



# CALLIOPE

Vol. XXII  
Spring 2025

THE STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART & LITERATURE





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Volume XXII - Spring 2025

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Submissions are welcomed from October through February each year. Submission guidelines are available at <https://sites.nvcc.edu/calliope/> *Calliope* reserves the right to reprint and present submitted works on the *Calliope* website and other media. Students interested in joining the *Calliope* staff as interns should contact the editors at the address above.

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

There were challenges getting this wonderful journal to you this year. However, the stellar work of the students, administrators, and faculty who are passionate about *Calliope* brought this beautiful edition to fruition.

From all of us at Calliope,

Happy reading!

Til Turner

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Til Turner". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Til" and "Turner" being capitalized and prominent.



calliope kal<e>i:opi. U.S. (Gr. Kallioph)

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses,  
presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of  
steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes,  
played by a keyboard like that of an organ;

2. attrib. calliope hummingbird,  
a hummingbird, sellula calliope, of the  
Western United States and Mexico.  
Oxford English Dictionary



*First Prize - Fiction*

Jeremiah Feindt

## THE SMELL OF FRIENDSHIP

Magnus liked the smells in the brewery where he lived. His owners didn't pay him any mind, so he had free rein to wander around and engage with the patrons. They all seemed to enjoy his company but treated him more like a welcome distraction than a friend. Most of the patrons smelled like beer and sweat. They laughed a lot. In a way they were his welcome distraction. Plus, sometimes they fed him tasty table treats, and he really enjoyed those. He just wished they didn't scratch his head. That made him uncomfortable, but he knew it made them happy, so he allowed it, especially since that often accompanied tastier table treats.

Magnus wasn't without friends, however, and his best friend was Billy Joe. Billy Joe smelled like sweat, old leather, and something faintly metallic. He smelled like beer, too, but the smell wasn't overwhelming. Billy Joe occasionally visited the brewery, and he always gave Magnus a smile and a pat on the side. Magnus preferred that to head scratches.

Magnus would count how many times the sun passed by the western windows, and he knew that every seven passes Billy Joe would walk through the front door. Billy Joe was nice to Magnus. He spoke to him in a smooth, even voice, and he gave him tasty table treats. He also smiled a lot and that made Magnus's tail wag.

The days when Billy Joe walked through the front door were the most exciting days of Magnus's life. That's because on those days many patrons walked through the front door, and some of them would bring oddly shaped pieces of wood with strings attached to them. Their fingers would move across these strings until the sky outside the western windows was as dark as the closet Magnus slept in. The sounds were glorious, and they made Magnus's tail wag back and forth like a metronome. However, nobody made sounds quite like Billy Joe. When Billy Joe's fingers moved across the strings, the sounds rang true and clear. Where the others seemed to command the strings, Billy Joe made suggestions and the strings gladly complied. It was as if his fingers and the strings were performing an intricate dance together, one they'd done many times but never quite the same. Billy Joe's sounds compelled Magnus to feel and remember. They could elicit the same joyful feeling that accompanied chasing the sprinkler in the field behind the brewery, the excitement of chasing the stray cat that dared meander into his territory. But they could also remind him of how he felt the day he was snatched away from his mother and siblings.

Magnus cherished the nights he shared with Billy Joe. The patrons seemed to as well because they clapped and hollered at him a lot. Billy Joe never gave them much attention, though. He just made his fingers dance with those strings, and every now again, he'd smile at Magnus, who sat in the corner. And Magnus would perk up and his tail would thump against the wall.



One day when Bill Joe walked through the front door of the brewery, he smelled like sweat and old leather, but he also smelled a bit sour. He still gave Magnus a little pat on the side, but he didn't smile. And that made Magnus's ears fold back against his head. He nudged Billy Joe's hand, encouraging him to pet his head, something he'd never done before. But Billy Joe wasn't receptive. However, he did eventually smile, and that made Magnus's tail wag.

When Billy Joe played that night, his fingers danced with the strings unlike any night before. Magnus imagined the strings were softly weeping while they danced. He felt like he was in a dream, and he was back with his mother and siblings, and they were wrestling and chasing one another until the sun hid behind the trees. The sounds rang through the brewery, and the patrons roared with satisfaction. Billy Joe continued playing well after Magnus's owners started pushing buttons on the bar machine and telling the patrons good night. When they were all gone, Billy Joe played for Magnus alone. And Magnus laid down in the middle of the floor, instead of the corner, and thumped his tail against the floor, raising his head at the end of every song, hoping that Billy Joe would play one more. It was the best night of his life.

Seven days passed, and Magnus waited by the entrance to the brewery. He was so excited to greet Billy Joe again. This time he'd stay in the middle of the floor all night. But Billy Joe never came, and most of the patrons who did come didn't laugh. They smelled like beer, sweat, and salt. All the sounds that night reminded Magnus of being snatched away from his mother and siblings. He forced himself to walk into the middle of the room, where he found an image of Billy Joe that wasn't Billy Joe. And lots of flowers, flowers like the ones kissed by the sprinkler behind the brewery. Magnus's ears were pressed to his head, and he didn't move from the center of the floor. He just laid there, tail still. He desperately wanted Billy Joe to walk through the front door and give him a pat and a smile.

When the patrons got up to leave and his owners pressed the buttons on the bar machine and wished them goodnight, he could smell sweat, old leather, and something faintly metallic. His ears perked up and he walked to the entrance, where he was sure he'd find Billy Joe. But Billy Joe wasn't there. The smell lingered for a bit, and that made Magnus's tail wag.

Magnus waited for the sun to pass by the western windows seven more times, but Billy Joe didn't walk through the front door, and Magnus never smelled him again.



*First Prize - Artwork*

Charlie Howard

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE?

Oil Painting





*First Prize - Creative Nonfiction*

Jeremiah Feindt

## CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF TEARS

The last time I saw my father, he waved goodbye at the end of my driveway, stepped into his truck, and drove away. It was Christmas Eve morning in 2020, and I remember it was cold, the sky was overcast, and the breeze smelled like snow. He had just finished visiting with me and my family. We hadn't seen him since earlier that summer, when it seemed like the COVID-19 pandemic was finally over. However, the months leading up to Christmas Eve had brought what experts called the second wave.

The visit was his idea. I pleaded with him not to come because he was in the high-risk group that included people with heart disease. He would have none of it. "Come on! You can have a beer with your dad," he had said. It was the disappointment in his voice, more than the words he spoke, that forced me to relent. So, we compromised and hung out on my front porch, six feet apart, and talked over a few beers. I don't even remember what we talked about. I just remember that navigating the conversation felt more like walking along a cliff's edge. He must have sensed our unease, too, because the visit was all too brief. I hate myself for not being myself that day. I will regret it for the rest of my life.

My father had a heart attack and passed away on a snowy day in late January 2021. I remember the sky was overcast, and the breeze smelled like despair.

