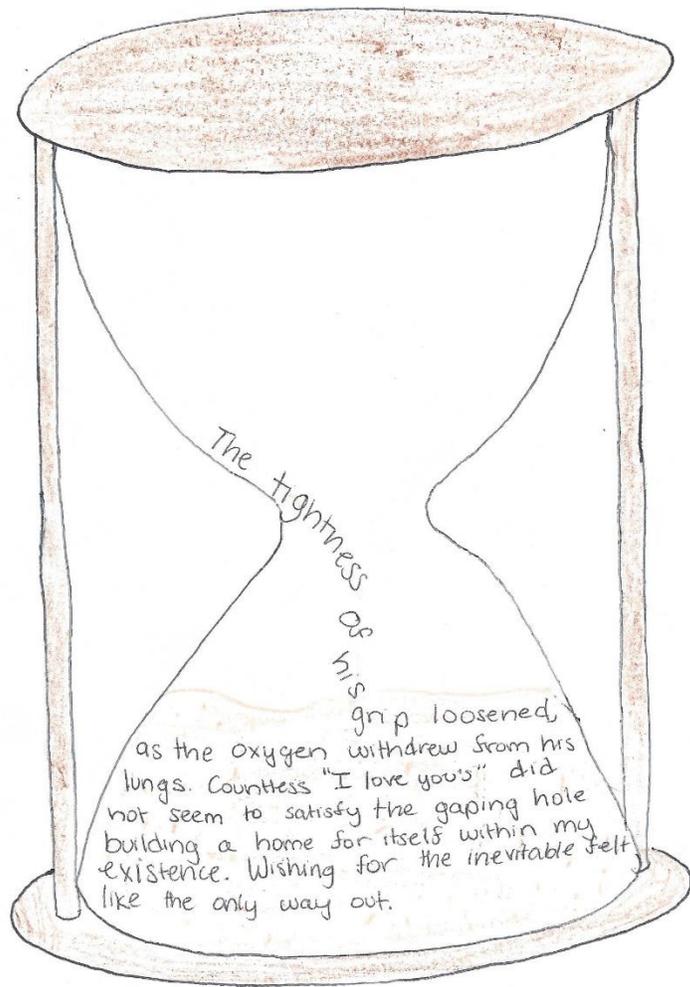


Whispers from the Wood

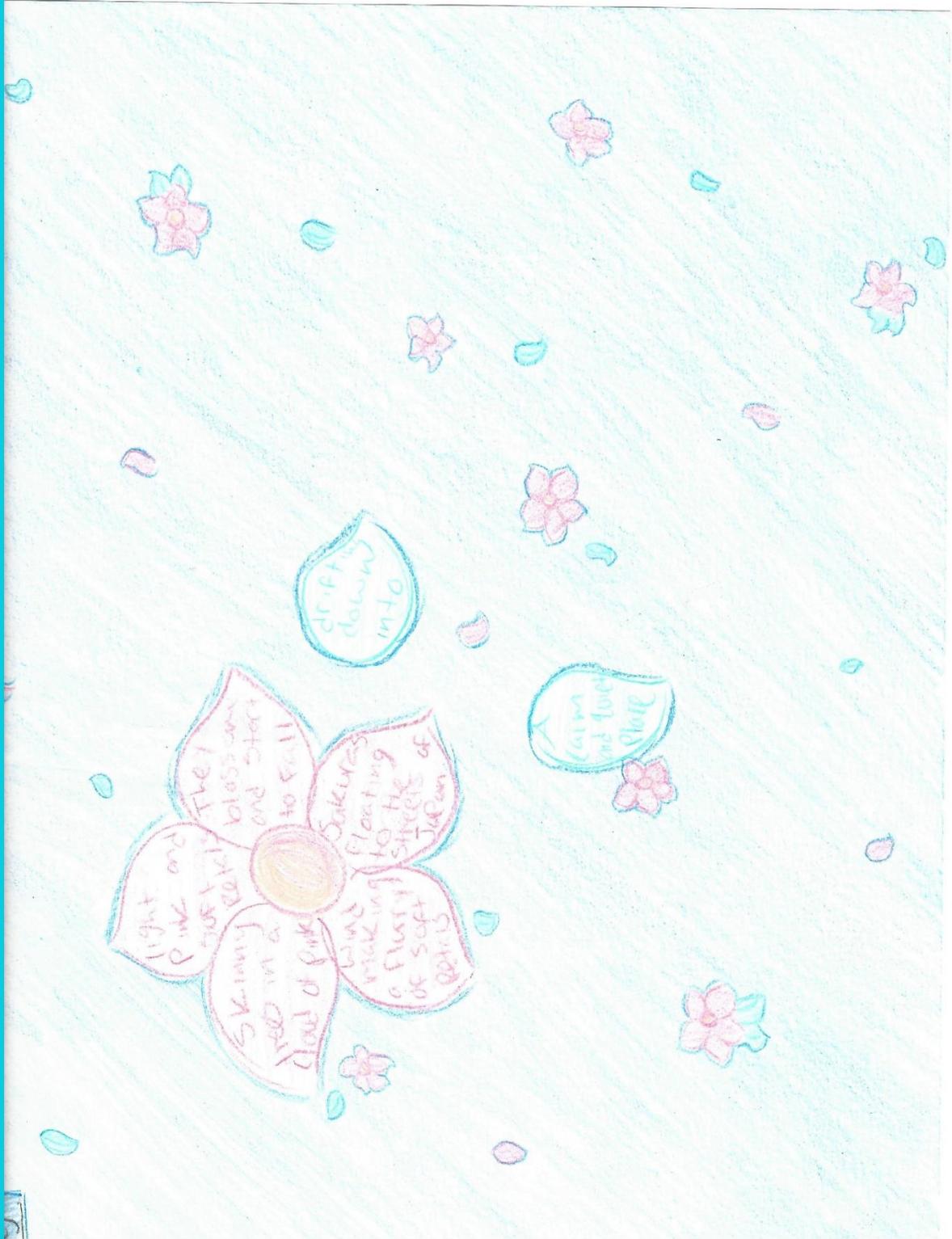


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The tightness of his
grip loosened,
as the oxygen withdrew from his
lungs. Countless "I love you's" did
not seem to satisfy the gaping hole
building a home for itself within my
existence. Wishing for the inevitable felt
like the only way out.

