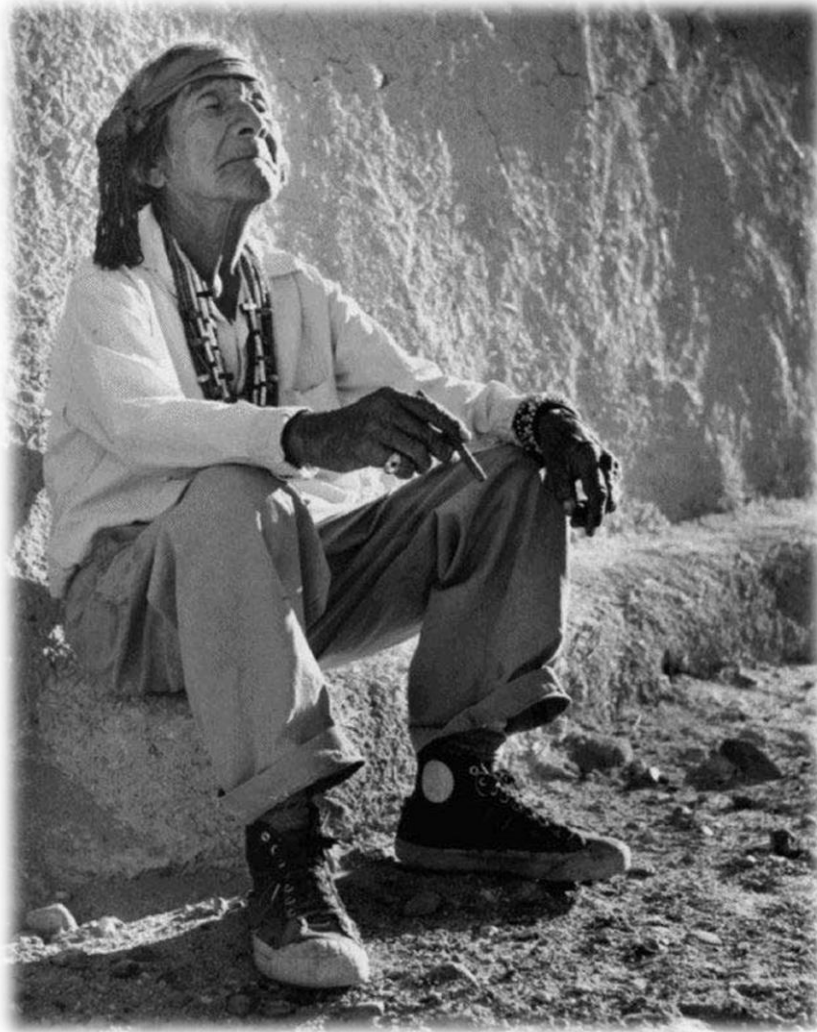


Wordplay



English '57 Series
#23: Spring 2016

Introduction

Every semester, a number of students enroll in English '57 courses in order to improve their academic, creative, and personal writing. The work that is done in these courses fosters creative growth, while strengthening students' ability to communicate ideas and emotion through both conversation and text. This is a short taste of the power of the written word and a testament to the power of collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.

Acknowledgments

To all of the tutors who help students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds: who take the time to understand each student who walks into the Writing Lab. To the senior staff who keeps everything running smoothly. To Paul Kratwell, who has done so much to make the Writing Lab the best learning environment on campus. To the students and faculty who recognize the importance of the services provided through the Writing Lab, and who continue to support its mission. And to the students who have taken '57 courses: You not only help yourselves grow, but you help us grow as tutors and as peers. Thank you!

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Jessica Beyersdorf

“Jessica was my first ’57 learner and actually my first learner in general. I remember feeling an acute amount of anxiety before that first session with her. I also remember that anxiety effortlessly falling away after meeting her. Jessica has made collaboration more than easy. She is both attentive and responsive in our sessions and her witty demeanor has made me smile countless times. What’s more, her good-spirited nature has been translated into her writing. Throughout the semester Jessica has been writing a fantasy story that includes science fiction undertones (and includes romance, because as her and I both agree, you *gotta* have that romance). Although there are indeed darker aspects to the story, such as attempted assassinations and murder, there’s an overall “spring in the step” of this story which makes it a fun, engaging read. It has been extremely neat to see Jessica’s writing improve over the semester and I am confident this growth will only continue! Keep on keepin’ on girl!” ~ Alli Walker

Blurb

By: Jessica Beyersdorf

“He is always treating me like a child! And there is no way that he is any more than 5 years older than I am!” I groused to Killian as we wandered down the long hall away from the throne room.

“You would be surprised” He snorted. “Marlo is a lot older than he seems” We stopped when we reached a large cushioned window seat that sat nestled in the corner of the hallway.

“What do you mean?” I wondered, shooting Killian a curious look. I sat down on the pale blue cushion, sliding myself across the soft satin like material until I was against the far wall, my body groaned in protest as it moved. When I finally was wedged safely in the corner, my side pressed against the glass, I looked outside. Large trees towered, growing far above the castle and disappearing into the clouds. During the day they seemed much like the trees we used to have on earth, brown trunks and green leaves. But I knew that when night settled upon this world they would glow with green and blue waves of life and magic.

“Well he hasn’t told me his exact age...” Killian sat as well, leaning against the glass, pulling my attention from the forest and back to our conversation. His hulking form took up a good chunk of the already small space, and despite my knees being pulled up to my chest he was still near enough that my toes brushed his thighs. “But from my calculations he is at least more than double your age”. He moved a large hand to lift my legs by the ankles. I went to pull them back, thinking that he simply didn’t like that I was touching him with my feet, that I was sure stunk quite horribly. But he surprised me by taking my legs and laying them comfortably across his lap. The more stretched out position was painful to reach but felt quite a bit better than my original contortion.

I watched incredulously as he began to unlace my knee high boots. “What are you doing?” I asked, finally finding my voice after he had slipped them both off. I blushed darkly when I noticed the badly patched cuts that littered my legs, particularly the nick by my knee. These had not been caused by training, rather by the battle I had fought against the antique blade they had given me to shave my legs.

“You were limping earlier” He didn’t look up from my feet as he pulled off my socks. The material stuck slightly on a few of the blisters that had ripped open. I bit my lip, but I couldn’t prevent the sharp intake of breath that revealed my

pain. Killian shot me a look that I couldn't decipher. "These are infected" I glanced at the red swells that covered my feet and winced at the greenish tint that was taking over. "Avianna" I refused to meet his gaze. Instead choosing to stare at my lap. Embarrassment darkening my cheeks once again. A few minutes past, and I could nearly hear him grinding his teeth as he tried to be patient. "Anna" He finally snapped. I looked up. Shocked. He had never called me that before. Always insisting on using my full name, or just no name at all. Even though many at the castle had taken to simply calling me Anna as I preferred. "Why didn't you say anything?" I was still having a hard time reading his expression. I could only pick certain emotions but none of them seemed to belong together. Anger was clearly there. Some concern that I could also notice seemed odd placed on his face. But the one that really caught me off guard was the faint tinge of what seemed to be pride.

"I didn't want to seem..." Human? Weak? Helpless? I wasn't sure which word to use. Each fit.

Killian didn't answer. He just turned back to my feet and pulled a blue jar out of his pocket. The silence continued as he scooped out a large dollop of shimmery goo. Slowly he smeared it on both of my feet.

It stung at first, but I once again bit my lip to prevent the yelp of pain from escaping. However the pain only lasted a moment before a cooling feeling spread over them. I momentarily wondered if he was using his ability to take my pain as his own. He had explained that among emotions he could also take physical feelings as his own, and pass them along. But I highly doubted he would do that for me. A better guess would just be that Madame Lahnda just made another amazing serum. Killian continued massaging my feet. His rough, hot fingertips kneading into the soles in a completely mind numbing way.

An uncontrolled moan escaped me, and I rested my head back, letting my eyes slip shut. His hands didn't stop at my feet however, and he continued his way up my sore calves. Bringing a much needed cooling relief that contrasted sharply with the heat of his skin.

It crossed my mind that I should probably stop him when he slipped his hands under the hem of my skirt. But his touch was doing funny things to my thought process. With each inch his hands slipped higher I found my desire to stop him fading away.

"So..." I dampened my lips, trying desperately to remember that this was Killian, and we were sitting in the middle of a public hallway. Not exactly the place to be getting an erotic leg massage. As much as I absolutely loved it. "How old do you think Marlo is exactly?"

"Hmm..." He sounded much closer than before. His hands were currently kneading my upper thighs. "Probably around 98 from my calculations."

"What is he? A sea turtle?" I snorted. Killian froze in his movements. I stiffened and opened my eyes. Reality finally crashing down around me. Killian was inches from my face. A uncharacteristically confused look gracing his features. He pulled back to his original placement. Removing his hand in the process and leaving me feeling oddly cold.

"...What's a turtle?" He looked offended at the laughter that spewed from me at his question. But I couldn't help it. I had never seen such a confused expression on his face before. It was almost adorable.

His expression shuttered and he stood and strode away from me.

"Killian!" I giggled, chasing after him. "Come on, I'm sorry I laughed" His stride slowed just enough for me to catch up. He didn't look at me, but I noted the slight smirk quirked his lips.

I pretended, however, not to notice that the pain in my feet and legs were gone...just as I pretended not to notice the slight limp in Killian's stride.

Dylan Couch

“It has been so great getting to know Dylan as a person and as a writer throughout my time with him in our '57 sessions. Dylan's passion for writing stories that address important, universal themes is what makes his writing so interesting and fun to read. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Dylan and see the story he has submitted to Wordplay develop as the semester went along. One of our main focuses this semester was to work on using dialogue to move the story along and reveal his characters' personalities, and I think he did an excellent job of this with his final product of "Marlene's Lucky Drawing." In every session, Dylan impressed me with his dedication to and excitement about his story, and I know that he will continue to be a successful writer in his future story endeavors.” ~ Shelby Steinke

Marlene's Lucky Drawing

By: Dylan Couch

Marlene's back was stiff and stubborn and hunched over. It was as if the countless hours she spent scrubbing floors on her hands and knees had devolved her of any right to remain straight and with her head held high. The houses in Apple Creek Valley were expansive yet unique in their own labyrinths of rooms and twisting staircases, giving Marlene the detail she needed to project her complaints onto some unlucky recipient as though that person should live the experience of cleaning houses seven days a week as she herself does and has done for the past thirty years. Her husband Herman, from his heedless expression fixed on the television screen, was not internalizing his wife's complaints as the bulk of her beneficiaries do, but his ability to tune out even the noisiest of Marlene's heckling was perhaps his strongest attribute.

Marlene's complaints always eventually directed themselves at Herman with a volition all their own. With his eyes glued to the big-game hunt on the screen, these protests began to take shape and demand acknowledgement.

“...exactly Herm. Anyways,” Marlene said bending further over Herman's chair, leaning into his ear. “That hamper at the Gregory's reminded me to tell you to use the one I put in your bathroom. When you toss them down the stairs they collect in a pile and I have to sort them out. Did you bring your clothes up to your room? I suspect you did not. Just like you didn't brush your teeth this morning either. Well, brush 'em tonight. And floss this time. Your breath is horrible. I'm going to say to you the same thing I says to your son. I says to him, 'I am not your servant.' You two expect too much of me after walking up and down stairs all day, and then you wonder why I go out and gamble. I have to have some fun before it all kills me.”

Marlene then walked to her chair and collapsed. Herman was attentive only of a slight nagging mosquito buzzing around the landscape of the Serengeti, a little disturbance in the hunt he was determined to be a part of. In fact, so much was Herman accustomed to that mosquito as a companion on all of his hunts, the abrupt absence of it pulled him out of the television set and into the present moment where his wife breathed heavily beside him.

“Did you say something, Ma?” Herman replied, turning his head slightly in her direction. “Sure. I'll get to it. Sure, yeah. I'll floss too. Let me sit down now and rest a moment.” His head swiveled back to the television.

"Did you buy a lottery ticket?" Marlene questioned. Herman twitched slightly and swatted at the mosquito with the wave of his hand. "Don't tell me you forgot the ticket. You-"

"Yeah, yeah I got you 'em, Ma. Yours is on the table. Jesus Christ. What crawled up inside your ass today?"

"Oh cut the shit Herman." Marlene moved from her seat, maneuvered her way to the kitchen and plucked the lottery ticket from the table. She took Herman's ticket from the table too knowing it would be a cold day in hell if *he* won any money on her watch. She wobbled back and snatched the remote from her husband's chair. "Give me that!"

"Hey!" Herman said. Marlene wrestled the remote from Herman and made a move to hit him with it. Herman recoiled from the attack.

"That's right! You watch yourself." Marlene changed the channel to discover the lottery drawings.

Once satisfied the numbers were not her own, Marlene tore up the tickets and returned to her seat. She changed the channel to a cooking show and turned to Herman. His face twisted in grief but he held his tongue and did not meet Marlene's challenge. "What are we having for dinner tonight?" Marlene asked, pleased.

Herman detected a trap rearing overhead but he placed his next words regardless. "How's lets treat ourselves and go out tonight. Been itchin' at Chinese for months."

"We cannot afford to go out to eat. Since I cook the meals around here, you-"

"You ask me to cook every day, Ma. Yes I do I do cook around here. I do and you know it." And before she could reply, Herman spat with increasing anger. "Oh to hell with it, then!"

The commercial ended and he settled back in his chair to watch the show. Marlene sat with her back straining to sit straight, her eyes wide and orb-like, her mouth partly open, waiting. Herman began to fidget without really knowing she was staring, being only aware of the abrupt mosquito-death silence, of a sound that should be coming back to interrupt his cooking show. Herman saw himself in the chef's place, rubbing a rack of ribs with brown sugar. The mosquito however did not come back and this began to make Herman nervous.

Finally, Herman pulled out of the TV and threw his hands in the air with a defeated, "Oh to hell with it then!" and stormed into the kitchen to cook dinner.

A faint but sound *dupa!* followed from Marlene in the living room. She settled back in her seat and turned up the volume on the remote just as Herman started to rummage for pots and pans and to begin to bicker and cuss.

