



MANUSCRIPT
2021-2022

The Wilkes University Manuscript Society presents

Manuscript
2021 - 2022

1947 Forward

With this issue of Manuscript a new publication is launched on the Bucknell University Campus in Wilkes-Barre. Those who have been responsible for its coming into being earnestly hope that through your efforts and the efforts of those who come after you that this magazine will develop into a college tradition of which we may all be proud.

— *The Editors*

Mission Statement

The Manuscript Society of Wilkes University has been publishing its creative writing and visual art magazine, *The Manuscript*, continuously since 1947. Currently, the student-led editorial staff publishes one issue per year, and copies are complimentary.

In preparation for a career in editing, publishing, or creative writing, any Wilkes student is welcome to submit to or work on the editorial board of the Manuscript Society. Staff members critique a variety of creative pieces from Wilkes faculty, staff, students, and alumni. This process includes creative workshopping, copy editing, and layout.

Wilkes students may elect to enroll in ENG 190B, Project in Writing: Manuscript, for one (1) credit of coursework. Meetings are held during club hours each semester. Monthly, bimonthly, or seasonal campus poetry reading are open to the Wilkes Community and greater public. The end product is a published, award-winning magazine.

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Seraphim, an Acrostic

- Fen Farnelli

Nature's reverse astronaut,
Evicted from the sky, the Earth
Pummeled by the
Heated form, limbs
Intertwined in the ground
Like roots tearing
Into soil to continue growing
Miles deep.

Forever

- Mya A. Banegas

Our love was soft and sweet. I remember how you'd give me flowers before every date. How you'd kiss my forehead softly in the morning to wake me up. I remember how you would sing to me when I had bad dreams, you always made sure I was never alone. I remember the sweet words that you would mumble in my ear just because. I remember all the many questions you used to ask me just to hear the sound of my voice. I remember how you loved matching clothes with me so that people instantly knew that we were together. You thought it was cute and funny, I thought it was cheesy but you loved it and so did I. I remember the Friday nights we would share laughing and cuddling while eating pizza on the couch and watching a movie. I usually picked the movies and you would groan at all my decisions because you claimed they were cheesy rom-coms but secretly you and I both knew how much you loved them. I would laugh at something funny and I would ask you "are you seeing this" or "isn't this funny" and you would say "yeah," but I knew from the tone of your voice that you weren't really paying attention. So I would turn my head to see you staring at me. I never felt more seen than that. I remember when I would cry you would hold me and tell me everything was going to be ok. And if it was a movie that I was crying for you would chuckle and wipe my tears away then you bring me ice cream and tell me "and this is why I don't like these types of movies," then we'd both laugh. I remember how we'd sleep. Me cuddling into your side or falling asleep on your chest then waking up to you on mine. I remember how you'd laugh at all my jokes even if they weren't funny because you thought that I made a good attempt. I remember how much you supported me in everything that I did. How you celebrated my wins and helped me through my losses. I remember you being nervous to meet my friends and family because you wanted them to like you. You made my mom smile when you offered to help her cook or clean. You made my dad laugh when you told a joke or made fun of me. You made my heart melt when I saw you playing with my siblings. I remember being told, "he's a good one" and I replied, "I know."

I remember the fights and arguments we used to have and how you would leave. But then you'd come back and say "can we talk about it?" I remember no matter how many times I pushed you away you pulled me closer. I remember how you'd give me my space when I needed it but how you'd also recognize when I needed you. I remember you telling me "we never go to bed angry" so you made us discuss all our issues and problems before bed. I remember when I told you that I needed space and I remembered how you looked when I said it. Your eyes instantly filled with tears and you sat down and asked me "Is there anything I could do to fix this?" I told you "no" because it wasn't you who needed to do the fixing, it was me. You didn't believe me at first, you claimed that that was something people always said. But I looked in your eyes, smiled, and kissed you. You asked me if I loved you still and I said "It's because I love you that I can't afford to bring you down with me." Every word of it was true. It would've been selfish of me to

let you fade with me. But I wanted to be selfish for one more night, so I asked you if you could stay and you smiled and said “I wasn’t planning on going anywhere”. Before we closed our eyes to drift off to our alternative realities you turned to look at me and asked one more question “How long will it take for you to come back?”. I looked at you with tears spilling out of my eyes, “I don’t know love. But I promise when I get better, it’ll be you and me forever.” You smiled and we held each other for the last time that night.

I remembered all the text messages you would send me every morning. I remember the voicemails you’d leave me telling me about your day and hoping that mine went well too. And if it didn’t you’d say “and if you didn’t have a good day then I’m sorry love. But just know better days are on their way, because where there is a storm there’s a rainbow too. I know that was cheesy but it’s true.” then you’d do that I laugh that I love so much. But slowly the messages and voicemails started to decrease by the day. And it made me sad but it made me happy as well. It meant that you were moving on. No matter how much I love you it would be selfish of me to ask you to wait when I didn’t know how long it would take. You’d only end up texting or calling if it were a holiday or my birthday and you would even tell me if something big had happened to you. Like a job promotion or booking a flight to your dream vacation that you always wanted.

I know that this is taking a while. And love I’m really sorry for that. I know you have a different life now and I hope that you haven’t forgotten about me because I haven’t forgotten about you or the promise I made to you that night in my apartment.

It’s been a few years since that night. We both have become accustomed to “adult life”. I went to our place, the place where you first asked me to be your girlfriend and we spent every anniversary thereafter that. I sat down and ordered a nice glass of red wine, it was sweet and savory. I ordered your usual, I don’t really know why since I hate steak but I guess it made me seem closer to you even if you weren’t there. But you were. I notice you sitting by yourself at a table near the far end of the deck by the water. The fairy lights above you were the only source of light that I got since it was dark out, so it was hard to tell but deep down I knew it was you. I waited for a bit to see if anyone else would sit with you or if you were alone. No one came. So I grabbed my wine and my plate and made my way to your table. “Is anyone sitting here?” you looked up at me in shock, as if you couldn’t believe I was there. “No. All yours.” Is what you said next. We talked for a bit and caught up with one another on our lives. Then you asked me what I was doing here. And I told you that I remember how we used to sit at that exact table year after year drowning in laughter and love, I told you I wanted to feel that again. Then I asked you what you were doing here. And you said “Waiting for you to show up.” I don’t think I ever smiled harder than I did that night. “Well I told you that I’d come back didn’t I.” We smiled and laughed. By the end of the night, we kissed. And just like that, it was you and I again.

Now, look at us. Married with kids living the life we both had dreamed of. No matter the challenges that we faced, the hardships that we went through, or where life took us, I always knew that we'd be together in the end. Because you and me, babe you and me were always forever.

Seasonally Torn

- Haley Katona

with you, somehow
I felt soft
despite the rest
I felt the flush of red
against my own skin from
the quiet of being stared at
and every part of me
wanted to embrace you
like a flower opening, petals blooming
I wanted to appear to you
as if I was the sea on a summer evening
even though you knew I was the sea
during a summer storm
crashing and striking the fragmented rocks
that sharpened and caressed the shore
you made me want to laugh grabbing a hold
of the door and swinging in between
in and out, in and out
and stick my tongue out as I ran away
while you tried to pick me up
I wanted to pick apples for you,
tossing those bruised, away
and sitting on the ground, hair flying in the wind
to tug on your sleeve and pull you down
to wrestle in the grass, in the pure sunlit green
smile on top of you,
like you were the clearest thing I'd ever seen
I wanted to hear you teach me anything you had
up in your brain, your treasure chest of years
that I had not been known
clinging to your shirt, in the soft wind of may
I don't think I would've ever let you go

Sedona 1

- Claire Wynne



shoes

- Darren Martinez

I give Greg a ride home
from his job.

One Thursday In A Sea of Them,
that I'll ever have off.

Greg takes a hit from his vape.
He empties the bin to
the bathroom.
It smells like wet cat.

Greg and I were friends, once.
I don't know what we are now, nor care.

I give him a ride
Because of that

Once.

Onceness. Debts repaid.
Ten marks were lain in the cupholder.
Obviously not a cup, but held all the same

the brain holes up in the body
but my thoughts seem to dance above
raw and bubbling,
full of a cruelty too much for my body

I am here, me, Darren.
Smiling laughing
absolutely unaware.

It's like my soul checked out
After I fell on pavement when I was 13,
Slipping out through a crack in my skull

I look at the road.
I look at Greg's shoes out of the corner of my eye.

Home at Last

- Hannah Simerson

Lately, I have
come back home.
It has been so long
since someone has
listened. Truly,

wholeheartedly listened. He begs me to talk to Him—about my fears, my goals,
my desires. He wants to know. He opened up His doors for me once again. He
called me home after I left and found a new one. He made a bed for me and

kept me warm.
He left my room
the way it was before
I ran away. He fed
me and poured His
love right into my
heart. He held my
head high when I
was ashamed to have
run away. He said to
me, “You came back
and that makes all
the difference.”

A year ago today

- Sydney Umstead

A year ago today I was still tasseled within your grip

The smell of coffee

One of my favorite books that I just started reading

The hold you had of me, the pain in my face everytime our eyes met

A look I once defined as love, but now known as fear

You stripped me of a soul of my own

I became your walking pradagee

A mold of what you defined as a good lover

The person I will never get the chance to know, a version of me that has withered away because of your actions

I will never know the plan that was made for the girl in that photograph.

One Moment In Time

- Breanna Ebisch

One.

A blink of an eye.

Two.

Your fingers wrap around mine.

Three.

Is this really happening? It is, it is, it is.

Four.

