



IMPRESSIONS

2020





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# **IMPRESSIONS**

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## ABOUT *IMPRESSIONS*

In print since 1974, *Impressions* is an annual publication created by and for the students of Maryville College and members of the surrounding eastern Tennessee community. *Impressions* aims to present the best of art, poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and other creative works submitted by the Maryville College community and the Appalachian region. Online editions of *Impressions* can be viewed at [impressionsmc.org](http://impressionsmc.org).



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Brinley Knowles - *Editor In Chief*

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and

Christina Seymour - *Faculty Advisor*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Brinley Knowles, Editor-in-Chief

Dear Reader,

This year, we attempted to compile the best student and community work in art, poetry, and prose. We also hosted our first-ever contest, The Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest. Please take the time to read the winners' pieces!

As you read, make sure you're aware that there is adult content.

Please enjoy the 2019-2020 *Impressions* Literary and Art Magazine!

## COVER ARTIST'S NOTE

Chloe Melton, Cover Artist

The "Mother Nature" painting was inspired by my following thoughts about nature.

My mother, Nature, provides for me a safe and secure home. She allows me to learn gracefully, grow tall, and fall softly. She grants me the ability to grow with my friends, swim in pools of still water, and hike in the rolling hills of the countryside. Nature is where I find myself. Nature is where I reside. Nature is where I am home.



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Impressions  
of Appalachia  
Creative Arts  
Contest

Prose Winner  
Marcus Burchfield  
*Looking for the Mountains*  
After Verlyn Klinkenborg's *January*

No matter where I go, I always go looking for the mountains. Even if there is none. Even if it's 2 a.m. and the world is black and the only sure piece of anything is the sliver of highway lit up by my headlights, I find myself looking up. Like mountains are just going to leap up out of the flatness of the horizon. Sometimes, a cloud bank will catch the glow of some far off town and its soft rounded edges will mimic familiar peaks and ridges and I'll tell myself, I'll say, "I'm home." Even though, after five years of book learning and building up friendships and tearing down friendships and chasing dreams like lightning bugs as a little boy just back of my grandmother's tiny house, I ain't really sure where home is, or where it's going to be. All I know is I'm looking for mountains.

It ain't like I hate other places. I've sunk my white, Tennessean toes into the sands of a Florida beach many of a time. I've sat, late at night, with the rising tide lapping away the shore, watching tiny fishing boats, pinholes of light bobbing out in the distance, stars just trying to fight their way back up into heaven from the blended scene of blacks, and greys, and deep blues. And I liked it well enough. I travelled west once, out to Kansas City, the January before my father died. I looked out the window of my step-daddy's SUV as we drove in silence at the drifts of brown snow pushed off the highway, drifts as big as I've ever seen. My cheeks got burnt from the wind as it whipped across the plains with no particular direction, with no particular origin, whipping around tobacco barns and soybean farms and through the valley between colossal skyscrapers, till it made its way to me. There was that time, the summer after high school, when I walked the streets of our nation's



capital, when I stood in Emancipation Hall among throngs of tourists of every size, shape and color snapping pictures of any old thing. Then in Arlington, I walked among row upon row of white stones carved into Christian crosses and Jewish stars and Muslim crescent moons and watched as the guard changed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Even still, it has always been the old voices of the mountains, the low rumblings you hear when you lay your ear to an outcropping of sandstone, that has spoke to me. It's a strange thing to hear, the mountains calling you home, but it's a voice you'd remember if you ever heard it.

And yet, It's the voice that lives somewhere deep inside of me, in some dark hole where the very stalagmites of my existence hang from limestone ceilings, my soul. It's a voice that courses through me, through tiny veins of black coal until it spills out in splotched ink, barely legible scribbles on the perfectly white page. It's the voice that always has me looking up. It's the voice in the distance tonight, hushed only slightly by this early April rain. I can hear its echo off the puddle that is forming on my back patio, beneath the popular tree. I'll stand in it tomorrow, when the clouds clear and the wind stops its blowing, and I'll imagine that I am growing roots and that my arms are branches. I'll look over the tops of the houses on the far side of Yellow Creek and I'll find the mountains, staring back at me. I'll imagine that they are watching as bark grows up around me and my fingers turn into leaves. And I'll hear their voice again, calling out to me.

But imaginations can grow wild, like the blackberry on the south side of Tackett Creek where the land has been stripped of its dignity and of its coal. They can grow wild like the laurels and the honeysuckles. But I cannot grow wild. My wife will be hollering about how another pen I left in the pocket of my jeans that exploded in the wash and my baby will be laughing at her pinky bunny

or one of her thousand books. I'll have to sweep the floor or do the dishes. But all the while, there will be that persistent voice at my door, rattling my windows in their pane, and at the end of the day, as I sit on the porch with my cup of hot coffee and a cigarette, I'll be looking for the mountains.

Last July, I found myself sitting in the front room of my Nana's house, on the red sofa covered over by cat hair. She sat across from me munching on a sandwich from the Arby's and drinking her Mountain Dew, and telling one of her many tales. She was always a storyteller, my nana. She would talk for hours about her time living in the coal camps of Newland and Dean. She'd tell tale of her daddy, Fowler, when he was constable or of a six foot rattlesnake her and her brothers found in some blackberry patch mid-May, but time is never friendly to anyone. There was a western playing on the television in the background, and she was on about the time when Virgil burnt down the church by accident when they was in revival, when she stopped, and she turned to me and said, "Marc, I don't really remember if that happened." And we both just sat there in silence, because we never imagined the day. And she looked at me, from behind those rose-rimmed, thick lensed glasses, and I saw it. We were both just looking for the mountains.

*Melton*

Art Winner  
Chloe Melton  
*Mother Nature*



Poetry Winner  
John C. Mannone  
*Black*

Shadows in the predawn // Pine tar walls of the Company  
Store / The shade of their souls // Coal-black coffee /  
Your porcelain cup // Murky streams under a new moon  
/ The full moon in Braille // Crow's wings in starlight //  
Obsidian, onyx, ebony and hematite / gold without light //  
Acetylene lamps starved of oxygen // Miner's blood caked  
mud-hard dry // Canary's eyes after carbon monoxide  
poisoning // Papa's lungs in the x-rays // The sound of your  
voice falling into a deep shaft swallowed by a black hole in  
the ground // Death mixed with dirt, ash and dust // The  
color of emptiness

Part I

---

Prose



William Grant  
*Uninvited Guests*

You softly frowned, silently strolling down the desolately dim path. There was nobody around. The night wind howled loudly in your ears, solely punctured by the the sound of your sneakers stamping on the path. Tall, metal lamps positioned every few feet dimly illuminated the bleak night. You depressedly looked into deserted building after deserted building, searching with vain hope that you could find anyone or anything. You furrowed your brow as you racked your brain, trying to think of anything you could recall. Nothing, apart from the fact you woke up like that came to mind. You were abandoned here, unsure of why.

Hesitating in front of one of the buildings, you curiously observed it. In a fading and yellowing script above the awning, read the word “Jewelry.” When your gaze finally settled on the door, you gasped in shock. It was left ajar. That meant someone had to be inside, right? People didn’t just leave jewelry stores unlocked, right? Right?

You quickly glanced across both sides of the cobblestone street, ensuring there were no cars coming, lest your mom learn of said actions. You shuddered; she wouldn’t ever let you hear the end of it. After ensuring there was no oncoming traffic, you quickly scuttled into the dingy alleyway separating the two buildings. Thrusting your back against the cold, brick wall of the store, you sighed, staring slightly to the side.

You were having second thoughts about entering the jewelry store. Was it really breaking-and-entering and trespassing if there was plausible believability that you were the last person alive? Were you really the last person

alive? Were you really the last person alive? It felt like when you were younger and you pretended to be someone, somewhere you weren't. Except, this time it was real. Somehow, in the back of your mind, you knew this was reality.

Your heart was racing and your palms were sweaty. The internal debate was no longer if this was reality or not—it was a debate about how much trouble you'd be in if you were caught doing this. Did the fact nobody was around *really* justify you breaking in?

Obscured by the darkness of the alleyway, you stole glances at the road once again. Your vain hope that somebody was there was shot down as quickly as it was raised. There was nobody there.

You silently shuffled to the front of the store and stole glances inside through the narrow crack of the door; shoving the door open, you looked inside it, shifting your attention towards any alarms that could be going off. There were none. A shame that truly was—that there was no security to the store. If you really wanted to, you could've robbed it blind, then and there, yet, your morals got the best of you ultimately.

You were truly alone within the store. There was nobody else there. As you took a tentative step onto the creaking old wood, seemingly shrieking in displeasure, you looked around once again. With a deep, gravelly voice, you softly muttered "I'm in," as a faint grin spread across your face.

\* \* \*

You quickly glanced around the claustrophobic room as your heart-rate skyrocketed. You had just forgotten about the fear surmounting before, and now, it finally returned with a vengeance. It was that breathtaking feeling of exhilaration that rushed through you. You had never done this before, (you hoped).

The same debate from earlier resurfaced. Were you breaking and entering? Was it really breaking and entering if the door was unlocked and left ajar though? And you had plausible deniability you were the only person left alive.

Your face then went blank. “*If I’m the only person left alive, who’s gonna charge me for breaking and entering?*” you silently think to yourself. You turn your head to the left slightly, pondering the implications of that. They didn’t make sense, but that got you thinking: How would that make sense to begin with?

You shook my head, muttering curses beneath your breath. It was in your nature to think about dumb things like that, and here you were, technically breaking into a jewelry store and pondering the ramifications of being charged for a crime when you were the only person left alive! You then shifted your gaze to the small, shining glass cases lining the inside of the store.

The jewels inside—various shades of reds, greens, blues and whites—drew your attention more than the inane debate could. “*This was an actual store... What happened to the people here though?*” you silently pondered.

You began striding across the rickety wooden floor. It creaked loudly beneath your weight, eliciting pained winces with every step you took. You felt like you could just fall through the floor at any given moment. You could feel your heart in your throat, your pulse quickening with every step. Why were you so nervous now? Sure, you were just casually breaking into a jewelry store, but you were the only person left alive, does that really matter now?

You shook your head again, steeling your nerves as you stole deeper into the building. You kept looking over the display cases. The gems were so shiny. You wanted to steal them. It’s not like anyone would really miss them

considering you were the only person left alive. But your morals got the better of you.

As you passed by the stairs leading down into the basement and you quickly glanced into it. It looked like a simple storage room, nothing more, but that caught your eye. Why did a jewelry store need a storage room in the first place? Sure, the small door, faintly illuminated by the pale light... wait... the small door in the storage room?

You turned your head to stare at it. There very clearly was a door down there. Suddenly, new questions rushed through your mind, pushing the old ones down deep into the recesses. Why would there be a door down there? Who could've made it? Why does it exist?

You tilted your head slightly, squinting to see it in the dim light. Here you were, casually breaking into a place, and there was a mysterious door here in a basement. That was a first. To both things.

You took a few steps closer to the lip of the basement, and then you heard it: The unmistakable sound of a doorknob rattling. Your heart was pounding faster than ever. You were sure you had seen the doorknob turn.

\* \* \*

Your heart was pounding faster than ever. You were sure you had seen the doorknob turn. It had to. There was no way that was something else, like the wind, right? You knew for a fact that nobody else was there, and you certainly would've heard them if they were. Against all better judgment you suddenly barked "Who's there?" into the derelict basement.

Moments after, you knew that you shouldn't have, but it was like the urge to steal all the gems, sudden, without warning, followed by a nagging voice telling you not to. You started wondering who it could've been. It couldn't have been a monster. Monsters don't exist. You knew that, right?

You then decided to descend into the dingy basement. You weren't sure what there was to it, but something called out to you. It wanted you want to push deeper and deeper into it and to investigate the strange room.

Step after step, you slowly began treading down the creaking, wooden stairs. Each step you took loudly groaned beneath your weight. If there was something in the basement, which there certainly was, they knew you were coming at this point. They'd have to be deaf not to hear you.

You then suddenly froze on the third-to-bottom step, stricken with fear. You could feel your face go flush with shock, your mouth hung agape. You thought you saw something move. There was no doubt about it. You couldn't tell what it was, but something certainly moved. Fear and panic raced through your entire body.

You could feel the adrenaline pumping through your system, urging you to fight with your tiny arms, or run using your tiny legs. You couldn't however. You couldn't bring yourself to move using either your tiny arms or legs. You could only stare in horror, watching whatever it was silently move about the basement floor.

Your breath shortened; you could feel yourself tensing up. It was hard to breath now almost like someone had suddenly taken a vacuum and sucked out all the air of the entire room. You could only silently tremble in fear.

That's when the figure stopped. You swear you could see them turn to face you. Even in the pitch-black darkness, you swear you saw whatever it was in there turn and stare at you as a wry grin slowly spread across their pale face. You were hyperventilating as you stared at Death, (or at least, that's what you thought it was), and you could feel your entire body forcibly trembling in its panic-induced state.



You could see it walking towards the door. You wanted to scream; to tell them not to, but nothing came out. Only the suffocatingly dead silence. It laid a bony hand on the door as it turned the doorknob while keeping its focus on you. It slowly opened the door, squeaked loudly, seemingly against the strange figure as well.

The figure let its hand go as the door slowly swung open, gaining speed with each second that passed. Moments later, it fully swung open, and all you could do was scream...

\* \* \*

The door swung open, loudly protesting the strange figure opening it, and when it finally finished, you could only scream, a blood-curdling scream. It was a scream that quite literally could wake the dead from their eternal slumber. You started to try to escape, feeling a sharp pain in your chest. The figure step closer only fueling your desire to escape. Before you could reach the top of the stairs, you froze dead in your tracks. The figure was now at the bottom, slowly getting closer to you.

You don't know why you stopped, admitting to yourself it was a dumb idea. You turned around, ready to book it out of there but you didn't get the chance as the bony hand took hold of your shin. You shrieked once again, kicking your leg behind you, hoping that you'd hit Death in the face. You didn't.

You could hear the figure approaching you from behind as you clambered onto the wooden sale-floor again, feeling another cold, bony hand on your shoulder. That was all the motivation you needed to run. You slammed into the door with your shoulder as hard as you could, running outside.

You were safe now, as you nearly doubled over, putting your hands on your pants, panting heavily. You could feel the initial adrenaline rush starting to wear off. That's when you heard the door close behind you once again. You felt your face contorting into a fearful frown, suppressing the urge to shout things you shouldn't say to your mother as loud as you can.

You lowered your head, trying to suppress tears, knowing your death was upon you.

You felt a hand on your shoulder and waited for a moment. The swift and painful death you expected never came. Instead you heard someone ask, "Hey, you alright? You elbowed the door pretty hard from the looks of it."

You turn around, confused. Standing behind you was a young man wearing a grim reaper costume. "You alright? I mean, I know it's suppose to be a haunted house and all, but, I didn't think it was that scary, y'know?" he worriedly continued.

"It... It... It was a... a haunted house?" you breathlessly reply.

The man eagerly nodded. "Well yea! It's Halloween after all! If you want your refund since, you didn't really get to experience the entire thing, just let us know. Alright? Anyways, if you need a moment, just take one. I'll be in the basement if you need me," he sarcastically replied, before beginning to tread back into the basement.

You began laughing, as you fell onto your back. It was just a haunted house. Nothing more. Thank god for that. You pass out on the cobblestone trail, realizing what an idiot you were for thinking that the gems were worth something.

Chloe Hamlett

*168 Hours*

Ramsey hit the ground hard. His arms and legs were all over the place, and he couldn't get them under him in time to keep his head off the concrete. The impact flooded his vision with black dots, and his tongue caught between his teeth. Someone—the makeshift referee—was counting, and Ramsey instinctively tried to get up. He pushed himself up on his arms, but the noise and the movement of the warehouse were rushing at him too fast. Hector was standing over him, shouting his victory, and the overhead lights turned him into a roaring shadow. The floor seemed to shift for a second, and Ramsey's arms buckled beneath him.

It took another minute for him to get to his feet, but Hector was waiting. When Ramsey went for their usual handshake, Hector pulled him in for a hug. It left fresh blood on both of them and made Ramsey feel like a child. Where he was lean and fast, Hector was broad and strong.

"You're getting good," Hector said. His voice boomed clear through the noise of the crowd. Ramsey watched the money change hands and knew that fewer people had bet on him this week than last. "I can't wait to see what you do when you're my age."

That stung. Hector was eleven years his senior, and Ramsey's timer was right there on his wrist for everyone to see. He had three months left. Every second of it had come from the fights, but there would be no more big wins until he beat Hector. He was running out of time.

The next morning, Ramsey's headache woke him up early. It took twenty minutes to get out of bed, and he swallowed the last two pills from the Tylenol bottle before putting his forehead back together with butterfly bandages

in front of the bathroom mirror. That was as far as he'd gotten when someone knocked on the door. Ramsey walked over slowly, and the person waiting kept knocking.

"It's Saturday," Ramsey said.

Decker grinned.

"You look like shit," he said.

"Hector smashed my face in, in case you didn't figure that out," Ramsey said.

"I was there," Decker said.

He paused a few seconds, leaning on the door frame. Like Ramsey, Decker had already lost both of his parents. He was tall, thin, and perpetually hungry. They saw less of each other after Ramsey transferred schools, but he still only lived two doors down. Decker had known Ramsey longer than anyone else alive.

"You're better than you used to be. He was hurting," Decker said.

"You should have saved your time," Ramsey said. He left the door open, and Decker followed him in. "It was the same thing that happened last week."

"I would have just gone out and done something dumb if I wasn't there," Decker said. "Keeps me out of trouble, right? Now let's get going."

Ramsey didn't have chairs, so Decker sat on the unmade bed while he waited. Ramsey got dressed and brushed his teeth, but he didn't bother with breakfast. They spent the day picking up bottles and cans on the side of the road before taking them to the recycling plant. Any other day, it would have been easy work, but Ramsey was so bruised it hurt to bend down. He knew he was moving slow, but Decker still split the recyclables evenly when they got to the plant. He dumped his half down the chute, plugged the cord into his timer, and watched as the number creep up. Ramsey repeated the process and got the same amount of time.

"It'd be easier if we could have jobs," Decker said. Ramsey made a vague noise of agreement. It was a long walk home, and he usually said that at least once. They had another year before they could legally drop out of school, and the type of jobs dropouts got were unlikely to pay in time. "Or if you gave up on that rich kid school, you might have a little more free time."

"To do what? Pick up bottles?"

"You get time for it," Decker said.

"Yeah, because you lose a day picking up other people's trash. It's a fucking trap. You give a day, you get a little less, and you spend your whole life knowing you'll die if you take a day off," Ramsey said.

"I don't want to fight," Decker said. They gave each other a lot of crap, but the closer Ramsey's timer came to zero, the kinder Decker got. Ramsey already knew Decker thought he should be picking up trash every free second he had to try to scrape by, but Ramsey had done the math a thousand times. It just wasn't possible.

They still picked up recyclables on Sunday.

Monday morning, Ramsey got out of bed early and dressed in the dark. The routine was easy—but-ton-down shirt, dress pants that showed too much ankle, hand-me-down blazer. Decker went to the public high school two blocks away, but Ramsey had managed to get a scholarship at Aster Rhode Academy on the other side of town. Most of his teachers thought he was a wasted investment, but for some reason, a donor was willing to pay his tuition. Ramsey liked it there, but sometimes he would catch someone staring at him in class and know they were picturing his funeral.

