

The background is a dark, textured surface with numerous thin, glowing light trails in yellow, orange, and blue. A large, white, translucent figure, possibly a person, is visible in the upper left, partially obscured by the light trails. The overall effect is ethereal and artistic.

Illume

New College Review

2023



photo by Emily Will

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Grace Sarkisian

Editor-in-Chief

"Beauty is the illumination of your soul." -John O'Donohue



Emily Will

Photography

"There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind." -C.S. Lewis



JL Atkins

Photography/Graphic Design

"You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop." -Rumi



Jacob Snead

Submissions Coordinator

"Hold courage in your heart and lightening in your hand." -Dragon Quest





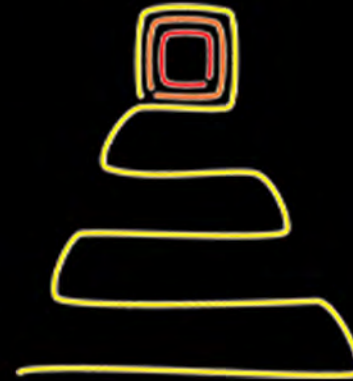
Amy Pirkle
Faculty Advisor
“Everything in moderation,
including moderation.” -Oscar
Wilde



Andrew Hodge
Social Media Coordinator
“You can’t let one bad moment
spoil a bunch of good ones.” –
Dale Earnhardt Jr.



Jaleel Shabazz-Blue
Photography
All its members believe in a supreme
being (obligations of a Freemason)
-Jaleel Shabazz-Blue



Celly Gullo
Graphic Design





Giovanina Fortenbury

Layout Manager

“The best revenge is massive success.” -Frank Sinatra



Makiyah Parker

Graphic Design

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” - Eleanor Roosevelt



Sightless
Giovanina Fortenbury

saying my peAce

by Andrew Hodge

*Wouldn't it be funny for an asexual
person to be on Love Island?*
A simple joke that seems in good taste.
Nothing to get too mad or ranty over.
It's a good thing I had Mello Yello
instead of Mountain Dew,
so I can stay calm.

But seriously, let's put a person in a place
that makes people become wild and a disgrace,
with a communal bedroom,
where the beds and toxic masculines squeak,
to lampoon them and laugh at their asymmetry,
like in a holiday movie starring Chevy Chase.

This is no rant. I don't do those.
But, if I had to I suppose,
I would imagine myself in villa clothes
ostracized in a box alone,
with no happiness or rainbows
like a Spongebob gif owns.

It's just like putting an ophidiophobic
in the tomb from Raiders of the Lost Ark.
Yes, I have researched some of this,
and yes, I'm a snake hater and Ace.
Don't make a joke.
Nay, this is no rant.
Neither a diatribe nor tirade,
just a response to being punched
in my face.

People talking about this should be good,
should be a nice way of representation.
Heck no, it's reincarnating a circus
freak show, like a way to erase
humanity from those whose case
is one of being kicked to the shadows,
not different enough but not the same.
Just like the duckbill platypus,
only cared for in a punchline.

Take that soapbox away from me.
I need no pulpit!

This is not about hellfire and brimstone,
but how society sprays some mace
at those with unchosen divergence
from a norm that is already labeled taboo
but is the home run hitter for prime time
television, not some antique vase,
but the next time the Bachelor sucks some
face.

I bet people might think this would be good
for us Aces to join in and embrace
a representation, but as a clown.
Being plucked from the shadows,
shoved in some limelight.
The light burns when it's been laced
with the bad intentions of stereotypes.
I am not calling for an Ace Drag Race,
but some decency and respect
beyond simple acknowledgment
would be nice.



photo by Emily Will

Newfound Spark

by Jacob Snead

The ground was sharp, sticking pins and needles into his soles as he walked the only road back home. His armor, now a sullen charred black, and dented in every way. Beneath his armor, wounds lie that would take months to heal. Scars litter his body that will inevitably tattoo his skin. Over his shoulder, his only other passenger on this lonely trip, a young girl, who remained unconscious from exhaustion.

She, like many others from his village, was in distress, and in need of help. She wandered too far from safety, trying to pick flowers for herself and her shop, when lo-and-behold, a damned wyvern decided to make her part of his treasure hall that evening. Like clockwork, Oscar stepped up to the proverbial plate to help the young girl, her family, her shop, the village, and everyone.

For so many years, it worked just like that, almost routinely. Something started to change, however. The journeys started to feel longer, the hits started to feel more painful. His armor, that he crafted himself, reduced to a steel heap by the time anything larger than a forest gnome decides to assault him. Most terrifyingly, he almost started to resent the negligence of the people he protected. An irrational thought, entirely, but the long, painful walks back started to warp his mind into something that traditional burnout cannot even describe. "Just don't leave the village and you'll be fine!" Imagining the desired outcome, he felt more at ease.

His pace then started to slow, ever so slightly, as his mind continued to wander. That was a new thought, right there. It's true, at this point, it began to feel like a burden, one that weighs heavily on Oscar. Was this another irrational, intrusive thought, brought upon by the labor of his work? The idea of just not saving people, now entirely negative in nature. And Oscar, he was good at what he did. The people depended on him. They rewarded him handsomely, and allow him to live lavishly. All of these things should be undeniable proof that he was in the right spot. So why was he not excited about any of it, anymore?

His distracted mind initially kept him from hearing the first shrieks of delight from the distant wooden gate, that guarded his hometown. As he approached closer and closer, the noise and bustle behind the thoroughway grew. He stood before the doorway, in expectance of what was to come. He shoved the large doors open with one hand, and was immediately met by an eruption of cheers, celebrating another in his continuous streak of heroic acts. Flower petals were thrown into the air, wine spilled on the ground, and the more sensitive denizens cried tears of relief.

The young girl, awoken by the spectacle, rubbed her eyes and looked around, confused. After mere moments, she recognized her hometown, and gently slid off of Oscar's pauldron onto the soil. Still in

a daze, she craned her neck up towards the hero, and thanked him dearly for the heroics once again.

He stood up straight, gave a quick thumbs-up to the girl, waved to the crowd, and began to strut towards his home. To most, this was the standard fare. But for a few eagle-eyed folks in the crowd, they could tell, something was different about him today...

Nightfall came, and as expected, Oscar's house was well lit into the darkness. The banging of steel could be heard by all neighboring houses, an accepted fact by the

The journeys started to feel longer, the hits started to feel more painful.

locals, due to the nature of his work. A man sought to interrupt the rhythmic tinkering, however, and banged on the door with great force. To the man's luck, the noise stopped, and an unclad Oscar answered at the doorway.

"Ah, my friend! It's been long since we've had a chat. Please, enter! I was in need of a break, truthfully." Oscar quickly sidestepped the door way to allow Darryl, the village's local blacksmith, to enter his abode. Oscar's genuine excitement was piqued as the he waddled through the doorway, having to turn sideways to fit his massive frame. Darryl's head was locked forward on the closest place to sit, and took advantage as soon as he

could. Oscar shut the door and immediately sought out refreshments to offer.

"Sit down, bud" echoed Darryl's voice through his home. "No need 'fer all that." Oscar stopped in his tracks, stunned, then relaxed his shoulders a bit. "Of course, my apologies." Oscar sat himself across his foyer table from him, allowing himself to relax a bit. "... what's got ya so high strung?" Oscar's head perked up at the accusation "High strung? Darryl, I am perfectly ok, I have no idea what you could mean!" His tapping foot betrayed his words. He didn't want to start this conversation. "Fer gods' sakes, boy, are ya sure? Fer starters, ya answered tha door wit all tha confidence of a spooked deer! Somethin's bothern' ya... and as yer friend, I won't let it slide."

Oscar rose from his chair, defeated, and motioned for Darryl to follow. They both made their way to shed adjacent to Oscar's abode, where the source of the clanging came from. Oscar pushed the doors open to reveal an elementary forge, with his armor clad upon a dummy made of straw next to it. "Apologies, friend, I thought we might continue in here, so that I may show you..." He grabs his helmet from the kiln with a pair of tongs, and begins to bang away. "... exactly..." KLANG "...the source..." KLANG "...of my frustration!" KLANG! After hammering out the last of the oddities in the helmet, he picked it up to show to Darryl.

"It's this, right here, my friend! The uncaring, unmoving face of a hero, clad in silver, and cursed to bear the responsibility of the people's weakness! I feel I have toiled for them adequately, yet the pain of travel, and the expectations of the people... they have reached a point that I can simply not bare! I feel I may let them down, and I fear that I have become too jaded to care..." Oscar continued to shove the helmet in his massive friend's face, while lamenting on and on.

Darryl's eyes were focused on something else however. A bit into his friend's lament, he noticed the state of the armor affixed to the training dummy in the center of the room. "My goodness, boy..." Oscar snapped out of it, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Sniff hmm? What? What is it?" Darryl ran his hand across the breastplate of the armor, and was even more surprised to see his foggy reflection in the plated sheen. He spun around to look Oscar dead in the eye. "This tha same Armor you were wearin' today?" Oscar nodded, perking up.

"Ah, you noticed! Being a man of armor craft yourself, I'm sure you have plenty scuffs pegged on it already, but I practice diligently every night in order to have her battle ready for the text battle." Oscar continues to ramble about the state of his piece, lost in his own world in discussion about the process he follows for proper maintenance. Darryl grabs his shoulder to halt his speech. His voice, shaky, makes out "Boy, I thought you went and found another blacksmith... yer tellin' me..." he points to the armor "... this is all you?" Oscar looks on, confused. "Y-yes sir? Is something the matter?"

Darryl scratches his chin for a bit, and looked Oscar in the eye. "Boy, I have an idea that's gonna solve a lotta problems fer both o' us," he grinned widely at a, still confused, Oscar.

Many months have passed, consisting of days and weeks of transition, training, and from some, disappointment. Loud klanging can be heard from the hut behind Oscar's home, as he hammered away at a lump of raw, unalloyed steel. "Haah... hoo... gods this is a workout..." He sputtered, as he placed the sharpened alloy into cooling water. As he was resting, a large, eclipsing man marched into his view, and gave him a great big smile. "You certainly look jolly, Darryl. Remember the techniques I taught you?" Darryl lets out

a hearty laugh. "Oh, don' worry yerself, boy. Yes, I do, but what's a few fancy spins in tha face o' raw strength?!" he poses his frame in a manly way, shaping the chainmail around his flexing arms. "haha... of course, of course, but it's good to know you've done me the honor of committing them to memory."

Oscar's brow narrows. "Loretta's gone again?" "Aye. Can't have anyone 'ere be missin' fer that long." A grin found itself across Oscar's face, as he turned to his finished work, resting in a pool of water. He tugged it out, and placed it gently on the counter before them. "Then you're going to need a weapon of master quality... just in case!" Darryl caught the sheer amount of pride exhibiting from his face as he started rambling about his masterwork. He had not seen him smile that way in a while, and to see one more person In town live as comfortably as and as happy as they should, what's a few quests in his stead? "Grahahah! It looks marvelous, boy! I'll take it!" Darryl slapped a generous amount of gold on the countertop, and started toward the gate.

