

VOluMe 7, 2023

CROSSROADS



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All contributions to KLIO 2023 are by Penn State University Park students, with the exception of:

- Timothy Blakeslee (Harrisburg)
- Katherine Joyce (Schuylkill)
- Carly Jane (Lehigh Valley)
- Danielle West-Habjanetz (Altoona)
- Nathan tam (Berks)

OUR MISSION



As an online creative arts journal, KLIO encourages, amplifies, and celebrates a diverse range of literary and artistic media from Penn State creative artists.

Like our sister print journal Kalliope, we publish traditional creative writing and visual art intended for the page, but we also aim to use our online platform to share digital and cross-disciplinary works, including performance art, music, dance, and film.

KLIO seeks to showcase and keep a community record of creative arts from all Penn State campuses. We strive to provide an inclusive community to celebrate the creative and linguistic talents of emerging Penn State artists and writers. We pride ourselves on being a multimedia publication that represents diversity in art, perspective, and culture.

Both KLIO and Kalliope take their names from the Muses called upon by early Greek writers and artists for inspiration and creative guidance. The Greek word *kleô*, meaning “to proclaim or celebrate,” gives the muse her name and gives us our mission. Here at KLIO, we celebrate and offer a platform for all Penn State students to express their creativity.

MASTHEAD 2023

Annika Shastry – Editor-in-Chief

Hannah Fritzinger – Managing Editor

Megan Kelby – Blog Editor

Anjani Jayakar – Assistant Blog Editor

Zoey Joseph – University Park Outreach Coordinator

Reagan March – Public Relations Coordinator

Christine Bahk – Translation Initiative/International Student Outreach Coordinator

Katie Volz – Fiction Editor

Christine Choung – Creative Non-Fiction Editor

Claire Williams – Poetry Editor

Sobi Mere – Art Coordinator

Andrew Jackson – Music/Audio Coordinator

Adam Waxman – Film Coordinator

Rivka Wolin – Webmaster

Alison Jaenicke – Faculty Advisor

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

"Crossroads," or Volume 7 of KLIO, is finally here!

Last year, the KLIO staff decided to highlight in their 2022 volume the vastly popular genres of science fiction and fantasy that they felt to be underrepresented in KLIO, as well as in other creative outlets and arts journals.

This year, after recognizing our collective desire to spend this semester highlighting the intermingling of different voices, cultures, and mediums, we announced our two main focuses: a translation initiative and an ekphrastic initiative.

The act of ekphrasis refers to creating a work of art or literature in response to another work of art or literature. Ekphrastic pieces encourage a dialogue, not just between different mediums of works, but between artists and creatives of different kinds who work together to craft a unique pair of works that complement and enhance each other.

At first, translation may seem like a technical act to some, but this changes upon further consideration. Translation is an art that draws direct connections between two cultures and languages and allows a piece to have twice the amount of meaning it could have.

The submissions from these initiatives as well as our general submissions from each category come together to tell a variety of different stories from a variety of different perspectives. Our initiatives allowed us to receive more of a diverse collection of submissions in which identity, content, and medium intersect. In more ways than one, the pieces featured in Volume 7 of KLIO bring us to a crossroads where poetry interacts with art through ekphrasis, and two languages interact through translation.

The 2023 staff of KLIO is beyond excited about the high number and quality of submissions we received this year, and we would like to thank all of the contributors who made this volume possible. We are so grateful to get to showcase your brilliant works and we would like to encourage you to continue submitting to both KLIO and our sister journal Kalliope in the future.

Special thank you to Esmaeili Elham whose piece "Star-crossed" is featured on the cover of this year's volume of KLIO. We thought the piece perfectly encapsulated the diversity of perspectives and healthy skepticism of our current state of life, whether that be on a nation-wide level or a personal level.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and thank my lovely fellow KLIO staffers for their hard work and dedication this semester. Lastly, thank you to our faculty advisor Alison Jaenicke who guided us so

wonderfully through many of our first experiences working with creative arts outlets. You all made the work very easy.

Without further ado, we are proud to present Volume 7 of KLIO. We hope you enjoy these pieces as much as we do.

Annika Shastry
Editor-in-Chief
KLIO 2023

Ekphrasis

FOOTNOTES FROM LOVE

Vikram Raj



I peel the tangerines for *you and me*.
He cuts the weeds growing in our garden.
And by him, I am known.
Love is that he sets the table for two.
In a godless world, he is my religion;
This is how it feels to be ripped open and still breathing.
In the dead of night, his love screams for me.
There is a cruelty inside me only you know how to tame.
I would repent for all eternity.
I do not believe in love — he is my *fate*.
In his laugh, I find the map back to my childhood.
He lives for me and I write for him.
What should I breathe for if not for you?
Watch as he kills me: our hands on the knife.

“Virginia Is For Lovers”

And for once, life can be *easy*.

And for once, it is enough.

All this grief brought me to you.

Vikram Raj is a sophomore from New York, majoring in advertising at Penn State University Park. He has been writing poetry since middle school and has been published in his hometown’s local poetry publication. A hard worker at heart, Vikram is an avid academic and actively involved across many student-run organizations on campus. In his spare time, he enjoys journaling, long walks, sketching, watching movies, and working out.

Gas Guzzler

Lance Colet



“Dog Tired” by D’Andre Tillman

John Boone looked dog-tired. Dinky door-chimes announced his entrance.

“Empty as hell out here,” he said. “Ain’t nothin’ but road and dust.”

Shepherd grinned. “Great spot for a gas station.”

“I reckon,” John Boone said.

He looked towards the pumps and furrowed his brow.

“Shep, that big fella there is drinking from your pump.”

Shepherd shook his head and scanned the array of cigarettes behind the counter. “He pays,” he said.

“He’s drinking diesel. Like milk from a tit. I reckon that big fella’s a few pickles short of a jar, Shep.”

“Don’t think about these things, John, they don’t make sense.”

John Boone shambled up to the window pane. “You ain’t even take a look at him. You see him, Shep?”

“Don’t look at these things either, John. Here’s your cigs.”

John Boone remained at the window. A box of Marlboro Reds laid on the counter.

“You payin’ for the cigs?”

John Boone shook his head. He still peered through the window. “Shep, that big fella’s got the biggest smile I seen. He’s still guzzling that gas.”

“Don’t think or look, John, it ain’t good.”

“I’ll think what I want and look where I want. Land of the free, Shep.”

Shepherd pursed his lips. “I heard of a Buddhist once who went crazy ‘cause he was trying to figure out what the sound of one hand clapping was.”

Finally, John Boone looked away from the window. “What do you reckon’s the sound of one hand clapping? Prolly like this. Thwap, thwap.”

“Don’t think about these things, John.”

“Thwap, thwap,” John Boone said, *thwapping* a single hand. “I reckon that gas guzzler knows the sound. Maybe he’s a Buddhist.”

Shepherd watched him. Slowly, without letting his eyes leave John Boone, he reached under the counter for his six-shooter.

"Maybe he likes the taste," John Boone said, looking back out the window. "I ain't never tasted gasoline, but it does smell good."

"John, you best pay for your cigs and go."

"That happy idiot," John Boone muttered. He put his hand up on the window. "You reckon he's guzzling gas because he's slow? Or is he slow because he's guzzling gas?"

"Pay for your cigs or get out," Shepherd said. The six-shooter grew sweaty in his palm.

John Boone started to pull away from the window, then stopped and stood in a state of limbo between the glass and the cigarettes, transfixed.

"John, you fixin' to end up like that Buddhist? Look away, damn it."

John Boone leaned back towards the window. "I'm curious, Shep."

"Don't be."

"He's still drinking. Looks so damn happy. Makes me wish I was happy like that."

Shepherd shook his head. "God gave us good heads for a reason, John."

"That reason ain't make sense to me no more."

"It makes sense to God."

John Boone shrugged. "I don't reckon it does. None of this makes no sense. Your good head ain't as good as you think, Shep."

Shepherd put the six-shooter at half-cock. "A Buddhist once told me to think on the phrase: If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't think on these things, John."

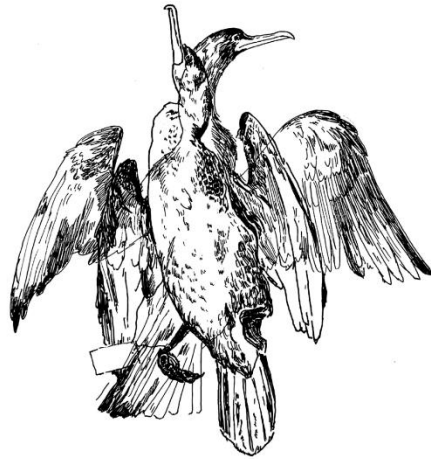
John Boone shook his head and looked back out the window at the gas guzzler. Sanity leaked from his eyes in tears. He muttered about killing the Buddha and moved his hand to his waist. Shepherd shot him dead.

Lance is a senior graduating this May with an economics degree. He has been published a handful of times in past editions of Klio, Kalliope, and Folio, as well as the online literary magazine A Thin Slice of Anxiety.

D'Andre Tillman is a meteorology major with a minor in art at Penn State main campus. He works primarily in digital media. In his free time, he enjoys bowling, biking, and hiking.

Ode to a Cormorant

Daniel Abramov



“Ode to a Cormorant” by Nicolas Fay

I. The Cormorant’s Song

Oh, double-breasted cormorant, form so fair
In coastal realms and rivers, you dwell,
And as your seraphic motion cleaves the air
In harmony with a river’s swell
Your opulent guise in flight is quelled
In lustrous form, plumage shades the night,
And the iridescent, winged cloak shines
In shimmering grace, he holds your hallowed form in delight,
As heaven’s stars with tapestry entwine
Each feather, like Phoenix, speaks of rebirth,
You are a cornucopia of nature’s boundless worth

II. The Hunter’s Shadow

In the verdant meadows of your stately reign,
His ignoble shadow, creeping ominously
To wreak havoc, cause endless pain
Incorrigible, destruction of beauty,
Fate’s calamity wrought
His wretched hands hold you rigid, caught
Unsightly forms in rigor mortis, set
And your vivacious grace, now fades
Lamenting your form—*annette défaite*
Death’s tender grasp, motion ceased, wings flayed
We must cease our avarice—that mars your pose,
From fragile beauty to silenced repose.

Daniel Abramov is a first-year student, originally from NY, with a double major in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and Psychology at Penn State Berks. While intent on pursuing a career in the medical field, he will continue to explore his interests in creative writing in the future.

Nicolas Fay is a fourth-year student majoring in Writing and Digital Media with minors in Business and English at Penn State Berks. Foregrounded by an interest in art and the biodiversity of the natural world, his practices span modes and approaches, interweaving analysis with image-making.

Prophecy

Meera Gupta



what is this "cruel fate"
but a dice rolled by my own palm?
i am oedipus and the oracle
colliding. I foretold this –
swallowing time and sinking heart –
then tripped inside anyways.
am I to blame?
I am asked if I believe in free will,
and my head nods,
compelled by the threads wrapped
around my own fingers.
I must make peace with this knotted string.

There is No Thunder in Space

Ryan Zaff



“Jovian” by Julius McBride

In ancient myths did old Jove reign
No more; yet in the sky, I see
Not one more worthy of his fame
Than Number 5, the king-to-be.

Unmatched in stature, robed in storms
This Jupiter takes up the throne
Attended by his doting hordes
With gravity that’s all his own.

He manifests torrential might
With black clouds rolling through his pelt
And conjures up, to his delight
A hurricane to crown his belt.

In majesty he roars and churns
Exulting in his maelstrom’s daze
As war drums boom, and lightning burns
And trumpets sound in thunderous praise.

Queen Juno sulks outside the court
And glares at all the fawning moons
Ignoring his bombastic sport
As underneath her breath, she croons:

“O Jupiter! My husband dear
So full of life, yet full of air!
Beyond your precious atmosphere
No one can hear you – no one cares!”

Although wind roars Jove’s every word
And thunderbolts he hurls like toys

His symphony will go unheard
Lost in the silence of the void.

Ryan Zaff is a freshman at Penn State University Park, majoring in Geoscience. He is a member of the Penn State Creative Writing Club and primarily writes short stories in science fiction and fantasy, but also dabbles in poetry. Apart from creative writing, he enjoys running with Penn State Club Cross Country, participating in THON, and learning obscure science facts that have nothing to do with his major.

Translation

À: L

Erika Neemeyer

À: L

De: une sisyphé heureuse

Ça fait très longtemps depuis la dernière fois que je vous ai écrit une lettre sans l'envoyer. Je n'en ai plus besoin d'y faire. C'est fabuleux.

J'en ai brûlées, toutes les autres. Cela m'a senti bon.

Je voudrais être honnête, nous deux. Ce sera peut-être pour la première fois. Je passe chaque jour complètement contente que vous m'ayez quittée. En fait, je trouve que j'aurais préféré mourir que de vous marier. L'ironie pure, ça. Peut-être que ce n'est pas si amusant pour vous que je dise cela. Il n'est certainement pas gentil. Ça, c'est la même.

C'est marrant, comment ce que nous pensions vouloir puisse être en fait un cauchemar.

Sans vous, j'ai tout ce dont j'aurais jamais besoin. Les amies, le bonheur, l'indépendance, l'acceptance de soi – je suis lesbienne, vous voyez – et malgré tout cela, je me sens encore coupable. Bête, plutôt. Pour être sortie avec vous, plutôt. Pour ce que j'ai fait. Pour avoir pensé que vous étiez digne de ma mort. La bêtise de jeunesse, il est fou comme pilule.

La chose la plus gentille que vous m'ayez jamais faite, c'était de partir. La deuxième, c'était de m'apprendre le français. Vous m'avez donné mon avenir gratuit. J'ignorais ce qu'il était.

Il y a bien plus dans la vie que de marier la première personne qui ne dise qu'il m'aime.

Merci.

===

To: L

From: a happy sisyphus

It's been a very long time since I've written you a letter I didn't plan to send. I don't feel the need to anymore. It's wonderful.

I burned the rest. It felt good.

I'd like to be honest with us both, probably for the first time. Every day, I am grateful that you broke up with me. I think I'd rather die than to have married you, actually. That's probably not very funny for you, all things considered. It's certainly not a nice thing to say. Some things stay the same.

It's funny, how things you thought you wanted can turn out to be a nightmare.

Without you, I have all I could ever need. Friends, happiness, independence, self-acceptance – I'm a lesbian, by the way; do with that what you will – and yet I still feel guilty. Silly, most days. For having dated you at all. For the way I acted. For thinking you were worth dying for. Teenage delusion is a hell of a drug.

The kindest thing you ever did for me was leave. The second was teaching me French. You handed me my future on a silver platter; I just couldn't see it for what it was.

There's so much more to life than marrying the first person who tells you they love you.

Thank you.

“Name any of the fine arts, and I’ve probably tried them with varying levels of success. I am (unfortunately) a classically trained ballerina, an armchair psychologist, a singer with little care for what key the original song was in; a hobby artist and photographer. But most of all, I’m a writer. Two and a quarter language (English, French and Chinese) are still not enough to contain all the words within me, waiting to be said. Philosophy majors are known to never shut up, and I’m (yet again, unfortunately) no exception.” — Erika Neemeyer

Tu Hambre Sabe

Anonymous

Se dice que una de las mejores maneras de estudiar es enseñar, así compruebas cuánto conoces de lo que hablas. Si puedes explicar con facilidad un tema a otros es porque tienes una foto mental de él. La foto es lo que le revelas a los demás. Realmente es una lástima que este razonamiento de fondo no se aplique así para los desórdenes alimenticios. Porque yo les juro que conozco el infierno, pero ahí no se permiten las cámaras.

Yo soy una persona muy visual. Dibujo, hago listas, diagramas, esquemas y patrones de absolutamente todo. Para procesar, recordar o resolver cualquier cosa, *necesito* imágenes. Sabiendo que en tierra de estos trastornos no podemos tomar fotos, queda claro que entender mi desorden es una tarea muy complicada y explicarlo a otros es todavía más difícil.

No solo hay que decodificar borrosos recuerdos del peor lugar que tu cuerpo puede visitar, sino que para hablar de ellos, tienes que vencer la vergüenza e incomodidad que exponer tus peores manías naturalmente supone. Esto que lees es mi mejor intento.

Al mismo estilo bíblico, cada uno llega a este infierno a su manera. El deseo de ser hegemónicamente bella solo es un primer paso dentro. Pecaron sobre nosotros, entonces pecamos también. Pero la realidad es que mientras no te detengas a ver dónde estás, e intentes buscar el porqué, solo sigues descendiendo y en el peor de los casos, transicionando entre infierno e infierno.

Algunos tenemos miedo de ocupar un cuerpo que nos recuerde a quien no queremos volver a ser. Convertimos comer en un castigo por los errores que creemos haber cometido, así hayamos vivido poco. En mi experiencia, mi accidentada relación con la comida tuvo mucho que ver con la palabra “pasado”, y mi imagen de una Mia más joven, profundamente estresada, profundamente dolida y probablemente inocente de todo lo que la culparon (y sobre todo de todo lo que la culpo) a diario.

Hace poco una de mis mejores amigas me hablaba de cómo me veía en sus ojos a los 15 años: “...eras quien siempre tenía algo nuevo que decir, algo nuevo que mostrar. Así hablamos hasta ahora de ti”. Entonces, me puse a pensar en las cosas que ambas Mias tenemos en común. Yo quiero cosas grandes, ella también quería.

Mi proceso de recuperación pasa por reconciliarme con ella. Confiar en lo que dejó en mí y revalorar lo que me hizo capaz de ser, y de hacer. Porque finalmente *ella* soy yo. Uno de los principios más importantes de la rehabilitación de un trastorno de la conducta alimenticia es aprender a “confiar en tu hambre”, o sea, perder el miedo a comer cuando tu cuerpo te lo pide. Tienes que estar en contacto con él y entender que no te va a traicionar, por más difícil que se pongan las cosas. Hay que confiar.

Hoy me di cuenta de lo valiosa que es esa lección para la vida. Es más, yo diría que es el regalo más grande que me trajo haber decidido salir de la hoguera. Y lo quiero compartir con ustedes.

La mayor parte de la gente que me rodea está bordeando los veinte. Una etapa incierta y llena de “no ‘s” y de errores que hacen que todas las ideas que tenemos sobre quienes somos, y quiénes podemos

llegar a ser, tiemblen. Pero así como yo puedo volver a confiar en mi apetito, tú también puedes confiar en tu ambición.

Vas a llegar, porque tu hambre sabe, y tu niño interior, también.

Vera
Elizaveta Skulskaia

Слёзы текут по щекам, я сежу на полу в своей комнате

Горькая, обиженная, разбитая,

Отчаянная

Слёзы душат меня

Шёпот остр, прорезает сквозь

плотный

тяжёлый

горячий

воздух

Маген Давид тяжела вокруг моей шеи

Опасность в её защите

Видимость в моей уязвимости

Я – Ам Йисраэль.

Я качаюсь в молитве.

Тихель покрывает мои волосы и рукава покрывают мои локти

И вдруг – я слышу улыбки и саламы

Я неловко отвечаю

И новые вопросы восходят на поверхность.

Запрос в интернете становится осторожным заданным вслух вопросом

Вопрос становится бесконечными сносками

Сноски – прочитанной сурой

И ещё одной

Начатой.

Мы разговариваем

Две души разговаривают и слушают.

Каждая – с наклонённой головой.

Я нежно направлена, мои вопросы отвечены,

И новые вопросы всплывают на поверхность

опьяняюще

Я не позволяю себе облегчение произнесения

Слов, к которым меня так тянет

Ещё несколько дней

А затем повторяю их трижды

ля

иллаха

илля

Ллах

===

Tears stream down my face, I sit on the floor in my room.

Bitter, hurt, broken

Desperate

I choke on tears

My whisper feels sharp as it cuts through the

thick

heavy

hot

air

A Magen David is heavy around my neck,

Protection and endangerment,

Visibility in my vulnerability

As Am Yisrael.

I rock back and forth in prayer.

I dawn a tichel and cover my elbows,

Suddenly, I hear smiles and salaams

I respond, awkwardly,

And questions arise anew.

An internet search turns into a careful question, asked out loud,

A question turns into countless citations,

Citations – into a surah read,

And another started.

We speak.

Two souls speak and listen.

Each – with a tilted head as the other talks.

I'm guided gently, my questions answered,

Creating more questions

Intoxicatingly.

I deny myself the relief of saying

the words I so long for

for a few more days.

And then I repeat them thrice.

la

ilaha

illa

Ilah

Ville de l'amour

Colby Kloehr

“Ville de l'amour”

Mais le prêteur sur gages près de
la Tour Eiffel est toujours en activité
Florissant.

===

“City of love”

but the pawn shop near
the Eiffel Tower is still active,
flourishing.

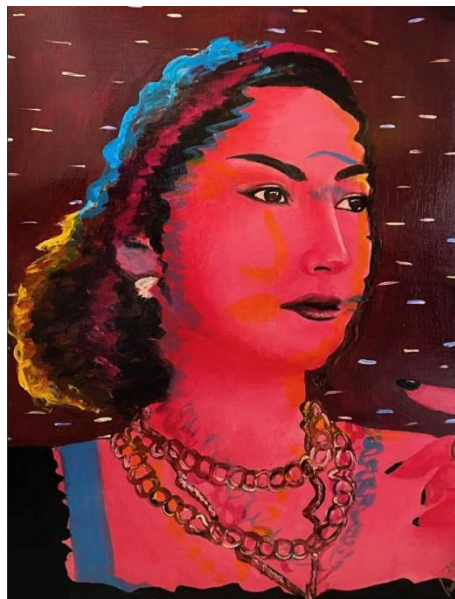
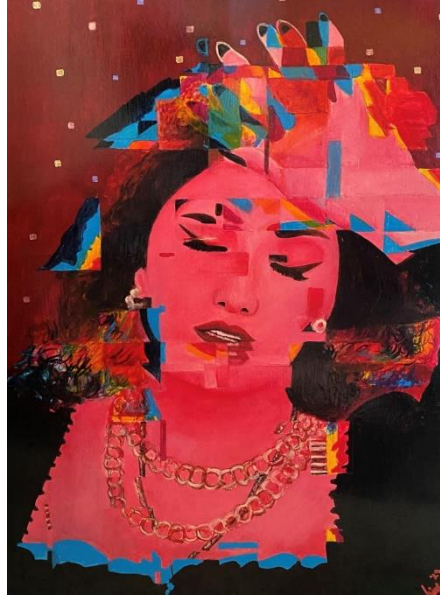
Colby Kloehr is a psychology and English major here at PSU. He's been writing poetry for a bit over a year now. He started in his high school literature class back home in Texas and has been obsessed ever since. He hopes you guys enjoy his work!