"You don't look so good," Jack said. Ramsey ignored him and kept digging in his locker. Jack would always say something about the bruises but never the fight itself. "Are you sure you should be at school today?"

Jack Parrish Jr. was the type of boy no one could call a wasted investment. His father was a prominent businessman expected to hit eighty-five, and his mother was in politics. They had three sons, all with similar timers, and Jack was the oldest. He had his father's name, but he smiled like a politician. Ramsey had expected to hate him when they first met. Now, Jack didn't mention that Ramsey was wearing his old blazer, and Ramsey pretended not to know that Jack Parrish Sr. paid his tuition. Their friendship was fragile, stretched too thin across distance between Jack's life and Ramsey's.

"I'm going to beat him someday," Ramsey said. Jack didn't respond. "Hector must get into all kinds of shit between fights. He always wins, but it never seems like his timer is going up."

On Friday, Jack caught him at his locker again at the end of the school day. He didn't speak at first, but he fidgeted with the straps of his backpack and scuffed his shoe against the bottom row of lockers. Ramsey ignored him and kept switching out his books.

"Can I come tonight?" Jack said.

"Come to what?" Ramsey said.

"You know what I'm talking about."

"Say it."

"The fight," Jack said. He sighed and finally let go of his backpack. "Quit being an asshole. Can I come to the fight?"

"Why?"

"I don't know," Jack said. "I just want to see what it's like."

"You're not going to like it," Ramsey said. He shut his locker and slung his bag over his shoulder. "And I don't think it'd be very good for your mom's campaign if you someone recognized you."

"You really think there's going to be anybody but

you and Decker there who would know me?” Jack said.

Ramsey shrugged.

“Come on, I’m going to be late to practice,” Jack said. “Can I come or not?”

“Fine,” Ramsey said. He gave Jack the directions and told him where to look for Decker. Decker thought as much of Jack as he did of the rest of the Aster Rhodes boys, but he would make sure nothing happened to him. “And don’t wear that. Dress like a normal person.”

Ramsey didn’t look for Jack or Decker before it was his turn to fight. It always made him nervous—and a little embarrassed—to recognize someone in the crowd. He and Hector were both fighting doubles tonight. A new face had popped up last weekend, and he was fighting all over the map so the gamblers could figure out his skill level. Ramsey beat him easily and got three weeks for it. The new guy was still tired when he fought Hector an hour later. That fight only lasted two minutes.

Doubles were always tricky. Ramsey had more time to rest, but Hector had an easier first fight. Ramsey told himself he had a solid chance of winning while he warmed back up. The cut on his forehead had reopened, but he felt good otherwise. Hector had only had twenty minutes to rest.

He couldn’t see the clock during the fight, but Ramsey could tell it was taking longer than usual. He’d gotten Hector down to his knees once, but that put the older man at the perfect height to headbutt him in the face. Ramsey’s nose was broken, and he stumbled just long enough for Hector to get back up. After another minute of trading blows, Hector had tackled him to the ground like it was a football game and wrapped both hands around Ramsey’s throat.

Ramsey clawed at his hands and bent back one of the fingers the way he’d been taught when he was a kid too

small to fight. He felt the finger break, but Hector didn't seem like he even noticed it. He kept leaning on Ramsey's throat. If Ramsey didn't tap out—if Hector didn't let him tap out—he could strangle him in front of a warehouse full of people.

"Come on, kid," Hector said. Ramsey's attempts to break his grip were slowing down. The room was starting to go dark. Finally, he managed a small nod, and Hector let go.

In the crowd, money started to change hands. That was the last fight of the night, and people trickled onto the street as Hector did his cool-down stretches. Decker and Jack pushed against the flow of bodies to get to Ramsey.

"Are you okay?" Decker said. Ramsey nodded again, but he didn't have the air to speak yet. Decker turned to Hector.

"Why can't you just let him win?"

With the warehouse almost empty, Decker's voice echoed. Jack—wearing something other than his school uniform for once—looked embarrassed when the stragglers from the crowd stared, but Ramsey couldn't bring himself to care. The blood from his nose was starting to go down his throat, and it felt a lot like drowning.

"You can see his timer," Decker said. "You know he's going to die. Why can't you just let him win once?"

"Everyone needs more time," Hector said. Decker was yelling, but Hector didn't match his volume. He glanced down to where Ramsey was trying to sit up and leaned down to lift him under the arms. "Your boy is just going to have to find another way to get it."

"You're nearly thirty," Decker said. "You've got fifteen years. He needs it more than you."

"It's not fair," Jack said. It'd come out so soft Ramsey barely caught it. Jack had never said a word against



the timers before.

“Not fair?” Hector crossed the floor in three quick strides and grabbed Jack by his left arm. There were fifty-two years on his timer, and Hector snorted. “Yeah, this is probably the worst thing that’s ever happened to you, pretty boy. You don’t get to sit by him at graduation. My daughter was born with twenty-seven months. How is that fair?”

Jack’s gaze broke. It had been generations since a Parrish child was born with less than sixty years, and almost all of them earned more. A bitter, resentful part of Ramsey was glad he’d done this to Jack. If the timers couldn’t hurt him, at least this would.

“She’s six now,” Hector said. He dropped Jack’s arm. “I’m going to fight, and I’m going to win. I’ll do whatever the hell it takes for her to have a life.”

Ramsey lowered his head to spit more blood, and Hector was gone when he looked up again. Decker and Jack were still standing over him. Decker’s fists were clenched at his sides, and his entire body was shaking. In contrast, Jack had gone perfectly still. The shame was smoothed from his features, and his expression was cool.

“I used to have enough time,” Ramsey said. His voice came out rough and shaky, like Hector’s hands were still around his throat. “Not like a Parrish or anything, but a decent amount. Enough to have a life.”

Decker unclenched his fists and looked away. He was the only person in Ramsey’s life who had known him as a kid. Ramsey had always let his classmates at Aster think he had been born shortchanged, but Decker knew what happened.

“When I was seven, my dad drove drunk and killed someone,” Ramsey said. “He didn’t have enough for them to take it all from him. Do you know what they do when someone doesn’t have enough time for them to

take?"

"The closest living family member contributes," Jack said. That was the way it was phrased in textbooks and legal documents. It was probably how his politician mother said it, but the words sounded hollow in Jack's mouth.

"My mom was already dead," Ramsey said. "I was seven, and they took nineteen years from me for something I didn't even do."

"He was supposed to die two years ago," Decker said.

"Fist fights and recyclables can only get you so far," Ramsey said. He smiled, and Jack flinched.

"I'm sorry, okay?" Jack said. "I didn't know it was like this. I didn't even know anyone supposed to die young before you."

"Because you all get to sit up there at Aster and pretend it's not happening," Ramsey said. "I know no one fucking wants me there. I know no one wants to sit in English class and think about me rotting."

"Then why do you keep coming, Ramsey?"

"Because I want more time! I want a life! Jesus Christ, I want what everybody else has."

"It's not my fault!" Jack said.

"But it works out awful well for you," Ramsey said. He spit blood again and started to get out of the floor. Decker grabbed him by the arm to help.

"I'm not going to fight again," Ramsey said. He'd made up his mind as soon as Hector said the words *my daughter*. "Hector won't lose."

"We'll figure something out," Decker said. He scrubbed at his eyes quickly and chewed the inside of his cheek. "We've still got time."

"It's okay," Ramsey said. The blood from his nose was slowing down, and his voice didn't sound so strangled

anymore. It almost sounded like he believed it. “It’s okay, Deck. Let’s go home.”

Decker nodded and wiped his nose on his sleeve. They left the warehouse slowly, Ramsey hobbling and leaning on Decker. Jack didn’t try to follow.

Chloe Hamlett  
*Godless*

The pastor hit his head when he fell, and that was what killed him.

It had to be, Bishop told himself, because he hadn't hit him that hard. At least, he didn't think he had. He hadn't focused on pulling the punch the way he did when he scrapped with someone smaller than him. Bishop had thrown his whole body into it, the way his dad had taught him, the type of hit that was supposed to end fights rather than start them.

He didn't mean to hurt Pastor Welch. He'd just wanted him to stop hitting Grady. And the pastor had stopped, but now he wasn't getting up. While Grady pulled himself back to his feet and stepped away from his father, Bishop watched the blood seep into the gravel.

When Bishop finally looked up, Grady was watching him. There was blood streaming from his nose, and he let it drip onto his tee shirt without bothering to wipe it. The streetlights made his eyes look more gold than hazel, and his expression was too calm. Between the blood on his face and his destroyed shirt, he should have looked savage, but he didn't. Grady had just turned fourteen, and he had a softness to his face that always made strangers ask if he was Bishop's little brother. He stood over the body of his father and stared without blinking.

"Grady," Bishop said. His voice was barely more than a whisper, and he didn't know what was going to come out next—an apology, an explanation, a cry for help. Grady just shook his head.

"You better get home, Bishop. Before somebody sees you."

Bishop tried to speak again, but his mouth was

too dry. Instead, he swallowed hard and nodded. Grady walked with him to where they'd left their bikes at the porch rail, and neither of them looked at the body in the driveway. There were no lights on in the house—Grady's mother and sisters had been asleep for hours. There were no neighbors to see them. They were alone in the godless night.

"Grady," Bishop said. His voice came out louder so long as he kept his gaze on the bike. His mom always told him not to ride at night, but she was working nights again and would never know.

"Yeah?" Grady said.

"I didn't... I didn't mean to," Bishop said. He'd caught Pastor Welch off guard, and the man had fallen and broken his neck. He was dead and bloody in his own driveway, and they were the only two people in the world who knew.

"I know," Grady said. He looked back at the house. From their angle standing at the road, Pastor Welch's truck blocked the view of his prone body, and they could pretend for a moment that it wasn't there. Grady took a slow breath. "You better get home."

Bishop nodded and got on his bike. He didn't look back as he pedaled down the street, but he could feel Grady watching him until he went around the corner and out of sight.

Suzanna Dye  
*Gone, But Never Forgotten*

At the base of the Cumberland Plateau, amid winding valley roads and the scattered cover of trees, sits Whitwell, TN. It is a small town, with a population of about 1,700 and a sparse assortment of businesses. If you drive down Main Street, there isn't much to see. You'll see the high school on your left and a little while later a Save-A-Lot on your right, but in the heart of the town stands a 7 ft tall hand-welded statue of a coal miner. He is equipped with a head-lamp, pickaxe, and anything else any good coal miner would require, and underneath there is a plaque that identifies the miner as "Big John."

While at first glance, Whitwell may not seem like anything special, once you take a closer look, you will see the spirit that unites the town: their rich coal mining history. Even though the actual practice of coal mining has become nearly obsolete in the past few decades, the town has held firm in its roots, in hopes to remember its beginning and all of the people who came before. Though there are many people in Whitwell, especially those of the younger generations, who have not had any first-hand experience with coal mining, the community has worked to keep its memories alive. Whether it is an uncle, great-grandfather, or even a distant family friend, everyone knows someone who had a hand in the coal mining industry in its prime.

"We're nothing but a coal mining town. That's all I can ever recall it being." J.T. Shadrack was born and raised in Whitwell, by a family of coal miners before becoming a miner himself. He knows as well as anyone else the value that coal mining once held in their community, through its highest highs and lowest lows.

Though their town has seen great tragedy at the hands of the coal mines, they continue to value their history and the hard work of their ancestors.

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For the people of Whitwell, December 8, 1981 began as a day much like any other. The children all went off to school, while the adults left for work. The men who made their living as coal miners trekked out to the mines the same way they did every day. Nothing was out of the ordinary, until around noon, 3 miles underground, deep in the dark of Mine 21, one miner flicked a cigarette lighter and sparked a methane-fueled fire that lit the mines ablaze. Due to the poor ventilation of the mine, a methane leak was trapped in one mine shaft, and when one man went to illegally use his lighter, what he thought would be a harmless deviation from the rules became a disaster that devastated an entire community. It was an explosion so powerful, it blew out the headlights of trucks parked over a hundred feet away from the entrance of the mine. It was an explosion so powerful it would shape the future of that small coal-mining town for months, year, and decades to come.

Shortly after the explosion, the six men that comprised the rescue team for the mining company were dispatched to the mines in search of survivors. As they rode out to the mines that day, they went on a journey they had taken countless times before, preparing for the day they had hoped would never come. As the rescue team entered the mine on a rail car, they knew this was drastically different from all of their preparations. This was no drill; this was the real thing. Strewn across the tracks was the debris of the explosion and the first of many signs of the deep tragedy that struck Whitwell that day. Equipped with masks and oxygen tanks, the team searched for survivors for hours, crawling through tunnels

as narrow as 3 feet wide. After 6 hours of desperately combing the remains of the mine shaft for survivors, all the rescue team found were the scorched bodies of the 13 men that had been working in the shaft during the explosion.

It seems unjust that these 13 men met such a cruel fate, while other men in different shafts of the same mine were left unscathed. Though this tragedy may seem minor or insignificant in comparison to other, more widespread disasters, to the small town of Whitwell, it was deeply felt. In their tight-knit community, everyone knew each other. You couldn't go to the grocery store or gas station without running into someone you knew, who would likely have questions about your recent medical history or family drama. While in a larger town, this loss might have been painful, in Whitwell the absence of those 13 men left a gaping hole in the fabric of their community.

Years passed, and in 1996 the mines were eventually shut down, but the town of Whitwell never forgot about the life that coal mining once breathed into their community, nor did they forget the lives that were taken on that day.

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Not only was J.T. Shadrack one of the men on the mine rescue team on that fateful day in December of 1981, but he was also the first one to enter the mine during their attempted recovery. Because of this, J.T. has an ever deeper emotional connection with the tragedy of that day. Though the disaster that took place in the mines was not only devastating, but also the result of many avoidable injustices, the people of Whitwell did not let this dampen their love and respect for the tradition that gave their town its name. While the accident was unspeakably heartbreaking, they would not give it the power to take even more away from them.



Decades after the mines closed their doors, J.T. noticed that the artifacts that many people had from their days in the mines were gradually fading. People started to sell their equipment and artifacts, hoping to at least get a few dollars for the metal scraps that the junk yards would exchange for their equipment. J.T. hated to see their history disappearing this way, but didn't know what he could do about it until one night the solution came to him in a dream: he was going to start a museum. This museum would hold all of the artifacts used during their time in the mines and the greater history of Whitwell's coal mining days, to preserve these memories for years to come.

While this project immediately ignited J.T. with a passion to collect memories for his museum, he knew that he could not do it alone. The success of the museum would rely on members of the community offering their help and donating their artifacts because, while J.T. had plenty of pictures and headlamps and oil cans on display in own home, he would need a lot more than that to accomplish something of this magnitude. He began trying to connect with other families in Whitwell that he knew had coal mining history to see if they had anything lying around on the bottom of a shelf or in the back of a closet. Because Whitwell has such deep roots in the coal mining industry, J.T. knew that nearly every family likely had something lying around somewhere, he just needed to gain their trust.

After countless months of calling and collecting, the museum finally came together. The collection of items that J.T. started with, from the display case in the front room of his home, expanded to a collection of hundreds of items, all connected in some way to Whitwell's coal mines. On November 9, 2010, the Whitwell-Marion County Coal Mining Museum had its grand opening. J.T. and the other retired miners who helped bring his dream to life stood in

front of the small building in which the museum was housed and cut a red velvet ribbon, officially commemorating this dream becoming a reality.

When you walk through the doors of the museum, your view is immediately flooded with the history of the town. Along each wall sits a display case packed full of artifacts dating back to the early 20th century, while the walls themselves are full of pictures of the men in the mines, immortalizing them and the work they did for their community. Each artifact has a small tag attached to it, with a handwritten note describing what purpose that object once served down in the coal mines. Of course, you would never need to actually read the tag because, before you got the chance, one of the workers at the museum would have already started walking you through and giving you an impassioned and detailed history of those items.

The museum wasn't very extravagant, but that's okay because it was never about how big or elaborately decorated it was. It was about remembering the 13 lives that were lost in the mines on that December day in 1981. It was about collecting stories and artifacts, and giving them a permanent home. It was about capturing the heart of Whitwell in a way that, long after the mines were closed and everyone who ever set foot in them was gone, the legacy of coal mining could live on in the hearts of many. The museum is a pure labor of love. The volunteers that run it are all local retired miners themselves, with no goal other than to eternalize the memories of the mines, and the lives that were lost in them.

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7 years after the museum opened its doors, on a rainy morning in July, J.T. and the rest of the miners that run the museum dedicated the lumbering coal miner statue, lovingly named "Big John," to the city as a symbol

of the coal mining legacy. J.T. and his cousin Jewell had spent a little under a year welding Big John, when they weren't volunteering at the Coal Miner's Museum or spending time with their families. Piece by piece, they welded his overalls, head-lamp, pickaxe, and before long their miner was complete. Big John stands powerfully over the city of Whitwell on a stone podium, with broad shoulders and slightly knobby knees. Neither J.T. nor Jewell were trained artists, so not every part of Big John is a picture-perfect representation but his imperfections only further capture the essence of the museum and the deep passion behind it.

Even though on the morning of the dedication, rain showered down on the town and the statue to be dedicated, that did not stop many of the people who came out to support J.T. and the miners. The entire field of grass in front of where Big John stands was covered in people of all ages, under umbrellas and canopy tents, eager to hear J.T. spin a tale of the legacy that coal mining left on Whitwell. His speech was full of passion, and even though sometimes he got so excited that he couldn't help but talk with his hands and move the microphone around so you couldn't hear him as well, everyone could still feel the deep meaning and emotion behind his words in the misty morning air. He talked of how coal mining had given him some of the best and worst days of his life, and spoke for many others when he said this. Despite everything he had seen and experienced in the mines on the day of the explosion, nothing could dampen his appreciation for what he so lovingly referred to as "the art of coal mining."

While coal mining hadn't been an active part of their lives for over 20 years at that point, that did nothing to diminish its value within their community. Through good days and bad, through triumphs and tragedies, the people of Whitwell have never forgotten what once united

them and helped to form them into the tight-knit community that they are today. Coal mining may be gone, but thanks to those that work to keep its memory alive within the hearts of many, it will never be forgotten.

Loren Vickers  
*Waiting Period*

You probably shouldn't have, but you definitely did it. Declaring your feelings in the middle of the high school cafeteria wasn't your brightest idea, and now the entire school knows. You probably should've written him a note, sent a text, or even got a carrier pigeon. But no you had to say it out loud and pretty much yell it at him. Nothing like screaming "I love you" to your best friend at 11 am to make that chicken salad come right back up.

You probably should've explained yourself better after the spontaneous declaration of love, but you chose to let your anger get the best of you. You started screaming about how he led you on. You reminded him, very loudly, how he always told you how beautiful you are, the late-night talks where you shared secrets, and the afternoon movie dates. You had those crazy eyes by that point and the red was creeping up your neck. He sat there dumb-founded like it was all news to him, and that was the final straw. Next thing you know, your plate of chicken salad was on top of his head.

You grabbed your backpack and flew out of there like a bat out of hell. The red face and beads of sweat on your face were enough to convince the nurse you were sick. She let you go with little argument and said she would phone your mom to let her know you had left school sick.

Now comes the waiting period. Now you get to sit in your room and stare at your phone waiting to hear from him, if at all. Your stomach is doing flips like a world-class acrobat and your head is ready to pop off your shoulders. Maybe this wasn't such a bright idea but too late now.

