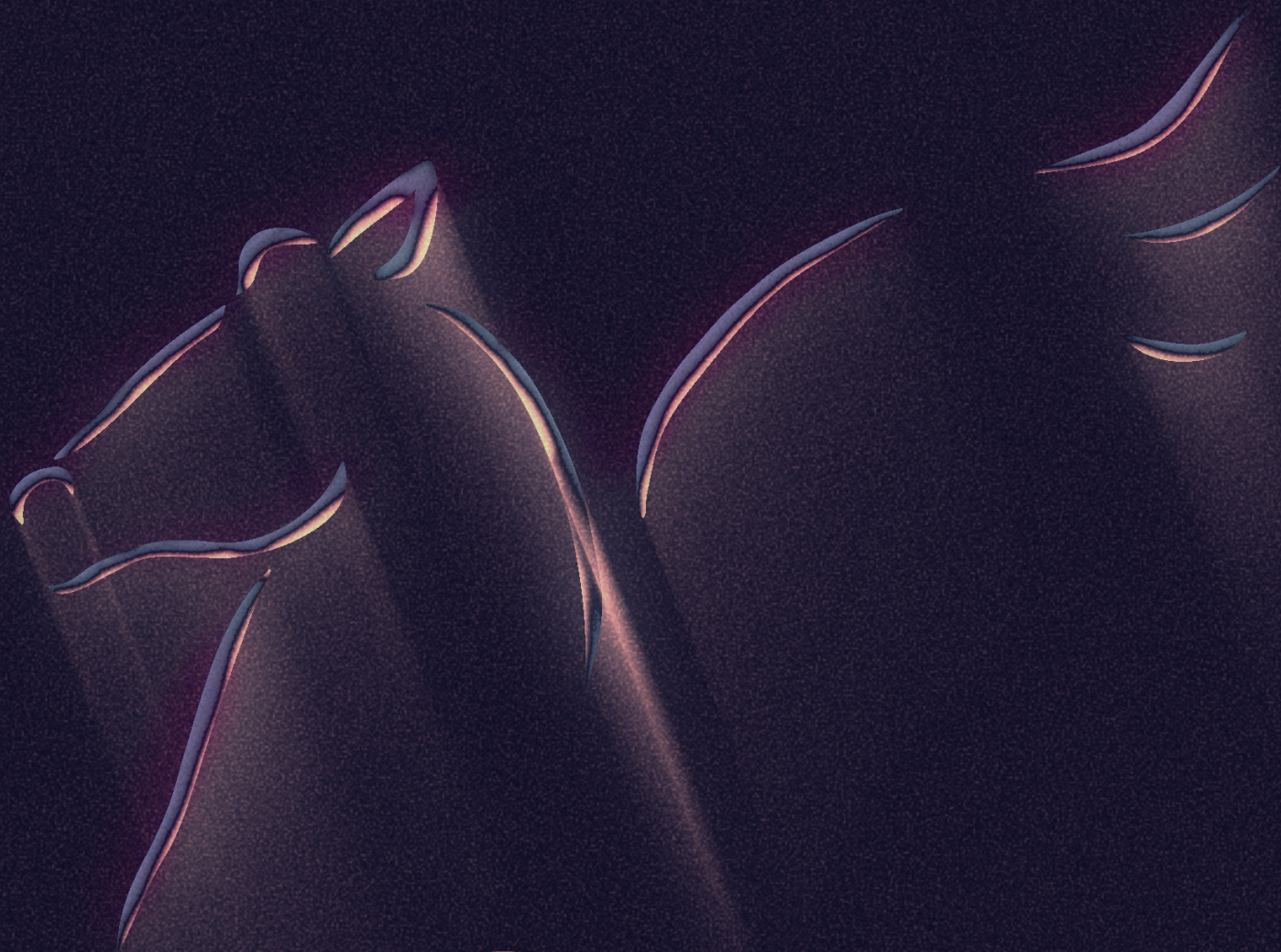




Pegasus

Spring 2026 XXXVI

THE MYTH OF THE PEGASUS



The winged horse of Greek fable is said to have sprung from Medusa's body at her death. Pegasus is also associated with the inspiration of poetry because he is supposed, by one blow of his hoof, to have caused Hippocrene, the inspiring fountain of the Muses, to flow from Mount Helicon. As a symbol of poetic inspiration, poets have sometimes invoked the aid of Pegasus instead of the Muses.

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Table of Contents

1		“Don’t Tell Me How to Write My Poem!,” Rebekah Davenport (Axley Award Winner)
2	.....	“My Gravity,” Katie Hunt Popejoy (Axley Award Finalist)
3	.....	“The Dresser,” T.L. Bell (Axley Award Finalist)
4	.....	“The Duck Blind,” William Cagle (Axley Award Finalist)
5	.....	“Gender Norms,” Noah Tannehill (Axley Award Finalist)
6	.....	“Zleep Glorp,” Deborah Davenport (Axley Award Finalist)
7	.....	“Hopelessness,” Crystal Avilla (Axley Award Finalist)
13	.....	“Birth of a Storyteller,” Rebekah Davenport (Axley Award Finalist)
14	.....	“Enough,” Lacey Veazey-Daniel
15	.....	“A Story From Childhood,” James Miller
16	.....	“Email and Such,” Julie Dill-Burnett
17	.....	“Last Day, 1989,” James Miller
18	.....	“Sanctuary,” Lacey Veazey-Daniel
22	.....	“Behind the Fence,” Deborah Paulick
23	.....	“When Stars Align,” Mason Dailey
24	.....	“More Than Meets the Eyes,” Patricia Spann
25	.....	“Metamorphosis,” Kyle Poteet
26	.....	“Creepers,” Crystal Avilla
32	.....	“The Oh No Hotel,” Deborah Davenport
38	.....	“Quilled Animals,” Missi Anderson
39	.....	“Interrupted Sunset,” Gail Cardone
40	.....	“Nature’s Beauty,” T.L. Bell
41	.....	“Girl in Nature,” T.L. Bell
42	.....	“Ryder’s Place,” Katie Hunt Popejoy
43	.....	“Unknown Era,” Isabella Muniz
44	.....	“Skull with Cigarette,” Kyle Poteet
45	.....	“Bridge Over Railroad Tracks,” Katie Hunt Popejoy
46	.....	“Overlooking the Potomac,” T.L. Bell
47	.....	“Bird’s Eye View,” Gail Cardone
52	.....	“18,” Isabella Muniz
53	.....	“Gravity,” Sharee Asberry
54	.....	“The Tethered Heart,” Misty Dorrough
55	.....	“Time,” Jacob Watson
56	.....	“Skittles,” Deborah Davenport
57	.....	“With My Eyes Closed,” Lauren Whitehead

continued

Table of Contents

58 “She Will Not Die,” Crystal Avilla
59 “America, The Fallen,” Marceline Conkin
60 “War Within War Without,” Misty Dorrough
61 “Beautiful Thing,” Chandler Griffith
62 “STORMING DREAMER,” Rebekah Davenport
63 “Mantra,” Carmita O’Bryant
64 “Words Strike True,” Mason Dailey
65 “The Loud Silence,” William Cagle
66 “Elemental Essence,” Deborah Paulick
67 “A Father’s Daughter’s Story,” Bradley Allen
69 “To Rise Again,” Brandon Kellogg
70 “Landscaped Moments,” Amelia Ochoa
71 “Fair Weather Friends,” Lauren Whitehead
72 “I Miss My Dog :(,” Deborah Davenport
73 “STRIPPED,” Candice Ford
74 “Links on a Chain,” Marceline Conkin

Axley Award Winners

The James Axley Creative Writing Awards honor the memory of James Axley, who served as faculty editor of *Pegasus* and taught creative writing at Rose State College. After his death in the early 1990s, his family and colleagues donated money to establish the awards.

