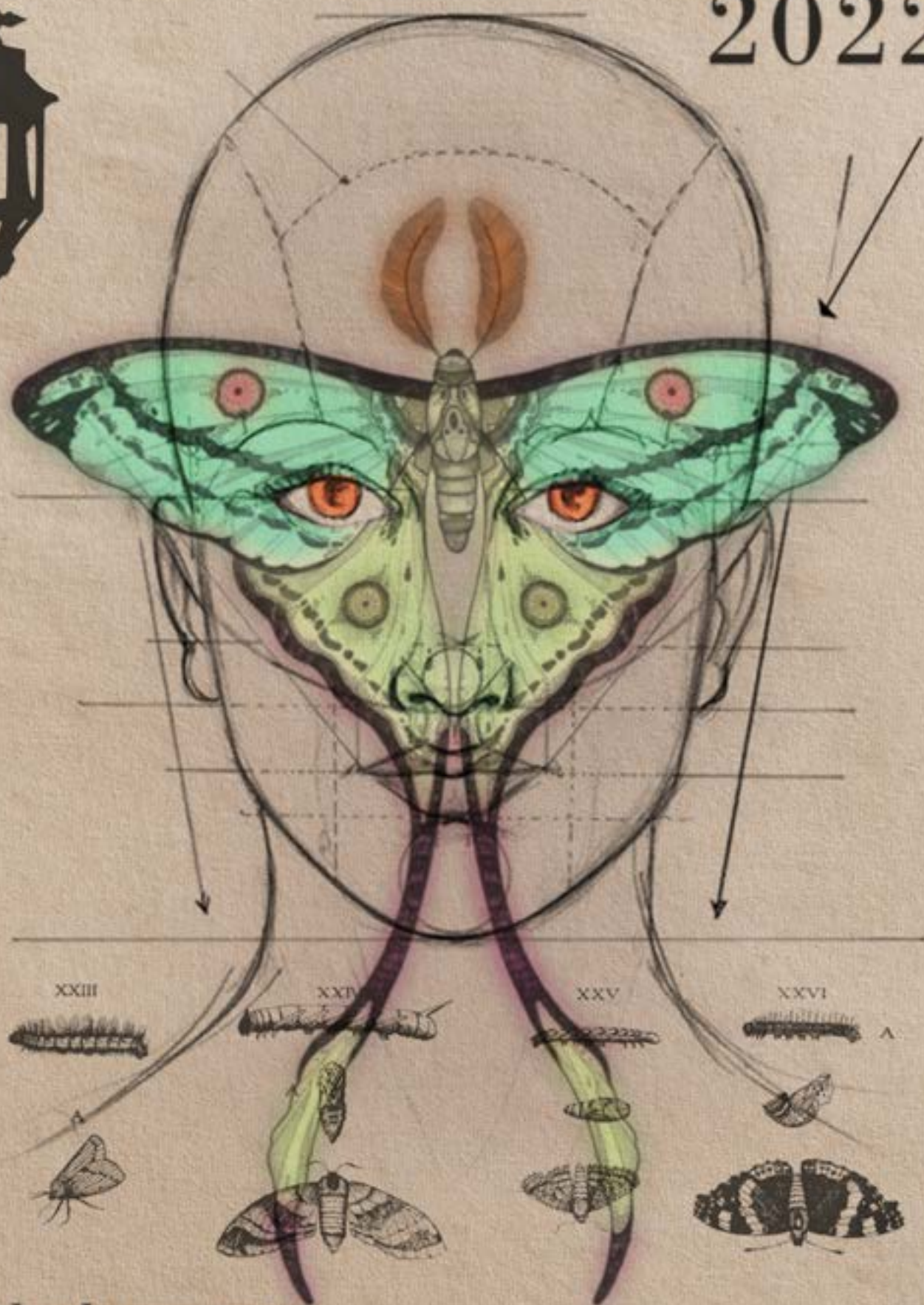


2022



*the lamp post*

# metamorphical

*adj. exhibiting or characterized by the process of change*



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*Pres. Paul Maurer, Dr. Don King, Dr. Kimberly Angle, Luke Levonius, Alexandra Furlong*

# in this edition





DR. KIMBERLY ANGLE • FACULTY ADVISOR

I'm very excited about the positive impact that *The Lamp Post* has had on Montreat's campus these past four years. More students are writing and submitting as well as attending Open Mic events. Dr. Juckett and I are continually impressed with the dedicated passion and commitment to excellence displayed by our *Lamp Post* editors.



DR. ELIZABETH JUCKETT • CO-FACULTY ADVISOR

Dr. Elizabeth Juckett is delighted to be working once again with the talented student editors of *The Lamp Post* as co-faculty advisor. As we go to press, it's a metamorphical season, Easter week, resurrection week. So: "Let [Christ] easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cressed east/. . . Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest. . ." (Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," 277-79).



CHRISTIAN YOUNG • EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Christian is a senior and a Communications/Cybersecurity double major with an emphasis in Public Relations at Montreat College. He's honored to be returning to the *Lamp Post* staff as Editor-in-Chief of the 2022 edition, in addition to leading the layout and design team.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Every edition of *The Lamp Post* strives for two things: The first is to be visually and thematically distinct from past editions, and it is safe to say that the 2022 issue meets that criteria. It has perhaps our most imaginative theme yet, with the idea that "metamorphical" can imply any sort of whimsical, magical, or fantastical change in something, and our submissions reflect this theme in unexpected ways. Some of the pieces may provoke your curiosity, and others your imagination, but it is my hope that you will enjoy all of them.

The second thing for which we strive is to be a publication on par with literary journals across college and university campuses nationwide, in order to bring critical acclaim to both Montreat College and *The Lamp Post* itself, which would allow us to broaden the size and scope of our publication. The first step on this path is quality, which is why I must thank the *Lamp Post* editors for their tireless efforts in producing what I believe to be our finest edition yet. Our staff this year is extremely talented and dedicated, and this issue would not have been possible without them. It is an unpaid (and usually thankless) position, and I'd like them to get the credit they deserve.

Finally, this edition is special. We've included a new section for the first time since the *Lamp Post* was rebranded in 2019, but I'm not going to spoil that surprise here. Without further ado, please—enjoy the 2022 edition of *The Lamp Post*.

CHRISTIAN YOUNG  
Editor-in-Chief

THE 2022 EDITORS



LILLIE WIEDER • FICTION, POETRY, AND LAYOUT EDITOR

Lillie Wieder is an English Major with a concentration in Creative Writing. She has a passion for editing, which she was able to channel while working on *The Lamp Post*. In her free time, you can find her reading, crocheting, or listening to a podcast.



WALKER LILES • FICTION AND LAYOUT EDITOR

My name is Walker Liles. I am a creative writing editor and creative writer myself. I have always drawn inspiration for my works from nature, art, and most of all, from the brilliant works writing from both renowned scholars, and my friends and colleagues.



RUKIYA WYLIE • NONFICTION EDITOR

RuKiya is a senior majoring in Communications with a concentration in Journalism. Her favorite thing about working with *The Lamp Post* is getting the opportunity to read the students' and faculty's beautiful work.



JANNESSA KAUFFMAN • VISUAL ART AND POETRY EDITOR

I am a sophomore communications major. I enjoy creating art and spending time outdoors. My art comes from my time I spend reflecting on God's creation.



STEPHEN MALZACHER • FICTION AND VISUAL ART EDITOR

Stephen is a senior majoring in Outdoor Education at Montreat College. This is his first year as an editor for *The Lamp Post*. He hopes in the future to be able to teach others about the joy of the outdoors.



## THE DAUGHTER OF ATLAS

by Daniel Caleb Bussey

I sat alone, taking in the sight of the dying day. Nothing but the rhythmic sound of the tide ebbing and flowing interrupted the tranquility of my Isle. Purples and golds stretched across the evening sky, as sculpted clouds lazily passed through it. On my lips a song began. An old one, from a time before the Greeks came to be. There in the distance, I could see a speck. A small ship loaded down with food and drink. A single man steered it. Odysseus. My dear Odysseus.

\*\*\*

Before I begin my tale, I wish to share a secret with you. The gods are to be pitied. We cannot die, yet we are no less terrible than the mortals. Our power does not make us good, but often cruel. Our emotions carry us away, like the wind drives the waves. They are our chains, the true steerers of our terrifying might.

I, Calypso, known as the nymph who would not let Odysseus go, am indeed named rightly. For there is much concealed about my life... and my love. The gods will say that it was their idea to release poor Odysseus from my care. That Zeus commanded me to send him on his way. But let me tell you another secret. Gods and goddesses are often liars.

I first laid eyes on Odysseus the year he sailed to Troy. His fleet passed within a few miles of my isle, Ogygia, though none but I knew it. I could see the soldier, so sure and confident of his expedition. I—who am gifted with the sight of all the world—kept watch as gods and goddesses entangled themselves in the war between the Achaeans and Trojans. But my eyes remained on that one man, whose wit and intellect delivered the city into the hands of the Greeks. I cannot say when I first felt that inner burning toward Ithaca's king, but once he set off to return, my heart was already lost. Like a stone falling into a well, that sinks down into the cool depths of fresh spring water, lodging in its bottom without any hope of being freed, so was my heart. I became passion's slave.

For the longest time, my heart was a stranger to me. My father, Atlas, chose poorly in the war of the Olympians, and was condemned along with the other Titans. Day by day, night to night he holds up the heavens above. The same arms that once embraced me, that gave to me food and all I needed, now eternally bears the weight of the sky itself. He does not see much of the earth, for most of his power is expended on his endless task. So, I came to the Isle nearest his face, where he simply has to look down in order to know it, and I endowed

Ogygia with as much wonder as I could muster. Every color of flower imaginable. Every plant that catches the eye. Every delightful fragrance. Pomegranate's red, hyacinth's scent, and the soothing dove's coo. I did this all for my father, so that he might find comfort in what he sees, hears, and smells.

But such a task is quite hard. For the ages of time do not stop, and immortality never ends. Odysseus once asked me, "What is it like to be immortal?" I have often thought of that. Those simple words. Words that etched themselves in my mind. A mortal cannot understand immortality. But were I to say it in one word, to be immortal is to be alone. It is to spend your years no longer satisfied with drinking your fill of every pleasure or whim. It is to be surrounded by selfish gods and goddesses, who only care about their next dramatic conquest or affair. It is to experience day upon day where everything leaves you and no meaning can be discerned. And what is ageless life without meaning? Little better than the torments of Tartarus.

Yet my thoughts wander. On with my tale. You, I am sure, are familiar with the journey home of brave Odysseus. But the poets have forgotten much in their telling of his story. Sharp eyed Athena, who gave him aid at every turn, and Zeus who supported her. This is what you have heard. But in fact, it was I who often intervened in the life of Odysseus. From the time he left from Troy to return to Ithaca, over and over again, I guided his hand. When he passed through the waters, after losing his entire crew, it was I who shielded him from being seen by Scylla. When he sat in the Cyclops lair, unsure of how to escape, I whispered in his ear about hiding under the rams. And when he left my isle, it was I who ensured he reached the kind Phaeacians.

I did this because my love for him surpassed that of any other goddess or woman. I knew fate said we could never be, but I spurned its counsels and cast caution to the wind. His near lifeless body washed up on Ogygia's shore and I fed him with ambrosia and nectar. I nursed him back from the brink of death. With songs I comforted his heart, for all the loss and pain he felt. He in turn gave me his love. I said that we could be together forever, and that he would never have to taste the bitter pangs of Hades. But he and I knew that such could never be. We knew it was wrong, that the Olympians would not approve of our betrayal of poor Penelope. (The divine hypocrites, who preach justice, while practicing every evil and vice.) Seven years we had before the god Hermes visited my home.

"I have never seen the like of your Isle, divine Calypso." The god sat in my cavern, sipping on nectar.

"It is lovely, no? I have tended it with the care of a mother with her child."

"The island is not the only thing you care for Calypso."

"My servants are here, yes, and there is the man Odysseus, whom I rescued from the sea."

The god's eyebrows raised, "And what is to be done with poor Odysseus?"

"Why, he has chosen to stay on Ogygia. I hope to one day soon be his wife." Hermes snorted, "Such can never be. You know the Fates and their decrees. Odysseus must leave you and sail away to Ithaca."

At this I stood to my feet.

"And why, pray tell, must such be written? Why must the gods decide to take and never give?"

"You truly do love him, all-seeing Calypso, do you not?"

I paused unwilling to spill my heart before the immortal messenger.

"I do, yes."

"Then you must tell him this, his house is in ruins, devoured by ungrateful suitors. His wife continues to keep back their advances, and his son, Telemachus, is in danger of being murdered by these worthless men."

My eyes fixed on the skies outside my cave. The words were sharper than a knife cutting into my breast. I knew what they meant. I knew what would happen if I related such a message to Odysseus. I looked back down, but the god was gone. And then I sensed it. Odysseus already knew. He had stood at the entrance of

the cave listening to our entire conversation. The next day I found Odysseus among the tall groves, cutting down trees. "I cannot stay here," he said, hearing my soft footsteps behind him.

"You cannot? Or you will not?"

"Cannot or will not, it makes no difference. I must be away."

I wrapped my arms around my sides, feeling my silver threaded robe. "So then, none of this has meant anything to you?" Odysseus dropped the plane in his hand and stared into my eyes.

"I am a married man, immortal Calypso. A man who has not been home in twenty years. I thank you for saving my life. I truly do. But this has to end. I am going home now." He paused, his eyes falling to the ground, and added, "I'm going to see my wife...Penelope." "And what about the gods, Odysseus? What about Poseidon, who has vowed to kill you? Or Helios, whose cattle your men ate?"

"Don't threaten me, Calypso. I have watched my men torn to shreds by Scylla, passed through the realm of the dead, and escaped the hands of the Cyclops. I do not fear death." I let out a short hot breath. "I'm not threatening you! I have never once told you that you could not leave my isle. I only warned you of what might be."

Odysseus kept his hands busy, concentrating on crafting the wood beneath him. My voice nearly broke as I spoke,

"Do you...do you feel shame for what you've done, for what I have been to you these seven years?"

The man would not look up at me, but I could sense the flush creeping across his face. The guilt. The fear. Mortals never know how transparent they are to us. "What are you afraid of Odysseus?"

"I fear," he began, his voice faltering for a moment. "I fear that I have left dear Penelope to be ravaged by wolves. I fear that Telemachus will die young never having known his father. I fear that I have abandoned my family for a dream. A deathless life that I can never have."

There it was. The truth. The lord of lies was speaking honestly to me, finally. I turned from him. I did not want him to see the tears in my eyes. Hopes broken that I knew were never mine to be owned. He was right. He had a duty to fulfill. She was his dear wife. He loved her. But he also had loved me.