A few days before Herman had taken a real cussing at the shop because of a careless mistake on the forklift caused in the attempt to show an employee the right way to operate a forklift. He tipped a pallet of potting soil, shook his head, and immediately walked himself up the stairs to the Floor Supervisor's office where the figure of a man stood illuminated behind the shaded blinds looking down upon the scene below. Herman's shadow, once inside, was visible in the office from the shop floor and a small crowd stood there among the mound of dirt to watch the spectacle. Both parties above threw their hands in the air, casting their shadows in long arcs against the closed blinds. Shouts sounded from above.

"Now I told you, Herman. I told you what would happen if you lost this company money again. I told you damn near a week ago."

"You know, I truly am sorry about the soil. I truly am. But sir – Randle, the damn fork lift – it – it – it got out of control. It just moved and the forks were all crooked. I should've told you about them forks sooner."

"400 dollars in damages in two weeks. What's this mess going to cost? Can you tell me that?"

Herman could not tell him that. But he stood his ground and continued his case.

"Now Randle, this is not my mistake. Them forks needed fixing, I'm not the mechanic. Seems to me you should know the state of your equipment around here. But I'll fix it Randle, on my word I will. I'll pay you back too."

"You just go home Herman. Get some rest, spend some time with Marlene. I won't tell her what happened here, not yet anyway." The crowd remained watching until Herman appeared outside the office with his head down and his fists clenched into balls at his sides. A red mark of frustration formed visible on his forehead.

That conversation shook Herman the rest of the day and the next. It cycled through his brain when he was left to his thoughts as he was now in the kitchen cussing over pots and pans.

Dinner reflected his bitter resentment. Pork chops charred to crisps sat in mushy potatoes and cold butter. Marlene emphasized that disgust as her gaze shifted over the unappealing plates. Her large eyes rested finally on Herman.

"One meal, Herm. Can't you cook one lousy meal for me after a long day of work? If you expected you had to cook occasionally, you could have prepared dinner earlier. You think I wanna eat this ash and mush?" In answer, she took her plate and tossed it in the trash under the sink. She washed the plate and the rest of the dishes before speaking again. She wondered at how tired she was all of a sudden, and how her voice quivered and her knees shook. And how mad she was! Terribly, terribly mad ever since her day started with Herman not waking up for work and her having to shake him awake an hour late. Then Marlene herself was late for work and she had to skip lunch to sort through the laundry strewn across Mrs. Gregory's basement floor.

When the house was clean, she waited around for her payment. Mrs. Gregory walked in with her hands full of shopping bags. She did not have cash so delayed payment until Monday.

"I must apologize Marlene," she said when she found Marlene standing in her kitchen. "I used my card for groceries. I'll make sure to run it to your house on Monday."

Marlene could not go gambling, which was her usual endeavor on Fridays after she had figured the amount of money to put towards bills. Gambling only ever came from personal savings, an allowance Herman spent habitually. Marlene accepted her answer but said nothing, not until arriving home she found Herman sitting and watching the television as she had found him the day before.

Her day had been so tiring indeed and all she wanted, her only request, was a meal. With the dishes now done, she turned to Herman. She held on to the counter in case her knees began to shake. She directed her speech at the back of his head. "It's been this way for thirty years, Herm. I've been waving my hands and raising my voice for thirty years. I'm sick of it, aren't you? You remember that time in Milwaukee when our trailer burned down? I had saved fifty dollars in a can, and it was the only thing to survive. Remember you spent that money on liquor while I went out looking for work? Then there was the time you brought home a 300-dollar paycheck from that place you worked briefly on 6th Street. What was I to do with 300 dollars? Well I did do something with it, I put my ad in the paper and got me those jobs in Apple Creek Valley, and I bought you that suit and tie. Made you get a real job, for a while anyhow. And that was before the kid. But I won't get started on that. Nope, I'll just make some toast."

During her speech, Herman's head was bent staring down at his untouched food as though he wished to crawl into the mush and escape persecution. He could hear her shoving bread in the toaster. Her breathing was heavy and haggard. After pouring a cup of coffee, she returned to her seat across from Herman, but his gaze remained shifted downwards at his plate.

Marlene settled back and crossed her legs. Taking a sip of coffee, she continued. "When I knew I was pregnant with Randle I was scared to tell you. You were between jobs, drinking at the pub. We had just moved here and I was cleaning Mrs. Gregory's for five years already. I got us out of that mess, Herm." Herman flinched at the mention of his name. His gaze remained down, and Marlene could see that his eyes were wide and that he looked scared. She smiled at his sudden fear of her and she took another sip of coffee.

"And I told you then. Remember? I says to you, 'Get yourself a damn job, a good job, and keep it for Christ's sake.' And you did, that auto mechanic job. That's when you quit drinking. Did good for a while, we did. But now look at you. Sitting on your ass and watching T.V. every day after work and not making a single meal without me pestering first."

It was doubtful that Herman was absorbing this conversation since his attention was directed at the pile of rubbish on his plate. Suddenly, and without speech, he picked up his fork, his knife, and began cutting into his chops. He chewed the cut without expression and without shifting his gaze upward, although Marlene's face transformed into a look of shock, disgusted. She stood up at the sound of her toaster, walking back to the table with a plate in her hand. Before sitting down, she cut into the butter next to Herman and placed two chunks on her toast, leaning over his shoulder. His face remained bent.

When Marlene sat down, she saw that Herman was still chewing. He looked so determined to finish chewing that tough piece of meat that his mouth worked in large mechanical circles and drops of sweat pooled on his forehead.

Marlene took another sip of coffee. "And then there was the hoof trimming business you started and lost and all the while I'm working at Apple Creek Valley. Finally, your son helped you out and got you that position by him. I am thankful to Randle for that. You should be too, with all the shit he probably has to put up with."

Herman was still bent chewing furiously and monotonously, sweat now beading down his face and the side of his neck. His expression was grim, determined.

"...I mean, for Christ's sake Herm. Randle has held his job now longer than you ever have! I'm sick of it, all of it. I've had enough. I must say, you're doing good now – but – you come home and just sit. Don't you think I need a break? Do you even think of me? Listen now, *dupa*. You know what I do at work and you know what I have to do when I come home. Tell me, is that fair Herm?"

If Herman found it fair, he did not say. He sat there in grim determination chewing, it seemed, without making progress. The meat was winning, but Herman's jaw did not slacken.

"...no, not fair. I work for my measly forty bucks and I can't even get that on time! Mrs. Gregory can put off paying until Monday, not giving a damn about how I feel. At least Randle is your boss! At least you have somebody who cares! Which is more than you deserve, I might add. Listen to me, Herm. Are you listening? Say something."

Herman remained chewing.

Marlene finished her coffee and went to pour herself another cup. Her hand shook from the caffeine. Her eyes however were drooping at the sides. Bags clung beneath them and shadows crept at their corners. She was tired and

the thought presented itself to her periodically and without notice. She said after sitting down, "Damn it, Herm. It's like I live by myself. After supper lets you and I go to the Store and get two tickets. There's a drawing tomorrow for the Badger. We need butter, too. - Hell! That pork chop is getting the better of you, Herm. You look like you're going to be sick!"

And he did. Herman's neck was wet with glistening dew, and his head tilted up like a hatchling ready to be fed. The cut of meat showed in his throat. Herman was clutching his fists and making large swallowing motions. With each of these, the obtruding slab of pork moved a fraction downward and his face turned a more defined shade of purple.

"Herman you're going to kill yourself. Spit it out! Spit it out!" Marlene stood up but Herman calmly, slowly held a finger out to stop her. His eyes were bug-like, bulging. He forced the meat down with one final swallow – it reverberated in the bottom of his throat before being sucked downward like a vacuum. Herman faced forward and slowly drained his glass of water. He took a napkin and patted the edges of his mouth, smiling. The clock ticked.

"Sit down now, woman." Marlene hesitated and then sat. "You should have had some of the dinner I made. Sure, meat was tough but not impossible to chew. Flavor was there, anyway. Potatoes weren't bad either." Herman had himself a bite of cold mashed potatoes and patted his neck with the napkin. "Now, now. I wanted to tell you on my own time because I knew how you would take it. You had to pick today of all days to ridicule me, didn't you? Did you speak to Randle? No? It doesn't matter. No matter where, the work I do goes unappreciated. Always has. My meal ain't good enough, huh?"

"Herm -"

"No, you had your turn. Now it's mine. There's no use warming up to it, not after what you said. I lost it. There I said it. I lost it. This time for good." He picked up his knife and fork and began cutting again.

"Herman what are you -"

"My job, damn it! I lost my job. That good for nothing son of ours hung his old man out to dry. He always was yours, you always did baby him. Turned him against me, I suspect."

"No... no, no, no -"

"Things will be tight for a while, sure, but we've been here before. A few times we've been here now. And I've always found another. We've always pulled through." He finished cutting the charred pork chop and inspected it under the light.

"Not again Herm. You can't do this to me again. Talk to Randle. You have to talk to your son. Beg him for your job back – he's your son!"

"I will not."

"You have to!"

"The hell if I do! It's about time I teach him a lesson. I'm willing to bet by the end of the week he comes to his senses but, no, I'm not taking that job back. Nope, I'm better than that. I work far too hard to be subject to the bullshit he puts me through."

Herman put the meat in his mouth and began to chew. Marlene collapsed into her hands. With Marlene facing the

table, Herman cringed at the taste of the charred meat. He quietly spat the pork chop back onto his plate. Herman stood up, tossed the dinner in the trash and put his plate next to the sink. He followed the noise toward the television still on in the living room, patting Marlene gently as he walked by.

Marlene sat up when she heard his chair recline. She cleared the table and wiped it down with a wet rag. She had not been crying and would not now, even with Herman in the other room.

She got down from the cupboard her bookkeeping affairs and began sorting through bills. Things would be tough but she'd been here before. She had been here many times before. When she was satisfied that the numbers added up, she closed the book.

As Marlene made her way to her bedroom Herman made a comment from his chair about buying lottery tickets, but she ignored it and closed the door softly behind her. She collapsed down in the dark with her clothes still on. She felt her body falling into sleep before her mind was ready to follow. Worries battled against exhaustion but soon sleep took over and she drifted with her eyes closed into a heavy and undisturbed slumber.

Zantasia Johnson

My Black is Beautiful

By: Zantasia Johnson

Never when I show pride in my culture will pro-black mean anti-white. I am pro-black for more reasons than I can put on paper. I love my thick, hard to manage, kinky hair. My natural hair is not straight nor is it curly. The thick mass sitting on top of my head is indescribable. When it is wet, my curls are very tight and beautiful. It also looks like I cut it every time it gets wet. My shrinkage is real. Shrinkage means my hair is wet or not straightened so it shrinks and looks shorter. But the minute air hits my hair, it then looks like I haven't combed it days. It instantly becomes an afro. I have to then go through the long process of straightening my hair. Since I was lucky enough to inherit my mom's thick hair with my dad's dry scalp, doing my hair takes longer than the average person. I have to make sure my scalp stays oiled and make sure I apply extra heat until my hair is actually straight all the way to my roots. When I have my hair straightened it shows the actual length of my hair. Trying to explain my hair to people who are not black is the hardest thing to do. Only black women understand the pains and struggles of black hair. It is a subject within itself to study in school.

I love being pro-black because of the community I am a part of due to my culture. Black people are the most welcoming to other black people either when no one is watching or when it is very clear that you are a minority in any situation. That's always when you need a community the most. I need my black community on a campus like UWSP. Whenever I see another black person, whether I know them or not, we can always talk and have a conversation about anything because we both know where the other is coming from. The black community is also the best one to be a part of when you need anything. If one person cannot help you they will find someone else who can. Being on a Predominately White Institution (PWI) having a community of people who actually look like you which helps you want to stay on the campus. It is very hard being the only one everywhere you go. It is different having just one other person in the room who can help you.

Even though I identify myself as African American, my culture is black. The music I listen to is black. My community I come from is black. My style of dress is black. The way I talk is black. The way I walk is black. Everything about me is black. That is one of the very few things about me that no one can take away. I am African American and I am black. The best thing about it is that my black is beautiful. Many people think that downplaying the power in my blackness or telling many black women that they aren't beautiful will affect how black women see themselves. In truth, others trying to get me to believe this only makes me love my black culture more.

Mallory Jones

“Mallory was such a fun learner to work with because she was always so excited to dive into her poetry and make it the best it could be. She came to every session with a smile, and I found myself looking forward to working with her each week. Her poetry is personal but relatable, and it is so diverse! It will make you laugh, make you cry, and make you question the everyday things we take for granted. She instills such powerful meaning into her words, and digs into such personal topics with her poetry. Although she is a beginner Poet, I think she will go far with the art.” ~ Jennifer Peterson

Concussion

By: Mallory Jones

A soaring swan,
My wings stretched wide.

As my webbed foot pushes off the ground,
my feathers whip back and forth,
a swan released into the night.

The cool air is crisp,
my skin tingles
like small nibbles.

My goosebumps are mountainous ramps.

Freely focused,
I push off the sidewalk
And I fly.

My arms out like an ostrich,
As my face smacks the pavement.

Hosea Quiet Time

By: Mallory Jones

I am a balloon, limp and scrunched, torn and trampled.
What was once shaped and full,
now is flattened.
Smearred with damp, thick mud,
Making it unrecognizable.
But You are there, You've always been there.
Your breath fills me, restores me, lifts me,
lightly and lovingly to the sky.
Your spirit gives me structure once again,
taking me higher than I've ever been.
Left without any control.
And as Your presence fills me,
I become more like You.
It was in this moment that I met You, when I *really* met You.
Too long have I lived trying to fix ripped rubber with another.
You are more than anything I could ever imagine,
on my own,
with my simple mind.
Yet it is anything but,

with Your presence.

As you resurrect me.

They Wear Masks

By: Mallory Jones

They wear masks,

With black patches over their eyes

And beaks over their mouths.

Their mouths move,

Up and down,

And up and down.

Shine a light in their eyes,

Through the pits

And past the mask.

Do you see a friend?