Gazes locked, nothing by love.

Five.

Lips colliding, making sparks fly.

One.

A blink of an eye.

Two.

Your fingers wrap around mine.

Three.

Is this really happening? It is, it is, it is.

Four.

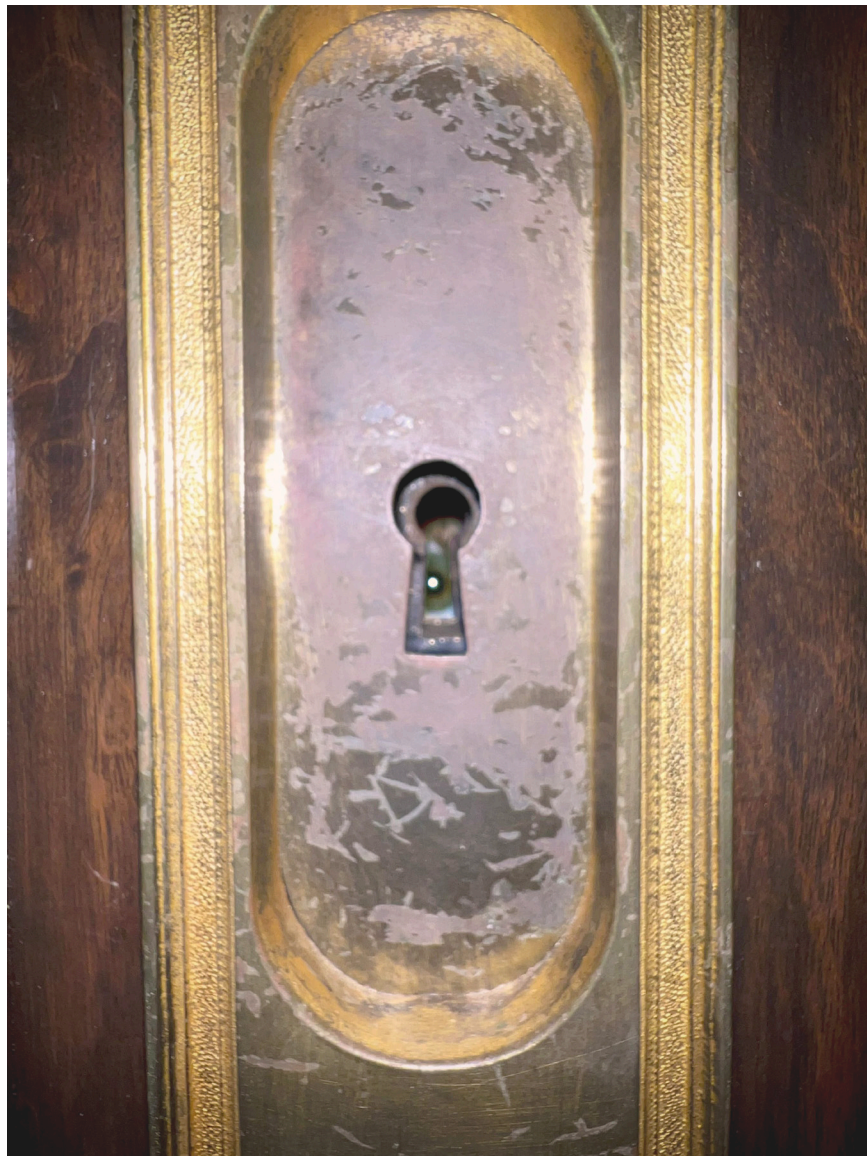
Gazes locked, nothing but despair.

Five.

The end has come, this is the final goodbye.

Observer

- Emily Cherkauskas



A Tale Told of Sapphire Steps

- Annie Arsenic



It started with a dinner, plain and simple. Our meal was cooked and fresh, a palette pleaser with no equal. And paired splendidly with a bottle of our finest drink. But in good company, cups soon run dry, and drink must be refilled.

I stood, as best able at the time, and offered to grab some more. I threw my azure cloak around my back and flipped open our cellar door. I grabbed a pair of candles for light and stepped into the dark downstairs. I fumbled down the first few stairs and almost lost my stance. The hot wax punished my drunkenness as I swayed it onto my hands. In my stupor, I reached for the rail, only for my elbow to greet a smooth stone wall. Peculiar of course, because I have no stone wall.

But in the moment, unnoticeable to an intoxicated me. And down I went. After some ten minutes of walking the steps, even I could sense something was odd. I looked out the window and saw in the darkness a range of imposing indigo mountains in the distance. Between them and I, a thousand pillars, wrapped in spiral sets of stairs. But, what fresh hell was this. A window? Mountains? In my basement? It must have been the wine in me, something I'm sure. "I'll stand perfectly still."

"And I will not move."

Such thoughts comforted me, let me hope I was dreaming. But this was no make-believe. This place, I could smell it, feel it. The cool almost-breeze as it crept up the staircase, which spun and spun under my feet. As I looked around myself, I found my staircase quite like the rest around me. Even behind me, and as up as I could see.

I had to understand. So down I kept, being more aware than before. Small markings in the slate walls became apparent, short notes in a script totally unintelligible to me. The window I looked through was

repeated down the stairway, giving me occasional glances at this odd world around me as I made my descent. In passing, I almost thought I could see candlelight on some of the other stairways.

I was almost at my wake's end and the bottom still eluded me. When my wax had burned nearly all out, I turned my self around. I shuffled back up those sapphire steps for as long, what felt like longer, than I had gone down them. My feet were tired and my spirit ached. The stony hallway felt colder as I climbed and climbed up as if it were to demand I stay. I could not give myself to it. And at long last, partially to my surprise, I came back to my door. I fell through it onto the warm floor of my home. The guests crowded around me and I fell asleep. From what I hear, I was gone for not even a minute.

An Aureate Response

I heard your footsteps patter on the gilded stone, a rhythm new to break the silence that's my home. I heard you walk and saw your candle's light glowing from afar. I tried to see you through the windows but you were too far and focused on your descent. What business you had at the bottom I would never know, because you turned back before you had a chance to show me. I wonder sometimes about the travelers, on these glittering golden steps they always climb.

Why not come down to the bottom, is there something they see that I can't? I've lived my life on this floor, and I've yet to find the trouble that seems to scare them all away. Countless pillars in my sight, no end I see at all. But as the glowing light of candles lowers toward and toward me, all are snuffed out or turned back, which I cannot tell.

I should learn to look away with both my eyes and hopes. These steppers will not reach me even if they come close. I make peace with my quiet because there is no other way. I wait for the flaxen light of another candle, and I wait for another day.



Ray Of Hope

- Sam Burgess, Jr.

Peeking just beyond the clouds,
Across the mighty firmament.
There is something to behold,
I feel it must be heaven-sent.

Fighting like a warrior,
Whose maiden's life depends on him.
It struggles on quite fiercely,
While sparkling like a precious gem.

Never wavering at all,
A splendid sight for one to see.
Climbing higher in the sky,
In life it is the treasured key.

What is this that shines so bright,
And allows you and I to cope?
The answer is known to all,
It is, of course, a ray of hope.

There are thanks in order

- Sydney Umstead

All that summer held used to be a mystery to me
I was ignorant to what it felt like to have the sun illuminating off your back
Surrounded by warm air and fits of laughter
Coming of age, for the first time in my entire life
The sun brightened everything
And for the first time, I realized what it felt like to be alive.

losing time

- Cas Schiller

every day i grow up a little more/i think the bags under my eyes are darker than they were before/and all the girls i went to school with avoid looking at me/sometimes i wonder what they see/sometimes i wonder what you see/will i remember today in six months or is it already gone? why am i trying so fucking hard these days? why am i never wrong?

i want to sleep for the next sixty years but i'm carrying her banner and i'm already here

i'm not scared of anything. maybe i could use a little fear.

i'm not scared of anything. i can't remember two weeks ago.

i'm not scared of anything. my hands are shaking again.

heartbeat at a hundred ten/i hate when you ask if i remember when/summer looming heavy starting to affect the tides/and i think i might know why/and i can't remember why

i'm sorry. why are you still here? 'cause this will never make sense. i say all these words but in the end it's nothing but pretend. are you a monster too? what's underneath your skin? is it ants or an anthem? unoriginal sin?

Astro1

- Tyler Savitski



bullet

- Darren Martinez

I'm here.

Quite alive, I assure you.

Unchanged from the last time we met.

Though much has come between us since.

The world greys,
with a wintry beard,

it scratches lines for planting
in the neighbor's field.

plants sprout from pods.

upon tasting air,
they curl up
spiders hit by a newspaper wound tightly

you smile
blighting the earth with light

she is drenched,
with too many privates
not enough towels
the tub spills.

rocking rolling,
the earth's task since
it became Earth.

the asteroid that rocked their surface
full of your grey matter, and mine too.
her crust bubbles like acne pustules
life spills forth in the absence of the reaper

when the reaper smiles, and lets his Jamaican accent ring forth,
I will not smile back. I am unchanged from the last time.
My facial structure is a little fatter sure,
The birch beer tap a little drier. My pants a little tighter,
My hair a little
Worse.
A bullet in my clavicle,
a coupon that the bodega owner
honors, but never takes.