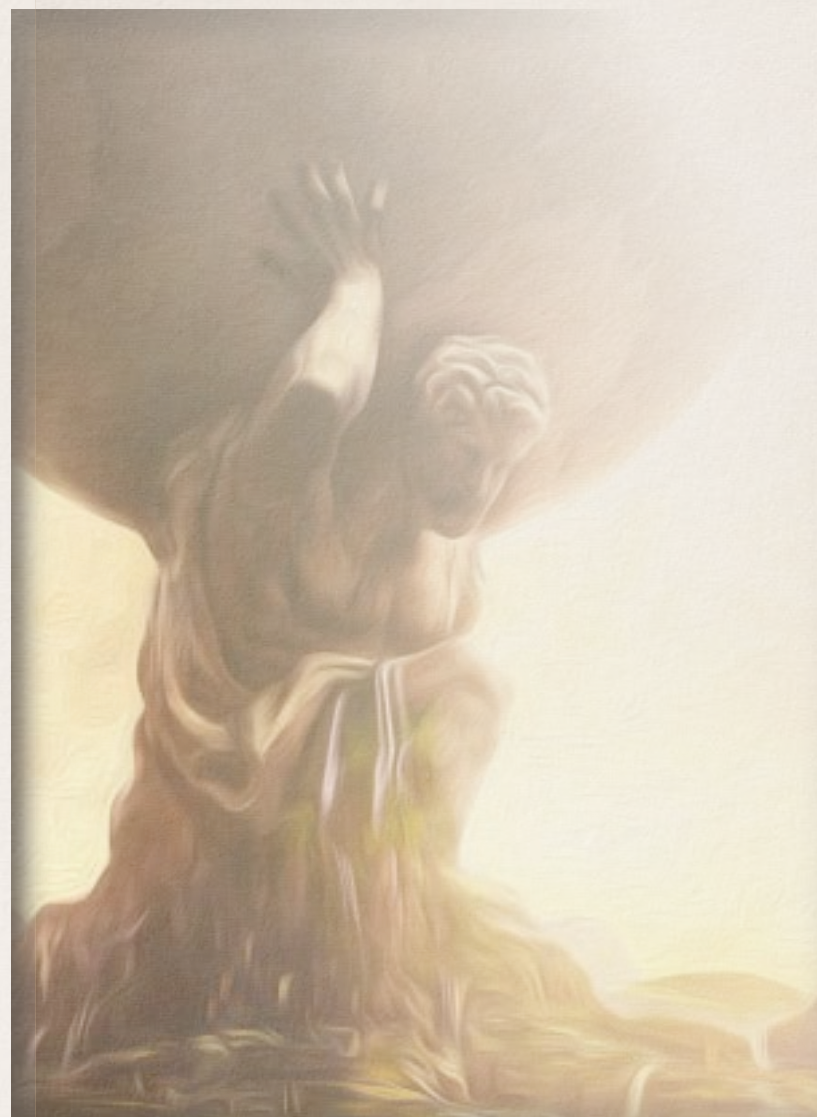
"Tell them, I kept you here against your will," I said.

I heard Odysseus stop his work. "I can't do that."

"Of course you can. You're Odysseus the cunning. The wise. The liar. You can make anyone believe any story you wish. Even a goddess." The last line I dragged out.

His hand touched my shoulder, "I never meant to..." I drew away.

"Whatever you did or didn't mean to do, it is done. You are right to go home. But tell them





nothing about you and I but lies. These years are mine to remember and mine alone.”

With that I then went up to my cavern, to prepare supplies for his journey, and to weep.

\*\*\*

“I love you,” I whispered beneath my breath. I could feel the twin babies growing within my womb. The children that would grow up to be men. Still the speck on the sea grew smaller. The horizon swallowed up fair Odysseus on his make-shift ship. My hand was guiding him. Though he could not feel it. My eyes would never leave him throughout his journeys. Until he took his revenge and embraced his wife.

The two little hearts beating within brought me back to myself. The days had grown long, and now I sat at the entrance of my cave. Bright light from the burning stars seeped down to me. I could almost make out the outlines of my father’s face as he bore the skies on his shoulders. Smiling. Could he be smiling?

“Something good came from our evil,” I said to the image of Odysseus in my head. “You left me two little lives. And now I am no longer to be alone.”

### ODIE’S FIRESIDE TALE A Retelling of the Odyssey

by Zoe Evans

A haggard man sits in the reddish dirt, the fire’s glow making his grizzled beard cast strange shapes across his weather-worn cheeks. He pokes it absentmindedly, chewing something tough on one side of his mouth like a cow with its cud. He turns his eyes up, and they shine with many years. He stretches a withered hand poking out of a ragged glove and pats the ground.

“Hello, friend. Need a bite to eat? Warmth? Ain’t my fire either, belongs to a friend of mine. He’s out getting kindlin’ for tomorrow. I’m sure he won’t mind one more. ‘Sides, I’m a weaver of many a great tale.”

He smiles at his new audience.

“Now, sit here a spell. I’ll tell you a right complicated tale. S’pose I better start near the beginnin’, shouldn’t I? Let’s see now. Well, my name’s Odie. I fought in the war, and I was damn good at it, too. I and my compatriots were the victors, our names were all over the west. Never could enter a saloon without hearin’ tale of our sharpshootin’. I was the king. I was elected sheriff over a little town called Ithaca. S’pose it’s a native word, think it means ‘home of the king.’ Well, that’s what I was. Ne’er was a finer king of that town.”

He stares at the purple sky, seeming to consider something sadly.

“I had my beautiful wife, Penny. A doll, truly. Smarter than a whip. She and I ran that town with grace and all the charm we could muster. We’d just had our first li’l ‘un when the call to action came. We named him Talluah, after the creek that ran nearby. Just called ‘im Telly for short. He was my pride and joy, and it near broke my old heart to leave ‘im and my wife alone. Boy, was I in for a surprise.”

Odie raises his wild brows and tips a metal can towards the stars before taking a drink, as if giving a toast to his story. His eyes dart over.

“Wonderin’ why I share a drink with the sky, eh? It’s become a habit of mine. Got a lot of help from someone who lives up there. She’s in this story, don’tcha fear. We’ll get to her. When my boys and I fought, we fought long and hard. We was all hankerin’ to get home to the missus, or the li’l ‘uns, or to Ma and Pa. Some of us were real young. A real shame.

“See, we’s got this age’s old brawl with this town over in the east. Real bitter folks. We had to give ‘em the once-and-for all, if you know what I mean. Well, that ain’t even the interesting part! The real challenge was getting’ home. We got mighty turned around for near a week, see. Many things look the same when you’ve got towerin’ mountains and them dry bushes covering the ground all over. After days of wanderin’ me and men were dry as a bone inside and out. Then, miracle of miracles! Over the dusty horizon we saw this

beautiful oasis, just a-settin’ there. It was all sorts of green, colors we’d hardly ever seen before. It was glowin’ somethin’ wild, and we practically run our horses into the dirt tryin’ to get there. When we dismounted, it was a huge mess of fig trees. Right in the middle of nowhere! They were as fresh and healthy as could be.

“The air was cooler, and it even tasted sweet, like the small, slow breath of a babe. We were at peace, I tell you. Well, we pushed right in, and the smell only got stronger. The further we got, the more we heard the sound of fellowship. We pushed right to the center of all those figs. Beautiful girls and beautiful boys, dark eyes and beautiful draped white clothes were just a-hangin’ around the necks of men that I felt I’d seen before. One man had a broken nose I’d swear that I had punched outta place for ‘im. They walked like they was dreamin’, muttering nonsense about how they loved their new home. The smell of those figs, the touch of those angelic people...

“Me and my men damn near lost our minds. Some of my boys just couldn’t help themselves. Nothing seemed to matter to them but gettin’ a taste of that fruit; they plucked those figs right off the tree and chomped. As soon as their teeth broke the skin, their eyes went all glassy-like. Their pupils got so big I thought they’d swallow their entire eyes. They just stared at me with a smile plastered on their faces, and no amount of my hollerin’ ever brought them back to their senses. By this time, my head felt chock-a-block full of cotton. I had to get out. I made the few men I had near me grab on to each other’s wrists and pulled hard. Some of those dark-eyed people pulled too, like a big game of tug-of-war. I tugged and tugged and finally they let go. We tore out of there like a cat on a tin roof, scrapin’ our knees and bangin’

our heads on the trunks of those devil figs.”

Odie chuckles to himself and shakes his head of matted gray curls.

“We’s looking a sight, sure ‘nough. Well, once we got out, we was still as thirsty and tired as before. We knew we had to get some shelter and some drink, so off we rode all night under the cold stars. Our poor horses protested and tossed their heads about, but we just had to keep kickin’. I was already a bit woozy from such a strange event, so when we saw a farm in the distance, we didn’t hesitate to ride right in and hitch our horses to the fence. In the early light, I could scarce believe my eyes. Sheep, bigger’en any I ever saw, was just millin’ around in that fence. They looked like fluffy ponies at that size, monstrous things. S’pose monstrous was the right word. When we knocked on the door of the house, out stepped just this big ‘ol boy at least 4 feet taller than any of us. His face was all scrunched with anger, and he had a nasty scar runnin’ right across his face. Whatever he got it from, it tore his right eye clean out. That big gaping socket stared back at me, and I ain’t too man to say I was scared. We didn’t have much, but I offered him some of the sweet whiskey I always keep with me.”

He opens his frayed jacket to display a flask tucked near his chest.

“It’ll put the wind in your sails, I tell you. Like nectar to the honeybee. Well, I offer him my last drop of my good stuff and he breathes real big, like this.”

Odie takes in a large lungful of air and begins to hack.

“He ain’t cough, see. I just cain’t breathe like I used’ta. The big boy, he sucks in all this air, and he leans in real close and he says *Ooh, whee. I smell something. I smell...fear.* Now, by this time, me and my boys, we’re good and



scared. Frozen like a dew drop on a March mornin'. We's still standing stock-still when big boy lunges, his giant hands swingin' with yella nails and caked dirt. He grabbed one of us and drug him straight back to the house. We could hear that man holler somethin' awful. The rest of us, we ran like hell, but by this time we were trapped in the pen. Now, I always been the smart one of my family. So, I huddled my boys, and I say, *Now boys, you ever seen a man make the right choices when he's slap-drunk?* And they shake their heads *No-o*. And I say, *Now boys, do you think that we got enough to get that boy good and shook up?* and they shake their heads *No-o*. 'Cept for one. Name was 'ol Willy. He come from way out east, up in them big mountians. I ain't ever seen that man sober, and that was a good thing. Willy, he says real slow, *Well, I got somethin' for 'im,* and he flashes those three teeth he has left. He hands me this big leather sack, and I know this stuff is strong enough to make even big boy stumble. That's purest of pure moonshine. Well, I sauntered on up to the house, and I knock three times, like this."

He knocks the air, clicking his tongue in tandem.

"Big boy swings that door open slow, wipin' his mouth like he just had Sunday supper. Me, sly as a cay-ote, I say, *Well, friend? How's about something to wash down that meal?* I don't think big boy's the sharpest tool in the shed, now. He rolls that one red eye of his up and down, thinkin' hard. He nods his brick head of his, and snatches that bottle from me. I get him to set down with me, him drinkin' Willy's stuff while me, I just take little swigs of my whiskey. I tell him stories just like I'm doin' now, and he gets as knock-kneed as a newborn colt in 'bout a half an hour. Told you that Appalachia fire is strong. I see he's gettin' wobbly, and I start to creep, creep, creep closer. I take out my trusty nail file outta my boot real sneaky-like. Then, when he's unawares, I jam that thing right into big boy's eye."

Odie slaps his knee in delight and guffaws.

"Brother, that eyeball squashed like steppin' barefoot on a cowpie. Big boy, he hollers and stamps and roars. I'm just a-hooting with glee. Big mistake. He whips that ugly head of his towards me and starts to run. Without speakin', I signal to my men grab onto those awful sheep for dear life. Big boy tears into the pen like a wildfire, gropin' and graspin' at nothin' at all. After a while, he gives up like a big baby. He feels his way over to the pen gate and unlatches it lettin' those big sheep run free. By this time, we's all getting tired from hangin' on and bein' so quiet. Once those sheep were out, we dropped and ran like hell. Me, I couldn't help myself. I cupped my hands up and I hollered so that all the world could hear me, *Big boy, when you get new guests, tell 'em their life is courtesy of Odie!* Whew, he

got madder'en a hornet at that. He grabs this pistol he had leanin' up 'gainst the doorpost. He didn't have eyes, but he could still shoot somethin' terrible. I near lost my ankles that day, he had me hoppin' like a cricket."

He sighs, and leans back with fingers laced behind his head.

"Friend, I barely told you a lick of my story. I just done so much, you cain't fit it into one night! I'm a good storyteller, ain't I? How's about we get some shut-eye, and I'll tell you about my lady star-walker tommorrow over breakfast. Sound alright? Alright. Good night, partner."

Odie's eyes, still gleaming with tales untold, shut-in sleep.

## WHAT I CANNOT SAY

by Lily Mintz

The words, each time I try to speak, get caught in my throat. It is hard to believe, to say, to even think. "Your brother is dead" keeps bouncing around in my head. We knew the possibilities of hearing these words were high with him going into the military, but we didn't believe it, didn't want to believe it. He left us in a way we cannot beg for him to come back, in an unforgivable way, yet still honorable. The song "Holding on and Letting Go" by Ross Copperman, is playing through my headphones as I stare at a picture of all my sibilings together a few years back at a concert we went to.

\*\*\*

The concert had just ended, and patriotic music started playing loudly through the speakers as fireworks lit up the sky. It was already an emotional concert; John Michael Montgomery does not play upbeat songs at his concerts. The fireworks were making a beautiful backdrop for our pictures, and I should have appreciated that moment more. It was an emotional night in the end. "We're holding on and letting go," as the song would say, holding onto the memories and letting him go to find peace in the afterlife.

My brother was a man of integrity, he always tried to do the right thing, always be the hero. I don't know the story of his death, but I would not be surprised if he was playing hero. "Sometimes we're holding angels and we never even know," he was someone's guardian angel. In war movies, a side character always tells the main character not to be a hero, so they would come back home to whomever. But I didn't, I thought he would be smarter than that. That he would want to come back to his wife, to his friends, his sibilings, and mother. Of course, he did, but being able to save someone, or do one small thing for a big cause has always been his thing. In this case, his small life was given up for saving our country and its big cause, "we're

holding on and letting go."

My brother is dead. This is a door I never wanted to walk through, not even get close to the handle to open. Gun shots rang out as the soldiers standing in front of me were folding the flag slowly, and neatly, to give to us. A symbol with both honor and sadness. His casket was slowly being lowered into the ground, that is when the dam breaks for our mother. She holds onto my older sister who is crying just as much as her, while my little brother and I stand side by side with silent tears running down our faces.

We go to shovel dirt onto his lowered casket, not caring for the dirt that got on our dress clothes. I looked away from his half-buried casket to his tombstone that reads: "Loving son, brother, and husband." He married the girl of his dreams, put a ring on her finger before he was deployed. He told me that he wanted to go out with her knowing how much love he had for her.

My brother fought for our freedoms because it was his dream, and he died serving a country he knew we would be safe in. He was a good man, he learned the way to be a good brother, and now he is a good angel.

From the Author

My brother is enlisting into the military, and after recent events out east I am really scared as to what will happen to him. I know he still has a while till he is deployed but it is a looming thought that will never leave my head. This is my story of "What I can Not Say."

## COLD VALENTINE

by Sophia Jordan

I gingerly step onto the frozen lake that is spread out before me and put one skate in front of the other. The first few steps are always the hardest, but I've learned to be cautious. I grimace as I think about the first few times I skated, and then I wince as I think about the times that I got too excited and rushed onto the ice. I try not to do that anymore, but I can't help myself sometimes. This time, however, I need to go slow. I need to think. I need to let my brain process this new development.

