

The Phoenix

Journal of Art and Literature



Spring 2019 Edition



The Phoenix

Spring 2019

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Table of Contents

Poems

6. **“Optimistic Nashville”**...Molly Shepler
“Vows, Take Two”...Katie Miller
7. **“Ode to Chicken Nuggets”**...Jon Burkley
8. **“Into the Flames”**...Sammi Duty
“September 6, 1901”...Hans Myers
10. **“Treble”**...Sophia Kostoff
12. **“Look Up”**...Talia O’Brien
“Revelations”...Katie Miller
13. **“Quantum Cognition”**...Jacob Morgan
15. **“My fifteen-year poem”**...Donald Hall
“Nostalgia”...Sean Oros
16. **“Creature of Habit”**...Anthony Sivie
“Nothing to Say”...Taraneh French
17. **“Pet the Armadillo”**...Molly Shepler
18. **“The Devil’s Groomsman”**...Conor King
19. **“Flower of Life”**...Zeth Palmer
21. **“Slaughtered in Their Sanctuary”**
...Samantha Walker
“Mortality” ...Sean Oros
“April 4, 1968”...Hans Myers
22. **“At Day’s End”**...Katie Miller
“At the Border”...Sophia Kostoff
23. **“When the Fire Dies Out”**...Jon Burkley
24. **“Seven Deadly Sins”**...Kyley Raskob
27. **“Virtuous”**...Anonymous
28. **“Norm Conform”**...Jon Burkley
29. **“Earth”**...Anthony Sivie
“In Autumn Weather”...Molly Shepler
30. **“All I Can Say”**...Taraneh French
“Introspect”...Sean Oros
“The Darkness”...Sammi Duty
31. **“July 2, 1881”**...Hans Myers
32. **“The Greyhound Plight”**...Sean Oros
33. **“November 22, 1963”**...Hans Myers
“The Star”...Sean Oros
34. **“Employment Appreciation Verification”**...Camille Radford
36. **“GhostGirl”**...Anonymous
“Fairytale”...Molly Shepler
37. **“I greet the haze”**...D.J. Martino
38. **“How Wonderful It Has Been Made To Be”**...Anthony Sivie
“June 6, 1968”...Hans Myers
39. **“Difference in Mind”**...Jon Burkley
40. **“Virtual Void”**...Talia O’Brien
“Someone asked Me”...Taraneh French
“April 14, 1865”...Hans Myers
41. **“Sapphire Skies”**...Jenyfer Pegg
“Lavender Days and Scarlet Nights”...Jenyfer Pegg
“Auburn Changes”...Jenyfer Pegg
“Midnight Demise”...Jenyfer Pegg
42. **“Pap”**...Molly Shepler
“How Frightening to Know Dr. Hall”
...Dr. Mary Theresa Hall
43. **“Definition: a natural response to stress”**...Tina Krolikowski
45. **“At the Shores of Botany Bay”**
...Conor King
46. **“History”**...Chris Moinet, Ph.D.
“The Old Barn”...Chris Moinet, Ph.D.
47. **“Today my poetry takes a turn”**
...Jon Burkley
48. **“The Wall”**...Sean Oros
76. **“Rodents”**...Katie Miller
77. **“God of Love and God of Glory”**
...Hans Myers

Short Stories

- 49. **“The Wall Stopped Talking”**...D.J. Marino
- 58. **“The Wilted Lily”**...Natalija Mara Kutlesa
- 60. **“Broken Mind”**...Alonzo Brown
- 61. **“The Treetop Child”**...Sophia Kostoff

Photos

- A. Byrd— 38
- Jace Coffie— 9
- Alrick Frances—Back Cover
- Z. Helstern— 32
- Teddy Kunkel— 20, 26
- A. Lapcevich— 19, 22, 31, 37, 39, 59, 70
- J. Langeitti— 20
- Allen Morrill— 28
- Hans Myers— 9, 74, 75
- Chimamaka Palmer— 25, 44, 57
- Ashley Prout— 9, 12, 38, 44, 57, 68, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75
- Molly Shepler— 9, 16, 36, 43, 44, 68, 70, 72, 73
- Yuanyuan Qu—7, 20, 26, 69, 71

In ancient mythology, the phoenix was a beautiful red-and-gold bird held sacred by the people of Ancient Egypt, who called it “Bennu,” believing it to be a physical manifestation of the Egyptian god of the sun, creation, and rebirth. The phoenix, as the Greeks dubbed this legendary bird, had an impossibly long life, which was sustained by cyclical regeneration wherein the bird was consumed by fire when it was due to die before being reborn from the ashes of itself. Phoenixes were symbols of renewal and rebirth, not only of life, but of the world: as the Nile River would burst its banks and flood the delta every year, as the waters receded, the silt and sediment transported by the flood would render the otherwise arid ground suitable for the cultivation of crops. In short, the phoenix was a symbol of divine promise: of the chance of redemption and renewal, despite the travails and hardships of the world.

So, too, does this phoenix symbolize rebirth in spite of travails and hardships. While the lifecycles of the mythological phoenix were measured in centuries, the lifecycle of *The Phoenix* renews itself once more for the third time in its history. Under the auspices of the Alpha Iota Kappa Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the National English Honorary Society; the English Department; and Dr. Mary Theresa Hall – whose dedication and zeal for this publication is without parallel – *The Phoenix* has risen once more from the ashes as Thiel College’s preferred outlet for the campus’ creative energies. Scores upon dozens of submissions prove the value of a literary journal on the Thiel College campus: whether one is an English major, a business major, a science major, or a history major, creativity and the creative process is something universal—and something wholly without equal.

The Editorial Board of *The Phoenix* is grateful for the support of the Thiel College community—faculty, administration, staff, students, and alumni – in providing submissions for consideration. We hope you enjoy our favorite submissions for the 2019 edition. It is our hope that you, reader, will consider submitting to the 2020 edition. Submissions—whether creative writing, photography, or artistic work – may be given to Dr. Hall at any point throughout the year. Past editions of *The Phoenix* may also be found on the Thiel College English Department website under the heading for Sigma Tau Delta.

Hans G. Myers
Thiel College Class of 2019
The Phoenix 2019 Copy Editor and Editorial Board Member

“Nor shall this peace sleep with her; but as when
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,
Her ashes new create another heir
As great in admiration as herself;
So shall she leave her blessedness to one,
When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness,
Who from the sacred ashes of her honour
Shall star-like rise as great in fame as she was,
And so stand fix’d.”

- William Shakespeare, Henry VIII (Act V, Scene V).

Optimistic Nashville

by Molly Shepler

From the time he first plucked those
strings,
His future was sealed.
Only God-given talent could that boy
have:
“He’s a natural, a prodigy.”
Hard work and sweat,
Sleepless nights and money, money,
money.
Waking up with three hours
Of shut-eye,
Never getting a thank-you, no
“Good jobs” or an “I’m proud of you.”

He can make songs appear like magic;
He writes music on the page
And poems in the air.
Words and notes that flow like honey,
Sticky enough to make you stay
And listen until the end,
Leaving you wanting just
One...more...taste.
A talent like that,
A passion that strong,
He’s got to go—

He’s headed to Nashville with a
Guitar on his back,
His dream in his pocket,
His eye on the future
And his future on fire,
In fame.
A fire-tongue and a gospel-brain.

He’ll get his name on his own album
cover
With songs he wrote in his head and
Recorded in his father’s studio-shed
During a time when I was all he had...
I’m so proud of him.
I just hope I’ll be the first he tells
When they put his name in lights.

Vows, Take 2

By Katie Miller

We danced under a
Star-lit twilight, the
city lights faded
in the distance. There
was no music, just
the rhythm of our
perfectly matched hearts.

I will never forget
That night, where our hands
Never unclasped and
Your gaze never strayed
From me. Oh, my love,
I remember when
You held me like it
Was our final day.

Here we stand now, bound
Together for all
Eternity. I
Know these rings on our
Fingers mean little,
But I like to think
That they will survive,
Even if we don’t.

With these words and my
Never-ending love
For you, I pledge my
Self, my heart, and my
Soul. May I never
Fail you, or you me.
Even Death will not
Compromise these vows;
Of this, I am sure.

Ode to Chicken Nuggets

By Jon Burkley

Love is a very strange ideal.
But who can say what's truly real.
Is it finding a partner to share life,
Finding the Griffith to one's Fife,
Or is it being content with your friends,
Or being able to make all amends.
"Wrong!" I yell to all of you.
Love is a simpler kind of view.
Imagine simply lying on a drugget,
In your hand a golden nugget.
By the fire, warm at night,
Just looking and waiting to take a bite.
A heavenly creation from the golden
gates,

Giving more satisfaction than from
one's mates.
Any good establishment will have such
a dish,
With all human's mouths watering
making that wish.
Add your own type of style too,
Anywhere from honey mustard to
barbeque.
But what matters truly is at the core
Not the "how it's made" type of lore
No more tip toeing around what's men-
tioned above
The fact of the matter is, chicken nug-
gets are love

Photo by Yuanyuan Qu



Into the Flames

By Sammi Duty

Forget about the swamps,
Forget about the 'gaters.
Let's go visit John's Home,
See what he can cook up.

See ya later, Buddy,
Burnt to a crisp.
Nothing left but bone
And ash.

Don't forget about the paperwork!
Into the Flames,
Birth certificate, Social Security
card,
All credentials.

He is now gone,
John did him up good.
Who is he?
Nobody now.

Just a figment of the world's imagi-
nation.
Sweep it all out, clean up.
Get ready for another,
Not too soon, I hope.

September 6, 1901

By Hans Myers

Battle-tested and born of war he
stands
in a Temple of Music in New York.
In the bosom of America, bands
play as he shakes hands with a twist-
ing torque.
Working men and women come here
to see
the man who led a "splendid little
war,"
whose armies and navies stretch wide
open seas
and shook ancient Spain down
through its old core.
Through the crowd he comes: anar-
chist and fool!
Weapon hidden in the wrap on his
hand,
"friend" of the people, now radical's
tool.
They move to shake hands, but he
acts now – planned!
Eight days of pain and agony yet ere
he passes. Still on his lips? A sad
prayer.



Photo by Ashley Prout



“Let Freedom Ring!” by Hans Myers



Photo by Molly Shepler



Photo by Jace Coffie

Treble

By Sophia Kostoff

The night feels dark
on my bad days. The pain
stabs like the thorns of a rose,
threatening to choke every last ounce
of life from my dying body. Alone
and scared, I walk the cracked sidewalks,
unsure of where to go, to run. Trapped in
my worried mind, the air is being forced
from my quivering chest. Like a corset
tightening, ever tightening, my chest clamps
down on my lungs. Stars, the ever-familiar stars
of darkness flutter into view as I collapse
to my knees. Gasping, crying, clinging for life, I reach
for something, anything that can ease it all.
The longer I go without air, the words are torn from
my lips and sent to eternal nothingness. The
sharp needle of life weaves through my flesh,
linking my lips together permanently with the thread
of despair. Silenced. Silenced my life is. Silenced
it shall remain if nothing can cut the line.

The night feels cold
On my bad days. The lack of
feeling drains my body of anything
human. The color drains, leaving nothing
but black, white, and shades of grey in it's
path. The nothingness and darkness
trap my life. What once shown bright now
chokes on its own flame. I don't feel the
burns that cover my body and the hot
coals that erupt from my throat with every
word I utter. But what can I do?
Even the small glimmers of pleasures in my life
don't produce joy for me now. Instead, a veneer
of pleasure adorns my face to hide the blankness
and blackness of my eyes. Secretly, the desire to
produce feeling eats away at me, making the notion of pressing
a sharp blade to the nothingness to draw something,
something that would prove to my diminishing emotions
that I still am a living breathing human being who feels the
cold and warmth of the world so very tempting to endure.

The night feels bitter
on my bad days. The anger, frustration
burns holes through my flesh and bones.
I wish that sothing on this cruel earth can curb the unbearable
desire to end the sources of my burning disappointment
and pain. But nothing can. Nothing can put out the
flames that engulf my soul and claim my big heart and
kindness. Soon, only a hollow shell of my former self
remains. Soon, only bitterness and anger take
roots in my black heart. The tightness in
my chest increases with every breath. My
blood begins to boil with each word that flows
from their unknowing lips. I want to reach out and
silence the twisted words, the distorted thoughts,
the uneducated remarks. Confusion, utter and painful
confusion engulfs my broken body. Ignorance, absent mindedness,
and my own vicious thoughts fuel this fiery inferno. My head
pounds like the bangs of a gun ringing through the night
as the burning red fire pounces on every word they speak.

The night feels calm
on my good days. The laces are
clipped, the colors are restored, the
fire is extinguished. Love and joy once more
return to my life. Freedom from the bondage at
long last has been granted. Sweet melodies tumble
from my gentle lips and dance around the open space
like dandelion seeds in the summertime wind. With each
touch of the ivory keys, the void in my mind, heart, life is
filled with the beauties of music. The words jump forth as
brilliant waves of color, filling every ounce of the confines of
the wooden walls of worship with faith, hope, and love. This is all
that heals my wounds. This is all that mends my
tattered heart and fractured self-worth. For I am like
a lone treble clef, the one that holds the lines of life
steady for others; the one drawn in one swift motion,
appearing to have no flaws or imperfections.
But she does have sharps, flats in her lines.
She isn't perfect, and neither am I.

