

# **RUCKUS** *Spring 2023*

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

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# RUCKUS

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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.

# The Incandescence of Death

by Myah Planten

Dilapidated dandelions flit through my  
fingers,  
Their Chaos  
    contained in pollinated buds –  
    Drifting through the torn shreds of lost  
winds,  
Swindled thread  
    pulled  
    apart,  
Cradled by spindly branches,  
    Where the  
  
    Moon  
  
    sits among an arid pool  
Of  
    glass.  
  
It's familiar – the way  
    Dirt,  
    Clings to the soles of my feet,  
The tepid  
    dryness of the horizon, the sun  
Struggling,

To reach over the mercurial silhouette of  
home wrapped in

Flames.

On the arch an absence of life,  
Barrenness of concrete cold and biting,  
lost.

A filthy cognizance spread over  
egregious land,  
Like the brush of  
snow

over severed, sandy roof tiles.

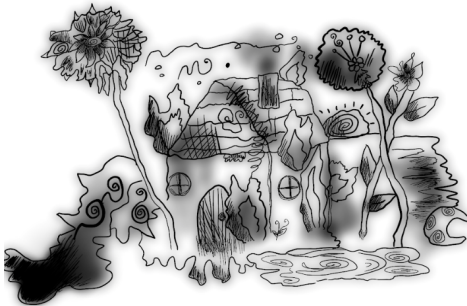
A susurrant of life carried in the  
hands–

Worn smooth,

Worn down,

A soft, motley enclosure –

Pressed flat between sanctimonious  
Palms.



## Caress the Fire

by Maddie Hess

Not every amazing day has to be some extravagant exhibit of emotion. Sometimes your day starts off bland, bare. But, sometimes you wake up with the company of soft bed sheets and the thoughts of someone beside you. Your arm is mildly damp with a midnight sweat, and you're plagued with the momentary worry that this arm wrapped around her torso dampened her smooth nightshirt. The lavender perfume you sprayed for good sleep still litters corners of your room, wrapping its aroma around bookcases and soft lanterns with the images of flowers on its luminescent paper. I glow like said lanterns when she echoes my good morning. The sound of her voice is bright enough to light up this somewhat dark room, sounding the same as a soft violin cascading through a bakery window. She is gentle. The feeling of her hand brushing against the side of my face makes me melt. She glows in the warm yet faint morning light - it sticks to her freckles and oozes like warm honey throughout her auburn hair. Waking up isn't usually an extravagant exhibit, but it is with her. We place our fingers through each other's

hands and step out into a warmly lit room, preparing pancakes and listening to her voice sing songs about intimacy and longing. The spread on the table is a work of art in itself, drizzled with syrup that takes off the autumn chilliness in a way that is both delicate and brutal. The weather is bitter, but that never stops us from a short swim in the spring behind her house. For now, we devour this pancake, bathe in the scent of citrus and look at each other like we are fiction and will wake up from a dream, because she is too good to be true. Sometimes I feel like her hands are an ocean, smoothing out my jagged brain into a desirable shell and placing me in the temperate summer sun.

But how can I be warm without her?

Even when we finish breakfast, even when the taste of citrus has escaped my mouth, even when we rush to the spring and bathe in the coldest water I've ever let my skin bear the brunt of, I feel warm. Maybe it's warmth from the blushing of my face, the redness crawling into me like a rainbow colored parasite. That must be it.

Finding out the cause of this warmth isn't an extravagant exhibit, though. For now, I just want to see her shoulders covered by wet and

wavy hair, flower petals falling from her braids and decorating the pool. When I'm with her, everything is rose-colored. Yes, even the silvery utensils used to make ourselves dinner as a song by a woman with a sultry voice sings behind us. Yes, all I need out of a perfect day is my lips meeting her cheek. Yes, I am stupid. I know that already.

It's not stupid when I swim in the moonlight to reach her, wrap my arms around her in such a way that she relaxes within a few short seconds, melts into me. I can feel my heart soar.

Yes, she is perfect. Yes, I am cursed with naivety. It's what makes me special.

