

RUCKUS

SENIOR MANIFEST

The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts

SUMMER 2020

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Senior Manifest ▪ 2020

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Aahron Abdul-Wahhab

Trinity Affuso

Eden Bailie

Sofia Barbour

Lars Clavier

Austin Ellers

Leonna Griffith

Jaylena Melendez

Rory Pelzel

Melanie Quackenbush

Talyscha Rivera

Annalyse Robison

Adiah Siler

Makii Smith

Madison Stallard

Sirina Tiwari

Julianne Tyler

Margaret Zhang

ADVISOR

Heath Mensher, M.Ed

RUCKUS

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.

Email **RUCKUS**: chartsmag@student.charterarts

Mission Statement:

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

Each of these seniors - these artists - brought something different to our Literary Arts major. For some, it was outstanding academics. Others brought spirit to our community of writers. Still others brought with them their force of personality, a unique voice that was singular to them. Each of these artists were vital to the whole. Each of these artists have something to say. My wish is that their distinct voices never be blunted. That each of our graduating students continue to grow. They are each sorely needed for the future.

Heath Mensher

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Aahron Abdul-Wahhab

We all

Hey kid don't cry
Where all going to die
By man or beast
Or the ground right under our feet
Where all going to. Die
From the sky above our head
A simple action will strike you dead
You'd wish you would've thought ahead
But none escape our end
That tragic change of situation
Is not so tragic at all
Every dog has his day
Every sinner there moment
Every righteous soul their hour
A time where we have no power
Not even those who see gods in the mirror
Escape that age old terror
Some day we all will die

Endless sky

The bold often dies
When falling through endless sky
No floor no end
The breath ripped from your lungs as you plummet
Through a cold endless sky
We used to look down on it all
Our heads held high
Till one small push
Into endless sky
A world that crumbles with no place to hide.
Silent I fall
Through endless sky

Hard time

I've. Been sentenced
70 years is What I'm told but it could be longer
Sentence date, Aug 14, 2001
Crime - resistance to the sun
A.K.A - melanin

But the truth is
My date matters little it's been much longer than that
The prison isn't as bad as it used to be
Well some days
Our cell is wide as their world
And narrow as an arrow
At the mercy of someone deeply shook by your spirit
There is no justice or release
From chains deep in the mind
Our attempts at individual mind
Crushed burned or erased from record
So now we sit here living out our hard time
Not a soul looks to raise hands
For fear to be gunned down right where they stand
But still I think it's not as bad as it could be
Till I see the wrong right in front of me
Bleak is the soul of a prisoner
But his mind always cries for freedom

Eden Bailie

Homebody

i wanted a pool when i was little, but there were too many
boulders in the ground

leftover like bodies in the dirt from glaciers moving across
the land

(before me, before microwaves, before native
Pennsylvanians burned offerings up into the sky)
and the trees made the yard too dark

too cold to grow strawberries and too cold for a pool
dad said it would fill with leaves, sticks, frogs, and water
bugs until it was just an expensive sludge pond for
woodland amphibians

i claimed i wouldn't have minded, that i liked the image of
myself like a small pond queen with snakes in my hair,
but i think i would have gotten cold

now, i look out across little islands of all my homes:

the house without a pool,
the apartment buildings: my mother's bedside table,
everything cobalt blue

the grandmothers feeding me perfect apples and
playing poker for shape-stamped pennies

the first person that said they loved me
(i liked the sound of his car keys in his
pocket

that he couldn't kiss me comfortably, had
to lean down,

kept a photo of me in his wallet with a four
leaf clover)

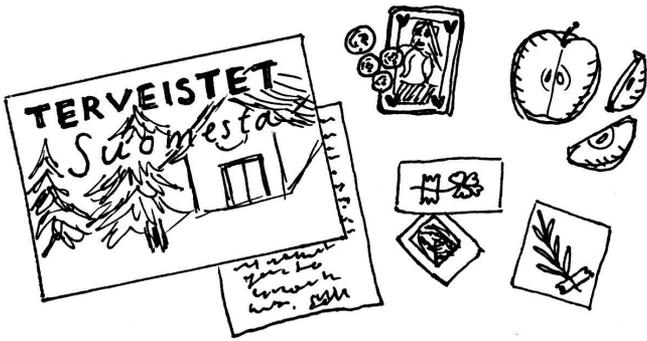
Finnish farmhouse postcards that
i swore moved in the middle of
the night
little voices talking in a different
tongue, whispering lightly
this could be yours.

looking out across my little islands, able to open up the
memories like jars of tea and spices,
i think about how we map,
constant cartographers letting bits of everything stick to us
how we collect like squirrels to line surfaces
how i mapped out my homes
collected snowglobes
how leg muscles act according to the circles of space on
wooden stairs that don't creak with your weight

how i make an indeterminate map of all the homes i'll have,
hoping for good walls made of good wood with a good man
and children that wake every day and want to do good

but maybe i'll reach the end of my life,
in a bed in that good house, or on the floor, or in the woods,
see all my maps

and be left with a sputtering collage of garden hoses, peach
pits, stolen pictures of female trick riders, my children's
names, men that were never as good as i thought them to be,
and remember home as my body,
wild-eyed, anxiously giggling, directionless,
leaning my head out of a train.



