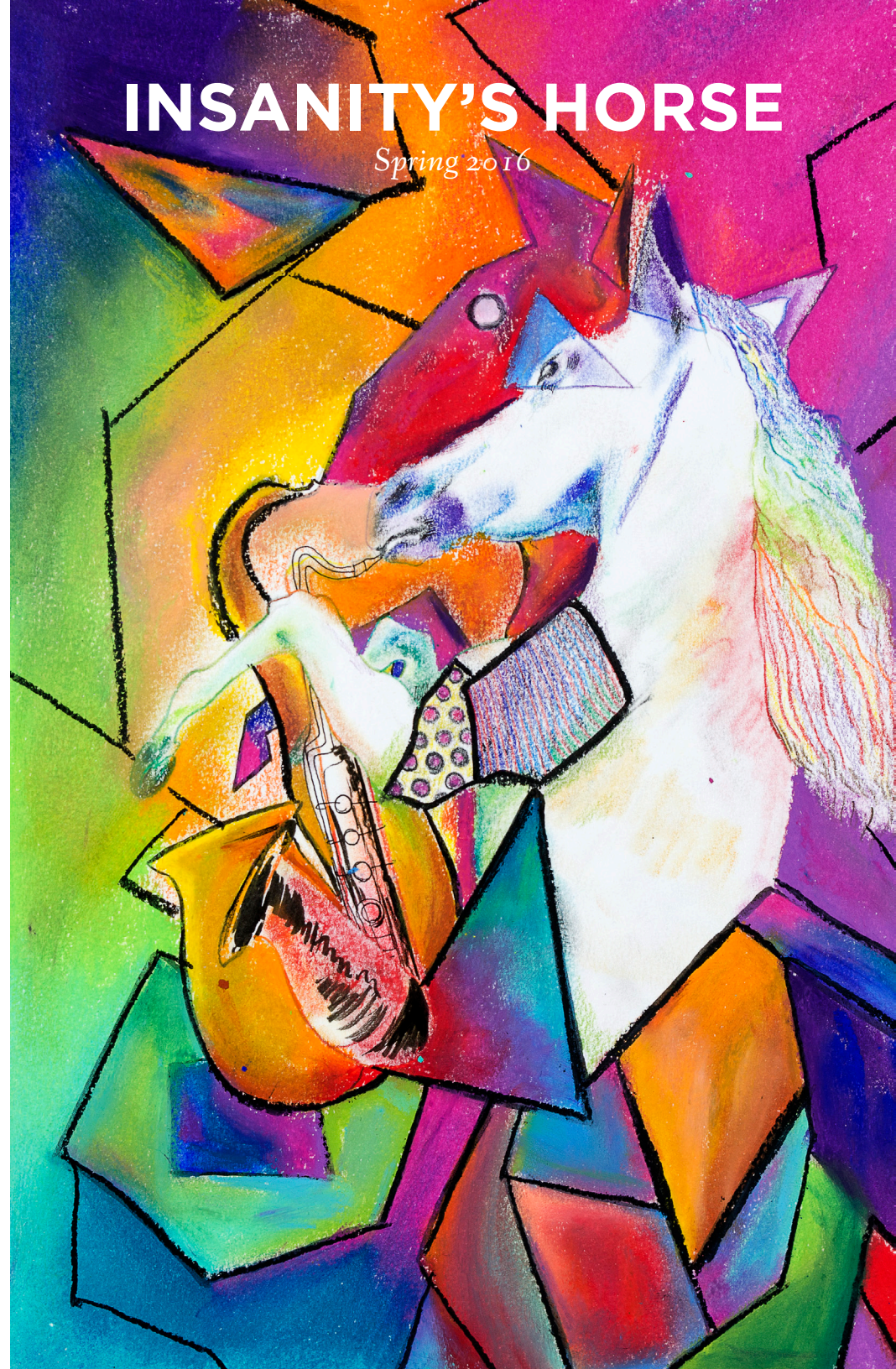


# INSANITY'S HORSE

*Spring 2016*



Cover Art by Christian Alvarado  
Design by Chris Ceravolo  
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# INSANITY'S HORSE

*Drew University Literary & Art Magazine*  
*Spring 2016*

**W**hat gives art its emotive power? For months, we at *Insanity's Horse* have reviewed your submissions for that inarticulable—yet undeniable—spark of ingenuity. We have been moved by your poetry, entertained by your prose, and enchanted by your photography. Although we cannot accept every submission, we've been consistently impressed by the range of voices and visions represented by your work. This magazine would not be possible without the support of Paul Molinari at Proforma Repromatic Printing. Whether you're a wordsmith or photographer, a seasoned submitter or emerging artist, we thank you for sharing a bit of your creativity—and insanity—with us.

Sincerely,

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## Behind The Veil

Sofia Amorim

The darkened rooms and solemn candlelight,  
Alone, sat I, suspecting clever theft,  
In which our sacred vow of strongest might,  
With time, it may renew if it were kept.  
The flame did sway upon your swift return;  
I smiled again, it was you by my side,  
Who brought me light where darkness had once burned;  
The wax that should have melted yet was dried.  
It seemed the light did take the form of smoke,  
Enshrouding you intangibly in grays,  
Which curl 'round nimble fingers as you spoke,  
For with each other, we need never stray.  
    Behind the veil of scented smoke it's dawn;  
    I turn the hallowed page and you are gone.

## Swallows

Andrew Bates

swallows are birds  
that fall down my throat  
to mulchy stomach floor,  
little baby words too early  
from their nest departed  
o those startled swallows  
stop my lips midtwitter &  
spitless I try to rescue  
my pidgin english enough  
to whisper: help

## Writer's Block

John Raney

The sacred waters of inspiration have been cut off from me  
    Albeit temporarily  
    I am distracted, confused, and frankly annoyed  
    The well is dry  
But, in due time, shall spring back to life with new ideas  
    And the sweet waters of inspiration shall return to me  
    And water my mind  
A drought is here now, and words are not forthcoming  
    For all my brimming ideas  
    For all my sentences  
    I cannot say a word  
I cannot impress upon the minds of my fellow men, for now it  
    seems  
    And, oh, my parched spirit is thirsty  
    And I pray earnestly for the rains to fall again  
And inundate my being with the equivocal eloquence which now  
    evades me  
    That familiar inspiration  
    That familiar stream  
    Sate the thirst of my soul  
So I may engrave my stake in history,  
    Once more

## A Rose By No Name

Katherine Ganger

This rose, picked in summer, begins to fade.  
Dead petals fall around dull thorned stems.  
The soft, sweet scent fights to linger, unsure  
of where to go; to stay, to leave, to be.  
Breath comes in slow ripples as the lonely  
moon moves the tides of you, and I drown  
in the undertow of what was, and when  
I reach for you, I cut my hands on rocks.  
Torn by the words you whispered in the dark,  
Cold black satin slips sadly to the floor.  
Lingerie, bought for you, but never seen,  
And I can't find the strength to cover myself.  
I try to leave, but I don't have the will,  
I love you, I loved you, I love you still.



