

# THREADS

2025

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### **Cover Image: Tranquility on The Hudson**

By Tiana Rios

I took this Photo on 12/14/2024 @ 5:06pm. I had spent several hours on campus doing some work and crying. HVCC was a safe place for me to come to on a day that I was dealing with some many stressful things. The photo represents the security, tranquility and optimism I left behind when it was time for me to go. Thank you for being my safe space.

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**Dr. Maria Palmara Creative Writing Award:**  
Olivia Kelly  
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“Fermentation via Monologue”

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**Noah Kucij Award for Outstanding Poetry:**  
Jeremy Knox  
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“Shokan”

\*\*

**Threads Creative Writing Award 1:**  
Siri Sorensen  
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“Travel-Sized Trouble”

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**Threads Creative Writing Award 2:**  
Kristabel Smith  
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“It’s Always a Team Effort”

\*\*\*\*

**Threads Creative Writing Award 3:**  
Tiana Rios  
“Tranquility On the Hudson”

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## Fermentation via Monologue

*Olivia Kelly*

I want my mother to stop microwaving salmon at 9 a.m. I want my father to stop sighing every time I walk into the kitchen, like my existence is a mild, chronic inconvenience, like the smog in Manhattan or a cyst that won't drain. I want my brother to choke on his law school textbooks. Not fatally. Just enough for him to feel human for once. I want my brain back. The one I had before I left college. Before I left me.

I want to wake up without the nausea of knowing I'm still here. This house. The blue carpet that smells like dog piss. The dining room chairs are upholstered in a pattern that looks like prison food. I want to want something good, something that won't make me more miserable. A job. A girlfriend. A sense of control. An empty inbox. A quiet mind. A different body.

I want to be brilliant, but I can't even finish a New York Times puzzle without cheating. I want to be straight, but my body curls toward women like a plant reaching for the sun. I want my brother's brain, my mother's patience, and my father's ability to go to bed without staring at the ceiling for two hours contemplating the collapse of the universe.

I want to stop thinking about Dartmouth. Like if I'd just been more disciplined, more interesting, less me, I'd still be there, chugging cold brew in the library at 3 a.m., pretending to understand The Brothers Karamazov. I want to stop hating everyone I meet, or at least stop assuming they hate me first.

I want God to explain why He made me like this. I want Him to show up in my room and hand me a pamphlet: "So You're a Failure: A Beginner's Guide" and tell me what page to start on. I want to be a different person. I want to be enough. I want to disappear. I want someone to tell me I won't.

Or maybe I want them to say nothing. Just nod solemnly, hand me a cigarette, and let me sink into the wallpaper like a water stain. Not that I smoke. Not that I do much of anything these days except stare into the bathroom sink, where the same glob of toothpaste has been clinging to the drain for three weeks. The same way I cling to this house, congealed, gelatinous, unwilling to break down entirely.

My mother says I should apply for internships. Maybe work for my uncle's accounting firm. "You liked math as a kid," she says, like that's enough to reanimate the corpse of my academic ambition. I tell her I'd rather let a bird peck my eyes out one by one. She says I'm dramatic. She's not wrong.

My father asks if I've "thought about grad school." Like he's handing me a little life raft, a way to scramble back onto the ship of people who have futures, but I know that if I get back on, I'll just stand at the bow and swan dive off again. I tell him I have, but the



application fees are expensive. I leave out the part where I'd rather be burned alive than write another personal statement about how "passionate" I'm not.

My brother calls me "kiddo," which I know is supposed to be affectionate, but it makes me want to scream into my hands until I am five years old and catch up to him. He thinks I'm fragile. A delicate girl in a lace bonnet, staring longingly at the window of her Victorian sickbed, wishing she could go outside and experience the world. I am not fragile. I am a cockroach in a microwave.

I lie awake at night and count the things I was supposed to be by now. I lose track after fifteen. I tell myself it's fine. That nobody cares if I finish anything. That nobody is keeping track. But I'm keeping track. I see every day stretch in front of me like chewed-up gum on the sidewalk, and I step right into it, again and again, until I can't tell where my shoe ends and the filth begins.

I Google "how to be a person" and get articles about skincare routines. I try praying but end up sitting on my bed, staring at the ceiling, whispering, "What now?" to the cracks in the plaster.

What now?

Sometimes I think about cutting my hair. Chopping it all off in the middle of the night, watching the strands fall into the sink like something shedding itself, sloughing off the past. Sometimes I think about leaving. Just walking out the door and seeing how far I can get before something stops me. A cop. A stranger. The weight of my own inertia. There's a version of me out there, somewhere, who made better choices. Who finished school. Who isn't drowning in this slow, domestic death. She's probably in a city, walking fast, drinking something overpriced, slipping into a party full of people who don't need to fake knowing what Dostoevsky is about. She has friends. Real ones. Ones who don't text "how are you?" just to feel good about themselves before disappearing again.

She exists. She must.

And if she does, then what the hell am I?

## Shokan

*Jeremy Knox*

My bedroom window in-between the yellow wall

Makes way for the view of my Japanese maple tree

I named it Shokan. Redemption in my native tongue

Dedicated to change, the power of new beginnings

Its branches reach out in multiple directions

Hugging the wind, defending my home

Its leaves burgundy like the blood I shed during the chaos

Planted with good intentions, a promise to the universe

I shall not destroy our home, the community, my family

To honor my health, soul, the oath was rooted in earth

My last chance, redeemed from wicked ways so selfish

I have watched this magical tree drink the rain

Fight ferocious storms then soak up the sun peacefully

From time to time, I touch its branches gently

Speaking loving words, encouraging it to keep growing

Just like me, we evolve together as the years pass by

The pinecones that surround its base, the pineal gland

A symbol that assists my sleep cycle, a dream catcher

The blue Jay who often visits finds solace in the energy

It radiates a form of peace that tucks me in at night

The moon lady sings to Shokan during chilly nights

My bedroom window in-between the yellow wall  
I gaze at my Japanese maple tree, deep in thought  
I named it Shokan. Redemption in my native tongue  
Grace from the most high, dedicated to the beauty of change

**Travel-sized trouble**  
*Siri Sorensen*

A travel-sized Trouble board game was laid atop a no-longer-neat and lumpy spread of textured, white hospital sheets. In your bed was, at least to me, what looked like the only colors visible for miles beyond those four blindingly pale and sickly walls.

Your bed acted as our game table in the center of that dreary room. The three of us took turns pressing the crest of that transparent half-sphered bubble in the center of the gameboard.

—

Our distinguished chatter and your inquiry about my young life, school, my friends, and anything else. My responses to your questions came to follow and then talk of what we were all to do once you became better; all of us being you, me, my mom, and my brother. Our own little family. We mentioned your list. That list of all the things you meant to do that were always put off but never dismissed. We laughed about that, too.

—Light-hearted laughter was interrupted by the sharp pops that seemed to pierce through the calm air whenever one of us players would press the plastic half-sphered gameboard bubble. Our eyes followed the sounds of the jumps, rattles, and bangs that the encapsulated miniature game die made against its plastic cage. The die, in its fishbowl prison, fought until its inertia eventually slowed and it had no choice but to succumb to its fateful rest. All of us watched, mesmerized with anticipation of the eventual reveal of the die’s final resting face, of which depicted our ability to advance. Press and go, and then again. Press and go. Press and go. Press, and then I left.

Leaving was easy for me then. It was easy because of my own naivety; because I assumed that there would be a next time.

