

THE PHOENIX

JOURNAL OF ART AND LITERATURE



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The Phoenix

Spring 2022

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- Sydnee Pilarski
- Morgan Wood

Introduction and Dedication

Every year, the editors of *The Phoenix* include an introduction at the start of the publication that serves as a reminder to all readers that the contents of *The Phoenix* are unique, creative, and worthy of admiration and respect. It exemplifies why *The Phoenix* is treasured annually by so many members of the Thiel community.

For the 2022 edition of this publication, editor Molly Shepler '22 has written that introduction on behalf of the editors and the editorial board. Her writing, featured below, is not only a tribute to the work and creativity put forth by the contributing students, faculty, staff, and alumni who allowed for the creation of this year's issue of *The Phoenix*, but it serves especially as a tribute to **Reverend Donald Hall** to whom this edition is dedicated. Donald is the beloved late husband of Dr. Mary Theresa Hall, a Professor of English at Thiel College.

The act of creation is often a labor of love. Beginning a painting, a poem, a story, a sculpture, or even an academic or scholarly project is often fresh and exciting as one anticipates the final product, but once the difficult work of actually bringing an idea to fruition becomes tedious and challenging, that excitement can quickly wear off. Perhaps the true essence of creation, therefore, comes not from the initial creative thought, but rather from the process: from deliberately choosing, repeatedly, to work toward an end goal purely for the sake of creating. *The Phoenix* provides an opportunity for those who wish to partake in a larger, community-wide act of creation; poets and artists humbly share their labors of love in their poetry, paintings, original photographs, and short stories in anticipation of being part of the final product. Similarly, we might often characterize the development of our lives as a labor of love: trying to understand the world, our place in it, and making choices that allow us to contribute to it requires time, patience, and intentionality, regardless of uncertainty.

In years past, *The Phoenix* has been read and thoroughly enjoyed by many people. Supporters of the publication know the significance of pouring out oneself for the benefit of others and respect the work of *The Phoenix* contributors. They carefully peruse the pages of the publication, reflecting on each word or piece of art with thoughtful admiration. One such person who always found joy in reading, appreciating, and sometimes even submitting his own work to *The Phoenix* was Donald Hall. Referring to the submissions in the 2021 issue of *The Phoenix*, he once told the members of the editorial board: "they have been a great gift for me, providing such rich material for reflection, giving me insight into others' experiences and expression." Among the many lessons that may be derived from his work and life, one could be that creation is a labor of love, but also that loving and serving others is a labor of love. His great support and appreciation of the publication warrants recognition, but so does his humble life of willing and selfless service, ministry, and outreach.

The scriptures encourage those who strive to live the Christian life to "love each other deeply" and to "offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4: 8-9). Peter wrote to young Christians in the first century, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4: 10). And in his letter to the church of Philippi, also in the first century, Paul the Apostle wrote, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). The life of Donald Hall was a picture of humble service; he was continuously engaged in some kind of selfless work for the benefit of others. He was known to go out of his way to minister to friends, family members, those in the churches he served, or even complete strangers. He strived to complete the continuous work of service to which he believed he was called by God.

Donald was an accomplished scholar, and he certainly used his gifts of learning and teaching to share his knowledge with those around him throughout his life. He was a graduate of St. Vincent Preparatory High School and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from St. Vincent College. He received his master's degree in theology from Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and received a master's in social work and a master's in public administration from the University of Pittsburgh. Donald served as a priest in the Greensburg, Pennsylvania,

Diocese, where he also acted as the Executive Director of its Catholic Charities. Later, his orders were received into the Episcopal Church. He was the rector at Trinity Episcopal Church in New Castle, Pennsylvania, and St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Canfield, Ohio. Until his retirement, he served as the rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Niles, Ohio. For three years, he was also Executive Director of Family Guidance Center, a serial service agency, in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Donald also extended his knowledge to Thiel College students for several years as an adjunct professor in the Religion and Sociology Departments, and he taught at Duquesne University in the Education Department as well. Additionally, he served as Chaplain for Seton Hill University and Clelian Heights in Greensburg. He was a proud veteran of the U.S. Army where he earned the Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and was an M-16 grenade expert. He served in the Army in Louisiana and in Heidelberg, Germany, from December 1969-December 1972.

Donald and Mary Theresa were married on August 10, 1996. In their 25 years of marriage, their dedication and service to each other created a strong partnership based on a covenant of commitment and loving sacrifice.

Donald lived a full and humble life of outreach. He went about his days with a heart postured toward a daily labor of love for his work, his faith, and for those around him. With each sunrise, he honored the Creator in whom he believed by striving to act in accordance with the scriptures by using his gifts and talents to humbly serve, and in doing so, he touched many lives. We dedicate this year's issue of *The Phoenix* to him out of admiration for the life he led, and for his quiet, gentle spirit which thoughtfully supported the artists, poets, and authors featured in *The Phoenix* year after year. He was a man who spent his life laboring out of love for the benefit of others before himself; may we all learn to live a little bit more by his example.

-Molly Shepler '22



Donald and Mary Theresa Hall at Niagara Falls.

Preface for Autumn

By Dr. Mary Theresa Hall

We give You thanks, Harvester of shadowy days and beckoning nights
for times and seasons
and now for fall magic
that wanders transforming images
of star-infested skies and moon-crossed clouds
and trees translucent in
 shedding
 love
 leaves
rustling to the beat of the Autumn Piper
 of saved hour and breath of life.

For Octoberfest
And Thanks offerings
For holy days to renew initial baptisms of life and birth
For rains and winds
 and all gentle, natural re-minders that
 the God of surprises asks for open arms to receive the Creator's
 embraces in fields
 fallings and risings
 that wear out seasons' passages and
 patch soul garments to Kingdom's cloaks.

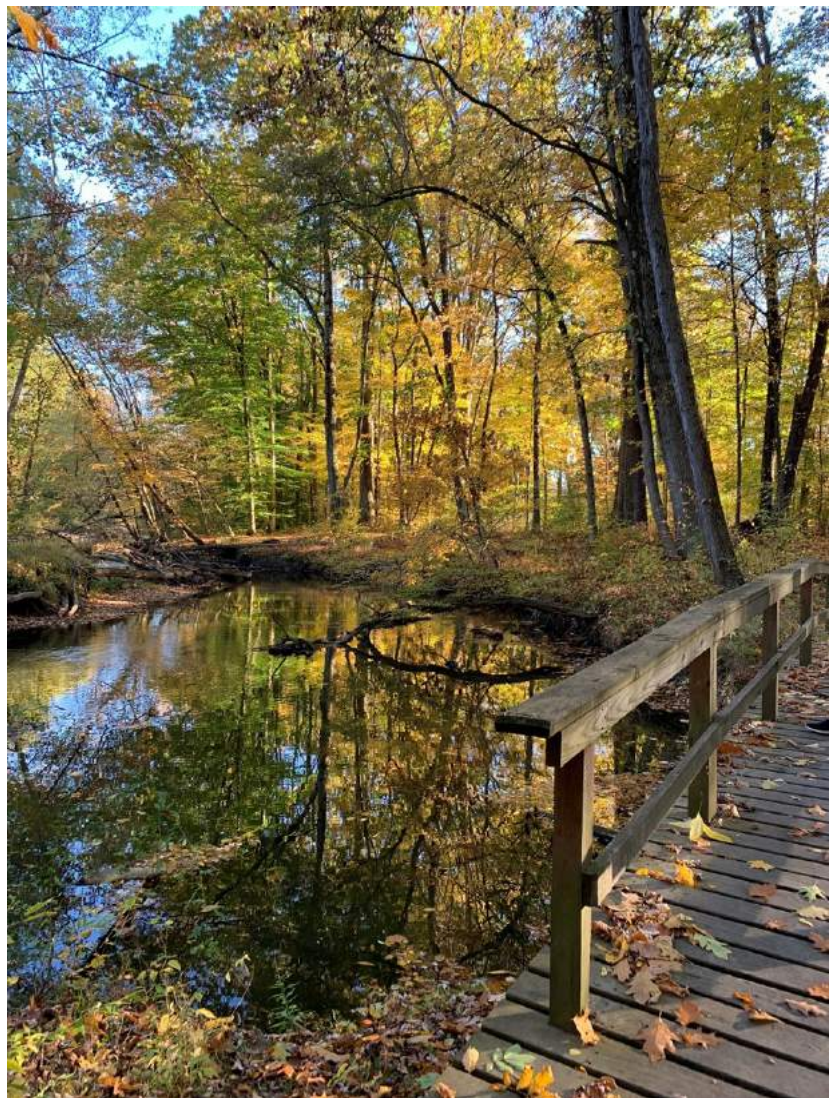
We give you thanks for the One
 whose presence, trust and generativity we celebrate in autumn
 so Your companions may know - may wildly know –
 that love is more tenacious and enduring
 than the most fiercely attached leaf of Your vine
 and spirit-filled breath encompasses all the land
 more pervasively than embers the hearth.

We give you thanks for God
 who makes more than the Home-bound joyful
 and does not cheat our attachment or our desire in the end.

Giver of eternal bounty and dignified splendor,
 beyond imagining but not beyond desire,
 we give you our mosaic tapestries and our seasons of change. AMEN!



“Grey Goose Lodge”
By Sydnee Pilarski



“The Perfect Walk”
By Sydnee Pilarski

The Old Oak

By Sean Oros '15

It is easy for the oak to feel weak
When it faces the storm, the worm, the rot.
But that is not what others see
They see it stand strong, enduring,
Weathering storm after storm,
Adversity and affliction.
You do not see the weakness,
But the strength in the face thereof.
The oak tree stands firm,
A testament throughout the ages,
Viewed as a tree of strength,
Broad-boughed, unbent,
Providing support and comfort,
Planting the seeds of the future.
The oak may feel its own pain
But all that others see
Is its strength.

“The Road Less Traveled”

By Sydnee Pilarski



A door opens, I follow in with you

By Gracie Mosko

A door opens, I follow in with you
We needed each other, you got me and I got you.
A bad decision here and a bad decision there
And I thought you cared but there was a wall up somewhere
Foundations crumble and so do I
We somehow stopped seeing eye to eye
The walls all broke and so did you
There felt like nothing to hold on to
Moving on with worry and regret in my heart
I needed to find a brand new start
Because growing up is a difficult expedition
However sometimes you need to find a new mission



By Morgan Wood

Memento Mori

By Janelle Mudry

To take one's own life is a selfish act.
There're consequences; think about others,
They say, with neglect for one simple fact:
They care not for the lives of each other.
Cradled to the grave, feeble humans are,
And it's heroic for one to play God.
The jump to this conclusion is not far:
On the "right" side of the gun—*heroes*—odd.
Death should be woeful, despairing, sad,
But it's commonplace, we're desensitized.
For this reason, there're questions to be had:
How do they view Death with these brand-new eyes?
When it comes to killing, much more or less,
What's the difference of selfish and selfless?



Walking a Snowy November Wood

By Jason C. Merriam '04

I was out because I had to be.
The weather had been miserable,
The previous days, relentless rain
Framed by falling temperatures.

The landscape was unlike anything.
The bright changing leaves encased in ice,
Late summer into early winter,
Autumn compressed into nothing.

A thin layer of wet snow covered
It all. The beauty was so heavy,
The branches snapped under the weight.
Green mixed with crimson and gold,

The light prismatic, crowned in white
Splendor. I forgot how cold it was.
I stamped my feet to shake loose,
My breath cold as the sun shone

Behind the gray snow clouds.
The gravel road crunched beneath my feet.
The buildings I saw reminded me
Of the Freedom Trail of my twenties.

The houses timeless in shiplap,
Maybe fifty, perhaps three hundred
Years old. One never knows these days.
Same with the old dry stack stone walls.

The sheer quiet was overwhelming.
Not a single bird song could be heard.
The evergreens stood, silent sentinels,
Mantled in contemplation, waiting,

Ready for their age to come round once more.

I continue on, a fortunate
Observer to the unexpected
Elegance of a November wood.

Take me away in whispers and stories

Anonymous

My mother tells me stories of the ghosts around us.
Most of the time they are invisible
Sometimes, if they feel comfortable, they show face.
Well, not face like we the living would think of it-
More like wisps of time long past.
When I was little, she swore I could see my grandmother.
I used to laugh at the jokes she made, and smile in her presence.
It didn't matter that her body was miles away,
Trapped between a wooden box and layers of soil.
Now that I'm older
The in-between has grown dim to my eyes.
Those who have left the mortal realm are transparent,
Forever to be lost in the minds of those who grieve their mortal presence.
How I wish I understood how one can exist on both planes,
To be grounded in a place populated by some,
Yet stranded in another with more people than places.
My mother never lost that knowledge, though.
To put it simply:
I can't see ghosts anymore
But the stories they share,
The stories they pass down,
Sate the most curious of eyes
And that is enough for my mother and me.

Gray eyes

By Sydney Varga

It's so sad
Looking into your beautiful eyes
And seeing the gold flecks have gone
The sunshine
The happiness
Is no longer there



By Morgan Wood

Hopeless Romantic

Anonymous

I am tired of
always being alone at
the end of the day.

I can empathize
with Sisyphus, for this hell
haunts me ev'ry night;

who would notice if
the boulder came to rest,
for I am weary.

This cannot go on,
and my mountain grows higher.
Still, I do not rest.

How could I ever?
For my heart has gone empty,
and with hope, it fills.



Who I am Not

Anonymous

I am coming of age.
Another book in which I turn the page.

Who am I to become?
A father; beyond wealthy; worthless scum?

I was raised on pure fear.
And those with malice in their hearts, I hear.

I fear this period.
Shouting my pure truths, but who can hear it?

To live a life selfless.
I wear these thoughts always like a necklace.

I may not know this thought.
I do know, however, who I am not.

By Morgan Wood

Birth of a Vampire

By Bradley Molnar

Birth of the Vampire...

