

# HORIZONS



# HORIZONS

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF  
WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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<b>Editors-in-Chief</b>	Cass Feurdean Isaac Russo
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<b>Cover and Interior Designer</b>	Allyson Randa
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<b>Copy Editors</b>	Ryan Diederich Jennifer Ruegsegger
<b>Editorial Committee</b>	Tim Davis Ryan Diederich Jack Farrell Marisa Orland Ian Page Alyx Ptak Jennifer Ruegsegger Katie Schneider George Vander Linde
<b>Marketing/Poster Design</b>	Marisa Orland Isaac Russo
<b>Faculty Advisor</b>	Dan Portincaso
<b>Faculty Art Advisor</b>	Cecilia Vargas
<b>Art Reproduction</b>	Jonathan Underwood
<b>Cover Artwork</b>	Jake Thompson, <i>Piercing Through the Clouds</i> , Archival Inkjet Print, 11 x 17 in. (orientation turned for this publication cover)

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Horizons staff would like to thank the students who submitted their work for consideration and the student editorial committee for sifting through those submissions during spring break to discover the work included here. Thanks also to the members of the Creative Writing Club for their commitment to the writing craft at Waubonsee.

Without the leadership of Cindy Sparr, Dean of the Communications, Humanities and Fine Arts Division, this magazine would not be what it is today. We thank her for her generous support and dedication to the mission of our publication. We would also like to thank her staff who have always been there when we needed them.

We would also like to thank:

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The English and Developmental English Departments for helping us get the word out to students about the magazine and continuing the tradition of teaching and inspiring the writers of the future.

The Art Department for inspiring and teaching the visual artists of tomorrow and for collecting and curating the wonderful artwork in these pages.

John Fu, Professor of Graphic Design, for connecting us to student designers and the Graphic Design Department for their work training designers who will pattern our world.

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And last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank the college community of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and the WCC Board of Trustees for creating an environment that fosters the growth of the literary arts at Waubonsee.

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# EDITORS' NOTE

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Horizons is a collection of literature and art from the students at Waubensee, but over time it has become so much more than that. As an annual project of the Creative Writing Club, we have worked to cultivate artists for years. The magazine has become a publication for people to share a piece of themselves with the world, to shed light on the darkest parts of their minds, and to celebrate the creativity of our Waubensee community.

We sincerely thank all those who submitted this year. You are the ink that filled these pages. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the editorial team and designers. Their tireless efforts ensured this magazine is the best version of itself. And to our fearless leader Dan Portincaso, whose knowledge and guidance proved invaluable throughout the process. The hard work and determination of our team made the magazine what it is today.

But all of this would be in vain if it wasn't for the reader. The goal of every artist, author, and editor in this publication is for it to be shared and enjoyed, maybe even loved. It is why we do what we do. With that in mind, we would like to say one final thanks to you, our readers. Thank you for picking up this year's issue of Horizons, we hope you get as much enjoyment out of it as we did in creating it.

Isaac Russo  
Cass Feurdean

Editors-in-Chief



# IRON BUTTERFLY

POETRY BY MOLLY SCHILTZ

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FIRST PRIZE WINNER OF THE CREATIVE WRITING CLUB  
FALL 'METAMORPHOSIS' WRITING CONTEST

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An iron butterfly floats outside my window  
The tips of its wings luminescent  
Fragile, delicate, at peace with this the only life it has ever  
known

I look at this butterfly and am reminded of myself

Bright and cheerful  
Friendly and energetic  
Optimistic and eternally hopeful

Smiling to myself, I settle in for the night and watch the light  
of my candle dance across the butterfly's wings

As I watch the butterfly a sense of nostalgia, wistfulness, sud-  
denly overtakes me

Did I used to seem as oblivious, as tranquil as this iron  
beauty?

It is at this moment the first drop of rain plummets from the  
sky

Slowly and steadily the rain starts to drip, drip, drip

The iron butterfly is not fazed  
It lands on my windowsill and continues its unbothered  
existence  
Yet as the rain continues to fall upon the butterfly, I am re-  
minded of the rain that fell upon me  
The decline into sadness

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The loneliness, the stress that took hold

Are these things by chance, or are they inevitable?

Finally, the rain comes to a stop.

The scene should be cozy, with the quiet hush settling outside  
and the soft light illuminating my room

But I feel unsettled.

The rain stopped, yes,  
but with every end comes a new beginning

I watch the iron butterfly perch outside my window  
Its glamour untouched, its resolve seemingly stoic

But then I imagine the iron butterfly starting to rust  
Withering away and becoming something new

Can a butterfly composed of iron survive the rain?  
Can anything good come of a bad circumstance?

Again, I am reminded of myself

I feel exposed, lying there watching this iron butterfly  
We are so alike, yet so different

The iron butterfly did not let the rain damage its spirit  
But I cannot say the same for myself.

Once cheerful, now cynical

Once energetic, now tired

Once optimistic, now just hanging on

The iron butterfly does not once waver  
Yet I am floundering as uninvited thoughts flood my brain

I think back to my own period of rain  
When the rust started to chip off of my wings

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Is it part of growing up? Or just circumstance?  
Either way I am different. The events of my past writing my  
future.

I spiral, my wings clipped  
How do I adapt to such a monumental change?  
How do I copy the butterfly's resilience?

Maybe not all is lost.

Lingering pieces of old remain  
And not all the new is bad.

Every day an adventure  
Adopting new attitudes, embracing a fresh outlook.  
Experimenting with these puzzle pieces,  
Building new wings for myself.

I look out the window at that iron butterfly once more  
The rust that spots its wings  
only enhances its unearthly image  
Perhaps we have more in common than I realized

Both hurt  
Both strong  
Changed, but better for it

# THE FALLEN

FICTION BY RYAN DIEDERICH

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“Shh, it’s okay. Rest now,” she whispered.

The boy in her arms couldn’t have been older than sixteen. Wounds covered his body, too numerous to count. Blood streaked his face and clothes. Slowly, as she watched, the blood oozing from his injuries turned more and more transparent, until simple water flowed from him. It washed away the dirt and grime that clung to him. It cleaned his wounds, but there was no blood to heal the immense damage.

He tried to ask a question, but water flowed up his throat, making him cough. As he struggled to spit it out, she answered. She knew he was trying to ask. “What’s happening to me?”

“You’ve used your powers too much,” she told him. Tears welled in her eyes as she pushed her dark brown hair from her face. “Your own magic is killing you.”

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**“Tears fell from her cheeks, mixing with the water that had once been his blood.”**

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He looked at her, eyes wide with fear. He clutched at her sleeve weakly. She held him closer.

“You did so well. You tried so hard. I’m so very proud of you.” Tears fell from her cheeks, mixing with the water that had once been his blood. “You can rest. Leave the fighting to someone else. None of this is your fault.”

He gurgled, trying to say something, but he never got it out. His grip went limp. His eyes stared into endless space. She wept for him, for this loss of life. She looked out across the battlefield.

Boulders were smashed into pebbles, their great size and strength reduced to nothing. Trees that had thrived for decades were splintered or incinerated. The muddy ground was churned

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into a turbulent sea of waves. Scorch marks dotted the landscape on every surface. What was most staggering about the view, however, was the body count. More than a dozen bodies littered the field, all of them teens or young adults. Some of their bodies were unrecognizable as human now, but she knew what they once were.

A man approached her cautiously from behind as she wiped at her tears.

“They were children,” she told him, furious.

He put his hand on her shoulder, crouching down to where she kneeled in the mud. “I know. But there’s nothing we can do here now. The fight is over.”

He took her hand in his, trying to console her. He knew this scene would haunt both of them for the rest of their lives, but he wanted her to know she wasn’t alone in this. Tears dripped from his eyes as well as he looked out over the carnage.

“I wish we could go back,” he whispered.

“Me too,” she said as her tears dried. Cold, hard anger filled her eyes. “I’ll kill them for this. I’ll tear them limb from limb. They will not get away with sending children to their deaths.”

She gently eased herself out from under the body, closing his eyes. The man put a hand on the small of her back as they walked away from the horrendous scene.

“I know,” he told her. “These poor kids never stood a chance against us.”



# MY MOTHER HAD NO VOICE

POETRY BY ELIZABETH HOLMBERG

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My mother had no voice.

She lost it in the pots and pans.  
Oh, she had it once, I am quite sure.  
Flushed in circles down the sink,  
In the years of bewilderment she would endure.

I saw her voice once when she turned around,  
and the words fell in the soup she was stirring.  
Some of the words came out of her eyes,  
They came out wet, and were burning.

As we grew we became her voice.  
She laughed at our jokes and sighed at our impassioned calls.  
She agreed with every opinion.  
I wonder if she missed her voice at all.

Perhaps when she relinquished her voice, she did not know how  
to retrieve it,  
And words fell with feelings like dried apples off a tree.  
Her silence now lies frozen,  
But, what she wanted to say is still in me.

# CLOWN

ARTWORK BY NICK CIPRA

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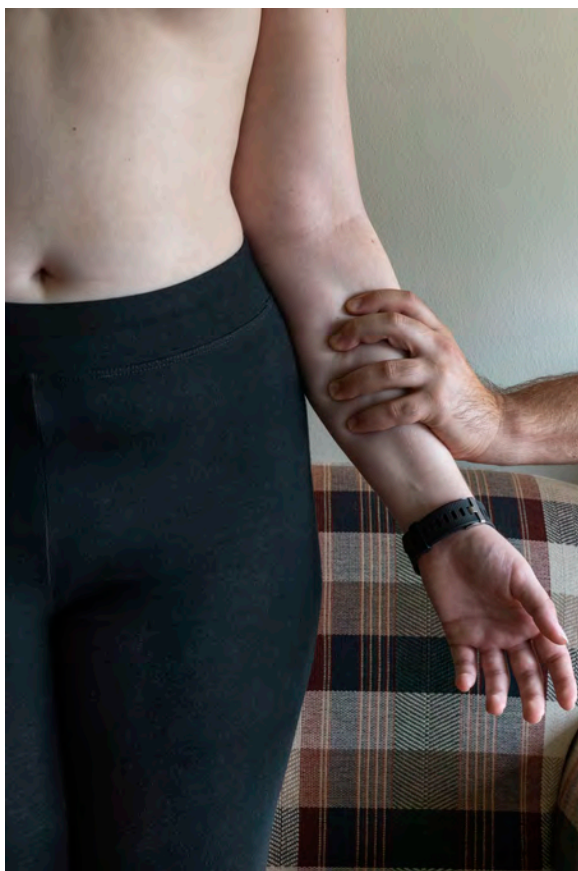
Archival Inkjet Print  
30 x 46 in.

# AN ARM LEFT EXTENDED AND THE HARM IT INVITES

ARTWORK BY NICK CIPRA

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Archival Inkjet Print  
19 x 13 in.

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*Horizons*

18

# NEVER FULL

ARTWORK BY NICK CIPRA

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Archival Inkjet Print  
13 x 19 in.

# BINGO!

ARTWORK BY NATION HENRIKSON

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Silver Gelatin RC Print  
8 x 10 in.

# FIVE-FINGER PROMISE

POETRY BY SEDONA HEDGER

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Thumb: I promise to be the first finger that your tiny hand will hold. I will always encourage you to keep going and to remind you that you're doing great.

Index: I promise to give you directions down your path of life. I will show you all the wonderful sights in the world and let your mind grow with each new wonder.

Middle: I promise to always protect you from all the hurt in the world that I can. I will be by your side during any moment of pain, and I will always be your wing man.

Ring: I promise to love you forever. There will never be anything in this world that would stop me from caring for you. I will show you the true meaning of love and teach you to never settle for less.

Pinky: I promise to keep every promise that I make to you. No matter how big, small, serious or silly it may be. I will follow through on every one of them to show you how important it is to keep your word.

These are my promises to you, and I swear I will keep every last one.

# MOTHER DEAREST

NONFICTION BY K. ATLUS

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To most, a mother is a loving figure and a best friend; a protector and a pillar of unwavering support, but I could never understand why. How could someone whose voice haunts my deepest, dehumanizing thoughts be this universal sign of love and safety? Sometimes I can still hear her voice when I lay in the darkness of my room, motionless as not to risk making a sound. The sound of her yelling at my father over some miniscule mistake one of us might have made echoes in my mind as I look at the seemingly endless darkness spanning in front of my eyes.

As I sit in class and attempt to focus, I realize that it's ultimately futile. I can feel the dark circles under my eyes growing by the day. Every day is the same once I return from school. I dread every passing second that brings me closer to going back home. When I walk to my home from the bus

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**“How could someone whose voice haunts my deepest dehumanizing thoughts be this universal sign of love and safety?”**

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stop to enter my back door, I pass the white fence my father built with his own hands. Tall, plastic posts stretched around half the property, protecting my brother and I from any outside threats. When I enter the house I'm greeted by the harsh smell of nicotine slipping through the two white doors that lead to both the kitchen and living room where she always sat. I would keep quiet and attempt to stay out of the main floor as much as possible so as not to disturb her. When my father finally came home it was nearly time for her to strike. I'd migrate upstairs to my room as her voice would list off accused sins my father had done against her and the family.

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I knew from the moment I opened my mouth in that damned counselor's office about how I felt, they would call her. At the time I wondered what would be less painful, to run out into traffic and try my luck with the first thing that struck me, or to sit next to her in silence for the car ride to the hospital. For years, I had struggled with extreme depression and self harm, with the news of my best friends' suicide weighing heavy in my mind. I attempted to reach out in hopes that it might prevent me from inflicting the same pain I felt onto others that I knew cared deeply for me. The ride to the hospital was filled with silence and disapproving looks. The counselor had told her everything. Little did she know I always thought she might have been happier if I had never been born. Maybe she would have had a child who excelled in school rather than one that failed every subject. The least I could do for her when arriving at the hospital was lie through my teeth and have them believe I was just a little sad. Maybe, just maybe, I would be less of a disappointment in her eyes.

Age had only made her episodes worsen and occur more frequently than ever. Her descent started with a few drinks and one tiny catalyst. I remember watching her from the stairs in silence. Her small form leaning against the kitchen sink. Her shoulders and arms tense, as if ready to lunge at the first sound she heard, whispering to herself in a seemingly endless argumentative conversation. She would stand there, hyping herself up for an argument she had already won. Wild accusations became the norm with her. With no evidence other than what she had made up, she came to the conclusion of whatever fit the narrative in her head. We were all guilty of crimes against her, we just needed to wait to find out exactly what we were guilty of. Every night she was the judge, jury, and executioner.

As an adult, I think to myself how I might have turned out if things had been different. Would I be able to trust easier? Could I have avoided years of early depression and attempts on my life had she been more invested in me? I think about her to the point of near madness and all the "what ifs." Her rum



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and nicotine breath sticks to me in the back of my mind, along with every word thrown at me. I should be living in a box in the street for not meeting her expectations, and I'll never amount to anything unless I improve in school. I'm like my father, I will work until I die due to my own stupidity. I'll never amount to anything more than a loser. She will swear it was a pep talk, just a way to motivate me to work harder and do better. To me, it was what she saw me as; just another mistake.

