



# HORIZONS





# HORIZONS

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF  
WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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# EDITORS' NOTE

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Working on *Horizons* was a first for many on the team this year. We had our fair share of issues to deal with and challenges to face, but with the incredible dedication and hard work from the team, we have been able to overcome these obstacles and create something we're truly proud of. Most importantly though, we are incredibly excited to be able to provide the students of Waubensee with the chance to see their work published professionally and hopefully open the door to future opportunities.

We would like to extend thanks to everyone who contributed to this magazine in one way or another. First, our editorial staff, who helped us make the crucial decisions that determined the content of the magazine. Then, our managing editors, who bore much of the workload in the magazine's early stages and helped create the framework upon which we built this issue. And of course we thank our graphic design team, whose tireless efforts have played an invaluable role in the creation and refinement of this year's issue of *Horizons*. Their work brought the magazine into a new artistic direction. Lastly, we thank Dan Portincaso, our faculty advisor, who has guided and assisted us through the editorial process and given us the amazing opportunity to work on *Horizons*.

We would also like to thank the writers, musicians, and artists who chose to share their artwork with us and without whom we couldn't have made this magazine. To share art requires a certain level of vulnerability, and for that we commend those who submitted to *Horizons* as well as the Skyway Writers and Art Festivals.

experiences, and we can only hope that we've captured a sliver of what makes this community so unique. We are proud to present to you the 26th issue of *Horizons*, and we truly hope you enjoy this year's magazine.

Sincerely,

Michael Aragon  
Abigail Kleimola

Breanne Berenyi  
Lizette Valdovinos

*Editors-in-Chief*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

*Horizons* would like to thank the students who submitted their work for consideration this year. We also want to thank the student editorial committee for reading through submissions during their spring break and discussing them upon our return. *Horizons* would also not be what it is today without the dedication and effort of members in the Creative Writing Club at Waubonsee.

We want to especially thank Sharon Garcia, Executive Dean for Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Jessica Guglielmi, Administrative Coordinator for Liberal Arts and Sciences. Their continued support for and commitment to the magazine ensures that the student writers, artists, musicians, and designers at Waubonsee have a vibrant space to gain experience while showcasing their talents and crafts.

We would also like to thank:

Todd Laufenberg, Assistant Professor of English, for his consistently excellent work with the Skyway Writing Competition, a wonderful opportunity for Waubonsee writers and major source of submissions for this magazine.

The English and Developmental English Departments for encouraging, teaching, and advising the writers of the future and for helping spread the word to students about *Horizons*.

The Art Department for inspiring and mentoring the visual artists of tomorrow, including *Horizons* in First Friday events at the Aurora campus, and their work with the Skyway Art Competition, from which the art in this issue was selected.

The Music Department who is committed to harnessing the musical muse for Waubonsee's students and connecting them to this publication.

Purchasing Manager, Theresa Larson, for her expert guidance through the purchasing process.

Michelle Dahlstrom, Student Life Manager, and Madeline Croft, Administrative Specialist for Student Life, for their guidance and support in organizing events and meetings and for creating an environment at Waubonsee that molds the student leaders of tomorrow and engages them in a community to build a better world.

The Marketing and Communications department for their ongoing support and Anders Lindell, Marketing and Communications Web Developer, and his team for expertly managing our website.

Alphagraphics of Aurora, our printing company, for reliably producing work of the highest quality and mentoring our designers through the publication process.

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



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# Growing Mold

## Poetry by Sara Cramer

---

How can I rot from the inside out?  
My heart is aching with the pressure of my chest  
                  concaving,  
my lungs have never felt this hazy,

      In, out. In, out. In,

      Outside of the walls of my skin,  
          I itch, I itch, I itch,  
      To feel like this is something I can *fix*  
      while my lungs continue to constrict,  
      like a boa that stretches up to my lips,  
restricts my urge to snatch all the thoughts that  
                  cave me

      In, out. In, out. In,

      Outrun the reflections of my past.  
As long as I keep moving, the ripples will break  
                  the reflection  
of my all seeing eyes I can't break out of.  
      That almost made sense.  
      I always almost make sense.  
      I almost do right.  
      I almost see the light,  
      Every time, every time, every time,  
      when I go to walk all night.  
I must keep moving, keep stepping, keep swim-  
                  ming,  
      so I don't keep thinking  
      Of all the little footprints in my head.  
From all the paths I've crossed and crisscrossed,

desperate to find a solution.  
But I'm falling, I'm drowning,  
and I can't keep fighting.  
I don't know what is right,  
I don't know why I lie,  
on the ground while I lie to me, to my friends  
because I'm certain there's no way in light  
that what my mind thinks is right is right.

In, out. In, out. In,

Outrage from something so small,  
I cannot escape the pent-up energy.  
It stirs inside me, screaming, burning to get out,  
Over and Over and Over again,  
until it realizes there's nowhere to go.  
That's when the feeling starts to sit.  
That's when the sinking begins,  
that's when the mold persists.  
It felt so much lighter when I was turning, twist-  
ing, aching,  
now I'm just sitting.  
The gravity pushes me down and I let it.  
I'm no longer fighting it,  
I just let it sit.  
My heart aches low and slow.  
My chest no longer rises.  
My lungs stop expanding.  
I rot from the inside out.

In, out. In, out. In,

But not out.

# The Wake of I Love You

Poetry by Bow Politowicz

---

*"I love you"*

That's what you said when you pushed me off the  
tree

I fell and broke my leg  
You didn't even see

You climbed down and sat beside me, yet stared  
straight ahead

You expounded about your life, sharing stories  
grandiose  
Wondrous deeds, sugared bellicose

Beaming you shared, bleeding I listened

You tie sweet words with humble phrasing, but  
you could never hide the bitter taste of your  
revelry

Your tales of self-sacrifice drawled on  
Repetition, repetition  
Altruism's narcissism

You boasted of sincerity, while stacking each word  
with hidden intent

Your words were so clean, like a polished crime-  
scene

Rehearsed and rehearsed, but never immersed  
Imitation, imitation  
Trust's cremation

I was scared to go, but scared to stay  
Even still, I crawled away



I needed help, but had no way to-

You grabbed my hand, "*Why do you reject me?*"  
You pulled me back, "I can't help those who have  
closed their hearts"  
Your fingernails dug into my wrist, "Listen to me"  
You let go of my hand and pointed at yourself,  
"Because I love you"

I pointed at my leg, but no words could leave my  
mouth  
You grinned, "That's why I'm here"  
You said you knew it already, better than me  
That I needed some help, as you prodded my knee

You speak like a hero  
Brutalize, stolen prize, plagiarize  
You smile like an angel  
Feint, mask of a saint, war paint

I knew you'd be angry, and it would end up worse  
than I feared, but I got up on one leg and  
would never return

"*So immature,*" You sighed, as you listed my  
downsides  
"*You were wrong to usurp me,*" You accused  
It was easy for you to lie and confuse  
Ingratitude  
That's how you pegged my attitude

Your grin resigned, laced with malign  
Your head shakes, condescending my ache

"*Leave if you want,*" You call  
"*But it was all for your sake*"  
I don't look back  
I won't look back  
Say what you want  
But your words don't match your wake

# Levels of Transparency

**Artwork by Taylor Knuth**



18 x 24 in.  
Charcoal

# Emails to my Archnemesis

## Fiction by Bow Politowicz

---

*Eight days ago, a well-known supervillain (or at least that's how he would describe himself) sent out an email to his "archnemesis" Domino Jones.*

*This is the email he sent:*

**From: Captain Beans**

**6/22/20**

**Subject: My Grandiose Threat (read immediately!!!)**

**To: Domino Jones**

**On June 22, 2020, at 9:30 AM, Captain Beans <beantheredonethat@gmail.com> wrote:**

Dear Domino Jones,

Listen here, hero! Tomorrow, the 23rd of June, I am going to place five puppies in a basket.

"That's it?" You may be thinking this, at this very moment. After all, such a thing isn't bad at all, right...but YOU'D BE WRONG! I will be placing this basket of canines inside a 2009 Toyoda Locolla (the worst year for a Locolla!), then, I will throw a brick through the driver's window to fall on the gas pedal (if I miss, I have more backup bricks to throw, as well!) which will send the car SPEEDING down a mountain. You may have superhero flame abilities, Mr. Jones, but how will those help these poor, poor puppies? How will you save them before they reach the end of the road (1.3 miles) and FLY OFF THE EDGE TO THEIR DEATH!

Do your best to protect them...

If you dare...

I'll be waiting...

Your Archnemesis,  
Captain Beans

***Even with that horrible (and albeit very odd)  
threat, Domino did not show.  
He didn't even reply for that matter.  
Here are the messages that transpired next:***

**From: Captain Beans  
6/27/20  
Subject: Disappointed  
To: Domino Jones  
On June 27, 2020, at 2:37 AM, Captain  
Beans <beantheredonethat@gmail.com>  
wrote:**

To Domino Jones,

I have noted your lack of reply. And, although you didn't even give the common decency to return an email in a timely manner (I worked hard on making it menacing and grammatically correct, you know!) or seem to care AT ALL for the lives of those poor innocent puppies, I got your message all the same. A message of indifference. A truly uncaring vibe. Cold-blooded, even. Are you a villain now? Have you turned away from your compassionate, virtuous, and "heroic" ways? If so, I would appreciate a response so that I may begin searching for a NEW archnemesis. One that actually does their job and fights me like a REAL hero. This clearly isn't working out. Two villains duking it out? How preposterous. Reply in the next 3 days or I'll consider your silence an official admittance and declaration of your newfound villain-hood.

I hope you're doing horribly,  
Captain Beans

**From: Domino Jones**  
**6/28/20**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Captain Beans**  
**On June 28, 2020, at 3:46 PM, Domino Jones**  
**<dominojoneswastaken@gmail.com> wrote:**

hey beans  
sorry i missed ur last email. i was out of town fighting a mutant spider in new york and then my flight got delayed home. as soon as i got back i was about to go crash in my apartment, but it appears to have been blown up. or eaten. idk. i just slept in a bush and hoped for the best. dont recommend honestly.  
anyway, a super friend of mine let me crash in her secret hideout and i only thought of asking to borrow her laptop to check my emails this morning.

Are the puppies ok?????? u better not have done somethin to them. ill kill u bro

sry for the late respond. hope the puppies and u are good. but mostly the puppies if im being honest

**From: Captain Beans**  
**6/28/20**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Domino Jones**  
**On June 28, 2020, at 5:14 PM, Captain Beans**  
**<beantheredonethat@gmail.com> wrote:**

Dear Domino Jones,

I accept your apology (for now at least! Don't get your hopes up). Are you back home now? Were you hurt from the battle in New York? How's your back after sleeping in a bush?

Were you hurt from the battle in New York? How's your back after sleeping in a bush?  
Not that I'm that worried about you or anything!  
How silly. I'm just trying to assess what shape you're in so I can plan accordingly to when our next conflict should be scheduled. That's it!

What type of villain would want to fight a hero with an aching back? Not I, Captain Beans! Because I am truly evil and require optimal conditions for my fated showdowns!

OH REALLY? You would kill me if the puppies were harmed? Murder. So heroic of you. And anyway, I'd like to see you even TRY to get close to me. As in like attack me. Not get to know me more as a person and forge a closer bond, like a friendship or something. I MEANT IT AS A THREAT YOU ABSURD FORGETFUL SLOW REPLYING BUFOON!

The puppies are indeed alive...but if you don't show up, again...they won't be so lucky.

So is there a date in mind that would work best for you to battle? I want to make sure our plans don't conflict, again.

Reply soon or else,  
Captain Beans (your Archnemesis)

**From: Domino Jones**  
**6/29/20**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Captain Beans**  
**On June 29, 2020, at 10:17 AM, Domino Jones <dominojoneswastaken@gmail.com> wrote:**

nah i dont have a home rn rip lol. yea im good  
how r u

murder??? more like justified murder. aka murder thats less likely to haunt u for the rest of ur life. and its justice. justice is classic hero stuff yknow

k i wont kill u yet then.  
why didnt you kill them tho? u said you would. i would say that doesnt sound very villain-y but then again you did promise to do it.....and this wouldnt be the first time a villain lied to me so idk i guess they kind of cancel each other out. like usual

**From: Captain Beans**  
**6/29/2020**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Domino Jones**  
**On June 29, 2020, at 10:44 PM, Captain Beans <beantheredonethat@gmail.com> wrote:**

"Like usual"???? What is that supposed to mean?? Are you implying my dastardly deeds are never actually that evil??? ARE YOU????

LOOK! Now you have me typing like you! AGH! You must be joking. I'm sorry, but it is extremely hard to take someone seriously who's named after a PIZZA RESTAURANT and TYPES LIKE A PRETEEN! YOU HAVE NO RESPECT FOR MY EFFORT AND FINESSE!

Come and insult me in person, you oblivious coward.

AND YOU STILL HAVEN'T GIVEN ME A DATE FOR BATTLE! REPLY WITH IT OR ELSE, HERO!

AND I MEAN A DATE AS IN JUST A TIME WHERE WE WOULD BOTH MEET UP TO BATTLE not like a time for us to get to know each other with a mutual interest in growing vastly closer to each other. OKAY CLEARLY I DON'T MEAN THAT!!!

Yours truly,  
Unrecognized Genius

**From: Domino Jones**  
**6/29/20**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Captain Beans**  
**On June 29, 2020, at 11:52 PM, Domino Jones <dominojoneswastaken@jmail.com> wrote:**

yes

no. im too tired and i forgot where you live to be honest my dude

literally name a single crime youve done that can be considered to have "finesse"

Look i dont like villains as much as the next hero but when dr. r. achnids made that giant spider??? even i was a little impressed. now //that// was epic.

but he did also try to kill someone. that wasnt epic. that was sad. i stopped him tho so its all good

how does a date help? its not like i knew a giant spider was going to attack new york that day.



how can i know that my day will be free to let  
you play villain? im busy bro

**From: Captain Beans**

**6/30/20**

**Subject: Re: Disappointed**

**To: Domino Jones**

**On June 30, 2020, at 12:33 AM, Captain  
Beans <beantheredonethat@jmail.com>  
wrote:**

WHAT!?! How are my plans anything other than  
marvelously crafted in the very foundations of  
evil!!! You have no respect for my CRAFT!

OHHHH WOWWWW! He created a BIG SPIDER.  
He's so COOL and EVIL.

And just so you understand, that was SARCASM!  
Fine. Go back to fighting big silly spiders. Let  
these puppies DIE because apparently I'm just  
not bad enough for you.

No date? I guess I'll just have to pick my own...  
and NOT TELL YOU! How does that sound? Trying  
to save dogs on a day you are unaware of? HA!  
Good luck!

