

THREADS

2018





Be bold. Be a Viking.

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Cover: Now You See Me by Sydney Carey

Message from the Editors

We would like to thank all the students who submitted their work to *Threads* this year. We received many quality submissions, and we continue to read with pleasure the enthusiasm and creativity each submission presents. Of course, all pieces have merit, and we would like to publish everything submitted, but the limitations of space will simply not allow it.

It is important to note that *Threads* reflects works that are not necessarily perfect in their format and composition, but exhibit insight, creativity, social awareness, and a unique perspective. These works—of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and visual art—reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the Hudson Valley Community College student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel and explore the territory each new issue stakes out.

Every year we are extremely pleased to highlight the exceptional work of the students at Hudson Valley Community College. Please plan your submission for next year.

Please submit your work to *Threads* electronically. Visit us at <http://clubs.hvcc.edu/threads> for more information.

Happy reading!

– *Threads* editors

Contents

Sean Madey, <i>Copenhagen With a Side of Denmark</i>	1
Shuling Chen, <i>Nostalgia</i>	3
Brian Rozmierski, <i>Sweet Desires</i>	6
Grace Sgambettera, <i>The poet herself, pictured in red</i>	11
Grace Sgambettera, <i>The Notebooks</i>	12
Skylar Blankenship, <i>Security of Childhood (A Piece of Home)</i>	13
Emma Hall, <i>Time</i>	15
Thomas McWatters, <i>The Angry Machine</i>	16
Sulman Tariq, <i>Fog of War</i>	18
Skyler Kocsis, <i>Some Years Ago, I Was Raped</i>	20
Julia Marino, <i>Painful Beauty</i>	22
Image by Lily Robinson, <i>Token</i>	23
Image by Isabella Kokoszko, <i>A Change of Heart</i>	24
Image by Isabella Kokoszko, <i>Purgatory</i>	25
Image by Lily Robinson, <i>Apple</i>	26
Raymond Toledo, <i>My City</i>	28
Becca Aldrich, <i>I Wish I Could Act Like I Felt</i>	29
Danielle Chevalier, <i>Dear Misery</i>	32
Danielle Chevalier, <i>Scars</i>	33
Sarah Elyounsi, <i>Once Upon a Song</i>	34
Rebecca Abreu, <i>Time</i>	36
Verdi Riversong, <i>The Stories Behind My Favorite Foods</i>	37
Isabella Kokoszko, <i>Antecedent</i>	40
Isabella Kokoszko, <i>Vitality</i>	42
Ahmad Al Sharbati, <i>Thunderstorm</i>	43
Joanna Pennings, <i>Still Waters</i>	46
Nathan Whiting, <i>Silence</i>	47
Jessica Rodgers, <i>The Girl in the Mirror</i>	48
Vanessa Roberts, <i>Dancing In Poetry</i>	50

Copenhagen With a Side of Denmark

Sean Madey

With nighttime comes the damp chill of North Sea air, penetrating the cavernous train station. High above, 11:00pm darkness pools in the recesses of the arching steel and glass roof. Below, bathed in a sea of warm light, and littered with benches and kiosks, lie the platforms of Hamburg main station. Dark swaths of track, grimy voids oft-filled with long, red trains delineate each platform.

These trains halt at the platforms, dishing up new arrivals, consuming new passengers, and slinking off into the night. The crowds change with the trains like a constant resetting of an enormous table. All regions of Germany and beyond are on the menu tonight.

Quarter past eleven announces the arrival of a new train. The menu on the destination boards says the train goes to Frankfurt; Frankfurt with a side of Germany.

A nervous tingle passes through the new passengers; almost involuntarily, they turn their heads and look into the darkness. A triangle of headlights appears, and the train grows suddenly massive. Almost instantly, the train towers above the waiting crowd, holding all spellbound.

Now the locomotive and coaches hiss past with a steely sound, blurred red sides telling of long, grimy travels. As the train sweeps past, bubble of warm air, filled with the scent of dirt and oil, envelopes the crowd on the platform. Quickly, the train begins to slow, the steely sound subsides, and a low rumble overwhelms the senses, shaking everything. Overhead, yellow platform lights play on the wet, glistening, and undulating sides of the coaches. In the same moment, breaks squeal, and the train slows and finally stops.

Almost instantaneously, doors open and light spills across the platform. New arrivals quickly pour out of the doors in a rush of urgency and excitement that floods across the platform. All arrivals are a frenzied whirl of coats and baggage. All are intent on being somewhere else than where they currently are. The new arrivals thread their way through the new passengers and leave, quickly; the new passengers push their

way through the new arrivals and board, quickly. The train effortlessly swallows them all and waits, doors agape, for more.

Far down the platform, beyond the open doors, shimmers of heat rise from the locomotive. A low throb permeates the space around the train. The red flanks of the coaches are striped with white and streaked with rain and dirt. White doors stand invitingly open. Next to the doors, coats buttoned tight against the chilly draft, conductors stamp their feet, impatiently awaiting departure time.

For them, the minutes go by with agonizing slowness.

Two minutes before departure, the conductors move down the platform, shepherding late passengers like eager fingers picking off the last crumbs from a plate.

At half past, a shrill whistle sounds, and the conductors bolt for the doors. Then the mouths of the train clamp shut. A great, satisfied belch of air is issued from underneath as the breaks are released.

Almost instantaneously, the laden cars begin moving; imperceptibly at first, then increasing, faster and faster. Nearby kiosk windows reflect pale rectangles of light as the warmly lit coaches pass by. Now the chromatic tones of powerful electric motors increase in pitch as the train accelerates. Now the low rumbles of steel wheels on steel rails succumb to the steely hissing once more, and the heavy coaches begin their slow, rocking motion. Now the shapes of passengers in the windows become blurred, only vague outlines remain, all in the giant belly of the train.

The passengers are already busy; they seem to have failed to notice the already swift movement that carries them away. Gaining speed, the train sways almost drunkenly across the points, seemingly unaccustomed to the heavy load. A rush of cool air quickly fills the void left behind at the platform. Then the train grows suddenly tiny, and two red lights glow in the darkness. In a moment, the train is gone, and quiet reigns supreme again.

Soon, new faces gather on the platform, faces alight with anticipation, luggage gathered close. The table has been cleared, and now it is being set. The menus on the destination boards change; the next course is due to arrive shortly. I too, am waiting, peering into the murky darkness, looking for the triangle of headlights.

The next train will be my train to Copenhagen. Copenhagen with a side of Denmark.

THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

Nostalgia

Shuling Chen

Elders say that as they get older, what they have experienced becomes clearer than what they are experiencing. I will not say I have become old, but some images from my earlier days do get more vivid as I age. Early spring brings Chinese-new-year, and the moist air feels as I was touched when I was a nine-year-old girl. I was in the temple observing people and deities of our region waiting for a new year parade. The wonderful tour was going to heat the chilly air and bring a good mood for the rest of the year.

The whole Chinese New-Year lasts for about one month. Most of the time, people spend time preparing New Year meals and serving deities and ancestors at home. However, at the end of lunar January when new year celebrations have almost finished, all people in my town come together in the temple which was set up for major deities of our village to worship, to pray for good fortune and wealth for their family, and to get ready for the parade which marks the end of new year celebrations.

During those days, I could not stay at home at all. Diving into the temple meant I could see people occupy the room and walk around. They lighted up the quiet and simple small-town life. Villagers brought food and lanterns which stood for their family on tables set in rows, together with items from other families. They lit joss sticks and candles on the corner for their family, carried scents from joss sticks bending and murmuring in front of deities. Some brought children and taught them to hold joss sticks with both hands showing respect and bowing to the deities making a wish. These children bowed so deep with their eyes closed, concentrated and searched their brain for everything they expected for the year.