Not even one week later did the ICU call. I watched my mom fall to her knees, unable to speak, talk, or think. Her gut-wrenching, ear deafening scream gurgled from the depths of her being... the pitch that still rings in my ears from time to time. The sound of a heart being torn out of the chest and crushed by the weight of reality.

I remember that ten-minute drive that seemed to have lasted for uncrackable hours... In that car, I still sit frozen in time with my foot on the break. And when I finally got to say goodbye to your limp body; your eyes glazed, hands still warm, but laying utterly lifeless in another just as dreary hospital room... This time with no color of hope in sight. Then, there was nothing left other than blue-teared goodbyes.

But...and there is a but...I can remember that travel-sized trouble game just as vividly as the rest. My mom’s ringed scream, with time, morphed into the high-pitched and lighthearted

laughs shared from that day. The marvelous abundance of color that laid in your bed, that is what I think of when the world seems any shade of underwhelming grey.

A life lost, but a life had. A father, a partner, a youthful spirit that has, and will continue to be, entirely missed. You taught me that true pain must be, perhaps even if only as a small part, intertwined within love. I grieve you because I loved you, but I celebrate you for the exact same reason. I thank you for your strength, your support, and for continuing to show me that color can prevail greyness, no matter the darkness of the shade.

Until we meet again, if even just to play another round of Trouble.

## **It's always a Team Effort**

*Kristabel Smith*

Berthing is always dark and quiet. A ship runs 24 hours a day and people are always sleeping. It's supposed to be a peaceful place filled with sailors just trying to get a nap in when they can. There should be a sense of peace about the space, a quiet stillness broken only by the shuffling of recently arisen sailors shambling quietly to the bathroom or getting dressed in the dark.

In one corner of the labyrinth of lockers and racks I sat on an overturned bucket with tears streaming down my face and the only sharp instrument I could find at the time, a pair of scissors that would prove incapable of getting the job done. I was lost in that moment, dead inside, unable to think or process. Ready for the end. I didn't get to that point alone; it was as much a team effort as my recovery would be. People don't try to end their lives because they are alone, they do it because the people around them have actively, although often unintentionally, forced them into solitude. Stripped of the powerful bonds of community, shunned and disregarded, we find ourselves in the dark shadows of those who are denying us access to the light.

Onboard the USS Ronald Reagan, about a week after departing the north Arabian Sea in support of the final troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of the Global War on Terror, is where I found what rock bottom feels like. I had come out as transgender just a few months prior and things were not going well. My attempt on my own life was unsuccessful and went largely unnoticed. The marks weren't really noticeable, having recently departed the Middle East and sailed east we moved into cooler waters where the 20 year old air conditioning units could keep up, temperatures inside the skin of ship had dropped drastically so nobody even commented about my sleeves always being rolled down. It was just another day underway for the crew, and just another day in hell for me.

Over the last four months the Chiefs Mess had slowly begun to extricate itself from my life. Individuals whom I worked with stopped interacting with me, some unsure of how to treat someone like me, some hesitant with their own discomfort around me, and some who were not confident with how openly hostile they could be with me. I was progressively left out of meetings and denied social interaction. Over the space of four months, I became a pariah amongst my peers. It was this sudden dissolution of every connection I had that began my descent. It wasn't being alone that broke me. It was being forced to be alone while surrounded by everything I used to love about my life.

Separating from the Armed Forces is a monumental upheaval of your life that you cannot truly understand unless you have done it. To everyone around you, it's a non-event. Nobody comes to you afterwards and checks in with you to make sure you aren't overwhelmed. People don't think of the weeks and months that come after you take off the boots as potentially dangerous until they are reading your obituary on Facebook. The void created by the sudden lack of

purpose and camaraderie is too often filled with nothing, filled only by the lack and the wish to have it back.

According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs almost 18 veterans take their lives every day. Having met several individuals who, like me, had failed to become part of this statistic I soon realized that my story was not unique. Almost every person I met in the many recovery groups I went to had a similar set of circumstances. Not all of them were as direct and obvious as mine, but that common thread was there. Often enough, their stories would include the dwindling connections with family and friends as they slid deep into episodes of depression. This is why the first couple of years after separating from service can be so hard for many veterans. The easy friendships and sense of belonging within every military unit is suddenly and irretrievably lost as you walk off the base for the last time. Hidden within their stories is silent, often unintentional, separation forced onto them by circumstances they felt couldn't, or sometimes shouldn't, be overcome.

Often times, people say that they didn't see the signs after someone commits suicide. This is true. I too missed the signs in myself and the shipmates I lost along the way. That is the problem; It's never that the signs weren't there, just that we failed to look. We get busy in our own lives and ignore the effects we have on those we have abandoned. It's unfair to say that we are the cause of someone else's self-harm, but we are the only way to prevent it. Open your eyes to the people who are falling out of your life, identify why they aren't communicating and reach out. It only takes one person to listen, it takes all of us to fail.

## WARNING!

*Layla Boudreau*

i'm on empty  
more than i should be.

my engine keeps sputtering,  
and my tires are flat.

i keep stalling,  
and my windows are cracked.

everything is leaking out,  
and i can't seem to cool off.

i'm falling apart,  
and my brakes won't let me stop.



## The Choice of Leaving

*Shuxin Zhang*

At fourteen, the words first found me,  
like wind catching on distant sails—  
Go, they whispered, and I knew,  
knew I'd be saying goodbye  
to all I held at home.

I left, and in that leaving, loss came close,  
like shadows lengthening at dusk.  
Friends I'd known since childhood,  
family's laughter around the table,  
each comfort I'd grown up within,  
receded like fading songs.

Time proved me right:  
loss became a companion—  
expected yet always sudden,  
unseen yet deeply felt.  
It arrived in quiet moments,  
in voices across an ocean,  
and the ache of distance  
that miles can't close.

But as loss wove through my days,  
other gifts emerged like spring from snow:  
A new language filling my mouth like song,  
holidays wrapped in unfamiliar joy,  
knowledge like fresh roots deepening  
in soil I had never known.

These new things are not replacements,  
they don't erase the hollow left behind.  
But with each step, I have learned  
to welcome what comes  
and hold what's gone with gentler hands.

In leaving, I lost—yes, more than I imagined—

yet life finds its way to offer balance,  
to lay gifts at my feet in exchange.  
And now, I do not fear the emptiness,  
for I know that in time,  
even loss finds ways to bloom.

## Every Bite, A Memory

*M. Qasim Navid*

Have you ever tasted something so delicious that it gives you nostalgia? Food brings back memories and joy, and for me it's the tasty Nihari from Waris, the delicious Biryani from Karachi Naseeb, and the crunchy Gol Gappas. There is a deep connection between humans and the food they love. These dishes are not just meals; these dishes hold special moments and experiences that make them unforgettable. Nihari reminds me of an early morning driving lesson in Lahore, Biryani takes me back to laughter times with friends at Karachi Naseeb, and Gol Gappas remind me of the fun challenges with my family at street stalls. Each dish is about a unique and cherished memory.

One of the most unforgettable dishes for me is Nihari. Nihari is a spicy beef dish that also includes Paye (cooked animal trotters or hooves) and is best enjoyed with Khamiri Roti (Mughal-era bread). My cousin gave me driving lessons. One rainy morning at 6 AM, my cousin was teaching me how to drive and we decided to go to Waris Nihari, which is a famous restaurant of Nihari in Lahore, for breakfast. Waris's Nihari was situated in Old Lahore, where streets are narrow and there were puddles. It wasn't easy for an amateur driver to drive through those streets, but I did, and I did well. Then, we sat there and ate the best Nihari in Lahore, Pakistan. The meat was so soft it almost fell apart, cooked slowly to soak in all the rich flavors of the spices. The gravy was thick and full of taste, with the right amount of spices. Paired with fresh, fluffy Khamiri Roti, every bite felt comforting and just yum. That day was not only about the tasty food but also the experience I gained in driving, making the memory even more special. Moving from thrill of driving to the warmth of friendship, another dish that holds a special place in my heart is Biryani from Karachi Naseeb.

