held high, in their gaudy clothes, laughing, smiling, trumpeting their lies to the world as truth, and the world so foolishly believes them, for no other reason than that they are beautiful. They can do no wrong, for if they are beautiful outside, than surely they must be just as lovely in heart, no? Hah!

They are a demon with two faces. When they are unwatched, they ridicule us, put us down, flaunt their beauty in our faces, knowing how we burn to snatch it from them, and so put it a hair out of our reach to discourage us and remind us that it is simply another thing which we cannot have. But should they think even a shadow be looking upon them, they will disguise that devil's face with more of their makeup until it is the face of an angel, and then they will stoop to help us up—but God forbid they soil their beauty by touching us! Indeed, they are saints for risking the contamination of their honor to help one in need.

To be different is a crime. We are judged by our appearance, race, culture, religion—indeed all those fundamental things which cannot be changed, but regardless of that fact we spend our lives trying to change this supposed darkness—this supposed inferiority—that we harbor in our hearts because we are different. We waste our time trying to change our lives, the epitome of truth, instead of the world, that great lie that has been polished, prettified, and presented as the real, highest truth.

Photograph by Jessi Rogers



Photograph by Anuska Narayanan



SPRING HAiku
BY GABE AYALA
A small flower grows
Nurtured by the warm
sunlight
Blooming in the spring

eternal STORM
BY CHALICE TACKETT
Wind storms hidden by chimes and
bells
Forget the air outside swirling;
Fill your glass with rain and listen
to the birds call at nighttime.
It's nothing out of the ordinary.

WINDOWLESS HALLS
BY EMILY HURLEY

Every day, over and over
We move like robots through these windowless halls
Every day we move in a sleepless haze
To classes with other ghost like figures
To move like a chain and ball latched to our ankles
As our backs grow with more sleepless nights
We stare upon a white slate developing color
We scratch ink on lines not knowing what our brain has missed
We see in our momentum less energy $2+2$ is 5
Our brain makes us say nothing when we think so much
We stare in confusion when the teacher asks a question
Wondering if they get we're in a daze
As freedom rings at the end of the day,
We leave only knowing the windowless halls are tomorrow's
mindless fog

Photograph by Leila Bond



Artwork by Angela Cheng



16

NEUTRALITY
BY CHALICE TACKETT

There must always be balance in the world.
In the instant that good was created,
evil appeared with it.
Life is the eternal struggle of good
against evil,
trying to once again form
Neutrality.
This is the plan of the universe.
This is its design.
If someone were to interfere,
the results would be
Catastrophic.
For if evil were to swallow up goodness,
the world would fade to black,
And if good were to overcome evil,
It may only do so by becoming evil itself.

17

SEARCHING FOR EVIL
BY CHALICE TACKETT

Why is it that we expect the worst in people? All normally functioning human beings want to love and be loved, want to give kindness and receive kindness. So why would we throw out these words? Words like «cruel...» and «monster...»

Perhaps we wish to believe in a great evil. We want to prove that badness is out there... because with great evil comes great good, right?

What if finding this darkness inside others is just another way of looking for lost hope? Maybe those people who have lost all trust in humanity are really just looking for goodness to save them.

Maybe, true faith is just finding something to believe in:
Something to hope for.

Would it be wrong to say that all actions are decisions made from hope? Every thought, every decision, every action.
Hope.

Because when the line between good and evil is faded, there's only one category, and whether you choose to name it one thing or the other, maybe, just for a fraction of a second, we can all call it «hope.»

*Photograph by
Sharon Balogun*



Photograph by Anna Swann



THE HIDDEN Paradise

BY MIKE CALHOON

The paradise that hides within
all of us

Is so close

But so hard to find

Our desire for it grows like a
tree

Why does it run from me?

Take my word for it

You do need things for
happiness

As it falls on those who care
less

The wise man once said:

