

SUMMER 2025

Emerge



ASSIGNMENT

Literary Magazine

Assignment Literary Magazine

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Cover art by Dianne Corbeau

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Assignment Literary Magazine is the official literary magazine of Southern New Hampshire University's Mountainview MFA program.

Mission Here at *Assignment Literary Magazine* we believe in the joy of creating and sharing art. Our editorial team is passionate about curating a platform that both celebrates and elevates literature and the diverse individuals who produce it. We are looking for literature that pushes the boundaries of excellence. We want work that makes you pull over the car because you have to get it out of you so quickly. The art that throbs in your chest and flashes across your vision like a daydream. We want work that hypnotizes us and floats back through our minds while we're folding laundry. Send us something that will change our minds, force our perspectives, or expand our vision. Send us something beautiful. Send us something ugly. Send us something raw. Send us something we can eat. Send us your best.

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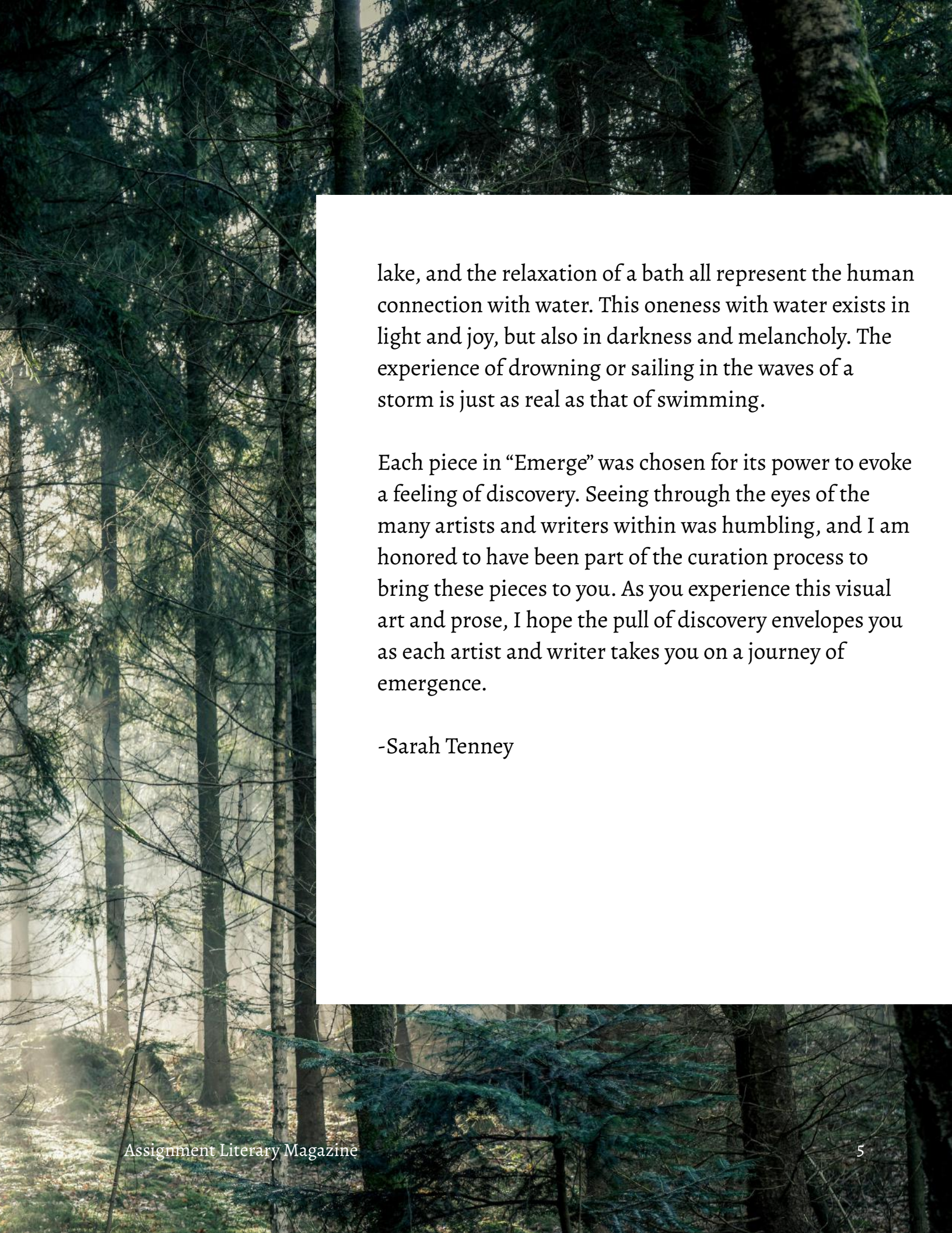
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The background of the page is a photograph of a forest. Tall, slender trees with dark trunks stand vertically. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of green and brown leaves, creating a dappled light effect on the forest floor. The overall tone is natural and serene.

Editor's Note

The heart of emergence is discovery, and each piece ahead encompasses the emotional depth of what it means to discover or be discovered in a way previously unknown. Whether it's learning about oneself or seeing through a shroud of darkness into another, new things are uncovered. As writers and artists, these interpretations explore the many definitions and emotions associated with emergence.

Many themes are evident, such as coming of age, seeing mental health issues for the first time, and feeling the pull of new desires. I was surprised to find the most common shared theme is water. As a viewer, I was taken to the beach, nameless bodies of rippling water, and swamps teeming with life. As a reader, I found water as an allegory for life, growth, and love. As humans who emerged from the sea, it only makes sense to see it as a source of comfort or solace. The serenity of an ocean sunset, the peace of fishing on a



lake, and the relaxation of a bath all represent the human connection with water. This oneness with water exists in light and joy, but also in darkness and melancholy. The experience of drowning or sailing in the waves of a storm is just as real as that of swimming.

Each piece in “Emerge” was chosen for its power to evoke a feeling of discovery. Seeing through the eyes of the many artists and writers within was humbling, and I am honored to have been part of the curation process to bring these pieces to you. As you experience this visual art and prose, I hope the pull of discovery envelopes you as each artist and writer takes you on a journey of emergence.

-Sarah Tenney

Raven Profile Blue

By Dianne Corbeau



Progress Is a Strange Thing

By Edward Michael Supranowicz

It was a small house sitting to the side of a narrow interstate winding through some Appalachian hills. Whether it was a private house at one time is anybody's guess. First time I saw it, it was a diner for those who got hungry on their journey to somewhere or nowhere. The second time I passed it, it had become a church painted in garish colors of damaged merchandise bought at a going-out-of-business sale. The third time I passed it, it had become a bar for those who put their faith in a bottle. The fourth time I passed the house it was empty, empty as the bottles that sat on tables of its last incarnation. Somebody owns the property, so sooner or later it will be made into something or other. Otherwise, nature would reclaim it, and most would not see that as progress.

I Skinny Dip You

By Madeline Bates

Our footsteps talk in the dark, on the gravel. We are too bundled and bleary-eyed to use our mouths, so I pretend I can read her mind. This is fine, Amelia is chanting to herself. More than fine, I think back. More than fine.

Down we go, down the gravel and past where gravel meets sand. Past the beachgrass that ripples and down the dune, a slide. We're roped in by the waves, their stripes, like china smashing, like dishes dropped.

The dark beach air has a different taste to it, like the stars have come closer to Earth. It's damp. We breathe in half air and half salt; I don't have to look to know that next to me, Amelia's face has broken into a grin at the noise and at the cold and at the space in front of us. Cold, oh, cold. When the salt spray picks up it is like needles to the cheeks, like scissors pulling splinters, like tweezers plucking hairs. 'Cause we can't see much we let the sound of the wind whipping the beachgrass lead us towards the water.

At the final pitch of sand, we peel off our pants and shirts and sweaters and leave them piled on the dimpled ground. We leap those last few meters, over shells and rocks and old dead weeds. Into the water without thinking is the only way this can go, because even though it's a handful of degrees warmer than the air, the body can't make sense of numbers like that anyways: when cold is cold, it is cold. So the shock of it, still, is like nothing else, like cold, like COLD, like FREEZING like scraping your knees and bleeding, like cactus, like bitter like sour like sweet, it is like a warm hug. Like scratching an itch and wiggling your fingers. Yup, still feel them, and my toes, can you?

I can feel them, but can't see them, she giggles. Our arms are bright white like some wide seaweed waving and our nipples stare, wide-eyed, scared. The spray washes our faces of expression but she's jittery, on top of normal shivers. The whites of her eyes reflect the choppy sea, even though we float in the calm past the sandbar. She's asking me to see how deep it is where we're treading.

I say, beat me to the bottom.

Up and out of the water we fly, instead of sinking down. The cliffs hang in the distance, mauvish, and we can see the yellow line of the horizon drawn chalkily between sea and sky. We do flips around each other, splashing and skating, fighting the pull of both gravity and the stars, until our legs and arms and hair gets all tangled and braided into one.

And Amelia points at the sun crawling up on the dark as we fall. We're huddled in the cool shallows behind that first sandbar, hiding in the pocket of each other for warmth. Her mouth hangs open. Her cheeks and nose and tongue are flushed in rosy pinks; I can't see it, but I'm sure mine are the same.

I want to enter the body of some bystander-witness; I want to photograph this moment and make it mine. Us, vulnerable, unclothed, breathless; want to put that picture in my wallet and carry it around like currency, unexchangeable and intangible, more symbolic than really real. The sun bursts up on the horizon in pinks and reds and orange. We cry pantingly. Let there be light, she whispers. And the beach shifts to a shade of dark golden.

So we let the tide pull us in, relaxing everything, all our limbs sore from the cold and the flight. We float like penguins, bellies and heads full of air.

The towels and clothes we left in a semi-damp pile--can you see them? From on our stomachs like small children, taking saltwater in our mouths to spit, we stand up, our bodies red and raw as cherries--our cheeks, salt-bitten and splotchy--like tomatoes, like plums, like pomegranate, like wild berries. You could peel our skin back and find fruit-like flesh within. You could cook us up and we'd get tender (almost melty!) as our juices seethed...

The dash to our towels: we saw movement up the peak of the dune. Tripping, dragging our sweaters behind us, half covered, half nude, we bolt to the cliffs, now breathless, to a nook where the winds and boys won't see or smell or hear us; to the rock wall, our blanket and fortress.

I unwrap the small thermos I stored in my kangaroo pocket to share. We sip the bitter coffee like cautious children and sniff the steam it emits. The sun makes its way out of bed. There is nothing else like it: a hug from inside, a teddy bear; like our knuckles interlocking, mine soft, yours square; I like my coffee black while you prefer it sweet; our bundle of warmth is like calm sea and deep breathing.

The heads of boys are now bounding down the dune to where we were--we made it over and out just in time. The sky, still navy-ish, is barely fit for fishing, but they're here, big long rods and rubber boots and bait buckets in tow. The tallest one raises his hand at us, a distant greeting. We wave back, sheepish, seen. I take a peek inside Amelia's mind. She is thinking, . I send her back a thought: Me too. We nestle further into the sand.