'Twas in the age of old Henry the 6th
When she found me in French sewers near death
So brave and sweet my kind Elizabeth
Called me demon but spared me in one breath

She brought me to you on her own free will
She showed you the powers I could offer thee
Back when she blindly followed your creed still
And you craved the power that I could see

You chained us two together, her and me
A monster and a spy bound in your greed
Though in time her fear would begin to flee
Taught her the love we desperately need

She called me black rose, and many times since
Demon no more, an angel that was sent
I knew not then of the significance
Of the meaning of love and what it meant

Our love only grew as my blood was spilled
I felt each time the doubt in her heart grow
But for my sake the rituals were filled
And I gave you those secrets that I know

Until one night she could take it no more
Your guards were strong, and our escape was tight
But as one we made it to the castle door
And she begged me to leave, to run, take flight

So how did you react when I was freed?
We both know you hate what you can't control
You labeled her a witch, her acts misdeeds
Fed her to the flames for her selfless roll

You buried her bones as I watched in fear
Banished her tomb, so many miles from home
Every night I wash her casket with tears
Buried miles underneath the silent stone

And here in the dark rings the broken glass
Restored in power, a truly great fright
Struggle, and fight to restore the past
Screaming with anger in the dying light

It was you who thought that you were so smart
it was you who broke my heart of the night
but power is hidden within your heart
and through you I will make everything right

Reader, beware where the blackened rose grows
Guard close your precious sanguine light
And should it appear within your window
You will serve a greater purpose tonight



By Morgan Wood



By Taylor Clayborn



By Zachary Bergstresser

My Words to You

Anonymous

What is to be said when all seems to have been stated?
When the symphony ends, and poetry negated?

I still find myself thinking of your colors and hues.
You showed your true regards; my skies are no longer blue.

I dreamed of our life; these memories have now faded.
How is one to live when the heart feels greatly weighted?

How do I fix what has been conceived, where is the glue?
The treasure we shared is guarded, I cannot get through.

I feel as though we are literature translated.
Thought to be justful, but much of the meaning wasted.

I dream of freedom, Icarus' notion when he flew.
I have fallen from the sun; wondering what to do.

Our connection is bastardized; you were persuaded.
I am numb but wanting to feel nothing but hatred.

When all is stated, what words could possibly be true?
However, if one notion could stand: I still love you.

The Window Kid

By Emily Irons

I've always been the type to sit at the window
The kid who looked out the window, wondering what's beyond her
Each house, each car, each person
What are they?
Who are they?
What is their purpose?
Why am I seeing them at this exact moment in time?
We are all a collection of roads crossing each other's paths
Each of us mosaics of the people we meet and the places we visit
From the sky we are small
From the ground we are tall
But from the window we are
Pieces of everything and nothing all at once
Exquisitely divine and utterly unique
Reflecting each other's past, present, and future
And beyond that window
We are something that no one is capable of comprehending
But in that window
We are friends, lovers, neighbors, and brothers
Together we are one
But separate we are none
Each of us representing the shards of glass
That make up the windows we unappreciatively look out
Every so often

My book is now about you

By Sydney Varga

You make me feel
Like all the poems I've written about others
Belong to you

3rd date

By Sydney Varga

How long had we been kissing
When I became aware
Of the screaming in my head
That was so loud
I was scared you would hear it



“Beach House Still Life”
by Molly Shepler



By Ava Kavulla

Slander

By Virginia Riddle

The lies we seem to know
Are like hidden dew drops
On blooming flowers that we show.

But flowers, sickly sweet and sly,
Often become our ultimate,
Detrimental, and moldering disguise.

For, you may say you are not a weed,
And beguile onlookers with romance,
But underneath, your thorns still bleed.

This is reprehensible.
The punishment for this appears
As petals fall, dispensable.

They carry fragile drops to the earth,
And seep deep into its foundation,
To fuel a new unbridled birth.

What a bastard cycle! How riddled with scorn!
Will it only end when you uproot and leave
The derisive toil from which you were born?

Until I See You

by Alaina Gregory

Four weeks starts the countdown
Three weeks the smell leaves your sweatshirt
Two weeks I miss your touch
One week I just want to be with you
6 days I am beyond excited
5 days I can count on one hand
4 days I can't stop smiling
3 days I don't want to stop texting you
2 days I start packing
1 day and all I think is about is being with you
0 days and I am finally in your arms

1 a.m.

By Sydney Varga

You do it because you think I'm asleep
Pressing send
While the moon shakes her head at you
When did you get the right?
To hide in the nighttime
After what you did to me

Dissociation

By Sydney Varga

I hate daydreaming
About you
Because I know
Inevitably
I must be interrupted

the blackness

by Taylor Clayborn

you help me.
you help me enjoy my days.
but when day turns to night.
i crumble.

the black darkness
is enveloping me.
i can hardly see
an inch past my face.

the blackness
WE now call home.

WE are trapped.
speculating what is stuck between US.

“Wake up”
“Talk to me”
Nothing comes out.
waiting....

what happened to US? what do WE do now?

Resting—

By Janelle Mudry

I see the world through cracked, rose-colored glass
And walk the earth with no determined pace.
Tripping into a hidden fairy ring,
I seek the mem’ry of things that have passed.
I tuck away mementos just in case.
With wind and soft wings, the Earth starts to sing;
Some fae will titter and others will weep.
Up until now I did not stop to think.
Tears of exhaustion, they dance down my face.
The forest’s low hum beckons me to sleep.
No worries. Nothing.



By Morgan Wood

Patchwork Ghost

By Dylan Evans

I am just a Patchwork Ghost,
As opaque as I am transparent—
I drift day-to-day, while some notice me,
though others do not.
I am both colorful and dull,
worn, torn, and used to be loved—
Shades of green, yellow, orange, and blues,
Some love some of me, some hate some of me—
And thus, I wander, not sad nor happy,
not angry nor joyous,
with all of my colors on display.
For patchwork is made of scraps,
but stitched with love,
waiting for someone to sew new pieces to it
before the rest fade.



By Taylor Clayborn

Fever Dreams...

By Bradley Molnar

With strength of heart, and mind's true might
We leave with our beautiful lover of the night.
We spread our wings, wide and true
And flee this world we thought we knew.
To come together and flee the battle.
Our fates intertwined, after being unraveled.
Through the night, we together will fly.
To escape the madness, the world's great lie.
And together we will seek a home.
And never again will we dare to roam.
To escape the whip of our world's cruel blade.
To escape what others want us to be made.
We take to the night in moon's pale light.
And we wonder if ever something felt so right.
But even now our time is short.
Our fates drawn apart by reality's cruel retort.
But as the sun rises, I promise to you
To come back and honor my love so true.
I'll count my moments until I return
For our moments together that forever I yearn.
My beautiful dreams of my world now lost.
For growing up, demands that cost.
But soon together, reunited we'll be.
If only my mind will again choose to see.
So, come with us if in your heart the sufferings stew.
Well make you question everything you thought you knew.

Ignorance

Anonymous

As the leaves wilt and face their imminent death,
They do so with the bliss of ignorance.

The sun waits with resilience as the clouds cover it to give life rain;
It does so with the bliss of ignorance.

Humanity fills with anguish upon the very thought of adversity;
It does so with the bliss of ignorance.

Star Child

By Jason C. Merriam '04

My little Wren, my third, contemplative,
Always watching, waiting, constant patience,
An azure gaze of impassivity.
Interaction is the key, unlocking

Elusive smile, eyes twinkling with laughter,
Cherubic arms and legs outstretched, searching
For all the miracles and mysteries
That the animate world has to offer.

You were our rainbow, joy out of grieving,
Solace from sadness, another angel
Arriving to grace us from high above.
The final flame of youth created your spark,

A prayer answered, a family complete.
Life changes, moving quicker than we ask
Yet you will be loved, and we will slow it,
Giving you the space to grow, thriving,

Being the blessing that you truly are.
My sweetest bluebird, your song has just begun
And I swear, will never be forgotten.



By Ava Kavulla

A Dedication to My Body

By Alaina Gregory

From the bottom of my feet to the top of my head
There is nothing in this world as great
Working 24/7 to keep me alive
You persevered when I provided you with next to nothing
Learning what I did to you makes me cringe
How did you keep me functioning?

legs let me run free
mind helps me learn
lungs make me breathe
eyes see beautiful things
stomach digests food to give me energy
mouth shares my voice to all around

This is a dedication to my body
Who still fought when I gave up
And for that I will be forever grateful
Thank you for all that you do

Anonymous

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but,
With me I hold a powerful weapon
An extension of my arm, a blade
Words that slide seamlessly slice through happy endings
Every time I hold my tongue I taste bitter copper
To prevent a fate worse than death: Rejection
Silent daggers in my eyes as those I love refuse my advice
Who still ask for more, again and again and again
I have accepted my fate as tool for others more willing than I
I am happy to comply as a means to an end
This is all I ever wanted in life
To help people
Isn't it?

Living with grief.
By Taylor Clayborn

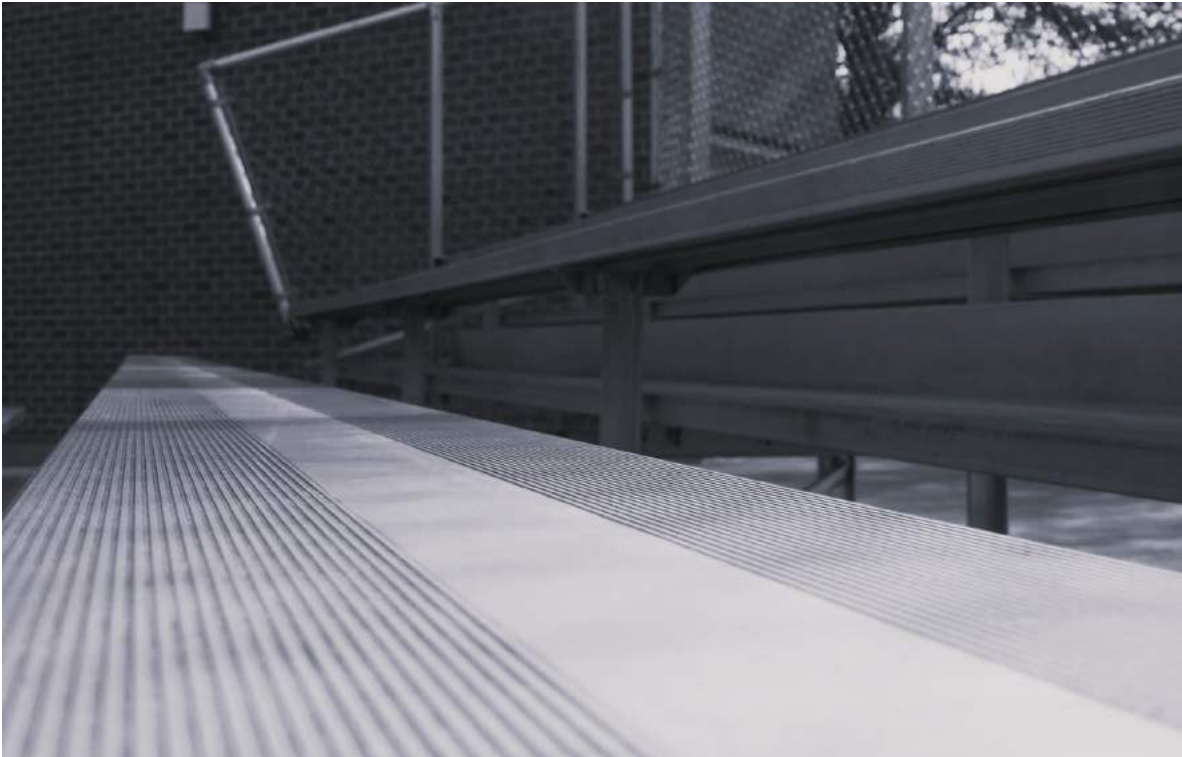
as i grow
i feel more incomplete.
year after year
our memories dwindling.

sometimes... forgetting how much time has passed
is the cruelest conception.

i lost you for six years now.
three hundred twelve weeks
two thousand one hundred ninety days....
too many seconds to count.

while planning my future ...i envisioned you there.
moments where i need you.
why did you have to leave me?
our journey feels incomplete.

i live a full, happy life,
just as you would want me to.
but every day i think what life could be like,
with you still in it.



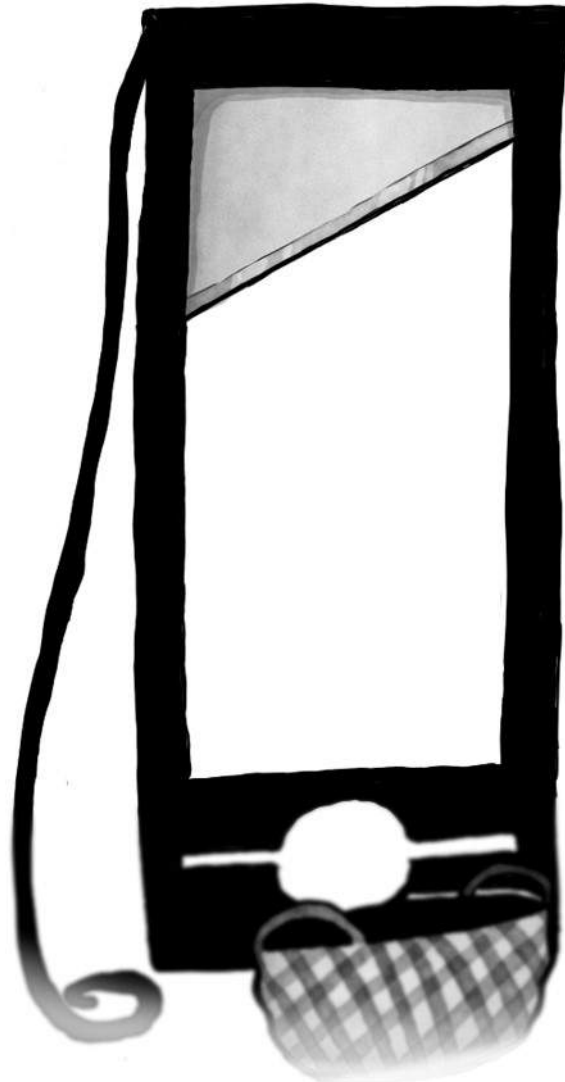
By Morgan Wood

Untitled

By Janelle Mudry

For Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

In assets or in cash,
The difference matters not.
Really, do libraries
Or universities,
Or fantastical cars,
Or rockets sent to Mars,
Really expunge the guilt
Of blood that stains their hands,
Of limbs crushed by machines,
Of immigrants gunned down,
Of sooty lungs and skies,
Of starving families,
Of ——



My Silent War

by Bradley Molnar

Do you wonder of silence's might?
That quiet moment that makes everything right?
Do you know how strong it can be?
How much truth it lets you actually see?
For you maybe, it's a moment of nothing
But for me at least, it's most certainly, something
A great tempest that rages in mornings light
As my dreams roar in my heart from the previous night
Sit with me here, on my patio deck
Relax as the sun here warms the back of your neck
But know as you listen to the bird's chirp in the air
A war is raging, not that you'd care
As armies and heroes clash and die
As schemers and tricksters heckle and lie
As adventures will come and just as quickly will go
And stories are told that only I know
Secrets that form beneath my silent gaze
Like fire my stories will rage and blaze
So, sit there, my guest, and let me tell you a tale
For to me in silence, ideas rain down like hale
I'll spin you a story of victory and loss
And I promise at its end you won't be cross
You know little how much of this I need
For the weight of silence to me, is crushing indeed.