Do not be afraid your life will
end

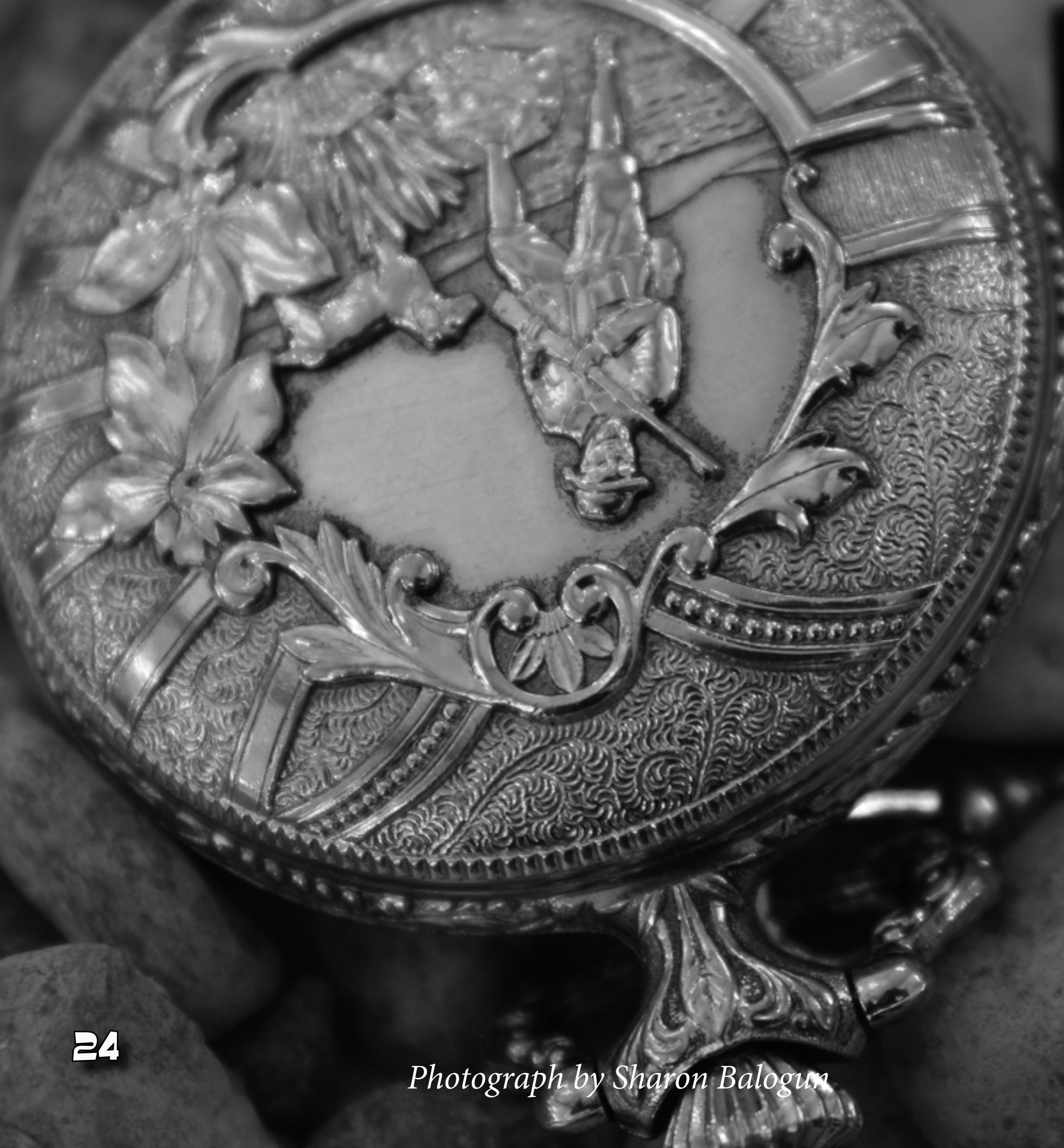
But rather be afraid of it never
beginning

