

RUCKUS *Spring 2025*

Student Literary Magazine
The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts

SENIOR STAFF

Cadence Ryan
Gianna Carbone
Everet Smith
Haven Simmons
Bee Kanofsky
Eclipse McKissick
Rayna LeBlanc
Maddie Hess
Alyse Gammons
Lila Pieson
Helena Velez
Liani Vargas
Simran Kaur

ADVISOR

Heath Mensher

Email RUCKUS: chartsmag@student.charterarts.org

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Through its efforts, the Giving Circle helps the Foundation's mission to support the welfare and educational interests of the Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts

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Cover art by Alyse Gammons

Line drawings by Alyse Gammons and Rayna LeBlanc

Featured art by Lina Morade, Olive Ferguson, Aaron Langensiepen, and Anastasiia Romanovna

The works contained within *Ruckus* are the artistic expressions of the individual members of the Literary Arts Program. This collection is not intended to be viewed as a statement about the views of Charts as a whole. Some readings and other content in this magazine may include topics that some readers may find triggering and/or traumatizing. We apologize for any content which may be viewed as offensive.

at play

By Samuel Griffith

like those wilting flowers in
your flowing blackberry hair,
my hands are stained with
the sweetness of your spirit
and the nectar of a honeysuckle
we split together, our dirty feet
and soaking clothes meaning nothing
compared to the life around,
the people i know to be true
and lazing turtles in the murky water
listening to the birds at play,
admiring the sun above,
I can't help but wonder
if they admire the flowers like we do

a fish shares a home with a worm
and a turtle shares a home with a bug
I'll hug all my friends so dear
as we dirty ourselves with the joy
of play, collecting rocks, exploring
and basking in the comfort
of a home shared by all.

our arms are woven together
like a spider's home is made.
our words belong to each other
like we spoke between fish foam.
i see the steel bridges, those
floating plastic bottles that run
down the stream, mimicking us,
relishing in their doom, a smoky
footprint left on the face of earth
that a single strand of silk could defeat.





Lina Morade, Stress, 2025, Digital Illustration, 2340px x 3508px

A Portrait of Transformative Loss

By Lila Dobrowolski

In the dimness of the sterile room, the air thick with the scent of hand sanitizer, I remember the way the light fell. Soft, almost golden, like an embrace from the sun that had forgotten the world outside. I was twelve, small and trembling, clutching the weight of a heart too big for my chest. Holding onto his hand felt like I was holding onto an entire world, rough but warm, the fingers like roots that had anchored me through storms, each line a story, each callus a lesson. I traced the map of his life with my fingertips, an explorer lost in love, as his mechanical heartbeat echoed in time with my own frantic pulse, a reminder that time was mortal enough to pass even me by. I wished for a spell that could pause the universe in that fragile, perfect second.

And then began the whispers of goodbyes, a symphony of soft cries from every corner of the claustrophobic room, a flutter of nurses descending upon us, their faces blurred, empty voids. I squeezed his hand tighter and my vision turned black in time with his own. The pulse of his life became an echo

that rang only for me as he left the room and belled his melody of love throughout the hospital, though his body laid in front of me, paralyzed in his lonesome little bed, surrounded by flowers and buttons. His quiet exit revealed to me the fragility of existence, the beauty of a fleeting touch, and the power of love that transcends the boundaries of time and space, and reaches for something deeper. As I allowed him to slip away, I let my tears fall onto his chest, each one a tribute, each one a promise that I would carry him with me so that his presence could scare any evil away from my human vessel for as long as I were to go without him.



Taboo to the 25th Degree

By Danica Dollenger

Being a woman in 2025 is the world's most
strangling game of "Taboo".
by god you have no rights
and by hell your life will be ripped from you.

We do not sit in the senate
or any place of congress
we sit in the house, with a broom and a butter
knife
smearing the mayo
of the world's most demanded sandwich.

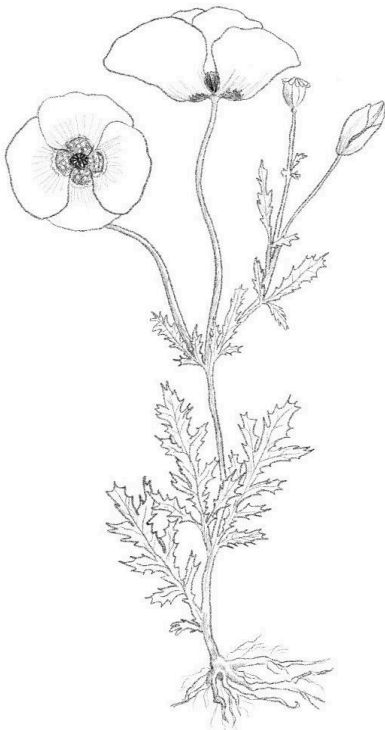
We wear aprons soaked in our own blood
and build lives upon lies.
Children forced into our uteri
only to die by the hands of a man
with a gun
exercising his second amendment right.

