

The Flight Issue

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In honor of the Flight Issue that our contributors created within these pages and the conviction that we hope this issue incites in our readers, our staff has composed an Exquisite Corpse to serve as this issue's Manifesto:

Flight

Across an endless sea of clouds

Feet off the ground

Fly above it all

Your sorrows should be grounded

In a breath of feathers, unfurled and free

Editor's Letter

Hello Dear Readers!

I would like to start off by thanking you for picking up The Flight Issue of *The Pen*. It means the world to us as *The Pen* Staff for choosing us for your daily read. Within the covers of this journal, you will find your mind soaring through many possibilities and feelings. As you glide through these creative pieces, all done by your peers around you, we hope that they encourage you to follow your aspirations in all cases. I would like to thank our contributors that present their work for all to see, we want to make sure that they know they are heard and appreciated. Without them, we would not have another wonderful issue of *The Pen*, so thank you for letting us be the platform for your voices to be heard.

I want to thank Sophia McKeehan, Hudson DeLoach, and Patti Teter, our wonderful *Pen* Staff, for all their hard work this semester. Without them, I would be at a loss and in a spiral of emotions. We are small in numbers, but we make up for it with unrelenting hard work and lots of coffee. They were an absolute delight, and I could not have asked for a better team.

I would also like to thank Dr. Malphrus for her endless support for us emotionally as well as in our pursuits of interest. She stays true to her beliefs; unwavering. Her fine, charismatic wisdom is a joy to have as she advises us to excel in our studies and in *The Pen*. I was recently introduced to one of her mentors, Pat Conroy, and like his love of teachers, Dr. Malphrus is one I will hold dear to my heart. We always love to inform everyone that we are looking for lovely, new faces to join our friendly staff. We ask that you talk to your advisor to take English 211, the Editing and Publishing Practicum, it is the driving force and home base for *The Pen*. This class is a hands-on course full of creative minds coming together to make *The Pen* come to fruition. We always want to advise those who are curious about this class that all majors are welcome. We also want to let everyone know that the Society of Creative Writers is always open to all types of creative work and letting you explore in a safe space. Being a part of Society has helped me in so many ways than just writing. I'm able to talk to so many interesting people that I truly do care for, I want to let them know how grateful I am to see an environment that is full of confidence and free of discrimination of any kind. Kindness is our mantra, along with WRITE ON!

I can't wait to see the next creative works in our next issue! Thank you again from the bottom of my heart!

Selena Menjivar
Editor-in-Chief

Advisor's Letter

Dear Reader,

Welcome to The Flight Issue of *The Pen*! As you untether yourself from whatever now occupies your mind and enter these pages, prepare to be transported. The creative writing and visual art you are about to experience is filled with flights of fancy—imaginative ascensions into diverse renderings of the human experience—renderings that soar over and under and through the triumphs and tribulations of the world around and within us. You will also find work that grapples with escape, with exodus, with taking flight from that which is too painful, too unjust, too horrific. In all of it there is an aspect of release through the cathartic power of art to send us aloft into other realms. As Jhumpa Lahiri says, “the power of art is the power to wake us up, strike us to our depths, change us.”

The writers and visual artists whose work was selected for this issue of USCB's four-time national award winning undergraduate literary journal are a varied group of students from all across campus—from biology majors to studio art majors to interdisciplinary studies majors to psychology majors to English majors. This interdisciplinary aspect of *The Pen* is always joyful to me, as is the

diversity in gender, experience, skin tones, and cultural backgrounds among our contributors.

This semester, there have been four people responsible for seeking and sharing this collection of creative output with you—Selena Menjivar, Sophia McKeehan, Hudson DeLoach, and Patti Teter. As the two seasoned members of *The Pen* staff, Selena and Sophia have taken on the lionesses' share of the inordinate amount of effort that goes into taking thin air and making out of it the book you hold in your hands. They have also organized and led weekly gatherings of the Society of Creative Writers (open to all!) and consistently labored behind the scenes to promote creativity on our campus. They are powerful, productive women, both of them, and I admire their determination. Selena, our editor-in-chief, is a long-time member of *The Pen* staff, and her unflagging allegiance to the publication always warms my heart. She surprises herself with her abilities, but not me; I've known the seed was within her, ready to grow and blossom. Sophia is a constant indomitable force, patiently getting the job done—whatever the job may be. Hudson and Patti are valued newcomers to the staff, learning the ropes in preparation for greater responsibilities ahead. The four of them have happily given of their time to help bring this

gift to you—the Fall 2022 issue of *The Pen*. Buckle up and let's fly!

Onward!

Dr. Ellen Malphrus
Professor of English
USCB Writer in Residence
Faculty Sponsor for The Pen and the Society of
Creative Writers

Astromech Odyssey

Jake McClave

Check Speed
reverse thrusters
oxygen levels low
highlights in the cosmos linger
Daunting

Star Struck
a daring crew
years of simulations
could never generate such views
Caution

Port Side
contact spotted
it's too late shields are down
an astromech's last dance awaits
Silence

Gods Speed
danger on screen
targeting systems lock
ion cannons ready on me
Engage

Splash One
silence echoes

astromech to H.Q.
E.T.A three lightyears away
Enroute

Belly

Chad Merritt

Spring pollen and my faint bruises from weeks prior
That sat among the canary's chest
Like dandelions in the sand as it grows against all
odds.

I took the canary that you laid upon my hand
And gave me a jaundiced view of this world
A lemony ring that circled my fingertips.

Yet you stood in the roman halls
A classical guitarist singing a song about you
As I lay in summer's flaxen days, and in Spring's
dying wish
And you caressing the arms of some broken man
That I've never met,
Once more a canary be laid upon his eyelashes.

If there ever was a dandy more cowardly
It'd be me
And you'd grow the flower in sands of bloom
underneath an amber sun
While I cried in those hazy roman halls
Butchered mind in hues of blonde
And tints of madness wrapped in glittered frailty.

Because of Time

Elizabeth Blanchard

Hair darkened with age
Maturity caved
Palpitating mark of emotion
Still unnamed

Twilight complexion with
Glassy eyes
Melancholic woe remains
A surprise

Of a Lover

Chad Merritt

Bridged between the nape of her neck and the arch
of her shoulders

Was where the rope began to spool,

That's where the chrysanthemums busted through
the skin

And grew like veiny, vitriolic comeuppance

For what she had bathed in when she was young.

I yank the weeds from this deadened growl

The roots painting the little dots of golden

"I am nothing," she says to me. "I'm null and void."

I lean down to touch her cheek with the cup of my
palm

Her eyes peer up, the moon goes down

Her cracked lips are the desecrated concrete of
broken dreams

And deep into her pupils, the vines rage through

Searching for an exit, somewhere to reach the
surface

And as I am gazing, like stars beneath the lover of
the sun

I grow weary, I grow bold, I grow with the tree
beneath her spine

The rain starts pouring from her hollyhock globes
below her brow
Arid wet cold and harsh
Dragonflies, they soar between her thighs
I lift her chin, trace her lips with one pen
And gift myself the black ink of the other one
shrouded in dark

My mouth is a supernova, her eyes glow like orbs
of starlit mirrors
And I'm past the bedroom now, into the hall of
empty
Candlelight, the withering glow reaches into orbit,
they pull out tears
And they pull out lies, and steady raindrops linger
on
Like dew on the blades of grass in the early
morning whispers.

The Café Down The Street

Gracie Laseter

The café we use to go to,
Sits vacant in my mind.
I tell myself,
The coffee was never good there,
The food never tasted right
In order to stay away
In order to not have to think about you
But secretly, I know
The coffee tasted best,
with a spoon full of your laughter
The bagels were always right,
when you were the one spreading too much cream
cheese on it
The café is still just as it was
But we aren't I'm afraid.

You Will See Me in Another Life

Chad Merritt

The inferno continues to revolt
Embers, all the while they lick up into the night sky
And the heart of the forest is engulfed with fever
Red, orange, like sunsets in the bolded evening
Except they still burn at noon.

The flame will soon die
As our grieving tears spill over the firestorm
And the charred ashes of fallen trees will cry
They will weep in the absence of home
And will keep the thorns of the brush beneath grey
fog

And as I saunter my way through the white-grey
snow
And the blackened burned trunks of trees
And the scattered ash that falls all around
Like dust, like snow
Like me, like home

I stretched my hand out toward the lake
They trembled and they quivered and they ripped
and they bled
And while that ruby river connected with the
windblown cinders
I thought, sunlit

I thought of everything, I thought of you, I thought
of home, I thought of snow

And I let the ashes scatter.

Cracks to Flowers

Hope Taylor

There was a girl once happy and whole. She found her way through life with wide eyes and open arms. Happy for new lessons and adventures until one day someone put a crack in her exterior. Just a small crack, hardly noticeable but she could only see the little crack and not her inner beauty. As the years went on with more and more interaction with people and places, she found herself getting greyer. Less and less happy with more and more cracks. She now goes through life without seeing the colors and happiness. With each new interaction she found a crack; either one getting bigger or a new one finding a place near her heart.

Becoming greyer and more broken she lost all hope for the near and distant future. She went day by day expecting nothing more and nothing less of another crack finding their place. Every time she looked in the mirror all she could see was the broken. The loss. Falling deeper into sadness she lost her way. No hopes for finding purpose. No hopes for finding happiness. No hope for anything other than one little thing. Hope that the cracks wouldn't meet and leave her in pieces on the floor.

One day, as grey as ever, she walked down the street on a rainy, gloomy day. It seemed fitting for her feelings with the dark being outside her mind instead of inside like the prior days. This day was different though she was just too busy looking down at the cracks in the sidewalk that mimicked the cracks she saw in herself. When she lifted her head from the ground, she noticed something for the first time in days- maybe even years. She saw a rainbow forming in the distance. She saw all the colors for the first time since her life turned black and white. Suddenly the colors consumed her being and she felt herself starting to walk differently. Less dragging her feet and more taking real steps. Head facing the sky letting the slight rain drops hit her face instead of hanging her head low.

She continued her walk home feeling an energy she didn't think she had ever felt before. Dreading looking in the mirror she noticed something. Something small but present. A little stem with a flower in bloom. All bright with green and pink. She stared in confusion at the light plant that shined bright in her reflection.

Each day she noticed she had more energy and willingness to start her day. A little more pep in her step. She began to use looking in the mirror at the end of the day as motivation to get things done.

More willing to try new things again. Opening her arms, a little more each day towards not just experiences but to people too. When she got home each night and made her way to the mirror she noticed after every day the cracks that consumed her began to fill with more leaves and flowers. Her life and soul beginning to become more color. Reds, blues, purples, greens. She saw it all.