My father was my best friend. Despite only spending weekends together for most of my childhood, we developed a close bond in my adult years. At one point, we were even roommates, living together in a dilapidated trailer. It was so bad: there was a hole in the kitchen floor the size of a small trampoline; the place was crawling with so many ants that it felt like they lived there, and we were the guests; and the gas didn't work, so we froze in the winter. The only bills my dad prioritized paying were the cable and electric bills, and he only paid the latter so we could enjoy the former. Still, I never felt so close to my father as I did during those years.

I can still picture him lying on his couch in the living room. He spent so much time watching TV on it that he just slept there. Then, he would get up at 4 a.m., smoke a cigarette, and head into work. We got home at different hours, but we usually spent our nights watching TV together in that living room—him on his couch and me on my futon. We'd order a pizza and spend hours watching sports or "riffing through the channels," as he used to call it, never stopping on one channel for more than 20 minutes—he did this through most of my childhood, too. In the winter, we'd sit huddled around a kerosene heater. I'm pretty sure that wasn't safe. When the kerosene ran out, one of us would drive to the gas station and get more. It was common practice for whoever made the trip to bring back a couple of Snickers ice cream bars. I still think of him whenever I see one in a convenience store freezer.

We went fishing together a lot—that was sort of our thing—and some of these trips

were legendary. I won't go into much detail, but suffice it to say, we didn't just catch fish. That was certainly the goal, but it was the time before, after, and in between catching fish that I enjoyed the most. Don't get me wrong; we both wanted to catch more than the other—there was definitely some competition involved—but I think spending time together under the open sky was what we enjoyed most.

There is one fishing hole in particular where we shared many memories: the section of the Rappahannock River that flows underneath the Kelly's Ford Bridge in Remington, VA. We'd often fish that spot on Father's Day. I've not fished there since his passing, but I still visit there every Father's Day. There is this nice shady spot where the water funnels between two large boulders. I'll sit there, crack open an ice-cold beer, pour a little into the water, and drink the rest in silence while I study the water as it weaves between the rocks.

When he had his first heart attack, I missed the call because my phone was set to "Do Not Disturb." I felt pretty guilty about that. He had left my house earlier that day complaining of heartburn. Little did we know, his heart was beginning to fail. He ended up in the ER, where a surgeon installed a stent in one of his arteries. I remember sitting in the waiting room, imagining how awful my life would be without him around.

He lived his life pretty fast and, despite his doctor's advice to quit smoking, he continued the habit. He did try, however. He'd walk around chewing on a toothpick, which eventually became an unlit cigarette between his lips, which eventually became a lit cigarette between his lips. I guess it's hard to quit when you've been smoking since you were a teenager.

I don't remember how I heard about his second heart attack five years later. That one earned him a helicopter ride and quintuple bypass surgery. When I came to visit him in the hospital, he seemed more embarrassed and agitated than scared. They'd just opened up his chest and put it back together, and he was more concerned about needing a catheter and missing the Daytona 500. For some reason, that brought me comfort.

When they sent him home, they gave him this little pillow he was supposed to hug before sitting up. Presumably, it was meant to keep his internal organs from tumbling out. That's what I imagined, anyway. I visited him a few times during his first weeks back home. I remember watching TV with him in his living room. It felt like the old days, except he didn't riff through the channels as much. In fact, we mostly sat and watched soccer, and in that time, he taught me all about the different leagues and tournaments. I was so fascinated—and it would become my favorite sport to watch—but mostly, I was relieved to talk about anything but his health.

His third heart attack was his last.

It snowed the day he passed away. Nothing significant, but we don't get much snow in Virginia anymore, so when we do, it's exciting. That morning, my father was home alone, and he posted a picture of his snow-covered back deck to social media. In the background, you could see the lake where he enjoyed fishing on Friday nights. Then, he sat down on his living room couch to watch soccer. As he often did, he fell asleep. Only this time, he didn't wake up. I'm not sure if that's exactly how his last moments played

out, but I hope I'm not far off.

I went through the days leading up to his funeral in a daze. I felt like I was the main character in *The Truman Show*, but I was in on the plot. I said all the right things; I did what was expected of me. I don't remember grieving much. I think I was just numb. I thought I needed to keep it together for the rest of my family, at least until the viewing was over.

The viewing was sparsely attended. Those who did attend just stood around in their facemasks with nothing much to say. By then, COVID had already severed most people's human connection. I sat off by myself and held back tears for as long as I could. It wasn't until someone began removing the flowers from around his casket that the dam broke. I think that's when it finally set in for me: My father was gone, and I would never see or hear from him again.

I'm not sure I've ever healed from his passing. I don't think I ever will. Sometimes I have this irrational fear that I will someday forget him. Maybe that's why I still think about him so often. Those thoughts are still painful. Writing this was painful. Grief is like swimming in the ocean: you spend most of your time plodding through the shallows, but if you're not careful, a rip tide can pull you out to the deep, dark abyss. I've been out there a few times. It's difficult swimming back, but I've always found my way to the shallows. I've just never quite made it back to dry sand. I'm getting there, though.

Today marks three and a half years since my father passed away. It is partly cloudy, and it smells like summer.



*First Prize - Poetry*

Salem Ekstrom

EMILY

January will not always be a minefield  
And these hands can learn to do more  
Than paint murals marking shame  
Scattered through a city that stopped  
Belonging to me months before I realized  
Her departure would leave calluses  
Where I thought roots were supposed to grow

Stolen from feet that used to carve patterns  
In hot asphalt where we danced with our sisters  
Now left too soft to participate  
And instead seek asylum with Emily  
And her sun and wine stained skin  
And whose name will forever share  
A definition with the first signs of spring

Like how both her green eyes  
And the green buds spell hope  
And the petals of the cherry blossoms  
Are as soft and fragile as her skin  
And a few others things subsequently dark  
Or sexual in ways I've painted too much shame  
To have desire left to describe

And instead gloss up or rust over  
Stranding Emily with my faith  
That spring will not be forgotten  
And that the version of our narrative  
That lives within her  
Is the one where we were exactly  
What the other needed  
To survive

*Second Prize - Artwork*

Hans Caballero

## SELF PORTRAIT

Acrylic Painting





*Second Prize - Fiction*

Christian-Anthony Galvez

## THE LITTLE FLOWER

I trudged through the snow, my breath visible in the cold air, my shoulders heavy from the day's hunt. The weight of my gear was nothing compared to the exhaustion in my bones. Yet, as I approached our home, I knew Mira would be waiting, shining bright as ever.

"Mihai, Mihai! Were you able to find the Rafflieu this time?"

"Haah... not yet, Mira. But I promise you one day I will!"

I had just come home from another day of hunting, and my sister is already at it again. The legend goes that every millennium, a mysterious little flower known as the Rafflieu, sprouts in the glade of Zarah, right in the thick of winter. To this day, there has been no reputable account of that flower ever blooming, but it is said that those who do witness it achieve eternal happiness. Of course, it's all a myth in the end, but my sister has remained adamant that it's true. Ever since I made the mistake of telling her that story when she was still just a kid, she would never stop talking about it. At the time, I wanted to spark a sense of adventure in her, since she was quite the recluse. She was always hesitant to go outside of our home, and timid around new things to boot. I think my story was too effective, as ever since then, she would go out into the glade of Zarah every night, hoping to find the Rafflieu. Well, I suppose it's okay, so long as she doesn't run into any trouble.