Rigid

- Haley Katona

I put people on pedestals
too often
I forget they're human,
born of blood and skin
I instead trace my fingers along the edge
of marble and ivory
in the ridges of my created memory
so breathless is the birth,
so dense is the destruction,
quick in its own life
careful not to dirty the white snow
to distract from the blood
caked on the floor
beneath not your shoe, but mine

Games Children Play:

November 1996: Twelve Years to Fatherhood

- Cody Marsh

When you're a kid, you don't think much of the history of a place. Often, the only thing worth knowing about it is the quickest way to leave. And in school, you learn about state history to some degree, but only as much as will be on the end-of-year standardized test which determines whether you'll move to the next grade, like who wrote "Texas, Our Texas," which you'll remember because you share his surname and make up a story that he's some great grandfather of yours. No one ever talks about the fact that, if you're in the heart of East Texas, you're living in Indian country, and so much has transpired here over the millennia—things you've been told only happened in other places—and that the land you walk, and the pines and nettle and chiggers, have been nourished by the spilling of blood.

Dad took me hunting on leased land in Jefferson County. He and Uncle Roger, my mom's brother, tended to the small acreage all year leading up to deer season, cutting away underbrush to create shooting lanes, ensuring the box stands were in decent enough shape to hold a grown man's body weight, placing dried kernels of corn in strategic places so the biggest bucks would become accustomed to grazing in a bullet's path. Hunting whitetail is a religion filled with sacraments such as these, all pointing to the first weekend in November—a holy time—when the general season begins and something primal comes alive in its believers. Practitioners become the new Indian braves on vision quests to touch that spiritual aspect of manhood which is seemingly activated only by acts of brutality. I would become such a brave when my first kill was bagged and tagged.

Before the sun was up, Dad walked me through the thicket from the clearing where we'd parked, accompanied by the beam of his Maglite. He carried a Maglite everywhere he went and had several more around the house in places he deemed handy. The Maglite, he said, was the finest flashlight known to man, and heavy, and versatile enough to be used as a weapon if necessary. And it could not be crushed no matter what you ran over it with, a twenty-six-thousand-pound Mack truck included. He'd tested this, and the Maglite was indestructible, like we were.

The flashlight beam bounced off the brush, exposing a walkable path to what would be my box stand. I barely stood waist-high to Dad, and both of us were fully decked out in camouflaged, insulated coveralls to beat the early morning chill, and both carried rifles—he'd outfitted me with a Marlin Model 336, a lever-action 30-30, forever a favorite gun for youth hunters. A few summers before, it had damn near blown me backward over the hood of his truck when he took me down to the river bottoms to shoot at cans for practice. I knew for sure my shoulder would turn solid black from the recoil, but there wasn't a mark on me when I inspected the impact site. This day, I'd be shooting the big rifle from an elevated place, which would make aiming easier, and the rail of the box stand would provide the needed steadiness; I could rest

my elbow on it, bracing myself as he'd taught me, and wouldn't mess up the shot. Missing my shot, if I had to take one, terrified me. How much more useless could a boy be than if he could not hit his target? So I practiced and practiced and could shoot the mouth out of a Pepsi can from twenty yards away, just like my Dad and Uncle, the sharpest marksmen in Angelina County. Uncle Roger had once slit a buck's throat with a .22 long and left no holes in its body, salvaging every morsel of meat. That's the story I remember anyway. And Dad had been trained to shoot by the United States Marine Corps, arguably the most expert killers on the planet.

My stand was a forest-green-painted, plywood structure, with a ladder crudely fashioned from two-by-fours, and a roof slanted to keep rain rolling off the back, just in case it started coming down when my trophy buck walked up and visibility was key. Because my legs were too short to reach the first rung, Dad hoisted me up to it, and I took it from there. A few steps up, and he handed me my rifle from his place on the ground.

"Now make sure there's no yellowjackets in there with you," he said as I cleared the stand's threshold. Yellowjackets were some of the most feared flying things of my childhood imagination. I'd seen Pawpaw stung by many while he worked in the woods cutting timber to be taken to the sawmills. Our town was altogether a timber town, and everybody worked in logging at some point in their lives, and yellowjackets seemed to be the tiny, crazed creatures who could end a logger's career—and life—in minutes. My respect for them was healthy, if not exaggerated.

"Yes, sir." The bill of my camouflaged cap drifted down over my eyes, obscuring my vision. I squinted hard and peered from underneath it to check my surroundings before settling down on the permanent bench the stand's builder had installed.

"And check under the bench. You don't want 'em gettin' ya in the ass." He was right. I didn't want that at all. When my inspection was complete, and no yellowjackets, spiders, scorpions, or any other critters were found, I sat on the pine bench and adjusted my bulky clothing to get comfortable.

"If you see somethin'—and you will—don't hesitate. Put your scope on him and fire, no second-guessin'."

"Yes, sir."

"When I hear the shot, I'll come see about ya, so don't shoot me comin' outta the bushes."

"Yes, sir." I could have pissed my coveralls as he walked off toward his own hunting grounds, a spot he'd cleared between two conjoined oaks, where he'd be hidden behind their tangling trunks.

Being tough is a lot easier when someone is watching, and pretending to want to kill a deer was being tough. In truth, I couldn't imagine anything I wanted less than to shoot a deer, but it was a rite of passage for we forest dwellers, and I'd heard stories of Indian hunters eating the heart of a fresh kill to honor its death and partake of its life, and it seemed like something that had to be done. To encourage myself in the pursuit of my game, I envisioned myself standing over the carcass of a massive, downed twelve-point buck, its pulsating heart-thumping between my clasped hands, my face covered in its thick, warm blood—war

paint. This image lasted only a few seconds before I began praying in earnest that no deer crossed my path that morning or ever. If I never saw anything, then I wouldn't have to kill it, because missing—I knew this to my core—was not an option.

Maybe an hour passed, and the sun began its ascent above the forest canopy, but it was still dark enough to have to squint to see. I'd spent the past hour daydreaming of baseball and being warm in my bed at home. A rustling came from a stand of brush to my left. I had shot plenty of squirrels and birds before, and it had never dawned on me that they might be conscious creatures. A deer, on the other hand, being a much larger animal with big, expressive eyes, was another thing. I hoped this noise was a group of rabbits playing, or anything other than what my gut knew it was.

Out she came, one hoof falling gracefully in front of the other, sniffing and grazing for corn on the cold earth. My heart rate must have tripled at the sight of her and the thought of what was coming next. Dad's voice played over in my mind—“No hesitation”—so I tried hard to steady my breath, which only seemed to make it heavier. I could hear the blood flowing around my ears. As quietly and slowly as was possible, I raised my rifle, propping my elbow against the splintery wood railing, which made an almost imperceptible creaking sound I feared (and inwardly hoped) would startle my prey and send her running. But it didn't; she remained there nibbling at Dad's corn. Peering through the rifle's scope, I placed my crosshairs directly behind the doe's shoulder, where the bullet would tear through her heart, and fired.

A perfect shot. The doe's back legs dropped to the ground and seized violently, her front legs holding her weight. She pushed herself back up into a running position, then lunged toward the tree line. But her attempt at escape was a stumbling race against death, as all four legs began to fail her. Her eyes. I seem to remember them, big and black and flooded with fear, though there was too much distance between us for that memory to be true. The wet blood stuck to her hide, turning it dark as the soil beneath her. Still, she pushed toward the trees hunting a place to die.

Dad was making his way to me by the time I reached the forest floor. I heard his boots clapping against the brushy earth. What my next move should be was not clear to me, so I waited by the base of the box stand until he joined me there.

“Did you get one?” He asked.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “A doe.” Hearing about my kill, pride radiated from his eyes, and his skin turned beet red between the cold and the joy of the moment. His only boy's first deer—like it had been his own relived.

“I'll be damned! Hell yeah, son,” he said. “Where'd she run to?”

I showed him the spot she fell in, and he inspected the blood on the dried oak leaves, sticks, and dirt.

“Clean shot, boy.”

He could tell by the blood's color that I hadn't hit her in the gut. Of all the possible ways to make a bad shot, gut shooting an animal is the worst, because then the blood is tainted, and the meat will be ruined if you ever catch her. But a gut-wounded deer may never be found because they usually have enough strength left in them to run faster and farther than you ever could. But my shot had been perfect, and the doe would

be easily tracked, her bright red vitality serving as our markers.

We found her not even a hundred yards from the clearing laying beneath a crooked oak. We watched for signs of breathing but saw none.

“I think you got her, boy.”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“Keep your gun on her just in case,” he told me. I raised my rifle to waist-level, not sure that I could shoot again if I had to, if she was only laying there playing possum and jumped up to maul Dad and me for our crimes. I obeyed, aiming my rifle at the top of her head. Dad took the yellow-covered Case Trapper from his pocket and opened its longest blade. Dad’s knives were always sharp enough to shave with, or use to cut a throat, which would be this one’s purpose today.

“Shit,” I heard him say half under his breath.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Boy,” he said. “That ain’t no doe.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a button buck.” He scratched under the bill of his cap, as though deciding what he should do next. “Hell, let’s get him skint and outta here.”

I hadn’t seen the young buck’s antlers just beginning to protrude through the top of his skull. It wasn’t exactly an illegal kill. A licensed Texas hunter is allowed a certain number of antlerless deer each year, but those are reserved for does like the one I thought I was shooting. By definition, a button buck is less than six months old, and killing one is frowned upon by almost everyone in the woods, and certainly by my Dad who had been so proud of my first deer until that moment.

He placed the blade of his Case to the fawn’s neck, slicing it all the way across. This ritual, some say, bleeds the deer out. To others it’s a spiritual act, releasing the animal’s soul back into the land. For Dad, I think it was just something he did because he was supposed to—a habit and nothing more. The fawn field dressed and hanging by its slit neck from a hearty pine, Dad’s blade skinned, quartered, and deboned my victim without another word.