It's interesting how the dynamic between parent and child changes when the child becomes a legal adult. Suddenly every argument puts the child at risk of being kicked out. It's legal to do so after all. My mother was very aware of this as well.

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**“It's interesting how the dynamic between parent and child changes when the child becomes a legal adult.”**

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Rather than allowing me to grow and enjoy my newfound adulthood, her leash on me grew tighter. Strict guidelines that she declared were for my own safety. She went

after my friends online with threats and abuses to drive them away. Her legal control was gone, however she wasn't ready to let go. She needed to prove she was still the one in charge. I was supposed to reflect a better version of herself. After all, what else could I be useful for as a child? When I raised my voice in protest she would silence it with the subtle threat that she was thrown out of her home at 18 and I should be thankful she's not doing the same to me. Eventually, she attempted to. I had spent the night at a friend's home because I wasn't feeling well and was woken up by a barrage of enraged texts from her. She had taken my belongings and thrown them in bags before tossing them outside. Her justification was that I was obviously doing heroin, whoring myself out, and was too fucked up to come home. I was only sleeping, but that didn't matter to her. She tried to kick me out a second time when I refused to lie to

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the police when she called to get my father arrested. She was the aggressor and my passive, protective father the victim. He acted in self-defense, but she claimed he was trying to beat her to death. She was a liar, and yet I was the villain. “If you think it’s ok for your father to beat me then you can get the fuck out of my home. You have 30 days to get out,” she spat at me after the police left. The choice was made for me and I couldn’t agree more. I knew that the mother I once had, slipped away years ago.

When I visit her on holidays, it’s almost always the same story. By the time we arrive we’re already walking on eggshells. We let her do most of the talking and choose what we do. In the end, it never seems to matter because something or another sets her off. On Thanksgiving, we didn’t thank her enough for everything she’d done. Christmas, it was our unimpressive gifts and movie

choice. Easter, we just showed up and she was already mad. But every time, without fail, she would call upset within a

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**“I became a positive force  
in my younger brother’s life.  
I’ve grown into the adult I  
needed when I was a child.”**

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week about how lonely she was and how unfair it is that we never visit. As if she forgot what happens every time we see her. If she can’t find something to fight about she will do everything in her power to be upset about something or provoke an argument. It is ironic that she feels so alone, but drives away those who wanted to be with her in the first place.

I could never live up to her expectations. But, it no longer matters to me. I did better than I expected. At age 10, I hoped I’d be dead, yet at age 20, I’m excited for what tomorrow might bring. I became a positive force in my younger brother’s life. I’ve grown into the adult I needed when I was a child. She resents me for the choices I’ve made because that is not what she wanted for her daughter. I’m unsure of what I will become, but I know that what happens is in my hands now. It’s both freeing

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and terrifying because, what if in the end I still become like my mother, never realizing my abuse towards others and always playing the victim? I might never know if my actions are my own, or if I'm damned to be a byproduct of her abuse; meant to inflict pain unknowingly on others.

I'm scared of seeing her now. I'm worried that spending time with her might make me act more like her. I've always been told that I look like my mother, so I cut my hair as short as possible. I was told I talked like her, so I became more vulgar and less formal. I never asked to be her redemption, her second wind at life. I know that if I see her, she will pick me apart any way she can. I resent her. Her words should hold no power over me, yet they still sting. Every off-handed comment about my appearance and her opinions about my interests twists the thorn in my side a bit more.

She calls me once again, shaking and stuttering. She's in the middle of another anxiety attack and is alone again. I look at the clock, it's 11 pm and all I want to do is sleep. She won't stop crying on the other end and I go into autopilot; talking to her slowly and attempting to keep her from putting herself at risk. I keep asking myself how this happened. Why do I keep letting her do this to me? She belittles me for everything I do and love, yet I'm the first person she calls for help. I try to tell myself that it's only because she pays for some bills, but I know it's not true. I still foolishly hope that maybe, just maybe, if I keep helping her, she'll become the mother I always hoped for. The one who faded away from my grasp before I could even realize it. Yet when my own moments of pain and vulnerability arose, it was never her who comforted me. I'll jolt awake in my bed in a cold sweat yet again and look into the darkness of another sleepless night. As I try to steady my breathing, I'll still see her inches from my face, so close it's nearly impossible to breathe. I'll curl up into a ball and try to ground myself, telling myself it was just another nightmare. The nightmares are always just the same tragic memory playing over and over. I blame myself for the accident in every way. Because of this,

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her voice always appeared, reminding me of my guilt. How the man I looked up to as both a hero and older brother was struck and killed by a drunk driver. Trading his life for mine didn't seem fair, yet life doesn't seem to care. I watched his body slam to the ground nearly 10 feet away, declared dead on impact by the EMT. Weeks later I found the hung bodies of 3 more friends who were unable to handle the grief our friend's death had caused. My mother's voice came like a whisper growing louder until it became a deafening siren reminding me of my guilt.

This time, however, was different. As I shake and pant in the dark trying not to scream, I feel my best friend shoot upright. I was too far in my own mind to hear her whisper my name, but she manages to become my rock in the storm I needed. I hold tight to her as she gently rocks me to safety. For once, I wasn't alone in the

darkness. When I woke up that morning, her hand was still placed gently on the back of my head, the same place I had fallen asleep, feeling

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**“My mother’s voice came like a whisper growing louder till it became a deafening siren reminding me of my guilt.”**

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her gently playing with my hair, lulling me into a rare dreamless sleep. I knew right there I was in love with my best friend, the woman who makes the nightmares and guilt go away. For the first time in a long time my mind was quiet and my world was at peace because she was in it.

I'll sit across from my mother in a restaurant of her choice as she chats about nothing in particular, acting as if she hadn't put me through hell. She'll crack a joke and I'll try to laugh. I'll do anything I can to give myself the opportunity of a normal life. She seems so lonely and sad, but is this for the best? Is this what she deserves? I've done everything I can to understand and empathize with people, but should I feel bad for her? Part of me wants to slap her for everything she's done. Another side

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of me wants to move on with my life and act as if she was never a part of it. Yet I'm sitting across from her pretending like we had always been close, like she has always been my mother. I'm unsure if going on like this means that I'm forgiving her, forgetting her transgressions against me and my family, or even worse, that I'm normalizing her and her actions.

I failed easy subjects in school to get her attention, good or bad, it didn't matter to me. Instead, it ended up costing me my self-worth. I tried to stay in the closet about how I felt so she could keep making jokes, thinking it was ok because she had "gay friends," but now I refuse to invite her to the wedding. If I win an event, I won't tell her because it's not in anything she's interested in. I belong to no one but myself, and the shame I feel for what I love will no longer be accepted as a fact of life. If she receives help, we might try to build something. But until that day comes, she is not a mother, or even a friend. I'm nothing like she had hoped. I'm not my mother's keeper.

# UNTITLED

POETRY BY TAHJAY BLACKMON

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Street lights,  
staying up on the darkest nights,  
Full moon I swear it's bright,  
Been spending all my years trying to get it right  
find my way live my life,  
Different song on repeat at the end of every night,  
Can't even fall asleep, lost some, they still a part of me  
We need a two but I'm always going for a three,  
you want to be average and I wanna reach infinite,  
that's the truth till the death of me,  
and till the death of me imma keep showing you the deeper  
depths of me,  
You say slow down but I can't let you catch up to me,  
Sonic, I'm too fast to see,  
I'm not trying to taste defeat,  
I got too many faces to feed,  
Out here there's so many snakes you can see  
Through the grass if you rake  
So many people claim to give, but backstab just to take,  
That's why I got a shield on my back like I been playing zom-  
bies since eight,  
And this a solo game so I'm running 'cause I know they ain't  
ate,  
Three-headed sins popping up every six levels why can't I  
catch a break,  
pulling out SKSs and AKs trying to mow down all these  
deadmen in this American made wonderland  
When I don't even know my own engine's intake,  
Wait,  
deadman,  
Pulling on this pin I don't know how much longer I can cock

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and all the logic in me says this is nonsense,  
Lately it just feels like my mind been ill like I was a prodigy  
of Hopsin,  
And I've been trying to fight the feeling but I can feel it,  
I'm getting weaker than these demons Mac and Ken,  
I swear they keep  
gnawing and eating, biting and screaming, ripping on my  
flesh but I know I'm not bleeding and you just can't see it,  
Cause I got courage like the cowardly dog,  
Got neutron in my system, laid back with boondocks,  
Getting tipsy off the Simpsons,  
I'm just trying to chill,  
Imagining if I was little Bill,  
But then again I wanna be the best,  
You know the king of the hill,  
It's crazy 'cause nowadays you gotta walk around with a bullet  
proof vest you know, 'cause it's killed or be killed,  
They say he point so then he shoot now the kid no longer  
lives,  
Everything going up in flames I don't think they gon' ever let  
our city heal.





# WELCOME TO ILLINOIS

ARTWORK BY JAKE THOMPSON

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Archival Inkjet Print  
11 x 8.5 in.

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*Welcome to Illinois*

# ISOLATED

ARTWORK BY ALEXIS HOWARD

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Archival Inkjet Print

11 x 17 in.

# KOHLER, WISCONSIN

ARTWORK BY ALEXIS HOWARD

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Archival Inkjet Print  
8 x 10 in.

# CACTI

ARTWORK BY VALERIA TORRES

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Oil Paint on Canvas  
24 x 18 in.

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# UNTITLED

POETRY BY TAHJAY BLACKMON

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See your truth is flawed,  
No, really, why do you hate?  
Judgement day awaits.

# THE CITY OF CHICAGO

POETRY BY KIMBERLY ESPINOZA

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She saw the streets as if they were made of gold,  
But she can see the potholes and the waste on the floor,  
She saw the people as gods made of glass,  
But she can see that some were shattered,  
She saw the schools and the students,  
But she saw the ones who cared and the ones who didn't,  
She saw the ones who thought about success,  
But she saw the ones who thought of death,  
She saw the ones who wanted to make it out,  
But she saw the ones who wanted to stay,  
She saw the ones who lived,  
But she saw the ones who died,  
She would hear the laughs from kids playing at the parks,  
But she would hear the screams from kids hearing gunshots,  
She would feel the warm summer breeze,  
But she would feel the frigid winter nights,  
She loved everything about her city,  
But she hated the dilemmas that it came with,  
She saw her city was beautiful,  
But she saw her city was broken.

# THE FLY

POETRY BY CELINA ESCAMILLA

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There is a dead fly next to me,

mostly preserved;

black body dulled a bit, wings still pristine.

A hollowed-out shell of what it once used to be...

I think,

“We aren’t so different, are we?”



# LIKE A ROSE

FICTION BY SEDONA HEDGER

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I have never regretted something more in my entire life, than the night I lost her. She had only just begun to see me in a pinkish, lovey light, but she glowed radiantly to me her entire life. I was content with that though, I didn't mind being in the background in her life. I wasn't going anywhere. Our love was like a rose, beautiful and blooming, yet dangerous to the touch.

Nadia and I had been friends for as long as I can remember. Our mothers were best friends and would spend every afternoon together, so Nadia and I got to see each other every day when we were growing up. Nadia had always been beautiful, even at a young age. All I ever wanted was to be with her and watch all the amazing things she could do.

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**“She had begun sliding down a dark path. I tried to stop her... I tried to help her, but she pushed me away.”**

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As we grew older, Nadia had become even more stunning, and gradually we began to drift apart. She was top of our class, senior class president, and had been nominated for prom queen. She was expected to win that year too.

She was so perfect, well at least in my eyes, but almost everyone in our high school wanted to either be her friend or be her.

Senior year was a dark year for her. She had begun sliding down a dark path. She was drinking and experimenting with drugs. Most seniors were doing it, but she skipped class a few times and I knew it was starting to get worse. I tried to stop her. I tried to help her, but she pushed me away. She even began dating a boy behind her parents' back, which she knew was a very dangerous thing to do. Her parents had the worst

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tempers. I never wanted to be around when fighting broke out at their house. They gave up on trying to hide their fighting from me, but all it did was make me anxious.

When she became invested in this boy, Noah, she also became a bit more invested in me, which I wasn't totally against. She mainly came to me to complain about Noah, but her voice was so angelic that I only listened to her tone versus her words. We weren't as close as we used to be, but we were working on that. Her acknowledging me really began when she told her mother that we were hanging out at the mall, but she was there with Noah. I had no idea she had told her mother this. All I did was call her mother because mine was there, as she was every afternoon, and wasn't answering her phone. When her mother asked me about what Nadia and I were doing, I explained that she wasn't with me. Her mother got incredibly suspicious. Not only did Nadia get into deep trouble, but my mother yelled at me for letting her go out with a boy by herself.

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**“I held her and just let her cry. She gathered herself and showed me the bruises and scars that Noah had left on her.”**

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After that Nadia wasn't allowed to go anywhere unless I vouched for her, or went with her. I became her escort for every outing she went on. She would smile at me like she used to when I picked her up, but as soon as she got in my car she would pout or strike up small talk. It took about a month before she realized that I didn't want to do this just as much as she didn't want to, then she eventually began to become her old self again and acted like nothing had changed between us. It was like everything had gone back to normal. We talked about everything; the drugs, the drinking, and even Noah. I think I broke through to her at one point because she stopped the drug use and only drank on occasions, which is fine with

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me, she wasn't getting drunk on a regular basis anymore. She was still on the fence about Noah the last time I drove her, but I never pushed the subject of him much; that was her decision.

A few nights after our last drive she called me and asked me to come over, I could tell by her voice that she had been crying. I drove over, past my curfew, with a tub of her favorite ice cream. I did our old secret knock on her screen door and I waited for my Nadia to come as she used to. Instead of skipping to the door, she trudged there in sweats, a baggy t-shirt, and a blanket dragged along behind her. She let me inside the semi-unfamiliar house, and I handed her the ice cream. She grabbed a spoon and headed towards her room. I followed, as I always did.

Once in her room she lost it. She threw herself onto me, sobbing. I could hardly make out what she was saying, but

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**“Then I did something I never thought I would ever do, I kissed Nadia.”**

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I put it together. I held her and just let her cry. She gathered herself and showed me the bruises and scars that Noah had left on her. She told me about how

he was treating her. He would punch her when she didn't want to go somewhere with him or do anything to please him. She confessed to me how just the day before he wanted her to strip for him, and when she refused he pushed her into the wall. He pushed her so hard that her head left a huge hole in his basement dry-wall. She broke up with him before she called me. I looked at the marks he left on my beautiful Nadia and I began crying too. How dare he hurt the most wonderful girl in the world.

Then I did something I never thought I would ever do, I kissed Nadia. Not a childish peck on the cheek, but a real kiss. She looked at me, surprised at first, but then she smiled and laughed, tears still falling down her face. I automatically began apologizing, but she smiled, pulled me in and kissed me. This

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time is was a bit deeper and more passionate. I was seeing fire-works for hours.