There's a guy that I have known for a while. We met on the first day of class, and we instantly started talking. Over the past several months, we have become really good friends. Then, I started to develop feelings for him. However, I kept those feelings to myself, since I wasn't certain that he liked me back. That is, until about twelve hours ago.

I am in the library, I just finished an essay for my English class, and I am just sitting at a table, listening to music. One of my favorite songs ends, and I unlock my phone to play it again. When I look up, I see him, and our eyes connect. He waves at me, and I smile and

wave back. He walks over and takes the seat next to me. I pause my music and remove my headphones. We sit in silence for a few minutes, and I start playing with my hands. This isn't unusual for us; we are quiet for a while before we start talking to each other. However, I could sense that there was something subliminal in the atmosphere.

"What were you listening to?"

"Music," I say, trying to swat away the butterflies that have started flying in my stomach. I know that I shouldn't be so nervous; I've never been nervous talking to him before now. But...something is so different right now.

He chuckles, and I gently bite my tongue to keep from smiling like a love-stricken idiot.

"What song?" he asks.

"'Naturally' by Selena Gomez," I reply.

He nods and sits back, relaxed. I look down at my phone and stare at the black screen. My fingers want to unlock my phone and continue with my life, but my brain won't send those signals to my hands. Then, I hear him clear his throat.

"I don't know if this is a good time, but I'm going to take this chance to say something."

The butterflies in my stomach flap their wings harder, and I can hear my heart beat faster and faster and louder and louder. I put my phone back on the table and look him in his eyes.

"I...I-I have feelings for you."

I come to a stop on the ice. I have skated to the part of the lake where I am the farthest away from all sides of the frozen body of water. I take a deep breath, and I watch as my breath becomes visible and then disappears. I fold my hands together and start to spin on the ice. I spin slowly, at first. As my simple spinning evolves into pirouetting, I close my eyes.

I can't speak. My mouth is open in shock, but my vocal cords won't let any words out. He's watching me, keeping his eyes gently on my face as he tries to read my expression. Any and all surrounding sounds have been muted, and I can only hear my heart as it threatens to beat out of my chest. My hands have decided to stop fiddling and are keeping warm under my legs. My ears are burning, and my eyes can't bring themselves to look anywhere other than his face.

"Well," he says, "what's your response? Do you have any feelings for me too?"

I can't help but stare at him. My mind and my heart are racing too fast for me to give any kind of response right now. And I feel angry. I don't understand why I'm angry or where this anger came from, but I can't sit here anymore. My legs seem to agree with this sentiment and push the rest of my body upward. I slide away from the table and grab my stuff.

"W-Wait!"

I look back at him. His face seems sad but hopeful. His eyes give his face a longing



look, and they meet my own again. He wants a response. I know that he does. But I can't give him a satisfying or disappointing response. At least, not right now.

"I-I have to think about this. I hope that you understand. I-I'll let you know. Just give me some time to think about this. Please."

I hate how I sound. I hate that I sound like I'm trying to plead with him. I hate that I feel like I must give him this answer so that he won't pester me about this. I hate that I'm so conflicted about this. I hate that this unfamiliar anger has set itself in the middle of this.

"Of course," he says with a smile. "Just let me know when you want to talk about this again. Okay?"

"Okay," I repeat softly as I start walking out of the library.

I open my eyes and quickly notice that they are wet. I hold my hand up to the sky, but no rain or snow is falling from the overcast sky. I then move my other hand up to my eye and almost immediately pull it away. I've been... crying. Why would I be crying? I know that my mind likes to run free when I'm on the ice; that's the only reason I'm here. But it was telling my eyes to open the floodgates. Why? I should understand why. My brain is attached to my emotions, and my emotions influence my brain and cause me to do things that I don't really want to do, but they're things that I should do. Like crying. Simple psychology, right?

I don't handle love well. Actually, that's not true. I can do familial love well. I can do friendship love well. I need to work on agape love, but I'm at least familiar with it. It's romantic love that I can't do. I've never been in a real romantic relationship, and even when I've developed feelings for a guy, the feelings were never reciprocated. Sometimes, those feelings were found out, and I was mocked, given false hope, and ruthlessly rejected. So, I would turn my feelings off. I ignored even the most passionate butterflies that hovered in my stomach. I didn't want to get involved with any guy. It didn't matter how high his morals were or how great his personality was or how handsome he looked. Emotionally and romantically involving myself with a guy was not an interest of mine.

And I don't even know how to love. I've seen those stupid movies about pointless romances that don't last. They won't last in this world either. I won't push myself into these toxic relationships and dangerous situations, because I at least know the difference between love and lust, healthy and unhealthy, safe and dangerous. And that's when I realize that almost nobody knows how to do romantic love the right way, and I start to question if romantic love has ever been done right. And I start to worry that I'm going to do it wrong. And I push people away. And I think too much.

And I deprive myself of a treasure that God wants me to have. And I forget that there are people who do know how to do romantic love right. There are Christians who know how to do all love right. And he might be one of them.

I feel my body being pulled down by gravity, and before I can understand why, my back hits the cold surface of the frozen lake. I instinctively stretch my arms out and feel the ice to see if any of it has begun to crack. It hasn't, and relieved, I grimace. This couldn't hurt more than being in a romantic relationship would. It hurts, but I prefer accidentally hurting myself doing something that I've done all my life to putting myself in a situation where I make myself so emotionally vulnerable. Emotional pain is worse than physical pain. I'll endure it for the Lord, but I don't know if I could endure it for a guy. Does that make me selfish? Am I a bad person for saying that? Is it always going to be like this? Will I find true romantic love one day? Will I tell him that I have feelings for him as well? Or will I spend every snowy Valentine's Day skating and pirouetting on a frozen lake waiting for my mind to let go of all the hurt and pain so that I can fall in love with a good Christian guy who will love me and stay by my side until death do us part? There's only one answer that I can give right now. Just like love, it is so simple yet so complex, and it doesn't make me feel much better or give me any closure. I don't know.



## INCOMPLETE

by Jacob Vander Weide

Deep down south, just past where south becomes north, our family resides, ever growing bi-yearly. Each addition has brought me pride beyond any quantifiable measure, but for the rest of the family, an unwanted joy, for they all thought we were already large enough to produce joy on our own. I disagreed full-heartedly, but I never told anyone but Jesus, and about everyone else with ears.

When the winter finally began, since it's delayed that far south, my little Jeremiah was born. He was the first in the new Vickerson lineage. From his birth, all importance lay within his soft, tiny palms. As he grasped his grandfather's finger, a whisper infiltrated his ear. "You will carry on our proud Vickerson name."

While rocking Jeremiah to sleep at night, my husband taught our boy to find joy in humming songs, just as he did for me years ago. Slow and gruff, but booming and soothing, my husband's voice was near perfect for the timeless lullabies. I remember little Jeremiah's favorite melody was "This Little Light of Mine." We intended the tenderness of those verses to instruct him to be our light. Jeremiah did not yet understand, but he was our future.

He always made me proud. Not a single lie ever crossed his lips, even while his friends and siblings committed that devilish deed. Nobody could lie to him, not even me. Jeremiah just had a way of knowing. As determined by the Lord himself, my boy led his peers. I didn't teach him to do that. How could I have? It was by grace alone that my boy grew to know servant leadership. He never had a right to be humble, yet he tried all the same.

I loved preaching his accomplishments. I'd tell everyone about my Jeremiah. I would even tell him. When I murmured to him my unending approval, I prayed my pride would become his.

Time has a way of running away from me. Wrinkles emerge in succession with each lesson I teach to my ducklings, but I have not yet learned how to keep them ducklings. Jeremiah is growing into a swan quickly, too quickly. I tried to pat him back down, but now he is packing away all that he has. I watched him throw clothes in trash bags, place hats in cases, and arrange stationary in trunks, piling them all in the car he purchased for himself. It is a car spacious enough to contain the infinite crates nestled in grandma's attic. He picked it out without any of my help. My boy is a man!

I don't understand why God planned his life this way. I miss him already, even as he is loading up. How could I survive with five out of six? Tomorrow will be wrong. My baby boy is going off to learn, so what could I possibly do apart from weep?

Even now, with Jeremiah at two hundred or more pounds, I still recall feeling the weight of his infant body in mine. Control then was easy; I knew everywhere he went, for he was a part of me, just like my soul and heart, of which he belongs to both. Now his weight feels heavier, not in the womb any longer, but dragging my heart so far down it cannot leave this abused rocking chair. Guilty are my tears, for it cannot be noble of me to bid him stay. He must go, yet how can I be fulfilled without my first love?

So off he went, down the asphalt in that well-earned vehicle, taking all I had given him along for the trip. It is just a trip; he will come home! But he went far, far down that road, further than I have gone in decades. How can he survive on his own? Am I not his lifeline? This isn't right. How can a baby run from his mother? Will his legs not falter? This distance will break the once corded connection. I miss little Jeremiah already. My member must come back, for I am incomplete without my first and foremost.

## THE BROKEN MUSIC BOX An Unfinished Short Story

by Jessica Mendlik

Rain pattered softly on the rooftops of London, England. The cool, grey clouds covered every inch of the atmosphere, and the smell of wet pavement lingered in the air. The only sounds in the city were that of splashing feet, cars rolling over puddles, and rain hitting windows of shops and apartments. In a small corner of east London, the twinkling of a distant melody could be heard. The soft notes of a music box wafted through the streets surrounding Highfield Apartments.

A single window was open in the entire building. On the seventh floor of the apartment building, the rain slowly leaked into a bedroom through the opening, soaking the curtains and carpet of the apartment. The room was dark, for its only light source was the sun that was being blocked by the London rain clouds. Clothing littered the bed and floor of the tiny apartment, boxes of pictures and other knick-knacks were stacked in an open closet, and several postcards and letters were piled high on the bedside table.

At the other end of the room, across from the open window, sat a young man at a small, wooden desk. His head was laying on the table, and his shoulders shook as he tried to stifle his crying. The brown curls on the top of his head looked like they had not been brushed in weeks and his clothes were wrinkled from neglect. An empty bottle of red wine lay next to his feet, which were dressed in brown, creased loafers. He was watching something on his desk as he wiped away his tears with his collared button-up. He was looking at a small, porcelain music box.



Oh, what a beautiful music box it was! It was the shape of a circle, one that could fit perfectly into the palms of your hands. The color was that of the spring sky, a blue so deep and rich, and yet so light and pale. The music box had golden feet which were in the shape of flower leaves. Golden roses were carefully painted across the small box, and a tiny golden dove was sitting on top of the lid.

Inside the music box was a single ballerina. Carefully crafted from porcelain, the little dancer spun slowly inside her box. She was dressed in a perfectly white tutu with golden accents on her leotard. Her golden ballet shoes let her dance elegantly, and their ribbons wrapped around her calves. Her hair was in fine, auburn curls, much like those of the late Victorian age. The front of her hair was pulled back by a small gold bow, letting anyone watching her dance see her fair face. Her eyes were closed, and she had a faint smile, making her look like she was swaying peacefully to the gentle music inside the box.

And the music! How could a craftsman create such a beautiful melody? The soft, mellow, twinkling of notes filled the apartment and seeped outside into the gloomy streets below. The slow rhythm of the waltz played in time with the falling rain. For a few moments, while the music box played its song, the world seemed to slow down, letting all worries and pains be lost in the trance of the tune. The ballerina twirled and twirled inside her little box, and the young man watched longingly with his tired, tear-stained eyes.

Suddenly, the music box stopped playing. The ballerina stopped dancing. The melody stopped, unfinished.

The young man let out a sad sigh and sat up, picking up the music box to look at it closely. The ballerina was in mid-turn, the faint smile still on her face, unaware that she or her music had stopped. The music box was broken. It had been broken since it was first created. For some reason, the music box could never finish playing its song, for it would stop playing halfway through its melody, and no one understood why. The young man carefully put the music box down on his desk and sat back in thought.

Now William Weatherford, for that was the name of the young man, was not on great terms with life at the moment. Actually, he never really was on great terms with life. It was full of constant turmoil. His father left his mother and two older brothers behind for another woman when William was around six years old. He was constantly bullied by his older brothers and schoolmates. He was not the smartest boy in his class, nor was he the most attractive. He was rejected by every girl he dared to ask out (knowing his odds), and his brothers abandoned him and his mother as soon as they graduated.

Now, at the ripe age of twenty-one, William worked as a binman at a run-down bakery several blocks from his apartment. He was not smart enough to go to college, nor did he have the money to afford college, so he was left with whatever scrappy job no one wanted to claim. His job paid very little money, so he could only afford the cheapest apartment in London. Crime littered his neighborhood, and most days he could not even afford food. On top of that, William's mother, the only person that probably ever cared for him, died of pneumonia just a week ago. His brothers did not show up for her funeral.

So, what does someone do when their life is miserable? They rely on their fantasies to keep their spirits high. Overcome with grief, William succumbed to his fantasies and began to live his life inside his head rather than living in the real world. And what were his fantasies one might ask? He believed he was in love with the ballerina in his music box, and that she was in love with him. He was miserable. When he was not working at the bakery or trying to salvage food or grieving over the losses in his life, he would spend hours at his desk watching the music box, restarting the music again and again to watch his "lover" dance.

### TOO LOUD TO THINK

by Alexandra Furlong

If life ever had a crux, a moment that everything led up to, this would be it. The moment that would make me or break me. The blessing of shock decided to remain adjacent and aloof, and so I knelt in every feeling and thought, like when a child bangs loudly on a piano. Tears stayed balled up tightly in my throat and my eyes stung for want of them.

"It's a moment." I could almost hear my mother whisper. "Only a moment." She always said that when I felt overcome. Her eyes full of tenderness and worry, bending down next to me. "It's just a moment..."

\*\*\*

(Two months earlier)

"Get your jacket, we're going somewhere." I frowned over my laptop.

"You can go somewhere, I'm in the middle of something."

"I guarantee this will be better." His eyes were shining and he was almost bouncing with excitement, so I sighed and got up. My older brother Nathan's surprises were very mixed. Sometimes they were wonderful and reminded me that he did in fact have a heart, and others were pranks that made me need to be reminded in the first place. This though, I could feel was probably going to be a good one. Discontent with my pace, he grabbed my arm and started running through the many acres of our backwoods. Soon I was gasping.

"I need a break." I managed to huff. He walked in circles impatiently as I sat on a mossy and slightly damp log.

"We have to hurry, it might be gone."

"What?" I snapped my head up. "It?"

"Yes! Hurry!" I reluctantly stood up and started running behind him. Suddenly I ran into his extended arm, hard.

"What in the..."

"Look, and be quiet." I looked over his shoulder, listening to the quietness of the woods, and remembering standing here with my mom.

"They used to be almost too loud to think," I remember her telling me. "My mother, your grandma said that they were alive with hundreds of creatures running up trees, rustling in leaves, and flying through the branches. She could barely focus with all the noise." I had closed my eyes tightly and tried to imagine it. A robin there, a deer there, and maybe even an owl. "Owls were a symbol of wisdom." My mother had said, almost reverently. "Beautiful, graceful creatures that flew through the night. They haven't been spotted in a couple of decades, but I know they are out there. I believe that they have found a place free of our pollution, where there are still trees, deep where we can not find them. But one day, if we keep trying, they will return."