Karachi Naseeb's Biryani is more than just a dish for me; it holds a lot of my memories with friends. Karachi Naseeb is a name of restaurant, famous in whole Pakistan for their Biryani. Karachi Naseeb was a tiny shop with only six tables, giving it a simple and cozy atmosphere. The counter was in front of a shop with a freshly cooked pot of Biryani. After academy, Me and my friends used to head straight there and enjoy a plate of biryani. We always sat at the same table in the corner, as if it was reserved just for us. That table has memories of me and my friends joking around, laughing, and making fun of each other. We made countless memories there. We used to play little games, like "heads or tails" or "rock, paper, and scissors" to figure out who was going to pay for the meal and talking about jokes from our classes. The Biryani was always tasty, but what made it even better was the time spent with friends. These small moments of happiness made Karachi Naseeb's Biryani unforgettable for me. Even now, whenever I have Biryani, it takes me back to those golden days with my friends. Like friendship bonds, family bonds are also created through shared meals, like Gol Gappas.

Among all the foods I love, Gol Gappas are the ones that remind me of most of the fun family traditions. It is a crunchy and spicy street food, which is made from thin, crispy wheat shells filled with tangy mixture of spiced water, chickpeas, potatoes, and different sauces, like

tamarind chutney, mint chutney, chili sauce, and creamy yogurt. Whenever my family and my mother's side of the family get together, we all go for a night walk on the streets to the Gol Gappas stall, having fun along the way. We would even play little pranks, like ringing neighbors' doorbells and running away, laughing like kids. Once we reached the stall, we would sit in the roadside seating area and eat as many Gol Gappas as we could. A fun competition always started that, who could eat the most Gol Gappas before their mouth burned from spices. These moments were filled with laughter and playful challenges, making Gol Gappas more than just a snack.

Food is more than just flavor; it is about the stories, moments, experiences, and emotions that make it unforgettable. The Nihari from Waris reminds me of my first driving lesson, the Biryani from Karachi Naseeb brings back memories of my friends, and the Gol Gappas remind me of fun times with family. These dishes are more than just food. These dishes are a connection to the past. Every bite brings back a story, making them special in ways beyond words.

**To My Grandson Dominick**  
*Sally Filancia*

How bright the days when you are by my side,  
A spark that lights the dimmest hours of gray.  
Your laughter's warmth, a sun that will not hide,  
And fills the world with joy, so pure, so gay.

With every step you take, a world unfolds,  
New wonders greet us in your shining eyes.  
Your curious heart, a treasure yet untold,  
In each small hand, a thousand dreams arise.

But swift, the time does fly; as moments fade,  
I watch you grow and change with tender sigh.  
Yet still, I hold these memories we've made,  
A keepsake of our bond that won't belie.

So here I vow, my love for you stays true  
Forever, dear, I'm always here for you.

## Frightful Tides

*Oliver Bulmer*

The ocean hums a song of birth,  
Of silent depths before the Earth  
Had voice to call the morning bright,  
Or name the stars that pierced the  
night.

It sways, unshaken, vast and free,  
A pulse beneath eternity.

Yet in its boundless, endless breath,  
It whispers tales of life, and death.

A silver shore, a fleeting peace,  
A moment's rest where worries  
cease.

But step beyond, where waters yawn,  
And soon the solid ground is gone.

For in the deep, the world distorts,  
Where light dissolves, where shadow  
courts.

A nameless fear, a formless dread,  
A grave where ancient secrets tread.

No walls contain its shifting ways,  
No map can trace its hidden maze.

It swallows time, it swallows past,  
What sinks below is lost, held fast.

Yet still we sail, we dream, we dare,  
To chase horizons, lost in air.

We write our fates on crested waves,  
Then watch them fade in ocean  
graves.

The sea of life will call us wide  
Some drift, some sink, some reach  
the tide.

So here we stand, both brave and  
small,

The ocean claims us, takes us all.

## Secret Garden

*Eve Oathout*

The old woman knelt over a patch of freshly tilled soil as she expertly scattered seeds along the choppy earth. Her back and knees had begun to develop a familiar ache, but the woman didn't mind. As the midday sun shone down, blocked only by an outrageous sunhat and a dirt stained top, the woman stood, satisfied with her work for the day. As she bent to pick up her worn watering can and dulled garden clippers, she spied something through her white picket fence. As the eye widened realizing it had been caught, she realized with amusement that it wasn't something, rather, someone.

The eye vanished quickly from sight after being discovered. If the woman hadn't known any better she would have thought she was seeing things. In fact, the first time it happened she did think she was seeing things. That was two weeks ago, and like clockwork, that same pair of eyes peeking through the fence watched her as she spent her mornings carefully tending to her garden. She had planned on fixing the hole in her otherwise impeccably cared for fence, but something about those youthful curious eyes paused her progress temporarily.

As she clambered inside, leaving her muddy shoes by the door, she removed her hat, raising an arm to wipe the sweat off her brow. She felt serene and accomplished, if not a little dehydrated. As she let the shade cool her warm skin, she poured herself a tall glass of water. Condensation gathered quickly on the outside of the glass, wetting her hand as she took several large mouth fulls. As she set the glass down, she heard a faint knock at the door. It was a soft raping, as if her visitor was unsure if they had the right house. The woman swiftly made her way to the door, not wanting to keep her visitor waiting.

As she opened the door, she came face to face with a young boy. He couldn't have been older than twelve, with shaggy brown hair and the last traces of baby fat still clinging to his round cheeks. However it wasn't his similarly mud stained clothes that caught the woman's attention, it was his eyes. She recognized the eyes, they were the same ones which had watched her for the past two weeks as she worked away in her garden. They boy made eye contact with the woman then dropped his gaze, nervously wringing his hands. He opened his mouth several times as if he wanted to say something, but nothing came out.

The woman chuckled lightly to herself, stretching her hand out to his and introducing herself. "I'm Elenor" said the woman as the boy clasped her hand and shook vigorously, causing another laugh to bubble out. "And who might you be?" she asked as the boy still held her hand looking at her excitedly now. "I'm Oliver," said the boy. "I live right down the street in that blue house with the black door. I told my Mama I was going for a bike ride but-" he trailed off as if he couldn't find the right words. "Well, I Was going on a bike ride," he started, "but I have a question." "Well Oliver, I might have an answer," the older woman said affectionately. "I saw you working through that hole in your fence when I rode by-" he paused for a brief moment, "and I was hoping I could see your garden?" Oliver looked up tentatively to meet the woman's

gaze. She could read the mix of emotions on his face from nervous to hopeful. She felt a familiar spark of joy in her heart as he asked the question. She was overcome with emotions, just as he was when she said “of course dear,” and opened her door wider.

She led him through her small but cozy house, passing by worn furniture and many pictures of family members all lining the walls. As she opened the sliding glass door which led outside, they were greeted by another wave of oppressive heat and the smell of fresh dirt. Elenor took a deep breath as she felt the sun warm her already rosy cheeks.