Because throughout all
meaningless trend

One hope remains till the end
That is the Hidden Paradise

Artwork by Anonymous

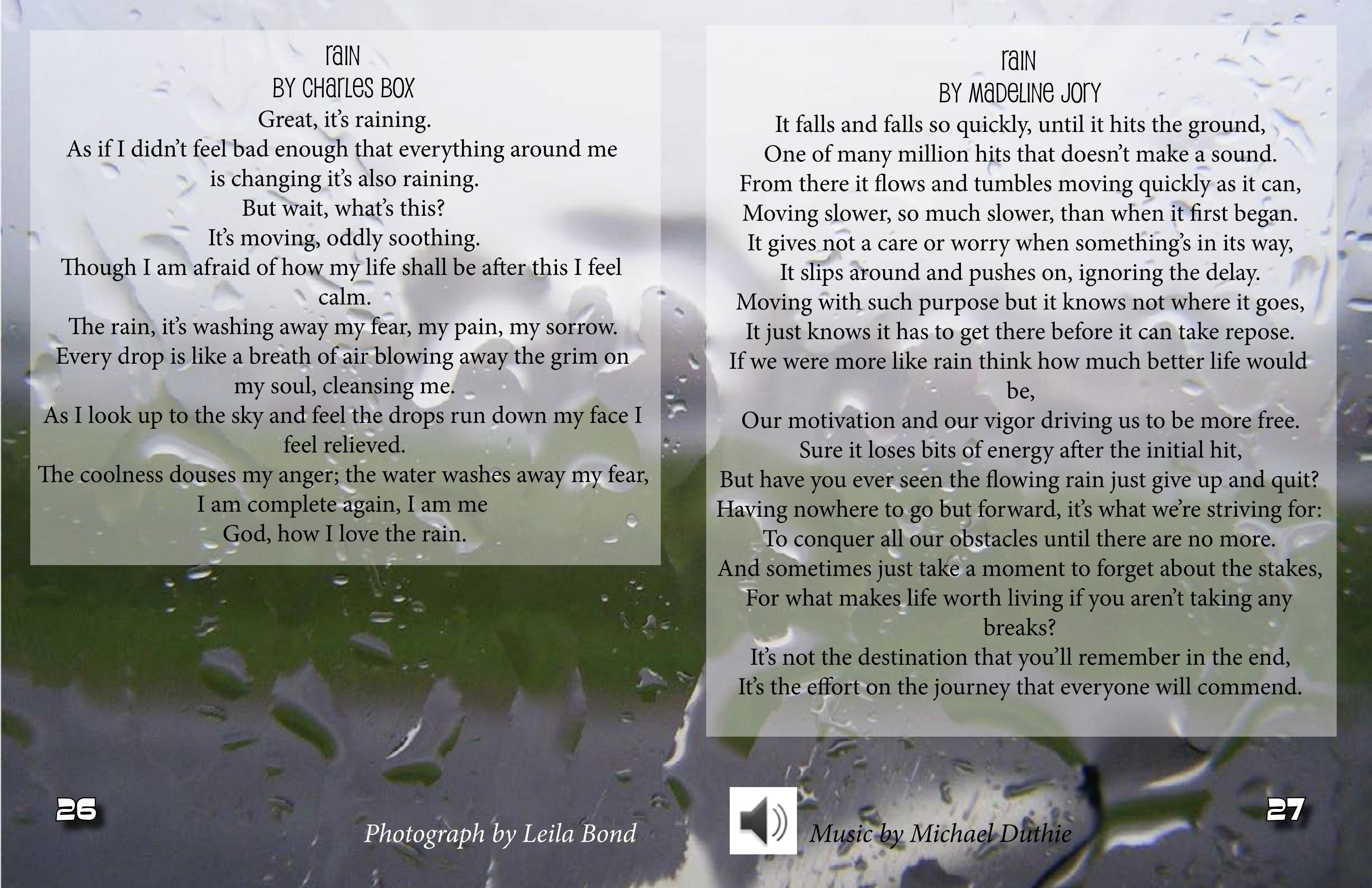




UNTITLED

BY KYLIE COUTURIER

So you thought of all your troubles,
and you put them in a box.
And you threw it in the ocean, and you
tied it down with rocks.
You were sure your pain was over, for it
suddenly was gone.
But that little box of troubles just
decided to move on.
It washed up on the beach one day and
drifted toward my feet.
It seemed a very handsome box that I
then chose to keep.
I brought it back to my small flat, and
opened it with care.
But when all your troubles flooded out,
I drowned right then and there.
They overtook my body, and they
coursed throughout my veins.
They nibbled on my nerves and then
wreaked havoc on my brains.
I fell away to nothing while they ripped
my soul apart,
And stared into the distance as they
stripped away my heart.
And with their conquest over, they
dribbled out my eyes,
Free into the world again as troubles in
disguise.



rain

BY CHARLES BOX

Great, it's raining.

As if I didn't feel bad enough that everything around me
is changing it's also raining.

But wait, what's this?

It's moving, oddly soothing.

Though I am afraid of how my life shall be after this I feel
calm.

The rain, it's washing away my fear, my pain, my sorrow.
Every drop is like a breath of air blowing away the grim on
my soul, cleansing me.

As I look up to the sky and feel the drops run down my face I
feel relieved.

The coolness douses my anger; the water washes away my fear,
I am complete again, I am me
God, how I love the rain.

rain

BY MADELINE JORY

It falls and falls so quickly, until it hits the ground,
One of many million hits that doesn't make a sound.
From there it flows and tumbles moving quickly as it can,
Moving slower, so much slower, than when it first began.
It gives not a care or worry when something's in its way,

It slips around and pushes on, ignoring the delay.

Moving with such purpose but it knows not where it goes,
It just knows it has to get there before it can take repose.
If we were more like rain think how much better life would
be,

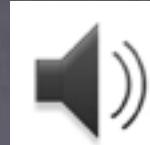
Our motivation and our vigor driving us to be more free.

Sure it loses bits of energy after the initial hit,
But have you ever seen the flowing rain just give up and quit?
Having nowhere to go but forward, it's what we're striving for:

To conquer all our obstacles until there are no more.

And sometimes just take a moment to forget about the stakes,
For what makes life worth living if you aren't taking any
breaks?

It's not the destination that you'll remember in the end,
It's the effort on the journey that everyone will commend.





Music by Michael Duthie



28

Artwork by Anonymous

THE OCEAN
BY TRACY BERRY

The dolphins are leaping
The fish are swimming
In the cool water at the first dawn

The children are playing
The parents are relaxing
On the hot beach sand in the morning

The sun is shining
The breeze is blowing
Above the blue sheet of glass at noon

The seagulls are cawing
The pelicans are flying
In the light blue sky in the afternoon

The waves are crashing
The tide is occurring
On the seashore in the pleasant evening

The seals are sleeping
The lobsters are hunting
In the dark blue sea in the peaceful night

29

Photograph by Jessi Rogers



30

Have YOU ever WISHED
BY CHALICE TACKETT

Have you ever wished
you could jump up to the stars
and dance with them,
just to say that you did?
Have you ever had the desire
to dream something so beautiful,
there was no way it could be
imaginary?
Have you ever wanted someone
to lay there next to you,
just to be there,
so you wouldn't be alone?
I have.
Sometimes I wished these things to myself,
Even though I knew you weren't really listening.

31

THE EYE
JASMINE WILLIS

Thou art never alone,
Whether thou wishes to be or not.
Thou art always judged
From the surface.

In the dark, thou art seen
By the Eye
Who can go everywhere
But death.

The watching Eye
Never sleeps.
Never has pity,
Never weeps.

Thou art surrounded by the Eye
In friends,
In family,
In strangers.

Should thou
Displease the Eye,
It will blink,
And thou shall disappear.

The Eye does its bidding

With invisible Hands
That lift you up
And make you dance.

