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N A T  
U R E S



# Volume 38

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## Literary Editors

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## Cover Design

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## A Letter from the Editors

It is our tremendous honor to share with you Volume 38 of *Signatures Art & Literary Magazine*, a celebration of student creativity here at RIT. We hope you find it as wonderful and captivating as we do. This year's edition of the magazine is not the first to make the jump to being digitally published, but does mark the beginning of our new website and our journey into accessibility. Digital publishing allows us to reach more people and keep a better archive of our editions, but it also allows blind and vision-impaired individuals to be able to hear our magazine through the use of screen readers. This edition is carefully designed with the correct tags and alt text to let our magazine be enjoyed by everyone.

*Signatures* is based in a collective passion for art and literature. Where other magazines focus on one or the other, we strive to connect both in celebration of their differences. We're very grateful for all the submissions received and would love to have featured more of the remarkable work shared with us. However, our challenge is curating a cohesive book, working with different layouts to bring together different creative media, including poetry, prose, illustration, and photography. So thank you to our featured artists and writers, the students who shared their work, our staff, our advisors, and everyone whose support makes this magazine and its publishing possible. And of course you, the reader.

Presented here is a vast breadth of perspectives, featuring everything from our living world's striking beauty to quiet loneliness, from the delightful to the strange. To see how art and writing uplift one another, and complement each other's strengths, look no further than *Signatures*.

Sincerely,  
Francesca Delaney, Katarina Boss,  
London Emmerich & Richard Kennedy

Francesca Delaney Katarina Boss  
London Emmerich Richard B. Kennedy

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Each year, two students are honored by awards for their submission to *Signatures*, generously funded by the UWP and CAD. Winners are determined by the student staff of *Signatures*.

\*The College of Art and Design (CAD) 2023 Award for the Best Art Submission:  
Stargazing by Kelly Jin

\*The University Writing Program (UWP) 2023 Award for the Best Literary Submission:  
Origin by Cathryn Szulczewski



## Afflicted Alphabet

Alphabet soup. Bowl and spoon. Can opener.

Don't use the microwave—it'll make too much noise.

Eat it up.

Full now. Garbage, don't leave a trace. Hallway.

Ignore the shouting coming from the other room.

Just get to the end of the hall, make it to your room without causing any trouble.

Keep on moving, that's all you can do.

Left foot, right foot.

Mommy and Daddy still love you. No matter how much they may yell, they still love you.

Oh no, a squeaky sound.

Pause, hope they didn't hear it. Quiet.

Room's so close. So close.

Time's right, go now.

Under the blanket. Vampires are around (let's play pretend).

Wait until the shouting stops.

X out the memory.

You'll never be able to escape it.

Zed.

## Mandy's Magic Donut Shop

Coffee.

The soothing, familiar scent of freshly ground

Coffee. Ah...

Yes...

There's only one good thing about mornings. And that's going to

'Mandy's Magic

Donut Shop.'

As a regular here, I enviously observe

The uncanny reactions of naive newcomers.

Just one bite, at Mandy's, and mind-boggling things will occur...

"Business workers, listen close!

When even coffee can't do the trick

Shockolate Frosted is a good choice

For sleepy-heads caught zombified.

As an opposite effect,

One Vanilla Dream for my insomnia, please!

With a Bosston Cream, no need to be on time for work

As many lunch breaks as the heart desires.

Headed to a job interview or ground-breaking audition?

Why not try a Wowdered Donut!

Fantasy lovers, gather 'round...

Finnamon Twist, now there's a treat

Sprouting mermaid tails perfect for the pool.

One bite of Strawfairy Frosted

Activates sparkling wings to

lift one on the sky's flight.

For a teensy-weensy Thumbelina experience, gobble down a Shrinkles

Or two.

Bold fashioned: for the chic customer longing to instantly wear any outfit imaginable.

Have kids?

Shownut Holes will perform and entertain

Fun for the whole family

More fun than the vintage drive-in movie theatre.

Apple Hiders

make our kiddies on the block

Immortalized

In the Guinness book of world records for 'best players at hide-and-go-seek.'

For the practical uses,

Hour Cream controls time.

And,

My, this Clueberry will certainly provide the hint

I need

To answer the questions

I seek.

Locked out of your car? No worries!

Consume a Coffkey Roll."

You see, here at Mandy's, there's a donut...for everyone...

Or so they say.

Sigh...

With the advertisement finished, I plop onto my rock-hard  
road-stool seat.

Yellowish light glares

From flower-shaped bulbs.

Popular music clang-a-clang-clangs

From star-shaped speakers.

Nestled between cheerfully chatty

And grossly gossiping conversations, oh finally,

There's Mandy!

"Trying anything new today?"

"Um...no no, just the usual!"

Thus I hurriedly leave, a single cup in hand.

Off to work with my mundane order

Perfectly normal, consistent,

Oily, slick black

Coffee.



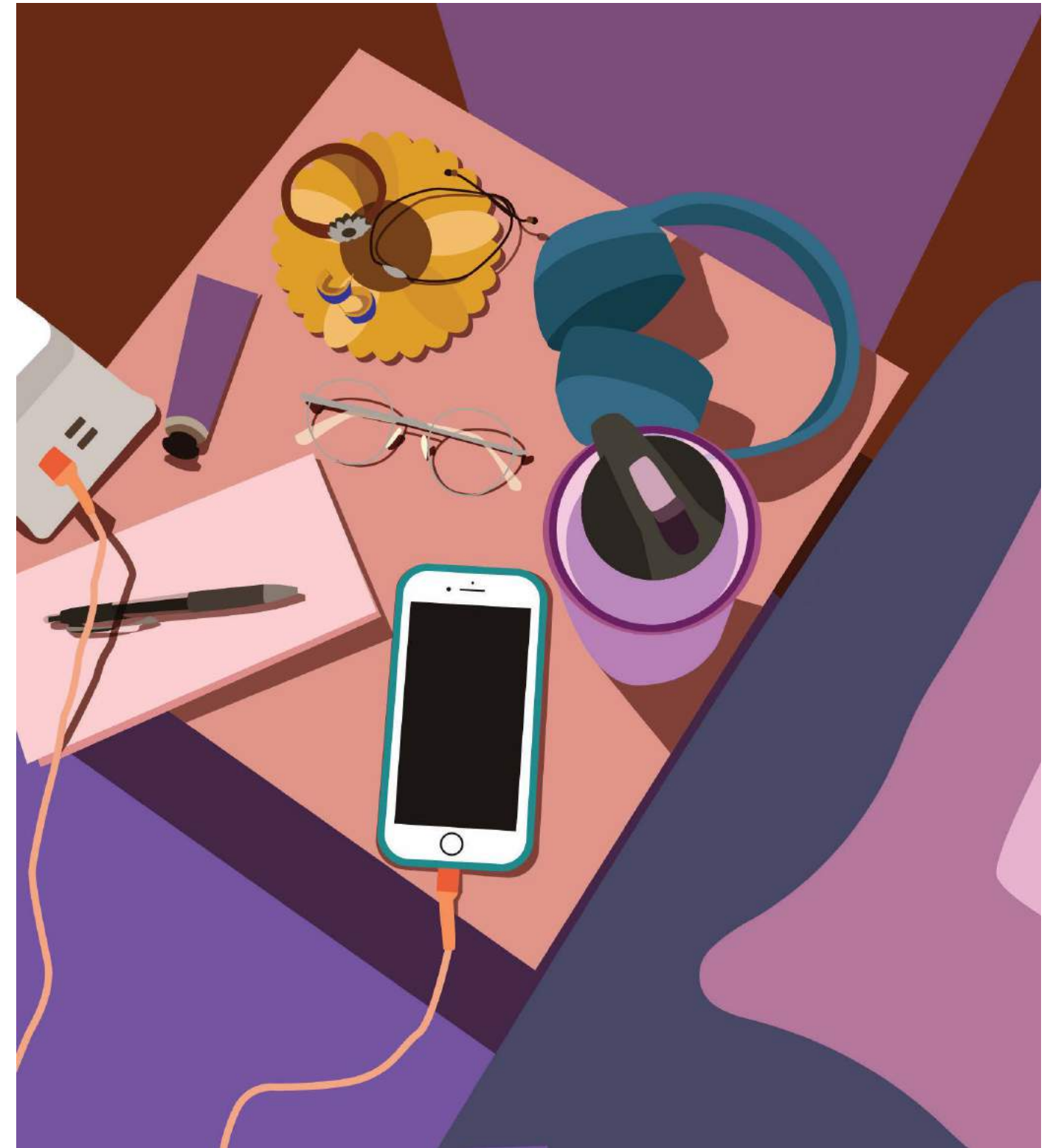
## I Need to Hire a Contractor

I have a water bed and  
a water chair  
Shiny blue water beads for  
my water hair  
A few water cups I'd be  
happy to share  
but the roof is always leaking

I watch water sports on my  
water TV  
I have waterfowl in my  
big water tree  
I love my pet water snake  
his name is Lee  
and the roof is always leaking

I have water wheels on my  
Ford water car  
I see water weeds grow in  
my water yard  
Some watercolors that paint  
rather bizarre  
while the roof is always leaking

I have just one wish no this  
isn't a spoof  
Something I desire and  
this is my truth  
While I'm looking up at the  
leak in my roof  
I wish that some things I had  
were waterproof





Scudder Avenue from *Marginality*  
Hannah Bailin

## Tecumseh

I am from a small town  
Where not much ever happens,  
and nothing much ever will.