Standing behind four sides of walls in the temple were figures of deities. They were nice deities who bless us. We respected them because they were so closely related to our ancestors, our primary belief, even though most of them in our belief live in hell and have ugly looks. Younger children dared not to observe them for they were so tall and stood for power, even if they were curious about the figure in front of them.

As for me, however, the elder child, who had developed the spirit of independence, decided to look carefully at what kind of creation those deities were. Some of them were as tall as trees which I tried to climb but failed to and some were just a little taller than me. The tall one was the "White Guard of Impermanence," and the short one was "Black Impermanence." They led people to the underworld, so they would not lose their way. They were both ugly, but they were ugly with their own style. White impermanence had a long tongue drooping in front of his chest. His face was twisted as if he was making a grimace. I thought he was such a poor, underweight ghost because his body could not even fit his clothes. The Black Impermanence looked kind but dull. He had a wide round and apparent swarthy face. With his smile that made his eyes squint, he looked like a guy who would even get mistreated by children but would never get angry. Some people were assigned to wear puppets of deities. They played a significant role in the parade.

After a few days of worship in the temple, the parade began. Deities and a music band led us. The band cheered us up by drumbeat and trumpet, which sounded as if a wonderful opera was going on. Some of the deities came into the crowd to entertain us. We traveled around our town and had several stops for squibbing firecrackers, so we could get rid of bad fortune and embrace good luck in the following year.

As children, engaging in the parade was an adventure. Shy children stayed besides their parents taking care of their lanterns. The lanterns we used were no longer traditional ones; instead, they had various sculptures and were able to play new year music. There were zodiacs playing tiny drums, little bear blowing bubbles and lotus blooming. These children's eyesight searched through the crowd and tried to catch newfangled lanterns that they could ask parents to purchase for the next year.

"They were both ugly, but they were ugly with their own style."

Active children got warm up right as they saw a deity came to them at a distance when people were at a stop. They came up as the deity was having his comic staggering steps and swinging his wooden arms, then hid behind him dragging his clothes with fear and excitement. Their eyes were sparkling, and their fingers were trembling. When the deity realized it and turned around for a goal to pat on, they got out of the way screaming, as if they were ducks who were frightened by a bomb exploding on their lake. However, sometimes the deity did not really pat on their heads. He reached out, but stopped right above the hair of his goal, just to cause panic. These little scared ducks astonished those shy quiet children. They stared in their direction and stroked their chests to ease themselves.

As the break almost finished, parents invited elder children to help them burn firecrackers. These children threw firecrackers as soon as the joss sticks their parents handed to them touched the surface of firecrackers. Firecrackers made noise remaining and stirred up sands. The noise covered trumpet sound like vocal loomed up in applause. Then, people headed toward the next stop. Everyone was refreshed in the sweet air of the early spring. There was light green on the trees which people passed by. They embraced a new year with us.

Till now, the smell of joss sticks, looks of deities standing in the temple, people who were doing worship in front of deities, the great noise of firecrackers and sparkling eyes of children stay fresh in my mind.

However, my town was destroyed for the expansion of the urban area and I am on the land of the other nation. The temple, the parade, and I, the little girl in the crowd of the parade can never come back. Conventional celebrations were so common in my country that every youngster who used to live in a rural area has her own memory about celebrating new year with all villagers. However, these events are fading away. Instead, they become the thing that makes early spring a warm nostalgia, but only nostalgia.

Sweet Desires

Brian Rozmierski

I didn't start out in life wanting to be a bank robber, I just came by it naturally. You could say it started all the way back in third grade.



Mrs. Labinowicz was a short, portly, middle-aged woman with slightly greying brunette hair, or as I thought of her then... old. Our classroom was the only one in the school with everything arranged at an angle, one rectangular room and nothing at right angles to it. It was almost disconcerting, but even more upsetting was sitting in her room day in and day out staring at the big jar of candy she kept on her desk.

That jar was filled with gumdrops, mini candy bars, lollipops, and every kind of diabetic-coma-inducing sweetness a third grader could imagine. And it was off limits. Every day we'd watch her teaching her lesson and randomly stop to reach into the jar and pull out a candy for herself. Occasionally, if someone did very well on a quiz or a test she'd let one of us take an item from the jar. Most days it would just sit there, calling out to me, begging to have a hand reach in and extract a piece of God-like sugar Heaven.

I was not a particularly smart boy by most academic standards. I did well enough for my parents to be sufficiently happy but not ecstatic when grades came home. It was this candy jar that helped me find my talent.

It was late in the school day on a warm Friday at the end of May, and Mrs. Labinowicz was passing out graded tests. After passing back the last one she returned to the front-corner of the room by her desk with a scowl upon her face. "It was clear none of you really studied for this test," she barked as she sat down. She opened a drawer from her desk, pulling out a full, unopened, bag of candy. "Clearly, none of you like my candy," came the under her breath condescending follow-up as she opened the lid on the jar and began to pour the candy from the bag into it. It was a beautiful sight, with the sun coming in the window, hitting the glowing jar and candy as it fell, causing all sorts of intoxicating colors to flash and reflect around the room.

Something snapped and changed inside me at that moment. It wasn't about the grades anymore, and it wasn't just about the candy. The rage of a nine year old begin to build inside me and it took all I could muster to tamp it down. I was boiling mad, staring at a sweet treat I knew I would never be given, left to long for it from afar. Right then and there I decided I would work harder than I have ever worked in my life... to get that candy.

I started when I got home, drawing a picture of the classroom, the desks, the doors, the windows. I drew the hallway, and the other classrooms, the offices, the bathrooms, even the doors to the gymnasium. I took notes when we went to art and gym each day of the week and when we came back.

My first big break happened a week later when Mrs. Labinowicz wasn't in the classroom when we were walked back from art class. I watched as she exited the teacher's lounge and apologized to the art teacher for being late, saying she lost track of time. It was then I realized she didn't spend her whole day in the room. There were times she wasn't there.

With school winding down, I was running out of time, but over the next two weeks I made sure to ask to go to the "bathroom" from each class, each day of the week. I would make sure to use the one on the far end of the building that let me walk past our classroom, and I made a note if our candy tormenter was in the room. On the Thursday night before the last week of school, I saw my opportunity. Every Monday when we were in art she wasn't in the classroom, and this was also the day she was late for our return.

On Friday we were given a note to take home asking our parents to help us clean out our book bags so, we could start taking stuff home the following week. It was the perfect excuse to make room in my bag. I'm almost surprised to this day my parents didn't think something was up when I was all too eager to clean my bag.

My parents were somewhat frugal people, they shopped at Sam's Club, and bought everything in huge boxes. When back to school shopping time came around, I would get 5-packs of notebooks or 20-packs of folders, and I couldn't count how many pens were in that huge box. They also bought me a backpack with wheels that was easily half my size saying it would be good for two years. I beat

the snot out of that backpack, dropping it, dragging it, yanking it around by the handle. By June it was pretty beat up, but it was still one thing... huge.

I spent an hour pulling out crumpled papers, old assignments, drawings, and worksheets going as far back as September. My parents weren't especially thrilled to find several letters to them they never received, but when we were done my backpack was nearly empty. It had a large main section and a smaller, but stretchy, outer section. Inside that outer section was a big zipper pocket. It looked like it would almost hold a jar full of candy.

