



The Published Scholar



Celestial Raindrops
Digital Photography



Brandon Grant

CELESTIALITY

We are finding our own place in the galaxy as our minds lead us on. No matter where this spontaneous rocket takes us, nothing will ever change our integrity. We have braved the same great mission and look to take it to the next world. We defy gravity, surviving the challenge of life...
our celestialty.

- Literary Magazine Staff 2010-2011

This issue of The Published Scholar is dedicated to the first graduating class of The Scholars Academy at USC Upstate 2011.

Literary Magazine

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Vigilance
Pencil



Nathan Smith

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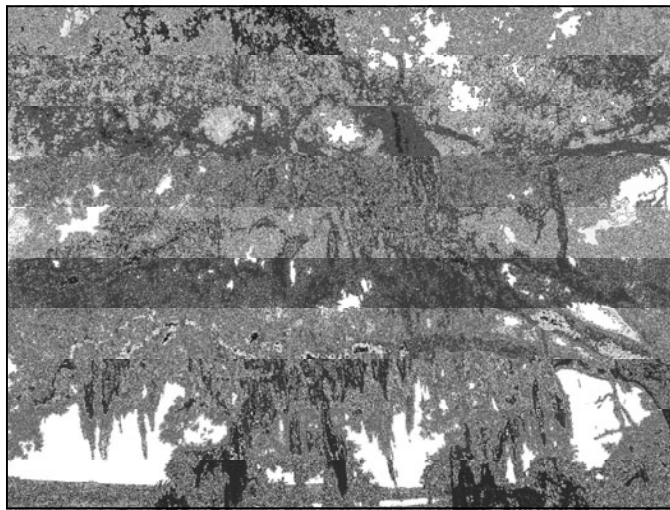
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Chiaroscuro

Digital Photography



Savanna Newman

The Dirt Road

Brooke Troxell

Many stories beaten into the dirt and gravel
Many stories I wish to unravel

Many mysteries imbedded into the trail
Many mysteries I seek to unveil

Some things the dirt may show
But some things I will never know

So for now I continue to stare
Remaining completely unaware

That these are my stories inscribed into the road
Hinting of burdens I will never unload





A Black Rose

Zach Gowan

So it was in this cancerous world that I saw fit to set her free.

Draped in a crimson dress, tears dried on her delicate face, she seemed to cry out in the darkness. Her heart left in shattered fragments, torn out at my disposal. She was pure divinity, immaculate beauty, only now marred by her travesties and subsequent punishment. I held her and studied deeply her pale features, the blood now let. Her magnificence was amazing, further exaggerated by the moonlight passing through the window of the downtrodden, wooden room, whose floor was disrupted by the glass she had dropped upon tasting the poison of my bitter vengeance.

Ghosts echoed our dance in the other half of the room. The dark, blue, nightly atmosphere showed clear their white faces; solid red lips; and tall, limber bodies. They held roses in their ghastly chalk hands as they moved about in reverence of my recently deceased inamorata. The ethereal nightmare in this dim room was a catharsis for my numbness, a lunar paradox to drive even wise men mad.

Betrayed and jaded, I affectionately released the bride of cold despair onto the floor, being careful to let her down slowly. I dipped her snow white hand into the small puddle of deadly revenge that had passed her feminine, Persephonous lips and had betrayed her to a bitter, choking end. I brushed her hand and thus the red elixir of corrupted love across her majestic, spectral

mask of death. A semblance of anguish was all that remained about her otherwise coruscate and stunning countenance. Pure divinity, immaculate beauty. A sharp, chilling wind blew into the room and sent her hair gently flowing in my direction, drenching the strands in the sanguine concoction of brutalized affection that painted her face.

Death knells in the cries of the ghouls that accompanied my wicked lover and I rang out in bereaved and sorrowed tones and timbres. I swallowed with difficulty and lifted the siren back to her feet, holding her securely. Her red-stained face hung back as her head fell back in such a limp, lifeless fashion, a fate she had fashioned herself. I gently lifted her head parallel to mine and examined her eyes, glazed, devoid of sapience but all too contained with sentience. Her eyes captured me, confused me, bewitched me, engaged me. They were deeper and shinier than the crystalline pools in the vast caverns of lonely mountains in the wilderness, accompanied only by the wretched and despised marine creatures of the dark, with their sinister antennae and bizarre features of various name. This wickedness was in her eyes as well, and she suffered for it.

She suffered as I had suffered. Poison, lies, heartache, betrayal.

She was soon placed in her coffin and buried under the ivory shining moon in the graveyard outside the old, ramshackle house. Though beautiful, her cruelty prevailed. Her ways were attuned to ravaging the hearts of innocents, and thus I simply repaid her.

Twisted, crushed, a result of destruction, I held her broken, still beating heart. Its steady rhythm was the only entity to pervade the otherwise dead silence. For in torture she had left me...

So in torture I had left her.

Waterfalls

Tanera Hammond

Waterfalls
Rushing here to there
Up & down
Round & round
Even on my darkest days
The water still trickles down
Sparkling in the sun
Letting me know
A new day has begun





Universal Read

Bravada Hill

Reading engrosses the mind and alienates the reader from the world around them. An African- American boy of about 16 with a Mohawk, black skinny jeans, and a deep purple shirt is so absorbed by his reading that nobody around him matters. He does not even hear or acknowledge the cacophony of students and clicking computer keys around him. He sits alone at a corner table by the large picture windows looking out into the atrium of Dorman High. Even surrounded by all the students and noise, his attention never wavers from his text. His friends continuously try to distract, annoy, and cajole him into putting down his book, but it never happens. The pestering never annoyed, but made the young man want to continue reading until the end. He gave his friends a disgruntled, narrowed eye look to make them leave him alone, so he could finish reading. In the defining silence that followed he continued to read Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*.

Wishing on Birds
Digital Photography



Dimpi Patel

Untitled

Emily Brooks

He followed her down the hallway to her room, shouting at her back all the way. She swung her door open, not bothering to shut it. She paid him no overt attention, seemingly completely unconcerned with his tantrum.

“You will *not* contradict me in front of company again! Do you understand me?” Philip shouted. She continued to putter around her dressing table, pulling pins out of her hair as she searched for a brush. He grabbed her roughly by the arm and spun her around to face him.

“I am speaking to you! You will face me when I am speaking to you!” He shook her.

She finally acknowledged his presence, her green eyes settling on his coolly for a moment before she jerked herself out of his grasp.

“What?” she asked mockingly. “Are you so insecure in your masculinity that you cannot handle a woman expressing a contradictory opinion? Are you afraid I might be right? That you might be wrong? Does that not mesh with your view of yourself as God, as the center of the universe?” Her voice rose in volume and pitch as she continued.

Then his hand, seemingly of its own accord, struck out and backhanded her across the face, sending her spinning across her dressing table and onto the floor. She lay there for a moment with her hands to her face, bottles of sweet scents and bright colors following her down, and looked up at him blankly.

He looked at his own hand for a moment as though it were some fearful monster that would as soon turn on himself as on her. Still, he would not let this go to waste.

“That was a warning. Don’t contradict me again.” But she heard the tremor in his voice as well as he did.

Slowly, she rose to her feet and came to stand directly in front of him. Her eyes were wide and wild with anger.

“If you ever hit me again,” she spoke in a low, dangerous voice, “I will make you regret the day you were born. Your reputation will be the last thing you have to worry about. I will leave you here, alone and pathetic, consequences be damned. Do you understand me?” She met his eyes and was silent for a long moment.