Follow Colby on Instagram: [@colbyk6103](https://www.instagram.com/colbyk6103)

Art

aberration, glitch, bloom, pinch

Lelaina Scott



Lelaina Scott is an artist and full time student working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Visual Arts and Music Studies from the Pennsylvania State University. After being thrown into the unknown with the rest of the world in 2020, she found her passion for painting from when she was a kid at grandma's house, playing with whatever art supplies and paper scraps were around. The reignition of her small childhood dreams begun here. She continues to have her work shared, displayed and published across Central Pennsylvania and she's just getting started.

Social media:

[@offtherecordarts](#) on instagram, www.offtherecordarts.com,

[@laineysrecords](#) is her personal instagram as well

Cherryland
Charani Gauravaram



Connections

Charani Gauravaram



Harassment

Elham Hajesmaeili



Elham Hajesmaeili is an artist-researcher and art educator who holds an MFA in painting and drawing from Penn State University. Her art focuses on identity issues for women post-migration. Currently, Elham is a Dual-titled Ph.D. candidate in Art Education and WGSS at Penn State University. Her research links art education and social justice, focusing on Iranian women who migrated to the U.S. Elham aims to raise awareness and promote empathy for diverse identities through her art and research.

Instagram: @elhamhajesmaeili

Harbor

Austin Hill



My major is Photography, I enjoy traveling, mingling with creative people, and late night drives. I have previously worked as a photographer in Tokyo, Japan. I grew up in New Canaan, CT. I constantly am trying new things to better myself and my work. - Austin Hill

Social media handles: @247artspace, 247artspace.com

MARYAM

Elham Hajesmaeili



Elham Hajesmaeili is an artist-researcher and art educator who holds an MFA in painting and drawing from Penn State University. Her art focuses on identity issues for women post-migration. Currently, Elham is a Dual-titled Ph.D. candidate in Art Education and WGSS at Penn State University. Her research links art education and social justice, focusing on Iranian women who migrated to the U.S. Elham aims to raise awareness and promote empathy for diverse identities through her art and research.

Instagram: @elhamhajesmaeili

Single Mom

Elham Hajesmaeili



Elham Hajesmaeili is an artist-researcher and art educator who holds an MFA in painting and drawing from Penn State University. Her art focuses on identity issues for women post-migration. Currently, Elham is a Dual-titled Ph.D. candidate in Art Education and WGSS at Penn State University. Her research links art education and social justice, focusing on Iranian women who migrated to the U.S. Elham aims to raise awareness and promote empathy for diverse identities through her art and research.

Instagram: @elhamhajesmaeili

Star-crossed

Elham Hajesmaeili

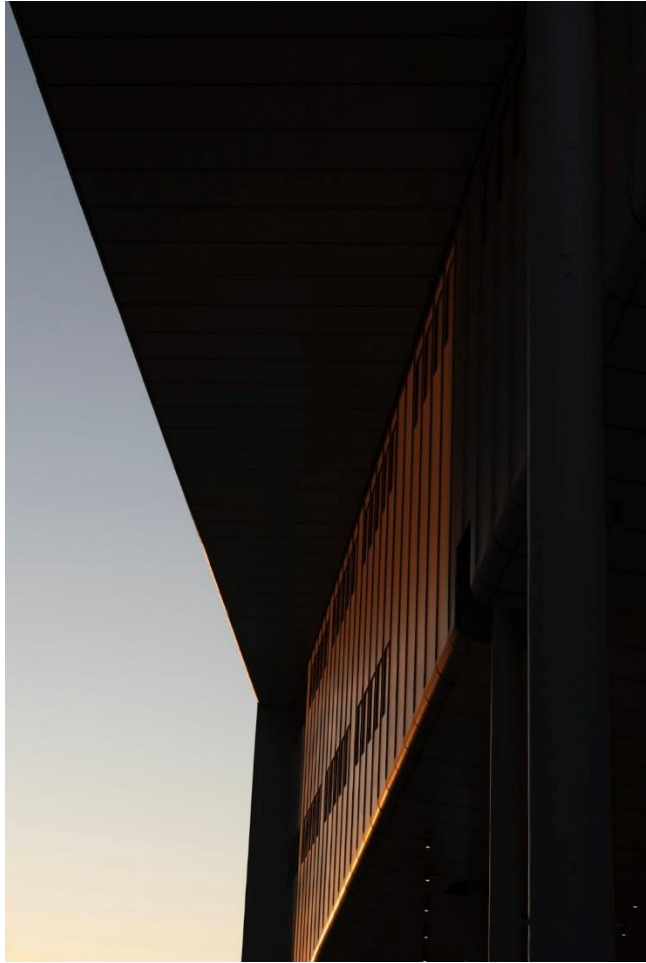


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Sunset on the Whitney

Austin Hill



"My major is Photography, I enjoy traveling, mingling with creative people, and late-night drives. I have previously worked as a photographer in Tokyo, Japan. I grew up in New Canaan, CT. I constantly am trying new things to better myself and my work." - Austin Hill

Social media handles: @247artspace, 247artspace.com

Synthetic Memories

Ellie Wullert



Ellie Wullert is a confused and queer third year photojournalism major. They enjoy making music and taking photos. Their hometown is Warrington, Pa.

Social media: @elliew.photos

torn

Lelaina Scott



Lelaina Scott is an artist and full time student working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Visual Arts and Music Studies from the Pennsylvania State University. After being thrown into the unknown with the rest of the world in 2020, she found her passion for painting from when she was a kid at grandma's house, playing with whatever art supplies and paper scraps were around. The reignition of her small childhood dreams begun here. She continues to have her work shared, displayed and published across Central Pennsylvania and she's just getting started.

Social media:

[@offtherecordarts](#) on instagram, www.offtherecordarts.com,

[@laineysrecords](#) is her personal instagram as well

Fiction

Clear Pine

Kameron Skrobacz

Harry's father was an emotionally unavailable man, one who lost his temper easily and wasn't shy to resort to violence in order to get his way. He remembers his father cutting a piece of clear pine on the table saw the day his mother died, the blade pushing a plume of agitated sawdust throughout the house. His mother, stomping about for a reason he was too young to understand, ran downstairs in a fit of rage only to return back up the stairs in a stretcher. Harry heard a soft scream and something that distantly resembled the sound of a wet stump being split by an ax, before a prolonged bout of silence. The silence lasted eleven minutes before his father came upstairs, slowly, to call the emergency line.

When Harry was young his father would tell him stories about Harry's grandfather, Georgi — usually in a resentful, unhappy tone that Harry was rather familiar with. Harry's father would take out his pocketknife and describe how Georgi would threaten him with it, slashing it back and forth dangerously close to his face. He would talk about the stink of mold that laced the air of his basement, and the cold nights he would spend down there. Any opportunity that Harry's father got to tell him how bad things were for him, he took; with every chance to remember, he became more and more enamored with his own anger.

Georgi loved a small dog, a Boston terrier, more than he loved his son or wife. It was named after Georgi and barked loudly in the early hours of the night. One day, after Georgi had beaten Harry's father for a reason Harry was never told, Harry's father killed the dog in an act of defiance. He claims he does not regret this, since it put Georgi into a state of bed-ridden depression for a few weeks, but when he tells the story there is a hint of sadness behind his eyes. Georgi took his own life not too long after the dog died. He was found in the woods after a week-long search about two miles from the backroad he parked his car on. There was a closed casket funeral, and Harry's father wept out of obligation while Georgi's wife stood solemnly. They moved to a smaller house about a month later, where Harry's father would take up woodworking to distract from the boredom. He claims these were the happiest years of his life.

When Harry was young his father would forbid him to enter the workshop, out of fear of Harry breaking his equipment. Despite this, he would take his time to sneak around the outside of the house, through the garage, and into the shop to look around and work on his own projects. Every time he was caught, Harry's father put bigger locks on the door as Harry garnered an increasingly larger collection of hammers to match. After each lock was broken, Harry would suffer a beating and a scolding, but this was not enough to dissuade him. A few days after Harry's mother died, he and his father sat on the porch together watching the golden sun oxidize into a rusty orange as it sank over the horizon. Harry's father was a few beers in, per usual, as Harry sipped on a Coke.

"I'm hard on you because I've made a lot of mistakes... and I just don't want that for you," he said, avoiding Harry's eyeline, "I just don't want that for you..."

Harry mouthed the words "no shit" to himself as he sat there silently, continuing to drink his Coke and stare at the sunset. This is the only time Harry remembers his father opening up, and he still remains bitter at what he perceives to be a half-hearted attempt. A few years later, just as Harry moved out, the woodshop caught fire while Harry's father was working, and he was pulled out of the rubble a black skeleton. Harry's father's church had to hold the funeral, since Harry refused to plan it, and what little of Harry's family that was left cut ties with him over the incident.

There was always a lingering fear in Harry's mind that he would end up exactly like his father. And just like his father before him, this fear consumed his life until he ended up in the same exact place: cutting a

piece of clear pine on the table saw. Only, the world had moved on without Harry as he refused to develop with it, so Harry cut his wood without a wife to be fed up with or a child to unknowingly transmit his resentments onto. When he switched off his assortment of tools, there was no fight upstairs waiting for him. No dishes destined to be chucked at the walls, no closed fist fights to be had with someone much weaker than him. He felt a sense of emptiness. He threw an extra couple of logs into the fireplace and sat in his chair to watch TV, preparing to enjoy another evening of the carpentry channel and gentle drinking before passing out on his recliner. Harry flinched at his reflection as he drunkenly stumbled to the bathroom; for a few seconds, it was like his father was standing in front of him. He had nightmares of his father reaching through the mirror with his calloused fingers, gripping Harry's shoulders tight, hurting his arms before telling him with his rotten whiskey breath just how "proud he was."

Harry found himself enamored with how his fire danced, its orange appendages flicking back and forth as if they were sarcastically applauding his life every time he went to warm his home. One night, in a drunken stupor, a casually aimed toss onto the fire caused a half-burned piece of wood to roll out onto the floor. Immediately, the drapery and carpet surrounding the fireplace caught on fire, the orange glow climbing upwards towards the roof. Harry stood in awe, half astounded by its beauty and half startled by its ferocious speed. After a minute or so, the fire had reached his roof and began to peel off the paint. Large sagging pockets of air began descending down towards the floor like bulbous stalactites. After the shock had settled, Harry went over his options carefully. As a piece of support beam fell behind him and the smell of smoke continually got thicker, he thought about how his father had died in a house fire just like this one. He wondered if he had made any attempts to flee. He wondered whether or not his father thought about his mother while he burned to death, whether he thought about Harry. Whether his father had ever thought about anyone other than himself. And as Harry sat down to watch more TV, he realized his father probably thought about Georgi, just like him.

Kameron Skrobacz was raised around the Pittsburgh area and has always been fascinated with mental health and its consequences. "I find a lot of enjoyment in exploring those themes and they make constant appearances when I'm writing. I am a film production major and hope to be a successful filmmaker at some point in my lifetime. Other than that I live rather uncomfortably but with a great deal of solace."

Heavy Rain

Thiago Rego

Editor's Note:

Italicized line is a quote from the film "Blade Runner."

A man exits the building's main entrance. It's early evening, and it's pouring rain outside.

"Dan!" shouts another man coming down the stairs in a rush.

Dan rolls his eyes as the man stands next to him under the rain cover.

"Where are you going?" he asks.

"I'm leaving, Jay," Dan responds.

"No!" Jayden takes Dan's hand, gripping it frantically. "I don't want you to leave."

The rain intensifies and starts to ripple with a gust of cold wind.

"I'm tired of this. I wanna go home. You can send the clothes that I have at your place back to my apartment, or you can just keep them, I don't care." Dan pulls back his hand and turns away from Jayden.

"What about our New York trip next week? We can still talk this over," Jayden says.

"I don't give a shit about the trip! I'll cancel the train tickets even if I don't get my money back."

"Dan, calm down, let's talk, please. Don't close yourself up."

"Jay, the last thing I want right now is to talk about this over and over again, and I don't have time to talk. I already ordered my Uber, and it's arriving soon."

Jayden stands, stunned and silent. All they can hear is the relentless rain, the shush of car tires through the water pooling at the curb, waves of it lapping up onto the sidewalk. It threatens to surge all the way up to where the two men stand, to pull them down and under.

Jayden sighs. "At least put on my jacket so you don't get too cold," he says, worried about Dan. "I'm going back up to grab another jacket, wait for me here please."

Jayden runs inside the building and rushes up the stairs, almost falling over. Dan looks over at the glass door, as he turns his back, and starts walking out in the rain.

He is too nervous to deal with this situation, but the rain helps by cooling him down. He takes a deep breath as his shoulders relax and his body starts to shiver. Walking downtown feels kind of nice. The neon lights are starting to turn on, and the reflection against the drips of water make it seem as if he is in a movie scene. The cold makes him wish for a cigarette.

His face is dripping wet. He stops walking, waiting for his Uber to arrive. His eyes slowly close as he moves his chin up to the sky, rain streaming down his face.

"Thank you, sky, for crying with me," Dan says out loud.

As he opens his eyes, he looks back toward car headlights, which illuminate his face. Dan puts his hand up to cover the dazzling light. The Uber arrives. From the distance, he can hear rushed steps on the sidewalk.

Dan leans forward to talk to the driver.

"Uber?" he asks, and the driver nods.

Dan opens the car door as Jayden catches up to him.

"Please don't leave! I can't let you disappear from my life," says Jayden, loud enough to be heard through the heavy rain.

The sky starts turning from a navy blue to a gray tone as the rain gets louder and louder.

"I can't just wait around for you to decide what you want!" Dan screams, as he turns his back to the car.

"I just need a little more time!" shouts Jayden.

“And I have given you that. This is all the time I have! I’m right here, Jay!”

They both stand quietly, breathing heavily and looking into each other’s eyes.

“When will you stop running from yourself?” Dan asks, “When will you stop hiding who you are?”

The constant rain crashing on the sidewalk fills the silence between them, until finally Dan confronts

Jayden: “If you loved me, you wouldn’t need time to think about it.”

“What am I supposed to do? What about my family?” Jayden asks.

“What about us, Jayden? You are so unsure of yourself! Look at the stuff you are saying. What about them? They are your FAMILY. If they love you, they won’t care, and if they do care, you would still have me,” Dan says. He nods his head. “I didn’t wanna get in this cab.”

The rain finally slows for the first time in that evening, now just barely loud enough to make its presence noticeable.

“Just stop for a second,” says Jayden as he looks down. His body is shaking, and Dan can tell that he is nervous and anxious, thinking of what he should do next. His sigh sounds like a million “I’m sorry’s”. Dan knows his partner too well; he can tell that he is frustrated and regrets pushing him away. Jayden takes a step forward as Dan looks up.

“You’re right. I’m done running from myself. I have been overthinking so much about this scenario in my head, that I’m scared to even try,” Jay says. “I love you. I have always loved you. Even when we were just friends walking around at night talking for hours. It has always been you. I know that no matter what, I will always have you. And I want to be there for you.”

They hug each other, strongly holding their grip on each other’s bodies to avoid letting go.

The sound of the rain gets louder and louder. They put their heads on each other’s shoulders. Jayden’s lips start moving, and no one but Dan can tell what he is saying because of the incessant noise of the heavy rain.

As tears flow from his eyes, Dan nods in agreement and speaks back, then shifts his forehead to his partner’s shoulder.

“What is said under the rain, and cannot be heard, will always stay between us.”

Dan takes a step back to look at Jay. Rain and sweat combined, making his face glow below the neon lights of downtown. He steps forward and kisses Jay, hoping the moment will last forever, and that all their problems will go unnoticed.

But he knows that these moments will be lost, like tears in the rain.

“I’m glad you were able to take this off your chest, Jayden. But I...I need some time alone. I’ve waited too long, hiding behind you. Now, I think it’s time to focus on me. I wish you the best Jay, and I love you, but I can’t be with you right now. Goodbye.”

Dan turns his back and enters the Uber. The door slams closed, and all Jayden can see is his own reflection in the car’s dark window.

In the cold rain, now slowly ceasing, Jayden watches the Uber as it drives down the street and out of sight. For the first time, he feels lonely in this relationship, a feeling Jayden once caused Dan, but now is his turn to experience.

He stands on the sidewalk, alone, looking at the horizon of the street, hoping to see the car turn back.

Keep Holding On

Sierra Auman

Within the borders of the beautiful land of Pridor stood the royal castle. Old, gray stone lined with marble trim and limestone accents, windows bigger than the main gates. Outside of those windows, the once colorful kingdom now lived in a cloud of dust and gloom, dragged down by the war raging on Pridor's grounds. Screams and cries for help were muffled by the thick blanket of dirt, clashing swords, and hooves thumping against the ground. On the other side of the windows, inside the walls of the castle, stood Prince Arda and his personal knight, Gideon Grant. Between the pair of friends, anger boiled like water in a kettle over fire, causing more tension between them than the neighboring kingdoms now ensnared within a bloody war.

"I can't believe you," Arda grumbled, staring at Gideon with a harsh look in his eyes. "You decided you would just... just *lie* to us. Are you crazy, Gideon? You don't think *maybe* telling us your parents were traitors to the kingdom would've been important? Just maybe?"

"Did you expect me to announce that to the entire world?" Gideon asked, his tone just as hardened as his stare. "I'm not proud of it, Arda! It's *humiliating!*"

"It's still important, Gideon! We need to know something like that —"

"Why?" Gideon asked, his hardened tone shaking a bit. "Just so you can judge me based on the things they've done. Make me work *harder* than I already have for something I've dreamed of my entire life? That isn't fair! Arda, I worked my whole life for this. I did everything I needed to do to get here. If I had walked in and announced that my parents were traitors, I would have *never* gotten to this point."

"Gideon, they were *traitors!*" Arda exclaimed, crossing his arms over his chest. "Do you not get that? Traitors! They became spies for Aclye from the inside."

"I *know* that!" Gideon replied. "But why should the choices they made lay the bricks of my path? I didn't make those choices for them; they made those choices for themselves."

"Gideon, you swore under oath to be completely transparent with the royal family. That was part of your initiation. How did you go all this time, under oath, and *lie*?"

"I was transparent, Arda. You just choose to hold their actions and their history over my head. I had *nothing* to do with the things they chose to do to your family. *Nothing*. I shouldn't have to pay the price for their actions, just as someone else should not have to pay the price for any actions I choose to make. You're just too caught up in the truth to see that. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a war to fight in."

"No," Arda grumbled, stepping in front of Gideon. "I'm not going to let you just... just walk away! You don't get to do that. Even if you weren't going to be truthful under oath, why didn't you at least tell *me*?"

"Because you hold grudges, Arda," Gideon replied. "You never react with level headedness. When things don't go your way, you throw a tantrum as if that will change things. I chose to keep that information from you for my sake as well as yours. *I* create my future. Not my parents, not my career, not anyone. So just... get out of my way. Please."

Right as Arda was about to rebut Gideon's argument, he was stopped by another loud, authoritative voice calling out down the hallway. The voice belonged to his father, who was shouting for Gideon. "We need you," he exclaimed, "We're slowing down, and their knights aren't backing down. Let's go, kid! We need you on the battlefield!"

Gideon's attention was turned to the hallway when he was called for. His hardened gaze softened just slightly into a more nervous look as he returned his eyes to meet Arda's. Just as quickly as the nerves hit, however, Gideon was dashing off down the hallway, towards his bedroom where he kept his armor and weapons.

In a wave of memorized motions, Gideon slid his chest plate into place and tied the straps across his back. He then slipped his feet into his metal boots, claspng the straps across the top of his feet and around his ankles. The next piece of armor were the shin guards, thigh guards and knee pads, which made Gideon shiver a bit under the chill of the silver metal. After every other piece was in place, Gideon slid his helmet down over his head, strapping it under his jaw. After all of this, he picked up his sword from the mount on his wall and slid it into the holster on his hip. After one final, longing glance around the bedroom he spent months feeling safe in, he turned away and dashed down the rest of the hallway, heading straight for the battlefield.

As Gideon turned away and headed off to war, Arda was left behind, standing stunned in front of the massive window, staring out at the village-turned-battlefield. Arda watched from above as the bloody war raged on. Metal clinked and clashed against metal; screams echoed off the walls and alleys of the homes lining the sidewalks and dirt paths of Pridor. The bodies of the lifeless were scattered all over. Pools of blood were under each body, draining from the insides and drowning the dirt in crimson red. Horses, abandoned by murdered owners, whinnied out of fear as they ran frantically. Their hooves thumped against the ground as they tore through the village, trampling everything and anything in their paths. The soldiers that were left were bloodied and wounded, crying out for help, begging for mercy against their potentially fatal injuries. Pridor's lush, fruitful lands had become a lifeless warzone, scarred from the wrath of Gideon's parents — parents Gideon had kept secret, a connection and truth only Arda knew.

After Gideon's departure, Arda took off for the family bunker as quickly as he could. With Gideon and his father out on the battlefield, Arda had no business standing in front of the giant window, waiting for intruders to get in. He would rather live to see tomorrow.

He used his key, which was handcrafted by the weaponsmith for him when he was a baby, to unlock the bunker door. Inside sat his mother, who was holding his baby brother while huddled in the corner of the room, as far as they could get from the door. He saw his mother tense when he walked in, then deflate in relief at the sight of her son, rather than an intruder.

"Arda..." his mother whispered, a relieved smile appearing on her face. "You're okay..."

"Momma..." Arda murmured, stepping closer to his mother and his brother. "I... What's going to happen?"

"I don't know, honey," she replied. "I have hope —"

"No... I mean, what's going to happen to... to Dad? Or Gideon?" Arda sat on the floor of the bunker, beside his mother and brother. He held out a hand for his brother to hold and play with as he continued.

"Gideon left without saying goodbye. We were arguing when dad called him to war... I... I'm terrified that something will happen to him. The last memory he'll have of me is the fight, and the last memory I'll have of him is his anger..."

"Oh, Arda... I know how scary it is. When our home went to war years ago, your father was sent to fight alongside the knights of that time. He was determined that things would be fine, but of course I had my doubts. We fought about it, and he left angry with me. Of course, things happened to go much better than they are right now, and your father returned home healthy and victorious. But, I know this fear you're feeling. You're afraid Gideon won't return home."

"I just..." Arda stuttered. "I just wish I had said goodbye, or good luck. *Something* to make amends before he took off. I know the risks he takes just being a knight for the kingdom. But, it's so *gruesome* out there, Mom. He might not... He..."

Using her free arm, the Queen pulled Arda to her side, running a comforting hand through his hair. "I know, baby. Please don't stress, okay? It won't help, and you need to think positively. Gideon is incredibly talented for his age. I'm going to have hope that he'll be okay. Can you try to do that with me?"

All Arda gave his mother was a tiny nod, leaving their conversation to fall into silence. This silence rang within the confines of the bunker for hours, leaving tension, apprehension and a bit of impatience to seep into the air. To Arda, these hours seemed to be equivalent to a lifetime. It left him in a trance of thoughts, constantly asking himself what he was going to do until the war was over. That is, until the horns of peace were blown outside of the bunker, signaling Pridor's victory over their enemies. The horns meant to ease his anxiety only created more, as the minutes ticked by. Where were the knights? Was his father okay? Was *Gideon* okay?