On D-Day I rolled my backpack to my desk and kept it at my feet while most of the other students put theirs in the back corner of the room in their assigned cubby holes. Mrs. Labinowicz probably didn't say anything because my backpack was so big it didn't fit in the cubby anyway.

My notes said we were supposed to leave for art class at 11:15am, but the clock on the wall showed 10:30am and was barely moving. Mrs. Labinowicz was standing at the front of the room talking about something, but I couldn't possibly concentrate. I had a mission, and dammit I was going to get that candy, come hell or high water.

10:35am and Mrs. Labinowicz was still droning on. Why was the clock moving so slow? She sounded like the teacher in those Charlie Brown cartoons my parents made me watch at Christmas – wah wah waaah.... I could barely stand it.

10:45am, she finally gave us a worksheet to do. I was so wound up I churned through the first half of the sheet before I realized she was still giving instructions to the class. When she finally stopped moaning on, I turned my focus to the sheet and finished it. I was done before anyone else in the class and looked up to steal a gaze at the prize I had been longing for sitting on the desk. I felt like I could reach out and grab it. Staring at the jar the whole time, I got up and took my paper to Mrs. Labinowicz's desk.

I was locked in a gaze with the container of dreams and didn't hear Mrs. Labinowicz incredulously ask, "You're Done!" I was shocked back to reality and handed over the worksheet, my eyes lingering on the jar almost too long. I stood there while she looked over the page, my eyes being forced to not look at the glowing jar of goodness, until she finally handed it back to me, "It's good to see you finally applying yourself." I almost chuckled.

My heart was beating at least twice as fast as that obnoxiously slow second hand would move until finally the time had come. Mrs. Labinowicz had us line up to go. I lined up near the back of the line and we all walked to the other end of the building. I knew Mrs. Labinowicz wasn't in the classroom during art, but I didn't know if she went back to the room at all. I waited 15 minutes and asked to use the restroom. "Be quick, about it," was Mrs. Wilson's reply, but thankfully my stomach decided to make an unusually large growling noise just at the right time.

I whispered back, "But I have to go poop Ms. Wilson!"

I bought myself a few precious minutes. I exited the room and made a quick pace to the far end of the building. Fast enough to save time, slow enough not to get in trouble for running in the hall. I glanced in the room as I passed and saw no one. I stopped just past the door, turned around to see an empty hallway, and slipped into the classroom.

My adrenaline was pumping, my heart pounding in my chest, the conversations in each of the rooms on either side audible like I was right next to them, and my eyes were constantly scanning for any sign of trouble. I made a beeline to the desk, grabbed the golden chalice, and moved quickly to the back of the room to put it in the backpack. The deed done, I sneaked out of the room and headed back to art.

We returned to the classroom and Mrs. Labinowicz went over the worksheets we finished just before art. With that done it was time for lunch, recess, and then back to the classroom.

By this time she noticed the empty corner of her desk and began to question the class, "Does anyone know what happened to my candy jar?" The room was so quiet a pin drop would sound like a marching band in a parade. Careful not to draw attention to myself, I sat quietly with my arms on my desk.

One by one she called us up to her desk to be asked what we knew about the confiscated confectionaries. When she skipped me I knew something was wrong. I went up last, standing in front of her, trying to calm my nerves, which were doing their best to jump violently out of my skin.

"So I guess you don't know anything about this either?"

The poet herself, pictured in red

Grace Sgambettera

There are eighteen stars on my face.

Pick your favorite three,
outline them in blue ink.
They can be mismatching sizes, but use them to connect everything together.

Kindly make the left eye different from the right
It does not matter which left: yours or mine.
People will still pause in the middle of a sentence
and have something new to chirp about
Same song, slightly different tune.

It's okay if the eyes don't change color when it rains
that's the lie of an amateur writer and does not happen to real people.

Please paint with a toothbrush and every easily obtainable shade of blue.
and then paint over all of that with burgundy and some orange color
A total change you'll know to make when you feel a stranger standing over you
(Or when my lawyer sends you a reminder in the mail.)

Make the canvas minuscule
I want to appear graceful and unreachable
but only from a little far away.
I require some squinting and grimaces from my audience.

My final request is that I'm painted in the red sweater
and that I'm pictured holding a frog in one hand
and a toad in the other.

You'll get points for attainability
and so will I.

But if it gets late
and the moon rises outside your third story window
and casts a shadow across my likeness
a lipstick-stained napkin would be accepted
in lieu of my proposal.

Just make sure to color in the stars.

"No, Mrs. Labinowicz, I don't," was my red hot lie in reply.

"Very well, return to your desk."

I went back, sat down, and I think I sighed a bit of relief just a little too loud. Mrs. Labinowicz came right over and tripped on my backpack. With a crash she heard something break into pieces in the backpack. Her eyes turned to me in a red gaze and she scowled, "Get up and follow me! Now!"

She grabbed my backpack now jingling as she carried it with me in tow to the Principal's office. She walked in and almost yelled at Mr. Taft, "Michael here stole my candy jar from my desk." She then opened the zipper on my bookbag and dumped the contents onto Mr. Taft's desk.

Out poured the pieces to my Mother's Day art project that I never brought home, a tall ceramic vase. I did my best to tear up, start to whimper and cry at the destruction of the vase. Mr Taft, still sitting silently at the mess now spread across his otherwise tidy desk, was locked in a stare with Mrs. Labinowicz, who by now was stuttering, "I... but... he..."

Mr. Taft asked Mrs. Labinowicz who was watching the students in her room, to which she replied, "I am." With that he called in the receptionist from the outer office and asked her to escort me back to class and wait there until Mrs. Labinowicz returned. She never did.

On the getaway bus, Mary was her usual busy-body socialite jumping from seat to seat. When she jumped to the seat behind us I quietly opened her bookbag, took the candy jar out and put it in mine. When I got home I rushed up stairs, put the jar in my closet, and went downstairs to "cry" to my mother about the broken vase, my plans complete.

◇ — ◇

So how did I end up locked back here inside a bank vault? It has better candy.

The Notebooks

Grace Sgambettera

The notebook with the unflattering self-portrait on page two.

The notebook with every detail of a dead house.

The notebook where my father left.

The notebook where my father came back.

The notebook where I figured out Santa Claus isn't real.

The notebook where "fuck" is written on every page.

The notebook that said, "I'm doing it today."

The notebook that didn't say what "it" was.

The notebook that's too nice to write anything in.

The notebook ruined by coffee

The notebook full of everything I ate and when.

The notebook where I first wrote the word "freedom"

The notebook where we'd been dating just a few weeks.

The notebooks with love letters left unsent.

The notebooks with love letters undeserved.

The notebook with wine drunk poetry written upside down.

Pages of a life story crackling, lost to flame.

No more paper to add to the fire.

Security of Childhood (A Piece of Home)

Skylar Blankenship

The grain of the cedar has been sanded down to the perfection of silk, smooth, yet strong, and stained to be the colors of milk chocolate and caramel. Bending down onto my knees, my fingers curled around the caramel lip of the lid, then slowly lifted the bronze coated hinges. A smell not quite stale, but nothing like a brisk spring morning floated from the first crack. Once wide open the ghosts of long forgotten dreams, life altering moments, and significant trinkets made their escape, taking the present into the past.

The top right corner is tied into a tight knot, to keep the last shreds of stuffing within its borders. Years of drying tears, wiping away runny noses, and tumbling around in the dryer had taken its toll long ago. Tattered, worn, and almost six times smaller he is folded with care and lying at the very top of the pile; on top of the cheap white and rose ceramic tea set, the pile of colorful birthday cards, the plain white, polyester graduation gown and cap, the box with the scuffed, but barely used shiny black tap shoes as well as every other piece of childhood that can be packed within the sturdy walls of a cedar chest.