"Mihai, you have to come with me today! I can feel it—this time is different. The air feels... alive, like the glade is waiting for us!" Mira pranced around the field, with her well-worn equipment at the ready. As always, she was raring to go.

"Mira, please! It was already hard enough hunting for more food; I don't think I have it in me right now to head out again so soon. Just go by yourself."

"Pleeeeeease!!!" Mira looked at me with those pleading eyes of hers.

Come on Mihai, just say no for once! Must resist... g-g-guh...! I can't... "Alright, alright! I'll go with you! Just... stop doing that."

"Stop doing what?" Mira smirked.

We walked the well-trodden path to Zarah. It's a beautiful wintry sight to behold; newly formed blue crystal prismatic aurums blend and mesh in the light blanket of snow. Moonlight bounced off the scattered aurums, accentuating the natural glow of the miniature icicles off the coni trees. The vairu vines branch and curl, in response to the cool breeze, stretching and entangling themselves in all sorts of marvelous shapes and patterns, as they reach towards the distant moon. Mira's laughter echoed softly, blending with the rustle of the vairu. This sight never gets old.

"Ha ha humm de dumm~!" Mira hummed a little tune, as she walked with a spring in her step. The forest did feel brighter than usual, and not just because of her singing. It's like the spirit of Zarah itself has been accompanying us on our journey, ensuring



our safety, while washing away all worries. In fact, I think I might just join in singing!

“Ha ha humm, de dumm~! Ha ha humm de dumm~! Maaaking our waaay through the forests of Za-ara-ah! The trove of the trees! So much there to see! Your glee is surely guaranteed! We walk up the hills! A wonderful thrill! To see the glade of Zarah!” As we sang, I noticed a faint haze creeping in. Subtle at first, like a whisper of smoke, but it soon began to thicken, wrapping around the trees and obscuring the path ahead. Mira didn’t seem to notice; her voice still ringing out in the cold air.

“Hey, you were too early, Mihai! It’s Zaaaaarah, not Zarah!”

“Ehh? But I think Zarah sounds better. And phew, am I out of breath! Just how long were we singing?” I turned to face Mira, only to find she wasn’t there. Rather, a thick layer of mist had taken her place, obfuscating my surroundings.

“Mira? Mira?! MIRAAA!!!” She couldn’t have gone that far from me. We were just singing together too. Where could she have gone?

“Mihai, Mihai! Over here! Over here! Guess what I found!”

“Mira?! I thought I lost you! Come on, let’s head back before this mist gets too—”

“Too slow! Just let me show it to you, you slowpoke! Hurry, hurry!” Mira’s voice faded into the mist, growing ever more distant. In mix of frustration and desperation, I bring myself to follow her anyway, out of fear of losing her.

Crunch, crunch, crunch. I littered the snow with my footsteps, as I went deeper and deeper into the mist. Crunch, crunch, crunch.

“This is...!” For a moment, the mist parted, revealing what it had hid; countless arcs of massive aurums radiated the shine of the moonlight glow, reflecting it upon the surface of a small crystal-clear pond. And at the heart of it, the most peculiar flower imaginable; its deep, shimmering blue bud seemed no bigger than that of a tulip, but what was strange was the gargantuan-sized roots this flower seemed to have. Knee-like roots encircle it, with a few even popping out the depths of the pond. They were monstrous, twisting and coiling around every gap imaginable, like a snake constricting its prey. But why would a flower this small need roots this big?

“Come to me...” A gentle seductive whisper fell upon my ear, filling my head with a feverish excitement. Entranced, I follow the direction of its voice. Splish, splash, splish, splash. The water comes up to my knees, but I push forward. It’s coming from... that flower! The flower is speaking to me! It wants me!

“Mira... are you... hearing this...?”

“Ufufu... you’re late, boy. You’re completely helpless now...”

“Miraaa... don’t joke around like that. Ohhh... to think something this beautiful was right here all this time...”

“Ufufu... thank you boy. I think I’ll treasure you for a long time... Now embrace me already... I’ll grant you that unending happiness your heart so desires; a thousand years of pure joy.”

“Mihai...?”

*Third Prize - Artwork*

Stephanie De La Cruz

# I DON'T LIKE HUGS

Tape Sculpture



## *Second Prize - Creative Nonfiction*

Nishant Gurung

# MAYA: A COLLECTION OF MEMORIES

### Chapter 5

In the break of dawn when all else has failed, I rest in the lap of my favorite chair. I don't quite fit in but I love how she makes me feel. She, because we called her Maya – which means love in Nepali. Mom was adamant about us taking care of Maya, and we did; we loved her. Crouched over, I open the photo album with all my mom's pictures of us – and for the love of God, I can't find that one picture with my Granddad. I had heard stories of how he built the chair for my mom. The wood was supposedly sourced from a forest nearby and had a distinct spiral grain structure that still held onto the woody aroma Maya once called home. The dark cinnamon shade of polish was as vibrant as ever, the nails showed no sign of aging, and the grains were like eyes that stood with all their might and poise. I never quite understood how Maya showed no sign of aging. I never got a chance to understand Granddad but I knew he could make anything out of everything. Mom rarely shared stories, adding to the myth of Maya. But when she did, her stories were like roller coasters with the tallest peaks that took you down a long windy railroad, her cadences never resolved, and I felt as if she wasn't ready to share her stories with me; her pauses were longer, and I wondered if she trusted me, I never asked if she did, but her stories flowed as if they were dying to resurface. She took me through towns I was familiar with but was not a part of.

### Chapter 1

There's a distinct smell in the air tonight; I swear I can tell when the weather is about to change. Tonight, the air is crispier; Mom will probably bring out the jackets next week. Oh, I will get to wear my favorite white jacket soon; that sounds exciting. But, onto why I'm sitting on my balcony floor. I'm here because my sister – who was about 15 back then, told me that counting stars was impossible. And there, I had an argument to win.

We've laid out an old, ragged rug on our balcony floor. Kathmandu feels amazing during this time of the year. I remember the balcony because I spent my childhood looking over the streets. The rug on our balcony is tattered and out of shape but God, it's the softest, the most comfortable rug to lie and roll down on. Me and my cousins are accompanied by our dads, who sit drinking their stinky juices and indulging in the delicious treats my mom had prepared. For a moment, I question how the grown-ups can even drink such smelly juice. I could never put that anywhere near my face, yet I saw them refilling their glasses without hesitation. I never understood how and why my dad drank orange juice that had gone so bad; I would've happily brought a fresh bottle if he had asked, I would've loved to go outside.

Lying down with my hands behind my head, I looked up, ignoring my cousins as they tried to pull me into their games. I had an argument to win. I start counting. “One, two, three.”

Our home was as vibrant as ever that night. Surrounded by bright yellow flowers on our veranda, fields of green-colored sugarcane and corn taller than my dad, and sculptures on our front door that were designed by the most celebrated artist in the country. Our home was the prettiest.

“Thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven.”