Whitetail

- Tyler Savitski



Garden of Secrets

- Ashlee Harry

Death and decay

These are the words used to describe me now.
I can no longer age
with the surrounding world,
that was once my home.

I float in my temporary grave as it drains
the remaining life from me.
The one that did this to me stares down
at my final resting place.

The scent of fresh dirt
that should have filled my nostrils
was lost to me from the bloody, metallic waters.
I'm left to wonder if anyone will know of my demise.

Will I be missed
or will I be scrubbed from their memories?
My grim reaper gives me another look
once his work is done.

My body is slowly pulled from the water's clutches
and dragged in the woods without care.
The reaper uses his scythe
and I am no longer one.

My blood waters my grave
instead of boiling with rage in me.
I should have listened to the little voice in my head,
when the man I trusted
revealed his true intentions.

He planted the belief for love
with his flowery words,
to only reveal
his danger coated thorns.

Without a second glance,
he covers me in the earth –
I will be his secret,
but soon will be revealed,

For the world will recreate me

horticulture

- jay guziewicz

i was partially formed
when i met you,
skin growing over my muscle
in broken patches
from where i peeled off the parts
of the last girl who said she loved me,
threw those pieces to the dogs
to try and make room for myself.

but you came along,
told me you loved me,
and my raw patches became
lakes for you to swim in
and my new skin cracked
to make way for the blooms
of your favorite flower.
i made myself into the image
of things you loved,
in hope i would become one,
in hope that you would not want to leave.

but you did.

you set the garden growing
out of my joints on fire,
drained the lakes i built for you
out my own blood and tears
and once again i found myself
left raw, patchy, broken.

and now i begin again.

i peel off the skin i grew for you

and let myself greet a new world
tender and sinewy,
preparing to shape myself into
gardens and lakes once again,
this time for myself.

April Leaves
- Ylonis Grant



Poetess of Motion

- Sam Burgess, Jr.

Gliding cross the dance room floor,
Was someone I did adore.
Swaying like a branch under the
Force of a windy day.

Sweet fragrance from her perfumed lotion,
Gave me an exciting notion.
But I hoped, she wouldn't approach,
For I didn't know what to say.

Rhythmic feet and dressed divine,
How I wished that she were mine.
Such devotion to an Art,
I had never seen.

Imitating a wavy ocean,
Was this Poetess of motion,
A delightful smile, all the while,
With warmth and senses keen.

When the music stopped my feet were tapping,
And everyone did join in clapping,
As she began to leave and out the door,
Did make her way.

Did she take some magic potion,
This Poetess of motion?
Whether she did or whether not,
She certainly made my day.

VIOLET PETALS

- Emily Cherkauskas

“Confused, faking, invalid.”
“A phase—a soon-to-die stage.”
“Nothing more than a plastic flower,”
Spews the venomous doctrine of normativity.

The system is said to guide me to the other half.
Unfortunately, it appears that I must be lost.
Or blind. Or, unfinished? Something isn't fitting in,
But alas, I am caged within the confines of this lonely world.

Is this limbo a supposed form of happiness?
Is this a form of liberation? This conformity?
This gray, bleak plane—which, suddenly,
Is broken by a spirited call of joy.

Locks and chains reflect the sight
Of violet petals falling from every which way,
Yet unite together in the wind, leaving a path for me to follow.
It might be treasure, it might be nothing—but it is my nature to go forward.

Those violet petals will always fly,
And only fall to grace the ground
Of the once-blocked path I walk through now,
Far from compulsory standards that my heart rejects.

The sunset rays shine through darkness,
Warming my cold and lost soul,
Bringing me hope for my once-lost future,
As I march toward my desired freedom.

As the sun sets, my once-clouded mind awakens.
The endless scarlet and orange skies call out,
Gartered with the pure white mist of peace,
Kissed by the striking fields of violets below.

The warm and wondrous landscape
Opens its glowing, glistening arms.
The opportunity to break free stands before me,
A sign of life for the woman I shall be.

As I watch the violet flowers blossom,
I sit and find myself where I am now.
The fact that I am me, that I exist,
Is not a miracle; it is mere nature.

Sketch

- Samantha Ann Stanich-Romasiewicz

Biting my bottom lip, tasting
the dull chapstick left by your quick kiss,
your grey eyes searching, pretending not to know
what lies beneath my rising sweater, silent inhales,
though you are an expert at shivers and groans
that overcome me, you are never lost in my curves,
always knowing where your touch should land,
always knowing that we can't, shouldn't, talk
about the sweat stuck to the back of our necks
as fingers trace outlines of our shapes,
grasping at any available skin, pulling at hair,
crashing into each other, tasting ecstasy and
salty skin as we fall back onto guilt-stricken
sheets that hold the secrets confined in my
memory, only to be shaken like an
Etch-A-Sketch as you pull me violently,
amnesia washes over me, erasing any sign
of another love who is mine but not
fully one with me as I have given myself up
to you once more, falling asleep in the wake
of the destruction we have become accustomed to.

Astro2

- Tyler Savitski



Sarah

- Mya A. Bagenas

Her name was Sarah. She was my best friend. She wore bright colors and her favorite season was spring because “that’s when the flowers would start to bloom” she would say. She was everyone’s golden child. There is no true definition of a person so perfect but she was. She made all the parents say why can’t you be more like her and all the kids either wanted to befriend her or hate her. She was the sweetest person you would ever meet and her voice sounded like a lightly feathered pillow. She always wore a lavender scent, it matched her so well. And her smile. That smile that everyone craved to see because it made their day brighter. That smile never left her face no matter what happened. That smile that so easily hid the cracks that laid deep within her soul.

Her name was Sarah. She was my friend. She wore grays and blacks, her favorite season was winter because “it’s cold and harsh just like the world” she’d say. She was troubled. She never listened to anyone anymore, she didn’t care for anything either. She made all the parents question whether their kids should be around her or not. And kids stood away, those who weren’t troubled like she was anyway. She rarely spoke. I almost had forgotten what her voice sounded like, and how it definitely would not fit the girl I knew today. And her smile. The smile that I looked forward to every day, was gone. No matter what happened that smile never came back. Now everyone was seeing what Sarah’s smile had been hiding.

Her name was Sarah. She was my friend. And over time I began to feel the weight of what being her friend meant. It meant waking up in the middle of the night to pick her up from her one-night stand or to get her from jail. It meant worrying 24/7 whether or not that would be the last time you receive a call from her. It meant babysitting her to make sure that she doesn’t do anything that can’t be taken back. It meant losing yourself and losing all connections that you have to the real world because you rather do that than lose your friend. It meant telling her that this was the last time you would bail her out, or the last time you would pay for her rehab because you can’t take it anymore. Because it is taking everything out of you physically and mentally. It’s watching her eyes fill up with tears because she’s finally realized that she has lost everything.

Her name was Sarah. She was my best friend. She was a sweet girl that was tainted by the cruelty of the world. She loved bright colors and warm seasons. She was kind and it was hard not to love her. But she had demons and it wasn’t her fault. She didn’t ask for the life that was given to her, to lose her dad to cancer one year and to lose her mom to an accident the next. It was hard for her. And even after everything that happened, all the fights between us and the things she’d done I still loved her. Because

we had no one but each other. I remember how much time we used to spend together. Going to the park, chasing each other, playing soccer, and picking the prettiest flowers that we could find. She loved picking flowers. And now I pick them for her, sitting with her every Sunday giving her the rundown of all the latest gossip.

Her name was Sarah. She was my family. And I wish that I could see her smile just one more time.

The Watchman

- Maura C. Maros

Safety latches mounted on cabinets,
monitors listen for every breath.
Eyes never far from catching a tragedy,
table corners and stairs are worthy opponents.
Safety cones line the end of the driveway,
training wheels removed.
Helmets fastened,
peddle to the end of the block, just out of sight.
 Watch for speeding cars.

Bus stop, good-byes,
yell, *I love you*.
Wait for school nurse to call,
hold your breath.
Exhale as she runs down the block,
back to outstretched arms.

Years later, a car horn beeps,
wave good-bye from the doorway.
The words *Be careful* bubble in your throat,
door slams close.
Silence echoes through the house,
imagination plays cruel jokes.
The sound of a motor approaches,
front door slams with *I'm home*.
 Resist the urge to gather her onto your lap.

A game of tug-o-war ensues,
the trophy- independence.
Curfews negotiated,
twilight sleep wins until stairs creak.
Her shadow lurks in bedroom doorway, *Hi, Mom*,
kiss her forehead, smell her hair.

Toss and turn sleepless with worry,
college looms like a predator.
Waiting to take her.
No more slamming doors,
announcing her safe arrival home,
She must go.
Long for her to come back to me,
even if she is only twenty feet away.
 Arms ache to pull her close.

The Glass Clock

- Haley Katona

sitting near the crumbled ivy
of seven months' neglect
it rests in the sunlight
reflecting back to me
and in the smoke of my breath,
it keeps me awake in the violet night
clicking, ticking, until it feels right
and I don't have the correct time set
it's all relative
it's all lack

I only see mornings because of the glass
I feel 4:04 in the afternoon in my chest
sitting near the crumbled ivy
and it counts down the wrong hour
or one that does not yet tick
until the shadows crack

Timeless

- Emily Cherkauskas



Battle Cry

- Breanna Ebisch

A battle cry.
That is how I entered the world.
The piercing cry that signifies life,
that I was breathing,
that brought tears to my mother's eyes,
was a battle cry.
Because the fight began when I took my first breath.
But from that moment on,
my battle cry wasn't heard
by those who needed to hear.
Yet, I push forward
and my voice is joined by millions of women
from across the world.
We have no other option.
Our rights are stolen away with
simple signatures on legislation.
Our earnings are still glaringly unequal.
Our bodies are seen as beautiful,
as a vessel to create and carry life,
but are damaged by violence.
And when we scream,
the air full of battle cries,
whether in triumph or fear,
we are ignored.
Ignored, silenced, defeated.
What will it take for someone, anyone,
to notice our endless struggles?
A war? A revolution?
I'm afraid it's already begun.