“Get out,” she commanded, shoving violently against his chest. He turned and did as she said. She slammed the door at his back.





Slumber

Dixie Chastain

I found him.

Hunched over.
Like a puppet,
With the strings let completely loose.
I tapped him.
Hoping, praying, begging.
For the strings to be lifted,
So he could rise.

He did not move.

I panicked.
Feeling hopeless.
Like everyone,
Everything,
Was gone.
For ever.
And.
Ever.

I cried.

No one came to help.
No one heard my cries,
For help.
Frightened, panicked, devastated.
What now?

Suddenly.

A movement!
A slight twitch.
A breath.
A tear.
A yawn.

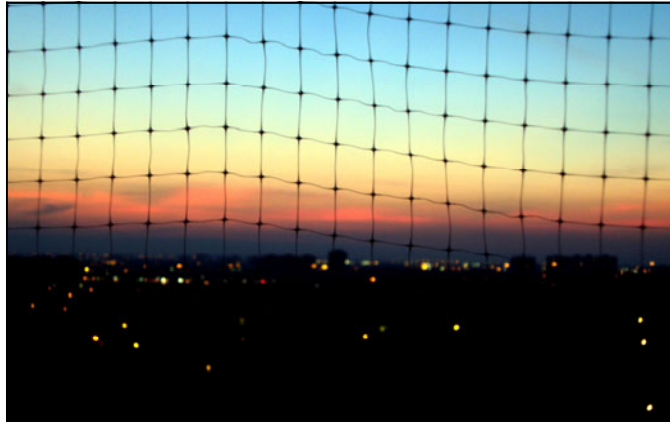
He'd only been asleep.

Bedtime Thoughts

Lucas Baker

As I lay down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
My thoughts will keep me up at night,
They are not happy, but of fright.
What of tomorrow, what of today?
I keep this in mind as I pray.
The tests, the stress, and the everyday strife,
Keep resurfacing through my life.
I worry, I fret, and I cry in my mind.
Nothing works out; the sun shall not shine.
Then I think long and hard, and work it all out.
Are these the things that make me scream and shout?
They are my problems, they do make me mope.
But they are a part of life, so I just have to cope.
I could be worse, starving day to day.
Yet I just can't seem to push the thoughts away.
They are problems of mine; they are problems none-the-
-less.
But they are problems that shouldn't cause me lots of
stress.
So I just let them float till my brain starts to wander.
The thoughts fade away and it's something else that I
ponder.
I think of happy thoughts and of joy.
Or of excitement, creativity, or even a toy.
These thoughts all flit through my head.
And then I doze off, and seem like I'm dead.
I start dreaming a dream, and that dream becomes lots,
But they cannot compare to my bedtime thoughts.

Caged in Town
Digital Photography



Dimpi Patel

The Strongest City

Emily Brooks

It doesn't matter how strong you are. Eventually, that fire in you will go out. You can get angry. You can fight all you want. But when it comes down to it, it is nothing in the face of that unstoppable force.

That never-ending stream of insults and derision and ignorance and blindness. You might be able to win a battle. Maybe even win a war. But you can't win the war when the battle doesn't end.

When, day in and day out, there is no cease-fire. No temporary armistice for you to regroup your strength. The world doesn't need to regroup. Its troops are limitless, its army never ending.

You can fight all you want. But eventually, even the strongest city must surrender to the eternal siege.

Eventually, you will have to give up.

You will have to give in.

You will have to surrender.





Time is Running Out

Jorge Garcia

As time crawls closer to the moment when the student will pop up and rush to his next class, the student's red mechanical pencil is quickly making its way across the paper as the student attempts to construct an essay on a library table. Trapped by books that surround him, the student is completely focused on his work as the paper is not leaving the sight of the eyes on his light brown haired head. The open notebook holding the paper on which he is writing is not the only object glued to the table as the student also has a light blue book that is open to a page inside. Time continues to walk away and the speed of the pencil accelerations causing the end of the pencil to break. A clicking sound is made as the student presses on the end of the pencil causing more black lead to come out. Pages are

being turned causing the sound of two pages being rubbed against each other as the student frantically searches for another passage inside of the book. Once a page is reached, the man presses his finger against the book and struggles to find a passage on the page. As a sign of panic and confusion, the student repeatedly passes his hand through his hair. The desired passage is found as a small smile is formed on the student's face. The pencil is finally put it rest on top of the blue notebook after another short instance of writing and the student lays back on the chair causing it tilt some. After a short moment of rest, the student looks at his black watch and decides that it is time to go. Therefore, he packs up all his material into his black backpack. After leaving the section of the library where he was working, the student stops and drops off his book in the reference collection before rushing off to his next destination.

Feelings to Illustrate

Brooke Troxell

A little girl sitting on her bed
Her hand holding up her head
Daydreaming 'bout that certain someone
Someone, she seems to have a crush on
She has an idea and pulls out her yearbook
Her heart flutters as she starts to look
For his picture as of late
And her feelings she starts to illustrate
Drawing hearts in the latest way
Adding flowers and spirals and words that say
But wait a minute! Who is this?
They can't put *her* picture next to his!
The girl scowls and vents and again starts to illustrate
But now they are feelings of hate!
And there on the next page over, *her* right-hand girl
These built up feelings the girl begins to hurl
Illustrated through horns, pitchforks, and tails
Insults like these will never fail
Until another shape catches the girl's eye
A heart that says "<3 'til I die"
And so the path back to daydreaming she takes
And thinks about the feelings that her yearbooks now illustrate

One Broken Heart; Two Hearts Lost

Tanera Hammond

The song begins with heart wrenching sorrow,
The uneven beats of a broken heart.
Listen; listen to the words ebb and flow.
The story so beautiful even from the start.

A clock slowly ticking slightly too fast.
A smile, a laugh, a breath, a life, gone.
But the world keeps spinning; the die is cast.
An innocent little boy left alone.

Nowhere to turn to; no place to call home.
His dreams are smashed; no meaning in his life.
Alone in a big empty world he roams,
Forced to survive and live a life of strife.

It is here the song slows and starts to end.
But one small broken heart may never mend.





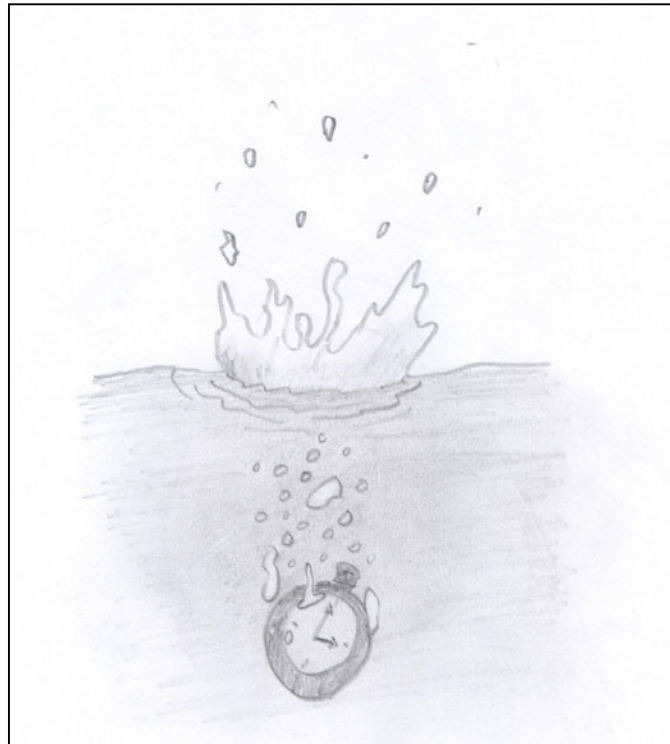
Fastest Woman on the Hill

Annabelle McCall

Wake up before sunrise to hit the slopes
Click! Snap! Boots in bindings; skis freshly waxed
Pile on the chairlift full of dreams and hopes
Posed in the start gate, I'm far from relaxed
The race worker yells, "Racer ready? GO!"
Shove through the timing wand for the first gate
Tuck down tight and low for a streamline flow
Burst left then right with a pounding heart rate
Carve through icy tracks with methodic speed
Muscles are exhausted, but I push on
Slam by the finish gates; finally freed
Breathless, panting, puffing, despite my brawn
Explode in laughs of victory and thrill
Because I'm fastest woman on the hill