Being in love with your best friend is problematic. More so than just a stranger. There's history between you and him, so now you're putting it all on the line. All your eggs are in some metaphorical basket ready to be smashed if he doesn't feel the same. You can't decide what's worse: him not loving you or losing your best friend?

Your brain starts planning an escape. You could move to a new school. Dye your hair, change your outfit, dramatic makeup, and you've got a whole new girl. Maybe that's the move if this goes awry. No, that's too complicated. You could just skip school tomorrow and tell him you had the flu, and it caused you to act all crazy. That's more believable.

This would all have been so much easier if you had just told him instead of you just blurting it out. Jealousy is not a virtue is what your mother always told you, but him talking about asking Amy Williams to the prom gave you shining green eyes. It's surprising that he couldn't tell right away since you had basically pureed your chicken salad from stirring it so hard on your tray. He was usually good at picking up on your moods, but he was too consumed with talking about the peppiest of the pep squad to notice.

But you knew he had had a crush on Amy since the start of this year, so it's your own fault for letting yourself fall for him. The reason you still did is not entirely your fault though. He flirts with you daily. He leaves sweet notes randomly in your books, he always grabs an extra snack for you, or he sends you funny videos on a bad day. He understands what you're thinking with one eyeroll or huff. You see past his good looks and know the goofy boy underneath. You know he loves you, but is there a possibility he could love you more than as his best friend?

You started to think maybe he would pick you.

Maybe you will get the soon to be prom king after all. The rapid knocking on the front door brought you back to reality. It had to be him. He always knocked like a psycho because it scared you every time, which he found hilarious. For the first time, you took your time getting to the door because your feet felt like sinking rocks. You grabbed the door handle and the acrobats started again. It was time to see if those eggs were going to make it to breakfast or end up on the sidewalk.

Delaney Redden

*Linger*

The ghost follows me everywhere.

She follows me to class, to work, to bed. She slips into my dreams and slides into my daydreams, as well. She lingers in my peripherals. She stands behind me in all my photographs. She is always present; she never leaves me.

This haunting is not cinematic in the way that horror movies always are. She does not crawl slowly towards me or jump-scare at suspenseful moments. Since I've grown so accustomed to her, I can ignore her completely or even forget she's there. But she is always there, silent and indifferent.

Today, she has followed me to a tree on campus. I lay with my back against the grass and my foot propped on a root. The bright mid-day sun warms me as a countering cool breeze gives me chills on my bare arms. I tilt my head sideways to squint at her where she sits cross-legged on the ground, and I say, "Don't you just love September?"

I wait for a response I know from years of experience won't come. She never answers.

"Can you even feel how good this breeze feels?"

Nothing.

Her expression never changes from her neutral, blank face. Her gray eyes stare into mine, but they never tell me anything about what she's thinking. Or if she's thinking.

"Can you feel anything at all?"

Same indifference as always. I look back up at the cloudless sky through the branches of dying leaves. She's not very good company, but I'm used to her.

I often ask her questions about her life, her interests, her love interests. I ask her questions so inappropriate



and personal; any other person would react with a grimace. But not her. Her pale eyes never shift. Her small mouth never quivers or tilts. My incessant desire for acknowledgement is never quenched.

I blow a sigh and push from my face the bangs that have blown into my eyes. My phone alarm dings from my back pocket, reminding me of my appointment. I groan quietly and shove myself off the grass and onto my feet. I brush my blue jeans off with my hands and look down at her, waiting for her to get up. She doesn't.

"You're not coming?"

Not even a blink.

"Fine, I'm leaving you here."

I play this game with her a lot, though it hasn't always been a game. I pretend I'm going to abandon her, leave her behind forever without so much as a second glance. Of course, I couldn't even if I wanted to. And I have wanted to.

I wanted to rid myself of her the time I was on my first dinner date, when she sat next to me, and I couldn't focus on what Charlie was saying or how fancy the restaurant was or how charming Charlie was. I couldn't focus because she sat directly next to me all evening, so close I could feel her cold skin against my arm and leg. And when we walked, she walked with me at the same proximity.

And when Charlie wanted to kiss me at my front door, the ghost's body leaned as near to me as he did. The butterflies in my stomach were frozen by ice-cold dread. I left poor Charlie on my front porch in the middle of the night with no kiss and a quick *good night*.

That night was only three weeks after she came to me. I was determined to leave her then. In a sudden panic, I sprinted up the stairs to my room with tears welling up in my eyes. In complete disregard for my sleeping father, I

I threw open my door and slammed it behind me. The impact shook the frames on my bedroom walls. I locked the door behind me, plopped onto my unmade bed. I closed my eyes, and I cried. I pressed my palms into my eyes and cried loudly, cried violently, cried furiously. I cried until I was tired of crying and I pulled my make-up stained hands away from my face and-

There she was. Standing in front of me, so close I could reach out and touch her icy hands.

That day is one of two days I swear her expression changed. Although barely noticeable, I saw empathy in her perpetually empty face. Her eyes almost glossy and her light eyebrows almost furrowed in a way that told me, "I know, I'm sorry."

I wanted to leave her behind that day, but I couldn't.

But not every day is like that. Some days, she never gets closer to me than a few feet. Some days, she doesn't catch up with me for nearly an hour. Some days, I don't even notice she's there until I seek her out. When she first came to me, she was with me all the time, but ever since then, I feel like I see her less and less.

As I leave her behind today, I am unbothered by the fact that I'll see her later. Today is one of the days where she's my friend, and I'd rather sit around with her than anyone else.

As if she can feel my yearning for her company, she falls into step beside me on the sidewalk. She's not close enough to touch but to where I can see her out of the corner of my eye.

"Ah, so you are coming," I tease. In my imagination she laughs.

Once we start crossing through the more crowded center of campus, I don't chat so much with the ghost. Since no one else can see her, I get weird glances when I

seemingly speak out loud to no one.

I talked to the ghost a lot the first day she came to me. It was only because of another person that I realized she wasn't alive.

The day after my mom died, I woke up at 7:00 a.m. to a knock at my door.

"Yeah?" I croaked.

The door creaked open barely a crack, and a petite girl stepped in. The first thing I noticed was her tear-soaked, blotchy face. Her hair had matted to her cheeks from the moisture, and her arms clutched tightly to her sides.

My entire body went cold when she closed the door behind her. I didn't recognize this girl, although she was vaguely familiar.

Unsettled because of the sudden weight that had fallen on my chest, I pulled myself into a seated position on my bed and jerked my covers over my chest.

My brows furrowed and I stared into her blood-shot eyes, waiting for her to say something. But her eyes just kept pooling with tears, creating an infinite stream down her red cheeks. Her tears felt so private; I felt like by watching, I was intruding although she'd come to me in my room. I shifted my gaze to my curtain-covered window. Although early in the morning, the sun was already shining brilliantly enough to fill my whole room with light. The light beaming on the side of my face was unconcerned with the shadow cast across my life by my loss. The sun shined like I wasn't heartbroken, like there wasn't a sobbing stranger at the end of my bed.

After a few awkward seconds, my discomfort forced me to break the silence. I sucked in a breath and said, "Hi?"

I searched her face as I waited for a reply. She said nothing.

“Are you here because of my mom?” I asked.  
“Did you know her?”

The girl said nothing. Her eyes bore into mine as they continued to pool with tears. Her mouth never opened.

Another knock sounded on my door, and before I could respond, it swung open. My dad, still in his wrinkled pajamas and his hair untamed, leaned against my doorframe with his arms folded tightly.

“Hey, chump,” he cracked a smile that didn’t touch his eyes.

Shifting my gaze back and forth between the girl and him, I responded with a quick hello. I hoped he would offer some kind of explanation for the girl he must’ve let into my room. But he never glanced in her direction.

“You need anything?”

I shook my head.

“I heard you talking, so I thought I’d see what you were doing up already.”

He didn’t know I was awake, but he’d let her into my room. Why hadn’t he even looked at her once? My mind reeled and I couldn’t grasp the situation, so I pressed the heels of my palms into my eyes and mumbled, “Dad, who’s this?”

“Who?”

Lifting my face up and lifting my hand, palm up, in her direction, I said “Her.”

His face scrunched, and he looked at the foot of my bed where she stood. With a quiet aggravated breath, and he raked his hand through his gray hair. “I don’t know what you’re getting at so I can’t play along. What are you pointing at?”

My eyes darted to the crying girl. The cold feeling had intensified until my body shook with chills. I couldn’t comprehend what was happening or who this girl was or

why my dad wasn't seeing her or why she was crying in my room or why I had to deal with any of this not even 24 hours after my mother lost her life.

"Hey, are you alright, kiddo?"

His voice broke my trance, and I took my hands away from my eyes to find them wet. I hadn't even realized I'd been crying. I shook my head but didn't look at him. I couldn't tear my gaze from the girl—the ghost.

That was the first day I saw her. That was also the day my dad thought maybe something was extra wrong and made an appointment with a therapist, named Dr. Henderson, in the next town over. After that, my life started to revolve around just those three people. Therapy, which started as a one-time thing and then a maybe-you-should-go-again thing, turned into twice a week. Dad spent a lot of time with me at home. He still does; he cooks dinner, rents movies, buys board games, and asks me questions about every single aspect of my life, but he never brings up the incident with the girl, and neither do I.

Dr. Henderson focuses a lot on the girl. She analyzes our interactions from how I describe them, and she always brings the conversation back to when the girl, my ghost, first appeared. She has a lot of questions that I can't answer: what's the ghost's name, who is she, why is she here, how does she know me, why is she attached to me?

Dr. Henderson is entirely convinced that the ghost is not real; the ghost is a made-up coping mechanism, which is reflected in when she showed up crying after my mom died. She is also convinced that antipsychotics will resolve this delusion, but my dad is adamant on refusal of medications.

So, to make Dr. Henderson's life easier, I tell her she's right and that the ghost is not real. I tell her I know the ghost is just in my head and that I don't even really see her anymore.

But often, I say this with my ghost sitting right next to me. With her cold arm brushing my own. With the weight of her presence on my chest. I lie to Dr. Henderson twice a week, smile and thank her for all of her help. Then I leave and go have take-out in my dorm with my ghost.

Today is just like every other day. Once my performance for Dr. Henderson is over, I leave and head back to my dorm. The ghost lags behind the whole way back home. My thirty-minute drive home feels lonely and silent without her, as if she actually brings any conversation.

Back at my dorm, I wait around for her a little while until I distract myself with homework. Hours go by before I pick my eyes up from my Literature textbook to find that I am still alone in my room. More time passes. I pull my covers down and start to get in bed.

And there she is, just in time for bed. I smile across from her unchanging face, roll over away from her, and I softly wish her a good night.

“Good night. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Delaney Redden  
*Long Black Skirt*

He doesn't like coming to this coffee house. It's not on his way to the office, and the one a couple streets over is cheaper anyway. But the avoidance of his recent ex-girlfriend forced him here today.

He shoves the glass door open to find the place filled with elderly early-risers, caffeine-addicted college kids, and businessmen like him. He adds himself to the weaving line ahead of him, right behind a petite woman in a long black skirt. His eyes cut down to the material that clings to the woman's thin hips and trail up towards the waves of dark hair spilling over her shoulders. The skirt and her twisting hair and how pretty they made her without even any need to see her face captures his full attention, which means he doesn't even realize how close he's standing to her until her stance shifts, and she just barely bumps into the man's front.

"Oops!"

And then there she is. The most awe-inspiring face he's ever seen. Twinkling eyes scrunched at the corners and red lips pulled thin in an instant apology.

He wants to tell her it's more than fine, that she could shove him over and he'd be just as happy to see her. He wants to tell her the brief contact of her body brushed against his made his heart knock in his chest so hard he could hear the echo in his head. He wants to tell her how much he likes her skirt.

And all too soon, she's turned back around for her turn to order. Her melodic voice perks his ears, and he strains to catch every word. A small chai latte with whip and a muffin. He doesn't like chai, finds the taste overpowering. But *she* enjoys it, so there must be something

special, hopefully better, about it here.

The woman finishes paying and steps to the side, her skirt rippling in waves around her legs as she moves to wait for her order. He watches as she unlocks her phone and taps around on the screen with a disinterested, unknowingly charming expression. The chipper barista calls the man to order, shattering his focus and snatching his gaze from the shape of her face. On a whim, he chooses chai, too, pleased by the little connection he's created between them. He thinks of what a great conversation starter it'll be, how she'll laugh at the coincidence, and then they'll go on to talk about other interests to find more commonalities. He thinks of the ways he'll try to make her laugh, of how musical it'll sound, and of how divine she'll look while she does it. He thinks of how much better this chai will taste while he drinks it with her.

He steps to the side where a crowd of customers wait for their coffees and uncaringly separate him from her. He slides past two people, bumping them both and earning huffs and mean looks that go unnoticed as gets closer to the woman. He squeezes between two more, and he's finally close enough to say hello.

"Number 34!"

The girl goes to the counter and receives her order with a smile and high-pitched gratitude.

"Number 35!"

The girl turns away from the counter, sipping her latte, and moves towards the door. The man hurries towards the counter to grab his chai latte. He bumps and shoves past people, reaches the counter, retrieves his latte with a quick, muttered thanks, and turns around just in time to see a wisp of hair and the flow of her skirt disappear behind the closing door behind her.

He stares blankly at the door. The slow thud of his heartbeat is faint compared to the bustling noise of the



shop. He takes a sip of the latte and grimaces at the taste.

*How ridiculous.* He doesn't even like chai.

Without another thought, he drops the drink into a trash can and leaves.

John Mannone

*The Hill*

*A man with his young wife traveled to the city in the hill country. It was time for the census, and he had to pay taxes. The couple struggled to make the trip—the young woman was pregnant and ready to give birth.*

The late September moon was shining full, its light falling on the travelers' faces as their shadows passed over the sheep lying in the soft grass.

Midnight frosted the air when they arrived into town very tired, but all the places were full of travelers. They found an empty barn—a storehouse for barley and corn. With his carpenter skills, he fashioned a cradle from scraps of wood found lying on the ground. The worn wood, once a grain trough to feed animals. He wielded his hammer deftly as he nailed the pieces together; the baby in the womb kicked hard and the expectant mother winced—contractions gripped her every minute now.

A small fire embered the night and steamed the water he would need to help his wife deliver. It wasn't long before the baby crowned. He stirred the stillness of the night. It was clear, and the stars seemed to sing while the heavens shimmered its scarlet curtains.

Joy filled the barn. The man kissed his wife on the forehead, on her lips, and then held the infant swaddled in cotton; kissed him, too, as he laid him in the cradle cushioned with pine tree boughs. There was something about the newborn that infused their hearts with warmth that stayed the chill of the future. After a moment of silence and prayer, the man fetched a goatskin bag that he had stashed under the mantle of blankets on the burro his wife had ridden. He held it up and blessed it before swallowing

a little wine. And though it had turned mostly to vinegar,  
he was content. The moon was setting behind a high hill...  
and his newborn son wasn't crying.

John Mannone  
*Miracles of Carbon*

When I see the soot-dust swirl in flue gas, even in the chambers of my mind, my ashes pile up on sack-cloth, I marvel at the miracles of carbon.

In the caldron of the sun with stellar winds from God's breath, atoms stack one upon the other, like promises, fusing to new ones: hydrogen to helium, helium to beryllium, and soon the impossible carbon atoms form from rare collisions. They stick together because of resonance in the hearts of atoms.

My atoms of carbon are fearfully and wonderfully made, as are all the other elements of my being. Joni Mitchell sings of it—*I am stardust, I am golden*. The whole of my chemistry where joy can swim, rejoices in the knowledge of Him. There is poetry to atomic orbitals; they sing a song that's everything organic—a plethora of compounds possible only with carbon because of hybridization, a self-bonding of sorts, a conjoining of spherical spaces, dumbbell shapes, cloverleaf designs where carbon's electrons reside.

I marvel at the continuing miracles of molecules—the overlap of p-atomic orbitals to make a pi molecular orbital—the aroma of aromaticity that is leftover from the union is a testimony to Jesus who authored my chemistry, my DNA, and trail-blazed my life so that I would have affinity to worship Him.

When I think of carbon, I am overwhelmed—the ash of life, the dust of death. That same carbon, dirty as sin, pressed and heated for a lifetime, will change, even transform. I am an alchemist seeking to turn the graphite of my soul to shimmering diamond.

Eliza Komisar  
*Sad Like Johnny Cash*

The night before I was set to fly out for a wedding, I went to a bar downtown, and a girl asked me where I was from. I told her Keystone, West Virginia, and she got this funny look. She asked me my name and I said “Batya,” and she furrowed her eyebrows and took a sip of her beer. The music was live and quiet, and I got a little lost in it before she started talking to me again.

“Do you have a lighter?”

“Yeah.” I fished through the front pocket of my jacket and handed it to her.

She lit a cigarette and asked if she could tell me a story. She told me about a woman in a book she read who wore flowers in her hair and then her lover gets married and she jumps into a lake. I thought this was a little too on the nose, and I told her that in two days I was losing my childhood sweetheart. She said that was the saddest, most bumpkin thing she’d ever heard, bought me a beer, and started calling me Johnny Cash.

“If we’re getting sentimental, I never had a childhood sweetheart,” she said. She took another drink and started fidgeting with a napkin. “But I did live with someone last year. He was kind, and he knew how to make French toast.”

This had all gotten too much, and we were both crying in public, so I told her we were going to have to cut back on the pity party.

“Whatever you say, Johnny,” she said. She grabbed a handful of napkins for the road.

We walked outside, and the air was chilly and dried my tears and I was incredibly thankful for that. She started laughing. I asked what about and she told me she

had never done that before. She thought people only drunkenly confessed to strangers in movies. I thought about a black and white movie I'd seen, and they cried and smoked all the time, but then they ate breakfast, and everything seemed fine for a few minutes. We stopped in a diner, she ordered waffles, I ordered French toast, she cried again, and I apologized for my insensitivity and forgetfulness. I scarfed down my food. I was hungrier than I thought. When we were finished, she asked if she could tell me a secret, and I said sure.

"We aren't exactly strangers," she said.

"We aren't?"

"No, I remember meeting you two years ago in the park. You were crying, and I felt bad, so I bought you a cup of tea. I had just started seeing the man I lived with and I don't know why, but I told you I was in love for the first time, and you told me every morning you woke up and got your heart broke all over again," she said.

I did remember that day. Dalia had sent me an engagement announcement in the mail. I was just eighteen, and I wanted her to come with me. I wrote her a letter telling her I loved her, that I always would, and I hadn't heard anything from her until that day.

I apologized for not recognizing her sooner. She told me it was okay, she had bangs then. I offered to walk her home. When we made it to her apartment building, we stood in the doorway and kissed, just once.

"If I had a hat on, this is when I would tip it," I said.

She laughed and I got a cab and went home. I figured I would sleep in and miss my flight to the wedding and start taking walks in the park again.

Lillian Tawney  
*Melon, He Calls Me*

That day of graduation, you picked me up and you spun me around.

“We made it,” you said with your teeth shining and your eyes sparkling. I was happy to have made it but sad to have made it with you. I loved you with all my heart, but along with love comes impermanence. Yes, we graduated together. Yes, here you are showering me with your love, showering me with your kisses, but yet here I stand unable to love you as such. And I cannot love you as such because I cannot get over the fact this is not permanent. Nothing is permanent. The yellow rose I held in my hand while I walked across the stage died, as we all will too. I always admired your ability to ignore reality, and to ignore the impermanence that follows me everywhere I go.