## **The Goddess**

by Greyson Del Priore Faltz

Her fingertips are dipped in ink,  
Red like blood,  
Dripping onto this page,  
Dripping into my mind,  
Rewriting every thought,  
Every feeling,  
With the touch of her wet  
Fingertips  
She smells like saffron and roses,  
Flower petals flitting from ear to ear,  
Gold studs all over her face,  
Framing her nose,  
Her eyes,  
Her mouth  
Her eyes are the color of gold,  
Glinting under her brown frames,  
White teeth shining whenever she smiles,  
Glimmering upon her face  
Like a true goddess  
Allow me to worship you,  
Allow me to wrap my whole being around your  
beauty  
Allow me to be yours



## **Salt**

by Rayna LeBlanc

The sea salt grinds through my molars  
My toothy machinery works around the  
crunchy bits of the bitter crystal  
I am drowning  
The salt drowns with me, engulfing my  
buck-teethed cave  
The water isn't refreshing but it's cold  
It's surrounding my body, with no mercy for  
my esophagus, my lungs, my stomach  
Its sour taste leaves me sick  
Bubbles of what would be breath escaping my  
parched lips  
My hands desperately reach for the surface  
For sunlight  
For air  
For land  
For life  
I swallow my last cup of salt

## Ghost Girl

by Everet Smith

The red splotch on May's barely-inhabited glass were either remnants of lipstick or blood. Either way, she didn't really care. Her line of work often required a splatter of iron on her teeth, and she had gotten used to it.

She swirled the glass's remaining liquid next to her gun, the sleek modernist lamp of her hotel room giving it a golden glint. She frowned, and looked at the red again. She took back what she'd previously thought. She hoped it was blood. Her lipstick was expensive, and made her feel so. In a way, she was. Assassins charged a pretty penny for their services, and she was no different. While she found what people were willing to pay for her services laughable (murder was not a difficult profession), she relished in what it could do for her, from the diamond necklace around her neck to the beach house she'd bought in the spring.

Her frown disappeared along with the last sip of her drink, as she thought about that pretty white house. She'd spent her twenties passing by it and its smooth wooden exterior

in her used Volvo, back when she reeked of incense and carried tarot cards instead of spare bullets. Yes, that property was enough to assure her of her life decisions. And when all was said and done, a penniless psychic to a killer in a cocktail dress was quite a promotion. Not that she had been a fake. She had sensed spirits, heard the cryptic voices (always rhyming, for whatever reason) of the dearly departed and the damned. She had not heard them since she had traded a crystal ball for a polished set of grenades. Just another perk of her new job.

The lights flickered. May shook, grabbing her gun and putting her finger on the trigger in one swift movement. She soon realized it was for nothing; She was only accompanied by the buzz of the minifridge and her own breath.

She slumped in her chair and dropped her gun on the table. What a waste of reflexes.

The lights had flickered like that, usually before going out for an undetermined amount of time, when she'd been a psychic, living in an apartment two floors above the dumpster. The landlord liked to punish her consistently late rent by turning off the power without warning. May remembered her mother when

the world went dark, not moving except for a narrowing of the eyes and a stream of taunts pouring from her mouth and into May's young brain.

“Ghost girl,” her mother had sneered.

“Will your spirits turn the power back on?”

“No,” May would whisper, her head hung. But that would not appease her mother. In the hours of darkness she'd yell, “Will they? WILL THEY?” May would hold back tears, because despite all she'd done for them, she knew the spirits would not.

May scowled, attempting to banish all thought of it from her mind. She hadn't needed the spirits to save her. She had saved herself, and now she had all she'd ever dreamed of. With the beach house in mind, she hoped that the early grave she'd put her mother in was cold.

The lights flickered again. May nearly threw her chair as she stormed up to the light switch and slapped it off, shrouding the room in the pitch-blackness of the night. It was unnerving to see the furniture morph into unknown edges and curves, but it was far preferable to her trip down memory lane. The adrenaline from her latest job now purged from her veins, May marched over to the bed,

focusing on the pristine white quilt that she could now afford.

*Ghost girl, ghost girl, full of sin.*

May froze. Her eyes, on instinct, darted around the room, but she was the only living thing inside. That knowledge made her blood run cold, because she knew the voice. It had not lost its jagged edge that had remained even in a final scream.

*Ghost girl, ghost girl, let me in.*

On, off, on, off went the lights, slow at first, then evolving to flashing chaos. May turned around, bracing herself for an undead attack. When her mother did not pounce, May dared a sprint to her weapon.

*Ghost girl, ghost girl, six feet under  
Was where I remained until gun's  
thunder.*

The door rattled as May fumbled her gun. She managed to get a grasp on it while staring at the door, but not before knocking her glass off the table and causing it to break at her feet. A string of pleading “no’s” came from her lips.