The cool weave of cotton, a color like a summer maple leaf, mops up the sheen of sweat and tears covering my candied cherry colored cheeks. The world now black with violet and orange blotches was one of boil and puss covered goblins, venomous fanged monsters, and the startling cracks of a midnight storm. Still curled tightly in a ball and wrapped snugly in the cocoon I had unconsciously created with my lemonade pink comforter, I loosen the grip my right hand has on the collar of my sky blue Scooby-Doo pajamas. Beginning the search, I blindly move my hand over the wrinkled, purple flowers covering the bed sheet as if it were in a meadow hidden deep within snowcapped mountains of foreign lands. First I find the pink, long, and fuzzy ear of my favorite stuffed bunny holding a carrot blanket, second is one of my pillows as plump as Winnie the Pooh Bear after his jars filled with honey. Then I find what I was searching for. As soon as my clammy fingers find the hand stitched ruffled edges, a sigh of relief chases the goblins and monsters back home, under my bed, and exchanges the startling cracks of thunder and flashes of lightning for the pitter-patter of rain. My hands, both clutching their own stitched patches, bring the cool cotton cloth up to my face so he could wipe away the memories. Now I am safe, warm, and content.

Her golden gown was swaying in step with the tale that was old as time, but still confined within the plastic borders of reality. Sitting on the evergreen couch I am enthralled with the Disney magic set before me. Fresh out of the shower, my damp hair is staining the rainbow polka dotted pattern of my pajama shirt. Next to me on the right, in a red and white striped bowl is the buttery and salty goodness, we have named popcorn. As soon as I pick up my first piece of stove top popped deliciousness, greasy melted butter and salt coats my fingertips. Finishing all except the burnt and spinster kernels at the bottom of the bowl I reach for the plain, ridged paper napkins and then for the hand of my friend sitting right beside me. He hadn't eaten any of the popcorn or had taken sip of the creamy hot cocoa. Kill the beast! My heart pounds with anticipation. Kill the beast! I squeeze his hand hard, but he does not squeeze back. Monster! I squeeze his hand, again he does not squeeze back, and though I know there will be a happily ever after, he makes everything okay.

The cracked cement floor is cold; not like ice, but like a bottle of water you grab from the refrigerator. Against the left wall, in-between a medium sized, synthetic wood shelving unit and three plastic blue barrels are two yellow cream metal boxes. The old but reliable bucket of bolts, rattles so loud it can be heard from every corner. He must be so scared or at least miss me; I miss him. After the grape purple smiling hippo, goldfish orange long-necked giraffe, and a stone grey elephant hungry for peanuts were stained with sticky dried apple juice and fine Cheerio dust, Mom said he had to go away from a while. She told me that he would be back soon, but I decide to sit at the door waiting for the bell to ring, so we wouldn't have to wait. Crouching down and placing my back against the door, my heart begins to beat with the rhythm of whatever song is that softly playing on the radio. I pull my knees close to my chest preparing for the seemingly long wait ahead of me, staring at the copper pipes lining the open pillar of the wood ceiling.

Bringing him up to my face once more a wave of peace and innocence rushes over me as the ragged piece of fabric fills my senses. The thread bare cotton, soft like rose petals brushed against my cheeks. Breathing deep a scent that could only be described as home filled my nostrils. Placing him back down, I griped the caramel edges of the lid to the cedar chest. Bit by bit I closed the lid, pushing down every piece, every memory back into their proper place. Knees cracking as I stand up, I lay my hand upon the milk chocolate surface as if to say good bye to my oldest and best friend.

Time

Emma Hall

In a dim wood I have heard ancient stories,
Whispered on leaf, in the earth, and in stone;
I've felt Time's great footsteps and yet walk alone,
Remembering former glories.

By an old creek I have heard shadowed voices,
Songs whispered still on the age-old breeze;
I have seen omens in the leaves of the trees,
And my spirit rejoices!

I have known secrets in Time-riven valleys,
Elixirs of youth hide in places unmet;
My time, it is ending, and ending yet,
While slipping away, still dallies...

On a high hill I have heard distant laughter,
And I've turned my eyes to Time's shadowy door;
Thinking of those who walked here before,
And those who will walk here after.

The Angry Machine

Thomas McWatters

Come night, poor Gemini
crouches low, stalking prey
eyes ahead, not on the sides
drawn to the moon, afraid of the afternoon
state of the empire, empire state
capital city
the angry machine
the through station
a once thriving and foaming
tap from a bootlegger's dream
things could be better, Lloyd, things could be a whole lot better
the angry machine
with a rusted iron grate
covering the flame licked
furnace mouth where
Gemini feeds souls

to the angry machine
Gemini can't live down
how far he's gone up
the psycho ladder, the sociopath to success
with just some dynamite and
some gasoline
the angry machine
there may be no "I"
but there's definitely a "me"
in "team"
the angry machine
check engine light is on
oil is low
needles broken
paranoid transmission
the angry machine

Fog of War

Sulman Tariq

From the top of the roof it seems like the entire village is entrapped in a birdcage. A wall of fog rises around the entire village cutting off the rest of the world. From such a distance it gives the sensation that the fog consumes anything it touches. A wall that has slowly consumed the world late last night and now just a small little village is all that's left. Four stories above the ground, I turn and walk to the north end of the perch I share with a blue barrel responsible for providing water to the rest of the house. With most of the village to my back now, the wall is the same at this end. Wrapping itself like a blanket around the edges, the fog has no plan of letting anything out. The deep bright green fields full of crop appear to be our last defense. A stretch of just a hundred yards between the feet of the fog and my world. Most of the stalks that were meant to be my sentinels have already been consumed. What used to seem like a sea of green is now cut down to just being a small moat.

Standing from on top of my marble and stone castle I hear a small chugging noise. A sound that's familiar to everyone in the village. The sound of someone driving an old beat up motorcycle down the dirt road. I immediately turn my head east in reaction to this new development. There I see a bright lance piercing through the enemy of the world. The enemy that had consumed everything and now is coming for the last little village on the surface of the Earth. This knight appeared from a land that was lost and before I could even figure anything out about him he had already driven through and gone back into the void.

The town itself wasn't much to behold. One small dirt road that ran through the middle and could barely handle one car at its narrowest points. Off this single

road came little alleyways where you could now see people moving about. The day was just beginning for this little village. From my castle I could see the other two mansions. One was only two stories tall and stood directly across from me. The other was also four stories and stood guard in the opposite corner of the village from me, with its own blue barrel just big enough to barely make out. The small little houses made of stone, brick, and dirt covered the town. Creating a complex interconnected maze with alleyways and streets. At about where the center of the town would be stood two white pillars with ornate gold moons at the top. In-between the pillars was a white dome-shaped building where people were gathering as they did five times a day, every day, for prayer.

The sight of the people moving towards the mosque made me realize that I also needed to start making my way down. As I looked back at the enemy that had eaten the world, I saw that it was fighting a losing battle. The first few swords of morning light had started to pierce holes through. Along with the cavalry that is the heat of day marching on the wall, the fog seemed to stand no chance. Just like any other morning this one seemed to be no different. What once seemed like the last hope for humanity was now just starting to seem just like any other village in Pakistan.

The intensity of the morning fog of war was now being lifted. With each step I took, down the flight of marble stairs, the demise of what was once my enemy got closer.

Today it seems like the world had won again but the battle will be fought again on another cool morning. For now, I had forgotten about the battle I had just witnessed and have begun to look towards the rest of the day.