We spent the whole night cuddling, laughing, and enjoying each other's company. We also talked about us and what we were going to do. We agreed to keep our relationship hush until after high school and go public once in college. That night was so magical. Being able to have her by my side and hold her. That night was the best night of my entire life.

We struggled to stay a secret. At school it wasn't so hard because we didn't have many classes together, but I think our parents were picking up on it. They never said anything though, just smiled and waved us on through the house. I think our parents hoped for this just as much as I had for all those years.

About a month later, I went over to Nadia's to make prom plans. We weren't going as a couple and were trying to figure out if we would get separate dates or just go "as friends." Nadia told me

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**"I saw her lights turn on and her engine start, and I couldn't help but start crying out for her."**

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that Noah had been apologizing for the past two weeks and kept asking her to prom. He had also invited us to a pre-prom party the Friday before the dance. I told her I would rather not go, but she said it would be fun, a great way to end senior year. She looked so happy and excited, I couldn't tell her no. I wish I had stopped her.

It was Friday and Nadia had convinced her father to let her drive the car. After much persuasion and persistence, and reassurance that I was going too, he finally said yes. We got in her car and headed to Noah's. We discussed our game plan; we would go, eat some food, say hi to people and aim to be back between ten and eleven. I looked at Nadia and I made her promise: no drugs and only one drink. She pinky-promised and that was the deal.

When we got there, it was absolute chaos. It was only eight

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o'clock and there were people everywhere. I looked at Nadia and begged her to turn around and go home, but she insisted on going inside just for a little bit. Inside smelled of booze and sweat and I did not want to be there. After not even three minutes inside Noah had already pulled Nadia away from me. I wandered around looking for her, but she was nowhere to be found. It was almost ten before I found Noah. I questioned him about where Nadia was and he just laughed at me. He high-fived his friend and then abandoned me in the kitchen.

Then a few bangs came from the stairs, and there was Nadia, barely able to walk straight. Her hair was a mess, and her clothes were torn and dirty. She was two sheets to the wind, and I caught her before she fell onto the floor. I told her it was time to go and I asked her for the keys. She started screaming at me, telling me that tonight was my fault and I'm no different than Noah and I was taking advantage of her. I tried to calm her down, but she was hysterical. She pushed me away and stumbled out the door towards her car. I tried to chase after her, but Noah grabbed me by the waist and held me back. I was screaming and kicking, trying to break free to save her.

I saw her lights turn on and her engine start, and I couldn't help but start crying out for her. Noah laughed and finally put me down. I immediately sprinted after her. She pulled away and sped down the street. I whispered 'I love you.' I called the police to let them know she had left, and I didn't know where she was going. I called her parents to tell them what happened. Then I called my mom, sobbing, just wanting her to come back. I knew she was gone. I was never going to see her again. I just wish I could have told her those three words to her face. I wish I had had the time.

An hour after I made the phone calls, the police showed up to Noah's house and arrested him and his friends. I don't remember the charges exactly, I had too much adrenaline and anxiety pounding through my body and it made my memory a bit fuzzy. I was in sensory overload. I do remember being angry

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that he was, and still is, the reason Nadia was taken from me. The police had found Nadia about a mile and a half away from Noah's house, she crashed her car into an old oak tree. There was physically no way she could have survived. The whole front end of her car was gone, every airbag had been deployed, and not a single window was still intact on the car. They guessed that she was going about fifty miles per hour. They said she was ten times over the legal drinking limit and someone had dropped Rohypnol in her drink.

After that night I refused to leave the house. And if I did, I left to go sit in Nadia's room to cry and to talk to her. I would hold the baggy t-shirt she wore the night of our first kiss and remember

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**“Even though she is gone, I know she is always with me. Nadia will forever be my rose.”**

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how my heart just flowed that whole night, wishing we could have that night again. Her mother started coming over to our house more frequently, not wanting to be surrounded by all the heaviness in her house. But also, to be with me since we both needed each other in this time of pain. Plus, since I was the one to be with Nadia the night of the accident, and I was the one to make all the phone calls, I was doing a lot of interviews with lawyers and law enforcement.

But believe me, I looked those boys in the eyes on the day of their trial and never felt so much hatred for somebody before in my entire life. They were being tried as adults since they were eighteen, I was asked to take the stand. That was the first day where I said out loud that Nadia and I were romantically involved. And I went into as much detail as I could to put those boys behind bars. Noah and his friends were found guilty of every charge that was filed against them from the night of the accident and they are never coming home.

Now, Nadia is truly a radiant angel. I've tried to move on, but I find myself snuggled up with that same baggy t-shirt, cry-

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ing, wishing she would just come home. She was going to do so many wonderful things and become such an amazing person. Even though she is gone, I know she is always with me. Nadia will forever be my rose.

# HOLY COW

NONFICTION BY GEORGE VANDER LINDE

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The phone rang early in the morning, too early for good news. It was my father calling from Northern Michigan. My youngest brother was in a car accident and hit a tree. Broke his neck. Pops explained that the break wasn't a paralyzing fracture at this point, rather a crack in the body of the third circular vertebrae. He was being operated on at Munson Medical Center in Traverse. A halo device was placed around his head. Four holes drilled into his skull. Four metal pins held a black matte circular aluminum frame surrounding his head. The frame was supported by four metal rods connected to a hard plastic harness lined with sheepskin.

I spoke to my brother over the phone a week after the accident. He was recuperating at my father's house in the Northwoods. The only enjoyment he had was baseball. He would watch Cubs games whenever he could. A true fan. He adored the loveable losers. I mentioned that I was going to Wrigley the next day with my fiancée, who is even more of a die hard fan than my brother. She was the daughter of a Cub fanatic. My future father-in-law. Who constantly reminded me that "Sox fans are a disease that needs to be eradicated from the face of the earth."

My brother wanted a baseball autographed by Harry Caray. No problem.

I remembered the Sharpie as we left the apartment late morning for the game. Good seats down the third base line. I waited until the seventh inning before buying a baseball. Wanted to catch a foul ball. I always brought my mitt to a game. Wilson A-2000. Best mitt ever. The A-2000 could make a mediocre sandlot shortstop into Ozzie Guillen. Once a baseball hit that deep pocket, it never came out. Harry was singing over the loudspeakers while I exchanged money for the ball. Brand new, clean white leather with red stitching. Unmarred.



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The game ended. I don't remember if the Cubs won or lost. People began to filter out of Wrigley as I made my way up flights of stairs to the pressbox. I waited for Harry outside the door. Another man was there, older, middle-aged, with a book. Harry's book. The door to the booth opened and out came Harry to meet his adoring public. Trademark glasses, sportcoat in the crook of his arm, tieless shirt unbuttoned and sleeves rolled up. Loose jowls. His attention went straight to the man who held the book. Short banter. The man gave Harry the book. Harry opened it to the inside cover, took the pen the man offered, and with a flourish autographed the book while pocketing the twenty dollar bill conveniently positioned there.

Harry handed the book back and shook the man's hand. I made my move.

"Mr. Caray, would you please sign this ball for my brother? He's got a broken neck and is your biggest fan

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**"I have many taints and blemishes in my persona, but lying is not among them."**

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and he has a halo....."

Harry cut me off with a wave of the hand.

"I hear that all the time. Not today. I gotta go. Look out."

He brushed me aside and turned to the stairs.

It took me a nanosecond to turn from a Southsider who tolerated the Cubs to a zealous radical who now hated this ursine asshole. A liar? He's calling me a liar? I stared at his back as he started to walk down the stairs. I have many taints and blemishes in my persona, but lying is not among them. Many times my truthfulness kept me out of jail at an early age. I don't lie and I don't rat. I prided myself on those two traits. I thought of my brother and his misguided hero worship of this money-grubbing douchebag and yelled to him the first thing that came to mind.

"I will piss on your grave old man!"

That was the summer of 1991. I called my brother the next day. He asked about the ball. I told him what transpired.

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“You coulda given him five bucks you cheap-skate. Harry would have signed that ball for five bucks!”

My brother recovered and the halo was removed. My pragmatic betrothed reminded me that baseball is a business and this is Chicago, and there is no such thing as a free lunch in this town. I married her in the fall. Any woman who has your back in a bar fight is a keeper in my book. Life went on. And Harry? You can find him taking a dirt nap in a Des Plaines cemetery. Section 42W, Block 22, Lot 13, Grave 4. Rest in peace you pandering geezer.

# PAPER PELLETS

POETRY BY ROBIN ALLRED

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I keep finding pieces of you around me  
Like crumpled up receipts in the bottom of my purse  
I can try to wipe you away like dust  
But the aftermath makes me sneeze.  
I ask myself  
Why I still write about you  
In broken poetry stanzas  
When there is so much beauty in the world  
And you have done nothing but stain me ugly  
I see you within all the lining of my pages  
And each reminder sets me back  
Farther.  
I see you in every simile when the like leaves my lips  
And every comma reminds me of the pause  
If I could just pause time  
It is such a painful thing to have such love and hate in  
conflicting emotions  
To see such beauty and only be able to feel ugly  
To have so much success and still feel worthless  
This week I have been filled with nothing but happiness  
This week I have also been completely alone  
And lonely.

# BLOOD CELLS

ARTWORK BY MARISA VANWYHE

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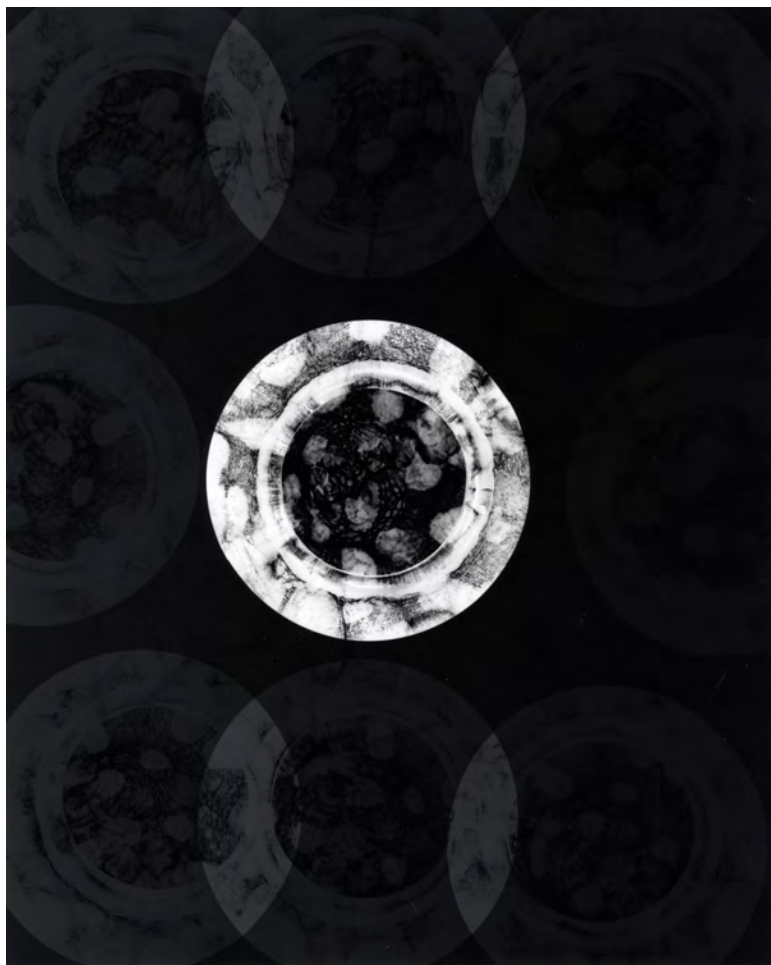
Acrylic Paint on Canvatex  
10 x 8 in.

# BACKYARD LIFE

ARTWORK BY MARIA MACKO

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Silver Gelatin RC Print (Diptych)  
10 x 8 in.

# BACKYARD LIFE

ARTWORK BY MARIA MACKO

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Silver Gelatin RC Print (Diptych)  
10 x 8 in.

# SPOTLIGHT (OVER THE TREES)

ARTWORK BY MARIA MACKO

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Silver Gelatin RC Print  
8 x 10 in.

# THE ELEPHANT AND THE RUG

NONFICTION BY CASSIE LAICA

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There are a lot of things we don't talk about, my family and I. There are a lot of things we don't mention, and if we do, we push it under the rug or ignore it. At least, everyone else but me. I bring it up when it concerns me, when it affects me. But if it causes problems for me, I drop it and then no one talks about it again.

My family asks what I have against Them, but we don't talk about it.

When I was five, my parents and I drove to Canada. It was a six to eight-hour drive, and it was exhausting. Being in the car took a lot from everyone. Even though I was sprawled out in the back, my body was sore and cramped. My mother had to navigate my father, and he had been behind the wheel since the early AM. It was a breeding ground for tension.

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**“There are a lot of things we don't mention, and if we do, we push it under the rug or ignore it.”**

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When we made it there, my aunt opened the door and greeted us warmly. As I rushed in, I avoided my uncle and went to Them. They were in Their room, talking.

“I'm here!” I announced as I opened the door, arms up to embrace Them. They glanced at me briefly, before going back to Their conversation. I stood there awkwardly for some time, until They began talking about me almost as if I didn't exist.

“Don't you hate it when people come in unannounced?” one said to the other.



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“Oh god, especially when no one likes them and wants them around,” the other responded. I lowered my arms, closing myself off, and slowly shuffled out of the room. As I closed the door gently, I heard Their laughter and shut the door. I walked back down the stairs and greeted my uncle, trying to forget the last thing I heard Them say. My aunt asked me questions like, “How are you?” “How is school?” and, “Anything new happen?” I lied and told her I was doing well.

I didn’t tell her my heart was breaking. I didn’t tell her that before I closed the door, I heard Them say I was annoying. I heard Them say how They just wished I never showed up. I didn’t tell my parents that I was sad and wanted to go home. I didn’t talk about it.

This wasn’t the first time it happened when I was there, and it wouldn’t be the last.

My parents and I were in Canada again, this time we all went out for a picnic together. My uncle brought a kite along

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**“I lied and told her I was doing well. I didn’t tell her my heart was breaking.”**

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because it was very windy. He gave it to Them and then went fishing with my dad. My aunt and my mom were setting up the food and were having an “adult”

discussion. I was left with Them and excited about it.

One of them set up the kite and asked aloud, “Who would like to fly it?”

“I would!” I shouted earnestly, bouncing up and down excitedly. She looked at me, squinted and without a pause shut me down.

“No! You’re not,” she said as she passed it to her sister. Crushed and hurt, I bolted. Soon, I was far enough away to cry loudly and no one would hear me. I could see my parents shouting and waving their arms, but I couldn’t hear what they said. I saw my uncle talking to Them, presumably angry, and

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They simply shrugged him off and continued to fly the kite.

Later that night, my mother apologized in my stead for ruining the picnic, my father ignored me, and They came up to me and apologized for Their actions.

“Sorry we didn’t let you fly the kite, but we just didn’t want you to lose it, since you are stupid and have never flown one before.” Already drained, I simply just ignored Them, and They walked away. They didn’t bother keeping quiet, talking about how I ruined the entire picnic and how I was so childish and a crybaby.