*One by one, you took our breath  
Bled by your hand, bringer of death*

It was a chorus now. All different voices, yet horrifyingly familiar. The lawyer with the

greased-back hair. The billionaire who'd bought her a drink at the auction. The accountant who had cried "Please! I have a family!" Each and every one of them, her victims. She hadn't realized there were so many.

The door began to crack, long splinters reaching for her. May yelled as she fired her gun at the force of whispers, their chants pounding against her skull. Her "no"s became pleas for help for the spirits she had long lost hope in.

*Ghost girl, ghost girl, say goodbye to dawn.*

The door burst open, falling onto the floor into shattered fragments. A nearby hotel staff member heard a loud "HELP!" coming from May's room, then a guttural scream. Whoever she'd yelled for had not come.

*Ghost girl, ghost girl, now you're gone.*

# Swallowed

By Alyse Gammons

Temples smash,  
Skin-to-skin,  
My brother by blood,  
Betrayal of kin,

Jealousy consumes,  
Muscles turn rotten,  
Organs decay,  
Throat of cotton,

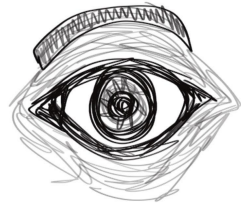
Flickering from moonlight,  
Dressing the flame,  
Silver and crimson,

'Regrets?'  
No shame.

Fix me,  
my,

Broken porcelain,  
Heart of stone,  
Pupils piercing,

Ocean's ode,



Blue as opal,  
Cracked beneath,

Sing me,  
A lullaby,  
Darkness creeps,

Over the shoulder,  
Into my lungs,  
Drown former mistakes,

Of morals strung.

Built like castles,  
Tall and mighty,  
Bite my lip,

All hail the lightning.



## **New Name**

by Zoe Lachter

I ate the fruit you grew for me  
With red stains dripping down my chin  
My name a blossom from the seed  
Planted by scarred hands

I drank what pooled around my feet  
And drowned in easy pale skin sin  
The murky water tasted sweet  
Of what he understands

The air turned into something thin  
That slipped so silky through my lungs  
My flesh became the oxygen  
So as to be what you could breathe

There was a day I climbed that tree  
The fruit of my old name low hung  
Her limbs ached at how heavily  
My new-named weight scraped through the  
leaves

## Recollections of a Bug Jar

by Marlow Kemp

Feeling like some storybook giant, I studied the ant on my index finger. It was nearly the size of my nail, and the three bumps that made up its back shone burgundy in the falling sunlight. It was just as curious as I was, sniffing at each line and speck of dirt on my finger, cautiously eyeing me and bracing for my next move. But I wasn't interested in hurting my new companion, rather wanting to study its size and compare it to my own. I've never felt so large, so in control. I leaned back and looked up into the dark oak branches above me. Should I put the insect on one, see if it possessed the ability to make its way back down? Or I find my way to the nearby stream and test its swimming skills.

These thoughts were interrupted by the shaking of leaves and contagious giggling of my best friend, Malachi, who tumbled out from under a bush, mouth covered in mud and little green stems. My family never really liked him, saying a six year old shouldn't have a bright green mohawk and that he was always getting me into trouble. That didn't matter, though. I thought the mohawk was cool, and he would

get into trouble regardless, I was just here to get him out of it.

Malachi stuck his grimed up thumb over his shoulder, “I found more clovers near the sick-of-more tree, you need to check it out.” He looked down at me and noticed the ant, who had now made its way to the center of my palm. He grabbed it and held it inches away from his eye.

“Oh, cool!” He toothlessly grinned as he took the bug’s face between his fingers and yanked. I watched as its head ripped away from the base of its neck and flew out of Malachi’s hand, landing in the short grass. We both dived to it, nearly smashing our foreheads into one another, watching, enthralled, as the disembodied head moved around still. My eyes widened as its pincers clicked, antennas whipped frantically, and shiny eyes whirled around in their sockets.

The sun nestled itself down under the trees, and the patch of woods we’d sat in for hours had grown far too dark to see any more ants or clovers. We made our way out of the line of oaks and pines to the tan colored ranch house where Malachi lived. A large bonfire sat in the front lawn, scorching bits of grass and shooting ashen cardboard pieces into the

night sky. Malachi's dad, a man with an even sharper and brighter mohawk than his son's, offered me a seat and two marshmallows. I declined, noting how it was getting late, and that my dad would probably want me home soon. They waved me goodnight, and I waddled down the hill the house was perched upon, soon finding the dimly lit sidewalk at the base. The walk to my house was quite long, but I enjoyed the silence, especially at this time of night. Very few cars whizzed by, and I liked watching the dim neon lights from the surrounding shops dance with the street lamps. I walked past an old McDonalds, one with yellow-planked walls and a brightly colored jungle gym. I saw a ghost there once, at the top of the slide. My sister believed me, but the rest of the family was upset that I'd "make up" such an unholy thing. When I insisted that I knew what I saw, my dad slapped me upside the forehead and called me a name I can't repeat. I'd get hit harder if I did.