Some Years Ago, I Was Raped

Skyler Kocsis

Some years ago, I was raped.

It was no stranger in an alley

It wasn't a friend's friend.

It was a boyfriend, someone who hit.

Someone who was scared to let me leave

Was scared as he did it

Was horrified with himself, and left me bleeding away from home

No phone

No light

No way to find where I was in the dense woods by his house.

If I went to the nearest house, would he kill me?

Could I find another house though?

What was my mom going to say?

She's due to be picking me up

Bruised and leaking an innocence taken from me

I walked

Where?

I didn't know

Mom, where are you?

I found a street light

Follow to another one!

No stars

No moon

I found a mom

Not my mom

She has a dog

I'm covered in blood from between my legs

My forehead is leaking red onto my breast

"Help"

And she does

"Who's this"

"Mom -it's me. Come get me please."

Police lights

Ambulance

The dog is gone

Mom

Mom

Mom.

Painful Beauty

Julia Marino

Ironically, on Valentine's Day, Tuesday, February 14th, a day of love I had to go see someone I hate, the dentist. It's like walking to my death sentence and paying to put myself into a torture chamber. I walk into a homey looking room with sky blue walls, a T.V. with a cooking show on and piles of magazines on a mahogany, oval coffee table. All the ambience is to distract you for what's to come. They make me wait long enough to shake with terror but not long enough so I change my mind and flee for the door. My hands build up a slight moisture on my palms. My head begins to pound like a drum. Then the door opens and then I hear in a calm, soft, slightly creepy voice, "Julia Marino". The hygienist asks me a couple questions as we walk to the back and is all I hear is, "Wah, wah, wah". We make a pitstop to take x-rays. The woman comes at my face with a silver contraption that clearly won't fit into my mouth. It's like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. I can taste a metallic taste on my tongue. One edge of the metal is gouging my cheek and the other is scraping against my gums. One side of my face looks like a blow fish ready to pop. She asks me to hold still and close my mouth and bite down as the x-ray machine zeroes in on its target. As I bite down the metal further protrudes into the raw flesh of my cheek. She takes it out of my left side for a moment of reprieve, only to quickly shove in another piece of sharp steel to torture me on the right side. After the x-ray we walk down the long hallway to put me through further misery. I enter a sterile, white room and take a seat in a vinyl, blue exam chair. Again, I'm told to wait long enough to get me shivering but not long enough to escape further abuse.

continued on page 27



Token by Lily Robinson



A Change of Heart by Isabella Kokoszko



Purgatory by Isabella Kokoszko



Apple by Lily Robinson

The hygienist enters and again her lips are moving but I'm not making sense of anything she's saying. There's a ringing in my ears. She sits down on a chair and I can hear the wheels wheeling toward my chair. I clench my eyes close and open my mouth wide. She begins with a pointy metal object scraping yellowy, plaque that has built up over the past six months. She concentrates on my inner, front bottom teeth continuing to repeatedly scrape. The sound is like nails on a chalkboard. My lower gums begin to slightly bleed and I can taste the saltiness of my blood. Saliva builds up in my cheeks and surrounds my teeth. She asks me to rinse. I pop up quickly to rinse and lay back for more misery. She then fires up something that mimics a mini electric sander. The robotic motor of the sander contains a cleaning paste that is applied to my teeth. I smell mint but it tastes like gritty dirt when applied. She works the dirt mixture with the power tool, to each tooth, applying pressure as she goes. Saliva again pools on the sides of my teeth, as I refuse to swallow. Again, I rinse with water. She finishes with flossing each crevice of my now clean teeth. My pink gums puff ever so slightly as she tortures me one last time with the long string of floss.

"I pop up quickly to rinse and lay back for more misery."

Finally, she sends the dentist in to look at the final product. He takes the time to count and admire my chompers. It's then when I realize why I go through such torture. As I run the tip of my tongue along my enamel, it's smooth like a freshly Zambonied ice skating rink. I can feel the fresh, clean surface of my pearly whites. My mouth smells of refreshing mint. My reflection shows white, clean teeth that sparkle like diamonds.

My City

Raymond Toledo

My city where the police still stop and frisk
My city where graduation rate is under 50%
My city where the MTA never sleeps
My city where on every block there's a hustle
My city where driving in traffic means racing
My city where you'll be referred to as "B"
My city where your friend really your energy
My city where your name is "yuurrrr" from afar
My city where the Yankees win and lose
My city where elementary students own guns
My city where the freaks are out at night... and day
My city where we lack opportunities
My city where we're the majority
My city where Roses rise from The Concrete.

I Wish I Could Act How I Felt

Becca Aldrich

"How are you?" I'm well, how are you?

I am well, a well that is empty, dry as the sahara. My village has abandoned me to find something that can adequately quench their thirst.

"How was your weekend?" It was fun! I saw my friend's dance competition, how was yours?

I danced too, danced between the options of existing amongst my friends who feel things and lying paralyzed in my bathtub of cold water for three hours before I worked up the courage to lift the drain.

"You dyed your hair dark brown! I love it! Why did you get rid of the blonde?" Thank you! I was just feeling the darker color for winter.

I was feeling the darkness, running through my veins, pumping through my blood, filling me entirely as everything good that has happened in my life flees from my memory. That darkness pushes me mindlessly to the bathroom. Reaching for a sharpness to bring a pain that I can control, instead finding a box of hair dye, a different element I can control.

I am well. I hang out with my friends a lot, and I have beautiful dark curls but I am not okay.

I'm not okay with how good I can feel on Facetime with my friend but as soon as that screen goes dark, so does my heart.

I'm not okay with how I empower myself before my work shift to not engage with the boy who leaves you on read, not look at how many times he's favorited her tweets, not cover shifts when I know he's working, but then the second I see him it's, "Haha let me say this funny thing to make you laugh and talk about you and pretend I'm not hurting".

I'm not okay with the fact that if I didn't initiate plans with my friends, I don't think I would have any.

I'm not okay with the fact that I'm here, and you're there, and

there's an ocean of the tears I shed when I admitted it was assault between us holding me back because I'm too scared that if I tried to swim through, my demons would pull me under.

I'm not okay with how I'm prospering. I get myself out of bed every morning, I get good grades, I do well at my job, I am kind to strangers, I play with my dog, I keep myself clean. All of these things mean my pain does not matter.

You don't take depression naps? Are you even sad?

You don't skip classes? Do you even have problems?

You don't have a monumental reason for why you feel like you want to punch the bathroom mirror and draw the shards across your radial artery so you can bleed out in seconds? Are you even suicidal?

I know what the radial artery is because I watch Grey's Anatomy. I watch at 3 am because I know that if I close my eyes to sleep, I'll have to wake up and that's scarier than sleep deprivation.

Christina Yang is my person; she tells me to get my ass together and work hard. No one will respect you if you don't. You can be sad, as long as you get shit done.

Izzie Stevens is my motivation. Here's a muffin, you can eat whatever you want. Don't worry about what it'll do to your body, you're sad so you deserve it. She lets me know it's okay to lay on the bathroom floor for days straight, so that's where I stay. Technically, my body goes to school, and then work, and then home to eat dinner and write an essay. But I leave my heart beating on the bathroom floor so that I can accomplish all of these things. It's okay if it's messy, George will clean it later.

"But I leave my heart beating on the bathroom floor so that I can accomplish all of these things."

George is my logic. He tells me when I'm fucking up but is careful to avoid my feelings. George doesn't know that I'm feelingless, apathetic. That I'm not right for him. I'm not right for anyone. I will never find someone who understands how even though I know how to swim, if you throw me into the water and give me the opportunity to drown, my legs will turn into lead and only McDreamy can save me then.