Yours truly,  
Extremely Unappreciated SUPER-Villain

**From: Domino Jones**

**6/30/20**

**Subject: Re: Disappointed**

**To: Captain Beans**

**On June 30, 2020, at 9:44 AM, Domino  
Jones <dominojoneswastaken@jmail.com>  
wrote:**

bruh

you speak very highly of yourself. to be honest when we first crossed paths i thought u were just some henchman to the main baddie i was after. i mean tho can u rly blame me?? like what have you even done. besides stealing those sandwiches from johnathan jims. thats literally the worst thing i can remember you ever doing. or actually no

threatening to kill puppies  
and not even doing it  
that is the worst thing you've done.

the worst thing youve ever done is send a hyperbolic email. thats your legacy dude

fine where are you then???? ill come fight you now before i have important stuff to do!!!!

or hey what if we put all this behind us maybe neither of us are great at our jobs. maybe im just not good enough to save puppies at a moments notice. and youre not evil enough to even hurt previously mentioned puppies  
what if i make u a deal  
you give me the puppies and ill make you my new sidekick. ill train u and we can fight evil together and help people with combined forces  
youre smart. i think u could help a lot of people if you chose to  
cmon dude. Do it for the puppies at least :(((

**From: Captain Beans**

**6/30/20**

**Subject: Re: Disappointed**

**To: Domino Jones**

**On June 30, 2020, at 10:24 AM, Captain**

**Beans <beantheredonethat@gmail.com>  
wrote:**

AND NOW I'M BANNED FROM EVERY JOHNA-  
THAN JIMS IN THE WORLD! How hardcore is  
that? ADMIT IT. YOU KNOW IT'S COOL!  
You're just jealous I bet. Being a villain is so  
COOL. I'm COOL! I'M SO COOL!  
I'm cool, right?

HERO! Turning good?? That would go against ev-  
erything I stand for, everything I've built up until  
now. I'd even need to re-train my laugh from  
"mwahahahah" to "hahahahahah" do you know  
how long that will take?

But I guess not having to run from the law all  
the time could be nice.  
Also not needing to schedule my fights with he-  
roes would be great. If I was a hero, I could just  
go when I was needed.  
Being needed sounds nice.

ASSUMING I ACCEPT OF COURSE!

Maybe.  
I shall deliberate and let you know.

Also the puppies aren't real. My real plan was  
to scare you and waste your time. Which would  
have gone PERFECTLY if you just had a phone to  
check emails on.  
Though, I guess that doesn't matter now. I af-  
firm my previous semi-declaration of forgive-  
ness.

But all in all, this may be you're best idea, yet.

Your Past-Archnemesis,

Captain Beans

**From: Domino Jones**  
**6/30/20**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Captain Beans**  
**On June 30, 2020, at 11:52 AM, Domino Jones <dominojoneswastaken@jmail.com> wrote:**

sounds like johnathan jims is ur actual archnemesis hahahahahaha

eyyyyyy cool sounds good bro lemme know when you wanna start. we can find a team name like uhhhhhhhhh food bois or something idk

Oh also \*your. "Your best idea, yet" not "You are best idea, yet." lol

**From: Captain Beans**  
**6/30/20**  
**Subject: Re: Disappointed**  
**To: Domino Jones**  
**On June 30, 2020, at 2:00 PM, Captain Beans <beantheredonethat@jmail.com> wrote:**

Dear Domino Jones,

I am going to rob Little Brutus's on the 1st of July at 11pm (CST). I will steal EVERY PIZZA IN THE BUILDING.

Stop me or else I'll commit a crime so great mutant spiders will be like a kids cartoon villain to you!

All deals are off.

You, of all people, dare make fun of my spelling?

Disrespect me and you will regret it, HERO!

Your ARCH-NEMESIS CONFIRMED,  
Captain Beans the Supervillain

**From: Domino Jones**

**6/30/20**

**Subject: Re: Disappointed**

**To: Captain Beans**

**On June 30, 2020, at 2:12 PM, Domino Jones <dominojoneswastaken@gmail.com> wrote:**

kk see u tomorrow pizza boi lol

*The next email, from Captain Beans respectively, was not so respectable, and if shown would make this short story far more...explicit...than is allowed for publication.*

*The gist of his 1,465 word reply was "don't call me pizza boi."*

*Domino Jones saved Little Brutus's. Beans didn't even make it into the building.*

*Domino bought a dozen pizzas to apologize for the disturbance and trouble the hard-working pizza people had been subjected to. He also made Beans apologize. Which he did, though very mumble-y and reluctantly.*

*But it's something, y'know?*

*Domino shared the pizza with Beans on the way back to the superhero base where Beans was to be under house-arrest for a while.*

*Beans said, and I quote, "this is the worst. Sharing pizza with my archnemesis? I hate this so so so much!"*

*But he was lying.*

# Writing, The Poem

## Poetry by Katie VanderLinden

---

Writing is not natural. Writing is *hard*. Writing is NOT enjoyable.

Writing flows naturally; it draws pictures effortlessly.

The way the arbitrary symbols dance a frozen waltz enchant the writer and the reader if each step is executed just so. Yet they also delight when the loudness crescendos or decrescendos, the beat staccatos or smooths into slurs, the tempo quickens or abruptly stops.

The rhetoric affects the composition of the music,  
but also the composer,  
the listener.

Writing: an art and a science; a want and a necessity. Perhaps a passion.

Writing, a bittersweet melody performed solo or with accompaniment.  
Yet if played just so, no matter the stage, it is profoundly enjoyed.

one  
must  
    simply  
        find  
            the  
                first  
                    note

one  
must  
    simply  
        find  
            the  
                first

# Untitled

**Artwork by Stefanie Evans**



Dimensions Variable  
Porcelain

# August Above the Fox

**Artwork by Daniel Capobianco**



12 x 12 in.  
Oil on Canvas



# Recurring Arguments

## Fiction By Arthur Sorya

---

Because. That's not an answer. Because I said so. That's not a good answer. Fine, because girls don't. That's a bad answer. That's how it is. That's not fair. That's too bad.

Stop fussing. I don't want to wear that. Why not? I don't like it. But it looks so nice. I don't like it. Why don't you like it? I dunno. We don't have time for this. I don't want to. Get dressed. No. Get dressed now.

Because one is for the boys and one is for the girls. But why? Because they play differently. No they don't. Yes they do. I want to play with the boys. You can't. Why? You won't be able to keep up. Yes I will. No you won't. I do it all the time. This is different. Why is it different? It just is. But why? It wouldn't be fair. It's not fair now. Those are the rules. The rules are dumb. Stop whining.

What on earth are you wearing? Clothes. Where did you get this? Do you like it? Did you find this in your father's dresser? Yes. Take it off. Why? You look silly. No I don't. Yes you do. I want to wear this. Absolutely not. Why? This is what you're wearing. I don't like that. I picked it out. I don't want to wear that. Too bad. I want to wear this. You will not be leaving the house that way. Why? Go change. I don't want to. Too bad. No. I'm not going to argue with you. No! Now.

You won't like it. Yes I will. It's going to look terrible. No it won't. What happens when you regret it? It'll grow back. I'm saying no. It's my hair. No. Why not? You'll look like a boy. I don't care about that. You will. No I won't. I said no. So what

if I look like a boy? That's final. Why does this matter so much to you? Stop talking back.

Ev everyone feels that way at first. I don't like it. No one likes it. It feels wrong. It always feels wrong. This is different. No it isn't. Something is wrong. You don't know what you're talking about. It keeps getting worse. It will pass. What if it doesn't? It will.

Take that off. I don't want to. Take it off now. Why? It's too hot out. I'm fine. Take off the hoodie. No. You're being ridiculous. I'm wearing this. Why? Because I want to. Why do you want to? You wouldn't understand. Fine, when you're miserable later don't come whining to me. I won't. We'll see. Just leave me alone. I'm writing you up. Why? Talking back. That's not fair. Be quiet.

You don't really feel that way. Yes I do. No you don't. How would you know? You're too young to know things like that. No I'm not. It's a phase. No it's not. Yes it is. You'll grow out of it. No I won't. Yes you will. What if I don't? You will. What if I don't want to? Go to your room. You're not even listening. Now.

Why not? I just don't want to. Bullshit. Stop. This is because you don't want to play with the other girls. Stop it. Why do you think you're so much better than them? I don't. Then why? Stop it. I'm not letting you quit. Just stop it. You're still playing. No I'm not. I'm not letting you give up because of this nonsense. You don't understand. I understand perfectly. You never even try to understand. You've always loved this. I don't want it anymore. You worked so hard. I don't want it. You'll thank me one day.

We don't have time for this. I'm not changing. Why do you always do this? There's nothing

wrong with this shirt. We need to go. Let's go then. Not until you change. This is what I'm wearing. No the hell it isn't. I'm not changing it. How can you do this now? This is what I want to wear. It's supposed to be a special occasion. I know. You're supposed to dress nice. This is nice. No it isn't and you know it. You bought this, you bought these pants and this shirt for me. They're not for you to wear today. When were they for then? You put that fucking dress on now.

It's for your own good. How could you? You'll thank me one day. I hate you. No you don't. I hate you. You're grounded. I fucking hate you. Watch your mouth. I can't fucking believe this. I threw it out because I love you. You threw it out because you don't fucking get it. You're not to bring home another one, do you understand? I hate you. Go to your room now.

It's your name. No it isn't. Yes it is. Not anymore. That's stupid. It's who I am. You can't just change who you are. Yes I can. I'm not going to call you that. Then don't talk to me. Really? Yes. You're really serious? Yes. Fine.

I don't want you talking to those people anymore. Why? They're a bad influence. They're my friends. They're hurting you. No they're not. They made you like this. No they didn't. You didn't feel this way before. Yes I did. No you didn't. I told you I did. No you didn't. You didn't even listen. Give me your phone. No. Now. I hate you. No you don't. I hate you so fucking much. You'll understand when you're a mother yourself one day. That will never happen. This conversation is over.

It's traditional. It's sexist. Calm down. I am calm. I don't see what the problem is. It should be a choice. It's never been a problem before. I want to wear the same color as the boys. I'm

afraid that won't be possible. It's extremely possible. Unfortunately, it won't be allowed. This is completely arbitrary. Well, I think you're overreacting a little. What if I do it anyway? If you come to graduation in the wrong colored robe, you will not be permitted to walk. Then I'm not even going to come. That's a little extreme don't you think? No, I do not. Your graduation isn't just for you, you know. Yes it is. It's for your family as well. Too bad. Doesn't that seem selfish to you? No. Your parents will be disappointed. Why is what they want still more important than what I want? It's only for a few hours, I think you'll survive. I'm not going to do it. I think you'll reconsider. I will not reconsider. We'll see.

Do you like it? I hate it. You said you were sure. You didn't do what I asked you to. What's wrong? I wanted it shorter. I can't take it any shorter. Yes you can. If I take it any shorter it's going to start looking like a boy's cut. That's what I want. No you don't. Yes I do. You think you do, but you really don't. What are you talking about? Give it two weeks, if you still don't like it come back then.

We won't be able to change it in the system. Why not? It has to display your legal name. Why? What do you mean? Why can't it just have the legal name on the private documentation and my real name in the email? It's not that simple. Why? The system isn't really set up for this kind of thing. I can't be the only person having this problem. You can just tell your teachers to call you something else. This still outs me to everyone. It's not going to let me change it for you until you change your name legally. Then that needs to change. We're working on it.

Are you sure? Yes. How long have you felt this way? A long time. How long? Forever. As long as I remember. We'll have to meet a few more times. Why? To make sure you're sure. I'm sure. We'll need to make sure. It's just a little while. How long? It depends. On what? On how it goes. That doesn't help me. I think it might. It's just a few more sessions. How many? We'll see.

It's such a shame. Why? You had such beautiful hair. I don't care. It looks just awful. No it doesn't. I can't believe you did this. I've been talking about it for years. It's going to take forever to grow back. I'm going to keep it short. You like it? Yes. It looks just awful.

You'll have to provide documentation. I did. You need more. Why? We have to be sure that you're sure. I have proved that again and again. I'm sorry, you need to submit a few more documents first. Why aren't the ones I have good enough? This is a big decision, there's no going back. I am well aware of that. We need to know that you're absolutely sure. Did you even read what I submitted? I'm afraid that's not my department. Then I need to talk to that department. They don't usually take public calls. Then who else can I take this to? You could appeal the decision, but they're going to tell you the same thing. How do I do that? You'll need more documentation.

How long have you been on it? Why are you asking that? I just need to know. Why? For your records. Why are you asking now? Look, I just need to know how long you've been on it. What does that have to do with this problem? It might have an effect. What effect? Look, I can't help you if you're not going to cooperate. What would the difference be? It affects a lot of things, it could turn out to be relevant. What effect do you think

it's having on this? Look, I don't know, but I need to know how long you've been on it.

What the hell do you mean by that? Exactly what I said. You're being ridiculous. You aren't welcome to contact me again. Are you out of your fucking mind? Until you can respect that this is who I am, I don't want to hear from you. Can't we even talk about this? We have talked about it. When? We've talked about it a lot of times. I just don't understand where this is coming from. That's because you weren't listening. How can you do this? Goodbye. Don't you dare hang up on me.

# Veterans Acres

**Artwork by Daniel Capobianco**



6 x 6 in.  
Oil on Canvas

# Diffusion

**Artwork by Lucie Jumonville**



3 x 2 x 5 in.  
Pit fired stoneware



# TC-ST-091088

## Fiction by Abigail Kleimola

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The following is an audio recording of communications officer Thea Carver working under contract on the [COMPANY NAME REDACTED] salvage mission to Selenia, abandoned moon of Tellus in the Promenade system, preserved for liability purposes. Audio recordings of crew members Amanda Scott and Hana Sakamoto have been deemed unrecoverable.

"...both got your transceivers on? Okay. A-hem."

*[7:58] This is comms officer Carver requesting a radio check. I repeat, this is Carver requesting a radio check. Over.*

*[7:59] Copy that, Sakamoto. Scott, is your radio working? Over.*

*[8:00] Yes, Scott, you still have to respond, even if you're still on the ship. It's just protocol. Over.*

*[8:00] Copy, Scott. Thank you. Over.*

"Alright. The crash site is northeast of us, it should be about an hour's walk. Our scanner isn't picking up any wildlife right now, but stay alert, and stick together. The moon's storm moves fast, so we've got until noon before our window closes. All further communications will be via radio."