The Hunger Games, Harry Potter,
Catcher and the Rye, 1984,
This Book is Gay,
The Perks of being a Wallflower
Looking for Alaska, The Great Gatsby,
Fahrenheit 451, Speak.

They don't want us to speak.

Ban essays of thought, of knowledge, of
strength,
but SA is a man's right
and a woman's casual walk home at night.

We have a lovely home, dear,
one we bought with pennies
saved from cheaper gas.
Happiness evades us, no evades me,
because if all rich white men have rights
Why can't we?



Mantras for Travellers

By Bee Kanofsky

Taking in
One
Two
Three vials each day.
I find that the secret of happiness
Is loving life.
Three vials were in placebo
As I took the wheel and put a note in my hat.
I kept it in my mind.
I prayed with it,
Ate with it.
If I had enough time to travel this city
I'd go in loops
I'd go in loops
I'd go in loops
Seeing faces along the wall.
Faces of strangers and seeing different
fragments of
Memories in motion.
I found Sycamores in solitude and confidence
in confidence.
Dropping a walking cane for the sweet
embrace of the moment,
I said that the moon was the reflection of
dreams yet realized.

In the corner of the room I cried from tears.
From which I dripped into the three vials after
noon.

Tears of laughter.

Tears of a joke from a friend who made me
sore in the belly from a well-delivered
punchline

That cut to the chase.

In each moment I loved unconditionally, as I
continue to love unconditionally
I find warmth in an embrace placing my head
on their shoulder as I say,

“Gatcha!”

We ran around in circles

I shook my wrists in a fit of joy

Because who the hell cares?

One can depend on that for good blessings.

They’ll live.

They’ll curse.

They’ll die, becoming a shadow on the wall to
their own discontent.

But me? I keep my heart on my sleeve and a
message beneath my hat.

The same one I tip to the people in my
imagination while walking through halls.

The same one that greets the walking guard as
he buckles down for emotionless teenagers

This is walking along,

Walking ahead.
I look on my sleeve
I see a heart of red.
I look to the sun
With a message that said,
“If not live tomorrow, live today.”
Vials with liquid tears only take me as far as
the blocks of this city can wind,
My yearning heart will take me to somewhere
new.



ozymandias's lament

By Azrael El Shami

the grass outside my house does not bow
to the king of kings.
and the wind that's blowing through it
will one day forget my voice
and the candied words it carried.
my incorporeal hand brushes along the turf,
and i tear it from the ground for its insolence.

i stand here as a ghost,
a creature beyond the comprehension of life,
but the world doesn't seem to mind.
the animals remain thriving despite my
absence,
lacking the hole in their heart i hoped for them
to have.
the footsteps i once took with pride
get swept away in the desert sand.
covering my tracks
like i never existed in the first place.
the perfect crime.

my legs are planted on a highway's edge,
and the force of cars whizzing by
tangles my hair.

there is no familiarity in the eyes of those
driving,
and if they saw me staring back,
i'm sure they would say the same.
they will not cry at news of my death,
instead a somber
"i'm sorry for your loss."
they have no idea what they've lost.
my head falls to the asphalt
and gets ran over until my face is shattered
beyond recognition.

i do not see my silhouette in the clouds,
nor form in the waves,
nor name in the cobwebs,
nor face in the leaves.
i am not to be found in the memory of a single
soul.

i drop to my knees,
and my head falls once more,
and i punch at the ground,
but i leave no markings in the soil,
i only crack my fragile face further.
my memory does not exist.

the king of kings will be forgotten,
and that is the worst fate he could envision.

ozymandias cries,
but his tears are made of marble.



Bioluminescence / Scientific Terms I Can't Pronounce

By Ellen Connolly

The boiling convection cells of your
chromosphere—
carved columns of superheated plasma
supporting your many-layered temple
its spire extending skyward to you
though from where I stand
I can only see
the unlit, infinite, abyssal ceiling.
I wouldn't dare to call on you by name,
instead employing your oft-used nicknames;
the light, sol invictus, both father and sun.
I speak of you in vague terms,
wax poetic like a pair of melting wings.
Repeat the terminology I have been taught
though I can't pronounce it all correctly.

I am an animal in a bioluminescent state.
Luciferin and luciferase are reacting inside me
as you warned they would
if I left your warm embrace,
and all that I am able to create
is that artificial light.

But I have done well enough, I believe,
in the darkness.

My chemical reactions at work
within my alien anatomy—
always moving, always awake
aimless drifting through the near-darkness,
the two inches of ocean in front of my face
alight in the black ocean.