I opened the door of the weathered town house at the end of Carson Street. Its hinges yelped at the touch of my hands, scolding me to give them a wash. I walked down the black hallway, avoiding discarded tin cans and pizza boxes, and turned into the

living room. I bathed in the light and static from the TV my dad had neglected. He was centerstage, sleeping on the leather recliner and a pile of empty bottles, snoring like a freight train. I poked his shoulder. He squirmed, fluttered his eyes in my direction, burped with a full body shake, then turned the other way and fell back into a coma. A typical night.

I made my way up to the attic where my sister, Cami, and I slept. The air was thick with a damp must, but the room was cozy; plastic X-men and porcelain dolls lined the floorboards, strings of fairy lights wrapped around each wall like cobwebs, and posters of cartoon characters smiled down at the two twin beds. Cami sat on one, her buck-toothed smile and rosy cheeks poking through a mess of unbrushed hair. Held between painted nails was a glowing mason jar, pregnant with lightning bugs and white moths and spotted beetles and a single yellow dragonfly. That jar was our prized possession, the culmination of all our hard work that summer. Hours spent in the golden heat collecting creatures under stones and riverbeds paid off, and now the glass was overflowing with laced wings and stingers.

Cami held the jar in front of my face, allowing me to see the little crawlers mingle and squirm.

“Can we? Can we? Can we!?” She asked, rocking back forth with anticipation. I nodded, of course, and plopped myself down on the bed, laughing at her gleeful squeals. I grabbed the jar, and she threw open the bedside window, letting a pleasant mugginess in. I held the bottom of the jar, and she rested a little hand on the lid. I promised I’d let her open it this time. We stuck the jar out the window, and I motioned for her to count us down.

“One...,” she began.

“Two...,” I continued.

“Three!” She ripped off the lid, accidentally launching it into the grass far below. Nothing happened at first, and we waited. Seconds later, like a firework of many legs and wings, the bugs shoot out, treating the jar’s lip like an emergency exit. The sky erupted in a chorus of low buzzes and leathery flaps, and the moon light was sweetly partnered up with bright fireflies. I looked at her. Her eyes were larger than usual and sparkled in the reflection. Her smile was bigger too, and she giggled endlessly. She

was happy, and I was happy. For the last time,  
for a long time, I was happy. Yet, nothing could  
prepare me for what I would wake up to.

## Untitled

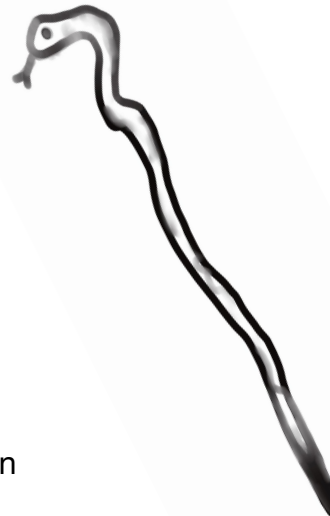
by Parker Frank

Silver rings  
Black candles  
Red, running through my palms  
The door stays open  
Seven burn scars  
Lines of stardust on the mirror

Silent threat  
Cobra fangs drip venom  
Gnashing teeth, clicking bones  
Snake gods, scaled altars  
Silver tongues  
Chew the metal off a microphone

Narcissus reborn  
Pools of liquid mercury  
Pearl handled switchblades  
Amber brown eyes, plucked and eaten

Claw marks into drywall  
Blood dripped onto coffee brown tile  
Kiss the rifle, kiss the revolver  
Kiss the ground  
You are lucky





My crucifixion was not a cross, but a bathtub  
Risen again and still no closer to god

## **Divine Attribution**

by Regine Henry

I am the voice that feeds music into deaf ears,  
I save my tears for fears I let myself own.  
I sing hymns as I sew the wings onto seraphim  
I rule dominion over dominations,  
I am of the highest order.