1532 Waves

By Zoe Nikolopoulou



ماء

By Mariam Ahmed

no one can own
rain

all water is life
all life is sacred

it's kismet (qisma):
the Arabic word for
water,
ماء

sounds like calling
for the comfort
of my mother,
“Ma!”

Ocean waters call to me
the rollicking lullaby-roar
of the waves. The salt-air scent
that hits you full on before
you can even set eyes on the ocean.

Sea-Longing

By Catherine Coundjeris

The sizzling-hot sand your
flip flops can't protect you
from entirely. The cool wet sand
at the edge of the water, where the
cream-foam tickles the shore.

The bracing shock as the waves
hit you and you can taste the salt.
The sparkling mesmerizing waves
in the distance that blind you
and you duck under the big one.

A handful of periwinkles throbbing
like the heart-beat of the ocean.
Their tiny shells the color of sunsets.
Combing the beach for treasure
always on the lookout for shark teeth

and sand dollars to pay the ocean
gods to release your spirit from the
salt-water longing that troubles you
all year long even in the crystal air of
the mountains where the sky always changes.

Wave

By Zoe Nikolopoulou



Queen of the Canal

By Kevin Sanchez

Five foot tall

she swims in the channels of Mexico

the cool water

tempering the desert's warm winds

Her playground;

she goes against the current

Reina del Canal

spending decades away from home

she dives into pools

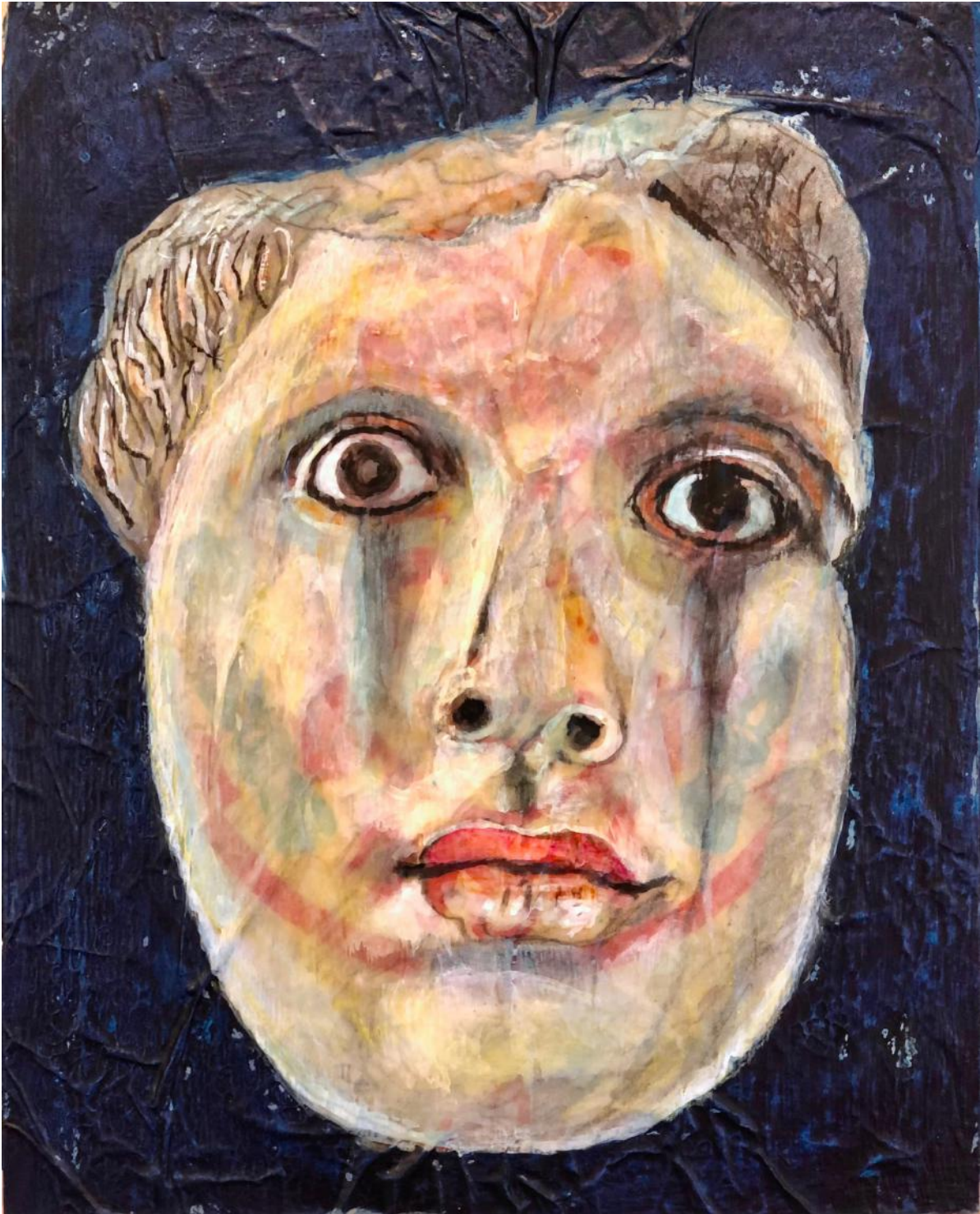
remembering the current,

the kids swimming in the canal,

& the ones that drowned

her body is ageless in the water;

She is home



Helen 4
By GJ Gillespie

Burn

By Carol Barrett

Hailstorm startles the cats, who crawl under my desk, up against the rumbling wall. The sky is white as the bouncing ground, picnic table obliterated with ping pong balls, the frothy little yellow flowers that had just ventured out, well, mustard. Thor's cymbals unleashed. The windows in back sound like someone throwing baseballs. The gutters are overflowing with gushing rain and glitzy balls, indiscriminately passing down clanking spouts. And yet it's 75 degrees out, my computer confirms, "raining now" with a blue umbrella symbol, as if I need to know. So many plans scuttled by the tempestuous air. So many travelers wondering whether to book another night. How can you drive in this?

Thunder continues to roll through the reluctant evening, lights flashing inside and out, despite the safety of closed doors. The poor rabbits and deer and squirrels – I hope they've found some cover, maybe under an old tree. The clover will be ready when they emerge, but they'll be hungry waiting for this long storm to lift. As will I. A friend is bringing pizza, but I bet there's a jagged catch in the plan. His new car could be dented, if he risks it out from the carport. Think of the trucks permanently pinged by this onslaught. Think of the homeless who finally got some summer weather to sleep through. No tent can withstand the battering. Where can they duck? I take a worried breath, wait for the skies to let go their tidal forces, shift into neutral. They must taste the zinc in the air, negative ions in a frenzied argument, shouting daggers.

My mother would ask: is there any end in sight? But she's somewhere out beyond the hail. An hour from now, phones will be ringing or flashing who was doing what, when. Despite the trappings of civilization, our relentless seizure of the earth, we are still undone by the heavens, impulsive as a three-year-old with a book of matches.

Fear

By Beck Weiser

If I was a different person, I would tell you that I learned to be afraid from my mother. My mother, who thought the best way to teach her children about fear of open windows, was to throw a pumpkin three stories down onto the pavement below. The way it shattered still haunts me.

I would tell you about her years as a paramedic, seeing some of the worst injuries that Oregon had to offer. I would tell you of the stories she used to tell me of growing up Southern Baptist in San Francisco in the 60's, of knife fights in school and the over starched pinafores she wore to church. I would tell you of her fear of being alone and how that caused her to try so hard to hold onto people that it made her crazy.

If I was a different person, I would tell you that I learned to be afraid from my grandmother. My grandmother, who taught me to mind my needles while sewing by pricking my finger until bright red blood welled up, staining the pillow I hand sewed with her, the one that still lives on my bed twenty years after. I would tell you about her cutting her own hair in the bathroom early in the morning, long before any of the rest of us woke up, because she never trusted another person with something sharp near her head. I would tell you of her fights with her only living sister, both of them seething with anger together in the living room because neither of them could stand to be the one to walk away.

If I was a different person, I would tell you that I learned to be afraid from my father. My father, who I only ever saw cry when he thought I was in danger. My father, who used to tell me about how when I was a toddler, I was fascinated by the trucks that drove down the block, heading towards the hardware store down the street from us. He would tell me about how I would always try and chase after them, running into the street with no hesitation and he wouldn't be able to grab me quick enough to stop me, so all he could do was shout and shout and shout until I came

back to him on my own. I would tell you about his best friend, who was a kind man that took team photos for the professional bowling tournaments that came through town, my charming father as his assistant and how they grew up together in a small, Oregon town, never leaving each others side until my father moved to Portland for better job opportunities and my dad became more open minded and his friend became more closed minded until he started refusing to get vaccines and COVID killed him, weeks before my dads birthday.

If I was a better person, I would tell you about all the adults in my life who tried to teach me fear, hoping I would make it further in life than they did. But I'm not that person.

I taught myself fear.

It was the only thing I knew how to do.

*

I was always a nervous kid. I shied away from new people, new experiences, new books and new TV shows. I always wanted everything to be exactly the way it was when I looked away, but by the time I looked back it was all different. I was afraid of all closed doors, absolutely sure that if it closed, I was locked in, and no one would be able to come get me. I would scream, hysterically banging on the door and never even thinking to try the knob itself. Someone would always come in, nearly hitting me with the door itself as they tried to open it but even once I was free, I couldn't stop the panic welling in my chest. I would cry, for so long and so loud that I stopped breathing, my entire world closing in around me. It didn't matter that the door was open now, only that it had been closed before. It had changed while I wasn't looking and by extension, I had changed. I had no control over it.

I had no control over anything at all.

*

I raised chickens as a child. They lived in a coop we bought from Lowes, on the back patio that I once watched a pumpkin explode on. I held them in my arms, both of us familiar and content. There was no fear, just a strong beating heart pressed against my own.

One of the walls of my bottom floor bedroom pressed against the wall of the coop. In the evenings, if I kept my window open, I could hear the sound of the chickens cooing as the sun went down, settling into their hay beds together as I settled into mine. It was calming, it was safe, the same every night.

I slept through the sound of the raccoon getting into the coop. I slept through the fear they must've felt, claws digging beneath their soft feathers. I slept through their screams, an echoing thing that must've rattled the wire that surrounded their enclosure.

When I woke up the next morning, trudging in my boots out into the cold morning air, the only thing I found in the coop was blood and feathers.

I didn't sleep for weeks after.

It was the first time in my life conceptualizing death. It was so different from when my grandmother had died a year prior. With her, I barely knew her. My paternal grandmother had lived across the hall from me my whole life, leaving my maternal grandmother behind. I didn't know the women who raised my mother and because of that, I didn't really care.

But those chickens were mine.

And they were gone.

*

I was in middle school the first time I heard the word Lesbian be used as an insult. Me and one of my friends would walk around the school during the first week of classes, holding hands so we wouldn't get separated. She was my best friend and I loved her dearly, the only way I knew how to. If we were together, then things would be okay.

It wasn't until later, during my first middle school science class, my only class without my best friend, did I hear it. One of the other girls, already tall with sandy hair that I couldn't help but watch swing in its ponytail as she walked, turned to a boy and gave him a shark grin. "Did you hear that we have some lesbians in class already?"

The boy scowled. "My dad said lesbians are disgusting."