What Would You Do If You Weren't Afraid

By: Mallory Jones

What would you do if you weren't afraid?

Would you tell that person how you feel?

Would you let your dreams fade?

Would you allow yourself to heal?

Would you take a different route?

Would you honor your self esteem?

Would you voice your doubt?

Would you follow your dreams?

Would you finally let go?

Would you let your worth be weighed?

Would you say yes? Would you say no?

What would you do if you weren't afraid?

Would you allow the world to see the real you?

Would you *be* you?

Nicholas Kubley

“Nicholas artfully crafted a short story in which he represents three “runners” and their newly-formed friendships. He emphasized that his story is up for interpretation—perhaps you can uncover a deeper meaning. It was an honor to collaborate with Nicholas on his narrative. Please enjoy!” ~ Kaitlyn Kreuser

Runners

By: Nicholas Kubley

Illustrations by: Kierstan Leaf

The first day began. Two friends ran.

Hast enjoyed the race. Kerma enjoyed the fun. Hast was in it to win. Kerma valued the friendship more.

Some might say Kerma let Hast win because Kerma valued the friendship.

Some might say Hast let Kerma win because Hast wanted to encourage competitiveness.

To an observer, though, Hast and Kerma were both around equally fast.



The second day began. The friends ran. It was another close run. But this time, before it finished, in the path of their usual run, the two came across someone neither of them knew. Both friends stopped to talk with this unknown person.

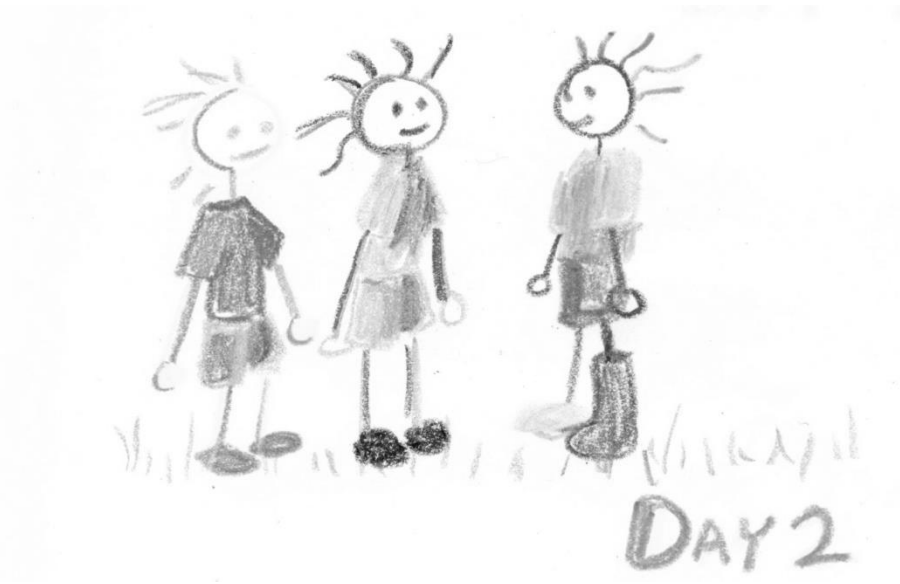
Although Hast was competitive, Hast wouldn't push someone over to win the race.

Kerma stopped because of concern for this unknown person's leg, which showed a clear injury. The injury made Kerma forget about the race.

All three introduced themselves and began talking. Eloreva, the new person, was also interested in running.

The leg was asked about. Eloreva explained about tripping earlier, also asking not to be excluded for being slower.

The three had become friends quickly and agreed to run together tomorrow.



The third day began. One friend ran.

Eloreva was slow because of the recovering leg and was unable to go far. Kerma was walking with Eloreva to make sure they were well with their recovery on the travel. Hast still went fast, and was well ahead of the others.

Eloreva was appreciative of Kerma's willingness to walk together but also didn't want to prevent Kerma from joining the race. Although Eloreva had expressed this, Kerma said their concern was not on the run.

When all three met up, Hast asked Kerma why they didn't run with them, remembering the competitions the two used to have before Eloreva showed up.

"Why leave them behind?" said Kerma, more concerned.

"Why can't you come ahead?" said Hast, more angry.

To address the disagreement, it was agreed that there would be a race tomorrow to determine the friend who should have say over the future priorities.



The fourth day began. The friends ran. Eloreva's leg recovery had also finished.

Hast and Kerma ran as fast as they could. It was close between the two, but the result was clear. The two had no choice but to agree.

The race was won by the fastest of the three: Eloreva.



Nicole Lynch

“Nicole is an imaginative writer whose stories grow as she researches the facts surrounding her settings. For “The Rabbit Hole Vortex” she experimented with writing a short story. By doing this she enjoyed the sense of accomplishment in the finished product, while at the same time she continues to develop these characters and plans to write more about them in the future. I hope she has the opportunity to do this, as she is a talented story-teller with many interesting ideas.” ~ Jacqueline Connolly

The Rabbit Hole Vortex

By: Nicole Lynch

“Houston, we have a problem.” Gatz said as they were being pulled into the dark and bottomless abyss.

“Really, Old Man?!” Ace shouted from his seat repulsed by his own name. *Houston*. “This is no time for jokes!”

Alarms were going off in the whole ship. Red lights were flashing. And Ace was reaching for the control panel, trying to steer the ship away. But it was no use. No matter how he steered or what controls he pressed, the ship was only being pulled closer into the abyss. The 283 Galactic was no match against a black hole. It felt like the galaxy was spinning, and everything was at full-speed ahead.

“It’s inevitable, Ace,” Gatz calmly said. “It’s too strong to pull away from-”

“SHUT UP!” Ace persisted at the controls, the ship kept whirling. “I’m going to get us out. We can out of this, Gatz!”

“It’s okay to let go,” Gatz tried to assure.

“Shut up, Gatz!” Ace yelled again, sweat dripping from his young and panicked face. “Just because you want to die doesn’t mean I do! We’re getting out alive!” The 283 Galactic kept spinning at full-speed.

Ace kept shouting orders, but the alarms drowned his panic. But at that moment, Gatz unbuckled himself from his seat, and swung across the ship slamming into Ace. They crashed into the ship’s side.

“Death is inevitable!” Gatz snarled with white hair out of place. “And I am stating facts when I say there is no way out!”

Ace pushed away and tried to argue, but Gatz interrupted.

“Do you see the ship we’re on?” Gatz said holding on tightly to the ship’s side. Ace looked to the surrounding chaos as he tried getting back to the panel. “This ship is going nowhere but backwards! We don’t have enough fuel to escape AND head back to Mars! There’s no way out, Ace. None.”

Ace held on to the panel. He wanted to fight, but he looked defeated.

“Get control of the ship,” Gatz instructed. “Go on. Straighten it out.”

Ace did just that, as the alarms still rang and the red lights still flashed. Ace looked back up at his mentor, gazing at him as if he were to change his mind. Hoping that they would make it out with another big scheme. Ace waited for instructions.

"Now let go," Gatz calmly said.

Ace looked to the control panel, and back up to Gatz hoping that he had misheard what he said.

"You can't be serious, Old Man," Ace barked with fear. "Are you asking for a suicide?"

Gatz wouldn't comply.

"I don't want to die, Gatz!" Ace's bark suddenly turned into a whimper. "I don't want to die."

"I know," said Gatz. "Neither do I."

By how Gatz said those words, Ace knew that death was inevitable. They were headed towards it. And who knew how long they had. Maybe a few seconds? Maybe a few hours? The realization of death seemed to drown out the ringing alarms, and the red lights seemed to blend with the ship.

"Let go, Ace."

And that is what Ace did. He had known it was a suicide mission, but he never guessed that he would make it this far. He let go. For the sake of himself and for everyone he knew and loved, he let go. And he went back to his seat to hold on to what was coming next.

Gatz floated to a small cupboard in the ship. It was dark brown and was attached to the wall. It was mainly used for junk, but he rummaged through the objects anyway.

What is that old man looking for? Ace thought to himself.

Finally, Gatz retrieved what he had been looking for. It was a small black box with buttons and a gauge on the top, and the speakers on the bottom half. It looked ancient; like an antique measuring tool. Gatz also had a small rectangle that had two small notched holes in the middle.

What on Mars is he going to be measuring? Ace thought bitterly.

Gatz wore an excited smile as he put the small rectangle into the antique. He looked up at Ace, who wore a look of irritated confusion.

"It's an old radio, from the 1970's," Gatz merrily said holding the black box up. "And this," he held up the small rectangle. "It's a tape. You just put this into the radio and that's how people listened to music centuries ago. Pretty cool, huh?" Gatz was smiling as he found his way back to his seat. Ace said nothing. "I wonder if this is what Neil Armstrong had when listening to music. Listen to this!"

Gatz put the tape into the radio and music started to play.

Ground control to Major Tom.

Gatz started to sing along with the music.

"Why are you so happy right now?" asked Ace. "We're about to die and yet you're singing at a time like this?! It doesn't make sense," He was irritated. "My mom was the same way before she passed."

Gatz let the radio float and play, then he looked to Ace.

"It's like what Dumbledore once said. '*Death is but the next great adventure.*' J.K. Rowling wrote that. Did you ever read her books?"

Ace shook his head.

"Well, she was an excellent writer. I think you would have enjoyed her stories-"

"What does this have to do with anything, Gatz?!" Ace snapped. "You're here telling me shit that doesn't make any sense! We're on the verge of death and you're acting like it's a damn joke! Just tell me, why are you acting like this?!" Ace finally went silent. He sat looking out the window to see the stars pass by. The vortex creeping upon them very soon.

"Because death isn't something to fear," Gatz said. "When you think about it, death is simple. It shows up in different ways, but it's always going to be death. Accepting death, however, is a bit more challenging. Some people know that it's time, others don't have time to react, and some people fear death so much that they've already died before death has taken them away. You need to understand that death is simple, and simply inevitable. Why fear it? There's no point. It only gives death the chance to kill you again."

"But what about the unknown?" Ace asked in pain.

"Ace, don't you see?" Gatz smiled. "That's the adventure! We're astronauts; we've been exploring the unknown all of our lives. Death never stopped us before, and neither has the unknown! So what if we don't know what's next? That's what makes it an adventure! And do you know something else, Ace? We've done things that some men have only dreamed about. And now we have an honor of dying in a way no one could ever imagine. From what I know, I'm pretty damn proud of us and everything we've done. We've done Mars proud, we've done MEIGSA proud, and we've done our families proud. We've lived lives that could last for generations to come," Gatz paused again. "And with every death comes new life...that's where the adventure begins."

The astronauts sat quietly for a minute.

For here am I sitting in a tin can. Far above the world.

"What kind of music is this?" Ace asked.

"It's David Bowie." Gatz grinned. "Space Oddity is the song's name. It's a classic."

"It sounds old," Ace chuckled. "Kind of like you, Lionel."

"I'm only 76, you little shit," Gatz chuckled. And Ace smirked in content.

Just like Ace, Gatz hated being called by his first name. *Lionel.*

"What a nice song choice to send us off into our 'next great adventure.'" Ace said. "I know we're astronauts, but who would have thought we'd be doing that in a tin can?"

The men both laughed, then listened to the song a little while longer.

"Have you ever travelled through a black hole?" Gatz asked.

"No Sir," Ace answered.

"Well," Gatz said smiling. "It'll be a first for both of us." Then he saw how much larger the abyss was getting. It was preparing to swallow them whole. "Are you ready?"

"As I'll ever be, sir," Ace looked at Gatz.

"Good answer," Gatz replied.

"What do you think is in there?" Ace asked.

It took Gatz a second to think before he could give an honest reply. "More than we could ever imagine."

"Maybe it's like Wonderland," Ace contently spoke. "My mom loved that story. It was her favorite." He lightly smiled for a moment. "You know, maybe I'll meet her down the rabbit hole..."

"Anything could happen, Ace Cale...we'll find out soon enough."

From there, they looked toward the bottomless abyss that was ready to engulf the 283 Galactic. They zoomed past the stars faster than ever before. They were at the face of death, what more did they have to fear? They had David Bowie serenading them into their next great adventure. They were going, going, going, and then...

Welcome to the black hole.

Ryan Mallek

“Working with Ryan has been a pleasure. Seeing his confidence grow over the course of the semester has been extremely inspiring! His piece, "Rock Bottom," was especially fascinating to work with because of the reflection of the character's inner thoughts in his unique voice and fragmented sentences, poetically incorporated throughout the piece. Ryan continues to amaze me with his ideas he brings to our sessions and I look forward to reading more of his work in the future!” ~ Abby Wallace

Rock Bottom

By: Ryan Mallek

Phone booth. Iraq War. 2005. 5AM

“Hannah’s not here right now.”

“Yes she is there, I call her the same time every evening, this is Ollie! You know the one in Iraq!?”

“.....she doesn’t want to talk to you.”

“Whoa...wow...ummm I gotta go.”

The metallic sound of the old phone as it hung sounded colder than ever before. That was the first time I felt true heartache. In the middle of a worthless war. And just celebrated my nineteenth birthday.

Every day my self-worth has decreased, like a warming glacier. She made me realize that day, with all the killing that had come before, and the killing that was yet to come, it was her, simply not wanting to talk to me, which made me realize this world has nothing to do with me, my wants, or my needs. Life is a hungry unforgiving machine, always marching onward, complete indifference. Fuck your propaganda land of the free home of the brave liberal, republican, black, white, fat, skinny, gay, straight BULLSHIT. Then ten years have passed in what feels like twenty four hours.

The haunting memories always pushed me back to my old medicine. Sitting in my usual place at 7PM. The old broke down whore of a lazy boy with cigarette burns resembling a forgotten STD. The stale whiskey burned pleasantly as I snuffed out the Marlboro red.

The discontent and hate for this world seems to grow stronger every day. Every week there’s a new epidemic ready to wipe out the face of man. Always a new regime ready to prove to the world its nuclear prowess. The pain of feeling bigger than all of this is a consistent throbbing. Not knowing how to change the feeling or make it go away feeds my hate for all things of this reality. Nonsocial networking, people living for themselves. People living at the center of their own universe. Watching people die a slow lonely death that they call life. Like grass before a sickle. Just waiting for the end.