*[8:04] Good luck. Over.*

*[8:20] Scott, stop complaining. If you're this whiny now, I can't imagine how bad it'll be when that sled is packed with metal. Over.*

*[8:32] Hey, the heat can't be that bad. The ship doesn't even have AC. Over.*

*[8:33] Whatever you say, Sakamoto. You take comms next time if I have it so easy. Over.*

*[8:41] No, Scott. The autopilot landed us as close as it could. This plateau seems to be just about the closest stable ground to the wreck. Over.*

*[8:59] Can one of you read me the code on the breaker to your left? Over.*

*[9:02] Okay, I'm tuned into the ship's security systems. Scott, head to the right. There seems to be a lifeform that way, but I'll keep tabs on you. Sakamoto, follow the hallway in front of you, there's some junk you can salvage behind a locked door. Over.*

*[9:12] Scott, the creature is approaching from your left. Try to scan it if you can, but you should make safety your highest priority. Over.*

*[9:16] Shit, Scott. You okay? Okay, good. That's good. Sorry- Sakamoto, the door should be open now. Scott, the scan's processing. Over.*

*[9:19] It's- it's called a firemoth. Um... they're not native—that's not very helpful. Wait, I've got it. It's territorial and attracted to light to its own detriment. Leading it to a room where sunlight has breached the hull should distract it long enough for you to take it out. Oh, avoid the stinger, obviously. Over.*

*[9:25] Thanks for the heads up, Sakamoto. Start hauling it outside. Over.*

*[9:29] Oh, gross, Scott. We can sell the body though, so toss it outside with the scrap. Over.*

*[9:34] The scanner isn't picking up anything else right now. Head deeper into the ship so I can get a better read on things. I'm watching your backs. Over.*

*[9:41] This ship is such a maze—its hallways alone look bigger than the whole of ours. I wonder what it was transporting...*

*[9:42] Yeah, yeah. We don't get paid enough to know. It's just strange. I'm looking at some of its*

*logs, and it seems to predate warp drives. It's so far from the solar system, though. So much data is either redacted or corrupted.*

*[9:42] Sorry, yeah. Over.*

*[9:57] You're coming up on the cargo bay. There's two levels, so you should split up to cover more ground. Over.*

*[10:01] Our scanner is picking up so much salvageable metal. This alone could cover our paycheck if we can get it out of here. Over.*

*[10:03] Hold on, the scanner pinged something living. It's moving fast. Over.*

*[10:05] It doesn't seem to be moving your way. I'll let you know if that changes. Over.*

*[10:12] Start bringing the metal to the entrance, you two. You need to pack up quickly. The return trip will be longer with your sleds weighing you down. Over.*

*[10:21] Sakamoto, the hostile is moving on you fast. I'll do what I can to slow it down. Over.*

*[10:23] I don't see it on the scanner anymore, Sakamoto, you're safe. Now, take a deep breath and tell me what the hell you saw. Over.*

*[10:23] Damn it. You need to scan it if you see it again. Scott, are you holding up? Over.*

*[10:24] Copy. Start tying down the scrap. Sakamoto should arrive at your position soon. Over.*

*[10:26] That's... odd. We weren't going to pay the bills with a carcass though. Over.*

*[10:30] Scott, Sakamoto, the hostile is approaching your position. Over.*

*[10:31] Scott, you're moving towards the hostile. Do not engage. I repeat, do not engage. Over.*

*[10:33] Sakamoto, what do you mean it took her? Over.*

*[10:34] She can't be- She's not- tough, Scott's tough, Sakamoto. Tougher than you or I. Over.*

*[10:34] Oh, thank god you scanned it. I'm processing it now. Over.*

*[10:37] Shit. There's nothing on this thing. I cross-referenced the scan with everything we've got and... there's nothing. I'll try to read the raw scan data, but I can't promise that I'll get anything out of it. Over.*

*[10:40] Scott? Is that you? Over.*

*[10:40] Oh my god, Ama- Scott. Save your breath. Sakamoto will bring you back. Over*

*[10:41] Sakamoto, you can put her on your sled. I don't- I don't care about the fucking metal! Scott's gonna die here if we don't do something, I'm not losing her over some junk. Over.*

*[10:42] She's through the left hallway, down a flight of stairs. Over.*

*[10:42] Sakamoto, I've deciphered some of the raw data and this- this can't be right. According to the scan, the creature's skin is nearly as strong as steel. It's old, too, older than the crashed ship. God, I don't know how it's even alive. What the hell is this thing?*

*[10:45] I'm not seeing it on the scanner. How's Scott? Over.*

*[10:47] That's good. Make sure she stays awake—she might have some kind of head injury. Over.*

*[10:51] Yeah, just dump all the scrap. We'll have to make our quota some other way. We'll figure it out, Sakamoto. I just- need everyone to make it out. Over.*

*[10:54] Sakamoto, is everything okay? Please check in. Over.*

*[10:55] Scott? Is Sakamoto with you? Over.*

*[10:55] It- what? The scanner didn't pick it up. Can you check her pulse? Over.*

*[10:56] God damnit. I'm coming in. We can- we*

*can wait out the storm inside the ship. Keep an eye on Sakamoto. Don't over exert yourself. Over.*  
[11:02] *Hey, stay with me, Scott. I'll be there soon. At least I don't have to drag one of those sleds, right? Over.*

[11:06] *Scott, don't fall asleep. I need you to keep watch for me. Over.*

[11:08] *I know, that's usually my job. You're okay, though. You're doing good. Over.*

[11:09] *Scott, I need you to do something for me. Can you tell me what you see?*

[11:10] *Okay, good. Now, what can you hear?*

[11:12] *You're doing great, Scott. Just keep talking.*

[11:15] *Scott? Are you there?*

[11:16] *No, don't be sorry. I know. You're gonna be okay. I promise.*

[11:19] *Honestly? The second we make it off this stupid moon I'm quitting. As much as I need the money, it's not worth our lives. What about you?*

[11:20] *Yeah. I get it. I don't quite know what I'm doing with my life either. But we can figure it out. We've got our whole lives ahead of us.*

[11:22] *The wind is starting to pick up.*

[11:24] *These suits really aren't built for this weather. I can make out the wreck though, so I'll be there soon. Over.*

[11:31] *Just hold on a little longer for me, Scott. I'm coming in.*

"Oh my god, Scott. I didn't realize how- how bad it was. When all I've got is the scanners it's so... distant. No, don't move, I'm going to check in on Sakamoto. Yeah, you can rest now, Scott. I'm here. I've got your back. Just listen to the sound of my voice.

"Jesus. Her breathing is so light. Okay- I'm disinfecting Sakamoto's wound—it's a deep, clean

gash to her midsection. She's- she's not bleeding anymore; it looks worse than it really is, I think. I hope, anyway. Now, I'm applying the gauze patches and- wrapping the wound with bandages.

"Alright, that should hold until we can get proper medical attention.

"God, the storm's getting loud. It's starting to mess with my walkie, too. Scott, I'm going to check your injuries, but let me just- okay. A-hem."

*[11:43] This is comms officer Thea Carver, speaking now to whomever hears this transmission. I'm on Selenia with Amanda Scott and Hana Sakamoto taking cover from the storm in a crashed ship. Sakamoto and Scott are badly injured, and there is a hostile creature in the ship with us. If anyone can hear me, please send help. Over and out.*

[End of audio recording.]

# Nothing, Nothing at All

**Artwork by Jezreel Culasino**



19.5 x 25.5 in.  
Charcoal

# Sights in the Swamp

Artwork by Corinne Condos



8 x 5.5 x 3.2 in.  
B-mix



# Arden, or A Girl From Yesterday

## Screenplay By Lydia Quattrochi

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FADE IN:

INT. ARDEN'S ROOM-LATE AFTERNOON

Dolls, dollhouses, unmade bed, scissors, and glue scattered about.

ARDEN, a mousy eight-year-old girl, hides in a blanket fort with a large journal. In the background, the Commodores are singing "Oh No," and there is the faint sound of her mother chopping potatoes for supper. ARDEN reads out loud.

ARDEN

We did a science experiment today. At least, that's what Mommy said it would be. Mommy is my homeschool teacher, and she is trying to make me into a genius even though she doesn't know much about science. She said she would make it rain in the kitchen. We boiled some water and put a washcloth on top and when the water steamed up the washcloth, that was supposed to be the rain. I wish it had rained all over the house. I'm a scientist. I made a secret science kit that I keep in a laundry room cabinet—and I am busy exploring the explosive properties of baking soda, vinegar, food coloring, and toothpaste. Won't Mommy be surprised? Too bad! My doll Gigi went into labor tonight, and I had to be the delivery nurse. She has a beautiful baby girl

named Sylvia, who weighs six pounds and fifteen ounces. I hope she stops having kids now. Darn it, Gigi!

(hugs GIGI)

I have to care for this baby. I am a very busy girl. I don't think I'll be able to put the silverware away tonight. Mommy's downstairs chopping potatoes right now. The Commodores are singing about going crazy with love from the computer as she chop-chop-chops.

I will sneak downstairs and she will not ask me to put the silverware away. I'm a pretty good sneak. I sneak all kinds of things upstairs that I need for my private kingdom—masking tape and graham crackers, especially. Uh-oh! Daddy just called. She's got to drop everything and go answer him on the phone and blither blather for like ten minutes. Maybe I'd better hang around downstairs and spy. I am a spy and a scientist, and oh boy, do I ever have spy equipment! Well, I don't have a tin-cans-and-string phone, but using old dried-up glue sticks and toilet paper tubes and yarn works just as well. After I investigate the top-secret details of my parents' phone conversation, I must report them to my superior in the Great Spy Company. That just means writing it down in this battered old notebook. Sigh. I really wish I had more people for my spying club than just my own self.

Anyway, I'd better tell you about me...

I am Arden Friess. You might think I live at 100 Cherry Blossom Lane, but I don't. You might think I live in this yucky old house with the folks, but I don't. Only the outside of me is stuck in the old house with the folks, day in and day out. Why, in my imagination, I'm not even a third grader. I'm not short either, and I don't have brown hair and missing teeth and glasses. Of course, stupid people in the real world just think I'm Arden Freiss and that I live in the old house with the folks. They're stupid and they think that way because they're badly mistaken, poor fools.

You see, I got together my own Kingdom and I'm the queen. Yep. The Little People Under the Bed are starting a rebellion. The Aliens on the Ceiling keep me awake at night. The Teddy Bear Chefs who make food for the entire kingdom have gotten into a rut of only fixing peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Sweet Princess Florine and her Royal Court Jesters are banging on the piano, making music to entertain us all. Meanwhile, the babies and toddlers of the kingdom are playing with toys on a blanket while they're supposed to be taking a nap. We've got a school and a church here and a circus and a riverwalk. The Palace is fifty stories high and there's almost always a birthday party going on in there. The racket is never-ending! Well, I don't mind. They're my friends. They always understand me. I just sit on my bed with my scepter and my crown and look down on the kingdom with a queenly smile and sometimes they even

bring me presents.

Little nickels and pennies. Bits of chewing gum. Bits of wax and feathers and cotton balls. Pretty stuff like that.

I can't quite remember how my Kingdom got started. Maybe I was thinking one night in my car seat, riding home from church, and the idea popped into my head. Maybe it was during math drills at Mommy's school. Maybe it was in my brother's stupid psychiatrist's waiting room. Anyhow, the idea for the Kingdom made me so excited that I couldn't think of anything else. Before, my life had been dull and empty, gray as the winter skies. Then I discovered I was magical, and I was Queen and that changed everything. And I mean Everything with a capital E!

But my Kingdom needed a name. Nothing sounded good. Narnia is already a name. Never Never Land is already a name. Finally, I called my Kingdom Yesterday. Yesterday. Just Yesterday. I can't tell you why that name sounded so good to me—it just did.

I am the Queen of Yesterday.

Doesn't that sound amazing? Wouldn't you like to be part of my Kingdom? Well, you can't! It's all mine!

(screams)

ALL HAIL THE KINGDOM OF YESTERDAY,  
MATEYS!

V.O. APPLAUSE offstage as ARDEN puts a crown on her head and grins.

DISSOLVE TO:

ARDEN'S room--Several days later

ARDEN

(pacing the floor)

The Kingdom of Yesterday has a problem. We need a better water supply. The Council of Yesterday is getting together to decide the problem, but two of the noblemen just yell their heads off at each other. What else can you expect from stuffed lizards? I'm taking charge here!

(screams)

Ladies and gentlemen, we will need to dig canals. Everyone will have to pitch in and help.

(sighs)

But they're groaning because they don't like this idea. They even tried to throw old peach pits at me. Things are getting ugly.

(bangs GAVEL on her bedside)

I know queens don't really carry gavels—judges do. But I'm a judge in my spare time. And this is my world, so I get to decide the rules.

You are the most unruly subjects. If you can't stop squabbling and think of a solution, I will have to come up with one all by my own self

without any help.

Just think! Now I have the idea of making my own ocean in the backyard. First, I need to plan it on paper with crayons.

Gets out SHEET PAPER. She draws pictures of fish and plants that nobody has ever seen before.

#### ARDEN

There's the Shrieking Whale that's sort of like the humpback whale, only it shrieks instead of singing. And there's a dolphin with wings. There's a Square Fish — that's like a starfish only square. There's the Ink Monster that lives in the deep dark bottom of the ocean and reaches up its tentacles disguised as seaweed. The Great Sea Cucumber is evil. And there are all the little bitty schools of fish that must escape from the predators out there. I'm so proud of my ocean.

Dang it! Mommy won't let me dig up the backyard. I threw a fit, but it didn't work. The only ocean I can have is floating Fisher Price toys and plastic boats in her dishpan. But I'm thinking of a better idea: the bathtub can be my ocean! Only Mommy won't let me fill the bathtub unless I'm taking a bath. Stupid grownup rules! Well, I'll just take a bath then. I still need help washing my hair whenever I take a bath, though, so Mommy will certainly come into the bathroom halfway through the process to find me surrounded by dolls and toys galore.

She'll say, "Arden, you're supposed to be getting clean! You know your toys will rust and get moldy from the water. Put them away this instant! You're too old to play with toys in the tub."

I may have to make an ocean when I'm older. For now, I can still make an aqueduct. I sort of learned about them in my homeschool. They sort of carry water or something. I think I'll have to fill a bunch of clear Tupperwares with water (dyed blue with food coloring) and drill holes in them so that I can insert plastic pipes to carry the water all over my room. Then the Kingdom of Yesterday will have water. And won't those nasty big brothers of mine be shocked that I'm so smart!

Alas! There's more work to do than I thought at first. I can't use Daddy's drill and I can't use Mommy's Tupperware. I hope my dolls won't die of thirst. For now, I just have to smuggle water for them. I take those plastic cups full of water from the kitchen sink—up to my bedroom. Sometimes I have to smuggle them under my shirt.

Isn't that silly?

(sulks)

But all those greedy subjects in the Kingdom of Yesterday want to be First, First, First in line to get water. They push. They shove. They need to learn manners and shape up!

DISSOLVE TO:

ARDEN'S Room-bed-nighttime

ARDEN is lying in bed with the blankets pulled up to her chin, a thermometer in a glass on her nightstand, and surrounded by Kleenex and stuffed animals. She coughs as she talks, sounding sickly and pathetic.

ARDEN

I think I'd like to be a sick girl. That might sound weird. But whenever I read about girls in storybooks who get sick, they always take to their rooms, and they're not allowed to leave bed. What's the thing they called it? Oh, yeah. Quarantine. Warning, peoples! Keep away from this girl with smallpox and diphtheria who is in quarantine! For weeks and months on end. Of course, those books were written before they had good shots and medicines to keep you from getting sick. So maybe things are different today. But I want to be a sick girl so I can stay in my room and never come out. I want my mother to send me dinner through a pulley. I can make a pulley that goes up and down the staircase and you can carry stuff. I really did make a pulley! I just sit at the top of the staircase and pull on the yarn and then my "package" comes up in a basket attached to the yarn. Maybe my mother can send me little notes and treats and presents. Wouldn't that be fun?

If I were a sick girl and I could never, ever leave my room, I don't think I'd be lonesome.



I'd just do whatever I want. I want to do whatever I want. People can't boss me around! I want to turn on the radio and pull all the pillows and blankets off my bed and dance, dance, dance! I want to eat those piles of candy which I shoved under my mattress.

Of course, maybe I'd feel too sick to dance and eat candy. But maybe I'd just be a little sick. Maybe I'd just act really sick for the doctor or visitors. Then I'd have the run of my own private kingdom.

(sits up and shrieks)

All hail the Kingdom of Yesterday and  
Queen Arden Friess!

CUT TO:

INT. Schoolroom-mid-morning

The SCHOOLROOM has a Dry-Erase board with ARDEN'S subjects: MATH, SOCIAL STUDIES, BIBLE, READING, JOURNAL, HUGS. Above ARDEN'S head is a large, childish poster that reads THE HAPPY HAPPY HOMESCHOOL, circa 2012.

ARDEN

(scowling over her math book)

I have fun being homeschooled. It's like me and my Mommy have a secret life nobody knows about. Nobody sees my fits and my bad behavior, either! Other kids go to public school. Even my brothers go to public school. But I am not other kids.

Besides, I'm not even really a human girl. I'm a fairy tale queen, remember?

Mommy!

