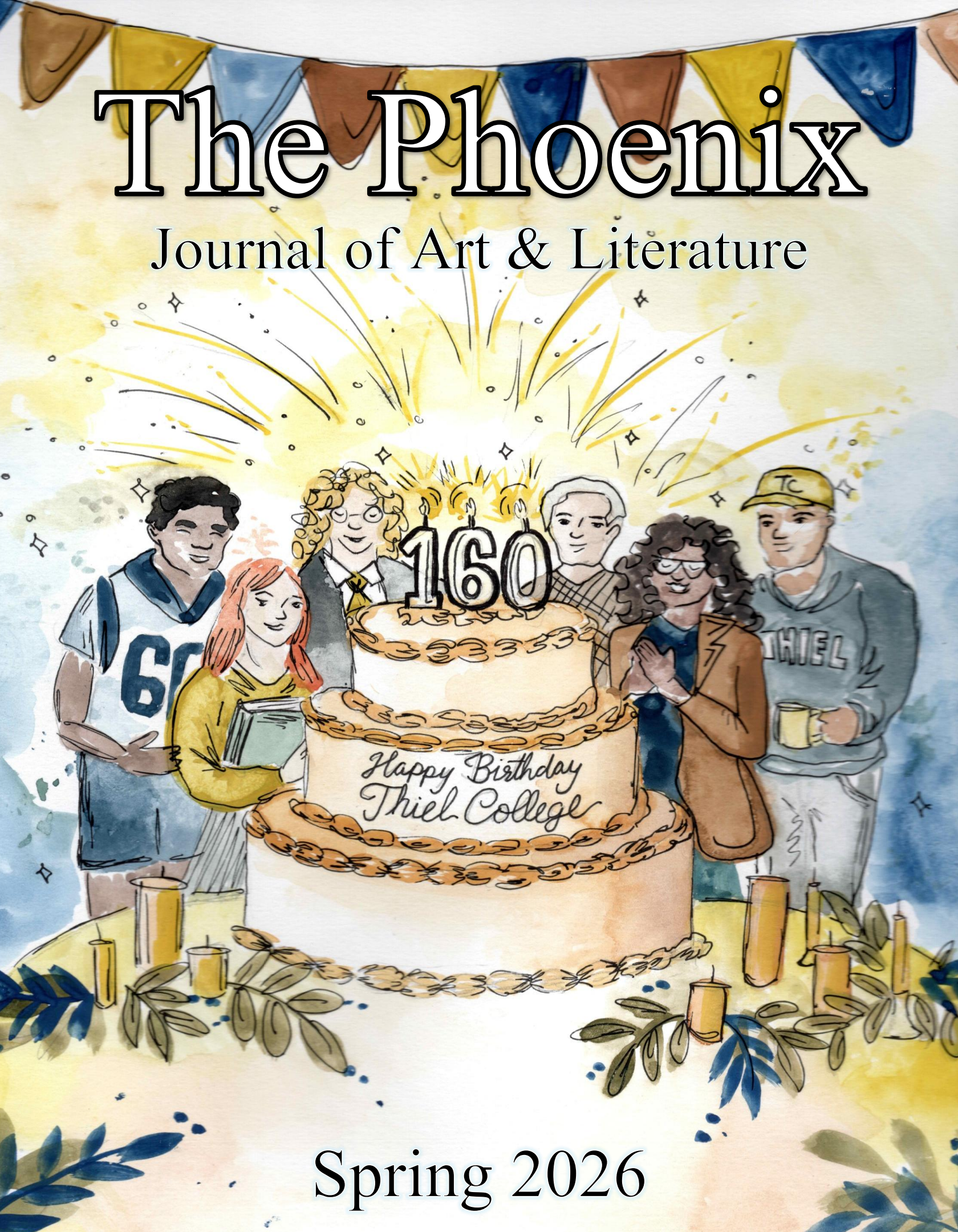


# The Phoenix

Journal of Art & Literature



Spring 2026

# *The Phoenix*

Spring 2026

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# Table of Contents

Introduction and Dedication .....	p. 4
Index .....	p. 69

## Poetry

“Alma Mater” .....	p. 5	“overdramatic musings” .....	p. 21
“Dearest” .....	p. 6	“A Poem for Trifles” .....	p. 21
“The Phoenix” .....	p. 7	“The Diary of Ken’s Doll” .....	p. 22
“Ghosts of Trickery and Charm” .....	p. 7	“All the ‘She’s’ that Sail the Sea” .....	p. 23
“College Buzz” .....	p. 8	“A Rose for Emily” .....	p. 24
“Scripted Thinkers” .....	p. 9	“PROTECTION” .....	p. 24
“The Files: From a Teacher’s Perspective” .....	p. 10	“A Glass Pane” .....	p. 25
“The Student’s Ledger” .....	p. 10	“Oh, Mother...” .....	p. 26
“An Ode to Environmental Science” .....	p. 11	“My Superhero” .....	p. 26
“An Ode to My Major” .....	p. 11	“My Sister, My Dearest Friend” .....	p. 27
“BUSINESS” .....	p. 12	“Becoming” .....	p. 27
“An Ode to Human Resources” .....	p. 12	“Sestina to my Niece” .....	pp. 28-29
“Ode to PA’s” .....	p. 12	“Cerebral” .....	p. 29
“The Front Line” .....	p. 13	“North Manitou Island” .....	p. 30
“They promise strength inside a pill” .....	p. 13	“Currents” .....	p. 31
“An Ode to Heath Systems (Pathway I PA): The Cost of Broken Promises” .....	p. 14	“Architect of Dust” .....	p. 31
“The Culmination of a Young Lifetime’s Worth of Dreams, Delusion, and Destruction” .....	p. 15	“Kairos for Agape” .....	p. 32
“ENG 282: Poetry Writing Class Poem” .....	p. 16	“The Faithful Shepherd” .....	p. 32
“The Brightest Minds are the Darkest dimmed” .....	p. 16	“Just Breathe” .....	p. 33
“A Return to the Garden” .....	p. 17	“Stanley” .....	p. 34
“A Night at the Table” .....	p. 17	“it’s a secret” .....	p. 34
“Who is Patience?” .....	p. 18	“Home” .....	p. 35
“Once Upon a Dead Man” .....	p. 19	“Urban Paradise” .....	p. 36
“To the Critics of Women” .....	p. 19	“Still the Stupid Tongue” .....	p. 37
“The Endless Waltz” .....	p. 19	“Idiosyncratic” .....	p. 37
“Try Hard: In Memoriam to Toby Atwood” .....	p. 20	“I will sing a sad song” .....	p. 37
“Love’s Symphony” .....	p. 20	“On the Field” .....	p. 38
		“The Artist in me is Dead” .....	p. 39
		“brown” .....	p. 39
		“Bidden to the Dirt” .....	p. 39
		“Heartbreak tastes like grave dirt—” .....	p. 40

“Moondreams, or Tidal Dynamics” .....p. 41  
 “The Quiet Art of Standing Still” .....p. 41  
 “Another Life” .....p. 42  
 “What Comes” .....p. 42  
 “Neutrality” .....p. 42  
 “Struggle Now Against the River’s Flow” ....p. 43  
 “The first morning—” .....p. 43  
 “I Will Find You: A Game” .....p. 44  
 “Reverence in Details: In Memoriam to  
 Rev. Martin M. Roth” .....p. 45  
 “A Poem in Six Hours” .....p. 46  
 “Enarmored” .....p. 46  
 “Before the Death of His Only Wife” .....p. 47  
 “Soul’s Sword” ..... pp. 48  
 “I am just a dog” .....p. 48  
 “Three Little Babes” .....p. 49  
 “Happy Heavenly Birthday” .....p. 50  
 “Time” .....p. 50  
 “Within the hush where time itself  
 grows still” .....p. 51  
 “Ehlers Danlos Syndrome” .....p. 51  
 “Fancy” .....p. 51  
 “Bothered Lives” .....p. 52  
 “wrath of the lamb” .....p. 52

**Short Stories**

“My Favorite Thiel Moment” .....p. 6  
“The Gold Bracelet” .....p. 53  
“Next in Line” ..... pp. 54-56  
“godslayer” ..... pp. 57-59  
“The End of a Traveler” ..... pp. 60-63  
“Noxious” ..... pp. 64-65  
“The Place of Destruction” ..... pp. 66-68

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**Audiobook:**

To listen to the submissions, scan the QR code below or search @ThePhoenix--Thiel on YouTube:



## Introduction & Dedication

Every year, the editors of *The Phoenix* include an introduction 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 2026 edition of this publication, editor-in-chief Alexa Beck '26 has written the introduction on behalf of 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 also serves especially as a tribute to the **160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Thiel College** and the young scholars it fosters. Such beautiful minds are what enable us to create a beloved publication like *The Phoenix*.

\*\*\*\*\*

This year's edition of *The Phoenix* encapsulates what it means to be a Tomcat. One hundred and sixty years ago, Thiel College was established and welcomed its first group of students. Many alumni, staff, and faculty have stories to share about their Thiel experience, whether it be planting one of the many trees along Brother Martin's Walk, remembering their freshman Opening Convocation, or simply getting involved in the many groups available on campus.

When looking back on the history of the College itself, the history of *The Phoenix* emerges. After a hiatus, *The Phoenix* resumed published in 2000 by the students of Sigma Tau Delta and the English Department. Twenty-six years later, the tradition lives on.

Stated in its earliest editions, *The Phoenix* "testifies to the courage of the Thiel community to create, to use our intellects and imagination, and to share the power and wisdom of the writing process." This tradition still stands, as each rendition of *The Phoenix* encourages and showcases the creativity of Thiel.

As a liberal arts college, Thiel fosters an environment where *The Phoenix* gives voice to a wide range of departments and scholarly minds. What's great about *The Phoenix* is that it has never been limited to English majors or the English Department. *The Phoenix* has always opened its submissions to all disciplines. As you explore this year's edition, you are guaranteed to see various areas of study. How many can you spot?

All in all, we as an editorial board thank you for your unwavering support. We stand on the shoulders of giants and those who came before us in creating this publication. We hope to uphold the integrity of *The Phoenix* and encourage the incoming classes of Thiel College to continue this annual publication.

As editor-in-chief, I have been blessed to see all of the leadership and hard work that goes into this publication. May this edition inspire you, dear reader, to submit a piece to *The Phoenix* and share your voice with the Thiel community. In doing so, you ensure that *The Phoenix* continues to rise from the ashes, year after year.

## Alma Mater

By Jason C. Merriam '04

People in my life now ask sometimes  
Why is Thiel College so important?  
You graduated there twenty years ago.  
It is just a small chapter of your life.

Some answers are unbearably complex.  
It was more than a place, more than a time.  
More than any person or a group.  
Thiel was the fulcrum, a forge to temper.

I arrived a callow youth, unprepared  
For all the wider world had to offer.  
I had lived life by reading about it.  
So many missteps and mistakes to come.

At Thiel, I began my life from nothing,  
Surrounded by mentors from all walks.  
I made my first friendships, tried everything,  
Had experiences that opened my mind.

Met and valued the worth of diversity,  
Changed my viewpoint on my future.  
I fell in love, found a place to belong.  
I held on so tight, not wanting it to end.

All things do, and that journey ended,  
A glorious age that I will treasure.  
Memories that will not fade easily  
Because part of it lives inside me.

Thiel's greatest gift to me was illumination,  
The passion to create something beyond  
The limitations of the person I was.  
Expression that pervades my existence.

She was my mother when I needed her.  
She was my shelter when I had none.  
She nourished me, granted her wisdom,  
And she has never abandoned me,

I met her when I was young and fearful.  
In her embrace, I entered adulthood,  
Where I became the person I am now.  
For that, Thiel has my eternal gratitude.

I may never see it on the hill again.  
Make my walk along with Brother Martin,  
Enjoy the fellowship of my former peers,  
Yet a piece of my heart always abides.

## **Dearest**

By Ashlee Osterberg '08

Every moment  
Every memory  
Every smile  
Every tear  
Never forget  
Those who are dear



By Abreanna Thompson

## **My Favorite Thiel Moment**

By Don Achenbach '77

My favorite nostalgia for Thiel begins just as dawn is breaking on a cool mid-fall day. The mist from the river over the cemetery gives the appearance of specters returning to their graves after a night of chicanery. The sun sleepily peeks over the Science Building, desperate for another hour's slumber itself, but that's not possible. The sun, you see, has an important role to play. It is GAME DAY at Alumni Stadium and the sun, even when covered by clouds, has its purposes.

A team of honking geese overhead greedily penetrate the hush. Geese flying in a disorganized manner are called a team, somewhat ironic given the plethora of seemingly disorganized Tomcat teams I have observed over the past 50 years or so, but the persistent disorder remains immaterial to the splendor of the Day. Once the honking fades and quiet returns, if you listen hard enough you can almost make out the shrill of a whistle and the barking of orders only a former player can recognize. Orders from legends like DiFebo, Stoeber, McCullough, and Leipheimer-the Mount Rushmore of Tomcat Football!

As the campus slowly comes to life, so does Alumni Stadium. Game Managers arrive to deck out the field with goal post pads and end zone markers. The clinking of chains tells me that the Chain Gang is on the job. Hydration experts (known simply as managers in my day) impartially deliver water containers to both benches while the first smells of burning charcoal suggest tailgating has begun anew. Band practice commences in earnest as half uniformed sleepyheads go through their paces in anticipation of their pre-game and halftime contributions.