Surrounded by cornfields, woods, and much more interesting cities,  
There isn't much to do here  
Except child games which happen half of the year  
Add Michigan weather of snow, freezing rain, and slush  
And you're sure in for a mess  
Though falls are pretty,  
With pumpkins harvested and leaves  
Falling from tall trees  
Orange, yellow, and greens glide to the ground until they freeze  
With winter's sneeze

Graduations and yearly festivals attract crowds of people  
Passerby or not, a big brown sign is sure to say hello,  
However long they may stay  
As they come and go

Though I may have felt confined,  
It's not to say that I miss the place  
Filled with childhood memories and how it used to be  
As my friends and I all agree,  
"It's not that great of a place,  
but it's home."

Tecumseh  
Andrew Selenko





## fall

i step outside, drenched in crisp air  
and watery sunlight  
i am not home, but i am close  
to where i should be

the cool breeze ripples over me,  
nostalgia hitting my memory in waves  
i drink it in  
let me feel once more  
the way i used to be

the way the wind would rustle my hair  
as if it knows me  
the way the trees match my rosy cheeks and oh,  
the way my younger self would run

soothing cocoa and cozy parkas  
drops of cider and pumpkin patches  
lights in the distance and spider webs

i want it all so take me back  
take me where the rainfall whispers  
take me where the skies are gray  
take me where the owls call  
i'm not there yet  
so take me where i'm meant to be

## School

You read aloud excerpts from books, books about physics and space, math equations and theoretical proofs. You tell me about new technologies and what they could mean for the future of the planet. I nod my head, not really understanding but loving the way your eyes light up as you read. I can see that big brain of yours working beyond those bright blue eyes.

We bike down a hill. My arms are wrapped around your waist. You excitedly shout about how according to some theory, our kinetic energy on this bike, or the propulsion of the bike, or the pull of gravity, or something else scientific and confusing, is causing us to literally slow down time. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me, but I like the sound of your voice and I like the idea of slowing down time with you.

You are fascinated with learning, but school comes hard for you. There are too many demands, too many things you find frustrating. The poor organization of websites drives you mad. But you dream big, despite the challenges. You want to become an engineer for the environment, or teach physics to students. I don't really get the material but if you were to go and teach, I think I would go sit in the classroom just to watch you talk, to see your hands move in passionate circles. I would search for that familiar gleam in your eyes.

I ran into your brother the other day. He told me that you dropped out of school.



## Do You Hate Me?

Everyone complains

I'm too cynical

sarcasm too strong

personality too off-putting

as caring as a cat

gentle like a bull

Disposition of a sailor's crass

Aren't you a horse's



Do You Hate Me?  
Josie Colacicco

Until We Forget We Are Horses  
Emma Williamson



CURRENT  
Mason Igawa



## Borders

I am aware of just how much space I can take,  
Between volume and legroom, I would say that my real estate has a lot of—*spare rooms*.  
I do try and deconstruct everything possible from manners to muffin tops,  
My mind is in a constant state of flux,

*“Self-improvement with a little mental health delusion.”*

Reapplying critical thought to the before, during, and after I say something is tiring,  
There are only so many haircuts before you run out of cash or hair.  
Thankfully, my genes are taking care of that last part.

So, I **blow** up my personal bubble hoping someone notices,  
And then I suck it in hoping no one notices,

It adds up to the idea that one of my personal nightmares is wading through a crowd,  
A crowd full of people that I can't stop bumping into while still trying to make sure they know that,  
I. Am. Here. Too.

Please understand. I know how I am.  
If I take up more room than necessary,  
Be patient and I will shrink in time,  
I am trying—with all the weight I carry.

## City Night

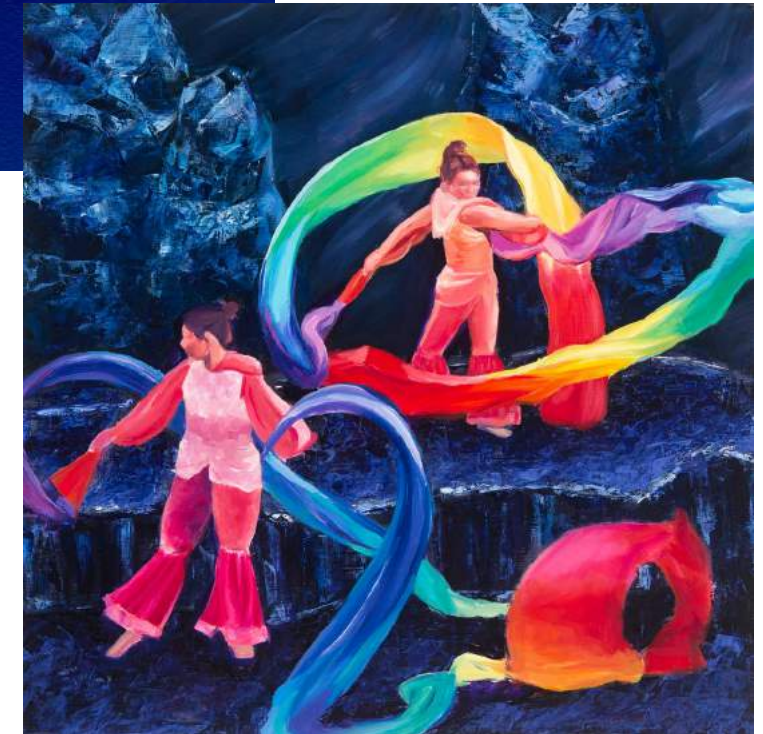
I look out and see  
Sparse lights and stars I perceive—  
Till morning, they flee.



## Laughter

Rainstorms that nip  
on the heels of humid  
days as mother nature  
releases the hot breath  
she's been cradling  
in her lungs and  
puffed-out cheeks  
as a torrent of wind  
and water blown out  
to pound the earth  
and churn the dirt  
each drop bursting  
upon impact shattered  
crystals bending light  
and the street lamps  
shine in her spittle  
distorting the world  
through a kaleidoscope  
and my hair sticks  
to my skin as rain drips  
into my socks, off my  
chin and I jump through

the parking lot bounding  
foot to foot over the  
imperfect pavement  
where little sprouts  
of green peek up to say  
hello through thirsty  
crevices and I try and fail  
to avoid submerging  
my shoe in hidden puddles  
that prune my toes and  
squelch under my weight  
and it is incredible,  
I must confess,  
how something so mundane  
as running in water-laden  
shoes with arms flailing  
for balance can bring laughter  
to my tongue, a hot breath that  
escapes my lungs, too-long pent up  
and repressed, finally pouring  
from upturned lips.



## Where?

There within the lilacs  
grows a wandering desire  
to taste the clouds,

to give into the bees'  
hum and bumble, which is low within my ears  
and dripping like honey

in melody—like song  
and whistles that blow below the mountaintops  
where we wander

before found, are we,  
by ourselves. By the clumps of lilacs  
that grow in small patches

in a singular spot of light  
by our feet, we feel the lavender buds  
like sunlight

between our fingers,  
rough, painted with dirt;  
over there

grow the lilacs.