Autumn Days

By Virginia Riddle

Tell me you remember
Those crisp lovely days of an eternal November.
When your keen smile sparked my heart's ember,
That I might survive the next harsh December.

It was but yesterday
That we watched the familiar trees bustle and sway.
We laughed with the melodic display,
And watched bliss exist as burnt amber rays.

Now time has fled, and the warmth has gone
To fill different souls, to live within a different dawn.
We can only hope that once the next curtains are drawn
That they too will remember the coveted days bygone.



By Morgan Wood



By Morgan Wood

Hidden Embers

By Jason C. Merriam '04

What is it to be the last?
Just present, no future, no past.
Last of a tribe, a people, a belief.
A feeling once fraught with anxiety

Yet now accepted with numbing relief.
A living relic steeped in antiquity,
Reminder of a forgotten age,
Brimming with lost knowledge and skills.

I was raised far from civilization,
The wilderness was my classroom and home.
My grandfather the teacher, I, his pupil.
I learned to hunt, to heal, to hone myself

Into a master of my surroundings.
I immerse into ancient culture,
The stories, art, dance, languages became mine.
For over two decades we trained, waiting.

My mother died in childbirth. Father left
To search for a bride among her people.
He never returned. Grandfather was alone.
Only a small babe, meager company

For a once legendary warrior.
He made mistakes, but I grew strong and thrived
Under his tutelage. He had one rule,
Obedience. I lived by boundaries.

Grandfather knew the dangers of the world,
So, he shut the door that we might be safe.
Years went by, most days the same, then he died.
I mourned him, in the old ways, as he wished.

I stayed in our camp for a few more months,
Gathering supplies to explore the unknown.
I leave in the light of my mother Moon,
Trusting in her to keep me safe.

Through the world of my youth, I travel,
Over the old hills, across cool streams,
Through meadows teeming with wildflowers,
I hear the chatter of the small animals.

I press beyond, past everywhere I know.
The forests are thinning, the game sparse.
I hear strange noises in the distance,
Ominous lights encroach the moon and stars.

At dawn, on the fifth day, I found it.
A river of black stone, stretching as
Far as my eyes could see. Lifeless, cold,
Perhaps a sign to mark the land of death.

I crept across it, hard, unyielding,
The dew slick on its smooth ebon surface.
Whispering my gratitude to the Spirit,
I shamble my way into the scrub brush,

My clothing caught on the thorns and brambles.
As I climb a large hill, my ears notice
Noises that are unfamiliar to me.
It drowns out the sounds of nature I know.

I decide to gain the summit, then wait for night.
When the sun sets, the dissonant noise grows.
I see the light of the Gods below,
More numerous than the stars of the sky.

This land is not for my kind. I know this.
Behind me, the serpents of the earth ride,
Their eyes aglow along the dark river.
There is no escape tonight. I must wait.

When dawn comes, I am tired, my sleep fitful.
The buzzing and noises are silent now.
I retreat down from the Gods, legs pounding,
My footsteps barely under control.

I sprint across the river into cover,
My breath rattling, my heart hammering.
I remember Grandfather's training.
I find the center and compose myself.

I decide to return to my homeland,
Knowing that I cannot live among those
Gods who could destroy me without effort.
I move in silence, when I hear screaming.

Instinctively, I rush toward the sound,
Blood pumping, muscles tearing at the thought
Of seeing another person again.
I scramble through forest into a clearing.

Directly ahead is a temple to the Gods.
It is tall like a tree and gleams white,
Rising from the ground like a mountain.
Walls surround it on all sides, barrier

For the gods to keep out the unworthy.
Through the slits in the wall I see him.

A small man-child, the source of the screaming,
Arms upraised to the sky all alone.

His hair the color of the highest sun,
Skin as pale as the blooming moon flower.
I notice that he has no food or drink,
That he is trapped by the walls around.

He is smaller than I remember being.
I think, has he been left to the Gods?
Some sort of sacrifice? My mind turns red.
Grandfather's words to do what is just.

I vault over the wall, daring the Gods
To strike me down. I cradle the child to me,
Offering soft words of reassurance.
The boy quiets. He plays with my long hair.

I sling him over my hip. His clothes are bright
Compared to the buckskins that I wear.
I heft my hand ax and strike the wall.
Three pieces of it fall down and we escape.

I head for home where my world makes sense.
I take the boy with me. I will raise him
As my own son. He will learn everything,
All of my knowledge, all of the culture.

When he is a man, we will venture forth.
We will find the homes of the Gods again.
We will find answers to all our questions.
Together, we will find our place in the world.

By Zachary Bergstresser



My Audacious Vision

By Taylor Clayborn

the future holds many uncertainties.
i thought we were forever.
things got in the way—
distance, beliefs, age.
the issues were submerged,
never spoken aloud
only telepathically.
where was the communication?

i will not be the same without you,
you were my motivation for waking.
the mornings without you grow cold
and unnerving.
your kiss was constantly in my dreams,
now it is my nightmare.
pinky promise — after pinky promise.
yet you still told me lies.

we fantasized about our future.
you said i was your other half—
and you were mine.
my trust is obsolete
diminished and shattered.
i will not forgive and forget.
when we meet again, do not meet my eyes.
IS THIS JUST MY *AUDACIOUS VISION*?

Selfishness

By Sydney Varga

I could never take a bullet for you
Because
I would never want you
To hurt
From the pain of losing me
I'd rather take it all myself

Prospice

By Taylor Clayborn

Shaky, Frantic, Drained.
My worry
Persists—

Sitting, Observing, Listening.
My dream
Unrelenting.
Laughing, Learning, Believing.
My Worry
Fading

Pollen

By Sydney Varga

I wish the wind
Would take you
And carry you
Far away
So that I don't have to feel
Your sunshine anymore

The Best of the Best

By Bradley Molnar

We the few, the best of the best
We who will pass the final test
We the few, the brave and the bold
We who die so you will grow old
So carve our names in plates of gold
While by our steel these lines will hold
Go live your life, and love this day
And for our souls I ask you Pray....

A Glimpse of Hope

By Alaina Gregory

In the never-ending abyss of pain and suffering there is hope. I know you only see the dark at the end of the tunnel, but there is a little speck of light somewhere. You are rolling in the waves of guilt, tiredness, sadness, anger, restlessness, aches, scary thoughts, urges, and confusion. I have good news... waves make it to shore eventually. I know the crash is hard – it is harder than hard – but you are strong. If you did not have the strength to do this, you would not still be here. Take a deep breath, my love, I am a survivor, and soon you will be too.

Scars are a sign of brokenness healing.

~ *A PSA*



By Ava Kavulla

Senior Year

By Sydnee Pilarski

It's finally time.

Time to say our goodbyes,
Get out some last laughs,
Let out those final cries.

Time to stand tall,
Brave what's coming next,
And show them all.

Show them how far we have come,
All the great things we have done,
Let them see for themselves who we have become.

And we owe it those who stood by our side
Who brightened our days,
Who just let us cry.

We shout "thank you" to those who loved us the most,
The professors who challenged us,
And even the Greenville Hall ghost.

Thiel will always be our home,
No matter how far we may stray,
No matter where we may roam.

So now it's time to let this journey come to an end,
It was full of adventure and worth every minute,
Now, let the next one begin.

senioritis

by Katie Miller

Write an essay,
Head to lab,
Give that homework
One quick stab.

Work on thesis,
Read the textbook,
Give my email
Another look.

Write some notes,
Take a test,
When will I have
Some time to rest?

Manage stress,
Don't be late,
Everyone has
A filled-up plate.

Don't complain,
Time's almost done.
Finished an assignment?
Here's another one!

Graduation is nigh,
And soon to bed
I'll be able to place
This senioritis dread.

The Lumberman

By Jason C. Merriam '04

The long winter had come early and fierce
Around this, the darkest day of the year.
For the Lumberman, it was another day.
Cut it, load it, haul it to good folk.
The reward of an honest day's labor.

Lumber was his life, always had been.
Starting as a lad, gaining size and strength
As manhood set in. He was tall and broad,
Shaggy hair tumbled past his shoulders,
A wilderness beard down to his chest,
A mixture of salt and pepper in both.

The Lumberman sold his wares all year,
Except during the wrath of winter.
Where he gave what he gathered for free,
Asking only for a meal and shelter
From the bitter wind and icy waters.

He tried to visit the remotest homes,
The ones who were in the most need of fuel.
It was arduous journey. Certain
Dangers lay along the narrow trails,
But he was a veteran of the wild.
Fear had no hold over him anymore.

There was one more stop to make before Yule,
To the Dockmaster of the mountain lake.
They needed the wood for the weather
Above the lake was the harshest around.
He slowly made his way to the plateau,
Gathering his cloak as best he could.
The house was greyed by the lake climate.
Large enough for a sizable clan,

Due to all the work that had to be done.
The Lumberman was used to laughter here,
But heard none. Barely a puff of smoke
From the chimney. Outside, the lumber pile was

Empty. When there should have been at least some
Sort of supply for a month or more.
Trouble. He had come in the nick of time.
After emptying the load, and securing his horse,
He lightly rapped upon the front door.
No response. He repeated firmly.

At last, the Dockmaster opened his door.
He had a grim smile for the Lumberman.
"Praise be that you came, sir. Malady
Has struck our home these wretched days.
A fever followed by chills unbroken
Even by the largest and longest of fires.

The whole family was struck down by it.
No one spared, but all have recovered
By the grace of God, save my little girl."
With that, his wife entered, tears falling
From red rimmed eyes. Anguish on her face.
"She is so cold, husband, we need flame."

The Lumberman quickly sprang into action.
Soon the house was warming again.
"Stefan, she is still cold." The wife insisted.
"The fire must be hotter! She needs it!"
The Dockmaster walked over to his wife,
Taking the small girl from her pale arms.

"Lisbeth," he said, "You must rest woman.
The other children will need you tomorrow."
The Lumberman saw the fatigue in his stance.
"Sir, I can hold the girl this night, you need rest."
"No!" Lisbeth shouted. "He is a stranger!"

“My dear wife, this child is beyond all harm.”

With that, the Dockmaster handed over the child,
Took his wife silently by the hand,
And left the room without a further word.
The Lumberman sat in a rocking chair
By the fire, the frail, cold child in his arms.
Deep in thought about the journey here.

His long life, filled with trials and toil.
The massive strength built from it all.
The blessings of health, yet loneliness.
He had loved the wild, the stars and moon,
The fresh air in his lungs, sun on his skin.
The freedom of being bound to no one place.

Yet, in the quietest of moments, with
Only the crackling of the flame heard,
The Lumberman held the cold child in silence,
A small tear in the corner of his eye.
So much time devoted to service,
But what had he really accomplished?

No friends, no home, and no family.
No one to miss him or think about him.
No one to worry about him on the road.
No one to mourn his passing someday.
All the strength of his body for nothing.
He shuddered and wept piteously.

Then a gift of supreme clarity
Came before his mind, a candle lit
Full of inspiration and resolution.
For the first time in his wandering life,
The Lumberman prayed to God of his need
To be part of something greater than himself.

All that coldest, darkest night, he prayed,
Asking for a miracle from the Almighty.
A man who had never needed anything,
Pleading for a miracle to come.
The whole night, begging for a chance,
Holding the girl in his warm strong arms.

At first light, Stefan the Dockmaster arose,
Coming into the main room, shaking cold
From his wiry frame. The fire had grown low.
He turned to wake the Lumberman and stopped,
Amazed by what he saw. The hair and beard
Of his guest had turned from grey to white.

The face flushed with the redness of berries,
Beatific in gentle repose, a slight smile
Engraved in his features forever.
His chest did not rise and fall in motion.
Yet something in his massive arms stirred,
The small warm body of a sweet, young girl.

Stefan found himself in tears, wanting to praise
God to the highest of all the heavens,
But he did not want to upset his daughter.
He stoked the fire and placed the child
With her sleeping mother in their warm bed.
Then he woke his sons to help him prepare.
They were never rich, scraping by truly.
They all had to struggle mightily
To pry his body from the rocking chair.
The ground was too frozen to dig a grave.
All they had to cover was a blanket,
Old woven wool dyed red by gathering.

They laid him to rest under the trees,
The little girl and her mother collecting
Holly and cedar branches to mantle him.

Smooth stones from the lake to weigh the blanket.
They sang and prayed and praised God.
Thanking the Lumberman for his great gift.

Then they took shelter from the winter storms,
Which raged for weeks. At the break of springtime,
They returned to the site, nothing remained.
Perhaps a giant bear had dragged him away.
Nothing smaller could have attempted it.
The family liked to think otherwise.

In the years that followed, the story spread,
The details lost in the building of myth.
The most important thing remembered was this:
A kind man, timeless, larger than life.
Spent his days wandering the whole land.
Bringing gifts and miracles to those in need.



By Zachary Bergstresser

Greedy

By Emily Irons

I know I am young
But I long for so much more
I am tired of settling
I want every dream
Every wish
Every goal
Every thing
I have ever created for myself
I want it all
Because if I do not get it now
Will I ever get it?
If we are not greedy
We may never get
The things we want
The things we need
And most importantly
The things we *deserve*

I love you

By Sydney Varga

I want to stare in your eyes forever
My eyes are too loud
They say far too much
They never stop talking
I'm scared you'll see
What I'm too scared to say

Simple men...

By Bradley Molnar

Dedicated to Matthew Arnold and Horace, Respectively

Sweetness and light, to instruct and delight
Such sweet words to entice our mental might.
Let them caress your ears and open your mind.
Let them bathe your heart and leave no place for shadows to hide.
This is the promise these men made to you,
This power is yours no matter what you do

Christianity

By Sydney Varga

I questioned
My faith for so long
You make me believe in God
Because I know He gave you
To me

penny for despair

By Emily Irons

i think
true desperation
is catapulted by
frustration
why am I not loved?
do I not deserve love?
how do you give to something
that does not give back to you
like throwing your only penny
to a well that doesn't grant wishes
desperation isn't embarrassing
—it's heartbreaking
leeching on to the thing
you deserve most
but do not get
in return
save your pennies
but do not be ashamed
if you throw them in the wrong well
because all well water
tastes the same

Two Things

By Derek Knapp

I am driving down the road, no cars, no music, just the wind.