Slowly, Tomcat players in various stages of uniform take the field to begin their individual pre-game rituals-each as unique and personal as their glove-covered fingerprints. Soon they will retreat to their sanctuary beneath the gym, only to return fully geared and in ballet-like coordination with their coach's drills. After a brief meeting at mid-field with officials and the loyal opposition, the teams align and the ball is booted into the air. Game Day is officially underway, although for me it is nearly four hours old!

More than a thousand fans share my experience from various locales throughout the stands and whether we are hunting Wolverines, swatting Yellow Jackets, or even debating Presidents on the field doesn't really matter. In fact, the outcome is only of passing interest to me. Win or lose, Game Day is my favorite memory of Thiel. (Truth be told, winning is preferred.)



**“The Phoenix”**

By Sylvia Patterson '25

The Phoenix flies low above my head,  
Scrapes her talons through my hair,  
A sharp-toothed comb—  
I reach for her—  
but she has no trouble dodging my  
grasping, stretching—  
If I cannot make her touch me, then  
why am I burning?  
My art burns like her pretty red feathers  
Blue-black under flame—  
I wish for it to rise from the ashes,  
triumphant!  
But no dice-  
all grey forever, I think,  
at least for me and mine.

**Ghosts of Trickery and Charm**

By Dr. Mary Theresa Hall

Who and where are the ghosts of Greenville Hall?  
Do they lurk in the rafters of the roof?  
Or do their clouded forms float through classrooms'  
One-hundred-sixty-year-old chambers where  
Students' and professors' clear voices glide  
Past each other and where art, hist'ry, lit,  
Philos, religion, once vied for laurels  
Deep and hidden in the warm classroom air?  
  
Do vengeful spirits emerge when slighted  
From the fog of hist'ry or swirling light  
Of art? Do Poe, Plath, Picasso pass through  
Luther's ninety-five tacked poems trav'ling  
From Wittenberg for Thiel's ivy towers?  
  
Are *you* a future ghost of Greenville Hall?

## College Buzz

By Brianna Whaley

The class droned on—  
the teacher spoke of subjects  
they slaved to possess.

Students listened to the buzz;  
few locked on,  
others drank the lesson like rain,  
catching bits and pieces.

Some drifted from reality,  
others dozed  
in carefree nature  
or willing boredom.

A faint gulp—  
one end of the room—  
a student quenched thirst,  
a distraction  
from the endless hum.

No bell would sound;  
life had passed the block  
most knew too well.

The clock ticked endlessly,  
mocking those  
struggling,  
disengaged.

Though not shackled in place  
as in years before,  
they remained—  
by will,  
or by pressure expected.

Money weighed heavy,  
though little was held.  
Bills drank greedily  
the luxuries once taken  
for granted.

Then, a wave—  
they rose,  
like bees at work,  
onto the next class,  
sluggish forms in motion.

Day in, day out,  
stretched to the limit:  
some cracked,  
others flourished.

Not all made it through,  
unable to climb  
the conditions.

One after another,  
minds changed,  
regrets spawned.

Will it get easier—  
or will the storm  
rage on?

## Scripted Thinkers

By Alexa Beck

The young thinkers are seated one by one.  
Their gears, masked by hair, wish to be oiled.  
Instead of grinding, they prepare for a performance.

A singular audience member watches on.  
The routine act stirs the yellow atmosphere  
of the desolate classroom. For a moment,  
Aristotle, Plato, and even Einstein are impressed.

Suddenly, all falls quiet—the performance stops.  
Balloons of thought fly high into the sky.  
The audience claps, matching the ringing of the bell.

The thinkers, satisfied with themselves,  
store away their scripts and exit the room.  
Their next performance is in ENG 120  
and they know just what script to use.

By Kalina Moreno



## **“The Files”: From a Teacher’s Perspective**

By Dr. Mary Theresa Hall

The files sit redacted now  
accusing their victims of crimes unspeakable  
in linguistic “chambers of horror”  
where friendships seem to nod in familiar smiles  
and grammar constructions transform  
language into universal innateness that  
preys on deep structures.  
To teach or not to teach?  
To introduce language theories to unsuspecting  
students  
or to leave them in the darkness of the cave?

## **The Student’s Ledger**

By Josie Gadsby

This ledger reflects my reality—  
Assets: caffeine and ambition,  
Liabilities: stress and student loans,  
Equity: whatever’s left after taxes.  
  
Knowledge accrues,  
Sleep depreciates,  
And deadlines compound like interest.  
  
But still the books must close,  
Weighted with returns yet unseen,  
One day it will all pay off,  
When the bottom line turns green.

## **An Ode to Environmental Science**

By Tegan Daugherty

I look up at the stars  
Except that's not what they are.  
Street lamps illuminating the grass,  
But it's nothing but hardness and crass.  
I walk a short distance to see what I find,  
Finally I found the mountain of mine.  
I climb up the steep, rocky sides  
peering down at some deep blue tides.  
Why don't people see the beauty in this?  
It's nothing new, but they just might miss.  
Mother nature might soon be gone,  
Laid down like a little deer dawn.  
What can I do to make her stay?  
I don't know but, "surely it's not enough pay."  
Here I am at the top,  
Don't look down, it's such a far drop.  
There they are the stars and moon,  
I'm so sorry, Earth, for your scars and doom.

## **An Ode to My Major**

By Nola Blöse

Ode to my major, so complex and profound.  
The classes, the lectures, and late nights abound  
Ode to my major, of healthcare I learned,  
an understanding of the human body,  
was diligently learned.  
Ode to my major, Biology, Chemistry, healing abound.  
Body-brain connections,  
all can be found,  
Ode to my major, helping people is the rule,  
Supreme care for patients is the ultimate goal.

## **BUSINESS**

By Anna Kavulla

Beginning from scratch, determined to start something new

Understanding was the beginning; my passion only grew

Spreadsheets, supply chains, marketing, and more

I realized there is still so much to explore!

Navigating the program, thanks to faculty members

Excited to graduate this coming December

So many memories and lessons learned

Soon, I will have a degree that was hard-earned

~An ode to my major, the one that I adore, thank you for shaping the person I am and more.

### **An Ode to Human Resources**

By Kendall McLaughlin

Workplace violation?

Doth hath no place.

You're getting fired,

I say with grace.

Workplace violation?

Doth hath no place.

You're a bitch,

They reply to my face.

Workplace violation?

Doth hath no place.

Time to find a new employee,

Find one with haste.

### **Ode to PA's**

By Ethan Narby

Coffee is cold,

Notes are scattered,

My skull can't decide

if its broken or shattered

Late nights in Pedas

have burned me out,

lots of chem mechanisms,

each a different route

In only a few years

I should be ready to go

but with becoming a PA

how could I know?

## **The Front Line**

By Hayden Tucker

We are your front line

When fear of the unknown impacts your life physically and you need answers, we are there

We are your front line

When families are in danger and the longevity of what they hold dear is put into question, we are there

We are your front line

No matter the time, place, person, or happenstance, we are there

We are your front line

But what happens if we disappear? When our equipment is defunded, or research disregarded, our help denied, will we be there?

Can you be your front line?

## **“They promise strength inside a pill”**

By Kaleb McDowell

They promise strength inside a pill,

A shortcut to a brighter glow,

Yet real health takes more time and will,

Then what the glossy labels show.

For fitness climbs an uphill way,

A path more winding than they tell,

It's built in effort, day by day,

Not in the powder stores will they sell.

So, skip the gimmicks, skip the craze,

True strength is slower, built to last.

The glow you seek is in the days

Of steady steps and trials passed.

## **An Ode to Health Systems (Pathway 1 PA): The Cost of Broken Promises**

By Isabella Zahner

They arrived with bright eyes,  
Books carefully placed in their bags,  
Their hearts are set on healing.

Through various dissections and chemistry's flame,  
Through neuroscience experiments and ethical questioning,  
They built their futures class by class, struggle by struggle.

But one sorrowful evening,  
A phone call was made—  
Their unique program was ending.  
No alternative solutions, no safety nets,  
Only the fear of what was to come—  
The unknown.

They would not be failures,  
They would not give up.  
They wanted to be future healers,  
They were a determined young bunch.  
Yet, they were left adrift by an institution,  
That forgot the cost of broken promises.

## **The Culmination of a Young Lifetime's Worth of Dreams, Delusion, and Destruction**

By Colin Schroyer

Hanging on by Earth's only effort to keep me down,  
A kickback sending mother away,  
I, cascading up,  
Higher,  
Tears crawling above my eyes,  
Sliding through my hair,  
Flying back home,  
To tend soil,  
A shared  
Soul,  
Mother moves out of the way for the sun,  
A falling star cracking into space,  
Melting the rainbow for me,  
Illuminating beauty,  
Giving me this,  
To witness,  
So I don't  
Blind,  
Terminal velocity is null without any air,  
The sound of openness to my ears,  
"Accelerando," it says,  
The conductor,  
He says,  
"Go,"

Around I somersault in the starkisses,  
Perceiving a world revolving,  
The revolution comes,  
Brace for impact,  
This is where  
I touch,  
Down,  
A product of myself and infinite acceleration,  
Eris becomes my springboard,  
My footstep,  
A crater,  
I go,  
As sounds of epicentric shockwaves propel me,  
My glitter of screams the only evidence,  
Going beyond reality,  
Missing the stars,  
Going farther,  
Momentum,  
Take me,  
Away

**ENG 282: Poetry Writing Class Poem**

By Alexa Beck, Emmett Gill, Maverree Stanley,  
Maddy Triskett, Dr. Hall

A poet's chair, glass of nectar, and thee  
Still holding a fountain of black ink. It  
Glides on the paper, creating stories  
Ones that will be passed down through centuries.  
But what stroke of the quill could conquer time?  
Amethyst words on February day  
Welcome the weary poet whose lyrics  
Dance in a purple mist and bid farewell.  
The poets have much to say on this day  
Sharing their deepest inquiries with all,  
Using words as bibliotherapy.  
Rhythm and rhyme relieve the poet's soul.  
As snow melts, inspiration springs forth.  
Sit and enjoy with me the drink of gods!

**"The Brightest Minds are the Darkest dimmed"**

By Mariah Moody

The Brightest Minds are the Darkest dimmed—  
For when we thinkers think too highly,  
Destroyers sit by, crushing us idly;  
And though our Brains may triumph theirs,  
We bow to their domineering airs.

For the Brightest Minds are the Darkest dimmed,  
And the dimmest Brains are mistakenly lit.  
We choose to accept rather than fight it;  
For the Brightest Minds must never Shine  
In a light shined soley on an Ignorant Eye—

## **A Return to the Garden**

By Jason C. Merriam '04

How long would it take? How long to erase  
The stain of human civilization?  
Surely not a century. A millennium?  
No. Drastic measures would be needed.

The terrors of technology would fall.  
All things modern would crumble to mere dust.  
Steel, glass, and polymetric rubble  
Strewn about haphazardly, waiting.

Waiting for Mother Nature to reclaim  
All the land ravaged by humanity,  
But the works of the Ancients endure,  
Even those that are magnificent ruins.

Walls that travelled miles in silent stone  
Crumble eventually, but patterns exist.  
The lust, verdant jungle would camouflage,  
Yet the marvels underneath would remain.

In the driest deserts, pyramids preserved  
For eons until oceans obliterate.  
Cryptic lines carved to be seen high above,  
A message that man was here once.

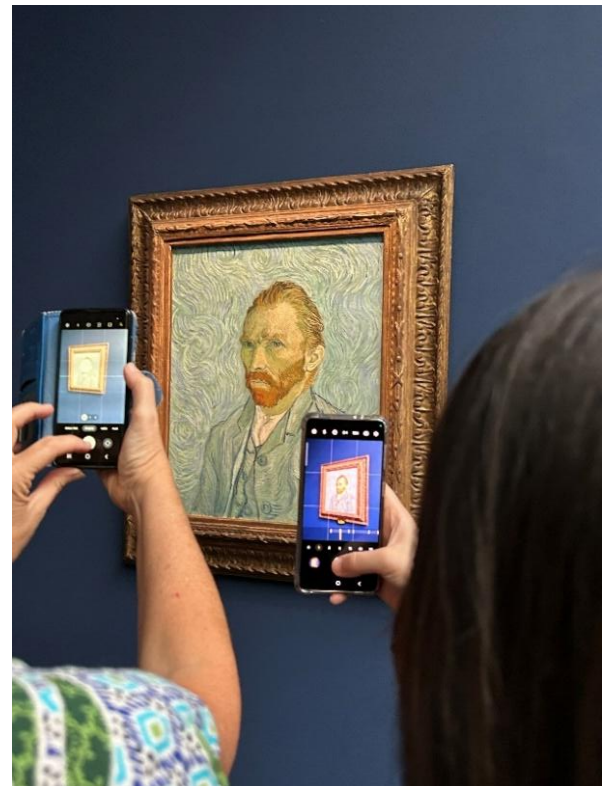
Five million years from now, a red giant  
Will consume the revered Mother.  
Who knows where her children will be?  
Will they weep or notice her passing?

## **A Night at the Table**

Anonymous

We sit and eat our dinner together—  
The feast we've made to enjoy each other.  
I cook our meat for you, because you can't  
Stand the blood red or the stench of fresh beef.  
Instead, you offered that I cook, you clean.

As the night begins to wind toward its end,  
You join me for a night at the table.  
I sit and write about unending praise  
As you kneel, praying for blessed eyes.  
It's a beautiful night to share with you.



## Who is Patience?

By Summer Stitt

Who is Patience?

Is She the silhouette of who is yet to come?

The tears of wonder for what has yet not begun?

Is She waiting in line despite being in a hurry?

Slowing down when the roads are icy on a cold, dark morning?

Is She that student in class who makes you bite your tongue—

itching to say something She may regret?