One of his many questions was answered as his father's keys turned the lock, opening the door to allow the rest of the royal family to escape to their peace. Beside the King was Commander Quinn, who was doing what he could to nurse multiple tiny wounds across his arm. When the door swung open, Quinn looked to the queen and the princes, his gaze coming to a stop when meeting Arda's.

"Your highness," he greeted hesitantly. "I want to inform you that your personal knight, Gideon, has been taken to the intensive care unit of the infirmary. Reports from the nursing staff say he's in critical condition. One of my other knights said he witnessed Gideon getting into a fight with his parents. He held his own, but it was bloody. He did kill them, though."

Arda felt his heart drop to the darkest pits of his stomach when Quinn broke the news to him. It was like his worst nightmares were coming to life. Gideon was brutally injured. There was a chance he wasn't going to survive his injuries.

"Let me through, let me through!" he exclaimed, pushing past his family and the Commander. Arda sprinted down the hallway, making turns left and right, going down flights of stairs until he arrived right outside of the infirmary. A gentle hand was placed on his chest by Penelope Trinkett, the head nurse for the royal family and their knights. She and Arda had grown quite close when he was younger, mostly because he liked to play pranks on the royal staff when he was bored.

"I'm sorry, Prince Arda," Penelope said in the gentlest voice she could give him. "But I can't let you in to see him yet. I know you're worried, but for my staff and me to help him, we need all the space we can get. Nobody can be distracted right now. I'm sorry. Soon, honey, okay? For now, stay here. I'll fetch you when things level out."

Arda reluctantly flopped down into a chair right outside the infirmary, waiting in purgatory, for Penelope to allow him in. Seconds turned to minutes, which then turned to hours and nothing seemed to change. It only made Arda worry more, that Gideon was going to succumb to his injuries before Arda could give him a farewell, or even an apology.

"How is he?" Commander Quinn asked, walking over and sitting beside Arda. All he was given from Arda in return was a shake of his head.

"They won't let me in until he's stable," Arda murmured. "That was hours ago, Quinn. What if...What if his injuries kill him? I... I'm so worried about him."

"I'm sure he'll scold me later for this, but he *requested* to fight his parents all alone. When they faced the last remaining knights in the center of the village, he stepped forward through the crowd with the darkest, most angry glare I've ever seen on his face before. The look he gave them... It was full of pure, unadulterated *hatred*, Prince. I think... I think Gideon wanted the satisfaction of ridding this world of them once and for all, after all the heartache they caused his home."

"But, why did he have to do it alone?" Arda asked in a whisper. Why would he think it was a smart idea for him to battle them both by himself? He... He's so *stupid*."

"I have an inkling that he wanted to prove something to the remaining brigade. Prove that their actions do not influence his own, which is outrageous," Quinn grumbled. "I would have never doubted his ability for a second. Gideon is one of the best knights Pridor has seen within my time as the commander. His family history means nothing to me. His skill is what matters."

"He... Oh, Quinn..." Arda mumbled. "He felt he had to prove himself because of *me*. Before Dad called him to fight, we were arguing. I chastised him for keeping his family lineage a secret, and one of the last things he said to me was his family's actions don't create his path, he does. I feel so terrible for fighting with him before he was sent to battle. Will I ever get to make amends?"

"The best thing we can do right now is hope," Quinn replied, placing a hand on Arda's shoulder. "Gideon is not only talented, but he's strong. It's going to take a lot before he gives up this fight, and if I know him well enough, I know he was fighting for you. You're his best friend, Arda. You're the reason he didn't quit when he first started and was treated like the servant boy for the brigade. You're the reason he continues to work hard, arguably more than he should some days. It's all so he can protect you. It's all for you. You're his inspiration. Don't let this little scuffle be the thing that tears your friendship apart. I have hope Gideon will survive. Where's your hope for him, Prince Arda?"

The words Quinn spoke hit a nerve in Arda's heart, but not in a sense to make him cry. He knew Quinn was right about what he said. Gideon was not only skilled, but he was extremely strong and stubborn as hell. He would never leave this life without making amends. The two of them *had* to make up now.

"Prince Arda," Penelope called, peeking out from around the doorframe. "We have him stable. You may come in now. Please, be gentle."

Arda shot up from his seat and quickly made his way to Gideon's bedside. It hurt his chest to see his best friend bedridden, wrapped with gauze, his wounds drowning in a mix of rubbing alcohol and healing creams. But, no matter how painful it was to see him like that, Arda knew it meant that Gideon had a chance. That's what had to matter to him.

Once Penelope stepped out of the room, Arda knelt beside Gideon's bed and placed a gentle hand on his friend's wrist. "Gideon? I know you're probably asleep, which is good, because you need it. But I need to talk to you. So, listen in your sleep, you stubborn ass, because this is important. Uh... You're not going to like hearing this, but Quinn told me you requested to fight your parents alone. I know you get your skill from them, whether you ever admit it or not. They *were* the best knights of their time for a reason. Anyway, you get it from them. You've been such a gift to me and my family. So, I owe you an apology. Keeping your family heritage a secret from me really should not have mattered, and I don't know why I made it matter. You are Gideon Grant. You are not your parents. I'm so sorry. If I could go back and change what I said to you, I would."

Arda stared down at Gideon, searching for any trace of comprehension in his static expression. When he got nothing, he took a tiny breath in, then continued speaking.

"I'm not sure if you're going to survive your injuries. Penelope doesn't even know. But, if your final act as a knight for us was to take down your tyrannical parents, then I am going to make it my life's mission to guarantee the people of Pridor remember your name. They will never again remember you as the son of traitors, but rather as Pridor's hero. As for me, I will always remember the servant boy who would play in the gardens with me during his breaks. The teenager who begged for a chance to try out for the knight's brigade. I'll remember that little temper tantrum you threw when Dad assigned you to the guard position instead. Right after you spent years being the servant boy fresh out of basic training. I'm going to remember the best moments I had with you. You're my best friend. I want to keep it that way, whether you wake up tomorrow or not."

Arda's gaze darkened just a bit when, yet again, not even a stir came from Gideon. Arda removed his hand from Gideon's wrist and backed away. He headed back out into the hall to grab one of the lobby chairs and move it into Gideon's room. Arda ended up staying in Gideon's room for days, waiting for any sign that Gideon was going to wake up. As time went on, he began losing the hope Quinn told him to have. All he did was watch Gideon, eat and sleep. He refused to leave and asked a million questions every single time a nurse came in to check on Gideon.

On the fourth night of waiting in Gideon's room, just as Arda was drifting off to sleep, he heard a groan from across the room. Upon perking his head up from the uncomfortable chair, which had turned into his temporary bed, he saw Gideon starting to move around a bit, glancing about his room until his gaze locked onto Arda.

"You're okay! Holy shit, you're alive!" Arda exclaimed, jumping up from the chair and dashing to Gideon's bedside.

"Yeah... I am," Gideon replied, letting out a tiny yawn. "And still surprisingly tired."

"I'm so glad you're okay," Arda said, giving Gideon a small smile. "So glad."

"Yeah, I know. I heard your tangent," Gideon teased, a smile growing on his face as Arda's cheeks burned red.

"All of it?"

"Every single word. Quite cute, really. You gave a whole speech about me *to* me."

"You're an idiot," Arda whined, putting his face in his hands. "That was meant to be special! You're not funny."

"I will forever hold that over your head, Prince. You're never living that one down."

"I know I'm not, but I hope you know that I meant every single word I said. And that I'm sorry —"

"I know, Arda. I'm sorry too, for getting so angry at you. If I had known this was all going to happen, I wouldn't have been so mean. I'm glad we got the chance to reconcile. It would've killed me if I didn't get my best friend back."

"I'm not going anywhere. You're stuck with me," Arda said with a smile. "Get some rest, yeah? You're one of the best knights we have. We can't afford to be without you right now."

"I'll heal as quickly as I can. You owe me a spar when I recover," Gideon replied. "I need to kick your ass to make up for the fighting we did."

Arda let out a chuckle, saying, "You're on, Gideon."

Sierra Auman is an English major at the Penn State University Park campus! "When I'm not studying or in class, I am writing. Whether it be answering prompts out of a prompt book or just writing drabbles such as this, my brain is always creating a new story! My goals after college are to be a published author."

Mr. & Mrs. Chaos

Katherine Joyce

By the end of the day, Billy felt so tired that he almost forgot to enter the apartment complex through the back door so that no one would see him in his work clothes. He trudged up the stairs slowly, as if in a haze, his leather-gloved fingers fumbling for the keys. When he finally managed to unlock the door, he stumbled inside, flipping light switches as he moved, and placed the bouquet of lilies on the counter with as much care as he could stand to muster up. It was only then that he allowed himself to collapse onto the couch, sending pillows soaring through the air and flopping to the floor. He was all arms and legs, built like a rather strong stick bug. He barely fit on the tiny loveseat they'd picked up at a garage sale last summer. As more of an afterthought than anything else, he removed the black mask from his face and the gloves from his hands, dropping both on the hideous shag carpet rather unceremoniously, and groaned.

He was going to get it.

With a sigh, Billy sat up and massaged his temples. His gaze traveled around the cluttered apartment as he made a very short trip to the kitchen, his frown only deepening as he did. Over the last year, he and Mia had done their very best to make the cramped space homey. But money was tight and it always led to arguments between them. Mia was one of those do-gooder types who refused most of her salary because, "JUSTICE HAS NO PAYCHECK." This was much to Billy's annoyance. Justice was nice and everything, but just like freedom, and peace and all those other silly ideals, it didn't keep the water running. By contrast, Billy's work was lucrative and risky, and it often bought him a mind-numbing lecture from Mia for his troubles. He was only making about half of what he'd made before he'd fallen for her. They'd worked in the same arena for years, and now, he routinely kept her in business. Losing so often didn't particularly hurt his pride. Not anymore. Because really, he'd won.

No one in the city of Goldcrest knew that at the end of the day, their darling little Starlight crawled home to the infamously malicious Mr. Chaos. No one knew that he had proposed mid-battle atop a skyscraper. No one knew that they had been married for one beautiful year to the day.

But tonight, he was going to get it.

The banged-up clock on the far wall of the kitchen read 6:19 p.m. Billy checked the calendar, tracing the red heart penned around that day's date with his finger. Their reservation was meant to be for 7:00 p.m. Changing from his work suit to a regular suit would take no time at all, but he knew that getting dolled up was an entire ordeal for Mia. It took her twenty minutes to pick out a pair of shoes. And *that* was banking on the meager hope that she didn't yell at him first.

After putting a classical CD in the stereo, Billy blindly went through the motions of getting ready: he washed the grime off his face, ran his fingers through his unruly blond curls, dressed in his fresh-from-the-dry-cleaner suit and even splashed on a little cologne. The orchestral music had an oddly calming effect on the man who the city had deemed "Mr. Chaos." He particularly enjoyed Vivaldi.

At the clicking sound of the key in the doorknob, Billy scooped up the bouquet of flowers in a panic and tried to straighten his tie with his free hand. But that only seemed to skew it more. Frantically, he leaned against the countertop, trying to look casual, and plastered a dazzling smile on his face as Mia pushed open the door.

"Happy Anniversary!"

Outside of work, Mia Hilton was about as intimidating as a marshmallow peep. She wore her raven-black hair in a tight high ponytail so that it swished as she moved. On her off days, she usually tied it with a pink ribbon. She barely reached his shoulders and refused to wear pumps. She loved nothing more than spending Friday nights snuggled under an endless pile of blankets on that teeny couch, watching old Disney princess movies and drinking hot cocoa made from a powdered mix.

Life with Mia was softer and safer than he'd ever imagined life could be. They'd met about two years ago in a drugstore, both nursing wounds inflicted by the other during a particularly horrible battle the night before. They had gotten into such a heated fight over the last pack of bandages on the shelf that the manager had thrown them out. He'd been *fuming* at such humiliation, already scouring his mind for methods of revenge. But with a laugh, she'd offered him a hand up off the sidewalk and a coffee at the shop next door. Too stunned to argue, he'd agreed.

"I'm Mia," she'd said then, her smile like a perfect summer night as she straightened her gold-wire glasses.

"Billy."

He had been the first to make the connection between the heroine and the girlfriend. A fire he'd caused on the east side of town had left the gloveless Starlight with terrible burns all over her hands. Mia had done the best to hide her affliction at lunch the following day, but even picking up a fork appeared to cause her pain. The realization came to him with startling clarity, and while Mr. Chaos continued to cause mischief for Starlight, the newspapers noted that he never set fire to a building again, and Mia found a pair of heat-resistant gloves on her doorstep the next morning. Eventually, she too made the discovery, and together, they decided that they didn't care.

With both of their identities known to each other, work became a little like a game. He *lived* for her hidden smirks, her stolen kisses, her secret winks. Being married only added to the fun. He'd cause enough trouble to get her attention, she'd save the day in typical heroic fashion, and he would narrowly slip out of her grasp, *every single time*, leaving her to smile for the cameras, while he slinked away to wait for her in their crummy apartment that had somehow become home.

Mr. Chaos wasn't afraid of Starlight. That much was obvious to those who watched the news. But Billy Hilton... Billy Hilton might have been a little afraid of Mia.

Standing there in the kitchen, precariously leaned against the faux-marble counter, lilies still in hand, the most feared villain in all of Goldcrest braced himself for whatever horror his wife was about to unleash upon him.

She yanked the white cloak off of her shoulders, balled it up, and threw it at his head. A moment later, the slam of their bedroom door indicated that he was alone again. He sighed, thinking that he probably should have been grateful, but definitely wasn't.

After Billy had unburied himself from her cloak, he noticed a few blood stains across the quilted pattern. His stomach churned uneasily, but he brought it over to the bathroom sink, treated the red spots with cold water and stain remover, and left it there to soak. It was only then that he tiptoed over to the bedroom door and knocked softly. "Sweetheart?"

The door opened, but only long and wide enough for her to toss the suit out. Then it slammed shut again. "Set that to soak, will you?" Her voice was even – deadly. He swallowed. "I'll do the laundry later."

Billy stooped to pick up her white suit, becoming increasingly distressed as he found more blood stains dotting the sleeves. "Mia?" he asked, trying to keep his voice calm as his heart thudded in his chest. "Are you... are you okay?"

"I'm *fine*. I'll be out in a minute. Just let me fix my hair in peace, William."

William. He really was in trouble now. No one called him William. He'd killed the last person who tried. And yet, he felt more afraid for himself.

"Mia, listen," he said desperately, leaning his forehead on the door as he spoke. "If you're hurt—"

"I'm *fine*."

"I didn't mean to —"

The door swung open with astounding force, smacking Billy square in the nose and sending him sprawling backwards onto the floor. He yelped, immediately clutching his nose as blood spurted through his fingertips.

“What was *that* for?”

Mia had initially gasped at the sound of impact, but the surprise hardened on her face. “Oh, so a little blood bothers you now?”

From his place on the floor, Billy could see that Mia was wearing a very pretty purple dress, with long fluttery sleeves. She’d done her hair up in its usual ponytail and swapped her dreaded contact lenses for her favorite pair of gold-wired glasses.

To look at Mia was to feel safe. The people of Goldcrest knew it, and for a moment, he did, too. This was *Mia*, after all: Mia who had slipped money in his pocket when he’d bought the coffees for their first date, Mia who always stopped to feed the pigeons in the park, Mia who volunteered at the soup kitchen every Thanksgiving, Mia who too often protected everyone but herself.

“I thought you were going to wear the pink dress. You set it out last night,” he waved his tie around a bit as he pushed himself back up again. “I wore this one to match.”

“The pink dress won’t cover my bandages,” she snapped, although her dark eyes softened slightly as he held up the tie with his clean hand. It looked as if she was fighting a smile.

“Don’t get me wrong, you look beautiful!” said Billy, trying to avoid letting blood drip into his mouth as he spoke. He tilted his head back. “You always do. I just... I noticed, that’s all.”

“Don’t do that. Let me get you some ice.”

Mia hurried over to the kitchen and made a cold compress with a rag. Both of them were incredibly skilled at quick first-aid, unfortunately used to patching each other up after fights with other adversaries. When she returned, she refused to meet his eyes, not even when she pressed the damp rag to his nose.

“Does that feel any better?”

“A little,” he admitted. “Did you know I was there?”

“I didn’t know you had your face squished against the door, if that’s what you’re asking. I was kind of going for your knee or something. Nothing major. Just a bruise. Make you feel it in the morning,” she glanced over her shoulder at the kitchen clock. “We’re going to be late for dinner.”

“Never mind that,” he cradled her face in his hands. “Tell me the truth. Are you okay?”

“Am I okay?” The lights in the room flared. “Billy, it’s our anniversary, and you dropped a *building* on me!”

“I didn’t drop a building on you!” Billy said defensively, cringing. He refused to close his eyes, lest he see it all over again. Watching that skyscraper crumble had been a horrific experience. “It just collapsed at a really inopportune moment. I hit it too hard with a blast, which happens sometimes. And I went looking for you, but I couldn’t find you anywhere. I was screaming your name — didn’t you hear me?”

Something flickered in her eyes. *Guilt*. “Yes,” she muttered. “But I got myself out just fine. Just a few scratches and nicks. I might have to stitch up the suit, too.”

“You... you got yourself out?” he asked, his voice faltering. “And you didn’t bother to say anything? How could you do that to me?” Billy pulled away from her, grabbing at his curly hair as anger began to simmer in his heart.

Mia didn’t look at him, instead staring intently at the bloody rag. “What, are you afraid you soured your bad reputation by showing some humanity?” she muttered.

“Mia, I screamed for you for an hour. *An hour*. Why didn’t you say something? I didn’t know if you were okay. I didn’t know where you were. I was scared that I... that I hurt you.”

He was sure that his eyes were wild by now. He was called Mr. Chaos for a reason.

There was a mania within, the kind that had caused him to wreak such horrific havoc in the past. These days, he mainly caused small disturbances to give Mia something to do. But now...

An empty coffee mug on the table began to clatter on its coaster, seemingly of its own accord. Mia shot him a warning glance, but there was a worried crease between her brows.

"Billy..."

The mug shattered. Mia strode up to him and grabbed his wrists, her eyes wide. More than anyone else, she knew how ruinous his powers could be. Starlight was perhaps more courageous than Mr. Chaos, but his rage was infinitely more dangerous. What was the sun against pure destruction?

"Billy, you need to calm down," she was so close that their noses were brushing; he found himself getting lost in the dark caverns of her eyes. "Let's just talk. Breathe."

A vase was the next to go, exploding on the coffee table in a mess of glass shards, spilled water and week-old tulips.

"Billy."

Her voice was becoming dimmer, more of a hindrance than anything else. He knew that listening to her was the right thing to do, but the power was thrumming in his veins, power laced with the fear and anger of the day. He liked the feeling a little too much to let it go. It felt better than forgiveness. She *deserved* this. All afternoon, he'd been worried about how he'd smooth things over with her, when in reality, it was *she* that owed *him* an apology.

"If it hadn't been for the news," he whispered, his breath ragged as power thudded in his chest, "I wouldn't have even known if you were alive. Mia, I thought you were *dead*."

The lilies he'd bought for her tore themselves apart on the countertop.

"Billy, stop it! I'm sorry, okay?" she cried out. "I was angry, and I wanted to punish you, so I didn't say anything, but that was wrong of me. I'm sorry. Just take a breath. You're going to do something you'll regret."

They were both shaking — Billy with fury and Mia with fright. He could feel his power buzzing in the air, hot and crackling, like lightning on a dry summer night. It was absolutely, positively, unquestionably *intoxicating*, and he could feel himself growing hungry for more.

And then Mia cheated, because she allowed herself to float a few inches off the carpeted floor, grabbed his face, and kissed him.

Billy stiffened for a moment, surprised that she'd jumped to such a forward and underhanded tactic. It was much more his style of fighting. Mia tended to stay on the defensive; that was just her nature.

After the initial shock of her attack, Billy found himself leaning in as she slowly floated back to the ground, all the while maintaining that soft kiss. Just like that, his powers faded into nothingness. The room was silent again, as was his mind. She'd won. He laughed, pressing another kiss to her forehead before pulling away.

"Sorry," he muttered, still grinning as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"Yeah," she murmured back. The tips of her ears had turned pink with bashfulness at her actions. "Me too."

"I didn't mean to break everything."

"I didn't mean to worry you," she replied. "I think we're going to be late for —"

DING! DING! DING! DING! DING! DING! DING!

The clang of the kitchen clock startled them both, particularly Mia, who let out a little squeak and caused the lights to flicker again. Over their time together, Billy had been surprised to learn how jumpy she truly was. They both suffered from it. He laughed nervously, and after a moment, she joined in.

Billy touched his nose gingerly, but even the slightest contact caused him to wince, "I think you broke my nose."

"You broke my vase. And my mug. And my flowers," Mia offered him the towel again with a shy smile. "What do you say we take you to the ER, pick up sandwiches or something on the way back, and just watch a movie tonight?"

"I'd say I love you even more," Billy walked over to the counter, scooped up the sorry remains of her bouquet with his hands, and proceeded to dump them on her head. "Happy anniversary, Starlight."

"Happy anniversary," said Mia with a little laugh. She attempted to brush the flower shreds out of her silky black ponytail, failing miserably. "But don't call me that. Not tonight. Tonight, I just want to be Billy Hilton's wife."

Billy had been shrugging on a leather jacket, but he stopped halfway, "Really?"

"Yes," she nodded. "Being Starlight is nice, but I like being Mia Hilton more."

He stared at her for a moment, trying to snatch the right thing to say from somewhere within the swarm of butterflies that had been plaguing him since the day they'd met in that drugstore. But he only managed, "I love you, Mia Hilton."

She pulled a pink fuzzy sweater over her head, then winked, "I know."

Katherine Joyce is a second-year English major with a minor in History. She is incredibly excited to be transferring to University Park in the fall for her last two years of college! On the rare occasion that she isn't working on her young adult high-adventure novel, she enjoys reading the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, spending time with family, listening to film scores, and having movie marathons with friends.

People Like Us

Huzaifa Malik

These traditions aren't for people like us – Saadat Hasan Manto

I wasn't the only whore in Rawalpindi, but if "they" (those who write things) wanted one to remember, I'd like to imagine it'd be me.

My name is Alina and I lived in a small gully just past the transformer bazaar. You know the jalebi chowk, in New Shakraltown? Where a gas station stands opposite the decades-old seller of fresh-made sweets? Make a right there. After two more lefts and another right, you'd find my abode above the sign for the milk shop. It was an old city. One where you could leave a book on the countertop and write your name in its newly settled dust by morning. My Dadi's parents held farms not more than an hour's drive from there.