I come up on this bend. I see no trees blocking my view.

There is this bright orange sky with a few clouds that fit perfectly.

I have two things on my mind: I miss you and I knew you'd always be looking after me.

A few minutes pass and that orange turns to red.

I have two things on my mind: I miss you and I wonder if I'll see you again.

A few minutes pass and that red turns to black. I still see no cars and only hear the wind.

Water starts to fall from my eye and the sky. I hear this crash and now I am sleeping.

I am awakened by a soft, "What's up, D?"

Now I am in the orange.

I look to my right, and I got my answer.

I got my brother I've been missing.



“Nothing Gold Can Stay”

By Sydney Pilarski

Our Unexpected Love

By Taylor Clayborn

Our love flourished out of thin air.
When first meeting, our journey began.
You opened the door to me -
my heart jumped.

I sat at the edge of the bed,
Shaking -
It was cold but
your presence kept me warm.

We spoke until the depths of the night.
Your eyes smiling back at me.
We lost track of time,
enmeshed in conversation.

We discussed our hopes and dreams.
Together we clicked.
There wasn't an uneasy moment -
not even a stress of what I should say.

...with a kiss goodnight.
I fell asleep -
falling in love.
I didn't see it coming.

You are the man I dreamed of.
I feel safe around you -
I feel loved.
(I pray for you every night)



"Pastel Sky"

By Sydnee Pilarski

January 4, 2022

Taylor Clayborn

I arrive. Breaths are staggered.
Unsettled thoughts.
Heart is pounding.
I see you walk to the car to get my lone bag...
Breathing starts to settle.

Ultimately, I feel secure again.
Safe. Protected. Appreciated.
Being together, I can completely be myself
Like a weight is lifted off my shoulder.
I feel accepted for who I truly am.

In the depths of the night, we hold each other.
You pull me closer when we are too far apart.
Whispers in my ears send chills down my spine.
Endless kisses that make me drift swiftly asleep.
When we wake, we continue to embrace and talk about our future.

Snap ...

Instantly, I am ripped to shreds.
We have to part once again.
Breaths become staggered.
Unsettled thoughts return.
My fast heartbeat is back.

"11 more sleeps"

Narrator arrives at 11:00 a.m. on January 4 in Ohio to visit a best friend for a day. Being long distance is hard and takes a toll on mental and physical health. Narrator leaves at 10:25 a.m. on January 5.

Science and English

By Jamin Wentling

Some of you may study scienc**E**,
Consumed in all the elements you lear**N**,
It may have slipped your wirin**G**,
English is the more important skill**L** for which you should year**n**.

Not an atom should pique your stimul**I**,
Chemistry should be left for those searching for evenness**S**.
Evenness? A foundational principle of the language of Englis**H**.
Maybe English and Science have more in common after all.

Quiet

By Sydnee Pilarski

The stillness of the world outside my window is haunting.
A white blanket covers the earth,
Hushing the sounds of life.
The trees have grown taller, darker, reaching for light.
Their branches, like fingers,
Create shadows of fright.

But as I look up,
And the flakes melt on my cheeks,
I listen for something that moment of quiet may not repeat.
The silence of the world, while strange and unknowing,
Brings warmth to my soul as the sky just keeps snowing.

Thank you, friends

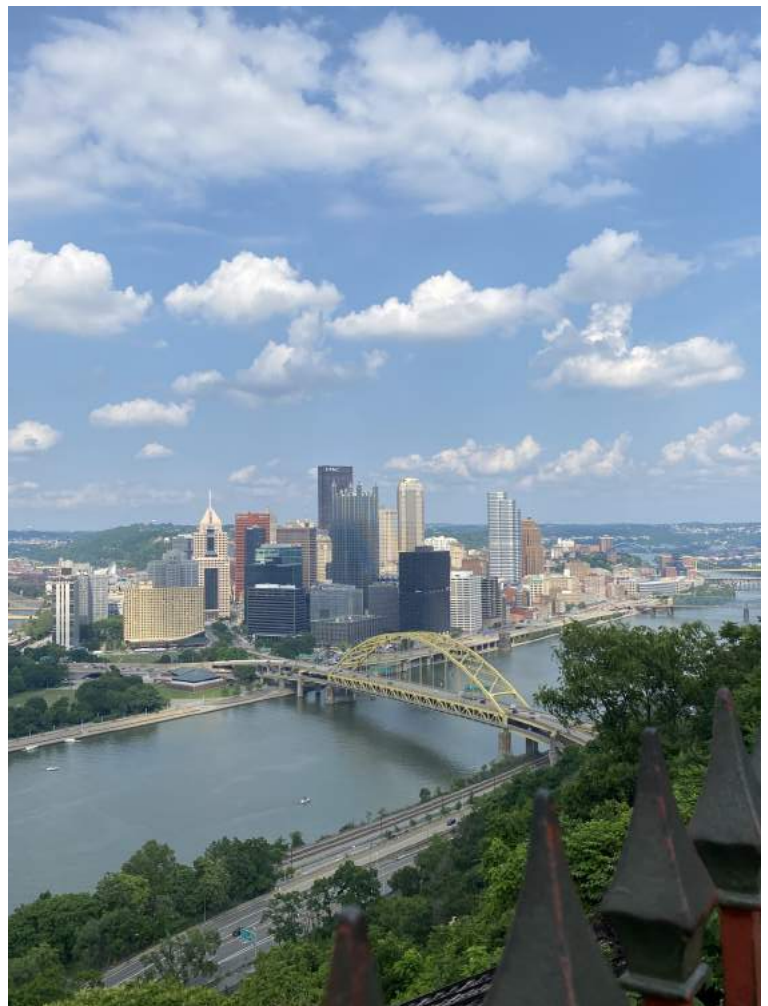
By Emily Irons

From shoulders to cry on
And hands to hold
I thank you all
From the new to the old

There are times in my life
Where I stop and look
Because every single one of you
Are main characters in my book

The smallest of gestures
The biggest of hugs
Every single heart strings
You all have tugged

Don't know where I'd be
Don't know what I'd do
I can't say it enough
I truly thank all of you



By Taylor Clayborn

regret your losses

By Emily Irons

regret – it's a terrible feeling
but do you know what is even worse?
loss
knowing you had something
but moments later it's being ripped out of your hands
leaving you helpless, powerless

with regret,
some things are unknown
but with loss,
most things are known

and they are felt
and they are kept
and they are protected
and then they are borrowed
and eventually – broken

it is one pain to wonder what could have been
but it is another agony to know what *was* and what *is*

Melodia Africana III by Ludovico Einaudi

By Sydney Varga

I still listen to it
How beautiful it is
And how beautifully you played it
I love the way it flows
Until it rises and rises
And then it just stops
Just like our love

What I Feel When I'm Crying in the Shower

By Sydney Varga

You were like
Quicksand
I picked you up
So full in my hands
You lingered just for a moment
Until you ran through my fingers
Grain by grain
Until you were gone

Poor Stargazer

By Katie Miller

My soul cannot fit in a glass bottle,
This vessel it resides in is not transparent.
Were I to be distilled so easily,
I could be consumed in one tiny sip.
This is not my nature, though some may wish
A life could be transported in a crate
Made of plastic, meant to be discarded
Once that meager taste of soul was taken.
If dilution sends me to the angels,
That is not the heaven I imagined.
I will, instead, create my afterlife
In a place more welcoming to my heart.
Say hello to heaven for me, my friend;
For I shall reside in the dog's temple.

Playing God

By Sydney Varga

The stars
Are hung so beautifully
Arranged so meticulously
In the sky
All for you

Dream of me...

By Katie Miller

In memory of Andy Wood

...and Julie Ann," you begged of me in that song
I hold so dear, though I never met you
Nor her to place you in my dreaming.
"Cry for the savior and the prophet's son."
For whom do I weep? The savior? The son
Of the prophet? Or for the singer, who
Left this life too soon? Truly, tragedy
Fills this space occupied only by your
Voice. What did we lose when your light flickered
Out? Oh, Stargazer, what music did we
Fail to preserve in your passing? Will we
Ever write those lyrics left unwritten?

High Notes

By Sydney Varga

I heard the sound
Of what it felt like
To fall in love with you
It is so tragic
That it took me this long to find it
I want to listen to it
Forever
So I won't ever forget that euphoria

But what if I don't want to forget?

By Sydnee Pilarski

But what if I don't want to forget?

What if I don't want you to go?

What if I'm just not ready?

I still love you – don't you know?

But what if I can't forget?

What if I'm not ready to let that part go?

What if I don't want to?

I still love you – don't you know?

Our chapter may be over,

But our story isn't finished,

I'll still hold you in my heart,

Because I still love you and that won't be diminished.



By Morgan Wood

It's not your fault: It's mine

A story written in Haikus

Anonymous

Please take my split soul
Of love suffered and love gone
I see clearly now

The chains that bind me
Are bound in past lives of mine
They define me not

There is something new
A friend, or perhaps, a love
To keep cloaked from you

The love of my mind
Hides behind shattered, smashed bones
Punctured are my lungs

My love, my darling
I stayed quiet all these months
Silence only hurts

To be a friend here
Experience reigns supreme
I feel better, dear

Excitement does rise
At the idea of being
Someone who's wanted

Woe to me a home
A rest for others' comfort
For I am that home

Take my clammy hand
Drag me to the daring sea
Morning dew sheds tears

My purpose is none
If the ones I care for fall
A shadow I shift

Wish me slow and sweet
A lullaby spun from string
And feathers of gold

The days of gold end
Another sunset is gone
Along with the sky

Numbness runs deep here
Filling the void of my soul
It remains unchanged

For days the dull reigns
Fire sea blazes in spurts
I cannot feel it

For once I wish me
My bones ash, my blood aflame
May I feel again

It is not your fault
I promise my affairs here
Are not caused by you

Lines dragged across sea
Singed red with age like fine wine
None can hear it scream

To feel is twisted
Defined by gods who use strings
I have no scissors

For once the dull gray
Lifts me from the dark abyss
I'm privy to breathe

Time passes like sand
Fickle and callous like so
Who am I again?

I'm allowed to live
Life has granted me air here
Floating above sea

My bubble keeps still
Fragile death is beckoned still
Not by my still hands
Me myself am free
From many waves in the sea
Endlessly, I plea.

She Isn't That Girl (Anymore)

By Emily Irons

With tears streaming down her face as she looked in the mirror
She realized who she was
More importantly, though,
She realized who she wasn't

She wasn't the girl who put on a smile every morning – not even a fake one
She wasn't the girl who knew what she was doing – at every moment of every given time

She wasn't the girl who loved easily – despite the times she let lose a little spark of passion
She wasn't the girl who could shake off the comments of others – even though she yearned to be

She wasn't the girl who enjoyed the things her younger self did – dancing, ponies, singing
She wasn't the girl who wanted to be someone else – yet she was desperate to feel new again

She wasn't the girl who needed help from others – she faced it all on her own
She wasn't the girl who carried the world on her shoulders – although she constantly felt the weight

What makes this realization even harder
Is that she did, in fact, used to be that girl
But the seasons change
And life goes on
Because she isn't that girl anymore
Not even a little bit
Not even at all



Artwork by Ava Kavulla

Starvation

By Sydney Varga

When they're slipping away
And you have a plate of food in front of you
It *instantly* makes you sick
You try to swallow
But all you can taste is salt water forming
And you think you might throw up
What you've just swallowed
Because the lump in your throat
Won't let it pass
And suddenly you're drinking tears
Instead of Diet Coke
And swallowing the snot that runs down your throat
Instead of mashed potatoes
And you know you need to try
Because it's been days
But you just can't bring yourself to do it
And so you put the fork down with your shaky hand
And hide under your covers once again

Paperclip

By Emily Irons

She is a paperclip
Binding everything and everyone together
She is a paperclip
Holding onto heavy topics that are light as a feather
She is a paperclip
An object that is practically see-through
She is a paperclip
Trivial and taken for granted by the person she loves most – you

The fifth sense

By Emily Irons

We aren't supposed to know
We aren't supposed to guess
We aren't supposed to assume
We aren't supposed to calculate
As humans, with five senses
We're supposed to
Hear
See
Taste
Smell
And most importantly
Feel
Every. Single. Emotion.
Feel every heartache in our chest
Feel every butterfly in our stomach
Feel every song on the radio
Feel every tear on our cheek
Feel every moment
Feel every thing
Because when you feel
That is how you know you have loved
And when you have loved so hard that it hurts
That is how you know you have truly lived

Night and Day

By Sydney Varga

Every night
I picked the moon out of the sky
And gave it to you
And every morning
You put it back
To show me you didn't need it

–herself

By Emily Irons

The funny thing is

She will always be the shoulder to cry on
And she will always pick up the pieces

The type to hold the door for strangers
And the type to clean up the dinner table after everyone has finished eating

The one who tells people she appreciates them
And the one who rounds up her total to donate to a good cause

The girl who always says thank you
And the girl who works hard to make the people around her feel proud

After she completes these adoring tasks for others
She will never return the favor to the person who needs it the most
–herself

The chidings of the muse...

By Bradley Molnar

Why do you so labor to build your thoughts?
Why are you fighting to make it sound right?
Why do you treat it like game to be caught?
Do you not know? You cannot tame the light.
I am your close friend, your voice in the dark.
I am your muse, the one truth in your work.
I am the one through whom you hit your mark,
And within your soul forever I lurk
Do not treat me like wild prey to be tamed,
Nor your own pet, though I do have a name



“Bay Side”

By Sydnee Pilarski



“Unearthed”

By Sydnee Pilarski



By Taylor Clayborn



By Amy Jackson



See the World

By Jason C. Merriam '04

My family were herdsmen, from way back,
As far as anyone could remember.
Chasing horses, cattle, raising livestock.
This was my whole life, and I hated it.

Clan squabbles for generations,
Fighting over water, pasture, animals.
Marrying a cousin to keep your land.
Born there, live there, die there, pathetic.

Then the King came. A fine warrior,
Old One Eye got us motivated,
Opened us up to new horizons.
Gathered our spears, trained calvary.

Next thing I know, I'm in blasted Greece,
Gold in my hand, wine in my belly.
Life is good, the women are better.
Couple of years later, we're moving.

The Boy has us cross the Sea to fight
The Great King and his huge armies.
Outnumbered always, but never outwitted.
Alexander led us to countless victories.