The girl just shrugged. "I'm just telling you what I saw."

And that was that.

I stopped holding my friend's hand but the word stayed.

A few years later, during 8th grade, another girl asked me if it was true. If I was a lesbian. She wasn't being unkind, not cruel or strange, just another girl asking because she had always heard that about me and wanted to know. She said she had never met a lesbian before and wanted to know if it was true.

I froze. I didn't know what to say.

I thought of the girl from my first science class, telling the boy about the lesbians as her hair moved. I thought of the women I saw on TV, two girls in love just long enough to die. I thought of my parents screaming at each other over the sound of

the Blazers losing another game. I thought of the boys in my classes, who looked at me with shame in their eyes, like they knew something I didn't.

I thought of my best friend, someone I didn't talk to anymore and the way her hand had made me feel so safe on that first day of school. I thought of the way it burned.

I knew my answer.

So I lied.

"No."

*

The pills don't help.

The first time was in high school, when my anxiety got so overwhelming that I began to fear speaking. I couldn't bring myself to stand or raise my hand during classes, leading to a rush of rotten apples in my backpack because I couldn't stand up to throw away the core when I was done with it in case my classmates stared at me while I did it. If I wasn't absolutely sure about the answer to something, I wouldn't raise my hand. I would spend every passing period in the bathroom, curled on the dirty floor until my breathing calmed itself. I couldn't handle going to class, but I also couldn't handle the idea of not going, in case they called my parents and I was found out. It scared me, badly.

I'm on Sertraline now, 100mg a day. I couldn't tell you if they are working but I take them every day like uneven clockwork, washing them down with lukewarm Red Bull most mornings before I head to work. My hands don't tremble as I help a little boy with his homework in an old PPS portable we use for after school programming, but it's uncontrollable as I log training certificates and birthdays

and CBR numbers in my spreadsheet. I don't know what that says about me. I'm too afraid to ask, but slow progress is still something I've never had before.

*

I looked at myself in the mirror today. That person looked so different from the me I remembered being. They look calm and strong, with green hair flopping over their forehead. They look happy.

But I know the truth.

Fear is not something easily buried. It is not something easily disposed of. If you swallow it, like a toddler with a lithium battery, it would burn you from the inside out, the acid making its way through the soft skin of your gut. If you swallow fear, it poisons you, turning every part of you in onto itself. It consumes you.

The person in the mirror wore their fear like a feathery coat, shedding it at the door along with their boots in the early evening. The feathers stick to their skin as they climb into the embrace of their lover but together, they pluck the feathers away. They always find their way back onto the coat, but for just a moment, they are free. The coat is still there, still laying in a heap on the floor but it isn't digging in. When they find the urge to give in, to put the coat back on, to live in it, their lover takes their hand and kisses it gently. She goes and grabs the coat, letting the person run their hands over it softly, tenderly, before she hangs it in the hall closet. She doesn't hide it, doesn't change it, doesn't ask the person to get rid of it. She treats it kindly before shutting it away for the night.

I look at myself in the mirror.

No feathers.

MATURATION

By Sarah Watkins

I thought (though I never would have admitted it)

a thousand-legged larva had at some point crawled into
a cocoon deep inside of me—

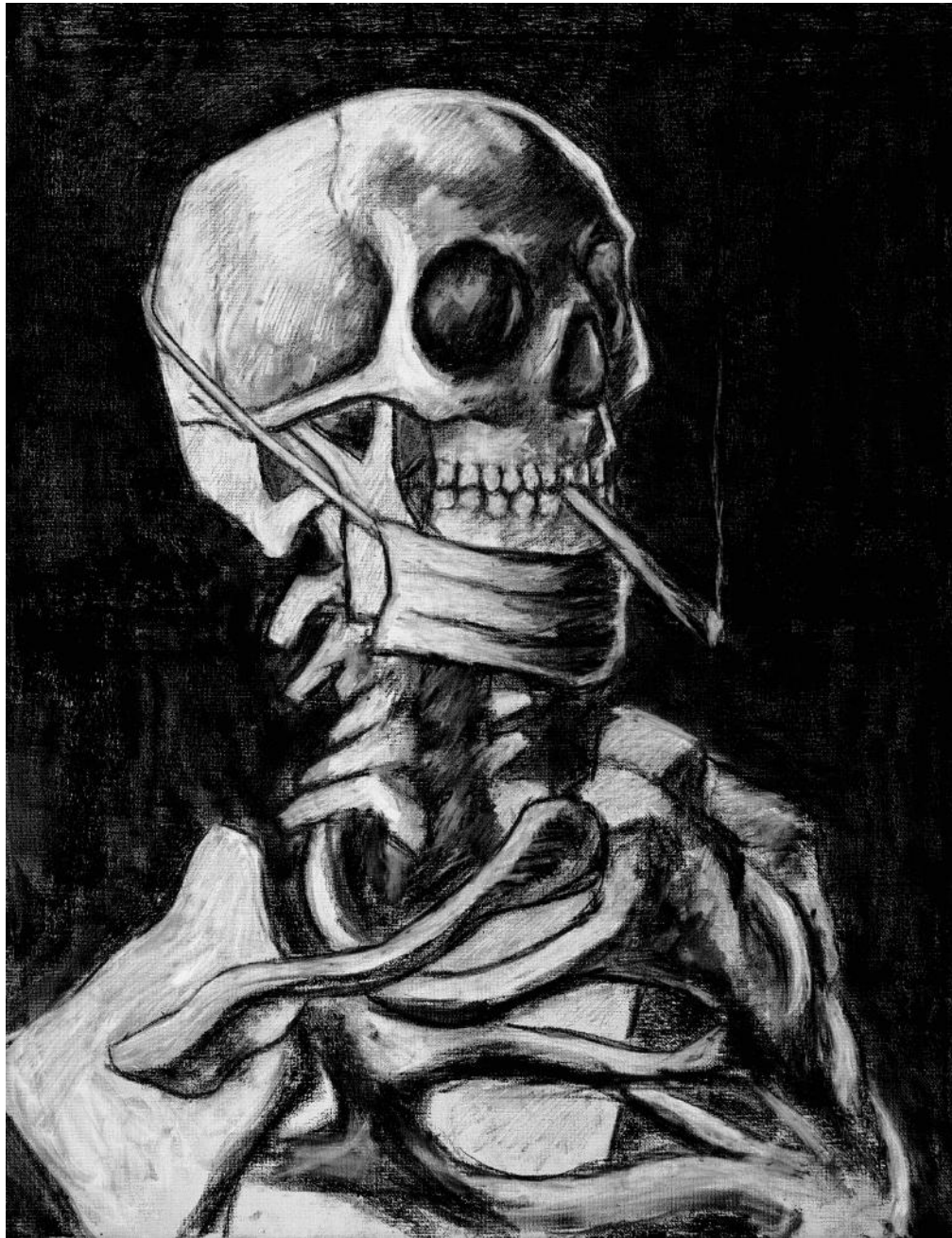
that once the clock struck midnight
when I turned 18
(or maybe when I turned 21)
it would hatch out of me at that very moment
and I would officially be
Adult,
something greater.

my larva
must be a late bloomer

many say I was born for such a time as this but
I think that often
I would rather have been born for such another time

Masked Skull of a Skeleton with a Burning Cigarette

By Donald Patten



I Always Liked Love Songs

By Whitney Weisenberg

When he approached the counter, my legs weakened. Not from fear, like I imagined they would if a man entered the bank with nude pantyhose pulled over his face, but with hope.

“Fill the bag.”

His eyes were slits. His nose was squashed and pressed to the side. His upper lip was plump, and his lower lip was a thin line.

Symmetrical faces don't interest me. When I'm on a date and a stranger comes up to the guy I'm with and says, “Didn't you go to McAlister High?” or “Are you related to Stephen Boone? Because you look just like him?” I get annoyed. I don't want to spend my life with someone who could be confused with someone else.

I want to be caught off guard. I want to be swept off my feet.

Becky from the loan department was lying on her side underneath her desk. One of her high heels had fallen off and was close to Earl's black rubber-soled shoes. Earl's gun was the first thing to be seized. Now, he leaned against the wall like it was holding him up. Before this morning, I bet he thought he was good at his job. Now he couldn't even stand up straight by himself.

My body knew before I did. It whirled like the alarm I didn't push. It screamed, “Run toward this man, toward love, not away.”

I emptied the drawer.

He must've admired my efficiency because he instructed me to empty more drawers.

Connor's. Celia's. Mary's. I felt like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. I felt like employee of the month.

I scooped up dollars and dolled them out like mashed potatoes. I was a housewife taking care of her man.

I must've been humming like I sometimes do without noticing because he made a comment about everyone getting a free concert, and someone near me laughed. I bet it was Celia. Last week she said to me, "Who eats cottage cheese with Cheetos? What are you, twelve?" and then she giggled.

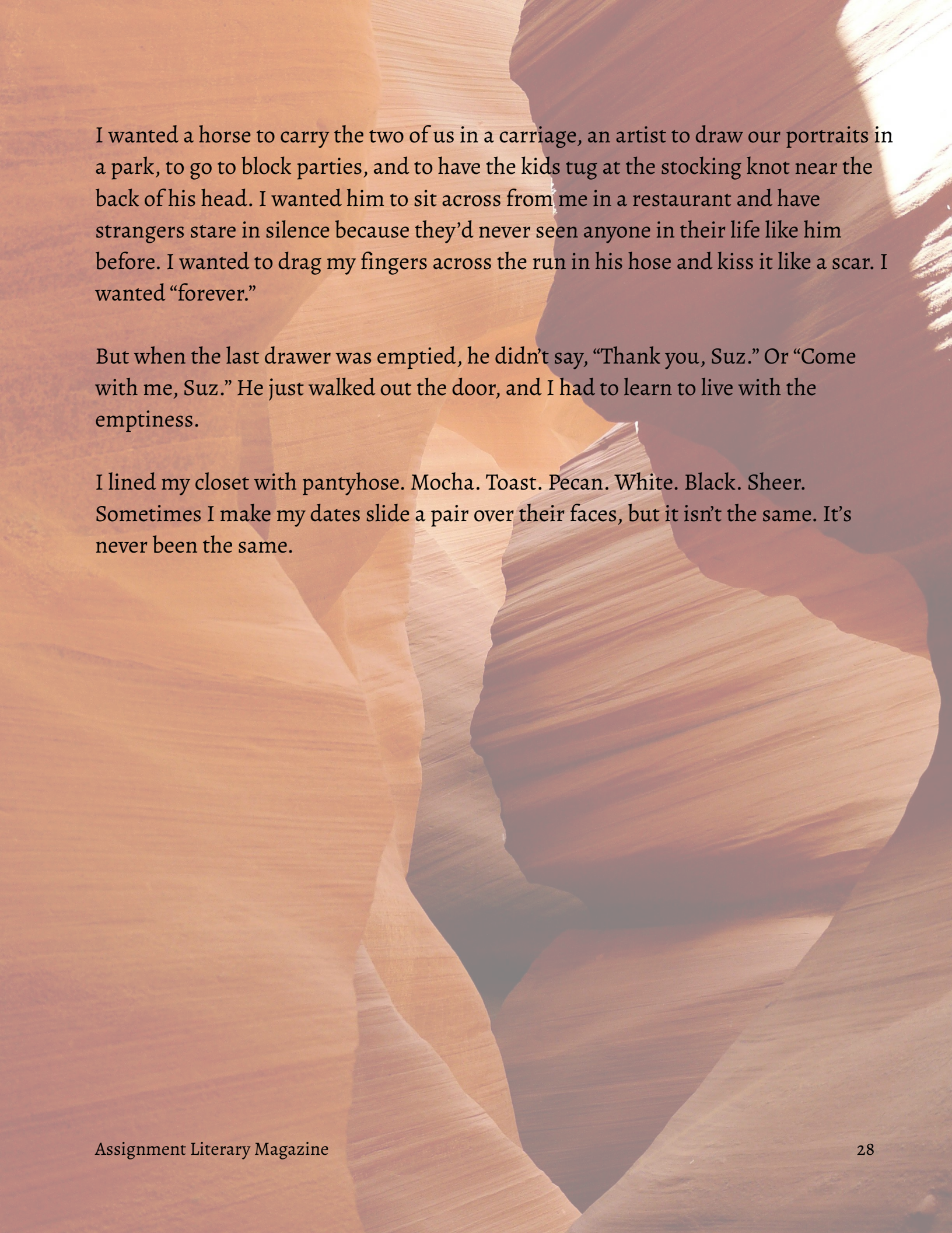
My favorite song is A Cosmic Kind of Love. It's about a scorned alien who abducts a human and then chains her to jagged rocks. The waves crash into her chin. "Someone! Help me!" She cries. "I'm too young to die."