The eyes of others feel heavy as I passed through the old door. The stench of old beer and vomit made the corners of my mouth water. I pass the curious stares as I sit next to Bill at the end of the bar.

"College kids taking over this damn town." Bill said after taking a slow drink from his beer.

"Young and dumb, ignorance is bliss my friend. I'll take a Jameson on the rocks thank you," I said with a smile to the cute bartender.

"Still wasn't that ignorant when I was that age." Bill said looking at the college kids like strange zoo animals.

"Bullshit Bill you were and still are the biggest dumb shit I know!" I said, giving him a friendly nudge.

"Yea whatever still twice the man you are small fry."

"I'll let you think that Mr. Badass, so what's new bud?" I asked staring at the bartender's ass as she gets a drink.

"Oh you know, work, kids, normal bullshit. You?"

"Yea same mostly, minus the kid part," I replied. I glance at Bill and notice he's glued to the TV.

".....ISIS attacks have been confirmed in Washington D.C," the news anchor announced.

"It's almost time bud, the end is closer than we both expected," Bill said looking at me mournfully.

"Good, hopefully the mother fuckers come visit me first," Spineless bastards.

"Don't let all that hate eat you alive Ollie all that stress isn't good for ya," Bill warned.

"Everything I love isn't good for me, I'll take my chances Dr. Phil."

"Cocky turd, I better be getting home before the old lady starts to think I have a drinking problem," Bill said gulping down his Bush Light.

"Yup sounds good bud," giving Bill a quick hand shake.

The crisp cool air stung like winter as I walk outside. Late October in Wisconsin is usually below freezing after the sun drops. I cranked over my old jeep, the worn engine seemingly angry to be awakened from its slumber. As I drove the lonely two lane towards home, Bill's words seemed to eat at me. *What if I am just a crazy, thinking the world is going to end just like every last generation of humans? What makes me think I'm so right?* Driving in silence my mind drifted to Iraq. Remembering the convoy like it was last night.

Sitting behind the 50 cal. driving slowly through dusty Fallujah. Passing the curious stares of civilians surrounded by trash and neglect. Then the car came...that white fuckin car. Coming straight at our convoy I popped a flare to warn them. Still coming I aimed my weapon and fired a warning shot just missing the car. Seeming to speed up my lieutenant screams FIRE! I open up the 50 caliber until the ammo belt disappears. The white car a smoldering mess. The convoy stops to investigate. I walk up to the car and see nothing but meat and blood of children no older than fourteen. One small boy is holding an even smaller girl. The boys head blown off and the girl missing her entire left arm. Why did I have to look....?

My heart broke that day, and it hasn't healed since, nor will it ever. I pulled over, as a gentle tear fell. With my head on the steering wheel a glimmer of light catches my eye. Down at the old Kenowski residence a strange dim light was emitting.

The old farm was abandoned years ago after a tornado took the silo and half the barn. Blessing really, Mr. Kenowski's drunk ass couldn't run a worm farm. Past away from liver cancer about 10 years ago. Nobody's been around there since, and nobody should.

My curiosity, overpowering common sense, forced me to investigate. I killed the lights on the jeep and pulled it into a grove behind some trees about eight hundred yards from the farm. Before I began my slow walk through the damp field, I grabbed my 1911 pistol. Normally I leave it under the seat but with meth-heads in the area I wasn't taking any chances. As I crested a small hill, the old Kenowski farm came into complete view. The farm rested at the bottom of a gentle valley which sloped down gently into a thickening forest. The grass was tall, most of the windows were knocked out of the farmhouse. Flakes of white lead based paint had fallen off surrounding the house, looking like a molting reptile. The barn half gone, twisted, mutilated lumber still looking violent.

Dim yellow light illuminated the back of the boards in a small out-house, sitting by the edge of the forest at the bottom of the valley. Power hasn't run to this farm since the tornado, even the power poles running the length of the driveway had been cut. The light was brighter at the bottom than the top, meaning the outhouse was illuminated from the bottom, odd way to take a shit. Hearing no generator, I clicked the safety off my .45 as my neck hairs came to attention.

With the uncut grass keeping my crouched profile hidden, I methodically picked my way down the gentle slope towards the light. Each step placed perfectly as to not disturb the still silence. My foot froze midstep as my ears perked to the faint sound of whispers. My body sunk down like a groundhog spotting a hawk. Peeking between the blades of grass towards the light source, the whispers grew into low voices. Still too quiet to distinguish words only vowels and S's were heard. My body jolted as a metal door banged against its stop, cutting the light source off instantly. The blackness of the old outhouse blended back into its abandoned settings as if it wasn't there, suddenly I wished I wasn't either.

Who could be staying underneath an outhouse and what would they be doing? Why the hell couldn't I just stay away? Why didn't I just continue home? I pushed the worthless thoughts from my mind and focused as I took a deep breath. Still laying on the ground the cool dew soaked through my faded flannel. I peered over my shoulder towards the top of the hill as my instincts told me to turn around and go home. But my gnawing curiosity forced me to crouch, and continue down the slope towards the black outhouse. I stopped twenty feet from the outhouse, twenty feet is the kill zone for most trip wires or alarms. Each step became a careful brushstroke, as it was intimately placed as silent as possible. Finally reaching the small building, nothing out of the ordinary. My eyes searched the ground for any disturbance or danger. There were no footprints in the grass coming in or out of the missing door. The floorboards looking as if they had not supported weight in years. The toilet seat was metal, stainless steel actually. Rivets were poking through the seat which meant the toilet seat locked from the inside. Someone has tunneled under Mr. Kenowski's old shit house and locked themselves in. Finding out why wasn't even a question.

I carefully pulled on the stainless steel seat to see if it was locked. To my surprise, and somewhat horror the lid quietly began to lift. With the lid fully lifted, a yellowish light registered illumination to the dingy wooden ladder hanging below. Every instinct was ripping at my skin screaming to turn around, yet my head, seemingly more clear than ever, was gently saying "go down, push onward." I said a short inaudible prayer and placed my foot on the first

step. The wood felt sturdy but old, another step and the ladder was supporting my weight, the old rungs creaked in protest.

Reaching the bottom, old dusty dirt greeted my boots. Instantly my eyes registered the footsteps of a recent visitor. They were leading to and from the dim light, meaning the individual came and went to the same place. With the light being so dim, I wished for more, pushing forward seemed the only way. Every sense was in full alert now, Marine Corps training instinctively took over. Each step placed with the precision of a watch maker, checking for trip wires and land mines. After rounding a small bend the light source was visible. The light an old mining lantern hanging next to a door. The door stood out vividly against the dirty aged dirt tunnel surrounding it. Looking brand new with the glossiest black paint my eyes had ever seen. Feeling as if there were a chain pulling me towards the door I began to sprint. I ran like a child hearing his mother's call for cookies. As I was running I began laughing, overfilled with joy.

I reached the door, dust settling from my sudden skidding halt. Having the giggles while winded was not the low key entrance I had planned. But it was uncontrollable, I tried to stop, but I couldn't compose myself. I opened the door, the laughing stopped.

Sitting in the middle of the whitest room I'd ever seen was a small boy. Playing with his toy truck, he didn't notice me. My mind began to race. *What is this boy doing? Why is he here? Where are his parents?* I stepped into the room through the black door. As soon as my foot touched the seamless white tile floor it turned black. Feeling more and more confused I took another step, the black again surrounding my foot. Now standing in a black circle with both feet in the room; the floor did not change around the boy, remaining pure, white as snow. As I stared at the boy an overwhelming sense of familiarity consumed me. As I took two more steps towards the boy I stopped, only fifteen feet separating us. The black still under each foot like a weighted chain.

The boy's toy truck caught my eye, a yellow Tonka truck. I had one just like it as a boy. I took another step as my brain fought to rationalize. My stare never leaving the boy, and the boy never noticing me. My eyes examined the boy, his hair a dark brown cut short. Blue jean overalls seemingly a size to big. A simple grey t-shirt underneath and beat up white Nikes. As I looked at the Tonka truck it dawned on me. The missing wheel of the truck and bent box was a dead giveaway. Fighting back the vomit, I realized it was me! My knees began to shake as they became weak. I managed two more steps before collapsing to the black tile surrounding me. The boy never stopped playing, seemingly as if I wasn't there. As I watched him, the tears began to fall. The boy made engine noises as he zoomed the truck back and forth across the floor. Smiling with content as he played with the old broken toy.

I remember the day my brother broke my truck, Mom had bought us matching pairs. He threw mine off the hill behind our house after he discovered I'd been riding his bike. The fall broke off the driver-side back wheel and bent the box. I was heartbroken, couldn't have been more than seven years old at the time. Mom tried to give me my brother's truck as consolidation, but I stubbornly kept mine.

As the memories flooded back so did the tears. Almost sobbing now, the confusion and emotion was uncontrollable.

"Who are you?" I finally managed to squeak out between gasps of sobs.

"You know that, I'm you silly," the boy said never taking his eyes off his truck.

"How? Why? What are you doing here?" I said sounding more firm than I wanted too.

"You ask too many questions," the boy answered still continuing to play.

"What is this place? How is this possible? Where did you come from!?" I screamed out like a desperate child.

The boy stopped playing and locked eyes with me. He stood and faced me, a blank stare seeming to burn through me. He walked towards me, the crystal white floor never changing, stopping just before we touched. I felt his breath on my face. His white floor pushed into my blackness, I felt a warmth surround me, as if my mother's arms engulfed me.

"Feel that?" The boy asked in a whisper.

"Yes," I managed back as I began to sob as I'd never before.

"That's how I feel all the time, its how you should still feel. You've made yourself sick, by worrying about stuff that we can't control. Find the love of playing with a broken truck, and love will find you."

The boy turned around and went back to playing with his three wheeled Tonka. Making the engine noises like I wasn't there. I looked down, still on my knees, the blackness had turned to grey.

Claire McMannes

“Claire was very fun to work with this semester. She is a creative and thoughtful writer who worked diligently on revisions and overall bettering her writing. She has put forth a lot of work in creating interesting and creative pieces this semester.” ~ Kevin Mohawk

Unorthodox Rhyme

By: Claire McMannes

I try to make a rhyme that will stick in your mind,
Show you I have the time to match up every line
Like it's the kind with a stanza of sorts
Where the poetry of originality is in support

But I really don't care,
Just to let you know if you were unaware
It takes away the creativity and makes you feel conflicted
Like everything you say is predictive

Like rhyming constricted
And then restrictive –
Even though I said another version of it before
But hey – rhyming can be a pain-in-the-ass chore

Even though you try to continue the flow of the end rhyme
But in all honesty who actually has the patience and the time?
Despite that you try to change that line-
The one you visited over eight times to create something new

And the circles you go just to get that continuous flow
So the people reading will soon know it by heart
But then you start to question that lyric and give it up
Stuff like that makes you worry that your story will turn out wrong
Like with that one line that doesn't belong but rhymes
Damn that gets old
It seems to go untold we find the loopholes
Just so we can avoid being toyed out of the creative spectrum
But you have to welcome the change
Just rearrange the lines in a choppy set that goes with a flow
Just like this one
Said and done
Short and fun
Now we go a little bit awkward and longer
Looking for a stronger and constructive rhymes and make it seem more productive than short so that-wait-
Guess that line was too long
Oh well that story is over and done
But you still need one that supports you conclusion
And gives the illusion it has a deductive ending for you to solve
One that can give you a feeling of resolve and falls into a category
Horror, fiction, nonfiction – just to name a three
But this doesn't really seem to fit in like any of these
But you have to have the kind that will be sending different thoughts and ideas
Gives you some sort of imagery and create a picture in your head
How about you just go paint your own picture instead?
I hope I haven't lead you to believe I don't care

I do!

I just choose to be more straightforward

And ignore the repetitive words

And not make it into something you already heard

Then I'll throw in a word or two that are unordinary

The kind that makes you want to pick up a dictionary so maybe you can find some sort of clarity

But to be fair you said make it more interesting

And that requires thinking with the clique 'outside the box'

So I think I knocked some sense into you

Showed you what I *prefer* to do

With this unorthodox rhyme scheme that has none at all

Emily Ninneman

“As an English major with a teaching intent, Emily aspires to use her knowledge and gift, so to speak, of the English language to teach others. Her eagerness to learn was demonstrated throughout the semester by our discussions of her writing. Her writing never ceased to amaze me, as she has a way of connecting the audience to the words and storyline: truly making you feel like the writing is about you. This piece, in particular, demonstrates her artistic writing style and curious mind.” ~ Katelyn McEachen

Her Curiosity

By: Emily Ninneman

Take me to a place of wonder. To a place of gold, a place of magic. Take me to a land where hurt doesn't exist, somewhere new and somewhere grand. Take me somewhere that doesn't define beauty by the books, somewhere that nature matters. Take me to an escape, a place of freedom and adventure. Take me some place my eyes have never seen, my ears never heard of, my mind never thought of dreaming.

Let this music I hear in my head drift me away on cloud nine. Let it take my feet and let them dance. Let them get carried away in a silly fashion, let them make their own rhythm and find their own muse. They want a place of creativity, of poise, of cold floors and history of great dancers past. Let them leave, let them come and go as they please. Let them show you the way, *their* way, and join in their adventure.

All I want is a wish, one that will actually come true. Bless me with a genie, a fairy godmother, a single star in the midnight sky. Something, anything, to pour all my hope into, someone to speak my deepest desires to. How this mind wishes to live a life full of big dreams and happiness and lust, to chase my aspirations higher than high. I need to make others see the beauty that lies within to make myself feel the slightest bit complete.

This mind can dream of dreams that you yourself could never stir up in a night's restless sleep. Do I dare give out those dreams? Do I dare release what swirls around in my mind, do I dare give any part of myself to anyone other than my own conscience? Oh, how we dare. How we dare to have these dreams, how we dare to have a brewing desire pestering our minds at every second. How we dare to be different, how we dare to go our own way. How we dare follow the crowd when the going gets tough. How we dare speak our minds and steer ourselves away from the ideas of others around us. How we dare wish for things so out of our reach. Oh, how we dare.