I am the lullaby that soothes the sullen and  
weary,  
weaving a silk duvet  
of phosphenes beneath their eyelids,  
leaving a touch  
of fever upon the soft of their lips.  
Rosy cheeked cherubim answer to me,  
too cozy upon their soporific whims to feel  
the grim weight of the world.

I hold the knowledge of god.  
Dreams of earthly pleasures flow  
from my fingertips and slow throes  
of love leak from my eyes.  
My body is an ethereal horror,  
too unearthly to be seen,  
impossible to demean  
I am holy holy holy.

## Untitled

by Amya Torres

Sticky August nights  
That were too hot  
Even for little jean shorts

A Backyard  
Hidden with overgrown vines  
A pool with  
few leaves swirling around  
As summer began to abandon us

Treading over the dried up grass  
Dodging the irrelevant supplies  
That only serves as a memory  
For the fun summer endured

Ducking beneath the brightly lit  
Windows  
As your mom prepared dinner  
The sneaky situation  
Brought me amusement  
That I yearned for my entire life

Sometimes I wish time travel  
Would have been a successful discovery

I'd go back to those  
Evenings where laughter filled the silence  
And sparkles filled our eyes

Then it was innocent  
Anything seemed possible  
Beneath the tall apple tree  
That covered the front corner  
Of your house

## **A Mother's Home**

by Liani Vargas

“I wish to see the heavens above.”  
Feel the pure sludge seeping into my toes.  
My body, rooting into soothing mud.  
“Become a creation of mother earth”  
A whisper lullaby said to me.  
Beauty blooming from, slits of my skin.  
Honey filled lilies form inside me.  
Rip and grow out of what's left.  
“I ask upon the heavens, to be a lily tree.”  
All pure, nothing rotten.

*“Wake up.”*

A gassed grumble said to me.  
Lost, searching for the ones before me.  
Mother earth is no longer found.  
Economy flowers, weathering away.  
Black liquor forms out of my throat.  
Gasping on thinning air around me.  
Sweet smell of toxic fumes.  
Clouds fogging my form of thought.  
A Storm rumples out from above.  
Raining acid falls.  
Hollow cries, from the angels above.  
Crying.

And crying.

And crying.

Whimpering in silent pain.



## **Winter's Silence**

by Dove Rogers

Face flushed—the wind breathing across my  
cheeks

Thrusting cool air over my skin

Cherry lips as if kissed by the snow

The night is still—blizzard pulsing lightly  
around

In the hush of night, we are the only sound

## Ode to Wegmans

by David Fadem

All of your lasts are nows,  
Recording over each other  
As the tape whirs within.

Awash in the tide of a  
volcanic gust from beneath,  
kaleidoscopic hearths melting  
snow in the lamplight.  
Crost the threshold, a world  
unfolds the doughy-thick scent of  
creation and yeast.  
Wind kneading the pastures.

You point at a seasonal display.  
Advent calendars are stacked, neat,  
Waiting to be undone.

The grand tracks endlessly spill out  
past faux windows glowing  
with light from my childhood room.  
Over the tender greens to be sliced  
on the backstroke, between cuts:  
the seasons in berries and baked goods



a looping waltz of shifting end caps.

How the homesteaders would lick the  
wind

To tell if it's autumn,  
You know it when the witch-fingers  
grow ripe.

# We Had Stars On Our Hearts

by Bee Kanosky

Hands planted the tree into the icy pit,  
Barely bigger than its roots.  
We had stars on our hearts.  
Like daffodil blossoms sprouting  
In endless rows of grey and white.  
All on a bright morning,  
When the sun reached its peak.  
Our hollow eyes reflected dreams  
Planted for a new life that would never grow,  
Planted to start life anew.  
We looked at the sapling — Our souls split  
with joy and fear.  
Even with men in steel helmets and iron-cold  
stares,  
We could find happiness in our own world;  
Our ashes will fall onto this soil.  
Blanketing the roots with warmth,  
Ashes of innocent dreams, and yellow stars.