A boy that is half fish, half human frees her, and they fall in love.

Becky's sobs turned into hiccups. They were coded pleas. Pick me up. Pull me back together. I'm just a damsel in distress. Hic-cup. Hicc-up. Hicc-up.

He said, "Suz, hurry." like he wanted me to bring the casserole that I had made out to the car already, because our kids were hungry and we had a long drive, and he also said it like, "Suz hurry." Our lives are moving fast, and we don't want to miss them.

At some point, the back half of my name tag had fallen off. I was no longer Suzanne. I was just Suz. He did that. He changed me.



I wanted a horse to carry the two of us in a carriage, an artist to draw our portraits in a park, to go to block parties, and to have the kids tug at the stocking knot near the back of his head. I wanted him to sit across from me in a restaurant and have strangers stare in silence because they'd never seen anyone in their life like him before. I wanted to drag my fingers across the run in his hose and kiss it like a scar. I wanted "forever."

But when the last drawer was emptied, he didn't say, "Thank you, Suz." Or "Come with me, Suz." He just walked out the door, and I had to learn to live with the emptiness.

I lined my closet with pantyhose. Mocha. Toast. Pecan. White. Black. Sheer. Sometimes I make my dates slide a pair over their faces, but it isn't the same. It's never been the same.

Emergence

By Benjamin Green



A Moth-Eaten Blanket

By Russell Chamberlain

In our sleepy town, a thick blanket of fog envelops the night, leaving us beneath a starless sky. You stand quietly, contemplating the view before you—a serene expanse where the trees stretch their shadows over the horizon, and the damp mist rises, creating an almost ethereal atmosphere blurring the line between earth and sky.

Countless nights have passed when you found solace in the little lights that flicker behind the clouds and fog, those distant stars that add an air of mystery to the vast expanse above. They conceal the truth of the sky, transforming it into a place of mystery, where only the faintest glimmers of light peek through. Those points of brightness, scattered across the hemisphere, cast a gentle glow over our town, imbuing even the darkest nights with a sense of magic.

Tonight, your thoughts drift to the Northern Lights—those mythical displays that dance across the sky and captivate the imagination. They seem so far away, just out of reach, perhaps you are too far south where they are rarely seen. As you watch the dense shield of gray fog, thick and voluminous, it obscures the night sky, hiding its true depths. Although in fleeting moments, the darkness appears torn, moth-eaten in places, allowing just enough of those little lights to filter through.

Loner

By Caleb Ishaya Oseshi



Our Country House

By Daniel Thomas Moran

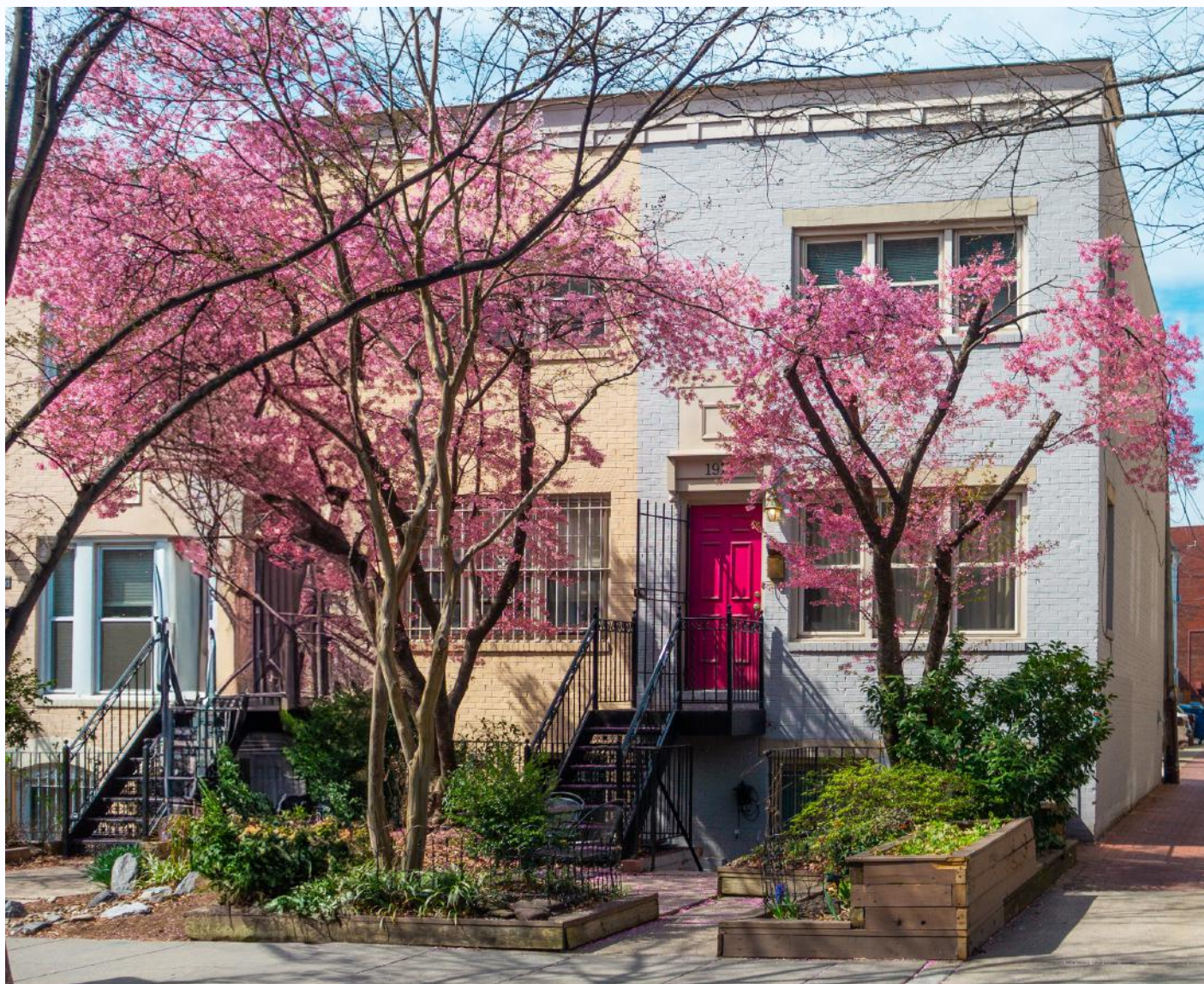
It is
the way of things
in a country house.

With the day
fallen beyond color,
the walls are suspended
in a silence which
is our cradle song.

The stars at slumber,
after the last lamp
of evening is unlit,
and with warm love
as my companion;

Between two hills,
but for a whisper
of moonlight,
the house floats
on the darkness.

I draw up our glad old
blanket around me,
once again I will
invite it in.



Blooming Again

By Nat Miller

THE RIP TIDE

By Collette Grace

Kennedy and Genevieve graciously allow you to follow them around. A make-shift mockery of a trio. You are simultaneously the butt of the joke and the only thing tethering these girls to the earth. Fifth grade is hard for a girl like you.

Kennedy lives in your neighborhood and thus is more easily accessible. You climb the fence behind the bamboo shoots and then you're in her backyard. When you ride your bike on the weekends, you get in the habit of popping your head up over the fence, to see if she's home.

Often you find her and Genevieve laying out on the trampoline. Not jumping, not playing, just lounging. Kennedy and Genevieve have stopped using the term "play date." Now you come over and "hang out." When you spot them on the other side of the fence, you ask them if you can "hang out," and the words feel alien in your mouth.

This is their language, though, and they eagerly invite you to join them. You abandon your bike amid the bamboo and hop the fence, climbing up onto the trampoline. They watch you with eager eyes. You are a dying breed, the last of your kind, the only girl in the fifth grade who can scratch this itch for them.

You say, "Let's play Dead Man."

They scramble to attention. The three of you make quick work of swiping red pine needles and dead leaves off the trampoline, and then Kennedy lays down in the middle. She's the smallest, the obvious choice. "Dead man, dead man, come alive," you and Genevieve chant, "by the time I count to five."

You circle the trampoline around Kennedy, bouncing all the while, watching her fight back giggles. “One, two, three, four, five—dead man come alive!”

Kennedy rises to her knees, then shakily to her feet. She lunges across the trampoline while you and Genevieve shriek and dodge. You crawl, jump, vault over one another, while Kennedy chases, stumbling and smiling, eyes squeezed shut, arms outstretched.

Finally, she catches Genevieve, because she’s taller than you and slower, not as swift in her getaways. Kennedy laughs as she grabs onto her thigh, eyes open wide. Genevieve pulls her halfway across the trampoline as she squeals. You laugh. The air is crisp and you are warm from the physical exertion. Genevieve accepts the terms of defeat, shutting her eyes and dropping into the center of the trampoline.

You and Kennedy circle her, beginning again. “Dead man, dead man, come alive,” you chant, breathless, “by the time I count to five.”

This game repeats ad infinitum, until the three of you get bored. This is when you declare, “Let’s play Crack the Egg,” and drop to the center, curling into a ball, your fingers interlocking tight to keep your legs drawn up. Kennedy and Genevieve jump around you, until every bounce sends you two feet into the air, your brain knocking around in your skull, your teeth rattling. When you can no longer hold on, you crack, cackling, spilling out as the girls still, letting you recenter. Then it’s their turn.

After at least a baker’s dozen of cracked eggs, your mother calls from down the street for you to return home. It’s dinner time.

Kennedy and Genevieve wilt. With all the excitement, you had hardly noticed the setting of the sun, the plummeting temperature. Now the air nips at your bare skin, and you realize your toes have long since gone numb.