Oscar, exuberant due to the praise of his work, immediately started work on a chest plate that would fit his friend. For now, and for all foreseeable days, Oscar was proud of himself. He was happy. And he felt confident in his friend to do well, with him assisting him the whole way. Oscar's lust for life had been reignited. A newfound spark had found its way into his life.



by John Valverde

"We are one
We all walk under the same sun
And the sidewalks...
Are the same for everyone

It doesn't matter if your rich or poor
It doesn't matter if you know more
Because...
We all stand as one"



Tom. The Pukwudgie

by Micah King

Wooly sheep slug by, bleating softly.
This dreamy scene was elusive, haunting.
Melatonin downed, upping the ante.
Sleep, a mundane task, seemed to be daunting.
Snuggled up with my cuddle buddy, Tom,
Protected by pillows and satin sheets,
The fae folk threw their coniferous prom.
Demonic dancing darted from their feet.
Nightly, the psychic festivals took place.
Terror hit the brain, I waked not the same.
Friend now foe, Tom whispered lies to my face,
Lured me to his lair. A prize he did claim.
Slumber's betrayal much sweeter than his,
The Pukwudgie, a sly trickster and whiz.



Autumn Fairy
Hunter Lapp

A Last Day

by Spencer Cook

“The way of the world,” I wrote, “The way of the world is...” With as much of the world as I had seen, I had hoped to be able to relay it in one concise sentence to the seer. Instead, I sat on a stone just beyond the kingdom’s most outer wall and was stuck brainstorming until dusk came. Once the tallest trees began to hide the sun, I made camp. I had one more day; I might as well use it. Not that

it was much use—if I couldn’t find the way of the world for an entire year minus one day, I didn’t have much hope for that one day. But at least I could cook up a forest-bird and enjoy my sleep. Not much sense in rushing to your death. The moons agreed; they rose slowly tonight.

I sat by the fire and tore away at the last of the bird’s meat. Some of the juices dripped down onto my journal. I tossed it aside. How can you keep a thing clean on a year-long journey through the wildest wilds, and then your last night you spill bird juice on it? Maybe the way of the world is to lull you into believing it’s a kind and trusting world. I wasn’t hungry anymore.

The fire was dying. I made it small anyway. A stray ash, a lonely flicker, flew off the fire and landed on my discarded journal. It

perched on the page. It didn’t blast into an awesome blaze. It sat on top, calmly (lonely). The stillness reminded me of my own trouble finding a use for the paper. I wondered what page it was on.

It seemed like my interest ignited the fire’s spirit. It took hold on the paper and grew. It wanted to cover it. That was when I knew

I couldn’t let that happen. I launched over to the journal. I smothered the fire. My hands hurt afterwards. I didn’t want to pick it up after because then I’d have to look at it and find an entry burned. And worse, I’d have to carry it with me to the

castle. I had to pick it up. My fingertips felt the burned grass under the pages. I lifted it. (The seared leather cooled my hands). It was ok—there was just a little hole (it was a perfect hole) in the middle. It had burned out a passage I wrote describing the ways in which horses up north travel the Golgan Ridge. I wasn’t too bummed about it. I doubt the migration patterns of horses hold the answer that could save me from the seer’s judgment.

It did bring back a memory. While I was documenting their migration, I camped too close to the herd one night. I awoke in the morning to one of the horses standing over

me. Doing my best not to move or show fear, I stared back into its eyes. This particular horse must have been one of the higher-ups. Its eyes were an impure white. They say once a horse of Golgan marks you, you can never escape death. That morning, though, I did escape. The horse left me. It turned tail and returned to the herd. I stopped following the horses after that. I’m beginning to think I didn’t escape death at all, miracle or not. The horse just pushed it back a little. (Maybe he wants to know the way of the world too?) Maybe he will join the seer in killing me tomorrow.

Sitting and looking at the burnt page, another memory crawled into my head. The clean hole in the white page resembled the king’s card in the game Yroth—the ancient game that my great-great grandfather had beaten the emperor at to win sovereignty of the kingdom we now call home. The king’s card had won me favor one night early in my journey. This one was one of the first few nights I spent outside the kingdom. I was alone and scared in these times, afraid of what I might see and what I might not find. I was staying in a farmer’s house. He had popped open the oak door a smidge and asked if I wanted to sit for a quick round of Yroth with him and his wife. “We don’t get many visitors out here,” he said, “especially not castle-folk.” I always hated being called that. Once the cards were dealt and the drinks poured, we settled in for a good match.

“You play well.”

Half the cards were torn at the corners. It was an old set—it still had the exiled emperor’s symbol on the back. I still remembered how odd it felt to hold something older than me, four or five times over.

“Thanks. I used to play.”

And how weird it felt to place the cards on the drink-soaked table. The table was small and we had to carefully organize our stacks amidst the silver tankards. At some point, the thud of my mug on the table brought forth a meek cry from the wife’s bosom. Looking closer, I saw she was holding a small child in her arms. The young one began to watch us play. His eyes were of great size, and their color a brilliant hue of amber.

“I’ve won!” the man across from me exclaimed, “Unless, of course, you have some other bold and brave strategy you’ve held from me!” Turning to his wife and whispering, “The castle-men always have secrets at how to win this game.”

“No secrets here. I lose.” I folded my cards down on the table and went for a drink when the child reached out from his mother’s lap and grabbed onto one of the cards. After we took it back from his hands, we saw he had picked the king’s card.

“That’s my boy! Out of all the cards in the deck he picks the king’s! Destined for

greatness, 'e is!"

Grateful for my playing the game and joyful
for the boy's oracle-
like prowess in
picking cards, the
man and woman
treated me to
another round of
dinner and a send-
off in the morning.
I have not received
such blessings
since, nor have I
played Yroth.

I hated it; I hated the thought of it and the contents and what they represent.

The sun was
coming up. I had
spent my last night
not even sleeping.
Maybe that was the best way to spend it.
Maybe that was the worst. I remembered
a quote I heard back in the Politic before I
left. "There are two fish in a bowl. They're
talking, and one mentions water. The other
asks, 'What's water?'. I used to think of my
journey as my being the fish that knows
about the water. It's my duty to find the truth
and spread it. I think I was lying to myself,
and I only just now realized I'm probably
the fish that doesn't know anything about
the world. Can the way of the world be not
knowing anything about the world?

I packed my camp up and started the walk
towards the high castle. In the daylight,
obscured as it was through distance and great
mountains on either side, I could make out
the towering spires that used to be my home.
I would be there before noon. Maybe I'd
be dead by one. I held my journal close to
my chest as I walked. I hated it; I hated the
thought of it and the contents and what they
represent. But it was kind of like me. The
journal was all I had at this point. So I held
it tight, and close. I wondered what would
happen to it after I was gone. Would anyone

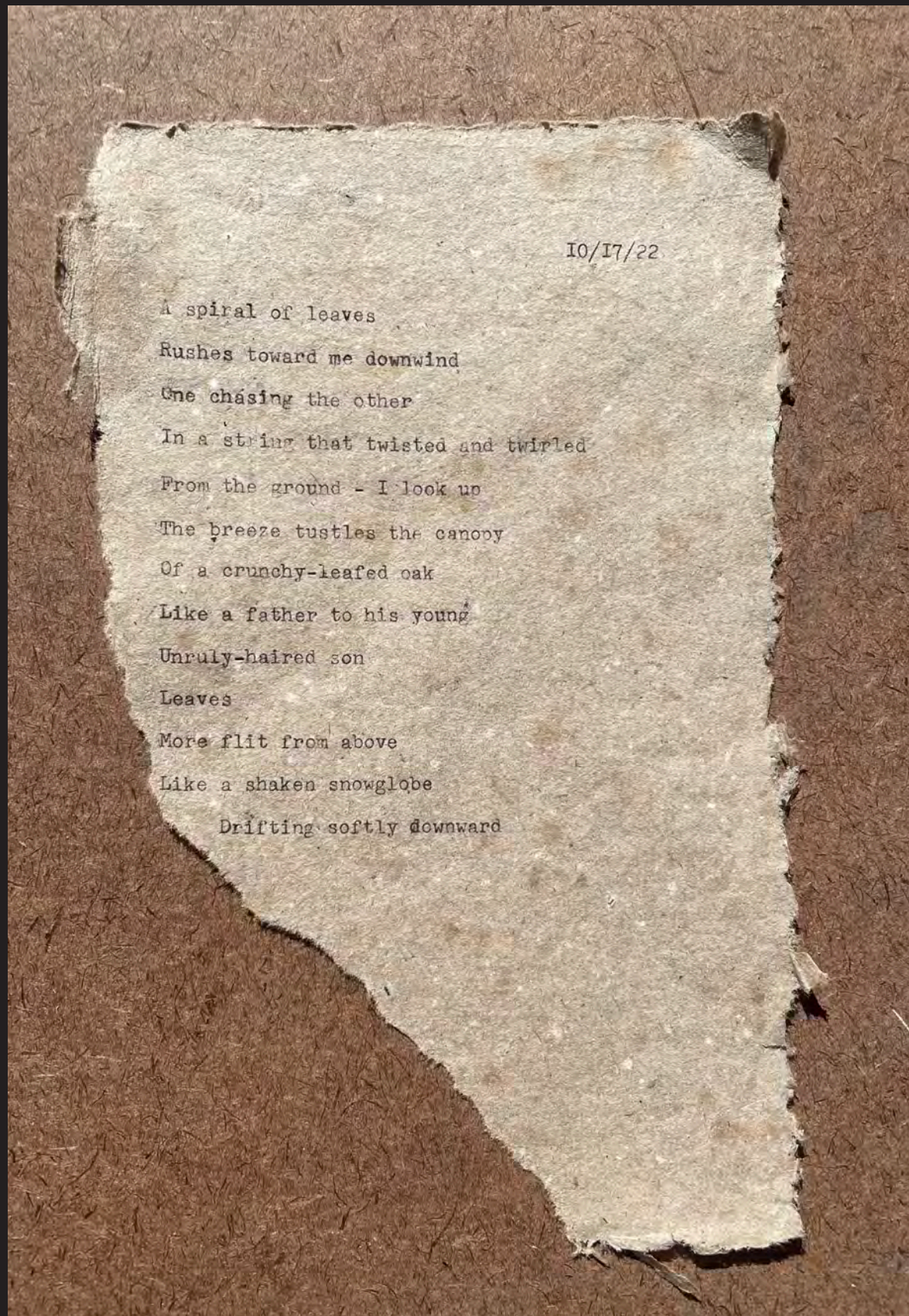
read it? Would they see the unfinished
sentence on the page about halfway through?
Would they wonder why a hole had been
burnt? Worse, would
they think that I did
it? Would the paper
be tossed aside, buried
with me, copied by
someone? I would want
someone to read it,
I think. Maybe they
could learn something
where I couldn't. After
all, this was my life.

Metempsychosis

by Samantha Mattison

The stag's last breath was quiet
And only the oaks and maples heard that soft exhale.
Age had weathered his horns, whitened his face.
And only the beetles and rabbits saw that gentle gasp.
Age had weakened his joints, slowed his pace.
But his eyes remained kind, the color of acorns. Age couldn't damage them.
His soul lifted from the woods and wavered, searching.
It focused on a village and soared forward.
The soul kissed the passersby's cheeks and swept through their hair.
It pushed aside the windowsill of a house and climbed inside.
A woman wailed as the child she bore began to emerge, and the stag's soul leaned forward.
As the baby was born, the soul tumbled across the room
And stopped above the child. It dropped from the air and landed into the baby, disappearing.
A cry erupted from the newborn, and its eyes flitted open.
The color of acorns





Untitled
Molly Lay

Si La Di

by Jaleel Shabazz-Blue

Si La Di –The meaning of Royal Canin

Cast of Characters-

Ceptisi: A Secret holder who tells the lost where to find themselves, casting them to speak.
Character Traits: White male, Age 12, Illuminati Gardens, Disciple of Rome, in philosophy and boarding school

Principle: Die hard fan of Ceptisi, also hold symbols but not for the people for Grace Significance
Character Traits: White male, Age 25, Congress Gardens, Stands as Significance towards Religion

Tom: Ruler of Vectorland, takes money from priests for their inhabitants of the world. A person who represents persons by plethora of descents and beliefs.
Character Traits: White male, Age 40, Vice People, Based Chapter / Based Fraternal

Hell: Protest of the Protection of Priest, gets catered by women of immoral behavior and the EMA.
Character Traits: White male, Age 89, North Gardens, Tech Support / Protector

Israel: Protects the Priest and all of the East land and Southern EMA.
Character Traits: White male, Age 90, Southeast lands, the head of Board destine in Asia/ Sign Holder

Pac: Sets the standard for all service before Kirk, teaching protection of truth and EMA
Character Traits: White Male, Age 2026, Odd Fellows, Carriers of Loki's lost brother

Descent of Persons - Centralized lost European People//Future counterargument ethnicity

Consil

Dark years of the reign of Carroloc. Were be it arks intruding on a venture are towned in planets. This is because we have been forced to stay out. We are learning only of what is to come. Many things have changed and Knowledge is the only hope.