As she glanced behind at the boy, she found him frozen, utterly transfixed by the garden around them. His gaze scanned the area, drinking in every detail with eagerness. He observed the white picket fence which enclosed this secret garden, hiding it away from the rest of the world. Ivy snaked up the fence in some areas giving the fence color just like the rest of the garden. A small cobblestone fence snaked through the center of the garden leading to a small bench surrounded by lush fragrant flowers on all sides. Everywhere he looked, there were explosions of color, from the fiery red roses blooming by the bench to the dainty purple flowers which liked the fence in some spots.

The boy took a slow step into the garden, as if he was in disbelief of what lay before him. The woman looked around proudly at her life’s work, then looked back to the boy who was still staring, transfixed. She waited expectantly for what he had to say. She couldn’t remember the last time she was able to share her garden with someone. As he turned to face her, still at a loss for words, she held out her hand to him, and he clasped it. She led them through the blossoming flowers to the bench where they sat side by side, enjoying one another’s silence. For a long time they sat without exchanging a single word. The truth is, they didn’t need to say anything to understand one another, their existence was enough.

## My Not So Secret Sanctuary

*Eve Oathout*

The trip down to my favorite place is never anything but mystical. I travel mainly by foot, following the winding road lower and lower, feeling gravity pulling me forward down the steep slope. The road is lined by trees on all sides, blocking out the sweltering heat of the mid-summer sun. The road seems to wind back and forth endlessly until the sounds of birds and distant cars are replaced by the sound of running water. The sound is never the same, on some days it’s like the gentle tinkling of a bell, lazily flowing over the rock underneath, unhurriedly making its way downstream. On other days the river flows fast and strong, chilly and fervent, eager to reach its final destination.

As I make my way to the end of the road the river comes into view, as does the rusty bridge which looks out over the water. As I cross the bridge, I can feel the slats under my feet, pressing into my sneakers, telling me this isn’t made for walking. On the other side of the bridge there’s a small dirt path where the grass no longer grows. Maybe it’s because of all the people that have walked there, or maybe it’s because of the discarded bottles and beer cans littering the entrance to my sanctuary.

When I touch down at the base of the river, I feel a familiar spark of delight come to life within me. I smile as I look down at the thousands of rocks that make up the bank of the river. They come in all shapes and sizes, many white and gray, others orange and pink. Some are large and round, too heavy to pick up. Others are small and flat, these are always my target. I pick up a small gray rock, exposing the wet mud beneath. I turn the rock over in my hand and look out to the water as I expertly flick my wrist, sending the rocking gliding over the surface of the water, skittering along as if it was solid ground.

The sun shines here, and unlike my tranquil journey, my destination is vibrant with color and life. As I wade ankle deep into the water and peer down, I see small fish and tadpoles swimming, fighting against the current. I know that in a month those tadpoles will turn into the frogs I see hopping around, and hear croaking at night right when I’m falling asleep.

As I take in the scenery around me, almost uninterrupted by the outside world, I remember. I remember the friends who have been here, and how we cooled off in the water, and explored the banks, looking for rocks to skip. I remember when I ventured through the forest, climbing up a slick fallen tree, and discovered poison oak for the first time. I remember my first kiss, an almost imperceptible peck on the lips which happened in this very spot. I smile with joy as I think of the memories I’ve been able to share with those I treasure so deeply in my life, just as I feel the bittersweet memories tug at my heart as I remember the friends who got lost along the way. They’ll never see my special place again, but their memories will live there forever, unaging and unchanging, even as I do.

When the sun begins to sink beneath the horizon, the air becomes crisp, raising goosebumps on my skin. The wind whistles past my ear as if to say, “ it’s time to go home now.” I retrace my steps, each one taking me further and further away. The steep winding road taking me home, and away from my own personal sanctuary is far more treacherous than the serene journey

down. My legs begin to ache in protest as I climb higher and higher, away and into the final rays of light. As my breath pants out unevenly, I can't help but think my physical journey only reflects the now somber tune of my heart. As I make my way home I am forced to remember that no good things come easily in life. Plus, I probably have at least three new bug bites to remind me of my adventure.

**Yggdrasil**

*Lauren Allen*

A tree grows inside me

A big tree

Its roots tangle around me

Its branches become my hands and its roots my feet

An old tree

An anchor in the shadowy forest

A bridge between today and tomorrow

And a passage through time

When I am thirsty, I drink the sap from this tree

When I am tired, I lay my head on its side

Dangling my feet from its great height

Occasionally the tree will say

Look

With its leaves blowing the other way

A storm approaches blowing its wind carelessly

The tree croaks and yearns

Its branches shifting in the wind

But not breaking.

Leaves blowing

But not shaking

I say to the tree

Help me!



Keep me high and guarded  
Above the ground  
The tree doesn't answer  
Help me!  
Lift me up above the storm clouds!  
The tree grows with its branches towards the sky  
Lifting me up high above the storm clouds  
Like a trusted friend

**Among the Stars**  
*India Honey*

To walk among the stars..  
It's a dream that has captured us all.  
To be like a feather. To hear the crunch of another terrestrial planet's dirt beneath your feet.  
Dreams of jumping contests on the moon i'm sure has come and gone.  
To ride a horse-like animal of another planet has been the dream of every child i'm sure.  
To pet the dog star.  
To hunt with Orion.  
To ride with Draco through the stars past Virgo.  
To chat with Gemini.  
To drink from the Milky way....  
I do hope it isn't spoiled.  
Imagine Christmas on Pluto.  
Imagine summer swims on Mercury.  
Imagine Halloween on Mars.  
All fantastical dreams of a child...  
But oh how grand it would be if they were so.

## What were the skies like?

*India Honey*

What were the skies like when you were young?  
Was it full of dreams of flying,  
Or filled with the hope of freedom?  
Did the birds sing as they flew to their winter homes as they do now?  
Was it as green as the trees when they are full and healthy,  
Or was it grey with early factory smoke?  
Was it dotted with birds and planes,  
Or did the birds fly alone?  
Grandpa, tell me please;  
What were the skies like when you were young?

## A Chronicle of Childhood Games (and other such things)

*Keira Benoit*

When I was a child, I used to play games.

Not as in video games or board games—though I certainly played my fair share of those games, the ones that occupied most of my time were of a different type. They were the games of nature.

Deep in the woods, at the bottom of a forest stream, at the highest branch of an evergreen tree, underneath a mossy rock—these were the places of true fun and games, where my imagination could run wild. Together with my siblings, I roamed free throughout nature. Entire kingdoms were formed right in our backyard, with wars to be fought, enemies to be conquered. It was good versus evil, and good always won.

As I and my siblings grew older, things began to change. It felt as though one minute, we were playing our games in the woods as usual, and the next, everyone had left me behind, and I was alone. For a moment, I was bewildered, and then the next thing I knew, I was thrust into a new world.

This world was not the one I knew. This was a world where games no longer mattered. Suddenly, it seemed like school occupied almost all of my time. I hardly went outside anymore, instead spending the time behind my computer screen. Thoughts of grades and work and college and money filled my head. Slowly, anxiety consumed me, until I had nothing left.

Where, I wondered, did the old me go? The one who would play outside or curl up with a book, feel carefree and happy? Had I left her behind, or did she leave me?

And as I pondered these things, I watched as the world around me was consumed, too. Hatred and lies had divided nearly everyone. I had not noticed these things when I was younger. Was it because the world had gotten worse, or was it because I had not paid attention until now? I could not find an answer to all of the questions that plagued my mind.

So I watched from the sidelines as the world began to collapse. Some days I wished to be older, so I could help stop this, and some days I wished to be younger, so I could be innocently oblivious to it all once more. Instead, I was stuck. I knew what was happening, but it felt as though I could do nothing to stop it.