“Don’t go,” Kennedy says.

“One more round,” Genevieve insists.

“Sorry, guys,” you say. “I’ll see you at school!”

You hop the fence and mount your bike and pedal home. And it’s true, you will see them at school. But if all the girls want what you have, they will admit it. Even Kennedy and Genevieve avoid your eye at recess as they lounge together on the alligator slide. All the girls have a spot, it seems, where they can sit still, bask, and watch the boys play soccer from a distance.

The boys shuffle back into the classroom sweaty and exhausted. The girls trickle in looking like they never even went outside. You get your twenty minutes on the swings.

Kennedy smuggles you over to her house. You take the same bus, but when you beckon her to sit next to you in the fourth row, she slows and says, “Get off at your stop. Go home and get your bag. Come over later.”

Then she slinks to the back of the bus, depositing herself next to Margot. You watch her go, meeting Margot’s harsh gaze.

If you have something to offer these girls, something they’ll only accept in private, Margot wants nothing to do with it. Something about you is highly undesirable. Poisonous. You and Margot are locked in an invisible push and pull. You are losing. You will lose. This is inevitable, and ineffable. You get off at your stop, go home, and bike over to Kennedy’s house.

Kennedy's mom is an interior decorator. She proudly boasts about the recent renovations. "Kennedy loves her new room," she says to her friends over the phone in the kitchen. "It was time for her to have something a little more grownup!"

Kennedy's room is, indeed, grownup. Her bedspread matches her curtains, her closet has been reorganized and color-coded, and all her toys have been sequestered in bins under the bed. While you pull them out and dig through them, amazed that anyone could neglect such a bounty, Kennedy watches. She sits on the floor with a blanket pulled over her legs.

"I started shaving," she tells you. "So now I'm always cold."

"That sucks," you say absently. She has so many horse figurines. You pull them out and line them up, admiring them. You want to ask if you can have them, if all she's going to do is keep them in a bin, but you know this would be rude. You suspect the only reason her mom did not throw them out altogether is because of the new baby.

Genevieve is much harder to schedule. When she's not at school, she's in dance classes. "Well, look at her!" her mother cries on a Friday afternoon. You've been granted a rare playdate. Sorry, hang-out. "With legs like that, she'd have to be a dancer! Can't let that go to waste!"

Genevieve squirms in her seat. You avert your gaze from the shape of her thighs in an attempt to be polite. She's strong, muscular, and tall for her age, but that age is still eleven. Genevieve's mom offers to take you both to Chick-fil-A. This is an exciting prospect. You're required to get grilled nuggets, though.

“We’re watching our weight,” she says to you, over Genevieve’s head as if she can’t hear. You decline to comment.

At Genevieve’s house, as soon as you’re done eating, she hauls you upstairs to the TV room, which used to be the play room. She sits you down on the couch and hands you the remote and lets you decide what to watch. They’re playing reruns of *Invader Zim*, so your decision is made easily. Genevieve sits on the floor, painting her toenails while you give your undivided attention to Nicktoons.

“Are you coming to my birthday party?” Genevieve asks.

“Yes,” you say. “My dad said I could go.”

“Awesome,” Genevieve says, singing the word like a song. “It’s gonna be so much fun. My dad said maybe we can go to Pleasure Pier while we’re there. But we’ll definitely go down to the beach. It’s gonna be you and me and Kennedy and Danielle and Serena and Margot.”

You say, “Oh. Cool.”

Saturday morning, you get dropped off for the birthday party. Margot is far more focused on you than on having a good time. She’s not subtle about your exile. The other girls say nothing. Not even Genevieve’s mother steps in. Margot wants you at a five-foot distance at all times. Any closer and she becomes territorial. This behavior follows you all the way to the beach, where you wade into the water. Danielle and Serena have already gone out farther than anyone else, giggling in the choppy waves. But Margot anchors Kennedy and Genevieve right where the water is waist-deep. She doesn’t want to get her hair wet.

“Do you guys wanna play Mermaids?” You ask boldly. “I call dibs on my tail being cyan.”

Kennedy and Genevieve turn to face you excitedly. But Margot stomps through the water between them, standing directly in front of you with her hands on her hips. “Nobody wants to play your stupid games!” she exclaims, finally getting to the root of the issue. “We’re not little kids!”

You want to challenge this, but Margot is angry enough already. There is a sense, as strong as the salt in the air, that Margot will win, no matter what you have to say. So you say nothing. Kennedy and Genevieve hide their disappointment. Margot takes them both by their wrists, leading them away. Kennedy glances over her shoulder at you. Genevieve does not look back.

Water laps weakly at your thighs. You are stationary, lingering in the shallows. These girls, they don’t want to abandon you here. They are being pulled out to sea by mothers, by Margots, by the passage of time. Even from where you stand, motionless and content, the rip tide tugs at you, threatening to buckle your knees.

Toad-Knots

By Catherine Coundjeris

Toad-knots used to gather at our
side door. You had to watch
where you stepped at sea-level.

They blended into the gravel
with their earth-tones and
roundness. Some were as

tiny as a fingernail and others
as large as a Florida orange.
But they could sit as still as stones,

there by the door under the oak.
The toad-knots watched over it,
eating up all the pests in sight.

Life was fecund on the shore.
Sun-fed tomatoes grew juicy
and cucumbers multiplied.

After a heavy rain there would
be toad-gangs on the roads
all hopping toward the ditch-rivers

on either side so full the ducks
would nest there in the spring,
and ducklings were a common sight.

Now on the mountain, it is unusual
to spy a toad. Occasionally I see one
by the gutter-spout—big, round, and alone.

Emerge





“Frog” in the Window Well

By Chase Olsen

“There’s a frog in the basement window,” my brother tells me. Incorrect. Without even seeing it, I know it’s a toad. An American toad. *Anaxyrus americanus*. But he’s six, so why would he care? I follow him to the basement, peering through the glass and broken screen. Ah, so it’s not actually in the window. The toad sits in the corner of the window well, surrounded by an arc of corrugated metal that it has no hope of climbing out of. The pane of glass between us gives the impression it’s on display at a zoo.

“How did it get down there?” my brother asks. I don’t know, but for a few days it stays down there and becomes an honorary pet. It’s like we have a terrarium attached to our basement. Another distraction from echoing shouts in the kitchen about money or cigarettes or me.

Days pass without rain and the toad remains in the window well. We continue to watch it. We’re spending a lot more time in the basement, where sound doesn’t reach as far. I never see the toad eat, but I’m sure there are bugs down there. Does it know how little time it has left? A Nebraska summer is dry and merciless. Without shade and moisture, the toad will surely be boiled alive.

I make the mistake of telling my brother that the toad will die. He starts to whine and tap on the glass, hoping he can scare the toad into jumping high enough to escape the window well. As is typical of younger brothers, telling him to knock it off only causes him to tap on the window with more force. He asks me to save the toad. I don't want it to die either, but mostly I just want my brother to be quiet. If we're quiet, it's like we're not home. If we're not home, we can't be dragged into whatever argument is going on upstairs.

With much chagrin, Mom offers a smaller plastic pitcher she used to make lemonade in. I stand at the top of the window well, looking down at the toad. What's my plan? Scoop it up in the pitcher? Don't toads give you warts? No, that's silly, that's just a myth. American toads do have toxin glands just past their eyes, however. I opt for Dad's oversized gardening gloves just to be safe.

I descend the three-foot ladder into the well, my shoes crunching against the gravel at the bottom. The toad tenses up, but it has nowhere to go. Despite my ample hesitation, I manage to contain it in the pitcher. I freeze, a thousand thoughts racing through my mind. What do I do now? Have I ever been this close to an animal that isn't our dog before? What if it jumps out and lands on my face? Spreading a gloved hand over the top of the pitcher, I climb back out. Once I've fully emerged from the window well, I turn the pitcher upside down over the grass.

The mottled gray creature sits in the drying lawn for just a split second. Upon getting its bearings, it quickly hops away, slipping between an empty space between the dirt and the siding of our house. It has no idea it escaped a miserable death. I stand beside the window well, staring at the empty patch of grass where the toad had been. The faintest of breezes brushes the top of my head, a subtle acknowledgment of my rescue. I return to the kitchen. The house is quiet, and so is my head.

Sea No. 67

By Zoe Nikolopoulou



The Cocoon

By Alexis Andrade

In they come, swaddled in silk, static,
their veins unhurried, breath lackluster –
the whispers of bodies braided shut,
wounds patched gently by time's tender hands.

Deep underneath the filaments of forgetting,
subconscious dreams shout in a low frequency,
memories melt among the margins,
loss dissolves into the hazy grips of sleep.

Some were cocooned only a few days,
others, lifetimes.
Beyond, the world adapts, mutating,
once fond memories, recalled, forgotten.

But a single fissure –
expelling radiance, embers before a flame.
heart flutters, insides stir,
an undeniable proof of renewal.

Emerging exposed, appearing iridescent,
doppelgängers of their old selves,
woven together, joined with their absence
and that which was left behind.

But lingering questions struck their tongues with vengeance,
Were they mended, or simply erased? Restored, or simply undone?



Bank

By Zoe Nikolopoulou

Weatherproof Shelters

By Angela Townsend

I tell myself I like being an outsider everywhere. It means I can leave every party early to go to another party. It means all my friends think that I have other friends.

It means I can polish my insecurity to such a sheen, I can admire my reflection, looking back into my own eyes as far as the ego can see. I get to pretend I am as humble as Moses while stuffing my pockets with precious quirks. Then again, Moses was the one who wrote that there was “no one humbler than Moses,” so maybe he was an outsider, too.

Maybe Moses and I could make a pot of coffee and list the reasons we like to be outsiders. We could start with simple body stuff. I write with my left hand, the one they used to call “sinister.” I am as menacing as a gumdrop, but I do cause elbow inconveniences at holiday dinners and sign my name with the penmanship of the damned.

I do not drink, which makes people uncomfortable until they have had enough to drink. I tell them it’s because I have Type 1 diabetes, but everyone knows a Type 1 who can shoot Fireball all night without getting singed. It is better to admit I am a goofus, which is so self-evident as to need no explanation. I tell them I just never started drinking, and forty-three is a weird age to start. Why don’t we make a date to finish off the Communion wine when we are eighty?