## Orchid Sonnet

Sitting in my window delicate as frost  
sits below the forlorn sky—a gesture  
of beauty and amity during tempered  
days and pastel mornings that become lost,  
Buried until the orchid blooms bold  
to say today has gold hidden there too  
and the endless stream of everyday blue  
is not blue, but yellow, with renewed goals  
to see that flowers bloom because of rain.  
My father picked this one for me. Wanting  
to create joy in my quaint room, hoping  
I'd glance at it during times of disdain  
smiling instead as I think of home, The  
orchid in my window, its own abode





Under the Stars  
Madeleine Saint Pe



Struggle  
Meg Evangelista



Hands in Tension  
Korey Hans



Cradle of Tension  
Kimberley Barge

## Hidden Knot

Wrapped myself in a knot and I can't untie it.  
I am the problem in this story, I hope you don't mind it.  
Wanting something I can't have is the greatest crime I did.

If I asked you if you loved me.  
I hope you say not in the slightest.  
All my homies ask how I can be stuck in that mindset  
Simply stop thinking, begin to wonder  
And rewind it.

Caviar and toast.  
That's some fine dining.  
You can talk to one and kiss the other.  
That's some thin lining.

I am taking a picture with your iPhone but she eyes mid.

But he's your picture perfect.  
And I can't take it.  
Imma turn the flash off and give him the worst lighting.  
Try to crop and select.  
And catch him at the worst timing.  
Somehow in every corner, he's still hiding.  
Hidden in plain sight.  
Presence can be felt but appearance can be blinding.  
He gives you bright days and me dark nights  
I want to win this battle but I won't fight.  
I know he's a small dog with all bark and no bite.

Wrapped myself in a knot and finally learning how to untie it.  
He's the problem in this story, I am letting you know I mind it.

Hidden Knot  
Yusef Ibrahim

## When They Knock

It's 2008,  
The door opens with a  
Bang—  
Shining shackles glitter &  
Blue uniforms stand stark  
Against our crumbling  
Perfect Lives:

My sister's  
First steps,  
Happened two paces  
From the Clicking  
And Clacking of  
Shimmering shackles  
Casting shadows  
Towards innocent eyes.

My brother  
Lost his first tooth,  
Four paces  
From the burning  
Bruised wrists  
Wrenched back  
By Impatient hands.

I had gotten ready  
For my first day of school  
Six paces past the  
Shocking shackles  
As they  
Cackle, drowning down  
Desperation—  
Hardly coming up for air,  
As They Watch  
The three of us:  
Cry.

As we wrestle  
Against the wondering of  
How long  
We have to wade  
In these unknown waters  
As blonde hair, in  
A blue uniform  
Telling 2, 4, 6 to be quiet  
As we try  
To douse the  
Dread  
From three pairs  
Of watering eyes  
As Startling Shackles  
Shatter our Starlit lives.

## Remember My Name

Once there was a place—  
Whenever I closed my eyes  
It's paradise  
God:  
Mahogany skin, hair made of wool like mine  
Here everyone remembers my name

Once upon a time  
There was a place—  
When you open your eyes  
It's hell on Earth  
Am I just another twitter feed? Hashtag?  
This world bleach Black skin and bury the bodies  
How can they forget they have **blood on their hands?**

**Blood on they hands**  
**Ringa--round-da-rosey**  
**Bloods on ya hands**

**Do you remember my name?**



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Genesee Overlook & A Courtyard View from *Marginality*  
Hannah Bailin

## A Remnant of a Past

Electric ghost by the lighthouse  
from where did you depart?  
When your mist waltzes the spotlight  
rise across boards, embracing itself  
the beacon's moody shadows swirl in turn  
I trace, yet wander  
the blazes of lightning  
pink and serpentine  
sparks of memory  
a well-lit canary  
and broken toys  
and empty noise.

Electric ghost by the lighthouse  
for whom do you echo?  
Sputtering light and splintering boards  
steel's last groan, muted by sand  
rings from miles away  
In your turbulent undertides  
I catch the whisper of whirlpools  
white and confused  
the static as foreign clothes  
are fastened to yours  
a crying child  
a bloody tile.

Electric ghost, your  
thundering, gaseous scream  
cleaves through the air.

Guidepost's halo blinks to death  
and fog whisks away  
Stillness follows  
a cessation  
a repose.

And electric ghost  
when you crackle again  
irregular as my heartbeat  
when I stumble towards you  
grains slipping between my toes  
you mumble on repeat  
on the sand, lit by stars  
weeping, "Mayday, Mayday."

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A Remnant of a Past  
Sammi Hong



My dear  
Dakota Halliburton

A Haunting Sestina  
Francesca Delaney

## A Haunting Sestina

I feel you haunting every doorway  
I know spring isn't this cold  
I closed all the windows  
Sat up watching the sunset  
I felt the numbness in my hands  
Before I woke up

Because everything changed when I woke up  
You were no longer in the doorway  
I could feel your hands  
In my hands, they felt cold  
The flowers wilt in the sunset  
Covering all the windows

You're covering all the windows  
I don't remember waking up  
In my dreams, I saw the sunset  
It's flooding through the doorway  
But still, it's cold  
I can't feel my hands

All I can feel are my hands  
I saw you peering in the windows  
Why is summer this cold  
They say things should be looking up  
I've barely stepped through the doorway  
I can't remember the last sunset

But in my dreams, it's always sunset  
It's just your hands in my hands  
Reaching across the doorway  
In the daylight with open windows  
No need for covering up  
It's not cold

But it's so cold  
The curtains cover the sunset  
I keep on waking up  
Still feeling your hands  
It's fogging up the windows  
I haven't stepped foot in the doorway

The mirror feels cold on my hands  
If I squint, I can see the sunset in the windows  
If I could only wake up, I'd be lingering in the doorway

## Family Tree

it was poetry  
that made me cry  
scribed onto the walls  
etched with an unquenchable,  
unshakeable fury,  
a madness of beauty,  
or at least it must have;  
it was my heritage  
that made me cry  
it was a vision of my grandmother,  
beautiful Erna,  
offering a platter of dried fruits, nuts and  
indiscriminate generosity,  
it was a vision of Aunt Nina,  
who tells me i'm pretty and loves me so dearly,  
it was a vision of Uncle Carl,  
his unspeakable intelligence and camera in hand,  
it was a vision of Aunt Jane,  
who supports all my art and collects tiny things,  
it was a vision of Aunt Toni,  
with her wild free spirit and contagion of laughter,  
it was a vision of Ted, my father,  
his innumerable stashing of jokes,  
his unrelenting kindness,  
his habit of mediation,  
his teddy bear nature & mainly sweet soft demeanor,  
it was the profile i see presented to me in pictures,  
it was the faces of my sisters and cousins,  
it was the gas chamber  
it was the violence  
it was the senseless hatred  
it was the poetry  
inscribed on the wall  
that made me cry  
my first visit  
to the first internment camp

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## On Days Like These

On days like these I talk to myself more than anyone else.

I face my closed door, what a strong trust we have.

And forget the windows  
draw them in.

caked in mud  
I lay in bed  
as hands  
and feet

just  
sink

in towards the bedrock of action and reaction.

Somewhere on this abyssal plain  
i'll find my bioluminescent quintessence  
by far the closest other person to me

myself.

Gliding low through the darkness i'll always  
see you who waits behind my every waking breath  
And shudder at the silence that finally ensues.

i'll admit, It's hard to look away  
but even harder not to see

the ever reaping vitriol of rolling erosion  
that comes with the true pressure of the ocean

aching and waving in ritualistic moments  
preying on and pressing through my pores in calculated motions.