My grandma loved flowers and she had painstakingly adopted a heavy amount of breeds. Grandma was adamant that we took care of the flowers; we never named them though; it just didn’t happen. Among the diverse breeds, the prettiest and the most vibrant ones were given their own houses in front of our front door and were stationed to guard the entryway. Grandma believed her flowers brought luck to our home. Grandma believed in her flowers.

“Sixty-three, sixty-four, sixty-five.”

The next day when the sun hadn’t even risen, I was up. There was a strong smell of burnt rubber tires amalgamated with a woody aroma. The streets were quiet and all I could hear were the sweet songs Grandma sang upstairs in the prayer room. She was up early that day. Her songs painted the house with strokes of comforting green; it almost assured no harm would be upon us.

I remember this specific day because as I lay on the old, rugged, dark red colored carpet; I had counted about 71 stars the night before. I remember the skinny white line I drew over the area I had covered, and was planning on counting my stars in the next couple of days. Sitting upright, legs crossed, I eagerly waited for the stars to show. I must’ve terrified my Grandma though, as she rushed out to the balcony. Her breaths were heavy and she looked like she had seen a ghost. Concerned by her reaction, I calmly assured her that I was okay and I was out to count my stars. I don’t believe I remember the conversation I had with my sister but I remember my whole family laughing at me as a thick stroke of red washed over me. I cried the entire morning on the balcony that day.

## Chapter 2

When I was 8, my family had finally gotten off my back for crying over the stars I could not count. Mom protected me from the bullies I lived with and I selflessly accompanied her through her weekly market trips.

As we walked through the streets of Kathmandu, I heard one of my neighbors – I think it was Sunita Aunty, bargaining. She looked enraged at the rising, unlawful prices of tomatoes and was adamant about not paying a rupee more than last week. The vendor wore a makeshift headband similar to the color of his lungi; a worn-out crimson red checked patterned skirt that assumingly, has seen better days. The lungi held onto its dear life with threads as fragile as wet paper and was adamant to not let go. He wore a disheveled white tank top which did not flatter his appearance and he always chewed tobacco which usually worked as a repellent but, Sunita Aunty was adamant about not

paying a single rupee more.

Sidewalks in Kathmandu back then weren't exactly like sidewalks though, it was just a path where a road wasn't built. It was muddy when it rained and dusty when it didn't. The temple shone brightly in the distance and the disciples waited in blobs of chaos to move in. Each vendor outside called us, hoping we'd go over and buy what they were selling. I never spoke to them and I never showed any interest except for that one sweet shop; I just couldn't help myself. The smell of freshly made desserts and the sizzling sounds of those deep-fried sweets teased me through every turn we took. But, I constricted myself. My mom and I had a contract.

"I will not make a fuss. I will not argue. I will not sit on the floor and cry as I did on the balcony 2 years ago, and I will not ask for anything," I told my mom, "except the toy car."

I stayed true to my word through every second we were in the market and came back home a jolly kid, smiling from ear-to-ear with his car.

### Chapter 3

My uncles have all left the house, slowly but surely. They all packed their belongings and we no longer live together. I am the only kid and I have no one to play with. Two weeks ago, I was running around our house circling the perimeter, and when I stopped to look back, all I saw were the large fields of sugarcane. I never said goodbye to my cousins. I never got the chance to. Dad tells me we're moving to a different home, I don't understand why but he said it will be a better home.

There's a deafening buzz in my room. It seems to echo through the corridors as my dad calls my name. The whole house has been stripped and nothing remains. I ran from one room to the other, hurriedly glancing over the corners of the walls to find my toys. I remember where Grandma sat with her legs crossed as she sang her morning prayers. I remember the kitchen where I watched my mom achieve feats I did not think were possible. Dad calls me again; he says we must leave before noon. I come downstairs. My next step. Heavier than the other. I hugged my dad and felt his heavy hands on my back embracing me. We walked outside.

I should've seen this coming. The smell of the air was more pungent than it ever had been and Granddad spoke less and less as the months rolled on. I never understood why he'd put himself in a chokehold, but I never understood him anyway. Grandma's flowers were scrunched, and their faces were disheveled. Some laid on the floor.

I look over my dad's shoulder and I see our barren balcony. Her membranes wrinkled and her face was full of scars; she had lost every ounce of joy she once held. I should've asked my dad to fix the balcony when I first noticed those hard bumps and cracks on its surface. I should've fixed it. Why did I ever assume she was okay? I never got to tell her how much she meant to me. I never told her how much I loved her.

We left the front door half-open for the new owners and drove away.

## Chapter 4

Maya never found a place in our new house and I don't blame her. The rooms were smaller and surrounded by wallpapers of depressing shades; I cringed every time I entered my room. The lights flickered and buzzed for what felt like hours; the hues painted the room a bright white, the absolute opposite of what the pitch-black hallways had envisioned for the house.

I tried to fix Maya a place in my room and had her placed on top of a wooden block. I had polished the block in a similar shade of cinnamon as Maya but, the scorching light in my room took away her beauty. Her presence felt unnatural. My mom then placed Maya in her room, where she was surrounded by dark leather sofas, a large dresser, a black colored 21-inch TV, and an old rusty cupboard. Maya looked out of place. I wanted her in my room. I needed her in my room.

For the first few weeks we spent together, I shared every story. Maya knew when I was sad, Maya knew when I was happy, and Maya understood when I didn't want to talk. After months of painful debate, Mom kept Maya in the heart of our dark hallway. Maya stood alone in the 20-meter-long hallway looking over the cold marble-capped stairs that would hopefully lead her out of the house. Maya shivered during the night and I'd hear her creaks as the years rolled on. "Was she crying? A chair can't cry, right?" I wondered. If it was though, Granddad's room was right next to the stairway, what was he doing? Drowned in dust and festooned with cobwebs, I wonder if she ever thought of jumping off those stairs.

## Chapter 5

Dad wished to see more of me but I was adamant to leave. I just could not see myself building a home there.

The weather had been relentless, and I had slept in beds built with nails for months. The machinery was bitterly unbalanced and it wreaked of unapproved corporate prescriptions. The winds howled and bullied us through the streets; I left my room only when I had to. When it snowed, it stopped everything. Drowning the entire landscape with its might, the chilly air numbed the toughest nose in town and I never understood why I was there. On Monday, when the entire town called it quits and halted work, I opened my favorite bottle of whiskey hoping to ease into the cold. Sweet cherry flavor infused with smoked tobacco and a heavy woody aftertaste, I closed my eyes and cherished every sip.

I watched my whole life play out sitting on my trustee dark cinnamon polished chair, caressing the photos Mom had taken. The knots in my stomach have taken the liberty of tensing themselves as I fast forward my movie; I take a deep breath and notice the flickering CFLs I had promised to change. Grandma loved flowers and Grandad wanted a warm, bright room.

I look around to find nothing but the stillness the dark hallways held. Sitting alone in the hallway, I remember the ghosts it holds. The Sounds of The Shattering Vase – or in other words, my first choral symphony; the ghost of my mom fastening her slippers before her market trips with Grandad; the very hallway where I had learned to tie my shoelaces was now nothing but a tunnel for the cold breeze rushing into Granddad's room.