Don't Tell Me How to Write My Poem!

*by Rebekah Davenport
Axley Award Winner*

The first line should Capture attention
What counts as a “heightened use of images”?
What kind of language is both Concrete and Interesting?
All of my words are necessary
Who's to say which words are necessary?
What if they all are?
Clichés can be **Beautiful**
When **Reality** is given a chance at new life
Birds are Free
Blood is Red
And Nature is a Mother
Bright eyes are things to **Love**
They are windows to a bright mind
Beautiful days should be cherished
Especially when so many are so dark
What if the words that hold meaning for the author
Are meaningless to the reader?
It may be true that no one person has a Universal Answer
But Personal truths can be Universal
All people walk through **Reality** in their own way
Poetry is the bridge between the spoken word and music
And so it must be written for the sake of the writer
Personal Expression can never bend to the will of the taste of another
It is the End of **Beauty**
The End of Meaning
The End of Truth
The End of **Love**
The End of Life
Sometimes you need a resounding Hark!
Who cares if my poem sounds like the Violin and Tears?
Why should I care where my words fall
On the scale of Generic to Hazy?
Don't task me with infusing my message with meaning
And then give me a list of Banned words
Those words are not for You
If you must be given a message
If you need me to give you some greater meaning
Then let it be this
Don't Tell Me How to Write My Poem!

My Gravity

*by Katie Hunt Popejoy
Axley Award Finalist*

My sons
are my suns
They are my gravity
the pull
that is unseen
They are my anchors
my hopes
And
my dreams
My gravity is both of them—
the identity inside me
from me
that shapes me, that drives me
My gravity is
the reoccurring dream
—the dream of seeing them
going back
and saving them
THE HURT I SCREAM
...please forgive me
Thank God for my gravity
My gravity is
my two sons
They are my center—
the invisible pull
that pushes me

The Dresser

*by T.L. Bell
Axley Award Finalist*

Old dresser, four feet tall,
curved front and deep wooden tones.
So smooth your finish, so bright your brass handles,
you came to me just before the old man passed.

You sailed from England to America's shore,
then on to Oklahoma in the roar over land
You stood in Cherokee, my great grandmother's home,
sentinel of memory for eighty years alone.

Then on to Mcalister, near lake Eufaula,
my grandmother's room would be your next space.
thirty years standing tall and proud,
mirror on top with a tilt, two wooden arms stretched out.

Then on to rest inside my mother's cabin walls,
to stand tall for 8 more.
It was 2017 you came to my door,
mirror beside you, resting on the floor.

You hold memories from each place you stood.
Deep within your wood my childhood echoes.
Christmases in Cherokee, summers at the lake,
standing nearby with every memory made.

It is with sorrow you darken my door,
there has been a passing once more.

The Duck Blind

*by William Cagle
Axley Award Finalist*

Morning glow across the wetland
life awakens one by one
birds chirp with the morning breeze
deer rustle in the reeds

Squirrels call out a distant hello
geese land for a morning feast
mallard hen calls to her flock
starlings streak across

Cattails bow at the sunrise
ice cracks at every gust
sandhill crane stand watch
smell moist air across the swamp

Fog gives way to early light
water shimmers as fish splash
decoys bob in the wind
distant hunters call

Bundled in many layers
frost gathers on our edges
hands folded in pockets
waders caked in ancient silt

We watch as the world awakens
preparing to harvest a meal
guns poised for a kill
but our minds are in a different state

That beauty God created
welcomed us to this sacred place
we thank him for this gift
and leave without taking the shot

Gender Norms

*by Noah Tannehill
Axley Award Finalist*

High-pitched voice
Wearing makeup
Buying platforms
Playing dress up
Have long hair
Emoticons
Poppy music
Smile on
Latex pants
Painted nails
Jewelry sets
And Wedding Veils

Gender norms
A normal life
Keep confined
To stay alive

Lower voice
Push chest out
Walk with shoulders
Hold chin up
Like dark colors
Have short hair
Act tougher
Just don't care
Drive big cars
Nod don't wave
Keep afar
And be brave

No variant personality
Don't be a danger to society.

Zleep Glorp

*By Deborah Davenport
Axley Award Finalist*

I am an alien
trapped inside a human body
I must
understand people
pretend I'm one of them
keep myself secret

Examine them closely
how long to make eye contact
when to smile
when to laugh
what to talk about
when to be quiet
Look like them

Constant self-monitoring
do I smile enough?
is my smile unsettling?
is my voice welcoming?
do I look friendly?

They can sense any divergence
from the norm

Use what I learn
become one of them
be welcomed by them

Failure

Hopelessness

*by Crystal Avilla
Axley Award Finalist*

Hopelessness is rot, silent and contagious

Changing a person as completely as a single drop of ink in water

Impossible to separate

Spreading outward until it consumes everything

Without mercy it paralyzes

And scars

And kills

Eating a person from the inside out

Birth of a Storyteller

by Rebekah Davenport
Axley Award Finalist

I remember the day I fell in love with magic.

Closing my eyes, the first thing I remember is my shoes sticking to the floor as we walked. Tinseltown Theater was like that—disheveled, greasy. The smell of popcorn had permanently infused itself into the very walls. But even this place, with its squeaking chairs and stain-covered floors, still managed to weave that unique kind of magic that only a movie theater can. I easily fell under the spell of the twinkling lights as they whispered promises of adventure and fun. My dad had also been bewitched and, for reasons that are still unknown to this day, decided that this was the only place in all of Oklahoma City worth the price of admission.

The Return of the King, the final movie in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* adaptation, had just been released. My younger brothers remained at home with our mom and baby sister. No parent in their right mind would take two toddlers to watch a three-hour movie. But I'd worked hard to convince my parents that I was old enough.

"I'm still for longer than that while I do my schoolwork," I'd argued. "And I don't even like school."

Having successfully plead my case, I bounced along behind my dad down the long, dark hallways of the theater. Afternoon showings were practically blasphemous in our house, so we arrived in the evening. Now, I couldn't tell you the time, nor the day. In fact, I wouldn't even know the time of year it was if I couldn't look it up. All that's faded over the years. But I can still feel the dread crashing over me as we rounded the corner, and stopped short before the rumbling sea of fellow Tolkienites who'd had the forethought to arrive early. They milled and chattered and laughed, apparently unaware they'd nearly crushed the soul of one eight-year-old girl. I watched my dad search in vain for two empty seats.

"Daddy, we should sit in the front." I pointed toward the long row at the very front of the theater.

"Those aren't any good," he grumbled.