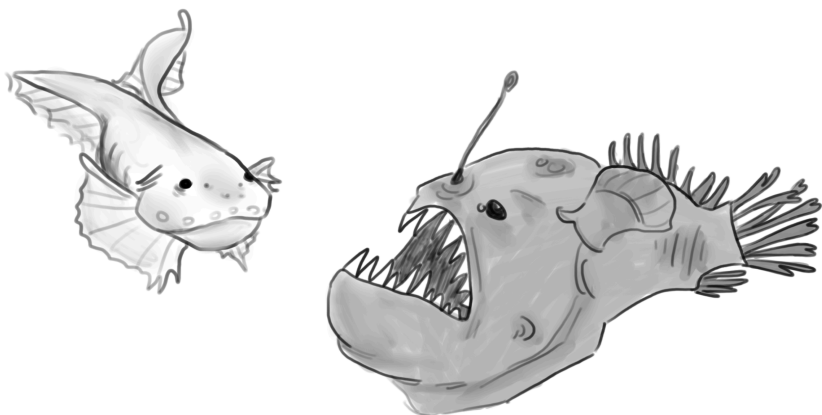
I do not fear you;
baking the air, boiling the sea.
But the only way you will find me
up there with you
is if you drag me from the deep
where I belong
where I have always resided.
Haul me to the surface
In your trawling net
my body bloating beyond recognition
My soft bones turned gelatinous.

It is not in spite of you I stay shining below,
in spite of you I make my own light.
It is your doing.
Because I know no better than to trust you—
knew no better—
and now you extend your thin golden fingers
tearing at my veil

claiming you seek only to free me.
Don't pretend you're any better
than the anglerfish you condemn for its false
light,
luring the unsuspecting fishes.

I have missed your glowing calling cards,
scattered about as they are.
Your rays of light cannot pierce my level of
ocean.
The deep sea envelops me with a force unlike
any other.
I am built like the viperfish,
the hatchetfish,
the blobfish.
My body is made for enormous pressure.

I'm not seeking any greater illumination
than what I make myself.





Olive Ferguson, *Todd*, 2025, Oil Paint and Embroidery, 40x40 Round

**For Those Who Wander Through Life
Wearing a Veil, Avoiding Compulsion**

By Alyse Gammons

We are never truly here,
instead waltzing with whispering thoughts of
“what if?”

and when we do become alive again, in
present tense,
our hands shift to pick at the little dignity we
have left.

Dignity defined in the texture of our canvas
skin,
painting a bloody picture that reeks of
infection,

wondering to ourselves if this is the last day for
us,
to breathe, to think, to walk another hour
wrapped

in a constant state of wandering contingency.
Contingence plaguing each action with three
repeated

steps. If not followed to a tee— *“Who’s to say
that this
river of thought is lying? Who’s to say that
uncertainty*

is not the dictator of my existence?” We check
the
locks four times, then six, and just in case,
seven more times.

We breathe in possibly poisonous air, and
consume contaminated
bites of blistering thought. The more we try to
heal,

the hotter the hot seat gets, and we start to
wonder if these
ruminations and this veil is all we’ll ever wear.
All we’ll ever be.

Glowing like a beacon through our streamlines,
is healing,
an idea on the tip of everyone’s tongue, a loop
of *“what if I could?”*

Beating it out of ourselves with scabby nail
beds, and dry flakey hands,
we try so hard to get these loops to shift in
direction. A *good* direction.

Every act of compulsion fuel to a fire of self
hatred,
yearning to say, "I feel more here than I've ever
been."



the results of being in love with an academic

By Maddie Hess

Thinking about being
Taken aback in hues of
Periwinkle and chartreuse and seeing

 Them lining your kitchen counter,
I had felt it before,
Known about it already —
 Summoned from solace into a
dimension
Of popcorn ceilings and missing tiles,
I was merely a fly on your wall.

//

(We whisper under our breath) as if retinas
Are littering the wallpaper
Instead of the uneven
 Book cases

With

- Fitzgerald and
- Hemingway
- And Austen

Coated in streamlined carpets of dust.

//

You ask me —

like “Why do you look at me
that?”

 “Why don’t you believe me?”
(The way I look when I feel left out)
(Because you laid in the same bed as her) (All
you ever talked about was her) (I was ignored,
by you) (I was alone, with you)
And we fire our language-tainted bullets at
each other all afternoon.

//

I try not to remember

 the only time I have ever
been loved like that —

At least, that’s what I convince myself that

 I am trying to do.

Seeing the scutigera coleoptrata crawling on
the hardwood,
 looking at me with its compound
eyes

And rewatching, and rewatching, hastily
searching for a delicacy—



i am not “woke” i’m tired

By Felix Murch

I am no longer
Enraged
Only jaded

A door off its hinges
I don’t shut all the way

My filter is clogged, water & sarcasm pour out
It drowns any progress

I am tired of being angry
Of being responsible
I am tired of caring

With every
Truck
Flag
And house
More hope drains
Pooling into apathy

I am tired of being a political argument
Issue
Weapon

The ones who promise to protect
Prove I am nothing more than a number

Parents
Friends
So confused, at fifteen
I don't desire to live till' fifty

But why would I, when everyday
I am wrung out of spur
Spur like a horse
Nothing to do but move forward
Faster
exhausted

Congratulations
You have smothered my flame
Suffocated my resistance
I have burnt out-



A

By Lillie Gensel

I don't know where my humanity was lost in all
these papers

I can't remember when I went from child to
scholar

I won't even tell you about the morning I woke
up

And realized I didn't care enough to get out of
bed

With all my adrenaline gone

My eyes taped open

I'm tired of justifying my existence

With a letter

I remember throwing my hand in the air

My hand reflection blurring in my teacher's
glasses

My enthusiasm echoed on her face

I remember when I was called bright and gifted

I was going to go places

So far,

The only place I've gone is the counselor's
office

To cry for the fifth time this week

The only bright thing is the fluorescent lights

And the only gift I've received is stress

wrapped in a pretty bow of a letter-grade
That A used to mean so much





Aaron Langensiepen *Untitled*, 2025, Digital Illustration, 1725px x 2550px

Is there a better word?