What is four times eight again? It's thirty, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it?

(wails)

NO! I'm going to be doing math for hours!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FAMILY DINING ROOM, EVENING

ARDEN is sitting at the dinner table with her full milk glass, a plate full of broccoli, and a colorful placemat, sulking.

ARDEN

When I'm not playing with my Kingdom of Yesterday, I'm just little eight-year-old Arden Friess. I hate my name. I want to be named Esmerelda Jane. Whenever I read girls' names in storybooks, I just about die of envy. Why can't I be named Chloé? Miranda? Isadora? Hildagarde? Whatever possessed my parents to name their only daughter Arden?

I live with my folks in their house. There are a lot of Friesses. Too many. When some lady at a homeschoolers' convention asked who I live with, I said in a very important voice, "I live with Mr. and Mrs. Friess and the two Friess boys." She thought that was funny.

Grownups always think I'm funny. But I don't think it's funny when your name is Arden

Ellen Friess and it's on your birth certificate and all.

Hey, Mommy and Daddy, wouldn't it be fine if I could get my birth certificate changed? I think I'd like to rename myself Alice. What? No? Why not? Just because Daddy's old girlfriend was named Alice? Stupid, stupid grownups! Stupid stinking grownups! And no! I will not eat my broccoli! Or drink my milk!

I don't like the things grownups are talking about at this dinner table, like wars, taxes, the End Times, hemorrhoids, corns, artheritis, and all that..that stuff. Stupid grownups! Stupid grownups and their old girlfriends and boyfriends and stupid, stupid stuff!

OK, I heard you, Mommy! The Three Bites Rule. And I have to be a good, respectful girl or I must go to my room. But I want to go to my room anyway, cause that's where I'm just friends with myself! Daddy, I don't want to replace you. I love you, Daddy!

Blows kisses as she gets up and leaves the table, running to her room.

#### ARDEN

After supper, I always go upstairs to my room, get out my crayons and paper, and write a new birth certificate for myself. I put in my date of birth, my hair color, my eye color. I even put in the number of teeth I lost. But when I get to the new name part, I just can't think of anything. I really can't.

CUT TO:

EXT. APPLE TREE-SUNNY SATURDAY MORNING

ARDEN is sitting in an apple tree in her backyard.

ARDEN

I have a friend who's an old lady, and she lives alone way down the street. There's a big old climbing tree with a birdfeeder in her yard and all the chitty-chattering squirrels running up and down. Inside the house there are snowglobes and clocks and things that kids can't touch and it's really dark in there so you can hardly see your face or anything except the TV. This old lady says I'm growing up so big. And she's growing so small.

She's my friend, the old lady down the street. She always says, "Why, Arden, how big you're getting!" as I stumble on roller skates down the street towards her house. I can't roller skate very well. If I fall and break my neck while roller skating, I will be an invalid like her husband that died in her own living room. He had cancer. That's what Mommy said. Once I saw him in her dark, dark living room when I was making me a visit. He had no shirt on and was lying on this weird bed thingie that doesn't belong in any normal living room. That scared me, so I left in a hurry. Then one day, soon afterwards, Jesus came and got him, and you can see The Old Man Down the Street sometimes if you squint real hard at the sunshine between clouds.

I bring the old lady presents sometimes. Like an extra Pillsbury Biscuit, piping hot out of the oven with honey on it. I run down the street and bang on her door and give it to her. Once in a food pantry line, I got me a bunch of expired Easter bunnies that the kids who have money don't want anymore. I brought some to her, and she nearly cried. She was so happy. Mommy thinks I just feed that old lady junk food nonstop. I say, "But she's nice to me!"

She is. My brother and I stayed at the old lady's house when Mommy said Daddy was sick and she had to stay with him alone at the hospital. She meant he was going to the psych ward, but she called it a hospital to sound nicer. My brother and I were kind of wandering around town and then the old lady invited us inside her house and gave us expired Chocolate Marshmallow Easter Eggs. She also gave us Blue Raspberry Peeps. We said, "thank you" very politely. Then we went home by ourselves. It was getting dark. My brother played on his computer and I took me a shower.

I'm getting too big for baths. I can even wash my hair alone. The shampoo was running all over me and my brother was listening to this sort of song that kept saying, Happy, happy, happy, happy over and over again and talking about a room without a roof. Then the song ended, and I had to go upstairs to bed. The Kingdom of Yesterday was watching me. Just before I drifted off to sleep, Mommy came into my room to

tuck me in. Like she always does.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY DINING ROOM, EVENING

ARDEN is sitting at a table by a birthday cake with nine lighted candles on it and her name etched in frosting.

ARDEN

Well, they're all singing for me right now and then I will blow out the candles and make a wish and I will be nine years old at last. My birthday. Goodness! Will I ever make my next birthday a celebration to never forget! I'm collecting candy right now so I can celebrate my next birthday by swimming in the candy ocean. I'm also collecting wads of paper to make a pinata we have to bust open. I read The Dr. Seuss Birthday Book and I'm just crazy with jealousy. I want to be more magical than ever. Maybe I can really build a palace in the backyard and fill it up with streamers and confetti! Hey! I'd better go out to the backyard and start building it with sticks and bricks and things.

There's a vacant lot down my street. An old man used to live there, but his house was torn down. I used to be scared of him when he lived there. He would just sit in his car for hours. But now he's gone and there's just a big old patch of dirt where a house used to be.

I want to buy that vacant lot to be my own piece of land. Then I will build a Birthday Palace. I may have to be a lonely pioneer girl living off the land until my Palace gets built, but when I'm done — hoy, boy!

There are so many dreams in my head that I feel like my head will burst.

I wish...I wish...

(blows out candles)

I wish I could go to outer space and just rise up there into the stars, f'rever and ever, amen.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY COMPUTER ROOM, LATE AFTERNOON

ARDEN is sitting in front of a gigantic, outdated big-screen computer that is crooning soft-pop oldies from the 70s and 80s. She is wearing a pink hat and thoughtfully munching popcorn from an aluminum bowl while staring at the screen. The songs playing are "The Living Years" by Mike and the Mechanics and "The House at Pooh Corner" by Loggins and Messina. A table nearby has Memory Game cards spread out on it. There is also an open backpack on this table, silent evidence of ARDEN's brother arriving home from his "special" school.

ARDEN

Outer space is very, very far away. I am on Earth. That's what I learned in school today. I get scared when I think about how hot the Sun

is. Hotter than a billion burning furnaces. And Mercury, you can't live there because it will fry your guts to jelly. Venus—it's so hot you could cook my brother a grilled cheese sandwich on the sidewalks there. Besides, it's full of volcanoes and I'm scared of volcanoes.

Mars is kind of rusty.

Jupiter, now that scares the living daylights out of me. It's just storms there all the time, and I get scared even during thunderstorms on earth. There's no surface, just gas. It's a gas giant. My oldest brother once got in trouble for calling his old teacher a gas giant, but that's off-topic. Saturn is real groovy. I could hang onto the rings and spin forever. Neptune's all icy and lonely and makes me sad. Pluto isn't really a planet because some scientist guys said so, but I think it is a planet. I am sort of like Pluto because I'm tiny and I'm stuck at the end of the "solar system" of my family.

Those are the planets. Earth seems kind of boring these days. After the planets, there are just stars. Daddy says only God knows how many stars there are. Daddy says nobody can find the end of the universe but they're sending out space probes to go look. I wonder if they will crash into a brick wall with a sign that says "End of the Universe." But what will be on the other side of the wall?

Oh, my head's hurting!



I am going to travel through outer space. There are aliens out there. I keep my blinds closed now because I don't want aliens to see me. I need a better spaceship to defeat any aliens or asteroids I might encounter as I travel through space. Today, it was raining, so I stayed inside and played spaceship in my room. I set up a blanket fort and looked at my Outer Space View-Masters real hard. If you look real hard at your Outer Space View-Masters you can imagine yourself sailing right into the galaxies. But then the aliens started chasing me and a black hole almost swallowed me, so I had to steer my spaceship real hard to get free. I wanted to take my friend to outer space once.

Sometimes I lie awake at night and think about what happened to her. I hope she is safe and that the aliens did not get her. I used to have a best friend. She was named Summer. I think she was named that because we were only friends for one summer. She had a little brother. We had a secret club in a blackberry tree, and we stayed there and wouldn't let her little brother follow us. She came to my house and raided my fridge and we played with a Baby Alive doll, even though we're both too old for Baby Alive. She was just interested in all the things that Baby Alive could pee and poop out of her. And I gave her my favorite pair of shoes that were too big for my feet, Hello Kitty glitter-slippers. And she put them on her feet and took them home and then I didn't see her again.

Once I begged her to come to my birthday party and said it would have clowns and bouncy houses, and she said she wouldn't be allowed to come, and then I cried. What she meant to say was that she was moving. A truck came and got their furniture. Now the house is just a plain dark house. I wish they'd tear it down.

A PHONE rings urgently somewhere in the house. The music stops.

ARDEN

(whispering)

No, no, please don't let Daddy be sick again! Please, God!

CUT TO:

Int. Hospital waiting room, nighttime

ARDEN is in a hospital waiting room, reading a Southern Living magazine opened to an ad for medication. Signs around her read KNOW THE SIGNS OF STROKE, KNOW THE SIGNS OF SOMEONE PLANNING SUICIDE, and EMERGENCY ROOM THIS WAY.

ARDEN

I can barely keep my eyes open. I wish I was at home with the Kingdom of Yesterday. But you can't take your dollies to the hospital. And they won't let me visit Daddy. No kids under eighteen can visit the psych ward. I cried, I really did, and Mommy couldn't make me stop. I even brought a story I wrote to

show the nurses that I was smart enough to go see Daddy, but they didn't notice.

I'm scared of being all alone in here with these two brothers of mine after dark in the cold scary, white-walled hospital, and I don't know where Mommy is. There are sick people wandering in and out of here and I keep reading in these magazines about diseases and medicines. Mommy says I have to sit still and be good for the receptionist, but my feet are falling asleep.

(ARDEN weeps softly)

I'm worried that my daddy's dead and they don't want to tell me cause I'm too little. I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm..I'm scared!

A door opens. ARDEN jumps up from her seat, disbelieving.

ARDEN

Daddy?

Runs to her dad and gives him a hug, rocking back and forth.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. Backseat of a 1993 cutlass sierra-nighttime

ARDEN is sitting in the backseat of her car, wearing her "AWANA Clubs" uniform and carrying her children's Bible.

ARDEN

Sometimes it's hard to be Arden Friess. Some-

times I get scared and can't pretend to be magical. Sometimes I have to stay at my church late at night, waiting for my parents to pick me up, because I'm enrolled in the Bible memory club that I didn't want to join.

When I feel very lonely and small, then I think fierce and angry thoughts. Thoughts that God doesn't want little girls to think. I think I will start a war and set all the children free. Children have all the rotten luck in this world. I think school is unjust. Homeschooling included. Kids should be allowed to do whatever they want. School is just jail. Kids need to be free. Arden especially! Sometimes I stare at my reflection in the windows at night. And then I'm a poor lost pioneer girl in the woods. A lost little five-year-old pioneer girl in the forest with howling wolves all around. A little girl that nobody loved. But my heart is full of courage then because I'm friends with myself. That little scared strong girl is me.

My pioneer name is Little Brown Hood, because I wear a brown jacket. I am the heroine and I save the village from a big fight. This is back in the days of the pioneers and the native people having big fights. They set up a wall between them and throw food over the wall. The food fights are never ending. Oh, when will it ever stop? But then courageous Little Brown Hood comes to the rescue. She stands between the warriors. She tells them it is stupid to fight and they should all get along. The people don't like

this. They put her in a jail cell. But alas!  
She is freed and made a hero. Little Brown  
Hood who saved the day.

(yawns, almost falling asleep)  
Daddy, are we almost home?

(pauses)  
Ok.

Will you pick me up and carry me into the  
house? And we'll have the prayer-and-hug-  
and-kiss with Mommy when we get inside?  
Promise you'll be there? Pinky swear?

Ok, Daddy, I love you too.

Now I am deep in my daydream, and no-  
body talks to me and that's nice. I look up  
and there is Daddy. Daddy takes me home  
from places at the end of the night. Some-  
times I'm so tired that he almost has to  
carry me indoors. Of course, I never really  
fall asleep in the car. But it's fun to pretend  
to sleep. It's interesting, too. The way the  
world sounds when everyone thinks you're  
not listening.

# Puppies and Noses

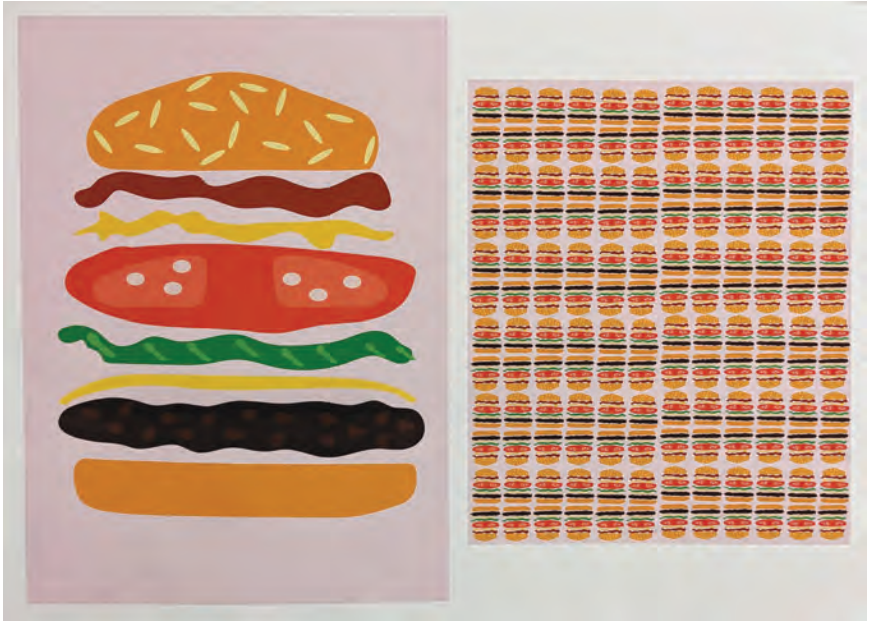
**Artwork by Tania Franco**



6 x 11 in.  
Graphite

# Burger. More Burger

Artwork by Lucie Jumonville



18 x 24 in.  
Digital Print

# Nightmare Heaven

Music by Rewound

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**Composer:** Sammy Steinberg  
**Performer:** Rewound  
**Genre:** Metal Electronic  
**Instrumentation:** Guitar & Sampling  
**Producer:** Sammy Steinberg  
**Engineer:** Sammy Steinberg  
**Cover Art:** Jay Hougham



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rGCuWG8hwc&list=OLAK5uy\\_ITFzkX4S9n50Broaliqt5yTLJA-T3AYMKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rGCuWG8hwc&list=OLAK5uy_ITFzkX4S9n50Broaliqt5yTLJA-T3AYMKU)



# Metanoia (Instrumental Mix)

Music by Kiana Kong

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**Composer:** Kiana Kong

**Performer:** Kiana Kong

**Genre:** Instrumental, Alt. Pop, Jazz Pop

**Instrumentation:** Piano, Electric Guitar, Synth, Electric Bass, Koto

**Producer:** Kiana Kong

**Engineer:** Kiana Kong



[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=pCKVV5wOD8A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCKVV5wOD8A)

# The Sea of Stars

Poetry by Michael Aragon

---

The night is quiet and dim  
The wind is blowing a gentle breeze  
I walk through the night  
Alone  
Far away from home  
In the darkness  
I trek on  
Resisting the urge  
To look to the sky

At last, a hill comes to view  
A hill where a large tree stands  
Upon sitting down  
The memories begin to return  
Memories of the past  
To the days when I saw you  
This spot was special  
It's the place we talked and played  
It's the place we sang and danced  
It's the place we met  
It's the place I saw you last

On that day  
We looked to the stars  
We saw one fly across the sky  
And we made a promise  
Twenty years from now  
We would meet once again  
Now I am here  
Twenty years later  
Awaiting your arrival

I gaze to the sky  
The stars shining in the night  
When something catches my eye  
A shooting star  
Zipping through space  
For the first time in years  
I smile  
Even if you aren't here  
I feel happy  
I will wait forever to see you again  
I'll be waiting  
Beneath the sea of stars

# Organized Chaos

Artwork by Taylor Knuth



18 x 24 in.  
Colored Pencil

# The Billion Lives of Billy

## Bullman

**Fiction by Breanne Berenyi**

---

The sun was shining, and the birds were chirping outside as Billy Bullman opened his eyes for the day. He could feel the heat of the sun roasting him under his blankets like a Christmas ham as it streamed in from his windows. He stretched in bed enjoying the last few minutes he had before his alarm clock would shriek as the time hit seven in the morning. The air in his room was crisp, a nice contrast to his bed, from the morning air coming in through his open window. There was a mixture of dew, fresh coffee, and a slight twinge of gasoline that filled the morning air. But the smell of the city wasn't what Billy was fond of the city for, it was the sound. He could hear a car several blocks away honking, his neighbor across the street blared their music, and people yelled and laughed on the sidewalk outside.