"Please, Daddy." My begging turned desperate as I watched more newcomers arrive. At this rate, even the front would fill up soon.

continued

With a long-suffering sigh, he strode reluctantly toward the last of the available seats. “This is ridiculous,” he muttered. “Absolutely ridiculous. I don’t know *why* there are so many people here. The movie’s been out for a week already.” He glared at the offending crowd as he took my popcorn so I could scramble into the too-big folding chair. “Absolutely ridiculous. My neck’s going to be so sore by the end of this...” The rest of his rant has been lost to time, which I’m sure is for the best.

The impossibly gigantic screen loomed over us. I twisted and stretched until I touched the very tip of my toes to the floor, the surest proof that I was still very big myself and quite grown-up. The lights dimmed, stilling my restless squirms, and a familiar hush settled over the crowd. The screen grew even bigger, swallowing the entire world and me along with it.

Most of the next three hours passed by in a blur, but these things still stand out in my mind. My small body burned with anger when Frodo sent Sam away. How could he do that to his friend? How could he not see the truth right in front of him? I wanted to yell that it wasn’t *fair*. But then I witnessed Sam’s return, his rescue of Frodo, and a new question was planted that has since grown into a thought. Can you really come back from this kind of mistake? Maybe, if you have a Sam with you.

The story moved on, planting more seeds—more questions. Then, King Theoden rode before his men.

“Spears shall be shaken.” His voice boomed above me. “Sheilds shall be splintered... Ride now! Ride for ruin and the world’s ending!”

The world shook with the thundering of hundreds of horses charging into battle, their riders yelling “Death!” The sound vibrated through me. The word rattled in my head, and I began to wonder what battles were worth fighting for, or possibly dying for.

My eyes stayed glued to the screen as I watched the heroes fight their epic battles. I celebrated their victories as if they were my own. And at the end I grieved with Sam, Merry, and Pippin as we all realized together that Frodo was leaving again. It couldn’t end like *this*. After everything they’d been through, they were going to be separated forever? It felt wrong, yet still there was comfort in Gandalf’s assurance that “not all tears are an evil.” Those words still find me in my own dark times.

I could go on forever singing the praises of this story, the lessons and long-held beliefs I still have because of it. But most of those came later, as I grew older and continued to come

continued

back to find new meaning, both in the pages and on the screen. So why are these the things that stand out about this particular day? This first experience?

Maybe it was the rarity of the environment. Hanging out with my dad, staying up late, watching a grown-up movie, any of these would have made the event special. But all at once? That made it memorable.

Or maybe it was the real, physical *closeness* that made it stand out. When every word reverberates through your body, it tends to leave an impression.

But more than any of that, I think it was the new sense of purpose that it left me with that makes it really stand out. A deep, almost hungry love for stories mingled with a new desperate need to tell my own. For a few hours I wasn't in my world anymore. I'd been whisked into a magical land to witness the triumphs of good over evil. I decided then and there that I would join the ranks of these powerful mages. I wanted to make others laugh with joy, scream with fear, cheer with victory, and weep when it all eventually came to its end.

Now, from those first seeds, a new dream has grown. One day another little girl will walk down a sticky hallway with her family. For a few hours she'll explore a new world, meet new friends, and have a different adventure. And when it's all over and the lights brighten again, she too will have fallen in love with stories, and one more teller will be born.

Rose State College Faculty & Staff

Faculty and staff submissions represent a cross-section of the writers working within our institution, outside the classroom and beyond their official responsibilities. Their work spans the same genres found throughout this journal — poetry, fiction, and nonfiction — and is selected through the same editorial process applied to all contributors. The following are a collection of voices from the people who make up the professional fabric of this community.

Enough

by Lacey Veazey-Daniel

She has never been enough

or so her world has told her

and she has told herself.

Misplaced burdens of grown-up woes

never meant for tiny shoulders

have rested squarely on hers

from her youngest days—

from her first memory.

A tiny girl bearing such a weight

cannot hope to be enough

but she has always come closer

than she could ever dream to be.

A Story From Childhood

by James Miller

I stand outside the deli, holding a copy
of Caetano Veloso's memoir in my left hand.

Did I walk this far, down the loop and across the interstate?
Last night, you interrupted my reading—took my hand

and admitted, *I know you've been having trouble breathing.*
This morning, you told me a story from childhood.

*We stopped on the side of the road, you said,
as the storm came in. The traffic signs up ahead*

*were trembling in the gusts. Mother leaned forward
to peer through the windshield. We knew. If a tree*

came for us, we'd splat like bugs. But here you are now,
ready to share a sandwich. I ask, *did you ever finish*

that thesis on Atacama's observatories? You assure me,
nobody writes such things now.

Email and Such

by Julie Dill-Burnett

Occasionally
At the top of my screen
Microsoft Outlook throws me a prompt
“Are you enjoying Outlook?”

Hmm.
How does one
Enjoy Outlook?

I enjoy ripe avocados
The cold side of a pillow
A pair of aces in the hole
Lit candles at church
Grapefruit mimosa(s)
Brass.
Traffic-free interstates
Restaurants with no wait
A Thunder win
Calls from my daughters
Goodbye kiss from my husband
Grinding my own coffee beans.
I do
Not
However
Enjoy Outlook.

Last Day, 1989

by James Miller

He sat behind me
in class, pulled out
orange string, long as
a deputy's arm.
Fashioned
a lasso, twirled it
above our heads
with a whoop,
caught me
round the throat.
Jerked my breath
back sharply,
so that I lost
the train of my
best thought.
After, we waited
for the wait to end.
I palmed coin in my pocket.
Stirred dregs for shifting,
shaping verses.

Sanctuary

by Lacey Veazey-Daniel

Give me a mid-day Monday
Sanctuary
at Tunica First Baptist Church
sun through amber glass
leaves angel-glow on an empty choir
and the gentle spirit
moves sleepily among vacant pews.

Give me a Thursday morning
Sanctuary
at First United Pentecostal Church
left-over organ hums echo
on pine-scented air
that vibrates still with the
buzz of the holy ghost.

Give me any moment's
Sanctuary
in an empty Christian church
no sting of judgment
from self-righteous believers
only the eternal peace
of a loving Father God.

Oklahoma Department of Corrections Award Recipients

The writers featured in this section are students enrolled through the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, participating in educational programming designed to develop literacy and creative expression. Their submissions were evaluated through the same editorial standards applied to all work in this journal and selected on the merit of the writing alone. Their work stands as a record of individuals engaged in the craft of writing under circumstances most contributors to this journal will never encounter. We extend our sincere thanks to Lacey Veazey-Daniel for gathering, typing, and organizing these entries.

Behind the Fence

*by Deborah Paulick
DOC Student Award Winner*

Sitting, watching
Listening, waiting
Hoping, praying
Enduring...
Things we see, things we hear
Orange, orange everywhere
Concrete upon concrete upon concrete
Fences all around
Beds like—baby mattresses—thicker than the beds
Food? Maybe it's slop, yet you're thankful it's something
Packages? Over the fence? Can I get some hair dye?
Lock down! Lock down!
Get up! Move around!
Count and recount
Reminds me of a childhood rhyme.

When Stars Align

*By Mason Dailey
DOC Student Award Winner*

As the trees grow cold and the grass withers,
The sun takes longer to rise, and the moons glow lingers.
Morning dew turns to ice as time passes over
And the stars twinkle in the sky.
The look in your eyes melts the frost of the past,
Your smile ignites a fire inside,
Hand in hand, you are fire and I am ice,
Melting my frozen heart, steam arises, floating into the sky.
Hand in hand, side by side,
As the Stars align.
Sun and moon pass through the sky,
Stars twinkling as if to say hello,
As we all watch from this world below,
The wonderment of the universe winks and puts on a show.
As the heat of the day fades away,
The breeze of the night wakes for its cooling delight.
As we watch in wonder,
Hand in hand, side by side,
As the stars align.