By Gianna Carbone

What is that word
When the world seems to
Turn in on itself?
Anxiety, I guess.
Is that really the best word for
Sleeping too much, but not sleeping at all.
Doing too much, but doing nothing at all.
Eating too much, but not eating enough.
Being present, but also drifting into this zone
when you feel like you are stranded in the
middle of the sea and you can't do anything
and you watch yourself get farther and farther
from the beach as the people having fun on
said beach just watch like nothing is
happening.

Is anxiety really the best word for that?

I should drink some water.
Take a break from the stress of life.
Go make a salad and breathe.
There's no need to stress, just calm down
You're too young to be stressed.
Oh, just wait until you get to the real world!
You don't even know the half of it!

Saying that doesn't really make the difference
you think it does.
If anything, it makes it worse.

I think it's time to stop.
Work needs to stop.
School needs to stop.
The whole world needs to stop spinning.
How would that happen, because it really
needs to happen.
Everyone just needs a break.
Or anxiety just needs to cease to exist.
I don't know which one would be better but
one needs to stop so the world can calm down
and everybody can have a break and just sit
down and make a damn salad or whatever
they want to make because not everyone likes
salad but we just need to stop.
The world needs to stop spinning
Or anxiety needs to cease to exist.

The Cat Queen's Address to Her Human Subjects

By Everet Smith

How can a cat be a queen? How can it sit upon a throne too large for its small frame? How can it strut around a castle in halls made for humans, the supposedly perfect tyrants? How can it refrain from crumbling under the weight of expensive silks and lavish jewels, under the weight of an entire kingdom?

To all of those questions, I ask another.

Have I ever failed you, my subjects, with my feline instincts? When your royals fell dead from plague, when you lost your spouses, your friends, and your children to the same horrid disease, it was I that led you into a new tomorrow. It was I who took your plights and woes upon my regal whiskers and mended what was broken in your lowly lives. It was I who kept our nation a hunter, rather than one of the hunted, when we were most vulnerable to bleed out and die on the ground.

So, yes, you must bow when I enter your atmosphere, when I grace it with my abandoned tufts of fur and leave them adrift in my majestic wake. In fact, collect my sheddings and keep them in jars, so that you

can look at strands of divinity when you go about your homes. Be grateful whenever they make you sneeze violently, and tremble when you pass them and their radiant softness.

Because who better to conquer an illness of rats than a cat?

My claws are swift and deadly. My bite is inescapable, with my teeth more damning than prison bars. My eyes can see threats shrouded in shadow as well as I can spot them in broad daylight. My body is agile and built for efficiently and fatally trapping my prey. And I always, always land on my feet. The rats that so easily took down your monarchy stand no chance against me and my kind.

And even if I wasn't so suited to wear a crown, it wouldn't matter. Us cats outnumber you now. We have taken seats at your tables, taken jobs at your places of work, and shaped your world to cater to our needs. There are more of us than there are of you since the Plague claimed so many of you humans, so you better learn to live with us, and become smart enough to know to keep the peace. The cats have risen, and they will not be going back down. So, please, tempt us all you'd like. Ridicule your queen, mock my fellow felines,

treat us as if we have no place in this world,
and see if you don't receive a few scratches.

I am a cat, and I am your Queen. It is about time you learned that those two incredible attributes are not mutually exclusive. It is my aim to raise our kingdom, our one true love, our glorious purpose, to a new level of greatness. But I cannot do that without all of my subjects, human and not. Despite the conflicts we have had in the past, I believe that we can all move forward and live in harmony. But for this to happen, for our kingdom to not only live on, but thrive, you must learn to believe in our conjoined futures, too.

So, as your Queen, I ask, "Do you love your kingdom? Love your people?"

"Then go forth, and embrace the mighty cats!"