From that, I protect my kin

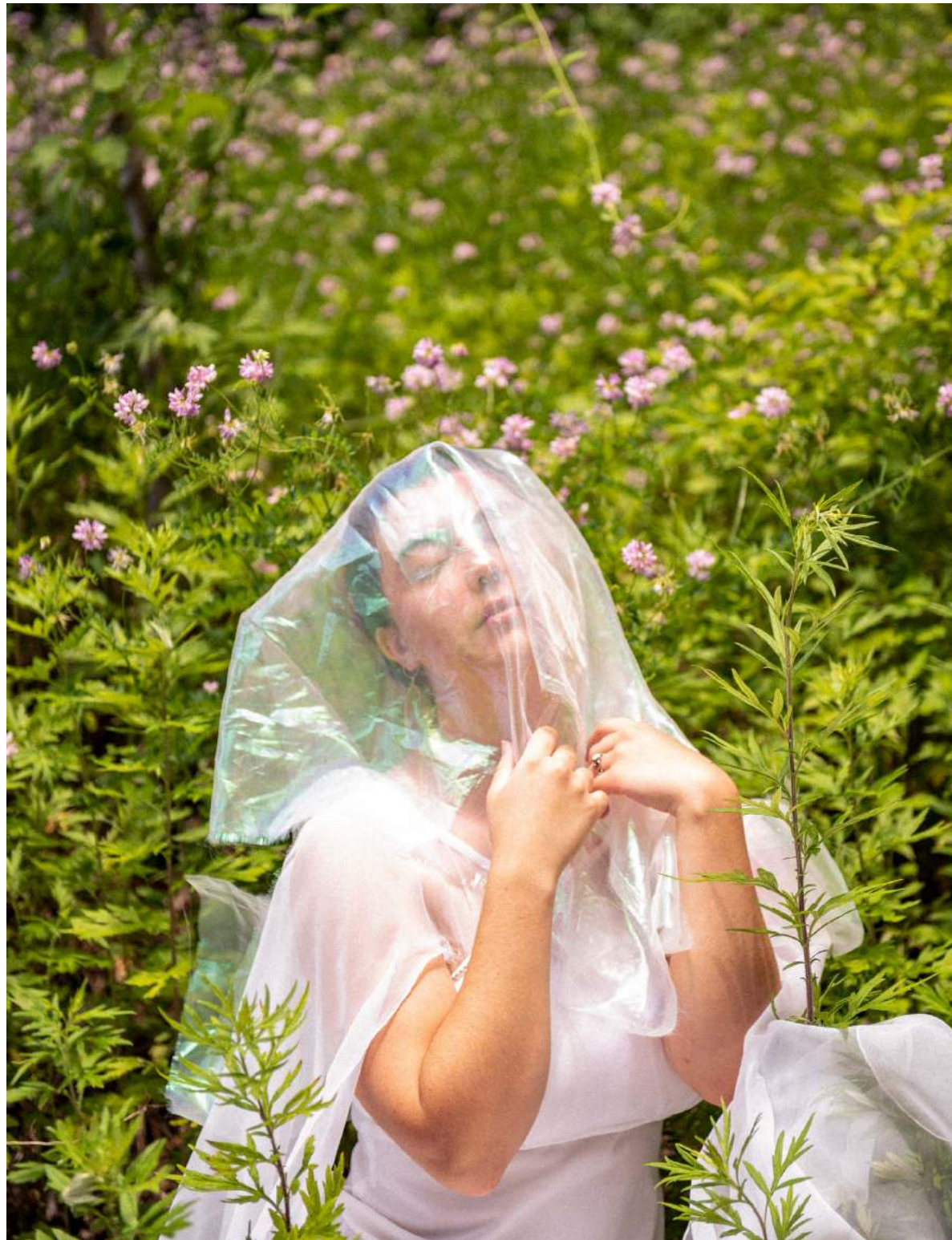
from the door shattering blinding light blood splattering  
pressure

that precedes every living thing  
In an attempt to tear, and rip, and pull their way in.

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45



Mercy Chokes  
Emma Mankowski

## Forget-Me-Nots

I run away, sometimes. Pack a little bag like an explorer and travel into the stillness of the night. It started off as a way to escape—a sprouting floescence nurtured by curiosity, now ready and yearning to rupture from its tight, neat flower bed to be free. Little roves, I call them—something to toy with fate.

It could only have been serendipity to find this garden: an unparalleled gift as waves of hues, lilac and twinkling periwinkle, shutter as invisible hands caress each tiny petal with delicate twists and swirls. Gently they ripple in steady rhythms, humming a hymn to count their beats as they dance in the dying light. I couldn't remember their names—even as they swayed.

It brought tears to my eyes the first time I found it. Stuck in the pull of the soft sweet inhales of the cold air as little melodies of nectar suffuse and spread like dandelions drifting in the breeze: pressing pillowy kisses to exposed skin, chasing away tight tremors and mumbling murmurs of a resonate remembrance. A midnight moonlit veil casting twisting twines of shadows as they pirouette over shimmering eyes. This is where I want to be.

After finding the garden, I was never the same. Life seemed so dull and pointless: monotonous and brimming with the constant churning of distant pleasantries in an endless circle—where beauty is sneered at, and novelty is discarded. Compared to the oasis of dreams beyond my doorstep, the real world seemed to lose its luster against the blooming brilliance of this moment where the world seemed to drift away.

However, I never found it again. I looked everywhere, traveled day and night to find it—year after year. I looked for clues, faint traces lurking under oaks and roots—but not even a petite petal was found to appease my hunger for that little rove. Sometimes, I think it might have been a dream: something so beautiful it could never be described in enough words and languages to feel completely right. But everything was so vivid, so ephemeral it must have been real: so I tell myself that I will keep searching, that I will continue my little roves even as time wears thin and my memories fade, hoping that someday I'll be able to gaze upon the countless Forget-Me-Nots again.

Forget-Me-Nots  
Laura Dougan





Lanternfly  
Abby Greenplate

## The Word

I can't remember  
the word he used

fireflies glitter off  
the one rabbit who  
lives around here  
he mows our grass  
for a room

he said, I felt like  
a weight was lifted  
off my shoulders  
the word he used  
was like epiphany  
but no, it's something  
different

I mean what a name  
lightning bugs  
they say the word every  
time they ignite

we'll have to settle  
for his arms outstretched  
and eyes closed, taking a flight  
back to the moment  
when we opened up again  
after being closed off  
for so long

the word makes you feel  
like you've been living more  
lately, it's the real deal  
for once, everything  
you were looking for  
inside yourself

the word describes days  
that feel like so much less  
of the same thing  
you welcome the wrench  
in your plan to say goodbye  
to no one, slipping out  
and going home alone  
again

this word brings you back  
to the realm of the living  
after walking with the dead  
for so long, it's your eyes  
lighting up like fireflies  
for the first time in months  
it thaws you out, keeps you  
company, makes pokemon  
real life, makes you loud  
as any cicada, bright as  
one thousand lightning  
bugs

I have a feeling I'll make it  
to eighty years old

by then I'll remember

to live every last second in sudden joy

I want to sip peppermint tea  
on my deathbed

or better yet, surprise me

with something different

The Word  
Noah Winslow

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Official Elmsview Town Membership Exam

Welcome, new town member! Happy birthday, or welcome to our happy little collection! I know you've studied hard for this exam, so please, remember your folktales! Remember, as you know, each of these questions has an absolutely correct answer, no matter how plausible all of them seem.

Questions 1 and 2 regard The House on the Hill, the stately, Victorian manor you walk by on your way to work.

1. What was the hill?
  - a. A burial ground
  - b. A swimming pool
  - c. A meeting house
  - d. The site of the witch trials
2. Who lives in the house?
  - a. An old lady who's prone to eating outside domestic animals
  - b. A family of five with children going to Elmsview Elementary for the past 30 years
  - c. A wealthy baronness accused of multiple murders and paying off the sheriff a decade ago
  - d. No one but a few ghosts, who technically lived there
3. How many citizens live in our quaint little town of Elmsview?
  - a. 1739  $\frac{3}{4}$
  - b. 1739  $\frac{1}{2}$
  - c. 1739  $\frac{1}{3}$
  - d. 1739  $\frac{1}{7}$
4. Which teacher was accused of embezzling funds from the school board?
  - a. Mr. Clark, the science teacher who goes to Disney every weekend
  - b. Mx. Keifer, the music teacher with whom no kid has ever actually been in a class
  - c. Mrs. Miller, the middle school algebra teacher with a very large greyhound
  - d. Mademe Lavigne, the French teacher with a Russian accent and questionable French skills
5. Which of these children is accused of being a bully by their peers but is actually very sweet?
  - a. 7 yo Milly Keifer, the one that always yodles at the yearly talent show
  - b. 9 yo Tyler Western, that one kid who's always sulking about under the library tables
  - c. 14 yo Mike Gravin, the surly teen who got jailed for beating Officer Fuller in table football
  - d. 16? Amelia Garth, child prodigy yet redoing her 9th grade year, for the 30th time
6. How many husbands has the Mayor had in the 10 years she's been re-elected?
  - a. 10
  - b. 7
  - c. 3
  - d. 2

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7. Why do farmers Alin and Cunningham leave the corn high even after harvesting?
  - a. They commune with the aliens every October on the full moon and need the length for crop circles
  - b. Each is competing to grow theirs the tallest
  - c. They are well-known vampires, and the height of the corn both hides the humans that get lost in it and traps their screams
  - d. They create a world-renowned corn maze each year, which is never solved by the few willing to participate
8. What does our local factory, where many of us end up working after high school, produce?
  - a. Pink salt
  - b. Wig caps
  - c. Compressed, complicated thoughts
  - d. Pink fidget spinners in a variety of colors
9. Where should one avoid on Halloween and why
  - a. The mansion on the hill, while its glowing green lights feel welcoming from afar, they've been known to immobilize folks at the best of times
  - b. 1499 Cornfield court, specifically the local dentist's house
  - c. Corn fields of farmers Alin and Cunningham, who often draw extraterrestrials
  - d. All of the above
10. How many of our townsfolk can you tell a secret to and it stays a secret?
  - a. None
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. Your family
11. How much time does it last for the spilled secret to stop being spread?
  - a. One-half year
  - b. One year
  - c. A decade
  - d. A length of time unknown to mankind

If you got 60% of these right, congratulations and welcome to the Elmsview family! You will receive a package in the mail, please only share it with others who have come of age and have taken this exam. If you got 59% or less, you will be brought to the reeducation room following your score reveal. Don't try to run.