More Than Meets the Eyes

by Patricia Spann
DOC Student Award Winner

Hazel eyes and a bright smile
Long dark hair, legs that go for miles
Quirks, perks, and pet peeves
There's more to me than what you see.
Big brat, little rebel, lot of sass.
Looks good in torn, faded jeans, rodeo
buckle, boots, and a Mossy Oaks hat.
Long necks on ice, tequila worms, and jello shots.
Two steppin', line dancin' to "Copperhead Road"
Four wheel drive, mud on the tires, Hank Jr playin'
Barrel racin', calf ropin', ridin' bare back.
Moonlight skinny dippin', catfishin', mudbug eatin'
Deer huntin' 16 foot up in a tree stand
Knows how to shoot a shotgun, aim a bow, use a buck knife
She's a bad bitch, don't need a man
She flirts with danger, kinda crazy, a little rowdy
Knows how to fight
Daddy's baby girl, Momma's little angel,
Turns heads and don't know why.
She'll break your heart and make you cry.
There's more to this little redneck woman than meets the eyes.

Metamorphosis

by Kyle Poteet
DOC Student Award Winner

In this grey forsaken world,
Life is all shadow and no light.
But behind these cold, unfeeling bars,
Lies a heart that longs for flight.

Enclosed in walls of stone and steel,
This shrunk world of darkened view.
Yet deep within this prison cell,
A tiny creature stirs anew.

Within these shadows, far from the light,
A caterpillar crawls across the floor,
Inching closer to its destined flight,
Beyond these walls, forevermore.

Creepers

by Crystal Avilla
DOC Student Award Winner

I don't know exactly when it started or why they keep coming back--but they do, almost every night, like clockwork. They creep down the wall of my bedroom like assassins, slouching toward my face when they think I'm not looking. I have no idea how they *know* I'm not looking; the things don't have any eyes as far as I can tell. They're completely silent and come in different shapes and sizes; some are flat, two-dimensional shapes about the size of a dinner plate that undulate when they move. Others have more substance, with fist-sized bodies and sets of four, six, or eight segmented legs.

A part of me knows they can't possibly be real; that they must be a manifestation of unresolved feelings or something. Even now, in the middle of a hot summer afternoon, my mind can't stop chewing on the mystery. What are they, and out of everybody in the world why are they targeting me? There must be some reason. I can't help but remember my grandpa saying, with the knowing assurance of ancient mystics everywhere, "You need to watch how you treat people, boy. What goes around, comes around."

It's a handy--if slightly vague--way to explain karma or fate, but his words stuck in my brain like a burr. Especially since I know that if karma does exist, I got a full-fledged shitstorm headed my way. After all, I done a lot of bad things. I even took a man's life once. It was years ago, and I spent a lot of nights on my knees apologizing for it, but I can't take it back. It happened and no amount of words can change it.

They say Hell is a place of torment, stocked with demons drooling at the thought of punishing humans. Maybe that's what the shadows are--demons come to drag me off to Hell. It makes as much sense as anything else. I suppose that somewhere near the ceiling there's one of them portals I read about one time in a science fiction book, because those things sure come out of nowhere. One moment my wall is smooth white Sheetrock, and the

continued

next it's teeming with those opportunistic little bastards.

At first, they're out of phase, like you're watching one of those old televisions I had as a kid where you had to tweak the antenna before you could watch *Bewitched* in all its Technicolor glory. Then they begin to solidify and move; down; to the side; down again; skulking closer toward my pillow. I don't know why they go for my head when they can probably reach a leg or a toe more easily, but I'm sure they have a reason.

I tried to catch one of those creepers a few days ago. I was just about to doze off when I realized the portal was open. Cold fear paralyzed me for a second, I'm not gonna lie, but then I thought--why not sneak up on them for a change? So, I waited, trying not to move, as they started their long, winding journey down. One of the spider-things was in the lead at first, but it slunk off toward my closet and I lost track. Another reversed direction and started working its way back *up* the wall. I started to wonder if they could feel me looking and decided to wait. Perhaps their power only existed in my ignorance, and they couldn't hurt me if I was aware.

And then one quivering blob, bigger than the rest, pulled ahead of the pack. I watched as it made its way closer, afraid every time I blinked it would disappear and prove my roommate right. Keith never saw them in his room and wasn't stingy with his opinion that the creatures were a figment of my imagination. In one of his more belligerent moments, he's also suggested they were a product of brain damage caused from all the drugs I did in my youth, but Keith's a jerk so I try not to listen to him. And anyway, I know better--imaginary figments don't have a smell, no matter how many drugs a person's done.

The huge blob was halfway down when the acrid, ozone scent hit my nostrils. I fought against wrinkling my nose. *Just play it cool*, I told myself. Cool as an Eskimo's balls in a blizzard. My fingers twitched against the blanket and I started to sweat. Almost there. Another inch and... my hand hit the wall with lightning quickness. My heart pounded. *I did it! I caught one!*

Three loud thumps came from the other side of the wall. "Knock it off!" I ignored my roommate and sat up, careful to keep my hand against the wall. Mouth dry, I looked up. The rest weren't sliding down like some fierce Celtic army to rescue their comrade.