Genesis

By Marcel Thornton

seventeen years ago, a pupae hatched from a
hole in a tree.

it climbed down that tree, and buried itself in
the ground.

the pharaoh cicada emerges after a
decade-and-then-some.

to truly live for the first time.

for about two weeks.

the age of some organisms is simply
incomprehensible.

to shove two ends of all of existence together.

if only to grasp that any animal-born in
1525—could still be alive today.

greenland sharks are blind, not born blind,
mind you.

but blinded over the years by worm-like
parasites that feed on their eyes.

it could spend five-hundred years in darkness.

never to know what a wonder it is.

prometheus was a bristlecone pine in wheeler
peak, nevada.

it was the oldest living thing, and nobody even
knew.

until it was felled.

prometheus was almost five-thousand years
old at that point.

five-thousand years ago, the human life
expectancy was forty years.

to shove two ends of all of existence together.

from tiktaalik to the newest infant.

nowadays, a person would live to about
seventy-nine, usually longer.

and are we so far from that non-mammal, with
its almost legs.

clawing its way up some cold shore.

in the beginning, before anything, before
everything.

the sea shimmered a dark red under a
blistering sun.

the primordial ooze was less of an immediate
genesis.

and more of a gentle stirring of silt on the
brand new ocean floor.

built off the decaying remains of meteors.

stardust and a chemical potluck, this is what
made us.

to shove two ends of all of existence together.

is to lose what defines us.

and what is lost, will not repeat itself.
because it trusts you to listen, and listen well.

seventeen years ago, a pupae hatched from a
hole in a tree.

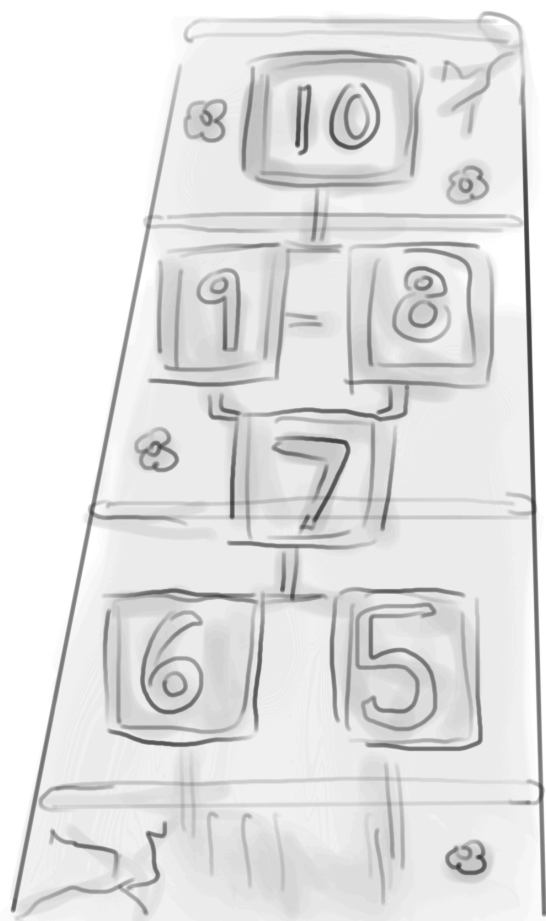


A Life Unlived

By Kelsey McIntyre

The attic of my mind,
dusty boxes line the walls,
each labeled with memories—
shadows of laughter, echoing in silence,
faded toys waiting for hands that never played.
I reach for a forgotten doll,
its glassy eyes hold stories kept
as the world outside spins forward
and I linger here, in the shadowed rooms,
haunted by a childhood never lived.
What is it like to climb trees?
To laugh till breath escapes like whispers?
Or share secrets with the wind—
the exhale of innocence veiled in confusion.
I stand on sidewalks where dreams were
drawn,
sidewalk chalk singing songs of tomorrow;
But where are the friends to scribble these
fantasies?
They slip through my fingers—phantoms of
hope.
my heart blooms with unwritten pages;
The past echoes, hollow
yet I chase them through sun-drenched
hallways,

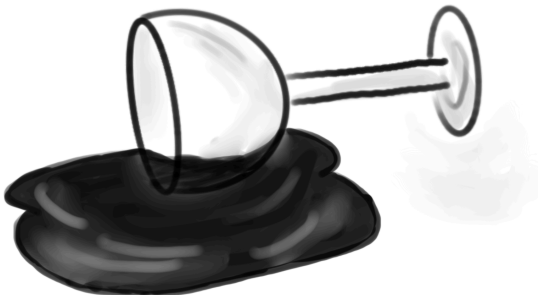
where history's ghosts pull me closer.
Do futures shimmer brighter than wishes?
Can shadows morph into light?
With each step toward open skies ahead—
a promise whispers.



Modern Society

By Lila Pieson

Firing off, the smoke covers the hills like a
burnt dinner.
Untouched is the hand that carries the wealth.
A lifeline.
Complacency reverberates through white
teeth,
Kneel for the kingdom of deceit.
Pigs devour humankind - festering, imperious
swine,
Oil partitioned on top of their wine.
Lies expertly spoken reflect malice within,
Infest their righteous melted-wax skin.
Target he who takes no blame, who's
Immorality has brought him to fame.
Corruption swarms from hollow mouths of
gods,
Infantile men who know not their laws.
Another attack toward those who defy,
Negligence acted in heavy supply,
Slimy and slithering, a smiling lie.