A Ripple in Time

Pencil



Nathan Smith

A Hairy Mystery

Carder Jones

On A Sunny Day: Pt. 1

There he sits staring up at me. Tongue hanging out, panting, staring at me with his transparent grey eyes. Covered in water and sweat, his Chewbacca-ish face reminds me that of a clowning wolf staring with a sagging face. His color converts from a deep ebony into a milky cocoa mocha vibrance that resembles that of a Starbuck's Frappuccino. It is as if god had spilled coffee on him in the production line and the hues of brown magically formed into a symmetrical pattern starting from his invisible brow, flowing down to his sterling silver chin. I yell the words, "Lets go to the pool" and his ears shoot up like pointed missiles. He seems to be able to smell the anticipation with his branchless catalogue of nasal olfactory receptors. I laugh at him for he looks almost like a black and white Rudolph with a bulging curious black nose.

On a Rainy Day: Pt.2

We know the vibrations of the world around

him travel through that hair infested cavern
and smells travel through that adventurous
sniff vacuum. Yet, we love him, not because
of his looks or his goofiness, but because of
his soft eyes that penetrate the mind and
show you instead a tale of hardship and fear.
Depression patches his eyes only to be over
powered by such a large smile and
intriguing slop mop of a tongue. And only
few will know the tale of abuse. Yet that
matters not, because he cares only about
now.

Conclusion: Pt.3

He sits at the edge of the pool, staring so
deeply upon me it feels as if his eyes were
about to explode in seconds notice. He sees
the water approach and backs away.
Growling at the infamous tsunami of waves
thrown at him, he bears his giant piercing
fangs. He acts almost like a bipolar trans-
former...His face has now turned from that of
a puppy to that of Cujo.

My dog Vader Von Rohmhausen
(Rom-house-en)
is truly a mystery.





The Embrace

Brandon Grant

I have not understood you for long
But now I'm glad that I know
You're always there for me regardless of
what I've done wrong
And you're by my side everywhere I go

I whisper to you each and every thought
And we dance together in the void black
night
You tell me I'm everything that I'm not
And your there with me in the morning
sun's light

Your unwavering commitment is shown
by very few
Still, most would agree our love is a mess
But no one knows you as closely as I do
Because you're all mine, Loneliness

Silence Only Seen

Kortney Schumann

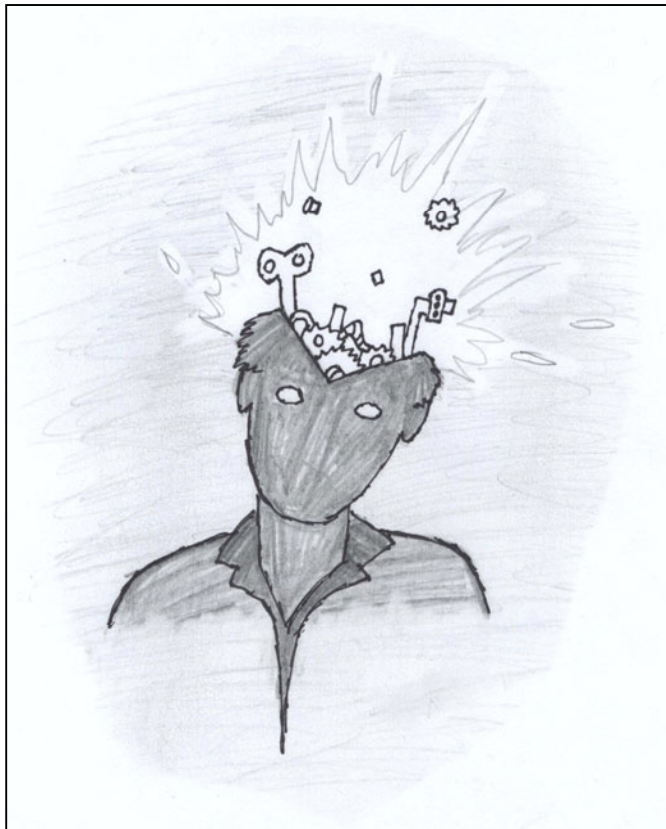
A secret can be
Hidden like the deep curling enchantment
That can be only seen in his eyes.

Or it can be
As easy to see
As the ocean waves
Forever stretching up the shore.

But most of all
A secret should be
As wordless as
The wind weaving its way
Through the ancient town all forgotten.

The Amateur Philosopher

Pencil



Nathan Smith

Oddities and Distractions

Brooke Troxell

College is an experience like no other. It is a young adult's first chance to survive on his own. This is where a person's true personality comes out. Imagine a young man relaxing in a cafe. Dimmed lights, glass doors on the far side, and brightly colored walls. He is plump and wears all black with a bandana decorated with skulls covering the beginnings of his long hair. His small, shiny, black laptop is on the square table in front of him. Rather than become absorbed in his work he surveys his surroundings. A few minutes later a friend stops by and joins the man and the small square table. They discuss their classes, work, and anything else that comes to mind. After an hour or so the friend leaves and the college student again tries to focus on his work. However, trying to procrastinate as long as possible, the student decides he is hungry. He walks to the other section of the cafe with the large windows and orders a sub sandwich. The student makes his way back to his seat slowly and begins eating the sandwich with the usual lack of adolescent lack of grace causing the tomatoes and lettuce to surpass the edges of the bread. After his noontime meal, he once again attempts to dive in to the work load in front of him. He succeeds to a degree but all the while keeps a watchful eye on the oddities and distractions around him in the dim, colorful cafe.





Wretch

Chris Harris

He was very tired from a hard day of working so, he decided to sit down in a corner of his study. He liked the privacy that his study offered. Any hour he could spend away from his wife was pure gold. "Has the newspaper come yet," he yelled across the house. "They don't deliver it on Wednesdays," he heard her yell back. It was the same call and response that took place every Wednesday and was really the closest thing to a productive conversation the two ever had. If nothing else, it was the most civil.

"Well bring me yesterday's paper then." He yelled. She reluctantly walked in with the previous day's newspaper in hand. The paper was loosely packed together because he had already read it and not put the pages back in the same order as they had come. He didn't hesitate to come up with a complaint for that as well yet held his tongue for the sake of his own breath. He read the newspaper once more from front to back in about two hours. Two hours that he could be away from her even if it was spent rereading the same boring headlines from the day before.

Despite the tranquility he expected to come about as a result of the solitude, he was even angrier after reading the paper. The paper was the same colorless one he had seen the day before. It brought no excitement or joy to him at all. This must all be the wretch's fault. After all, she had brought him the driveway litter that she claimed was a newspaper. He expected news yet he got the same crap he had gotten the day before. This was sheer insult! He wouldn't stand this abuse from the wretch any longer.