— bernadette pimentel ♡



light and
pink and
just like
They
blossom
and start
to fall
Sakuras
float
to the
streets of
Japan
wind
blowing
a flurry
of soft
petals
skimming
across
clouds of pink

drifts
down
into

Calm
and quiet
place

[Redacted]
By Erik Davis

Freedom of speech
Is only allowed
If the message is liked.
Remember not to disgrace the disgraceful.
Remember to be civilized and polite
When talking about mass mu*der.
If you want to make money
You have to burn your art.
So keep a happy smile
and obey your corporate messiahs.
Money is more important than integrity.
Money is more important than values.
Money is more important than love.
Money is more important than life.
So you better get on your knees
and pray for mercy.

When man plays God.
By Erik Davis

There are rules to the game of life. Rules that should be followed and obeyed. It's argued over what those rules are and what put them in place. Some say God, some say the universe itself all we know is that there are in fact rules, laws, and answers in which we don't want or need to know.

I was a scientist. I honest to God wish we took into play the fact that the higher beings who keep order are there for a reason. We decided to play God. we decided we would create life itself. How foolish we were.

We took different embryos from different types of animals that had similarities to humans. We merged them together.

It took over two hundred and forty-seven times but tragically we got it right.

It was twenty-seven pounds in weight and was half a foot in height.

It was deformed, a true unholy abomination not of good and not evil but of sheer disgust and human ignorance.

We were a mixture of horrified and stuck in awe with our results.

However, after time had passed we were purely horrified with what we had done.

I still remember what it looked like. Every time I close my eyes I see it.

It's missing lower jaw and strange bright red scale like skin. The strange right that resembled a bat wing and the left arm that looked like a grown man's hand.

I still recall its eyes.

Oh God, it still sickens me to this day.

They were a dark grey and they begged for death.

It wasn't until the screaming started that the veil of ignorance had been removed.

It wouldn't stop screaming. It was deep guttural scream that didn't stop. It screamed for three days until we decided what needed to happen. We decided that it would be cruel to let this *thing* live in its state of agony.

I took an icepick from my shed back home and put it out of its pain.

Its blood was a foul smelling stench and the blood itself was black as midnight.

We ended up doing an autopsy on the *thing*. It appeared that it had half a heart and many vital organs were missing. It had two lungs except the left lung had collapsed. It's kidneys, liver, and spleen had all been merged into one single operating organ. It still disturbs me to this day thinking about it. That a living breathing creature had to live in such agony. Looking back at it, I don't think it was screaming over physical pain. I believe it was screaming over the fact that it was alone. A soulless monstrosity that shows the arrogance of mankind. It was husk, something that didn't belong in God's domain or the devils. An entity that sat on its own island of being. A being of pain and misery that only achieved peace through the sweet release of death.

In the Blink of an Eye.
By Erik Davis.

Charlie ran down the street as fast as humanly possible. The simple suburban street that Charlie had known all their life was now flooded in chaos. People ran to the churches. People ran to loved one's homes. People ran to shelters in hope of surviving. Charlie on the other hand was running to a tree on a hill. That's all Charlie could think of at the moment. Preachers where on their knees making amends with God on the sidewalks. Mothers and Fathers cried and hugged their confused children. Favorite songs where played as loud as possible. Lovers expressed passion for each other in the streets. Gluttons held one last feast. Musicians played their last songs and poets recited one final poem. Drunkards where enjoying one last drink. Charlie ignored all of that. Charlie passed all the memories of their childhood. All the friend ships they forged. All the grievances they had bared. All the good times and the bad times. Then Charlie saw it. The old oak tree on top of the hill and saw him. "It's about time!" Frankie said. "Sorry I got lost," said Charlie. Charlie got on top of the hill and looked into Frankie's green eyes that seemed to sparkle in the light of the sunset, almost as if they were emeralds on a neckless. Charlie ran their hand through Frankie's brown hair. "Maybe it won't be that bad?" Charlie said, knowing it was a lie. "No it's going to be awful," said Frankie. "Well, at least I'm with you then. So in a way that makes it a whole less awful," said Charlie. Charlie looked at the trunk of the old oak tree. Charlie placed their hand on a heart that had both of their initials carved in. "How old do you think we were?" asked Charlie. "Teenagers, older than thirteen younger than eighteen," said Frankie. "I didn't think this is how it would go," said Charlie. "What do you mean by that?" asked Frankie. "Well if I'm being honest I thought we would get married and settle down somewhere, I figured we would die of old age together or... or... or... something less tragic," said Charlie. Frankie tilted their head and leaned against the tree. "Marriage you say?" asked Frankie. Charlie blushed. "Yeah, I was planning proposing someday. I really wish I did it sooner but I guess I was too much of coward," said Charlie. Frankie leaned in and placed their lips on Charlies. "I would have said yes. I wouldn't have even hesitated," said Frankie. Charlie wrapped their arms Frankie.