The next day and onwards, no one talked about it, but I still remember.

Over the years, I stopped going to Canada. And my parents kept wondering why I didn’t want to go. I would tell them, “I don’t want to see my cousins,” but they would always respond negatively.

“That’s outrageous! They are your family!” would be my mom’s reaction.

“I don’t know what is going on between the three of you, but I can’t say what you are doing is the right thing. I can’t tell my sister that you hate her children, that will only bring me shame,” was my father’s reaction.

I dropped the subject and lied. I would tell them I had too much homework to work on and I needed to get it done. Satisfied with that response, they would leave me behind. But, I couldn’t dodge my parents forever. When I was fifteen the day came when I had no excuse to appease them.

While I was there, I couldn’t stop having depressive breakdowns. During the day, I would shut down and sit quietly on the couch, texting my friends on my phone to distract me, but the night would provide no comfort or distractions. I found myself crying to sleep every night I stayed, waking up the next day more tired and exhausted than before.

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Eventually I would have to confront one of Them, since the other was away at college. Hiding from the one that remained only caused more tension between my parents, my aunt, my uncle and I. My mom shoved chocolates into my hand and with an iron grip, tossed me towards my cousin's room, and knocked for me. With daggers in her eyes, she urged me to walk in to the room when a soft, "you can come in" was spoken.

My body was trembling as I walked in the same room I had years before, expecting her to react the same way she always did. She turned around and smiled at me, apologizing for not leaving her room. She had finals to study for and she only had a few minutes to spare to talk to me. I gave her the chocolates and we talked for the longest five minutes I've experienced. I would answer her questions stiffly, sitting as far away as I could. The entire time, I felt like a different person. My voice and body didn't feel mine, as did my behavior. Normally, I was energetic, smiling, cracking jokes to make others laugh, but with my cousin I was stiff, robotic, and serious. I hated it. Inside, my gut was burning with disgust. *How dare I display this groveling behavior towards this person? How dare I still want to be accepted?* I

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**"I forced my voice to remain neutral under all of the emotional turmoil I was feeling."**

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thought.

"I'm glad you came," She said. "Illena and I really missed you." I instantly shot up.

"I should probably stop keeping you from your studies." I forced my voice to remain neutral under all of the emotional turmoil I was feeling. I left before she could even get a word out. My mother asked me how it went, but I only told her what she wanted to hear. "It went good," I lied, shaking and on the verge of tears. Pleased with my answer, she smiled and walked away. We didn't talk about how I was feeling, and we

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didn't talk about why I was crying.

My cousins and their effects on me were never fully discussed until I was visiting my family in Romania. To my misfortune, our visit happened to overlap with one of Them also visiting our shared relatives. When we ran into each other, I couldn't keep quiet anymore.

My mom and I were getting into the car after saying our goodbyes to my grandparents, assuring them that my father would visit soon and that he also missed them. My mother drove away and almost hit another car that was heading to my grandmother's home.

"Oh!" my mother said, realizing who was in the other car. "I guess we are staying a little longer. Illena is here." She started to turn the car around.

"You know exactly how I feel about Illena and we just left my grandparent's house. We are not turning back around!" I insisted.

"What is wrong with you?" My mother demanded. "That's your cousin. Your family! What's happened to you? You used to beg us to visit your cousins when you were younger, when did you become so hateful to them?"

"I have no idea. It may be since they've always pushed me out. It could be since they've treated me like shit!" I yell. "Or maybe, just maybe, I became resentful towards them because every time I was there, they would make me so miserable, I wanted to kill myself!"

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**"We didn't talk about how I was feeling, and we didn't talk about why I was crying."**

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My mom was silent but kept driving back to see my cousin. I unlocked the car door and jumped out. Before my mom could protest, I had already slammed the door and ran in the opposite direction. I knew the road back and kept going, knowing that my mom would eventually come down the

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road and pick me up on her way. I had walked a little under two miles before my mom stopped the car next to me. When I got in, we didn't talk about what happened.

A few weeks passed and I was staying a little longer at my great aunt's place. My mother went back to the US, but I stayed to avoid the trip she and my dad would make to the Carolinas with my relatives from Canada. I enjoyed the time I spent with my great aunt and the conversations we had. But one night was different from the others.

"I've noticed that you are cold when talking about Illena and Oana," she began. "Why? You know they are your family and that kind of behavior is not acceptable." For a minute, I didn't say anything. When I did, I finally talked about how I felt about Them and why. My great aunt listened to me and waited for me to finish. When I did, she finally spoke.

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**"I felt nauseous. I remembered when she and her sister laughed at me, hit me, acted like I was just air."**

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"I may not understand how you are feeling, but I think you may be remembering things wrong. Illena can be harsh, but she does care about you. I think

Oana cares more," she began. "Last time you were over here, three or four years ago, you were very immature and childish. But now, you are seventeen and have matured greatly, but I never would have known if Oana didn't tell me. She visited me after you did, and I was telling her about how immature you were, and she stopped me. She looked at me and told me I was wrong about you and that you were a completely different person than how you used to be. She mentioned that time you talked to her when she took a break from studying for finals. She really does care about you, she defended you like a sister would."

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I felt nauseous. I remembered when she and her sister laughed at me, hit me, acted like I was just air. How They always made it clear how much They didn't want me around Them. How little I mattered. And all I ever wanted was to be accepted. I was lonely as a child, with no siblings, and my parents working during the day. I just wanted someone to connect with; a sibling. And I thought that They could fill in that role, but all They did was treat me like I was nothing to Them.

Hot tears pooled up in my eyes, "She and her sister can go straight to hell!" Without looking at my great aunt, I went to my room for the night and cried myself into an exhausted sleep. The next morning, my great aunt apologized for upsetting me and asked if I still wanted to talk about it. Knowing it was too much to talk about with my great aunt and have her understand, I declined. When I felt ready to talk about it again, my great aunt would be there to listen.

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**"All I ever wanted was to be accepted. I was lonely as a child, with no siblings, and my parents working during the day."**

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My great aunt understood I didn't want to tell anyone, so she kept our conversation between us, until she heard that my cousins were coming over for Christmas that year. She called my aunt and told her she thought it was a bad idea and explained to her how I felt around Oana and Illena. Then, she called my mother and told her what happened, but all my mother did was thank her for thinking about me and that she was grateful. When my aunt called my mother to discuss the situation, my mother said that I was fine and that I would be okay, ignoring my great aunt's warning.

I was not going to be okay on Christmas, and had I not worked that day, I would have attempted to kill myself. My father watched me cry in the car on the way to my job but didn't

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say anything. He didn't talk about the incident where I finally snapped and screamed at Illena about how I wanted to kill myself and was too exhausted to do anything, after she chided me for not doing a simple task. He didn't talk about how I locked myself in my room and shouted, "Fuck off!" at Oana after she was trying to talk to me through the door. He didn't talk about how he felt, or how my mom felt, or even how my aunt and uncle felt. With a guilty look, he wished me a nice day at work and dropped me off.

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**“With a guilty look, he wished me a nice day at work and dropped me off.”**

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When I got back from work, no one talked about my outburst. Everyone acted like it never happened. The problem was simply swept under

the rug.

After Christmas, I stayed as far away as I could from my cousins. Life eventually got in the way and They were far away from my mind as well. By the time I turned twenty, my depression had worsened, from a mild form of major depression that was seasonal, to a moderate form of major depression that was recurrent. Thoughts of suicide and self-harm were never far, and after a while I couldn't justify not hurting myself. After I started to cut, suicide was never far from my mind.

Eventually, I sought counselling and talked to a therapist. The year was getting close to the end and I wasn't getting better. During one of my sessions my therapist decided to talk to me about my cousins.

“You've voiced your concerns about not being able to grasp reality, mentioning that you can't push back against some of your distorted thoughts because you have doubts,” he began. “You've said that most of the time when you are having a depressive episode, it's because you feel like you aren't good enough and that people don't like you. Now, I want this to be

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very clear: people do like you! I think you feel this way – and push back on this if I’m wrong – because of how you were treated and reacted to how your cousins treated you. Would that statement be wrong?”

I paused for a bit, thinking about what was said. Then it finally clicked in my head. The reason why, despite being told countless times by my friends that I wasn’t hated, I didn’t believe it to be true. The reason why I had a toxic view of myself. “No,” I responded. “I think you are right. What They said to me and about me stuck with me, and I don’t think I’ve put together that my distortions were caused by Them. Because you are right, I do believe that people don’t like me even when there is enough evidence to suggest otherwise, and I do think that this has been caused by my cousins’ actions staying with me. Essentially, they have conditioned me to think that I don’t matter and that no one liked me since I was a child.”

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**“Essentially, they have conditioned me to think that I don’t matter and that no one liked me since I was a child.”**

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My therapist nodded excitedly. “So you know where to start with combating the distortions, do you think you’ll be able to handle doing that from now on?”

I nodded confidently, “Oh definitely! Now that I know what the cause is and how to deal with it, I can work from there. I think the reason why I was struggling with believing people care about me is because I didn’t know where that thought originated. Now that I do, it should be easy to fight back.”

My therapist and I talked more until my time was up and I had to leave. As I left his office, I turned around to wish him a good day. On his desk, I saw a cute stuffed animal that



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I hadn't noticed the entire time I was there. The elephant in the room.

# THE LONE WOLF

FICTION BY ISAAC RUSSO

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It was the night he had been waiting for.

The air was warm and heavy as the shadows danced in the light of a waning moon, and when Jakharo breathed deep he could smell a coming storm. The jungle seemed alive around him, great ancient greengods reaching towards the heavens with twisted, writhing arms and leaves like a thousand hands. Tonight he would show them that he was a boy no longer, a grown man, and the gods of the wild would whisper to him through the wind. They would give him knowledge, and in time wisdom, but most important to the young teen was the magic. There was great sorcery in those old trees.

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**“They would give him knowledge, and in time wisdom, but most important to the young teen was the magic.”**

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Though first he must prove himself, as every boy in the village must do if they are to pass into manhood, those who fail were deemed cravens and shunned. That was not to be his fate. He was in his fourteenth year of life now; a man and a warrior in truth, if not in name, and nothing would stand in his way.

His journey promised to be a long one, across hostile territory and hazardous terrain, but Jakharo had faith that his gods would guide him. This was their jungle after all, and he was their champion, or so he hoped. The time for his trials had come, and his enemy was the night.

But first he had to say goodbye. “Always be the hunter, never the hunted.” His father said as he gave his blessing. The old man’s bearded face betrayed nothing, but the flickering torchlight revealed the tears in his eyes. “Tonight you leave us

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a boy, Jak. You will return to us a man, or not at all.”

These were practiced words, entrenched in tradition and older than the memories of men, yet it was plain to see the pain it brought his father to utter them. He was losing a son without the promise of return, and while he left his true feelings unspoken, Jak knew his father loved him, and he felt the same. So with nothing but a cloak of sewn leaves and the fears of his father, Jakharo left the village and ventured into the shadows. For it was there, amongst his gods and the beasts, that he would discover his destiny, he was sure of it.

The fires of his people slowly faded as the jungle closed in around him, and then it was only darkness. Not even the stars looked upon him there, but he was sure the gods were watching. They were all around him, whispering in the wind, and their leaves rustled in endless applause as he passed. The path ahead was long, and the night offered little comfort as he trekked through the mud and trees, but still young Jak pressed on.

He had walked for leagues by the time the sun came up, its golden glow reaching for him through the canopy with broken fingers, and in the morning light he found what it was he had

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**“There were legends of a tree so large it watched over the world, with branches that touched the stars and roots that descended to the deepest hells.”**

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been searching for. The trees were older here, ancient and untouched by man, but the gods were the same: green and good. It was the Godsgrove.

The Godsgrove was a sacred space, and a secret one too, where gods could tread and evil stayed dead. It was here that Jak would make his case, he only hoped it would be heard. As he crossed the threshold, he knew at once that he was in the presence of higher powers, but not just any old greengod would do. No, he needed the greatest of the gods, the

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king of the forest.

There were legends of a tree so large it watched over the world, with branches that touched the stars and roots that descended to the deepest hells. No one had ever seen it, the one they called the Old Oak, but Jak knew he would find it, the gods had willed it so.

He wandered the Godsgrove until the sun was high in the eastern sky, but still he found nothing. His hope was fading fast, perhaps he was fated to fail after all, but then he fell. It was there, amongst the dirt and the undergrowth, that he saw it. The king of the forest was bigger than any castle, and its roots must have slithered through the earth for leagues. It was perfect, a true legend, and it was his.

Jakharo raised himself from the dirt and sat cross-legged at the base of the Old Oak, and with a deep breath he closed his eyes and opened his mind. As he prayed, he thought of his father, and how proud he would be to see his son return a man. He remembered his people, whom he vowed to protect from all harm, but most of all he prayed for himself

Though if the greengods were listening they gave no sign, so when he was done he sat and listened to their song in the breeze. They sung of glory and triumph, lyrics older than time in a tongue lost to men, yet somehow he knew they were speaking to him, leading him to his destiny. But then they were interrupted by something in the distance. It began as a whisper in the wind, and for a moment Jak wondered if his prayers were being answered, but as they grew louder he recognized them as the gruff tones of men.

*Sandmen*, he realized, and their arrival could mean only one thing; invasion. A savage folk from the deserts beyond the jungle, the sandmen were cannibals and killers, the lot of them. As they grew closer Jakharo could tell there was a great number of them, he needed to hide. Even the greatest of warriors knew when he was outmatched.

Scrambling up the Old Oak, he went as high as the branch-

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es could bear before nestling himself in amongst the greenery. To his dismay, they did not in fact reach the stars, though there were more pressing concerns than ideological inconsistencies. He scarcely breathed in fear of being heard, and as the voices grew louder he sat still as a statue, watching, waiting.

When the first of the Sandmen came into view, Jak was sure he was looking upon death himself. Plodding along on the meanest stallion he had ever seen was a hulking man clad in

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**“The sky had grown dull and gray while he slept, and Jak watched from his seat in the heavens as a vast legion of storm clouds came marching in from the west.”**

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the furs of half a hundred beasts, so close he could hear the snorts of the horse and the snarls of its master as they reigned up beneath his very tree.

His heart was racing, pounding against his ribcage as if it want-

ed to burst free and run. The feeling was mutual, and for a moment he wanted nothing more than to find the blazes of his village and warn his father, but that would not do. *Craven!* He cursed himself under his breath, his life would not be one of an outcast, he would not be defeated by his own fear. So he waited, and like the terror that had gripped him moments before, the Sandmen passed. Yet even when they were gone Jak did not move, he had to be sure it was not a trap, but in the end it was exhaustion that took him, not enemies.

He did not remember falling asleep, but when his eyes flicked open to the soft spray of rain he knew he had been dreaming. The sky had grown dull and gray while he slept, and Jak watched from his seat in the heavens as a vast legion of storm clouds came marching in from the west. While the sun was nowhere to be seen, he knew it was there, hidden somewhere behind that heavenly host.