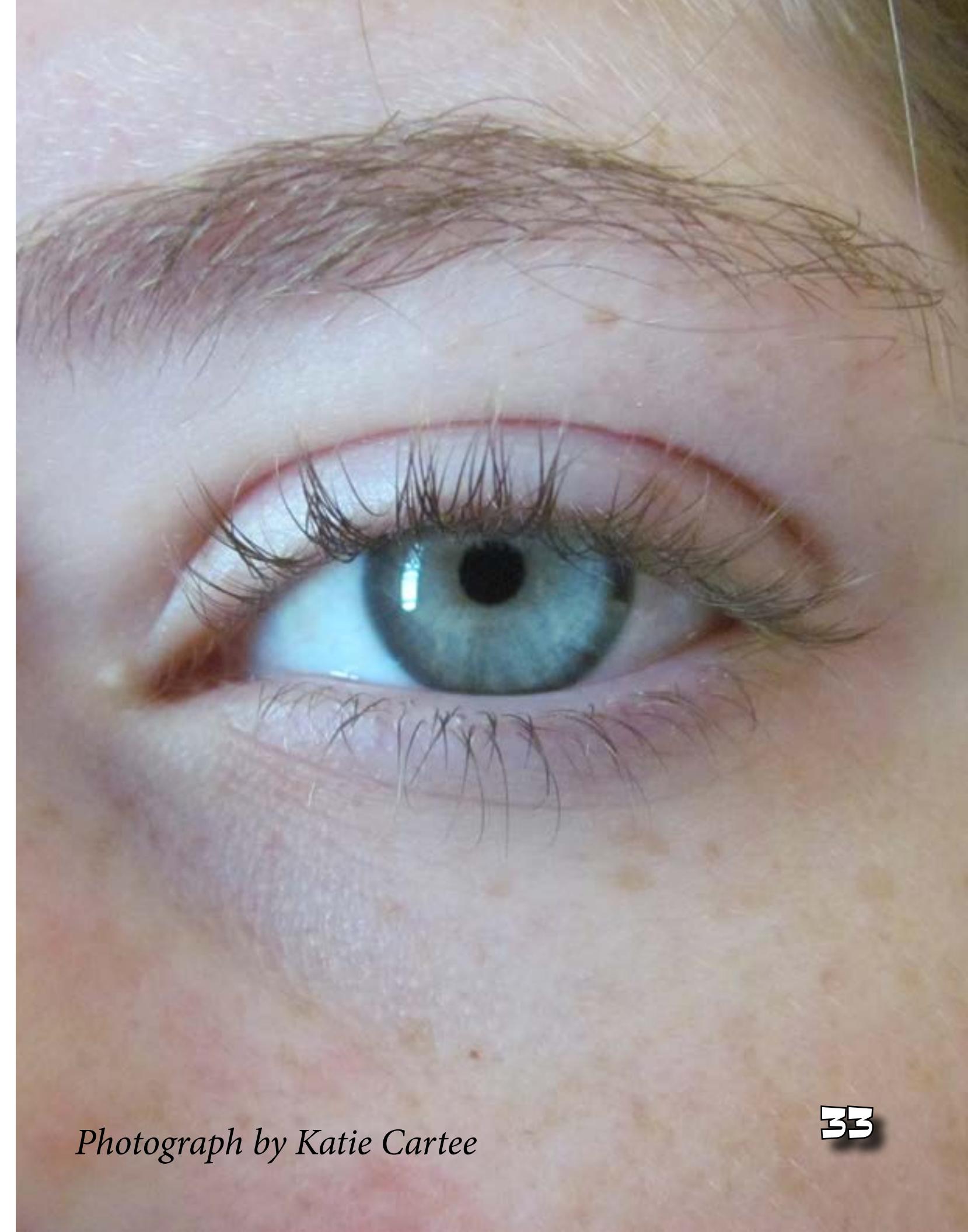
The Eye is watching
From the moment you are born.
Please it well,
And off to Hell.

Make it cry,
And shoot to the sky.

Can't thou see
That thou art blind?
Thou will see nothing but a lie
If thou looks through that one Eye.

Thou must see for thyself.
Thou must kill the Eye!
Wriggle and writhe until it bleeds,
And make it pay for all its
misdeeds.

If thou know not of whom I speak,
Then we are doomed.
Destined to remain
Blind and meek.



Photograph by Katie Cartee

Photograph by Michael Duthie



34

THE PURSUIT OF VICTORY
BY GIANLUCA SIMMONDS

It was a cold day, the clouds blocked the sunlight and the wind chilled the boat every now and then. My oar handle felt hard and especially chilled to the touch. I was stoke seat, in a boat with three others and the coxswain, be it that it was a small boat, I had to be a leader. I knew that any changes in power or timing that I made would be followed by the crew, they were my friends, they were not weak and I trusted them greatly. We had never practiced in the “Dirigo Four” before the race, and we expected it to be rough, but it wasn’t. The boat lay low to the water, forcing us to move our blades just inches from the surface. It was like nothing we ever felt before. Our stroke was perfect; it was nothing but smoothness and parallel motion, but how would this new technique affect our racing? We thought. As we made our way up the side of the course boats periodically battled down the channel, keeping tightly to their lanes and desperately trying to win. Josiah, our coxswain re-assured us that we’ve worked hard and that we should pull our hardest. As we continued upstream I felt nervousness and my heart beat faster. It was the same feeling as when you give a speech to a large audience, and all the same completely unavoidable.