I look into the abyss the darkness held hoping to scream and shout at the top of my lungs but there's nothing. I lean forward and peek into my parents' room; Mom knits a sweater while Dad naps with the TV still on. I peek into my grandparents' room; Grandma has put up a few flower pots by her window and Granddad seems to be resting peacefully. I realize I've understood everything and nothing about love; I crouch further almost kneeling.

The hallways cave in, and my soundtrack runs faster than it ever has, building and building as every note passes the other; the movie begins to make sense as the stars up in the sky get brighter and December sets in bringing the cold swaths of evil; I see myself running out in the fields I once called home looking for Granddad and Grandma, I want to tell them how much I love them but, with a deep long breath, everything ends.

Rachel Lee

## FATHER'S DAUGHTER

Acrylic on Canvas



*Second Prize - Poetry*  
Isabelle Grace Rollins  
**A LAMB'S PLEA**

Oh dear father, do not lead me to my slaughter  
Though you know I would go without struggle, without hatred, without trouble  
Though I will always honor your wishes, for I could never deny you  
For all I would do for you and you alone, if you ask me to  
I will fluff my white coat and clean the dirt from my plush wool  
I will pull at the wells of my ebony eyes and produce holy tears for your fountains  
I will let you carve scarlet ribbons from my broken tonsils just to decorate your holy chapels  
I will even let you rip my lame tongue for I have always promised to never make a peep  
For I will be pure and ripe as long as you want me to be

Oh father, think of mercy and love  
Grant me a life of mellow sunrises and starry nights in the pastures with my mother and all her children  
Allow me the comfort of her love and the world surrounding us  
Allow me to grow weary and old as you are now  
Allow me the sweetest fruits to try, as if not to just sweeten my meat  
If you must, hold me at that altar with knife in hand, but hold me not as a newborn lamb

Oh father, I am just as much a child to my god as you are to yours.  
You hold the knife  
You pick the time  
You choose if I deserve this life

Oh father, lead me to our rebirth and redemption

Look me in the eyes when you do it, see for a glimpse what end may have been in tale for this  
little lamb's life

Why ruin it all to try and seek the approvement of your God

Splay my blood across your door and seek his mercy as I do now

See if he will answer you

For you have been just as good to him as I've to you

Oh father, if it must be, lead me to our slaughter.

Nafia Syeed

## PALISADES ABLAZE

Mixed Media



### *Third Prize - Fiction*

Kathryn Sayers

## IT ALWAYS COMES UNDONE

Anyone who says they like getting tours of other people's homes is a liar. Either they've been unwillingly forced to participate or, like me, were forced to willfully participate. So here I am, following my overly eager new coworker as she proudly showcases her kitschy souvenirs from forgettable trips and amateur DIY renovations. Unless there's a stack of gold bars in the basement or an Elvis Presley clone lounging in the living room, I'm not interested.

We flit from room to room until we end up at her office, her "pièce de résistance" as she calls it. It looks like a pièce of garbage to me. And no, this isn't a matter of opinion, it's a matter of not putting lime green striped curtains on a black curtain rod. The room is small, only about 100 square feet, and filled to the brim with second-hand everything. A bookshelf with a sizable crack running down the side, two porcelain dogs that are begging for death instead of treats, and similar items in equal or more tragic states of disrepair. No wonder she can't get herself together enough to get to the office on time when everything around her is barely functioning.

She sticks her finger out like a child to point out a rug behind her half mahogany-stained desk. Whether the unfinished look was intentional or not is a mystery, for all I know she thinks it looks chic.

She yammers on about how the rug is an heirloom from her grandmother that she just couldn't bear to give away. As she steps her dirt-caked shoes on the rug she cares about oh so dearly, she turns her head to gaze through the window. She looks like a Hallmark character reminiscing, out loud might I add, on what she thinks is a meaningful life.

Unable to remain focused on nonsensical talking, I tune her out, moving my attention to her idea of accolades that line a lopsided shelf. Third place in a high school cross country race, a small glass heart with "Community Leader" inscribed on top, and a certificate from her old job attempting to masquerade as something other than a participation award.

She shifts her whole body towards the window, once again kindergartener pointing out to a birdbath her husband installed and praises him for his unmatched renovation skills. The only thing he should be praised for is his consistency in going to the gym where he probably does cardio workouts that don't involve running. How would I know this? It's only been an hour and I'd do anything to get out of this house and away from the decorator herself.

I pick up the glass heart and weigh it in my hand, it's got some good weight to it. I slip it into my pocket and walk over to look at the "handiwork" to murmur a comment about how strong her husband must be to carry the 10-pound plastic bath. Satisfied that she's gone over her interior and exterior design talking points, she turns to face me.



“So what do you think?” She asks eagerly, desperation for validation pouring out of her like sewage into a clean lake. She wants proof that she did a good job? Think again.

“What do I think?” I pause, preparing myself. “I think It looks like shit,” I say grinning, “There is nothing remarkable about your unsightly apartment or frankly you. I’m only here because I lost a bet with my friends to go visit the home of the “crazy bitch from work”,” I shake my head, “Remind me not to go drinking on a work day, or don’t because then no one would even care that you existed.” Her face freezes, the bright smile stays plastered on but her eyes shift to shock. She wasn’t expecting this, and she definitely won’t expect this.

“If I were to spice up your home a bit,” I place my finger on my chin, “I’d add a little,” I pause again, reveling in my own anticipation, “...color.” Slipping my hand back into my pocket I grab the top of the glass heart, pointing the sharp tip towards her as I slam it into her skull. The shocked look on her face finally makes it to her face as she tumbles to the ground. God, the way she hits the floor is absolutely delicious.

I crouch down to where she writhes on the floor, screaming as she touches her hand to her temple to find a gushing wound. I look at the pool of blood next to her body that’s slowly spreading onto the carpet, sorry not sorry Grandma.

“Wha...” She stammers. I shift the heart in my hand so it’s flat against my palm and ram the engraved side into the wound. Her screaming stops, she stops, and I’m just getting started.

A smile, the first real one of the day, spreads across my face. I shove her all the way onto the rug, pick up the tassels of the short side, and neatly place it on her body, as I begin to roll. Her lifeless body is easy to move, none of her human instincts to escape stopping me. I pull the wrapped-up body out from behind the desk to the center of the room, careful not to spill any more blood onto the floor. She would be very upset if I ruined her pride and joy of a room by staining her faux wood floors with streaks of red. I leave her for just a moment, returning to the desk in search of a trash can to hide the heart or at least bleach wipes to remove any blood or fingerprints.

My hand stops halfway through a drawer of paper clips as I hear a thud. No, no, no, this can’t be happening. Not again, not again. I close my eyes, hoping that if I don’t move then maybe it won’t continue. The sound of carpet unraveling and hitting the floor is barely audible over the ringing in my ears. I raise my eyes, just enough to see a corner of the now flat carpet, but not enough to see where her body once was. Apparently, things will always be in motion whether I can see it or not. Cross that theory off the list.