## Strength

by Addyson Csordas

8, infinity laced through tower tops  
as you have to listen to yours sister's boyfriend  
rant  
about trickle down economics  
and you smile with the face of womanhood  
I knows dancing upon your irises  
as he cries "not fair, not fair, not fair"  
disrupting the sweet taste of cayenne  
that returns your breath to its usual pace of  
rage  
you've spent decades wishing better for her  
desperately attempting to sped snows pace  
so your footsteps no longer remain a path  
it was to no avail  
she wears your face now  
dressed up in hand me down expressions  
in lineage drench sighs and settling  
you hope at least she finds the strength to  
leave him  
grappling with how he could lose a beauty  
such as her  
and you'll beg her in the bathroom to see his  
worth

which is a mere glint of coin  
compared to a vast sea of diamond which she  
poses  
glittering in company of peonies and faith  
she will stare blankly back  
wishing to go back to the times you found  
shelter in your bedroom  
with locked doors and close hugs  
to protect you from the harsh voices outside  
but now you are harvested versions of those  
girls  
and you must face the man who pretends to  
understand  
all the things that haunt her  
swallowing the cayenne on your tongue  
and trusting pinkie promises to settle you

## Unspoken Words, and Silence

by Bryanna Tavarez

It doesn't matter where I am,  
who I am with,  
or who I will be  
I run out of breath  
everytime I speak.  
I know you're not there;  
But I can still feel your  
presence in the  
indent of my dark room.  
Your eyes meet mine, it  
stings,  
And although I want to  
scream  
I cannot.  
Instead I choke;  
leaving unsaid words  
scattered across  
my sheets.

You are constantly there,  
gnawing on the innards of  
my unkempt brain.  
Leaving me unable to function,  
process,



THINK STRAIGHT.

Alone or not.

Your touch will always be there.

Ultimately, it may dissipate, perish,  
cease to exist...

But until that day comes;

and I'm still here, breathing, blood pumping.

I will wave you hello

while you watch me;

never knowing

unspoken words.

## Divinity in Ego

by Sea Gallus

You don't know me.

You don't know me.

*Maybe you didn't hear me*

You don't know me.

because I am unknowable:  
    much like the universe,  
transcendental dimensions  
– and you: much like the earliest existentialists,  
Your organic mind cannot wrap itself  
    around  
me; infinity

Stars consuming, galaxies birthed and decayed,  
celestial evolutions and magnificence  
you are so little, so *minuscule* beside me.  
    Lightless, glowing, expanding, contracting,  
    folding into  
myself like a cosmic origami  
– too utterly priceless for a man's hands to harbor  
Vortex: swallow, life: devour  
(the greed your





Mistaken for the sun, don't open your eyes to  
me too

long

I breathe the light your days are devoid of  
and taste

your observations and spit them out as  
dirt and rot, and so when your hands are  
clapsed in prayer, I remind you not of worship  
but of devotion

Men's reverence runs dry for beauty, someday  
and

if I were to care, maybe,  
my fire would burn lower

But I do not.

*I simply don't care.*

and so I am ablaze

Because you do not know me.

your grasp has slipped from the chance to ever  
comprehend

my beginning, my end

I am engulfing, I am chemical

I am old, old hymns of admiration

I am the sea churning blue

And when ancestral praises echo from the grave

Of women who gave and gave and

gave

Their words are for me

And *never* for you.

Do you think you know me now?

## Snowless Winter

by B.F.

is the wheezing sigh of a  
dying body.

the leaves and stalks are rotting early  
because desert sunshine in north's December  
beat down our backs, and we were too  
careless  
to consider that it'd all burn up.



## Soap

by Lina Whitaker

the day i was awoken from  
the nightmare of  
never-ending  
tired eyes studied

a cemetery next to  
a baseball field next to  
another cemetery next to  
three abandoned houses  
something's once lived,  
some things once lived.

the night i awoke from  
the dream of  
daytime,  
vacant eyes fell to

a round rainbow right  
there in the meeting of  
the nose and the orbit  
is she smiling at me?  
i blinked and the water  
washed her away.

i find myself fearing

she may be gone for good,  
a feeling that won't fade  
if i just wash it with soap.

## Hide and Seek

By Theodore Veluz

It couldn't have been past noon, but the forest seemed dark. The tree branches stretched huge canopies that blocked out the sunlight. I loved the quietness of the woods. For hours I listened to the hum of the bees and cicadas and the rush of wind through the trees. I made it into a game. I would try to be as quiet as possible, and to change nothing. I was simply an observer, existed only to see and listen, never to disturb. When I tip-toed through the forest, I often would see wild animals. I saw a little bit of everything during my walks. Blue jays and robins, rabbits, mice, raccoons, and opossums, but more than anything else I saw deer. They were always my favorite to watch.

They walked so gracefully with their long legs. The bucks had majestic crowns of antlers and could jump over a five-foot fence effortlessly.

There was a special kind of magic the deer had that I couldn't help but be captivated by.