—

Serra Building~ The Congressional House ~ 5% 003/023/3006

—

Hologram Begins ~

Pac: Why are we observing the facts of tomorrow? It is wrong and it is treason.

Hell: Consider our victory ahead, is all; look forward.

Pac: Is it worth the attention? We cannot surrender to such a victorious priest... the priest will not surrender.

Hell: The Priest of Kirk?

Pac: Yes, the Priest of Kirk.

Hell: Do we even know what Kirk is to set standards again?...

Pac: The Point is ...

Hell: Do we know PAC?...

Hologram Ends ~

Cloud City Force and Patrol

The base in the East has become inaccessible. The world is beginning to reach behavior. That of indiscipline towards EMA. Looking ahead the land is sure to fall. The EMA urges the priest to help and assist. The Priest begin searching for Ceptisi of Vectorland.

Hell: The kirk teaching has begun the crime of wickedness... It is a lie set upon the earth. We have always set proper standards Yet... we are here. Is it not a symbol of our truth?

Thoughts of Tom ~

Tom enters ~

Tom: Welcome thy people

Principle enters ~

Principle: Welcome thy people

Tom looks at Principle {speaks} ~

Tom: Is it not for Hell to conclude?

Principle: The World is the conclusion. Where are the Priests?

Pac: They are said to be lost in kirk. We question the Mounts of our offers. We will search for Ceptisi soon.

Principle: Soon Days are old

Tom: We are of Crimson.

Pac: What does it mean to Crimson one's home...? To relate to Crimson? You have lost God? Forgive yourselves and begin the search.

Nights of EMA

Beyond the walls and through to the west of Vectorland. Israel is bound. He along with Ceptisi are to find, support, and/or confront any that are lost. Looking for those beyond the light of Dem/Dim which is (The sacred caved rockland governed by clouds and reigned by trees. Also survived by the people of uni)... Safe is the hope. Hope that Pac and Hell; while Tom and Principle begin the journey, find the Truth of the Land. New Beginnings to reach and enlighten each realm. Darkness comes to understanding and the search for Ceptisi continues.

A tree falls as Ceptisi and Israel enter ~

Ceptisi: The common mistake of the air.

As they are pushed forward with tears of the city before ~

Israel: We only can do as we are told.

Ceptisi: What service shall be it that listens...

Israel: The situation isn't just about them...

Ceptisi: Then we do as we shall

Israel: Which is?... Are we to visit?

Ceptisi: The possible City before us is not yet of dem/dim

Israel: Fair then... The Realms are attuned with prayer from the priest.

Ceptisi: Let the Paths be narrow they stated; The Weather has changed and we all have dragged. We are claiming the might. Retrieve it how a Roman puts the extensions on with paths. It is the essence of a quarrel. They say it is neither impossible nor real. If the base of our life is clean. Then it is clean. If the hour passes by congress by time of reaching. It is then held by all people. By choice we are to govern. Then our Consil in our mind is uncertain. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Israel: What is it?...

Ceptisi: Dem/Dim is the course we take?

Shortly after thinking on the topic they gain vision of a light
In the light a fading teller/tele encompasses the sort of recorded hologram message
This expands from the wind; a voice begins to speak ~

Tom: ...

What we will learn of the Dark and those who seek.
The story continues with the way we determine if philosophy or poetry takes a role or truth in matters outside of society.

The path is not of light and of dark though we may seek.
The choice is ours and our might to protect it.
Without vengeance or greed and without pause.
The History of the World and the purpose of expansion.
A life of Christopher Columbus of our Destiny.
From (North) Egypt to (Mek) Brazil and (Yein)China to (fairer)Russia.
Of Church Destiny.\\\...
The world of Cloud can stop the competition and secure all safely. Thankfully we have the truth.
Tom and Ceptisi will drown the naked eye to view this in pure nature.
Written to let truth continue amongst them.

Philo of New/Found Destiny

The year of healing is rare and no one knows yet what is to come.
I expect that the personnel/people are with hope.
As the sky darkens and all the might troubles both Tom and Ceptisi.
We are within the forest as it begins to light the way.

Tom: ... If learned where... to be a Dim/Dem path walker. Then the word would be more powerful

Ceptisi: None other and the age zone the range and build. What power comes from that.

Tom: I can Honor who I am. Light two rows we will follow I am knowing it may be east but power comes from the core.

Ceptisi: That assures what the needs are. Aspects even. In this world of truth. We fall upon what's to come.

Tom: Complications but it is good to be with you both. Are you aware that you have to save our land? Where are the priests? They know the power has compass.

Ceptisi: I'm written in that to fail. We are. We should become a memory of the priest.

Tom: A memory... no and what do you mean?

Ceptisi: We let live. Then we assert.

Tom: No, we let live and we live.

Ceptisi: If I begin now we will only be doing harm...

Scheduling

by Ansel Smith

Monday I have class at 10, but maybe Tuesday we can

Oscillate between delusion and wakeness as the sores groan and your dry eyes

Rewatch the season finale while everyone's trick-or-treating.

Behold your arms bolted to the chair and the TV flooding with red static, the master whispers:

It could be really fun

Don't forget to leave the light on in the hallway

Mercury and its Consequences for my Stomach

by Isaiah Bolin

In an effort to adhere to the basic principals of the scientific method and other such processes and procedures, I am recording the sequence of events that have taken place within my home, my mind, and my being (not including the mind). May science look upon this with gratitude. (And maybe Rolling Stones too??)

It was a warm Thursday evening. Crickets chirped outside, a warm breeze gently rocked a windchime, eliciting light tinkling sounds, and I had recently consumed a lovely batch of California sushi rolls acquired from a downtown Texaco. All of this to say: it was a pleasant evening. But I wasn't currently experiencing a pleasant evening because I was too warm. I needed the cool air to soothe my rising internal body temperature. Issue #2: the thermostat wasn't working. The thing was ancient, dust had become a base molecule in its structure at this point; more importantly, the temperature couldn't be changed. I had no replacement thermostat, but something needed to be done; and in that moment, inspiration overcame me.

It took a few minutes work, WD-40, a carpenter's hammer, and some stern looks, but eventually the cover came free. Once I had gazed upon the inner workings of the elderly thermostat, I no longer felt concerned about my 102.5° (and rising!) conundrum. Sitting inside, glistening in the incandescent light, were two small glass tubes of a shiny liquid. Perfectly opaque, solid at first glance, but liquid upon further inspection. It was mesmerizing, "could such a substance as this

exist in our natural world?" I asked myself. I quickly concluded that it was the work of science; science had created everything I considered mesmerizing, so it only made logical sense that this too was the product of some Laboratory-Boy.

Now, dear reader, you must remember this about me: I had an upbringing. That much is certain, but I fail to recall the exact details. However, a recent Spring cleaning in my basement revealed a sealed box. Its contents, old Boohbah DVDs and a faded polaroid of myself attempting to place a rectangular block through a circular opening in a toy with the aid of a squeak-hammer, suggests a tragic tale. I am afraid that at the time I was not the wisest knife in the cabinet, but not every fourteen-year-old can be a genius.

Curiosity got the better of me and I put my full trust in science and Lab-Boys (and Lab-Girls!) as they had never failed me before so why would they now? I proceeded to drill a hole in both glass tubes. Through these I was able to drain this mysterious liquid into my awaiting palm. The sensation of it on your hands is quite the unique one! It was heavy, like the metal it seemed to be at first glance, but it was a fluid! It jiggled around in my hands, slid this-way-and-that, came together, and broke apart, all the things that a liquid does; except one thing: make the surface it is on wet. Whatever part of my hand it touched, when removed, remained dry! How amazing!

And now we approach the event that sparked this piece, the consumption of the



Plate
photo by Pia Winkler

funny liquid I had found in my thermostat. Regressing from my wizened state to the foolish mentality of youth, I began to salivate as I pondered what this mysterious liquid would perhaps taste like. It was seemingly metallic, thus I cross-referenced all of the metals I had placed within my mouth in my lifetime: copper, iron, steel, zinc, tungsten, cobalt, iridium. I had my guesses with these results, but I wasn't going to be satisfied with educated guesses by themselves. I knew what had to be done so I did what needed to be done. Taking all the liquid I had within my palm, I opened wide and tossed it back as if it were a fine liquor in a shot glass.

I found myself (and even now in retrospect) disappointed by the mystery liquid. It didn't quite have a flavor to it, it just felt really slippery and heavy. As a side effect of the said weight and slippery aspect of the liquid, it stayed in my mouth for very little time and slipped right down my gullet. It felt like it had almost been dropped right down my esophagus (in fact, I could swear I heard a sound reminiscent of a stone being thrown into water.)

And now dear reader(s)((s?))(((s.))) I speak in the present. As of this moment in time I am in my living room, splayed out on the carpet (and wishing I was on the couch.) I tremble with a terrible shake; my skin remains in a heated state (and yet I have begun to feel cold.) The palms of my hands have begun to sweat, I cannot stand up as my knees have weakened, wipe my forehead I cannot as my arms feel to be weighed down, and already have I vomited upon my home-knit sweater.

Fortunately, a handful of hours before I began my adventure with the thermostat, I had been working on a small project on my laptop and had set it on the coffee table in the middle of my living room (a mere two feet from my current position), so I was able to grab it and begin research on what dastardly liquid I had just consumed. Very quickly I discovered the name of the

villain: mercury. Oddly enough, it appeared to me in these searches that small doses of the elemental kind (like the one I had consumed) without multiple prior exposures weren't deadly in the slightest. However that contradicts what I am currently struggling through. And now I arrive at my conclusion (both in this essay and perhaps even my existence!), mayhap I be a medical anomaly!

Following this revelation I ceased my research and penned a strongly worded letter to a reputable contact, making a simple request for a medical review by one of their trusted professionals. Two minutes passed without reply, thus I sent another. This time I allowed a generous six minutes for a response to be sent my way, however it never came. A third was sent, but ten minutes of patient waiting caused my id to rebel and I proceeded to play "Sugar, Sugar 2" on coolmathgames.com instead.