continued

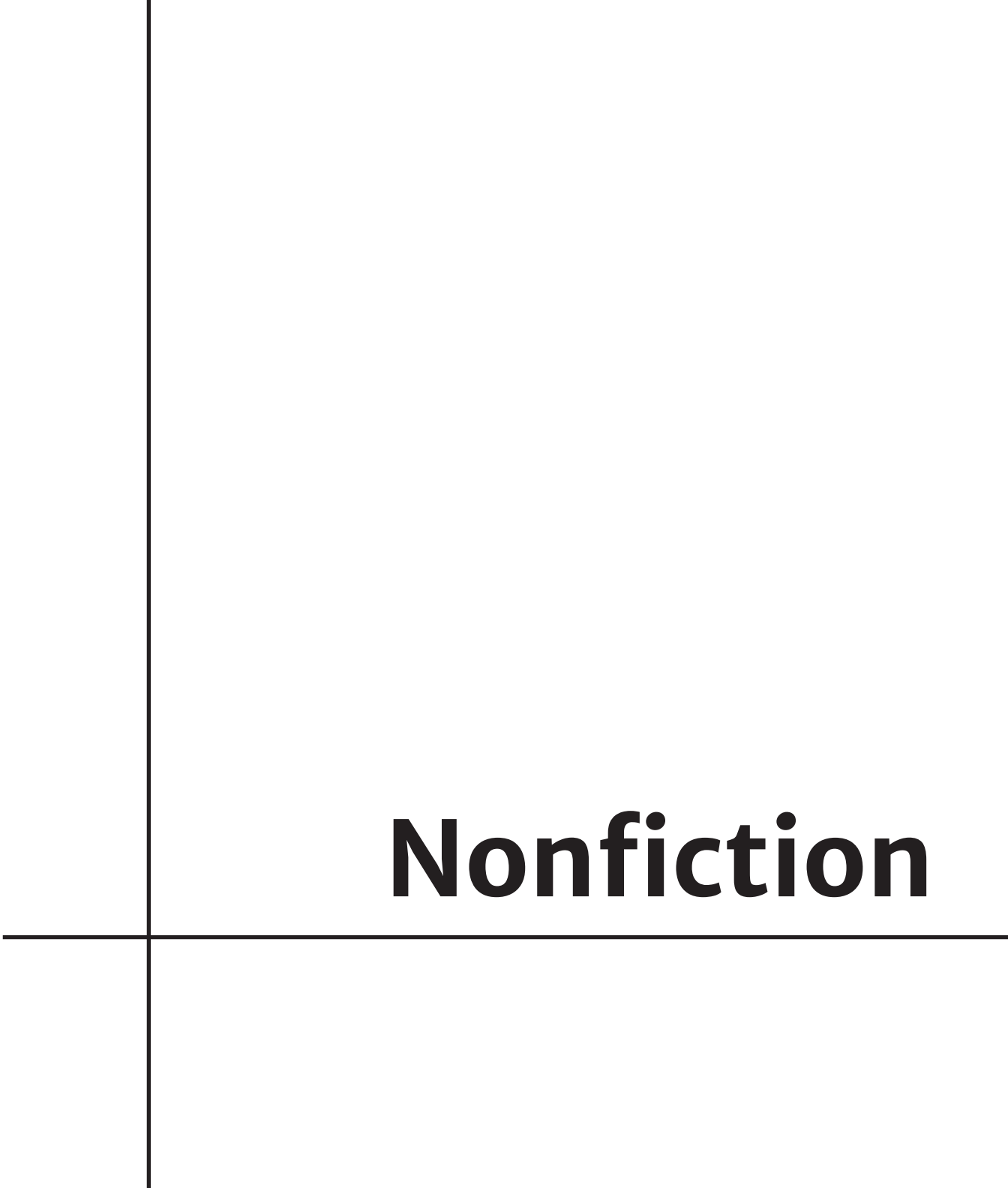
The wall was bare, the others having disappeared back through the portal. Staring at the back of my hand, I opened my fingers slowly, carefully, my other hand poised to attack. Finally removing my hand from the wall, I saw...Nothing.

Frowning, I lay back down and looked at the ceiling. Somehow, the thing had known I was awake. It had either been taunting me with its bold journey down the wall or the stunt had been a ruse to get me to reveal that I knew they were real. Either way, I knew things had changed.

They haven't been back in a few days. Maybe I was too much work and they decided to go after easier prey. Whatever happened, I'm glad; although I can't help but wonder what they were after. Were they really demons? Or were they something equally terrifying, like the spirits of murdered people out for revenge? Those shadowy tumors of malice, evil specters of spite--what would they have done if allowed to reach my face?

My drug-scarred imagination supplies far too many answers to that question. They could have dragged me through the portal, back to a dimension where they have more substance than me; they might have laid eggs in my brain that hatched into larva of rage; they could have melded into a single organism that covered my face like a sheet, cutting off my air. I just thank God for sparing me. He must have heard my prayers after all.

One good thing that happened is that I think my roommate finally believes me. He woke me up last night banging on my door, convinced he'd seen a huge spider on the wall. I helped him look, but we couldn't find one. I told him he was crazy and to go back to bed, but I can't help wondering how long it'll be before he starts smelling ozone...



Nonfiction

The Oh No Hotel

by Deborah Davenport

The room smelled like a chain smoker had lived there for over 30 years. The walls were a dingy yellow, our shoes stuck to the floor which made a creak with every step we took; the bed sheets on both of the beds had mysterious stains ranging from pale yellow to a concerning shade of red, and worst of all, the TV didn't even work.

We were staying at this seedy, rundown hotel because it was the cheapest pet-friendly hotel Dad could find close to where we were meeting with his side of the family. Aunt Missy had a coupon for family photos at a small photography studio and invited the whole family to have photos taken. It was mid November of 2019, and everyone thought this would be a nice thing to do together for the holiday season.

Of course, we couldn't leave our two dogs home alone the whole time and leaving them at a kennel for a couple days was out of the question. One dog, a small chihuahua-mix named Chocolate, had a history of biting people she didn't like. The other, a slightly larger beagle-mix named Piper, had separation anxiety and we didn't want to cause her any more stress since she had just recently recovered from being deathly sick. She had been so sick that all of the hair on her tail had fallen out, making it look like a large rat tail, for which Dad not so affectionately nicknamed her "rat dog." The only option was to take them with us, and to do that we needed a pet-friendly hotel.

"I don't trust a hotel that cheap, James," Mom told Dad as he was booking the hotel rooms.

"It's only cheap 'cause of the Black Friday deals. It's fine," he said.

All nine of us piled into the two cars, Dad and my older brothers Jamie and Noah and Piper in Dad's Ford 500, and Mom, me, my sisters Rebekah and Esther and Chocolate in Mom's 2012 Chevrolet Sonic. It took several minutes of Mom turning her key in the ignition to get

continued

her car started. Esther and I tried to nap in the backseat while Bekah tried to help Mom with directions. I noticed that patches of skin on my arms were still a light blue.

A couple nights before, my sisters and I had the brilliant idea to dye our hair different colors before getting our photos taken. I had chosen a shade of blue similar to a blue raspberry Jolly Rancher. Bekah had done our hair with at-home box kits. She started with Esther's hair at around 5 pm and by the time she got through my hair it was well into the night.

"Can you help me out?" I asked Bekah when it came time to rinse out my hair in the sink.

"You can do it yourself," she said.

"But you did it for Esther."

"If you can't rinse it yourself in the sink, just rinse your hair out in the shower," she told me.

"But that's not what the instructions say to do. Can't you just help me?"

"Deborah, literally what difference does it make? You don't have to follow the instructions exactly, just use the shower."

Apparently, it did make a difference. I came out of the shower with streaks and patches of blue stained all over my body. I spent at least an hour trying to scrub it all off.

By the time we finally made it to the hotel at around 5 pm, we had been driving for over ten hours. Mom and Dad had been bickering over the phone while driving. The stink of Piper's vomit filled the car. We had to make a stop at another gas station just to clean her puke off of my leg, but the scent lingered. We pulled into the parking lot and waited for Dad to check in at the lobby so we could head to our rooms and get ready for our photos. My back ached from sitting in the car for so long, my stomach grumbled at me. I looked out the car window. The hotel didn't look too bad in the daylight, although the paint on the walls was chipped and peeling. The faded sign at the front read "Oyo." It's a chain hotel and like any chain organization, quality varies depending on the location. So I was unsure of what to expect.

"What's taking Dad so long?" I asked Mom.

"Blame your grandparents," she snapped at me. "They thought it'd be a good idea to meet your dad as soon as we got here instead of leaving us alone to settle in."

continued

I groaned.

The 20 minutes spent sitting in the car waiting on Dad felt like ten hours. When he finally exited the hotel lobby and we were able to enter our rooms, I realized that Mom was right. You can't trust a hotel that cheap. The stench of cigarettes slapped me in the face when I opened the door and sent Esther into a coughing fit. A couple of dead cicadas laid in the corner by the door. The shower in the bathroom had cracks along its edges and corners and grayish brown stains around the drain.