As the years went on, she welcomed new things and with each new welcoming she saw a new color. She kept her head held high and her feet moving forward, but that didn't stop her from looking back. When she remembered the grey and cracking mess that was her life she began to smile because it made her appreciate the colors and fullness she felt that much more.

Dream Cake

Jake McClave

Imagine.

Glimpses of reality.

Distracted by association.

I am conscious of such dreams.

Illusions which I egotistically cherish.

Imagine.

Waking up.

Without ever going to sleep.

Imagine.

The flavor of the most beautiful word.

And savor it.

Don't just say it.

Imagine.

All the dreams you have baked.

To taste something you create.

What does your imagination taste like?

Mine tastes like Cake.

A Voyage

Elizabeth Blanchard

Scarlet swirls
Twirled with white
Ruby armor
Did not break your flight
Your sharp edges
Show the stride
From a foreign land
Your home to mine

Shoreline

Gracie Laseter

The water crashed against the bar of sand that stood
guard of the land
With each soft kiss to the shoreline
The water brought new life
And snatched away the old in one fell swoop
The girl observed this cycle,
And smiled,
She found solace
She found her sign



The Connection
Sean Pittman

A Life Never-Ending

Elizabeth Blanchard

Ashes to flight
Wings of gold
Soar above and
Cascade in fire

Tears of medicine
Burn like a fever,
Live like a flame

My constant comfort
In each and every
One of your lifetimes

Falling in Love again

Kathryn Tovar

I can remember when it began. That creeping sense of discomfort as my dad or grandpa looked down at me. The last book I showed to them both was *Twilight*. I told grandpa to read the back, it was clearly a very well-written book. A look passed between him and my dad. My dad reads Shakespeare for fun, and my grandpa is a historian of local and national history. Surely, they can see that my interest is just as important and lofty as their favorite reads. I waited to hear them both say that it was beautifully written, and the fact that Edward was a vampire wasn't a secret, a nice twist on a common trope. When they both laughed, I couldn't breathe. Their laughter is a lesson that I needed to be ashamed of this part of myself.

I was 8 when I found a *Romeo and Juliet* retelling with a dog and a cat. I knew it was good because it was based on Shakespeare, dad told me he was good. I got a fluttery stomach reading about how they loved each other. It wasn't a feeling I had felt before, I wasn't sure why, but I wanted to find more like it. I am sure my dad would agree Shakespeare retellings are important.

My love of history guided me towards historical romance for kids. History is very important, my grandparents told me that. So, I read stories of pioneers meeting the Native Americans and then marrying into the tribe. That had to be very historical, women marrying into new cultures and finding love with people who are not like her. Even though I knew it was historical I always felt my heart race when I would get to the kiss. But kissing was just a scene, I really wanted to get that over with so I could learn more history, I don't care about the kissing.

What I didn't want to admit was I liked kissing books. I knew that strong girls did not read kissing books, but I have no idea who informed me of that. If I could just explain away my interest and say it was history or a unique story, then I wouldn't have to come to terms with the fact I liked books that are considered bad.

It was clear to me that boys did not like what girls liked. I distanced myself from romance books to hopefully be liked by boys in my school but still read them and discuss them with friends, they were the only ones who got why I liked these books. Boys never could understand wanting a first kiss or being embraced (whatever that meant). It was clear to me that men disliked our interest too. That when

my grandpa and dad laughed at my love for my favorite book, they viewed my interest as less than theirs.

Along with my dad, grandfather, and boys my age disliking what I read, there was my mom. My mom didn't take us to church, but I went regularly. I was a good church girl, who loved Jesus. You see, girls my age were so inappropriate, my mom would explain. Some girls even would engage with S-E-X (spelled out so my little siblings would not know what we were talking about). They read about it and encourage things to happen between them and boys. But I was different, a bookish girl who didn't think of those kinds of things. It's why I had a purity ring.

At around 15, I had to give up my love for romance books. They were keeping me from God and good literature. It was so apparent when I read a book about a centaur and a woman falling in love. He transforms into a handsome man, and is holding...what is that word? Pen-es, PEEN-ESE, PEN-ice? P-E-N-I-S? What is that? He's holding it, so it must be a word for cup, like the word chalice. I decided to google it to see what kind of cup he is holding. My mom warned me that girls who looked at that kind of stuff were not good girls, and I came

to the realization that I was not a good girl because of the books I read.

I slowly ebbed off romance books by the time I was 18, I no longer considered them fun to read. Girls who read romance are soft and weak, they aren't feminists. Just look at how they are fawning over *Fifty Shades of Grey*. They aren't reading good books like me. I am reading *Lolita* and want to cry because I can't believe Humbert would be so vulgar. I am reading *Gone with the Wind* to dissect the racism of the confederacy, and Rhett and Scarlett's relationship has nothing to do with it. I won't even watch romance movies with my boyfriend, they are cheap and poorly made. I am a good kind of girl, who doesn't get sucked into that romantic crap.

I watched reviews of bad romances, watching the synopsis repeatedly. When I do pick them up or think of them as a possibility that I can consider, a feeling of shame washes over me. I am an adult, but truly how can these be good for me? The blatant sexism, anti-feminist, and the viewing women as *sexual beings*. Disgusting. The more I understand this, the less I read, but it was just so hard to find good literature. I am sure that this is a problem all good literary critics have.

2020 taught people a lot of things. And while trapped in my house I downloaded *Outlander*. Now I was not reading it for the romance, clearly. The author said it wasn't romance, but it was time travel, which means I am fascinated by the magic and history of the story. I listened to it once, and read it to filth, a romance troupe through and through. When I finished it, I told my husband: Jamie is shallow, he has bright red hair, is vile, and is very smart, violent, very handsome, temper, very protective, rude, very sweet, and a misogynist. My husband allowed me to rant about this horribly handsome evil man and when I paused simply asked,

“Did you like him?” What? Of course, I liked him. But I answered, “No... well yes.” What was I admitting exactly? That I liked Jamie, that was all. My husband encouraged me to read more books like *Outlander*. Clearly, time-traveling series, not romance.

I began to read romances to critique them. To contrast *Outlander's* ridiculousness to other subgenres of romance. This culminated in *How to Date Your Dragon*. I am listening to it in an audiobook and casually ask my husband if he wants to listen to it, part of my brain begging that he says no. But he agrees, and I put it on speaker. We get

the sex scene, and I am horrified. My face is hot, I can't look my husband in the eye when we are cleaning and every few seconds, I stop to say, "Well this is bad." My husband is laughing. And it's notable to me that the same feeling I am feeling isn't coming from his laughter, but something from inside. His laughter is his own joy and fun at the story, and I am not at the expense of his joy.

I wish I could say the switch was clear and defined. That I knew when exactly reading romances to compare to *Outlander* became a love for the genre again. But change happens gradually so it feels like it was always there. There is a sense of joy I get when picking them up, knowing that I enjoy sex scenes, and kissing scenes. There was a time were liking the troupes and stereotypes was a sign of unintelligence in my life, but now leads to me laughing and having joy unencumbered.

The hunt for clinch cover books from the 80s and 90s has become a pastime of mine. Apparently back in the day, people really thought they were inappropriate. And considering I am on the hunt for the famous novel, *Tender is the Sorm*, with a man completely naked on the front, his penis between a woman's breasts, I agree a bit. But tit is the thrill of finding them and reading them which gives me an endless sense of joy.

The last time I went to my home state my dad took me to a coffee shop/bookstore combo. While I perused the shelves, he wrote emails. I collected a stack of beautiful romance books, with women draped across the covers and men holding them in embraces. A teenage boy is checking out my books, looking a bit embarrassed at my books. Maybe he is embarrassed looking at them, maybe he is embarrassed because I am buying them and not trying to cover the fronts, which he quickly flips over so no one can see. I met my dad stating I found a rare cover of *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett in her night dress in the arms of Rhett. My dad laughs, and I do too. His laughter tells me that my joy is justified, though he will never get it. I laugh, knowing I will never let this joy be crushed again.

Born for what?

Elizabeth Blanchard

Desire so much
Of Life
Itself
To only be
Shut,
Scared,
Silenced,
Out of fear
Itself

Dream of a time
When it
Would leave and
Go away

Never did
Not to this very day.

Where We Began

Elizabeth Blanchard

The lonesome park bench is where I capture my thoughts. I write each and every one down in my journal as if they are of high importance. The old oak tree keeps me company. I lie on my back and stare aimlessly.

“What are you writing?”

The girl hovering above my figure has asked a question.

“Importance,” I reply. My cheeks burn a shade of hot pink.

“Why would anyone write anything of importance?”

She seems to notice my sarcastic tone. “So the importance would be made known.”

She doesn't laugh. Only stares. Then sits down on the concrete and leans against our bench.

I can tell she is not from here. Her rugged, combat boots. A diamond in the side of her nose. Her long, blonde, disheveled hair. Its length shown

in front of her face. Nobody looks like that around here. That's how I know.

Silence between us strengthens. I break it.

“Where are you from?”

“I'll tell you, if you tell me what you are transcribing over there.”

“But I already told you.” I lick my index finger and use its stickiness to flip the page of my writing. I continue scratching down my thoughts. She turns her head to look at me. She locks her eyes with mine.

“I'm from a place of importance.”

I don't laugh. Only stare. She turns back around, leaning against our bench.

Constant

Elizabeth Blanchard

Intrusive thoughts
Race through
My mind
Will they end if I flip this dime?
How long will they last?
Til they go away
I'm holding on
But they still come to play
No, they are not welcome
But invite themselves in
Here we go
My fingers start to spin
Maybe I blame the Trinity above
Maybe I blame the ones I used to love
I don't have the answer
To this wading flood
Only that
Maybe it's in my blood

Broken Drive

Z

You know the feeling
Stomach on the ceiling
Lurching over keeling
You're so nervous
Like when you broke your thumb drive right before
That presentation in high school
How silly that seems but you deemed that the end
Of the world at age 16
Well now you know
So long to broken thumb drives
Goodbye trivial things
Like that school presentation or the way your
Mama sang you to sleep when you were little
Farewell world
Hello void
And as you close your sleepy eyes
The pills begin to kick in
You think about how you should have left behind a
Thumb drive for your family
A broken one
Just to be ironic

A Promise to Keep

Elizabeth Blanchard

My hands ached from handwritten works
One day to be shown to people who mock
My face on the screen because I chose to live
My voice strong, for someone to listen
My art there, for someone to notice
My flight canceled, because I ran late
I'll book it again or run like the wind and
catch the train
To take me somewhere that clearly was not
planned
My fears, seen
My children, grown
My condolences, taken
My life left with no promise unkept.