Derek Shepard is my reason to live. I love Derek Shepard. He gets me up in the morning and keeps me sane. He knows just how my brain works and takes his neurosurgeon hands and pulls all the baggage right out of my brain and puts it in my bathroom closet next to the bag containing my mother and shuts that door nice and tight because I'm living the McDream and I don't need those things anymore.

Except I'm back to reality now, season eleven episode twenty one.

My will to live is dead and my entire body is in that bathroom now, blood and tears mixing with my baggage and mothers ashes on the floor and

I look at the clock and I have to get ready for school and I know I should shower but I'm Meredith Grey yet I have beautiful dark curly hair and I'm doing well and I have friends to exist amongst they're Cristina, Izzie and George except they're at a dance competition and my worlds are colliding except the world where Shonda Rhimes always gives the character a silver lining is not the world I live in and my safe space is my bathtub and not the floor and

Here I find myself again.

I don't know where the curtain ends and the bathtub begins.

I cannot lift the drain this time.

Dear Misery

Danielle Chevalier

Dear Misery,
You were given too pretty a name
For such a terrible thing.

If I could, I would spit
On the graves of the poets
Who dressed you up as beautiful.

Dear Misery,
I've had enough of your company,
And the foul miasma of self-pity
You carry around you.

I'd much rather be with your brother,
Anger,
Whose fires can be tempered
To make the flames of Justice.

Or your sister,
Spite,
Who spurs me to do what I never realized I could,
Because the cynics looked down their noses at me.

Dear Misery,
Go sit instead
On the headstones of poets
Who foolishly praised your company
And leave me be.

Scars

Danielle Chevalier

I wonder if I could map the scars on my skin
And draw lines between them
Like constellations.

I could guide you past
The pockmarks on my arms and legs —
The result of an anxious childhood
Where I decided to restlessly pick at old scabs
Instead of biting my nails.

I could make signposts out of the shallow lines
From workplace mishaps,
Nicking my fingers on cardboard and boxcutters
While management yelled at us to go faster.

There is no great tragedy behind my scars.

But I could make constellations all the same.

Once Upon a Song

Sarah Elyounsi

Anastasia was never my favorite movie; it wasn't even on the list of top five. Compared to some of the other ones I watched obsessively, much to my parent's frustration, Anastasia was insignificant. The only thing I could really remember about it as I grew up was the song 'Once Upon a December.' When I was six years old or so, I discovered a passion of mine—singing. For some reason, it was never the soundtracks of my favorite movies like *Mulan* or *Sleeping Beauty* I longed to shout out. Instead, I found myself compulsively singing a song from a movie I felt completely indifferent towards. Something about the song resonated with me, from its bittersweet introduction, "Dancing bears, painted wings, things I almost remember," to its rhythmic melody, I could not get the song out of my head.

My mom was less than ecstatic each time I announced that I would be putting on a concert. One day in January, in the faux warmth of the forced air heater, I donned my best blue sundress. Hairbrush microphone in hand, I serenaded her with the soft lyrics of 'Once Upon a December.' She put on her best smile and feigned excitement that I was too young to identify. I thought she loved my concerts; I've learned after becoming a mom that she just loved me. My daughter is a lot like I was as a child with the same enthusiasm and passion. I can say without hesitation that I look forward to her concerts with much anticipation.

I first learned that my daughter also loved this song when I was still pregnant. I had forgotten about it for

years until one muggy day in August, when the air was thick and stifling. I had hopped in the shower to cool down when the chorus of this song just popped in my head. It was as if a butterfly had perched on my shoulder and whispered its lyrics to me. I couldn't shake the feeling that it was not I who brought the memory back. Regardless, I began to sing. By the end of the first line, little baby Scarlett was kicking all over the place. After learning just how much the child I was bearing loved the same song I did as a child, I was relentlessly singing it to her. Each time I did, without fail, she would dance to it.

When she was an infant, I would cradle her and sing it while softly swaying back and forth. Even in my sleep deprived, barely lucid state, my words never faltered. It was like my vocal cords had adhered to the muscle memory of reciting this tune. She always fell asleep to it, and I learned that this song that was once my source of inspiration had become my salvation.

Now, Scarlett is a bustling three-year-old and insists that we sing together. Although, most times she steals the spotlight and hushes me to do her solo. She is so much like me; she even has the same espresso brown eyes. Most times it feels as if I'm looking into a rose colored mirror. I sometimes wonder if she too will forget these lyrics as she grows older when life gets too busy to reminisce. For now, we shall keep singing.

"Far away, long ago, glowing dim as an ember. Things my heart used to know, things it yearns to remember. And a song someone sings, once upon a December."

Time

Rebecca Abreu

Time flies, or so they say.
Time is slow,
Dragging its feet when you beg it to go faster.
Then it sprints,
Tearing itself out of your hand and out of sight.
It can be stilled by a watchful eye,
But turn away,
And it slips between your fingers.
You are friends,
Exploring what others have made.
You spend time to work on something new,
Passing your days by making things for others.
Time allows you to grow,
Letting you lead it by the hand,
Before grabbing yours and becoming your enemy,
Dragging you to a place you don't want to go.
It gives you moments,
Then takes them away.
To replace them it grants you memories,
Which soon,
Will slowly fade as well.
Time is kind,
By granting you some.
But Time is cruel,
When it runs out.

The Stories Behind My Favorite Foods

Verdi Riversong

Back when I was growing up in Utica, I was a terribly picky child. I would never eat anything spicy, I could count the vegetables I was okay with on one hand, and I would turn down meals if they weren't things I knew even if the alternative was starving. Soon after moving to Albany, I thankfully started growing out of it and have since been discovering new and delicious foods often. Yet, all the ones that hold as my favorites do so because we met in memorable ways.

One day in my second year in Albany, I was at the library for a program involving coding robots to dance when I got stumped trying to teach mine to climb a ramp. Wanting a reason to take a break, I decided it was lunchtime and went wandering the area for a place to eat. After a long walk up and down Lark St., I entered the NoHo Pizzeria, which I'd gone to before for close proximity to the library. All prior visits to NoHo, I had ordered two slices of cheese, but this time when I reached the end of a long line, they only had one left. After some thought, I figured that if I got something I didn't like, I could try something new, but also probably end up nibbling away at it for ages, killing time until I got picked up at the end of the program. So, I ordered the slice of cheese to sate my hunger, and a slice of the strange white pizza with broccoli to kill time with.

I sat down, took a bite of the cheese slice, and turned to the white-broccoli slice, at which time I realized I had made a grave mistake: my nemesis, whole raw tomato slices, had gone unnoticed, partially obscured by the other toppings. I set about taking out every little piece of tomato I could get at, but couldn't get everything out, and what I did remove left an unpleasant, almost slimy residue that made me feel a little sick when I tried a bite. Then, after another bite of cheese to balance out the gross feeling of the white broccoli tomato slime, I had an idea. I put the cheese slice on top of the other

and tried a bite of both—layered to cover the tomato-polluted slice and keep it from offending too much. To my surprise, this was a delightful contrast. The broccoli paired with the cheeses on the cheese slice, the ricotta worked a lot better with the additional crust atop it, and the residue of the tomato was hardly noticeable. I decided I had to try this again. The next chance I got, I went to Dino's at the other end of Lark Street for a different take on white-broccoli pizza. I was surprised and relieved to find that they didn't put tomato on their version, so my trick wasn't needed. White-broccoli is nowadays my favorite pizza topping and one of my favorite foods. Maybe someday I'll return to NoHo and have it the way I first tried it.