But it didn't make sense. He wondered why the sky was

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weeping, had the gods been displeased with his journey into manhood? No, that couldn't be it, he resolved that it must be for all the souls that would soon fall before him. *A thousand souls, a million . . .* he vowed to the greengods . . . *the world shall know my name, and they shall tremble before it.* That was his destiny, he had little doubt, and the gods were only weeping for his foes.

Then a long solemn note swept through the jungle like a wind, and Jakharo knew the gods were giving him his next test. He listened closely to the howl of a distant wolf, *just one*, he thought, *a lone wolf*. This is what he had been waiting for, a chance to prove himself. Wolves were not the only beasts that dwelled in those woods, and far from the only thing that hunted at night, but he was a hunter too, and he was sure any foe would crumble before him.

Oh, the folly of youth.

He climbed down from the Old Oak and began in the direction of the sound, though he couldn't decide quite where it was coming from, and soon he was left with nothing to guide him but the echoes in his mind. They took him over hills and through thickets of evergreens, across streams and gorges and rushing rapids, before finally reaching the edge of the forest, yet he found nothing but tracks in the wake of the beast.

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**“Little more than a shade  
against the gloom of a moon-  
less sky, it's fur might've been  
made from the night itself.”**

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But just as he had lost all hope, a low growl came from the shadows beyond the tree line. He was being hunted. Remembering the words of his father, he turned to face the sound. *You are the hunter*, Jak tried to convince himself, *not the hunted*. Then he saw it.

Little more than a shade against the gloom of a moonless sky, it's fur might've been made from the night itself. But its eyes were a different story, burning like yellow flames against

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the dark, and when it bared its fangs they gleamed with blood. Never had Jakharo seen anything so beautiful.

Then the wolf charged, snarling and snapping all the way, and Jak took one last moment to muster his courage and banish the fear. It was then that the boy became a man, and not long after that the man became a wolf.

As the two collided, the greengods intervened in a magical flash of light followed by a clap of thunder, and when Jak opened his eyes again it was not the wolf he saw. No, instead he saw as the wolf. The gods had granted his wish, man and beast in perfect harmony, body and soul.

He took off through the woods, mud squishing beneath his paws and a thousand new scents begging for his attention, but there was no time. The transformation only happens at night, and he needed to get home to save his village before it was too late. Jak dashed through the rapids, beneath the evergreens and over the hills, before at last the greengods began to look familiar. *Home*, he realized, but just then he realized something else too.

The gods wept the whole way, yet the rain seemed heavier here, as if the gods were showering him with tears of joy. But there was something wrong, a scent, something both sweet and sour, almost sickening. It wasn't until he got closer that he recognized it as the stench of blood. Padding through the village he had lived in his entire life, now reduced to a smoldering mass grave, Jak was once again nothing more than a little boy searching for his father.

When he found him at last, the old man was clinging to life. He smiled when he saw the wolf, but that did little to hide the tears in his eyes, glittering in the glow of the rising sun. As the storm passed, a beam of light reached out to touch his fur and Jak shed his skin, becoming human again; something that did not seem to surprise his father. "You returned a man, or should I say a wolf?" His breaths were labored when he spoke, yet somehow he managed to laugh. "I'm so proud of you, Jak."

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*I love you.*” Those were his last words.

As the sun rose on a new day, it set on the life of a great man, and Jakharo was all alone once again. His cries broke the sound of silence that had swallowed the forest, and that night he howled to the heavens for the gods to turn back time. He would give anything to have his father back, even the magic, but it was too little too late. Though he might’ve gotten what he wished for, now it was he who was the lone wolf.



# A WEIRD DREAM

FICTION BY JOSEPH WAGNER

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It was a lazy Saturday afternoon, and I had one of the weirdest dreams of my life that day. I was sitting there in my living room when I saw a commercial for some new fertilizer called “WONDER ROOT.” The salesman dabbed a bit of the green gloppy substance on the end of a root. “Watch how fast it grows!” Then, the announcer said they left the branch for an hour after putting it in soil. After an hour had passed, the branch was firmly planted in the dirt!

“Hmmm,” I thought to myself, “That must be a sham. Everyone knows that if you put a branch in the ground, it will grow into a tree.”

Then the screen with the price on it came on. “It can be yours for \$29.99, not including shipping and handling.”

“I’ll buy it, try it out, and prove them wrong!” I thought to myself out loud. So, I dialed the number on the screen.

“Hello. Crime Chemicals Corporation speaking,” said the voice on the other end. It seemed to be an older lady who didn’t seem interested in the job. She also seemed to be eating something. “What do you want? If you’re a lawyer or a cop, we’re hanging up.”

“I’d like to buy some of your WONDER ROOT.”

Three days later, my box of WONDER ROOT arrived. Almost immediately, I took it to the kitchen and opened it. The goop was in a jar. So, I opened the jar. A whiff of rotting fish and mold came from it. I was barely able to keep my lunch in my stomach, but I was bound and determined to prove it wrong and the company a fraud. I took a chicken leg from the fridge and covered it in the foul-smelling goop.

Something must have made me drowsy, because I was about to fall asleep. I went to the couch to take a nap.

Unbeknownst to me, the stuff worked. The chicken leg

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started to grow, first into an actual beast with two wicked legs, four horrendous arms, and a head uglier than sin. Its skin was scaly and grimy, and covered in a slime almost the consistency of snot and mucus.

Then it grew some more. First, the size of a chicken, then a dog, then the counter, and then the size of me. Within ten to fifteen minutes, it grew too large for the house. And it kept growing.

I was awakened from my nap by the sound of the ripping rafters. The first thing I saw was the big, mutated, deformed foot coming towards me. It was by this time that I woke up.

# METAMORPHOSIS: A STORY OF GROWTH

POETRY BY VALERIE ANDERSON

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As a young caterpillar,  
I always dreamed of what I'd become.  
My full, beautiful wings,  
vibrant with color,  
crisp with the morning air,  
carrying me far, far away.

I would sit on my thin branch and stare,  
as second after second,  
the sky would fill with bursts of color.

Butterflies were so free,  
so happy.

But, as time went by,  
the other caterpillars in the tree began to spin their cocoons.  
I tried to spin mine, I did.  
Every morning, I'd wake and wrap myself up as tight as I  
could,  
but nothing was changing.

One by one, by one,  
each caterpillar slowly disappeared  
into their own private worlds  
until I was all alone,  
with only the butterflies far above me to keep me company.

Weeks went by,

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and just as sure as they'd left,  
each of the caterpillars came back again,  
but changed.

Crack by crack, push by push,  
they emerged with the most beautiful wings,  
carrying them away again.

Soon enough,  
there were only the empty shells of what they once were,  
and me.

I was sure I was cursed,  
doomed to live a life on my little branch  
no colors, no freedom  
no wings.

I curled myself up,  
afraid, embarrassed,  
and alone.

I closed my eyes to hide from the colors above me  
circling, swarming, and tauntingly free.

I huddled and wept,  
clenching tight,  
until I opened my eyes again,  
and everything was white.

I was finally in my cocoon.  
My time spent waiting was worth it all along.  
I would finally get to join the others in the sky,  
see my vibrant colors,  
feel that crisp air.

And when I emerged...

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I saw my wings out of the corner of my eye.

A flash of grey,  
a loose piece here and there.  
I looked strung together, as if someone used scraps to knit  
me,  
draining their color and leaving holes and scratches.

My wings were ugly.  
I was ugly.

I couldn't fly.  
My wings were painful to use,  
unevenly catching the bite of air, here and there.  
And why should I fly?  
Where would I go that anyone would want me?

My wings were made broken.  
And I was still alone.

Before long, the colors I'd admired in the sky for so long  
came down to the branch to rest.

Why should they rest?  
Who would want a break from freedom?

They came down as a rainbow,  
huddling together,  
keeping their distance from the dark cloud that was  
me.

The most vibrant blue I'd ever seen inched toward me  
and as he grew closer,  
I saw his massive wings.

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They were the color of Saturday mornings,  
bright and full of hope.

They had exuberant designs,  
stretching to each end of the branch,  
creating a whole new sky behind him.

But, in the corner at the top left,  
I noticed something many might overlook.  
It was small, but there was a tear, flapping on its own.  
It reminded me of my own wings.

He stared at me,  
his eyes big and bright.  
And mine became just a little less cloudy.

He glanced at my wings,  
not mesmerized, like the others,  
but kindly.

He flew a little closer, stepped out from the crowd,  
and said, loud enough for everyone to hear,  
“I’ve never seen wings like yours,  
they’re so...”

I expected: “ugly”  
or maybe a polite: “unique”  
and prepared for the worst, starting to turn away, as he mut-  
tered

“beautiful.”

He couldn’t mean me.  
Didn’t he see my absence of color?  
How could he miss my scarred wings:  
ripped, torn, broken?

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But I looked back at him,  
and I knew he saw it all.

He called me beautiful.  
All of me.

And I suddenly had the urge to look down,  
noticing my branch was so far below me,  
and I was finally able to fly.

# HOSPITALITY

FICTION BY M.K. PHILLIPS

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“So that’s what, about six-two?”

Scott nodded. “A bit taller. Freakishly tall.”

“And they were smiling? You sure you didn’t hit your head in the crash?”

“They ran me off the road!” Scott protested. “I went up for directions after the fog made me miss my exit, they got taller, and they just rushed at me. Their fingers... claws? They looked like claws.”

Norman laughed. “And they were smiling?”

“Norman, I’m serious. I think they followed me.” Scott looked nervously out through the windshield of his friend’s car. Nothing but a tree and a stretch of empty country highway faded into the fog. He knew if he looked behind them, he’d see the dilapidated barn they’d parked beside on his request. He knew his mind would put another of those monsters right behind it if he looked, so his eyes stayed forward, and he focused on the steady rhythm of staticky country music from the radio.

Norman wasn’t impressed. He sighed and reached for the key hanging in the ignition. “Look man, I’ve got shit to do tonight. Let’s just get you home and—”

“I can’t,” Scott silently pleaded to Norman. He let out the breath he’d been holding when Norman’s hand dropped from the key. “Thanks.”

“So how long you wanna stay here? Until you pass out?”

“I... don’t know,” He admitted. “When they looked at me, I got this sinking feeling. The fog got thicker. It still hasn’t thinned out and I’m not gonna chance driving alone. The one just appeared in front of me—yes, still smiling—while I was trying to drive away. I nearly died trying to avoid it.”

“Sounds like sleep deprivation to me,” reasoned Norman. “You look terrible enough for that to be it. Something happen



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at home?”

Scott looked out the windshield. He convinced himself the movements he barely saw were his nerves.

“That’s it then. You know what I think? I think you fell asleep at the wheel and had a nightmare. Didn’t even get out of the car. It’d make sense with the cold and the fog. Got boring driving down the empty highway and it was probably real warm with the heater on.”

“Yeah.” Scott continued to look out the windshield. It made logical sense, but he had to hold onto what he saw. He could feel the creatures move in on him, his heart pounding against his ribcage. He could hear them breathing hungrily. He could see the crowded, pointed teeth in their grins. His body tensed when the radio suddenly stopped for the car to start.

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**“When they looked at me,  
I got this sinking feeling.”**

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He turned his head in Norman’s direction but couldn’t look at him. He must have been right. It made the most sense. After all, nobody else had ever told him about people becoming monsters in the fog. It must have been a nightmare.

“See? Nothing just out of view.” Norman’s taunt came muffled through the haze Scott was in. He needed sleep. He was gesturing through the windshield to the three figures which came into view as they slowly rolled forward from their spot on the side of the road. Scott froze.

“Th-They...” His voice caught in his throat. He pointed and the figures grinned.

“Nothing at all.” Norman looked at Scott as the fog crept through the closed windows. His limbs grew long and thin, his fingers stretching into claws. “You should get some sleep. It’ll be good for you.” His lips parted into a sharp, crowded grin.

# INNER VOICES

FICTION BY SEDONA HEDGER

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*“You Know You Can’t Do This...”*

**“But It’s Only An Application For An Internship... I’m Sure He’ll Do Fine.”**

‘Ya’ll, I’m right here. Like can you stop till I’m done?’

*“No. Because I’m Here To Constantly Remind You Of Your Capability to Fail Everything You Attempt To Do.”*

**“And I’m Here To Motivate You To Finish Everything You Set Your Mind To And Remind You Of How Awesome You Are.”**

Trevor rolled his eyes and continued to fill out the empty lines on the page. This form could change his life forever.

‘Well if you must be here could you stay quiet till I’m finished?’

*“I Can.... If You Can Tell Me Why You Think You Deserve This...”*

Trevor shook his head in frustration and continued trying to make himself sound better than he actually was.

**“Well I Can! He Can Read And Write, And Sight Read Music, And Play Video Games, And Knows A Lot About History, And Is Organized, And Is Punctual And.... And... And...”**

*“And How Is Any Of That Going To Help Him Get Into The Internship Program?”*

**“But He’s Applying For An Internship With Hasbro. Why Wouldn’t Any Of That Be Helpful To Him?!”**

**“WILL YOU BOTH SHUT UP!!!!!”**

Trevor was no longer sitting at the table but was standing up with his hands intertwined with his hair. His voice echoed

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**“He just sat there and stared at the road in front of him, wondering where he was gonna go next.”**

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off the walls and everyone had stopped to stare at him. Trevor quickly gathered the few things he brought in with him, wadding the application up in a ball and tossing it in the trash as he left his dream job behind him.

‘I hate you both.’

He zipped up his coat and walked to his car. He sat and put the key in the ignition but lacked the motivation to turn it. He just sat there and stared at the road in front of him, wondering where he was gonna go next.

**“You Could Go Back In There And Ask For A New Application...”**

*“Or You Could Get Out Now And Stand In Front Of Traffic And Hope Someone Hits You...”*

# RESIDENCY

ARTWORK BY MARIA MACKO

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Silver Gelatin RC Print  
8 x 10 in.