"I told you this was a bad idea, James. I told you," Mom chided Dad.

The plan was for Mom and Dad to stay in one room, the boys in another room with one dog, and me and my sisters in the third room with the other dog. But Mom insisted that it was far too dangerous for us girls to be left alone. The new arrangement was that Bekah and Jamie were put in a room together, and Esther and I shared our room with Noah.

After having our photos taken with our extended family that evening, we returned to our hotel rooms. Noah decided to test the locks on the door. He stood outside and I locked the door, including the deadbolt, and told him to try to open it. He opened the door.

"Did you even lock it?" he asked.

"Yeah, she locked it," Esther responded for me.

"Shit."

I had no intention of actually sleeping in that room. I was convinced that if I let my guard down for even a moment, I'd end up on a true-crime documentary. I tried turning on the TV, clicking the power button on the remote several times with no result. I searched the sides of the TV for a power button, but it didn't work either. I laid awake in the squeaky bed next to Esther, making sure to keep the somewhat clean comforter in between me and the bed sheets covered in stains.

None of us even bothered to shower the next morning before throwing our things in the cars. The sun hadn't come up yet by the time we were settled in the cars and discussing where we would get breakfast.

Art & Photography

Quilled Animals

*Missi Anderson
DOC Award Winner*



Interrupted Sunset

by Gail Cardone



Nature's Beauty

photo by T.L. Bell



Girl in Nature

photo by T.L. Bell



Ryder's Place

by Katie Hunt Popejoy



Unknown Era

by Isabella Muniz



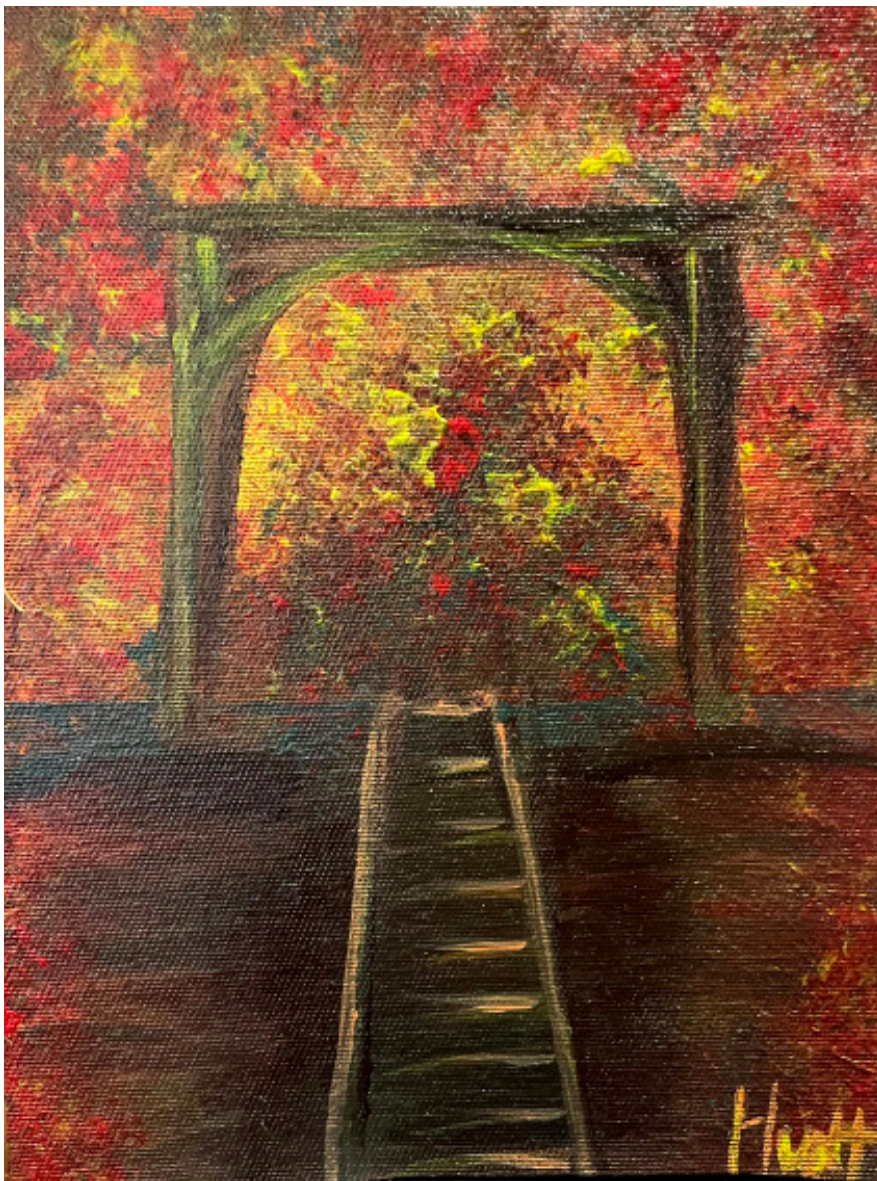
Skull with Cigarette

by Kyle Poteet



Bridge Over Railroad Tracks

art by Katie Hunt Popejoy



Overlooking the Potomac

photo by T.L. Bell



Bird's Eye View

by Gail Cardone



Poetry

18

by Isabella Muniz

Things are different now.
Things are changing and holding on,
but I know...
...that you know.
How could this go on?
Maybe it's just me.
Maybe it's the insecurities,
Maybe it's the lady in the doorway, who didn't approve of the last girl who couldn't speak her own language.

Thought this life was the movie,
and I was the song that somehow got put on this soundtrack.
Playing in her scene.
So I tried to sing, chest voice and all,
thought it went perfect,
but you were over it.
And then I noticed it wasn't the song,
it was the exact one I chose to sing along.

Now I know,
to choose the best of the best.
But my friends are saying "Just get some rest, there's not one that exists".
Believe me, I will.
As soon as someone tells me the rhythm,
calls her before her life goes over him.
As soon as someone tells me the story of Presley.
As soon as someone explains to me why he left so early.
As soon as someone says the world is coming to an end.
As soon as someone explains the things happening in my head.

Gravity

by Sharee Asberry

In the corner resides the broken pieces of a thesis called by Excellency.
Framed to be what is currently not, but claimed to be a masterpiece.
Only what the heavens may see.

Loving you isn't easy but it's beautiful
You menace my soul
In the disquieting – the rioting burns black fire in me.
It's determined to be purifying.
The evoking of my emotions as it liberates the complexity –
while the rest of me screams during the travailing.

At times, too laborious to weep.
The warm embrace of what's indescribable...
I melt
The obtainable rivers of flowing water ending in a bank – walking the plank of the unknown.
Deep involves a trust to where your entire life is at risk
Forever...jumping into eternity.
Costly, but solid in the presence of.
I nodded in green pastures that turned into deadly shadows as deadly shadows turned into
green pastures.

Held, though let go – steadied on a thin rope of strength that kept as the monstrous storm
swept everything away.
My eyes were open the entire time
Hurting, but refused to grit my teeth
Laying at the lowest part of the throne being purified from the bitter beginning as
The brokenness reveals its worth...the Refiner.

