

CATHARSIS

2021-22



Catharsis is defined as “the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.”

Art by Delaney Harrison

Editor's Letter:

This will be the second and final literary magazine produced under my authority. The words that follow and their careful arrangement have been the culmination of many long nights filled with consideration, research, and concentration. Resultingly, I can confidently say that, without a doubt, this newest edition of the magazine has been filled with the inner emotions and utmost care of our staff. Each piece most definitely contains its own part of its author: their catharsis. Ultimately, I ask that you read each piece with this notion in mind and that you feel their catharsis as your own.

Sincerely,
Alison Eltz

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Golden

By Alison Eltz

Acidic winter flurries blind my vision
to the chilled air reminiscent of forgetful memories lived.
Whistling wind always seems to torment golden light,
fingers coiling to drown the flickering flames of candles in the
sea,
to incite each open soul to a plummeting fall
in pursuit of a wistful world driven.

In a modern year, we two drive
far from the amber-clouded fire I had past envisioned
before my stinging fall
from grace, plunging recklessly into a naive life
that sent me sputtering into a violent sea,
its waves wrestling to devolve fractured light.

Blinking stars in the summer nights are perpetually lit
solely by headlights' white on our drive,
straining my narrow rose-clouded sight
to the dancing flowers warped in visions.
Flowers and humid night must eventually yield to a clementine
life
of crisper air that chills and hastens my fall.

Heavy rain and dimples began in early fall
as we ran down the street, water from the sky and light
of streetlights consuming the depths of our lives.
Soon the ache of frost and flurries drove
our soaking bones, plastered against shirts, to envision
a past of warmth and tanned skin against the sea.

Flames lie dormant within a tossing sea,
whispering as if they too, have fallen
as I have, into a rabbit hole, a vision

of a world that may endeavor mending fractured light.
The sea compels flames to their depths, driving
each weakened candle to an expunged life.

Hollowed fire once absorbed innocent lives
of the calmed and contented sea.
But the water and its clementine air have driven
a segmented and harrowing fall
from grace into the Christmas light
that whispering wind has exacted as an ending vision.

We two drive, nevertheless, into the golden light,
a vision of euphoria that acidic wind sought to fall
into the storming sea's freeze—instead, gold finds a life intent on
being lived.

Just a Nightmare

By Sarabeth Campbell

This is not how I imagined the world would end.
No fire, no ice, no life-shattering earthquake, plague, or famine.
Just a single shout.

With that one yell, insignificant to most, the world began to crack
and splinter and fracture.

Yet it didn't stop there.

Sound herself (normally so gentle) began to throw a fit, shaking
and screaming in my ear.

Oxygen, incensed by my presence, decided to join.

It was a hopeless case of Simon Says from there.

Simon says cry.

Simon says sob.

Simon says weep until you can't breathe, and the world starts to
spin, and you wish you could
just vaporize from existence and

and

and

Let the white noise settle in.

Armies try to help, rub with gentle hands while asking, "What's
wrong with you?"

Oxygen wraps his misty hands around your throat and begins to
choke you to death.

It should be me that Oxygen is choking, it is me.

As a soulless body.

Separated from mind and body, a lifeless husk in my stead.

This is always the best part of the worst thing I am afflicted with.

A pretty ugly oxymoron, my existence creates.

Sound and oxygen continue to wage war against an empty fortress.

The longer I am out here, in the void, the longer I take to recover.
And the longer I take to recover, the less patience the world has for someone like me.

I lead such a dangerous life, I do admit.

With bare fingers, I eat scorpions that whisper poisonous murmurs.

This life, this pain is the one I was fitted for at birth.

The pathetic carcass has stopped shaking, making me wonder if it's over at last.

I watch Oxygen and Sound finally leave the shaking husk alone.
The battle is over, and I am supposed to have won.

But I only know that it's not over just yet.

If only I could stay here in the void, instead of returning.

This, this is the most dangerous thing I can ever do: rejoin the world.

As I enter, it's eerily calm and painless, and because I have danced this dance thousands of times, I know it's coming, coming to get me.

An explosion of color and feeling assault every inch of my body.
The feeling of cold icicles and warm fireworks war on the borders of my skin.

I feel like I'm one of the popcorn kernels at the bottom of the bag.

Boiled alive then left to rot in the horrible cold.

I have to move, have to get going, have to leave, but

I don't want to go back to school, back to life, back to *me*.

But the almighty Powers That Be order me to.

So, I heave my chains over my shoulders and give my marionette

strings an experimental pull.
All good to go.

I am alright if that's what you're wondering.
You who pass me in the hallways and sit next to me in class and
teach us words, concepts, numbers.
You don't have to worry about me.
Just continue on your way and enjoy the noise.
I most certainly can't.

I don't need people to ask if I'm alright because I don't know if I
am.
I just need people to suffocate me in their arms and tell me you
understand.
Tell me it'll be fine.
Tell me I'm ok.
Tell me I'm not abnormal or freakish or malformed.

There aren't many like me to do so.
Maybe someday I wish there were.
But then I remember that I wouldn't wish this kind of life on
anyone.

I know that this life, however terrible, is not for the squeamish.
All I can do to comfort myself is think longingly that it's a night-
mare.
Just a nightmare.

Hiraeth

By Jupiter Welsh

Just like that, their heart was in their stomach.
from reading a text they thought would only exist in their mind.
causing dispirited fog everywhere.
Their world came crashing down into a million pieces, as they
had to see their safe place finally give up on them,
watching her walk away from ten years of memories.

Their walls towered higher than the depth of the ocean,
scared to be broken again.
All of the nightmares and restless sleeps.
Endless amount of tears,
Rolled down their cheeks.
creating a giant monsoon.
Drowning in the water,
but still being able to breathe.
Seeing everyone float into oblivion.
Because just like that, as fast as a blink of an eye, she was gone
forever.

Death of a God

By Mordecai Blevins

My fingernails are filled with dirt.
Ripping and tearing
into the earth. Finding bones,
I let out a cry.
My sweet beloved Eros,
my wonderful rose.

My anger rose.
Those bastards, they dirtied
my sweet beloved Eros.
With a single tear,
I began a sobbing cry.
Because all that's left of you is bones.

Your bones, oh your bones!
I take them and to my feet I rose.
Imagining your final cries,
alone. Falling into the dirt,
as the savages tore
Into my sweet beloved Eros.

Oh, by the gods, Eros.
Who would ruin such pale bones?
What heathens would tear
you apart, the youthful rose.
The hellhound who covered you in dirt
"I'll kill them," I cry.

And oh how I cry.
I cry for you Eros.
So I shall wash away the dirt.
I shall clean your precious bones,
my dear, lay you in the roses.

I will shed a tear.

Let the pain tear
my heart away, without a cry.
So lay peaceful in the roses,
your place of rest. Goodbye, Eros.
Leave your lovely bones
in a precious box in the dirt.

And I'll lay a rose my sweet Eros,
let the tears go, a cry
for your bones, no longer writhing in the dirt.