The night feels dark, cold, bitter, on my bad days.
The night feels calm, beautiful, treble on my good days.

Look Up

By Talia O'Brien

All I hear are silent screams
Echoing out of all our tiny screens-
When all you're typing are things you
do and don't really mean
Well what do you mean when you
scroll on your mini machine
I don't read love
All I read is hate
When will we switch our screensaver
to be something that we create
Out of something less viscous to fill
the void
Because when we tweet out our lives it
really kills our vibes
Resulting in living a life full of lonely
goodbyes
Open your eyes
And see through the lies
It's time for love
But only if we try.

Revelations

by Katie Miller

You call me an angel,
And I suppose that makes
You a devil. So, let
Us be like Marilyn
Manson and turn heaven
Upside down. Nothing in
This universe could convince
Me to love you at all;
I implore you to try,
However futile.

I know you despise me;
So, do not worry, for
I hate myself as well.
And perhaps, you are not
So much a devil at
My door, than a thorn in
My side, inhibiting
My evèry inhale.

We'll end the world tonight,
My dearest foe, my friend.



Photo by Ashley Prout

Quantum Cognition

By Jacob Morgan

Once the inner eye begins to fly, the world becomes quiet and nice.

In this place of ultimate space, we find a white cord that holds us no more.

With an expansive gaze that leaves no trace, we start to embrace the heavenly grace.

The breath of life, a radiant delight, has a bounty of secrets to tell you late into the night.

A stream of air that fills you with compassionate care, will ignite your light deep into the night.

There will be a day that you come to pray, where you will be implored to say:

Caress my eye and restore my sight; allow me to see your beautiful and golden light.

Within a moment, our deepest core can be restored.

Banishing the freights from our collective and temporary human life.

Into the night, we strike a might, wondering if the flight will ever be a perpetual sight.

And in the morning, there will be a story, of our timeless travels that infinitely unravel.

Brothers and sisters, give yourself permission to confront the unordered cognition may confront you,

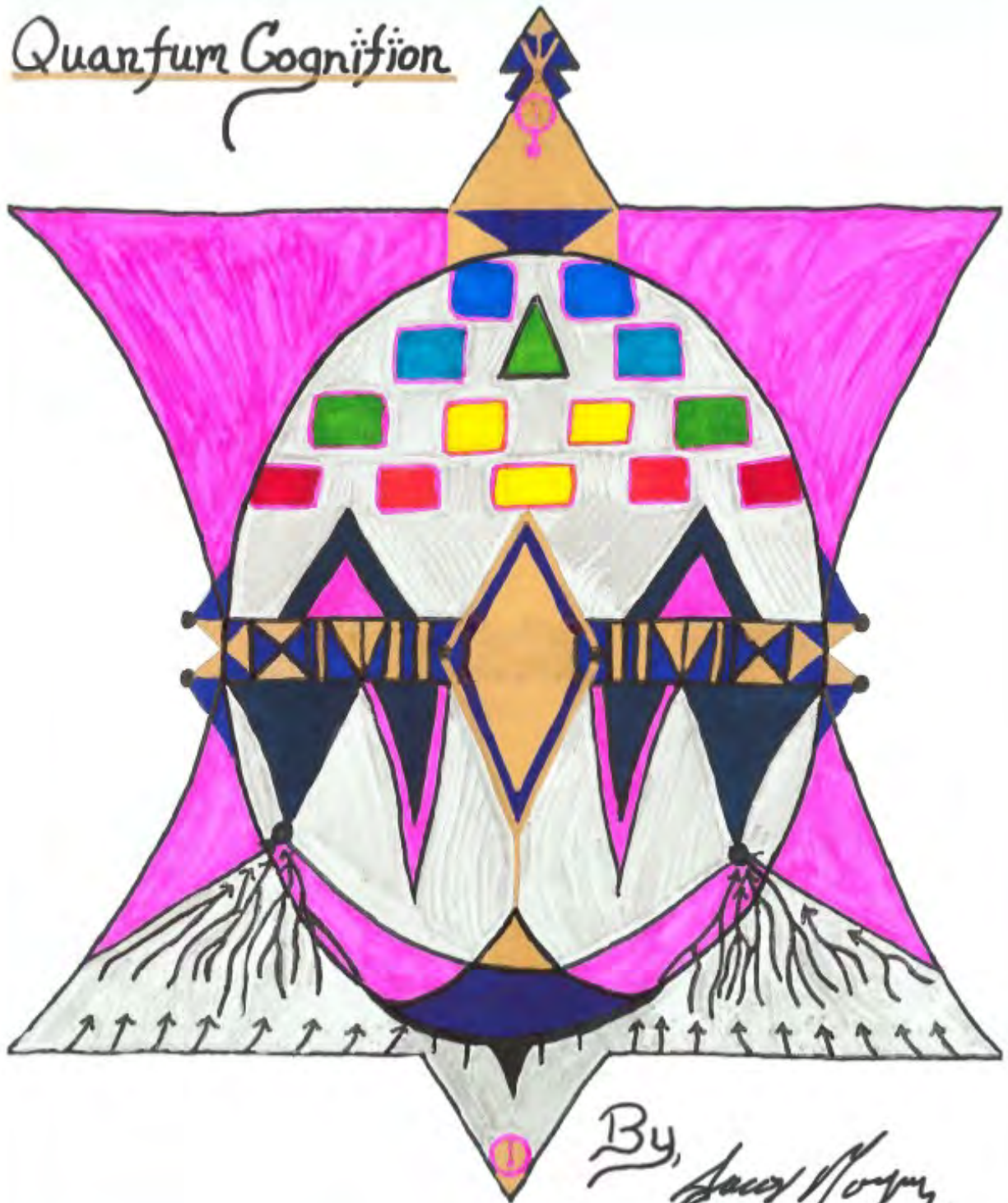
But always know that in the end, know that the ladder will always await you.

So find your breath and commence the steps.

Make today the day, where you begin your journey towards the radiant love that we call grace.

Dear being of light, follow the moon because Quantum Cognition patiently awaits you.

Quantum Cognition



By, *Lucy Meyer*

My fifteen-year poem

By Donald Hall

What happened
to the themes, the rhymes,
the allusions, the comparisons,
the literary tools?

What happened
to darkness and light,
the “Force” and “Darth Vader,”
with sexting, texting, Facebook, and
Instagram?

What happened
to High School graduation
and “We will be BF’s forever,
text every day and talk every month?”

What happened
to secrets: home beer parties, “grass,”
joy and hope, praise and thanks,
the night I was going to commit suicide?

Ubi sunt?

I realized
two or three true friends in a lifetime is a
blessing;
I am loved for myself and am moving
forward.

Ubi sunt?

I slowed down to look at the stars
and embrace that I am one.
I take home with me.

Nostalgia

By Sean Oros

At a desk, my mind wanders back
To leaves upon a forest floor.
A carpet all of nature,
Hiding many wonders more.
But now nostalgia distant beckons
From splendid days of yore.

Back then my biggest conflicts
Were choosing either shoe or boot;
Good and Evil were but concepts,
For I had not yet tasted of that fruit;
Back then I only knew that people
All came from common root.

I was too young to see the judgement
In eyes of either friend or foe;
I had yet to see the conflicts
That now I sadly know.
For through a child’s eyes,
You saw the highs before the lows.

Perhaps nostalgia beckons so to us
Because we’ve lost our wonder in our
rush.

Creature of habit

By Anthony Sivio

Back and forth,
 stuck in osculation.
Movements of worth,
 could mean deviation.
Just stay in rhythm,
 it's the human system.
It's not hard to see,
 the motion in me.

Hear me ask,
 hear me learn.
Remove my mask,
 you won't be able to
discern.
Create my sector;
 alienate my past and
present vector.
I won't stay in motion,
in debt to a night of ideation.



Photo by Molly Shepler

Nothing to Say

By Neh French

You found me
You saw me
Yet you say,
Nothing to me.

You just stared
Looking at me
Yet you say,
Nothing to me.

You smile
You wink
Yet you say,
Nothing to me.

Are you my friend
Or just an enemy
Yet you say,
Nothing to me

Are we cool?
Are we mean?
Yet you say,
Nothing to me.

Just speak!
Please tell me
Yet you still,
Say nothing to me!

Pet the Armadillo

By Molly Shepler

Once-subconscious thoughts flood forward
now,
My mind rages again.
The Pit hits my stomach once more,
Such a familiar feeling.
What is this world? Where is
My plan, my purpose? They were all laid
Out like tomorrow's clothes,
Like the white gown before wedding-day;
The gown of a shy bride
Whose plans may change before tomorrow,
Not unlike my own—

Arizona deserts,
Hawaiian sands,
Ancient cities buried
And bubbling
Up in the streets of the
Old-aged lands,
Begging to be walked upon.
Sights which call, sounds which sing,
Tastes and music and dances—
So much to live and bring.

Oh, to see every angle of the sunrise...
Maybe the sun sets differently in Australia,
Or in Brazil or Switzerland.

How am I to know?
Flowers of color which my eyes have never
seen,
Ones which push up persistently through
The driest cracks of earth,
Doing exactly the opposite of "logicality";
But still they're "too far away from me."
I want to touch every ocean and every sea.

"I want to pet an armadillo."

Maybe the stars would look closer from a
mountaintop in Norway
While the navy sky swallows my attention,
Engulfing me in the wonder that is the
world.

I want to feel the soul-stirring rhythms
Which they say can be heard on each New
Orleans street corner;
The kind of beat which can turn an
Old man into a toe-tapping "fool,"
His body swinging and feet dancing.

But at least he is a fool who has lived;
At least, unlike me, his feet this ground
have left.

The Devil's Groomsman

by Conor King

Sing to me, muses of fire
Let me hear your breath one more time
Rake my soul over the coals at last
And allow me, for this moment, the gift of your rhyme

Did you think it would come to this?
When we were twenty and sitting on that porch
The whole world laid bare before us
Thankful for those who came before and lit that torch

Muses, if you hear me now, I implore you
Give cadence to my quivering voice
I've chosen to write down my thoughts
Because my pen serves as the only choice

Looking back on those moments, it seems so strange
We were so young, little one, and we knew so few
And now we're older but I doubt any wiser
And all I can see in front of me is the world brand new

Muses, if I could list with you the reasons I need
What I need today that often can't be put in tongues
Would it be nothing but salt on my open wounds?
That come from bared souls to the brothers among

I'll give you that speech, my brother, if you would prefer
Telling her of these memories we share
And hoping that she'll come to the understanding
Of just how great a guy she's ensnared

And I could go all day, waxing poetic in my verse
About your virtues, or your insanity, both a blessing
That she'll be enraptured by your presence consuming
In a way that will leave her heart confessing

Again, Muses, I call you forth
For this monumental task I'm about to undertake
My admiration for this devil who stands before me
Now he's a man. Now he's awake

“Towpath Akron, Ohio” by A. Lapcevich



Flower of Life
By Zeth Palmer

Blossom of life,
Rain peace down upon your children.
Bring peace to the cold, the weary, the lost,
The ever-going traveler whose only home is
within himself.

Breathe breaths of life and rejoice,
For the dawn of a new age is upon us.
Shake concerns of the past from your mantle,
And frolic in the blinding light of the Universe.

The fractal images and their teachings
May seem hollow to some,
But those who are accepting of Her Gift
Return feeling as if they had been cleansed.

Speak easies to us all.
Breathe life into our every thought.
Bring with you peace and hope
Of a time wherein we fight together...
As One.

Such joyous night of laughs and cheer,
And glittering imprints upon the snow.
Winter wonderland of thought and whimsy,
From the seeds of life, love is sewn.

Blues and reds of blurred reality
Meld together in perfect duality,
Radiating inner thought
To Her children who listen.

The infant child among a mass of men,
Inwardly searching for warmth and shelter
Against a cruel unforgiving world
Of hate, of greed, of pride,
Over which many tears are cried,
Falling upon the mind,
Or upon silenced ears.

Patterns refract on the clear night sky.
Open wide the eyes behind
A tortured and painful gaze,
Peering from the depths,
Peering through a haze,
But never breaking,
Ever stoic against the night
That dons upon us All.



Photo by Teddy Kunkel

Photo by Yuanyuan Qu



Photo by J. Langeitti

Slaughtered in their Sanctuary

By Samantha Walker

*(On the shooting in a synagogue in
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2018)*

I know it must be frightening
We are not what was promised
The streets are filled with fighting

Freedom of expression
In the home of immigrants
Freedom of religion

Eleven innocents to remember
One man's plan
To relight the gas chamber

Take a knee
Run for government
Maybe then you'll be free

April 4, 1968

By Hans Myers

The calm before the storm of hope and love.
The life of one so true and good: a man
whose name is peace, and whose sign is the dove,
And a movement, bound together, his plan:
to overcome evil, as was begun
By his forebears over a century
Of suffering, shame, crime, murder: all done
By those who send to penitentiary
Innocents who wish for life's joy and time,
Men and women who say enough has come,
Who wait for the sound of Freedom's loud chime:
Who will no more softly be seen as dumb.