The two lovers held each other closely, almost as if they were trying to shield each other from the impending danger that was coming.
Their lips where clenched together.
Their hearts where interlocked.
Then the bomb fell.
The fire was casted.
Ashes came to ashes and dust went back to dust.

White Knuckles
By Jonathan Baumgardner

Day after Day
Week after week
Begging for help
Pleading for justice
Hoping one day,
He'd be saved.
He looks down,
Fearful of what would happen,
If he said something.
Crying himself to sleep,
Tears soaking his pillow,
Sleeping through his headaches,
Waking up to another.
Eventually, it has to stop,
It has to.

Magic City
By Makayla Kendrick

These streets are filled with magic,
The beating of a tight drum line,
And the aroma of what has to be 6 different culture in the air.
It's like I can feel the rhythm in my soul as I walk down Broadway

This is the city of the world
Different smells
Different languages
Different cultures
All melding together in a perfect harmony

This is the city of magic

Painkiller
By Ryen Gordon

I keep you close
Wanting you there to subdue the pain
My eyes are glassy and my mind is else where
I feel light as if with one gust of wind I'd be gone
Floating off to somewhere new
I like to imagine you would try to catch me
Grab my hand and pull me back to reality
Killing the pain that never seems to end
Maybe that's why I do it
Maybe it's not
The pain is unbearable
Yet when you're with me I feel brand new
I get the shakes and the itches when you're gone
You're my painkiller

Bliss

By Fatima Diallo

Everything was up in roses.

Your touch made me weak.

Your smile made me blush.

Everything you did made my mind go into bliss.

From the way you talked,

To the way you walked.

I couldn't get you out my mind.

Whether I was asleep or not.

I was constantly at bliss.

My Escape
By Emily Moody

I touched the water ever so lightly
Moistening my hands just enough to see the sparkle from the moon
There was something about the reflection of the stars and the moon on the water
It comforted me,
Made me feel safe when nothing else could
It was my escape
Obliterating everything else
All of the stress,
All of the arguments that have been engraved into my mind,
The sound of glass crashing on the floor,
My dad's drunken voice

The water was calm,
Creating just enough noise to distract the voices in my head,
And pull me back to the reflection of the stars and the moon

Fatal Education
By Kaitlyn Gardner

Imagine getting ready for the school year,
Gathering your favorite supplies,
Comparing schedules with your closest friends,
Being excited to get in the swing of things again.
When excitement quickly twists into terror.
When the lockdown bell rings,
Children are frantic,
Running through the halls,
Running to the classrooms.
Kids are crying,
Screaming.
Kids are terrified.
We hear these stories all the time.
We brush them off, thinking,
“That could never happen to me.”
But all it takes
Is a person with a motive
And a gun.
When did we allow it to come to this?
When did we decide to normalize this?
Nothing is being done.
It allows criminals to see schools
As a shooting range,
Students their targets.
A free game
Without punishment.
Because it’s normal, right?
No big deal,
Just a few more kids killed
In the building they are forced to go to
For 180 days a year.
Why would anyone send their kids
Somewhere they’re at risk of never returning from?
A place where they may have to make the decision of
Jumping out of a two story window
Or taking a bullet.
A place where the only protection from shooters
Is putting a black sheet of paper over the door window
And playing the quiet game.

The Green's Protector
By Katie Coffman

A long time ago, long before humans began making up stories about them and hunting them into extinction, magical creatures roamed the Earth.

Now this story takes place in a land you now know as Ireland, but before it was known by that name it was simply known as The Green, for this place was brimming with life.

The story takes place on the cliffs of Moher, where at the time there was a small village lived in by the Aos Sí, or as they are more commonly known today, the Fairies. Of course, it had a few other creatures living there, but most of it was inhabited by the Aos Sí.

On the outskirts of the town there lived a young Aos Sí by the name of Ita. Ita was young for her kind, only about two hundred years old, but she was gifted in the magical arts. She had the ability to converse with plants, and could cause them to spring forth from the ground.

One day, a human from the neighboring town, farther down the coast, galloped into the town on horseback, crying out for help. She said she had seen a great behemoth swimming through the water, and it was heading towards the Aos Sí village. The Aos Sí panicked, knowing the creature was probably out hunting, and quickly evacuated the fishermen in the water below.

But unbeknownst to them, this leviathan was hunting for vengeance, rather than food. For many years prior, this village's ascendants had attacked and killed this creature's mother for sport. So instead of swimming past, the creature climbed the cliffs and attacked the village. The people gazed upon the monster in fear, for its body was as tall two mountains stacked upon one another and as wide as a valley, with a long, curved tail half that length, tipped with a single curved point. Its scaly hide was a shimmering dark green that melted into a deep blue at its otter-like snout, and the two curved, ebony horns emerging from brow were sharper than any sword forged by man. Each of the leviathan's claws were the size of a house and soaked with the blood of its prey, and its limbs were as muscular and thick as a great tree. When it opened its mouth to let out an ear splitting bellow, it revealed a wide, gaping maw with razor-sharp teeth.

Most of the Aos Sí ran, but Ita stayed and attacked the monster with her plants. It was a long and hard battle, the monster bent on vengeance for its family and Ita determined to protect her home. The leviathan chomped and clawed at the little girl, but she evaded his attacks, as lithe and clever as a fox. She wrapped thick vines around its massive bulk, and roots sprang from the ground, pinning down its limbs and tail. The creature immediately tore them from the earth, becoming far more enraged than before. Suddenly it paused, the monster's great jaws closed, and a rumbling sound emanating from its throat. The leviathan suddenly opened its mouth, spewing fire everywhere, burning the child's plants and some of the village. Ita was not swayed though, for now she was determined to stop this beast from ravaging her home any longer.