Must I listen to everything they tell me to hear? Must I believe in every syllable, every letter in every spoken word to the drums of my ears? Must I indulge in the literature I read, in the lectures I attend and the notes my purple ink pen scroll, only to forget it all later? If only there was this place, a beautiful place. A place none other than my own, a place where being my own kind of human is okay. A place where beauty can be seen and not hidden, a place where magic happens on every corner. Must I wish? Must I dream? Perhaps. Perhaps this is what we were meant to do. Perhaps we are always supposed to take what we see in our minds and feel in our bones and inscribe them in a different form, and for what reason? Or is there any reason at all?

Does this reality even exist or is it just a fragment of this wild imagination? Is it an affiliation to some emotion I have unwillingly felt in my days past? Some of these darkest hours still haunt my mind, never to be erased from paper and permanent ink. We all have them, those memories that co-exist amongst many other thoughts in our minds, ones that do not go away yet make it known of their presence at the most unwanted of times. And of those thoughts, which hard and precedent ones are actually meant to worry us, if any at all? Why must we carry these with us, bare skeletons of our past? How is it that they cannot be forgotten so easily? No pitiful box of matches could ever burn such regrettable times to ash, and yet I deal with them. I must deal with these ghosts that can never be taken back and traded in for something much more grand, perhaps as stunning as a ruby or a rare find of a man. Nothing in the world replaces these thoughts.

But is this the place? Is this the place where that magic is supposed to happen? Is there magic left sitting within that rotting, unforgiving mind? Is there ever a way to escape such a place of darkness? That's just the hidden beauty of all these things. You can't see it. You can't touch it. But you can feel it.

Feeling. What evokes such feeling? What eases us into such wonder, such amazement of all these marvels around us? How? Just how does a single soul like mine search for such answers that may not even exist in this chaos? How? I can only wish for things I know do not exist and things I can only get close to in my dreams. But I do not wish to worry, to concern these hands of how they will ever clasp around such mindless games I tend to create. To believe, to *understand* that there does not have to be a rhyme and a reason to every dream in every mind in this world. I wish to one day be okay with the things I cannot control. All I really want is to be of great importance to someone that doesn't understand these aspects of life either and to find that place full of happiness and wanderlust. I must learn to hope and to aspire for things far out of my own reach and to do so to my heart's content.

Is this what it would feel like to find your magic? If it's as real as I think it is, God, it's beautiful. The magic that lies within all of us can only be brought out by certain emotions. Why can't I feel them? I know that this magic must exist somehow; how could I have made it this far without it? How does a soul like mine come this far in such a state of numbness? Something inside of me has it all figured out, but whatever it is, it does not choose to share it with the rest. This mind has done so much worrying, so much ruthless thinking in its day and the thoughts that come out of it tend to wander too far. How does one find this magic? How can you dig through this mess of a mind and expect to find gold? With tear glittering eyes, I have still seen it all. With silenced ears, I have still heard it all. Unwillingly, I have still felt it all. Maybe the magic in it is just the experience. I have been brought here for a reason and given a purpose. But that purpose in life does not outline who we must become and how we must work to be this fictional character, but rather that we are meant to continue about this on-going search for the magic that lies within us all.

And how have all these answers gone undiscovered for so long? Is it only minds like my own that ever wonder such ideas? Perhaps that's what beauty is, is being able to wonder without reason and think such daring thoughts. It's allowing your mind to wander free, to chase after answers that you know you'll never find. It's believing in your own conclusions when all other hope has been lost. It's picking yourself up and giving yourself a reason for even being on on these grounds in the first place.

It's quite the phenomenon allowing your mind to become a free bird. When the cage is left unlocked and the door to imagination is left wide open, it's amazing how quick these thoughts can multiply. This mind never ceases to leave a single question left behind. The answers may be lost, but hell, so am I. This can't be all I owe this life. A trapped mind and a soul full of unanswered questions cannot be all that I am worth. There must be someone out there that gives a damn.

But it's curious nights like this for my always curious mind, and how I really shouldn't be left alone with all these thoughts in my lonely head. Darkness never truly hits until its weight is spread across your body, overtaking every crevice that lies deep within your skin. One wouldn't dare to scrape the surfaces of such a perfectly imperfect monster I have become. What God has created is filled with a brain full of self-destruction and the ability to let that brain run so wildly that no hunter could ever catch the beast it is. And what an utter disappointment I have turned out to be. It's rather beautiful, really, how one could ever find my mistakes so genuinely precious and wish to hold them forever. The bonds that hold my string of thoughts together so late at night are too lovely to be broken, so don't even try. I cannot be kept from all my beautiful curiosity.

Felycia Noblet

“Felycia has been an absolute pleasure to work with. This wasn’t Felycia’s first semester in a ’57 class, but it was my first semester as a tutor. Felycia lent a hand in putting my nerves to rest however, and was a great *help* to me in showing me how to best *help* her. As our sessions progressed, so did our collaborative discussions. It was a wonderful feeling whenever she worked through a difficult idea aloud with me and then successfully incorporated that idea into her story by our next session. The story that Felycia has been diligently working on this semester is a fantasy tale touching on childhood struggle, friendship, and the bond between siblings. The story begins with a depiction of a child’s personal experience with suffering. It then seamlessly moves the reader into a magical land that acts as a safe haven to the children while also being a world of wonderment and adventure for them. I sincerely hope that Felycia will continue to work on this delightful story as well as other writing endeavors.” ~ Alli Walker

Through the Willow

By: Felycia Noblet

She pressed her hands tightly to her ears, but even that didn’t help. The yelling coming from upstairs was too loud, like always. She just wanted to go back to sleep. Suddenly something made of glass smashed against a wall, making her jump in her bed. She balled up a handful of blanket in her fists, and pulled it closer to her chest. A whiskey bottle she assumed. The screaming got louder still. She hated when they did this. It happened every time her father would drink. Once he was drunk anything could set off his temper. How many times had she woken up to her father screaming, her mother pleading for him to stop, and objects being thrown at the walls? She didn’t know. She had lost track a long time ago. She tried to tune out the noise, but couldn’t. Something else slam against the wall, metallic this time, maybe a pan? She grabbed her pillow and placed it over her head and pressed it down against her ears. She willed them to stop, but knew it wouldn’t work, it never did. With the pillow pressed down against her ears the yelling was now muffled, but there was no way she was going to be able to sleep like this. She sighed, giving up, and pulled the pillow off her head as she sat up. Obviously sleep wasn’t going to happen any time soon.

She looked around her dark room. It was small, but she didn’t mind, she didn’t need anything big. There were a few toys still lying across the floor, and a small TV that was tucked away in the corner. But mostly there were books. They were piled on the top shelf in her closet, and a few on her bedside table. She reached over to the other side of her bed, and grabbed the book she was reading earlier (there was usually at least one, or two books in her bed at all times). Her teachers loved that she read so much. She had the highest reading level in the fourth grade, but she didn’t care about that. For Ashton, books were her safe place. It allowed her to leave reality, if only just for a little while, where she could be in another world; going on adventures, fighting dragons, and using magic. Once she started reading the screaming always died down until she could barely hear them anymore. She sat up tucking her blonde hair behind her ears, and opened her book. As she was about to turn on her bed side lamp when a warm breeze came in through the open window and with it came a soft voice.

“Ashton...”

She jumped. Someone had said her name. But it couldn’t have been her mom and dad they were still fighting upstairs.

“Ashton...”

It came again. She got up and looked out her window. It was so dark in the thick forest that surrounded her house that she couldn't tell where the voice was coming from. Then from the shadows, a little light appeared, then another, and another. Fireflies, hundreds of them. They were floating out of the forest towards Ashton. One by one they came in through the window, and began to circle the ceiling, lighting up the glow in the dark stars that were glued there.

Ashton stood back in astonishment, watching the fireflies dance around her room. She had never seen fireflies act in such a way before. Her blue eyes glistened as she watched the tiny lights twirl around the room. Suddenly they stopped circling the ceiling. They stayed suspended, motionless in the air for a moment. They shined so brightly in the darkness that surrounded the rest of the room. Motionless, the fireflies seemed to shine like a hundred tiny stars. Ashton held her breath afraid that any sort of movement would break the spell of the beautiful scene taking place. One by one the fireflies began to drift down from the ceiling, falling in slow motion toward the floor. Just before they landed they began to move once more. They started flying swiftly towards her. For a second the girl was startled, and let out a small gasp as the fireflies started circling her feet. She stared in amazement as the fireflies started rising up towards her head, until she was completely surrounded by swirling lightning bugs. She looked as if she was caught in a small slow moving tornado completely made of light. Ashton began to giggle as the lightning bugs continued to circle her. They were flying so closely that she could feel their wings softly graze her cheeks. The movement of the fireflies was causing a soft breeze around the girl, and as they flew past her ears she could have sworn that she could hear the same voice she heard outside her window.

It whispered softly in her ear, “Ashton...come, with us...we will show you the way...”

Ashton gasped, for she had never heard fireflies speak before.

“Come with you where?” She asked.

“Come...and we will show you...” They whispered.

The fireflies above Ashton's head began to float away from her, towards the window on the other side of the room. The rest of the fireflies followed their lead. Ashton ran to the window, not wanting them to leave, when a breeze drifted over to her.

“Come with us...” it said.

With the fireflies gone, she could once again hear her parents fighting upstairs. She hadn't even realized that the noise had stopped. It was almost as if time had ceased to exist while the fireflies were in her room without Ashton even knowing it. She looked back out the window, watching the last of the fireflies disappear into the woods. She had never been in the forest at night before, what would happen if she went with them? What if she got lost, or some wild animal found her? A loud bang came from upstairs. What would happen if she stayed?

“Where ever these fireflies want to bring me, it has to be better than here.” She whispered to herself.

Fear tugged at her stomach, what if she was wrong? She took a deep breath. *I have to try*, she thought. Taking one last look around her room, grabbed her sneakers, and began to climb out of the window. She quickly pulled on her shoes and without another thought, ran after the fireflies. She darted past the first few trees, and into the dark of the forest. She caught up to them very quickly, and was now walking slowly through the woods with the fireflies leading the way.

Ashton has walked through these woods many times over the years, but always during the day and never too far from home. She never before dared to go into the woods at night. During the night she would look out at the woods only from the safety of her window. It was so dark in there that the only thing she could see would be the trees that lined the outside of the woods. Everything else beyond that point was pitch black. To Ashton's surprise she could actually see quite well in the dark, thanks to the fireflies. There were many that flew low to the ground, lighting up the trail in front of her, and the rest were spread out all around Ashton to help her see the surrounding area. It was like walking around with a nightlight. She was shocked to discover that the forest wasn't very scary at all. It was just like how it normally was when Ashton would run through the trees during the daytime, only a little darker. How silly she felt for being so afraid.

Ashton continued to follow the fireflies deeper into the forest. After a while of walking she realized that it was the farthest that she had ever journeyed into the forest alone.

"Where are we going?" She asked hesitantly.

She was not used to having conversations with bugs. She waited, but there was no reply.

After what felt like an hour they arrived in a small clearing. There were hundreds of flowers that surrounded every inch of the ground. There were so many different colors, and all of them looked so beautiful dancing in the soft breeze under the moonlight. But perhaps the prettiest thing of all was the willow tree that stood tall in the middle of the flowers. The low hanging branches were gently swaying in the wind. Through the gaps in the leaves Ashton could just make out what seemed to be the outline of a very big knot going up the trunk of the tree. Suddenly the fireflies drifted away from her, and started swirling up the trunk of the tree, until they were completely hidden behind the leaves. At once the fireflies burst out from the top of the willow in all directions, looking like one big firework. Ashton was in awe. She realized that this must be the place that the fireflies wanted to bring her to. She was about to bend down to pick some of the flowers when she noticed the fireflies drifting towards the trunk of the willow.

That's when the strangest thing happened. Right before her eyes the fireflies began to disappear one by one. Her mouth fell open. This couldn't be right. She ran to the trunk of the tree where the big knot was, to have a better look. And sure enough one by one the fireflies were flying straight into the center of the knot, and disappearing. It was like magic. In an instant the fireflies were here, and then they were just...gone.

"No way..." Ashton whispered in astonishment.

There were only a few fireflies left in the clearing with Ashton. A soft breeze rustled the leaves, and she once again heard the sweet voices of the fireflies. "Come with us Ashton...this is the way."

The last of the fireflies disappeared into the knot, leaving her all alone in the clearing. She stared at the willow tree wondering what to do next. *Could it really be that easy?* She wondered. She reached out her hand until it was almost touching the trunk. Then she softly placed her fingertips against the center of the knot. But to Ashton's surprise she did not feel the rough texture of the bark. Instead she felt nothing but a warm sensation in her hand. She quickly pulled her hand away from the tree. She stepped back and took a look around until her eyes fell on the edge of the woods that led back to her home. What if she went with them, but could never come back? Did she ever want to come back?

She thought of her mother and the new bruises that would form on her skin by morning. She thought of the way her mother's eyes would be glazed over after she took her pills, and the way she would look right through Ashton. She

thought of her father, and the way he frightened her. She thought about the way her heart hammered in her chest when he would first walk into the house smelling of alcohol. She remembered the way it felt to wake up to the sound of both of them fighting, like tonight. Tears filled her eyes. Her hands shook at her sides, and she balled them into fists to keep them still.

“Never again.” She whispered, her voice quivering.

Taking a deep breath Ashton turned to the tree and stepped through the knot in the willow.

Javon Scott

“This is the first time Javon has been enrolled in the English '57 series. Throughout the semester, we have worked on both poetry and short, fictional stories. Javon always brought unique, yet relatable ideas to each writing session, so it was easy strike up conversation about his writing. He has written poetry about his baby sister, the season of winter, and he wrote a multi-chapter, fictional story about the life of a teenage vampire that you will get to experience in this book. A majority of our writing lab sessions have focused on working on this story. In our sessions, Javon brought creative plot ideas to each chapter of his story, but, together, we focused on adding more details and dialogue in order to expand his character development and make his story clear to his readers. I have seen tremendous growth in Javon’s story and his overall writing style. I am excited to have been his teaching assistant and I have enjoyed seeing the progress that Javon has made on this story throughout the semester. Although his story is fictional, I believe that many will instantly connect to his story and will find themselves wanting to read more of Javon’s writing.” ~ Serena Holdosh

The Life of a Teenage Vampire

By: Javon Scott

Being a teenage vampire is not so bad. Vampires are blessed with unnatural strength and speed. We have heightened senses in all areas and something about us draws the prey closer.