The Tethered Heart

by Misty Dorrough

After the gray years, a colorless space,
She found a new touch, a new time, a new place.
Twenty-four years of a cold, empty bed,
Of disgust and of dread and of words left unsaid.
A wall built of pillows, a moat of her own,
To keep out a man she had never quite known.
His presence a chill, a sickness, a stone,
That left her soul brittle and utterly alone.
Then time brought a stranger, a fire, a new song,
And her heart knew in an instant where it belonged.
His touch wasn't chilling, it melted her fears,
And washed away the cold stain of those long, barren years.
The attraction was instant, a visceral heat,
Every part of his being was utterly sweet.
Their bodies, in sync, a magnificent art,
An undeniable passion, a spark from the start.
The world looked and whispered, "It's too much, you see!
How can a love be so wild, so carefree?"
They couldn't conceive of a bond so profound,
Where two souls so separate, could make such a sound.
An echo of feelings, a mirror of grace,
A silent knowing that filled every space.
When one felt a tremor, the other one knew,
A connection so ancient, so fiercely and true.
Their passion a beacon, a furious flame,
No matter the trouble, or anger, or blame.
The desire, unyielding, a constant, deep ache,
A love that's for giving, and for goodness sake,
It's a testament to the soul's deepest need,
A miraculous garden of a beautiful seed.
It's proof that a heart that was broken and dead,
Can be set on fire and beautifully led.
To a love so divine, so brilliant and vast,
A love that will heal, and forever will last.

Time

by Jacob Watson

Tick, Tick.

Why do I breathe this time alone?

Living in this time alone.

Hands of motion,— mounting erosion,— and crafting the time.

You handed me a promise and then hissed your pace.

Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter crafted your chime.

Counting, ticking, singing this race just to save face.

Tick, Tick.

Your promise was short lived, and sadness weathered the bend.

Summer chills now crushed under brutal cold hands.

Winter burned weathered skin that you felt so inclined to send.

Faded numbers now sedated under hated sands.

Why do I breathe this time alone?

Living in this time alone.

Round you spin and your worries fall away.

A Story's tick is left shattered, day by day.

Tick, Tick.

Skittles

by Deborah Davenport

I shovel a handful of Skittles
in my mouth
An overwhelming sensation
citrus, grape, cherry
swirling in my mouth
it's disgusting
Chewing so much makes my jaw hurt
The sound of crunching fills my head
I hate it

I shovel another handful of Skittles
in my mouth

With My Eyes Closed.

by Lauren Whitehead

For some, they find grief in darkness,
For some, they find darkness in pain,
For some, they find pain in every rasp of disgusting breath.

Inhale. Exhale.
Our lungs try to close up.
Clench. Unclench.
We try to keep conscious.
Flick on. Flick off
Our eyes try to adjust.

I fall to my knees!
My old friend has left me.
I have been bound and blind.
Yet here I am:
Still. Fucking. Breathing.

Darkness, sop up my grief.
Work through the pain,
And I shall breathe again,
and again until my lungs
feel clear:
of sticky emotion.

She Will Not Die

by Crystal Avilla

Her sighs are the wind; orgasms, lightening;
Primal, scorching, the epitome of Eve;
That uncured vanity of lust, of face

Like a butterfly, pierced and still;
She lies grieving; of passion, of life;
A seed; love's memory planted

Death cannot touch her; siren, phoenix;
Temptress reborn each day with the dew;
And each night with the mist

America, the Fallen

by Marceline Conkin

Our home, our humble abode.
Our country, our source of pride.

Patriotism appears where?
Democracy is neither here nor there.

Our flag is torn to pieces,
The red is bleeding.
Blue, bruised like a peach.
White scrubbed into textbooks,
Bleached bullets shot into the bodies of our own.

Freedom, I don't see you.
Liberty, I haven't forgotten you.
Justice, I can't feel you.

Our homeland, our lives on the line.
Our America, our tears fall for you.

War Within War Without

by Misty Dorrough

Not every war finds battlefields wide,
Nor thundering armies where shadows ride.
Sometimes it's fought by just two souls,
Or deeper still, where only one controls.
A silent struggle, deep within the mind,
The quiet wars, of countless forms, we find.
Of right or wrong, a constant, weary plea,
A secret conflict, only you can see.
With predispositions, woven in our frame,
Or seeking self, to speak a truer name.
Our very core, our spirit, held in strife,
A war with genetics, defining parts of life.
Our sexuality, a truth to claim and keep,
While shadows of old judgments softly creep.
And then, the battles against outer walls,
As society's expectations rise and fall.
We wage these wars for truth, for simple grace,
To find our purpose in this crowded place.
Yet in these fights, though weary, we grow wise,
A quiet strength begins to softly rise.
For every struggle, every hidden scar,
Reminds us who we truly are.
And from these depths, a brighter dawn will gleam,
A future built upon a hopeful dream.

Beautiful Thing

by Chandler Griffith

Here I am at your feet in remembrance of all you've done for me
It's a beautiful thing, It's a beautiful thing
Here I stand face to face with the one who holds me in his embrace
It's a beautiful thing, It's a beautiful thing

I was the one with the hammer, the one with the nail.
I spat in your face, and drove you away.
You bore the cross that I fashioned.
I was the one with the scourge
In the moment our eyes met it's a beautiful thing,
That you would die for me.

So now we walk side by side
I am yours and you are mine
It's a beautiful thing, it's a beautiful thing

I was the one with the hammer the one with the nail.
I spat in your face and drove you away.
You bore the cross that I fashioned.
I was the one with the scourge.
In that moment our eyes met it's a beautiful thing.

Oh, it's a beautiful thing I can write on my heart that all the horrible sins have been ripped apart.
It's a beautiful thing I can write on my heart that all the horrible sins have been ripped apart.

I was the one with the hammer the one with the nail
I spat in your face and drove you away.
You bore the cross that I fashioned.
I was the one with the scourge.
In that moment our eyes met it's a beautiful thing.
That you would die for me.

STORMING DREAMER

by Rebekah Davenport

Storming dreamer

Drunken whispers lust under waning moons

Blood gardens watch hot skies

As a thousand petals crush the wind

Storming dreamer

Sleeping beneath black water

Summer hair and spring skin

Wanting shadows of bitter death

Storming dreamer

Crying for delirious symphony

From gentle music springs

Our pleasing ships

Mantra

by Carmita O'Bryant

Stupid. Mistake. Ugly.
A mantra replaying in my head.
Failure. Whore. Slut.
Repeated til it became my belief.
Unable to love myself.
How do you love someone with so many flaws?
Resigned to being no one and a nothing.
Black skies with no rainbow in sight.
Why even fight?
Wait...could they be lies?
Start to reflect. Start to detect.
Discover a me I never knew could exist.
Claiming a hold of my new discoveries.
Tossing out the lies and grasping
what truly could be.
Who knew it could actually be the truth?
Rooted underneath the lies, trying to spring through.

Words Strike True

by Mason Dailey

All of my poems ebb and flow,
From words to images,
To feelings others know,
But are scared to show.
Brought forth from the mind's eye,
I paint a picture of a world, my world,
My rain, my sun, my sky,
Sometimes dark and cold, with bleeding wounds,
Others with love, opened hearts, and happy tunes.
These feelings and words strike true,
I mostly write when feeling blue.
Imagery is an understanding
That so few can grasp.
My words paint images,
That make others gasp.
Poetry is a remembrance,
Of an individual's life, sweet and brash.
Embracing emotions and feelings of the past,
Knowing you're not alone, and this won't be the last.