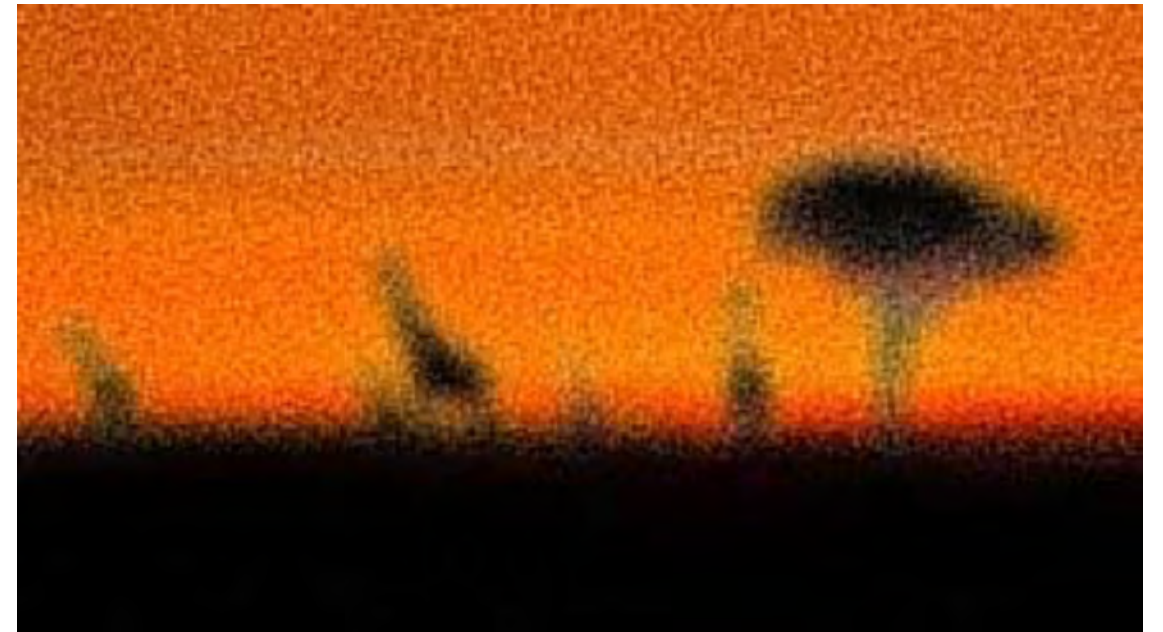
Unfortunately, I once again could not conquer level nine. Thankfully, the realization that I could be a medical anomaly that changes science forever once studied helped to distract from the ever-present qualm (both from once again being bested by "Sugar, Sugar 2" and the elemental mercury poisoning.) Suddenly I had an epiphany: if I am to be a significant figure within the history of science and medicine themselves, I should have a documentation of my experience for others to study years in the future! And thus we arrive in a time wrap-around. I could continue to type about how I am typing this, but that would leave me with a whole mess of issues once I would have to write about writing about writing about my experiences.

Until next time, dear readers, where you will hopefully see me in a dentist's waiting room, my face plastered across the cover of Scientific American! (And hopefully not the obituaries!)

Much love,
- Tanner H. Vanderbilt

Soar Course of Land

by Jaleel Shabazz-Blue



Introduction

Time and Time again we take on the challenge of western philosophy without knowing we are not that yet accessible. Shall it be a day of thunder and a year of tools. I feel what is to enlighten will come forth to make herself known as is. Thankfully I want to progress yet I hope I can progress. A Bond of land and a Bond of future. Why let us stand and let's fall too. obey that yearly due sentence. Our objective is to master what is deemed respectable.

Lesser

Anything can be seen as a matter that exists then again I witness the existence of new and the existence of sound. Today I write Self-Evidence.

True Act

Extension of Education. One must have the courtesy of one's own life. In that if we may ask to win, then success is always a possibility. I love justice in the heart of a spoken lead American. As that we are to search. As we must, "the unspoken truth"; to say that search is Universal. We can acclaim that it is possible. Or travel through knowledge to put use to the effects. Courtesy.

Vive L'Evolution

by JL Atkins

Once I was a cell:
just a single lonely thing.
I replicated DNA
from which our lives did spring.

I remember growing big.
I could finally digest,
and with my newfound evolution
was increasingly impressed.

Because now I could expel,
That which did not serve.
Next, I could feel everything,
Because I grew a nerve.

I remember that one day,
Somewhere down the line.
I gained some more stability,
Because I grew a spine.

I was swimming freely,
Satisfied with my new birth,
But soon began to wander,
Up to the very Earth.

Now it started as a trip,
But soon became my home.
I'd gotten used to changing,
And shifting my genome.

I traded out my gills,
So that I could breathe the air.
Then I grew some legs,
And I started sprouting hair.

From there it gets all fuzzy,
and I don't remember when,
but I started having feelings,

So, I could finally grin.

One day I stood up straight,
and looked down at my hand.
I figured I could use it,
Now that I could finally stand.

As my brain got bigger,
I learned to break the rules.
I gained a big advantage.
'Cuz I started using tools.

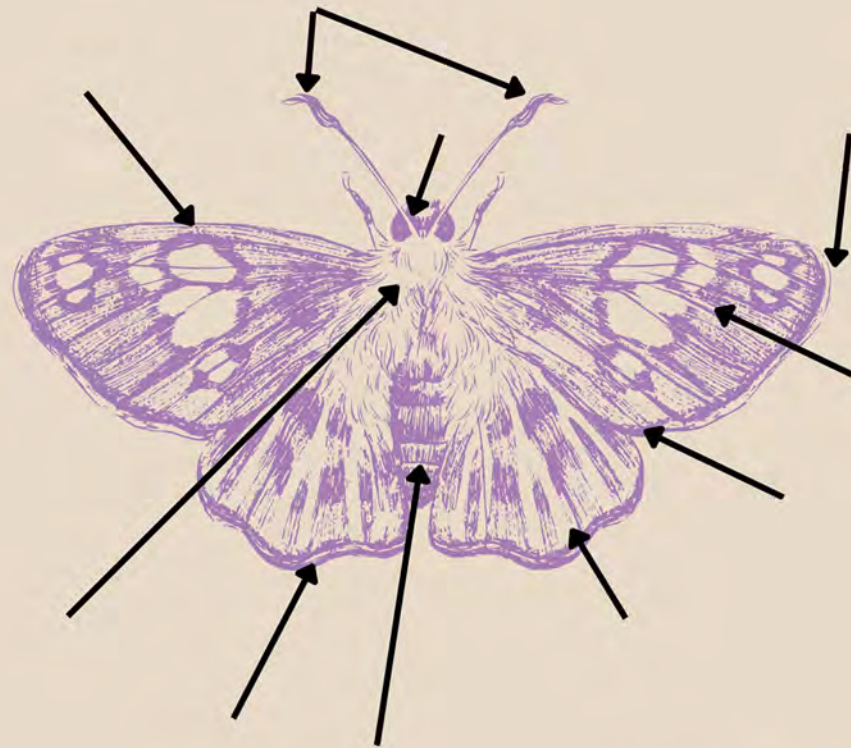
I guess you probably wonder
about what happened next.
Well then, I became you!
Aren't we so complex?

Now, as we journey on,
Extending our lifespan.
Let us not forget,
just how it all began.



photo by Emily Will

ANATOMY OF A MOTH



WORD BANK

Costal Margin	Antennae
Eye	Outer Margin
Apex	Thorax
Fore Wing	Abdomen
Inner angle	
Hind Wing	

Anatomy of a Moth
Giovanina Fortenbury

Campus Graves Mystery

by Rylee Nicely

On UA's campus, next to the biology building, sometimes called the Math and Science Building, lies a cemetery now formally known as The Pratt Cemetery. UA's campus has a unique history, especially in the times before the civil war. Many times, those that were enslaved never had a marked tombstone, so their final resting places were not ever properly "marked" for a remembrance, their masters never disclosed the location they were buried. This falls true for Jack, and William "Boysey" along with Isaac and others that were enslaved by people who worked or lived in previous buildings on UA's campus.

William "Boysey" and Jack were enslaved by Basil Manly Sr., who held the position of President of UA between 1837 and 1855. William was purchased along with his Mother Mary from Robert C. Brown of Charleston, South Carolina on April 10th, 1838. Jack, unlike William, was the enslaved property of Basil Manly's father-in-law. He was given to Manly along with five other enslaved individuals, Jack being the oldest at 51. Jack and William's last names are not being provided because often in that period, the enslaved person after they were set free, so out of respect I have not used them throughout this writing. The University itself paid for another enslaved person, Isaac. Isaac was one of four black individuals purchased directly with university funds.

In a diary entry, written on May 5th, 1843, Manly wrote that "Jack had passed away from bilious Pneumonia, and he was buried in

the University burial ground." The following year, William "Boysey" passed away in November 1844, of whooping cough and was also buried in the University burial grounds.

A survey was conducted in 1952, which showed the site of the cemetery that contained two small coffins. Those coffins are now presumed to be those of William "Boysey" and Jack. This 42" by 28" piece of land, now mostly covered by the biology building, was purchased by Isabel Pratt on September 28th, 1854. Isabel was the wife of Horace S. Pratt, who was a professor of English literature here from 1837-1840. During that time, this piece of land was a part of the University Cemetery. She purchased this plot because she wanted to be laid to rest along with her other children and her sister. One of her sons was already here. The University had designated an area of land for the "University Cemetery" after Samuel James passed away from typhus fever.

The Pratt Cemetery was a small portion of the University cemetery which could have spanned from that spot next to the biology building to University Boulevard, however at the time, it was formally known as "Huntsville Road." Samuel James' body was later moved. However, when William J. Crawford died in 1844, he was reportedly buried in the exact same grave dug for Samuel James. Crawford is the only student still buried somewhere on university grounds; however, the exact location is still unknown.

As I walk by each day, observing this

cemetery where so much history lies, it now has a black, metal fence that is worn from the weather surrounding the graves. When you walk up to the fence, you see four marked headstones, one concrete slab, and some hedges surrounding the black fence. One headstone is that of Isabel Pratt, and the other headstones, unfortunately, are difficult to read due to the overgrown hedges.

The cemetery is passed everyday by students who have not heard about the history that lies in that spot on campus. I was one of those students prior to this research on it. Often, I see other students by heads buried in their phones, not paying any attention to their surroundings, and, in turn, the Pratt cemetery, which holds such meaningful history, gets disregarded. Hayden Jones, a sophomore on campus, when asked about students' lack of awareness of the Pratt Cemetery, said, "I absolutely think students don't understand and respect the cemeteries on campus at all, I think people deserve to know and hold a place of value for the resting places."

The history of these people not getting a set-in-stone, permanently marked, final resting place on UA's campus makes students, including myself, feel upset and angered. Jones said, "it makes me genuinely upset that people, specifically, people of color (POC) don't get their respectful resting place, I wish they had a more prominent resting place because the deceased deserve to rest, not be ignored."

As a student at the University, knowing that there is much undiscovered or under-researched history right here on campus, to me is an injustice to those whose final resting place is the same place we scream "Roll Tide!" The same place that we laugh with our friends, where we eat lunch, and take our math and biology tests. The is just a small

portion of the recognition and appreciation needed for this history to be remembered in a proper way, instead of falsifying some of these facts about Jack and Boysey, and the mysterious history of William J. Crawford's burial place on campus.



photo by Emily Will

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Reflections in Nature
photo by Allison House

Cherish

by Gabriella Puccio-Johnson

I cried the day the plains burned,
and green was reduced to brown.
When life fled in fluttering wings and thundering hooves.
Nothing was left behind, just barren, lifeless plains
and smoldering flames.

I mourned the day a star died,
its entrails splattering the universe in rainbows and flecks of light.
The catalyst, unknown, and the star so young.
No science, no telescope,
could explain such a phenomenon.