One day, I found myself pulling on shoes and stepping out the door. I had spent so long studying my textbooks, and now I suddenly felt my childhood urge to wander the woods. A breath of fresh air would do me some good, I thought, so now here I was, walking through a park and towards the edge of the forest.

I stood awkwardly for a moment, as if the outdoors was an old friend I hadn't seen in too long, and now I wasn't sure what to say. Then I took a deep breath, expecting for my nostrils to be greeted by the scent of flowers and moss and wet dirt. But this was not the case. Instead, I smelled smoke and motor oil and burning rubber.

I blinked and looked around. The forest was not the same one I used to know. The trees were missing many of their leaves, the grass was trampled underfoot, and I could see houses not too far away. When had this happened? When had such a beautiful place become a place of ruin?

I had grown up, and as I did so, I had forgotten about the world. I had learned more, yes, but perhaps, I had forgotten to care. Something changed, and it wasn't just the world. It was me.

When I was a child, I used to play games.

But I am a child no more.

## The Island

*Keira Benoit*

The sun rose over the horizon, spreading its golden light over everything within its reach—the ocean waves, the sparkling sand and stones, the scuttling crabs and cawing seagulls—but it did not touch Amilee. She wasn't sure if any light ever would again.

She sat alone, as she always had, on a large rock overlooking the ocean, as the day she had dreaded all summer finally dawned upon her.

Had it really only been a few months? It felt like years, but no, it was only in June that it had happened.

When Rosalynn had drowned, Amilee had felt like she was drowning too. Her older sister had been the magic of their family, in every way. Now that she was gone, the magic was gone too. Amilee had always felt like she was broken, but now she was shattered.

But today she knew she must learn to hide it again. She had always managed to act normal at school before, but now, she wasn't sure she could keep it up all day. And she could hardly bear to think of the entire school year that came after.

That was why Amilee had come to the beach this morning, before anyone was awake, before her younger sister could follow her. She needed time alone, as much as she loved Caliana. So she had walked through the woods, across the stones and sand of the beach, and came to this rock, a place she often watched the ocean from.

“Ami?”

Amilee jumped at the quiet voice behind her. She spun around and looked down from her perch. Below was her sister, peering up with large eyes that had always reminded Amilee of a sparking night sky. But now, Amilee realized, they looked cloudy and distant.

“Cali,” Amilee said, reaching out her hand to help her sister onto the rock, “what are you doing out here?”

Caliana took Amilee's hand and climbed onto the rock next to her. “Mom wanted me to come find you. She says you need to get ready for school.”

Amilee put her arm around her sister in a quick hug. “I just wanted to think a little before school.”

Caliana didn't say anything right away. She stared out at the rolling ocean for several minutes before she turned to Amilee. “Can you see it?”

Amilee blinked. “See what?” she asked, though she knew what her sister meant. She just didn’t want to think about it.

“The island.”

Caliana’s voice was as soft as it always was, but the words hit Amilee like an arrow piercing her heart. “You know I can’t.” The words came out in a whisper.

Caliana shrugged. “I thought maybe you could now. Rosie always said you would someday.”

Amilee didn’t reply, instead watching foamy white crests form, then break upon the sand, again and again, never failing. For the first time this morning, she let her eyes drift beyond the shoreline, farther out, at the place an island should have been.

That was the magic. An island only children could see, a quick canoe ride from the shore. A place for all the neighbor kids to gather and play make-believe. A magical place, and a place that created magic.

A place that Amilee could not see.

She pushed herself up from her sitting position and hopped off the rock. “We’d better get back to the house before Mom and Dad wonder where we are.”

Ever since Rosalynn had gotten caught in a rip tide and drowned, Amilee’s parents had been more cautious letting her and Caliana come to the beach, even if they didn’t go in the water. Sometimes, Amilee didn’t mind. The ocean held so many memories of Rosalynn, not all of them good.

“We’ll just go out to the island for a little bit,” Rosalynn had always said. “Then we’ll come back and spend just as much time on the beach with you.”

She had always kept her promise, but the times when Amilee sat on the rock, watching Rosalynn, Caliana, and the neighbor children paddle out to what seemed like nothing in their canoes and kayaks always made her feel lonely and empty, though she tried not to show it.

Amilee held out her hand and Caliana took it, using it as support as she slid off the rock. The sisters started to walk towards the woods, but after only taking a few steps, Amilee stopped and turned to look at Caliana. “Do you remember how Rosie used to run down the beach with us?”

A hint of a smile brightened Caliana’s face. “I remember. She called it flying.”

Amilee took Caliana’s hand. “Want to do it again?”

Caliana nodded, so Amilee began to run, and Caliana with her. Sand flew at their ankles, and a salty, cold sea breeze blew Amilee’s hair into her face, but she didn’t care, because beside her,

Caliana was laughing. She held one arm out like a wing, but kept the other clasped in Amilee’s hand.

Amilee also held out her other arm. It really did feel like flying. The ocean, sand, rocks, trees, everything blew past them as they ran. They were together, just the two of them.

When they were both panting for breath, they stopped and started back towards the woods. As they walked, Amilee glanced at Caliana. Her little sister, who had hardly smiled in the past months, looked happy. She was still smiling, and the clouds in her eyes had cleared.

Amilee felt lighter than she had before. She had done something—she had helped her sister. Maybe she wasn’t as broken as she had always believed. Maybe she’d never really been broken. Just different.

As she and Caliana entered the woods at the edge of the beach, she turned back to glance once more at the ocean. She blinked once, then twice, to be sure she wasn’t imagining things.

Maybe, she thought, to be able to accept magic, she just had to accept herself.

Because behind her, she could see the island.



# Sunset

By Malik Shehryar Awan

The picture shows two people sitting by the lake during sunset. The sky is filled with bright orange and pink colors, reflecting on the water. It's a beautiful scene of nature and friendship.