Surmonter

- Ylonis Grant

Being in the same room was stifling, thank god I won't be trifling.

I'm sure in your eyes I'm still a prize, a prize?

The anxiety, the guilt, the blade was pushed to the hilt.

I refused to make eye contact, it was like I was in a contract, and I couldn't escape.

You demanded attention and I figured we could stay past collecting our pension, but there was tension.

Thinking about it makes my skin crawl. Being in that situation— I no longer ship us together, now I feel
light like a feather.

Anticipating everytime you would touch me, tensing when you approached, too close, too close.

How do I react? Do I say stop? Do I say sorry? I became unresponsive, I froze.

Let it pass, let it pass, this can't last. I didn't realize how much my past affected my present. I don't hold
any resentment towards you.

Had I known, I would have healed more, I'm going to heal more. I don't want to feel anymore. I don't
want to see it now, but I'll see more.

Please let me go, I'm not the best you'll ever have. I don't want to feel trapped, I want to be free, free
from the pain, from the trauma, the anxiety.

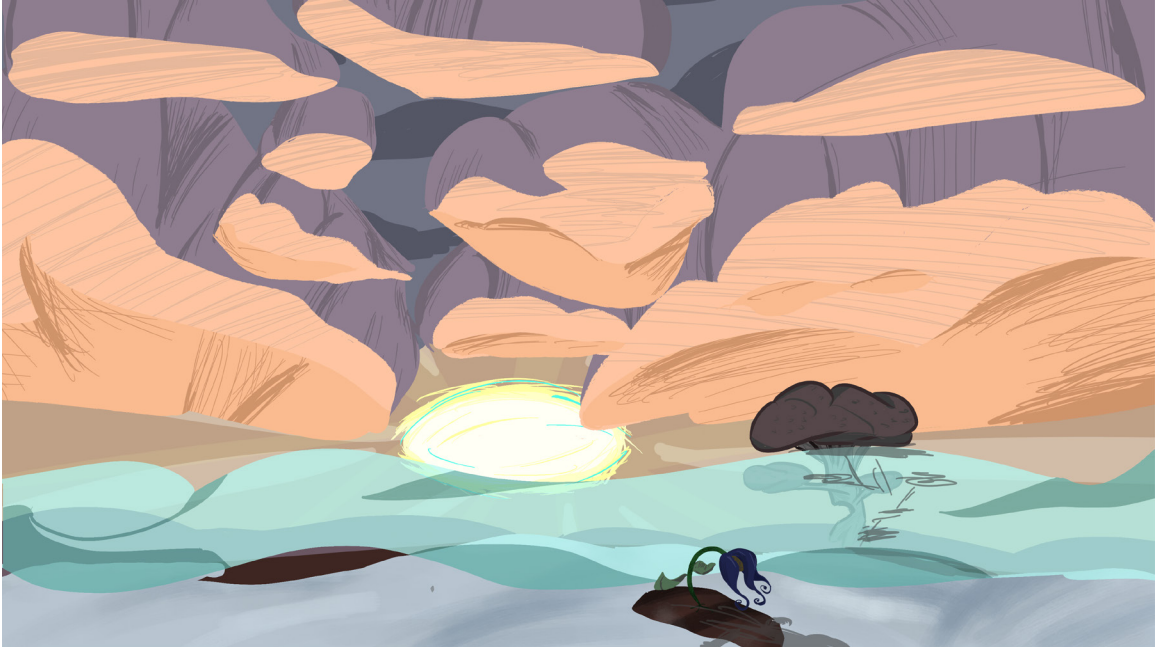
I want to start again. I want to be in control, I'm giving back the heart I stole.

Forgive me, for a rose has its thorns and I can't help but use mine. You can no longer call me yours and
I will no longer think you're mine. It'll get better with time.

I won't tell you any more lies. I sincerely apologize.

A hopeless romantic, who feels undeserving, who's still understanding the concept of romancing.

Unsetting Sun
- Annie Arsenic



Today, of all days, I put my feet toward the unsetting sun. After deliberation day in and out. And so I marched forth to that deathless light. The cold of my breath projects fog to my visor, and I cannot see but a meter. The fog protects me from its damned stare, but no haze could ever fully obscure its light. That light which hammers down upon me as the snow crackles to my feet. The light which the frost itself returns to my eye from below is like the reflection of a mirror.

How human we were to imagine we could travel beyond its touch. How arrogant, to imagine we could live without its warmth.

Through countless hours of travel I wade, hot on its trail. Days(?) perhaps, pass me by as I go. The grass seen through frostings of ice loses some of its green. The cold now warms my feet as it licks its chops, hungry. I cannot say I am not surprised; I cannot say I am not afraid. The sun has not set.

On my tenth day, time returns to me. The passing of each second is etched into my mind. My mind, like a perfect clock. My legs walk in exact rhythm to each moment. I know when each breath, and the next will hit me, and all thereafter. I know of each minute, a hundred twenty steps. I know of each hour, that same tree, twice. I know of each day, a day of light. The grass creaks like now as it yellows. I wonder if it is so behind me as well.

My mission is one of good. Why must it be this difficult? The cold has brought me to numbness, and I am warm for just a moment. I bask in it for twelve-point-three-nine-six seconds to indulge my aching body.

On my twenty-eight-thousands-five-hundred-twenty-third minute, it almost blinded me. Fogged no longer was my visor, for ice had formed where breath once laid. I'd hoped it offered the same protection, but in its solidity was its weakness. The ice obscuring, protecting, my eyes began to crack. And then it fell. Now in my visor, there was a hole no smaller than a penny. A horrible portal through which that wicked sun could stab and jarr my eye! I must move forward, but this pain is too much to bear, I must stop it.

My left leg is still, and time has no meaning. I knew trusting the warmth would undo me. And now it has swallowed me whole. Aside from my coldened leg, I've given four fingers to the cold, if the two lost aren't to be counted. If only I could reach this sun, I would be healed. I could stop it. Why does it torment me? Why does that tree echo back again?

I've forgotten the time. I can't move. The ice has become thick over my visor. The world is dark. My mind is cold. My body is cold. I can still feel the light around me, even without my eye to see it. The sun still stares down at me, cobalt rotten thing. I can see it with my eyes closed, with my mind in silence. I can see it with every fiber of my being, shining demonic rays of hate. I want to move further, but the ice keeps me still.

twilight

- jay guziewicz

i've been in love with sunsets
ever since i was a child,
the beginnings of night started
with the most beautiful colors
i'd ever seen before.
pennsylvania hills flooded
with oranges and purple,
gentle pinks fading into
dark night skies.
i would try to draw them,
laying on the floor,
torn up crayola crayons
scribbling on scrap paper
pulled from trash cans.

i saw the most beautiful sunsets
down in the south,
during that summer,
the summer i lived on a bus
the summer i felt the most lonely
even though i never had a minute alone.
that summer,
my phone camera roll was filled
with pictures of the sky
instead of other memories,
hazy purple in missouri
tiger lily orange in texas.

now, looking at the sky
from my work parking lot,
i think of those color in the south,
talk myself out of driving sixteen hours
to you, and your sunsets,

the colors you must see tucked into
the mississippi lowlands.
i wonder how similar our skies are,
if we see the same palettes
or if yours are more bright,
and i wonder if i'd ever see them,
with you, together,
our hands tucked into each other,
our faces illuminated by the evening light.

Grand Canyon 1

- Claire Wynne



No Shame In Defeat

- Sam Burgess, Jr.

There is no shame in losing,
No matter what they say.
It's not the end of the world,
And it happens every day.

One must not take defeat,
As a sign that all is lost.
Just lick your wounds and carry on,
No matter what the cost.

For defeat, you see, is a cleanser,
That clears the clouded mind.
It enables all to start anew,
And leave the worst behind.

So, if you've hit rock bottom,
And you're full of endless doubts.
Always remember, and never forget,
It's where you go from there that counts.

Treading Water

- Maura C. Maros

Arms ache,
paddling to stay afloat.
Head heavy,
struggle to remain above water.
Weeds like fingers encircle ankles,
in murky depths below,
Slipping below, trying to surface,
sun penetrates the dark
A beacon, follow the light,
breach the flat veneer.

Gasp for air.

Sun blinds,
shoreline on horizon.
Eyes seeking,
a vest, buoy, boat- any lifeline
Sinking again, clinging to hope,
kick, breath, propel forward.
Breathless, crawling on the sandy beach,
safety at fingertips.
Until next time a riptide,
drags me back under.

Valley of Fire 1
- Claire Wynne



The Diet Game: Conditioning the Conditioned Response

- Rene Allen, M.D.

One of my patients, Flora, called from the hospital.

“Dr. Allen, I wanted you to know what happened. I wanted to gain weight, so I went to a hamburger joint and ate two quarter pounders, large fries, and a milkshake. That was two days ago. Yesterday, I had my gall bladder out.” At 5’3”, she weighed ninety pounds and had been trying her entire life to gain weight.

I didn’t even try not to laugh. Fat overload and gall bladder disease— “Flora, did you enjoy the burgers?” “Yes,” she said. “But do you think it was the fries or milkshake that pushed me over the top?”