I stand up at the same time she gets to her knees, using the floor to push herself up. The blood has stopped following the laws of gravity as it absorbs back into her wound. With an emotionless expression, she makes it all the way to her feet and bends down to pull on the carpet which has returned to its ugly shade of someone walking on it with dirty shoes brown instead of the masterpiece of murder it had just been. Not a drop of luscious red liquid is left behind.

With a frustrated sigh, I move from behind the desk towards the lopsided shelf, there’s no stopping the process. I look down at the heart in my hands, of course,

that blood is also gone and I have no choice but to put it back on its shelf. The carpet quietly brushes against the floor as she moves it back in place, perfectly covering the sun-stained rectangle it came from.

She also returns to the position she was in barely five minutes ago, body facing towards the window, eyes filling with delusional pride. If only I had gotten to do it, really do it. Kill her in cold blood for the mental anguish she has put me through at work and the past hour. Instead, we're back to the beginning. One day this will stick, one day my thoughts will become reality.

"So what do you think?" She asks eagerly, desperation for validation pouring out of her like sewage into a clean lake.

Back to the start as though nothing happened. Every goddamn time. Tired of disappointment I give in. She wants proof that she did a good job? I guess this time I have to think again.

"What do I think?"

Rachel Lee

## JOURNEY

Graphite





Rachel Lee  
**STILL LIFE**  
Acrylic on Canvas



*Third Prize - Poetry*

Bailey Holt

MAY LOVE ALWAYS BE SOFT

I have known love.  
She was small, skittish,  
a rescue whose gray fur  
didn't match her sister's.

"Hold onto her,"  
my mother said to me.  
"Hold tightly or she'll run away,  
but not too tightly or you'll hurt her."

It isn't long before she squirms,  
restless.  
I panic  
and hold on tighter.

She claws at my skin –  
*let go, let go, let go.*

Sharp points bring blood to surface  
and so I battle with an unanswerable question:  
Which would hurt worse?  
This pain or nothing at all?

I grow angry.  
"Go if you want to go," I say.  
I don't know if I let her down  
or if she jumps herself.

I pretend it was my choice.  
I wash the fur off my clothes  
and take the long way home  
so I don't have to pass the shelter.

It claws inside my chest –  
*I don't need, I don't need, I don't need.*

Years later, there's a cat at my door.  
A feral stray seeking warmth  
that my caged heart cannot turn away.  
I tentatively reach out.



Like me, at first she is afraid  
but it's not long until we learn to cuddle,  
to cradle, to treat love loosely,  
to know it will come back.

Sometimes she sleeps in my arms,  
sometimes on the soft window perch.  
I am still afraid that she dreams of escape  
but my love is a promise and no longer a prison.

I am open, my claws unclenched, and  
*I am warm, I am warm, I am warm.*

Charlie Howard

## LONGNOSE HAWKFISH MERMAID

Ink



Gladis Hernandez  
**STAINED EYES**  
Acrylic Painting



*Microfiction*

Anthony C. Ermi

WINGS

Manny fell last week. People are like ants from up high, they say, and they're right. A gust hit Manny's lunchbox, he reached over the girder— offset balance. I did not reach out.

One step, two step, three step. One step left and I drop alone to Brooklyn. Daylight burns away faster than fear. One step, two step, three step. An aeroplane soars at eye-level.

Manny fell last week. Bernard fell today. Steel above, steel below, steal away my hesitation. I do not hesitate, for I know something few others do. Man can fly— but he can fly only once.

*Microfiction*

Jeremiah Feindt

WITHERING

She is old and alone, clinging to life with all her remaining strength. Her skin is brittle and weathered, her veins exposed. She once shined like a sequin in the morning sun, but he no longer kisses her or shows her affection. A tear traces a track down her discolored face. Then another. Then many. Now she is cold and heavy. Life has drained her. The wind screams, and she is startled. She lets go, fluttering to the ground, where she settles among her old friends.



*Fiction*

Jana Ibrahim Jaber

## THE FALL OF IRENE

To Irene, and her aroma of jasmine flowers as well as the flavor of fresh bread. To Irene, whose pearly smile glinted along the stoned walls of the houses. Her warmth; showered along the backs of her children. Her arms; shading them from her blazing love. She was a queen, a living legend. She was a safe haven for her people – a haven where Talia's little figure gladly roamed.

As Irene woke, Talila would carry baskets of bread and sweets to the market that her mother baked before the birds chirped at dawn. She would rush back home where she saved mini cookie tarts, and wait on a swing for her friend Selina.

The girls never knew who built the swing, but it became their favorite spot where they would meet. At the time, Talia and Selina had been strolling between the olive trees that guarded Irene. Each was a few hundred years old, and the girls would hug them, a 'thank you' to their service. Then they spotted one with a swing attached to it. As old as the tree was, it did not complain under the weight of Talia and Selina.

Selina brought her mini bag one time and opened it. Inside were a few flowers, colors of red, yellow, and white... the first sign of spring.

"I'll braid your hair first." Selina had said, "I got these white ones just for you. They'll look pretty with your gray eyes."

The two would spend the evening decorating one another's hair until the tarts were finished and the breeze became cold.

Talia couldn't remember how her village started to change. A deep cut had made its way to Irene, and she slowly bled. In her pain, she watched helplessly as Talia slept some nights on an empty stomach or spent a full day on water and a bite of bread if she were lucky.

"Ma, I'm really hungry," Talia cried one morning. She had spent almost a week on water. As her tears slid down her cheeks, her mother hugged her with tears of her own. "I'm so sorry little Lou. I promise, I'll get you something to eat. I promise."

It wasn't the last time Talia complained. She sometimes sobbed on the swing before Selina came. There were days when one of the girls had eaten nothing, so the other would split her food.

Irene's suffering didn't stop there. Her leaves got so dry in the summer that before fall came they were scattered on the roads, her color fading quickly. Her warm blessed days became a reflecting image of Talia's gray eyes. She did not dare shed a tear until her final straw snapped.

Selina wasn't herself that day. She spoke very little. She didn't even want to sit on the swing for a bit.

"Do you want to braid my hair?" Talia asked.

Selina smiled and began doing so. She stopped midway when the ground shook and

screams echoed. Selina got so curious she ran toward the commotion.

“Where are you going?”

Selina gave no answer.

She never gave one.

After that the wind banged on the doors and the leaves slammed into the windows. It terrified Talia. She often slept in her mother’s arms who whispered to her stories and promises. The little girl never stepped out of the house in fear of Irene’s wrath.

“Ma, will we ever get our lives back?”

Talia’s mother looked at her surprised. She gave her child a soft smile.

“Yes, my love. When we do, I hope to see you become a young woman with a brave heart.”

That night, Irene had seemed to take a break from her anger. She let everyone sleep well under a full moon. But that would be everyone’s very last.

The earth had shook again, this time it was followed by violent colors swarming the houses.

Talia barely had enough time to get on her feet, as she was startled awake by her mother. As they tried escaping their home, a piece of the ceiling collapsed. The two coughed violently as they got back on their feet. They navigated out of the house into the heart of the village where mothers carried their children, and some screamed as they remained stuck in their homes.

Talia wondered why her mother didn’t carry her. Why did she limp so much and use her free hand to clutch her robe?