Trying to block out the anguished cries of the plants, Ita grit her teeth, clenched her hands into fists and used some of the most powerful vines the child had ever beheld, locking the creature's great jaws shut. The monster tried in vain to get the vines off, and while it was distracted Ita crept more branches and roots around the beast's limbs. When the leviathan finally figured out her plan, it was too late. After the long battle she overcame the creature, and questioned as to why it had attacked her home.

When it explained its sorry tale to her, she apologized for the crimes committed against it, and begged forgiveness. The leviathan saw the truth in the girl's eyes, and accepted her apology, promising to leave the village alone. She released it, and the creature went back into the sea, keeping its promise.

After they put out the fires the beast had caused, the village threw a feast in the child's honor, and spent the evening celebrating, naming the child The Green's Protector, but Ita was just happy her home was safe.

Rose Field
By Cierra Henley

Thousands of roses in a bright field
each rose for a new field
all are blooming but one.
an undetermined bud of green
not knowing how amazing he is
and that he'll save a girl's life.

Fresco

By Keyami Collins

I'll never forget the day you came to me.
My guardian angel must've knew I needed you.
Neither Heaven nor Hell could keep me from your velvety embrace.
Your elegance makes Aphrodite like an apprentice under your guidance.
You turn melancholy days into sanguine paradises.
No money can tempt me anymore,
Because the fortune I have, which is you, is more valuable than any gold to be given to me.
Despite our ups and downs, your outlook on me has never faltered.
Even when I break down over the small things.
So I guess this poem is that of a "thank you."
I will forever be in gratitude for your presence in my life.

Existence
By Shelby Powell

You exist in a place that cannot be seen by the naked eye,
A place of silent peace,
Absent of deafening conflict.
I close my eyes,
Let me exist there too.

Hungry

By Aneesa Freeman

I'm sorry but the light in my stomach has grown dim.
I only apologize to the young kids with pie in their cheeks,
to the people that see ice cream as treats
instead of their favorite food to throw up.
I'm sorry to everyone that made me think these things.
They were never taught better.
I have to say I'm tired.
Not because I'm hungry
but because I'm not hungry enough.
Because society will only see me as enough.
Mother told me you only get what you work for
so why am I not satisfied with my body?
Why am I not the only one that works harder
on my calories than my future?
Maybe because there's no future with big dreams,
imagining a world with better things than kids
that only consume air
and still can't see that society needs to change,
not you.
For giving awards to big girls getting skinny
and handing out doctor's appointment to already skinny girls.
Every person with an eating disorder will say I'm hungry.
I'm hungry for a better place,
to see a difference in the scale,
for a day my stomach roars and I don't smile,
for my children that I'll never get to have,
for someone to tell me that my weight doesn't equal who I am,
that more calories I lose isn't less to worry about.
I'm hungry for my crush to hold me
and not think about the fat he touches.
Every part of my body is there for a reason.
Not for a season or for a man with dirty touchy hands
that only see my body as another parking lot.
I hope one day I'll stop being hungry
and say for once I'm full.

Traveler
By Shelby Powell

My traveler,
The explorer of my heart,
What have you found?
Beyond the ravaging seas of my persona,
And into the wading shallows of the iris,
Through the foggy windows of my soul,
You still see.

Explorers
By Melissa Downs

My map was once full
Full of destinations
And pathways I'd yet to tread
I was an explorer
Lost in awe of everything around me
Now I fear the storms
Threatening to sink my ship
And I've anchored myself
Watching islands wash away.

Love Hurts
By Rebecca Meeze

The sound of broken glass rang through the classroom as one of my classmates fell to the floor. An average height blonde with blue eyes and a tiny waist. It was obvious that her heart broke, but how?

“I heard the one guy she actually liked in this school said she was shallow,” someone across from me whispered to their neighbor. As they gossiped and laughed, I tried to resist the urge to grab my own heart.

“No, idiot! Didn’t you hear? Her boyfriend found his soulmate! Didn’t you see the blockage in B house?”

I sucked my teeth.

“B house is always crowded! How was I supposed to know?” The male next to me hissed what I was thinking. I looked over to the front of the classroom again. If it was in B house, why here? I looked to the teacher who was unfazed. She was an older woman whose hair had already turned gray. Her face yelled “aged and stressed” all over it.

“What an emotional sub...” I mumbled and the guy next to me laughed. I looked at him from the side of my eye before continuing to watch the teacher. She called someone up before returning to her laptop. Soon the nurse and a janitor came to our classroom, the janitor wearing gloves. As the nurse helped her into a wheelchair, the janitor picked up some red glass shards that fell out of her. I squeezed my own chest as I looked away.

“She’ll be fine.” My friend at another table tried to assure me. I looked up at her. “And you’ll be fine, too. That won’t happen to you! It can’t!”

I just looked away and sighed.

“Because I’m destined to be alone.” I softly said and tried to laugh it off, but ended up almost crying instead.

Getting through the rest of the class was difficult. Our actual teacher left us a mountain of work and actually expected us to complete it all.

“Do you think that girl’s okay?” I asked in concern. My friend nodded.

“Yeah, she’ll be fine. It’s high school! People get their hearts broken all the time!” She laughed. I softly nodded. Love wasn’t something to be messed with. That’s why I tried to stay away from it.