Now, the blocks of effusively cramped three-story houses threatened to overtake even those far fields. The tiny streets expanded in every direction, bordered by highways and loud maze-like bazaars. A beautiful menagerie of noise and pollution. But don't think this (even for a second!) a tragedy. Some houses were poor, yes, but we made do.

Inside is no pigsty either! My small apartment, in a widow's house, was of ample size. A single room with brown-red couches, and a charpai tucked into one corner. Blankets filled with all the artwork of a Mughal palace. On the walls hung small canvasses of metal and cloth, inscribed with all the names of God. Paint peeling from a few walls here and there. Ambivalent lighting casting the room in comfort. One end, a kitchen, with all the spices needed for any dish. The front door was metal, with raised patterns forming twisting stems and rusty flowers.

Once, the day started earlier than usual. I could hear the rooster cawing in the distance, and then the one responding next door. The many voices erupting from the dusty small city streets.

Sometimes, folks came by early in the day to acquire my services. On that day, one such man, a young man, knocked on my door as I was just putting chai on the stovetop. He was youngish, a few years older than me, but still only around 26 or 27.

I chatted with him a little. Gave general well-wishes. And then we went into the bedroom. We removed our clothes, both bearing the same slight level of reluctance, baring the same dark skin. He grabbed my breast, and we lay together.

If a man were telling my story perhaps he'd pause now to tell detailed imagery of my sexual character. Use amply fleshy vocabulary and curvaceous sentence structure. But I'll just suggest you picture whatever you imagine to be the most luscious woman in your heart; there you go, that's perfect, exactly what I looked like.

We finished, and after washing up, he began to get dressed. He put on his pants, and before he reached for his shirt, I asked him, "Won't you stay a little longer?"

He looked a little confused at the suggestion, so I repeated myself: "Stay for a bit, if you don't mind."

I reflected momentarily that it was odd that he came to me to satisfy his needs, rather than a wife. Or a lover if his family were the richer type. My uncle often said that the only thing separating a liberal and a conservative was that the liberal was richer; I didn't really care for politics.

The man wasn't altogether unattractive and not being altogether unattractive was all you really needed to get yourself a wife. He paused, shirtless, and I looked at his chest to see if his nipples could reveal any details that his lips refused to give. They remained silent.

I asked the question of most visitors to my home. It was unprofessional, sure. There were better whores and better saints in the city. But could you blame me? I couldn't bear the silence that a word's end left behind.

In any case, the man said he had to get to work, paid and then left. His clothes all on his person, he didn't forget a scarf or sock. The quiet, then, settled in the room like a visitor from out of town. I sat back down on my bed. There was a map on the wall whose placement I didn't quite like. I thought it might be better by the doorway. I remembered that I also had a poster in the back-closet. One I had been meaning to put up for a while.

I didn't really understand people. Nothing they did ever seemed to make sense. Once, I watched a Bombay TV show, one of the new Netflix ones, with queer folk and even Muslims. I kept thinking about how none of the characters did things that made sense, always loving one person and kissing another; never saying exactly what they mean. Later, I figured it's just the thing about people, they just did things that don't make sense.

Now, I considered going around town, talking to the shopkeepers (I knew who the kinder ones were by now). Or calling my American cousin, Mariam, who didn't particularly enjoy talking to me. But she answered my calls, so I talked to her often. As I raised the phone to dial her up, I felt tired, and decided against it. I went to lie down for a bit instead.

But my rest was rudely interrupted by a knock at the door. I sat up, taking one leg off the charpai and then the other. I leaned my head down, and my hair fell around me. Another knock. I came down and found the bangle seller, who had come by to put bangles on my wrists.

I had asked her to come by yesterday, as my cousin's shadi was in a week. Our family was relatively traditional, so the shadi would be a brief affair. Not more than an hour or two. Longer weddings are too showy.

"Wouldn't want to risk the nazar of others," my Uncle told me.

I halfway considered not going to the wedding. I was beginning to feel as though my family had learned a new language and made the events of other planets the sole topic of their conversation.

The woman had brown hair dyed henna-orange at the edges and wore a simple shalwar-kameez. She poured oil in her hands and rubbed them together. She massaged my hands to fit the churian.

She rubbed oil over my hands and wrist. Her wet fingers danced around my limb. I tried to focus on something else. Tried to wonder what Mariam was doing, so far away. But I could only think about how nice this moment was.

There was nothing particularly special about it, it was just an average day, average preparations for an everyday wedding. All things I had done a hundred times before. I was used to the inconsequential touches of the bangle seller. But I think the world was beginning to weigh on me the way the world has a tendency of doing. And so, every gesture of the lady's fingers on my wrist, was felt all the more deeply.

The lady's eyes were blank, working an artist's absent and precise movements. She lifted my hand to massage the knuckle now. She applied pressure to the linkage on my thumb; it was a little painful. My heart ached. She worked my half-coarse and slender fingers. She pushed on the knuckle just below my index with her thumb. I felt myself choking a little, with her hands around mine. I wanted her to keep them there. My eyes were weak, heavy like mountaintops.

"Is this what it's like to be old?" I asked her.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing."

I paused. "Would you like to stay for dinner?" I immediately regretted asking; of course she would, and I would have to spend time preparing something.

"No," she said. She slid the bangles over my naram wrists, one at a time.

Work finished; she gathered her things while I counted the money to pay her. She left, with the clanging of the metal door. Again, the same silent guest made himself at home. Though I thought his presence was not so bad this time.

I warmed myself some milk and sat down on the carpet. As I sipped the warm milk, I closed my eyes. The last of the sun's light faded from the world, and the night-air floated in through an open-window. A sparrow (having lost his pocket watch and not knowing the time) gave the last calls of the day.

It's hard for people like us, you know, the sad ones. What are we to do? I thought about my cousin; how she lived in faraway country. She told me how she could wrap the goras around her finger there, so simply! How they must have looked at her, those Americans. How they must have taken her in with their big American eyes.

I'm sure the intimacy felt more real out there. I heard you could even buy real love in that rich country. Maybe I could go there. I closed my eyes and considered the possibilities faithfully.

Huzaifa Malik is a Pakistani-American poet and writer raised across multiple countries. He is studying Comparative Literature at The Pennsylvania State University but is also still trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. He enjoys writing and sharing poetry that presents his emotions honestly and fully, exploring themes of love and immigrant identity. His favorite poets include Agha Shahid Ali and Li-Young Lee. His work is also forthcoming in Kalliope.

Smoke and Fire

Sierra Auman

You dashed out of the building as the flames nipped at the hair on the back of your neck.

The unbearable heat clashed with the ringing in your ears; the alarms sang a siren's song through the hallways as you ran, which followed you out the front doors.

Congregations of people surrounded you as they frantically asked questions. The soot smeared across your cheeks and the blaze of fear in your eyes said it all; things weren't ending well.

He started it, to be fair. If he had just stopped pestering, and allowed you to explain your side, the fighting would've never happened. Sparks would've never flown. Flames would've never erupted.

Your life and sanity over the others in the building wasn't worth it. These people needed to be away from someone as dangerous as you.

Before questions could be asked any more, you took off in a dash for the forest. Lights of red and blue shone onto the trees, the sirens of your future captors grew louder and louder as they gained ground on your footing. You were wasting time.

You pumped your legs even harder, feeling the ground fly past your feet at feather-like touch. It was as if your feet were floating above the ground, just barely grazing the gravel and dirt below you to create momentum.

Your heart thrust against your chest with every step you took, the adrenaline of the situation overtaking any fear, anger, or distress you were once feeling. Emotions were gone.

His face flashed through your mind once again. His stupid brown eyes, that cocky smirk when he knows he's right, his raven-brown hair. That stupid attitude he gets when he argues with you. As much as you hate it, and as much as you would *love* to punch it out of his face, you guiltily admit to yourself how much you adore it.

Maybe you're going crazy.

Your retaliation to his cockiness and the yelling was to light a fire over his radiator. Your response to his argument was to burn your history together. There is no maybe.

You *are* crazy.

You destroyed lives that never belonged to you. You let your emotions get too out of hand. You chose to make a decision that changed the lives of so many people.

You potentially murdered him, left him engulfed in the smoke and fire of your memories.

You're crazy, and the world is after you now.

Congratulations. You did amazing. Time to learn how to survive.

Sierra Auman is an English major at the Penn State University Park campus! "When I'm not studying or in class, I am writing. Whether it be answering prompts out of a prompt book or just writing drabbles such as this, my brain is always creating a new story! My goals after college are to be a published author."

The Cycle

Sarah Langer

It was hypnotic.

The rising heat. The constant drumbeat. The fluorescent haze.

The atmosphere in the Lansdale County Laundromat was absolutely electric. The wonders of the world could not hold a candle to this fervor.

There was something about the rhythmic *thump-thump-thump* of the Speed Queen Commercial, the beating pulse of the LCL. Few could fathom the excellency of such a creature, the divinity encapsulated in her four-vane polypropylene agitator. Surely, she was not the crem-de-la creme. After all, she was top-loaded, resulting in nearly two-fold of front-load water usage. But for 45 minutes a day, she was his.

He had grown quite fond of Machine 007, keeping strange hours to ensure her availability. He shuddered at the thought of some rando tossing his clothes in the machine, likely neglecting a color catcher.

At this point, it is worth noting that Shane owns a washing machine. At the very least, coparented one. His relationship with his girlfriend had been on a decline since March, gradually sinking into convenience. She had a willowy composure, thinning to the point he could almost see right through her. She was a great nurse, but always sick with worry. He was tired of coming home to a husk and she was tired of being one.

Besides, there were too many children of divorce to leave. The lease wouldn't expire for another six months, and he wasn't ready to say goodbye to their Dachshund, Cody. He wanted to believe a split would be amicable, but not everything comes out in the wash.

The bulk of Shane's formal training was HVAC units — a job which had led him to the Lansdale County Laundromat exactly one month ago. The unit was oversized, but a relatively easy fix. More impactful was the ambience of the place itself. He would stay there forever if he could, if not confined to the intervals between his HVAC gigs. Shane could not put a price on time away from his girlfriend, but \$3.99 was beyond a bargain. He liked to imagine he was walking straight through the gates of heaven as he stepped through the door, basking in the white glow.

His stream of consciousness was interrupted by the sweet symphony of beeps and clicks. The rumbling ceased and stillness settled over the Speed Queen Commercial like a layer of dust. He begrudgingly fished his sweatshirt and crew socks out. They were clean — they had always been clean. Nevertheless, the cycle will repeat tomorrow. Was wasting water such a crime? Is a crime of passion a crime at all?

The Lightning Bug Escape

Bethany Tomes

Where I'm from, we call the glowing critters "lite-nin bugs." They're the flying insects that appear at night, you know — the ones you collect in glass jars when you're small. These bugs were the symbol of youth when I was small; they represented wonder and innocence — everything I associated with the world and myself. They're the flying critters that when you're small, you think you've just witnessed magic they glow so bright. Though — after ten years "lite-nin bugs" mean so much more to me. Let me take you there... back a decade, when I was eleven years old.

November 2nd, 2013: Somewhere in Pennsylvania

The old folks grumble loud whispers in the backyard huddled around a growing fire. The flames burn red hazes in their eyes while they talk in circles, waving their hands when they speak, drawing in each breath with gossip. When the old folk gather, I think it looks like they feed the flames. The fire gets so big that the lite-nin bugs disappear, and I can't see 'em no more. The fire gets so big every time the old folks talk, that I worry they'll be eaten up by the flames. But most of all, I worry the lite-nin bugs will accidentally fly into the fire.

Sometimes when the folks talk, I catch what they're saying like their words are lite-nin bugs headed toward the feeding flames. A lot of the time, they talk about Miss Lina. Miss Lina is 20, and she works at the corner store just down the road from where I live. She's pretty, slender and has long dark hair. Miss Lina also has brown eyes — and I've seen them glow. I've seen her brown eyes glow and sometimes, if you look real hard — they flicker.

When I saw Miss Lina's eyes glow, it was one of the hottest days in September. I was walking home from school and I thought I might pass out without some water. That's when Miss Lina saw me through the window and came out to my rescue with a cold paper cup of water. She didn't hesitate, she didn't even say a word. Miss Lina silently handed me that cup with a soft smile — both of which I gladly accepted. It was then, right then, when she was turning to leave that the sun captured her eyes so nice, they glowed a golden brown just like how the lite-nin bugs glow. The sun captured her eyes so nice; it was like the sun was just picking up some of the glow he dropped. That glow just happened to fall right into Miss Lina's eyes, and it flickered there inside her for just a moment. Then when I handed the cup back to her, I thanked Miss Lina hoping to see that flicker the sun had dropped. But just like that, the sun picked it up and the glow was gone.

I always hear what the folks say around the fire. When they talk, they call Miss Lina stupid. I hear them gossiping around the flames in sharp voices and quiet scoldings they offer the fire under their breath. Their arms and hands wave furiously in the air as they speak.

"That girl Lina, she got herself into that trouble all on her own. I don't know why she don't leave that son of a bitch."

"Yea, he may be hittin' her, but she's the one who's stayin, that's on her."

"That's her only excuse, she's so stupid she won't leave that damn man. At this point it ain't on him, she's doin' it to herself. She could easily get outta there."

"I don't know how people stay in relationships like that, how could you be that stupid? Whatever, it ain't on us, we just gotta mind our own."

"Did'ya hear what Miss Brandi said about Lina? I told her all that business about how I saw Lina all marked up the other day and Miss Brandi had the nerve to defend that girl! Talk about getting too offended by nothin'."

In the midst of the growing flames and the old folk talk, I spot a lite-nin bug in the corner of my eye. The glow intrigues me as I quietly creep towards her with my hands cupped in front of me. Walking barefoot in the wet grass I take my time to slowly warm up and inch closer to the glowin' critter. Setting my right foot

down methodically in front of me, my heel touches the coolness of the earth first, then the grass splits in between my toes as I reach closer and closer to catching the light. Then, quietly, but swiftly I clasp my hands around the lite-nin bug tight so she can't escape. Her glow twinkles softly in between the cracks in my hands before dropping her into my glass jar. I screw on the lid and inspect my new critter as she glows every few seconds.

The old folks talk grows faint and shrivels up like ashes into the air as I walk farther and farther away. Then, reaching a quiet spot under the velvety black speckled white sky, I watch the lite-nin bug for the next few minutes. She climbs up the side and around the inside rim of the jar, she climbs on the underside of the lid until I flip over the jar so I can see her again. Realizing the lid is now the "bottom", she climbs to the "top" along the side of the jar and circles the glass bottom. I flip the jar again and she repeats her attempts at an escape route. Eventually, the lite-nin bug gets so confused she doesn't know which way is the opening, and which is the bottom and so she sits in the center of the jar glowing less frequently than before.

Worried that I'm hurting the lite-nin bug, I unscrew the lid slowly, set it on the pavement, and wait for her to climb up and fly away.

I wait.

And I wait.

And I wait.

But — she doesn't move.

Panicked that I killed her, I turn the glass jar over into my palm and the lite-nin bug starts to crawl in my hand slowly and settles still on my knuckle. She stays there for ten minutes. She stays there until the old folks finish their fire. She stays there until my mother calls me for bed. She stays there until the fire dies out. She stays there until the sun quiets and falls asleep. Then, swiftly, another lite-nin bug lands gently on the back of my hand, silently it crawls to my knuckle next to the first, and without hesitation, they both fly away.

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The Lovers Macabre

Ayden Mateo Herold

Celine bit her knuckle softly as she waited, gnawing it between her canines. She felt miserably cold, but didn't know whether to blame the cruel winter weather or her own lack of body heat. Normally she didn't mind feeling chilly, but tonight seemed different. Tonight, the cold seemed to soak through her clothes and skin like icy water.

She glanced at the broken window frame spewing frigid air. How long ago had its panes been cracked, split and shattered? Broken shards of glass lay strewn about the floor covered in years of dust. Generations of cigarette butts joined them, lying between the dirty desks (still screwed down after so long). The suggestion of curses and slurs was graffitied on the chalkboard, too faded to truly read now. A crusty mirror stood next to the doorway, though Celine highly doubted she could use it.

Celine padded over to the window and looked out across a moonlit field surrounding the school. Even in winter, the overgrown grass stood tall and blackish green, washing over in waves with every gust of wind. In one of the broken shards still bound to the window frame, a shadow moved slowly. Celine smiled lightly and adjusted her view.

Peter appeared bundled up in a patchy coat and an old scarf, steadily wading through the lake of flora. His clothing seemed eager to escape in the unrelenting wind, dragging behind him and flapping about urgently. The full moon cast his shadow long and far across the field, turning it into a translucent giant. Quickly, Celine fetched her lantern and held it in front of the window. From below, Peter saw its warm light. He lifted an arm skyward and gave his broadest wave before scurrying inside.

Celine's thoughts went to Peter. She'd miss his warmth more than anything else after tonight. He could always be counted on for a cozy hug, and his palms felt like heat pads on cold nights. Celine just wanted to be wrapped in him, their fingers interlocked and his head on her shoulder, feeling his heartbeat behind her back. Maybe she could get him to do it one last time.

Beyond the empty doorway, echoing throughout the worn linoleum halls, Peter's footsteps rang out. Celine could hear his shoes tapping against the stairs up to the second floor. She looked down nervously at her outfit: A cheap and oversized shirt with jeans and boots. It felt strange to be out of her normal attire, which typically involved a lot more jewelry and antique coats, but tonight called for expendable clothing. Despite years of evidence to the contrary, she worried Peter may judge her for such an outfit. Peter poked his head through the empty doorframe.

"Evening," he smiled with his lips and eyes.

Celine lifted her lantern and turned it off, placing it on the nearest desk. In its fading glow Peter saw her mouth curve upwards.

"Good evening," she said.

Peter took a second to trace Celine, his eyes trailing up from her dusty boots to her hair, nearly blue in the moonlight. She had dressed perfectly for the occasion except, to his surprise, her lips and cheeks gleamed a bright red.

"You look lovely," he began. "And your makeup looks so... rosy."

Celine gave him a wide, toothy smile. "Thank you," she nearly whispered.

"I'm a tad surprised you went for it, though," he mentioned. "I know tonight's probably gonna get messy."

Celine rolled her eyes and stepped closer. "I figured you'd find it comforting," she replied.

"Well, I appreciate the thought," Peter finished.

An awkward pause took hold of them. Peter could normally ask about Celine's day or bring up something fascinating he'd seen on the walk over, but his mind was virtually blank tonight. Even his body felt

immobile with indecision, his usual instinct to embrace her tampered by apprehension and made worse by the pounding in his ears.

Celine, hearing the throbbing in Peter's chest, grinned slyly.

"Are you nervous?"

Peter gave a small laugh, "Maybe a little," he said, scratching the back of his head. "Do you just want to do it now? I figured maybe we could talk a bit before, but..." he trailed off.

"We'll have forever to talk afterwards, right?" Celine finished, stepping a bit closer to meet his eyes.

He nodded gently.

Peter shrugged off his old, patchy coat and dropped it on the nearest desk. The wind blew goosebumps up his arms and across his back. If he'd been cold before, now he felt truly frigid. He slowly withdrew a pocket knife from his trousers and flicked it open, sending a glimmer of moonlight to the chalkboard.

"Should I sit down for this?" he asked.

Celine looked down and around at the grimy tiles beneath their feet, her lips pursing with distaste. Unfortunately, this was the only place they could sit together comfortably.

"Yes. Let me just clear some of this filth away first," She replied.

She dragged a boot across the dust and refuse, attempting to make a marginally clean sitting space. Peter joined her, shuffling his shoe through the layers of dust until he could slightly make out the once blue and white tiles.

After clearing away a patch big enough, Peter spun around and lowered himself, squatting slowly over the floor before dropping all his weight and kicking his legs out. In contrast, Celine knelt down in one steady motion, compressing herself lower and lower, before finally letting her knees descend to the tiles. Peter looked in the mirror and saw his reflection for the first time in a while. He looked ragged and tired, his eyes weighed down from his nearly nocturnal sleeping habits; his complexion appeared much paler than usual, as well. Peter forced his mouth to lift into a grin, to find comedy in his ghoulish appearance, and he felt a little better.

Not wanting to waste any more time, Peter lifted the knife to his collar and slid it between his shirt and right shoulder. With one labored motion he slashed away from his body and opened a large rip in the fabric. Celine slowly pressed herself into his back and reached over, extending an open palm. Peter clicked the knife closed and carefully placed it into her long, fine fingers. She promptly slipped the blade into her pocket, then pulled down on the tear, exposing more of his back and neck.

Celine ran her fingertips along Peter's shoulder blade, savoring his warmth like the last embers of a hearth. Her thumb glided down his back until it felt a familiar, dreadful aberration. She softly circled the engorged growth with her finger, deep down praying it had somehow softened its unforgiving anatomy. As always, the lump held rigid like stone. Peter could sense Celine's mood shifting as she traced that same old spot. He didn't need a mirror to know her brows were furrowed now, as they always did when she became frustrated or worried. Her lips would soon tighten into a thin line, and she'd reach her hand around his torso for assurance, as though he would disintegrate in her grasp.

Wishing to spare her, Peter spoke up.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked. "Do you really want to go through with it?"

Celine fully wrapped her arms around Peter, squeezing him in a tight embrace.

"Of course," she replied. "I'm tired of the possibility of an eternity alone. I'm ready for our future, where we can spend every night running in the dark, side by side." Overcome with emotion and anticipation, Celine kissed Peter beneath his ear, sending another surge of goosebumps across his upper body.

Peter relished the moment, then grinned, "You know, most people would just get married."

Celine chuckled. "Perhaps we can talk about that later," she smiled for just a moment, before returning to her serious demeanor. "And you? You know we can stop here and now if you're not ready to leave it all behind. We can find some other way to go on."

Despite Peter agreeing time and time and time again, Celine still considered the possibility of him saying "no." Their love was certain, but human minds were complex, capable of instantaneous hesitation and discouragement.

Peter gently rested his hands atop hers and turned his head back, meeting her eyes.

"I'm more certain now than ever. Giving up this life... almost everyone I care about, will hurt," Peter recalled the smiles of everyone who'd ever shown him love. His family and friends, his colleagues, his past lovers. After this, all he would have left of them were memories. Yet his thoughts went to the symptom stuck to his back, slowly growing its way toward his spine. He could still vividly see the tears in their eyes as his face became more gaunt with every visit. He could still hear them gasp when he took off his shirt. "But Celine, I can't let them watch this, watch me wither away."

Peter curled his hands around Celine's fingers, giving them a light squeeze.

"I'm ready to be done with this. I'm ready to be more than myself," he took a deep breath and looked in the mirror, seeing his fingers wrapped around seemingly nothing. "I want to be half now. Half of us..."

Celine took one last moment to savor the warmth radiating off his back, then sat up. Peter lowered his hands and leaned left, exposing his neck.