My Kaleidoscope, my everything

By Rayna LeBlanc

Her rays drew me in
An embrace so warm that it makes the air
around us sting

frost-and-nettles

She cradles me in soft-lipped words
So quiet they barely make my lashes twitch
As she touches my forehead with her own

A babbling water moats around us

Protective

Twinkling in her light

Too pure to touch

(Drink)

Yet she lifts it to her lips, the liquid dripping like
crystal honey from her fingers

Quenching

until the moat runs dry and a verdant field laps
before us

An ocean of wildflowers and chrysanthemums

Each step is a glance at the sky

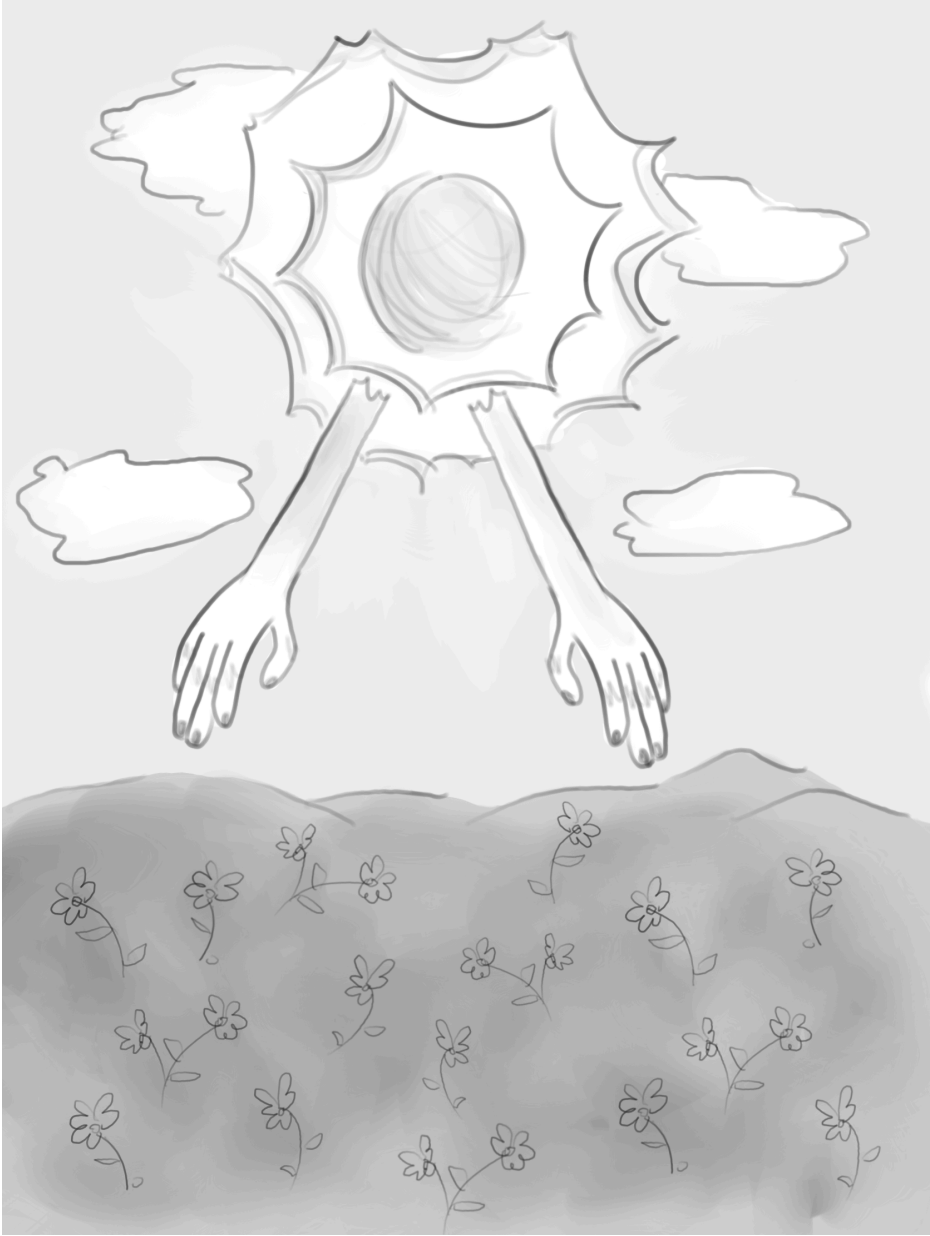
As she guides me with a golden palm

Reaching down and almost touching my
shoulder

Wincing

Her silence sinks in
And pulls me toward the truth

No matter how distant the Sun's touch is
how much she smolders-and-freckles my skin
how much her laughter seems to mock my
helpless adoration
No matter how much I long to watch her
without tears forming in my eyes
I realize I need her
I need her warmth
The wordless joy she feeds me
as she awakens from the cold
as she folds out into a vast glorious summer of
kaleidoscope light
Despite the pain
Despite everything
I still yearn
Just as everyone else must



Field of Reeds

By Sofia Schilling

The room was misty and dry. Like an ancient breath filled the room. The smell of ancient history filled every inch of the place. I walk in steadily. I came bearing gifts for my Mom. She lays in her spot. Every year on my poor mother's birthday, I open her crypt and visit her in her still place.

“مرحبا الأم - hello mother.”