We passed the start line and idled around behind it. There were about thirty boats spread across the cold watery wasteland, all waiting to be filed into their lanes to race. Everything from eights to doubles were coordinating their boats to keep from touching each other. The wind ruffled the water and crews cringed when the breeze came by, and there we waited. We waited for happiness and we waited for sadness, only our experience could decide our place in the race. When our race was announced we slowly paddled to the starting lanes. Heart rate took a climb with each successive stroke. The boat was set in place, and the “sit ready” order was given, we slowly moved to the posture. Sitting ready we could feel the power, like a lion on its hind legs, and much like the gazelle, the enemy was about to hear the roars of our drive. The signal horn sounded, we took the first stroke, and the second, and the third, each like a series of explosions becoming closer in succession. We saw the backs of our competitors, we knew we had a chance, I picked up the rating and held the power. The crew followed like hawks, and I had confidence we could pull away from the competition. We began to hear distant cheers, they became louder and louder, we were near the finish. We could hear the announcer as he broadcasted that Rocket City had the lead. Sheer electricity flowed though us, our strokes were lightning and we shocked the crowd. Josiah called twenty strokes to the finish, we crossed the line and looked into the crowd, we were champions.



Music by Grant Park



36

Photograph by Katie Cartee

THE SEA IS IN THE SKY BY MICHELLE DRIESNACK

endless rolling waves
that never crash or break
always white and foamy
yet never even salty

changes down below
can send the water rushing
on and on it floods
people curse the chain
reactions

over the sound of wind
some scientists are yelling
“your selfish pompous living
is ruining innocent nature!”

consider the power of
nature
of the water and the
creatures
vain for humans thinking
we can really ruin it

some scientists do say
we've been here for far too
long
and still we cannot control
anything going on

we cannot control each
other
or tame ferocious beasts
neither can we destroy
the beauty of the ocean or
the sky

37

HETERO

BY ELIJAH STEVENS

From the day I entered the world, my mother always told me that being born different is a blessing, and not a curse. I was special. I was different. She was a chef, so she used the analogy of the world being a great pot of boiling soup and every individual being a different ingredient adding to its splendor, including me. And for a great part of my life, I believed her.

Until that day.

"Hi, I'm Diane," she said.

I looked up at her from the sand box, noting her deafening pink shirt with graffiti styled letters in stark black splayed across the front saying "Daddy's Little Troublemaker." I wondered why she came here to the edge of the playground, away from all the other kids playing on monkey bars and screaming down slides. Why me?

"Hi," I said back simply then continuing constructing my sand castle.

"Why are your eyes different colors?" she asked. I looked up to see genuine curiosity on her face. No one had ever asked me about my eyes before. They were all probably raised to treat me no different, or pay me no mind. But she broke the system. She actually wanted to know. I suddenly grew excited.

"My mommy said that I have heretochromnia," I stuttered, having difficulty with the word. "She said it makes me special and that I'm my own ingrident." Diane's face then held confusion. And I knew I couldn't explain it to her, because I hardly knew anything about it myself.

"Well do you like it?" I asked her, growing shy.

Diane suddenly burst out laughing, pointing at me, now the one whose face held confusion. "No," she then yelled in humor. "You're a freak. Freak Eyes."

She then proceeded to chant it, raising her voice level up with each repetition. Suddenly there were kids everywhere. All around me, chanting, laughing, pointing, and yelling.

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

"Stop it," I pleaded loudly. "Stop it please. That's not nice."

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

"Stop it, pretty please." I tried hard to raise my little voice over their masses to the point of soreness, rising to my feet to feebly try and get above them.

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

"But...but its ok, right?"

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

"I'm an ingrident."

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

"I'm special."

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

"I'm different."

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

I feel dizzy. I stumbled back,

tripping over my pail. Something hit my arm painfully. I look and see a red line with red dripping out. The chanting masses moved in closer around me.

Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes. Freak Eyes.

My face was warm and wetness ran down my cheeks. I saw Diane and I crawled to her feet. She looked down at me smiling then leaned over and yelled in my face.

FREAK EYES. FREAK EYES.

FREAK EYES.

She jabbed her fingers in my eyes. Pain. Crying. More pain. I fell on my back, pressing my hands over my face, trying to bare the pain and the crying. A feeling rose up in me, a deep set feeling. My body felt numb, but my eyes felt as if they were aflame.

"You are different, my child," I heard my mother's words echo through my head. "And because you are different, people will react to that difference." She looked down at me in her lap, her eyes a mixture of emotions. Her green eye held concern and worry, and her blue eye stared with love and understanding. "But my dear, you must never react the way they do. Never fight. Never say mean things. And most importantly, never, ever, scream."

"Why not, Mommy?"

I screamed.

A shrill, earsplitting noise sounded around me. It effortlessly washed over the chanters and poured its way into my

ears until I couldn't take it and took my hands from my tightly shut eyes and pressed them over. But I still heard that noise clearly as if it was coming from inside my head.