Now Celine noticed her pulse, usually undetectable, beginning to race. It was time. Her head felt foggy with excitement, and her mouth began to water uncontrollably, feeling a terrible hunger and thirst at once. With shaking palms, she clasped Peter's arms and pressed them tightly to his sides.

For the sake of his nerves, she recalled her own experience, "When I begin to feed, your body will naturally want to move and shake me off, so I have to grip you as tight as I can."

Peter let out a nervous laugh. "No complaints from me."

Celine rolled her eyes, but Peter knew she was also cracking a smile. Scouring his neck, she found her mark — the perfect patch of skin to nestle her mouth and nose into.

"I'm going to do this as fast as possible, but it still might take around five minutes. It'll get hazy after the first two, and before you know it, you'll fall into a very calm sleep, okay?"

Peter gave a quick nod.

"When you wake up, you'll be nearly dead. All you'll want to do is go back to sleep — you'll feel more tired than you ever have in your whole life. But you can't do that. You'll need to imbibe my blood until you feel strong."

"Do I get to bite your neck?" Peter asked, half-serious.

"You'll be just a bit too weak for that," Celine chuckled. "But don't worry, I'll make it easy for you. And then... then it's over."

Peter took one more deep breath in preparation, and Celine opened her jaw wide. His heart pounded in her ears, thudding like the hooves of a panicked doe sprinting through a forest; as to whether it raced with excitement or anxiety, Celine could not decide.

"Ready?" she asked, hovering just above his vein. Peter could feel her breath gently blowing across his skin.

He gave a subtle nod.

Peter gasped as Celine sank her fangs into his neck, feeling like he'd been stuck with needles. He jolted in pain naturally, and his arms reflexively tried to reach up. Celine was prepared, however. With a strength Peter had never once felt or could have imagined, she restrained him. Her hands gripped into Peter's biceps like a vice, completely immobilizing him, and his forearms uselessly flailed against his thighs.

He tried to focus on anything but the aching pain in his neck slowly spreading across his chest. His breathing quickened, nearly hyperventilating, and his legs started to kick out wildly. No matter how he thrashed, however, Celine kept him held in place.

Peter glanced at the mirror and saw his panicked expression, the whites of his eyes bulging wide with horror. It felt like he was watching his body on a movie screen, trapped within his own mind and unable to do more than observe and struggle in vain. Just barely, he could make out two dark spots on his neck. From seemingly far off he could hear the sick sound of heavy breathing and wet lips ingurgitating.

Celine had forgotten this feeling of unmatched excitement, a sensation like she was drinking pure adrenaline. She was stranded in a desert kneeled before an oasis. Her body was ready to erupt with energy, ready to run down timber wolves, fly over mountaintops, tear apart trees with her dead hands. She could feel Peter's body attempting to escape, but it was too late now. His blood was an unparalleled essence, to describe it would be asking an infant to describe mother's milk.

Peter felt the energy draining from his struggle, his desperate kicks and flails weakening with every instinctual thrust. With no more strength to lift his arms or bend his knees, his body settled into a cold, violent shudder. The sick feeling of icy perspiration spread across Peter's torso, soaking into his shirt until it gripped around his back and chest. After another minute he could no longer move at all, and a ringing sound emerged in his ears. It was tiny at first, but quickly grew into a loud, ceaseless drone. Peter took one last look in the mirror as the room started to whirl around like a gyre. His eyes seemed translucent, nearly one with the ghostly light of the moon and the pitch-black shadows.

Celine watched Peter's eyelids close as his reflection faded away. He was nearly there, and she was almost finished feeding off him. A new warmth spread through her fingertips, a combination of adrenaline and love pumping through her with every heartbeat. At last, Celine unstuck her fangs from Peter's flesh, using her shirt to wipe off her mouth. He seemed to melt further into her arms, limp as a blanket. *I'll need to be quick*, she recalled. She took out the knife again and flicked the blade out. With her free hand, she pinched Peter's nose shut between her thumb and index finger.

Peter violently jerked awake with a gasp, his eyelids just barely holding open. His head swam and waded in a thick drowsiness. He was being pulled underwater to a cold, but peaceful and enveloping slumber. As she leaned around his shoulder, Peter noticed Celine's eyes blazing an intense, colorless hue.

"This is it," she said, bringing the knife up to her face. "We're nearly done."

Celine ran the blade horizontally over the end of her tongue. From the tiny slit, a line of black crimson began to spread. She looked into Peter's now-white eyes, and with an impatience for their approaching eternity, she whispered urgently.

"Now kiss me."

With his last sliver of energy, Peter parted his lips and Celine closed the distance, embracing him with the desperation of a hundred years without love — and the passion of one hundred years of love to come. He was on a path now, a path in defiance of Death's grip, but laden with new pains, curses and thirst.

Yet as Celine felt Peter's hands wrap around her once more, imbued with new life and strength to be discovered, she was euphoric in knowing she could hold them through every opaque night they'd spend together — an eternity under the stars.

Ayden is a journalist and writer at Penn State. When he's not writing articles or essays, he loves creating poetry and stories. In his free time, you can find him recording his podcast "[Do You Make Music?](#)" walking around downtown State College, or browsing YouTube. His favorite works of fiction (not ranked) include "Ratatouille," "The Raid," ASOIAF series, "The Grand Budapest Hotel," and Always Sunny!

Things That Follow

Timothy Blakeslee

Crimson smear of low clouds streak the graying sky, where a cold sun paints livid shadows over rain-soaked fields. Mired stench. That sweet, cloying scent of things left too long to bloat in leaden air. Here, a horse — legs mangled, body sprawled, and half buried in the mud. There, a ghostly hand rises from beneath tangled, twisted wire. Flash, flash and flash again in the distant sky. Unnatural yellow light followed by the guns' low rumble. A fitful silence fills the space between, uneasy quiet torn to pieces with the shrill blast of a nearby whistle.

And it's up, up and over the edge for the storm beyond. The whole lot of us, crawling first — crouched — bent, then, standing as we shoulder our way forward. Line by line. File by file. Something I can't quite find a name for trailing me all the way behind. That presence I always try to ignore. Don't let him get to you. He can't catch you, they told me!

A few paces further and the machine guns open up. Their brisk chatter feels all too distant. Remote. The crack and whip of an invisible threat rippling across the field. Someone nearby falls down. I wish, "Maybe, I'll fall down too. Lie there, quiet in the mud and stare at the fading sky as it all drifts far away."

But I don't fall. I stumble on, until it's just me in the smoke, and the smog and the haze; only the occasional shout or cry from beyond the gray to tell me someone else is there. One more step and I'm at the lip. Now I'm sliding to a sticky halt, butt of my rifle pulling free with a greedy, sucking hiss. A figure moves from the other end of the pit. I raise the rifle and fire. The figure vanishes. Cold, familiar steel as I work the action. Am I aware my teeth are clenched? Another shape. Is it theirs? Is it ours? I don't know. I fire, again.

The third one's faster. Bolts on top of me before I know it, and we scabble, sprawling in a slimy heap on the ground. Grunting, as I strike and feel the give of something soft. Stagger, upright. Raise the bayonet.

Then I see it. That face. A face that waits for me at home. Dirty, smeared and bedraggled— something barely visible behind those clouded gray eyes. Is it fear? Is it shock? Hesitation.

The soft pop of a revolver follows the delay, a standing figure crumples into a heap atop the other. The smaller, panting, scrambles free. Slithers away and stares down at the shapeless mass beside him — gaunt, sunken face and ashen cheeks. Tattered uniform, once-gray wool still peeking beyond the mass of layered filth.

Pale lips move in silence a moment, then:

"But you... you're just a kid..." and the words come out with a frothy gasp.

I can't feel it, but I know there's a hole in me somewhere and I can't tell where. And the kid starts crying, and then keeps crying and keeps trying to shove his canteen in my face. And I keep trying to shove it away. Just... stare. Just want to stare at the sky.

"...It's what I asked for, after all..." and the sound of her voice falls flat in the empty room. She leans toward the mirror, fingers prodding at a dark blotch of deeper purple against pale skin; a frown wrinkles the corner of her lips. A brush — half ignored — hangs listless in the other hand. Curtains are drawn tight over the further window, just a little spray of sunlight left to ignite dancing sparks of dust in the air behind. A bed. A chair in one corner and a nightstand in the other. Worn floorboards half-covered with an old shag of tattered rug. An open suitcase sits on a chest at the foot of the bed. It is empty.

And the knot in my hair won't go away — won't go away. Like the knot he left in my stomach and — then — leaning closer to the mirror, probe at my face with a wince. Were those lines around my eyes? Had I been crying? Was I still crying? I step back and try to look at myself again but can't — too much! Too hideous. And then the floorboards outside the door creak. I feel a jump and a skip in my chest and turn to rush for the suitcase; only for the door to open and he walks into the room.

There is a vase in his hands. Swirling turquoise climbs its way to the porcelain mouth, where bright green, red and splashes of lavender. Bits of gold sprout in vivid color — he takes the room in all at once, those cloudy gray eyes finally settling on her. He clears his throat. "I brought these just for you, dear!" A few more steps into the room, and the vase is placed at the dresser's edge. He eyes the empty suitcase a moment, then back to the woman — who, for her part, seems to brighten a little at the sight.

"Oh... they're beautiful!" a distinct pause, then —
"What's with the suitcase?"

And in the moment, there was that hard edge in his voice, and I have to think quick — think of something quick — and nothing comes, so she just blurts the first thing that comes to mind and it's something like...

"I was looking for something, I thought maybe I'd left it in there after the trip," she swallows. Some of the color begins to drain from those sunken hollows, a sad little droop in the corner of her mouth as shoulders stoop and head bows toward the splintered floor. He smiles.

"Oh, nothing of it. I wanted to bring you an apology," and the two embraced.

He tells me he loves me. I'm not even sure I want to say it too. But I know there's nothing else to say. So, now I just say nothing at all as those hands claw their way against my flesh, fabric torn from skin as his weight presses me against the bed. Besides, he *loves* me, I say. Even if I'm no longer quite sure what it means. The rank scent of something strong lingers in his breath. I see the flowers taunting me from their vase behind him, as I close my eyes.

When I open them again, and uncover my ears, Mama and Papa are still fighting in the other room. Oh, but I wish they would stop! Maybe I can help. So, I slip out the backdoor and find a few of the flowers that I know Mama loves. I sneak back in through the front door and grab that vase she likes so much from the table. I put the flowers in the vase and balance the vase in my hands and step into the kitchen.

And now they stop for a moment. Words sputter to a trickle; two pairs of eyes turn baleful gaze toward their tiny child as she emerges, that precarious vase balanced in both hands.

But now it's me! They're staring at me! And I don't know what happens. Because then I'm staring at the thousand and thousand pieces of mother's vase, and all those flowers spilling across the floor.

"Oh! You! You stupid girl. What's wrong with you?" and she snatches the little girl's hand, yanking her closer, as a dreadful crack of the whistling spoon follows. *Snap! Snap!* The tears begin to flow.

"Why would you do this to me... your own mother?"

And I don't know how to tell her why I did it. I shouldn't have done it! And the spoon hurts and it hurts. But that sting always goes away. Not the words. They follow me up the stairs. Follow me, even after she stops.

And as the little girl goes limping back to her room, he stares — silent — arms folded across his chest. Those gray eyes, as clouded as that impassive face. He doesn't lift a hand. Not even as the vengeful mother hurls the spoon after, striking the child square between the shoulder blades before she vanishes around the corner.

In my room, I sit down with Bunny. Bunny says I mustn't be cross with them. Not with mother, even if she sometimes gets cross with me. Because father is often cross with her, and he was in The War, and that's hard and she doesn't know. But, Bunny knows father loves her. And Horse nods his head like he agrees — but, when I ask him what he thinks — does father love me? does mother love me? — I can't hear what Horse has to say, because it always starts with a neigh and ends with a neigh. I know he does it to try to make me laugh, but I don't feel like laughing today. So, I gather them up and we burrow deep beneath the covers together.

Sometimes, I dream. And I dream that I put the vase all back together again. And then father loves mother, and mother loves me, and nobody is cross with anybody. But today I've been bad, and I don't know why I'm so terrible — I thought I meant to help! But today I've been wicked. And I can't stop crying. So, I hug them both very close and shut my eyes and hope it goes away. Maybe, someday, I can love somebody too.

And beyond the room is only the soft scratch of needle on vinyl — thin whine of a distant melody, smothering the tears. A worn, tired woman rocks in a chair, staring at her hands. Somewhere, smoke from a cigarette drifts through the open window, gray eyes staring — staring at the cloudy sky.

Timothy is an undergraduate currently studying political science at the Harrisburg campus. Trim Carpenter by trade, he's enjoyed writing as a creative outlet for most of his life. Subjects of interest include history, travel and literature. He has a somewhat unhealthy fascination with ancient things, and no overseas trip is complete without visiting the oldest buildings available.

Two Aces

Ashleigh Earyes

He was the boy in my class that always wore a blue tracksuit, with white stripes down the sides of the arms and legs. He pocketed a deck of cards in his pants and asked me to play card games with him. He taught me Rummy, and Poker and how to shuffle cards the “dealer” way. With Poker, he used to cheat. Kept two aces up his sleeve for when I got too cocky with my hand.

When I foolishly placed down my ten on the cards for disposal, he slapped the table hard and called “RUMMY!” too loud for the teacher to appreciate.

He was the teenager in my class who began to dress nicely. He wore button-downs with the sleeves neatly rolled up to his elbows, khaki slacks with colorless shirts and black slacks with his signature cherry polo. He kept the same deck of cards in his pocket. They were cream-and-coffee colored, the reds had since turned periwinkle-pink. He asked me to play a game of Poker. I spoke sweetly to him, trying to persuade the aces up his sleeve to come out.

He let me win.

He was the first boyfriend I had going into college. We went to the same university and told ourselves that, if anything were to get in our way, we’d play cards to sort it out. With every fight that we carried on, I brought out his deck of cards and asked him to play a game of Rummy. The cards were brown and bleeding; the pink suits finally gave in to mere outlines while the black suits bled and ran down the sides of the cards. “Whoever wins, wins the argument,” I said.

He won almost every argument with his pocket of aces, and the sly smile he always gave me afterwards.

He was a casino owner by the age of 30. We had moved in different directions once we graduated. I had found out about his ownership when I took my new friend to the casino. He was dealing that night at a poker table full of spectators. He wore his cherry polo and black slacks with gold chains around his neck. He knew how to work a crowd, flourishing the same deck of cards from when we were young in front of people.

I took my seat across from him, placing my glass of whiskey on the table. The forest-green Poker table looked brand-new. I looked to my friend and asked for a light, balancing a cigarette between my lips. I blew the smoke into his face once I took a heavy inhale. He looked up at me.

He asked me, sweetly, to a game of Poker. I asked him to clear his sleeves.

Out came two aces.

Ashleigh is an English major who practices writing and drawing. As an intermediate writer and a beginner artist, she crafts her work in ten to fifteen minutes but revises for days on end. She enjoys a lot of music and utilizes alternative and indie in order to create a more powerful piece. Ashleigh has been published in University Park’s 2023 Folio with her piece “1930”, as well as Any Other Word at PSU York in 2022 for “Oil/Stool/Palette/Paintbrush”.

Vanity

Katherine Engleka

It was an ugly piece of furniture, in all honesty. The hinges were rusted over, the paint was peeling at the edges after years of scratches from pencils, and fingernails were scrawled across the surface. It was a piece that did not quite fit with the rest of the knick-knacks I had carefully acquired over the years. Too dainty and ancient to match my awkward artworks and oversized brown couches.

There was a mirror at its center, so old that green dots had begun to form across the glossy surface. When I sat in front of it for the first time, I couldn't recognize myself. The reflection was not the clear modern image I was used to seeing, but a rusted version, one that distorted my features to a point beyond identification. The drawers no longer opened smoothly, years of pulling and pushing made their place a home difficult to fill. The legs melted into claw feet, giving the entire piece a sense of desperation or hunger.

I wasn't sure when it had been made. I guessed the 1950s from the style of decoration, but I could very well be wrong. I knew that it had been my mother's, and before her it had belonged to my grandmother. It was an heirloom that had been a looming architect in my mind since I first laid my eyes on it. I remember the first time I realized that vanity would hold monumental importance in my life.

They had just moved it into my mother's room, but I was drawn to it as something of my own. I wanted to play with it, play on it, something. But my mother warned me not to. Usually her warnings came from a hope for my safety, but this time it was clear that fear drove her words.

She told me that it was a very old piece of furniture, and that it used to be a desk. She elaborated that now it was something called a vanity, something that she would fill with beauty products to keep her from wrinkling, from being dull or anything less than perfect.

The more she spoke of it, the further it pushed me away. In fact, for the remainder of my life at home, I spent close to no time at all near the vanity. Any time I would work up the bandwidth to get near it, another warning would emerge from my mother's mouth. She told me to watch what I ate near it, so as not to tarnish its beauty. She told me to be gentle with it, since it was so old. She told me that I must sit a certain way when I looked in its ugly mirror.

So, instead I filled my time with games invented by my brothers that ended with mud underneath my fingernails, pulled hair and a lack of tears watering the grass. I grew up with these games instilled in my mind, rather than memorized table manners and the knowledge of which product worked best in my hair. And I liked it that way. I liked that I could run faster than any of my brothers by the time my breasts came in. I liked that I rarely got catcalled when going to and from work. I liked that I could open pickle jars and kill spiders. I liked the amount of distance I put between myself and my mother's vanity.

Even though all discussion of my inheritance ceased after I stopped shaving my underarms in tenth grade, my mother still insisted on giving me the vanity once I turned 25. I suppose the gift was a last-ditch attempt from her to help me get a move on in life, to move out of my beloved studio into a home with a yard for a dog, and an extra room for a nursery. My argument of "a single sink and dresser being perfectly fine" for now went unheard amidst my mother's glee at ridding herself of the ugly thing once and for all.

It hardly fit in my current apartment and seemed to leave a sour trail throughout the place. Even the name left a residue on my tongue. Vanity. How awful? Like a piece of old, rotting fruit.

It was made of mahogany wood that was then stained white with veins of gold. It had begun to crack when my grandmother gifted it to my mother. I remember her complaining that her mother never took care of nice things. She had attempted to patch the cracks, but they were already beginning to show again. I ran my fingers over the surface and wondered if I should try to patch them up again. It's what my mother probably would have wanted. But soon they would splinter once more, so what was the point?

Sometimes, when I got home from a particularly long night where men were men and I drank too much and began to act like one, I threw my bra on it. When I woke up in the morning I would glare at it, that ugly confining thing, but I always put it back on before I left again. Just so no one would stare, or laugh or ridicule me for stepping out of line.

Despite my abhorrence towards the piece of furniture, I couldn't bring myself to get rid of it. An entire space in a room dedicated to presentation. Designed to make it easier to paint over any defining feature, to replace what are dubbed as flaws, in order to drain every ounce of beauty from the skin before we reach 30. This is what we strive for, what generations of women have strived for before us. I felt their pain through the old mahogany wood. Through the delicate pink flowers painted around the edges of the mirror. Through the reflection of the woman I saw staring back at me. I felt their beauty and elegance rushing through my veins, like a disease and a blessing simultaneously.

I watched as the woman in the mirror began to cry, and so I began to cry with her. Her pain was my pain and always would be. We cried for our own ugliness, for how ashamed of it we were. For the ways in which we had been taken advantage of, and the weakness that came with it. Our anger for the conversion from a desk, to a vanity, spilled out of our mouth in a silent guttural scream. For a moment I felt inhuman and then, suddenly, it was all over.

The pain was gone, and replaced with a feeling of peace that started in my chest and spread throughout my body. A peace to replace all of the fear, the jealousy and the lack of respect. It was a peace supported by the hundreds of women, who had owned the vanity before me. Who had looked past its ugliness to find a beauty, one that was desperately and utterly feminine.

Creative Non-Fiction

I Imagine

Emmanuela Eneh

I imagine that when my Dad pushed me, he immediately realized he had shoved too hard. Some combination of the crunch and snap must have tipped him off. I'm aware of just how uncomfortable it is to see a child cry; the quiet sniffing and big, somber eyes before the storm breaks and silence shatters are off-putting — no one wants to be the one around when that first-grade dam breaks. I know that, as someone sworn to do no harm, staring down at harm done must be like realizing you served your boss coffee that your snot-nosed kid sneezed in. I'm sure that when he locked himself in the bathroom, fear had wiggled in through one of his ears and wrapped around his brain stem like a dotting parasite. I'm certain that watching me be escorted by paramedics would have been watching a death knell toll. I imagine the policewoman's voice was a ghost of a horrifying future hovering over the head of "one of the good immigrants." I know the days in prison were embittering; I can guess that he thought this was all some grand plan — the police being called was a mother's vengeance against a father whose eyes did not shine on what they'd made together. I know his lawyer assured him he could spin a prison sentence, a declaration against family, as torment unto an only child. I imagine more than I remember the anger from after his release: it pulsed under every too-loud laugh, every reprimanding touch, every flat smile. If I could remember, I don't have to imagine the strain it would lace my voice with whenever I see him to assure my college costs are paid.

Emmanuela Eneh is an English major and member of the BA/MA program. Although she has been obsessed with fiction writing ever since watching "Avatar: The Last Airbender" as a child, she began delving into poetry and non-fiction during her junior and senior years. She has found these mediums to be incredibly therapeutic methods of telling the story of what makes her up as an individual. She enjoys tabletop role-playing games, reading fanfiction, and playing video games.

Inflation of the Spoken Word

Elliott Rose

In the bank of words, apologies are the gold standard. They heal rifts carved by a thousand sentences and silences, and they often create rifts of their own, if given at the wrong time.

Many save their apologies, hoarding it in piles stuck under their tongues — like a dragon, lounging on its wealth of treasure. But dragons would never survive in the 21st century. For wealth, at least right now, *must* circulate (or so common sense tells us).

And it is on that assumption that I trade apologies, choosing to toss a coin into the hat of the random passerby whom I almost ran into, and the random passerby whom I might have run into had I not noticed him, and the random passerby for whom it once had appeared that I may have had the possibility to run into.

I'm quite liberal with my trading, you see.

Because of this, there are few people I know that *don't* hold an apology from the Rose Mint. I have to imagine this is the exception — not the rule. Partly because I observe other people and the way they act, and while most are kind and decent, many also don't consider minor inconveniences "worthy" of an apology.¹ Partly because of other people's advice — or, more accurately, criticism.

Notably, they find my haphazard use of apology reckless and risky and — to some small extent — shortsighted. They claim that my generosity strains the value of my word — that by leaving a wake of apologies behind me I am somehow degrading the value of the words *I'm sorry*.²

It's basic supply and demand, they say. Inflate the supply, and demand plummets. Ignoring the fact that we are treating a complex economic phenomena — one which has whole careers dedicated to it — as a basic rhetorical metaphor, I think this is bullshit. Although, not in the way you may expect.