And that is not even the best part.

Immortality is something that all inferior creatures loath to have. To walk the earth and do what you want, without any limitations of time being a burden. This concept is something that we vampires are blessed with.

Sincerely, your father.

Chapter 1

This is the letter I awoken to, eyes hazy, head throbbing, and neck covered with a bruise; trying to muster up the strength, in order to remember what happened last night.

This must be some joke; what does these symbols even mean?

I came up with no results, so I retrieved my unharmed glasses and realized.

My name is Vladimir Ryder. I am only 16 years old, and this is how my Monday started at 7:00 AM, and math started in 10 minutes.

I'm screwed.

Hawthorne High, like many high schools located in a small town, they tend to feel crowded and everybody knows each other; making it hard for any student to get away with being disobedient.

Cutting through the cafeteria, I'm greeted by the last person I wanted to see.

How would you feel, if not only the lunch lady, but the "custodial worker" knew your mom?

But trust me; it gets no worse than that "custodial worker", being your stepdad. Having to deal with the jokes from your peers, who believe you will amount to the same level.

"Good morning Vladimir, I didn't see you get up this morning" said my step- dad.

"I hope you didn't sneak out again, me and your moth----"

Before he could finish, I walked right past him and the multiple eyes that glared in my direction.

Heading into my English class (one of my strongest subjects), I sat directly in the back left corner of class like I usually do.

I'm that weird kid who never talks to anyone and seems uninterested in life. I have pale skin and green eyes (The only attractive feature I possess).

Students of Hawthorne High seem to stay away from me----

Well except for----- "Hey Vlad."

My best friend Alex Stucky is the only person in the world who understands me or even tries to.

"So tell me what happened last night Alex?"

"I know I was supposed to meet you in the woods last night, but I ended up getting caught by my sister, who I was unsuccessful in bribing, to let me go," Alex replied."

"Long story short, I'm grounded for a week."

I told him about me not being able to remember anything and awaking in the woods this morning.

“Crazy story bro, you may have just fainted like usual.”

Maybe he was right, I do faint often. That is the most logical possibility.

“GOOD MORNING CLASS”.

Mr. Chad walked into the classroom with his old burgundy brief case, boring gray suite, and plain black tie.

“Students please take out your English assignment from the other day.”

Crap!!

I totally forgot to do this assignment. I watched in misery as the students passed their work up front, as I had nothing to offer.

“Vladimir, where is your assignment?”

I stared blankly in his direction, giving no response, feeling like I let him down.

“Very well Vladimir, I’ll be sending your mother an email and phone call about this.”

He returned to his desk and started his lecture, while I slammed my head into the desk, in misery.

The bell rang at 3:00 PM, announcing to the students who no longer wanted to be confined in hell, to leave.

I closed my locker and departed through the front doors of Hawthorne High with Alex by my side. The sun hit my pale skin, giving me a tingly/ irritating sensation I never felt before.

Alex and I went our separate ways, four blocks ago. I make it home before my mother and the person she happens to be stuck with. As I was placing the key into the door, I heard laughter.

Turning around quickly, seeing the huge figure and his henchman behind me.

“Hey Vladyy, how was your day today?”

Kyle, he was the bully of the school, as well as the only child who seems to get away with whatever he wants; maybe because his dad happened to be the Sherriff of Hawthorne.

“What do you want Kyle?”

“I just came to get that necklace that you always seem to wear.”

He meant the necklace that is shaped weird, and can’t be found on the internet; the only item that his father, who he never met, seemed to also leave behind.

“Not a chance Kyle, leave me alone!”

I turned back to my door to prepare myself for my mother's coming. I heard giant footsteps rushing in my direction, then huge hands pulling me down the steps, while giant shoes smash my body, and a pair of hands reaching for the necklace that I held on tight too.

I smelled something strong....

Blood.

Chapter 2

They continued to bash me with their shoes, showing no signs of relent. My mind went blank and I felt a strong sensation to live....no to prevail.

My body shot up fast, with inhumanly like speed. I pushed Kyle's henchman away with such a strong force, that they flew 4 feet away from where they stood; one of them hitting the pavement hard and the other crashing into my neighbors' garbage can.

I was in a trance like state, with all my urges pushing me toward Kyle, who trembles on the ground before me, unable to move or speak. I stop while he continues to point and say.....

"What are you?"

I smelled a strong stench that came from Kyle.

Walking away with a smile, I knew my life long bully...peed his pants.

I gleamed into my bathroom mirror, poking at the elongated canines protruding from my mouth.

"This can't be real," I said aloud.

I rushed into my room to retrieve the letter I found this morning; rereading it, hoping to find something more than what I believed at first to be a joke.

Throwing the letter down, I ran back into the bathroom and stared at my fangs.

"Mom comes home in 15 minutes. I have to get rid of these before she comes back, wouldn't want her to have a heart attack."

Pushing his hands against his teeth, he tried to force them back in. It wouldn't budge.

He calmed down, breathed slowly, and when opening his eyes, his fangs had disappeared to normal length.

"Vladimir!" his mom screamed from down stairs.

Walking to the source of the yelling Vlad sees his mom, a short lady with long hair and beautiful blue eyes. Her size seemed to always give others the impression of taking her lightly, but Vlad knew better than that.

"Why did I get a phone call at my job today Vlad?" she said in a sarcastic manner.

Before I could say a word, she sent me upstairs and restricted me from hanging out with Alex after school.

I stared in the mirror for 2 hours, running my hands through my mouth. My stomach ached for mom's spaghetti dinner, which I was unable to partake in.

I awoke in the middle of the night; the pain in my belly had gotten worse. I sneak down stairs, trying not to make a sound, in order to alarm my mom and step-dad from their beds.

I open the fridge, to find no leftovers.

"Great, I whispered "

I opened the freezer next, not surprised to find nothing this time around.

I smelled a sweet aroma in the air. Looking out the window, I noticed a jogger running past the house.

I don't know why, but I followed her as she crossed the street, lurking in the shadows.

I was unable to control the stalking I currently was in; all my mind could focus on was the sweet aroma coming off of her.

She stopped running and reached for her water bottle, before she could take the bottle off of her lips; my teeth sank into her smooth skin, which produced the substance I truly craved all night.

She tried to scream, but my hands were already covering her mouth.

I wanted to stop what I was doing, but couldn't manage to pull myself away from the delicious aroma I was receiving.

After I had finished, her body laid on the ground, as I now trembled.

"What have I done, I rambled on."

I see someone's porch light turn on, as if it was pure instinct. I vanish into the night heading back home.

Chapter 3

"Vladimir," I laid in my bed looking at my alarm clock that read 11:00am.

Luckily, it was a Saturday morning and I did not have to go to school. My mother called my name once more, to remind me of my punishment. My mother knew the best way for me to suffer while on punishment---- spending time with the man she says she loves.

I was required to help him fix the roof of the house as well as clean the gutters, which were plugged up with leaves from the huge tree that sits in our yard.

"Vlad, let's get to it," said Nickolas (stepfather).

I looked at him in a manner, to give him the impression that I loathed the fact that we had to spend time together.

Why do I hate him so much?

The reasons were simple; he came into my mother's life three years ago, and got married after two of those years. I know that she truly doesn't love him, and only married him because of the loneliness she has endured, since the departure of my biological father.

"Hand me the drill in my toolbox Vlad." Having to comply, I did so, and as I was handing him the drill, my body fell sideways. I was tumbling down towards the ground; a strong grip had hold of my arm.

"How did you get over here so fast?" I said in a frightening tone.

He pulled me up, effortlessly.

"Are you ok Vlad?" He said, avoiding the question I previously had asked him before.

"Let's stop for today," he said as he climbed off of the roof.

Four days after the incident of my near- death experience, I started to get that unbearable craving that I got on the night of my punishment. Fortunately, I didn't kill her because she made a report of being attacked, but not remembering what had happened to her.

That must be the side effects of getting drained or fed on. That also must be the reason why I couldn't remember what happened to me, on the night when all these weird stuff started to happen.

Even with knowing this aspect about my abilities, the fact still remained.....I needed to feed.

This time I planned on breaking into the hospital of Hawthorne, which is also my mother's job, in order to get blood bags.

I waited until 3:00am, making sure everyone in the house was asleep; I snuck out of the back door, wearing black pants and a hoodie. I made sure to avoid the houses that hinted that the residents were still up, and finally reached my destination.

I wandered through the empty and mid- lit halls, searching for the room where they stored the blood bags. I knew my way around the hospital, because my mother usually brought me along with her when I was younger.

Reaching the room where they keep the blood stored, I sensed a strange presence inside.

I opened the door, to find a tall figure that came for the same reason as me. His teeth were sunk into the blood bag as if he did not receive this wonderful and required substance in a while.

"Who are you?" he noticed my presence as he turned around with fresh blood dripping from his elongated fangs.

My fangs rushed out of my mouth, uncontrollably as the blood dripping from his teeth hit the floor.

The stranger must have taken that as a sign of aggression.....because he charged at me with inhumanly speed.

Chapter 4

He rushed me with unimaginable speed and force, knocking me into the wall. I felt a sting of pain in my back. The tall vampire held me in the air before I even realized it, staring at me inquisitively.

"What clan do you belong to?" asked the man who held his hand tight onto my neck.

"I don't know what you're talking about," gasping for air.

"So you're a Caitiff, a vampire with no clan."

"So it doesn't matter if I take your life then," he said with his fangs now white because he just licked off the remaining blood.

When he said this, he threw me across the room and next to the door where I had previously entered. I got up fast, ran out the door and down the hall. I turned my head back to see if I was being followed, and I was not. I was running faster than a normal person was capable of. I knew this because I was already out of the building and heading down an alley.

A familiar force hit me again, knocking me into the side of the dumpster, sending a sharp pain into my shoulder.

"You thought you could escape me with that speed fledgling?" he said teasingly.

The fear of death raced through my mind, I would no longer get to see my mother again, nor even try to look for the man who abandoned me.

I felt my fangs protrude longer than before and a rush of anger towards the man who was trying to take my life away.

I charged at him with even faster speed, to demonstrate my capabilities to the monster that mocked me. I ran into his body full force, knocking him to the ground and punching him. My fist felt heavy as they bashed his face, but must have not been as effective as I perceived them to be. He threw me off of him with ease and got on top of me, returning much more pain to my face.

He then placed both of his hands on my neck and squeezed tighter, making it clear that he wanted to crush my windpipe and extinguish my youthful life. I felt my life fading away as I drew my last breath.....

The man, who was seconds away from ending my life, flew off of me and seconds later I heard a snapping noise that the neck makes in vampire movies. I knew the man trying to kill me, could not anymore.

I could barely make out the figure that was approaching my nearly dead corpse, as things began to blur, and then it was all clear.

The stranger who saved my life was no other than my stepdad.

I awoke in a dark room with very dim lights that gave the room an ugly yellow color. I continued to look around and noticed strange symbols that were similar to the note I received in the woods. I got out of the bed and walked closer to the wall, placing my hand on the symbols Nickolas.

"It means Nickolas," turning around quickly, I seen the man who I thought I knew...or didn't try to get to know.

"It is Vampyr, a language only known to our kind," said Nick.

"We use these symbols to mark our territory, homes and property and only we can see it."

I turned around and yelled "Did you do this to me?"

Before he could respond I rushed towards him, with the intent to place my fist into his face. Before I realized it, I was on the ground, one hand on my neck and the other covering my mouth.

"Listen Vlad, I didn't turn you."

I heard Nick's voice in my mind, but his lips were not moving.

"How are you doing this?" I was unable to speak because his hands still covered my mouth.

He uncovered my mouth and said "Telepathy," placing a finger on his forehead.

"It's an ability we all share, and I will teach you if you would like?"

"Now for who turned you, I have no clue."

"We leave our names on your neck, showing what family or house you belong too." He continued to say, "This ensures safety from other vampires who may try to take a fledglings life and lets this vampire know what clan they are messing with."

"Well no wonder that monster asked me who I belong to, before trying to kill me!" I stated.

"Vampires who belong to no clan usually are attacked because there aren't any repercussions," said Nick with a worried face.

Chapter 5

Nick's facial expression showed a sense of worry and concern for my well-being.

A loud noise that sounded like a baby lion's growl filled the room.

"Well it looks like someone's hungry," said Nick who's entire face changed from being worrisome, to delight.

"I don't want to kill anyone," I said in a panicky tone.

"You won't have to if you do it right Vladimir."

I felt some relief lifted off of my mind because I didn't want to kill anyone, but I knew that I couldn't cease this craving I desired to survive.

"Where are we anyways?"

Nick responded by saying, "We're in the basement of a building that every student in Hawthorne loves."

Hawthorne High, I thought to myself and realized why Nick probably chose the career of a custodial worker. This job allows him to stay out, late at night, where he can feed with minimal chances of getting caught.

“Very good Vlad,” Nick was in my mind again.

“You really got to teach me how to do that,” I said.

“Sure, but not on an empty stomach,” He grabbed his black trench coat and threw my black hoodie towards my direction and we were headed out the door.

Nick and I went to the park downtown; it was chilly and dark outside. I checked my watch, which read 11:30pm. Nick must have read my mind again, and sensed the worry I had of being out past my curfew.

“Don’t worry Vlad, I told your mother that you were helping me out back at the school to fulfill your quota for your punishment.”

I didn’t like how Nick was able to enter my mind so easily, and it gave me an awareness to keep my guard up to avoid him from exploiting me. I checked his face to see if he was, in fact reading my mind as I contemplated this problem.

There was a male jogger approaching 20 ft. away from the position Nick and I chose behind the trees. The man was very built and looked as if he worked out every day. I smelled the sweet aroma coming from his body, though it did not smell as good as the woman who I had fed on a couple of days ago.