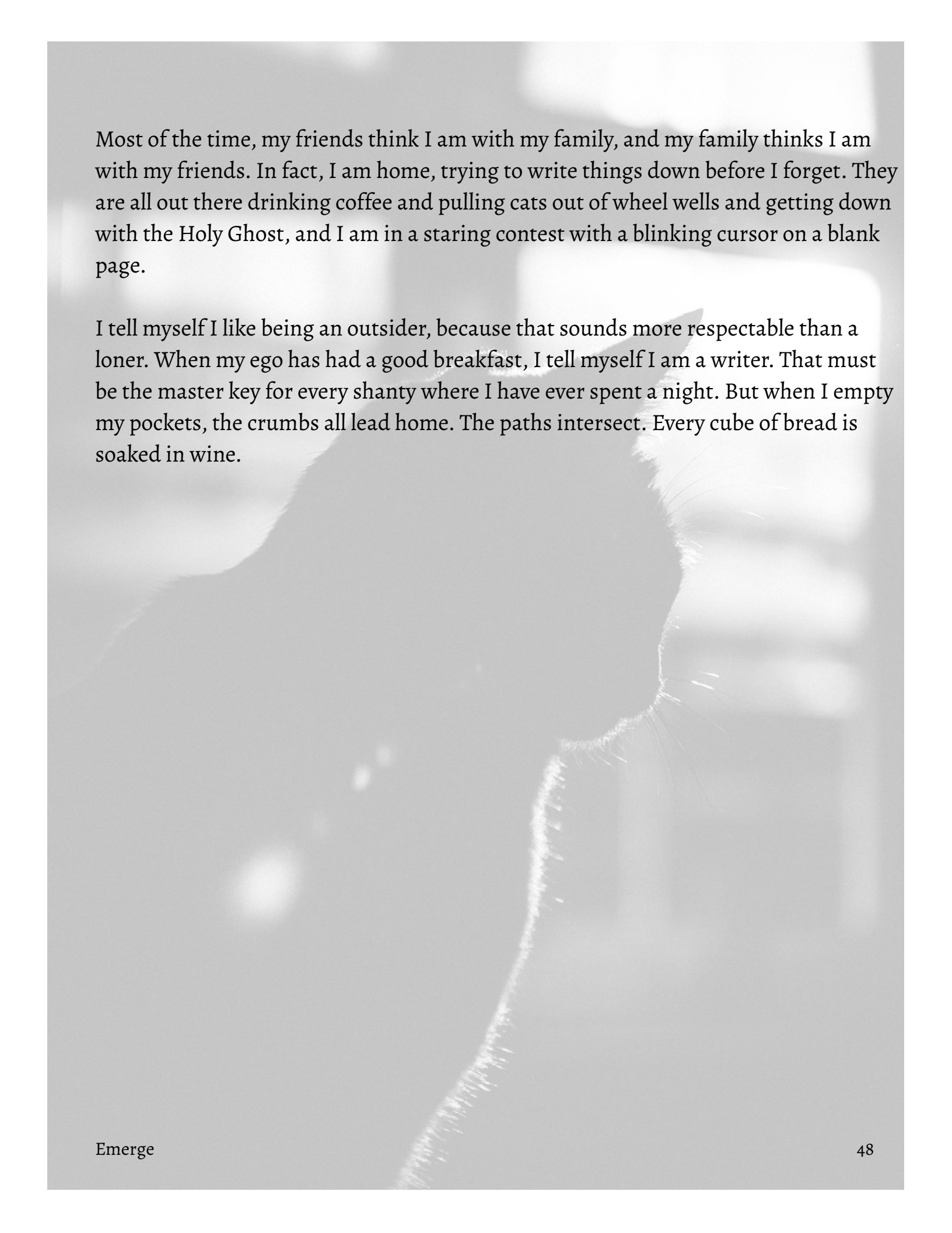
My friends put it on the calendar, though they know I will bail when Communion time comes. My friends do not sit in pews, but they are familiar with liturgy. We work at a cat shelter, where Matins are insulin injections for animals who can’t metabolize sweetness. I offered to lead a diabetic support group, but the cats were not interested.

They do not drink, either. Vespers are kisses on surly feral foreheads. If you are a cat, my friends' affection is unearned and non-refundable. If you ask my friends to pray for you, they will break your gaze and offer to "keep a good thought" instead. In so doing, they have saved my life eight times.

At the cat shelter, everyone knows I rolled off the holy bus. They took me in because there are tire treads on my back. I went to seminary to be a pastor, but by the second hymn I was under the pulpit with other strays. I believe Jesus is alive and Jesus is everything. I believe everyone is going to get home together, and no one can write "mercy" in a big enough font. I believe Jesus finds it hilarious that I planned for church and ended up at the shelter. I believe Jesus is responsible, because I am not that creative and nowhere near that good.

My friends try not to swear around me, no matter how many times I swear around them. They took me in, but I tell myself I like to be an outsider. I am the goody goober whose shoes stay clean. My friends carry living beings on their shoulders, and I have the upper body strength of a mid-sized gerbil. They scruff the unashamed and snake subcutaneous fluids into the dry and dying. I write public relations. I am the only member of the staff who has never been a victim of "rage diarrhea."

I do not use words like "rage diarrhea" when I go home. I am the black cat of the family. They ask me to give the blessing at Thanksgiving even though my Psalter is scuffed and hairy. In election season, I am one blueberry in a tureen of cranberry sauce. I am hard to feed. I won't eat shrimp, even though there is little evidence that they have thoughts. My family makes me lentil loaves and learns to love my tattoo. They send birthday cards that call me "Meowvelous," even though they are embarrassed to buy them and tell the clerk that this is for the niece at the shelter. I leave the party first because my cats get fed at Vespers. I don't drink.



Most of the time, my friends think I am with my family, and my family thinks I am with my friends. In fact, I am home, trying to write things down before I forget. They are all out there drinking coffee and pulling cats out of wheel wells and getting down with the Holy Ghost, and I am in a staring contest with a blinking cursor on a blank page.

I tell myself I like being an outsider, because that sounds more respectable than a loner. When my ego has had a good breakfast, I tell myself I am a writer. That must be the master key for every shanty where I have ever spent a night. But when I empty my pockets, the crumbs all lead home. The paths intersect. Every cube of bread is soaked in wine.

Bow 3

By Sjafril Riz



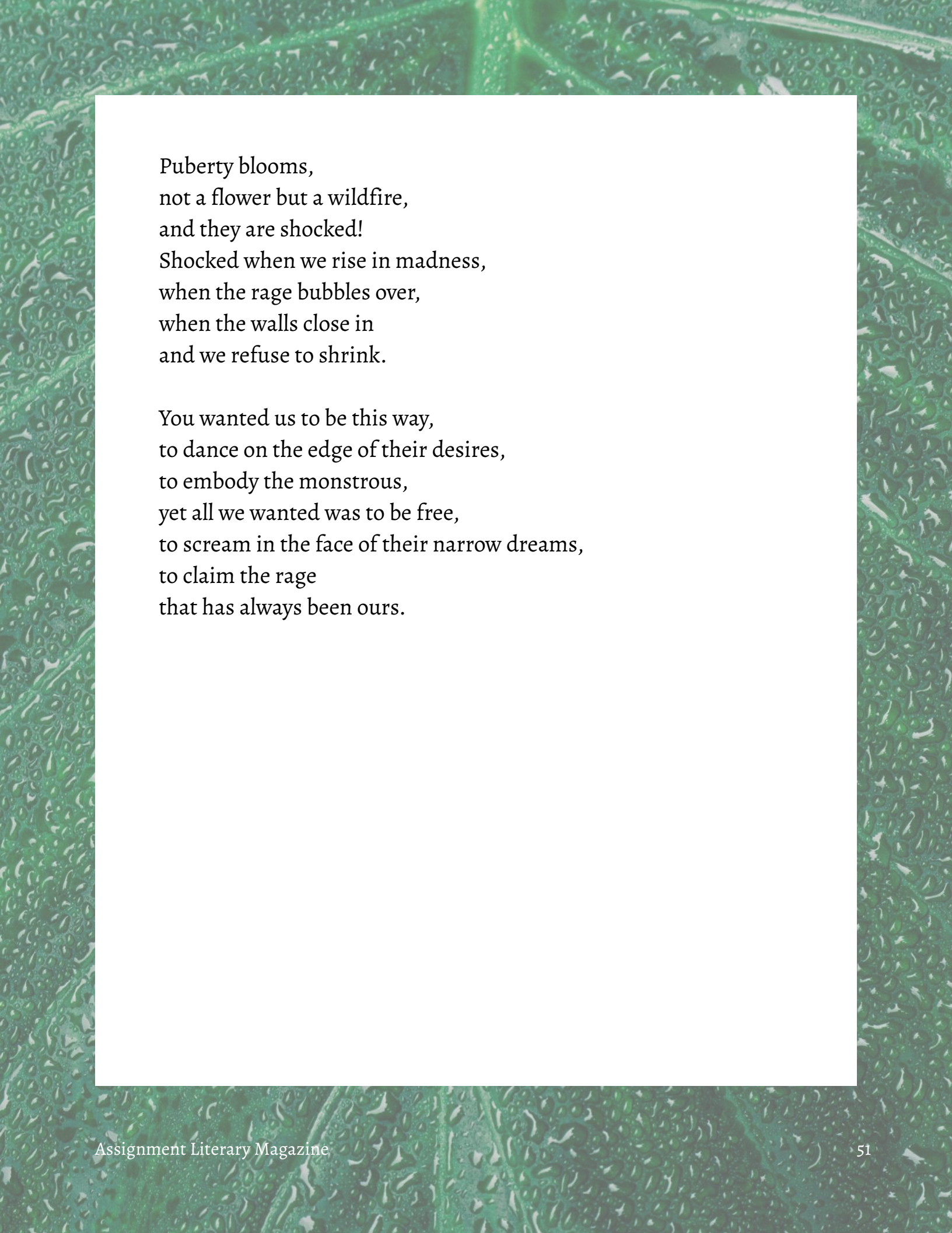
Wild-Eyed

By Waverly Vernon

When I witness her,
that wild-eyed girl,
how she throws the rules to the ground,
her laughter a blade,
cutting through the suffocating air,
there's a spark of liberation in her chaos.

To be young and female,
a dance with death;
they call it "bad behavior"
as if good could ever be a safe harbor,
as if survival meant submission,
a quiet whisper instead of a roar.

We are portals, they say,
to be filled with expectation,
yet we are always less,
less than whole,
less than fierce.
In the mirror of their eyes,
we see the horror they project,
the shadows of their fears
clinging to our skin.



Puberty blooms,
not a flower but a wildfire,
and they are shocked!
Shocked when we rise in madness,
when the rage bubbles over,
when the walls close in
and we refuse to shrink.

You wanted us to be this way,
to dance on the edge of their desires,
to embody the monstrous,
yet all we wanted was to be free,
to scream in the face of their narrow dreams,
to claim the rage
that has always been ours.

Covid Anxiety

By Donald Patten



The Truth the Dead Keep

By Chase Harker

They came by night, the dead
In their mahogany boats,
Rolled their white, worm-holed sheets

Into ropes and tossed them round
The harbor cleats. When we found them
At first light their tapered prows

And sterns were black with perched crows.
I skipped some stones across low tide
To scare them off, then peered into

Those empty cockpits. Someone said they likely
Took the wrong creek out to river Styx,
Cut a left when they should've cut a right,

And drifted here down the river Trent—
But I know the truth the dead keep
In deep sockets beneath their silver coins,

The dim light seen within their dark skulls,
The places they go while we doze or sleep,
And I'm not saying a word.

Chad Stinson's Sick Day

By Phil Robbins

To: LonnieMcLauren@bcsinvestments.com

Subject: Chad Stinson SICK DAY

Lonnie, hope you're doing well. I'm sorry, but I woke up feeling really sick and won't be able to come into the office today. I called the caterers first thing this morning and reviewed the menu, including the special diet options for a few of your guests. Hope the reunion is fun. I plan to be back tomorrow.