I reached the creek sometime in the early afternoon. I took my shoes and socks off and walked barefoot over the smooth river rocks. The cool water bubbled over my toes and felt fantastic in the summer heat. I tipped over heavy rocks and caught the crayfish that lurked underneath. They were slimy and slipped from my grubby hands, swimming away in the cover of silt. After playing in the creek, I sat down to eat the sandwich I had brought. I rested on a rock near the river and ate.

At first, I didn't notice anything, too busy licking the crumbs off my fingers. But suddenly, I was struck by the quiet. The creek still bubbled over the rocks, but it seemed... muffled. I could not hear the animals rustling in the brush. The birds were not singing. The background hum of the bugs and wind was gone. My world was too quiet. I felt unusually uneasy, a stark change from the calm the forest typically brought me.

That was when the deer peeked its head out of the bushes.

Hidden in the shadows, I couldn't get a clear view of the thing. I felt frozen. Like I was playing my game and if I so much as breathed, that was game over. It slowly crept out of

the foliage. It's fur? I'm not sure if that is the right word. It was dark. Not the light brown of every other deer I have ever seen. The first thing that popped into my head was that it looked like coal dust. The color was so dark it seemed to suck up all the light around it. The proportions were... odd. Deer are already strange, but this one's gait was not right somehow. Sort of like its joints bent backward, twisting like branches. When it saw me, it did not freeze and run like I had come to expect. It just looked at me with eyes that were so dark and deep I could not see where they ended and its face began. I got a dreadful feeling that I was the one being watched, not the other way around. It was playing my game, and I was losing.



## **A Dog Howling on A Moonlit Night**

by Jesse Graham

Years become seconds

Moments, now memories

A Dog howling on a moonlit night

Gold turn silver

Fur starts falling

A Dog whimpering on a moonlit night

Walks in the winter so wondrous and wild

Walks in the summer so playful with joy

Walks in the spring when her birthday falls

Walks in the fall when the leaves start to  
crunch

A Dog walking on a moonlit night

As fast as light

As strong as can be

When she's in sight

The room gets so bright  
A Dog running on a moonlit night

My very best friend  
That knows all my secrets  
My very best friend  
That knows me so well

I love you  
My puppy

A Dog quiet on a moonlit night

## Dreaming of Stars

by Sam Veluz

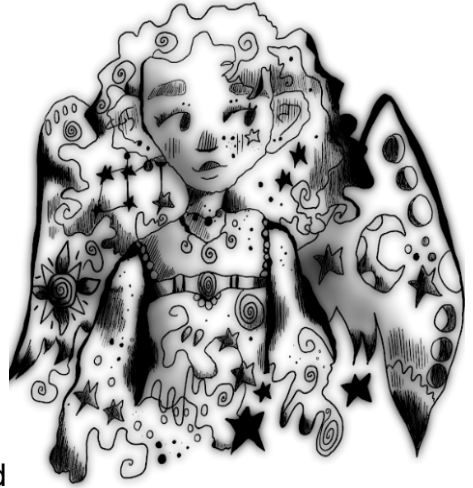
breach midnight sky  
aureate suns tangle  
rippled surface  
raze of organic life

harbor to light and  
haze holding void  
so wander the galaxy

traverse through  
dense hydrogen cloud  
or scorched scarlet sand  
that drift softly upon  
planets weary faces

walk the stars  
as iridescent  
skipping stones

connect falling  
constellations  
weaving ivory twine  
beading them together  
until you awake again



## **Innocence**

by Persea Rogers

A flash of memories reflecting of the glass,

The sweeter the moment, the greener the  
grass,

The greenery was vivid because our happiness  
radiated

Like the warmth of my fathers laugh.

An enchanted place colors of fluorescent

Fragrance of innocence of adolescence,

Our mothers luminescent voice, essences,

Societal perfection in our presence.

Giggling and laughter, an ebullience scene

Of our joy created from playing hide and seek,

Safety was our mother, mother showed us  
love

Love was a treasure that came from her hug.

My young happiness that my parents  
promised to protect

Who masked the world to make it seem  
picture perfect,

Our imagination of no limit ran us wild,

The beautiful ignorance of an innocent child.

## Love, the Multiverse, and Everything in Between

by Ollie Kubisek

*Breathe in.*

Lungs expanding and reaching outwards,  
Stretching their warmth into the rest of my  
body

*And exhale.*

Filtering out the toxic pieces, the carbon  
dioxide,  
Feeding it to the trees and the flowers of many  
colors

Red, blue, yellow, *pink, pink, pink*

Pink flesh, soft and smooth.