“Listen Vlad, feel the rush your body is giving you to attack, control that feeling, and run as fast as you can towards him and aim for his neck.”

I didn’t want to hurt the stranger who decided to go jogging late at night. But I knew that I had to cease this curse given to me.....my hunger.

“Vlad, be sure to get completely behind him before he notices you.”

Nick’s voice started to disappear from my mind as I heard the man’s heartbeat edging closer to us. My eyes were closed as I tried to focus on the timing of my attack. My fangs exposed themselves from my mouth as I opened my eyes, then I attacked.

I ran so fast toward the man, that he didn’t notice my presence as I knocked him down to the ground with such a force that a 16 year old boy should not possess. The man was dazed as he tried to get up, but it was already too late as my fangs sunk into his neck, as blood began to pour into my mouth. This must be the feeling bees and butterflies get when collecting nectar from a flower, I thought while I continued to drink. Blood flowing much faster into my mouth and out of the man’s body, I wanted to stop but couldn’t budge my mouth off of my prey’s neck.

Then a hand was placed on my shoulder and a familiar voice in my mind began to say, “You’re going to kill him if you don’t stop.”

“Do you want to be a killer Vlad?”

This question raced through my mind, and I managed to control this uncontrollable urge..... my instinct to kill.

Chapter 6

I pulled my sharp fangs out of the man's neck, whose body slumped to the ground. I stood over him, wondering what I had transformed into.

"Vlad lets go." Nick said without using telepathy.

I looked into Nick's brown eyes, and felt my mind slip into his. I saw images of my mother and Nick at the grocery store, where they had their first encounter of each other. I pushed further into his mind, placing me into a room at a long mahogany table where 10 men (including Nick) and 2 women sat. One of the men wore a black biker jacket and seemed to resemble my facial appearance.

I felt a strong push, not physical, but a mental one coming from Nick who was kicking me out of his head.

"What do you think you are doing Vladimir?"

Nick's face seemed to light up red and a temper that I never seen from him before, started to emerge.

"I was just testing it out." I said in a confident tone, revealing to Nick, that he is also vulnerable.

"Now Nick, tell me the truth, do you know my father?"

A smile appeared on Nick's face who then said in a surprised remark, "so you were able to go back that far."

"First things first Vlad, we have to get out of here, and then I will tell you what you want to know."

We returned back home where my mother was sound asleep in here room. Sitting at the table Nick looked into my eyes and told me to open my mind so that he could show me the information I desired.

Nick noticed my hesitation and reluctance to do this and said, "I promise not to read your mind in the process."

I shook my head to his agreement and calmed my mind; the sensation of him entering my mind was different from before, this time I was aware of his presence. He took me back into the room from before. The people at the table were all vampires and they were arguing over a matter of banishment.

The room was very large and resembled a board meeting room one would see on television. Everyone sitting at the table was well dressed in suites and ties, and the women wore black skirts and blouses. In the room together, they gave off a very intimidating feeling as if one would be killed if they spoke out of turn.

My father seemed to give off a calm demeanor and placed both hands on the table with the facial expression of not seeming to be interested in the matter they were discussing.

One of the men who seemed to be in his mid-60's sat at the far end of the table, and had two guards behind him.

"This is a Camarilla (a group of vampire leaders in a particular area) and the old man is the elder or head leader amongst us," Nick's voice whispered into my mind.

The elder man looked into Nick's direction and said, "Are the claims that you plan to marry a human true?"

There was a long silence in the room but was broken when Nick responded, "yes these claims are true."

All eyes looked upon Nick with disgust and hate, especially one, the man who resembled Vlad.

“That is your father Vlad, we were great friends until a year ago.”

“I guess me planning on marrying the woman he got pregnant while he was human didn’t sit well.”

“The Camarilla banished me out of the organization, making me a Caitiff (clan less).”

Nick released his mental connection as he held his head down towards the table.

“Your father chose to leave your mother and you after he got changed.”

“He chose to obey the rules that the Camarilla created, while I chose to defy them for love.”

Nick’s tears poured, as he continued to hold his head down towards the table.

I finally got the answer I’ve been searching for, since I was five. My father didn’t love me or my mother enough to disobey a stupid group of vampires.

I truly don’t have a father who cares for me and wants to be with me. My heart started to throb as I placed my hand on my chest. I now wished, I didn’t know the truth about my father.

Even Nick decided that the love for my mother was more important than some dumb vampire group. So why couldn’t my own father, the man who gave birth to me, choose me over them?

Two questions still remained....who turned me? And did I want to find out?

Kyle Thompson

Last

By: Kyle Thompson

Live everyday like your last

Don't be stuck on small shit in the past

I tellem pay attention times moving too fast

10 years go by in a flash

Old smoke turns into an ash

Fake faces hide behind masks

Everyday I wake up with an empty flask

Fill it full accomplishments I'm talking task by task

One sip of success could knock you off your ass

Some work to buy treasures others happy with trash

But I wouldn't bat an eyelash

A summer full of acorns stacked in a stash

I been focused on my goals so they feeling harassed

Pouring Irish luck into a champagne glass

Bright ideas shine like they're made of brass

The west coast weather hot like it's made of gas

So lma see thru polarized sunglass

Shoes off toes in the grass

Sipping mimosas like it could be your last.

New Jersey

By: Kyle Thompson

There was a man from New Jersey

He only like to wear jerseys

Favorite one was Steph Curry

Not a 40 but a 30

Usually wear his hair curly

But it ain't like nothing girly

Heard they call him quick because he move in a hurry

Like to get up extra early

With eggs cheese and Turkey

He be ducking the controversy

Got more cars than a derby

But the wheels stay dirty

Spent some time in Missouri

Waist deep in snow flurries

Now he living without a worry

Said he won't never take the jersey back to New Jersey

Night Job

By: Kyle Thompson

I'm on my all day

With no breaks

Doing anything if that's what it takes

They said stay off the grass that's where they hide the snakes

But the sidewalk was still full of fakes

And you can't trust they handshake

So I roll the dice with life at stake

In a tight place with no space for mistakes

Better concentrate they might seal your fate

So don't take the bait

I heard the early bird ate the one that's late

Then I speed up or stay awake

Don't need a worm I want lobster steak

With foreign real estate full of silver plates

These basic dreams I know most relate

Things are never what you estimate

Yeah, it's fucked up but it looks great

Make the wrong move then it's checkmate

That's why I'm all day with no breaks

Nothing Special

By: Kyle Thompson

Maybe not to you but

You're worth more than gold and You should be told.

I need your heart to hold as the world grow old.

I can keep you warm in Wisconsin's cold,

I put a ring around your soul to make you lose control

Long walk or a stroll to be with you is the goal.

I usually don't say it but for you I will

I'm usually a nice man but for you I kill.

Because when I look into your eyes it's like the clock stands still

Silk soft brown hair and eyes Green as Brazil

Sentence you to life with no appeal

Introduce you to the fam so you know it's real

And we don't need nobody but netflix and chill

Im Jack you Jill with sunsets on a hill

Anytime I take you out for a meal don't touch that bill

You gave me your heart can't break that deal

Now I'm happy as a kid and I can't sit still

Or are we emotionally numb hearts on Advil?

Questions

By: Kyle Thompson

Please don't ask no stupid questions

Things are best without suggestions

Attitudes are lethal weapons

Brings aggression and depression

Don't send me the wrong direction based on your misconception

So F u and your first impression

If it doesn't match what you expecting

Gather your feelings make a collection

People obsessed with their possessions

Stressing about the next imperfection

Hoard your happiness in a section

My obsession was progression

They told me just count your blessings

Study your guide know what you testing

Your selection who we finessing

Half past high that just my expression

Right

By: Kyle Thompson

Sitting at a desk I could live under light
Robe and some house slippers so today dressed slight
Had to try again because I can't get it right
My mind make lines faster then my hand write
Pen and paper on my left with a cup on my right

Try to say it out loud and my chest got tight
Cramp in my hand hit me like a red light
Due dates on my plate I be at it all night
Sleep calling me and it's so polite
Me vs a empty paper is a crazy fight
But I could never lose won't see that sight

I'm hungry to win that's an appetite
Mailed every challenge personal invites
10 points up can't reach that height
I sit back and watch the world like a satellite
You stuck in the same place like domestic flights

Should Stay

By: Kyle Thompson

Where you going you should stay

If you make breakfast I call you Bae

Couple pancakes and a Creme Brule

Now she miss me like yesterday

Plenty of fish in the sea but I can't let you get away

Promise no one else could get in our way

I be home sometime in may

Roll a j catch and a play

Do you like opera or Ballet

Think I seen you before running on a runway

She Drive the wrong way down a one way

Then Park on the grass like church on a Sunday

It's her forte to watch every shade of grey

Woke up tomorrow with the same thing to say

Pouring up pink while she sippin Bombay

She ordered a frappe at my favorite cafe

Somewhere Inside the Party

By: Kyle Thompson

I think I lost myself somewhere deep inside of the party

Up with Jack Daniels and Bobby Bacardi

Now every other shot is like a punch to the body

Had a whole lot of purple and I don't mean Barney

Only 3 deep but we strong as an army

Standing on tables respect the hierarchy

Jeans by Givenchy t shirt by Versace

She say why you dress like a safari

Treat a Toyota like it's a Ferrari

Pull off from the party and race for a hobby

I wanna go fast like Ricky Bobby

They won't let you in you stuck lobby

I'm in my zone hanging with Holly

She came here with Tommy and Tommy play Hockey

Holly said she like Teriyaki wasabi

Me I ordered calamari

Then I lean like a zombie

And dance like Bill Cosby

Somewhere in the crowd I saw Paul Mc Carthy

My style is unique I could lend you a copy

We the new wave and it's a tsunami

Wild E

By: Kyle Thompson

Feeling like Wild E. when he catches road runner

Or Bugs Bunny when he shot at the hunter

7 days 6 months I been working all summer

So we won't get treated as yesterday's newcomers

I'm tryna be a legend like Earl Malone's number

Or go Kevin Durant and make it rain with Oklahoma's Thunder

But I Neva had a free throw and couldn't shoot a jumper

They said work for what you want but I had a different hunger

So if it ain't about getting paid I can see it happening like Stevie Wonder

Sometimes I really wonder if another man could put it in my words what he a do

He probably tell the same story different point of view

His nightmare yet we see a carnival fireworks flashing blue

We come from a wild place where they fight for tennis shoes

I call it crazy some people call my city a zoo

We made it out like it's just another door to walk thru

Seen some things but who could you talk to

Amy Vida

“The mythological world Amy created is so intricate and developed that I can picture the city of Prosepolis and all its components- the Shades, the City Watch, Persephone - in my mind's eye. Amy's talent as a writer gives her creation a volition and life force all its own. Our shared interest in Greek Mythology, witchcraft, and monsters has made our conversations some of the most interesting I have ever been a part of!” ~ Dylan Couch

Despoina

By: Amy Vida

What's it like? Big, in a lot of ways. Standing anywhere inside its bounds, you can see only a microcosm of the whole, but it's enough to indicate that the borough is tall, and that it is *loud*. The “wall” that separates Despoina from the city at large has more gated walls than solid brick, seems like; it's doubtful anything was ever meant really to be kept in or out. Nothing like what lives in Prose, anyway. In the borough, the buildings rise high, seeming without end to the little ones, taller the further outward from the Living Tree you get. It's law in Prosepolis that no building may block the view from an outer-more structure's highest height; the Tree, city's Center, is to be seen from the very farthest structure, at least from the top floor. So the buildings closer in are shorter, and those further out have the luxury of upward mobility. Some of the buildings in Despo, everybody knows, lay their foundations deep underground and have as many as a dozen floors under the city's streets, some of which open into the First Ward. That's where the Others live, mostly, and no other borough of Prose has such direct access to them. And we mostly call them Others for the tourists, when we manage to find any, and for our own amusement. Truly, they're just a part of what we are. Neighbors, though mostly beneath; they just don't sunbathe as often as us Topsiders.

Aside from the walls and the Ward, as in, *not really the borough, but things adjacent to the borough?* How about Despoina Proper? *Cramped*; apartments mostly, especially farthest outward from Center where the buildings have that height to them, you know. Lot of courtyards, lot of well-developed rooftops, but extremely crowded living spaces climbing skyward. I've traveled more than some, and was most cozy-at-home in Hong Kong by comparison—cunningly contrived, massive labyrinthine structures with thousands of tenants. Clothes on lines between buildings, shade all times of day from the sheer height of things. My own city, though, I find cleaner and greener, private and public. We've got pride for this place. Each spare inch of Prose at large is covered in growth, it seems—compared to the Surface, anyhow, I can say, from what I've seen of it, the three continents I've been. In Despoina, though, the Mother's colors are like an objective of the lay and of the PMA both—that muted, deathly purple, the gentlest grey, the bloody, living, pomegranate scarlet, and the deathly bone white, looking to stain or to chalk. The palette, everywhere, in blooms, vines, clouds of tiny flowers, sweet grasses. In the trees that line the streets; in the vines growing across the stones in walls while sprouts peek petite up from between the loose-paved stones in the oldest streets. Terraced gardens interrupt the span of industrial concrete, where it can even be found. Not that industry lives in Despoina—it's too crammed with shades and the machinery of their daily and cultural lives. Seams-bursting restaurants and shops, schools and clinics. Captains of industry seek their real estate elsewhere: shades have no interest in sacrificing square footage in crowded Despo for office space, or anything like that. The Northwest of the city is where corporate interest lives, far opposite from us. We don't even have to look at it if we don't want to, from

most of Despo; the Living Tree spreads shade looks like halfway across the city's diameter in each direction, blocks it right out.

That thing is *enormous*. No living person could wrap their arms around its trunk. Its bark is cool to the touch, a dapple of colors, deep and greying to bleached bone-white. Leaves and occasionally blooms carpet the ground beneath its canopy. You know, I've only known a couple of visitors, but one man I remember talking to called the trees here "haunting" in color, and it's true that I've never seen them anywhere else. I mean, particularly the Gift, Demeter's testimony to life in Prose. It's a Wonder of the world, but I can see how it might spook the shit out of some Joe from the Surface. I suppose it's easy to focus on death when you think of Prose, if you haven't walked the paths, seen the vibrancy. This city lives in a way I've never seen, the world over. Built up tall, and down into the ground, and growing all across.