An Ode to the Ever-Hated Purple Truck

By Ella Yarosshik

I've never been enraged
by the color purple.
It's the color of eggplants
that nourish those who eat it.
It's the color of lavender flowers
that bring peace and calming tea.
It's even the color their vintage dresses
tearing at the edge of its fabric —
However,
even under the loveliest sunrises and morning dew,
with the softest tunes humming through the radio,
and the perfect breeze hugging me,
I am enraged by the color purple.
It revs its engine
smothering the lovely sunrises with smoke and eating away at the
soft tunes,
leaving the breeze, once hugging me,
now choking my lungs with smog.

I will never forgive the color purple
For ruining my mornings.

Escaping the Wrong Things

By Jupiter Welsh

All day, I had tears running down my face
looking up to the dark blue sky for an escape
to only feel heavy rain
start running down my cheek.

One of the worst moments I have had in a long time
only to end up constricted and quiet.

Walking into school quietly,
watching everyone look at my blotchy face.
Slowly watching the time
dreading every minute that passes by because I only want to es-
cape.

My eyes stay lowered, only showing everyone my cherry red
cheeks.

I wish I could just go outside, to feel comfort from the harsh rain.

The sound of the rain,
It was gone, everything was quiet.
The pigment in my cheeks
were going away like the rest of my face.
My mind was the only thing to escape
and slowly slipping away was time.

I no longer have the extra time
to daydream and wish I was outside in the comforting rain.
The only way I can escape
is to stand up and stop being so quiet.
To question my issues alone and be straight faced,
wiping the tears off my cheeks.

My eyes were just as clear as my cheeks.

Relying on myself and time,
to gain anything in me to face
everything and not running away into the rain.
My days were the same, always quiet.
But no more trying to flee and escaping
the world.

I stopped trying to escape
and the thing that improved most was the color in my cheeks.
I stood up for myself while staying quiet,
not watching every minute of time,
letting it trickle like rain.

Everything I needed to face,
Was now only in me and not in the world.

Enjoying the rain clashing against my cheeks,
Not letting it darken my face as the time before,
It was still an escape, but not so loud and hurtful.
It was quiet as the world made it be.

Recovery

By Alison Eltz

My organs grew back jagged.

My skin now bristles with crude thorns at the touch of a whispering breeze.

Strawberries breathe, glistening in red, deep in the chambers of my swimming indigo lungs, reaching with hollowed fingers,
morphing,
concealing.

Vines grow thick beneath my luminescent skin, jutting out in place of veins along my shriveling forearms.

Tall grass sways with the seething wind inside my stomach, a desert of green.

Pressed flowers lie obedient in a book of floating black ink inside my mind. The word

“no”

is written in serrated letters beneath each of my tattered fingernails.

My heart has grown callous from lack of use,
from lack of care,
from lack of consciousness,
from lack of.

Sitting at the base of a scarred throat, my heart pounds,
jumps,
screams to be let out.

As a serpentine snake, it slithers out, stretching, pulling, reaching into the bases of others' throats, searching for their hearts and finding none.

It rips into flesh, all too familiar a practice, before returning to its rightful place in the midst of loosely patched cells.

Flames befall its berated victims without a single moment given

for their hurried explanations.

Not everyone will destroy my organs--rip them to pieces--they tell me.

Not everyone will scrape against my skin, leaving seeping wounds that will never seem to heal.

Not everyone will pick ripened strawberries from my lungs.

Not everyone will cut me open, blood spilling from wounds but always flowing back inside of me.

Not everyone will eat me alive, tearing original organs from my stomach and sewing subverted snakes and patched replacements inside of reddened skin.

Not everyone is a cannibal, they say.

I don't believe them.

Frozen Still

By Jupiter Welsh

Time is perceiving.

Completely motionless or accelerated at the speed of light.

Days persistent with the same things, the same regimen.

Inner headspace never changes, remains constant.

Mind frozen, but life around you is still in motion.

Going in circles endlessly in your mind,

demanding ways to get out of the spiral.

Running away from ordinary days,

the fulfillment of familiar activities.

But still unbreakable from the loop.

Words

By Sascha Packard

Sometimes I feel like I'm drowning in a sea of words
Insults and reprimands wash over me like waves
Some words envelop me, gentle and soft
But far too many swallow me whole

Words fall in crumbling pieces from arguments
With them, I attempt to build a bastion
But when I stand back to behold my work,
I see that it's really a bastille

I constantly dodge words thrown like daggers
When they miss me, I laugh
But when they don't, my heart carries the scars
The knife-thrower, however, remains unscathed
After all, "The ax forgets, but the tree remembers"

I try to control the words
(Maybe then they can't hurt)
I create lists upon lists
Poetry, song lyrics, reasons why
Though at times my tears blur the letters,
It helps me breathe, dissociate
But words are my constant companions
Unavoidable, they nest in my memories

Sometimes when buried in words I wonder-
Is this storm of letters and sounds worth it?
Would I be better if free from this constant pressure?

Perhaps- but I have my words
I can wield them like a weapon
And maybe I can't change the world,
But I can save myself.

A Place to Go When I Fall Asleep

By Taryn Mareau

When I shut my blue eyes from the dark night, there's a place I frequent in my dreams:

It's a place of unkempt, chaotic beauty.

It's a place my brother and I run off to every time I dream of us going to visit our estranged grandparents,
A safe haven from their strangeness; their foreign presence.

It's a place that seems to sing of fairies, of all things beautiful and delicate.

Across the acreage, there are intermittent bridges, all leading to the warm presence of the big house.

Bridges that take you over the sea of soft beds of grass and wildflowers,

Bridges that have one side exposed as if to say, 'Anyone can join at any time. Come, just walk on.'

Vines cling to the single railway along the left side of those walking bridges,

Vines that seem to decorate the house, built into it like the seams of a tapestry.

As if the house would be unfinished without their untamed presence,

As if they were the strength that held the image together.

Trees are scattered throughout, placed in some pattern only nature and God can recognize.

Their leaves make a canopy that shields both the summer sun and the winter wind.

And as you walk across that soft grass,

You can feel the roots of the trees as if they go hundreds of feet
below—
Grounding the entire oasis—
Firm as the protection and comfort we often seek.

Wildflowers fill in the cracks of the bridge and the grass,
As if to patch up any holes where shadows might exist,
They sing a familiar song of belonging and protection.

The same song that place has been singing me to sleep with for
years:

I see my brother and I running on the grounds at age 4.
We played with a swing hung off a branch much too high to
reach,
Knowing it wouldn't break.

I see us there again at the age of 7, racing across the bridges to
see who could get to the house first.

We revisited at 9, and I read my brother to sleep in that sea of
soft grass, which undulated to create a lull:
Like a swing on a breeze,
Or a boat on the ocean.
I read to him tales that spoke of the whispers of magic that line
our world.

I hear us singing with the birds at age 10, always off pitch,
But they didn't mind.

3, 2, 1, the age gaps seemed to say,
But— counting down to what, I didn't know.
3, 2, 1.

At age 13, we searched along the edges of the property, finding

squirrels and toads to talk to,
They never did talk back.
Not till we left, anyway.

When I was 15, my brother and I went inside the beautiful house,
There we found sweet tea and lemonade waiting for us on the
counter.

The house was derelict, but not withering in any sense of the
word.