I watched her closed tomb. She probably is shriveled up and dry in there. Cocooned in linen strips that preserve her body for longer. She was unstoppable. But nothing is immortal. I will take her spot on the throne. She has burdened me with a hopeful county. One that is known for its dunes, its gold, its queens, and its pharaohs. I'm next, I get the legacy. I will be carved into walls, my face will be painted on parchments. My name will be written down in books, my story will be weaved into baskets. They say I embody Thoth, they give me something so hard to live up to. They tell me I'm a god. I don't feel like one. I don't think I'm ready for this empire. This empire depends on my right decisions. Now that I have come of age, I will take power.

“أمي ماذا أفعل؟” - mother what shall I do?”

Gone too soon without a goodbye. I breathe. One long breath. When I smell the room, I convince myself that I can almost smell your dead flesh. It's been too long. She stays still in her quiet tomb. Resting in the afterlife. I wonder if she enjoys being buried with gold and nice trinkets. The way I remember, she was a woman of simple and elegant life. She ruled well, making the empire become wealthier under her watch.

فقط شاهدي يا أمي، سأجعلك فخورة. سأتغير وأجلب”
-المجد لمصر just watch mother, I will make you proud. I will change and bring glory to Egypt!”

I can do it. I know I can. I will live up to the image of Thoth. I will show them all that the son of Queen Nefertari was not a waste. She might have fallen, but from dust I will rise. I stand there ashamed. This was not supposed to be a time for me to share my troubles. This is a moment to my mother, that is amongst the fields of reeds. She runs along in Aaru. I have to respect this moment. I need to think of only her.

أتمنى لك الخير في صمتك. أعلم أنك وصلت إلى حقول”
القصبة الخاصة بك. أعلم أنك تنتظر إليّ إليّ م

بـاستخفاف- I wish you well in your silence. I know
you made it to your Fields of Reeds. I know
you look down upon me from your place.”

Now rest, mother. I will take your place.
I watch the dimly lit room. The flames dance
against the walls. Flickering and dancing
around the room. I smell the must. I breathe in
the moist walls. I notice the amount of weight
on the tomb. The heavy rocks that stick
together to enclose the body. I sit. I breathe
deeply one more time.

“لديك حزني- you have my sorrow.”

I stand, placing my dried up bouquet on
her tomb. I stride to the spot of the torch. I
take one deep breath and blow it out.





Anastasiia Romanovna, *The Last Offering*, 2024, Oil on Canvas and Silicone, 49 x 44 Inches

Elegy for ye' Heartbroken

O'er the mountains to the west

By Eclipse McKissick

Can you feel your breath
As it makes misty, obscuring
Clouds in the air. When the

Sun goes down to the shore of
The sea, seeing the painted silhouette
Of wild horses running alone, who are
Freed to be at no mercy but the wind.

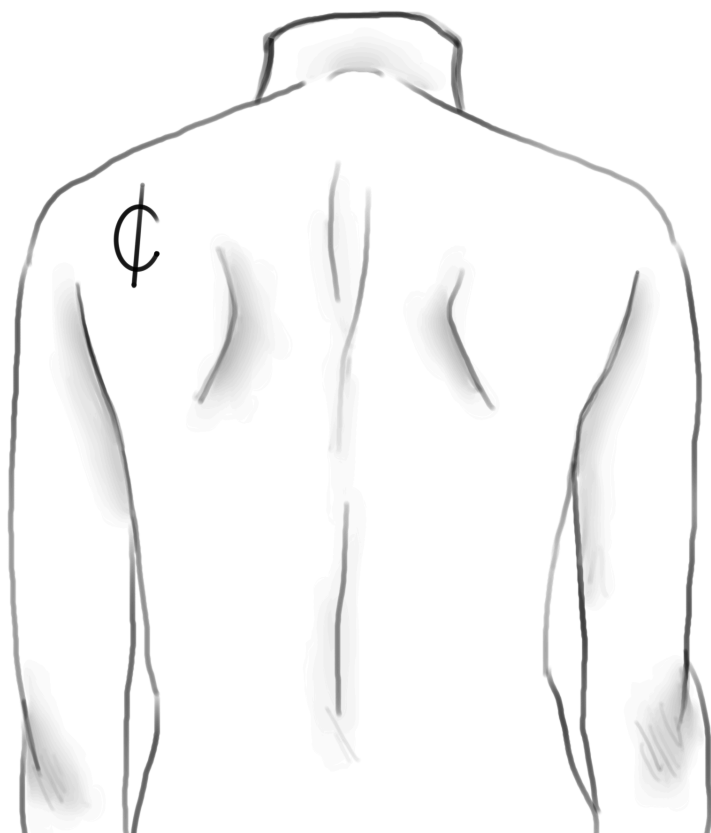
We are so cold. So numbed by the
Frost of mourning that has seeped into the
Blood of our veins. So we will

Put on a mask of radiant pleasure. In hopes
That we will one day be that which we wear
Until our face begins to drip and become
Soaked with a nervous sweat and tears of
Regret.