“Did you have any idea what you handed me a few hours ago,” he yelled nearly at the top of his lungs to the wretch. “Yes, it was your newspaper—it was exactly what you asked for,” she said while trying to keep her temper under control.

“This is not a newspaper. Newspapers have news!” He was now yelling at the top of his lungs.

“I’m tired of you treating me like crap every time something doesn’t go your way. This wasn’t even my fault.” She was gesturing and flailing frantically while she talked, trying to get her point across in vain.

“WELL IT DOESN—“

“EVERY TIME I—“

“LET YOU OFF THE HOOK JUST BECAU—“

“TRY TO BE CIVIL YOU JUST TURN INTO A BELLIGERENT PSYCHOPATH.”

He was furious. What the wretch had done was completely unacceptable. He threw the newspaper and knocked over the lamp, shattering it to pieces. There was no lamp. “I suppose you won’t even clean that up huh!” he said while raising his hand and striking her. His hands were strapped to his side. Realizing how futile it was to try and hit her, he tried lunging his body at her, hitting his head on the wall. It didn’t hurt because of the padding. The doctor realized all the commotion in the cell and rushed to halt it. Two orderlies held him down while the doctor prepared the sedative. The doctor quickly pushed aside the straightjacket and pulled down his waistband to inject the serum. The fit was over.

The lamp was fixed; the newspaper was current; he was back in his study and he and his wife were both docile again. The doctor could now go home as the next fit wouldn’t be until the next day. When it comes, more serum. When the vial of sedative runs dry, the wretch will have to stay until he dies.

Alone

Joshua McDonnell

When your heart breaks
It always tries to find
Something to fill the hole
Something other than time
So you go to church, play a sport, or make a rhyme
But nothing seems to fill the home
Better than good old time
But then after my searching,
I found you
Standing all alone
And my heart told me, "go for it,
This is love at first sight."
I believed for a while
I had fallen in love with you
I searched for just the perfect words,
To tell you the way I felt,
How I had fallen I love
Until I found them,
And I asked you if you wanted to love me too
You said, "No."
Two little letters,
They cut so deep.
But I realized,
You were just a cover for that hole,
You weren't concrete.
I had fallen back into that hole,
And I learned that,
If you trust your heart,
Or fall in love,
It will stab you in the back
And leave you...

...Alone

Song for the World

Nathan Smith

Verse #1

Hey what's with you?
What can any of us do,
When our world is falling apart?

Chorus #1

Oh, what a world
Where we are hurled.

Verse #2

What can I say,
To change people's ways?
I've got to write some words,
And hope that they get heard.

Chorus #2

Oh, what a world
Where we are hurled.
I've got to write a song,
In an effort to keep strong.

Bridge

Poverty and hunger and war and pollution and illness
and hate,
Politics and racism and pain.
No matter who tries these things never change.

Verse #3

I hope that I'm not the only one,
I want to be outdone.
For our world this is my song,
The way we're running things will have to change
before long.

Chorus #3

Oh, what a world
Where ideas and senses are swirled.
I've got to sing about what's wrong all along.
I've got to carry on, and sing my song...
For the world.





Music of the Night

Tanera Hammond

Music
In my soul
On my mind
It's my goal.
I hear it calling
Late at night
And then I'm falling.
But it's alright
I fall into the music
But I come out strong.
I come out bright
Because of the music
Of the night.

Tropical Blizzard
Digital Photography



Kortney Schumann

The House

Cassidy Galloway

The stormy skies looked bleak. The chill of the wind whipped through my coat, and I shuddered. Things were about to get worse. I could feel the evil in the air, and I could taste the hardship to come. I felt something pull me toward the woods; I resisted. There was a thought in my mind that told my body to run through the storm. There was a spirit inside me that was pursing my heart, and I rebelled.

A warm-looking house stood behind me. I could smell the aroma of sweet pine and honeysuckles penetrate the air around me. With a regretful glance toward the forest and sky, I ran for the house.

Inside it was comfortable and warm; every luxury was at my disposal. Love moved throughout the house, and I embraced it. I was in love with love. The house belonged to love, so comforting, so wonderful, and so bright. I was content to stay in the house, but something was terribly wrong.

After months of warm and fuzzy feelings, my eyes were opened. The house became a nightmare. Images of Aphrodite and Romeo crept along the walls. The warm feelings disintegrated to dust. And the house turned into a snare. It threatened to swallow me up, but my ignorance had turned into realization. The house of love was a trap; I had fallen for it. My heart was tugged
33 once again; I bolted for the door.

The house of love collapsed, for it was built on sand. But I waited for the presence of love to come after me, and I looked for it to pursue me. A storm had come again; I felt the wind rip through my coat, stronger than before. The air tasted like a battle of darkness and light. The bitter darkness taunted me; the light beckoned me to come.

I began to run; I was pursuing something, but something was also pursuing me. I fell, and got tired, but didn't give up. I was running from the deceptive, superficial love of the world. I was running towards something bigger than myself.

Sun suddenly surrounded me; my world was rocked. My heart stopped tugging and was comforted. I had run into the arms of my lover. He embraced me with a "welcome home", and I felt entirely whole. His Spirit pursued my heart, while I sought His face. This was true love; this was the love of Christ. I knew that I had not arrived, and I knew there was work to be done. I continued on with the knowledge that there would be many more storms. I turned my back on myself, knowing that I could never do it on my own. I didn't want to be humanly me. I wanted to be a clear glass that Jesus shone through.

On that hill, the sunlight growing dim,

I picked up my cross...and followed Him.





My “Escape”

Savanna James

I stand behind the line ready to start.

I throw the ball up and the game begins.

My racquet is like an accurate dart.

I hit the ball straight, and my heels dig in.

I am ready to receive the return.

The ball comes flying back and I smash it.

My point! I tell myself to feel the burn.

I am slowly crawling out of the pit.

Game three is mine, her turn to serve to me.

The ball comes and my racquet moves itself.

Maybe if I play like this, I'll be free.

Free from her, the stress, the world, and myself.

That's what tennis is, a way to escape.

I just play on a polygonal shape.

Unawares

Nathan Smith

I had been walking down a road for years,
A quiet, shady road.
If something had not changed in me,
I would have always borne that load.

But there was a strange change inside of me,
Something that made me look.
Something made me see and hear,
All that for quiet peace I had mistook.

My solitude was instantly shattered,
As I realized,
The peace was never really there.
In truth I was watched by a hundred eyes.

I staggered back from the frenzied crowd.
Had it always been,
A bloody struggle all about me?
Was I blind? Was this my sin?

This was the world I had passed through
Without a second glance
I walked through life both blind and deaf
In this way I wandered in a dark expanse.

I had been walking down a road for years,
A quiet, shady road.
If something had not changed in me,
On that path I would have always strode.

Sunset

Digital Photography



Michelle Wood

The Infinite Expression

Tery Burt

Throughout the history of mankind's lore,
nothing has ever been so symphonic
as the power that we wholly adore
exhibited in us through our music.

The way it fills us with exuberance,
or pulls us down into deep depression,
either way viewed with a great tolerance,
is always shown in our great expression.

People often use music to find peace
or to discover excitement in life.
maybe they are searching for some release
to escape from depression and their strife.

The expression of music will live on
until civilization is long gone.