"Do you want to see one?" I had asked. Her smile rivaled the stars as she said, "more than anything in the world." Nathan had flexed and said, "I'll catch one for you!" "Oh no, don't catch it, let it be free. But if you ever see one, please come get me. I would love to hear their call one time before I die." At the time I hadn't picked up on the sadness in her voice, but Nathan had, and he wrapped her up in a tight ten-year-old boy hug. "I'll find one for you." He had promised. "Me too!" I chimed in, jumping into the hug. I can still feel her arms around us as she said, "Thank you. I love you more than anything, even owls." Her laugh had surrounded us like the rustle of the wind in the trees, and things were good.

Things were different now as I looked over Nathan's shoulder, wondering what he had seen.

"There." He whispered, pointing to a tree branch. I saw a flash of red and a quiet flapping of wings. "A cardinal." I gasped. Cardinals hadn't been seen in twenty years since air pollution and deforestation had driven away or killed all the birds in America. We stood in silence, barely breathing. The cardinal hopped along the branches, occasionally lifting up his head and singing into the sky. I felt my heart swelling inside of me and gazed in awe as he proudly sang his song. Nathan suddenly jumped, and I saw another flit of red. A female. She responded to his song from another branch and they sang together, slowly hopping closer and closer. Soon she jumped to

the same branch and they tilted their heads, chirping and inching closer. Suddenly they both flew off into the trees.

"Oh," I murmured. "That was, that was beautiful." I looked up and was surprised to see Nathan's eyes shining with tears.

"They're coming back, just like mom said they would. I just, I just wish," I rested my head on his shoulder.

"Me too."

"To think, all the hard work that our family put in over the generations planting this forest is finally starting to pay off. Maybe one day it will be full of animals and almost too loud to think, just like grandma said it was." I nodded, unable to form words. The next couple of hours were full of excitement as dad got home from work and we told him about the Cardinals. He had scoured the woods and found them just before daybreak, together on the edge of the forest.

"It's happening." He had said, clapping Nathan on the shoulder and ruffling my hair. "They're coming back."

\*\*\*

(One month later)

"I think I found a new bird species." I chewed on my pen and flipped through a couple of books. "We haven't documented this one here."

"Do you know what it is?"

"Not yet, I'm trying to identify it." A couple



Photo by Zoe Riggs



of squirrels noisily ran through tree branches and birds hopped around, pecking the ground and chirping to each other. It was, in fact, almost too loud to think.

"It's almost dark, you have the picture?"

"Yeah, I got it."

"Then work on it inside, dad said bears might be coming back soon." I nodded and closed the book.

"I think it might be a," a sound cut me off. A deep, resounding call. Nathan and I froze, staring at the trees.

"Is that, is that a," the sound came again.

"It's an owl." I breathed, pointing up. There, perched on a branch, was a brown and white spotted owl. Her eyes were dark and knowing, and her wings were folded against her side. She lifted her head and called again into the night. I shuddered, unable to tear my gaze away. Her call sounded like an echo of an ancient language and in her eyes I could see her regality and beauty. "They're back. They're finally back." I clutched my mother's necklace around my throat, whispering, "we found one mom. We found you an owl."

In a great flapping of wings, she took flight, gracefully swooping over our heads and into the darkening sky. A single feather drifted down, and I picked it up carefully. "Come." I beckoned to Nathan and we walked deeper into the woods until we came to my mother's grave. Fresh flowers ordained the headstone, and I knelt by it, resting my face on the cold rock. My tears wet it as I gently placed the feather on her grave. "We found you an owl. They're back. You did it. You brought them back." Nathan knelt down and touched the stone gently, looking at the feather. I don't know how long we stayed there, occasionally hearing the calls of the owl, looking at my mother's name

engraved in the rock, staring at the beautiful spotted feather. Eventually, Nathan took my hand and put his arm around me and we walked home.

Dad was flipping through books rapidly and staring at the dark picture he had managed to capture on his phone. As soon as we had returned he had raced out into the wood, searching for the owl. He had been successful and managed to get a very bad picture of it. Now we were trying to identify it.

"Aha!" He suddenly yelled. "It's a female Barred Owl!" Nathan and I grinned at each other.

"That's so cool," Nathan said, looking at the picture in the book. Dad suddenly grabbed me tightly and lifted me off the ground, spinning in circles.

"An owl would you believe it, an owl! Oh if your mother," He put me down and lifted his glasses to swipe at his eyes. "If your mother had gotten to see this." He looked at us tenderly. "But you get to see it. And that would have made her just as happy."

\*\*\*

The next day Nathan left for college.

"You'll text me a video if you see her again."

"Yes," I groaned. "I promised."

"And you'll look for her a mate so there can be more?"

"Yes Nathan, you're going to miss your flight you need to hurry."

"You remember what to do, how to lure them both together,"

"Yes! Now go!" I hugged him. "Have fun!" He waved and hopped in the old truck. "Don't change the name I gave her!" He yelled out the window.

"I would never," I yelled. Nathan, with my dad's approval, had christened her Jewel, my mom's middle name, and it suited the owl well.

Dad hugged me tightly as we watched Nathan's truck disappear.

"It's just you and me kiddo." He said. "Don't worry though, we'll have lots of fun. And you'll start up your junior year of high school!" I frowned deeply.

"That is not fun." He laughed and went inside.

"Speaking of which, we need to make the long trek to town and get your school supplies!" I reluctantly followed him, looking out at the road where Nathan had gone one last time.

One month later

Nathan jumped out of the truck and wrapped me in a crushing hug.

"I brought you these." He tossed a bag of chocolates at me and grinned.

"Yay for fall break!"

"I reserve the right to have some though if I want!"

"Mhm," I mumbled, already digging into the bag.

"This isn't even the best part though." He beckoned me and dad over to the backseat of the truck. "Be quiet and still or you'll spook him." My eyes widened and I looked in the back. Nathan carefully pulled a sheet off of what looked like a box, and I almost screamed. The Barred owl tilted his head and looked at us as if he was trying to figure out where he knew us from. He hooted quietly, hopping forward for a better look. Nathan put on a glove and stuck his hand in the cage. The owl gracefully jumped on his wrist and gazed curiously at us while Nathan moved his arm out of the truck.

"Meet Danny. He's a male." Dad gasped but I couldn't seem to make a sound. I just stared at him in awe. Jewel had never gotten this close to me and I was entranced by Danny. His eyes reflected the dark of the night and his beautiful feathers were soft and splashed with dark and white spots. He occasionally ruffled his feathers with his beak and hooted softly, as if he didn't want to scare us.

"He's perfect," I whispered.

"Hopefully Jewel feels the same." Suddenly

a gunshot pierced through the air, breaking us all out of our reverie.

"What the" Dad ran into the woods, yelling over his shoulder "stay here!" Nathan put Danny back into his cage and shoved me towards the truck.

"Don't you dare follow Grace! I mean it!" He darted off into the dark and without a second's hesitation, I followed him. I followed Nathan's shadow into the forest, weaving through trees and trying to avoid the thorns sticking out through the dead leaves. Sounds of shouting and cursing got louder and louder until I ran smack into Nathan's back. He looked at me in horror.

"Get back Grace!" I shoved him and tried to see what he was looking at. Dad and a man with a rifle were wrestling on the ground, and Jewel was in a cage, calling out desperately. Nathan jumped on top of the man, trying to tear the rifle from his hands. I just stood, frozen.

"Let out Jewel!" Dad yelled. "He's trying to kill her and sell her feathers!" I feverishly worked on the metal clasp of the cage until it relented. Jewel flew out in a mad flapping of wings and disappeared. I quickly turned just in time to hear an ear-shattering shot and Nathan's shocked face. I didn't realize I was screaming until I felt my throat start to burn. Blood started seeping out of his clothes and he pressed his hand on his side, staring at his red hand in confusion. Something overcame me and I charged at the man. Dad was still on top of him, trying to pin him. I pulled out my pocket knife and stabbed the man's hand that was wrapped around the rifle. He howled and let go. I yanked the rifle away, clicked on the safety, and clutched it to my chest. Dad punched him in the face and knocked him out and then ran to Nathan who was sitting on the ground.

"Nathan, Nathan!" Everything started to blur in a mess of blood and dried leaves and I fell to my knees, my emotions roaring in my ears. "It's a moment," I could hear my mom whisper. "Only a moment." But this wasn't. She used to tell me that while she rocked me during my panic attacks, reminding me that



they would end and that everything would be okay. But this wouldn't be a moment. If I lost him, grieving him would take until eternity. Just like it's been taking to grieve her. Not a moment, but forever.

\*\*\*

*(Two months later)*

I knelt by the grave, gently placing a white, fluffy feather on it.

"This belongs to Henry, Jewel, and Danny's baby." I had named Henry after my dad's middle name. "He's a couple weeks old and still looks like a small puffball. He's been trying to hoot but it doesn't sound very good. Jewel and Danny still seem proud though." I paused for a moment, brushing my fingers along the soft feather. "They're coming back mom, the owls. Me, Nathan, and dad have seen two other ones around the forest. Dad says soon there should be a lot. I just wish you could be here and see them. They're beautiful, just like you said." Nathan leaned against his crutch, looking at the feather moving slightly in the wind. I stood up and carefully leaned against him. His face looked grave in the moonlight. He looked older and thinner since his wound, but still kind. Still strong. He put his arm around me and I closed my eyes, listening to the calls of the owls and the songs of the birds fill the night. A couple of squirrels ran over the crunchy leaves and a hoarse, semi-hoot resounded through the air.

"It's loud," Nathan whispered.

"Almost too loud to think." I finished softly. And it was, just like grandma said.

## HOME OF THE WILDFLOWER

### A Children's Story

by *Caprice Coffey*

Once upon a time, a young dandelion sprouted in a flower bed. She had many bright yellow petals, and was the only one of her kind in the whole garden. All around her lived bushes covered in beautiful red roses.

At first she was glad to be in the flower bed. It was a very nice garden with rich soil and plenty of sunshine. However, it wasn't long before the roses discovered her. They stuck up their noses and crossed their leafy arms at her.

"How dare you grow in our flower bed!" they cried. "You're not a rose, you're just a weed! You don't belong in our garden!"

"A weed?" the dandelion asked. "What's a weed?"

"A weed is a bad flower! Weeds take our precious sunshine and good soil! Besides, you're not even on a bush like us! Now get out of here before the gardener sees your ugly blossom!"

The dandelion wept dewdrops. Her stem drooped and her petals began to curl in. She had never felt ugly before, but now

she couldn't remember feeling pretty. The dandelion begged for them to let her stay, but they simply scoffed at her.

And so, the dandelion was kicked out of the rose garden. She sniffed. She may not be welcome in the rose garden, but surely there was another garden that would accept her. She dug up her roots and began her journey to find a new garden to call home.

After a long day and night of traveling, the dandelion found a garden full of lovely orange tulips standing in a row.

"They might let me stay," the dandelion hoped. "They grow on one stem like me!" However, when the tulips saw her coming, they huffed.

"What do you think you're doing?" they said. "This flower bed is for tulips, not ugly weeds! Besides, you're not even orange like us!"

The dandelion held back her tears. She sighed and continued her search. The next day, she came across a garden full of golden sunflowers, tall and proud. "Maybe they'll let me stay," the dandelion thought. "They're yellow like me!" But when the sunflowers saw her coming, they laughed and laughed.

"Why would we let a puny weed like you stay in our garden?" the sunflowers asked. "You're too short to belong in our garden anyway!"

The dandelion sighed and once again gathered up her roots and continued her journey. She traveled from garden to garden, asking for a place to stay, and every time, she was turned away. The dandelion journeyed to gardens of lilies, petunias, daffodils, hydrangeas, hollyhocks, and azaleas. No matter where she went, all the flowers scoffed and laughed and huffed. No weeds were allowed in the gardens.

The dandelion found herself rooted in a crack in the sidewalk. She stayed there for a long time. Rain fell and droplets fell from her petals like tears. The dandelion was heartbroken.

The dandelion wept and wept until all her tears were spent. She hated being a dandelion. She wished she were a beautiful rose, or a lovely tulip, or a proud sunflower. With nowhere else to go, the dandelion gave up all hope.

"I'll never find a home," she cried. "No one wants an ugly weed like me in their gardens. There's no such thing as a weed garden. I don't belong anywhere."

"I'm sure you belong somewhere," said a soft voice. The dandelion looked all around for the owner of the voice. In a small patch of grass next to the sidewalk stood a small, pretty violet. "Come with me, and I'll show you a place to stay."

The curious dandelion followed the little violet down the sidewalk and through a small forest. When they came to the very edge of the forest, the dandelion looked out and couldn't believe her eyes.

Beyond the forest was a large meadow, filled with flowers of all kinds. The flowers bloomed wherever they wished and no one told them where to grow. There were dozens of dandelions growing next to patches of poppies. White asters, pink bitterblooms, and yellow buttercups all laughed together. Honeysuckle bushes grew tall, with daisies and violets blooming underneath them. Pink lady's slippers and Queen Anne's lace bowed to each other and smiled. Bluebells told stories to eager galax flowers.

"I don't understand," the dandelion said, walking into the meadow. "Aren't you all weeds? No one wants weeds."

"We're not weeds," the little violet told her. "We're wildflowers. We grow wherever we want! You can stay here too if you want."

The dandelion thought for a moment. It didn't take long for her to decide. The other flowers welcomed her and made room for her in their wild garden. She planted her roots, and as the sun shone over the meadow, her yellow petals blossomed more beautifully than ever before.

"I'm a wildflower!" she said. "And this is my home!"

## PROSSIE AND THE BANDIT KING

by *Lillie Wieder*

Every year in the town of Hope's Brook, Wyoming, the entire town gathers for the annual storytelling contest. In 1874, the town had what many of the residents would describe as the "most clear and obvious winner of the contest in the history of the town." The winner, a lady who would come to be known in the town as Storyteller Brown, told the tale of Prossie and the Bandit King.

When Storyteller Brown climbed onto the stage, she brought a chair with her to sit in, something none of her competitors had done. Then, she began her story. "Now this is a tale you may have heard before," she said, with a voice much louder than anyone expected, "but it's one I tell my grandchildren, so it's one I'll tell you. If you make your way a little farther west, you'll stumble on a town known for its farming prowess. The biggest farm in that town was run by a woman named Cordelia. Now, Cordelia had a daughter named Proserpina, but everybody in town just called her Prossie. Everyone all agreed that she was the prettiest girl in town. The only thing in town that rivaled her beauty were the flowers that she grew. Her garden was her pride and joy, and she was almost always working in it."

"Passing through this very same town was The Bandit King, the terror of the west. If you ever encountered him, you were lucky to make it out alive. My mother said she saw him once and when he moved his jacket, she could've sworn that flames were coming from

the bottom hem of it. The older people in the town knew The Bandit King was really Denver Hughes, brother of Mayor Zachary Hughes, but nobody dared to talk about it 'cause Denver was the outcast of the family. But anyways, Denver passed through town one day and saw Prossie tending to her flowers, and as if Cupid himself had shot him with an arrow, Denver fell in love."

"Now, being The Bandit King and the disgraced brother of the town's Mayor, Denver knew that going about the usual routes of courting and getting married would be hard. But Denver wasn't called The Bandit King for nothing. He came up with a plan to steal Prossie just like he would anything else. And as crazy as it may sound, he succeeded, but not without Prossie putting up a fight. No, Prossie was screaming and yelling, flailing her arms about her with no regard to how many seeds she dropped or flowers she knocked down. Prossie's pride and joy, her beautiful flower garden, was a mess, with sunflowers toppled to the ground and pansies trampled and every type of seed she had gathered scattered with no rhyme or reason."