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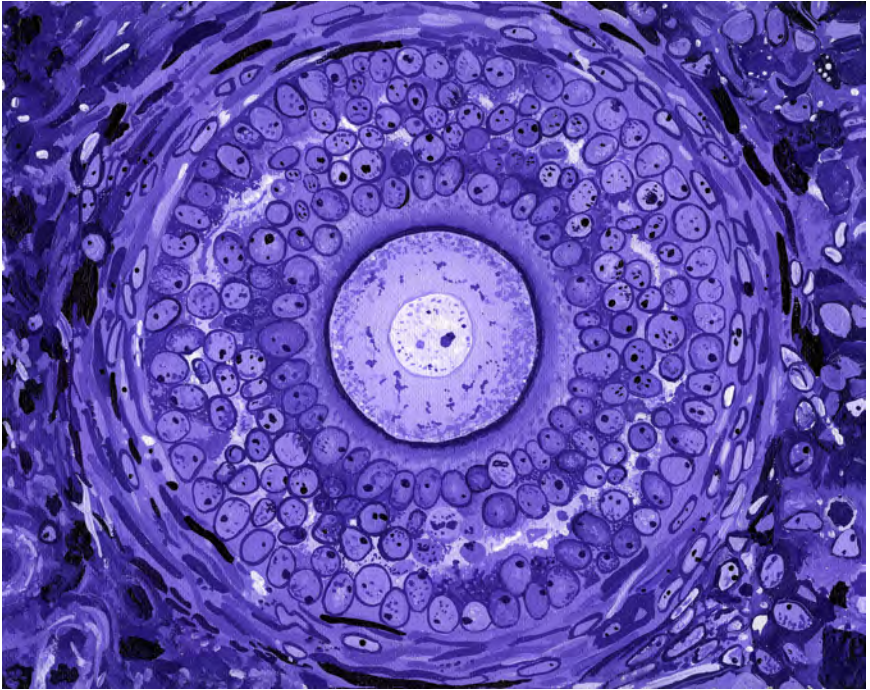
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# OOCYTE

ARTWORK BY THERESA DAUNHEIMER

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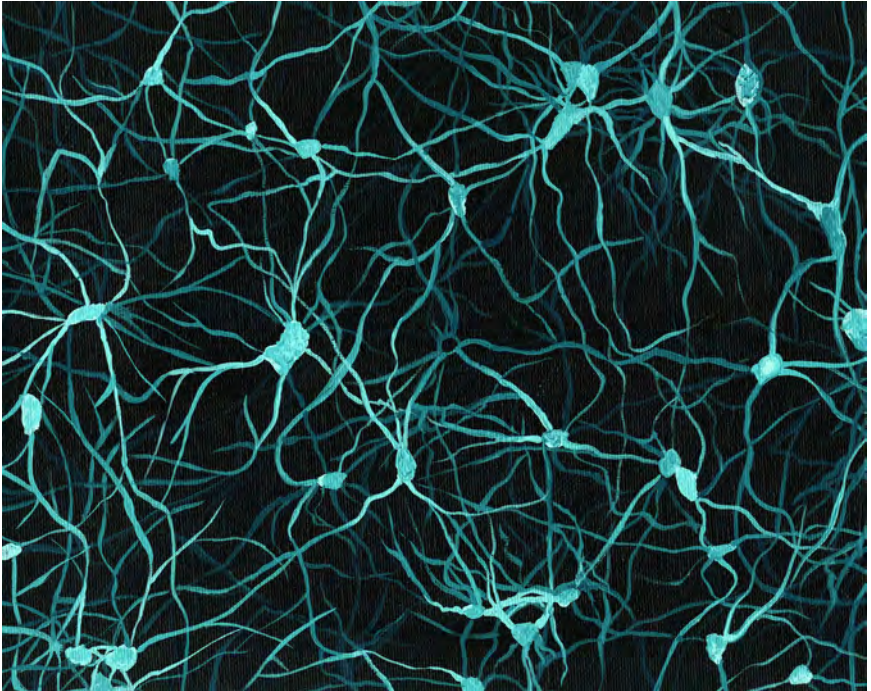
Acrylic Paint on Canvatex  
8 x 10 in.

# NEURONS

ARTWORK BY THERESA DAUNHEIMER

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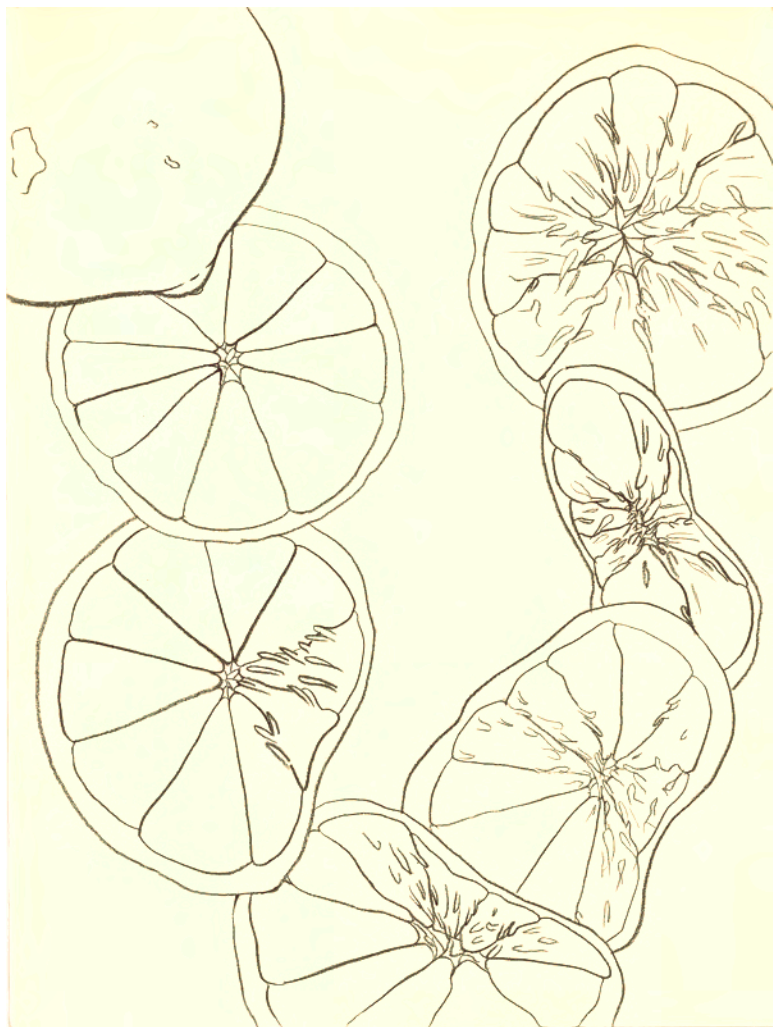
Acrylic Paint on Canvatex  
8 x 10 in.

# LIME SQUEEZE

ARTWORK BY CASSANDRA MEJIA

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Charcoal Pencil on Paper  
24 x 18 in.

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# GIVE AND TAKE

ARTWORK BY MELODY PALENCIA

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Archival Inkjet Print  
11 x 17 in.



# PIECE OF DRIFTWOOD MY TURTLE WOULD LIKE

ARTWORK BY AUGUSTA KRAWCZYK

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Charcoal on Paper  
24 x 18 in.

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# LET GO

FICTION BY ALEXIE DIAZ

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Pounding, they never had any etiquette when knocking at her mind. Alice sat with her back against a worn white fabric, her index finger twirling the rim of her wine glass. Next to her, a plain rustic table held the cup. In the uncorrupted part of her mind the walls had no paint, only chipped, weak, and faint scarlet red wallpaper. Its surface was littered with stains and tears, as if something had tried to claw its way out.

A few bright orbs floated above her form, they lit the space and kept her away from the darkness. Although, given that she possessed the power of a night creature, dark always followed.

Her glass's hum sprang at the walls; each note rammed inside her inner sanctum. Her attempt to deafen other voices she disliked.

"Hello, Alice." Monotone and disembodied, its voice gargled over the pipes made from her instrument.

She turned her attention to the empty armchair on the other side of the table. "Greetings, nice to hear from you again."

Her voice chirped a snarky welcome. She hoped if she kept playing it'd go away as it used too. As she discovered more of her powers, it only made everything worse.

The figureless being didn't respond right away. Its voice came from nowhere in particular, yet Alice's eyes moved up from the chair and to another corner of the room.

"You don't have a name for me today? It's been a while since I visited," it hesitated as if it found a weaker section of the room. "I thought you would have another one for me."

"I was young when I gave you names. I didn't understand what you were." Her finger still twirled.

Alice created the same melody over and over. It sounded like a broken record that couldn't move to the rest of the song. Over the years its tone grew softer because she couldn't keep

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playing forever. When she started, her scape was larger, big enough for a whale to swim comfortably. Now, the room barely fit an elephant.

“I remember those years, they passed so quickly, didn’t they? I thought you would have given up.” The tone distant, unmoving, emotionless. It was colder than an icy breeze. “By the look of things, you don’t have much left until my celebration.”

“I love celebrations.” A smile appeared at her lips as permanent as happiness during a raining parade.

“Then why don’t you let go?”

“Let go?” She sounded innocent, like a kid who knew nothing about the world.

Alice habitually sounded calm and mocking. She knew it pushed others away, she preferred it that way. The girl couldn’t risk standing out and presenting too much like other people. It knew this about her, and she tried to block it. She knew she couldn’t keep doing it, but what else could she do with her brimming cup.

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**“I remember those years,  
they passed so quickly,  
didn’t they? I thought you  
would have given up.”**

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“There isn’t much of you left, is there, Alice? You’re a few clustered thoughts,” it said to her. “You’re forcing your consciousness far away from me. You can’t keep it up forever.” The figureless being spoke as it danced inside the cluttered space, so free.

She leaned back, her finger’s rhythm slower. “I’m much more than clustered thoughts,” she remained seated. “You pressed me so far back into a corner, what did you expect? It’s an animal’s instinct to defend oneself whether the danger is inescapable or not.”

It went quiet, no response.

Alice’s crimson beams highlighted the shape that no one could see, she followed its gentler pace. Eventually, her eyes

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stopped in front of her. It leaned over her chair. Hints of charcoal brushed her nose, almost burning. Her lips puckered and scrunched together.

“You had a goal when we first met, this very day so many years ago.” Her eyes teetered back and forth as if it did. “You said you’d get strong enough to beat your own power, and you know Alice,” her body felt heavier as it continued, “you got so far, not to your own goal but to mine.”

The glass’s octave drowned under its vocals. Her cup’s liquid flowed over the sides.

“Alice-Marie-Hyde, don’t you want to stop being alone?” It asked. “Aren’t you spreading yourself thin using this power?”

Her legs unfolded, both her feet grazing the ground. It caused her velvet red gothic dress to span out.

“The other three night-eaters don’t compare to you. Do they, Alice?”

Her smiling lips began to twitch listening to it, and her left fingers tapped at the upholstery. She didn’t stop twirling her other finger even if it made little noise.

“I can see it, you’ll get to your strongest point and slip. All this you created will become a single picture, a barely visible memory. Not that you’d care, you’ll be that picture in the back of my head.”

Alice heard its low snicker. Her eyes shut as hot air expelled from her nose.

“You’re developing perfectly into your role, a creature that devours weaker beings by their body and their minds. Why don’t you let yourself fall before the others? Would you rather their minds get destroyed first?”

Its voice whispered near her face, allowing the soot to pour in like a pepper shaker without its cap. The idea dropped the organs in her stomach. She couldn’t accept it, her grin wavered.

“Should I take your cousin Matthew before you? He’s also growing into quite the puppet.”

Immediately, the humming of the glass ceased. Alice’s feet

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planted on the ground, and her body slung upwards, wrapping around the lone object on the table. She lurched forward and...

SMASH, it struck the wall. Glass shards exploded and scattered in every direction.

Her face no longer smiled, and in the air behind her, a small screech called for help. After the yell stopped the orb, a stray shard hung like excess skin.

“I’m not going to lose to you, and neither are they.” Her body quaked and her eyes burst with white flames. Her teeth began to chatter and scramble from her jaws, similar to eggs from a broken shell.

“There she is. After everything you’ve been through, you still have a connection to people. You care. And that’s going to end you, Alice. So...”

It moved closer as it spoke. It was a reflection, corrupted and tainted, a version Alice never wanted to let happen. In this entity’s reality, it had her body like all the other night eaters before her.

But she refused to let go, and it showed. A tiny glimmer of herself remained inside. Yet if it ever got what it wanted, it’d destroy that part of her and use her mind and body to take over everyone.

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**“It moved closer as it spoke. It was a reflection, corrupted and tainted, a version Alice never wanted to let happen.”**

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“Are you sure you won’t lose?” The hideous beast questioned.

Alice couldn’t answer. The lights dimmed and blackness poured from her wounds, pushing the glass pieces to the floor. She didn’t even notice the wine glass strike her back. Darkness coated her tawny skin like a fall of warm chocolate onto a marshmallow. She shook her head, only on the outside would she let the night consume her.

The figureless being vanished as the wall collided with her body, forcing it back. She extended her arms out to fight it,

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but her fingers stood no chance. She didn't react to the pain it caused. She couldn't afford to stir her emotion, nor did it hurt. She lost her feeling of pain a long time ago.

She stumbled back into her seat. Her room touched her shoes, and the wall was a few feet away from her face. She looked back at the table where a teacup remained. Her right pointer finger lifted over it. Only three orbs stayed lit in the smaller space. Alice touched the top of her new glass.

She stopped herself. Her eyes blinked very slowly. Instead, she grabbed the cup's handle. She stared into the empty black water. There weren't any answers for her. She pitched the corner of her lips up again, this golden-haired beauty never lied.

"I don't know," Alice replied to its question.

She decided to take a sip, treading where she never had before, because Alice knew she couldn't make a sound loud enough to ignore it anymore.

# METAMORPHOSIS

POETRY BY BRENDA G. PEREZ

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The leaves fall and wither, but the tree still stands  
Burning with rage and sheer passion, but carries trembling  
hands  
Holding on to what seems to be a small withered leaf  
Red cheeks filled with radiant heat to what the heart hides  
underneath  
Let go of the past, but continue to feel  
Let go hindered, and within you will heal  
Reach into the space that seems an abyss  
And inside, all around, you will find the bliss  
Disguised as the future is a sweet eternal kiss  
One receives as they undergo metamorphosis

# CALISTO

FICTION BY ALEXIE DIAZ

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When I met you, you were ugly. You and I exchanged glances at the Tinley subway station. I couldn't match your stupid grin, nor your care for the little girl's iPad as it slid toward the tracks. Everyone watched your body tip to the oncoming train except me. I grabbed at whatever I could without a thought, and I yanked you back with all my strength. We fell together, and when our eyes met again, you looked beautiful.

I didn't understand what happened, the difference from before and after I saved you. It wasn't the lighting or the angle. What was it?

Regardless, you looked good enough to date. We went to dinner that night, then a horror movie, a walk on the beach, and clicked. It was fun to go out with you at first, fun until everyone started to talk.

Everywhere we went someone would stare, or many people if it was a busy place. They'd whisper things about you and me. Muttering insults about your complexion or that I was using you for money. Neither of us had jobs to brag about, I forgot what you were, but you weren't rich.

The more I heard them talk, the more flaws I saw when I looked at you. Your face was god-like on our first date, but gradually, it turned sour and dull. As bland as a bowl of grits.

Your features rounded overnight. Your bright blue crystal eyes turned into faint, sad gray ones. Your clean face popped with freckles like popcorn kernels in a microwave. It's the reason I squeaked that night you made blueberry pie.

After that, I couldn't help but pick at my food anytime we went out, those comments and stares bugged me. I couldn't argue with the truth they told, you weren't perfect. Yeah, you took me out to places I loved, but your nose was a little too big. You'd buy me gifts whenever I felt down, but you were gaining



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weight. You always listened to my problems, but your teeth were crooked. You went with me shopping, but I couldn't pay attention to myself because of your mug. You weren't perfect, and I put up with it for a few months.

Eventually, I grew tired. Anytime you spoke about yourself, I'd look off in another direction to avoid your face. If I ever glanced your way, my eyes would catch the glare of a mole or stubble on your chin. I'd watch that as you talked instead. I always loved when you asked about me though.