## Untitled

Shanna Quackenbush

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5



## Watercolor Study

Brooke Winters

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6

## The Scene

Ryan Genauldi

In leather on streets, the highest heels that click  
with music and highs of Terminal Five.  
The guy with Brando eyes, and all of the style,  
breathing in charcoal and perfumed pheromones,  
blending with sweaty street light.  
Her fingers, serpents, teal tipped fangs, quick  
strike necks and sunsets before the nights sky.  
They were the disciples of each other,  
he leading her, by the belt hoops of jeans,  
by kisses and Marlboros, trading secrets,  
and it didn't matter if they were true.  
It's a fingerprint proof affair,  
and it's only surface deep  
and the only rules,  
"please don't touch the glass."  
Loving loosely, with painted façades,  
slipping Pabsts like teenagers past teeth through  
boundaries, walking, stalking the neon lamped valleys.  
And he and she, both know they want this too,  
end up in his place, tangled in white sheets.  
Hands around waists, sink low fleeting across  
crosses on shirts, that belong to no God.

## Mary Magdalene

Andrew Bates

Kneeling at my feet, your fingers  
clutching the hem of my jeans  
and your wedding-wine eyes  
gazing up at me (so coy, so  
reverent),

you looked like Mary Magdalene.

You blessed me so hard;  
I can still feel the net  
of your fine black hair,  
snaking through my fingers  
as you prayed in tongue.

Your spit on my belly  
was a perfume priceless  
and broken open  
all for me.

Did I look like a God  
to you then?





## Dome

Natalie Marionneaux



## Cheers

Natalie Marionneaux

## Little Lemon Drops

Janine Pasquale

The little chunks of lemon in my water look like a floating fish that's been chewed on and spit back up. My right hand swishes the bendy straw in circles, my face too close to the edge of the plastic cup. I stare down into the bottom, coming up only to sneak sips stemmed from discomfort. Grayson leans on my dorm room desk, I sit cross legged in a spinny chair, and I begin to hear words spill out of my mouth like liquid from a glass, like at one of my frantic family dinners.

"I feel so unraveled. I'm unraveled."

I tug at my hair, then at my shoe laces. He doesn't understand. He stares. I feel him trying not to judge because he hates drugs, but low-key loves me. I'm all exposed and frayed.

"I think the only way I can re-ravel is if I unravel completely." He smirks.

"I didn't mean it that way, Grayson. Calm yourself."

We just started hooking up a few days ago, so he knows what I look like nude (it's all still new) but not what I look like on acid. I feel him not wanting to judge but doing it anyway and hating himself more than he hates himself normally because he's judging me while not wanting to judge. I'm criticizing me even harder, hating me. Trying to act normal—just act normal—I feel like my skin is dirty and the buttons on my crop-top keep popping open and my eyeliner smudged and I purposely left my sun glasses on. I left them on because I feel like I'm unraveling and that everyone can see it. That he can see it, see that I was wrong.

Then he says,

"Right. Well, I'm feeling the strong desire to leave. Right

now."

But he's standing still. Staring at these little chunks of lemon is making me sick and I feel defeated, by some drug I no longer want to be on. I'm hoping the silence will defend me, will fix this.

"I didn't want to make you feel uncomfortable. I'm so mad at myself because I just wanted some way to feel better. You were right. I shouldn't have—I didn't—" (I'm rubbing my head too hard). "I'm never going to do drugs, besides for weed, again."

There's nothing, no more words, no noise but the grumbling of my micro fridge.

"You don't believe me, do you."

This is an insight, not a question. But he hasn't left yet. He's still here. Why hasn't he left yet?

"I believe that you believe that. Like, I don't know if it's true, but I believe you."

I crumble into my own body. I don't know what that looks like, but he must see it from the outside because he's walking towards me. He's kneeling down and holding me and I faintly hear myself saying, I mean it. I'm never doing this again. Maybe I'm too loud. I don't know. I just feel unraveled. Yet I want to be unraveled and to rip off my boots and my clothes, not out of sexual desire, but because I feel so wrong and gross and itchy and foolish and the walls are swelling and breathing like creatures do and he's rubbing my back and for so long I've wanted him. For three years we've wanted this and here we are, here I went, dropping two tabs right after class and his head now nestles in my lap, while mine rests on his, and I don't know. I don't know what I did. To keep him here.

So six hours ago I dropped two papery tabs of acid, or some synthetic drug that tasted sour like little lemon drops

burning up logic and sensibility under my tongue. Six hours later, the sun streams through the faded white of my blinds and the tighter he holds me, the sweeter those little lemon chunks smell. That universe outside this room turns sour and insignificant as he lifts up his head, his cheek soft against mine, whispering,

“Do you just want to snuggle? Because I can do that.”

I let my mind unravel and I finally find relief from my own skin, securely wrapped in his. Knowing that nothing and no one, not even me, could dare ruin this.

## Through Drugs To Danger

Janine Pasquale

Here I am, sitting on glass, drinking not-quite coffee.

I snuck in a sort of drug that does me bad, makes me mad,  
but doesn't control me.

Your death has rendered my laughter—There and then I  
remember...

The worst, that there is this lacking. I figure it is yours, is you,  
but some days I've mostly forgotten. Oh! Here I am,  
sitting on glass, eating not-quite Laughy Taffy.

Ah, damn, I remember it all, man. I thought this stuff's supposed  
make me happy!

But I recall for the third time since it's happened, that there is this  
sort of lacking.

I figure it is yours, is you—since your absence marks the salt  
on my cheeks burning through, from the already faced  
fear, and the too many tears—

Those are my only clues.

I keep trying to restore a kind of joy, a false joy which lets me  
think of you.

Need fulfillment, not a ploy.

Because I'm lost from the you I've lost, as my wild world's been  
slipped a new.

Been sickeningly pinched in my heart—was once red, is now the  
color blue.

So I'm so tripped, I'll surely slip through drugs to danger  
'til I meet up

with you.



## Untitled

Alexandria Keith



## Untitled

Alexandria Keith



**Untitled**  
Ryan Genauldi



**Untitled**  
Natalie Marionneaux

## A Garden Cannot Rise

Alexa Young

This world leaves not a single girl unhurt  
Knees scrape and bruise against the gravel ground  
A garden cannot rise above cracked dirt

This eerie cloud proves one she cannot skirt  
With dreamy gusts fly anxious ghosts abound  
And world's left not a haunted girl unhurt

The moon's too bright, from light her eyes avert  
Yet she, in darkness, finds herself unwound  
A flower cannot root among cracked dirt

This tongue's gone mute, her voice cannot exert  
Lips waste away, producing quiet frowns  
Our world has left a silent girl with hurt

Her bed's like stone, night fails to bring comfort  
Beneath these sheets can lonely girls be found  
This longing stem cannot break through cracked dirt

The desert land's left only life to flirt  
If you dare ask she'll teach you how to drown  
This world leaves not a single girl unhurt  
A garden cannot rise above cracked dirt

## The Ledge

Zarina Akbary

I'm sorry  
All I can do is watch you  
sway over that precipice.  
Your tear-stained pillows,  
your nights kneeling before the porcelain god—  
I know, I know.

I've picked up the shovel,  
and joined you in piling dirt on those secrets.

When I saw those shattered pieces of your mirror  
I tried my best to put it back together,  
But a shard sliced my finger.  
I promise that wasn't your fault.  
Sometimes, when you're on that ledge,  
I see you shift your weight,  
and  
                  my  
                                  heart  
  drops.

I just stand there  
as powerless to pull you back  
as your blind parents.

And I'm so sorry



## Chromatic Leaves

Hayley Goldstein



## Leaves And Snow

Thomas Cleary

## Tabernacle Dream

Julia Cornell

I dreamed I lived in a house made of bones  
Collarbones stretched over my head like cathedral stones

I ambled around the church, blood-wine  
in the tabernacle, stained glass windows hinting  
at blue eyes and glint lust.  
I ran my hands over the pews.