Untitled

Alla Korolchuk

It is a beautiful Wednesday afternoon at the Inman Public Library. The time is 5:03, which means the library will be closing in 57 minutes. While sitting at the computer waiting for my father to come get me, I notice a woman at the computer adjacent to mine. She is working furiously on some kind of application, as if she feels the pressure of time running out. She is an overly-skinny, fragile woman with a tiny tank top on, revealing her bones that are visible in unnecessary places. At a second glance, I notice a tattoo on her right shoulder with two names and two dates. While assuming she has children, two boys skip over to her. They jump all over her like a dog would jump on his favorite squeaky toy, and she has to restrain herself from falling over. She then assertively shoves her kids off, while giving me an apologetic look. The boys, however, are persistent.

They continue to aggravate their mom, trying to show her a book that they are excited to check out; she just keeps her eyes glaring at the screen. As their volume continues to accelerate with eagerness, eagle eyes begin to peer at the little family. In the serene, quiet library, the family is at center stage. All eyes are on them, which causes the mom to panic and snap at the two children, who then slink back to where they were earlier like turtles sticking their heads back in their shells. The woman continues to type, getting more and more frustrated with each section of the never-ending application. When she receives the pop-up telling her that there is only 10 more minutes left until the library closes, she looks at me with fear written on her face. Her eyes are opened wide and resemble the eyes of a puppy, begging for a treat. When my dad walks in the library to tell me it is time to go, I look back at the lady. She remains in her seat, but her head is now in her hands, and my heart goes out to her. I fear what the consequences are for the woman if she does not complete the application, but all I could do was keep on walking.

Love's Sympathy

Cassidy Galloway

I cried a thousand tears that summer night.
Was it a task for you to console me?
The world was robbed of its eternal light.
I turned you away on your bended knee.

The boundless depths of faithfulness failed
you.
I helplessly longed for you worshipped
hands.
I will assure you my love was pure, true.
My futile words were a wasted heartland.

What strange event led me to this sad end?
My dispassionate approach helped no one.
I was tempted to comply and contend.
My cheek were tainted with a bold crim-
son.

I can never express my empathy; I only
hope for true love's sympathy.

The Love For Her

Taylor Hedgepath

What is love? What could it possibly be?
Is it a potion set upon the eyes?
Or is it attraction that is the key?
Or maybe it's just full of lovely lies.

The mortals live in a confusing place.
Is their love real? For I just do not know.
Their lies and their truth are apart of their
race.

But in the end, you see their true love show.

My love is one that's constantly changing
My lovely fairies will tell you this
The way I treat her I should be hanging,
But I make it all up with a mere kiss.

What is love? What could it possibly be?
For lies to be rid and love to be seen.





The Scream

Dimpi Patel

Nature is screaming but nobody is hearing, nobody is seeing, nobody is feeling, nobody except me. The others simply walk on. A million fire grenades explode in the sky, attacking the earth with blazes of anxiety. The sky is no more, and the reflection of its replacement blisters the hydrogen bonds of the brilliant blue water below. The tension is seen on the rails of the boardwalk as it is tinted with the rays of the coming apocalypse. The others simply walk on. I need to drench my body with a few doses of Effoxer. The coquelicot wave of depression dehydrates the earth, dehydrates my body. The fumes choke my brain, and my mouth swings open like the blade of a guillotine. My hands fly to my face to hopefully squeeze out this sensation. But no such luck. The water around me and my mouth seems to be evaporating but how will it condense? Will it become part of the wild fire above? Agoraphobia clasps my throat. The others simply walk on.

Simple Perfection
Digital Photography



Elizabeth Fisher

Where Mountains Seem to Smile

Annabelle McCall

Early in the morning, when only the fish are awake, the lake appeared almost magical. Mist rolled off of the placid water in psychedelic swirls and loops. Mirroring the sunrise stained sky, the typically turquoise water was every shade of pink. A stoic line of trees fringed the far shore, leading up to a series of ancient green mountains. Directly in front of me, Hogback gently curved into the skyline along with its Appalachian sister hills. There they formed a silhouette that will forever be branded into my memory.

This morning, like most others in my corner of the Carolinas, was perfect. I smiled to myself with this thought and lazily made my way across the dock. My sister's hammock, tied between two oaks, beckoned for me to come and sit. "C'mon," it whispered, "Just for a little while. The girls aren't up yet so breakfast can wait."

My long brown curls grew rowdy as I swung myself into the rope cocoon. Eager to greet the ivy below, they flew down my back and thorough the hammock's spaces. I giggled because the long English Ivy was tickling my back in return. Then, I began to pluck up a leaf to examine but was stopped short by an abrasive quack. Down on the shore, a female mallard was buried in the ivy. Her small brown head ducked over something I couldn't quite see. I clambered out of the hammock and tiptoed over for a closer look. Covered in the mallard's hulking form and many long strands of ivy lay two small ducklings. Dirty brown fuzz covered their fragile, wet bodies while yellow and green streaks defined their heads and chests. Perfectly tiny webbed feet popped from their down covered figures like the first sprouts on a bean vine.

Unlike little lambs, they were already waddling and curious. One set of inquisitive young eyes looked up at me. The infant drake opened his pale yellow beak to emit the tiniest hint of a peep. I grinned as the other duckling, also a male, caught on and began to peep as well. Together, they opened their delicate mouths to the giant girl standing above them and begged for their first meal.

Upon witnessing this, the mother mallard rose on her webbed feet and shuffled out to the water. She opened her beak with a loud quack before going out to find breakfast for her ducklings. The still water rippled as she hastily plunged in. The little drakes closed their beaks to watch as she disappeared into the spools of mist.

Then, a human peep sounded from the porch of my small cottage up the hill. Amid the weathered olive colored walls and vast windows of the old, three roomed home, I found a young girl. She leaned against the cedar rail that my father had just rebuilt last summer and gazed at me through the maze of mistletoe infected oaks and white-flowering laurels. Revealing herself to be my little sister, she reminded me that she, too, needed her first meal. Her eyes still held the sandman's dust in their corners and her long hair had become tangled just like mine, but her hunger rumbled wide awake. I beamed up at her through the hillside of arched mountain laurel and called out, "Just a minute."

She smiled drowsily and retreated back into the burrows of the house. Looking down at the ducklings, I discovered that they had done the same. The two drakes nestled together in a mess of ivy, sand and broken shells patiently awaiting their breakfast. Above, the mountains seemed to smile as new life and young appetites grew with the rising sun.





The Home of the Weak

Cassidy Galloway

These halls are filled with emptiness and light.
The doors are perfectly adorned with brown.
Behind Their eyes it is eternal light.
In Their hands they hold the truths that they
found.

Time's hands have stolen their beauty and
youth.
Death's minions prepare their bed of demise.
They secretly own their own bit of truth.
Time's as constant as their claim to be wise.

A young lover remains; he is the last.
Her lips partake of her husband's last kiss.
The gray man dwells on his far away past.
Their lives reflect an evanescent bliss.

Though pow'rless to undo what death hath
done,
Their mem'ries by humanity are won.

Goodbyes to Loved Ones

Aspen Duff

Death is many things,
Sorrowful, for all the tears cried,
Sad, for all the lives lost,
Loss, for the family of the missing.
But most of all,
Death is Beauty.
Death is like being set free from imprisonment
Of many years.
It is like being given a new life after
Your old one is faded.
Many look to death as a tragedy.
But it is indeed, Freedom.
Freedom from this world of lies and tears.
Freedom to move to a better place.
A place with Gates Golden
Where everyone you have ever loved
Is there to greet you,
To love you once more.
Death is Beauty.
Death is Grace.
Death is...
Freedom.