Stop, Start

Blue lived with her aunt, who'd left town on an insurance sales business trip three years ago and had come back insane. Blue finds her in the woods, muttering numbers to no one. Once she even found her typing on a water-logged desktop computer that she'd taken out there in the rain. She had plugged the cord into the eye sockets of a dead bird.

Their house was old, but nice. It made her body feel too small for the space, the feeling probably accentuated by the backwards surreality of taking care of her legal caretaker.

On a gray morning, she began the long walk down their driveway in the rain to the trash cans. Looking down at her own feet, watching her boots be dripped on by Pollock-like drops of garbage juice, she wondered if she would ever get away.

The sound of the back door shutting interrupted her bleak determinism. She looked back to see her aunt frantically shuffling out of the house toward the woods, wearing nothing but a blazer and a scuba mask and carrying a stack of wet books.

Throwing the trash down in frustration, (immediately regretting it, hearing the bags rip on the stones), she started toward the house, red-faced and dripping in the rain.

Picking up her pace as her aunt sped up toward the forest, Blue felt a crack-squish beneath her feet. She looked down and saw a violently abstracted version of a red racing snail. She didn't know what to do, feeling an obligation to both stop her naked aunt from running into the woods and hold an elaborate emergency funeral. Just as she noticed that its head was left intact, it lifted its eyes and told her, in clear English, *Stop looking and start looking.*

Then its head fell, and made a small, end-of-life plop noise back onto the gravel. Blue laid down next to it,

hoping the rain hitting her straight in the eyeballs would
wake her from this and take her to her real life, one without
prophet snails and naked ex-corporate family members.
Could insanity be passed on through the air?

Madison Stallard

Fish Bowling

It's easy to love you
yet falling for you is so much deeper
With this pick me up vibe I fell even harder
And I'd like anything if I just got one more hour...

It's simple with you until I have to explain
I even love your flaws because they're refreshingly honest
I'll just watch you and in my gut get the same feeling
And I'd dance with you if no one was watching...

They can make eyes and it'll feel all too familiar
You can pull me close and whisper delicate things you know
I like to hear
I'll hold you tighter and love you with every fragment I have
left
*And for awhile I won't notice you stuffing your pockets with
them...*

We can put up some blinds if it helps us reconcile our
differences
I'll slip on that dress if it will cut this tension

I'll stay quiet if you want despite how much I want my
company to be enough
*And I'll wait cause I can't be stupid enough to fall for this
same joke...*

I can be patient if you can promise to make that one-eighty
I'll go to parties because the smoke masks my feelings
I can love you if you gave me the opportunity
*And I'll pretend that the nice guy at work doesn't treat me the
way I wish you did...*

Even if the simplest of things you do seem shady
I'll make up a bunch of excuses if you held my hand and
asked for it
So I'll write down I love you in the midst of this wake up
call
And still beg you to stay one last time before I sign off.

Something Real

Do you yearn for me like I do for you?
When we were on fire yet, the heat never captured us in the
pain of inevitability

Where you would say that thing you always said and it
would leave a different taste each time again
The seasons changed and in the serotinal so did we
Allow me to remember you the way it should be
Where our love left memories with each touch
Memories where your hands gave me comfort
Your kiss gave me lust
A memory where our love was something real before it was
not
To be able to walk on my porch and remember the times
where you met me by my front door
Where you would smile and greet me with the attention I
longed for
How I'd invite you in and we'd shower each other with
endless laughter
Intertwining our hands and stare at another
Perfectly peaceful even with the odds against us
Although this is a memory and we remain distant and
defeated
We beat those odds because it was something real and I
choose to remember that

Austin Ellers

Pendulum.

I am a pendulum,
A grandfather clock aged with regret and stained with bitter
citrus tears.

I creak under the pressure of their words,
I bend and deform, my chestnut wood splinters prodding
those closest to me.

I am a pendulum,
Swinging from side to side I am stuck eternally.
My aged body is battered and beat from heavenly honey
highs to petty putrid lows.
Grief fills my hollow body, weighing me down
Sinking it's claws inside me, etching it's name into the
wood, marking me as it's host.
A prelude to my demise, it blurs my vision distorting the
world around me
Blinding me to the light.

I rely on the mood dial, a waning crescent is upon me.

I am a pendulum,

Swinging from side to side I am stuck eternally.

The sun beats down on my cracking wood allowing the
tendrils of Zinnia to wrap around my base,

Birthing life to a decrepit husk of what once was a proud
and rich keeper of time.

What once could manifest it's future is now a temple of
nature,

A safe haven from the harsh reality,

I have found new life in death.

I am a pendulum,

Swinging side to side I am stuck eternally.

I am aged with regret and stained bitter citrus tears.

My wooden body, a coffin filled with fermented peach pits
and orange peels,

My wooden body, a temple for life, a new opportunity to
restart.

I am a pendulum.

Cinnamon.

My bed smells of her.

Sweet cinnamon apple and smokey ash saturates me,
The tendrils of abrasive smoke twist and swirl around her,
She approaches.

Her afterimage is a collage of a thousand sticky sweet smiles
and superficial sentiment.