Just— a house wanting to be filled, to be known.

So, we left, and came back with curtains from my fake room, a
poster from his, a blanket from the living room, and a small vase
from the kitchen.

We pulled out wildflowers here and there,

Put them in the clear cage— but it felt wrong to trap them so.

We took them and placed them back in the warm crooks of the
vines, like the crooks of an elbow in a warm embrace.

We whispered a ‘sorry’ before the waking world called us back.

When I just turned 16— 3, 2, 1, I heard. Like the beats of a drum
ever reminding of some deadline— I stumbled upon someone else
in my sanctuary.

He wore an orange hat that stood out among my natural browns
and greens.

I led him inside, but he still stuck out like a sore thumb.

I looked into his gray eyes as he looked back into my blue,

On his breath were words of destruction, of change,

Of modernizing the once unadulterated space—

3, 2, 1.

My sneer was interrupted by a snuffle, and that was interrupted
by a snicker, then sniveling, then sniggering, a snuffle sneaked in,
then a snide snippet— snickerdoodles. The smell of snickerdoodles
floated from the oven and the timer went off.

I breathed. “Are you sure?” A raw prayer, a pathetic plea. A peti-
tion, an imploration, I would have provided him with anything,
paid him to not work, if only he would leave my hiding place.

3, 2, 1.

Like everything, my beautiful oasis has a dark side, an alter ego:
The journey to get there.

One night, I woke up in a dream at that strange house and a friend
was sitting next to me.

Her Latino heritage leaves her with a skin innately sun-kissed and
olive.

Her brown eyes and brown hair stood out against the emerald
green she often wears.

She smiled in greeting and asked me what she was doing there.

I didn't know, so I didn't answer.

I just stood to go where I always go when I hear those alien voices
in the other room:

Through the darkness to reach the light.

Through the antithetical counterpart to my safe haven.

Through the journey that makes my experience as much of a
nightmare as it is a dream:

A path of rough terrain in the form of sharp, slippery rock;
A path that runs through caves whose darkness cannot be filled by
those lovely wildflowers;

Sharp edges and inconsistencies in the ground that those soft beds
of grass couldn't cover with millions of layers;

Cuts on my feet that cannot be held together by even those vines;

Animals whose delayed responses seem to promise something
wicked, carried to us by a cold wind those trees can't shield me
from.

I shivered— and it wasn't from the cold. I looked into the looming
and unending darkness just off the path.

I looked into the soul of the place,

What I have truly hidden myself away from in a land of natural
greens and browns:

I saw blue eyes like an echo sent back to me.

I glanced over my shoulder— she was still there. Her brown eyes
got me to the end of the tunnel

We finally arrived. After all the darkness we had to travel
through,

She doesn't look baffled or afraid or annoyed or fed up,

She looks ready.

So, we approached my beautiful, little Heaven.

I gesture towards its great beauty, marred just barely by the start-
ing construction

I blink—

My haven is gone.

No vines, no wildflowers, no warm house, no singing birds, no
beds of grass, no bridges or trees—

But there she is,

Looking at her image in the mirror.

I let go of the fantasy

And held onto her instead

I let one tear out, and I smiled.

Goodbye, dear oasis.

And yet,

Hello.

Lovers Ln.

By Ella Yaroshik

Ta tum ta tum ta tum

The ivory keys are pressed gently into the cold midwinter wind.

Your skin is pale now.

Your home is stocked with ripe berries and warm broth.

Your hands are cold in her warm arms.

The pearls are strewn on the floor

that neither of you care to clean.

So are the leaves with melted snow

gently pressed into their dna.

The dried flowers hang from the sky

that she insists are to remain

as the remainder of May 25th

many blooms and threads ago.

The wind taps its limbs onto your tinted windows—

A subtle nudge to bring her closer and never let go.

Her drowsy eyes sink and rise and sink into sleep.

And she sleeps, peacefully, oblivious

to the love that you have

for her soft sighs and

her brown eyes and

her blue mind.

The Jaws that Bite

By Sarabeth Campbell

Born on a moonless night, the first thing I can remember is blood.
Engulfed in a river of crimson, heads idly floating by
while a strange woman, hair red as the river I floated in, beckoned me forward.
Arms spread wide as if to welcome me home with a triumphant grin.
Ruminating over me she murmured, "Rise and serve me well, O Jabberwocky."
Ever obedient, I bowed deeply and swore my servitude.

The world I was born into was mad, no doubt about that.
Hatter, Chesire, and Dormouse twitched and whispered about
evermores, and writing desks, and ravens.

Jesters and Jokers, the lot of them, all
afraid of my sharp teeth and claws.
But it wasn't a horrible feeling to hear them cry in terror.
"Better to be feared than loved" my mistress always said, and their fear is as
exquisite as the sweet
raspberry tarts made in the castle kitchen.
Wonderland was all mine to enslave and
own as long as it was my mistresses' enemies that I
cut down and never her.
Killing quickly and quietly, with sharp teeth and biting jaws, taking life after
life.
You may think I'm cruel, but death is truly what Jabberwockys do best.

A Summer's Memory

By Alison Eltz

In the bittersweet cast of bare moonlight,
the sycamores sway in cicada summer night static
and the rain pitter-patters softly on the rooftops
of those who live comfortably and blissfully in suburbia.

You and I lie on the soft earth, let the rain
fall over us as if we belong nowhere and everywhere,
as if we are the rain's and the sycamores' and the leaves' watching
over us.

As if we drift in the clouds above us
and touch the stars with our eyes
and feel the sea hundreds of miles beneath our feet,
as if a mother somewhere is not wondering where we have gone
and will we be home by curfew,
as if this is not the final summer we have together
before reality sends us in opposing directions.

The angered sky plasters tendrils of hair to the nape of my neck
in lengthened, suppressed waves, but I do not mind,
for this moment remains ever the same,
even as those alongside its memory shift,
morphing,
 leaving,
 growing
up.

Who let us do that?

It is only beneath the bitter shadow of pale moonlight
that I may escape a future barreling toward me as if I am not a
child,
as if I am old and right and true.
It pounds its fists on my doorstep late into the night, deafening.

It hurls rocks at my delicate windowsills, shattering.
It chases behind me in sickening nightmares, fearing.

But not when I belong nowhere and everywhere,
when I sit beneath the blinking stars,
when we haven't grown old and we haven't changed
and we are just little kids
playing in the rain with soaked hair
and muddy shoes
in a memory old and right and true.

Sunscreen Skin

By Ella Yaroshik

Chlorine scented air consumes your nose every May 25th.
One to never experience a hand going up and down from the window of a moving car
or the sweet kisses of grass blades on your feet at dusk.
The futile music made for the summer is lost in the crowd on the boardwalk
and you're there, alone and caught in the middle.

The ripe melon sours on your kitchen counter
while you bike past Oak St. and Lovers Ln.

The air was calm and smelled of sunflower seeds on the beach
when you passed by her soft shades of pink tinged skin.
Suddenly, the hand went out the window and the feet touched grass
and you—
you were on your bike riding past Willow St.

May 25th passed and you became lovelier than summer.
With the sun on her lips and the future in her dark brown eyes—
the future encapsulated in her overhead car light—
you fell in love.