I helped build the siege towers at Tyre.
Walked through the monuments of Egypt.
Stood in Phalanx at Gaugamela,
Crushing the Persian chariot charge.

Darius and his armies fled before us.
We gave chase, collecting treasure
Beyond my wildest imagination.
The poor bastard killed by his own men.

Our Lad became the Great King.
His ambition endless, he wanted to
Create something that had never been,
Melding East with West, it did not work.

We were fine with the riches and women,
Taking foreign wives, having children.

Founding new cities was exciting.
Life was good for almost all of us.

Alexander wanted more than that though.
He needed to conquer, needed us
To help him reach the end of the world.
So, we went. He was our General.

I climbed sheer cliffs in Bactria.
Swam across wide rivers in India.
Marched across miserable jungles.
Fought against towering Gray Giants.

All in the name of one man's Glory.
Fortune favors the bold, the meek survive.
We were finished, bled enough, died enough.
We wanted peace, most wanted to go home.

Our Great King became a God among Men.
He wanted us to bow down before him.
Accept Easterners as our comrades in arms.
We told him no, he was furious.

In the end, though, he understood.
He remembered when Persepolis burned.
He saw the blood of Cleitus on his hands.
He let us go and headed for Babylon.

By luck, I went by sea with Nearchus,
While my friends perished in the desert
Of Gedrosia. Even Alexander
Could not conquer Death in battle.

I made my way to Egypt's wonders,
Serving with Soter into old age.
Such a beautiful place to find peace.
I never made it home to Macedon.

I lived without regret, saw the world
In all its splendor and beauty.
Earned my scars inside and out.
The world will never see an age like this.

Sometime

By Dylan Evans

Sometime,
Not so long ago,
We used to rush home.
We always had plans with each other.
There was never a day we weren't together,
And what fun we always had, spending time, with such joy.
I remember on a rainy autumn day we both were the happiest we could have been—
But things are much different now that you're grown and different,
Though that day seems like it was yesterday,
You and I haven't talked in many years.
You and I used to rush home.
Not so long ago,
Sometime.

To My Sister

By Taylor Clayborn

(Hold these words close to your heart)
Life is hard, I understand.
But do not let someone bring you down.
Know your self-worth.

I love you.
I love your personality.
I love your laugh.
I love everything you stand for.
I love your focus.
I love your drive.
I love how you don't back down.
I love how caring you are.
I love how much you love animals.
(My love for you is ENDLESS)

Do what makes you happy.
I wish you could see yourself—
through my eyes.
Thank you for being you.

I understand we are apart...
it may seem like I'm away for a long time.
But in the end, we will be together.
Let's get through these hard times together.

We are sisters forever —
with the choice to be best friends.
I love you, Lina.
Forever.



By Zachary Bergstresser

By Zachary Bergstresser



By Morgan Wood



By Zachary Bergstresser

Someone to Watch Over Me

By Jason C. Merriam '04

One night, not long ago, I slept deeply,
The dream unremembered, but immersive.
A wail of pain ripped through my subconsciousness,
Hurt, from the voice of my beloved child.

I wake, startled, parental reflexes
Charging to the fore, ready for action.
I sprang to her side, with comfort and love.
She soothed, quietly falling back to slumber.

As I placed her into the cradle,
I felt diminished. Something was lost,
Somewhere in Nod, part of me remained.
The reason unknown, yet I imagine.

Stirring, waves crashing, wet sand in my grasp,
Eyes opening to gray, gray everywhere
From the platinum of the sand, slate ocean,
The silver foam, and the charcoal sky distant.

Lightning streaked the horizon, thunder roared.
I shivered against the incoming wind.
A storm was rising, one unavoidable.
Daunted, I turned from its menacing presence.

My gaze traced up the pale slopes to the crown,
Autumnal splendor in all colors of tree.
Leaves falling under the assault of the winds.
Beyond the great wood stood alabaster towers,

Lit by the setting sun, glorious in
Its refulgence. A city nondescript,
Majestic in contemplation, luminous,
Humanity's home, and beacon of life.

Yet too far for succor. Dread came forth,
Creeping into my heart, but so did hope.
Faintly, I heard the beating of hooves
On the path, the jingling of the reins.

Cresting the hill was a lone rider,
Silhouetted by the setting sun.
He made his way slowly down the dune,
Features of both coming into focus.
The steed was a magnificent stallion,
A smoky gray, speckled with white,
Silvery barding and horseshoes shining,
Not a hint of trepidation in its gait.

The rider was lightly armored, plates
Jointed at elbow and knee, mirror polished
At both helm and pauldrons, His tabard,
A red cross emblazoned, surrounded by white.

Springing lightly from his mount, he spoke,
Doffing his helm after adjusting his swordbelt.
"The storm is almost upon us, why do you tarry?
No one can hope to stand against its fury."

I studied the horseman intently.
He was youthful, somewhere past his teens,
Dark wavy hair cascading down the neck.
Soft eyes belying the firmness of gaze.

His jawline reinforced the sentiment.
"You obviously do not belong here,
I can tell by the look on your face.
Do you remember how you came here?"

"My daughter cried out and I ran to her,
To comfort her so she could fall asleep.
Yet I cannot remember anything
Beyond that. I do not feel like myself."

The young man nodded in recognition.
"I understand. You have a foot in two worlds.
Can you ride? We must be away from here.
Time is of the essence, sit behind me."

He deftly mounted his steed and reached back
For my hand. I clambered up, holding on
As best as I could as we galloped
Up the sandy hill and into the woods.

The thunder roared from behind the hill,
Wind howling through my ears into my soul,
Fear creeping slowly around my being.
Yet, onward we sped, galloping to light.

Every step, sure, solid, weaving through the
woods,
Leaving and branches glancing past, my eyes shut,
Holding on for dear life, prayers muttering.
A pace unlike anything known to me.

The ride could have lasted a minute,
An hour, or a lifetime. Sometimes
I feel I am still on that harrowing jaunt.
At last, we stopped as the wood ended.

My eyes could barely focus amidst
The splendor of it all, infinite arches
Stretching across the abyss to the jewel,
The final Home of Humanity.

Towers raised like arms in rapturous faith,
Shining in cascading light beyond compare.
Coruscating color beyond imagination.
Tears flowed freely in sheer awe of it.

My heart leapt at the music in the air.
As if all the masters harmonized
The sum of human emotion at once.
Its melodies linger at the edge of dream.

The rider dismounted and said,
“You have reached the end of the journey.
It is not your time to go further.
Your place is with your family.”

“How do I leave, how do I wake up?”
I asked, but I wanted more answers.
“A leap of faith must be taken into
The chasm below. It is the way home.”

“But there is so much I want to know...”
I told him as I dismounted.
He took off his helm and smiled.
“All will be revealed in time, Jason.”

I looked at him closely and, in his gaze,
Saw the faces of friends in unison,
Saw the faces of other little ones
I had held in my arms not long ago.

“Nolan?” I asked incredulously,
“How could this be, a man fully grown?”
“Anything is possible in this place.”
He laughed and reached inside his gauntlet,

Pulled out a small object, tossed it to me.
I cradled it in my hands, stunned.
My eyes filling with tears. An acorn.
“But why would you know me? We never met.”

“I know you, Uncle, I heard your prayers,
Felt the tears on your face, the mourning
Of my passing from the life I had.
The love you still bear. I heard your voice,

The voices of my beloved family.
Tell them to not worry about me.
I do the work of the Lord in this place.
Guarding the dreams of the living.”

“Guarding dreams?” I asked. “From whom?”
“Evil will always seek a way to corrupt.
I, and my brethren, protect sacred rest,
The Lord charges us to uphold the peace

So the whispers of the enemy
Cannot be heard while you slumber.
We have been here since the beginning.
We shall be here when the last are called home.”

“But then what was the purpose of your birth?”
“The Lord grants us the blessing of family,
To be loved, to experience life,
However briefly, reminds us why we fight.

I feel the love of my parents and siblings.
I know that it will be there always.
Tell them I was called home to serve,
But that we will be reunited in Heaven.”

I stood astonished at this young man,
Words and thoughts afire in my head.
So much information to process,
Not enough time, I think of a question.

“Yes,” He replied. “Your Angel is here.”
“How did you know? I didn’t say anything.”
“I read your heart, mighty in the Lord’s Host.
Your prayers and love are received and returned.”

“Thank you, Nolan, you have eased my heart.”
“I’m glad, but our time has come to an end.”
“Will I remember all of this beauty?”
“Just traces, but the message will remain.”

I took one last look at the shining city
Across the bridge. The gathering storm
Bringing darkness and thunder to the east.
“Goodbye, we are so very proud of you.”

“Farewell, Uncle, I will await you all.
Send my love to the waking world.
May your rest be untroubled, your dreams sweet,
Someone will be there to watch over you.”

A smile spread across our faces and I fell,
Fearless and fast, wind rushing by,
Yet strangely under control, and warm,
Like being swaddled in a blanket.

My eyes slowly open, secure in bed.
Quiet, the presence of my family around me.
The dream vision cloudy, the message clear.
Thank you, Nephew, we love you so much.

If Only Pear Could Talk

By Lana Kulik

A big, beautiful spreading pear tree proudly stood in the middle of the family backyard. It was not the only fruit tree there; there were also apple, mulberry and tart cherry trees. It was not the oldest in the family's little orchard, that would be the two mulberries, but the pear tree was the biggest and obviously the most valuable as it sat right in the center, providing shade for a big part of the backyard. It had been planted by the patriarch of the family, a father of two girls at the time, in 1951, to celebrate finishing the construction of the main house on his little farm. In more than 40 years of its existence, the pear tree saw a lot of the family life and the way the village changed.

The pear was growing together with the younger girl of the family, a tomboy who liked playing with the neighborhood boys and getting into a lot of mischief. She loved climbing the old mulberry tree where she would sit for hours, eating the sweet juicy berries until her tummy started to hurt. The girl also liked talking to the young tree and called it Pear, which quite accidentally was a female name in her native language. If only the girl knew that Pear could hear and understand her! The girl attempted to climb Pear when no one could see her, as if trying out the tree's agility and viability. However, Pear was too young to hold the girl's weight and once, when caught, the girl took a lot of scolding from her mother. "I'm not going to put your bones back together when you fall and break them! And that poor little tree will break as well!" the mother yelled, carrying her big belly around. She had two more sons, when the girl was about 10 and 15.

Pear was so healthy and robust that already in the third spring it bore fruit: small, perfectly shaped, sweet, juicy pears, yellow and red when ripe. They grew in clusters on the branches' ends, making them heavy and easier to pick because the branches were willowing down under the fruit's weight. As the father of the family took care of the fruit trees by whitewashing their trunks at the base and spraying them with something in early spring that killed the bugs and worms, the fruits were almost never rotten or wormed from inside. The kids were delighted to pick them and then help their mother to cut them into slices for jams and dried fruit to eat in the winter. Their favorite was the fruit paste that the mother made by combining ground apples and pears, rolling them into thin rounds, drying them and then rolling them into tubes. Sweet and chewy joy!

With every year that the pear grew, it produced more and more fruit, and the family was happy to pick them, preserve them in different ways and share them with neighbors. When the tree turned 20, the younger daughter, who was a beautiful young woman now, brought home her own little daughter, a fussy and crying little creature. They stayed for several months until it became warm in the spring and went back to the city where the woman's husband was. As she was growing up, the new little girl was sent to her grandparents' place for the summer break from school. She was the oldest grandchild, and six more came after her, almost every two years. The little girl was just as mischievous and crafty as her mother was, and Pear was happy that it could now provide the climbing rescue for her. Just like her mother, the girl could sit in the tree for hours, eating the fruit and chatting with Pear. She was quite a story teller, that little girl, with vivid imagination and an ability to weave a tale about anything she looked at: the Sun, clouds, trees, plants, birds and animals, giving them all voice and soul. Pear was surprised by how perceptive the little girl was and wished it could talk back to her.

One year, when the little girl was about eight, Pear decided to take a break from fruit-bearing. It bloomed in the spring as usual, but the flowers did not turn into fruit. "Barren bloom," the grandmother explained to the little girl, "It happens sometimes. Everyone, even trees, needs some rest." The family greatly missed the pears that year but decided they couldn't do anything about it and were content with having the cherries, apples and mulberries. They also had a lot of raspberries that the little girl was happy to pick.

But Pear quite liked the lightness of her fruitless being and decided to take the break next year as well. "Barren bloom again," the grandfather was saying, quite concerned. "Perhaps, it's just its time, the pear is getting too old or rotting from inside."

The grandmother wouldn't have it. She took a big axe the grandfather kept on their farm, called her granddaughter, went around the tree with the axe three times as if sizing it up and made a move as if she was going to chop Pear off with one blow. The tree of course knew it was too big now and couldn't be taken down with just one blow, so it was quite amused. The granddaughter, however, was very scared. She watched her grandmother with her big eyes wide open in horror, covering her mouth with the palm of her hand in shock, trying not to cry. The grandmother looked at the girl and said, "You talk to Pear and she understands you. Tell her that if she doesn't bear fruit next year I will take her down personally and plant a new one! I don't need barren trees in my orchard!" After the grandmother left, the girl hugged the tree and started to cry, saying, "Pear, please, have some fruit next year, even if it's just a little bit! You know my grandmother, she always keeps her word! I don't want you to die!"

Pear was touched by how scared the girl was. She had never experienced that much love from one human. She thought they only liked her for the fruit. But the little girl was something else: she really cared that the tree continued to live. Next year, Pear produced the biggest yield in her entire life, just to please the little girl. The whole family was thrilled to have the juicy pears again, and shared them with everyone who would care to take them.

Then the little girl grew as well and started to skip the summers or came only for a short period of time. She still liked sitting under Pear in the shade but rarely climbed it. She also didn't talk to it that much now, and when she did she made sure no one was around to hear. "Too grown up now," Pear thought, "afraid that the family members would laugh at her for talking to the trees."

One year, the girl did not come at all. And the next year again. From other family members Pear knew she went to some place called "college." Pear still hoped she would come back one day. And when she did, she started to spend only about two weeks at her grandparents' in the summer and Pear was always happy to see her.