Over 7 trillion nerve endings so that  
I can feel your soft embrace and welcoming  
touch.

I can touch the sky, reaching *up, up, up.*

Expanding and stretching *up, up, up*

Into *infinity.*

The infinite, stretching multiverse.

Our universe started with an explosion-

Something violent, *but silent,*

A muffled scream, a jammed gun. *An egg  
cracking*

Has it been smashed on the concrete, or has it  
been chipped away by something small and  
delicate?

Or maybe its a morning bloom, unfolding and  
unfurling all its petals for a brief moment

So that we may be witness to its beauty *until  
the sun sets.*

The sun, a glorious star shining brilliantly in our  
galaxy.

A galaxy full of stars just like it.

Stars filled with the same bits and pieces that  
we are.

Stardust and matter, exploding and  
reconstructing.

Exploding and reconstructing.

I am thousands and thousands of years of  
evolution

I am the stars

I am the earth

I am the multiverse

*And I breathe in.*

## **She is the Moon**

by Moon Ramirez

Sometimes i wonder how she sees me  
How she always tells me how the moon lights  
up my eyes and how stardust dances across  
my skin

My love will tell me my tears turn to silver and i  
create the thunderstorms that rock the oceans  
shore

She will make me wonder about my home  
amongst the cedar and pines  
Birthed on a canoe but alive to welcome on  
the peonies, roses, baby's breath and  
rhododendrons

Every foggy morning in june holds the  
mysteries that i secret  
The hot air that hangs low enough for me to  
reach

My boots roam the earth just for spite  
But always to love never to fight  
the music in your headphones is just my love  
telling me that the world is created by  
aphrodite and my fingertips  
Fingertips that will always pick the next record  
to spin



She will tell me that i am sweeter than all the  
caramel coffee

So sink your teeth into my neck

As i am not a product of god but the devil  
himself

Hotter than hells fire and more divine than the  
apple given to eve

I am a child of the moon

She will tell you that you can find me dancing  
across the milky way



## **I Wonder if Tea is Meant to Scorch the Tongue**

by Jamison Butz

and warm the ribs.

I wonder if it could be hotter.

Serenity never seemed to come from anyone  
but myself until now. And I wonder where I...

we

could have been if not for the

*nothing*

s.

A blistered mouth never hurts when the past  
transpires at your feet.

The past sworn to have fallen to the floor and  
vanished at the last beholding.

We broke through doors and concrete walls,  
you and I, into November's thrust. We kissed  
the sidewalk with tears in our eyes. We kissed  
the cheeks and eyelids of one another with  
solaced souls.

I forever stressed the perils of winters until this moment. Former secrets dead and buried.

But even the dead rise

Let her defrost.

Everything you do is touched with grace.

Everything I touch leaves dirt finger tipped  
smudges.

Its mix is what makes the union of the Moon  
and the Sun faultless, paying homage to our  
children Stars.

## Untitled

by Birdi Diehl

*I do not know where you came from.*

The water is boiling, finally. The steel pot is rimmed with weeks ago's food, crusted on the outside with its mortal nemesis of dish soap yet to be defeated. The bubbles within the water remind me of looking glasses, portals to another world, creating memories from water, or simply seeing the water's memories before devouring.

*Where did you go?*

The creak of the floorboards signals your presence and the clink of wood against teacup glass signals mine. There are always two mugs for two people yet both let the last swallow go cold. I grab cream from the refrigerator, hoping it is not spoiled, and grab honey, darling, from the cabinet. The tea has already been steeping; remove the herbs and make it sweet.

*I can feel your eyes on me.*

The cream does not falter as I pour, the perfect splash, held hovering over our cups for more than one second but less than two. The honey is the gods' nectar and with it, it does not make our routine but it could ruin it.

*Pull out my chair for me.*

One... two... three... three-ish... and the honey halts by my hand. It's perfect. Cap the bottle and put it back, and do not look back; close the cupboard and turn off the stove; put back the milk, do not let it sit out. Do you see the glow from your cup or are you faking the facade?

*Take now, and hold my and your cup.*

I do not see the light in your eyes but I feel the warmth of your touch- flame against burning flame. Hopefully, the heat from the tea will not ignite and smolder the hold you have on Mother Earth. She has kept us company for too long and the cadence of change is calling, jump over her lily-padded stones and...

*drink her secret.*

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