A signature is burned on my back. A little letter
With two lines inside it. That means the mask
Is not mine, but yours

To keep and to wear and to one day destroy in
A fit of self destructive rage. Until then, I will
feel

The warmth of my breath against the shell of
Your porcelain face that you leave with me,
and try to live.



Tale of the Sickness

By Keira Steele-Hause

The crescent moon: dusted around the corners
with clouds.

Above the inky blue waters, the bed was made
with grass and reeds.

Her twisted black-tipped fingers clawing soil.
Caked at the nails, blood oozing from her
mouth.

Wailing into the night, she took herself into the
waters,

Collapsing into its cold, dead embrace.

Drenched in frost, a chill that chipped away
bone.

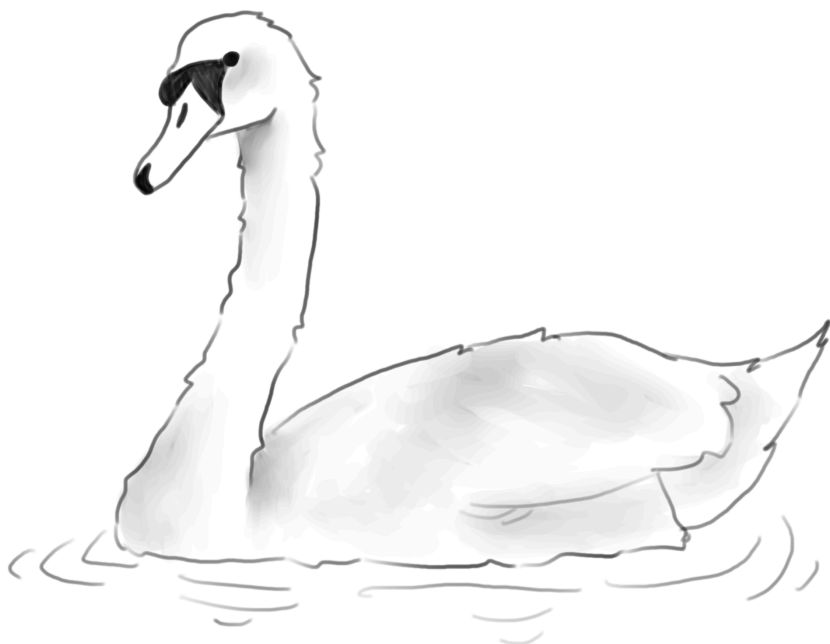
Water seeped into her brain as she rose from
it.

A swan glided seamlessly over the river.

With a helpless frog clamped in its mouth,

It paid no mind to her as she laid her head on
the river's floor again.

How willing it was
Not to look into her eyes and see it.
Not to gaze just once at her blood-ridden
mouth,
Or her dirt-caked nails.
Perhaps if it had, she wouldn't be sleeping at
the bottom.



You must be present

By Haven Simmons

I say to myself when all the stuffy thoughts
(like ones about death) (ones about my future)
(I wonder if I'll be a successful poet in the
future?)

(ones about whether I need a therapist or
not...)
invade me. (but who is me?)
Grounding techniques, I'm getting lost again!

Let me trick my brain into saying, *five sights*,
(what if I suddenly go blind?)
four sounds, (these people are too loud) *you're
good at this!*

So then, society says, *three things you can
touch, two scents*,
all better! (like they're putting on a bandaid)-

Validation that I have not yet succumbed
to the hurt (to the realization I need help).

It's true that the weight of my thoughts (my
flaws)
(my flaws) (so many flaws) don't crush me
(what if the ceiling falls down right now and
crushes me?)

like others but sometimes they like to
overstay their welcome. (I'll never go away)

They're here right now as I'm writing this poem
(stop writing this, you'll never be Jose
Olivarez.)

I'm not him, I'm me (but who is me?)
Ugh, over and over these thoughts race
through my head

they consume (I consume), they consume (I
consume)
They consume the pages that are my mind

and I can act like grounding exercises
and denial (isolation) (lying) (putting on a happy
face) make me feel fine but-

One thing you taste!
One thing you taste! society says.

Society begs me to not be like the others.

*Please, just brew yourself some tea,
take a few breaths, name something you taste!*

Fine. I taste...(the polluted air that'll make me
sick so then I'll need a shot.) (I hate shots.)
(my own saliva) (who is me?)
(the food stuck between my teeth that are
causing a cavity as I speak right now.)

See? Look what you did!

These techniques were never grounding (the
ground is gonna collapse below me).

I can't be present when– (just end this poem
you're gonna go into an anxiety spiral!)

(but I guess I already have...now I'm lost in
these thoughts again...How am I supposed to
be grounded when the world doesn't help in
the stressful moments? How can just doing
menial exercises get rid of overpowering
feelings? I'm tired of telling myself *You must be
present!* Society has made it impossible to be
present...)

(I am too consumed to carry on.)

(This poem is over now...leave me alone.)

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FOR THE **ARTS**

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The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts provides a unique environment that fosters a creative academic approach to learning and a development of talent in the arts. Built upon passion, discipline and a commitment to excellence, this integrative educational experience inspires all students to believe in themselves and what they can accomplish.