Concern of my State

Elizabeth Blanchard

She felt small. Still can. Felt so watched by the people swarming around her. Their busyness made a buzz that raged in her eardrums. Patronized by those who “could” because she “couldn’t.” She was cute. She was quiet. She was shy. She wasn’t good enough like the kids who weren’t nervous. Faces with shocked expressions when she would speak. When she would feel. Heartbreak. Anger. Confusion. When she would feel anything but being *quiet*. Left a small girl that wanted to speak.



Untitled
Graceyn Yonce

Someone You Won't Talk About

Gracie Laseter

As I lay

Drifting through my own thoughts

My greatest fear surrounds me

Pulling me under the tidal wave of dread

Suffocating me in the idea

That my name will never be formed by your lips
again

Animosity

Z

It's

Hard to believe that one could be pure
Animosity toward her
Though
Even the slightest slice will do harm

Yet here you are dotting your i's and crossing your
t's
Oh please
Ultimately it was your goal to cause pain

So here you are
Talking through the agony
Un unraveling the lies
Plotting the time
In just a few moments
Death will be the only friend you need

Completely
Undoing the chance of a
Next
Time

The woman in green (GY)

Sam Messinides

Her eyes haunt their sockets,
each a mossy lens
gaping and screamless,
white breath imprinting
against the glass of
the old house.

Something happened here
among the overturned furniture and
sagging floorboards,
too tired to creak,
shattered offerings to some
long-departed god.

The walls barely remember how
to stand and falter into
forested silence,
as nightfall grows wild with
twilight green.

She has come for what remains.
A promethean daughter,
fingers slender as silk
wresting stories from the
bottomless dusk of
crooked drawers.

Her eyes blink without consent.
Nothing will be forgotten.

Dream Cake

Z

Darling you're a dream cake in between my

Red velvet sheets

Ecstasy dripping like frosting

All over your beautiful body

Marble curves and swerves

Can't you see it yourself that

All the sweetness in the world is you

Known only to me almost too beautiful to eat

Ever wonder what it's like to love a dream

To expect a taste of lustful lips

And only to find a taste of air

Love

Z

Call me crazy and reckless

But

I think I am in love with you Love

Yes

I know

Everyone recognizes you

You are on billboards and stuffed animals and every
teenage girl's mind

See even before we even met I was hearing your
name in every song

But now I hear a song about you

And I imagine you dancing in the Walmart parking
lot in the dark

And unlike the others, I want to know you

Cause you're different than they say you are

How funny it is that you tell people that your name
is like the heart on my sleeve

When my hear feels like a crumbling Styrofoam cup
in your hands

How beautiful and ironic that your name is Love

Cause you sure did a hell of a job leaving your mark
(and marks and marks)

And now I'm calling you every day

While there's a heart on my sleeve

The magic up your sleeves is getting caught on the
scars

But I still have to pinch you to see if you're real
I know I owe you nothing but I want to give you the
world
Yet at the same time it seems like the weight of the
world is already on your shoulders
Or maybe it's just the mop of hair on your head
that's weighing you down
How beautiful and ironic that your name is Love
That apathy and affection conglomerate into
something so exquisite
That you make my body move in ways I never
thought it would
And it reminds me of when you would quiver from
my gentle touch upon your skin
Please let me in
Don't push me away
Please let me in

Conditioner

Chad Merritt

“I’ve only met a few people quite like you.” you
said to me
as I was lost
and counted the seconds
in between each kiss.

I remember when I accidentally bought
the same conditioner that you used
and I didn’t realize
it smelled just like you
until I vacated my memory
and now I get sick
when the scent fills my nostrils
and tears well in my eyes
glazed and glossed over
like the rain in clouds
or the sudden sun in grey’s final hour.

I remember your last day here on earth
your breath snowing
your heart’s slowed beating
and I remember what you said to me
before you closed your eyes
for the final time
“I’ve never met anyone like you.”

and you were gone so sudden
like the sun when it showed its teeth
I still remember your gentle touch
like the soft sweetness
of a nectarine to my skin
thinly layered underneath satin sheets
where we gazed at one another
and talked of the future.

Now I'm flailing at your tomb
bourbon streaming down my cheeks
and the smell of flowers
sing my swollen lungs to sleep
almost like when we lowered you in
when I wept until I could not breathe.

Thank You

Z

Since she was little she has been known for her
cards

For her

Thank you cards

They started as scribbles and dribbles of drool on
crooked cut out pages

With little hand traced turkeys

Always having a sun in the corner and the word
“Thank You”

(clearly written by her mom)

But soon she grew and you knew by the purposeful
lines and bunches of smiley faces

And white spaces were filled with colorful lines that
were supposed to be confetti

Already

People would swoon and soon they gave her more
attention

Not to mention that they began to love her

Thank Yous

So she drew and drew

All of a sudden they became more and more
elaborate with articulate words, papier-mâché in

Array and letters that would pop

And jaws dropped when they received a thank you
card from her

But then it became excessive

And no less than hours would be spent
Thanking the smallest of actions
For people's reactions to her thank you cards
People began to find it strange
That she would write thank yous all tied up in string
For things
Like talking to her, holding the door for her and
remembering her name
But lately
You can see the shakiness in her hand
And unmistakable mark of splattered tears
With crushed antidepressants she is supposed to be
taking mixed in with the glitter
The artistic confetti is an unsettling color
And if you look closely
You can see in small italics it says
Please
Help
Me
But no one ever notices with the big bubble letters
that say
Thank you for everything

Tended

Sophia McKeehan

She fell in love
With a burning hand
He knew her desires
And at length
She revealed herself

Impulsivity

Z

If I told you I wrote this on the ledge of a bridge,
would you believe me?
Because impulsivity is taking over me
And I have been running at two thirty-three in the
morning lately
Running from thoughts fueled by cigarette smoke
Wondering if the taste of vodka will ever leave my
mind
Or the taste of your lips on mine
Oh how beautiful is the dripping of blood down my
leg
And the bruises on my neck
From the choking and rough sex
I keep walking around downtown in the middle of
the night
Hoping something might happen
I hope something happens
If I told you I wrote this on ledge of a bridge, would
you believe me?

Requiem

Jake McClave

As I slept

I was met with the face;)

Of already living

In

A

Dream

Like

(.....Space.....)

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Untitled
Jen McCarty

Twelve Years

Sam Messinides

I was nine years old in this photo, if I do the math.
Twelve years counted backwards, fingers furling
into fists.

Unfurling, furling again.

I never learned to count in my head
and it's too loud to try now.

I don't remember the day in the picture.

The skeletal walls of the cabin are finished now
and the soybean fields are gone.

I don't remember ever wearing that color blue
or owning those white shoes, streaked with red clay.

And that's what scares me,
because I know I haven't smiled like that
in twelve years
as my little brother's eyes peek out like
crescent moons from between his fat cheeks.
He'll be taller than me soon.

We got old.

Too fast.

I hope he still smiles the way he did
in that photograph and that
he knows that I always loved him

even when I didn't

and that I will still be here long after I am gone,
love holding my bones in place
twelve years at a time.

The House Faced East

Sam Messinides

Up on the hill the red brick walls teeter stubbornly
under withering rafters and the gaps between
where the cloudless blue peeks
through into the dust-choked black.

The window sills are barren now,
save for whispers of vines framing the silence
within,
glass cast to the weeds,
their jeweled edges hot with June heat.

I can still feel you here
and I want that to mean something.
Out in the garden the spiderwort
thickens in defiance
of the abandon.

Perhaps this is all to say
that the morning will burn on
and that someday I will have loved you.
Just like this. A dream.
Quiet at first and then all at once.

Spartina Roots

Jake McClave

Perched upon a southern sound
wide brims flair and feather.

As Aries breathes
she brings old friends together.

Memories melancholy
&
ferment with age.

Intoxicated by requiems
of once childhood days.

Spartina roots holdfast
determined to remain.

Only Ghosts in the House

Sam Messinides

Nights like these were made for wanting.
And not having.

Nights thick with breathing and ruin.
Look now, through the window
upon our dying.

The rain scars the streets with meaning
as the asphalt ruptures under the havoc
of traffic lights.

Nights like these were made for dying.
We feel too much when it rains.

Eyes gathering darkness against the glass,
haunting their own sockets.
This is our dying.

Yield Nothing
Sophia McKeehan

Upon this appointed favor
I asked you to take care
Of shedding the axe
However your flesh protested

Thalassophobia

Jake McClave

What creature below me I cannot see,
a nightmarish conjure dwelling the deep.

I shout exposing myself cowardice,
they laugh not feeling my bump on the knee.
This was something they could not truly see.

With terror as my anchor I linger,
now forfeiting my safety in others.
With each stroke and stride my breath lags behind,
a lion of the sea without his pride.

I shouldn't be here this is not for me.
I forget my pride and look to the shore,
but our friend has not yet forgotten me.
My senses now forsaken me as prey.
Painting a graphic picture of what is,
the creature below me I cannot see.

Untitled 1

Traliya Mitchell

I see a lonely tree. Stump and sad
I grab a branch, holding onto its roots
Day by day
the tree grows
Roots slowly moving up my arm
Til they consume me
Day by day
The tree grows
Till I am wrapped up in all their ropes
Til it drains me
What a selfish tree
I tried to offer another way
But there is only one
Draining my energy
To grow
How could the tree not see
How could they disregard my feelings
But it's ok
I saw the sad Monterey grow
Into a beautiful peace of nature
giving shade into others
Because I let the ropes of this tree
Consume me
Without me
How would they grow,
I cannot leave

I have to pretend everything is fine
Otherwise
How would they survive
How selfish of me
I cannot leave
Til it is the death of me

Grounding

Yasna Hadipour

There is a stillness surrounding me that contradicts the storm that rages inside. The breeze blows with such tenderness that I almost do not feel it; the only indication that I am not imagining it is the sway of the leaves on the trees around me. Cars go past and I hear birds singing their songs and bugs buzzing along while I do nothing but sit here. There is the sound of a lawn mower in the distance and the occasional voice or bark. A group of three crows pass by so closely I almost hear their feathers ruffle together as they fly. I look to the lizard sunning on a nearby rock and there is no sense of urgency, perhaps because there is no sense of time- no schedules or deadlines or feelings of impending doom surrounding the fact that she should be doing something that she is not. There is only the rock and the sun. I take deep breaths and try to match my inhalations to the sounds of nature. The sky eventually darkens.