On the Horizon

Digital Photography



Joshua McDonnell

The Midnight Rose

Brooke Troxell

A rose stretches toward the sun
Making many think that she
Enjoys the daytime
They think this is where
Her beauty is displayed

But the daylight is just a mask
In the light she feels
Insecure and uncomfortable
She pushes her secrets deep
down
Inside her petals

When the sunlight fades
“Goodnight” is whispered
And the rose is expected
To enter
Peaceful slumber

But the rose is restless
She cautiously waits
Encouraging the darkness
Awaiting its arrival
Awaiting its comfort

The rose finally frees
herself
When no one is listening
When no one is watching
When no one is waking
When no one is caring

Only the wise, omniscient
crescent moon is there
Carefully watching
She longingly looks up to
him
And releases all her cares
and woes
They soar like shooting
stars up to him

With her voice heard
And her burdens lifted
The real beauty of the rose
shines
And dances in the freedom
That only the moon can
bring

And so, a heroine of him
who knows,
She is called
The Midnight Rose





The Darkened Mirror

Eva Zygmuntowicz

I blinked and my whole world changed. Suddenly I was falling through impenetrable darkness. I heard nothing and could see no light. After what felt like hours of falling, I hit the muddy riverbank with such force I couldn't breathe. After I was able to move again, I got up and looked around. It seemed eerily familiar to me. The way the dead, leafless trees looked in the moonlight reminded me of the way the woods behind my house in Florida appeared. Except these seemed more dangerous, more ominous. I felt frightened and ran in the direction my house would be in. I felt as if I was trapped in a nightmare and couldn't wake up no matter how hard I tried. I felt the branches painfully whip against my exposed face and arms. My feet would often become entangled in the thorny brush and I would rise with new sets of cuts and bruises. I saw the dead, dark trees around me and realized something. I was being watched, stalked. I wanted to run but I could not move. I stood, frozen by fear of the darkness falling around me. I knew it, whatever it was, was close. I dared not look up. I felt eyes staring at me from behind. I could not help but turn although I dared not look up. I heard it say in an unnatural, deep voice, "Welcome to my home, Kira." I asked, without looking up, "How do you know my name?" it replied, "Kira, I know many things. But do not fear me. I, at least, will not harm you."

I finally gathered the courage to look up. To my amazement and fear, standing not ten feet from me was a giant lion. Its eyes were deep purple and glowed against its fur that was darker than the night around me. Upon seeing it I asked, "What are you? Why am I here?" it replied, "I know not why you are here and what I am depends on why you are here. We are the only things that change here, you and me. I know of everything that stayed the same. Your name does not change that is how I know of it. But you and I, we change. I know nothing of either of us." "Then why am I talking to you?" I retorted. "I don't know." he laughed, "Why are you?" and with that he vanished. I decided to continue onto what should be my house. After a few minutes I was in view of it. I ran toward it and opened the door. I stopped halfway into the house and fell back. Upon my touch, the mirror changed and I saw my family kneeling around someone with the local doctor. I heard him say through the mirror in a sad voice, "She is in a coma." I thought to myself 'I hope it's not anyone I know.' People often drown in the river behind my house. My mother asked, "What happened to her?" The doctor replied, "She fell in the river and hit her head on a rock on the bottom." My family started crying. The doctor got up and said, "I'm sorry I can't save her." And he got up and went with my family outside. I gasped. There I was lying on the couch. I saw my chest rise up and down as I breathed. Then all of a sudden, I stopped. And once again I was falling through darkness never to see light again. The last thing I heard before the silence was an unnatural, deep "Goodbye Kira."

Plea of a Suffering Lover

Nathan Smith

I beg of thee remove my sight!
So that I cannot see
The human treasure that I love,
And how she tortures me.

Be gone my other senses too
So that I shall not hear,
How sweet and soft her voice and song
I long to so endear.

Oh, please forsake me consciousness.
I cannot stand to bear
The one I love more than myself
To not be in my care.

Oh, please great Cupid make her mine!
Life I love her even more than you!
Tempting, tormenting, beautiful gift
How much I long to love her true!

Love of a Country Boy

Michelle Wood

Talkin' bout a good ol' boy from Dixie
Ain't backin down gonna finish the fight
True grit, 'round here the boys sure ain't sissy
If he's done wrong, he's gonna make it right.

Can't be seen without cowboy hat and boots,
Carried high and proud is granddaddy's gun.
Gonna love you good cus it's in his roots.
When he is your's you'll be that number one.

May be a rebel, but still a good man.
Hear that thick southern drawl callin' Hey Ya'll
Worn ringed back pocket from a Grizzly can,
Ain't e'er borin', always havin' a ball.

Lookin' great in his signature camo.
We will see ya'll on the farm tomorrow.





A Soldier's Return

Aspen Duff

They wear their clothes to match their surroundings.

They leave families for months at a time.

They work to keep our forefathers founding's.

And through it all they don't ask for a dime.

Missing birth, life, death they await their fate.

In the heat they dream of the days to come,

When the calendar hits that special date.

Their thought of that day will not equal some,

The tears that will be cried that fateful day.

They come home to smiles that are priceless,

The laughter of the children as they play,

The worries of yesterday are useless.

They fear they will soon have to leave again,

Countdown to deployment has just begun.

Illuminated Innocence

Digital Photography



Dimpi Patel

Teardrop Warriors

Kellsie Edwards

The two girls sat on the front porch of the family's plantation home, playing with old dolls that belonged to their mother. They kept looking up at each other and then looked through the open front door. Their parents were fighting, again, but the girls never cared, they were only two years old and just thought their parents were playing some sort of game.

"Kendall, you can't just come in and say you are going to take Kinsleigh. What about Raelyn? You can't just split them up, they are sisters!" Rayleigh, the girls' mother, exclaimed, beginning to get frustrated with her husband.

"Rayleigh, I told you I would have to do this! I was at the meeting and the council wants Kinsleigh." Kendall explained. "And Raelyn can't know about my family, not until later."

Rayleigh looked at Kendall and walked up to him and embraced him. He did the same and laid his head on hers. "Will I ever get to see you or Kinsleigh again? Will Raelyn ever get to see you two?"

Kendall kissed the top of his wife's head and laid his head back on hers. "I don't know, it all depends on Kinsleigh and what the council wants."

At that moment Kinsleigh and Raelyn walked into the house hand-in-hand. The twins were practically inseparable and Kendall was going to regret taking Kinsleigh away, but he had to. The young parents hugged each

other and then knelt down in front of the girls and gave them each a hug. Rayleigh picked up Raelyn

and Kendall picked up Kinsleigh. The parents kissed each other and then the children. Kendall turned, picked up the suitcases, and walked out the door, not once looking back, knowing that if he did he would not be able to leave. It was then, that Kinsleigh realized what was happening and she started to cry and fight against her father's grasp, reaching toward Raelyn and her mother. Even though it hurt Kendall to do this, he put Kinsleigh in the car and drove off down the stone path, the pebbles crackling under the weight of the car. Fallon looked at her mother, knowing she was needing to tell her something, but trying to phrase it so a two-year-old child could comprehend her words.

Fallon gave up and slowly turned and walked into the great room, where her toys were, but that was not what was on her mind, she was trying to find her father.

Fallon did not know her father had left or why he had left, but she knew something was not right. Fallon heard her mother's soft footsteps coming up behind her and when she turned around to face her, she was picked up and her mother took a seat on the couch, with Fallon on her lap.

Fallon looked at her mother and started to play with her mother's earring. "Mommy?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Where's daddy?" Fallon looked at her mother, genuinely concerned.