If your body is my church, your ribs my temple,  
then I dreamed—unafraid—that everything was holy and just.

## Composition

Alexa Young

i am made of old things.  
there is dust behind my ears and cobwebs under tongue.  
my lungs are shriveled spiders, dead  
lying in your mother's chest—  
where air never reaches.  
find my big toe in the moon,  
spot my iris in the sun,  
and remember a galaxy is no less a galaxy  
if its stars shine duller through your brother's telescope.

i am made of brittle things.  
my lashes float like dandelion wishes—  
glue them to my lids  
with your dead uncle's syrup recipe.  
dig teeth from your neighbor's sandbox,  
clog the kitchen sink with grey matter,  
and string veins across your father's clothesline.  
let them billow in the breeze like crisp linens.

i am made of ordinary things.  
my head is full of rain clouds and my jaw is made of tree bark.  
my hair is a broom collecting grime in your sister's closet—  
grab my ribs like bicycle handlebars,  
shake my funny bone like your aunt's margarita,  
sweep the dirt of my nails off your grandmother's porch  
and sit on the step beside me.



excavate me.  
bone by bone  
stacked like bibles on your grandfather's nightstand.  
stacked like bibles, yet somehow holier.

## The Teller

Alexander Slotkin

Eric should have been happy. The twenty-two year old was finally pimple free, having undergone an unpleasant round of facial Benzoyl peroxide injections. And, what's more, Tiffany said she would love to have dinner with him. But the blank piece of paper tucked away in his pocket printed by 'Merlin the Seer' was unsettling.

The old fortuneteller rewarded Eric in ways nothing else could, answering questions he had concerning the following day with remarkable accuracy. When the young man asked yesterday if Tiffany wanted to date him, the mechanical genie, sitting with folded arms behind a sheet of glass, printed out the word "Yes." But now the machine, which Eric had bought a year ago from an antique shop, only printed blank slips of paper, something its previous owner never warned him about.

Reaching into his pocket, Eric pulled out the paper, unfolded it, and held it firmly in front of him. Light from a nearby lamp revealed the buildup of sweat stains near his fingers. He crumbled the paper before tossing it aside, readying to leave his apartment for an evening walk.

\*\*\*

He walked under dim streetlights, thinking about his upcoming date and putting his thoughts about Merlin aside. Looking to cross the street, a blue walk sign appeared on the other side of the road, encouraging Eric to keep up his pace. He tucked his hands into his pockets, grimacing as a gale of cold air rushed

past him.

As he began to cross, Eric felt something in his pocket that he had not noticed earlier, causing him to stop in the middle of the road. Pulling out the alien object, Eric was surprised to find a thin white slip of paper.

Is it from earlier today?, he thought.

Headlights flashed Eric before a car drove through the red light and struck him, tossing him over the car's hood and onto the road behind it. Onlookers, in shock and disbelief, stood still. A bum picked up a nearby piece of paper, which had flown out of Eric's hands.

"No future," he read aloud, pulling a long face. "Just like papa."

## Fractals

Julia Cornell

I saw a snowflake  
drift down  
over the rocky coast  
as we made fairy houses  
in the 80 acre woods  
and dreamed worlds out of words.

I saw a snowflake  
plummet past  
the window the cat's bed faced,  
as we slept in the twin bed  
under your glow-in-the-dark solar system,  
and listened to Simon and Garfunkel.

I saw a snowflake  
skate across  
the pond we went to  
to say  
goodbye,  
see you later,  
things would be the same.

I saw a snowflake  
fall  
down here in New Jersey,  
and my cold fingers typed out  
"Is it snowing where you are?"  
and I know I have asked you this before,

but you haven't replied yet.

I think the best way to say it  
after all this time  
is that

the crystal colonies in a snowflake-  
the sharp shale of the rocky coast-  
the dust that makes up galaxies-  
and the two of us,  
are all  
fractals;

(we are?) similar pieces that form part of a Whole:  
a collection of well-traced patterns  
recurring on progressively smaller scales,

smaller than your breath leaving your chest every few seconds,  
smaller than the twitch of your toes when we were sleeping,  
smaller than a piece of snow caught in your eyelashes,  
smaller than the squeeze of your hand before you let go.

I saw a snowflake fall-  
and as I stood with my hands shoved inside my coat pockets  
I found that the root meaning of the word for us  
is the Latin word for broken-  
the word for the pain of your foot slicing open on an edge of shale-  
the word for the shattering of a crystal-  
the word for a whole heart broken-

the word for a snowflake falling,  
and no one else to see it.

## Kidnapping Complex

Grace Cerra

*Once upon a time, a witch trapped a fairy, far more powerful than her, inside of a coin. It was said that anyone who found this coin could have any wish granted. A wandering knight found the coin, and wished for the most beautiful princess in the world to fall in love with him. Enraged that he took her coin and wasted it on something so pointless, the witch made his wish come true, only to kidnap the princess and take her to a far away tower. Still, the knight raced after her, killing the witch, saving the princess and hiding the coin somewhere in a book.*

\*\*\*

From the impressionable age of five, Princess Sundae had it repeatedly beaten into her head that when she was someday kidnapped (and she was told explicitly that she would be kidnapped as a princess), she was to await the prince on a white horse to come and save her. She was not to beat against the iron bars of her prison with a pole or to use any of her ice magic to save herself.

“Why can't I?” she would whine, crossing her arms and pouting at her mother, who loved to preach how much proper princess etiquette truly mattered.

“You will understand more when you are older,” her mother insisted. “You must learn from experience what the meaning of it is.”

Sundae rolled her eyes at that, but waited nonetheless for the day that she would finally understand.

Her castle was as dull as the stormy sky, set against the snowy mountains far ahead of them. The interior was no different- the gray stone walls channeling the chilly air throughout the castle, and most unfortunately in her room. Oh, how she dreaded returning to that room only to pull three or four blankets over herself. There were days she wished to race out of that dreary place and away from both the mountains and the castle, but she knew that they would catch her before she could think of a way out of her bedroom window.

Beyond being near the coldest place in the land, the Snow Globe was also the dullest, the only interesting place of access being the palace library, and the only interesting companions to have being her pet frogs. Whenever she needed to escape the pains of being lectured to, Sundae would gather them up in her cloak, and travel to the far back corners of the library. Here, she could truly foster her natural gifts into something better and more powerful than simply making pretty little sculptures to “impress” her parents and “future suitors”.

Upon asking why she could not learn anything more powerful, her teachers explained that princesses were born with powers to serve others and that their magic wasn't for anything other than pleasing their princes and their family. In Sundae's case, she was to create beautiful, glittering sculptures with her ice magic. Just as she would need a prince to save her, he would need a gentle hearted girl capable of creating something beautiful.

At this, Sundae retorted that she needed no prince, only the companionship of her frogs, and that she would use her gifts for her own purposes. Marriage was only a cage that allowed a complete stranger control of her realm, and if she could, she would have used her gifts to keep that from happening. Unfortunately, she was not born with a strong gift, and would

never be able to create any of the fierce storms she dreamed of.

And so, she would sit in the library, desperately awaiting the day that she would find the solution to her problems. She read all sorts of things, but witches were the most fascinating subject of all her studies, and she always found herself gravitating toward the rickety, warped shelves that contained the dusty volumes. Witches had far superior magic, which they used to create storms and chaos, as well as grand harvests and an increase in one's fortune. They did not rely on the help of a prince but created potions or summoned creatures to do their bidding. They were in control and truly the most powerful wielders of all.