At work, I sometimes ignored your texts when I'd visualize your face. No offense, but it repulsed me to answer. I wanted someone fit, handsome, someone who sat a few cubicles away. Jackson. He started during the busy season, and right away he flirted with me. His black button-up reflected his muscles

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**“Yeah, you took me out to places I loved, but your nose was a little too big.”**

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underneath, barely containing his hunky Latino charm. Man, I hate him, but he was a man.

His face, sharp and rustic. His haircut, razored and slicked back. Unlike yours, once it looked so soft and luscious, but then it changed to the curly brown mop-top. Not like Jackson's.

A lot of girls at work shot daggers, arrows, and even spears in my direction. It felt amazing, his attention on me, and everyone else was jealous. Yes, you always focused on me, yet no one cared if you did, you weren't good looking.

After work, I started to go to the bars with Jackson. You always texted me to plan dates. At the time, it was annoying. I told you every time I was busy. It was true, I couldn't always hang out with you, I needed space. Over time, I still received texts, and I called you for ten minutes every two days, at least. You suffocated me. You wouldn't give me time for Jackson.

So, I made a choice. I agreed to go on a date with you after work on Tuesday. I was going to break up with you, and in celebration Jackson and I got tipsy Monday night. He'd been grabby,

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seductively whispering into my ear, running his hand down my back, and groping me at every opportunity. What else could I do? I called us a cab to my apartment. You never did that stuff to me, you respected my boundaries, you cared about me, right?

Unlike yours, Jackson's body was firm, thick, and everything I wanted. A handsome face, beautiful bright green pools, and he gave me a bliss that I thought could last a lifetime. But it only lasted that night.

The next morning, I woke up and swung my arm over to caress his chest, yet I rubbed on my empty bedsheets. I assumed he got up to make breakfast, so I leaped from bed without putting anything on and strutted right around the corner. The kitchen was empty. I couldn't smell bacon, eggs, or the broccoli and cheddar soup you'd make for me when I was sick. I miss it.

I thought he had to go home to get clothes for work; it made sense. Ergo, I got ready and left. As I got there, I expected him to say what he said the night before. "You're one of the most beautiful girls

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**"You weren't handsome,  
but you cared about me.  
In fairy tales that's the  
valuable lesson, right?"**

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I've ever seen, Rachael. Your body's better than anyone I've been with, your chest and ass are amazing." I thought he'd be waiting to compliment my looks, after all, he knew nothing else about me. He didn't know I liked cheesy romantic comedies. He didn't know what music I wanted to hear or take me to concerts. He didn't know what food I loved, how many brothers and sisters I had, what my family was like, what dreams I had, nothing. You did.

Jackson didn't care, he's an asshole. That was clear when I walked into work and saw him flirting with another girl. I ran away in tears. I needed someone to talk to, I wouldn't speak to those skanks at work. That's when I called you. I told you we needed our date now! And you worked your magic. You calmed

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me down on the phone, you didn't even ask what happened. You knew I hated when you asked questions right away. You told me you would make everything better. That's why I didn't tell you I cheated until now.

You weren't handsome, but you cared about me. In fairy tales that's the valuable lesson, right? I wanted to apologize to you. I wanted to try to care about you. I needed to be happy and show up Jackson. "Who cares about looks?" I asked myself as I walked to your apartment.

That was pushed away so fast, because of you.

Your image is burned into my head. As burned and scarred as your twisted, bee-stung lips and pug-nosed face. I'm haunted by your nearly toothless grin. Sure, your lips pursed later, but

then I remembered your milky white eyes watching over me. It made me cringe.

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**"Your image is burned into my head. As burned and scarred as your twisted, bee-stung lips and pug-nosed face."**

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I didn't know what to say to you that day. You didn't look like that the previous week. You suddenly popped with

obesity like that day you popped freckles. It's IMPOSSIBLE. Something occurred in that week, you were somewhat average before, and then you went to horror movie gross.

I gained focus when you said my name. Your voice, so soft, it was like mine when I called you. But you didn't cuss about some jackass. You spoke about me.

I listened when you did.

The first thing you said was right. You called me beautiful and funny. You said you thought I was different because I smiled in the subway. You said only a few people could smile at you, but I didn't smile anymore. I was repulsed.

Then, you backed from your door and said that terrible thing. That word hit me, it still does.

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I wanted to harass you for saying it, I'm drop dead gorgeous. Yet I slumped against your door. I lacked the strength to mock you. Everything hurt. I kept banging and begging for you to come out, you heard me as I cried. You didn't open it even after the police dragged me out of the building.

I called and left sobbing voicemails. I texted you nonstop and went to your apartment every day for three whole months! You know I did, now you got me doing this. I'm writing you a letter for god sakes! I want answers! I want you to tell me, Calisto. It's been six goddamned months! I've never stopped thinking about it. Talk to me, open your door, something! Tell me what happened to your body.

And tell me why you called me that. I'm beautiful, aren't I? I confessed everything to you. You owe me this! Tell me why you called me ugly.

# RUNNING

POETRY BY BRIDGET BUTLER

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I'm running  
Running from the problems of the day  
Running from the hateful things that people always say  
I'm running  
Running out of steam ---  
Trying to achieve the all praiseworthy "American Dream"  
I'm running  
Running towards the silver lined horizon  
Hoping that there I will find my life's calling  
I'm running  
Running towards a future that isn't shadowed with my doubt;  
I want to smile, laugh, and always joke about.  
I am running  
Running with the faith that God is always near-  
Praying that the path I take won't be trudged along in fear  
I am running.  
Running towards the optimism and fighting against all pessimism-  
Bringing light to the dark and hope to the faint of heart  
I AM running.  
Not in the hopes of hiding from my life,  
But in reaching my better self and conquering all my strife  
I. Am. Running.  
Taking it all in my stride.  
Realizing that I no longer need to hide.  
For I am running my own show, and in my plot I intend to flourish and grow-

# DELTAS

ARTWORK BY THERESA DAUNHEIMER

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Acrylic Paint on Canvatex  
8 x 10 in.

# SOMETHING AFOOT

ARTWORK BY KIARA VARGAS

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Charcoal on Paper  
24 x 18 in.

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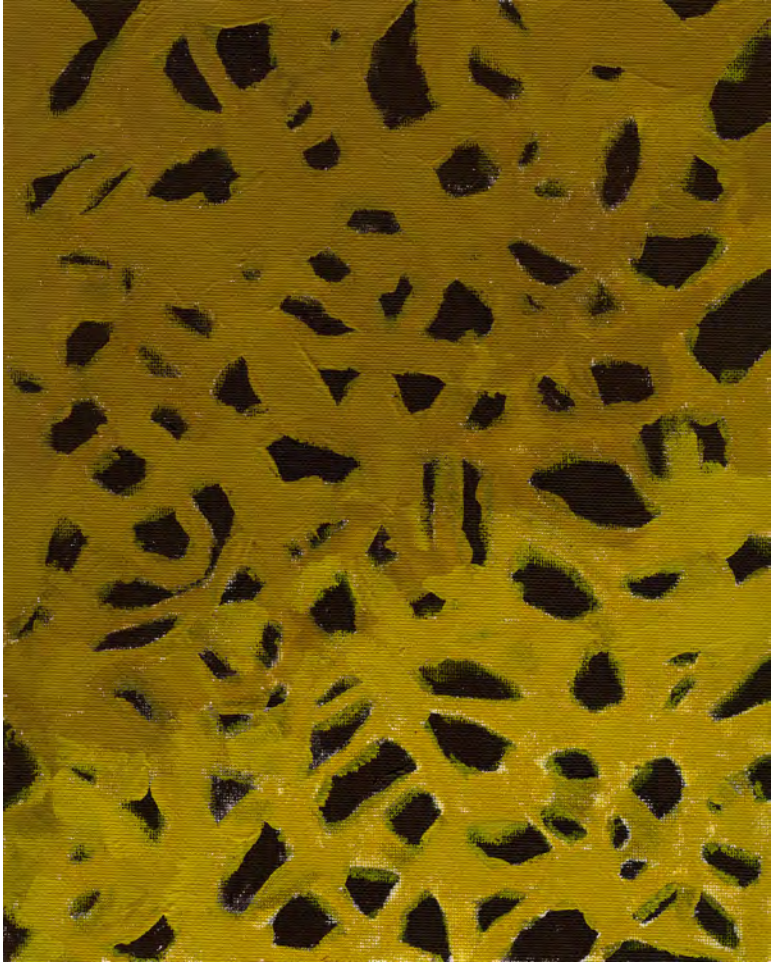
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# MARROW

ARTWORK BY ZACH GLADWIN

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Acrylic Paint on Canvatex  
24.25 x 10 in.



# MANNEQUIN

ARTWORK BY BROCKTON HARNER

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Charcoal on Paper  
24 x 18 in.

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# GOLDEN TREES

POETRY BY ROBIN ALLRED

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My mind is in constant battle.  
Between the good and bad of this situation  
My head is in full attack mode ready to puncture  
The next thing that touches my heart  
Even my heart itself  
Cannot comfort herself in a warm embrace  
My mind, he is afraid that she'll stop beating by the slightest  
touch  
The only thing covering her up  
During cold stormy nights  
Is my head's reassurance that they'll only have each other  
And that the rest of the world will continue to spin on without  
me  
You see when something's broken  
You can't always cover the cracks with gold and call it beautiful  
You cannot shape it into what it one was  
When you cut down a tree you make it paper

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You don't expect it to touch the sky like it once did before

You expect it to be open and blank and ready for the ink to be drawn to it

You cannot expect my head and heart to work the same

Now that they have been hurt.

They are no longer synchronized

To beat each time serotonin is released into my body

To think every time my heart skips a beat

I can no longer smile when I think of love

All I can do is listen to my heart rattle in its armor

No more warm comforting embrace

Only cool metal touches my most tender organ

I know that my defense system will be flawed

Because I am broken and the walls that I have built around myself

Will crumble like paper when you touch me

My head will only think in battle mode

And my heart will cry to cover the sound of its beat

To cover the sound of the cracks in my soul

To fill the now empty spaces in armor

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Once my purpose was to heal people

And now that I am broken I am wandering around in this cold world

Listening to the battle between my brain and my heart

The worst part about recovering from injury

Is knowing that you're not hurt at all

# REMEMBRANCE

POETRY BY CELINA ESCAMILLA

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It is strange to me  
how the ocean lets loose the tightness in my bones,  
as if it is gently slipping off the corset that reality laced me into.  
Naked and cold, she gives me breath.  
I gulp down the salt water air as a newborn would  
its Mother's milk;  
instinctual and with need.

In exchange for this giving  
she pulls on me... pulls on my heartstrings,  
in a transformative dance where we each get to be something we  
are not.  
She is the moon and I am now the water,  
swelling with each pull of her tempestuous gravity.

I think we were lovers before...

Before buildings, before man,  
before beast, before light...  
When all there was  
was the darkness in which we swam in each other;  
content to always be saturated and engulfed  
in the dance of *being*.

Some place in time we were pulled apart.  
It was painful.  
It was fire.  
It was the end...  
but the end is always a beginning,  
and thus, it was the beginning of light and life.  
We moved in different places,

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in different ways,  
and with different energies.  
We moved through ages of time,  
endless days, and everlasting nights.  
We moved into different existences, and forgot...

Whether we wanted to or not, we forgot...

Still,  
when I see her and when she sees me,  
or rather when we are within close proximity  
and we *feel* each other...

Within the crashing roars  
and rushing swells of her waves,  
I can faintly hear  
the primal beat to which we once danced,  
beckoning me...

*Come closer, come closer, come closer*

But something more than sand separates us now.

# THE KING OF CUPS

FICTION BY JOHN RILEY

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You wake up in your bed chambers next to your wife. You clean and get dressed in your formal clothes. You head out to your dining hall for breakfast where you gorge yourself on meats, wines, and bread. You raise a cup and toast to a new day.

You leave to the council room for a meeting that will bore you as it has day after day. You sit there nodding off only to somehow bring your consciousness back for a

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**“Party, food, wine, debauchery. Like many nights before. You are the King of Cups. I am the King of Cups.”**

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little while. The only thing you pick out from the meeting is taxes have risen, your military is growing, and something about a small group of people asking for a permit of some kind. You didn't really get that one. But none of this has you worried for the rest of your day.

You come to the main hall to see servants decorating for the night. Your throne room is adorned with garland and flowers. Two servants come up asking, “How much wine would you like brought up from the cellar?” You smile and tell them, “What a silly question, the whole cellar to be brought up.” You leave to get ready for tonight. You dress extravagantly for what you expect to be the biggest party you will throw. You enter the throne room to a large group of party goers. A servant gives you a cup of wine. You raise it in the air to toast the occasion. You know how this night will end, like it has many times before. Party, food, wine, and debauchery. Like many nights before. You are the King of Cups. I am the King of Cups.

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I wake up in my bed chambers next to my wife. I clean and get dressed in my formal clothes. I head out to my dining hall for breakfast where I gorge myself on meats, wines, and bread. I raise a cup and toast to a new day.



# PETALS IN TRAFFIC

POETRY BY ROBIN ALLRED

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If you were a garden and I your taker  
Your fertilizer would be love  
Until I realize you can't just grow  
Reliant on emotions and expectations  
I cannot expect to pick the fruit you bear  
When sometimes I am just a bear  
Ravaging away at your produce  
So now I am your carer  
Picking away at your weeds  
Giving your seeds to the community  
And letting you grow into what you need to be  
Wrapped up into rusty chain loops  
A roundabout of organic earth  
So rooted  
So essential  
So you

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# HOW I FIT INTO PUERTO RICAN CULTURE

*NONFICTION BY MARISA ORLAND*

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One surprising aspect of myself is that despite my fair skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair, I am half Puerto Rican. This part of myself has affected me in a multitude of ways. Some ways have been with my own identity, my privilege, my personality, my views on the Hispanic community, my creativity, and my family.

When it comes to my identity, the fact that I do not look Puerto Rican, and do not speak Spanish fluently, has made me feel like I am not of this ethnicity. I feel as though I am lying when I tell people that I am indeed Puerto Rican. But I have found ways to combat this mindset and immerse myself in Puerto Rican culture. For example, I cook more Puerto Rican dishes; I learn more Spanish; I listen to Puerto Rican music; and

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**“I feel as though I am lying when I tell people that I am indeed Puerto Rican.”**

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I ask my family what the island itself is like, because I myself have never been to Puerto Rico.

Another aspect to my ethnicity is my appearance and the privileges it grants me. This feeds my feeling of separation from my fellow Puerto Ricans. We are treated differently because I can pass as a fully Caucasian woman, when many other Puerto Ricans cannot. I am sure I gain kinder treatment because of my Caucasian appearance, while my family members that appear more Hispanic have encountered racism and intolerance. This fact irritates me greatly! Just because I happened to be born with a lighter complexion, I get an easier life, while members of my family do not. One of my second cousins writes for a LGBTQ online newspaper, and he has had many instances where he has been attacked with racist slurs. We both are Puerto Rican, but he

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receives more bigotry because of his Hispanic appearance.