The parable of their summer never left their sunburned chests,
even if the luminescent daisies wilted in October
and the birds no longer cleansed them of sunscreen skin.

Now it's a cloudy winter
and you want to keep her warm as the snow falls
just as you wanted to calm her sun kissed shoulders.

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Stained

By Ethan Vidals

I am stained.

I am stained with my utter thirst for annihilation. My bible, a repeated history of the gothic. The anthropocentric denial of death and transformation of it into recurring or eternal life. And so, I am stained with my western paradox of Christianity.

I am stained with the epistemology of the gods. I am stained with the sins of logic, I am forever stained with my thirst for greed, my foundation of my ego, my repetition of the psychoanalytic one-thousand plateaus.

My stains are not the foundation of humanist optimism in light of our empires who produced our flaws. I am thereof nothing besides my stains. And so, I bear the existence of Sisyphus who bears the pre-American mark of Cain.

And now onto the stain of our political discourse on colonialism, as our humanism spreads, we lose sight of our escapes, passes, feelings, and desires, we are now the dawn of a political franchise in which we are pinned on the “original sin of the white man” Our anti capitalists only enforce capitalism, and our thinkers on cave to the idea of existential or stoic thought, we are a collective monolith of liberal, and entirely western political systems.

There is not a sin or stain of the “white man” There is a sin on his humanity. We need not enforce the idea of a white colonialism with a European culture, but we need associate a white colonialism with an industrial greed. We are all stained but do not bear our stains or seek to understand and sympathize with our stains.

Our stains are not byproducts of Emerson’s aboriginal

self, our stains are not natural to us. They are given to us by way of out dead institutions. And so, I laugh at the nature of us.

We are stained and doomed and forgotten.

Wax Wings

By Lee Reynolds

I want to be the next Icarus. I want them all to see me soar triumphantly to the sun with wax wings upon my back, only to fall in the ensuing moments.

I want them to see that all I ever did was only worth nothing: that the most I'd ever be able to take claim to would be my own shame and demise.

I want to take my fall while the hot wax scorches my skin. I want to lean my head back and smile at the sun that felt an inch away.

I want to know how he felt so that I might feel the same. I want to feel Death's same kiss that she gave to him on the back of my own neck.

I want to see what colors the gods choose to paint the sky as I watch my world burn beneath me. In shades of gold, I will crash to the ground.

Icarus is who I shall be, and just as he I will laugh in the moments of my decline.

Þar til þat gerir þú bleeð

By Ethan Sarrell

I fall to the ground, my fingers still tightly wrapped around my sword.

Pain. Blood pools on the floor below me.

I look down at the dagger protruding from below my breast. The blade had gone clean through the cream colored blouse I wore and sank itself deep in my pale flesh. My gaze travels back up to her face. Her golden locks fall in a curtain around our faces, blocking out the surroundings. And her eyes... a million words could not describe the emotions swirling in their shimmering emerald depths. Grief, desperation, agony... love.

I am to be killed by the one I trusted to keep me safe, who was now covered in my crimson life-force. Amusing, is it not? Once, the god of stories described love as a dagger. A weapon to be wielded far away or up close. You can see yourself in it... it's beautiful.

Until it makes you bleed.

Ironic, isn't it?

The hand that wasn't gripping the hilt of my weapon reaches out towards her face, and my lover, my murderer... flinches, bracing for a blow. Instead, I caress her cheek, wiping away her tears with my ichor-stained thumb. It creates a smear of darkness where I had touched.

"Why?" I whisper, my breaths shortening.

“It had to be done,” her words come out broken, followed by a choked sob, “There was no other way.”

My heart began to slow.

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

Tears drip from her emerald eyes, landing on my collarbone. My finger on her lips silences her.

“You are never without your reasons, my love. If I must die, then at least it was from your blade. My only request is that I hear your voice as I pass into the halls of Odin. Know that I love you, and my love will always be with you, till the day where you join me in the next life,” My glowing gray eyes meet her viridescent ones, and with my last reserves, I lean up to replace my finger with my lips. One last kiss before I leave this life.

I lay back, and for the first time since her blade found my heart, I cry. Not for myself... but for leaving my heart behind. Even if she betrayed me.

“My brothers and sisters...
Lo, there do I see the line of my
people back to the beginning.
Lo, they do call to me.
They bid me take my place
among them in the Halls of
Valhalla.
Where thine enemies have been
vanquished.
Where the brave shall live
forever.
Nor shall we mourn but rejoice
for those that have died
the Glorious Death,”

She whispers over me, sobs flowing freely.

My vision begins to fade. My fingers slowly loosen around my weapon, and my heart ceases around her dagger.

I let out my breath,

and do not take another one.

A Rock at the Play- ground

By Mordecai Blevins

Oh god please do not put that in your mouth. I wish I had lungs so I could yell for someone, anyone, to keep this small human from eating a wood chip. See, that's my dilemma. I live my life till I erode and just sit until I am moved. It's rather boring all things considered. But now I've been stuck at a kids playground having to watch these little monsters.

I can't even do anything about it. I just have to sit and listen to them scream, or cry, or shove dirt in their mouths. One time I was even thrown at another tiny human. I almost was injured, thank god the kid was soft enough.

However, I can't tell which are worse. The children or the adults. They sit there and watch as these kids do these things and laugh. Laugh of all things ! What in gods green earth is funny about a child pushing another child off the slide. Well- it is slightly amusing. That's besides the point.

I bet Jamie doesn't have to deal with this. I used to be part of a skate park. Jamie would always go on and on about how lucky he was to be a boulder. Maybe it is lucky to be a boulder. I hope someone stuck some gum on him again. Stupid Jamie.

In the entire time of my monologue the child has eaten not one, not two, but three wood chips. I guess it's nice to see why I out live these humans. At least that's something I can do while I sit here.

Holmes' Library

By Anonymous

“When we were little, my sister and I loved to waste all hours of our day at Mrs. Holmes’s library. We joked that she should be a detective because she was real smart and could read real good, unlike Holly and me.

“Now you see, Mrs. Holmes had done read a lot of true crime because she had always wanted to catch the man who killed Mr. Holmes—a real tragic murder, done up like a fake suicide n’ everything, damn bloody too—but she ain’t never done it before the time she finally passed away. Now it ain’t my right to talk about how, but I’ll say she didn’t go gentle into that good night, bless her heart.

“The library closed up when she passed, so Holly and I hadn’t been back for nearly ten years. We’d gone off and gotten ourselves some good jobs too, so you can understand when I say it was quite jarrin’ when we drove past the library to see Mr. and Mrs. Holmes runnin’ it all sparkly and clean, just like nothin’ ever happened.

“Holly and I loved the Holmeses, so we didn’t even need a minute to think about it before we parked the car and ran into that library to say hello.

“Mrs. Holmes ran up and hugged the both of us, ‘My eyes must be deceivin’ me. Holly and Drew Parker? There’s no way in hell! I haven’t seen you youngins in nearly what? Ten years? You done left me up and dry.’