Now at this point in her tale, Storyteller Brown was leaning forward as far as she could, and everyone in the crowd was leaning towards her. Everyone was enraptured by Prossie's tale, wondering whether Denver would get away with kidnapping Prossie or if she would eventually be returned home. She continued her story, telling of Denver's escape.

"After Denver got Prossie on his horse, they rode off faster than light. Eventually, they made it to the train station where the rest of his band of thieves were waiting for him. The thieves had all jumped the train already and it was leaving the station as Denver and Prossie rode up. Denver knew that they would have to jump onto the train as it was moving. As he and the thieves were getting Prossie up onto the train, the Stationmaster saw them and rode off after them. When Denver saw the Stationmaster approaching out of the corner of his eye, he immediately got Prossie up into the train car and swung around. He pulled out his gun, shot the Stationmaster's horse in the leg, grabbed one of his men's hands, and swung up into the train car safe and sound."

"Now back in town, Cordelia returned home to see her daughter's flower garden wrecked and no sight of her daughter. She started to ask around town, to see if anyone had seen Prossie recently. Over and over again she was told no. It looked like her daughter had wrecked her garden and disappeared. Eventually, Cordelia found her way to the train station. She sat down on one of the benches, worn out from a hard day of trekking across town and asking everyone she saw about Prossie. Then she saw the Stationmaster. She walked up to that man and said 'Stationmaster, you're my last hope.



Please tell me you've seen my Prossie come by this way.' The Stationmaster said 'Well, I don't know for certain who it was, but I did see a maiden that The Bandit King seemed to have stolen from her home.' With that, Cordelia was nearly certain it was her daughter. But the rule in town was that running away with The Bandit King meant that you couldn't return. Cordelia was desperate to get her daughter back, so she knew she had to go and talk to the mayor."

"Now the mayor wasn't quite fond of his brother, but he also couldn't do much about his brother's actions. The two of them had an understanding, you see, that so long as Zachary was in power, he wouldn't pay mind to his brother's misbehaving ways, so long as Denver didn't stir up too much trouble in town. So, when Cordelia found the mayor, she wasn't sure what he'd do. So, she simply asked that if her daughter was found and returned, that her daughter could be allowed back into town. Zachary tried to convince Cordelia that maybe her daughter being with The Bandit King wasn't such a bad thing, but Cordelia wouldn't hear a word of it. So, they came to a compromise. If Prossie hadn't already eaten with The Bandit King, she was free to return home to normal life."

"Meanwhile, Prossie had been refusing every piece of food she was offered. She couldn't imagine eating with these foul men who had just kidnapped her and taken her away from everything she loved. They all eventually got off the train and made a camp for them to spend the night at. She still didn't eat until the next day when she knew she wouldn't be able to make it in the heat if she didn't get some food in her soon. When the whole group gathered that night for dinner, she had a tiny portion of beans. Soon after, a stranger on horseback arrived with a message for one of the men in the group, Nelson, who was secretly a spy for Zachary."

"There was a short conversation between the two, and the stranger left. Prossie felt it in her bones that the message had something to

do with her. She put on her sweetest voice and asked Denver, 'Would you please have Nelson come over here?' Denver couldn't say no to any of her requests, and when Nelson approached, Prossie had another request for Denver. She said, 'Denver, would you kindly ask Nelson what that stranger was talking to him about?' Well, Denver asked, and Nelson evaded the question. Denver asked again, and Nelson still tried not to answer. Finally, Denver asks one more time, except this time he says that if Nelson doesn't answer the question there will be consequences. I guess that Nelson didn't believe that Denver would do anything because he still didn't answer."

"For a little bit, he thought he had gotten away with it too. But the next morning he woke up to ropes being tied to each of his limbs. The other ends of the ropes were tied to horses, each one ready to pull in another direction. With a nod from Denver, the horses started walking in opposite directions and Denver asked Nelson one final time what the stranger said. As Nelson felt his limbs being slowly pulled, he began to tell everything. When Prossie heard about the agreement her mother and Zachary made to get her back and how Nelson mentioned her tiny portion of beans, she was enraged. Her chances of going home were ruined. So, in a fit of anger, she reached for Denver's gun, pulled it out of his holster, and shot Nelson where he was."

"Prossie immediately convinced Denver to turn around and take her back home. The entire band of thieves packed up their belongings and went back to that little town. When they arrived, they called on the mayor and asked him to meet them at the town line. Cordelia just so happened to have seen the group and knew her daughter would be there. When Zachary and Cordelia arrived, Prossie made her final attempt to get back into town. She yelled, she threatened, she looked like a raging woman with a gun in her hand. Zachary knew he couldn't possibly ban her from the town forever, not with the way she was acting. It

seemed that if she wasn't allowed back into the town peacefully, she might kill anyone who got in her way. Luckily, Zachary had an idea. He proposed that Prossie could come to town for the spring and summer, long enough to plant her flowers and tend to them. For the fall and winter, however, she would travel with Denver and the band of thieves. Prossie took this deal more willingly than Zachary had expected, 'cause during her time with The Bandit King, she had developed a bit of a bloodlust."

"She and Zachary shook on it and the arrangement was made. From then on, every year when the planting season started, she would return to that tiny town and plant the most beautiful flower garden you've ever seen. As soon as the first frost started killing her lovely garden, she left town to join The Bandit King. Slowly but surely, throughout the years, she began to fall for The Bandit King, and they became the most feared duo in the whole wild west. Now this story is the real reason why they tell you not to travel during the winter, cause if the cold doesn't get you, you can be sure that Prossie the Bandit Queen will."

With this final statement, Storyteller Brown ended her tale. She carefully and slowly stood and walked off stage. As she began to leave, she was met with a standing ovation. Storyteller Brown's fame spread, and she was invited again and again to tell her stories all over the west. She didn't accept these invitations too often, as she was preoccupied with her grandchildren, but occasionally, people would hear that Storyteller Brown was coming to town. No matter how well renowned she was, she never revealed her full name, but some swear that she looks just like the Bandit Queen herself.

## THE END

by Christian Young

"Let's start at the beginning: or, at least, where I want to begin," he said, never taking his eyes off the figure of the young woman in the distance to look at the even-younger woman before him. "I know her magnum opus has since become a symbol for something greater than herself, but she never envisioned anything so grand when she first painted it. She had something simpler in mind, something I didn't understand at the time, but I've come closer to empathizing with myself in these last few years."

"And what would that be, gramps?" answered the girl, only a teenager herself, as her comrades paraded on in the background. "It seems pretty clear to me: 'Never Forget'... she obviously wants us to remember everything that happened to her, to avenge her and her people. Isn't that what we're doing?"

"How do you know anything happened to her at all?"

"What do you mean?" She scoffed, offended

at her perceived ignorance. "Something must've happened. It's an old mural, times were tougher back then, people were less kind. What else can 'Never Forget' mean?"

"She was my mother, you know," the man replied, completely ignoring her question. "She painted that when I was six years old. I barely remember what she was like during it, but, even more than that, I can barely remember a time when that old brick wall was unpainted."

"So then you must know whatever it is that she wanted to remember, right?"

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "...at least, not completely. See, she died the summer after my tenth birthday. She was a nurse, and at that point there was no such thing as the Geneva convention."

"I'm...sorry."

"Childrens' memories of their parents are often so fuzzy, you know? Especially at that age. I never really got the chance to know her, to know what she was like as a person, beyond the fact that she was my mother."

"So? Wasn't that enough?"

"If it was, I don't think she would have painted that," he said, smiling wistfully as he gently shook his head. "She was more than just my mother. She was a person, a human being, like you and me; someone with hopes and dreams, unfulfilled and left behind as life led her down a more practical path. At least, I'm pretty sure that's the case, judging from what my father told me. He hadn't known her for more than fifteen years when she died...is that truly long enough to understand a soul that's not your own?"

The girl turned to look at the mural in the distance, the young woman's vibrant face framed by the bold text that had inspired her generation: Never Forget. She turned back to the man, whose leathery face suddenly seemed to take on a childish sense of grief at the memory of his lost parent, faint tears welling in his eyes. She didn't know what to say, for as much as she had endured, she had yet to experience anything like what he had described.

"Did your father ever tell you why she painted it? What incident prompted it?"

He slowly nodded, his face never losing the nostalgic smile that had taken up residence what seemed like hours ago.

"Yes," he said, slowly, measuring each sentence with a breath. "Not the exact reason, really, but the true title of the mural. But that's enough."

"What's it called?"

"Who I Am," replied the elderly man in the rocking chair. "It's called Who I Am. There used to be a little plaque at the base saying so, but I'm not sure if it's there anymore."

"So she's like the rest of us," said the girl. "She's someone who never forgets, who uses the past as a reason to keep fighting for the





present. That actually makes a lot of sense—it explains why it resonated so much with our movement.”

“No, that’s not what it’s supposed to mean.”

“There’s not any other way to interpret it, is there?” the girl asked, her tone walking the thin line between incredulous and impetuous. “Who I Am...she’s describing herself, isn’t she?”

“It’s a single thought, my father said. Never Forget Who I Am. Like all of us, she was driven by her fears—the fear of losing her life, her husband, her son. But, above all of that, she couldn’t stand the thought that one day there would be no one left who could describe her.”

“There’s you.”

“I only knew her as a mother,” he said, his smile finally fading away. “I never knew her as anything more than that. My father did, but even he didn’t know her completely, and he’s gone now too. They all are—everyone who knew her, except for me—but I’ll be seeing them soon enough, and when I do, there’ll be no need for any of us to merely remember her anymore.”

The girl was silent.

“She never wanted any of this to come out of her work,” he continued, gesturing to the people-flooded street a few meters away. “She wouldn’t have disapproved, mind you, but this was never her intention. She wanted the people who knew her to talk about her after she was gone, to pass on her story. She wanted that mural to cause people to ask questions, so that her memory would be immortalized in the answers.”

“I guess it didn’t exactly work out, huh?”

“No,” he replied with a chuckle. “It earned her some fame when it was finished, but by the

time she died, no one cared enough anymore. They’d...well, they’d forgotten about her.”

“I won’t forget about her,” the girl said, trying her best to sound determined. “Even when you die, I’ll still be here, and I’ll tell people about her.”

He didn’t say anything, and she almost felt guilty when his smile returned.

“What’s so funny about that?” she asked, suddenly feeling defensive.

“I’m sorry, my dear, it’s just that I don’t believe you in the slightest. Not that you wouldn’t try, of course, but if the people who knew her best couldn’t remember her, what chance do you stand?”

“It’s a new generation. People care about stories like hers’ now.”

“Do you even know her name?”

Silence.

“Exactly.”

More silence.

“I can find out.”

“Yes, you could, but in the end nothing will change. If I were you, I’d be more focused on making sure your friends don’t suffer the same fate.”

“How can I?”

“How should I know?” he retorted, albeit playfully. “Neither I nor my mother are good examples for you to follow, obviously, since she failed so spectacularly. You’re going to have to figure that out on your own.”

“Can’t you at least point me in the right direction?”

“I’m afraid not. This is the end for me, dear girl. Good luck.”





## DID GOD LOVE HITLER?; OR, WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

By Christian Young

I think from the title of this piece it should be obvious what the premise is. It's a provocative question to be sure, but one that is only so contentious because of the extremity of the chosen example—Adolph Hitler. But, to both introduce the question and summarize my argument, let me ask you this: Would the innate reaction you had to that title be the same if I had used someone else's name? Say, Barack Obama? Donald Trump? Or, to be less blatantly political, Harvey Weinstein? Jussie Smollett? What about the person sitting next to you—your friend, spouse, colleague, roommate? What about me, or you? Would your reaction have been different had I chosen as my title *Does God Love Me?* instead of *Did God Love Hitler?*

I think it's safe to say there would have been some difference between the two. The default response to the former is "Yes, of course He does," and to the latter it's "Yes, but only because He's God and He loves everybody." There's the underlying conception that it would take an extraordinary amount of love in order for anybody to feel that way about the Fuhrer, and that only God's infinite supply is enough to meet the need. But, let me ask you this, and know that I am being purposefully dramatic in order to prove a point: How are you better than Hitler?

"Well, because I haven't killed six million Jews and tried to take over the world by force," I hear you saying. And that, to most, would be a fair response. It certainly helps most people sleep at night. But I would contend—and I know this is a rather radical perspective, at least in our current society—that *sin is sin regardless of magnitude*, meaning that it took just as much love for Christ to sacrifice Himself for you as it did to sacrifice Himself for Hitler.

"I can agree with that on a theological level, but there's still a difference between anything I've done and the unjust deaths of six million people," you say. And that is true; or is it? Let me ask a rhetorical question—what is the difference between murdering one person and murdering two? The answer that would be typical of modern American democratic philosophy would be that two people is a greater "amount" than one person, and so killing two people is a worse crime than killing one. On a certain level, this appeals to our common sense, and I can't blame anyone for being deceived by this logic for that reason. However, it is not true—it *cannot* be true!—because if it is, it means we have greatly devalued individual human lives.

Allow me to briefly explore this tangent before returning to the point at hand. Modern Americans love to extol the virtues of 'democracy' without thinking about what that democracy

really means, and why we have (so far) avoided becoming a 'true' democracy: to have a democratic vote is to legitimize the interests of one party, the majority, while delegitimizing another, the minority. In essence, whoever sets up a purely-democratic system is saying that because one group has more members than another, their beliefs, their wishes, their desires matter more than the others—but is this not counterpurposeful to the ideals of our country? Do we not claim to value the beliefs of *all* Americans, regardless of whether or not they are in the majority party?

This naturally leads to the question: when is a minority large enough to matter? For example, if a population is divided into five equal groups, whichever party has the attention of three-fifths of the populace has the majority vote, and so is in control. But the remaining two-fifths—an entire 40% of the population—is still a massive percentage of the population, so surely their opinions matter, right? What if it was only 35%, or even 30%? Would their opinions still matter? 30% is large, almost a third of the entire population; so what about 25%, or 20%? What if the minority is a single individual? If you, dear reader, were being forced to accept a policy against your will—simply on a matter of numbers, because there were more people on the other side—would you feel that your human right to be heard, to decide your own destiny, was being trodden on?

Both this hypothetical situation as well as the question *What is the difference between killing one and two people?* boil down to a simple mistaken belief, rooted in the misunderstanding or misapplication of democratic principles. We have been raised to believe that people are invaluable in the truest sense of the word: you cannot place a price on a human life. But this is not true, because democracy has led us to place a more subtle value on humanity: the value of 'one person.' It is by this logic that we can claim the opinions of 'five hundred people' matter more than the opinions of 'two hundred people,' even if we never give an exact dollar amount each person is worth. It's like a mathematical equation:  $2a > a$ , even though you don't know what  $a$  is.

I deny this logic. The value of three peoples' opinions does not outweigh the value of one person's opinion, which necessitates that killing two people does not matter more than killing one person: to say so would be to say that the one did not matter, because they were *only one person*. In truth, each

# NONFICTION



individual person does not have the value of 'one person', but rather an infinite value, totally incomparable to the infinite values of other people. Each of us is a unique individual, with a unique soul, a unique history, and the recipient of a unique love from God—none of us are replaceable, so none of us can be valued so lightly. Infinity is the only way to balance the democratic equation, because only with infinity can you say  $2\infty = \infty$ .