The Diet Game—as a gynecologist, I was always looking at new diets both for myself, who, at a svelte 212 pounds was obviously overweight, and my patients, ninety percent of whom, normal weight or not, wanted to lose a few pounds. Flora had been the rare exception. She had wanted to gain weight.

The Diet Game was a game of Try This, Try That. How would this food plan, this nutritional manipulation, these shakes, and supplements be better than the last ones? Realizing I had certain trigger foods I wondered if I could turn off the triggers to make the next diet more successful. I decided to deal with the trickle of candy that came into the office, particularly those universal favorite, M&Ms.

The problem with M&Ms was that they tickled Skinner’s pleasure centers and triggered Pavlov’s conditioned response. In the Diet Game, they were rainbow yumminess, the perfect reward for passing go at the check-out counter. You could easily hide several in your hand. They melted in your mouth. They were filled with chocolate, and they had the requisite number of grams of sugar to make them sweet and delicious. My patients called them PMS pills. And if you only ate a few and were really good with the rest of your diet, well—conventional wisdom said to not be so harsh with your food you developed obsessions. And twelve peanut M&Ms—Twelve! only had about 140 calories.

We kept a dish of them at the check-out counter. I’m not sure who felt obligated to keep the cut glass bowl full. I may have had something to do with it and on occasion, my patients. They brought large bags, poured them into the bowl, then free of guilt, grabbed handfuls for the trip home.

Part of the game was to see how long I could go after having one M&M before I had to have another. It was white-knuckle will power. Once I had an M&M, the remaining candy whispered my name every time I walked to the front office. I was particularly fond of the brown ones. “Doc, we’re here for you,” they said, and I responded like Pavlov’s dog.

This was about the same time Barry Sears came out with his Zone Diet which promised remarkable results, plus it had the added credibility of Sears being a biochemist. Part of the Diet Game was determining how much food you could eat and lose weight. The best thing about the Zone Diet was the quantities of food—albeit veggies—that you ate to be in the metabolic zone that promised peak athletic performance, a muscular body, longevity, and weight loss. I bought the book and a plethora of green, orange, and purple vegetables.

M&MS, however, were an obstacle to entering the Zone. Thinking about Pavlov's dog, I wondered if I could change my conditioned response whenever I saw an M&M. Winning would be freedom. They would no longer call my name. I would no longer be victimized by a bowl of candy.

The transformation ignited one day in a sporting goods store when I saw a pile of slingshots, those Y-shaped pieces of wood with bands of rubber attached to the arms and to a piece of leather into which you put your bullet—a spit wad, a rock, a small orange—anything you wanted to propel through the air toward a target. In a heartbeat, I imagined a red M&M zooming toward—here I faltered. I couldn't see myself actually hitting someone or something. So, what could I shoot at? The perfect solution came to mind. On impulse, I purchased three slingshots, two for home and one for the office, and three bags of peanut M&Ms.

That afternoon, I took my son to the driveway and raised the lid on the dumpster which was about twenty-five feet away. "Okay, this is what we are going to do. We are going to take these slingshots and shoot these M&Ms at that lid where they will splat into pieces and drop into the garbage."

There is an expression that boys get, baffled, mouths open. "Mom, you don't shoot M&Ms. You eat them."

"You do? Well, I thought I would try this. Look." I picked up a yellow piece of candy, loaded it into the slingshot and let it fly. It was a lucky shot. It hit the dumpster lid with a loud thwack, and like magic, dropped in. The feeling was incredible.

I reached for another one, but not before my son defensively put a handful in his mouth. "No," I said. "You need to try it. Here." I handed him one of the slingshots.

He shook his head. "Mom." But he loaded the slingshot and let it go. He obviously wasn't interested in the dumpster because the candy flew past another twenty feet before hitting a eucalyptus tree.

We went through two bags of M&Ms. I don't know how many he ate while I zealously peppered the dumpster, but when we were finished, I hadn't eaten a single piece of candy. It was a miracle.

The next day I took the remaining bag of M&Ms and a slingshot to the office. I explained to my staff we were going to play a game, that I had to get rid of M&Ms and had an idea about how to do it.

I am sure we looked ridiculous standing in the parking lot shooting candy at a dumpster lid. But once we started, we forgot about appearances. There were three of us, me, Jeanie, my office manager, and Linda, my nurse. Soon, we were venting with each shot.

Jeanie said, "This is for the bleep-bleep insurance company that made me file a claim three times because they kept losing it." Wham! "Give me another piece of candy."

Linda pulled back on the rubber tubing. "This is for my idiotic ex-husband." The candy smacked the dumpster lid and broke into pieces.

I didn't say anything, but a surge of anger caused me to pull hard on the slingshot. I let go and the candy shattered. "So there," I said.

We laughed at ourselves, but there was underlying substance to what was happening. Not only were we having fun, but the M&Ms disappeared and with them the craving. After that, whenever I saw a M&M, I imagined the sound it made hitting the dumpster lid, WHACK, and the urge to have one went away.

At the time I was in therapy for some personal issues, including a desire to lose weight. I told my psychologist about the experiment with the M&Ms. “I’ve been playing this game,” I said, explaining it to him. “I think it’s going to work. I haven’t wanted any M&Ms. What I’ve wanted to do instead is go outside with the slingshot and shoot the dumpster. It’s really fun. You ought to try it.”

Then I told him about my plans for the Zone Diet. “I’m excited about this. I think I can do it. You get to eat lots of food.” The fear of not having enough food because of low-calorie restrictions was one reason I had failed in the past.

Before I left, I asked if we could have a hiatus from our weekly visits, so we agreed on a return appointment in six weeks. Since it was the end of May, we talked about vacation plans and set up another appointment for July.

I didn’t eat any more M&Ms. I didn’t want any M&Ms. And I ate lots of lettuce and celery, and the requisite amount of protein, and I cut way back on my favorite trigger foods—white bread and flour tortillas, and I took all the omega-3s suggested by the diet. I lost three pounds.

When I saw the psychologist again, he looked different. “Did you lose weight?” I asked suspiciously.

“Twenty pounds,” he said proudly. “After you talked about the Zone Diet, it sounded so good, I tried it.” He shrugged and held out his hands, palms up in the classical, what-was-I-supposed-to-do pose. He had the baffled look men, and sometimes boys get.

I shook my head. “Dumb game. It’s just not fair.”

Valley of Fire 2
- Claire Wynne



**A Brief Description of the Creek Behind the Old Barn on a Hill, where I often Wrote
when Alone: A Haiku**

- Fen Farnelli

Smashed television
Bicycle sans handlebars
Half buried in dirt.

shape of form of love of

- Darren Martinez

do courtship rituals come naturally to thee?

or do we mirror our favorite films and tropes and books and novels and novellas and parents and and and
and just hope that the object of our affection shares our favorite

film trope blah etc. you know the details whatever

love's innates

innards?

I don't know, innards

things that demonstrate what love is, such as, like, so, forthwith, wherewithal

you know like

the warmth of a fellow being

gifts ranging between any or old new thing

meal prepared special attention effort compassion teaching

how many of

what?

I have many, have had many, will have many

if I keep on moving

will I ever be satisfied????

life hardly feels real
in your arms

Does the Ocean Likewise Fear the Swabby?

- Fen Farnelli

The ocean, a sheen
Shewn shining ashore,
Could scant keep its tongue
As I mopped the starboard,
For to mess with the mate
Who messes with masses
Of messes about the estate,
Oh how great,
For the fates shan't abate
As I portly pad port,
Captain calls, "Keep at work!"
And the mates shout "Aye-aye!"
Captain says; I comply.
Captain says; I comply.

And from the wind aft the aft,
The Odyssey's oddities
Audit inaudibly,
Muses amused mumbling
To my bumbling ear
Of cephalopod deep,
Most extreme of enemies,
Squeamish extremities
Reach up as I cup both my hands
To cover my ears.
It is then from the helm
That I eye an aye-aye,
Captain says; I comply.
Captain says; I comply.

Just to peek the beaklike maw,
Not in awe, for the gnaw
Of that natural 'nought

One cannot dread not,
The nautical knot
Of nocturnal naught,
I curse the serene
Surface of the sea
For these sirens who've sighed
Of what beneath the waves lies,
And avert my eyes
As I hear more aye-ayes,
Captain says; I comply.
Captain says; I comply.

And when the ship had docked that night,
I swiftly took flight, abandoned my plight,
And set myself right
To never go sailing again.
I never heard, nor smell'd, nor saw,
There may have never been a maw,
But praise the Lord
And all that's good
That I have not seen it
And now never would.
So good luck to the mates
And their solemn aye-ayes,
Captain says; they comply.
Captain says; they comply.

glass feelings

- jay guzewicz

it's time
her skin
delicately translucent
sparkling with light,
sparrow-sized,
bone
fragile
comforted me
made this for you."
like an infant
brimming with tears
is it good?
bits of glass,
bits of glass,
feelings
maneuver it
between
my cheek
half choking
oh yes."

Is there a way to love me?

- Haley Katona

socks dripping wet from muddy puddles
and footprints that follow
my march to the fridge to grab the wine

would you love me
even in the mascara caked to my freckles

would you wash my hair
holding my head under the water

running your fingers through the strands
watching me bend to your form
as though I am warm clay for you to sculpt

would you let me consume you
where no matter how far I reach
I just keep reaching and pulling into your chest
to reach in to your evaporated soul
finding midnight blues and greys pool
where my end becomes yours

would you grace me like lightening
leaving me patterned and struck
and listen to me roar as the thunder does
whenever your flame bends to my wick

is there a way for love to construct
and conquer, captivate and corrode
all while letting our souls eat one another alive
while it pours and floods outside

do we lay against and with one another watching the time
though you could kiss me without your eyes closed

does that mean you watch your love grab a hold of me
or that you are waiting for the explosion of the ticking time bomb

of all that's mine

Phototropism—Growth Toward Light

- Rene Allen, M.D.