“I’ll see you later!” I said with a shaking voice and forced smile.

“See ya!” She said, excitedly, as we walked away from each other.

Once I got onto the bus I looked down at my phone and sighed, remembering the girl in my last period. I opened my gallery and opened my crush folder. I started deleting pictures left and right, trying to ignore any memories or feelings I felt from them. I let out a soft sigh and gently touched my hand to my chest. I waited for what felt like an hour and nothing happened. I shrugged, leaned back, and crossed my legs as I looped my earbuds around my ears, jammed them as far as they could go, and blasted the happiest song I had on my phone.

He's gone
By Jatoreya Parker

One night after I got done cleaning the house. I stared out the window at the stars. My dad and I used to stare and pretend like they were passed family members. Some nights I lay there wishing he was still here. But knowing he's gone, I just stare and pretend like he's there with me.

Just laying and crying
Staring at the stars wishing
You never left me here...

I Am Always There to Care
By Ayanna Bravo

I am always there to care for you
Love is not something you get a lot
But love the person you already got
That's something you should always do

For eternity it'll always be me and you
You're so sweet and kind
You're the only person on my mind
The moment I first met you I knew our love was true

Our love isn't a game
You're my world and my everything
I can't wait till the day I make you mine
We love each other just the same
I wouldn't change you for a thing
Our love will always and forever be one of a kind

SHE

By Bernadette Pimentel

Cold winds graze my face,
Azure eyes connect mine,
Our hands squeeze tight,
Butterflies roam my stomach,
My head shifts back to the sky.

The Floods
By Shelby Powell

“We have to leave. We have to leave now.” I say, plastering a calm look on my face. Even an idiot could tell our house only had but so much protection from the floods. My wife shook her head, holding our newborn-child tightly.

“I am *not* leaving the house. Do you know the risks of illness is *significantly* higher in this type of weather?!” My wife continued to mumble as she closed all of the windows and blinds. This wasn’t about the flu, or some other minor illness. This was about us. Everything had been perfect for all these years, she had never known. I mean, I planned to tell her at some point, but then Emily had been born. But if we stayed, if this water got higher and higher, it would all be ruined.

“Why don’t we go to your parents’ house?” I questioned, sitting down on the couch. She loved her parents. Not to mention, we’d be far from here.

“No.” She said sternly, and I sighed. There was only one way to fix this. If she wouldn’t go to her parents’ house, she wouldn’t go anywhere. If we’re going to stay, she has to know the truth. She would have figured it out soon enough anyway.

“Mary, come sit down, I need to tell you something important.” She sat down next to me, her strength glinting in her eyes. She loved me, we loved each other. Even more than that, we loved our child. She could handle this.

“Jim, what’s wrong?” She said, tilting her head. I closed my eyes. I’ll explain it carefully. I’ll explain that they’re down in the basement, safe, air-tight. I sighed. This is it. It’s finally time to tell her about the bodies.

Shattered Moon
By Melissa Downs

Light. That was the first thing I saw as sand crumbled down from above me. Still partially blind, I could only make out the blurs that were my siblings, climbing on their egg shells to reach the surface. It took some time, but we had finally made it out.

None of us really knew where to go in the darkness of night. Our only guide was the moon, which strangely seemed to stretch in every direction. One stood high above the rest, though dim in comparison. It was the first one I saw, which led me to travel its way. Only a few times did I stop and turn around, which in hindsight was dangerous. I could've been eaten by gulls or crabs, but curiosity got the best of me.

There, I saw what looked to be a broken moon. It had shattered to pieces, and hung across a stretch of rock. Whatever split the light apart, I thought, would've surely done the same to us. Not long after, I realized I was right. Large, noisy beasts roared across the rock. But didn't stop them from moving forward. Now terrified, I hurried across the beach, ignoring anything other than the hopeful sound of waves. Finally, I felt a splash of cold water under my flippers. I'd made it.

Magic Is A Problem In Our Society
By Rebecca Meeze

I made my way down the street to my small, white, one story house. As I walked my friend, Benjamin, walked next to me. Before I could even greet him he pulled out a bag of red pop rocks.

“Watch this!” He yelled, a little too excited, and shoved the pop rocks down his throat. He then forced himself to burp, causing a large fire to come barreling out of his mouth. I jumped and stepped back in case it happened again. I wasn’t trying to get burnt!

“Cool, right?” He asked me as he slammed his hands on my shoulders, his eyes brighter than the sun.

“Yeah, real cool. But, like, can’t you *already* breath fire?” I questioned.

“Yeah, but not that big! I found these cool pop rocks at the... convenience store... D-Down the street! You should try some!” He said, dug for something in his black hoodie, and shoved a small bag of pop rocks at me. I frowned.

“You know how my mom gets! She-”

“And is she here?”

I jumped at his sudden response. Did he want me to break my mom’s rules? Like, yeah, he knows more than anyone how much I would love to break her rules just this once and use magic for myself but I couldn’t betray her like that!

“No!” I snapped and shoved them back at him. “I’m going home!”

He blew me off and forced his hands into his hoodie.

“Fine, be like that! I was just tryin’ to help you have some fun!”

“Well then call me when you want to do something my mom wouldn’t hate!” I called back as I stomped off to my house. I hated it when did this! He was always trying to push magic on me when I’ve already told him how my mother feels it! I quickly unlocked the door and got my afterschool snack.

“Hi, sweetie.” My mom softly said. I jumped and slowly moved my head to look at her. My father was with her...

“Come sit down.” He said, trying to sound calm. I shook my head.

“No, I’m good...” I softly said, holding my arm tight. My father harshly groaned, forcing my mother to put a hand to silence him.