Is She boiling water, sizzling mightily on the stove?

A growling stomach,

Tastebuds hungry for contentment.

Who is Patience?

Does She meet us in our dreams, reaching for a dance—

struggling to achieve, anxiously weeping?

Is She the exhale we hesitate to release?

A stomach tangled in knots,

a heart sprinting for escape?

She is a teacher. A parent. Maybe even a friend—

whispering reminders that peace does not have to end.

She is our shadow, following quietly behind,

urging us gently to collect, pause, and unwind.

She is a harp, a violin, maybe even a flute—

a garden, a river, green grass, and sandy dunes.

Patience is chocolate cake.

A baby's feet. A graduation cap.

Does Her arrival come with warning or catch us off track?

Who is Patience?

Is She the warm hug received with tears in our eyes?

Or the scrape on our knees after a fall?

Maybe Patience is not far away—

but waiting for your return after all.

Reaching for your hand, she asks to dance.

Her steady, unwavering, longing eyes meet your gaze.

Like the morning sunrise, the star-filled sky,

the moon kissing the sun goodbye.

She is waiting for your silhouette to come home.

Patience.

### **Once Upon a Dead Man**

By Sam Mitchell

There was a Man who lived  
and He used his time to help others  
just to be crucified  
by those who opposed Him.

There was a President who lived  
who started a civil war  
to free the enslaved  
and his reward was a spiteful bullet.

There was a King who lived  
with so much courage and persistence  
that he intimidated his oppressors  
into waking him from his dreams.

There was a Debater who lived,  
spread his truth, and died for it.  
I have yet to make an impact but dare I say:  
live for your truth, but do not kill for it!

### **To the Critics of Women:**

By Maddy Triskett

They say women are free,  
Until freedom makes them uncomfortable.  
They say women are free,  
Yet question their uniqueness.

They tried to silence Sappho,  
Leaving her voice fragmented,  
Burning her stories,  
Silencing her history.

They ridiculed Emily Dickinson.  
Leading her to become a recluse,  
Disregarding her mental state,  
Judging her inside confinement

But women are not completely free-  
It is staged, rehearsed, and regulated.  
However, these women chose defiance:  
To create, live, and act how they pleased.

### **The Endless Waltz**

By Jason C. Merriam '04

I have been walking my entire life.  
When I was a child, I skipped to school,  
I ran from bullies, I flew to my books,  
Journeying on countless adventures.

As a young man, I trudged onward  
Through the harsh trials of adolescence.

I shuffled, danced, and pirouetted,  
Finding love and hope in a girl's eyes.

I strode into middle age, unafraid.  
Walking hand in hand with the one I love,  
Traveling life's paths with purpose and joy.  
Hearing the steps of children tracing our own.

At last, I will slow to a gentle glide,  
As I wander, full of wonder, into heaven.

**Try Hard: In Memoriam to Toby Atwood**

By Sean Oros '15

Trying hard  
Sparks fire  
The light of which  
Attracts attention,  
And inevitably  
Both praise  
And critique.  
Being a try-hard  
Is often judged,  
But some people  
Try hard anyway,  
Living life fully  
Even if ended young,  
Running the race  
With boundless energy  
And enthusiasm  
And unashamedly  
Individual.

If Toby had been allowed  
To run longer  
How far  
She would have gone—  
But we can look to her  
To inspire our steps  
And try hard  
To live up  
To her example,  
To take the torch  
Of a life  
Lived so brightly  
And relay it on,

She was  
Unafraid  
To let her light shine  
Unafraid to try hard,  
Unafraid to be genuine,  
And we, too,  
Can be  
Unafraid;  
We never know  
How long we have,  
But in living unafraid

**Love's Symphony**

By Neira Laird

In the stillness of the night,  
where shadows dance in soft moonlight,  
two hearts entwine, a sacred rite,  
where love's sweet melody takes flight.  
With every beat, their souls ignite,  
a symphony of pure delight,  
in love's embrace, so pure,  
so right.

## **overdramatic musings**

By Dylan Foster

What is the soul?  
A shadow splayed out on the wall  
Incapable of communicating its own complexity  
Its insane, winding pathways  
A tesseract impossible to interpret  
What is the soul?  
Greedy and willing to gnaw at its brother  
To bare its teeth at inconvenience  
And yet  
To pour love into great tragedy  
To shed blood for another  
Both urges in the same heartbeat  
What is the soul?  
It demands loneliness  
Only to insist on an ache  
When we are alone  
Petulant baby  
What is the soul?  
It must be what was sundered at Babel  
All of human tongues incapable of mapping it out  
Even the merest inch of its vastness  
So terrible and deep that we can't know ourselves  
Trapped though we are inside us  
I would throw it all away  
To know precisely what my neighbor wants  
For breakfast

## **A Poem for Trifles**

By Jordyn Sobotka

In a kitchen small and bare,  
Women notice what men don't care.  
A broken bird, a tangled thread,  
Secrets hiding, words unsaid.  
  
The quilt's uneven, the jars unloved,  
Clues are there if you just look above.  
The men dismiss what seems so small,  
But women see the truth in it all.  
  
A lonely life, a silent cry,  
Behind the walls where sorrows lie.  
They understand what's really wrong,  
In quiet things that don't belong.  
  
In trifles, power quietly grows,  
In hidden pain that no one knows.  
The women's voices soft but strong,  
Tell the story that rights the wrong.

## **“The Diary of Ken’s Doll”**

By Mariah Moody

Carcinogens and menthol cigarettes  
Drowning in despondent tears.  
How many crunches does it take to get to the center?  
Minor trifles of Our teenage years.

Bubblegum Barbies blow big bubbles  
Sugar free, of course—Our only meal today  
Unless You count Tylenol and water,  
The idol of all teenage girls:

Light, invisible, flexible;  
Held by someone, yet never truly.  
It collects like raindrops in the well of  
Our bodies, shallow like Our early graves.

Twiggy made it look real easy,  
But the hours We spend at the mirror  
Scrutinizing Our image, fishing for imperfections  
Takes more skill than You think.  
“Thinner,” You say? “Skinny is in!”  
The push-ups are crushing Our bones,  
So We stop to count the calories  
In three Advil capsules.

You’ll never understand Our pain.  
Our friends say size is just a  
Number, but Theirs barely exists.  
We prefer solace to disappointing company.

Our pants are baggy and held up by Our femurs,  
Our shirts droop below Our prepubescent breasts  
And We think it’s working...  
Until Our ribs start to beautifully ache

And Our spines run down Our backs  
Like the serpent’s tail. There is  
Nothing left of Us, but that was the goal,  
Right? Atoms instead of a body?

Our beauty standards sting like Tuberculosis  
Yet we entice You in Our illness.  
Make love to Our skeletons,  
That’s all We ever were anyways.

We were made for You. From ribs We come,  
So ribs We must remain. We’re all Barbie dolls,  
With our stiff limbs—tanned and wiry—and our painted  
faces.  
Let’s face it: You can’t spell diet without die.

**All the “She’s” that Sail the Sea**  
By Sam Mitchell

How dare you call a woman  
the weaker sex  
after all she has done for you!

Mother dearest to your ignorant heart  
carried you in her womb,  
allowed you to rip your way through her,  
and soothed you anyway!

When has a man  
the stronger sex  
loved one who tore his genitals?

As history recalls:  
pirates believed Woman was cursed on the sea  
banning all with a vulva to the land  
yet referred to their ships as She!

More ships have sailed the ocean blue as the sky,  
and it is thanks to those three She’s  
We are here, you and I.

The Titanic, unsinkable ship,  
carrying many in her womb,  
steered by Man who sent her to her watery tomb.  
Do not call her weak!

She rocked millions of sailors to sleep,  
ensured safe passage through rough seas,  
not for her body to be beaten by Pirates!

Do not call a woman weak  
as she has carried more than a man.  
She took Pilgrims from sea to shining sea,  
cherish Her: La Nina, La Pinta, and Santa Maria.

**A Rose for Emily**  
By Jordan Sobotka

Emily lives in an old, quiet house,  
Where time feels slow and shadows drowse.  
She has a rose, soft and red,  
But it feels lonely, almost dead.

She stays inside all by herself,  
With dusty memories on every shelf.  
The rose is pretty but a little sad,  
Just like Emily, feeling bad.

No one comes to see her there,  
Her world is empty, quiet, bare.  
The rose is still, not growing strong,  
Like Emily, holding on too long.

A rose for Emily, gentle and slow,  
A flower that doesn't want to grow.  
She stays inside and hides away,  
With her rose that fades day by day.

By Abreanna Thompson



**PROTECTION**  
By Gracie Mosko

Fall into me  
You shattered and broken soul  
I will be your lighthouse  
And shine for you until you grow old  
Ill hold you close and patch you up  
And protect you from the cold

## **“A Glass Pane”**

By Mariah Moody

I remember the day mother put me up.  
Her prominent round belly bumping me.  
I reflected the sun’s smiles upon you while she  
Spun in circles, scrutinizing my image.

I remember when the bump disappeared  
Mom drew lines over the scars, perplexed  
How creation left destruction. She  
Gazed with anguish, praying for deception.

I watched you grow, the young and innocent  
Eyes looking inside themselves.  
I remember when you went silent, the  
Weight of the world floated above your head like

An accumulating cloud of melancholy.  
I didn’t understand why you  
Loathed me so, for I only ever  
Told the truth. But I was your nemesis.

Your eyes desperately fished inside me for  
Something, a buried treasure or lost  
memory; but  
You never found it, did you? Venus  
Strained for perfection too though.

I remember the day you came to me with  
Eyes drowning in a flood and a voice  
Bellowing curses at my pane. Then,  
A swift kiss from your knuckles.

Life flowed between my cracks, but the tears  
Stopped. You stood back to admire the  
Crimson audience through glistening knives.  
And with a shard, you

Left me in pieces. A  
Battered corpse lying  
Broken on the carpet,  
Awaiting an unlikely return.

Every life is a  
Shard of glass.  
It’s your choice  
Whether to

Destroy or  
Reflect.

## Oh, Mother...

Anonymous

Sometimes I forget mother tried her best.  
I think about the time she gave to us-  
The way she taught us how to walk and fuss,  
To speak with care, to love, to grow, to rest.  
We overlook the hours she invests,  
Those lost beneath the faults we still discuss.  
Yet judged by standards harshly placed on us,  
We too would fall and fail beneath that test.

My mother tried with all her patient heart  
And holds a quiet pride in what we've grown.  
When she feels bound to just those four short years,  
I wish to show her life torn far apart:  
She's more than time that sorrow claims its own.  
She is our mother, constant through our fears.

## My Superhero

By Maddy Triskett

She helps me in numerous ways.  
She always answers my calls, shows up for me,  
And listens, never turning me away.  
But when does anyone acknowledge her feelings?  
When do her worries get a place to land?  
Hardships cling to her viciously,  
Prying at her confidence, her will,  
She wakes each day, putting on her armor,  
And she never lets her bruises show.  
Thank you, Mom, for your heroic gestures.  
You deserve a medal for perseverance.  
A daughter, wife, sister, and caretaker, a superhero:  
Unbreakable, like the tempered steel,  
Who endures and remains.



## **My Sister, My Dearest Friend**

Anonymous

You're the first ray of sunshine in the morning,  
the last voice to say goodnight.  
the one who knows all my secrets,  
even without me saying them outright.

We've shared whispered stories  
in the dark, far past midnight.  
We've turned tears into inside jokes,  
all the wrongs into "it's alright."

You've seen me at my messiest,  
my ugliest, my worst,  
but somehow love me louder  
when I feel like I might burst.

We fight over the little things-  
who did what, who's music, who's to blame-  
but within five minutes later, we're laughing  
like our arguments were just a silly game.

You're my built-in teammate,  
my partner through it all,  
the one who stands behind me,  
when I fear I may fall.

If lifelong best friends are hard to find,  
then somehow, I've been blessed-  
because I didn't have to look far,  
I grew up next to the absolute best.

## **Becoming:**

By Ireland Anderson

As the river flows so do I,  
Carrying memories in my ribs,  
Learning the language of leaving  
Without ever arriving whole.

I bend where the earth insists,  
Polish my grief against stone,  
Let time press its thumb  
Into my back until I curve.

Once, I tried to be still—  
A held breath, a dam of bone—  
But even silence has a current,  
Even prayer erodes.

I have loved like water loves:  
Reckless, Reflective, Returning.  
I have drowned and called it devotion,  
Called survival a miracle.

If I am lost, let it be downstream,  
Where light breaks itself open,  
Where motion is not a failure  
But a form of Faith.

## **Sestina to my Niece**

Anonymous

My tone becomes softer when I'm around you.  
You look up with a gummy smile, reaching for my hands.  
An overwhelming emotion fills my heart- it's love.  
Wide eyes full of joy, you make me want to be a better person.  
I am not your mother, but I will always be here.  
As I hold you, I quietly swear to myself a lifelong promise.

I will always show up early and leave late- I promise.  
No matter the circumstance, I'd put anything aside for you.  
When you're scared, I'll be waiting with open hands-  
there to catch you, protect you, and shower you with love.  
I cannot wait to see who you become as a person.  
As I write this, I think of your first birthday being here.

As you reach this milestone, I recall the day you arrived here.  
I told my sister- your mother- I'd be there, it was a promise.  
Hours quickly turned to days, then I finally got to meet you.  
I held you, wrapped in warmth, as I analyzed your little hands.  
When I first met you, my eyes watered, for I'd never felt such love.  
I couldn't believe my sister had birthed the most perfect little person.