At all times of the day, he could hear a cacophony of life bleeding in through his windows. But before he knew it, the music of the city was interrupted, and he was covering his head with his pillow in a hopeless attempt to block out the screams of the alarm clock as he blindly smacked his hand over his side table hoping to hit the off button. After about a minute of this blind escape he was welcomed with silence from the machine. He groaned as he rolled over and out of bed and winced as his feet hit the cooled wood floors sending a wave of goosebumps over him as he

begrudgingly dragged himself to the bathroom to shower.

A few moments later he found himself staring at his shower floor, towel in hand debating with himself. He'd just removed his shower mat last night. He'd been due for a new one, the yellow ducks on it were so faded that the whole mat was just a translucent blue. And even worse when he stepped on it, he could feel it flatten like paper. His feet could feel the texture of the shower floor through the mat. He couldn't stand it, but it had been years since he'd showered without a bathmat. When he was twelve, he'd slipped while in the shower and had hit his head on the edge of the tub, not only knocking him out, but also leaving him with a concussion that haunted him for months after. Past girlfriends had mocked or judged his fastidious need to have a bathmat when he showered in fear of hitting his head again.

It bothered him more than anything to not have a bathmat, he regretted taking the old one out early, but he was picking one up from the store after work. There was nothing else he could do about the situation, so he buried the knot that built in his stomach and jumped in under the steaming hot water. The room smelled of the eucalyptus that hung over his shower head letting Billy relax into the steam. Quickly he started to shampoo his hair thinking about the day ahead of him at work. He reached for the body wash on the edge of the tub, noticing the bubbles still on the shower floor where he stood. Quickly he stood up, bottle in hand, and maybe the water was too hot, but he momentarily lost his balance and slipped.

He squeezed the bottle in his hand as his other failed to find anything to catch himself on. For a

moment Billy looked at the ceiling above him and marveled at the white landscape of hills and mountains the stippling created before his head collided with the faucet and everything stopped. His vision blurred, and the world around him melted away like candle wax.

Then suddenly, as if he'd been tugged back into the moment, he was wrapping his warmed towel around his waist as he stood on the bath rug. He paused, feeling a slight twinge in the back of his head, though it was fading faster than dusk. The air around him had a chill to it with the shower no longer running. He couldn't quite remember turning off the shower and getting out, but it was early so he blamed it on sleep brain and shook the feeling of unease away.

Quickly Billy finished getting ready before heading to the kitchen to make breakfast. It was easily his favorite room in the house. The deep green walls that felt soft to look at and the usual smell of fresh coffee making his mouth water. This morning there was a hint of gasoline in the air, sending Billy into a panic sniffing around the room to see if it was coming from his kitchen or if it was from something outside. If anyone had seen him through the windows, or even worse walked in on him doing this, they may compare him to a stubborn bloodhound sniffing for his bone. He even resorted to sticking his head in and out of the window to try and tell the difference. Finally, he concluded the smell must be coming from outside and dug through his cabinet for a frying pan as he vowed to start closing his windows at night to prevent it.

Finally finding a pan in the very back, he stood and assessed the stove. The pungent smell of gasoline didn't register for Billy until he'd already ignited the stove and flames were flying. Some

were crawling up his arms and the walls and the furniture too. Billy was suddenly on the floor in front of the stove, only aware of the blistering heat for a few moments as it started to eat away at him before he gave over to the flames and smoke. His vision blurred, and the world around him melted away like candle wax.

Yanked back to attention Billy set the pen down on top of the note he'd just written and was grabbing for the spoon out of his cereal. He blinked at the note for an instant, forgetting what he'd just written.

*Woke up to the smell of gas in the kitchen,  
might want to have a look at that today please.  
- Apartment 306, Billy.*

There was a foggy memory of needing to drop the note off at the front desk for maintenance before work that came with a tightness in his lungs that evaporated almost immediately. He was so hungry he blamed his lapse in memory on the roaring noises from inside his stomach, devouring the cereal so quickly he hardly enjoyed the sickly-sweet sugar. Glancing at the oven clock his eyes widened as he saw it was already quarter to eight. If he didn't leave now, he'd miss his train and then he'd have to hear an ear full from his boss.

He was outside the door with his keys and wallet in hand almost immediately. He was so rushed he'd left the bowl of half-eaten cereal on the kitchen table to deal with later. He wished he'd put the bowl in the sink or at least dumped the milk. He kept picturing the flies that would be invading his kitchen as he closed the building door behind him and stepped out onto the



sidewalk. He was once again greeted with the city noise and a graying sky as rain started to roll in. Billy could feel the change in the air around him, as if the air came alive.

Glancing left and then right he bound into the road to get to the subway entrance on the other side. Billy was only a few steps from the sidewalk when a car came hurtling around the corner. They hit their horn just moments too late for Billy to dodge the metal bull of a vehicle. There was an echoing snap, crack, and thud that he could feel as the car was finally able to stop.

There was pain all over his body as he lay there on the road. He could feel the chill of asphalt through the fabric of his pants and jacket. He could hear people running towards him and screaming, none of their words were clear to him. Suddenly, there were people leaning over him as he struggled to breathe. All of them were trying to keep his eyes open and him breathing. But he couldn't hear them as his vision blurred, and the world around him melted away like candle wax.

Billy sat down almost falling forward in a seat feeling like he'd just been tugged into the moment as the train took off rushing through the tunnels. He sighed as he relaxed into his hard plastic seat, wincing as the muscles all over his body ached, though he enjoyed having the seat next to him empty. But the rest of the seats in the car were full. There were elders, parents, young adults, and teens all spread throughout, each trying to mind their own business in the early morning.

Before he knew it, he was walking back up to the surface down the street from his company's building. The air was crisper downtown than it had been when he'd left half an hour ago. He started to walk down the sidewalk, watching the palette of

reds, oranges, and yellows flutter through the sky as leaves. The street gutters were filled with them, painting the roads in color. He spotted a coffee cart outside the building and decided a nice steaming coffee would fix his morning.

Billy had only made it a few steps before everyone around him erupted in screams that rang in his ears. He turned in circles trying to see what had happened, he didn't understand why everyone was running. Then there was an ear-splitting pop that rang in the air and a sting in his chest before his knees gave out under him. He tried calling out to the people that were running around him, but his cries for help were either ignored or unheard. Then his vision blurred, and the world around him melted away like candle wax.

Billy was yanked back to his body as he was running into the building in front of him, closing the doors and hiding with the others. He was horribly out of breath even though he'd barely ran a couple yards. He wasn't sure when he'd started running, but he was glad he had. Within minutes the person who'd fired shots, which Billy wasn't sure he'd heard, was caught and everyone was able to go about their days. So off Billy went back across the street, his coffee forgotten.

Maybe he decided to take the stairs up to his floor and slipped over the railing; or when he was working at his desk, he might have spilled his drink all over his computer tower, electrocuting himself when he tried to fix it. Maybe for Billy's lunch he decided he'd try the new place down the road, only to eat something he hadn't known he was allergic to and went into anaphylactic shock. Maybe when he went to pick up his

new bathmat after work, he stopped at a store in a sketchy part of town and got beat up by a mugger and left for dead. Billy Bullman was spending his day melting away and being yanked back through billions of his timelines like a thread being pulled from a sweater. And everyday after for him was the same until finally every version of Billy Bullman died only leaving behind new loose threads to be pulled from the fabric of the multiverse.

# Untitled

Artwork by Collin Benson



9 x 3 x 11 in.  
B-mix soda

# Toys

Artwork by Tania Franco



25 x 19 in.  
Charcoal

# A Walk in the Park

**Artwork by Corinne Condos**



5 x 5 x 2.5 in.  
B-mix

# Stem Cell

Music by Kiana Kong

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**Composer:** Kiana Kong

**Performer:** Kiana Kong

**Genre:** Metal Electronic

**Instrumentation:** Erhu, Piano, Electronic,  
Synth & Percussions, Vocals

**Producer:** Kiana Kong



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArGPMbQprBM>

# My Untold Story

## Non-Fiction by Sarah Greffe

---

I marked the calendar square of May 1st off which meant the last semester of being in a school that cared so little about me and that I cared so little about. Attendance became my last priority, I was going to work full-time more days a week than I was going to school. When I went to school, I always had to get a late pass and it was seemingly the same routine: the office lady would look up above her glasses with her head still down as she wrote my pass and would unenthusiastically mutter "You are going to regret your choices, young lady." She muttered this phrase every single time as if this time it was going to make an impression on me. It didn't.

I was so excited, this was the start of the best years of my life, however, things changed rather quickly. On May 8th, I had a great day at work and went home ready to relax and enjoy the following day off. I opened the door to the house and a horrifying blast of air escaped. I looked to my left to find my dad leaning over the stove and holding an empty breath not facing me. My mom was leaning against the kitchen table chair. Dad turned around with water in his eyes. This is a sight I had never seen in my eighteen years. My little naive self just stood there waiting for any words to fill the silence. "Papa had a heart attack and didn't make it." The reaction I had to these words was something I had never felt, the stillness in my head and the pain slowly crept through my body. I walked right back outside without saying a word to escape any attempt of comfort. That night I sat on the kitchen counter



of my apartment and I shoved Golden Grahams into my mouth as I figured it wouldn't taste so bad if it came back up. Salt and snot poured into my mouth every time I tried to fill the terrifying void that overtook my tummy.

May 12th. I struggled in silence because I didn't want to burden anyone else with my troubles. I could feel old habits starting to crawl back into my life. The fear of numbers on nutrition labels started to outweigh the need to survive. The abusive relationship that I had worked so hard to escape ignited again. Food became a privilege to me rather than necessary to thrive. Most nights I went to sleep hungry. I lay squeezing my abs hard as if I was trying to make them protrude through my back. This was a way to alleviate the hunger pain because there was a new pain for my brain to focus on, a skill I had learned at age thirteen. All of this began because I was trying to escape the void of no longer having Papa. It took me by surprise, he was the last person I imagined not seeing another smile from or wave goodbye as I backed out of his driveway.

May 20th. I stood across from my boss and broke down. I told him that Nana, papa's wife, probably wasn't going to make it through the night. Nana had been struggling for many years now with dementia, however this didn't make it any easier. She had forgotten who I was many years prior. They say you lose people with the disease twice. The first is when the person who they once were has completely faded away and the other is death; I can confirm this to be true. My boss reached out and grabbed me into the hardest hug I have ever encountered. He knew that I was hurting and attempted to squeeze the pain away. It didn't. However, for the minute the hug lasted I

felt very safe. He asked why I came to work, and I didn't have an answer. I simply just didn't know where to go or what to do. I gave myself the task of keeping the family going. I thrived at it, but I was struggling more than I wanted to admit. Once I received news of her passing, I found myself back on the kitchen counter of my apartment eating snot, Golden Grahams, and salty tears.

May 22nd. I graduated. My fake nails fell off. I stood up way too early in my line and the counselor at the end of the aisle scowled at me to sit down. I took offense to her tone so I just kept standing there looking at her. I simply couldn't care any less about the protocol. I walked across the stage and looked out for two people who were never going to be there. They would have been there if they could and boy it hurt. I plastered a smile on my face so no one could see the pain that ripped through me.

The next few months were terrifying. I stopped making time for myself and started working more. I was keeping myself busy. I couldn't allow myself time to think. It only made things worse. I stopped going out on the weekends and wouldn't respond to any attempted outreach from friends. I forced myself to sleep as soon as I got home. It was the worst sleep. My brain never turned off. My heart rate was skyrocketing as anxiety never sleeps. When I was awake, it felt as though I was recovering from a raging tequila hangover.

From May to October I lost an incredible amount of weight; frankly I didn't have it to lose. Now this is when you would think people would start to notice, but I am incredible at hiding my struggles. I wore baggy clothes everywhere. At

home, I would wear sweatpants and a very long oversized long-sleeve shirt. Partially to hide the tattoos I had gotten before legal age, but also because I knew that if my mom saw the actual state I was in I would find myself in some kind of hospital. At work I always had on a sweatshirt no matter how hot it got. I wore a hat just about everywhere so no one could see how pale I truly was or how little life was left in my eyes. When I read about people with similar struggles there tends to be a common theme, their environment. This wasn't the case for me. My family has been nothing but supportive my whole life. There is absolutely no stigma around struggling. I mean my mom works in mental health. I still do not know for sure what influenced my challenges.

November 1st. I found myself in a staring match with myself in the mirror, prompted by finding a picture of my younger self. Trees blurred the background while I stood clear, standing almost in the center of the photo but just a little left if you look closely. My royal blue tee ball shirt sported the number 15. My hair is pulled in lop-sided pigtails. My bright pink tee ball bat rested on my shoulder, and I smiled. The teeth that I still had were misshaped and spaced far. My eyes were full of youth and happiness, something that I now struggled to find. My eyes shifted their focus back to the mirror for about an hour, attempting to burn the color out of them. The hour started with tears of hate and anger, I picked every part of myself apart. I hated my eyes. The black filled almost my entire eye and the color resembled dirty swamp water. My nose was crooked and huge. My nostrils were an odd shape and would flair as I breathed too hard trying to silence my cries. My cheeks were too full and I

I found the color of my face repulsive. My eyebrows were not symmetrical and were mismatched colors. My lips were thin and chapped. My chin wasn't the right shape. When I smiled or spoke a "double chin" appeared and all I wanted to do was rip my entire head off and stuff it down a garbage disposal.