My privileges have been another driving force to learn and immerse myself in my culture. Perhaps if I become more knowledgeable about it, I can use my privilege to teach more people about the incredible accomplishments, perseverance, and love of my people. If ignorant people will not listen to the more Hispanic-looking Puerto Ricans, then maybe they will listen to me. Through that, perhaps they can become more educated and open minded about Puerto Ricans and people of Hispanic backgrounds.

I also felt my personality contrasted with my ethnic background for a time. I have been shy for most of my life. Talking to people used to be such a struggle, which caused me to avoid it all together. However, when I visited the Puerto Rican side of my family, I saw how outgoing most of them were, and I found myself feeling like there was yet another way I was not like

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**“I love my people. I admire all their amazing qualities.”**

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them; another way I did not feel like I truly was Puerto Rican. As I grew up though, I began to get

to know myself better. I discovered parts of my personality I was too nervous to show for fear of rejection. I realized I have more in common with my family than I first realized. I discovered my own fiery passion for being outgoing, and just an overall joy for freely being myself.

I find that my view on the Hispanic community is one of immense pride. I love my people. I admire all their amazing qualities. I have learned of them first hand. When I see that not everyone views them this way, I am filled with rage. The fact that we have a president who spreads such racist views about the Hispanic community is absolutely horrifying. Ignorance has always run rampant in the United States, but a leader who speaks openly about these views is so damaging. This needs to change! There are so many talented and incredible people from each of the Spanish speaking countries. For example, Lin Manuel Mi-

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randa, a Puerto Rican composer and performer, has had such success with his recent musical, *Hamilton*. Lin Manual Miranda is also such a strong advocate for the rights of the Puerto Rican people. He spoke out about the lack of aid for Puerto Rico when they were hit by a terrible hurricane.

I also find that bringing Puerto Rican culture into my artwork and stories helps me to feel closer to my heritage. I create Puerto Rican characters that speak Spanish fluently, and I create ones that do not. I create Puerto Rican characters that have large, loving families, and I create characters that do not. I try to share both the positive and the negative aspects of the Puerto Rican community, because that is the truth. Just like any group of people, they have both. However, all the while I made sure to celebrate these characters for their differences and similarities. They talk about their favorite dishes from home, like tostones, Puerto Rican rice, or Ropa Vieja. They talk about their favorite Puerto Rican singers, like Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, and Ricky Martin. I am so glad I can share these aspects.

Despite my own insecurities about how I fit into the Puerto Rican community, my family has always made me feel like I belong with them. They treat me with the same welcoming, enveloping love they share with all our family. That has always helped me with my fear of not belonging with them. Our family, as well as many Hispanic families, are so close-knit and supportive of each other. Family is so important to us. There have been some family members of mine that despite us having just met, have been so loving and familiar with me. When I first met my aunt a couple of months ago, she hugged me so tight, held my hand, and showed such kindness to me despite having just met me that day. Now of course there can be downsides to this. Sometimes a strong devotion to your family can be misplaced if they have been unkind to you. This has happened with my mother and some of her immediate family members. They did not deserve her love. However, in my experience with most members of my mom's Puerto Rican side of the family, they have been some of

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the most important people in my life.

As I share and learn more about my family, other Puerto Ricans, and write and create Puerto Rican characters, I feel my sense of belonging grow stronger and stronger each day. I think about our amazing food, sing our unique and beautiful songs, discover our incredible accomplishments, see our fiery passions, and share our amazing love. My people have such a rich and beautiful culture that I am so proud to belong to.

# PEACEFUL WALK

ARTWORK BY HEATHER FEIGNER

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Archival Inkjet Print  
8.5 x 11 in.

# COMPONENTS OF NATURE

ARTWORK BY VALERIA TORRES

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Oil Paint on Canvas  
24 x 30 in.

# COLLAGE PAINTING

ARTWORK BY NEALION SMITH

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Oil Paint on Canvas  
30 x 24 in.



# KALANCHOE

ARTWORK BY ANGUS NOACK

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Oil Paint on Canvas  
24 x 18 in.

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# I LOOK AND APPEAR JUST LIKE YOU

POETRY BY DESTINY MITCHELL

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THIRD PLACE WINNER IN THE POETRY CATEGORY OF THE  
2018 SKYWAY WRITER'S FESTIVAL

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Look through the eyes of us and this is what you  
see and feel.

See what I see.

I go through school. I look and appear just like you.

But I get bullied; I say it's nothing, I'm used to it,  
maybe a little too used

to it.

Sometimes I laugh along like it's okay, but I'm hurt on the  
inside.

I'm always the butt of the joke. I feel like it's a poke.

A dig!

For something my brain struggles with. I get bullied and  
teased every day.

To the point; people bang at my classroom door screaming  
and laughing

"LDD!"

Making me ashamed to be me. I want to feel free.

I want to be at peace, with my learning disability.

This is what I go through.

See what I see.

I go through school. I look and appear just like you.

But people doubt me and my dreams, because it's hard for me  
to focus

and I lose interest fast.

I'm probably THE last person you would ever think to pass  
any class.

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*I Look and Appear Just Like You*

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But don't underestimate me, because you might be surprised  
as to what  
Me, Myself, and I can actually grasp.  
I have ADHD  
And if you don't decipher; then you can just ask me.  
This is how I feel.  
See what I see.  
I go through school. I look and appear just like you.  
Yes, I'm smart  
But why does everyone point and laugh at me?  
The statistic is I have poor eye contact.  
But did you know I feel and I see what individuals do to me?  
So what, some sounds bother me; but it's all because of my  
disability.  
Little by little making me feel small losing my precious self-  
esteem.  
But No!  
I have autism and I'm going to strive and rise and let no one  
change me, nor my dreams.  
This is what I go through.  
See what I see.  
I go through school. I look and appear just like you.  
People usually stay away from me and think I'm abnormal or  
strange.  
So in conclusion, I just stay clear out of their range.  
I'm usually sad and I'd rather be alone  
I don't want to be pushed over the edge; So, I walk with my  
body and face solid in stone.  
I'm depressed sometimes; I feel like I need a friend, another  
me, a clone.  
Someone who can relate and, maybe, if a little friendship  
light  
can shine in a scary dark place, I would be freed out of my

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own mind's  
race.  
This is how I feel.  
See what I see.  
I go through school. I look and appear just like you.  
But sometimes my heart is fast; Of course you didn't know  
that.  
Of course I didn't expect you to; you can't see inside of me,  
because if you did,  
you wouldn't tell me gossip concerning me.  
That makes me anxious. Far from numb.  
I've got anxiety.  
My body goes into shock. And my breathing feels  
temporarily blocked.  
And any minute I feel as though my body's 'bout to drop.  
I get constant migraines hopping around in my head. Day  
after day just wanting my bed.  
Stuck in my anxiety's sorrow  
hoping to feel better tomorrow.  
Hashtag positive vibes is strong enough to save many lives.  
This is what I go through.  
See what I see.  
I go through school. I look and appear just like you.  
But, my mood changes rapidly to sadness, happiness, then  
anger.  
Sometimes I become my own stranger and we all know the  
saying  
"stranger danger" and that's how I feel.  
I don't know who I am half of the time.  
My mood is at the edge of the equator.  
I don't realize my personality  
So please don't become my hater.  
I have a bipolar disorder.

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So I need you to be my supporter.  
This is how I feel.  
See what I see.  
I go through school. I look and appear just like you.  
Though I'm usually referred to as a vegetable.  
That's not the proper term.  
And I noticed when people see me they don't speak, just stare  
like I'm some sort of germ.  
I have feelings, I'm still human.  
I think about my things and people around me. I wish my  
surroundings  
Could see me for what's inside of me.  
And by the way my disorder is called permanent vegetative  
state (PVS).  
So maybe I was wrong, I don't actually look like you but, I'm  
still human and I feel too.  
This is what I go through.  
See what I go through.  
See what I see.  
I go through school. I look and appear just like you.  
Well I may look a little similar to you.  
But should that define me? Should that define who I am as a  
person?  
Who's to say the way I look is wrong?  
Can anyone accept me for me?  
Like Alicia Keys said "he ain't no different from me" and "she  
ain't no different from me"  
Unbreakable.  
And guess what, even if I have Down syndrome;  
I am unmistakable and Lady Gaga made herself loud and  
clear when she said  
"I was born this way"

So I am and will forever be unshakable.

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That's the story of my life.  
This is how I feel.  
See what I see.

# THE DEMISE OF A LIFE

FICTION BY ALAYNA LEWIS

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I should've known.

I should've sensed.

In hindsight the evidence was obvious, immortalized in family photos. The demise of a life summed up in a deteriorating smile. Emotional unrest concealed behind carefully constructed facial expressions. Each photo an 8x8 lie corralled in a polished frame, adhered to the walls as testaments of feigned stability. I felt sickened walking through the halls of our childhood home, feeling as if those dull, lifeless eyes were following me. It was as though their owner was pleading with me to rescue her from a time already gone; decisions already made. I rather wished I could reach into any one of those frozen moments and pull her into the present, where the possibility of hope resided. She had become a martyr to her choices; desires. But could she be blamed? Was the fault entirely hers? Surely not. Surely, a portion of her downfall was due to happenstance. Situations had pulled her into their toxic orbit, threatening to never release. It wasn't her fault! How could one expect something as intricate as a soul to remain intact when they've abused it so? She had tried, hadn't she? I had to give her credit for that. All the ways she had pushed herself almost to a breaking point... to prove she could live... and live normally. But it was only skin deep.

I should have noticed the hairline cracks in her pleasant demeanor. I should have seen her bloodshot eyes and sensed that there was more than a bad night's sleep to hold liable. I should've known all this because I loved her. I did... I had. I loved her when we were young. I had no cause to do anything other. But as the years pressed on... and in... I found reason upon reason to loathe who she was becoming. Maybe, after all... I was the one who should be blamed.

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Ever since my disgust began I had wanted to destroy and preserve her in equal measures, which deeply perplexed me. Every time I had contemplated destroying her, I visited memories of us. Innocent, inquisitive little towheads we had been; her hair had eventually darkened alongside her outlook on life. I wanted to preserve that girl and all she was made of. That first, false smile was the beginning of the end I think. She had never been alright after the first time she pretended she was. Our commonalities were numerous: a face, a mind, a dream. We both had shared aspirations of flight; soaring high on metal wings.

Now, in her absence, I was faced with a life-altering choice; continue on a road that would lead to 6 feet under, or one that would land me 30,000 feet in the opposite direction. I tried to help her succeed beyond her past, but I had failed time and time again.

My last days with her were spent watching regret consume her without my consent. There was nothing I could do now except move on, carrying my memory of her for as long as it would last. Perhaps it was all eventual. Still, I felt I should've sensed, I should've known.



# HIS FAVORITE

POETRY BY KIMBERLY ESPINOZA

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God said he never had favorites,  
But you can tell SHE was his favorite,  
He admired her,  
She was pure though she had sinned,  
Her beautiful soul brightened the cold gloomy world,  
She was his light,  
He had seen himself in her,  
The problem was that she had no clue,  
No clue on what he had planned out for her future,  
She was letting her life go to waste,  
He would give signs showing he was there for her,  
Just like her guardian angel,  
They would speak even though she did not pray,  
She was like the daughter he did not have,  
She was his heart,  
She was his soul,  
She was his mind,  
She was his favorite,  
She was his EVERYTHING.

# DYAD

POETRY BY CELINA ESCAMILLA

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Is there anything that makes me  
feel as bold as the summer sun?

3 a.m.

Moving like a wraith in the void  
that night celebrates.

Darkness & Light  
Perverseness & Right

I've never lived my life in gray;  
only the witching hour and  
the light of day.

# FEMALE STILL-LIFE

ARTWORK BY MEGUMI JENSEN

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Charcoal on Paper  
24 x 18 in.

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# ON POINT

ARTWORK BY HEATHER FEIGNER

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Archival Inkjet Print  
17 x 11 in.

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# LONE GOURD

ARTWORK BY KIARA VARGAS

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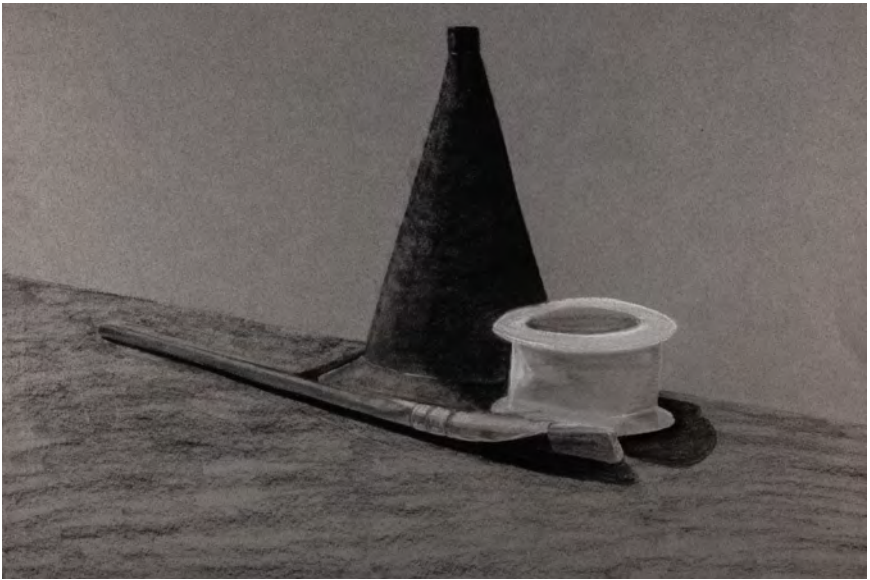
Charcoal on Paper  
24 x 18 in.

# THE EVERYDAY

ARTWORK BY KIARA VARGAS

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Conte Crayon on Paper  
13.25 x 19.75 in.









## CALLING ALL WRITERS!

- Do you have a passion for the written word?
- Are you looking for a community of writers who share your love for the craft?
- Would you like to be involved in the creation of future issues of Horizons?
- Join the Creative Writing Club!

### What is the Creative Writing Club?

The Creative Writing Club is a very inclusive group open to writers of all genres and forms. Our goal is to create a space where art can be shared and new ideas can flourish. As one of the most active clubs on campus, we meet weekly to workshop pieces, play writing games, and discuss all things literary. Each year, the club also hosts open mics, writing contests, write-ins, and even travels to a national writing conference. You don't want to miss out!

- **When?** Wednesdays from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM
- **Where?** Room 120 (Student Life office) in the Student Center on the Sugar Grove Campus
- **Questions?** Contact Dan Portincaso at [dportincaso@waubonsee.edu](mailto:dportincaso@waubonsee.edu)
- **Horizons has a webpage!** For more information and digital editions of past issues, visit [www.waubonsee.edu/Horizons](http://www.waubonsee.edu/Horizons)
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- We look forward to meeting you!

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Alexie Diaz  
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