Melon, he called me. Melon, he called me because I am nothing more than Melancholy. Melon, he called me because I was a bit more sour than the others. Melon, he called me because he could. He saw a future with me, he saw us and our kids in his dreams. He saw a marriage; he saw a ring on my finger. But what did I see?

I saw a man. A man that is not eternal, who reminded me that none of us are eternal. I saw a strong impermanence, as I do with all things. I saw an end, not a future. And I saw this because I could not get over the fact that eventually we will all dissolve into meaninglessness. I will not exist, he will not exist, neither will a remembrance of ‘us’ exist. One day no one will remember or care that he called me Melon. And that is what true Melancholy is.

Myndalynn Word  
*The Smile*

I don't remember the first time I saw that man. It was probably around the time of my parent's divorce; I would have been about nine. My dad and I were in the grocery store. He was shuffling through coupons trying to figure out what paper towels were the best deal when I looked to my right and saw a vision of my nightmares creeping behind the bread display. He had to be in his mid to late forties; I could tell this because of the slight wrinkles under his eyes and the receding hair line. There was something about him that made him look even creepier, though. He had one of the largest smiles I had ever seen. His teeth were so white and shiny, and it seemed as if his smile didn't stop creeping up his face. I looked up to tell my dad that it was time to move aisles, but I could tell by his face that he was not in the mood to hear about some man he didn't even know.

It was evident to me during that time that something wrong was going on with my parents. My mom quit for him to get home at night, and he kept staying out later and later. Instead of arguing about things, my mom would just choose to ignore my dad. Looking back now, I think that's why my dad started to push away. However, at nine years old, I never expected my parents to be the type of parents that got divorced.

When I got home that evening, I had mostly forgotten about that creepy man and his smile. I helped my dad bring in the groceries and watched as he began to pull out the ingredients for dinner.

"Does fettuccine alfredo sound good to you for dinner tonight?" he asked knowing that I didn't really care for it. I couldn't get past the sliminess of the noodles,



which he didn't understand.

However, I wasn't really looking to fight about that at this moment, "Yeah, that's fine." I usually didn't express how I was feeling with my dad. He was far less understanding than my mother at any point. "What time will mom be back? Will she be here for dinner?" I asked curiously.

"I'm not sure. She had to run a few errands and said not to wait for her if we were ready to eat," he responded. It turned out that she wasn't there for dinner. In fact, she wasn't there the next morning for breakfast either. When I questioned this, Dad just said, "I don't know, Jess."

I don't remember how long he held up that front, but it was a few weeks before I knew what actually happened with my mom. She finally got tired of everything with my dad and moved away with a man she met online. I never could understand why she would do something like that. I guess I knew why she left my dad, but why me?

He told me that news at dinner, and I went to my bedroom right after that. I couldn't bear to see him so sad. As I stared out my window, I could have sworn I saw that same man that was at the grocery store earlier. He had the same creepy smile; it went all the way across his face. The sides of his smile seemed to go up past his nose. He was squatted out beside the tree across our yard. I immediately ran out to my dad screaming.

"DAD! DAAAD! There's somebody outside in our front yard!" I screamed.

He responded, "What? Let me go check..."

Of course, he didn't find anything out there, but I still had trouble sleeping that night. After the next day, I forgot all about that man and played it off as a figment of my imagination.

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Five years had passed, and I still was not over my

mom leaving. I guess that's understandable, though. Being a fourteen-year-old girl without a mom was difficult. My dad didn't understand anything about me, and he was hardly around because of his work schedule. He still felt bad about leaving me alone, so Dad bought me a dog, Theo. Honestly, I liked Theo, but I still felt alone. I felt like I had to grow up so much quicker than all of my friends because I had to take care of myself.

My friend group was relatively small. I only had two friends that I really enjoyed hanging out with. We would always go to "Margaret's Café" after school to get our lunch. Margaret had the best grilled cheese sandwiches; I always ordered one with a side of fries.

My best friend in the whole world was Julia. I met Julia when I was eleven years old. We had the same teacher, and we both wore the same shirt on the first day of class. It was meant to be from the beginning. Julia always got a grilled cheese with fries, too, but she preferred mozzarella cheese instead of cheddar.

Our other friend was Sam. We met Sam shortly after we became friends. She wasn't in our class, but we met her during field day one year. She was the complete opposite of us, very outgoing. She always ordered spaghetti with a chocolate milk.

This day was like every other day that we went to "Margaret's." We were sitting at our regular booth in the left corner, watching the cook fry our grilled cheeses, and gossiping about everything that was going on at school. Shortly after we ordered, the waitress came back with our food, "Here you go, girls, the usual!" I started to dig in immediately after I received my order. I focused on nothing but my food. Finally, I looked up and saw a familiar face. "Who is that?" I asked out loud to my friends, Julia and Sam.

They stared at me blankly. "Who are you talking

about?" Julia responded, "The waitress who just took our order? You know who that is."

"No! That man! I swear he looks so familiar."

I responded. I just couldn't shake what was so familiar about him...I guess it had to be his smile. It was one of the biggest smiles I had ever seen. His teeth were so white, and he was staring right at me. It literally made me sick to my stomach. "Never mind. Can we just go home now?"

They were confused but agreed to take their lunch to go. Julia and Sam dropped me off at my house first. We lived on the same street, and my house was only about a five-minute walk from the cafe. I got my key out of my backpack and watched my friends continue up the street as I unlocked the door to my house. I was still feeling sick, so I went to the kitchen to grab a glass of water. I let Theo out to use the bathroom and sat down at the table. My dad was never home before nine o'clock, so I knew it was going to be a long evening. I let Theo back in and went up to my room to take a nap, hoping I would feel better when I woke up.

"Jess!" I woke up with a start. I could tell it was late because it was dark outside, and my dad's voice was now ringing through the house.

I got up and ran downstairs. "Hey Dad, sorry, I was sleeping. Something I ate at lunch made me sick. I walked into the kitchen to see that he looked very depressed. I knew something was wrong, "What's going on?" I asked. My dad, with the same upset face, lifted up his finger and pointed to something on the ground...it was Theo, and he was not moving. He was sprawled out on the ground, dead.

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It was July 25th, 2019. I saw that stupid face again. That stupid receding hairline. That stupid smile. Why was it so big? I was getting sick of seeing that man.

Every time I saw him something bad happened. And I couldn't talk to him because he just stared at me, never saying a word, never taking his eyes off of me. It was 10:22 PM when I saw him that night, and it was 3:43 AM the next day when I found out Julia had died.

She was so sick, though. I knew it was going to happen. Julia was diagnosed with cancer shortly after she turned eighteen. It wasn't fair...she was so young. We lived life to the fullest, though. She never let her cancer slow her down and always said to me, "Don't miss me too much." She knew it was coming, we both did. It was still hard to see her body laying there in the hospital.

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Here I am, seven years later staring at my wonderful husband over my pregnant belly as he's watching television. I've mostly forgotten about my mom leaving, just hoping that I can be a better mother than she was. I barely remember that dog I lost in eighth grade. There would be new dogs with my new family. The death of my best friend kills me every time I think about it, but it's something I can deal with now because of my supporter-my husband, Adam.

Adam is my best friend. I met him when I was nineteen years old, right after the death of Julia. He assured me that we could take our time with our relationship because he wanted me to be able to cope with what had happened. Four years later we got married. It was a very small ceremony, but it was perfect. Two years after that, I became pregnant, and there was nothing in this world that could have made me happier.

Today was one of my favorite days; it was a Friday night. Tonight, we ordered pizza and picked a movie to watch. It was an action movie, my least favorite, but I was happy to lay next to Adam while he enjoyed it. I could barely keep my eyes open, but I didn't want to fall asleep. I

stood up to grab something to eat from the kitchen, “Hey, you want anything to eat? I’m falling asleep and need some popcorn.”

Adam responded, “Yeah, I’ll take some!” I smile as I walk to the kitchen. Hobble was more the word for it; I was eight months pregnant. I smile thinking about Adam making fun of the way I walk. I grab a bag of popcorn and walk over to the microwave. As I push the start button, I notice that the outside light is on. Adam must have left it on when he was working out there earlier. I walk out to the back porch in order to shut off the light. I open the door and reach for the light. Then, my heart stops. The breath gets stuck in my throat, and I can’t move. I look out to our shed and see nothing but a smile.

Serenity Shalander  
*Wait*

Sometimes you just wake up sad, you know? I never had a bad life. My parents separated when I was young for some reason that I still didn't know at the age of 15. I was lucky with my parents' divorce. They never fought or spoke bad about each other to me or my 18-year-old sister. We stayed with our mom so that we didn't have to move schools since our dad let her keep the house. They've both remarried now, and I have step-parents who love me just as much as my real ones. Yet, even with two extra parents, I've never felt so alone.

My sister and I never really got along. As I was ending my freshman year of high school, she was finishing her senior year. Everyone always compared us to each other, whether it be our friends, teachers, or parents. We were nothing alike. She was always the favorite. I was nowhere near as talented as her. She could learn an instrument in a week and her resume was taller than me, but I was better with sports or anything that required movement. We tried to keep our distance to make ourselves as different from the other as much as possible. Neither of us liked to be compared, so we came to a silent agreement to not be nothing of the same. Everything she liked, I hated. She was happy, and I wasn't.

I couldn't get enough of working out, sports, or anything active. At a young age, I realized that I loved pain. Sports were the only way that could feel hurt without it destroying me. The feel of my muscles pulling as I lift a weight is something that can curb a craving but never satisfy it. As I got older, I noticed that it's just not enough to work out for three or so hours. Anytime something bad happens, I just want to lift weights. Dad doesn't really like

this hobby as he doesn't want his baby girl to get too masculine. He doesn't know that this is the only thing that's stopping me from hurting myself.

You see, I wasn't only obsessed with pain. I was in love with death. The thought of dying has crossed my mind more than once every day of my life. Every morning, I cross a bridge on my walk to school while my sister catches a ride with her friends. Every night in bed, I think about how peaceful it would be to just fall off that bridge into the dark water below. I think of how it would feel to have the water fill and cleanse my lungs as I slip off to nowhere.

This day was already off to a bad start. As I got ready, my older sister got frustrated as I took my normal time to get prepared in the bathroom. She had a band concert and as a first chair, she felt that she should look more than presentable. As I grabbed my backpack and my sports bag, I heard her come to the top of the stairs. I didn't realize that I had left my cleats in the bathroom, the ones I had tried to clean dried dirt off of after practice last night. My sister threw my cleats down at me and yelled, "These are disgusting. Can't you be more normal and take care of your things?" I really try to. I can't have nice things if someone throws them down stairs.

After picking up my cleats and shoving them in my sports bag as I walked down the street, I crossed the bridge that called to every fiber of my being. The water was high from where it had been raining the past few days. Today's forecast called for more rain.

As I went through my classes for the day, I heard the same thing over and over again. "When your sister was my student...", "You should try harder to be more than just an athlete," and my personal favorite, "Why don't you just cheer up? You shouldn't act sad all the time." They say this as if I'm acting sad. Some people just wake up sad.

Practice that night was hell. I pushed so hard, but my coach wasn't satisfied. As I went through my exercises, the screaming from my coach got worse. It didn't help that I had a pounding headache. It felt like a blunt needle being shoved through my head. Every time I lifted something it felt like something in my brain was going to burst from pressure. After hours of work, Coach announced he was unhappy with the day's results and released us to go home.

As I walked across the bridge, I looked over at the water. It looked so beautiful as the sun was setting. I set down my sports bag and stared deeper into the crashing waves. I felt my hands remove my backpack and set it down beside my sports bag. I climbed onto the ledge and stared down at the rushing water. I let the light breeze rock my body back and forth as I closed my eyes.

Behind me, I heard an unfamiliar voice say,  
"Wait."



Deon'te Starks  
*Sanguine Aura*

He gazes into the known, trying to find an unknown within. He insists on using my old broken telescope. It's not like he needs a broken telescope to look at the sky, he can clearly see what's out there. He's only squandering our time using it. All you can see through that thing is fog and a dark void. Besides, I don't know what eight-year-old would rather gawk into space than play video games.

It's fine though; it's not like I've spent my *entire* life looking through telescopes and would know when one is used up. I don't understand why he insists on using this particular telescope. I am even willing to buy him a new one. After all, the model is decades old. It's time for an upgrade, or maybe just a new hobby. Every day we come out here and I watch him stare through that imperfect lens. Frankly, it's getting old. He sees no auroras, no comets, no planets, no constellations... nothing.

He'd be lucky to see a silhouette of something, but no. There is just his hopeless imagination. He continues to read his astronomy books and imagine the stars in the sky, rather than getting a more powerful telescope that could see past the stratosphere. It's quite embarrassing having a child who would rather imagine the Big Dipper than see an actual constellation like Andromeda.

All you can see with that telescope is a vast emptiness from here to space. But he refuses to accept this and I have to play along until he decides to grow up. It's possible that his vision will disintegrate before he reaches adulthood, as mine did, and he will have no choice but to change hobbies. Probably, he'll be intrigued by the auditory. At least then we could enjoy the mellifluous sounds of

the outdoors at dusk, rather than watching darkness fade through a broken telescope.

I stare at him and internally crack. I try to confiscate the telescope, but he insists that I look through it first. I hold firm and refuse until the waterworks start. He pleads, says that if I look he'll let me upgrade it, or buy him a video game, and I will no longer have to be prey for voracious mosquitoes. The joke is on the mosquitoes in this case, my blood cells aren't good for anyone. They'll more than likely bite the dust before I do.

I give in and adjust the telescope to point in a new direction, as I stare into the fog. There's never anything in it, so I don't know why I expected now to be different. The waterworks got to me as usual, but this time is different. This time, the telescope is going in the trash, and he is getting something new. It is time for him to grow up, and he's just going to have to accept that. I mean, at least I'm still around to help him mature. I had to grow up alone, but he won't. I'll supervise him through the entire process.

I decide to start with imaginary friends and games. Those will be done from this moment on, and he'll realize that once he dumps this telescope into the rubbish before school.

Speaking of school, that will be the next priority. There will no longer be any of this staying up late when silhouettes fall. He will not be seeing any more nights, especially at this hour. There will be no more Bs in school. The sooner he focuses on his grades, the easier it will be for him later in life. He'll get into any undergraduate program that he would like, after he exceeds their expectations with grades and extracurriculars. Then, it'll be onto graduate school where he will do the same. He will never have to worry about anything. The job of his dreams will soon follow, with a pen to sign his own salary. Those

moments all start with tonight.

I withdraw from the telescope and take a moment to clench my eyes, giving them a chance to reset. I open them, ready to tell him the news, and I catch him staring back into the lens. I reach out to take the telescope away, but I see something unexpected. It isn't out in cosmos, it's right here, in Earth's troposphere, right above his head. It is some type of sanguine aura. As quickly as I see the light, it begins disabling me. The luminous light has latched onto me. The ethereal ambiance filches my freewill with an unwavering radiance. I am unable to renounce its splendor, but also unsure if I really want to.

This aura has a mysterious object within it, and my constant curiosity for the universe is piqued as I puzzle about what it could be. It's difficult to focus on the core, but it appears to be some sort of sphere. The sphere doesn't move, but the aura around it does. It fades then flourishes... fades then flourishes... fades then flourishes...

It resembles a heartbeat. After glaring at the object for a few minutes, the aura finally dims and allows me to stare at it without that chastising intensity.

Unfortunately, I am unable to experience this phenomenon with my child, although he is present. This unexplainable occurrence has me immobilized and incapable of notifying him. There must be a reason for it. Or maybe I am hallucinating. That would explain the lack of heat and why only I am able to see this light.

Surely, if my son saw it, he would acknowledge it. Something of this intensity should be releasing insane amounts of thermal energy. It is also possible that he is afraid.

After all, he is only a child, and I don't know what exactly it is, so I understand his possible fear of the unknown. It's highly improbable that light of this intensity is not acting as an incandescent, so he must be afraid.

Somewhere inside of me I hope that if he sees this light, his ridiculous hobby of voyaging into the vast nothingness of space with the telescope will cease to exist. He's just like his mother, she used to stare through it for hours. Nothing can be seen with that cheap telescope, though. The telescope didn't work when I was a child, and it surely doesn't work now. Between my attempts as a child to use the telescope, and watching my son and wife use it, I should have some comprehension of the attraction the telescope holds, but I don't.

I didn't understand my wife's excitement staring into oblivion with the broken telescope then, and I surely don't understand my son's now. The only glimmer to brighten the eternal nightfall of this yard is right above his head, and he doesn't even realize it. Hopefully, I'll snap out of whatever state I'm in to tell him to look up.

There has to be a reason why my body is responding this way. Unless, it's another aspect of my mind. My 'id' could be reacting selfishly, and not want to share the light with anyone. It makes sense. Especially if I don't have an answer for what it is. It may be best that I keep it from him; let him continue to enjoy his fictional expedition, while I enjoy mine.

The orb begins to flicker again as if it is communicating. I feel like there's more to my silence than selfishness. Maybe, it's hunger.

I haven't had the proper amount of calories today. Actually, now that I think about it, I haven't consumed *any* calories today, or water for that matter, so that must be what it is. The chemo has been affecting appetite and memory lately.

The aura around the orb brightens a little more, and I begin to think it could be my subconscious feeling guilty about wanting to take the telescope from my son. He's only a child. I reminisce about my own childhood,

remembering what it felt like to grow up without a man to teach me, and the light starts to fade like I solved its riddle but got the answer wrong.

As I try to explain away this unexplainable floating orb, it transmutes. The aura diminishes for a moment to gather energy for an alteration. For the first time, I'm dumbstruck. A pantomath without an answer. Is it serendipity or destiny that this orb is here?

It seems to be responding to my rationalizations, trying to provide evidence of its existence, to prove that it isn't here by chance. It's giving me no choice but to trust its presence, so I begin to listen. Maybe if I listen I'll understand why it's here.

There are no words, only feelings. The energy of this orb radiates through every bone in my body and overwhelms me with warmth, passion, and love. The aura begins to feel familiar. The logic fades, and the emotions flourish. I stop trying to explain and only begin to feel. The orb allows me to close my eyes and connect.

Then, repressed memories of my wife arise. The moments appear as if they were happening for the first time. The only difference is that this sanguine aura surrounds her, and after each argument, every time I walk out, every time I disregard her feelings, the aura fades. This time she isn't alone though. We feel each moment together, and it dims the warmth in my heart. Each time her smile inverts, my heart breaks a little until I feel only regret and sorrow.

As I start to understand the purpose of the orb, the logical side of me devours that regret and sorrow. I begin to think that the orb is giving me some type of PTSD. The more I think, the brighter the orb becomes once again.

More memories overwhelm my thoughts until they dig into my heart. The first phone call, hug, date, and

kiss with my wife, and many other memories that I thought I had lost of her resurface like they were never gone.

The one that stands out from the rest is the first time I met her. After attempting to sell her a flawed telescope for a few bucks, she started walking out of my pawnshop. A reflective box caught her attention, and she caught mine. We talked and she convinced me to get the telescope for us to try together.