Elmsview welcomes all!!

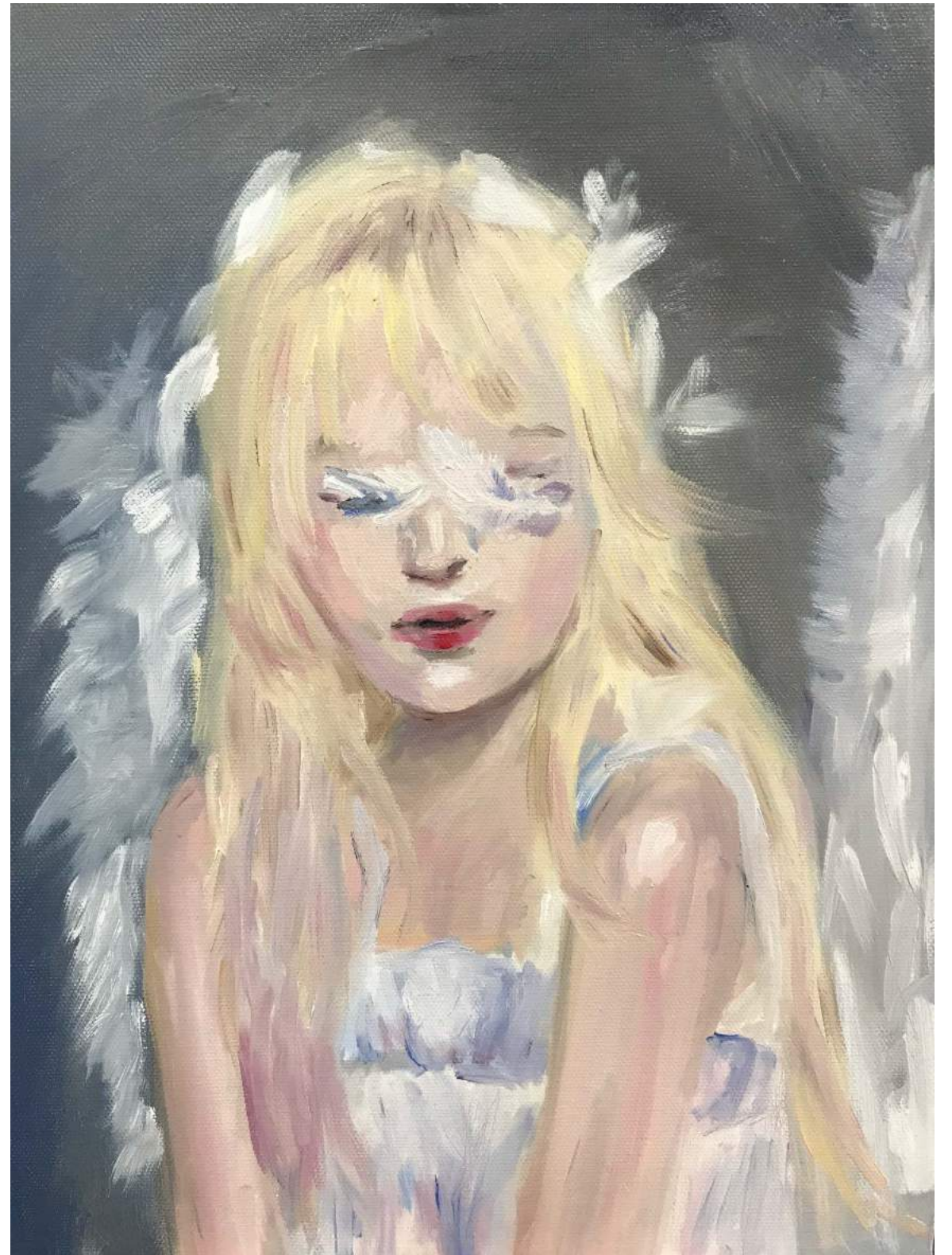
Key: 1d, 2b, 3d, 4d, 5a, 6b, 7a, 8c, 9d, 10a, 11d

Official Elmsview Town Membership Exam  
Emily Ohl

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Doll?  
Jordyn Katz



Seraph  
Carolyn Lee

## There Is Something Behind the Moon

There is something behind the moon. It crept back there last night while no one was looking, but I saw. In the moment that the rest of the world blinked, I saw it sliver back there like a dream or a whisper. It was massive and had many tentacles and eyes and teeth and minute hair follicles. I couldn't hear it screaming, but I could tell it was. It's hiding behind the moon for something terrible.

Nobody believes me. They call me crazy. They say I need to get help. Don't they see that's what I'm trying to do? I'm trying to get help to stop the creature that's hiding behind the moon. My own friends and family look at me like I'm insane. Like I'm the monster, which is impossible because I'm here, not on the moon.

The monster has gotten more bold. It's taunting me. It knows. It wiggles its tentacles out from around the moon in some hideous eldritch corona when nobody else is looking. It waits for the world to blink but it knows that my eyes are still wide open. It's going to do something terrible soon, but I'm not sure what.

I told my father today and he gave me the same look as everyone else but there was something wrong. His face wasn't the same. There was something hiding behind his eyes. The same monster, I'm sure. It stole his smile and is wearing his skin like pajamas, but I could see through its deception. Nobody else can, but I can.

If nobody believes me then I'll have to make them believe. I'll show them there is a monster hiding behind the moon. I'll show them it's hiding behind my father's gaze. I'll grab it by its slimy tentacle and rip it out into the light where everyone can see it. Where everyone will know I was right.

There is something behind the moon.



## My Dream Home Isn't Just One House

let's have a neighborhood night  
at the bar on our block, anything's  
better than the community garden  
where everyone loves telling you  
how vegetarian and busy they are  
a street full of friends  
couldn't ever be homeless  
Again

a silent dust floating  
Sunday, went to church  
on my laptop, just  
to test my waters again  
they were in the "Bless Up" series  
of course the first message  
I hear in years is where  
they preach about giving  
it all away to god, it's they/them's  
already anyway right

I have nothing to say this year  
no offering for the youth pastor's  
comb-over, beard and flannel  
I walk by a few others from  
the neighborhood who are  
adding in no way to the world  
today

this apartment is passive income  
for the dentist who owns it

I know the names of four people  
total on my entire street and it's not  
my fault

Nextdoor was a good attempt  
a failed app full of lost cats  
and blurry doorbell camera  
burglars

I stayed awake for  
my old friend  
we painted houses  
felt homeless

get a u-haul  
you asshole

come back so we can  
go visit the monks  
on Mt. Hopeless  
meet the drunks  
in the Uncanny  
Monroe Valley

I'm a free agent looking to take one  
for the team, where's our house league?

if I had one flaw as  
a roommate it'd be  
the dishes, I'm always  
the first one to leave  
the movie theater  
I'm more of a puzzle  
than a board game guy  
I feel homeless in my own  
body at times

## Morning Routine

It's morning. It's 06:45 am. It's time to get ready for the day and you've been staring  
at your closet for fifteen minutes. Cloths of assorted colours and textures stare back at you,  
waiting. You can feel the tic, tic, tic of the analog clock on your dresser but it doesn't matter  
because you are paralyzed. Every twitch of the fingers is stopped as your brain spins its  
wheels thinking of all the possibilities and preventing any other function in the meantime.  
It shouldn't be this hard, you think to yourself. But that doesn't matter because you are still  
frozen before your closet.