Talia’s thoughts were interrupted when her mother collapsed on the ground. The little girl, terrified by her surroundings, pleaded with her to get back up.

“You need to get out of here, Talia.”

“No, Mama. I’m scared.”

Her mother cupped Talia’s face between her hands. “I know, little Lou. But you need to leave. I can’t come with you.”

“You said you’ll stay to see me become a young woman. Why don’t you stay?”

Her mother choked on her words. She planted a small kiss on her daughter’s forehead, “I will, when I do, I’ll meet you here.”

Talia couldn’t understand her. She didn’t give her mother a proper goodbye. Foreign hands scooped her away. She pleaded to her mother to come.

Her tears streamed down, and thunder muffled her screams.

To Irene, the village who was left alone in the unforgivable night as her lantern dimmed out. To Irene, who reeked the smell of ash and fire, who bled as she carried children in her hands. To Irene, and to Talia who waited as the leaves blossomed eleven times for her mother to come.

Hans Caballero  
LANDSCAPE, LAKE ACCOTINK  
Acrylic





Isabella Millan

# PAINFUL GROWTH

Mixed Media on Canvas



*Poetry*

Jonathan Salgado

END OF A REEL

Sitting in the darkness,  
Our worlds are lit by the silver screen.  
You're stuck in the movie,  
I'm making my own.  
Walking in the storyline of my dreams,  
Where reality fades and fantasy gleams.  
You're looking ahead admiring the view,  
while I look at you,  
The character I can't pursue.

Running from desire,  
running through this endless reel.  
This reel may be a lie,  
a fantasy through my eyes—  
But this reel is all I've got,  
The only thing I bare to watch.

I know for certain the stories of fantasy will never be—  
and even the ones I dream of will end in tragedy.

The reel plays while I wish it were our lives on the screen,  
Running from desire,  
running through this endless reel  
You fall for the character I want to be.  
Searching for the character that resembles you  
but I will keep coming back to the scene of you.  
Wishing someday to play the lead with you.

Our reel ends in tragedy to me all in fantasy,  
so, I hide the desires that live inside of me.  
The screen fades, you're already gone.  
The lights come on I stay behind,  
no choice but to say a silent goodbye.



*Microfiction*

Ben Parker

## THE GLIMPSE

The command room was a large, dark auditorium. An electronic cavern concealing a throng of observers within. The room buzzed with equal parts anxiety and anticipation as mission control announced with cautious enthusiasm, “The Chronos IX Drone has entered its Temporal Orbit; images should be appearing on the primary monitor any moment!”

At once the crowd fell silent, their quickened pulses beating like war-drums in the dark. On a large screen at the center of the room the first pixelated images of our world in one-hundred years’ time began materializing. A low murmur stirred, and somewhere, someone was weeping... Desolation.

Jaz Sisouvong

## AUTUMN

Digital Media



*Poetry*

Ethan Ward

ANY OTHER DAY

A fleet of Flying Saucers looms over;  
Over the Mayor's office in talks of peace!  
To involve a truce between us men  
and the Insectoids of andromeda.  
Must be Monday...

News spill out, "Godzilla attacks";  
Attacks San Francisco with a ball of atomic fire and poisonous ash,  
Tales of evacuations and the eternally heating remains  
of a once thriving metropolis.  
That's Tuesday for you...

The Justice League is now offworld;  
Offworld to defeat the New Gods of Apokolips.  
Warlords who plan to conquer and rule over us  
under the hopeless banner of Darkseid.  
Usual weather on Wednesday...

Midnight chimes twelve as the undead had risen;  
Risen to take another attempt to dethrone humanity,  
To ring our society up onto the breakfast menu,  
and feast on already decaying remains.  
That's our Thursday morning...

Cthulhu unveils themselves and R'lyeh to the world;  
A world where sanity will die and the normality we lived in will bend and break,  
The now opened door to eternal enslavement  
to the recently reawakening old ones!  
Freaking Friday's, am I right?

We hear the Hulk is hurtling towards our town;  
Our town, filled with gamma-mutated monsters.  
Homes, cars, and many shops are to soon be destroyed by them  
and by our military.  
Some things about Saturdays, huh?...

Nothing,  
Nothing happens but beautiful silence...  
Silence only to be cut by her ever-flowing  
Chilling breeze of a nice  
Sunny  
Day...  
Thank Flipping Goodness for Sundays!

Alaa Radwan  
**UNTITLED**  
Acrylic on Paper





Yana Rogers  
**SKELETON HAND**  
Sculpture: Cast Metal



*Microfiction*

Amber Del Rocco

CORRUPTED MEMORY

Her body felt just like a computer. Except the data hadn't been stored properly. A great deal of it had been...*corrupted*. For she was not very good with computers. She only knew basic commands like *ctrl*, *alt*, and *delete*. The one that she struggled with the most was *delete*. She could not delete the *anger*. The *guilt*. Or the *shame*. *All of it lingered in the mainframe, consequently compromising her hard drive*. When she tried to locate the files that said *peace*, *joy*, or *happiness*, she received an error message: FILES NOT FOUND.

Lee Soderborg

IN WAIT

Charcoal and Chalk





*Poetry*

Evan Moss

PHOENIX

I never had a childhood;  
Never have I  
Walked to a green bladed field for  
A simple game of catch  
With my beloved father;  
And yet I burn.

I rise from the ash;  
A phoenix, firebird-  
The embodiment of the  
Adaptable, emotive, resilient.  
The flames conform;  
And yet I burn.

My anger, hatred,  
Love, and more-  
They burn, an inferno  
In place of my heart.  
I thought I was the fire;  
And yet I burn.

I burn as a tribalistic, human bonfire  
What could have been my childhood acting as kindling;  
Feeling the cold inferno of my grief  
Consuming the remnants of memories.  
And so I burn  
Forevermore.

Jaz Sisouvong  
**JADE ABLAZED**  
Painting





Maxwell Roux  
**BRUTALIST VAPORWAVE**  
Acrylic on Paper



*Poetry*

Bayan Hamad

ACID

Thoughts bubble up from the center of my chest.  
Sharp and painful as they make their  
    gruesome climb up my throat.  
They make my nose burn  
    and my eyes water.  
My tongue is like a battlefield,  
    teeth standing in formation,  
    clenched tightly.  
My lips are pursed in a sharp line,  
    a panicked,  
        forced  
    tightness, just in case the front lines should fail.  
It's gruesome and bloody,  
    tragic, yet strangely  
        cathartic.  
My self-assuredness goes to  
    die  
    on that battlefield.  
All my self-confidence,  
    brutally seared into a  
    mangled carcass by the  
    harsh words  
        banging  
    and  
        burning  
    against the backs of my teeth.  
Yet, the front lines stand firm,  
    held together only by the  
        strength  
    of my morals, and, more secretly, by the  
        fear  
    of whom I could be seen as if these words were said.  
Defeated, the slick,  
    burning acid makes its way back  
    down my esophagus,  
        waiting,  
            boiling,  
                festering.