“Holly laughed as she let go of Mrs. Holmes’s grasp, ‘Mrs. Holmes, I’ve been out workin’ hard on the farm for a long while now, so I haven’t been in town for quite some time: I must’ve missed you movin’ back in.’

“Same with me, Mrs. Holmes—well, workin’ odd jobs a ways over, but I haven’t been back to town in a while either. I’m glad you did move back though, you and the mister.’

“Moving back in? Are you kids just twistin’ my leg, so you don’t feel bad about not comin’ around?’

“Mr. Holmes rested his hand on his wife’s shoulder, then talked in that deep burly voice of his that made everyone in town swoon, ‘Darlin’, how about I go make some lemonade while you three get to talkin’?’

“Choked up, she responded, ‘That’s a mighty fine idea there Harvey; you go get on that.’

“Hey Mrs. Holmes, it’s been a long drive, is that bathroom still up and runnin’?’

“She gave me a nod, so I walked in, surprised I still knew the layout of the library like the back of my hand. The drive had taken Holly and I the whole day, so I had to go real bad, and it took a little longer then normal.

“After I washed my hands, a habit I only got into because of Mrs. Holmes, and left the hallway, I could hear some sort of chantin’ coming from the kitchen. Oh, I didn’t describe it before, but the Holmes’s house was connected to their library. Anyway, I had to take a peek in to see what Mr. Holmes had been doin’, since I always had wanted to steal their lemonade recipe. When I looked in...

“I saw poor ol’ Holly strung up like a pig on a spit, not even havin’ a chance to beg for her life as they spun her dead over a fire.

“I was so dumbstruck I couldn’t find any words to scream except, ‘Stop!’

“Mrs. Holmes looked over to me. I could see the starvin’ in her eyes, but they were so pained too. ‘I’m so sorry Drew. Why’d it have to be you kids? I wish it’d been anyone else.’

“Mrs. Holmes... w-why? Why’d you have to go and kill Holly?’

“I couldn’t handle not havin’ him, but I also knew I couldn’t handle being dead. I made a deal with the Devil, Drew. I told ‘em, you get my soul for five years, then I get brought back from the dead with my husband, then I’ll be your slave on Earth, do your biddings. You know what they had me do, Boy? You know what they did?’

“Mrs. Holmes rolled up her sleeve to show me a mark they’d branded into her skin as if she was cattle—it was a horrendous symbol. All I could do was shout in fear as I slowly began to understand what she’d done and why.

“As long as we kill and eat human flesh once a year, we get to live. And if we can find Harvey’s murderer and kill ‘em, then we’re released and everyone who we killed is brought back like nothin’ happened, they won’t even remember it. We’ll be the only ones to know. Please, Drew, you gotta help us.’

“It’ll bring Holly back? I’ll admit I don’t quite know what on God’s green earth—if it even is his anymore—is happenin’, but if I gotta way to save her, I gotta try... Alright... ten years. You have ten years to find and kill the bastard before I shoot silver bullets or whatever the hell I need through your heads.’

“Mr. Holmes took a deep breath and responded for both of ‘em, ‘Okay, ten years.’

“Where do we start?’

“Savannah, Georgia.’

“That’s when she showed me the map.”

In his hoity-toity northerner voice, the policeman replied, “I’m sorry kid, but you really expect us to believe that Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, notorious serial killers and cannibals, are something supernatural? And they were trying to bring back their victims as well as themselves. You must’ve fallen for their delusions.”

As if in a moment of karmic justice for keepin’ me captive, like the bastards they all was, Mrs. Holmes came from behind and knocked the livin’ daylights outta him, “They ain’t delusions, and he knows it.”

“So, Mrs. Holmes, Kentucky?”

Mr. Holmes walked out, not far behind her. “That’s the most recent lead we could find, but I promise you, Drew, we’ll find him.”

“Two years. That’s all you have left before I shoot you both dead if we don’t.”

The Misfortunes of Trash

By Mordecai Blevins

Out of all the unlucky creatures in the world, Trash was the unluckiest. And he could prove it. First of all, his name was literally Trash. Second of all, he was a mismatch of different parts sewn together. The head of white dog, the belly of a black dog, the back leg of Gods know what, and worst of all the brain of a human. So yes, Trash's entire existence was unfortunate. And the final, most unfortunate thing: there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

"Trash," sighed his current owner. Cupping the dog's chin and inspecting where the dog's eye used to be. "How did you get an arrow stuck in there?" Trash simply stared back with half-lidded, indignant eyes. His owner, a man blessed with the normal name of Wahoo, looked the mutt over.

Wahoo Evans was, in fact, a simple man with a simple life. He worked an office job doing whatever he did (not like Trash cared enough to listen) and in his free time played things like scrabble. Trash had met the man a couple months ago when he was going through his trash. Wahoo had at first screamed when he saw him, pissed himself, and passed out. The dog had felt *slightly* bad. Not enough to make sure the man was ok, but enough to have the decency to drag Wahoo back into his house.

Wahoo had started leaving out bowls of food to try and tame the strange animal. And while Trash didn't have the best of luck, he wasn't stupid. At least that's what he told himself. Thus, the strange relationship between the two began.

Currently, Trash was sitting in Wahoo's kitchen. To Wahoo's horror, the tramp had walked in with an arrow stuck in

his eye. Trash seemed unfazed by the wound and simply waited for the human before him to stop flipping out. Once he was calm, Wahoo inspected his companion with worry.

“Do I just remove it,” he said with a wince. “How do I even do that? I mean doesn’t that hurt?” Trash blinked at him and didn’t respond. It’s not like he couldn’t, he had a human mind after all. He was just pretty sure Wahoo would pass out and wet himself again, which would rob the dog of his Sunday dinner.

Wahoo sighed before getting up and walking out of the kitchen, opening a door to what Trash assumed was a garage. ‘Good,’ the canine thought. ‘I’m getting the gourmet stuff tonight.’ His mouth was just starting to water when Wahoo returned. To Trash’s horror, he was holding a tool kit.

“I’m not the handiest man in the world,” Wahoo began, looking nervous.

‘I never would’ve guessed.’

“But it’s worth a shot right,” Wahoo said with a chuckle.

‘No,’ Trash thought, ‘It is not worth a shot.’ He promptly got to his feet, fur fluffing up instinctively. Wahoo lifted his hands to try and calm Trash, but this only aggravated him more. In one swift movement, Trash shot past him and to the couch. Wahoo gave chase and it became a game of furniture hopscotch as Trash leapt from chair to chair.

“C’mon man,” Wahoo groaned, already out of breath after a few minutes. “I’m tryna help!” Trash gave a snort out his nose, glaring daggers at the man. Wahoo had to think of a new plan. He suddenly looked to the wall and gasped, acting as if he saw something on it. Trash turned curiously and that’s when Wahoo pounced on him.

The issue with two idiots in a room is that something always gets broken. Everything happened in slow motion: Wahoo leaping forward, Trash starting to leap to the lamp, and the spontaneous **CRASH** from both. Wahoo had knocked over the chair and caught himself while Trash (poor Trash) knocked over the side table. The lamp came crashing down, smacking him on the head. He couldn't stop what happened next.

“Ow,” he yelled, “Christ what’s that made out of, steel?”