Are you feeling feminine? Masculine? Somewhere in between? You think maybe its feminine  
today, so you start to reach for the red lacy shirt but stop: no, the texture is all wrong, plus  
it shows off your figure too much and frankly your diet hasn't been the best lately. Your hand  
retracts as you try to reevaluate. Maybe the soft cotton? But if you wear that one then you'll  
have to change your bra, and if you change your bra then your chest will look bigger, and  
on second thought maybe today isn't a feminine day. So, you reach for a long sleeve but when  
you put it on you realize your chest is too large now, so you roughly pull at the handle of your  
drawer. As you feel your ribs ache from the new restrictive layer you look in the mirror  
and decide this outfit looks like shit.

Rinse and repeat.

You are trapped in an eternal cycle, like Sisyphus, cursed to a never-ending torture for all time.  
Only, there is no boulder, just you and your clothing. It should not be this hard.

There are a thousand other things to worry about, yet here you are, on the verge of tears as  
you still look at the closet. The idea of wearing the any pilled cloth brings tears to your eyes.  
Just pick something, anything. There is only so much time, and, in your deliberation, another  
fifteen minutes have passed. What are you going to do? You can't procrastinate forever.  
Choices must be made; things need to be done. You still need breakfast. You still need  
to make lunch. You still need to start your car. The dog needs to be let out before you leave.  
A thousand little things need to be addressed and you are still standing in front of the closet.

Just wear another sweatshirt, for the third day in a row, and get going. You can wallow  
in your shame on your way to school. No one is going to care what you look like. It's not  
like they aren't used to your slobbish tendencies. You were never the most attractive person,  
and it isn't fair to compare yourself to other people. Make a joke and smile through the pain  
like you always do.

By the time you get to school you'll have decided how you want to be perceived today  
and none of this suffering will matter. You can agonize over how easy this came to you  
while you do derivatives and compare yourself to your friend.

## Cat Called

**Content Warning: sexism and assault**

Wet whispered words soak through my tattered clothing. Stretched across my back are the remnant scars of the wings you ripped away for your very desire.

Falling from heaven, is what I did...Or at least that's what you said I did when you hit me with that cheesy pick up line.

And when I didn't respond you hit me again with a different one. And that time when I was indifferent to your words, slightly annoyed to say the least, you hit me again.

This time with your fist. This time your eyes turned a deep dark shade of Evil Emerald, trademarked by the rest of the fragile ego men who feel beat down and have to beat down someone else.

This time, you attacked me.

Your nails, the sight of black lines across the tips where the old dirt laid, dig into my muscles. The stinging sensation of my skin ripping apart at the seams burns incessantly. The squelching sound of my jugular being squeezed in between your hands births a cacophony. The smell of metallic blood stained against the brick of this old corner store becomes a permanent cologne. And I taste the flavor of fear lingering on the tiny tastebuds of my tongue, even after everything has stopped.

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**This time, you killed me.**

No, not physically. But the moment you stood from those steps, made your way over, and stepped in front of me, you beat me up violently without having to lay a hand. And like the feline you called me, I curled up, hair standing tall and attempting to make myself look more formidable than we both knew I was.

You were able to laugh it off once you saw my keys forming temporary brass knuckles. A smile on your lips, a finger tucking a stray of my hair behind my ear, purposely grazing my cheek in the process. You backed away, eyes lingering on my ass telling me to keep walking.

For you, this angel fell from heaven. A masterpiece ready to be painted and since I didn't agree it was my fault for the mistreatment you had planned. After all, wearing my ethereal gown was purposely for sore eyes of men to gawk at and weakened bodies to fill with life. But for me, this angel is in the process of getting her wings repaired after your harsh yanking caused them to crack.

**This time** you weren't in the mood for breaking them off fully, and yet I still feel the ghost scarring of the girls whose time was sadly this time.

**This time** you hit me, not with a punch. But a smile. A knowing smile that this time I should somehow be grateful you didn't actually attack me.

**This time you killed me.**

No, not physically, but by the way my stomach stirs and teary eyes sob on my couch, it surely feels like you did.



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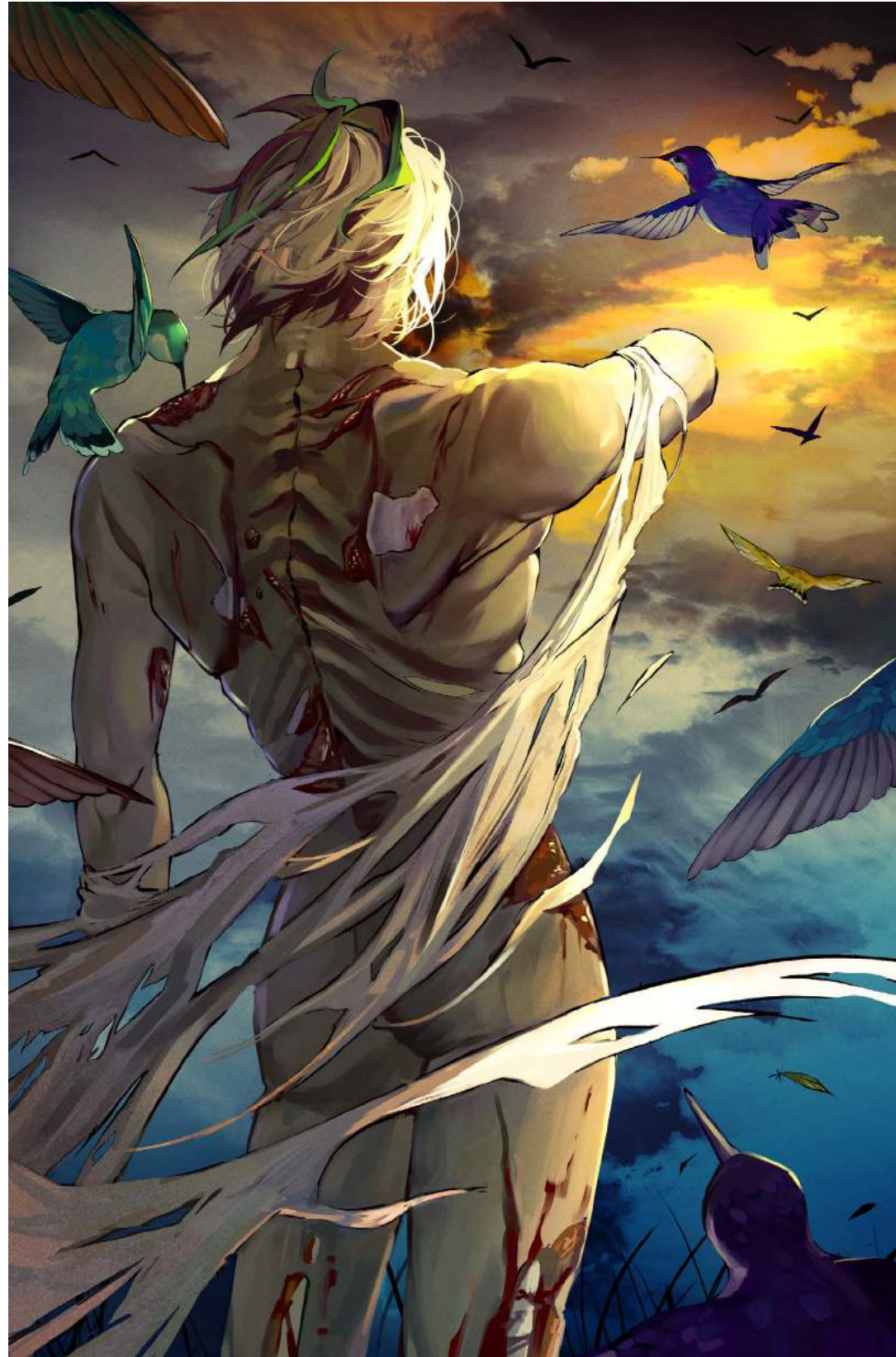
Cat Called  
K Monét

Drowning  
Kelly Jin



## Words for the Bacchae

I am Frenzy. I am the one  
That calls the crowds  
To the gallows, standing stoically  
On high, like mountains reaching heaven.  
Driven mad by my own blood,  
They hang the man,  
Whom I anointed and made blessed.  
For in his eyes I saw mine:  
A sin worse than murder  
And a virtue right for the gods  
That gaze down from on high,  
Perched atop their thin wooden mono-liths.  
I made us all equal, and he pays the price.  
His blood will lubricate the mechanism  
By which my endless will can function,  
Giving me the comfort  
By which I may find rest.  
I called him to death.  
And might I mourn, only briefly.