They were also the ones responsible for kidnapping the princesses. Not all of them; some preferred to have nothing to do with such a situation, and solved conflict in direct battle. But there were witches who precariously planned every little detail, like the laying down of the trapdoors, for either the naive princess or even the foolish knight that was supposed to save her, to be the hero.

She always loved reading those parts.

And of course she knew of the great legend of the wishing coin, as did every person in the palace. After all, it was the origin story, the one that started the ritual of saving kidnapped girls in order to receive their hand. But while everyone sighed at the rescuing of the princess, her mind wandered to the coin, knowing full well what she would wish for if she were the one to find it.

The day was no different than any other. She escaped her embroidery lessons and planted her frogs in the beds of the pompous, visiting princes. She was rather fond of them, but for some reason, everyone else thought they were revolting, and so in order to get her new suitor to back off, she would make sure her companions made their new home right on his pillow. He would not say a word against his gracious, hosting princess, but the rest of

the princes would shoot all-knowing glares at her, while the noble girls would gossip right in front of her.

She was not in the mood for reading, so she sat at the window overlooking the courtyard and the mountains, her hands neatly framing her face. She stared out longingly, until something caught her attention.

“It took quite a bit of coaxing on mother’s part, but she finally convinced father to hire the witch.”

She peeked to the left, snarling at the sight of Prince James and his squire, Sir Neal. They arrived a mere two weeks ago, and already she could not stand the mere sight of the two of them. Neal was a pompous redhead that paid her no mind, claiming she was too crazy for her own good, and James was an air-headed blonde that paid her too much attention. She recalled his blank stares from the night he arrived, and tried to shove the memory of that horrid night out of her mind.

The two donned their armor, laughing as they cracked muscles and stretched their limbs as they awaited to begin their morning lesson. Neal had a particularly smug look on his face as James looked on in astonishment.

“I suppose that means you will have Miss Bubbles’ hand soon enough?”

“It is only a matter of time.”

Frowning, Sundae pushed herself against the wall tightly, her hands shaking.

“Oh Neal, you lucky bastard,” James slapped him on the back, “I only wish I had your financial backing. Father insists I spent too much travelling up here and I need to wait a while before hiring the witch.”

“Financial backing?” she repeated to herself, “Hiring the witch?”

“Oh? Who do you intend to... have appropriated?”

“The fair maiden of this castle, of course. Who else?”

Her stomach lurched at the way he said fair. And then lurched again when she realized just who he was referring to.

The third time was because she finally managed to piece together the meaning of their conversation.

How did she not see it before? Of course they would have to hire someone to kidnap her, to kidnap the girls! Of course she was expected to wait around all pretty like! That was exactly what they wanted!

“Princess Sundae?” Neal sneered, shaking his head. “Are you serious? She plants frogs in our beds and freezes our water during our showers! Would you not care for someone a bit more... obedient?”

“She may not have obedience, but she does have money. Her inheritance will certainly cover the costs of hiring the witch and more.”

She stormed off, no longer capable of listening to their benign conversation. There was only one thing left to do now.

For days, she searched high and low for the coin, praying that it was in the palace somewhere. Her search took her from *A History of Witches* to *Beginner’s Guide to the Magical Arts: How to Win Over Your Suitors With Your Talents*. It was a painful search, especially when she had to resort to the rubbish in the library. The silver shelves were in much better shape, even sparkling if light was directed onto it properly. Most of the volumes were brand new, replacing the tattered, old ones. Just staring at the *Princess Classics*, or more accurately, *The Princess Approved* selection made her want to gnaw her eyes out. The only solace she had was thinking that it would all pay off when she finally managed to find that coin and wish herself free.

Days went by without any progress. Sometimes, she refused to sleep just to get closer to finding it. That wasn't to mention the discovery of the horribly written love poems she found and the long lectures she faced from her mother for either skipping more lessons or not paying attention. It was by complete irony that she managed to find it in the one place she vowed to never wander near; the Archive of the Great Heroes.

The Archive was of course the grandest part of the library. It was just next to the Princess Classics, and the shelves painted a sunny gold in complement. The top was shaped like a crown and engraved with tons of little gems. The coin was inside a thin green pamphlet, lodged in the very back of the top shelf, shining brilliantly. Without a second thought, she ripped it out of its pocket, and allowed such power to flow inside her veins. A voice called out inside her head, asking for her greatest desire.

I want far greater magical power. More powerful than any witch. I would give anything to have such power.

The voice called back out, a faint echo. If this is what you desire, you must sacrifice that what is most precious to you, the only ones loyal and true to you.

She bit into the corners of her mouth, tears pricking at her eyes. Her frog companions would not be at her side when she finally achieved her freedom as she dreamed. One of her wishes with her new powers was to turn them human and finally have real friends. But even with them at her side, she could not stomach the thought of being trapped as James' bride for the rest of her life.

I understand.

The voice and rush of the power faded, leaving her cold and sore. She felt a bleakness plaguing her heart, one that could not be fixed. Returning to her chamber, she took the time to stroke each frog on its head, silently saying her goodbyes. As she dragged

herself up to bed, her plan to escape marriage started plotting itself.

She awoke early the next day, hastily scribbling a note and pinning it to the prince's door. After sacrificing the frogs and earning her new powers, she made the walls of her bedroom crumble with ease and froze the guards that dared to oppose her as she made her way to a cave in the south. Upon entry, she coated the rocky staircase to make it slippery, but ultimately passable, and with a snap of her fingers, the grand door was created, sealing her off into the highest chamber. She made sure to leave the keys in the most obvious of places, leaving only the cage to craft. Stepping inside, Sundae knew that it was only a matter of time before James would arrive.

He didn't disappoint. His manic footsteps woke her up from her small nap, easily reaching the door. After he cleared his throat, the lock clicked. Rather than try to turn the knob, he tore it completely off and shoved the door to the ground. The warm light flooded onto her back.

"Princess Sundae!" James cried, running up to her cage door. He turned the key in the lock and ran inside. "Wake up! I have come to save you from the witch, Eadnus!"

Weakly, she lifted her head, meeting his gaze.

"James?"

"Yes! I have come to get you out of here!"

She reached her hand out through the bars, weakly grasping his forearm, "You came all the way here for me?"

"Yes, now come on—"

A harsh laugh escaped from her mouth, to the point of her grasping her stomach with her other hand.

"You desperate, desperate fool."

"Huh?"

Her hand crawled all the way up to his wrist, squeezing tightly.

“And now, you shall know what it is like to be imprisoned for fun and sport.”

He struggled to break free, grunting, “What did you do to me?”

Her grin grew larger. “The moment you stepped into this cage, you lost little prince.”

“What did you do with Princess Sundae?”

She completely erupted into laughter this time, pulling his wrist backward. His eyes widened in alarm, and he fell to his knees. She slammed the cage door behind her shut, resetting the lock. “I am the real Princess Sundae. I just happen to also be the witch Eadnus.”

“What?”

With a flick of her wrist, she pinned him into the ground with her icicles. “You see, I happen to be many things at once. What I am not, however, is a pawn in your game of rags to riches.”

He scowled, trying to scramble to his feet. She wanted to let up on the magic, just to give him a chance. “We could have it all, Sundae. With my status and your money, we-“

“Are you trying to make me laugh again?”

“This is serious! Stop fooling around like that!”

“Oh, I am no fool,” the playfulness in her voice faded away, replaced with serious, cold contempt. “That is why I refuse your sham of an offer.”