And thus, another misfortune in his life. He froze when he realized before turning to look to the stunned man standing before him. Wahoo lifted a finger, pointing at the canine. His mouth blubbering with no sound coming out. And, as expected, the man promptly fainted right on the couch. With a sigh, Trash looked at the limp form of his owner.

“Well. Shit.”

Around 10 AM on a Tuesday Morning

By Lee Reynolds

To think, just last night I was on a call, arguing with my sister, Oli, over whether or not I should visit an art museum before driving thirteen hours home. Oli hadn't wanted me to stay much longer since my health wasn't at its best, but I'd rather spend my last moments looking at *The Starry Night* by Van Gogh, than at home on the sofa though I didn't quite think that I'd be right.

I got up around nine-thirty to get myself ready before going to the Museum of Modern Art. When I'd woken up, my arm had gone numb from falling asleep on it weird. I rolled my shoulder since that usually brought back the feeling, but not much changed. I had prepared my suitcase the night before, so I grabbed it and walked to the lobby to grab a blueberry muffin for breakfast before leaving.

Since it was a Tuesday, there wasn't much out anyways, and the little they had served was already eaten besides a banana and a few decaf coffee pods. While I made my coffee, the smell of burnt toast seeped into my nose. I looked over to the side of the room where the toaster was, but I was the only person in the lobby besides the receptionist.

I went to my car and shoved everything down so I could see out the rear window. The drive to the museum wasn't very busy, so I got to the parking lot and found a spot quickly.

I made my way into the museum and hurried over to the room carrying the painting. As I made it there, my walking slowly became more unstable and difficult. Once I reached the painting, I began to realize what was happening.

Maybe Oli had been right. Maybe I should've been in the company of family rather than in the company of a few famous art pieces by people I had never, nor would ever, meet. After all, I was only a high school bus driver out on spring break.

A stroke.

Not the way I thought I'd go, but I knew that's what it was.

Maybe I should've quit when I was twenty-seven since I already hated the job, but then again bus drivers can make money; artists starve. I wish I could've been more like Oli and had the gall to do what I wanted, but she was always braver than me, and there just never seemed to be the right time after to quit, especially when I began to have a family that I needed to take care of.

Maybe it's irony or just coincidence that I happened to be in front of my favorite painting, but I feel that it perfectly portrayed how my final moments felt: circles and swirls of color covered by a large dark figure. The people surrounding me, the confusion, the blur in my vision.

I wasn't ready, but I had no choice. All I could do was look back and think:

I could've done better.

I could've been so much better.

I died around 10 AM on a Tuesday morning.

Death, Oh Death

By Sarabeth Campbell

There was once a time when the sky was blue, and the air was clean. When there were birds singing outside of your window in the morning, and a sun moving around the sky. There once was a time when families didn't have to pay to keep their children.

Then came the war followed by the Great Cataclysm, and a world once filled with so many beautiful things changed in an instant. After the Great Cataclysm, the balance was destroyed, for there were now too many people and not enough resources. So, the remaining leaders came up with the solution: if one couldn't pay to keep your child, the population thinners would remove the problem from the home.

Everyone had a reason to fear the population thinners. Even if a family could afford to pay for their children, there was always the possibility they couldn't afford them on the next visit. That's how things have been and always will be. If a citizen can't afford to keep the child, well, they won't be theirs for much longer.

As the Head Midwife of Sector 17, it was my burden job to report any new births to the population thinners. I spent day after day checking on the children that remained, making sure no complications occurred during pregnancy, and delivering all the children in Sector 17. My job is a difficult one but seeing the miracle of life makes it a tiny bit easier.

Today, I had to check on Ethan Reynolds who was suffering from a bad case of walking pneumonia and oversee a visit from the population thinners for the Nolan family. So, I pulled myself out of bed, dressed, and dropped to my knees to recite the Midwife's creed before I started my day.

"Death, Oh Death

ransom us your scythe

to do your sacred bidding

for us, thy children,

and our holy leaders

who bear thy heavy yoke.”

It felt almost like a prayer to me, and some days it felt like I needed to pray. Just before I went out the door with my medical bag, I took the time to lock my heart away in an iron coffin. I had no need for it, not with my job anyway. I headed out to the Reynolds' home. Ethan was healing nicely but still needed a few more doses of medicine. On my way out, I notified Mrs. Reynolds of her son's condition and advised her to continue the medicine routine for another week or so.

But before I could leave, Mrs. Reynolds grabbed my arm. I turned to face her and found her holding out a tin for me. I tried to refuse but she insisted saying that my job was difficult, and I needed a sweet treat to brighten my day. After 9 years as a midwife, I had learned that some presents weren't meant to "brighten my day" so I dumped the tin in the nearest trash can. It made my heart clench in its cage when I did so, but I wasn't interested in spending my evening throwing up.

I remember the one and only time I was so foolish. It was a long time ago, a couple months after I had started as a midwife, when I had to visit the Jordan family because their eldest son (Timothy 6 years old) had fallen ill with pneumonia. I had visited them two weeks prior with the population thinners and was wary to go, but I had a duty. So, I went. I gave Timothy medicine and received some cookies from Mrs. Jordan. I spent the rest of the evening alone in my apartment fighting against the poison laced cookies, and from that day on, I promised myself that I would never trust another person again.

I headed to the Nolan household where the ominous black van was already parked, awaiting my arrival. I could feel the beginnings of panic when the eyes of the group landed on me. I nodded to the leader of the group, and he nodded back. Ridding myself of any feeling, I walked to the door and knocked three times. Mr. Nolan answered the door with wide eyes and a petrified expression.

“Good day Mr. Nolan. I am here to notify you that the month our generous state gives is up and you need to pay for your newborn child, or another will be taken away by the state. Can you produce the 14,800 credits needed?” That speech will be something I remember to the day I die; I know that.

Mr. Nolan stepped out and closed the door behind him as if that would keep the population thinners out. He took a deep gasp, “We just need a little more time. If the state could just give us a few more days, then-”

“So, you don’t have the money to pay?”

“No, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you. My pay’s been delayed, if we could only have a few days, we can pay.”

I nodded and walked off the porch. I walked over to the population thinners and shook my head. The group immediately snapped into action. Grabbing guns, the men shoved past Mr. Nolan and went into the house. I watched as they dragged out Mrs. Nolan and two out of three of the Nolan children.

All of them were sobbing as the population thinners selected their prey (Aaron Nolan 7 years old). Aiming their guns at the remaining Nolans, the population thinners dragged Aaron to the van. I watched as they opened the back doors that led to a mobile crematorium and threw the boy in. A button was pressed that activated the fire. His screams echoed around the street as the population thinners packed up and left.

A few stubborn tears made their way out of my eyes, and I quickly brushed them away before anyone could notice. There was a time and place for such things, and it was not here. Emotions such as forbidden sorrow were not allowed for anyone much less midwives, so I secured myself as quick as possible. The last midwife that showed emotion during a job joined the poor child in the furnace.

With the deed done, I was no longer needed and finally dismissed. Turning away from the sobbing Nolan family, I started my journey home. Before the Great Cataclysm, I heard that it usually took an hour to completely burn a body whereas now it only took 30 minutes. The

wonders of modern technology.