The afternoon sun illuminated her in amber rage, it
powered her.

She consumed me, alienating me from who I once was.

She ripped the stitches from me,

Opening the aperture in my heart.

Looming over me, the poison enveloped me,

She leads me down the avenue of backwards “I love you’s”
and broken promises.

My bed smells of her.

The aperture in my heart opened again,

She ripped the stitches from me

Lars Clavier

LEECHBIRD (JAEGER)

I can't kiss you. not here.
these store fronts and narrow
streets are no place for us.
here is the place where a kiss
feels like road kill. fur tufts
and mangled body and glassy
eye that I swerve around in
my station wagon.



in the way you are looking at me I know you want
it so I give you a little peck and you wince and it
leaves a mark. I don't stop seeing the mark for days.
it looks like road kill and it doesn't go away and I
keep driving, thinking about stopping, passing
pull-offs. would I bury it? would I leave bundles of
flowers until you believed I would change?

the ride is over and I cut the engine. shame curves
my spine into a sickle. they'd curbstomp us both
and it wouldn't be romantic but our blood would
form a shape that the clouds could mimic because
they knew it wasn't fair.

I sell the wagon and buy a bike. the world slows. I
think it would be beautiful to float in a giant
bathtub. even if the water cools we will be seals and

we will be warm inside of ourselves but I am a bird
and you are a lichen rock and we both sink.

we spent so much time together that the rock was
inside of me. taking it out caused breakages. it took
a long time. maybe that was all I was ever doing. I
think the rock was a piece of something bigger. I
think it was shed from the seacliff at the edge of my
center. I sat in the wagon that I didn't sell, the one I
wished I had. someday soon, when I am tired of
flight.

after I took out the rock, I spent a lot of time
making myself ugly. I welcomed bruises and
brought them tea and told them they could stay as
long as they liked. I ate weird things like rutabaga
and shaved all of the hair off my face. I am like this
a lot. a dream you want to forget. the hair will grow
back a new color and I will love again.

ALLEYCAT (HARRIE)

the regulars head to the same section of shelves at
the back of the store where all the light comes in
and ivy shadows creep up worn paperbacks.

women with rings on every finger, penny loafer
girls, boys in sweaters. some self-loathing, some
married. some perfectly put together, some hanging
by sinews and threads.

they turn the corner of the aisle clutching covers
with curly hair romeos and dirty thumbs hoisting
chaps. they are looking for love, just like the barflies
and street performers. sending songs across miles,
waiting for someone to hear.

I guess I am a witch in this way, too. look no
further, human. here be bundles of beating hearts
and twisted stomachs.

I look in manuals and spirituals. not for love, but
for purpose. are they not the same? tundra foraging
guide. astrology in the tarot. an introduction to
veterinary medicine.

old boss lady Mara is the real witch, the one who set
the romance novels next to the ivy windows, who
collected all of these books in the first place. she's
always trying to sneak me charms, inviting me out,
telling me what I need.

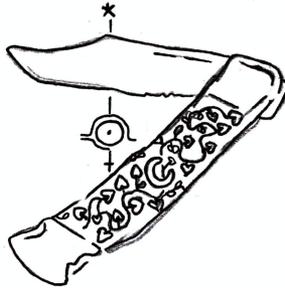
the moon was new. we walked a street I'd never
seen in all my years in this place. I saw Jaeger for the
first time and split, left that old lady all alone in the
bar, four glasses deep. she stopped asking me out
after that.

that nightmorning I was lost in my own town,
unfamiliar with my own body. burning hot ears,

strange breath, dry throat. relax your jaw, put your shoulders back. you're doing it again. nearly gone.

then there was the bleeding sound of an alleycat funeral. my alley. Helga lost her newborn. if I had been there. I took my fathers pocketknife from under my pillow and put it on a chain and put that chain around my neck because I can't ever forget again.

we all woke up to the smell of sour milk, all of us in this place.



Rory Pelzel

The Uncertainty of Seventeen

I'm already late by the time I slip out the screen door, a fact that my watch alarm seems eager to remind me. Hopefully, he hasn't forgotten. The block and a half to his house feels longer than usual, the air thick with the humidity of midsummer. In the distance, I can hear the dull thrum of a lawnmower, can smell the sharp sweetness of cut grass as I creep through the brush, stopping just below his window. Three knocks. He springs up to let me in, nearly tripping over his own feet. That klutz. A click of the latch and the window flies open. He helps me clamber inside.

“Hey,” he says.

“Hey.”

We stand there for a moment, feeling out the empty space. Strange. The room seems loud all of a sudden: the swish of the fan blades over our heads, the hum of the lights, the roar of that damned lawnmower. I anchor my eyes on him, tracing the constellations of his freckles in an attempt to center myself.

“I was starting to think you wouldn’t show up,” he says, chipping away at the stillness.

“Yeah, sorry about that. Mom was really on my case.”

“No, no, it’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

We take a seat on the bed, the box spring rippling beneath us. He glances in my direction, amber eyes alight with a boyish sort of excitement.

“So...are we gonna...” he trails off, a gentle blush creeping up his throat and settling on the apples of his cheeks.