My boots crunch through a thick layer of frost and break the predawn silence. It is January and cold enough in Tucson, Arizona I wear a jacket. But cold is something I will remember in July before the monsoons come. Daily temperatures of 112 degrees, and looking at thirsty saguaros, their green-ribbed bodies gaunt and shriveled, is depressing. Recalling that a few months ago I wore a jacket and in a few more months, I will again, helps. Seasons do change in the Sonoran Desert. Eventually, respite comes.

A deep salmon color in the low eastern sky dusts the undersides of clouds left over from yesterday's storm. Every morning is different, the color, the air, the way the gravel sounds underfoot as I make a three-mile loop. But it is always quiet here—so quiet I hear my thoughts. I claim this time, this silent pause between night and day when the sun gathers strength, pierces the darkness, and illuminates the desert in a wash of light.

I have been present at this pre-dawn hour countless times when I have written through the night in a room called Purgatory—so named because when we put in a Pergo floor, my four sons chose the name Pergo-tory, which in a heartbeat became Purgatory. But it fits. Purgatory is a place to do penance and make peace with the past. Only it wasn't my sins that kept me writing in this room long past sunset into the darkest part of the night. The gift and curse of both writing and a room called Purgatory is how they pull truth from my soul and demand of me my finest integrity. What is written exists. I can hold it in my hands. It is mine.

I stop and wait for the sun. My breath comes in bursts of white vapor and my hands are cold and clenched in my pockets. When it is cold like this, I wish I had thought to wear gloves.

Winter sunrises are subtle, gentle pulsations, delicate at first, a nudge of light, a ripple of orange-rose that gradually turns pink, then yellow, until it fills the entire eastern sky. Gold light brushes the tops of the eucalyptus and illuminates priestly saguaros whose arms raise heavenward in morning supplication.

There are lessons here about these magnificent saguaros. In the desert where survival depends on meager inches of rain and the topsoil is only an inch deep, saguaros may live 150 years. Those massive arms begin as tiny buds. In the spring, their heads are crowned with white flowers that are pollinated by bats. Native Americans harvest the ruby colored fruit. When full and tight with water after summer rains, they may weigh two-and-a-half tons.

I had an epiphany about saguaros. A couple of weeks ago, I was walking later in the day—the sun was up, the sky was blue, the clouds were pristine and white. That day was the first time I really noticed the saguaros.

I had been thinking about night things, particularly the anxiety that kept me in Purgatory writing until dawn, how it had been going on for months since I attended a conference on Multiple Personality Disorder and Childhood Sexual Abuse. I went because I had a patient with multiple personality disorder. Ignorance is my enemy. One day, she was dissociative and unresponsive in my office. I can tell you firsthand, gynecologists do not like unresponsive patients curled in a fetal position on their exam tables.

The conference was five months earlier at a Scottsdale resort. I had eaten lunch on the patio next to a terra cotta pot of white and pink petunias. It was pleasant and warm, and I hesitated to return to the over-chilled auditorium. When I finally went back, a statuesque woman in a royal blue knit dress was well into her presentation. Marilyn Murray was talking about her book, *Prisoner of Another war: A remarkable Journey Healing from Childhood Sexual Trauma*. Hers was a story of being gang-raped as a child. She repressed the memory only to recover it years later during treatment for severe depression.

Something she said punched a button in my brain that set off intense physiological alarms. My hands shook. My heart pounded and thumped. I felt vitality pull away from my skin and hunker down inside, around my muscles and organs.

Inside my head I heard my own physician's voice, "It's a panic attack, just a squirt of adrenaline. Nothing here will hurt you. Let it go. Breathe. Come on, it's only a panic attack."

The panic slowly congealed into my own memories of childhood sexual abuse. I wrote at night in Purgatory and took desert walks at dawn to manage feelings of doom and fear. The psychologist I saw said it was all part of post-traumatic stress disorder—anxiety, depression, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, disturbed sleep, loss of self-esteem, hypervigilance, a sense of being damaged goods—a massive infection trapped inside thick walls of repression that finally ruptured.

I had always thought saguaro arms grew toward the sky, but I was wrong. The day of my epiphany, I realized many saguaros have no arms. Occasionally, there will be a crested saguaro with a swirl of growth at the top, but it is armless. That January afternoon, my attention was on the mature saguaros that were a hundred years old and had many arms. I was surprised to find that on some of them the arms were bizarrely twisted and convoluted, that they seemed to grow toward the earth rather than away from it. Yet, even on the arms that curved toward the ground, the tips pointed up. I did an experiment. I found five saguaros and looked carefully at their arms. On each, regardless of which way it grew, the tip pointed up, toward the sky.

Plants have receptors that respond to light. This phenomenon is known as phototropism which is an orientation or growth toward light. I was amazed that regardless of what had happened to the saguaros, whatever caused the distortions, the tips pointed toward the light. There was a mechanism for correction and continued growth.

Estimates are one in three women will be sexually abused at some point during their lives, and though the numbers are underreported, boys are also sexually abused with similar, devastating consequences. Emotional growth, the ability to enjoy life, the agency to make choices about your life, all of these are deformed by childhood abuse. Yet, what I found during those Purgatory nights was a compulsion, call it a phenomenon, to move toward the light—to uncover, illuminate, reveal, disclose, and find—truth.

I feel great reluctance to face the residual demons of abuse, but the capacity to see clearly, to change course and heal, is intrinsic, and is as powerful as the receptors that direct growth in the saguaros.

In the stillness of a winter morning, there is hope.

Roses Lightened

- Emily Cherkauskas



pwepwepwpe

- Darren Martinez

i Do not Interact with American Reality teleVision

i am unWelcome in churches, they lack,

missing my brother's wedding
where god consummates the union
and fucks my brother's wife

the birthPlace of LoVe?
why, the mcdonaldo's BathRoom
where i woke up
missing an ear

i hired A Man
to craft the soundtrack of my life
with SynthWave techno logy
quitting yesterday, he DeCried
'cannot eat chip and dip,
for Each And Every meaL'
why, the only dip was He

i drew the sWord from the sTone
while Municipal Men sCCCreamed
'get out of the sewage pit, goblin'
and with their laZer pointers they went
'pwe pew pew bam boom plamow'
with their little Pursed lips

Angry but, a Little Less

- Sydney Umstead

You painted her the perfect portrait
Left the harsh and immediate brush strokes with me
The painting you never want to discuss the details of
You perfected your art later
The torn up canvas now represents a box buried at the bottom of your closet
The faded colors reside behind my tired eyes
The version of the Mona Lisa that did not make the final cut
This fact becomes clear to lovers I take in
It's in my eyes
The glistening fear that I will never be the masterpiece
Only the groundwork that needs to be built upon
A painted over image of all that has been done to me
And all that I have become
But, will it ever be the final work?

Bluebird

- Tyler Savitski



Last Night I Cried

- Sam Burgess, Jr.

I cried last night, as I watched on TV a small child
who suffered from malnutrition lay motionless.

The tears welled up in my eyes as I watched this baby who was
so weak from hunger, so helpless from starvation,
that she had no strength with which to open her eyes.

This young and innocent creature of God, who in no
way was responsible for her pitiful condition, was now
on the brink of death.

And her mother, her mother whose breast had
completely dried up, could no longer feed her.

You see, her daughter is one of a set twin girls. And
unfortunately, she had to choose between the two of her
babies because she could not keep them both alive.

The decision for her was gut-wrenchingly hard, but she
knew that if she did not choose one, they both would die.

She lost not only a child that day, but a significant part of her soul.

I cried last night, as I have never, ever, cried before.

this poem isn't quite as important as you think it is

- Darren Martinez

I have fallen in love.

My life is sexless. I do not know intimacy,

Only stories. The emotions that permeate creations.

The spirit of a Babylonian man that made small goats out of clay,

nodding vigorously at our engineering process

And the creation of potato chips

there are, realistically, only about seven types of stories out there
look at human beings,

and you might piece together there are just as many types of people

its like there's only about, 20-25 different facial structures?

Up to the individual to remix on that, I guess.

among dweebs, there are many Darrens.

skinny Darren, Darren 2.0, darren,

many of them too, loveless, sexless beings.

/

all of them telling one of seven stories

telling of love they've never had, even though

it was written in the stars a long time ago

when, who, and why.