My body felt electrified. My lungs began to ache oddly, my breathing felt strained and then the high noise began to sound strained as well. My aching lungs started hurting more as my breath was getting shorter, strangely as the noise started getting quieter. Until I let in a GASP

And the noise was gone.

Silence, save for the beat of my heart in my ringing ears. My eyes no longer felt the pain anymore. I slowly peeled my hands away from my ears and still, silence. Dead silence. Nothing. Not the rush of air, or the chirps of birds. Only my shaky panting pierced the quiet. Then, I hesitantly opened my eyes.

The sky was a nebulous black, unnatural looking, strange. The low growl of some gigantic creature rang and echoed seemingly through the expansive sky. The air held a faint shimmer, as if the molecules themselves were sparkling. I inhaled sharply and nearly choked on the overwhelmingly sweet that hung thick all around. I sat up, confused and froze.

The box of sand around me was destroyed, its pieces, heading in different directions and the grains of sand, all

suspended in mid-air.

I spun my head around, my mouth opening in wonder. I reached out and touched it, swirling the bits of sand until they stopped again and tapped a plank of wood watching it float off some before it froze above my head.

And that's when I saw them. I don't know why I didn't notice it sooner. But there they all were, flying overhead, their bodies looking as if they'd been hurled into the air by some great strength. The chanters, all of their faces held enough stiff shock to incite a small giggle from me. They all looked silly with gaping mouths and wide eyes with some faces obscured by locks of hair or arms and legs stretched out at all angles.

Then my eyes rested on her. For some reason she wasn't above with the others, but a foot or so above the ground. Her hair was blown back, her mouth open only so far as to let out a gasp, and her eyes were widened in fear.

I walked up to her, looking at them. They were a green, more hazel. Simple, inherited, normal like everyone else. If anything they were the freaks, being so normal. We, the ones who were dubbed different, are the normal ones now.

"Freak eyes," I yelled with satisfaction and I jabbed at her eyes then jumped back gasping as she quickly disintegrated to a shimmering dust that fell to the dirt to then suddenly lose its

luster.

"I told you not to scream."

Mildly startled, I turned around and there she stood, her multi-emotional gaze striking me with fear. Her green eye glaring at me with disappointment and controlled anger was paired with the concern and sadness held in her blue eye. She crossed her arms and waited for me to explain myself.

"No excuse, ma'am." I sighed looking at the ground and fiddling with my fingers.

"Come here, child."

I did, stepping by the suspended sand and dodging a piece of wood. And I expected a harsh slap or loud words as I've heard many mothers do, but I was given a warm embrace instead. And I heard her deeply sigh.

"It's all right, my ingredient. Don't worry. I love you very much, dear." She rubbed my back.

"I love you too Mommy." I looked up to her brilliantly smiling face and couldn't help but follow her lead.

"How about we go home and eat ice cream?" I simply nodded my head and she took my hand and began leading me away from the playground.

As we walked away I saw her turn behind and wave her hands then look to me smiling again as the sound of falling wood and sand and children's cries filled the air.

"There. Much better, right?"

I hugged her sides. "Yes Mommy."

Photograph by Michael Duthie



THE STRINGS
JASMINE WILLIS

Dance, dance, thou foolish world,
To the music of the strings!

Naive, brainless, the lot of you!
You'll take your poison
From the sole of their shoe.

Thou dance so well
Thou think so smartly
But had thou not considered
Who pulls the strings?

Oh, indeed, you have free will
To hang limply
From their strings.
Thou art nothing more than a puppet,
An expendable pawn to kill.

So dance on, puppets, to your obedient song!
Think not of the strings that uphold you,
Or how low you'll fall
When they are dropped.
Think of none of this, thou puppet.
Of reality, O think not, think not!

Artwork by Leila Bond



TYLER
BY LEILA BOND

"We should have only ten minutes left before arrival," announced a small child sitting in a red booster seat. The little boy strained against the stiff, ancient seat belt that tethered him, prohibiting any movement that exceeded breathing. "Not quite, Tyler, just be patient," replied the woman driving, a thin, strict-looking lady, in a tight, falsely cheerful voice. The child, although tired and cranky, fell into a thoughtful silence; despite his young age, he had long since learned that crying and whining got him nowhere. They had been driving for the better part of three hours, most of which he had slept through, but now he was awake and wanted out. He examined the clasp that held him and considered releasing himself but then remembered that it did keep him safe to some extent. Suppressing the shudders that accompanied the words "car wreck" (his father had died in one), he imagined a car crash, trying to visualize how being practically chained down would protect him from death. As Tyler's boredom increased, the scene in his mind grew until soon he was trapped in a flaming car with a dinosaur pounding on the roof. This stumped him. How, he wondered, would he be safer not being able to move if stuck in a burning car with a raging dinosaur trying to squash him? He thought about voicing this aloud, just to pass the time, but decided against it. The driver, Ms. Primm (he sometimes wondered if that was honestly her real name, and often doubted it), would only say dinosaurs were extinct and to stop pestering her. That was what she always called his questions: pestering. He sometimes wished she would say annoying, irritating, aggravating, bothering, or even vexing, just to break the monotony. And if there was one thing Tyler Joseph Alexander the Third hated yet was surrounded by, it was monotony.

All his life, which admittedly wasn't very long, only four and one fourth years, he had lived in Sir Marchey-Frederickson's Home for Boys.