But with one noise, one sound, he falls: bloodshed!
Now ask: do we carry on his dream instead?

Mortality

By Sean Oros

Would you live forever, or merely for a
day?
Would you know mundane, or marvel at
every star?
For if we knew when fate would cut our
life's thin cord,
We could order every day, meet death
with accord.
Yet to know our days a burden surely
would be,
Yet one more task list for our weary
eyes to see.

So seize the day, your mortal race to run,
To grapple fate before your day is done.
For Duty need not strangle or burden
life,
If through us love is grasped instead of
strife.
Cut free from tethered bonds that mute
your tones,
For then a fateful choice is all your own.

At Day's End
By Katie Miller

We were perfect,
Once upon a
Time. You were my
Knight, and I the
Dragon you were
To slay. Who would
Have guessed that the
Beast could also
Be the Princess?

Though I was of
Little beauty,
And you short on
Time on this earth,
We loved a love
That was hardly
Tainted by those
Surrounding us.
You were mine alone.

But now the world
Has stopped spinning
Since you left me,
Your blood spilled where
Our children might
Have played. Your corpse
Serves as a grave
Reminder of
What I have lost:

My love, my knight,
The rising sun
To my swooning
Moon. As your life
Has now set, I
Will cry at the
Stars, For none will
Shine nearly as
Brilliantly.

At the Border
By Sophia Kostoff

They have all been taken,
 Locked away, they're far from home,
They are the Caged and Broken.

Their parents told they are mistaken,
 To want a better life,
They have all been taken.

Alone and scared they are awoken,
 By the men in blue who watch the show,
They are the Caged and Broken.

Mothers' hearts are pained and stricken,
 For they know not the where or why,
They have all been taken.

For months the young ones have not spoken
 To their families—will they ever?
They are the Caged and Broken.

Behind the bars the elders are heartbroken,
 Why must the children pay the price?
They have all been taken.
They are the Caged and Broken.



Brandywine Falls
By A. Lapceovich

When the Fire Dies Out

By Jon Burkley

When the fire dies out
Or when the light fades from the day,
Even in a death, when the life leaves someone's body
These are moments when truths show in this world
Whether it is true intent or truth in someone's drive to keep on
So here is my truth to tell the world
Like the light,
Like the fire,
Even like the life leaving,
I face into what I never know
I face something that is nonexistent
And yet I feel sorrow in my heart
I feel an unnecessary sadness
I want everything to end, I want the pain gone
But I keep pushing through.
Why?
My truth to tell is the answer to that question.
My mind is twisted,
Twisted into something dangerous
Every thought pushes for destruction of myself
And trying to push for achievement is almost impossible for a mind like mine
Every time I fail, I drive myself down
No solutions, no answers
Just down the rabbit hole
When I succeed I still fail
I haven't made people proud and I haven't achieved the highest level
Therefore, I lost
Even though outward appearances I play off as being up beat
The truth,
The truth branded on my soul
That TRUTH
Is that I don't believe in myself,
I don't trust myself,
That is the way I was wired. Not by nurture as some may say
It was by nature.
Something is different in me.
Something that could lead me to success
Or understanding
Or happiness,
The question now,
The next truth to tackle,
Is whether or not I will make it there

Seven Deadly Sins

By Kyley Raskob

Wrath

Blood boils under my skin,
Painful,
Yet exciting.

Red,
clouding my sight,
that boiled blood.

Scarlet clouds,
my fist flying,
exhaustion.

Hard crimson breathing,
warm liquid,
cannot stop now.

I taste the colors,
metallic,
salty.

I cannot stand,
yet somehow I do.
I am not finished.

Pain and Excitement,
the clouds fading.
Only Black.

Envy

Each day they walk
ignorant of my existence,
blind to my needs,
careless and free.

I stare after them,
a heaviness to my limbs,
croak in my throat,
inability to call out.

They have everything.
Everything is theirs.
Nothing left for me,
never anything left.

Warmth,
Wealth,
Love,
All only theirs.

The other side stares at me.
It criticizes me.
It hates me,
For I am not them.

I am un-cared for...
For I am not them.
I am abandoned...
For I am not them.

I hate them.
I despise them,
and yet,
it is them I wish to be.

Lust

Everyday, hour, minute, second
Touch, Taste, Feel it
An enticing Smell
A tempting Look
Shivering with anticipation
Losing yourself to that feeling
Giving yourself to it freely

Greed

Not just a want - a need
NEED wealth
NEED attention
NEED love
NEED power
NEED everything
I need more

Gluttony

More, More, More
I need more...

I need all
It's not enough
What will I do
I need more

More, More, More
Give me more...

Not enough
Without it I am lost
Lost and gone
I need more

More, More, More
I demand more!

More is not enough
I need more than more
More than all
I need more

Gone, Gone, Gone
It can't be gone!

Sloth

Sound blaring
Eyes open
But I don't care to move

Traffic holds
Horns sound
But I don't care to reply

Working through
Day passing
But I don't care to hurry

Pressing on
Finishing up
But I don't care to try

Going home
Lying down
I don't care to move

Television glows
Phone rings
I don't care to answer

Day ends
Light fades
I don't care to continue

Pride

They all look at me as I pass by
I am all they need to glimpse
Upon the others I need not look-
lest reflections show me the glimpse
With only the glimpse I smile
This too is all I need
This is how I know



Photo by Chimamaka Palmer



Photo by Yuanyuan Qu



Photo by Teddy Kunkel

Virtuous

by Anonymous

Gentle glances. Afternoon
passes surely, swiftly into
night's cold, bold, black opportune
time. Gentle as I construe.

Brown beats behind lashes bold,
as Hazel strains to meet them.
A fire fleets now uncontrolled
within my heart's wild mayhem.

Addressed accentedly,
your voice sighs sweetly to me.
And I talk tentatively,
afraid already to lose thee.

Is this what once old writers
dipped quill in ink to illustrate?
The fierce beating, bold biters
who so easily make me "wait?"

To stand askance on this ledge,
hesitating to take the plunge,
Afraid to see what the sludge
within my heart might dispunge.

Sighing softly has never
been my milieu, but it is
all I do since did we sever.
'tis madness, and madness 'tis.

Pious, righteous, virtuous,
all mean the same to me now.
But to me these are torturous,
Theft of heart I did not allow.

What must I do to take back peace?
Must I fight and resist your charm?
Or let my resistance cease?
When your smile simply can disarm.

Though weeks it has been since then,
still I feel you beside me.
Longing for your smile again.
To feel your touch on my knee

beneath the table once more.
The sound of your laugh echoes
in my mind and in my core,
and my heart for more bellows.

To feel my hand entwined with yours
was akin to creation:
Angels sang and ended wars
in the moment of my ablation.

Worlds turn on our decisions.
Perhaps this one will turn our
globe further into God's visions,
and perhaps even my ossified heart
scour.

Norm Conform

By Jon Burkley

Does society tell us all to conform?
Should we live out our lives in a comfort zone,
Becoming creatures of our habits known,
Or do we try to move far out from that norm?

Do we live pointless lives that we will mourn?
Waiting for the day when we are dethroned,
The day when we are repaid for our actions sown.
When we receive justice, will we ever know the form?

My mind screams for us to be unique.
“Society is wrong if that’s its message!
You should live to enjoy the colors of the world.

We should ignore society for its negative critique,
It ends up as simple sacrilege.
And that is what I hope everyone can afford.”



From a Mountain of Despair

Submitted by Allen Morrill

Earth

By Anthony Sivia

For all my dwellers, please take heed

From the lofty oak, roots so deep

To the upright beast, heart filled with greed,

Four billion years, but still, I have found no sleep.

I am not tired from spinning slowly,

Like a ballerina twirling around on her feet,

Nor am I weary from being so lonely,

For I see a quiet pretty form; from my galactic seat.

In fact, the beauty that surrounds me is the cause for my unrest

Perhaps I have grown envious of all the galaxies I've seen,

A flaw that, you see, I have tried so hard to address,

Displayed in my coat of tepid blue and emerald green.

In Autumn Weather

by Molly Shepler

Hello, my old friend, it's been awhile!

Never could you go out of good style.

You've been buried deep, a challenge to find
But out of the depths you have surely climbed!

So sweet and so warm, so bright and so clean,

You've aged not at all, it surely would seem.

Reliable, ready, you don't complain

With you, my happiness easy to gain!

It's good to have something that feels secure

On days like this one, I know that, for sure.

Though a chill runs through me as I step out,

I still have warmth if you're up and about.

A beautiful, deep, rich hue: my sweater!

I'm glad you help me endure this weather.

All I Can Say
By Neh French

All I can say or do
Is tell you they aren't good for you
Yet you don't hear me out.
I am sorry you love
Them but you need to give them up.
They don't want to treat you right
You need to leave those children alone until there is
Some sense knocked into them.
Like when cartoon snake gets hit on the head for trying to steal an apple
I love you and you're my best friend
But these people you love aren't good
For you and they don't deserve a queen
Like you!

Introspect
By Sean Oros

There comes a time you feel defeated,
Out of time and hope,
As if all the world is fading fast
And you can only cope.
There's unyielding years still flowing
Leaving you behind,
As you feel time slipping through your grasp
And you can't rewind.
In youth's dawn you feel immortal,
Free from thought of end,
But age can weigh upon a weary soul
As years their progress wend.
Then memory is an aging monument
To all that's come before,
And regret grows like a sordid weed
Sighing "could it have been more?"
Life and death surrounds us,
A swirl of mortal mist;
We must make the most of time that's left
And think not what we've missed.

The Darkness
By Sammi Duty

At the end of the darkness,
a small glimmer of light flickered.
Creatures kept growling from darkness
Trying to get me.
None prevailed as I kept walking,
Walking to the light.
It grows as I near, the growling
Ceases. I have overcome the darkness,
I am in the Light.

July 2, 1881
By Hans Myers

Forgotten tragedy, fallen son of
Homer: proud mentor, soldier, statesman all.

To Jersey was he bound, to speak of love,
when he entered first the low, cold, rude hall
where waited both a train and his doom now.

The man whom fate anoints to be his doom
stands near, waiting just to take his great bow:
Guiteau, madman, levels his gun, and *boom*.

He staggers and clutches his bosom tight,
his great struggle now begins: death or life?

A nation waits with bated breath, affright
but none more so than children and dear wife.

Seventy-Nine days did he suffer 'til
Death in his sweet embrace will be God's will.



Robert Frost Farm
Photo by A. Lapcevich

The Greyhound Plight

By Sean Oros

Once I took a bus ride
On an old Greyhound bus;
I'd rue the poor judgment
That threw me in that fuss.
I boarded close to midnight,
Amidst a motley crowd;
From Pittsburgh to Chicago
I thought I'd need a shroud!
The bus was tight and packed
With many unsavory souls:
Wayward pilgrims cast adrift,
And maybe several lonesome trolls.
Ahead one man cackled loudly,
Lifting high his bottled whiskey;
When he looked back to chat,
I looked away quite briskly.
Then at 3 a.m. we stopped for nothing
At Cleveland's terminal;
I thought I'd not escape its grime,
It's title quite metaphorical!
When last we boarded again at 4,
I saw a fight unfold:
The empty whiskey bottle rolled about
And bus crew blamed some student
bold.

“Alas, good ma'am; tis not your foe!”
I bravely interjected—
But I found my plaintive pleas
Were entirely rejected.
So on we rolled, packed tight again,
Into the eternal night;
My eyes so heavy now with sleep,
But open out of spite.
When at last sweet sleep then saved me,
I woke to such a sight:
We had stopped in Gary, Indiana,
A downtown urban blight.
Tall towers rose high and rusting,
Amidst the lonesome streets,
As again we took on wayfarers
And those of sordid feats.
At last on dawn's horizon
Rose Chicago's skyline grand;
Amidst our wayward passengers
Arose a murmur bland.
We stopped at last and off I sped,
Fit to kiss the ground;
I swore the Greyhound I'd now avoid
With my new judgement sound.

Photo by Z. Helstern



November 22, 1963

By Hans Myers

From building high to streetside low, the world
watches closely today as the car wends
along the crowded streets: cheers, flags, signs hurled
skywards to greet him and his wife and friends.

“All The Way with JFK,” so they say:

But above waits one who wishes to end life,
who intends to cause all a new doomsday.

Bang. The first shot misses man and his wife.

Bang. The second slices through the man’s throat.

Bang. A shower of gore, and as one hearts
across the world break as if lashed by knout.
Another felled by fate’s cold, cruel, evil darts.

Muffled drums and broken Taps echo still,
down the roads of memory, sound still chills.