Monster Almanac Illustration  
Sammi Hong

Leviathan  
SH

## Leviathan

I never felt holy in church  
But I flourished in the gallows  
And in the tombs of the wandering dead.

Picked at random are the twelve stooges  
Who must embark their final flight where  
The man in black ties knots of seven.

The whispering window of the town strings off tall tales of  
some ghouls that had faces too human to make them monsters  
But were just ugly enough to get them alienated entirely.

It took me until now to realize that the singing  
windows are just warmongers and the  
Hike up the twelve stairs isn't something to be proud of.

I too will soon migrate to the gallows  
With only my wit and morality and  
hands too stained to be pure.

Those things alone are a tell-tale sign to fate:  
An inevitable eradication to a sinner's  
Free will and his discomfort of speculation.

The ritz of my death would only serve  
To please the crowd and their greed  
to taste blood and pandemonium.

The longer I reread the epigraph on my grave  
The more I feel the need to vomit.  
I read, "Such a lovely kid—"

But I could never be lovely. Yet as a polite guest, my words  
Stayed restless on my tongue and I would always  
put my strength down next to the muddy shoes by the door.

And even though I protected them from having to flinch  
when I would smile, I could still tell that the window  
would always open her mouth as I turned the corner.

Nevertheless, it was such a beautiful death they gave me:  
All tied with pink ribbons and silver beads to hide  
My tender awkwardness that the town so humbly killed.

I just know that when they inevitably get lonely again,  
they will put back together the body they  
So desperately wanted to dismantle. So for now,

They'll kiss over my corpse and  
Learn to forget that I am even dead  
Leaving me to be a vapid respect in the back of their heads.

(Being an outsider isn't a death sentence  
But familiarity didn't save me. Tell me where to  
place my hands so that I don't scare you too.)



## Young

Death gets carded at the liquor store

the one across from the gas station  
where there's green growing from the diesel cracks  
the liquor store that They frequent  
because They like the ring of its church bell  
and because They'll end up there anyways  
less of an open season sniper  
more of a midnight shift paramedic

They're trying to buy some nice shade of red  
when the cashier scans  
Their moonlight eyes  
Their frayed black hoodie  
Their acne scarred jawbone  
and believes that They are too young

and Death knows They look too young  
They know more about what too young looks like  
than anyone that's ever lived  
it's not like They chose to be angelic  
infinitely present and unfathomably old  
like some kind of white fuzz mold  
growing just behind that refrigerated hum  
but there's something about the flickering blue lights  
the cashier's cigarette smoke eyeliner  
the heavy revving of a cement-scrape low rider  
that casts Them as too young

Death's breath reeks of cypress  
the kind they don't get in heaven  
and certainly not the kind in the soft dirt  
overlooking a few old stones  
as They tell her They don't have an ID  
They just exist

which isn't wrong in this domain  
where the tiles are a little too slippery  
and flies spend their whole lives in the grout  
there's still a few under Their fingernails  
like how a bit of brain still stains Their shoes  
Their last highway robbery

the cashier laughs  
her bleach-tipped halo frayed with impulse  
and too many bad break-ups  
she tells Them she don't care if They're the devil himself  
she needs to see some kind of ID  
and Death makes a note to spend more time around old people  
so They can look a little too old  
and buy cheap ambrosia without question

but Death doesn't get to chose  
when They show up  
They just show up  
at a fresh flower hospital  
a wrong turn alley  
a dawn pink bedroom  
or a liquor store  
where a fermented ford pinto

smashes through the stained glass  
and rings that old bronze bell



Young  
Sarah Phillips

Divine Light  
Skylier Grooms



Burning Down the House  
Jordyn Katz

## Before the World Ends

Before the world ends...

...a walrus will eat Key West  
...monkeys will write Shakespeare  
...anaphora will be how we sing  
...an asteroid will blow up the Taj Mahal  
...I will have published a poem

Before the world ends...

...Pluto will sue to regain its planetary status  
...we will reinvent the wheel  
...bananas will take over San Francisco  
...humanity will eat Edward Scissorhands  
...George Martin will finish the Lord of the Rings  
...twenty dollars will seem like a lot

Before the world ends...

...I will draw a dream of catatonic entropy  
...electric chairs will exist in perpetual motion  
...echoes will rise from the depths of Mars  
...Ruth Bader Ginsberg will emerge from the grave  
...my grandfather will arrive to Thanksgiving on time

Before the world ends...

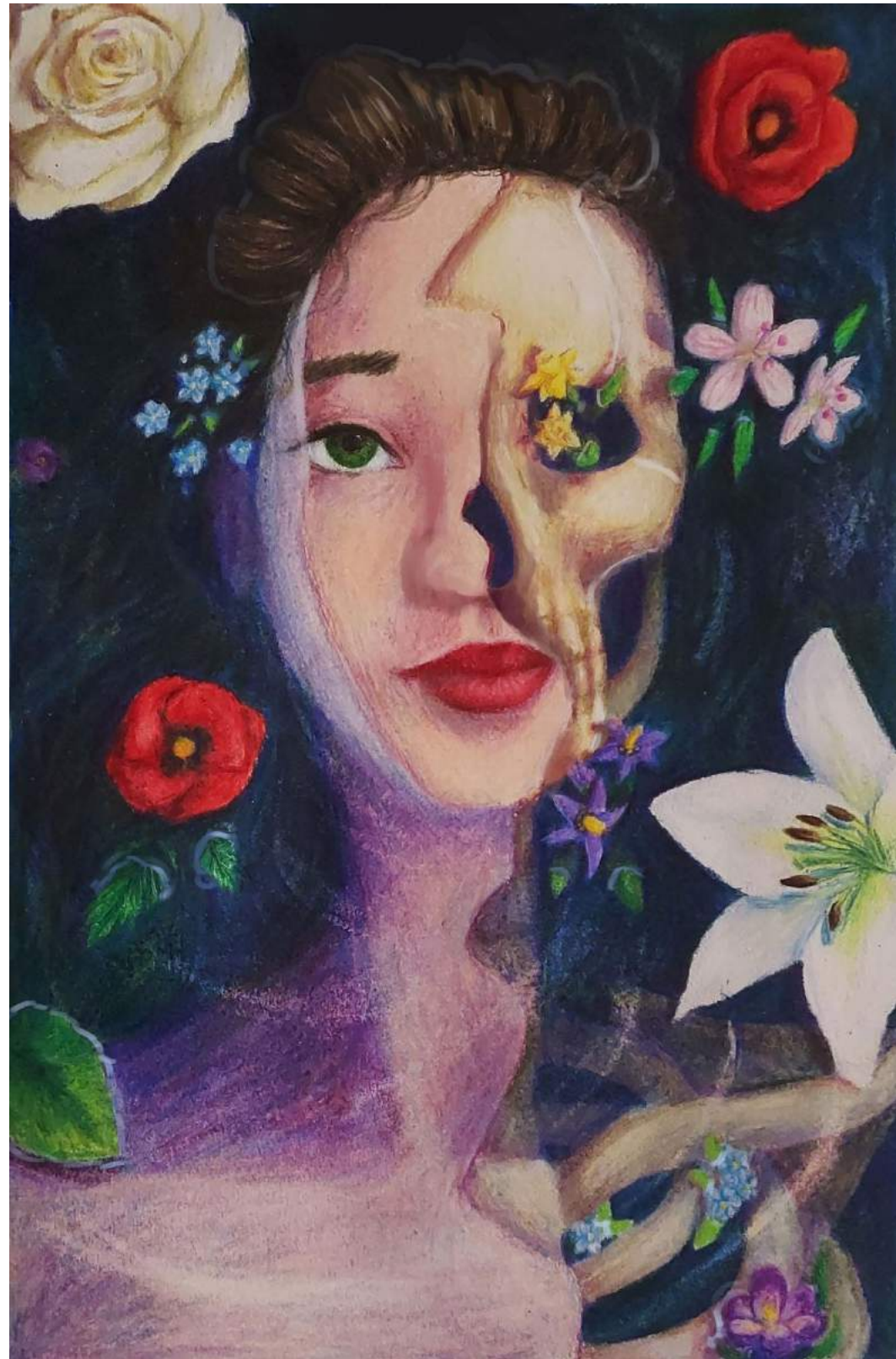
...we will be remembered by our actions  
...NASA will reach the bottom of the sea  
...Superman will go extinct  
...they will look at you with bedtime eyes

Before the world ends...