When it begins to rain, the drops fall through the sky with an elegance and grace that was not translated to humans. The impact is gentle as the rain showers the earth with a million little kisses. The sky breaks and light surges through,

accentuating the outline of the earth. And as quickly as the light had come, it is gone again.

It is difficult for me to believe and even harder to accept that humans are as much of a part of nature as the birds and the rain. Everything in this life, and even everything in me, feels so artificial- an abomination to the natural world. It is necessary, though I often forget, to be still- to match the beating of my heart to the pulsing of the earth; to breathe in the sighs of the trees and feel the wind dance across my skin in a way that assures me I have not and will never be alone. I take one last breath and go back inside.

Untitled 2

Traliya Mitchell

The weight of the water is comforting
snug

Not letting me walk away

caring

wanting me and only me to themselves

I never imagined feeling of death being so

Loving

Luxe Rosé
Icis Dunlap

Brown yet still in form
dry yet I come back for more
Gone said the last pour



Americana 2
E.J. Stephens

Seeing you differently

Icis Dunlap

Her breath
Fills atmosphere
Her face drowning in rain
Providing life for your soil
Yet you
Go on
And she lets you
Erupt a kind spirit
Grounded in the dirt of your world
Thriving

Flesh and Blood (excerpt)

A. Miller

He saw the women through the water. He felt the numbness pushing its way back into his bones. God, he was so tired. His vision began to tinge black. He waited to drift back down again, fall asleep under the weight of the cool water.

But then hands were grabbing his shoulders and he was being pulled upright. His lungs seized for air. Hands slammed into his stomach. They whacked his back. Colton collapsed onto all fours, arched, then vomited onto his hands. Red ribbons of blood shot from his mouth, drenching his pale, twitching fingers. His vision pulsed, growing redder and redder with each strobe. The room felt like it was breathing, closing in around him. He gagged and the bile wouldn't stop coming up. Tears were stinging his eyes. A venomous taste of iron and grit stuck to the back of his throat like peanut butter. The hands were still on him. He heard chanting and whatever was at the back of his throat grew bigger, started to twist and gurgle. The women were saying something but he couldn't make it out. Everything was pulsing and painful. The pressure was growing inside him, around him, until there seemed to be no part of him left. And then just when he thought he would burst, everything stopped.

The room was quiet. He had nothing left in his stomach, in his veins. He collapsed onto his side, shivering.

It seemed like an eternity he was just laying there, hurting. A woman held out a large black vase in front of him. She unscrewed the lid. “Eat,” she ordered.

With jerky motions, he turned his head just slightly and peered into the vase. Something inside of it was roaring, the same way a couch shell will when they’re held against your ear on a windy beach. But there was no wind. The whole room was silent but the hissing from the inside of the black vase.

Even this far away, Colton smelled ash and blood and metal. But –

The woman shook the vase. “Eat.”

He was so hungry. Not normal-hungry. The thought of bread, fruit, anything that would normally stave a person made him want to wretch - if only he had the strength to wretch. No, food wasn’t enough. He didn’t want food. Food wasn’t good enough. Not for him. He needed something more, something bigger- he was so empty, so hungry, so starved -- he

needed something there to take the place of what had been lost... and there was the ashes. They reeked of fire, but flesh, power, vitality.

He ripped the vase from the woman's hands and poured it down his throat. The women cooed in excitement- all except one, standing with her arms crossed in the corner of the scarlet room, made more ripe by the flavor of the ashes. She seemed dangerously familiar, but he was too distracted to care. He chugged the ashes down, swallowing one sticky gulp after another. And when he was done, they handed him another vase- this one tall and red. He didn't hesitate. Colton grabbed it, and licking off whatever ash didn't go down, he put the cool glass to his lips and drank hungrily. It was a thick, salty, metallic liquid. Too much drank too quickly made his head spin and as he clawed to regain himself, he tried to yank it away. But the women were there. And then women pinned his hands, his throat, his legs. Like a spoiled child refusing to eat, then took the vase from him and forced it against his mouth. "Drink!" The one woman shoved it against his teeth, but he had his jaw clamped shut. Something in his stomach was roaring, writhing painfully in tune to the roaring sound the vase of ashes had made.

"DRINK!" She pinched his nose. He tried to hold it in, but he couldn't breathe. He opened his

mouth to gasp for air, and she seized the opportunity to force the liquid down. “Eat the body,” she murmured. When the vase was empty, Colton fell onto his side, holding his stomach. He felt feverish. Too hot, too cold. He groaned, pushing his fists further against his ribs. The thing wiggled through his bones and bucked under his fingers. There was something taking shape inside him. He started to writhe. He wanted to rip out his own flesh, make room for the thing inside him, the thing that was pushing his organ and blood vessels, trying to make the space he didn’t have. And when it couldn’t fit, and he couldn’t push himself any further, it began to eat. It began to eat the parts of him away.

A Letter to my Cat

A. Miller

I wonder if you're lonely in the ground.
Like I'm lonely in my bed without you.
I wonder if they're taking care of you out there
Or if you're scared
If there's a part of you that's conscious of your own
decaying -
The mites finding life between the pads of your
paws
The soil tumbling between the folds of the blanket I
wrapped you in
and the roots tying round your rib cage
I hope you know that they aren't suffocating you
Not parasites making a host
They are coming for you
To make a new life.
There is sanctuary in your skin
Where death has squeezed away your spirit.
I buried you tight
I tucked you in your blanket
Now all you have to do
Is lay down
And sleep.

Mason Jars

A. Miller

You keep their fingers in your jars,
Lifeless, so they cannot scratch for help
Their hearts like smothered jam against these mason
lids
Keep them like trophies, like idols,
The bodies more personal to you than the person
herself
You say their existence is purposeless
If they have not laid in your bed, if they have not
Objectified themselves first and silenced their voice
By wrapping their lips around your member
Who gives you the right?
Who put that pistol in your hand and made you
God?
Their bodies are not your bodies
Who gave you the strength to dominate, to overrule
When you are made of broken pieces -
A heart, your fingers, as lifeless and unfeeling
As her slaughtered female parts in your mason jars.

Darkroom Housefire

Carly Rossi

You were the photograph in the album of my thoughts.

I burned you to a million pieces when I saw the flames through the walls.

It was easy to miss-- the bright, rising infernos matching our surrounding hues.

But you noticed the fire before I did and let it run.

“Maybe it would just burn out eventually.”

But I couldn't bet on that.

It could hurt me. It could hurt us.

It could spread and hurt others.

Too afraid of all the maybes and what ifs that could change our situation,

I did what both of us knew was coming.

I put it out and ended things.

Finding Isaac (excerpt)

A. Miller

When it started, Isaac and I spent a lot of time together after school. My mom was an elementary school teacher and she always had work to do after class, so me and all the other work kids used to run down the halls in the strange after-hours of school, steal quarters from the “counting jar” of our mom’s classroom and stock up on Cokes and Sprites in the teacher’s lounge. I guess it never occurred to me at the time that Isaac didn’t have a parent who was a teacher - there was no Mr. or Mrs. Clay - but he behaved like a teacher’s kid like all the rest of us. He belonged, and so I didn’t question it.

But one day, when we were all playing our version of dodgeball on the soccer field, James McGomery asked, “How come I only see you in Ava’s mom’s classroom? Doesn’t your mom have her own classroom? Or is she just, like, really mean or something?”

I couldn’t remember exactly how Isaac had started to become a vital part of my after school routine, but it had been so long and it had happened so organically, I never bothered to question it. School was like a second home to me, and since Isaac was always there, he was like an adoptive brother. Isaac

loved school, and he loved after school more. He was always bummed when my mom and I had to take him home.

Isaac tossed the ball up and down several times before responding, “my mom doesn’t work here,” he said. “She’s just really busy. So I wait around with Ava, and then her and her mom take me home afterwards. Any more dumb questions or are you ready to get your ass kicked?”

James’ face turned red. I snorted, slapping my hands over my mouth. Isaac and I were the same age, but I had always seen him as my older, cooler brother who was always wise and never stumbled to say a cuss word or something sharp. He always sounded like an adult, or a teenager from a movie.

James wasn’t quite ready to let it go. “Someone told me you live in the Mudds. Is that true?”

Isaac stared at him, and I stared at James.

At the time, I didn’t really know what the Mudds were but I knew they always sounded bad. My parents never talked about politics much, and if they did, I didn’t pay attention. I always assumed

that's how kids got the information that I didn't know
- from listening to their parents.

I knew, however, that there was a stark difference from the neighborhood that I lived in and the neighborhood that Isaac did. For as long as I could remember, our hometown had resembled something like a patchwork of normal houses, rich houses, and poor houses all stitched together. There was no hierarchy or clear division in a traditional sense where maybe one side of the town was poor and the other was rich - they all melded together. The difference was obvious when you would have parts all over town where a bent, crooked fence like a pair of braces would lock in a cluster of mobile homes and right next door would be a winding community of life-size doll houses overlooking the shore.

I looked at Isaac, and for a moment I worried that he was going to yell at James, but then he grinned and hurled the ball. In James' confusion, he let out a loud yelp and although he had been playing the game with all defenses up, he never saw it coming when the kickball hit him square in the stomach.

“You're out,” Isaac said, “should have paid more attention.”

“That’s not fair!” James yelled, “I was distracted.”

Isaac shrugged, “sounds like a ‘you’ problem. Shoulda called recess.”

We continued to play until the sun started to melt between the trees and we knew it was time to return home to our respective classrooms. James didn’t bring up the Mudds ever again that year. That was back when we didn’t quite understand the subject of Mudds and Sandies and the topic could be derailed by a kickball to the stomach.

Kiln or be Kilned

Carly Rossi

I'm not "stuck in the mud" stuck.
The mud I'm in feels like clay.
The weight of it on my legs is tight and unbearable.
The way it pulls me and dries out my heart makes
me believe
I'll never be able to reach the surface if I don't
Get out now.

Soon enough it will turn me into something I'm not.
A decorative plate,
A vase that seems to only fit one small, wilted
flower...
Other pottery items that could have been useful but
Just sit there with their pretty reflections and empty
souls.

(Masochist adjacent)

Iesha Whittaker

It's time to admit that you enjoy pain,
not the physical kind,
And perhaps enjoy isn't the right word,
but pain gives you comfort

When you're in pain, you feel alive,
conscious of your existence

Maybe you're not so incongruent
Maybe you are human

You rather feel afflicted than
vacant, hollow and broken.