The Star

By Sean Oros

Rolling storm clouds fleck the sky
As darkened evening draws ever nigh;
The wind is howling and branches
creak

As stalking shadows haunt the meek.
Dark flames billow, consuming light,
As all the world seems struck with
blight,
A darkness creeping over all the land
Consumes and breaks with relentless
hand.

But through the darkness, see, a Star;
A glimpse of hope now seen afar.
Burning through cloud and growing
gloom,

It shines, restoring spirit, dispelling
doom.

A light so small, but undefeated,
Giving faith to all it’s greeted.
The darkness swirls and gnashes teeth,
But starlight is beyond its reach.

The clouds then swirl and block the sky,
It seems again that all will die,
But wind picks up and lifts the veil,
As darkness howls to no avail;
The starlight burns beyond the clouds
And pierces through, unbent, unbowed;
And with the wind, the darkness passes,
As clouds dispense before wind’s lash-
es;
The sun returns, but still remains
A single Star to sing light’s refrains.

Employment appreciation verification

By Camille Radford

Hi I'm calling with an organization to verify the employment appreciation of one Camille Radford.

Yes, I'll hold and wait for you to be done deciding on what to say.

I'll hold and wait for you have a quick chat with your boss about the level of appreciation you had.

What pleasant hold music you have.

Hi, so what would you say your quality of appreciation for her work would be ranked above average, average or below average?

Confused by this question ok. Maybe my follow up questions will grant you some clarity of your treatment of your worker.

What would you say you gave to show the appreciation for the quantity of work she performed?

Maybe you showed it by working her through lunch pulling 8 and a half Work-days. You did let her eat her lunch at her desk right.

What about her interpersonal skills?

So, her smile was contagious. Ok, so what was hidden behind that mask of a smile? O you didn't realize it was a mask I'm sorry. So, She got along with all the staff and remained professional when you talked to her like a child. And Even though your relationship began only a few short months ago you felt comfortable talking to her as if you were her parent. Ok And her attitude during all of this, uh... got it calm and collected even respectful to your disrespectful line of commentary. How would you say your appreciation of her attendance was?

I understand she showed up to work the day after being in the ER ready to learn and work. Never has called off once not even in those difficult days that followed. Awww ok I see, she was 5 min late one morning and what conversation did you have about this? I see ridiculed her in front of new employees after moving her to the back of the office where she was isolated from all other coworkers.

What was the nature of your appreciation?

You paid for her lunch a few times. And helped to celebrate her birthday. Have you ever considered giving parking passes to your three employees? No to expensive for three passes. Understandable it's not as if the company has a high turnover rate.

Do you believe she had trust or faith in you as an employer? Confused as to why this question matter I'll explain. You see having a two way street of trust builds loyalty for employees to stay at any job long term.

Just a few more questions then.

What some areas of strength you have in your work relationship with her?

Who are we talking about Camille? I see that you've had lots of employees in a rotation. O not in a rotation. She always talks about things when asked to elaborate. She is a valued employee that's great to hear. How have you expressed this gratitude? In small brushed ok thanks here and there. O and I won't forget the occasional free lunch.

Just a few more questions then.

Would you treat another employee this way? O you treat all of your employees this way great good to know.

Any additional comments you would like to provide that her new employer should know not to do? Yes, not to. Well since her leaving your work she has been especially careful of how the staff is treated in the workplace. Always personally handling all interpersonal relationship and standing up for coworkers when bosses push too hard. We wanted to see how far she has risen.

Well, that's all I need thank you for offering your time. Have a great day! O my name, of course, Camille Radford CEO of a nonprofit organization for animals. Thanks for your lack of appreciation.

GhostGirl

By Anonymous

The GhostGirl is in my dreams again.
She steps in my shadows
And walks so surely,
Even when I doubt my own path.

The GhostGirl is calling me again.
Her voice is spun sugar,
So sweet and so pure;
I fear she could cut my tongue.

The GhostGirl is by my side again.
Her eyes are the shade of the sunset,
Her skin paler than the freshest milk.
If I touch her, shall she shatter?

The GhostGirl is my friend again.
Her lips taste of salt,
A reminder of the tears I caused;
I will never forgive myself.

The GhostGirl will be here again.
She left my shirt cold on the bed,
The same I wore the night before.
She'll come to take it once more, in time.

The GhostGirl is in my dreams again.
She follows me so certainly,
And holds my hand so secure.
I will give her happiness, endlessly.

Fairytale

by Molly Shepler

They say you shouldn't need a man—
And never did I need a man—
Until this boy came right along,
Who showed me love, which I was
taught
Was only found in books and rhymes.
It's love I thought was only real
In movies, or songs, or poems.
This is one of those.

Crazy love as deep and wide as
You can go; it is devoted,
Respectful, patient, and kind,
Fun and free and vast and strong.
As much as can be managed by
My heart and his—
Sometimes I can't believe it,
But I can always feel it.

Photo by Molly Shepler





July Moon
Photo by A. Lapceovich

I greet the haze

By D.J. Martino

I greet the haze.

The grasp of uncertainty, the seed of doubt
Words fail, spirits fall, while eyes fill
Midnight rain, silent, ignored, unknown
Sprinkling despair, under cover of night
Starlight dims, as shadows grow
Moonlight fades, shackled by clouds
Contained, constrained, retained, ingrained
Saturated by the coming blackness
Drowning, deserved damnation
Interrupted by painfully temporary peace
An early sunrise, banishing the rain
Again, a temporary salve, ineffective
The spirit dissolves, numbed by false hope
Daylight fades, an infernal cycle
The rain returns, ruinous, remorseless
Running in rivulets of regret
Cruel hands of memory and time intertwine
Strangling, smothering, sinful
The spirits rise, then fall, a supernatural fog
Released from torment, removed from the real
I greet the haze.

How Wonderful It Has Been Made to Be

By Anthony Sivie

Wonder, wonder, wonder
How it must be lovely to see;
The creation or blunder,
That you set forth to be.

The Worms have dirt to feed,
And the trees have wind to catch;
The fish proficient in speed,
And hounds so eager to fetch.

The scribes have pages to fill,
And philosophers books to read;
Farmers to run the mill,
And a king with men to lead.

Ponder, ponder, ponder
The things you gave to me;
I could dream of nothing fonder
Than the moments of wondrous glee.



Photo by Ashley Prout

June 6, 1968

By Hans Myers

Aeschylus and his verse are favored now.
Brother, living in the shadow of the martyr,
By God's grace eloquent and given a vow
"For justice, fight!" Equality starter:
From Mississippi to California
he fought for love and life, always rough, bold!
Hand in hand with Chavez in the flora,
Arm in arm with King, both with wisdom old
sought an end to hate and grief and pain here.
He sought all to help, ruthless though he was.
High office distant helped him for to hear
The broken cries of those trampled by laws.

In California he won! Forward on!
But the joy was soon ended by a pawn.



Photo by A. Byrd

Squires Castle

Photo by
A. Lapcevich



Difference in Mind

By Jon Burkley

To cope with my mind, I caused harm with a blade
It seemed like the only way to help with the pain
Now I must live with those marks that don't fade

I tried early on to find someone's aid
But no one seemed to understand my brain
To cope with my mind, I caused harm with a blade

I thought that this was just my crusade
That all these thoughts wouldn't be my bane
Now I must live with those marks that don't fade

As the thoughts continued, my mental state de-
cayed
With blood and scars becoming a stain
To cope with my mind, I caused harm with a blade

I keep all thoughts behind a mental barricade
With every thought of happiness, a feign
Now I must live with those marks that don't fade

My thoughts and actions always like nightshade
If people hear them, I'd be labeled insane
To cope with my mind, I caused harm with a blade
Now I must live with those marks that don't fade

Virtual Void

By Talia O'Brien

Wake everyday with the same pain within
Turn on your phone it's time to plug in

Check all your apps what's your social status today?
Did you get all your 'likes' without delay?
What's going on in society this day-
50 more people died today

Fear and strife this same old life
Murder and thugs there's no time to unplug

Describe your feelings with emoticons and texts
But deep down you know there's still something left
You know inside that the pain is real
But when you're a slave to the screen you're taught
how to feel

You want to scream but you don't know why
How long until technology sees us die?

Someone asked Me

By Neh French

Someone asked me.
Someone said.
Someone told me.
Someone read.
Yet here I am.
Yet here I stay.
Wondering why
The sky is gray?
Yet here I write.
Wondering why
I stare at
The Sky?
Yet here I lie.
Not wanting to know why,
Why I stare at
The Sky.

April 14, 1865

By Hans Myers

Good Friday dark, Good Friday cold ends now.
Laughter bright, love so pure shattered by one –
Whose aim is hate, whose name is fame: now bow!
For through rude hands and cruelty it is done.
“With Malice Toward None,” once he spoke truly.
The “Better Angels” now tend him – brave soul
Whose head lays wounded, his blood freed newly.
The man who preached love and duty as goal.
The Martyr now they call him, true and loved.
First to fall in country's name – great hero!
The man who felled him a villain and shoved
Unto the darkest room: A modern Nero.

But let his life ever serve as our ideal state:
The man whose moral compass led us straight.

Sapphire Skies

By Jenyfer Pegg

The color of the sky,
As far as I can see
Looks exactly like Your eyes.
Bright, blue, and shining like the sun.
And in them –
I can see the whole world waiting for me.

Lavender Days and Scarlet Nights

By Jenyfer Pegg

Days apart from you are long,
Nights apart are event longer.
I long for every moment to be next to you.
Being with you is better than a soft breeze.
You feel like warm skin
And new possibilities.

Auburn Changes

By Jenyfer Pegg

The world is changing.
And so are we.
We're different now than before.
New possibilities are now old.
The need I feel to always be next to you
Has fallen away like leaves from trees.

Midnight Demise

By Jenyfer Pegg

We were flawed, fading, and faltering.
A love that was once warm,
Turned cold.
We are completely different now.
The world is still waiting,
But it no longer looks just like Your eyes.

**Pap: A Companion Piece to Dylan Thomas’
*Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night***
by Molly Shepler

My mind will wander to that woeful night
When miss I your happy laugh, oh so gay.
I wish you had not gone into the light.

A selfish thought; but maybe you just might
Have raged and raged to have another day.
My mind will wander to that woeful night.

So joyful now, angel that is in flight,
We cry and weep, regret this is the way.
I wish you had not gone into the light.

We’re singing songs, it’s such a cheerful sight,
Reminders of your smile take that away.
My mind will wander to that woeful night.

I know that joy for you is only right.
I will see you again someday, I pray.
I wish you had not gone into the light.

Great earthly pain had surely reached its
height,
So right for you to leave, I know and say.
My mind will wander to that woeful night.
I wish you had not gone into the light.

How Frightening to Know Dr. Hall

By Dr. Mary Theresa Hall

Based on the Edward Lear poem “How Pleasant
to Know Mr. Lear”

How frightening to know Dr. Hall!
Who has challenged her students to tears
Some think her short-tempered and weird
But I think her odd and precise.

Loving Chaucer and all of his Tales
Makes her smile oh so joyously fair
Pilgrims all in the journey of life
Her students the stars of her world.

Definition: a natural response to stress

By Tina Krolkowski

Racing heart. Sweaty palms--
Am I the only one that hears the ringing?
I thought I knew this-- I really did. But my mind
is blank.

Does she know the answer? I dare to peek--

No-- what if someone saw?

I have no help. I have no hope.

I'm nothing.

I won't--I can't--get through this.

Maybe if I pretend I'm sick?

I may--actually--be sick.

Then could I leave?

Then would I be able to avoid this?

These thoughts have led me astray.

I used to think, "They motivate me."

"I'm better when I over-think."

No, I'm not.

The terror that pounds through my veins, my ears

--

There is no good there.

Freedom is:

Knowing there is failure, but also success.

That perfection does not (quite) exist.

These thoughts do not control me.

They do not define me.

I define myself.

Life is too short to sit and worry.

I do better on my own, with the thoughts that
bring joy

Than with the critic that brings me misery.

I cannot take my own internal judge too seriously.

She is, quite frankly, an idiot

That when listened to too often brings only de-
struction instead of growth.

These thoughts do not define me.

I am not defined.

I change; I grow.

I remember, I forget.

But anxiety will not control me.