So if there is no difference between killing two people and killing one, then what difference is there between killing six million and killing one?

"But, even still, I am not a murderer," you argue. Hopefully this is true, knowing that it is extremely unlikely an actual murderer will read this due to the relatively-small scope of publication (if, indeed, it is published at all). And yet the Bible tells us that we do not need to commit the crime to be guilty of murder: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matt. 5.21-30 NIV).

I do not quote this verse to condemn anyone; if I am to exude condemnation with this piece, let me first out of frank honesty condemn myself, but it would be best if we can discuss this principle rationally without becoming emotionally attached. Perhaps I hope too much: there will come a point in this conversation where rationality will fail us, since, ultimately, it is my goal to provoke the lackadaisical church in America. But not yet.

If there is no difference between hating someone and murdering them, in the eyes of the Lord, and there is no difference between killing one person and killing six million—I ask again, how are you better than Hitler? Or maybe it would be kinder to rephrase: how am I better than Hitler? I return to my point: sin is sin regardless of magnitude, which means, ultimately, none of us are better than Hitler without the saving grace of God.

Yet we do not act as if this were the case. This is expected of the world, which is so blind in its foolishness it cannot see the truth through the lies—but we are Christians, are we not? Why then have we forsaken the command to *love thy neighbor as thyself*, why have we forsaken the wisdom which says *God opposes the proud, but gives his grace to the humble*? Why do we judge, condemn, look down upon those from whom we would be no different without Christ? Why do we vehemently hate those whose beliefs differ from ours, when Christ himself would have run to them with open arms, pleading that He'd do anything for them if only they'd turn

from their wicked ways—a promise which He already made, and which only He could fulfill, and which He *did* fulfill.

Perhaps I am being too critical of modern Christianity as a whole when, in reality, it might only be the most vocal elements which act this way. Perhaps this is the case, and if it is, then I sincerely apologize. But I have been to many churches. I have met many Christians, and many who claim to be Christians, and often the difference between the two is not as pronounced as we would like to believe.

Allow me to finish this micro-essay by returning to the topic I introduced in the title: it is in vogue nowadays to unanimously criticize, disavow, and disparage the unique human being known as Adolph Hitler. Truly, if Jesus's command to love our enemies is to be taken as literally as possible, we have failed a thousand times over on account of a man who died eighty years ago. We say it is impossible—let alone completely immoral and unethical—to love Hitler, so why even try? (Allow me to reiterate that I know this is a radical view, and that many people will not agree with what I am about to say, and that I completely understand where they are coming from.) But if I am no better than Hitler because of my sin, how can I love myself without being able to understand God's love for Hitler? How am I able to say with certainty that, were I in Hitler's place, with his memories and history, that I would have acted differently?



In conclusion, I believe it is dangerous to judge the sins of others, even in the most obvious of cases; as Christians, we are called to forgive those who have wronged us, and which one of us will be brave enough to say that Hitler is less deserving of forgiveness than anyone else? It might be necessary to remind you that the use of Hitler in this argument was not prescriptive, but rather exemplative, so allow me to rephrase: who among us is brave enough to say that they are more deserving of forgiveness, of God's love, than their neighbor? As Jesus said, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8.7 NIV)—and if you are not confident enough to take that risk, which I suspect none of us are, then we need to reconsider how we treat those we consider to be enemies.

Will it be difficult? Will every natural instinct scream that we shouldn't? Yes. But that might just be a clue that we're on the right track.

### A LETTER TO THE LOST, A LETTER OF MY LOSS

by Daniel Green

It's raining outside. The water cascades along the widows as if mirroring the sorrows laden upon my heart tonight.

But where do I start? There is no need to remind you of what was. There is only what is. My pen grazes the page and the wind cries in pain.

I know, this hurts me too.

My ink blots the parchment, the rain torrents my soul.

And so there I was, with the same person I tried to run from...myself.

As I lay there with a smile on my face, I realize, maybe in another lifetime—just not this one.

No matter how much I loved her, she was never mine to love. I was selfish, so I couldn't walk away without a taste.

I knew she loved me, but she was not in love with me.

I always noticed she saw me, but with time, I saw she was just looking right through me.

All I ever wanted was to be enough for you, and even through all the pain and everything I suffered, I still want to see you happy.

I changed for her, yet she never noticed; at least they helped to become a better version of myself.

We were meant for each other, but we weren't meant forever.

It's hard to create another chapter to a story that can never be finished.

Because my chapter in your book is over, and it will forever be my favorite—but we can't keep re-reading it while hoping for a different ending.

I wish I could write our story to have a "happily ever after."

Because in the end we only have history, with no future.

And even though it hurts, I have to let you be happy.

We were strangers to friends, friends to lovers, and lovers back to strangers.

I think I knew in the beginning. From the start of the story you weren't "the One." Only now has my heart processed what my brain has always understood.

But knowing the reasons why we couldn't continue made you that much more of a loss to me.

It's better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all.

I might not have gotten to keep you, but if being with him makes you happy, then I'm happy too. Even if it's not with me. And that's okay. It has to be.

Sadly life continues, things keep moving, and we get older. I could only wish our paths would align later, but for now you are my someone. My right in the wrong.

It always felt like I was in one of those dreams where you're falling. She was next to me falling, but she already hit the ground, and I'm still falling.

And that was it: love, or so they call it... love.

How could something so painful be so sweet?

My heart was filled, yet you broke it in two.

You dropped me in an endless pit of misery, with no way to escape.

I screamed but no one heard, I mourned and only silence answered.

The rain beat me down as if challenging the tears flowing from my eyes.

My heart wailed and burned in sadness and fear.

I traveled for miles, yet I stood still.

I wept for days, but not a minute passed.

Suddenly my heart went quiet, and, finally, I wasn't in love anymore...I just loved her soul, but I couldn't see it anymore.

### THE MESSY PROJECT OF BECOMING A WRITER

by Anna Rajogopal

In my comparatively-short life, I have arrived at the conclusion that most of the vexation in the world, or at least most of the vexation imposed upon young people, is caused by ignorance. I started the semester with the lovely vision of "killing two birds with one stone" through registering for a class that would fulfill the credit-hours requirement for my financial aid, yet would also get my senior creative project out of the way at the same time. It never occurred to me that exploiting the system in this manner might be against the rules. Maybe I shouldn't be wanting to kill



birds. Whatever the case may be, the result was that I put most of my effort into a story only to learn that I was no closer to completing the requirement for my senior creative project than I was to begin with. This scenario was typical, though, of my course-by-arrangement class experience: I had once again not accomplished what I set out to achieve, but had still gained useful knowledge.

The first thing I learned concerned the writing process itself. At the beginning of the semester, my strategy was simply to sit down and crank out five pages of a story each weekend to meet my self-prescribed quota. But I soon found out that I couldn't keep up that pace, that I couldn't write creatively to a deadline. Creativity, I discovered, isn't like using the water dispenser on your refrigerator—a simple matter of pressing a button. Instead, it is more like a spoiled child, needing just the right time, place, and atmosphere in order to work, and yet still the slightest disruption will generate endless protests. Creativity is unpredictable and capricious. On a weekend when you have loads of time, it will refuse to play...but then at the end of a long day, just a few minutes before eleven o'clock, it will suddenly tap you on the shoulder while bounding with energy. My most valuable discovery in this area was that I can only be productive if I comply the moment I feel the inspiration to write; when I let that moment slip, my incentive is gone. I've already known that I work best if I am in a well-ordered room, with a fan on and the door closed. However, I've recently learned that the "well-ordered room" requirement comes with a caveat. My prime period for writing is early in the morning, from four to ten o'clock, because my mind is clearest then and I work more efficiently; but I realized that if I spend any time straightening up my surroundings, I invariably squander the time I needed to make headway with my story. Ironically, this class showed me that the most important thing to me is not creative writing, per se, but keeping the house neat, since I always made "sacrosanct" time for that activity and none for "Scars & Stripes"—a critical finding.

Time management wasn't an issue with my reading, though. I finished the *United States Disciplinary Barracks* book I had wanted to read this semester, and only used it to dip back into whenever I needed to refresh my memory about certain details and descriptions. I abandoned *The Return of Claudia*, my true "model book," when it began to make me feel defeated. However, its mechanics and style are so familiar to me that it still hangs over my head, like an unwanted muse or a fault-finding tutor. To my surprise, the volume I ended up using the most was not even one I had selected, but rather one I received in an English class, *Bird by Bird*. That was a comforting thing to open whenever I became frustrated, and it

would unfailingly comment on (or give advice regarding) what I happened to be struggling with at the particular moment: perfectionism, writer's block, note-taking, and even my concern for my grades. I learned so much from that book about my approach to life and writing. Most blindingly and crucially, *Bird by Bird* enabled me to comprehend—through its author's style, which I found easy to imitate in journalistic assignments—that if evaluation and editors are involved in my product's future, I don't like fiction writing best: I much prefer non-fiction writing. If that isn't the lesson definitive of this semester, I don't know what could possibly be.

That might be an overstatement: perhaps an as-definitive lesson would be the one I was given concerning incapacitating stress. I saw that having stress in the background when one is trying to write a story is like feeding antifreeze to a dog. My other classes, and the anxiety, the assignments, and the driving back and forth that they entailed certainly didn't prove beneficial to my overall mental state. They drained my time and energy and caused me to treat my story as a lesser priority. Since I considered other classes (especially Shakespeare and Journalism) to be more academically "serious," I poured my effort into them with the mindset that I would use whatever was left over for my course-by-arrangement. Naturally, I saw that once I had completed the required work for my major classes, or spent the early part of the day attending them, I had no brain power left. I understand now how privileged real writers must be—or devoted—since they apparently find the mental energy it takes to focus on, produce, and polish their works in the midst of the toil of everyday life.

Reflecting through the lens of this new insight regarding how stress works, I would definitely make some alterations if I could redo my course-by-assignment. I would attempt to write my entire story during the first few weeks of the semester, a period when I am still usually relatively relaxed and not too pressured by hefty projects or other obligations. If I had done that this semester, I would have had the rest of the term at my disposal to focus on editing. I wouldn't have tried to aim for a second story, period, avoiding that added level of stress altogether. Even while I was creating the syllabus and selecting the deadlines for the weekly pages and the stories themselves, I felt unsettling quivers of doubt in the back of my mind: with all my other classes as well as my Writing Scholar job, would I manage to deliver on the lofty goals I was setting for myself? Would I be able to accomplish that much writing? I learned the hard way that my suspicions were correct.

I also learned that my favorite aspect of the writing process, despite the struggle I experienced to get to this point, was still

the writing itself. I particularly enjoyed depicting scenes dealing with family strife (which probably shows something terrible about me), or featured allusions to the past, since the books I have been attracted to in the past always included them. It was fun, as well, to weave symbolism into my novella, through objects, colors, or nature, or to take a second look at a particular passage and ponder the symbolism that could be there. I have discovered how layered my writing is, which is definitely very useful.

While writing, I uncovered a wealth of other information, advantageous both to me and to my writing. I now know that if I persist, I can outlast any obstacle or quandary to do with my piece. I appreciate how many hours of research stand behind one little detail in a book, and I have gained a charitable respect for reporters (a category of humans I previously hated), since now I realize how hard it can be to track down that one specific detail that will make or break your story in terms of accuracy. I filed away the message that writing with the awareness that someone would shortly be looking at my work does distance me from my piece and restrict me, as it does many others, after I had proudly assumed that it wouldn't affect me. I gained humility from that lecture, and I also perceived that I had been writing selfishly, only putting in as much or as little detail as suited me, because up until now I have been writing solely for myself. My course-by-arrangement opened my eyes to the fact that when another person is reading my story, she needs to be allowed to share in the picture that is so vivid in my own mind. I was given a broadened perspective, too, when I learned hands-on what selecting a point of view entails: it's more than a whim, and demands commitment either way, to either provide



Painting by Raquel Smith

the audience with insight "about everything" or to provide it with enough insight about a particular person. I made the counterintuitive discovery that telling the story through the closed lens of first-person narration actually gives me more freedom. And finally—and in many ways most constructively—I was made aware that the girl others said was a wonderfully round and interesting character in a novel I wrote seven years ago has now grown obtuse and vague, like a face from a past barely-remembered. Perhaps it's because I have matured beyond her. Thankfully, she has potential for growth and new intelligence now too, like me.

Fiction Writing and Editing for Publication (my course-by-arrangement) thus ended up being mostly about my instruction in the task of becoming a writer, instruction that I needed as badly as I needed to know that you can't "kill two birds with one stone" at college. Even though I didn't finish the term with a beautifully-crafted short story worthy of an anthology—or two, for that matter—I managed to produce one with underlying potential, and, in addition to that, I can show for my efforts something that is much more important than even finishing a senior project: the experience I have gained from playing around with the tools of authorship. I have seen that even though being a writer is a messy business, I can become better at embracing the mess. And that, for me, is probably a greater achievement than my goal of winning the Flannery O'Connor Award.





# VISUAL ART





**RAQUEL  
SMITH**





**JANNESSA  
KAUFFMAN**







**ZOE RIGGS**



**JOHN STRANGE**



## ALONE

by Daniel Green

I'm drowning in regret,  
I'm choking in despair,  
I wallow in self pity.  
The wind whips my hair.  
I've dug a hole,  
Bottomless, so it seems.  
I claw my way upwards.  
The darkness rips my soul.  
I'm floating in the wind,  
Helpless to its changes,  
Thrashing in my darkness.  
The ground moves swiftly forwards,  
My heart lies in shreds  
Torn apart by their hands.  
I used to think it was my fault.  
I seek to understand  
Why they left me to the wolves  
And why I cared at all.  
I loved too much to fast.  
Why'd I think it'd ever last?

## BRAVE

by Alexandra Furlong

I am cold, the deep twisting kind.  
That binds up one's organs and freezes one's mind.  
The cold that stops the chatter of teeth and  
the body's shaking,  
That hollows out the stomach until one can  
hear their insides breaking.  
The kind that stops all movement and intents,  
That will not stop until its victim relents.  
It freezes my tears and clenches my fists,  
Convinces me that when I'm gone I will not  
be missed.

I curl up on my bed, searching for the warmth  
that should emanate from me,  
Looking for light that I don't think I will see.  
I hope for the door to open and dread the same,  
Does anyone understand me when they call  
my name?  
Call me lazy, careless, and cold,  
Mourn over the lost child who was once  
reckless and bold.  
Wonder what happened to the girl that once was,  
Guilt me for losing her, like everyone does.

My prayers are ink and never more,  
Needle and thread lay where I used to stitch  
what they tore.  
It wouldn't hurt as much if potential didn't rest  
Dormant and unused, deep in my chest.  
They bring up when I once was brave,  
And not a lost girl no one could save.  
I'm too weak now to sustain the lie that I'm okay,  
And don't worry, I no longer expect you to stay.

And when the storm brings the end near,  
And I'm numb to even sadness and fear,

And the end hits me like a bullet in a dove,  
I reach out one last time to the God that I was  
told is up above.  
A moment passes, one of silence and of  
almost hope.  
Of searching for a lifeline and listening for the  
drop of a rope.  
They say that when your children call, you come,  
But it feels like the Devil has already won.