“Sweetheart, I’m afraid that we’re going to be moving...” My mother said with sad eyes. I felt my eyes start to well up and a burning in my throat.

“Why?”

“It seems like the..Magic... It’s spreading. And you know how we feel about-”

“What’s wrong with it?! Everyone does it and *everyone* is fine!”

“Young lady don’t you dare yell at your parents!”

“Or what?!”

My father sent me a glare that could kill any normal person, but not me. I’ve gotten this glare ten times over and it had never affected me, so I sent one back and stormed out of the house. I roamed the streets, looking for Ben.

“Ben! Ben! Did you go home?! I... I’m sorry!”

“You change ya mind?” Ben asked, stepping out of the shadows. I jumped and awkwardly nodded.

“Y-Yeah... Yeah, I did...”

“Great! This one’s on me, since you’re my pal and all.” He said as he handed me the pop rocks. We sat down and I placed a few in my mouth, chewed them slowly, and swallowed. We laughed as fire spat out of my mouth and suddenly, I felt...
Better...?

Starboy

By Jaleea Copeland

my dearest boy, always a star
blue bruises blossoming over pale skin
blood trailing from your nose to your chin
i still see how vulnerable you are
even with that flashy new car
this fake appearance could never win
and neither could that boyish grin
your facade shattered from afar
you were never good with lies
or maybe I just knew
no longer could you mask your cries
the sorrow beginning to brew
push me away and despite your tries
I will still have love for you.

Quiet Lovers
By Jaleea Copeland

A love without words,
the silence that we both shared;
infatuated.

Anti-Piangere
By Jaleea Copeland

when the boy I loved
sold his soul to sleep,
I did not cry.
when his entire existence vacated
his body in a single sweeping
movement and found sanctuary in his casket,
I did not cry.
we swore that we would die together,
but we could not stop our mouths
from making promises that we
couldn't keep.
his lips had been sworn true,
taking my secrets to the grave.
I am still trying to figure out
why I am still here and he isn't.

Release
By Daija Knight

You've been gone for years but it feels like I lost you yesterday.

Every breath you've lost I will now take.

Now I have to escape this monster every day.

Her name is grief and she makes me feel like I'm going to break.

Trying to be okay every day because I know that's what you'd want me to do.

But every day is hard knowing I'll wake up without you.

I don't want to let you go I refuse to believe this is the end.

Deep down inside I'm still miserable no matter how many fun days I spend.

No day is fun without the person you love. But I have to release you to the one above.

The Long Road
By Rebekah Seigneurie

The memory of us is only a blimp in my oblivion
Your love whisked away
Precipitating slowly
As time passed
Now as I walk through this long road
I think of how much I've grown
How much my heart has healed
And how much I've come to learn
As my pages turn into chapters
And my chapters form my book
I've come to terms with it all
Happy and content
I'm glad to say thank you
For helping me grow
And teaching me
The greatest lesson of all
That love is unforgettable
That people come and go
And last but not least
To live with no regrets
And love with no limits

Without You
By Chastity Krier

His only friend
Her only brother
A mother without her son
Nobody pays attention until its them
Until they're wiping the tears and blood that stains their skin
Until they're the ones bringing bears and balloons
Lighting candles to remember their loved ones
begging God to bring them back from the sky

The Beginning
By Ren Klett

It was junior year of high school and everything was a disaster; my grades were horrible, my friends were toxic, and worst of all, I had a secret.

It had been eating me alive for months yet I knew there was no way I could tell anyone. Three words had never been so terrifying to me and while I knew my parents were catching onto my sudden change in behavior, I didn't know how to talk about something so completely unexpected. I didn't know how they'd react or what they'd say. So I spent a good portion of my time closing off the deepest parts of myself to stay safe, even if it meant that I was being buried with it.

Eventually though, secrets build up and lies unravel until it feels like you're drowning, like the pressure from the water is pushing so hard on your lungs you think you might burst. That pressure increased every time I lied to my parents or put on a mask around my friends. I spent so much time hiding traces of myself from everyone around me that I forgot who I was even hiding. That is, until the pressure got so bad that I had to release that breath.

Look Within
By Brylee Cerual

Look at me,
tell me what you see.
A normal girl,
laughing with her friends,
happy, bright, overjoyed.
Everything in my life looks perfect from afar,
until you look within.
Only take a quick glance though,
It may be too much to handle.
Stare at my eyes.
They're a vivid blue,
and that's all everyone really sees,
but look past that.
See the tears that are always forming,
sitting there waiting to break lose.
Always on the verge of falling down my face,
but everyone's so oblivious to them.
Now look at my feet.
Nothing out of normal to you,
maybe just a little beat up,
but isn't everyone's?
Can you see the struggles they walked me through though?
The pain they dragged me along when the rest of my body was done?
See my hands,
the way the scars are overtaking them.
All people really see are these meaningless wounds,
but not the demons they were fighting off.
The battles they went through to get me to where I am now.
They had to fight for my life,
hitting away the hate thrown at me.
Look into my mind.
I'm good at making them seem happy.
Like everything is okay,
but if you could really know what I thought,
you wouldn't be able to look at me the same.
I think about the way you see me,
the way I'm not the most attractive, or Barbie-doll thin.
I think about how I'm not good enough,
and how hard I try to be,
just to be unnoticed.
You see me in costume.
My hair doesn't have a piece out of place,

my face always has a smile on it.
Everything seems perfect.
You couldn't handle the real me,
I wouldn't look within.