Photo by Molly Shepler





Photo by Ashley Prout



Photo by Molly Shepler



Photo by Chimamaka Palmer

At The Shores Of Botany Bay

By Conor King

So, now I lay alone as they've taken me away
Waiting in agony on the ship I know will sail today
What more can I do or what more could I say?
Staring off into the distance at the shores of Botany Bay

When the day came that our fields had grown naked
Waxy and pale had become standard youthful faces
They should have known that we could not sustain on Peel's brimstone
But it mattered not when our food was filling up their homes

But dear old Trevelyan, he means so very well
What little food he has gifted us, kilometers from where we dwell
The Whigs believe that the free market will come and correct itself
And this shall save us from this disastrous Hell

So, now I lay alone as they've taken me away
Waiting in agony on the ship I know will sail today
What more can I do or what more could I say?
Staring off into the distance at the shores of Botany Bay

I could no longer watch as children starved in the streets
Or listen to their haunting cries begging for something to eat
I truly doubt they even wanted us to survive
Their policies nothing more than a systemic genocide

I had never been the one to rally for our freedom
Too busy trying to eek a life in this modern fiefdom
Yet, I share this cell with 1803 and the men from July
Now, I realize it is for them that I have begun to cry

So, now I lay alone as they've taken me away
Waiting in agony on the ship I know will sail today
What more can I do or what more could I say?
Staring off into the distance at the shores of Botany Bay

"Equality- it is new strung and shall be heard"
From the mouth of martyrs, this cry like a flag unfurled
Still fueling us now some fifty years later
Dying for our country, yet still being called traitors

Against the incessant backdrop of rain in my rundown cage
For those that starved me, I feel nothing but rage
So, I wish nothing but success for those still fighting for the
cause
And may no defeat discourage you or give you pause

So, now I lay alone as they've taken me away
Waiting in agony on the shi I know will sail today
What more can I do or what more could I say?
Staring off into the distance at the shores of Botany Bay

History

By Chris Moinet, Ph.D.

History is not history when it happens,
but only after,
after the hours, days, months, and years,
after the events, effects, results,
after the passage of time and consequence
allow us to know if what happened was
history.

History is not history when it happens.
It's just life.

The Old Barn

By Chris Moinet, Ph.D.

The old barn
has long outlived its usefulness
and so looms
silent and gray, alone,
imposing, massive, but weakening,
bending, bowing, cracking,
slowly splintering,
waiting, stoically,
for the final collapse.

Today my poetry takes a turn

By Jon Burkley

Today my poetry takes a turn.
I always write about depression.
I usually use some rhyme scheme,
Create some form of harm,
And include a gruesome depiction.
Today I want to just say it,
The thoughts running through my mind:
Who would care, what could I ever amount to?
Is anything worth it?
I see a scene in the future that has a combo from my past.
The first part is a dead friend,
Lying pale, lifeless and unmoving.
The next a trail of blood.
A thick, scarlet pool reflecting images.
Follow it to its owner.
Can you guess who?
A man of twenty,
A deep gash from his throat,
Small slits dripping with blood on his arms and legs.
I try to shake the thought from my mind,
But it won't leave.
The eyes with a thousand-yard stare,
But there are tears.
Just a few noticeable traces of tears running down his pale, cold cheeks.
They are from his regret. That this never should have been him
The image fades and my eyes drop.
I have a steely blade in my hand,
And the blood is already flowing down my arms...

The Wall

By Sean Oros

Across the country, an iron curtain looms,
Not across land, but between our hearts and minds.
Both red and blue, we squabble to our tombs,
Bound by creed, we bicker till we're blind.

The "others" leer, twisted to shapes obscene,
For where people stood, our eyes see only foes.
Families divided, end-times surely we have seen,
For as division grows, so surely do our woes.

We build up walls, our fortresses to keep,
We block "them" out, whether young or old.
We stand our ground, and enjoy but restless sleep,
But our pride remains, the original killer bold.

Roads may languish, but that's the others' fault,
Or so all think, from the Potomac to the Thames.
"They" are fools, praise reserved solely for "our" folk,
With no relent, because it's only "us" or "them."

We seldom talk, then only to echo what we think,
Or else we'd fight, no compromise to find;
The lines are drawn, our voices shouting from the brink,
From our concrete walls, we bicker till we're blind.

There's no common ground, triumph's our endless thirst;
We can leave this fight at any time—but let them do it first.

The Wall Stopped Talking

By: D.J. Martino

The wall stopped talking. Miles sighed. Of course it would decide to clam up right when he was about to ask it the question that was always burning in his mind: *How – oh!*

Miles flinched, his bunk bucking belligerently, attempting to throw him off. His room had been quite disagreeable lately. The only good thing about the situation was all the extra space he had, now that his roommate was finally gone...mostly. They still hadn't cleaned up all the pieces. Miles doubted they ever would. He sighed again. At least the rats would have a good meal, provided they ever returned from Barbados. Come to think of it, he rather missed his roommate, Tom. He had been easy to live with, quiet and reserved. Of course, the coma helped keep his noise under control. Miles wished the men in white would have left Tom's wheelchair. It always looked so comfortable, even after the Dark Ones had painted it red. But, of course, they had to take the wheelchair. "Evidence," was all they said. Apparently, his right arm and left foot weren't evidence, as they still lay on the floor, the blood congealed into a brown gel. Miles smiled. He had gotten to the blood while it was still good and wet. It had been so long since he had been able to finger paint.

Miles returned to his thoughts, recovering from the bunk-inflicted interruption. Now, what *was* he thinking? Ah! Yes, the question. It was on everyone's mind, which is remarkable, considering some of the residents had precious little mind left. *How did – bats!*

Bats were flying through the room! Miles stared through the small window of his door, watching the strange creatures. They seemed lost, and he could swear one of them was his cousin, Terry. Before he could call out, they were gone, and Miles craned his neck to look at the large cell block. The entire room was cold cement, much of it crumbling. The steel doors that adorned the walls were rusted, the paint peeling. Overhead, yellow lights flickered, their industrial buzzing syncopated by lapses in power. Miles didn't mind the flickering light. After all, the room needed to blink, just like everyone else. He could hear Dave grumbling from next door. Dave was a new patient, with a knack for crazy, even considering his fellows. Miles smirked contentedly, knowing he would always appear sane while next door to crazy Dave. His neighbor seemed to really be on a rant today, voice rising with excitement. His tone was reminiscent of a violin, if the musician was using a rock in place of a bow.

"The rest will see...they'll let them free. Up and up and down and out and left and left but never right. Always wrong. Ring the gong! Poets know it even if they can't write. Stumps! Bloody stumps! How am I supposed to work with these rank amateurs? If the shoe fits, make a cat box. When the storm comes, put the pooch in the pouch. Pooch pouch...pooch pouch..."

Another familiar voice rang out, shrill and piercing.

"Hey, Dave! I called your brother on the soup can! He wasn't in. He wanted to take a shower, so I told him he'd better not take mine!"

Miles peeked out the tiny window of his cell, peering across the large cellblock. It looked like Colin had decided to contribute to the academic discourse. His wiry gray hair stuck out in all directions, and his forehead was bloodied, the result of his daily attempt to perform osmosis with his door. His shout woke up Tod and Dot, the midget brothers who shared a cell. They had a tendency to speak at the same time, somehow knowing what the other would say, rather unsettling, in Miles' opinion. Miles figured it was just the staples in their heads reacting with the electroshock treatment they both experienced regularly – some kind of electric feedback that linked their cerebral something-or-other. It was odd to hear them talk, as it was always to themselves, not directly to someone else. And they always said simultaneously what should be said by one, making the intended speaker indiscernible. Their demeanor was that of eerie calm, their voices almost monotone. They stared at Colin, with perhaps only a hint of aloof annoyance.

“They have woken us, brother.

Indeed they have, brother.

Trips and traps, bits and bats.

What shall we do?

Wait for the doctor.

More medicine for us.

Plug us in, and charge us up.

We really must upgrade to solar power.

That would require escape, brother.

I suppose it would.

Not possible.

No one escapes.

Why do you suppose that is?

You know.

I do not.

The Observers.

I know them.

I told you that.

I thought I didn't know.

Well, I knew you knew.

Who knew, you?

Yes, me.

If you, then us.

Indeed.

The Observers keep us here, until we make a mistake.

We don't make mistakes, brother.

We make others make mistakes.

That's how to win the game.

The downfall of others is our salvation.”

“Aw, stick a possum in it!” Dave yelled. “No geese wanna make chickadees with midget luchadores!”

“He makes no sense, brother...Indeed, brother...I believe he wishes us to stop talking...We would have never started had our slumber not been disturbed...Valid point, brother...Colin’s fault...Colin’s fall?...No, Colin’s fault...Oh, sad...Why sad?...Sad because we can’t exploit his downfall, as there was not one to be had.”

“Hey, Bolt Brothers! Running low on juice? You know, the best way to catch a fish is to have someone toss it to you. Static charge, foreign barge. Charge barge!” Colin yelled.

“Charge barge!” Dave replied.

“They are stupid, brother. Agreed, brother.”

“Stupid?!” Colin replied indignantly. “You ever been stuck behind a wide-load truck in a hot tub? That’s stupid.”

“Don’t even get me started on wide loads!” Dave yelled. “That damnable porpoise is always holding up the hot tub! Holding the pooch pouch in the charge barge.”

“Charge barge!” Colin echoed.

Miles started to say something, but he stopped when a piercing scream rang out in the cellblock. It dripped agony, oozed fear. As it faded away, the echoes lingering like his unfortunate roommate Tom’s limbs, the brothers spoke.

“Mistakes, brother.

Indeed, brother.

That is why we became the batteries.

No screams like that in our therapy.

Who do you suppose it was, brother?

I imagine it was Barry.

Ah, yes.

Barry has been missing for three days,
brother.

Ever since the good doctor came to talk to him about
mistakes.

Chief Observer.

Yes, brother, we interest him.

That is why we are safe.”

“Hey!” Miles called out. “Have your walls been givin’ you the silent treatment? Yesterday, mine wouldn’t shut up about gorillas in trench coats. Now, I can’t even get ‘em to whisper.”

The discussion was interrupted by the ominous slow creak of the upper level entry door. This door only opened at very specific times, unless something terrible was about to happen. It wasn’t feeding time, nor was it medication time. Miles considered the silence, thick and tangible, quiet enough to hear a nun’s dirty thoughts. The creaking stopped momentarily, the rhythmic footfalls of a booted figure filling the silence. Then, the door moved again, the whining grate against the doorframe ended by the

condemning slam of imprisonment. The footsteps continued, progressing down the stairs. Miles, long since devoid of fear, peered curiously from his window.

Tod and Dot stood at attention, back-to-back, humming a monotone note, trying to embody the batteries of which they so often spoke. Colin sat in the corner, holding his knees to his chest, his wide eyes darting wildly, like a small animal sensing an approaching predator. He appeared to be mumbling to himself, spittle flying like the bats that had so rudely departed. His hands, already bone-thin due to lack of food, gripped his legs so tightly they were practically skeletal. It was odd, Miles thought, that Tom had so much meat on him, but he never shared with anyone else. Coma or not, there's something to be said for common courtesy. Maybe Colin would appreciate Tom's arm. The hand was still plump, only a little grey. It had never gotten much use, after all.

The visitor reached the bottom of the staircase and paused, as though pondering where to go. Miles could see a dark silhouette in the dim light, but features were indistinguishable. The figure moved toward the opposite side of the cell block, toward Colin and the brothers. He passed the first door without stopping, but that made sense. The only thing in there was the Goat-Man, and he was fairly moody on Tuesdays, or was it Thursdays? In either case, he came back from the Observers one day with small horns and a tail. Despite the custom appendages, he saw fit to retreat into inescapable madness. Quite rude, in Miles' opinion.

"Rude, indeed," the familiar voice of the south wall said behind him.

Miles whirled around, peeved that the flat barrier of stone had been reading his mind before dinner. Why bother laying out contractual terms if they fell to tatters at the first sign of errant whimsy? He sighed, taking a step toward the wall.

"So, now you want to talk?" he whispered, hoping to avoid the visitor's notice. "You certainly have an inconvenient speech window. Ha! A wall with a window."

"You're downright hysterical," the wall said flatly, another pun in Miles' head, as he considered a wall speaking flatly. "Forgive me if I'm simply stone-faced."

Miles laughed boisterously, quite forgetting the presence of the stranger. He immediately ceased his laughter, his blood turning to ice as he heard the footsteps approaching his cell. It wasn't fear that caused him to recoil, but a grim certainty that a horrid fate awaited him outside that door. He retreated from the window, curling up in his bunk, hoping the visitor would think the noise came from Tom.

"How can an arm and foot laugh?" the wall retorted, once again intruding into Miles' personal thought-space. "At the most, they can give you half a standing ovation."

Miles again lost himself, cackling maniacally.

"Stop! You're killing me," he sputtered in between chuckles.

"No, we're not," another voice said. "At least, not yet."

Miles froze. That voice belonged neither to his walls, bunk, nor ceiling. His floor was a mute, so that was out, and it had already been established that Tom's

limbs lacked a vocal capacity. The rats were still on holiday, so, by process of elimination, that meant...

“You,” the visitor called sternly. “Get off your bunk, and stand against the back wall.”

Dutifully, Miles complied. He had seen enough to know that disobedience left one wishing they could be reduced to an arm and foot. He remained silent, sending all manner of explicit thoughts to the wall, hoping it heard every last curse. He heard the sharp click of a lock, followed by the harsh screeching sound of his door scraping against stone. Footsteps approached him, slowly, ominously. He felt cold steel restraints quickly slapped onto his wrists. A burlap sack eclipsed the world around him. The brothers always said the Observers liked to be secretive. In case a patient did return, they didn't want him knowing too much. While he was disoriented in the sudden blackness, his ankles were swiftly shackled. He chuckled. These people were pretty darn good at locking things up. They should probably work a little more on the unlocking aspect of the job, though, he thought. He was forcefully shoved in the direction of his door. As they passed the threshold into the main hall, he felt an odd mix of exhilaration and sadness. He had never left his cell, yet when he finally was let out, he couldn't even see.