After about 30 minutes the tone of my tears changed. The once burning cutting tears started to become soft and comforting. My eyes were now allowing me to see the beauty that I held and had suppressed for so long. The black part of my eyes seemingly appeared smaller even though their true size never changed. The once swampy green changed to a granny smith apple with caramel running off it. My nose now told a story of when I face-planted off my razor scooter many years before. It held memories in its huge presence I no longer resented. My flaring nostrils now aided me in collecting myself. My cheeks now were complementary to the rest of my face. My eyebrows never looked so perfect. They held all of my emotion and when they relaxed the pit in my stomach started to diminish. My lips were now soaked from the tears but they were so bountiful. A small smile started to form on my face. That "double chin" didn't fade away. I held the picture of little me in my hand and looked at it again. That little girl had it too. I now realize that it only made an appearance when I smiled. When I was truly happy. That little girl saved my life that day.

December 25th. This was the first Christmas without the only set of grandparents that I had and it was certainly a foreign experience for me. I didn't go to the extended family Christmas because I knew that I needed to be home. As everyone was eating the Christmas spread that was

prepared many miles away, I ate Golden Grahams sitting on my kitchen counter. That day I spent a lot of time with my dogs who had watched me and been there with me this entire year. Gracie snuggled with me every night and never once complained as my warm tears puddled on her fur. Hazel licked the tears off my face as I sat on the bathroom floor not knowing how much longer I could keep going. She never once let me cry alone. River was still a puppy and we hadn't had her for very long, but she knew that I needed her. The puppy antics were in full force every single day. She would flop on the ground demanding a belly rub. I didn't realize it at the time but she was forcing me to slow down. She was forcing me to take a second to stop thinking.

February 4, 2023. I look back and evaluate how far I have come and what got me through it all. I can say for certain that struggling alone is not what got me through it; in fact it set me back. The picture of the little girl that I was once is taped on my bathroom mirror and is now joined by a school photo of me around a similar age. I have been asked about it and I simply just explain that if I couldn't look that little girl in the eyes and say something mean about her that I shouldn't be saying it about myself today. I do not explain it much further, just leave it at that. Still today, the people closest to me do not know how bad I struggled or what I was putting myself through.

Most would assume it is because I am ashamed of it, that is false. I fear the guilt that they would feel. I never want them to think that they caused any of it. I never want them to think that they failed as parents, as a friend, a sister

or simply someone who cares about me. I am so incredibly proud of myself for all that I survived and the person that I have become today. I would never wish anyone to struggle the way I did, but I wouldn't write my story any differently.

# Untitled

Artwork by Collin Benson



9 x 6 x 7 in.  
B-mix Reduction

# Set in Stone

## Non-Fiction by Joel Johnson

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"Why read about what others already know and have known when you could observe and discover the world around you for yourself? It makes much more sense to watch, listen, and absorb what you perceive in the real world; not only is it easier, but it also gives you physical interactions with your environment. Shapes on a page have no significance if they don't hold your attention long enough to decipher it. So why should I read when there are better forms of communication? You don't walk on your hands when you can stand on your feet; it's easier and much more efficient. Sure, some people might find reading better because it makes it an open-ended idea that is for *them* to interpret, but this is wrong; when someone puts words onto a document, they are etching the fabric of their world into something that will long outlast them. In the future, the *reader* won't care about how I feel, they'll care about what is being said, what is fact, why they're dedicating time to comprehend the events of my days."

Words dragging through my head as my leg anxiously beats on the ground at over 300 beats per minute. Anxiety, stress and shame are the only things keeping me awake.

"I need to write a paper on how I relate to reading and literacy; but I've never truly read anything outside of books being forced on me at school, and *The Bible* at church. I have nothing. Nothing to talk about, nothing to relate to, nothing to use for my paper. I never liked reading; it is boring. I would much rather sit down and watch an entertaining video, instead of lying there and



mindlessly staring at meaningless shapes to decipher. It kills me to read; every line or two having to backtrack and reread something because my eyes deceived me, and what was just said in my mind makes no sense. Either that, or I'll start reading and re-reread the same line over and over, unable to link the end of one line and the beginning of the next."

Needless to say, I was never good at reading. It gives me anxiety, it stresses me out, and it could never hold my attention for more than 15 minutes before my mind faded into the white void of meaningless thought.

After an hour of staring at a blank page; listening to every noise around me, and thinking of what was is happening, why it was happening, who was making that noise, why were they here, what was their day like; all these questions and more come flooding my mind as if a dam had just given way, with me down stream. Right before the water takes me to my inevitable doom; I snap awake.

"Where was I? Oh, I'm writing. Why am I writing? Oh yeah, school. Oh... how reading has affected me."

A deep sorrow full of self-doubt engulfs my body.

"I am not a reader. I am not someone smart enough to go to school. I am not someone who is considered smart. Sure, I could explain nearly anything; from the difference between fission and fusion, and why the Soviet Union cutting corners on energy production caused the worst nuclear disaster in human history, all the way to proto-homo sapien lifestyles and how avocados should've gone extinct."

A vast library of knowledge spins in my mind

like the roller of a machine that will decide the winning lottery numbers. Yet I sit here, doubting myself? Doubting my future, just because I was never good at reading.

I take a deep breath, seeing my life as it could be, should be, but won't be.

"I may be smart enough to hold meaningful conversations with experts in their field, but I will always be below them. They have a degree, they graduated, they were able to; I can only call the topic at hand something I find interest in; A hobbyist. My words won't change the world, they may as well fall on deaf ears. No one listens to a fool, even when they're right."

Now heavy hearted, imagining what my life will be, a thrall to the labor force. Condemned to the life of the blue-collar mindless brutes that make the world function as it should. Looking down at my hands; full of half healed cuts and scars from work. Light bruises that slowly have healed. Cuts and scrapes from plunging my hand into the unknown to retrieve a tool I dropped. Knowing very well, the worst of my injuries is still yet to come. Feeling the crushing feeling of being used as a tool, and not as a mind. I am the cannon fodder of a war in which I do not even know. Companies won't see me as a valuable person; all they see is a body, and a set of hands that can be endangered at the cost of someone else to do the dangerous dirty work that no one else wants to do. My neck, my back, hands, and feet, knees, every single joint in my body already aching, from such a short time in the field. Oh, what damage will be inflicted when I've done this for half a life? Dare I imagine?

Sitting there in a near catatonic state. I read what I've written. It's borderline incomprehensible ramblings about a person who gave up before the

fight was lost, and that person is me. Maybe I need to see things from a different perspective. Think more creatively.

"Maybe this paper doesn't need to be about me reading literature and how it has affected me, but instead about how the lack of it has affected me day in and day out. How the daunting task of simply writing about one of my cruxes was nearly enough to make me doubt all reality. How it had given me so much distraught, anxiety and self-hatred it nearly discouraged me to the point I thought my life story was predetermined, how I had convinced myself it was something already Set In Stone."

# A Spider's Moment

**Artwork by Madelyn Rizzuto**



13 x 11 x 8 in.  
Ceramic

# Gradient

Music by Tyler Nix

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**Composer:** Tyler Nix

**Performer:** Tyler Nix

**Genre:** Guitar / Synth-Based Instrumental

**Instrumentation:** Guitar, Synths, Drums,  
Bass

**Producer:** Tyler Nix



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRyDaL3vVVK>

# The Eager Egret

Artwork by Corinne Condos



9.2 x 3.5 x 3.5 in.  
B-mix

# Amongst the Rows of Radishes

Fiction by Jordy Koenig

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A calling, most say, is a word that means many things to many people, as all good words do. Everyone has a calling. For some, it may be to venture the great seas in search of treasures, and victories just as valuable. To others, it may be to create glorious works of art. Taking pen, pastel, charcoal, oil, or paint to paper and spilling unto it visions that dazzle the highest of critics and saturate the deepest of wealthy appetites.

For many people in Mira's village, that calling was one of quite a literal origin. Proud and piercing as all hell, the rooster perched upon the awning of Samson's farmhouse, its own conquered mountain, Everest for the flightless, as it screeches its morning song to the dozens of Tall Oaks.

Mira and her family did not differ far from many of the citizens of Tall Oaks. Mira and her mother were farmers, or the meager equivalent of what could be considered a farmer in this small town. See, many of those in Tall Oaks worked small. If one were to think of prose to describe the village, the word 'vast' wouldn't even begin to prod at the edges of one's mind. Tall Oaks was a small town and those who lived there made do with what they had. Trade between neighbors was open. Honesty was sacred. People owned property but none was wasted on silly ambitions like hedge-trimming displays or gloriously confusing walkways. No, Tall Oaks was a home to those who were *considerate*. Those who saw land that could be used for farms, gardens, and pastures, and who built and practiced accordingly. One thrives in a place like Tall Oaks when one learns to live in

harmony with the land. Meager in size as it may be, no plot of land dedicating its soil to harvest was undervalued. Mira and her mother, June, were gardeners. Their house was attached to a small patch of land, backing up to the town's bordering forests, that served their family as a garden.

Vegetables were June's specialty. She had this knack for soothing the dry and stubborn soil into something orderly, wet, and most importantly, patient. June and her daughter would trade their crops for their neighbor's own yielding. A basket of radishes for some of Hennison's flour, or perhaps a bundle of carrots for a jar of Miss Addison's honey. Although most folks who traded with Miss Addison would often be wary of the hives lying in her backyard. Despite the number of times she had tried to argue that "my bees don't bite, and they certainly have no interest in chasing you blocks down just to gamble away their lives on your silly hide. Especially not when they got a queen to come back home to after all". Mira liked Miss Addison, even if the buzzing from her backyard made her feet itch with the urge to run, whenever she had to pay her a visit while mum was busy. Miss Addison was a smart enough woman and well, her bees' honey was sweeter than any cake her mum had ever whipped up.

June and Mira's garden served them well, it served their community well. It was a living thing and a reliable thing at that. Annually yielding stunning clusters of scarlet flushed tomatoes with a tangy but savory quality that would make any stew heavenly, or columns of turnips, nutty and sweet, that would become a key ingredient in townsfolk's slaw recipes. Mira and her mother were gardeners, that had always remained a truth. From the moment her mum had moved Mira and



her brother to Tall Oaks, they had learned to love this little corner of the world. Give grace to earth and its mother shall bless you back.

Now, Mira could spend hours, and she means, *hours*, in the garden. Tucked away between overlapping vines of squash. Knees, guarded by trousers or bare, stained with the imprint of grass and dirt. Hands skimming over the rising mounds of pumpkins, steady fingers twisting to examine the tell-tale hue of a ripe tomato. Mira found a home for herself in their little garden. The garden spoke its love to Mira in the language of a hearty meal. "I love you," was in the satisfying crunch of a carrot, and Mira would echo back the sentiment with cotton sleeves rolled up past her elbows, dirt-stained despite the efforts, as her hands buried pockets of squash seeds into tidied lines.

What Mira loved most, however, about the garden, was where it took her. Mira looked at the garden as if it was a fantasy land, a vast expanse of open world, with its colors and character shifting daily. A land that held possibility in the palm of its hand, like stream water, drank gratefully by Mira's heart. Out in the garden, hidden between her house and the thick forest bracketing the town, Mira could become anyone she wanted. And most days, that anyone would fashion itself from Mira's mind, as a soldier.

She couldn't put her finger on exactly what it was, but something about the garden, the possibilities it held for her, the vastness of its identity, its shifting climate day to day, a scene of growth and decay alike, reminded Mira of a battlefield. Not that she and her mum's garden was violent, no villagers ever complained of stomach aches after polishing off a bowl of tomato soup from

soup from their garden, and certainly no hysterics over cuts suffered from rosebud thorns, as those criticisms seemed to be aimed at less, deliberate members of the community. The violence Mira saw in the garden was measured in the hushed and hidden struggle between root systems spanning far beneath Mira's feet. A quiet power play. If crops had teeth, and some of the rare ones do, which is why you always have to check, would bear them and snarl and neighboring species. A vicious assertion that this rain water was *theirs* to keep. Stems like two brothers, standing on tiptoes, bodies acting as shadows, best smiles on display and leaves like fingertips outstretched in a greeting to the sun and her rays, a silent plea for her attention. Who was her favorite, and which good boy would get mommy's attention today?

All these small battles would remind Mira of a battlefield. Those far away grounds where people like Charley and Mira's brother, Thomas, would go to defend their home.

Mira had only known about war from the few books her mother kept stored in the family room chest. Aged pages, filled with passages and illustrations, depicting throws of magnificent proportions between two (and in some of the more interesting stories) or more forces. The stories of deep-rooted conflict, spanning bloodlines deep, coming to a boiling point, and hashing it all out on a battlefield that reminded Mira of her own garden. She and her mother's small plot of land, here long before any of those in Tall Oak or previous settlements had been, was spiteful against intrusion. Crops have this weird way of fighting each other. Mira often thought that plants and crops, all of them, would just share the collective goal of just, well, just *growing*. But nature has never, and

will never be so simple. Its battle scars show up in the form of tomatoes, prematurely withering, not from the sun or from lack of attention, but from the grit and competitive spirit of neighboring turnips. Those colors ripened, deeper roots reaching the groundwater and drinking deep before the tomatoes ever could.

It's within the quiet nature of this conflict, stationed between the muffled cries of crops, that Mira can imagine herself a compatriot of these battling sides. The silent nature of these battles suits her, she thinks. If nothing else, Mira is deliberate, her patient nature and measured silence an advantageous asset on any war-ridden terrain.

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Mira remembers, with perhaps too rich of vividness, the day that her brother, Thomas, had left her and mum, to go off to battle.

The great war, not to be confused with ones spoken about in religious texts that some neighbors of Mira's had offered their weighty suggestions of reading, was what took Thomas away from them.

Thomas had grown up the same as Mira, raised upon a land that demanded respect, in a house and a town that would tolerate nothing below patience and deliberation. Action was not something that either Thomas or Mira had first thought of as violent. Action was always purposeful. One who grew up in Tall Oaks would never think of themselves as impulsive people. The only natural inclination to do in a town like this was in relation to harvest. Care was poured out of hearts and minds alike, into the creation, and sustaining of the villages' creations. War

wasn't something that called to the hearts of these villagers.

If one would ask a fellow who resides in Tall Oaks, what the thing nestled between their ribs screamed for, they would probably say that it yearned for a life of simplicity. A steady ebb-and-flow of creation and harvest. Mira's neighbors thought themselves archivists. Preservers of the history that lay around them. From dried bouquets of flowers hung by hemp string in kitchens, to pets of childhood, now pushing up daisies in the backyards of their families. History was something living, always, in the heart of Tall Oaks, and the hearts of its villagers. So, when you take a group of people, a village, in this case, and beckon them to leave their peaceful way of life. When you arrive on the backs of animals so tall poor little Mira had to strain her neck upwards and eyes against the December sun, and demand that families send their eldest sons, the fitful and sharpened men of the village, off to fight in the great war, you can imagine there was a grand, collecting question that echoed between each and every pair of temples in the village. Why?

Why take the hands that were built and bred to preserve, the spirits and minds that aimed to create, restore, and protect, and ask those very hands, and spirits, and minds to *destroy*? Of course, most villagers weren't given the time to mull such a decision over, perhaps even over a cup of broth with their families, as impatience and intimidation tactics make for such hasty decision-making, don't they?

Thomas, much like Mira, or vice versa, was a creative soul. An inspired spirit. He would read stories from neighbors' homes, or make up ones

himself, about glistening armies that fought beyond mountain ranges. Dreaming of swords that glinted off fractals of light in sunlight that washed across battlefields. His hands quick to clench into fists, as he exaggeratedly told Mira tales of such sweeping battles. If there was one thing Thomas wished to be in life, more than he wished to be truly happy forever and ever, it was to be truly great. Those war generals, poised so elegantly and assured upon the backs of what you would first think of as beasts, they seemed quite great to Thomas.