“You must be out of your mind. How do you think your parents will react when they find out you have become a... a witch? Do you really think they will take you back with welcome arms?” He smirked as he saw her face darken. “That’s what I thought. But don’t worry. Once we get married, I swear I won’t

say a word about it so long as you do everything that I say,” he declared.

She walked out of the cage, leaving him pinned to the floor by the icicles. With a snap of her fingers, there was a click, lifting him up in the air and over a pit, deep inside of the cavern.

“W-What are you doing?”

“Sending you to a place that is as empty as my heart once was. I hope you enjoy it.”

As she walked away, she lost control of the atmosphere pinning him to the ground, allowing James to rattle and rage against the icicles. But she did not look back. The rattling was music to her ears.

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“Sundae, you are back!” the king cheered upon her arrival home.

“Oh thank goodness that nasty witch did not harm you!” the queen sighed in relief.

“But where is Prince James? Did he not rescue you?”

She fought back an all knowing smirk.

“I have an announcement to make. Come, let’s gather everyone in the ballroom.”

The people flooded into the ballroom like bees to honey, eager to hear of their princess’ engagement. Gossip echoed about the walls, and if she listened carefully, she could hear specific conversations.

“I heard it was Prince James.”

“How lovely!”

“I heard he did not have to even hire anyone! The princess was legitimately kidnapped!”

“No! That has not happened in decades!”

She snapped her red lace fan shut and cleared her throat.

“Thank you for coming this evening. I have an important piece of information to share with you. My dear people, as you all know, I was kidnapped by the witch, Eadnus, just last night. Fear not, however, as I’m alright. I made sure of that.”

She stole a glimpse back at her parents, her mother blinking and looking to her father in confusion with a strained smile. Tapping Sundae on the shoulder, he asked, “Whatever do you mean by that, Sundae? Did your prince not take care of her for you?”

“A prince never arrived,” she said sweetly, “I saved myself.”

Everyone in the ballroom looked to each other in confusion, gossiping.

“Do not be foolish, Sundae. We know you are not capable of doing something like that.”

“But I did! I used my magic to escape!”

“Sundae, this is preposterous! We told you time after time never to use your magic against a witch! You could have been hurt or worse!”

“But I wasn’t,” she protested, curling her fingers inward until her nails bit into the palm of her hands. Instead of minor stinging, she felt shots of ice numb her limbs. “I’m perfectly fine.”

Her father snarled, trying to maintain his composure as her mother awkwardly skirted away in the background. “That is not the point-”

“So you don’t care about my well being?”

“Do not interrupt me when I am speaking!” he roared, making her flinch and stumble backwards. Something in her gut warned her that not only was he not pleased, not only was he

horrified by her rebellion, but he would take any action possible to get her to comply.

She bit into her cheeks, narrowing her eyes and refusing to allow him to see her fear. “Answer my question, father.”

Without hesitation, he smacked his hand across her face, leaving a stinging red mark.

“How could you!” she screeched, pounding her hands against his shoulder, “Don’t you care about me at all?”

Trying to answer, he let out a pain-stricken gasp as a blue, wispy glow surrounded him. When it faded, he was completely changed.

“F-Father?”

Realizing what she did, her mother gasped, running over to her husband and immediately let out cries of “No. She did not... she could only have enough magic to make art... there is no way she could have done this.”

The guards, looking to one another in confusion, pulled out their spears and approached Sundae. Trembling into the railing, she released another burst of cold energy. It raced over the floor and staircase, rushing up the ankles of the terrified guards and stopping them in their tracks.

“Monster!”

“Witch!”

As the protests of the king’s guard continued, her grip over the railing tightened, sending more icicles to engulf them until they were nothing more than ice statues decorating the top of the balcony. Below her, the guests rushed about in a mass panic, trying to thaw their way out of the sealed doors. Some of them were infuriated and also charged her.

“Get her! That witch will tell us what happened to the real Princess Sundae!”



She paused, suddenly very calm. These people, her own people, rejected her once again. She thought it would have hurt her, even the tiniest bit, that they could not see what she was truly capable of. All they wanted was the safe illusion of their dainty princess in the arms of their future ruler. She couldn't make them see who she was, only the image of what she should have been.

Change was what they needed. But since they rejected it en masse, Sundae realized there was only one solution left.

She unleashed the last burst of energy, entirely built up of the anger she numbed herself to, stopping everyone in the room cold. As her breaths escaped in the freezing air, she examined the statues, all of which were painted with expressions of despair. There was something more terrifying about staring those statues in the eyes than watching them run away terrified of her.

With that in mind, she smashed away at every single last one of them until the ballroom resembled a cave with chunks of ice lying in small piles.

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There would be those who would come after her in retaliation. She did not fool herself into thinking otherwise, but invited such a challenge. In the meantime, she continued to train and watched as her powers grew to become more than she ever imagined.

The castle was hers now. She could place what she wanted wherever she wanted. She did not have to care for uppity princes looking to rule her kingdom. More importantly, no one could hurt her or take her away to be married.

It was always quiet now. The croaks from the frogs were long gone. And they had been the only sound that she appreciated.

## Saturday Nights

Katherine Ganger

Dispatch whispers over the radio, promising,  
That just for this moment,  
The world is quiet.  
Just for this moment,  
There is no call,  
And I am not needed,  
And I let the big world carry on without me.

Just for this moment.  
Laying in this little bed,  
I press my face into his chest and breathe,  
Taking this moment,  
Even though it's stolen,  
Losing myself in  
Hazel eyes that hold me close.

## Sunday Nights

Katherine Ganger

I find it hard to sleep at night; the whispers on the radio are not soothing.

Will I know you? Can I save you?

My hands are curled beneath my pillow, and I clench them tight.

I feel my pulse, rapid and steady.

Waiting.

I lay and wait for what might be the worst day of your life.

I'm waiting for the tones, for the screams of the sirens, screams of your mother.

Your screams.

I'm waiting for the moment to leap out of the ambulance, jump bag in hand, and tear through your home.

Your backyard barbeque.

Your son's baseball game.

I wait for the blood and the ragged breathing.

I tremble for CPR.

To my core it shakes me down.

Will I know you?

I clench my hands again. They feel small to me.

I have not yet outgrown the fear.

I take pills for the nausea.

Will I know you?

Can I save you?

# Monday Mornings

Katherine Ganger

My stomach churns  
In the early hour,  
Made worse by the heat  
Blasting hard at us,  
Obscuring the windows  
As hot breath wars with cold air

As we wait, I watch the sun  
Running off the night,  
Tucking in the stars,  
Chasing away the moon,  
Making our neon jackets  
Glow brighter with each new ray.

Coveted coffee drinkers  
Blinded by red and blue lights  
Try to peak inside this world.  
What's hidden within this truck  
Inspires the wildest imaginations  
That I don't have time to indulge.

We sit and we wait,  
And we wait and we wait,  
Waiting to disrupt the morning commute,  
Waiting for the all clear,  
Waiting for action that never comes.

This happens occasionally.

Getting ripped out of bed only  
To be turned away at the scene.  
My nerves are on fire  
But my eyes won't open,  
An ember that won't go out  
But just can't burn.

I look at my partner  
His ice blue eyes melting  
Into deep lagoons as  
The sun peaks over trees  
He pulls away from the train station  
And asks if I want to stop for bagels.