“I guess. I mean that’s why I came, right? Unless if you don’t want to—“

“No, no, I do.”

He reaches back, tugging his shirt off by the collar. I take a moment to notice how boyish his hips are, to admire the delicate curve of his chest. He’s still a kid, I remember. We both are. It’s strange to think like that, to remind myself that just a few years ago we were trading Pokemon cards in the lunchroom and riding our bikes down to the park after school. He’s changed a lot in that time, but I can still see the boy behind his eyes—timid yet mischievous, teasing yet kind.

I reach my shaking hand out to cup his cheek, pulling him in for a kiss. It's haphazard, untrained, all teeth and tongue. Neither of us have a clue what we're doing. Then something breaks, like an elastic band pulled too taut between the two of us, and we collapse into a fit of laughter.

"That was...that was ridiculous." I say, wiping the tears of laughter from my eyes. He nods, flopping back onto the bed. I follow suit. For awhile, we just lie there, staring up at the ceiling and catching our breath. His presence at my side is familiar again, and I let myself latch onto it. That's all I'm looking for really—just a warm, familiar presence to stave off the uncertainty of seventeen.

He rolls onto his side to face me. "You wanna play Smash Bros or something?"

"Only if I can be Pikachu."

He laughs, a cocky smile spreading across his cheeks. "You can be whatever you want. I'm still gonna kick your—" I shove him off the bed before he can finish.

"Yeah, yeah, just get the controllers already, you dork."

He sticks his tongue out at me and rushes to find them without even bothering to put his shirt back on. I can't bring myself to mind.

Adiah Siler

surfing from home

multifacet mind, one day i'll be a mother. bigmouthed boys
own the world, pretty and slimnosed, lean and clean like
rippling muscle, like famous for no reason, placed under
house arrest with a homemade anklet/

what is there to do in the vacuum of myself,
i proposed to my reflection and she said put her head in her
hands/

now-a-days i'm all straightjacket intensity.
im on the path of the righteous, im living purely. I puked up
the kalecarrot concoction mom made this morning and we
cleaned it up without a word.

east stroudsburg

economy of language, air shakes the vocal chords, white
noise we eat and like and eat again

public speaking doesn't make me nervous the way seeing
myself does.

i screamed on the car ride home just to see how it would
sound, scared myself, scared myself, scared myself.

i visit you in the poconos of my upper mind and bury my
tongue in the dirt of niceties.

my voice was scratchy last wednesday, the ghost in my room
wrapped its soft fingers around my throat.

tonight i'll think of plaster and blowdarts, of blossoming
bruises and popping vertebrae.

Sofia Barbour

the new story of persephone and hades

One day long ago, before you or even I were born, a young man walked through his dark kingdom. As he wandered along through his fields of lonely souls, the man felt a calling, deep in his own lonely soul. A summoning to take the long journey to the Overworld. But for him, it wouldn't be so long. This summoning that he felt could be easily traced, and he followed a path that flowed with the scent of lotuses and apples.

As he approached the last stretch of his journey, he entered a tunnel of bright green leaves and arching branches. Soft yellowed sunlight shone through the cracks, warming his cold black suit and drying the tears off of his shoes.

Suddenly, a swinging ladder formed of vines and small pink flowers appeared in front of him, and the summoning he had received pulled him up the ladder, breaching the tall grasses to reveal a multicolored springtime garden, filled with lotuses and roses, and the scent of ripe apples ran

through his every pore as their trees materialized around him.

Without warning, a cage of woven vines with large white blooms and deep green leaves dropped around him, coming from nowhere as he was encased in nature. As he attempted to find a way out, a tanned woman in gardening attire appeared, her hair pulled back into a knot and a black watering can in her hand. She went around to all her flowers, giving them each copious amounts of water and whispering to them words that the man could not hear.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“Persephone. This is my garden.”

“Are you the one who captured me in this cage?” He sat down cross-legged on the ground, tired of standing.

“You could say that, yes. But you’re the one who answered my summons. You’re the Lord of Death, my dear Hades. You could’ve ignored it.” She put down her watering can, which still looked to be very full. “I wonder why you did

end up coming to me. Were you curious as to who it could be, seeing as all of Olympus fears you?’

He opened his mouth to object, then quickly shut it, realizing that she was correct. He had been curious, but he never expected his call to be from Persephone, the youngest of Zeus’s children.

“I find you interesting, Hades.” She let her hair out from the knot, causing a mess of curls to rest around her shoulders, and sat down on the other side of the vines from him.

“Would you like to stay with me for a bit?”

“I have a job to do, you know.”

“Why should I care? Rumor has it that you hate what you do.” He shifted, seeming uncomfortable. A light shone in her eyes as she realized that she could be getting to him on something.

“What about the mortals? Do they just not die?”

“Not my problem, love. You figure it out, and let me

know.” She stood up, retrieving her watering can. “No leaving yet, though. I’ll be back tonight with something for you.”

Hades laid down onto the ground, closing his eyes in wait for Persephone’s arrival.

Hours later, Persephone returned, holding half a pomegranate in her hand.

“Here.” She thrusts her hand through the vines of the cage, handing him the fruit. He took it, looking it over with confusion.