So, when those knights marched, upon foot and horseback, into Tall Oaks and asked for additions to the royal army, Thomas did indeed feel that same question echo through his temples, the same question as all of his neighbors had asked. Except for Thomas, there was a slight variation to this process. Thomas only asked one question, a quite simple, "Why?" but, this 'why' was in suit followed by a "not".

It was such a pretty invitation was it not? The opportunity seemingly throwing itself at Thomas, and he not having a single reserve in his body not to throw himself right back. This was his chance now. The way that Thomas could truly fulfill his purpose in life, his map and compass guiding him along terrains unexplored in a journey to become truly great. So, when the knights echoed across the village dirt streets and into farm homes a call to action, Thomas, always ambitious, answered his *calling*.

Mira and June watched the only family they had left, leave on an unforgiving winter morning. The sun had risen to nearly its full potential but lay shadowed by curtains of icy-gray clouds.

Winds, nearly as angry as Mira, whipped across the soft hills of Tall Oaks. A smell one could only describe as 'cold' flooded Mira's sinuses, making her fret, atop everything else, that she would receive a nosebleed. Probably the first bloodshed Thomas would see since he decided to become a soldier, and it would be spilled from his very own sister. June said very little that morning. Her lips were sealed tight, perhaps afraid of what might be spilled if she let what words held inside out, or maybe just in a simple attempt to shield her lungs from further frost of icy-gray clouds. Winds, nearly as angry as Mira, whipped across the soft hills of Tall Oaks. A smell one could only describe as 'cold' flooded Mira's sinuses, making her fret, atop everything else, that she would receive a nosebleed. Probably the first bloodshed Thomas would see since he decided to become a soldier, and it would be spilled from his very own sister. June said very little that morning. Her lips were sealed tight, perhaps afraid of what might be spilled if she let what words held inside out, or maybe just in a simple attempt to shield her lungs from further frost. Mira had to confess that she couldn't find much to say to Thomas. Perhaps that wasn't the right thing now. Not that Mira had nothing to say to her brother, but how, *how* does one fit an entire lifetime of companionship, an entire future of uncertainty, the only guarantee would be missing him? How does one encapsulate such a strong sense of betrayal, so strong it rattles bones? Although, that could have just been the cold. *How* could Mira possibly say a goodbye fitting for all she felt that morning, and all that she would feel for the rest of her life, into a few meager minutes, as the knights of her Majesty's Army waited impatiently at the

foot of their land?

Thomas, it turns out, didn't say much of a goodbye either. It could've been for reasons like June. Maybe he frets about what he would unleash if he started speaking, his storyteller's tongue letting out too much, too much and so much that he could never choke back in. Or maybe he too was suffering from the vicious chill of this morning, thinking ahead, and wanting to preserve his lungs and his heart for the battles he was soon due to fight, and simply wished to guard his assets behind closed lips. Perhaps, just perhaps, it was for reasons like Mira's. Too stumped to find a way to dwindle down a lifetime, and its remainder of feeling, into a few simple sentences. Cause again, no words would be enough to allow Thomas to properly express his love for his sister, for his mother. For this home, this land, this comfort, and this life. Not even an expert weaver of tales, no poet, nor storyteller could fit such a monument of feeling, into speech. Or maybe it was even for reasons of Thomas' own. Reasons separate from why June held her words inside, or why Mira kept her mouth shut. Maybe he knew that if he said goodbye it would break on its syllables, a stumbling thing like a newborn calf, splits and cracks in his voice betraying the braveness a soldier *supposed to have*, boiling up and spilling from his eyes into tears that would most certainly freeze on their way down his cheeks. No. Thomas didn't say much of a goodbye at all. His blue eyes remained bright, undimmed by the grey hues of this winter storm. Wistful in their attempt to convey his love for his family. Those eyes would echo in Mira's memory for years afterward. If nothing else

about that morning would last in her memory, she knew that Thomas' gaze would echo in her mind, a brightness that would linger behind her irises as if a lighthouse cast its glow from inside of him.

Even if Thomas never said the words "I'll miss you," that morning, Mira knew he meant to. Knew he was thinking it, over and over again. Both while standing there facing his mum and sister, and while riding away from them on the back of an excess horse of the Grand Army. He would miss them. Mira grew sure of this when remembering later how when she would rush in to hug her brother, the softness of her cheek scratching against the tough wool of his cloak. When her ear rested upon Thomas' torso, and she felt his chest hitch, breath caught in his throat like a fox cub in a hunter's snare trap. She knew in that silent language that siblings echo to each other, that Thomas would miss her. That sentimental heart of his told her so.

Balancing on the cusp of nineteen years, Thomas left his family, his home, and the life he had always known, to join Her Majesty's Grand Army in a valiant fight against kingdoms of the north. It was time Thomas to answer his calling, his pathway to becoming a soldier. Whisked away by a blizzard and troops alike, his narrative now led him onwards, in a pursuit to fight in the Great War.

And Mira would loathe that war with everything she had in her.

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It would take Mira a long, *long* time, for such a wound to transform into what would soon become a muse for her daydreams.

*Healing* takes an awfully long time in the



beginning. Losing Thomas to the Royal Army was something neither Mira, June, nor old woman Sunsie could have seen coming. It's important to note that old woman Sunsie was quite the expert at reading tea leaves. She had dazzled nearly everyone in the village at one point or another, with her hushed tones echoing over soft ceramic, lavender-stained nails pointing out the small fractals and mounds of tea blends, asking if you were prepared to make a great sacrifice. Many people in the village were not ready to lose so much. June and her daughter alike. It's not as if the Great War only took from Mira and her mother. Every villager had been cratered out by such a vast conflict. The War was merciless in such ways. It found a way to take its fair share. Good people, bad people, morally ambiguous, the absolutely wretched, the positively divine, it didn't matter. No one, not in Tall Oaks, nor in neighboring villages, had remained unscathed by the harrowing claws of the Royal Army and their unsaturated thirst for conquest.

Mourning came hard for those who had lost to the kingdom and it's pointless, at least to Mira, spurs of vengeful action. Many of the men recruited to the Royal Army, were never allowed to write home. The mind must be guarded like your own kingdom. Within the mind lays strategy, lays plan, and lays weaknesses. If one would be so foolish to let such things slip onto paper, and if that paper then so foolishly found itself into the hands of the wrong person. Well, that would create quite a bounty of trouble now, wouldn't it? So many families spent the lonely months of winter, barren weeks of thaw and growth, without a single word from their loved ones. How *does* one

mourn something that they're not sure is truly gone? This was a question Mira asked herself and to the annoyance of some elders, a lot. Mira didn't know if her brother was gone. Not receiving any word from him didn't necessarily assure her of his safety, but it's not like she and mum had received a notation of death in the post, telling them Thomas was gone for good either. That, even in its grimness, would've been closure. Closure most certainly was not flurries blurring the form of Thomas from Mira's view, until his silhouette and those of the small platoon who came to gather him disappeared amongst a howling sea of white. Closure, also was not a hitched breath, a nearly whispered "I'll miss you". There were no promises made in Thomas' goodbye, no swear to return home, to vow to write back. Mira likes to dream some days that his letters would've been things of legend. If there was anything Thomas could do well, it was spinning a tale. Shame such talents were hidden away under paranoia-rusted lock-and-key by her Majesty now. Without a reunion in sight, with no letters home, nor a promise of return, not even an assurance of safety, the ghost of the family Mira once knew, haunted her bones for years to come.

For eight years, the bitterness that Thomas' departure had left her with froze and then thawed, as all things do with time. That of the Royal Army, of the Great War, morphed itself slowly into a thing of curiosity. A little girl, well to note Mira was no longer *little*, she was nearly the same age as Thomas was when she had seen him last, can only spend so much time pondering about what could have happened to her brother. Only so much time, Mira figured, could be spent wondering, until all

that anxious energy reached its boiling threshold, and transformed itself into a vibrant need to do *something*.

With Thomas gone, more help was needed in Mira and her mum's garden. June was growing bitter with her age, and it seemed her joints were following in quick succession. No longer able to rustle loose the stubborn roots of pumpkins or carrots quite like she was used to, June was eventually forced to ask her only remaining child, for more help around the garden. She figured it would do the kid some good. Get her in the practice of growing things, maybe for her own family one day, if she ever showed some semblance of interest in the men of the village, June thought with a bitter grin. At least it would give the girl an outlet. Something to put those puttering hands to use.

So, Mira, a creature of habit, a child raised in a town of prosperity, where every heart of every soul in Tall Oaks beat with a hunger to create, a daughter of harvest, turned her focus to her mother's garden.

A great question to ask a gardener, or perhaps a farmer, would be how many hours a day, while out in the fields of their backyards, would they spend, on average, daydreaming about one thing or another. The farmer or gardener would respectfully try, truly, to think of the answer, but as their head upturned in thought, gazes pasted upwards and distant, would lose the semblance of the question nearly immediately, and begin to dive back into one of their fantasies.

Mira found quite an excess of time in that

garden, daydreaming, pondering, plotting, or whatever else you wanted to call it. Those first few months, spent amongst the vines would see Mira, hunched over cabbage patches, hands clawing in her hair. To a distant observer, one might think she was trying to water the damn garden with her own tears. Plants don't grow no good under a hand that's more miserable than the winter that's predicted. Those crops did best raised with ambition, it's like they can feel the hope, its contagiousness, almost like they listen to the voices of the gardeners, and if the words they speak are kind, then they feel loved enough to grow some more. Of course, that's just another idea Mira had imagined while crouching amongst the vines. She spent an awful lot o' time speculating about her brother, about where he could be now. If he was alive, she wondered, could she do something, anything perhaps, to bring him back to her? A silly thought, she knew, but missing someone so much does that to you. Mira remembers the books she read as a child, the stories Thomas told her once upon a time, all of them showing that the bravest of soldiers, the ones who took the risks that counted, were the ones with the best imaginations. The ones with plots so absurd, that no sane man would ever try them, of course, those always made for the best adventures in the end, the most dazzling of rescues were products of such vibrant minds. As more time passed, Mira's curiosity grew and grew, just like the garden around her. Mira had the heart of a gardener, that she knew. Her hands were molded to tend to sprouting vines. Her mind was tailored to the habits of harvest. She was a creator and a caretaker. She helped things *grow*. But beneath her ribcage, something

venturous and headstrong kicked into her heart. A notion, a *calling* if you will, that maybe, just maybe, she could venture beyond the forests that hid away Tall Oaks, journey across lands yet conquered, and find what had once been lost. Mira felt, sometimes, that deep down, she could be the force that slayed nature, the being that overcame the harshness of many winters, of distance, famine and war, and bring her brother back. Vengeance, even in those new to wielding it, is as strong and fine a tool as any. And in those moments of wonder, those spurs of heroic daydreams, amongst the rows of radishes Mira grew, she could feel a sword form itself from the shovel she held in hand.

# Winding

**Artwork by Lucie Jumonville**



12 x 5 x 19 in.  
Stoneware

# "Mercury" Moon Jar

Artwork by Tanni Aggarwal



8.5 x 8 x 8 in.  
Salt Fired Crusty  
Layed Slip with Oxide

# The Orchard

**Non-Fiction by Julia Martinez Arroyo**

---

Nestled in between an archway dripping with grapes, and what was once a greenhouse now overcome by nature, the circle of life manifests itself in the form of apple trees. Please enter with caution, as apples beginning their final stages of life litter the ground. Pops of red, green, and brown tucked lovingly between blades of grass, as a rot begins to blossom beneath their soft vibrant flesh. Some apples are farther along in their journey than others, melting into the ground while tiny critters enjoy the sweetness that occurs in the slowly decaying fruit; a sweetness that a soft breeze will invite you to take part in. Taking a seat upon a lone stump, you notice the initially delicate crisp scent of the apples will be tinged by a lingering note of candied decomposition.

A fly buzzes past your ear as she looks for not only a place to feed, but a perfect place to lay her eggs. The maggots will thrive in the decay their mother so expertly scouted for them. Even closer to the ground you'll see black ants working in tandem to carry the best bits of the rotten flesh back to their colony. Squirrels bob and weave between the trunks as they too enter the orchard, stopping abruptly for just a moment as they take note of your seated form. The squirrels become perfect statues before writing you off as non-threatening and continuing to chase one another between the trees, stopping once again only to pick at the scattered fruit as if nature herself had prepared snacks just for them. The rot doesn't seem to bother them, while they enjoy the fruits of her labor.



Spinning around on your stump, you are now face to face with the fates of some not so lucky apple trees. Their branches lay bare of any leaves or fruit. The trees now gray with age chips while wood splinters from the inside out; chunks of dried meat, exposed for all to see. Life has not graced their branches in years, yet they stand just as tall as the others. They welcome you to bare witness to the vines latching to them, making use of their decaying bodies. The sight of those frail limbs, ever reaching towards the sky, breeds nothing but questions. But who are we to question the speed at which nature decides to devour those trees? Maybe not this year, or the next, but eventually nature will embrace them and return them back from whence they came.

Although you should note just how even the ground is here. The lack of life is rewarded with a perfectly soft patch of grass. The grass free of any imperfections makes it the ideal spot to take a nap. Here the trees guard the edges of the orchard, allowing for anxieties of prying eyes to be blown away into the wind. Curiosity gives way to peace, and life continues her dances around you. In its most lifeless form, the orchard offers solitude free of loneliness. How could one be lonely with the buzzes and chirps of life bouncing from one ear to another? Thump. Thump. Thump. Apples keep tempo for the cardinals as they sing from the tops of the trees as you take a moment to rest. Beneath you, however, lies a more permanent visitor. A tuft of black fur wrapped lovingly inside of a fluffy blanket, nestled deep below the orchard's grounds. In life he would sit in every lap, welcoming every guest, and wanting nothing but a gentle touch. Now nature carries him into his final stages of life, gifting him with

lively green sprouts blooming from his grave. He too watches over you, enjoying the company you afford him. If you allow it, Crowley will sit upon your stomach, rumbling away your anxieties with soft purrs. He, like the orchard, will ask for nothing in return.

Rays of sun whirl between the branches, warming your soft skin like an old friend with a tender hug. The orchard beckons you to close your eyes, breathe in the sweetened air, and allow yourself to melt into her promised peace. Here you are safe. Here all are welcome in the orchard, no matter the stage of life you find yourself in.

# Untitled

**Artwork by Collin Benson**



7.5 x 7.5 x 11 in.  
B-mix Reduction

# High Dawn

Music by Tyler Nix

---



**Composer:** Tyler Nix

**Performer:** Tyler Nix

**Genre:** Instrumental

**Instrumentation:** Guitar, Synthesizer,  
Drums

**Producer:** Tyler Nix



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K82RpNuLvvg>

# Swirling Clouds

**Artwork by Daniel Capobianco**



12 x 11 in.  
Oil on Canvas

# The Thunderstorm

## Non-Fiction by Sydney Weeks

---

The sun streamed through my bedroom window onto the floor, leaving the carpet nice and warm if you were to step on it. I had just finished my cup of coffee for the day and a small breakfast. My grandma had the news playing on the TV, but no one paid any attention to what the reporters said. I was reading a book, which one, I do not remember. My granny was leaning over her phone playing Candy Crush, probably on level three thousand something. I've shared a room with her for several years now, so I've gotten used to the TV being on with no one watching its content.