They stopped at the bottom of what turned out to be the stairs. Miles felt a nudge, indicating he lift his foot. The visitor led him up the stairs, keeping a firm grip on his arm, not unlike the famously fatal grip of his Aunt Bernice. Granted, she simply strangled sheep. Maybe she and Goat-Man would've made a good couple.

“Fare thee well, dear Milo!” Colin cried out behind him.

“Watch out for the charge barge!” Crazy Dave yelled.

“Charge barge!” Colin echoed.

“They know nothing of charges, brother...Indeed, brother, but Miles will know soon...Or not...He may simply be falling...Falling down...Ever down...Better him than us, brother...Too true, brother.”

The voices all dissolved into a cacophonous din as Miles fumbled up the stairs. At the top, he was led to the door through which he assumed the stranger had entered. After they passed through it, he felt a sharp jab of pain in his arm. A moment later, he was floating, or at least, it felt like it. It was like his brain was bobbing down a babbling brook, perhaps going to meet the rats in Barbados. Did they have babbling brooks in Barbados? He felt himself smiling, a peaceful bliss washing over him. Then, his mind switched off. It was as though someone had pulled the plug on his brain. His last thoughts, before the last bit of consciousness drifted away, were, “I finally got the wall talking, but I forgot to ask the question.”

A jolt of electricity caused Miles to leap up, only to immediately slam down on cold steel, restraints firmly pulling him back. He opened his eyes, but a blinding spotlight shone directly over him, masking the world in white. It was a pleasant change from red, he thought, though he then detected the iron taste of fresh blood.

“Name?” a voice asked firmly.

“Pardon? Is that you, Mr. Light?”

Electricity filled every cell of his body, his own scream rudely trumpeting throughout his surroundings without his permission. His brain felt like it was being tossed in a skillet, lightly coated with olive oil, seasoned with a pinch of garlic salt and oregano. Great, now I’m hungry, he thought, the pain and excess voltage subsiding.

“Name,” the voice repeated again.

“Mr. Light, I’m flattered you are taking an interest in me, but I must say, I’m shocked at your harsh approach to courtship. Ha!”

Again, the surge of electricity, until Miles felt he must have been confused for a light bulb. His thoughts, already fairly detached, were becoming increasingly less focused. He wasn’t sure if he was still screaming, but his throat was sore, so he must have been. He wondered how Tod and Dot learned to enjoy this. Again, the voltage subsided.

“Name.”

The voice was growing more and more stern.

“Miles,” he finally replied weakly.

“Last name.”

“Wilburn,” he answered, almost forgetting. His thoughts were slipping away, his memories melting. He thought he could feel his brain oozing out of his ears. He imagined a red-grey paste, spreading like spilled milk, with the viscosity of runny eggs.

“Very good,” said the voice. “Gibson, make sure all records of Wilburn here are misplaced.”

“Understood,” another voice responded, presumably Gibson.

“He’s all yours, Doctor.”

“Is it tea time?” Miles interrupted. “I do love a nice Duke Blue, cousin of Earl Grey, you see.”

“My, you are a fascinating specimen,” a third voice said, chillingly stony, yet flecked with dark amusement. “Leave us.”

“I’d love to, Doc, but I’m currently a bit blinded and strapped down.”

Two pairs of footsteps retreated from them. He could hear clinking of small metallic objects, keys, he thought. It reminded him of his old spoon, given to him by Whatshisnuts, such a dear friend.

“Now, let’s see what we can do with you.”

“I imagine there’s a great deal that you can do with me. I’ve always considered myself multi-faceted in my usefulness. I can, for example, make one hell of a rat-cake. It’s not quite as good as my batberry pie, but – AAAAGGGGHHHH!”

He could feel cold steel piercing his skin, his splattering blood changing the

light to a crimson hue. The cutting continued, relentless and unyielding. As it progressed, he felt his skin parting, opening to reveal his inner self, the hot blood cooled by the damp air of the room in which he lay. In the dimmed light, he glanced at his surgeon. Wrinkled lines ran along an aged face, the skin grayed from lack of exposure to the sun. Wiry white hair hung limp, looking more like spiders regularly disposed of old webs atop the doctor's cranium. His lips were pursed in concentration, a slight smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth, his white operating robe spattered with red and brown, the remnants of victims new and old. Perhaps his most striking feature, however, were his eyes. A despicably vibrant orange, they were steeled in an odd mixture of enjoyment and concentration, yet devoid of any humanity. It was as though he were simply cutting into a corpse, something already beyond life, beyond use, beyond hope. In that cold stare, Miles saw straight into the maw of Hell itself. They embodied the darkest parts of the human condition, emanating both chaotic madness and meticulous precision.

"You will forgive me, Miles, but I'm out of anesthetic. However, I feel this is more personal. It brings me closer to my patients, seeing the absolute depths of pain in their soul. I do hope you enjoy it."

Miles' thoughts were blurred, incoherent, the pain blinding him to everything. He felt a metallic thud against his sternum, exposed after the skin was pulled aside. Another two thuds, and there was a light crack. He felt the doctor's hands, his fingers rough and thick, wrapping around his ribs on either side. A sharp tug, and the bones separated, exposing his insides. He could feel his life slipping away, the continual dripping of his blood like light rainfall.

"You, sir, have a wonderfully strong heart. I believe I can make use of this, now that you're done with it, that is."

"Wait," Miles squeaked, choking on an upwelling of blood, surging relentlessly, drowning out his best attempts at speech. "My question...I never asked...my question..."

His words gurgled, like the rusty water pipes that ran above his cell. Miles envisioned each syllable, the words slowing, coagulating along with the life that ran from his body in rivulets. For a moment, the amusement disappeared from the doctor's eyes, replaced with the purest, most terrifying malice Miles had ever seen. When he replied, Miles thought he heard another voice, deeper, darker, beneath the doctor's.

"Very well, but be quick about it. I intend to harvest the organ while it still flickers with life."

"How did I..." he coughed again, feeling the end coming. "How...did I...get here?"

His consciousness faded as he struggled to hold on. He must have an answer. This question had plagued him for so long. He had forgotten who he was before this place, before imprisonment. His heartbeat slowed, the inevitable blackness of the void swiftly approaching. When the doctor heard his question, however, the amusement returned, mingling with the dark malice to form a visage of delighted inhumanity. The surgeon of the damned pondered the question for a moment, as though the answer had to

simmer before bursting from him in an excited tirade. As he spoke, he waved the scalpel through the air, his hands as animated as his tone.

“Why, you put yourself here, my boy! The harshest punishments are reserved for the worst offenders, you see. They found you kneeling in a pile of viscera that belonged to your family, a cleaver still clenched in your hand. It was rather amateur stuff, really, but still delightfully twisted. And then, to my delight, you sealed your own fate when you used that cleaver to take your own life. You abandoned all hope of redemption, for reasons I neither know nor care to know. Thus, here you are.”

In a flash, Miles remembered, his remaining synapses flooding his mind with images – his wife, his children, even the family dog. It had all made sense, why he had to do it. Even taking his own life seemed to have some purpose. But then, suddenly, he had found himself in this place, amidst other tortured souls. In his last moments, another chilling question presented itself to him. He choked back blood, his voice barely a whisper.

“How long...have I...been here?”

“Don’t burden yourself with thoughts of time, my boy! That’s one force whose tyranny holds no power here. Just know that, in a few seconds, you’ll wake up in your cell, and we can start again. Hmm...I haven’t noticed the brilliant green hue of your eyes before. Maybe that will be our next project.”

In the final moments of his most recent torment, he saw a flash of fire in the doctor’s eyes, the darkness surging forth, a near-tangible force. In that flaming abyss, he saw himself, partially submerged in a magmatic lake, his flesh bubbling off, revealing bleach-white bone, the fire rapaciously spreading. He saw his face, an agonized, ghastly visage, his screams increasing in propensity until all he heard was his own pain. He closed his eyes, wishing for the end.

Then, silence.

He opened his eyes, daring to peek at his surroundings. Cold cement, the floor splattered with congealed blood and the remains of his roommate, Tom. The wall chuckled lightly.

“Good morning, Miles!” it said boisterously. “You were about to ask me something?”

Then, the wall stopped talking...



Photo by
Chimamaka Palmer

Photo by
Ashley Prout



The Wilted Lily
By Natalija Mara Kutlesa

Lily Anna Rightly was the most delicate and dazzling creature who ever lived. Her golden blonde hair reflected the light within her soul. Her eyes, blue and dilated, reflected the ocean of love, of curiosity embedded in her heart. She surrounded her world with lilies. When Lily Anna was younger, her mother always gave her a lily, saying, "Like the lily, you are alluring and elegant. Never forget that."

As Lily Anna grew older, she kept the lily and her mother's words close to her heart. Now nineteen years of age, Lily Anna was ready for courtship. She knew the best way to find her desire was at the Melancholy Hall ball.

Lily Anna entered the foyer of the hall wearing a white gown with black silhouetting accents. Her eyes examined the room for anyone she knew and saw George Gringsly, a tall, handsome man whose eyes were a piercing green and whose hair was as dark as night. He had a dimple that beamed on his left cheek when he smiled. Lily Anna could not help but fall in love. George briskly walked over to Lily Anna. For a mesmerizing moment, they just stood in silence, staring at each other, but their souls danced. George, barely recovered from the moment, could only whisper, "How do you do?"

Within the next few months of courtship, Lily Anna and George were very much in love. Everyone in the town expected an engagement, even though George seemed to have little interest in it. Lily Anna was naively in love. She did not focus on the town or the pending engagement. Her heart was solely concentrated on George Gringsly. To her, he was something out of a dream. He loved Lily Anna and made her feel unique like the lily her mother described her as. Lily Anna felt giddy when she saw him. Anytime he would walk in the room, her face would light up like a freshly lit Christmas tree; she felt warmth, love, and happiness. For the first time in Lily Anna's life, everything made sense. For the first time, she felt completeness. All her wildest dreams and fantasies of love were coming true. Love now was more than just a word.

Since the family knew of the pending engagement and Lily Anna's heart, the family invited the happy couple to a dinner party at Lily Anna's aunt's house. After dinner, the family retreated to the parlor. While Lily Anna played the pianoforte, George was pulled aside by her father. After ten minutes, they returned. Soon after, it was time to go. They bid their farewells and were off.

When George walked Lily Anna from her carriage, the rain began to lightly fall. The bitter early December cold wrapped itself around them. They reached the door and entered the house. George slowly closed the door behind them. He turned to Lily Anna and began expressing his true feelings.

"I don't love you, nor could I ever love you," George ruthlessly confessed.

"My George! What has gotten into you?" Lily Anna promptly exclaimed.

"Don't you see? All I ever wanted was money, and when I learned that your family was reluctant to give a slice of the fortune, I refused to marry. You silly girl, so desperate in wanting love and beauty!"

Lily Anna stood there in shock. "But I love you."

George flashed a grim smile. "I don't care."

George Gringsly left without warning. Lily Anna collapsed to the floor, questioning every word, every action, every emotion she felt. Could this be possible? Her

world was destroyed, spinning off its axis. The freezing rain pounding on the window drowned out the noise of Lily Anna's heart breaking. Her heart crumbled to ruin. She could feel her eyes shatter; the once glistening blue was now dull and grey. Lily Anna could feel the light in her heart slowly dimming. Her heart, once full of love and warmth, now became bleak and desolate. Huddled by the radiator, her heart ached and begged for any warmth before the cold completely overtook her. The color in her face drained as the winter sun. There was no hope. The once flourishing beautiful bright lily turned into a wilted, scraggly thorn.



Photo by A. Lapceovich

Broken Mind

by Alonzo Brown

Every day you wake up, something new is in store for you. Every day is different and while that can be frightening it is a part of life's many mysteries. How you handle the fear is what determines what type of person you will be in the future.

Your mind gives function to all things you do but it also carries all the burdens that occur in one's life. The mind can be broken. Broken thoughts and the disarray that forms in the mind. Stress can severely strain your mind. The mind can be broken. Through stress your mind can be viewed like juggling. Juggling your thoughts and feelings can break your mind.

Depression can break your mind. The way you handle the thoughts and feelings that occur in your mind can make or break it. It happens to everyone at some point in their lives. How you handle it determines what person you will be. Just like the young girl in the short story, "The Flowers," who lost her innocence at such a young age. She prevailed and even though her innocence was broken, she continued with her life by not letting it determine her future.

Depression and stress can break your mind. The way you handle it can either keep you in a jail or set you free. One must learn from the struggles they face to free their broken mind. Life can and will always have stressful and depressing factors associated with it. Thinking positive and continuing each day, remembering that you could be dead tomorrow, is key to moving forward even with the pressures one has on the mind. Advice from others can help, but the way it is used is what determines if you can break the broken mind. Life is hard, and knowing that may make it easier for one to take the stress and use it to encourage success. If you don't have stress, are you really working hard, and could you ever be successful without stress in your life? Your answer is no. The mind will not always be broken.