“Why the pomegranate?”

“Eat six seeds, you stay with me for six months out of the year. During that period, people in the world may not die.” Hades’ eyebrows rose. “When that period has been completed, you return to your palace in the Underworld and people may die once more, and the rhythm will be reset.”

“And then I return after those six months?”

“If you desire. But I suppose the seeds would compel you to return.” She hesitated, taking a shaky breath. “Would you like some time to think about it?”

He looked her in the eyes, trying to find something in them that would cause him to say no. “If I stay, would I have free roam over your gardens and your home?”

“Of course. Would you like me to set you free now?”

He nodded, gently removing a few seeds from the pomegranate.

She crouched down to the bottom of the cage, singing something under her breath and lightly touching the flowers with the tips of her fingers. Hades watched her, enthralled with the way that she managed to turn the will of the plants to her own. He removed two more seeds.

The cage lifted, and he stepped out, basking in the unbroken sunlight and the glow coming from her skin. He

removed one last seed.

“So I’m assuming that your answer is yes?” He
popped the six seeds into his mouth, one at a time. “I
think that you’ll like it here.”

employees only

It’s September again. The final drifting tendrils of bonfire smoke flow past your face, dawn rising as a hint of the sun appears over the horizon. There’s a silence to this time, one where it’s so quiet that it’s almost deafening. The world surrenders itself to one pure moment of peace. All at once, a symphony of colors erupts as vibrant rings of flowers erupt in the surrounding space. Sparks fly as their blossoms open into late spring bloom, and it’s magnificent.

And then you wake up.

Phone signals cut out once people enter the speakeasy, but that’s okay. Everyone you want to talk to is in there anyway. The sequins dotted on your dress reflect the candlelight as you take off your heavy jacket, relishing in the natural warmth of the room. Silver lights flicker as bodies

move, grabbing drinks off the bar and socializing, girls flirting with each other, their tongues loosened by cocktails.

You drift through the room, easily maneuvering around the crowd as you push to your destination, a door marked with an “Employees Only” sign. In it, you find a man tied to a chair, and a table next to him with a coiled garrotte on top. You pick it up, and silently slice his head off.

You clean the wire off, and put it back on the table.

You turn around, leaving the body and its discarded severed head alone.

Talyscha Nylet

Part one

I loved him before I met him,
It was his accent.
Rough to the ears,
But soft to the soul.
The words rolled off his tongue,
Like ocean waves hitting shore.
Ik mis je, he'd say.
His laugh was the rumbling of a thunderstorm,
It created a frenzy of fish in my stomach.
I loved him before I met him,
It was his eyes.
His eyes were the blue of night,
They crinkled when he smiled.
Bright as the moon,
And mesmerizing like the stars...
He was.

Part two

I knew i loved him before i met him
It was the way his eyes fluttered
The sighs that escaped his lips,
Tasted like warm honey
We were both falling
He'd fallen into deep slumber
And I into his beehive
I've been stung before
But never by him
Instead his buzzing brings the heat
That surrounds me during hibernation
I watch him as he tossed and turned
Wishing I could be there to hold him
But instead we are worlds apart
And his wings haven't fully grown in yet

Margaret Zhang

clarity-

recalling memories from guangzhou
sweet tangy humid air, the hustle and bustle of a too wide
street and bicyclists with straw baskets strapped to their
backs fight with beetle cars
a time when sitting with mah mah on the back of her own
bike felt secure
at night time the cicadas chirp outside my closed window
and i'm thankful that i got the one of two rooms with a ac
system
but we still have to use straw fans outside; sweat trickling
down our necks
mah mah made fresh squeezed orange juice with her juicer.
her favorite tool
i watched her sometimes
cutting the orange in half, pushing it on mercilessly,
twisting, grinding, pulp
it tasted good though.
and she did the same thing with my brain
carved it out. ate it. spat it out.

so all my china poems have to be melancholy
fill my brokenness with molten gold until the cycle of love
and hate destroys me
dripping down my chin like the orange juice

The In-Between-

I wear a bra today for the first time in months
listen to idle chatter, boa constrictor squeezing my throat

If only I was a different person maybe the words would be
able to come out easier
slip through like butter on toast
instead I am ghosting. ghosting like mother mother song the
only thing that makes me feel normal
i stand at the 20th floor balcony, city surrounding me
everything is shiny. the sky is dark but the skyscrapers light
up the world and i think about how much it would cost to
live there.

i used to stare my future in the eye, shake their hand and
look forward to a day where i'd have short curly green hair

and tattoos on my neck and arms and legs and susu and shiro would be able to run around a clutter plant home maybe there'd be someone else for me to slip my arms over shoulders

litter kisses across the back of their head and they'd laugh because it tickles

but i've never been in love and instead i am standing there, sirens echo in the distance. car tail lights a distant stream of red and stings my corneas. I can see some bridge (George Washington?) grey blue blending into the night sky, black water below. More red from ships blinking like in ponyo

my future has no more sympathy. It is an invisible entity draped across my back, a weight that follows me. My hair still fades with shitty rite aid bleach

i am thinking. i am always thinking. today it is about how we all hate each other when we should be loving, yet i am afraid to even reach out and tell my best friends how much they mean to me while they wear their hearts open and proudly. this is recurring.