I found it easier to believe, once I realized your mother is my person.  
Your presence has made me beyond grateful to be here.  
These moments are to be treasured, which I promise  
to do. I remember a time I didn't adore you.  
I'm constantly amazed by you, as you learn to use your hands.  
You've become so expressive, a little bundle of love.

The first emotion you learned was from your parents' love.  
I'm so thankful they're raising you to be an outstanding person.  
With you at this moment, I prefer to be here.  
Though one day, you'll grow old enough to understand a pinky promise.  
It is at those ages; you will begin to understand you.  
Knowing that, I will cherish this interim full of little clapping hands.

The future makes me appreciate all the times your little hands  
reached for mine. One day, they won't be as little, but will still hold all the love  
they did the first time we met. You will outgrow me and become your own person.  
Even then, when you're there and I'm here-  
I will always be your aunt, that's a promise.  
No matter what, I will always root for you.

I'll cherish you always, even when distance empties my hands.  
My love for you will show, even if it's not in person.  
I'll always be here for you, that's a promise I'll always keep.

### **Cerebral**

By Maddy Triskett

My mind races– ruminating rapidly.  
Thoughts slide through synapses,  
Consciousness cascades into the cortex,  
Sending signals through my nervous system.  
A current, a change, a cerebral wave  
That refuses stillness.  
The frequency reminds me–  
I am alive

## **North Manitou Island**

By Alana Rudolf

I open my tent to the bird's chirping overhead,  
wishing to be as lively as they are.

I place my hat on my head and slip my radio into my pocket.  
Catching my reflection, I give a small, insecure smile.

As I walk, the lake glimmers.

I sigh, longing to be as deep, as endless.

The sun beats down upon me,  
oh, to be as warm and welcoming as the rays.

I reach my destination, but those I'm searching for aren't there,

I sigh again, wishing to be as free as they are.

As I wait, throwing rocks is my pastime,  
hoping I could be as soft and gentle as the sand below.

I stare into the swaying tree line,  
jealous of their careless yet sturdy dance.  
The gentle waves creep toward the shore,  
but I only wish to be as dynamic, as unbounded.

Out of the corner of my eye, my friend arrives,

I pull out my notebook and record their arrival.

"See you tomorrow!" I say aloud.

The bird just stares back at me, knowing everything I long to be,  
I already am.

## **Currents**

By Maddy Triskett

Life moves in tides and surges

One day I feel like I am pulled into the riptide

While the next day I am swimming back to the shore

Trauma taunts me like a memory that I can't outswim.

Anxiety annihilates me, making me hold my breath.

I worry that one day I'll forget how to stay above water.

But healing is not linear,

Nor is growth.

Continue to learn new swimming styles,

Enjoy the sunrises and endless sand,

Shift your perspective like a drifting sail.

After all, no current ever remains the same

## **Architect of Dust**

By Dylan Foster

The lines are drawn with utmost care

Their meanings are not yet revealed

My face betrays a sense of calm

A stagnant mask to hide what's real

My castles crumble in the dirt

My words are fading on the page

My mind is numbed beyond the pain

Receding place is my escape

### **“Kairos for Agape”**

By Jason C. Merriam '04

So much gratitude for God given gifts,  
The beauty and stillness of nature.  
The love and joy of friends and family.  
The blessing of a community united in faith.

Somedays it is too large to hold in heart.  
Somedays stress and the mundane obscure it.  
The cult of individuality outpaces it.  
The baseness of overthought and indulgence.

Yet this morning refreshed and energized the soul.

Dissonant voices became one in purpose,  
Interwoven in the reinforcement of creed.  
A song communing in the Worship of the Lord.

It is a font of strength for God's children,  
One we so desperately need but can neglect.  
The first duty to self, is to align with God,  
Find the place where He is, build that Foundation.

All the good begins with that moment,  
A flicker of the flame of belief fanned.  
Whose motes are as the stars in the sky.

Worship transcending individuals

Into something greater than the sum.  
Allowing the construction of Brotherhood,  
Mirroring the reunion with the Creator,  
A path that leads to everlasting life.

### **The Faithful Shepherd**

By Jason C. Merriam '04

A dream, however brief, still has value.  
Putting good out into the world, the same.  
My friend had a wonderful dream.  
Even though it is over for now,  
Faith and life have a way of opening doors.

An unexpected opportunity arose.  
The Lord asked him to step forward,  
To open his heart to four angels.  
He listened, and acted as a shepherd,  
Welcoming the flock into his life.

Their time was short but meaningful,  
For one who helps the innocent, helps the Lord,  
Walking in the footsteps of the Almighty.  
I saw the bond between them with my eyes,  
A blessed moment of love and commitment.

You were there when you didn't have to be.  
A shelter to those who needed you,  
A respite full of love and security  
For these little girls who had none.

Hopefully, bad memories will fade in time.  
Maybe they will remember all the good.  
Know and cherish this, in solace, my brother.  
You were the first step in their new life.

## Just Breathe

By Jason C. Merriam '04

Here lies the last gasp, creative fervor  
Amidst the stagnation of modern times.  
We are a race driven by instant pleasure,  
A dopamine drip stuck at maximum.

Everything within the grasp of wi-fi.  
Questions of all sorts answered immediately.  
Effort a mere pathway to idleness,  
Days-long fatigue, and empty malaise.

So many spending life racing to the end,  
Embracing the nothingness of dreamlessness.  
Finding meaningless filler, killing time,  
Committing unwitting suicide.

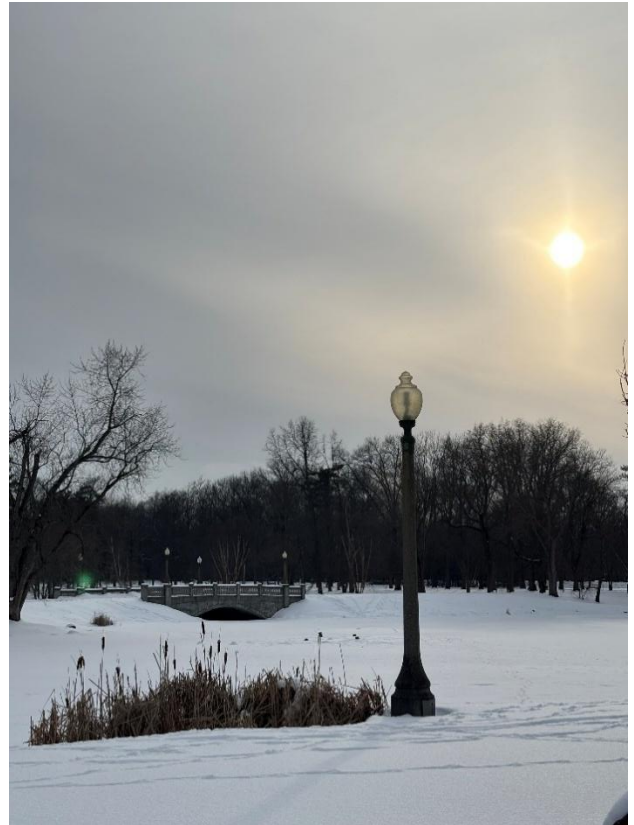
Choosing self-isolation as coping,  
Sliding into an indifferent abyss.

Fight. Fight now! Throw off the yoke of apathy.  
Shatter disillusionment with a roar.  
Abandon despair. Open your eyes.  
Inhale deeply of the fresh air.

Grasp the warm hand of another person.  
Establish connections with society.  
Stand for a cause, participate in life.  
Make a difference for someone else.

Pick up a pen, be the instrument.  
Find inspiration in the waking world.  
The path to happiness lies in the first step.  
Your joy will free the hearts of others.

It will not be easy. Nothing of worth  
Ever is. To not try is the tragedy.  
I believe in all of you. Take courage.  
Together, your efforts will save us all.



By Muncie Canon

## **Stanley**

Anonymous

He's always been the one who knows the way,  
The steady voice that solves what feels undone.  
The hand that lifts each burden day by day,  
The call I trust will never end begun.  
So many times, he's picked up the phone to stay,  
A constant through the silence and the strain.  
Though we may clash, those moments fade away-  
I learned my strength through him, through joy and pain.

He taught me more than books could ever give,  
Through quiet work and patience deeply shown.  
I dread the day his voice may cease to live,  
When I must stand and face the world alone.  
Though time will dim his flame, his name remains-  
A part of me no ending ever claims.

## **it's a secret**

By Dylan Foster

How can I show you anything  
When you look at me like that  
When I know you will think about it  
When you will have to see me in the words  
And see me even after  
I'd sooner crack my ribs  
Split them open  
And reveal to you the marrow  
Than let you in my mind

## Home

Anonymous

Whatever  
happens to a nest  
when all the chicks learn to fly?  
As the parents of the chicks say their farewells,  
the once strident nest is replaced by the creaking of oak- the wood  
their world once revolved around. Where will mother and father go?  
Will they stay, reminiscing about the time they spent keeping their eggs warm?  
Will they be reminded of their hatchlings as their wobbly legs took their first steps?  
Will they reflect on their nestlings as they all started to grow feathers and flap?  
Will they remember when their fledglings still relied on them for dinner?  
Or will they simply recall their juvenile chicks, as they took flight?  
Will they feel a sense of relief?  
Maybe they will hope to  
see them again  
sometime soon?  
Or will they  
leave the nest  
in hopes to  
start all over?  
Leaving the home  
that once held so much  
life, so much love- to rot.

## Urban Paradise

By Jason C. Merriam '04

Each day I go to the silent city,  
I stand awe struck by its sleeping beauty.  
Twin rivers run in azure and umber.  
The skies a grey tempest of swirling clouds.

The buildings mark the once glorious past.  
The faces of its people show the decline,  
The wear and tear of civilization,  
The worries of uncertain tomorrows.

I walk the streets in a cascade of time.  
Things change, but the underlying truth does not.  
Yes, I see the faces of indifference,  
But the good-natured hearts remain.

Perhaps the slow fall has its benefits.  
New life often revives from decay,  
Nature replaces the hustle and bustle,  
Healing the wounds we have inflicted.

My footsteps echo across its bones,  
Its treasured memories become my own.  
It has my love even in decadence,  
Yet in the future, it may rise again,

Two decades lapse like fog over water,  
The march of time waiting for no one.  
I speed over the bridges for brevity,  
The days of reflection past for me.

Always moving in time to the story,  
In which I have become the narrator  
Instead of the main protagonist.  
Family makes it easy to share the stage.

A personal contribution to renewal.  
My children will know the restoration  
With their own eyes, experience its  
Revitalization in their lives.

As for me, the current has come.  
Its gentle pull inevitable.  
So much joy in this second half.  
Never regret as we continue.

The infinite streams to the river,  
The river leads slowly to the sea,  
Where one mote of consciousness  
Ceases to be, transfiguring  
Into being everything all at once.

We all have a place of origin,  
A hometown, where we became who we are.  
I proudly call this urban paradise mine,  
The City of Rivers and Bridges.

### **Still the Stupid Tongue**

By Dylan Foster

Nail the tongue  
Where it hurts  
Pin the bastard  
Watch it lurch  
Struggle, squirm  
Stop it now  
Quiet your verse  
Shut you up  
Restrain it  
Bleed its nerves  
Punish the thing  
For how it works  
Stupid blurts  
Rolling dumb  
Never speaking  
What it wants  
Stigmata  
Is no curse  
To keep the words  
In reverse

### **Idiosyncratic**

By Kierstin Barger

Ones and zeros blind my eyes  
The price of progress is finding time  
When you are identified by a number instead of  
your name  
And your face is owned by the common domain  
When Identity is so important  
That privacy is overlooked  
And you can't make a mistake  
Without being called fake  
They are quick to scream they care  
But they turn on you just as soon  
When they ask who are you  
We all respond I am you  
When individualism turns into collectivism  
we are all the same  
Yet no one is as unique as you

### **"I will sing a sad song"**

By Gracie Mosko

I will sing a sad song  
An eerie kind of tune  
I will go to the depths of everything  
To please and honor you

## **On the Field**

By Alexa Beck

The sweltering sun beats down on the turf.

Despite it, the seven-day work awaits—  
rigorous and unavoidable.

Hundreds of feet are locked in.

Roll steps, heel-toe, slides, and crabwalks—  
all of these forms are rehearsed.

A bass drum's heartbeat is felt,  
while the soul of a saxophone is ignited.  
Alongside these, colors swirl across the field.

A metronome marks the air:

Dut-dut-dut-dut, Dut-dut-dut-dut.

Here, muscle memory overrides thought.

Again and again, the metronome beats on—

Faces tighten as the director says  
“One more time,” not “Last time.”

Some members of the hive share a history of many years,  
while some are still learning the names  
of their fellow members and instruments.

This mixed family does not know what they have given each other—  
the quiet gift of momentum, a reason to rise instead of fall.

They are unaware of the darkness that once loomed over a member.

Like the metronome, life must dut on.

## **“The Artist in me is Dead”**

By Mariah Moody

The artist in me is dead:

She has replaced her paintbrushes with black pens;

Her canvas has become misshapen, portable, and limited to Phonetics;

She can't find inspiration in nature anymore, but in the endless hubbub of textbooks.

She is buried 6 feet below her essays, exams, interviews, business attire, office hours—

The artist in me is dead.

She has given away her creativity for conformity,

Her palette has become monotone and symmetrical,

Her once messy mind is now organized suffering—

The artist in me is dead and I killed her.