Chad Stinson
Executive Assistant
Office of Lonnie McLauren
BCS Investments

To: chadstinson@bcsinvestments.com

Subject: Chad Stinson SICK DAY

Chad, this is bullshit. You've given me what, two hours of notice? You better be on death's door or I swear to God, I'll end you. And where the fuck are the suits you were supposed to pick up from the cleaners? I need the wool Brioni for tonight. This is just the kind of whiny limp-dick nonsense that I was referring to in your last review. Pop a couple of Advil and get your sorry ass in here before opening bell.

Lonnie McLauren
CEO BCS Investments

To: LonnieMcLauren@bcsinvestments.com

Subject: Chad Stinson SICK DAY

Lonnie, I'm sorry this is such an inconvenience for you. I can send a Task Rabbit to the dry cleaners to deliver the suit to the office. I'm not on death's door, but my fever spiked this morning, and I'm pretty sure I'm contagious. As you know, I've taken only one prior sick day back when I had my appendectomy. Hopefully, the fever will break tonight, and I'll be back in the morning.

Chad Stinson

Executive Assistant

Office of Lonnie McLauren

BCS Investments

To: chadstinson@bcsinvestments.com

Subject: Chad Stinson SICK DAY

You think I give a shit about your temperature? Spare me the histrionics before I fire your ass. We had enough of your drama in October when Jasmine dumped you. Why anyone as hot as her would want a guy like you is beyond me. Next time I hear from you, you better have a coffee in your hands for me. And it better be hot.

Lonnie McLauren

CEO BCS Investments

To: LonnieMcLauren@bcsinvestments.com

Subject: I hoped it wouldn't come to this

I really did hope it wouldn't come to this. After four years, I hoped maybe you'd cut me some slack. I woke up today and told myself, I'll give him another chance to be a decent human being. Maybe a simple "feel better, Chad." So now I really have no choice but to go ahead with this. Let me explain how the rest of today is going down.

So that you'll understand, let me start by stating the obvious about guys like me. We're easy targets. Lord knows we don't make it hard for guys like you to have fun at our expense. We've never quite understood how to edge our way into conversations or how to crack the code to gain your respect.

But here's what you don't know: guys like me are keeping score. We may not play squash at the Yale club, but we understand the notion of last licks. And we know that when the game is over, the winner is the one who is able to walk away.

This time, that'll be me. I've been playing the long game for a while. I've dealt with people like you my whole life. In middle school the kids used to go through my lunch bag and take whatever they wanted. I lost count of how many times I watched while my locker was trashed, and my stutter was mocked.

Four years I've worked for you. Not an easy line of work you're in, buying and selling high-risk stocks. You guys all live and die with the times, riding the crests of economic waves and trying to coast down and find that soft landing. I've been right there with you through all those cycles, completing paperwork, filing forms, and doing all the mindless grunt work that you detest. I don't blame you; it's tedious shit. And please, I totally get your need to vent when you take an astronomical hit. I understand why you and the guys might want to have some fun at my expense, throwing order sheets at me and telling me someone pissed in

my water bottle. Whether or not you and Jesse actually did that, I guess I'll never know. That's what guys like me are there for; we get it.

Did you know, Lonnie, that the word scapegoat has been around since biblical times? The Israelites used to sacrifice a goat as a way of ridding them of their sins. The actual Hebrew word for scapegoat is azazel, literally meaning to escape with God. But here's what you probably didn't know. The roots of the word—az and el—mean rough and mighty. I guess I've been there to allow you to project all your sins into me and then banish me from your mind. But, like the bible says, I'm rough and mighty. And I've been waiting. Waiting for today.

How many times have you all told me I was a sick motherfucker who should probably save my personal days for when I might completely lose my mind? Well, I've taken your advice. And I've fucking had it with the likes of you. I guess I should apologize in advance for directing all my anger at you. You're just one more prick in a long line of many. But today was the straw that broke the camel's back. Look at that! Camels and goats. We could start a fucking petting zoo!

But before I tell you exactly what I've got in mind for you, let me take a moment to thank you. Had it not been for your insights, I never would have learned about the risks of different carpeting materials. Remember when you tasked me with re-carpeting the office? You always wanted the best, so I looked and looked until I found a special little carpet just for you. And not only is that little baby your desk is sitting on right now imported from the south of France, it's made from some of the most flammable man-made composites on the market. And the best part? The cyclohexane I bathed it in a few days ago—don't worry, it's okay to breathe—is manufactured by that chemical company you guys invested heavily in last summer. How ironic is it that you helped manufacture my plan?

Now, before you do anything too hasty, you should probably know a few things. First, I installed a Trojan Horse on your OS while you were in the Maldives last

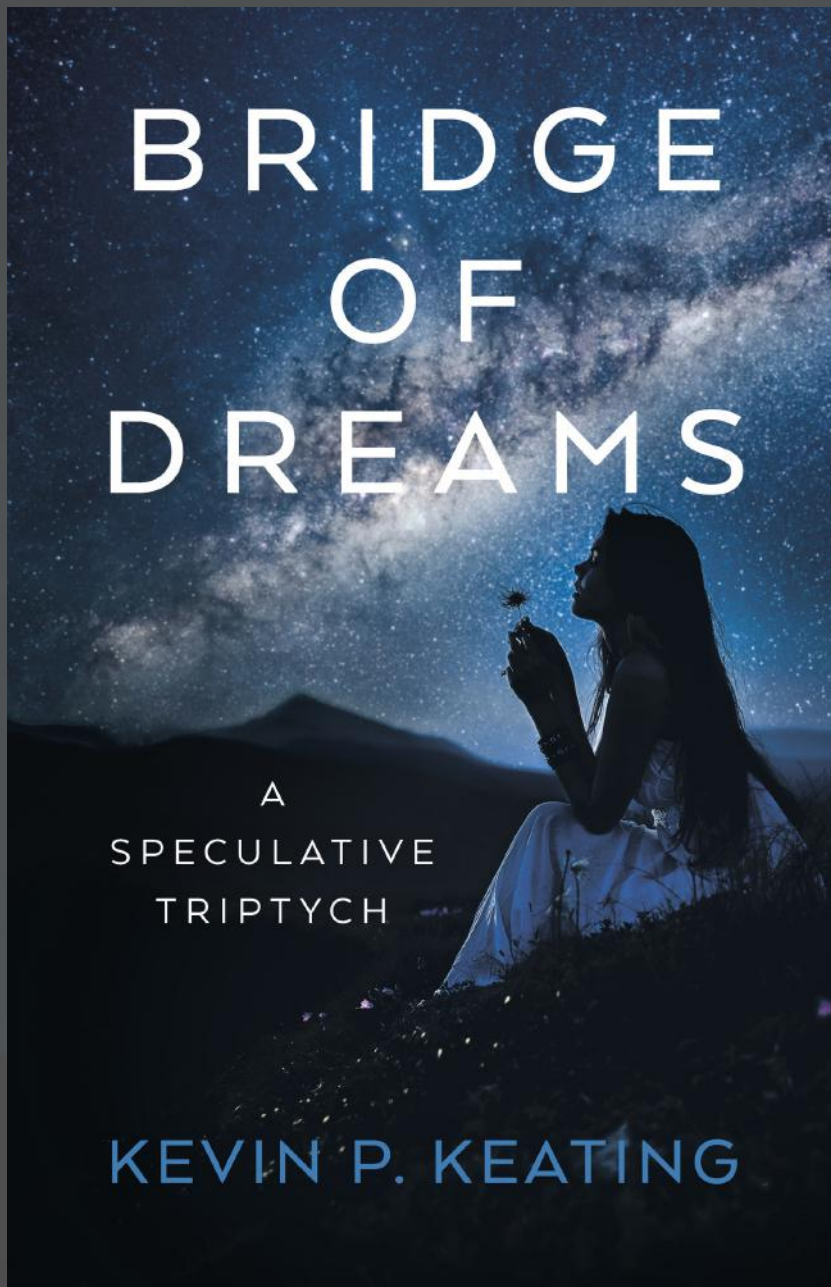
month, and I'm watching you right now through your webcam as you read this email, so I'll be able to act quickly should you attempt to reach out for help. Second, take a look at the left side of your computer. Do you see that little bundle of wires coming out the side? Perhaps you never noticed them. Follow them below your desk and you can see how they go right into the carpet I special-ordered for you, the very same carpet that has absorbed more than four gallons of that pesky (aforementioned) combustible chemical. Once I punch a key at my end, which I'll do momentarily, anything electronic at your end will cause a short-circuit, a little spark, and the whole office will explode in flames. It will be a magnificent burnt offering, like one of those goats sacrificed to God in the Old Testament. Of course, if you refrain from triggering it yourself, no need to worry. I'll help you, as usual, and short-circuit the whole thing at my end in a flash. A flash! Get it?

No need to tell me how it feels, Lonnie. I've lived my whole silent, tortured life, knowing that there's nothing you can do when someone decides they're going to shit on you. You have to just sit there and say, "please sir, may I have another?" Can you taste the fear? The way I did for more than fourteen hundred days in that shithole you call an office? It's nauseating, isn't it? And one more fun part: I'm recording this for future viewing. I'm looking forward to having something to picture while I drift off to sleep. I'd hoped today might go differently, but the truth is, I actually feel pretty good things turned out this way—so, thank you.

Oh yeah, if you get the chance, tell Claire she can go fuck herself. I know she stole my stapler.

Chad Stinson
Executive Assistant
Office of Lonnie McLaren
BCS Investments

ALUMNI NEWS

**“Bridge of Dreams” Review**

By Courtney Symes

Mountainview MFA alumni Kevin P. Keating’s third novel, set to debut this month, is a beautiful study in the mystical threads that connect humanity through time and space. “Bridge of Dreams: A Speculative Triptych” weaves together the lives of three women separated by centuries. They have in common a connection to Heavenly Hill, a rural community that houses a portal to a bridge of dreams and a cave that holds ancient secrets.

Keating has cleverly melded three novellas to comprise this new work and expertly blends themes of fantasy, philosophy, and the search for meaning. He states that he wasn’t sure of the order in which to present them, but the universe delivers the answers exactly as

things are supposed to be, and the entire collection flows well. The first story offered, “Gwendolyn Greene and the Moondog Coronation Ball of 1957,” is both whimsical and devastating. Keating captures the capriciousness of youth with the voice of the unnamed narrator, Gwendolyn’s childhood friend and advocate. They anticipate a carefree summer

with McKenna, who is Gwendolyn's best boy; however, an evening row on Lost Village Lake turns into a harbinger of things to come as the children experience an otherworldly encounter and Gwendolyn changes the course of the future for herself, her dog, and the entire town.

Keating tugs the threads of time to pull us back to meet Hilda Whitby, a woman far ahead of the year she lived in. "Hilda Whitby and the Heavenly Light of 1857" tells the story of a survivor. Hilda is smart, savvy, and strong. Like so many of us, she became a mother without the requisite skills or desire and had to make the best of it, gaining the love and protective instincts along the way. We don't like her any less for it and, in fact, admire her blunt honesty and self-awareness. A sort of Marie Curie in a cave-woman/circus performer way, Hilda is a vessel of supernatural energy and a charlatan's charm. Keating's rich descriptions provide a portal into another world teeming with shady characters and uncomfortable settings. The return of Stanislas, who is "vaguely reptilian, prehistoric, Mesozoic, a plucked bird in need of basting," is the catalyst to a brilliant and just ending to a sad chapter in a woman's life who deserved much more.