I wonder if i will ever be okay with myself again, if i've ever been

lately the sun hasn't been streaming through my windows in the morning and it's getting harder to leave the warm nest in my bed when the outside world is so, so cold

i find myself returning to the 20th floor in my head. That scares me.

because there was a brief moment where i wondered what it would be like to stand on the brick ledge; it wouldn't have been hard; peering over at the street below
wondered what it would be like to finally let go, to fall asleep and stay in a dream

I don't really want that, I tell myself. It'll hurt and people will miss you

I know I know

but it still scares me like when i was four and watched mr. bean's holiday in theaters and watched him pour escargot into a woman's purse except the escargot is my blood and guts and i am watching myself from far away
i've been doing that a lot lately. That scares me too.

What am I doing anymore? What do I even want? I always say things in twos I dunno why
i used to have the answers but right now it feels like the world has opened its jaws and swallowed me whole and i

only reached level four in swimming class so i can't find my
way out

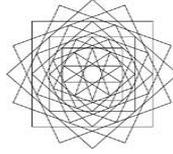
these moments i replace the invisible entity with soft arms
with soft future and the indulgence that this reality isn't
real, and when i go to bed i'll wake with my legs tangled up
against my lover's in a world where i'm not a coward and
my past never existed

just baby lamb doe eyes chrysanthemum meadows though i
don't think that's real little lesbian cottage, basically just
farm core gah i'm too predictable

quite a paradox to letting go hm

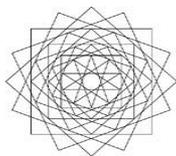
Sirina Twiari

Puddles



My tears bounce down my chubby cheeks; it seems like they'll never stop. As the bus screeches, I know it's my stop, but still, I can't stop to collect my breath. The sun rips through thick stretches of melancholy clouds stripped of their radiant color. My throat tightens, and the bus door opens. Under those clouds, my dad waits with a stone face. I lean into the softness that is his beer belly, and he wraps his inked-up arms around my delicate frame. I look at the buttercups growing beneath our feet, and daylight grows. We play football together, and my nails dig into the foam ball, covered in dark dirt and bite marks. We play around deep potholes in my driveway, which collect muddy water. Oddly my image appears clear when I stand over it. I look at my distorted face and wonder if this is my magic mirror into some dark rotted place that will lead me away from everything good. I run back to him, whose eyes are bulging, and his stare reminds me of the polluted puddles.

Achy Eyes



Your eyes fall perfectly in the shape of almonds, and when the light creeps up next to you, I get jealous. In those eyes, I see a tired boy who's pushed and pulled, stretched like those pretzels you always ask me to make. I see textbooks tied to strings pulling beneath your puffy eyes, exposing the red along your bottom lash line. I think you've gotten used to the pain, like that dryness you said never goes away. Can we throw your bullshit degree away and catch up on our cuddles that distance has snatched away? On our long drive home I feel you look my way as I force my gaze. I force my gaze on the moving green trees and keep them locked on anything, but you, I'm never truly able to focus on anything but you. I avoid your look in hopes of making this easy. Let's pretend how we feel about each other is effortless because I know if I catch your glance, I'll have no choice but to fall in love with those achy eyes.

Melanie Quackenbush

The Lost Queen and the Rebel Soldier

Excerpt from *The Tale of Issa and Mieri*(w.t.)

“Stop! Please!” I cried out in desperation, “I love you!”

The look of outraged confusion on his face as he turned back to look at me was one of the funniest things I’d seen in months. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. I only wished it had been enough to make him stop running. He turned down a side hallway and then he was out of my line of sight. Oh well. At least my ploy tricked the guards. They didn’t follow me as I ran after him, probably assuming I was just some stupid drunk girl chasing her crush from the ball. A bitter laugh escaped my lips. Let them think what they want; it serves my purposes.

I started catching up to the man. For all the pain and suffering of recent times, at least it’d made me stronger than ever before.

Just as I came within a few feet of him, he took sharp right the turn cutting off the hallway. I jumped at the wall in front of me. When I was two feet shy of crashing into the gilded wallpaper of the citadel, I twisted until I was parallel with the floor and pushed off the wall behind me. As the added momentum carried me to the man and I tackled him to the floor, I bore my teeth in a grin. I’d been wanting to try that move.

Before we'd even stopped sliding, I had brought my hip blade to his throat, resting its sharp edge ever so tenderly against his jugular. With my other hand, I grabbed his hair while I pinned him to the ground with my knee. All that's left was to bring my mouth up to his ear. It wouldn't do to be overheard.

"Why did you run? What do you know?" A jolt of surprise went through me. I sounded so panicked, so...vicious.

It hardly mattered though. Not a second after I said the words he'd moved and I was being shoved off of him. A goddamn mischievous grin formed on his face as he scrambled to his feet. He pulled something from his pocket and *shook it at me* like one would a toy at a dog.

"All I know is, I'm about to be a slightly richer man." And then he *dashed away*.

I stifled my grumbles and immediately followed, but like... the hell? Why did a royal soldier steal my wallet? Was that really all he'd wanted? Now I definitely needed answers. I ran faster.