...West China will embrace the Imperial System  
...we will turn the sun into Portugal  
...a red sharpie marker will inhabit Alpha Centauri  
...someone will finally cancel The Simpsons  
...North America will look like an origami swan  
...two children will be born on a Wednesday

Before the world ends...

...Cain will reunite with Abela  
...sheep will reach critical mass  
...Genghis Khan will be forgotten  
...a single Lego brick will breach the edge of the universe  
...two 43-year-old men will finally leave their local department store



Death and Rebirth  
Madeleine Saint Pe



Ophelia's Lamentation  
Nikki Chai

## Origin

“No, no, no, Death!”

I groaned as Life prattled on. She had such an annoying, childish, high-pitched voice. To my left, Life perched on her glimmering sun-gold throne of light like a little bird, her arms flailing as she spoke. Her lime-green robes flapped with the rapid arm movements as she gabbed, her mouth clacking with the sharpness of a beak. Suddenly I could see her as a little parakeet, wailing and flailing as it threw a fit about being ignored. I felt a chuckle rise in my throat, but suppressed it with an awkward cough. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the disapproving glare of our father as he furrowed his snow-white brow at me. I ignored it. “You can’t just kill every dang creature you lay your eyes on! You’re undoing all my hard work here!”

And... Silence. As usual.

“Do you realize how difficult it is for me to create new souls?” she squeaked angrily, “That takes a lot of time and effort!”

More silence. Death wasn’t having it today, huh?

“Are you even listening to me, Death? I’m talking to you, you know!”

Her red eyes were blazing; If they were directed at me, I swear they would be piercing my very soul. Thank goodness I wasn’t the object of her rage. The thought of it didn’t seem very comfortable...

I turned to where her rage was directed—the throne to my right, composed of bones of all sizes bound together with the jet-black lilies that grew within the cracks. Atop it sat the skeletal figure of Death, shrouded completely (save for his face) in a black satin cloak. He was leaning lazily on his scythe with an elbow, one boney hand holding his face as his hollow sockets gazed straight ahead at Life, uncaring and unmoving. Without a word.

I wish he’d just talk to Life or stop his impulsive killings so we could be done already. These councils became more and more unbearable with each passing moon. They just couldn’t stop fighting.

“Death, you know, you’re really a piece of—”

“THAT’S ENOUGH!”

I recoiled into my armchair of soft orange plumage as Father sprang out of his oakbark throne, the giant, centuries-old tree from which it was hewn just barely framing his now giant figure. The heights he could grow to always astounded me. He slammed his staff of gold on the earthy surface of the Empyrean Plateau with a roar. His booming voice projected like thunder, carrying through the rest of the Dragspire Peaks with the force of a mighty gale. I could hear it echo, silencing the chatter of the surrounding mountainside forests and the world below. A murder of crows fearfully bolted from their perches in the Tree of All behind Father, darting above our heads as they fled. I cringed. I hated it when Father was angry like this. We all did, I think.

Life’s blazing red eyes faded to a stunned white as she froze, like a deer realizing that it was an inch from death as a wolf pounced toward it, jaw agape. Death started and straightened his posture, his sockets spreading wide with surprise as he embarrassedly pulled on the edges of his cloak’s hood to cover some of his face.

“F-Father, I—”

“Don’t stutter when you speak to me, Death,” Father bellowed, “You haven’t spoken all council and now you stutter?”

Death lowered his head in shame, averting his gaze and nervously making circles in the dirt with the blade of his scythe. Not a word.

Father rested his frustrated countenance in a broad, tan palm, his furred snow-white robes rustling slightly in the wind.

“I don’t get why you two can’t just get along. I created you to be counterparts, to work together in enforcing the cycle of life.”

He glared at Life as her wide, white, unblinking eyes rested on some random point in the distance as she



dissociated. Her defense mechanism. She never took Father’s discipline well. “I expect the two of you to figure this out...” he glared to his right toward Life, then to his left toward Death, “...like the mature spirits you are. Transition and I shouldn’t have to sit through all of this nonsense every time we try to sort out a problem.”

He looked down at me as I was mentioned, expecting a response. Nervously, I nodded. Both Life and Death scared me, and might be angry with me for agreeing with Father. Frankly, though, I was fed up with their constant bickering at our family gatherings. It would be better if they kept it to themselves.

That...and Father scared me even more than either of my siblings could. “Additionally,” Father bellowed with the voice of a tempest, “It isn’t fair for Transition to do this much work. You know that he has to personally escort every soul you tear out of living creatures to the afterlife, Death.”

Death didn’t move—he continued to stare at the ground, at the scratches he was nervously making in the dirt.

Leech  
Emma Mankowski

Father paced forward until he stood before me, and then looked back disappointedly at both of his children once more as he reached out and touched my shoulder. “Figure it out.”

And with a snap, we were gone.

\* \* \*

We returned to the Plateau the next day to a horror scene. Life, once boisterous and energetic, lay slain beneath the Tree of All in a pool of thick red blood, her wide white eyes still staring at nothing. Atop her green robes were caterpillars beginning to gnaw at the material, consuming it little by little. I stood there, wide-eyed and stunned as her bright white soul—a ball of gelatinous material, the size of a fist—slowly bobbed up and down over her body in the air.

Just a few hours ago I was chuckling at her acting like a silly parakeet. Now, I stood wordless above the corpse of my own sister, tasked with bearing her soul. I don’t remember what happened exactly. I stood there for what felt like an eternity, hearing nothing but the wind howling in my ears—those intimately familiar winds. The winds we all heard growing up on this Plateau as we indulged in those



Untitled  
Dakota Halliburton

rare moments of togetherness and play in the blink that was our youth. I just couldn't fathom the idea of this place, so important to all of us, being a grave for my family.

Those memories felt so distant at that moment.

But the familiarity of the wind's gales brought me, at least for a second, a moment of comfort amidst despair.

All I know is I stood there—empty, broken, and confused for what felt like eternity, just staring at the soul of my sister as it slowly bounced with the howl of the wind. The air around me filled with tears as rain began to fall. The sky was crying.

I could feel drops fall from my eyes, too.

Father came to me after some time, a black sphere covered in chitinous spikes hovering above his outstretched palm. He offered it to me; I didn't move. It was Death. He killed Death, too. I was alone.

Father reached out to me with a wavering voice, "Son, I..."

I sniffled.

"I didn't think Death would kill her... They were still siblings, after all... I... I never would have thought..."

Father rubbed his eyes with his free arm, wiping the heartbreak off his countenance. "I had to kill him. Death cannot exist without Life. But..."

He put a hand on my shoulder, Death's soul levitating above his other outstretched palm. "Son... I... I'll have to create new siblings for you. We need a new Life and Death. Their absence cannot persist, or else the world will fall out of balance." My eyes widened in anger. "Things will be fine without a birth or a death for a little bit. We can last a day or two without them, but..."

"I don't want new siblings."

Father looked down at me, shocked. My fist clenched while my other hand gently cradled Life's soul. "Son, they're dead. You must escort their souls

to the afterlife, so I can create new spirits. You know that. Don't be irrational. You ne—"

Whipping around to face him, I swiped Death's soul from his grasp and looked him in the eyes, furious. "I said I don't want any other siblings! They're my brother and sister, the only ones I'll have."

Eyes furious, Father lashed out, trying to steal the souls from my grasp. Behind him, I saw a group of emperor butterflies rise into the sky. Taking it as a sign, mustering all the courage I could, I shoved both souls into my chest cavity with all my might.

Silence.

The world stopped.

Father was suspended, frozen in time before me, as Life and Death stood beside me. But they were not beside me. They were in me somehow, barely visible in my peripheral vision. To my left, I could barely make out Life's childish smile—I could feel her bouncy energy and her warmth. To my right, Death's skeletal face stared back at me. He nodded. I could feel his remorse for what he'd done, his sorrow. From both of them, I sensed understanding. Somehow we all knew that this was the only way we could stay together and perform the duties Father created us to fulfill.

Light. Darkness. Blue. Green. Purple. Light. Darkness. Blue, green, and purple flashed before our collective consciousness repeatedly as we felt our bodies rise and stretch into the atmosphere. I couldn't see them anymore, but I knew they were there, and I could sense that they felt the same.

We were now one, but separate. Of this world, but just outside it. Suspended in the sky, beyond the barrier of the world, connected to each other as all things are. Somehow, I knew I would be able to guide souls here—past the barrier, into us. Death knew he could kill, and Life knew she could take the souls I guided and place them in new hosts. We felt each other fully.

We are one. We are flow. We are ether.

Origin  
Cathryn Szulczewski