My Goodbye
By Sarah Verbeck

My eyes stare into yours,
yet somehow you aren't looking at me.
You see right through me.
My presence doesn't make an impact on you.
A feeling settles in my stomach,
making me sick of the way you treat me.
I back off.

It's been a week since I left.
My outlook on life has changed.
The future once seemed distant and dark,
but now there's hope.
Hope to be happy,
hope to get out of this town,
hope to make a life for myself.
A life that's worth living.

Three months have passed.
Someone new is in my life.
He makes me feel beautiful.
When I look in his eyes,
I don't feel unwelcomed.
Instead,
I feel like I'm free.
Free to be who I am,
and not afraid of what he'll think.

This is my goodbye to you.
You've taught me things that will help me grow.
I've learned what makes me happy,
and what doesn't.

Beyond Me
By Tasia Dixon

My body dripped with golden accent
Eyes alluring as brown as oak
Hands as soft as textured silk
4c hair speaks queen upon it's curly thread
My body is me
But looking within myself speaks deeper truths.

Separating the soul from my body is the person who I truly am
Personality hanging on each side of the tree, picking each one that dares to show within a moment.
I see emotions crowding around the embodiment of the physical form I partake
Love, despair, fury, and craving
Each pounding its way into my heart
Leaving a mark of its representation in some way that expresses itself externally.

Playing the lines that I walk through my world
Aspiring to be more than people's perspective
Changing with each progressing year following the footsteps that I've collective.
Looking within is what I see myself as the flower that blooms within and without on it's marvelous journey of life that's sweet and scented without a doubt.

I Give Up
By Aubrey Draughn

The breaking point,
The point where you break down in every type of way and give up on everything,
The moment when your emotions reach their peak in your aching heart,
The time you hit rock bottom so hard that you feel like your body shattered on impact,
Your heart explodes and goes up into pain,
Your eyes drip your tears trying to put out the flames,
All the while your soul puts itself back together piece by piece until it's whole again,
The sad chills breezes over you nonstop making you tremble,
The flashback plays on repeat in your mind,
Another stab is cut deep into your heart,
So you grab your needle and thread and try to stitch the open wound close,
Once you're done and look in the mirror,
You watch the last pieces of you go back into place,
Your glow not as bright anymore,
You hold your heart in your hands and watch the stab turn into a scar,
As you tuck it back into your sleeve,
Not realizing that the pain will come back,
When you give your love away again.

Space
By Madison Trahan

Purple
Blue
Black like the night sky
A star billions
Millions
Trillions of light years embraced in space's cold reassuring arms
Bright and vibrant dismissed from hard callused hands
Screams stifled by cold
Bruising
Punishing lips that once gave the promise of forever
He destroyed
Crushed
Killed her
Extinguished her light trillions
Millions
Billions of miles away from the concert floor where she laid

Sandwiched
By Katrina Nguyen

For the last 4 years
You were left with nothing but the heart that was unoccupied
With the love that couldn't love anymore
Friends and acquaintances
Family and relationships
All were blurred by the memories and the pain of the one you first loved
And all that followed her in the process of leaving you to rot
But you trusted instincts and met a girl
When glances started to turn into stares
Something sparked
A flame
A thought
A feeling
Red lights turned to green
Stop signs said go
As you heart ran away from your mind carrying anxieties and worries
Even though
It was starting to trip over its own feet
Chasing something it knew it wanted but was hesitant about

You watched from afar at first
Watching as the girl you finally learned to loved
Let demons dressed up as angels
Be in control of her life
Every day
She would quake with the learned helplessness and the fear of losing someone
And always cared about the happiness of everyone besides her own
Time and time again
Observing her behavior to the finest of details
You stood in silence as she apologized for the mistakes of others
Even when she was the one wronged by those who told her that they "cared"
That they "wanted" her
That they "loved" her
And gave the forgiveness that was never deserved or earned
She was stuck in a cycle she couldn't break out of
Because she didn't know she was in one

You didn't want to intervene
To get involved
To care
Because you knew it wasn't your business
You knew it had no effect on you
But you did anyways

Never understanding why you did so
Until the answers weaved themselves together
Like the veins of your heart
Plumping blood in and out
Ready to explode from the waves of puppy love that swept you off your feet
And held your head above the water
You wanted to help her
To be her knight
Because you saw something
Something that you hadn't seen in a long time

You saw the beauty she had trapped inside
But was ignorantly blind to
Or had knowingly hidden
A difference couldn't be made between the two
A nickname was gifted from you
Wrapped like a present and ribboned off with your words
She became your metaphor of the moon
Helping get through your darkest days
Guiding you when you're swept out into a sea of misery and reminders
Looking beautiful on a night where nothing is clouded
The stars brought focus to her laugh and smile
Her eyes glowed with the same love you gave her
The same feelings that were given in return
The same emotion that filled your once barren heart

You saw through her lies
Her deceptions
Her façades of her own feelings and thoughts
That were spoken in the smoothest, softest voice
With that brightening face of "I'm okay"
All was comforted by your sweet honey reassurance
Planting itself in every word she said with the slightest of whimpers
Coming from the depths of your loving heart
You told her that everything would be okay
You wanted to protect her and keep her safe
And that became a promise you wanted to keep

With every missing piece
And every crack or chip
You still saw her as beautiful
With every water droplet that would seep out of her eyes
And slide down her cheeks
You still kissed it to make it all better
With the broken heart that was shattered to pieces
And scattered across the world

You still searched everywhere to put her heart back together
Like the final piece to the puzzle of her thoughts

You sandwiched your love
Around her heart
Hugging and fixing the broken parts
You were there
When her world came crashing down
When the continents of her mind came apart
You stayed when she was at her worst
Stuck in a grave
Being buried alive from the pressure of the world
You loved her till the endless flame of the candle you lit for her love blew out
As the fire sparked something new for both you and her
You became her shield
Her knight
Her love
And all she could say was
Thank you
Thank you for wanting me
Thank you for loving me
I love you too

The Silence
By Kalia Brown

I'm used to being alone -
years of dragging family along
as they grumble and complain and whine
until the guilt loosens my grip on their hands.