Diego Moore  
20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MALE PORTRAIT  
Charcoal





Julissa Rios Soto  
UNTITLED  
Acrylic Painting





Eduardo Rodas  
**SELF PORTRAIT**  
Acrylic





Arli Orellana Damas

# UNTITLED

Charcoal



*Poetry*  
Jaeden Kunkel  
CHAINS

I'd like-

No, Love...

No. Die.

I'd die to help

..You but I

..I can't even hold

..Hold eye contact

No

    Contact is so hard

My arms are stuck in my head

Forward in time

Clinging onto the times I got lucky

When you read me

Saw the chains around my limbs

Strapped down and tied up by nerves

And every time you're around I feel myself start to shake

My heart wants out

Claws scratching at the front door, begging to say hello

But the chains found their way through my lungs and they're pulling it back, saying

"Close the damn cover"

A smooth, black, leather hardcover

All embossed with silver and polish

Flashy chains and smiles locking the tattered pages in

I don't know where you found the key

I thought I'd thrown it down the well

Yet through all the rust and stiff

It tries to jam, it tries to resist

But the lock clicks

And the pages come falling out, threads loose and old ink faded

And it's...

Safe

The scribbles, the messy loops that only make sense in my head

You can read them?

You can read them.

So even when my voice chokes up and I can't sing the notes out

A rhythm without a melody



You feel the rhythm and sing the harmony  
Somehow you can hear it in my eyes  
I wish to hear yours too but I'm so hard to tune out  
So loud, all the time  
Do re mi mi mi  
But even when I cover my ears and feel for the rhythm  
I don't know how  
How do I slow that beat of anxiety?  
I fear my own heart pounding will only send it faster  
And then my volume is up again and  
..I've lost it in the noise.  
I just wish that I could break off my metal casing for once and not stiffen up the second I try to  
help  
I want to requite how you melt my metal confidence away into something softer, gently denting  
And although I keep those dents hidden, I hide them close to my heart and don't want to fix them  
But I'm scared to push back with the same pressure  
Scared to dent too far  
From a comfortable memoir  
To a scar  
If I-  
I couldn't.  
I'd do the same to myself thousands over and it still wouldn't be enough if I did  
So I let the chains stay  
It's better this way, I say  
Heart locked in a cage  
Far  
far  
..away

*Poetry*

Sophia Welland

# THE MOON BEING VISIBLE DURING THE DAY

The moon is in love with the sun  
The sun is in love with the moon

However, as with many old tales of love  
this one ends in tragedy  
... and hope  
... and doesn't end at all

The sun and moon watch each other from afar  
Fond, silent appreciation

They exchange small words in passing  
as the day changes to night  
Then again as the night changes to day

Sometimes, perhaps far too often,  
there are moments when their love gets too much  
The moon forgets to sink as the sky is blue  
and the sun makes the moon glow orange against black

The mortals on Earth point and whisper  
It's an omen, a curse, a blessing

The gods grit their teeth in anger  
A scale tips and turns in the Universe

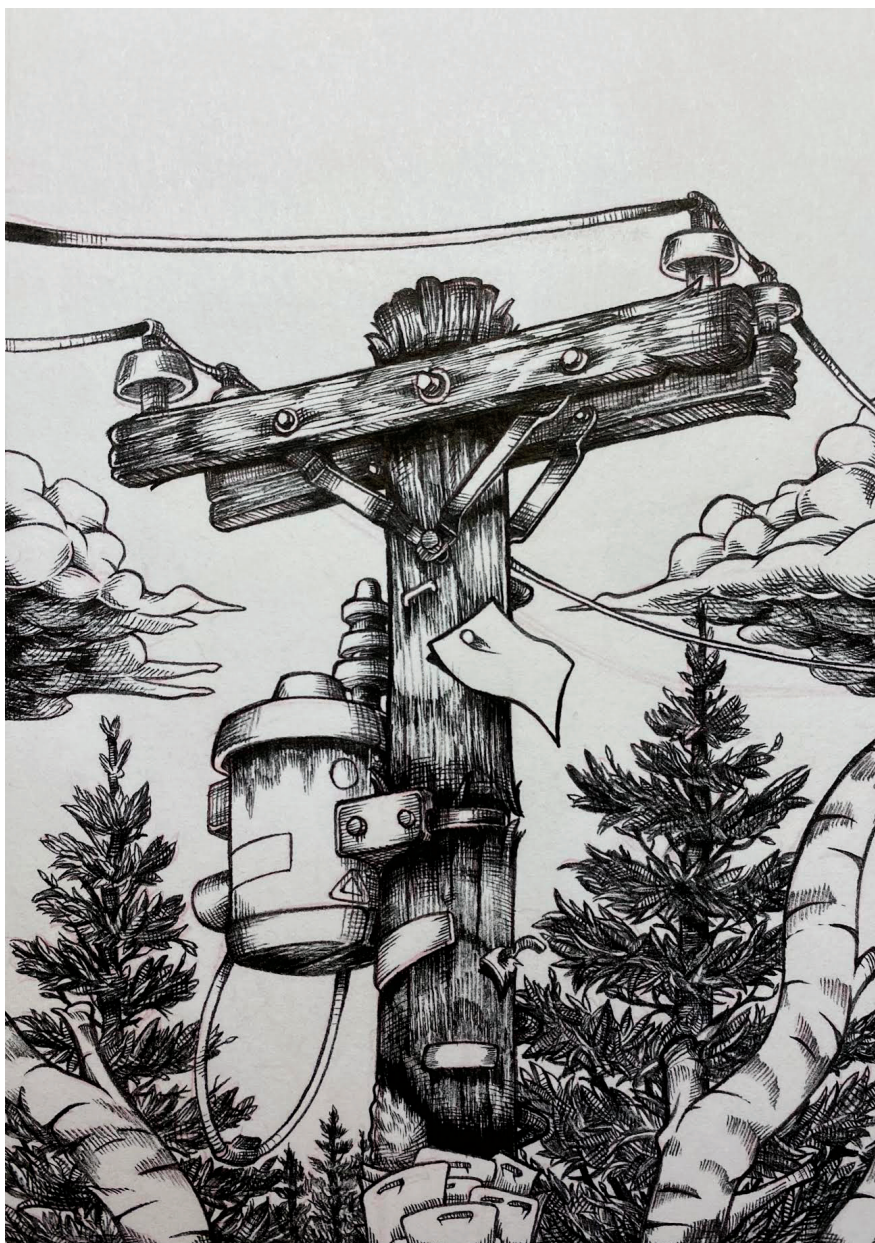
The moon was not meant to love the sun  
Yet, the moon overlaps the sun in love anyway when the time is right

Eclipses are such a rare thing

Victor Albertson

# HOLLOWROCK WASHINGTON

Ink on Paper





Radhian Chowdhury

# MORTALITY

Charcoal





Tamae Koga  
**STILL LIFE**  
Acrylic





Nafia Syeed  
**PEACE IN PERIL**  
Mixed Media





Lee Soderborg  
**UNTITLED (SELF PORTRAIT)**  
Colored Pencil



*Poetry*

Amber Del Rocco

THE SHUCKED CORN HUSK

So much depends  
Upon  
a corn husk  
shedding  
and tied tight  
daily  
cuing my kin  
ashé.



## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