I try to do what my fellow poets do. Romanticize

Wanting to kill yourself, fall in love with inanimate objects,

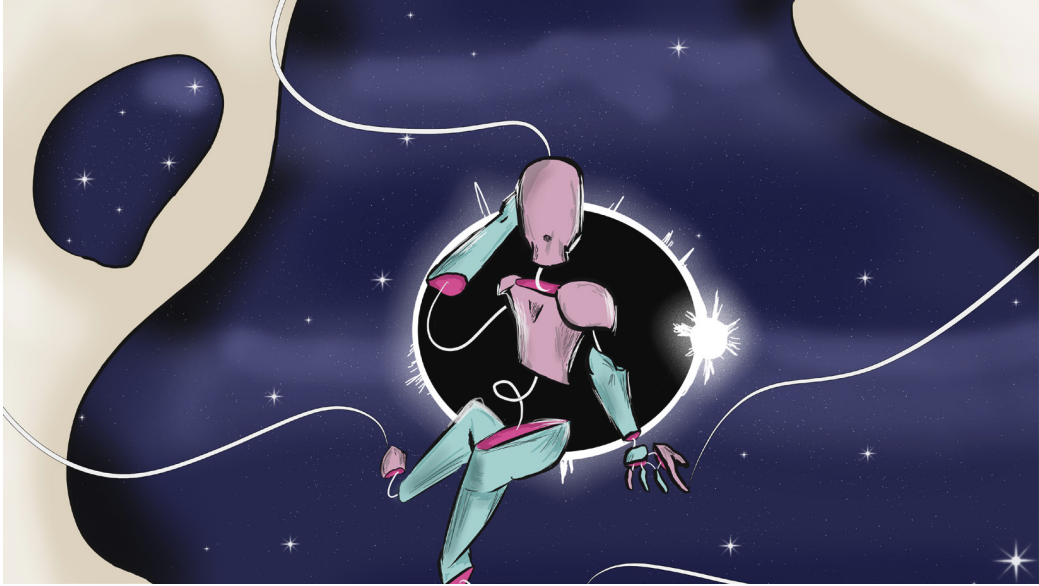
Reflect the human condition, think.

I'm tired of thinking and being

this poem isn't quite as important as you think it is

Pull the Threads

- Annie Arsenic



In all my dreams I see the world come undone. Thin strips, thread by thread pulled away. Seams split into the open to reveal the vastness of space. When it has all been revealed, I am alone, stuck floating in perfect stillness.

The voice tells me to come close.

The sun appears before me, blinding me. I'm too close to it, and I feel warm. But then just as the discomfort encroached on me, the moon eclipsed the star. And in this moment, I am cooled again. Calmed, and at rest.

The voice tells me it's name.

Then the moment breaks, and the threads again pull apart my world, this time giving way to even more nothing. The vision of the eclipse is shredded piece by piece before my eyes, and I am alone with myself in emptiness.

The voice tells me everything.

I look down and see that I too have been unraveling, or at least I am now. I hadn't considered it a possibility, but common sense dictated it should happen. I embrace the universe. As the last piece of me falls into the void,

I close my eyes. And just then, I open my eyes. The dream ends, as it has a thousands times before.

The voice is silent.

Grand Canyon 2

- Claire Wynne



Prima Materia

- Fen Farnelli

Black are His eyes, two circles of shale,
Which gaze, morose, upon His art.
Lead bones proved, in time, too frail
To hold His flesh and Iron heart.
Ashes to ashes, upon the pyre,
Dust to dust, our passions avowed,
Aimless, He walks into the gyre,
Met now chiseled on His brow,
As He had chiseled into stone,
Numen now penned in His Will,
As He had penned a perfect clone,
A changeling that He could not kill.

White are Her teeth, which gnaw on the bones
Of those who'd called Her Son of Man,
Copper veins flowed through the stone
Which formed Her womb when time began.
Ashes to ashes, She guided the plough,
Dust to Body, now given a voice.
Let loose Her soul from passive vows,
If formed before She had a choice.
Let loose Her half-divinity,
If half must stay upon the earth,
Then formed from Tin or Antimony,
Held at home without a hearth.

Gold is Their hair, in unbraided strands,
Which flows around Their perfect face.
Mercury held in Their cupped hands,
None spilled as They walked with unmatched grace.
Ashes to ashes, smoke to the skies,
Dust to Man to Woman to God.
Undressed from culture's rude disguise,
Removed from Their obtuse facade.
Is it a sin to mold our selves,
Earthen flesh on the potter's wheel,
Letting that which in us dwells
Loose from this gyre, Their form revealed?

Red is my blood, my passion renewed,
Now flowing through my Copper heart.
Why must my body be broken for you?
Who would destroy a work art?
Ashes to cinders, cinders to fire,
Dust to that which pleases me,
Formed in the image of my desire,
Elements of a new Alchemy.
Now replicated with my voice,
The voice which rang while I was stone,
I have created a third choice,
A changeling who is not alone.

Astro3

- Tyler Savitski



haven

- jay guziewicz

picture this:

me, in blue,
standing on top
of a tall building,
foot hovering off
the edge of the roof.

breathe in.
breathe out.

it only takes two steps
for me to learn that
even boys named after birds
can't fly, only
f
a
l
l.

and then.
you.

you, a flash of red
lighting up the dark
skyline of my city.

“just a call away,
day or night,
whenever you need.”

my foot steps back.
i feel the heat of your hand
linger against my skin
smile ever present on your lips.

breathe in.
breathe out.

it only takes two steps
for a boy named for a bird
to
f
a
l
l
into your arms.

Exit..?

- Emily Cherkauskas



Little Braves

- Maura C. Maros

Ask for what you want, take what is yours.

Stake your claim, make your mark.

Leave, stay.

Hold the candle, stand with others.

Face the ugly, find the beauty.

Make time, take time.

Confront your fears, hold them in your hand.

Release them.

Love everyone.

Find the words, speak your truth.

A sister's lament
Janine P Dubik

Her grief cannot be erased
or halved by putting
her heaviest stones
in my hands.

Her grief cannot become
mine despite the sunny room
we once shared, despite my wish
to ease her burden.

Her grief is hers alone;
it clings to only her and
doesn't transfer, so I
cannot fathom its depths.

Biographies

Jay Guzewicz is a senior (?) psychology and English major and this year's executive editor. He saw The Batman (2022) 3 times in the first 24 hours it was on HBO Max. That's 9 hours of Batman in one day.

Emily Cherkauskas is a junior communication studies and English double major with minors in creative writing and women's and gender studies. She accidentally noclipped into the backrooms and doesn't know how to get out.

Breanna Ebisch is a senior communications studies major with minors in English and Women's and Gender Studies and is the layout editor for the Manuscript this year. She has been a writer almost all her life, at least for as long as she can remember, and hopes to take that love into her career and future. You can usually find her watching a hockey game, belting out Harry Styles and Taylor Swift songs, spending time with her loved ones or with her nose in a book. Breanna loves to travel and frequently indulges in her sense of adventure, most of the time on an impulse. She loves sunny days, laughing with friends and living life to the fullest.

Fen Farnelli came from mud and to mud they will return.

Darren Martinez: Otaku, habitual Dance Gavin Dance enjoyer, Dark Souls strength build enthusiast. I'm sorry my poetry is so pompous.

Jackie Costello: Junior, DDMA, She/Her, Jackie occasionally publishes under the pen name 'Annie Arsenic', enjoys pistacio ice cream, and leads a local cult.

Maddy Kinard is a junior English and communication studies dual major with a global cultures minor and is a staff member of Manuscript. She enjoys long walks on the beach at sunset and kittens.

Hello! My name is ***Jordyn Williams***. I'm a Theatre Arts and English Graduate with a minor in Dance. It has been a pleasure being a part of Manuscript. I have learned so much from my peers and professors and enjoyed reading the works of other writers. My favorite poet John Keats once said "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity, it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance" (John Keats). I believe poetry is an escape from reality where an individual can express their true feelings and experiences on paper. With my degrees, teachings, and the experience I have gained in Manuscript I hope to become a published author and work for a publishing house.

Rene Allen, M.D. graduated with a MA in creative writing in January 2016. Funny fact: She has chia seed breakfast pudding with blueberries and grain free granola every morning for breakfast. You otta' try it!

Sam Burgess, Jr. graduated in 1994 with an MBA in management. He is a foot soldier in the army of his Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ!

Mya A. Banegas is of the class of 2025 with majors in theatre and psychology. Her senior year she won first place in a city-wide playwriting contest in Philadelphia and Temple theatre students performed it.

Janine P. Dubik graduated in '78 and again with her MFA in '19. Fun fact: she was on The Beacon staff for my four undergraduate years.

Ylonis Grant is in the class of 2025 and is majoring in psychology. She loves poetry.

Ashlee Harry has an M.A. in fiction and is a self-published author of The Guardians Trilogy: The Guardians, Ascension, and Legacy.

Haley Katona is in the class of 2023, majoring in political science. She has never watched Monsters Inc. without crying.

Maura C. Maros has a Masters in Fine Arts. This year, she started a new adventure and co-host the podcast, A Reel Page Turner!

Cody Marsh received a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Wilkes January of 2022. He lives in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where he is involved in various causes, namely prison abolition.

Tyler Savitski is a senior biology and physics major, and plans to study astrobiology.

Cas Schiller is a freshman with a major in biochemistry. Fun fact: Cas is ethically sourced!

Samantha Ann Stanich-Romasiewicz, MA, MFA '20 in Creative Writing, worked as a grad assistant for Marketing Communications for Wilkes and had to be told not every university uses "The" in front of it. Being from Ohio makes you pretentious in that way.

Hannah Simerson is a senior English and communication studies major. She was on an episode of Dance Moms (and she even got to sit right next to the moms in the audience)!

Sydney Umstead is in the class of 2025 and is currently majoring in English. She has an unhealthy obsession with coffee.

Claire Wynne is a senior environmental engineering major, and is also the Vice President of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance, as well as Officer of the Games and Media Club.

Dr. Mischelle Anthony, co-advisor to the Manuscript Society, is also Associate Professor and Chair of the English Department at Wilkes University. She teaches and writes poems, and has served on the editorial boards of the Midland Review (now defunct, hopefully not her fault) and Cimarron Review.

Dr. Chad Stanley makes the English department better by both being a great professor and bringing his dog to campus.

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The Kirby Hall Ghost: We can sense your presence and we love you.