"Gone." Her mother tried to respond without crying, but did not have such luck.

"Where did he go?"





Fallon looked into her mother's saddened eyes. "I don't know." Her mother replied, knowing she could not tell Fallon that there was a chance she would never see him again. While Fallon was taking a nap her father left after receiving an important call from the council, saying that it was time to train a warrior. Fallon's mother could not tell her about her father's family, at least not yet.

"I miss him." Fallon said, breaking into tears and leaning into her mother's warm body.

"I do too, sweetheart." Her mother replied, knowing that she, herself, would never get to see her husband again, but Fallon might.

Sitting in front of the antique vanity, in her older sister's lap, Calista watched her sister gently brush through her hair. Every time her sister stroked Calista's hair, it made her eyes droop with sleepiness.

When her sister was done, Calista stared at the mirror, holding her sister's gaze. "Why are mommy and daddy fighting?"

Calista's sister looked at her in the mirror and replied with a straight face and no emotion, "They both have to leave."

Calista spun her little head around and stared at her sister, tears filling her little brown eyes. "Why? Do they not love us?"

This made her sister break into tears and she stroked Calista's hair, trying to calm both herself and Calista.

"Of course they do sweetie, they just have to go."

Calista's tears were flowing like rivers over her chubby baby cheeks.

"Why?"

"I don't know..." Her sister replied, knowing that other families around the

world were having to say goodbye to parents because the sacred Council had "called" their best warriors to train a new warrior. She had been told of her family's history, but had not been Chosen for the court or to become a warrior.

She was a Keeper, someone who knew of the secret society and swore to keep it secret. She had been told by her parents that they were leaving and did not know if they were going to see their girls again, but were leaving her to care for Calista. She was not allowed to speak of the family's secret or history to Calista, but knew it was for the best and to protect her.

She had also been told that the new generation of kids would become the next rulers and fight the war against the ancient force that has been prophesized for centuries. This was why the Council selected the Warrior and from what she heard this warrior was all they really needed and this was why the past warriors were being called, to train the new one.

Who Owns a Soul

Kara Smith

Lucinda stood in the empty classroom, tapping her foot against the floor. She sighed, checking her cell phone. 2:00 pm. Her ice blue eyes flicked to the ceiling before returning to the empty space before her. Her messenger was late.

Five torturous minutes later, she caught sight of his blonde hair glistening in the sunlight. "About time you showed up!"

"Sorry about that." he replied.

"Gabe, seriously, you could have texted me!"

Lucinda shot back.

Gabriel shook his head. "This needed to be said in person.

"Well?"

"You know I'm not here on your behalf."

"Your point?"

"None."

Lucinda's eyes widened. "What?"

"No point. That's exactly my point. It's pointless for you to keep trying." Gabriel answered, keeping his voice level.

"Excuse me?"

"It's over, Lucinda. You have no more power over their souls. They're moving away from you, following their true paths. They see you for what you are now. A manipulator. A traitor. A deceiver."

Lucinda's icy irises were eclipsed as her eyes narrowed. "I was there for them when you and your ilk failed to be. They'll come back to me. They always do."

Gabriel smiled. "You just don't get it, do you? You think you control them, that everyone's heart is as black as your own, but you're alone."

Gabriel walked briskly out of the room, taking with him what little warmth his presence had brought in, leaving

Lucinda alone in her self-created Torment.

Future Undefined

Kortney Schumann

It creeps up on you,
Never truly announcing itself.
Showing itself in pieces,
Bursts of pain followed by breathtaking relief.
What is happening to me?
No one can find the problem.
Doctor after doctor,
I begin to lose count.
Nothing seems to help.
I'm missing out on life,
It's beginning to pass me by as I watch it
through my window lying in this constant bed.
Finally, after years, it comes.
An answer at last!

But, no.
It can't be.
It will never go away.
I'm stuck in this broken body for the rest of my
life.

Dealing with pain,
Learning to move beyond it.
Then comes the last blow.

Death.





Untitled

Tristian Dowis

It's a nice, slightly chilly day in Iraq.
You and you're buddy wake up early and roll out.
You tell yourself today is gonna be a good day.
All you have to do is meet some of your Taliban buddies
and lead an assault on a U.S. Army camp in Baghdad,
right?
Wrong. My job is to stop you, and I'm pretty good at my
job.
You're equipped with AK-47's, M9's, RPG-7's,
and M2 Frag Grenades.
You have enough ammo to last you both more than a day.
300 rounds for the AK's, which is ten 30-round banana
clips.
90 rounds for your M9, in six 15-round clips.
8 rockets and 4 grenades.
Hey, you're pretty well armed....
The only thing you should have remembered to bring was
an SVD.
Wait, no. From this range an SVD's .308 round which
drop more than 10 feet.
I laugh at the remembrance of the 2643 yards separating
us.
That's more than a mile and a half.
World record for longest kill was almost exactly a mile
and a half.
These two kills would be record breaking.
I'm in a desert ghille suit. Completely blended in with my
surroundings.
Besides, you couldn't see me if i stuck a billboard in the
ground before me, saying "here I am."
My equipment: Barrett M107, semi-automatic sniper rifle,

packing a punch with a .50 Caliber round.
I have with me a silenced M9 and enough rounds for both
to last a good sniper a year.
This amount of ammunition lasts me only a month or so.
One by one, picking off the Taliban, making it easier for
my troops.
Instilling fear into the Taliban's mind.
Doing good for my country like Vassili Zaitsev did for the
Motherland
I've been watching you two now for 3 days.
Every time you took a sip of your coffee, I was watching.
I was watching when you slept, when you woke up.
I was even watching when you just happened to stumble
across these weapons.
Trust me, I knew who you were the whole time.
I was just waiting for you to slip.
You did.
I haven't missed a target since I've been here, and I don't
plan on missing now.
I laugh again. This time I think of how unfair it's gonna
be to hunt back at home.
The perfect hunter. The perfect sniper.
You think today is gonna be a good day.
You were wrong.
As I pull the trigger, the bullet takes 8 seconds to reach
from here to there.
Next thing you know, you look up and see your buddy's
head explode.
You run and try to hide from me. Maybe you can get
away.
You don't know however, that you're already in my
crosshairs.
I look away from my scope, and scratch two more tally
mark in the sand.
I look back and pull the trigger.

Caves of November

Zach Gowan

Embarrassed to trust you with me
I could never reveal my gravest identity
Can you not see the barrier between us?
Or can I not see that that's all you see?

Could I be told the truth of this friendship?
The conquest that is never concluded
Eternal pondering of the miracle that might have
been real
If only I would have stayed
I could have stayed
Now all I can do is imagine
Make my family my thoughts
I can't decide on what to settle for
I just know that my heart needs more

I simply cannot let you drift away
Your pictures have to speak to me with more than
you could say
No face can hold the memories like yours can
Priority kills me with only one sip

Protect me from the parting with no goodbye
The harbinger that I summoned with no intention
I don't reject the knowledge of what I did for you
I won't forget you

I can't forget you
Now everything that I've loved is a plague to
me
My affection has no recipient
Every promise I've made may as well have
been saved
Because by now, everyone I've promised to has
thrown it all away

Have you thrown it all away?
Have you thrown it all away?
Have you thrown it all away?
Or are you preserving it for one more day?
Please keep it for me, for just another day
Just another day

My friend, don't leave it to decay
Don't forget the things that I had to say
Isn't it clear that I was the perfect match?
That's what you told me
Did you lie to me?
Now I have to mourn for you
As I am haunted by the shame
I have to know if you truly cared for me
But I don't want to know, because I don't want
to miss you anymore

I don't want to miss you anymore
I just don't want to miss you anymore





Poison

Angelica Bergen

Boxes. Big boxes. Little boxes. Unpacking... put this in the hallway closet... store these in the cupboard... only a few containers left... not very much to unpack... twenty years... free. Moving into his late mother's house was a step up, the house was all she had to leave him. He was grateful. After twenty years in prison he didn't have much money to go real estate shopping. Nice neighborhood. One more box... Nice neighborhood. Put this in that drawer. Plenty of kids here... he saw some girls that were the last one's age. They would do nicely... later though. Get settled first. Get more information. He rummaged through the cabinets and started a pot of tea. He sat and read the newspaper, catching up on news he had been out of touch with.