## **Bidden to the Dirt**

By Dylan Foster

Bidden to the dirt

One and one in hand

Lovers laying still

Given to the land

A grin on the face

A hymn and then not

Buried in their lace

Together but not

Gave it all their worth

Footsteps in the sand

Neither had the will

To revoke the plan

A life spent in hate

Lovers and then not

Trapped in a place

Together but not

## **brown**

By Dylan Foster

It's brown

Of course it's brown, but what shade

I would call it chestnut

Really? I'd say umber

But the masses agree

Over 67%

That it is chestnut

Alright, it's decided

But what shade of chestnut?

22% is the highest consensus

On a single hex code color

They say it is a perfect match

Alright, it's decided

But even that can be broken down

What imperfections of your eyes

Might tweak the color a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a fraction brighter or darker?

A neuron explodes in connection one way or another

And suddenly there is no consensus

No two men agreeing on a point

In the infinity between zero and one

I rest smugly at a point proven

They sigh

Look man

It's brown

Just brown

Do you want the car or not

**“Heartbreak tastes like grave dirt—”**

By Mariah Moody

Heartbreak tastes like grave dirt—  
Like moonlight-bathed candles  
Illuminating smudged letters  
From philosophers long dead.

It clings like grief,  
Sobbing set to Mozart.  
The notes are fleeting but  
Eternal, like candles’ smoke.

It smells like rotted roses,  
Petals painted red with thorns  
Awaiting their next victim:  
Ignorant yet blissful.

Heartbreak is an art  
Perfected by solitary women.  
They pray for their suitors  
Then are left with shadows.

We fall in love with the smoke,  
But the candle grows dimmer,  
Forgotten in a wave of passion  
Only fools fall for.

I am Heartbreak, I am the Smoke—  
Barely seen, but always here—  
I lurk in the darkness;  
Watching, waiting, scheming...

Rather than compare me to a  
Summer’s Eve, worship me as you  
Do the transient moon. She who  
Incessantly transforms shall never be whole.

I sting like a serpent’s tongue  
And strike like a flogger’s whip.  
I’ll always die, but you treat me as your  
Lazarus, resuscitated by lustful men.

Drown me in your bottle,  
Sting me with your needle,  
Echo my pain in your pleasure;  
Just remember who I am.

I am Heartbreak:  
Stronger than Death,  
Weaker than Life,  
Forever residing in my victims.

## **Moondreams, or Tidal Dynamics**

By Emmett Gill

An empty sky, filled with stars and the dark  
Rises from the depths with slivers of light

Silver shines on loan from the auburn sun,  
Slowly growing, sugar-sweet radiance  
Giving way to hope's brightest guiding white

Starlight fills the sky as minds fill with dreams  
Of great ambition not yet fully seen

Like all else, our dreams have an end;  
Changing truths are something we can't ignore

"I can do it" slips into "I just can't"

As their faith, ever-waxing, loses grip---

Dreamers can't do what they could once before.

How can anything we do ever last?

We fall to the dark, and we start anew.

## **The Quiet Art of Standing Still**

By Dylan Foster

I'm struggling and standing still  
I'm hoping that they pass me by  
I'm terrified to make a sound  
I'm horrified of asking why  
The quiet art of standing still  
The subtle skill of fading fast  
There's no embarrassment for you  
There's nothing left of much to say  
A whispered woe before the end:  
I wish you saw me now and then

**Another Life**

By Neira Laird

Born into the world one way,  
But lived life another  
My destiny changed,  
From a decision not of my own

I see others with the life I could have led,  
I hold anger towards you  
Vivid memories of destruction  
Confusion filled me when young

The older I grow, the wiser I become  
My pain is from you and all the lies promised  
I put on a mask to appease you  
I'll never heal from the wound I've been given

**Neutrality**

By Abreanna Thompson

I plead neutrality.  
In a world of hostility and corruption,  
I block it out and live my life,  
while others suffer.

I hear screams for freedom and cries for revolution, I smile and move on,  
they want change.

I watch them on the news being killed for speaking their minds, I changed the channel and forgot,  
their movements and protests on mute.

I have never enjoyed conflict,  
it is not in my best interest,  
but I question my words when I am asked.

“Where do I stand?”

I plead neutrality.

**What Comes**

By Jason C. Merriam '04

I never ask why. It is not polite.  
Who am I to question the backbrain,  
The imagination factory that  
Grafts perceptions and ideas freely,  
Coalescing them into forethought.  
Sifting and shaping is my purpose.

To craft from subconscious memory,  
Extrapolating the randomness  
Of everyday experiences.  
It is a mystery in how it works.  
A gift to be cherished, not questioned.  
One can only hope for worthiness.

I follow my tenets in the work.  
Not all journeys need to be epic,  
Nor adventures that range eternally.  
Beauty can be divined directly.  
Yet as the evening ebbs to ending,  
My eyes close to dream what may come.

**Struggle Now Against the River's Flow**  
By Dylan Foster

Struggle now against the river's flow  
Endless time in whiter water's rage  
Worldly wrath will beat upon you so

The sword of life leaves cuts that only grow  
Thrashing now the wires snap about your cage  
Struggle now against the river's flow

Ensnare the pain that fate upon thee does bestow  
Noble wrath your temper cannot assuage  
Worldly wrath will beat upon you so

Earthen fangs snap and tear far deeper than you know  
Struggle now to bleed the bolded blots upon the page  
Struggle now against the river's flow

Watching, winding, whipping, waning water goes  
Sickly wrath and poison is thou just life's wage  
Worldly wrath will beat upon you so  
Do not allow the water's sting to lay you low

Do please witness the hollow words of this lowly sage  
Struggle now against the river's flow  
Worldly wrath will beat upon you so

**The first morning –**  
By Neira Laird

The first morning had come –  
Such a dreadful thing  
Relentless storm –had been suffered –  
I beseech my Soul to mourn, lamenting –

Cutting of her Thread –  
Her spindle –shattered –  
And so, to rebuild her – needs dedication  
Another morning spread –

Go on – a momentous day  
Following multiple morns,  
not all tears are evil –  
Darkness passes but, beauty remains –

It can be a burden –but also an anchor –  
The melody – lingers on –  
Time – heals all –  
But not scars –they are drawn.

Just a smaller version –  
A different me today–  
Little by little –becomes a lot –  
Is this – okay?

## **I Will Find You: A Game**

By Sam Mitchell

*Who am I? Who am I? What are you even saying? I'm the loser of the game you didn't know you were playing. Let's play another game, this time I get to win. Lives on the line, winner takes all, ready or not, let's begin!*

*-Steven Universe*

I played a game in the dark,  
one we all recall loving as children:  
Hide and Seek.

Elected as seeker, I waited for several  
minutes, giving time to hide, and myself  
a moment of respite.

Tired eyes watched dusk turn to dawn  
as they searched for others. Lefts, rights,  
highs and lows. Dawn evolved into dusk.

After restless days without nourishment,  
I switched the light on and saw the other player  
looking back at me in the mirror.



By Abreanna Thompson

## Reverence in Details: In Memoriam to Rev. Martin M. Roth

By Sean Oros

Servant Leadership  
Lived fully  
Opposes  
The siren call  
Of Self.  
In attention to details  
Can be a reverence  
And service—  
No detail  
Too small  
To overlook  
In service  
Of Faith  
And community.

Such a man  
Was Pastor Martin Roth,  
A pillar of the community,  
A life of disciplined example,  
Lived faith alone,  
By Scripture alone,  
By grace alone.  
The world was a better place  
For having had him—  
But his legacy  
Lives large  
And echoes onwards.

A star,  
Even after it dies  
Can be seen for lifetimes  
And inspire  
Well beyond  
Its own passing,  
Infinitesimally small atoms  
And star dust  
Bursting outwards,  
Sparking life  
And hope  
Across ages.

## A Poem in Six Hours

Anonymous

We sit and meet to discuss what to do

About how so many became so few.

What could we do to get our numbers back?

We will have to plan a course of attack.

We're still talking, brainstorming how to find

Those out there who could be a likened mind.

We plan out another week of events

As we leave for our event in suspense.

I stop to see my love, and she decides

That she wants to come along for the ride.

Then, we reconvene in a different space

To hopefully gather crowds in the place.

Nobody shows up besides our kin,

So the event is just us once again.

We play our games, a challenge to all

To best my prowess—let pride be my fall.

As I sit and wait, I make a call home

As my beloved and I sit alone.

“We are doing well, love, but we miss you!”

“I’ll have to visit soon; I miss you too.”

The event winds down, and it’s time to go—

I must get ready for live radio.

The songs are all chosen, and I’ve done my part

To journal six hours into this art.

## Enarmored

By Alexa Beck

As shaky breaths exit my lips,

my mind races with bleeding thoughts.

Or is this wound an illusion?

Guarded by chainmail of my own,

I flinch at every coming blow.

Like you, my soul feels bare and ill.

Your arms that once never let go,

now carve a wicked spell into bone.

I always wound myself too tight.

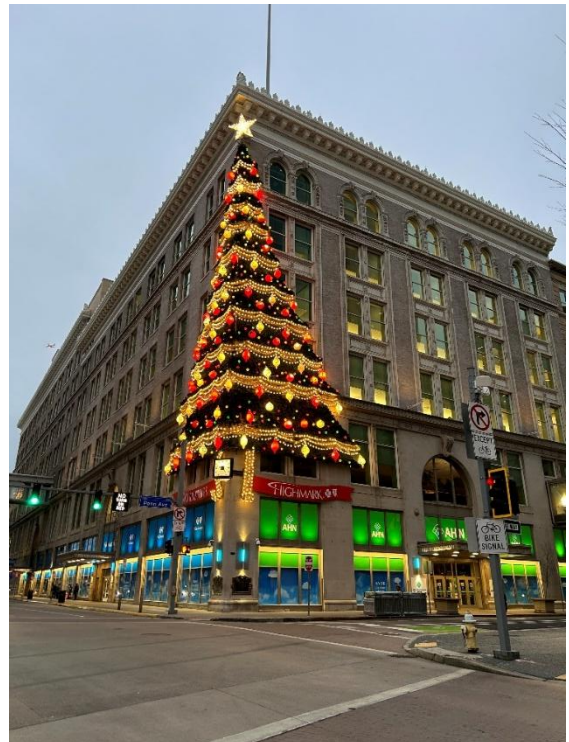
I cannot imagine what went wrong.

When we were inseparable,

I was wounded with laughter.

Again, I ask, is this an illusion?

Are we meant to have a grand conclusion?



By Allison Cannon

## **Before the Death of His Only Wife**

By Allison Cannon

Replication Poem of "To My Dear and Loving Husband" by Anne Bradstreet

Although all things within this world hath end,  
Love for you stays, my dear beloved friend.  
And the parting by death, it feels not sweet,  
But in my dreams, we shall forever meet.  
You call the sentence past irrevocable,  
You claim that such fate is inevitable.  
Yet your deathbed I do not wish to tend—  
I do not dream the loss of my best friend.  
Ignorant though we both may seem to be,  
Sad farewell lines I will not write to thee.  
The knot that is tied, it keeps us as one.  
My wife you'll always be, my heart has been won.  
Convinced as I am you'll see all you are due,  
A life without you would only ever be blue.  
Though to you it seems, you are nearing the grave,  
For you, for always, my love will be saved.  
Faults though you have, they too be found in me.  
Yet none, I pray, would convince us to flee.  
Were thou to die, I would take up the arms  
Until Hades himself allowed me back to your charms.  
To lose you, my love, would bring me great pain.  
Our babes would ache for their mam in vain.  
To love again, with someone who isn't thee,  
Is a path I cannot bring myself to see.  
You'll stay alive, I know, to read my verse.  
For you to pass could be only a curse.  
By your bed I shall stay, no matter the stake.  
My love for you stays, the farewells shall not take.

## **Soul's Sword**

Anonymous

Why is living  
never simple  
When simple is  
what we need most?  
We fade far  
from our graces  
As nightmares haunt  
our souls like ghosts.  
Why is unsheathing  
from the forge  
Something we're  
never ready for  
Even after years  
of smithing,  
We are brittle  
ore at our cores.  
Why must we always  
take defense  
To the ravenous  
assaulting  
Of our senses  
by offenses  
Others could  
ignore to parry?  
We strike, parry,  
then strike again  
Just to see another day pass.  
Every chip and  
crack, reminding  
Us to reinforce  
our soul's  
sword

## **I am just a dog**

By Alexa Beck

*Dedicated to Maddison Rose*

Why is it that you cry over me?

For I am just a dog.

I soil your things with my slobber  
and cause discord when I'm alone.

I scratch you with my nails but  
do not intend to hurt you.

For I am just a dog.

I like to eat from my bowls,  
but I do not mind pressing my tongue to  
your salted skin  
when your spirit wavers.

For I am just a dog.

I love to hear your laugh  
when we romp through the autumn  
leaves  
or break the stillness of the newly fallen  
snow.

For I am just a dog.

I may not move as much as I once did,  
but it is still you whom I cherish most.

As long as my nose is wet,

I am your dog.

Until one day,

I am the one who waits  
at the rainbow bridge.

For you to return home.

### Three Little Babes

By Jason C. Merriam '04

If ever you could bend your will to mine,

I pray that now is the time to listen.

Hear me, for though I am a mere humble man,

On this day, I am the richest among them.

For my children are more precious to me

Than all the wonders of God's Creation.

In them, my faith in God has been restored.

And even if they are called home to Him,

The memories outshine any sorrows.

But this is not my message to you all.

My peers, my fellow fathers, I ask you.

Is not faith weightier than darkest doubt?

Is not hope mightier than your despair?

We live in times of gross uncertainty.

I am no paragon of virtue without sin.

I stray in thoughts, words, and even my deeds.

What I do know, my friends, is that we live,

And as long we still breathe, there is hope.

I see you, walk amongst you, hear your words,

The stories of frustration and struggle.