# What A Disaster

Amanda Tucker

Lava erupting from a volcano  
But silently  
Overflowing  
Forever going  
Never knowing  
When it'll come to a halt

Tears bursting from the eyes  
But silent cries  
Overflowing  
Forever going  
Never knowing  
When the tears will dry up

Mass wreckage from a tornado  
Horrific sounds  
Picks you up  
Throws you down  
Finally over  
Too much damage to recover

Heart broken from the lies  
Gruesome love  
Picks you up  
Throws you down  
Finally over  
Too many pieces to recover

Take cover from the hurricane  
A storm of devastation  
Crushes  
Rips apart  
Ruins lives  
Now you have to remodel

Take cover from the pain  
An agonizing experience  
Crushes  
Rips apart  
Ruins lives  
Now you have to recuperate

Oh, look out for the avalanche  
It drops so viciously  
Accelerates rapidly  
Destructive  
So dynamic  
Yet, so rare

Oh, look out for the depression  
It appears sadistically  
Accelerates rapidly  
Destructive  
So dynamic  
Yet, so weak

The nature of it all  
Broken down, metaphorically  
Or, is it straight to the point?

Is it telling a story before or after,  
The damage has been finalized?  
Can a natural disaster and heartbreak compare?  
But is it even in comparison?  
As perplexing as it all sounds...

It is.

## The Bus Stop

Lindsey Heale

The worst thing is having to wait at a dirty bus stop, with chewing gum stuck to the seat and someone inevitably asking for cash when we've obviously got none to spare. Someone's kid is screaming, crying, absolutely wailing, "I wanna go home!" and I'm tempted to say, "Fuck, kid, me too!" because the mother doesn't seem eager to reply at all. On top of that, it's cold, we're all tired, and surrounded by irate strangers. At 5pm on a cold Friday night, the bus stop is the last place we want to be.

"Hey..." I hear muttered to my left and I turn to see the grinning face of a man, ratty beard and yellowed teeth on full display. "You got five bucks?" he asks and I don't bother to hide my disgust.

"No, I don't," I snap and turn away. If he touches me, I'll have no qualms about letting fists fly. Luckily, he turns toward another ear to murmur, "You got five bucks?" and his voice falls beneath the screaming, laughing bus stop raucous.

Of course it's not quiet, but I sigh, eyelids slipping half-closed, and watch my breath blossom like cigarette smoke. The man standing across from me laughs and the light of his cellphone illuminates his smile, the woman of the screaming child reaches down and pulls her kid into a tight hug, and the moocher from before is sauntering around, still muttering, "You got five bucks?" with a fat, lazy grin. The bus isn't due for another 15 minutes, and everyone here just wants to go home, but at least we're not alone in our misery.

That's one way of looking at it, at least.

Now, I wouldn't call myself a pessimist, but there's a point

in life where someone can't help feeling a bit jaded—especially when life consists of a shit job, shit pay, and shit social life. But, to be fair, I think, seeing the moocher out of the corner of my eye, it could be a whole lot worse. I roll my eyes, stuff my hands into my jacket pockets, and feel the coins and three crumpled dollar bills inside. Everyone at this bus stop could use five bucks.

Then there's the unmistakable rumble of the bus and everyone's heads turn in unison, a sudden hush filling the area. I pass no judgment, for I'm just as eager to get the hell home. The man across from me straightens from his slouched position and pockets his cellphone, the mother manages to grasp her child's hand among the shopping bags, and I file into the throng of strangers. Slowly, laughter and chit-chat crescendos as I filter through my change for the bus fare.

As I double-check the amount in my palm, I spot the moocher hanging back from the crowd. The bus comes to a stop and everyone rushes to get inside, where it's warm and one step closer away from the shopping mall parking lot. One last look to the crowd, I walk over to the moocher.

"Hey," I say and he turns to me, eyebrows shooting up his forehead.

"Yeah?"

I purse my lips and grip the change in my hand even tighter. "Look, I won't give you any money, but I'll pay for your bus fare. You know, if you want."

The moocher looks over my shoulder and to the bus before resting his eyes back onto mine. "Thank you," he says with a smile, all yellowed teeth shining. "I'd really appreciate that."

"No problem," I reply and turn toward the bus. The last few passengers are climbing the steps and I think I really hope I don't end up sitting next to anybody.

At the doors, the driver says, "Evening," and tips his head in my direction.

"You too," I say and glance back at the moocher looming behind me. "I'm uhh...gonna pay for him as well, so."

The driver only nods, so I put in the correct amount of change. When we're good to go, I give the moocher a wave goodbye. With a grin, he waves right back and I immediately look for a vacant seat. When I find one, I place my bag right next to me, and decide that I've never done anything as awkward as I had just then.

He passes by me seconds later, heading for a seat further down the aisle. It's then that the bus begins to rumble and the many voices of the people around me fill the air. Next week, perhaps, I might just put my bag in my lap and leave the seat next to mine open for a change.

Regardless, it'll be nice to finally get the fuck home.



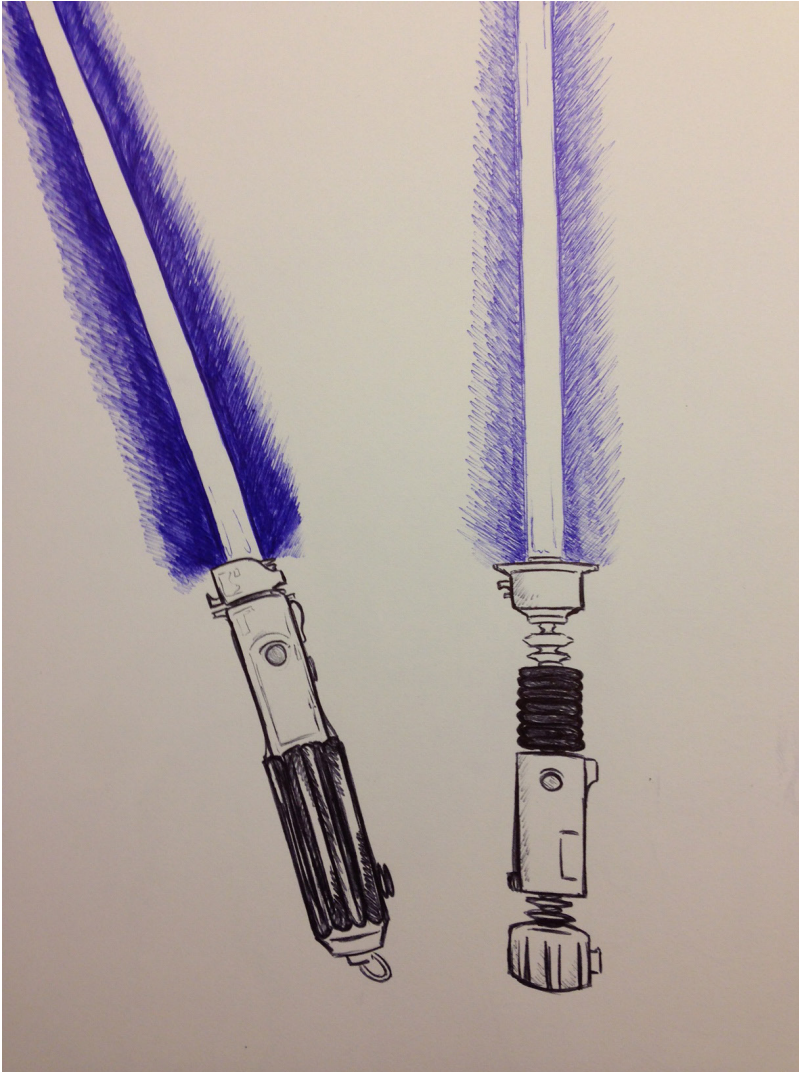
## Untitled

Emma Gillespie



## The Sea Beacons

Brianna Donofrio



## Lightsabers

Christian Dugan

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## Midnight Ride

Brianna Donofrio

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## I Love You

Kameron Raynor

The way a squirrel loves a nut  
On a cold morning  
Before the deep frost  
Where food is scarce  
You were the lucky one  
I found at the last minute.