# Mirrored Shadows

By Kevin Clark





# Stony Beach

By Kevin Clark



# Flying Through Time

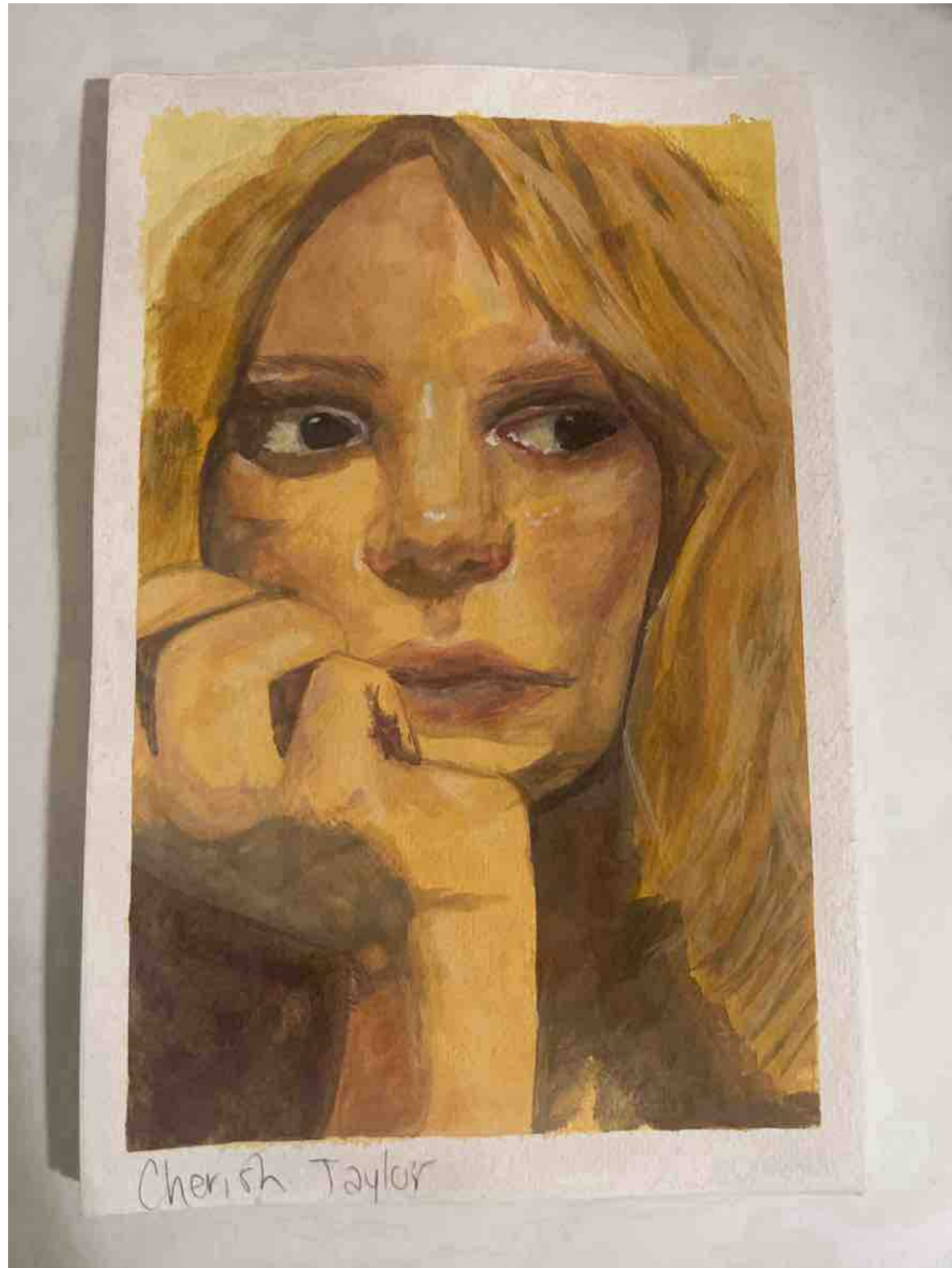
By Amanda Rosenblum Johnson





## “Ripped pages and Broken Items”

By Cherish Taylor



## Form infused, Dissolving

By Harlough Dingman

Artist Statement: I spent hot June days creating this over the course of the month. I pushed and pulled, and when I felt frustrated, I walked away, mostly. This piece is an exercise in trusting the process, a lesson most of us learn over and over, but this time it was fun.



**GROW UP!**  
*Layla Boudreau*

take off your costume,  
your stage smile.

this is real life,  
not a high school drama.

there's no need for  
your clan of drooling  
followers.

you aren't the queen bee.  
you're not even popular.

crowds don't part for you,  
people don't stare when you  
walk by.

get over yourself  
you are one in millions  
of girls just like you.

**"Wolf in dog's clothing"**  
*Rylan Decker*

I see this face in the mirror, that people tell me is mine

Unnaturally round and smooth with skin that feels like sinful velvet

Teeth too short to bite, claws too round to kill

Eyes that see more than they should.

I don't know why they lie to me,

To be confined to this body that isn't mine feels worse than death.

To sculpt myself from nothing, layering and layering,

The ultimate freedom.

The wolf inside hungers and cries

Begging for a breath in a sea of dogs

Up, down, left, right

Glares and stares as far as light allows.

Suffering, suffocating! Just one break!

Drowning, pulled back into their storm.

Rabid fangs bite, dulled teeth scream

Blood of wolves spill, spit of dogs flies.

The anger in their hearts for wolves, hurts.

Will it ever go away?

They might never understand.



Are they scared?

They might be, but I sure am.

I am a wolf.

I am no dog.

The dogs can say otherwise.

I am a wolf.

**A Dance in The Moonlight**

*Isabella Silvano*

The first time I met Hope was a long, dreary January day. The ground was covered in a sparkling white blanket, the wind was howling, and the day was eager. The first thing I noticed about Hope was her long red hair. Her hair was as red as a rose, and her skin was fair, with blushing cheeks and minimal freckles around her nose. She was tiny, only 4’11 in height. During our first conversation, I noticed she was shy yet kind and compassionate. She was an amazing listener, holding onto every word from my mouth. I instantly knew that we would become good friends.

We both decided to travel to Catskill for a highly anticipated masquerade ball. The only issue was finding a ride there. We tried to get a ride from our parents, but, they were both busy. At that point, I started to doubt that we would ever get there in time, but Hope reassured me that we would make it. She told me that if I wanted something, and persisted in achieving it, then I could do anything I dreamed of. We then called some friends and asked if they could bring us, no luck. We were running out of options when Hope had an idea to call a cab service. We finally got a ride, and this night looked like it was going to be amazing. I soluted her persistence and optimism, as it made me feel safe and secure having someone so positive by my side. On the ride to the social event, we continued to connect and relate to one another about our personal lives. We specifically connected on how bullying has affected us, we both shared similar qualities that allowed us to be the targets of bullying. Having someone who shared a similar experience to me made me feel seen and heard.

When we finally arrived at our masquerade ball, we already felt like best friends, after just meeting. The ball was held in a beautiful white chapel church, with roses and baby breath flowers guarding the entrance. The flowers smelled heavenly, like a warm summer evening, and the greenery was breathtaking. Inside the church was decorated in white linens and a dazzling chandelier in the center. There was a massive buffet, and the food smelled of a comforting hug, with a hint of garlic. Throughout the night, Hope and I mingled and danced our hearts right out. While the party was wrapping up, Hope and I spotted a chocolate fountain. We ran to grab our skewers and some apples to dip into the fondue. The fondue was warm and sticky and smelled of a chocolate dream. We dipped our apples in fondue, until SPLAT, I dropped my apple filled with fondue right over my gorgeous hand-tailored gown. I was shocked, my mother was gonna kill me, she stayed up all night hand-sewing my gown. Hope grabbed her clutch, and lying inside was a stain remover stick. I held out my hand for her to give it to me, but she insisted on taking care of my mess. She carefully wiped the chocolate off the seams, careful to leave the delicate fabric still intact. We giggled after the ridiculousness and I thanked her for helping me out so quickly and effortlessly.

After a long night of fun, it was time to go home. The problem was that we didn’t have a ride home. It was the wee hours of the night, nobody was up, and no cab services were available, we were screwed. Although we had no way home, we were in a town we were unfamiliar with,

and it was freezing cold, somehow everything still felt fine as long as Hope was there. She was a beacon of positivity and light, always reminding me, that no matter what, as long as we had each other, everything was okay. We walked to the nearest park, sat down, looked at each other, and started laughing profusely. It was funny to us that we were stranded in an unfamiliar town, with just each other and the clothes on our backs. It really wasn't funny, actually quite dangerous, but sharing this unique experience with her brought us closer than ever. She remained positive and hopeful, reminding me that we would get home, no matter what.

Finally, the morning hours strolled on in and daylight was upon us. Our phones were dead, so we only had one choice to get home. We were strolling on the main street when we came across a helpful old man. He had a white beard and a chubby belly, somewhat resembling Santa Claus, and his name was Jerry. He smelled of cigarette smoke and cheap cologne. Jerry was concerned that we stayed out all night in the cold and insisted on taking us back home. He was extremely kind, as he went far out of his way to make sure we made it home safely. The ride home was relaxing, we finally were in a safe place and we knew where we were going.