The tearing apart of family and faith.

Inner turmoil causing outer sorrow.

My heart and mind bend in deep sympathy.

You are never alone my friends. For God

Walks with you in the deadliest terrain.

There is no place where you cannot be heard. 49

I read a true tale that shook my very soul.

Many years ago, a father, fraught with doubt,

Took the lives of his children, to spare them

From the ravages of slow starvation.

I would walk with that man, I would reason

With him. I would tell him that it is always

Darkest before the dawn. That evil

Whispers to us when we are most vulnerable.

If he said that God has ignored his prayers,

I would refute that God works mysteriously,

Through indirect means. That sometimes you must trust

In Humanity's innate benevolence.

We are far from perfect, flawed in many ways.

Yet we possess a great capacity

For tremendous mercy and compassion.

Even in the harshest times, you would be welcome.

Embrace hope and risk, break with deadly pride.

Know that one truth is certain in this world.

You are never alone without a choice.

Love and Faith listen for a whisper of Hope.

## Happy Heavenly Birthday

By Justice Ludy

"Sixteen candles, glowing bright,  
A brother's day, a shining light.  
My heart is full, though hard to say,  
The love I feel won't fade away.

Through every laugh, through every  
fight,  
I'm by your side, day, and night.  
This birthday marks the path you're on,  
A journey new, though some fears dawn.

But know this truth, forever near,  
My love for you will conquer fear.  
Though hard it feels, I'll hold you tight,  
Happy 16th, my guiding light.

Sixteen years, a light so bright,  
Now shining softly in heaven's light.  
Though you're gone, your spirit stays,  
In hearts that love you all our days.

A birthday there, beyond the sky,  
Where tears are wiped and angel's fly.  
I feel your love, though hard to bear,  
A bond that time can never tear.

Though here below, I miss you so,  
Your memory helps my heart to grow.  
Happy birthday, up above,  
Forever held in endless love."

## Time

By Ashlee Osterberg '08

As day fades into night  
As darkness into light  
The change of time is lasting  
Time she is a-wasting

For every thing change will attend  
For every problem it will mend  
The change of tie is lasting  
Time, she is a-wasting

Make the best of all in place  
Decorate all in lace  
The change of time is lasting  
Time, she is a-wasting

Time is precious and it's too short  
Time is telling and hard to sort  
The change of time is lasting  
Time is not worth wasting



**Within the hush where time itself grows still,**  
By Jordyn Sobotka

Within the hush where time itself grows still,  
A leaf descends like whispered thought, discreet;  
The self dissolves beneath a quiet will,  
And finds in nothingness its own retreat.  
The hourglass spills sand without a sound,  
Yet in its fall, a universe expands;  
A soul, in solitude, is loosely bound—  
Not by the earth, but by unseen commands.  
Immortal questions hover in the air:  
What lies beyond the veil we dare not part?  
No answer waits, but silence and despair,  
And yet the heart persists, a patient art.  
To die, perhaps, is simply to become—

**Fancy**  
By Ashlee Osterberg '08

Walking into a room  
    crowded to the brim  
I felt all alone  
    with merely a whim  
A fancy of dancing  
    alone with a prince  
Then, I open my eyes  
    and began to rinse  
The clamoring was loud  
    the clattering of dishes  
It brought me reality  
    instead of my wishes

**Ehlers Danlos Syndrome:**  
Anonymous

My body fails quietly  
So, no one calls it an emergency.  
  
Joints slip.  
I reset them myself.  
  
Pain is constant enough  
To be dismissed.  
If I scream, I'm dramatic.  
If I don't, I'm fine.  
  
I am praised for flexibility  
Like it isn't damage.  
  
I did not choose this body.  
I maintain it out of spite.  
  
Do not call this strength.  
Call it endurance  
Under disbelief.

## **Bothered Lives**

By Abreanna Thompson

Am I next?

Before it all, I walked my street, one full of life and joy, where my neighbors once waved to me,

their lives once unbothered.

The strangers came at night without warning or sound, No noise other than stomping boots in dewy grass, My neighbors wailed, "Why me?"

Their lives now bothered.

I walk my street; it is empty and dull.

Where the vacant houses echo with hollow noise, no neighbors to wave to.

Surely, I am fine, I reassure myself,

I knew what I was voting for,

it is not my fault.

Yet I still ask myself,

Deep in my head, where my sense hides,

I hear the question creeping around:

Am I next?

## **wrath of the lamb**

By Dylan Foster

I have heard the people of the valley cry out

In the hopes that they will be buried, hidden from the light

That they may not be known by what they think lives in the stars

I have never met the Lamb

I have only met the jeering of His sons and daughters

Who live in the valley in fear of Him

Of what worth is a God who grows angry with His creation

Of what value is a life spent in fear of the sky

Let them be buried in their pious hovels

I will sit in the rain and speak with the Clouds

## The Gold Bracelet

By Sam Mitchell

We- my older sister and I- walked down the street to a local coffee shop one morning in mid-July. Our shorts rode too high and our tank tops too small, not quite reaching the waistlines of our jeans. We reached the crosswalk when Talia pointed out a shining object lying stranded on the sidewalk. Shaking my arm, she hissed, “Amelia, look! It’s gold. Your favorite kind of jewelry. You should grab it!” I stared at the bracelet, transfixed by its splendor. Nothing in the world existed besides my unblinking eyes and that mesmerizing gold bracelet.

“Amelia! Hello? Earth to Amelia!” I blinked and looked around me, whipping my head to see my sister crossing her arms over her chest. “Just grab it already! You’ve been staring at it for five minutes. Grab it or I will.” Anger and possessiveness bubbled deeply within my stomach at the thought of someone else having the bracelet. It made me feel even angrier thinking about her having the bracelet. She hated gold and I knew the bracelet would be lost soon if under her possession. It deserved to be cared for and worn every day. I snatched it up and instructed Talia to fasten the clasp around my wrist. She obeyed and the anger burned as bright as the gold in the sun when her fingers touched my new jewelry. I snatched my wrist back the second she was finished.

It was my bracelet, and only mine. My eyes were glued, memorizing the intricate pattern of the dainty bracelet. My bracelet, my bracelet, my bracelet...

I had never been much of a possessive person before. Even now, I would not call myself possessive. However, the thought of Talia’s wrist bearing my bracelet disturbed me deeply. Talia was taller than I am, her hair had more length and volume than mine, she was more beautiful than I. Talia’s hazel eyes, which had hints of gold flecks near her irises, would have gleamed if complemented by the bracelet. I always knew I was in her shadow. I was not as smart as my older sister, not as kind-hearted or friendly, or as visually interesting. We were only eleven months apart, and I was always far behind her, never able to catch up. I knew that if I ever wanted to be anything outside of her shadow, I needed to wear this bracelet everywhere.

Talia pressed the button for the crosswalk signal to turn to the white man. “Amelia,” Talia grabbed my wrist with the bracelet. “Stop staring at the bracelet. We have to cross the road now.” No matter how much I tried, I could not pull my eyes away from the bracelet. My wrist grew warmer, as if my bracelet could sense someone else’s touch. The bracelet did not like her touch. I did not like her touch anymore. The gold bracelet did not like Talia. I realized at that moment that I did not like Talia.

“Aw, man...” she scolded me. “We missed our chance to cross safely because you kept looking at that stupid bracelet. Take it off and leave it if you can’t handle it.”

The bracelet burned my skin, and I pushed Talia.

**Next in Line**  
By Muncie Canon

“I don’t understand why I have to do this. I didn’t chose to be Santa’s son!” I rant.

“You’re being ridiculous!” exclaims Farah. “You know how many kids would love to be a child of a seasonal figure? They would kill to have your job!”

“Well, they can have it,” I say, “cause I don’t want it.”

“That’s horrible! The whole point of being Santa Claus is to make children happy; who wouldn’t want that? And you don’t even have to touch gross teeth to do that, unlike me,” Farah shudders. “Or hop around town like Easton, son of the Easter bunny. There are children all over the world who are counting on you, don’t you wanna be their hero?”

“I’m not their hero because most of the children won’t even believe in me or care about me,” I retort.

“Unbelievable,” Farrah mutters under her breath as she exits the room.

Whatever. I gotta go grab the updated naughty and nice list for my dad anyways. I tear out of the room, keeping my head down and ignoring all the cheer filling the workshop as tonight is Christmas Eve. I soon realize I should have been paying attention to where I was going as I run right into Ellie. I apologize as Ellie chuckles.

“It’s okay, Kris,” she says with a cute, dimpled smile, “I’m sure you’re a bit stressed; I heard tonight’s the first time your dad’s taking you out on the sleigh for Christmas Eve; how exciting! You know, when we were younger, I used to be really jealous of you,” Ellie says. “Like, wow he’s the son of Santa, how cool. I’m just the daughter of some elves. Elves are of course important too, but I’m sure nothing compares to actually going out to deliver presents to the children and knowing that they are going to wake up to have the best day because of you.”

“It’s not all cracked up as it seems to be,” I inform her.

She frowns at this as I continue on my way. I grab the naughty and nice list and head straight to my dad’s office. I enter to see him cheerful as ever.

“Ah thanks, Kris,” he says, taking the list with a smile. “You don’t know how excited I am to be taking you out for your first Christmas Eve on the sleigh!”

“Yeah, uh, that’s great Dad but I better get back downstairs,” I tell him as I start for the door.

“Wait Kris don’t go just yet!” He smiles ear to ear. “We’re having a ceremony for you to celebrate this very special occasion!”

“That’s great, Dad, but I mean it’s Christmas Eve so we probably don’t have time to-”

“Nonsense, of course we have time to celebrate your special day. Be in Snowflake Hall in ten minutes!”

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Snowflake Hall is packed when I arrive. The room is chattering with excitement, but as my dad approaches the podium at the front of the room, it quickly dies down.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am overjoyed to officially present my very own son as the new Santa in training!” He beams as the room fills with applause. “Why don’t you come up here and say a few words?” He motions me over.

I take the podium, feeling hundreds of eyes on me.

“Now Kris, tell us how you’re feeling,” dad prompts me.

“Uh...I...”

“I know super excited right? I was too when my time came!”

“Yeah...uh...I...”

“Don’t get too excited yet, Son, I still have quite a few years left in me; you’ll eventually get your own time in the spotlight -”

“I DON’T WANT TO BE SANTA CLAUSE!” The words scream out of my mouth.

The audience lets out a loud gasp, followed by dead silence.

“Sorry,” I say. I’m embarrassed, and I feel bad, but I just couldn’t take it anymore.

I head out to the reindeer barn to clear my head. A little while later, I see a shadow in the doorway. It’s Ellie.

She stands there for a second, then speaks: “I think everyone calmed down now, so you should be safe to head back inside.”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll stay out here,” I say.

“I just don’t understand why you don’t want to be Santa Claus,” she says.

“Because every year I see how hard my dad works and for what? Half the kids he delivers to don’t even believe in him. He’s not a hero, not to them anyways. He’s underappreciated, and I don’t want that to be me,” I let it all out.

“Have you ever been to the naughty and nice camera rooms?” she asks.

When I shake my head no, she motions for me to follow her.

We enter the room and are surrounded by walls containing rows and rows of screens depicting children from all around the world.

“Here, look at this,” she points to a screen of a little boy, probably about age five.

“See what I mean?” I ask. “They didn’t even bother to leave out milk and cookies, or even decorate for Christmas.”

“It’s not that they didn’t bother,” she points out, “it’s that they can’t. This little boy’s family can’t afford the cookies and the decorations. But tomorrow is going to be the best day ever for him, because he knows Santa is going to come and make it better.”

“I never thought about it that way,” I say. “Man, I messed up, big time.”

“It’s okay,” Ellie assures me, “There’s still time to fix it. The sleigh hasn’t left yet.”

“Thanks,” I tell her as I turn to go, then turn back, “Wait, come with me.”

“Really?” She asks, surprised.

“It’s the least I can do. Now come on, we don’t have any time to waste!”

We sprint to the sleigh garage as fast as we can. My dad is nowhere in sight when we get there. We ask an elf if anybody saw him. He points towards my dad’s office.

I slowly open his office door to see him staring glumly out the window.

“Dad, what are you doing? It’s almost time to go!” I exclaim.

“I’ll leave you two alone,” Ellie says, quietly exiting the room.

“Dad, I’m sorry. I was wrong. I want to be Santa Clause,” I say.

“It’s okay Kris, you were right. No one even cares about Santa anymore,” he sighs.

“Yes, they do,” I insist. “It might not seem like it, but the children adore you. For some of them, you are everything they have. They might not be able to afford decorations, or to have Christmas parties, but they have Santa Clause. You are their hero, dad, and I can’t wait to have your job, so that one day I can be a hero too.”

Tears fill my dad’s eyes as he speaks, “Kris, you bravely shared your feelings in front of everybody even when you know they were controversial. Then you came up here to cheer me up so I can go bring joy to the children of the world. You, son, are *my* hero.”

He rises and wraps me in a giant bear hug.

We suit up and head to the sleigh. The elves cheer at the arrival of Santa.

“You ready for your first sleigh ride?” I ask Ellie with a grin.

The three of us get settled in the sleigh as a crowd lines up to see us off. I look around to see all the joy filled faces, and for that alone, being Santa Claus is worth it.

**"godslayer"**  
By Dylan Foster

"I only witnessed Heaven after I had purged it of its angels."

The decrepit figure languished in its throne. It was clearly humanoid, although any trace of humanity had long since left its hollow body. Despite the semblance of strength in its great, hefty armor and the mighty stature of the man, his skin betrayed a frailty-- it looked akin to papyrus, paper-thin, as though it might crumble to dust at the slightest touch.