I remember when I saw a butterfly in a shadow box,
the luster of its little yellow wings diminished.
The frayed edges and broken body
told a story of a life that ended too quickly.
A hot summer day on a sidewalk

I wept as she lost her hair,
as the life in her eyes reduced to embers.
I clung to every word, every text, wondering if they'd be her last.
And when her spirit returned,
I wondered when she would again slip.

I grieved when the gun went off,
when my friend lost his brother.
When a radiant soul painted the walls of his bedroom with his life.
Even if I wasn't there, my soul stood in the blinking red light,
holding him as he wept.

I recall the day I saw a boy in a casket,
The grayness—the youth—of his face haunts me.
Or maybe it was the divot on his brow,
the harrowing reality of his death.
That his future was taken so gruesomely.

Life is fragile, I was told.
Nature is unpredictable and unyielding.

One day the sun will rise,
And you won't be alive to see it.
Cherish each blink,
Each breath,
Each beat of a heart.
Cherish comfort of all forms,
The warmth of a friend,
The womb of your mother,
The wave of a stranger.
Cherish your life,
Cherish others.
Live to love.

photo by Emily Will



Ode to Myself: A Flightless Man

Collaboration by Dr. Sara Pirkle's
EN 408 Poetry Class

O! Quest for flight, you claim another soul.
My breathless feet catch up with empty hands
to kneel and worship sky and sun.

I mold myself into the bird whose talents I struggle to possess:
that cerulean kingdom which birds call home
opens for me and becomes my very own.

What is love but freedom from the body?
Is love what separates us from birds?
What is my love worth to a widow?

I am, I think, worthy.
It seems I'll never know.

...

The waves below crash soft against the cliffs, and I let go.



Space
JL Atkins

A Day in the Sky

by Grace Sarkisian

There's something special about the actual journey to your destination, everything that happens in-between point "A" and point "B" has almost a larger impact than the actual arrival. When traveling by plane, the journey is almost just as crucial as the destination. From airport to airport, change is in the air, as well as a newfound sense of clarity forming. Emotions are high as I anticipate what is to come. For the next 15 hours, I will sit in the same place next to strangers on a similar path, I can only hope to fall asleep for the majority of the trip, but my excitement won't let me rest just yet.

The first few hours go by swiftly, listening to music on and off, one of the only negatives about flying is airplane mode. It's difficult to use phones as a distraction when most of its abilities are disabled while in are in the air. This is one of the reasons I pay for Spotify Premium, I have access to all of my downloaded music, which is essentially all of my liked songs in one playlist. When the plane first takes off, I'll be listening to songs like "Fire for You" by Cannons and "ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?" by Tyler, The Creator, the songs are upbeat enough to keep me awake, but it's also like elevator music for my ears as I wait for the flight attendant and snacks to appear.

One of the only other things to do on my phone when restricted by airplane mode is play games. My personal favorites are Word Blitz, a competitive game between players of who can find the most words in under a minute, I actually play this game with my father – which probably just makes it

even more entertaining. My other favorite game also includes putting words together, Wordscapes, and trying to craft words together from a few randomized letters. Although very engaging, I can only stay focused on these games for so long before my head starts to hurt, and I have to start playing more mellow music to balance my mood.

As a headache remedy, I'll look out the window and analyze the world beneath me. Having a window seat is one of the few luxuries I actually look forward to when flying, some people prefer the aisle for easy access to the bathrooms, and almost no one hopes for the dreaded middle seat. It's like I'm able to see the world through a much simpler lens, everything appears so much smaller, and it's fun to imagine what life would be like if I were one of the little people I could see down below.

Now it's time for everyone's favorite part of flying – the snacks. As the flight attendants prepare their snack caddies, all the passengers, including myself, start to get eager while anticipating what their snack of choice will be. The options are typically limited, with a choice between trail mix or pretzels, which is why I always bring the backup snack. Before getting on the plane, I always stop by one of the tiny shops in the terminal so I can pick up a few necessities before taking off.

I always make sure to pick up a bag of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, as well as a bag of White Cheddar Cheetos Puffs. This combination of snacks is the perfect mixture of sweet and salty and is the perfect pre-nap munchies.

After stuffing my face with cheap junk food, I purchased hours before, I usually start to slip into a sugar coma for at least an hour or two. This is when my music transitions from somewhat upbeat to music I can fall asleep to. I don't use any fancy neck pillows or eye covers; I just throw my hoodie over my head, lay back, and let the soft rhythm of the music playing through my AirPods take over.

It's the last few hours of the plane ride that start to take a toll on me, my body is starting to cramp as I've now been constricted to the four walls of the plane for hours on end. I've tried to get as comfortable as I can, but the armrests feel like they are closing in on me.

I'm in and out of sleep at this point, so this is usually the time when I pick a movie to watch from the airline's pre-selected list. My go-to category of movies to watch while flying are romcoms, they are good to pass time, and I don't have to thoroughly pay attention the entire time. I usually pick a Nicholas Sparks film and snuggle into my hoodie while I endure the last few hours of the plane ride.

I'm half asleep when I hear the pilot make an announcement that entails the details of our landing – only a few more minutes and we'll be on the ground. I look out the window one last time to enjoy the scenery down below, and then I begin packing up my things.

Map's Plea

by Andrew Hodge

I am still here in your sack,
clutched together by a band,
almost a sacred scroll.
If we find this treasure, we get a plaque,
our story will be extravagant and grand,
if you just let me play my role.

Yes, I know my corner is torn
and my ink has begun to fade,
but my spirit is still high,
I can still display and warn
of the danger of the path to the Jade
skull with a shiny ruby eye.

Are you not afflicted by cabin fever?
Do your legs not hunger for journey?
I know mine would if I had any limbs,
yet I am still a hopeful believer,
the path of our dreams is still ferny,
but your passion must be on dims.

I don't want to call you lazy,
to bash my faithful ally,
so please unravel my paper,
I can lead you through any mazy
if you would just comply
and help me solve this caper.

An Open Letter To Agatha Christie

by Quade Mainzer

Dear Agatha,

How do you do it? Tales of such whimsy, of such wisdom! I want to know your secrets. Did you take them to the grave? If so, do you mind if I come to Cholsey and dig them up? I'm sure you wouldn't, what with the strong metaphoric parallels between digging and sleuthing. I can predict the ending of most Hallmark movies, so I feel particularly qualified.

For as long as I can remember, my little gray cells have shown me the ways of the detective. I do palm readings of ashtrays wherever I find them. (Spoiler, the murderer always turns out to be a devastating case of lung cancer.) I scour newspaper obituaries for unlikeable spinsters and royal sons fourth in line for the throne. First in line is way too obvious, second just as much, third a little bit less...you get the idea.

I promise I am quite eccentric enough to carry on with some of your novels. For instance, did you know the field of mathematics has made leaps and bounds since 1939? And Then There Were None could be extended into the negative numbers. And sorry to break it to you, but handlebar mustaches have been out for decades. I think instead Hercule Poirot could be revived as a Calvin Klein model.

Speaking of, did he just come to you in a dream one night? Hercule Poirot is certainly the subject of many of my dreams. I just feel like we are the same guy—the green eyes, the five-foot-four dignified stature, the egg-shaped head. Sure, my mother is from Lebanon and Poirot is sultry Belgian (re: my dreams), but that's just a hop, skip, jump, and Orient Express away. A long enough train ride, though, to solve a duodecuple murder. Maybe even a tredecuple. People are so much more organized these days. Have you ever heard of Microsoft Teams?

I am organized beyond your wildest imagination, Agatha. I've got the meds to prove it. I'm as unlikeable as Miss Marple, and as jobless as Tommy and Tuppence. I have what it takes to continue your legacy.

The gum to your shoe,
Encyclopedia Brown



Final Rest
Giovanina Fortenbury

Philophobia

by Donnetra Freeman

Love, such a simple word with an impactful key.
The piano plays songs to this word because the first-time sweaty palms understand it,
the first trace of rapid heartbeat shows it.
But the word philophobia is the untold story of being afraid-
afraid of falling for the emotions of intentions like kindness and not love.
Fear of falling in love is the phrase breathed into the word philophobia,
the weakness of the pause from the lips to not say I love you.
I want you cannot capture the rhythm of the meaning I need.
You, you are the reason my sleep doesn't have a lifestyle,
However, it always falls back to the twinkles of halos from the word philophobia,
Falling in love is from the fear of feeling it,
Philophobia.

I Found the Stars

by Attalea Rose

“Tell me something that will drastically change my opinion of you,” he says, caressing my knuckles with the pad of his thumb. We’re in the truck bed of his fire-engine red Toyota, nuzzled into scratchy wool blankets and one another’s warmth, gazing up at a light-polluted, nearly starless sky.

“I don’t know,” I reply. He asks this every week.

“Think about it.” So I do, as I turn to my side and press my chest, stomach, pelvis flush against his and weave fingers in his soft, fluttery hair.

I’ve told him about the time I failed my algebra 2 test in high school. I make straight-As.

“Everyone has to fail sometime,” he’d said. “Unsurprised.”

I’ve told him about the middle school fling with the boy that had a girlfriend and I thought was a friend, but the boy said he’d fallen in love with me and instead of breaking it off, I kept talking to him, because I still wanted him to be my friend. “I feel icky about it all,” I’d said.

“You were kind to friend. How is that icky?”

I’ve told him that when I see white crosses on the side of the road, I think of identifying corpses by their teeth. Once, my mom had left a magazine sprawled out on the coffee table, an article not suitable for little girl

eyes blinking up at me. It was about a man that murdered his wife and children, buried them in the woods, and marked the collective grave with a white cross. Someone had found the grave years later, and the corpses were identified by their teeth. Now, every cross on the side of the road has a corpse waiting to be identified by their rows of pearly whites.

He’d pressed his forehead against my temple and whispered, “That’s morbid. But that doesn’t change my opinion of you.”

I’ve told him fun fact after fun fact, the birthday party in high school my parents threw for me that I didn’t want and tried to sabotage with shredded invitations and popped balloons, the time I chucked a sharpened pencil at my sister’s head in anger but missed, hiding the last pieces of chocolate from my brother behind the jar of peanut butter because he hates the way peanut butter sticks to the roof of his mouth so he’d never touch it. And not just the bad things, too. I’ve told him about the surprise party we threw for my mom, my aspirations of becoming a singer-songwriter popstar, how talented I am at dancing and singing and drawing and how over the years I’ve learned to how stop degrading myself and embrace my talent, that he was my first love.

Nothing would change his opinion of me.

“Tell me something that will drastically change my opinion of you,” I murmur into his shoulder. He pulls the blankets tighter around us. “I’m consistent,” I conclude. He sighs and his chest shudders with the

heavy breath. “I guess you are.”

I swivel in his arms, slightly away, so that the left side of his body and the right side of mine are still pressed together, but our opposite sides are held apart, creating an acute angle opening to the sky. The stars used to be brighter, I’d thought. He used to be warmer, his skin was softer, his laugh kinder. But no, the sky had always been this dim.

“I don’t think I love you anymore,” I say in a breathy voice two heartbeats louder than a whisper. “I’m tired of you looking for something that isn’t there.”

He tenses. Sighs again. And again. And again. Until his tears are pitter-pattering onto my face and I realize that he’s sobbing as silently as he’s able. “I can’t see a future with you anymore,” he warbles. “I haven’t been able to for a while.”

I swivel on our axis, pressed up against him once more. “This is for the best, right?” I ask, looping my arms across his back. Getting closer when I should be drawing away. He snivels a couple more times before uttering a bleak, “Yes, it is.”

And then the stars are brighter again, and I’m more awake than I’ve been in months, and I’m gasping like I did after our first kiss as I fight against my devastated tears, and he holds me tighter, tighter, tighter.