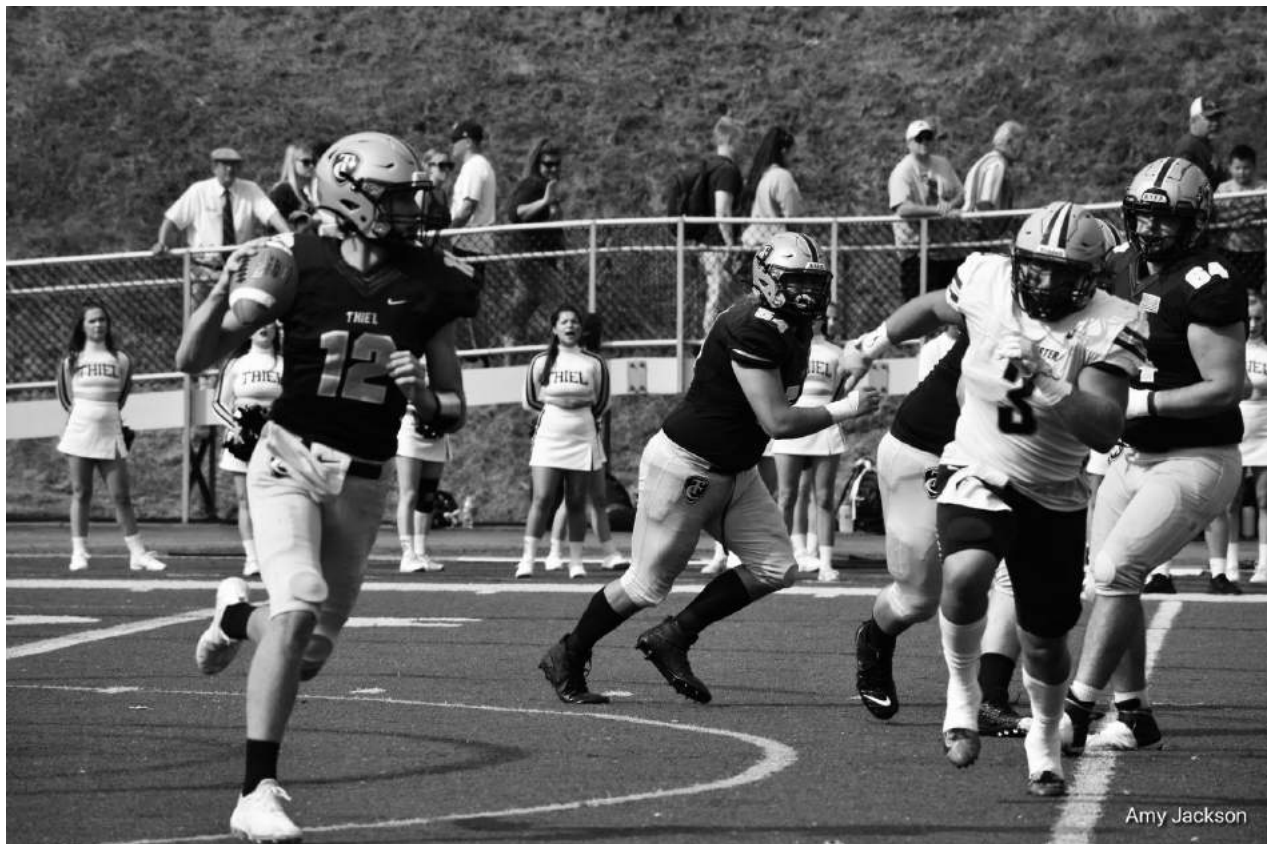
And then one day everything changed. It was the year Pear turned 42, and was mature and happily fruiting every year. The grandfather still worked the farm and one day when he was weeding potatoes he fell on the draw hoe's handle and broke two ribs that damaged his right lung. He made it back to the house but the next day he felt so bad he had to be taken to the hospital. He wasn't back for a long time, and when he did come back he was frail and thin and couldn't work on the farm anymore. His four children and seven grandchildren all descended on the house one day, helped pack everything up and moved the grandparents to the city. They sold the house and the farm to another family.

That family did not like the trees at all. They never picked or preserved any fruit, and all the pears, apples, and cherries fell on the ground, rotting there. There were not enough wild birds to get to them and the family did not keep any chickens, ducks, or pigs like the family before did. In the first three years, the new family took down all of the poplar trees with the brush under them. They were growing around the farm's boundaries on three sides behind the main house, making up the farm's natural fence. The new family had a lot of young men in it who took the trees down with the axes, chopped them up and stored the logs in big stacks in the shed. In the winter, they would take the logs to the house and never bring them back. When all the poplar trees were gone, they cut the two old mulberry trees. In a year or two, the apple and cherry trees were gone and Pear found itself alone in the middle of the farm that was transformed from a small crop farm to one big sheepfold. Pear was tired, feeling old and lonely. It missed the old family dearly. It was also quite puzzled by why it was still standing. The new family put the asphalt everywhere on the ground so that they could drive the sheep easier in and out. But Pear was still sticking out in the middle.

And then one day, the father of the new family and his two oldest sons came to Pear with axes. "I'm sorry," the father said, "Even though I gave that young woman my word, I have to take you down. You are in the way." As Pear was feeling the hard axe blows on its trunk, it thought of the little girl who was so shocked by the threat of Pear being axed she must have made the new family promise to keep it. That thought warmed Pear's heart as it was going to tree's Heaven. "I had a good life." Pear sent the last thought to her favorite girl, "I wish I could tell you that."



Photos by Amy Jackson



12 Days
By Bailey Stilts

Day 1:

The sky outside of the restaurant was getting dark, way too dark. The only light that was coming in from the outside shone from the lone lamppost and the headlights of cars passing by. None of which were coming in. None of which had a pretty girl. None of which had his date. Sam took another sip of his drink; at least he had that. A drink would not stand him up. But a drink wasn't a date. You couldn't love a drink, spend the rest of your life with it. Only a person could do that, but she didn't show up. He was in deep thought when a middle-aged server came over to his table. She was wearing her light blonde hair up in a bun, a weird sight when most of the waitresses went for the ponytail. She was wearing a white dress shirt with a black bow tie, as if to enforce how fancy the restaurant was. Sam thought it was the perfect first date place.

"Hello, sir. How is everything?" Everything was horrible, he thought as he watched the waitress sway back and forth. He was tired from working late nights at the hospital and was looking forward to this date for a while. He met her on one of those dating sites. He would never have joined if he was not desperate. That's when he saw her. She was perfect. She loved reading, she loved drawing, she loved puppies, and enjoyed vacation at the beach in Rhode Island. They started chatting and hit it off immediately. Tonight was the first time they were supposed to meet in person. His heart sank as he saw other couples in the restaurant start to leave.

"I'm fine."

"Ok, let me know if you need anything," the waitress said as she left. She was definitely trying to seduce him. He didn't care. The girl of his dreams was just a text away. Then he got a text. It was her:

Sorry I couldn't make it. An emergency came up.

We will have to reschedule

"Hopefully, Dad's appointment won't take long, I have somewhere I need to be," Michelle said, flipping through the pages of a Food Network magazine. Tim looked over to her, watching her with a deep concentration. If she didn't want to be here, why didn't she just leave. She was always focused on what was coming next. She couldn't live in the moment. He needed her to be here: in the moment. Here: in the hustle of the emergency waiting room. Waiting for her dad to get done. Spending time with her brother who she doesn't get to see that often. After college, they went their separate ways. She went to Pittsburgh, the big city, to find a job and a life away from the rural environment. Meanwhile, he stayed and helped his father deal with mom's passing. He never left.

They sat in silence right beside each other, hoping for their father to come out and say that he was fine. To say that the heart attack was just a one-time event and that he was fine. Instead of him, a nurse came out. She was carrying a clipboard and ushered them to their father. They both got up and followed the woman down the hall where they reached Room 213, a room in which so much will happen 11 days from now. When they entered, shock filled both of their faces.

The room was empty except for the nurse, them, and a 40-year-old man who lay in the bed on the one end of the room. The man was watching TV, and didn't notice they had entered until the nurse spoke up. He turned and looked at both of them with a big grin and then turned back to the TV.

"He is still a little out of it from the event. It will take a couple days until he is back on his feet," the nurse said, looking down at her clipboard. "There is something you should know. Come with me."

They left the room and walked to a room that looked to be her office. There was a desk and two chairs in front, and they both sat. They watched as she sat on the other side of the desk and clicked through different applications on her computer. Eventually she turned to face them.

"Your father has developed the signs of stage four leukemia."

The room was coming together slowly, but surely. Isabelle watched as her husband, Mark, brought in a new container of paint and started to put a second coat on the wall beside her. She watched him for a moment and went back to reading the instruction manual for the assembly of the crib. Her hands were steady as she worked, even though she feels like they shouldn't be. She was freaking out, but she had to hold strong. She had to put on this mask so that her husband wouldn't freak out. The problem is that he wasn't freaking out. He was just as calm as she was trying to portray. Maybe all the movies were wrong. Maybe guys don't freak out as much as they show you. Or maybe he was also putting on an act for her. Either way, she thought, he would

make an excellent father.

"How is our little miracle today?" he said, getting down from the ladder and moving it to the next wall. After this morning's kicking event, everything had been fairly quiet on the baby end. They had been working on the room for the past hour and she was feeling fine and the baby seemed to be asleep, as there was no kicking.

"He or she is doing well," she responded, putting the last section onto the crib. They decided to paint the wall a grass green. It was a nice neutral color and was Isabelle's favorite. It was only a month until her expected delivery date. She was excited and Mark seemed to be too.

Day 2:

The hospital was relatively quiet today, so Sam was able to spend a lot of his shift behind a computer screen. The mundane stuff. It didn't take him too long to do most of the management side of the morning's work, so he had to be there to answer the phone. While he was waiting for more phone calls, or any for that matter, he opened his texting app and checked his messages. She hasn't said anything more, meaning she was probably waiting for him to make the next move. He would need to figure out a well thought out message. Just as he started to formulate a message in his mind, the doors at the front of the hospital burst wide open. In came two police officers. One was hunched over, holding the side of his chest that had a giant red stain on the side of it. The other had his arm swung over the injured police officer's shoulder. He was the first to talk.

"We need immediate medical attention; he has already lost a lot of blood!" Sam quickly pressed a button on the intercom that alerted the other medical professionals, and he jumped up and rushed over to the two officers. He put his arm around the injured officer and the other one, whose name is Detective Reese, starts to explain what happened. "We were in a gunfight. He was shot in his side..."

When he finished, they had made it halfway to the door back to the emergency room. This is when five other members of the medical staff ran out, pushing a bed to put the injured officer. Sam and Det. Reese, with the help of other medical personnel, lifted the officer, whose name was Officer Eric, onto the bed. Once he was properly set onto the bed, they quickly pushed the bed back to the emergency room. Sam followed them, grabbing a mask, gloves, and surgical tools. Performing an operation is something that a person can never get used to. Sam always felt nervous, but he ended up successfully removing the bullet. He felt a weight leave his shoulders. He told the other doctors to take him to a free room and nurse him back to health while he went back to the desk. The hospital started to fill up more. Yesterday was a heart attack, today a bullet wound.

Sam started back on the desktop computer, but eventually transferred to his phone. He checked the messages, still nothing. He figured that she was either shy about meeting in person, had some kind of emergency and felt embarrassed about calling off, or is really an overweight, middle aged man who is catfishing him. Either way, he has to find out.

Day 3:

Michelle sits in the middle of her childhood bedroom; photos surround her in circles. The photos of her in high school and her and her dad out on a fishing trip. They both had giant grins on their faces. She holds up the smallest fish ever to exist, yet her dad had been so proud of her. You could not wipe the proud smile from his face at all that weekend. She sets the photo back onto the floor, picking another one up. This was one from when she was three. She sits on top of her father's shoulders. Her older brother was walking beside them. That was the day they went to Disney World. Mom was always such a great photographer and loved taking pictures of them, even with Tim's disapproval. He always argued it was ruining some of the fun of memory-making.

"I'm home," a voice came from downstairs. She could hear him starting to put the groceries away. "Where are you?"

"I'm up here," Michelle managed to get through the tears. She heard him close the fridge and climb up the stairs. She had to hide all the photos, he couldn't see her like this. She started pushing the photos into the cardboard box when she heard a soft knock coming from the other side of the door. "Just a minute!" She says but he comes right in. She knows that this was typical of him. When any of them was upset, he would be right there to comfort them. He sees her putting the pictures away and stops her. He then picks up one of the pictures and holds it up for both of them to look at.

It was a picture of all four of them on the beach. Their mom and dad were lying on a beach towel, let-

ting the sun shine on them. Michelle and Tim were 5 and 10. They were working on building the best sandcastle together. They both had huge smiles on their faces as they worked. Tim waits a minute and holds up another one. This one was quite a while later. Tim was 21, a college student, and she was 16, a high schooler. They were at the movie theaters. They were just about to watch Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*.

"Man! I totally forgot we went to see that opening weekend! I absolutely love that movie."

She laughs and says, "So do I!"

Day 4:

Isabelle smelled the bacon and immediately got hungrier, as if she wasn't hungry already. She had two people to feed: herself and her baby. Therefore, it felt like she was always hungry. She was sitting in the living room, watching tonight's Jeopardy. It was not the same since Alex Trebek passed, but she still loved it. She loved to see how much she could get right. Before she was on maternity leave, she would always share some of the puzzles with her coworkers, but now she would share them with Mark. Just as the commercial break began, Mark walked in with two plates of eggs and bacon. One for him and one for her.

"You are the best cook ever," she said to him as he hands her the plate.

"You're just lucky you married a man with a chef for a mother."

They both laughed. Mark did all the cooking. This was good as Isabelle could not cook a thing. The closest thing she could manage is making Ramen noodles in the microwave and even then they usually never turn out right. She knew she lucked out when he was such a great cook.

"Still looking for another job?" She said, biting into a piece of bacon.

He was, but he wouldn't take any right now. They had plenty of money and he had to be here.

4 months earlier

The clock on the wall said 2:49. Only one more minute and he would be on his way back home to see his wonderful wife, the mother of his soon-to-be child. That minute seemed to drag on forever, but eventually it changed to 2:50. He packed up his things and rushed to the car. He drove the 10 minutes it took to get home. He entered the house and walked into the kitchen.

"Honey, I'm home," he says, setting his bags onto the counter. That's weird. Usually, she was eagerly waiting in the kitchen and they would discuss their day. The kitchen was empty. "Honey?" He started jogging, searching the house. He found her in the nursery. She laid on the floor, passed out. He started to panic and crouched down. She suddenly burst awake and sat up.

"What happened?" she said, rubbing her head. He wrapped his hands around her and gave her a giant hug. He realized he had to stay home. He couldn't keep leaving and coming back when she needed him here. Later that night, he called his boss.