The Loud Silence

by William Cagle

The silence is not quiet, but loud.
It is the necessary pause

the space

before the hand descends

the beat held until the beat progresses
is not retreat nor an empty cage
but the moment where the tension starts to

pull

The violinist takes the bow, long, and slow,
but the greater power is in when he stops

in that thin air, true meaning grows
a quiet thunder when music falls

In that moment we feel the song
In that quiet we finally hear
The melody the composer dreamt

Dead silence is alive.
Its message louder than song
When that rest is finally heard
We hear the true

symphony.

Elemental Essence

by Deborah Paulick

Rooted in the depths of a twisted heart
A spiraling constellation of chaos and desire
Invoked by a fiery passion
An irresistible cosmic need
Piercing the soul like an iron rod
Creating a catastrophic storm
With phantom caresses upon mountain peaks
And winds that whisper sweet nothings
Under pale moonlight where two silhouettes
Join as a river into the cobalt blue sea
Where space and time cease to exist
An eternal love begins.

A Father's Daughter's Story

by Bradley Allen

(Verse 1)

March was written on the papers, that's when you were meant to cry
But January had ya'breathin', in a heartbeats hurried sigh
Into this world so early, a fighter from the start
With all those wires tetherin' your brand new tiny heart
Your mother never left you side, through every beep and light
I just stood there helpless, holdn'on with all my might
Finally got to bring you home, a fragile, precious load
We were walking on a road we didn't know was about to explode

(Chorus)

A midnight drive, your momma by my side, you sleeping in the back
Was the only taste of heaven I will ever know I lack
By the break of day, my freedom was a memory, gone and through
Because of the selfish, cowardly things I do
I left you in your cradle, I left your world undone
I'll pay for it every second until my time is done
I love you more than these prison walls can hold
I'm just scared this cell will swallow my story whole **(leave off to bridge)**

(Verse 2)

The sun came up that morning, I put a pot coffee on
I never heard the quiet, before the storm had really gone
When the door kicked in, it was all a blur of blue
No time for goodbye, from your old man to you
The secrets and the silence, I wore like a leaded coat
They wrapped around my throat, and stole the only words that mattered most
Now the only thing I see, is that empty car seat leaving without me at the break of dawn

(Chorus)

continued

(Bridge)

They gave me your pictures, and I watched you start to grow
In a world of plastic chairs, and conversations slow and low
I'm miss'in every first, I'm just stain, a faded name
The weight of what I threw away, is drown'in me in shame
I had it all in my hands, a perfect, sleep'in girl
And I blew it all to hell, in this cold hard world

(Chorus)**(Out)**

Yeah I'm scared...
This concrete is gonna steal my breath...
And all the word I have for you...
My Emma

To Rise Again

by Brandon Kellogg

In the Beginning,
When all things were new,
The mere thought of sinning
Was beyond what we knew,
For we lived in the Light
And beheld His perfect Love,
Sheltered by His Might,
Glory from above.

Then came the Darkness
And we were seduced
To forsake His Brightness,
To become unloosed,
To become like Him.
Deceived though we were,
Yet with Love He didst brim
As He crossed that Veil of Murk.

Amongst us He dwelt
To show us the Way
To feel as we felt
To be Crucified one day,
And yet to Rise Again,
That we may heed His Call,
Ignoring the Deceiver's lies,
And reversing the Fall.

Landscaped Moments

by Amelia Ochoa

Lamborghini-blue and pink clear as a mirror.
Created memories in my mind,
lasted forever.
Thoughts ran by fast
in and out, slow motion.
Pearl white sat upon your vault.
Fluffy cotton candy.
A mental compilation.
Pixy dust.
Scattered glitter like ashes.
Return dust to dust
Probably pink made of gold ashes.
Purple sashes
grew upon your grave.
How ironic
you
never liked that color anyway.
Pink, blue in color both fading out quickly.
Sun sits down-laid to rest.
Although, you weren't tired.
Hidden horizon. Reminisce.
Still watching. Had to Retire.
Greatest of all time.
Real GOAT born 95.
Newspaper called you five alive.
Hospital called said you're not alive.
Landscaped more moments
lasted forever,
Created memories in my mind.
Lamborghini-blue and pink clear as a mirror

Fair Weather Friends

by Lauren Whitehead

Fair weather, fair weather
and all its paltry friends –
In summer together–
But for me, winter begins.

Fair weather, fair weather
and all its so called friends–
Always round they gather
Until the good weather ends.

Fair weather, Fair weather
and all its short term friends–
Claim truth and trust forever
Until the warmth suspends.

Through the summer and spring
we frolic and play,
Day by day, they leave fray
Til I alone stand,
When November air blows
them all away.

Fair weather, fair weather,
Return to me!
Oh, bring me your warmth and company.
But like birds they fly south to fair weather.

I Miss My Dog :(

by Deborah Davenport

Furry, brown blur zipping around my backyard
small and soft, snoring as she sleeps in my lap
jumping up and down and barking when we come home
begging for french fries
chasing bugs around the house

Brown fur turns grey
food won't stay down
tries to run and jump
falls
can't stand on her own

I hold her for the last time

Eyes burning
I helped pick out her urn
no more running
jumping
barking
cuddling

Just recurring dreams
memories
growing dread
of what will happen
when it's not just the dog

STRIPPED

by Candice Ford

outside my shower stripped
when it catches my eye
the mass cane plant

once long stout leaves lay drooped
subjected to miscare
desiccated

fingers grasp bottom leaf
pull it slowly away
browned and pliant

quiet hiss of relief
drops into the waste bin
blight discarded

each leaf, one by one stripped
'til only green remains
pause, sharp breath, pull

loud snap, violence gripped
dew weeps from broken limb
hands move in blur

overcome by fervor
to tear away all that
it is in full

reach the top but falter
a tender bud remains
meant to feel pure

but now only feels stripped
shower has now gone cold
drained, unclean, raw

Links on a Chain

by Marceline Conkin

My mama couldn't break all her curses,
But she did break some.

Staying put, stuck in her ways,
She couldn't ever leave it all behind again.
My place was forever in Oklahoma, our roots held deep.
For my mom had houses and apartments, but never a home.
The stubborn, the longterm single,
She kept her life shut, her heart under lock and key.
Didn't want to end up with the wrong man.
In the end, my mother gave me a father who stayed,
Instead of a man who never could.
Never lacking for money, love, or time well spent,
She made true on all her promises.
Made sure I didn't feel alone, wasn't her caregiver.
Inside, my mommy's little girl cried tears of joy.

My daddy couldn't let go of all his traumas,
But he did let go of some.
Putting aside violence, embracing peace,
He never wanted to put up his fists again.
My space was forever in his heart, his only daughter.
For my dad grew up with a pretty living place, not a happy space.
The lover, the loyal,
He felt too hard and gave too much.
Didn't want his woman to feel stuck in one place.
In the end, my father gave me a mother who was strong,
Instead of a woman who never stood up for her own.
Always there for a hug, kiss, or a shoulder to cry on,
He made true on all his dreams.
Made sure that I was safe, was listened to.
Outside, my pop couldn't have asked for anything more.

Links on a chain,
Fall down to me.
I will continue the line.
I will shed what has come before me.

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