My apartment seemed lonelier than ever. It always did after a job with the population thinners. Placing my medical bag in its usual spot by the door, I journeyed into my bedroom where my one secret from the state lived. Wiggling the loose floorboard, I opened the vault and took out the three objects that could potentially destroy my life: a bottle of anti-quatated whiskey, a copy of the Bible, and a tattered journal.

Taking a swig, I opened the journal and began to write the name of poor Aaron Nolan on the next available line along with all the other children that got tossed into the fire while I watched. Then, I opened the bible and read a passage from Psalms. I've been told that's what pastors used to do at funerals.

With my ritual done, I hid the three objects away under the floorboard. Then I curled up on the floor and unleashed my poor heart from its coffin. The effect was instantaneous. My mouth opened on its own accord and let loose a wail I had only heard from the mouths of babes. Maybe this is why babies sob when they are born; they know what fate awaits them. Stupid, sweet, treacherous, *freeing* tears escaped once more, but I did nothing to stop them.

They felt good.

Sadness felt good.

Living felt good.

I didn't bother to wipe my face as I stumbled to my bathroom. I chanced a look in the mirror and saw for just a moment what everyone else who ever lost their child saw: a monster. That felt good too. Turning on the faucet, I wiped my face with water until I couldn't tell whether the wetness on my face was from the sink or from my eyes.

Turning off both the sink and the lights, I went into my bedroom, dropped to my knees, and began to recite the only "prayer" I knew.

"Death, Oh Death"

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Memory Foam Mattress

By Anonymous

My body remembers
Every touch, every bruise
Every scar it remembers.

I want to be like rock.
With a rough surface
That has to be chipped at.

Instead, I'm plush.
I'm soft, I squish.
And it remembers.

Every tear has left a mark.
It takes chunks out of me,
Leaving behind empty spaces.

I have imprints
Where hands pressed too hard.
Where they left dents on me.

Yet my brain can't recall it.
I can't remember how that mark
Ended up on that spot.

Who made that dent?
Who left their imprints?
Who pressed too hard.

My body's simply
A memory foam mattress.
It remembers what I can't.

The Rot

By Alison Eltz

Ache fills my frigid blood as the sky dulls
into gray-white, acerbic retreat.

Fear latches onto my withering frame
as the ebb and flow of a lacking control
sends me spiraling
into the chill of a cold shoulder,
then the fragility of a stretched smile.

I do not know which is worse.

Bitter winter air breathes my glazed eyes
into the spine-crawling wind
and I must follow,
weak, paralyzed.
Anchored.

Paranoia wakes my bones in Godless mornings,
months of tired eyes, fallen shoulders, sinking feet.
Often, I fear the sky will open up,
take me away—into the rot, grayed trees, sunken circles,
and that, maybe,
I do not fear
a malignant retire into rotting nights,
away from the sky I resent and that resents me.

My eyes hollow into paper-white
and my limbs harden black against dull nothing.
I have waited centuries for a sweeping apology
that will never come.

Who will mourn a statue once it is already gone?

I am not sure.

Embers float, scattered beneath my veins,
secret swim in desolate space,
scream against flesh, wrath begging for escape,
begging to sink its teeth into sin,
take back control,
free hollowed eyes and frozen shoulders,
sunken ribs.

But control is as elusive as sweet summer wind
in broken December.

Tonight I Lament My Treehouse

By Ella Yaroshik

I had a treehouse in the inferno
with limbs that held me so warmly, so closely.

She was cut down by the same man who built it,
her singed hands cracking and popping and
melting into my skin.

It tore down the wanderlust walls and apricot seeds
leaving nothing but my eyes behind.

And in the ceruminous tearing
I was the only one covered in clouds.

The sun poked around for everyone else,
making way for a burning April,
while I was stuck in the desolate August with desolate grasses.

Who's to say what's fair and what's not.
The memory of my abode soaks into my finger tips
and you cut down trees.

The orange flames held me back
while I wanted nothing more than hymns of unached eyes.

I want to see the technicolors in the fire—
the glistening in the sun—
the ripples in the sea.

My thirst is leaking out of the fire
burning with the fruit of youth.

It's pouring out of my old baby blue drive
as I breathe in the mixed berry spring.

Honey Wine

By Anonymous

Beginnings aren't sweet, they aren't sour or bitter—they're nothing. They aren't clean slates because you still have to wipe the debris from the past off its surface. You clean more and more, but you always find new dirt that you couldn't see before. Then you get tired of cleaning. Tired of trying to create that perfect new beginning. Tired of remembering how much you lost when you chose to give up your past.

For some, they see their beginning as a new sword and their dirt as the blunt ends they have to sharpen, but for us, our beginning was that river. The river where we met. The river when, the moment you took another step inside, silt stirred up from its floor to make the water murky. Together, we tried to clean our river. Not with buckets or sieves, but with something we found more human.

We left our river—our new beginning—and went back inside. The dirt settled to the ground, but the river stayed unclean. We tried to solve the tarnished water by forgetting it. We drowned ourselves in outside liquids, hoping that it wouldn't fester and worsen itself while we lay together.

The beginning didn't grow or shrink, it stayed the same. It awaited us with open and unwashed arms. It called for us to return, but we neglected it because we found sanctity in another. His body and voice replaced my need for spirits and, near the end, the need for a beginning at all. He, a man whose very being was that of the nectar of the gods, became the only beginning I ever felt I needed because he was. He was a beginning.

One with unwashed hands, but a beginning nonetheless. A beginning who I wouldn't have to wait forever to be happy with. A beginning that did have a flavor. A beginning that would bring about a beautiful end as sweet and soft as honey wine.

Sanguine Catharsis

By Sarabeth Campbell

Humans are such fragile things.

My former companions saw them as sensible, smart, and strong, but I alone knew the truth.

In the end, they were all made of flesh that can be cut and bones that can be broken.

It didn't matter how many technological marvels they built, plagues and famines they prevented, wars they won, nothing they would ever do in their insignificant little lives could make a difference.

Humans are such arrogant beings.

My former companions told me not to judge them too quickly, but I alone knew I was right.

They constantly sought to control what they could not. Taking the spirit of the Earth as they continuously dissected for more resources, more things to put under their yoke like the sun, the wind, the water, the lightning in wild storms, the animals that once roamed free among the plains of the Earth.

Humans are such wicked monsters.

My former companions told me I was insane, but I alone saw through their innocent façade.

With each passing year, the humans monsters grew crueler and crueler.

Emerging from their own coffin like chrysalis, humans turned from fragile things to arrogant beings to wicked monsters that ruled this world with my former companions, forcing my hands to be forever baptized in the blood of their victims.

As the years passed, lives once so precious began to turn insignificant under my grotesque hands. The deaths made each life blur into something unrecognizable like a warped mirror showing only fractured forms. I felt each death deep in my chest, all the children

lynched and hanging from southern oaks like rotten apples; women bombed and shot by soldiers; men choking on acidic poison; every single heartbeat of my sanguine catharsis.