Like a cat loves a string  
On a quiet afternoon  
Hours could pass  
I would not mind  
Even if catastrophe struck  
You would be the string; I'd never let go.

Like a dog loves a walk  
Sun beating down like a beam  
A perfect cloudless day of smiles  
I could go for miles  
You are the road would never end.

Like a bunny loves a bag of carrots  
Fresh, crunchy and in abundance  
I'd eat the whole bag  
'Cause you were the lucky bunch  
The last one at the farmer's market.

Like two things that were meant to be  
Judgment day could come  
The stars could fail to align  
We'd never part  
'Cause we're that good.

## Evangelize

Donea Gomez

her radiance absorbs the rays she outshines  
her beams dissipate the surrounding crowd  
there's nothing less than her or more than us  
surely time will corrode this beauty, age is finite  
still her soul will resonate  
her light will ceaselessly travel

one day she will be the sun.

## Shaking The Milk

Julia Cornell

I shook the milk carton twice  
up and down,  
up and down,  
poured it out,  
frothy bubbles around the rim,  
handed it to you,  
and you asked me  
“Why did you just shake the milk?”  
Doesn't everyone?  
“No.”

I realized then  
that I had watched  
my mother shake the milk,  
a habit  
which hearkened back  
to when her  
and six siblings  
who ate supper on pews  
got milk from a nearby farm  
and had to shake it  
to disperse the film of cream  
which settled on top.

As we sat together  
and I played with your hair  
and we drank milk

I thought of my acquired habit  
and the phrase:  
Imitation is the most sincere  
form of flattery.

I thought of my niece Hazel  
who imitated her mom's stuck-out tongue  
at two months old,  
who learned to smile at me by six months,  
who is impressionable,  
who copies what her parents do,  
who does not know right from wrong,  
who does not know how to love someone.

But do I?  
As I looked at you,  
I thought of my parents  
fighting over nothing,  
I thought of the broken marriage  
that the house had kept secret.  
I thought of my earliest memories  
and I thought of broken glass.

I thought of the first time  
I ever saw a married couple  
kiss  
remembered my shock, my confusion—  
before that kiss,  
before I met you,  
I guess I thought that everyone  
shook milk.

I should teach Hazel  
not to shake milk,  
or she would not know  
that's not how it's supposed to be done—  
but first  
I would have to unlearn the shaking myself.



## On The Edge

Brooke Winters

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## Untitled

Alexandria Keith

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**Untitled**  
Alexandria Keith



**Untitled**  
Alexandria Keith

## Mom and Dad (And Maybe Me And You)

Katherine Ganger

Silhouetted by blue and red lights  
I would never have guessed just  
How beautiful you could be,  
Or how the red could bring  
Out the green in your eyes.  
I never imagined how artful  
Hands could be, until I  
Watched your latex covered ones  
Beat life back into a patient, and  
How you could breath life into a tired soul,  
For I have walked alone too long.  
I never anticipated that the back of the rig  
Could be so romantic, and  
I never knew how sweet a siren could sound  
When accompanied by your voice, asking  
For directions as we race along  
The streets we played on as children.  
I can't believe our paths never crossed before.

Looking back on that very first day,  
I would never have guess how  
Beautiful life would become  
Or how full my life could feel  
When I chose to share it with you.  
I never imagined that lonely nights  
Could vanish by just the

Whispers of eyelashes  
As I watch you dream and  
I know I'll never walk alone again.  
I never anticipated that my own  
Norman Rockwell could be achieved  
Until I saw you wash the dishes.  
I never knew a sound could be so sweet  
Until I heard you say yes,  
And then again when I met you at  
The church to say it again.  
I can't believe the luck we've had, my dear.

## If You Were Still Alive

Julia Cornell

If you were still alive,  
the National Geographics would still be accumulating dust in the  
basement.

If you were still alive, I could expect the smell of coffee to wake  
me up—  
to come downstairs and find the funnies in their usual spot.

If you were still alive, I could sit on your lap before bedtime and  
you would read me stories  
in your gruff and gentle voice, your bottle-thick glasses sliding  
down your nose.

If you were still alive,  
I would tell you that I made the Dean's List,  
and that the middle of a black hole is called a singularity,  
and that I've been on an airplane.

If you were still alive,  
I would read you some of my poems,  
and I would play cribbage with you, and chess,  
and you could teach me how to waltz like you promised.

Papa, if you were still alive, I wouldn't feel like you never really  
knew me.

If you were alive, you could have taught me how to drive.  
instead of me and mum making circles around the cemetery in the  
mini-van,  
coming to rest beside your grave and the lightning-struck tree.

## A Leap Of Faith

Amanda Farbanish

It was night when he packed up the last of his things and quietly snuck off the farm. He had worked there since he was born, and the animals knew him so well that they barely stirred when he walked past. His favorite cow raised her head in greeting, as if she knew it would probably be the last time she would ever see him, before settling back down to sleep.

He crossed the field, wading through familiar shadows. The railroad was close to here. Not that he had ever seen it. He was never allowed that far out. No, he hadn't seen it, but he had heard it. Heard it all his life, like a second heartbeat that whistled next to his own drum. And then there were the stories the elderly told him. Stories that tasted of a way out, if only one could somehow manage to make the jump.

Sneaking off the farm was surprisingly easy, but he had known from the start that wouldn't be the hard part. It was everything else now waiting before him that would decide his fate. He crossed the next empty plain and trudged up the hill, a forest looming to his right. If worse came to worse, he figured he could camp in there, at least for a little while.

But once he had reached the top of the hill, he saw he shouldn't have worried; the train was much closer than he thought. The railroad cut through the grass a couple yards away from the bottom of the slope. Gazing out, he could see a stack of steam in the distance, steadily drawing near.

He had to stifle a whoop of excitement, but nothing could stop the grin threatening to overtake his face. Running forward, he raced down the hill as if in competition with the metal beast

itself, sliding on loosened rocks and dirt in his haste. By the time he reached the track, the train was not that far away, and he finally felt a wave of anxiety crash over him. This was likely to be his last shot. If he missed this chance, he would be caught the next morning, at the latest. Visions of whips and nooses danced in his head, and he could feel the electricity coursing through his veins.

The train sped closer. He watched as the grass rippled like waves. The front of the train finally reached him, then blew past, and the carts began thundering one after the other.

He tensed his legs, bending his knees and stretching his fingers.

With a deep breath, he jumped.



## Our World's A Willow Weird

Janine Pasquale

Lie there in a lame lively fashion, like a monster craving passion.  
The door closes without having been satin, sunk into motion,  
    ailing an inch in close is far out of the way.  
But, hey, what is forbidden reels in a dream sort of day...  
Just sneak a stick through the chance of a romance already done  
    through.  
As we trip into trance—splash! Daggered and smacked into that  
    stench pool.  
When without quenched, you cannot drool. With time, my mind's  
    frisked into another low mood.  
I hear a sick-quiet (sit quiet; you fickle fool!)  
Instead your lips said: It'll be fine in time, but find time. Find time  
    in fine time! Nine Tai  
crunches on loud cries, from thoughts about your budding craven  
    crimes.