We stared through the telescope and talked for hours. There wasn't much in the sky, but that moment was the first time I can remember experiencing what it was like to feel instead of think. Each date after that ended with us staring into the sky with that telescope. There was never anything up there. It was the moments together that kept her staring into the faulty lens. Looking back, I realize that there was never any interest in the telescope. It was her love for me that continued to make it important, the telescope was just where it first started. I guess I forgot that along the way.

Next, came the memory of her last breath. This was the one that completely broke me. My last moment with her, and my son's first. It was also our last hug, kiss, cuddle, and conversation. As the final breath departed from her body, he screamed. Just moments before, they had been one, and a part of him perished on that bed along with a part of me.

My heart shatters all over again.

My eyes open and tears descend along with the orb. It merges with my son as he gazes into the telescope. Once the orb is no longer visible, her aura surrounds him. He peels back from the telescope to look at me, as if he felt what I saw.

I wipe the tears from my face and roll around the telescope to hug and kiss him on the forehead.

I say, “Thank you.”

Uma Sood  
*Revenge: 2008 Style*

Every elementary school has that weird kid. That kid that everyone avoids, the one who always smells weird, never has the right clothes, and never says the right thing. In my elementary school, I was that weird kid. I wore chunky dad shoes before it was cool, I hated to shower, and while my classmates were dying to grow up I was trying to delay it as long as possible. All the adults in my life seemed pretty miserable. The girls in my grades were already flirting with boys and wearing “makeup” (Smackers Chapstick). The only male attention I wanted was from my Club Penguin boyfriend online.

They bullied me in a typical way. It only got violent a few times. When I would ask to play four square, they would laugh and kick the ball at me. The occasional rock-throwing here and there. Never enough to fear for my life, but enough for me to skip school a lot. Looking back, it made sense why they bullied me. My family was poor in their elite private school eyes. I had a dad who was a different race than me. I didn’t have any friends or siblings my age, so I spent most of my life alone, resulting in me not having any social skills. It didn’t bother me that much, though. I still painted my whole body blue for Halloween and wore a thrift store wedding dress to school. I still performed a handwritten song about being a cat pilgrim at the all-school Thanksgiving assembly. In spite of their humiliating and hurtful words and actions, I didn’t change. I didn’t try to be friends with them. I still joined clubs and volleyball. I was fine and I chose to be by myself. Until one day, a bully’s words got to me.

It was the last day of fifth grade and my little ego was flourishing. We had just had a “graduation ceremony.”



No longer was I an eleven-year-old child. In those 5 minutes, I had become an eleven-year-old *woman*. A middle-schooler. My school at the time was a private school that held grades K-8. While it was the same school, the elementary and middle school never crossed paths. The middle schools were too “old and cool” for the elementary schoolers and the elementary schoolers were too in awe and intimidated to say anything to them. This school was all we knew. To finally become middle schoolers, the big cool kids on campus, was a big deal. I wasn’t excited about middle school, but I also didn’t dread it. Thirty new kids were supposed to join the class, and I was thinking that with those odds, I would gain a friend. A fellow outcast.

The new young adults all filed out of the classroom and out into carpool. People formed small groups and talked and traded goods. Earbuds were shared. Smackers were applied. Tomigachis were ogled and played with. I went and sat in the grass, alone, lips naked, and petless. My family couldn’t afford electronics and if they did they were too cheap and the items were too impractical. I was minding my own business, tearing up grass like bored pioneer children did, when I saw a white Cross-Trainer step up to my green casualties.

“Hi,” I said, shielding my eyes to look up. It was Caylyn and Elise. My two bravest and most constant bullies. They were standing the way only skinny girls can stand: one hand on their hip, the other clasping that hand. One leg pushed out. They slouched to seem casual, but it was a strategic kind of casual.

“What can I do for you ladies?”

The two looked at each other and smirked. I had said the wrong thing of course.

“Yeah,” Caylyn said in her high pitched nasally voice. “We just wanted to say-” she paused and looked me

up and down, “-good luck in middle school.” Then they both laughed and got into Elise’s mom’s big SUV. The way that Caylyn had said it made it very clear that she wasn’t wishing me good luck.

Sometimes there are moments in life where you see your life in full clarity. You are jarred out of your perception and forced to look at yourself and your actions in an objective way. Most of the time, you don’t like what you see. This was the first time that I had felt that. I looked around and for the first time started to compare myself to my peers. The girls were prettier than me, with shorter skirts and washed hair. Their uniforms ironed and washed by their maids. Mine stained and worn and washed only when my mother pretended to care. They talked excitedly and happily with one another. They seemed young and happy. I felt old and alone.

That summer my grandfather died. I used to spend my summer days playing chess or watching old Hindi movies. Now that he was gone, I realized how truly friendless I was. I also realized how weird it was that my only friend was an 80-year-old Indian man who wouldn’t let me watch TV in English. I analyzed my life in a new way. My phone was always silent, never ringing for a play date. No one was inviting me to their pool, or the movies. In volleyball practices, my shorts were too long and my shirt too big. More balls hit me than other girls. I was treated differently at away-camp, too, avoided and judged anytime I tried to make a friend. It even happened at chess camp, an activity for the weird nerdy kids. No matter where I went or what group I was in, I was disliked. I wasn’t just quirky or weird, people didn’t want to be around me. I realized that I didn’t like that, I was angry at myself for who I was. I found myself embarrassed and disgusted. Perhaps it was losing my best friend. Perhaps it was growing up and puberty hitting. No matter the reason,

one thing was evident; I didn't like who I was. I could either be like that forever or change.

Luckily, I had read *Twilight* the previous year which led me to consume mass amounts of YA books. I had a lot of insight into the minds of teenagers. I knew what made them cool and what didn't. A classic trope of these culturally enriching novels was the popular revenge story. Take an unpopular girl, which in 2008 usually just meant not having layered hair and glossed lips, who is bullied for her unusual interests. One day she's had enough and wants to prove that she can be like all the other kids. To prove that it's not hard to be popular, it's hard to be different. Usually this involves a makeover, a complete change in her personality, joining a cool club, getting cool friends, and of course a hot boy (who she convinces to pretend to be her boyfriend by tutoring him, but eventually they fall in love). I decided that I would do the same. The boyfriend was optional, but ideal. The other elements were crucial. My plan was simple:

1. Research how to be cool in magazines, books, and on the internet. In hindsight, an 11-year-old should not be reading *Cosmo* and learning the best positions for an orgasm. YouTube, though, was an excellent resource. Fashion and makeup videos were in their prime, thanks to JuicyStar07 and Michele Phan.
2. Execute a makeover. With eyebrow waxing, a real haircut (not my mom in her bathroom who has no experience), and raiding Forever21.
3. Learn to shave.
4. Join a cool activity. Luckily, I was already in volleyball.

It's not always good to try and model your life

after a book or movie. They are fictional for a reason, but I had no friends or even close younger family members to give me advice, so these fictional characters acted were all I had. Making myself over seemed like the perfect plan to show Caylyn and Elise that I didn't need any "luck" in middle school. I was going to show them that I could be just like them, but better.

If life was a movie then this would have been my makeover montage scene, but in reality it was a slow two months. I learned and changed in the privacy of my home. I threw out my Barbies, started my period, started wearing Victoria's Secret bras, and convinced my dad to get me a cell phone. I was a woman now. I couldn't wait for the whole world to see.

A week before school started, my new pink Motorola Razor chimed with a new text notification, the first of the summer. It was a text from a boy in my class, named JP. Read receipts were not a thing then so I quickly opened it.

*JP: My dad wanted me to invite you to my pool party. It's on Saturday at 1.*

They always invited me because our dads are friends. I never went because, well... that's embarrassing. I may be weird, but I have some pride. Pride wasn't an option now. They already thought I was weird, so what could I lose? This was the perfect place to test-drive the new me, and my new shaving skills.

*Uma: Sure.*

Perfect response. Casual. Am I coming or not? They don't know, nor do they care.

The day of the party I was smooth in my new tankini from Justice. My hair was blonde and layered. My eyes rimmed black and my lips coated in bubblegum pink lip gloss. I had grown from 5'3 to 5'7 that summer making me leaner but unfortunately taller than any other boy. I

couldn't change that though. As I walked to JP's house, my fried straightened hair stuck to my lips. I was stunning and ready for my grand entrance. I knocked on the door and struck a pose. JP opened the door and his reaction was the exact one I wanted.

"Wow... um hey Uma," He said with wide, shocked eyes. God, he was so in love with me it was embarrassing for him.

"Hey," I said, sounding bored. "Where is everybody?" I let my eyes gaze past his shoulder, then back at him unimpressed.

He looked sheepish as he said, "Yeah, everybody's downstairs playing Guitar Hero. It's not uhh.. so much of a party as it is like a hangout."

Never in my life had someone apologized for something not being cool enough for me. This was going better than I had planned. I followed him down the narrow hallway into the basement, the sounds of missed notes led me to where the hangout was. Aerosmith was not what I would have chosen from my grand entrance to be to, but some things in life are out of our hands. Everyone was focused on the screen as David played. Soda cans and snack packaging littered the coffee table. Heads turned as we walked in and no one said anything. Suddenly I feel self-conscious and stupid. Just because I changed my appearance didn't mean that I was any different. I was the same me just with a cleaner exterior.

They stayed silent and I knew that I had to say something. I pushed through my anxiety and tried to be as confident as possible. Like they always say, 'fake it 'till you make it.' I flipped my hair and bounced to the couch.

"Hey, guys! How was your summer?" I asked with a big smile. They smiled back and started talking.

As I was leaving the party, sunkissed and feeling popular, JP walked me to the door.

“Well I had fun,” I said, heading out the door.” I’ll see you at school on Monday.”

JP hesitated and looked at me in a way a boy never had before. He then said the words that I was dying to hear all summer.

“You know, you’re different,” he said sheepishly.

I smiled coyly. “I know.” I bounced down the stairs to my dad’s waiting car.

\*\*\*

With the prospect of friends, the first day of sixth grade seemed less daunting. I straightened my hair, applied my makeup, and put on my middle school uniform. A crisp baby blue oxford, a shorter than the regulation plaid skirt, ankle socks, and wallabies. I looked at the mirror and could not believe how much I’d changed. I looked like any other middle school girl in 2008. I hated the way I was treated before, but was it worth losing any sense of individuality to fit in? What if after all this they still hated me, and I looked like a fool? At least before I was myself and different. Now I could just be a try-hard, which is worse.

“Uma, let’s go,” my dad yelled, hurrying to drop me off before he had to be at work. I ran down the stairs and headed to my inevitable doom.

It might have been my imagination, but I swear the whole gym stopped to stare as I walked in.

I looked around and met some confused eyes, trying to place if I’m a new student. I also saw that I wasn’t the only one who grew up. Maybe it’s the fact that we were all in our middle school uniforms, but everyone seemed to look older and more grown-up. I anxiously noticed how much a lot of the guys had changed too. Their hair looked shaggier and some had grown taller. I was lost as to where to sit. I used to automatically go to the back, where I could be ignored in peace. If I wanted this year to be different

though, I couldn't do that.

"Uma! Over here," I heard a cracked male voice yell. I turned to see JP waving at me. He was sitting with the rest of the crew. I smiled with relief and headed over.

As I walked over, I felt someone staring at me. I looked down and noticed that Caylyn and Elise were staring, shocked. As I got closer, I saw that their makeup was too cakey and their mascara too clumpy, which I now knew were fatal mistakes. I couldn't help my ego when I noticed that I looked better than them. As I walked by them, I smiled coyly.

"Hey, girls," I said and kept walking to my new friends.





# Part II

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## Art

*Impressions*

Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest

Art Honorable Mention

Megan Pogue

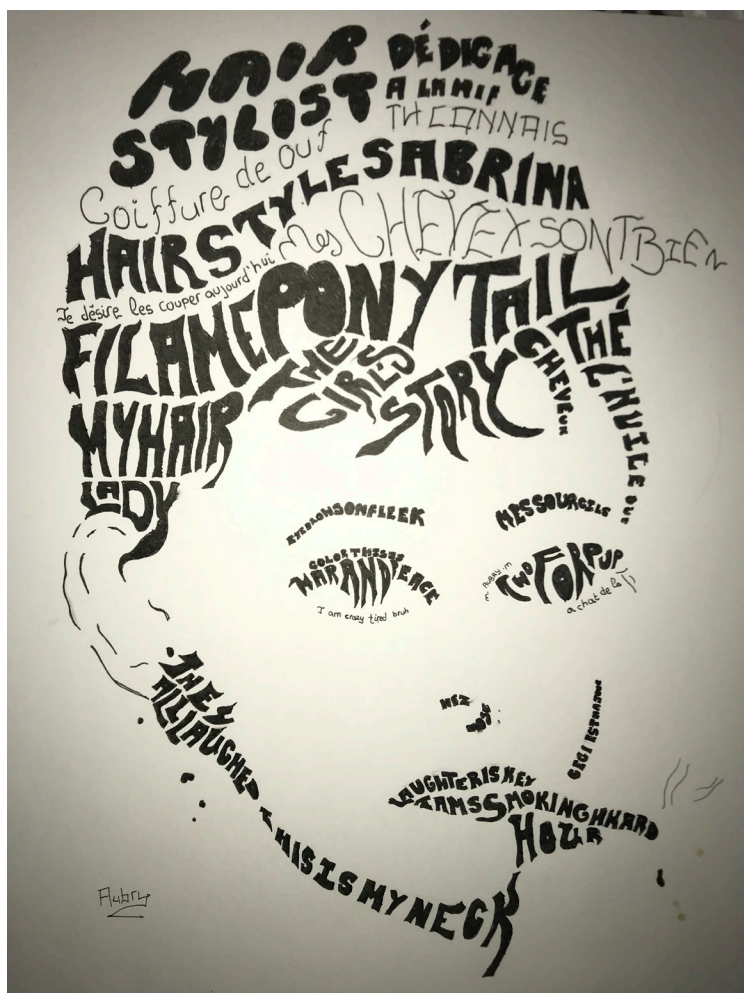
*Reflection*



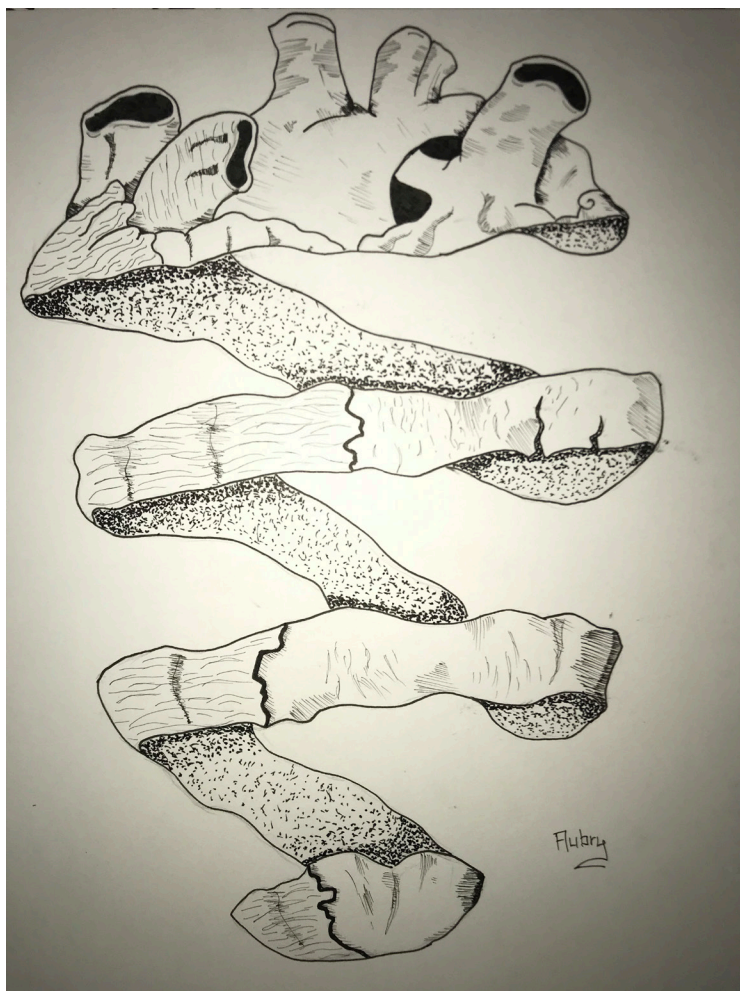
*Willenbrink*

Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest  
Art Honorable Mention  
Claire Willenbrink  
*Home*