As I took the next bend, I saw him. Talking to guards. I almost skidded to a stop, but caught myself at the last moment. With more than a little effort, I brought my all out sprint into what hopefully looked like a casual jog. Once again, I addressed the hellsprite of a soldier.

“Sir! I’m so glad I caught up to you! The General said he wanted to see you after the speech! I was looking for you, and then I saw you running over here, I’m sure on some incredibly important urgent business, of course, as befits one of your station,” Okay, maybe that was a bit too much, if the look on his face was anything to go by. I swore to every god I’d heard of that if he didn’t wipe the *bemused grin* off his face then I was going to wipe it off myself. It was time to get to the point. “I need you to come with me now, sir. We all know the General isn’t particularly fond of waiting.”

Thankfully, both guards looked appropriately apathetic. At this time of night they were nearing the end of 8 hour shifts. Way too tired to really care about a 1st Lieutenant and a simple servant. But the lieutenant(at least his uniform said he was a lieutenant) looked ...strange. There was a glint in his eye, and for a second I thought he’d turn me in. Then he smiled kindly and stepped forward.

“Okay, but let’s hurry. After all, we don’t want to keep the General waiting.” Without hesitation he began walking in the same direction we came from, grabbing my wrist as he passed.

I managed to keep the surprise off my face and out of my voice as I said, “Wonderful!”

He kept hold of my wrist, pulling me surprisingly gently. We backtracked past the bend, and I expected him to let go, maybe begin running again, but he just kept pulling

me. For maybe five minutes he led me through the halls of this godforsaken fortress. I kept my free hand close to the dagger at my hip, and checked every shadow and turn before I let us continue. Every now and then he glanced back at me, and it was the look in his eyes that made me continue following him. There was a bit of fear- but that was to be expected- more than the fear was a look of curiosity, concern. Sure, it might've been a ploy, but I'd known plenty of people who'd thought they were playing me. It never ended well for them.

So I followed, and eventually he stopped us in the middle of a small, empty, unassuming hallway. It was a short side hallway and there wasn't anything that seemed useful. I jerked my hand away, slid my knife halfway out its sheath and took a defensive position. His eyes swept over me, and he grinned, as if he thought it was cute that I believed I could fight him. I drew my knife, letting it hang in the air in between us. The grin on his face widened, and a smile just short of feral formed on my own.

“Here,” he said, and threw something flat and black into the air.

I caught my wallet, and checked it quickly before sliding it back into my pocket. Everything, all the cash, fake ID's, and stolen credit cards were still there.

“What? You didn't have a chance to go through it?”

“No I did.” Then his smile dropped and he bowed. I looked at the bare skin of his neck and had to stop myself from attacking when he spoke. “I want to help you Your Majesty.”

He stood, took a step back (out of range unfortunately), and pressed on a piece of the wall. Alarm shot through me and I dropped into a crouch, pulling my long hunting knife out of my boot. The bastard stifled a laugh, and gestured dramatically to the wall, as the panel of wall slid underneath another section. Somehow he’d known that this was one of the hidden emergency exits of this complex. It looked like the other exit doors I’d seen, plain black metal with bars reinforcing it and a heavy handle. He removed the steel bars and opened the door, revealing the night beyond. I stood and approached it slowly, watching as he went out and stood on the wire platform outside.

When the cold air hit me, so did a sense of relief. I steeled myself against its bite, ignoring the barrage of memories flashing through my mind. It’s silent behind the door, save the whistling of wind, and I reveled in the feeling of air moving against my skin, glad to leave the stifling stillness of the indoors. I looked around. The courtyard was empty and dark, and aside from the man who’s name I still didn’t know, I was alone. Blissfully alone. The safest I’d been in hours. Keeping one eye on him, I pull the door closed behind us. I turn back and face him, keeping my knives in position. Time to get some answers from this guy...

Leonna Griffith

i me my. i me my. i me my.

There's some parts of me that I haven't touched since I still did business in the public eye. Summer's all warm but I want to scrape my feet on rusty gutters and run over barren ankles with razor scooters like me and Kyeisha did nine years before she went off to be a German cop. Much to think about when I'm too big for one life but too small for my flower printed sheets; too bold for authority and too tender for nine-to-five. I'm tired of being delicate. There's a girl who rests inside me that sleeps under bridges and indulges in wicked activities and is proud of the chest that she bears. She can carry a rusted pickaxe and bread with butter and her whole entire family on her back. For once in forever I'm taking my life slowly but I just can't seem to impress her.

I'm not the kind of girl who will keep sprinting as long as she's told to. I'm a harp player. A stringer who snaps her neck backwards to sing the high notes. My fingers are bitten to the bitter bone and only one person claps when I speak my piece. I wear a long flowing dress that I've torn holes in because I'm not cautious of the bushes I walk through. One too many cups of apple cider later and I'll be transported to my new life where I can dance to a different tune. I won't struggle as I walk, won't cross my legs, won't brush my hair. I'll tiptoe barefoot on dirty pavement that a million feet step on and few people sleep on. Tend to the

glass windows and the small hands that slip into pockets,
find love in zippers and snap locks. Become infatuated with
callousness and never wonder why I can't find it in myself.
Worship thieves for all their hard and admirable work. Kiss
everyone I feel like and give up on the he-said she-said
woulda-coulda-shoulda mindset that makes me want to
bash my head in. Embrace gentle selfishness while
remaining the best person I can possibly be. I'll stop sleeping
in late. I'll stop touching my face so much. I've learned to
love for real this time. I've got it, this time.

january was realer than december

i've lived my life to the point where it still counts,
because nothing over twenty actually exists,
so everything that i say is the truth.
i'm a folklore fable, i'm a singing fortune teller,
kasper is my little cat companion
who i trust with my deepest concerns.