A Contemporary Renaissance

By Ethan Vidals

I sat quietly in my empty townhouse with nothing but the soothing engines of cars and the occasional small talk between the people beyond my mahogany door and my bow shaped window.

The church bells rang in a myopic harmony, breaking the loop of honks and the usual Sunday newspaper dialogue.

While the bells dancing in momentary intervals broke the pattern of my works, it was in the end quite relieving. The buzz of the international ink did nothing but enact the causation of the works among the olive colored walls of my dormant cube. But within the my feint smile began a wave of clarity. The bells passed and I was left sitting on my stool, palette tucked loosely into my forearm.

The old canvas before me sat blank, almost mocking my lack of surreal, or even earthly fulfillment. The art surrounding me, while in reality splashed in a formation of architectural color and contrast seemed to engage in a psychedelic kind of puzzle. The awful realization that they all seemed to resemble each other in the most unintentional and vile of ways set in.

Everything from the nauseating synthesis of triangular color to the equally flawless yet disturbing, crooked, and grotesque placement of the canvases that shook me to the core having looked at. I couldn't tell if the seemingly automatic action of hanging them up or the natural action of creating, and therefore expressing them was a precursor to a horrible sickness. These strangely foreign pieces were anything but classical, anything but different, and anything but captivating to the eye, the desecration of Judas kind of murder scene was sickening to stare at for more than a split second.

Out of a rare, and entirely human reaction I shifted my gaze back at the blank canvas, desperately trying to sink the deepening pit in my stomach among the waves of uncoordinated and ugly colors I so delighted myself with for my many years of sorrow and addictive manner. My ill life was a sadistic fetish to the likes of doing nothing, a libidinal appeal to the contemporary, and my subpar work was the threading to the silk lingerie advertised in the international ink mentioned before my momentary dive into the absurd.

No matter how much I frantically painted on the decaying canvas the tear swelling in my eye could do nothing but slide down my red cheeks onto the smeared wooden palette. I broke into a silent sob as I could do nothing but instinctively keep on my tinted pains. There was no time to revel in my sorrow for I was set out to create something different, perhaps even something modern. The paint clashed with the barley white canvas as I ever so quickly attempted to manifest something other than my works.

But in the end I hammered the nail into the peeling wall and set the desperate canvas into the wall in the formation my other hauntological creations resided in, a new and reactionary me would have reckoned I did it out of some kind of symbolic unrest.

I took a step back, scanning my weary and tear crusted eyes along the walls of art surrounding me. A desperate grin turned into a now all too normal frown. I fell to my knees in a horrifically sorry and pathetic sob.

This existential; all but stoic feeling of sadness was a common phenomenon such an addictive life. But it never manifested itself into the rush of anger in which I felt after seeing my failures having been praised by the ants whom I associated myself with in front of my eyes, and in the deepest corridors of my sensitive ears.

I rose from my bruised and battered knees, as the resurfacing agony of my overbearing failures. I wiped my eyes with my stiff,

sore hands. To no avail had I done this and the tears ran down once more, this time my cries turned into an awfully inhumane scream for release, a piercing belt at such an atrocious pitch.

I grabbed my old oak palette and tossed it with an unmediated rage blindly at the wall of contemporary despair before me as my years of unchanged and unnoticed foolishness crashed to the ground in the most dramatic of ways. My screams of relief turned into a sadistic laugh as I brought my nails down on the surface of the canvases before me, a cathartic cascade of pure unrelenting wrath that rivaled the likes of the most vile kind of folk.

Once every single failure was ripped into pieces on my carpet I turned sat down and took in a graceful breath.

Perhaps I should try a classical and weary approach to a reactionary kind of art.

Metaphors Describing the Meaning of the Hyacinth

By Ethan Sarrell

I. Phoenix

I am drowning amidst a sea of frozen heat,
an endless cesspit of ash and death.

The jagged tears on my face crystallize,
the fragments of my heart lost to the cold.

I choke out a final broken sob,
breathing out with an indifferent finality, and then...

I knew only you.

My ragged lungs could no longer inhale,
so, you kept me alive with yours...

My beautiful anchor,
the one comfort to my shattered soul.

Solace and peace; all things
unknown call me to your warmth.

I leave now this ruined corpse to take flight in fire,
a quiet melody of flame ending with you.

II. In arms made of stars...

Your velvet tongue paints a picture of starlight and peace...

A haven of night to shield me from the agony of the past,
allowing the sobs to relent and burning tears to cease.

You hold me close, intertwining yourself with me and quiet darkness.

I wish this moment were infinite,
for it would be the never-ending comfort that I can never seem to find.

This is a perfect silence and calm so innately intricate,
in which your simple touch is all that can repair my numbed heart
and shattered mind.

I wish for you to understand, while reading my clumsy words,
that I love you in a way that drowns everything else.

You are the light and dark that dragged me away from my torment
and showed me how to live and love and let go of my pain.

You gave me life when my own had faded like a dying celestial,
wrapping and sheltering me in arms of stars and night.

III. A rose stained in emerald

“You always loved plants, though I must say you rather lacked a green thumb. I recall you once purchased a gardening kit for growing hyacinth... the poor flower promptly died. I reminisce the feeling of laughter as you protested, full of mock indignation and telling me you preferred artificial flora anyway.

“You always asked me to get you faux arrangements instead of true ones, going on about your sorrow when they inevitably died. In retrospect, it’s slightly ironic, but I digress. That’s how I came to be here, holding a glass rose, stained in shimmering tones of emerald and fresh tears that continue to fall.

“There’s not a single day that goes by something doesn’t remind me of you. This particular hue sends me back to visions of you in a certain dress... dancing in my arms, with a smile on your face that could rival the stars at night in their brilliance and beauty. A certain nostalgia follows it, wrenching my heart as I remember the way you spun around the grass and the warmth your love gave me.

“I miss that warmth very much now... standing here at your grave, the absence of it is hard to ignore, and even harder to accept. I will leave this viridescent rose against your headstone, and I will let you return to your peace.

“Goodbye, my love.”

A Battle's End

By Vanessa Lovelace

Is this grief or relief? That is the question. To spend so many years walking on eggshells, not knowing if this love was real or if it was all a lie. Now, I shall never know. Perhaps I've known the answer all this time. The one-way battle I've been fighting for so long; did I win or lose? I should feel defeated, but I am not sorry for my loss, no sir! If I'm honest, I've dreamt of this moment, holding you in my arms for one last time. No doubt and no fear, just holding you in my arms, the way it should have always been. Instead, I spent countless late nights Googling and searching—

Am I being lied to?

Am I being manipulated?

Am I being abused?

Searching for an answer but not wanting to open my eyes to all the evidence in front of me. What I was really looking for was a

No, silly!

How foolish of you!

How could you ever conspire such a thought?

If only you would have just loved me, the way I always tried to love you. I deserve that kind of love, not you. At least now you've gotten what you deserve. The breeze is so intense today, I know you would've whined about it. Luckily for me though, it is more than powerful enough to carry you away forever. As soon as it hits 3 o'clock- your very least favorite time of day- I slowly unscrew the lid of your urn.

Goodbye... my love, my pain, my fear, my despair. Your death brings me new life.

I hope it stings, baby.