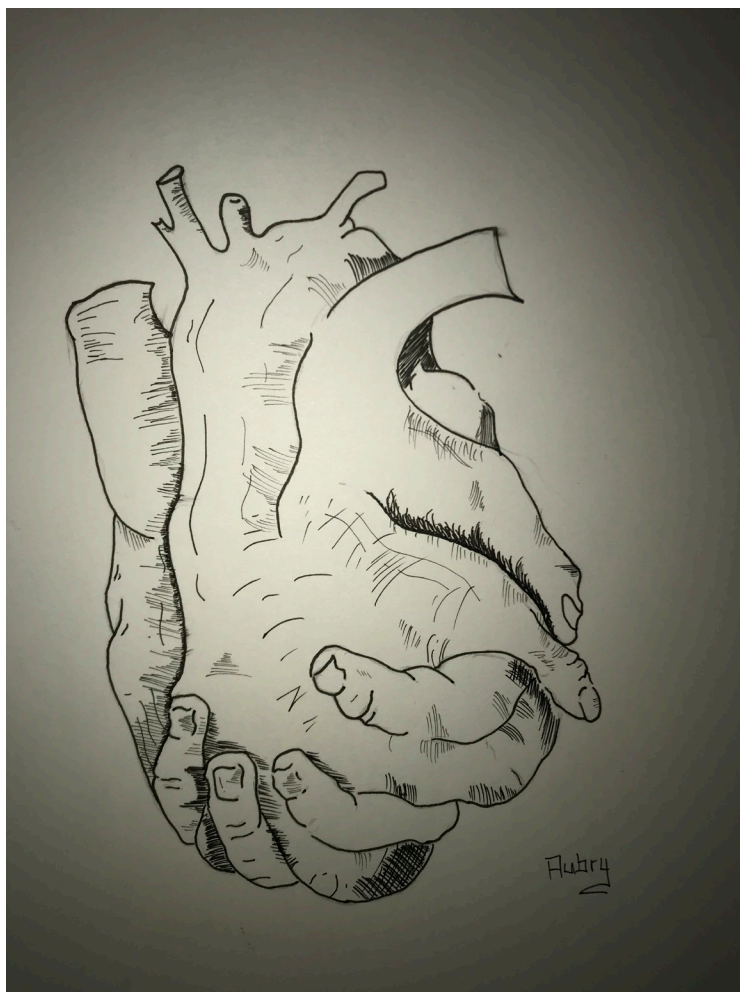




Untitled by Aubry-Quentin Munana

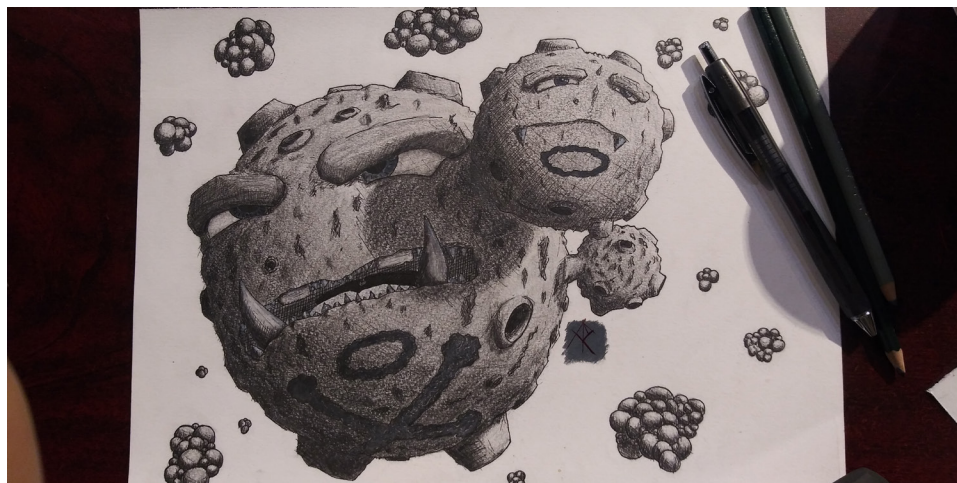


*L'incompris* by Aubry-Quentin Munana



*Untitled* by Aubry-Quentin Munana





*Weezing Drawing by Axel Ruiz*



*Sunset on the Cumberland* by Ashleigh Evetts





*Untitled* by Brandon Radomski



*Persistence of Cinderella* by Chloe Melton



*Bubble lady* by Chloe Melton

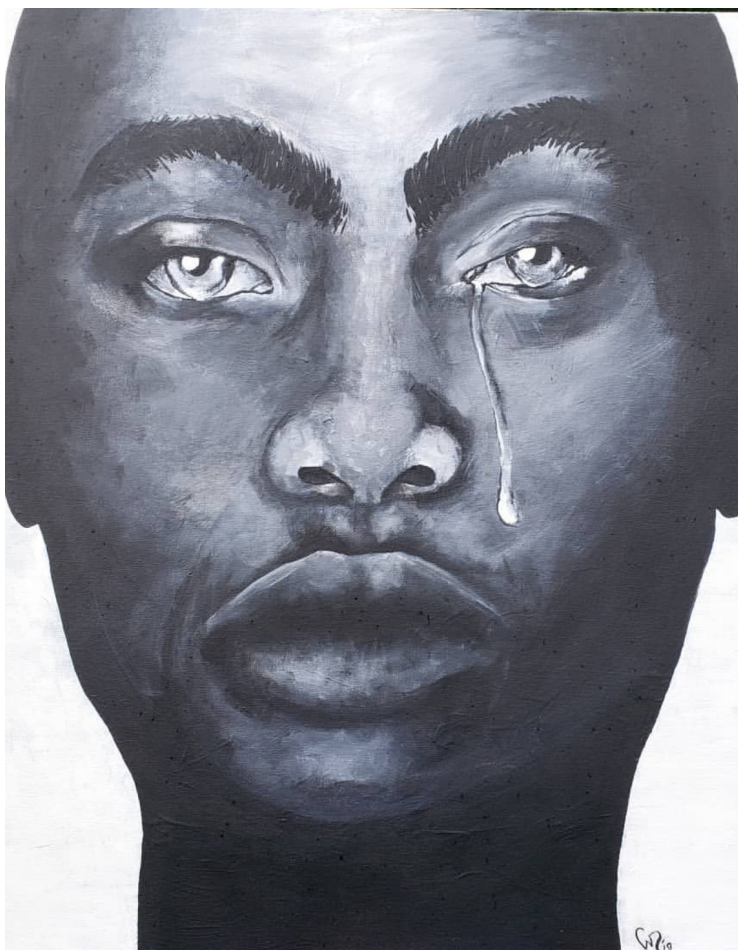


*Picasso blazer* by Chloe Melton





*Vincent* by Chloe Melton



*Real men do cry* by Chloe Melton

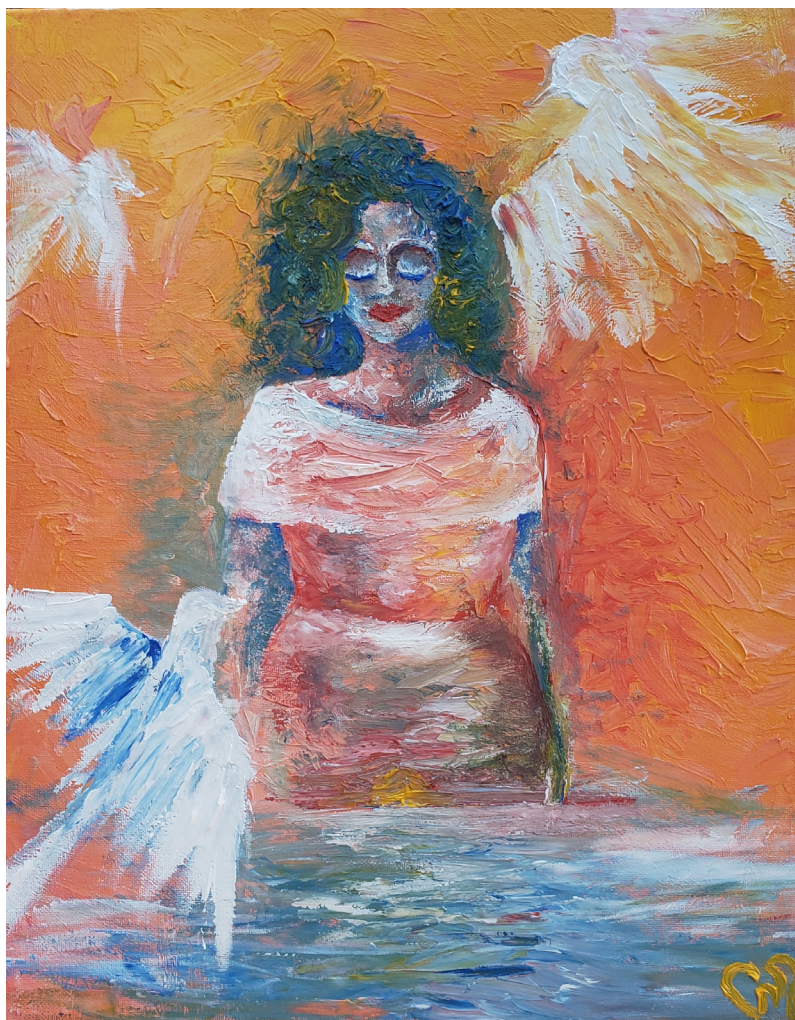


*Scruffy* by Chloe Melton



*She is the tide* by Chloe Melton

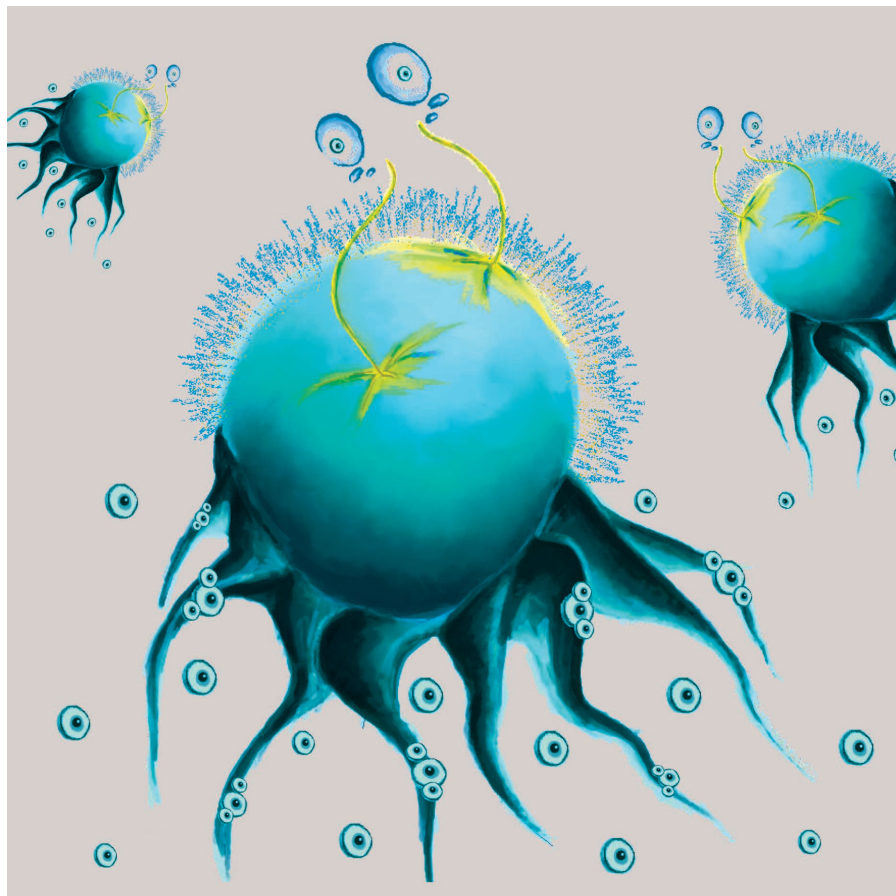




*Still like the sun, I rise* by Chloe Melton



*You are art* by Chloe Melton



*Eyes Open* by Chloe Tragesser



*Mr. Spiny* by Claire Willenbrink



*Art*



*May* by Eden Hensley

*Impressions*



*Foothills* by Eden Hensley



*7:29AM* by Eden Hensley

*Impressions*



*10:49AM* by Eden Hensley

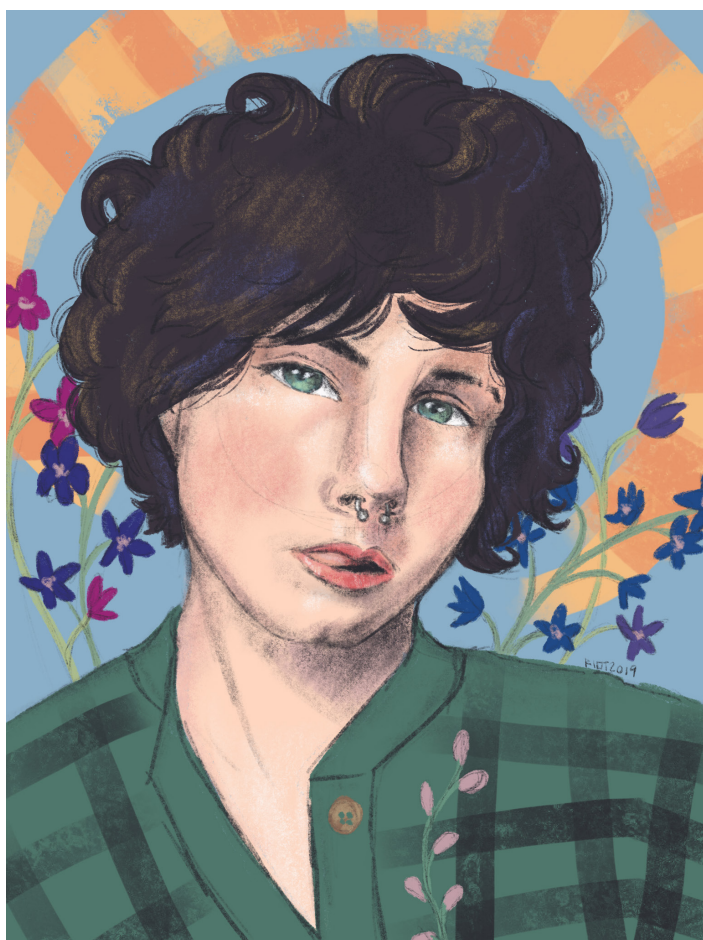




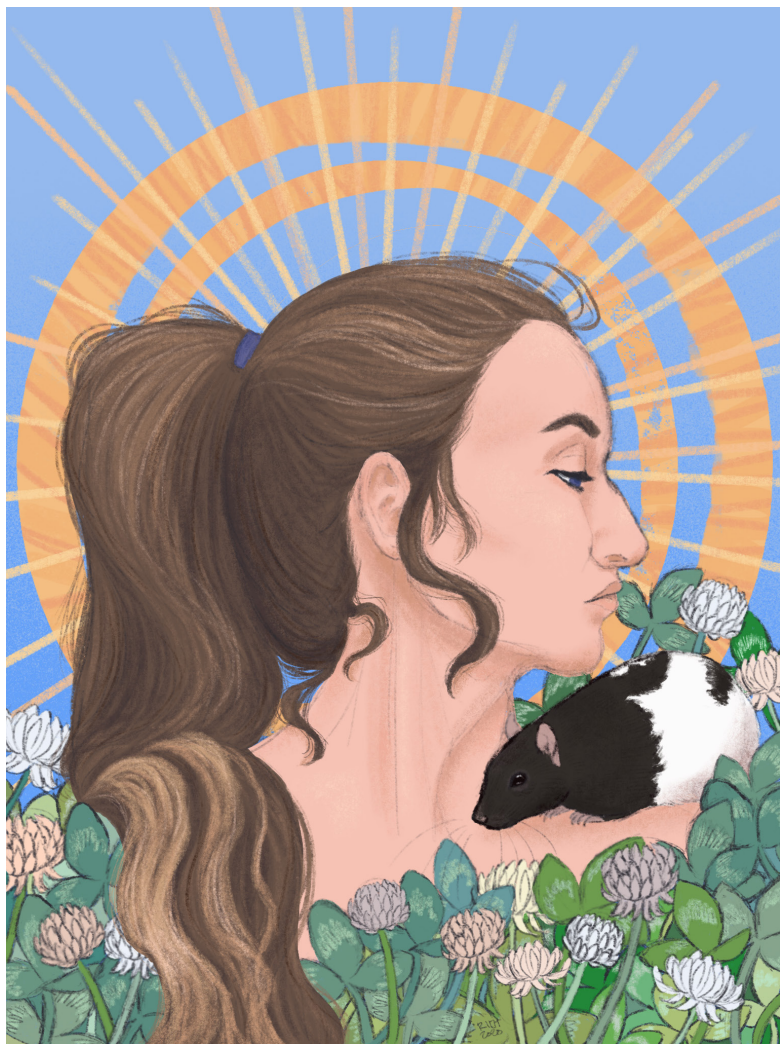
*Garden Cat* by Hannah-Rose Libby



*Andy* by Hannah-Rose Libby



*Levi* by Hannah-Rose Libby



*Self- Portrait* by Hannah-Rose Libby



*Possessed by Hannah-Rose Libby*





*Wounded* by Hannah-Rose Libby



*Grace* by Jamie Yoder



*Happiness* by Jamie Yoder





*Meadow Road* by Jamie Yoder



*Joy* by Jamie Yoder



*Rest* by Jamie Yoder



*Grease Hopper* by Jamie Yoder





*Untitled* by Kier Hull



*Untitled* by Kier Hull



*Untitled* by Kier Hull





*Untitled* by Kier Hull





## Flower Meanings by Kier Hull



*Organic Fish* by Kier Hull



*Mili Grimes* by Rain Larsen



*Lapis Lazuli* by Rain Larsen





*A Starry Night Personified* by Rain Larsen



*Beauty of Nature* by Lesli Nolzco



*Bliss Behind the Pain* by Lesli Nolzco



*Many Dreams. One Family* by Lesli Nolzco





*Tracks to Life* by Lesli Nolzco



*Kennewick Man, Bank of the Columbia River* by Megan Pogue



*Passion Flower* by Megan Pogue

*Impressions*



*Untitled* by Nataly Bennett



*Untitled* by Nataly Bennett



*Impressions*



*Untitled* by Nataly Bennett

*Art*



*Untitled* by Nataly Bennett





*Oxygen* by Sarah McFalls



*Pura Vida* by Sarah McFalls



# Part III

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## Poetry



Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest

Poetry Honorable Mention

Rachel Swatzell

*Who's the Boss*

Eighty percent of women are  
still not receiving equality pay.  
*Didn't we fix that?*  
We had the Civil Rights Movement, check.  
We had the Women's Rights Movement, check.  
Women have the right to vote  
so what more do they need?

How about a voice  
that's not lost in translation.  
A voice that's not oppressed for our accents.  
*You're from Appalachia, you don't  
have a voice that's powerful.*

Cantankerous narcissists of the "proper"  
blindsided by the flicks of our tongues,  
our words as soft as the tulip's silk petals  
and airy as baby breaths.  
Our agency, women of courage  
for the stubborn mule.

They expect us to be a laborer  
but not I, I have climbed  
my way to the top of  
The Hill of White Elephants.  
There's nothing more liberating for a  
Southern woman than standing  
on top of a mountain screaming  
*I am woman and I am change.*

Gabrielle Garner  
*My, Ours, You, the Enemy*

Our tolerance is high because of what  
We've had to tolerate.

.  
Unable to obliterate,  
The sudden gush, hush-hushed  
Bitter vitriol  
From YOU,  
From ME,  
From US.

.  
Foul tobacco, your tongue in my mouth  
The singe and sting of your hands moving south  
Helpless, hopeless, the moon above is hung on a celestial  
hangnail  
Rip.  
It.  
Off.  
By rusted moans, on whispered delirious beats,  
You see a goddess lie hot,  
But I'm blue bitter frantic.  
Please stop.  
Just not.

.  
You tell me I own what is mine by right  
But still I have to fight,  
To liberate our society that  
You  
Own  
My behavior, my breasts, the fabric of my life,  
As you bunch it up my thighs,  
Cries,

*Impressions*

Wont you stop, why wont  
YOU  
Stop?



Gabrielle Garner  
*Writing Block*

Blotted ink stains my fingers, I suck dry  
Deep gouges in paper  
Where words once were.

Where's the wisdom?  
Where's the grace?  
Will the pages feel real?  
Skin to skin, and face to face?  
If I breathe new life, will the worlds return?  
An organized chaos, they churn, they churn?  
An ignorant ringmaster am I,  
standing,  
searching through my circus on a page.

Crimson blots of blood,  
Flushed parchment  
Wrinkled flesh.  
Oh, the worlds must come back,  
Imagination must return,  
yearn,  
and eat once more,  
Please illustrator, give divine life  
To where I am no longer.

Gabrielle Garner  
*Gray, Going, Gone*

A fingerprint entombed, warped around my neck,  
Cut, cut, cut,  
The necklace strangles  
to mangle the emotions from escaping.

Sadness serrates the memories,  
Gone, but not forgotten,  
Chipped nail polish, blunt residue,  
From his departure.

God bless the broken, a token of grief,  
To make the machine move again?  
Pinball the emotions, a bipolar symphony:  
A father's love,  
Ping! Ding! ----- Ping, Ding!  
A father's love,  
Ping! Ding! ----- Ping, Ding!

Stuck in repeat, a Ferris wheel of up and down,  
But falling into agony,  
Pounding pain, grounding reality...  
I thumb your thumbprint  
Forever worn around the neck,  
Strangled, mangled, by the love it sets back.

I feel your love,  
I feel your love,  
I miss your love,

Hey, Dad!  
It's me,

Frost covered organs,  
Gray, going, gone.

Lilly Daffron  
*Flame Feud*

we played with fire, you and I.  
that germ x that we lit up, the flame  
was so blue it appeared as a ghost.  
almost not visible, but present still.

that waltz we danced, our bodies  
melting together with sweat and  
longing.

that song we covered so many times,  
our parts clear and defined, our  
verses known and understood.

that long distance call bittersweet as  
any sour candy sold, bringing us  
together again despite miles and  
miles.

we played with fire, you and I.  
that time literally, sparking our hearts  
into realizing we've played with it all  
this time, almost visible, but present  
still.