I'm used to being alone -
years of misunderstandings and mistakes
as friends poke and prod and laugh
until the squirming in my stomach drives them away.

I'm used to being alone -
years of fearing judgement suffocating the loneliness
as I watch the ones I love walk by without me
until the tears begin to blur my vision.

Being social is coded in my blood,
the curse of being human,
even when the fog wraps around me so tight
I begin to call it comforting.

The fog is comforting to me;
I've always loved the cold –
its icy breath chills my insides
until even the fear becomes numb.

The fog is comforting to me;
my friends can walk by me
without being weighed down
by forgetting somebody who wanted to be forgotten.

The fog is comforting to me;
those that wander through are only alone,
protecting them from each other
and themselves.

I won't feel when I'm in the fog,
but nothing is better than everything.

I won't see when I'm in the fog,
but nobody will be chained to a dead weight.

I won't exist when I'm in the fog,
but it's the best place for someone like me.

Space Between You and Me
By Alysia Pree

I remember tracing constellations with the freckles on your skin
Drowning in the scent of permanent markers and paint
Laughing at jokes I didn't quite understand
Living in complete blindness behind the idea that you were all I needed

I let the atmosphere thicken and my lungs cave in
I let my lips forget everything besides the taste of your lips against mine
I watched as my heart chose to ignore the bruises and keep giving you all it has
And I should have hesitated but you dragged me in,
Never loosening your grip

Your hold on me was unyielding
Like your satellite I followed you,
Safe distance at best
Never veering too far off your path
Slowly drifting into orbit with you
Dismissing who I became on your behalf

And at the zenith of this rift you've created in my head,
Splitting me in two,
Was a little girl trapped in who she thought she was
Naïve to your evils
Imperceptive to the thorns on the roses you gave her
Choking on the hypocrisy she fed her friends stuck in same complications

But pain made her stronger
No longer does she whimper at the mention of your name
She does not let tears dribble from her eyes when you touch her
And from the ashes of one photosphere she bore grew another
Brighter than the last
That even the black hole in your chest could not swallow

Interview with Erik Davis
By Ren Klett and Katrina Nguyen

What inspired you to start writing?

I started writing for fun because I was bored and it turned out that apparently I'm kinda decent.

How long have you been writing consistently?

Since 8th grade so for about 3 years now.

What made you join the creative writing classes in the first place?

I have a passion for creative writing. I like to research authors and musicians and take inspiration from them.

How did you get the inspiration for your piece "Playing God"?

I was in economics and got bored so I thought, "Wouldn't it be disturbing if man played God and created some sort of human mixed with other beings?"

Do you prefer writing poems or short stories more and why.

I write a lot more poems than short stories because they're a lot quicker. I have a google document that's like 40 pages right now full of poems.

What's your favorite genre to write?

I definitely like horror and the sci-fi fantasy type stuff.

Were you inspired by anything or anyone specific?

I am inspired by a lot of other writers and authors like H.P. Lovecraft (not his political views) and Alan Moore, Edgar Allen Poe at times. The number one person who has inspired me to write is someone I don't think anyone would expect me to say.
Weird Al Yankovic.

Interview with Jaleea Copeland
By Madison and Alysia Pree

Maddy:

We picked all your poems, so what really interested you in writing?

Leea:

I used to go on writing apps, like Wattpad, and that what's started it.

Maddy:

How long have you've been writing?

Leea:

I've been writing for three years.

Alysia:

Who's your biggest inspiration writing wise?

Leea:

Writing-wise, I use a lot of slam poetry off of YouTube so there's not really one person but Rupi Kaur and Rudy Fransico are some of my favorites.

Maddy:

I know your only a freshman but do you plan on pursuing a career going into college and continuing writing?

Leea:

I've considered that but as a side job and certainly not as a main job, something like a hobby I would do in my spare time.

Alysia:

I really found of the poem that you did "*Anti-piangere*", I was wondering how you came up with the title?

Leea:

Well *piangere* is an Italian word, it basically means to cry and in the poem I wrote: "I do not cry", which explains the anti- in *anti-piangere*.

Interview with Shelby Powell
By Aubrey Draughn and Madison Trahan

Do your poems correlate in some way?

They do kind of correlate in some way because they kind of stem from the same idea and then I split them because I focused on two different words but they did correlate because they were written around the same time, like the same idea.

What made you choose some of the words you didn't use?

I tried to be selective about the words that I used because I didn't want to convey a negative message I wanted to keep it in a certain tone so that's why I used specific words

What was your thought process on how you were writing 'The Flood'?

I usually think about the ending first and then I'll kind of work to how I get to that point but I just wanted to make it something that no one would expect or if you do expect it, you couldn't dismiss it. You'll think about what if it's that but then you're like no it can't be that then I twist it at the end and it ends up being what you didn't think it was going to be.

If you would like to continue writing this story, what would be the big general plot on overall how it would keep it going?

I feel like it would continue with whether the wife would tell anyone or how she would react to him telling her about the body, so it would be about if she would tell or not or what she would decide to do from there or whether he would get caught.