Untitled 7
Graceyn Yonce

Golden Pothos

Emily Matthews

Questioning if my current state of braveness comes from a place of courage or from a place of pain, I am curious in this instance because I know both of these places well. There is no fine line distinguishing the two, courage or pain... not caring about the origin of which one pertains to my circumstance, I spit out a rather dangerous question.

I ask, why me? How can I show or be shown authentic love by someone or something when I hardly have enough love for my small, low-maintenance house plant, much less any for myself? I only question the existence and depth of reason and of love because of how heavy this humanness feels to me at times. This is my prayer for which I feel no words adequately exist. My stained thoughts are washed over with the fragile feeling of peace and comfort when I feel my heart deeply taking root into my body, down to the ground beneath my vessel, reassuring me that in this exact moment, this is where I am supposed to be-questioning the meaning of it all? Maybe, but at least finally present. This is new to me; my soul feels uneasy because I am used to my absence. I don't understand this new feeling, the idea of hope

and grace and love. I assume this is already embedded into some, because how would humanity have made it this long without? Is this hopefulness an attribute I was only destined to live among?

I often hear that everything happens for a reason, but the more I realize that the ones who have said this to me are the ones tempted the most with the idea that there is no reason at all. I find myself believing that this phrase has become only words that are said to comfort the wondering. I feel like the only way we are able to live rather than just survive, is to put our own reasons to the days that happen to us.

I have found my reasons in the most distinctive places; on the lips of a stranger's gentle smile, the warm sunrise on chaotic morning, rested in my sister's loud laughter, the trees that are in bloom all year-round, and with only twenty-four hours on my worst days. Not to mention, my low-maintenance house plant, who is in fact, thriving.

Dead Red

Emily Matthews

But red is a classic. Red is the color of a woman. Their gaze travels from my showing ankles to my distracting shoulders and then back up again to God knows where. I am the one who put this red on my lips. It's no longer placed here out of anger, but it's still bleeding red like I remember. There are some who gently line their lips before perfectly coloring it in with their red, but that is not me. I have learned that red is messy. People only like red on women when it is convenient for them.

Silkworm

Yasna Hadipour

The comfort and safety of the womb is not one I remember. Even so, since my gruesome emergence, I have pursued the familiarity of security, warmth, and a sure sense of belonging. Joy is fleeting: a silk thread that slips through time and space faster than the wind can blow new pleasures into our lives. But still, I cling. Still, I search.

Here. Here, I can taste the phantoms of happiness, of peace. Here, the hands of time cannot touch me; not for a while, at least.

I am alone. Warmth surrounds me and I am encompassed by the sacred, ephemeral silk. Like a worm I am resting, growing, changing. My own little sanctuary, where I can allow myself to shed my skin and collapse into a pile of tired bones.

The cloud beneath me supports my aching frame. The blanket cocooned around my body holds me together as I let myself fall apart. There is no light, save for what manages to slip through the cracks of the blinds. The air caresses me as a lover would. My anxieties were left at the door, and though I can still hear their incessant chatter, their whispers through the walls, they are no longer

shouting. It is never quiet, but, finally, it is not so loud.

Beacon of Courage

E.J. Stephens

Standing tall against the elements
beauty goes unnoticed, Saluting
minds rest protected, lounging
about your feet.

Laughter swirls among the arteries,
adoringly watching as hope drifts
through young hearts dashing.

Extending warmth, dancing lightly
along the green, calling here, and there,
come, come, don't pass swiftly.

Stay, play among our laurels
rejoice in your triumphs, send
the young, and old alike, soak
in my waters, drench yourself,
within riches all deserve.

Leave footprints engrained
within my soul, as echoes announce
names forever cast in precious stone.

Mistress of Pollen (excerpt)

A. Miller

I have moved into this estate because of Daisy and yet I have not seen her exhibit a single sign of gratitude. While I admit, the estate has not been well-tended for many years and it was purchased at a significant discount, it is not often that I am able to afford such a vast and luxurious mansion. I understand that women, in their ways, appreciate a man of great wealth and prestige, but Daisy has never been so taken by such things and besides that point, I don't believe it is the finances that particularly bother her. Daisy says that our ancestral halls frighten her, but I believe it is her condition that causes her to trouble herself with such things.

Ever since the miscarriage, Daisy has not quite been the same. My wife has always been difficult. When we first met, I found it charming; her slight eccentricities, her defiant nature. It was quaint - a headstrong sort of disposition rarely found in females, especially one of such small feminine stature. She truly was enchanting to a scientific mind; this duality of body and spirit. I wondered - I had hoped - that marriage would tame her - but it seems that she has only gotten worse.

It sounds foolish now, coming from a physician of my standing, but I had not suspected my wife of hysteria for some time. I had always known her to be outspoken and strange. Any queernesses she exhibited, I had simply dismissed as exhibitions of a colorful personality. She had told me on multiple occasions during that dreaded winter that she had trouble falling asleep due to troubling nightmares of the child that had never come to be, but Daisy had often been known to exaggerate.

I won't tell you in great detail what event led me to believe that she may be exhibiting any signs of hysteria, for here is the manor, and here in the future ahead of us. I am a man of progress. Any mishaps of the past are to be left in the past, and I do believe it would serve Daisy well to take note of that.

I was relieved to see that Daisy was enjoying the estate upon our arrival. She did not even grab her hat case, which she so truly desires, from the car before she rushed into the garden with her skirts hiked, a smile wide on her rosy cheeks. The previous owner had left an overgrown greenhouse and many boxed gardens to frolic-in. While Daisy is beautiful gallivanting around in the greenery, her bright brown eyes as wide and sparkling as a child's doll, I have to remind myself that I must be strict with her and any

emotional stimulation would negatively affect her physique.

That is why I have resolved to move her into the estate's upstairs nursery. Upon setting her luggage down, Daisy protests, saying that she would much rather sleep by the rose garden where she can overlook the shrubbery and the flowers. Where she can sit with a cup of tea and her diary –

This is where she stops herself. “There will be no mental stimulation or work on this retreat,” I have to remind her. I shake my head, tssking. She gets carried away so often. Just one frolic in the rose garden and she has already forgotten why we came to this place in the first place. Now, Daisy turns red and tries to argue back at me, but I put up my hand and stop her. I have to remind her that I, too, will be sharing the room and that I selected it specifically for her. There is but one window, which provides just the appropriate amount of breeze to soothe her (though Daisy insists that the strange temperament of the breeze upsets her) and that the brightness of the wallpaper would do well to cheer her spirits, though those too she expresses unsettles her. I grow more frustrated by the minute. I cannot please her - there is no solution to be proposed. When that doesn't work, I have to resolve to raise my voice. In my shadow, Daisy is always quick to retreat. I do not like

having to be stern with her, but she gives me no other options. I drive myself sick having to remind her that I am the doctor and she is the patient, and I know what will be best for her.

Ms. Virginia

E.J. Stephens

Innocence so bright, has a blight, not
free from this rite, red flags fly unwanted,
impounding freedom, desired by those wanting
sweet honey's light.

Eve's apple blossomed, with rights to twilights,
glory blocked, and confined, Sitting high, smiles
cheer patriotic flights of semen selling
coal for diamonds.

Aches, and screams sound out as undesirable cells,
swell, awaiting the journeys through canals,
narrowly ready, young voices snatched,
before rights of the butterfly was free.

Cries sing through walls lined by souls' paths
they follow, no guidance for their plights,
despising a seed, laughing at the depths
of pains.

Nations frown as equality is stifled
in the land of openness and honor.
Liberty hangs her head, as states call out
her name, chanting land of free, blowing smoke,
up her red, white, and blue skirt.

Reveling the chosen few without a vessel self-
control
to carry the light.

Gold never wants honey

E.J. Stephens

My allies, my brother

wars face
cruel, free love
fire flying leaves nothing
hijabs for sale daily, joy only sees
bullets

Never seen

women
bloody horror
heads washed cold, Ah-s
silent symbols
gone

Dusty Jane's

sweet girls,
tears passed on bread
from mother's, years before
stones found your pretty face mid smile
absent

Morning light lifts

prayers high
in mourning as
the sun's east shadow cries
gives a silent world
tears

U is of A's

condemned
leaders' dead words
blast homes, as war runs swift in
worlds circled by smoke signs long ago
sanctioned

Legal shame

We 24

Kylie Metheny

The air was frigid in the auditorium. This wasn't out of the ordinary, the school was known for its inability to keep a heater working for more than 4 hours a day, but the cold felt like an insulting turn of the screw that day. It was unnerving, feeling so unsure in the room I had spent every night in for the last 3 months.

I walked, almost casually, down to the small gathering of crying teenagers spread across about two dozen seats at the front of the stage. It reminds me of a tragedy that had occurred my freshmen year. A senior named Helen had taken a turn on the winding back roads of our town and was killed by an oncoming truck. It sent tremors through the whole county. Things like that weren't supposed to happen in such a quiet, close-knit community. Yet, this tragedy was different. There would be no candlelight vigil, no yearly memorial, no mandatory grief counseling. 24 teenagers were grieving someone who was years from death.

I was pulled out of my thoughts by the feeling of arms around me. I was in an embrace with a girl I had barely spoken to. We had joked

around backstage a few times and she had filled me in on notes I had missed a few rehearsals back, but when we saw each other in the halls we wouldn't so much as wave. I shared hugs like that with each of the 24 that day. Each one felt like some unspoken agreement. We were each other's people now, no longer just acquaintances trying to put on a good show. They don't have a five-step plan for the kind of grief we were experiencing, but we figured it out together. Our once beloved director's decisions may have ruined his own life, his own career, but they weren't about to ruin ours. Not even close.

evoL

Iesha Whittaker

It's the feeling that stirs in the darkest crevice of the
heart

The one that with each thought and reflection upon
tears me apart

So uncontrollable and untamable that it pollutes
every sacred and sincere intention

Why is it that I allow it to control me

To denture my very sanity

To cultivate new feelings of loss and rejection

To infect my every emotion

To drive me to my deepest low

It claws and claws till...

It desires requestion

To no avail

It is unrequited



Bobcat in Snow
Lindsay Pettinicchi

District 7

Kylie Metheny

The muddied ground slushes under my feet as we hike to our destination. I focus on the smell of wet pine surrounding me. This was the best time for one of our adventures, right after the rain had swept over the trees with its gentle wrath. The dirt was soft enough for the loggers to shut down operation, giving us the perfect in. I feel the crisp air hit my skin, and I know we're reaching our cross. I look at the small waterfall before me and attempt to gain my balance on the thick log parading as our makeshift bridge. I feel calloused hands steady me, my eyes catching on the dark-eyed girl in front of me. Her palms weary and worn from her aid in the orchard that morning. We navigate our way across, anchoring each other as we go. It doesn't take us much time to reach the jagged rocks of our desires. The tree line parts, as if welcoming us. I take a cautious step forward, glancing at the daunting waters below me. I back up, stumbling into the two long-haired boys. The boys tease me, asking if I'll finally join in on our entire purpose for coming here. I shake my head, moving to sit on a smoothed edge of the peak. I watch as the long-haired boys and the dark-eyed girl take a running start. They leap into the uncertainty below with joyful screams and laughter. I hear the familiar splashing below,

but I do not glance over the rocks edge. I sit, and I wait for my adventurers to reappear through the trees once more. I'd return to this place 100 more times, but I'd never jump.