Every now and then, on quiet weekend mornings, I love to dedicate a morning to producing quadruple or even quintuple batches of crepes for breakfast for the whole family. I'll stand in front of the stove for hours refining my methods. This means pouring and swirling 110 milliliter portions of the thin, watery batter one after another, figuring out the optimal spot on the heat dial, the best timings to bring the crepes to perfection, and stacking the iterations on a large plate. The first few that come out tend to be unevenly cooked or tear easily, but my family is happy to devour them regardless—due in part to the filling-dependent nature of them, it's difficult to make a crepe that doesn't work. The final and most refined crepes to come off the pan are my reward for the morning's labor. This habit came about from a want to get good at a recipe I could make with simple ingredients, and the time that I had a week's access to the best-equipped kitchen I've ever seen. My stepfather's extended family has a vacation-reunion event every year, and the richest guy decides (and pays for) the location. The first year I attended, a few years after the white-broccoli pizza, we had a fancy vacation house in rural Pennsylvania that could host twice as many people as we had. After consulting with my mother for recipes to try, I woke up early one morning, gathered the ingredients, and blended a small first batch. It was a success. My first crepes did come off the pan in pieces, but they tasted just as good as they would have whole. The buttery goodness went well with my topping choice of

sliced peach with a side of simple salad. Once I had eaten, I energetically whipped up a quintuple batch and cooked for the rest of the morning, serving my stepdad's whole family what they reported to be a wonderful breakfast.

Just a year or two back, I was out in the south Wyoming area for my late father's memorial service, and so I was meeting many of his friends and family who I'd never known existed before. While staying with my godmother, Carol, I went out with her and an aunt of mine who lives without internet in rural California, drawing a comic strip for a local newspaper. We went for dinner at the Avogadro's Number, an esteemed place with apparently very well-renowned vegetarian foods. Carol asserted that as a long-time vegetarian, I had to try the famous tempeh burger. Nothing on the menu appealed to me, and I doubted I'd have an appetite, so I nodded. Avogadro's Number is one of those restaurants that's so fancy it's fine for there to be a long wait for the food, and, by the time it was in front of me, I had managed to grow somewhat hungry. Eventually, I went for it to distract me from the depression. After taking off the tomato slice, I picked up the unwieldy stack and opened wide. The first bite surprised me. The texture of the tempeh patty was bizarre to me, but I didn't find it disagreeable. And all the burger's ingredients, though I might not have liked them if I had them individually, were here a coordinated orchestra of flavor. This tempeh burger was, as Carol had said, the best burger I'd ever have. Recently, I found that the Daily Grind café here in Albany has tempeh burgers almost as good as Avogadro's Number, and I go sometimes just to have one again. Though they're hard to find, they've held the spot of my top favorite food ever since that day in Colorado.

Having only started really appreciating any variety in cuisine over the last seven or so years, I've found it hard to choose a favorite. There are a lot of great foods out there! But the ones I remember, the front-runners, are consistently the ones that have a story attached to them. They have this special quality where they can almost bring me to the past. Associated sensory experiences across all senses can bring back old memories, and taste is no exception.

Antecedent

Isabella Kokoszko

Look.
Forgetting you was hard enough
Everything we had
Together
Now are separate entities.

We look at each other now
As strangers,
With a bounty of beautiful memories,
Reserved for years down the line.

In passing I think of you.
Replaying all the old recollections in my head
Like an old projector that flickers
Between pictures.
Finding anomalies in producing a
Clear image.

We were so far ahead of the rest,
Yearning for the picture to play on.
Showing two radiant people
Entirely Infinite.

Memories mismatched
Switching rapidly from day to year.

The same look on our
Painfully pleasant faces.

Slide after slide,
Day after day,
Emotions become repetitions,
Finding frailties in each other.

We never imagined this result
But split reactions call for split decisions
And reality sweeps into motion
Entirely changing our once sheltered world.

The clock moves on
Ticking with the pictures,
Time changes the quality.

It's difficult
To see clearly
Love still fogging my mind.
Everything seems brighter,
In our own silent movie.

The image shifts,
Projecting our silence
The love now lost.

Stop the show.

Vitality

Isabella Kokoszko

Dark buds blossom,
The colors shades of violet.
Violence the only settlement
Leaving barely what is relevant.
Angered hands leave stems
Only loneliness left to mend.

Marks creating masterpieces
Remarking horrible remembrances.
Only left by you,
The one I thought to be so true.

///

Red and blue drench the white walls,
Left with a dull ache of the past.
Justice is now the only hue
Time to pay your dues.
Never taking time to look at my heart
Tenacious flowers bloom into new art.
Relief.
Violet emerges to emerald,
Creating every complexion ever assembled.

///

You taught me to love one tint of purple
But I captured all the colors of the rainbow.
Iridescence gleams off of every façade,
Too intense for travelling strangers.
Show compassion for humanity,
Behind every screen
Is another person's destiny.

Thunderstorm

Ahmad Al Sharbati

Tears were running down my cheeks as I saw mom begging my dad to stop pranking her and wake up; a scene that is planted in my memory, playing itself repeatedly every time I wake up. Driving was my antidote to this memory. Crazy, I know. I say that because when I turn the volume knob of my rusty car to hear my favorite songs, my heart starts jumping with joy and nostalgia. The day my father said his farewells to this world was a bad day for me, but a nice one to spend. Little things that deliver joy to our hearts are always looked down upon. I believe that they all add up to make the most out of our day. During the morning of mixed emotions and confusion, the beautiful sky was being my friend; looking at it made me feel better without any reason. When my phone rang, I was at first reluctant to take it, but my conscience told me to remove the phone from my pocket since the call might be an emergency.

After I received my sister's call, I hurtled to the hospital. The afternoon was hot like a furnace. My plans were to wind up the rest of my Sunday on my favorite couch, but that never happened. While driving back to the hospital, a wave of One Republic's music was playing on the sound system as it locked away joyful memories of the trips my father and I had; childhood that were jostling in my brain. The soothing voice of Ryan Tedder also planted a lazy smile on my lips as I leaned back and let the good old vibes seep into me further. I decided to stop at a gas station to rest before carrying my journey.

After a short period of time, I woke up after hearing a very loud sound as if a bomb exploded. My mind was still wandering away from the current troubles of the world, but I was brought back to life with the sight in front of me. The sky that was a while ago bright with a bliss-blue complexion was now as dark as the devil's soul. I felt my heart leap and all I could think of under these circumstances was to rush to the hospital. A flash of lightning illuminated the gas station. The lightning was followed by a deafening crash of thunder that sent chills down my spine. A thunderstorm had come. There were ominous dark clouds hovering in the sky.

I woke up still perplexed by the sudden weather change and grabbed the car keys. I turned on my car and drove at the speed of lightning towards the hospital. By that time, the city's rugged tarmac was overflowing with rain. A strong wind was blowing outside while lightning flashed and thunder roared at the same time. Thunder snapped the air as if the heavens were split into two halves.

As soon as I was at the parking lot of the hospital, safe and sound, I leaned on my window to have a look at what was happening. The lightning was so bright such that it illuminated the dark clouds and momentarily exposed my surroundings. The clouds up in the sky were so heavy looking like they could violently collapse down on top of the buildings; just like a firefly on a hot summer night.

The lightning, at times, was flickering on and off. In spite of the fear that was creeping in me, the way the thunder flashed blindly through the air and lit the sky revealing the heavy dark clouds was just a thriller.