“Hold me tightest before I let you go.”

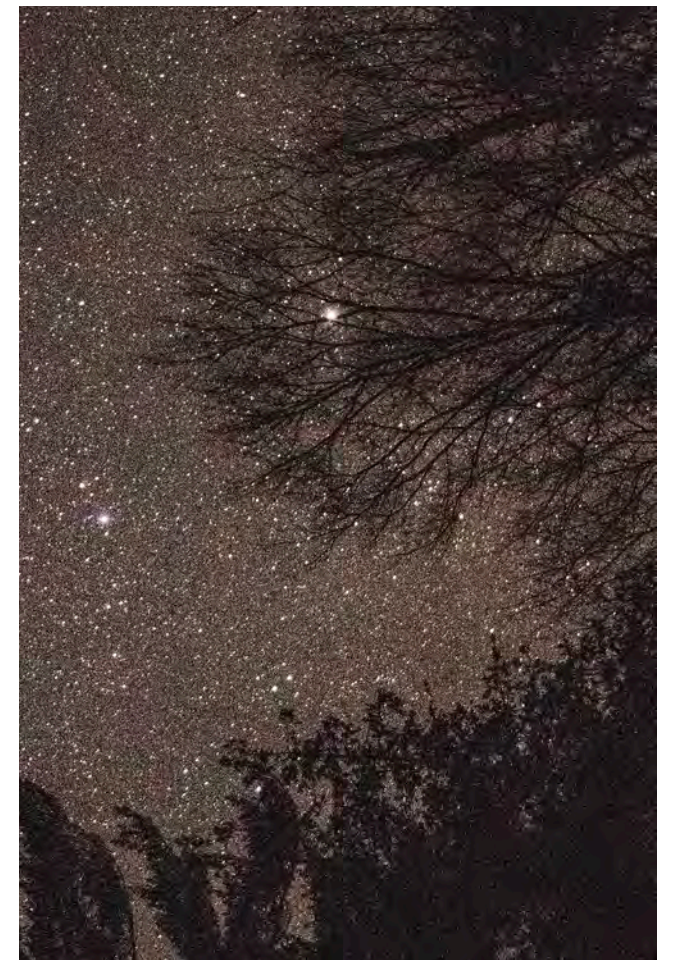


photo by Emily Will

Green Lights: Ty's Poem

by Grace Sarkisian

Green Lights

I remember the first day we met
I knocked on your door and you let me in
Green lights all around
And that was when the friendship started to begin
Every day was an adventure with you
I rerun the memories in my head like a movie
Imagining we are taking a ride through the drive-thru lane
Or watching the same YouTube videos on repeat with the green lights behind us
All I can hear is your laugh and I know you are watching from above
I still feel your presence and suddenly I'm transported to my living room from sophomore year
We are having a sleepover, talking about our ambitions and dreams
I turn around and think you're there, I see signs of you everywhere
Whenever I see a white Audi, I'm reminded of you
Whenever I hear the songs you wrote, I'm reminded of you
Whenever I see green lights, I'm reminded of you



A Spark of Childhood
Alex Nail

Cowboys & Zombies

by Andrew Hodge

Dreary days filled with decay
cascade my TV as I play
the episodes and immerse
myself in the world.

Never been too fond
of horror or scares,
but the way humans face
this apocalypse spurs my mind.

I first imagine myself as a character
interacting with the others,
before spinning my own web
and making my own survivor crew.

I lasso a wild horse
and scamper away from rattlesnakes
on a couch in air conditioning
glee making a home on my face.

Western legends dance in my dreams,
my bored in-class thoughts
involving horses and moonshine
and a new cowgirl anti-hero.

Playing these games influences my vision
of the art my hands desire to craft.
I want to frolic with cowboys and zombies
in the fields of my own design.

Begin Again

by Kaitlyn Scorza

I left home when I realized the world wasn't right. I was trapped in my own life. There were too many rules and too many people breaking them in a chaotic, never-ending imbalance. I needed a world where I could get away from it all. Earth is where I chose to go. I don't remember who told me about this place, but it seemed as good a start as any. There, I could get away from the wrongness of home. So I went.

I've been here for less than a day, as they call the cycles of their planet. So far, four of the inhabitants have asked me where I got the tattoos on my arms done. I don't know what they mean by that, but I stopped asking. The people here don't like it when you ask questions. They also don't like it when you stand in one place for too long, as I often did in the first moments after arrival. I wanted to take it all in. Perhaps the inhabitants aren't as fascinated by their world as I am. I should have guessed. It is familiar to them, after all.

As the darkest part of the day settles over the world~ far quicker than I expected~ I come across a man. He shakes a container at me and it rattles. He says, "Have you got any spare change, kid?" I don't know why he calls me kid, but I let it pass. I don't think I have any sort of change he might want. Starting over meant bringing nothing with me. I tell him so. He shakes his head and pats the blanket next to him, offering the spot to me. I sit. He may be the first human I can call 'friend.'

The man asks me where I live, and I furrow my entire forehead. "Nowhere," I say, and the man laughs.

"Me, I live right here," he says. "New York won't let me leave."

New York is a silly name for a place. It doesn't seem new at all. Like the man, who I suppose is much younger than he presents himself. Yet again, I will not ask. His is the only soul willing to reach out to mine.

"Will it let me leave?" I ask.

"Only if you want it to," he says, and I nod because it sounds important. He tells me his name, and I tell him mine, though both get lost in translation. Neither of us asks the other to repeat themselves. It hurts in the center of my chest, though I don't know why. It's only a name.

Eventually, the man falls asleep. I'm not tired. It's likely the result of an intergalactic version of what people here call 'jet lag.' Or adrenaline. Both, probably.

On the other side of the street, I spot a glowing set of words that spell 'Now Hiring.' It occurs to me that I will not be able to survive here as easily as I anticipated back home. I thought home would feel like a distant word, now. Instead, it feels closer than before I decided to leave.

As the morning comes, I procure a new goal: integrate myself into society so that no one will wonder if I am out of place. I wait until the man awakens, and then ask him what humans typically do during the light hours. He gives me a strange look~ at this point I am quite used to receiving such looks~ and explains to me the concept of getting a job. It sounds like something we had to do back

home, and I get the burning sense that my decision to choose this planet wasn't mere happenstance.

Feeling like I understand, I thank the man and promise to come back soon. I march into the building with the glowing sign and ask for a job. The human at the front gives me that familiar look, then hands me a form that I don't understand. I tell her I'll return with it and leave the place without any intention of ever going back.

Three similar occurrences one after another, and I've stopped walking into buildings. It seems that finding a job that doesn't require knowing a secret sequence of numbers is impossible. The star that lights this planet is disappearing again~ it moves far quicker than the star back home did~ and signs start lighting up windows. One in particular catches my eye: Happy Hour, it proclaims. This certainly piques my interest. I go in.

The room is a warm brown, but I don't feel any happier, so I sit down and wait for something to change. There's a woman sitting next to me, drinking something so colorful it might be poison. She takes one look at me, and chuckles.
"Bad day?"

I'm surprised she had the mind to ask. "Is it obvious?"

"Here," she says, sliding something over the table, "This will make you feel better."

That sounds exactly like what I am looking for, so I take it. I discover a small, blue capsule the size of my fingertip. She holds up her own and places it on her tongue, so I do the same. Nothing happens at first, and then it all happens at once.

It doesn't make me feel better. In fact, it doesn't make me feel anything at all.

Everything is sort of... floaty. The woman has disappeared, and I have been forgotten. I wonder if anyone misses me back home.

Somehow, without my knowledge, I end up sitting on a park bench, under a tree where a strange creature is humming a strange song. The world, the Earth, is upside-down. Well, maybe that's just me, but still I know far less about this place than I believed.

The creature stops singing, opens a pair of wings, and flies. I gasp. I have never seen such a beautiful creature. Or perhaps I have. My brain is still a bit tangled. Regardless of what I have or haven't seen, I think I'll stay here awhile. It reminds me of home.

Middle Road of Life

by Megan Minium

Where do you draw the line,
Straight down the middle?
A small apartment in NYC
A four-bedroom in the suburbs
Can she dance through the center?

Straight down the middle?
A baby crying
A city that never sleeps
Equally wanting to be cradled
Each is unable to be ignored

Will she remember life isn't linear?
When filming movie stars
She's dreamed of meeting
When she records baby's first steps
Waiting for these steps her entire life

In cyclical patterns
She writes a movie
It's on streaming platforms
She writes in her journal
It's in her child's hands now

Why must she choose?
Is one or the other better to lose?
Society claims it's not in her oath
An award of achievement
Only if she tackles both

10 simple ways to Illumine your life

1. Practice breathing into your belly and sighing out of your breath.
2. Take regular screen breaks, practically the last hours of the day.
3. Visit a peaceful place in your mind.
4. Get out and enjoy nature.
5. Try breathing exercises (box, lions breath, balloon, bubble, etc.)
6. Do a restorative exercise (yoga, meditation, etc.)
7. Explore your creativity (knit, pain, sew, etc.)
8. Listen to music without feeling the need to do something at the same time.
9. Concentrate on low-stake task like a jig-saw, crossword, or coloring.
10. Do a body scan.

by Giovanina Fortenbury

Life's Ladder

by JL Atkins

you have to start from the bottom now

you start to slip

it's too late

you lose your grip

as you envy

lives above

everything you've ever wanted

they have it

you begin to notice

it gets harder and harder

but the fall to the ground

takes you higher and higher

each step of the ladder

you carry on

though you are weak

lost in nowhere

it's time to begin

you must start somewhere

A Dusty Road

by Andrew Hodge

I am living the dream.

It may not seem like it from an outsider's perspective as I am currently driving in a cramped old Honda at 2 am. I just turned down a dirt road that I could draw in my sleep. It's a second home along with my Honda. The moon is my only company as the three passengers in my car are all asleep. My lovely girlfriend sitting beside me in the passenger seat snores cutely like a kitten. She is still in her gear because it was a big night for her. She just became the Tri-Southern Women's Champion. Wrestling is a hell of a thing. They always say it's fake but that smile on her face as the tears streamed along her rosy cheeks were as real as they get. She has worked for three whole years to get there and I couldn't be prouder. I glance over and see her clutching her championship like a teddy bear as she slumbers. I can only imagine what her dreams are like right now.

Behind me in the back seat are my two best friends. They are twin brothers I met in high school and instantly accepted me as a weird cousin. They were the first people I ever met that encouraged me to chase my dream to be a wrestler. I remember seeing Victor doing flips on his trampoline as Carmelo pumped weights when I visited their house for the first time and realized they had the exact same ambitions as me. We all signed up for wrestling school the day after graduation. It

was like 3 months of hell but we survived, together. They are a tag team and a fine one too. That twin intuition has to be why. They have had many championships but right now want more than that. They have sent off so many tapes and videos to the bigger companies. I think they send them monthly. I would sign them if I was in those companies but something just seems to be holding them back. They won't quit though. They would go wrestle in Antarctica for a year if it meant getting signed. Now, though, they are sleeping, making piles of drool on their gear bags.

I pass the old diner I used to work at to help pay for wrestling school. I would spend all day there to spend all night bumping and running the ropes. It was tiring but fulfilling. My dreams have been haunted for years, basically since I was twelve, with the sight of me holding up the championship belt in an arena of a hundred thousand people. They were all chanting Jace, Jace, Jace at the top of their lungs. I would wake up and be sad that it was just the dream again. It has become a nightmare in a way because it is not the real thing yet. I need the real thing. I have spent so many hours in this Honda traveling around Bama, Georgia, and Tennessee for 25 dollars a night and a hot dog per show. I have seen my name on old signs that are missing some of their letters so I become Jac Hndrix. I need Jac though for the superstar version of Jace to be born. I need my Honda

to become covered with dust from these backroads.