It was a tall, gloomy building with exactly six windows. The people there were gray and the food was, if possible, even grayer. Ancient Sir Marchey and spidery Mr. Frederickson owned the place, but it was Mrs. Cook who was really in charge. She was Ms. Primm's sister (her husband, Mr. Cook, had died years ago, but Ms. Primm had never gotten married). Mrs. Cook was a tall, spindly woman who looked as if she just had too much *leg* and not enough *head*. Her head was very small, and, in comparison to her limbs, which looked like they had been stretched, had the distinct air of looking through the wrong end of a telescope. She was as sharp as sixty-year-old women are able to be, and twice as irritable. Her office, on the bottom floor of the Home, comprised mainly of seven large filing cabinets containing files on all the unfortunate boys who had lived there and all the pathetic people who had worked there. Mrs. Cook made sure nothing changed her perfectly organized world, and never bothered with anything that threatened cheerfulness or newness. When the old cook, a harassed-looking old lady with a tiny puff of white hair, retired, Mrs. Cook had hired a no-nonsense chef who had cooked for the army "back in the day"; specifically, before he had had a nervous breakdown in the middle of the soldiers' mess hall. The man's employers had decided to just admit him into a mental hospital, but Mrs. Cook saw her chance and stopped him before all the papers were signed. Mr. Peddles had worked at the Home ever since and was now celebrating his ninety-first birthday and twenty-four long years of cooking bland food for dull, comatose boys of all ages.

Tyler had been born in a small mansion belonging to his mother, Dianne Rose Alexander, an actress. At the time, she was acting as the main character in a movie named (a bit prophetically) *The End*. It got horrible reviews, and shortly afterward, the producers, having no one else to blame, told the press that the movie was awful because Dianne had been on drugs. When asked why she hadn't been fired and turned over to the police, they made it worse and said she had threatened them unless they went on with the production. Dianne, ever the drama queen, committed suicide

rather than prove the preposterous accusations wrong. Tyler's father, Tyler Wesley Alexander the Second, had been a famous singer. He was very good at producing long, high notes, but sadly failed at parenting. He was also a quitter. So he dumped Tyler, who was only one year old, at the Home, where he was quickly shunted to the back of the building to Room Twenty, the darkest, bleakest living space they possessed. Two weeks later, Wesley (as he had preferred to be called) got drunk and drove into a tree, killing himself instantly. His will gave the family's fortune to Wesley's parents, who had been adjusting the legal documents for years just in case something like this happened.

So, knowing this whole story, the maids and other employees at the Home had never expected much from Tyler, except maybe incredible stupidity and thuggish-ness. They amused themselves for a few months, gossiping and imagining the pranks Tyler would attempt. But Tyler was neither stupid nor thuggish. His brain developed at an unnaturally high rate, and he wised up to their jokes after about a week. So he waited until his muscles were strong enough to support his weight and was soon rewarded for his patience: Mrs. Cook bought, as the delivery man put it, a "brand-spanking-new-computer-thingy", which was to replace her mass of filing cabinets. One night, Tyler crawled into her office (he had long since discovered where the janitors kept the skeleton keys) and gave it a destructive virus. Other incidents like this soon left the maids feeling distinctly uncomfortable around Tyler, subconsciously knowing that they had bitten off a bit more they could chew with the small and innocent-looking boy in Room Twenty.

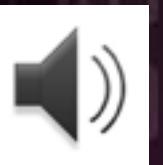
Although blessed with his enormous brainpower, Tyler still allowed himself little excursions into childhood. This was where he was now, driving along a narrow dirt road, imagining a new car wreck scene. This one involved the Loch Ness Monster gnawing on Ms. Primm and he was just inviting some aliens from Pluto to join the fun when the car stopped. Ten minutes exactly, thought Tyler triumphantly, glimpsing Ms.

Primm's ancient wristwatch. "Well, Tyler, here we are," announced Ms. Primm unnecessarily, wiping her brow and getting out of the rusty old car. She released him from his buckle and went to the trunk to gather his one suitcase. It was a sad, brown box with a pitiful clasp that had almost fallen off. Tyler got out of the car and glanced at the ground, wondering if there was a dustier place in the entire universe. He doubted it, thinking even Mars couldn't top this powdery earth. A few brave sprigs of grass had dared to grow, but had been choked to death by the ever-present dirt. These depressing clumps of vegetation were splattered all over the yard, which came into view as Tyler rounded the front tires. Noting the dead tree clawing at the sky, he apprehensively raised his eyes to the house perched on the hill. It was the most depressing, dusty, gray, run-down, pathetic excuse of a home he had ever seen, including the Home. He rolled his eyes, thinking what a cliché the whole thing was and wondering if he would have friends in this dump. He doubted it. Any children who lived here would probably be just as boring and depressing as the house itself. For once, he couldn't have been more wrong.



Artwork by Chalice Tackett

Music by Michael Duthie



Photograph by Sharon Balogun



Since the beginning of the school year, Grissom has been donating baby supplies to the Huntsville Downtown Rescue Mission. The Rescue Mission is a nonprofit facility that shelters homeless people, and has a special section for its less temporary residents, the mothers who have had to rearrange their entire lives and those of their children to accommodate sudden homelessness. These are their stories.