Billy's Moon

Patti Teter

Chester was locked up in Golden Grove Correctional Center for assault and Janey spent days with Lyle and Billy on the beach. Their home was up a hill, a short distance away and looked unfinished and lonely. There was no glass in the windows, unpainted cinder block foundation, a curled tin roof and heavy uncut wooden doors, that dragged the ground and made some impossible to open. The furniture and beds were patched and mended from the consignment stores or the locals who carefully placed salvageable items beside the dumpsters. No electricity, but no need for air conditioning, as the trade winds blew 24/7 and provided comfortable ventilation through the thick walls.

Rains brought scorpions with curled tails, that bit painfully from both ends if you were unlucky enough to encounter one. They hung from the door frames like ornaments and Janey always stared above her before she entered the house. Tricky Mongoose were vicious little creatures and came out at sundown, jumped through the windows to steal anything edible. Tolerated by the locals, they rid the island of snakes or rats. Lyle hung plastic bags from the ceiling where they could

not reach it, for they were quite resourceful in opening cabinets without latches.

A large dugout in the sand was used to cook in the backyard, and Lyle usually built a fire and placed tin over it. Fish, Caribbean lobster, mussels, or veggies were placed on top and covered with a croaker sack, wherein beer or whatever available, would be poured over the top and allowed steamed, fresh delicacies. Janey waited on the beach for their arrival in the morning. They sometimes brought a ripe mango or Johnny cake to soothe the hunger pains. Lyle slowly walked up behind, and she jumped.

“You scared me, where’s Billy?”

“He won’t be with us today. He’s sick and asked for you last night...If you make money doing an errand, save it for a pint of rum. That’s all he asks for.”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Old age and years of rum and smoke. He wants to wash in the ocean. Will you help me bring him down in the afternoon?”

“Of course,” she sighed. She knew that the ocean was a last resort to heal.

Lyle looked old himself. His weathered face was cracked with lines, and he was the color of a buckeye from years in the sun. She stared and noticed his eyes were weak and moist. His nails were yellow and long. She wished she could cut them. His pants were held with a rope, no button on the top. An old Huck Finn. Late that afternoon they walked together up the hill. The air permeated with Lyle’s smokey sweat and she tried not to breathe in too much. The sandy road conjured up little tornados of paper, dirt, and empty bags, that swirled like her mind from the heat. Billy was lying on an old cot with his face to the wall. He shook and moaned as he rolled over.

“Are you ready for the ocean?” Janey asked and he nodded.

“Would you read to me when we get back?”
He asked.

Billy dropped to his knees and struggled to slide something from under the bed. The huge golden book had a shiny mother-of-pearl glow with broken shells glued haphazardly to its cover.

“What is this?”

“My family Bible. I’m almost blind now. I need to know the names written in it. Each of my family signed. Need to hear the Word.”

Lyle brought a smooth piece of gray driftwood used as Billy’s cane, and they helped him to his feet. The walk was stop and go, and by the time they reached the beach, the moon hung so low, it was touchable.

“She’s watching us,” Billy said.

“Who?” Lyle said.

“She,” Billy pointed to the gigantic orb.

They undressed Billy to his shorts and steadied him to the quiet incoming tide. He shuddered as the water covered his legs. They filled a cup with water and streamed it down his back.

“Too cold?” Janey said, but he shook his head and stared at the gray ocean.

“I never helped anyone. Too busy thinkin’ bout myself. It was all bout me. Where to get

food, or smoke or something to satisfy whatever I needed at the time. Never time for anything like mama or the sister. No time for important things,” he said.

Lyle and I sat down in the shallow water beside him.

“Never told anybody, but one time I remember mama falling in the house. She cried out that she couldn’t get up and to help her. I heard her, but I didn’t help her. Left her right there and walked out the house. Spent the day drinkin with the boys and playin dominos. When I come home, she was still on the floor and had wet herself. I stood over her and watched her like I was God or somethin’. Left her there and went to bed. I listened to her cry until sister got home and helped her up. That was me. Never carin’”, he said.

“You were too young to know better. You helped lots of people in the day,” Lyle said.

“I am so sorry for the way I was. Wish I could tell mama and God how sorry.” He hung his head and wailed.

“You can ask God right now for forgiveness. He know. He know.” Lyle said.

When they returned home, Janey and Billy sat in the windowsill and lit a tiny candle, but it was the light from the yellow moon that brought enough to read from the enormous Bible. She read name after name and the dates they were born and died. She read from the Old Testament and The New Testament David and Solomon, Christ, and the Disciples, until Janey could hardly keep her eyes open. She looked over and he had fallen asleep against the wall, his head rested on his chest. She and Lyle helped him to bed and covered him.

When she came back in the morning, Lyle sat under the Banyan tree.

“I added his name to the Big Book,” he said.

Tide

Patti Teter

Fan out of our cove,
This weary day,
Past the escarpment-You do know the way?
Dolphins thrust fish onto the shore
Snowy egrets look on and seem to ignore.
The wind growls and wants my cap,
Hair wipes out and gives me a slap,
Just when the tide is right.

Murmuration of starlings put on a show
They swoop and follow, nowhere to go.
A green frog caught this splendid ride,
He eyes me intently, no reason to hide.
Just when the tide is right.

The Grey Key West spills out to sea,
Smell of the pluff mud familiar to me
I am at peace again, my wits are anew
Red globe moves west and waves adieu,

Just when the tide is right.

Euphemia

Hudson DeLoach

An eternal night,
Filled with boundless roses,
Delicate to touch and sweet to smell,
Something I could never possess,
But in its finite facsimile...
Tears well in my eyes,
As I mourn a world that never was,
Nor ever could have been...

Cairo

Patti Teter

The Mohammed Ali mosque guarded the city. Its minarets towered the expansive, globe dome, which was surrounded by a huge courtyard. Kate and Chip reached Cairo exhausted from their final trip to the Valley of the Kings, where they played tourist, rode camels and crawled on the inside to the top of a pyramid. When she reached the top, Kate's head spun from lack of air, or perhaps just the energy at the top of a king's tomb. They checked into their hotel and planned on a street falafel before they retired.

Outside of the hotel, some young men had gathered and motioned for them to follow.

“They must have seen us come in.” Chip acknowledged. There was no worry about their intentions.

They fell into an entourage of men in long, white, cotton robes, with hair tucked neatly in short, rounded, religious taqiyahs. Most of the Arab men could not speak English, but it was pantomimed enough to understand they had invited them for mint tea, usually in shiny, copper pots, and hashish,

packed into fiery, long tobacco pipes, laughingly called , “Ubbly bubbly.”

The air was alive with the enchantment of festivals and dances in the streets, while the people waited excitedly, for the dignitaries to arrive in Cairo soon. The tent or lean-to they searched for, sat up a steep hill, so the climb was slow over the rocky terrain. The Kasbah lay at the bottom behind them, as they shuffled their way up. Chip walked some distance ahead of her, and was engaged in conversation, not concerned with her obvious trudge up the hill. She was frightened by the intense diversity of this country and Chip was unaffected, and worldly. She cried often and was frequently sick. He said she should learn to take care of herself.

They struggled to the top of the hill, and one of the Arabs politely held the tent door for her. Seated on the ground on flat, embroidered pillows, the men smiled, positioned by a tame fire, and motioned them in. Kate sat down closest to the make-shift door and waited. The pipe was stuffed meticulously, sticky, soot-black, hash pushed in with stringy, tobacco on the top. The men began to pass it around the fire. Kate had not heard her come in, but the men became sullen and motioned the person to go away. An ancient woman plopped

down beside her with a toothless smile. Her hair was wrapped tightly in a black turban and with a jolt, Kate noticed the woman had no arms. They were clean cut from the elbows down. A sure sign of the grandest thieves, Kate thought. She had learned from the trip into homes, proper etiquette. The right hand is the working hand, used for daily activities such as to eat, and the left used for cleaning your rear, as you poured water from a provided pitcher down your back. The person with the right hand removed was outcast, for most meals were enjoyed in one bowl. But both arms removed? She must have done something terrible, she thought, puzzled. Her biggest concern at the time was how to pass the pipe to the armless woman. The serpent pipe arrived in Kate's lap, and she took a hard, choking hit and leaned to the woman.

“Smoke?” Kate asked.

The woman, cackled in animal-like laughter, understood and motioned for the snake pipe. Holding the pipe with her elbows, the woman bent to pull a slender stick out of her pocket with her teeth, and with surprisingly, little effort, used it to push and clean the resin of the pipe deeper into bowl. This went on for several minutes, until the men growled and grunted for her to pass it along.

With the dilemma of the passing of the pipe resolved, she finally had the courage to look at the faces by the fire. Maybe paranoia from the hash, or maybe she was uncomfortable for women weren't allowed in social situations with men, especially a young American, and an armless thief. Could there be ramifications? She thought with a gulp. Chip whispered he was going out for a pee, just at the wrong time. She adjusted her pillow and gazed timidly up.

Every face in the group looked like someone she knew in her life. There was a childhood friend, smirking through crusty lips, her first boyfriend, kicking ashes back into the fire, a drinking buddy, with tangled long eyebrows and greasy hair sticking out from his turban. Gotta be the hashish, she thought, and tried to shake it off. Kate's eyes continued and stopped on the one man she hoped to never remember. Her attacker from years before. Although he could not stare, his eyes constantly wandered, and rolled in all directions. Like an animal sensing fear, he growled and showed his teeth, smelling the terror in her. He was dark and had a hook nose with eye lashes, long and thick, like a camel. His lips curled to points on the sides of his mouth and his skin was weathered and blistered. He fingered a stone with grimy hands and pushed

his way off the ground. Was he making his way to her? Kate wanted out. Every muscle in her body tensed and she felt glued in her position, just as she had years before. Crawling for the door, she got to her knees, stood, and lifted the tent. Chip was nowhere! She felt air on the back of her neck. Fear encompassed her. She turned to see the man, a breath behind her, noses brushed, eyes continued to roll. FLIGHT, NOT FIGHT! Kate's mind screamed.