The hero steadied himself. He had always been told to be wary of the lies he would hear at this moment. This monster had destroyed the world, rendered all of time to a stand-still. It could not be fixed, but it could be avenged.

The giant figure spoke under the watchful glare of the hero.

"It was devoid of light. I was never sure whether this was due to the lack of its population or a sign of the state of its master. I'm still not." A moment of contemplation and a shifting of weight, great and vile plate armor whining under its own mass in protest of the movement.

"Nevertheless, I pushed onward through the dark and dreary kingdom of God the Master. Buildings crumbled away into the void as I passed them. And as I reached the final citadel where I knew he would be resting in his throne, I took a moment to behold what was behind me." He paused, staring into the middle distance, as though he could see it still. "Nothing. Nothing was left."

"So I continued up the stairs, each step a more laborious task than the last, until the final step robbed me of all stamina. It was all I could do to continue walking into the titanic antechamber that lay beyond. 'It will be over soon', I recall thinking. Over and over. 'It will be over soon, it will be over soon, it will be over soon.'"

The hero felt a wave of exhaustion wash over him. For a moment he wondered if this was a trick-- but, no. In these moments of calm before the final strike, he realized he, too, was so, so tired. When was the last time he had rested?

Without knowing what would come next, would he ever rest?

**It will be over soon**, he thought grimly.

"I stood before the throne of God. It was the only source of light left-- not God himself, but the throne, perhaps infused with some divine light of its own.

I was petty then, prideful in my wrath. I held a blade that snuffed out the angels-- so too did I snuff out the final light in Heaven, if only to see God wince." Again, a pause. "But he never did. Not once."

The figure stood. The hero did not recognize the sheer bulk of him before. He must have easily stood two stories in height. He turned away, staring off this final platform of his citadel and into the darkness beyond. He didn't seem to pay the hero any mind at all as he spoke. "He looked... \*ready\*, even. Prepared for the end. I did not expect him to speak, and he did not- by then I knew that the voice of God had run out long before I arrived. Even a word may have rendered me deaf, but he offered none. He beheld me with his meager stance and bowed his head. He had divested me of what was rightfully mine, a glorious final blow to end a war that had been waged for my entire life." The gargantuan figure hung his head and dropped his voice to a whisper. "He surrendered."

Turning to the hero once more, he now locked eyes with the comparatively tiny man. "It took me a great deal of time to understand what had happened in Heaven, boy. To understand my role in all of this. What I had thought to be a war of vindication, of retribution and of power, was just... nature, running its course."

"Do you know what I think, manling? I think the Creator was ready for the end. I think in the endless years of his existence he had grown so weak, and spent so long lengthening his life and lording over it all that he finally realized it was all for nothing. I think he weighed his love for his world against his draining passion and recognized that death was an escape."

"You have heard the stories, boy, of the Creator's first steps- painstakingly molding planets and stars in the void for millions of cycles, bringing forth the world in which his spawn would live. Your religions all recognize this to be true, though they disagree on the reason- love, loneliness, power, it matters not. It was then he created his children, you and I, and all other living things. Some- most- were not born, but they existed in the Creator's mind, ready to manifest when their time came. And though he continued to create, much of what is was then made. For eons we have simply played out the beginning, start to finish. Do you understand?" He took a long look at the hero, whose wrath was waning as he weighed the giant's words.

"Reality stagnates with the death of God- not only because there is not a being to create more, but because we had, in fact, reached the end. All the world was a play, ending with the death of God at my hand. I was created by Him, how could I not be destined to do what I have done? And now, without the guiding hand of the Creator, time spins onward, but nothing new can come to be. Even death is a difficult thing to achieve." Another pause. "This all should have ended a very long time ago."

The giant returned to his seat, apparently exasperated by the time spent standing. "How old are you, boy?"

The hero did not expect the question and answered truthfully. "I was born 236 cycles ago."

The giant smirked. "Does your kind still measure time by the passage of a sun that no longer spins? I suppose there is no alternative." He sighed. "I am old, boy. I wonder if time is not a difficult thing to grasp now. I wonder if you even know how old you are, really- when nothing changes, by what do you determine time? But I know how old I am. I can recount the exact amount of time that has passed since I struck down that horrible old man, waiting for death in his kingdom of slaughtered children. I have lived for millions of years, child. Were God alive, I would have been granted death long, long, long ago. I considered that a gift, once, but now..." He beheld once more the expansive darkness surrounding the citadel.

"It will be over soon, at least."

"Life does not end when change does not exist, man-thing. That you know, and have prepared for. That artifact you wield, you know that when it is used, I will cease to be. You have come prepared for a fight in the hopes of rendering me unable to resist, of rending my body and breaking my bones so that you might finally do away with the Godslayer. Allow me to assure you that no such effort will be needed."

With that, the giant figure left his throne and knelt before the hero. Even at a reduced height, the colossus' head was above the hero's own. He stared at the ground, waiting for the hero's execution. The hero, unsure of what else to do, raised his artifact high, prepared to make a final strike. Just before bringing it down, he considered the colossus' words and spoke. "Why do you do this, beast? Why destroy the Godhead if only to lay down your life in pitiful surrender?"

The giant tilted its head to meet the eye of the hero. There was a moment of thought before he spoke his last words. "Do not take for granted that which you cannot return, child."

The hero tried not to give the words much thought- they were lies, after all, and this demon had destroyed the lives of his people. He swung the artifact and the giant was gone, with no evidence of his ever being there.

The citadel crumbled around him as he departed. This fixed nothing- he was the last child that would ever be born, and indeed the last thing that would ever change. The divine backlog had run dry. What is shall be forever.

## **The End of a Traveler**

By Katherine Cooper

A traveler was warned of a place. There were rumors that a mysterious city existed, separate from the rest of society. It was the only one of its kind. The modern world had made work effortless. While the world embraced these new technologies, one sorrowful city refused to live in the same way. People claimed that the ruler of this horrid place was cruel and demanded constant labor from his slave-like citizens. There were whispers that if a poor soul were to travel too close, they too would be taken into the city and would remain there for the rest of their days. This place was the city of “Y”; a fitting name for this city, for why would any soul want to go to such a place? Luckily, the town the traveler now entered was no such place.

The traveler stepped into the grand city gates and observed the bustling square. This town was bursting with life. Vendors of all sorts crowded either side of the town’s shopping district. The street was crowded with citizens. The area seemed to explode with constant movement and chatter. Young children clung to their mothers as horses pulled carts filled with various goods. A single musician sang proudly while strumming on an instrument the traveler could not name. Bright banners and displays tempted buyers to come closer. He found himself drawn to one of the shops. It was filled with pottery and trinkets of all patterns and colors. He was amazed by how unique each piece was. No matter how many different artifacts he looked at, there was always something special about each one that made it one of a kind. The traveler spotted the seller sitting on a chair in the corner of the shop. The older woman sensed his gaze and greeted him with a smile. She introduced herself as a learned sculptor and explained that her inspiration came from the city. She continued to say that the town is always changing and progressing, and that she attempts to channel the life and culture of the people in her pieces. The traveler noticed a small dish on an opposite shelf. It depicted a cliff reaching out over the sea. He was about to take a closer look when another buyer picked it up. As the traveler was about to ask to take a look, he was overtaken by an alluring aroma.

As he turned towards the square, he noticed a spirited vendor making what appeared to be a fire-roasted fruit stick of some kind. He walked across the street to observe. The vendor noticed his intrigue and offered a small sample. He explained that it was a delicacy of his own creation. Upon closer inspection, the traveler discovered that the fire-roasted fruit was covered in a mixture of sticky-sweet spices. The taste was unlike anything he had sampled from any other land he had previously visited. The traveler was desperate for more, and as the vendor happily began preparing another, he spoke with him. The vendor explained that he had once lived in a modern city and worked in an almost fully automated restaurant. The vendor continued his tale as the fruit sizzled over the flames. A sweet-scented smoke filled the air. He explained that he grew tired of the repetitive days of his old city and explored the world. He eventually happened across this town. He talked enthusiastically about the creative fire the town ignited inside of him and credited his dish to the city. As the traveler accepted the now-ready food, he thought of the lady at the previous stand who mentioned the inspiration the city had provided her with. He thanked the vendor and continued into the city towards a less crowded area.

As the traveler finished his food, he wandered out of the dense area surrounding the city entrance. The stone path began to turn to dirt and gravel. The buildings thinned and the rural side of the city emerged. As he walked, he wondered which city he had stumbled upon. If the delicacy he just enjoyed was due to the great city he was in, he must find the name so he could direct others to this wonderful place. The traveler passed fields covered with crops and dotted with cattle. Children played in the fields. They seemed to be recreating a battle scene with sticks and old hats. A young couple walked past, and they seemed to be debating the best material to build a fence for their yard. Whenever he spotted a citizen, they always seemed cheerful. The traveler also noticed that they were also always occupied with a task, be it farm or housework, or something more creative such as painting or gardening. He continued towards the side of the town opposite the city gates. The path began to turn to stone once more and more houses came into view. The quiet of the countryside was slowly overtaken by the sounds of the city. The houses gave way to more shops, busier streets and grand buildings appeared once again. The traveler began to smell seawater and heard gulls screech above him. He concluded that this side of the city must be bordered by the ocean.

The traveler turned and chose to walk on a path that ran parallel to the cliffside. He admired the grand view of the never-ending ocean reaching out towards the horizon. He came to pass a strange land bridge protruding from the cliffside. Its path led out from the city and across the ocean. There seemed to be no end nor island on the other side. As the traveler's path came closer to the bridge, he observed an older man standing at the entrance. The man seemed to be lost in thought. Slowly, he began to walk out onto the bridge. The waves crashed into the steep, rocky sides and clawed up towards the path. The old man seemed unbothered by this and persisted along the bridge. The traveler watched as he continued, never looking back towards the city. As the minutes passed, the man's silhouette became smaller and smaller as he continued to walk away. Eventually, when the man was no longer in sight, the traveler continued on his way. He wondered what could be on the other side, but he was preoccupied with more pressing matters. He must see what else the city had to offer before he could leave.

As he continued his self-guided tour, he found no building with any insignia to determine the name of the grand city: and grand it was. The traveler had not noticed upon his arrival, each building was well kept, and the busy streets were clean and smooth. He passed by several workers cleaning and painting large buildings as well as ordinary homes. Even the most basic of structures were beautiful in their own way. There were fountains, statues, and patches of greenery. He passed by several schools and libraries. It seemed that the people of this town were obsessed with knowledge. The traveler decided that if he wanted to find information concerning this unusual town, one of the libraries would hold the answers. He craved the answer to what this town was and what was on the other side of the land bridge he had passed.

The traveler came across a library that seemed older than the rest. It had tall columns, and a delicate pattern etched around the doorway. As he entered the library, the smell of old books filled his nostrils. He thought to himself that this was what knowledge must smell like. The traveler noticed that unlike libraries of other towns, this one was busy, almost crowded even. He asked a stranger at a table where the history section was located and followed their gesture further into the library. He came across a set of double doors leading into a cozy room. There were shelves on the two opposite walls, and a table and chairs under a window opposite the door.

The books on these shelves surely held the answers he was seeking, as they were obviously old and well-used. The traveler-turned-detective scanned the shelves. As his fingers danced over leather bound spines and titles in many languages, he found no book containing any mention of the land bridge. He turned to the shelves on the opposite side of the room. He continued to search through the titles. There were histories of many lands that he had travelled to. Eventually, he came across a book titled “The History of the city of Y.” He stopped. Could he be in the very city of which he was warned?

He nervously opened the large book and scanned the pages. Indeed, it told of the beginnings of the city and the ruler who reigned. However, this story told of a ruler more ambitious and curious than cruel. This history claimed that the first ruler wanted the answer to life’s questions. The book revealed that the long-dead founder of the city demanded not merely work, but progress. The traveler thought to himself: how is progress any different than work? He read further and discovered that the rulers who followed continued to build on the founder’s goal. They created schools, libraries, gardens, and temples of all religions, all in the search of knowledge. All to answer life’s question of “Why?”.

The history continued. People were given jobs based on talent, not necessity or pay. The people upset with this left for easier lives, and those who stayed helped the city grow astronomically. Citizens were told that to remain in the city, they must learn when they are not working. This was an attempt to come across the answer to life. For this was why the founder created the city. Therefore, the citizens learned about arithmetic, nature, philosophy, the arts, astrology, music, the sciences, architecture, and medicine. There seemed to be an endless number of topics the citizens could learn about. Those that were most educated in architecture became the builders. Those skilled in philosophy and arithmetic sought to be teachers. Those that were talented in medicine became the doctors. The city grew because the citizens were encouraged to learn throughout their lives. The city could constantly progress because the people progressed. That was the greatness of the city: knowledge. The subsequent rulers of the city understood this, and they constantly demanded better of their people because they knew the people could do better. The rulers of the city did not accept what was easy, they expected the best.

The traveler wondered how the citizens could live in this way. He left the library and continued down the path along the steep coast. He came across a group of young adults discussing politics and asked them why they would live in a city with such lofty demands. They looked surprised by this. One of them answered with a question. Why not live in a city that encourages them to be the best that they can be? The traveler thought about this and continued on his way. That man had given him a new view of the city of “Y.” It was not a city of overworked slaves as the rumors had described. It was a city of limitless creation. As he continued his walk he thought back to the woman at the shop and the vendor. He now understood why they valued their city so much. It was the city that allowed them to become masters of their trade. He continued to ponder the wonders of the city. No wonder that when visitors came across the city they never left! With all the knowledge and opportunities in the world, how could anyone go back to simplicity? The traveler continued his tour of the city with newly opened eyes. He viewed the fountains and statues as tests of skill. He thought of the city now as a never-ending list of possibilities for its people. A reoccurring thought then entered his mind. He remembered the question that began his journey. What was his place in society? Maybe the seemingly infinite knowledge of this city could provide the answers.