Gregory Dover was a man of unremarkable appearance. He wore a plain button up tucked into his kakis. Thick rimmed glasses aided his sight; his mustache had flecks of gray. Walking down the street he attracted little attention. Occasionally, younger girls looked wary of him, and often would change their route to avoid him, knowing with some sixth sense of an intuition he meant danger for them, but not all of them. Many were oblivious. They never knew he existed until he made his move. Their shock made it better...

Deborah was calm. She tended to her garden with a cautious hand over the next couple of days. Oleander... Virginia creeper... those berries were coming along nicely... water hemlock...

castor bean plants... those were her favorite. As the days grew closer she had been leaning towards the castor bean... yes, she decided. She picked a handful of the beans and put them in her pocket. She uprooted the plant and burned it, being careful all the beans had been removed first. They could all go into the casserole. The more the merrier, her monster deserved them all. For good measure she would get rid of the Virginia creeper. The others could stay; she liked the way they looked. The creeper would not due though. It was neither appealing nor native to these parts. She wasn't sure if it was safe to burn though, she would double check before she did.

After heading inside and washing her hands, Deborah sat down at her desk and pulled out the papers with the plants' information she had copied out of

books at the library. She did not check out the books, nor did she search for any information on them using her computer. She didn't want to leave any traces that could look... incriminating. She doubted her precaution was necessary, but it didn't hurt. She rifled through the papers remembering that she would need to burn these soon too.

Virginia creeper... good, it was fine to burn. She went back outside and burned it, along with the poisonous plant papers, in her small fire pit. Deborah then went and found a small jar in which she deposited the castor beans. She took her jacket and threw it in the wash, getting rid of any trace the beans left in her pocket. Deborah sat down in the kitchen and looked at her recipe for her five bean casserole. She used to be famous for it within her family. A family she no longer had. Her

husband had told her it was his favorite... but that had been *before*. Julie had liked it too. Deborah stopped her train of thought. Getting up, she grabbed her keys and headed to the store to get the things she needed.

Gregory settled into his new home quickly. After he relaxed for a few days he began his "work" again. He drew up new plans. Had his sights set on a new girl. She lived two houses down and liked to ride her bike along the street. He watched her regularly go off on her own into the woods at the end of the road. One day, he took the route she usually used to go in the trees and found a tree house. It was quite a ways away from the populated street. It had high walls and a roof. He climbed up the ladder and found the small fort much to his liking, she even had a beanbag chair and a

stack of books for her to enjoy. He was liking this more and more. He started walking back to his house when he saw the girl getting ready to enter the woods. He quickly hid behind a large tree. He could do it now. But no, it was too soon. He waited for the girl to pass and walk out of sight. Gregory didn't want her to know he had found her hideout... yet.

She pulled the casserole out of the oven and placed it on the counter. Shaking the hair out of her face, Deborah went back to her room to prepare to face the monster. She looked lovingly at the framed photograph on her bedside table of a man and a young girl with a halo of gold hair framing her face. They were both dead now, because of the monster. The stress and grief caused by her beloved Julie's death gave her husband the heart

attack that took him from this world, but it hadn't taken Deborah yet. She adjusted her wig in the mirror. The chemo wasn't working, but she had stayed alive long enough for this. She knew the tumors growing inside her were caused and fed by her want for revenge, but she was past the point of caring. After this was done she would happily walk into death's embrace. There was nothing left for her here. Because of the monster. A tear slid down her cheek.

Tea. He sipped as he watched his girl ride her bike. His fingers itched for her soft skin. He took another picture of her, and placed the Polaroid on the table to develop. He would add these to the scrap book he kept under the floor boards. He finished his tea and washed the mug and kettle in the sink. He dried them with a towel and put

them back where they belonged. He wiped the splashed water off the counter. He took some vinegar and wiped down the counters and sink. Again. He washed his hands. When everything was to his satisfaction he went back to watching his girl. Her hair was golden, just like the last one. What was her name? Jennifer? No. Oh yes, Julie. He smiled with the memory.

With leather gloves that would leave no fingerprints, Deborah put the still warm casserole in her car. She drove to a neighborhood a few miles away from her own home. Not just any neighborhood. The monster's neighborhood. She had twenty years to plan this day. This long awaited day. She remembered when she saw the monster's mother in the obituaries. She recognized her picture from the hours





sitting in the awful court room, crying that herhor- rific son was “a good boy.” It had been a sim- ple thing to go to the courthouse and request to see her will. She knew that *he* inherited the woman’s house and would move in once his too short sentence was up. No, not too short, too *long*. They should have given him the death sen- tence and been done with this years ago. Should have put him in an elec- tric chair and turned up the power slowly, making him suffer the way he made Julie suffer. No matter. That man had avoided his true sentence for twenty years in jail, but it was now coming for him.

A knock on the door. Gregory got up from where he was reading his paper and went to answer it. A hauntingly familiar face greeted him with

what appeared to be a warm smile. He felt like he should know who this woman was. She was wearing leather gloves and a jacket despite the mild weather, and was carrying a covered dish. “Hello, I live a few houses down from you and wanted to welcome you to the neighborhood. I used to be famous for my five bean casserole.” She gestured with the dish. It smelled good, and though he usually did not like to eat food he himself hadn’t prepared, he de- cided to make an excep- tion.

“Thank you, would you like to come in for a min- ute?”

“Oh yes please,” she sounded eager, “I want to know what you think of my cooking.” She smiled.

Inside the monsters lair Deborah saw a reflection of the cold hearted beast in his home’s design.

Everything was perfectly placed in its spot and meticulously cleaned. There smelled faintly of cleaning supplies. He kept in good practice his skills of cleaning up a crime scene, she assessed grimly. Following him into his kitchen, she marveled at how easy this was all turning out to be. He got out a plate and fork and scooped out some casserole. She sat down with him at his table. She watched him with relish as he took his first bite. Flavor burst into his mouth and he ate a bit quicker. He had forgotten what it was like to have a woman cook for him. It left a slightly off aftertaste but Gregory dismissed it and kept eating. It was only until after he cleaned his plate that he began to feel strange. His stomach began to burn as he attempted to take in a breath. He couldn't. Knocking over his chair he collapsed to the floor as his

“neighbor” calmly watched him twist and writhe. In an instant of clarity as the last of his oxygen burned away he remembered. The girl. The last one. Julie. It was her... her mother... He kicked one last time as and died with his realization, fingers clenched grotesquely.

With a hollow rush of victory, the shell of a woman that was once a mother took his plate and casserole and put them in a bag. She walked out his door and locked it behind her without a last look at the man who stole her life. Driving back to her home, she passed a small pond and threw the sack containing the murder weapon in the murky water. She went home. Her work was done. There was nothing left for her to do but wait and see who could catch up with her first, the cancer or the police.