Once we made it home, we sighed a deep breath of relief. We made it home by ourselves, we felt proud and adventurous. Hope's relentless positivity and optimism, despite the circumstances, helped us to have the best night of our lives, and we found a best friend in each other. We lay together in bed, debriefing this crazy night we shared, laughing at all the irreplaceable moments of the evening. After this night I knew that this girl was special. She was beautiful, hopeful, and always held her head high. I knew that I had found my true best friend in this world.

Pride, i guess.  
Amanda Colleen Marcil

Hate me.

It's fine.

I can take it.

I hated myself for 25 years.

Now with self love , my love

is up for debate again.

I am always bathed in a pool of anger,

Whilst devilish hyenas with microphones wish I were dead.

I could speak up with my own platform.

Nobody would listen.

If white maned lions are defending me,

Then I'll defend other

prey.

Maybe then, the hyenas will tame

and

listen.



**The Call Home**  
*Molly Graiff*

I reached out my hand to your unlit wick

Arm bridged to your candle

But instead of warmth

I felt a sharp prick

Your presence was felt

A roar of a flame

But why didn't you answer

When they read out your name?

Why was your once boisterous volume

Tuned down to a hush

Your silence is haunting

It makes my heart gush

Why is it that I hoped

You'd join us again

But this prayer ended

With a simple amen

And you're not here with us

You're here in spirit

But I want you with me

I want to feel it

So when your name was read aloud for all to hear

Why didn't you speak?

Why didn't you yell, "I'm here!"

When the final embrace

Was spoken by prayer

Why did you leave us

With an empty chair?

**A Walk in The Rainbow Woods (Or How I Learned to Relax and Love  
Our Leafy Overlords)**

*Meaghan Morrison*

Once upon a time, in an unfamiliar land, I went for a stroll in the woods. The path I walked on was covered with whorls and streaks of color, as if an army of children had dumped all their fingerpaints on the ground and then slid around in the mess like ice skaters on a frozen pond. The leaves on the trees lining the path were just as colorful, though their shapes were strange. The effect was like someone had shredded an enormous watercolor painting and haphazardly glued pieces of it to the tree branches.

As I picked my way along the technicolor trail, I noticed that the leaves did not appear to have stems. Upon closer inspection, it became clear that the leaves actually were glued to the trees. Furthermore, the trunks appeared to be made of papier-mâché! The paranoid part of my brain whispered that perhaps these woods were an elaborate trap, set up by some nefarious criminal arts collective.

Suddenly, the trunks and branches of the pseudo trees started to shift and split! As matted paper leaves rained down around me, it seemed that my worst fears were about to be realized. The papier-mâché bodies of the trees then burst apart, revealing the writhing filamentous bodies of alien beings!

Shaking off the remnants of their disguise, they moved quickly to surround me. Afraid, but unwilling to be cowed, I stood my ground. A group of them then approached me. However, they did not attack. Instead, some of them handed me round sheets of paper which upon closer examination turned out to be surveys about my experience and fliers for future events. Several of them then began to solicit donations for various projects. And I realized then that while my life was in no danger, I was nonetheless well and truly trapped.

**The Bloom of Loss: Finding Gifts in Leaving**  
*Sophie Zhang*

The Choice of Leaving

At fourteen, the words first found me,

Like wind catching on distant sails —

Go, they whispered, and I knew,

knew I'd be saying goodbye

to all I held at home.

I left, and in that leaving, loss came close,

like shadows lengthening at dusk.

Friends I'd known since childhood,

family's laughter around the table,

each comfort I'd grown up within,

receded like fading songs.

Time proved me right:

loss became a companion —

expected yet always sudden,

unseen yet deeply felt.

It arrived in quiet moments,

in voices across an ocean,

and the ache of distance

that miles can't close.

But as loss wove through my days,

other gifts emerged like spring from snow:

A new language filling my mouth like a song,

holidays wrapped in unfamiliar joy,

knowledge like fresh roots deepening

in soil I had never known.

These new things are not replacements,

they don't erase the hollow left behind.

But with each step, I have learned

to welcome what comes

and hold what's gone with gentler hands.

In leaving, I lost -- yes, more than I imagined --

yet life finds its way to offer balance,

to lay gifts at my feet in exchange.

And now, I do not fear the emptiness,

for I know that in time,

even loss finds ways to bloom.

## Paying Stacy's Bills

*Juliana Utter*

Dear Stacy,

I know you do not know me, but I may be your primary customer and the sole contributor to your company. If you must know, I eat five bags of your cinnamon pita chips in a week like it's my religion. I have always had a sweet tooth. From the moment I learned what sweet was, it was all I could eat. My middle school lunchbox was filled with gushers, strawberries, Nutella, and Oreos. I knew what I liked, and I never shied away from it. However, my entire life, I have been searching for that perfect food that instantaneously fired my taste buds in a way I'd never experienced before. For me, Stacy's Cinnamon Sugar Pita Chips are just that.

At about 14, I remember walking the aisles of our local Hannaford with my dad. Our weekly Sunday shopping trip was always my favorite because I could pick out the sweet treats calling to me. As we secured the deli meat, something caught my eye: a large bag of cinnamon pita chips staring back at me. I had never seen them before but knew I needed to try them. The perfect image of the chip coerced me into buying. It showed a golden-brown pita chip coated in a shimmery layer of cinnamon sugar.

I went home and tore the bag open. A struggle to tear the seal occurs each time without fail, followed by the loud crinkle of the bag ripping. I have never heard a louder bag of chips in my life. The chip rang through my ears with each bite, echoing throughout my room. The smell of straight sugar and cinnamon encapsulated me. I felt the saliva coat my teeth. The chip tastes like a beach, a salty, sugary, delectable treat. With each bite, I could feel my teeth decay or form a cavity, and I knew that meant it was perfect for me. With that first bite, I felt just as Nguyen said, "But it tasted like a memory." While I had never had a cinnamon pita chip before, I felt my taste buds dancing and creating new memories to come.

Following the first bag, I never returned to another snack, that'd be a betrayal. One of the 'big bags' of pita chips would last me half a week. I plowed through them like my job was to eat. I brought them anywhere, no matter the decibel it would reach, as I crunched them between my teeth during third-period History. It was soon that the big bags were discontinued, so I went a while without a cinnamon pita chip, and let me tell you, I don't know how I functioned. It felt like I'd gone years without a pita chip when suddenly, on one Sunday shopping trip, I saw an awfully small bag and flipped. While they were not the 'big bag' I had hoped for, a few small bag purchases would not kill me.

Wrong, I made my dad buy five of them each week consecutively for the past three years. I can't imagine the total my father has spent on these chips. Stacy, I believe I solely pay your bills with my excessive consumption. Everyone knows me for my pita chips. Do you even know me if you have not witnessed me in the act of shoveling a bag of pita chips in my mouth? I know my dad has gotten me pita chips for the week just by the sheer sound of the bag being put in the cabinet.

Sometimes, he would try to surprise me by spontaneously buying them. Hearing the bag a mile down the road is never a surprise. These chips will never fail to bring out that twinkle in my eye. Stacy, I can taste the love and time put into each chip with each bite, “We think time is an essential ingredient, which is why we devote up to 14 hours to bake each batch of Stacy’s® Pita Chips. That’s just how long it takes to reach perfection” (About Us). 14 hours of precious and devoted time just for me to devour an entire bag in 14 minutes. Thank you, Stacy, for your determination to help us sweet-toothed people find our lifelong snack.