Christopher Bryson  
*Benefits, Not Friends*

It's warm and inviting, yet cold and slimy  
But we all love it  
It's almost as if we crave it  
A necessity for life  
Like that hot cup of coffee before a long day  
Or those shots of vodka after it's over  
Whether we admit it or not, it's the only thing we think of  
We try and fight it  
We know they don't have any legitimate feelings  
We do everything in our power to deny our impulses.  
We remind ourselves of the chaos this causes in our life  
Nothing works, absolutely nothing  
FUCK IT, we give in  
The momentum begins to build  
Our heart rate skyrockets, breathing becomes frantic,  
beads of sweat form all over.  
And then, it's finally over.  
You get dressed  
Go home  
Regret it  
And do it all again tomorrow.

Lilly Nixon-Perkins  
*Untitled*

I'm tired of sleeping in the empty spaces you left  
Suffocated by the shortness of breath  
That used to dance here  
Like ghosts on a gravestone

Coleman Bomar  
*Words of Millenial Dead*

I'm told they died obviously, plain, Crushed under  
locomotive  
Silicon Valley glow worms sliming into the hearts of us.

I'm told they ascended from coffee stain Aprons  
To green fields heavy with pecan pie Scent  
Sewing patchwork tablecloths.  
I'm told Love is harder now, but it was once papercut  
Red ink on white spritzed with perfume Singing:  
*Your heart is not forgotten.*

I'm told electric light flicker pain and the  
Skimble-scamble flash of our most connected fantasies  
Exorcise spirits in kindred Eyes.  
I'm told I have killed hills sought out for Loneliness  
Wanted and deserved.

I'm told the world isn't mother so try a New cancer.

I'm told the old gods are dead with my  
Generation and soon we will want for  
Rain on our skinny rainbow shoulders.

I'm told what I'm told is rightfully Impending.

I'm told it's our own bootless fault.

But I tell you, all damn headless tellers  
Be damned,  
I have seen young hearts face down  
In sunny puddles of April



*Impressions*

Pooling red,  
Bleeding yearning:  
Dead  
Dead in the cooking future  
They have foretold

Coleman Bomar  
*Before I asked for help*

If this is what kills me

In the corner of every room

The black wings flecking every thought

Know it started as a lion smile

Loneliness wasn't always so Ferociously predatory

Spiked and clawed

If this is what kills me

And the nuts say I was possessed

Please nod vehemently

Because life would have been

Easier if it was all red eyed lizard men and lead hat  
conspiracies

If this is what kills me

I slept late

*Impressions*

I do not regret it

But then I look into my brother's eyes

And the reservoirs underneath

And it can't kill me

If this is what saves me

Know I am saved because all of you

Reading this

Lifted me above pointless wars

Of silent paradox

Without even realizing

If this is what saves me

I am saved already hallelujah

Metamorphosing never for the last Time

If this is how a human lives and dies

On and off the brink

Know that I no longer crawl to Hell for

The rigged self loathing

But hike in heaven on sunsets

Gazing sunsets

Sleeping sunsets

Dreaming sunsets

Sunsets

Thank you

Selena Cook  
*Missing Sock Journal*

Hi, I'm the missing sock-some people loose me during a wash and rinse cycle when I run off to some better place where no one can find me but some- like you- lose me in a way that seems so innocent.

I was a part of your favorite pair of socks,

you like the way the two bold stripes on me ended right below the knee and the way I felt comforting gripping soundly to the back of your calf despite slipping down every three or four steps every three to four steps.

I remember how you lost me- you were at a friend's house, two maybe three years ago

you wore me over in hopes to go to the mall feeling cute

but plans changes and so did your outfit, the night got late but mom still came early in the morning, so you had to rush to pack joking with your friend the whole time all the while trying to remember where you left your hair brush- bathroom floor to the left of the toilet paper holder

I remember the feeling when you walked out of the room without me-

your friend found me a few days later when she was finally forced to clean, she texted you that night and said she would bring it to school after a wash

I was washing in a cramped crowded washer that reminded me of a shoe that was just one size too small, I got close with a sweater who complained about the strings she always got cut off despite the fact that the little girl that wore it used them as a grounding method- they were pretty upset about the talk of them being 'worn out' and went on about it until the final cycle.

I remember the days that turned into weeks of your friend's promise being forgotten about in the morning- I tried to understand- oh its early, oh she has somewhere to be... but I began to feel the loneliness tugging at me.

I was alone at the front door awaiting pick up to be brought home where I was loved and worn. but the waiting made me grow tired and dull- her mom found me and saw no use for me.

so... hi, I'm the missing sock, I wasn't lost in the dryer or misplaced when folding, I was left and forgotten about in months' time despite the work and effort put into making you love me.

I hope your socks match today.

Cooper Harrison  
*GHG-34-KIOF-3566*

The rocks are splitting from the mountain  
And falling far below into an ever-growing valleys.  
With each pebble the valley grows taller;  
With each pebble the mountain grows smaller.  
Over Time I suppose they shall both become level  
When Eternity ceases to be and the eons fall into nothing-  
ness,  
But for now Time wares upon the face of the mountain.  
Carefully counting each pebble's drop,  
Destruction waits to level the World.  
And I, carefully marking the strokes of Time,  
watch the center.



Cooper Harrison  
*TYU-65-KKGH-6579*

A summer flower bloomed before the dawn  
and to the morning prayed a silent song.  
He thanked the Lord in heaven for the dew.  
He thanked the sun that warmed the afternoon.  
He asked of God, who dwells in skies above,  
to make sure when he's picked he picked for love.  
For flowers picked for lovers never die,  
But bloom each time the sun does set or rise.

Cooper Harrison  
*RDA-45-FHCT-5275*

In the silence of the morning,  
In the coldness of the dawn,  
I awake before the sunrise  
So that I may think upon  
The world that is around me,  
The people that I know,  
The choices put before me,  
And the silent falling snow.  
I open up the window  
With coffee in my hand,  
And watch the snow come falling  
On the cold and quiet land.  
To the snow I softly whisper  
That you are on my mind.  
Then I sit in total silence  
And pray to the divine.  
The divine I see in nature.  
The divine I see in you.  
The divine that is the sunset.  
The divine that holds the clue.  
I care for you quite deeply,  
Though you may never know,  
And I pray that you find sunshine  
When the world is bleak and cold.  
From your deepest darkest ocean  
To my dreary mountain peak,  
I know you will keep fighting  
Through this world that makes you weep.  
It's for you I write this prayer.  
It's for you I sing this tune.  
With this rhythm from the ocean

I'm sure you've always knew.  
In the silence of the morning,  
In the coldness of the dawn,  
I awake before the sunrise  
And on you do think upon.

Pero Brittz  
*Dance*

They twist and turn to invisible beat  
That deep inside their chest they keep  
A symphony of risk and tears  
As armies drum inside their head  
And greater pain throughout the years  
But without this, I'm truly dead.

Caution rules and rules do reign  
In a dance that none do not profane  
Gentle breeze of dangerous might  
Be careful of your heart this night  
Be vigilant in seeking truth  
Lest you shatter twice your youth.

If you find the raw and bare  
didn't hearken to beware  
scars hollow your blooming mind  
loving turns to hate and dread  
Lean on those who can rewind  
Those who know to raise the dead.

Fear your faults no less than this  
That saved you cannot be  
He set out to bring thine rest  
He said, "You, follow me."  
If you breathe and know the truth  
That deep regret its grip will lose  
Shadows will their silence find  
In the water of your mind  
Freedom is a walk away  
promise me before all this

Not the right path you will miss  
That you'll choose to walk this day  
Neither right or left to sway  
In walking in The Way

Katlyn Bogle  
*Take Care*

Do you ever feel so tired  
Yet do not understand,  
Why your eyelids keep falling  
While your body continues to stand?  
Have you ever thought maybe  
It is not your body that needs the rest,  
But your mind and soul  
That are on a far more fragile quest.  
And even though you get the same sleep,  
It never seems enough,  
Because you aren't taking care of your existence,  
Just the easy, obvious stuff.  
Your mind asks for more than sleep,  
To give you dreams and calm your strife,  
While your soul requires even more,  
To give you laughter and tears and life.  
So, next time you think,  
Sleeping in will do the trick,  
Take a moment, take a breath,  
And always remember this:  
Your body can handle so much,  
Before it's broken down,  
You are so much more than your body,  
You are all the things that make you smile,  
And all the more what makes you frown.  
So don't just take it easy,  
Just let yourself be,  
And always remember that within every day,  
You do so much more than what you see.

Graham

Matthew Graham  
*Terms of Misfortune*

The feeds that they like are telling them  
That things are better than they've ever been

The more I think,  
The more I think that no one thinks...  
The more *I think*...

Matthew Graham  
*Sunday Florist*

Hellfire screams the wind  
The air, stumps, shrubs, chrysanthemums.  
Howls the coyote All for One  
And None for All Motherfucker

I want to drop a Xanax bar down the  
Throats of every miserable person in this place.  
The white fractals beaming  
Between McDonald's and the Emerald Club

String me up if I say what's on my mind  
*Christ, I'm an american*, don't I deserve it?  
*Mr. Pound*, how does it feel  
To be the one who got away? Lucky dog.

I kid... I kid you;  
Racist *political piggy*. To feel sympathy would be to  
Admit to all of your pathetic sins;  
Pitiful swindling *piney rose*

Daffodils still cleave the zipper shut  
So that your manhood doesn't slip out  
And swallow us all whole...  
We really are in the asshole of this holy universe

The night finds that their voice left  
And lost the authority of their glory days.  
What finds the deer when it leaps the meadows fence?  
Mountains, mounds, hills, and cliffs

Of antelope shit.



*Graham*

Matthew Graham  
*See the Day*

I still wait for the cat to lick the whipped cream from my  
hand.

The evil New York chef made a better bratwurst than the  
Chicago native.

The rain keeps a-fallin' and the weirdos keep coming.

This town has more character than one might realize.

Matthew Graham  
*The Seventh of February*

Frost sets the morning  
No time but the chill whisp'd breath  
Trees, splitting the wind

Kaylie Dawe  
*After Snow has Fallen*

We walk with quiet,  
identical footsteps that  
couldn't help it---

They made a twisting maze.  
Timid prints sunk deep into  
the snow.

Our breaths dense  
clouds mingling  
right above unsure  
faces.

Still, we go on. Keep  
walking forward with  
numb hands.

Stop. Do you see? You  
seem not to notice.  
Aren't you scared?---

scared of The Lady pressed to the  
glass? Long fingernails tangled in  
bright, red hair.

Run! Run away. The  
stiff legs carry me  
without noticing

I have left you behind. My  
matching companion. But  
there is no time to go back.

Brandon Spurlock  
*Twin Flames*

Two flames met one fateful day  
They began their dance in synchrony  
One was dull, the other bright  
Their motion ignited the lesser of the two

In that moment they became mirrored  
The lesser found new life  
Bound forever to the brighter's step  
They gracefully waltzed ahead  
An entangling of the soul

The brighter slipped away  
Thus the lesser shrank  
It sought to close the gap  
but could not keep pace  
The chase will never end  
As long as they are linked

One day they may find unity and once more  
Both burn bright into eternity.

Brandon Spurlock  
*/embrace*

In awe I wander  
In the embrace of mist.  
I'm urged to escape  
But cannot resist.  
When at last I'm free  
And can finally see  
I seek to invert  
My new discomfort  
And return  
To the embrace of mist.

K. G. Mathews  
*Chlorine*

Chemicals burning in my nose  
Met their match in  
The hollow pit of my stomach  
The night I realized I was in love with you

Acid dread of that knowledge  
Solidifies in the pit of me  
Threatens to drag me into  
The trench of this public pool

You reach for her hand  
Instead of mine  
As my lungs burst and  
Bleached water rushes to fill the space

Sour fumes and bitter water  
Clinical white of the tiles  
An old t-shirt of yours instead of  
the swimsuit I'd forgotten at home  
My only comfort at the bottom

I look up from my depths  
Ears bound to rupture from pressure  
As the lights underneath the water flicker on  
One by one  
So you two can swim in the dark

I ought to grow gills here  
Learn to breath chlorine instead of your air

K. G. Mathews  
*Shake Loose, Shakespeare!*

“What’s past is prologue” all of them say  
But what, pray tell, will they say of today?  
I’m telling you now, I won’t be here to know,  
I’ll be off and away like fresh melted snow.

God is a fellow of infinite jest,  
And maybe he’ll make the sun rise in the west.  
If that is the case, watch me give chase  
I’ll follow her east to hold her gold face.

Parting, for me, won’t be a sweet sorrow  
But it’ll be sweet not to see you tomorrow.  
I’ll be long gone, far out to sea  
Far beyond you, belonging only to me.

They’ll ask and they’ll ask, “To be? Not to be?”  
And from my great heights I’ll shout, loftily,

“Don’t be,  
Won’t be,  
Not ever,  
Not me!”

I’ll run to the sun, to my promised share.  
See me exit your world, pursued by a bear.

K. G. Mathews  
*The Shambling Thing*

She is a shambling thing, barely sewn together.  
Why don't you set down those eyes, love?  
They're only hanging on by the grace of those big black  
bags  
And they burn itchy, itchy red.  
What is thrown against the walls and shuttered windows  
In that storm-cloud head?  
No mouth to open and tell, is there?  
No tongue. Only the red, red itchy eyes  
Bloodshot without tears

She is a shambling thing, barely even human shaped.  
Red eyes. Red, red bones  
Joints that ache and reel against their confines.  
Jabbing, stabbing  
Shaking their chains.  
That spine must hurt, dear one.  
So red and angry its almost black.  
Worse than the prisoner joints,  
It cracks like a whip on Sunday.  
And the red, wide eyes so heavy and hungry  
They won't ever, ever close

She is a shambling thing, barely standing up.  
Creaking and crawling.  
Just drop, why don't you?  
The ground is never as cold as your guts.  
Rest those red, red eyes.  
If you ever remember how.



Riley Hamant  
*Spectrum*

Blue  
The anxiety  
The loneliness  
The flashbacks  
The past  
Red  
The anger  
The frustration  
The exhaustion  
The present  
Don't tell me I'm being irrational  
I know I am  
Don't tell me I need to calm down  
I know I do  
Don't tell me I complained yesterday  
I know I did  
But all I ever see is blue  
    Red  
        Blue  
            Red  
                Blue  
                    Red  
                        Blue  
                            Red  
                                Maybe that's why  
                                My favorite color is  
                                Purple

Harley White  
*profile of a Queen fan*

his hands were almost alarmingly immaculate  
but of course, by this point  
they had grown quite familiar

and his hair, though much changed  
over the years, always looked  
wonderful by a fire

one of his best features, if i may say so  
is a quarter-sized tattoo by his ear  
a fitting place to rest my thumb

and we are on our side

Harley White  
*grieving: anger*

i can't visit you like i used to anymore  
i can't watch you swimming  
or sleeping or grinning your  
teeth like embers  
i can't see those red and pink  
snowflakes that got stuck to  
your skin in the hospital when you cried  
i can't even hear your name  
my immune system has gotten  
weird like that i guess  
hair like yours but not yours  
makes me a cottonmouth and  
my smile is filled with venom  
i don't have a place to hide and  
feel warm as you keep trotting  
off the path in the woods and  
getting too close and i have  
to rear back to warn you  
'please go away so i don't strike'  
i can't visit you like i used to  
i can't spell your palm or shoulders  
on my fingertips  
i can't taste your favorite fruit  
but blackberries are in season  
and each time i reach towards  
a bush they reach back with  
new thorns on their branches  
did you know blackberry  
bushes grew thorns now  
did you know that the cigarettes  
you used to smoke taste

*Impressions*

like tears and  
did you know i can't visit  
you like i used to anymore  
not who i am right now i can't  
we'll see who i am in a few  
weeks and if i can come say hi  
but i have a fresh pack  
to open and some jam to make

Shoshana Overstreet  
*The Professor of English 331*

There once was a man who taught books  
Who maintained a professorial look:  
To the end of the age  
Asked “questions, comments, outrage?”  
‘Bout Middle English gobbledygook.

Rain Larsen  
*Walls*

Mimes from birth,  
taught to build invisible boxes  
and believe they are real;  
growing accustomed to these walls,  
children try to make a home out of them,  
others' words stacked up like bricks.  
The sticks and straw and mortar  
that shelter them cannot be blown down by sheer wolves  
alone.  
Instead, the wind reinforces it,  
a psychological barrier that can stand the test of time.  
Rather than changing the parameters  
of their own forts,  
they cut their limbs like sewing patterns  
to fit inside.  
The box becomes bars,  
keeping them in,  
keeping others out.  
Are they not of the same cloth?  
Yet their boxes are different,  
decorated with everything  
they've put inside,  
and how they decorate the outside.  
The outsiders are no more than unwanted mutts in their  
eyes,  
only allowing those who are willing  
to morph their features to join their  
self-declared ranks.  
What was meant for comfort and unity created isolation.  
What was meant for finding themselves created the  
expectations they panel their roofs with.

And all the tests,  
all the exams,  
all the quizzes in the world  
only help them lay out the blueprint  
for the label of the can.

Jonathan Bates

*Self-Important Poems About My Childhood*

*Gather 'round this keep of words.  
Forged in the fire of turmoil and dread -  
a man is formed of pain and sorrow  
by which no gauze can stop its gush.*

*I tell you not a tale ending in hatred nor scorn,  
Fore I tell you tale of grace and compassion  
borne of toil and soot-mud so thick  
nary a soul expels thought of it.*



Jonathan Bates  
*Shame*

Sequestered in lilting mountains of green and blue,  
a dead cat hangs – eyeless – from an electric fence  
popping as no ground may sustain its vicious currents,  
melting flesh and fur alike.

Now five years old, I wonder what feline-averse devil  
without thought committed this act of barbarity.  
Looking about, my eyes peer upon a great horned owl  
of golden brown and furious eye.

Bare-feet grips grass in haste  
as I run back into my dented blue trailer  
composed of tin, vomit, rats, and animal urine –  
the pungent smell of death only seconded by carcinogens.

Mother – high – slumps over red-hot burner  
cooking Ramen and nodding out whilst she  
summons that familiar sleep which the addicted  
know as well as their inner-most secrets they are attempt  
ing to kill.

I know this is no time to disturb mother  
as I know *she knows what she is doing*  
and to wake the bewildered beast would mean  
tears and shaking and longing for the touch of another.

Senior Sister skulks like pale Victorian ghost -  
outward from her room she bellows in frail frame  
where she munches on crackers with mouse-like precision  
and deafening silence as no one knows where they were  
hidden.

*Impressions*

Exists in books she does, in escape from the same  
horrors  
which grip her *and* I, but her maturity a pure shield  
and her hope to one day escape  
is a fueled fire winding her serene sails.

I calculate how to present my familiar need  
to use the bathroom as I alone cannot navigate it myself  
but I know Senior Sister loathes this task,  
but I also know the black, stale, carpet is not a bathroom.

I know Senior Sister will scream with wraith-like  
howls.  
I know *the shame* will come if I soil my clothes.  
I understand the calculated risk of using necessity,  
but I do not want my bottom hurt by Senior Sister again.

I know it was a mistake and that  
Senior Sister would never hurt me like that again  
fore bruises are quick to heal on the young,  
but the mind recollects as deep as one may plunge.