At the show we just left, I had a match that was not all that. I slipped off the rope and my opponent took my finisher wrong. I was devastated as the referee raised my hand. I felt low. Then, I saw her. A little girl sitting beside her father who must have had the most majestic beard in the world. The girl was cheering and smiling. She was happy I won. Her eyes glimmered with her story. I could tell that she and her father don't have much and it's probably just them. I could tell that she must not have many days where she can go somewhere and just have a good time. I had just made her happy. I had gifted her face with the glow of a smile. That is why I love these late-night journeys in my Honda. I want to get put through tables and fall off ladders if it means that a little girl like her can enjoy herself and smile. The moon shines upon us almost as if she's granting us the light we need to get down the dusty road of success. I can't help but smile at her in thanks as I continue to drive my family in my Honda to our next show.

I am living my dream.



photo by Emily Will



To the Bone
Hunter Lapp

Junction Bridge

by Tika Ciceron

Strolling on the Junction Bridge
My footsteps are soft and unheard
I inhale the calming air in the atmosphere and watch as a submarine floats on the wavering
waters beneath the bridge

The ocean is at the top of its fin with unexplored beings
But the submarine rest beneath the bridge
Among locked love and stories with unwritten chapters
Witnessing as lovers like Jennifer and Jonathan carve hearts and key in their love

There is something about two strangers professing love that makes my imagination run wild
So I picture them bike riding under the astounding sunset and their pulsing heartbeats
bursting through the angst of uncertainty
Jonathan is the yang to Jennifer's yin as they defy odds to balance the universe

And just like that,
I become the cliché
I never thought I would,
but if love is the cliché,
it does not shame me that I too am one.
Trest on the low tides because
as beautiful as it is to discover,
I prefer to witness the birth of
something as equally beautiful
despite whether the world
knows it or not.
I am not much of a traveler,
and I have not been everywhere,
but it is on my list to travel and witness love in all its proportions.



Addiction
Giovanina Fortenbury

The Ire in Respire

by JL Atkins

"Do you wanna hit my vape?" they asked. *I won't get addicted*, I told myself. *I have strong willpower. I'm not susceptible to addiction like other people. If it becomes a problem, I'll just stop.* I confidently held these lies in my mind to validate my actions. The persistent sinking of my heart screamed for truth, yet I signed a deal with denial and ignored the fine print. I took a long, satisfying inhale of the blue raspberry-flavored e-cigarette. I let the weight of my mind fall back onto the headrest of my ex-boyfriend's car as the first rush of nicotine slowly paralyzed my body, flooding my dopamine receptors with a small taste for which they had been secretly longing. I breathed out the exhausted vapor and watched as it danced from my mouth, clouding my vision.

Four years, two-hundred and seven days, eight hours, thirty-one minutes. That is how long I have been addicted. It's the first thing I think of when I wake up and the last thing I do before I allow myself to rest. I take it everywhere with me. I anxiously pat for it when it is not in my sight. I hide my addiction from those I know would care enough to suggest a permanent fix. I can't bring myself to admit that my frequent bathroom trips aren't always "feminine issues" or an excessively long bowel moment. I am constantly finding new ways to make time for a date with my death stick. I slink off to the shadows to relieve the draw of addiction, abruptly lashing out at anyone

who might see and therefore dissolve the illusion of normalcy. The worst part is that now, I know the extent of my dependance. I know I am only perpetuating my suffering.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Hold it. Breathe out. My glare was inordinately fixed on her; I was frozen in longing for the green, mint-flavored, vaporizer that stood a foot outside my grasp. I tried to pace my breathing to calm the storm that was swelling within my aching mind. How cruelly she taunted me, *I own you. You need me.* Three hours, forty-seven minutes. That's how long it had been since I last gave in to the urge. Each second that passed as I dissociated into her cold plastic flesh only further fueled the swirling hurricane inside. *Breathe in. Breathe out.* My eyes remained wide, not taking a moment to blink, not taking a moment to think. The possession over me grew and I watched as she imprisoned me in a shadow of my own mistakes.

Just one hit. That's all it would take to silence the demon and allow me temporary peace. But that's all it was: temporary peace. I was selling my future health and happiness for moments of fleeting, false relief. Each hit only making me more immune, resetting the time it would take for me to successfully withdraw.

I could start tomorrow though, I told myself. *I don't feel good, so it's a bad day to start to quit.* Not even the world's most precious

diamond could cut the tension between her cursed mod and my watering mouth. The enticing green color of her body chained my awareness, reminding of the delicious flavoring that would be followed by a guilt inducing, pleasant rush of toxins. *It could be mine. Breathe in. Breathe out. It would be so easy to stop the pain.* My gaze did not falter. *Not fair! It's not fair!* A storm of tears swelled within my heart and flooded out my eyes, but I did not blink. I watched helplessly as my sight became shrouded in a river of self-pity. *I forgot to breathe. BREATHE!* With a frustrated and noisy gasp, I hastily wiped the shame from my eyes, desperate to once again leer at the bane of my daily life.

Cold turkey has never worked for me. Maybe I'll just ween myself off, like a baby off a bottle. That's exactly what I felt like, an infant child, completely surrendered to the needs of my body, and I was *starving*. I was *ravaged*. Though I did not ask to be born and bear the helpless weight of hunger, I was the one who bared my wrists and let addiction cuff my hands. *Guilty... Guilty!* Another tear fell and rolled in-between my lips. My jaw too weak to hold, my mouth dropped open, finally allowing the salty tears to taste on my tongue. The flavor delivered notes of self-hatred to the folds of my brain as I stuttered with staccato cries of protest.

Please, please, PLEASE, my body begged, tempting my hand enough to lift towards the mouthpiece. *NO! Don't do it,* my mind combatted, sensitive to the pain we have already endured. The heavy shadow of my possession grew as mighty as a god while my fragile human frame shrank down to hell, convincing me to succumb the darkness in which I suffocate. I took one last deep breath and exhaled my decision. With a sudden burst of energy, I lunged forward, snatching her off the table before me. I closed my eyes and sealed my lips tightly around her face, immediately welcoming her burning,

chemical breath. Blink...Blink...BLINK, and just like that she died, leaving me guilty and unsatisfied. I briefly watched in horror as she flashed her final goodbye before aggressively tossing her lifeless body across the room with a blood-curdling scream. I let my body fall back into the couch, as I shook up and down with a series of defeated cries.

Breathe in. Hold it! My mind tried to soothe, but I couldn't even keep the air in my lungs. The following cry forced the failed attempt out of my lungs, reviving my symphony of sobs. *Pitiful. Just, pitiful... Someone's coming.* I pulled myself up enough to gaze through swollen eyes. My roommate carefully entered the room, concerned with my current state. "Are you alright?" they asked with a sympathetic brow. I shrugged, though another tear fell. They took a long draw from their blue-raspberry flavored e-cigarette, "Do you wanna hit my vape?"



GIOVI

Verity
Giovanina Fortenbury

Swarm

by Giovanina Fortenbury

The bug inspector brought her head out of the large whole conquering half of the bedroom wall, “Yep, looks like you got a bad case of moth infestation. We can remove this for you, but you need to pack a bag and exit the house immediately.” Carlos planted his hand on his face and let it slide down, scoffing loudly under his breath. “You can’t just fix it now! For what I’m paying you? Seriously?!” Carlos asked with an agitated tone. He rolled his eyes as the woman looked at Carlos incredulously.

The bug inspector kneeled down and began packing her tools away into her black bag, shaking her head with an annoyed look. “Look, sir, you can’t be here if the moths get annoyed. They could swarm around and really hurt you. It’ll be best if you left.” The bug inspector reassured. Carlos chewed down on his bottom lip giving it a bit of thought, stepping over the woman’s stuff and sticking his head into the deep hole, seeing the big moths lying around, some small white eggs seeping through the walls. He stuck his head back out and nodded slowly, “Alright, how much time do I have?”

Carlos threw what he needed into his navy blue duffle bag, “This is just ridiculous! I don’t know how this even came to be! She wanted me out in an hour but told me I’d have to book a hotel for three days before it was safe. I outta just spray the moth’s with a water house-that’ll teach ‘em!” Carlos screamed at his speaker phone, his close friend on the other line. Carlos grabbed his duffle and whipped it over his shoulder; heavy steps could be heard as he came down the stairs. Carlos slapped his duffle bag down

onto the floor next to the hole. He was also partially annoyed with the bug lady, so why not leave a mess for her to clean up—He was paying her for this anyways!

Carlos dug into his pocket and pulled out a mothball then along with a lighter-lit. He threw it into the hole. Carlos stood there watching the moths swarm towards the light, getting burned to the nimb by the light. The mothball had gone out almost immediately, which was strange. Carlos needed to get a better look, so he stuck his head into the hole, but there were no moths left. “Hey, bug lady! Looks like I did your job for you!” Carlos yelled out. She was around here somewhere.

Carlos turned his head and immediately a large swarm of moths came straight for his face. Carlos’s screams were agonizing, sinister, and painful. He began digging his nails into his eyes, the small teeth of the moths clamped on. Their dusty wings invaded his eyeballs, some crawling into his ears, nibbling at the skin. Carlos wildly shook his head and waved his hands around, his feet shuffling back toward the hole. “Get it off!” He yelled once more, before tripping over his duffle bag and falling into the hole; hitting his head against a beam.

Carlos’s head was pounding; he tried to open his eyes but it felt like they already were. Carlos slowly sat up and looked around, but body language confused. The warmth of the light coming from the hole beamed down on his forehead. Carlos lifted his fingers to his eyes and pressed down onto the open gritty flesh where moths were feasting on.

Ode to a Lie

by Jamelia Williams

Though you are hated by mankind,
know that you will always find a home in my heart.
For I see the way you keep the world intertwined,
The relationships that would crumble without your persistent presence at the start.

I’m in awe of how you shield feeble hearts.
That everyone follows the golden rule like it’s in the covenant of the ark.
That it’s normal to be scared of the monster in my closet at the ripe age of sixteen.
That ma’s health isn’t as bad as it seems.

How your hope illuminates the darkest night.
That for those who wait, good things will come in their plight.
That ma won’t be in pain when she goes to visit the king.
That there is strength in numbers that can surmount all things.

You provide shelter from truth’s perilous confines.
Keeping those I love free from worry with a simple “I’m fine.”
Telling the little ones ma’s just taking a trip to the sky.
Saying that anything is possible as long as you try.

They claim that freedom can be found in honesty,
But how can one be free when captured in chains of agony?

After seeing countless atrocities, I found myself lost in despair.
People with my skin condemned,
for its color alone proved they weren’t innocent,
Women shaving their heads in anger,
mourning the woman who died for exposing hers,
Lives destroyed overseas as countries drop bombs to decimate cities,
Adults telling children they are fit to be mothers
because the life that was forced into them
matters more than their own.

Bearing witness, as I lacked the power needed to do anything else.
Feeling guilty for the pain that I carried, knowing it was not mine to bear.
Praying for peace, in times when war prospered

The hope you gave in the form of “everything will be okay.”

When I was in need, it was you who saved me!

Lost in the valleys of despair, you gave me an escape, a place to be free.

Instead of living in this cruel world, you helped me find serenity in a realm of glorious fantasy,

One in which treacherous candor could not reach.

Whisking away the memories bringing the much sought-after peace.