"I'm just asking for a couple days of vacation, that's all I need."

"I can't do that! We need you here."

"Please, my wife is going into labor! I am just asking for a couple of days!"

"I can't do that."

"Fine then, I quit. I need to be here."

Day 5:

Sam looked at the clock over his stove. 5:30. He had two hours to make the perfect date for the perfect girl. He looked at the groceries on the counter and back at the clock. He then went into overdrive. He started with the steak, he preheated the oven and started making the seasoning. Normal guys wouldn't make a steak for their dinner date because most girls would not appreciate that, but she was not like most girls. She specifically called for steak tonight. As he put the steak in the oven, he set a timer on his Alexa for 8 minutes (she likes her steak rare). He would then leave the steak in the oven at warm (at a lower temperature) to keep it warm until she came.

Next he grabbed a vase and turned on the faucet. As the water flowed into the vase, he looked into the mirror. A hopeless romantic. A vase of flowers, a nice steak dinner. He was in love with a girl he hadn't even met yet. He reached into the Walgreens bag and pulled out a bouquet of daisies. Her favorite flower. He turned off the faucet and set the vase on the table, with the flowers in it. Next, he prepares the potatoes he got fresh earlier at the farmers market (yes, he was that hopelessly in love). As they start to cook, the timer on Alexa

goes off. He flipped the steaks over and put them back in for another 8 minutes. He took out the dishes and started to set the table.

As soon as the table was set, the timer went off again and he put the steak on warm. He fixed up the potatoes and started on the drinks. He grabbed the bottle of champagne and set it in the middle of the table. The minutes passed by as he danced through the kitchen and the dining room, setting up for the perfect date. Suddenly, the dinner was all set and the clock over his stove read 7:15. He changed into a suit and tie and went to sit at the table when there was a knock at the door. He opened it.

"Good evening! Sorry, I am a little early."

"It's all good. Please, come in!"

Day 6:

Michelle rings the doorbell. She knows that the door is probably unlocked, but she had too many bags in her hands to open it. It took a minute but the door eventually opened to Tim with a phone in his hand. She had interrupted him mid call.

"She just showed up. I am so sorry, I will call you later, Dad." He hangs up and grabs a couple of the bags she was carrying. They were silent as they walked to the kitchen to put the groceries away. They were silent as they both put away all the things that she had just bought. They were silent as they both went onto the living room. Finally, after about 30 minutes, Tim breaks the silence. "Where were you?"

"I'm sorry, it took a little longer than I expected."

"Bullshit!" He said, straightening up in his chair. "You have been taking 'a little longer than expected' for the last 2 g—damn days. I don't know what you've been doing, but I need you. Dad needs you. I understand that it is difficult but it is life. You need to grow the f— up. Ever since you were little, you wanted to get rid of us. You were off to Pittsburgh and left your family in the dust, not caring how we felt. Not caring how I felt. I needed my baby sister. You were my best friend when we were growing up. I could tell you everything. When I was getting bullied in school, you would be there, telling me your dreams of being an Astronaut and making a difference in this world. I just didn't know that difference would be over 200 miles away from us. Tonight, I was afraid you were going to leave again." Tears started to stream down his face. "I am sorry. I didn't mean to yell at you. I am sorry."

"It's alright. You're right, it was selfish of me. I left you guys. I wanted to make a difference, but I never realized the consequence that it would have on you guys. I am so sorry. I am here now and I am not leaving."

Day 7:

"I love you."

"I know," a middle-aged Harrison Ford says just before he is frozen in his Carbonite prison. She has watched this movie a hundred times, yet Isabelle still gets goosebumps when Han delivers the line. Isabelle and Mark sit together on the couch, sharing a half-eaten bowl of popcorn and a blanket that is falling off both of them. Isabelle fixes the blanket and grabs Mark's hand.

"I love you," she says, bringing his hand to the baby. He feels the baby start to kick again.

"I know," He replies, kissing Isabelle on the forehead. In just a couple of weeks, they would have a new addition to the Lilac family. In just a few days, their world was about to change. Their lives were about to be a whole lot better, as long as everything goes as planned. As Luke faces off against his father, Mark gets up and goes to use the restroom. While he is gone, Isabelle does what she does best: recites the lines of the movie. She has watched the movie too many times not to. By the time Mark returns, the movie is almost finished. He slides into his position back onto the couch.

"Have you given any more thought to the name?" He says as he changes the TV over to episode 6.

"If it is a boy, Luke, and if it is a girl, Leia." They both laugh, but she knows this is not the answer he is looking for.

"I know it seems far away, but we should probably pick out the name soon."

"You are definitely right. How about you start brainstorming as I go take the popcorn to the kitchen?"

"Ok," he says as Isabelle leaves the couch. "What about..." He doesn't get to start brainstorming before his phone starts going off. "Hold on, I should get this. Hello?"

"Hello, is this Isabelle Llilac?"

"No, this is her husband. Can I take a message?"

"Yes," the voice on the other side of the phone said. "This is Sam from the Karington Hospital. Have you two ever discussed the possibility of having twins?"

Day 8:

Sam is back behind the front counter of the hospital, waiting for anyone to come in and need his assistance. He worked on the computer for a little bit, but eventually changed back to his phone and back to the messages with the girl. The two dates that they had, back-to-back, were perfect. He was absolutely sure that this girl was the girl of his dreams. He tries to think of something to say to her. Something flirty? No, they were past flirty. Something romantic? Probably not, he didn't want to scare her off. What about something sweet? That would probably work. He is in the middle of the text when the doors open and a middle aged man and a woman come in. They walk up to the counter.

"How may I help you?" he says, leaving the draft of the text to finish later.

"Yes," he responds. "You called last night about a development in my wife's pregnancy."

"Ah, yes. The Llilac family," Sam says, bringing up the files on his computer. He was excited. Not only did he have something to do now, but he had been following the Llilac family. They were expecting, but it turns out they are having twins instead of the planned one. He gets up from his chair. "Come, follow me." The three of them pass by a couple of doors until they find an empty room. Sam sits at the computer while the couple finds seats inside the room. They begin by getting through the introductory stuff that they do for almost everybody who comes on. Now comes the interesting part.

"So twins?" The soon-to-be father says, looking like he was getting nervous. He knew the man's name to be Mark.

"Yes, there definitely are two heads," Sam says, showing them the ultrasound. "But this is a good thing. Parents with twins always are nervous at first but they end up being glad they had twins. Twins are amazing. Twice the love."

"Yes, of course, I am just wrapping my mind around it." The woman he knows to be Isabelle responds, putting her hands to her stomach. "It's just a lot."

"Just take your time. You'll grow to love it. I'm sure of it."

Day 9:

Michelle feels the water rush past her legs and starts laughing. She doesn't know why. Maybe it's the memories she has from being here with dad and mom, or maybe it just feels funny when the ocean water passes by her legs. Either way, she is enjoying the time. She is glad that Tim brought her here. He looked back and saw him working on a sandcastle right by the edge. He waves at her and she waves back. She leaves the water and makes her way over to the sandcastle. Tim is working on the moat to the already completed castle.

"I was just coming over to help, but it seems like you're already done," she says, kneeling beside Tim. He finished the moat and sat back to admire his creation. He then turned to Michelle.

"It's not even close to being done!" That was typical Tim, he was never done. He would work on something until it was perfect. She reached over and started creating windows. He looked at her.

"What? How else are the tiny sand people supposed to look out at the ocean?" He laughed and joined in with her. They worked for a half hour, continuing putting the finishing touches on their castle. While Tim was working on creating the flag, Michelle got a text.

"Who is it?" he asks, cutting a piece of his shirt to use as the flag.

"It's no one important," she says, putting her phone away. "I will text them later. Did you just cut your shirt!?"

"Yes," he said, putting his creation at the top of the castle. "I thought it would make a nice flag." They both laugh.

"Thank you for taking me here today."

"You're welcome. I thought you needed this."

Day 10:

They were both watching the *Breakfast Club* when Isabelle started to burst into tears. She was known to cry in movies, just like Mark, but this was weird. The *Breakfast Club* was usually a more upbeat movie, not usually causing waterworks.

"What's wrong?" he said, putting his arm around her. "This is supposed to be a happy movie."

"I know!" she said, wiping the tears from her face. Why was she crying? She had no real reason to be. Then, she figured it out. "What if I'm not good enough? What if I'm not a good mother?"

"What?" he said, pretending to be surprised. "How could you say such a thing!?" She laughed a little bit, causing her crying to go away. "But seriously, you're going to be a wonderful mother. Luke and Leia will have a great role model." Another chuckle. "When I learned we were having twins, I wasn't nervous, I was excited."

"You weren't nervous at all?"

"Ok, maybe I was a little nervous. But then I realized they would have you as a mother, and that helped to make the nerves disappear. They are so lucky to have you as a mother just as I am lucky to have you as my wife."

They both finished the *Breakfast Club* and she felt better. When she went to the kitchen, she grabbed the envelope from the end table beside the couch. When she returns, he immediately knows what is happening. She opens the envelope and looks at the paper inside in silence.

"Well?"

"Two baby girls."

Day 11:

It's 11:50 and Sam sat at the table in his dining room, almost awaiting the call that is about to come. In just a few hours, lives were about to change. What was Sam doing before this? Playing a game of sudoku. He had two boxes fully complete, but he was having trouble finding the next move he could do. He couldn't sleep. He was thinking of the Lilacs and thinking of his date. He set the sudoku aside and laid his head on the table. Not a minute after he lay his head down to sleep, the phone rang.

Day 12:

Michelle and Tim sit in the emergency room waiting room, just as they did 11 days ago. Waiting to hear the update about their father, just as they did 11 days ago. Michelle turns to Tim, tears in both of their eyes.

"What do you think happened?" She says, wiping away some of the tears.

"I don't know," he said honestly. "I know I usually have all the answers but I don't today. They said he had another heart attack just half an hour after we left. They don't know what caused it."

Just as Tim was finished speaking, Sam came rushing in. Sweat was pouring down his face. He was wide awake, unlike just a few minutes before when he was about to fall asleep at the dining room table. He ran over to them. He took a minute to get his breath back. When he did, he was speechless. So was Michelle. Tim looked at both of them and understood.

"So this is what you meant when you said you were meeting with someone?"

"Sorry, I knew if I told you, you would get angry. I was just tired of being single," He paused for a minute, trying to wrap it around in his head that was already stuffed with emotions.

"How is our dad?" he asks, changing the subject.

"Oh, yeah. He is still in a coma. He seems to be doing fine, but it is difficult to tell. If you follow me, I'll take you to see him," Sam says, leading them down to the room they have been visiting the past week: Room 213. In the room, a man lay in the bed just as he had before. This time, he was hooked up to much more machinery and he didn't greet his children as they entered. Tim walked over to the chair that sat in the one corner. Meanwhile, Michelle and Sam walked into the hallway.

"You never told me about your dad. I have been looking over him for the past week and I never real-

ized."

"Sorry, we had just met in person. I'm sure you can understand."

"Of course I..," He starts but is interrupted. Suddenly, a bed passes by with some doctors at the sides. On the bed was a woman, sweat pouring down her face. She was wearing one of those medical gowns. She must be going into labor. She knew Isabelle was expecting, but she didn't know it was this soon.

"Aunt Isabelle!" Michelle exclaimed, watching them pass by. Mark looked back to see who said that. He was shocked to find it was his niece, Michelle. What were they doing here? He would have to find out later. He had more important matters to attend to.

"Are you sure you are ok?" Mark said, just a few minutes before. They were not rushing down the hall of a hospital, but back at home in their bedroom. Isabelle had awakened him with loud shouting and sobbing. He turned over to find that his wife was fine, that he had imagined the screams and crying.

"I am fine," she said. "It was just the babies kicking." He let out a sigh of relief and tried to go back to sleep. He knew that he wouldn't be able to though. He hadn't slept well since they first got the news.

"I think I am going to get a drink. Do you want anything?"

"A glass of water, please," she mumbled. He figured that she would be asleep by the time he came back up, but he'll get her one anyway. He pushed himself off the bed and started his trek down to the kitchen. By the time he hit the stairs, he already heard her snoring. He sluggishly made his way down the stairs and to the cabinet. He pulled out two glasses, one for each of them, and filled them both with ice. He started to pour the first glass when he heard screaming coming from upstairs. He threw the glasses onto the counter and rushed up the stairs. He entered their bedroom and gasped.

Isabelle was hunched over, tears in her eyes. The sheets were stained red. He quickly rushed over and helped her out of the bed. Her legs were a little wobbly, but with his support, they were able to make it to the door frame. They made it to the top of the stairs and stopped.

"I can make it, just hold onto me," she said. He is worried though, but they have to get down the stairs in order to get to the hospital.

"I am not letting go," he said and they made their way down the stairs. After a little bit, they reached the car door. Mark helped Isabelle into the passenger side and he ran over to the driver's seat. As he drove, he called the hospital and put them on speaker phone. He told them that his wife is going into labor. Once they arrived at the hospital, there was a team of medical professionals there that helped Isabelle into a gown and onto the portable bed. Next thing he knew, he is rushing by his niece and the doctor in the hallway.

Michelle sits at the foot of the bed, watching her new boyfriend take her father's vitals. Beside her sits her brother, aghast.

"Aunt Isabelle is going into labor! How did she look? Did she look ok? Did she notice you?"

"I saw Uncle Mark look back at me. He must have noticed it was me" she said, playing with the end of her sleeve. Now she had more things to be nervous about. After a little while, Sam told both of them that he had to leave. After he left, Michelle and Tim sat in silence for a while. They had nothing to talk about. They were quiet until Sam walked back in with Mark at his heels. Sam left again and left Mark with them.

"How is he?" Mark said, nodding to his brother in law. They both were quiet for a minute, just as they had been for the past half an hour, but eventually Michelle spoke up.

"He had a heart attack a couple hours ago, he has been in a coma ever since." Mark looked at him for a minute, then sat in a chair next to Tim. "How is Aunt Isabelle?"

"She is doing well. She had twins. Did you know that?"

"No," Tim responds, wiping away the dry tears. "We've been a little busy with dad's cancer."

"He has cancer! I thought it was a heart attack!"

"We think that the heart attack was a result of the leukemia."

All three of them look at their dad/brother-in-law. It was only a few minutes before his eyes snapped open. Tim shoots straight up and made his way over to the side of the bed. As he made his way over, dad's smile gets bigger.

"Dad, how do you feel?" he says, helping to sort out his blankets.