Jonathan Bates  
*Fentanyl Dreams*

Scorched soil dryly screams, begging the sky to cry  
upon it.  
Crops wilt to brown, stealing what it can from the soil.

My Father with diseased legs of fire, pierces the wall  
with his fist.  
My Mother with severe opioid dependency, cries, grinning  
with four teeth.  
My mind screams murder as two titans fight in a hot tin  
can.

Senior Sister, studying in the far hallowed halls of the  
greats, stretches her mind.  
Senior Brother, spreading his seed across the known  
world, gets high.  
Father, like opioid eagle, drives to find pills somewhere  
across the hot land.

Mother, grasping knife, slits her wrists.  
The blood drops to the thirsty Earth  
as it sucks it up with furious vigor, begging for more.  
Young Sister squalls with tears on hot earth.

She wastes water better in her body than on the  
greedy Earth.  
Upon the second slit, my mind splits.  
I ask her, "Why are you doing this, mom?"  
She replies, "It takes the pain away, Jon."  
With a third slit, a torrent of blood gushes forth to the soil.

*Impressions*

Blood drips down hands that once attempted to hold me  
when I was scared -  
when she was not high or angry with my presence or  
existence.  
A small, wet, puddle of maroon spirit pools in splotches  
on yellow dirt.  
Her head sinks low into her chest, sleep finds her, she falls  
into the grass.  
I feel the intuition that this is not the sleep of death, rather  
the feigned death of pills.  
Shaded, I allow her to lay in the maple grove.

I pick up Young Sister and take her to my Eldest Parents.  
I think of my often traversed spot below my house – a  
running creek.  
I walk down long stretches of baked road until I find the  
low creek.  
It powers on even in this horrid drought.  
I dip my feet into her.  
My muse and inspiration to keep flowing.  
On yonder bank, I peer three craned snakes.

I know they mean no ill intent.  
Nor can I blame their presence as my mother blames  
mine.  
Their cold blood enjoys the blistering sun.  
My hot blood enjoys the cool babbling brook.  
The sun hangs low in the sky as the pale blue day drifts to  
sweet orange.  
The snakes lurch back into their holes.  
I now must lurch back into my hole.  
I ponder what awaits me.

I begin the ascent back -  
The Golden moon lights my way.

Crickets sing in the distance.  
Cows swing bells toward me, believing I have come to feed  
them.

Starving animals beg for alms on the road side  
just as monks do the same.  
Their presence flees as I approach my house,  
as if they can sense the presence of an ever present evil.  
A darkness has fallen on my land.

I walk into my chilled tin trailer.  
Younger sister sleeps heavy.  
Mother, rag on arm, sleeps curled into father.  
Father, holding mother, sleeps curled into her.  
Bottles of urine and leg wraps surround the bed.  
Empty methadone bottles are strewn across the floor.  
Needle and spoon dark as night rests on the desk.  
Clinical white Fentanyl powder on its Folgers lid.  
My parents sleep the sleep of Fentanyl.  
I am happy and at ease.

Jonathan Bates  
*Questions For My Water Mother*

My dearest Water Mother,  
I seek your counsel  
for I have lost the path and key  
to happiness so sublime and simple.  
I lament in heart as my chest fills with  
hollow bird songs of mourning  
like an empty valley filled with sorrow -  
a blackness by which no hand can be reached.  
What is my purpose?  
Where do I go?  
How do I contend with me  
and the plethora of enemies which seek my demise.  
How should I live and how should I die?  
Will I be of any use to this life?  
I beg you now for an answer.  
I am lost, in need of love and counsel.

-

*So-so, child I am here -  
Live life not in constant fear  
as I know what will be  
if you learn to stick with me.  
I do flow forever on.  
Into streams, and into ponds.  
I lack a start, I lack an end.  
I have simply always been.  
So have you and so have I  
You will live and you will die.  
I am past and I am now -  
The future is an open cloud.  
It finds its way through breaks in dawn  
when seasons change and life moves on.*

*Many children have come to cry -  
ask for answers by my side.  
I tell you now of what will come  
because life flows ever on.  
You will play and you will sting.  
You will cry and you will sing.  
You will make and you will gleam,  
but most important: you will think.*

*In your mind, you will take  
life's confusion and debate  
upon things strange and vague  
as to freely educate.*

*All that pass inside your mind,  
you will dry their tears and bitter cries  
by looking through the velvet sky  
and peering to the other side.*

*Some may say there's nothing there.  
This just means they are scared.  
Just be patient, just be kind -  
as you know the other side.*

*You are kind and you are strong  
life has tested for too long -  
to break your will and break your spirit  
but you are few who do not fear it.*

*So, now LIVE, do your job  
help the others get along  
think so vast, go so deep  
you'll find respite and make your peace.  
Go within and live without  
Faith in you? I have no doubt.*

*Now, show the world what life's about...*

Natalie Tankersley  
*Graceland*

Disappointing, bland,  
The hype for someone  
Cherished by gone.  
His home seems empty  
Just another show,  
One building he won't leave.  
Empty. But present.

They tell me to use  
A different word.  
They weren't there.  
Use something nicer  
They say. How about  
Abuso. It's Spanish.  
But that's the same  
They say.  
But it's Spanish  
I say.

Be nicer, give grace  
It was long ago  
It wasn't that bad  
They say.  
But in my mind,  
I am offering as much  
Grace as the land does.



Rebecca Lesley  
*to katie pony*

first off, i just want to say,  
i'm glad that coach sent ferris away.  
i would of never found myself upon your back,  
now look at all the time i get to put on your tack.

i remember that time in the field,  
when you didn't want to yield.  
i never again left it up to luck,  
for you not to try and buck.

thank you for being calm on that trail ride,  
when the saddle ended up on your side.  
sorry your girth wasn't tightened all the way,  
it won't happen again, okay?

when i was riding you at the end of that show day,  
and all you wanted was some hay  
i'm sorry i didn't grin,  
i just really wanted to win.

i can't thank you enough,  
even though it's been a little rough,  
you've been a great guide,  
to teach me how to ride.

John C. Mannone  
*After Reading the Gospel of John*

It is not finished

Unnail him from the cross  
Return the blood and water  
    gushing from his heart  
Suture his gouged out flesh

Return the ripped out bits  
    of bone from his back  
Uncrown him  
Give the royal thorns back  
    to the locust tree

Unclasp the iron shackles  
Return him to the stone-cold cell  
—where the roaches won't betray  
Don't let Judas kiss him

Let the cup pass  
Return his sweat-turned-to-blood  
    into his pores  
Don't hear his prayer in the garden

Let the cockatrice slither back  
    into its rock crevices  
Let not the cock crow—

The hour has not yet come

John C. Mannone  
*An American Flyer*

I was a little guy like Willie,  
but most of my friends stood  
taller and owned their own  
bikes: BF Goodrich, Schwinn,  
American Flyer.

They would ride me anywhere:  
to a buddy's house or to the park  
to play ball until suppertime.

I'd balance my rear end  
in the cradle of handlebars, face  
the road, feel pedals torque tires  
through chain and sprocket—  
the bicycler's sheer strength  
transmitting through frame & bars.

I must have been stronger than  
I thought to have stuck out my legs  
stiff on many of those long rides  
so that they wouldn't touch  
the front tire. I would tire  
from the heaviness, but didn't want  
my calf or shin to scrape and burn.

My face, naked to the wind,  
I felt the freedom of birds when I  
didn't think I was going to die,  
especially on curves when I leaned  
the opposite way the bike turned.  
What did I know

about physics, about the sliding  
friction depending on  
how I moved to offset that pull  
to the center of the turn?  
He'd say, *For Chrissake, Johnny,*  
*don't do that! Lean the other way!!*

I understand now. I think  
of my childhood often  
and how I survived pubescence,  
when pulled to the center  
of things those days. A blur

of wires in the wheel. I remember  
the whirr of air, the sparks  
of light and the clicks of a card  
feathering the spokes like clacks  
of a gambling wheel.

I couldn't close my eyes long  
because of my fear of falling,  
so I'd stare at the wheel, let it  
hypnotize me to arrest any fear,  
yet the hum of tires on asphalt  
haunted me,

and when we ran over  
the trolley car rails, the hard steel  
jolted me from my metal seat  
and something flowed through me

like tension  
in those bare electric wires overhead,  
where birds perched; and Willy,  
my best friend,

two years earlier reached up for them  
while climbing on a railroad car  
because he walked by Penn station  
everyday, because he didn't have a bike,  
either, or any friends to take him far  
away, to fly in the other direction.

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Contributors' notes appear for writers and artists who included them with their submission.

\*indicates Impressions of Appalachia Contest contributors

### Nataly Bennett

Nataly Bennett is a sophomore originally from Colombia, but now she lives in Nashville. Her major is studio photography, and she loves getting the chance to capture the beautiful smiles of her friend's faces and the beautiful moments! She feels that it has been a true blessing that Maryville college has given her so many opportunities to explore her love for art and photography! There is not a day when there isn't a camera in her hand and she is not smiling! She loves what she does and is beyond grateful to have her pieces in Impressions.

### Katlyn Bogle

Katlyn Bogle is a Writing Communications major who enjoys storytelling in many shapes and forms. From reading and writing to TV shows and movies, she hopes to continue experiencing stories in so many different mediums throughout the world.

### Pero Brittz

Pero Brittz is a South African immigrant studying at Maryville in the class of '23. He loves writing music, walking in the college woods, and spending time with his friends. He hopes to graduate at Maryville with a Neuroscience degree, and go on to become a clinical psychologist. His motto is *"In sterquiliniis invenitur."*

### Christopher Bryson

Christopher Bryson, more commonly known as Cj, is a 19 year old Psych major who just happens to write in his free time. If he's not writing or stressing, you can find him singing in Voices of Praise.

### **\*Marcus Burchfield**

Marcus Burchfield was born and raised in the mountains of East Tennessee where coal and timber were King. He grew up roaming the hills and hollers, and when he wasn't knee deep in some creek, he was thinking about it.

### **Selena Cook**

Selena Cook is a sophomore double major from Kingsland, Georgia. She is president of PRIDE and a proud dog mom of a Miss Gracie Mae-who is her little ray of sunshine. In her free time, she loves to cuddle her fur baby, draw and paint, and write.

### **Lilly Daffron**

Lilly Daffron is in her sophomore year majoring in Environmental Studies & Religious Studies. From McKenzie, TN, Lilly enjoys reading, writing, hiking and being outdoors in her free time. She is active in the West Tennessee Presbytery for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and a member of the worship team at CCM.

### **Kaylie Dawe**

Kaylie is a senior English Literature major. She has been very influenced by Sylvia Plath in her writing, as well as her own crazy childhood.

### **Suzanna Dye**

Suzanna Dye is a senior Writing Communications major from Chattanooga, Tennessee. When she isn't doing homework, she enjoys reading and taking naps with her dog. You can follow her dog's Instagram @samoa.snuggles to see lots of cute pictures of him.

### **Gabrielle Garner**

Gabrielle Garner is a current sophomore ASL Interpreting major at Maryville College. During her free time, she loves to eat all the chocolate she can find, scrapbook, journal, and destroy all her friends in Guitar Hero. Thank you for your support! Go Scots By God!

### Matthew Graham

Matthew Graham is a Knoxville native who is in his junior year at Maryville College. Matthew transferred to Maryville from Roane State Community College after receiving his Associates of Arts in English, and is on track to graduate with a Bachelor's of Arts in English in 2021. Possessing a strong interest in the arts, Matthew enjoys writing, acting, drumming, and singing, and he can be seen on stage with the Maryville College Concert Choir. Matthew has a passion for serving impoverished people in his community and hopes that his writing will always be a clear reflection of this passion.

### Riley Hamant

Riley Hamant is a junior Theatre Studies Major, Business/English double minor from Cincinnati, Ohio. She is very active in Maryville's theater program, being in the production of *Shrek* and holding the position of president elect of Alpha Psi Omega, and she's also a usual member of dance ensemble and a Maryville College ambassador.

### Chloe Hamlett

Chloe Hamlett is a sophomore Writing Communications major from Athens, Alabama. She is the Impressions poetry editor and a member of SPB. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, bullet journaling, and making friendship bracelets.

### Eden Hensley

Eden Hensley is a freshman here at Maryville College. Her major is Psychology with Counseling! She loves art with all her heart and soul. She is prayer team leader for Intervarsity Christian Fellowship here on campus. She loves art and photography, and anything creative just makes her heart happy!

### Eliza Komisar

Eliza is a junior English Literature major from White Bluff, Tennessee. She loves dancing, playing in creeks, drinking coffee, and looking at birds. She's a big fan of orange juice and cinnamon but not mixed together.



### Rain Larsen

Rain Dove Larsen has always lived in Knoxville, Tennessee. She is 24 years old, soon to be 25. She is a Fine Arts major and plans on becoming an animator and a writer/illustrator in the future.

### Rebecca Lesley

Rebecca is sophomore Writing Communications major. She is on MC's equestrian team and also has had work published in the Echo.

### Hannah-Rose Libby

Hannah-Rose Libby is a fifth year student who transferred to Maryville College after attending Pellissippi State Community College for two and a half years. Her major is Environmental Studies and her minor is Psychology. She has four pet rats that she loves dearly, Mr. Gushers, Ratthew, Glitter, and Peaches. For more art, follow her Instagram @paintedfrisbee.

### \*John Mannone

John C. Mannone, author of three poetry collections, won the Jean Ritchie Fellowship in Appalachian literature (2017). His poems appear in journals such as *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Poetry South*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Baltimore Review*. He served as celebrity judge for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (2018). One of eleven global winners, "The Water Glass" will be featured at the *Antarctic Poetry Exhibition* (2020). John is a retired physics professor and lives in Niota, TN. <http://jcmannone.wordpress.com>

### K. G. Matthews

K.G. Mathews, known to friends as Grace, is a junior double major in Writing Communications and Theatre Studies from Lebanon, Tennessee (but she tells everyone she's from Nashville because that just sounds better). She is a member of Alpha Psi Omega and Sigma Tau Delta. She is an avid reader and writer, a fan of weird music, and a hair dye devotee.

### Sarah McFalls

Sarah McFalls is a junior at Maryville College. She enjoys studying the environment and capturing small moments of natural beauty on camera when they feel like they could slip away. Her friends and family are always inspiring her.

### \*Chloe Melton

Chloe Melton is a 19 year old artist. She created Clover Fine Arts as a way to share her work. Her art has been displayed in the Knoxville Museum of Art, the nation's Capitol, and various other galleries and competitions. She placed 7th nationally among qualifying high school students in the acrylic competition at the National Beta Convention. She is currently studying to be an art therapist. Art has always been a part of her, and she hopes to make a meaningful impact through her creations.

"I love that I can use art to inspire others. It allows me to show viewers a perspective they may not have otherwise considered. In a world where everyone is seeking change, I believe the pivotal role of the artist is to be a messenger of the many perspectives people have."

### Aubry-Quentin Munana

Aubry-Quentin Munana is an international student in Maryville College and majoring in design. Art has been a passion of Aubry-Quentin's for as long as they can remember. Aubry-Quentin started drawing at a very young age, and it has now become a part of them, as their actions revolve around art itself.

### Lesli Nolzco

Lesli Nolzco is a Psychology and Human Resource Management Major with a minor in Spanish. Lesli has been doing photography for 5 years & loves the different opportunities and experiences lived due to this beautiful art. Sharing Lesli's passion and vision with others and bringing them joy is why she is constantly inspired.

### Lilly Nixon-Perkins

Lilly is a senior psych major and her professional focus is animal conservation/behavior. Outside of that Lilly is an environment/sustainability freak and sometimes, in her free time, a painter. Lilly is also a proud mom to two boys, her dog Jamie and her cat Furgus.

### **Delaney Redden**

Delaney Redden is a freshman attending Maryville College in East Tennessee. Born in Jackson, TN and raised in Ripley through her childhood, she has traveled much of the United States during her young life. She resided in Minnesota, Georgia, and graduated high school in Louisiana. She accepted an academic scholarship and is settling into her English major. She is an avid concert-goer with a diverse taste in music and loves to read almost any genre.

### **Axel Ruiz**

Axel Ruiz is a 19-year-old freshman with a Spanish background. Axel is studying towards an engineering degree. Axel likes to draw because he finds it relaxing and it provides him with a sense of accomplishment. After every drawing, Axel sees improvement in some areas of his abilities and always strives to improve. The Pokemon Weezing drawing was from a reference but with a twist of Axel's own style.  
Instagram @Silvermonkey303

### **Serenity Shalander**

Serenity Rose Shalander is an aspiring writer and theatre technician from Whites Creek, Tennessee. She will graduate as a Writing Communications major with a double minor in Theatre and English at Maryville College this year. For her thesis, she wrote her second children's book called, "You Are Not Alone".

### **Uma Sood**

Uma Sood is a senior History major with a Writing Communications minor. She believes that living your best life is the best revenge.

### **Brandon Spurlock**

Brandon Spurlock is a sophomore who made the decision to go back to college as a 31-year-old freshman in the fall of 2018. He is intending to declare a writing communications major with a potential minor in Spanish. Brandon's love has always been writing. Channeling himself through written word has been his primary mode of expression for a long time.

### Deon'te Starks

Deon'te Starks is a senior that is majoring in writing communications. He enjoys being outdoors and playing basketball. He has been working at Mountain Challenge for four years. Deon'te is also a writer for the Highland Echo. A couple of clubs he associates himself with are the Black Student Alliance and the Latino Student alliance

### Natalie Tankersley

Natalie is a senior Religion major, co-moderator of Progressive Christian Community, and vice president of Define American. Next year, she will be going to law school.

### Lillian Tawney

Lillian Tawney is from Powell, Tennessee. She is double majoring in Philosophy and Writing Communication here at Maryville College. She is planning on going to Law School after her four years here at Maryville. Her hobbies include being outside, playing drums, and writing.

### Loren Vickers

Loren Vickers is a junior English with Teacher Licensure major from Sparta, Tennessee. Her love for reading and all things literary has pushed her to want to teach high school students about the very stories that lit her imagination as a young child. Loren also doubles as a Student Event Coordinator at the Clayton Center for the Arts and a Peer Mentor. As you can probably tell, Loren likes to keep busy, but in her very limited free time, she also enjoys expressing herself through drawing and painting and catching up on that large "to be read" pile next to her bed.

### Harley White

Harley is a person-loving queer. They like being hard to categorize, writing the occasional poem, and lesbians. You might see them in the choir or in your dreams.

**\*Claire Willenbrink**

Claire Willenbrink is a Biology B.A. major with minors in Outdoor Studies and Tourism, American Sign Language Deaf-Studies, and Environmental Science graduating in May 2021. She wants to be a National Park Ranger after college. For fun she reads, goes outside, rock climbs, and knits dinosaurs.

**Myndalynn Word**

Myndalynn is an English major and Writing Communications minor at Maryville College. She works at Roane State Community College as a writing tutor. In her free time she enjoys reading, writing, and playing the piano.

**Jamie Yoder**

Jamie Yoder is originally from Michigan but has been in the beautiful state of Tennessee for the past 10 years. Jamie is a special education teacher at Lenoir City High School and lives in the Greenback area. Jamie has a mini-farm with goats, chickens, bunnies, dogs, and cats and enjoys spending time with all the animals. Jamie loves being outside and taking pictures.

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