And we live differently than I've seen in some other places, too. Less cautiously, but somehow more deliberately. Rough-housing is the play we participate in; there's little concern for the young other than a good crack on the head, which will do most folks in after all, even some Others. And the young, like those grown up, run amok in Despo—there are loud markets, late businesses, and a lot of open doors. Neighborhoods are loud, shared, and teeming with folks concerned about a scraped knee or a bruised ego, their own kid or someone else's. We look after one another, our own. "A shade's home is the home of all shades"; that is the way it's said. It's what the city was built for. It could seem like we're roiling, civilization in collapse. But that said, we've also got the finest and cleanest Mother's Churches you could find. The squat, white stone perfectly smooth, built thick with pillars. Not a speck of dust on the idols standing at altar, the shades' pantheon: Three Sisters, the Mother presiding. Each carved of the stone of the Great Mother, Rhea. We gather there mindfully, not for services usually, but to be with Her even when we can't. The God who walks among us. She hears our words there, in the quiet space. It's a place to visit and rest, and be with Her, but not to congregate and profligate, and there's no preacher. No Holy Man speaks for her. But it's hard to—it's the mindfulness. We fight and we climb and rough-house, but we also preside over some of the safest, quietest altars to be found in Prosepolis. And our rowdy kids do that presiding; the Mother's Churches, where they're found, are maintained exclusively by those under-age. I'm not even sure why; they've always been. Fabulously maintained, too, to the credit of our youths. This is the landholding that our oldest, wealthiest families keep; mostly, shades don't have houses of their own. The exception is the relatively small neighborhood of thin townhomes, curving around the Center-side of Despo's only, and rather dense, park. Even these homes are open, though—it's really our nature. We show our wealth in works, mostly.

We're not so gimme-gimme here, with the sort of stuff they hoard household to household on the Surface, a matching one standing unused on each neighboring property. Fifteen pools in one neighborhood, there. Everybody in the cul-de-sac stands up a basketball hoop. You stay in your yard. It's the Surface-riche think we don't get; here, it's community center, community pool, community pond, community park. And they're gorgeous, all, maintained proper and alive, and teeming often, mostly with shades, at least in Despoina. The city is well-used, crammed all over (though most of all in my 'hood). It makes more sense. It makes more fun. It wastes less space.

We're very alive, my mother always told me. Shades. Never more than during the Festivals, colors and cloth draped across any surface, candles and the walking whispers found across the pavements and stoops and even in the remotest park-paths, nestled and gently dripping in the limbs of the sweet-smelling trees. We climb and watch, we holler and drink, we attend. We witness. We walk the Mother home. We spill all over the city ever the more, though most of us lived in Despo the year round anyhow, it's true; at any rate we're never more *present* than during the Festivals of the Mother. And there's even visitors, then, at this time—almost exclusively shades, and mostly ones who've lived here, or were born, and so have dual citizenship. Because this place is more than geography. It's more

than all these things I list, like a clumsy talking cartographer. I can't *map* Prose, can't map Despoina, in what stands and where. I can't say the teeming, the sharing, the rough and salty-sweet. I'm no professional talker, much less a writer, but the desire to try is so much.

Now I thought I could capture it proper, but there's so much *more*. I tell when I should show. But what language is there for the bitter-sweet of arils on your tongue, surrounded by a million of your closest friends? The rough hands of everyone you trust, the tumult and roar of the Welcoming. The salt and fat of the offerings, the soft crunching of walking whispers underfoot, staining toes and soles ashy for days if you walk barefoot. You walk barefoot. The pavement is cool, and in the Fall so soft, with the leaves and blossoms. The streets and walks stain. Your skin stains. The ankle hems of your jeans stain, often for good; you cuff them, or wear the mottled color without notice. There are sweet drinks on every corner, freely given from sweating glass decanters; summer wines, tea, lemonade, often with pomegranate, which tastes like home. The home of your life, and someday your death. And it's all sweet, even the salt, even the heat of dying Summer. Even knowing that as the days cool, the time winds and it is the Parting, and the mourning comes after, and Winter will fall. But the flavors balance. And after all, for now, it's Summer, if late Summer, and there's light and warmth, and color, and more. One million of your closest friends, each a brother or sister. You spend time in homes you've never seen, and you're mourning together, or celebrating together, and you miss your Mother and yet at home, here, you've got an entire family together to care for this place until She returns. Like clockwork, and this is Her part and this is your part. And She parts from us, and you watch her disappear, and you sing the songs and you eat all you can from the feast, and you give up and push your chair back and you take the warm walk back across the colors and the confetti filled with seeds that will take even in the cold, as Demeter promised, and you'll smack the dividing wall with a flat, stained hand as you walk back into Despoina through the arch, and the streets will be picking up here as everyone streams back from the Square where, too, the singing and eating will continue, probably until the next sun comes. But back in Despo—this is where the family comes together, the core of it. And a couple hours later you'll sit in the falling sun on a once-stranger's cool stoop, thighs staining underneath the hem of your black shorts (they hide the color), the colors blotching together with your more permanent ink. You'll talk with people you met two hours ago at the feast, and you'll laugh with a vampire who's just now able to sit outside of the shade with you as the dark grows, even though that's not your crowd, the Others, usually. He's funny, and he knows how to tie the knots in the cords that you always wondered about, that hang in the feast tent. He tells you that it was always his people that did this task for Her, and you hadn't known, in all that you knew. And he's the more your brother for this service, for this history. Every corner of the city, loving Her. At the feast and after, everyone's a crowd. You'll drink lemonade with tart arils floating in it, waiting for a break in your wrist from twenty minutes ago to heal, shaking out the hand. "Shit, Ez," your brother says. "A nasty one." You shake your head, "Nahhhh. It's clean."

And you'll laugh and joke and remember the Procession from just before, and it'll sting to've seen Her go. You watch the dark come, and you can hear the city alive with murmur, lit all with the candles inside and out, windows, stoops, partitions and walls, in tree limbs and even on bicycle seats, across the ledges atop balconies and roofs, that all will be taken back in tomorrow with the cloths and colors, though the whispers stay, and the blossoms stay, and the togetherness stays. You think more about the knots in the cords, now. You appreciate them. And you've got new numbers in your phone and some more stories, and a bellyful of the foods you see and make and share only twice the year, at the feasts, and when you hear a new crowd walking by down the boulevard you look up to say hello, to heckle, and you see and feel—something that you'd only read about in books. And it fits, that as the sun drops on the third day a Revelation comes—and a man stops dead in his tracks to hold your eyes and though he doesn't speak, he smiles with a stutter, and it's as if he's here to tell you that the world, in fact,

as it was,

is now changed. Something has ended, and something has begun.

Things as they are, you're fixed. The city turns around you, and the lit candles blur. You don't even breathe, probably for a minute, and the feeling is heady.

And the air is cold, and sweet, and you're warm, hot even, and everything is spinning, but in harmony, because the world we live in is a circle, and in Prosepolis, in the Shade's Eden, the circle begins and ends here, where we are born and die. And the cool night is welcome, and the hot days are welcome. Togetherness and separateness are the same, are unimportant for their obviousness, are *everything* to us, are balance. And strangers are your family, and a look is a lifetime of looks. A word is more than enough to offer. Your feet are a little cold, you feel the tingle of bone growth just below your thumb joint, and your breath leaves your open mouth a little too warm once you've found it, once it's caught. It will be visible soon in the chilly night airs, that breath. And you share it. And just like that your life changes, in this place, and it doesn't go back, but so it goes. So things are. His friends lag behind as he stops, as he approaches you, unsure, and you stand, leaving half a glass of sweet lemonade on the stoop in between candles your brother's idly carved in the scant hour since you arrived here, to someone's home. You'll walk, barefoot, to meet him at the curb. And you'll face your fate, thrilled, in the twinkling and heckling and walking and staying and sitting, the raucous partying that comes after, in the living and dying of the last day of the Festival. These are parts of life; all things as they are.

That's Despoina. But where are the words for that, to show, and not tell?

Amy Wasleske

“Amy has been a pleasure to work with throughout this semester. The poetry she has written speaks to engaging topics that her readers can relate to. Amy brought in creative ideas each week with both her new poems and her revisions of the first drafts she had written. In our sessions, we worked with developing metaphors that carried throughout a poem and making each line flow smoothly from one to the next. The poems Amy has submitted here were some of our favorites from the semester, but all of the poems she created for this course are meaningful and interesting to read. Amy's innate poetic ability shines through in her writing, and I am glad I had the chance to work with her this semester.” ~ Shelby Steinke

Anxiety's Unpredictable Storm

By: Amy Wasleske

I am floating in the calm still of the water.

I am chatting, laughing, noting

Everything is free and great

And then the first wave crashes,

So suddenly,

Catching me completely unaware

Another wave and I am no longer floating I am scrambling

gasping

Searching for a hand to hold

gasping

and realizing I am all alone

gasping

realizing that no hand can help me

there is a tug

I can't breathe

and I am reaching for anything,

Reaching in hopes the air might suddenly be able to pull me up

I can't breathe

I can not breathe

Waves are crashing

and the unstable ocean I am surviving in is tilting,

pulling me every which way

gasping

I feel a tug so hard and I scramble

my last feeble attempt

the water tugs hard and I am under.

I am underwater and am not drowning but suffocating

I am in a sea of hopeless understanding,

all the weight in the world has placed itself on my chest

I could feel its smug smirk as I try to fight back.

I can not breathe

I can feel myself moving with the ocean

I have no control

The waves grow bigger

and bigger

no air is reaching my lungs

I peel my eyes open to see

How far up I need to swim,

But my eyes burn

and the tears fall unseen,

just mixed in the mess of dark fear

the ocean, the sea, all the waters are against me

and the great storm hits

I am thrown in and out of the water

In and out

And each time my head is above

I gulp the air

My had is trying to take control

but my body is fighting back,

it is a war within myself

I breathe in and I am under again

Then I decide, I am sick of it,

done

in and out and

in and out and

in and

out

I fight to say up

I am craving air

I am craving normality

I am craving life

and am needing out of this hazy disaster

I can be strong

I am strong enough

I can keep my head above

The waves are crashing less and less

I am gaining more stable breath

The waves are calming with little crashes

and the storm passes just as suddenly as it began.

I am tired and worn from struggling

My head is nodding above water,

bobbing along the tides and I breathe steady again.

My body still feels as though it is crashing with unsteady waters

my head cannot understand how I survived this one

and it readies itself for another unexpected attack

although my breath is calm,

my head knows the truth;

that waves crash without warning

and breath escapes with no sign,

my head knows that my body needs to prepare for the next storm

to be strong enough again to keep itself up, to steady my breath,

and remember that the fight is never over.

Cecilia

By: Amy Wasleske

Call me Cecilia

I want to be enchanting

I want to be memorable

I want to be the woman that can't be forgotten

I want to be the one who is loved by a man

as if I were a dream

I want to be the one

who twirls with her daughter

I want to be the mother in **You've Got Mail**

The one whose memory lives on

More than a Romance Novel

By: Amy Wasleske

When I was Younger

I used to pray to God,

asking him to find me a man,

I prayed that he would provide me

with a legendary love story

One that would last a lifetime

One to inspire others around me

I wanted whirlwinds,

and lost in the clouds

I didn't understand that love is

more than a romance novel

I didn't understand that love is comfort

Love is being with your best friend

Love is holding his hand

and feeling at home

Love is realizing that the man beside you

is your partner in life

That you were meant to travel

these days together

That he is meant to be there

for you

To place his hand

on the small of your back

To help guide you,

and struggle with you

To walk beside you close

Love is balance

It is completing each other in ways

you didn't know were possible

Love is arguing

Love is compromising

Love is realizing that having

that person in your life

is way more important than winning a fight

God provided me with pain

God provided me with ups and

downs

And a story that is all my own

A story that I get to share

with my love

My love will grow with me

My love will be with me

My love knows me

My love is mine

And I am his

As long as he will have me

Always and Forever

The Right Atmosphere

By: Amy Wasleske

Years ago you were the whole world to me
but now when I look back I realize that really you are the moon
a nice place to visit,
I can look upon you and see fond memories but that is all you are.
You cannot sustain me,
cannot even let me breathe comfortably,
you are not something I can live with.
You changed from the beginning,
a new moon full of mystery uncovered,
yet as each phase came into view, I realized I was not meant for you.
I was holding on in hopes that there was something
I had yet to discover and once you were a full moon
and our relationship was in bloom
There was a change in you,
Your surface seemed so smooth with a few craters
that I was looking forward to jumping into
but there was more than I was anticipating
you had seemed so interesting.
Then the insults kept coming like a meteor shower

hitting me in ways I wasn't expecting

and hurting me to my core

You had become the eclipse

blocking me from any happiness

I felt myself drifting from you

a distance that had seemed so close before

now appearing wide before me.

Taking the journey had made me realize that you and I were too different

I had thought we were the only two in this universe,

but after pulling away I realized that there are many others,

that are shining brighter than you ever had.

Many others who will make me feel happier,

although your dark mystery drew me in,

it cannot hold my attention, you had hurt me too badly.

I needed something new, and you did too.

I am grounded now, after looking at the stars I found a new love

My world is changed now with him

I am with Earth full of comfort and stability.

I feel at home,

a place I can raise children.

A place where I can move forward,

with you watching from afar,

with you understanding

that this is where I belong

I have finally found an atmosphere I can survive on.

Unwrapped

By: Amy Wasleske

He held my hand through the rocky waters
And he lifted me over the jagged mountains
He told me that love was pure
And he was gold
And time was free for him to spend with me
But I've come to realize
The rocky waters had a bridge I hadn't seen
And the jagged mountains weren't as big as I had dreamed
Love is only pure as you make it
And real gold doesn't make you sick and green when you wear it
And my time is precious and he's not worth me wasting it.



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