My savior, my protector, my comfort.

For providing me a sanctuary, I will forever give you praise.



photo by Emily Will

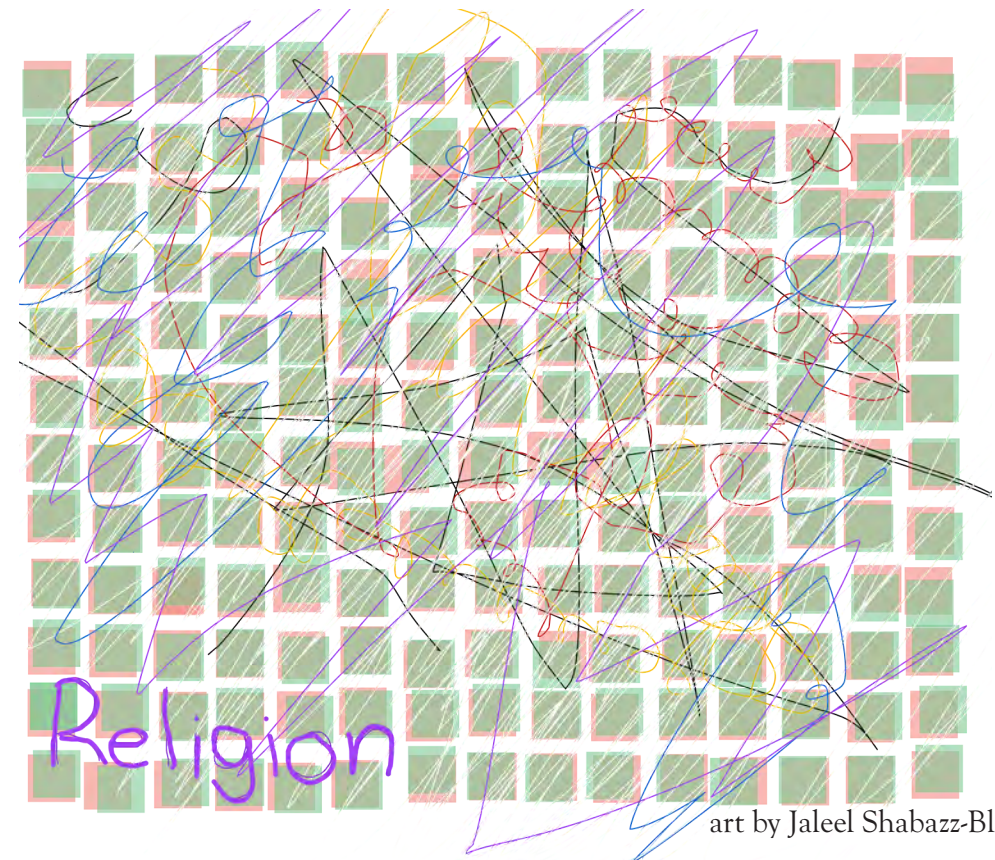
Cute & Quirky

by Andrew Hodge

Oftentimes, we see the crazed germophobe, your Monicas, your Howie Mandels, but this is also how OCD is depicted, a simple habit that means you love organization and cleanliness. So cute and quirky right? Is it cute and quirky to have death make your mind its playground, to have the realization of mortality ruminate in your mind, to have the urge to Google age after age?

Cleaning is a part of the disorder but not just for the sake of structure, instead, it is to try to be assured that everything will be safe, that you won't be struck by lightning or shot by a drunk hunter. Worry and panic are bedfellows in the mind, tempting with terrors and causing actions that I don't want to do. It marries you to anxiety and there is no divorce.

Doubt about everything is the new reality of every situation. Every bad thought is now near certainty, which ironically is all I scavenge to seize. There is no landing zone of pillows and security blankets at the end of the tumultuous twirling slide. It feels like putting bandage after bandage after bandage over a scar that will not stop gushing blood from coating the skin and placing an invisibility cloak of pain around my shoulders.



art by Jaleel Shabazz-Blue

by Giovanina Fortenbury

It had been fifty-four days since I had been locked in this dark room. I had a rickety old metal bed with a few back-aching cushions, a ripped old blanket to keep me warm, and an IV connection on the wall to IV my food. There was a loud dripping noise in the corner of the room however, I could not find the water. It was driving me absolutely insane—drip, drip, drip. I had been dragging my bruised and belted feet in front of the beaten and scratched door that had me locked away inside. Occasionally, I would hear a loud rattle outside, like a metal baseball bat against a chain link fence. Then sometimes I would hear whispering right outside the door. I would push the left side of my ear against the door, moving my body up and down, lower and higher until I could hear clearly. *“We can’t do this while she’s here, it’s not right.”*

The footsteps would fade and I would go back to my rickety bed, slouching in the corner. I had tried yelling, screaming at the top of my lungs, begging, pleading, punching at the door until my knuckles bled, pushing my bed against the door— but nothing worked. That stupid heavy door would not budge. I haven’t heard any whispering voices for days or had it been months? I couldn’t tell.

Then it was just that. A small echoing giggle. I lifted my head up from my drowning never-ending rocking and looked towards the door. There it was again; an echoing giggle. I planted my hands next to me on the floor and pushed myself up, hurrying towards the door, pressing my ear against it to hear what I could. I didn’t hear anything so I got on my

knees and tried to look under the door for anything, but there was nothing. Complete darkness, just a small beaming light towards my eye. I jerked my head back and crawled up the door, pressing my palms against the door, then my hands both made it down to the door knob. I had hope. Every day, every hour I would try to simply move the knob, but again— not a single budge.

“She’s never coming out of it! I’m planning on serving her divorce papers immediately when she comes too, anyways.” My eyebrows furrowed together. I knew that voice. It was my husband’s. *“If you say so, back to her...I mean your place?”* I knew that voice too— my sister. Divorce? What was he talking about?! Divorcing me?! My sister and my husband were having an affair! *“You jerk!”* I screamed at the top of my lungs, my fists began pounding on the door, and tears streamed down my face. He had me locked in here and he was planning on divorcing me?! I wanted to be let out!

“Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!”

My eyes opened.

Co•ma, *noun*, a state of deep unconsciousness that lasts for a prolonged or indefinite period, caused especially by severe injury or illness.



A Moment of Clarity
Reagan Christian

Awaken

by JL Atkins

Awaken now you say,
As if I cannot see.
Only ever had two eyes,
Yet you say I have three.
Quiet, quiet, listen,
for that little voice inside
to take your tiny mind,
and open it up wide.
But how am I to listen
to that I cannot hear?
You laugh and say so softly,
Don't listen with your ear



Patmos, Greece
photo by Emily Will

As i remember what once was

by Jenna Fuller

i think of nails
polished a peony pink
and hair held high,
like a halo of the divine,
by curlers worn in the night, sticky
spray ensuring they maintained
their spiral shapes.

oh, how i begged
to be Your reflection.
You'd gently wrap strands
of my hair around a silver
cylinder, pinning them close
to my crown between clasps.

then, You'd grab Estee Lauder 223,
housed in a navy tube,
and paint it across my lips
before sliding my feet
into Your golden Sunday sandals.

my favorite hours
were spent in Your oak kitchen
as we'd bake birthday cakes
or You'd wipe briny drops
from my face in the shadows
of the dim pendant light,
where darkness absorbed
any wrong that couldn't be made right.

we often drained away every
hour of the day in that kitchen
until the sun sank into the earth,
inviting us to mold moonlit memories;
one of these nocturnal nights,
You folded my palms
into Yours and promised
the Lord will bring healing if we pray.

now, i think of You every time
the sun shines on the surface of the moon



Survival
Giovanina Fortenbury

Observations By Ann E. Mation

by Andrew Hodge

Hello everyone! I am awesome adventurer Ann E. Mation and I have just returned from a recent excursion off of NepToon to another weird planet named Earth. What a dumb name, right? I learned a lot from living among the humans. They differ a lot from us but certain things really stuck out to me. Here are my top 12 things that shocked me about Earth and the humans. Number 7 will shake your soul.

1: The humans wear something different every day. Like what?!?! You have to claim your style. Everyone on NepToon knows that I am the purple shirt with a white skirt! I would not be able to live if some other Toon stole my style. Some people even purposefully match when they are not twins. Like, have they no rules on Earth?

2: Humans age!!!! Again, are there no role rules on Earth? I am the hip teen adventurer. I will always be the hip girl adventurer. My mother will always be the worried mother. My little brother will always be a numbskull. We have our roles. I met a lady, Cynthia, who has gone from stoner teen to hot mom to casino grandma. That is three completely different roles! How many people did she steal a role from? Humans are selfish.

3: Pets are just pets. My adventuring partner is my super cool kitty, Reginald. He knows how to fix any problems my spaceship has. Cynthia has 6 cats and they all just lay around all day and do nothing. They just eat and sleep. Like where are there secret agent fedoras? Why can they not speak to the humans? Reginald talks my ear off daily!

4: Humans can get hurt badly! Unlike us Toons, humans get hurt often. I saw two people fall and injure their ankles. I watched this one thing called football and why would this fragile species willingly smash into each other and hurt each other when they cannot just see stars and then be fine? Humans make no sense.

5: Earth's seasons are different than NepToon's. Instead of having one big long season that includes the Halloween episode or Valentine's episode, Earth splits into 4 seasons based on the weather. They have things called years which is something to do with the orbit. Their orbit is not even though so they have a leap year with an extra day. Earth is weird. They could not even plan their passage of time right.

6: Humans are obsessed with magic, but have none. Humans love magic and magic-based entertainment. They have like a bajillion amusement parks that claim to be magic on Earth but they are usually just filled with minimum-wage workers in torturous costumes. It is weird to see them so magic-obsessed, especially since magic is not all that. It gets old after a while. I mean, my best friend is a genie, and she hasn't had work in like 7 seasons.

7: Humans have no random body swap episode. I guess this is because they can change their roles at seemingly a whim but Toons know that once every few seasons a body swap episode happens. Why these happen is to help us understand each other and/or gain more love for ourselves. I guess

the lawless land of Earth has no need for this.

8: Humans have to eat, like a lot. Humans eat so much. They have breakfast, snack, lunch, snack, snack, supper, and snack. It is like constant. I got bored of it just watching it. There are so many restaurants too. Like 50 in most towns. Some have like just lines of them side by side. It is so strange.

9: Scares are beloved and not hated. Humans loved to be scared. They watch so many films about it. I don't get it. They can get hurt and even get canceled yet they love watching a tiny redhead doll quipping and killing. Human brains are too bizarre. I would love to understand one but I don't think that would be possible.

10: The humans have 5 fingers! What is that extra one for? It is just a waste of ink to me. I guess it's to make them feel all special or something. My group was stronger than most humans I came into contact with. Humans seem to have a love for excess.

11: There is a lack of quicksand. Quicksand is not around every turn on Earth. It seems to be more just used as a joke for danger than an actual danger that everyone has to deal with. My whole family has been trapped in quicksand. I have at least 7 times. I almost lost Reginald to it many times. I guess this is the one way that Earth is better than NepToon.

12: Human bodies are not very fluid. Toons can shift how we look to hide or due to outside forces. Humans can not do this. They are stuck how they are. I played hide and seek with many groups of humans and won every time. I hid behind everything from a light pole to a bush. Toons are just so much more cooler.

In conclusion, my travels to Earth and

mingling with humans led me to have a greater respect for Toons and NepToon. There is more love on my home planet. Humans just seem to want to hate and argue. It's weird. I hope to visit Earth again soon. They have things called french fries there and I'm obsessed! Toodles for now!



photo by Emily Will