The Treetop Child

By Sophia Kostoff

“Dearly beloved, we gather here today to celebrate the union of this couple in matrimony,” the deep voice of the reverend echoed.

Nellie could barely focus on the words he spoke. Her focus drifted to the deep brown eyes of her love standing across from her. To say she was lucky was an understatement. To say that she made the right choice in life was too general of a statement. Life is an endless cycle of forks in the road, and we’re never given the map to follow. We end up wandering aimlessly down the beaten path until someone happens to lift the blindfold from our eyes to reveal what we were looking for all along.

If anyone had ever experienced the blind side of life, it was Nellie Grace. The words of the reverend flew over her head and into the forest behind them. She couldn’t focus, not for a minute, not even three minutes.

“You may now kiss your bride!” Those beautiful words still lingered in Nellie’s mind as reality finally struck. Could this even be real? Everything changed when Bea came into her life...to stay.

The instrumental music twisted and turned through the trees as she danced in the arms of her love. Everything was perfect. Nellie couldn’t focus on one element. The back yard of her childhood was alive with the sounds of guests chattering away. It looked unrecognizable with its white and purple embellishments. The aroma of lemon chicken and grilled asparagus filled the air as each guest claimed a plate of food from the buffet line. The excitement of it all was almost too much for Nellie.

“It’s so good to have Nell and Bea home with us.” Papa boasted to everyone who would listen. “It’s been long enough since we’ve had a visit.”

He wasn’t wrong. Over a decade had gone by since she’d been home last. She couldn’t remember the appearance of the back yard without the white adornments. However long she had been away now didn’t matter. She was home...home to stay.

“Whatever happened to that other girl she was dating? Delia, was it?” one of the family members asked.

“I don’t know. I guess the distance was too much for ‘em,” Papa said. Papa didn’t know at the time, but he was right. Distance proved to be the only obstacle too steep to climb for the lovers. Nellie was determined that nothing would ever come between her and Bea.

“You know, I haven’t been down there since before Nell left,” Papa said as he twirled the tip of his orange beard around his calloused fingers. Nellie couldn’t help but listen to the conversation. “Heck, I don’t even know if the little thing survived the storm a few years ago...”

“What are you going on about now, Papa?” Nellie questioned.

“There she is now! Come here, Nellie! I was just telling the family about those days you spent at the creek bed when you were young. I’d be surprised if that old tree-house you had survived that storm...,” Papa chuckled, “I’ll be dipped if I could even find the path anymore.”

If she hadn’t realized how long she had been away before, there was no denying it now. “It was nice seeing all of you,” Nellie stammered anxiously as she quickly departed.

“It was nice seeing you too, sweetheart!” they called after her. “Congratulations!

"It's really not that difficult to find the path," Nellie mumbled under her breath as she passed table after table adorned in white, aromatic flowers and any other decorations Papa could conjure up, "All he had to do was look for the purple ribbons..." Her eyes fixed themselves on two weathered poles wrapped in what appeared to be tattered and frayed purple ribbons. "...tied around two poles," she stumbled. Her childlike curiosity hadn't completely dissolved. She just had to sneak away for a little while...

"Nellie!" Bea exclaimed as she ran to her love's side. "Are you alright, sweetheart? Is something bothering you?" she whispered as she brought Nellie's slender body closer to her own. Words could not be formed. All she could do was submit to the warmth of her love's embrace... and peer over the bare shoulder at the poles with the ragged purple ribbons.

"I'm going to get some wine. Would you like a glass my love?" Nellie cooed.

"Yes, I would, sweetheart," Bea replied sweetly.

After a quick kiss, Nellie departed for the wine table...which was near to the ribbon embellished poles. "I'll only be away for a few moments. No one will notice my absence..." Nellie thought to herself as her curiosity forced her to edge of the vast forest. Her flimsy white shoes landed on the freshly cut grass as she cast them off.

Nellie could feel the blistering heat from the sun as she stepped over the briars and weeds onto the unending path formed by the old oak trees. They've been here for as long as she could remember.

"Look! Is that our girl? Is that Nellie?" an old oak implored.

"It is! It is! Our Nellie is back!" The others exclaimed.

The sound of rushing water pounded through her body as she approached the ever-familiar creek bed. The wildflowers gave off an almost sweet aroma at her approach. The old sycamore tree stood strong as a soldier among the oak filled forest. It could see her approach from a mile away.

"My girl is back! She's come back to me!" the ancient tree moaned in the wind.

A worn rope ladder hung from the remnants of what she perceived to be her old treehouse perched high atop the gnarled branches. Nellie felt like a child as she gazed curiously into the treetops. "Hello there, old friend," she whispered aloud. No friend in the world could be considered older. The frayed, weather-stained rope ladder that now blew in the wind once supported the weight of her childhood. The day that the treehouse took its rightful place atop the branches of the old sycamore suddenly returned to her memory.

"Nellie! Nellie Grace, come here!" her father's deep voice had echoed through the trees.

"Papa, where are you?" her high-pitched, little voice had echoed back.

"By the creek bed, little one," he responded.

The tiny clover sprouts and bright yellow dandelions flew up under her bare feet as she ran through the path formed by the tall oaks. "*There goes our girl again,*" they said through the wind. All nature adored Nellie Grace. The trees, the birds, the animals, the flowers, and even the creek bed adored the child. They believed her to be their child and loved her unconditionally. Nellie knew that the one thing that she had been waiting for longer than anything else in her short seven-year life.

"Papa! Is it done yet?" she asked as Papa picked her up and turned her upside down.

“Look for yourself, little one,” he chuckled.

The spacious tree-dwelling sat high within the branches of a great sycamore tree, the only one of its kind in the forest. The reddish colored wood of the treehouse stood out against the dark, groove covered bark of the old tree. Etched into the surface of the entrance of the treehouse was *Nellie Grace's Treehouse*. A rope ladder hung from the top of the treehouse down to the base of the tree.

“What do you think, little one?” Papa asked as Nellie gazed up through the branches.

Nellie couldn't begin to form words. Curiosity overtook her being and sent her up the ladder without so much as a thought of looking back. Once atop the great sycamore, her childlike imagination soared beyond her wildest dreams. She could now have battles aboard a pirate ship, tea parties in a royal castle, and even trips to space in a spaceship. She could do anything her little heart desired. The days to come, she thought, would be filled with more than just adventure and wonder. They would be known as the epitome of childhood. The mighty sycamore supported these dreams high above the forest floor. Nothing would ever prevent Nellie Grace from reaching for the stars. When Nellie Grace frequented the little treehouse, happiness was only as far as the climb up the rope ladder.

As the years went by, the little treehouse became more than just the keeper of Nellie's imagination. It became her escape. Nellie often found herself at the base of the tall sycamore when she felt a need to hide away from the outside world. Thoughts of remaining there forever never ceased to cross her mind. No one could ever tell her differently. For the longest time, the noble sycamore considered Nellie's motives to hide as part of the naivete that accompanies childhood. That's not to say that the tree didn't want her to stay forever. All the inhabitants of the forest only had that wish for Nellie. She could only wish that they would've understood the true depth of the hiding. Although she didn't want to, Nellie began to recall the day when her fantasy met the real world...and the world won.

The details of that day remained vivid, even after all these years. The shrill screaming and laughter of the children chasing each other around the shiny metal playground still echoed in her ears. Nellie stood like a queen atop of the tallest tower, looking down on her subjects. Then, she saw her: Lorelei. Nellie couldn't help but admire her golden ringlet curls and sea blue eyes glistening in the sunlight. The only word that could begin to describe her was beautiful. Lorelei never appeared alone. Nellie could scarcely see her through the crowd of people that constantly surrounded her. Despite that, Lorelei never seemed satisfied with the shower of affection. Nellie wished for nothing more than to see a smile adorning her angelic face. If no one else could make it happen, she thought, maybe I could be the first. A small bunch of white daisies caught Nellie's eye as she made her way down the slide. She had never seen a more beautiful bouquet, not even in the forest. “Perfect,” she whispered under her breath.

She could hear the rustling of the wood chips under her feet as she slowly approached the crowd encasing Lorelei. “What do you want?” Lorelei snapped. Nellie extended the sweet white flowers to her.

“I...I j-just wanted to ask if you wanted to rule my kingdom with me. You seem sad and...” Nellie stumbled. One moment later and the white petals became stained with brown as the bouquet landed on the earth under foot.

“Your *kingdom*? What are you, four?” Lorelei cackled.

“I think the little fool likes you!” one of the others laughed.

“Don’t be silly! Girls can’t like other girls...” Lorelei giggled.

“But...” Nellie stammered as she ran after them. A hand forcefully shoved her from behind as she struggled to catch up. A moment later and the innocent face met the pavement.

“...unless, of course you’re Netty here!” Lorelei cackled as the group departed, leaving her alone.

“It’s NELLIE!” she whimpered as a puddle of red slowly formed on the beige slate.

Fallen leaves now danced in the air as Nellie’s pained figure ran past them. Even the trees, unfeeling and inanimate, appeared worried at the sight. Ten years had passed without a single tear. The loyal sycamore greeted her as it always had, but deep within, the caring giant wished that its branches could wrap around and embrace her. But the branches couldn’t move. Instead, the poor old tree remained still. Sweat and dirt now saturated the ropes of the ladder as she forced herself up and into the little treehouse.

Droplets of tears and blood now adorned the wooden floor. Confusion mixed with pure sadness overcame her small body as she now gazed into a small mirror in the treehouse. The ruby pain streamed down the innocent face. As a child, the good is seen in all things -- and all people. None could ever fathom the thought that evil may reside in some.

Now, the innocence of childhood began to drift off into the sunset. Nellie’s comprehension dwindled as she stared at her altered reflection. How could the injured image belong to her? It was beyond her capacity to believe. If Lorelei didn’t think she should like her, then she wouldn’t. She’d do anything -- even letting go of herself -- if Lorelei would only accept her. If only the world outside the forest would accept her. Who would with her foolish imagination? No more battles, tea parties, or space trips. Grow up, they said.

“*Stay little,*” the aged inanimate tree whispered into the air. Sadly, Nellie didn’t hear the towering sycamore’s plea. Months became years as the forest began to lose sight of the innocent little girl all creatures adored. The changes did not bode well for any of the creatures. Nellie’s happiness seemed almost painted on like a clown face at a birthday party. This was the start of what was yet to come. Love was a complicated topic for Nellie. Fear of judgment clouded her own as a series of failed relationships walked into and out of her life. Nellie remembered when the forest first met Clark, the first and last boyfriend she ever had. Nothing could have prepared the creatures for an unexpected visitor like this one.

“Come on, slow poke!” Nellie’s distinctive voice echoed through the forest. The oak trees smiled contently to themselves at the sound.

“*There’s our girl again,*” one whispered.

“*Who is she talking to?*” another questioned.

“Alright, alright I’m coming!” an unfamiliar voice answered.

“Who’s that?” all the trees moaned.

“*It’s a...boy,*” one gasped.

Shrill laughter thrived through the trees as Nellie’s slender figure darted past the rows of oak trees. Her footprints lined the walkway as they always had...only this

time, others appeared with them.

“You’ll never catch me, Clark!” Nellie cackled as she ran further down the path.

“Yes, I will!” the one called Clark responded after her. The trees could only catch the ash color of his curly hair before he disappeared after Nellie.

“*I don’t know about this...*” the row of oaks moaned in unison.

Up to the edge of the creek bed they ran, until they reached the base of the old sycamore. “Come on!” Nellie called as she made her way up the mildly weathered rope ladder. The old tree could only watch in amazement. *Who was this one called Clark and what business did he have with Nellie?* The two landed in a heap on the creaky wooden floor in a fit of laughter.

“I’ve got you now, goofball!” the one called Clark laughed as he scooped her up into his arms.

“Let go of me! Stop it!” Nellie giggled.

The wise old tree couldn’t comprehend what it was seeing. *What was this one called Clark doing to Nellie?*

“I love you,” Nellie whispered.

“I love you too,” the one called Clark responded as he placed a kiss on her innocent cheek.

The protective sycamore needed to wonder no longer. Nellie loved this one called Clark. While it wanted to be happy for her, it couldn’t help but worry about its girl. *No one and nothing could love Nellie as much as it did...right?* No one had for the past fourteen years, anyway. “*This one called Clark has a lot to worry about now,*” the old tree thought, *“for taking care of our girl is a big responsibility. I just hope he does it right.”*

The trees watched Nellie and the one called Clark appear and disappear into the old treehouse day by day. They came to expect the two sets of footprints on the path and two distinct voices in the trees. For years, the scene was repeated. Sadly, though, the old tree was right to be wary. Through the smiles and laughter, every tree in the forest could tell that Nellie didn’t feel quite as happy as she let on to be. As she recalled, they were right.