She dared not look back, and collided with clothes lines, chickens, dogs, frightened women and children, as she jumped open fires, kicked garbage and fell into holes and dry bushes, down the hill. The rocks rolled and crashed into people, their voices raised in protest, pigs squealed, while water and objects, flew past her. She dared not stop and fell and got up, fell and got up, scraping her knees and busting her jaw, until finally, she slid into an embankment, a dog running up to lick her blackened face. She had reached the Kasbah, the market still bustling. She looked up in embarrassment, to see Chip coming toward her.

“Get up. They are arriving early,” he said standing over her, “The treaty will be signed hopefully in morning, and we can get the hell home.”

He turned and walked casually away! Tears and rain began to fall. She looked around and did not see the man from the tent. She rolled over and a little boy kicked a ball to her, as she attempted to get up. An old woman in a black kaftan walked over to help her stand. She laughed. Where next?

Song of Self

Hudson DeLoach

I am the free-standing willow,
I am a dead past's sad echo,
I am the grit that forms a road,
I am the sober dreaming night,
I am the sunlight wanderer,
I am a night bird's sad warble,
I am a footnote in a history,
I am the things that walk the road alone.
But only to the grim, impassive me.
Others might say of me,
"You are my moment of joy,"
"You are a spark of inspiration,"
"You are unyielding honesty,"
"You are the calm ship on a rough sea,"
"You are the pain that I love,"
"You are better than you think,"
"You are the you I'm proud of,"
It should seem I am a bountiful me.

Untitled No6

Hudson DeLoach

You whisper sweetly Holy Lady,
Through the sheets and around the bed,
You, your bounties spread before me,
Laid out with glaze words air'ly said.
Like an organ, your will does play me,
Tender touch with trembling beats wed,
To join fore'er, so you bade me,
To sate these passions, so far unfed.
Yet such enchanted, pallid white,
As we've learned from history's light,
Comes from mineral cerussite,
Killing its dame in cruel spite.



Hooded Merganser
Lindsay Pettinicchi

Fear No Reaper

Hudson DeLoach

I met a man in a foreign land,
His heart sagging from his chest,
Who said to me in passing,
As we happened to pass a field,

“On yonder field I'll make my bed,
Not to rise again or to take bread,
But on that field I'll soon be dead,
My stomach full with rotten lead.”

Before the gray

Iesha Whittaker

I miss seeing the world through little big eyes
When clouds had shapes
And cars had faces
And each earthworm had a name
When I had many happy dreams, filled with wonder
And I knew not of labor and responsibility
When I could easily pinpoint a beautiful
constellation
And every beach needed a sandcastle
And friends were easy to make
When every sunrise and sunset was colorful art
And I knew not of pollution
When my soul purpose was to take it all in

To Health

Hudson DeLoach

I've often marveled at the stagnant colossi in stride. The same as you or I, moving at speeds so slow they prove imperceptible. Even then, they live, breathe, love, and die...

When I have finally died, leaving this world to my children, our colossus will have taken its third stride since I began counting, when I was a small child. All of them down a narrow dirt track between the even more massive trees. There are a dozen more behind ours, a tapestry of colours and numbers...

Sometimes, I used to wonder why they were running. I trekked from our colossus to the ones behind but found no answers among their inhabitants. I walked until I met neither man nor colossus before turning back...

I could not find answers so I made my own, I tested my theories, and I ran too. Down a dirt track would have appeared to the colossi as a cute reproduction. I discovered that it was hard, to run and to recover, that I would sweat and my joints would ache...

Why do they run? If they are like us, and they look like us, it should hurt to run. I did not have the answers, so I kept on running. One day, I realized that I had long since abandoned finding an answer...

But I still ran, every morning. Sometimes staring up at the colossi and feeling a sense that, even though I was a hundred times smaller, I was certainly faster...

(Secret lover)

Iesha Whittaker

crawl through the tunnels and reignite the flame
make me feel what it's like to burn again

look at me with those kaleidoscope eyes
analyze every hue and reflective pattern

calm me with your gentle waves
wash over me and take me in

illuminate me with your laughter
let the notes awaken my hollow bones

Naw away the numb

Iesha Whittaker

pain feasts on my heart

but I don't mind

It's a beautiful symbiosis:

pain gets to eat

i get to feel

Tomorrow, I will understand them.

Graceyn Yonce

Expansion within myself is movement I crave.
There is a certain beauty in not knowing- a kind of
innocence that,
with a second glance,
is understood as selfishness.
I want to caress the face of a stranger,
I want to know their troubles.
What was dragged across the scarred
body of their soul?
What memories bring a soft smile to their
tired face?
Is it love in others that carries them forward,
or is it their own desire for expansion?

more melanin, more problems

Iesha Whittaker

HANDS AT 10 AND 2

They're watching you

LOOK BUT DONT TOUCH

Your kind likes to steal and such

BE INSIDE BEFORE THE STREET LIGHTS

RISE

They won't listen to your cries

TAKE THAT HOODIE OFF YOUR HEAD

Don't wanna end up dead

Be careful, don't let the felon in

All because God chose to give you more melanin

Stranger in the Mirror.

Graceyn Yonce

Everything I see in you, I also see in myself.
We are opposites, yet
I see my own reflection in your eyes.
Don't feel pressured to explain.
Your anger is justified. Your love is justified.
Every part of you is also a part of me.
I have loved you, I have despised you. I despise
myself.
I would probably do anything for you,
depending on who you are at the time.

The Crucible

Selena Menjivar

Jab their flesh— a red scare,
America's power to stir fears.
Creeping illusions, spiraling accusations
The paranoid cried out
Burn!

Forgotten Memories.

Graceyn Yonce

If time is the grand measurer of all things, how
would you describe me?
Would you describe me as a minute that drags by,
one you count down,
One that feels like torment?
Am I a summer that you didn't appreciate enough?
Like a sunset
sinking into the ground, did you find yourself
wishing for me to stay?
Am I a silent moment that you couldn't understand?
In the end, was I gone before you realized I was
even there?



Untitled 2
Graceyn Yonce

Soft

Sophia McKeehan

I'm soft. For a long time, I thought it meant I was weak. Or scared. That I didn't have it in me to stand up for myself. Countless times, I chose silence over yelling back, pushing, fighting, arguing. And sometimes, I tell myself I should've done something different. Said something. Told them they were hurting me. But I didn't.

I feel a lot. I think about the things people say. I let my sorrow course through my veins. And sometimes, it gets clogged up. The words don't go anywhere. It just sits and festers into a black mess, taking the rest of me with it.

I told you I was stuck. Do you remember what you said? It's not their words that's the problem, it's me. I'm too sensitive. You tell me to move on. To let go. Because the ones who hurt me aren't thinking about me anymore. And why should they? I meant nothing to them. I was just another girl looking at the floor, waiting for the inevitable.

I can't help but wish they'd think back to me. But even then, they'll never understand the significance of our interactions. They'll never know about the thorns they should've into my chest. The

suicidal thoughts, the depression, the anxiety, the medication. I guess that's just life when you're soft. You think too much. You're an easy target, a walking bullseye with lowered eyes. A free pass for abuse and manipulation.

I've thought about ending the pain for myself. Anything is better than reliving it, right? But I know I can't. Even through all the crying and arguments, the generational trauma and bullying, I can still see a fleck of life through the darkness. Just barely, but it's there. It looks like the sky when it's an unexpected color on the way home from a late shift. It's the way strangers look me in the eye when we pass on the street. It's the way I hum to myself when I'm happy. And all at once, I know that I have to hang on, that there has to be more to this life than pain.

And so, even after everything, here I am. Soft. But it's not my inhibitor anymore. Ironically, it is my strength. It's my will to live. Me having the gift to feel everything is who I am. I feel all the bad. And I feel all the good. And there's a lot of good to experience. So yes, I'm soft. Passionate about everything. Still dreaming, still creating. Still kissing and hugging and laughing and dancing. Being soft isn't being weak. It's being strong. It's choosing to guard my heart by guarding my tongue

when it isn't worth it. Being soft, it's a gift. It's forgiving others, so I can move on. It's choosing grace over rage. It's allowing the good and the bad to flow through and out, transforming into something else entirely. A life force. Being soft is beauty. Its kindness. It's love. It's me.

The Last Stop

Sean Pittman

We're running late to make it to our train. All the adults know something, but it hasn't quite been explained to me what's happening. For all my life, it's been the same sights, smells and movements, but they were a rite of passage. I'm not quite old enough to call a taxi or ride the subway alone, but I'll be bigger next year and things will be better tomorrow. I'm outside and my home is bleeding all the things that I had forgotten since I was little. Bedframes, photo albums, toys and clothes are being put inside a white truck whose name I don't know. Dad's here and it's not Sunday-which is odd. Moms made sure that we're dressed and we're saying little to the downstairs tenants and there's an air to what's happening. It's not the same metro station I recognize with the high up boarding station and the corners that are brown from smoke and wet newspaper. There's no need to hold on to the amber tokens, swipe a card that tells me I have one fewer trip remaining. No, this time it's a platform whose train is boarding and there's no more talking. I don't see Dad anywhere and my watch is still telling me that it is Friday.

I'd ridden trains before, but this one is different. I don't know where it leads or when it

will stop. There's no map or sign to tell me where the path we're following is taking us. It's cramped in here, and the sun was up when we boarded. I don't see the same brown bricked apartments, the concrete gardens, or towering offices in every direction. Each tick of my watch tells me that I'm further away from my tiny bed, my small room that overlooks the neighborhood. There are more trees now and a pregnant pause among us. Mom says something and I can't make sense of it. It's gone from my ears as soon as it has arrived. Stephanie's retreated into herself, Jennifer's wiping her eyes fighting back tears, Jessica's underneath mom's arm bawling and I'm fixed sitting in my seat with my bookbag filled with what my hands threw in it this morning. That unfamiliar darkness is coming and for the first time in my life I can truly recall, I can see the stars.

Like a Sister

Elizabeth Blanchard

Cheap bottles of borrowed wine
Darkened nights made from light
Burned with an incandescence
Of our adolescence

Theories of creation and existence
Heard by the Folly waves
Their sound silenced by laughter
Their breeze made warm by only us

A friend, you are
One I didn't suspect
Fifteen years have passed
Since we first met
An odd pairing some say we are
Each so different
But have journeyed so far

The Engineer

Sean Pittman

Engineer Mk. 1

Built wings. Bought a ladder. Forgot stationery.