Then a voice speaks, quiet and impossible  
to ignore.  
"You are still the same brave girl you were  
before."  
And I realize that maybe I am brave.  
I am still here, even after being sucked down  
by wave after wave.  
And when I reached my limit, much further  
along than I thought it would be,  
God reached out His hand and held tightly to me.  
I found strength in myself that I thought was gone.  
I discovered that I could make it until the dawn.

Pieces of light like a mosaic break through,  
The low sweeping clouds as I look at you.  
A slant of warmth begin to brighten the blue,  
Of my lips and hands and they turn a lighter hue.  
My boldness was never lost, only hidden.  
And it rose when by God it was bidden.

God waited, but he came.  
And now I will never be the same.

## CRUSHING

by Sophia Jordan

Why do you taunt me with your wonderful eyes  
And flood my mind with thoughts of you and me  
As you stand there, carrying on with your life,  
as if I don't exist?  
Why do I feel like this?

Why does your smile blind me  
And your laugh drowns out the world  
As you move through the motions as if nothing  
bothers you?  
Why do I feel like this?

I keep asking why I am attracted to you  
When you're not that great of a guy  
And a relationship with you wouldn't last.  
Why are you like this?

I keep wondering what draws me to you  
When you do some of the questionable things  
that you do  
And you say the hurtful and disgusting words  
that you say.  
Why are you like this?

I feel so distressed and confused  
One second you're sweet, and the next  
you're mean.

You're messing with my emotions and you  
don't even know it.  
Why do I wish that we were together?

I feel so upset and frustrated.  
You hurt me, then you apologize and don't change.  
You're playing tricks on my mind and you  
don't even realize it.  
Why do I wish that we were together?

And I feel like we would be toxic  
Because you don't acknowledge what you do to me  
And I would bottle up my emotions until I explode.  
Why do I want to break my heart by falling in  
love with you?

And I know that we would never last  
Because you don't truly care about how I feel  
And I would care too much for my own good.  
Why do I want to break my heart by falling in  
love with you?

## DAHLIAS

by Walker Liles

It takes strong hands to pull the weeds,  
To shift and unearth the stones,  
To dig and dig and dig so that  
There is good space and soil for the seeds.

But this is not even the beginning.  
There is a cost to the seeds,  
And there is much to learn on  
How they must be nourished and cared for.

And even once they begin to sprout,  
The needs and wants of these soon tall  
And colorful blooms only continue.  
The work is strenuous, but fruitful.

Posts must be set in the right stature,  
Bounds must be tied accordingly,  
The foundation and future for these  
Wonders must be tended endlessly.

But for all the wonder, they are,  
Terribly and beautifully,  
Wonders that are equally fantastic  
As they are unpredictable.

Even for how well they are tended and loved,  
The world blows winds that bring days  
With not enough rain and too much sun.,  
It brings pests and vermin that eat at the stems.

The dangers will ever be present,  
And the damages will always be falling.  
But the strong hands do not stop working.  
She works and watches until the buds emerge.

And soon the flowers grow tall and  
broad and blossom with the most  
lovely colors of purple, pink and peach.

But for all of that, is it in vain?

How wretched the flowers are that,  
For all the colors it blooms,  
They have not the faintest understanding  
Of what it took for their stems to still stand.

No, it is not in vain, not for those hands  
That worked day and night and again on,  
Who now gets to see her work blossom.  
I pray for those tall, beautiful and foolish  
flowers.

May they know just how blessed they are  
To be tended by such strong hands,  
And how they could never have grown  
So well without her relentless love.

## MOTHER

by Jeremiah Bryan

Mother,

Pray for me to the Lord, our God.  
I send you bouquets of roses, even in the coldest  
Decembers  
to show my fervent love for you, though I  
have one request:  
pray that I do not burn in the depths of Hell's fiery  
embers.

O, my pure Mother, I long to always greet  
you with that sweet  
Angelic Salutation that you hold so dear.  
Your love flies me to the  
moon which you stand upon as you wear that  
beautiful crown of  
twelve stars.  
You who are full of grace, perpetually chaste,  
with a spotless face,  
I beg you to pray for me unto my final hours.

## NO

by Lillie Wieder

Am I mourning what could've been?  
I don't think so, not really.  
I am mourning the choice I didn't get to make.  
I am mourning the months of maybe  
ending in a *no*.  
Not a *no* from me.  
Not a *no* from you.  
A *no* that confirmed the fear  
I've had this whole time.

If the *no* had been yours,  
or mine,  
ours,  
this might all feel different.  
But it was theirs  
and we never had a say.  
The decider of our fate



was against us from the start.

We could try again later,  
but later is so far away.  
For now, this is the end.  
But maybe,  
just maybe,  
for one of us  
this *no*  
is just the beginning.

### RAINING ANVILS

by Zoe Riggs

delphic eternity parts  
at the word's command.  
In His palm of His galaxy  
a plan is already written.  
Celestial bodies violently dance,  
my atoms scattered in their wake.  
On Terra: Spirit's breath weathers,  
a beginning unfolding from dust.  
Then it was torrential.

Holy serpent's manipulation,  
his sharp, venomous, destruction.  
And his rabid, yet certain compliance.  
Broken psyche,  
squirming and writhing intestines,  
his talons twisted, ripping into tender flesh.  
And we said,  
"it is torrential"

In the neighbor's tree,  
an abandoned nest rots,  
lined with poison.  
We weed eden in a paternal eclipse,  
overgrown justice strangles the sun.  
and we said,  
"it is torrential"

Beloved brethren: broken,  
incomplete, missing.  
It must smell sterile, cold, separate.  
But also so dearly loved,  
maternally missed and mourned.  
So we said,  
"it is torrential"

Freedom found in the decay,  
we spread our wings.  
So far from shalom,  
our broken peace.  
Less one,  
find many more,  
finally we say,  
"it was torrential"

### A SEA SHANTY

TO THE TUNE OF "BLOW THE MAN DOWN"

by Joshua Holbrook

**Chorus:**  
Sing hallelujah now to our Great God,  
Sing hallelujah!  
Sing with the angels who'n heaven have trod,  
Sing out hallelujah!

Come now and hear of our God from above  
(Sing hallelujah!)  
Clothed in great splendor and festooned with  
love (Sing out hallelujah!)  
He comes as a lover to tenderly lead (sing  
hallelujah!)  
His people from captivity freed (sing out  
hallelujah!)

**(Chorus)**

But fear now his enemies, pray fear his wrath  
(Sing hallelujah!)  
Tremble and quake if ye choose side with death  
(Sing out hallelujah!)  
Fell sons of God, warrior Yahweh will  
route (Sing hallelujah!)  
Yea, even the daemons all shake in their boots!  
(Sing out hallelujah!)

**(Chorus)**

So repent now I say and lay down your sword  
(Sing hallelujah!)  
Believe and submit to th'eternal Word! (Sing  
out hallelujah!)  
Though you have left, gone the harlot's way  
(Sing hallelujah!)  
He'll embrace you still if you turn back this  
day (Sing out hallelujah!)

**(Chorus)**

He'll prepare there a banquet for us, we will  
dine (Sing hallelujah!)  
Good meat and our cup overflowing with wine  
(Sing out hallelujah!)  
Those of this world have their good wine at  
first (Sing hallelujah!)  
And now our great God ever quenches our  
thirst! (Sing out hallelujah!)

**(Chorus)**

### SEASONS OF LIFE

by Brianna Kurmai

Oh, thus a season in life,  
Another dreaded morning to sounds  
Of empty screams, whispered through the wind.  
Bitterness reigns throughout this barren  
wasteland  
As song once sung of triumph,  
Now sorrow sweeps the dust from underneath  
Of the tears that were shed beneath .  
Oh, thus a season in life,

Longing for answers that may never be found.  
Should we rejoice in the pain  
And hold onto what may be brought anew?  
For in the morning what daylight brings  
Life still shines itself upon me,  
Though my grieving has its grip,  
The valley may try to parish all in its storm  
of uncertainty.  
As Life's trials arise  
It's always a reminder  
Oh, thus a season of life.

### SIDE OF HEAVEN

by Sophia Jordan

We are broken  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are lost  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are unclean  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are hurt  
On this side of Heaven.

There is death  
On this side of Heaven.  
There is sorrow  
On this side of Heaven.  
There is destruction  
On this side of Heaven.  
There is pain  
On this side of Heaven.

We murder  
On this side of Heaven.  
We abuse  
On this side of Heaven.  
We manipulate  
On this side of Heaven.  
We hate  
On this side of Heaven.

We are racist  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are sexist  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are killers of developing babies  
On this side of Heaven.



We are bullies  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are ignorant  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are thieves  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are neglectors  
On this side of Heaven.  
We are sinners  
On this side of Heaven.

And I'll never understand why  
We call Earth "this side of Heaven."  
Maybe because we try to hope  
And hold onto the promise of Heaven?  
Maybe because we dream and wish  
That Earth would be more like Heaven?  
But this wretched and disoriented world  
Is nothing like Heaven.

The only heavenly things  
On this side of Heaven  
Are the things of God  
That He sent from Heaven:  
His Word, His Son, His Holy Spirit  
That He sent to us from Heaven.  
I trust in these eternal things  
So that I may see them in peace in Heaven.

But there is some hope  
On this side of Heaven,  
Something to hold onto  
On this side of Heaven,  
Something for everyone to trust in  
On this side of Heaven,  
Something to look forward to  
In Heaven.

There will be no brokenness  
In Heaven.  
There will be no one lost  
In Heaven.  
There will be true cleanliness  
In Heaven.  
There will be no hurt  
In Heaven.

There will be no grief  
In Heaven.  
There will be no sorrow  
In Heaven.  
There will be no destruction  
In Heaven.  
There will be no pain  
In Heaven.

There will be no racism  
In Heaven.  
There will be no sexism  
In Heaven.  
There will be no bullying  
In Heaven.  
There will be no hate  
In Heaven.

There will be no murder  
In Heaven.  
There will be no stealing  
In Heaven.  
There will be no ignorance  
In Heaven.  
There will be no sin  
In Heaven.

We will be new  
In Heaven.  
We will be pure  
In Heaven.  
We will be whole  
In Heaven.  
We will live with our Father  
In Heaven.

We need to be more focused on Heaven.  
We get our direction from our Father in Heaven.  
We need to focus on the things of Heaven.  
All that is eternally good comes from Heaven.  
We need to look forward to Heaven.  
All our hope comes from Jesus in Heaven.  
We need to look towards Heaven.  
Our help comes from the Holy Spirit who was  
sent from Heaven.

TICKET TO \_\_\_\_\_  
by Christian Young

Ticket in hand, I stand on the platform  
Searching, waiting, breath trapped  
In anxious hope of coming \_\_\_\_\_  
A train arrives, I rush on board,  
And as I wait for it to leave I see:  
This is not the train for me.  
My ticket is no help, it says  
GO WHERE [Happiness?] IS,  
And that's not the name of a platform here.  
I rush as another train starts to leave  
And barely catch the door with my hand;  
I'm too slow, but fast enough to see:  
\_\_\_\_\_ is not a destination on this line,  
Even though I've waited all this time.

UNCERTAINTY  
by Sophia Jordan

There is absolutely nothing that rips your heart  
out of your chest  
And makes you feel like you're about to fall  
from a high altitude  
And makes it seem that the world is falling apart  
Like the feeling of uncertainty.

And you just can't shake the feeling,

It's always there, whether you consciously  
acknowledge it or not.  
And it hurts as you fail to ignore the lump  
swelling up in your throat  
Because uncertainty is real.

It stings. It burns because it's honest.  
It pierces your heart, it stabs it and keeps it so  
deeply wounded.  
It hurts. It pains you because you can't fight it  
And uncertainty is so much more than a  
complex feeling.

It's a state of mind and an atmosphere,  
It's the thickest cloud in the sky that  
continuously threatens to unleash thunder  
and lightning and ice,  
It's the straw that breaks the camel's back, the  
roaring waters that break through the dam,  
It's uncertainty, and it's always ready to  
wreak havoc.

It's the fear that things won't turn out well.  
It's the anxiety that floods your mind and  
breaks your spirit.  
It's the uneasy feeling that resides in your  
stomach and frequently visits your mouth.  
This is only a small glimpse of what  
uncertainty is.

It causes you to push others away until you're  
completely alone.  
It makes you question whether anything even  
matters anymore.  
It forces you to say that you're okay and  
it's all okay, when you're really not and  
it's really not.  
It never lets you go; uncertainty will not let  
you go free.

Pain, loss, grief, brokenness, poverty, danger,  
Injury, sorrow, depression, anxiety, death,  
War, famine, disease, drought, natural and  
man-made disasters,  
All breed and fuel and sow and lead to that  
uncertain terror

And if that's where it supposedly ends, there's  
more uncertainty  
And the cycle continues and continues.  
But that's not where it must end and start again  
That's when we cry out to the One who sees  
and cares about us

He doesn't promise that it'll be easy, but He  
does promise to stay with us.  
He doesn't immediately show us how it all  
works out, but He does promise that it  
will work out.  
He doesn't work on our time, but He moves on

His divine time, never early and never late.  
He walks with us and He carries us and He is  
always right there, embracing us.

So we must open our eyes and open our ears to  
His sweet voice,  
We must deny our flesh, pick up our crosses,  
and follow Him.  
We must strive to love and care as He does.  
We must heed His Word and follow it with all  
our hearts, minds, souls, and strength

Because the Lord God is the only certainty  
in our lives.  
He is the only one who is in control of all things  
And He's moving right now. He's turning  
situations around as we just try to carry on  
Even during all the terror and the sorrow and  
the constant uncertainty.

UNDERSTANDING THE ARTISITS  
by Christian Young

I stand amazed that even now  
Truisms past ring truer still:  
For when in life I knew no strife  
My artistry did suffer still.

For can it be  
That art is pain?  
That love so sweet  
Could harbor ill—  
O, let me never  
Write again!  
If this, the cost,  
Then take my will.

How then my songs, which now art lost,  
My poetry, and paintings too,  
All the products of hopefulness  
Clashing against the wall of truth:  
How can it be  
That pain I hate,  
Yet pain I need  
To now create.

WRATH AND FURY  
by Lillie Wieder

I don't get mad.  
Not often.  
Not really.  
Today?  
Today was the exception.  
Today I felt wrath.  
Today I felt fury.  
Today I felt what I so seldom feel  
at just the  
*sight*  
of those who hurt you.



THE LAMP POST 2022

# METAMORPHOSES

ACKNOWLEDGING CHANGES ON CAMPUS AND AROUND THE WORLD



*“Walking with a student to find that place, it’s like a journey.”*  
*Prof. Jim Southerland (1947–2021)*

## PREFACE

*The Editors*

This is a ‘special edition’ of The Lamp Post, with a special section intended to discuss the serious themes of an equally-special year. The following nonfiction pieces have been expressly curated as observations on some of the Spring 2022 semester’s defining events, because the editorial staff felt that they could not (and should not) be ignored. It is our sincere hope that the reader will benefit from joining this conversation, but should the weighty topics presented here prove damaging to that cause, please—by all means—feel free to move past this section and give it no more thought.

With that in mind, please enjoy this very unique section of The Lamp Post.