During my stay in the car, my window had become an entertainment screen, feeding my eyes with a lightning spectacle that was stabbing the air like a sharp knife. Looking outside from the window, a tree, three cars away from where I was, got struck by lightning; splitting it in half and making it burst into flames. Rain poured in it causing steam to burst in the air. Amazed by the spectacular display, I could only stare at the sky and try to imagine how other trees received the news of the

"The lightning was followed by a deafening crash of thunder that sent chills down my spine."

sudden death of their mate. The sound of power captivated and instilled fear in me. The rain cascaded like a waterfall from heaven. The strong winds blew the rain and lashed against windows and doors. The hospital was dimly lit which made me realize there was no power. The electricity supply was also affected by the storm. Lightning was striking the ground like a man striking his sword; full of anger and power.

Most roads in town were now flooded, and the heavy rain torrents made visibility poor. In this case, many vehicles were stuck in traffic. I got out of my car and the wind quickly slapped my face; it was cold and strong. I arrived at the hospital door, but before I entered, I looked at the sky and day dreamed of what it would be like to just fly and never come back to the ground. I shuffled my legs to the reception as my heart sank. Thoughts of death rushed through my mind. The sight of the lifeless body when I entered the room made my legs shake like a twig on a windy day.

The storm lasted two hours or more. When the wind subsided and the rain stopped the weather became beautiful again and the sky was clear as crystal. In spite of the storm ending, it had already done more harm than good. There was a widespread destruction of property. Flood waters had entered into several houses, which were on low lying areas and the wind blew the roofs away like a weightless leaf. This made several families homeless that day. There was also reported loss of life in the neighborhood where a tree fell on a car and crashed it while the lady was rushing home from church.

Lastly, a flash of lights lit the sky and gave the illusion of daylight scenery. It was still muddy outside. I cursed the previous ill-fortune that had befallen our family.

Still Waters

Joanna Pennings

The last time I saw nature,
It was seven fifteen
On a summer night.
The sun had begun its slow descent
Followed by floral hues, remnants of white light-
Refracted through the great expanse of the sky.
Nature smiled, eyes lined with age.
Eyes that have seen more than this heart could ever hold.
I didn't recognize the grief in that smile.
I didn't know then,
That I would fail to notice
Nature's silent voice;
Day after day after day.
That we would pass by one another
On early morning commutes
And brisk walks to class
Never acknowledging.
Nature passed by, a memory.
I woke up this morning to silence.
No fire to run me out of this house.
I heard a still, small voice,
And one step at a time I walked out.
Nature waved.
The kind of wave given by old friends.
"Hello. Do you remember?"
I smiled back, eyes a little older.
"Yes, I remember."

Silence

Nathan Whiting

The silence seems to befriend me while waiting for sound to bless me
Despite unending vexing, the fuel of doubt is soon relenting
Forget projecting the despair silence will bare
Salvation is found in sound
Here I bound
Rally around a placid tone
Mellow molds to cast the unknown
Sculpted through reflection and resonance
Silence is hushed away through sound's persistence
Insistence of acceptance that knows no bounds
Salvation will always be found in sound

The Girl in the Mirror

Jessica Rodgers

She was a girl I'd never seen before. A young woman with a face like mine, calling multiple doctors and hospitals to request records. She was fifteen, but throwing her voice to try and sound older, using multisyllabic words and hoping her voice didn't shake. She was broken, but brae, putting on a front she didn't know she was capable of projecting. The advertisements for The Cancer Treatment Centers of America had seemed promising, and the reassuring voices on the other end of the line walked her through the steps that needed to be taken.

Fifteen! What an age in a lifetime. Already a confusing time with puberty, school, focus on the future, parents, friends, so many elements to balance. For me, though, only one thing reigned: Would my mother live or die? Everything else fell away. Friendships were left abandoned, school barely considered, and a life outside of caring for a sick mother forgotten.

Many people had told me I should think about being a nurse because I was so good at caring for my mother when she was sick. I held her hair, and her bucket, as she threw up. I helped my father change her when the time came for adult diapers. I held her head in my lap and soothed her forehead, and monitored her medication schedules. As the only child at home and with a father working two jobs, it never occurred to me, to any of us, that there was another option. But no, said I. Never would I be a nurse! Never would I carry this burden again, of watching, helpless, as others withered away.

Why would I want to be there again? Feeling the cold weight of pills in my hands as I measured out the dosage. Waking in the night to listen to the labored breathing just to be assured that breath still passed her lips before allowing myself to sleep once more. Who would want to be so cold, so mechanical, that as family wept over the lifeless body, you'd be unable to join in? As the caretaker it wasn't my place to grieve with others. Instead I found solace in the cold shed, screaming in the nothingness around me. The August day was warm, sunny, a few clouds in the sky. I yelled at the breeze, at the day, at the month. How dare the birds chirp as though life would go on? How could the sun shine as though my sunshine hasn't just been ripped away? But the time for crying passed, and when I looked in the mirror, my eyes held only vague recognition.

Four years passed, and I became a nineteen year old who kept up the facade of being able to assume adult responsibilities. I worked a job where I, fresh-faced though I was, managed an intern and was supposed to be a role model for how to complete certain tasks. A night came where we were supposed to go out on the town together, drinking ahead of time with alcohol I had procured for us. She got there first with a friend, and they drank the vodka I'd hidden away. Before I arrived they decided to just go out and let me meet them there. I had not even left yet when drunken voices informed me they had met some boys and were heading off to a strange apartment. My voice became eerily calm as I took control of the situation. I was no longer nineteen and carefree, but sober, in every sense of the phrase, and needed.

Years more went by and more than once I fielded a phone call, or provided a rescue for a friend in need. A pregnant stranger came to live with me because she needed a place to stay. For the girl who was broken and brave it as an easy decision. It was no longer putting on a facade to help others in need; it was simply what she did because it was necessary. Because it was who she was. Because it had become who I was.

My mother passed away the year I was fifteen, and it took time to rebuild the life I had fallen away from. Friends, while understanding, had been hurt by my disconnect, and I had to find forgiveness and growth. School became a nightmare as I sought to complete my last two years of high school and finish the education I had previously cared so much about. In many ways I regained the girl I had been before my fifteenth birthday, but I was never able to fully shed that mask.

For years I ran from accepting that I was a caretaker. Despite the familiarity of the face, I was determined to be hard, to be cold. If no one came into my heart, I would be safe. But living in such coldness withers the soul, and in another summer, another August, warmth seeped in again as I found myself working in a nursing home.

It was too late to forget the lessons I had learned. The face I had put on out of grief and necessity had become the face I saw in the mirror. She took care of others, and was calm under pressure. I could no longer pretend I was someone else, or that my experiences hadn't changed me completely. We are who we become, and at fifteen, for better or for worse, I became someone new.

Dancing In Poetry

Vanessa Roberts

Eyes grazing the clock, waiting for the hands to
Tick, tick so that I can stop. I want to rest my arm.
I've been writing and scrawling and pushing a pen
Across the same wrinkled page for three days.
Still can't come up with anything.
I feel heat running up my side upon the realization
this project is missing something important:
Meaning.
Then I ask a dumb question:
What does it mean to mean something?
When there is no reply, I fill the silent air
With gratuitous laughter.
Trying to ignore fatigue that hugs my back.
I scan the words I've forced onto the page,
Noticing how I hook the E's into the N's and trail the W's into the A's.
I see a pile of letters dancing in jagged lines.
Vowels and consonants spin off the page,
Tangling their syllables with my limbs.
It moves me left and right.
I've found myself in an estranged tango.
Twitching and twisting in a symbiotic rhythm with this poem.
Dancing in poetry, a fluid symphony.