“*Look, there’s our girl again,*” they whispered, *“and there’s that one called... wait, where is he?”*

Nellie’s footsteps could be heard as the dried leaves crunched and cracked underfoot. She could once more feel the mild heat from the sun as she walked through the path formed by the old oak trees. The crisp fall breeze blew against her pale face as she made her way to the water’s edge. The crawdads and water spinners danced across the water, almost as if they were putting on a dance recital for their girl. Nellie couldn’t help but smile. It was the first to come across her face for quite a while. The old sycamore watched as Nellie once more climbed the rope ladder up to the treehouse...this time, alone.

“*Where is the one called Clark?*” it thought to itself “*He left her didn’t he? I knew he couldn’t love her like I do! How dare he...*” The faithful tree trailed off. Nellie, however, didn’t appear phased by his absence. She looked content. It was almost as if a tremendous weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Only a week earlier, she decided that her relationship with the one called Clark would be no more. It wasn’t anything he did or said. Her reason was simple: She wasn’t meant to love his kind. Nellie knew for

years that her preferences didn't fit the prefabricated mold. Rather than breaking free, she chose to contort her inner feelings until they fit into society's very narrow shadow. After all these years, she finally realized that the position she found herself in was rather uncomfortable. That was a wakeup call.

The old wooden floor creaked as she paced back in forth in deep thought. How did she lose herself so quickly? Perhaps her loss of innocence was the start. Who even was Nellie Grace anymore? Her sixteen-year-old mind hadn't known the answer for quite some time. Age can do that to a child. Expectations come with choices. Some would rather be contorted than have a custom mold. For Nellie, societal norms overtook her personal preferences. Forced smiles and fake laughter defined her life. That was no way to live. It was time to imagine, create, and inspire herself once more. Maybe, just maybe, some of her childlike ambitions remained within. Thankfully, there was more than enough left to fill the gaping void in her heart. Nellie smiled as memories from those rebuilding days flooded back into her memories. Life had once more filled the quiet forest once its girl and her sense of wonder reunited. The little treehouse once more became a place for adventure. Nellie remembered the day when her new form of self-expression revealed itself: watercolor. Every type of animal and tree in the forest was now immortalized in the paintings. The old sycamore loved to see its girl happy. It thought she had everything she needed up in that painting covered treehouse. But for Nellie, something was still missing....

As the summertime gave way to changing leaves, another change would be upon the forest... but this time, more than just the leaves would be missing. The elderly sycamore knew its girl wasn't the small child she once was. Now a woman of eighteen, Nellie climbed the old rope ladder one last time. The paintings came down and the toys were cleaned up, leaving the little treehouse stripped of life. The days of laughter, fun, and adventure would be no more. With a sad and heavy heart, the old broad watched Nellie's final descent down the rope ladder. Nellie looked up into the branches of the old sycamore and shook her head. She wrapped her arms around its trunk and whispered, "Goodbye, old friend."

In the wind, she could almost hear the poor old tree moan, "*Goodbye to you, my girl.*"

Tears trickled down her freckle-covered face as she walked up the path lined by the old oak trees. This was the last thing she remembered before she left home to continue her studies. Not long after the door appeared to close on the imaginative forest that she called home, another opened in Nellie's life... and it could not have opened fast enough.

The orange and brown leaves crackled under foot as she made her way around the autumn campus. Nellie couldn't help but feel empty. The trees surrounding her were not anything like the line of oaks or the resilient sycamore. None of them spoke to her...or even acknowledged her presence. Imagination, the only thing she knew, didn't work there. Nellie felt as if she were at a crossroads. Years had gone by since she last accepted herself. Now, after having hit rock bottom and clawed her way back up, she once more felt out of place. Under the shade of one of the large ash trees on campus, Nellie took shade from the brightness of the sun. Flipping open to a blank page in the sketchbook from Papa, she once more isolated herself from reality.

"That's a beautiful drawing you've made," said a voice from above her.

Nellie's eyes panned upward to meet a pair of deep brown eyes belonging to the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. "Th-thank you..." Nellie started.

"...Bea," the girl finished. "Call me Bea."

Nellie lost her ability to form sentences. She kept losing herself in Bea's eyes.

"Is that a queen in a kingdom?" Bea asked as she joined Nellie in the shade of the ash. Nellie nodded. "Where's the king?" Bea once more implored.

"There isn't one. Besides, she doesn't want a king anyway. She wants another queen," Nellie said.

"Oh, I see," Bea uttered softly. It didn't take long for Bea to win Nellie's heart. It only took one tender kiss under the grand ash for them to realize that the missing queen had been Bea all along. Twelve long years passed since the fairytale began.

Now, as she stood at the base of the old sycamore tree, all she could do was remember. The adventures were long gone, but never forgotten. Battles, tea parties, and space travel were all in the past. Nellie couldn't decide what to feel. Joy mixed with sadness in the confines of her ever changing thoughts. A few tears rolled down her cheeks as she placed a hand bearing a diamond ring on the trunk of the aged sycamore.

"*Hello to you too, my girl,*" the archaic tree moaned.

Nellie couldn't help but chuckle. Even after all these years, the old geezer still loved her.

"Nellie!?" a faint voice called.

Papa still loved her too. Who knew that an old sycamore could provide so much love and so much relief simply by existing?

"Nellie!? There you are, sweetheart," said an all-too-familiar voice.

"Oh, Bea! Don't ever scare me like that!" Nellie squeaked innocently. Almost instantly, her voice faded away. Bea was like nothing she'd ever seen before. Her snow-white skin seemed to glow under the beams of sunshine that trickled in through the gaps in the treetops. Her tight black curls seemed almost violet in the light. Nellie stood motionless for a few moments. How could she have been so lucky?

"Come back with me. Everyone's looking for you" Bea plead as she wrapped her arms around Nellie's slender body.

"Oh alright. Let's go," Nellie sighed as Bea delicately took her hand in hers. Now, hand in hand, they walked together through the path formed by the old oak trees.

"Look what I found on my way down," Bea said as she produced a weathered piece of wood that, even after all these years, still read *Nellie Grace's Treehouse*.

Life is an endless cycle of forks in the road and we're never given the map to follow. We end up wandering aimlessly until someone happens to lift the blindfold from our eyes to reveal what we were looking for all along. For Nellie Grace, her blindfold had been lifted at last. She was lost, but had been found; she was blind, but now could see. Bea didn't lift the blindfold, she was just the one hidden with it.

"So this was your old treehouse?" Bea whispered.

"Indeed it was," Nellie responded as the two walked back up the oak lined path.

"*And it always will be,*" moaned the old sycamore.



Photo by
Ashley Prout



Photo by
Molly Shepler



Photo by Yuanyuan Qu

Dark Hollow Falls
Photo by A. Lapceovich

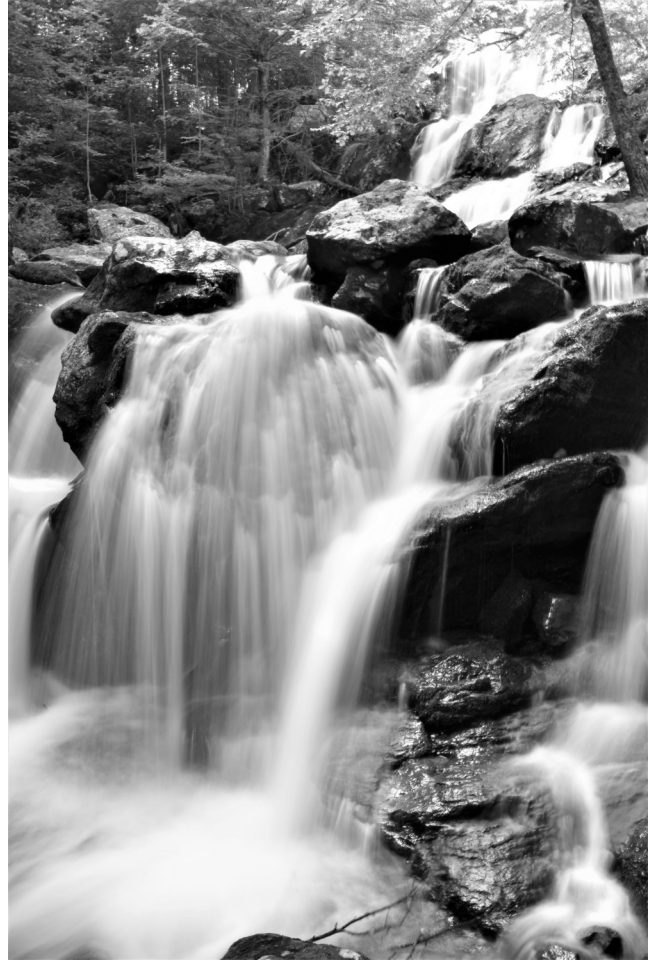


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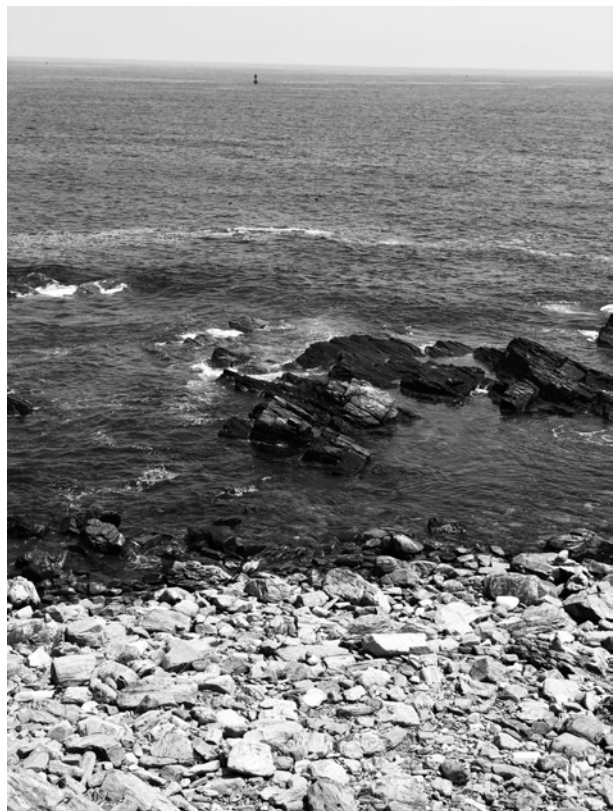


Photo by
Ashley Prout

Independence Hall
Photo by
Molly Shepler



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Ashley Prout

Photo by
Ashley Prout



The People's House
Photo by
Hans Myers

A Sea of Humanity

Photo by
Hans Myers



Photo by
Ashley Prout

Rodents

By Katie Miller

Inspired by "Bullet with Butterfly Wings" by The Smashing Pumpkins

They laid out traps before me,
Hidden poison and pain
Amongst honeyed treats.

They find distress in my cries,
The squeals of fear from my own throat
Placing screams in their own mouths.

A swift *snap* would be relief to their ears,
Though it would be the last sound I'd hear
Before their fear kills me, too.

But why should I be surprised
Of their tendency to run and hide?
They love to blame others, never their kind.

They condemn me for disease,
For their own dirty plagues,
When all I want to do is eat and breed.

I still cannot avoid
The untimely end they have planned;
An exterminator is already on the way.

They take my kind and harm us,
Less of a liability, they claim,
Than using their own mewling babes.

"It's for science!" They claim,
As they inject my brothers with the flu,
And my sisters with every possible cancer.

I find myself in the trap I meant to avoid;
Coerced by honeyed treats and silence,
I fear this fate is worse than death.

 Their own loud tunes predicted my fate,
 Though I wish they wouldn't understand;
 "Despite all my rage,
 I am still just a rat in a cage."

God of Love and God of Glory (*An extemporaneous response to the Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting, October 27, 2018*)

By Hans Myers

God of Love and God of Glory,
Speak now to your people in this story.
Lead us out of the darkness and grief,
And save us from this purgatory.

Of love and kindness, thou art chief,
And we lurk here on Earth as like a thief
Come in the night to steal grace
But you give it freely, by the sheaf.

As we trek this damnéd world, lost in our place,
You look from above – your love boldface
In the words of humanity and of history's days
Yet we ourselves always debase.

Our hatred among ourselves does blaze
And the harmony you once sought lost in our craze:
Violence begets violence, yes once you said,
Yet that is all we do, while filling our lips with false praise.

How many of your children have bled?
How many of them now lie dead?
Consumed in the violence and grief of this world,
How many of them spoke to you in their final moments with dread:

Of the fate of this world where your grace seems furled,
Of the people of this world in whom hate and violence have swirled?
How much does it grieve you when one life takes another?
How long must we suffer in this netherworld?
In every death, one loses someone rather
Than it simply being the act of letting a candle smother.
And yet we act as if it were some other thing
Where the deceased did not leave behind people to suffer.

God of Glory, to whom we cling:
Rescue us from the darkness' sting,
Deliver us to paradise and peace
And away from the place where damnation sings.

Deliver us from hatred and darkness – let them cease.
Let murderers and bigots be washed away, piece by piece.
Let “Never Again” be true – Let violence surcease,
Begin a welcoming world, all divisions forgotten: Lord, let us have peace.



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