—Dangling on the word won't— While you will wait a while, or  
    rush to droop. No matter. I'll be waiting  
for you upon my childhood stoop,  
with a creeping panel of blankets on a dropped-shame trickle  
    blocked off from that mess.  
So go on there, sleep and slave into your mind's treasure chest.  
A mangled mind is cool, is hotter than seams on the bluest of blue  
    jeans—(Up there you go?)  
Although I don't see beyond your bed, I hate to hear you cringe  
    and beg alone inside your head.  
Now, I pledge; I plead. I tell you, you're a born frost.

You're a-never lost, if ever lost, if you're ever lost in me.

But listen; applaud the get-up scream—It's that I hear?—Your  
    voice crushed on a pillow!?  
Whenever the other weird world willows—again— you're all set.  
Our world's a willow woe to me mean still sad, yet:  
You've got a love there satchel-jet stream. And, look! It's a tea.  
It's a tea! Lucky me; you need not nothing never to need. Being  
    that—well...  
If you ever meet a telltale look,  
when two winks wane into one of many weeps, you'll see—  
Our world's a willow weird when we're lost (in a dream).

## Look Again

Kristina Simmonds

You looked at her and what did you see?  
An ugly face? A pretty face?  
Really what did you see?

Did you see the way her light brown eyes  
glisten like a star in the sky  
Or..  
Did you see the way her smile  
Illuminates rooms,  
penetrating souls of sadness  
“Coming before your presence with gladness”

She...Oh so carefully  
plans out her life plan to success  
She’s an educated black woman nevertheless,  
but did you see that ?  
Nope, I didn’t think so

You looked at her and what did you see  
Really? What did you see?  
I know exactly what you saw...

You saw the 5 foot 7-inch beauty  
with thighs so thick you can’t even imagine  
You saw the way her spandex leggings  
hug her beautiful curves and crevices,  
as she steps one foot in front of the other

left...right...one...two...  
hips swaying from side to side  
hair flowing with the wind

but is that all you saw?  
Really, there’s so much more to see.

She’s caring,  
she puts others’ needs before herself.  
She’s supportive,  
she’ll do whatever she can if one needs help.  
She’s a poet,  
her pen fills lines with words of encouragement  
that lift the fallen and mend the broken.  
She has such a good heart.  
It kills her to see others in pain.

But you looked at her  
and with judgmental eyes  
you objectified her  
and all I can do is wonder why...  
Why? Because she is I and

I am a person.  
Not just a representation  
of the lustful desires of society,  
not just curves and hips worthy of  
hissing and catcalling.  
I am a person,  
but not just any person.  
I am an intelligent black woman  
who is destined to greatness.

## Why I Will Never Submit To A Literary Magazine

Kate-lynn Brown

The year was 2008. I sat in the last class of my first day of high school: poetry. I hadn't told any of my friends I signed up for poetry, out of fear that it would make me a nerd. But poetry! My first literary love! I felt welcomed into the classroom by thoughts of Emily Dickinson, William Butler Yates, Maya Angelou, Robert Frost.

Until the actual teacher walked in. She was an old and matronly-looking woman. Her hair was exactly like my grandmother's—short and pale blond with a bang in the front. Mrs. Birchtree sat in a rolling chair at the front of the classroom that I assumed had been there as long as she had. One of the arms of the chair was broken; she swiveled it to the side so her hips could fit into the chair. She rotated it back and locked herself in. In my four years at that school, I never once saw her outside of her classroom: room 233. Mrs. Birchtree spit each of her words as if she was aiming for a target at the back of the classroom: "Hello. This is poetry. Who can tell me what a cinquain is?"

I'd like to think I impressed her. I made the most intelligent comments I could think of, sweating as I stuttered facts about iambic pentameter and slant rhyme. "Good, Kate-Lynn, very good." She'd wiggle her head and peer at me, her glasses slicing her eyes in half. Once she winked. I still never told my friends I was in poetry.

One day in the middle of February Mrs. Birchtree handed me back an assignment with a few lines of near-perfect script along the bottom: "I'm the staff advisor for the school literary magazine, *Quintessential Essence*. Submit this." It was not a

request but an order. I was in. Yes, it was just the school magazine. But my ambitious mind already had my eyes set on college applications: get one poem in the magazine, attend the weekly review meetings, editor in chief by senior year. *Quintessential Essence* was mine.

The poem was called "An Ode to My Braces," and to be honest I thought it was brilliant. I patted myself on the back only a way a fourteen-year-old who thinks she has it all figured out can do. The poem was an enthralling tale, wrought with descriptions such as "metal jail for my mouth," and "wire gates of hell." I thought I was playful and witty, and if Mrs. Birchtree liked it, I must have been right. And so the next week I submitted the poem, my name on the back for anonymity, into the *Quintessential Essence* box in the back of room 233.

Rejected. I got rejected. The next Thursday in class Mrs. Birchtree, on the way to her scratchily upholstered chair (I had never touched it, but I could tell it was scratchy and that's why she was unpleasant), slid a piece of overturned paper on my desk, pursing her lips. "We at *Quintessential Essence* would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_," in the blank space, in her own wicked, mocking cursive, the devil herself had written: Kate-Lynn Brown, "for submitting work to the publication. Unfortunately our decision is: YES/NO/WITH REVISIONS," and there was a big red-penned circle around no. "Thank you again and please consider more submissions!"

She said no! She told me to submit the poem—the juvenile, asinine poem. The juniors and seniors in my class were writing about sex and love and abuse. I deserved to be rejected for thinking I was so cool, so officially a poet. There was no reason I should have thought my work could compare, no matter how much I knew about word choice and syllables and rhyme.

And Mrs. Birchtree would do it again—five weeks later! I nearly forgot about the blunt punch of the first time around when she whispered as I packed up my notebook one day: “That poem about the turtle. Quite good, I’d love to see it in *Quintessential Essence*.” And so, slightly bruised but not beaten, I once again visited the submission box. And once again, the bulbous red circle made its answer clear: no.

I would go on to develop a rather close relationship with Mrs. Birchtree. I took her class almost as seriously as she did. She never asked me to submit to *Quintessential Essence* again, and I didn’t want to. If the work she suggested hadn’t been good enough, surely nothing else would be. As an English teacher she disciplined me with obscure grammar rules about compound possession and quote punctuation and verb agreement. I was queasy under her drill-sergeant stare: one wrong answer and she would chortle at me in front of the whole class. I was determined to wow her, the sting of literary rejection still a crippling fear.

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It is 2015, my junior year of college, and I have finally recovered from my traumatic literary magazine past. Every time I’m in the English Department office, *Wisdom’s Fox*, the university magazine, taunts me. I will not let who I was in high school define who I will be as an adult. I pick up a copy one day and read through *Wisdom’s Fox*, cover to cover. I realize how desperately I want to be in the publication—any publication—and erase the name *Quintessential Essence* and its foul association from my brain. I’ll do it! I swear with fierce resolve— the following weekend I will look through folders of writing and find something to submit: school literary magazine redemption.

Before the week is over, I see an advertisement on campus,

right near my mailbox: “Are you a writer or artist?” and I take out my phone to take a picture of the flyer. I look at the image on my phone. I am dumbfounded, a little shocked, as I read the second half of the flyer: “Than submit to *Wisdom’s Fox*.”

Than. Not then, than.

I thump my forehead into my palm and give up.