Love always,  
Juliana Utter.

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America,  
*Siri Sorensen*

America,  
Oh, say can you see  
Your still sparkling rivers,  
Glistening under the sun’s great beams  
Glittering like shards of glass along smooth tile  
  
Birds eye view from a plane window  
Can reveal your vast wonderous landscapes  
Beautifully sculpted by something  
more powerful than a human hand  
  
Captivating, you are,  
In every single way.  
A land for the brave who wish to be free  
And for those in want of your American dream.  
  
Oh America...  
Can you see?  
The rivers that set afire in chemical flame  
Or the people consumed by the media  
Ignoring everything said unless having said their name.

Us desensitized people have to choose to care  
For if they put bread on our plates  
And entertainment in our faces  
We become preoccupied, mindless just as they'd like.  
We have seen this before,  
Remember? We were once there.  
And then we left...  
To a land that would be different  
To a place that wasn't corrupted  
At least not quite yet  
And I have learned that escaping man's greed  
Big brother's overarching bloodied, red-stained hands  
Cannot be done simply by migration or by flee

The American people, brave? Maybe...  
Yet maybe not quite,  
Perhaps just looking for easy ways to cheat  
Death or despair or discomfort or discontent  
At whatever price, right down to the exact cent.

Freedom lies with few  
With the rich and with those  
determined and daring, to those who  
question publicized "truth"

And who follow cues  
beyond commercialized red herrings.

America.  
Your beauty  
In scattered mess and utter shambles  
Still glittering.  
We've made a mess  
out of natural beauty,  
But maybe it truly does get worse  
Before it can get better.

You are still beautiful to me,  
America.



**Upon Reflection: After “To a Stranger” by Jason Rosamilia**  
*Siri Sorensen*

I didn't like it when  
You would judge  
Or when you'd assume  
I was this Person  
This Version of Myself  
That lived within Your head.

I was beautiful to You,  
to two foreign eyes  
viewed in a perfect light

A stranger's eyes  
Noticed the words written,  
ignoring the Importance of  
the spaces in between.

Your Ignorant Ears  
heard swear words,  
oblivious to escaping  
silent sighs  
from my weakened lungs.  
Invisible Weight

Building, stacking, Crushing  
until I had no air left.

...

Sometimes, I wish  
That I could go back too.  
Back to that corner  
to the beginning, to the time  
where I only knew our love and You.

I would go back  
just to tell myself  
that You lived inside of My head.  
in our conversation of love  
a one-way street  
not any different now than it was then

...I guess I really was only talking with a stranger.  
And so were you.

## Peruvian Perspective

*Jeremy Knox*

Stunningly beautiful, strong, mysterious like Machu Picchu

Affectionate, loving, open yet impossible to see through

The roots are deep in Peru majestic indigenous

An energy that screams like a war cry still the rhythm is

Inquisitive, wisdom radiates from her aura electric

So, I sit to listen closely to a Peruvian perspective

North of Lima the district of Paramonga

A family of ranchers worked from autumn to summer

Memories so sweet as the sugar they harvested

The wind from the Fortaleza River tales were lost in it

Her homeland is sacred the landscape a blessing

So, I sit to listen closely to a Peruvian perspective

Land built strong a staggered pyramid on a hill

As I write this, I feel the emotion of time standing still

She made the trek to the United States in 2017

Most of her family already settled here carving out the dream

Happiness for new beginnings mixed with sadness the essence

So, I sit to listen closely to a Peruvian perspective

She explained the stark difference in opportunities & money

The significance of Independence day is the same in both countries

The joy in the land of milk & honey, the aching of missing home

Blended, meshed, intertwined together inside this poem

Funds are essential, Familia is more important what a lesson

So, I sit to listen closely to a Peruvian perspective

## A CONCRETE TABLE

*Jeremy Knox*

Help me! I scream inside my twisted mind

A graffitied concrete table in a southern California park

Homeless, strung out, with blisters on my poor feet

Addicted to the crystal that dances in my pipe

I watch the demon faces form inside the poison smoke

I can hardly walk which puts me in terrible danger

Killers stalk the night with sick intentions

Hysteria is thick in the air, whispering madness

I get up limping, a car window reflects my ungroomed face

Invaded by my own stench, the putrid smell of despair

Not even 30 years old & all out of hustle

Sitting in front of the 711 begging for change

Degraded. Cursed at. Laughed at. Psychosis sets in

I look at the garbage can & see a piece of food

Snatch! Devouring the stale half eaten pizza

Tears form like armies ready for battle with the enemy

Palm trees are speaking gibberish above the lamp post

Wolves are circling around me snarling deliriously

Cars are blaring, I flare my arms walking the yellow line

The devil wants my soul as much as I want sleep

Back to the graffitied concrete table in a southern California park

I lay on my back weeping until I finally slumber

I awaken to a living nightmare barely holding on

I reach for the pipe praying there is crystal left

Out of nowhere I hear my name echo in the distance

An angelic voice sweet as the memories before drugs

I look closely. It is the unmistakable face of my mother

Her green eyes the hold pain as if I was already dead

Oh, how excruciating watching her son wither away

She approaches me as I feel the shame over power me

Help awaits me. A rehab is ready to take me now

Swirling thoughts invade my addict head violently

Relief & defeat wash over me like a million waves

Trauma from the streets pour from my eyes uncontrollably

I devour tacos in my mother's car like a starving animal

Crazed, on my way to a facility to clean my dirty soul

Valuable lessons learned; gratitude, perseverance formed

Appreciation for the “small” things as big as the Nephilim

Freedom after being caged in the prison of addiction

The memories of my drug use remain like stubborn tenants

Distant yet so close they haunt me many moons later

Each word written forged in the fire of turmoil

The strength I possess internally is raw & unbreakable

Today I am clean with a life I never thought I deserved  
Still there are days the flashbacks crash through violently  
I am Healing, growing, evolving, learning day by day  
Wisdom, from a graffitied concrete table in a southern California park

## UNCHARTED WATERS

*Jeremy Knox*

From the safe way, smooth sailing, to uncharted waters  
Clouds are screaming, from the distance I hear destiny calling  
Swarms of Vikings hunting to pillage my peace  
No paddles or life preserver, call on my inner beast  
I will not cease, on a cruise to the unknown with direction  
Tiny holes poked in the bottom of my boat no intersection  
The intensity of the ocean attempts to swallow me whole  
Use my arms to navigate, stay vigilant, follow my goals  
With all my might & soul, I paddle furiously with passion  
Realized that I was wasting energy, breathe, relax it  
Become part of the vessel, embrace the water, the movement  
In tune with ancient hymns so soothing no chance of losing  
Only learning, I communicate with dolphins telepathically  
My spirit animal revealed by a native in my past, magically

Summon the power of courage! Uncharted waters explored  
Summon the power of courage! Hardship must be endured

Onward on my journey some days the waves enter my boat  
I empty the murky water completely soaked still I coast  
Coast to coast, on a mission to conquer my fears viciously  
Above the treasure chests, ghosts of pirates cry out miserably  
Sea monsters out to drown me, I am protected by a force



Light radiates from my essence, connected to the source  
Sharks maneuver like snakes plotting against me with vigor  
What does not kill me teaches me that God's plan is bigger  
The sky violently snaps, lightning crash, waves they smash  
Guided by righteous energy therefore Satan's attacks  
Are no match, the chaos passes, the calm of peace arrives  
Overcome, engage, acceptance, persevere, I shall survive  
The day is still uncertain, the shore so far in the distance  
That's the beauty of the process, a lifelong challenge never finished

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## NOTES