//

my baby's talented at:
sneaking out of midnight windows,
finding comfort in the cold dead void,
having the biggest, most innocent
love the world has ever seen,
and handing out heart attacks
like gift baskets to those
who've kept the patience.

you're my lover lover number nine,
don't you pout and don't you whine,
i will love you every time.
my yes ma'am, okay,

everythings just fine.
kick your feet up and enjoy the ride.
keep me in the backseat
with my two sense and my resilience
that you love so much.

you're my half and half, tea time,
what's mine is yours.
double dutch, finger nails,
suicide pact, ovaline angel,
giggly twinkling stars,
fruit loop fingers and redeye.
target practice for cupid's bow.
standing darling, raise your hands to my cheeks,
i've never loved anything more.

Makii Smith

love stars

I believe that when our loved ones die, they are reborn, so that the world can once again witness the light that they bring on our darkest days. Or that our loved ones are stars. Pieced together in the most beautiful constellations, waiting to be found, and they'll live on for millions and millions of years as they watch the universe around them. Their love lasts in the hearts of the world to get all of us through the day, week, months or years. Forever, they will comfort us. Forever they'll push us to keep fighting.

rest/sleep

A little less peaceful than death itself, or so we believe. Something so simple can be so satisfying. Closing each eye, waiting to go under a sound of ambience, slowly slipping into your own mind. And when it happens nothing makes sense. The dreams that you have will never quite add up, and in the morning you'll forget most of it. Your mind is composed of the most beautiful thoughts and hopes, waiting to be expressed in an open space of euphoria. Each night, you visit that sacred place. Each night you play, make believe and frolic freely like a child in a jungle gym. Each night you revisit your own mind for a checkup of its recklessness and love. And each night, you remind yourself just how much you needed rest. For the love of God, never stop dreaming.

Jaylena Melendez

Grandma

Grandma was a dreamer
That's why she cut off all her hair
She couldn't allow the weight of her head keep her down
She has decorated her house with ornaments instead of
family because she didn't have many
And adored the sounds of Marc Anthony because she
believed that was a man
A man she never knew but believed in more than her own
She lacked love, just as the rest of us
That's where we learned what it was like to grow old before
reaching fifty
We grew past our limits and it started from the love she gave
us
I admired her grays
Because they weren't from stress
It was natural
She was natural
Grandma believed that lemon juice could wash out her
freckles or that coconut oil was the cure for everything
She believed in color chapsticks because lipstick was too
much and the only accessory necessary to life was a pair of
the smallest hoops to clip right in
She is why I hate broccoli and love bagels
Why I know family is important to my center ground
She's why I am bitter and carry a strand of red hair on my
head that carries her mindset
The very reason why I am who I am towards her

I don't cry like grandma
But I fight like her
Grandma is my root
The one that keeps me from evil
Grandma is
Home
The one I've never had

Turkey Hill

There was a time when all my happiness relied on a little
structure down the street, forcing myself to visualize a
painted picture more than a photographed one
Painting shoulders while my nails press calmly against his
smooth surface that reflected the sight that was designed of
us together
Sometimes my fingers would draw circles
 (Making wishes for the both of us)
I'd slowly defeat life's purpose and spring my palms up to
reach a higher ground than the one I believed in
Careful we don't wanna fall

I did anyway
Falling down from my sky to feel the harshness of nature's
dreams being crushed right between my fingers

Trinity Affuso

Negligence

I keep busy
drowning
content in caverns of honey
and the kind of sugar
that's melted over heat
a schedule keeps me hungry,
rough around the edges but sane
isolated my shoulders carry less weight
animals in the zoo are well fed but still caged.

I ask the question
*"Do I best breathe as
a well functioning machine skin and bones
but still fierce under a thick layer of trees
or a fat lazy organism under a self appointed microscope
surrounded by the walls of the Petri dish?"*

two inch thick laminated glass
cast my existentialism in a mold and fill
concrete into the gaps
so I can grasp at every crevice of my
thought process because
we're all forced to feel the broken back
or twisted ankle we've been ignoring
when we are forced to stop moving.

I don't like what I see
when I stop
caverns and gaps long neglected
nothing more to show for my past self improvement
aside from a few bandaids saturated with blood
that turn to mush to the touch
a few wounds filled in with dirt to
absorb the overflow
infected and forgotten

I go from drowned in honey to
cemented under a thick layer of dried blood

Then I continue to wake up to my own company,
yet again to find my glass walls intact
and a heartache unresolved-

THE
LEHIGH VALLEY
CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL
FOR THE **ARTS**