## OBSERVATIONS

*Luke Levonius, class of 2022*

### 4:24

I was writing on the balcony when  
 Hearing that sound,  
 I closed my laptop and  
 Rushed to see what had happened there  
 On the chapel floor

### On the chapel floor

The carpet  
 is  
 gone now  
 And  
 it  
 did not  
 Seep through

### Seep through

We know even  
 As you ask, “How could he?”  
 The ease with which we could  
 say goodbye

### Say goodbye

Montreat rains  
 Everyday it seems  
 Like I can’t help  
 But remember how  
 It fell that day

At 4:24



## REFLECTIONS ON A CAMPUS DEATH

*Pres. Paul Maurer, PhD*

A few weeks ago, our Montreat College community experienced death. It was our community's second death this academic year. The first was Professor Jim Southerland, who succumbed the day after Christmas to a lengthy battle with significant health problems. We were saddened but not shocked by Professor Southerland's passing. We remember Jim with gratitude and appreciation for the person he was, the witness of his Christian pilgrimage, and his teaching, expertise, and passion for the visual arts.

This second death was different. I've spent a great deal of time reflecting on the events of March 23. Perhaps you have too. If so, I'm encouraged, not for any pain you may experience, but for the reflection and self-examination that helps to shape our souls more toward the image of God. What follows are a few of my reflections on the experience and its aftermath.

*Shock, Violation, and Anger.*

The death on March 23 shocked all our senses. No one saw it coming. Its violence rocked us. Many of us experienced a sense of violation. Not only that someone would come to campus to take their own life, but especially in Graham Chapel where we gather to worship God. Graham Chapel is for many a sacred space. For this reason, many have experienced a valid and intense anger. There was a palpable rawness on campus for days.

*Process and Healing.*

A thoughtful process guided the days that followed. Many behind-the-scenes meetings and decisions. It wasn't perfect, but it was rooted in love and care with the intent of healing and restoration. There is an individual process, which is different from a campus-wide process. Each individual processes a tragic event differently from the next person. You have processed and are processing it in your own way. Keep doing that as needed. The campus-wide process attempts to facilitate healing and restoration. Hopefully, prayerfully, the campus-wide process of making counselors available, closing then reopening Gaither Hall, then Graham Chapel, and having worship and prayer gatherings has been helpful to your individual process. As a community, we are here for each other. Please reach out if we can help. Please.

*Restore, not Reclaim.*

For the first few days, I found myself using the word "reclaim" quite a bit. As in: "we need to reclaim Graham Chapel." A few days in, I realized "reclaim" was not the right word. "Reclaim" implies that Graham Chapel was taken from us, and that we had to take it back. And then I realized that it was never taken from us. It is still Montreat College's, used for holy purposes. Our job is to restore it to its intended and historic use. For almost a century, Graham Chapel has been a place of worship, proclamation of the Good News, weddings, baptisms, and the celebration of faithful lives well-lived. We, in partnership with Christ Community Church, have sensitively and successfully restored the chapel to its rightful use.

*Our Good People.*

There were numerous selfless acts of courage and leadership from the first moments, and in the weeks that followed, both from the college and Christ Community Church. Too many to name. It was beautiful, truly a long series of redemptive acts, weeks on end. I suppose unless you're in a different setting where people don't act in the best interests of others in love, you might take it for granted. These weeks have been a powerful reminder of what makes Montreat College such a special place. Less so its natural beauty and history, and more so because of the people who breathe life into it. Culture is about the people.

*The Promise of Easter.*

The Lenten season we have just concluded specifically calls us to reflect on the most fundamental aspects of life: the purpose of our lives; our relationships with each other and God; our sin, and; coming to terms with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Shock and anger inevitably fade. But for the Christ-follower, let us embrace Christ's promise that he will make all things new. In the shadow of Easter, let us proclaim: Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? (1 Corinthians 15:55, NIV)

He is risen. He is risen indeed!

## AGAINST HUMANISM

*Alexandra Furlong, class of 2024*

I in me—Can only see—That which blurs and bends.  
The flood and fire—The mud and mire—Only itself lends.

I break down—Bruised and bound—Buried in my heart.  
As I try to find—The intents of my mind—and the intricacies of each part.

But you see—I kill me—on my path and in my truth.  
Because my truth is not true—and I know not who—I am in my youth.

And I will die—By and by—Trying to carve my way.  
And I will die—As I try—My soul to find and save.

The floating feathers—My handmade tether—I cannot reach hope.  
I am too hollow—The well too shallow—And I drip poison on my rope.

They say you find—In your heart and mind—what you truly need.  
But there is nothing left—and I am bereft—hope leaves as I bleed.

To see in me—I need to leave—All of me behind.  
To see outside—I must reside—Far outside my mind.

And it was not until—I stood at one—With He who played with ashes,  
That I saw—Through my gun—Myself amongst the masses.

The light I know and see—Not through me—But only through Himself.  
This soul of mine—Will twist and wind—Until it rests in Himself.

I found freedom—in the Son—when I tethered to Him.  
My path is made—I am saved—From the heavens, and not within.

REFLECTIONS  
ON RECENT HAPPENINGS*Prof. Don King, PhD*

The recent death of my colleague, Jim, and the more recent death of my former student are sharp reminders of the fragility of life. Like many, I tend to forget that we are only wisps of the wind or morning dew. But death is not new to Montreat College. Over the years, many colleagues have passed on as well as several students. In the mid-1990s one of our senior English majors—a bright, winsome, delightful young woman—went home for Spring Break, had a brain aneurysm, and died. A few years later, three of our students were traveling on I-40 between Swannanoa and Black Mountain when a semi crossed over the median, struck them head-on, and took them from us. Not long after that, a recent graduate—who had been a fierce but compassionate pro-life advocate—was killed in an automobile collision; ironically, she was pregnant with her first child. And then, not long afterwards, a gifted athlete—with a smile as cheerful as a summer sunrise—went home for Christmas break, contracted a blood disease, and died. None of these student deaths made sense. All of them left deep heartbreak. There is never a satisfying answer to the question, "Why?" I have no new insight to share about these shattering losses. Poems like John Donne's "Death Be Not Proud" and many passages of Scripture offer anodynes, but in the end, many of us are left bewildered by death. After the recent tragedy, I texted a friend: "In spite of his death, I still believe in the goodness of God's character. Life may be a boatload of dung at times, but He is worthy, loving, and gracious. While chaos swirls around us all, He is the still, turning point of the universe." My friend texted back: "Amen. I believe that with Don." I am writing this reflection—appropriately enough—on Good Friday. In a few days, we celebrate Easter and Christ's defeat of death. Although the fragility of life remains, in His victory over death, we find the only hope worth living—and dying—for.



## AFTERMATH

Prof. Kimberly Angle, PhD

I don't know about you, but I'm not good at math—  
numbers leave me numb, and I'm left stymied by stats  
of days, boxed and masked, left dimwitted by decimals  
of improper death counts and photographs  
of empty strollers in Ukraine.

Where are the common denominators?  
The times tables of memorized dates and logic  
devised to keep history from repeating?  
And then a text of the police report bleeps:  
“In Graham Chapel, one unattended death.”

So even here, in Montreat, in late March, the bare trees  
stand at odds for solving Y, and the daffodil,  
its head bowed with rain is still yellow two days  
into Spring, 2022, where under lovely pale blue skies  
we're left to grapple with the actions, actions, actions  
that leave us fractions, fractured sums of someone,  
something we desperately dreamed we'd become,  
left us searching for lost plans, for the standard deviations  
meant to bridge once upon a time to happy ever after.

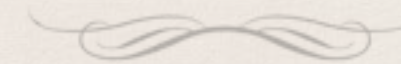
One arithmetic lesson I remember: anything multiplied  
by zero equals zero. I don't know about you,  
but as I review my rough calculations  
three days into Spring, the sweetest of days in Montreat  
in fifteen years, I find, after all, that I actually do.  
And, so, I'm learning. Ask my neighbor:  
“What do I need to know about you? . . .  
And do you know what's unsolved in me?”

Still, the other side of ledgers must factor in,  
the checks and balances, the steadfastness of light:  
a given, after all—here, here, where physicists haven't yet  
accounted for the Great Cloud of Witnesses, hymns  
by the ten-thousands going up and out  
spilling goodness, now, now into eternity.

Even today I heard voices raised, rehearsing  
on a sunny Wednesday at 4:30 for Good Friday  
while in an upper room a student stumbles over Joy  
to the World, and practices for Christmas twelve days  
into Spring, here, here, now, now, at Montreat, gratitude  
and reverence and praise are ever increasing with voices  
off key and wailing over everything that's loved and lost  
and found, yet harmony echoes still—here, here—The Lord's Prayer  
raised approximately one million, three hundred thousand,  
four hundred and eighty-seven times from the beating hearts  
peopling the Church services, the Chapel gatherings, the weddings,  
the baptisms, the convocations, the prayer meetings, the Children's  
Pageants, and the Easter Sundays since 1935.

In the end, all the problems with words—the unrhymed lines,  
definitions dimmed, meaning muted and unmetered—  
the mutterings of “I love you, I love you, I love you”  
that can't be received in sickness or by percentages  
of the stuff of flesh and blood, are still resounding.  
Here, here, Brother, Sister in Christ, know this constant:  
the Spirit sighs, transfigures tongues and calculus and primes,  
our circumstance and consequence  
into eloquence incomprehensible.

Here, here in Montreat, our chapel, Graham Chapel—  
this place of rings exchanged, of prayers and good intentions,  
we are broken and, yet, still, I find the report must be corrected:  
for now we can stand and bear witness  
that our circle, still intact, embraces any shadow  
that our Holy Ground remains indivisible—here, here—  
where there never was, nor never shall be  
one life or one death  
unattended.  
Amen.



## UKRAINE

The Editors

The events of March 23rd shocked the campus in many different ways, because this is a campus made up of unique individuals—people who have diverse reactions to adverse situations. Yet the widespread concern, intrigue, and sadness that stemmed from that event also served to distract us from something that started almost exactly a month previously, and which is a tragedy just as deserving of recognition as anything else that has happened this semester.

Tensions had been rising between Russia and Ukraine, but on February 24th, 2022, Russia began its attempt to invade. Ukraine has been putting up a fierce resistance (as of the time of writing, they have not yet fallen), though they have also made many requests for international support, to which many nations have responded. The majority of the world has condemned the actions of Russia and Vladimir Putin, yet Ukraine has received solely munitions and humanitarian aid, with not one country having yet responded to Ukraine's request for additional troops to drive out the invaders.

As of the week this was published, Ukraine has been at war for two months, which has forced millions of people to leave their homes. The UN estimates that there will be around seven million refugees, with just as many people internally displaced within the country. Many refugees have fled to Poland, with others heading to other parts of Europe, and some fleeing to Russia. This year, this conflict has hit our campus differently than it may have in the past, as we have students attending Montreat from both Ukraine and Russia. Because of this, a situation that is so far removed from many students hits unusually close to home.

If you would like to support Ukraine, one of the most impactful ways to do so is through donations. There are a variety of organizations that are working to both help the Armed Forces in Ukraine and provide humanitarian aid. Along with that, you can email Congress. There's a variety of templates that can help you to know what to write to your local Congress Members, or you can write your own message. Congress Members' websites provide their contact information.

The world is going through changes—a *metamorphosis*, if you will—and it may seem like all we can do, as college students on the other side of the world, is observe. It may seem like we can't do anything about the passing of Prof. Southerland except watch; or that there's nothing to be done with Graham Chapel except wait for life to return to the status quo. But this is only partially true: through observation, we can do what we came here to do. Learn. Understand. Appreciate. And, most importantly, we can grow in ways we could never have predicted.



“Art is a balance of observation of the real world, it needs to be original, and that observation in and of itself is not very interesting or inspiring, but when you combine that with your intuitive formalism—that is the best of the art you can make. Your own sense of beauty, balance and repetition reflect that in your own set of aesthetics. That cannot happen without critical thinking.”

Prof. Southerland, in a student interview from the Fall 2021 semester





*Selected Art by Prof. Jim Southerland  
Top: "Big Oak" • Bottom: "Squash & Tomatoes"*



*Selected Art by Prof. Jim Southerland  
Top: "Mostly Pesto" • Bottom: "Botanical Bridge"*







### TO THE READERS OF *THE LAMP POST*:

It has always been *The Lamp Post's* goal to provide a showcase for the creative abilities of Montreat College students, alumni, and faculty, as well as being able to provide some measure of stability when going through periods of change. And this literary journal has seen its fair share of changes: the last two issues were published in the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape, and while this issue has been largely exempt from those complications, it is fair to say that much has gone on during this semester which we felt we had to address. This obviously led to the creation of the “Metamorphoses” section, and it is our hope that future editors will take similar initiative to change the format of *The Lamp Post* as the need arises—and in doing so, prove this to be a truly metamorphical publication.

Many thanks must also be given to our faculty advisors, Dr. Kimberly Angle and Dr. Elizabeth Juckett, without whom *The Lamp Post* would not exist at all and whose guidance has proven to be invaluable once again. We would also like to honor Dr. Juckett in particular, who will be retiring at the end of the current semester, and who will be dearly missed by both the Lamp Post editors as well as the Montreat community as a whole. This is one more metamorphosis to which we will adapt, however reluctantly we must do so. We wish you the happiest of retirements, Dr. Juckett, as well as the best of luck in wherever the Lord decides to take you next.

We'd also like to give special mentions to two of our editors—Lillie Wieder and Jannessa Kauffman—whose work on the “Metamorphoses” section allowed it to be finished in time for publication, with quality content of which the entire staff is proud. This section was a late addition to the journal, and one unprecedented in recent history, but they made sure we were able to print it regardless.

The editorial staff is proud to present this issue as our finest yet, and it is our continued goal that this can be said of every new edition of *The Lamp Post*; and, with the help of our creatively talented Montreat community, we're positive that we will be able to meet this goal again next year.

With prayers that, not shunning change, we gracefully adapt to God's will,

*The Lamp Post Editorial Staff*



### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*The Lamp Post* is an interdisciplinary undergraduate arts journal—created, designed, and published by and for Montreat students, alumni, staff, faculty, and supporters. At *The Lamp Post*, we believe that art comes from within and potentially creates response, reaction, inquiry, and discourse. We do not limit the definition of art; instead, we believe “we are the clay, and You our potter; all of us are the work of Your hand” (Is. 64:8).

### EDITORIAL POLICIES

*The Lamp Post* accepts submissions via email at [thelamppost@montreat.edu](mailto:thelamppost@montreat.edu). Upon receipt of a piece, the submission will be reviewed by members of the editorial staff and faculty advisors. *The Lamp Post* reserves the right to edit texts received; however, substantial changes are made in consultation with the original creator. Montreat College administration gives final approval before publication. Creators retain copyright and publishing rights to all submissions without restrictions. There is no limit to the length of submissions, but shorter (two pages or less) submissions are preferred. Visual art submissions should be sent as attachments to an email with the artist's contact information present.

### SELECTION CRITERIA

*The Lamp Post* considers submissions of artistic merit in any publishable form. After review, submissions will fall into one of three categories: *Acception Without Revision*, *Acception Pending Revision*, or *Decline to Accept*. The Editorial Board of *The Lamp Post* reserves the right to summarily decline works that unnecessarily glorify violence, promote any variant of prejudice, contain illicit content, or do not represent the academic standards of Montreat College.

*Opinions presented herein are those of the student authors and editors, and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the Montreat College administration, faculty, or staff.*