Finishing the chapter, I closed the book and decided it was time to get ready for the day ahead of me. I placed the book on my desk, grabbed my coffee mug, and headed to the kitchen to put it away. I stepped onto the warm spot of the carpet that the sun shone on with my bare feet and padded out of the bedroom. The sun, shining so brightly, followed me into the hallway.

My mom, years ago, suddenly decided that she wanted to paint our hallway yellow. On the wall on one side of the hallway hang two wide mirrors with a fake golden outlining. The sun reflected off the mirrors and onto the yellow walls. The hall illuminated in a soft yellow glow.

At the end of the hallway is my sisters' bedroom. The door opened as I entered the hallway, and out came one of the twins. Tiredly, she rubbed her eyes with her knuckles and stumbled into the hall. Half of the thick, tight curls on her head stuck out so far, I could set my coffee mug on it, and it wouldn't fall. The other half was flat, still in the

scrunchie she had put it in the night before. Her pajamas, a T-shirt and Christmas pajama pants despite it being the beginning of summer, were ruffled.

Not knowing what kind of mood she woke up in, I stood there a few seconds, contemplating if I should acknowledge or ignore her to let her wake up. A smile grew on my face as I found my answer. "Hi, sweetie!" I exclaimed with a dramatic gasp.

She groaned in response and began to stumble-walk towards the bathroom behind me. I walked over to her and trapped her in a hug, my arms over her shoulders. "Good morning, honey! How did you sleep?" I ask in an extra happy tone just to annoy her. Another groan is the response I get. Trust me, it's a love language.

She tried to escape my hug, getting agitated. I let her go before she started yelling at me. In her attempt to escape, she turned her body towards the mirror and got a glimpse of her reflection. Unexpectedly, she burst out laughing. Her eyebrows were raised, corners of her eyes wrinkled, and her mouth open to the point where I could see all her teeth. Despite the little attitude, she was laughing. She reached up to the section of her hair that was sticking out, closed her hand around it, and laughed. She laughed.

I've heard her complain about her hair so many times that, if she were to go on that rant right now, I could start and finish her sentences before she even got them out of her mouth: "I hate my hair." "Why do black people have to have hair like this?" "I wish I was bald," et cetera, et cetera. She's even cut her own hair multiple times. Once after she got a haircut around age 6. Another time she cut hers and her twin's

hair around age 8. She has cut her hair at least four times. Our grandparents and my mom are all white; I'm mixed, white and Mexican. My sisters are mixed, black and white. They don't really get to spend time with their dad's side of the family all that much, so they were raised white. With no knowledge of taking care of mixed hair, raising them to embrace their hair has been a challenge.

Our grandparents haven't always been all that nice to either of the twins. Especially Adana, with her out-of-pocket remarks and quick to retaliate responses. I've been there when she screams and cries and throws things around, the war in her mind revealed through her actions. I've seen the fear in her eyes when she hears our grandpa stumbling into the hallway. When she's frozen in place until the flight wins over the fight, and she sprints into the nearest room. I've seen her come out of that nearest room when he passes, and dashes to her bedroom, her safe zone. With social anxiety so intense, she rarely ever leaves the house, afraid of the risk that people will see her as fat or having frizzy hair. So intense that I had to homeschool her my second semester of my senior year in high school. I had to push her to learn the 5th grade basics, hoping my efforts could pay off enough for her to go back to school for 6th grade. Finally, my mom signed her up for official homeschooling for 6th grade.

Most recently she decided to cut all her hair off, leaving about an inch or two of her curls spread around her scalp. About two weeks later, she completely shaved off her eyebrows. She claimed boredom led her to both decisions, but it's obvious that the reason was deeper than boredom.

That same little girl laughed. She laughed at



her reflection. The little hand holding her messy hair belongs to that same little girl who was laughing. The soft yellow light illuminating her laugh, bouncing it off the mirror to me. Her squinting eyes met mine in the mirror, holding my gaze. I laughed too, joyful at her response, but mostly shocked.

This small incident couldn't have taken more than four minutes, but it sticks with me. Whenever I have a bad day or have a fight with my sisters, I just remember this moment.

Adana is like a thunderstorm, fierce and bold. Thick and dark clouds rolling in that are full of rain, lightning, and thunder. But this small moment, was sun shining through those clouds.

# Alert, Shaken, Confused

## Poetry by Paris Diaz

---

Alert, Shaken Confused

Around people I don't know what to feel

Many not knowing what's going on

Each one is revolved in their own world

Hey You. I sit next to you, my eyes wander around

Not knowing anyone, what can I do to stay sane

Alert, Shaken, Confused

Motion sensitivity activates in an unknown place

The focus corner stare on people without purpose

Easily startled when a single noise shakes

Crowded light places make me anxious

Wide awake when I'm alone

Wishing to be a social norm without the stare

Alert, Shaken, Confused

Dressing to Impress when others around

Will I ever meet people like me

A clone of my own to understand my struggles

Cannot be easy fighting this battle alone

Alert, Shaken, Confused

Will there be a cure

Staying silent with my wondering eyes is suffocating

Wanting to scream and shout of my stance of awareness

Emotions thrown all over the place

Staring directly in the eyes of others without reason

Don't want to care of what others think

Alert, Shaken, Confused

I am unique creative weirdo who fails to express herself

Communication is harder than it is

Wishing to numb emotions to not care

A need to act like no one is watching

My own company should be enough

Forcing energy on other social norms

Alert, Shaken, Confused.

# Atlantic Archives

## Poetry by Jordy Koenig

---

Without ever trying to be one,  
The oceans have become one of the grandest museums of our globe.  
The bottom of her sea floor,  
The grandest depths of the Challenger Deep  
dusted with the scatterings of millennia's history.

If there were a grand master here on earth  
Of artifact storage  
It would be the sea.

Do you know how many things lie now in a permanent rest upon her seabed?  
Quite a few things it turns out.

More than three million shipwrecks are rumored and theorized to be stuck there at the bottom of the ocean,  
*Three Million.*

I guarantee you couldn't begin to picture what a fleet of three million ships must look like,  
Let alone think about how they must appear sprinkled along the sands and sediment, thousands upon thousands of feet below.

But it's not just about the shipwrecks now, is it?  
No, no it isn't.  
It's about what's inside of those shipwrecks.  
We have no way of knowing for sure, but the

ocean might just be the largest holder of historical artifacts we know.

Think about the clothes of people's pasts, the sunken warships filled with weapons that will never fulfill their designed purpose.

Think of the manuscripts and novels and sheet music and art,  
*oh* the art.

Think of the paintings and sculptures and jewelry and hairpieces and garments and dining ware and teacups and snail prongs and swords and daggers and pistols and people and maps and families and parcels and,

And, well,

I'm quite sure you get the point.

Think of the sunken whales.

Somewhere, down there, the skeleton of captain Ahab's wretched white beast lies,  
Now nothing but a cluster of marrow and bone,  
Dreaming of his own role in the chase.

We often think of a burial happening in a traditional sense.

A shovel and six feet of negative space.

You take earth out and earth covers back up.

The ocean buries in her own manner.

The blankets of her tide and the dips of her trenches,

All her amenities creating a perfect place of rest.

I'd like to think that perhaps this is why we refer to it as 'the seabed'.

# Grandma's House

## Poetry by Lizette Valdovinos

---

Five years  
Lemonade air  
Symphony of crinkly red peppers  
My grandmother makes meals like magic  
She stirs the *olla* with a wooden spoon half my  
size  
She sings a voice full of tenderness and grace  
Songs of Rivera and Fernandez  
A woman who has carried her children on her back  
Across the border  
More times than our fingers and toes  
She traded blisters for loafers  
And fear for freedom  
Though they seem to intertwine  
With every step she took  
Summer sun casts its fingers through the kitchen  
window  
Powder white tank tops  
Cinderella shorts and marker stains on my hand  
I merrily carried along  
With fresh pigtails on my head  
The scent of her coffee with a few seconds of  
cream  
And a smile of sugar  
Sipping noisily my mug of Sunny D  
We spotted robins and squirrels through the win-  
dow  
As I twiddled with her gold bracelets  
Every dinner meant she gave me the role of the  
professional taste tester  
This job is of the utmost importance  
I was paid with a kiss on forehead and a tight hug  
Every evening met me with a bubbly bath and a

wealthy lathering of baby oil afterwards  
While my toes furiously protested and curled under  
the pink carpet  
She cures every cold  
And wipes every tear  
She holds my heart in her hands diligently  
We live in her house, but she is my home

# A Griffen's Freedom

Artwork by Madelyn Rizzuto



18 x 24 in.  
Mixed Media



# A Dragon's Rage

Artwork by Madelyn Rizzuto



18 x 24 in.  
Mixed Media

# My Obsession

**Artwork by Daniel Alvarez**



19.5 x 25.5 in.  
Charcoal

# Just a Girl. Chasing Life.

## Poetry by Johanna Cabada

---

Just a girl.

Chasing life.

Wanting to live what life has to offer.

Get away and make it big.

So, one day, she'll tell the stories of when she was young.

To live the life many dream of.

Traveling the world and not worrying about money.

To shop and not see the price tag.

Having a closet many girls dream of having.

To drive her dream car, blasting music with the windows down.

Maybe she's just a dreamer.

Dreaming of false hope.

False hope to be happy and carefree.

Maybe she isn't ready yet.

Maybe She's dreaming of a world that isn't real.

But if it's all fake.

Why are others living her dream?

Is there a way she can live her dreams?

So, she can get out of her head and live in the present.

- Just a girl, Chasing life.

Mr. & Mrs.

Artwork by Taylor Knuth



17.5 x 21.5 in.  
Chalk Pastel

# ONE MILLION

## Poetry by Tanya Alcalá

---

I'm not one in a million

I'm one

With a million reasons to stand here and speak of  
peace and forgiveness

To preach to the children that love is religion

The trees are what's giving us life

How can we stand here like it's alright

I'm not saying we fight

There is no need for violent behavior

The environments unstable

We need to gather as one and love our neighbor

Love our nature

She is our mother why would we hate her

How much more can we take from her

# Slowly

## Poetry by Luca Koranda

---

Pen held tightly between my fingers  
committed to put in on the page  
How?  
Ink only dries as  
fast as this hand will move  
Molasses dripping off a tablespoon, leaving  
residue on the carrying instrument  
Biding time in the sink after its use  
My hand travels towards an  
empty journal  
Raindrops splatter  
onto an absence of words  
Bathtubs are not meant for ink

# The Depressed Diamond

**Poetry by Destiny Mitchell**

---

Broken

I always feel broken

And worthless

Lost

I remembered when I was facing homelessness

Now I'm working so much I'm home much less

And I have nowhere to go no one to turn to

So even though I have a place that I'm at much less

I still feel broken and lonely

Homeless

I'm tired of being tough

I want to let my guard down

But every time I do my heart pumps outside my chest

I tell myself I got this and to just do my best

My best sounds good

But the home inside of me is a mess

I need spring cleaning

Inside and out

Inside and out

But it's not spring its fall so the inside of me is

Shouting

Shouting with doubt

And sorrow  
Yelling on the inside can I borrow any happiness  
Just for a moment  
I want to freeze time  
And hide  
What am I supposed to do when my guard is up  
But somehow I'm still getting attacked by life,  
personal problems, and my own mind  
So I feel broke and kicked down My heart is cry-  
ing and I'm silently screaming  
And I've been Verbally communicating  
But no one hears me  
I need help  
I'm not okay  
Depression is killing me  
Everyday  
I feel like I'm going crazy  
My mind can't take it  
But, I need to be strong because only 1 out of 5  
us  
is supposed to make it  
And I vowed to the child I once was  
That I am going to come out victorious  
And I'm going to keep my promise  
Because at the end of this rainbow is supposed to  
be glorious  
No matter how hard it gets  
No matter how many bricks I hit



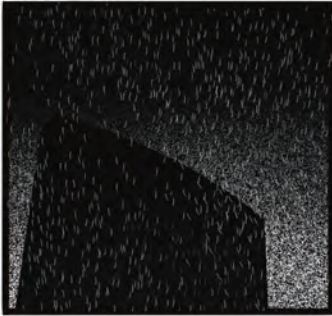
And how much I get pissed  
They say a diamond is made under pressure  
I hope that's true  
I hope I'm not diamond in the rough  
That gets found and shined up  
The one that's worth billions of bucks  
Because I can't take this  
Anymore  
I don't want to walk away and say I had enough I  
don't want to give up on myself  
I want my story to continue and have a nice end-  
ing  
not a rush through unhappy in pending  
I don't want to have my book closed and put on  
the shelf  
I want to be an inspiration  
To those like me that didn't come from wealth and  
don't have much mental health.  
You are truly strong  
You got this  
High pressure is applied  
Because you are the diamond the world has been  
looking for.  
So do as Rihanna say and shine bright

# Foul Play on the Night Shift

Graphic Narrative by Alina Lara

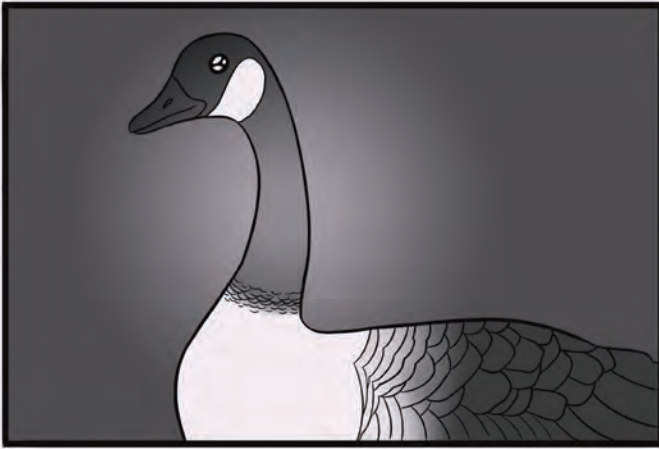
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# Foul Play on the Night Shift







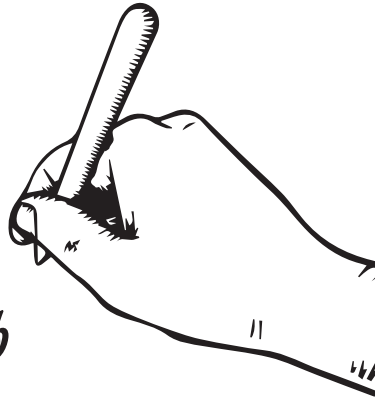


The End.



# Calling All Writers!

*The Creative Writing Club  
Invites You!*



---

*The Creative Writing Club is an 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 related to the written world.*

*Each year the club also hosts open mics, writing contests, write-ins, and sometimes even travels to a national writing conference*

---

**Meeting Every Wednesday 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | Student Life Office  
(Sugar Grove Campus)**

Contact Dan Portincaso at: [dportincaso@waubonsee.edu](mailto:dportincaso@waubonsee.edu)  
Webpage: [www.waubonsee creativewritingclub.wordpress.com](http://www.waubonsee creativewritingclub.wordpress.com)

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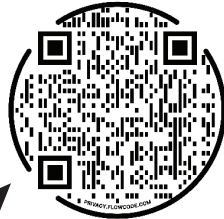
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Instagram: [www.instagram.com/waubonseeCWC](https://www.instagram.com/waubonseeCWC)

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**CWC is on Zoom and Discord**  
Zoom: <https://waubonsee.zoom.us/j/94068124898>  
Meeting ID: 940 6812 4898

**QR Code to join our Discord  
Server!**





Tanni Aggarwal  
Tanya Alcala  
Daniel Alvarez  
Michael Aragon  
Julia Martinez Arroyo  
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