The Halloween Party

She arrived at the Rescue Mission on October 31, 2013. “I was depressed,” and didn’t feel like attending the party the Mission was having for the kids. She went to her new living quarters, completely unused to the environment and still in shock about how her life had changed. Her former home had been male-dominated, and she was not used to being around so many women. Soon someone came to check on her, and got her to come down and get something to eat. Now she laughs about the experience, feeling much more comfortable around her fellow mothers.

Their whole lives gone

She is in the Mission because she lost her house and twelve-year-old son, then when she went to her husband for help, she found him living with another woman. Clothes were all she had brought, and her children “ha[d] no toys, nothing.” She says the Rescue Mission “put God in my life” and that “I’m not letting it get me down”.

One woman’s brother kicked her out of the house, deciding she wasn’t his problem. Through the support of the Mission, “I got peace of mind”, and that’s all that matters to her now, that no matter where she is, she can feel at peace.

Another woman, who also lost her house, is a licensed hairstylist in several states and is in the Rescue Mission, like all of the other women, until she can get back on her feet and secure a job.

“I was crying... I couldn’t buy my daughter a birthday present”

The Rescue Mission throws birthday parties for all the children there, so one mother, new to the Mission, was delighted to find that her daughter would not celebrate her birthday, for the first time, without a celebration. In fact, the Mission tries to make life as normal as possible for all the children there and shelter them from the harsh transition. If possible, they stay at the same school as before, and, as I observed, play with each other as if they’ve been friends their whole lives.

Harder for family to visit

Her daughter, a Grissom graduate, usually comes home from college every summer to visit, but now if her daughter visited she might have to sleep in the “overnighters” section, which as the name implies is a temporary living situation for passersby. She says the Mission’s authorities are currently trying to work out arrangements.

It’s not only more difficult because it’s a temporary living state and therefore more complicated to accommodate visitors, but because the daughter doesn’t understand her mother’s situation; she’s “dumbfounded” at the idea of homelessness.

Schooling

The Rescue Mission makes sure the children’s lives are disrupted as little as possible. Taxis and buses come every morning to shuttle them off to their respective schools, often the same as before they became homeless. “Nothing changed for them,” mused one woman, watching her children shriek happily and race around the small Day Room with someone else’s kids. “They think it’s a big old sleepover.” The Mission also has Kid’s Chapel, with snacks and crafts, and parenting classes for the mothers.

Hardship can occur at any time

She came to the Rescue Mission at 2:00 AM, and no one batted an eyelid (except perhaps her new roommate(s), a little surprised to be up that early). The other women spoke casually of the occurrence; the Rescue Mission's staff (some of whom are residents themselves) are always ready for new arrivals.

Three generations

I met a grandmother, her infant grandson balanced tiredly on her hip, who said she had, before becoming homeless, volunteered at Grissom. Her daughter would be a senior in high school this year, "but we didn't make it," she said as she glanced down at the baby, who stared openmouthed at me, chubby hands waving restlessly. The grandmother has custody of him, and while his future is uncertain, he gripped my finger and drooled like any other baby.

Safe

One woman relates a story of a family that had gone through more pain and sorrow than anyone deserves. She says the mother had "the best sleep she'd had in a long time," because, finally, "they felt safe", which meant a lot to the forlorn family.

"You come here for safety and you make friends," says one mother, looking around at the other women in the room. The incredible situation of being in a difficult time in their lives is eased by the support of those who understand each other's feelings and can relate to their struggles.

"Somebody helps me... I want to do the same for you"

The mothers at the Mission appreciate beyond words the supplies, all of which the Mission comes by through donations. They also ap-

preciate the bonds forged through hardship between the mothers. I asked if any of the former residents had ever come back to visit, and got a rousing chorus of positive replies. "I would come back here and visit and see how everybody's doing," one mother says, explaining how once she becomes independent again, she would gladly donate to the Mission because she knows what its inhabitants are going through.

"They try their best here"

The Mission offers a variety of different services beyond shelter and three meals a day for its inhabitants. Different churches come speak to the residents on Sundays and Wednesdays.

There are parenting, life skills, and other such classes, as well as a library and computer lab. The Mission provides some funding and helps as much as possible to get jobs and housing for the mothers.

But, as one mother told me, the Mission won't put as much effort into a mother who is not helping herself; residents have to be motivated and actively trying to make their lives better.

A birth certificate

As I was about to go home from the Rescue Mission, having finished speaking to the mothers, the Assistant Director of Women and Children came in with an envelope for one of the women. Everyone in the room grew more and more excited as she tore it open and unfolded the paper, and the room broke into cheers and applause when she waved the birth certificate, which meant she could finally get housing, in the air. It was an incredible moment of support and triumph.

--Leila Bond



Three members of Seed's staff recently placed in a local writing contest run by the Huntsville Literary Association. Michaela Geib won first place in the Young Writers short story division for her story about Death's assistant. She read an excerpt at the awards ceremony on May 4th and was presented with a \$500 check. Gillian Carusone, Seed's editor, and Jasmine Willis both achieved honorable mention in the Young Writers poetry division. Their writing has been printed in *Expressions: Face Time*. Many other Grissom students also placed in the contest and are featured in the book as well.