He decided to stay in the city of “Y.” The time went by quickly as he surrounded himself with knowledge. He was particularly interested in philosophy. As the years went by, the wandering traveler disappeared, and a curious scholar emerged. He dedicated his life to discovering the answers to life’s largest questions. He debated with others, listened to teachers and frequently returned to the many libraries. His search for knowledge was never-ending. He began to share his knowledge with his fellow citizens. It was in doing this that he realized his potential in the city. He became obsessed with teaching and philosophy. He sought out opportunities to help others answer their questions. He took pride in educating others, and his life in the city became a full one. As the years passed, he continued to teach others and spread the knowledge he had gained. He wrote books on the topics he studied and shared them with the library. He visited often to expand their selection.

It seemed that his life was complete, and that he had found the answers he was looking for. Still, he craved more. What lay past the land of the living? What could he accomplish if his mortal life did not hold him back? In his old age, he took a walk along a cliffside path. This was where he pondered his deepest thoughts. As he walked, he came across the land bridge. He stood at the entrance and looked out across the ocean. He could not see the other side. He had never considered crossing before. But he had also not yet encountered this feeling before. He had pursued knowledge all his life, and he shared it with those around him. Perhaps there was something missing that was on the other side. As he walked across the bridge, the waves crashed into the steep, rocky sides and clawed up towards the path. He was unbothered as he persisted along the bridge. As he walked, never looking back towards the city, an onlooker watched from the cliffside.

**Noxious**  
By Dylan Foster

The angry red sun we called Noxious drifted towards the horizon, ever in its haunting pursuit of the pale green moon, Vesper. I crept up to that terrible cliff, a lonesome, jagged thorn on the ochre plains below, and found him there, legs dangling off the edge.

I had known he climbed here most mornings. Though he did not report it, it was no secret, either. Us youth had wondered what he saw with his too-wide eyes, concealed within his breathing apparatus. The rust-colored ruins below were choked with unrelenting sand, their industrial nature obscured by erosion and war.

Henry, his name was. It was a strange name, and he was a strange child. His parents had, too, been strange- wasters that carried objects of the old world. They said the name had come from that old world, as did many others- but we had never heard of a Henry before. It was a strange name.

I spoke when I reached the peak, only a few paces behind him.

"The Workman's Chime has sounded, Henry. You ought know better, chum. Ought come down now, receive infusions with the rest'f us 'nd-"

Henry cut me off. "There's a fire down there, eating up out of the ground. Look."

I peered anxiously past him, over his thick polyester armguards and- indeed, a large, greenish flame tore through the sands. Some gaping maw had opened on the ruined plain, devouring half of one of the old factory floors, the remains of that colossal wreck jutting upwards like fangs. I could only stare for a while.

"It's not like the others, this one." Henry spoke matter-of-factly. He was calm- I now stared at him in wonder. Of course, he knew the risks, of such a thing being so close. It couldn't have been more than a mile away.

"We... we've got t' tell someone, the Hearthmaster or the-"

Again, Henry cut me off. "It wouldn't matter. The fire won't ever go out. And there's nowhere left to hide." He gestured vaguely to the huge expanse of ruin and nothingness around the mountain. "I think it's nice that Noxious kept it out of sight. The mountain hides it from the homestead."

He looked back at me, his pale eyes faintly visible through the large, tinted lenses of his helmet. His voice was curious, unconcerned.

"They won't know until the toxins hit. I don't think we should tell them."

The suggestion felt like acid in my gut as I closed the distance between us. My gloved hands punched forward and grabbed Henry by his protective wear. "Why th'hell not? Who gave you th' right t' decide that?" I snarled, the heat of my breath fogging my own lenses. The heaving in my chest was consuming more oxygen and biomass than it should- valuable resources that should not be wasted. But I couldn't stop myself.

In a flash, I raised a heavy hand shaped into a fist and smashed Henry's face. His lenses broke instantly, the brittle glass being decades out of shape. The feeble metal of the helmet crumbled beneath my savage strike. Immediately blood oozed from Henry's mouth, congealing and blackening upon interaction with the air's poison. Henry nodded weakly on the ground where he had fallen.

"It won't do any good. We made it a long time, but..."

He pointed up at Noxious, its final wrathful embers falling below the horizon.

"...the sun is setting, see? Let them... have a few hours. Go tell jokes. Stories and things."

He dipped a hand into the tear in his helmet and felt the blood pooling at his mouth. I knew he would die soon- through that small hole I could see his skin tightening, his veins undergoing necrosis.

I had killed him. And so, I felt the sting of tears when he smiled.

"I'll watch it awhile. Go and... do as you will. Until the time comes, okay?"

Meekly, he sat up and returned to his spot on the cliff's edge, watching the greenish flames tear up from the sinkhole in the distance.

I stood exhausted, unable to move.

He was right, of course. There was nothing that could be done. I staggered away. Mindlessly, I adjusted the nozzle of my biomass allocator and set it to expend all resources- the small creatures in the tank on my back shrieked as the device began harvesting them en masse. I figured there would be no point, and that I may as well feel truly alive in these final hours.

I never did return home. I walked off into that painful, dusty desert, and thought of Henry, who saw the end with a smile. I'd never seen him smile before.

A long distance away I found the ramshackle corpse of some great vehicle- nothing like our Striders now, this was a behemoth of steel, its body eaten away at by the razor-sharp winds. I lay with my back to it, far now from the Homestead, and thought of Henry. An ancient whirring in my ear told me my filtration system had finally succumbed. Here, in the starving desert, I found no peace.

## The Place of Destruction

By Dylan Foster

The cavern smelt of sweet, rotten meat and salt; his mouth dried at the detection of the overwhelming aura which seemed to cling to every stone. Even in the darkness, he could see thin, towering, white stalks of stone growing from the limestone floor, ascending into some unknown abyss above. He shivered, though there was no chill.

"Abaddon."

The word escaped his lips without his notice. It was an observation that demanded another spasm of the body. From above, a great, lingering voice rang out.

"Yes. Abaddon."

His head yanked about to find the source of the voice. There, high in the chalk-roots, a terrible thing watched him. Its true size seemed impossible to estimate among the widening and thinning stone pillars, but he was certain it was a colossal thing. The cavern seemed to warm when it exhaled- a slow, torturous process that caused a flux of warm air to wash over him. He felt he might tumble downwards, but he stood his ground. He managed a nod- a terrified, shaky nod, an action that brought a creaking sound in his neck that was unusual to him.

"Abaddon. You're him. I know of you."

The creature above was more visible now as it eyed him with tired interest. It was as he had heard when he was young: a great buzzard with crooked bones, eyes that hung from its head and looked all around, great fangs that jutted against all logic from its beak, a great beard-like extension of fur hanging from its wrinkled, elongated neck, and the eyes-

"My gods. They were right."

The eyes were just as he had been told they would be. No bird had eyes as these. They were practically human- cunning, hungry, anxious despite the otherwise relaxed appearance of the thing. Few men possessed the evil to rival these eyes.

"Yes. You know of me. Then you know where you are."

He swallowed. "Hell."

The creature exhaled. "Abaddon. The bowels of Hell. My home. My place of destruction."

He shuddered as the warm breath gusted him once more. The creature continued. "You are to be wiped clean. So great are your sins that mere punishment is insufficient. I would have you know that I have wiped clean so many of your kind so far. I know not their number. Their names are carved here, upon the dead rock." The creature's eyes, hanging and cruel, leered at him through the darkness. "I would have you reveal your name, so that I might save you. So that Hell might remember who it has destroyed."

His mind was not caught up in the conversation. He murmured when he spoke, as if unfocused. "Are you a demon?"

A raucous fit of laughter erupted from the upper echelons of the cavernous space. "Then you do not know me! I was misled." The laughter was cacophonous, ear-splitting as it rattled his skin. After some time- some unknown time- the beast subsided, satisfied with the horrible shrieking bouncing from wall to wall. "I am an angel in hell. Such is my task. Only by my claw can the Above be assured of the destruction of the most vile souls."

He shuddered, by inches becoming aware of the strangeness of his own form- skin like chalky bark, hands that ended in horrible, clawed things, resembling fingers only in the way that sharp twigs might. He feared what features he might not know of yet and cared not to investigate further.

"Then I am to be destroyed?"

The creature grinned- managed a grin, with its great, menacing razor that served as its mouth. "You have sinned greatly. But first I would have your name."

"In what way have I sinned? I... I did not believe in you, but I was a pious man! A servant of the law! Even-"

The creature hissed. "There can be no error. You are to be destroyed. Reveal to me your name."

He stood upright- the bark-like skin resistant and unpliant- and spoke clearly. "Longinus. Longinus is my name."

The laughter resumed, this time successfully knocking the soul over. Heated breath swept over him and stung at his skin. That sickly sweet smell overwhelmed him entirely, seeming to permeate directly through his not-skin.

"The spearman! The spearman is at last come! I have longed for your presence greatly, Longinus. I have hungered for you above most else. Yours will make a fine notch for my pillars." Even as he cackled and howled madly, a clawed appendage etched with incredible accuracy into the stone- Longinus took it as his name entrusted to the stone.

"Then there is no forgiveness?"

The clawed appendage stopped in time with the laughter. Somehow this muttered query was heard in spite of the symphony of awful things. Those cruel eyes assessed him yet again.

"There can be no forgiveness. Not for you, Longinus. Not for the Centurion."

He stood there in silence for a time before finding his words again. "I met him once again, you know. I begged forgiveness, for I knew... I knew just when it was too late what I had done. I begged forgiveness. Was that not the promise? Was forgiveness not the just wage of endless nights spent in prayer?"

The hulking buzzard tapped the stone with its immense talon. The impacts threatened to crack the perch it held, but even the stone seemed fearful in the face of Abaddon. "No. Not for you, spearman. Not for Longinus, the Murderer of God."

The soul spoke on, nervous. "I did not know who he was, then. I know now. I was told all would be forgiven if I believed, if I asked- they damned me, they bid me out of my place and insisted that I-"

His babbling was cut short by another gust of breath- more forceful than the last. The grotesque buzzard spoke in a low rumbling tone. "You know the answer, Centurion. No forgiveness."

Summoning to himself some unknown pool of courage and stoicism, he fixed his posture and stiffened against impending doom. "Then it must be so." The Centurion stood and stood tall. As his name was committed to the dead stone of the cavern, he awaited whatever came next. That terrible beast, Abaddon- the cavern and the beast in hand- swung low and snatched his feeble body in a single hulking claw. He had never felt feeble before- but now he was small, diminutive in the grip of final perdition.

This was not his body. He had come to understand now- it was him, something central, essential. And now it cracked beneath the straining grasp of God's executioner. Its skin shattered and chunks of stone splintered and shot off like shrapnel as he was compressed and destroyed.

Longinus' final vision, before Oblivion claimed him, was his own face reflected in those giant, evil eyes- an empty crevasse where his face ought to be, like a tree hollow. Horrified, Longinus was destroyed at last as the integrity of his ethereal form gave way, and his soul was fractured under the incredible weight of Abaddon, who greedily watched the splinters fade away into the darkness of the cave.

## **Index**

Anonymous Pieces.....	pp. 17, 26, 27, 28, 34, 35, 46, 48, 51
Achenbach '77, Don .....	p. 6
Anderson, Ireland.....	p. 27
Barger, Kierstin .....	p. 37
Beck, Alexa .....	pp. Introduction & Dedication, Back Cover, 9, 16, 38, 46, 48
Blöse, Nola.....	p. 11
Cannon, Allison.....	pp. 7, 17, 26, 46, 47
Canon, Muncie.....	pp. 33, 54-56
Cooper, Katherine .....	pp. 60-63
Daugherty, Tegan .....	p. 11
Foster, Dylan.....	pp. 21, 31, 34, 37, 39, 41, 43, 52, 57-59, 64-65, 66-68
Gadsby, Josie.....	p. 10
Gill, Emmett.....	p. 16, 41
Hall, Dr. Mary Theresa .....	pp. 7, 10, 16
Kavulla, Anna .....	pp. Front Cover, 12
Laird, Neira .....	pp. 20, 42, 43
Ludy, Justice .....	p. 50
Merriam '04, Jason C.....	pp. 5, 17, 19, 32, 33, 36, 42, 49
McDowell, Kaleb.....	p. 13
McLaughlin, Kendall .....	p. 12
Mitchell, Sam .....	pp. 19, 23, 44, 53
Moody, Mariah.....	pp. 16, 22, 25, 39, 40
Moreno, Kalina .....	p. 9
Mosko, Gracie.....	pp. 24, 37
Narby, Ethan .....	p. 12
Oros '15, Sean.....	p. 20, 45
Osterberg '08, Ashlee.....	pp. 6, 50, 51
Patterson '25, Sylvia .....	p. 7
Thompson, Abreanna .....	pp. 6, 24, 42, 44, 50, 52
Triskett, Maddy.....	pp. 16, 19, 26, 29, 31
Tucker, Hayden .....	p. 13
Schroyer, Colin .....	p. 15
Sobotka, Jordyn.....	pp. 21, 24, 51
Stanley, Maverree.....	p. 16
Stitt, Summer .....	p. 18
Rudolf, Alana .....	p. 30
Whaley, Brianna.....	p. 8
Zahner, Isabella.....	p. 14



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