Rarity and "strength" are certainly tied together when it comes to rhetoric — I would argue especially so in the written word. Phrases such as "bullshit," jar us out of our standard thought process, forcing us to more carefully consider what was written. Can this apply to apologies? Of course — it's why "the rare apology" is such a widely used trope. When the norm is broken, we consider what has changed — what about *now* is special? This engagement could theoretically be the difference between a success and a failure when it comes to forgiveness.

So *rhetorically*, these arguments about the frequent apology have merit, but I think there is a fatal flaw to this logic — common experience. I commented earlier about how the written word is the biggest beneficiary of "dictionary restraint" (as I call it), but this is because of scope.

When reading a piece of writing, you are immersed in a highly constructed vernacular space where the number of 'to be' verbs is carefully tracked and adverbs are trimmed as hedges in a garden. Despite this, some words still are processed as so 'commonplace' that they are practically ignored when read by a fluent speaker. I call these *invisible words* — these are the words that disappear into the page no matter how seemingly awkward their ubiquity is.

Take, for example, the word "said." When writing dialogue, the word "said" is unavoidable — it is the basis of nearly every dialogue tag known to man and you end up just throwing it in prose to keep the pace going. Because of this, however, you almost never pay attention to it. Even when a page uses the word six or seven times in the exact same context, it's overlooked. Its ubiquity allows it to hide on the page, and this is invaluable for pacing.

This becomes painfully obvious whenever invisible words are removed. When, for example, an assignment pushes students to use more specific, rarer alternatives to "said," suddenly the pace slows down to a crawl. The page becomes cluttered.

Up to this point, I have been discussing this impact of rarity in the medium of the written word because it is the most controlled there. In the spoken word, it is much more rampant — a truly good speaker can explain the most complex topics in fascinating ways, using words that really enter in one ear and leave before making more than a basic impression.

The diction of apology is relatively narrow.³ So even in a world where everyone uses these words very, very sparingly, every single English speaker will likely hear these few expressions countless times in their lifetime (I have, and I'm fewer than two decades old). This means that apologies, while emotionally complex, are *invisible words* in speech. It is an expected expression, yes. It is an important expression, yes. But it is still *invisible* — when we hear it, the use of the word or phrase isn't what matters.

What matters is context — the moment you chose to apologize, how you approach it, and the way you hold yourself while you do it. What matters is the tone of voice and struggle of admitting yourself as wrong.

What matters is everything *but* the words.

An apology is *everything* but the words.

So when I mutter “sorry” to the guy who needs to change his stride to pass me, I'm not proving my apology so worthless that I will drop it for any minor inconvenience. I'm not devaluing the next time I truly ask forgiveness, blemishing my gold coins into pennies. I'm offering a courtesy — the smallest courtesy maybe, but still a courtesy; a courtesy that really has nothing to do with the words that leave my lips. It's about the mere fact that I'm willing to offer an apology for the smallest wrong — it's an olive branch to be kind, to be caring and to be considerate.

And I won't apologize for that.

¹ Telling, I think, that we use the word ‘worth’ to refer to apologies. As if apologies are a deity we pray towards, hoping that they will forgive us our trespasses. Ironic, because apologies are all about forgiveness in the first place.

² As well as “I apologize,” and other synonyms.

³ At least in English, although (from my minimal knowledge) I suspect it extends to other tongues as well.

Elliott Rose is a physics/math major pursuing a creative writing minor. He's from State College, PA, and a part of the Creative Writing Club at University Park. Elliot says, “I've only really been writing since high school, but I love writing stories and poems and getting any cool idea I have down onto paper.”

Lemon Tree

Sarah Langer

Pop used to tell me that on his birthday, he got to ride the barn pony to school. The walk was about a mile long, which worsened in the winter months of Wisconsin. By late December, snow was creeping under the roof shingles as he slept, drifting lazily onto his forehead. He woke up to the crow of a half dozen roosters and the ravenous howl of his chihuahua, Zombie.

By the time I was born, he lived in Jenkintown, an outer layer of Philadelphia, nestled away on Sycamore Street atop the steepest driveway known to man. Regardless, he schlepped our house roughly five days a week to bring my sister tasty cakes and play dumb when I cheated in Solitaire.

My grandfather grew up on a farm, which meant he cradled the lemon tree sapling like a fourth grandchild when he brought it home. He did not have my mother's blessing, nor my father's, but he delivered it to my brother. Josh was eleven, towering over the sapling that would eventually gaze down upon him.

When my grandpa slept over, he stayed in Josh's room. The tree fit neatly onto the corner of his desk, scooping up every last drop of the natural sunlight. By the time my brother graduated high school, the lemon tree was awkwardly balancing in a pot the size of a cantaloupe. It threatened to topple, and my brother threatened to leave.

By the time my brother left for Penn State, Pop's visits became infrequent. I like to think there was less to see around the house, no little kids running amok. Truthfully, I believe he felt outgrown. We moved the lemon tree to a wider clay pot, stashing it in the living room. Situated in the space between two windows, the tree bent and wobbled. It was desperately stretching for the sun.

My father fastened the plant with pieces of rope to straighten its growth. At this point, my sister had left for Drexel, and the plant was about six feet tall.

I used to yank on the leaves, taking one with me on the bus and running my thumbs over it like a boarding pass. I know better now; the leaves fall off on their own.

"I'm not going anywhere," he affectionately joked when I asked if he'd be around before I left for college.

Ever since being confined to a wheelchair, it was comedic gold to him.

His 100-acre farm was now a 7 by 10 studio, the kind with handles in the shower and baby-blue trays that fasten around the side of the bed. My grandfather always told me he wanted to be remembered as honest and generous, and I did my best to return the favor. I picked up three jelly donuts from Dunkin on the way, maneuvering the stallion of a Toyota I had inherited from the man himself.

My last visit was unremarkable. I teased him that he couldn't die before Penn State's Thanksgiving break, and it was more or less unspoken that he was praying to. It was worth noting that his tree never produced lemons — nor did my grandfather ever make it to college, or even remarry. Lemon trees aren't indoor plants, but our family loved him so.

My First Love

Emma Scott

I was ten, but I remember the day like it was yesterday. My dad and I rested on a cold, metal bench just outside the airport, waiting for a bus to take us away from the unfamiliar fumes that engulfed the surrounding air. Fog consumed the night. Flickering street lamps attempted to fight against the darkness, but they were no match. As I watched the road — surprisingly empty — suddenly, two headlights pierced through the brume and blackness that plagued the sky. The car, a spirited, vivacious, and electric shade of blue, reflected onto the puddles that lay in the street, lighting each one up as it purred by. I involuntarily rose to my feet to get a closer look, my eyes increasing in size, and my hands stretching over my surprised mouth.

I scanned the vehicle, investigating for any clues about the owner (I could *smell* the success of the man driving it). His fingers drummed the steering wheel, leaving me to wonder if impatience or excitement kept him tapping. When the stop light flashed green, the car's engine roared, its tires spun, and its taillights disappeared as it peeled into the night, leaving me with the darkness once again.

After the exhaust settled, I sat back down on the bench, turned to my dad, and confidently said, "I'm going to buy that car one day."

He shook his head with a smile. "Good luck explaining that to your mother."

I laughed at his joke, and we never spoke of the car again.

Four years after my encounter with my dream car, I got my first official job at Dairy Queen, the only place that would hire a 14-year-old. I spent my days making ice cream orders, stocking napkin holders, and cleaning the floors where rainbow sprinkles decorated the linoleum like confetti. When I turned 16, I transitioned to the restaurant scene and moved up in the world; I bussed, hostessed, and — finally — waitressed. I spent the next two years smiling at customers and pocketing my tips, and at 18, I had saved up enough money to buy a used, but safe car.

One Sunday morning, everything felt right. The sun shone brightly, awakening the flowers from their sleep: spring was blossoming. My dad decided it was the perfect day to visit our local car dealership (and I happily agreed). A copious number of cars filled the lot, forming endless rows that snaked around the side of the building. As I studied the gray sedan that sat adjacent to my dad's car in the parking lot, I noticed the same blue reflection I saw in the puddles that night at the airport. Time froze and daydreaming commenced. Visions of me driving my dream car occupied my mind; I pictured myself rolling down the convertible top, my strawberry-blonde hair flying through the wind. My heart, fluttery and agile, raced at the thought. Before doubt could infiltrate my mind, I turned around.

It was the beacon of light that called me eight years ago.

The car was just as — if not more — beautiful in the daylight and sunshine as it appeared that cold night. I whispered in shock, "Dad that's the car. Th-that's the car."

The windshield had no price sticker; I questioned if the car was even for sale.

"How much do you think —?" I queried before trailing off.

My dad sped into the dealership, the bell ringing as he briskly walked in. I waited outside for what felt like hours.

My dad waltzed out of the shop, giving me a warm grin. "It actually is for sale, but it is more than what you saved."

Disappointment (and confusion at my dad's glee) washed over me. My dream car — the one I worked for all these years — was here and for sale. Questions raced through my mind. *Can I take out a loan? Should I just wait? X, who are you kidding? The chances of seeing this exact car again are slim to none.* My thoughts came to a halt as they were interrupted by my dad's rich, yet soft, voice.

"Emma, I will pay half."

I stood stunned. I croaked a “thank you” and felt his arms wrap around me.

After a few seconds, my voice returned.

“You’re my best friend.”

“You’re mine too.”

One of his hands returned to his side, the other resting gently on my head. “Now, why don’t we take it for a test drive?”

My fingertips traced the detailing on the exterior before gripping the keys that the dealer gifted my palm. I slid into the car and rested my hands on the steering wheel. I no longer sat on the cold bench; I sat in the driver’s seat.

I reached my goal: I bought that Grabber Blue Mustang with the racing stripes in the middle. As I shifted the car into gear for the first time, the only thing that crossed my mind was this thought: *my mom is going to kill my dad.*

Emma Scott is a third-year student at the Pennsylvania State University where she is majoring in supply chain management and minoring in information systems management. Emma credits her creativity to her performing arts high school because it was there that she fell in love with the arts and grew a deeper appreciation for diverse perspectives. In her spare time, she enjoys long walks on the beach, sipping pina colodas, and many other clichés.

Ripples in the Water

Dana Lynch

Message boards on my laptop illuminated my face, columns of white and yellow and red. I rubbed my forehead as I stared at a message from my friends from the States. I pressed my fingers to the keys and began to type.

“Want to come walking with us?”

My mom stood at the doorway into the small green bedroom, watching me as I lay on a similarly small green bed, fingers glued to the keyboard. I jumped in my skin, whipping my eyes away from the screen towards her; she was dressed in leggings and a puffer vest.

“Do I have to?” I asked. It was six in the morning; I had just pulled an all-nighter.

“Yes, since you’re awake,” she responded before walking deeper into the condominium, purposely leaving the door open so I either had to close it myself or follow her.

I groaned, slamming the laptop screen shut before swinging myself off the bed. I glanced groggily around a few times before finding my own pair of leggings and a t-shirt. I changed quickly, leaving my pajamas on the floor to spite my mom, and I left the room.

My grandfather was standing there next to my mom, in a similar puffer jacket. They stood the same, their heads high and posture straight. It was like watching a mirror as they talked and moved aside to let me put my shoes on. They talked to each other in Korean because my grandfather didn’t know any English. I couldn’t understand anything they were saying, so I stayed completely silent.

We descended from the twelfth floor of the condominium complex before beginning our walk. It was a relatively quiet morning once we set out onto the main road; very few people – particularly the elderly – would walk by us with boxes or other heavy objects. At first, I was confused, but my mom explained to me that they were working. Older Koreans in the area did not have the luxury that my grandparents did to walk leisurely in the mornings.

We walked, swirling around playground areas and office buildings. The sidewalk was too far from the edge of the cliff for me to properly see the lake stretching alongside us that eventually led down towards the farmlands.

A few Kia and Hyundai cars sped past on the nicely paved road beside us, ignoring how close my mom was to the edge. She moved away soon after and struck up a conversation with my grandfather again. Although I couldn’t completely understand, I pieced together that she was enjoying the nice day. The rest of the walk was mostly a blur; I remember how steep the path was and the strain on my frail body, paired with the occasional eyeing up of the lake every now and then to try to get a better look at the ripples in the water. When we went out for a walk a few days prior, I managed to get a proper look at the flowing water. It was crystal clear, completely translucent to the point where I thought I could stick my hand into the water and it would come back dry – as if it were air. The only thing that reminded me of the water atop the rocky lake bottom were the minnows. They rushed down the stream as quickly as they came, bundled together to cut through the resistance of the water. It surprised me to see fish sweep through the water as if they were flying in the air, but it was captivating. I would have touched the water if not for all the government-regulated signs surrounding the area.

As if she could read my thoughts, my mom said to me, “You can’t touch the water. I know how pretty it is, but it’s for drinking and the fields.”

After 30 minutes of walking, a large cement structure came into view. It was distant and uphill, causing my shins to flare in pain and my lungs to heave with each breath. My mom pointed ahead to a modest-sized red pavilion that overlooked the lake. The pavilion itself was circular, forming a dome at the top with intricately, swirled designs resembling redwood. Once we arrived, I noticed that benches lined the

inside; I sat myself down, sliding my legs through holes in the railing toward the exterior of the structure. Stone and wood were the only things holding me from a 16 meter drop into the waters below. The rocks shone like gems towards the shallow ends of the lake bed. The large tan concrete structure neighboring the pavilion was a dam and water treatment plant.

“Dam, Mom,” I said while pointing to the flawless stone structure in front of us.

Her eyes went wide, staring at me as if I cursed. I waited a moment for her to realize what I was referring to, and she started laughing. It was rare to hear. She always seemed so stressed, and the sound was ethereal to my childhood self. She pressed her index finger to her thumb and reached towards my forehead, flicking the center, I squeaked, reaching for it reflexively.

“Don’t say that again. Let’s head back,” she said as she put a hand on my back, pushing gently to coerce me to my feet.

I don’t remember properly turning back, I don’t remember getting back to the condominium, and I barely remember leaving Korea a week later. Yet, I remember that intersection of my world and the dam. I remember my love for the water and the inability to properly touch or immerse myself in it. I remember my mom’s laugh, a sound I’ve only heard a few times since.

My memories of Korea are renewed every few years when I revisit, but the impact of the first time had never compared to the rest. The water isn’t exactly how I remember; it doesn’t look like air, but it is still vibrantly clear and clean. Regardless of my flawed memory, the tranquility of being in a place where no one understood me and I could not understand them, created a true peace alone in nature.

Dana Lynch is a computer science and English double major at Pennsylvania State University. She is an avid writer and hopes to someday escape the desk job lifestyle and write fiction for a living. For now, she can be found buried underneath coding projects and writing submissions at a State College local coffee shop near you.

Robert Horan (1942-2021)

Dana Lynch

"I have kinda sad news to tell you," my mother says through a mouthful of nachos.

She knows I hate when people talk with their mouths full.

"But don't get too sad, okay?"

"Okay."

"My dad died."

I choke, and a shard of tortilla chip scrapes its way down my esophagus. She stares at me as I cough it back up into a napkin. The mariachi music in the restaurant continues.

"Are you doing all right?" I ask in accordance with social norms.

"Oh, I'm fine," she says. "Didn't even cry. None of us cried." She means her siblings.

"When was this?"

She thinks for a moment. "A couple months ago."

"Why didn't you call me when it happened?"

"It wasn't that important," she says.

Three weeks earlier, she called me to tell me about a documentary on hammerhead sharks she had watched.

"So," she went on, "what we're mostly worried about now is figuring out what to do with his cats. He had three: Robert, Sharon —"

"Wait, he named his cat after himself?"

"Yeah, and Sharon is named after his sister. And the third one is called Gimpy."

"Gimpy?"

"He has three legs — oh, look, booze!" She points a long acrylic fingernail at the waitress approaching the table.

Our margaritas arrive in tacky, cactus shaped glasses. My mother squeezes a lime into hers. I take a sip of my own, and the alcohol burns the fresh cut in the back of my throat.

Three years earlier, I'm on the floor of my childhood bedroom. It's maybe a day or maybe a week after my high school graduation. I'm holding a crinkled envelope with my name misspelled on the front of it.

I open the envelope, and a check for \$750 falls out, along with \$14 in singles. There's also a small yellow lined piece of paper that reads something like: *You're my first grandkid to graduate high school. Don't deposit the check until the patent goes through.*

I bring the card and its contents to my mother's room.

"Your father sent me a graduation present," I say. "Do you know anything about a patent?"

"He was probably stoned when he wrote that," she says, not looking up from her phone. She's probably playing Candy Crush. "Just deposit it."

"All right, and what about all these one dollar bills?"

"Like I said — stoned. Let me play my game," she says. I leave.

A week later, Bank of America hits me with a \$14 fee for attempting to deposit a check from a nonexistent account.

This occurrence would never be brought up again.

The mariachi music is still playing. My mother is talking about the last few days of her father's life in the same tone one might talk about traffic on the way to work.

"— so Heather and Holli and Paris took turns admitting him to the hospital, but he'd always take his IVs out and leave without the physician's approval. And then every time he was admitted again, he wouldn't

let them perform tests on him — you know, the nurse would say, ‘can I see your arm?’ and he’d say, ‘yeah, it’s right here’ without moving it. So they ran tests while he was unconscious —”

“Is that —”

“Legal? I have no idea. But they wanted to amputate his leg. And they said his blood sugar was off the charts. And they found a tumor in his lungs the size of a golf ball.”

“Jesus Christ, he didn’t see someone about any of that earlier?”

She furrows her brow. “Of course not. So anyway, Heather said that one morning when she was visiting him, he woke up, took a sip of water, closed his eyes, and flatlined. Then a doctor came in and recorded the time of death.”

“And then what?”

“I dunno, she went home.” My mother shrugs and downs the rest of her margarita. I look out the window and watch a seagull stand on a snowbank outside. It eats a piece of garbage.

“Was there a funeral?”

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “They didn’t bother. One thing he was good at was cutting people off.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. A funeral would mean I’d have to meet her siblings. Then again, he’s been rotting in the ground for two months now, so it’s a bit late for a funeral. My mother doesn’t want a funeral either, when her time comes. *Just toss me in the bin*, she says.

My own carcass is going to the Forensic Anthropology Center at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, so undergrads can watch me decompose in an open field—at least then I’d be useful.

“So now what?” I ask.

“Well, we still have to find homes for the cats,” she says.

The waitress comes back with our orders.

I stare down the plate of inauthentic enchiladas in front of me and consider whether my mother’s father’s death will impede my enjoyment of them. And I know it won’t because I don’t really feel that bad. In fact, I don’t feel bad at all, which makes me feel worse. Because I know I’m supposed to cry, so tonight I will go home and attempt to cry myself to sleep.

They always say *it’s okay to cry*, but they never say *it’s okay to not cry*, and they certainly never say *it’s okay to feel complete indifference*.

I wonder what’s wrong with me — with us.

“So how’s school going?”

“Oh, it’s fine.”

Victoria Gough is a senior majoring in advertising and public relations and minoring in German. In her free time, she’s involved in The Daily Collegian as a lifestyle editor and in the Creative Writing Club as secretary. Her work has recently been featured in the 2022 edition of Folio. She loves snails.

Slowed to a Tractor's Crawl

Lance Colet

80 slows to 70, to 60, 40, 30, 20 miles an hour. I'm stuck behind a tractor. A mustard yellow behemoth with rear tires as big as boulders. It rolls along lazily, watched by me, watched by the traffic coagulating behind it. The road is a one-laner, with too many turns and thickets on either side for anybody to feel comfortable flooring it and attempting to overtake the crawling road block. Cars whiz by the other lane, the other way. The tractor keeps chugging.

We're in hillbilly country. That part of Pennsylvania that could be Kentucky. It's dense and dull. The dirt is dreary. The bushes are drab. The trees are green but they can't be described as colorful. Rotting houses dot the road every mile or so, flying rattlesnakes declaring "Don't Tread On Me." The tractor slows down. It puts me in an "I'll Tread On You" mood.

What's it doing out here? Last time I checked, you can't till a road. You can't plant crops on asphalt. "Go back to the fields," I say. I feel the swell of agreement behind me. "Get off the road," the pileup says. The tractor doesn't stop chugging. It hears, but it doesn't listen. I can't see the driver but I can guess that he's a smiling old farmer, dressed in dirty dungarees with a straw hat and a stem of wheat hanging from his mouth. He's leaning back, hands behind his head, humor in his eyes, while us tenderfoots simmer with annoyance in our air-conditioned Camrys, our Explorers fitted with radio and GPS, our minivans with built-in movie theaters.

Our eyes are glued to its rusty ass, but the tractor takes in the summer smells and smiles at the sun. Cottony clouds mill about like sheep in the sky. The dirt is dark with moisture and exploding with life. The bushes are bundles of thin branches that have fireworked into shape over years of slow content growth. The trees join together in lush barriers that shield this little one-lane road from the world.

Then it opens up. The thicket grows sparse, opening up into fields that are so green it hurts to look at, and the road grows more visible. Cars slip into the other lane, roaring ahead while the way is clear of oncoming traffic. They leave the tractor in the dust. Pretty soon, I'm the only one left. A procession of one. Then I too leave the tractor behind, taking off from 20 to 30, to 40, 60, 80 miles an hour.

It's probably off the road now, rolling through fields and tilling soil, scattering seeds, harvesting crops, engine thrumming with horsepower and full of mechanical muscles all pumping and pushing like a hard-working flesh and blood farmer. His sleeves rolled up, dirt caking his arms, the sun beating down on a weather worn face full of smile lines. Maybe I'd have those smile lines too if I drove at a tractor's crawl and spent more time playing around in the soil.

Lance is a senior graduating this May with an economics degree. He has been published a handful of times in past editions of "KLIO," "Kalliope," and "Folio," as well as the online literary magazine "A Thin Slice of Anxiety."

Sounds Like Somewhere I Once Was

Kate Irwin

"I know I'm not a hopeless case." – U2, "Beautiful Day"

I'm six (and I'm also four, eight and nine), and I'm squeezed between the boys in the back of Dad's car. I'm nervous, in the way one can only be for six-year old soccer (and four-year old, eight-year old and nine-year old soccer.) But a sound is slicing through my focus, and although I'm staring intently at my knobby, scraped knees, I'm feeling the melody cut into my body in an undeniably moving way. It's the favorite sound of every six-year old (and four-year old, eight-year old and nine-year old): Bono's voice, crooning on the "All That You Can't Leave Behind" album.

There is an established routine, and we don't stray from it: every Saturday morning, we bop our way over to Evans Field listening to "Beautiful Day," and "Elevation," by everyone's favorite Irish rock band.