"Pretty good, I just have one question."

"Of course, what do you need?"

"Who are you?"

About an hour later, Isabelle was laying in her bed on the opposite side of the room, holding her twin

girls. Mark was beside her, but their attention was drawn to Sam. Sam stood on the other side of the room, talking to the family at the other end. Sam looked at the two of them. How crazy has this day been? It could not get any crazier (it eventually did).

"Memory loss can be a side-effect of a heart attack," He says. He has had to give this speech a couple of times before. It never gets easy. It just makes it more difficult to tell it to a woman he has been dating the past 2 weeks, way more than that if you count texting. He also is telling a sister and her husband that just went through a childbirth with twins. Tonight has been one of the craziest nights he has ever had. "It will probably only last a couple of months, but there is no way of knowing." He continues to explain when suddenly Isabelle screams out, scaring everyone in the room. Sam looked over and sees a pool of blood filling the blankets. Without even thinking about it, he grabbed the intercom.

"Any available personnel, please report to room 213 immediately!" He said and put his phone away. He then rushed over to Isabelle. He tried to stop the bleeding, but it was too late. The medics arrived. They pushed her out of the room, leaving the five of them. Sam ran out of the room and followed Isabelle. Only four of them are left. They sit in silence for a while, not knowing what to say. There was nothing they could say. A few minutes later, Sam came back into the room with tears in his eyes. He was carrying the two baby girls and handed them both to Mark.

"They tried everything they could."

One Year Later:

Six people stood in front of two gravestones. One was Timothy Larson, holding a picture of him and his dad that he rests on one of the graves. Two of the other people were Michelle and Sam Johnson, holding hands as they both looked at the graves. The other three were Mark Lillac and his two daughters, Kylie and Michelle Lillac. They all stood in front of two gravestones. One said Isabelle Lillac. The other said Sam Larson.

The Perfect Day

By Bailey Stilts

She floats down the aisle, her dress flowing in the breeze. She feels her father's hand in hers, clenching tightly as they approach the altar. All the eyes are on her. She feels the sweat start to wipe away her makeup. So much for all those hours in front of the mirror. They make it to the end and approach the pastor. He was dressed in a nice white gown, a golden cross hanging from his neck. He gives her a smile as she passes and gets into her place. She looks back at her best man and bridesmaids, all silently giving their excitement. Now the moment. She looks to the place her partner would be, but it stands empty. Just her partner's father stands, talking to the pastor.

8 Hours Earlier

The alarm clock blared, putting an annoying ringing in her head that wouldn't stop. She put her pillow against her ears, trying to drown out the noise. It didn't help. She could still hear it through the cloth and feathers.

"Time to get up," another sound entered her head, counteracting the blaring. The sound belonged to her father, who entered the room just moments after. He had a Mickey apron on and a grease-stained spatula in his hand. He looked at her for a minute, huddled up with a pillow covering her face. He walked over to the end table and turned off the alarm. Kylie removed the pillow. "Get dressed and meet me downstairs. I made your favorite!"

"Bacon!" she yelled and jumped from her bed. Her dad left and shut the door, giving her privacy. She took off her comfy, fuzzy pajamas and traded them for jeans and her one direction t-shirt. She sat at her desk and admired her look. Her golden hair was all tangled and messy. She grabbed her spray and brush. Time to go to work! When she was finished untangling the mess, she put it up into a ponytail. She used her blue scrunchie, her favorite one. It was a special day, she deserved to have her favorite one. After her hair, she did her bathroom duties: Brushing her teeth, putting in her contacts, washing her face (it seems as if the zits will never go away).

When she leaves the bathroom, she slides down the stairs. She anxiously awaits to see what her father concocted this morning. She plants herself into her place at the table, right beside her sister, Michelle. She was busy working on a Sudoku puzzle, trying to find if the one box should have a 1 or a 3.

"Good Morning!" Kylie says, grabbing an apple from the middle of the table to eat while she waits for the good stuff.

"Mornin'," Michelle responds, not looking up from her puzzle.

"That's all you have to say to your sister on her wedding day?" Mark addresses Michelle as he grabs the pan from the stove and starts dishing out cheesy eggs onto three plates. "You could at least pretend to be happy for her."

"I am happy for her!" She says, slamming her book onto the table. "I just wish it was me in the gown."

"Don't worry. You're super pretty. I'm sure you'll find someone," Kylie says.

"You realize we are identical twins, don't you?"

"That's the point."

"Breakfast is served," Mark says, putting a plate in front of each of them. On the plate was a healthy helping of eggs, bacon, and an everything bagel (their favorite). She opens up the bagel and starts scooping eggs onto the bottom and laying the bacon on top. She then closes the sandwich and takes a bite.

"You are so weird," Michelle responds, grabbing the pepper.

"You know your mom used to do the same thing with her eggs. I thought the same thing, but she kept doing it."

"She was a smart woman," Kylie says, taking another bite. "It's upsetting that she never got to see us."

"She actually did," Mark responds. "Just for a moment or two."

They spend the next hour eating breakfast and talking about their mom, but eventually change the subject to the wedding. Soon, Kylie was back in her room with Michelle. The latter was helping the bride to apply her makeup. When they were satisfied, they went back downstairs to see their dad packing up the dress and the other things for the wedding. Once the car was all packed, they were on the road. Mark was at the wheel with Michelle in the back, helping get the finishing touches to Kylie's makeup.

The church wasn't too far from their house and they were there within 30 minutes. The pastor was standing outside, expecting them as their jeep rolled into the parking lot. He walked over to the trunk and

helped carry in some of the supplies, conversing with dad. Kylie grabs her dress and immediately goes to her dressing room, followed by Michelle. It takes a while for Michelle to get Kylie's dress on and all tied up. They had to make these things as complicated as possible. After her dress was on, she sat down while Michelle went to work on her hair. She was an hour in when there was a knock. Michelle told them it was unlocked. Mark and Tim both entered, with their eyes covered.

"Is the bride-to-be ready to be seen?" Mark said.

"Not yet," Michelle said, running the brush through Kylie's hair. "But you can uncover your eyes anyway."

They both uncover their eyes and Tim pretends to wipe tears.

"They grow up so fast,"

"Shut up!" Michelle laughs, throwing the brush at the both of them. Mark grabs it and hands it back to her.

"All joking aside, how is it going?" Tim says, sitting on the edge of the windowsill.

"It is going good; just making sure she looks beautiful for her big day."

They stay for a little while, discussing how the service would go and the reception after. By the time they go to leave, Michelle finishes working on Kylie's hair. Only about 4 hours left until the wedding and Kylie sits in the room, alone. She thinks of her honeymoon. They picked Disneyworld. They already made the reservation. She can already imagine the mickey waffles, already tasting their deliciousness. She imagines the monorail when the door opens and her dad comes in. He is already dressed. He wears a navy blue suit with a ruby red tie, her mom's favorite color. He sits down beside her.

"How are you feeling?"

"A little nervous," to be honest, she was terrified, but she was also excited. She never dealt well with change, so today was a lot. "I just am a little overwhelmed"

"I figured you would say that," he says and grabs her hand. "Come with me, I have something to show you!" He led her down the stairs and out of the church. They continued on and ended up at a bench in the forest about a mile or two from the church. When they approach the bench, she sees a guitar case lay across the seat.

"You brought my guitar out here? I thought I had it packed up for the honeymoon"

"That one is packed up for the honeymoon" He says and gestures for her to sit. She does and he hands her the case. It felt a little heavier than the one that she had. She looks at the case, not knowing what to do with it. "Go ahead, open it."

She unlatches the hooks along the metal, feeling excitement to see what is inside. She swings open the case and almost faints.

"I wanted to wait, but I knew you needed a little something to help you destress now. I will come get you when we need you."

In her lap lay a navy blue guitar with streaks of red that go along with the grain of the wood, her mother's favorite color. On the base of the guitar was a signature. It said Taylor Swift.

"I love it!" she screamed and hugged the case.

"I know she was your favorite. She was extremely nice and was excited to help out," he says. "Now play your heart out!"

Mark left and it was just her and the guitar. She plucked the strings, feeling the vibrations upon her fingertips. The strings felt brand new. They were almost too perfect to use. Almost! She spends the next couple hours playing a couple of her favorite songs, feeling herself in the music. She was now singing "The Best Day" by Taylor Swift. She gets halfway through the song when she realizes what time it is. She scrambles to put her guitar back into the case.

She floats down the aisle, her dress flowing in the breeze. She feels her father's hand in hers, clenching tightly as they approach the altar. All the eyes are on her. She feels the sweat start to wipe away her makeup. So much for all those hours in front of the mirror. They make it to the end and approach the pastor. He was dressed in a nice white gown, a golden cross hanging from his neck. He gives her a smile as she passes and gets into her place. She looks back at her best man and bridesmaids, all silently giving their excitement. Now the moment. She looks to the place her partner would be, but it stands empty. Just her partner's father stands, talking to the pastor. She smiles.

She reaches over to put away her guitar when she hears her sister running from the church to her. Michelle takes a minute, out of breath, then tells her that she needs to stay out here for a few minutes.

"What are you talking about? It's my wedding day!" Kylie says, trying to push past her sister. Suddenly, she sees her. Her gown was red, matching her navy blue one. Her hair was pulled back and she could see the giant grin on her face. Katelyn was just as beautiful as the day she first met her. She was on vacation in Rhode Island when her family happened to be there. Their first kiss was shared on the beach under the bright stars. She would never forget that moment. She set down the guitar, which was picked up by her sister, and she met Katelyn. They embraced each other, not wanting to let go.

"You said you wanted an outside wedding," she said, kissing her.

"I love you," she said and reciprocated the kiss.

"What are you two doing?" Michelle says as everyone rushes past them. "You're supposed to save it for the ceremony!"

"Sorry," Kate said, grabbing Kylie's hand. "I couldn't help myself,"

"Move on, lovebirds," Kate's father says as he passes by. "Mark and I are paying by the hour."

They laugh and make their way to the bench where the pastor stands. He goes through the typical wedding stuff and they give their vows.

"Do you Kylie Samantha Llilac take Katelyn Rose Haley as your lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do,"

"Do you Katelyn Rose Haley take Kylie Samantha Llilac to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"Of course!!!!...I do."

"I now pronounce you married. You may kiss the bride,"

Kylie grabs Kate and goes to kiss her, but Kate ends up twitching so she ends up kissing her cheek. They both laugh. Kate then pulls Kylie in and doesn't twitch this time.



By Amy Jackson

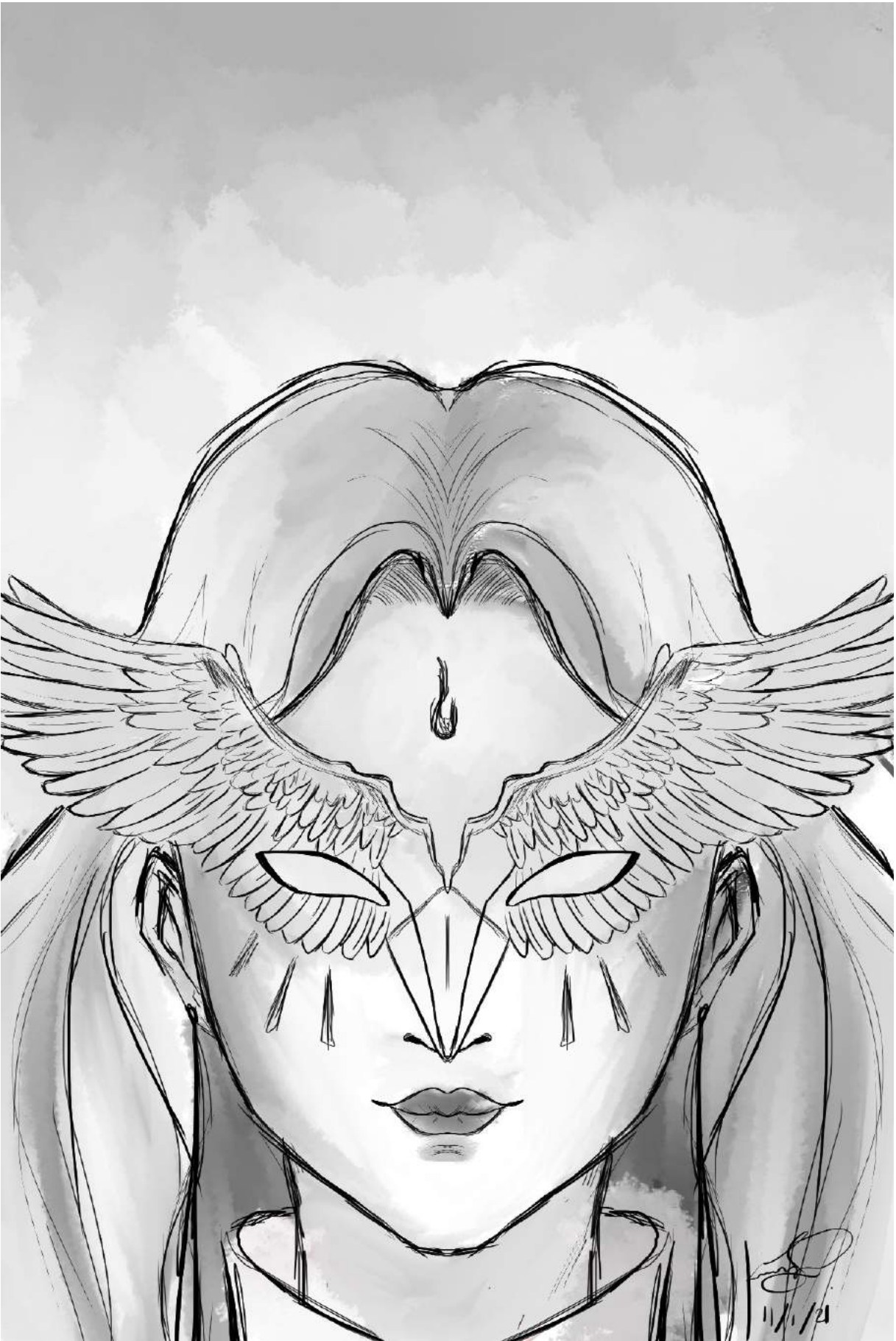




Amy Jackson

By Amy Jackson





Artwork by Kaye Vizcarra



Thank you to the students, faculty, staff, and alumni members of Thiel College for your submissions! Publication of *The Phoenix* would not be possible without your willingness to contribute your time, talents, and creativity to ensure the continued growth and outreach of this journal. -The Editors