Engineer Mk.2

The wings are finished drying. All the accounting has been verified with scrutiny. Ladder is set, no room for wobbling. The fittings are proper.

I ascend. Alas, to my dismay, I realize that I have left one variable unaccounted for—I forgot to leave stationery.

Engineer Mk. 3

Everything is as it is meant to be. A testament to mechanical harmony and mortal ingenuity. The wings are finally dry to the touch. My itinerary is punctual, my deadlines met. Fourteen to eighteen steps. Pythagoras, Euclid, Archimedes- flush with envy as I ascend. How they will write of me from on high—look at his splendor!! And yet... the view from up on high, a radiant sun, a boastful azure sky and nary a cumulus in sight. And still, dread, as I recognize my human err—the stationery, I forgot to scribe a will in the event of my unforeseen--

My mother's eyes

Rebecca Taliaferro

I once was a child
This I knew,
I raised up my siblings
And with them I grew.
And as the days became shorter
I finally realized why
I'd sometimes catch my mother with tears in her
eyes.
Sometimes tears of joy
Sometimes tears of pain.
But where an iron fist ruled
There was little to lose and all to gain.

Now I see to my mother why kids were a chore,
The oldest daughter is supposed to help
And do so much more.
Not just me, but her as well
The pressure being built from the sting of welts.
Now when I look back to my childhood and try to
see
Why I was a parent, a mother of three.
But in the reflection of my mother, I find
What was made to become and how my life was
never mine.

Answer the Call

Selena Menjivar

It craves

a brush with can break minds,
some are so fortunate to the stillness.

It craves

O hollow heart; do you hear It?

Drag me to hell for the better

It Craves

Telescope

Traliya Mitchell

Extremely sensitive

Form distance, but possible to see
hidden behind those dust clouds.

In and out of Earth's shadow
obstructed

Last Exit

Chad Merritt

Illuminate, under caution
Don't let them see you
Don't let them dim you
 or kill you

I called upon my knees to carry all that weight
 to live all the lives we've lost

Ruminate, withhold information
Keep your secrets
Keep your reckoned words
 or die for nothing

I lulled my heart to sleep so you wouldn't worry
 to break yours just a little deeper

Culminate, break communication
Kill your darlings
Kill your feelings
 or they will lie

I walked back completely empty-handed
 to the last exit on the right

Index of Contributors

Elizabeth Blanchard, 4, 14, 17, 25, 26, 28, 30, 31, 131

Elizabeth is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing. Elizabeth is nineteen years old and from Charleston, South Carolina. She is a sophomore at USCB.

Hudson DeLoach, 104, 111, 112, 114, 116

Hudson is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Icis Dunlap, 60, 62

Icis is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Yasna Hadipour, 57, 80

Yasna was born in Iran, raised in Kansas, and now lives in the Lowcountry. From the Middle East to the Midwest to the East Coast, Yasna has sought to draw on the accumulation of their experiences and turn them into a tangible art form. Yasna is now a senior at USCB, majoring in Psychology and minoring in Anthropology, and dabbling recreationally in creative writing.

Gracie Laseter, 7, 15, 33

Gracie is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Emily Matthews, 77, 79

Emily is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Jen McCarty, 47

Jen is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Jake McClave, 1, 13, 46, 51, 54

Jake is a Communications major with a minor in Creative Writing. He's a senior and is expected to graduate in the Spring 2023 semester. Thanks to Dr. Malphrus, Jake has found a muse in writing, and loves to share his imagination with his peers along with reading all the awesome things they write.

Sophia McKeehan, 44, 53, 126

Sophia McKeehan is a junior at USCB, whose recently changed her major to English, with a concentration in Creative Writing. In her spare time, she enjoys reading classic novels, writing short stories, and hanging out with her friends, family, and boyfriend.

Selena Menjivar, 123, 134

Selena is optimistic and a dog mom to a wonderful pup named Terri. She loves to dive into horror stories of all kinds. She is also the President of the Society of Creative Writers.

Chad Merritt, 3, 5, 8, 40, 136

Chad is a freshman at USCB and majoring in English. He is a dreamer, obsessed with writing and his vivid appreciation for fiction, film, and hopeless romanticism.

Sam Messinides, 35, 48, 50, 52

Sam is a senior Biology major here at USCB and is set to graduate this December before moving on to graduate school.

Kylie Metheny, 91, 95

Kylie Metheny is a first-semester freshman at USCB and wrote her two non-fiction pieces in her creative writing workshop. The first piece is about an event she experienced during her senior year of high school, and the second is about her hometown in Washington State.

A. Miller, 63, 67, 68, 70, 83

A. is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Traliya Mitchell, 55, 59, 135

Traliya is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Lindsay Pettinicchi, 94, 113

Lindsay is a USCB Studio Art major. She is an award winning, exhibited, and published photographer. She discovered photography while biking on Hilton Head Island with nature and wildlife all around her. HHI is certainly a nature and wildlife photographer's paradise. Moving targets are her most challenging subjects; her Tamron 150-600mm lens is her favorite. She also loves ceramics and the silkscreen printmaking technique.

Sean Pittman, 16, 129, 132

Sean is a Studio Arts Major at USCB with a concentration in 3D Animation. He is currently a senior at USCB. He is originally from New York City, New York, but calls Goose Creek, South Carolina, home. He likes working with traditional media like Prismacolor color pencil and graphite but has since learned to branch out into digital media using software packages like Autodesk Maya. He wants to eventually use everything he knows to cobble together a series of short films percolating in the back of his mind. After graduation, he plans to teach digital art and learn a few new things.

Carly Rossi, 69, 74

Carly is a sophomore originally from New York. She transferred to USCB and moved to Bluffton last spring. She loves the Lowcountry, but this is her

first autumn not up north and she misses the seasons. However, writing about it has been a great comfort as well as a good way to document the moving process, so she's excited for what's to come.

E.J. Stephens, 61, 82, 87, 89

EJ Stephens is a writer and photographer that writes about her native home in the low country, and her Gullah roots. Many of her pieces reflect her views on women's rights and her experiences as a black woman in society.

Rebecca Taliaferro, 133

Rebecca is an 18-year-old freshman at USCB. She's an English major and has had a passion for writing poems since she was little.

Hope Taylor, 10

Over the years, Hope Taylor has found comfort in writing. It has been a great outlet for them, and they know the same could be said for others. Hope really enjoys writing, especially the piece they submitted, and hopes that it reaches people when they need it most.

Patti Teter, 97, 103, 105

Patti Teter is a Patient Affairs Coordinator at the SC Department of Mental Health. She attended Hunter

College at the City University of New York in the 1980's and has now returned to college here at USCB in order to attain a BA in English/Creative Writing. She is a native South Carolinian, and although she has traveled in Europe, Africa, South America and the Caribbean, she is always happy to be home where her heart is, in the Lowcountry.

Kathryn Tovar, 18

Kathryn is a dog mother to Atticus and Edgar Tovar. She also loves her husband Michael Tovar who motivates her to be more creative and open about her experiences. Kathryn loves writing about trauma, romance, and good essays. She loves to try to crochet and knit in her free time if she isn't reading.

Iesha Whittaker, 75, 93, 115, 118, 119, 121

Iesha is a Biology Major and aspires to be a scientist by trade, but her heart loves the arts, so she chose a Studio Art minor to remain close to the arts and work on her crafts.

Graceyn Yonce, 32, 76, 120, 122, 124, 125

Graceyn Yonce is a third-year psychology student. She enjoys photography, reading, and discovering new music. Photography allows her to capture meaningful moments in time.

Z, 29, 34, 37, 38, 42, 45

Z is a junior in college, is a part of the Society of Creative Writers, and is ecstatic to be a part of this semester's *Pen* edition. She is a Psychology major who enjoys writing poetry in her free time. Z hopes that her poetry can reach the hearts of others and inspire them.

About The Pen

The Pen is a four-time national award-winning literary journal sponsored by the Society of Creative Writers. It is produced under the Department of English, Theatre, and the Arts at the University of South Carolina Beaufort and is advised by Dr. Ellen Malphrus. This publication features creative works from students across all three of UCSB's campuses. Accepted submissions in this creative journal include fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama, as well as other, non-written forms of art such as music and visual arts of all types. *The Pen* (ENGL 211) proudly showcases the creative works of its student contributors and also serves as a credit learning course for any major to gain transferable skills and experience in the publishing and editing world.

About The Society of Creative Writers

The Society of Creative Writers is a student organization at the University of South Carolina Beaufort that sponsors the publication of *The Pen*. The student-led club serves as a writing community for USCB's students of all majors. SCW's mission is to provide creative writers with a safe and nurturing place to workshop, share, and discuss

their creative work, as well as engage students in writing activities to improve their writing skills and inspire them as writers. For more information on meetings and events please follow *The Pen* on Instagram (@uscbthepen), and Twitter (@uscbthepen). Or like our Facebook page (Society of Creative Writers). For additional comments, questions, or concerns please email our editorial staff at thepenuscb@gmail.com

Submissions Guidelines

In order to be considered for publication in *The Pen*, writers must be current USCB students or alumni with no more than two years since their last active semester. Students from all majors are encouraged to submit their creative work. All work submitted must be original, unpublished, and preferably produced while at USCB. Simultaneous submissions are allowed; however, if a submitted work is accepted for publication elsewhere, please inform editors of *The Pen* immediately.

Submissions are open year-round. Creative writing, art, and other forms of expression will be considered. Fanfiction will not be accepted.

All submissions should be sent via email to ThePenUSCB@gmail.com in one document (Microsoft Word Only) with page breaks between each individual titled piece. The author's name should be included in the file name. Please use 12-point Times New Roman font. Writers are expected to send only polished, college-level work. Any work submitted must include a short author bio blurb (no more than 100 words) in the submission email.

For poetry, no more than seven pieces may be submitted. Poems exceeding our allowed maximum

of 66 characters per-line will not be considered (character count includes spaces and punctuation).

No more than two pieces of drama may be submitted, and they should not exceed 2,500 words per piece. **For prose**, no more than five pieces may be submitted, and they should not exceed 2,000 words per piece. Ensure work is formatted as it is intended to appear on the page. **Photography and art** must be sent as a JPG or PNG file no smaller than a 5” x 7” at 600 dpi, and no more than ten pieces may be submitted. Artists and photographers must include their name, title, medium (i.e., oil on canvas, charcoal on paper), and dimensions for each entry. Music submissions should include an audio file, along with any lyrics or notes.

Submitted pieces go through a blind voting process— no one on the staff knows the identities attached to the pieces to make certain no voting bias takes place.