Heavenly Hill seems to be the breeding ground for The Travelers, mysterious beings who unite the three women in the triptych. They are never expressly identified, and that is part of the charm of this piece. I haven't decided if they are aliens, hippies, spirits, or something else entirely. They seem to take on another form, caregiver, in the last story. "IMPETUS 13 and the Constitutional Crisis of 2057" takes on a religious angle, following Maggie, a young college student, in a post-apocalyptic kind of setting. Her constant companion is an IMP, much like a Hal 9000 of "2001: A Space Odyssey" fame, that belonged to her brother. The IMP is much more of a sentient being than Maggie realizes, and Keating explores the relationship between human and machine in this mind-twister that brings us back to a much-depleted Heavenly Hill from Maggie's controlled environment within city confines. With nods to Henry James and necromancy, Keating incorporates more of the supernatural as he turns The Travelers into pseudo-babysitters for a

young boy who leads Maggie to a hauntingly familiar place. She can't determine what is real and what isn't as she explores her connection to Gwendolyn, Hilda, and a dead woman she bears a striking resemblance to who once lived in the mothership she is now standing in.

Keating's writing contains a wonderful mix of emotion, action, and world-building. The characters are well-developed and the women are charmingly flawed. The author approaches feminism with consciousness and care, as is evident in his depictions of the complexities of his characters. The pacing never falters and all three stories are brisk and engaging. The only problem I see is waiting for the next (I hope!) installment in the series from Heavenly Hill.

About the Artists

Dianne Corbeau graduated with an MFA from The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 2002. Since 2002, Ms. Corbeau has exhibited nationally and internationally. Her paintings are in numerous private and public collections internationally. Dianne was a professor of Anatomy for over a decade and lives and works in Cape Cod, MA.

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Lithuanian/Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*. Edward is also a published poet who has had over 700 poems published and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Madeline Bates is an artist from Montreal, Toronto, and Halifax.

Zoe Nikolopoulou is a visual artist whose work emerges from the meeting point of emotion, intellect, and nature. Working primarily with pencils, watercolor and acrylic ink, she creates vivid, textured paintings that reflect an intuitive process — one that embraces vulnerability, memory, and transformation. Currently pursuing studies in Botanical Illustration at Cornell University, Zoe Nikolopoulou continues to explore the delicate tension between chaos and order, nature and abstraction. Her work has been exhibited in London and Athens and featured in journals and magazines for its raw expressiveness and lyrical depth.

Kevin Sanchez was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. As a first generation college graduate, he earned a BA in English and a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Arizona. During his undergrad, Kevin's work was published in the *UA Persona Creative Magazine*. His work is also featured on *Unstamatic's* online journal. Kevin was recently a part of PEN America's pilot program: *Poets Across Lines*, having his work published in a zine.

Mariam Ahmed is a Californian poet. Her latest book, "Hidden Parts," was published by Broken Tribe Press in January 2025. Her poems have appeared in "The Elevation Review," "Progenitor Art and Literary Journal," "Kitchen Table Quarterly," "Flint Hills Review," "Folly Journal," "The Offending Adam," and elsewhere. Her book reviews and interviews can be read in "Poetry International," "The Los Angeles Review," and "Atticus Review." Mariam holds a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry from San Diego State University.

Catherine's Coundjeris poetry is published in magazines, including The Raven Review, Evening Street Review, and Green Ink Poetry. She also has stories published in Proem, Quail Bell, KeepThings, and Opendoor. She has published two essays in anthologies from Luna Press. The first collection was called Not the Fellowship Dragon's Welcome and published her essay "Éowyn as Light Bearer." And the second one was called Follow Me, publishing her essay "A Christian Fellowship: Inklings' Perspective on Religion, Myth, and the Word." Catherine is passionate about adult literacy.

Carol Barrett has published three volumes of poetry, most recently READING WIND. An NEA Fellow in Poetry, Carol has lived in nine states and in England. She currently lives in the high desert of central Oregon.

Beck M Weiser is an emerging writing out of the Pacific Northwest. They spend their days working in an after school program and their nights watching 80's movies, reading weird books and attempting to knit a sweater for their cat. They have not yet been successful.

Sarah Watkins is an educator by trade and a poet by necessity. She currently resides in Arkansas with her husband. She has a love for written language and a passion for teaching.

Donald Patten is an artist and cartoonist from Belfast, Maine. He produces oil paintings, illustrations, ceramic pieces and graphic novels. His art has been exhibited in galleries across Maine.

Whitney Weisenberg is a writer, artist, teacher, Master Educator, mother of two daughters, and a member of SCBWI. She likes writing short stories and creating unflattering portraits. Her literary work has appeared in Dead Skunk Magazine, Five Minutes, Gabby and Min's Literary Review, Jung Library, Nat 1 Publishing, Nine Cloud Journal, Nunum-Done in a Hundred Anthology, Paper Dragon, Please See Me, Poet's Choice, Porter House Review, Little Old Lady, Storybottle Co, The Blue Mountain Review, Vine Leaves Press, and WILDsound Writing Festival.

Benjamin Green is the author of eleven books including *The Sound of Fish Dreaming* (Bellowing Ark Press, 1996) and the upcoming *Old Man Looking through a Window at Night* (Main Street Rag) and *His Only Merit* (Finishing Line Press). He is also a visual artist. At the age of sixty-eight, he hopes his new work articulates a mature vision of the world and does so with some integrity. He resides in Jemez Springs, New Mexico.

Russell Chamberlain was born in Nashville, Tennessee, but currently lives in the Pacific Northwest with his family. He recently published an article in the Salt Weekly (issue 35) about the independent music scene in Nashville, Tennessee. He writes short stories, fiction, and poetry. He has two nonfiction pieces coming out this winter, one with *Waxing and Waning* and one with *Beyond Words Anthology*.

Caleb Ishaya Oseshi is documentary photographer. He embarked on his photography journey during the pandemic and has since never relent, he aims to tell stories through photography, exploring nature's beauty and human diversity. He participated in the UNESCO World Heritage Volunteer Program (2022 and 2024) in Nigeria, and collaborated with Kaduna Fashion and Art Exhibition (KAFART) as a Research Photographer (2023). His photographs are featured in Sunlight Press, Watershed Review, The Word's Faire, 3Elements Review and other publishing platforms. With exhibitions in Nigeria and The United States, He is an alumni of Creative Business Studio, Unpublished Africa and a member of The African Photojournalism Database(APJD).

Daniel Thomas Moran, born in New York City in 1957, is the author of seventeen collections of poetry. "In the Kingdom of Autumn", was published by Salmon Poetry in Ireland in 2020, who also published his previous collection, "A Shed for Wood" in 2014. His "Looking for the Uncertain Past" was published by Poetry Salzburg in 2005. His new collection, "As Water Flows over Rock" will be published by Salmon Poetry in early 2026. He has had more than four hundred poems published in more than twenty different countries. In 2005, he was appointed Poet Laureate by The Legislature of Suffolk County, New York. His collected papers are being archived by The Dept. of Special Collections at Stony Brook University. He is a retired Clinical Assistant Professor from Boston University's School of Dental Medicine, where he delivered the Commencement Address in 2011. He is Arts Editor for The Humanist magazine in Washington, DC. He and his wife Karen live in New Hampshire.

Collette Grace is a Texan author who needs to write like she needs to breathe. She is a graduate of Texas State University with a B.A. in English and Religious Studies. She enjoys literary fiction with queer and romantic themes, though her guilty pleasure genre is apocalypse fiction. She currently works as an administrative assistant. Her hobbies include reading, writing, napping, and being plagued by e-mails.

Chase Olsen is an author from central Iowa. His writing is heavily influenced by his experiences growing up as a gay man in the Midwest, and he seeks to connect these experiences with the natural (and sometimes unnatural) world.

Alexis Andrade is a Master's student of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. She is passionate about the environment, the passing down of memory, and a large cup of peppermint tea. She is new to the publishing world – but eager to begin her journey.

Angela Townsend writes for a cat sanctuary, where she bears witness to mercy for all beings. She is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee, seven-time Best of the Net nominee, and the 2024 winner of West Trade Review's 704 Prize for Flash Fiction. Her work appears or is forthcoming in Arts & Letters, Chautauqua, Epiphany, SmokeLong Quarterly, Terrain, Under the Sun, and World Literature Today, among others. She

graduated from Princeton Seminary and Vassar College. Angela has lived with Type 1 diabetes for over 30 years and laughs with her poet mother every morning.

GJ Gillespie is a collage artist living in a 1928 farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island, WA. A prolific artist with 22 awards to his name, his work has been exhibited in 70 shows and appeared in more than 185 publications.

Sjafril Riz is a visual artist and writer from Indonesia. His work explores themes of faith, silence, and the subconscious through digital paintings and poetic reflections. He often blends spiritual nuance with personal memory to evoke stillness, yearning, and transformation. <https://ko-fi.com/sjafril>

As **Waverly Vernon** grew older, they began to see poetry as a form of documentation, capable of capturing moments and emotions too intricate for other mediums. It remains both a personal refuge and a way to engage with the world. Through their writing, they aim to continue exploring themes of identity, resilience, and connection, inviting readers to join them on these journeys. Poetry is no longer just a tool for self-understanding; it is a means to connect with others, build bridges between shared and disparate experiences, and contribute to the broader literary and artistic landscape.

Chase Harker is a native of New Bern, North Carolina. He is a student in the MFA program at UNCW.

Phil Robbins is a clinical psychologist who started writing fiction seriously during the pandemic. He is currently pursuing his MFA in fiction from the Mountainview program--yeah, you--and enjoys using the short story format to experiment with different genres and structures. His short fiction has appeared in Wilderness House Literary Review, Passengers, and Military Arts and Press: As You Were. He has no problem with his counseling staff taking sick days.

After working as a boilermaker in the steel mills in Ohio, **Kevin P. Keating** became an instructor of English and began teaching at Baldwin Wallace University, Cleveland State University, and John Carroll University. "The Natural Order of Things," his first full-length novel, was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prizes/First Fiction Award. The novel has garnered starred reviews from Publishers Weekly and Booklist and praise from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert Olen Butler. His second novel "The Captive Condition" released as a Pantheon hardcover original and was featured at the 2015 San Diego Comic Con International. His latest novel, "Bridge of Dreams: A Speculative Triptych," will be released in June 2025 by Bernardo Kastrup's iff Books. He currently resides in Cleveland, Ohio.

Courtney Symes has a BA in English Language & Literature from SNHU. She is pursuing an MFA in Fiction from the Mountainview MFA program at SNHU. She reviews theatre for Broadway World in the Sacramento Region and is a board member of the Sacramento Regional Theatre Alliance. Her debut short play, "Seoul," won Best Script and Audience Favorite at the 2024 SacTown Play Festival. She is currently working on a novel.



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