I'm not singing along. I'm nervous, so I can't. But I'm listening, I'm listening intently. I can feel the music, I can feel his voice, I can feel the words. (I was young, but I learned to love words young.) I can feel it, and it's working, it's working, it's working. U2 is, indeed, helping to make me emotional enough to undertake an in-house soccer game with all the energy and feistiness I can muster.

We skip track two on the record. Too mellow.

"That's not a song meant to listen to before a game. That's a driving home song," Dad says.

"The years go by, and time just seems to fly." – Daughtry, "September"

It's a different car now. Mom's driving, not Dad, and the boys and I have more room to spread out in the silver minivan, the soccer family cliché, rolling down the street. Music is always playing on the radio. Mom is always singing.

"I'm not ready for school to start yet," I'm thinking. "I'll miss these summer days. I'll miss *this* summer."

Who wouldn't? These summer days in the 2000s are boring, fun, and sweet, and slow and all too fast, and although we look forward to them each year, they're never quite the same as they were last year.

This song feels a bit like one of us is reading "Harry Potter," in the back of the van and the texture of that plastic wiffle ball bat. I'm looking out the window in the way all young kids do (in the way that we all should.) I like this song a lot, I decide. It makes me feel a little sad.

Mom cries on the last day of school and on the first. I pretend not to understand. I scoff, but I know. I feel that too, that melancholia, that confusing feeling of the freedom of another summer and the quiet sadness of another school year gone already. I'm a year older, and so is she. Already, I'm feeling the irrevocable pull of the years.

"I don't want this feeling to go away. Please don't go away. Is this how it's supposed to be?" – Jack Johnson,
"Upside Down"

I stayed home from school sick today, but by the time Dad gets home from work, I'm feeling well enough to shoot hoops with the mini basketball in the living room. The "Curious George" movie CD is playing from my pink Barbie CD player.

He kisses my forehead. "It's good to see you're feeling better."

I certainly am. But what is this beautiful song on right now? Why is it pulling at my heart? It ought to be illegal for a song with such a haunting ending to exist on the damn "Curious George" film soundtrack of all places. Hell, no wonder I grew up obsessed with music and nostalgia.

I shoot another hoop.

"Come, we finally cry, oh, and we don it." – Bon Iver, "Wash"

Where am I now? I'm 21, and I'm looking at a particular cluster of pine trees in the hills of Austria. There's one tiny note, this one damn note, in the Bon Iver song right at 3:01, and I'm on the verge of tears. That one note, that little note, is sending me flying through the air to a very similar cluster of trees in my grandmother's backyard in Pennsylvania. I'm getting flashes now — this is becoming blurry — and it sounds like Bob Ross drawing similar trees, and also the dark green, almost blue, hue of the trees on the cover of that book I loved, "*The Blue Castle*."

What is the link here? Why am I almost in tears? How is it all connected? Oh yes, yes — it's coming together now. I watched Bob Ross at Grandma's and read "*The Blue Castle*" at Grandma's, and I spent many days, which melted into years, quietly admiring the stillness of those pines in her quiet, soft yard. And I must have listened to this note there too.

My God, it's an impressive note, sending me to Pennsylvania and Austria, and 17 years ago, and 97 years ago and back again all in one hazy, beautiful sound.

"Weightlessness, no gravity. Were we somewhere in between?" – Gregory Alan Isakov, "San Luis"

A shuffled song can be a dangerous song. I only let this one play for a few moments because it takes me to that first college winter, and it has a *taste* to it. It tastes like loneliness and cold hands and long walks and dining hall dinners and riding that fine line between unhappiness, and hanging in there and I don't think I want to listen to this song anymore. I don't want to be here anymore.

I press skip.

"I'm going to miss it when it's over." – Alessia Cara, "October"

We, my roommate and I, are both putting on makeup in our little shared bedroom. It's a college apartment with pictures taped to the wall and inside jokes written on the refrigerator, and an oven so small that people laugh when they see it. But we love it; it's ours, at least for a little.

It feels like we just did this last night because we did. But I've come to love this little ritual we have, laughing, and primping and singing our way through the early evening, realizing that we can do this many, many times, and enjoy it nearly every time. Still one day, it'll have to be our last.

That doesn't matter right now though. Not when you're spending your weeks laughing harder and more than you ever thought possible.

"I'm gonna miss this when it's over," I sing quietly under my breath, mirroring the lyrics coming from her speaker in the other room, carefully applying mascara with my fake-tanned hand.

I pop the mascara brush back into its tube.

"Are you feeling it?" I ask her.

"Believe in me. 'Cause I don't believe in anything." – Counting Crows, "Mr Jones"

The really impressive moments of this musical time travel is when I'm suddenly dropped off in a place I never was.

I hear "Mr. Jones," by Counting Crows, and it's instant. I'm on the front porch of a college house, drinking beer in the warm spring days of 1997. The fact that I wasn't born until 2001 suddenly doesn't seem to matter. Or I hear Jim Croce's earnest storytelling, and I'm drinking coffee at a diner in Michigan in the winter of 1974. It's a merry-go-round, switching its song every few moments, twirling me through my past, others' past, scenes and glimpses and emotions and the loveliest little gut punches. And, though the sound is coming through my ears, it's all just happening inside my head. I can't quite reach it.

How comforting is it that music can transport us like that?

How heartbreaking that we can't *really* go back in time?

It's August, again.

I'm not sure what year it is — maybe 2007 or 2008. There's a golden nostalgia in the kitchen that only exists in August. The one that only exists when you're young enough to revel in it and old enough to realize the particular beauty of these moments — the moments in which Mom is calmly serving pasta, Dan and Dad can't stop laughing from Dad's wit, and I'm soaking it in. Feeling the slight ache in my chest already, feeling at this young age the lovely ache that will come to define so much of my life. The ache that says, "My God, this is something. Can't we stay here forever? Can't we just stay a little longer?"

I'm transported to this dinner table particularly when I hear Sting albums and the "Home" record by Simply Red.

(Thank God my parents exposed us to such rich, gorgeous, moving music at a young age. Thank God my parents have given me such loveliness to look back on. Thank God I don't need to skip many songs.)

"Remember this," I'm thinking to myself.

The low sun drenches the kitchen in such a pretty light.

Kate is a senior majoring in public relations and minoring in English, history and digital media trends and analytics. She has had a love for words from a very young age. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys having dance parties with her friends, exercising, talking about the swift passage of time and listening to a wide variety of music.

The Ache of Endings

Kate Irwin

“So much of life is just things ending,” I told someone last week.

I said it last week, but I said it a few months ago, too. And I thought about it last night, and three mornings before that.

And I also thought about it a lot last year. I said it aloud to everyone about four years ago, when we were graduating high school, heading into the void, the group of us who had been thrown together since kindergarten and were now, somewhat suddenly, being separated forever.

“Guys, I think it’s our last first Monday of April at high school,” I announced to the AP Physics classroom.

“Kate, we get it,” they groaned collectively, fed up with my fixation on the passage of time, on nostalgia, on the endings of things.

But it’s true — endings are a constant in life. You get settled for a bit, and then time’s up. Move on to the next era of life. Whether you want to or not is often irrelevant.

A more optimistic person would immediately focus on the inevitability of endings beckoning the equal inevitability of fresh beginnings. And while there is truth in that outlook (as much truth as there is mine, the one that makes people groan and ache), there’s something about endings that beginnings don’t possess — there’s something that makes endings stick around in our hearts for a bit longer.

And I think that something is a sharp pain in my gut, and a dull, throbbing ache in my chest, and a squeezing hug with a level of desperation, and a lump in the throat and all the other physical clichés that creep on us when our bodies don’t know how to react to goodbyes.

Beginnings are quick; we jump into something new, and then the beginning is over. It ended. Endings and beginnings blur together, fighting for space, battling out the emotions between nostalgia and newness, between aches and hope, and the fine line is sometimes more than I can handle.

It’s funny when I think about it now — the way I felt when I first came here. Everyone told me how fantastic Penn State was, and I was skeptically optimistic. But that first year, I felt like I was looking through a window at everyone else’s happiness, feeling unable to take part in any of it. It was talks on the phone with Mom, and lonely walks and a rising panic in feeling like I wasn’t feeling how I was supposed to be feeling, not at all.

But then it became everything. When I look back on college now, I’ll think only a little bit about those lonely days. In fact, I don’t want to forget them at all. They remind me of how sometimes change can be for the better, and how things do get better. Really, they do. But now I’ll think about Apartment 11 and my favorite seat in the library and seeing my name published in the newspaper and sending lots of emails, and drinking with friends, and dancing with friends and screaming when one of “our” songs came on at the bar. And maybe I’ll remember the bit of panic we all had in this final month, how we said yes to everything and how we weren’t quite ready to let go.

A big ending is coming. And although I feel the familiar sadness creeping on me as I stare at my cap and gown, I’m trying to keep my eyes wide open for the next month. I’m using a little mind camera to remember exactly how my friend leans over when we’re laughing so hard we can’t breathe. I’m capturing the way it feels to spend a whole afternoon in the library, drinking coffee and writing. I don’t want to forget how it feels to put on makeup with my roommate in our tiny shared bedroom, or how it feels to receive a text from my friends on a sunny weekday, asking me to meet them at a Cafe. I loved walking to my Tuesday and Thursday class last spring; I would get coffee, and walk to class in the sharp sunshine, and I always enjoyed

that. I was always listening to “*Strangers*,” by Mt. Joy, and I know that song will make me think of last spring for the rest of my life.

I’m clinging to the little things — the laughing, and our favorite bars, and singing the songs that have defined the last two years and raising my hand in class to discuss something interesting for possibly the last time ever. *Click*, my mind camera goes every few moments. *Click*.

A big ending is coming, and a new beginning is, too. I know that. I do. But right now, I’m storing away the feelings, the images, the places, the songs, the routines, the books, the people that have built out the last two years.

I just love when we’re telling a story at the bar, and we start laughing so hard that we can’t finish it. I love that. I hope that feeling doesn’t end with my days here.

Kate is a senior majoring in public relations and minoring in English, history and digital media trends and analytics. She has had a love for words from a very young age. When she’s not reading or writing, she enjoys having dance parties with her friends, exercising, talking about the swift passage of time and listening to a wide variety of music.

Your Average Relaxing Canoe Ride

Katie Volz

My cousin Amelia and I, still drenched in the day's aromatic cocktail of sunscreen and Deet, walked down to the dock. We walked slowly, watching for skittish garter snakes, and coiled, patient rat snakes that favored the overgrown grass surrounding the shed. We untethered the green canoe that bobbed gently in the crystal-clear water. This was the first year we were allowed out by ourselves, something that we took great pride in as eleven-year-olds. We began to paddle out, me in the front, her in the back. Unable to agree on who paddled when, and unwilling to hear each other's argument, we pinwheeled our way into Bill's Bay, instead of the swift gliding that we had envisioned in our heads. We slowly wobbled our way over the water, fighting the whole time. At last, we arrived at our destination, which was a few hundred yards from our starting point, a short and tumultuous voyage. This was technically our second trip out; the first time our paddling skills were just as poor. Earlier that afternoon, we had been in the same bay, and chaos ensued.

"There's a spider on you," she nonchalantly mumbled.

"There's a WHAT?" I froze with fear, imagining one of the tarantula-sized fishing spiders that lurked under our dock.

"Just kidding," Amelia giggled, as if that was hilarious.

Oddly enough, she was not kidding, and a daddy long-legs crawled over the shoulder pad of my yellow life jacket. Gracefully, I leapt up, screeching "get it off, get it OFF!" causing the canoe to tip violently from side to side. Figuring that my peace of mind was more important than whether or not our family's canoe capsized, I stood my ground.

"I told you I was kidding because I KNEW you'd do this!" Amelia rolled her eyes and tried to encourage the tiny monster off of my shoulder as I flailed about.

"Is it off?" I asked anxiously, not risking a look. "No. Here, I can't stand, too. Let me try this." She hoisted her paddle out of the water, and began whacking my life jacket, probably indifferent as to whether or not I fell in.

"Tree! On the right!" I shouted, using my own paddle to push us away from shore.

"There, got it!" she triumphantly said, like this act granted her membership into the Avengers or Justice League.

Returning to the spiderless evening, we drifted into blooming white and yellow water lilies. For such a pretty flower they really do smell like cat pee. Amelia leaned against the wooden bar in the middle of the vessel and cast a lure into a perfect fishing spot along our neighbor's shoreline. I sat and watched the sunset reflecting off the water like a Monet painting.

"What is that?" I sat up suddenly.

"Probably a fish," she muttered without looking.

"No, its head is above water."

"A snake then."

"It's got fur."

At this she finally glanced up.

"Maybe it's a muskrat?" she suggested.

"It's too big," I rebuked, and she knew it too.

"A dog?" Amelia tried. Logical, our neighbors had dogs.

We kept staring and nodded our heads that it was one of their dogs, perhaps fetching a soggy tennis ball, or just out to cool off. That conclusion fell apart as the creature dipped its head underwater. We watched it submerge and waited for it to come back up. It did not.

"Well, crap. Probably not a dog, it's been under too long," I observed.

“Then what is it?”

“Okay, maybe it’s a person. We’re kind of far away, they could have long hair covering their face,” I hypothesized.

“Yeah, that’s probably it.”

We went back to our casting and skygazing but kept one eye on our mystery company. Our attention was delightfully torn away, as a fish tore off beneath us with her bait. We leaned over the rim and watched as her rod bent into a trembling arc. Alas, the fish made away, taking the foot of her rubber frog with it. It was even a big one too, one worth bragging about. She could have gotten her picture taken with it, holding it out as far as possible to make it look larger.

“Um, is that swimming around us?” Amelia suddenly looked concerned.

“Yeah.” We got quiet with worry, as our guest was making wide circles around us.

“What is that?” she whispered. It clearly was not a person, or a dog, or any of our previous assumptions.

“I don’t know.”

“Let’s leave.”

“Right now.”

We grabbed our paddles, and in a remarkable feat, glided in a perfectly arrow-straight line away from whatever that *thing* was. We stopped around the marshes and algae across the way near Camp Red Cloud and sighed with relief. We had escaped. The joy, however, was cut short: mosquitos murderously swarmed our heads, the sky was a proper blood orange, and dinner was probably ready. It was time to head home. We deftly used our newly acquired skills and paddled back to the cottage, pausing briefly to admire a loon that had popped its head out of the water. Perhaps it had come up just in time, as the nightly chorus of loon calls echoed over the islands, as if Opinicon Lake was secretly a water globe or marble that we lived in a month out of each year. We hastily tied down the canoe and ran up to the cottage, prepared to amaze our parents and grandparents with our horrifying saga: the fuzzy Loch Ness monster of Rideau Lakes. We opened the creaking screen door and announced our presence, as breakfast for dinner was being assembled.

“You won’t believe what we saw in the bay!” Amelia started.

“There was this huge thing and it started circling around us!” I added, nodding.

“Oh, you saw a beaver?” my aunt replied.

“No, this couldn’t have been a beaver, this was gigantic,” we scoffed.

“Yep, beavers can get up to 70 pounds,” our grandmother chipped in.

A beaver? We spent all that energy to escape the evil wrath of a *beaver*. Perhaps if we had not fled, if we would have waited around long enough, it would have slapped its famous tail, causing a *kersmash* to reverberate throughout the channel. We sat side by side, eating our blueberry Krusteaz pancakes and imagined a ravenous were-beaver chomping down on our family canoe.

Katie Volz is a second-year student at the Penn State University Park campus. Always having a love for writing, she is pursuing her studies in English and medieval archaeology. In her free time, she enjoys writing mysteries, discovering underrated Broadway musicals, and entertaining her beagle, Lucy. Katie grew up in State College, Pennsylvania, and hopes to continue her writing and archaeological studies at graduate school in the United Kingdom.

Poetry

Aise Zamane

Huzaifa Malik

You, who came, beside the sidewalk,
Upon a grove of small purple flowers.
You who could not bear the loss of things,
Nor the absence of beloved folk.
Who thought to take the bodies, whole,
Petals, leaves, and pollen-flesh.
Even you, could not bear to cull
The beauty from the stem.

Huzaifa Malik is a Pakistani-American poet and writer raised across multiple countries. He is studying comparative literature at The Pennsylvania State University but is also still trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. He enjoys writing and sharing poetry that presents his emotions honestly and fully, exploring themes of love and immigrant identity. His favorite poets include Agha Shahid Ali and Li-Young Lee. His work is also forthcoming in Kalliope.

Cardboard Dishwasher

Ella Freda

Cardboard dishwasher;

what a pointless contraption.

Soapy, soggy mess.

Childish

Emmanuela Eneh

Mother reminds me:

A puffy-cheeked, glarey-eyed child
bares her tongue not in honor
but to strike with the wrath
of an embryo viper.

Mother reminds me:

A big man called "Daddy"
isn't angry like he ought to be,
is nonplussed like the dead pulse
of the pregnant rat in the apartment's kitchenette.

Mother reminds me:

"I don't love you," says the child to
the man Mommy dragged her
to America for.
("He'll slap me," she thinks.)

Mother reminds me:

"I don't love you either,"
says the big man to the baby
the village they'd left prayed for him to have.
("You'll grow up," he thinks.)

I remember:

You may be my father
but you hate me like a kid.

Emmanuela Eneh is an English major and member of the BA/MA program. Although she has been obsessed with fiction writing ever since watching "Avatar: The Last Airbender" as a child, she began delving into poetry and nonfiction during her junior and senior years. She has found these mediums to be incredibly therapeutic methods of telling the story of what makes her up as an individual. She enjoys tabletop role-playing games, reading fanfiction, and playing video games.

common grounds

Anonymous

You went south
and I was ugly once more
rotting cabbage, blue-green and untouchable

Eighteen hours between us
no longer close-up,
no longer like the back of my hand

The feted *salted-caramel-mocha-frapuccino*
this I knew
you loved me, you loved coffee, and you hated the Virginia heat

But I don't satisfy seven states away
you drink chai now
melting like butter in Richmond, right into her arms

And I still burn my tongue every morning
common grounds brewed and bitter,
my lips sting and my eyes water

Cultural Parasite

Thiago Rego

When I first came here, I would spell my name to cashiers
Starbucks kept getting my name wrong, making me feel so alone

Had to learn biology, economics, math, and psychology
No assistance to the person who could barely speak English

I memorized words to start conversations,
Couldn't make jokes because of my dictation.

Ts at the end of words became *ch* sounds
Words ending with *ing*, overemphasized, eenGuh

infiltraCHinguh in an unfamiliar space, infested with unknown faces.
I never felt so insecure, so alone, living in a place I wish was home.

Mom, I'm not understanding, this sooffucaCHEenguh feeling,
Of not knowing what they are saying.

They make me so discontent, with comments of my accent
An endless complication, of being lost in translation.

I came with open arms, but they treat me with disregard.
Why this comparison, between me and an American?

I feel so intrusive in this unwelcoming illusion.
Why is it deemed so worthy, this scheme called American Dream?

Thiago Rego is from Brazil, loves his country's culture and is happy to be able to share his experience as an international student through poetry. He is currently the President of the Brazilian Student Association, helping each Brazilian student to feel home and included.

Discount

Josh Reiff

There's a discount at the store today.

For the next 24 hours, meaning is for sale.

Buy something big enough to crawl inside of and soothe your agoraphobic existence.

Wait in the traffic, wait in line, and tell yourself that you've spent your life waiting for something that will be worth it.

Fill up your cart with as many things as you can, you won't want to regret missing out on the finer things.

Let us tell you how to be. Don't you want to feel wanted?

Tell yourself you need this to be valued.

Cover yourself in faux fur, you only need to look real.

Fight your neighbor for the must-have items; claw at their face until it's unrecognizable, they can always purchase a new one.

Once you've checked out, go to the next store over,

then the next one,

keep going until you've spent it all.

Invest everything that makes you human in the market

every meaningful poem you've ever read, every drawing your parents pinned on the fridge, every touch that has made your body tremble.

Hand them to the man working at the checkout aisle.

Watch him count them and lock them in the register.

Smile, knowing that your worries have been taken care of.

Go back to the suburbs and crawl into bed.

Wash your cheap pills down with the bottle of water you bought.

Sleep dreamlessly; it's what you paid for.

To live without the fear of a nightmare, or worse, a happy dream

of a life you'll never experience because you can't afford to.

Josh Reiff is a freshman anthropology major and part-time poet who is involved with the WORDS slam poetry club on University Park campus. He'd think it'd be awesome if you'd come to a general body meeting in Burrowes Room 26 from 7-9 every Tuesday, or if you could attend a slam or open mic event which occur throughout the semester and are announced on the WORDS

Donner Table For Two

Colby Kloehr

Editor's Note:

This poem is in reference to the **Donner Dinner Party**, a tragic event which is the result of hikers being stranded due to extreme weather in California during the nineteenth century.

You've got it all

figured out.

You know how to eat

another man

without being disgusted

with dining on demise.

I wish I had

your ravenous taste

for flesh.

I tried.

I keep spitting

it out before I can muster

the courage to

swallow.

Colby Kloehr is a Psychology and English major here at PSU. He's been writing poetry for a bit over a year now. He started in his high school literature class back home in Texas and has been obsessed ever since. He hopes you guys enjoy his work!

Drinking Rain

Sofia Rosenbaum

The water wells over
And makes a mess
I get soaked all over,
And I mean
All over
Every layer of clothes and skin –
My dress, my neck, my nail-beds –
Are kissed by little droplets, and
The world smells like moss
And peaches
And a campfire.

Mom yells at me to come inside,
It's dinner time and you're going to catch a cold
And ruin your hair,
And why are you wearing that dirty dress?
Haven't I told you we're going to your aunt's tonight?
Put on something decent.

But instead of running inside,
I tilt my head up
And drink the rainwater
And laugh.

Sofia Rosenbaum is a Communication Arts and Sciences major from Gaithersburg, Maryland. An avid writer, singer, podcaster, theatre fan and aspiring witch, Sofia wholeheartedly believes that ghosts exist and will talk your ear off about obscure TV shows. Her favorite literary genres are poetry, science fiction, and fantasy.

Fungi Feed on Carcinogens and Corpses

J.D.

I've decided I want to start a garden,

But all of my flowers keep dying.

I went out and bought some more.

Botanists call this species "ghosty"

And it makes sense why.

This one's leaves lie pale and curled

On thirsty brown soil.

A translucent paper ghost.

In a little potted desert.

They used to be thick with green flesh,

Filled with gooey chlorophyllic jelly —

A comely little cactus.

But all my flowers die

And this one is no exception.

I know flowers love to purify

A home's malignant air with nothing

But their presence.

They take in the carbon dioxide.

The benzene and the formaldehyde

(It's to preserve the bodies)

And clean it for consumption.

I want to see if I can grow

A garden of my own

To clarify the toxic chemicals

That haunt my house,

Like that poor succulent

That lies withered and wilting

On my windowsill.

was never much of a gardener

But it's time for me to learn.

I'm starting to suffocate

On the smoke and skeletons

Stuffed in my closet.

I need something that can thrive

In the poisonous dark. Feeding

On the cremated secrets

Cramped in the smog

Behind that door.

Something like a mushroom.

So I'll grow

A fungus to consume

The cancerous chemicals

In my makeshift morgue.

Flowers are too fragile,

A garden would never help.

Instead, I'll cultivate a colony

to keep me

Safe from the corpses.

Mushrooms know how to clean too.

How to Leave a Home

Ashleigh Earyes

He lies to the food pantry for the next two weeks.

He stacks up cans of processed hams and hearty stews
alongside a few tubs of peanut butter. A box of Ritz crackers
he begged for will pair nicely with the Jif. His backpack's
zipper nearly busts off the track when he tries
to close it tight. And he mumbles,

"This is enough."

He shovels clothes into a duffle bag
and tries to regulate his breathing
as the pressure builds in his kettle-pot lungs.

He finds a stash of money buried under
his old twin, cream-colored mattress
and counts the twelve singles.

His family stalks the halls:
a distant brother, a shitty sister,
both raised by a hollow parent
one so gutted of his sympathy
he uses calloused hands instead
of words for discipline.

Torn notebooks and hidden letters,
the black pen moves across the page
with fevers trembling in his arms.

The boy writes a letter to his father,
the one who ruined him for eighteen years,
and lets himself finally have the last word.

Ashleigh Earyes is an English major who practices writing and drawing. As an intermediate writer and a beginner artist, she crafts her work in ten to fifteen minutes but revises for days on end. She enjoys a lot of music and utilizes alternative and indie in order to create a more powerful piece. Ashleigh has been published in University Park's 2023 "Folio" with her piece "1930", as well as "Any Other Word" at PSU York in 2022 for "Oil/Stool/Palette/Paintbrush".

Laundry Day

Sarah Langer

the drumming rhythm, the electric glow
of the Speed Queen Commercial
on the go

a god among appliances,
music to my ears,
a miracle of sciences

tempos shift, spin cycles slow
i still fall for her
in pianissimo

her agitator, my aphrodisiac
tiptoe, rising to crescendo

Liquor Store

Carter Cavaliere

I sent you into the liquor store
And on every shelf you found
Me pining, needing, clawing for
an Absolut only a man,
Shoulders wide with contentment,
Could bring a gay boy who came
From nothing and may very well stay there.

I once had dreams
Of marrying an old man
And inheriting money
Stained with the guilt
Of having no children to pass it on to.

Love makes me sick
Just like the vodka I drank
Last night lost in woods
Boys my age never escaped.

Carter Cavaliere is a second-year English major at Penn State. He grew up in Pittsburgh but is a State College boy through and through. In his spare time he enjoys hanging out with friends, playing The Sims, and listening to Taylor Swift and Lana Del Rey. After college he plans on either attending graduate school or doing marketing for a publishing house.

Love Birds

Sarah Langer

I like to think my mother fell in love with my father

Gently, like drifting feathers

Rather than careening

Wings clipped,

No longer a teacher

No longer a woman of rolling rocks and skinny dipping in the Poconos

Because those who stay home wear red, steel plated smiles

Because cages have corkscrew curls and baby teeth

She loves us so much, my sister and I

Her split ends that grew and grew

Into the noose around her neck, the nest which trapped her, the home which kept her

Poem Seven

Carly Jane

Come meet our cast of characters, longer than I can list.

Two girls leap over fighting fields.

They will rarely meet,

both trailing a path long forgotten.

Let's think of each other.

(Do you read stories about me?)

My, and your, imagination man.

Let's howl and stomp our feet.

Maybe he'll come inside, sit down,

drink from the fuzzy bushes,

and show us how to sing.

Some cats.

Please never cross the street and please

never stop me.

They don't make it.

His family's splattered rooms.

Not the people (not anymore),

but the place.

So much potential for three young students.

Praise us more, we'd think.

My bed or yours?

Our sheets use the same detergent,

but mine always take longer to clean.

(Will you do them for me?)

A book I'll never finish.

An immortal staring back,

her words reaped from her mouth by my hands.

I'm too scared to kill her off.

You hate me a little for it.

Should we continue?

Carly Jane (she/her) is a junior at PSU studying psychology. She recently won the Mihelcic Poetry Award. In her free time, she hangs out with her four cats: Pearl, Beatrix, Dean, and Sammy.

Poem Six

Carly Jane

What is bounty without dignity?

What is twenty without broken expectations
and a room of unread books?

What is adoration without disappointment?

What is perfume without denial

and worn-out escape plans?

What is watching God if we're watching each other?

Carly Jane (she/her) is a junior at PSU studying psychology. She recently won the Mihelcic Poetry Award. In her free time, she hangs out with her four cats: Pearl, Beatrix, Dean and Sammy.

Questions for Assholes

Jonathan Krystopolski

where do assholes come from?

are they born, or made, or brought

from somewhere with a bent thumb?

and is this condition genetic and

should i get checked because i'm certain my father never got

tested but my little brother has his special brand

of bullshit and privilege i'd like to think

i've avoided but i ought

to step away from their brink,

and stomp out the last bit of my ego

like so many busted bottles bought

on the nights i let it all flow

out and lose my ability to backtrack

but i'm stuck with a knot

the size of my father's fist in my back.

Jonathan Krystopolski, originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a senior at the University Park Campus studying political science, philosophy and creative writing. He has previously been published in "From the Fallout Shelter," where he won the Editor's Choice Best Poem Award, and "Fission." When he isn't staying up all night doing homework or writing, Jonathan can be found playing D&D and spending money he doesn't have on his record collection.

Soliloquy because it sounds nice

Huzaifa Malik

"Can you blame me?" – Tariq Luthun

I know that I will one day abandon my child
& don't we all know or choose when death
comes for us? I know there is a lover who
could love me longer in some part of this continent
or another. She will love me & a moment later I will leave
her too. Or maybe she will hurt me. It's always one way
or the other with pain (the aimless thing). I know
that drinking black milk tea, caffeinated comfort,
before bed leads to violent dreams before I wake.
In those restless sleeps, I am usually
fighting those I love most. Often, it's a pair
of cats, creatures I adore with even
the fleshy wall of my heart. I see them, fangs bared.
Tonight I am young, still, and would sacrifice
any future for a taste of love. I have seen
wet earth turn slippery just after rain,
knowing a composition of violence doesn't often make
for good melody.
The music: gray rainy days, which tend to meld
earth & sky & push humans and turn humans,
these holy unholy twirling dervishes,
fabric flailing and cutting air.

Huzaifa Malik is a Pakistani-American poet and writer raised across multiple countries. He is studying comparative literature at The Pennsylvania State University but is also still trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. He enjoys writing and sharing poetry that presents his emotions honestly and fully,

exploring themes of love and immigrant identity. His favorite poets include Agha Shahid Ali and Li-Young Lee. His work is also forthcoming in Kalliope.

Swallow the Burden

Ashley Person

We sit in rooms painted pastel pink, wait
for the creak of the sleek door to release
intermittent shrieks and howls from newborn
babies – screams shrill enough to break faces
of the never-to-be mothers-to-be.

We stare at fluorescent lights, cold metal
glides inside, opens us wide. *Don't be shy.*
We don't care if you're shaved, just spread those legs.
Pressure and pain, the swab comes away stained.
“Not so bad, right? We'll call in a few days.”

We push little pills out of their casings
to prevent life from taking root and try
to swallow the burden. Push, push it down.
Like a buried seed, never to break out.

Ashley Person is from Pottstown, PA. She is an English major here at University Park. She fell in love with writing poetry after taking the class Introduction to Creative Writing. Continuing down that path, she is currently taking Introduction to Poetry Writing and plans to take Advanced Poetry Writing.

The Great Flood

Carter Cavaliere

My life is a faucet I can't turn off.

When I'm satisfied with the water,

that makes my tub my tub,

I cannot stop the overflow

and its propensity for change.

All I can do is hold a small pool

between my small hands

and hold it close

as the gaps in my fingers betray me.

Drip. Drop.

Drip.

Carter Cavaliere is a second-year English major at Penn State. He grew up in Pittsburgh but is a State College boy through and through. In his spare time he enjoys hanging out with friends, playing The Sims, and listening to Taylor Swift and Lana Del Rey. After college he plans on either attending graduate school or doing marketing for a publishing house.

The Stooges at The Cincinnati Summer Pop Music Festival, June 1970

Jonathan Krystopolski

A month before The Stooges released *Fun House*

They sit behind stage

Imbibing piles of downers, uppers, and anything in between

While a sea of heads crashes into Crosley Field.

James Osterberg takes a handful of tabs

Of Orange Sunshine,

The same Orange Sunshine

That Charles Manson used when "Helter Skelter" made sense.

James strolls onto the stage and becomes

A man he calls

Iggy Pop. Shirtless, with a dog collar and silver gloves,

he convulses, gyrates, moves his body in the most disturbing manner.

Belting out "TV Eye," holding the audience

In the palm of his hand, he leers over them.

The announcers broadcasting his image to the nation

refuse to understand what he is.

Jumping the five feet between crowd and stage,

Iggy growls the lyrics to "1970."

Steve Mackay's saxophone drones and Iggy pulls himself,

Climbing up people's bodies, their hands grasping for his legs,

One glove missing as they hold him, standing

On their hands above the crowd. He is cemented as Iggy

on a platform of palms, becoming something of a god.

A terrible god with

Loose morals, a body full of acid,

And a jar of peanut butter that he scoops from,

Smearing the crowd, in the strangest ritual since Ash Wednesday.

Slinging smooth Jif in a peanut butter baptism,

Iggy absorbs the crowd which,
To him,
Is a sea of amorphous appendages and bobbing head buoys,
Emitting a red-yellow sound in his direction.
While these people witness something their kids
Would appreciate more than they ever did.

Jonathan Krystopolski, originally from Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, is a senior at the University Park Campus studying political science, philosophy, and creative writing. He has previously been published in "From the Fallout Shelter," where he won the Editor's Choice Best Poem Award, and "Fission." When he isn't staying up all night doing homework or writing, Jonathan can be found playing D&D and spending money he doesn't have on his record collection.

Throw it Away - Refuse to Reuse

Danni West-Habjanetz

I don't want you to use and abuse.

I don't want to see your veins swell and bruise.

I don't want you to suffer, even if it's what you choose.

Anyway I could possibly protect you.

Anyway to intercept and ease you.

Anyway for safety to find you.

Bringing new needles and Narcan and fears.

Bringing two non-judgmental ears.

Bringing along loving volunteers.

Danni West-Habjanetz is a senior English major with a minor in Vocal Performance. She is graduating this semester from the Altoona campus. They are the secretary of the Creative Writing club and a light lyric soprano in the Ivyside Pride Choir. She plans to earn an MFA in poetry after taking a gap year. They love nature and cats. She has published poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and photography in "Hard Freight" magazine.

To Live In The Borderlands

Clio Roker

“To live in the borderlands means you are neither *hispana india negra espanola, ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed, caught in the crossfire between camps, while carrying all five races on your back, not knowing which side to turn to, run from...” – Gloria Anzaldua

—

To live in the borderlands means*

you are trapped in the intersection of a Venn Diagram.

Where the circle 1 and circle 2 overlap, you walk alone.

Meanwhile, onlookers behind the walls of either side watch from windows in confusion,
wrapped in a warm blanket called belonging.

In the borderlands,

you are stifled by wind from one side that whispers

“ghetto.”

while the snow from the other side stings your face and says,

“too white.”

To live in the borderlands means

you are always catching your breath.

For the angry black woman, sassy sidekick, thug, underachiever, welfare queen, the token,

and the blue and red lights

relentlessly chase you in and out of the overlap;

and their threats pin you down,

kneeling on the hollow of your throat.

It means you're well-spoken, but you've abandoned your roots.

Rap music playing too loudly is suspicious, but your white music taste is a disgrace to your people.

You're desired, but fetishized as exotic experience to be tried;

never to be savored.

To live in the borderlands,

you must understand that

you are feared.

That smiling faces that invite you to stay for dinner still don't want you in the prom pictures or at the Thanksgiving table.

That your double-consciousness is forever and that you will eternally slip in and out of it
with blurred vision
and bruised knees from begging for acceptance.

That your lungs will burn from the never-ending marathon,
and that your ears will ache from not being able to put your hood up in the cold wind as you run.

You will come to find that in the borderlands,
an outsider may venture cavalierly into your territory and ask of the tight walls you reluctantly call home.

Pulling strength from your jaded heartache you will find your voice but,
lose it again
as you see the stars in the trespasser's eyes dissolve into fear because
black and white are profanities,
and they are the terms that made them fear you in the first place.

You will come across a traveler, deaf to their microaggressive comments but when you
gut-wrenchingly,
agonizingly,
meticulously,
find a way to address your hurt
their shoulder will turn cold, your face will turn hot and
they will remember why they don't travel beyond borders.

As they retreat to safety, the lesson you hate teaching going unlearned, you will feel anger.
Not at the traveler but,
at yourself
for admitting what the borderlands have cursed you with understanding.

But to live in the borderlands means
an un-paralleled omniscience.

It means standing alone with the knowledge to succeed in both worlds despite being scrutinized.

To survive the Borderlands
You must accept the overlap;
revel in both.

*Inspired by "To Live in the Borderlands" by Gloria Anzaldúa.

Untitled

Ethan M. Capitano

The same funeral home, the same priest, almost the same family. My mother, her brothers and sisters, now orphaned. Last time it was their father — he was ashes by the time I saw him again. He wanted to be spread in Frances Slocum — we'd go fishing there; but my uncle didn't want to do that, neither did grandma — she wanted him buried with her; I guess they didn't want to let go. So, in front of me in the casket sits the little black urn we'd call grandpa — or dad, that's what my grandma called it (him... sorry). When my brother and I were in her beeping hospital room overlooking the Wilkes-Barre cemetery, she choked out *where's dad?* asking him to take her away, to take her home. *Are you asking for Dave?* (our father), we knew she wasn't. My brother was the only one brave enough to speak. In shock, I prayed it wouldn't happen now, not with me in the room, not without my mother here. Her affliction was unexpected — stage four cancer in the liver and pancreas, not even the lungs (she was an avid smoker). My mother hated how cigarette smoke haunted their house; but I didn't, it reminds me of grandma and the poem I wrote for her when I was six: violets are red/roses are blue/I love you. To my embarrassment she kept it on the refrigerator, along with smiling pictures of my aunts and uncles, cousins and siblings. After the hospital visit we knew what was coming, we just didn't know when: *I'll give it a month...* my brother started the car, it was three days. Now we're back here: the viewing room, with its floral manila wallpaper; little glass bowls of mints I suck on to justify the silence; and the plastic bouquets nestled on each side of my grandparents' new home. *It is your family's turn to say goodbye*, beckoned the graying priest as he backed away and gestured toward the casket. I felt like I was intruding, like I'd wake her; I feared she'd suddenly open an eye and stare back, burning a hole in me; but the heavy concealer poorly mimicking life, poorly hiding pale death, told me the truth. *She looks nice, they did a good job*, croaked my mother from behind me; *Yes, yes they did*, reassured my father with hands on her shoulders. The casket made grandma impossibly shrink — she was only 80 pounds before she passed — I didn't think she could get any smaller, but the white blankets covered her from the waist down and I couldn't tell how tall she was. She wore a yellow dress — her favorite color, our favorite, her hands crossed her stomach; they would've stood out more, but her fingers were no longer purpled by poor circulation — there was nothing to circulate.

How long should I look? *How long should I look? However long you do is the right amount of time*, but I know that was a lie, because when the casket closes they are gone.

“WEAK”

Emmanuela Eneh

1. To be (decidedly) incapable of fulfilling one’s purpose. For instance, “I am too weak to wear the mask today, but my elders will roll their eyes, so I will don it anyway.” To be unable to perform to the best of one’s ability, which garners the same reaction as a child who is too willful to clean their room. A moment wherein bodily unresponsiveness challenges the spirit, which is well-trained and eager, to do that which is unthinkable and lay down thy cross: a cross which is borne with labored breaths, not dying ones.
2. To use tears as blues and reds that paint a sky that sobs and bleeds and is not always idle and clear. To keep this painting hidden away when told that the fruits of labor must be harvested and sold and not kept locked within the heart.
3. To think that any work is ever simply as it is and not an homage to broken chains.
4. A man, woman, person, or child who cannot stand at protest for the sake of well-being, but perhaps not for lack of apparent health. A human being who has felt the joys, sorrows, and madness of living — in this case, as “of color” — and must take, at most, some days to live as color blind.
 - o Weakness: To sit down and think and cry about the screams which will (by effort and not by choice) never pass lips.
5. Note: One may be labeled with the term “weak,” but never should this insult be stood for. “To be” is not worthy of degradation.

[An homage to Alice Walker’s “Definition of a ‘Womanist.’”]

Emmanuela Eneh is an English major and member of the BA/MA program. Although she has been obsessed with fiction writing ever since watching “Avatar: The Last Airbender” as a child, she began delving into poetry and nonfiction during her junior and senior years. She has found these mediums to be incredibly therapeutic methods of telling the story of what makes her up as an individual. She enjoys tabletop role-playing games, reading fanfiction, and playing video games.

Weinermobile

Sarah Langer

I met the weinermobile off I-76
exit 247, you were the most divine appetizer
State College, I am no longer starving

I learnt love in locomotion
a pilgrimage of pulverized pork
nestled between Henderson and Burrowes

a sizzling cornucopia
luring me into its marmalade maw
vienna sausage, poppyseed bun, pickles, mustard — hold the relish

I wonder how much of the world it has tasted
in that same way I am so full,
so far from where I belong

Oscar Mayer knew something of hunger
that you can never really come home
but you can always enjoy a shitty hot dog

Music

Bryan Wang



[Stream Bryan Wang on Soundcloud](#) [Bryan Wang · Asterisk Demos](#)

Hi there – I'm Bryan. I'm a sociology major set to graduate this summer. I'm from Rochester, NY. I've written a bunch of songs, but "When We Were Kids" was actually my first co-write. A friend from high school had written a bunch of lyrics and shared them with me, and I decided to put them to music (with some minor tweaks/additions). I think the song is relatable in that it deals with the somewhat sobering reality of growing older and the nostalgia that people sometimes feel for a time when things were (seemingly) less complicated. Thanks for listening

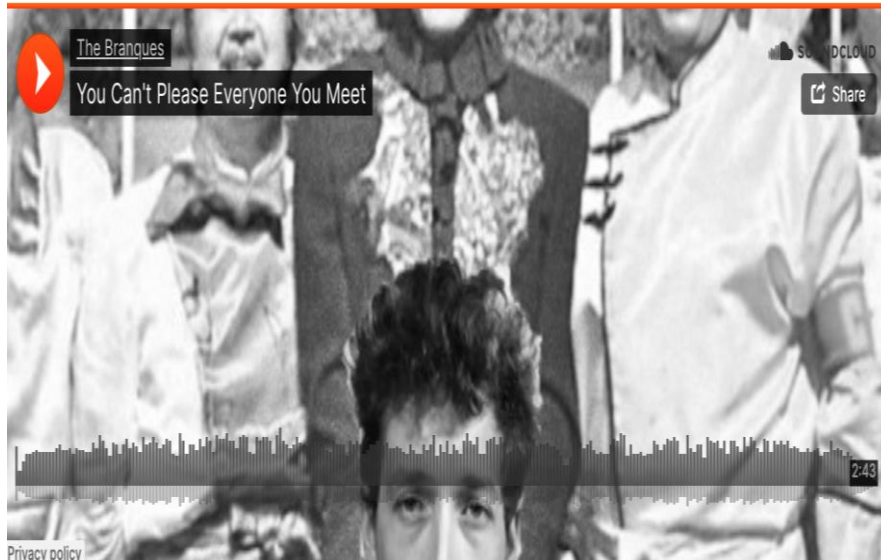
Mitchell Brown



[Stream MB3 Music on Spotify](#)

Mitchell Brown a.k.a MB3 Brown is a freshman here at Penn State University Park. He started rapping after the passing of his grandfather, and found pure passion and success with his musical talents. His discography spans from multiple albums to singles. His latest project was an album titled “The World Was Ending Anyway”, which soared to popularity here on campus.

Nehem Felices



[Nehem Felices Soundcloud](#)

[The Branques · You Can't Please Everyone You Meet](#)

Hello, my name is Nehem Felices and I am a Computer Science major at Penn State! I'm mainly involved in the comedy clubs at Penn State, as a member of Full Ammo Improv, Second Floor Stand-up, Phroth, and a supporter of Derby. However, this song is a serious one. I mean it.

Slickklando



[Stream Slickklando on Soundcloud](#)

Landon Shaw a.k.a Slickklando is a sophomore, majoring in business, who loves content and creating music. He is originally from Jersey and moved to MD for college. My favorite type of music is R&B; I love live performances and bands. Some of his discography includes "Harley Quinn" and "Exotic Flava".

Film

Moonlight

Nathan Tam

“Moonlight” is a short film by Nathan Tam. About the film’s origins and creation, Tam notes: “This film was made as a project for a class called Creativity (INART 197Q/SC 197Q), and it was created to satisfy a prompt discussing the concepts of mutation and adaptation in creativity. As a classical musician and a composer/arranger, I decided to adapt the first movement of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, originally written for solo piano, for full symphonic orchestra. To incorporate an element of mutation, I altered the dynamic structure to match the phases of the moon. To accomplish this, I featured solo instruments in the beginning and ending of the piece and gradually built to a full orchestra climax in the middle. To enhance the mutation of the piece, I set the music to a time-lapse of the moon going through all of its stages. The arrangement was created in Studio One and used Spitfire Audio’s BBC Symphony Orchestra Professional sound library.”



[Watch it on YouTube](#)

Nathan Tam is a first-year student at Penn State Berks majoring in Biomedical Engineering with plans to minor in Music Performance and Applied Math. As a pianist, violinist, and violist, music has been a huge part of Nathan’s life for the last 14 years. Nathan plans on pursuing neuroscience, and hopes to study how music and art impact us physically and emotionally through the study of the brain.

SLIME

Kameron Skrobacz

“SLIME” is a short film by Kameron Skrobacz, who says this about his creation: “I decided to make the film because I had what I thought was a good idea, and that spiraled into the piece you see before you. It was an overall good time, and for now that is all the reason I need to make short films and the like. The film is about a man who has killed a woman and decides while the police take their time that he will make his favorite drink/slurry. He then mixes a concoction of inedible substances together with glee and gargles them down into the recesses of his husk.”



[Watch it on YouTube](#)

Kameron Skrobacz is a second-year film production major who grew up around the Pittsburgh area. Kameron has always loved film and enjoys watching films. Kameron likes the way softly melted ice cream tastes and has been known to enjoy having a bit of fun here and there. Kameron lives life rather uncomfortably, but finds solace in the little things.